

EUCHOLOGIUM SINAITICUM 59A10 ЧЛѢКЪИѦ ПЪТНЦА. ON AN ENIGMATIC
READING IN A PRAYER TO SAINT TRYPHON

(Summary)

The prayer to Saint Tryphon “against all the bugs spoiling vineyards, gardens and fields”, translated into Old Church Slavonic from a Byzantine prototype by the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century and then included in the Euchologium Sinaiticum (ff. 59a5–59b14), may be considered a sort of exorcism, functioning in the context of agrarian folk rites of springtime, rather than a canonical prayer *stricto sensu*. Special attention is devoted in this article to the formula ЧЛѢКЪИѦ ПЪТНЦА (“human birds”), apparently unknown to other mediaeval Slavic texts and here attributed to an ill-defined kind of birds, whose appearance, according to the final admonition in the epilogue of the prayer, will clean the earth from the unwelcome bugs.

Despite a common opinion, considering the adjective ЧЛѢКЪИѦ an erroneous transcription from an original *ЧЛѢКЪИѦ (in accordance with the evangelic formula τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, slav. ЧЛѢКЪИѦ ПЪТНЦА – see, e.g., Frček, Nahtigal, etc.), the article argues that the epithet attributed to the birds in Euchologium Sinaiticum is far from being a mistake by the Slavic copyist (or the translator). On the basis of several literary and ethnological sources it is shown that the mysterious birds mentioned in the prayer are nothing but storks. Venerated as sacred animals from times immemorial because of their hostility towards bugs, rodents, lizards and snakes, in Balto-Slavic traditional beliefs, legends and fairy tales storks are in fact considered to be human or to have originated from human beings.

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