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The Image of the Emperor Heraclius in the works of the Byzantine Authors

Objective, Methodology

The main objective of my dissertation is to investigate the image of the Emperor Heraclius (610–641) in the works of the Byzantine authors. These works are studied not separated, but in connection with context and tradition of representation of the Emperor by the Byzantines. My project lies at the intersection of history and literary science. My project is based on the interdisciplinary analysis of the Byzantine historiographic and literary text-tradition. To some extent, my project lies within the framework of *history of reception*.

The representations of the Emperor Heraclius in the narrative sources are very similar structurally, lexically and in the sense. The accent of my project is exactly on this textual similarity, on the permanent or little changeable elements in the representation of Heraclius — i.e. on the *topoi*. Two common ways to explain this similarity are *historical and literary analysis*.

Historical approach emphasizes the role of *real* historical events in the formation of image. According to it, the image of Heraclius, which is to be found in the texts of VII–XII centuries, is only reaction to the particular events of his reign (610–641), i.e. his Persian war (610–628), the victory over Persia, return and raising of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (*Exaltatio Sanctae Crucis*), heresy of Monothelitism, Arabic invasion (from 634) and others. In fact it is a “realistic” view in a positivistic manner, which supposes that history reproduces itself in the texts again and again, so that the texts are nothing more than “reflection” of real history. Partly I apply to this approach, it helps me to connect the texts to *real* Heraclius and to make his figure centre of my work. However the disadvantages of historical determination are that it doesn’t accept that each historical representation is interpretation, underestimates the role of other factors (each author’s subjectivity, peculiarities of the time, when the certain work was composed etc.) and, what’s more, remains deaf to the existence of other, non-historical *topoi*, yet there are such.

The textual similarity can be explained literary, using such methodology of *literary analysis* as *narratology* (Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, Heinrich Lausberg). It stresses the role of the literary and linguistic *topoi* — used lexic, images, allusions; structure, rhythm, emphasis, background, selection of events of the literary work. The sort of language used by my authors is also significant. The Byzantine Greek that they used has not yet reached the later Medieval stage (since 12th century), when it was sharply divided into the artificial “archaizatory”, classical-oriented language of intellectuals and vernacular language. The language and way of narrating of my authors hasn’t reached the level when it could only be a *linguistic game* of classical allusions, with certain rules. The authors of most of my sources (both court intellectuals and monks) could

read and easily understand each other's works. Therefore the poststructuralist methodology of *narratology*, with its overemphasizing of the role of language and linguistic *topoi*, i.e. rules of the linguistic game, throughout the whole (Byzantine) literature, is used, but only to a certain extent. It helps me to understand the *intertextuality* and the rules of "functioning" of the literary texts, to view the literary tradition in its integrity. The most obvious disadvantages of *narratological* approach are not seeing the reality behind the texts, not considering the sense that the authors themselves wanted to express, and deconstruction of the texts, reduced to absurdity.

The third way to perceive the essence of the *topoi* is also borrowed from literary *analysis*. Its main point is paying special attention to the *genre specific* of the texts. This approach is very important for me, because the difference of portraying Heraclius in the sources of different genres (chronicles, poems, rhetorical works) is significant. It can be argued that the chroniclers, e.g., only wrote and rewrote the same historical narrative with minimal changes. Yet the unity of the whole textual tradition and the authors' subjectivity remain to be an important factor.

I believe that the only way, which remains, to interpret the essence of the *topoi*, together with taking into account both literary and historical peculiarities, is the interpretation on extraliterary and extrahistorical level, i.e. *geistwissenschaftliche* analysis (in the terms of W. Dilthey, H. Rickert, hermeneutical school). This approach emphasizes the *geistliche and mental reality*, common to most of my authors. I suppose, only the fact that the authors *thought* in similar categories explains the way how (literature) and about what (history) they wrote.

Their thinking in similar categories is, in my opinion, not due to some metaphysical reasons, but is a result of similar reading, education and upbringing. I have found that there are three main mental *topoi*, or factors, which result in similar way of portraying Heraclius – *rhetoric, Bible and imperial ideology*. The structure of my work corresponds to this observation.

Survey of the Present State of Research

The theme "The Image of the Emperor Heraclius in the works of the Byzantine Authors" hasn't been specially investigated, except the work of David Pritchard (1993)¹. But the method of this scholar was historical only: he investigated rather history than the entire image. Some aspects of the image have been subject of articles of P.J. Alexander, S.S. Alexander, M. Whitby, P. Magdalino, D. Pritchard, G. Reinink, B. Stolte. What has been studied in a more active way – it's political, social and religious history of the reign of Heraclius (610–641)².

¹ Pritchard D. The Emperor Heraclius: Investigations into the Image of an Emperor [Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD at the University of St Andrews]. St Andrews, 1993.

² N. Baynes, G. Ostrogorsky, A. Stratos, N. Oikonomides, Av. Cameron, J. Howard-Johnston, W. Kaegi, J. Haldon

Sources

I have divided my sources into two main groups. In the first (and greater) group are the Byzantine sources of VII–XII centuries which contain information about Emperor Heraclius. They belong to different genres – chronicles, poems, homilies, visions, vitae, theologic-polemical literature. Most important are the poems of George of Pisidia, the homily of Theodorus Syncellus, the Paschal chronicle, the chronicles of Theophanes the Confessor and patriarch Nicephoros.

Sources of the second group have nothing to do with Heraclius, but they help me to understand better the views and information provided by the authors of the first group. Mostly these are earlier sources (II–VII centuries), which were well-known from the seventh century onwards and could have been read by the authors of the first group. First of all, it's the Bible, and, then, the rhetorical treatises (Hermogenes of Tarsus, Menander Rhetor, Libanius etc), works of church historians (Lactantius, Sokrates Scholasticus, Euagrius Scholasticus) and Fathers of the Church (Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom etc). Eusebius' of Caesarea *Vita Constantini* and Procopius' of Caesarea *Secret history (Anecdota)* play a particular role as the most famous in the Byzantine historiography examples of panegyric and psogos. This group of sources is necessary because it's these texts that form the Byzantine tradition of representation of the emperor. By means of these sources I try to reveal and explore the rhetorical, ideological and literary rules of portraying of an emperor. By means of these sources I try to put the Byzantine authors narrating about Heraclius into context and tradition.

Structure of Dissertation

The concept of the structure of my work is to combine the topological level, which unites the categories of the mental reality which result in the certain ways of representing the Emperor Heraclius – and the historical material, i.e. the real Heraclius, who is also, to a certain extent, present in the texts. I believe that, just as the sense of a legal document is in fact combination of the *schemata* and the reality, so the sense of the Byzantine sources concerning the image of the Emperor Heraclius is in fact combination of the mental *topoi* and the real history.

The first chapter of my work will be dedicated to the rhetorical (classical, ancient Greek) element of the image of the Emperor Heraclius in the works of the Byzantine Authors. In this chapter I will compare the most “classical” of the Byzantine sources telling about Heraclius (namely George of Pisidia, Theodorus Syncellus, partly Theophanes the Confessor) with the late antique and early Byzantine rhetorical texts. The purpose is to put the representations of Heraclius into rhetorical tradition and observe how it works on the concrete material. I will analyze the structure of late antique and Byzantine panegyric concerning Heraclius, the classical virtues of an “ideal” emperor (the Aristotelian courage, temperance, justice and prudence) and the virtues of Heraclius, the “classical” military descriptions and the battles of Heraclius, the classical imagery and the comparisons of Heraclius with Heracles, Perseus, Iason, Orpheus in the

works of the Byzantine authors. The subsections of the chapter will be organized according to the historical principle: which concrete events of the reign of Heraclius are used by the Byzantine authors who follow the classical tradition, and why? Why is for George of Pisidia the destruction by Heraclius of the Persian town Dvin in 623 an example of his courage, and not the conquest of more important and strategic territories?

The second chapter will be devoted to the biblical and Christian element of the image of Heraclius in the works of the Byzantine Authors. I will find out the biblical and Christian *topoi* in the portrayals of the Emperor Heraclius, emphasizing the Christian conservatism of the authors and its concrete manifestations. In the centre of attention will be the subject of the piety of Heraclius (the narratives on his prayers and speeches; the images of Heraclius with an icon or the Gospels, *Exaltatio Crucis* by Heraclius); the Christian elements in the narrative on his struggle against the tyrant Phocas, against the Persians and Arabs; the discourse on the empire as the New Jerusalem and the Emperor Heraclius as the new David, Solomon; the biblical imagery and the comparisons of Heraclius with Noah, Moses etc. The historical basis of most of the *topoi* will be also taken into account and examined in the certain subsections. For example, the comparisons (in fact, identifications) of emperors with Constantine were quite common in Byzantium due to the mental tradition, but under the comparison of Heraclius with Constantine lay the firm ground of *Exaltatio Crucis*, which was made by both of them, so that the number of authors applying to this image with regard to imperial ideology grows swiftly since the seventh century.