The Most Ancient Greek Manuscripts of the *Ladder* of John Climacus

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Abstract

The Byzantine hand-written tradition of the *Ladder* of Divine Ascent has poorly been studied. The first step in this direction should be the systematic description of all surviving Greek manuscripts of this book. According to the counting of the author, not less

* **Abbreviations:** *EBE* – collection of manuscripts of the National Library of Greece (Athens); *EBE Met.* – collection of manuscripts Metochion tou panagiou Taphou (Athens, *EBE*); *RNB* – collection of Greek manuscripts of the National Library of Russia (Saint Petersburg, fund 906); *Bar.* – collection of manuscripts of Giacomo Barocci (Oxford, Bodleian Library); *Conv. Soppr.* – collection of manuscripts of Conventi Soppressi (Florence, Laurentian Library); *Dem.* – collection of manuscripts of the Skete of Saint Demetrius (Mount Athos, Vatopedi); *Grott.* – collection of manuscripts of the monastery Grottaferrata (Italy); *Iber.* – collection of manuscripts of the monastery Iviron (Athos); *Jer. Saba* – collection of manuscripts of the Holy Labra of Saint Sabbas (Jerusalem, The Library of Greek Orthodox Church); *Karak.* – collection of manuscripts of the monastery Karakallou (Athos); *Kutl.* – collection of manuscripts of the monastery Koutlounousiou (Athos); *Lond.* – collection of manuscripts of the British Library (London); *Met. Metam.* – collection of manuscripts of the Holy Monastery of Great Meteoron (Meteora); *Mil.* – collection of manuscripts of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Milan); *Paris* – collection of manuscripts of the National Library of France (Paris); *Plut.* – collection of manuscripts Plutei (Florence, Laurentian Library); *Sin. N.* – A New collection of Sinai (Saint Catherine's Monastery); *Sin. gr.* – collection of manuscripts of the Saint Catherine's Monastery (Sinai); *Sinod. gr.* – Synodal collection of Greek manuscripts of the State Historical Museum (Moscow); *Tor.* – collection of manuscripts of the National and University Library (Turin); *Urb.* – collection of manuscripts Urbani of the Franzoniana Library (Gevoa); *Vat. Chig. gr.* – collection of manuscripts Chigi graeci (Vatican City, Apostolic Library); *Vat. Palat. gr.* – collection of manuscripts Palatini graeci (Vatican City, Apostolic Library); *Ven.* – collection of manuscripts of the Biblioteca Marciana (Venice); *Wolf. Gud. gr.* – collection of manuscripts Gudiani graeci of the Herzog August Library (Wolfenbuettel).

than 511 Greek manuscripts from the eighth to the nineteenth century with text of the *Ladder* were kept. This article is dedicated to the 35 most ancient books, dated from 8th to 10th century. The most ancient Greek manuscripts of the *Ladder* are available in the libraries of not less than 8 countries (Italy, Greece, Egypt, Russia, England, Germany, France and Israel (Jerusalem)).

Keywords

Byzantine monasticism – manuscripts – libraries – Ladder of Divine Ascent – John Climacus

One of literary monuments, which had huge influence on whole European culture, is the treatise written by the abbot of Sinai Monastery John in the early seventh century. In the Christian world it became widely known under the name *Klimax* (*Scala paradisi*, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, *Лѣстница* etc.). The Byzantine hand-written tradition of the monument has been studied rather poorly. The first step in this direction should be the identification and the systematic description of all surviving Greek manuscripts of this book.

The question about the quantity of surviving Greek manuscripts is open. The first scientist, who named an exact number of manuscripts, was Dmitrii Bogdanović. In his monograph the researcher gave a chronological list of the 78 Greek books from the ninth to the seventeenth century.¹ This list can sometimes be complemented. In 2010 the number of Greek manuscripts known to me was 123 books,² in 2011 – 180 books.³ 627 manuscripts appear in the electronic database Pinakes of the Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes (<<http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr>>), but many books are repeated two or even three times, the information about the books is given briefly and dating is often incorrect. So, for example, the manuscript *Jer. Saba* 605 is named in this database as the *Ladder*, but in fact this manuscript represents a *Sammelband* (convolutus), in one part of which there are fragments from the *Ladder*.⁴

1 Д. Богдановић. *Јован Лествичник у византијској и старој српској књижевности*. Београд, 1968, app. 1.

2 Т. Г. Попова, *Славянская рукописная традиция Лествицы Иоанна Синайского*, Северодвинск, 2010, pp. 272–275.

3 Т. Г. Попова, *Лествица Иоанна Синайского в славянской книжности*, Saarbrücken, 2011, pp. 429–434.

4 S. J. Voicu, S. D'Alisera, *Index in manuscriptorum graecorum edita specimina*, Roma, 1981, p. 327.

The database Pinakes is doubtlessly, a great help for researchers, but its information needs to be verified. So, from 627 significant manuscripts of the *Ladder* in this database 505 really exist. On the other hand 6 Greek manuscripts of the *Ladder* are absent. According to my countings, not less than 511 Greek manuscripts from the eighth to the nineteenth century with text of the *Ladder* were kept. Chronologically, the Greek manuscripts are distributed as following: of the eighth century not less than 2 books were kept, of the ninth century – not less than 4, of the tenth century – not less than 29, of the eleventh century – not less than 68, of the twelfth century – not less than 63, of the thirteenth century – not less than 79, of the fourteenth century – not less than 142, of the fifteenth century – not less than 39, of the sixteenth century – not less than 49, of the seventeenth century – not less than 24, of the eighteenth century – not less than 7 and of the nineteenth century – not less than 5. Thus, it is obvious, that the peak of popularity of the Byzantine *Ladder* fell on the fourteenth century, on the period of hesychasm disputes.

This article is dedicated to the set of 35 most ancient books, dated by 8th–10th century.

No.	Dating	Storage	Signature
1.	8th cent.	Italy, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana	<i>Mil. B</i> 117 sup.
2.	8th cent.	Egypt, Mount Sinai, Saint Catherine's Monastery	<i>Sin. N.</i> 71
3.	899 (24 May)	Russia, Moscow, State Historical Museum	<i>Sinod. gr.</i> 145
4.	9th cent.	Italy, Vatican City, Apostolic Library	<i>Vat. Palat. gr.</i> 49
5.	9th cent.	Germany, Wolfenbuettel, Herzog August Library	<i>Wolf. Gud. gr.</i> 41.
6.	9–10th cent.	Egypt, Mount Sinai, Saint Catherine's Monastery	<i>Sin. gr.</i> 416
7.	948	England, Oxford, Bodleian Library	<i>Bar.</i> 134
8.	First half of the 10th cent.	Greece, Mount Athos, Monastery of Iviron	<i>Iber.</i> 1434
9.	First half of the 10th cent.	Egypt, Mount Sinai, Saint Catherine's Monastery	<i>Sin. gr.</i> 421
10.	Middle 10th cent.	Russia, Moscow, State Historical Museum	<i>Sinod. gr.</i> 362
11.	958	Greece, Mount Athos, Karakallou monastery	<i>Karak.</i> 29
12.	969	Greece, Meteora, The Holy Monastery of Great Meteoron	<i>Met. Metam.</i> 565

No.	Dating	Storage	Signature
13.	985 (31 January)	Greece, Mount Athos, Monastery of Iviron	<i>Iber.</i> 415
14.	992	Russia, Moscow, State Historical Museum	<i>Sinod. gr.</i> 313
15.	Late 10th cent.	France, Paris, National Library of France	<i>Paris</i> 1069
16.	10th cent.	Greece, Athens, National Library of Greece	<i>EBE</i> 307
17.	10th cent.	Greece, Athens, National Library of Greece	<i>EBE</i> 308
18.	10th cent.	Greece, Athens, National Library of Greece	<i>EBE</i> 2210
19.	10th cent.	Russia, Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia	<i>RNB</i> 86
20.	10th cent.	Italy, Florence, Laurentian Library	<i>Conv. Soppr.</i> 162
21.	10th cent.	Greece, Mount Athos, the Skete of Saint Demetrius	<i>Dem.</i> 15
22.	10th cent.	Jerusalem, The Library of Greek Orthodox Church	<i>Jer. Saba</i> 157
23.	10th cent.	Greece, Mount Athos, Koutloumousiou monastery	<i>Kutl.</i> 18
24.	10th cent.	Greece, Mount Athos, Koutloumousiou monastery	<i>Kutl.</i> 49
25.	10th cent.	England, London, The British Library	<i>Lond.</i> 17471
26.	10th cent.	Italy, Florence, Laurentian Library	<i>Plut.</i> 09. 03
27.	10th cent.	Italy, Florence, Laurentian Library	<i>Plut.</i> 89 sup. 22
28.	10th cent.	Egypt, Mount Sinai, Saint Catherine's Monastery	<i>Sin. gr.</i> 417
29.	10th cent.	Italy, Turin, The National and University Library	<i>Tor. C.</i> III. 11
30.	10th cent.	Italy, Gevoa, Franzoniana Library	<i>Urb.</i> 29
31.	10th cent.	Italy, Vatican City, Apostolic Library	<i>Vat. Chig. gr.</i> 7
32.	10th cent.	Italy, Vatican City, Apostolic Library	<i>Vat. gr.</i> 2059
33.	Late 10th cent. – early 11th cent.	Italy, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana	<i>Mil. E</i> 108 sup.
34.	Late 10th cent. – early 11th cent.	Italy, Florence, Laurentian Library	<i>Conv. Soppr.</i> 116
35.	Late 10th cent. – early 11th cent.	Italy, Grottaferrata monastery	<i>Grott. B.d.</i> 29

According to Pinakes database, *EBE Met.* 857 is written in 10th–11th century. I did not include it in this list, because the manuscript represents a *Sammelband* (convolutus) from 4 parts, and the *Ladder* is dated by 11th century.

One has to conclude that the ancient manuscripts of the *Ladder* are investigated in extremely insufficient way. Almost no manuscript was included into scientific circulation *Iber.* 1434, *Karak.* 29, *EBE* 307, *EBE* 308, *EBE* 2210, *RNB* 86, *Dem.* 15, *Kutl.* 18, *Kutl.* 49, *Tor. C.* III. 11, *Grott. B.d.* 29. For many years till now the hypothesis, that *Sin. gr.* 416 and *RNB* 86 are two parts of the same manuscript, is not proved.

The most ancient Greek manuscripts of the *Ladder* are available in the libraries of approximately 8 countries, a big part is kept in the collections of Italy (12 books) and Greece (10 books). 4 manuscripts are kept in the libraries of Egypt as well as in Russia, 2 – in England, 1 – in Germany, in France and in Israel (Jerusalem). The manuscripts were created in Halki (*Bar.* 134), in Vatopedi (*Sinod. gr.* 313), and in Capua (*Paris* 1069). From 35 manuscripts 6 manuscripts have the exact dating by the scribes.

Chronological distribution of the most ancient manuscripts of the *Ladder* (eighth century – 2, ninth century – 4, tenth century – 29) shows a strong increase of interest towards the book after the ninth century. Since that time, John Climacus became revered as Saint in the Byzantine church.

The most ancient manuscripts with interpretations are *Jer. Saba* 157, *Sin. gr.* 421, *Urb.* 29.

Among the owners of these books there were such great historical personalities as the French politician Jean-Baptiste Colbert (*Paris* 1069), the Italian scientist and writer Jacopo Gaddi (*Plut.* 89 sup. 22), and the German merchant Ulrich Fugger the Elder (*Vat. Palat. gr.* 49).

The most ancient manuscripts of the Synodal collection of the State Historical Museum (*Sinod. gr.* 145, *Sinod. gr.* 313, *Sinod. gr.* 362) were delivered to Moscow from the Athos monasteries by Arseniy Sukhanov.

Many of the Greek manuscripts of the *Ladder* are beautifully illustrated. The catalogue of illustrated Greek books of the *Ladder* contains 33 names.⁵ And manuscripts may contain not one but many beautiful images (for example, the manuscript at Princeton University library (Garrett 16) is illustrated with 43 miniatures). There is an opinion that the first illustrated manuscripts of the *Ladder* appeared not earlier than in the 11th century.⁶ This is not correct. The

5 J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus* (Studies in Manuscript Illumination, 5), Princeton, 1954, pp. 164–192.

6 A. P. Kazhdan, "John Klimax," in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, New York, 1991, p. 1061.

tradition of illustrating the manuscripts of the *Ladder* with pictures and miniatures began in the 10th century. Such manuscripts as *Iber.* 415, *Paris* 1069, *Vat. Chig. gr.* 7, *Sin. gr.* 417 are illustrated, and *Sin. gr.* 417 has kept not one but three miniatures.

Of these 35 manuscripts 13 ones are “*Ladder* with additions” (Sammelbands). The scribes of the manuscripts combined the text of the *Ladder* and the works of other authors in one book. The works of Basil of Caesarea (*EBE* 307, *Jer. Saba* 157, *Mil. E* 108 sup., *Vat. gr.* 2059) and Diadochos of Photiki (*Sinod. gr.* 145, *Dem.* 15, *Jer. Saba* 157, *Vat. Chig. gr.* 7) are most frequently included together with the *Ladder*. The works of Nilus of Sinai (*Vat. Palat. gr.* 49, *Jer. Saba* 157, *Kutl.* 18), Mark of Egypt (*Sinod. gr.* 145, *Dem.* 15, *Jer. Saba* 157), Dorotheus of Gaza (*Sin. gr.* 416, *Vat. Chig. gr.* 7), Ephrem the Syrian (*Dem.* 15, *Jer. Saba* 157) are a little bit more uncommon in ancient books. The books with the most ancient texts of the *Ladder* could also include the works of Ammon Monk (*Jer. Saba* 157), Amphilochius of Iconium (*Kutl.* 49), Anastasius Sinaita (*Dem.* 15), Athanasius of Alexandria (*Jer. Saba* 157), Gregory Thaumaturgus (*Jer. Saba* 157), Evagrius Ponticus (*Vat. Palat. gr.* 49), John of Damascus (*Jer. Saba* 157), John Chrysostom (*Dem.* 15), Isaac of Nineveh (*Jer. Saba* 157), John Cassian (*Kutl.* 18), Maximus the Confessor (*Vat. Palat. gr.* 49), Nikephoros I of Constantinople (*Dem.* 15), Thalassios of Libya (*Kutl.* 18) and Theodore the Studite (*Jer. Saba* 157). *Vat. Palat. gr.* 49 has kept the fragments from the Triodion.

A scientific critical modern edition of the Greek text of the *Ladder* is not present. The best, in fact, is the publication of Jesuit Matthew Rader dedicated to Cardinal Richelieu (S. Ioannis Scholastici, abbatis Montis Sina, qui vulgo Climacus appellatur, *opera omnia*, Interprete Matthaeo Radero, Lutetiae – Parisiorum, 1633). This edition is at the moment practically inaccessible. For this edition Rader used 7 manuscripts from Munich and one manuscript from Antwerp, the destiny of which is unknown. This edition (with some corrections) is reprinted in 1860 in Paris (Climaci Joannis *Scala paradise*, in *pg* 88, col. 583–1248). In 1941 in Turin P. Trevisan has republished the text of the J. P. Migne with a parallel Italian translation (S. Giovanni Climaco *Scala paradise*, testo con introduzione, versione e note del Sac. Pietro Trevisan (Corona patrum Salesiana. Series graeca, VIII, IX)). A new edition of the *Ladder* was published in Constantinople in 1883, prepared by the monk of Great Lavra (Athos) Sophronius, for which the editor used a manuscript (which is unknown) of Dionisiou Monastery. A further new edition of the *Ladder* was issued in Oropos (Greece) in 1978, with a Modern Greek translation and commentaries prepared by Archimandrite Ignatius. The manuscript from monastery Stavronikita (cod. Nr 50) and the edition of Sophronius serve as two bases of this edition. This version of the Greek text of the *Ladder* is constantly republished. Thus, there are known

three printed versions of the Greek text of the *Ladder*: of Rader (Migne, Trevisan), of Sophronius, and of Ignatius. (None of these books takes into consideration the texts of the above-mentioned oldest Greek manuscripts of the *Ladder*.)

The general picture of Byzantine hand-written tradition of the *Ladder* would be incomplete without mentioning the ascetic *Sammelbands* into which structure the authors included fragments of the text of the *Ladder*. Among the most ancient ascetic *Sammelbands* with fragments of the *Ladder* are *Jer. Saba* 605, *Mil. S. P.* 6.14, *Mil. Q* 74 sup., *Ven.* 23.

So, now it is possible to talk about the existence of 35 Greek manuscripts of the *Ladder* of Saint John Climacus from the eighth to the tenth century included into the scientific circulation. The author will be very grateful to everyone who can give any information, which may help her in finding or identification of the oldest Greek manuscripts of the *Ladder*, and also for remarks, notes and additions.