

Valuable Manuscripts and Old Printed Books Preserved at the Bulgarian National Museum of History in Sofia*

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The National History Museum of Bulgaria, located in Sofia, is a relatively young cultural institution established in 1973. One of the main tasks of the museum is to search and collect artefacts related to the history of the Bulgarians and the territories they inhabited. Enhanced collection activities over the past 45 years have yielded fruitful results, and today more than 600,000 tangible cultural assets are in store at the museum.

The museum's collection of manuscripts and old printed books goes back to the creation of the museum. Over the years, it has grown thanks to redeeming manuscripts and printed publications as well as to donations. The collection, though small, contains remarkable monuments of medieval handwritten heritage and of printed literature. For this reason a project for the preparation of a Catalogue of manuscripts, old prints, rare and valuable publications stored at the National Museum of History was called into life. Over a period of several years, a team of scholars joined the efforts. As a result, two volumes were published, in 2013, and in 2017, containing for the very first time detailed descriptions of manuscripts and printed publications in line with national and international bibliographic standards. All paratext records, presenting important historical sources (and sometimes the only source of information about historical events) have been identified and published.¹

* This article is my presentation of the work on the two-volume *Опис на ръкописите, старопечатните, редките и ценните издания в Националния Исторически Музей* ('Catalogue of the manuscripts, old printed books, rare and valuable editions at the National Museum of History'), I: *Славянски ръкописи, кирилски печатни книги и периодични издания* ('Slavic manuscripts, Cyrillic printed books and periodicals'), ed. N. Voutova and V. Velinova, II: *Чуждоезични ръкописи, документи, старопечатни книги, редки и ценни издания* ('Foreign manuscripts, documents, old printed books, rare and valuable editions'), ed. N. Voutova (Sofia: Unicart, 2013 and 2017). The contributors included Alessandro Bausi, Kiril Pavlikianov, Nadya Danova, Vassja Velinova, Emmanuel Moutafov, Nina Voutova, Svetlana Ivanova, Anka Stoilova, Lora Nenkovska, Zorka Ivanova.

1 I would like to thank on this occasion all colleagues from Bulgaria and overseas who took part in coordination meetings and authored catalogue descriptions. I am absolutely positive that the invited scientists are among the best, internationally recognized academic authorities who committed themselves to the research and spent their time not only to work directly with specific groups of books, but also to solve all sorts of issues that occurred during the preparation of the volume.

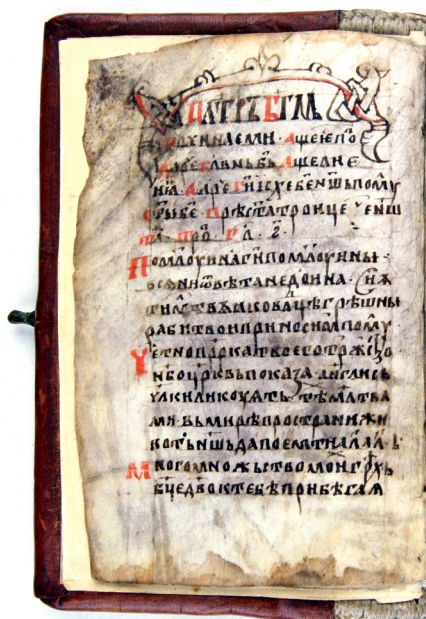


Fig. 1. MS Sofia, NMH Inv. No 14070 (NMH Slav. 1), parchment, 140 × 90 mm, second half of the thirteenth century, f. 1v.

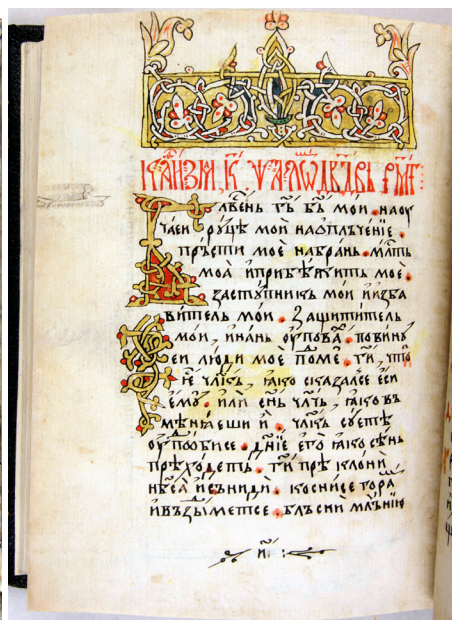


Fig. 2. MS Sofia, NMH Inv. No 4605 (NMH Slav. 2), parchment, 195 × 140 mm, 1660s, f. 111v.

The first part of the project was finalized with the volume which appeared in the end of 2013 and included descriptions of Slavonic manuscripts and Cyrillic publications from the museum's collection. The descriptions in the catalogue are arranged following the traditional classification scheme for scientific inventories: biblical books (Old and New Testament), liturgical (service/prayer) books, mixed content collections, manuscripts of secular content.

The Slavonic manuscripts in the collection cover a relatively broad chronological time range from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century and include codices and fragments, written on parchment and paper of wide geographic distribution on the territories, limited by the borders of Bulgarian lands. Most manuscripts date to the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries and reflect the literary tastes and preferences of readers and users during the Bulgarian Revival. Though small, numbering a total of 45 complete codices and fragments, the collection of Slavonic manuscripts contributes significantly to our knowledge of the late Bulgarian manuscript book, as well as the literary activity of prominent Bulgarian revivalists: St Paisius of Hilendar (or Paisiy Hilendarski), St Sophronius of Vratsa (or Sofroniy Vrachanski), Milko Kotlenski, Todor Pirdopski, Theodosius Rilski, and others.



Fig. 3. Часословец ('Book of Hours'), Jacov Kraikov printing house, 1566.

The older manuscripts include the so-called 'Boyana Psalter' from the second half of the thirteenth century, a parchment codex named after the remarkable medieval church of Sts Nikola and Pantaleimon in the Boyana residential district of Sofia, where it was found (see fig. 1), and the Menaia and the Triodic panegyric from the mid-fourteenth century, one of the most rare examples of ancient collections of such content. Another remarkable object, also from the point of view of art history, is the exquisitely decorated Psalter dated to the 1660s (see fig. 2).

In 2016, in the framework of a project of the University Library of the St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, all Slavonic manuscripts from the collection were fully digitalized and are used in a special mode in the Zograph electronic library at the Sofia University (see <<https://zograflib.slav.uni-sofia.bg>>).

As for the collection of Cyrillic prints, it counts 349 literary titles in 365 volumes. Of particular importance are the Venetian editions of Bozhidar Vukovic Psalter (1520) and the Festal Menology (1538), as well as the 1566 edition of the Horologion of Jacov Krajkov (fig. 3). The museum also holds two copies of the first printed book in the New Bulgarian language: 'Kiriakodromion' of the prominent Bulgarian Revival Bishop Saint Sophronius of Vratsa (or Sofroniy Vrachanski), published in Rimnik, Romania, in 1806.

The second part of the project was finalized in 2017 with the publication of the second volume of the Catalogue. It contained identifications and descriptions of foreign language manuscripts, printed publications and doc-



Fig. 4. MS Sofia, NMH Inv. No 16507 (NMH Ethiop. 1), readings from the Bible and prayers in Ethiopic, parchment, 222 × 155/160 mm, fourteenth/fifteenth century, ff. 2v–3r.

uments, and rare and valuable editions. It also included a Supplement to the first volume, with descriptions of Slavonic manuscripts brought to the museum since the publication of the first volume, and also of Cyrillic old books and of rare prints of the Cyrillic alphabet. The descriptions were organized by the language of the written tradition and included a section on Ethiopic (with one manuscript); Greek manuscripts (four) and printed books; Arabic manuscripts (six) and printed books; and Turkish manuscripts (one manuscript) and printed books (including a book in Turkish printed with Greek letters). The oriental section is followed by printed works in Latin, Italian, French, Romanian (with two subchapters, for books using Latin script and for those using Cyrillic alphabet), German, English, Czech, Slovenian, and Hungarian. The appendix includes descriptions of four manuscripts in Slavonic and three in Bulgarian, of Paulician dialect with Latin. On the whole, there are descriptions of 19 manuscripts, 32 documents (in Ottoman Turkish), and 156 printed books.

Due to the variety of materials, its scientific presentation required the commitment of experts in different languages, as well as competencies in the areas of handwritten and printed cultural heritage. Among others, Alessandro Bausi described the only Ethiopic manuscript in the collection, a fragment of 13 parchment folios, containing readings from the Bible and prayers and dating to the fourteenth or fifteenth century (fig. 4). Kiril Pavlikianov pro-

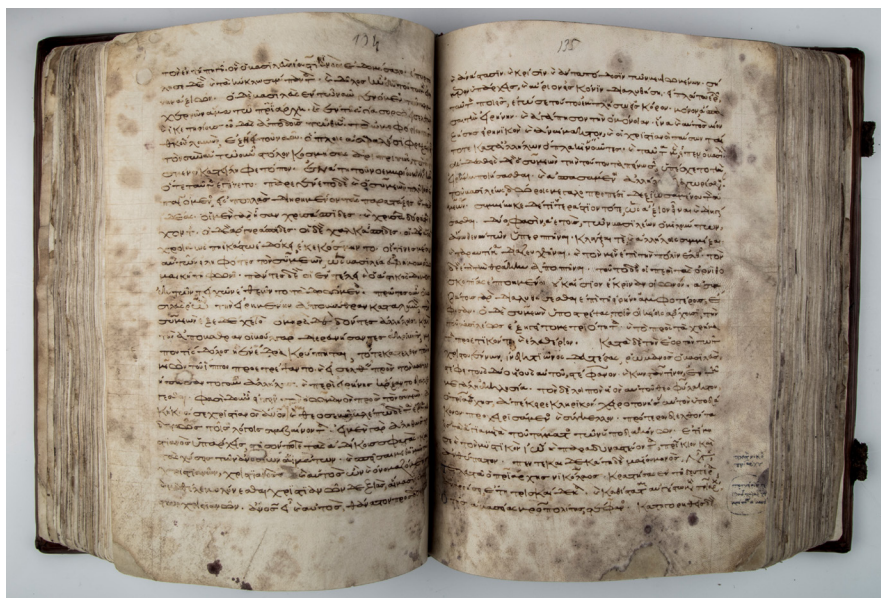


Fig. 5. MS Sofia, NMH Inv. No 29202 (NMH Gr 2), Chronicle of John Skylitzes, parchment, 275/280 × 195/200 mm, twelfth century, ff. 134v–135r.

vided a detailed description of an exceptional handwritten monument, the twelfth-century manuscript with the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (fig. 5). The historical work from the second half of the eleventh century includes important data of Bulgarian history. Ani Stoilova described another impressive artefact in the collection, the richly decorated Arabic manuscript containing the famous *Dalā'il al-Ḥayrāt* by Muḥammad al-Ġazūlī.

The two volumes are completed by a variety of indices (an alphabetical index, a subject index, a chronological index, etc.). They are richly illustrated and provide an album of watermarks of all paper manuscripts.

