

The Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences

as a manuscript

Alina S. Alekseeva

**APOCRYPHAL PRAYERS IN THE SOUTH AND EAST SLAVIC
MANUSCRIPTS OF THE 11TH – 19TH CENTURIES: HISTORY OF THE
TEXTS AND THEIR LINGUISTICAL FEATURES**

Dissertation Summary

for the purpose of obtaining academic degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Philology and Linguistics

Academic Supervisor:

Aleksey A. Gippius

Doctor of Science

Moscow 2023

§1. General characteristics of the thesis

The work studies the history of South and East Slavic apocryphal prayers on the example of the Sisinnios' Legend (*SL*) in two plot versions (*Michael-type* and *Sisinnios/Melitene-type*, *MT* and *S/MT*) and of the set of prayers for the search for a missing person or property, which goes back to “The Decree on the Proskomedia to the Holy Three Confessors Gurias, Samonas and Abibus” by the archbishop of Novgorod Ioann III (*GSA*). These texts have similar features of handwritten tradition: being borrowed entirely or partially from the Greek-Byzantine tradition through the South Slavic literature, they penetrated to the Eastern Slavs and were copied for several centuries.

Thus, the South and East Slavic apocryphal prayers in manuscripts of the 11th–19th centuries constitute the main **object of the research**. The **subject of this paper** is formed with the origin and development of the *SL* and *GSA* in all the diversity of the written tradition.

The **purpose of the research** is to describe the history and linguistic features of *SL* and *GSA*, which determines the **following tasks**: 1) construction of the stems for the history of *SL* and *GSA* and reconstruction of their archetypes, 2) “layer-by-layer” description of the history of *SL* and *GSA*, 3) presentation of the linguistic and textual features of *SL* and *GSA*, 4) determining the place of monuments in the Southern and Eastern Slavonic literature. These goals and objectives of the study determine the **research methods**, which are: 1) textual analysis, 2) linguistic analysis, and 3) comparative analysis.

Handwritten magical texts usually become the object of investigation for ethnographers and folklorists, although they are no longer a product of oral literature in its pure form and they require a special study as the product of written culture¹. The complex of codicological, textual, and linguistic research methods which were not previously applied to sources of this type determines the **novelty** of

¹ With regard to the East Slavic tradition, this was expressed by A.A. Turilov and A.V. Chernetsov in: [Turilov, Chernetsov 2002: 29].

the paper. Folklore texts existing in the handwritten tradition are for the first time considered in all copies as facts of medieval and post-medieval literature.

Research material. The plot of *MT* revolves around a conversation between Archangel Michael (in some copies, St. Sisin) and South Slavic witch *veštica*² who talks about her demonic essence for which she was punished. As a way to avoid new suffering, the protagonist suggests that she not harm people, and the witch tells her names which protect those who know them or have them written down. This text, according to T. Agapkina, goes back to the Pataxarea-type of *MT*; however, the lack of word-by-word correspondence between the Greek-Byzantine and the Slavic copies did not allow her to identify the source of the translation. Nevertheless, the general scheme of the evolution of the prayer, according to T. Agapkina, is unquestionable: separated from the donor culture, the text retracts features of local beliefs.

Currently, *MT* is known in twenty-three Slavic manuscripts. The corpus of copies examined in this research consists of twenty units: copies Sok275-30, and Sok275-65 were studied *de visu*, *PopKr*, *SPD4*, *HAZU140*, *NBKM273*, *NBS454*, *Hash281*, *Dui31(2)*, *Dui32*, *Pavl2*, *NBS113*, *Hil672(2)* — from photocopies, *IerP1*, *HGA2* and *HAZU2(2)* — from publications.

The *S/MT* relates to the fight of the *veštica* against St. Sisinnios who protects his sister and her children from the witch. According to T. Agapkina, the Slavic translation of the prayer was made from Greek no later than the 12th century; she dates the *IerP1* exactly by this period [Agapkina 2017: 487]; however, the lower layer of the palimpsest with the prayer appeared no earlier than the 13th century.

The text is known in seventeen copies of the mid-13th–19th centuries. The *S/MT* history research is based on 14 sources from half 13–19th centuries. Copy *Sok275-49* was studied *de visu*, *SPD1*, *SPD2*, *SPD3*, *Hash284*, *NBKM631*,

² For more information, see in: [Vinogradova & Tolstaya 1995].

Dui31(1), *Pavl1*, *NBS425*, *NBS88* and *Hil672(1)* — from photocopies, *IerP1*, *HGA1* and *HAZY2(2)* — from editions.

Compiled by Archbishop John of Novgorod the *GSA* is a type of so-called “God’s judgment”, a practice condemned by the church. The text intends to capture the thief or to search for lost property or person later. The *GSA* is known in six Old Russian copies late XIV–XVIII centuries.

The following propositions are to be presented at the thesis defence:

1. *MM*, translated no later than the beginning of the 11th century, until the 19th century circulated in Southern Slavia and the principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania in no less than nine redactions, which can be characterized as stylistic ones. The archetype of the Slavonic translation is the closest to the Greek-language copy GI on a lead tablet from the beginning of the 8th century³. The corpus of Slavonic sources contains one copy in Old Slavonic and one in Middle-Bulgarian redaction of the Church Slavonic Language, while other manuscripts contain some features of the Serbian language in the phonetics and morphology.

2. Fourteen copies of *S/MT* reflect the existence of at least seven versions that existed in South Slavia and the Danubian principalities before the 19th century. The reconstructed archetype shows similarities with several Greek-Byzantine *S/MT* redactions. The corpus of Slavic manuscripts includes one copy in Middle-Bulgarian redaction of the Church Slavonic and one in New-Bulgarian redaction of the Church Slavonic Language; other copies contain features of the Serbian language.

3. *MT* and *S/MT* are translated in the Serbian zone by a scribe who spoke Ekavian and Shtokavian dialect, and their use in the Slavic manuscript tradition has similar features: the editions composed in Old Slavonic and Church Slavonic of the

³ The text is printed by O. Choekha in: [Choekha 2017: 247–248].

Serbian redaction acquire more and more features of folk culture over time, and their language, having passed the hybrid stage, approaches the folk language.

4. The *GSA* archetype contains both a description of Proskomedie actions and a prayer, one fragment of which goes back to a South Slavonic source, and the other refers to the cult of St. Gury, Samon and Aviv that existed in Novgorod. Later the prayer spread in the Old Rus' in the form of a complex of different prayers for different purposes, and the language of the late corpus can be characterized as a hybrid variant of Church Slavonic.

5. *SL* and the prayer from *GSA* are the products of apocryphal literature of South Slavia and Old Rus', but over time the tradition of their use begins to diverge linguistically. The *MT* and *S/MT* which initially belonged to the "high" literature begin to "decline", coming closer to the vernacular language, while the prayers including the names of St. Gury, Samon and Aviv are still transcribed in Church Slavonic, but already in a hybrid register.

The work was discussed in oral presentations at thirteen **conferences**:

1. 18th International conference for students of Philology (St. Petersburg, April 6–11, 2015);
2. International scientific conference for students, postgraduates and young scientists "Lomonosov–2016" (Moscow, April 11–15, 2016);
3. 6th Scientific conference for students and postgraduates "Anthropology. Folkloristics. Sociolinguistics" (St. Petersburg, March 23–25, 2017);
4. Second Readings on Russian Literature of the 18th century (St. Petersburg, October 26–27, 2017);
5. 37th Scientific conference "Kurbatov Readings" (St. Petersburg, November 27–30, 2017);
6. 7th International conference for young researchers "Textology and Historical and Literary Process" (Moscow, March 15–17, 2018);

7. 47th International philological scientific conference (St. Petersburg, March 19–28, 2018);
8. Scientific conference for young scholars within the Days of Slavic Script and Culture “Slavic World: Commonality and Diversity” (Moscow, 22–23.05.2018);
9. International scientific conference “Traditions in Time (in memory of V. M. Gatsak)” (Moscow, May 22–23, 2018);
10. Historical and philological readings (Veliky Novgorod, August 4–5, 2018);
11. International conference “Grammatical Processes and Systems in Synchrony and Diachrony (in memory of A. A. Zaliznyak)” (Moscow, May 27–29, 2019);
12. International scientific conference “Savremena srpska folkloristika 7” (“Modern Serbian Folkloristics”) (Kruševac, June 21–23, 2019).
13. International scientific conference “Marginalia–2023: borders of culture and text” (Arzamas, September 22–24, 2023).

§2. The overview of the research

The research consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, three appendixes, list of sources and literature. The first two chapters are devoted to the investigation of *MT* and *S/MT* in the copies of the 11th–19th centuries. The chapters address such issues as the relationship of copies, the reconstruction of prayer archetypes, and the description of text editing. The third chapter presents the results of a research of the textual history of the *GSA* against the background of South Slavic manuscripts. Appendix No. 1 contains the stem of copies for *MT*, *S/MT* and *GSA*, Appendix No. 2 provides illustrative material for §1.6 and §2.6, and Appendix No. 3 presents the description of studied manuscripts.

The research of 20 *MT* versions in the **first chapter** provided the archetype of translation, the description of the translation strategies and the main stages of

the development of the text in the handwritten tradition. T. Agapkina rightly notes that *MT* is similar to the *Pataxarea-type* of the Greek-Byzantine tradition [Agapkina 2017: 489]. However, we suppose that the closest copy of the Greek prayer is *GI* on the lead plate of the beginning of the 8th century.

Before the late 10 — early 11th centuries, when the earliest copy PopKr is dated, the prayer is translated into Old Slavonic and a version of *MT1* with a truncated beginning appears. Further, by the end of the 14 — beginning of the 15th century, the version presented in *HGA2* was formed, and no later than the 17th century appeared a variant of the truncated *MT2* version, which formed the basis of the 17–18th centuries copies (*HAZU140*, *NBKM273*, *NBS454*, and *Pavl2*) written in Serbian-Slavonic (*српскословенски језик*) with the peculiarities of pronunciation. Finally, a new reworking of the text using the copy of the third branch is created no later than the 19th century, as *HAZU2(1)* evidences. Judging by the significant number of features of the Horvat language, the Glagolitic type of writing and its isolation from other copies of the first branch, the origin of the redactions presented in *HGA2* and *HAZU2(1)* can be confidently associated with Croatia. At the same time, if the first redaction is composed in the Croatian redaction of Church Slavonic with the peculiarities of the living language, the second one is written in the vernacular language with an admixture of rare elements of the Russian Slavonic language.

The second branch with the first-person narrative is formed before the middle of the 13th century, and the version on behalf of the archangel Michael was composed before the version with the protagonist Sisin appeared (*SPD4* and probably *IerP2*). The first version seems to have originated in one of the Danubian principalities, while the second one is written in the Serbian redaction of the Church Slavonic language.

The third branch is formed no later than the turn of the 17-18th centuries, when *Dui31(2)* is dated (we do not take into account the list of *Kač*, which the publisher attributes to the XVII century because there is no possibility to confirm

the dating of the manuscript: the place of its storage is unknown), and, accordingly, the editorial work reflected in *MT10* and *MT12* takes place before this period. The redaction in *MT13* dates from before 1832, judging from the list of *NBS113*, and in *MT11* from before 1850, based on the accurately dated copy *Hil672(2)*. In our opinion, *Kač*, *Duj31(2)*, *Duj32*, *Kov*, *NBS113*, *Brat*, *Hil672(2)*, *Sok275-30* and *Sok275-65* are written in Slavonic-Serbian (*славеносрпски језик*) with a dominant number of features of the vernacular language, which are contrasted with the archaic linguistic stratum: examples with markers of high style penetrate the copies from the preceding (Serbo-Slavonic) tradition. The redaction in *Kat*, on the contrary, is composed in the vernacular language with a minimum number of features borrowed from the protograph.

The study of twenty copies confirms the existence of three branches, which are divided into nine stylistic redactions.

The **second chapter** is devoted to reconstruction of the archetype of *S/MT*, the description of the translation strategies and the redaction of the text in the handwritten tradition. The reconstructed archetype shows that the *S/MT* has common features with several Greek-language redactions, and it is very difficult to prefer any of them in contrast to the more source-dependent *MT*.

The prayer is translated into Slavonic until the middle of the 13th century, when the earliest copies of the *S/MT* (*IerP1*, *SPD1*, *SPD2*, *SPD3*) are dated, and by this period there are already copies representing the stages of *S/MT1*, *S/MT3*, and *S/MT2*. The *S/MT*, like the *MT*, is translated by a speaker of the Ekavian and Shtokavian dialects, and the text is composed in Serbo-Slavonic with penetrations of living speech features.

The fourteen examined copies demonstrate the existence of four branches in the history of the *S/MT*. Five copies belong to the first one, the youngest copy is *SPD2*, and the oldest one is *HAZU2(2)*. The creation of the *HGAI* redaction can be dated only to the time of the composition of the amulet, i.e., the 14-15th centuries,

and the *HAZU2(2)* redaction, which was formed until the 19th century, originates from it. Both copies, as well as *HGA2* and *HAZU2(1)*, are connected with the isolated Croatian Glagolitic tradition, but the latter is written in the Serbian vernacular language. No later than the 17th century, judging from *NBKM631*, the stage *S/MT6* appears, and the stages *S/MT4*, *S/MT5* and *S/MT6* appear before the turn of the 17–18th centuries, by which one of the extreme copies on the stem (*Duj31(2)*) is dated. The formation of other editions and variants can be determined only by the dating of material sources. The *NBKM631* is composed in New-Bulgarian, and *Hash284* — in the Middle-Bulgarian redaction of Church Slavonic. The younger copies of the third branch are written either in the vernacular language (*Sok275-49*) or in Slavonic-Serbian with different percentages of features of the living language (the other copies).

The individual redactions, in our opinion, are presented in seven stylistic variants.

The **third chapter** discusses the transmission *GSA* in the Old Russian manuscripts. The ritual of “Exposing the Thief” (“The Decree on the Proskomedia to the Holy Three Confessors Gurias, Samonas and Abibus”) was written by the Archbishop of Novgorod, Ioann III. The creation of the text was inspired by the sign from the icon of the confessors on December 24, 1410 in St. Sophia Cathedral. The full text of the “Decree...” is preserved in two copies from the 16th — 17th centuries, whereas the prayer alone until recently was known in two copies not earlier than the 17th century. The corpus of copies of the prayer was replenished with three copies in manuscripts from the end of the 14th or the beginning of the 15th century and from the 18th century, respectively. The discovery of the earliest copy raised the question about the original text written by Archbishop Ioann: did he write only the only prescriptive part for a previously known prayer or the full text?

A textual study of the “Decree...” and the copies of the prayer allow to reconstruct the history of the text and conclude that the archetype contained both

the prayer and the prescriptive part. Thus, it could be confirmed that the author of both parts of the “Decree ...” is Archbishop Ioann, but the prayer is a less uniform formation. The comparison with Slavic prayers showed that the fragment about the forefathers, going back to a Greek tradition, was borrowed by Ioann from a South Slavic manuscript, while the first part of the text about the three confessors was compiled by the archbishop himself in the context of the special attitude of Novgorod to the cult of St. Gurias, Samonas and Abibus. The language of the prayer belongs to the hybrid register of Church Slavonic, and this feature is also characteristic for the other apocryphal prayers existed in Old Rus’.

Then, it should be noted a certain transformation of the genre: if the Greek source is associated with magical practice, then the Old Russian one is closer to non-canonical prayers. This is also emphasized by the change in the situation in which the text is used: instead of a magical ritual performed by a layman, a ritual is formed intended to be performed in the church. Further in the process of development, the pragmatics of the text approaches the urgent problems of the people: the search for the missing property or the missing person — thus, the emphasis on punishing the guilty disappears.

Finally, the story comes full circle and prayer is again used to locate the missing servant (*Muz*) as in the source originating from South Slavia. The development of this function indicates the use of the text in a wealthy environment, which could not be inferred from other copies. The listed innovations that occurred on Old Russian soil probably appeared under the influence of handwritten charms, which gained popularity in the literature of the early modern period. Thus, having retracted new details, the initially magical Greek text, in a new round of its history, returns to the magical environment, already in Old Rus’.

To conclude, the study allows to make an attempt to fit *MT*, *S/MT* and *GSA* into the system of handwritten literature of Southern and Eastern Slavia. N.I. Tolstoy schematically depicts it in the form of a pyramid, one of the positions of which is occupied by apocryphal literature, imitating canonical literature in its

linguistic features [Tolstoy 1998: 209]. However, this peculiarity is fully characteristic only of *GSA*, which is always rewritten in Church Slavonic, while the *MT* and *S/MT* make the transformation from the “high” language to the vernacular one through a hybrid stage.

The main results of the dissertation research have been published in **six articles** in journals (five of them are included in the lists of high-level journals recommended by the National Research University Higher School of Economics), totaling 7 a.s. (4 a.s. without co-authorship):

1. *Alekseeva, A.S., Gippius, A.A.* Nablyudeniya nad tekstom Oloneckogo sbornika [Observations on the Text of Olonetsky Sbornik] // *Drevnyaya Rus'. Voprosy medievistiki* [Old Rus'. Questions of Medieval Studies]. №2 (76). 2019. P. 141–157.

2. *Alekseeva, A.S.* Russkoyazychnye teksty Oloneckogo sbornika: fonetika i grammatika [Russian Texts in Olonetsky Sbornik from the 17th Century: Phonetics and Grammar] // *Russkij yazyk v nauchnom osveshchenii* [Russian Language and Linguistic Theory]. 2020. №2. P. 128–150.

3. *Alekseeva, A.S.* Izoblichenie vora na Rusi: ot postanovleniya Novgorodskogo arhiepiskopa Ioanna III do nizovoj rukopisnoj knizhnosti [The Ritual of “Exposing the Thief” in Old Rus’: from the Enactment by the Archbishop of Novgorod Ioann III to Apocryphal Manuscript Culture] // *Slověne* [The Slavs]. 2021. Vol. 10 (№ 1). P. 230–261.

4. *Alekseeva, A.S., Gippius, A.A., Miheev, S.M.* Vozvrashchayas’ k amuletu iz Oreshaka: chto govorila veshtica? [Returning to the Oreshak Amulet: What Did the Vēshtitsa Say?] // *PALAEOBULGARICA / STAROBULGARISTIKA*. XLVI (2022). №3. P. 3–24.

5. *Alekseeva, A.S.* Molitva arhangela Mihaila protiv veshtitsy v rukopisi Nikoly Hadzhina [The Prayer of the Archangel Michael against the Veštica in the

manuscript written by Nikola Hadzhin] // Slavyanovedenie [Slavic Studies]. 2023. №6 (in the press).

6. *Alekseeva, A.S.* Sisnieva legenda v Codex Sturdzanus: tekst i yazyk [The Sisinnios' Legend in Codex Sturdzanus: the Text and the Language] // Litera. 2023. №11. P. 228–237.

Bibliography

1. *Agapkina, T.A.* The Sisinnios' Legend in South Slavia] // The Sisinnios' Legend in the Folklore and Manuscript Tradition of the Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Moscow, 2017. P. 489–490.

2. *Chyoha, O.V.* The St. Sisinnios' Prayer in Byzantine Tradition // The Sisinnios' Legend in the Folklore and Manuscript Traditions of the Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Moscow, 2017. P. 242–304.

3. *Tolstoy, N.I.* The Relation of Old Serbian Literary Language to the Old Slavonic Language (in Connection with the Development of Genres in Old Serbian Literature) // Works. Vol. II: Slavic Literary and Linguistic Situation. Moscow, 1998. P. 200–211.

4. *Turilov, A.A., Chernetsov, A.V.* The Apocryphal Beliefs in the Russian Manuscript Tradition // The Apocryphal Literature in Russia of the 17–18th centuries. Moscow, 2002.

5. *Vinogradova, L.N., Tolstaya, S.M.* Veštica // Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary]. V. 1. Moscow, 1995. P. 367–368.