

Title: Oral- Formulaic (Re- )Composition as "Rhetorical Translation" in the Old Slavic *Digenis Akritis*

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Abstract:

André Vaillant, who resolved numerous problems surrounding the Old Slavic version of the Byzantine romantic epic *Digenis Akritis* (such as locating its creation in fourteenth-century Macedonia), claimed that it was not a translation, but "un récit libre d'après une version grecque du poème." Indeed, in its "folklorism" and brutal epic ethos, the Slavic version diverges greatly from any extant Greek text, especially that to which it is most closely related genetically, the highly romanticized Grottaferrata version. Paradoxically, in its style and ethos it is closer to the vernacularized Escorial version, a distant relation.

In many places where the Slavic *Digenis* diverges from the Greek versions, it makes use of *formulas* ("group[s] of words ... regularly employed under the same metrical [vel sim.] conditions to express a given essential idea" [Milman Parry]) or *themes* ("group[s] of ideas regularly used" in telling a tale, "repeated passage[s] with a fair degree of verbal or formula[ic] repetition from one occurrence to the next" [Albert B. Lord]) found in the Greek and South Slavic oral traditions: the *Akritika* or ballads of the borderers, the Marko Kraljević cycle.

Is the Slavic *Digenis*, radically altered by oral-formulaic (re-)composition, a translation? The theory and practice of vernacular translation in the European Renaissance would suggest that it is. Popularizing vernacular translators such as 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 Stephanus privileged the source language (Greek) and its resources. By analogy, the oral-formulaic "rhetoric" of the Slavic *Digenis* may be distinguished from the literalism of "philological" translators of the Euthymian school. We may even consider the Escorial version to be a translation into vernacular (Demotic) Greek, with all this implies for its style and ethos.