

A UNIQUE MONUMENT OF RUSSIAN BOOK CULTURE

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents a project for the creation of digital and facsimile copies of a unique monument of the Russian book culture – The Illuminated Chronicle Code of the 16th century – produced in a single copy by the order of Tsar Ivan the Terrible. The Illuminated Code contains 10,000 handwritten sheets and more than 17,000 colorful miniatures created by the best Russian scribes and icon painters of that time. The Code features a presentation of the Biblical history, abstracts of history of Ancient Rome and Byzantium, and the 400-year history of Russia, from 1114 till Ivan the Terrible’s death in 1584. The history of the creation of the Code, the contents of its parts (volumes), the fate of this monument of culture in times hard for Russia, and the problems facing scholars when developing the project are briefly described.

The execution of the project of digitalization of the Chronicle Code and the creation of its facsimile copy have allowed not only to collect its individual parts that were stored in various state repositories,

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but also to make this monument of culture available to scholars, specialists, library staff, schoolchildren and students in Slavic and other European countries.

1. Introduction: early Ancient Russian chronicles. In the middle of the 11th century the Ancient Russian chronicles began to develop, in which the history of Russia, beginning with the calling of the Varangians, fit into the biblical world-historical context. The language created by Cyril and Methodius for the Slavonic translation of the Sacred books became the language of the chronicles [1, 89]. Being introduced to the Bulgarian literary heritage of the 9–10 centuries (e.g., the works of Clement of Ohrid, Joan Exarch), performing Russian translations from Greek, and having adopted Christianity for half a century, Russian culture incorporated all this into original works of literature. New writers appeared in Russia – Hilarion, Nikon, Nestor – known as “scribes”, a notion equal to “a philosopher” or “a sage”. The book in Russia became a highly artistic piece of work, with binding often richly decorated with precious metals and stones, with text written in Cyrillic characters, and with numerous miniatures, ornamented initials, frames, and savers. Such are, for example, Ostromirov’s (1056–1057) and Mstislav’s (1117) Gospels.

One of the Codes of Nikon’s Chronicles, the largest monument of Russian chronicles of the 16th century, was created as a luxuriously illustrated Chronicle Code containing up to 17,500 illustrations. The present article is dedicated to this unique monument of Ancient Russia’s book culture, which has no analogues in world culture.

2. Creating the Illuminated Chronicle Code. The Illuminated Chronicle Code, the largest chronicle-chronographic code of the Ancient Rus’, was created in the 40–60s of the 17th century by order of Tsar Ivan IV Vasilievich (the Terrible), in a single copy, and was apparently intended for the education and upbringing of the tsar’s children. The work on compilation of the Code was headed by the most educated person of that time—St. Macarius, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia.

The Illuminated Chronicle Code of the 16th century, an enormous collection of chronicles, presents biblical events from the Creation of the world up to the heyday of Rome and Byzantium, as well as the history of Russia

during four and a half centuries, from 1114 to 1567. No other such chronicle collection decorated by a large number of highly artistic illustrations has been created by any civilization in the history of mankind. It is a literary, historic, and artistic monument of world importance. It is by no coincidence that it is unofficially called “Tsar-Book” (by analogy with Tsar-Cannon and Tsar-Bell).

In the Middle Ages, illustrated manuscripts depicting people “in faces” were called “illuminated”. The Illuminated Code contains 10,000 hand-written sheets and more than 17,000 colorful miniatures. They make the text surprisingly beautiful and demonstrative. The sheets of the Code have the size of a full manufactured (Alexandrian) sheet, approximately corresponding to the modern size A3. All sheets are made uniformly — two thirds of the page are occupied by a miniature, with a laconic text in Old Slavonic written underneath in calligraphic characters.

The best scribes and icon painters from Moscow, who were masters of book graphics (particularly developed in Russian art of the 16th century), have worked on the books of the Illuminated Code located at Alexander Sloboda— then the tsar’s permanent residence. The magnificent multicolored presentation aimed to emphasize the precious character and luxury of this really royal monumental book created in a single copy. Miniature drawings not only illustrated the text, but also complemented it — presenting battles, fights, military campaigns, natural phenomena, natural disasters, everyday scenes from peaceful life, and showing what clothing, military armor, church vestments, weapons, household items and tools looked like in ancient times [2].

In fact, the Illuminated Chronicle Code is the earliest hand-written historical and literary illustrated encyclopedia in the world, created by Russian masters and containing three large sections: Biblical history, history of Ancient Rome and Byzantium, and Russian chronicle history. It also highlights the ancient history of the Slavic peoples (e.g., Bulgarians, Czechs, Serbs, and others), the christening of the Bulgarian kings, conquests of Alexander the Great and other events.

3. Fate of the Chronicle Code after the death of Ivan the Terrible. However, the huge work of scribes and artists of the Chronicle Code was obviously interrupted shortly after the death of Ivan the Terrible in 1584.

The manuscript was not finished. The miniatures of the last part of the Code were executed only in ink version, but not painted. The edited text (scholars assumed that some entries in the margins of the last volume were made by Ivan the Terrible himself) was not copied completely. The Chronicle Code was stored for a long time in the Moscow Kremlin in the form of separate sheets, which nearly perished in the fires of the Time of Troubles in the beginning of the 17th century. Gradually, parts of the Code were moved to other storage locations, both within the royal and patriarchal households and to new private owners [3]. The foliant became a desired object for all “enlightened” bibliophiles. The most influential members of the nobility such as Osterman, Sheremetev, Golitzin and others, who understood that such a treasure is invaluable, took fragments of it for their libraries.

Already in the first half of the 17th century, arrays of sheets of the monumental Chronicle Code were dispersed and for two centuries, piles of them remained unbound. They were later bound separately, and some of these foliants were named after their new owners: e.g., Golitsin’s volume, Laptev’s volume, Shumilov’s volume, Osterman’s volume. Gradually, the Illuminated Code began to be treated as a monumental body of 10 huge volumes. Each volume contained from 1,500 to 2,000 miniatures reflecting various historical events.

In the course of time, several volumes of the Code were given to the two main Russian libraries established by Tsar Peter the Great in 1714 and Catherine the Great in 1814 in St Petersburg.

4. Preservation of individual parts of the Code. By the beginning of the 19th century, separate parts (volumes) of the Illuminated Code were found in three state repositories—today’s State Historical Museum (SHM) in Moscow, the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (LAS) and the Russian National Library (RNB) in St Petersburg.

SHM stores the Museum collection (1,031 sheets, 1,733 miniatures), containing the exposition of the sacred, ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek history from the Creation of the world up to the destruction of Troy in the 12th century BC, the Synodal volume (626 sheets, 1,125 miniatures) the exposition of the Russian history in the years 1533–1542, 1553–1567, and the

Tsars Book (687 sheets, 1,291 miniatures) of the Russian history in the years 1533–1553.

LAS stores three volumes of the original Illuminated Chronicle Code: The Chronographic Collection (1,469 sheets, 2,549 miniature), containing an exposition of the history of the Ancient East, Hellenistic world and ancient Rome (from the 11th century BC up to the 70s of the 1st century AD) and Osterman's two volumes—Volume I (802 sheets, 1,552 miniatures) and Volume II (887 sheets, 1,581 miniatures), which reflect the Russian history during an almost 200-year period from 1254 up to 1424.

RNB stores the Illuminated Chronograph (1,217 sheets, 2,191 miniatures), containing exposition of ancient Rome's history from the 70s of the 1st century up to the year 337 and the history of Byzantium up to the 10th century, as well as Golitsin's, Laptev's and Shumilov's volumes (together containing 3,026 sheets, 5,086 miniatures), which present the Russian history from 1114 to 1533.

The importance of the Illuminated Chronicle Code as a central monument of historiography and book culture from the times of the reign of Ivan IV is generally recognized. However, this valuable monument was mainly a focus of Russian medieval studies. Due to the exceptional value of the original document and its large volume, with separate parts located in three separate repositories, for a long time access to the Chronicle Code was restricted even for researchers—art historians, literary critics, and historians. That is why the Illuminated Code remained little known beyond a narrow circle of specialists even in Russia.

5. Designing the digital version of the Code. Several years ago, three main Russian repositories storing separate volumes of the Illuminated Code made a decision to produce a facsimile edition of all the ten volumes of the Illuminated Chronicle Code and create an official digital version of it. The aim of this project is to significantly expand the access to this unique monument of book culture and to ensure the preservation of the original. This task was undertaken by the specially established Acteon Publishing House, which signed contracts with the custodians of the manuscript, obtained rights

to scan and publish the Chronicle Code, and developed a unique technology of color reproduction and rectification of scanned images.

The complexity of the project consisted in finding suitable techniques that would allow scanning without touching the originals (because even turning the pages of the ancient manuscript could cause irreparable damages), while also achieving high quality of the scanned materials. At the same time, the scanner had to be able to support a big weight, as each of the ten volumes weighs 15–16 kilograms. In order to avoid losing even small details or shades, each individual miniature was scanned twice. To process the scanned files, special software had to be developed by Akteon specialists.

The processing of the files took approximately two years and consisted in rectification of images and combination of the front and back sides of each sheet so that texts and miniatures could coincide at the lumen—as in the original monument. The printing of the volumes was carried out in Russia on specially purchased digital polygraphic equipment.

The volumes of the facsimile edition were bound by hand. The shagreen leather binding is decorated by gold embossing with Russian ornaments from the royal books of the 16th century. Each volume of the edition has scientific annexes prepared by researchers, historians, linguists, art historians and contains information on the history of the compiling the manuscript and the research on it. Beautiful from a polygraphic point of view, the edition consists of 30 volumes, with 11 of them being a scholarly apparatus to the edition. At present, the complete edition is available for researchers in all three state repositories. In this way, the masterpiece of ancient Russian art regained its initial unity.

6. Presentations of the Illuminated Chronicle Code. The first presentations of the facsimile edition of the Illuminated Chronicle Code outside Russia took place in Bulgaria and Macedonia. A presentation organized by the Index Information Center in countries of the Eastern Europe was held in the Cyril and Methodius National Library of Bulgaria in November of 2010. It was attended by famous Bulgarian scholars—Byzantinists, art historians, historians, as well as by artists. This event was covered by all print and electronic media and provoked much interest and became a milestone with

major importance for the history and development of the cultural relationships between Russia and Bulgaria.

During the next six years, dozens of presentations of facsimile and digital editions of Ivan the Terrible's Tsar-Book were organized and held at the University of Belgrade and the National Library of Serbia; the National Library of the Republic of Macedonia; the International Book Fairs in Skopje, Sofia, Belgrade, Thessaloniki; at the XXII International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Sofia, August 2011); at the plenary meeting of the International Conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Russian language studies in Bulgaria at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia; and at some regional and university libraries. Conferences and round tables on problems of studying this monument of book culture were also held. Everywhere the attendees' interest to this unique edition was enormous. An acknowledgement of this are the international conferences specifically dedicated to this monument of culture which took place in the Bavarian State Library (2012) and St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia (2013). A so-called "people's edition" of the Illuminated Code specially prepared for libraries and schools, designed for a wider audience, was presented during these presentations and conferences. The Edition fully reproduces the miniatures and the Old Russian text of each manuscript sheet. At the same time, the transliteration and translation of the text into modern Russian language are outside of the text. A similar edition has been prepared with a translation of the text into Serbian. The "People's Edition" is now used as a visual aid in teaching schoolchildren and students.

7. Future prospects for using digital versions of ancient Russian manuscripts. This project did not end with the creation of digital and faximile copies of Ivan the Terrible's Tsar-Book. The following four illuminated manuscripts from the 16th century that were part of Russian State libraries collections have also been digitized: "Life of Nikolai Mirlikiiski," Kosma Indikoplov's "Christian cosmography," "Illuminated collection of Chudov Monastery," as well as a manuscript from the 14th century, "Chronicles of Georgii Amartola." The work still continues, and museums and university libraries are now acquiring electronic versions of ancient manuscripts for

gaining a deeper understanding of the culture of Russia and its cultural heritage.

The execution of the project on digitalization and popularization of the Illuminated Chronicle Code not only ensured the preservation of the original monument of culture, but also provided completely new opportunities for exploring this unique monument of culture and national treasure and made the Illuminated Code available to many generations of researchers of Slavic and world history and culture not only in Russia, but also in other countries.

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