

SOME PECULIARITIES OF THE LANGUAGE OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE*

Abstract

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is a unique phenomenon as a philosopher, a theologian and a writer. All the problems that arise around the author infer from the grounds of his uniqueness, his diversity from others and they always claim quite peculiar ways and means of investigation and evaluation. All this holds true to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as a writer; to his language, to his style. The common impression made by reading this amazing author is first of all that of magnificence, of lofty, exalted character of his language style.

In the evaluation of Dionysius the Areopagite's stylistic peculiarities, be it investigations of either grammatical character or connected with stylistic problems, it is always necessary to look into the roots of his Weltanschauung, his theological and philosophical attitude.

Key words: Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Neoplatonic ideas, Ephraim Mtsireh, grammatical attributes, language style

It is well-known that post-Hellenistic literature was subjected to a profound influence by the introduction of Oriental countries into the Hellenistic areal. Plain, clear and monumental style of the Antique literature succumbed by and by to oriental lofty and demurred style. The oriental element grew so large even in the first Christian centuries, new literature grew so different from the old one both thematically and stylistically that it led to a protest from the higher Greek aristocracy who clung to the old traditions. This protest was expressed by the return to the archaic language style in the literature, by the revival of the ancient Attic language.

Nevertheless as time flew this revived Attic also changed and inasmuch as "almost all the work that eventually gave Byzantine culture was carried in the Orient"¹ and as men who promoted this culture were mostly from Oriental countries, it was natural, that the literary greek language despite its Atticization was more oriental, than Hellenistic in nature.

If we consider the literary style of Pseudo-dionysius the Areopagite from this point of view we must note, that Oriental eloquence in its literal meaning is very far from the peculiarities of the literary style of the Areopagite.

Unboundly and excessively ornate lofty Asianistic style has nothing to do with the speech of the author of the Areopagitic doctrines. Here we have no desire of decorating the expressions with boundless epithets and shedding the abundance of word, of beautification and of showering ornaments incessantly. The Areopagite brings the idea itself to such a height, elevates, lifts it up to such a level that the verbal expression of this idea, its rendering into words becomes an impossible possibility. Therefore we have a lofty style "by itself", inasmuch as the idea itself is lofty. "To mystic words it is most and most appropriate and becoming (πρεπωδέστατον), that we veil them with mystic and monastic symbols", Dionysius the Areopagite writes². This is a plain Biblical verity to him. Demurred ideas should be rendered in demurred words, and a different shell, different clothing is needed for such misty ideas. But

¹ S. Kaukhchishvili, History of the Byzantine Literature (in Georg.), Tbilisi, 1973, p. 10.

² De Celesti Hierarchia, Migne, PG t. 3, 140 A.

the style of Dionysius the Areopagite is unusually poetic even without that, poetic in its profundity, in the richness of expression³.

But again, what kind is the verbal material, that language textile, woven and embroidered in amazing patterns that served the author to render in plain words unaccountable, intricate, complex ideas that were extremely difficult to grasp for the mind and the sense? What serves to render it in this language? Here a number of problems arise. First of all we shall consider the following among them: abundance of words in the Superlative degree and of the words with the ὑπέρ – forms. Naturally this problem would not arise if it did not have special significance for this investigation.

The interest in this problem arose as early as the first doubts appeared as to the authorship of Dionysius the Areopagite who had been considered to be a public man of the first century A.D. and St. Paul's disciple; then it took the form of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The first weightiest reason that clipped the possibility of the Areopagitica being written in the first century A.D. was that of a philosophical nature and it implied deciphering of the Neoplatonic ideas in the so called Apostolical books. "In Areopagitica one feels an excessive Neoplatonist, who even a word plainly and simply will not utter, and who will not take a single step without the Superlative degree", V. Bolotov wrote in 1914⁴.

"He is full of artificial loftiness" – N. Smirnov wrote even earlier. N. Smirnov sees in him clumsy, awkward, demurred and unnatural style. A trife towards the rhetorical manipulations and beautification, verbosity and lofty style, abundance of philosophical terms. To put it plainly he sees all the characteristics that were peculiar to the literary taste and to theology in the fifth century⁵. One can hardly call the Areopagite's language and style "unnatural, artificial loftiness" or "forced-in verbosity"⁶. Nevertheless it is difficult to agree with such characterization. On the contrary, its internal expressivity is so intensive, the author's inspiration so deep, that the Georgian translator, Ephraim Mtsireh (XI c.), sunk into the author's extasy, so to say, brings the original ideas and forms of the text to a more refined, exalted and clearly defined form.

One of the important recent studies on Dionysius the Areopagite's language belongs to the Italian researcher Piero Scazzoso. He belongs to the small group of researchers who strive to uncover the mystery of the Areopagite's language. "To clear up the importance and meaning of Dionysius the Areopagite's word I have to build up a great spiritual building that was created by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in his works" – writes the author⁷.

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The material shown below with respect to this problem was picked up from the Treatise and Epistles of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

The degrees of comparison are a common characteristic of the Adjectives and Adverbs. Nevertheless in emphatic speech Nouns also may have such degrees. Even very early Homer used such words as: βασιλεύτερος "more of a king", or κύντερον "more of a dog", Herodotus had δουλότερος "more of a slave", the Superlative degree was used with a word that apparently cannot have such a form μονώτατος the unique, the most unique (Thucydides, Aristophanes), and more unnatural κυντατώτατος (Eubulus)

³ D. Sumbadze, Dionysius the Areopagite and Dante Alighieri, Matsne (Series of philosophy...). 1972, N1, 54 (in Georg.).

⁴ В. Болотов, К вопросу об ареопагитских творениях, «Христианское чтение», СПб, май, 1914, 562.

⁵ Н. Смирнов, Русская литература о сочинениях с именем св. Дионисия Ареопагита, Православное обозрение, VI, 1872; See also: O. Bardenhewer, Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Freiburg, 1924, Vol. IV, S. 282; S. Antoniadis, Places de la liturgie dans la tradition des lettres grecques, Leiden, 1939, 166; E. Norden, Agnostos Theos, Leipzig-Berlin, 1923, 82.

⁶ Compare it - «Перед нами парадокс словесной бессловесности» и на редкость многоречивого «молчания», но в известном смысле это и впрямь «бессловесность» и впрямь «молчание» – С.С. Аверинцев, Поэтика ранневизантийской литературы, М., 1977, 139.

⁷ Cf. P. Scazzoso, Ricerche sulla struttura del linguaggio dello P.D. Areopagita, Milano, 1967, 16. On the evaluation of the language of Dionysius the Areopagite in European scientific literature.

– a doubly Superlative form: “more of a dog” and “the most doggest”. Such instances are of special interest to the linguists⁸.

The Superlative degree is formed by a number of affixes: the most archaic suffix is -ιστος, compiles of * is – tho (comp. isthah in Sanscr.)⁹, -ατος, -τατος originated from the suffix of the ordinal Numerals -τος (e.g. δέκατος – tenth), also – έστατος and ίστατος, the latter is mainly used to emphasize bad, vile characteristics: ποτίστατος (Aristophanes) – the most of a drunkard, κλεπτίστατος – the most notorious thief, μονοφαγίστατος – the most of a glutton, the greatest glutton, etc.

It was demonstrated that Dionysius the Areopagite applies the adjectives in the Superlative degree not very often, as it may seem while reading the text, and even when he uses it, it hardly implies solely epithetical specification of a subject or phenomenon.

If we glance at the examples we shall note that the Degrees of the Adjectives are mainly formed in those chapters of the works, where the author gives the characterization of the Celestial Hyerarchy and of Divine Names.

Here we consider it useful to recall what the Areopagite’s “Celestial Hyerarchy” is. First of all it is a catafatic means of perception of the Areopagitical “superbright darkness”, That is, of God. This means of perception is hyerarchial, gradual, it is compiled of several stages; “step by step the divinest elevate the humblest” Maximus the Confessor writes¹⁰. This hyerarchial way, or the hyerarchy itself is a structure of an ideal reality, of metaphysical being, steps of emanation of the Divine Light; this with Dionysius the Areopagite takes the form of a group of angels striving to God. Here emanation implies a continuous enlargement of the distance to the Divine Light, i.e. to divinity in general, and as such the emanated subjects are characterized by gradual reduction of the nature of divinity. Angels that are most close to God are called “the other bright feature” and “a copy, picture of the First Light” (Maximus, PG 4, 288), i.e. they resemble God most of all; and most retarded from God are lest resembling God. The aim is the likeness to God, i.e. closeness to God, His vizualisation.

Areopagite’s Celestial Hyerarchy consists of three triads, i.e. of nine stages: Seraphim (Σεραφίμ), Cherubim (Χερουβίμ), Thrones (Θρόνοι), Dominations (Κυριότητα), Virtues (Δυνάμεις), Powers (Έξουσίαι), Principalities (Άρχαί), Archangels (Άρχάγγελοι), Angels (Άγγελοι).

Every first stage has greater likeness to God and is more divine, while every subsequent stage is less resembling God and, so to say, less divine, etc. This reducing of rising characteristic of stages laconically, smartly could be rendered in the speech just with the Degrees of the Adjectives. Let us consider in what cases is used the Superlative degree:

έγγύτατος – nearest, closest (CH 205 B), - is used of the first congregation of the most divine subjects – the Seraphim, angels that are most near God, that actually gaze at Him.

ύψηλότατος – highest, is said of the third member of the first triad (CH 205 C).

άκρότατος – highest (CH 321). It refers to the correspondence, adequacy of material numbers and Holy numbers of the highest angels.

φανοτάτη (DN 592 C) clearest, brightest, purest is said of souls approaching God, when God’s apparition “with the clearest brightness (φανοτάταις μαρμαρυγαῖς) fills souls with “the most pure look”.

άνώτατος and πρεσβύτατος – highest and oldest (DN 697 C) - i.e. most highly esteemed, chief, most principal. The above-mentioned example refers to angels being near the God.

σκοτεινότατος – Darkest, most intensive darkness, refers to the location of “mysterious words” (MTh 997 B).

άμιγεστάτη (CH 208B) – most clean from impurities is said of the Saints, elevated and flawless, devoid of any shade of blemishes... etc.

⁸ П. Шантрен, Историческая морфология греческого языка, М., 1953, 96.

⁹ Шантрен, 90.

¹⁰ Sancti Maximi Scholia, Migne, 4, 61D: τὰς βαθμηδὸν ὑπερκειμένας αἱ ἀνώτεροι ὡς ὑποβεηκυίας μυσταγωγούσα...

Examination of the individual cases makes it clear, that Dionysius the Areopagite's whole hierarchial system is a base for grammatical attributes, to put it another way, that of hierarchy of grammatical degrees also: if Dionysius's every hierarchy of the Celestial Hierarchy gives a definition of the degree of closeness to God, hence the degree of likeness to God, likewise, degrees of the adjectives and adverbs – gradus comparationis and gradus superlativus – are the main linguistic means of expressing the degree of likeness to God and serve hierarchial apprehension of Dionysius the Areopagite's hierarchies.

Here we must point out one thing: "farthest" from God is "nearest" to this world. Thus, hierarchy that is most distant from God is most close to the real world. So, one and the same objects can be characterized by a pair of attributes: farthest-nearest, lowest-highest, vilest-finest, etc. according to the fact that the characterization is given from higher to lower degrees or vice versa. In the treatise "Ecclesiastical Hierarchy", i.e. in describing a terrestrial picture of the Celestial hierarchy, words in the Superlative appear much rarely. And when they appear they generally are used in instances when the treatment refers to the relation of this world and the Celestial world.

Here we shall not recount all the cases, but we shall mention one name, as a result of Ephraim's translation: τὸ τῶν οὐρανίων νοῶν θεοειδέστατον – Ephraim gives: *zecisata mat gonebata ghmrtis mxedvelobisa* (CH XV, 2 – 329A –143, 33) and elsewhere: *πάσαις ταῖς θεοειδεστάταις* – *qovelta mat ghmrtis mxilvelta dzalta* (CH VII,2–208 B/120,18). τὸ θεοειδέστατον is rendered by Ephraim as "seeing the God", and θεοειδεστάτη (ἡ) "a person who sees the God". While generally θεοειδής means "resembling God", "something of God's looks", hence the Superlative is 'ughvtismsgavsesi', most resembling God, most like God. Just this is a phrase that Ephraim gives several times: *ghmrtis saxisa mis simartivisa* – θεοειδεστάτην αὐτῶν ἀπλότητα (CH IV, 1-112, 32; XV, 2...). We do not think that such identical translation of "a person who sees" and "like, resembling" is caused by the fact that εἶδον is thought to be the Second form "Aorist" of the verb ὁράω, that means exactly "seeing, watching, gazing at something". From the Areopagitic conception we consider it more proper to think, that in "Divine Hierarchy most resembling God (as it was mentioned above) are most of all such intellects and beings, that directly receive the light showered by God, they see God directly, they are His first copies. "Most like God" are only beings who see God. In other hierarchies perception of Light is already indirect, not first-hand, and the resemblance – less (Celest, Hyer. VII, I). Thus Ephraim Mtsireh gives in fact an equivalent of a phrase and not a literal translation (moreover, not a false translation). Such instances are not rare in Ephraim's text.

As we see, Gradus Superlativus has a great conceptual textological weight in the language of Dionysius the Areopagite.

The foremost peculiarity of Dionysius the Areopagite's language is mainly all that makes the peculiarity of his system of reasoning, his philosophy. We are most interested in the fact where the point is that "General Grammar" ends and "Supergrammar" begins.

We see such gradual elevation of characteristics from lower to higher in Dionysius the Areopagite's reflection of the stairway of physical and metaphysical realities that degrees of the Adjectives and Adverbs cannot already supply enough linguistic material to erect such an edifice. Here an indispensable means for the Areopagite becomes use of words with ὑπέρ – forms in such abundance that was not peculiar neither to the theologians of the post-Dionysius period, nor to the Neoplatonists that were prior this time.

ὑπέρ in Greek first of all comes an Adverb (very, greatly, over, absolutely, intensively, excessively, in outmost manner); on the other hand, it may be a preposition (on, over, higher, higher up, for) and thirdly, it may be a constituent part of a composite that gives to a word, be it a Verb or a Noun, or an Adverb and a Participle – the following meanings and shades of meaning: out of the bound, to the other side, passing by, on the surface of, for the profit of, for the sake of, for the protection of, and most interesting for our investigation – very much, extraordinarily, exceedingly. Its Grammatical arena, as we see, is rather vast and as to its word-forming capacity – rather productive. But it may be said that the

quantity of words with the prefix ὑπέρ becomes ὑπέρ with Dionysius the Areopagite. Let us name these forms first, and then we shall try to give a logical explanation of this fact. This ὑπέρ is most of all used with an Adjective and either it brings the quality to the higher degree (perfect- superperfect, kindhearted-superkindhearted, full – superfull, overflowing, clear- superclear, etc.), or it elevates the meaning, extends it in space or time (world's – superworld's, superheaven's...), or it gives a word a meaning out of the bounds of everything, above all attributions:

ὑπεράρχιος, 2 (CH 273 A), ὑπεράρρητος, 2 (DN 640 D), ὑπεράγνωστος, 2 (DN 592 D), ὑπεράγαθος, 2 (DN 641 A, 680 A), ὑπερκόσμιος, 2 (CH 284 D), ὑπέρκαλος, 2 (MTh 997 B), ὑπερουράνιος, 2 (DN 645 C; 641 C; 592 C), ὑπερτελής, 2 (DN 648 C), ὑπερπλήρης, 2 (CH 260 c), ὑπερφαής, 2 (DN 597 A; MTh 997 A), ὑπερφανής, 2 (DN 593 B), ὑπερφύς, 2 (DN 648 A; 648 D; 684 C; 592 B) etc.

ὑπερούσιος (2) Superbeingly (ὑπερουσία – superbieng) – this term may be said to form a basic term for all other words with ὑπέρ in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite. It is the fundamental concept and the sole aspect of Dionysius the Areopagite's philosophy (also in linguistic sense) is shifted to this direction (to put it better "is lifted" to this direction). Here we shall have to give special emphasis to Areopagitical apophatics, i.e. to the Negative theology, and we shall have to present its characterization.

As it is discovered and explained in special literature such a way of definition of God's nature is Neoplatonic, but it takes origin in the Platonism¹¹.

Reflection of Plato's Absolute, of the Unattainable//Unreachable One in unification of the Absolute Being and the Absolute Nothing, i.e. his definition of the Absolute as of Unity (i.e. the One) and Nonunity takes the following form with the Neoplatonists: Unity is Nonunity, meanwhile the basic thing is, that as it is Nonunity, it is more Unity, because it is Superunity¹².

Neoplatonic Absolute is already above antinomials (words of opposite meaning: existence-nonexistence, unity-nonunity) and if it is nonunity, it is nonunity inasmuch as it is superunity.

Hence: Areopagitic Unity, i.e. God: it is beyond existence, it is neither existence nor nonexistence, because it is Superexistence, it is neither God nor non-God, because it is Supergod. It is ὑπέρθεος and its entity is not an entity (οὐσία) or nonentity, but it is "superentity" (ὑπερουσία), that catafatically acquires a meaning of "super-full", "Super bright", "super clear", "super natural", "super shining", "super flowing", "super-unexpressible", "super unaccountable", "super kind" and such attributes. This defines the lofty character of the Areopagite's style. If one did not take it into account and perceive it as peculiarity of the literary style only – the main idea would be lost.

This is also such a peculiarity of the Areopagite's style that makes his works immensely difficult, in fact, the most difficult works to be translated, because every language does not possess the means of expressing ideas laconically, there one word cannot grasp all those meanings that the Areopagite gives as terms using degrees and ὑπέρ – forms (e.g. imagine these difficulties on English or French translations). As to the extended translations of phrases, it somehow reduces the intensity of a term and even impoverishes the discussion terminologically.

πηγή τῆς ὑπερουσίας θεότητος (DN 641 D)

ταῖς ὑπερουσίαις θεολογίαις (DN 641 D)

τὸ ὑπερούσιον αὐτοτάγαθον (DN 593 B)

Τριὰς ὑπερούσιε (MTh 997 A)

περὶ... τῆς ὑπερουσίας... θεότητος (DN 588 C)

ὑπερούσια φῶτα (DN 645 B)

ὑπερούσιον λόγον (DN 644 C)

τάξεως ὑπεριδρυμένη... (DN 648 C)

ὑπερουράνια φῶτα (DN 641 C)

τῶν ὑπερουρανίων νοῶν (DN 592 C)

¹¹ D. Sumbadze, Dionysius the Areopagite Dionysius the Areopagite and Dante Alighieri, Matsne (Series of philosophy...). 1972, N3, 25.

¹² Ibid.

ὥς ὑπερτελής (DN 648 C)
 ὑπερπλήρη τῆς πατρικῆς ἀγαθότητος (CH 260 C)
 ὀνομάζουσι τὴν ὑπερφαῖ (DN 597 A; MTh 997 A)
 ἢ τῆς ὑπεραγαθότητος ὑπερύπαρξις (DN 593 C)
 ὑπερουσιότητος ἀγνωσία (DN 588 A)
 ὑπερκειμένην θεωργίαν (DN 644 C)
 ὥς ὑπερέχοντα πάντας... (DN 596 B)
 ἀνάβασιν ὑπερβαίνουσι (MTh 1000 C) etc.

Many other examples of this kind could be named, if we do not mention the use of ὑπέρ as of a Particle, or as of an Adverb.

We want to give special interest to the term ὑπέρθεος.

ὑπέρθεος in Sophocles' Greek Dictionary of Byzantine Period¹³ is given as an Adjective. Then it must have a meaning of "superdivine". But the definition given by the author of the Dictionary does not mean that – "more than God, absolute God", Even without that, we know a simple peculiarity of the Greek language: every word can be substantivized, even a Verb and an Adverb, if we add an article to it. Articles of Masculine form and Feminine Gender from personal nouns, while of Neuter nouns of action and abstract ideas.

Thus it suffices to add an article to ὑπέρθεος to get on the one hand ὁ ὑπέρθεος – Super-God, on the other hand τὸ ὑπέρθεον – superdivinity.

In Stephanus's Great Dictionary¹⁴ it is given with Nouns – ὁ ὑπέρθεος, "just based on Dionysius the Areopagite – "qui supra deum est" – something that is above God, more than God.

We give all the examples that we found in the Areopagite's works. Note Ephraim's equivalent of this term:

1) ἀνὴρ ὁ ὑπέρθεος ἐχρημάτισεν (DN 648 C) – mamakac ikmna zeštaghmertta (II, 10) – пребожественный стал человеком (Eikalovich)¹⁵.

2) ὑπέρθεος ὑπερουσίως εἰς θεός (DN 649 C) – zeštghmertta uzeshstaesi arsebataj (II, 11 – 24, 14) – остался пребожественным, сверхсущностным единым богом

3) Τριάς ὑπέρθεε (MTh 997 A) – samebao zeštghmerttao (I, 1 – 223, 4)

4) τὸ ἀμίμητον μίμημα τοῦ ὑπερθέου καὶ υπεραγάθου (II epist. Gaios) – umsgavso msgavseba zeštghmerttajsa da zeštasaxierebisa (233, 25)

5) τὸ υπεράγαθον, τὸ ὑπέρθεον, τὸ υπερούσιον, τὸ ὑπέρζων, τὸ ὑπέρσοφον καὶ ὅσα τῆς υπεροχικῆς ἐστὶν ἀφαιρέσεως (DN 640 B) – zeštasaxieri, zeštghmerttaj, zeštaarsebisaj, zeštacxorebisaj, zeštasibrznisaj da raodeni raj ars zeštaaghmatebulisa qovelta gonebata uzeštaesobisaj (DN 640 B) – сверхблаго, сверхбожество, сверхсущность...

6) τὸ ὑπέρθεον φῶς ἔνωσις (DN 593 C) – šeertebaj natelsa mas zeštghmerttajsa (10, 31) – соединяются с пребожественным светом.

7) ἢ ὑπέρθεος θεότης, ἢ υπεράγαθος ἀγαθότης (DN 641 A) – zeštghmrtisa ghmrteebaj, zeštasaxierebisa saxierebaj (17, 15).

As you have noticed undoubtedly, the Russian translation offers the main term for ὑπέρθεος – "пребожественный", (superdivine), rarely "сверхбожество" (supergod). Bolotov wrote on this term: "Известное выражение «прииде Иисус пребожественный» ведет свое начало из Areopagitica, и смысл его в словянском переводе затухеван: в подлинно „Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὑπέρθεος“ – Пребог, Вышебог, - излюбленное словечко Псевдо-Ареопagitа. Я сильно сомневаюсь, чтобы церковь апостольского века позволила кому-либо из верующих употреблять такое философски нелепое выражение, как „ὑπέρθεος“¹⁶.

¹³ Sophocles E.A. Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods, New-York, 1900 s.v. ὑπέρθεος, 2.

¹⁴ Thesaurus graecae linguae, ab Henrico Stephano constructus, Parisiis, 1865, v. VIII. s.v. ὑπέρθεος.

¹⁵ О божественных именах, Буэнос-Айрес, 1957.

¹⁶ Болотов В., К вопросу об ареопagitских творениях, стр. 556.

Our attention is drawn to one circumstance in this connection again. If, as we have noted, in the Russian equivalent the essence of this term is disguised, ancient Kartuli//Georgian translation also evades construction of the literal adequate and Ephraim Mtsireh uses in all cases but one “Zeštaghmerttaj” for ὑπέρθεος, that is a post-Genetive form of the word “God” taken in the Plural. Why did Ephraim make such a significant correction?

Unity of the hypostasis of the Uninatural Holy Trinity, as we know, is such unblemished unity, where all parts are equal, they do not blend and meanwhile are inseparable. For Christian philosophers and the congregation the concept of “Super God”, naturally, caused definite fear of forming doubts about equality of the Trinity hypostases. If there is “Super-God” then there must be a “Subordinate God” also, etc. Hence, we think that Ephraim, acknowledging the necessity for it, tries to nip in the bud the basis for such doubts. He tries to shift emphasis to the fact that the Christian God is above other Gods, who are several. Recall I Corinthians: Many are Gods and many are sovereigns, - but our God is one, the Father, who created everything (8, 5-6). Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite has made a reference to this citation in “The Divine Names” pointing to the Sacred Scriptures” (Div. Nam. II, II-649).

In Commentaries of Maximus the Confessor we read: “all these have one cause and there are not several Gods and Makers, and all this he said only to criticize those Pagan philosophers” (παρ’ Ἑλληνιστοφῶν, Migne, PG 4, 312 A).

Thus, if God may be “Super-God” then he may be above those Gods that are mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures also.

Like ὑπέρθεος the term ὑπερούσιος is also interesting from this point of view. It is the first attribute of the Absolute and in fact they are identical concepts. In the sense of the heretical interpretation it was more dangerous than ὑπέρθεος, but it seems that such a possibility was not very apparent and in most cases Ephrem gives a literal translation – zeštaarsebas, zeštaarsebiti – Superbeing, Superbeingly. In a pair of instances he gives a Noun in the Plural again.

It is very interesting to note, that Maximus the Confessor in Commentaries on Dionysius the Areopagite never gives a definition of a term ὑπέρθεος, while he gives extraordinary thorough definitions of not terms and concepts only (ὑπερουράνια, ὑπερκόσμιος, ὑπερούσιος etc.), but of ordinary expressions as well, supplies grammatical commentaries and sometimes even points to the synonymous notes in the dictionaries: ὄλβον – πλοῦτον, ἁγύλον – ἑπικαμπές (PG 4, 400 D) he corrects as: τῆς κατὰ νοῦν, saying it should have been to; κατὰ νοῦν, etc.

As to ὑπέρθεος he mentions it in the text, as far as we have discovered it, only once. It is well-known, that these works have also been translated by Ephrem Mtsireh and in this instance again he gives a more extended translation of ὑπέρθεος: ὁ ὑπεράγαθος καὶ ὑπέρθεος “zešta saxierebaj igi da zesta ghmerttaj ghmrtteebaj”¹⁷.

Neither Pachymerae gives the definition of it in his Commentaries to the Epistles¹⁸.

As we see, this ὑπέρθεος term caused certain awkwardness, notwithstanding the fact, that the whole Areopagitical theology served to its clarification and to its establishment.

We cannot treat in isolation, without the background of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s whole philosophical and theological system. We must treat it only in the range of such words as ὑπεράγαθος, ὑπερούσιος, ὑπεράγνωστος, ὑπερφυής, ὑπερκαλός, etc. The Areopagite legalizes these attributes as terms and uses them separately.

Looking through the Sophocles’ Greek dictionary of the Byzantine Period for words with ὑπέρ- forms, we’ll see that the majority of these words have been quoted from works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. They are mainly undefined or have a note for a classical form, i.e. a form without ὑπέρ. If the author of the Dictionary mentions another author besides the Areopagite, as a rule, he is either a forrunner of the Neoplatonists Philo the Alexandrian or Plotinus, much rarely Gregory of Nazianzus.

¹⁷ Migne, PG 4, Sancti Maximi Scholia, 401 D.

¹⁸ Georgii Pachymerae, Paraphrasis in Sancti Dionysii epistolas. Migne. PG, 4.

Even this only fact is enough to mention first of all Philo and Plotinus among the Areopagite's priors.

Thus, ὑπέρ- “ze, zešta, super” mainly forms conceptual categories and it is an unchangeable means for the textological colouration of a phrase. Hence it is clear, what is the essence of unnaturally lofty style of Dionysius the Areopagite and that it cannot have an aesthetic value only, neither is it love for ornate phrases. Of course, the phrase: „τῆς ὑπὲρ πάντα ὑπερουσίως ὑπερούσης ὑπερθεότητος... (Holy Trinity is ment. Div. Names. XIII, 3–981 A) serves as an example of the author's style, but first of all it is an example of terminological meticulousness. Dionysius the Areopagite finds extraordinarily exact, expressive concepts. He gives masterly possibilities of the impossibility of giving a definition to the Absolute but he says in the end that this is an “unfillable overflowing superfull” – ἀπλήρωτον ὑπερπλήρες – aghuvsebeli zeštasavseba (Div. Names II, 10-649 C–24, 7). This peculiarity exactly – the author's peculiar fullness, brimming and overflowing way of expressing ideas, his style analogous to that of “showering and shedding divine fullness”, all these are in perfect agreement with the Areopagite's aim and purpose of liturgy.

In the end we want to repeat that in the evaluation of Dionysius the Areopagite's stylistic peculiarities, be it investigations of either grammatical character or connected with stylistic problems, it is always necessary to look into the roots of his Weltanschauung, his theological and philosophical attitude, because only such background can afford a full and perfect interpretation of these peculiarities.

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