Study on the Greek version of the Barlaam and Josaphat in the different phases of the text tradition from India to West-Europe.

This article has for its objet to bring into relief the importance of the Greek version of the story Barlaam and Josaphat, which shows the similarities between the features of the life of St. Josaphat and the corresponding episodes in the life of the Buddha. In Fact, the indian biography of Buddha written in Pali and Sanskrit was transmitted into the west gradually through divers cultures.

At first, Buddhism came into contact with Manichaeism in the Central Asia, especially in Sogdiana and Bactria. As a result of this religious contact, we have the manichaean version of the Barlaam and Josaphat. On the base of internal textual evidence, we can assume that the Christian Barlaam and Josaphat romance originated in this

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region as a Manichaean religious trace. This Manichaean version must have entered in the Arabic and Persian World, especially in Baghdad, where no less than three works about the Buddha (al-Budd), also known as Budhasaf (i.e. the Bodhisattva prince), were circulating. One of these books was entitled Kitab Bilawhar wa-Yudasaf, and this is the direct ancestor of our Greek Barlaam and Josaphat.

But these versions owed no allegiance to Christianity. The first christian version is the Georgian Balavariani romance, which remains today in a very short fragmentary form. Therefore, in order to understand the whole phase of the Christianization of Buddha's life story, the most important version is the Greek one, whose author is not yet definitely decided: John Damascene according to, for exemple, the Ms. Paris. 1128 ? or Euthymius according to the Ms. Paris. 1771 ? In the process of Christianization, the author of Greek version maintained the frame of Buddha's life story maintained also in every precedent versions. He coated this frame not only with the essential content of the Bible, but also with the effective defence of Christianity known as the Apology of Aristides (an A.D. second-century Athenian philosopher) against the Greek religious mythology and atheistic philosophy. But the first georgian version does not include this Apology. Moreover, the Greek version is important in the respect that it played the principal role as the original form for almost all the other European versions of the Barlaam and Josaphat romance.

[Key words: Buddhism, Christianization, Text Tradition, (Greek) Version, Authorship.]