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THE *VITA MARIAE AEGYPTIACAE* IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN BULGARIAN LITERATURE

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The aim of this paper is to introduce some differences between the earliest *Vita Mariae Aegyptiacae* and Damaskinos Studitis's sixteenth-century Greek version, in order to explain their diffusion in medieval and early modern Bulgarian literature.

The cult of Mary of Egypt was widespread throughout the East and the West. The saint was mentioned for the first time in the *Vita Cyriaci anachoretæ*.¹ Although medieval literature attributes her earliest *Vita* to Sophronios, the patriarch of Jerusalem,² several scholars argue that he is not the author of the composition, and assume that it was written earlier at the beginning of the sixth century.³ The *Vita* can be found in approximately 260 Greek copies in different versions.⁴ It

¹ A.M. Sauget, "Maria Egziaca", *Bibliotheca Sanctorum VIII* (Rome, 1967), col. 981-991.

² Such notes can be found in some, but not all, Slavic copies as well: see for instance the title *Žitie i Žizn' prěpodobnye matere naše Marie s'pisanno Sofroniem' arxiepiškopom ierusalimskym*, attested in the copy written by Vladislav the Grammarian in the manuscript IIIa47, kept in the archives of the Croatian Academy of Science in Zagreb, or the sentence *Zatova az' sofronie ierusalimskiji patriarx razbrax*, attested in the introduction of the *Vita* in the *Svištov Damaskin*. (In these two quotations from the manuscripts, as well as henceforth, I solve abbreviations and ligatures in Slavic texts, and transliterate them with Latin letters.)

³ H. Usener, *Der heilige Tychon* (Leipzig – Berlin, 1907), 78-80; H.G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 435; K. Kunze, *Studien zur Legende der heiligen Maria Aegyptiaca im deutschen Sprachgebiet* (Berlin, 1969), 21. It shall be referred to henceforth as Sophronios's *Vita*.

⁴ F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca II* (Brussels, 1957), 80; I. Špadijer, "Žitije Marije Egipćanke u ranovizantijskom književnom kontekstu", *Književna istorija* 24 no. 87 (1992), 178.



was translated into Latin, Armenian and Syrian.⁵ The Latin translation survives today in three versions.⁶

Most scholars are convinced that the *Vita* was translated into Old Bulgarian (Old Church Slavonic),⁷ or into Middle Bulgarian from Greek.⁸ However, there is uncertainty among philologists as to when and where this translation was made, and by whom. I. Špadijer⁹ points out that the earliest copies of the Slavic translation dating from the fourteenth century are Serbian. She makes the distinction between two Slavic versions, both frequently copied in *Slavia Orthodoxa*. However, the author does not provide any information about the manuscripts containing these versions, such as when and where the texts were translated. E. Demina¹⁰ mentions the version in the manuscript N 75 in the archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Theology. Keipert¹¹ notes that the text contained in Makarij's *Četi minei* is close to the ver-

⁵ Sauget, "Maria Egiziaca"

⁶ Kunze, *Studien*, 173-181.

⁷ The term used for the language of the earliest extant medieval Slavic manuscripts is controversial in Slavic studies. In English, the term "Old Church Slavonic" is traditionally used. "Church Slavonic" refers to later linguistic redactions of different ethnic origin (Croatian, Russian, Serbian, etc.). In German, the term *Altkirchenslavisch* is often used, as well as *Altbulgarisch*. Russian scholars defend the appropriateness of the term *staroslavjanskij* (rarely *starocerkovnoslavjanskij*). The term *občeslavenski* is proposed in some Croatian inquiries; see S. Damjanović, "Općeslavenski književni jezik", *Jedanaest stoljeća nezaborava* (Zagreb, 1991), 31-35. In Bulgarian scholarly research, the only term employed is *starobălgarski* (i.e. Old Bulgarian). It is generally recognized that the literary language created by Constantine and Methodius was based on the Thessalonian dialect of Old Bulgarian, and that this language was promoted as the official state language and as the language of literacy in medieval Bulgaria. From the extensive literature illustrating the appropriateness of this term, I shall quote only some recent works, such as R. Cejtin, "O sodržanii termina staroslavjanskij jazyk", *Voprosy jazykoznanija*, no. 4 (1987), 43-58; E. Dogramadžieva and K. Kostova, "K problemej definicii drevnebolgarskogo jazyka na osnove opredelenij drugix drevnix slavjanskix jazykov", *Slavjanska filologija* XIX (Sofia, 1988), 19-28; K. Kočev, "Svetovni medievisti za starobălgarskija ezik", *Bălgarski ezik* 38 (1988), 3-18.

⁸ I. Dujčev, ed., *Bdinski Zbornik, Ghent Slavonic Ms 408, A.D. 1360*. Facsimile edition with a presentation by Ivan Dujčev (London, 1972); E. Voodeckers, "Introduction", J.L. Scharpé and F. Vyncke, eds., *Bdinski Zbornik. An Old-Slavonic Menologium of Women Saints. - A.D. 1360* (Bruges, 1973); H. Keipert, "Zur parallelüberlieferung des "Bdinskij sbornik" (cod. Gand. 408)", *Analecta Bollandiana* 93 (1975), 282.

⁹ Špadijer, "Žitije", 178. I am grateful to my colleague Irena Stefoska who drew my attention to Špadijer's article.

¹⁰ E. Demina, *Tixonravovskij damaskin. Bolgarskij pamjatnik XVII veka* (Sofia, 1968), 169.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 282.

sion in the *Bdinski Zbornik*,¹² and that the version included in the *Cracow Triodion* is the same as that in the *Bdinski Zbornik*. He considers that only further detailed investigations can determine whether these two texts represent two different textual redactions of an Old Bulgarian prototype, or if they are two different translations from Greek.

A comparison of the text in the *Bdinski Zbornik* with the text in Vladislav the Grammarian's codex from 1469¹³ shows that the two texts differ in many respects. The text in the *Bdinski Zbornik* is shorter. There are differences in syntax, word order, expressions, and morphology.¹⁴ For instance:

Bdinski Zbornik

i stax v' uglě v' prustě cr(')kovněm

*pokaži mi, vl(a)d(y)ko, molju te,
pl'tskaago agg(e)la*

um'ršuju m(ě)s(e)ca aprilě

smokvi

Vladislav the Grammarian's codex

*i stax' v'' někoem rozě dvora crkov-
nago*

*pokaži mi, molju se, suštuju v'' pl'ti
aggela*

*skončavšuju se m(ěse)ca farmufi po
egip't'skomu ezyku. iže jes(t'') po
gr'č'skomu aprilie*

paksimade

¹² On the manuscript, see above, as well as K. Kuev, *Sădbata na starobălgarskata răkopisna kniga prez vekovete* (Sofia, 1986), 265-266.

¹³ On the manuscript see above.

¹⁴ Here I quote the second part of the two introductions, which reveal all kinds of differences:

Bdinski Zbornik

*Pověst' s(ve)tuju az' slišav' i nikaakože ne
mogu taiti. i niktože mi ne nevěruj jaže slyšax
pišemaa, ili mene gr'deštaa se ili dive se čjudesi
velikomu. i ne udi mi mně l'gati na s(ve)tuju.
ašte li sut' eteri č'tušte knigu siju i o visotě
slovesi divešte se, ne xotešte věrovati, budi im'
m(i)l(o)st' g(o)s(pod')nja. ty bo, nemošt'
čl(o)v(ě)č(s'k)u pomyšljajušte, neprietnaa
tvoret' nam' g(lago)ljemaa o čl(ově)čěx'.*

Zagreb Zbornik

*Pověst' s(ve)štenuju do mene doš'dšuju
nikakože uml'čju. taže da niktože ne nevěruet'
jaže slyšax i pišu, ili m(')ně čjuditi se eže pače
v''sěx'' nepštuju. m(')ně bo ubo da ne budet
b(o)ž(')stv(')naa l'gati, i kr'm(')č'stovovati
slovo imže b(og)' pominaet se, i eže m'nšaa
mudr'stovovati i nedos(t)oinaa v''pl'stennago
b(og)a slova velič'stvo i nevěrovati iže tako
g(lagol)juštim'', ne mnit mi se iměti
bl(a)goslovoe. ašte li že něcii siceva pisanja
polučajušte. i přěslavnomu vasn' slova čjudešte
se i věrovati udob' nexotešte, i oněm'
m(i)l(o)stiv' da budet g(ospod)', ponježe ubo i
tii nemošt' čl(ově)č'skažo pomyšljajušte
jest''stoa, neprietna nepštujuť jaže přěslavně
někako o čl(ově)kox' gl(ago)ljemaa.*



It seems that these two texts represent two independent translations of two different Greek versions. However, this statement could be proven only after a precise comparison with the Greek copies, which are not available to me.

It can be assumed that the text in the codex in Zagreb resembles the Greek text published in *Acta Sanctorum*¹⁵ to a great extent. It is not certain which version of the *Vita* is included in the *Menologion* of April, a sixteenth-century manuscript of a Russian redaction kept in the former Synod library in Moscow,¹⁶ nor which version is found in the fifteenth-century *Tikveš Zbornik*.¹⁷ The *Vita* of Mary of Egypt is also included in the following Bulgarian manuscripts: the fifteenth-century miscellany, N 506, kept in the archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Theology;¹⁸ the sixteenth-century *Patericon* kept in the library of Rila monastery;¹⁹ and the *Triodion* from 1638 copied by Daniil of Etropole.²⁰ Both extensive and short *Vitae*, as well as an office devoted to the saint are included in the sixteenth-century *Triodion* in the Bulgarian National Library N 582.²¹ As a whole, the problem of medieval Slavic translations of compositions devoted to the saint, and their Greek counterparts, remains to be explored. A collation of various versions is necessary for the corroboration of Keipert's assumption that Sophronios's *Vita* was translated into Old Bulgarian in a comparatively early period of Old Bulgarian literature.

A new Greek *Vita* of Mary of Egypt was written by Damaskinos Studitis in the sixteenth century. The author included it in his book *Θησαυρός* printed in Venice in 1558.²² In the sixteenth century,

¹⁵ AA. SS. Aprilis 1 (1866), XI-XVIII.

¹⁶ I. I. Sreznevskij, *Materialy dlja Slovarja drevnerusskogo jazyka* (Saint Petersburg, 1893), 19.

¹⁷ My colleague Petko Petkov from Sofia assumes that these two manuscripts preserve a very early translation of the same type as the translations included in the *Codex Suprasliensis* dating from the eleventh century.

¹⁸ B. Xristova, D. Karadžova and A. Ikonomova, *Bălgarski răkopisi ot XI do XVIII vek, zapazeni v Bălgaria. Svođen katalog* (Sofia, 1982), 74, N 166.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 126, N 330.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 165, N 443, and cf. B. Rajkov, "Ieromonax Daniil i Etropolskijat knižoven centăr prez părvata polovina na XVII vek", *Starobălgarska literatura* (1) 1971, 277.

²¹ B. Xristova, D. Karadžova, A. Ikonomova, *Bălgarski*, 116, N 298.

²² This book is a collection of *vitae* and sermons. In general, they are written in the traditional language of Byzantine literacy. However, many vernacularisms concerning both grammar and vocabulary are included as well, in order to make the texts more comprehensible to the uneducated Greek public from the sixteenth century, who did not master the written language of medieval literature. Therefore, this book had many edi-

Grigorij Pelagonijskij, bishop of Prilep,²³ translated this book into the traditional archaic language of medieval Slavic literacy used both in Western Bulgarian monasteries and in Serbia in that century.²⁴ In the same century, a Western Bulgarian monastery made a new independent translation of the *Θησαυρός* into the same language. (Henceforth, it shall be referred to as the translation from Sredna Gora.)²⁵ A copy of the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt has not been found in the manuscripts containing the Sredna Gora translation of Damaskinos Studitis's book.²⁶ A controversial problem is whether such a translation of the *Vita* in question existed at all. If it did not exist, it is inexplicable why the entire book was translated and that the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt was neglected. Several assumptions can be made. One assumption is that the translator from Sredna Gora did not include a composition devoted to the saint in his translation of the Greek book. Rather, the translator or a later copyist or compiler included Sophronios's variant of the *Vita* taken from an Old Bulgarian or Middle Bulgarian manuscript. A second proposition is that the translator from Sredna Gora translated the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt written by Damaskinos Studitis, but later this text was lost and the Old Bulgarian translation of Sophronios's composition replaced it in manuscripts containing the translation of Damaskinos Studitis's book. Consequently, either the first translator or a later scribe had the Old Bulgarian translation of Sophronios's composition at his disposal and preferred it to Damaskinos's work. This assumption seems likely because of the existence of a manuscript such as the *Boboševo Damaskin* containing the translation of seven sermons of Damaskinos Studitis from the *Θησαυρός* and

tions in the following centuries. See D. Petkanova-Toteva, *Damaskinite v bălgarskata literatura* (Sofia, 1965), 6-41.

²³ P. Iljevski, *Krninski damaskin* (Skopje, 1972).

²⁴ This language is known as Church Slavonic with some Serbian orthographic peculiarities, such as OY for the letter denoting nasal *o*, E for the letter denoting nasal *e* in early Cyrillic script. This definition provokes the critiques of several scholars. On the language of early translations of the *Θησαυρός* in Bulgaria, see B. Velčeva, "Norma i tradicija v bălgarskija knižoven ezik ot XVI-XVII vek", *Bălgarski ezik* 16 (1966), 110-112, V. Vasilev, "Po-važni pravopisni osobenosti na arxaičnite damaskini", *Slavjanska paleografija i diplomatika* (Sofia, 1980), 118-122.

²⁵ It is supposed to be Rila monastery or a monastery in Sredna Gora; cf. D. Petkanova, op. cit., 46-48; E. Demina, op. cit., 44-50. In Bulgarian scholarly tradition, the term "translation of Sredna Gora" became customary.

²⁶ Demina, *Tixonravovskij*, 169.



Sophronios's composition of Mary of Egypt.²⁷ The question as to why this replacement was made warrants further investigations from the standpoints of the textology and history of medieval literature. One probable explanation may be the fact that the compiler preferred the earlier composition because of its literary characteristics.

From the Sredna Gora translation of the Greek book *Θησαυρός*, a new translation into the vernacular (Modern Bulgarian) was produced in the seventeenth century.²⁸ The manuscripts containing it are called "modern Bulgarian *damaskins*".²⁹ In addition to Damaskinos Studitis' compositions, many other translations made from Middle Bulgarian and Greek manuscripts, and Russian printed Church Slavonic books, were included in this type of miscellany. Demina finds two versions of the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt in them.

The first version is a translation made into the vernacular from the Old Bulgarian translation of the *Vita* attributed to Sophronios.³⁰ It is not clear which medieval variant served as the original for this translation. Demina³¹ assumes that it was similar to the variant contained in the *Boboševo Damaskin*. However, it has not yet been shown which Slavic version of Sophronios's composition was preserved in this manuscript. It seems that the original version of the modern Bulgarian translation was different from both the version in the *Bdinski Zbornik* and the version in Vladislav the Grammarian's manuscript.

The second version is a vernacular translation of Damaskinos Studitis's composition.³² Petkanova³³ asserts that the translation was

²⁷ The manuscript is described by S. Kožuxarov, "Dve rākopisni knigi", *Izvestija na Instituta za bālgarska literatura* 16 (1965), 151-162.

²⁸ In fact, in the seventeenth century, Bulgarian literate people followed the example of Damaskinos to use a language closer to the vernacular in written texts; see Petkanova, *Damaskinite*, Velčeva, "Norma i tradicija", idem, "Kām ustanovjavaneto na vzaimootnošenijata i dialektната основа na novobālgarskite damaskini", *Bālgarski ezik* 11 (1961), 402-417; E. Demina, op. cit., 27-29.

²⁹ In Bulgarian scholarly tradition, the term *damaskin* was adopted from seventeenth-century Bulgarian literature. It is formed from the name of the Greek author and became a general term denoting any manuscript from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries containing *vitae* or sermons, or other compositions translated into the vernacular; cf. Petkanova, *Damaskinite*,

³⁰ E. Demina, op. cit., 169, finds it in the following manuscripts: the *Tixonravov Damaskin*, the *Drijanovo A and B Damaskins*, the *Trjavna Damaskin*, the *Kotel Damaskin*, the manuscripts N 1073 and N 1066 from the National Bulgarian Library "SS. Cyril and Methodius" in Sofia.

³¹ Demina, *Tixonravovskij*, 169.

³² Demina, *Tixonravovskij*, 169, finds it in the *Svištov Damaskin*, *Berlin Damaskin*, and the manuscript N 39 (79) from the collection of Grigorović in Moscow.

made directly from Greek, while Demina³⁴ admits that the original (of the modern Bulgarian translation) could be the supposed translation of this *Vita* from Sredna Gora. As far as the language and style are concerned, this text is not so different from other vernacular texts translated from the Sredna Gora variant. However, as mentioned, it is not clear whether the translator from Sredna Gora included Damaskinos Studitis's composition devoted to Mary of Egypt in his work at all.

Only precise statistical data could corroborate or challenge the hypothesis that copies of the former translation prevail over the latter in vernacular Bulgarian literature from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and could equally shed light on the question of literary preferences of that period. In general, the problem of modern Bulgarian translations of compositions devoted to Mary of Egypt still requires further exploration. Further work firstly requires a textological collation of different versions preserved both in medieval Slavic manuscripts and in Bulgarian miscellanies written in the vernacular, and second, an investigation of all kinds of compositions³⁵ devoted to the saint in medieval and early modern southern Slavic and Russian literature. The exploration should take into consideration spiritual movements and literary stereotypes of the periods when these compositions were translated, as well as the authors' purposes, the specificity of the books in which the texts in question were included, and

³³ Petkanova, *Damaskinite*, 79.

³⁴ Demina, *Tixonravovskij*, 170.

³⁵ It should be noted that besides traditional *vitae*, other genres were devoted to Mary of Egypt in medieval Byzantine and Latin literature, and not only in prose, but in verse as well. The following compositions are widely known: (1) in Greek (following F. Halkin, *op. cit.*, 81-82): a *Vita metrica* was written by Ioannis Commerciarios, two poems: one by Nicephoros Prosuchos and another by Maximos Cholobolos, an *oratio* by Manuel Palaeologos, an *encomion* by Euthimios Protasecretis, some *epigrammata*; (2) in Latin: a *Vita metrica* by Hildebert of Lavardin, a poem by Flodoard of Rheims; the story of *Maria Aegyptiaca* was included in the *Legenda Aurea*. Thus, the pre-existing textual material devoted to the saint was reshaped into various new compositions. Several scholars examined the new interpretations which the text attributed to Sophronios underwent in later tradition, in particular K. Kunze, *op. cit.*; P. Longo, *Bios και πολιτεία Μαρίας της Αιγυπτίας (κατά τοῦ βαϊκανον ἑλληνικοῦ κώδικα 2556)* (Athens, 1962); P.F. Dembowski, *La Vie de Sainte Marie l'Egyptienne: versions en ancien et en moyen français* (Geneva – Paris, 1977); D. Robertson, "Poem and Spirit. The Twelfth-Century French 'Life' of Saint Mary the Egyptian", *Medioevo Romanzo* 7 (1980), 305-327; A.M. Sargent, *The Penitent Prostitute: the Tradition and Evolution of the Life of Saint Mary the Egyptian* (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1977). Unfortunately I do not have the investigations of Kunze, Sargent, Longo, and Dembowski at my disposal.

the cultural and educational level of their public. Further, an examination of the quality and principles of translations, as well as differences concerning language and stylistic peculiarities should be made. An inquiry into the reasons for including a text devoted to Mary of Egypt in the *Θησαυρός*, as well as for its diffusion in modern Bulgarian *damaskins*, also seems reasonable.³⁶

This paper focuses on the main motifs and references to the Bible in the *Vita* attributed to Sophronios,³⁷ and in the late post-Byzantine composition by Damaskinos Studitis,³⁸ as preparation for further work which will concentrate on the Greek and Bulgarian traditions from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.³⁹

Sophronios's *Vita* is part of early Byzantine literature.⁴⁰ It is a pre-metaphrastian type,⁴¹ which had not yet been transformed into a conventional "bundle of *topoi*", or into a "simple icon of sanctity and *virtus*, constructed on the basis of a long row of hagiographic images".⁴²

³⁶ In contrast to the Greek *Θησαυρός*, Bulgarian *damaskins* consist of texts about saints, arranged as a rule according to the Christian calendar. Besides the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt, other texts for women are included in them, for instance the sermons for good women or for evil ones attributed to John Chrysostomos.

³⁷ I shall use the Greek and the Latin texts published in AA. SS. Aprilis 1 (1866), XI-XVIII, 68-84, and to a certain extent the versions in Vladislav the Grammarian's codex and in the *Bdinski Zbornik*. Quotations are taken from the Latin text in AA. SS.

³⁸ I shall use not only the text in the *Θησαυρός*, but its translation into modern Bulgarian, included in the *Svištov Damaskin*, edited by L. Miletič in *Bälgarski starini*, vol. 7 (Sofia, 1923).

³⁹ Several investigations of quotations from the Bible included in Old Bulgarian literacy have shown that such an examination can be helpful in determining the period (or school) when the translation of a certain composition was made, cf. I. Dobrev, "Apostolskite citati v Besedata na Prezviter Kozma i preslavskata redakcija na Kirilo-Metodievia prevod na Apostola", *Kirilo-Metodievski studii* 1 (1984), 44-62.

⁴⁰ S. Averincev, *Poetika rannevizantijskoj literatury* (Moscow, 1977).

⁴¹ "Pre-metaphrastian redaction of *vitae*" is a general term given to those *vitae* which do not show the peculiarities of the hagiographic pattern and conventions established in the time of Symeon Metaphrastis, that is at the end of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh. On the problem see K. Ivanova, "Metafrastova žitijna redakcija" and D. Petkanova, *Starobälgarska literatura. Enciklopedičen rečnik* (Sofia, 1992), 267-268. On Symeon Metaphrastis himself see D. Ehrhard, "Symeon Metaphrastes und die griechische Hagiographie", *Römische Quartalschrift* 11 (1897), 531-553; L.A. Frejberg and T.V. Popova, *Vizantijskaja literatura epohi rascveta IX-XV vv* (Moscow, 1978), 68-72.

⁴² Here I use the definition from T. Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints. The Diocese of Orleans 800-1200* (Cambridge, 1990), 117, referring to later *vitae*. Nevertheless, the composition under discussion was based on the existent literary tradition in Byzantium. A.M. Sargent (I quote from Špadijer, "Žitije", 184-186) distinguishes three main traditions: (a) the ascetic one; (b) the tradition of the repentant prostitute; (c) the tradition of

A parallel narrative structure can be observed:⁴³ two people change their hearts and lives with the help of a holy personage – the Virgin Mary in the case of Mary of Egypt, and Mary herself in the case of Zosimas.⁴⁴ The autobiographical narration of Mary is incorporated into the story of Zosimas. Her life is narrated and interpreted by herself in an unadorned and direct way without rhetorical polish.⁴⁵ Neither autobiography nor retrospection are typical of the later meta-phrastian type of *vitae*, which contain strictly conventionalized elements.⁴⁶ Therefore, Špadijer⁴⁷ considers that the composition attributed to Sophronios resembles stories in *patericon* rather than typical Byzantine *vitae* of saints. However, these features of Sophronios's

the Virgin, especially of her miracles. On the other hand, this early *Vita* of Mary of Egypt influenced later Christian literature, cf. the impact on the tradition devoted to Mary Magdalene; see S. Averincev, "Marija Egipetskaja", *Mify narodov mira*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1982), 116-117, idem, "Marija Magdalena", *ibid.*, 117-118, M.M. Gauthier and C. Deremble, "Les saintes prostituées, légende et imagerie médiévales", *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* (Chicago – London, 1989), 219-225.

⁴³ Špadijer, "Žitije", 187-190.

⁴⁴ Zosimas is an old monk who has been raised in a Palestinian monastery since his childhood and who has become perfect in ascetic disciplines. One day a miraculous voice directs him to go to a monastery by the Jordan river in order to find an answer to questions disturbing him. A Lenten exodus into the desert is a custom of that monastery. While Zosimas is looking in the wilderness for a hermit who can teach him, a shadow of a human form appears in front of him. He runs after it and it turns out to be a white-haired naked woman. She tells him her life. When she was 12 years old, she ran away from home and lived as a prostitute in Alexandria. One day she joined a ship full of pilgrims going to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. During the voyage, she seduced many men. In Jerusalem, she took up her trade again. However, on the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross when she tried to come into the church, a magic force did not allow her. She realized that it was because of her sins. The Virgin helped her and then directed her to go into the desert. She crossed Jordan and spent forty-seven years in the wilderness. After finishing her story, the woman asks Zosimas to bring her Holy Communion on the evening of the Lord's Supper next year. At their next meeting, after she receives Holy Communion, she prays to be at last freed from this life. The following year, the monk finds her dead at the place where he originally met her. An inscription reveals her name and the date of her death. He manages to bury her with the help of a providential lion. Then he returns to the monastery to tell her story.

⁴⁵ The inclusion of an autobiographical narrative in the *Vita*, as well as its language, recall other early Christian compositions, for instance the *Passio sanctae Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, see T. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography. Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford – New York, 1988), 185-230.

⁴⁶ X. Loparev, "Vizantijskija Žitija Svjatyx VII-IX vekov", *Vizantijskij vremennik* 17 (1910), 15-36.

⁴⁷ Špadijer, "Žitije", 187. A corroboration of Špadijer's assumption can be the fact that this composition was included in one Slavic *patericon* mentioned above.



composition under discussion made it appropriate and preferable for the purposes of Damaskinos Studitis, and he did not substantially alter the main scheme of the earliest *Vita*. However, the author changed several details, nuances and emphases on account of his audience.

Although various factors should be considered in any analysis of medieval images of saints, such as the purpose of literary compositions, the time they were written, the relationship between the saint and the hagiographer, and the time the saint lived in, it is well known that medieval Christian literature commonly followed sacred models, predominantly from the Bible. Close adherence to the Bible is especially typical of early Christian literature.⁴⁸ R. Picchio uses the term “thematic clue” to refer to direct quotations from or comparisons with the Bible in the *vitae*, as well as indirect references and allusions to the Holy Scriptures which “help the reader reveal the hidden meaning of any earthly event” and “bridge the semantic gap between the literal and the spiritual sense”.⁴⁹

The initial sentence, a “marked place”⁵⁰ of the earliest *Vita* of Mary of Egypt is a quotation from the Old Testament:

Secretum Regis celare bonum est, opera autem dei praedicare gloriosum ita Angelus dixit Tobiae post mirabilem illam illuminationem, easque aerumnas, quas sustinuit, et a quibus ereptus est propter suam pietatem. (Tobias 12: 7)

Later, the parable of the talents from the New Testament (Matthew 25: 14–30, Luke 19: 12–26) is mentioned. Although in the following centuries, these references to the Bible become stereotypical formulae characteristic of many hagiographic compositions,⁵¹ in this early *Vita*, they cannot be regarded only as a literary convention.⁵² Their presence is more integral. The ideas expressed in them form one of the main motifs in Sophronios’s composition, namely the motif of hidden treasure. It is a stable constituent of the composition, which

⁴⁸ The early church believed that every saint was a new Christ who combined features of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Three main types of *vitae* (apostle, martyr and hermit) can be derived from the fundamental pattern of the gospels. On these problems, see for instance T. Heffernan, op. cit., or, concerning Slavic medieval tradition, K. Stančev, *Poetika na starobalgarskata literatura* (Sofia, 1982).

⁴⁹ R. Picchio, “The Function of Biblical Thematic Clues in the Literary Code of *Slavica Orthodoxa*”, *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 1 (1977), 5-6.

⁵⁰ R. Picchio, op. cit., 5-6.

⁵¹ Špadijer, “Žitije”, 187-188.

⁵² It should be pointed out that the references to the Bible have their specificity in different genres and times.



is repeated several times in different forms and expressed in other quotes from the Bible as well. The author of the *Vita*, as well as Zosimas and Mary herself, believe that God wishes to reveal her story to the people. It is not a coincidence that the life of the saint is revealed to Zosimas (later, the *Vita* is read annually to the believers)⁵³ in the period of Lent, when everybody has to think about his or her deeds, and to try to find salvation. Mary is ashamed of her previous life as a prostitute, but she knows that she should tell her story to Zosimas, because this is the will of God. Several times, Zosimas encourages her to continue her story and tell him everything. Expressing an idea similar to references to the Bible in the preface of the *Vita*, the monk quotes *Sapientia*: "The hidden wisdom and the unseen treasure, what is the benefit of them?". Later in his prayer to God, Zosimas calls Mary a treasure because he regards her life as a real treasure which he should share with the people. Mary helps Zosimas to understand his delusion. His meeting with her plays the role of an *illuminatio* of his thoughts. Thus, he understands the necessity to tell this story as an *illuminatio* of the world.

Not only the monk but also the author of the *Vita* believes that the new saint's representation will help people in their quest for salvation. Their position clearly expressed in the *Vita* is a manifestation of the medieval belief that while the Holy Scriptures are "the primary guide as to how to live a good life", "lives of saints presented examples of how to put such divine wisdom into practice".⁵⁴ In this respect, the image of the author of the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt and the image of Zosimas coalesce to a certain extent. Therefore, in the Slavic translation included in the *Bdinski Zbornik*,⁵⁵ the third-person narration changes to a first-person narration at culminating moments:

Togda že uzrě ju jako znameniem' kr(')stnym' přěkr(')sti Iordan' přěsvětla bo běše nošt' lunoju. abie znameniem' poide, vr'xu vody xodešti i k' mně idušti.

⁵³ The feast of Mary of Egypt is celebrated on April 1 in the Orthodox church and on April 2 in the Catholic church. The fifth week of Lent is also devoted to her.

⁵⁴ Head, *Hagiography*, 120.

⁵⁵ The third-person narration is used in Vladislav the Grammarian's copy: *i xodešti vr'xu vody, k' njemu ptiide. togo že xotešta s'tvoriti metanie. v'zbranjaaše gl(agol)je [...]* (505a) (As she was walking over the water, she came to him. When he wanted to bow, she forbade him.)

mně že xoteštu pokloniti se ei, i v'zbrani mi v'pijuštii [...] mně že poslušavšu [...] az' že k' nei otvěštax s' trepetoom'... ⁵⁶ (185v, 35: 15–27).

The preface of Damaskinos Studitis differs completely from that of Sophronios. As in the prefaces of other compositions in his book, he explains the main idea illustrated by the story of the saint in a directly didactic way. Whereas the ideas of the earliest *Vita* emerge from the coexistence and interplay of several images, symbols and allusions with early Christian culture, the later author discusses the moral of the story and emphasizes it in an explicit manner. In the later modification, the earlier text loses the impression of the transforming experience shared by Zosimas and his friends. It is changed into a cautionary tale which happened long ago, into an instructive, pious story for the use of believers. In the earlier composition, neither the author nor Zosimas intend to instruct their listeners didactically. Retelling his experience of the story, Zosimas justifies his wish to reveal this new saint not only because the narrative has the value of the edifying example of repentance, but also because of his own inner change. Thus, the earlier author describes not only the feelings of Mary, but his and Zosimas's feelings as well. Damaskinos Studitis views this story with the distance of time. He demonstrates that the only reason for telling it is his conviction that it is an excellent means for him to impress on his audience the idea that everybody can redeem his or her sins through repentance. Thus, although many original elements of the early composition are present in Damaskinos's modification, they do not constitute a whole entity, or a system of ideas as in Sophronios's work.

The preface of the later composition also reflects the different role and position of Zosimas.⁵⁷ Sophronios's composition emphasizes the contrast between the two main characters: the pride and self-confidence of the monk perfect in asceticism and belonging to a mo-

⁵⁶ Then *he* saw her making a sign of cross over the river Jordan, because the night was very bright. Immediately, with this sign she left, walking over the water and coming towards *me*. As *I* wanted to bow, she forbade *me* [...] As *I* obeyed her [...] *I* answered her with anxiety.

⁵⁷ The appearance of men as antagonists in *vitae* of female saints-sinners is a model established in the story of Avramios and his niece Mary, as well as in the *Vita* of Pelagia, and in the *Vita* of Thais. However, there is an important difference between these *vitae* and the *Vita* of Mary. Whereas in the former compositions the male characters convert the prostitutes, Zosimas has not such a function. He only finds Mary and listens to her story after she has already reformed her life.

nastic community,⁵⁸ and the humility and modesty of the repentant prostitute living alone in the wilderness for fortyseven-seven years.⁵⁹ The contrast between the two main characters recalls the parable of the publican and the Pharisee from the gospel (Luke 18: 9–14). The story of Zosimas is an illustration of the Christian idea that *verum inter homines nemo est qui perfectum se possit dicere*. God gives him a chance to understand that *multae sint aliae viae, quae ad salutem ducant*.⁶⁰

In later compositions devoted to Mary, scholars⁶¹ note a shift from “Zosimas-centered” versions into “Mary-centered” ones.⁶² Although Damaskinos Studitis describes Zosimas as an excellent monk and points to differences between him and Mary, the contrast between them is not emphasized as it is in Sophronios’s text. The depiction of Zosimas’s life is taken out of the context of early monasticism. He is not a complacent monk who believes he is one of the most excellent Christians. His meeting with Mary is not an illumination for him nor is it an answer to his own hesitations. Therefore, many details concerning his life in the monasteries, as well as his thoughts, doubts, and feelings described in Sophronios’s composition are missing in the text of the later author. In addition, these elements concerning his behavior, which Damaskinos Studitis preserves from the early composition, have a decorative function and do not constitute a motif. Zosimas is simply looking for a hermit who can teach him. In this sense, the later composition gives the impression that Zosimas is one of the members of the audience targeted by the *Vita*, who listens to the instructive and edifying story of the repentant prostitute.

As the autobiographical narration of Mary is the story of a penance completed, it became the center of Damaskinos Studitis’s composition. The life of the saint is an illustration of the biblical idea of the merciful, compassionate and grace-giving God, who awaits the

⁵⁸ The description of Zosimas’s life in the earliest version reflects the ascetic movement in the Mediterranean world in the period after the edict of Milan. The monk is depicted as: *orthodoxus, per omne exercitationis genus probatus, ad omnem virtutem congruenter institutus, volens carnem spiritui subiicere*.

⁵⁹ On this contrast, see Robertson, “Poem and Spirit”, 310-311.

⁶⁰ Quotations are taken from the Latin text of the *Vita*; see footnote 37.

⁶¹ Robertson, “Poem and Spirit”, 312.

⁶² The Old French poem discussed by Robertson, “Poem and Spirit”, is a good illustration of this shift. It is a third-person narration which begins with the childhood of Mary. There is no autobiographical element; Zosimas does not have his personal dilemma.



repentance of his people and saves everyone. Therefore, Špadijer⁶³ finds the “thematic clue” of Sophronios’ composition in the words of Mary:⁶⁴

Sed Deus, ut arbitrator, quaerebat poenitentiam meam: non enim vult mortem peccatoris, sed longanimiter sustinet, conversionem expectans.

Her words have a parallel in Ezekiel 18: 23,⁶⁵ and also in Ezekiel 18: 32, 33: 11, II Peter 3: 9, and I Timothy 2: 4.⁶⁶ It is interesting that they are missing in Damaskinos Studitis’s version. This is understandable, because in the preface and in the conclusion he interprets and frequently repeats this idea with different expressions. It is a characteristic of Damaskinos Studitis’s method that he tends to put his interpretations and instructions in prefaces and in conclusions, and presents events in the main parts of the *vitae*.

The story of Mary reveals the transformation of a woman from a seductress, a *diabolo vas electionis*, into a saint, an *ancilla Domini*, an *angelus incarnatus*. It is understandable why the idea that even the greatest sinner can be saved by God’s mercy is illustrated in the story with a prostitute as the main character. The features of seductive and deceptive women, in general,⁶⁷ is best represented by the image of the

⁶³ Špadijer, “Žitije”, 188.

⁶⁴ These words are expressed when the blessed woman explains to Zosimas why the sea did not take her although she was extremely sinful.

⁶⁵ “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”

⁶⁶ As a whole, the story echoes the parable of the lost son from the New Testament. It is a demonstration also of the biblical idea that “it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Mark 2: 17) to repentance” (Luke 5: 31). In one of the Greek versions of the *Vita* there is a direct quotation: Οὐ χρεῖον ἔχουσιν οἱ ἰσχύοντες ἰατροῦ, ἀλλ’ οἱ κακῶς ἔχοντες... (Cod. Oxon. Bodl., Holkham 26 (olim), sixteenth-century manuscript).

⁶⁷ Church fathers regarded women as sinful in general because of the temptation they posed to man. Tertullian called woman “the devil’s gateway.” On different attitudes towards women in the Christian world in Late Antiquity see also E.A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith* (Lewiston – Queenston, 1986), 23-60 idem, *Women in the Early Church* (Wilmington, 1983); G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity. Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford, 1994). Sexual promiscuity was considered more detestable in women than in men; see J. Brundage, “Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law”, *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* (Chicago – Oxford, 1989), 88. Therefore, medieval canon law prescribed more severe punishments for women than for men see E. Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs 900–1700* (Cornell University Press, 1989).



prostitute.⁶⁸ There are no mitigating circumstances in the case of Mary and this fact is stressed in both compositions. She was not forced into prostitution by anybody.⁶⁹ On the contrary, she ran away from her noble family. In her narration she stresses that she did her trade not because of lack of money,⁷⁰ but because of uncontrollable and wild lust.⁷¹

Mary was converted thanks to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. Physically excluded from the liturgy on the day of Exaltation of the Holy Cross, she became aware of her sin. There is an indicative parallel. Mary covered the distance between Alexandria and Jerusalem paying with her body: she said to sailors: "*Corpus enim habeo hoc ipsius erit pro nauulo, pro viatico mihi.*" Later, in Jerusalem she was unable to walk the distance from the atrium to the altar because of her sinful flesh. When Mary prays in front of the icon of the Virgin, the contrast between the two Marys is underlined in both compositions.⁷² This

⁶⁸ The basic model of the story of Mary of Egypt is the story of the prostitute in the gospel of Luke (Luke 7: 37-47). She was said to wet the feet of Christ with her tears, to kiss them and pour myrrh on them, while he was reclining at a banquet. Jesus said: "Her many sins have been forgiven for she loved much." [This woman is considered by some to be Mary Magdalene; for instance Brundage, "Prostitution", 95, comments on Luke 7: 37 in the following way: "and the example of Saint Mary Magdalene demonstrated that the believing and the repentant harlot could achieve salvation." In fact, in the gospel Mary Magdalene is a woman who ministered Jesus and his disciples (Luke 8: 2-3). She is the first person to see the empty tomb and resurrected Christ (John 20: 1-2, Mark 16: 9-11). Following Tertullian and Gregory the Great, the Latin Church identified her with the repentant prostitute of Luke 7: 37-47 and with Mary of Bethany (John 11), freed by Jesus from demoniac possession by seven devils, and honoured them under the title of Saint Mary Magdalene (July 22), who became a symbol of the repentant prostitute in the Western tradition. Following Origen, the Orthodox churches honoured the three biblical women as individual saints; see J.E. Fallon, "Mary Magdalene", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* IX (New York, 1966), 387-388.] In addition, it was well known that Jesus said to the Pharisee that repentant tax collectors and prostitutes would take precedence over them in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 21: 31-33). Rahab from the Old Testament (Joshua 2: 1-21, 6: 17-25) also became a symbol of the prostitute who could be saved.

⁶⁹ In medieval Christian canon law, a mitigating circumstance for prostitutes was if they had been forced into prostitution by their parents or somebody else; see Brundage, "Prostitution", 90.

⁷⁰ Some scholars mention that slighter punishments were imposed on prostitutes who plyed their trade because of poverty; see Levin, "*Sex and Society*". Others question this statement; see Brundage, "Prostitution", 90.

⁷¹ This emphasis in her words is significant, because canonists thought that the more pleasure a prostitute derived from her sexual encounters, the more serious was her offence; see Brundage, "Prostitution", 90.

⁷² On that contrast in Sophronios's composition see Robertson, "*Poem and Spirit*"



contrast is emphasized on a stylistic level in the entire narration of Mary in Sophronios's composition. Mary characterizes herself as *sordida* and *impura*, while she always calls the Virgin *semper virginis intemerata imago, anima incoinquinata mundissimaque*. In contrast to diverse attributes in Sophronios's text, in the later modification, the Virgin is described only with words widely used in spoken language, such as *πάρθένος, θεοτόκος, δέσποινα*.

Mary addressed the Virgin and hoped that she would not refuse *orationem peccatricis indignae*, because it was she who had given birth to Jesus Christ who *homo factus est, ut vocet peccatores ad poenitentiam*⁷³ and who, she believed, *proprium sanguinem dedit pro mea redemptione*. From this moment on, the Virgin Mary became for Mary of Egypt, as she herself defines, *salutis meae mediatrix, magistra salutis manuducens me per viam poenitentiae*.⁷⁴

Extreme sin demands extreme penance. In the depiction of the asceticism of Mary in the desert Sophronios follows the model of the *vitae* of hermits. In fact, it is one of the early demonstrations of this model.⁷⁵ In general, Damaskinos Studitis preserves the main characteristics of early composition, but at the same time, he brings it closer to the mentality and behavior of his audience, discarding the connotations with the tradition of early monasticism. The description of

⁷³ This phrase, preserved by Damaskinos Studitis in his text, is also a reference to the Bible. It has its analogy in Matthew 9: 13: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners." (Cf. also Mark 2: 17, Luke 5: 31.)

⁷⁴ The significant role of the Virgin in the story of the repentant prostitute is the reason for the close association of the cult of this saint with the cult of the Virgin. The *Vita* of Mary of Egypt, as well as an early *akathistos* and the legend of Theophilus, were the compositions which formed the main attributes of the Virgin accepted in later tradition; see Špadijer, "Žitije", 186. In the centuries that followed, Honorius Augustodunensis narrated the story of Mary of Egypt in his sermon *In Annuntione Sanctae Mariae*. The story with the prostitute appeared in Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Italian and Croatian collections of miracles of the Virgin Mary; see Robertson, "Poem and Spirit", 311-312; I. Petrović, "Bogorodičina čudesa u Ivančićevu zborniku, hrvatsko-glagoljskom spomeniku 14/15 stoljeća", *Radovi staroslovenskog instituta* 7 (1972), 123-210.

⁷⁵ Scholars (see for instance Špadijer, "Žitije", 184) find common elements between the *Vita Mariae Aegyptiacae* and the *Vita Sancti Antonii*. E. Patlagean, "Ancient Byzantine Hagiography and Social History", in S. Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults. Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge, 1983), 108, notes that although this model was rooted in Christ's withdrawal in the desert, as well as in the experience of John the Baptist as a hermit, it was established in the Christian literature in the epoch after the edict of Milan, which was an epoch of asceticism and early monasticism. On this period, see also P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), 64 sq.

Mary's experience in the desert contains the following typical constituents in both compositions under discussion.⁷⁶

First, Mary is completely separated from civilization. Her travel through space has a symbolic meaning. She lived as a prostitute in Alexandria, which symbolizes urban life. Later, she went to Jerusalem, which Toporov refers to as a "town-virgin",⁷⁷ a symbol of Christianity connected with the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of human sins, as well as with the early tradition of hermits. It is in this town, where, with the help of the Virgin, Mary decided to reform herself. The real border for her was Jordan, also a symbolic toponym in Christian culture. After crossing it, she began her new life of total abstinence from civilization: she ate only herbs, she was completely naked, she had no shelter, and did not converse with people.⁷⁸

Second, she struggles with demons and bodily temptations. There are symbolic parallels. Mary lived as a prostitute for seventeen years, and she spent seventeen years in the desert struggling with her previous habits. Although Damaskinos Studitis follows the main scheme of Mary's asceticism described in Sophronios's composition, he does not include some typical features, such as the appearance of a divine light which enlightens Mary every time evil thoughts come to her mind, and which helps her to overcome temptations. The later author dismisses quotations from the Bible, namely Deuteronomy 8: 3, Matthew 4: 4, Luke 4: 4, Job 24: 78, and Hebrews 11: 38. However, he adds a large conclusion, which does not exist in the earlier text. In this conclusion he interprets a similar idea from the Bible, in particular Matthew 6: 25–34.

Finally, Mary has the ability to work miracles. A clear indication of her sanctity, miracles are present both in earlier and later compositions.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ I shall follow the model described by Patlagean, "Ancient", 101-122.

⁷⁷ V. Toporov, "Tekst Goroda-Devy i Goroda-Bludnicy v mifologičeskom aspecte", in T. Civ'jan, ed., *Issledovanija po strukture teksta* (Moscow, 1987). I am indebted to Adelina Angusheva, who drew my attention to this article.

⁷⁸ Mary crosses this border only once, and in a miraculous way recalling Christ's supernatural power. She crosses the river in order to take Holy Communion. The parallelism is indicative: the last Holy Communion which she took before her withdrawal into the desert was in a church on the opposite bank of the river.

⁷⁹ Some of Mary's miraculous actions are similar to miracles worked by Jesus: she walks on water, she foretells the future. Most of them have a parallel in the *vitae* of hermits: Mary knows the Bible by heart although she has never been taught to read, she receives her education miraculously, she levitates, and her burial with the help of a providential lion is also miraculous.



Through thorough repentance and extreme asceticism, Mary unites with God. A symbol of this union is the last scene in the *Vita*, when Zosimas covers her legs with tears. This scene brings to mind the scene from the gospel when Jesus's feet are covered with tears by the repentant prostitute. Whereas in her previous life, Mary is identified with the biblical whore, at the end of her life she is identified with Christ. Thus, her life becomes an explicit and impressive illustration of one of the main Christian ideas that everybody, even the greatest sinner, can be saved through complete and sincere repentance. That is why her figure became so popular in the Middle Ages and in early modern times.