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## THE OLD SLAVIC *DIGENIS AKRITIS*: FREE RETELLING OR RHETORICAL TRANSLATION?

André Vaillant, who resolved numerous problems around the Old Slavic version of the Byzantine “romantic epic” *Digenis Akritis*, claimed that it was not a translation, but “un récit libre d’après une version grecque du poème.” Indeed, in its “folklorism” and epic severity, the Slavic *Digenis* diverges radically from any extant Greek text, especially its closest relation, the highly romanticized Grottaferrata version. In many places where the Slavic *Digenis* diverges from the Greek versions, its compiler makes use of oral-traditional *formulas* or *themes* found in the Greek and South Slavic oral traditions: the *Akritika* or ballads of the Byzantine border guards, the Marko Kraljević cycle. Is the Slavic *Digenis*, radically transformed by oral-formulaic composition, a translation? Vernacular translators of the European Renaissance such as Louis Le Roy granted “the rhetorical resources of the target language ... at the very least, ‘equivalent weight’ to those of the source text” (Kenneth Lloyd-Jones), while philologist-translators into Latin such as Henri Estienne (Stephanus) privileged the source language (Greek) and its resources. By analogy, the “rhetorical” oral-formulaicism of the Slavic *Digenis* may be distinguished from the literalism of “philological” translators of the Euthymian school. Refs 31.

*Keywords:* *Digenis Akritis*, *Devgenievo deianie*, oral-formulaic composition, Parry-Lord hypothesis, formula, theme, vernacular translation.

**For citation:** Romanchuk R., Shelton L., Goldgof R. The Old Slavic *Digenis Akritis*: Free Retelling or Rhetorical Translation? *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2017, vol. 62, issue 2, pp. 299–308. DOI: 10.21638/11701/spbu02.2017.207

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## ДРЕВНЕСЛАВЯНСКИЙ ДИГЕНИС АКРИТИС: СВОБОДНЫЙ ПЕРЕСКАЗ ИЛИ РИТОРИЧЕСКИЙ ПЕРЕВОД?

Андре Вайан, разрешивший целый ряд проблем старославянской версии византийского «романтического эпоса» *Дигенис Акрит*, утверждал, что данная версия не перевод, а «свободный пересказ одной из греческих версий поэмы». Действительно, при своей фольклорности и эпической суровости славянский *Дигенис* радикально отличается от любого сохранившегося греческого текста и особенно от своего ближайшего родственника, сильно романтизированной гроттаферратской версии. Во многих местах, где славянский *Дигенис* отличается от греческих версий, его составитель использует эпические *формулы* и *темы*, найденные в греческой и южнославянской устных традициях: в «Акритике» или песнях о воинах-героях, защищавших границы Византийской империи, в цикле о Кралевице Марко. Является ли славянский *Дигенис*, существенно преобразованный эпическим стилем, переводом? «Обиходные» переводчики европейского Возрождения, такие как Луи Леруа, трактовали «риторические ресурсы языка-реципиента ... по крайней мере, как “равновесные” ресурсам источника» (Кеннет Ллойд-Джонс),

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в то время как переводчики-филологи, например Анри Этьен, отдавали приоритет языку оригинала (т.е. греческому) и его ресурсам. Аналогично «риторический» эпический (формульный) стиль славянского *Дигениса* отличается от буквальности «филологических» переводов школы Евфимия Тырновского. Библиогр. 31 назв.

*Ключевые слова:* *Дигенис Акрит*, Девгениево деяние, устно-эпическое сочинение, гипотеза Пэрри — Лорда, формула, тема, обиходный перевод.

Is it necessary to rehearse again what we know about translation into Slavic—or more precisely, about translation *from Greek in Slavia Orthodoxa* — during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries? If Church Slavic was never really much more than “Greek in Slavic morphemic dress,” to recall Alexander Issatschenko’s metaphor<sup>1</sup>, then at the time in question we attend a veritable masque. Robert Mathiesen has outlined the practice of translation in the age of Patriarch Euthymius as follows:

[E]xPLICITLY stated at the time [was] that any translation of a Greek text with theological content (but what other kind was there, or at least was perceived to exist? — RR *et al.*) into Church Slavonic must be very accurate and must conform to its original in any of its most minute details. The earlier translations, which had been made to satisfy less demanding criteria [...] were not merely insufficiently precise: they were dangerously imprecise. To obviate this danger, Orthodox Slavs undertook the immense labor of revising the current translations against their Greek originals, and in certain cases they went so far as to retranslate such texts from Greek into Church Slavonic [Mathiesen 1984, pp. 58–59].

Leaving aside the question of whether the “metalinguistic doctrine” behind this practice indeed “claimed that the connection between a *significans* and a *significatum* is not arbitrary and conventional, but necessary and inherent in the *significans*” — as Mathiesen avers, aligning himself with a scholarly tradition that goes back to Dmitrii Likhachev (and even gets a cameo in Tarkovsky’s “Andrei Rublev”) [Mathiesen 1984, p. 58; Likhachev 1986, p. 23; Bird 2004, pp. 26, 83 n. 31] — we may still ask whether, beguiled by the Greek language’s Slavic attire, we have seen the whole affair.

The Slavic version of the Greek “romantic epic” *Digenis Akritis* — often (without any authority at all) called the *Devgenievo deianie*, titled in manuscripts “The Deeds of the Brave Men of Old”<sup>2</sup> — offers us a chance to broaden our view of translation in the later medieval Balkans. *Digenis Akritis*, compiled in twelfth-century Constantinople, has been identified as “Byzantium’s only epic” [Jeffreys 1998], but recent scholarship has shown that it was oriented toward the romance in all stages of its Greek tradition [Beaton 1993, pp. 64–65]. *Digenis*, whose name means “of two origins,” is the son of an Arab Emir who converts to Christianity out of love for the daughter of a Byzantine general. The work is devoted to the hero’s “warlike and amorous exploits along the lonely Byzantine border”<sup>3</sup>. As Erich Trapp showed, the Slavic *Digenis* is a cousin of the Greek Grottaferrata (G) manuscript: both descend from a laconic early version distinguished from the other main branch of the tradition, that of the Greek Escorial (E) manuscript, primarily by the pres-

<sup>1</sup> “[D]as Altkirchenslavische [...] war in der Tat ein in slavische Morpheme travestiertes Griechisch” [Issatschenko 1975, p. 7].

<sup>2</sup> Дѣяніе прежнихъ временъ храбрыхъ чловѣкъ, in part a variant *formula* found in the Greek Grottaferrata manuscript at book 6, line 656 and book 7, line 61: τὼν πάλαι ἐν ἀνδρείῳ (hereafter, cited in the format G 6.656, G 7.61, etc.) The Grottaferrata (G) and Escorial (E) texts and English translations are cited from: [Jeffreys 1998].

<sup>3</sup> [Ševčenko 1985, p. 21]. The *akritai* (sg. *akritis*) were Byzantium’s border guards.

ence of an episode in which Digenis encounters the Byzantine emperor, absent in E, and by the greater number of romance conventions than are found in E [Trapp 1971, p. 46]. Following André Vaillant's proposal — the most cogent of such arguments put forth — we may locate the production of the Slavic version in bilingual, Byzantinized Macedonia or “Old” (i.e., Southern) Serbia of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the era of Stefan Dušan and his successors [Vaillant 1955, p. 228].

## I

While conceding that individual passages of the Slavic *Digenis* have the character of a “free but direct translation” from their Greek source, Vaillant insisted that the whole was not a translation but an adaptation or “free retelling” (*récit libre*) of this source<sup>4</sup>. One does not have to go far to seek the reasons. The Slavic version is confusing to the Byzantinist who knows *Digenis* well. John Mavrogordato characterizes it as follows: “Here, combined with many folk-tale elements [...] we can recognize the chief incidents of the Greek story” [Mavrogordato 1956, p. xxiv, our emphasis]. In his comparative study of the work’s “enraving” episode, during which the hero carries off a general’s daughter for his bride, Hugh F. Graham examines this problem more closely [Graham 1974]. Superficially, the plot of the Greek and Slavic versions here (in the latter, the episode is titled “On the Wedding of Digenis and the Abduction [всъхъщение] of the General’s Daughter”) is the same. Digenis is warned against pursuing the girl, attracts her attention nonetheless, and departs. He soon returns, plays his lute, and the two converse at some length. One thing leads to another, and before long the hero carries off the girl, challenges the general, and defeats his sons and his army in battle. The young couple’s wedding then follows. Yet, as Graham notes, “in the scenes present in both versions the contrast is striking [...] all the Greek manuscripts uniformly follow one sequence of events [within each “incident”] down to small details, while the Russian manuscripts [of the Slavic version] follow another.” In the Greek texts, for example, the hero begins on the road, returning home between visits to the girl; in the Slavic he begins at home, on his journey forth meets a youth of the General’s court (who serves as informant), and pitches camp between visits. The “spirit and mood” of the Slavic version, in which the hero accosts the girl in a “blunt and menacing tone,” are likewise “very different from that of the Greek,” in which his speeches are “filled with words of tenderness and endearment.” Throughout G, at least, the hero likewise behaves in a courtly manner toward the girl’s family, while in the Slavic he threatens to brand her father on the forehead. Such contrasts can be multiplied. Graham concludes: “the differences between the two” — between the Greek manuscripts, on the one hand, and the Slavic manuscripts, on the other — “outnumber and outweigh the similarities” [Graham 1974, pp. 490–493]. When we recall that the Slavic version does not belong to an independent main branch of the tradition, but descends from a source whose plot closely resembled G (and which was a sibling of E), this is especially surprising.

Even more surprising, perhaps, is that — as Mikhail Speranskii demonstrated in his 1922 monograph on and edition of the Slavic *Digenis* — in several places the Slavic text does render passages of G or the related Greek Trebizond manuscript (T, a descendant of

<sup>4</sup> “[D]ans des phrases isolées, [...] le [Digenis] slave a l’aspect d’une traduction libre, mais directe, du grec”: [Vaillant 1955, p. 216]; “[le Digenis slave] n’était pas une traduction du grec, mais un récit libre d’après une version grecque du poème”: [Vaillant 1956, p. 63].

an omnibus edition produced in sixteenth-century Venice, which made use of a sibling manuscript of G) quite closely [Speranskii 1922, pp. 39–41, 82–84]. An example is the enumeration of the hero's wedding gifts as found in G and in the Tikhonravov manuscript (Tx), the fullest extant copy of the Slavic *Digenis* in its older redaction. In both G and Tx the list progresses from the gifts of the general to those of his wife to those of his sons (in G, the gifts of Digenis's own kin are inserted into the second place)<sup>5</sup>. In G and Tx, the gifts themselves are in almost the same order and share considerable detail.

Thus, in G the general gives Digenis “twelve black horses, twelve delightful and very handsome chargers (φάρια), twelve choice mules with their saddles and bridles of silver metal-work, praiseworthy craftsmanship, twelve young manservants, gold-belted grooms, twelve well-proven hunting leopards, twelve snowy hawks from Abasgia, twelve falcons and the same number of falcons, two enameled icons of the saints Theodore, and a beautiful tent, very large, embroidered with gold and decorated with multiform shapes of animals, — the ropes were of silk and the poles of silver — two Arab spears of young wood, and the famed sword of Chosroes” (G 4.899–912). In Tx, the general gives “thirty chargers (фарева) — they were covered with precious silks and their saddles and bridles were forged with gold, and he gave him twenty grooms, [and thirty] leopards and thirty falcons with their keepers, and he gave him twenty leather coats sewn with solid gold, and a hundred great silks, and one great tent, all [sewn] in gold — it had space for many thousands of warriors — and the ropes of that tent were of silk, and the rings of silver, and he gave him a gold icon of Saint Theodore, and four Arab spears, and the sword of his great-grandfather” (Tx f15v). In Tx the mules have gone missing — their tack transferred to the Arab horses — as have the Abkhazian hawks; coats and silks have been duplicated from the mother-in-law's gifts; the icons of St. Theodore have exchanged places with the great tent; and the number and size of the presents has generally increased, thanks to epic exaggeration. But considering the vagaries of transmission of secular texts, and moreover the distances in time and space (we are comparing a thirteenth-century Greek manuscript from southern Italy with an eighteenth-century Slavic manuscript from Russia), this is a remarkably close rendering: a “direct translation,” not a “free retelling”<sup>6</sup>.

## II

Let us extend our investigation, both socio-historically and comparatively, to the *Sitz im Leben* of the Greek and Slavic *Digenis Akritis* and Greek and Slavic oral epic<sup>7</sup>. What were the social and institutional concerns around enlavishment in these milieus? In the oral source (whatever it was) of this episode in the Greek *Digenis*, what took place was certainly an outright abduction: the Greek texts preserve the verb ἀρπάζω (ravish, carry off) and the corresponding noun ἀρπαγή (abduction) [Laiou 1993, p. 201]. As Peter Mackridge and William J. Entwistle have remarked, bride-stealing is common in Greek

<sup>5</sup> The Tikhonravov (Tx) and Titov (Tr) manuscripts — the latter being the best copy of the seveneenth-century Muscovite epitome of the Slavic *Digenis* — are cited from the photographic reproductions in: [Kuz'mina 1962, pp. 185–211, 215–248]. No existing printed editions of any of the manuscripts of the Slavic *Digenis* are reliable.

<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the silks on the horses in the Slavic version (transferred there from the mules of the source) were apparently in the archetype: they are also found at E 1074, although they have fallen out of the G text.

<sup>7</sup> On the *Sitz im Leben* of Early Slavic texts see: [Ingham 1987].

“akritic” songs about a hero’s wedding, such as “The Daughter of King Levantis” and “The Sun-Born Girl,” and is even the norm in their Serbian counterparts, such as “The Marriage of Stefan Dušan,” “The Marriage of Đuro of Smederevo,” and “The Marriage of Todor of Stalac” [Entwistle 1953, pp. 10–13; Mackridge 1993, pp. 155–159]. Moreover, as Entwistle observes:

[I]n the Balkans the [abduction] theme is so usual that even a peaceful wedding will be described in these terms. A *guslar*, improvising on traditional lines, thrills the douce wedding-guests with a quite fictitious account of the young man’s raid on the stronghold of his lady. The narrative is a certificate of his manliness [Entwistle 1953, p. 13].

The epic practice of bride-stealing is thus “imposed [on society] as a standard of heroic conduct” (Entwistle). This is apparently the ethos of the oral-traditional ballad *behind* the enravishment scene in the Greek *Digenis*, as well as of the Slavic “Wedding of Digenis.”

Yet the “prevailing tone” of this episode in the Greek *Digenis* itself (as Graham observes) is one of “urbanity, courtesy, gentleness, politeness, and respect” throughout [Graham 1974, p. 490]. The reasons for this “tone” have been convincingly laid out by Angeliki Laiou [Laiou 1993, pp. 133–154]. She demonstrates that the urbane Constantinopolitan compiler of *Digenis* rewrote this scene to portray, not an abduction — punishable, if the victim were noble, by the perpetrator’s death and the confiscation of his property — but an elopement that could stand up in a Byzantine court of law. *Digenis* goes to the girl alone: without accomplices, he cannot be accused of abduction, but only the lesser crime of the seduction of a virgin. He tells her of his love, which she reciprocates; he asks for her hand and she offers her consent and, in G, a ring. Thus, no abduction has taken place. The couple kiss but remain chaste, so the charge of seducing a virgin falls away too. “The entire treatment of abduction, marriage, [and] social values [in the Greek *Digenis*] is redolent of an aristocratic Constantinopolitan milieu,” Laiou concludes [Laiou 1993, p. 206].

The source of the Slavic version resembled the extant Greek texts, especially G (as Laiou has shown, G is more careful than E to recast the abduction as an elopement; if this care was taken in G’s immediate ancestor, and not in the hyparchetype it shares with the Slavic text, then E will be of value to us as well). Therefore, the Slavic “Wedding of Digenis” has *undone* the legalistic fuss identified by Laiou. The Slavic compiler appears to know little of Byzantine law and to care less. In his version, the hero sets off with his three companions to undertake what could only be interpreted as an abduction. In a brutal exchange, he offers the girl the choice of marriage or slavery (while she responds that he need not abduct her: she will go with him voluntarily)<sup>8</sup>. And he is every bit as vicious to her family and to their property, destroying the general’s castle. Are the differences, then, simply a matter of *Sitz im Leben* — the relative legal primitivism of the target milieu?

### III

As Norman W. Ingham once pointed out, social functions cannot spontaneously generate a well-formed writing: conventional needs are, more often than not, expressed in conventional forms [Ingham 1987, p. 243]. The oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord (a.k.a. the Parry-Lord hypothesis) offers us a set of such forms to in-

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<sup>8</sup> She offers no ring, but there is none in E either, so this convention may be assumed to be an addition by the editor of G’s parent.

investigate. Oral-traditional narrative, according to Parry and Lord, is not composed *for* performance, but *in* performance. The singer or teller of a tale knows a condensed version of a plot and “unravels” it by means of his or her repertoire of *formulas* and *themes*. Parry defined the *formula* as a “group of words [...] regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” [Lord 1991, pp. 15–37, esp. p. 26 n. 18]. For instance, the formulas *a na kuli* (“in the tower”) and *vino pije* (“drinks wine”) are used in the first, four-syllable segment of the ten-syllable South Slavic heroic line [Lord 1960, pp. 34–35]. In 1976, Paul Kiparsky proposed a definition of the formula that removed Parry’s metrical constraint: the formula — which gives rise to the verse line and not the other way around — is a bound expression (a phrase characterized by the arbitrarily limited distribution of its parts, among other features) whose elements are syntactico-semantically related or “dominated by a single node”: e.g., adjective-noun, verb-object [Kiparsky 1976, pp. 84–85]. Kiparsky’s redefinition allows us to identify formulas in prose (the form of the Slavic *Digenis*): folklorists had of course long referred to prose formulas, albeit with some uncertainty.

Oral-formulaic *themes* have not been as well defined, although anyone familiar with oral tradition will recognize these repeated building blocks of plot. In one context Lord defined the theme as a “group of ideas regularly used” to tell a tale, bound together by a “tension of essences”; in another, as a “repeated passage with a fair degree of verbal or formula[ic] repetition from one occurrence to the next” [Lord 1960, p. 97; Lord 1991, p. 26 n. 18.]. Like formulas, themes are units of form, not content (i.e., they are not motifs): but they consist of content — groups of motifs — arranged in a particular structure. Roderick Beaton refers to this structure as “a kind of mutual cohesion [...] within which systematic transformations and inversions can take place” [Beaton 1981, p. 28]. In *The Singer of Tales*, for example, Lord discusses the South Slavic “Arming” theme, repeated both within a song and across those of several singers, which describes how a hero is *dressed by his mother*, typically in the order *clothing, armor, belt, weapons, and hat* [Lord 1960, pp. 86–91; cf. Fenik 1991, pp. 52–55]. And as Beaton suggests, certain elements (or motifs) of the theme can be reordered, replaced or removed.

Several changes in the Slavic “Wedding of Digenis” are *formulaic*, characteristic of epic transmission. As we have mentioned earlier, the number and size of the gifts is exaggerated, so that (for example) the “very large” tent (G 4.908) can now hold “many thousands of warriors” (Tx f15v), the usual formulaic occupancy of a tent in the Slavic *Digenis* (cf., e.g., Tt f173; Tx f17). Likewise, the girl’s two bellicose brothers (G 4.610) are doubled to four (Tt f184)<sup>9</sup>. But the most striking changes derive from *themes* found in Greek and Slavic epic song from the late Middle Ages to the present. First, the compiler may *render* Greek narrative into Slavic using the theme. In G, the enravishment episode begins with Digenis on the road, asking his father about the general and his daughter and receiving a warning. A brief encounter between the girl and Digenis follows; then comes the latter’s lovesick return home, which troubles his mother (who offers a prayer for him at E 810–815: E picks up the narrative at about this point); then his night journey, lute in hand, to the girl. This garden-variety romantic plot is retold by the Slavic compiler by means of a “Hero’s Complaint and Departure” theme, found twice more in his text (Tx f31,

<sup>9</sup> Likewise in the less romantic, more epic E (969), the number of brothers is amplified — to five. In T and A they are recalculated as a folkloric three, probably a change by the Z-editor (although two brothers reappear in P). See: [Mavrogordato 1956, p. 255 n. 16].

Tr f182) as well as at the start (E 622–637) of the episode “Digenis Among the Raiders” in E. This latter has been called an “undigested *cantilène*,” added to the Greek E-tradition at what was apparently a late date<sup>10</sup>. In the “Complaint and Departure” theme, the hero (1) learns of the object of his quest, (2) complains to his parents and is released, (3) equips himself, and (4) departs his parents’ home on his quest. Its elements resemble what Vladimir Propp calls the functions of the folk wondertale’s *complication*, with the addition of an arming/equipping scene (proper to the epic, and — as we have seen — often a theme in itself) [Propp 1968, pp. 30–39]. Thus, at the start of the Slavic “Wedding of Digenis” (Tr ff183v–184) the hero broods over the general’s beautiful daughter; is warned by his father and mother not to pursue her, but evidently wears them down (we have only the Muscovite abridgement) and accepts a prayer from them both; takes a few soldiers, some rich clothing, and a lute; and sets off for the general’s “town”<sup>11</sup>.

The theme may also be used by the compiler to *invent* material entirely absent in his source. On the road, the Slavic hero meets a youth of the general’s court. Questioning him, he learns about the general and his sons and daughter, and of their prowess in battle; he recruits the youth and soon reaches the “town” (Tr ff184–184v). *None* of this material is present in the enravishment episode of the Greek *Digenis*, but several motifs and most of the thematic structure — a “Young Informant” theme, in which (1) the hero interrogates an informant, who (2) describes the enemy forces and (3) makes a heroic evaluation of their bravery, before (4) taking the hero, or the hero’s message, to his leader—*are* found, again, in E’s interloping “Digenis Among the Raiders,” immediately after the latter’s “Complaint and Departure” theme (i.e., at E 638–645). A variant of this theme with a hostile informant is found in late medieval Greek song (“The Lay of Armouris,” lines 33–65) [Ricks 1990, pp. 172–175], as well as in the first episode of the Slavic *Digenis* (the unnamed first part of the Slavic “Lay of the Emir”), Tr ff172–173v. The “hostile” variant of the theme is preceded by a “Flyting” theme that consists of an exchange of insulting boasts and/or a prayer, the crossing of a boundary (e.g., a leap across a river), and a slap to the face or binding of the future informant.

Finally, material scattered across the compiler’s source text may be gathered and thematically *reworked*. A “Bride Stealing/Gate Crashing” theme, present in wedding and related songs of the South Slavic epic tradition, helps the Slavic compiler produce the climax of the “Wedding of Digenis,” following the hero’s exchanges with the girl. In the Serbian song “Marko and the Moor” (lines 67–74), a knight (1) mounts his horse, (2) rides to the palace where his beloved is confined, and (3) commands that her father (the sultan) bring her forth. In that song and “The Marriage of Đuro” (lines 263–272), the knight then (4) draws his weapon, (5) shatters the gates, (6) enters the palace, and (7) strikes it so hard that it collapses (or at least, its windows shatter)<sup>12</sup>. The Slavic compiler finds analogous material scattered across his Greek source: in the scene that opens the enravishment episode in G, Digenis orders that his horse be saddled (cf. G 4.376) and rides off to woo the girl (G 4.406); following the elopement, some 200 verses later, he issues a playful challenge

<sup>10</sup> [Beaton 1996, pp. 36–38]. The characterization is that of: [Ricks 1990, p. 19].

<sup>11</sup> Note here the similarity with “akritic” song, in which, e.g., Syria is a “city”: [Ševčenko 1985, p. 21].

<sup>12</sup> [Karadžić, 1977, pp. 243, 299]. To the best of our knowledge this theme is not found in Greek “akritic” bride-stealing songs (“The Daughter of King Levantis,” “The Sun-Born Girl”), in which the hero uses magic, not force, to achieve his goal. Even in songs such as “Sir Porphyro,” whose hero humiliates the king and his daughter using violence, the theme does not appear.

to the general (G. 4.594); he finally draws his staff some 50 lines afterward (G 4.645). Out of these far-flung verses, and supplemented with material he has invented, the Slavic compiler constructs a “Bride Stealing/Gate Crashing” theme. Over two folio (Tx ff11–12), the hero — who has left the girl behind until her father returns — saddles his horse; rides up to the “town”; takes his staff and strikes the gates, which shatter; calls the general and his sons to witness the girl’s abduction; enters the courtyard; and strikes the porch, which in turn collapses. As we can see, it is the theme that shapes the Slavic *Digenis*; and the theme leaves little or no room for the romanticized, and legalized, conventions of the source.

#### IV

It is thus not, or not so much, any legal primitivism (“institutional concerns”) of the target milieu as its literary preference for oral-formulaic style and structures that most cogently explains the differences between the enravishment episodes in the Greek and Slavic *Digenis*. This being the case, can we still speak of translation, or must we accept Vaillant’s evaluation of the Slavic as a “free retelling” of its Greek source? We would argue that it is necessary to maintain the term “translation,” precisely *because of* this consistent use of oral-formulaic forms (not to mention the number of closely rendered passages, first observed by Speranskii). Paul Zumthor proposes that in vernacular writing, “formulaic style can be described as a narrative strategy: it inserts within the discourse, as it unfolds, lexical and syntactic rhythm sequences borrowed from other preexisting kinds of expression, thus referring the audience to a familiar semantic world” [Zumthor 1984, p. 78]. These forms are proper to *Digenis Akritis*, to a greater or lesser degree, in all its variants.

Moreover, if one were to translate not *out of Greek* in the sense that the “translation of a Greek text [...] conform to its original in many of its most minute details” (producing what Mathiesen has called the “verbal icon” of Church Slavic writing of the Euthymian era) [Mathiesen 1984, pp. 59–60], but rather *into Slavic* in the sense that the translation render linguistic structures of the “vernacular”<sup>13</sup>, as well as the “figures of speech suitable to its usages”, to paraphrase Cicero on translation (*De optimo genere oratorum* c. 14), then one would almost inevitably make use of oral-formulaic forms. For it is in these forms that the rhetorical “canons” of the South Slavic “vernaculars” of the later Middle Ages consist: *they* are the authoritative “figures” of secular verbal art. That is to say, the “oral-formulaic style” is an authorizing strategy, not only for the “author” of a kind of writing, i.e., the vernacular, that lacks the built-in authority of sacred writing, but indeed for its *translator* into another “vernacular” as well.

Our assigning the category of translation to the Slavic *Digenis* is supported, albeit indirectly, by studies of translation in the European Renaissance. Kenneth Lloyd-Jones has remarked that while philologist-translators such as Henri Estienne (a.k.a. Stephanus) privileged the source language and its resources in their works, popularizing vernacular translators such as Louis Le Roy granted “the rhetorical resources of the target language [...] at the very least, ‘equivalent weight’ to those of the source text” [Lloyd-Jones 1998, pp. 26–27]. Lloyd-Jones notes two of Le Roy’s closely related strategies: the neutralization of unsuitable material, “less as an act of censorship [than] as the enactment of a rhetorical

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<sup>13</sup> By “vernacular” Slavic we mean something like Mathiesen’s “Hybrid Slavonic” [see: Mathiesen 1984, pp. 47–48], a written language that mixes Church Slavic and vernacular forms — the latter construed in both linguistic and generic/rhetorical terms.



strategy that sets the values of the target culture ahead of those of the original readership”; and ultimately, the orchestration, via translation, of an “extended debate with the [source] text” [Lloyd-Jones 1998, pp. 36, 34]. We have shown that the compiler of the Slavic *Digenis*, or, as we prefer to say, its translator, engages in the former strategy of reorienting the work upon local rhetorical “canons,” neutralizing and circumscribing his cosmopolitan, Constantinopolitan source in a number of ways. As Zumthor has taught us, such textual instability (*mouvance*) is perhaps the only consistent feature of the medieval vernacular tradition<sup>14</sup>. It might further be argued that, by incorporating passages of close “philological” translation *from Greek* in his “rhetorical” translation *into Slavic*, the translator employs the strategy of debate with his source as well. But with the apparent decline of Greek literacy in South Slavic space after the fourteenth century and the concomitant transmission of the Slavic *Digenis* to the monolingual East Slavs, moderating this particular debate would be left, not to the target audience, but to later philologists. We are only beginning to understand its terms.

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<sup>14</sup> For a definition of *mouvance* see: [Zumthor 1986, p. 96 n 49].

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Received: 01.02.2017

Accepted: 22.05.2017