

Saint Nicodemus of Tismana's Tetraevangelion and its Relation with Slavic-Byzantine Manuscripts

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ABSTRACT. This study aims to bring a series of clarifications regarding the objectives pursued by Saint Nicodemus in creating a Tetraevangelion for the Tismana Monastery in 1405. We believe that these objectives could be better understood based on the investigation of the relationship that Saint Nicodemus' Tetraevangelion has with similar Slavic-Byzantine manuscripts, especially with Bulgarian and Serbian manuscripts, of his time. This relation helps identify both the characteristics of the manuscript made by Saint Nicodemus at the beginning of the fifteenth century, as well as its originality among other Slavic-Byzantine manuscripts.

Keywords: Tetraevangelion, Saint Nicodemus, Slavic-Byzantine manuscripts, liturgy

Introduction

The Tetraevangelion of Saint Nicodemus from Tismana, dated 1405, is the oldest biblical manuscript made on the territory of our country that has been fully preserved. Its value has been appreciated historically, philologically and especially artistically, but very little from a theological point of view.

Much of the existent scientific debate about the Tetraevangelion has unfortunately revolved only around rather marginal issues such as the question of where this manuscript was produced. As a book of worship, the Tetraevangelion gives us the reading of the Gospel text in a liturgical key, its fundamental quality being that of proclaiming and permanently updating the word of the Lord in the life of the Church and, implicitly, of its faithful followers.

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Therefore, in this study we consider the role that a Tetraevangelion has as a cult book, aiming to better understand both its characteristics and how it responded to the liturgical needs specific to its time. To this end, we rely on the investigation of the relationship that St. Nicodemus' Tetraevangelion has with other similar Slavic-Byzantine manuscripts from the second part of the fourteenth century and the first part of the fifteenth century. Based on this comparison, we want to get closer to understanding the motivation and objectives that St. Nicodemus had for the realization of this valuable manuscript.

Objectives of Saint Nicodemus' Tetraevangelion

The first objective pursued by St. Nicodemus in the realization of his Tetraevangelion seems to have been generated by the need to leave to the Monastery of Tismana a new and updated Tetraevangelion that would meet the current liturgical needs of the monastic community. In the final note of his Tetraevangelion, it is written that: *Această Sfântă Evanghelie a scris-o popa Nicodim în Țară Ungurească în anul al șaselea al prigonirii lui, iar de la începutul firii socotim (anii) 6000 și nouă sute și 13 [This Holy Gospel was written by Father Nicodemus on Hungarian Land in the sixth year of his persecution, and from the beginning of the world we count 6000 and nine hundred and 13 (years)].*

About the place and implicitly about the so-called persecution of Saint Nicodemus, several hypotheses have been issued which, lately, could be summarized in two.

The first hypothesis pointing to Prislop Monastery as the place where the Tetraevangelion was written is rather based on the local tradition that was preserved around this monastic settlement, believed to have been built by disciples of Saint Nicodemus. This hypothesis is grounded on an alleged conflict between Saint Nicodemus and Prince Mircea cel Bătrân [Mircea the Elder] (1386-1418) which led to the retreat of St. Nicodemus in Ardeal¹.

The second hypothesis indicated Vodița Monastery as the place where the Tetraevangelion was written, being supported by Metropolitan Tit Simeadrea², but also by historians such as E. Lăzărescu³, I.-R. Mircea⁴ or M. Păcurariu⁵,

¹ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân* (București, 1944), 152.

² Mitropolit Tit Simeadrea, "Glosă pe marginea unei însemnări," *MO* 1-4 (1961): 15-24.

³ E. Lăzărescu, "Nicodim de la Tismana și rolul său în cultura veche românească I (până în 1385)," *Romanoslavica* 11 (1965): 237-85.

⁴ Ion-Radu Mircea, "Cel mai vechi manuscris miniat din Țara Românească: Tetraevangelul popii Nicodim (1404-1405)," *Romanoslavica* 13 (1966): 203-21.

⁵ Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. 1 (București: IBMO, 1980), 293.

demonstrated great scientific thoroughness in researching the role that Saint Nicodemus had in our ancient culture. That place of “persecution” was interpreted by Metropolitan Tit Simedrea as a place of spiritual “retreat”⁶. This is also consistent with the *Life of Saint Nicodemus* written by Stephen the Hieromonk⁷, who also speaks of a “retreat” of Saint Nicodemus to his cave at Tismana in the latter part of his life. We also share this opinion, considering that Vodița monastery was part of the Banat of Severin, which, in the consciousness of that era, was considered a feud of the Hungarian Kingdom attributed to Wallachia, which is why Saint Nicodemus considered the place to be in the Hungarian Country. Of course, this is also done to amplify the idea of his retirement. The Vodița Monastery offered Saint Nicodemus a secluded environment, conducive to the completion of his undertaking regarding the copying of the Tetraevangelion.

Unlike Vodița, the Tismana Monastery had truly become a monastic “great lavra” at the beginning of the fifteenth century thanks to the great princely gifts, but especially to the efforts of Saint Nicodemus and, implicitly, to his prestige as a spiritual man of that time. This certainly attracted a considerable number of monks to the Tismana monastery and gave scope to monastic life. This may also be the reason why Saint Nicodemus, in the last part of his life, entrusted the monastic community of Tismana to his trusted disciple, Agathon, and retired to Vodița. Thus, he wishes to be able to detach himself from managing the current problems of the growing community of Tismana and to dedicate himself to this last great cultural-ecclesiastical project of his, which seems to be represented by the realization of a new Tetraevangelion. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that Saint Nicodemus considers this “persecution in the Hungarian Land” as a gesture of true repentance, the work of copying the Tetraevangelion being added, in this last part of his life, to his struggles.

The Tismana Monastery, together with Vodița, constituted a “true autonomous space” within the Church of Wallachia, being administered directly by the community led by Saint Nicodemus. This fact is confirmed by Dan I's charter in 1385, which strengthened the donations made in the past by the ruling families, as well as the “autonomous” status of the two monasteries⁸. Therefore, the choice of Vodița as a place of refuge by Saint Nicodemus, to create a new Tetraevangelion, seems entirely natural to us, if we also take into account that the Banat of Severin had ceased to represent at that time, including from a political-state point of view, a reason for dispute between the Hungarian Kingdom and Wallachia, interested first and foremost in strengthening their

⁶ Simedrea, “Glosă pe marginea unei însemnări,” 20-1.

⁷ Ștefan Ieromonahul, *Viața preacuviosului Nicodim sfințitul* (Craiova, 1935), 81-3.

⁸ *Documente privind istoria României, B. Țara Românească*, vol. 1 (București, 1953), 32-3.

common defences against the Turkish threat that had already reached the Danube⁹. However, the most important aspect to be considered regarding the realization of Saint Nicodemus' Tetraevangelion at Vodița is that Saint Nicodemus could have used to copy his manuscript the Tetraevangelion given by Vladislav Vlaicu (1364-1376), by royal charter, most probably in 1372 to the Vodița Monastery at the time of its foundation. In this charter, it is mentioned that the Vodița Monastery, built through the efforts of Saint Nicodemus and his disciples immediately after their passage north of the Danube, was endowed by the ruler of the country with religious gifts, as well as with beautiful Tetraevangelion encased with gold and silver¹⁰. This Tetraevangelion will be used by the community from Vodița until the moment when the community will have to look for another monastery place following the conquest by the Hungarians of the fortress of Severin in 1376¹¹. Certainly, then, the Tetraevangelion came into liturgical use of the Tismana Monastery, which will use it at least until the moment when monastic life could be resumed in Vodița. This may also be the moment when Saint Nicodemus decides to return the Tetraevangelion to Vodița Monastery, his first foundation, to which he had been gifted, not before using it to create a new and updated Tetraevangelion.

The second objective pursued by St. Nicodemus seems to be represented by his interest in updating the biblical text to the current language standard, which also implied a slight "Greekization" of it, noticeable at the level of proper names.

Thus, Ioan-Radu Mircea believes that Saint Nicodemus' Tetraevangelion has as a specific characteristic "the use of the Greek diphthong *-av, -ev* even where it was not required"¹², as well as "the spelling of biblical names in a pretentious Greek form"¹³. This so-called Greekization would be due to St. Nicodemus' dual culture, Slavonic and Greek, and especially to his Greek origin after his father. For example, Serbian sources call St. Nicodemus, Nicodemus the Greek. However, this so-called attempt to "Greekize" Slavonic manuscripts must be seen rather as a kind of "fashion of the time", as the colophon of Ivan Alexander's Tetraevangelion written by monk Simion attests, which explicitly reveals that its editors also confronted their calligraphy text in Slavonic with the text in Greek.

Therefore, it is to be assumed that this "Greekization" could not have been done practically without the support of a Greek text. This text could have been that of the Greek Tetraevangelion from the Museum of Oltenia from the

⁹ Constantin C. Giurescu, Dinu C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor, 2, De la mijlocul secolului al XIV-lea până la începutul secolului al XVII-lea* (București: Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979), 75-6.

¹⁰ *Documente privind istoria României*, 27-28.

¹¹ Iusztin Zoltan, "Stăpânitorii Cetății Severin în veacul al XIV-lea," *Analele Banatului, S.N. Arheologie-Istorie* 24 (2016): 379-91.

¹² Mircea, "Cel mai vechi manuscris miniat," 210.

¹³ Mircea, "Cel mai vechi manuscris miniat," 218.

11th-12th centuries (*Codex Craiovensis*) which, after 1389, would have been donated by Metropolitan Antim Kritopol to the Tismana Monastery¹⁴.

Thus, Saint Nicodemus updates the ancient Tetraevangelion of Vodița, of Serbian editorship, according to the Greek standard of the language, which certainly did not show any Athonite influences.

The third objective that St. Nicodemus pursues when creating a new Tetraevangelion for the monastery of Tismana is given by the need to update the liturgical apparatus which, first, had to correspond to the liturgical needs specific to the monastic environment. Unlike the Gospel text, which by script and language attests to a much older Serbian editorial source, the liturgical apparatus of the Tetraevangelion is an updated form for a Slavic-Byzantine manuscript from the latter part of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the next century. However, the updating of the liturgical apparatus was made according to the Romanian ecclesial context and the liturgical needs of the Tismana Monastery at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Saint Nicodemus places the liturgical apparatus at the beginning of the Tetraevangelion, and not at the end, as is found in most Tetraevangelions of the time. St. Theophylact of Bulgaria's *predoslovia* [introduction] about St. Matthew the Evangelist is missing. Moreover, he doesn't seem interested in the theological aspect.

The liturgical apparatus of the Tetraevangelion has the following structure:

“Arătare cuprinzând tot anul cifra evangheliilor și ordinea evangheliștilor, de unde încep și unde se sfârșesc” [Indication for the entire year with the number of the gospels and the order of the evangelists, where they begin and end] (Folio 1 r)

“Arătare de evanghelia ce trebuie să se spună în fiecare zi în săptămânile pe tot anul” [Indication of the gospel to be read every day of the weeks throughout the year] (Folio 1 v)

“Sbornicul dumnezeiesc al celor 12 luni, arătând capetele fiecărei evanghelii pentru sfinții aleși și sărbătorile împărătești” [The divine zbornik of the 12 months, showing the beginning of each gospel for the chosen saints and royal feasts] (Folio 6)

Different gospels for every need (Folio 12-13v)

Resurrection Prochemons at Matins, on Sundays, before the Gospel (Folio 13 v)

¹⁴ Ion Reșceanu, Mihai Ciurea, Carmen Bălțeanu, Ion Sorin Bora, *Studii despre Tetraevangheliarul grecesc de la Muzeul Olteniei din Craiova (sec. al XII-lea) / Studies on the Greek Tetraevangelion from the Museum of Oltenia in Craiova (12th century): “650 de ani de la înființarea Mitropoliei Olteniei (1370-2020)”*, trans. by Alina Reșceanu – bilingual edition (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 2020), 58.

“Arătare cum se cade să afli fiecare evangheliie a zilei și evangheliile Învierii și Apostolul, dar și Glasurile” [Indication how it is proper to find out the gospel of the day and the gospels of the Resurrection and the Apostle, but also the Voices] (Folio 14)¹⁵.

Its relation with Bulgarian manuscripts

Regarding the relationship between the manuscript of Saint Nicodemus and the Bulgarian manuscripts, we will focus first on those made in Vidin in the last part of the fourteenth century and the first part of the fifteenth century. The motivation for this approach is given by the fact that Saint Nicodemus, before crossing north of the Danube, is present with his disciples in the Vidin area, where, according to tradition, he founded two monasteries, in Vratna and Manastirica¹⁶. What is known for certain is that Saint Nicodemus was a direct witness of the events that took place in the area after the occupation of Vidin in 1365 by the Hungarian Kingdom, under whose rule it remained until 1369 when it was liberated by Prince Vladislav Vlaicu. After this moment, due to the political and military instability of the area, Saint Nicodemus will find refuge and support north of the Danube, at the ruler of Wallachia¹⁷.

The period Saint Nicodemus spent in Vidin is certainly much longer than the time between 1365 and 1370, the year around which he passed in Wallachia. The persecution to which he was subjected by Franciscan monks, including the test of fire, during the Hungarian occupation of Vidin, implies a pre-1365 stay of at least several years.

During this time, he organized his monastic hearth and gained a certain notoriety in the area, which also attracted his persecution from the new rulers of Vidin, who were eager to catholicize the entire region that became part of the Hungarian Catholic Kingdom. Therefore, Saint Nicodemus spent an important period in Vidin and certainly kept in touch with the Danube fortress after he arrived in Wallachia. Therefore, Vidin could naturally exert a considerable cultural-ecclesiastical influence on Saint Nicodemus for a period when he actively participated in the ecclesiastical life of the area. Therefore, there is a need for an evaluation of the relationship between the manuscript of Saint Nicodemus and the Vidinian manuscripts made in the latter part of the fourteenth century and the first part of the fifteenth century.

¹⁵ Based on the translation of Ion-Radu Mircea, “Cel mai vechi manuscris miniat,” 206-7.

¹⁶ Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. 1, 288.

¹⁷ Lăzărescu, “Nicodim de la Tismana,” 259-61.

After the division of the Bulgarian Empire by Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) between his two sons, Ivan Shishman and Ivan Sratsimir in 1356, the rivalry that arose between them, although it led to a departure from Tarnovo, also had beneficial consequences in terms of ecclesiastical and cultural affirmation of Vidin, henceforth ruled by Ivan Sratsimir. With the settlement of Ivan Sratsimir in Vidin, the city began to develop culturally. During this period, the existence of a scriptorium is attested based on manuscripts that have been preserved until today.

An advantageous aspect of our research is the fact that a series of manuscripts and a chancery document have been preserved since the period of the Vidin Empire (1356 -1396), based on which we can make a thorough comparative analysis.

These are:

- Tetraevangelion of Metropolitan Daniil of Vidin;
- The Zbornik of Vidin (*Bdinski Zbornik*) (1360)
- The Apostle of Vidin, made during the Hungarian occupation (1365-1369) by brothers Dragan and Rajko;
- Letter to the people of Brasov of Ivan Sratsimir (1369).

An Apostle is added to the above-mentioned documents, which was copied by Draško in 1428 and is currently stored at the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb under inventory no. MS.III.b.16.¹⁸

The Tetraevangelion of Metropolitan Daniel of Vidin draws our special attention. It is of Tarnovean Bulgarian editorial origin in terms of script, but in terms of language, it has obvious Serbian influences. However, there are no elements to confirm the exercise of a direct influence on the later work of Saint Nicodemus, even if the Tetraevangelion in question would have passed north of the Danube together with Metropolitan Daniel, who is forced to take refuge in Wallachia after the occupation of Vidin by the Hungarians (1365). Metropolitan Daniel had received the approval of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to exercise his episcopal ministry, with the consent of the local hierarch, most probably in parts of Oltenia¹⁹, a fact confirmed by the synodal decisions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1370 issued at the same time when Metropolitan Antim Kritopol was installed in Severin²⁰.

This manuscript could have represented a model, both for Vidin and for Wallachia, where, after 1365, it was certainly in liturgical use. The other manuscripts produced during the Hungarian rule of Vidin are also of Bulgarian

¹⁸ Maya Petrova-Taneva, "The Ghent Manuscript of the *Bdinski Zbornik*: The Original or a Copy?," *Slavica Gandensia* 28 (2001): 121-2.

¹⁹ Răzvan Theodorescu, *Bizanț, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești* (secolele X-XIV) (București: Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1974), 209.

²⁰ *Documente privind istoria României*, 20-1, 25-6.

editorship with a strong Serbian influence on the language, which is evidenced by the increasingly rare use of nasal vowels and their replacement with *-ou* and *-e*, as well as that pronounced iotization specific to Serbian spelling²¹. The same phenomenon is to be found in the letter to the people of Brasov²² written by Ivan Sratsimir's chancellery after 1369, which attests that the influence of Serbian spelling was exerted to the same extent at the level of the chancellery language for official documents.

The Vidin Zbornik, even if it is not a biblical work, has characteristics that are of great use to us. It is a hagiographic work, including the lives of holy women from the Church of the East and was made in Vidin, in 1360, at the request of Tsarina Ana, wife of Ivan Sratsimir. She was the daughter of the Romanian ruler Nicolae Alexandru (1352-1364) from his marriage to Clara Dobokay (Lady Clara). According to recent research, the Zbornik, currently preserved at the University of Ghent, is not an autographed document, but a copy made in the first decade of the fifteenth century, as attested by the evaluation of the watermark of the paper used²³. However, the transcription of this manuscript does not diminish its historical and cultural value, but on the contrary, as far as we are concerned, it is meant to reconfirm the use of the same type of spelling at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Therefore, the type of spelling used in Vidin is a hybrid between Bulgarian (Tarnovean) and Serbian norms. All manuscripts known from Vidin, as well as the letter to Brasov, use both nasal vowels, specific to the Bulgarian editorial workshop, and semivowels specific to the Serbian editorial workshop, which indicates that a strict orthographic system was not used here. Therefore, specialists believe that a mixed spelling typical for Vidin was in use at the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century²⁴.

The explanations offered by the specialists considered both Ivan Sratsimir's efforts to give a new cultural identity to Vidin about Tarnovo, and the fact that the spelling of the Bulgarian editorial workshop without nasals better reflected the spoken language of Western Bulgaria, which had been formed before the fifteenth century²⁵. Therefore, we can understand that the breaking of political ties between Vidin and Tarnovo had immediate cultural consequences, which required attracting cultural people from neighbouring Serbia, including professional scribes, to work for the ruling family in Vidin. These, not only through their formation but also through the sources used, were

²¹ Petrova-Taneva, "The Ghent Manuscript," 120-1.

²² Mariola Walczak-Mikolajezakowa, "Braszowska Gramota Iwana Sracimira. Nieduzy Dokument o wielkim Znaczenin," *Balcanica posnaniensia* 29 (2022): 71-80.

²³ Petrova-Taneva, "The Ghent Manuscript," 122-3.

²⁴ Petrova-Taneva, "The Ghent Manuscript," 125.

²⁵ Petrova-Taneva, "The Ghent Manuscript," 121.

introduced in an area with Bulgarian cultural specificity norms of Serbian orthography in the scriptoria and chancellery of the Tsardom of Vidin.

In this context, it can also be understood that Saint Nicodemus is rather a man of influence in the area, being part of the outstanding representatives of the Serbian current, which has a major contribution to improving the cultural-religious environment in Vidin during the reign of Tsar Ivan Sratsimir. The fact that Saint Nicodemus does not resort to the orthographic system specific to Vidin, where he was resident for a long time and with which he kept a direct relationship, proves that Saint Nicodemus was already formed in the spirit of the Serbian school, whose outstanding representative he is both in Vidin and, later, in Wallachia. If we consider what P.P. Panaitescu remarked about the fact that Wallachia did not have a direct border with the Serbian Empire at the end of the fourteenth century²⁶, we notice that Vidin had the role of intermediating, at that time, the relationship with Serbian culture and its important representatives, such as St. Nicodemus.

As for the relation of St. Nicodemus' Tetraevangelion with the Tarnovian manuscripts, a possible influence exerted by them is very difficult to prove. Tarnovian manuscripts made during Ivan Alexander's reign are distinguished by graphic elegance and beautiful illuminations, the most famous being the Tetraevangelion made by monk Simeon in 1355-1356. This manuscript, considered to be one of the most beautiful biblical church manuscripts, ended in the possession of Alexandru cel Bun, ruler of Moldavia, after the fall of Tarnovo fortress in 1393, as indicated in a note on one of its pages.

Ivan Alexander's Tetraevangelion is a deluxe edition par excellence, and any possible influences exerted on that of Saint Nicodemus might be considered as "forced". At most, one can speak of that tendency to Greekize the text, which we mentioned above, which is found in both manuscripts. We can also observe a possible influence at the level of illuminations, exerted by another Tarnovean reference work, such as the Tomic Psalter, to which the Tetraevangelion of Saint Nicodemus can be related only as an artistic work of synthesis of the Slavic-Byzantine world in the middle of the fourteenth century.

Its relation with Serbian manuscripts

The Serbian editorial influence in Church Slavonic on Saint Nicodemus' Tetraevangelion is indisputable, being supported by most researchers. The exception is, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Alexandru

²⁶ Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, 31.

Ștefulescu, who speaks of a mixed Bulgarian-Serbian editorial influence²⁷ and then Emil Turdeanu, who claims that it was written in Middle Bulgarian²⁸. The language and spelling elements are Serbian, presenting specific characteristics of the Rașca School. However, the manuscripts made at the beginning of the fifteenth century posed a whole series of difficulties when researchers tried cataloguing it the manuscripts of its time. Its spelling denotes characteristics that can only be categorized as archaic about the period in which it is made. However, the language appears updated with Greekizing tendencies, while the illuminations do not follow a specific style for Slavic-Byzantine manuscripts and can be considered rather “eclectic”. To all this, we add the fact that, unlike most contemporary Serbian manuscripts, the liturgical apparatus is placed at the beginning and not at the end, and that the introduction to Matthew of Saint Theophylact of Bulgaria is missing, or that the menologhion does not record the Serbian saints Simion and Sava. We can thus truly understand the difficulty of cataloguing it based on generally recognized characteristics for each family of manuscripts and for the respective time.

Starting from the graphic analysis of the text of Saint Nicodemus' manuscript, Ion-Radu Mircea observes that the one who copied the Tetraevangelion between 1404 and 1405 preserved the Serbian orthographic tradition of the previous century²⁹. In contrast, Ion Iufu claimed that, through his manuscript, Saint Nicodemus would make himself the exponent of manuscript writing in the Romanian Principalities in the new spelling of the Serbian editorial style, which was known to have been promoted in the first part of the fifteenth century by Constantine of Kostenets³⁰. Clearly, the writing used by Saint Nicodemus is much older. He uses a bold, ample, almost uncial letter, specific to the Rașca School that was perpetuated in time until the second half of the fourteenth century. Unlike this type of writing, the Athonite manuscripts of Serbian editorial tradition of the mid-fourteenth century no longer used such scripting, adopting an elegant semiuncial script, smaller in proportion, which benefited from a much more generous space for word delimitation and punctuation use.

This can be observed both in the Tetraevangelion copied by the monk Dionysius from Hilandar Monastery in 1356, and in a Tetraevangelion from the same period made at Hilandar Monastery by the monk Teoctist. Therefore, at the level of script, the Tetraevangelion of Saint Nicodemus differs from the Athonite manuscripts, with which, however, it resembles at the level of language, just like the other Serbian manuscripts of the second half of the fourteenth century.

²⁷ Alexandru Ștefulescu, *Mănăstirea Tismana* (București, 1909), 57.

²⁸ Emil Turdeanu, *La litterature bulgare du XIV e au siecle et sa diffusion dans les pays roumains* (Paris, 1947), 125.

²⁹ Mircea, “Cel mai vechi manuscris miniat”, 210.

³⁰ Ion Iufu, “Despre prototipurile literaturii slavo-române din secolul al XV-lea,” *MO* 7-8 (1963): 533.

However, regarding the writing style which uses a broad and bold letter, it seems that the tradition of the Raška School continued among Serbian manuscripts after the middle of the fourteenth century, being found in several manuscripts whose spelling is like that used by Saint Nicodemus. The most conclusive example of this is provided by a Tetraevangelion of the third quarter of the fourteenth century, currently at the National Library of Russia in Moscow, under inventory number F. p. I. 114. The writing is strikingly similar, as is the layout of the biblical text on the page, the use of punctuation or marginal notation to indicate chapters (pericopes), and the wording of the *kephalaia*. Even the illuminations found at the beginning of each Gospel indicate that both manuscripts are under a strong Byzantine influence. The Serbian Tetraevangelion surprises with very beautiful representations of the four evangelists.

A writing style with a Serbian editorial influence, less ample, slightly flattened, less bold but not much different can also be found in another Tetraevangelion dated to the third quarter of the fourteenth century, which was later completed in the sixteenth century with a liturgical apparatus that is included at the beginning of the manuscript. This is also kept in the National Library of Russia, with inventory number F.P.I, 109, as well as two other Serbian Tetraevangelions from the fourteenth century that are kept in the same location, under inventory numbers F.P. I, 79 and F.P. I.111. Gradually, however, in the last part of the fourteenth century, a less ample and cumbersome letter is mainly used, so that, in the first part of the fifteenth century, this tendency becomes generalized, as in Serbian Tetraevangelion of this period, such as those under inventory numbers OP F. I. 579 and OP F. I. 579 from the National Library of Russia or the much better known Radoslado Tetraevangelion, kept in the same location under inventory number F.I. 591. It is distinguished by an exceptional representation of the four evangelists at the beginning of each Gospel, but also by an elegant semi-uncial writing, close to the style that Gavril Uric³¹ would use in his manuscripts and those of his school in Moldova of the fifteenth century.

After this overview of the Serbian editorial manuscripts, which aimed at briefly presenting the evolution of writing in the second half of the fourteenth century and the first part of the fifteenth century, the resemblance of St. Nicodemus' manuscript with the Serbian Tetraevangelion of the third quarter of the fourteenth century should seem at least surprising. Despite all the similarities in spelling and language, a whole series of features specific to the first part of the fifteenth century relate, first, to the format, content and arrangement of the liturgical apparatus, together with the considerable time

³¹ Sorin Ulea, "Gavril Uric. Studiu paleografic," *SCIA* 28 (1981), 35-62.

distance between their issuances, practically prevent us from considering that the two manuscripts under discussion could belong to the same family of manuscripts. However, this paradoxical situation leads us to understand that, at the editorial-orthographic level, the manuscript of Saint Nicodemus uses a similar manuscript from the third quarter of the fourteenth century, while at the level of the liturgical apparatus, it follows the current trends from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Therefore, it is not difficult to assume that it is not the Tetraevangelion of Saint Nicodemus that belongs to the same family of manuscripts as the Serbian manuscript of the third quarter of the fourteenth century, but the Tetraevangelion given around 1372 by Prince Vladislav Vlaicu to Vodița Monastery. This manuscript was produced in the same time frame as the third quarter manuscript, most likely in a Serbian scriptory which had largely preserved the tradition of the Rașca School in terms of script/writing. It is this manuscript that St. Nicodemus used to copy the Gospel text with its specific fourteenth-century writing style in his new Tetraevangelion for the monastery of Tismana, to which he added an updated liturgical apparatus, which he adorned with beautiful illuminations to strengthen its originality.

Conclusions

Saint Nicodemus of Tismana makes from the writing of his Tetraevangelion an end in the last part of his life. The reasons are mainly determined by the need to have a complete Tetraevangelion that would replace the one at Vodița Monastery, to update it to the standard of language and to promote a good liturgical order. For copying the text, Saint Nicodemus most likely used the Tetraevangelion from Vodița. Moreover, he revised the Slavonic biblical text using the Greek text, which had already become a trend in that era. This Tetraevangelion of Saint Nicodemus ends an entire tradition, specific to the second half of the fourteenth century and opens a new one, specific to the fifteenth century.

Through the realization of the Tetraevangelion, Saint Nicodemus proves to be a defender and promoter of the Slavonic ecclesial culture. In other words, his work could be seen as a response to the campaign of “Greekization” carried out by the Greek hierarchs in the Romanian territories of that time.

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