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On One Unknown Definition of Grammar in Byzantine and Georgian Literary Sources

An unknown definition of hermeneutic grammar is survived in some Byzantine literary sources. These are the following: Gregory the Theologian's (the 4th century) Epitaph on Basil the Great (or.43, c.23. PG36, 528A5-7) and the works connected with it – the commentaries on this text by Basilius Minimus (the 10th century; cod. Paris.Coisl.Gr. 240, s. XI, f. 27r) and by Niketas of Herakleia (the 11th century; cod. Oxon. Coll. s. Trinit.Gr. 44, s. XII, f. 178v); also the Life of St. Gregory the Theologian by Gregory Presbyter (the 6th-7th centuries; PG 35, 256 B6-C10). The grammar itself is mentioned in the system of Byzantine general (i.e. secular) education among the disciplines of the complete course as a part of the trivium. This definition of grammar might have originated from an unknown grammarian of Hellenistic period.

These sources present the functions of grammar defined as: 1. hellenization of language (glw'ssan ejxellhniivzei), 2. collecting the histories (iJstorivan sunavgei), 3. governing meter of poems (mevtroi" ejpistatei' [sc. tw'n poihtmavtwn]), 4. regulations of literary composition (nomoqetei' poi hvmasin).

It seems that the anonymous definition was so rare and unknown that in the last source of Niketas of Herakleia another definition was added to it that was well-known since the Hellenistic period. Thus Niketas of Herakleia complies two definitions of grammar: one is based on Basilius Minimus's commentary, and another the well-known definition of Dionysios Thrax is added to Basilius's interpretation. The definition in the "Life" seems to be the combination of anonymous definition with the elements of Dionysios Thrax's definition.

All divisions of grammar of unknown definition have their parallels in Dionysios Thrax's well-known definition except the division of versification (e.g., the 1st and the 2nd divisions is to be compared with the 3rd division of Dionysios's definition: glwssw'n te kai; iJstoriw'n provceiro" ajpovdosi" - the provision of notes on particular words, i.e. dialects, and the words difficult to understand, and on the subject matter; the 4th division – with the 6th division: krivsi" poihtmavtwn - the critical evaluation of literature). It also differs from the definitions of other Hellenistic grammarians.

The commentaries by Basilius Minimus and by Niketas of Herakleia were translated into Georgian in Hellenophile schools (by Ephrem Mtsire in the 11th century and by an anonymous translator of Gelati theological school in the 12th century) making Georgian readers acquire the elements of "outer" education wide-spread in Byzantine culture of that period. Supposedly this type of education existed in Gelati school in the 11th-13th centuries that is confirmed by historical sources, by handbooks of the translations of philosophical and rhetorical works, also of verses.