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Citation

Schaeken, J., Gippius, A. A., Gzella, H., & Mikheev, S. M. (2020). Semitic inscriptions in the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod: a reply to alternative interpretations. *Russian Linguistics*, 44(1), 1-12. doi:10.1007/s11185-020-09223-0

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Semitic inscriptions in the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod: a reply to alternative interpretations

Семитские надписи из Новгородского Софийского собора: ответ на альтернативные трактовки

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Published online: 30 March 2020
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Abstract In the present article, we offer a detailed reply to alternative interpretations of our explanation of two eleventh-century phrases inscribed many times on the walls of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod: *коуни рони* and *парехъ мари*. According to our previous article in this journal, the phrases have a Semitic origin: Hebrew *qūmī ronī* and Syriac /barrek mārt/, respectively. In both instances new empirical evidence is provided by S. Ju. Temčín. In the case of *коуни рони* we argue that his alternative hypothesis cannot be maintained for a number of compelling reasons; our interpretation stands as it is. In the case of *парехъ мари* we basically agree with Temčín and provide evidence that sheds further light on its path of transmission into Slavic.

Аннотация В настоящей статье дается подробный ответ на альтернативные трактовки выражений *коуни рони* и *парехъ мари*, многократно записанных в XI в. на стенах новгородского Софийского собора. Ранее эти выражения были объяснены нами как семитские: от древнееврейского *qūmī ronī* и сирийского /barrek mārt/. После этого новые факты по обоим вопросам привлек С. Ю. Темчин. В случае с *коуни рони* мы

The contribution of A. A. Gippius and S. M. Mikheev was supported by a grant from the Russian Science Foundation (project no. 19-18-00352).

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приводим аргументы против альтернативной гипотезы, что позволяет остаться при прежней точке зрения. Между тем, по вопросу о *парехъ мари* мы соглашаемся с трактовкой Темчина и привлекаем данные, которые позволяют уточнить обстоятельства распространения этого выражения на славянской почве.

1 Introduction

Several years ago, the authors of the present article published their interpretation of two phrases inscribed on the walls of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod: *коуни рони* and *парехъ мари* (Gippius et al. 2012). Both inscriptions can be dated to the earliest period of the existence of the church, between 1050 and 1109.

The first inscription is spelled as *кюни рони*, *куни рони* or *коуни рони* and mostly written by different hands. It is attested more than forty times in a part of the church that was usually restricted to the clergy: the northern wall of the Diaconicon and the western wall of the passageway from the altar to the Diaconicon. We argued that *коуни рони* is a Slavic adaptation of the Hebrew expression *qūmī ronnī* (קִּוּמִי רֹנְנִי) ‘Arise, cry out’, which occurs in the Hebrew Bible, verse 2:19 of the Book of Lamentations. There is good reason to assume that the citation can be connected to the seizure of Novgorod and the plundering of St. Sophia by Vseslav Brjačislavič of Polotsk in the year 1066, a dramatic event which in the eyes of the Novgorodians may have had parallels with the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II.¹

The second inscription, *парехъ мари*, occurs twice in the same part of the church as where the many attestations of *коуни рони* are located. The two occurrences are most probably in the same handwriting, which seems to differ from the various handwritings used in the case of *коуни рони*. We proposed that *парехъ мари* could be a Slavic adaptation of Aramaic (Classical Syriac) /barreḫ māri/ ‘Bless, O Lord’. Furthermore, we suggested that the hand that wrote *парехъ мари* also inscribed *ефремъ сурин[ъ]*, i.e. the monogram *Ефремъ* and the word *суринъ*, ‘Efrem the Syrian’, on another wall of the cathedral. It is conceivable that this Efrem was a local citizen, probably a clergyman, who carried the epithet ‘the Syrian’, either as a nickname or because he was Syrian by descent.²

In sum, in our 2012 article we suggested a Semitic origin of the two inscriptions: Hebrew for *коуни рони* and Aramaic for *парехъ мари*. In the case of *коуни рони* we seem to be dealing with the oldest tangible proof of contact with Jews and Hebrew in Rus’. In both cases we argued that the orthographic deviations between the Slavic phrases and their underlying Semitic counterparts result from a *hearer*-based orientation of the scribes. This would explain the *н* (instead of *м*) in *коуни (рони)* and both the *н*- (instead of *б*-) and the *-х*- (instead of *-к*-) in *парехъ (мари)*.

In recent times, the well-known linguist and philologist S. Ju. Temčín from the Institute of the Lithuanian language in Vilnius published a number of articles in which he criticizes our interpretation. He offers a totally different explanation for *коуни рони* (Temčín 2013a; cf. 2013b, pp. 101–103, 2015, pp. 260–261) and suggests an alternative scenario for the historical context in which *парехъ мари* appeared on the walls of Novgorod’s St. Sophia (id.

¹The second time Vseslav Brjačislavič went to war against Novgorod was only three years later, in 1069. There is a birchbark document (no. 590) which can be linked to the 1069 campaign (Zaliznjak 2004, p. 244; cf. Schaecken 2019, p. 129 and fn. 9).

²This local citizen might be identified as the monk Efrem who is the author of birchbark letter no. 605 (Zaliznjak 2004, pp. 271–272; Gippius et al. 2012, p. 281, fn. 25; cf. Schaecken 2019, p. 46).

2013b, 2015). Let us examine the arguments both for and against this alternative scenario, beginning with *коуни рони* (Sect. 2) and then proceeding with *парехъ мари* (Sect. 3).

2 An alternative interpretation of *коуни рони*

2.1 Arguments against Gippius et al. (2012)

According to Темчѝн (2013a, pp. 255–256), there are five reasons that make our interpretation of *коуни рони* problematic:

- (1) There is no reliable evidence of the presence of a Jewish community in eleventh-century Novgorod or of people who knew Hebrew and could have been a source of information for the pronunciation of the biblical phrase, which hardly attracted the attention of Greek and Latin Church Fathers.
- (2) The second consonant of *коуни рони* differs from Hebrew *qūmī ronnī*, which is explained as an assimilation of the *m* of *qūmī* with the *n* of the following *ronnī*. However, none of the authors of the more than forty attestations was able to produce the correct form **kumi* although literate people in Rus' knew the Semitic form with the consonant *m* from the Church Slavonic Gospels (Mark 5:41: *талиѝта коумъ* or *талиѝѝа коумы* 'Talitha cum', i.e. 'Little girl, get up!').
- (3) The Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew in Ukraine, Poland, the western regions of Hungary and the southeastern variant of Yiddish, where etymological /ū/ is realized as [i] or, less frequently [ü], cannot explain the variety in the spelling of the first syllable of *коуни* (*кю-*, *ку-*, *коу-*) in an eleventh-century graffito because the change occurred much later—after the beginning of the resettlement of Ashkenazi Jews from German to Polish lands (in the thirteenth century).
- (4) The people who inscribed the phrase did not understand its structure and did not realize that the two Hebrew forms *qūmī* and *ronnī* are imperatives, as evidenced by the use of the accompanying personal names in the nominative (and not vocative) case.
- (5) The conjecture that the earliest (albeit distorted) recording of a Hebrew phrase was found in Novgorod, and not in Kiev, where we witness a Jewish community has existed since the tenth century, does not receive an explanation.

Arguments (1) and (5) are merely based on expectations. Admittedly, the presence of Jews predominantly in the southern parts of Rus' may have been more in line with what we know on the basis of small pieces of evidence. However, expectations do not *a priori* prevent or exclude the hypothesis we proposed. Moreover, there is evidence that the presence of Jews in pre-Mongol Rus' was certainly not restricted to Kiev and other southern cities (Franklin 2002, pp. 117–118; Hill 2016, pp. 603–606; cf. also Gruber 2013, pp. 434–435, with reference to Gippius et al. 2012). In our 2012 article (pp. 280–281) we mention the specific case of the word *машиаакъ* for the Jewish messiah, which is attested in an early-thirteenth century manuscript from Novgorod and may also point to a hearer-based orientation of the writer, just like *коуни рони*.³

³See now also Reinhart, who recently (Rajnxart 2015) discovered the Greek original of the text. However, the passage in which *машиаакъ* (also *машикъ*) occurs does not seem to have a Greek parallel and might be an East Slavic addition (ibid., pp. 291–292 and fn. 6, and 329). According to Rajnxart (ibid., pp. 300–301), the translation originated in Kiev Rus' in the eleventh or twelfth century. Later, in the course of the twelfth or thirteenth century, substantial textual changes were made, including the addition of the part in which we find *машиаакъ*. Apparently, the text does not reveal any specific Novgorodian dialectal features.

Arguments (2) and (4) ignore the fact that we proposed a *hearer*-oriented interpretation of the phrase. This would explain the *н* in *коуни*, which is a clear case of long-distance assimilation. We provide historical evidence that implies that the writers were aware of the content of the meaning. However, our hypothesis does not rely on any specific grammatical knowledge the writers may have had; on the contrary, it is highly unlikely that they had any linguistic understanding of the phrase and would have been able to connect *коуни* with *коумъ* or *коумы* in the Gospels.⁴ Also, there is no reason to assume that the Hebrew imperatives—whether they were perceived as such or not—would require vocatives for the accompanying names (such as *Хотѣнь Носъ* or *Dobrata*)⁵ since the exclamation was certainly not directed towards these specific persons who were the writers of the inscriptions themselves.

Finally, in the case of argument (3), pertaining to the first syllable of *коуни*, we never claimed that our explanation was a necessary condition for our hypothesis; the variation in the spelling *кю-*, *ку-*, *коу-* “*can* be explained” (Gippius et al. 2012, p. 273—our emphasis), not *must* be explained, by an Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew. The development of the Ashkenazi pronunciation is not well known, since vocalization is rather inconsistent in the earliest relevant sources (twelfth- and thirteenth-century Hebrew manuscripts from Western Europe). It can be assumed that it was a gradual, long-term and decentralized process and, more specifically, that the pronunciation of /ū/ as [i] could have been common or at least emerging long before the thirteenth century among Jews in the Rhineland and elsewhere in Western Europe. After all, it is commonly accepted that the phonology of the (pre-)Ashkenazi pronunciation tradition is based on an ancient Hebrew reading tradition. Anyway, there is no proof to the contrary (see the summary by Eldar 2013, with further bibliography). Moreover, the variation in spelling reflects a well-known orthographic pattern in the rendition of Greek *κυ* in the Old Slavic writing culture (Gippius et al. 2012, p. 274). This pattern may also have been applied to the phrase *коуни рони*, which was certainly perceived as a foreign (non-Slavic) expression; perhaps Ashkenazi pronunciation only played a partial role.

In our opinion the five arguments put forward by Temčín are merely critical observations, which by no means falsify our hypothesis. It should also be mentioned that Temčín does not comment on the historical pragmatic context we provide (Gippius et al. 2012, pp. 278–280). This particular context motivates the many attestations of *коуни рони* in their specific location in the St. Sophia Cathedral and strengthens our case. It would require a compelling alternative explanation to put aside our hypothesis.

2.2 An alternative explanation

It is Temčín’s merit (2013a, pp. 256–258; cf. 2013b, pp. 102–103, 2015, p. 261) that immediately after the publication of our article he discovered a word that seems to be another attestation of *коуни рони*, namely *кунирони*. It is written in the margins of a service Menaion for August in a hymn to St. Maximus the Confessor. The manuscript (GIM, Sin. 168) is from the last quarter of the twelfth century and of Novgorodian provenance. The word can be found in a later fourteenth-century addition in the lower margin of fol. 71v: “Дньсь благоизвольную кунирони да похвалимъ Максима . . .” (“Today let us praise Maxim with the honored *кунирони*’); see Figs. 1 and 2.⁶

⁴Incidentally, the Greek expression *Ταλθᾶ κοῦμ* in the Gospels is of Aramaic provenance, not Hebrew.

⁵In Gippius et al. (2012, p. 273) the name is spelled as *Dobrjata* but on closer inspection it should be read as *Dobrata*.

⁶For a facsimile of the manuscript, see the electronic catalogue of the State Historical Museum (GIM: *Gosudarstvennyj istoričeskij muzej*) in Moscow (<https://catalog.shm.ru/>) and search for “Син. 168”.

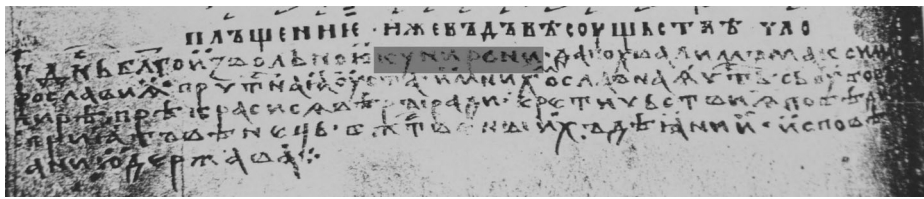
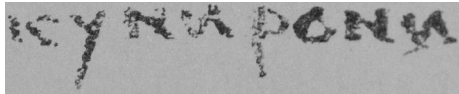


Fig. 1 *кунирони* in the addition in the lower margin of fol. 71v of GIM, Sin. 168

Fig. 2 Close-up of *кунирони*



According to Stern (2008, p. 541, no. 5868), the Greek equivalent of this hymn has not been found (“textus graecus non inventus”), although a parallel text seems to exist in the eleventh-century manuscript Sinai 598 (fol. 138v), which is a service Menaion for January: Σήμερον τῇ εὐήχῳ κινύρα ἐγκωμιάζεται Μάξιμος . . .;⁷ see Fig. 3.

Thus, it is clear that we have another attestation of *коуни рони*, at least at first sight. Without doubt the word corresponds with Greek κινύρα ‘lyre, harp’, viz. the name of an Old Testament stringed instrument. The Greek word is derived from Hebrew *kinnōr* and attested in Slavic as the loanword *kinura*.

However, the Slavic translation of εὐήχῳ κινύρα as *благоизвольною кунирони* is puzzling. First, εὐήχος ‘euphonious, melodious’ is rendered by the more general word *благоизвольнь* ‘honored; εὐδοξος’, whereas a word like *доброгласьнь* ‘well-sounding; εὐήχος’⁸ would have been a far more accurate translation. Second, we would have expected a feminine noun in the instrumental singular corresponding with the instrumental *благоизвольною* and the Greek dative endings εὐήχῳ κινύρα. This would have yielded **кунурою*, not *кунирони*. The attested form *кунирони* instead of **кунурою* presupposes two unusual mistakes: (1) the vowel letters *u* and *y* have been swapped (**kinu-* > *kuni-*), and (2) the ending *-ою* (or *-оѣ*) has been distorted to *-они* ‘for some reason’, as Temčín puts it (“počemu-to”; 2013a, p. 257). It is obvious that **кунурою* was incomprehensible to the copyist, most probably due to the fact that he simply did not understand the meaning of the word *кинура*. Temčín points out that the earliest attestation of *кинура* is from the seventeenth century, found in a source from 1654; in medieval times Greek κινύρα was usually translated by other words such as *бряцало*, *цѣвьница* or *гусли* (2013a, pp. 256–258).

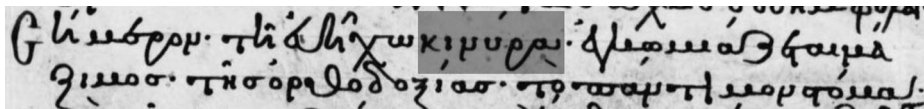


Fig. 3 κινύρα in Sinai 598 (fol. 138v) (The photograph is taken from a microfilm of the Library of Congress Collection of Manuscripts in St. Catherine’s Monastery, Mt. Sinai, which is available on their website: <https://www.loc.gov/item/00271075170-ms/> (for fol. 138v, go to image 135).)

⁷We would like to thank Dieter Stern, Ghent University, for providing us with further information on the Greek text.

⁸*доброгласьнь* is attested in Psalm 150:5 as the (Old) Church Slavonic translation of εὐήχος (cf. Kurz 1965, p. 492, and also Mareš 1997, p. 48).

According to Temčín, the new instance of *кунирони* in the service Menaion is the primary source of the many instances of *коуни рони* on the walls of St. Sophia. It is not derived from Hebrew *qūmī ronni* ‘Arise, cry out’ but from Greek *κλύρα* ‘lyre, harp’. The scribes of the graffito knew the word from the service Menaion; they were not so much interested in the hymn itself but more in ‘the unfamiliar word’ (“nepriyvčnoe slovo”) denoting an object that was familiar to them—a harp, which in Novgorod was a popular instrument, more than in Kiev (2013a, pp. 257–258).

As already briefly indicated in earlier publications (Gippius and Mixeev 2013, pp. 157–158; Gippius 2018, p. 187, fn. 10), we cannot agree with Temčín’s hypothesis. In fact, we argue that the chronological relationship between *кунирони* in the service Menaion and *коуни рони* on the walls of Novgorod’s St. Sophia is just the other way around. It is the latter which is the primary source.

First, *кунирони* as some sort of modification of **кинурую* can hardly be explained by simply assuming two unusual scribal errors, especially regarding the ending *-ою* > *-они*. It is much more likely that the distortion of the form must have been triggered by another word that resembled **кинурую*, namely the word *коуни рони* from the St. Sophia inscriptions.

Second, we cannot imagine a historical pragmatic context, which would have triggered the clergy to inscribe repeatedly a distorted word with the meaning ‘lyre, harp’ on the walls of St. Sophia. Simply because it was a popular instrument among the Novgorodians? The lack of any plausible context weakens Temčín’s line of reasoning and stands in contrast to our own interpretation, which provides a detailed reconstruction of the historical pragmatic context of the inscriptions in St. Sophia.

In sum, the arguments both for and against our interpretation clearly speak in favor of the primacy of *коуни рони* as an adaptation of Hebrew *qūmī ronni* ‘Arise, cry out’ as attested on the church walls of the St. Sophia Cathedral. As by accident, it later made its way into the service Menaion for August, where the Novgorodian scribe of a marginal addition used it to replace a word that was incomprehensible to him. In our opinion this is the most plausible scenario. A scenario which confirms Temčín’s hypothesis (2013a, p. 257; cf. Šul’gina 2007, pp. 109–110) that the fourteenth-century addition reflects a very early stage in the compilation of the service Menaia from the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod, at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century, when the inscriptions were still known before they disappeared behind the frescos which were painted in 1109. At that early stage the copyist had already resorted to using *коуни рони*, which was well known to him, to replace the unknown **кинурую*. Whether the clergyman understood the meaning of the writings on the wall of St. Sophia or not is irrelevant; it was part of his lexical stock, it was a word attested many times in a sacred place, in contrast to **кинурую*, which evidently meant nothing to him.

3 An alternative interpretation of *парехъ мари*

On two occasions Temčín discusses our interpretation of *парехъ мари*—in 2013 and 2015. In his 2013 article (2013b) he agrees that *парехъ мари* is possibly a Slavic adaptation of Aramaic */barrek mār/* ‘Bless, O Lord’. He also follows our suggestion of identifying *парехъ мари* paleographically with the inscription *ефремъ сврин[ъ]* ‘Ephrem the Syrian’. However, Temčín disagrees with our assumption that this person does not refer to St. Ephrem the Syrian but rather to a local citizen, possibly a clergyman, who carried the epithet ‘the Syrian’. He takes an additional inscription into account, which is located below *ефремъ сврин[ъ]* and which he reads as *на вечерни ѿл[мъ] | бѣженъ* ‘at Vespers the Blessed Psalm’. The words

‘Blessed Psalm’ most probably point to Psalm 1:1 (“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked”) and suggest a liturgical context in which the famous theologian and liturgical poet St. Ephrem the Syrian is the first candidate to think of in the case of *ефре́мъ сврѣин[ѣ]*. In addition, there are a few letters which are inscribed in between the lines *ефре́мъ сврѣин[ѣ]* and *на вечерни ѱл[мъ] | бѣ́женъ*. These letters might be read as *инкѣ* and interpreted as *ино́к* ‘monk’. If this reading is correct, the whole set of inscriptions should be interpreted differently; it would carry a non-liturgical meaning but at the same time still indicate that we are dealing with St. Ephrem the Syrian in view of the monastic background later tradition ascribes to him. However, as Temčín points out, we also have to consider the possibility that *ефре́мъ сврѣин[ѣ]* and *инкѣ* on the one hand, and *на вечерни ѱл[мъ] | бѣ́женъ* on the other, are two separate independent inscriptions, written by two different hands, as Medynceva already concluded a long time ago (1978, p. 92). In that scenario *ефре́мъ сврѣин[ѣ]* and *инкѣ* could—at least from a formal point of view—either refer to St. Ephrem the Syrian or to a local clergyman Efrem, who carried the epithet ‘the Syrian’. Temčín still prefers the first interpretation because it is ‘historically real’ (“istoričeski real’na”) and ‘attested by independent sources’ (2013b, p. 106).

The main problem with Temčín’s reasoning is his interpretation of the lines *инкѣ* and *на вечерни ѱл[мъ] | бѣ́женъ*. The reading *инкѣ* is very doubtful; it was suggested by Ščepkin (1902, p. 33)⁹ but Medynceva (1978, p. 92) already mentioned that the letters (?) are unclear (“neskol’ko nejasnyx znakov”) and that the meaning is inconclusive.¹⁰ The whole reconstruction of *на вечерни ѱл[мъ] | бѣ́женъ* is also troublesome.¹¹ Instead of Temčín’s *ѱл[мъ]* Medynceva proposed the more common reading *ѱл[ѣ]*, viz. *пѣсалъ* ‘wrote’. In conjunction with *б(ѣ)женъ*, as reconstructed by Medynceva (*на вечерни ѱл[ѣ] | б(ѣ)женъ*), this would yield the plausible alternative ‘at Vespers Božen wrote [this]’. The possible contextual relationships between the lines, including *ефре́мъ сврѣин[ѣ]*, therefore remain highly hypothetical.

Finally, Temčín contests our argumentation that all other monograms discovered so far in the St. Sophia Cathedral are autographs of the bearers of inscribed names (cf. Gippius and Mixeev 2013, pp. 154–156): *Лазорь*, *Стефанъ*, *Лука*, *Поутъка*, etc. It therefore makes sense to treat the monogram for Efrem in the same way and recognize Efrem as the author of the inscription. Temčín’s concern is that in the Byzantine tradition monograms were not exclusively reserved for autographs; therefore, we cannot exclude the possibility that in the early period of Rus’ monograms were also used in the case of names of traditional theologians like St. Ephrem the Syrian. This general conjecture might be true, but in this particular case we still have to formulate a hypothesis primarily based on the available data that come as close as possible to the monogram *ефре́мъ* followed by *сврѣин[ѣ]*: except for *ефре́мъ*, fifteen monograms have been identified in the cathedral so far (Gippius and Mixeev 2013, p. 154) and for all of them we have to assume that they reflect the autographs of the people who inscribed their names.¹²

⁹Ščepkin also provides a photograph of the set of inscriptions under discussion (1902, Table III, No. 15).

¹⁰A recent inspection of the inscription by Gippius and Mikheev yields a different reading, viz. *[ноѣ]ѣ*, which may be the beginning of an unfinished text.

¹¹Gippius and Mikheev read *на ве[ч]ерни (...) | бѣ́жен[ѣ]*; the letter *ѱ* is doubtful.

¹²It should be borne in mind that the names of saints and their accompanying designations could also be used as nicknames. A vivid example is provided by the Novgorod charter of 1293–1304 (Valk 1949, pp. 141–142), which mentions a person called Ondrěj Kritckyj. This Ondrěj, who was the head of a fishermen’s artel (‘vatamman’), carried the name of the eighth-century Byzantine theologian and hymnographer St. Andrew of Crete.

So far, we see no reason to deviate from our interpretation in view of Temčín's objections from 2013a, 2013b. But there is more: in an article from 2015, Temčín returns to the question of *парехъ мари*. Strangely enough, the lines *инкъ* and *на вечерни ѿл[мъ] | бѣженъ*, which played a crucial role in his previous considerations, are not mentioned anymore. Instead, he presents important new evidence. It turns out that the phrase *парехъ мари* is attested in almost the same form elsewhere, namely as a greeting formula in the Church Slavonic translation of the Life of St. Hilarion the Great, which appears in the Menaia under 21 October:

“Услышаша же, яко святыи Иларионъ мимо градъ идеть (...), събраша же ся вси и, съ женами и съ дѣтьми излѣзьше изъ града, и срѣтоша и видѣвъше его, и поклониша главы своя и возопиша вси вкупѣ, сирьскы глаголюще: парехъ мара, еже есть сказаемо, благословести, господи!” (VMČ 1880, p. 1698)

The original text of St. Hilarion's Life is in Latin,¹³ where we read in the last sentence of the quote: “*BARECH*, id est, *benedic*” (Migne 1845, p. 42; Bastiaensen and Smit 1975, p. 110). The Church Slavonic text is a translation of one of the three different Greek versions of the Life (Strout 1943), which not only renders *Barech* as in the Latin, but also the following word *μαρί*: “*Βάρεχ, μαρί· ὁ ἐστὶ μεθερμηνευόμενον· Ἐὐλόγει, κύριε*” (Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1898, p. 114; Strout 1943, p. 371). The underlying Greek version was apparently called into existence, more or less in its known form, by the eighth century at the latest, perhaps even by the seventh (Strout 1943, p. 308), but its textual transmission is complicated (ibid., pp. 339–347). In other witnesses to the Greek text we encounter the variant spellings *Βαρέχ* instead of *Βάρεχ* and *μαρεῖ* instead of *μαρί* (Strout 1943, p. 371, textual note *ad* (13); Temčín 2015, p. 262). There is no direct evidence for a Latin text with the longer expression **Barech mari* either in the survey of diagnostically significant variants by McNeil (1943) or in the apparatus of the most recent edition by Bastiaensen and Smit (1975). However, it has to be emphasized that the latter is essentially based on a few earlier printed editions, not on a rigorous and comprehensive examination of the numerous manuscripts themselves and of the ancient versions (Bastiaensen and Smit 1975, pp. 70–71). A second, more literal, Greek translation of unknown date that survives in a single manuscript has *Βαράχ, ὁ ἐστὶν εὐλόγησον* (Strout 1943, p. 322), which exactly corresponds to the received text of the Latin. In this translation both *μαρί* and the expansion *μεθερμηνευόμενον* are omitted. The third Greek translation, by contrast, is only indirectly attested in a fragmentary Coptic version and offers no further clues in this matter.

As for the Church Slavonic text, we not only find *парехъ мара* (with an erroneous final *-a* of *мара*, apparently under the influence of the vowel in the preceding syllable) but also *пархъ марию* and *пархъ марию* in other copies. The oldest witnesses are from the late fourteenth century and of South or East Slavic provenance. Kuzidova-Karadzhinova (2012) has demonstrated in detail that the Church Slavonic translation from the Greek text has a long history and must have originated in the Old Bulgarian (Old Church Slavonic) Preslav literary school. According to Temčín (2015, p. 263), *Βάρεχ μαρί* as attested in the Life of St. Hilarion the Great is the source for our *парехъ мари*; the clergyman who inscribed the words on the walls of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod in the second half of the eleventh century was apparently already familiar with the Church Slavonic version of the Greek text.

We believe that Temčín's (2015) interpretation on the basis of the new empirical data is plausible: *парехъ мари* is a Slavic adaptation of Aramaic /barreḵ māri/ ‘Bless, O Lord’

¹³The English translation of the Latin original reads: “When it was heard that St. Hilarion was passing through (...), the men swarmed out with their wives and children to meet him and, with their heads reverently bowed, cried out in Syriac: ‘Barech,’ that is, ‘Bless us!’” (Ewald 1952, p. 264).

and may have a textual rather than a hearer-oriented origin that goes back to Greek Βάρεχ μαρί. The Slavic words coincide with the Greek version, except for the Greek and eventually also Aramaic *b-* versus Slavic *p-* in *napexъ*. Temčín calls this change ‘unusual’ (2015, p. 263), although we pointed out earlier that it has many typological phonetic parallels elsewhere (Gippius et al. 2012, pp. 276–277). Alternatively, *napexъ* may derive from a hypothetical Greek *Vorlage* that graphically represented *b-* (which would have shifted to *v-* in native Greek words) with π - (cf. Griščenko 2015, p. 305, 2018, p. 200). This would correspond to a reasonably common Byzantine Greek spelling convention attested from the eleventh century onwards in documentary and literary texts from Athos and Southern Italy (Holton et al. 2019, pp. 114, 157), even though *Πάρεχ is not recorded among the textual variants known to Strout (1943). Such an explanation would, at any rate, presuppose some knowledge of the plosive pronunciation of *b-* in the original Aramaic word. In addition, we also cannot exclude the possibility that Slavic *p-* in *napexъ* arose because Βάρεχ (μαρί) was simply perceived as a non-transparent ‘foreign’ oral expression, at least something which was definitely *not* Greek. Therefore, instead of applying the standard mechanism Greek β - > Slavic *v-*, the translator removed β - and replaced it with the plosive *p-* as an alternative ad hoc solution.

Temčín’s discovery also furnishes a compelling explanation of two peculiarities of the various transcriptions, that is, the single *r* in Latin *Barech*, Greek Βαρέχ and Slavic *napexъ* as well as the final *-i* in Greek μαρί and Slavic *mapy* respectively. In light of the Christian context, we previously argued in favor of a Syriac (i.e., Eastern Aramaic) origin, which may account for *napexъ* due to an inexact rendering of underlying /barrek/, but the expected form of the following word would, at any rate, have to be /mār/, from which *mapy* can only be derived with the help of additional hypotheses. However, St. Jerome seems to have written the Life of St. Hilarion during his early years in Bethlehem, where he settled in 386 (Mohrmann in Bastiaensen and Smit 1975, p. xl). Composing an account of a local saint from Gaza, whom tradition identified as the founder of anchorite life in Syria-Palestine, he added considerable *couleur locale* (cf. *ibid.*, pp. xlvii–xlvi). Another Aramaic lexeme, *gubba* ‘well, cistern’ (from */gobb/), occurs in the Life of St. Paul the First Hermit by the same author (Migne 1845, p. 22). Likewise, the wording of some references to St. Hilarion in Sozomen’s Ecclesiastical History reminds one of the Greek translations of the Life and may therefore imply that versions similar to, though not necessarily identical with, the ones known from later manuscripts were in circulation as early as the fifth century in Palestine (see the balanced assessment of the ambiguous evidence in Strout 1943, pp. 308–311), where they, in all likelihood, were first produced.

So regardless whether Greek μαρί points to an original *mari* that has later been omitted in the Latin text by a scribe who no longer understood its meaning, or was added to the less literal of the Greek versions by a translator who worked in fifth-century Palestine and thus was exposed to Aramaic (in the absence of a full critical edition of the Life, a clear-cut decision seems impossible), a Palestinian (i.e., Western) Aramaic source is now much more plausible than a Syriac one. Aramaic, after all, was still widely used both as a vernacular and a literary language by Jews, Christians, and others in fourth- and fifth-century Palestine (Gzella 2015, pp. 281–296). According to the Life, too, St. Hilarion regularly expressed himself in this idiom in ordinary conversation, here labeled *sermone Syro* or *voce Syra*. Note that the term ‘Syriac’ often appears for ‘Aramaic’ at large in ancient writers, contrary to its more specific employ in modern scholarly nomenclature for the Eastern Aramaic dialect of Edessa that came to be adopted as a supra-regional Christian literary language (cf. Gzella 2019, p. 206). Particularly significant are the narrator’s vivid remarks about the ‘genuine’ pronunciation of vernacular Aramaic (Migne 1845, p. 41; Bastiaensen and Smit 1975, p. 104) with its fricatives (if that is what *stridor* means), gutturals (*aspiratio*) and typical expressions (*idioma*

aliquod Palaestini eloquii). Since this latter passage is rendered considerably less precisely and vividly in the Greek (see the passages in question in Strout 1943, p. 367), one may suppose that the translator did not exhibit the same interest in the distinctive features of Palestinian Aramaic as the subtle philologist Jerome himself. As a consequence, it seems a bit more likely that the original Latin text already read **Barech mari* instead of *Barech*, but that question chiefly pertains to the transmission of the Greek and the Latin text and goes beyond the scope of the present article. For our purposes it is sufficient to conclude that the Aramaic elements in Jerome's Life of St. Hilarion clearly derive from Palestinian Aramaic.

More specifically, the Western Aramaic dialects, to which the Palestinian vernaculars belong, shortened word-medial /r/ as in the factitive-stem imperative /barrek/ 'bless!' to /r/ some time between 150 BC and 120 AD (Beyer 1984, p. 122, 2004, p. 56), just as in Babylonian Aramaic, but contrary to the early pronunciation of Classical Syriac. At the same time, they consistently preserved the etymological */-ī/ in the first-person singular possessive suffix 'mine', lost in Syriac, due to a secondary stress-shift (Beyer 1984, p. 144, with the addition in id. 2004, p. 63; Gzella 2015, p. 288). The Greek translation of the Life thus adequately reproduces /mārī/ 'my lord', which, as opposed to its Syriac counterpart /mār/, is completely normal in Palestinian Aramaic, Jewish and Christian alike, and is also amply attested in everyday usage as well as in religious discourse (see the survey of the evidence in Beyer 1984, p. 630, 2004, p. 235). With this slight modification, the Aramaic origin of *нарехъ мари* has been established beyond any reasonable doubt: it is based on transparent and historically plausible Aramaic forms, it fully corresponds to the known sociolinguistic context in which the underlying original wording was coined, and its path of transmission into Slavic can be traced throughout its various stages, from Latin via Greek into Church Slavonic. Since both *нарехъ* and, especially, *мари* reflect Palestinian Aramaic and are thus affiliated with a dialect cluster that was marginalized fairly quickly after the eighth century, a connection with the Life is ultimately the most convincing explanation.¹⁴

Finally, in view of the new findings we would like to emphasize that we already indicated that it is "most probable" that the handwriting of the two instances of *нарехъ мари* is the same as *εφρεμъ сврин[ъ]* (Gippius et al. 2012, p. 281). There was no hard evidence to substantiate our claim, which merely remained a hypothesis based on the available data. However, we now have more data and it seems that an identification of both handwritings has become less plausible.

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¹⁴Alternatively, one might argue that the attestation of *нарехъ мари* on the walls of Novgorod's St. Sophia is an independent instance of the greeting formula without any connection to the Life of St. Hilarion. Note that the inscription is located near another greeting formula, viz. Cyrillic *о херетис[мос]*, which is Greek *ὁ χερητισιμός* (instead of *χαρητισιμός*) 'greeting' (Vinogradov 2013, pp. 101–102). This might suggest that *нарехъ мари* was also a fixed 'foreign' phrase that was known to the scribe solely from hearsay, i.e. on the basis of some vague and inaccurate linguistic knowledge. This scenario seems less plausible, especially because there is no evidence that *нарехъ мари* in its Palestinian Aramaic form was ever used as some sort of liturgical or otherwise common formula.

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