Translating the Russian Vision: the Scribe as Intersemiotic Mediator Between Orality and Religious Text

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Abstract

This article explores the role of the scribe in Russian Orthodox visionary literature as an intersemiotic translator–one who mediates not only between orality and writing, but also between vernacular spirituality and doctrinal authority. Drawing on Roman Jakobson's typology of translation, especially the concept of intersemiotic transposition, it argues that the transcription of visionary experiences constitutes a complex process of cultural and theological translation. Through close readings of the Vision of Evdokia, the Vision of Yakov Lanshakov and the Narration of Timothy, the article demonstrates how scribes act as interpreters and co-authors, reshaping raw spiritual experience into institutional narratives. These acts of translation are not neutral but ideologically charged, influenced by class, gender, and ecclesiastical agendas. The article ultimately calls for a "vernacular traductology"–a framework attentive to the politics of mediation, the ethics of transcription, and the transformation of marginalized voices into canonical forms.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, visionary literature, Russian Orthodoxy, scribal mediation, orality and literacy, vernacular religion, textual domestication, translation ethics

Μεταφράζοντας το ρωσικό όραμα: ο γραφέας ως διασημειωτικός μεσολαβητής ανάμεσα στην προφορικότητα και το θρησκευτικό κείμενο

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Περίληψη

Το άρθρο διερευνά τον ρόλο του γραφέα στη ρωσική ορθόδοξη οραματική λογοτεχνία ως έναν διασημειωτικό μεταφραστή–ένα πρόσωπο που μεσολαβεί όχι μόνο μεταξύ προφορικότητας και γραφής, αλλά και μεταξύ λαϊκής θρησκευτικότητας και δογματικής αυθεντίας. Επικαλούμενο την τυπολογία μετάφρασης του Roman Jakobson, και ιδίως την έννοια της διασημειωτικής μετάφρασης, το άρθρο υποστηρίζει ότι η καταγραφή των οραμάτων συνιστά μία σύνθετη διαδικασία πολιτισμικής και θεολογικής μετάφρασης. Μέσα από την ανάλυση τριών οραμάτων (το Όραμα της Ευδοκίας, το Όραμα του Γιάκοβ Λανσακόφ, η Αφήγηση του Τιμόθεου), αναδεικνύεται πώς οι γραφείς λειτουργούν ως ερμηνευτές και συν-συγγραφείς, μετασχηματίζοντας την άμεση εμπειρία του ιερού σε αποδεκτό αφηγηματικό και θεσμικό λόγο. Αυτές οι μεταφραστικές πράξεις δεν είναι ουδέτερες, αλλά ιδεολογικά φορτισμένες, επηρεασμένες από την κοινωνική τάξη, το φύλο και τις εκκλησιαστικές στοχεύσεις. Το άρθρο προτείνει, τέλος, ένα νέο πλαίσιο μελέτης με τίτλο «λαϊκή μεταφρασεολογία», επικεντρωμένο στην πολιτική της διαμεσολάβησης, την ηθική της αποτύπωσης και τη μετατροπή περιθωριακών φωνών σε κανονιστικά κείμενα.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: διασημειωτική μετάφραση, οραματική λογοτεχνία, ρωσική Ορθοδοξία, διαμεσολάβηση του γραφέα, προφορικότητα και γραφή, λαϊκή θρησκευτικότητα, οικειοποίηση, ηθική της μετάφρασης

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Introduction: From Transcription to Translation

In his seminal 1959 essay On Linguistic Aspects of Translation, Roman Jakobson proposed what has since become a foundational tripartite typology of translation. He distinguished between interlingual translation, or translation proper, which involves the rendering of a message from one language into another; intralingual translation, or rewording, which refers to the interpretation of verbal signs within the same language through paraphrase or explanation; and intersemiotic translation, or transmutation, which he defined as the interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal sign systems, or more broadly, the transposition from one semiotic system to another (Jakobson, 1959). While the first two categories have dominated the field of translation studies –often focusing on the linguistic challenges of fidelity, equivalence, and cultural transfer– the third category, intersemiotic translation, has garnered increasing interest in recent years for its potential to illuminate complex processes of meaning-making that transcend the merely linguistic[1].

Intersemiotic translation invites us to consider translation not as a purely linguistic operation, but as a semiotic negotiation in which different systems of signs –oral, written, visual, gestural, symbolic– interact and overlap. This framework becomes particularly fruitful when applied to religious and visionary narratives, where the source material is not simply a spoken discourse but an experience, an affective and often ineffable event conveyed through sensory, emotional, and symbolic registers. Visionary experiences, especially in Christian contexts, typically originate in non-textual forms: dreams, voices, apparitions, bodily sensations, or ecstatic states. Their conversion into written narratives thus involves not only a shift from orality to literacy, but a transformation across semiotic boundaries–from the domain of the felt, the seen, or the intuited, to the codified structure of language, grammar, and narrative form.

This process is not merely descriptive; it is interpretive and constructive. The act of recording a vision in writing involves choices about how to render the ineffable in a system that demands coherence, clarity, and doctrinal conformity. It is here that Jakobson's third category proves invaluable: the transcription of a mystical or visionary experience into a written text is, in essence, an intersemiotic act. The scribe must find linguistic correlates for visual, auditory, and emotive phenomena; they must translate not just what was heard or seen, but what was meant, often through a theological lens. The resulting text is not a neutral record, but a mediated artifact shaped by the conventions of hagiography, liturgy, and ecclesiastical authority (Parker, 1997, σσ. 117-118· Haines-Eitzen, 200, σ. 69).

Moreover, intersemiotic translation foregrounds the material and cultural transformation inherent in this process. The visionary's fleeting, subjective encounter with the divine is inscribed into the enduring medium of manuscript or print; a spontaneous event is stabilized into a teachable narrative; a personal revelation becomes a communal resource. In this way, intersemiotic translation sheds light not

[1] On intersemiotic translation, see Aguiar & Queiroz, 2009 and 2013, Clüver, 1989 and 2007, Dusi, 2015, Gottlieb, 2008, Holobut, 2013, Lotman, 2000, Mossop, 2019, Petrilli, 2003, Torop, 2000, Toury, 1986.

only on the mechanics of representation, but also on the politics of mediation–who has the authority to interpret the vision, how it should be framed, and for what purposes it may be mobilized. As Elizabeth Fine has argued, such written texts should be understood as intersemiotic translations of performance to print, shaped by loss but also by strategic editorial decisions designed to convey the performative event to new audiences (Fine 1984, σσ. 8, 89, 96). Richard Bauman likewise emphasizes the partiality of written records, viewing them as "thin and partial records" of deeply situated oral acts, while also noting the productive entextualization that transforms them into analyzable units (Bauman 1992, σσ. 41-42). Dell Hymes' ethnopoetic method, employing lineation and strophic analysis, represents one way of preserving the performance features within the written form–what might be called a mimetic intersemiotic strategy (Hymes 1975, 1981). John Miles Foley further nuances this view, observing that although performance is inevitably altered in translation, it can still be "keyed" for informed readers who recognize embedded traditional signals (Foley 1992, p. 292).

By recontextualizing visionary narratives within this broader semiotic framework, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how religious experience is not merely transmitted but transformed–from ephemerality to permanence, from individual perception to collective doctrine. This theoretical lens thus provides a critical foundation for reinterpreting the role of the scribe not as a passive recorder, but as an active translator across semiotic worlds, mediating between experience and expression, emotion and doctrine, the mystical and the textual.

Building on this framework, the present article proposes to examine the figure of the scribe in Christian orthodox visionary literature not as a mere passive recorder of mystical experiences, but precisely as an intersemiotic translator[2]. In this role, the scribe mediates between the immediate, often emotionally charged experience of the vision and its textual rendering, which typically seeks to conform to prevailing religious, literary, and moral norms. As such, the scribe engages in a complex process of translation: not only from speech to text, but from popular religiosity to institutional orthodoxy, from vernacular spontaneity to codified narrative, and from subjective revelation to shared doctrine.

[2] The corpus examined in this article consists of visionary narratives –primarily from Russian Orthodox contexts– that were originally rooted in oral, experiential, or affective registers and later transcribed into written form. These texts straddle multiple boundaries: between the spoken and the written, the popular and the doctrinal, the vernacular and the canonical. Produced mainly between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, they include peasant testimonies, hagiographic visions, pilgrim accounts, monastic transcriptions, and lay revelations. While diverse in form and origin, they often follow a broadly recognizable narrative structure: the visionary (typically a humble or marginal figure such as a peasant, child, or illiterate woman) receives a dream or ecstatic experience in which he or she is transported to the otherworld –most often to hell, paradise, or a transitional state. There, the visionary witnesses' scenes of judgment, punishment, or beatitude, encounters angelic or demonic beings, and is taught spiritual lessons about sin, salvation, the state of souls, and divine justice. A central motif is the command to return to the earthly world and *report what was seen*, giving these texts a para-prophetic function. Upon awakening, the visionary recounts the experience, which is then recorded by a scribe, often with interpretive framing or editorial embellishments.

A representative example of such a visionary narrative is provided in the Appendix of this article: *The Vision of Evdokia*, a mid-nineteenth-century account attributed to a young Russian peasant woman, whose complex trajectory of transmission –from oral testimony to French transcription, clerical translation, and published religious narrative– exemplifies the intersemiotic and sociocultural transformations at the heart of this study.

The scribe's function cannot be reduced to that of a mechanical copyist or neutral transcriber. Rather, he (or in rare cases, she) assumes a cultural and theological role, actively shaping the form, tone, and content of the visionary testimony (Alturo & Alaix, 2021). This transformative labor involves decisions about vocabulary, structure, theological framing, and even the intended audience. The scribe becomes, in effect, an agent of textual domestication, a figure whose editorial interventions recast personal mystical experiences into acceptable forms of spiritual instruction, moral exemplarity, or eschatological warning.

This understanding of the scribe as translator aligns with broader theories of translation that emphasize its inherently interpretive and transformative nature. As theorists such as Lawrence Venuti have argued, translation is never neutral: it involves ideological positioning, aesthetic judgment, and cultural negotiation (Venuti, 1994). In religious contexts, these stakes are even higher, since the act of transcription may entail not only linguistic mediation, but also the sacralization or purification of lived experience. The translation of a vision from the ephemeral world of speech and sensation into the permanence of writing necessarily imposes a series of filters –linguistic, doctrinal, stylistic, and institutional–that shape both the form and reception of the narrative.

The present study explores these processes through a comparative analysis of Christian visionary texts spanning the medieval and modern periods. It focuses in particular on three case studies: the Vision of Evdokia, a nineteenth-century narrative transmitted across social and linguistic boundaries; the Vision of Yakov Lanshakov, a nineteenth-century account prefaced by a reflexive, ethically charged scribal commentary; and the Narration of Timothy, a late seventeenth-century Old Believer text that incorporates extensive theological and polemical material into a child's visionary testimony. These cases illustrate how scribes act as translators of vernacular spirituality, engaged in acts of interpretation, selection, and framing that profoundly influence how visionary experience is preserved, understood, and mobilized within religious discourse. Ultimately, this article argues for a reconceptualization of the scribe's work within the framework of translation studies, with particular emphasis on intersemiotic and intra-cultural translation. By foregrounding the scribe's mediating function, we shed light on the complex negotiations between oral expression and written form, between individual experience and collective authority, and between cultural periphery and doctrinal center. In doing so, we aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how spiritual experience is not only recorded but also re-created through writing[3].

I. The Scribe as Intersemiotic Translator

The act of transcribing visionary narratives from oral performance into written form is never a neutral or mechanical process[4]. Rather, it constitutes a profound transformation–an intersemiotic translation in

[3] Voir T. Mournet, *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency*.
[4] In *Les revenants. Les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale*, Jean-Claude Schmitt emphasizes that the scribe plays a much more active role in the transmission of vision narratives than it seems. Far from being limited

the sense defined by Roman Jakobson, whereby a message is transferred not only from one language to another, but from one system of signs (oral, gestural, experiential) into another (written, textual, codified). This shift entails far more than the preservation of content; it involves a comprehensive reconfiguration of form, tone, and authority.

Oral visions –particularly in Christian mystical or vernacular traditions– are typically spontaneous, emotive, and deeply contextual. They emerge from lived experiences marked by affect, immediacy, and situatedness within a specific cultural and linguistic milieu. The vision is often narrated in the first person, using a vernacular register rich in idiomatic expressions, repetitions, emotional disfluencies, and gestures. The visionary might stumble over words, hesitate, cry, or invoke divine names with trembling urgency. These features are integral to the performative and experiential dimensions of the account.

The written version, however, is shaped by a very different set of conventions. It is structured according to literary and theological norms, adapted to a literate audience that may include clerical readers, moral authorities, or members of a devotional community. As such, the process of writing imposes a narrative logic, a lexical discipline, and often a doctrinal conformity that reinterprets the raw material of the oral account. This transformation typically entails:

i) Narrative restructuring: The vision is organized into coherent episodes, given a clear temporal sequence, and often framed by an introduction and conclusion that interpret the meaning of the events.

ii) Lexical standardization: Dialectal or vernacular speech is replaced with standard religious terminology, scriptural references, and formulaic expressions appropriate to the written genre.

iii) Doctrinal alignment: Ambiguous, heterodox, or theologically problematic elements are either removed, clarified, or rephrased to conform to accepted ecclesiastical doctrine.

The American scholar T. Bergen, in her work on oral history transcription, has aptly observed that transcription is never neutral. Every choice–punctuation, omission of hesitations, smoothing of idiomatic phrasing, substitution of dialectal words–entails an interpretive act (Bergen 2019, p. 6). In the context of religious visions, these choices are not merely aesthetic or practical; they are theologically and ethically charged. What is at stake is not simply how to render someone's spoken words intelligible on the page, but how to represent the sacred, how to give written form to a moment perceived as divine revelation or spiritual rupture.

The scribe is therefore confronted with the challenge of writing the ineffable –of translating an experience that, by its very nature, resists conventional description. Mystical experiences often involve paradoxes, silences, bodily sensations, or states of ecstasy that exceed the capacity of language. To translate such experiences into writing is to make a series of interpretive decisions about how to render

to a neutral transcription function, he intervenes as a mediator, selecting, ordering and reformulating the elements of testimony according to doctrinal norms and the expectations of the institution. This scriptural formatting reveals a tension between the spontaneity of the popular visionary experience and its legitimization by clerical writing (J.-C. Schmitt, *Les revenants,* p. 58-68).

silence, how to convey awe, how to represent visions of the divine or the infernal in terms that will be intelligible –and acceptable– to readers shaped by religious doctrine and literary expectations.

The implications of this process are considerable. In selecting what to include or exclude, how to phrase the visionary's utterances, and how to frame the experience within a recognizable narrative schema, the scribe becomes a mediator between worlds: between the sacred and the profane, the oral and the written, the individual and the institutional. His (or occasionally her) decisions influence how the vision will be read, whether it will be considered credible, and what theological or moral lessons it is meant to convey.

Moreover, as this article will demonstrate through specific case studies, scribes may adopt different strategies in handling these tensions. Some seek to domesticate the vision–recasting it in familiar theological and literary molds–while others attempt to preserve traces of the original oral expression, including disfluencies, repetitions, or vernacularisms, in an effort to maintain authenticity[5]. In both cases, however, the written vision remains the product of intersemiotic translation, shaped by cultural, theological, and rhetorical forces that extend far beyond the simple act of transcription.

This dynamic invites comparison with archival folklore practices, where the act of recording oral traditions also entails significant recontextualization. In the analysis of archival narratives, such documents should not be seen as neutral transcriptions of oral material, but as reformulated textual artefacts shaped by the expectations and frameworks of institutional reception. Far from being detached from context, archival documents create new contexts of reception. They are shaped by audience expectations, institutional criteria, and the politics of representation" (Anttonen, 2013, p. 159). In this perspective, the scribe occupies a role akin to that of the folkloric collector or editor– not merely a transmitter, but a cultural translator, whose interpretive interventions determine how a spiritual testimony is inscribed, classified, and interpreted within a doctrinal or communal order. The written vision, much like the archived tale, is a new composition, crafted through decisions about what is speakable, theologically valid, emotionally persuasive, and narratively coherent.

II. Case Study: The Vision of Evdokia as a Chain of Translations

The Vision of Evdokia offers a compelling example of visionary literature that has undergone multiple layers of transformation –each functioning, in effect, as a form of translation. This text, ostensibly a firsthand account of a young Russian peasant woman's visionary experience, presents not merely a personal revelation but also a complex product of linguistic, social, theological, and ideological mediation. Far from being a simple record of oral testimony, the written form of Evdokia's vision reflects a long process of intersemiotic, interlingual, and intralingual translations, shaped by a succession of intermediaries with differing social positions, intentions, and discursive strategies.

[5] It is shaped by conventions of readability, genre, and authenticity–what Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman call an image of intertextual fidelity. (Bauman & Briggs 2003: 206–214)

At the heart of this narrative lies Evdokia herself, a twenty-five-year-old illiterate peasant woman from the province of Smolensk. Her vision was initially transmitted orally in the narodnyi iazyk ("popular/common tongue") and recorded not by a local priest or folklorist, but by Tatyana Borisovna Potemkina, a prominent aristocrat of the Russian imperial court[6]. Potemkina, known for her deep Orthodox piety and philanthropic engagement, chose to transcribe the vision not in Russian, but in French –the language of the Russian nobility at the time.

In this regard, Nilus's emphasis on the interaction between different cultural strata –particularly the contrast between the cultivated nobility, embodied by Potemkina, and the simplicity of the peasant woman Evdokia– resonates strongly with the findings of Offord, Rjéoutski, and Argent in The French Language in Russia (2018). As they demonstrate, the use of French among the Russian elite in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was far more than a passing fashion: it functioned as a key marker of social and cultural distinction –a form of symbolic capital that affirmed one's membership in the upper class. This phenomenon, often described as "aristocratic diglossia," shaped not only social interactions and private correspondence but also the very transcription of orally transmitted popular narratives.

In cases like Nilus's, such stories were filtered through the French language –not the native idiom of their tellers– by aristocratic mediators such as Princess Potemkina. As the authors argue, this practice was far from ideologically neutral: it reflected a desire to inscribe Russian cultural expressions into a Europeanized linguistic register, often at the cost of displacing their vernacular immediacy. Moreover, a growing tension emerged throughout the nineteenth century between this elite francophonie and the rising prestige of the Russian vernacular as a bearer of national identity, literary tradition, and moral legitimacy. Within this dialectic, Evdokia emerges as a symbolic counterweight to Potemkina –a vessel of unadulterated popular religiosity and memory, unmediated by the cosmopolitan codes of the salon. This opposition between the francophone aristocracy and the Russian-speaking narod structured much of the cultural and ideological debate in imperial Russia, as reflected in the writings of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and others, who interrogated the social alienation and moral ambiguity of bilingual elites (Offord et al, p. 215-262).

This initial act of translation already constitutes a significant shift: the vernacular speech of a peasant woman –likely marked by dialect, emotional immediacy, and performative cadences– was recast into the polished, codified prose of salon culture. In this transformation, Evdokia's "voice" was made legible to, and acceptable within, the aristocratic public sphere –one deeply distanced from the oral and spiritual matrix in which the vision originally took shape.

[6] *Vologodskie eparhial'nye vedomosti* 71 (1908), p. 326-334. Tatyana Borisovna Potemkina (1797–1869) was a Russian aristocrat, philanthropist, and patron of the arts, belonging to the high nobility of the Russian Empire. She is best known as a descendant of the renowned Potemkin family –related to Grigory Potemkin, the favorite of Catherine II– and through her marriage to Prince Nikolai Borisovich Yusupov, one of the wealthiest men in Russia. She is therefore also known as Tatiana Yusupova.

The next stage in the vision's transmission involved a clerical figure, identified as Father Theophan Komarovsky, who translated the French version into Russian. This second layer of interlingual translation –from French back into the language of the original oral account– was not a return to the vernacular, but rather an ideological and theological reframing. As a representative of the institutional Church, the translator was not simply reversing Potemkina's linguistic intervention but recasting the vision in line with orthodox moral and spiritual expectations. Phrasing, tone, and doctrinal framing were all subject to adjustment to ensure the text's conformity with religious norms and the edifying purpose expected of such a narrative. This layer thus represents a form of doctrinal translation, one that aligns the vision with ecclesiastical orthodoxy and repositions it within a clerical economy of truth.

The third and final major phase of transformation occurred when the text was published by Sergei Nilus, a controversial religious thinker and mystic in early 20th-century Russia, best known for propagating apocalyptic and eschatological interpretations of Orthodoxy[7]. Nilus introduced the text with a rich meta-narrative commentary, framing the manuscript not only as a spiritual curiosity but as a socially and spiritually significant artifact:

> "Before me lies an old notebook, yellowed with age, quarter-page in format, made of the thick and coarse paper of bygone times; on its cover is written: 'Notebook of Hieromonk Euthymius.' At the top of the notebook, one reads: 'Wondrous dreams of the young girl Evdokia, a twenty-five-year-old peasant woman, occurring at different moments in her life. Translation of the French words of Tatiana Borissovna Potemkina, who heard them from Evdokia in the common tongue'… and beneath the title: 'Evdokia, twenty-five-year-old girl, peasant of Princess Gortchakova (from her village in the province of Smolensk)'… Images of the past arise unbidden: a great aristocratic lady, well-known, even famous, in Russian high society, close to the Court, personally esteemed by sovereigns Alexander I, Nicholas I, and revered by Alexander II –a true Orthodox Christian, a patriot, one of the richest women of her time– in short, a pinnacle of nobility and wealth in Russian society during the era of serfdom. Beside her… a modest peasant girl, poor, obscure… This girl recounts something, and it must be something so extraordinary and captivating that her noble interlocutor records every word and quickly writes it down in her notebook… in French?!
> Tatiana Borissovna –a truly Russian Orthodox woman, sincere and patriotic in essence; she speaks and feels in Russian, but when it comes to writing and thinking, she can only do so in the language of the Bossuets and the Fénelons, who were then regarded as the pillars of

[7] Sergei Alexandrovich Nilus (1862-1929) was a Russian religious writer who described himself as a mystic and is known for his antisemitic views. He is primarily recognized for having published, in 1905, the complete version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a forged document purporting to reveal a global Jewish conspiracy. Born on September 9, 1862, in Moscow, Nilus studied law at Moscow University and worked as a magistrate in the Caucasus. After spending a period in Biarritz, he returned to Russia in the early 20th century and became closely associated with the Orthodox faith. He published several works on religious and mystical themes, notably concerning the Antichrist and the end times. In 1906, Nilus married Yelena Alexandrovna Ozerova, a former lady-in-waiting to Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. From 1907 to 1912, they lived near the Optina Monastery, during which time Nilus published several spiritual writings. After the Russian Revolution, his works were banned by the Soviet regime due to their anti-Soviet and antisemitic content. Nilus was imprisoned several times and died of a heart attack on January 14, 1929. It is important to note that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* have been thoroughly exposed as a forgery and a work of antisemitic propaganda. Nevertheless, Nilus's publication of the text had a lasting and harmful influence, fueling conspiracy theories and antisemitic sentiment around the world.

> all culture and refinement. A time when ignorance of this language deprived members of Russian high society of the right to call themselves educated… Such was the reality of the age!
> At the end of the notebook of Father Hieromonk Euthymius, a monk unknown to me (this manuscript reached me through several hands, perhaps even third or fourth generation), it is signed: 'Translation by Father Theophan Komarovsky.'
> Thus, four people in their time took an interest in what was recorded in this worn-out old notebook: a noble and aristocratic lady, a young peasant girl, a hieromonk –the keeper of the manuscript– and its translator, also a member of the clergy, yet certainly no ordinary man, for he commanded the French of the educated Russian elite of the previous century. But what is this timeworn notebook, capable of attracting the interest of individuals so diverse in their social standing?…
> I believe, dear pious reader, that you too will be intrigued by this notebook when, after smoothing out its somewhat archaic style, yet preserving its content in full, I pass on to you this astonishing story. Listen!"[8]

His introduction, both literary and ideological, draws attention to the dramatic contrast between the social classes of those involved in the narrative's transmission: the peasant visionary, the noblewoman transcriber, the clerical translator, and finally Nilus himself, a mystic and editor. He presents the story as an emblem of spiritual authenticity transcending class, yet his framing simultaneously filters the text through his own eschatological lens, reinterpreting its message for an audience steeped in turn-of-the-century Russian religious anxiety.

What emerges, then, is not a simple vision, but a palimpsest: a text layered with multiple strata of interpretation, intention, and adaptation. We can distinguish at least four levels of translation:

Oral → French: A shift from vernacular, emotive oral storytelling to refined, elite written prose.

French → Russian: An interlingual and ideological recontextualization into ecclesiastical and didactic Russian Orthodox discourse.

Clerical redaction: A theological domestication of the vision, aligning it with canonical morality and the needs of clerical pedagogy.

Editorial glosses: Meta-narrative commentary by Nilus that positions the vision within apocalyptic and mystical currents of Russian Orthodoxy.

Each of these levels introduces shifts in meaning, tone, and function. The original emotional immediacy and affective texture of the peasant woman's speech may be attenuated in Potemkina's polished French. The heterogeneity of Evdokia's vernacular religiosity is absorbed into a more regulated spiritual grammar, suited to Church audiences and print circulation. The rawness of mystical experience, often marked by the chaotic or ecstatic, is shaped into a narrative arc of spiritual instruction, moral lesson, and doctrinal affirmation.

[8] Nilus S., *Sila Bozhija i nemoshh' chelovecheskaja*, ch. 1—2.

This process can be illuminated through the lens of Lawrence Venuti's concept of domestication in translation. Venuti defines domestication as the strategy by which a translator assimilates a foreign text to the values and norms of the target culture, thereby erasing its cultural alterity and rendering it "fluent" and acceptable (Venuti, 1994, p. 40-41). In the case of Evdokia's vision, we witness a triple domestication: linguistic (from vernacular Russian to elite French and then standardized Russian), theological (from subjective revelation to orthodox doctrine), and sociocultural (from peasant spirituality to noble and ecclesiastical propriety). The effect is a transformation of the vision into a culturally legible and spiritually normative artifact, one that can circulate within the hierarchies of empire, Church, and print culture.

Yet even as these layers mask the original texture of Evdokia's speech, they also testify to its power: the fact that a rural, illiterate woman's visionary experience captured the sustained attention of an aristocrat, a priest, and a published religious mystic suggests that such narratives functioned as sites of negotiation between center and periphery, elite and popular, feminine and institutional religious voices. The very fact that Nilus felt compelled to "smooth" the style while preserving the "full content" of the narrative reveals the tension between fidelity to a lived experience and the imperative of spiritual edification. It is precisely this tension that positions the scribe –not merely as a transcriber or editor– but as a translator in the deepest sense, navigating the porous boundaries between expression and doctrine, voice and text, orality and legitimacy.

III. Case Study: The Narration of Timothy and the Scribe as Author-Interpreter

The Narration of Timothy, a seventeenth-century Old Believer text composed on the banks of the Don River, provides a powerful example of the scribe not merely as a transcriber or redactor, but as an author-interpreter, whose act of writing constitutes a profound intervention into the content, structure, and purpose of the visionary account. At first glance, the narrative appears to document the visionary experience of a ten-year-old boy named Ivan, who claims to have encountered a posthumous vision of his deceased father. However, a closer reading reveals that the original oral core –likely centered on a child's intimate and emotive encounter with the afterlife– has been thoroughly reframed into a doctrinally charged eschatological text, aligned with the polemical agenda of the Old Believer community in a time of intense religious persecution and schism.

From a traductological perspective, what we observe in the Narration of Timothy is a form of ideological translation. The scribe takes what was probably a brief, unstructured oral testimony and expands it into a complex and rhetorically crafted narrative. This expansion is not merely stylistic; it is hermeneutic and doctrinal, involving the insertion of scriptural citations, apocalyptic imagery, hagiographical motifs, and overtly sectarian commentary. The result is not a "recording" of a vision, but a reconstruction –a new text in which the scribe's theological worldview and polemical priorities are deeply inscribed.

As V.G. Druzhinin and other scholars have noted, the description of the Last Judgment in this text –where persecutors of the Old Believers are cast into a river of fire while the faithful are led into heavenly dwellings– bears striking similarities to early patristic sources, especially the Lausiac History of Palladius of Galatia. These intertextual borrowings suggest that the scribe, likely educated in ecclesiastical or monastic literature, consciously framed the child's vision within a pre-established eschatological model. Moreover, elements appear to have been drawn from earlier visionary texts, including the Vision of Cosmas, further underscoring the degree to which the scribe functioned as a cultural editor, weaving together strands of literary, theological, and sectarian tradition (Druzhinin, 1996, p. 235).

In this way, the scribe performs what we might call a process of translation through amplification. The child's vision –if indeed it was ever recounted in such detail– becomes a vehicle for reaffirming the eschatological expectations and persecutory worldview of the Old Believers. The apocalyptic tone of the text, its emphasis on divine retribution, and the glorification of Old Believer leaders as righteous martyrs all point to a deliberate reorientation of the narrative's meaning. What might have begun as a tender tale of familial reunion in the afterlife is thus re-signified as a theological weapon, embedded in the cultural struggle over liturgical reform, spiritual legitimacy, and the very definition of salvation.

This process can be usefully illuminated by invoking Antoine Berman's critical concept of ethnocentric reduction, which describes one of the deforming tendencies in translation: the erasure of the foreign, the unfamiliar, or the resistant elements of the source material in order to render it acceptable to the target culture or ideology (Berman, 1984, Godard, 2001: 50, 55, 62). In the Narration of Timothy, we observe a striking instance of this phenomenon: the potentially idiosyncratic or ambiguous nature of the child's vision is domesticated and restructured in accordance with the theological convictions and rhetorical needs of the Old Believer tradition. The individual voice of the visionary is partially or entirely effaced, replaced by a collective voice of sectarian suffering, prophecy, and moral vindication (Pigin, 2006, p. 168, 208-217).

Such ideological domestication is not merely a matter of content, but also of form and function. The narrative is carefully structured to mirror familiar visionary topoi: the journey through the otherworld, the encounter with celestial beings, the moment of divine judgment, the contrast between the saved and the damned. Yet these familiar motifs are resignified: the torment of heretics becomes the torment of state-aligned Orthodox believers; the path to salvation is identified explicitly with adherence to Old Believer ritual; the visionary's authority is transferred from personal revelation to doctrinal confirmation. The scribe, in this sense, does not merely transcribe or translate –he re-authors the vision in a manner that is both culturally situated and polemically engaged.

This case study therefore highlights the creative and interventionist role of the scribe as translator –a role that cannot be divorced from the historical and ideological context in which the text is produced. The process of intersemiotic translation here is not simply a passage from orality to writing, but

a movement from private vision to collective dogma, from narrative spontaneity to theological choreography[9]. It illustrates how visionary narratives may serve not only as spiritual testimonies but as discursive instruments in ongoing cultural and religious conflicts.

In conclusion, the Narration of Timothy underscores the necessity of treating scribes not as neutral intermediaries, but as agents of interpretive authority. Their work entails profound ethical and hermeneutic choices: what to preserve, what to expand, what to omit, and how to align a raw spiritual experience with the doctrinal boundaries of a particular community. From the perspective of translation studies, this case challenges us to move beyond the paradigm of linguistic fidelity and toward a more dynamic and critical model of translation as ideological and cultural negotiation.

IV. Between Authority and Mediation: Scribal Ethics and Reflexivity

While many scribes in visionary literature present themselves as authoritative transmitters of sacred truth –faithful intermediaries between divine revelation and the written word– there are notable cases in which the limits of this authority are openly acknowledged. In such instances, the scribe steps beyond the role of passive transmitter and assumes a reflexive, ethically engaged posture, openly grappling with the fragility of visionary testimony and the potential risks associated with its interpretation and dissemination. These moments, though rare, shed important light on the ethical dimensions of the scribe's task, which, when viewed through the lens of translation studies, can be likened to the moral responsibility of the translator facing a text whose truth value is not absolute but contingent, unstable, and potentially dangerous.

A striking example of this reflexive stance appears in the Vision of Yakov Lanshakov, a nineteenth-century Russian account transcribed by Hieromonk Alipy of the Kiev Caves Lavra (Pigin, 2006, p. 303-304). In a brief but revealing preface, Alipy recounts his experiences as a pilgrim traveling through various holy sites, during which he encountered fellow travelers who shared stories of visions, miracles, and spiritual revelations. While initially enthusiastic about these reports, Alipy confesses to a growing sense of doubt and caution, brought about by the behavior and inconsistencies he observed in many of these self-proclaimed visionaries. He writes not from a position of absolute belief, but from one of measured skepticism, guided by the virtue of spiritual discernment (diakrisis):

> "During this journey, I also visited other holy sites and observed, among other things, the lives of fellow pilgrims like myself. I took particular interest in everything that could initiate me into the spiritual life.
> However, due to my lack of experience and inability to discern people, I was often troubled by the actions of these wandering travelers, whose behavior was at times far from exemplary. This made me suspicious of their accounts of spiritual matters, especially those

[9] See the chapter on mysticism as confiscated speech in M. de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, p. 257-260. Michel de Certeau analyzes here the way in which the narratives of female mystics or possessed women –generally written by men– are domesticated through writing. Their speech, often perceived as excessive, subjective, and deeply embodied, is taken up, framed, and transformed into a normalized discourse, in line with the expectations of the ecclesiastical institution.

> who claimed to have had extraordinary experiences. As a result, I gradually lost the enthusiasm I had initially felt for such observations and became more cautious, refusing to believe blindly everything I heard.
> Prudence is a virtue in all circumstances, and whoever exercises it in spiritual matters deserves praise all the more. However, there is a limit to everything, including skepticism. Certain events, despite the current tendency toward disbelief and doubt, cannot be entirely dismissed, even if they seem to exceed the bounds of possibility in the eyes of the incredulous.
> The present account –or description of events remarkable in their content –is clear proof of this." (Pigin, 2006: 303-304).

In this passage, the scribe articulates a position of epistemological modesty. Rather than assuming the truth of the vision outright, he invites the reader into a shared space of reflection –a space in which the status of the narrative as sacred testimony is not asserted but questioned. What is preserved in the text is not only the content of Lanshakov's vision but also the ethical uncertainty surrounding its transcription and interpretation. In this role, the scribe becomes both guardian and filter. As a guardian, he preserves a narrative that might otherwise vanish from historical memory. As a filter, he determines how that narrative enters the realm of theological and institutional legitimacy. His work constitutes a form of editorial discernment, not unlike the translator who must decide which nuances of a culturally or spiritually sensitive text can be safely preserved or must be mediated for the sake of intelligibility.

This position brings into focus a set of dilemmas that resonate deeply with contemporary concerns in translation ethics, particularly in the translation of oral testimony, spiritual experience, or culturally charged material. When faced with a narrative that may be sacred, delusional, manipulated, or sincere – but perhaps all at once– what is the role of the mediator? Should the translator (or scribe) correct or sanitize contradictions, smooth emotional disfluencies, or preserve them as markers of authenticity? What happens when the translator does not believe –or cannot fully believe– the content they are rendering into another semiotic or linguistic system?

As scholars of oral history and ethnography have argued, rendering ambiguity, silence, and the ineffable is not only possible but often necessary when the aim is not just to communicate content but to respect the epistemic integrity of the testimony. The scribe, like the translator of religious or testimonial texts, faces the challenge of not imposing too much coherence or orthodoxy, lest the original be distorted into an institutional artifact. In Alipy's case, the scribe ultimately chooses to preserve the vision, but with explicit caveats: he does not present the story as a sanctioned miracle or verified vision, but as a narrative with potential value –a text to be read with discernment, not dogma. His modest skepticism functions not to undermine the narrative but to model a hermeneutics of humility, in which faith and reason, belief and doubt, are held in dynamic tension.

This ethical posture, however, must also be understood in light of the semiotic and institutional conditions under which visionary texts are produced and transmitted. As Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman have shown, such texts are not transparent windows into experience or oral tradition but are shaped by conventions of readability, genre, and authenticity –what they term an "image of intertextual

fidelity." The visionary account, in this view, is crafted to function not only as the referent of a specific event but as a metonymic emblem of a broader tradition or religious normativity. The scribe or collector plays a decisive role in this construction of meaning, selecting and shaping material to conform to literary, doctrinal, or archival expectations.

This insight challenges the assumption –prevalent in earlier folkloristics– that field texts or visionary accounts preserved in archives offer unmediated access to oral traditions. As Pertti Anttonen (drawing on Geertz, Clifford, and Kurki) argues, these texts are themselves performances in a new medium (Anttonen, 2013, p. 157). The act of transcription is laden with semiotic decisions: how to represent affective states in grammar, how to simulate orality in literary form, how to encode the ephemeral in stable symbols. Context, in this view, is not something external to the text that has been lost –it is something produced through entextualization and genre-specific conventions. The archival text possesses a context of its own: one defined by its intended readability, classification, and institutional validation.

From this perspective, Alipy's reflexivity is not merely a theological hesitation –it is a response to the tension between the rawness of visionary experience and the normative frameworks that govern its transmission. His skeptical tone signals awareness of this double bind: to preserve a fragile truth without granting it unconditional legitimacy, to transmit without canonizing, to write without closing off interpretation. His posture exemplifies a broader scribal ethics that mirrors the ethics of the translator: both are caught between voices, tasked with rendering what resists expression, and bearing the burden of fidelity not just to a text, but to the unknowable world it gestures toward.

Thus, the three cases jointly suggest that scribal work in visionary literature ranges across a spectrum: domestication across classed channels (Evdokia) → ideological re-authoring (Timothy) → reflexive mediation under acknowledged uncertainty (Lanshakov). Read through Jakobson's intersemiotic lens, each instance combines mode-shifts (oral→written), register-shifts (vernacular→clerical idiom), and authority-shifts (individual experience→institutional discourse). Two ethical pressures recur: (1) legibility –pressure to standardize lexis, structure, and doctrine; (2) fidelity to experience –pressure to retain affect, disfluency, and situatedness. Scribal decisions calibrate these pressures differently, producing texts that are alternately exemplary, polemical, or cautiously testimonial. A vernacular traductology must therefore treat scribes not as neutral copyists but as norm-producers, whose editorial operations distribute credibility and reshape the economy of the sacred.

V. Towards a Vernacular Traductology: Popular Religion and Cultural Translation

The figure of the scribe in visionary literature, as this article has argued, cannot be separated from the broader dynamics of cultural translation. In their mediation between orality and writing, between individual experience and communal meaning, scribes perform a function that closely parallels that of the ethnographic translator –a role familiar in the work of folklorists, anthropologists, and early

collectors of oral tradition. What unites these roles is their shared engagement with vernacular forms of expression and their transformation into culturally legible, morally acceptable, and often ideologically aligned texts.

A particularly instructive analogy can be drawn with the well-known case of the Brothers Grimm, whose Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales) stand as one of the most influential examples of folkloric collection in European history. While often regarded as faithful preservers of German folk tradition, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were in fact deeply involved in reshaping and moralizing the materials they collected[10]. Their editorial interventions –whether in the form of smoothing syntax, removing sexual content, amplifying Christian motifs, or accentuating nationalist undertones– highlight the extent to which oral materials are never simply transcribed but transformed, often in accordance with the values of the compiler, the tastes of the intended audience, or the ideological imperatives of the time (Zipes, 2002, p. 25-64).

Religious scribes working with visionary testimonies undertake a similar process. While the materials they work with are often presented as sacred or divinely inspired, they nonetheless engage in what may be called a form of doctrinal editing –a translation of the vernacular experience into the normative discourse of religious institutions. This translation often involves:

i) the expurgation of vulgar or theologically problematic elements, including folk motifs, local superstitions, or raw emotional content,

ii) the addition of edifying content, such as scriptural quotations, hagiographic comparisons, or explicit moral lessons, and

ii) the reinforcement of doctrinal norms, by aligning the visionary's experience with accepted teachings on sin, salvation, judgment, or divine grace.

In performing these acts, the scribe assumes the role of cultural translator, repositioning the visionary experience from the intimate and ephemeral world of private revelation into the structured, communal, and pedagogical framework of religious life. The personal is thus made public; the spontaneous is rendered formulaic; the mystical becomes catechetical. This transformation is not accidental –it is the outcome of deliberate and culturally situated choices about what constitutes a legitimate spiritual narrative.

Importantly, such translations are never neutral. As with the Grimms and other collectors of vernacular culture, the work of the scribe is always normative –shaped by the values, anxieties, and aspirations of the scribe's milieu. This normativity is expressed not only in what is preserved but also

[10] According to R. Bendix, this process unfolded within a constant tension between the romantic idealization of "the people" and the actual rejection of the urban lower classes, who were perceived as vulgar or degenerate. The figure of the *Volksgeist* projected a noble, rural, and pure image of the people, while ignoring the concrete social conditions of the narrators. Thus, the inscription of oral traditions into writing often involved a profound transformation: what had been transmitted in a living, spontaneous manner, rooted in a social context, became a fixed, "artefacted" object, ready to be circulated within learned or national circles. (Bendix, 1997, p. 48-49).

in what is erased. Visionary testimonies that include ambivalent theological claims, ambiguous eschatological content, or emotionally disruptive language may be subtly reframed –or entirely omitted– in order to conform to the expectations of orthodoxy, piety, and readability.

The power dynamics embedded in this process are significant. Scribes often occupy a higher social or educational position than the visionaries whose experiences they record. As priests, monks, aristocrats, or clerical translators, they are positioned to determine which visions are worthy of preservation, how they should be phrased, and what they should mean. Their interventions, therefore, reflect not only theological concerns but also the social stratification of religious expression. A peasant woman's spontaneous vision may be tolerated or even celebrated –but only once it has been reframed in terms acceptable to clerical or elite audiences[11].

This dynamic points to the need for a vernacular traductology: a critical framework within translation studies that pays attention not only to linguistic equivalence but also to the transformation of local, oral, and spiritually charged materials into standardized forms. Such a framework would foreground the politics of mediation –how authority is constructed, how marginal voices are appropriated, and how spiritual experiences are repurposed for broader cultural or institutional agendas.

A vernacular traductology would also insist on contextualization: understanding how visions are embedded in specific historical, social, and theological conditions, and how the act of writing them down –often long after the original oral moment –constitutes an intervention into those conditions. It would reject simplistic binaries between faithful and unfaithful translation, and instead ask: Faithful to whom? To what community? To what vision of truth?

In this light, the religious scribe can be seen not only as a transmitter of revelation but as a cultural agent engaged in the shaping of spiritual meaning. His (or her) work participates in what we might call the domestication of the divine –the rendering of sacred, disruptive, or extraordinary experience into a form that can be managed, transmitted, and endorsed by institutional religion. This does not negate the visionary's experience, but it does recode it, placing it within boundaries that make it intelligible and usable.

Thus, the scribe becomes both a translator and a regulator –one who makes the sacred speak in the language of doctrine, and who channels the unpredictable flow of vision into the recognizable form

[11] Comparable dynamics have been explored in archival folklore scholarship. Anttonen, reflecting on the work of amateur collectors like Meriläinen and Mannonen, highlights how these mediators negotiated questions of authenticity, authority, and editorial voice in transforming oral material into institutionally accepted forms. In such cases, the collector acts as a cultural editor who reframes local narratives to match the expectations of national, archival, or moral discourse. As Leea Virtanen and Pirkko-Liisa Rausmaa have shown, collectors often suppressed vulgar or politically sensitive elements, emphasizing instead a morally suitable and textually stable version of events. Anttonen, citing Kurki, notes that the text is an emerging document written by one person only but still containing many voices. This observation resonates strongly with the visionary corpus: scribes of religious visions are likewise involved in producing hybrid texts that mediate between personal experience and collective normativity, between marginal voice and clerical approval. The transmission of visions is thus never univocal but always negotiated –a multivocal process shaped by theological, ideological, and institutional filters. (Anttonen, 2013, p. 156)

of theological narrative. Such work demands close scrutiny, for it reveals not only how spiritual texts are made, but how spiritual authority is distributed, negotiated, and preserved.

In recognizing the translational nature of the scribe's task, we are better equipped to understand the hybrid nature of visionary literature itself: as a genre situated at the crossroads of orality and writing, marginality and power, vernacular insight and doctrinal control. And in calling for a vernacular traductology, we open the door to reexamining these texts not merely as relics of faith, but as dynamic sites of cultural translation, where the boundaries of meaning, truth, and belief are constantly redrawn.

Conclusion: Rethinking Translation in the Context of the Sacred

At the intersection of orality, writing, theology, and culture stands the figure of the scribe, whose work in visionary literature parallels –and often anticipates –the most complex tasks of the modern translator. Like the translator, the scribe is far more than a conduit for transferring content from one form or language to another. He is a shaper of meaning, a cultural and theological mediator responsible not only for preserving a source but also for interpreting, framing, and at times transforming it to meet the expectations of readers, communities, and religious institutions. His interventions –whether subtle or explicit– have the power to redefine the contours of the sacred narrative he transmits.

In the specific domain of visionary literature, the scribe's role becomes particularly charged. The material at hand is not a neutral message, but one that is understood –by the visionary and often by the scribe himself– as divinely inspired, sacred, or spiritually urgent. This imbues the act of transcription with high stakes: to write down a vision is not simply to make it legible, but to fix what was fluid, to domesticate what was ecstatic, and to frame what was potentially dangerous. In doing so, the scribe becomes both the guardian and the gatekeeper of revelation. His choices –lexical, structural, theological– determine not only how the vision will be read, but whether it will be believed, transmitted, or forgotten.

This article argued that such a role must be understood through the lens of translation, broadly construed. Drawing from Roman Jakobson's tripartite model –interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translation –it has proposed that the scribe's work be read as a form of intersemiotic and intra-cultural translation, in which oral, vernacular, and often marginal spiritual experiences are reshaped into written, canonical, and morally instructive texts. This translation is not only across modes (from speech to writing) and languages (e.g. from vernacular Russian to aristocratic French or ecclesiastical Slavonic), but across registers of authority –from lived testimony to theological discourse, from private encounter to communal teaching.

Importantly, this approach challenges the notion of translation as a neutral or secondary operation. As scholars such as Lawrence Venuti and Antoine Berman have emphasized, all translation is ideologically embedded, shaped by the translator's position, audience expectations, and the norms of the receiving culture. This is no less true in religious and folkloric contexts, where questions of truth,

legitimacy, and orthodoxy intersect with stylistic, ethical, and institutional considerations. In this sense, the scribe's work is formative: it does not merely convey the vision, it constructs its meaning –both for its immediate audience and for posterity.

A vernacular traductology, attentive to this complexity, is therefore both necessary and overdue. Such a framework would direct attention to the margins of transmission –to the voices of peasants, women, pilgrims, and children whose visions were mediated, often radically, by figures of higher social, clerical, or cultural status. It would ask not only what was said, but who had the power to translate it, and to what ends. It would consider the multiple "translations" that occur in the life of a single vision: from oral performance to manuscript, from manuscript to printed text, from local usage to canonical status. It would resist flattening spiritual narratives into mere sources of ethnographic or theological data, and instead interrogate the processes of shaping, filtering, and legitimizing that have always accompanied their transmission.

In bringing together insights from translation studies, religious history, and folklore, this article has sought to illuminate the scribe as a liminal figure, one who operates between realms –between the spoken and the written, the mystical and the dogmatic, the vernacular and the institutional. Far from being peripheral, this role is central to the making of religious meaning. Recognizing the scribe as a translator allows us to reframe visionary literature not as an unmediated window onto the sacred, but as a composite artifact: the product of negotiation, discernment, and transformation across multiple registers.

Future research might deepen this approach by examining scribal practices across different traditions –Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist –to explore how sacred visions are differently mediated, and how vernacular religious expression is translated across cultures. Comparative work between visionary narratives and other forms of testimonial literature (such as martyrdom accounts, prophetic writings, or oral confessions) may reveal further insights into the ethics, aesthetics, and politics of translation at the threshold of the sacred.

Ultimately, to rethink translation in the context of visionary literature is to acknowledge that meaning itself is always in motion –never fully given, but constantly mediated through the hands, words, and intentions of those entrusted with its preservation. The scribe, in this sense, is not only a servant of the text but a co-creator of the sacred legacy it carries forward.

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APPENDIX

Dreams and Visions of the young woman Evdokia (Mid-19th Century)

Evdokia, a 25-year-old girl, was a peasant belonging to Princess Gorchakova, living in a village in the Smolensk province. At the age of 9, Evdokia lost her mother, who died in childbirth giving birth to twins. Her father raised her with principles of righteousness and piety. Without any formal education, he tried to instill in her the fear of God and love for her duties. He would tell her that the law was to flee from evil and do good, and that man pleases God when he endures trials and humiliation with patience. "I was so convinced of these truths," she said, "that in my ignorance, that was all the knowledge I had. When people mocked me, I felt no resentment, thinking that it pleased God at that moment, and that thought helped me endure their mockery. I was shy and quiet, unable to say two words, for which my companions called me foolish. That was the reason they mocked me."

Her masters were always pleased with her, as she was hard-working.

"At the age of 9, I dreamt that my mother would die within the year. This dream frightened her. My father scolded her for taking a child's dream seriously. In truth, she died that very year giving birth to twins. My father made great efforts to teach me prayers, and he would beat me when I failed to memorize them. Then I was told: 'Tell your father to stop beating you. Everything he wants to teach you, you will learn later.' From that moment on, my father began to take my dreams more seriously. Another time, I dreamt I was in a large church washing the floor. As I approached one side of the church, I saw a hole in the floor. I looked into it and saw a coffin. Frightened, I asked, 'Whose coffin is that?' A child replied, 'In your language, it's a coffin, but in ours, it is a bed where an old man rests who celebrates the liturgy here every day.' Indeed, I saw him celebrating the divine service with great reverence and heard a harmonious chant. Then he sat on a seat near a window, where there were blessed loaves. He seemed to eat from the loaves, but they never diminished.

Then I heard a voice say: 'Draw closer to the old man; one day you will need to remember him.' I approached him, fell at his feet, and bathed them in my tears. I asked him to pray for me and my loved ones. I thought the sun was shining on me, but I realized that this warmth and light came from his holy face. He wore a black robe. An indescribable love and reverence overwhelmed me. Several young boys escorted me out of the church, showing me the way. They were as beautiful as angels, illuminated by light.

I thought I could find my way back alone, but they accompanied me, reminding me not to forget what I had seen, and they made me repeat the vision and the appearance of the old man before them. Then I was told that this old man was Saint Macarius.

I was suffering from not knowing my mother's fate and longed to know the state of her soul, praying to God about it without ceasing. One day, after I confessed, on the eve of communion, I dreamt that a woman asked me if I wanted to see my mother. I said yes. Then she offered to take me to Ivan Yakovlevich, saying he was a sorcerer and would show me my mother. I refused, saying that this was not right and that my spiritual father had warned me against consulting sorcerers.

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Suddenly, I found myself in the middle of a field, where I saw two flocks. One had 10,500 sheep, and the other 5,500. The first had no shepherd, while the second had one and grazed in good pastures. I felt so good among this flock that I did not want to leave.

I said: 'O God! Let me stay here, for I have never known such happiness. Here, it is spring and so pleasant, while on earth it is winter.' A voice replied: 'You are not here to stay forever, but to tell on earth all that you will see.'

Then I was shown the great flock of 10,500 sheep, and the voice said: 'You see this large flock; it has no shepherd and needs pasture. Your task is to lead these sheep to a good flock and better pastures.' I thought then that my masters were angry at me for being assigned to herd a flock. But suddenly, instead of a flock, I saw an assembly of people, and in place of the blessed flock, a gathering of magnificent and youthful beings, all similar in appearance.

I noticed, between the two flocks, two small black and skinny lambs, trying to join the good flock. But all the sheep they approached pushed them away, saying: 'They are not ours.' Rejected from all sides, these poor little lambs sought refuge with a sheep of the same color as themselves, who was groaning. She was outside the good flock, in a cold and suffocating place. At that moment, the sheep changed appearance, and I recognized her as my mother. The two little lambs were the twins she had given birth to before they had time to receive holy baptism.

At that moment, my feelings of compassion and sorrow for my mother turned to coldness, and I felt the need to leave this place. Then a voice guided me through paths so foul-smelling and difficult that I could no longer move forward. But the voice said: 'I suffer more than you do, and I will show you even greater things.' I was led through a long passage and heard loud groans. I asked, 'Where do they come from?' and I was told, 'They are the souls of sinners, who suffer in hell.' I said, 'Lord, show me this place of suffering.' The reply came, 'I will show you many things.'

Then I was brought to the edge of an immense abyss. The voice said: 'Here you will see terrible suffering.' And I saw a multitude of souls plunged into boiling lime. I was horrified, afraid I would fall into this abyss. Then I saw a soul being pulled out of the boiling lime with iron tongs, and it was allowed to move forward. I was supposed to follow it, so I asked, 'Where is it going?' and was told: 'This soul is searching for its place.'

The soul then stood before a disfigured body that belonged to it. It cried out: 'Lord! Why are you returning me to this disgusting corpse?' And it began to weep. This soul had a human form, but much smaller and weakened. It expressed immense repulsion at the idea of reentering its body and said: 'Lord, increase a thousandfold the torments I suffer in hell, but spare me the return into this repugnant body!'

I asked for an explanation of all this, and I was told it represented the resurrection of sinners and that their greatest torment would be to reenter their bodies, for there they would endure even greater suffering, and their flesh would only fuel the fire. And all this, I had to tell on earth. I replied, 'Lord, who will believe me after seeing such extraordinary things?' And the voice replied: 'Let people mock you; they will believe later.'

The soul I was following threw itself back into the boiling lime. I said: 'Let us leave this place!' and the voice answered: 'My presence is a consolation for them.' Then I was brought to another place of suffering and again asked, 'Where do these groans come from?' and was told, 'These are sinful souls, who suffer in the same way.' I said: 'Lord, do you not have compassion for them?' and the voice answered: 'I have compassion for the world, and I show you these wonders so that you may report them there. I Myself have suffered more than they have. I offered them the gift of paradise, but they chose hell.'

Then I was brought before a large house, and the voice said: 'You asked to see the many sufferings of hell. Arm yourself with courage for what you are about to see.' I was placed before a door, which was opened with an iron bar, and immediately, it opened. I saw a being sitting in fire, with flames coming out of his mouth. I was terrified and said: 'Now I see that I am dead.' But the voice replied: 'Listen carefully to what is about to be said.'

Satan said to me: 'Soul! Why are you surprised? If, during your life, you lived to please me and my angels, now you belong only to me.' Then I cried out: 'The one who brought me here has abandoned me!' But the voice replied: 'No, I have not left you and will not leave you here, but listen attentively to the words I will tell you. You must report everything you hear on earth, and you must neither add nor omit a single word.'

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The voice said: 'Satan! You are mistaken: this soul belongs neither to me nor to you.' Satan replied: 'Then why do you show her your secrets and the depth of your ways?' The voice replied: 'It is not for her merits that I reveal my plans, but so she may proclaim them on earth. Satan, you hasten to send your forces to earth to trouble people. You have conquered ten thousand five hundred souls, but I will forgive those ten thousand five hundred men, and if necessary, I will grant them thirty more years of life to bring them to repentance.

It is your evil forces that led Napoleon to destroy nations. They think the French are the cause of all this misfortune. I know neither "French" nor "Russians" — those are earthly terms — I know only souls. Napoleon was your instrument. Your power acts through hatred and lies, but mine acts through mercy. For a hundred sins, one good deed is enough for me to save. I created men in my image, not for you, but for me. You are not the only one who destroys people — they destroy themselves. In the end, I will make them turn away from you.'

The voice then said: 'Let us leave this place!' and led me to a secret place, where I heard something like a council and received a new order to report it on earth. During this assembly, I heard about the punishments planned for earth, to bring men back to God. There was a council between the saints and the Lord to decide on the most effective punishment. The Lord said: 'If I send a plague, what will I gain? The good will perish with the wicked, and hell is already too full. And if I take the good from the earth, how will it survive? If I turn the waters into blood, then all men will perish, the birds of the air and the fish of the seas. If I send an earthquake, those who survive will think themselves better than those punished. And if I destroy Moscow? But the saints, whose relics have rested there for centuries, have pleaded for mercy.' And out of love for them, the Lord decided to preserve the city.

Eventually, it was decided that a famine would ravage the earth, and some countries would be particularly affected. The land that was supposed to produce wheat would remain completely barren. 'This punishment,' said the voice, 'will be sent to remind these nations of their forgetfulness of my laws and their contempt for the sacred feasts established in memory of my blessings on earth.'

I then said: 'Lord! No one will believe that I have witnessed all that I now see.' The voice replied: 'Already, by my command, peasants have spoken in other lands. Now, for Russia, I choose as my servant the voice of the ignorant and blind, to confound the wisdom of the wise of this world. I am always just. Your duty is to speak, and mine is to act. If in this year 1839, your words are considered fables, in 1840 the truth of your message will be proven. I give as a guarantor of the truth of your words the holy father Macarius. As surely as his relics exist, so surely will I send this punishment.'

This same Saint Macarius was the one I had seen in my dream. And it was told to me that his relics lay in the old cathedral of Mozhaisk, buried underground for 195 years, and that the hour of his glorification had now come. As soon as he was glorified, his prayers would draw upon us a great blessing from God.

I was also told about the priests, that very few were worthy of the title. However, regardless of their unworthiness, the liturgy they celebrated remained a true liturgy, for at those moments, it was God's angels who performed the service in their place. I heard accusations against them for the habit of taking snuff during religious services and for receiving the Body and Blood of Christ without proper reverence. The voice said to me: 'You have heard the divine liturgy of my angels; you will hear on earth the service of the clergy, among whom are many whose bodies are weakened but whose souls are well-nourished, and others whose bodies are well-fed but whose souls are exhausted.'

As for the nobles, I was told that they angered God with their balls, theaters, satanic temptations, and their luxury.

I was also told about philosophers and scholars, that they had forgotten the law of God and did not believe in eternal torments; they taught much knowledge but ignored divine law. 'What I value is not he who knows much but does little, but he who, though knowing little, does much.'

As for the military, I was told that their conversations were tempting and impious before God, and that the indiscretion of their words condemned them.

I had this dream on February 16, 1839. On May 3, 1840, I saw in a dream that I was to be in Mozhaisk on May 20 and to organize a memorial service for Saint Macarius, and that by his prayers, he would turn away divine wrath. In another dream, I was told that his relics were buried in the old cathedral on the left side of the tomb. I also received the order in a dream to go to the Novospassky Monastery to speak to Father Philaret and tell him my visions. I went there and told him everything I had seen. He

advised me not to be discouraged by the obstacles and punishments I might expect to receive, and to remain faithful to God in all circumstances.

At another time, I was ordered to go to Kiev to see Spiridon Yakovlevich, who, I was told, had also had a dream announcing my arrival. In the third week of Great Lent, on the night from Friday to Saturday in 1839, I saw in a dream that I was ordered to recount all that I had seen in dreams to the Grand Duke heir.

I also saw that he had been told in a dream: 'Do you wish to know my ways?' and he had replied: 'Yes, Lord!' and it had been said to him: 'It is not I who will tell you, but she will recount them to you.' That same day, the Grand Duke had the same dream about me. Before deciding to speak to him, I felt an inexplicable repulsion. But an inner and physical discomfort gnawed at me, and one day, in church, I firmly resolved to remain faithful to my mission. As soon as I made that promise, my sadness and suffering ceased.

I then revealed my mission to my masters. They listened to me with kindness and allowed me to follow my inspiration. During the maneuvers at Borodino, I approached the Grand Duke, and he asked me what I wanted of him. I told him my dreams, and to make him believe me, I added that I was the one he had seen in a dream on such and such a date. That date was written in his notebook. He was very surprised and listened to me attentively before sending me to the emperor's tent. I approached him with confidence and told him for almost two hours everything I had seen in dreams.

He showed me great kindness and ordered Count Orlov to give me ten rubles. I didn't want to accept them, but I didn't dare refuse, for it was an order from the emperor. I told the emperor of the misfortunes I had seen in dreams that threatened Russia, and I told him that it was his duty to ward off part of them. I also told him about the relics of Saint Macarius and said that he was called to rediscover them.

The emperor replied that he deemed himself unworthy of this task. I said: 'Yet you demolished the old Alexeyevsky Monastery to build a new church in its place, and you did not ask yourself whether this pleased the Lord or if it was in accordance with His will.' She thought the emperor was moved by these words and added: 'You planned seventeen years for the construction of this new church. But a church dedicated to Saint Macarius could be built in less than seven years thanks to the abundance of alms that would flow from everywhere to his tomb. And the person you have appointed to build this church in seventeen years will not be able to do it.'

The emperor threatened me with punishment if I had invented everything I told him. I replied that I would rather suffer all penalties than keep silent, for I had received the order to speak.

Having completed my mission with the emperor, I returned to my masters, who, having taken my visions seriously, began to pity me and to accuse me of being mad or idle. I felt a deep inner discomfort upon returning to my former life. The need to speak and obey the command I had received haunted me. I decided to leave my masters and go to Saint Petersburg to once again attract the emperor's attention to my visions.

I left Moscow on foot with a silver ruble. Arriving in Saint Petersburg, knowing no one, I asked the first police officer I met to take me to the detention house, since I had no passport and nowhere to go. I spent four days at the police station and precinct, where some mocked me and others were surprised. Eventually, the police decided to question me about everything I had said. After hearing me, they transferred me to a large prison under the supervision of the female prison wardens. One of them, taking responsibility for me, released me from prison and took me into her home.

Σύντομο Βιογραφικό Σημείωμα

Ο **Σταμάτης Ζωχιός** είναι ερευνητής γ΄ βαθμίδας στο Κέντρο Ερεύνης της Ελληνικής Λαογραφίας της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών. Έχει διδακτορικό από το Πανεπιστήμιο Γκρενόμπλ με θέμα τις αναπαραστάσεις της υπνικής παράλυσης στη μεσαιωνική λογοτεχνία και τις λαϊκές δοξασίες. Διευθύνει το περιοδικό Études Balkaniques – Cahiers Pierre Belon και συνεπιμελείται τη σειρά «Λαογραφία: Ερμηνευτικές και μεθοδολογικές προσεγγίσεις» τις εκδόσεις Ινστιτούτο του Βιβλίου – Α. Καρδαμίτσα. Τα ερευνητικά του ενδιαφέροντα αφορούν τη βιωμένη και λαϊκή θρησκεία, τις λαϊκές αφηγήσεις, την ψευδο-λαογραφία και τις επιθανάτιες εμπειρίες. Από το 2024 εκπονεί Habilitation με θέμα τον εξορκισμό και τον δαιμονισμό στη νεότερη Ορθοδοξία. Δραστηριοποιείται επίσης στη λογοτεχνική και επιστημονική μετάφραση, έχοντας μεταφράσει Ρώσους συγγραφείς όπως ο Α. Τολστόι, ο Οντόγιεφσκι και ο Τσουλκόφ. Είναι μέλος της γαλλικής ερευνητικής ομάδας Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcité. Έχει δημοσιεύσει εκτενώς, συμμετάσχει σε διεθνή συνέδρια και οργανώσει συλλογικά έργα. Η επιτόπια έρευνά του περιλαμβάνει το Άγιο Όρος. Διδάσκει στην École Pratique des Hautes Études ενώ στο παρελθόν έχει εργαστεί στο ΕΑΠ, το ΕΚΠΑ, την École des Hautes Études en sciences sociales και το Πανεπιστήμιο Στρασβούργου.

Short CV

Stamatis Zochios is a Research Associate at the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens. He holds a PhD from the University of Grenoble, with a dissertation on the representations of sleep paralysis in medieval literature and folk beliefs. He is the editor-in-chief of the journal *Études Balkaniques – Cahiers Pierre Belon* and co-editor of the series *Folklore: Interpretative and Methodological Approaches* published by the Institute of the Book – A. Kardamitsa. His research interests focus on lived and popular religion, folk narratives, fakelore, and near-death experiences. Since 2024 he has been preparing his *Habilitation à diriger des recherches* on exorcism and demonology in modern Orthodoxy. He is also active in literary and scholarly translation, having translated Russian authors such as A. Tolstoy, Odoevsky, and Chulkov. He is a member of the French research group *Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcité*. He has published extensively, participated in international conferences, and edited collective volumes. His fieldwork includes research at Mount Athos. He teaches at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, while in the past he has worked at the Hellenic Open University, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and the University of Strasbourg.

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