

THE SO-CALLED “FIRST SERMON” BY JOHN THE EXARCH DEDICATED TO THE
NATIVITY OF CHRIST AND ITS GREEK SOURCE

(Summary)

The “First Sermon” by John the Exarch dedicated to the Nativity of Christ (inc.: Χριστου̅ π̅ραβ̅δ̅β̅νομο̅υ̅ σα̅ζ̅ν̅η̅ς̅) is one of the least studied texts of Bulgarian mediaeval literature. The exact Greek sources were found and published by M. Capaldo only a little more than 20 years ago, though the text of the work had been discovered and published as early 1889. The manuscript tradition of the Sermon has not been studied so far and remains largely unknown. Only two copies from the 16th century were published until 2006 (one is a Russian copy and the other – a Resava copy). Because of that the history of the text remains unknown and it has not been possible to analyse the problem of establishing the original text and the problem of the relationship between the Slavonic text and the Greek works used in compiling it.

Over the last years I have tried to collect as much information as possible about the manuscript tradition of the work so that on the basis of this tradition one can elucidate at least part of the problems that emerge in the analysis. As a result of this work done I succeeded in systematizing and finding information about a total of 92 copies of the Sermon (14 South Slavonic and 78 Russian ones) that cover a time period from the early 14th to the 19th centuries. Their texts provide an opportunity to analyse some problems in connection with the original text and its Greek sources.

Some manuscripts proved to be of particular importance: a copy that is included in a manuscript from the middle of the 14th century, a manuscript that has Serbian orthography but was written in the Western Bulgarian lands, a copy that had not been noticed hitherto by students of the work of John the Exarch. It is kept now in the collection of A. Khludov (Хлуд. 162) in the State Historical Museum in Moscow. In it the concluding formula is preceded by a passage from the Pseudo-Chrysostomian homily published already in 1896 (Εἰς τὴν Χριστοῦ γένεσιν), a homily which M. Capaldo believes has nothing in common with the text of John the Exarch and which indeed is not the main source used by the Old Bulgarian author. The analysis of this passage on the background of the opinions voiced hitherto concerning the text of the Sermon as well as the inclusion of some newly-discovered copies of the work and other translated Slavonic works dedicated to the same feast day make up the main body of the article. It studies the relationship between the Pseudo-Chrysostomian passage and the Greek source and discusses the problems of the authorship of the Slavonic text and of the time when it was included in the text. It notes that Хлуд. 162 is the only one among the copies of the Sermon that includes the passage analysed and it presents in brief the development of the text of the Sermon on the basis of the copies known to me.

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