

## Literary history of the tale of st. abraham: textual criticism, poetics

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**Ключевые слова:**

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**Аннотация:**

The article is devoted to the literary history of The Tale of St. Abraham, which is ascribed to Ephrem the Syrian. The Tale was widely spread in the Christian tradition of the West and the East. The article summarizes the results of a study of the 60 Slavic manuscripts of the Tale (Russian, Bulgarian, and Serbian), as well as its publications in the XVII—XIX centuries in Syriac, Greek, Latin, and Polish, which are based on early manuscripts of the Tale.

As a result, textological research showed that the Tale was exposed to editing several times in its literary history. We can mark seven editions of the Tale, which are spread in the Slavonic manuscripts. The Main Edition is represented by 42 copies of the XII—XVIII centuries; the First Prologue Edition is represented by a Russian copy of the XII century; the Second Prologue Edition is represented by ten copies of the XVI—XVII centuries; the First Solovetskaya Edition is known in the handwritten tradition through two re-written copies of the XVI—XVII centuries; the Second Solovetskaya and Sofia Editions are familiar only through one re-written copy of the XVI century; the Speculum maius Edition is represented by ten copies of the 1st translation from the XVII—XVIII centuries.

The copies' analysis lets us establish its genealogy and, thus, recreate the existing history of the Tale's text in the Ancient Rus booklore

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Creation the translated literature's history in Russia is an essential object of the modern literary studies. According to A. I. Sobolevsky, number of the original works in the Russian literature of the Pre—Mongol period is less than one percent. [1; 94] Translated Byzantine and Latin works quickly came into general use, predestining development of the original Old Russian literature. Hereafter, in the modern history, translated works turned out to be a literary wellspring, which many famous writers of the XIX century had appealed to.

*The Tale of St. Abraham* (hereafter, the Tale), which is ascribed to Ephrem the Syrian, is one of the most popular and respected translated hagiographic works in the Ancient Rus, as evidenced by a relatively big number of re-written copies (catalogue of the re-written copies of the XII—XVIII centuries contains around 60 units), and by the Tale's impact on the original Old Russian works, such as *The Life of St. Abraham of Rostov*, *The Life of Nilus of Stolben Island*, *The Life of Abraham of Smolensk*, *The Life of St. Stephen of Perm*. [2; 12—43] [3; 537—544] Nevertheless, there are still no scientific works, dedicated to the literary history of the Tale in the Russian medieval studies. This article is aimed to filling this gap.

The Tale is written in the Syriac language. The eldest copy — Mus. Brit. cod. add. 14,644 fol. 28—44, V—VI centuries. The attribution of the work to Ephrem the Syrian was challenged by Th. J. Lamy based on the fact that this work contains the real facts of the life of St. Abraham the Great of Kidunja, who lived in the V

century, whereas Ephrem the Syrian (Classic Syriac: *Mār Aprēm Sûryâyâ*) is a well-known representative of the Christian Syrian literature who lived in the IV century (deceased in 373 AD). [4, 5–9]

The Tale was translated into the Greek language not later than in the X century. Translation into Slavonic was accomplished in Bulgaria during the rule of Simeon I the Great in the X century. [5; 27–81] [6; 146–148, 398–405] It was attributed to Ephrem the Syrian, and, according to the Byzantine tradition, it was included in the *Paraenesis* (Greek: παραίνεσις — exhortation) under the number 48, along with other insightful works. The *Paraenesis* was widely spread all over the Rus in the XI–XVII centuries.

Around 985 AD, the edited copy of the Tale was included in the *Menologion of Basil II* and, in the XII century, in the Rus Lands, it was translated for the 2nd time as a part of the *Synaxarion*.

Owing to the translations into Latin, the Tale became familiar in Germany, Poland, and other countries of the Western Europe. In the XVI century, the changed edition of the Tale was included in the *Speculum maius*, in the form close to the Exempla.

In the XVII century, within the first translation of the *Speculum maius*, the Tale was adopted from the Polish literature into the Old Russian literature.

The history of the Tale in the Rus Lands in the XI–XVII centuries was quite complicated. On the one hand, there was a traditional form for such works in the miscellanies of a constant structure (*Prologue, Paraenesis, and Speculum maius*); on the other hand, the Tale was included in the miscellanies of a combined structure where it could be presented in the changed or modified form; therefore, a lot of Tale's editions were made. As a result of a textological research of the Slavic re-written copies of the Tale, we can mark seven editions: the Main Edition, the First Prologue, the Second Prologue, the First Solovetskaya Edition, the Second Solovetskaya Edition, the Sophia Edition, and the *Speculum maius* Edition.<sup>1</sup>

Altogether, there were 60 copies of the Tale that existed in the Rus – Syrian re-written copies published by Th. J. Lamy [4; 10–49], a Greek re-written copy of the Tale published by G.S. Assemani [7], a Polish re-written copy published in the *Speculum maius* in 1624 [8; 327–330] — to study its literary history.

The Tale consists of three separate parts<sup>2</sup> typical for the Byzantine tradition of hagiography. The first part of the Tale is dedicated to the Abrahams life as a Hermit and his further holy life. Willed by the bishop, Abraham travels to a pagan settlement to turn pagans into Christianity. He lives there for three years, suffering from humiliation and beating, until pagans feel sympathy for Abraham and adopt Christianity. The second part is about Abraham going to a desert where he is tempted by the devil. The third part describes how Abraham saves his niece Maria, who he has brought up from brothel. The Tale ends with a description of the last years of Abraham and Maria's life.

### **Search for the Greek script of the Tale translated into Slavic**

Although there are no Slavic copies of the documents dated earlier than the XII–XIII centuries, the translation of the Tale, as it was mentioned before, can be referred to the earliest period of the Slavic writing (the X century).

One of the issues of studying the Tale is finding the original Greek script, which was translated. We are familiar with only one re-written copy of the Tale, published by G. S. Assemani [7; T. II; 4–20], which makes the whole situation quite complicated. Researchers as A. S. Arkhangelsky, G. Boykovsky, and A. P. Kadlubovsky used it as a basis to find the best reading in their monographs. However, a macro textual comparing of Assemani's copy with the earliest Syrian copy translation (Mus. Brit. № 14,644, the V–VI centuries)<sup>3</sup> and one of the earliest Slavic (Russian National Library, Pogodin 71a catalogue, XII–XIII centuries) copies of the Main Edition present us with many variant readings. For example, description of Abraham turning into a hermite after baptizing the people of the pagan settlement is presented only in the Greek and Slavic copies. Moreover, the Greek copy has got a richer description of the people baptized by Abraham. There are quite many variant readings in the copies.

Can these variant readings be explained by the fact that the copy of Assemani is some another Greek edition of the Tale and not the one that was taken as a basis for the translation into Slavic? While analyzing various readings, one can get the impression that a Greek copyist changed the text on purpose to make it more space. Can it be explained by the fact that the Greek original later than the X century was exposed to changes, which are reflected in the copy of Assemani, and that is why the familiar Greek copy is full of secondary readings? Only one thing is clear: the Assemani's copy is not the document that was translated into Slavic. Therefore, the issue of finding the exact Greek copy, which was translated into Slavic, remains open.

Comparison of the Pogodin 71a catalogue, Russian National Library, with the translation of the earliest

Syrian copy showed that the texts' composition is identical. Therefore, it is possible to speak not only of genetic bond between the Pogodin 71a catalogue and the oldest Syrian re-written copy, but also of the supposition that the assumed Greek original of the Tale occurred as a result of a precise translation of the from Syrian into Greek, which was further precisely translated into Slavic.

### **The Main Edition**

The Main Edition (ME) is represented by 42 re-written copies of the XII—XVIII centuries (Elder re-written copies of the Russian National Library, Pogodin 71a catalogue, until 1288, Russian State Library, Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius catalogue 7, XIII century).<sup>4</sup> The presence of ME in the Slavic tradition is connected with the *Paraenesis* of Ephrem the Syrian. 33 of 42 re-written copies of ME are included in the *Paraenesis* where they steadily take the 48th place, being included in the number of the main articles of the miscellany. The exceptions are the following re-written copies: Russian National Library, Main Catalogue of the Script Books F1—201, 47th place, Russian Academy of Sciences Library, Main catalogue 31.7.2 - 49th. The title in the copies of the *Paraenesis* is constantly the same ("The Tale of St. Abraham"); only one re-written copy - Russian National Library, Solovetskoe 173 catalogue (173) - has a different title *The Tale of St. Abraham and his foster daughter Maria*, which occurred under the impact of poetical Prologue. All other ME re-written copies are included in the miscellanies of combined structure; they have inessential differences. Titles of many re-written copies of the XV century were changed under the impact of the Prologue editions. For example, text of the New Collection of Script Books, I, F—149, Russian National Library, is entitled *The Life of Abraham the Hermit and Maria the Blessed*; text if the Main Collection of Ancient Artifacts, Q—50, Russian National Library, is titled *The Life and Acts of Moral Courage of Reverend Abraham the Hermit* (impact of the Prologue's 2nd edition). The text's ending of the Sinodalnoe 1063/4 catalogue, State History Museum, is missing. All re-written copies of ME included in the miscellanies of combined structure have missing fragments, because of the mistakes made by writers.

Traditionally the Tale is presented together with *The Tale of Joseph* and *The Tale of Antichrist* by Ephrem the Syrian, the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, *The Ladder* by John Climacus, insightful words of John Chrysostom, words of Athanasius of Alexandria, of Dorotheus of Gaza, patericons. The presence of the Tale in the line with the works of the Reverend Fathers shows that its readers in the Ancient Rus considered it to be one of the most authoritative and readable works.

### **The First Prologue Edition (FPE)**

The Prologue Editions were widely spread in the handwritten tradition. A Prologue originates from the Byzantine Synaxarions; the lives of the Saints are arranged there according to the days they are remembered in church. In the Rus, the Prologue became the most favorite book to read. There are more than three thousand Prologues scripts of various types. There are three main types of an ordinary prologue: the Slavic Synaxarion, the 1st Russian edition, and the 2nd Russian edition. There is also an independent, a so-called "poetic" Prologue. The Tale is described in all types of prologue. [9]

Literary history of FPE is connected with the Synaxarion, the poetic Prologue and the 1st Edition of the Prologue.

**The Slavic Synaxarion** can be found only in one Russian re-written copy of the end of the XII century and in some of the Serbian and Bulgarian re-written copies of the XIII—XIV centuries. In this particular research we work with the Russian re-written copy (Russian National Library, Sofiyskoe 1324 catalogue, end of the XII century).

The Synaxarion, as well as its Byzantine source (Menologion of Basil II, around 985, together with the additions from the XI century), is a calendar corpus of lives together with the troparions for the most important Saints. October, 29 - is the day of remembrance of Reverend Abraham. According to V.A. Moshin, the Synaxarion was translated not later than in the beginning of the XII century, so FPE can be dated by the XII century.

FPE, as well as the prologue stories, in general, is notable for the very short descriptions. There are no descriptions of the Abraham's saint deeds in a pagan settlement and of demons tempting him. The maker of the Synaxarion left only the most significant episode of the Tale: the story about saving the niece Maria, which is delivered as a recitation of main events.

Such choice of an episode corresponds to the idea of a miscellany. Originally, the Synaxarion was

intended for the church use (for instance, the rules of the Monastery of Stoudios ordered to read the Synaxarion during the service), that is why the Saints whose lives were included into a miscellany had to build a strict hierarchy according to their Christian act of moral courage: the apostles of pagans belonged to apostle sainthood, martyred for faith – to martyr sainthood, saints honored for monastic acts of moral courage – to reverend sainthood and so on. Apparently the acts of moral courage that were described in the lives in Synaxarion including the article about Abraham had to correspond to the sainthood that the saint belonged to. According to this, the author chooses only one event from all described in the Tale that is connected with the moral act of courage of the reverend. Abraham saves his niece at the cost of his Christian life. The Saint wears military clothes and enters wanton house where Maria is. In order not to be noticed, he drinks wine and eats meat. In such way, he breaks all monastic bans that are equal to death in monastic life. But here is the paradox of Christianity: just as Christ sacrificed himself to make amends for all people's sins by his death and resurrect, so Abraham sacrifices his Christian life to return the lost soul to reformation path and as paradoxically as it may sound to save himself. In such way, the Saint follows the gospel commandment "Greater love has no man than this, that a man gives up his life for his friends" (John 15:13). At the same time, the author of edition omits the apostle act of moral courage of Abraham who baptized pagan settlers. That is why Abraham expectedly called "reverend" in the title of FPE as opposed to ME where he is called the *Saint*. The question of author's choice of Saint's act of moral courage can be explained by the assumption that in the Story Abraham's saving of Maria is a top of his service because in this act of moral courage he is compared with the Savior. That is why Maria's saving is infinitely more serious than his apostle acts.

**The creation of the Prologue's 1st edition** dated from the beginning of the XIII century; it is familiar only in the Russian re-written copies. [9] The copies of the State History Museum, Sinodalnoe 239, 240 catalogue s, were used during the research.

1st edition is bigger than the Synaxarion; under each number there is a patericon story or a lection. The section with the lives fully corresponds to the Synaxarion; and the article for October, 29, dedicated to Abraham, also fully corresponds to the article from the Synaxarion.

**The Poetical Prologue** is an independent type of a prologue. It was not widely spread in Russia. The Poetical Prologue of the New Jerusalem Rules was translated from Greek in Serbia in the XIV century. It is called "poetical" because before the articles of lives there were short poems honoring the Saints. (In this research the Poetical Prologue is presented by 2 copies of the XVI—XVII centuries). Greek copy of the Poetical Prologue is unavailable.

The article about Abraham in the Poetical Prologue compared to the article from the Synaxarion has two differences: firstly, before the story about Abraham there is a poem: "Telesnaya vsya oudesa Avraamie oumertvil oumer zhitelstvouyeshi s besplotnymi angely ostavl'she telesnye rachitelya Marie dushevnomu rachitelyu pripletayeshi"; secondly, the titles of the articles differ:

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