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New book: Shibaev on manuscripts of the Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery

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M. A. Shibaev. *Rukopisi Kirillo-Belozerskogo monastyria XV veka. Istoriko-kodikologicheskoe issledovanie*. Moskva-S.-Peterburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2013. 560 pp. ISBN-978-5-98874-092-6.

[Readers of this review need to be warned at the outset: it is R-rated, for I invoke the “F word”. No, not the one you expect. F as in “filigranology.” Those who are allergic to discussions of filigranology (and, for that matter, codicology) should probably stop reading now.]

When more than four decades ago I was fumbling my way to learning about how to study manuscript books, I wrote a (now-forgotten) piece on filigranology/the study of watermarks (it appeared in the "original" *Kritika: a Review of Current Soviet Books on Russian History*, VI/2 [Winter 1970]: 78-111; <http://faculty.washington.edu/dwaugh/publications/waughwatermarkskritika_6_2_1970.pdf>). While at the time I may have been optimistic that this “auxiliary discipline” would develop and flourish, for it to achieve, finally, the importance it occupies in this pathbreaking book has taken a lot longer than I would have wished.

On the surface, much in Shibaev’s book may seem unexceptional. After all, as he is careful to credit, there has been a huge amount of scholarly attention devoted to the books of the Monastery of St. Cyril at White Lake (here abbreviated KBM). One of the most important contributions was that of N. K. Nikol’skii before the end of the 19th century, when as part of his major study of the monastery, he published its 15th-century book inventories and manuscript descriptions in a still valuable edition that was far ahead of its time. These guides to the collection as it existed ca. 1480 are still extremely important to work such as Shibaev’s in attempting to trace its early history. In recent years, especially fueled by the interest in the manuscript miscellanies owned/copied by the monk Efrosin, there has been an outpouring of descriptive and analytical material. Many of the most recent works rely on sophisticated modern approaches to codicology, studying the history of individual manuscript books. Among the significant contributors to this study are S. N. Kisterev and O. L. Novikova, who are close collaborators in various publications of “Al’ians-Arkheo,” for which Novikova is the chief editor.

The importance of the books of KBM in part stems from the fact that much of the original collection remained intact down to modern times, unlike most of the other major book collections in pre-modern Russia. Shibaev argues that this then offers a unique opportunity to examine in detail the process of book production and accumulation in the monastery, especially for its first century of existence (the 15th century), where there is a large, but not overwhelming quantity of material. To anticipate, one of his conclusions here is that the evidence points not to the production of a scriptorium (in the sense of a special workshop staffed by professional

copyists whose main purpose was the regular production of fine manuscript books). Rather, it is more accurate to speak of the monastery as a “center of book copying” (*knigopisnyi tseñtr*) where books might be produced on demand, not necessarily in particularly elegant copies, often assembled piecemeal, and largely not by professional copyists. His book then is an attempt to trace in chronological order, the processes of book production in the monastery during most of the 15th century. He is not especially concerned here with content analysis or textual filiations; rather the main data are codicological evidence such as palaeography, foliation, quire structure, and, of course, watermarks. Attribution to particular copyists does require close attention to colophons and other annotations and the careful comparison of hands. Whereas such serious codicology to date has tended to focus on individual manuscripts or small groups of them, this is a pioneering attempt to extend such analysis broadly to write the history of a major center of book production in Russia.

The chapters then are organized around groupings of manuscripts associated with particular copyists and those who, on the basis of the codicological evidence, can be most closely associated with them (even if anonymous). Within each chapter, the discussion is manuscript-by-manuscript, most of them ones still housed in the KBM collection in the Russian National Library (RNB, ex-GPB), but a good many, identifiable because of inscriptions or handwriting as having come from KBM, in other collections. Parchment manuscripts are part of the discussion, even if a relatively small percentage of the identifiable 15th-century books of the monastery, and do yield important data from their palaeography, even if by their material they do not contain watermarks.

The technique Shibaev uses to tabulate codicological and filigranological data is very helpful, since one can see from the charts the exact correspondence between changes in hand or paper, foliation, and signature divisions. This then enables one to see easily where one copyist’s work may appear in separate sections of a given manuscript, where paper used in one section overlaps into another or recurs later. Then it is possible to compare these data with another manuscript that may contain the same hand(s) or paper(s). As one progresses through the book, the annotations to these tables identifying other KBM books with the same hands or paper increase, demonstrating the ways in which copyists must have been collaborating, interacting, or incorporating the work of their predecessors.

Of course there is much here which will be controversial. Shibaev does not hesitate to argue even with some of his closest colleagues about datings and identification of hands. (While it has nothing to do with this book, he mentions in passing that he believes the “*Slovo o polku Igoreve*” was composed in the KBM in the 15th century.) He warns the reader up front that he sees his study as but a first step in what has to be a much more extensive study of the material and one likely to be subject to much revision. Assessing the validity of his conclusions will be difficult for anyone who relies solely on this book, since important parts of the evidence have been left to the discussions by others. In the matter of handwriting analysis, for example, he does not engage in any kind of detailed discussion of methodologies. That is, there is nothing innovative here which may advance our ability to identify scribal hands in early Slavic manuscripts. He adopts the approach others have used of talking about what may seem a rather vague “manner of writing” which can be associated with a particular scribe. There then seems to be a range in the confidence of such attributions. Rarely does he go into specific details about the shape of

particular letters and then only if he is trying specifically to refute someone else's attributions. Of great help, of course, is the substantial number of excellent photographs of manuscript pages, scattered throughout in black-and-white and included in 71 color plates at the end. The hands of most of the copyists he discusses are thus illustrated, in one or more examples. Yet at times, one wishes to see illustrations from other manuscripts he is using for comparison. Often those are to be found in some of the recent scholarship he cites.

One of the important contributions Shibaev has made in his previous publications on the KBM manuscripts is to identify all the instances where the famous bookman Efrosin annotated manuscripts other than ones he seems to have owned and assembled. This is extremely important for the larger task of writing the full history of KBM book production, since Efrosin was the one really in charge of the work and the keeper of the collection in the late 15th century. Often his hand provides the most important evidence for determination of a book's provenance. Shibaev published his preliminary list of all these annotations by Efrosin in the most recent volume of *Knizhnye tsenry drevnei Rusi* (2013) and reproduces that material here in an appendix to his last chapter.

Unblushingly taken as I am by the "F word," filigranology, that aspect of his book really caught my attention. When I wrote about it ere long ago, I indicated that much needed to be done in the way watermarks in manuscripts were described and compared. Among the desiderata were to look at the paper evidence of each and every page in a manuscript (that is, not cite only selectively from amongst any watermarks that were present), and to have a clear hierarchy of descriptive terms when referring to possible analogies or identity of the marks with ones in published albums. Moreover, I emphasized how such careful analysis of paper evidence might help determine provenance of manuscripts, as the use of the same paper might help prove different books originated in the same center. For future generations, it was going to be important to expand the database of watermarks, not only those in dated manuscripts and books but all others that might be recorded accurately. Ideally the catalogue of the future would be a searchable electronic one, and comparisons be facilitated by some kind of computerized optical scanning.

To a considerable degree (and I claim absolutely no credit), Shibaev and his equally skilled colleagues (both within and outside of Russia) in manuscript codicology and filigranology have been doing all these things for some time and now have begun to put in place the cornerstone for the future development of the "ultimate" reference work we might hope to have for studying paper evidence. Shibaev distinguishes among "identity" (generally followed by a question mark), similarity and type when comparing watermarks. Given the largely 15th-century date of the papers in his sample, he has been able to use for reference the huge online Piccard image bank of watermarks <<http://www.piccard-online.de>> (as well as the earlier multi-volume published selection from it) and another online watermark archive <<http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/wz/wzma.php>>), electronic tools which had yet to be invented back in 1970. He has thought very carefully about the variations in watermarks induced by deformation of paper moulds, and he recognizes the limits in accuracy where in most of the albums we have at best tracings of the watermarks.

The only way to move beyond the limits of tracings is photography or some kind of contact imaging. To date, most techniques for this have been slow and technically problematic. Shibaev has worked with the technical laboratory in RNB in devising a method of photographing watermarks using infrared digital photography (see a photo of the apparatus, p. 19), where the images can be manipulated and stored directly in an electronic database. Thus, he has created a digital catalog of the KBM watermarks, and reproduces in an appendix in this book 452 high-quality photographic images of them obtained by that method. (Does RNB plan to put it online, as it should be?). Granted it has its limits, where some of the watermarks were too fragmentary to provide useful images, but most of those would be useless if merely examined *de visu*. The photographic technique can be used successfully even for small format manuscripts (where the marks might be divided on separate pages, depending on how the sheets had been cut), and the infrared lighting and filters render the watermarks quite clearly, “seeing through” much of the ink on the pages. The techniques used here seem clearly to point the way to a bright future for filigranology.

Awed though I am by what Shibaev has accomplished, I would venture a few criticisms. In his detailing of the evidence from individual manuscripts, he identifies the watermarks with reference to published albums (mainly, N. P. Likhachev, C. M. Briquet, G. Piccard) or the databases mentioned above. However, in some instances where he has told the reader Likhachev or E. M. Shvarz had published the marks from those very manuscripts, those citations have not been included in the annotations to the tables themselves. It is not always clear, for example, why a mark is termed only “similar” to one in Likhachev, if Likhachev actually published an image of it. Perhaps of greater consequence here is the absence of proper indexing for the appended 452 photographs of watermarks. Nothing in the main text of the book refers the reader to any of those individual images by sequential number, nor is there an index keyed to manuscript number which then would facilitate locating all the watermarks from that one manuscript which have been illustrated in the catalog.

That is, the appended plates (and this is true for the color plates of manuscript pages too) are not cross-referenced or indexed properly. The organization of watermark catalog is by type (head of bull, grapes, bell...) in the traditional manner of all watermark albums (but for Likhachev’s which grouped them by source, an idea which Shibaev seems to applaud); the illustrations of manuscript hands are roughly by the chronological sequence in which they are discussed in the book (which, granted, makes looking through the plates for them not overly burdensome).

The production values in the book are wonderful, from the solid cloth binding to the excellence of the plates; I noticed but a few typesetting glitches. Important as this book is though for anyone who would study seriously the manuscript legacy of the KBM, it is not a volume most subscribers to this list would want actually to *read*, unless they too were to be embarking on serious codicological study of early Slavic manuscripts. Short of actually engaging in such analysis themselves though, readers can learn here a great deal regarding what underlies some of the best modern scholarship that looks beyond simply the study of texts.