

BLOC 2.7

EXÉGÈSE ET TRANSFERT CULTUREL CHEZ LES SLAVES :
CONNAISSANCE DE LA NATURE DANS LES TEXTES
MÉDIÉVAUX TRADUITS / EXEGESIS AND CULTURAL
TRANSFER AMONG THE SLAVS: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT
NATURE IN MEDIEVAL SLAVONIC TRANSLATED TEXTS

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PLANTS IN EXEGESIS: DIFFICULTIES IN MEDIEVAL SLAVONIC TRANSLATIONS OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM AND THEODORET OF CYRRHUS

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The translators of Greek Christian texts into Old Bulgarian literary language (Old Church Slavonic) needed to render both Christian terms and ancient Mediterranean cultural lexis, including designations of plants. There was not one single way of coping with this task. Different authors and translators had different approaches.¹ Generally speaking, the translations from the earlier period (9th-11th century) were more contextual, they preferred using synonyms, which could better reflect the nuances of the Greek terms. The translations in the 14th – early 15th centuries aimed at greater precision and often mirrored the Greek grammatical and lexical structure.

The goal of this paper is to discuss botanical designations in medieval South Slavonic translations dating from different periods.

Biblical plants in John Chrysostom's homilies *De statuīs* – two examples

John Chrysostom's homilies "On the Statues" were first translated in full in the 10th century in Preslav (P), and again in the 14th century on Mount Athos (A).² They are not specifically exegetical, unlike many of his other works, but they provide interesting imagery from the natural world in metaphors and biblical quotations. The Slavonic translations represent the two main

¹ On techniques of medieval Slavonic translators, see, among others, F. Thomson, "Sensus or Proprietas Verborum. Medieval Theories of Translation as Exemplified by Translations from Greek into Latin and Slavonic," in *Symposium Methodianum. Beiträge der Internationalen Tagung in Regensburg (17. bis 24. April 1985) zum Gedenken an den 1100. Todestag des hl. Method*, hrsg. K. Trost, E. Völkl, E. Wedel (Neuried, 1988), 675–691; M. MacRobert, "Translation is interpretation: Lexical variation in the translation of the Psalter from Greek into Church Slavonic up to the 15th century," *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie* 53, 1993, 254–289; А. Минчева, "За преводаческите принципи на Константин-Кирил," в: *Изследвания по кирилометодиевистика*. Съст. А. Игнатова, Кр. Станчев (София, 1985), 116–128; Л. Тасева, М. Йовчева, "Езиковите образци на атонските редактори," в: *Българска филологическа медиевистика. Сборник научни изследвания в чест на проф. дфн Иван Харалампиев по случай 60-годишния му юбилей*. Отг. ред. А. Давидов (Велико Търново), 221–240; И. Христова-Шомова, *Бог бе слово: етюди върху християнството, видно през призмата на езика* (София, 2016); Т. Илиева, *Терминологичната лексика в Йоан-Екзарховия превод на "De fide orthodoxa"* (София, 2013).

² See А. Димитрова, "Два цялостни южнославянски превода на Златоустовия сборник Андриант," в: Л. Тасева, А. Рабус, И. П. Петров (ред.), *Учителното евангелие на Константин Преславски и южнославянските преводи на хомилетични текстове (IX-XIII в.). Филологически и интердисциплинарни ракурси* (София, 2024), 365–386.

periods and styles of translation, with archaic and flexible language in **P**, and a more literal approach in **A**.

Some of the words denoting plants in the text are ῥόδον ‘rose’ – **P** шипѣкъ / **A** роужа; ἴον ‘violet’ – **P** ионѣ / **A** любичица; κρίνον ‘lily’ – **P** / **A** кринѣ; ἐλαία ‘olive’ – **P** / **A** маслина (ἔλαιον ‘olive-oil’ – **P** масло древѣно, древѣномаслие / **A** масло); σταφύλη ‘grapes’ – **P** грознь / **A** гроздь; συκὴ ‘fig tree’ – **P** смокъва / **A** смоковница; δρυμός ‘thicket’ – **P** дразга / **A** джбрава, лжгъ; νάπη ‘grove, glen’ – **P** джбрава / **A** ждоль; λειμών ‘meadow’ – **P** цвѣтильникъ, зима (*χειμών), пристанище (*λιμήν) / **A** садъ, раи; παράδεισος ‘garden’ – **P** овощьный оградъ / **A** раи, and others. In some cases, loanwords are preferred, but both translations attest to a large array of botanical terms and synonyms.

Two biblical quotations give the opportunity for a deeper look into the translations and their understanding of less familiar notions.³

The first one is from Isaiah 1:30: ἔσονται γὰρ ὡς τερέβινθος ἀποβεβληκυῖα τὰ φύλλα καὶ ὡς παράδεισος ὕδωρ μὴ ἔχων “they will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water”. Both translations **P** and **A** render the name of the tree (terebinth, *pistacia terebinthus*) as теревинѣ. It is mentioned several times in different books of the Old Testament and is understood as a large deciduous tree, sometimes translated as ‘oak’. In some of the earliest translations of this verse, the word is rendered as церъ (*quercus cerris*, a type species of oak), which is also the corresponding term in the Preslav translation of the commentary. The word теревинѣ, however, is the preferred word in the prophetologion.

The second quotation is from Hosea 9:10: ὡς σκοπὸν ἐν τῇ συκῇ πρώϊμον εἶδον πατέρας αὐτῶν “(I saw their fathers) like the early fruit on the fig tree” (cf. also Nahum 3:12) – **P** стражець на смокви, **A** смоквоу на смоковници. Here, the word σκοπός ‘guardian’ means ‘the first fruit on the fig tree’ and has posed some problems to the understanding of the passage. It was sometimes replaced with καρπός ‘fruit’, and the 14th-century translator of **A** was apparently familiar with this meaning.

³ On the distribution of the terms and their meanings, see, e.g., T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain, Paris, Walpole, 2009) H. Moldenke, A. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (London, New York, Bahrain, 2002).

Plants in three translations of the Song of Songs and in commentaries

At the end of the 14th century or at the beginning of the 15th century Konstantin Kostenechki or a monk (Gavriil?) on Mount Athos translated a catena containing commentaries by Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Three Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Nilos of Ancyra, and Maxim the Confessor), and Michael Psellus (catena B2). Solomon's Song abound in lexemes denoting plants and Theodoret of Cyrrhus used his botanical knowledge in his exegesis. In contrast to the two earlier translations of the Song of Songs (the earliest translation without commentaries from the late 9th century and a translation of a catena from the 10th century),⁴ the late translator of the catena exploited more Greek loanwords to denote plants. In this manner he satisfied the different theological interpretations included in the catena, especially in cases of polysemic botanical lexis. For instance, in the earliest translation of the Song, елие corresponds to ἐλάται (Ct 5:11), rendering its meaning 'silver fir, *abies cephalonica*', as it was understood by Gregory of Nyssa. In contrast, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, following Origen, concentrated his interpretation on the meaning 'the spathe of the date inflorescence', '*involucrum* of a phoenician palm', 'palm fronds', 'spores of a palm'. Therefore, the late translator chose a loanword (елата) to satisfy both commentaries in the catena (by Theodoret and by the Three Fathers). In the same manner he used a loanword for another polysemic botanical term ὄλυνθος. In Ct 2:13 it means the first green, small, young, unripe fig fruit. The earliest translator of the Song rendered it with пѣпъкы 'buds' and the translator of the earlier catena chose цвѣтъ 'blossom'. Theodoret compared people who had not been baptized with ὄλυνθοι that often fall from the tree and do not develop into ripe fruit. The late translator preferred the loanword олины to render this specific orchardists' term, but he, in order to make the interpretation clear for those who did not know Greek, explained it with прѣдъплодіа, прѣдъплодные смоквице, прѣжде плодъ смоковнице. Also, in the translation of the commentary of Ct 1:7[6], he used дилитиріа from δηλητήρια as a word with specific medical connotations (τὸ φάρμακον ἐπὶ ζωῆς is opposed to τὸ δηλητήριον ἐπὶ θανάσιμου by the grammarian Ptolemaeus), but he explained дилитиріа with пажити раждаючи метиль [pasture that produces fluke parasite]. Similarly, he translated ἦνθησεν ὁ κυπρισμός (Ct 7:13[12]) with a beautiful figura etymologica процвѣте цвѣтникъ but in the commentary he used the loanword

⁴ The examples in this paper from these two early translations are taken from the editions of A. A. Алексеев, A.A. *Песнь песней в древней славяно-русской письменности* (Санкт-Петербург, 2002) and from the late catena from М. Димитрова, *Тълкувания на Песен на Песните в ръкопис 2/24 от Рилската света обител* (София, 2012).

κνπρίσμοσ because Theodoret explained this rare lexeme and emphasized ὅπερ ἐνταῦθα κνπρίσμον προσηγόρευσεν. Again, the translator added a synonym: κνπρίσμοс рѣкше цвѣтникъ. Further, he used another rare loanword, κνпри (κύπρος, ἥ) in Ct 4:12 because it is also polysemic: henna (*Lawsonia inermis*) or camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*), while the earliest translator of the Song rendered it with цвѣтъ ‘bloom, blossom’. Similar difference appears in Ct 1:14, το βότρυς τῆς κύπρου corresponds виняга κνπρѣскаа/ κνпра in the late translation versus цвѣтъ in the earliest translation of the Songs and зрѣлъ in the earlier catena translation. When the late translator had to render Theodoret’s etymological explanation of this plant’s name with the rare verb κνπρίζω, he made a contextual translation with оупыщрати ‘to turn color’, because Theodoret compared the vineyards, flowering and developing fruit, with spiritual statures: τοῖς μὲν ἀνθεῖν > ωвѣх оубо цѣвти, τοῖς δὲ ὀμφакίζεῖν > ωвѣх же въ оскoминных, τοῖς δὲ ὑποπερκάζειν > ωвѣх же оупыщравати, τοῖς δὲ πέπειρον εἶναι > ωвѣх же чрѣвленѣх бѣти.

In conclusion, the late translator of the Song of Songs used more loanwords than the earlier ones because he was confronted with different theological interpretations in the catena and because he aspired to render correctly the Greek botanical terminology making the style higher. Still, in order to make the exegesis understandable, he explained the loanwords with synonyms.

The examples demonstrate not only the difficulties faced by the medieval Slavonic translators in rendering botanical terminology, but also their skill and varied approaches toward preserving the initial meaning and bringing it closer to their audience.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND: ALEXANDER AND THE FANTASTIC CREATURES OF THE EAST

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Book III of the *Alexander Romance*, a work widely translated into Slavonic at least from the 14th century onwards in various regions of *Slavia Orthodoxa* and from at least three different Greek versions, is the one devoted to the adventures of Alexander of Macedon during his expedition to India and beyond. In this Book, less focused on historical events, is when Alexander meets all forms of fantastic creatures: dog-headed people, apple-eaters, griffons and headless men. The effort made by the translators and the illuminators of the Slavonic versions of the *Alexander Romance* in order to render both the terminology and how they imagined these creatures to be are the focus of the present paper.

The *Alexander Romance* was translated in Slavonic from at least three different Greek versions (β , γ and ϵ). From all the Slavonic versions made in *Slavia Orthodoxa* up to the 17th century, the most profusely illustrated is undoubtedly the version included in the *Litsevoi Letopisnii Svod* (Illuminated Chronicle of Ivan the Terrible), itself a highly interpolated version descending from at least two Greek originals of the *Alexander Romance*, versions β and γ . From all the South Slavic versions made from the 15th century onwards, all descending from a Greek ϵ version, some are partially illuminated, others not at all. My paper explores both the translations made from each Greek version into each Slavonic version, as well as some of the visual depictions of the extraordinary and fantastic beings that were described. It also looks for possible parallels with the only other widely known work that was devoted to animals and exotic creatures, the *Physiologus*, where the translators and the illuminators could find some inspiration.

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INTERPRETING LIVING WORLD IN LATE MEDIEVAL APOLOGETIC TEXTS: NATURE AND BODY IN THE SLAVONIC TRANSLATION OF JOHN VI KANTAKOUZENOS' POLEMIC TEXTS AGAINST ISLAM

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Christian writers often used the representation of the living world as a part of their interpretative *instrumentarium*. References to nature, animals and human body became mandatory elements of theological discourses, apologetic, homiletic and encomiastic literature. Patristic authors produced a large pool of exegetic samples, which obtained almost canonical status and were used and reused throughout the Middle Ages.

The polemical works of John VI Kantakouzenos (d.1383) present a typical case in this respect. As an emperor he sailed through troublesome times of Byzantium, but in 1354 he abdicated from the throne, took a monastic vow, and produced historical and polemic books, among which four treatises debating the Islam in defence of Christianity (*Apologiae*) and four discourses on the Prophet Muhammad.¹ Written in the conventions of the apologetic genre, they present a compendium of Byzantine theological and dogmatic views, in which exegesis plays an essential role as a technique of persuasion and refutation, while at the same communicates Christian understanding of nature and body (be it human or animal). The author uses the entire range of exegetic techniques from an explanation and symbolic interpretation to glossing and expansion of the biblical narrative. In *Apologiae* Kantakouzenos paints a picture of God's created world in which all the elements are linked together as "a string of pearls." For him, the reproduction in nature ("the fig tree produces figs, the olive - olives") provides a proof for the unitary essence (sameness) of God the Father and Christ. Further, the paradoxical presentations of the animals as the bearers of the truth and wisdom in contrast to the humans is didactically employed by Kantakouzenos in his deliberations on ethics and knowledge. Plethora of symbolic and allegorical characterisations of animals are applied in the discourses, including legends on the creation of boar, mouse, fox. Kantakouzenos comments on the "spiritual circumcision" practiced by Christians *vs* the bodily one, and claims that only the woman in Old Testament times was impure, as the baptism obliterates the original sin. The interpretations Kantakouzenos offers, are not original, yet he often expands them or creates exegetic chains (For instance, he repeated the traditional understanding of the Burning bush from Exodus 3:2-5, adding that Moses was commanded to put off his shoes, because they were made of dead

¹ Greek text had been published and commented on many times since the 16th century (cf. the short bibliography). K.-P. Todt (1991) list ca 50 Greek copies of the texts.

animal skin and had no place in the presence of living God). Kantakouzenos drew on the established set of questions used by earlier Byzantine polemicists debating the Islam, but while still an emperor he also commissioned to Demetrios Kydones (d.1398) a translation from Latin into Greek of Refutation of the Koran (*Confutatio alcorani*) written about 1300 by the Dominican monk Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (d.1320). Kantakouzenos owes many of the discussions on the Koran, the history of the Islam and the life of Muhammad to Riccoldo's work.

By the end of fourteenth-century Kantakouzenos' polemics have already been translated in the Balkan Slavic milieu. The translation was probably produced in one of the monasteries of Mount Athos (Prokhorov 1997:39). The genre of theological disputation has not been particularly popular among the Orthodox Slavs, and thus the choice to translate these texts already signals a shift in the taste and the cultural competence of the audience. The fact that Kantakouzenos' texts were translated relatively soon after they have been written also points at changes in the reception practices, as in the previous centuries the Slavonic translators privileged Byzantine texts written some centuries earlier over the works of their contemporaries.

C. J. G. Turner remarked that "the translation is so literal that it becomes virtually incomprehensible" (Turner 1973). In fact, it follows so called new Athonite-Turnovo principles of a word for a word rendition of the Greek text, but the texts are not obsolete – there are at least four copies containing all the eight works (Cod.Slav34 ONB, Vienna the 14/15C; MS 25 Museum Șchei, Brașov, mid 15C; MS I/152, Synodal Lib. Bucharest, the 16C; MS Gaster 2082, 1591, John Rylands Lib. Manchester). In the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries in the Balkans these translations were undoubtedly used and appreciated as the educated religious elites were aware of the principle on which the translation was based and were expecting nothing less. These texts continued to be in use in the Balkans after 1500, and even if the bookmen did not entirely comprehend them, they did not find them indecipherable either. Moreover, in the Ottoman dominated Balkans the texts equipped the Christian reader with a critical perspective to the Islam, and were one of the first instances to offer him an insight into the narratives on the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Further, they undoubtedly were the first and the only place in which the name of Riccoldo appeared in Slavonic in the late medieval period.

The Slavonic translator and the later copyists rarely omit passages or phrases of the original with three exceptions: (a) the number of synonyms used for rhetorical purposes in the Greek version are reduced in the translation to just one word, even when the Slavonic linguistic

resources allow the rendition of more or all of them; (b) shortening of the long biblical quotations; (c) omission of some of the complex theological exegeses. The latter is particularly interesting and discloses the preferences and the level of theological knowledge of the translator and the audience. However, almost all the references to and interpretations of nature, animals, of human body, behaviour and emotions are preserved in the Slavonic version. The marginal glosses in some of the manuscripts suggest that these passages were employed in one form or another (in preaching, as a knowledge acquisition or in deliberations). In most of the cases the exegetic components in the original text were correctly rendered by the Slavic translator. Some of the exegeses of the biblical texts employed by Kantakouzenos were not unknown to the Slavic bookmen, as they were attested in other works in Slavonic, both translated and original (e.g. the prefigurations of the Virgin Mary). In some of these cases the lexical rendition betrays the knowledge of the earlier instances, especially with the view of the biblical quotes explained in the passage. My paper explores number of such examples by comparing the Slavonic renditions of particular phrases, suggesting also the possible implications for their meaning and interpretation.

The comparison shows, that in the Balkan Slavic context, the picture of the living world painted by Kantakouzenos' texts, though traditional and unoriginal, offers hitherto unknown narratives about the animals in Slavonic, as well as a richer selection of exegeses on the Holy Scripture, and adds to the Christian imagining of the human world. The Slavonic translation of these works is a unique document of complex cross-cultural exchanges, combining Christian exegesis, Byzantine polemic discourse, Western Catholic account of the Koran (no matter how partial) shaped through Slavonic linguistic resources.

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«BOOK OF NATURE» IN CROATIAN GLAGOLITIC SERMONES DE SANCTIS

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Sermons represent a valuable source for understanding the transmission of natural knowledge in Glagolitic environment. Except for the translation of *Lucidarius*, passages from collections containing knowledge about nature are mainly found in treatises and sermon collections. Even the passages from the *Physiologus* and bestiaries are in Croatian Glagolitic literature preserved in a very fragmentary form.¹ Medieval sermons are one of the genres in which we find the multiplication of natural symbols for the purpose of shaping hagiographic passages, moral interpretation or simply an extended argument for a particular doctrine. In manuals on the art of preaching (*artes praedicandi*) turning to the Book of Nature was stated as one of the principle for teaching moral lessons.² The world of the kingdom of God, into which the saints entered precisely thanks to their exemplary lives, virtues and miracles, was not spared comparison with the natural world, which served as the starting point for moral and allegorical exegesis.

In the Glagolitic *sermones de sanctis* there are passages written with a peculiar combination of Christian symbolism, (pseudo-)etymological interpretations and unexpected analogies between the natural and sacred. They were translated from the medieval collection *Sermones de tempore et de Sanctis, sive Hortulus reginae* compiled by the German author Magister Petrus Meffordis (Meffrethe) from Leipzig in the 15th century.³ Despite the popularity of his sermons collection in Switzerland and southern Germany, very little is known about the author today. The translation is kept in the four Glagolitic manuscripts from the 16th century (*Disipul A*, 16th century; *Disipul B*, 1558; *Disipul C* 1541; *Disipul D* 1600) which mostly contain a Croatian selected translation of the Latin sermon collection *Sermones Discipuli* written by German Dominican Johannes Herolt.⁴ References about the Book of Nature were borrowed from various sources, sometimes even outside the common corpus of knowledge (Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*, Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, *Physiologus*, Ambrose's *Hexameron*, Isidore's of Seville *Etymologiae*, Bartholomew's of England *De proprietatibus rerum*, Vincent's of Beauvais *Speculum naturale*, Thomas of Cantimpré *Liber de natura rerum*, Albert the Great *De animalibus*), but not all of them are always explicitly mentioned.

¹ Zaradija Kiš 2008; Kapetanović 2004.

² Wenzel 2013.

³ Cruel 1966.

⁴ Radošević 2022.

Passages from the Book of Nature, appear most frequently in the introductions, but we also find them in other parts of the sermons. In Meffreth's sermons, the Book of Nature is not just mere medieval *sensus moralis*,⁵ but also a mirror, an incentive to find role models in so-called lower nature. The animal world is interpreted as a symbol of morality and metaphysical truths, in such a way that their physical characteristics, behaviors and the role they play in everyday human life are regularly moralized. Here the natural world appears in a threefold role: as *memorandi*, *imitandi* and *admirandi*. Episodes from the lives of the saints and their virtues are interpreted using examples of selected characteristics of a chosen animal species. In the nature, analogies were sought to recognizable character traits of saints, not necessarily and always to their virtues, but also to striking details from their hagiography.

These sermons represent a combination of the two most common ways of composing a hagiographical text: one in which the focus is on the narration of events from the lives of the saints, and the other in which their virtues are interpreted. According to the complexity of symbolic relationship, one animal symbolizes very different meanings, but several animal species also appear as symbols for individual Christian virtues.

Although this sermon mainly follows the principle of *imitatio Christi* by presenting the virtues of the saints, the emphasis in Meffreth's passages is on the recognizability of the saints in the sense of highlighting their characteristic qualities. The connection between the Book of the Nature and the Book of the Saints, is often found in the interpretative etymology of the saint names or the meaning of a particular nature phenomena, sometimes according to Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*.⁶ These (pseudo-)etymologies in particular had a mnemonic function, associating saints with certain qualities and virtues that we also find in certain animal species: courage and boldness are common traits of the lion and St. Stephen, and vigilance and fidelity are virtues that adorn St Gregory the Great and the dog and the crane: *Zato prilike se b(la)ž(e)ni Grg(u)r k' čuvaru od' žerêvi. Ar(i)š(totil) v' kn(i)g(a)h ·dž· (= 8) Animalum' gov(o)ri od životinij' da kada bdi na straži stoi na ednoi nogi a v drugoi drži kamičac' ako zaspe tako mu spade kamičac na nogu i zbudi se i kriči i ostali se probude i od pogibeli se očuvaû. T(a)ko b(la)ž(e)ni Grg(u)r pomnivo o č'redi g(ospo)dni bdel ere e stal samo na ednoi nogi kada e za s(ve)tu crikav skrbno providil, a drugu e gori držal kada ni maril za slavu sega s(ve)ta ere niedno želenie ni imel za imeti hv(a)lu od č(lovê)k (Disipul C, 25r).* In the vigilance of the crane, Ambrose recognized the qualities of a calm and modest leader as well as certain virtues such as a talent for natural and military organization. With the passage about the crane, he opened the

⁵ Weisl 2018.

⁶ Rydel 2016; Baarda 1992.

chapter in the *Hexameron* devoted to birds. According to Rydel, the etymologies is one of the feature that contributed to the understanding the saints lives, and finally to the popularity of *Legenda aurea*.⁷

Although the etymological interpretations of the names are usually not given in Glagolitic sermons, they sometimes represented a bridge leading to certain animal. St Stephen, whose name, according to Jacobus de Voragine, refers to one who speaks courageously is compared to a lion who, standing in the open field, skillfully resists the enemy's attacks.

Even in very short passages Meffreth relied on several different interpretations and descriptions of phenomena of the natural world. Although he refers to at least one source, he often omits the name of the reference on which most of the descriptions are based. These sources often refer to Bartholomew of England and Vincent of Beauvais. The Voragine's etymological interpretations served Meffreth only as a starting point for the compilation of the descriptions. Sometimes it is precisely those details about individual animals that come to the fore that were not previously associated with the Church's teachings. Due to some omissions of the etymological interpretation in the Croatian translation, the entry of a particular interpretation is sometimes unclear, such as the analogy to the singularity between St. Thomas and the phoenix.

In addition to etymological and pseudoetymological interpretations of the names of saints and animals, there are also attempts to find a species in the natural world whose characteristics reflect several details from the lives of saints. Of course, the primary aim of such analogies, as the example of the comparison of the St James holy apostle with a swallow, was to contribute to a more complete recollection of important events from his life. The connection between the hagiographical and the natural is not limited to identifying similar characteristics, but goes further to establish the existence of parallel struggles with the same enemy. Although the legend of St George himself describes the fight against the dragon, Meffreth attempts here to find a similar fight in the animal world, the one between the basilisk and weasel.

The analogy between the profane and the sacred is not based on just one or two isolated characteristics of animals, but on the comparison of many characteristics that come from different sources, from their basic properties to their use in daily life. This is the hagiography of St Peter, which is compared with many details about the dove, a bird that received numerous allegorical interpretations in religious works. In addition to ornithological data, moral or allegorical interpretations, the passage about the dove also contains details about its medical

⁷ Rydel 2016.

and social uses from the agronomic work *Liber Ruralium Commodorum* by Pietro de' Crescenzi and Constantine the African medical text *Viaticum*.

In these *sermons de sanctis* the animals, as the most numerous examples from the Book of Nature, not appear as an integral part of hagiographic passages or as protagonists of stories from the lives of saints. It is neither the theocentric nor the anthropocentric attitude towards animals that characterized the lives of the saints in early Christianity. Meffreth's main principle was to surprise the recipient with this atypical associative approach to the different sources of knowledge about nature. Therefore, the translation of the passages of his sermons for the recipients of the Glagolitic manuscripts (*Disipul*) also served as a source for various details from the natural world.

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