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**THE LEGEND OF THE PROCOPIUS USTYANSKY: TEXTOLOGY  
AND POETICS**

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**Abstract**

The article analyses the history of the text and poetics of the Legend of the North Russian righteous man Procopius Ustyansky, which differs from the medieval hagiographic Canon. The research was conducted using textual and source research methods to identify new handwritten copies of the writing and find out the history of the manuscript. Discovered among the documents of the Holy Synod new copies of the XVII–XIX centuries allowed us to present the history of the manuscript as the history of the Synodal edition of 1739 and 1746, created by diocesan commissions as accounting documents for the Holy Synod as a result of the examination of the saint's relics in 1696 and 1739 with the involvement of the Ustyansk editorial board. The study of the genre and stylistic originality of the text, based on the consideration of the medieval manuscripts' poetics as a phenomenon of literary etiquette, showed that it demonstrates a certain stage in the development of the hagiographic tradition. It turned out that the writing is close to documentary sources: the protocols of relics' "inspection" and "interrogative speeches" of events' eyewitnesses. Textually, the Ustyansk edition of the monument, as it was first established, focuses on the Word about the appearance of the relics of the all-Russian glorified Novgorod righteous man Jacob Borovichsky, published in the Printed Prologue of 1659-60, since it contains an exhaustive rhetorical and theological commentary on the veneration of the righteous "without a biography".

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## 1. Introduction

Hagiography, or the lives of saints, is the main genre of medieval Russian literature, possessing certain genre-thematic and pragmatic possibilities, created according to specific laws of perception of reality and reflecting the most important dominants of religious culture. In this regard, the statement that literature is a part of culture is true, and the history of Russian culture should be considered as “the history of Christian culture” (Alekseeva, 2018, p. 10). A key category of poetics is the genre (Zakharov, 2018, 2020). In the “matrices of the genre,” according to Popova (2016), the mechanisms of “memory that play a significant role in organizing the text” are concentrated (p. 77). The formation of the saint’s worship is connected to the memory processes. As a rule, it “materializes in a kind of conditionally “historical” writing, which may take the form of a chronicle story, a legend about an icon, a life of a saint <...>” (Semyachko, 2020, p. 41). At the same time, the works of ancient Russian literature are characterized by the complexity of genre nature. Studying their poetics, based on the manuscript tradition of the texts, allows, as Pigin (2019) believes, to understand why in different versions of the text there may be a connection “either to one genre of medieval literature or to the other” (p. 45).

Despite the rather long history of studying Russian hagiography and the significant research interest in the North Russian lives of saints, which has been observed recently, nevertheless, the judgment expressed by Dmitriev (1973), who believed that the lives of the Russian North saints as ancient manuscripts are “least studied” (p. 7), still remains valid. However, it is worth noting that in the North Russian tradition of the 17th – 19th centuries, the phenomenon of veneration of the righteous “without hagiography” is formed, that is, without any written reference to the worldly virtues of the saint. Even if a written text was created about the holy righteous man – hagiography or a legend about miracles – then, contrary to the early Christian canonical hagiographic tradition, which the authors of the later hagiographic writings were oriented to, nothing was reported about the Christian endeavors and pious biography of the hero.

## 2. Problem Statement

The difficulty in historical and literary comprehension of the “non-canonical” hagiographic manuscripts of the North Russian tradition leaves significant gaps in the description of the main trends in the development of the Russian hagiography and Russian literature of the Middle Ages and the early Modern period, as well as in the understanding of the holiness phenomenon. In this regard, it becomes necessary to turn to an examination of their textual history and characteristics of poetics. One of such works is the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky (hereinafter – the Legend).

## 3. Research Questions

The main problem of this study is to research the literary history of the text and poetics of the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky, “non-canonical” text from the point of view of the hagiographic canon.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to characterize the history of the text and poetics of the Legend of St. Procopius Ustyansky.

- 4.1. To do this, it was necessary to identify all the handwritten copies of the Legend in Russia's archives and museums of antiquities and on the basis of the identified sources to study the history of the text.
- 4.2. To conduct a structural-genre analysis of the identified editions and variants of the manuscript; to describe the relationship of this work to other genre forms.
- 4.3. To describe the nature of the revealed in the Legend textual borrowings from other hagiographic works; to characterize the stylistic features of the text.
- 4.4. Based on the revealed sources and the analysis of the poetics of the work, to characterize the veneration of the righteous Procopius Ustyansky.

## 5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study is the principle of a comprehensive study of ancient Russian texts, consisting of a combination of textual and historiographic analysis techniques and the consideration of the poetics of a medieval manuscript as poetics of literary etiquette.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. History of the text of the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky

For a long time, for many researchers, the main source of information about Procopius Ustyansky was the retelling of the handwritten legend about the righteous man, given in the 1880 edition of the work by the priest and local historian Veryuzhsky (1880).

One of the first people to point out the existence of specific copies of the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky was A. S. Lavrov, who considered the peculiarities of veneration of the righteous man along with other "unverified" saints (Lavrov, 2000, pp. 221-222). In his observations the researcher relied on Synodal documents, in particular, on a very voluminous case of 1740 from the Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg (hereinafter – RGIA), fund 796, inventory 18, case 349 (RGIA, n.d. a, pp. 451-459). In this case on pp. 451-459 a copy of the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky is placed. Another Synodal manuscript of 1746 with a case about the relics of the "unrecognized" saints of the RGIA, fund 796, inventory 25, case 723 (RGIA, n.d. c, pp. 50-53; RGIA, n.d. d, pp. 588-597) was referenced by Yves Levin who studied the history of veneration of "folk" saints (Levin, 2004, pp. 169; Levin, 2004, pp. 173; Levin, 2004, pp. 182). However, she does not analyse the actual text of the Legend about the righteous man which the case contains. Various aspects of studying the veneration of Procopius Ustyansky are reflected in the publication "The Verb of Time" (Bilanchuk, & Verevkina, 2005). It includes publications from archival sources about the righteous Procopius developed by R. P. Bilanchuk and G. A. Verevkina, including the

text of the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky from a manuscript from the State Archive of the Vologda Region (hereinafter – GAVO). "Historical and statistical description of the churches of the city of Velsk and the Velsk district of the Vologda province" (GAVO, n.d., pp. 430-448). In addition, the publication indicates another copy of the Legend from the funds of the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg (hereinafter – the RNB) (RNB, n.d. b, pp. 1-13).

Thus, the researchers revealed four copies of the Legend about Procopius Ustyansky of the 18th – 19th centuries, but they neither examined the history of the text of the Legend nor analyse the artistic features of the work.

In addition to four already known copies of the work, we located two more copies in the already indicated handwritten documents of the Synod. So, the manuscript of RGIA, fund 796, inventory 18, case 349 contains not one, as A. S. Lavrov believed, but two copies of the work: on pp. 482-484 reverse there is also a short version of the text. Besides, it turned out that the documents of the Synod of 1747 contained not just one copy referenced by Yves Levin, but two copies of the Legend about Procopius Ustyansky (RGIA, n.d. c, pp. 50-53) and (RGIA, n.d. d, pp. 588-597).

Our textual study of six copies of the Legend of the 18th and 19th centuries allows us to say that they relate to two editions of the work: the Synodal edition, presented in two versions – 1739 and 1746, moreover, both versions exist in two forms: lengthy (version 1739 of the (RGIA, n.d. a, pp. 451-459); 1746 version of the (RGIA, n.d. d, pp. 588-597)) and short (version 1739 of the (RGIA, n.d. b, pp. 482-484); 1746 version of (RGIA, n.d. c, pp. 50-53) and the Ustyansk edition, presented also in two versions: Savvaitov's (RNB, n.d. b, pp. 1-13) and the Statistical Description (GAVO, n.d., pp. 430-448).

The time of creation of the actual Legend about Procopius Ustyansky, not just the list of miracles from the relics of the righteous man which exists in Vvedensky Ustyansky church, can be defined by the period from 1600, when the first miracle from the relics of Procopius Ustyansky was recorded, until 1739, when excerpts from the Legend with a description of miracles from his relics were sent according to the decree of 1737 and after the work of the commission of 1739 to the Archangelsk diocese, and then to the Holy Synod. The singularity of the copies of the Legend is understandable, since the righteous Procopius was never canonized, remaining locally venerated.

## **6.2. Genre-stylistic features of the Synodal edition of the Legend**

Archival documents allow us to say that the Synodal edition of the Legend was produced twice: in 1739, specifically as a document made for the Holy Synod in response to the decree of Empress Anna Ioannovna of November 14, 1737, obliging the diocesan priests to report twice a year to the Holy Synod about "superstitions" and the veneration of "unverified" bodies, and in 1746 as a result of the actions of the diocesan authorities according to the decree of Empress Elizaveta Petrovna of December 7, 1744 on informing the Holy Synod about the "unverified" relics of saints in the Russian Empire. To create an extensive version of the Synodal edition in 1739 and in 1746, the clergy of the Archangelsk and Kholmogorsk dioceses used a number of documents: copies of the 1696 certificate about the inspection of the righteous man's relics by the diocesan commission at the direction of Athanasius Kholmogorsky and of the inspection of the relics by the commission in 1739. Descriptions of miracles from the relics of the

righteous Procopius, recorded during the work of commissions in 1696 and 1739 and preserving the style of the document, constitute the main part of the work.

A copy of the miracles in the Legend consists of 14 stories dating back to 1600-1739. They represent two complexes of miracles that occurred, in the first case, before 1696, and in the second – before and in 1739. The first eight miracles date back to 1696; they have titles that briefly contain the theme of the miracles of the righteous Procopius. The first and fifth stories testify to the emergence and formation of the saint's veneration: they tell of the righteous Procopius' relics' appearance in a willow tomb near the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin into the Temple from the east side and of writing the icon of the righteous man in 1658. Obviously, these miracles had been recorded in the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin into the Temple for many years from the words of the healed people themselves because both the description of the 4th miracle and the story of the 8th miracle preserve the form of narration from the first person singular (RGIA, n.d. a, pp. 451-459). The documentary and factual nature of the stories is also confirmed by the exact indication of names and nicknames, place of residence, time of the event and its specific circumstances.

In the extensive Synodal copies of 1739 and 1746, stories about the miracles of the XVII century are accompanied by a narration about 6 more miracles of 1725-1739, which were recorded by the diocesan commission in 1739. Narratives of miracles recorded by the commission in 1739, like the stories of 17th century miracles, are built according to the same compositional scheme: "a serious illness or misfortune" – "a prayer appeal for help to God, the Virgin and Procopius Ustyansky"; "a promise to worship the relics of the righteous Procopius" or "the appearance of the righteous Procopius urging to take a vow" – "Miraculous healing or deliverance from difficult life circumstances" – "fulfilment of a vow" – "veneration of a saint by panikhida and a prayer service over his relics in the church." It should be noted that the practice of veneration of ascetics by panikhidas and prayer services was widespread in the XVII – XVIII centuries. This was especially characteristic of a number of manuscripts of North Russian and Siberian hagiography, where biography was not known (Alekseeva & Rudi, 2018).

### **6.3. Genre-stylistic features of the Ustyansk edition of the Legend**

The early copies of another, Ustyansk, edition of the Legend are not known. Its late copies of the XIX century, characterized by a rhetorical introduction, dating back, as we have found, to the Word about appearance of the relics of Novgorod saint Jacob Borovichsky who received all-Russian glorification. It was first published in the Prologue edition of 1659-1660 (RNB, n.d. a, pp. 602-606), and then repeatedly reprinted. The publication in the Printed Prologue of the editions of Russian hagiography played a special role in the history of Russian book culture, because due to the huge circulation these editions were widespread and constituted an important source of knowledge about saints (Dukhanina, 2018, 2019).

The author of the Ustyansk edition, as it turned out, almost literally copied a lengthy rhetorically decorated passage about the righteous Jacob Borovichsky from the printed Prologue to explain the lack of canonically necessary information for a hagiographical work about the newly appeared righteous Procopius. The borrowed fragment provides an exhaustive commentary on the veneration of the righteous man "without a biography". The explanation is based, as we found out, on the detailed metaphor "a righteous man is a resident of Heavenly Jerusalem", on the series of antitheses "earthly – heavenly", on

rhetorical questions and exclamations, transformed into lengthy verbal periods commenting on the “heavenly fatherland” of the righteous man (Ryzhova, 2016). However, the Ustyansk edition of the Legend’s author’s orientation to the Prologue text, as our observations show, turned out to be wider and could not be reduced to borrowing only a comment about the “heavenly homeland” of the saint.

All other revealed textual matches are associated with the episode of the appearance of Procopius Ustyansky’s relics. So, when describing the sudden appearance of the righteous Procopius’ relics, the author used the following verbal formula from the Prologue source: “... that hastened to the time of the glorification of the holy one, together with his honest relics” (RNB, n.d. a, p. 605; GAVO, n.d., p. 431). It is this very fragment from the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky that is already reflected in the Synodal documents of 1739 about the righteous Procopius (RGIA, n.d. a, p. 452). The author of the Legend of Procopius Ustyansky also borrowed from the Prologue text about Jacob Borovichsky the formula “people who live in ...”. However, if the Prologue text talks about the rejection of Jacob of Borovichsky’s revealed relics (local residents thrust the relics away from the shore with a fishing pole) (RNB, n.d. a, p. 605), then in the new work, on the contrary, no one doubts the sanctity of the relics, and the body of the righteous man found in the ramshackle tomb “from the vine” appears imperishable and “whole” (GAVO, n.d., p. 432). In addition, the stylistic formula for glorifying the revealed relics by miracles is borrowed from the Prologue text almost without changes: “But most gracious God, willing to glorify his saint, allowed his honoured relics to work glorious wonders – to heal various ailments” (compare (RNB, n.d. a, p. 607; GAVO, n.d., p. 432). The decision of local residents to honour the miraculous relics is described textually alike. However, if the printed publication relates this with a general phrase “giving thanks” (RNB, n.d. a, p. 607), then in the Ustyansk edition the actions related to veneration of the righteous man’s relics are specified: it talks about the erection of a chapel over the revealed relics GAVO, n.d., p. 432). ]

## 7. Conclusion

The two editions of the Legend which we identified on the basis of six manuscript copies of the work – the Synodal (in two forms and versions) and Ustyansk – reflect certain stages in the history of veneration of the righteous Procopius, differing in creation time, structure, style of narration, factual account, and also the number of records about miraculous healings from the relics of the saint. The peculiarities of poetics and the genre-compositional originality of the work are most powerfully presented in the copies of a lengthy version of the Synodal and Ustyansk editions.

The manuscript history of the Legend about appearance of the relics and miracles of the North Russian righteous man Procopius Ustyansky testifies to the fact that the genre of legends about the righteous is actually close to documentary sources. Such documents are the protocols of the diocesan inspection commissions of the relics, as well as “interrogative speeches” during the recording of miracles, in which there is a narration on behalf of the actors.

The creator of the Ustyansk edition of the work was guided by the printed Prologue text about Jacob Borovichsky, who received all-Russian worship. The author practically rewrote without changes the introductory rhetorical part from A word about the appearance of the relics of Jacob Borovichsky in the edition of the printed Prologue 1659-1660, which explains the veneration of newly-appeared saints “without a biography”. In addition, certain stylistic formulas in the episode of the appearance of the saint’s relics to

the local people, as well as in the story of glorification of the newly appeared relics by miracles, were borrowed from the printed edition.

The lives of the righteous of the Russian North as exemplified by the Legend about North Russian saint Procopius Ustyansky consequently demonstrate a certain stage in the development of the Russian hagiographic tradition in the context of Christian culture as a whole, when the revealed relics of an unknown saint are recognized as “righteous”, from which numerous healings subsequently occur. The veneration of saints in the Russian North in the 17th – 19th centuries, concerning a certain type of holiness – the righteous men, as the history of the text of the Legend shows, seldom culminated in all-Russian canonization.

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