

Typology of Anthroponymic Transformations in the Arabic, Georgian, and Greek Redactions of the "Story of Barlaam and Ioasaph"

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Abstract

This article examines the typology of anthroponymic transformations in the Arabic, Georgian, and Greek recensions of *The Story of Barlaam and Ioasaph*. The study aims to identify the mechanisms by which personal names are modified in the process of textual transmission and to determine the cultural and religious factors underlying these changes.

The analysis is based on comparative, descriptive, cognitive-conceptual, and linguo-cultural methodologies. The findings demonstrate that, in the Georgian recension, anthroponyms frequently undergo a process of Christianisation: Arabic names are replaced either by biblical anthroponyms or by phonetically similar forms, likely created through association with biblical naming traditions. This tendency is particularly evident in cases where a given character is absent from the Arabic recension but appears in the Georgian and Greek versions under a newly introduced name.

Conversely, in the Greek recension, anthroponyms found in the Georgian text that are only phonetically similar to biblical forms are rendered as exact biblical names.

The results of the study reveal a gradual process of anthroponymic Christianisation (Arabic → Georgian → Greek) and confirm the intermediary role of the Georgian *Balavariani* within this transformation.

Keywords

Barlaam and Ioasaph; Balavariani; Anthroponyms; Comparative Analysis.

Anthroponyms - personal proper names - constitute a fundamental subject of linguo-cultural inquiry, as they reflect the cultural and social contexts of a given *ethnos* across diverse historical epochs. Alongside various other factors, anthroponyms are fundamentally shaped by the religious or mythological belief systems that assert a dominant influence within a specific culture. For medieval Georgian society, the reflection of biblical and, to a lesser degree, mythological associations within anthroponyms holds profound cultural relevance, given that Georgian cultural identity during this era was strictly contingent upon the Christian faith.

From this perspective, the present study investigates the anthroponyms embedded within one of the most prominent medieval literary works, the *Balavariani*. It analyzes their relationship, on the one hand, with the primary source of the Georgian text - the Arabic *Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdāsaf* ("The Book of Bilawhar and Būdāsaf") - and, on the other hand, with the Greek translation of the work

(which a prevailing faction of scholars contends was translated directly from the Georgian).

The methodological framework of this research incorporates a comparative approach (specifically, a comparative analysis of proper names across the Arabic, Georgian, and Greek texts of the *Balavariani*), a descriptive method, cognitive-conceptual analysis (examining conceptual associations), and linguo-cultural analysis.

Relatively generalized perspectives concerning the anthroponyms within the Arabic, Georgian, and Greek redactions of the "Story of Barlaam and Ioasaph" are discernible in the respective scholarship of D. Lang and K. Kekelidze. Both D. Lang (Lang, 1957, p. 399) and K. Kekelidze observe that the onomastic data within the Greek text exhibit a distinct reliance on the Georgian manuscript. Furthermore, they identify a specific methodological pattern: the translator of the Greek text systematizes and refines proper names based predominantly on biblical onomastics.

To further elucidate this hypothesis posited by D. Lang and K. Kekelidze, it must be noted at the outset that while the Greek text indeed employs authentic biblical anthroponyms for proper names (rather than mere approximations or adaptations of biblical names, as is frequently observed in the Georgian translation), the same anthroponyms in the Georgian translation are nevertheless generated through an association with biblical onomastics.

Several anthroponyms within the text are examined in greater detail by E. Khintibidze and I. Abuladze. The primary focus of their inquiry is the nomenclature of the main protagonists - Barlaam, Ioasaph, and King Abenner (Abenes) - and the morphological shifts these names undergo across the various translations. In the

historiography of *Balavariani* scholarship, broader scholarly attention has traditionally been devoted to the proper names of the narrative's central figures: Balavar, Iodasaph, and Abenes. In this regard, the observations posited by I. Abuladze and E. Khintibidze are particularly noteworthy.

According to E. Khintibidze, the name attested as *Iodasaph* / *Ioasaph* in the Georgian and Greek redactions is known in the Arabic tradition in the form of *Būdāsaf* or *Yūdāsaf*. In his view, both *Iodasaph* and *Yudasaph* originate from the Arabic *Būdāsaf* as a result of the paleographic confusion between the Arabic letters "b" (ب) and "y" (ي); furthermore, the Georgian *Iodasaph* serves as the intermediary evolutionary stage between the Arabic *Būdāsaf* and the Greek *Ioasaph*. Khintibidze suggests that, based on this identical confusion of "y" and "b," the Georgian translation ought to have inherited the form *Yudasaph*; however, the Christian milieu could not reconcile the name *Yuda-saph* (Judas-saph) for a saintly figure, which consequently necessitated its rendering as *Iodasaph*. This same desire to distance the name from the *Yoda* / *Yuda* (Judas) form, operating through an analogy with the biblical onomasticon *Jehoshaphat*, likely facilitated the transformation of this name into the Greek *Ioasaph* (Khintibidze, 1982, pp. 341–342). In this instance as well, a discernible trend emerges: the anthroponyms of the Georgian redactions are translated into Greek with only minor modifications - specifically, reflecting a tendency towards assimilation with biblical anthroponyms.

Similarly, according to I. Abuladze, the Georgian *Balahvar*, aligns more closely with the Arabic *Balawhar* (or *Bilawhar*) than with the Greek *Barlaam* (Βαρλαάμ) (Abuladze, 1962, p. 511). The

character's Greek name, in this case as well, is translated via an analogy with established Christian onomastics (e.g., the 3rd - 4th century martyr, Saint Barlaam).

I. Abuladze specifically investigates another anthroponym from the *Balavariani*—*Hebena*, *Abenese*, *Abenes*, and, according to the Hymn of Iodasaph, *Abeneser*. According to the researcher, a juxtaposition of these variants reveals *Habeneser* as the primary form. The Greek *Avennir* (Αβεννήρ) or *Abenner* (Avenir) must derive from this, whereas the Georgian *Habeneser* remains dependent upon the Arabic source. I. Abuladze contends that the Georgian *Habeneser* was derived from the Arabic *Janaysar* as a result of scribal letter confusion caused by ambiguous diacritical marks (Abuladze, 1962, pp. 511 - 512).

Within the scope of the present article, the anthroponyms of the *Balavariani* and their relationship to the proper names found in the Arabic and Greek redactions are comprehensively examined.

Zadan is the name of Prince Ioasaph's tutor and loyal servant.

"The Book of Bilawhar and Būdāsaf" (The Arabic Redaction)	<i>Balavarian</i> <i>i</i> (the Georgian Short Redaction)	<i>Balavarian</i> <i>i</i> (the Georgian Extended Redaction)	<i>The Story of Barlaam and Ioasaph</i> (the Greek Recension)
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In the Georgian *Balavariani*, the name of this character appears as **Zandan** in the Short Redaction and **Zadan** in the Extended Redaction; in the Greek text it occurs as **Ζαρδάν**, while in the Arabic version it has no equivalent at all.

Since the name of Prince Ioasaph’s tutor is not attested in the Arabic text and appears only in the Georgian translation, it may be assumed that the Georgian translator endowed the name Zadan/Zandan

with a specific conceptual significance, modelling it on the well-known Georgian pagan idol **Zaden**. According to *Balavariani*, Zadan/Zandan is an adherent of pagan religion; it is therefore plausible that the author of the Georgian text deliberately selected for this character a name that phonetically resembles the pagan Georgian deity Zaden: **Zaden – Zadan/Zandan**.

The alternation of vowels observable in the forms *Zaden/Zadan* represents a typical phonetic phenomenon, as proper names often occur in multiple variants even within texts of the same period or by the same author. For instance, historical sources, much like hagiographic texts, attest different variants of the same personal name within works of the same or different centuries, primarily due to phonetic processes such as elision, insertion, or the alternation of vowels and consonants: *Nasar/Nasra/Nasre/Nasri*; *Jibgha/Jibghu*; *Dimitri/Demetre*; *Samoeli/Samueli*; *Tekla/Tekle* (Kirtadze, 2009, p. 70).

The idol Zaden was one of the supreme deities of Iberia and is attested in early written sources:

“Thus in this land of Kartli there were two principal idols set up: Armaz and Zaden” (*The Conversion of Kartli*).

“This King Parnajom increased the construction of fortresses and cities, and he built the fortress of Zaden, and created an idol named Zaden, and established Zaden” (Leonti Mroveli, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*).

“O holy fathers, utterly inaccessible and impassable to men was that mountain, and formerly there stood there the impure idol of Zaden, which Saint Nino overthrew; and it is said that the mountain was filled with evil spirits” (*The Life of Shio and Evagre*).

“For in those times of paganism there stood a tower, and upon it was erected the idol of Zaden; and through the multitude of abominable sacrifices a host of demons had taken up dwelling there, from whom proceeded many terrors and apparitions” (*The Life of Ioane of Zedazeni*).

The name of the idol Zaden has also been preserved in Georgian toponymy, for instance in **Zaden-gora (Zaden-hill)**: “And when he passed through the gorge of Shatvlo and came to the borders of Samtskhe, he reached a village called Zaden-gora” (Leonti Mroveli, *The Life of the Kings*), as well as in **Zedazeni**. The latter is likewise connected with the idol Zaden, as is evident from the following: Ioane of Zedazeni “by the command of the kings and with the blessing of the Catholicos ascended the mountain of Zedazeni”; hence he is referred to as Ioane “of Zedazeni” (Juansher, *The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali*).

According to Niko Marr, Zaden represents a Georgian variant of the Persian Mithra: “Zaden undoubtedly derives from Avestan *yazata*, from the Middle Iranian (Pahlavi) plural form *yazdan* or *yaztan*, corresponding to Persian *yazdān*, and originally denoted Mithra (Mihra), and subsequently, more generally, a deity” (Javakhishvili, 1979, p. 113).

According to M. Andronikashvili's research, the divine name Zadan dates to the Achaemenid period. It must have been borrowed into Georgian from Old Persian, as indicated by its phonetic form, which differs from that of its Middle Iranian and Armenian counterparts (Andronikashvili, 1966, p. 23).

Thus, the cult of Zaden appears to have entered and become established in the Georgian cultural sphere from the East. Within the scope of the present study, no attestations of this anthroponym have been identified in Greek sources predating *The Story of Barlaam and Ioasaph*.

As for the Greek equivalent of Zadan/Zandan, it is transmitted with only minor variation as **Ζαρδάν**. Although this anthroponym would not have been familiar within Greek cultural tradition, the Greek text does attest the name of the well-known biblical official Nabuzardan, the captain of the

guard of King Nebuchadnezzar. It is therefore possible that, by analogy with the name Nabuzardan - and in keeping with the general tendency to align proper names with biblical anthroponymy - the translator modified Zadan/Zandan into Zardan (either through the insertion of *r* or through the alternation of *n* and *r*).

In both Georgian recensions of *Balavariani*, this name designates a pagan priest.

The Book of Bilawhar and Būdāsaf' (The Arabic Redaction)	<i>Balavariani</i> (the Georgian Short Redaction)	<i>Balavariani</i> (the Georgian Extended Redaction)	<i>The Story of Barlaam and Ioasaph</i> (the Greek Recension)
Al-Bahwan	“Then they went to Thedma, for he was a servant of idols and dwelt in the wilderness; and the king and all the people placed great hope in him, believing that rain and sunshine would be granted to their	“Then they arose and went to a certain man who dwelt in the deserts and mountains, withdrawn and set apart from both modes of life, whose name was Thedma. This man adhered to their religion, and the king and all his people placed	Ἄνασταντ ες δὲ καταλαμβάνουσιν ἄντρον ἐν βαθυτάτῃ διακείμενον τῇ ἐρήμῳ, ἔνθα κατόκει ἀνὴρ τις Ἑλλήν μαγικαῖς σχολάζων τέχναίς καὶ θερμότατος ὑπάρχων προασπιστὴς τῆς εἰδωλικῆς πλάνης.

	land through his prayers.” (Abuladze, 1957/2006–2007, Recension B)	great hope in him, to the extent that they believed that both rain and sunshine would be granted to their land through his prayers.” (Abuladze, 1957/2006–2007, Recension A)	ὄνομα δὲ τούτου Θεοδᾶς, ὃν καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐτίμα διαφερόντως καὶ φίλον ἠγεῖτο καὶ διδάσκαλον, διὰ τῆς αὐτοῦ λέγων μαντείας εὐθηνουμένην προκόπτειν τὴν αὐτοῦ βασιλείαν“ (Volk, 2009, p. 294)
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As can be seen from the table, both Georgian recensions refer to this character as **Thedma**, whereas in the Greek recension his name appears as **Θεοδᾶς**, and in the Arabic version as **al-Bahwān**. It may be assumed that, in both the Georgian and Greek recensions, this name - like Zadan/Zandan - acquires a particular conceptual significance.

The Georgian translator replaces the Arabic anthroponym, which is phonetically entirely different, with a form shaped by biblical association, aligning it with the proper name **Theudas**, attested in the *Acts of the Apostles*. The Georgian form *Thevda* corresponds to the Greek **Θεοδᾶς**: *Πρὸ γὰρ τούτων τῶν ἡμερῶν ἀνέστη Θεοδᾶς...* (Acts 5:36) - “For before these days Theudas rose up...” (Acts 5:36).

It is also worth noting that the biblical Theudas and Thedma of *Balavariani* exhibit functional similarities. According to the *Acts of the Apostles*, Theudas (Gk. **Θεοδᾶς**) is a self-proclaimed prophet who deceives and gathers a large following, persuading them that he is capable of

dividing a river by his word and thereby providing them with an easy passage.

It is therefore plausible that the Georgian translator of *Balavariani*, drawing on the associative potential of this biblical anthroponym (Thevda), replaced the Arabic name **al-Bahwān** with **Thedma**, while the Greek translator of *Balavariani*, based on the phonetic proximity between Thedma and Thevda, rendered it as **Θεδῶς**. It is natural to assume that the Greek translator was familiar with the Greek form **Θεδῶς** from the *Acts of the Apostles*, as well as with its Georgian equivalent *Thevda*.

Thus, the anthroponym attested in the Georgian recensions - radically different from the Arabic original - appears to be the result of a translation strategy grounded in biblical association, whereas in the Greek recension it is rendered with only slight modification as an exact biblical anthroponym.

The progression **al-Bahwān** → **Thedma (Thevda)** → **Θεδῶς** may therefore be understood as reflecting a gradual process of Christianisation of anthroponyms. In this process, the Georgian *Balavariani* clearly emerges as the intermediary text, just as in the case of **Zadan/Zandan** → **Ζαδῶν**.

Nakori is not attested in the Arabic recension.

"The Book of Bilawhar and Būdāsaf" (The Arabic Redaction)	<i>Balavariani</i> (the Georgian Short Redaction)	<i>Balavariani</i> (the Georgian Extended Redaction)	<i>The Story of Barlaam and Ioasaph</i> (the Greek Recension)
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<p>----- ----- ----</p>	<p>“I know a man who is without equal in learning, and no one in this land knows him; he belongs to our religion and is exceedingly learned in wisdom, and his name is Nakor.” (Abuladze, 1957/2006–2007, Recension B)</p>	<p>“But if we are unable to accomplish this, I shall bring to you, O king, a certain man whom no one in this land knows, of our religion, whose distinction cannot be discerned from that of Balahvar in form, appearance, age, voice, or speech; he dwells outside in the wilderness, and his name is Nakor.” (Abuladze, 1957/2006–2007, Recension A)</p>	<p>Εἰ δὲ ἐκεῖνον μὲν καταλαβεῖν οὐ δύνηθεῖμεν, ἕτερον ἐγὼ ἐπίσταμαι πρεσβύτην μονερημίτην, Ναχωρ καλούμενον, ὅμοιον τῷ Βαρλαάμ κατὰ πάντα, ὃν οὐκ ἔστι διαγνῶναι μὴ ἐκεῖνον ὑπάρχειν" ὃς καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐστὶ θρησκείας καὶ διδάσκαλος ἐμὸς ἐν τοῖς μαθήμασι γέγονε (<i>Volk, 2009, p. 215</i>)</p>
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Raqisi (the king's loyal vizier) proposes to Janayzar that he himself assume the role of Balahvar and attempt to reconvert Ioasaph to paganism. After Ioasaph exposes him, Raqisi repents.

In the Georgian translation, however, the function of this character (Raqisi) is redistributed. In the corresponding episodes of the Georgian and Greek recensions, instead of Raqisi, the role of Balahvar is assigned to a new character - **Nakor**:

“And Raqis said: ‘What shall we do now?’ And he replied: ‘I know a man whose learning is without equal, and whom no one in this land knows; he is of our religion and exceedingly wise, and his name is Nakor. Let us bring him, for he closely resembles Balahvar in appearance and age; and we shall clothe him in the garments in which Zandan has seen Balahvar’” (Abuladze, 1957/2006–2007, Recension B).

Ioasaph recognises the deception and exposes him. The outcome is likewise identical: after being unmasked, Nakor converts to Christianity.

The proper name **Nakor** (Gk. **Νακὼρ**) appears in the Georgian recension by analogy with biblical onomastics. Such a pattern—the introduction of an entirely new anthroponym into the text—occurs particularly in cases where no corresponding character exists in the Arabic recension (or where a character appears without a name), and is then supplied in the Georgian version.

Barakia (Gk. **Βαρακία**) appears in the final section of the Georgian and Greek recensions. It is well known that these two recensions diverge most significantly from the Arabic version precisely in their concluding part. Ioasaph entrusts the governance of his kingdom to the pious Christian Barakia/**Βαρακία**.

Here again, the author of the Georgian recension follows a characteristic tendency: the anthroponym **Barakia** (Gk. **Βαρακία**) is introduced into the text in accordance with biblical onomastics.

In fact, within the work, the only anthroponym that passes unchanged from the Arabic text into the Georgian recensions is **Raqisi**, which in the Greek version appears as **Ῥαχίς**.

Thus, an examination of the anthroponyms of *Balavariani* across all three recensions - Arabic, Georgian, and Greek - reveals a clear tendency toward the Christianisation of proper names. From this perspective, two principal patterns may be identified:

1. The anthroponyms of the Arabic recension are rendered in the Georgian version either by directly employing biblical names or by introducing forms that are phonetically close to them and likely created through association with biblical anthroponymy. This tendency is particularly evident in cases where a given character is absent from the Arabic recension but appears in the Georgian and Greek versions.
2. In a number of instances, anthroponyms in the Georgian recensions that are phonetically similar to, but not identical with, biblical names are rendered in the Greek translation as exact biblical anthroponyms. In such cases as well, the Georgian *Balavariani* appears to function as an intermediary recension between the Arabic and the Greek versions.

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