

# Old Russian Translation of *Cosmographia, sive De Situ Orbis* by Pomponius Mela: Reception of Renaissance Culture in Muscovy (15th-17th Centuries)

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## 1. Introduction and main purpose of the paper

For a long time the question of contacts between Muscovy and Western Europe during the reign of Ivan III (1462-1505) and his successors has attracted attention of different researchers. It has been noted that during the last quarter of the 15th to the first third of the 16th century Muscovite culture was developing under a strong Renaissance influence. A variety of elements of Renaissance culture were assimilated by Russia and found vivid reflection in Russian architecture, literature, and fine arts. Renaissance traces are evident in the exterior of the architectural ensemble of the Kremlin. One of the most important questions related to the Renaissance influence on Russian culture is the issue of the degree and nature of these changes: whether they were integral and fundamental, affecting the sole basics of Muscovite culture, or whether they only touched the surface of Russian way of life, not altering traditions and ideas<sup>1</sup>. In order to solve this matter one might find it helpful to turn to the history of the

<sup>1</sup> Chreptovič-Butenev 1909; Beltrami 1912; Filippini 1925; Lo Gatto 1934; Shmurlo 1937; Barbieri 1957; Gukowsky 1967; Sinicya 1977; Choroškevič 1980; Baracchi 1983; Zemcov, Glazyčev 1985; Pod”japol’skij 1986; Chreptovič-Butenev 1993; Sinicya 1993; Mil’čik 1997; Panova 1998; Pod”japol’skij 2000; Višnevskaja 2004; Mel’nikova 2006;

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most significant Renaissance texts – the ways in which they appeared in Moscow, who and how made use of them, and how these texts were perceived by Muscovite intellectuals.

The studies on the distribution of Renaissance texts through the territory of the Grand Duchy of Moscow are at the center of attention in Russia during the last years. This especially relates to the studies of V.A. Romodanovskaja on fragments from Latin Vulgata, translated for the Gennadij's Bible of 1499. Her editions of Old Russian translations of the treaty *Rationale divinatorum officiorum...*, written by Wilhelm Durand, and quotations from Lactantius<sup>2</sup> should also be mentioned. Among others, the studies of E.V. Bodnarčuk<sup>3</sup> and E.R. Skvairs<sup>4</sup> on the Old-Russian translation of *Dyaloghus de Vite et Mortis* (*Prenie života so smert' ju*) occupy an important place. Nowadays N.A. Ziablincyna studies the translation of the anti-heretic treatise *Rationes breves magni rabi Samuelis iudaei nati* (*Učitelya Samuila oblichetiye*)<sup>5</sup>. E.S. Fedorova analyzed the translation of *Contra perfideam judeorum* (*Protiv kovarstva iudeyev*) by Nicholas de Lyra. The translation of antiheretical treatise *Contra haereticos et gentiles...* (*Prenie Afanasija s Ariem*) is less studied.

The main purpose of this paper is to present the most relevant results of my complex study about the obtained copies of the Old Russian translation of the First book of Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia, sive De Situ Orbis*, known also as *De Chorographia – Geografija* in Russian scientific tradition. This text was also translated into Old-Russian at the same epoque. All preserved and detected copies of this translation have been carefully studied by me both from an archaeological and from a substantive point of view<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia* in the 15th century Europe and in Russia

The text of the First book of *Cosmographia* is a brilliant compilation of known facts about Europe, Asia, and Africa in the Ancient world. It provides information about the topography, nature and important places of the described lands, as well as the habits and customs of native peoples. In his work, Mela mentions ancient gods (Zeus, Diana, Apollo, Neptune) and heroes (Anaximander, Alexander the Great among others) and retells some of the myths of antiquity.

Garzaniti 2008; Matasova 2014; Gardzaniti 2015; Matasova 2015; Pljuchanova 2017; Garzaniti 2019; and others.

<sup>2</sup> Romodanovskaja 2003. In this V. A. Romodanovskaja's publication two copies of excerpts from Lactantius, contained in two more copies of the 16th century were not taken into account (Cf.: Veršinina, Matasova 2015); Romodanovskaja 2004; Romanova, Romodanovskaja 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Bodnarčuk 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Skvairs 2006; Skvairs 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Zjabicyna 2013.

<sup>6</sup> This Old Russian translation was recently published (see Matasova 2016a).

Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia* was one of the most cherished ancient texts by Renaissance humanists and scholars. The first time the text was published in 1471 in Milan by the famous typographer Panfilo Castaldi. It was the first among many printed editions of this work on the Apennine Peninsula. During the second half of the 15th century there were at least nine other editions of *Cosmographia*. Seven of them were published in Venice (twice in 1477, twice in 1478, in 1482, in 1495, and in 1498), and two in Spain (Valencia 1482, Salamanca 1498). A beautiful map of the world was attached in the Venetian edition of 1482, and the 1498 edition was prefaced by a dedication to Pope Alexander VI, written by the humanist Hermolaus Barbarus.

Until the beginning of the 16th century humanists considered the text of Pomponius Mela to be the most complete and accurate description of oecumene. Even after the discoveries of Columbus and the realization that the ancient information about the world order had become invalid, Mela's text was still republished as an example of the excellent ancient Latin, the ideal with which the humanists sought to comply. During the first half of the 16th century this work was published at least 14 times (in Paris, Basel, Florence, and Venice). Among the publishers we can identify some of the most prominent typographers, distinguished innovators, and 'masters of the art of printing' of that time – Erhard Ratdolt, Simeon Bevilacqua, Joachim Vadianus, and Gilles de Gourmont.

At the same time Mela's wonderful text became known in Russia. Two copies of the Old Russian translation of the First book of Mela's *Cosmographia* were discovered at the end of 19th century by the famous Russian philologist professor A.I. Sobolevskij<sup>7</sup>. The first copy – M – was made at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries and it probably comes from *Posolskij prikaz* – the predecessor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>8</sup>. The second copy – C – was composed in the 17th century and was originally kept in the library of the Monastery of the Miracle of Archangel Michael at Chonae (*Čudov monastyr'*) in the Moscow Kremlin<sup>9</sup>.

In 2014-2015 three more copies of this book were discovered. One of them – S – was found by O.L. Novikova<sup>10</sup>. It comes from the library of the Solovetsky Monastery and dates back to the late 15th century. It is kept now in the Russian National library in St. Petersburg<sup>11</sup>. Two others – discovered by K.V. Veršinina<sup>12</sup> – can be referred to the second half of the 16th century. These originated from

<sup>7</sup> Sobolevskij 1903: 52-53.

<sup>8</sup> Russian State Archive of the Ancient Acts in Moscow (*Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj arxiv drevnix aktov*, RGADA), Fund 181 *Manuscript collection of the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire (Rukopisnyj otdel Moskovskogo glavnogo axiva Ministerstva inostrannyx del*, RO MGAMID). Reg. 1. Part 6. N. 514. Ff. 10v-40v.

<sup>9</sup> Manuscript section of the State Historical Museum in Moscow (*Otdel rukopisej Gosudarstvennogo istoričeskogo muzeja*, OR GIM), *Čudovskoe sobranie* 347. Ff. 1v-16.

<sup>10</sup> Novikova 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Russian National Library (*Rossijskaja nacional'naja biblioteka*, RNB), *Solovetskoe sobranie*, 922/1032. Ff. 1-12v.

<sup>12</sup> Veršinina, Matasova 2015.

the private collections of ancient manuscripts of the late 19th century – that of Egor Egorov<sup>13</sup> (*E*) and the other of Timofey Bolšakov<sup>14</sup> (*B*). Now these manuscripts are kept in the Russian State Library. At present it is unknown where these manuscripts come from and how they appeared in these private collections. It can be mentioned only that the marginal notes in *E* give evidence of the fact that earlier the codex was used in the Northern parts of Russia (*Ust-Sysolsk* – modern Syktyvkar – is mentioned on the margins of the manuscript<sup>15</sup>).

### 3. Comparative reading of the obtained copies of Pomponius Mela's translation

My profound comparison of all five copies of the Old Russian translations of Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia* revealed only insignificant differences between them. These differences are due to spelling variability<sup>16</sup> and punctuation and substitution of single words by synonyms<sup>17</sup>. Sometimes Russian copyists did not understand some details and consequently made mistakes in spelling<sup>18</sup>.

It could be possible that there were more copies than we have obtained thus far. The following discrepancies (variants of the text) are proof of this fact. There are the words *Лимерикъ град по берегу ж* in copies *E* (f. 282), *B* (f. 379), and *C* (f. 15v). These words are omitted in *M*. Copy *M* in its turn contains several phrases, which are absent in *C*<sup>19</sup>. Therefore copy *C* was made not from *M*. Copies *E* and *B* can't be prototypes of *C* because a number of small fragments (lines) of the text which are present in *C* (lines of prototype(s) *E* and *B*?) can't be found in copies *E* and *B*<sup>20</sup>. The comparison of *C* and *S* revealed minimal discrepancies between them, which might have occurred during

<sup>13</sup> Manuscript section of Russian State Library (*Naučno-issledovatel'skij otdel rukopisej Rossijskoj gosudarstvennoj biblioteki*, NIOR RGB), Fund 98 (*Sobranie E.E. Egorova*) 843. Ff. 265-282v.

<sup>14</sup> Manuscript section of Russian State Library (*Naučno-issledovatel'skij otdel rukopisej Rossijskoj gosudarstvennoj biblioteki*, NIOR RGB), Fund 37 (*Sobranie S.T. Bolšakova*) 16. Ff. 371-379v.

<sup>15</sup> F. 82v *E*.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. *наки-накы, пръво-перво, разливається-разливатца*, etc.

<sup>17</sup> For example, *похоранивають* (f. 27v *M*) – *хоронят* (f. 10 *C*); *деля* (f. 13v *M*) – *ради* (f. 3 *C*); *зело* (f. 20v *M*) – *добре* (f. 6 *C*), etc.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. *скотовъ* (f. 27v *M*) – *скотвов* (f. 10 *C*); *Меотида* (f. 13, 39v *M*) – *Меодита* (f. 2v, 15v *C*); *Черному морю* (Red sea) (f. 28v *M*) – *Черному* (f. 10v *C*); *почитаются* (f. 38v *M*) – *починаются* (f. 15 *C*); *Дономъ* (f. 12v *M*) – *Доломъ* (f. 266v *E*); *Лаодикиа* (f. 377 *B*) – *Лаодикия* (f. 11v *C*) – *Ладюкиа* (f. 30v *M*); *Фитори* (f. 39v *M*) – *Фотори* (f. 379v *B*) – *Фотири* (f. 15v *C*), *Европиа* (f. 17v *M*) – *Еропиа* (f. 4 *S*), etc.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in *M* there are words *оттоле море накы шире чинится* (f. 36v), *изгыбаяся потомъ великимъ льбомъ* (f. 13v – 14), *Оутика и Карфагенъ, оба славныя грады* (f. 21).

<sup>20</sup> In *E* there are words which are lost in *M* and *C*: *роубежь. въ преднихъ же было царемъ* (f. 271), *знають а иные и не знаютъ женъ* (f. 273), *по городе Корытескыи зракъ* (f. 277v). There are words added to the main text of *E* as marginal notes: *а инде глаголются. Тауриky а инде Москвы* (f. 282) *и мужи же пешую брань сътворяютъ* (f. 282v). In *B* there are no words *а инде Москвы*. *А инде. Амазоникы*, which are present in other copies: f. 39 *M*, 282 *E*, 15 *C*.

copying<sup>21</sup>. It means that probably copy S in full (or another copy similar to it) could have been the prototype of C.

Copies E and B despite being read in codexes of similar content<sup>22</sup>, apparently have different prototypes. Thus there are phrases in B, which are not present in E<sup>23</sup>. And in E, in turn, there is a phrase which is omitted in B<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless it shouldn't be excluded that they could have been made from the same copy, taking into consideration that each copyist made the same mistakes.

Despite these discrepancies it is easy to notice that copies S, B, E, and C were made from similar copies: a number of words and proper names are similarly or closely conveyed in S, E, B, and sometimes in C, while in M they look different<sup>25</sup>. Particularly noteworthy are discrepancies in constructions with demonstrative pronoun *оно*, pointed out by Dr. O.L. Novikova on the basis of comparison of copies M and S. According to our observations these inconsistencies are present not only in S, but in E, B, and sometimes in C. This is important as readings in copies S, E, B, and C are closer to the Latin original, where adverbs *quondam*, *olim*, and *aliquando* are used<sup>26</sup>. However, there are differences in the spelling of proper names in S, E, B, and C, which can't be explained only by the variability of spelling<sup>27</sup>.

Copy M contains Cyrillic semi-uncial marginal notes of the middle (second half?) of the 16th century<sup>28</sup> and shorthand in the 17th century<sup>29</sup> (marginal notes are not written in the same handwriting as in C). In E there are marginal notes in the handwriting of the 15th and 17th centuries<sup>30</sup>. This indicates that some-

<sup>21</sup> E.g. *Гораманти* (f. 1 S) – *Горамантис* (“гора Мантис”?) (f. 5 C).

<sup>22</sup> Moškova in *print*; Porfir'ev, Vadkovskij, Krasnosel'cev 1885: 551-553; Veršinin, Matasova 2015: 119.

<sup>23</sup> In B there are words *рубержь. Въ преднихже было царем в* (f. 374) and *По городе Корытескыи зракъ* (f. 377). These words are also present in M (f. 20v; 31v), S (f. 3v) and C (f. 6; 11v).

<sup>24</sup> In E there are words *Скифия. инаа еже глаголемая есть* (f. 269). These words are also present in M (f. 16v-17), S (f. 2v) and C (f. 4).

<sup>25</sup> E.g. *Туским* (f. 16v M) – *Тускоум* (f. 269 E), *Туском* (f. 373 B, f. 4 C); *доле* (f. 17v M) – *донеле* (f. 269 E, f. 4v C) – *донеле* с зачеркнутым *не* в списке B на f. 373; *Катабафмомъ* (f. 24v M) – *Катабафмонъ* (f. 273v. E, f. 8 C); *Канописъ* (f. 28v M) – *Канопискъ* (f. 11v S, f. 276 E, f. 376v B, f. 10v C); *Сеневитик* (f. 28v. M) – *Севенитик* (f. 11v S, f. 276 E, f. 376v B, f. 10v C); *Мендес* (f. 28v M) – *Мендис* (f. 11v S, f. 276 E, f. 376v B, f. 10v C); *Маукль* (f. 33v M) – *Маусол* (f. 279 E, f. 378 B, f. 13 C); *Селевкиа* (f. 30v M, f. 11v C) – *Селеоукиа* (f. 277 E, f. 377 B), etc.

<sup>26</sup> In S, E, B и C there are words *в оно было поле*, and in M there are words *преже бело поле*; in S, E and B there are words *князем в оно бывшим*, and in M is written *княземъ тогда бывшимъ*. Cf.: Novikova 2015: 42.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. *Иппогери* (f. 21 M) – *Иппореги* (f. 5 S, f. 271v E, f. 374v B) – *Ивпогери* (f. 6v C); *Рекаба града* (f. 271v E) – *река Ботрада* (f. 6v C); *Ганифаса идеже* (f. 273 E) – *Ганифасанди* (f. 8 C); *Иллирис* (f. 17 M; f. 269 E, f. 4 C) – *Имирис* (f. 373 B); *Портмом* (f. 266 E) – *Портомон* (f. 371v B) – *Портфмонъ* (f. 12v M, f. 2 C) etc.

<sup>28</sup> Ff. 26v, 28, 31 M.

<sup>29</sup> F. 28 M.

<sup>30</sup> Ff. 279, 282, 282v E.

one looked through the manuscripts in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was not an accidental reading: as stated below there was profound thought involved.

We can now assert that copy *S* is not the oldest version in existence prior to 1490. This becomes evident from the fact that on page 10 of this copy the words *и инаа чюдная дела* are written and crossed out with cinnabar. The same words can be found in their proper place in copy *S* and in all other copies<sup>31</sup>. In other words, the copyist of *S* accidentally glanced at the wrong fragment of the prototypes and mistakenly included it in his work. The error was noticed later and unnecessary words were crossed out. There are more similar examples in copy *S*.

Copy *M* was not the oldest as well. It becomes evident from the already mentioned absence of the line (which is present in copies *E*, *B*, and *C*) that the copyist of the beginning of the 16th century had overlooked it. This gives additional evidence that the Old Russian translation was composed at the end of the 15th century (the dating of copy *S* is proof of that). Moreover some obvious slips of the pen in manuscript *M* can be considered as typical of the process of copying and not of translation<sup>32</sup>. More likely the prototypes of *E*, *B*, and *C* were not the oldest copies: as already mentioned above, some phrases, which are present in *M*, are absent in these copies.

Hence, minor but existing differences between all the copies allow to conclude that each of them might have had its own prototype. The oldest copy might have been the unpreserved prototype *S*, but it is hard to say for sure because of the defective nature of *S*<sup>33</sup>.

Consequently, it may be suspected the existence of not less than ten copies of the Old Russian translation of the First book of *Cosmographia* by Pomponius Mela in the 16th-17th centuries. Five of these copies have survived. The oldest copies date back to the last decade, or even the last quarter of the 15th century.

#### 4. The problem of the Latin original and a hypothesis about the author

Thus, Mela's text appeared in Russia almost immediately after it became known among the humanists. A number of obtained and probable copies indicate that Mela's text was popular among Russian scribes of that time. They, just as the humanists had also become involved in the process of the comprehension of ancient manuscripts.

It is tempting to assume that Mela's text was translated from one of the incunables<sup>34</sup>. At first glance this seems very likely as researchers have a great variety of evidence at their disposal, which testifies that foreigners brought incunables to Russia. Both the treatise by W. Durand and *Rationes breves magni rabi Samu-*

<sup>31</sup> F. 26v M; f. 10 S; f. 274 E; f. 376 B; f. 9 v C.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. *И бе въ брани падение много от обeix от обeix странъ* (f. 22 M).

<sup>33</sup> Novikova 2015: 37.

<sup>34</sup> Romodanovskaja 2005: 594.

*elis iudaei nati*, as well as *Dyaloghus de Vite e Mortis* and *Historia destructionis Troiae* (*Troyanskaya istoriya*), and some other texts were translated from incunables<sup>35</sup>. However, the situation with the First book of Mela's *Cosmographia* is different. The comparison of the Old Russian translation with the texts of incunables reveals that in the former there are omissions of fragments, which are present in incunables. It should be noted that we have the translation into Old Russian *only* of the First book of *Cosmographia*, whereas in all editions Mela's works are published in full.

This may indicate that the Old Russian translation was made not from any incunable, but from a manuscript. An important argument in favour of my hypothesis is the peculiarity of the transmission of proper names noticed by me. For instance, the city of Sida is translated *Сикла* – "Sicla"; as it is well known, in the Latin manuscript *d* resembled *cl*. This is one of the most frequent mistakes of Latin copyists, while in incunables letters are distinct and it is impossible to make such a mistake. This confirms the hypothesis that the translation was made from a manuscript. There is a similar situation with the name of the city Ocstros, which is translated as *Дестрос* – "Destros" and in some cases *Дествос* – "Destvos". Here *oc* is read as *de*, and in the second case *r* as *v*. This too is a typical mistake. The name of "gamphasantes" is translated *ганифасаде* – "ganifasade" (*m* turned into *ni*), and the people called "antibarani" has been translated by a scribe as *антибазане* – "antibazani" (*r* resembles *z*, this too is a frequent mistake).

What manuscript was it? Currently it has not been found and it is possible to assume that the manuscript was lost. Apparently, it was a copy of the 15th century made from an ancient manuscript. How could it find its way to Moscow? With high probability it may be assumed that it came with the books which Zoe Palaiologina might have brought to Moscow in 1472. It is important to specify that these books *were not* a part of the library of Byzantine emperors<sup>36</sup> (the lost or mythological collection of Greek and Latin books widely known later as the "ancient library of Ivan the Terrible"<sup>37</sup>). These books could be a small collection of 15th century copies of ancient manuscripts made by Greek scribes or merchants: Cardinal Bessarion could have given it to Zoe as a dowry. Bessarion was an experienced bibliophile who devoted all his energy to the preservation and distribution of Ancient Greek culture in the Renaissance world<sup>38</sup>. What is more important – he was almost the only authoritative person in the West, who worried about the fate of the Greek world after 1453 and Zoe's destiny in particular.

Who was the translator of the manuscript? There is an abundance of Grecisms (*аравес, вактри, вретанииского, Камвиск царь, Кимон, Кизик, Селевкия, Олимпос, Омирос, Трацыус*, etc.). There is also an "Italian accent" in translation of some proper names. For example, *Certasor* is translated as *Чрътасор* (*ce*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*: 593-594.

<sup>36</sup> Fonkič 1977: 221-222.

<sup>37</sup> Tichomirov 1968: 287.

<sup>38</sup> Vast 1878; Bianca 2004; Mioni 2004; Ronchey 2006.

was read as *че*, not as *це*), and *Damascena* is translated as *Дарамшена* (*sce* was read as *ше*, not as *сче*). All these particularities make it possible to assume that the Greeks who spoke Italian could be involved in the process of translation. Members of the Tarchaniota family are widely known in Russia (brothers Giorgio – *Yuri* and Dmitriy and Dmitriy’s sons – Manuel<sup>39</sup> and *Yuri Maloy* – Giorgio Minor<sup>40</sup>) as translators. They translated many texts from Latin in Novgorod. They spoke Italian and they were also directly related to the connections of the Russian state with Milan, Venice, and Rome. The Tarchaniotas also participated in the close circle (*dvor*) of Grand Duchess Zoe Palaiologina. Unfortunately, we don’t know the precise name of the translator.

## 5. Perception of Mela’s information in Russia

Pomponius Mela was a pagan author; he provided vivid and detailed description of pagan rites of the Ancient world, sanctuaries of gods, some fact of the deification of nature, etc. How did Russian scribes perceive this “aggressively pagan” information?

The perception of Mela’s information in Russia and in the West was drastically different. In Muscovy the information of the ancient geographer was conceived not as ‘objective’ information about the world, but in the traditional manner of pursuit of biblical analogy.

Mela’s text in Old-Russian codexes adjoins theological works and extracts from the Bible. But more importantly the infrequent marginal notes in the copies indicate that intellectuals tried to correlate the facts about pagan culture, about pagan way of mind, provided by Mela with the Bible. It was a traditional providential manner of understanding of the world order and of history, characteristic of Russian medieval intellectuals.

It is important to examine a notable marginal note “Psalm” in *M* made by a 16th century reader beside the description of pagan Egypt. This description is one of the most colorful fragments of the text. Here is the Latin variant of the fragment:

Terra expers imbrium mire tamen fertilis et hominum aliorumque animalium perfecunda generatrix. Nilus efficit, amnium in Nostrum mare permeantium maximus. [...] non pererrat autem tantum eam, sed aestivo sidere exundans etiam irrigat, adeo efficacibus aquis ad generandum alendumque, ut praeter id quod scatet piscibus, quod hippopotamos crocodilosque vastas beluas gignit, glaebis etiam infundat animas ex ipsaque humo vitalia effingat. hoc eo manifestum est, quod, ubi sedavit diluvia ac se sibi reddidit, per umentes campos

<sup>39</sup> For a long time, this Manuel was unknown by the researchers. But now we can affirm that he surely existed. Cf.: Vorob’jev, Matasova 2017; Matasova 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Florja 1982.



quaedam nondum perfecta animalia, sed tum primum accipientia spiritum et ex parte iam formata, ex parte adhuc terrena visuntur<sup>41</sup>.

And here is its Old Russian translation:

Земля Египта велми родима и на человеческий род, и на скоть: Ниль еа поливаеть. Ниль же река [...] есть боле всех рекъ, иже в Наше Море вливается [...] Имееть ж водоу родимоу не токмо на всякую рыбу, но и потоми ражаеть, иже тлькоутъс речнии кони, и коркодили ражаеть, иные многие скоты. Еще вода его въ земленую крому дыхание сътворяеть. И сътворяеть от земли живоущаа, то же явно есть, егда бо оубывая сливается с поль и въ своа берегы вьлиется. Находять по полемъ некия скоты еще не свръшена, но почати образитися, иная ж часть образна телесна, а инаа еще земля<sup>42</sup>.

In a number of Psalms we can find fragments that possess an extremely close resemblance to Mela's description of Egypt. Mela talks of the fertile soil of Egypt and about the very good life of all the animals there. And in Psalm 104 we can see a similar idea. Our Lord blesses water and soil and every animal is happy: our Lord "makes springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills; they give drink to every beast of the field..." (Ps. 104: 10-11). Then the psalmist exclaims:

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great (Ps. 104, 24-25)

Surprisingly close to Mela's narrative on Egypt is a fragment of the biblical text; the Third book of Ezra, translated into Old Russian at the turn of 15th-16th centuries – at the same time with Mela<sup>43</sup>. Ezra writes:

Upon the fifth day thou said unto the seventh part, where the waters were gathered that it should bring forth living creatures, fowls and fishes: and so it came to pass. For the dumb water and without life brought forth living things at the commandment of God, that all people might praise thy wondrous works. Then did thou ordain two living creatures... (Ezra 3, 6: 47-49).

Thus, Mela describes how the water of the Nile gives life to the soil and it revives the animals. The Third book of Ezra tells how Our Lord blesses the water and this water gives life to animals as well!

Interestingly enough, in the first third of the 16th century, the Russian scribe Fedor Karpov asked Maksim the Greek about the meaning of these exact words of Ezra. The question arises – was Fedor Karpov one of the first readers of the Old Russian translation of Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia*?

<sup>41</sup> Parroni, 1984: 119-120.

<sup>42</sup> Ff. 24v-25 M.

<sup>43</sup> Romodanovskaya 2000: 6.

Another remarkable fragment in the description of Egypt in the Old Russian translation of Mela is dedicated to Apis – a holy bull for the Egyptians: “Apis populorum omnium numen est”<sup>44</sup>. Surely, this Apis was unknown in Russia. The translator didn’t understand that in this particular case “apis” was a proper name and decided to translate “Apis” from Latin into Old Russian. In this way Apis suddenly became a bee (пчела): “Все же родове Египетскыа чтят пчелоу акы божествену”<sup>45</sup>. This example discovers that the Old Russian translator understood far from everything in the text. But later in the translation a providential interpretation is again revealed. After this phrase in Latin, Apis is marked only as “bos” (“вол”): “*bos* niger certis maculis insignis et cauda linguaque dissimilis aliorum. raro nascitur nec coitu pecudis, ut aiunt, sed divinitus et *caelesti* igne conceptus”<sup>46</sup>.

Here is this fragment in Old Russian:

Когда рождается воль чернъ з белыми пестринами языкъ же оу него и хвостъ разнымъ подобиемъ, иже оу них редко ражаются, и глаголютъ тако: не от скотьска естъства зачать, но от божественаго огня<sup>47</sup>.

In Psalm 104 it is told that Our Lord “makes winds his messengers, and flames of fire his servants” (Ps. 104:4). It means that Our Lord makes fire to serve Him, and He can present Himself to people as fire. The medieval Russian intellectual – the reader of the translation of *Cosmographia* – as if accepting Egyptian perception of the divine nature of the fire, by which the bull might be conceived, implied a providential meaning of these words.

Mela also tells about the springheads of the Nile: the river

... crescit porro, sive quod solutae magnis aestibus nives ex immanibus Aethiopiae iugis largius quam ripis accipi queant defluunt, sive quod sol, hieme terris propior et ob id fontem eius minuens, tunc altius abit sinitque integrum...

In Old Russian this fragment looks like this:

Прибываетъ же Ниль и выливается или снегы тают иже на великихъ горахъ Ефиопьскихъ или о тоу пороу на верховия его дожди великыя бываютъ. Инии же глаголютъ пескомъ оустья своя заносить. и от того прибываетъ или паки собою прибываетъ оубываетъ<sup>48</sup>.

Thus, Russian medieval intellectuals had a considerable knowledge about Egypt and – as we can suggest – wanted to know more about Egyptian nature. The comments of Maksim the Greek (in his *Skazaniya otčasti nedoumennyh nekiih rečenii v Slove Grigoria Bogoslova*-Maksim the Greek’s *Comments on St. Gregory the Theolo-*

<sup>44</sup> Parroni, 1984: 121.

<sup>45</sup> F. 27v M.

<sup>46</sup> Parroni 1984: 121.

<sup>47</sup> Ff. 27v-28 M It is interesting that in the Old Russian translation the word “divine” (“божественный”) is used, while in the Latin original is used “heavenly” (“caelesti”).

<sup>48</sup> Ff. 25 об.-26 M.

gian) about the Nile and the fertility of the soil of the Nile banks are widely known<sup>49</sup>. Thus, these ideas exclusively relate to theology: Maximus the Greek tells about it in his exclusively theological work. The salvation of the soul and providential way of understanding the world order was the only interest of Orthodox intellectuals. It is time to mention, that in the middle of the 16th century there was a famous discussion between G.B. Ramusio and G. Fracastoro about the springheads of the Nile<sup>50</sup>. But it can be supposed that the Russian interest in the Nile and the comments of Maximus the Greek were not connected with this humanistic discussion<sup>51</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions

The theological interpretation of Mela's text in Muscovy is vivid evidence that the Russian culture of those times was still (as it had been for a long time prior) focused on Orthodox doctrine and tried to dwell even on Renaissance subjects using the Bible.

Thus, rigorous scrutiny of the remaining copies of the Old Russian translation of the First book of Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia* reveals that those texts which were important to the culture and thought of the Renaissance made their way into Russia and aroused a vibrant interest among scribes. However, the history of the appearance and treatment of Mela's text in Muscovy gives evidence of the fact that the perception of Renaissance traditions in the Russian world was imbued with a superficial quality. Nevertheless, the encounter and interaction with Renaissance traditions gave the Russian scribes a powerful impulse to examine and ponder the outside world and played its part in the development of the fundamental pillar of Russian culture-Orthodox theology. Nevertheless, the analyzed material reveals that the acquaintance of Russian scribes with the intellectual traditions of the Renaissance played a significant role in the formation of Russian culture at the time in question.

In conclusion, I would like to draw the attention of the field to my recent publication of a scientifically annotated Old Russian translation of the First Book of Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia*<sup>52</sup>. It is my conviction and hope that increased interest in this important text on the part of European scholars will lead to new and exciting discoveries.

<sup>49</sup> “Также глаголетъ [Григорий Богослов]: ни елика Нила почитающее ругаются плододателя нарицающе его и доброкласна и меряща гобзование локотми. Разумъ же сихъ [слов] сицевъ есть: египтяне, къ прочимъ премногимъ ихъ безумнымъ прельщениемъ, и Нила реку, обливающую весь Египетъ и плодовиць творящу и, почитаху ю, и плододателя и доброкласна нарицаху ю, и мерящу лактми хотящее бытии или гобзование или меженину, есть же разумъ сицевъ: египтяне многолетнымъ искусомъ разумевше, колицемъ пребываниемъ воды Ниловы гобзование бываетъ, соделаша по брежу его степеня каменные, иже и лакти нарицаху; понеже лакотно разстояние беаша промежъ степенемъ, и, егда разливашеся вода до верхняго степеня, то угадаху, яко гобзование будетъ темъ плодомъ земнымъ”. Cf.: Maksim Grek 1862: 42.

<sup>50</sup> Ramusio, Fracastoro 1550.

<sup>51</sup> This question needs a special study.

<sup>52</sup> Matasova 2016a.

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## Abstract

The article deals with the results of the analysis of the Old Russian translation of the First book of *Cosmographia* by Pomponius Mela. Mela's *Cosmographia* was admired and praised by humanists. The research of the way the text was comprehended and interpreted in Muscovy demonstrates the original features of the perception of the Renaissance traditions, ideas and values by Russian intellectuals. The study reveals that the comprehension of Mela's information was characterized by traditional manner of pursuit of biblical analogy. Thus, even the close acquaintance with the Renaissance culture did not change the essence of the Russian Medieval Orthodox culture.

**Keywords:** Pomponius Mela, Old-Russian translation, Muscovy, Renaissance, Orthodox theology.