

Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 26, No 2 (2016)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 26



Book review: E. TCHKOIDZE, Ένας Γεωργιανός προσκυνητής στον βυζαντινό κόσμο του 9ου αιώνα: ο Άγιος Ιλαρίων ο Γεωργιανός [A Georgian Pilgrim in the Byzantine World of the 9th Century: Saint Hilarion the Georgian], Athens 2011, 273 pp. (ISBN 978-960-6813-29)

Johannes PREISER-KAPPELLER

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.10337](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.10337)

Copyright © 2016, Johannes PREISER_KAPPELLER



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

PREISER-KAPPELLER, J. (2016). Book review: E. TCHKOIDZE, Ένας Γεωργιανός προσκυνητής στον βυζαντινό κόσμο του 9ου αιώνα: ο Άγιος Ιλαρίων ο Γεωργιανός [A Georgian Pilgrim in the Byzantine World of the 9th Century: Saint Hilarion the Georgian], Athens 2011, 273 pp. (ISBN 978-960-6813-29. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 26(2), 429-432. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.10337>

Ε. ΤΣΗΚΟΙΔΖΕ, *Ένας Γεωργιανός προσκυνητής στον βυζαντινό κόσμο του 9ου αιώνα: ο Άγιος Ιλαρίων ο Γεωργιανός*, Athens 2011, pp. 273. ISBN 978-960-6813-29-0

This monograph of Eka Tchkoidze emerged from her dissertation on “Byzantium in Georgian sources (chronicles and hagiography) in the 9th-11th centuries” at the University of Ioannina (2006) and was finished during a scholarship provided by the Alexandros S. Onassis-Foundation in the academic year of 2010/2011 at the National Hellenic Research Foundation in Athens.

After the table of contents, a list of abbreviations (pp. 11-18), acknowledgments (pp. 19-22) and a foreword by Prof. Kostas K. Konstantinides of the University of Ioannina (pp. 23-24), the author in her foreword (pp. 25-27) highlights that the “Life of St. Hilarion the Georgian” is a source not unknown to Byzantinists and Greek scholars (one would mention here especially the studies of Bernadette Martin-Hisard as also used frequently by Tchkoidze), but could demand further attention.

The author begins her general introduction (pp. 29-39) with a chapter on the geographical space in the Southern Caucasus and of course in Georgia in particular (pp. 29-34). A short overview on the relations between Byzantium and Georgia from the 4th to the 13th century (pp. 24-39) provides some basic information on the political and especially religious exchanges between the two polities, highlighting also the wide diffusion of Georgian monastic communities across the Eastern Mediterranean from Palestine and Sinai via Syria and Asia Minor to the Balkans. It is followed by a paragraph on the state and social organisation of medieval Georgia (p. 39). These passages could have been more elaborated especially for the reader who is not a specialist on medieval Georgia.

Section A of the core of the book is devoted to a philological study of the “Deeds of our Holy and Blessed Father Hilarion the Georgian”, as the full title of the text goes in the English translation (pp. 41-81). A first chapter outlines

the introduction of the cult of St. Hilarion (pp. 41-44), a second one the versions, manuscript traditions, editions and translations of the “Life of Hilarion” (pp. 44-49). There exist four versions of the text, a long one (with its oldest manuscript in the Monastery of Iberon dating from 1074), a brief one (with the oldest manuscript dated to 990), a metaphrastic and a synaxaric one (the latter again in two main variants). Tchkoidze compares these four versions (pp. 49-52) and analyses their most reliable redactions and their time and place (pp. 52-68), dealing also with the enigmatic figure of the (proto)asekretes Basil, who is mentioned in the long, brief and metaphrastic versions as writer of the text. She then provides a short summary of the most extended version of the “Life of Hilarion” (pp. 68-72) and a comparison of the chronology of events presented in the four versions of the text (pp. 72-75). The section is completed with a literary and historical assessment of the “Life of Hilarion” (pp. 75-81); Tchkoidze makes clear that the brief version of the Life should be considered the original one, written (the latest) in the first half of the 10th century and also preserved in the oldest manuscript of all versions.

Section B deals with the life of Hilarion before his arrival at Mt. Olympus in Bithynia (pp. 83-94) and also presents a first extended passage from the Georgian text of the Life, translated into Modern Greek (p. 91); we learn about the birth of Hilarion in the region of Kakheti in Eastern Georgia in ca. 822 (816 and 829 were presented as alternative dates by other scholars) as son of Aznaur, a member of the lower aristocracy, his education in religious texts starting at the age of six and his start of an hermitic life at the age of 15 in Garedža in Eastern Georgia, where his activities later initiated the transformation from an agglomeration of hermits to a monastic community. At the age of 25, Hilarion was ordained priest by the Bishop of Rustavi and then travelled to Jerusalem and Palestine, where he spent seven years in the Sabas-Monastery. Then he returned to Eastern Georgia, where his fame as monastic father spread.

This section is followed by colour tables with photographic material, especially images of places of the life of Hilarion (such as Garedža) and depictions of the Saint (on murals and in manuscripts) (pp. 97-111).

Section C deals with the time of St. Hilarion on Mt. Olympus in Bithynia (pp. 113-133), again with illustrative passages from his life (pp. 115-120); his migration together with a number of disciples from Georgia to Bithynia is dated to the reign of Emperor Michael III (842-867). As Tchkoidze points out, the description of the opposition of the “Greek” monks on Mt. Olympus against the newcomers from Georgia is of high interest and illustrates that “being orthodox (...) was necessary

but not sufficient to make one a Roman” (p. 217). Especially the use of a language other than Greek in liturgy by the Georgian monks aroused the suspicion of the Byzantines – as it did in the case of “Chalcedonian” Armenians around the same time, one could add¹.

A long excerpt from the “Life of Hilarion” forms also the core of section D on the significance of Thessalonike in the Life of Hilarion (pp. 135-165). After five years of residence at Mt. Olympus, Hilarion and his disciple Isaak travelled on to Constantinople, from where they continued their journey to Rome. After two years they returned to the Byzantine Empire; the last three years of his life Hilarion spent in Thessalonike. His Vita thus provides valuable information on the administration and especially also the topography of and life in the city and its environs in the 9th century (in the period before the Arab capture in 904), as Tchkoidze describes in detail.

In Thessalonike Hilarion also died at the age of 53 on a November 19th during the reign of Emperor Basil I (867-886); his grave became a place of miracles and healing. Because of this, the Emperor initiated a transfer of Hilarion’s remains to Constantinople, according to the long version of his Life during the second term of office of Patriarch Ignatios (867-877) (these events cannot be found in any Greek source, but the 13th century Russian pilgrim Antonij of Novgorod confirms the existence of an “Iberian” monastery with the skull of St. Hilarion in Constantinople). In the final section E of the book (pp. 167-213), Tchkoidze deals with this passage in the “Life of Hilarion” and especially the (not exclusively positive) image of Emperor Basil I presented in the text; she also provides a very useful systematic table of the Georgian terms (and their Greek translations) used for the Byzantine ruler (pp. 212-213).

Section E is followed by an English summary of the main findings of the book (pp. 215-219).

The appendix provides a Modern Greek translation of the anonymous brief version of the Life of St. Hilarion (pp. 221-230). The book is concluded with a bibliography (pp. 231-259), divided in sources (pp. 231-236) and studies (pp. 236-259), especially in in English, French, Georgian, Greek and Russian, and an index (pp. 261-273).

1. Cf. N. G. GARSOIAN, The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire, in: H. AHRWEILER – A. E. LAIOU (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, Washington, D. C. 1998, 53-124.

On the whole, Eka Tchoidze's book presents a most useful overview and analysis of the "Life of St. Hilarion", especially for those not able to read medieval Georgian. It is a valuable contribution to the study of middle Byzantine monasticism and its important "non-Greek" component.

JOHANNES PREISER-KAPPELLER
Institute for Medieval Research/Division of Byzantine Research
Austrian Academy of Sciences