

# The Question of Interpretation of Images in the Voynich Manuscript (XV century) and those by Maxim the Greek in Manuscripts and Iconography of XVI - XVIII centuries

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**Abstract**—A brief description of the Voynich manuscript, its structure and sections, methods of determining place and date of its creation, life and oeuvre of Maxim the Greek as the presumable author of the manuscript. The article presents an attempt to determine the language of the manuscript and to interpret its images.

**Keywords**—*Manuscripts; the Kremlin; hesychasm; Buddhism; the Ancient Khmer language*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Interpretation (from the Latin "explanation, construction") – is a fundamental operation of thinking and making sense to any spiritual manifestations of human activity, objectified in a sign or a sensory-visual form. As a method of investigation in explaining and understanding various texts, signs, symbols, images, the interpretation historically goes back to the ancient hermeneutics, and in modern science it represents a tool for scientific modelling and includes a multi-stage hierarchical system of intermediate interpretations [2, s.220]. Hermeneutics, being an art of understanding and interpreting texts in the ancient Greek philosophy, becomes in the epoch of Renaissance an art of translating the past culture into the language of the contemporary live culture. In the German romanticism hermeneutics was being developed by F. Schlegel and Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher interpreted hermeneutics as an art of understanding another person's identity; the aspect of expression stands for the subject of hermeneutics, rather than its content, because expression is the embodiment of individuality. According to the researcher W. Dilthey, the basis of hermeneutics is the so called "understanding psychology" – the direct apprehension of the integrity of the soul and spiritual life. Husserl, on the basis of the "non-thematic horizon" giving prior knowledge of the subject matter, and merges into a "single horizon", put forward the concept of the "life-world" which renders mutual understanding of individuals possible. Any study of an outlying culture requires reconstruction of the "horizon", the "life-world" of this culture, and that is the only way to understand the meaning of its artefacts. Heidegger identified "language" as a historical horizon that determines the fate of

being: "It is not us who speak the language, but rather the language speaks through us". His disciple, Gadamer, considered that the basis of the historical knowledge of the language is always the "preliminary understanding" set by the tradition and, developing the concept of language, he proclaimed that "the game played itself, sucking the players in" [2, pp.119-120].

## II. SECTION EXAMINATION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

That is the actual way, in our opinion, of searching the truth in interpreting of the Voynich manuscript, in the form of an aesthetic game. It is known that the Voynich manuscript was donated to the library of Yale University, USA (MS 408). The library employees posted it online, hoping to get clues from the scientists around the world. The reference to the manuscript reported that the radiocarbon identification dated it of 1408 - 1438. Moreover, the British scientists, upon the visual analysis of the manuscript and of its illustrations, suggested that the origins of the manuscript traced to Russia. This was presumed according to the decorative elements of architecture, reminiscent, perhaps, of towers and churches of the Moscow Kremlin of XV-XVI centuries, or of the so-called "dovetail" on its ramparts. Unfortunately, the images of the architectural artefacts for some reason were not exposed in the Internet publication (?!). The online publication includes photos of 116 sheets with opposites. The manuscript format is 2° (A4). Meanwhile, sheets 12-12op., 59-59op., 60-60op., 61-61op., 62-62op., 63-63op., 64-64op., 74-74op., 91-91op., 92-92op., 97-97op., 98-98op., 108op., 109-109op., 110 are missing.

The first, "Botanical" section of the manuscript, sheets 1op. – 66op., represents a detailed view of 134 plants with their textual descriptions. Consultations with the doctor of biological sciences Vereshchagina V.A., professor of PSNRU, allow to suggest that among the plants presented in the manuscript which seem familiar to our territory there are those that can grow only in the "seaside", i.e. on the areas coastal to the sea, and, moreover, precisely tropical or subtropical. Scientific description of the images of those

plants is currently being prepared by the students of biological faculty of the PSNRU. Thus, the territorial limits of the manuscript origins are considerably enhanced.

The second, "Astrological" section of the manuscript, sheets 67 – 73op. with numerous broadsides, contains circle charts depicting the stars, the sun, the moon (67-67op.), different energies, perhaps "chakras" (68 - 69), signs of the zodiac with male and female shapes, dressed in medieval Europe Renaissance style (70-73op.), i.e., there was no reference to the traditional ancient Russian costume. Thus, logically the author of the manuscript may be a person of European origins.

The third, "Esoteric" section of the manuscript, sheets 79op. - 84op., represents numerous images of female nudes interlaced with various vessels and channels resembling to plants. Moreover, the figures are depicted in the realistic traditions of Western Europe, rather than in the symbolic and irrational style of the Russian iconography. Which indicates inter alia that the author of the manuscript may be a person familiar with the culture of painting nudes, which pertains to the European Renaissance only, and not to the Russian culture of the Middle Ages. Drawing nudes appears in Russia only in the XIX century.

The last, final section, sheets 86op. - 102op., contains images of various energy fields, as well as those of rhizomes of different plants, and texts.

### III. MAXIM THE GREEK'S ASSUMED AUTHORSHIP

Based on the available information, it can be assumed that if the manuscript actually was created on the territory of Russia, the author could only be a European, a highly educated one. At that epoch in Russia, such a person could only be the Byzantine scribe and lexicographer Maxim the Greek (1470-1555). He arrived in 1518 at the invitation of Vassily III, and under the recommendation of the Athos' elders of the Vatopedi monastery, with the purpose of translating the Greek manuscripts of the Explanatory Apostle, Explanatory Psalter and others into Russian. Upon completion of his works Maxim the Greek applied to the Grand Duke for letting him go back to the Mount Athos. However, in 1525 and in 1531 he was prosecuted for making "heresy" and "damaging the liturgical books." Maxim the Greek was imprisoned in the St. Joseph Monastery of Volokolamsk, then in the Tver Youth monastery; in 1547-1548, by the order of Ioann IV he was released and removed to the Trinity St.Sergius Lavra, where he died [1, pp.90-91]. In 1988, the Russian Orthodox Church canonized Maxim the Greek, and in 1996 there took place the acquisition and transfer of his saint relics to the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Trinity St.Sergius Lavra.

The influence of Maxim the Greek over the Moscow public and the ancient Russian culture was extremely strong. His cell in the Miracle Monastery of the Moscow Kremlin was called by the modern historians the "public academy". Russian diplomats of that epoch (Fedor Karpov) and reputable persons of the Prince's court (Vassian Patrickeyev), as well as many others came to communicate with him. Practically, he created around himself a kind of circle of

enlightenment and education. Maxim the Greek's case is still causing various judgments and remains unclear. There are different versions about it. Since Maxim the Greek had learned Russian quite fast, there remained a lot of works by him, repeatedly re-written afterwards and very popular, especially in the Old Ritualist environment. The "life world" of the Moscovite Russia in XV - XVI centuries, and especially the psycho-spiritual life of the church environment were imbued with the ideas of hesychasm – the "deification." Many representatives of the ancient Russian Orthodox monasticism and episcopate were healers and seers. No wonder there is the concept of "Holy Russia". Subsequently, these traditions have continued with the Old Ritualists. Therefore, in our quest, we also applied to a "seer" descending from an Old Ritualist family – Tatiana Panteleevna Sosnina, born in 1953. Showing her the printed photos, we asked her about the author and his time and location. She closed her eyes and drew a portrait: a large broad beard, "duck nose", monastic robes, and then confirmed that it refers to a monastery in the Kremlin. Then we specified the question: how he wrote, what he wrote upon? And we heard a stunning response: "He was shown it, as I am shown now." The artefacts of the Orthodox and Old Ritualist iconography of XVIII - XX centuries depict Maxim the Greek as a man with a huge beard, but with a refined nose and face, all like a true hesychast. The image is given in strictly canonical tradition. Still, there remained manuscripts of the XVI c. with the autographs by Maxim the Greek containing his self-portrait in profile, where his "duck nose" can be clearly perceived. The question remains: what language wrote Maxim the Greek? He knew Latin, Italian, Greek, studied Russian Cyrillic. An even more stunning answer we received from colleagues- cryptographers from the lab of "computer security" of PSNRU. The laboratory scientist Y.R.Aydarov, with whom we worked on deciphering the Perm "Helmsman" cryptography of XV century, simply said: "This is not a code, this is a language – the Ancient Khmer". Nowadays, the modern Khmer speaking people live in a state Cambodia with the capital Phnom Penh, where the main religion is Buddhism. Moreover, there remained the famous architectural ensemble "Angkor", where the sculpture represents a lot of nude female figures, symbolizing the main goddess of the Buddhist mythology, Tara. There is 21 forms of Tara on iconography. The text "To the glory of 21 Taras" is read in all the schools of Buddhism. Probably, these images fill the third section of the Voynich manuscript.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, the further interpretation of the Voynich manuscript could be offered to our honorable Chinese colleagues, as in the Middle Ages there was a close interaction between the Thai and the Ancient Khmer cultures, and there may be even specialists of the Ancient Khmer language; it should be also taken into consideration that in China, along with Taoism and Confucianism, Buddhism is one of the main state religions.

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