

CORPUS DIONYSIACUM SLAVICUM

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In a massive body of philosophic literature, translated and original, current in Medieval Slavic world, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite occupy a very distinctive place. Along with such texts as treatises by John Damascene,¹ *Dioptra* by Phillipos Monotropos,² popular selections from various Greek authors,³ the *Corpus Dionysiicum*, together with the commentaries attributed to Maximus the Confessor, played an important role in the process of development of Slavonic orthodox theology. In the famous *Cyrril book* (Кириллова книга), which was compiled in 1644 and contained two lists of books, respectively, recommended and prohibited for reading by the Orthodox Christians, the *Corpus* is mentioned among the books highly recommended, second only to the Bible.⁴

Composed by an unknown author in a turning point of Byzantine theological history, marked by bitter Church controversies and one of the most serious prosecutions of the Platonic School which culminated in its close in 528, the *Corpus Dionysiicum* was predestined for rebirth everywhere theological thought began its evolution in Christian society. It was the writing of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite that attracted the attention of the brilliant thinker of the ninth century, John Scottus Eriugena, who translated it into Latin, composed commentaries and made an extensive use of it in his own theological constructions. Five centuries later, in a similar situation, a Slavonic theologian, *Starets* Isaiah undertook a translation of the *Corpus* into Church Slavonic.

This period was a ground breaking one in Slavic theological culture, since at the time of Isaiah it was undergoing quick development, when it finally took Christian shape, incorporating the traditional values of Christendom.

In fact the history of Byzantine literary influences on Slavic thought can be traced back as far as to the time of Constantine and Method's mission and the period shortly after it, when the Bible and liturgical corpus were translated from the Greek into the newly created Church Slavonic literary *koine*. From that time onward the Byzantine literary heritage was constantly translated from the Greek, commented

¹ For a general overview see: Мещерский 1978; especially on John Damascene in Church Slavonic translation cf. Гаврюшин 1989; Weiher 1969.

² Cf. Miklas 1975; Прохоров 1987, esp. the second chapter, and a new edition of the *Dioptra* in a series «Памятники религиозно-философской мысли Древней Руси» (Прохоров–Миклас–Бильдюг 2008).

³ Сперанский 1904; Бондарь 1990. A facsimile edition of the *Izbornik 1073 goda* is published in Moscow in 1983 and a new edition is in progress. The best edition so far is Динеков 1991–1993 (unfortunately, it contains virtually no apparatus and almost no attempt to trace the Greek source of the *Izbornik*).

⁴ For selections from this book cf. Грицевская 1993 and Громов 1997, 239–242.

upon and paraphrased in the Slavonic literature and influenced those original literary genres that come into existence around this time.⁵

Our main concern in the present outline – the fourteenth century Church Slavonic version of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* – is an important and somewhat curious piece of writings. Taken together with translator's foreword, it captures well linguistic situation in Slavonic theological literature, witnesses about certain very touching political and historical circumstances and allows to trace the way the early Slavonic educators approach Byzantine literary heritage and adopt the Greek theology and philosophy to Slavonic language. As the medieval translator acknowledges it in his foreword, this task was difficult, mainly because of virtual absence of developed Slavonic terminology, which could allow rendering the Greek correctly. Notwithstanding this he faced the challenge bravely and definitely succeeded in his job to a degree that the resulting text, I believe, did not lose its interest even for contemporary reader of Dionysius and therefore is worth investigating not only from the philological point of view (which goes without saying), but also for the sake of a better understanding of the ideas of the *Dionysian Corpus* as such, as long as it contains things which do not depend upon particular linguistic expressions.

1. The *Dionysian Corpus* in Context: A General Overview and Miscellaneous Considerations

To begin with, let us outline the broader context in which our literary event took place. The document we have at hands, the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, consists of four treatises (*De divinis nominibus*, *De mystica theologia*, *De coelesti hierarchia*, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*) and ten *Epistulae* addressed to different persons.⁶ The unknown author of the *Corpus* wrote under the name of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, a convert of St. Paul in Athens (*Acts* 17:16–34), but the ideas and terminology used throughout the text, its general design, numerous literally parallelism with and even *verbatim* quotations from later Neoplatonic literature prove that the work was probably written as late as at the turn of the fifth/sixth centuries by an unknown Christian (possibly from Syria or some other part of Asia Minor), strongly influenced by later Greek metaphysics. Though it is no longer believed that the *Corpus* is

⁵ Among the earliest texts is the aforementioned *Izbornik 1073 goda* as well as the *Izbornik 1076 goda*, which also included various translated materials as well as an interesting collection of original texts moulded under the Greek influence. It is worth noting that a quote from the *CD* and a part of a *Vita* of St. Dionysius are included in the former collection. For the text and a study of this selection cf. Keipert 1976. We shall return to this subject later.

⁶ The most recent critical edition of the Greek text (which however does not include the *Scholia*) is a two-volumes set by Suchla 1990 and Heil–Ritter 1991. The list of the works devoted to the *CD* and its place in the history of Christian doctrine and relation to Neoplatonic philosophy is extremely extensive. For bibliographical summaries cf., for instance, Hornus 1955 and 1961; Totok 1973, 163–167; Goltz 1974, 310–357; Brons 1976; Ritter 1994, 149 ff.

actually the work of the historical Dionysius the Areopagite, one may only guess now who is the real author of this controversial document.

The reasons usually given to justify this (already common) opinion can be briefly summarized along the following lines.⁷ The *Corpus* came into historical being (mysteriously ‘discovered’) somewhere in the first decades of the sixth century and immediately started to play an important role in the ecclesiastic polemics which was going on in that time. As a work of apostolic authority it was explicitly appealed to by Severus of Antioch, then by John of Scythopolis⁸ and some other Church writers and the monophysite bishops at the Colloquium of 533. Therefore it can scarcely be composed much after 500. More precisely, except to the earliest extant references to the CD (the first of which being found in the *Dormition of Virgin* dated as early as 451 and the second in the 10th chapter of *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum* by Liberatus of Carthage, composed before 560–566, which, as researchers argue, must be considered later interpolations, made on purpose in order to confirm the Dionysius’ legend) the writings ascribed to the name of Dionysius were for the first time definitely referred to by Severus of Antioch in his third letter to John Higuemenus. Therefore, as R. Roques (1957, 249) summarizes it:

En tout hypothèse, la composition des *Areopagitica* doit être fixée avant 528, date à laquelle Paul de Gallinice a déjà traduit en syriaque les deux traités de Sévère (...) Si l’on tient compte des délais de traduction et de composition de ces traités, on peut dire sans témérité que les *Areopagitica* ont dû être écrits : soit avant 525, si la 3e Lettre à Jean l’higoumène est de 532 ; soit avant 510, si telle est la date de cette lettre.

On the other hand, provided that the *Corpus* apparently embodies ideas of the later Neoplatonists and those of Proclus (418–485), it appears reasonable to assume that the *Corpus* was composed no later than at the end of the fifth century.⁹ In these circumstances, although it would be interesting to learn the name of the author, it is unlikely that anything more than conjecture will ever be possible and the historical and philosophical interest of the writings is due not to the question of its authorship, intriguing as it were, but to the content, significance and influence of

⁷ One can take as an example the treatise by certain Theodorus Rhaithuensis, mentioned by Photius (Bibl., cod. 1), where the reasons for this doubts are listed. (This mysterious person will later come up again in our discussion of the earliest Slavonic translations from the CD).

⁸ On John of Scythopolis’ work see a comprehensive study by Rorem–Lamoreaux 1998.

⁹ First philologically justified doubts concerning the *Corpus* having been written by Dionysius, the convert of St. Paul, were expressed in the works of Lorenzo Valla, Theodore of Gaza, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Luther. The last “negative” solution of the problem of authenticity was given by a series of independent studies of H. Koch and J. Stiglmayr at the end of the nineteenth century. The disciple of St. Paul has definitely become a follower of Proclus. On this subject see: Koch 1895 (here the author shows direct parallels between the CD and the treatises of Proclus, first of all a short treatise *De malorum subsistentia* written by Proclus in around 440?); Koch 1900; Stiglmayr 1895. See also a new translation of Proclus’ *On the Existence of Evils* by Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel (2003).

the text itself. In any event, judging from the text itself, the unknown author was a learned philosopher, possibly a member of a Platonic School, who most probably came from Syria, Palestine or Egypt in the last decades of the fifth century to participate actively in the on-going polemics of the monophysite Church with the orthodox Chalcedonians. Who can fit this picture? Having no firm ground for accepting or rejecting this or that possible candidate we should better leave this question open.¹⁰ Whoever Pseudo-Dionysius may have been, he was an admirer of the classical philosophy and much rather a convert of Plato than St. Paul. This makes his dependence on Proclus understandable, because who was Proclus, if not the legal heir of Plato in capacity of the head of the Academia in Athens. Having adopted the Neoplatonic *via negationis* and the theory of analogical and anagogical ascent, Pseudo-Dionysius had accomplished what none of the Neoplatonists could do. He was able to connect the metaphysics and theurgy of Neoplatonism with a theory of symbols, inherited from Jewish¹¹ and Early Christian philosophy, reconciled it with the Christian sacraments, and expressed all this in a politically correct language, having succeeded in turning it in such a way and producing it in such a light that it became compatible with the mainstream of Christian theology.

Interestingly, that already the oldest manuscript tradition preserves the complete *Corpus* in the same form, as we know it today. Consisting of four treatises and ten letters the *Corpus* constitutes certain unity and, despite frequent self-references to other writings by the same author is very consistent and well ordered. This fact alone allows assuming that we deal with a complete work, carefully designed by the author or an editor. It appears that the unknown author or editor wanted to be as persuasive and error free as possible. Quite probably that the prologue and commentary to the *Corpus*, later attributed to Maximus the Confessor, were composed – partially or completely – simultaneously with the publication of the *Corpus*. Is it therefore possible that their author, John of Scythopolis, is an editor or the author of the *Corpus*? Or could Severus of Antioch, the first person to mention and probably to discover the *Corpus*, play this role? In any case he made use of it in his argumentation and was certainly interested in accepting its apostolicity. Immediately after ‘discovery’ of the Greek *CD*, already in a form of a complete document (the text and a set of commentaries), it was translated into Syriac. The translator Sergius (Sargis) of

¹⁰ For an extended but still incomplete survey of different opinions held by various researchers about the problem of the authorship of the *CD* cf. Hathaway 1969, 31–35. Cf. also Скворцов 1871, Донемиц 1956.

¹¹ Did Pseudo-Dionysius know the works of Philo of Alexandria? One may suppose he did, since the monks are called in the *CD* the *therapeutae*. This fact is duly noticed by the commentator (a scholion to the title of the First Letter), but, as Paul Rorem and John Lamoreaux note (1998, 250 fnt. 1), the commentator most probably has acquired this information from Eusebius.

Rīsh ‘Aynō (d. 536), a theologian and physician, who possibly came from Alexandria, was also proposed as an alleged editor of the *CD*.¹²

An accepted sequence of the treatises within the *Corpus* is *DN* – *MTh* – *CH* – *EH*.¹³ Besides these writings the author of the *CD* mentions the *Theologikai hypotypōseis* (*DN* I 1; I 5; II 1; II 3; II 7; XI 5; *MTh* III, etc.), the *Symbolikē theologia* (*DN* I 8; IX 5; XIII 4; *CH* XV 6; *MTh* III; *Ep.* IX 1, etc.) and some others¹⁴, which are either separate works that have been lost, or were never written. But if these treatises ever existed, no trace of them has remained in the later history of the *Corpus*. The *Letters*, as it is proved by a number of considerations, is also a work of the same author, not only because they are similar in style, but also because Proclus is used in them in the same way as elsewhere in the *Corpus* and, moreover, because they are not missing in any branch of the manuscript tradition (Hathaway 1969, 6 and 10–11).

The *Corpus Dionysiacum*, known from the beginning of the sixth century, played a very ambiguous role in the history of Byzantine philosophy and theology. In 532/533 at a Colloquium held between the followers of Severus (Severians or moderate monophysites) and the Chalcedonian orthodoxes,¹⁵ the leader of the anti-Severian opposition, Hypatius of Ephesus, put into question the authenticity as well as the orthodoxy of these writings.¹⁶ Nevertheless, due primarily to the great commentaries of John of Scythopolis (composed around 530–540),¹⁷ and especially after the addition of those written by Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century, the authenticity of the *Corpus* was accepted by the majority of the authorities. Later its authority was enhanced in the eighth century by the references made to it by the great doctor of the Eastern Church, St. John Damascene. The commentaries which, following some confusion on the part of the scribes, were entirely attributed to

¹² On this translation, the manuscript tradition, and new important discoveries see especially: Nau 1929–30; Sherwood 1950 and 1960–61; Balthasar 1961, 644–672; Hornus 1970; Wiessner 1972; Brock 1989 and 1995, 101–105; Briquel-Chatonnet 1997; Quaschnig-Kirsch 2000; in a series of studies by Istvan Perczel (e. g. 2001, esp. 267 ff.) the Syriac translation is explored in the context of the Origenism, and the Syriac version by Sergius is used as a valuable supplementary source for emending those obscure places in the Greek text of the *CD* which are transmitted in a corrupted form. In the ninth century Phoqa bar Sargis made a new Syriac translation of the *Corpus*.

¹³ Certain comments on this see in Ruh 1987, 13–14.

¹⁴ Cf. Register at Heil–Ritter 1991, 230.

¹⁵ On political and ecclesiastical circumstances of this event cf. two papers by Milton V. Anastos (1951 and 1962).

¹⁶ See the report of the colloquium in: *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* (Strasburg, 1914) 4-II, S. 172, 173 (the answer of Hypatius). A detailed analysis of this and also of the evidences of Severus of Antioch cf. Rorem–Lamoreaux 1998, 9–18.

¹⁷ In addition to the above-mentioned book by Rorem and Lamoreaux see the following seminal contributions: Balthasar 1940 and 1961, 644–672; Suchla 1985 (here is to be found a facsimile of different Greek codices of the *CD*). See also Suchla 1980 and 1984; Ritter 1980; and a general overview by Sheldon-Williams 1967. A new critical edition of the *Scholia* should have appeared very recently: Suchla 2007 (an introduction and scholies to the *DN*).

Maximus the Confessor, always followed the text in the manuscript tradition during the Middle Ages, including the Slavonic translation.¹⁸ It should be remembered that one of the factors in the quick success of the *Corpus* was, on the one hand, the apostolic authority which it conferred to some of the tendencies characteristic to late fifth- and early sixth-century monasticism, reconciling them, on the other hand, with Episcopal authority. In the East, Theodore the Studite appealed to Dionysius in his argumentation against iconoclasm. Among theologians who commented on the *CD* were Michael Psellus (1018–1974) and George Pachymeres (1242–1310).¹⁹ During the hesychast controversies both Gregory Palamas and his opponent Barlaam of Calabria appealed to the *CD*.²⁰

In the West there are references to Dionysius in the works of Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria (580–607) and Moderatus, Patriarch of Jerusalem (631–634). Pope Gregory the Great, who was a friend of Eulogius, referred to Dionysius as an “ancient and venerable Father”.²¹ The *CD* was mentioned during the monothelitic controversies on the Lateran Council (649), in the letters of Pope Martin I (Lateran, 649) and of Pope Agatho (Dogmatic letter to the Emperor Constantine, 680), during the Constantinople (680) and the Second Nicene (787) Councils.

The works of Dionysius received a new life when, around 858 John Scottus Eriugena, at the request of Charles the Bald, made a Latin translation of the Greek manuscript which had been presented to Louis the Pious in 827 by Emperor Michael II.²² A bit later John Scottus composed glosses on Dionysius that became the first in the series of Western commentaries on the *Corpus*. Anastasius the Papal Librarian made some clarifying remarks and revision of the translation in 875. This translation was widely accepted and did not change throughout the Early Middle Ages.²³

¹⁸ For the Greek text and a Latin translation of these commentaries cf. *PG*, t. 4.

¹⁹ *Opera sancti Dionysii Areopagitae cum scholiis sancti Maximi et paraphrasi Pachymerae*, a Balthasare Corderio Soc. Jesus Doct. Theol. latine interpretata et notis theologicis illustrata... *PG*, t. 3 (Paris, 1857).

²⁰ See Meyendorff 1957; Lossky 1985, 45–69.

²¹ *In Euang. Homily* 34, 12. *PL* t. 76, col. 1254.

²² Two decades earlier, in 838 Hilduin, abbot of St. Denis, also undertook a translation of the *Corpus* at the request of King Louis. The immediate reason for this was that people in France believed that St. Denys the Martyr, the first bishop of Paris, was the author of the *Corpus*. For this translation and an edition of the text see Théry 1932–1937.

²³ For the text of the commentaries of John Scottus cf. *PL* t. 122, col. 125–266.

Starting with the eleventh century the *Dionysian Corpus* became almost a standard work of reference for theologians, philosophers as well as Church and State authorities and their opponents, was frequently commented and several times translated into Latin.²⁴ The works of Dionysius attracted the attention of Abbot Suger of St. Denis (d. 1151),²⁵ Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141),²⁶ Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), St. Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, Aelred of Rievaulx, Alan of Lille (c. 1120–1202) and Isaac of Stella (d. 1169) in their works made much use of it.²⁷ Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253) carried out a new translation of the *Corpus* and the *Scholia* between 1240 and 1243.²⁸ There are commentaries of Albert the Great (d. 1280) and Thomas Aquinas (who around 1261 wrote an *Exposition on the Divine Names*). Bonaventura hailed Dionysius as “the prince of mystics”. Finally, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we have references, discussions and commentaries on the *CD* in the works of Master Eckhart (d. 1327),²⁹ Tauler (d. 1361), Ruysbroeck (d. 1381), Nicolas of Cusa (d. 1464), Dionysius Carthusianus (d. 1471), Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499) and the Spanish mystics Abbot Cisneros (d. 1510), Francis of Osuna and John of the Cross.

The reader will excuse me for such a wearisome but still incomplete list of names, but all this complicated story cannot remain untouched in our study of the destiny of the *Corpus* in Slavonic philosophy and theology, since its translation into the Church Slavonic, accomplished in the fourteenth century, must necessarily have inherited the widespread tradition of commentaries together with the text of Pseudo-Dionysius.

Let us come back to Byzantium. It is known that a certain Theodorus the Presbyter composed a work defending the authenticity of the *Dionysian Corpus*. The treatise entitled *Theodōrou presbyterou, hoti gnēsia hē tou hagiou Dionysiou biblos* is summarized by Photius (Bibl., cod. 1; PG t. 103, col. 44–45). Long ago people identified this Theodorus with Theodorus the Monk to whom Maximus the Confessor addressed a letter (PG t. 91, col. 276 ab) and also with Theodorus Rhaithuensis, the author of a short refutation of heresies (PG t. 91, col. 1484–1504). This view was quite widespread and shared for instance both by the composer of the *1073 year's Izbornik* (where

²⁴ Following Hilduin and John Scottus Eriugena in the 9th c., the *CD* translated John Sarrazin in the 12th c., Robert Grosseteste and Thomas Gallus in the 13th c., Ambrose of Camaldule and Marsilio Ficino in the 15th c., Joachim Perion in the 16th c., and Pierre Lancel and Balthasar Cordier in the 17th c. For the text of various translations cf. Chevallier 1937–1950.

²⁵ He was interested in this work from the point of view of the symbolism of light. Cf. McGinn 1976.

²⁶ He wrote the *Commentaries on the Celestial Hierarchy* (1115–1137), see: *PL* t. 175, col. 923–1134.

²⁷ Elder 1976; for a brief history of influence of the *CD* on the western theology and philosophy cf. Ruh 1987, 50–63.

²⁸ About commentaries of Robert see Callus 1955, 44ff.

²⁹ Lossky 1960.

the aforementioned passage from Maximus is found just before a selection from a treatise explicitly ascribed to Theodorus Rhaithuensis) and by the editor of the *Patrologia Graeca*, who referred to Theodorus Rhaithuensis in relation to Maximus' letter and published his treatise on heresies at the end of the same volume.

Modern scholars made the situation even more complicated. In his monograph on the development of Christology W. Elert (1957, 211) tries to prove that this Theodorus Rhaithuensis actually was Theodorus the bishop of Pharant and the founder of Monothelitism. B. Peichev (Пейчев 1983) somewhat corrected this hypothesis and developed it in the relation to the *1073 year's Izbornik*. If it is really the case that Theodorus Rhaithuensis and the founder of monothelitism are identical, as W. Elert tries to prove, then one can easily understand why our Theodore was so interested in establishing the authenticity of the *Dionysian Corpus*. It is clear that many concepts of the Pseudo-*Dionysian Corpus*,³⁰ being firmly established as authoritative ones, would work for his own monothelitic and monoenergetic interpretation of the nature of Christ.

Maximus the Confessor testifies (PG, t. 91, col. 136) that Theodorus of Pharant composed a treatise *On substance and nature (Peri ousia kai physeōs)*, where he addressed the controversial problems of hypostasis, personae and the like, and that his interpretation, due to some efforts on part of patriarch Sergius, become quite widespread. This fact is highly relevant to the present study, since in the *Izbornik* we find a piece of writings of uncertain origin³¹ on a similar subject, ascribed to the name of Theodorus Rhaithuensis and placed immediately after the letter of Maximus the Confessor addressed to Theodorus the Monk (from *Opuscula theologica et polemica ad Marinum* =PG, t. 91, col. 276ab), presumably as an answer to it. It is clear that the composer of the Greek protograph of the *Izbornik* considered this two Theodori identical and, in order to reaffirm Maximus' authority as well as his superiority, he concluded the section with another extract from Maximus (*Izbornik*, pp. 223g–237b), that is to say, gave him the last word to summarize this exchange. This is also suggestive: if the composer had taken this text directly from the *Dialectic* of John Damascene, he would not need all this and we would expect the name of Damascene mentioned.

Thus, along with a quote from the *CD* (p. 47v), in the *Izbornik* we find an extract from the author who was quite interested in Dionysius. The name of Dionysius is mentioned twice, spelled differently as ДИОНУСИА АРЕОПАГИТА and ДИΩНИСИИ, – a curious although not unusual feature in the Medieval literature.

³⁰ Take, for instance, the famous place from the *Fourth Letter* on “both human and divine action (*theandrikē energeia*)”, referred to both by Severus and the compiler of the *Izbornik*. Cf. Rorem and Lamoraux 1998, 108 f.

³¹ This text is anonymously used in the *Dialectics* of John Damascene.

It is clear that all the sources included in the *Izbornik* (or rather in its Byzantine protograph) have something to do with the monophysits.³² The authors selected are not contemporaries to the composer, but mainly belong to the previous epoch of Byzantine theological history when the monophysitic controversy still raged. It appears as if having mastered it at home the Byzantine church authorities now passed their experience to a newly Christianized state under their spiritual protection.³³

In relations with the heretics the *CD* is mentioned around this time in a letter of Anastasius the Papal Librarian dated to March 23, 875 (Anastasius was the same erudite who made a revision of John Scotus' translation of the *CD* in Latin).³⁴ It is said that Constantine the Philosopher whom Anastasius happened to meet in Rome praised the *Corpus* as a great tool in the battle with the heresy.³⁵ The text of the letter is quite interesting. It is said, that Constantine "totum codicem saepe memorati et memorandi patris *memoriae commendaverat*". Could this mean that he made a copy of the *Corpus* or deposited an existent one in the library? And later on:

...et, quantum utilitatis medulla eius habeat, *auditoribus commentabat*, solitus erat dicere, quia, si sanctos, videlicet priores institutores nostros, qui hereticos quosque vix et quodammodo cum fuste decollaverunt, Dionisium contigisset habere, cum acuto illos procul dubio gladio trucidassent, innuens profecto haec dicens, quia, quorum os laboriosius et forte tardius obstruxerunt, facilius et acutius sive velocius – 'oxy' quippe et acutum signet et velox – obmutescere coegissent.

So we conclude that the *CD* was at least known to the founder of Slavonic Church literature. He used to mention it in his public lectures and extremely valued it as a weapon in the battle with the heretics. He states that this new and more advanced tool is as effective as a sharp sword, and so on. It appears that Anastasius translates Constantine's words from the Greek as if he uses his notes. So this phrase could be a *verbatim* quotation. While Constantin's interest in Dionysius is understandable, his emphasis upon the value of the *Corpus* as a weapon against the heretics is certainly somewhat overdone.

Generally speaking one could remember many situations when the *Corpus Dionysiacum* as a work of apostolic authority had managed to play an important role in

³² Extracts from various writings of Anastasius Sinaita, who was the major authority on this, form the bulk of the *Izbornik*. Cf. for instance the sixth chapter of his *Viae duc (Hodegos)*, directed against Severus of Antioch (*PG*, t. 89; *CChSG*, t. 8).

³³ No doubt that this text enjoyed the highest official status both in Bulgaria and Kievan Rus'. We do not know how the *Simeonov Izbornik* looked like, but judging from the Slavonic copy of it, we have to assume that it was a rich and lavishly illustrated copy of equally great original. It is also not improbable that the Greek text was compiled especially for the purpose of its consequent translation and dissemination.

³⁴ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Epist. T. VII, Karolini Aevi V, S. 433. Cf. a study by Goltz 1983, 138.

³⁵ Beyond any doubts, the main treat to the orthodoxy in Bulgaria at this time was the Bogomil heresy on which cf. Hamilton 1998 (sources in an ET), Stoyanov 2000 (a detailed study).

the development of orthodox theology. It is commonly believed that Dionysius made a successful attempt to harmonize Platonism and Christian doctrine in order to construct, as a result, a Christian-Platonic theological synthesis and this fact determined the role the *CD* played in the history of theology. Needless to say, that the problem of orthodoxy of this synthesis, put forward already in 533, still intrigues Dionysius' readers. Byzantine theologians spilled much ink to prove this fact.³⁶ It is to prove this fact that such skillful and detailed commentaries, which follow the text of Dionysius in the *Corpus*, were written. They clearly intend to demonstrate that Saint Dionysius is an orthodox Father; otherwise people would have to consider him a great heretic. Having this in mind, for example, the author of the Prologue and the commentary to the *Corpus* says that the reader "should not think that this divine man performs an act of impiety towards God" (*PG* t. 4, col. 429), proclaiming that God as above everything and in this sense non-existent. Since the notion of divine darkness in the *Mystical Theology* is difficult to grasp and should be interpreted in a symbolic manner, nobody has any reason to accuse Dionysius of impiety only on this basis, and so on. Wherever possible John of Scythopolis tries to maximize the Trinitarian orthodoxy of Dionysius³⁷ and certainly greatly 'improves' Dionysius' Christology. It is important to remember therefore that as a document of medieval culture the *Corpus* existed *only* within the framework of these commentaries, the 'pure' text of Dionysius being an invention of modern times.³⁸

To sum up, as an important theological document, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was translated and commented upon throughout the Middle Ages by Latin and Greek authors and enjoyed high esteem, not only among mystics but also among professional writers on theology and philosophy such as John Damascene, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. Besides Greek and Latin manuscripts, today we have several codices from the sixth to ninth centuries that contain Syriac translations of the *Corpus* (cf. above). From 712–718 an Old Armenian³⁹ and from the twelfth

⁴²The modern orthodox authors did the same. Consider, for example, the following passage by a Russian researcher of the nineteenth century, I. Smirnov: "As for the religious system of Dionysius, – he insists, – all mistakes and ideas that contradict the Christian doctrine are removed from it. For example, the world is considered by Dionysius as a direct creation of God, matter is not a cause and source of evil; he accepts resurrection, body for him is not a source of evil and sin in men; although in a few words, he rightly teaches about the Holy Trinity... All these ideas are basically orthodox, despite some elements of Neoplatonism, not entirely rejected for the sake of the Christian doctrine..." (Смирнов 1872, 869).

³⁷ Though not always, as Rorem and Lamoreaux rightly suggest (1998, 68).

³⁸ S. Petersburg's researcher G. M. Prokhorov (Прохоров 1987, 10) is quite right in pointing out this unity of the commentaries and the text as an essential feature of the *Corpus*. Therefore if you take the text alone it will not appear as straightforward and compatible with the orthodox doctrine as it is commonly believed.

³⁹ This translation was made by Stephan of Siunik in Constantinople and certainly influenced Armenian philosophic thought. For a short description of Armenian manuscript tradition the reader is referred to: *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique*, t. 1, col. 863.

century an Old Georgian translations of this work exist.⁴⁰ There is a partial translation the *Corpus* into Arabic.⁴¹

2. Church Slavonic Translations of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

The Church Slavonic translations of the writings ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, accomplished in the fourteenth century, became an event in Slavic culture. It was important not only because knowledge of this famous Byzantine theological and philosophical corpus of treatises now allowed Slavic theologians to understand a wide range of problems of traditional and contemporary Byzantine theology, but also because, thanks to the extremely rich and creative language of the *Corpus* itself, its translation opened new horizons for the development of Slavic theological terminology.

We have already seen that the translation of the *Corpus* from Greek into Church Slavonic had its pre-history in the earlier epoch. There are witnesses that works of the 'Great Dionysius' were considered to be an important power against heretics as early as during the Slavic mission of St. Constantine and Method. Euthymius of Tarnovo also translated a part of the *CD* (Keipert 1976). One can say now that a long work of translation and adoption of the *CD*, which was brought to an end in the second part of the fourteenth century, reaped the harvest of at least three previous centuries of scholarship.

The second part of the fourteenth century was a crucial point in the history of Balkan countries: it was the period of heroic struggle with the Turkish invasion, the defeat and final fall of the most powerful Slavic armies, and this fact meant the desperate enslavement of the Balkan's Slavic population.

The author of translation, monk Isaiah, flourished in the time which immediately preceded this period of Balkan history, and his destiny was to witness and to describe the events of this time, namely the battle of Maritsa and the Turkish conquest of Serbia and Bulgaria which immediately followed it.

Researchers note that the language of the *Introduction* to the translation is strongly influenced by Russian and most of them have accepted that Monk Isaiah was the Ab-

⁴⁰ On this translation of Ephrem Mtsire, Abbot of a Monastery in Kastana, cf. the extensive literature by contemporary Georgian researchers. A special interest in the *CD* was provoked in Georgia by the Nutsubidze–Honigmann hypothesis, according to which Pseudo-Dionysius was Peter the Iberian (411–491), the Patriarch of Antioch of Georgian origin. Another factor of the increasing interest in the *CD* in Georgia was the discovery of its influence on the classic Georgian epos of Rustaveli. For the text cf. Erukashvili 1961; see also two studies by Sh. Nutzhubidze: Нуцубидзе 1942 ("The miracle of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite"); Нуцубидзе 1957 ("Peter the Iberian and the problems of the Areopagitica"), and a book by Honigmann (1952). For a critical overview of this hypothesis cf. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique*, t. 1, col. 253 ff. It is interesting to note, that this hypothesis was recently re-evaluated and basically accepted by Michel van Esbroeck (1993).

⁴¹ About the Arabian translation of *Epistula 8* see esp. W. Scott Watson (1899/1900).

bot of the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos, that is to say *Staretz Isaiah*, who was probably a very educated person and, as an Abbot, one of the influential figures in Church diplomacy of that time.⁴² His theological and literary works were connected with the city of Serres in Macedonia, which was one of the centres of education and culture of the region.⁴³ We can see from the text of the *Introduction* that Isaiah knew and loved Greek (Byzantine) literature and language. Obviously, he used to translate Greek texts, and that is why he dared to attempt the translation of one of the most difficult (and influential) monuments of Byzantine theological and mystical thought – the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite.

According to his own words he received an *official* request from Theodosius, the metropolitan of the city of Serres. It was by this metropolitan that he “was encouraged” (принужден бых) to undertake the difficult task of translation of this famous text. Isaiah obeyed and started to translate the *CD* from “the very pithy Greek into our [Slavonic] language [зъло скупаго еллинского языка в наш языкъ]”⁴⁴:

...although 'on the fall of the Sunday of my life', I managed to learn Greek, but very little, only to understand the pithiness of this language and the difficulty in translating from it into our language. Really, Greek language – from the very beginning and thanks to God's gift – is very expressive [художень – artistic] and is able to contain a lot of things [пространъ – rich in content]. Moreover, it was greatly improved by the long tradition of philosophising. On the contrary, our language is well created – since all God's creation is perfect – but it was not awarded [не удостоися] the same improvement as the Greek because of the lack of philosophical works of those lovers of literature [любоучения любочестивых слова мужей хитрости]. Therefore, though knowing this language, I myself did not dare even to touch the things that are beyond my understanding (I mean the translation from the Greek), because, according to the expression of the Scripture: ‘Do not search for things that are beyond your abilities, and do not test those that are more profound than the limits of your understanding’. So, I was very afraid that I could damage the divine things, if I dared to touch upon them, or offend those things that are contained in the Old or New Scripture. But the metropolitan of the god-saved city of Serres, Theodosius, this divine and most honoured man, encouraged me to do so. And I obeyed with great delight and without question this man who saw in a vision an angel, ordering him to receive the enlightening power of Dionysius.

The work of translation took years and was finished around 1371. This date can be inferred from the very words of Isaiah himself, who, in the *Introduction* to his translation, says that he started it in good days and finished it in “the most evil of all evil days”, meaning by this the Turkish occupation. In fact, it was exactly in September 1371, after the catastrophic defeat and fall of the most powerful lords of Serbia,

⁴² Cf. Мошин 1940 (Moshin, “The Vita of Staretz Isaiah, the Abbot of Russian Monastery on Mount Athos”); Трифуновић 1980 (Trifunovich, “The writer and translator Monk Isaiah”); Pušković 1951.

⁴³ Ангелов 1967, 149, esp. footnote 2.

⁴⁴ For the text of Isaiah's *Introduction* cf. the appropriate chapter in the book by B. Angelov, («Исай Серски», Ангелов 1967, 148-161). This text is also published in «Great Monthly Reading», October, days 1–3 (Палаузов 1980, 263–266).

King Vukashin and his brother Despot Ioann Ugljesha in the battle of Marica, that the Turks started to conquer the Balkan Slavic countries. Isaiah's description of the events which followed the defeat in this battle is unique in South-Balkan literature of the fourteenth century, since his account is the only known story concerning this historical battle told by a contemporary who testifies as though an eye-witness (Ангелов 1967, 148). Isaiah says that the country, its population and Christian culture seem to perish and the last hope is lost. It was really the most evil of all evil days. He continues his introduction in the following way and gives quite an impressive picture (Ангелов 1967, 159–160):

As I have already said I started the translation of this book of St. Dionysius in good days, when Churches of God and the Holy Mount flourished like Paradise, a garden in full bloom, constantly nourished by founts of water, but I have finished it in the most evil of all evil days, when all Christians of the Western countries perished in flame. Despot Ugljesha gathered together all Serbian and Greek armies, and those of his brother King Vukashin and of other noble dukes; and all these armies extended to six thousand [soldiers]. Now he moved them to Macedonia to expel the Turks, but he had forgotten that nobody was able to withstand the wrath of God! They did not oust those, but were slain and they fell, and plenty of their bones remained without burial (...) And after they had slain the brave warrior Ugljesha, the Ottoman Turks started to diffuse and spread throughout the whole country like flying birds, and they either slew by sword or took in slavery other Christians. Really, the dead were happier in these days than those alive...

The translation of the *Corpus* was a very difficult task both because of the complexity and the flexibility of the language of Dionysius and because of the fact that the translator had to face the problem of creating rather than using a similar system of philosophical categories and theological language in Slavonic. The translation of Isaiah is very literary but, on the other hand, following the Greek original almost word by word, it gives a complicated and skilful interpretation of each passage. At the same time it gives an impression of an outstanding philosophical work.

The Ottoman occupation and the destruction of many centres of education in Balkans determined the further destiny of the *Corpus Dionysiacum Slavicum*. Fortunately, the victory in the battle on Kulikovo-Field and the establishment of Metropolitan in Moscow opened the great possibilities for development of Christian culture in Russia, and the *CD* found its place in this process. In fact, these writings became very popular in Russia since the time of the Metropolitan Cyprian (d. 1406), who is said to bring a copy of Isaiah's translation here and possibly was in personal acquaintance with the translator Starets Isaiah.⁴⁵

The *CD* played an important and ambiguous role in Russian history. It was used both by heretics, e. g. Novgorod 'freethinkers'⁴⁶, and by Church and State authori-

⁴⁵ For a general overview cf. Дмитриев 1963.

⁴⁶ We know this from the letter of bishop of Novgorod, Gennady, to the archbishop of Rostov, Ioasaf, in which the former begs the latter to send him some books to oppose the arguments of the 'freethinkers', and lists Dionysius among the works involved in this polemics. Cf. Goltz 1983, 142.

ties. *Tsar* Ivan the Terrible quoted the *CD* in his Letter against *Князь* Andrew Kurb-sky, a well-known educator and translator of John Damascene into Church Slavonic.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the *CD* was constantly in the focus of interest of prophesychastic oriented clergy of Russian Church. This way it found its place in the realm of iconography and the philosophy of icons. According to observations of many researchers, certain ideas of the *CD* influenced the iconography of Sophia, Wisdom of God, and this influence can be traced back as far as to the time of Metropolitan Cyprian himself who probably was in personal contact with the most famous of Russian painters of that time.⁴⁸

The writings of Dionysius were included in the first great corpus of Monthly Reading [Великие Минеи Чегии], arranged according to the days of memory of the saints. This edition, prepared under the direction of Makary, Metropolitan of Moscow, in 1552, became standard and had then been reprinted for almost three hundreds years.⁴⁹ Gelian M. Prokhorov observes that the text of this first printed edition of the Slavonic translation of the *CD* belonged to the same manuscript tradition as the Serbian codices of Isaiah's time (Прохоров 1987, 53).

In the above-mentioned book G. M. Prokhorov publishes a part of the manuscript of the last part of the 14th century (namely, the Church Slavonic translation of *the Mystical Theology* and *the Ninth Letter* of Dionysius together with commentaries of John of Scythopolis). This manuscript from A. F. Gilferding's collection (Gilf. # 46) of the State Public Library in S. Petersburg can (according to his suggestion: Прохоров 1980) be the 'autograph' of Isaiah himself or one of the earliest copies of it and (which is important) the scribe or translator must have followed the structure of the Greek original.⁵⁰ In fact the situation (as one would expect in such a case) is more complicated. As my Novosibirsk colleague V. Itkin argues, it is quite probable that two scribes wrote the manuscript. The first of these scribes composed the first part of manuscript (namely up to the *CH* 3, 4, 1), while the second finished the rest of the text and all the marginalia (ИТКИН 1999).

Generally speaking the manuscript tradition of the *Corpus Dionysiacum Slavicum* is very widespread. Nearly a hundred of various manuscripts of the *CD* in Church Slavonic are now found, but *Gilf.* #46 or – it will be much safer to say⁵¹ – its proto-graph seems to influence almost the entire Russian manuscript tradition.

⁴⁷ The text see in Лурье–Рыков, 1993. For a general outline cf. Калугин 1998. For detailed studies of the *CD*'s fragment in the letter see Goltz 1979 and 1983, 144 as well as an article by Vladimir Itkin in the present volume.

⁴⁸ For the history of these possible contacts cf. Бетин 1977; Прохоров 1987, 20–27 (on the iconography of Sophia); Goltz 1978 and 1983, 142.

⁴⁹ Палаузов 1870, vol. 3, 263–786 (the last reprint).

⁵⁰ An international team (H. Goltz, D. & S. Fahl and G. M. Prokhorov) is now working upon a critical edition of this manuscript. The results are summarized in Fahl 2005.

⁵¹ Simply because this manuscript was quite unexpectedly discovered by A. F. Gilferding in Serbia in the nineteenth century it could not possibly influence Russian tradition.

Except to the above-mentioned oldest known manuscript, the most important are two manuscripts of Serbian origin from ГИМ, собрание Воскресенского ново-иерусалимского монастыря (*Voskr.* # 75 and *Voskr.* # 76), manuscripts from РГБ, собрание Московской духовной академии № 144, ГИМ, собрание Уварова № 264-1 and some others.⁵²

Two Slavonic manuscripts of the *CD* are kept in Novosibirsk (the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, State Public Scientific Library, Krasnoyarsk collection F.I.12 and F.VI.6), dated respectively to the end of the 17th and the end of the 15th centuries. Vladimir Itkin has described the latter of these manuscripts in details.⁵³

The edition of Metropolitan Makary constitutes an important, but in no means the final step in the history of the Slavonic *Dionysiaca*. This very difficult text continued to be copied and re-edited many times, more or less successfully. The theology of Dionysius played a great role in Russian ecclesiastical and even political controversies that made it necessary for theologians to attempt an exact understanding of the text. But they had to face at least two serious problems that made the proper understanding difficult. On the one hand, the changes in the Church Slavonic made some expressions of the old translation incomprehensible and, on the other hand, careless copying made it almost impossible to distinguish the text from the commentaries. The accumulation of the mistakes as well as new interest in the *CD* in the seventeenth century induced the monk Evfimy Chudovsky to undertake a new redaction of Isaiah's translation. This translation, still unpublished, was finished in about 1675.

The next step in the history of the Slavonic translations of Dionysius is connected with the work of the Moldavian monk, Saint Paisy Velichkovsky from the eighteenth century. For his translation of the *CD* into Church Slavonic he already used the *printed* Corderius' edition of the Greek text of Dionysius and shortened most of the commentaries. Some of them he excluded completely, but at the same time added selections taken from the paraphrases by George Pachymeres (13th century) included in the edition of Corderius.⁵⁴

⁵² For a partial edition, a modern Russian translation and commentaries: Макаров–Мильков–Смирнова 2002a and 2002b. For a general overview of medieval Russian philosophical tradition cf. a recent work by the same author and his collaborators: Мильков–Пустарнаков 2005.

⁵³ ИТКИН 1997. Interestingly enough that this manuscript combines features typical to different groups of manuscripts and therefore was copied from several protographs. A series of studies by V. Itkin (still unpublished) see on-line at our resource dedicated to the *Dionysian Corpus*: <http://www.nsu.ru/classics/dionysius/itkin.htm>

⁵⁴ The first publication: *Opera sancti Dionysii Areopagitae cum scholies sancti Maximi et paraphrasi Pachymerae*, a Balthasare Corderio Soc. Jesus Doct. Theol. latine interpretata et notis theologicis illustrata (Antuerpiae, ex officina Plantiniana Balthasaris Moreti, M.DC.XXXIII) and reprints: Paris (1644, 1655, 1702), Lyon (1677), Cologne (1684), Venice (1755), Augsburg (1780), and finally PG, t. 3 (Paris, 1857).

Monk Moisej made the last translation of the *CD* into Church Slavonic at the beginning of the nineteenth century and this translation was already a kind of a scholarly exercise (Прохоров 1987, 57–59). Since this time the *CD* has been several times translated into modern Russian.⁵⁵

Finally Gelian M. Prokhorov, who, in his book on the Slavonic translation of the *CD* mentioned above, had justified the importance of reconstructing the whole document, that is to say the Slavonic text of Dionysius with all the commentaries added to it in the course of centuries, successfully accomplished this task, having published in 1995 in St. Petersburg a new Russian translation of the *Dionysian Corpus* and all the commentaries with a reprint of the Greek text. Now the publication is complete and a second (corrected) edition with a new preface has appeared in the *Aletheia* Publishing house (St. Petersburg, 2003). Despite certain criticism of this new translation by the classicists,⁵⁶ I think the publication is a valuable tool for researchers and more general readers and is accomplished with great care and dedication, notwithstanding many technical constraints the editor had to overcome.

⁵⁵ In 1787 D. I. Dmitrievsky translated *The Mystical Theology* with some of the commentaries of Corderius and paraphrases of Pachymeres. For this work he used Corderius' edition of the *CD*. Two (unpublished) translations of *The Divine Names* are dated to the beginning of the nineteenth century (Прохоров 1987, 59). Several published modern Russian translations of the *CD* are now available. *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* were published in 1786 in Moscow by the Hieromonach Moise (Gumilevsky). The *Mystical Theology* and the *Letters* in translation of Gavriil Voskresensky were published in 1825 and 1839 in the review *Христианское чтение*. The *Divine Names* were translated and published by the Abbot Genady (Ejkalovich) in Buenos Aires in 1957. This treatise was also published in a translation of L. N. Lutkovsky (Moscow, 1990). The *Mystical Theology* in two different translations by L. N. Lutkovsky, on the one hand, and V. V. Bibikhin, on the other hand, was published in *Историко-философский ежегодник*, 89 (Moscow, 1990, 221–232).

⁵⁶ Cf. a review of this translation by Yu. A. Shitchalin (Ю. А. Шичалин) in *Museum Graeco-Latinum 2* (Moscow, 1999).

To conclude this short outline I shall note that, as it appears, the future research could go in two directions. First, from a general historical prospective, it will be extremely interesting to trace the ways the *CD* was used (and misused) in train of theological polemics. Had the *Corpus* really been a “sharp sword” directed against the heretics, as Constantine the Philosopher put it, or it much rather resembled a “double-sided knife”, a controversial peace of writings which is equally ready at hand and potentially dangerous for both camps? Secondly, as far as the Church Slavonic translation is concerned, the endless possibilities of comparative research are open, and first of all it will be interesting to trace the ways of adaptation of Greek philosophic terminology of the *CD*, not only in this particular translation of it, but also in other writings of later times it had influenced.⁵⁷

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⁵⁷ In my M. A. thesis – written under the direction of Istvan Perczel of the Central European University, Budapest, to whom, as well as to Hermann Goltz and G. M. Prokhorov, I am grateful for much help and advice – I attempted to look at the *Ninth Letter* from this prospective. Cf. Afonasin 1995.