

# The Scete Paterikon

By William R. Veder

The *Apophthegmata Patrum* ('Sayings of the Fathers'), compiled in Palestine ca. 475–500 from much older sources, form the well-spring of Christian monastic literature. Their translation into Slavonic has a great deal to teach us, not only about the more than 12 centuries of life in the South and East Slavic cultural areas, but also about the life of its Greek source text and its early translations. The Slavonic translation faithfully and fully renders a Greek codex of great age, which contained the *draft* copy of the *Systematic Collection* of the sayings (ordered in 22 thematic chapters) along with remnants of the *Alphabetic–Anonymous Collection* (ordered by name, the anonymous sayings by themes); the Greek *fair* copy of the *Systematic Collection* was given its definitive form only after the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 553). The translations into Armenian and Syriac, made before 550, reflect both the structure (the alphabetic–anonymous part not yet diminished) and the text of this codex; those into Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopian, Georgian, and Sogdian may do so as well (but remain to be studied in depth).

This Greek codex left no trace in the Greek textual tradition because it was physically removed from Palestine, most probably by St. Martin of Braga (†580), who in 550 went to christianise the Suevians in the northwestern corner of the Iberian peninsula. He must have left it at Rome, to be translated selectively into Latin by the deacons Pelagius (pope 556–561) and John (pope 561–574) and an anonymous translator (chapters 21–22), surely on condition that it would be sent to him for the translation his deacon Paschasius was to make at Dumio (Portugal) until 580. Along with a selection translated by St. Martin himself, four other selective translations into Latin are known to have been made from this codex before the end of the century.

The Slavonic translation, conventionally named *Scete Paterikon* (after its identification in later Russian manuscripts), can be dated to 870–880: in 870, St. Methodius returned from his first visit to Rome, where he was presumably given the codex for his own missionary translation, and in 880, he made his second and last visit, surely returning it (we have an Italo-Greek copy in a sorely diminished state, made in the 13th century). There can be no doubt that the translation belongs to St. Methodius himself, although some chapters towards the end seem to show the hand of a disciple. This is the longest text (over 96,000 words) translated for the mission to Morava, save the Old and New Testament.

The original translation of the Slavonic Bible is notoriously difficult to establish, because so little can be ascertained of the history of its transmission. The history of the transmission of the *Scete Paterikon* is, in contrast, crystal clear. The Glagolitic protograph was brought to Pliska in Bulgaria in 886 by the refugees from the mission to Morava. Its first Bulgarian reader (might that have been Prince Boris-Michael?) took the liberty of annotating it profusely (in Glagolitic) as to changes in wording. These changes were all incorporated in a Glagolitic master copy, made at Pliska presumably before St. Clement departed for Ohrid in 887, taking the protograph with him, which reached its destination in a diminished state, lacking 6 or 7 quires at the beginning and one at the end (as documented by the Glagolitic master copy made at Ohrid).

The Pliska master copy engendered at least five Glagolitic copies with serious disturbances in the ordering of the text (the master copy was left unbound for ease of copying, and the sequence of the quires was progressively muddled); the text itself was not affected, save by individual intrusions of Hunno-Bulgarisms. The Ohrid master copy engendered a single offspring with deep interventions into the text: the Ohrid Cyrillic Edition of the *Scete Paterikon*. All other South Slavic copies until the conquest of the city in 1394 were made as Cyrillic transcriptions directly from the Glagolitic protograph, most of them treating the Pliska reader's Glagolitic annotations as the *author's last will* (only one Serbian copyist before ca. 1300 neglects them altogether); they include an attempt to spot-check the translation against an exemplar of the Greek *fair* copy of the text, bringing it marginally closer in line with the Greek mainstream tradition.

That the Ohrid master copy engendered no further offspring is not surprising: it must have happened to be at Preslav together with the original of the Ohrid Cyrillic Edition (perhaps in order to gain official approval for it) in 971, when the Preslav library was packed and shipped to Kiev. In this way, six Glagolitic copies of the *Scete Paterikon* and a Cyrillic edition of its text became the progenitors of no less than 38 Russian copies (not to mention the excerpts and compilations).

The development of the text shows the impact of two major shock waves (the Pliska reader's annotations and the Ohrid editor's interventions) and one minor one (the Ohrid collator's alterations of the text on the basis of a younger Greek manuscript), the second and third confined to two branches of the transmission (which do not come into contact with each other). For the rest, the text does not develop; it only suffers the usual traumas of manuscript transmission while attempting to remain faithful to the antigraph.

The fact that the *Scete Paterikon* came to the East Slavic area both in Glagolitic copies and a Cyrillic edition is significant for the further study of manuscript transmission of Slavonic texts: it makes it possible to study in detail the differences in variation patterns that arise from transcribing a Glagolitic antigraph and from copying a Cyrillic one. Of the Russian manuscripts, four (dating to ca. 1175–1500) have so far been identified as direct transcriptions from Glagolitic and six as copies from a single Cyrillic exemplar; 28 remain to be studied in this aspect (and are available in full, lineated collations in *Polata knigopisnaia* 36 [2006] @ <https://kb.osu.edu/dspace/handle/1811/6399>).



Photo courtesy of W.R. Veder

Authors William R. Veder (left) and Hans van der Tak with publisher Susan van Oostveen