Платонов Вячеслав Михайлович, *Рукописная книга в традиционной культуре Эфиопии*, Санкт-Петербург: Российская Национальная Библиотека, Российская Академия Наук, Институт Восточных Рукописей, 2017, 216 стр.
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Platonov Vyačeslav Michajlovič. *The Manuscript Book in the Traditional Culture of Ethiopia*, Saint Petersburg: Russian National Library, National Academy of Science, Institute of Oriental Studies, 2017, 216 pp.

This book by Vyacheslav Platonov (1941–2012) resulted from the long-life interest of the scholar for the Ethiopian manuscript culture and his direct contact with the Ethiopian manuscript collections available in Saint Petersburg. Through the examination of the available literature in European languages and Amharic, enriched with his sometimes passionate reflections, this work will introduce many Russian readers to the fascinating manuscript culture of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The book was originally presented in its typewritten form in 1998. The book was later edited *post mortem* by one of his pupils, Ekaterina Gusarova, who introduced some necessary updates to the bibliography. In addition, Gusarova further enriched the book by adding colour images of some of the manuscripts that were preserved in Saint Petersburg in order to give some idea of the physical collections even for those who do not read Russian. The only unfortunate aspect regarding the images is their small scale.

The concordance of information about Ethiopian manuscripts in the Saint Petersburg collection, prepared by Gusarova is an important resource, which has been already appreciated by the scholars of the *Beta Maṣāḥaft* project. Generally, Gusarova treated her teacher's work with great respect, her interference, from what I can judge from the declared strategy, is clearly distinguished from the original exemplar. This allows a reader to appreciate the work by Vyačeslav Platonov in its historical context. For those who were not acquainted with Platonov, the bibliographic profile prepared by Gusarova may be of special importance. There we meet Platonov as a young student of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Saint Petersburg University, who goes to Ethiopia; then we find him as an activist and later a political prisoner, rehabilitated in 1994; in the footnotes we meet Platonov as a grandfather, kindly teaching his granddaughter how to read Ethiopic. See also a short biography of Platonov in: *Biographical Dictionary of Dissidents in the Soviet Union: 1956-1975*, ed. by S.P. de Boer, E.J. Driessen, H.L. Verhaar, The Hague–Boston–London, 1982, p. 437.

This contribution apparently was based on the seminary materials prepared for students. Each topic related to the book finds its place, the material is well balanced and well structured, which is a great achievement for such an

ambitious project. This may explain some of author's serious simplifications. Sometimes one can find deliberate stimulating speculations, which are very common in a classroom, and thus should be considered as belonging to this genre.

Long before multidisciplinary approach became a common trend, anticipating international scholarly recognition of the potential offered by the study of the Ethiopian Manuscripts traditions, which counts for centuries and centuries and will hopefully, still count in the future, Platonov introduced his potential readers (students?) to the Christian literary world in Ethiopia.

For the international scholarship, the most meaningful discussion is contained in chapter three, where Platonov presents his studies on Ethiopian church and monastic libraries and modern private libraries. Platonov discussed some inventory lists, synthesizing his analysis with the bulletin prepared by the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia (NALE). On pp. 121-123, Platonov presents full translations of two inventory lists found in MS РНБ Дорн 612 ff. 161-162, containing the Four Gospels coming from the Ethiopian monastic community in Jerusalem from the fifteenth century, which were only partially presented by Boris Turaev in his article. Ted Erho contributed to the study of the church and monastic libraries, introducing further inventory lists other than those presented by Platonov in Ted Erho, *The Shepherd of Hermas in Ethiopia*, in: *LAfrica, l'Oriente mediterraneo e l'Europa. Tradizioni e culture a confronto*, a cura di P. Nicelli, Milano–Roma, 2015, pp. 102-117.

The decision not to provide labels in translation and then only numbers of books is not the most informative one, it will force the following scholars to go back to the originals.

An interesting hypothesis suggested, while Platonov analyses paratextual information contained in the manuscripts, is to consider condemnation notes as juridical documents, observing that the book collections of the churches and monasteries appeared to be in their private possession and could not be expropriated.

In the first chapter, Platonov discusses the traditional transmission of knowledge – in the system of education. This chapter is based mostly on accounts by Ethiopic scholars, eyewitnesses, who went through the same traditional education method themselves. Thus, Platonov's attempt to reconstruct the traditional education system in Ethiopia, clarifying each point with the insiders is of great value. No accounts predate the nineteenth century, when tradition was overhauled by the preference for modern schools. Platonov analysed material evidence from the previous centuries, trying to demonstrate the continuity of the tradition. Obviously, one should remember that the evolution of the educational system was reconstructed from the modern times to the past and is therefore purely hypothetical.

The second chapter needs to be revised, nevertheless, it is astonishing to see how many aspects of book culture were elaborated by Platonov. For the topics discussed in chapter One I rather address the reader to consult (or at least cross-check) the Ethiopic sections in: *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: an Introduction*, ed. by A. Bausi, P.G. Borbone, F. Briquel-Chatonnet, P. Buzi, J. Gippert, C. Macé, M. Maniaci, Z. Melissakis, L.E. Parodi, and W. Witakowski, Hamburg, 2015.

To learn more about the book binding one should consult master thesis by Eleana del Sasso carried on at the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario (ICRCPAL), supervised by Silvia Sotgiu and by co-supervisors Giampiero Bozzacchi, Giovanna Falcone, Francesca Pascalicchio: Eliana dal Sasso, *Studio codicologico, diagnostica e tecniche di intervento non invasive per il restauro del ms. etiopico CRYPT. AET. 7 della Biblioteca statale del Monumento nazionale Abbazia greca di Grottaferrata*, Roma, 2018.

Nevertheless, for the sake of historical justice to the scholar, I will present a brief list of the themes discussed by Platonov as follows: parchment, ink, writing instruments, ruling lines, *the making* of quires, the composition of the quires, the page layout, decorations, the scribe and the painter at work, the duration of copying, bookbinding, the roll and the rotulus, and, finally, paleography.

The presence of Ethiopic terminology made the book even more interesting. However, the decision to present the terms in their Russian transliteration only reduces its value; moreover, the list of 'terminology' on pp. 163-167 is not complete. In my opinion, it would have been much better to provide both, the original Ethiopic form and the transliterated form.

To sum up, the book is a good and useful in many respects. Considering all the above points, it is a good introduction to the Ethiopian book culture and a solid basis for further research.

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