

Patrological Collection “*Samotkhis Quavili*” (*The Flower of the Paradise*), its Sources, Specificity and Origin

Abstract: “*Samotkhis Quavili*” (*The Flower of the Paradise*) is a collection of spiritual writings, compiled by Gabriel Mtsire. Its five manuscripts, three of which are autographic, are preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts (in Georgia). The earliest manuscript is S128. We have compared the rest of the sources exactly to it. The research revealed that the majority of the plots of the narratives included in “*The Flower of the Paradise*” display the most semantic resemblance with the manuscript of Hieromonk Theophilus. They show certain coincidence with “*The Alphabetic Patericon*” and slight resemblance with “*The Paradise*” by John Moschus.

Key words: Gabriel Mtsire, *The Flower of the Paradise*, *Samotkhis Quavili*, Georgian manuscript, *Patericon*.

“*Samotkhis Quavili*” (*The Flower of the Paradise*) is a collection of spiritual writings, compiled by Gabriel Mtsire. Its five manuscripts, three of which are autographic, are preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts (in Georgia). The collection was published in 1895 (*The Flower*, 1895), but the sources have not been compared and studied from the textological viewpoint so far.

The earliest manuscript is S128. It may be assumed that its copying was completed on April 28, 1796. We have compared the rest of the sources exactly to this manuscript. The autograph, preserved as № S128 abundantly contains editorial corrections, deleted words, etc. So, it must have been the working manuscript of Gabriel Mtsire. This autograph belonged first to Polievktos Karbelashvili, then- to his brother Stephane, who donated it to the book depository of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among the Georgians. It appears that exactly this manuscript was used by Stephane (Vasil) Karbelashvili during publishing “*Samotkhis Quavili*” (*The Flower of the Paradise*).

The manuscript S852 is also an autograph. Gabriel Mtsire completed copying it on March 24, 1797. Technically, the opening pages of the manuscript are designed like the manuscript S128.

The text of A244 is an autograph too. Obviously, the author created them in parallel with S852, as the interval between the dates of their writing is very little (March 24, 1797/April 19, 1797).

The above-mentioned three autographs do not show fundamental textual differences, whereas orthography and spelling of individual words are often different. Some words in all the manuscripts are used with different forms and sometimes also have different semantics. In addition, there are passages where entire sentences are omitted or inserted. In some cases the author in the earliest manuscript (S128) replaces a word or adds a phrase, and in the subsequent manuscripts this amendment is already reflected.

In the process of study two non-autographic manuscripts were also taken into account: A588 and A854. Copying of manuscript A588 was completed on September 9, 1813. The copyist is Ter Stephan Ter Stephanov. This copy too, as well as the manuscript, which was copied by a priest from Martqopi, Petre Tabliashvili, and is dated to June 20, 1837 (A 854), is executed highly conscientiously.

From the viewpoint of identification of the author, primary source and date of “*Samotkhis Quavili*” (*The Flower of the Paradise*), a piece of information by Ambako Javakhia is noteworthy, which was published in newspaper “*Mtsqemsi*” (Javakhia 1893: 9-10). According to the evidence,

offered by Javakhia, the copy of “*The Flower of the Paradise*”, available to him, was copied on September 27, 1794, which is earlier by almost two years as compared with the autograph available to us, dated to April 28, 1796 (S 128). In the above-mentioned article an extract from the manuscript is cited, according to which, it was copied in Mravalmta Dessert of Gareji and was based on “a very old manuscript”.

The manuscript available to Javakhia is lost at present. The question is: Who was the copyist of the text, dated to 1794? As this manuscript was “written in the Mravalmta Dessert of Gareji”, where Gabriel Mtsire lived in the same period, it is likely that exactly he might have been the copyist. As regards the primary source on which this manuscript was based, all is known about it is, that it was “very old”.

“*The Flower of the Paradise*” is distinguished from collections of the same genre by its special simplicity and immediateness. Each narrative is embellished with examples and extracts from the Holy Scripture. The entire creative pathos is imbued with prayer. The text is also impressive from the linguistic and stylistic viewpoints, which points to the artistic skills of the author.

The narratives, making up “*The Flower of the Paradise*”, are gathered from ancient manuscripts, but Gabriel Mtsire offers their new and original rendering. The narrative covers several sections. The first is the preamble, which is inevitably substantiated by a story and a quotation from the Holy Scripture. After creating such - so to say - a predisposition, the story proper – a tale from the *Patericon* is narrated. Then follows a section of exhortation or blessing, beginning with the addresses: “Therefore, I beseech you and entreat you”, “Yea, I beseech you”, “Dearly beloved brethren”, etc. In total, the collection contains a hundred similar narratives.

“*The Flower of the Paradise*” is divided into ten chapters, each of which has a general, uniting title: I – *On Humbleness and Meekness in Resemblance of Christ*; II – *On Obedience to Jesus Sweet Lord*; III – *On Confession and Repentance Giving Joy to Angels*, etc.

Each chapter consists of ten spiritual narratives and is entitled according to its contents. The titles of the sub-chapters of “*The Flower of the Paradise*” reflect ten main issues that are necessary to guide the God-pleasing life of a Christian person: 1. Humbleness and meekness; 2. Obedience; 3. Confession and repentance; 4. Patience; 5. Fasting and prayer; 6. Mercy; 7. Righteousness and truth; 8. Purity; 9. Faith; 10. Love.

St. Gabriel explains why the book is compiled according to this principle, this structure: 10 chapters – Ten Commandments, 100 – hundredfold fruit. The division of the text into ten chapters does not have a semantic parallel with the Lord’s Ten Commandments. The intention of the compiler of the collection is elucidated to a greater extent by the final, hundredth narrative. Here Gabriel Mtsire formulates in ten paragraphs an address to the listeners and readers as to how Orthodox Christians should act in order to be “successful in virtues and raised to glory ... to achieve perfection”.

Exactly these ten paragraphs are unfolded in the titles of the ten chapters of the work, each of which contains ten narratives. The reading of the book from beginning to end facilitates a Christian in understanding the essence of the hundredth exhortation (in this case, teaching, commandment), offered in the final narrative.

As noted above, each paragraph of the ten exhortations, given at the end of the work, corresponds to the ten chapters of the work, each of which covers ten narratives. Such structure of the book imparts it compositional coherence and intensifies the didactic outcome; from the beginning of the text to the end it prepares the reader to comprehend the ten exhortations, thus, the essence of the work is brought as close as possible to the reader’s mind and heart.

At the end of the manuscript, in the so-called “*bechedi*” (seal) Gabriel Mtsire writes: “This divinely inspired writing is called “*The Flower of the Paradise*” because it is compiled by means of selection from the book of the Fathers which is “*Samotkhe*” (*The Paradise*).” It is obvious from this evidence, that “*The Flower of the Paradise*” is made up of the narratives selected from the existing literary source entitled “*The Paradise*”, “compiled by means of selection”.

In Georgian sources several texts are known under the title *The Paradise*: 1. Collection of the *Paterics* by John Moschus (550-634) (7th c.); 2. Collection of Acts and Rules by Holy Fathers and Mothers, copied by Archpriest Stephane, dated to the year 977, referred to as “*The Oshki Paradise*”; 3. Collection of teachings and narratives of the 11th-12th-cc. Holy Fathers by Hieromonk Theophilus; 4. “*The Scete Paradise*”, known at present only from literary sources.

“*The Flower of the Paradise*” bears certain resemblance to several of the above-mentioned manuscripts. First of all, the primary source of the version, copied by Ilia Pantsulaia (A-1142), should be mentioned, the original of which is preserved on Mount Athos and is dated to 977. This book is known as “*The Oshki Paradise*”. To the present day, a collection of the monastic purpose has come down to us which was copied in 925 in the Holy Lavra of St. Sabbas the Sanctified and is kept in the Georgian collection of the Monastery of St. Catherine of Mount Sinai. The manuscript of 977 is an almost exact copy of the named version.

The above-mentioned manuscripts include a composition of the 7th c., authored by John Moschus: “*The Leimonarion*” (Leimōn), which is called “*Samotkhe*” (*The Paradise*) in Georgian. It was published by Ilia Abuladze on the basis of three manuscripts: Mt. Athos 9 (dated to 977), Sinai 36 (925) and Sinai 68 (13th c.). The comparison of “*The Flower of the Paradise*” and “*The Leimonarion*” by John Moschus indeed reveals certain resemblance and interrelation between them, but there are grounds to assume that it could not have been the only source of “*The Flower of the Paradise*”.

In the eighty-first narrative of the work by Gabriel Mtsire we read: “Which is of the Holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils”. It is clear from this extract that this narrative could not have been earlier than 787, as the Seventh Ecumenical council took place in 787. At the same time, in the same narrative the break of the Armenians from the Orthodox creed is discussed, which occurred in 726. As “*The Leimonarion*” was written in the 7th c., naturally, Gabriel Mtsire borrowed this narrative from a later source.

It is noteworthy that “*The Flower of the Paradise*” shows semantic (non-literal) similarity with the texts which are entered in the book: “*The Alphabetic Patericon. Selected Teachings of Fathers of the Scete*”. This book is based on three manuscripts: Mt. Athos 12 (10th-11th cc.); Sinai 35 (10th c.); Sinai 8 (11th c.).

“*The Flower of the Paradise*” displays the most resemblance with the book “*Teachings and Narratives of the Holy Fathers*” by Hieromonk Theophilus. This collection, published in 2014, is based on a text dated to the 11th-12th cc., translated from the Greek language by Hieromonk Theophilus (A1105). Ninety-three narratives of “*The Flower of the Paradise*” show semantic coincidence with the narratives included in the manuscript of Hieromonk Theophilus. It is also noteworthy that the style and language of “*The Flower of the Paradise*” by Gabriel Mtsire differs from the above-mentioned manuscripts.

The question is: In what a form did Gabriel Mtsire use the named ascetic-moral works? In some cases he left the titles as in the primary source, but united under a single idea, made the narratives more coherent by the plots and enriched them with quotations from the Holy Scripture and other teachings. In the works of Gabriel Mtsire the predominant form is that of novella, which imparts to them a definitely new colouring.

We have also compared “*The Flower of the Paradise*” with “*The Lives of the Desert Fathers*” by Rufinus (Rufinus 2014) and the book “*The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers*” (Worthley 2013), where narratives are offered in Greek and English. It represents a collection of apothegmatic narratives (*Apophthegmata Patrum*). The comparison demonstrated that some tales coincide with one another. On the basis of the study we have created *A Comparative Table of Identical Narratives*, which will demonstrate clearly for the readers the resemblance and difference between various sources.

The manuscript S 1139 is entered in the description of S Collection of manuscripts under the title: *Collection-Teachings* (vol. II, 1961, pp. 32-35). It includes eleven teachings by John Chrysostom and fourteen teachings by Ephrem the Syrian. This manuscript lacks the final pages

and it may be assumed that numerous readings may be missing. The teachings included in the collection follow a single style and represent narratives of a didactic-moral character. The style and structure of the beginning and final sections of the narratives of “*The Flower of the Paradise*” bear strong resemblance to the style and structure of the above-mentioned narratives.

As a result of the conducted study the following is identified:

The majority of the plots of the narratives included in “*The Flower of the Paradise*” display the most semantic resemblance with the manuscript of Hieromonk Theophilus, they show certain coincidence with “*The Alphabetic Patericon*” and slight resemblance with “*The Paradise*” by John Moschus.

The beginning and final sections of the narratives of “*The Flower of the Paradise*” are mainly inspired by the manuscript: “*Collection-Teachings*” (S1139), or perhaps by a similar source, unknown to us.

Accordingly, we assume two versions for the origin of the narratives included in “*The Flower of the Paradise*”:

1. Mostly, the collection by Hieromonk Theophilus entitled “*The Paradise*” was used and the text was complemented from other sources.
2. A source was used which entirely covered the narratives included by Gabriel Mtsire in “*The Flower of the Paradise*”, which has not come down to us.

References:

Javakhia, A. Mtsqemsi, Kvirila, issue 7, 1893;

John Moschus, *The Leimonarion*, prepared for publication by I. Abuladze, Academy of sciences, Tbilisi 1960;

Rufinus, *lives of the Desert Fathers*, Betania, Tbilisi, 2014;

The Alphabetic Patericon. Selected Teachings of Fathers of the Scete, published in series: Georgian translations of medieval novellas. v. II, prepared for publication by M. Dvali, Tbilisi, 1974;

The Flower of the Paradise, prepared for publication by V. Karbelashvili, Tbilisi 1895;

Wortley, J. *The anonymous sayings of the desert fathers*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (SRNSF) [Grant # DP2016_18 'Textual Scholarship and Editorial Studies'].