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THE LIFE OF THEODORA OF ALEXANDRIA (BHG 1727–1730). (In Greek and Georgian Sources)

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Abstract

This study examines the Greek and Georgian textual traditions of the *Life of Theodora of Alexandria* (BHG 1727–1730), one of the most popular hagiographical narratives of the medieval Christian world and a prominent example of the “disguised saint” motif. Drawing upon papyrological evidence, medieval Greek manuscripts, and Georgian translations, the article offers a comparative analysis of both the pre-metaphrastic (Cimenic) and metaphrastic recensions of the text. The earliest Greek witness – a 7th-century papyrus from Fayyum – confirms the early circulation of the Life, while complete Greek manuscripts of the pre-metaphrastic recension date from the 10th–11th centuries. The metaphrastic Greek tradition, associated with Symeon Metaphrastes, is first preserved in Greek in a 14th-century manuscript.

In contrast, the Georgian tradition preserves both recensions in significantly earlier witnesses. The pre-metaphrastic version survives in 11th-century manuscripts, most notably Bodl. Georg. 1 (1038–1040), copied at the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem by St. Prochorus the Georgian. Even more significant is the Georgian metaphrastic translation of 1081 (Ivir. georg. 20), which predates the earliest extant Greek metaphrastic manuscript by approximately three centuries.

The chronological priority and textual value of the Georgian evidence demonstrate that the Georgian tradition constitutes an essential and independent witness for reconstructing the textual history of the Life. The study underscores the broader importance of Georgian translated hagiography for understanding the development and transmission of Byzantine literary models.

Keywords: *Theodora of Alexandria; Byzantine hagiography; Georgian translated literature; pre-metaphrastic recension; metaphrastic recension; Symeon Metaphrastes; Georgian manuscripts; Bodl. Georg. 1; Ivir. georg. 20; textual transmission; medieval Christianity; „disguised Saint“ motif*

Introduction

Old Georgian literature preserves a rich corpus of both original and translated works, among which hagiographical texts occupy

a central place. Recent advances in the methodology of studying translated literature, together with significant progress in Byzantine hagiographical research, have highlighted the

necessity of systematic investigation into Georgian translated hagiography. Georgian translations of both the Cimenic (pre-metaphrastic) and the metaphrastic Lives of the Saints reflect, almost synchronously, successive stages in the development of Byzantine hagiography. This fact renders Georgian material particularly important for the study of both Byzantine literary evolution and Georgian literary culture.

The *Life of Theodora of Alexandria* (BHG 1727–1730) represents one of the most popular hagiographical narratives of the medieval Christian world. Theodora of Alexandria (5th century) embodies one of the earliest and most enduring hagiographical motifs – that of the so-called “disguised saint.” As noted in scholarship, the image of repentant women ascetics who adopt male monastic identity introduced a new model of sanctity in Byzantine literature, rooted in Eastern Christian narrative traditions of the 4th–5th centuries. The Georgian transmission of this text therefore provides valuable material for textual, literary, and cultural analysis.

Research Method

The present study is based on a comparative textual and manuscript-based analysis of the Greek and Georgian sources of the *Life of Theodora of Alexandria*. The research proceeds in three stages:

1. Identification and classification of Greek sources, including papyrological, pre-metaphrastic, and metaphrastic recensions.

2. Examination of Georgian manuscript evidence, distinguishing between pre-metaphrastic and metaphrastic translations.

3. Comparative evaluation of textual chronology and transmission history, with particular attention to the relative dating of Greek and Georgian witnesses.

The study draws on published editions (Wessely, 1889; PG 115), papyrological research (Carpon, 2013), and modern catalogues of Georgian manuscripts (Chkhikvadze et al., 2018; Gippert et al., 2022).

Results Analysis

1. Greek Sources

The earliest known Greek witness of the *Life* is a 7th-century papyrus discovered in

Fayyum, Egypt (P. Louvre Hag. 3), written in Alexandrian majuscule. Although fragmentary, its existence demonstrates the early circulation and popularity of the text.

The complete pre-metaphrastic Greek tradition survives in two recensions, represented by 10th–11th century Paris manuscripts (BnF Paris. gr. 1454; 1468; 1506). Their distinction and publication were established by K. Wessely (1889). Another manuscript (Holkham Gr. 15) contains the text as a later addition (14th–15th c.).

The metaphrastic recension, associated with Symeon Metaphrastes, is first attested in a 14th-century manuscript (BnF Paris. gr. 1526). The version printed in *Patrologia Graeca* (PG 115) is based on this witness. Thus, in the Greek tradition, the earliest metaphrastic manuscript dates from the 14th century.

2. Georgian Pre-Metaphrastic Tradition

The pre-metaphrastic recension survives in ten Georgian manuscripts. The earliest is the Menologion copied in 1038–1040 at the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (Bodl. Georg. 1, Bodleian Library). Written in Nuskhuri script, it contains 45 hagiographical works. The *Life of Theodora* occupies ff. 426r–434r.

The manuscript was copied by St. Prochorus the Georgian (†1066), founder of the Monastery of the Holy Cross. The monastery itself was constructed with the support of King Bagrat IV and Queen Mariam and became a major Georgian spiritual and cultural center in Jerusalem.

Additional manuscript evidence (e.g., British Library Add. Ms. 11281; Cambridge University Library Georgian Ms. 5 / Add. 1890.3) demonstrates the active manuscript production associated with Prochorus and the Holy Cross monastery.

The structure of Bodl. Georg. 1, including its calendar irregularities, suggests compilation from multiple sources rather than reliance on a single archetype.

3. Georgian Metaphrastic Tradition

The metaphrastic recension of the *Life* survives in two Georgian translations:

1. Ivir. georg. 20 (1081) – preserved at the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos.

This manuscript contains the translation by Teopile the Hieromonk and represents the September volume of a metaphrastic Menologion. The *Life* appears for September 11 (ff. 155v-164r).

2. KNHM K-4 (1565) – preserved at the Kutaisi State Historical Museum, a September–October metaphrastic collection containing 67 works.

The most significant result of this comparison concerns chronology: the Georgian manuscript Ivir. georg. 20 (1081) predates by approximately three centuries the earliest known Greek manuscript of the metaphrastic recension (14th c.). This circumstance substantially increases the importance of the Georgian tradition for reconstructing the textual history of the metaphrastic *Life*.

Conclusion (Discussion)

The comparative analysis of Greek and Georgian sources of the *Life of Theodora of Alexandria* demonstrates the exceptional im-

portance of the Georgian manuscript tradition for the study of Byzantine hagiography.

First, the Georgian pre-metaphrastic tradition preserves an early textual layer parallel to the 10th–11th century Greek recensions. Second, and more importantly, the Georgian metaphrastic translation of 1081 predates the earliest surviving Greek metaphrastic manuscript by several centuries. This chronological priority suggests that the Georgian version may preserve readings closer to earlier Greek prototypes no longer extant.

Therefore, Georgian material is not merely derivative but constitutes an independent and indispensable witness for reconstructing the textual evolution of the *Life*. Further philological comparison between the Georgian translations and the extant Greek manuscripts may shed new light on the formation of both the pre-metaphrastic and metaphrastic recensions, as well as on the broader mechanisms of textual transmission between Byzantium and medieval Georgia.

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