Greek and Russian Iconographer's Manuals: Content and Structure

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Iconographic manuals, or painter's manuals, contain drawings or textual descriptions of the iconographic motifs, images and compositions and also technical instructions for the icon painter. They are generally divided into two basic types: the pattern-book (*licevoj podlinnik* in Russian) and the text manual (*tolkovyj podlinnik* in Russian). Pattern-books contain the drawings of the motifs and images with a short commentary in the margins (Fig. 1). Text manuals include a more or less detailed textual description of the motifs (Fig. 2).

Text manuals give the common idea of the icon image, but they do not provide information on icon schools or icon styles. Especially Russian text manuals comprise rich information about saints, not only their images but even biographical details, and therefore constitute a less known part of the hagiographic literature. Such information can be obtained also from other sources, but in text manuals it is systematically organized and possible to treat statistically.

Byzantine manuals comprise entirely technical instructions such as *De Coloribus at Artibus Romanorum* of Eraclius and *De Diversis Artibus* of Theophilus which are preserved from the 11th–13th centuries. This tradition was continued in *Libro Dell'Arte* of Cennino Cennini and later in Western Europe where a considerable number of technical manuals appeared in different handicrafts.[1]

The Greek and the Russian manuals for the icon painters are preserved mostly from the 17th–18th centuries. They include not only technical instructions but also iconographic material. These manuals are developed from earlier Greek texts: in his *Hermeneia*[2] Dionysios refers earlier sources, and in other Greek manuals preserved from the 18th–19th centuries fragments are present which also indicates an earlier tradition.[3] Thus, earlier Byzantine manuals, which are not identified, may have included iconographic material as well as technical instructions.

The Byzantine *menologia* and the Greek pattern-books are pointed out in the literature on icon painting as the source of the Russian manuals, both text manuals and pattern-books.[4]

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[1] R. W. SCHELLER, *A Survey of Medieval Model Books,* Haarlem 1963.

[2] *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne, greque et latine* avec une introduction et les notes par. M. DIDRON, traduit du manuscript byzantin "Le guide de la peinture", Paris; P. Durand 1845. *Hermeneia* of Dionysios of Fourna, the well-known Greek manual including both technical instructions and iconographic material, is written about 1730.

[3] *The "Painter's manual" of Dionysius of Fourna.* An English translation, with Commentary by P. HETHERINGTON, of cod. gr. 708 in the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library, Leningrad, London 1974, p. I-V.

[4] F. I. BUSLAJEV, *Общие понятия о русской иконописи,* in: Сборник общества древнерусского искусства, St. Peterburg, 1866; D. A. GRIGOROV, *Русский иконописный подлинник,* in: Зап. Русского археологического общества, т. III, Moskva 1887; N. V. POKROVSKIJ, *Очерки памятников христианского искусства и иконографии,* St. Peterburg 1910³; D. A. ROVINSKIJ, *Обозрение иконописания в России до конца XVII века,* St.

Figure 1. *Stroganovskij podlinnik* from the end of the 17th century: page for January

Figure 2. Tichvin text manual, 1831: page for July 14

Old Russian chronicles contain evidences about Greek painters and their books and rolls used by their pupils in Kiev Russia and later.[5] The Byzantine icons and miniatures were also used as patterns by Russian icon painters. Russian manuscripts provide much evidence for the existence and use of the rolls and separate pattern sheets, called *prorisi*, copied from the finest icons. *Prorisi* were still in use at the end of the 19th century. It is supposed that by the end of the 16th century these separate patterns were gathered into a codex, that is a pattern-book.

The evolution of text manuals is more complicated that is the case with pattern-books. Russian pattern-books were copied from Greek drawings or paintings.[6] Text manuals, however, are the result of compilation from many different sources: *menologia, synaxaria,* hagiographic literature, liturgic books, and actual paintings. The Russian text manual developed into a specific type of manual, which differs from the known Byzantine and Greek manuals both in content and structure.

Besides the pattern-books and text manuals there obviously existed some older transitional forms. A Greek-Georgian illuminated *menologion*[7] written in 1495-1500 at Mount Athos was a subject for several paleographic articles between 1912 and 1983.[8] Is is written partly in Greek and partly in Georgian and contains detailed and coloured miniatures of more than 900 iconographic images and compositions. This kind of manual was difficult and expensive to produce so it never became common. Later pattern-books included only drawings, as is the case with, e.g., the well-known *Stroganovskij podlinnik*.[9]

It was suggested at the end of the 19th century that a text manual was a later textversion of a pattern-book, developing short marginal comments into longer texts.[10] The Greek-Georgian manuscript is an unusual type of *menologion* containing both illuminations and texts. It shows that the relation between both forms – pattern-books and text manuals – was more complex and that their development involved different models.

Peterburg 1903; I. P. SACHAROV, *Изслѣдованія о русскомъ иконописаніи* 1-2, St. Peterburg 1849-1850.

[5] I. P. SACHAROV, *Изслѣдованія о русскомъ иконописаніи* 2, St. Peterburg 1849, pp. 3-12.

[6] D. A. GRIGOROV, *Русскій иконописный подлинник*, in: Зап. Русского археологического общества, т. III, Moskva 1887, pp. 3-4, 74; I. P. SACHAROV, *Изслѣдованія о русскомъ иконописаніи* 2, St. Peterburg, 1849, pp. 3-12.

[7] The Greek-Georgian illuminated *menologion* 01-58 at the Saltykov-Ščedrin State Public Library, Sankt-Peterburg.

[8] D. I. ABRAMOVIČ, *Сведения о приобретениях отделения рукописей в 1913 г.,* in: Сборник Российской Публичной Библиотеки, I:1, Petrograd 1910; N. L. OKUNEV, *О греко-грузинской рукописи с миниатюрами,* in: Христианский Восток, St. Peterburg, 1912, pp. 43-44; L. ŠEVARSIDZE, *Миниатюры рукописи Кутаиси 115 и Ленинград 01-58,* in: Сообщения АН СССР, 14(1), сер. 56, Tbilisi 1953; V. D. LICHAČEVA, *Художественное оформление менология грузинским художником конца XIV столетия,* in: II Международный симпозиум по грузинскому искусству, Tbilisi 1977; L. M. JEVSEJEVA, *Греко-грузинская рукопись из собрания Гос. Публиной Библиотеки им. М. Е. Салтыкова-Щедрина,* in: *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo. Rukopisnaja kniga,* Moskva 1983, pp. 342-367.

[9] *Строгановский иконописный лицевой подлинник,* Moskva: Духовная Академия 1869.

[10] D. A. GRIGOROV, *Русский иконописный подлинник,* in: Зап. Русского археологического общества, т. III, Moskva 1887, pp. 3-6; I. P. SACHAROV, *Изслѣдованія о русскомъ иконописаніи* 2, St. Peterburg 1849, pp. 3-12; *Ерминія или наставленіе в живописномъ искусствѣ, составленное іеромонахомъ и живописцемъ Діонисіемъ Фурноаграфіотомъ,* Труды Кіевской Духовной Академіи 2 (1868) pp. 270-272.

This Greek-Georgian illuminated *menologion* is in fact one of the oldest known manuscripts that can be referred to as an iconographic manual. The illuminations in the manuscript are arranged thematically into several cycles. The texts are of various content and not systematically organized. The illuminations are the most important part of the codex while the text is a complementary part. Many compositions have two or three iconographic variants in different cycles. A remarkably great number of personal images also shows that the manuscript was obviously created and used as a kind of pattern-book. Thus, iconographic manuals were in use as early as at the end of the 15th century.

This conclusion is confirmed by several features in the Tichvin text manual from Northern Russia.[11] This manuscript was written at 1831 but the protograph must have been much older, from the end of the 15th century.[12] The language includes some archaic forms and lexemes. Furthermore, the Holy Princes Vladimir, Boris and Gleb are not mentioned, although their celebration was practically compulsory for the whole Russian Church after the councils 1547–1551. The protograph was supposedly written before their proclamation.

Another argument for the older protograph of the Tichvin manual is the anachronism in the use of the calendar. Three months in the calendar – April, June and July – are called second, fourth, and fifth respectively, with the order counted from Mars. The other months have the Old Church Slavonic names instead of numbers. However, the introduction text shows clearly that the scribe considered September the first month of the year. Then the protograph used the calendar starting from Mars. The calendar starting at September was used by the Russian Church from the 10th century, while the secular calendar was beginning at Mars. From the 16th century both Church and secular calendars in Russia start at September. Thus, the manuscript using Mars calendar must have been written before the beginning of the 16th century.

The structure

The comparison of the contents in manuals of various origins shows differences in sequence and volume among parts (Fig. 3). Byzantine manuals preserved comprise only the technical part. The Greek manuals usually have three main parts. (1) The first one contains technical instructions on the whole working process from preparation of the brushes to varnishing of a ready icon. (2) The second part is an iconographic one. It contains descriptions of the images and compositions, which are divided thematically into smaller chapters on the parables, the saints, the martyrs, etc. Descriptions of figures follow the same scheme including the limited number of features as age of a person, shape and colour of hair and beard, gestures, attributes, and type of clothing. Descriptions of the saints are organized thematically, not chronologically. However, the calendar is present in the end of the second part of the book. (3) The third part of the Greek manual contains special technical instruction on the disposition of the paintings in the church and sometimes chapters on, e.g., fresco painting and inscription texts.

[11] Manuscript No. 75-116, Royal Library, Stockholm, described as a text manual, see note 12.
[12] Nelly LINDGREN, *En nordrysk ikonmålarhandbok i Sverige*, Konsthistorisk Tidskrift 64 (1995) 241-250; eadem, *Палеографический анализ севернорусского иконописного подлинника*, Canadian-American Slavic Studies, in press.
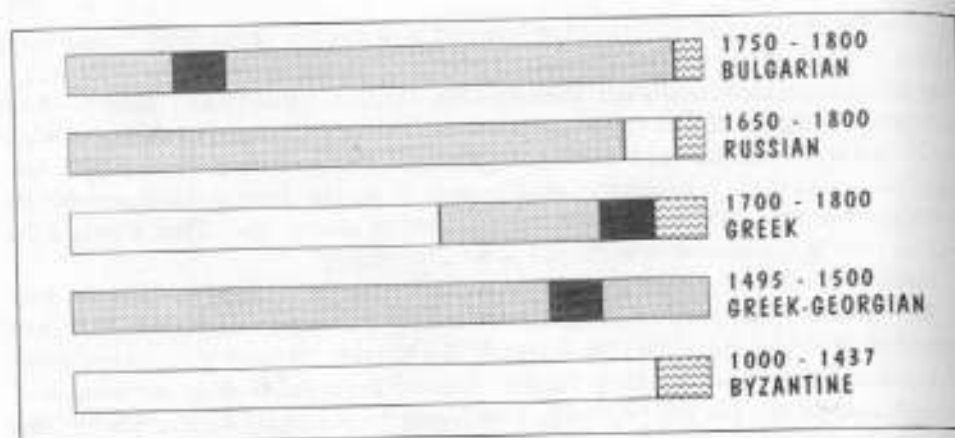
Firure 3. Text manuals of various age and origin: proportions of different parts of the text

The technical part is not present in the above-mentioned Greek-Georgian manuscript (Fig. 3). The iconographic part is arranged thematically into six cycles: (1) The Gospel events; (2) The Great feasts; (3) Images of saints; (4) Selected events; (5) The illuminated *menologion*; and (6) The miracles and the parables of Christ.

Bulgarian text manuals preserved from the 17th–18th centuries have the same structure as the second, iconographic, part of the Greek manuals, with the same thematic subdivisions and largely the same content.[13] The technical part is not present, but the third part on fresco painting and inscriptions is included in the middle of the iconographic part, between the parables and the Great feasts (Fig. 3).

In the Russian text manuals the calendar part is developed into the main part concerning the volume and the content. The technical part is much shorter than in Greek manuals and obviously less important. It is placed at the end of the manuscript or sometimes even missing. Russian manuals have various technical instructions organized in different ways, which shows that there was no specific prototype for them. These instructions were obviously chosen from different sources, sometimes oral, depending on the icon painter's interests, contacts, and experiences. There is no evidence that entirely technical manuals were spread among the Russian icon painters. The few preserved Russian technical manuals are small booklets with different sets of instructions and not comparable with Greek manuals.

Especially in non-Greek manuals – Bulgarian, Georgian, and Russian – the iconographic part is the most important. The icon painters had to learn and remember a great number of texts, non-Slavic names, biographies, dates, rituals and other data coming from centuries of Byzantine history. In this situation the manuals were indispensable and had to contain as much information as possible.

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[13] The organisation of chapters differs on some points, but the greater part of material shows considerable resemblance. Greek manuals have several chapters not present in Bulgarian manuals. The detailed comparison of the content is a subject for further studies.
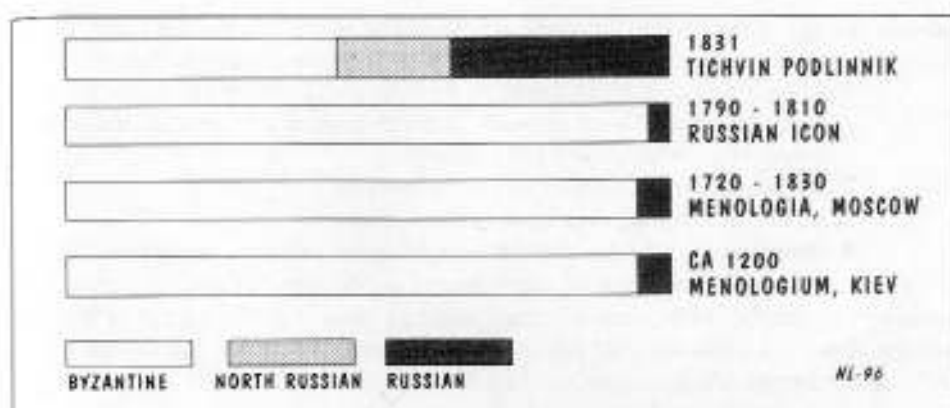
Firure 4. Russian calendars of various age: proportions of Byzantine, Russian
and North Russian Saints

The calendar

The calendar of the Russian manuals comprised predominantly Byzantine saints (Fig. 4).
Only fourteen Russian saints were proclaimed between the 10th and 15th centuries. My
comparison of the content of several calendars in the manuals and *menologia* of different
ages[14] shows that the main part consisting of Byzantine and all-Slavic saints changed very
little between the 12th and 18th centuries. The oldest known Russian versions of calendars
from the 12-13th centuries have content identical with the Greek *menologia* of the same age.
The share of the Byzantine saints in the oldest Russian calendar from the 13th century is
about 95%, while the number of Russian saints is insignificant. These proportions are about
the same until the beginning of the 19th century. In the canonical version of the 18th centu-
ry calendar of metropolitan Makarios 97% of saints are Byzantine and only 3% Russian.

Actually more Russian saints were proclaimed after the councils 1547–1554 but it did
not influence the official church calendar immediately. Many new saints were celebrated
only locally. The local Russian church usually celebrated at first the most important
Byzantine and all-Slavic saints, secondly, the little group of all-Russian saints proclaimed
before the 15th century and already compulsory for the whole Russian church, and finally,
the local saints, many of them not being proclaimed at all. This special situation in the
peripheral local churches is illustrated by the North Russian manuscript of the text manual
from Tichvin written in the beginning of the 18th century. It contains only 45% of the
Byzantine and 55% of the Russian saints. More than a third part of these Russian saints are
local North Russian.

The calendar part in the Russian manuals is also quite different from the Greek manu-
als concerning length and content of descriptions. The calendar in the oldest Russian man-
uals exactly follows the *Synaxarion* and usually it is completed with an index in the begin-
ning or in the end of the manuscript. Descriptions include the same features as in Greek

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[14]   See Material.

manuals: the age of the person, the shape and the colour of the hair and the beard, the kind of clothing, the gestures and the attributes. In Russian manuals are also included:

1. Compulsory and detailed data on the colour of clothing and important details of the motif (in Greek manuals such information is poor and limited to the colour terms white, black and golden)
2. Biographical data, sometimes even a short *vita*
3. Details of clothing, even minor ones
4. Descriptions of landscape, buildings, secondary figures, and objects.

These deviations in calendar structure depend on the fact that descriptions in Greek manuals were mostly codifications of actual paintings while in the vast areas of Russia the shortage of the old icons and wall paintings made it necessary to use the written sources. The great number of details compensated for the lack of standards.

The function

In the 17th century many local Russian saints were excluded from the official calendar, but locally they were celebrated and painted anyhow. Icon painters moving through the country from one patron to another needed the patterns of many local images, so they were forced to find out the material about lesser known saints in *synaxaria* and other sources, such as liturgic and reading books of different types. The volume and content of the text manuals from the 18th–19th centuries are very close to these popular compiled manuscripts containing stories about saints from different sources. Text manuals assumed the structure of a *Synaxarion* and a large amount of hagiographic data coming closer to *menologia*.

These text manuals were rather overloaded and supposedly ineffective as painter's manuals so the question is what their real function was. The text manual was used as a reading book, a church calendar, and a local book for celebration of memorial services as is obvious from the marginal notes in the Tichvin manuscript. It was a kind of encyclopaedia for the monks and priests of the local Russian churches, which had to hold services and to paint icons as well.

Manuals were compiled by the icon painters themselves. During the long history of the icon painting in Russia there is no evidence that the iconographic manuals were ever the subject for edicts or censorship. The political centralisation of Russia around Moscow in the 15th century brought also a centralisation of social and religious life. A long line of documents on many aspects of the state and the church activities appeared. Special official canonical versions of liturgic texts were made. Service books were corrected at the same time. Several edicts dealing with icon painting emerged under the councils 1547–1554. They were dealing with the education and the status of icon painters, the rules on the sale of icons, and the improvement of the standard of icon painting. The painter's manual is not even mentioned in these documents. Manuals have never been printed either, and the Church has not tried to create a corrected official version, as was the case with *Synaxarion, Menologion,* and other texts. Thus, the manuals were the property of the painters.

The well-known council 1551 named Stoglav has as its 43rd chapter *On the icon painters and the real icons* where the main demand upon icon painters was that they should paint after the patterns of the old masters.[15] Manuals are not named here either. They were

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166 [15] *Стоглав,* Sankt Peterburg 1863, pp. 150-154.

obviously considered as the painter's private reference books. On the other hand, Stoglav underlined the significance of the old canonic patterns. From this moment the manuals became necessary and common.

The edicts of Stoglav made 19th century scholars assume that the manuals appeared after that council and due to it.[16] However, two new text manuals, written in the beginning of the 16th century, were discovered already at the end of the 19th century.[17] Their publication did not cause any noticeable discussion on the age of the earlier manuals, probably depending on the tense political situation in Russia at that time. Anyhow, these two manuals were obviously created before Stoglav. The Greek-Georgian and the Tichvin manuals discussed above approve that various forms of iconographic manuals definitely existed before the 16th century.

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[17] N. Lichačev, *Иконописцы подлинника краткой редакціи,* in: Извѣстія Отдѣленія русского языка и словесности Имп. Акад. Наук, Т. 2, St. Peterburg 1897, pp. 353-355; M. Speranskij, *Еще один списокъ иконописного подлинника XVII века,* in: Чтенія в Имп. Обществѣ Исторіи и Древностей Россійских, Moskva 1912, pp. 68-71.

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