

## ПРЕГЛЕД / ОБЗОРИ И РЕЦЕНЗИИ / SURVEY AND BOOK REVIEWS

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## AN IN-DEBT STUDY OF THE DRAGON-SLAYING MOTIF IN BYZANTINE AND SOUTH SLAVIC HAGIOGRAPHIC TRADITION

Ана Стойкова. *Светци-змееборци: Теодор Тирон, Теодор Стратилат, Георги Победоносец в южнославянската средновековна традиция* / Ана Stoykova. *Dragon-Slayer Saints: Theodore Tiron, Theodore Stratelates and George the Victory-Bearer. South Slavic Medieval Tradition*. София, 2019. 319 с. ISBN 978-619-01-0465-0.

The topic of the dragon-slayer saints has long been in the focus of Prof. Ana Stoykova's attention. She has dedicated to it more than ten articles and a monograph. Her study *St. George the Victory-Bearer. The South Slavic Medieval Hagiographic Tradition* (Sofia: Iztok–Zapad, 2016)\* is an exhaustive research into the cult and the hagiographic accounts of perhaps the most popular Christian warrior-saint; the book is equipped with a critical edition of the Slavonic translations of St. George's Passions as found in medieval South Slavic manuscripts. In her new book, *Dragon-Slayer Saints: Theodore Tiron, Theodore Stratelates and George the Victory-Bearer. The South Slavic Medieval Tradition*, Stoykova is interested mainly in the episodes depicting the battles of these

saints with dragons. The stories of these fights are representative for their veneration. They had a significant influence on the expansion of their cult, their iconography and the popular beliefs about them. The presence and the development of the dragon-slaying motif in the mediaeval South Slavic literary sources have previously not been systematically examined.

The book consists of a Preface (p. 11–14), followed by three identically structured chapters dedicated to the three holy martyrs respectively – Chapter 1: *The Miracle of Theodore Tiron with His Mother and the Dragon* (p. 15–54), Chapter 2: *Theodor Stratelates and the Dragon* (p. 55–103), and Chapter 3: *The Miracle of George the Victory-bearer with the Dragon* (105–176), and a Conclusion (p. 177–180). The chapters are divided into numerous subchapters describing the history of the cults of these saints, the known Byzantine literary works relating their fight with the monsters, and the reception of the texts (or of some of them) among

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Southern Slavs. The study is based on rich archival material – more than 45 Bulgarian and Serbian manuscripts (dating from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), as well as a great number of Greek written sources (dating from the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries). The second part of the book (p. 183–288) is a critical edition of all the examined Slavonic texts, some of which are paralleled with their Greek versions. The book also provides a full list of the Slavic and Greek manuscripts studied (p. 291–296), an extensive Bibliography (p. 297–308), an Index (p. 309–311), and an exciting set of illustrations witnessing to the representation of these saints' battles with a dragon on icons and mural paintings.

In the Preface, Stoykova presents the history of the dragon-slaying myth. She points out that the victory over an enormous serpent is a common motif not only in medieval hagiography, but also in biblical and classical literature, as well as in folklore. Stoykova starts her survey by outlining the mythological roots of the theme, emphasizing that in mythology the constant conflict between the hero / the god and the monster / the dragon aims to preserve cosmic order. From this mythological monster, the dragon of the Christian legends inherits its ambiguous nature of a creature that, on the one hand, causes destruction, but, on the other, is the guardian of water springs that ensure fertility. In Christian hagiography, the motif is often part of the saint's vita (be it as an episode of the saint's Passion or as an independent miracle) and is adjusted to fit the purposes of Christian propaganda. As a rule, the fight with the monster precedes the martyrdom of the hero and is symbolically interpreted as a prognostication of his future triumph over the "spiritual" dragon Satan, a victory that results in the conversion of many pagans to the Christian religion. The story stands as proof of the saint's strength, courage, and, above all, of the power of his faith.

However, as Ana Stoykova suggests, the content of the episode and the meaning of the dragon-slaying motif gradually develops in hagiography and only at a later stage becomes a metaphor of the triumph of Christianity over paganism. The image of the dragon also changes: initially the creature is depicted as a minor nuisance, more similar to a wild animal hiding in thick bushes in the vicinity of a water spring, than to an evil mythological beast. Yet, in time it gradually transforms into a serious adversary. In earlier sources, in order to exterminate it, it is sufficient for the saint to make the sign of the cross and say a prayer, so the encounter is depicted only by means of hagiographic *topoi*. Later narratives are more detailed and dramatic. It should also be noted that there is always a female character involved in the legends, notwithstanding that the role of the lady varies in the stories of the three saints, as well as in the different versions of these stories. Thus, some Passions of St. Theodore Tiron mention certain Eusebia (initially with no connection to the dragon-slaying episode) as the saint's mistress, to whom he leaves his testament and the instructions to bury his body in the land that she owns; alternatively, she is the woman who buys his relics and builds a church dedicated to him. A Miracle of the same martyr tells of his mother, beautiful "as a virgin", who is abducted by a dragon and subsequently saved by her son. As Ana Stoykova emphasizes, the *Miracle of Theodore Tiron with His Mother and the Dragon* (BHG 1766–1767) is clearly influenced by folklore and is most probably a legend reworked as mediaeval popular literature. In her opinion, it is quite possible that the initial (oral?) narrative about the fight of the saint with the serpent followed the folklore (mythological) motif of the hero who defeats a monster and, in reward, is wedded to the ruler's daughter. Along with the Christianization of the legend, the bond between the hero and the maiden is modified

into a subordinated “(spiritual) mother-son” relationship (p. 30–31). The “pious Eusebia” is also present in the *Passion of Theodore Stratelates by Augarus* (BHG 1750), where she warns the sleeping saint of the dragon’s presence. A princess offered in sacrifice to feed and conciliate the monster has an important function in the Common and in the Extended Greek recensions of the *Miracle of St. George with the Dragon* (BHG 687, BHG 687b).

Although traditionally associated with the narrative cycle of St. George (as Ana Stoykova convincingly shows by a meticulous study of the preserved visual and written sources), in Byzantium the episode about the slaying of a monster is attested for the first time in the miracles of St. Theodore Tiron (p. 15–34). It has proven difficult to trace the origin of this motif, because the encounter with the dragon is absent from the earliest literary works about this saint; hence the legend of their confrontation obviously postdates the appearance of his *Passion*. The dragon-slaying scene is first attested in the famous MS Par. gr. 1470 from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, in the so-called *Early Passion* of Theodore Tiron (BHG 1761) – a text dated by various authors to between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Notwithstanding that, according to some scholars, the story of the struggle with the beast in this *Passion* might have been a later interpolation, it soon penetrated into other hagiographic and hymnographic works related to this saint, where it was further developed. Stoykova explains the attachment of this motif to the deeds of St. Theodore Tiron by the influence of local tradition and histories about his fight with a dragon narrated in the area of Euchaita (the main centre of Theodore Tiron’s cult). Although usually preserved in a few manuscript copies, the versions of the accounts about St. Theodore Tiron’s victory over the dragon strongly influenced the hagiography of St. Theodore Stratelates, who himself was

probably modelled after St. Theodore Tiron (p. 55–62). Acquiring deeper symbolism and more dramatic dimensions, the episode becomes central to St. Theodore Stratelates’ *Passion by Augarus* (an alleged disciple of the martyr who witnessed his sufferings) and to his cult. The *Miracle of St. George with the Dragon* appears rather late, only in the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and is shaped after the stories about Theodore Tiron and/or Theodore Stratelates (p. 105–114).

In order to extract this information, Stoykova, after scrutinizing various historical, archaeological and iconographic sources, summarizes the data about the cult of each of these three early Christian martyrs paying special attention to the interrelationships between their cults and texts and the ways in which these intertwine. She makes a very concise overview of the emergence and interpretation of the dragon-slaying motif in the respective Greek hagiographic, homiletic and hymnographic works, outlining its time of occurrence, its enrichment with new elements, and the dissemination of the texts containing it in various types of manuscripts (both as independent miracles and in the frameworks of saints’ *Passions*). The number of Greek manuscripts consulted is impressive – approximately 40 (some of them unpublished). In addition, the presentation of the Byzantine literary sources is accompanied by occasional glimpses at the Latin and Georgian traditions.

Against this wide background, the author introduces the South Slavic manuscript material that is the real core of her analysis. It should be emphasized that the search, in various manuscript collections, libraries and archives, for the extant manuscript copies of the texts containing dragon-slaying narratives about St. Theodore Tiron, St. Theodore Stratelates and St. George the Victory-bearer, the thorough examination of the texts, and their division into groups based on their versions, is in itself a contribution, since

many of the manuscripts do not fall within the scope of Klimentina Ivanova's catalogue *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica*. Moreover, Ana Stoykova's discoveries in the field of archaeography are not limited to drawing up a detailed list of the preserved South Slavic copies of each of the works studied, or to introducing many of them for the first time into the scholarly discourse. For instance, she succeeds in identifying the Serbian codex used (without referring to it) in 1886 by Vatroslav Jagić in his publication of the *Miracle of St. George with the Dragon*. Jagić's text has proved crucial for studying the history of this work in Slavic literatures. Furthermore, Ana Stoykova has succeeded in finding an earlier South Slavic copy of the same text, correcting A. V. Rystenکو's claim that it has no Byzantine parallel, proving that it corresponds to the so-called *Extended Greek recension* (BHG 678b), and tracing its presence in the *damaskini* collections related to the Bulgarian Adjar literary centre in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (p. 148–164).

The examination of the manuscript copies of the texts describing the dragon-slaying miracles of St. Theodore Tiron, St. Theodore Stratelates and St. George in South Slavic medieval literatures confronts Ana Stoykova with a very difficult task. Firstly, some of the texts (especially those referred to as *староизводни*, that is, found in Reading Menaia belonging to the so-called Old redaction) display a large number of variations. This fact is due to constant changes resulting from editorial interventions over time – changes not only in language and vocabulary, but also in terms of frequent additions to, or elimination of elements from, the plot. Secondly, as no critical editions of the Greek texts about St. Theodore Tiron and St. Theodore Stratelates have been published, there is no solid basis for comparison with the Slavonic translations. All this makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to determine which of the extant South Slavic copies is

closest to the supposed Byzantine text, to draw the stemma of the copies, to suggest the sequence of the appearance of their versions and to outline their possible interrelations.

One gets some idea as to how complicated the problem is by tracing Ana Stoykova's investigations of the history of the Old Bulgarian translation of the *Passion of St. Theodore Stratelates by Augarus*, initially meant to be read on the First Saturday of Lent (p. 64–102). Stoykova examines in detail its language (which is very archaic, especially in its lexis) and concludes that the translation was made in Preslav in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Preslav translation of this *Passion* became widespread as part of the early liturgical books; it was brought to the territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid (thus finding its way to codices written in Western Bulgaria, Serbia, and Russia), and was copied in both liturgical and non-liturgical manuscripts. By studying their linguistic peculiarities, Stoykova classifies the South Slavic manuscript copies into two main groups, each of which has three subgroups. However, as Stoykova has found, the *Miracle with the Dragon* was a later interpolation not originally included in the translation. Moreover, she convincingly demonstrates that its inclusion in the *Passion of St. Theodore Stratelates by Augarus* was not done on a single occasion – the episode itself has three independent translations (which go back to three different types of books in Byzantium), each of which was incorporated in copies of the already existing Slavonic text of the *Passion* at different stages of its transmission. Along with the Preslav translation of St. Theodore Stratelates' *Passion by Augarus*, South Slavic manuscripts preserve a great number of copies of its later, Middle Bulgarian, translation, made, in Stoykova's opinion, in Tărnovo in the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> or the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The *Miracle of St. Theodore Tiron, with His Mother and the Dragon*, the only ex-

tant account of the saint's struggle with the monster in the medieval South Slavic tradition, has also been translated more than once in the South Slavic environment – at least twice, as Ana Stoykova demonstrates, in a relatively short time span during the Middle Bulgarian period (p. 34–53). One of the translations has survived in a unique copy, in the well-known *Germanov Sbornik* (written in 1359–1360). The other translation (which Stoykova believes to be of a slightly later date) is widely present in Bulgarian, Serbian, and Moldavian codices dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its distinctive feature is the replacement of the name of the king ruling at the time when, according to the legend, the story takes place – here he is called Constantine, while in all Greek sources, as well as in the *Germanov Sbornik*, he is Saul. Stoykova assumes that the second Slavonic translation was based upon a reworked Byzantine version of the main text, which most probably originated at the periphery of the Empire and found no further echoes in the Greek manuscript tradition. The existence of significant discrepancies between the Slavonic texts she ascribes to the influence of the natural changes taking place in language over time, as well as to the numerous editorial changes typical for the transmission of non-liturgical texts.

The *Miracle of St. George with the Dragon* has an equally complicated textual development (p. 105–176). Ana Stoykova has discovered two South Slavonic translations of the so-called *Common recension* of the Greek text (BHG 687), one of them preserved, again, as a unique copy in the *Germanov Sbornik*. Along with them, there is also a translation of the *Extended Greek recension* (BHG 687b), which was widespread in Russia – it is not clear whether the text entered South Slavic literatures with the mediation of a Russian source (as believed by A. V. Rystenکو) or, in reverse (as the author assumes), the Bulgarian translation made at

the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century was transferred to the East Slavic lands. She also examines a reworked version of the *Miracle* preserved in a single copy in the sixteenth-century apocryphal *Tumanski Sbornik*, which has no identified Greek original. By analyzing their language, Ana Stoykova highlights the specific grammatical and lexical characteristics of each South Slavonic translation or textual recension; she lists and explains some archaic and rare words, and offers convincing hypotheses as to the time and place of their occurrence. The South Slavic manuscript tradition of St. George's *Miracle with the Dragon* is so complex that, in order to facilitate the comparison between its different translations and versions, Stoykova introduces comparative tables indicating the presence, change or absence of specific elements in the plot.

Among the undisputed merits of Ana Stoykova's book are her observations on the relationship between the texts examined and their manuscript context. She not only uses the manuscript content to confirm the localization and dating of the translations, but also draws the important conclusion that the Greek originals of dragon-slaying narratives and their Slavic correspondences are distributed in codices of a similar type and purpose. Regardless of whether they belonged to official literature, read in churches and monasteries, or represented the low-level type of writings strongly influenced by folklore and copied mainly by poorly educated local priests and monks, these texts invariably had a huge impact on the popular image and representation in art of three of the most venerated Christian saints.

The critical edition of all the South Slavic texts discussed in the book has been carefully prepared in accordance with contemporary editorial practices. The publication of the *Miracle of St. Theodore Tiron, His Mother and the Dragon* is based on all the 8 known manuscript copies (some of them

preserved in fragments) from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. In order to facilitate their detailed comparison, Stoykova has divided the text into parallel segments, presenting all the variant readings as horizontal structures – a method already used by the author in her earlier monographs for publishing texts of floating tradition. In selecting the main texts for the editions of the rest of the works studied, Ana Stoykova has sought maximum proximity to the translation archetype, adhering to two principles – the main text to belong to the older manuscript tradition and to contain a minimal number of innovations. The critical apparatus provides the substantive variant readings in the lexis, grammar, word order and word formation. For representing the Old Bulgarian translation of the *Passion of Theodore Stratelates by Augarus* Stoykova has chosen as main text its copy in the *Jagić Zlatoust* (MS Q.п.I.56, Russian National library, St. Petersburg, first half of the 14th century), and for its Middle Bulgarian translation – the Rila Panegyric (Rila Monastery, MS 4/8 from 1479) of the well-known man-of letters Vladislav the Grammarian. The two South Slavic translations of the Common recension of the *Miracle of St. George with the*

*Dragon* are published according to the so-called *Dragolov Sbornik* (MS 651 from the National library of Serbia, third quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century) and the *Germanov Sbornik*, respectively; the edition of the *Extended recension* is based upon the seventeenth-century Cod. Slav. 32 (No 1025/34) from the Bavarian State library, Munich, discovered by Jagić; the unique copy of St. George's *Miracle with the Dragon* from the apocryphal *Tumanski Sbornik* (MS III.a.10, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb) is added. The existing differing versions of *St. Theodore Stratelates' Miracle with the Dragon* (interpolated in *Augarus' Passion*) and *St. George's Miracle with the Demon* (closely related to his miracle with the dragon) are published separately, also with variant readings.

The edition of the dragon-slaying narratives about St. Theodore Tiron, St. Theodore Stratelates, and St. George preserved in the South Slavic hagiographic tradition provides invaluable source material for further studies in the history of medieval literature, culture, language, and art history. Complemented by Stoykova's commentaries and conclusions, it will serve as a sound basis for future scholarly research.

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