

## Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 16 (2003)

SYMMEIKTA 16



### The New Edition of The Letter of the Three Patriarchs: Problems and Achievements

D. AFINOGENOV

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.901](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.901)

Copyright © 2014, D. AFINOGENOV



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

AFINOGENOV, D. (2008). The New Edition of The Letter of the Three Patriarchs: Problems and Achievements. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 16, 9–33. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.901>

DMITRY AFINOGENOV

THE NEW EDITION OF *THE LETTER OF THE THREE PATRIARCHS*  
Problems and Achievements\*

The *Letter of the three Oriental patriarchs to Emperor Theophilus* is one of the most mysterious texts from the Iconoclast period in Byzantium. Its date, authenticity and the mutual relationship of its different versions –all have been subject of a debate. However, this debate has hitherto been based on an insufficient textual material in the absence of a comprehensive critical edition of the Letter in all its various forms. The first attempt to fill this gap was undertaken by H. Gauer<sup>1</sup> but his contribution, albeit very important, was soon overshadowed by the monumental volume prepared by the team of British scholars led by Joseph Munitiz<sup>2</sup>. The present paper was initially meant as a review of that work, but then it turned out that some of the problems raised (or ignored) by the new edition of the Letter called for a more detailed discussion. Therefore I have subdivided the article into three parts, of which only the first one is a review properly speaking, while the other two are dedicated to the subjects that from my point of view deserved a more thorough examination.

1. *The edition*

Besides the Greek text and English translation of the Letter and its various modifications the volume contains an extensive introduction in which the editors deal

---

\* The completion of this paper has been made possible by the fellowship granted to the author by Alexander S. Onassis foundation.

1. H. GAUER, *Texte zum byzantinischen Bilderstreit. Der Synodalbrief der drei Patriarchen des Ostens von 836 und seine Verwandlung in sieben Jahrhunderten*, Frankfurt am Main 1994.

2. *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilus and Related Texts*, edited by J. A. MUNITIZ – Julian CHRYSOSTOMIDES – E. HARVALIA-CROOK – Chr. DENDRINOS, Camberley 1997, xcvi+295 p., plates.

with a particular problem related to the published source material. Thus, J. Munitiz discusses the manuscript tradition (p. lxxix-xcv), Julian Chrysostomides –the authenticity (p. xvii-xxxviii), E. Harvalia-Crook– the language and style of the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs* (p. xxxix-l), while Chr. Walter makes an important outside contribution with his Iconographical Considerations (p. li-lxxviii) concerning the stories about icons contained in the *Letter* as well as different aspects of the cult of icons, both material and theological.

The overall level of the Introduction is quite high. J. Munitiz is at his best describing in detail each of the surviving manuscripts, their peculiarities and interrelation. There is a stemma and a convenient list of the corrections proposed against the consensus of all mss available (p. xciii). E. Harvalia-Crook provides a subtle, perspicuous and convincing analysis which makes it possible to establish within the text three different styles each with its distinct and clearly recognisable features. This is an invaluable help for any scholar who will in the future undertake the Herculean labour of writing a history of the Letter from its hypothetical prototype to the versions we have today at our disposal. Especially remarkable is the virtual absence from the piece by Harvalia-Crook of those subjective stylistic judgements that often make scholarly discussions on subjects like this so pointless. The part by Chr. Walter is neatly structured, concise yet illuminating. It places the text into a wider context from the point of view of ideology and art history, which is certainly a great advantage of this edition.

It has to be noted, however, that when it comes to the written sources dealing with each of the miraculous stories contained in the *Letter*, Chr. Walter is a little bit less thorough. Such is the case with the Holy Face of Edessa (p.lx-lxi), to be discussed in the second section of this paper. A somewhat less than adequate treatment of this subject also mars the essay on the authenticity of the *Letter*<sup>3</sup> by Julian Chrysostomides. Admittedly, the question of authenticity is by far the most difficult, all the more so as it is interwoven with several related problems of the 9th century Byzantine literature (e.g. the date of different versions of the chronicle of George the Monk) which have not yet been clarified completely. Then it is also the investigation of this question that turned out to be most heavily affected by the major defect of the present edition, to be examined in the third section of my article. This taken into account, the piece by Chrysostomides is fairly stimulating and makes one reconsider some assumptions which have been usually taken for granted. A more detailed development will follow in the second section.

---

3. For the sake of brevity I will further down refer to the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs* as Ep. Syn. and to the text published as Ps.-Damascene as Ep. Th.

The Greek text and the critical apparatus are for the most part prepared very well. There are only a few remarks that I can make following the editors' own request on the concluding page of the book: καὶ εἴ τι σφαλερὸν εἶη, συγχωρήσαντες διορθώσατε.

- 15,1: The reading ὑμῶν (BO; ἡμῖν AW) is probably preferable, because «your imperial happiness» (i.e. happiness under the sceptre of the Byzantine emperors) makes more sense than «our imperial happiness». The Church Slavonic version<sup>4</sup> (f. 364, line 2) has **вашего** = ὑμῶν.
- 17,8: εἶναι is problematic. The translation tacitly supposes a consecutive construction, but the Nominative ἀνώτεροι makes this unlikely. It is difficult to offer a good solution, but the apparatus should mention the irregularity.
- 27,4: The Slavonic translator probably read ἐθεσμοθέτησαν (**положиша**) and ταῦτα (εἶα, f. 365v, lines 5–6). ταῦτα seems to me a better correction to MS's ταῦτην.
- 35,8: The comma after σήμερον should be deleted.
- 53,12: I suspect that the words τῶν εἰκόνων Χριστοῦ φημι καὶ ἀγίων are gloss. They are completely superfluous for the exposition, which goes like this: if the images (παράγωγα) imply idolatrous practices, then their prototypes are among non-existent things. «Copies of the images», as in the translation, sounds strange. The seclusion of this clause will eliminate the problem with φημι (on which see Harvalia-Crook, p. xliii). Below I will analyze this passage from the point of view of the Slavonic translation, but in any case there should be a comma either before or after τῶν εἰκόνων.
- 73,21: The editors change ἐπλημμύρησε of the MSS to ἐπλημύρησε without any clear reason.
- 113,24: The obvious itacism of the MS should be corrected: εὐθνοῦντες instead of εὐθουοῦντες. Cf. two lines above: εὐθηνίαις.
- 119,6–7: There should be a comma after αὐτῶ. The translation is also incorrect, because the phrase means: «I made the Patriarch and his men free of care, having mocked them».
- 123,25: The interpunction τοῦ, χάριν, is bewildering (unless it is a misprint).
- 149,27: The sentence is indeed awkward, as it consists of two absolute Genetives. Yet I would delete the comma after δέ.
- 151,2: The name Διόσπολις should either be written as two words or translated as Diospolis, not «the city of Zeus». The latter option is certainly preferable.
- 157,14: The comma after θεοπασχίαις is unnecessary.

4. See section 3 of this paper.

- 177,5–6: The grounds for deleting not only the second αὐτοῦ, but also καὶ seem to me insufficient. οἰκείων αὐτοῦ καὶ μυστικῶν θεραπόντων sounds perfectly well.
- 181,16: Maybe it would be better to put a comma after εἰδέναι and a period after τελευτᾷ.
- 187,7: The more common spelling is Παυλικιάνων, not Παυλικιανῶν.

The English translation is generally quite accurate (for obvious reasons I cannot pass a judgement on its stylistic merits). Here are a few bugs I have been able to notice.

- 31,15: ἀνεξίκακος is certainly not «robust», but «forbearing», despite its placement within the «somatopsychogram».
- 41,13: καὶ μάλα ἀραρότως does not mean «utterly», but rather something like «as it was right to expect» or «and quite appropriately».
- 43,18: «For this reason alone» is wrong. The Greek says simply that τὸ οἰκνηρίον is the only ancient house of prayer that has remained intact.
- 55,4–6: αὐτὰς in Greek probably pertains to churches as buildings, although earlier in the sentence ἡ ἐκκλησία is in singular. The translation should be corrected accordingly. Cf. below (p. 55,19) where ἡ ἐκκλησία means a building.
- 55,23: ἱεραὶ ἐνδυταὶ is a very specific kind of objects –altar cloths (called inditii in Church Slavonic and Russian). The translation «sacred vestments» is therefore erroneous. A note on the nature and function of altar cloths would be useful.

The notes are probably the weakest part of the present edition. The editors should have informed the reader right away that they are not undertaking a comprehensive investigation of the history and the sources of the text they publish but rather intend to provide a basis for such a study. Otherwise it is very difficult to explain why some obvious parallels with earlier anti-Iconoclast texts are not noted and such important textual studies as those by B. Melioranskii<sup>5</sup> and P. Speck<sup>6</sup> ignored. This especially applies to the legend of Leo III and the Jewish sorcerers. When Ch. Walter discusses the scenes from Christ's Life enumerated in the Letter, he fails to mention that a similar list can be found in the famous 8th century tract *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*<sup>7</sup> (this is just one of the numerous parallels which cannot be explored in the framework of this paper). Then there are such casual remarks as p. 100, n. 60: «Ep. Th. and George the Monk (p. 737), who both seem to be basing their accounts on the

---

5. B. M. MELIORANSKIJ, Georgij Kiprijanin i Ioann Ierusalimljanin, dva maloizvestnyh borca za Pravoslavie v VIII veke, St. Petersburg 1901.

6. P. SPECK, *Ich bin es nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen*, Berlin 1990.

7. PG 95, 309–344, here 313D–316A.

Alt[ernative] *Ending 2* or on a similar version...». The Alternative Ending 2 survives in a sole manuscript copied in 1426, and there is absolutely no ground to suppose that it served as a source for George the Monk, who probably wrote in 846–847<sup>8</sup>, and not vice versa. Incidentally, that means that the text of the paragraphs 11a–b of Ep. Th. should be corrected with the help of George’s chronicle, and not of Alt. End. 2 which betrays conscious efforts to improve the grammar.

The editors do not even attempt to establish the sources of the Alt. End. 2, e.g., to clarify, whether the stories of the prophesies could have been borrowed from Theophanes Continuatus or may go back to an independent tradition. Notes as «Similar story, with certain variations, in Theophanes Cont., p. 22» (p. 112, n. 97) leave the reader in the dark as to the mutual relationship of the texts. As a result, what seems to be a late compilation receives treatment it hardly deserves, as if it were a respectable ancient source. This is not to say that there is no early and valuable material in the Alt. End. 2, but before it can be used, it should be separated at least from the borrowings from known later texts, such as the Continuator of Theophanes.

There are also some mistakes and omissions in the notes. Here are those that deserve to be mentioned.

15,10–12: The combined quotation of 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11,13 (*God has appointed in the Church first apostles, secondly prophets, and thirdly teachers...*) had such a glorious history during the Iconoclast period, from John Damascene to Theodore the Studite to the Synodicon of Orthodoxy, that a note on that matter would have been most welcome.

59, n. 200: The figure of Epiphaniides was very prominent in anti-Iconoclast polemics. Iconophiles ascribed to this obscure 5th century personage several anti-icon writings by St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, frequently cited by their opponents. This is why Epiphaniides is called *ψευδώνυμος* in the Letter. Patriarch Nikephoros wrote a special treatise against Epiphaniides<sup>9</sup>. Unfortunately, this information is absent from the note.

72, n. 238: Patriarch Nikephoros died in 828, not 829.

---

8. See D. AFINOGENOV, *The Date of Georgius Monachus Reconsidered*, *BZ* 92, 1999, 437–447, where the date 844–846 is proposed; for a more exact dating, see ID., *Le manuscrit grec Coislin 305: la version primitive de la Chronique de Georges le Moine* (forthcoming in *RÉB*). It must be noted, however, that the piece in question was probably added not long after 872.

9. NICEPHORUS PATRIARCHA, *Adversus Epiphaniidem*, in: J. B. PITRA, *Spicilegium Solesmense* IV, Paris 1858, 292–380.

- 101, n. 58: The identification of Patrician Sisinnios with Bishop Sisinnios Pastilas, active at the Council of Hieria in 754, is certainly erroneous. According to Theophanes, Patrician Sisinnios Rhendakes was killed by the Bulgarians in 718/719<sup>10</sup>. It was in all probability this official whom the authors of the legend had in mind.
- 112, n. 96: The Church of Our Lady τῶν Ὀδηγῶν existed before Iconoclasm and John the Grammarian could perfectly well serve there as a reader. Janin's entry on this church<sup>11</sup> is obsolete and misleading<sup>12</sup>.
- 188, n. 68: The following statement concerning the removal of the famous Chalke icon is puzzling: «Ep. Th. here has either confused the two emperors [Leo III and Leo V - D.A.] (which is more likely), or he is referring to another icon, restored over the Gate during the intervening period». Of course, Ep. Th. is referring to the icon restored (or simply placed) there by Eirene and, according to a contemporary source<sup>13</sup>, taken down by Leo V under the pretext of preventing desecration.

A few scriptural quotations or parallels have been overlooked as well, e.g., on p. 21,14: one single flock (cf. John 10:16); or on p. 55,25: *the work of human hands* (2 Kings 19:18). I suspect that all references to γάγγραινα (p. 97,1-2 etc.) are supposed to allude to 2 Tim. 2:17 and should be marked accordingly. Finally, although this goes beyond the limits of scholarship, the authors might find it useful for later reprints to correct two errors in their beautiful colophon, namely in line 6 συμμελειούτων to συμμελετώντων and in line 32 κυρωμένου to κεκυρωμένου.

To sum up, the new edition of the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs* represents a major step forward in Byzantine studies, as it for the first time creates a firm ground, on which all subsequent research on this highly significant and fairly enigmatic text can be based. That such research is needed will be hopefully shown in the next two sections which both have to do with the problem of authenticity of the Letter and of its original form.

---

10. THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883, 400.26-27. The identification was proposed by P. A. YANNOPOULOS, Σπουδαὶ βυζαντινῶν προσωπικοτήτων. Σισίνιος Ῥενδάκις, *ΕΕΒΣ* 39-40, 1972-1973, 591-593.

11. R. JANIN, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, I, 3: *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique*, Paris 1969, 199-200. To be sure, Janin says that there is no proof of its construction by Michael III.

12. See Narration on the Church of *Hodegon* published by Chr. ANGELIDI in *RÉB* 52, 1994, 113-142.

13. *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*, in: *Leonis Grammatici Chronographia*, ed. I. BEKKER (CSHB), Bonn 1842, 354.15-355.6.

## 2. *The Holy Face of Edessa and the date of the Letter*

Julian Chrysostomides selected the story of the Mandylicon of Edessa, which undoubtedly plays a prominent role in the Letter, as the key issue that could help to establish its date and consequently to prove or disprove its authenticity. The main problem may be summarized as follows: could this story be included in an official patriarchal document of the Eastern Sees of 836, which Ep. syn. purports to be? The scholar's conclusions turn out to be negative: she thinks that there are no testimonies indicating that by 836 the Holy Face of Edessa and the story of its origin had been officially recognized by the Churches of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem as an integral part of the Orthodox tradition<sup>14</sup>. However, the array of sources employed by Chrysostomides is far too incomplete to justify any such conclusions. Therefore it could be worthwhile to make a short overview of the material overlooked or consciously ignored in her exposition (this applies to Walter's contribution as well, but his conclusions are much less far-reaching).

Chrysostomides argues, to my opinion quite convincingly, that the mentions of the «acheiropoietos» icon of Christ ascribed to John of Damascus (†749) are probably later interpolations. The two fragments in question speak respectively of ἱμάτιον<sup>15</sup> and a «piece of cloth» (ῥάκος)<sup>16</sup>, on which Christ imprinted His face. As for the passage by Church historian Euagrius, who wrote in the late 6th century<sup>17</sup>, the arguments adduced in the edition to prove an interpolation are somewhat weaker, but the text itself, be it genuine or interpolated is far less relevant, since Euagrius mentions only the quality of the image sent by Christ to Abgar as «acheiropoietos», but does not explain what did it look like. As a result, the scholar is left with just two sources –the Greek translation of the Syriac apocryphal «Doctrina Addai» (called *Acta Thaddaei* in Greek<sup>18</sup>) and the testimony of Pope Hadrian at the Roman council of 769 about his predecessor Stephen (752-757) hearing the story of the Mandylicon from travelers who arrived from the East<sup>19</sup>. It is clear that none of these sources can be regarded as proof that by that

14. *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs* (as in note 2), xxiv-xxxvii.

15. *Expositio fidei*, ed. B. KOTTER, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos II*, Berlin 1975, 208 (IV, 16).

16. *De imaginibus*, ed. KOTTER, *Die Schriften*, III, 145-146.

17. *The Ecclesiastical History of Euagrius with the Scholia*, ed. J. BIDEZ - L. PARMENTIER, London 1898, 174-175.

18. The Greek translation is convincingly dated to the first half of the 7th century: A. PALMER, *Une version grecque de la légende d'Abgar*, in *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, Turnhout 1993, 137.

19. For references see *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs* (as in note 2), xxxiii.



time the image of Edessa and the story of its origin had won the official recognition of the three patriarchates of the East, let alone of the See of Constantinople. Very eloquent in this context is the silence of the Acts of the 7th Ecumenical Council, whose information on the Mandylion is strictly limited to the data provided by Euagrius (or interpolated into his work). The Acts do not mention any cloth or towel with the Holy Face imprinted on it.

There are several sources which, although ignored by Chrysostomides, do not contradict her conception. Despite their early date, the «Testament of St. Ephraim»<sup>20</sup> as well as the so called *Νουθεσία γέροντος* with its explicit reference to the former source<sup>21</sup> represent an apocryphal tradition which certainly did not enjoy any more respect with the official Church than *Acta Thaddaei*. Of the well known mentions of the Edessa image coming from the highest ecclesiastical level in the early 9th century Chrysostomides says nothing about the Chronicle of George Synkellos (died between 810 and 813) and about the correspondence of St. Theodore the Studite (Letter 409, dated 818–819). Their information, however, still does not do any harm to her main argument, since Theodore speaks only about an «acheiropoietos» icon sent by Christ to King Abgar<sup>22</sup>, while George adds that the whole city of Edessa still venerates that image<sup>23</sup>. Neither author says anything about the nature and the origin of the icon, so these testimonies cannot serve as proof of the official recognition of the story of the Mandylion by the Eastern Churches in the early 9th century.

Yet this is not all. Other sources not cited by Chrysostomides are extremely important and may undermine her main thesis. These texts belong to the period between the 7th Ecumenical Council and the alleged date of the Letter of the Three Patriarchs. Admittedly, one of them appeared in the *editio princeps* the same year as the edition under review and could not have been taken into account by Chrysostomides. It is *Refutatio et Eversio*, the main anti-Iconoclast work by the Patriarch Nikephoros, published for the first time by J.M. Featherstone in 1997<sup>24</sup>. Here is what the patriarch says in his voluminous treatise written between 821 and 828: «The Savior Himself took a fine linen cloth, imprinted [His] most splendid and most beautiful image

20. EPHRAEMUS SYRUS, *Opera* II, ed. J. S. and St. Ev. Assemani, Rome 1743, 235f.

21. MELIORANSKIJ, *Georgij Kiprijanin* (as in note 5), XXII (f. 155b).

22. THEODORUS STUDITA, *Epistulae*, ed. G. FATOUROS, Berlin–New York 1992, ep. 409.44–45.

23. GEORGIUS SYNCCELLUS, *Ecloga Chronographica*, ed. A. A. MOSHAMMER, Leipzig 1984, 399.21–400.3.

24. NICEPHORUS PATRIARCHA, *Refutatio et Eversio*, ed. J. M. FEATHERSTONE [Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca 33], Turnhout 1997.

and sent [it] to the prince of Edessans who had asked [for it] with faith»<sup>25</sup>. The word ὀθόνν used by Nikephoros, corresponds to σουδάριον of the *Letter*<sup>26</sup>. This information is repeated by Nicephoros once more in the same work in almost identical terms<sup>27</sup>.

More difficult is to explain why the editors of the Letter missed two more passages by Nikephoros, this time from his well known works published a long time ago. In *Antirrheticus I* the patriarch says: «And if Christ on request of one of believers imprinted His divine image on a cloth (ὀθόνν) and sent it to him, why should others who portray Him be accused idly?»<sup>28</sup>. In *Antirrheticus III* the whole story is narrated of King Abgar's painter who was unable to make a portrait of the Savior, whereupon He imprinted His face on a cloth (ὀθόνν) and sent it to the king<sup>29</sup>. Since the *Antirrhetici* were written even before *Refutatio et Eversio*, that is, in 815–820<sup>30</sup>, the first unequivocal testimony of the Holy Face of Edessa coming from Byzantium can be securely dated to the second half of 810s. This testimony, which is in full accord with the information given by the Letter, is repeated several times in fundamental theological works by the leading Byzantine ecclesiastic of the time and does not leave any place for doubt about the official recognition of the Mandylion and its story long before 836. So much for Chrysostomides' argumentation.

The testimony of Nikephoros might suggest that between 787 and 810 (or 815 at the latest) the Byzantines got some additional and more specific information about the icon of Edessa, its origin and the veneration it enjoyed. This assumption is corroborated by another extremely valuable source –the Life of St. Euthymios of Sardis, written by the future Patriarch Methodios in 831. Re-telling Euthymios' speech addressed to Emperor Leo V at the famous palace reception on the Christmas day of 814, Methodios says, among other things, that the bishop saw with his own eyes in Edessa

25. *Ibid.*, 7.54–56: αὐτὸς ὁ σωτὴρ λαβὼν ὀθόννν λαμπράν, τὸ ὑπέρλαμπρον καὶ ὑπέρκαλον ἐναπομαξάμενος εἶδος, ἐκπέμπει τῷ πίστει αἰτήσαντι τῶν Ἑδεσσονῶν ἡγεμόνι.

26. Ep. syn., *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs* (as in note 2), 33.18. Ὀθόννν properly means «fine white linen» and thus indicates the material of the piece of cloth. Contrariwise, the Latin borrowing σουδάριον points only to its functionality and can be translated as «towel». Therefore the two terms are perfectly compatible.

27. NICEPHORE, *Refutatio et Eversio* (as in note 24), 184.56–59. The word ὀθόννν is used again.

28. NICEPHORUS PATRIARCHA, *Antirrhetici adversus Constantinum Copronymum*, in *PG* 100, 260A: Εἰ δὲ παρὰ τινι τῶν πιστῶν αἰτηθεὶς ὁ Χριστὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ θεῖον χαρακτῆρα ὀθόννν ἐναπεμάξατο καὶ ἐξέπεμψε, τί μάλιν ἄλλοι χαρακτηρίζοντες αὐτὸν ἐγκαλοῦνται;

29. NICEPHORUS, *Antirrheticus III*, cap. 42, *PG* 100, 461AB.

30. See P. O'CONNEL, *The Ecclesiology of St. Nicephorus I* [OCA 194], Rome 1972, 58.

the ἀτεπίδοτον καὶ ἀχειρόγραφον icon and venerated it together with multitude of people<sup>31</sup>. Euthymios makes clear that it happened when he visited the East (i.e. the Arab Caliphate) with an imperial embassy. The bishop indeed participated in an embassy to the caliph, most probably in 798<sup>32</sup>, so there is nothing impossible in his seeing the image of Edessa. It can be therefore supposed, that it was St. Euthymios who passed to the Byzantines that specific information on the Holy Face, its appearance and possibly the legend of its origin. The very fact that Euthymios under the pen of Methodios refers to the «acheiropoietos» image in a discussion with Iconoclasts, indicates that neither of the Orthodox heroes had any doubts concerning the Holy Face of Edessa as a part of genuine Church tradition. Even if Euthymios' speech of 814 is entirely the hagiographers's fiction, it is absolutely certain that in 831 Methodios knew about the Mandylion and regarded its veneration as undoubtedly sanctioned by the Church. Yet if such was the opinion of Byzantine Iconophiles, the Churches of the East, especially that of Antioch, under whose jurisdiction was the diocese of Edessa, must have adopted it by that time *a fortiori*.

It has to be noted, however, that although the main argument advanced by Chrysostomides against the authenticity of the Letter does not withstand criticism, the problem is not automatically solved in favor of the opposite thesis. Another source, which may provide an important insight into the textual history of the Letter, got far less attention from the editors than it deserves. It is the already mentioned chronicle of George the Monk. Its value has been underestimated by Walter, Chrysostomides and others because they proceeded from the traditional date of that text, namely 866–867 or even after 872<sup>33</sup>. Since, as I have said, there are serious grounds to believe that George wrote 846–847, that is, just ten years after the purported date of the Letter, the evidence he provides is of immense significance. As correctly observed by Chrysostomides, the Holy Face and its story is mentioned in the chronicle three times. In one case, according to my study, there is a *verbatim* borrowing from *Refutatio et Eversio* by Nikephoros with the sole difference that George specifies the name of «the Prince of Edessans»<sup>34</sup>. Another passage, as noted by C. De Boor, the editor of the chronicle, is also borrowed almost to the word from *Antirrheticus III* (the fragment

---

31. J. GOUILLARD, La vie d'Euthyme de Sardes (+831), *TM* 10, 1987, 35.

32. *Ibid.*, 4.

33. Cf. *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs* (as in note 2), xxxi, n. 61: late ninth century.

34. See GEORGIUS MONACHUS, *Chronicon*, ed. C. de BOOR - P. WIRTH, Stuttgart 1978, 784.24–785.3, and D. Je. AFINOGENOV, «Обличение и опровержение» патриарха Никифора как источник хронике Георгия Амартола, *Khristianskii Vostok*, n.s. 1, 1999, 17.

already discussed above)<sup>35</sup>. It is introduced by the following noteworthy phrase. After re-telling the contents of Christ's correspondence with Abgar, George first repeats Eusebios' words: «Joined to these letters is also the following, in the Syriac language»<sup>36</sup>, and then continues himself: «What Thaddaios accomplished after the Ascension of the Lord (Θαδδαίου πράξαντος μετὰ τὴν ἀνάληψιν τοῦ κυρίου)». The key word is, of course, πράξαντος. It may indicate that the chronicler knew the apocryphal *Acta* (Πράξεις) *Thaddaei* and was aware of its Syriac origin. Although there is no solid proof, it may be supposed that the same *Acta Thaddaei* served as a source to the Patriarch Nikephoros. In any case, the patriarch seems to have used a written source, since on all four occasions when he mentions the image of Edessa, he employs the word ὀθόνν, which is not applied to the «acheiropoietos» icon by any other author. *Acta Thaddaei* call the object σινδών<sup>37</sup>, and that term is parallel to ὀθόνν in the Gospels (although the latter word there has a diminutive suffix and is used in plural ὀθόνια). Matthew (27:59) and Mark (15:46), as is well known, call Christ's burial cloth σινδών, whereas Luke has both σινδών (23:53) and ὀθόνια (24:12), which probably denote one and the same thing, and John (19:40 and 20:5) –only ὀθόνια. The choice of ὀθόνν instead of ὀθόνια or σινδών could have been motivated by stylistic considerations. The story of the origin of the image in *Antirrheticus III* is introduced with the word ἱστόρηται, which is characteristic of a written source rather than of an oral tradition. However, if the patriarch borrowed his information from *Acta Thaddaei*, the fact that he was the first Iconophile of the highest rank to make use of this text, demands an explanation. Perhaps the testimony of Euthymios of Sardis played a crucial role here. It cannot also be excluded that the Greek translation of *Doctrina Addai* had hitherto circulated only among Greek-speaking Christians of Syria and found its way to Byzantium first on the eve of the 9th century. This might have had something to do with Euthymios' mission as well.

The third mention of the Holy Face of Edessa in the chronicle of George the Monk is especially significant from the point of view of textual history. It is very close to the account given by the Letter of the Three Patriarchs, as is duly noted in the apparatus to de Boor's edition<sup>38</sup>. Therefore when Walter maintains that «apart from the *Letter*

35. GEORGIUS MONACHUS, 421.16-422.1; NICEPHORUS, *Antirrheticus III*, cap. 42, 461AB. It is difficult to understand why the editors of the Letter failed to look up de Boor's *testimonia*.

36. GEORGIUS MONACHUS, 321.14-15 = EUSEBIUS, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I, XIII, 11.

37. *Acta Thaddaei*, in *Acta Apostolorum apocrypha*, ed. R. A. LIPSIVS - M. BONNET, Leipzig 1891, 274.17.

38. GEORGIUS MONACHUS, 740.16-22.

only George Hamartolos uses the term σουδάριον»<sup>39</sup>, he probably should mention the opinion of de Boor, who believed that the corresponding passage of the chronicle was compiled from the Life of Stephen the Younger and the *Letter to Theophilos* (=Ep. Th.)<sup>40</sup>. On the same page of de Boor's edition one can read that the manuscript P of the chronicle has only the words from the Life of Stephen, so it is only the mss of the vulgata that mix them up with borrowings from Ep. Th. It turns out therefore that codex P of George the Monk (Parisinus Coislinianus graecus 305), which presents a version of the chronicle considerably different from the one published by de Boor, does not have this third mention of Edessa image. It is impossible here to dwell upon the very complicated problem of the relationship between the two versions of George the Monk – suffice it to say that, according to some evidence, it is the version of P (i.e., its archetype), that was compiled in 846–847, while the version of the vulgata probably goes back to the period after 872<sup>41</sup>. In this case the natural conclusion will be that the editor who was re-working the original text some 30 years after its composition (I strongly doubt that it was George himself, as de Boor believed), inserted into it the passage from the Letter concerning the Holy Face of Edessa.

### 3. The Slavonic translation

The first to pay attention to this translation was S. Gero<sup>42</sup>. Unfortunately, so far he has also remained the last. Gero rightly pointed out that a book published in Moscow in 1642<sup>43</sup> contained the earliest printed edition of the Letter in any language. He also observed that the Slavonic text represented a different version of the *Letter*, rather close to Ep. Th. and to *Athous Iviron* 381, i.e. the Alt. End. 2. Gero named it *versio permixta*. However, a closer examination of the translation has revealed that it contains elements that might make the problem of the mutual relationship of the various versions of the *Letter* even more complex (or far simpler) than it has been

39. *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs* (as in note 2), liii.

40. GEORGIUS MONACHUS, 740 (in apparatu).

41. See AFINOGENOV, Le manuscrit Coislin gr. 305 (as in note 8).

42. S. GERO, Jannes and Jambres in the *Vita Stephani Iunioris* (BHG 1666), *An. Boll.* 113, 1995, 286–287.

43. КНИГА СЛОВА ИЗБРАННЫХ СВАТЫХЪ ОТЕЦЪ О ПОКЛОНЕНІИ И О ВЕСТИ СВАТЫХЪ ИКОНЫ, Moscow 1642 (quoted after GERO, *op. cit.*, 287 n. 23). Since this book is extremely difficult to come by I am quoting the translation after *СОВОРНИКЪ* (Moscow 1648), which is easily available due to numerous exact reprints in the 18th and 19th centuries.

hitherto. Although the comprehensive study of the Slavonic text, including its publication in a more accessible form together with a translation into one of the modern European languages remains a task of the future, in this paper I will adduce some evidence, which, in my opinion, is of paramount importance for the study of the Letter of the Three Patriarchs.

#### a) Chronology

The *terminus ante quem* of the Greek original of the Slavonic translation can be established fairly precisely. A large part of the text, including fragments absent from all other Greek versions, can be found, with very slight variations, in the Homily on the icon called Maria Rhomaia (BHG 1067)<sup>44</sup>. One of the manuscripts in which it is preserved probably belongs to the 11th century, and the text is assigned by von Dobschütz to that same century<sup>45</sup>. The compiler of this homily explicitly refers to the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*. This reference is worth quoting side-by-side with the title of the Slavonic translation (in reverse translation into Greek):

BHG 1067, p.241\*\*,18 - 242\*\*,5

Slavonic (f.360v, lines 4-14)

εἶ τις τὸν πολύστιχον ἐκεῖνον διέλθοι τόμον, ὃν οἱ ἀγιώτατοι πατριάρχαι πρὸς Θεόφιλον, τὰ Ῥωμαίων σκῆπτρα παρὰ πατρὸς κληρὸν εἰληφότα, συνελθόντες ὁμοῦ μετὰ τῶν κατ' αὐτοὺς συνόδων ἔγραψαν συστατικὸν ἐκ περιουσίας τυγχάνοντα, τῆς τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων τιμῆς τε καὶ προσκυνήσεως, ἱκανὴν ἔξει τῶν εἰρημένων τὴν πίστιν. Ὁ τε γὰρ Ἀλεξανδρείας Χριστόφορος καὶ Ἰὼβ Ἀντιοχείας καὶ Βασίλειος Ἱεροσολύμων ἐν αὐτῶ ὑπογράψαντες καὶ πενήκοντα πέντε πρὸς τοῖς τριακοσίοις καὶ χιλίοις ἑτέροις συνυπογράφοντας ἔχουσιν...

\*Πολύστιχος τόμος, ἦγον πολύστιχος ἐπιστολή, ἣν οἱ ἀγιώτατοι πατριάρχαι πρὸς Θεόφιλον, τὰ Ῥωμαίων σκῆπτρα παρὰ πατρὸς κληρὸν εἰληφότα, συνελθόντες ὁμοῦ ἔγραψαν ἐπιστολὴν συστατικὴν<sup>46</sup>. ἐκ περιουσίας τυγχάνουσαν, περὶ τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων καὶ περὶ τῆς τιμῆς αὐτῶν καὶ προσκυνήσεως, ἱκανὴν καὶ προσέχειν (?)<sup>47</sup> τὴν πίστιν τῶν εἰρημένων (οἱ τοῖς εἰρημένοις), ὁ Ἀλεξανδρείας Χριστόφορος, Ἰὼβ Ἀντιοχείας, Βασίλειος Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ ἐν αὐτῶ ὑπογράψαντες πενήκοντα καὶ πρὸς τοῖς χιλίοις τετρακόσιοι πέντε,

44. E. VON DOBSCHÜTZ, *Christusbilder* [Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, N.F. 3], 1899, Beilage VI B, 233\*\*–266\*\*.

45. E. VON DOBSCHÜTZ, *Maria Romaia*, *BZ* 12, 1903, 214.

46. The Slavonic has **ΠΟΛΥΣΤΙΧΕ ΣΥΣΤΑΒΙΤΕΛΗΣ**, which in fact may render συστατικόν (understood as noun). In this case the similarity will be even more close.

47. **ΒΗΜΑΤΙ** is literally προσέχειν, but I suspect that the Greek original had παρέχειν.

It is clear that the above passage was borrowed by the author of the Homily from the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, and not vice versa, because in Slavonic the words rendering ἐκ περιουσίας τυγχάνουσιν can still be recognized as a part of a somewhat distorted construction meaning «which [scil. the letter] is abundantly capable to inspire faith in what it says about the holy icons etc.». Referring to the relationship between the Homily and the Letter, von Dobschütz remarked: «es ist hiernach wahrscheinlicher, daß dem Verfasser [of the Homily - D.A.] eine dritte Rezension... vorlag»<sup>48</sup> (as opposed to Ep. syn. and Ep. Th.). Now there is hardly any doubt that this third version was none other but the Greek prototype of our Slavonic text<sup>49</sup>.

This, however, is not the only trace of that particular version of the Letter to be found in the Byzantine literature. As has already been mentioned, the chronicle of George the Monk includes passages borrowed from Ep. Th., which are all absent from the manuscript P. One of such passages is the story about Emperor Leo III and the Jewish sorcerers. From de Boor's edition we can see that this fragment from p. 735, l. 14 to 738, l. 6 coincides with the text of Ep. Th. (159, l. 13-165, l. 8). The latter finishes this section with the words ἐπιτελεῖν ἐπαγγέλλεται (=GM 738, l. 6) and goes over to the next story. Yet P omits (or rather does not have) the lines 738, ll. 6-9 of George as well. This is a rhetorical lamentation meant to conclude the story of Leo (Ep. Th. has no trace of it). Here is the text:

ὦ τῆς ἀνοίας, ὦ τῆς φρενοβλαβείας. Ὁ χριστιανικώτατος βασιλεὺς Ἑβραίοις ὑπόσπονδος ὄφθη, ὁ τὰ σκῆπτρα βασιλικῆς δυναστείας ὑπὸ θεοῦ ἐγκεχειρισμένος ὑπὸ θεομάχων ἀνδρῶν τερατεύεται. .

An analogous passage is found in *Athous Iviron* 381 (Alt. End. 2, p. 103,4-10). It goes as follows:

ὦ τῆς ἀνοίας, ὦ τῆς παραπληξίας, ὦ τῆς φρενοβλαβείας. Ὁ δεσπότης πάσης τῆς Ῥωμανίας δουλικῶς ποσὶ καταπεπάμπται, ὁ χριστιανικώτατος βασιλεὺς Ἑβραίοις ὑπόσπονδος γίνεται. Ὁ τὰ σκῆπτρα τῆς βασιλείας ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ ἐγκεχειρισμένος ὑπὸ θεομάχων ἀνδρῶν αἰχμάλωτος κατέστηκεν. Ὁ γοῦν φιλόζωος καὶ δυσώνυμος, μᾶλλον δὲ θηριώνυμος, ἀλλοιωθεὶς τὰς φρένας ἀντὶ τοῦ βασιλέως γίνεται πολέμιος, ἀντὶ ἐξουσιαστοῦ τύραννος.

Now, the Slavonic translation of the Letter does finish the section on Leo and the sorcerers with a lamentation. It is longer than the two quoted above, but contains remarkably similar clauses:

48. DOBSCHÜTZ, Maria Romaia, 175 n. 1.

49. Note that ms. Vind. pal. hist. gr. 38 (hist. eccl. 31), of the late 14th. century (codex V of the homily), gives the number as τετρακοσίους, i.e. exactly as in the Slavonic translation.

Slavonic (f. 364v, lines 4-15)

Reverse translation

Ⲓ βεροϳμῆμα ϳγμα ηζτρϳπλενομδ. ε̅β̅κα ϳνι  
 ποβνнен̅ъ вываеτ̅ъ ϳавωωμ̅ъ, наϳλο  
 ϳовѣτ̅ϳϳиμ̅ъ, и τ̅ѣχ̅ъ нogaми ποπιραеτ̅α.  
 χρ̅στ̅ι̅αν̅ι̅ν̅ι̅ ϳνι ϳρ̅β̅, жи̅δο̅β̅ω̅ω̅μ̅ъ ποκορνε̅α...  
 иже ϳκινετ̅ρ̅υ ϳαρ̅τ̅ва ϳρ̅ι̅ε̅μ̅υи, Ⲙ вра̅г̅ъ  
 β̅ж̅ι̅ν̅ι̅χ̅ъ ποβѣ̅ждаеτ̅α... и ϳρ̅ε̅μ̅ѣ̅ни̅ε̅ ϳ̅γ̅μ̅ъ,...  
 вываеτ̅ъ β̅μ̅μ̅ѣ̅сто ϳρ̅α, ϳаτ̅ни̅к̅ъ, и β̅μ̅μ̅ѣ̅сто  
 β̅а̅ки, μ̅ρ̅ϳ̅и̅τ̅ε̅л̅ъ.

\*ὡ τῆς ἀνοίας τοῦ φρενοβλαβοῦς. Ὁ δεσπό-  
 της ὧν ὑπόσπονδος γίνεται δούλοις ἐπὶ κακῶ  
 συμβουλευούσι καὶ ἐκείνων ποσὶ καταπα-  
 τεῖται. Ὁ χριστιανὸς ὧν βασιλεὺς Ἑβραίοις  
 ὑποτέτακται,... Ὁ τὰ σκῆπτρα τῆς βασιλείας  
 ἐγκεχειρισμένος ὑπὸ θεομάχων τερατεύεται...  
 καὶ ἀλλοιωθεὶς τὰς φρένας, ἀντὶ βασιλέως  
 γίνεται πολέμιος καὶ ἀντὶ ἐξουσιαστοῦ τύραν-  
 νος.

Taking into account that the Slavonic translation in our particular case is not always literal, the Greek *Vorlage* could have been even closer to George and the Alt. End. 2.

There are several more passages in George the Monk's accounts on Leo III and Constantine V where the manuscript P differs from the vulgata. On p. 743, l. 11-744, l. 2 it does not have the following sentence:

Πᾶσαν δὲ εἰκονικὴν ἀνατύπωσιν τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς θεομή-  
 τορος καὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων κατέστρεψε καὶ κατέκαυσεν.

Only Alt. End. 2 has something remotely similar (p. 103,17-20):

Καὶ εὐθέως πᾶσαν σεβασμίαν εἰκόνα τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς θεο-  
 μήτορος καὶ παντὸς ἁγίου ἐκ πάσης ῥωμαϊκῆς ἐκκλησίας κατέστρεψεν.

And the Slavonic:

f. 375, lines 12-15

Reverse translation

Весь иконный зракъ, образа е̅п̅с̅а нашего і̅с̅а  
 χ̅ρ̅ῖ̅τ̅а, и в̅и̅ц̅ъ м̅р̅и̅и, и вс̅ѣ̅χ̅ъ ст̅и̅χ̅ъ ϳаζορ̅ати,  
 и ϳожигати ποβел̅ѣ̅.

\*Πᾶσαν εἰκονικὴν ἀνατύπωσιν τῆς μορφῆς  
 τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς  
 θεοτόκου Μαρίας καὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων  
 καταστρέφειν καὶ κατακαίειν ἐκέλευσεν.

Vulgata finishes the description of Leo's quarrel with Patriarch Germanos with the following words, absent from P: ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶ ῥαπίσας τῶν βασιλείων ἐξελαύνει (p. 741,19-20). Again, only Alt. End. 2 is close: τὸν μέγαν πατριάρχην Γερμανὸν ἰδίαις χερσὶ τυπύσας ὁ δειλαῖος... ἐξωστράκισε τῆς ἐκκλησίας (p. 103, ll. 13-15), while Ep.Th. borrows from Vita Stephani something different: ὁ βασιλεὺς... ξιφῆρεις σατρά-  
 πας ἀποστείλας ἐν τῷ πατριαρχικῷ οἴκῳ, πυγμαῖς καὶ ὄνειδισμοῖς κατενέγκαι τὸν ἅγιον



ἐκεῖνον τῶν ἐκεῖσε προσέταξεν (p. 167, ll. 2-4). The passage about Leo's beating Germanos is reproduced by the Homily on Maria Rhomaia almost verbatim, so here we have a piece of the Greek original of the Slavonic translation: φασὶ δέ τινες καὶ ῥαπίσματι τὸ τίμιον ἐκείνου καὶ ἅγιον πρόσωπον ἐνυβρίσαι τὸν ἀλάστορα τοῦτον τῆ μιαρῶ παλάμη τῆς ἑαυτοῦ δεξιᾶς (von Dobschütz, p. 246, ll. 7-9 = Slavonic, f. 374v, ll. 21-22). The Slavonic has **заѣхеними**, which certainly renders the Greek ῥαπίσματι or ῥαπίσμασι.

On p. 750,18 vulgata adds (about Constantine V): ὁ ἐκ Δὰν ἀντίχριστος. No Greek version has any trace of it, whereas in Slavonic there is a passage about the same emperor (f. 375v, ll 7-13) which begins with an allusion to Deut. 33:22: «Dan sprang up from Basan» and ends with a free quotation from Apoc. 9:11 mentioning the beast's horn and the dragon who made war with the saints.

The comparison of the above fragments, in my opinion, provides a solid proof that both the compiler of *Athous Iviron* 381 and the editor who furnished the chronicle of George the Monk with interpolations in the last quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century were using the Greek original of the Slavonic translation and not any of the surviving Greek versions. Thus we are dealing with a text which is just as old as that of Tirana manuscript, to say nothing about *Patmiacus* 48.

The comparison of Tirana manuscript with the Slavonic text also yields some very important information. According to Munitiz (p. lxxxviii), the single parchment folio designated as *Tirana graecus* 25, of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, contains a fragment of Ep. Th. 3e-4c (καθὼς οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ἱστορικοὶ... παραβάτου ἀποσω[ζόμενον]) with the addition of «a fragment found only in *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, 7.d (pp. 31, l. 22-33, l. 4, καὶ ὡς φαντασίας... ἀναγόμεθα θεωρίας)». In the Slavonic in that very place (between 149,15-16, **Μανιχαίων λήρους...** and 149,21, **Καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεσπέσιος**) we find the following text:

Slavonic, f. 366v, lines 4-8

...по манихейскому знамѣну, ꙗкоже рекоша в ментѣ сѣць истинный егво образ, а не поистинѣ. истина же оубо древнаа, во образѣ кажетса, и видимыми знаменами, невидимаго разсмѣваемъ. и оубо лѣка бжтвенны...

*Tirana graecus* 25

...κατὰ τοὺς τῶν Μανιχαίων λήρους, καὶ ὡς φαντασίας Ἴνδαλμα λογισθέν, τὰ ἀληθῆ... τὸ γὰρ ἀληθές ἐν ὁμοιώματι δείκνυται... καὶ δι' αἰσθητῶν συμβόλων ἐπὶ τὰς ἀπλᾶς τῶν νοημάτων ἀναγόμεθα θεωρίας. Καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεσπέσιος...

Although this is not a word-for-word translation and the Slavonic text is shorter, the correspondence between the passages is unmistakable. In the paragraphs that follow,

however, Tirana fragment agrees with Ep. Th., and not with the Slavonic version, which is here considerably more detailed. I will return to this problem later.

There is one more piece of evidence that the Greek prototype of the Slavonic translation was well known to the Byzantine tradition. On p. xciv Munitiz quotes titles of various late texts related to the Letter of the Three Patriarchs from manuscripts dated from the 11th to the 14th century. They invariably refer to the Letter as πολύστιχος ἐπιστολή. The same does Constantine Porphyrogenitus: τὴν πολύστιχον ἐκείνην ἐπιστολήν<sup>50</sup>. This has no parallels in the manuscripts that contain either Ep. syn. or Ep. Th. The title of the Slavonic version, however, as we have already seen, includes the expression **МНОГОСЛОВАЖНОЕ ПОСЛАНИЕ**, which is the exact rendering of the Greek πολύστιχος ἐπιστολή.

b) The structure of the text

There are several features in the Slavonic text that deserve a most thorough consideration. First of all, it looks much more like a real letter than both the presumed original version and Ep. Th.. The title quoted above finishes with the following clause: **предисловіе имоуше сиче посланию** (=τὸν πρόλογον ἔχοντες οὕτως τῆς ἐπιστολῆς), which means that it does not purport to be a part of the original text. Chrysostomides convincingly shows that the title of Ep. syn. (p. xviii-xix) «could not have been included in the original document» as well, but there the copyist did not make this apparent. Thus the Letter as preserved in Slavonic begins right with the salutation. Now, Chrysostomides correctly notes (p. xviii, n. 11) that if the missive were genuine, Theophilus «should have been addressed as ‘Emperor of the Romans’». This is not the case with Ep. syn. The Slavonic, however, says: **враздодержателю гревескагв навалства** (=τῷ... τοὺς οἴακας κατέχοντι τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς). Another major deviation of the Greek version from the customary way in which such letters were written at that time, is formulated by Chrysostomides as follows (p. xix):

On the other hand, the names of the Patriarchs do not appear at the end of the letter, as was customary, nor is the date and name of the city where the synod took place, or the numbers of the participants indicated there. One assumes once more, that these details must have been supplied by the copyist. The point in question, therefore, is from where he derived them, for they are crucial elements in assessing the authenticity of the letter.

50. CONSTANTINUS PORPHYROGENITUS, *Narratio de imagine Edessena*, PG 113, 441B3.

Now let us see what we can find in the Slavonic version. Here are two passages from the last three of the thirty-two folios of the text. The first of the fragments is more complicated and therefore given in English translation, the other, of a very formulaic nature, in the reconstructed Greek as well:

f. 390, line 19 - 390v, line 5: For that reason we have compiled this minor letter<sup>51</sup> to your God-appointed power and lordship, having gathered in the holy city of God, on the very Resurrection of Christ our God, in holy Jerusalem, bishops and other brethren numbering 400 upon 1000 and 50 and 5, and so we decided to write down this letter with the help of Basil, the faithful monk and the loyal slave and servant, ...this is why we have decided to compile this in the temple of the Holy Resurrection, on the Calvary...<sup>52</sup>

f. 390v, lines 21-23: \* Ἐγράφη δὲ ταῦτα ἐν τῷ τιμίῳ πατριαρχείῳ τῆς ἁγίας πόλεως Ἱερουσαλήμ, μὲν ἠπριλλίῳ ἰνδικτιῶνος ιδ', ἔτους ἀπ' αἰῶνος στμδ'. (This has been written in the venerable Patriarchate of the holy city of Jerusalem in the month of April, of the 14th indiction, the year from the Creation 6344).

The description of the frontpiece depicting the Virgin with the Child, which seems so suspicious to Chrysostomides in the title of Ep. syn., figures in the Slavonic in its proper place, after the colophon (f. 391v, lines 17-23), and there only. Thus the Letter in its Slavonic version fulfills all the necessary requirements of the protocol and explains where the copyist of Ep. syn. got the dates and numbers he placed in the title. The only problem that remains is the absence of the Patriarchs' names anywhere except the title. It is not impossible, however, that they initially had been a part of the salutation, which in its present form, both in Greek and in Slavonic, contains only the names of their sees. Once the title with the names had been added, the copyist might have deemed it superfluous to repeat them again in the very first sentence. On the other hand, the *Athous Iviron* 381 (Alt. End. 2) does have the names of the Patriarchs at the location roughly corresponding to the first of the quoted passages from the Slavonic Letter (p. 125, l. 1-2). They could have been left out by the Slavonic translator (as is obvious from the comparison of texts, omissions and abbreviations are frequent in the Slavonic version). The third explanation is even simpler. If the Letter was genuine, the names of the Patriarchs as well as of all other participants of the Synod followed the main text as a list of signatures, exactly as Alt. End. 2 puts it: «...with the signatures of each participant, name and place of his bishopric, metropolis,

51. **книгы**, Plural, corresponding to the Greek γράμματα.

52. I read **НА МѢСТѢ КРАНИЕВѢ** (ἐν τῷ κρανίου τόπῳ) instead of **НА СΤῚΛῶΝ ΚΡΑΝΙΕΒῚ**.

monastery and village» (p. 125,4-6). The copyist would then take only the Patriarchs' names and place them in the title, leaving the list out altogether.

It should be noted that we now know who was the actual author of the Letter of the Three Patriarchs. The Slavonic construction *василіемъ вѣрнымъ верноризцемъ* renders the Greek *διὰ Βασιλείου τοῦ πιστοῦ μοναχοῦ*, and the context refers to the compilation, and not to the delivery of the letter. He may well have been a monk of St. Sabas monastery, as Gauer surmised<sup>53</sup>. He even might be identical with the well-known Basil, monk of St. Sabas and later bishop of Emesa, who wrote the Life of his uncle Theodore of Edessa<sup>54</sup>. Actually, the time and place fit in perfectly –according to the Life, Basil accompanied Theodore to Jerusalem for his ordination,<sup>55</sup> and this visit has long been brought into connection with the synod of 836 (see Chrysostomides, p. xix). People with good rhetorical training in Greek apparently were not plentiful in Palestine at that time, so it would have been most natural, if the Patriarchs sought Basil's help for the compilation of such an important document. Parallels between the Life and the Letter are also apparent: the interest in history, both real and legendary; the idea of the direct correspondence between the Empire's welfare and the emperors' piety; the abundant display of theological education.

#### c) Additional evidence

Here some more circumstances will be pointed out suggesting that the Slavonic text reflects the earliest surviving form of the letter sent by the three Patriarchs of the East to Emperor Theophilos. On f. 363r-v, right before the text corresponding to p. 13, ll. 23f of the Greek, there is a long passage (more than a page) addressed to the Emperor Theophilos, which is absent from all the Greek versions. It reads<sup>56</sup>:

So thou also art a great emperor and autokrator, and very much a Christian, who hast legitimately received the sceptre of the great Empire of the Romans through Christ, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Thou art a most splendid emperor, intelligent in everything and valiant against the adversaries, so that the foes will be subjugated under your feet, and thou wilt have the upper hand amongst enemies...

53. GAUER, *Texte* (as in note 1), p. LXII.

54. See *Prosopographisches Lexicon der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, Berlin 1999, I, no. 950.

55. *Žitie iže vo svjatyh otca našego Feodora, arhiepiskopa Edesskogo*, ed. I. POMIALOVSKIJ, St. Petersburg 1892, p. 39, cap. XLIV.

56. Pending the proper reconstruction of the Greek original, I quote the Slavonic in an English translation, which might not be completely exact.

There follows a lengthy development on the anticipated defeat of the pagans at the hands of the emperor and a substantially amplified quotation of Es. 45:1-3 applied instead of Cyrus of Persia to the addressee of the Letter, in the sense that God promises to eliminate all the obstacles before His chosen king. Now, the message is addressed to an Iconoclast emperor, which makes it doubtful that a fragment like this could have been interpolated by a later editor. In general, the Slavonic version contains considerably more references to Theophilos than the Greek Letter, let alone Ep. Th. For instance, on p. 51, l. 5 Ep. syn. has: *καὶ ἐπιλείπει χρόνος διηγούμενος*, (Ep. Th., p. 155, l. 1: *καὶ ἐπιλείπει με χρόνος διηγούμενον*) and the Slavonic (f. 369, lines 20-21): *καὶ ἐπιλείπει με χρόνος, ὃ τῆς θεοφιλίας ἐπόνυμε βασιλεῦ καὶ ὑπέρκαλε, διηγούμενον* (where the pronoun in Singular may have appeared as a slip of Basil's pen)<sup>57</sup>. Right before the colophon there is the following sentence (f. 390v, lines 19-21): *\*ὕγις, ὕγις, ὕγις, καλῶς πράττων εἴης, ζωφόρε δέσποτα καὶ αὐτοκράτορ, καὶ πολυχρόνιος*, which is the proper valediction, again expected by the protocol but omitted by all the Greek versions, if we do not consider as such the bare three words that conclude Ep. syn.: *ἔρρωσο, θεοφιλέστατε αὐτοκράτορ* (p. 79, l. 22).

Another important case is once more the story of the Jewish sorcerers and Emperor Leo III. The Slavonic text, describing their first encounter, introduces the youth as Conon (f. 373, line 1), while the Greek invariably gives the name as «Leo» (Ep. Th.: p. 99, l. 2; Alt. End. 2: p. 161, l. 15; Georgius Monachus: p. 736, l. 17). «Conon», in fact, is much more appropriate, because it is only later in the narrative that the sorcerers suggest to the future emperor to change his name. Furthermore, Ep. Th. (but not George the Monk) makes a somewhat enigmatic remark that the two Jews were «relatives of the Isaurian Jews» (p. 159,20: *ἐξ ἀγχιστείας τῶν ἰσαυρικῶν Ἰουδαίων ὑπάρχοντες*). The Slavonic in the corresponding passage (f. 372v, line 2) has *асурискѣ жидаѣ*, which makes much better sense, because the sentence as a whole speaks about the sorcerers' expertise in astrology, and the Assyrian descent of the two Jews was undoubtedly supposed to explain the source of their knowledge. A later copyist probably changed *ἄσσυρικῶν* to *ἰσαυρικῶν* under the influence of the expression *ἐν τοῖς ἰσαυρικοῖς μεθορίοις*, which occurs later in the story.

---

57. This passage is illuminating in another respect, too. HARVALIA-CROOK writes (p. xlvi): «An apt illustration of the author's [of Ep. syn. - D.A.] incertain linguistic background is the insertion of the commonplace expression denoting excuse: *ἀλλ' ἐπιλείπει μοι ὁ καιρὸς διηγούμενω* or *ἀλλ' ἐπιλείπει με διηγούμενον ἢ ἡμέρα* changed into *καὶ ἐπιλείπει χρόνος διηγούμενος*». Thus some of her conclusions concerning the style of type II pertain to the (rather inept) editor, and not to the original writer.

One of the major sources of doubt concerning the authenticity of the Letter has always been the string of miracle stories that occupies such a prominent place in Ep. syn. Here the Slavonic text also displays some significant variations. It recounts in much greater detail the history of the icon painted by St. Luke (f. 366v-367) (No. 5<sup>58</sup>) and the miracle stories No. 3 (the image of the Virgin on a column in Lydda, f. 367-367v) and 4 (the attempt to erase that image, f. 367v-368). Then follow the stories No. 1 (the Holy Face of Edessa, f. 368-368v) and 2 (the Holy Face repels the siege by Chosroes, f. 368v). After that the Slavonic has only three more stories: Nos. 11 (a crow flies into the desecrator's mouth), 9 (the limbs of a prefect in Alexandria are severed) and 10 (the Virgin on an icon turns her back on a detractor), in that sequence, which occupy exactly one page: f. 368v, line 21- f. 369, line 19. This brings the total number of miracles to seven (the same number as in Ep. Th. and in the same order) instead of fifteen in the Greek Letter, occupying less than two and a half folios out of the thirty-two. As will be shown later, the original size of this section might have been even smaller<sup>59</sup>. In any case, the icon prodigies were the main subject of interest for later interpolators, so it will be logical to assume that the less pieces of this kind a particular version contains, the closer it is to the original in that particular respect. The bulk of the Letter in its Slavonic version consists of theological polemics and invectives against the heretics, either direct ones or disguised as historical accounts, while the miracle stories play a peripheral role. This is exactly what should have been expected of an official synodical letter. As is well known, the situation with Ep. syn. is entirely different.

The story of the Holy Face of Edessa, as presented in the Slavonic text, deserves special attention. The account of the miracles No. 1 and 2 goes like this.

(1) Abgar, the King of Edessa, is struck by leprosy. He sends to Jesus a request to free him from the illness and expresses his wish to see «the divine look of His face». Christ takes a towel and wipes sweat off His face. The image miraculously appears. He then dispatches Apostle Thaddaeus to Abgar, who is instantly cured upon receiving the image.

Neither Ep. syn. nor Ep. Th. nor, for that purpose, Patriarch Nikephoros, say anything about Abgar's leprosy, which is, however, well known to the later tradition.

---

58. The stories are numbered according to the manuscript tradition and H. Gauer's introduction, not to Ch. Walter's list.

59. Thus Gauer's hypothese that the original Letter contained far less miracle stories than Ep. syn. appears to be correct, except that he did not make the next logical step: to assume that in the beginning there were just the seven stories found in Ep. Th..

Here we can see again that the interpolator of George the Monk's chronicle was using the Greek prototype of our Slavonic text, because he finishes the story with the words «...[Christ] sent it to Abgar, the King of Edessa, and cured his illness (καὶ τὴν νόσον αὐτοῦ ἰάσατο)» (p. 740, ll. 21-22).

(2) The Persian King Chosroes besieges Jerusalem (sic!). He piles up olive trees around the walls and sets them on fire. At the same time the metropolitan of Edessa visits Jerusalem, bringing the Holy Face with him. He sees the disaster, takes the image and carries it round the walls. Then a strong wind turns the flames on the enemy and destroys those of them who are nearby. There follows a remarkable concluding sentence (f. 368v, lines 19-21): «Many times and others who insolently attacked this city were subdued by the righteous Judge».

This looks very much like a piece of the genuine Jerusalem local tradition. It should be noted here that the Slavonic translation does not contain any of the anecdotal stories connected to Constantinople (p. 65, l. 21-75, l. 20), like the one of Theodore of Syracuse trampling upon a paten. This is another argument in favor of both the priority of the Slavonic version and the authenticity of its Greek prototype.

In some cases the text as it can be reconstructed from the Slavonic makes more sense than the surviving Greek. I will illustrate this with just one example. Here is a theological passage from Ep. syn. (p. 52, ch.8b):

If, therefore, copies of these images, I mean, those of Christ and the saints, were part and parcel of idolatrous practice, it is clear that their prototypes both in essence and in title are insubstantial and non-existent things, which are spoken of, but do not exist. These wretches ignore the difference between images and idols...

The Greek is much less smooth: τὰ πρωτότυπα... εἰσὶ καὶ ὀνομάζονται ἀγνοοῦντες οἱ δειλαιοί... (no finite verb follows). In Slavonic this passage is found in its proper place, in the refutation of the Iconoclast council of 754, and goes as follows (f. 377<sup>v</sup>, lines 17-25):

[Constantine V deemed Christ to be equal to Cronos, Zeus etc. and implied that He was inventor of idols]

For «whatever is copied from the prototype form, is not called a man, but a likeness (ὁμοίωμα) of the prototype. So if [these likenesses] are his [presumably man's] idolatrous invention, it is clear that their prototypes both in essence and in title are insubstantial<sup>60</sup> things. As for the likeness of the prototype, it is substantial, since it is

---

60. Literally **везвещественое/вещественое**, immaterial/resp. material, but I reconstruct the Greek from Ep. syn. as ἀνόπαρκα/ὕπαρκα.

not the prototype itself, but its shadow. Therefore it is not absurd to call icons idols». Thus spoke this wretch and his associates.

The author of Ep. syn. obviously abbreviated the original text in an utterly clumsy manner by combining the Iconoclast thesis and its refutation in one sentence.

Now it is time to go back and look for the reasons for the discrepancy between the Slavonic version and the Tirana folio. As has already been mentioned, the section dealing with the icon painted by St. Luke, the icon on a column in Lydda and the attempt to erase it are almost identical in the Slavonic Letter and the Homily on Maria Rhomaia. It is precisely in this section that the Tirana folio and the translation differ. Yet the Homily is a skillfully constructed rhetorical text which seems to be stylistically uniform, and the piece in question does not stick out as something alien to the rest of the narrative. Moreover, it is improbable that such a well-trained writer as the author of the Homily would borrow a fairly long piece of text from a source clearly written in a different style than his own, without modifying it. So I suspect that the section on St. Luke's and Lydda icons got into the Slavonic Letter from the Homily on Maria Rhomaia, and not the other way round. Fortunately, the Slavonic translation of the Homily is printed in *Sobornik* right before the Letter, and the comparison of the two texts is revealing. The section on the two icons (f. 340-342<sup>v</sup> resp. 366v-368) turns out to be identical in Slavonic, too! Now, it is statistically impossible that such a large fragment written in complicated and rhetorically embellished Greek would be rendered identically by two independent translators. Even if both works were translated by one and the same person, the only way to achieve this kind of coincidence would have been to simply copy the section from one text to the other. That could happen, of course, if both texts were translated at the same time by the same person. If so, we would expect the two works to be transmitted in one «package», just as they stand in *Sobornik* and *Kniga slova izbrannyja...* (see n. 43). This, however, is not the case. The early manuscript tradition of the Slavonic version of the Homily on Maria Rhomaia never associates it with the Letter of the Three Patriarchs<sup>61</sup>. In the three manuscripts of the Slavonic Letter known to me so far (December volume of *Velikie Minei Chetii* by Metropolitan Makarii, mid-16th century; Yefrosinov sbornik, Russian National Library, Kirillo-Belozerskoe 53/1130, late 15th century, and RNL Sofiiskoe 1444, 16th

---

61. See Klimentina IVANOVA, *Cikl slova za nedelja na pravoslaviето v starobulgarskata literatura, Godišnik na Sofijskija universitet «Kliment Ohridski». Naučen centūr za slaviano-vizantijski proučvanija «Ivan Dujčev» 1, 1987, 251-261.*



century) the homily is not present<sup>62</sup>. So the only explanation left is that at some point the Slavonic translations of the Letter and the Homily met in the hands of a certain Slavonic copyist who compared the accounts on St. Luke's and Lydda icons and found that the Homily had them in a more detailed and more colorful form. He therefore replaced the short piece that reported these stories according to Tirana folio and Ep. Th. with the exposition borrowed from the Homily, and it was this copy on which the subsequent manuscript and printed tradition of the Slavonic Letter depended. In any case it is significant that the order of stories in the Homily and in the Slavonic Letter (Nos. 5,3,4) still corresponds to Tirana folio and Ep. Th., and not to Ep. syn.

As for the translation itself, there is some indirect evidence that it was produced in the second half of the 14th century. K. Ivanova has demonstrated that around this time Bulgarian *literati* of Turnovo school translated from Greek several polemical writings in defense of icon worship. Among them were the Homily on Maria Rhomaia and *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*,<sup>63</sup> which are preserved in manuscripts copied in the last quarter of the 14th century. The Letter was probably translated in the framework of this undertaking, although its absence from the early manuscripts of the so called *Triodnyj Panigirik* (collection of texts read during Lent) compiled in Turnovo at that time suggests that the translation was made elsewhere. The most obvious place where it could happen is, of course, Mt. Athos. If, as we have seen, the Greek prototype of the Slavonic version was available to the author of Alt. End. 2, which survives in a manuscript copied in 1426 probably on Mt. Athos, it was by no means impossible that one of the many Bulgarian or Serbian translators active there in the second half of the 14th century also had access to it.

\*\*\*

The above exposition, in my opinion, provides very serious grounds to believe that in Slavonic translation we possess (with the exception of the piece on St. Luke's and Lydda icons) the original version of the Letter of the Three Patriarchs, written by monk Basil, of which only the Tirana folio survives in Greek. Many of the doubts concerning its authenticity, including those based on stylistic considerations, are invalidated when

---

62. Although all three MSS predate Moscow edition of 1646, the quality of text in the two last ones is far inferior to the printed Letter. It can be demonstrated, however, that all of them go back to one and the same prototype.

63. IVANOVA, *op. cit.*, 255-256.

applied to the text preserved in Slavonic, and many obscure points clarified. Therefore any edition of the Letter that is based exclusively on its surviving Greek versions has only a limited value, because it does not present the text in its original form. This fully applies to the present edition as well. Hopefully, this is going to be another admonition to all Byzantinists not to ignore the Slavonic material, even if at the first sight it seems so remote from the subject they are studying.

