

Unexpected Evidence concerning Gold Mining in Early Byzantium

Tatyana I. Afanas'eva and Sergey A. Ivanov

ONE OF THE CONSEQUENCES of the decline of Roman imperial might was the shortage of slaves at state-run mines. Consequently, criminals were often sentenced to *damnatio ad metallum*. The need for gold especially soared when the gold solidus was introduced at the beginning of the fourth century.¹ Side by side with common criminals, political prisoners, including Christians, worked in the mines. In the third century, Cyprian of Carthage addressed convicted Numidian bishops: “No wonder that you, being pure gold and silver yourselves, are sent to gold and silver mines! Yet their nature has changed: whereas before they sent gold and silver uphill, now they get it from outside. (The persecutors) put you in fetters, as if gold could be sullied from its contact with iron!”²

It was probably at this time that the first prayers for Christians suffering from such persecution appeared. The earliest attestation is in the fourth-century Apostolic Constitutions: “We pray for those in the mines and in exile and in prison and in fetters for the sake of the Lord,” τῶν ἐν μετάλλοις καὶ ἐξορίαις καὶ φυλακαῖς καὶ δεσμοῖς ὄντων διὰ τὸ

¹ F. Millar, “Condemnation to Hard Labour in the Roman Empire,” *BSR* 52 (1984) 141.

² Cyprian *Ep.* 76.2; cf. Eus. *HE* 4.23.10, 9.1.7, *Mart.Pal.prolix.* 5.2, 7.2, 11.6. See J. G. Davies, “Condemnation to the Mines. A Neglected Chapter in the History of the Persecutions,” *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 6.2 (1958) 99–102; M. Gustafson, “Condemnation to the Mines in the Later Roman Empire,” *HThR* 87 (1994) 421–433.

ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.³ In the *Vita* of Pope Silvester the same set phrase is used in the address to the newly baptized Emperor Constantine: the pope begs him to liberate “those who are suffering in exile and in the mines *for their piety*,” τοὺς διὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν ἐξορίαῖς καὶ μετάλλοις κακουμένους ἀνακαλέσασθαι.⁴

Later this formula became part of the Anaphora within the Liturgy of Basil the Great: it was integrated into the *intercessio*—a series of invocations on behalf of different groups of people, beginning with emperors and bishops and all the way down to orphans and widows. Basil’s Liturgy was practiced by the Eastern Patriarchates and in different languages, the oldest being the Egyptian; later it was included in the Armenian, Syrian, and Greek traditions. The most flexible part of the Liturgy was the intercessions: different groups of manuscripts contain different pleas subdivided into different thematic groups and arranged in different sequences. The Byzantine version likewise had innovations.⁵ First and foremost, it introduced the block, labeled θ’ by Fenwick (211), which contained adjurations for convicts and the exiled. Here we also have a plea, already familiar to us, for those in the mines, but without mention of the offense for which they were sent there: God is simply implored on behalf of those “under tribunal and in the mines and in exile and in hard labor,” τῶν ἐν βήμασι καὶ μετάλλοις καὶ ἐξορίαῖς καὶ πικραῖς δουλείαις.⁶ A comparable group of pleas is found in the second Armenian version of the

³ F. X. Funk, *Didascalia et constitutiones Apostolorum* I (Paderborn 1905) 236–237, 490–491.

⁴ *Vita sancti Silvestri papae Romae* (BHGn1632e): F. Halkin, *Le ménologe impérial de Baltimore* (Brussels 1985) 26. Cf. Eus. *Vit. Const.* 2.32.1.

⁵ J. Fenwick, *The Anaphoras of St. Basil and St. James: An Investigation into their Common Origin* (Orient.Christ.Anal. 240 [Rome 1992]) 290, 308.

⁶ H. Engberding, “Das anaphorische Fürbittgebet der Basiliusliturgie,” *Oriens Christianus* 47 (1963) 16–52, at 46.

Liturgy, translated from the Byzantine version.⁷ Yet the translator omitted the reference to “those in the mines”—probably because it was by now irrelevant.

The triumph of Christianity could not improve the situation of labor in the mines, which, on the contrary, continued to deteriorate throughout the fourth century. The state responded with increased levels of control. This can be illustrated by imperial decrees: an edict of Valentinian and Valens in 369 regulated forced labor in gold mining (*Cod. Theod.* 10.19.5); in 370–373 gold mines were put under the control of special officials, *procuratores metallorum*, who were subordinate to the *comes metallorum per Illyricum* (10.19.7, cf. 10.19.12);⁸ a law of 373 forbade harboring fugitive gold miners, *aurileguli* (10.19.7); in 378 all governors of maritime provinces were forbidden to transfer gold miners anywhere, under threat of severe punishment (10.19.9); in 424 gold mining was declared a hereditary occupation (10.19.15).⁹ Amid and in spite of these harsh measures, gold miners were taking refuge anywhere they could, even among the barbarians (*Amm. Marc.* 31.6.6).

In all likelihood, Christian emperors picked up from their pagan predecessors the custom of sending to the gold mines not just captives and criminals but political opponents as well. The Armenian historian Moses of Khorene tells us something that is not found in the Byzantine sources: that Constantine the Great condemned Arian bishops to the mines, and that later another emperor, Valens, who had pro-Arian sympathies, did the same

⁷ G. Winkler, *Die Basilisus-Anaphora* (Rome 2005) 13, 263.

⁸ On the offices see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* II (Norman 1964) 838.

⁹ For more details see O. Yu. Belous, “Ob upravlenii gornymi predpiiatiiami v pozdnej Rimskoj i rannej Vizantiiskoi imperiakh (IV–VI vv.),” *Antichnaia drevnost’ I srednie veka* 24 (1988) 143–151; J. C. Edmondson, “Mining in the Later Roman Empire,” *JRS* 79 (1989) 84–103.

to Chalcedonian bishops.¹⁰ On this matter we have discovered a piece of evidence in a quite unexpected source.

Two Old Russian manuscripts of St. Basil's Liturgy, copied in the fourteenth century, in the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg, Solovki Collection N 1016/1125, f. 41^{r-v}, and Novgorod Sofia Collection N 521, f. 26^v, contain, like all other Slavic manuscripts of the Liturgy, the intercession with the plea for "those in the mines and in prison and in hard labor" (*i v rudakh i v potochenii i v liutakh rabotakh*), which accurately corresponds to the Greek τῶν καὶ ἐν μετάλλοις καὶ ἐξορίαῖς καὶ πικραῖς δουλείαις. But these two manuscripts also contain an interpolation: "those who move the gold ore because of Caesar's wrath" (*izhe zlatuiu rudu kopaiut po gnevu tsesarevu*). Two other manuscripts, one in Moscow (Russian State Library, Rogozhskoe Cemetery Collection, N 566, f. 14^r) and one in St. Petersburg (Russian National Library, Solovki Collection N 1017/1126, f. 14^r) have the same interpolation in a truncated form: "those who move the gold ore" without the words "because of Caesar's wrath."

This interpolation is lacking in all the existing versions of St. Basil's Liturgy, whether Armenian or Egyptian.¹¹ Nevertheless, it could not be a mere invention of a Slavic scribe or a translator: the Slavs themselves did not mine gold. This means that the interpolation was translated from a Greek version that has not survived. The fact is that liturgical texts were copied in the so-called 'controlled tradition',¹² in which a scribe had several

¹⁰ This information is reported only in *Moses Khorenatsi, History of the Armenians*, transl. R. W. Thomson (Cambridge [Mass.] 1978) 246, 290. Hence it should be treated with discretion, cf. R. W. Thomson, "Armenian Literary Culture through the Eleventh Century," in Richard Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times I* (New York 1997) 199–239, esp. 215.

¹¹ Winkler, *Die Basilios-Anaphora* 263; A. Budde, *Die Ägyptische Basilios-Anaphora* (Münster 2004) 470.

¹² A. A. Alekseev, *Tekstologïa slavianskoj Biblii* (St. Petersburg 1999) 48–51.

manuscripts before him and very often conflated readings that he found in different copies. This is what has happened in our case: the four manuscripts in question combine the traditional formula “those in mines” with a rare reading, “those who move the gold ore (because of Caesar’s wrath),” connecting the two with the conjunction “and,” although in the Greek tradition these phrases must have belonged to different manuscript families, one of which has become extinct.

St. Basil’s Liturgy was translated into Slavic in the ninth century, probably more than once. But in the tenth century in Preslav, the capital of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, the church service was unified and adjusted to match the contemporary Constantinopolitan models.¹³ If the plea in question had survived in any of the Constantinopolitan Euchologia of the tenth century, it would have been preserved in the Greek up to the present. In all probability, the prayer for those in gold mines because of Caesar’s wrath dates back to some of the peripheral Greek manuscripts of the pre-Iconoclastic period, from which many Slavonic translations were made in Macedonia in the ninth century.¹⁴ Manuscripts going back to the Preslav tradition prevailed in Rus’, but manuscripts of the Macedonian tradition also circulated, though rarely, and the ‘controlled tradition’ was conducive to the survival of their readings.

The oldest Greek text of St. Basil’s Liturgy was composed in 375–379,¹⁵ i.e. exactly coinciding with the period of the harsh-

¹³ M. Jovcheva, “Problemy tekstologicheskogo izuchenija drevnejshikh pamiatnikov original’noj slavianskoj gimnografii,” *Drevneslavianskaia liturgicheskaia poezii. XIII Mezhdunarodnyj s’ezd slavistov. Tematicheskij blok n14. Doklady* (Rome/Sofia 2003) 64; A. A. Turilov, “K utochneniju ob’ema I sostava drevnejshogo slavianskogo original’nogo gimnograficheskogo korpusa v drevnerusskoj traditsii (na materialakh minejnykh sluzhb),” in *Slavia Cyrillomethodiana: Istochnikovedenie istorii I kul’tury juzhnykh slavian I Rusi. Mezhslavianskie kul’turnye sviazi epokhi srednevekov’ia* (Moscow 2010) 68.

¹⁴ T. I. Afanas’eva, *Drevneslavianskii perevod liturgii v rukopisnoj traditsii XI–XVI vv.* (diss. St. Petersburg 2012) 5, 44–45.

¹⁵ Fenwick, *The Anaphoras of St. Basil and St. James* 301.

est imperial decrees concerning gold mining. It is noteworthy that “moving the gold ore because of Caesar’s wrath” is the only type of hard labor specified in the liturgy. One can surmise that using forced labor in gold mining began to cause discontent of sorts. Such feelings can be discerned in a metaphor of John Chrysostom: “This gold is produced not from the ore mined by prisoners’ hands, but from virtue,” ὁ χρυσὸς οὐκ ἀπὸ μετάλλων ἐστίν, ἀ καταδίκων χεῖρες ὄρυξαν, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ ἀρετῆς τίκτεται.¹⁶ It may be that the same latent displeasure is reflected in the liturgical formula discussed in this article. The author of the plea hints, as it were, that hard labor in gold mines was too cruel a consequence of the imperial wrath, especially since it had been used in persecutions by pagan tormentors.

However, this cruel practice was terminated not as a result of moral reprobation but because of its economic ineffectiveness: already by the middle of the fifth century it had become clear that an enterprising free prospector could pan more gold than a convict in fetters, surrounded by guards and working in a large mine.¹⁷ When the use of prisoners in gold mining became outdated, references to this practice would begin to disappear from fresh copies of St. Basil’s liturgy. This gives us a *terminus ante quem* for the creation of the Greek manuscript that served as ultimate source for the four Slavic ones that have preserved centuries-old realia for us.

From the point of view of the genesis of Slavonic translation, this conclusion is quite unexpected: a Macedonian bookman came across an extremely old and rare Greek manuscript of the liturgy. Viewed from a Byzantine perspective, the same hypothetical manuscript would have seemed unbelievably late, since up to now it has been assumed that “imprisonment and the mines ... though perhaps a fading memory as the fourth cen-

¹⁶ *In epist. i ad Timotheum*, PG 62.513.

¹⁷ Edmondson, *JRS* 79 (1989) 93–95.

ture progressed, suggests a pre-Constantinian”¹⁸ time for this intercession. This pious dating should now be revised, since we have learned that when prisoners “for the sake of piety” were set free, almost immediately another group of convicts in chains took over their spades—to “move the gold ore because of Caesar’s wrath.”

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Department of Letters
St.Petersburg State University
160-27, Naberezhnaia Kanala Grobiedova
St. Petersburg, 190121 Russia
atha@mail.ru

National Research University
Higher School of Economics
2/8, korp.5, Khitrovkii per.
Moscow, 109028, Russia
s.ark.ivanov@gmail.com

¹⁸ Fenwick, *The Anaphoras of St. Basil and St. James* 281.