Translation and Transformation of John Chrysostom’s Urban Imagery into Old Church Slavonic

John Chrysostom preached for 20 years in the two major cities of the Eastern Roman empire – Antioch (386–397) and Constantinople (398–404). He delivered hundreds of sermons, some of these were written down at the time of preaching, others were edited and published later. More than 800 are considered genuine, another thousand texts bear his name as the author. His works were widely popular in all the neighbouring cultures from the 5th century onwards. In the 9th century, the Slavonic tradition joined this trend.

The title of my present research suggests mainly a survey on literary and cultural reception, but it also allows a discussion on several broader questions, such as the history of rhetoric and preaching, the use of literary sources as historical evidence, late antique and medieval architecture, city planning, and everyday life. John Chrysostom’s extensive and diverse body of work provides a large number of examples and theoretical models in various study domains. Here I will focus on his depictions of the city and urban life and their rendition in the early Slavonic tradition.

John Chrysostom was a preacher and a writer – many of his sermons were both oral performances in an actual reality, and written works meant for reading in posterity, outside of their immediate context. His fellow-citizens in Antioch and Constantinople were his audience, but they were also subjects of his sermons. He drew material from contemporary events, natural disasters, political and social turmoil, local landmarks, the neighbourhood, etc. It is not surprising then, that his works served as documental sources in academic research. The written texts, which have come down to us in numerous manuscripts, still keep traces of direct communication.

\[2\] Some aspects of this question are discussed also by other researchers, Preacher and Audience. Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics, ed. P. Allen, M. Cunningham, Leiden 1998, p. 18.
to the surroundings, refers to the previous day ("yesterday"), names particular persons, and local suburbs. One way of looking at his preaching, as Wendy Mayer points out, is as a liturgical act which takes place within a liturgical setting.

In this line of reasoning, Mayer poses a number of questions concerning the actual moment of delivery and the interaction between the preacher and his congregation, such as: “What behaviour does he expect of the audience during the homily”, “Where is his audience situated?”, “Can John project his voice adequately?”, “Who is sitting and who is standing?”, and so on. Another strain of questions refers to the preacher’s surroundings: “In which city are John and the audience in question situated?”, “In what part of the urban or suburban landscape are they positioned?”, “In which building are they located?”, etc. None of these questions, which represent the liturgical, topographical, social, or personal perspective on Chrysostom’s preaching, is relevant to the afterlife of his homilies. Later copies and translations take the homily away from the initial moment of delivery and bring it to a new readership (or audience), into another era and another cultural and topographical context. This loss of actuality is typical for all oral sermons put into writing.

The double nature of the homily – oral and written – creates an artificial, rhetorical reality, cf. W. Mayer again:

Even if we can confirm that the homily that survives was delivered before a live audience and is identical to the original, and we can demonstrate that John individualised the content in response to his audience, we must still deal with the fact that the information itself is presented within a rhetorical medium and represents a constructed reality.

Some elements of the live delivery, such as improvised dialogues with the audience, *exempla*, deictic expressions and other references to the context, are often preserved in written sermons. However, they are not only remnants from a single past event, but also rhetorical devices aimed at attaining more convincing moral and instructive power. The homily – be it exegetical, panegyrical, polemical or

---


6 The medieval sermon both as oral and literary genre in the Western tradition is examined in: The Sermon, ed. B.M. Kienzle, Turnhout 2000, esp. p. 159–174; the signs of orality in written sermons and the tension between the written text and the oral discourse are summarized on p. 965–978. The volume gives also an extensive bibliography on general and specific questions.


8 See, e.g. Preacher and Audience…, p. 13: By employing an informal and conversational method of discourse, frequently inventing imaginary interlocutors, preachers may be inventing a dialogue which did
Translation and Transformation of John Chrysostom’s Urban Imagery…

ethical – is a rhetorical genre and John Chrysostom is famously one of its best champions. His eloquence, acquired through classical education, applies some methods of the second sophistic in Christian context. He uses metaphors, comparisons, *ecphrasis* and other vivid figures of speech in a wide range of topics. For instance, he borrows images from athletic games, medicine, sea and navigation, the hypodrome, the theater, etc. – sources typical for the sophists, but always directed by the preacher at moral or religious instruction.

John Chrysostom’s urban imagery also falls into these two categories. On the one hand, his descriptions of the cityscape and the urban life give a snapshot of the era and of the actual moment of delivery. On the other hand, they are *topoi* that transcend the particular space and time and, as written literature, fit into other contexts. By comparing some of these images with their translations into Old Church Slavonic I will try to determine how much of Chrysostom’s urban imagery was preserved, what was adapted to the new audience, and what remained unchanged and detached from the actual reality. Some aspects of this cultural transfer were addressed in previous (predominantly lexical) studies on Greek and Roman *realia* and their rendition in Old Church Slavonic. Terms, names, and places from the classical and late antique world were not entirely unfamiliar to the educated Slavic audience. Personal and geographical names, exotic food, and other objects are frequently mentioned in many genres of translated literature, such as biblical translations, historiography, hagiography, rhetoric, juridical texts, etc. At the same time, the abundant scribal errors suggest that many *realia* were misunderstood or entirely incomprehensible to the scribes.

---


The descriptions of the urban life in the late antique city do not always contain specific vocabulary and therefore may remain undetected and unexamined in lexical research. Some of the examples cited below depict scenes set in an urban environment, and the present study investigates not only how specific objects were named but also how ordinary situations were described. The selection of the examples is based on several criteria. The study is focused on genuine Chrysostomian homilies translated into Old Church Slavonic in the 9th–10th century. John Chrysostom’s authorship is an important criterium, because it gives a reliable point of reference in terms of time and place of origin of the homilies. The translations, however, belong to various anonymous Old Bulgarian translators and are mostly preserved in late manuscripts, some of which are not published. Therefore, the manuscript tradition and the reception in the following centuries should also be kept in mind.

The passages I will discuss below refer to the urban environment, public and private buildings, and the everyday life of the citizens. The examples are excerpted from the following Old Church Slavonic collections and manuscripts: the Chrysorrhoas collection (Zlatostruy), Chrysostom’s On the Statues, and Codex Suprasl-
Translation and Transformation of John Chrysostom’s Urban Imagery

...iensis (10th century)\textsuperscript{16}, and Uspenskij codex (12th century)\textsuperscript{17}. Other important Slavonic manuscripts, such as the Symeon florilegium (Izbornik 1073, 11th century), the Troickij codex (12th century), the Mihanović homiliary (13th century), and the German codex (14th century)\textsuperscript{18}, did not provide any more examples. Although John Chrysostom is the most translated author in the medieval Slavonic literature, one of the reasons for the scarcity of examples is the fact that only selected works and fragments were translated into Slavonic in the early period (9th–11th century) and the selection was based on their topic and function. As a result, catechetical, festal, and panegyrical homilies in the homiliaries are less likely to contain urban descriptions, compared to the ethical and even exegetical sermons, collected in instructive miscelanies such as Zlatostruy. Some brilliant references of John Chrysostom to the life of his fellow-citizens in Antioch and Constantinople were simply left out of the Slavonic selection. The translations of the later period (from 14th century onwards) are not taken into account, because they represent a different cultural context and principles of translation. Nevertheless, the available instances are sufficient for drawing some conclusions about the way the Slavonic audience saw the 4th-century Byzantine city.

City streets and buildings

The first group of examples describes spacious streets, squares, and buildings. The two biggest cities of the Eastern Roman Empire in the 4th–5th century were impressive in terms of infrastructure and population even by today’s standards. They shared some features, e.g. busy streets and markets, big churches and tall buildings, a hippodrome, noise, nightlife, streetlights, baths, dense and stratified population. Reference to any of these features in Chrysostom’s homilies could pertain to either city. Aside from that, Antioch was famous for its porticoed streets, the proximity to the Orontes river and the mountain, and the luxurious suburb Daphne\textsuperscript{19}, whereas

\textsuperscript{17} Успенский сборник XII–XIII вв., ed. С.И. Котков, Москва 1971.
Constantinople was surrounded on three sides by the sea and was distinguished by the imperial palace and the occasional presence of the emperor\textsuperscript{20}.

The following example mentions not only the noise in the (unspecified) city, but also suburbs and houses with golden roofs and triclinia:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

This is the biggest praise to our city, not its noise and suburbs, nor its golden-roofed houses furnished with couches, but its devoted and diligent people.

There are several issues in the Slavonic translation that should be addressed. First of all, it is the overall meaning of the phrase. According to John Chrysostom, the noise, the rich houses and the suburbs (where, supposedly, the wealthy citizens could retreat in their villas) are inherent to his city, but it is the people who are more praiseworthy\textsuperscript{21}. However, the Slavonic translation suggests that this town has nothing but its people. The meaning is further adjusted by the vocabulary. Chrysostom’s “our city” (τῆς ἡμετέρας πόλεως) has become “your city” (καλῆς γραντ, ἡμετέρας) – a common itacistic error, but also a lost connection between the preacher and the audience. The Slavonic χάλκινα ‘field, farm’ hardly implied luxury\textsuperscript{22}, and the big Roman house with many rooms, including the typical dining-room triclinium furnished with three couches, where the guests reclined for dinner, was rendered as дому и полаты, ‘houses and palaces’.

The following passage refers undoubtedly to Antioch:

\begin{quote}
This is the biggest praise to your city, not its noise and suburbs, nor its golden-roofed houses furnished with couches, but its devoted and diligent people.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
There are several issues in the Slavonic translation that should be addressed. First of all, it is the overall meaning of the phrase. According to John Chrysostom, the noise, the rich houses and the suburbs (where, supposedly, the wealthy citizens could retreat in their villas) are inherent to his city, but it is the people who are more praiseworthy\textsuperscript{21}. However, the Slavonic translation suggests that this town has nothing but its people. The meaning is further adjusted by the vocabulary. Chrysostom’s “our city” (τῆς ἡμετέρας πόλεως) has become “your city” (καλῆς γραντ, ἡμετέρας) – a common itacistic error, but also a lost connection between the preacher and the audience. The Slavonic χάλκινα ‘field, farm’ hardly implied luxury\textsuperscript{22}, and the big Roman house with many rooms, including the typical dining-room triclinium furnished with three couches, where the guests reclined for dinner, was rendered as дому и полаты, ‘houses and palaces’.

The following passage refers undoubtedly to Antioch:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

This is the biggest praise to our city, not its noise and suburbs, nor its golden-roofed houses furnished with couches, but its devoted and diligent people.

There are several issues in the Slavonic translation that should be addressed. First of all, it is the overall meaning of the phrase. According to John Chrysostom, the noise, the rich houses and the suburbs (where, supposedly, the wealthy citizens could retreat in their villas) are inherent to his city, but it is the people who are more praiseworthy\textsuperscript{21}. However, the Slavonic translation suggests that this town has nothing but its people. The meaning is further adjusted by the vocabulary. Chrysostom’s “our city” (τῆς ἡμετέρας πόλεως) has become “your city” (καλῆς γραντ, ἡμετέρας) – a common itacistic error, but also a lost connection between the preacher and the audience. The Slavonic χάλκινα ‘field, farm’ hardly implied luxury\textsuperscript{22}, and the big Roman house with many rooms, including the typical dining-room triclinium furnished with three couches, where the guests reclined for dinner, was rendered as дому и полаты, ‘houses and palaces’.

The following passage refers undoubtedly to Antioch:

\begin{quote}
There are several issues in the Slavonic translation that should be addressed. First of all, it is the overall meaning of the phrase. According to John Chrysostom, the noise, the rich houses and the suburbs (where, supposedly, the wealthy citizens could retreat in their villas) are inherent to his city, but it is the people who are more praiseworthy\textsuperscript{21}. However, the Slavonic translation suggests that this town has nothing but its people. The meaning is further adjusted by the vocabulary. Chrysostom’s “our city” (τῆς ἡμετέρας πόλεως) has become “your city” (καλῆς γραντ, ἡμετέρας) – a common itacistic error, but also a lost connection between the preacher and the audience. The Slavonic χάλκινα ‘field, farm’ hardly implied luxury\textsuperscript{22}, and the big Roman house with many rooms, including the typical dining-room triclinium furnished with three couches, where the guests reclined for dinner, was rendered as дому и полаты, ‘houses and palaces’.

The following passage refers undoubtedly to Antioch:
Whenever you want to praise the city, do not tell me about the suburb of Daphne, the multitude and magnitude of the cypresses, and the water fountains, nor that many people live in the city and one can walk around the agora deep into the night without any fear, nor about the abundance of goods.

Unlike the first example, this translation is faithful and unadapted, including the mention of the Daphne suburb and the cypresses in Antioch. Since the entire homiletical series Ad populum Antiochenum is famously dedicated to this particular city and its people, it is not surprising that the references to the topography remained unchanged. In the translation, it constructs a “rhetorical” reality, which is consistent within its own context and is not necessarily connected to the surroundings of the Slavonic reader23. Another passage from the same homily also mentions the columns and stoas in the city and adds some information about the lexical variety of the translation:

Not because it is a capital city, nor because of its big and beautiful buildings, numerous columns, broad colonnades and covered walks.

23 Such a “constructed reality” is present not only in translation, but also in Chrysostom’s original: The information that is supplied is largely allusive rather than specific. In addition, the way in which John refers collectively to “the baths”, “the agora”, and “the theatre” leads one to suspect that for pedagogical and polemical purposes he operates largely within a symbolic topography, W. Mayer, The Topography of Antioch…, p. 86.

24 In the 15th-century translation (or revision, cf. note 15 above) of the homilies On the Statues, this sentence is as follows: ή γὰρ μητρόπολις εἶναι, οὐδὲ τὸ μέγεθος ἔχειν καὶ κάλλος οἰκοδομημάτων, οὐδὲ τὸ πολλοὺς κίονας, καὶ στοὰς εὐρείας καὶ περιπάτους (Ad populum Antiochenum homilia 17, CPG 4330; PG, vol. XLIX, col. 176).

Not because it is a capital city, nor because of its big and beautiful buildings, numerous columns, broad colonnades and covered walks.
The translation in this example (especially прікрисли і овунтелівіца) does not convey the exact meaning of the Greek στοὰς εὐρείας καὶ περίπατος. The contextual synonyms “columns”, “colonnades” and “(covered) walks” allude to the famous covered streets in Antioch. The Slavonic овунтелівіца ‘school’ is an unusual counterpart to περίπατος ‘walk, place for walking’. However, it corresponds to one of the secondary meanings of this word ‘philosophical school’ and reveals either a very well educated translator, or a random and inexplicable mistake.

The next two examples are from a Constantinopolitan homily, In sancto hieromartyre Phoca (CPG 4364). The selected passages are just a small sample of all the references to the imperial city. They describe the surroundings and refer to a particular event at the time of the delivery of the sermon:


The city was bright yesterday, bright and prominent, not because it has columns, but because of the martyr who came to us in a procession from the sea.


Did you miss it yesterday? Then be here today and see him being brought back to his own place. Did you see how he was carried across the agora? Watch him cross the sea, as well.

Chrysostom’s homily celebrates the two-day procession carrying the saint’s relics through the city and across the sea – a single event, which connects the preacher and his audience with their shared actual reality. To the Slavonic reader (and, indeed, to every member of an audience other than the one present at

25 Cf. LSJ, p. 1382, s.v. περιπατέω – one of the meanings is ‘walk about while teaching, discourse’ and ‘dispute, argue’, and for περίπατος cf. ‘school of philosophy, first used of the Academy’, and ‘generally, any school of philosophy’.

the delivery of the sermon on this day in Constantinople) the deictic χθές ‘yesterday’ was already anachronic, hence it was omitted in the translation of example 4. The word вьера in example 5, together with the sea and the “marble” columns of the city, create a new “rhetorical” reality, which includes also the images of other exempla, ecphrases, and comparisons.

Chrysostom’s cities were lively and dynamic, and their social and economic centres were the city squares and marketplaces, the agorai27. Chrysostom transfers the realistic image of the agora into the constructed reality of the rhetorical figures of speech. In the following exemplum he compares the troubled soul of an angry man to an agora and it is difficult to differentiate between the 4th-century reality and the topos. The description is very realistic, but its function in the text is purely rhetorical:


The soul of a troubled man] is similar to the clamour at the marketplace and the city streets, there is great noise from people coming and going, camels, mules, and donkeys, people shouting to the passers-by, so that they do not get trampled; and silversmiths and black-smiths hammering from both sides; and people either bullying, or being bullied.

The Old Church Slavonic translation is closer to the so called “rough” version, here cited after one of the oldest manuscript copies, Oxford, New College No 75 (10th–11th century). The text published in Patrologia Graeca has a somewhat different wording, cf.: ἡ ἐκείνου δὲ ἀγορᾷ καὶ θορύβῳ, ἔνθα πολλὴ ἡ κραυγὴ τῶν ἀκολούθων καὶ καμήλοις, καὶ ἡμιόνοις, καὶ θόντως, μεγάλα τοῖς προσιοῦσι κυματίζοντων, ὥστε μὴ καταπατηθῆναι; οὐχ ἡ μὲν τοῦ τοιούτου ταῖς μέσαις πάλιν τῶν πόλεων ἐοικυῖά ἐστιν, ἔνθα νῦν μὲν ἐντεῦθεν ἄργυροκόπωσι, νῦν δὲ ἐκείθεν τῶν ἀλκοτσών ὁ ἄρχος πολὺς γίνεται, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐπηρεαζόντων, οἱ δὲ ἐπηρεαζόντων (PG, vol. LX, col. 61).

The variants are after the so-called Shorter Zlatostruy, earliest copy Saint Petersburg, Russian National Library, ф.п.И. 46 (Russian, 12th century), edited in Т. ГЕОРГИЕВА, Златоструй от XII век, Силистра 2003.

---

27 For his congregation, the main axes of life seem to be: the house, the agora, the baths and the church, see L.A. Lavan, The Agorai of Antioch and Constantinople as seen by John Chrysostom, BICS 50, Issue Sup. 91, 2007, p. 157–167.
28 The Old Church Slavonic translation is closer to the so called “rough” version, here cited after one of the oldest manuscript copies, Oxford, New College No 75 (10th–11th century). The text published in Patrologia Graeca has a somewhat different wording, cf.: ἡ ἐκείνου δὲ ἀγορᾷ καὶ θορύβῳ, ἑνθα πολλὴ ἡ κραυγὴ τῶν ἀκολούθων καὶ καμήλοις, καὶ ἡμιόνοις, καὶ θόντως, μεγάλα τοῖς προσιοῦσι κυματίζοντων, ὥστε μὴ καταπατηθῆναι; οὐχ ἡ μὲν τοῦ τοιούτου ταῖς μέσαις πάλιν τῶν πόλεων ἐοικυῖά ἐστιν, ἔνθα νῦν μὲν ἐντεῦθεν ἄργυροκόπωσι, νῦν δὲ ἐκείθεν τῶν ἀλκοτσών ὁ ἄρχος πολὺς γίνεται, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐπηρεαζόντων, οἱ δὲ ἐπηρεαζόντων (PG, vol. LX, col. 61).
29 The variants are after the so-called Shorter Zlatostruy, earliest copy Saint Petersburg, Russian National Library, ф.п.И. 46 (Russian, 12th century), edited in Т. ГЕОРГИЕВА, Златоструй от XII век, Силистра 2003.
Whether the camels in the marketplace were real or imaginary for the Constantinopolitan audience, they were not part of the everyday life of the 10th-century Bulgarian translator (nor of the 15th-century Russian scribes and readers). However, any medieval audience could relate to the clamour and racket in the market (ἀγορά, тръгъще), the mules and their shouting owners on the streets (μέσαι, стъгъвши, incorrectly къдъвши), or the deafening noise coming from the blacksmiths’ workshops. Some variants of the words meaning ‘noise’ in the Slavonic manuscripts also suggest familiarity with the scene, which allows for a freer interpretation by the scribes.

Private life and daily routine

The urban environment and the public spaces were the scene where a large part of the citizens’ daily life took place. This interaction between man and city is presented in the following several examples. In the evenings the narrow streets and squares were not the best place for the poor and the homeless:


And the deprived [by you] may be bitten by the most basic needs, and lament himself, and summon thousands of accusers upon you; and when the evening comes, he may go around the market-place, encountering all sorts of things in the alleys, and be at a loss, not daring to spend the night.


And you come back refreshed after bathing, kept warm in soft garments, cheerful and happy, rushing to a lavish dinner.

Retrieved from https://czasopisma.uni.lodz.pl/sceranea [01.09.2021]
The Slavonic translation in example 7 mentions only the dark and narrow streets (στενωπός, ὀλικα, see also example 11 below) and omits the agora, but although it simplifies the wording of the original passage, it renders truthfully its general meaning. The next example 8 from the same episode is not adapted to the Slavonic audience and the translation keeps both the baths (βαλανεῖον κανή) and the sumptuous supper (δεῖπνον πολυτελές νεῖρα). The same image can be found also in other homilies30, e.g.:


The evening comes again, and some are in a hurry to the public baths and relaxation.

The Greek word δεῖπνον from example 8 can denote any meal during the day, either lunch, dinner, or supper, but the context suggests that both going to the baths and the meal afterwards happen in the evening and the Slavonic translation reflects this accordingly. Examples 9 and 10 are unambiguous in this respect – the visit to the public baths (λουτρά) is in the evening and is followed by a banquet. This way of life was not accessible to all the citizens, cf. the continuation of example 9 below.

The house

The following examples depict domestic scenes in big Roman houses with servants and lavish banquets:

[10] ἐκεῖνοι δὲ τῶν πόνων ἀπολύσαντες έαυτούς, τότε τῇ τραπέζῃ προσανέχουσι, οὐκ οἰκετῶν πλῆθος ἐγείροντες, οὐδὲ περιτρέχοντες τὴν οἰκίαν, οὐδὲ θορυβοῦντες, οὐδὲ όπα πολλὰ παρατιθέμενοι, οὐδὲ κνίσσης γέμοντα, ἀλλ’ οἱ μὲν ἄρτον μόνον καὶ ἅλας, οἱ δὲ

30 Leslie Dossey’s interesting study about the nightlife in the 4th-century big cities Antioch and Constantinople explores the shift of the main occupations of the citizens towards later hours (compared to the country and to earlier time-periods). Afternoon naps, baths, shopping and supper occur several hours later than before, cf. L. Dossey, Night in the Big City. Temporal Patterns in Antioch and Constantinople as Revealed by Chrysostom’s Sermons, [in:] Revisioning John Chrysostom, ed. C.L. de Wet, W. Mayer, Leiden–Boston 2019 [= CAEC, 1], p. 698–732.
ἔλαιον προστιθέντες, ἕτεροι δὲ, ὅσοι ἀσθενέστεροί εἰσι, καὶ λαχάνων ἔχονται καὶ ὀσπρίων (In Epistulam primam ad Timotheum homilia 14, CPG 4436; PG, vol. LXII, col. 577).

The other ones attend to the table after finishing with their labour, without awakening a multitude of slaves, nor running around the house and raising a clamour, nor having many dishes full of meats, but some put on the table only bread and salt, others add olive-oil, and some – the weaker ones – have vegetables and beans.

This contrast between the wealthy citizens with their baths, big households and banquets, and the poor (the working people, τῶν πόνων ἀπολύσαντες ἑαυτοῦ), the ones who have simple meals and a small or no house at all, is a recurring motif in Chrysostom's works:

When you come home, when you lay down on the couch, when the lights shine bright in the house, when the table is ready and full, then remember that miserable and unhappy one, walking down the alleys like a dog, in darkness and mud.

Example 11 presents a picture, where at least some streets or alleys (the same στενωποί from example 7) are dark and not paved. It also makes the transition from the public space into the residential area – into the dining-room of a Roman house. This is where the Slavonic translation shows some deviations and adaptations. The phrase “lights shining bright round the house” is omitted altogether (perhaps the medieval Bulgarian house was darker than its Byzantine counterpart, but this cannot be the only explanation of the omission). Chrysostom's citizen reclines on a couch for supper in the customary manner (ἐπὶ τῆς εὐνῆς ἀνακλιθῇς) – probably the couch in the triclinium from example 1, whereas the man in the constructed reality of the Slavonic translation sits down (εἴσων τῷ) and someone else (a slave? a servant? a wife?) puts the table in front of him. The
Translation and Transformation of John Chrysostom’s Urban Imagery…

less fortunate men from example 10 are at the table in an unspecified position (τῇ τραπέζῃ προσανέχουσιν) and again “sitting” in the translation. These subtle deviations of the translation suggest that the Slavonic audience did not differentiate between sitting at the table and reclining on the couch of a triclinium.

The next examples also give some architectural details, e.g. the following image of a Roman house:


And those who build splendid houses and wide porticoes, and long courtyards, let them know that Christ did not have a place to rest his head.


If you peek out to the street, you will not hear a sound; if you look into the house, you will see everybody lying as if in a tomb.

The Greek sentence suggests that an observer is looking through the window out (towards the narrow street), and in (towards the house). In the Slavonic text the house is a palace (пολατъ) and the observer is looking out to the street, and then back into a courtyard (къ дкрофъ). An inner courtyard is imaginable only in a big building – in the palace or in a monastery.

In the following description of the morning routine of a common citizen, a small alteration in the translation gives us an idea about the layout of the house:
As soon as we wake up, we sit up and stretch out, we answer the call of nature, then we wash our face and hands, afterwards we take our shoes and clothes, and a lot of time passes.

Early in the morning, after sitting up in the bed and stretching, and before washing and dressing, the citizen relieves himself (goes πρὸς χρείαν). In the translation, this happens behind the house, or at the back (ἐκεῖ δέμε). This deviation in the Slavonic translation alludes to an area of the house, or outside the house, that is otherwise rarely mentioned. It is also another point of difference between the well-equipped Roman house and the average medieval Slavic houses.

The last example, which is another description of a building, also gives some interesting information about architectural terminology and adaptations of the source text:

The building in the Greek comparison has a vaulted roof built of stone, with a keystone on the top – a structure, characteristic not for a house, but for a church or a similar edifice. In the translation, it is covered with lead (στρώσει κάμαραν πολυμερώς) and there is also a stone on the top of the dome. Other examples of

31 The Greek word καμάρα is rendered with the borrowing комара, witnessed in other 10th-century translations such as John the Exarch’s Bogoslovie and Pseudo-Kaisarios’ Erotapokrisis, see И. Срезневский, Материалы для словаря..., vol. I, Санкт-Петербург 1893, col. 1263–1264 (s.v. комара); Я. Милтенов, Диалозите на Псевдо-Кесарий в славянската ръкописна традиция, София 2006 p. 544.
the word олово in some Slavonic texts refer specifically to covering churches with lead\[32\]. It seems that it was not unusual for a dome to be coated with lead, which suggests that the vault in this example was associated with a leaden church-dome – a notion which is not explicit in the Greek source.

Wide porticoes and long courtyards (cf. example 12) were not typical features of the medieval Bulgarian house, except for the ruler’s palace. Even if we assume that the initial audience of the Old Church Slavonic translations was well familiar with the Byzantine culture, the topography of Constantinople, its squares, columns and obelisks, the surrounding sea etc. (cf. examples 4 and 5), the readers throughout the Slavic world in the following centuries most probably did not see villas with spacious courtyards, porticoes and a large body of water from their windows.

What did the 10th-century Bulgarian see from his window? Unlike Antioch and Constantinople, there is only limited archeological data about the medieval Bulgarian town and almost no information about the everyday life of the common citizen\[33\]. Pliska and Preslav, the two capitals of the First Bulgarian Kingdom (7th–11th century), had some monumental architecture, such as the ruler’s palace\[34\], churches, and city walls. However, the cities were in steady decline from the end of the 10th century onwards and lost their significance in the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (12th–14th century). According to the archeological and historical studies, the medieval Bulgarian fortified town had a residential area outside the city walls. Most people lived in small semi-dug-in houses\[35\], the door opened directly to the street. In the later centuries the houses were made of stone and could have a backyard with service buildings. Some prominent citizens owned two-storey houses with many rooms. The marketplaces and the town-squares, formed from the intersection of two roads, were an important economic and social element

\[32\] Cf. И. Срезневский, Материалы для словаря..., vol. II, Санкт-Петербург 1902, col. 661, с.у. олово: “създана есть церковь велика клѣтскы, покрыта же есть всꙗ оловомъ”; “Обновлена бысть церкы свꙗта Богородꙗца... и покрыта бысть оловомъ от верхѹ до комаръ и до прискоровъ”.


\[34\] …since the palace covers a large area, its central part was taken by a courtyard enclosed by the balconies of the building, A. Aladzhov, The Byzantine Empire..., p. 120. This structure was probably burnt down at the beginning of the 9th century.

of the medieval town. There is no information about city lights, but there were baths and a sewage system in the First Bulgarian kingdom at least at the palace. In the 13th–14th century the water supply was provided by cisterns and wells.

The medieval Bulgarian town shared some features with the Byzantine major cities and differed in others. From the examples above, and the entire history of translation, transmission, and reception of Byzantine texts in the medieval Slavonic literature, it is evident that the homilies of John Chrysostom had many points of reference to the actual reality of 4th-century Antioch and Constantinople that were not present to the Slavonic audience. The translators of Chrysostom’s homilies, however, did not adapt each detail that might be unfamiliar. Many realia are unchanged in the translation – there are exact renditions of stoas, columns, baths, vaulted roofs and camels in the agora, athletic games and theatrical performances (not included in this study), etc. At the same time, some passages were slightly adapted without damaging the general meaning, e.g. the villas with triclinia in the suburbs, where people dined lying on couches, became “fields” and “palaces” (example 1), and the master sat at the table for dinner (example 11).

Urban images were transferred from the Byzantine world into medieval Bulgaria also in other literary genres, such as the juridical literature. One of the law texts translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic pertains to the same topic – life in the city – and uses vocabulary similar to the examples commented above. This text is the Procheiros nomos – a Byzantine juridical compendium based on Justinian’s law. Title 38 of the Procheiros nomos deals specifically with the urban environment, buildings and renovations, private and public property, relationships between neighbours, co-ownership, etc. The Slavonic translation (the earliest witness is from the 13th century) contains numerous technical terms which are a significant contribution to the terminological vocabulary of the Slavonic language. This text deserves special attention, but here I will briefly comment on some issues which are relevant to the present study.

The Procheiros nomos settles legal matters in the Eastern Roman Empire which are irrelevant to the medieval Bulgarian, Serbian, or Russian reality. For instance, the cases in chapters 14 and 18 involve multistorey residence buildings, which were not typical for the medieval Bulgarian town (upper floors should not be heavier than the ground-floor can support, and the residents of the ground-floor may not conduct smoke into the homes of their neighbours above). Other

36 Ibidem, p. 118.
chapters deal with topography and landscaping characteristic to the Mediterranean – according to chapters 5 and 6, the residents have the right to preserve their unhindered view to the sea (the city is explicitly named – в селъ городъ и мь градъ рекше къ городахъ), and chapter 50 discusses olive- and fig-trees. Chapters 23–24, 37, 51, 58 deal with developed sewage and water systems, and chapter 34 mentions neighbouring porticoes (или прикоснетъ се прикорњахъ на свою потрѣбѹ њемъ).

These big-city problems were translated into Slavonic without significant adaptation. Apart from several explanatory additions, the translation follows faithfully its Greek source. This lack of adjustment is an indication that the technical juridical text was perceived not as a legal manual, but as literature. The connections to the actual reality in the original were lost in the new context of the translation in a way that is similar to the transformation of the oral sermon into a written literary genre.

The more a text is used and appropriated, the more it is subjected to alterations. The translations of John Chrysostom’s homilies show both tendencies – in some cases they are true to the Greek source, in others they are adapted to the new audience. The examples cited above were translated by different anonymous translators in the early 10th-century Bulgaria, they represent various approaches towards the original. The genre of the homily is also an important factor in this process. Although the written homily is removed from the initial moment of delivery, it lives on as reading matter or material for new sermons. John Chrysostom’s urban images are only a small piece of the cultural and literary history. They were often documents of his time, pictures of his fellow-citizens and their surroundings, which served sometimes as rhetorical means for conveying a deeper and more general message. For the Slavonic audience, however, these episodes were equal to all the other figures of speech – parables, exempla, etc., which were one step further from their day-to-day life. Most of this literature was monastic, for individual or collective reading in monasteries, but sometimes also for highly educated and prepared readers (we still do not know enough about the reception of these texts). Therefore, the translation of the realia into Old Church Slavonic involved not only adaptation in order to make the foreign reality more relatable, but it was also a transformation of a document into literature.

40 Ibidem, p. 190, in the Greek text στοά, cf. J. Zepos, Στοά, Prochiron…, p. 211. For the same Slavonic word прикорњах cf. examples 3 and 12 and notes 24 and 32 above.
41 D. Naydenova argues that the early translations of various Byzantine legal texts into Old Church Slavonic were part of the political ideology rather than a state legislation, and they should be considered literary sources, cf.: D. NAYDENOVA, Cyrillo-Methodian Legal Heritage and Political Ideology in the Mediaeval Slavic States, PBAS.HSS 1.1, 2014, p. 3–16.
Bibliography


Mihanović Homiliar, ed. R. Aitzetmüller, Graz 1957.
Translation and Transformation of John Chrysostom’s Urban Imagery…

Mirčeva E., Germanov sbornik ot 1358/1359 g. Izsledvane i izdanie na teksta, Sofija 2006.
Abstract. John Chrysostom was not only one of the most prolific and influential authors of late antiquity but also a renown preacher, exegete, and public figure. His homilies and sermons combined the classical rhetorical craft with some vivid imagery from everyday life. He used descriptions, comparisons, and metaphors that were both a rhetorical device and a reference to the real world familiar to his audience. From 9th century onwards, many of Chrysostom’s works were translated into Old Church Slavonic and were widely used for either private or communal reading. Even if they had lost the spontaneity of the oral performance, they still preserved the references to the 4th-century City, to the streets and the homes in a distant world, transferred into the 10th-century Bulgaria and beyond. The article examines how some of these urban images were translated and sometimes adapted to the medieval Slavonic audience, how the realia and the figures of speech were rendered into the Slavonic language and culture. It is a survey on the reception of the oral sermon put into writing, and at the same time, it is a glimpse into the late antique everyday life in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords: John Chrysostom, literary reception, translations into Old Church Slavonic, urban life, Antioch, Constantinople