Slavonic Translations of the “Master of Rhodes Letter”

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Abstract

The “Master of Rhodes Letter”, which tells of the birth of the Antichrist, was one of the most popular eschatological writings in Europe in the 15th century. This pseudo-epistle was translated from Latin into Russian in the middle of the 15th century in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by Feofil Dederkin, an informant for the Grand Duke of Moscow Vasily Vasilyevich. Previously only one letter from Dederkin to the Grand Duke Vasily Vasilyevich was known: a translation from Latin describing the earthquakes in Italy in 1456.

The “Master of Rhodes Letter” was translated a second time into Ukrainian from Latin in the 1630s, during a time when the Orthodox hierarchy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth resisted the adoption of the Union of Brest. The third translation was made from English into Russian at beginning of the 18th century, and was believed by Metropolitan Job of Novgorod to be the work of Old Believers.

Keywords

"Master of Rhodes Letter" – eschatological texts

1 Introduction¹

In the late Middle Ages in European countries, eschatological sentiments acquired particular relevance. The expansion of the Ottoman Empire, changes on the political map, the weakening of the power of the popes and the conciliar movement contributed to the emergence of apocalyptic writings. The expectation of the end of the world was accompanied by the creation of prophecies about the birth of the Antichrist, which would mark the beginning of Armageddon. These writings were circulated both among the lower classes and the elites.

One of the more popular writings was "Antichrist (Endkrist)-Bildertext" ("The Book of the Antichrist"). This original collection of "legends" about the Antichrist in pictures was popular in Europe in the middle and in the second half of the 15th century and continued the European tradition of illustrated tales of the Antichrist.² The earliest chiroxylographic blockbook of the "Book of the Antichrist" was published after 1450; since 1482 the same text was published many times in different European languages.³ It was translated into

- 1 The research was carried out with the financial support of a grant from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in the form of subsidies as part of Project No. 075-15-2020-786 "History of Writing in European Civilization". The authors thank Anastasia Shapovalova, Natalia Berezhnaja and Jana Howlett for their help, and especially Nicolaos Chrissidis for his comments on the article. Aleksandra Chirkova provided invaluable assistance in working with the Latin text. The authors are grateful to Aleksandr Andreev for translating the article into English, but any responsibility for possible mistakes remains with the authors.
- 2 B. McGinn, "Portraying Antichrist in the Middle Ages," in: *The usage and abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, A. Welkenhuysen. (Mediaevalia Lovaniensia. Series I / Studia xv), Leuven, 1988, pp. 13–20; С. В. Иванов, *Русский перевод немецкого "Сказания об антихристе" по рукописям XVII–XVIII веков* [S. V. Ivanov, *Die russische Übersetzung des deutschen "Antichrist-Bildertexts" nach Handschriften des 17.–18. Jahrhunderts*], St. Petersburg, 2018, pp. 19–21.
- 3 The earliest edition of the "Book of the Antichrist" has been reproduced in facsimile: *Der Antichrist und die fünfzehn Zeichen. Faksimile-Ausgabe des einzigen erhaltenen chiroxylographischen Blockbuchs*, hrsg. von H. Th. Musper, 2 Bde. (Faks. und Kommentar), Mit zahlr. tlw. farb. Abbildungen (OHPgt. in Schubert, 4to), München, Prestel, 1970. See also: McGinn, "Portraying Antichrist in the Middle Ages," pp. 18–20. Later editions in Latin, German, French, Italian and Spanish were published after 1482; before 1500 at least 13 editions

Russian and is known in Russian manuscripts of the 17th and 18th centuries.⁴ The “Book of the Antichrist”, which became widespread in Europe by the end of the 15th century, opened with the prophecy of the birth of the Antichrist from the tribe of Dan, based on the words of the Old Testament patriarch Jacob.⁵

The richly illustrated “Book of the Antichrist” attracted readers and was one of the most widespread, but far from the only, essays that prophetically announced the imminent birth of the Antichrist. Another work announcing the birth of the infant Antichrist, the “Master of Rhodes Letter”, dates to the middle of the 14th century. This essay had a peculiar fate: written in the form of a report, it was rewritten as a series of letters and accounts of real events⁶ and, once the date indicated in it was updated, came to be relevant at any time. The latest translation known to us was published in 1706 in English. Like the earlier “letters”, it is presented in the form of an account of recent events and is accompanied by the publisher’s reflections on whether this text could have been created by Protestants.⁷

2 “The Master of Rhodes Letter” in Europe in the 14th–15th Centuries

The “Master of Rhodes Letter” is written in the form of a letter from the Master of the Order of the Johannites to Italy. In different versions of this story, the place of writing varies: either Rhodes or, in later versions, Malta is specified.

appeared. Information about them can be found in Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke, see also: Иванов, *Русский перевод немецкого “Сказания об антихристе”* [Ivanov, *Die russische Übersetzung des deutschen “Antichrist-Bildertexts”*], pp. 22–24. The text of the “Book of the Antichrist” without illustrations was edited together with an English translation: A. C. Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200–1600* (Studies in medieval and reformation thought. Vol. 55), Leiden, New York, Köln, 1995, pp. 229–246. On the influence of the “Book of the Antichrist” up to the middle of the 15th century, see: W. C. McDonald, “Red Jews and the Antichrist as the Jewish Messiah: Michel Beheim’s *Endicrist* (c. 1455). With a translation,” *Mediaevistik*, 28 (2015), pp. 195–199.

4 For a study and edition of the Russian translation of the “Book of the Antichrist”, see: Иванов, *Русский перевод немецкого “Сказания об антихристе”* [Ivanov, *Die russische Übersetzung des deutschen “Antichrist-Bildertexts”*].

5 Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age*, p. 229.

6 F. C. Kneupper, *The Empire at the End of Time. Identity and Reform in Late Medieval German Prophecy*, Oxford, 2016, pp. 36–37.

7 *The Present State of Europe or the Historical and Political Monthly Mercury, giving an account of all the publick and private occurrences, civil, ecclesiastical and military, that are most considerable in every court. The interest of princes, their pretensions and intrigues. For the month of January, 1707. With political reflections upon every state. Continued monthly from the original published at the Hague, by the authority of the States of Holland and West-Friesland*, vol. 18, London, 1706, pp. 107–108.

The key element is the Order of the Johannites (Hospitallers), which from 1310 was located on the island of Rhodes and since 1530 – on the island of Malta. The earliest version of the text was written in Latin on behalf of a priest retelling the news that circulated in Jerusalem, which allowed Robert E. Lerner and Jessica Roussanov to name the original text "Jerusalem Rumors".⁸ R. Lerner suggested that the original short version was created around 1356 in the middle Rhine region.⁹ According to a later elaborated version of the text, which was recorded no later than the last quarter of the 14th century,¹⁰ the letter was written by the Master of the Order of the Johannites and sent to Italy. The letter announced the birth of the Antichrist in the vicinity of Babylon. The child's father remained unknown, and the mother came from the biblical tribe of Dan and was a harlot. The letter went on to describe two embassies sent by the Hospitallers to Babylon to check on the terrible news. The messengers learned that the child born to the harlot had an unusual and repulsive appearance; being two months old, he had the mental capacity of an adult. His birth was marked by a number of supernatural phenomena: precious stones and snakes fell from the sky, voices were heard, and so on. One of the mountains in the vicinity of Babylon split in two, and a stone column appeared in the crevice with the words of prophecy engraved on it. The locals fully trusted the Antichrist, considering him a prophet and messiah and handing over to the "Saracens" for death anyone who refused to worship the infant.

The content of the "Master of Rhodes Letter" makes one wonder whether its creation is connected with the activities of the Order of the Johannites to a greater extent than R. Lerner assumed. Obviously, the occurrence in the text of "Saracens" who appear to be on the side of the Antichrist reflected the constant confrontation between the Hospitallers and the Turks,¹¹ which began with the arrival of the Johannites on Rhodes and continued until their exile to Malta. Italian cities took part in the conflict, most importantly, Venice.¹² This explains why the "Master of Rhodes Letter" devoted to the growing power of

8 J. Roussanov, R. E. Lerner, "The Jerusalem Rumors: the Earliest Stage of the *Master of Rhodes Letter* on the Birth of Antichrist," *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo*, 2 (2005), pp. 157–166.

9 R. E. Lerner, "The Jerusalem Rumors: An Addendum," *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo*, 3 (2006), pp. 541–543; R. E. Lerner, "Reception of prophecy in Bologna: the *Visio fratris Johannis* in a hearing of 1299," *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia*, vol. 61, No. 1, Gennaio – Giugno, 2007, pp. 69–70.

10 Roussanov, Lerner, "The Jerusalem Rumors: the Earliest Stage," pp. 157–158.

11 M. Carr, "The Hospitallers of Rhodes and their Alliance Against the Turks, 1306–1348," in: *Islands and Military Orders, c. 1291–c. 1798*, ed. E. Buttigieg and S. Phillips, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013, pp. 167–176.

12 Carr, "The Hospitallers of Rhodes and their Alliance Against the Turks," pp. 170–171.

the Antichrist and his Saracen patrons is addressed specifically to the Italian authorities.

Regardless of whether the text originated in the German principalities in the middle of the 14th century or in some other setting at an even earlier time, by the beginning of the 15th century the “Master of Rhodes Letter” had gained popularity in various European countries. At the end of the 14th–beginning of the 15th centuries, its translations into Italian, Spanish and German appeared. There are no fewer than 34 handwritten copies of the “Master of Rhodes Letter”, which differ significantly in text and composition.¹³ The most complete information about the extant manuscripts, editions, studies and mentions of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” was collected by Klaus Graf,¹⁴ but a text-critical study of this pseudo-epistle has not yet been carried out. The known manuscripts (most of which date to the 15th century) are divided into several groups, depending on the addressees of the epistle and the date to which the birth of the Antichrist is assigned. Thus, at least five manuscripts are addressed to Venice. Some manuscripts indicate the same year of the birth of the Antichrist – either 1385 or 1440 – which no doubt indicates the date when the text was revised. Frances Courtney Kneupper has shown convincingly that the “Master of Rhodes Letter” attracted the particular attention of theologians who met at the Council of Basel (1431–1449). Its prophecies about the birth of the Antichrist and the vague expectation of the collapse of the adherents of the true faith agreed with the mood of the participants at the Basel Council. F. Kneupper connects the creation of the revised version of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” mentioning the date of 1440 with the sessions of the Council.¹⁵

Throughout the 15th century, the popularity of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” in European countries grew. The dates in the manuscripts of this time indicate new interpretations of the prophecy and attribute the birth of the Antichrist or the sending of the letter to 1408, 1412, 1441, 1465, 1489, 1491, 1519 and other

13 Manuscripts of the elaborated version of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” are listed in the studies: S. Meyer, “Kleine Mitteilungen. Ein *Antichrist* nach mittelalterlicher Vorstellung,” in: *Altpreußische Monatsschrift. Begründet von Rudolf Reicke und Ernst Wichert*, hrsg. von August Seraphim, B. 59 (der Provinzial-Blätter B. 125), Königsberg, 1922, pp. 303–307; Roussanov, Lerner, “The Jerusalem Rumors: the Earliest Stage,” pp. 169–170; Lerner, “The Jerusalem Rumors: An Addendum,” p. 543; Kneupper, *The Empire at the End of Time*, pp. 197–198; K. D. Döring, *Sultansbriefe. Textfassungen, Überlieferung und Einordnung*, Wiesbaden, 2017, p. III. A significant number of manuscripts have been identified by Klaus Graf: *Kundschaft vom Antichrist – Archivalia* (hypotheses.org) (accessed 16.01.2021).

14 *Kundschaft vom Antichrist – Archivalia* (hypotheses.org) (accessed 16.01.2021).

15 F. C. Kneupper, “Conciliarists Employment of Eschatology during and after the Council of Basel (1431–1460),” in: *Factional Struggles. Divided Elites in European Cities and Courts (1400–1750)*, ed. M. Caesar. Leiden-Boston, 2017, pp. 63–68.

years.¹⁶ The rich manuscript tradition and especially the constant updating of dates speak to the popularity of the work and the perception of it as continually relevant.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the first editions of the text appeared. Around 1502, Johann Weissenburger published in Nuremberg an engraved wall sheet entitled "Missiva potenti Venetorum dominio a Grandi Rodien. Magistro missa", in which the "Master of Rhodes Letter" was reproduced in Latin with an illustration depicting the key plots of the story.¹⁷

In 1502 the palaeotype "Diss büchlin saget von dem Endtcrist un[d] vo[n] syner grusame[n] geburt zu Babilo[n]ie von der snede[n] frowe[n] Ulcas" was compiled and published in Strasbourg by Bartholomaeus Kistler, as Gisela Möncke has proposed.¹⁸ It contains the text of the "Master of Rhodes Letter" with the date of 1475. In 1502 the same palaeotype was published by Johann Schönsperger the Elder in Augsburg.¹⁹ The publication of Schönsperger combines two works about the Antichrist: following the "Master of Rhodes Letter" (ff. 2–3) the foreword of the above-mentioned "Book of the Antichrist" was appended on ff. 3–4.²⁰ A Latin original for the German edition is evidenced by the preservation of Latin terms with explanations in German, for example: "Exploratoren oder Potschafftern".²¹

16 Roussanov, Lerner, "The Jerusalem Rumors: the Earliest Stage," pp. 169–170; Lerner, "The Jerusalem Rumors: An Addendum," p. 543; Kundschaft vom Antichrist – Archivalia (hypotheses.org) (accessed 16.01.2021).

17 W. Heß, *Himmels- und Naturerscheinungen in Einblattdrucken des XV. bis XVIII. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1911, pp. 99 (reproduction), 107, No. 2 (catalog). Information about the wall sheet on the website of the National Library of Bavaria, Munich: Missiva potenti Venetorum dominio a Grandi Rodien. Magistro missa – BSB-Katalog (bsb-muenchen.de) and a copy of the engraving: Digitale Bibliothek – Münchener Digitalisierungszentrum (digitale-sammlungen.de).

18 The palaeotype is the subject of a study: G. Möncke, "Zeitungen vom neugeborenen Antichrist," in: *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 80 (2005), pp. 210–219. See catalogue: Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts. zV 97.

19 We know only one copy of the edition of this palaeotype: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Cz 7080. See catalogue: Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts, zV 26491. A digital copy of the palaeotype is presented on the website of the Berlin Library: https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN799326526&PHYSID=PHYS_0005.

20 The foreword is based on the treatise of Hugh Ripelin of Straßburg "Compendium theologiae veritatis" (c. 1260). There is study of Hugh Ripelin's composition and its influence on "The Book of the Antichrist" by Georg Steer: G. Steer, *Hugo Ripelin von Strassburg: zur Rezeptions- und Wirkungsgeschichte des "Compendium theologiae Veritatis" im deutschen Spätmittelalter*, Texte und Textgeschichte, 2, Tübingen, 1981. For more on this see: McDonald, "Red Jews and the Antichrist as the Jewish Messiah," pp. 198, 212 (footnote 15).

21 About the Latin sources of the Strasbourg palaeotype see: G. Möncke, "Zeitungen vom neugeborenen Antichrist," p. 212.

3 Translation of Feofil Dederkin into Russian (15th Century)

Prophetic and apocalyptic writings became widespread not only in Western Europe and Byzantium, but also in the Slavic countries.²² The prophetic letter about the birth of the Antichrist was in demand not only in Western countries. Already in the 1440s, it was translated into Russian with elements of “prosta mova” by a certain Feofil (Theophilus) Dederkin. Until recently, this translation remained unknown to scholars. Dederkin addressed the letter to the Grand Duke of Moscow Vasily Vasilyevich the Blind (1425–1462),²³ narrating the story of the birth of the Antichrist as the latest news and introducing himself as one of the participants in the events.²⁴ Dederkin prefaced the translation with a message that a certain essay in Latin was sent from Venice to the Kingdom of Poland, and from Poland to the city of Lutsk, one of the centers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Dederkin used the term “leaf” (“лист”), which in the clerical terminology of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania meant “letter” or “epistle”.²⁵

22 V. Tapkova-Zaimova, A. Miltenova, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria*, ed. M. Nikolova, Sofia, 2011; Д. И. Антонов, М. Р. Майзульс, *Демоны и грешники в древнерусской иконографии: Семантика образа* [D. I. Antonov, M. R. Majzuls, *Demons and Sinners in Old Russian Iconography: Semiotics of the Image*], Moscow, 2011, pp. 164–191.

23 The prince received the nickname “the Blind” because he was blinded by his enemies in 1446 during an internecine war for the throne.

24 See also: М. В. Корогодина, А. Г. Сергеев, А. В. Сиренов, “Послание об антихристе Феофила Дедеркина [M. V. Korogodina, A. G. Sergeev, A. V. Sirenov, Feofil Dederkin's Epistle about the Antichrist]”, in: *Фестшрифт в честь А. А. Турилова* [Festschrift in Honor of A. A. Turilov], 2021 (in print).

25 The term “leaf” (“лист”) for any letter, regardless of the origin of its author, is characteristic of the business correspondence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; see: А. Золтан, “Пути проникновения западнорусской лексики в великорусский деловой язык в XV в. [A. Zoltan, Paths of the Penetration of West Russian Vocabulary into the Great Russian Business Language in the 15th Century]”, in: *Из истории русской культуры. Киевская и Московская Русь* [From the History of Russian culture. Kiev and Muscovite Russia], vol. 2, book 1, compiled by А. Ф. Литвина, Ф. Б. Успенский [A. F. Litvina, F. B. Uspenskiĭ], Moscow, 2002, pp. 767–768, 790 and other. An example of this is the use of the term “leaf” for the letter of Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople to Novgorod (1467) and the epistle of an Athonite monk to Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich in the 1590s. See: М. В. Корогодина, “Неизвестное послание царю Федору Ивановичу из Константинополя [M. V. Korogodina, An Unknown Epistle to Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich from Constantinople]”, *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, 2/24, July–December (2018), pp. 21–36; М. В. Корогодина, “Грамота патриарха Константинопольского Дионисия Новгороду (1467): судьба славянского перевода [M. V. Korogodina, The Charter of Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople to Novgorod (1467): the Fate of the Slavonic Translation]”, *Slověne*, 2 (2021), in print.

Following the brief introductory words addressed to the Grand Duke Vasily Vasilyevich, Dederkin, with minor abbreviations, translates the pseudo-epistle about the birth of the Antichrist.²⁶ He omits all information about the Master of the Hospitallers and the Order of the Johannites and smooths the line between his own words and the beginning of the translated text, so that the reader gets the impression that Dederkin himself talked with the members of the embassy to Babylon. The supporter of the Antichrist mentioned in the Latin text – a Franciscan brother from the city of Viterbo – under the pen of Dederkin becomes a noble Venetian. Perhaps this is due to the desire of the translator to make the text more understandable for the Muscovite Grand Duke, who was well aware of Venice, but might not have heard of Viterbo.

At times, Dederkin, or his assistant who translated the message, experienced difficulties in transmitting the Latin text. He tried to translate some phrases verbatim, but he was hopelessly confused: “this letter we have (received) from our (envoys), which epistle our confidants received in the Babylonian lands through us” (“листъ есмя от нашихъ, которыи взяли върнии во странах Вавилоньскихъ чрес нас посланье”, cf.: “*litteras recepisse a nostris exploratoribus, quos pro nostra fideliumque salute in partibus Babilonie*”), misunderstood the original: “not glorious descent” (“роду неславна”, cf.: “*staturam infantuli mirabiliter esse formatam*”), or provided the opposite meaning in the translation: “the star did not appear” (“не явилася звезда”, cf.: “*alique stelle vise sunt*”). He missed some details – for example, an indication of the month of birth of the child or the story about the descent of lights flashing over the house of the infant’s mother: “they said they saw a large flame” (“огнь велик повѣдаютъ видѣли”, cf.: “*apparuit ignis magnus supra domum, ubi erat dictus infans, qui descendit subito in terram sine verculo extinctionis*”).²⁷ The translator completely left out the interpretation of the rockfall and the flying snakes, attributed to the words of the infant; on the other hand, he colorfully described the snake, turning it into a fire-breathing dragon: “a dragon appeared flying around his house and frightening all of the people with his hissing, (and) fire came

26 We had the opportunity to compare, in addition to the text published by J. Roussanov and R. Lerner (c. 1400), the German and Latin editions (c. 1502), as well as the Paris and Augsburg manuscripts: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 8731 (Italy, c. 1450); Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. 1.3, 2°, 18 (1472). Both manuscripts are available online. Of these, the closest to Dederkin’s letter is the text of the Paris copy, on which we rely for the rest of our study: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 8731, ff. 33r–34r. For example, only this copy contains the name of the mother of the Antichrist, close to the translation of Dederkin: Chancas (cf. Канѣгаса). It is from the Parisian copy that the Latin text is cited from hereon and it is reproduced in the Appendix.

27 Words that Feofil Dederkin omitted are in bold.

out of its mouth” (“Змии явишася лѣтаючи округъ дому его и свистаниемъ вся челоуѣки устрашаючи, огонь из устъ его исхожаше”, cf.: “*Unde dictus infans interrogatus respondit, lapides preacisos significare electis suis gaudia Paradise, serpentes vero dare mortem contratriis suis*”). The translator reduced to two words the prophecy written on the pillar: “The time has come” (“Приде час”, cf.: “*Venit hora mea, ortus meus, exitus de mundo*”). Perhaps it was these misunderstood words about the exodus into the world of the Antichrist that led to the appearance of the phrase “he began to rule” (“нача пановати”) in Dederkin’s translation.

Dederkin mentions that the Latin original was obtained by him from Venice. However, given the abundance of Latin and Italian manuscripts in which Venice appears as the addressee of the “Master of Rhodes Letter”, it is obvious that the name of this city was borrowed from a literary source. There is no reason to believe that the Latin original actually came to Dederkin from Venice. In addition, Dederkin indicates the year of the birth of the Antichrist as 1440. This date can only be taken as a ‘terminus post quem’, since it dates back to the revision of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” prepared at the time of the Basel Council.

Describing the second embassy to the Babylonian countries, Dederkin adds that it was sent from Radoml, a city in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This allowed Dederkin to give the story the features of a contemporary incident that he himself witnessed: “we selected a location at a holy cathedral in Radoml and jointly decided to send several (people) to Babylon” (“мы есмя избрали дом у святомъ сборѣ в Радомлѣ и содиначили есмя некоторыхъ послати до Вавилона”, cf.: “*Congregato consilio nostri capitollii decrevimus aliquos nostros fratres in Babiloniam destinare*”). This is another example of an incorrect translation by Diderkin: instead of the verb “convened” (“събрали”, cf.: “congregato”) he uses “selected” (“избрали”), and translates the word “consilio” using the word “дом” in the sense of “location”²⁸ instead of “съвет” (“council”).

The language of the translation bears characteristic features of “prosta mova” or the Old Belarusian language, a dialect of the Old Russian language typical for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and common to the East Slavic lands, which acquired pronounced features by the 15th century. Among the most typical lexemes indicative of “prosta mova” are: “кажут” (“they say”), “послали до твоей милости” (“we sent to your mercy”, with prepositional control in the dative case), “знаменитый” (in the sense of “noble”),²⁹ “борзо” (“soon”),

28 Гістарычны слоўнік беларускай мовы [Historical Dictionary of the Belarusian Language], issue 8: Девичий – дорогость [Devichij – dorogost’]. Minsk, 1986, p. 286.

29 Словник староукраїнської мови XIV–XV ст. [Dictionary of the Old Ukrainian Language 14th–15th Centuries], vol. 1, Kiev, 1977, p. 404.

“пановати” (“to rule”), “выкладывают” (in the meaning of “they interpret”),³⁰ “содиначили” (in the meaning of “jointly decided”),³¹ “Полское корольство” (“Polish kingdom”, instead of the usual term for Poland used in Moscow, “land of the Lyakhs” [“земля ляхов”] or “Lyadish land” [“Лядская земля”]), “мѣсто” (in meaning of “city”).³² The lexical features indicate that the translation was prepared in the eastern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The only known manuscript containing the letter of Feofil Dederkin addressed to the Grand Duke of Moscow Vasily Vasilyevich is the manuscript Russian Academy of Sciences Library, collection of the Arkhangelsk Museum of Antiquities, No. 617, which contains the text on ff. 2v–5v.³³ The folios with Dederkin’s message are woven into a manuscript that dates from the 1440–1450s³⁴ and is a collection of eschatological and spiritually edifying works. Judging by the peculiarities of the language and palaeographic data, the collection was copied in the vicinity of Pskov,³⁵ a territory that in the middle of the 15th century was located between the Muscovite State and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and experienced influence from both sides. Based on palaeographic observations, the folios with Dederkin’s letter may be dated to the same period. The letter is not set off by a cinnabar title and so for a long time escaped the

- 30 *Гістарычны слоўнік беларускай мовы* [*Historical Dictionary of the Belarusian Language*], issue 5: Всперати – выюрати [Vspirati – vyorati], Minsk, 1986. С. 223.
- 31 *Гістарычны слоўнік беларускай мовы* [*Historical Dictionary of the Belarusian Language*], issue 32: Смыковати – струмень [Smykovati – strumen], Minsk, 2012, p. 50. In the Muscovite texts of the 15th century, the word is used exclusively in diplomatic documents and in a reflexive form with the meaning of “to unite”, see: *Словарь русского языка XI–XVII вв.* [*Dictionary of the Russian Language 11th–17th Centuries*], issue 26, Moscow, 2002, p. 92.
- 32 Many of the listed lexemes and constructions are markers of the clerical language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the middle of the 15th century. See: Золтан, “Пути проникновения западнорусской лексики [Zoltan, Paths of the Penetration of West Russian Vocabular]”, pp. 766–804.
- 33 А. Г. Сергеев, “Новонайденное послание Василию Темному [A. G. Sergeev, A Newly Discovered Epistle to Vasily the Blind]”, *Древняя Русь. Вопросы медиевистики* [*Old Rus. Questions of Medieval Studies*], 3/69 (2017): Тезисы докладов участников IX международной конференции «Комплексный подход в изучении Древней Руси» [Abstracts of the Participants of the 9th International Conference “An Integrated Approach to the Study of Old Rus”], pp. 124–125.
- 34 А. Г. Сергеев, “Уточнения к Предварительному списку славянских рукописей XV в. (по материалам БАН) [A. G. Sergeev, Refinements to the Preliminary List of 15th Century Slavic Manuscripts (Based on Materials from the Russian Academy of Sciences Library)]”, in: *Труды отдела древнерусской литературы* [*Proceedings of the Department of Old Russian Literature*], vol. 64, St. Petersburg, 2016, p. 974.
- 35 For more details, see: Корогодина, Сергеев, Сиренов. “Послание об антихристе Феофила Дедеркина [Korogodina, Sergeev, Sirenov, Feofil Dederkin’s Epistle about the Antichrist]” (in print).

attention scholars. The proximity of the dating of the manuscript to the time of the creation of the translation allows us to consider this manuscript as one of the earliest copies of Dederkin's letter.

4 The Person of Feofil Dederkin

Feofil Dederkin wrote another letter to the same Grand Duke of Moscow, Vasily Vasilyevich the Blind. It was written after 1456, when a wave of earthquakes hit Italy, destroying many cities. The letter about earthquakes, like the letter about the Antichrist, is filled with eschatological sentiments and is a translation from Italian of a letter of an anonymous author to Cardinal Prospero Colonna with a description of the calamities and a list of affected cities.³⁶ The study by Marcello Piacentini made it possible to identify many of the place names mentioned by Dederkin.³⁷ The source of information on earthquakes was

36 В. Н. Малинин, *Старец Елеазарова монастыря Филофей и его послания. Историко-литературное исследование* [V. N. Malinin, *Elder of the Eleazarov Monastery Philotheus and his Epistles. A Historical and Literary Study*], Kiev 1901, Appendices, pp. 234–235; П. К. Симони, *Памятники старинного русского языка и словесности XV–XVIII столетий* [P. K. Simoni, *Monuments of the Old Russian Language and Literature of the 15th–18th Centuries*], issue 3: *Задонщины по спискам XV–XVIII столетий* [Zadonshchina According to the Manuscripts of the 15th–18th Centuries] (Сборник Отделения русского языка и словесности Российской академии наук [Collection of the Department of the Russian Language and Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences], vol. 100, No 2), Petrograd, 1922, pp. 13–16; Н. А. Казакова, *Западная Европа в русской письменности XV–XVI веков. Из истории литературных связей России* [N. A. Kazakova, *Western Europe in Russian Literary Texts of the 15th–16th Centuries. From the History of Literary Ties in Russia*], Leningrad, 1980, pp. 158–163; Я. С. Лурье, А. А. Турилов, “Дедеркин Феофил [Ja.S. Lurje, A. A. Turilov, Dederkin Feofil]”, in: *Словарь книжников и книжности Древней Руси* [Dictionary of the Scribes and Literary Culture of Old Rus], issue 2, part 1, Leningrad, 1988, pp. 185–186; С. М. Шамин, “Переводы иностранной прессы в русской книжной рукописной традиции до начала XVIII века: история изучения [S. M. Shamin, Translations of the Foreign Press in the Russian Manuscript Book Tradition before the Beginning of the 18th Century: a History of Research to Date]”, *Российская история* [Russian History], (2009), pp. 3–4; С. М. Шамин, “‘И в ту же ночь было потрясение великое от Божия разгневания ...’: переводы европейских известий о землетрясениях и извержениях вулканов в русской духовной культуре XV–XVIII вв. [S. M. Shamin, ‘And on the same night there was a great shaking from God’s wrath ...’: Translations of European News about Earthquakes and Volcanic Eruptions in Russian Spiritual Culture of the 15th–18th Centuries]”, *Вестник церковной истории* [Bulletin of Church History], 1–2/41–42 (2016), pp. 139–142.

37 M. Piacentini, “Un’eco del terremoto del 1456 nell’Appennino centro-meridionale sui confine della Slavia orientale. L’epistola di Teofil Dederkin al Gran Principe di Moscovia

identified by Ya. S. Lurie and N. A. Kazakova.³⁸ As a study by Bruno Figliuolo has shown, reports of earthquakes became widespread in Western Europe in the 15th century, were translated into various European languages, and were known not only in Italy, but also in France, Spain and Germany in both Latin and German.³⁹

Dederkin's letter about earthquakes is known in three manuscript copies, the earliest of which (dated to the 1460s) was recorded by the Kirillo-Belozersky encyclopedic scribe Euphrosin; another (dated 1483) was located in a manuscript from the St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kiev; the third was found in a manuscript from Pskov (dated 1517).⁴⁰ Thus, although the letter about earthquakes was not widely circulated, it was known both in Muscovy and in Kiev. The appearance of both of Dederkin's messages in Pskov may speak of his ties with this city, which for a long time retained its independence in disputes between the Moscow and Lithuanian Grand Dukes.

Like the earlier letter about the Antichrist, the translation of the information about earthquakes contains certain lexical features, which indicate that

Basilio II," in: *Mosty mostite: Studi in onore di Marcello Garzaniti*, ed. A. Alberti, M. Ch. Ferro, F. Romoli, Firenze, 2016, pp. 83–102.

- 38 Я.С. Лурье, "Литературная и культурно-просветительная деятельность Ефросина в конце XV в. [Ja.S. Lurje, Literary, Cultural and Educational Activities of Evfrosin at the End of the 15th Century]", in: *Труды отдела древнерусской литературы [Proceedings of the Department of Old Russian Literature]*, vol. 17, Moscow, Leningrad, 1961, pp. 154–155; Казакова, *Западная Европа в русской письменности [Kazakova, Western Europe in Russian Literary Texts]*, p. 162.
- 39 B. Figliuolo, "Il terremoto del 1456", in: *Altavilla Silentina*, 1988, vol. 1, pp. 31–46 (study); 1989, vol. 2, pp. 31–32 (critical edition of the anonymous letter about earthquakes).
- 40 М. Д. Каган, Н. В. Поньрко, М. В. Рождественская, "Описание сборников XV в. книгописца Ефросина [M. D. Kagan, N. V. Ponyrko, M. V. Rozhdestvenskaja, A Description of the Miscellanies of the 15th Century of the Scribe Evfrosin]", in: *Труды отдела древнерусской литературы [Proceedings of the Department of Old Russian Literature]*, vol. 35, Leningrad, 1980, p. 141; М. А. Шибает, *Рукописи Кирилло-Белозерского монастыря XV века. Историко-кодикологическое исследование [M. A. Shibaev, Manuscripts of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery of the 15th Century. A Historical and Codicological Study]*, Moscow, St. Petersburg, 2013, pp. 236–242; Н. И. Петров, *Описание рукописных собраний, находящихся в г. Киеве [N. I. Petrov, A Description of the Manuscript Collections Located in Kiev]*, issue 2: *Собрание рукописей Киево-Печерской Лавры, киевских монастырей Златоверхо-Михайловского, Пустынно-Николаевского, Выдубицкого и женского Флоровского, и Десятинной церкви [Collection of Manuscripts of the Kiev Caves Lavra, and the Kiev Monasteries of Zlatoverkho-Mikhailovsky, Pustynno-Nikolaevsky and Vydubitsky, Florovsky Convent and the Church of the Tithes]*, Moscow, 1896, pp. 218–221, No 493; Лурье, Турилов, "Дедеркин Феофил [Lurje, Turilov, Dederkin Feofil]", pp. 185–186.

Dederkin came from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.⁴¹ This is also evidenced by his family name, since the nickname “Dederka” has been recorded in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania since the 16th century.⁴² In addition, he calls himself an “intercessor” (“богомолец”, that is, one who prays to God on behalf of someone) for the Grand Duke of Moscow, which is a term typical for clergy. The use of the full name Feofil (instead of the diminutive “Feofilishko”) and the absence of the epithet “sinful” indicates that we cannot view him as a monastic. It can be assumed that Feofil Dederkin was an Orthodox priest, perhaps the rector of a church.

Until now, the assumption about the Ruthenian origin of Dederkin was based only on the peculiarities of his language. Two cities are mentioned in the letter about the Antichrist: Lutsk and especially Radoml, about which Dederkin writes in the first person. Radoml is a small town near Smolensk, in the Principality of Mstislavl, which found itself in the thick of political events after the Ferraro-Florentine Council of 1437–1439, when the Orthodox inhabitants of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were divided into two camps: supporters and opponents of union with Rome. Radoml was located on the lands of Prince Yuri Lugvenevich of Mstislavl, who declared his rights to the throne of Lithuania and in 1440 opposed the Grand Duke of Lithuania Casimir Jagiellonchik.⁴³ In the midst of hostilities, Yuri Lugvenevich cordially received Metropolitan Isidore, who was touring the Ruthenian lands after the conclusion of the union; but defeat in the war forced the prince of Mstislavl to flee to Moscow.⁴⁴ One can suppose that the supporters of the Moscow prince who remained in his possessions were in a far from comfortable position when

41 Сimoni, *Памятники старинного русского языка и словесности* [Simoni, *Monuments of the Old Russian Language and Literature*], issue 3, pp. 13–14; Казакова, *Западная Европа в русской письменности* [Kazakova, *Western Europe in Russian Literary Texts*], p. 163.

42 *Русская историческая библиотека* [Russian Historical Library], vol. 33, Petrograd, 1915, Col. 754.

43 В. А. Варонін, *Князь Юрай Лынгвеневіч Мсціслаўскі. Гістарычны партрэт* [V. A. Varonin, *Prince Yuri Lingvenevich Mstislavsky. A Historical Portrait*], Minsk, 2010. See also the review: С. В. Полехов, “Несколько замечаний к биографии князя Юрия Лугвеневи́ча Мстиславского” [S. V. Polekhov, Several Remarks on the Biography of Prince Yuri Lugvenevich Mstislavsky], *Древняя Русь. Вопросы медиевистики* [Old Rus. Questions of Medieval Studies], 2/44 (2011), pp. 105–112.

44 С. В. Полехов, “Смоленское восстание 1440 г. [S. V. Polekhov, The Smolensk Uprising of 1440], *Исторический вестник* [Historical Bulletin], vol. 7/154: Литва, Русь и Польша XIII–XVI вв. [Lithuania, Russia and Poland 13th–16th Centuries], Moscow, 2014, pp. 160–197.

the lands of the Mstislavl principality passed to Casimir Jagellonchik and the Orthodox churches were transferred by Metropolitan Isidore into union with Rome. Feofil Dederkin, apparently, was one of such supporters.

We already know two letters from Feofil Dederkin sent from the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Grand Duke of Moscow Vasily Vasilyevich. This allows us to see in their author an informant for the Moscow prince. In both cases, the source of the translation was widely-circulated letters about events in Western European lands that were eagerly translated into different languages. Such dispatch letters acted as a special genre in which the author and addressee did not have much importance, since these letters were intended for a broad audience. Unlike other informants who reported on political events,⁴⁵ Dederkin presented news exclusively about the impending end of the world. It can be assumed that for Dederkin, the news about the cities that had sunk into the ground and about the roaring infant-Antichrist were equal in importance and equally valuable as terrible signs of the times.

However, the amazing and scary stories of Feofil Dederkin, judging by the rarity of the extant manuscript copies, did not gain popularity. Perhaps the Grand Duke of Moscow did not consider them important enough or trustworthy. The small number of copies of Dederkin's epistles suggests that eschatological prophecies and the description of signs of the end times did not attract much attention among Orthodox readers. In addition, in the 15th century in the East Slavic lands, the genre of letter was not as widespread as in Europe, where reports on the latest news were collected in special collections, copied and translated into national languages.⁴⁶

45 S. Polechow, S. Szybkowski, "Nowe źródło do dziejów kształtowania się polskiej reprezentacji stanowej w późnym średniowieczu. Raport krzyżackiego informatora Mikołaja Steinchena z początku grudnia 1432 roku," *Roczniki Historyczne*, 86 (2020), Poznań, pp. 133–152; С. В. Полехов, "Сведения о Руси в переписке сановников Тевтонского ордена первой половины XV века [S. V. Polekhov, Information about Russia in the Correspondence of the Dignitaries of the Teutonic Order of the First Half of the 15th Century]", in: *Источниковедение в современной медиевистике [Source Study in Modern Medieval Studies]*, Сборник материалов Всероссийской научной конференции. Москва 2020–2021 [Proceedings of the Russian Research Conference. Moscow, 2020–2021], ed. I. G. Konovalova, E. N. Kirillova, Moscow, 2020, pp. 274–277.

46 Kneupper, *The Empire at the End of Time*, pp. 36–37.

5 The Ukrainian Translation of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” (1635)

Dederkin's letter is not the only case of the translation of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” in the Slavic lands. In 1635, the letter was translated from Latin into “ruska mova” – the Ukrainian variety of the everyday language of the Orthodox inhabitants of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The translation is known in a unique surviving copy originating from Lvov.⁴⁷ According to the text, the work was brought to the “Ugric Land”, or Carpathian Rus, in 1635, where it was translated.⁴⁸

The Ukrainian translator allowed himself only one innovation: he dated the birth of the Antichrist to 1634, that is, like his predecessors, he turned the letter into the latest news. For the rest of the text, the translator appears to have followed the original. Since the European tradition of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” in the 16th–17th centuries remains unstudied, we have no way to determine the closest Latin text to the translation.⁴⁹ However, there is no doubt that the Ukrainian translator had the original Latin text in his hands: this is evidenced by the Latin statement preserved by the translator at the end of the work (“Tu ne crede malis hisce et falsis Antichristi nugis”), which is a paraphrase of the proverb “*Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito*”. The translator must have used a contemporary Latin copy of the work and not a fifteenth-century manuscript, since the island of Malta is named as the seat of the master, where the Order of the Johannites had been located since 1530.

The Ukrainian translation is much closer to the Latin text than Dederkin's version. It contains the description of stones falling from the sky and an unusual noise, as well as the prophetic interpretation of them by the infant, which was omitted in Dederkin's translation. In the Lvov manuscript, the text of the prophecy on the pillar, which had been shortened by Dederkin to two words, is fully preserved: “The birth of the Antichrist who is born has already taken place” (“Южъ пришло нароження того антихриста, юж ся народил”), cf.: “The time has come” (“Приде час”) in Dederkin's translation.

47 Stefanyk National Science Library in Lvov, coll. 77, inv. 1, collection of A. S. Petrushevich, No. 208. See: I. C. Свенціцький, *Опис рукописів Народнього дому з колекції А. Петрушевича* [I. S. Svencyskij, *A Description of the Manuscripts of the People's House from the Collection of A. Petrushevych*], Lvov, 1911, part 3, pp. 55–56.

48 *Апокрифи і легенди з українських рукописів* [Apocrypha and Legends from Ukrainian Manuscripts], зібрав, упорядкував і пояснив І. Франко [collected, arranged and explained by I. Franko], Lvov, 1906, vol. 4, pp. 397–400.

49 Gisela Möncke finds 12 editions of the text on the birth of the Antichrist, which copied the original edition of “Diss büchlin ...” of 1502 and are dated to the 16th century: G. Möncke, “Zeitungen vom neugeborenen Antichrist,” pp. 214, 218–219.

While Dederkin shortened the text, the Ukrainian translator, on the contrary, added numerous artistic details of his own, which sometimes led to errors and misunderstandings. Thus, in the above-mentioned plot, jewels ("*lapides preciosos*") under the pen of the Ukrainian translator turn into "manna, pearls and precious stones", and snakes ("*serpents*") – into "shuffling" ("шарканье"). In the description of the second embassy, the Ukrainian translator adds of his own accord that four "persons" were sent: "two clergy and two laymen" ("две духовный и две свецки"). Obviously, the participation of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities in the embassy should have added credibility to the text.

One of the few abbreviations made by the Ukrainian translator is the exclusion of the story of the Saracens leading unbelievers to the infant and killing them. It can be assumed that the translator deliberately avoided mentioning Saracens as the Antichrist's patrons, so as not to provoke conflicts with the Turks after the conclusion of peace in 1634 following the Ottoman Empire's unsuccessful war with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The Ukrainian translation is preserved in a manuscript miscellany dated to the 17th century, which includes the correspondence between the Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev Peter Moghila and his correspondents in Lvov. The figure of Metropolitan Peter Moghila of Kiev is extremely significant for the history of Orthodoxy in the Ruthenian lands of the 17th century. After the revival of the Kiev Metropolis in 1620, Peter Moghila in 1633 achieved the recognition of Orthodoxy as an official confession of the Commonwealth. Closely associated with the Orthodox circles of Lvov, Peter Moghila had a large number of supporters there at the beginning of his career. Dramatic events, constant conflicts, the need to maneuver between the Polish king, the Moscow tsar and the Uniate metropolitan, however, maintained a constant state of tension throughout the life of Peter Moghila and his Orthodox followers. The essay on the birth of the Antichrist was translated into Ukrainian during the period of the revival of the Orthodox hierarchy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth following the adoption of the Union of Brest and the transfer of the majority of church parishes to the Greek Catholics.

6 The Russian Translation of the "Master of Rhodes Letter" (End of the 17th–early 18th Centuries)

At the beginning of the 18th century, the "Master of Rhodes Letter" became known in Russian in the form of a "pretended letter" or "letter-forgery" ("подмётное письмо"). The full text of the translation has not survived or remains to be found. We know about it only from the work of Metropolitan Job of

Novgorod (d. 1716), who on May 8, 1707, published at the Moscow Print Yard “A Brief Response to a Pretended Letter about the Birth During Our Times of the Antichrist” (“Ответ краткий на подметное письмо о рождении сими времени антихриста”).⁵⁰ In his essay, Metropolitan Job quotes an anonymous letter about the birth of the Antichrist and proves the impossibility of the events described in it. The “Response” is built in the form of a dialogue with an opponent who was too gullible about the news of the birth of the Antichrist.

Metropolitan Job’s polemical composition contains only short quotations from the “Master of Rhodes Letter”, so it is impossible to judge how complete the translation was. Nevertheless, based on the storyline outlined by Metropolitan Job, we can recognize the “Master of Rhodes Letter”. It has many differences from the texts of the 15th century and even from the Ukrainian translation of the 17th century, including abbreviations and a free retelling of the plot.

The variant of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” known from the work of Metropolitan Job could be attributed to a Russian translator or even to the Metropolitan himself; however, all the innovations belong to a Western European version of the letter about the birth of the Antichrist that formed the basis of the translation. The source for the translation was the same text that was published in 1706 in London in English. By the beginning of the 18th century, the “Master of Rhodes Letter” made its way to Great Britain, where it was still perceived as the latest news and made readers look for the author of the message about the birth of the Antichrist among Protestant contemporaries. It was published in 1706 under the date of March 22 in the periodical *Monthly Mercury* with the title: “A pretended Letter from the Great Master of Maltha, concerning the Birth of the Antichrist at Babylon, has been spread in several places, and by which many weak people have been imposed upon, is as follows” and was accompanied by the reflections of the publisher, who came to the conclusion that the letter was a fake.⁵¹ A comparison of the texts shows that all the quotations used by Metropolitan Job, except for one, are a literal translation of the English text, excepting the phrases misunderstood by the translator:

⁵⁰ The copy preserved in the collection of the Museum of Books of the Russian State Library is available online: <https://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01008509278>.

⁵¹ *The Present State of Europe or the Historical and Political Monthly Mercury, Giving an Account of all the Publick and Private Occurrences, Civil, Ecclesiastical and Military, that are most considerable in every court. The interest of princes, their pretensions and intrigues. For the month of January, 1707. With political Reflections upon every State. Continued Monthly from the original published at the Hague, by the Authority of the States of Holland and West-Friesland*, vol. 18, London, 1706, pp. 107–108.

Monthly Mercury, 1706.
Vol. 18. P. 107–108.

"Response" of Metrop. Job, 1707, ff. 2–6

A woman of great beauty
is brought to bed of a son,
whose father is not known.

Some beautiful woman gave birth to a son who did not
have a father.

Родчаа нѣкоторая жена прекрасная сына, не
имѣющаго отца.

He spoke and walk'd in 8
days after his birth; he calls
himself the Messiah, the
Son of God, in whom a'one
we must believ.

The infant who was born began to walk and speak on
the eighth day after his birth, and openly calls himself
the Messiah, the Son of God, in whom alone it is
proper to believe.

Рождшиися младенецъ ходитъ и говорить почаль
по осми днехъ рождения своего, явственно
и видѣниемъ сказывается мессиею, Сыномъ
Божиимъ, въ котораго единого вѣрити должно.

This infant rais'd people
from death, ... restor'd sight
to the blind, hearing to
the deaf, made the lame to
walk, and cur'd all sorts of
diseases.

The above-mentioned child rose from the dead, gave
sight to the blind, hearing – to the deaf, (made) the
lame to walk upright, and cast out all sorts of diseases.
Вышереченное отроча воскресъ из мертвых,
не видящимъ свѣтъ далъ, глухимъ слышание,
хромымъ поступъ прямой, и всякия немощи
изгонилъ.

The child is more
inclinable to white than
black, has a short neck, his
head is of a pointed shape,
his forehead wrinkled, his
eyes sparkling, his ears
very large, his mouth cross
ways, his teeth sharp, and
his nose hollow.

The child that was born is more black than white, has
a short neck, a head that is pointed, a pockmarked
forehead, shining eyes, very large ears, a crooked
mouth, sharp teeth (and) a flat nose.

Отроча рождшееся болѣ чернѣ, нежели бѣлѣ,
шею имѣеть короткую, голову востристую, лобъ
съ рябинами, очи свѣтлые, уши превеликие, ротъ
кривъ, зубы острые, носъ плоский.

They heard in the air, for
12 Miles round, a voice
crying: Make ready to
receive the Son who was
promised you.

For three hundred miles around they heard and saw
angels singing such words: make ready to receive the
son who was promised to you.

За триста миль кругомъ слышали и видѣли аггеловъ
поющихъ сия слова: готовитесь принять сына вамъ
обѣщаннаго.

(cont.)

Monthly Mercury, 1706.

"Response" of Metrop. Job, 1707, ff. 2–6

Vol. 18. P. 107–108.

The people of the country
worship him ... and those
who will not are destroy'd
without mercy.

The people of that country worship him, and those
who do not want to believe in him they kill without
mercy.

Народъ той земли ему покланяется, а тѣ, которые
вѣрители въ него не хотятъ, убиты без милосердія.

Metropolitan Job used a fragment of the heading of the English text to define the sense of the text "подмѣтное письмо" ("anonymous letter-forgery", cf.: "a pretended letter") and to explain the purpose of the epistle: "возмути простыи народъ" ("he stirred up the commoners", cf.: "weak people have been imposed upon" in the *Monthly Mercury*). In the English translation, as in the quotations from Metropolitan Job, the date of birth of the Antichrist was missing, and Metropolitan Job borrowed from an English publisher an indication of this feature as a sign of the forged nature of the document: "А в кой годъ, в кой мѣсяцъ, коего числа, не написано" ("neither the year, nor month nor day was written", cf.: "no notice was taken either of the day, month or year" in the *Monthly Mercury*). Metropolitan Job suggested that the emergence of the "pretended letter" is associated with the activities of the Old Believers: "мню, яко жидовинъ или расколникъ, сии бо наипаче ждутъ антихриста и любима о немъ бесѣды обыкоша имѣти" ("I think a Jew or a schismatic, for these, more than others, await the Antichrist and like to have their favorite discussions about him"). This is similar to the perception of the text in Great Britain, where the contemporaries of the English publisher saw in the letter about the birth of the Antichrist a composition of Protestants: "Some ignorant credulous Papists embrac'd this fable greedily out of their zeal against the Protestants, who charg'd the Pope to be Antichrist". The proximity of the "anonymous letter" to the publication in an English journal convinces us that the translation was made not by Old Believers, but by a person who followed closely the latest events in Western Europe.

The short time gap between the publication in the English monthly and the publication in Moscow of the "Response" by Metropolitan Job does not allow us to regard the English journal as the direct source for the Metropolitan. In addition, the composition of Metropolitan Job has an important difference

from the English edition: in the *Monthly Mercury* it is reported that the voice announcing the birth of the Antichrist was heard 12 miles away, while Metropolitan Job gives the original figure of 300 miles. Probably, the distance over which the sound reached was corrected to a more believable number just prior to publication in the English monthly.

Thus, at the beginning of the 18th century, a Russian translation was made of a text extremely close to the one published in 1706 in the *Monthly Mercury*. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, foreign newspapers regularly delivered to Russia were one of the main sources of European news.⁵² Messages about various curiosities and prophecies filled such press and were eagerly translated for the Russian reader.⁵³

7 Conclusion

The "Master of Rhodes Letter" has been translated at least three times in Cyrillic literature. The chronological framework of the existence of this text in East Slavia is very broad: from the middle of the 15th century to the beginning of the 18th century. Each translation occurs at a time of changes in the status and position of the Orthodox Church: the earliest translation of the 1440s was made in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the time of the conclusion of the Union of Florence; the Ukrainian translation of the 1630s appeared at a time when the Orthodox Church in Ukraine was defending its right to exist; the Russian translation of the early 18th century arose in the midst of the confrontation between the Old Believers and the official Orthodox Church. This led to the fact that the eschatological text about the birth of the Antichrist, originally written in the second half of the 14th century in the German lands, was perceived as current news in the Orthodox culture of Eastern Europe in the 15th century, in the 17th century, and again at the beginning of the 18th century. The Cyrillic

52 С.М. Шамин, *Куранты XVII столетия. Европейская пресса в России и возникновение русской периодической печати* [S. M. Shamin, *Chimes of the 17th Century. European Press in Russia and the Emergence of Russian Periodicals*], Moscow, St. Petersburg, 2011, pp. 130–145; *Вести-Куранты. 1671–1672 гг.* [Vesti – Chimes for 1671–1672], подг. текстов, иссл., комм., указ. И. Майер, С. М. Шамина, А. В. Кузнецовой, И. А. Корнилаевой и В. Б. Крысько при участии Е. В. Амановой, под ред. В. Б. Крысько и Ингрид Майер [prepared for publication with study, commentary and index by I. Maier, S. M. Shamin, A. V. Kuznetsova, I. A. Kornilaeva and V. B. Krysko, with the participation of E. V. Amanova, ed. by V. B. Krysko and I. Maier], Moscow, 2017, pp. 5–11.

53 С. М. Шамин, *Куранты XVII столетия* [S. M. Shamin, *Chimes of the 17th Century*], pp. 288–294.

tradition of the text of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” significantly expands our knowledge about the degree of prevalence of this eschatological text.

Appendix

The Latin text of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” is edited from the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 8731, ff. 33r–34r (Italy, dated c. 1450; in the edition this is labeled P).⁵⁴ Abbreviated words in the manuscript have been restored and set in italics in the edition. Punctuation marks are placed in accordance with modern norms for the publication of Latin documents. The edition takes into account the most significant textual variants found in the manuscript Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. 1.3, 2^o, 18, ff. 13r–13v (dated 1472; in the edition this is labeled A). The phrase missing from the Parisian manuscript was reconstructed from the Augsburg manuscript and is placed in square brackets [].

The fifteenth-century Russian translation of the “Master of Rhodes Letter” that is part of the letter of Feofil Dederkin is published according to the only known manuscript, Russian Academy of Sciences Library, collection of the Arkhangelsk Museum of Antiquities, No. 617, ff. 2v–5v. The text of the letter is set in the modern Russian typeface, but preserving the letter Ѣ, as well as the letters Ѣ and Ѣ in all positions. Superscript letters are placed inline. The letters following the superscript letters and titlo abbreviations are reconstructed in accordance with the norms of the clerical language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Letters omitted by the scribe or lost due to manuscript damage are reconstructed in square brackets [].

The English translation of the letter of Feofil Dederkin does not reproduce all complex syntactic constructions of the Slavonic text. Interpolations required to reproduce the meaning in English are set in parentheses ().

54 The authors are sincerely grateful to Alexandra V. Chirkova for invaluable assistance in preparing the Latin edition.

Latin text of the “Master of Rhodes Letter”	Feofil Dederkin’s Epistle	Translation of Feofil Dederkin’s Epistle
	Къ господиню господарю великому князю Василѣю Васильевичю Фефил Дедеркин богомолецъ твой челом бѣеъ. Зѣдъ, господине, пришел листъ от Валионскихъ стран до Вѣленѣи, от Польска до Луцка. И мы тотъ листъ послали до твоеи милости, предложили еся от латыньскаго языка на словеньски языкъ всѣмъ православнымъ христьяномъ знаменитымъ.	To the Lord Grand Duke Vasily Vasilyevich, Hefil Dederkin, ^a your intercessor ^b before God, sends reverend greetings. ^c Here, sire, a letter ^d came from the Babylonian countries to Venice, and from Venice to the Polish Kingdom, and from Poland to Lutsk. And we sent that letter to your mercy, having translated it from the Latin language to the Slavonic language for all noble Orthodox Christians.
Jesus Universis et singulis per presentes dominis, civitibus, comitatibus Italie alisque Christi fidelibus notescat, nos, magistrum Ordinis Sancti Iohannis Ierosolimitani, litteras recepisce a nostris exploratoribus, quos pro nostra fideliumque salute in partibus Babilonie tenemus assidue, effectualiter continentes, quoad de currente anno a nativitate Domini MCCC ^o XLII, die duodecimo mensis Ianuarii, in extremis partibus Babilonie, locu nominato Sardasi Fugarabas in lingua Latine, ex provincia de	А листъ еся от нашихъ, ко[то]рыѣ взяли вѣрнии во стра[н]ахъ Вавилонскихъ чрес нас посланье. И такое посланье имущи, иже исходъ лѣтомъ от Божья Рождества 1000 и 400 и 40, в день 20 на краи стран Вавилонскихъ, на мѣстѣ реченномъ Икятзя от языка латыньска,	And this letter we have (received) from our (envoys), which epistle our confidants received in the Babylonian lands //(f. 3r) through us. And we have such a message that at the end of the year from God’s Nativity 1000 and 400 and 40, on the 20th day, at the edge of the Babylonian lands, in a city called in the Latin language Ikatzya,

a Thus in the manuscript, but this should be read as Feofil Dederkin; see the main text of the article for an explanation.

b Literally, “one who prays to God for someone.”

c Literally, “knocks his forehead on the ground”.

d Here and further the word “leaf” is translated as “letter”.

e Corrected; the letters *mo* are omitted in the manuscript.

(cont.)

Latin text of the "Master of Rhodes Letter"	Feofil Dederkin's Epistle	Translation of Feofil Dederkin's Epistle
Condoloso, ex quadam vilissima muliere nomine Chancas de stirpe dammata ^f natus est infans obscurus et tenebrosus, de cuius patre nulla habetur notitia, cuius aspectus nec clarus, nec lucidus, forme terribilis, oculis ardentibus, ut lucerna, videtur. Et ut ipsi exploratores referunt, grossior est ultra communem aliorum staturam. Refferunt etiam ipsi exploratores, <i>quod</i> idem infans existens etatis duorum mensium loquebatur perfecte, ut etiam alii homines perfecta etate loqui consueverunt. Nuntiando ipse infans esse filius Dei, scribunt <i>quoque</i> ipsi exploratores staturam infantuli mirabiliter esse formatam, et ipsum vidisse et omnes scientias in illo illucescere.	из некоторые нечистыя невѣсты именемъ Кангасы, из рода Данова, родися дѣтя неясно, темно. Отца его никто же знает, и которого возрѣнья, а не ясен, ни свѣтель, от прунатаго ^h лица очи его горящи, аки свѣщи. Яко ти посланици повѣдаютъ и кажутъ, то истѣни посланици повѣдаютъ, иже то ист[о]- е ⁱ дѣтя 2 мѣсяцю, мољвили и сказали, яко ины люди свѣршеннымъ разумомъ навѣкл[и] ^j //(f. 3v) мољвити, вѣдаючи то истое дѣтя быти Сыну Божью. И пишють тоже посланици, его же видѣли, и вси науки в немъ повѣдаютъ быти, роду неславна.	from some unclean bride named Kantasa, from the tribe of Dan, there was born a child unclean and dark. No one knows his father, and what his appearance is; he himself is neither clear nor light, and on his terrible ^g face his eyes burn like candles. As those envoys narrate and say – and what they tell is the truth – that this very child at two months old (already talks), just as other people of sound mind are used to // (f. 3v) talking, (and by this) they know that this child is truly the Son of God. And the envoys also write (that they) saw him, and they say that he possesses all knowledge, (and) he is not of glorious descent. And, at the time of his birth, they saw many signs when he was born: at midnight it was bright and clear in those lands, and then it was changed into
Dicunt et in eius nativitate virtutes celestes, plurima monstra prodisse, quia ipso nato, hora medie noctis tempore lucido et sereno [subito	Такоже в роженѣе его видѣли знаменья много, коли ся родилъ: в полночь свѣтло и ясно на тѣх мѣстех было, и тако преложиися	
<hr/>		
f	<i>Danakias</i> A.	
g	A corrupted reading in Slavic text. Possible, the antigraph read <i>страшного</i> (terrible).	
h	Probably a corruption. Possible, the antigraph read <i>страшного</i> (terrible).	
i	The letter at the edge of the folio is lost.	
j	The letter at the edge of the folio is lost.	

(cont.)

Latin text of the “Master of Rhodes Letter”	Feofil Dederkin’s Epistle	Translation of Feofil Dederkin’s Epistle
<i>huiusmodi tempus in tenebras esse conversum^k in tantum, quod maiori spacio, quam quinque mensium,^l illuc sol non apparuit in partibus Babilonie. Et quamvis quos modum temporis clartatem aliqualem, non tamen totalem, sicut pristinam, cum in habitantibus fuerit, non in ipsis partibus.</i>	в темность, борзо избегши. Бе же 5 месяць не явился солнце в гѣх мѣстехъ Вавилонскихъ, и потомъ явилася свѣтлость, но не таково, якоже было преже.	darkness, and the change was quick. It so happened that for 5 months the sun did not appear in those places of Babylon and then the light appeared, but not like (the light) that was before.
<i>Post hec aliquae stelle vise sunt, in ipsa quoque nocte nativitatis spatii trium /// (f. 33v) horarum apparuit ignis magnus supra domum, ubi erat dictus infans, qui descendit subito in terram^m sine verculoⁿ extinctionis,^o multaque alia signa visa fuerunt, quia tertia die post infantis nativitatem evenit tempus tenebrosum, pluit quoque lapides preciosos. Et illa nocte usque in diem visi sunt serpentes terribilissimi per aera. Unde dictus infans interrogatus respondit, lapides precaciosos significare electis suis gaudia Paradise, serpentes vero dare mortem contrariis suis.</i>	И в ту же ночь, яже родися онь злыи, не явилася звѣзда. При же часа ро/// (f. 4r) женья его огонь великъ повѣдають видѣли. А по 3-емъ дни роженья его пришел часъ темень въ дни, в немъ же дождь и камене, страх и гроза несказанна. И тоє ноци змии явишася лѣтаючи округъ дому его и свистаниемъ вся челоуѣки устрашаючи, огонь из усть его исхожаше.	And on the same night when this evil one was born, the star did not appear. For three hours after his birth /// (f. 4r) they said they saw a large flame. And after the 3rd day after his birth, an hour of darkness came in the middle of the day, and at that time (there was) rain and stones, fear and an indescribable thunderstorm. And that night a dragon appeared flying around his house and frightening all of the people with its hissing, (and) fire came out from its mouth.

k The following words were written by mistake at this point and then crossed out: *monstra prodysse A.*

l The text in square brackets [] is from A.

m There follows a *domicilio extinctionis A.*

n Before this word, the letters *ai* are placed, which are marked for deletion by a stroke with dot P.

o *extinctionis P.*

(cont.)

Latin text of the "Master of Rhodes Letter"	Feofil Dederkin's Epistle	Translation of Feofil Dederkin's Epistle
Item ipsa nocte ipsius nativitatis quidam mons maior ceteris in Babilonia se divisit in duas partes, in quo monte fuit reperta quedam columna partim rubea, partim alba, in qua scriptum ^q erat litteris grecis in isto monte: «Venit hora mea, ortus meus, exitus de mundo».	И тоє же нощи роженья его гора велика роздвоилася надвое. Мнози же приходящи видѣть чюдю, обрѣтоша в раздвоенъѣ горы столпъ великъ, половина го бѣла, а половина червлена, а [н]а ^r обонихъ стра[на]хъ написанаго елиньскою грамотою, а жидовскимъ языкомъ: «Приде час».	And on the very night of his birth a great mountain was split in two. Many people who came saw a miracle: they found a great pillar in the split mountain, half of it white, and half of it scarlet, and on both sides (of the pillar) it was written in Greek letters, but in the Jewish language: "The time has come."
Quam columnam asserunt nostri exploratores se vidisse, similiter asserunt ipsum infantem multa miracula facere mortuos resuscitando, ^t infirmos curando, cecos illuminando solo verbo. Ultra nobis innotescunt ipsum infantem Babilonie tanquam verum Deum adorare, in qua si quis sue legi non credit, Saracini ipsos ducunt ad ipsum infantem, quos nolentes credere interficere facit.	Нача пановати, видѣнья, знаменья дати, немощнымъ здравья, мертвья воскрешати // (f. 4v) и слѣпымъ свѣт словомъ повѣдати.	He began to rule, to produce visions and signs, (to give) health to the sick, to raise the dead // (f. 4v) and to preach light to the blind with his word.
	Вси же вавилоняне яко Богу поклоняются ему, а хто ему не вѣруеть, срачиновъ его приводять до того младенца, и котории не вѣрують ему, тѣхъ убивати повелѣвають.	All the Babylonians worship him like God, and if someone does not believe in him, they (the Babylonians) lead the Saracens to the infant, and command (the Saracens) to kill whomever does not believe in him (the Antichrist).

p Corrected; the last letter is repeated twice by mistake.
q The word *scriptum* is written twice, and the second word is marked with dots below the line, indicating that it is intended for deletion P.
r Corrected; the manuscript erroneously reads *ка*.
s Corrected; the manuscript erroneously reads *спрах*.
t *resuscitando* P.

(cont.)

Latin text of the "Master of Rhodes Letter"	Feofil Dederkin's Epistle	Translation of Feofil Dederkin's Epistle
Et dicunt ultra ipsum dicere se declaraturum antiquas scripturas, et non intelligentes eius loquellam ipsos intelligere facit, et profetias, quas nullus intelligit, declarat.	И выкладывают о нем нѣкая писанья и пророчества, иже преже тѣхъ вѣрѣяни никто же видѣ, ни слышы, прельсти исполнена.	And they compose about him some writings and prophecies full of delusions, which no one has seen or heard before.
Et etiam referunt ipsi exploratores, quod quidam venerabilis frater et magister in theologia de Viterbio Ordinis Fratrum Minorum habet tantam fidem in ipsum infantem, quod in ipsum infantem predicat populis in illis partibus dicens ipsum infantem fore filium Dei omnipotentis.	Иже нѣкто вѣнецѣяниитъ отъ славныхъ тако ему вѣруеть вселукавому, яко во многихъ странахъ проповѣдаеть его людемъ, яко Сыну Божью тому //(f. 5r) были.	And a certain reputable Venetian so believes in him, this all-evil one, that in many countries he preaches about him to the people, that (this infant) is the Son of God. //(f. 5r)
Et hoc ideo, //(f. 34r) quia spacio duarum horarum ante eius nativitatem, audita fuit vox. Nostri exploratores dicunt audivisse cum maximo tonitruo et rumore per partes circumstantes per spacium trecentorum miliarium: «Preparate vos ad accipiendum meum dilectum, et beati illi, qui sequentur verbum illius».	Бысть же за 2 часа роженя его грекляго, глас бысть великимъ гременьемъ и трусомъ и блистаньемъ, и слышано бысть в тои странѣ, идѣже родися оканни, за триста миль бысть глас слышанъ: «Уготоваетеся пріяти любимаго благословенна онѣ, котории имя его насльдуютъ».	And 2 hours before the birth of this thrice-damned one, a voice (was heard) with great thunder and earthquake and lightning. And it was heard in that country where the accused one was born – for three hundred miles a voice was heard: "Prepare to receive the blessing of your beloved, you, who will inherit his name!"
Quapropter nostri exploratores hoc audientes et videntes nobis scripserunt, ut scribamus vobis credentes, quod ille, qui exspectatur in fine seculorum nomine Antichristus, sit filius predicionis. Et nunquam scripsimus predicta nolentes cito dare fidem.	А то посланици наши услышавыши и узрѣвши, сказали намъ, вѣрѣчи, иже тои млладенецъ явился, его же чаемъ на конецъ вѣка, нарицаемъ антихристъ, дьяволъ, сынъ пагубъ, отъ его же прельсти избавитъ Господь душа наша.	And our envoys, upon hearing and seeing this, told us, in faith, that the infant whom we are expecting at the end of the world has appeared, who is called the Antichrist, the devil, the son of perdition, from whose delusion may the Lord deliver our souls.

u perditionis P.

(cont.)

Latin text of the "Master of Rhodes Letter"	Feofil Dederkin's Epistle	Translation of Feofil Dederkin's Epistle
<p>Congregato consilio nostri capitoli decrevimus aliquos nostros fratres in Babiloniam destinare, qui ad ipsos exploratores venientes et veritatem requirentes de predictis.</p> <p>Postmodum reversi retulerunt vera esse predicta et predictum infantem vidisse, sicut notificatum fuerat. Et ipsam columnam semi albam, semi rubeam in ipso monte diviso repertam et alia multa miracula, de quibus esset longum scribere.</p> <p>Et ideo devote supplicamus, ut per Italiam et alias partes predictas predicta manifestare velitis, quatenus omnes et singuli Christi fideles mala dimittant et bona sequantur, sicque in fine seculi appropinquantes a Iesu Christo in brachiis suscipiantur.</p> <p>Copia litterarum, quas Magnus magister Rodi scripsit ad illustrissimum principem, ducem Mediolani de ortu Antichristi.</p>	<p>И мы есмѣ избрали дом у святомъ сборѣ в Радомлѣ //(f. 5v) и содначили есмѣ некоторыхъ послати до Вавилона до тѣхъ мѣстъ испытати извѣстно и видѣти, иже родися пагубыникъ.</p> <p>И тѣ наши посланици повѣють намъ, что то всо тако, да скажетъ в томъ листѣ написано.</p> <p>Тако приде всепугу[б]нии^v душегльнии змии, и таково его знаменье.</p> <p>Се же слышахомъ, повѣдахомъ всѣмъ православнымъ христьяномъ, иже бы есте сему внимали. Разумѣйте, еже писанья пророческая, и самъ Господь нашъ Иисусъ Христосъ глаголетъ, яко подобаетъ ему^w быти в послѣдняя лета.</p>	<p>And we selected a location at a holy cathedral in Radom! //(f. 5v) and jointly decided to send several (people) to those places in Babylon in order to test for sure and find out that the destroyer was born.</p> <p>And our envoys tell us that everything is as it was said and is written in that letter.</p> <p>So the all-pernicious, soul-crushing serpent has come, and such is his sign.</p> <p>And when we heard this, we told all Orthodox Christians, so that you would heed this. Consider as the prophetic writings and our Lord Jesus Christ himself speak, as it befits him (the Antichrist) to appear at the end of times.</p>

v Corrected; in the manuscript, the letter *б* is omitted.

w Corrected; the manuscript erroneously reads *емю*.