

Π Ο Λ Υ Ι Σ Τ Ω Ρ

SCRIPTA SLAVICA

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В книге собраны статьи ведущих европейских и российских славистов, посвященные кирилло-мефодиевскому литературному наследию и различным вопросам взаимоотношений славянского и западноевропейского мира.

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DIRECT TRANSLATIONS INTO SLAVONIC FROM SYRIAC:

A PRELIMINARY LIST

1. INTRODUCTION

The influence of different non-Byzantine traditions on early Slavic Christianity, not just from the Christian West, is now an accepted fact. As Jean-Marie Sansterre once noted, “[l]a compétition entre les Églises grecque et latine occupe le devant de la scène. Toutefois, la situation religieuse en Bulgarie était plus complexe, car des missionnaires d’autres confessions parcouraient également le pays”.¹

There is only one Christian Oriental culture which left more than an occasional impression on the earliest Slavic Christian traditions – that of the Syrians or, perhaps better, of one or several of the various differing Syrian cultures. This influence has been studied, albeit not in a systematic way, since 1935, when André Vaillant published his famous article about the hypothetical “Syriac letters” in the long Slavonic *Life* of Constantine-Cyril.² Since then, the data accumulated by the adherents of this hypothesis have become convincing enough to demonstrate, at least, that the question of possible Syrian influences is worthy of much deeper study, regardless of whether Vaillant-Jakobson’s hypothesis about the “Syriac letters” is true or false.³

Syrian influences in early Slavic Christianity are traceable within such diverse fields as, e.g., architecture⁴ and manuscripts’ illumination and orna-

¹ J.-M. Sansterre, *Les missionnaires latins, grecs et orientaux en Bulgarie dans la seconde moitié du IX^e siècle*, “Byzantion”, 52 (1982), pp. 375-388, p. 388.

² A. Vaillant, *Les “lettres russes” de la Vie de Constantin*, “Revue des études slaves”, 15 (1935), pp. 75-77.

³ Cf. a detailed review in B. Lourié, *Syrian Shadows behind the Back of Cyril and Methodius: Vaillant-Jakobson’s hypothesis revisited*, “Slovène” (forthcoming).

⁴ Anatoly Leopoldovich Jakobson’s (1906-1984) studies still remain definitive in the field: А.Л. Якобсон, *К изучению раннесредневековой болгарской архитектуры (армянские параллели)*, “Византийский временник”, 28 (1968), pp. 195-206; cf. his summarising monograph: А.Л. Якобсон, *Закономерности в развитии средневековой архитектуры IX-XV вв.*, Л., Наука, 1987. The author explicitly takes into account the role of Syrian traditions and Syrian specialists in both Armenian and Bulgarian architectures. Cf. С. Ваклинов, *Формиране на старобългарска култура на VI-XI век*, София, Наука и изкуство, 1977, pp. 95-96. The only explanation for the non-Byzantine and rather Syro-Armenian character of the earliest Bulgarian architecture (both ecclesiastical and secular) provided by Jakobson and those after him is the (purely theoretical) local availability of Syrian specialists. It is rather too weak an explanation for the fact that the earliest Bulgarian church buildings are patterned not simply after non-Byzantine but after blatantly “unorthodox” prototypes.

ments.⁵ Our present purpose, however, is limited to early Slavonic literature of translation, a recurring topic within the scholarly interests of Mario Capaldo. These influences are traceable in Slavonic translations from both Syriac and Greek,⁶ but the present paper will sketch what is known about translations from Syriac.

2. AḤIQAḤ

The possibility of the Slavonic *Aḥiqar* being translated from Syriac directly into Slavonic has largely been accepted – as a hypothesis – since 1913, when Alexander Grigoriev published his study on the Slavonic *Aḥiqar* (*Povest' ob Akire Premudrom*). The same hypothesis had been put forward by François Nau a bit earlier (1909) but Nau's work omitted to include any detailed study. Recently, I have tried to show that this hypothesis is true.⁷ The Slavonic text is a Bulgarian translation of a lost Syriac recension which was closer to the fifth-century Syriac original of the Christian hagiographic romance on Aḥiqar than the presently available five Syriac recensions. In this respect, the earliest Slavonic recension is comparable with the Armenian version (of the late fifth century) which conveys an even more ancient recension of the Syriac original.

Moreover, I have tried to demonstrate that the origin of the Syriac romance is related to a competition between different cults of saints used by the adversaries and the followers of the Council of Chalcedon (451) in their propaganda. Namely, that the Syrian anti-Chalcedonian cult of Aḥiqar was created by the Syrian Christians in Iran in opposition to the earlier cult of the Three Youths in Babylon, whose centre in the capital of the Iranian Empire Ctesiphon had passed into the control of the Chalcedonians. This is why the Syriac romance on Aḥiqar, anti-Byzantine even in origin, has never been translated into Greek and has never been a part of Byzantine culture. On the contrary, it became a part of the literary arsenal of the Syriac missions based in Iran, including the Nestorian mission to the Sogdiana (a fact which is witnessed by the remnants of the Sogdian translation).

3. THE TWELVE DREAMS OF SHAHAISHA

Another Syrian Christian work of Iranian origin is the Slavonic apocalypse called *The Twelve Dreams of Shahaisha*. No trace of this work is known either in

⁵ The field has not been systematically explored thus far, but see some first impressions in А. Джурова, *1000 години българска ръкописна книга. Орнамент и миниатюра*, София, Септември, 1981, pp. 17–21, 26.

⁶ Cf. the main idea of Vaillant-Jakobson's hypothesis concerning "Russian/Syriac letters". Roman Jakobson (1954) pointed out the first reading in the earliest Slavonic translation of the Gospels which could be influenced by Syrian recensions. The number of such readings known today is four: B. Lourié, *Syrian Shadows...*

⁷ B. Lourié, *The Syriac Aḥiqar, Its Slavonic Version, and the Relics of the Three Youths in Babylon*, "Slověne", 2 (2013) Nr 2, pp. 64–117 (with the complete previous bibliography).

Greek or in any language other than Slavonic (there are, however, two Romanian versions created on the basis of South Slavic recensions).

In the early studies of this work by the great specialist in comparative literature studies Alexander Nikolaevich Vesselovsky⁸ (1838–1906) and the great scholar in the field of Indology Sergei Fëdorovich Oldenburg (1863–1934) it had already been shown that it was the Shahanshah of Iran⁹ who had dreamt these twelve dreams. The same specialists have shown, moreover, that the contents of several dreams go back to India and especially to Indian Buddhist legends. Therefore, they were conveyed from India to the West (that is, the Christian East) through Iran, as was the case for other Indian legends, e.g., those of the *Kalilah wa Dimnah* (Byzantine and Slavonic *Stephanit and Ichnelat*) and the *Barlaam and Joasaph*.

These conclusions have largely been accepted since the 1920s, but subsequent studies, including my own, published in 1997, have been less successful. Recently, however, I have approached the text in a more systematic way.¹⁰ My conclusions are now as follows: the Slavonic text appeared as a direct translation from Syriac made in Bulgaria in the earliest epoch of Slavic writing. The Syriac original was created in Iran after the middle of the seventh century (in the late seventh century or a little, but not very much, later) within the large influx of Syrian apocalyptic literature provoked by the Arab invasion into both Christian and Zoroastrian worlds. Its framing story goes back – evidently, through the early Christian literary tradition in Syriac – to a Second Temple period Aramaic Jewish pseudepigraphon about Mambres (whose name in Aramaic “Mamera” is preserved almost intact in the Slavonic form “Mamer”).

Below (section 6) I will add a note about the earliest manuscript tradition common to both *Shahaisha* and the Slavonic *Aḥiqar*.

4. THE CYCLE OF SOLOMON

There are a number of Slavonic “rewritten Bible” texts whose Slavonic versions possess an early dating (certainly before the 15th century), and which are often discussed in the context of hypothetical direct Jewish influences on the Old Russian literature of the Kievan period. Their Jewish origin is rather obvious and was already established by scholarship in the nineteenth century. According to a

⁸ A. N. Vesselovsky was also the major predecessor to Hippolyte Delehaye in the field of critical hagiography.

⁹ His title was corrupted in the manuscripts as *Shahaisha*, among other things.

¹⁰ B. Lourié, *The Slavonic Apocalypse The Twelve Dreams of Shahaisha: An Iranian Syriac Reworking of a Second Temple Jewish Legend on Jambres*, in S. Tokhta-sev, P. Luria (eds.), *Commentationes Iranicae, Vladimiro f. Aaron Livschits nonagenario donum natalicum / Сборник статей к 90-летию Владимира Ароновича Лившица*, St. Petersburg, Nestor, 2013, pp. 481–507 (with the complete prior bibliography).

radical claim by Nikita Alexandrovich Meshchersky (1906–1987), “this rich and varied stream of Old Russian writing¹¹ can be explained only under the condition that we acknowledge the possibility of direct translation from Hebrew into the Kievan Rus’”.¹² It is difficult to decide, however, whether these texts were translated or paraphrased into Slavonic directly from their ultimate Jewish sources or through some (Christian?) non-Slavic intermediary.¹³ Neither Meshchersky nor any of his predecessors and followers provided any methodological clue for this. This is why I think that the whole range of alleged pre-fifteenth-century “translations from Hebrew” needs to be re-evaluated with respect to the possibility of translation from Syriac. Here I limit my review to the only work that I have already studied in great detail elsewhere.

The Jewish origin of the legends composing the Slavonic cycle on Solomon from the *Palaea interpretata*¹⁴ is self-evident and was first noted by Alexander Vesselovsky. The Byzantine Greek *Palaea* does not contain these texts, and no Greek original of any of these legends is known at all. The majority of the stories (nine out of ten), however, are present in Jewish rabbinic collections (in either Hebrew or rabbinic Aramaic) in recensions that are different from the Slavonic ones. They do not, however, form any kind of unity on a macroform level as none of them occurs in the same rabbinic collection as another, whereas

¹¹ Meshchersky refers here to several other works beside the texts which are preserved in the Slavonic *Palaea* but have no known Greek original. These include the so-called “Russian” recension of the *Book of Esther* (different from all other recensions), whose history still remains an object of heated discussion; cf. И. Люсен, *Книга Есфирь: К истории первого славянского перевода*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Slavica Upsaliensia, 41, Uppsala, 2001; A. Kulik, *Judeo-Greek Legacy in Medieval Rus’*, “Viator”, 39 (2008), pp. 51–64, see pp. 58–62. The latter paper by Alexander Kulik provides the basic bibliography of discussions related to the question of direct Russian translations from Hebrew.

¹² “Эта богатая и разнообразная еврейская струя древнерусской письменности может быть объяснена только при том условии, что мы признаем возможность непосредственного перевода с еврейского в Киевской Руси”; Н. А. Мещерский, *К вопросу об изучении переводной письменности Киевского периода* (1956), in Н. А. Мещерский, *Избранные статьи*. Сост. Е.Н. Мещерская, Петербургский университет. Наследие ученых, St. Petersburg, SPb. UP, 1995, pp. 271–299, see p. 298.

¹³ It is often easier to define the language in which the text was originally written than the language of the possible intermediary lying behind a given translation. Cf., for possible methodology, e.g., A. Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*. Text-Critical Studies, 3, Atlanta, Scholars, 2004.

¹⁴ The cycle, which comprises ten stories, has now been published in a critical edition by Constantine Bondar’: К.В. Бондарь, *Повести Соломонова цикла: из славяно-еврейского диалога культур*, Харьков, Новое слово, 2011. There are several other stories relatively close to this cycle in terms of content, but their connection to this set of ten is unclear.

their Slavonic counterparts occur, in the *Palaea*, in striking proximity to each other.¹⁵

Some traces of direct translation into Slavonic from a Semitic original were noticed by N.A. Meshchersky and A.A. Alekseev, both of whom considered a unique possibility, namely, that the Semitic original was in Hebrew – despite the fact, unrealised by Alekseev, that a part of the collection has Jewish parallels only in rabbinic Aramaic.¹⁶

According to my 2009 study, the main problem with this Slavonic cycle on Solomon is the need to choose between two possibilities for its non-Byzantine origin: Jewish or Syrian. There is no doubt that the cycle is ultimately a collection of the Jewish Second Temple period, but what was the channel by which it was conveyed to the Slavs?

The presence of these stories in different rabbinic collections is not an argument in favour of a direct Jewish provenance for the Slavic text, because none of these collections (as a macroform or a large fragment thereof) is known in Slavonic. To discern between a translation from Hebrew and a translation from Aramaic is already a difficult task, but to discern between translations from rabbinic Aramaic and Syriac (which is also a dialect of Aramaic) is almost impossible if we are limited to the methods of linguistics. By chance, the cycle contains, at least, one obscure section that might be made clearer with reference to a word specific to Syriac and absent from rabbinic Aramaic. The parallel section is preserved in Hebrew but the wording is different and certainly not responsible for the obscure elements in the Slavonic translation.¹⁷

5. THE THESSALONICAN LEGEND

Unlike any other Slavonic text, the *Thessalonican Legend* is of quite specific importance for Slavistics. Normally it is treated as an original Bulgarian work of the twelfth or thirteenth century but, if it is a translation from Syriac, one would

¹⁵ The stories are interwoven into the biblical text and the commentary of the *Palaea* and follow each other at some interval.

¹⁶ For a detailed bibliography, see B. Lourié, *The Courts of Solomon. A Jewish Collection*, "Scrinium", 5 (2009), pp. 353–363.

¹⁷ A Slavonic *hapax legomenon* in the phrase мечь пруджанъ "sword *prudjan*" (variant readings пруденъ and проденъ) (К.В. Бондарь, *Повести...*, p. 127), with the parallel from the Hebrew text "sword (made) from tin/plumbum" (מִן הַבְּרִייל). I proposed (B. Lourié, *The Courts...*, p. 357–358) that the Slavonic *hapax* is to be explained as a transliteration from Syriac ܦܪܝܕܐ *pridā* "fragile, putride" misunderstood by the translator into Slavonic as a noun signifying some material suitable for the situation (B. Lourié, *The Courts...*, p. 357–358). The conjectural reading прутянъ ("made from a wooden stick") proposed by Lunt and Taube (H.G. Lunt, M. Taube, *Early East Slavic Translations from Hebrew?*, "Russian Linguistics", 12 (1988), pp. 147–187, see. p. 159) has no support in the manuscripts – not to say that hardly fits with the plot, in which the wife seriously intends to kill her husband with this sword; such an intention presumes that the sword did not look like a toy.

have to take seriously its claim that some kind of Slavic writing was created by a mission other than that of Cyril and Methodius, and, moreover, that this mission was Syrian. Such an explosion of historical problems would be impossible to deal with in the present article. In 1996, I published my first study dedicated to the legend.¹⁸ Since then, my conclusion regarding the translation from Syriac has been cautiously accepted by some and rejected by others. I have recently prepared a new version of my study taking into account the alternative linguistic interpretation of the text proposed by the late Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Zagrebin.¹⁹

Setting historical interpretation aside, my linguistic argumentation is now not limited to an attempted partial recovery of a Syriac version of the mysterious corrupted phrase, which I consider to be a Slavonic transliteration of a difficult section of the Syriac original.²⁰ The text as a whole bears rather clear traces of an original in a Semitic language (such as an overabundance of the conjunctions “and” at the beginning of phrases and the verb “to descend to (toponym)” in the sense of “enter into” for all the three occurrences). If not translated from Syriac, such a text would be a strange stylisation after an Oriental tale. I accept, nevertheless, that several features of the two presently available recensions are significantly later and are to be dated to the twelfth century, at which point the legend was called for and re-read in new political circumstances.

The lack of a Greek intermediary between the Slavonic text and its lost Syriac original is not demonstrable linguistically with absolute certitude; however, it is by far the most probable hypothesis from a linguistic point of view²¹ and could be validated by appeal to Ockham’s razor.

6. THE ELEUTHERIUS RECENSION OF THE *TWELVE FRIDAYS*

A short text which is attributed to Clement of Rome and enumerates the twelve Fridays of the year when one has to keep a specific strict fast is widely

¹⁸ В.М. Лурье, *Около “Солунской легенды”*. Из истории миссионерства в период монофелитской унии, “Славяне и их соседи”, 6 (1996), pp. 23–52.

¹⁹ B. Lourié, *The Slavonic Solunskaja Legenda (“The Thessalonican Legend”) and Its Syriac Original*; C. B. Horn, C. Villagomez (eds.), *The Syriac Voice in the Dialogue of Cultures: Syriac, Persian, Caucasian, and Slavonic Interlocutors*, Warwick, RI, Abelian Academic, 2016 (forthcoming; with the complete bibliography).

²⁰ I restore it as follows: (the raven threw from the beak) “a plurality/set of the downy plumes [sc., (raven?) quills] tied with (leather) ribbons into the bunch(es)”. These downy plumes entered the body of the main character of the legend, Cyril, and their number turned out to be equal to that of the letters of the Slavic alphabet that Cyril subsequently created. The phrase has been left untranslated because of the rarity of its central term ܪܒܘܥܝܢܐ or ܪܒܘܥܝܢܐ in the meaning “quills” (with an implied wordplay with ܪܒܘܥܝܢܐ “bird chirping”, in order that these quills become a specific kind of bird speech).

²¹ Normally, Semitic /s/ would result in /s/ in Greek transliterations and, therefore, never lead to *u* in Slavonic. But given that Greek transliterations of *u* were used in Byzantium, the possibility of an abnormal transliteration of /s/ is not to be ruled out *a priori*.

known in the Byzantine and Western worlds (in Greek, Slavonic, Latin, and Western vernacular recensions). The so-called Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* is quite a different work and is known only in Slavonic; it does not mention Clement. As I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere,²² the Eleutherius recension is part of a large hagiographic tradition that arose, in the early sixth century, in some anti-Chalcedonian Syrian milieux involved in the conversion of Naḡrān in South Arabia. This tradition subsequently influenced the then-emerging Islam, especially through sharing with it the tradition of the specific veneration of Friday. Among the main hagiographic heroes of this tradition are such legendary characters as the personified Friday, the martyr Parasceve of Iconium²³ (in turn, an avatar of the personified Friday), and the bishop-martyr Eleutherius of Illyricum. The name of the main character of the Eleutherius recension (Eleutherius) refers to the latter.

The Eleutherius recension contains two parts. The first part is an account of a dispute between some Christian named Eleutherius and a Jew. The second part is a secret document about the twelve Fridays written by the apostles but, until Eleutherius' victory in the dispute, kept secretly by the Jews. This second part is similar to the Clement recension but contains clear allusions to the Arab conquest of the seventh century together with eschatological calculations of the duration of the Arab rule performed in a manner already known from contemporaneous apocalyptic texts in Syriac. This permits the dating of the text to the second half of the seventh century.

The text, as I have demonstrated on linguistic grounds, is certainly written in Syriac, whereas it is more difficult to define the language of the original of the Slavonic version. I have one linguistic argument in favour of Syriac but this, by itself, would be far from sufficient. However, one has to take into account extra-linguistic factors, namely, that the text, being part of the Syrian tradition's own flesh and blood, shows no specific connection to any Greek-speaking milieu (apart from its use of the earlier twelve Fridays tradition). This is why, having no doubt about the ultimate Syrian origin of the work, I would prefer to place it among the direct translations from Syriac into Slavonic.

The earliest manuscript containing the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*, the *Twelve Dreams of Shahaisha*, and the Slavonic *Aḥiqar* is the same,

²² B. Lourié, *Friday Veneration in Sixth- and Seventh-Century Christianity and Christian Legends about the Conversion of Naḡrān*, in C.A. Segovia, B. Lourié (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, *Orientalia Judaica Christiana*, 3, Piscataway, NJ, Gorgias Press, 2012, pp. 131-230. The critical edition is in preparation by Anissava Miltenova.

²³ An exceptional fortune of her cult in the early Slavic Christianity must go back to the same cluster of hagiographical legends first produced by Syrian anti-Chalcedonian missions to South Arabia ca AD 500. The cult of Eleutherius is also important for early Slavic Christianity. His Slavonic *Life* contains some archaic features that are not preserved in the available Greek and Syriac recensions. Cf. B. Lourié, *Friday Veneration...*

that of the Savin monastery (AD 1380). According to Anissava Miltenova, these works constituted a part of an apocryphal collection whose translation is to be dated to the earliest period of the Slavonic (Old Bulgarian) literature.²⁴

7. CONCLUSIONS

The list of five works reviewed above is not exhaustive. There are certainly a number of other works that could be added. Some of these are likely to be found among those which are considered to be direct translations from Hebrew. Most often, the analysis provided so far for such works (e.g., the *Sermon of Blessed Zorobabel*)²⁵ demonstrates only the fact of direct translation from a Semitic language, with no differential diagnosis between Hebrew (or rabbinic Aramaic) and Syriac.

In one respect, however, the present list might be considered representative. All the works translated from Syriac were unavailable (and never existed) in Greek.

²⁴ Д. Богдановић, А. Милтенова, *Апокрифният сборник от манастира Савина, XIV в., в сравнение с други подобни южнославянски ръкописи*, "Археографски прилози", 9 (1987), pp. 7-30.

²⁵ L. Navtanovich, *The Slavonic Apocryphon of Zorobabel*, in L. Di Tommaso, Ch. Böttrich (eds.), *The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Slavonic Tradition*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 140, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011, pp. 303-335. Cf. also fragments within different Russian chronicles now mostly interpreted as direct translations from the mediaeval Jewish book *Yosippon* - despite their divergences with the text of the latter [e.g., those studied in H.G. Lunt, M. Taube, *Early East Slavic Translations from Hebrew?*; M. Taube, *On Certain Unidentified and Misidentified Sources of the Academy Chronograph*, in W. Moskovich et al. (eds.), *Russian Philology and Literature: In Honour of Prof. Victor D. Levin on His 75th Birthday*, Jerusalem, Hebrew UP, 1992, pp. 365-375]. In fact, the *Yosippon* itself is completely depending on Christian sources; see, most recently, S. Dönitz, *Historiography among Byzantine Jews: the Case of Sefer Yosippon*, in R. Bonfil et al. (eds.), *Jews in Byzantium: dialectics of minority and majority cultures*, Jerusalem studies in religion and culture; Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp. 951-968; cf. Ead., *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon*, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism, 29, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013. Therefore, the unexplored possibility of common Christian sources of these Slavonic fragments and the *Yosippon* is worthy of consideration.

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