

THE UNORTHODOX 'ITINERARY' OF AN ORTHODOX BISHOP: ABRAHAM OF SUZDAL AND HIS TRAVELS

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Abstract: This article re-examines a description of two 'religious spectacles' seen by Bishop Abraham of Suzdal during his visit to Florence in spring 1439, 'a source without parallel in the history of medieval theatre', according to one theatre historian. The article suggests that instead of an 'itinerary', a term commonly applied to the account, it should be read as a staging manual. The article is accompanied by a stemma of the extant manuscripts of the text and a new translation into modern English.

Keywords: Bishop Abraham of Suzdal, medieval theatre, travel literature, manuscripts, Church Slavonic, Ferrara-Florentine Council, Assumption, Ascension, Florence

♣ The first Russian accounts about Western Europe were written in the 1440s, which, given Russia's size, location and significance, seems surprisingly late. This does not mean, however, that the Russians did not travel to the West in the Middle Ages and did not know anything about it. Russian contacts with Scandinavia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were very active: a 'north man' was a familiar and often benign reality of that period, gradually becoming less familiar and far less friendly from the 1200s onwards. The tenth and eleventh centuries were the period of close dynastic alliances between Kievan Russia and Western Europe.¹

However, the time between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries witnessed a certain regression in Russian contacts with the West. One reason was the Great Schism of 1054, which finalized a long-running process in the split between the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches; another was the fragmentation of the once unified Kievan Russia, whose downgraded international status confined its weakened local princes to the narrow boundaries of their patrimonies. Worse still, the disastrous Tatar-Mongol invasion, which started in the 1230s, affected all the Russian territories, with the exception of the northern-western lands of Pskov and Novgorod, as these, in turn, were under constant attack from their Baltic neighbours, the Teutonic Order and Sweden. However, friendly contacts continued with southern and central Europe, with the focus on Byzantium, facilitated by their similarity of language and religious practices, and even the relationships with northern Europe enjoyed occasional thaws, with Pskov and Novgorod playing an increasingly important role in the Hanseatic Union.

During the period of internal and external troubles the Russians continued to travel around the *oikumena*, although this was affordable only to a few. The primary aim of an Orthodox learned traveller was a pilgrimage to the holy sites of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Egypt, and Syria, and therefore *Хождения* ('travels', 'pilgrimages', or 'itineraries'), written mainly between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, were found among the best-read genres of medieval Russian literature.² Most of

¹ The Grand Prince Vladimir Monomach (half-Greek himself, since his mother was a daughter of the Byzantine Emperor) married Gytha of Wessex, daughter of Harold Godwinson, who fled to the Continent after 1066. Their son Mstislav the Great (known as Harald in Old Norse sources) married the Swedish Princess Christina; their two elder daughters both married kings of Denmark and the third a Byzantine co-emperor. Vladimir's grandmother was another Swedish princess, while his four aunts all married European rulers, the most famous being Anna, the queen of King Henry I of France (her somewhat idealized sculptural representation can still be found in Paris, in the Jardin de Luxemburg). Vladimir's half-sister Eupraxia achieved the even higher status of Empress, having married the German Emperor Henry IV — later to divorce him with a scandal.

² Professor Prokofiev cites over seventy examples of itineraries written in Russia between the eleventh and seventeenth centuries, found in seven hundred and fifty extant copies, of which about fifty versions are based on real

them were proper itineraries, although, admittedly, as conservative and reductive as many of their Western European contemporaries and, occasionally, as problematic.³ The distances the authors had to travel were impressive, and the fact that their accounts only concerned the lands of the Orient does not necessarily mean they never went to, or perhaps through, the West. Early Russian travel literature reflects a great deal of tension between the 'holy' (Middle Eastern, biblical, close to the earthly paradise) and the 'sinful' (all other) lands, with only the former meriting detailed description.⁴ The spiritual value of reading about the West was negligible compared to the importance of the biblical *loci*, as true pilgrimage began east of Constantinople, the first main depository of Orthodox Christian relics and, until the late sixteenth century *de jure* (or late fifteenth century *de facto*), the ruling Patriarchal See of the Russian lands. The absence of earlier accounts of travels through the neighbouring Catholic lands highlights the remarkable conservatism of medieval Russian culture⁵ and the primary interests and concerns of the Russian audience, as well as confirming the established confines of the genre, which dictated that the 'travel' should be to a holy site in Asia Minor and the Holy Land — the same, again, being true about many medieval 'virtual pilgrimages' from the West.⁶

The political and economic recovery of Russia in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries brought about the formation of a centralized state and a strengthened national self-awareness. This process stimulated the renewal of the contacts with Western Europe,⁷ which, in turn, was to a certain extent effected by Russian presence at the Council of Ferrara and Florence in 1438–39, while the negative response to it in Muscovy further triggered the political and religious separation of Russia from its Byzantine 'older brother'. The Council, proclaimed Ecumenical, was called to examine the main differences between the Orthodox and the Catholic churches, such as the *filioque* problem, the doctrine of Purgatory, and papal supremacy, and sought to reconcile the two branches of Christianity and make them one Church again. The union was desperately needed by Constantinople, and was the brainchild of John VIII Palaiologos, who was thereby hoping to get help from the West against the advancing Ottoman Empire. His idea was met with enthusiasm by Pope Eugene IV, whose position after the rebellious Council of Basel was insecure and who would welcome such a large-scale diplomatic victory as the 'return' of the Eastern Church under the pallium of the Roman bishop. The event gathered over seven hundred delegates; the Russian party numbered a hundred or more people,

journeys made by authors or their informants. The remaining twenty are translated from other languages or based on popular legends. See Prokofiev, *Kniga khozhenii*, p. 5.

³ The earliest Russian Itinerary proper is the influential work of the Abbot Daniel of Kiev in the first decade of the twelfth century (known in English as *The Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel to the Holy Land, 1106–1107 AD*). Another famous Russian 'travelogue' is Afanasy Nikitin's *The Journey Beyond Three Seas*, outlining his voyage from Russia to India in 1466–72.

⁴ See, for instance, Lotman, 'O poniatii geograficheskogo prostranstva v russkikh srednevekovykh tekstah'.

⁵ Likhachev, *Poetika drevnerusskoi literatury*, pp. 14–15.

⁶ Cf. Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent: Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages*, which is about late-medieval virtual pilgrimage in the Low Countries, esp. Appendices, pp. 263–448. Unlike many Western European accounts of the pilgrimages to the Holy Land, which contained illumination (a particularly detailed example is the 1467 account of a journey from Venice to Palestine, Mount Sinai and Egypt, in BL MS Egerton 1900, <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7667&CollID=28&NStart=1900>> [accessed 1 October 2013]), Russian equivalents very seldom had even most basic pen-drawn illustrations. The only example I am aware of is a mid-fifteenth-century Moscow Rogozhin Cemetery Collection MS 253, Russian State Library, which is of a Pilgrimage of Agrefeny to Palestine composed in the 1370s (Prokofiev, 'Hozhdenie Agrefeniia v Palestinu').

⁷ The importance of late-medieval Slavic literatures for the general literary history of Europe has recently been recognized in a pioneering project *Europe: A Literary History 1348–1418*, commissioned by Oxford University Press and led by David Wallace (forthcoming as a book; the accompanying website is found at <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~dwallace/europe/index.html>> [accessed 1 October 2013]).

headed by the Greek Isidore, Metropolitan of Kiev and all Russia, an advocate of the union.⁸ The other notable Orthodox hierarch in the delegation, this time Russian by birth, was Abraham (Avraamii), the Bishop of Suzdal in 1431–37 and 1441–52.⁹ Consequently, many of the Russians who came to Italy were from Suzdal; it is not surprising therefore that all three extant Russian accounts about the Council were written by Suzdalians.

The last of these accounts exists in several versions first compiled in about 1447 by a quarrelsome priest, Simeon of Suzdal, as *A History of the Eighth Council*.¹⁰ It focuses on the political events of the Council, striving to prove the ill judgment of the advocates of the Union, particularly Metropolitan Isidore, to underscore the saintliness of its main opponent, Mark the Archbishop of Ephesus (1392–1444) — the only Eastern hierarch who refused to sign the Union document as it contained the Roman Catholic *filioque* formula. The *History*, often biased and patriotic, yet informative and entertaining in its own way, is dedicated to Grand Prince Vasily II (1415–62), who had just (in 1447) secured his position on the Moscow throne after a period of dynastic upheavals, and who flatly denounced the Union and nominated Russian-born Iona as the Metropolitan of Moscow instead of the deposed Isidore, thereby by-passing, for the first time, the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople. For this, Vasily was lauded by Simeon as the true protector of the Orthodox Christian faith after the Council of Florence and the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Simeon, busily demonstrating the political and theological falseness of the Council, does not say anything important about the countries and peoples he came across while in western Europe, and thus his oeuvre will not be considered in the present essay.

The earliest extant account of the journey to the Ferrara-Florence Council is composed in the form of a proper itinerary, apparently made during the journey itself (1437–40) by an anonymous scribe in Bishop Abraham's retinue. The style suggests that it was written as a diary, consisting of semi-official notes, which in its original form was never intended for a wide audience. It was in fact not even wrought into a proper literary piece, but nevertheless became popular with Russian readers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite its dry style and untidy composition. About twenty copies of the *Journey to the Florentine Council* (another title of the *Itinerary of the Anonymous Suzdalian*) are known, most of which (ten and eight respectively) are of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.¹¹ The content is typical for an itinerary: the author describes distances from town to town in local mileage (with the towns' names often very much slavonized); for some towns he lists their curiosities (for instance, a particularly large and beautiful church or a monastery; fountains; water supply and sewerage system; a menagerie).¹² If a curiosity in the next town is similar to the one mentioned before,

⁸ Concerning him, see, for example, ch. 6 in Gill's *Personalities of the Council of Florence*.

⁹ Suzdal is a large Russian town, about one hundred and seventy miles north-east of Moscow. Former capital of the principality of Rostovo-Suzdal, it had a castle (a 'kremlin') and several monasteries, first mentioned in 1024.

¹⁰ The text is printed in Popov, *Istoriko-literaturnyi obsor drevnerusskikh polemicheskikh sochinenii protiv latinian (XI–XV vv.)*, pp. 360–95. For a concise discussion of this work see Kazakova, *Zapadnaia Evropa v russkoi pis'mennosti XV–XVI vekov*, pp. 62–67. A more recent consideration of Simeon of Suzdal's text has restored some of its historical value: see Lomidze, 'K voprosu o vospriiatii Ferraro-florentiiskogo sobora russkoi delegatsyi (analiz svedenii Simeona Suzdal'skogo)'.

¹¹ St Petersburg, BAN MSS 16.8.13 and Ustyug 10; Sophia, GPB MSS 1453, 1465 and 1464, OLDP Q.63, Q.I.1366, Pogodin 1571, 1557, 1572, 1596 and 1606; Moscow: RGB (formerly, GBL) MSS Museum 939, MDA (5)80, and 6(81); Troitskii 801 and 805; GIM MSS Synod 448/144 and 46/177; and Solovetskii Sbornik 31(46). See Kazakova, *Zapadnaia Evropa v russkoi pis'mennosti*, pp. 15–17.

¹² This interest in architecture, civic as well as religious, unusual for earlier Russian *Travels*, is also found, although to a lesser extent, in a text of the 'Anonymous Itinerary to Constantinople', composed in first half of the fourteenth century, perhaps by Grigori Kaleka (the Cripple), who was elected the Archbishop of Novgorod in 1329 under the name of Vasily.

he does not normally give any details about it but refers his reader to a foregoing description. The text contains mainly lists and enumerations, from time to time elaborated by scanty descriptions.

The journey started on 8 September 1437 from Moscow, then the Embassy went via Tver', Novgorod, and Pskov; having left Russia, it passed through Derpt (Russian name — Yuriev, now Tartu in Estonia), Volmar, Riga, then by sea to Lübeck, which impressed the travellers greatly. The author calls it a 'glorious city', the same being said again only about Florence. For some time Lübeck becomes for him a model for an ideal town: of certain German cities and towns he notes that they are 'like Lübeck in its grandeur'. The next part of the journey lay through Lüneburg, Braunschweig, Magreburg, Leipzig, Vorheim (which is called Pont and is said to be the native town for Pontius Pilate); the next stop was Nürnberg, about which the Suzdalian notes that the Alleman (that is, the Bavarian) language differs from German in the same way as Russian differs from Serbian.¹³ The last two stops in 'Germany' were Augsburg and Innsbruck, which meant that the travellers crossed German lands from the North to the South. Having undertaken a tiring journey over the Alps (the first experience of really high mountains for the Russians), the delegation reached Italy. By way of Trent and Padua they arrived in Ferrara on 18 August 1438 and later had to move to Florence because of an outbreak of plague. The delegation stayed in Florence from 14 February to 6 September 1439. The Anonymous Suzdalian gives an excited, but quite laconic description of some details of the city, from which one can recognize the Ponte Vecchio,¹⁴ the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova¹⁵ and the Duomo of Santa Maria del Fiore with its campanile.¹⁶

During their stay in Ferrara some of the Russians must have travelled down to Rome, as there exists a brief 'Note concerning Rome', apparently written in the same style and at the same time as the *Itinerary of the Anonymous Suzdalian* and therefore presumably by the same author. This short piece, barely more than two hundred words, describes in the first-person plural the distance between Ferrara and 'the great city of Rome', the city's geographical location and size,¹⁷ its derelict but large and beautiful buildings, as well as its main religious attractions (predominantly to do with apostolic relics), and is everywhere being very precise about measurements. The 'Note' finishes with the words 'А иного не писахом' — 'We wrote nothing else [about this]', which could be read as a political statement in the light of the unwanted Union, concerning the deliberate rejection of non-Orthodox relics and

¹³ 'Аламанская земля, то есть [...] ни ины язык, но [...] язык немецкий же, но разно, яко и русь сербы, тако и оне с немци'. *Pamiatniki literatury Drevnei Rusi*, p. 476. All translations are mine; all quotations in Slavonic from the *Journey to the Florentine Council* are taken from this edition.

¹⁴ 'In the middle of the city there is a river, great and very swift, called Rna (i.e. Arno), and on this river is placed a stone bridge, very wide, and on both sides of the bridge chambers are made'. ('И посреди града того течет река велика и быстра велми, именем Рна; и устроен на реце той мост камень, широк велми, и съ обе страны моста устроены полаты'), *Journey to the Florentine Council*, p. 482.

¹⁵ 'There are over a thousand beds, and even upon the worst bed there is a marvellous feather mattress and expensive quilts; it is established for Christ's sake for weak strangers and travellers from other lands; and they are even being fed and clothed and provided with shoes and washed and kept in a good manner' ('весть в ней за тысящу кровати, а и на последней кровати перины чудны, и одеяла драгы; то ж устроено Христа ради маломощным пришельцем и странным и[з] иных земель; тех же боле кормят и одевают, и обувают, и омывают, и држат честно'), *Journey to the Florentine Council*, p. 482.

¹⁶ 'And in that city there is a house of prayer, its stone is marble both white and black; and by the church is made a column-like bell-tower, its stone is also white marble [...] and we climbed up inside the pillar upon the staircase, and we counted 450 steps'. ('И есть во граде том божица устроена велика, камень морьморь белъ, да чернь; и у божицы тое устроен столпъ и колоколница, тако же белы камень морьмор [...] и ходихом в столпъ той по лествице и сочтохом степеней 400 и 50'.) *Journey to the Florentine Council*, pp. 482–84.

¹⁷ The interest in measurements, shared by Abraham of Suzdal himself, seems to be a frequent feature of medieval travel narratives; Master Gregory, for example, took pains to measure a number of Roman ruins and record their dimensions in his twelfth-century account *De Mirabilibus urbis Romae*, which was extensively used and popularized in Ranulf Higden's *Polichronicon* and its translations.

places of interest.¹⁸ It is more likely, however, that, given the neutral tone of the whole work, the author acknowledges the rushed nature of his visit, as they only had two days in Rome ('We went round the city on horseback for two days'), which meant that their sightseeing programme must have been extremely full.

The way back lay by way of Bologna, Ferrara, and Venice, which amazed the travellers with its canals instead of streets and with its magnificent Basilica of San Marco, and then across the sea to Poreč, Zagreb, Buda, Krakow, L'viv, Galich, Vilno, Smolemsk, Moscow, returning to Suzdal on 29 September 1440. The journey home is described much more sparingly, usually simply by giving distances between towns. The traveller either became exhausted and bored with writing, or was feeling unwell and therefore spent a minimum of time working on the itinerary.¹⁹

Such a long-haul trip, there and back again, and the reasonably enthusiastic reaction it aroused within the Anonymous Suzdalian clerk must have given plenty of opportunities to fascinate his Russian fellow-travellers, including Bishop Abraham of Suzdal himself — if he was indeed the author of the text which already in the early manuscripts is known as *The Itinerary of Abraham of Suzdal*. But none of the events and places which they came across during the three years of their journeys really caught his eye, except for two mystery plays he saw in Florence in spring 1439. A theatre historian called his account 'a source without parallel in the history of medieval theatre',²⁰ as it is the longest and more detailed report of all the ones available in roughly contemporary sources (such as Pietrobuoni or to a lesser extent Vasari).²¹ It used to be believed that the performances witnessed by the bishop were variants of *sacre rappresentazioni* 'L'Annunciazione' and 'L'Assunzione',²² composed by the Florentine playwright Feo Belcari (1410–84).²³ These, however, are representatives of a broader assortment of the surviving texts pertaining to religious spectacles available in the fifteenth-century Florence, all of which post-date Abraham's visit and do not, in fact, entirely agree with his description, making the Russian account even more important for the study of the subsequent development of the genre.

Sacre rappresentazioni, originating in late-medieval Florence and flourishing there in the fifteenth-century, were an early type of liturgical or religious drama not dissimilar to Middle English mystery plays in that they were performed, with at least some regularity, on an established day (usually the commemoration of a feast), and through the efforts of the local community in association with a religious institution (in the case of Florence, by confraternities associated with convents or monasteries of the city). They did not, however, form cycles but took place within the church building, relying for their impact on the audience not so much on the liveliness of the action or the dialogue, but, being more *tableaux vivants*, on the accompanying special effects, facilitated by elaborate machinery.

¹⁸ Ranchin, 'Opisanie zapadnyh zemel' v "Khozhdeniiah" na Ferraro-Florentiiskii sobor', p. 114.

¹⁹ An interesting yet completely separate large theme, emerging in this connection, is the question of 'the way back' in the world of travel literature. Most of the classical travel narratives contain almost no 'way back' (the most notable exception is *The Odyssey*, which, however, contains no 'way there').

²⁰ Nagler, *The Medieval Religious Stage: Shapes and Phantoms*, p. 25.

²¹ For a brief comparison between Abraham's text and the extant fifteenth-century sources, see Henderson, *Piety and Charity in the Late Medieval Florence*, pp. 96–98; a more detailed discussion is found in Nerida Newbigin's classic work, *Feste D'Oltrarno: Plays in Churches in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, I, 2–14.

²² Wesselofsky, 'Italienische Mysterien in einem russischen Reisenbericht der XV. Jahrhunderts: Brief an Herrn Prof. D'Ancona', 425–41 (at pp. 432–33); Morozov, *Istoriia Russkogo Teatra do poloviny XVIII stoletii*, p. 27. A good review of historiography and a bibliography on *sacre rappresentazioni* is found in *The Theatre of Medieval Europe*, ch. 10, and, again, in Newbigin's *Feste*.

²³ See Belcari, *La rappresentazione quando la nostra donna vergine Maria fu annunziata dall'Angelo Gabriello*, in Newbigin, *Feste*, II, 23–953. A later version, attributed to Belcari by D'Ancona, appears in his *Sacre Rappresentazioni dei Secoli XIV–XV e XVI*, pp. 169–81, and is reprinted in many modern anthologies. His attribution, however, has been recently questioned, see, for example, chapter 3 of Paola Ventrone's *Lo spettacolo religioso a Firenze nel Quattrocento*.

Imagine a person who had visited (however briefly) all the exciting places catalogued above, seeing things which were not only new to him, but also novelties for the vast majority of his compatriots, and which certainly had never been described before. Why would he choose to write about a mystery play, as if there were nothing worthier or more important in what he saw during these three years of travel? If one had not known what is set forth above, could one have predicted that the earliest account of such a three-year journey across western Europe would have contained a description of a theatrical performance?

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century compilations, Abraham's report is often placed among other itineraries: a late-medieval Russian scribe instinctively put his narrative into the genre category of 'travel literature'. A closer look at the text, however, demonstrates that this narrative has little in common with other representatives of the genre to which it was ascribed. Most importantly, it cannot be of any practical use to a potential traveller: there is no travel information, such as distances, the safety/perils of the routes, or places to stay or to see, or their history, or how to find them. In his account Bishop Abraham breaks new ground in Slavonic literature, producing a unique type of description. It is true that many early Itineraries would paint pictures of the places the author visited, so that the readers could contemplate the sights as if through the authors' eyes, making their own textual pilgrimage; with time, as the generic canon became fossilized, many of those eye-witness accounts gradually gave way to a more conventional set of descriptions, 'copy-pasted' from the authoritative, time-sanctified versions (often anachronistic or garbled through multiple copying) of imperfect protographs. If the idea of a virtual pilgrimage was at all present behind Abraham's writing, it was clearly not the main one.

Nothing is known about Abraham's personality and background, or why he was selected to be Isidore's Russian counterpart, so it is difficult to speculate what actually determined his choice of topic; some cautious guesses about his reasons can, however, be offered, based on his account. Not only the fact that Abraham was a bishop of a large spiritual centre, but also the style of his narrative suggests that he was well educated and well read. He certainly knew Church Slavonic and Greek literature, which was required in the curriculum for a high Church official; he also had to communicate with the Greek Isidore, who was unlikely to be fluent in medieval Russian: he would, of course, have a personal interpreter, but written Greek should have been familiar to Abraham — he could even have had some command of spoken Greek, as was apparently the case with his subordinate Simon.²⁴ He might have had some idea of Latin, but this is only a hypothesis: although he seems to have understood what was said in Italian (or Latin) during the performances — either himself or through the help of an interpreter — the cues were most certainly based on quotations from the Scriptures which he could have recognized quite easily, even though he may have been experiencing a mystery play for the first time in his life.²⁵ It is tempting to suggest that, as a distinguished guest, he could have been given a booklet with the text of the performance. No such booklet, however, has yet been discovered.²⁶

²⁴ See Lomidze, 'K voprosu o vospriiatii [...]', pp. 144, 146–48.

²⁵ Although there are no studies specifically discussing the education of medieval high clergymen in Russia before the seventeenth century, one can collect some information from various related works. As in the West, the Primer for basic reading skills was the Psalter; further reading depended on the resources of local monastic libraries, a number of which were rich indeed; learned monks could obtain permission to travel to a cathedral city or another monastery to consult or copy other books. An interesting (although somewhat disputable) case study of two fifteenth/sixteenth-century Russian scholars is Ya. S. Lurie's *Russkie sovremenniki Vozrozhdeniia*.

²⁶ One of the anonymous reviewers of this article suggested that 'Abraham was probably struggling to find words in Russian for an experience which he, as he says, had no words to express', and thinks that 'the ambiguities of the Italian he was translating' are reflected in the text: '*porte* means both gates and doors; *su* and *sopra* cover a range of on, up, over, above, that is, both stasis and kinesis'. This is an interesting suggestion, and even if a booklet did not exist, Abraham could have had an interpreter to translate oral commentaries from the Italian. However, it is worth considering that the Bishop's expressed inability to describe his theatrical experience is a standard figure of speech

Religious spectacles familiar to late-medieval Western audiences were a phenomenon entirely new and alien to the Russian (and Slavonic in general) Orthodox Church. Theatre, broadly defined, still belonged to the sphere of folklore; its natural habitat was the streets, although it would be too simplistic to say that it was predominantly a pagan concept. The Church's attitude varied at times from indifference and disdain to active hostility and prohibition. The idea of staging a drama in a church would have appeared weird and madly sacrilegious to Orthodox clergymen; in fact, it would not have occurred to them at all. Abraham, however, having witnessed a play within the walls of a church, not only refrained from labelling it as madness and heresy, but even wrote, it seems, a manual on how actually to stage a mystery play.

He carefully describes not only 'scenography', speeches and cues, gestures, scenery and décor, which character emerges from where and in what way — all in detail, but he also notes the things which would have been inaccessible for him if he had been simply one of the audience. For example, he writes about the appearance of a boy who represents Archangel Gabriel in the *Annunciation*:

His descent is carried out as follows: to his pants, in the middle of his back, are attached two wheels which are small and invisible due to the height. And those wheels are held together with two ropes, and on them, with the third very thin rope people lower him down from above and pull him back up again, all without being seen by anybody.²⁷

Here it appears likely that Abraham undertook some extra research after the performance was over, and was even allowed 'backstage' to look at the device used to manipulate the archangel.

With the other play, however, Abraham obviously was not so privileged: the description of *The Ascension* is slightly shorter and somewhat less detailed. He still tries to describe everything he saw and remembered, this time saying:

all people see through those gates of heaven a man dressed in a chasuble and a crown, in every way reflecting the likeness of the Father, held right over those gates of heaven by an intricate device [...] And it cannot be seen in any way at all, how and by what thing he is kept there — just as if he is sitting on the air.²⁸

In the last comment one can almost hear a note of nuisance and annoyance in the Bishop's voice — he cannot see the tricky mechanism, it is too high to be available for a closer examination. But even without seeing the device itself, he nevertheless tries to describe the appliances in as detailed a manner as possible, probably hoping that his skilled compatriots would be able to figure out how to reproduce the sophisticated machinery. The high quality of the mechanisms was later ascribed to Filippo Brunelleschi, who was named as the designer of the stage machinery for *The Annunciation* by Vasari more than a century after.²⁹

It is also important that the account, while being written very emotionally, bears no hostility to the Catholic Church — the same, too, is true for the *Itinerary of the Anonymous Suzdalian*. It might seem surprising, especially as one recalls that the Council of Florence was by no means a peaceful gathering, certainly not one radiating concord, brotherly love, mutual respect and understanding. But regardless

found in nearly every example of Russian itineraries, and the ambiguity of prepositions is overall typical for Church Slavonic anyway.

²⁷ 'Схождение его сице бысть: на портех среди хрепъта наряжена два колеса мала и отнюдь невидима суть высоты ради. И те колеса тех дву[х] вервей держашеся, и по них третью тончайшею вервию людие сверху пушаху и кверху возношаху, устроении ничим невидими суть'. Prokofiev, *Kniga khozhenii*, p. 154. All quotations in Slavonic from *The Annunciation* and *The Ascension* are taken from this edition.

²⁸ 'тогда узрят вси людие над враты неба того человека наряжена в ризу и венец, подобие повсему яко отец, и хитрым же устроением над самими же врата неба того держашеся сый [...]. И отнюдь же видети яко ничим держим, просто яко воздусе сядящи'. Prokofiev, ed., *Kniga khozhenii*, pp. 156–57.

²⁹ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, vol. I, part II, pp. 420–23. Whether he indeed had done so, is still open to debate, see Newbigin, 'Greasing the Wheels of Heaven'.

of theological divergences, Abraham signs the document about the Union together with Isidore, and he seems to have done so quite willingly, although Simeon the Suzdalian reports a few years later that to make Abraham sign it the Metropolitan had to imprison the Bishop for a week.³⁰ This, however, was not confirmed by any other source.³¹

Abraham's report neutrally calls the performance space *церковь*, 'a church', whereas his anonymous subordinate even while admiring the religious buildings of the West (as we saw on the instance of Santa Maria Nuova) still habitually calls them *божница*, 'a prayer house', a term allocated to 'spiritually incomplete' Catholic (and later Protestant) religious buildings — a bit less than proper (that is Orthodox) churches. However, he tends to use the word *церковь* to describe churches on the way back, presumably indicating the shift in his perception as, after the Union, their status was made equal to the ecclesiastical buildings of the Orthodox world; Abraham seems to be much more open-minded about the whole venture from the start. In recording the two religious spectacles his intent was possibly to borrow a good idea and then to realize it at home. But this idea was obviously so outrageously avant-garde, such a daring innovation, that it did not occur to anybody in Russia to try and repeat the performance, although the account was copied and read with interest, being placed amongst other Itineraries, after general and local chronicles, as items in spiritual or edifying miscellanies.³² This provides us with an insight into the reception of Abraham's text in Russia: most of the Itineraries were examples of religious interest, not geographical ones — this is why it is correct to translate the word *Хождение* as 'pilgrimage', as well as 'itinerary'. This means that late medieval scribes, following Abraham, recognized the spiritual benefit of the plays. His accounts were read, yet nobody ever attempted to stage the described performance.

This does not, however, mean that Bishop Abraham of Suzdal was too much of a pioneer and a man ahead of his time. What he saw in Florence, in fact, suited his Russian aesthetic taste very well. In Dimitry Likhachev's words:

When we speak about connections which existed between the literature and the art of medieval Russia, we should consider not only the fact that Russian medieval literature had immensely strong visual "iconicity" and that pictorial arts constantly had literary works as their themes, but also that medieval Russian illustrators worked out very skilful ways of transmitting a literary narrative. Although pictorial art is static by its nature and always depicts a certain stationary moment, it has always attempted to overcome this immobility — either aiming at creating an illusion of movement, or at narrativeness, telling a tale. Aiming at narrative was necessary for miniaturists, and they used a broad range of methods to turn the *space* of what they depicted into the *time* of the narrative.³³

Drama would best suit these requirements, overcoming the immobility of an icon, a fresco or a book miniature, and the narrativity of late-medieval Italian paintings, whose iconography influenced contemporary religious spectacles and vice versa, serve as an apt illustration of the statement. Yet with

³⁰ The accuracy of this statement was refuted as early as 1900 by Golubinskii in his influential *Istoriia Russkoi Tserkvi: Period Vtoroi Moskovskii*, II, 1, 443, n. 2.

³¹ An interesting echo of the Bishop's signature can be found in Dostoevskii's *Idiot*, which was partly written in Florence. At some point Prince Myshkin is asked to demonstrate his skill of calligraphy, and the phrase he chose to take as a sample was 'The humble Abbot Paphnutius hath set his hand hereunto'. This phrase closely correlates with Abraham's own signature under the final protocol of the Council: *Смирёный Епкп Аврамій Суждальскій подписую* ('I, humble Bishop Abraham, sign [this]'), which Dostoevskii could have seen in the Medicean Laurentian Library of Florence. Abraham's is the only Slavonic signature among the Greek ones, standing out because of its bright colour: the Russians apparently brought their own ink, which was made according to a Chinese recipe and did not fade so much.

³² On the eighteen known manuscripts and early editions of Abraham's text, see Kazakova, *Zapadnaia Evropa v russkoi pis'mennosti XV–XVI vekov*, p. 61, and the second part of the present essay.

³³ Likhachev, *Poetika*, pp. 36–37.

no tradition of liturgical drama, such as present in the contemporary western Europe, any form of theatrical event would be perceived in Russia as deeply rooted in semi-pagan folklore, in the carnivalesque, and therefore as unacceptable by the official Church.³⁴ Interestingly, the Anonymous Suzdalian noticed in a monastery in Lübeck 'an extraordinary marvel, indescribable and incomprehensible' — a scene of the Adoration of the Magi, most probably a mechanical puppet-show, or a clock with figures. He, however, does not make an attempt to understand how the design works, but simply registers it in his account with great astonishment. A reader accustomed to descriptions of relics, physical remains or reminders of the events of the sacred history, felt perplexed while witnessing their real-life re-enactments — both of them in material form rather than as spiritual meditations, and outside of an immediately liturgical context.

Yet the indirect influence of Abraham's 'staging manual' can be found in the only example of what could at least remotely be compared to liturgical drama in Russia. A number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources (the period in which most of the known copies of Abraham's account had been produced) refer to the 'Burning Fiery Furnace' performance which usually took place in major Russian cathedrals (such as Moscow, Novgorod, or Vologda) on the last Sunday before Christmas as a part of the Matins.³⁵ This ritual commemorated the miraculous rescue of three Jewish youths by the angel from fire (Book of Daniel, ch. 3), which was a standard subject of parts of the regular Canon sung at the Matins, but on this occasion the singing was accompanied by a brief performance.³⁶ A large wooden model of a furnace was made inside of the church (the earliest known example is that mentioned to be built for Novgorod's St Sophia in 1553), surrounded by numerous candles and oil-lamps, over which floated a double-sided life-size image of an angel, painted on parchment and suspended on the hook normally used for the chandelier. This angel was lowered into the furnace, with 'thunder and lightning', at the climax of the action. The 'actors' consisted of the three youths (Hannaniah, Mishael and Azariah), dressed in long white tunics and surplices, with cast brass halos; their teacher, a member of lesser clergy, who performed the technical tasks of dressing the youths up and binding/unbinding them; and two Chaldeans (Babylonian retainers of King Nebuchadnezzar), wearing short red garments and conical hats trimmed with fur. Adam Olearius, a German visitor to Muscovy in the 1630s, compared their outfits with those of western European carnival fools.³⁷ The Chaldeans, played by hired professional entertainers, not only supplied a boisterous dialogue in colloquial Russian (in contrasted with the more liturgically worded cues of the three youths) but also provided some special effects such as waving gilded palm branches and blowing burning moss smoke ('*plavun* grass') out of iron pipes into the furnace and over the spectators.

The rite itself is known from Byzantium and is mentioned, for instance, by Ignatius, a Russian cleric from Smolensk visiting Constantinople in 1389,³⁸ or by Symeon, Archbishop of Thessaloniki in the early fifteenth century (by the latter in the context of a severe critique of precisely the same kind of *sacre rappresentazioni* which so appealed to Abraham).³⁹ The Greek version of it, however, was

³⁴ *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. by Leach and Borovsky, p. 19.

³⁵ For a detailed account of the performance see Evreinov, *Istoriia russkogo teatra*, pp. 50–58. A comparable study in English is found in Miloš Velimirović, 'Liturgical Drama in Byzantium and Russia', pp. 365–84. An easily-accessible re-enactment of part of the performance, although with some artistic licence, is found in part II of Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1945): <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEfDe4fvfFA>> [accessed 1 October 2013].

³⁶ On the musical side of the ritual see Terentieva, *Peschnoe deistvo: muzykal'naja tekstologija i rekonstrukcija*.

³⁷ See Adam Olearius, *The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth-Century Russia*, pp. 241–42, and also Fletcher, *Of the Russe Common Wealth*, pp. 105–06.

³⁸ See Prokofiev, ed., *Kniga knozhdenii*, pp. 103, 281. An English translation and commentaries are found in Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, pp. 100, 233–34.

³⁹ See transcription and translation in White, 'The Artifice of Eternity', Appendix 6: Archbishop Symeon's *Dialogue in Christ*, pp. 248–53 <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/91176916/70/Appendix-7-The-Russian-Furnace>>

nowhere near as spectacular, although it implied the presence of a stage-like furnace, three children, some lamps, and an 'icon' of the angel. The Chaldeans, providing the main action and the comic relief, were lacking altogether.⁴⁰ Ignatius of Smolesk, who is always keen to record anything unusual, was apparently unimpressed, mentioning the ritual held in Hagia Sophia in passing.⁴¹ Neither was Bertrandon de la Broquière, a spy for Philip the Good of Burgundy, who stayed in Constantinople in 1432 (he was more interested in the looks of the Empress, 'une tresbelle dame').⁴² The use of the paraliturgical setting, of the vernacular, and of the hired professionals, as well as of the sufficiently complex machinery (the large furnace which required annual assembly in front of the rood screen and the removal of the pulpit, the mechanism to lower the angel into the furnace, the provision for thunder and lightning, hundreds of oil lamps or candles, supplies of fire powder, special pipes to blow out large clouds of thick smoke) all these suggest that perhaps Abraham's account was indeed read as a staging guide and applied to the only existing ritual, suitably sanctified by time and its Byzantine origin, which allowed for theatrical development.⁴³ In fact, the theatre historian N. Evreinov who studied the ritual in detail, suggested in his 1925 monograph that Abraham's description of the angel from the *Annunciation* performance 'undoubtedly influenced the mechanics of the Russian spectacle of *The Burning Fiery Furnace*' — the hypothesis repeated by Velimirović years later.⁴⁴

It appears as if in Abraham's retinue there was a distribution of literary labour: the Anonymous Suzdalian was responsible for a non-ideological, unbiased travel journal, while Simeon of Suzdal had to think about ideological interpretation of the Council, which would have been possible only after the Court of the Great Prince and the high clergy expressed their official opinions about the Union (which is why Simeon's account is written later and sometimes is not very concerned with historical accuracy). This left the Bishop free from any official literary commission and he could pick up any subject he liked to write about in a suitably informal way. Due to the reasons suggested above, and perhaps thanks to his personal interest in mechanics and visual effects, Bishop Abraham chose to write about mystery plays. Until the 1630s his work was the only example of Russian literature which described a theatrical performance in detail; secular theatre in Russia did not start until the late seventeenth century.⁴⁵

Play> [accessed 1 October 2013].

⁴⁰ On the Byzantine service of the Furnace see also Lingas, 'Late Byzantine Cathedral Liturgy and the Service of the Furnace', and White, 'Late Byzantine Cathedral Liturgy', pp. 179–215.

⁴¹ 'On the Sunday before Christmas I saw how the "Furnace of the Three Children" is performed in St Sophia. It was after the patriarch had reverently celebrated the holy liturgy in all hierarchical dignity' (*Russian Travelers*, p. 100).

⁴² 'Je veiz un jour ledit patriarche faire le service à leur maniere auquel estoient l'Empereur, sa mere, sa femme qui estoit une tresbelle dame, fille de l'empereur de Trapezonde, et son frere qui estoit dispot de la Mourée. Je attendi tout le jour pour veoir leur maniere de faire, et firent un mistere de trios enfans que Nabuchodonosor fist mettre en la fournaise' (Bertrandon de la Broquière, *Le Voyage d'Outremer*, pp. 154–55). White translates the passage as follows: "I went one day to see the patriarch celebrate services in their manner; there were the Emperor, his mother, his wife (who was a beautiful woman), daughter of the Emperor of Trapezond, and his son who was despot of Morea. I watched all day to see how they do and produce the mystery of the three children that Nebuchadnezzar threw into the furnace" ('The Artifice of Eternity', p. 157).

⁴³ An English Elizabethan visitor, Giles Fletcher, sceptically remarked on the conservative nature of the performance: 'the same matter played each year without any new invention at all' (quoted in Leach and Borovsky, *A History of Russian Theatre*, p. 27).

⁴⁴ *Istoriia russkogo teatra*, p. 53; 'Liturgical Drama', p. 374.

⁴⁵ Leach and Borovsky, *A History of Russian Theatre*, p. 41. The aftermath of the Italian visit also contributed to the development of stone architecture in late medieval Russia: when Ivan III (1440–1505), the first ruler who could seriously claim supremacy over most of the Russian lands, decided to rebuild his city of Moscow in a style which would be suitable for the capital of a superstate, he summoned Italian architects to take charge of the renovation. His wife, Zoë (Sophia) Paleologos (c. 1440–1503), was a niece of the last Byzantine Emperor Constantine, whose brother Thomas, like many Greeks of that time, found refuge in Italy. As he died soon after his arrival, his children, including Zoë, were left in residence at the papal Curia, the Pope being their official guardian. The Princess brought with her a

Manuscripts, Editions, and Translations of Bishop Abraham of Suzdal's Travels

As has already been mentioned, the Bishop's account consists of two parts and was preserved in nineteen manuscripts, of which, however, only fifteen are currently known to exist in their manuscript form; the other four are either mentioned but lost, or printed but later lost. The manuscripts (as well as the early editions) do not necessarily contain both parts of the text, or place them one after the other. The list of the manuscripts and their tentative stemma are provided as Appendix 2 of this article.

The connection between the two descriptions is certain: the first concludes by saying: 'Here is a marvellous sight and a cunning doing we saw in the city called Florenze'; the second begins in a similar fashion with 'Here is yet another most marvellous sight we saw in the same most famous city of Florentie'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in an early copy of the *Travels*, MS Pogodin 1571, the Annunciation piece is followed by the Ascension, in which there are references to the first fragment:

In the middle of this church there is a similar arrangement as in the previously described one. But that one is the church of Annunciation and is in a monastery which is outside the city, whereas this one is the church of Ascension in town.⁴⁷

In the same manuscript both fragments are fused into one narrative. This copy seems to be the closest to the original plan, not only because it contains both descriptions without interruption, but also because of it being the second part of a manuscript, which also contained the *Itinerary of the Anonymous Suzdalian* as its first part (now bound into a volume of a dozen miscellaneous items by different scribes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). This copy was made after 1552, as suggested by the watermark.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the manuscript is incomplete as it breaks off very soon after the beginning of the Ascension section.

As the extant manuscripts demonstrate, the readers were more fascinated by the description of the Annunciation, the minuteness and animation of which are apparently explained by the Bishop's access to behind the scenes and close examination of machinery. The *Annunciation* redaction is preserved in thirteen (fifteen) copies as opposed to five (six) of the *Ascension*.⁴⁹ However, another reason for the second text enjoying lesser popularity may well be to the fact that it had lost its ending fairly early in its transmission history, certainly by the 1550s, and the only complete version of the account is to be found in a copy from the far North of Russia written out in 1717.⁵⁰

Of all the existing manuscripts, only three are collections of works describing the Council of Ferrara and Florence, containing either the *Itinerary of the Anonymous Suzdalian* (three MSS)⁵¹ or Simeon's *A*

retinue of Greeks and Italians, as well as imperial ambitions. These soon found their ideological expression in a theory of Moscow being the third, and final, Rome (the first and the second being correspondingly Rome and Constantinople), the stronghold of Christianity and the City of God. During his reign Ivan III sent at least ten diplomatic missions to Italy in order to invite architects, jewellers, silversmiths, artists, and craftsmen to Moscow. Thus the third Rome began acquiring suitable paraphernalia, outfitting herself for this role, generously mixing Russian, Byzantine, and Italian architectural ingredients. Between 1475 and 1508 most of the late medieval buildings of the Moscow Kremlin were designed by Italians, and consequently a number of Italian architectural details became widely used in Russia during the following century, such as the 'swallow-tail' tops for castle walls, or distinctly 'Renaissance' stylized shells.

⁴⁶ Popov, *Istoriko-literaturnyi obzor*, p. 406.

⁴⁷ GPB Pogodin 1571, fol. 88v.

⁴⁸ See Briquet, *Les Filigranes*, no. 11973.

⁴⁹ *Annunciation*: {Novikov (lost), Popov (lost?)}, Synod 272 (apparently lost or a mistake); CGADA 591; CGADA 13/14; BAN text. post. 496; BAN Celepi 50; Pogodin 1952, Pogodin 1571; GPB F. XVII. 38; GPB Q. I. 788; Troitskii 801, Zabelin 419, Zabelin 451; Uvarov 1547. *Ascension*: {Tikhonravov (lost)}, BL Cotton Vitellius F.x, BAN text. post. 496; Pogodin 1571, Pogodin 1572; GPB Q. XVII. 321. See Appendix 2 for more details.

⁵⁰ BAN text. post. 496, see Appendix 2, item 11.

⁵¹ Troitskii 801, Pogodin 1571, and 1572.

History of the Eighth Council (two MSS).⁵² However, at least six copies of the *Travels* are situated in the compilations containing either Pilgrimage/Itinerary texts, or examples of travel literature discussing accounts of marvels and unknown lands and peoples, which clearly demonstrate the reception of the Bishop's work as that of the 'exotic travel' genre.

Bishop Abraham of Suzdal's Travels or their fragments were published in Church Slavonic several times — first by a famous figure of the Russian Enlightenment, Nicholas Novikov, who printed the *Annunciation* fragment from a now-lost manuscript in 1791.⁵³ Later Vostokov published fragments of *Ascension* (not being able to identify the subject while correctly suggesting that those were related to the Novikov's edition) transcribed from the much-damaged Cottonian version (London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius F.x) in 1842.⁵⁴ After thirty-odd years Tikhonravov printed a fragment of the *Ascension* (without realizing that it was the same play as described in Vostokov's edition) from an unknown manuscript of the mid-seventeenth century.⁵⁵ About the same time, A. Popov edited the *Annunciation* from a copy in his collection (now lost), also using Novikov's edition and a seventeenth-century manuscript (Synod Collection 272).⁵⁶ Finally, after almost a century, the most recent edition was published by Prokofiev in 1970. Although the editor claimed to have used some fourteen manuscripts and previously printed versions, a number of his readings indicate that proper collation was never undertaken.⁵⁷ This edition did not take into account five important copies (kept mostly in Moscow) and contains a number of mistakes due to the editor's misunderstanding of the original text. In 1979 N. A. Kazakova, a specialist who previously edited the *Itinerary of the Anonymous Suzdalian*, published a review of the known manuscripts of the *Travels* as a prolegomenon to her own edition, which apparently was never completed.⁵⁸

Unfortunately for such an important historical source, the *Travels* has never been adequately translated into any modern language. In an open letter to his friend, Alessandro D'Ancona, a specialist in Italian theatre, the renowned scholar Alexandre Wesselovsky produced a German translation of Popov and Tikhonravov's editions in 1877,⁵⁹ but as both editions were imperfect, this translation, too, was incomplete. D'Ancona, in turn, translated Wesselovsky's German text into Italian and published it in the second edition of his monograph,⁶⁰ not only accumulating Chinese whispers type slips, but also making the text sound extremely Renaissance.⁶¹ The snowball effect of the three interpreters' flights of fancy reached its peak in the English translation of D'Ancona's version by Orville K. Larson in *Educational Theatre Journal*, which made some fragments of the text totally unrecognizable.⁶² The same can be said about the much-abbreviated version published in Joseph Spencer Kennard's *The*

⁵² Zabelin 451 and Celepi 50.

⁵³ Novikov, *Drevniaia Rossiiskaia Vivliothika*, pp. 178–85.

⁵⁴ Vostokov, *Opisanie Russkikh i Slavianskikh Rukopisei Rumiancevskogo Muzeuma*, pp. 338–39.

⁵⁵ Tikhonravov, 'Novyi otryvok iz putevykh zapisok suzdal'skogo episkopa Avraamiia', pp. 37–40.

⁵⁶ Popov, *Istoriko-literaturnyi obzor*, pp. 399–406.

⁵⁷ Prokofiev, 'Russkie khozhdeniia XII–XV vv.', pp. 205–08, 254–56; reproduced without the apparatus in his *Kniga khozhdenii*, pp. 152–61. If he had really used so many manuscripts, and particularly Popov's edition, many of the mistakes he made in his rendering of the text could have been avoided. For instance, he translates '(po)most' as 'bridge' instead of 'platform', or 'half of the three *sazbens*' as '2.5 *sazbens*'.

⁵⁸ Kazakova, "Iskhozhdenie" Avraamiia Suzdal'skogo. Spiski i redakcii', pp. 55–66.

⁵⁹ Wesselofsky, 'Italienische Mysterien', pp. 425–44.

⁶⁰ D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, I, 246–53.

⁶¹ Examples are listed in Danilova, 'Prazdnik blagovescheniia v cerkvi Santissima Annunziata vo Florencii (1439) glazami Avraamiia Suzdal'skogo', pp. 168–69.

⁶² Larson, 'Bishop Abraham of Souzal's Description of Sacre Rappresentazioni', pp. 208–13.

Italian Theatre.⁶³ Eventually, Wesselovsky's and D'Ancona's renditions were once again employed in the 1983 *Staging of Religious Drama in Europe*.⁶⁴

In 1976 a Latin translation with parallel Slavonic text was published in *Acta Slavica Concilii Florentini*,⁶⁵ compiled from Popov's edition and MS Pogodin 1571 (called 'no. 19' in *Acta*), the earliest manuscript to contain both accounts; however, this copy is corrupt and incomplete, as was pointed out above. Besides, the Pogodin manuscript was only used for the *Annunciation* version. For the *Ascension* a French translation was used, made in 1876 from Tikhonravov's edition by J. Dumouchel and published as 'Nouveau fragment de l'itinéraire d'Abraham, évêque de Souzdal'.⁶⁶ The Latin version printed in the *Acta* finally made Bishop Abraham submit to the scholastic niceties of Augustinian and Thomist speech, but did not render the text better than any of the others. Ironically, even the modern Russian translation of the best edition so far, by Prokofiev, is not devoid of mistakes, as the Communist-era translator sometimes failed to recognize (or pretended to have failed to recognize) a number of liturgical and New Testament quotations in the original.⁶⁷

In a recent collection of documents on the history of medieval European theatre,⁶⁸ the translation of Bishop Abraham's account on the Florentine plays is reprinted from *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe*, which was, as noted above, once again made from the nineteenth-century Italian and German editions. Moreover, the editor of the section, Michael J. Anderson, says in his introduction: 'Russian manuscript of the diary of Archbishop Abramo of Souzdal (now lost)'⁶⁹ — a very ill-informed remark about a work extant in at least eighteen early editions and manuscripts, one of which is deposited in the British Library. The most accurate version is found in Nerida Newbigin's *Feste d'Oltrarno*:⁷⁰ she produced a new English version using the Slavonic text and translations, supplied in Krajcar's *Acta Slavica Concilii Florentini* (see above), collating it with Wesselovsky's German and Dumouchel/Tikhonravov's French translations and relying on advice from assistants familiar with Church Slavonic. This project, again, was using imperfect sources (particularly in the case of *Ascension*, which stops mid-sentence and is also missing two paragraphs in the middle), and sometimes required a significant conjectural effort.⁷¹ Finally, in the absence of a proper translation to a western language, Paola Ventrone had to argue the correctness of her hypothesis that the *Annunciation festa* was staged at the Dominican convent of San Marco⁷² — a fact which at least two versions of the Slavonic text state explicitly.⁷³

⁶³ Kennard, *The Italian Theatre*, I, 51–53.

⁶⁴ Meredith and Tailby, *Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 23.

⁶⁵ *Acta Slavica Concilii Florentini, Narrationes et documenta*, pp. 114–21.

⁶⁶ 'Nouveau Fragment De L'itinéraire D'abraham, Évêque De Souzdal (1439)', pp. 22–26.

⁶⁷ Prokofiev, *Kniga khozhenii*, pp. 333–42. For example, he translates Christ's words to Peter, based on Matthew 16. 18 ('Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'), as 'Thou, Peter, build upon this rock my church; and the gates of hell are not separated from it' (p. 341).

⁶⁸ Tydeman, ed., *The Medieval European Stage, 500–1550*, pp. 454–59.

⁶⁹ *Theatre in Europe*, p. 454. A number of other recent works seem to employ the translations made from incomplete versions of Bishop Abraham's account, e.g. Plaisance, *Florence in the Time of the Medici*, p. 49, or Phillips-Court, *The Perfect Genre*, pp. 36–37.

⁷⁰ Newbigin, *Feste: Annunciation*, pp. 3–7; *Ascension*, pp. 60–63.

⁷¹ For example, a difficult phrase accompanying Jesus's gift of a sword to an apostle ('From this, by my name, you will not receive any harm') is interpreted in as 'No harm will come to you from it if you use it in my name' (*Feste*, p. 62), thus implying that the use of weapon is justified if it is done in the name of Christianity — a meaning which is not present in the original utterance.

⁷² Ventrone, "Una vision miracolosa e indicibile", pp. 43–44.

⁷³ MSS Troitskii 801 or Pogodin 1571. There is an ongoing debate about the location of the *Annunciation festa*,

Now it is time to correct all the injustice done to such an interesting text as *Bishop Abraham of Suzdal's Travels*, an important source for both theatre scholars and those interested in Slavonic studies. I hope that the information provided above explains the need for this literal translation of the *Travels* into English directly from Church Slavonic.⁷⁴

Appendix 1: Bishop Abraham of Suzdal's Travels

I (Annunciation)

In the land of Fryaz (Italy) in the city of Florence a certain ingenious man born Fryazin (Italian) made a deed, cunning and wondrous, for many people to marvel at: [an imitation] in image and likeness in every way of the descent from Heaven of Archangel Gabriel in Nazareth to the maiden Maria in order to announce the conception of the only-begotten Son of God. This is how it was.⁷⁵

In a certain monastery of that city there is a sizeable (lit. 'no small') church in the name of our most pure [Lady] the Mother of God. In this church, diagonally over the front door at the very top, at the height of about seven *sazhens*,⁷⁶ there is an equilateral place, each of its sides measuring one and a half *sazhens*, with a small and intricate staircase leading to it, and this place and the staircase are concealed with curtains. Here it is made in a likeness of celestial spheres, whence Archangel Gabriel was sent from [God] the Father to the Virgin. In the same place, at the top, is made a throne, and on this throne there sits a dignified man, dressed in a chasuble and a crown, in every way reflecting the likeness of the Father, holding a gospel book in his left hand. A multitude of little children are suspended around him and at his feet through an intricate device, that is to say, to depict the Heavenly Powers. Surrounding that throne, amongst the children and around the Father there are over five hundred candles, and this is made exceedingly marvellous.⁷⁷ It is all arranged high above behind the curtains.

which by 1445 was identified with San Felice in Piazza; the extant records and accounts of two other possible sites, San Marco and the Santissima Annunziata, contain no evidence that the performance took place there. In the case of the *Ascension*, Abraham simply gives the name of the feast to the church, which in fact is Santa Maria del Carmine. He could have done the same for the *Annunciation*, calling it a church 'in the name of our most pure [Lady] the Mother of God'. An extra difficulty arises with the word 'monastery': Orthodox Christianity has no concept of friars and it is not clear whether Abraham meant a monastery or a convent. See also Newbigin, *Feste*, pp. 7–13, 47ff.

⁷⁴ The base text used for the translations derives from Prokofiev's edition, with necessary emendations used to correct a number of mistakes and misunderstanding; the *Annunciation* text is collated against Popov's edition and MS Troitskii 801 (from the seventeenth century) and *Ascension* against the fragments found in Cotton Vitellius F.x (second half of the sixteenth century). It is important to stress the oral nature of the text: it frequently uses 'пекше' ('that is to say') or other similar *dicti*, and employs colloquial syntax (which is often reflected in the translation), suggesting dictation in real time as the performance unfolded.

⁷⁵ Troitskii 801 instead: 'We have seen in a town called Florenza, in the monastery church of the holy apostle and evangelist Mark: a certain cunning man born Fryazin made, for many people to marvel at, a deed cunning and wondrous' (fol. 169^v).

⁷⁶ It is not entirely clear what a *sazhen* is in terms of modern measurements: medieval Russian *sazhens* could be anything between c. 1.4 and 2.8 m. The most probable type used for quick measurements in Abraham's time was a *makhovaia sazhen* ('span *sazhen*') — the distance between the tips of the fingers of the spread arms, approximately 1.78 m (at one point some MSS specify the use of 'long *sazhens*'). Professor Newbigin, superimposing Abraham's measurements on Santa Maria del Carmine, surmised that what is transcribed as a *sazhen* is a unit of measurement approximately equivalent to 0.9 m, that is, a pace or a yard. She furthermore suggested the 'the symbol or abbreviation for the 'foreign' unit of measurement could well have been corrupted by the Russian copyist' (*Feste*, p. 9). Although the equivalent of 0.91 m/*sazhen* overall corresponds with the measurements of the Carmine, where *Ascension* most probably took place, I could not find examples in Old Russian literature of a *sazhen* being as short as 0.91 m, nor of scribes using a specific symbol to signify it.

⁷⁷ Amended from Troitskii 801, fols 170^v–171^r. Prokofiev's edition instead have 'And another [thing] is made exceedingly marvellous'.

In the same place, there are twenty-five long *sazhens* between the above-mentioned doors⁷⁸ and the middle of the church. In this space a stone platform (i. e. rood screen) is made from one wall to the other, on stone pillars, three *sazhens* high and one and a half *sazhens* wide. And this platform is all lined with beautiful fabric. Upon this lined place on the left-hand side there is a bed with magnificent lordly bedding and blankets. Most wonderful and rich cushions are laid at the head of this bed.⁷⁹ In this great and marvellous place there sits a prudent⁸⁰ young man, dressed in rich and most wonderful maiden robes and a diadem. In his hands he holds a book and reads silently, everything in his appearance looking like he were the most pure Virgin Mary herself.

Also on the same platform there are four people, dressed up with long beards and with the hair of their heads lying over their shoulders; they wear diadems, small and blue, and every one of them has a gilded circle (i.e. halo) fastened over their hair, and the robes upon their shoulders are simple and uncouth, like long, white and broad girdled undershirts. Over these [tunics] each of them has a small red aer (cloth) put over their right shoulder on to the left — not for decoration.⁸¹ In all [is seen that] they are dressed to resemble prophets.

And all this arrangement is covered over, like the abovementioned upper place, with precious Italian woollen fabrics and beautiful curtains. From that abovementioned upper place through this stone platform there are five thin and strong ropes, made to run all the way down to the very altar. Two of them are made to go past next to that [boy] dressed up as the Pure Virgin. Upon the same rope the angel, with the help of the third, very thin one, comes down when sent by the Father with the good tidings [lit. with the Annunciation]; having descended from Him, he then ascends back with joy. Meanwhile three thin ropes run right through the middle of that platform.⁸²

At an appointed time people gather to see this great and marvellous deed. And that large church is filled with a multitude of folk, and, after a short delay, they grow silent, looking up, in the direction of that platform erected in the middle of the church. And very soon in that place all curtains and fabrics are opened, and all people see that one dressed up, that is the most pure Virgin Mary, seated on the aforementioned marvellous place, arranged by the bed. This sight is beautiful and marvellous to see, and also touching and filled with completely unutterable joy. Then on the same platform appear the aforementioned four people, who are dressed up as the images of the prophets. Holding in their hands various scriptures, telling the ancient prophecies concerning the descent from Heaven of the Son of

⁷⁸ Popov and Troitskii 801 instead have 'front doors'.

⁷⁹ This in fact could have been a *Strycsitten*, a medieval bench with a turnable back-rest popular in western Europe in the fifteenth century and usually depicted as adorned with cushions, particularly in Flemish and French Marian paintings: see, for example, *Mary Reading by the Fireplace* from the Merode Altarpiece by Robert Campin (New York, Metropolitan Museum, c. 1422), or *Annunciation* by Jacquet Daret, again, c. 1422, in Koninklijke Museum in Brussels. The closest Italian examples are the *Annunciation* from the Palazzo Doria in Rome (between 1439 and 1458) by Filippo Lippi, but with no cushions, and, to a certain extent, the fourteenth-century Annunciation fresco of the Florentine Santissima Annunziata (with one cushion) and its derivatives. The northern influence is not surprising, given close connections between Florence and Flanders: see F. Ames-Lewis, 'Fra Filippo Lippi and Flanders'; also cited in Newbigin, *Feste*, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Popov and Troitskii 801 instead have 'good-looking'.

⁸¹ Popov and Troitskii 801 contain an extra piece at this point, corrupted in transmission: 'not for decoration, but [they] take their loose(?) [bits of] garments and tuck them underneath(?); each of them holding his [cloth's] brim by its tip'.

⁸² Regarding the absence of the graphic depiction of the descent of the dove of the Holy Spirit in this episode, Newbigin implies that it may be because the *filioque* question was still unresolved by the Council of Florence at the moment of the spectacle, pointing out that in a later play by Belcari the Son was placed next to the Father at the origin of the angelic mission. However, another reason may be that the early plays, as she argues, took place not on 25 March but on Easter Monday (*Feste*, p. 21); traditionally, it is believed that Christ himself dwells on earth between Easter and Pentecost and, in the liturgy, prayers to the Holy Spirit are replaced by Easter hymns to Christ (as practised in the Orthodox Christian church even today); so no mention of the Holy Spirit immediately after Easter can be explained by this liturgical practice.

God and concerning the Incarnation, they start striding along the platform to and fro, each of them looking at his scripture and pointing up with his right hand to each other in the direction of that arranged and enclosed space above, whence, that is to say, will come the salvation to the gentiles. And one tells another, looking at his writing, whence God will come,⁸³ and they start arguing with each other, tearing up their writings, casting them down as false. And after that, running fast, they grab their scriptures and, coming up to the edge of the platform, bow to each other, looking at one another's writings, and each beating on them with their hands, pointing hither and thither. One tells whence God will come to recover the lost sheep, and others say something else. And so they compete with each other about half an hour.

While they are disputing, lo, soon the curtains above are opened and from that place cannon thunder is emitted, to imitate the heavenly thunder. Because of this thunder these prophets, together with their scriptures, quickly become invisible. Now in that upper place the venerable Father can be seen, and around him, as it has been written before, there are over five hundred lit candles. And these burning candles are constantly moving about, quickly descending and clashing, some moving up, others going down towards them.⁸⁴ Also, around the Father there are little children in white robes, that is to say, the Heavenly Powers, singing,⁸⁵ and some beating the cymbals, others playing fiddles and pipes. In every way this spectacle is marvellous and joyful and impossible to express in its fullness.

After a short while from that very same upper [platform] the angel appears from the Father, descending on these two abovementioned ropes down to the Virgin to announce the conception of the Son of God. That angel is represented by a handsome and curly boy, his garment being white as snow and decorated with gold all over, and he has his angelic stole over his neck; his wings are gilded, and in all his appearance he is like a painted image of an angel of God. Coming down on these ropes and singing in a quiet voice, he stands before [her] sweetly, like a [real] angel. In his hand he has a beautiful branch, that is to say, that of a date palm tree.⁸⁶ His descent is carried out as follows: to his pants,⁸⁷ in the middle of his back, are attached two wheels which are small and invisible due to the height. And those wheels are held together with two ropes, and on them, with the third very thin rope people lower him down from above and pull him back up again, all without being seen by anybody. And this marvellous arrangement is wondrous to see even to the elderly and the noble, [as] everything is decorated with gold.

Let us now return to the original [account]. As the angel comes down on these ropes in front of the Virgin, he immediately turns his face to her, having in his hand the already-mentioned beautiful branch, and starts saying to her thus, in a sweet and gentle voice: 'Rejoice, Maria, blessed art thou among women, for thou hast obtained grace from God, and thou shalt conceive in thy womb a Son, the Word of God, and give him birth and call him Jesus. And he will save his people from their sins' [Luke 1. 31]. She then, rising promptly, replies to him with doubt⁸⁸ in a quiet maidenly voice: 'Oh young man, how darest thou approach my threshold and enter hither? And thou speakest unthinkable words: thou hast said that it is for God to dwell in me and to be incarnate in my womb, and I cannot believe these words since I am yet unwed and know no husband [Luke 1. 34]. Therefore, leave, O

⁸³ Popov and Troitskii 801 has instead 'God will come from the South': cf. Habakkuk 3. 3.

⁸⁴ Troitskii has instead: 'In the same place is seen the Father, seated on the throne, dignified and marvellous and formidable — in every way reflecting the likeness of the Father'.

⁸⁵ Popov instead has: 'some standing, some beating in cymbals'.

⁸⁶ Popov supplies the original Greek term in the footnote: 'βραβειον'.

⁸⁷ Popov: 'his rear'; Troitskii 801: 'at his rear, on his pants'.

⁸⁸ Popov and Troitskii 801: 'with terror'.

young man, so that Joseph does not see thee speaking to me in my abode, else he will smite off thy head with an axe.⁸⁹ So I pray thee, be gone, otherwise he will cast me out of his house as well'.

He, seeing her so scared, says: 'Maria, fear not! I am Archangel Gabriel⁹⁰ sent from God to announce the conception of the Son of God, and do believe my words that such conception is without seed, for the Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the Most High will overshadow thee' [Luke 1. 35].

She, looking up and seeing the Father seated on the throne with much power and glory and sending her his blessing, puts her hand to her breast and says to him with humility: 'Lo, handmaiden of God, be it unto me according to thy word' [Luke 1. 38]. The Angel gives her the beautiful branch that he has brought with him and goes back up. She then, having received the news from the angel, stands and looks up at the ascending angel.

While the angel is going up, at the same time from above, where the Father is, fire emerges with great noise and unceasing thunder down on the afore-mentioned ropes to the middle of that platform where the prophets were standing. And the same fire goes back up again and then quickly comes down from above; because of this circulation [of the fire] and due to the claps of thunder the whole church is filled with sparks. The angel meanwhile is going to the very top, rejoicing and waving his hands hither and thither, and moving his wings. It is clearly and plainly seen that he is really flying. The fire then starts descending abundantly from that upper place, pelting all over the church with great and frightening rumble. And many of the unlit candles in that church are lit with that fire, while neither the people watching, nor their clothes (lit. pants) suffer any damage. Marvellous and frightening is this sight.

The angel then returns to his place whence he came, and the fire stops, and the curtains are closed as they were before. This marvellous sight and ingenious doing we saw in the city called Florence, and as far as I could comprehend it with my limited wit, so have I described this spectacle.⁹¹ It is impossible to describe otherwise, because it is most wondrous and unutterable. Amen.

II (Ascension)

In the same most famous town of Florence⁹² in the church of Ascension of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, on Thursday of the sixth week after the Easter, the Latins observe that same high festival [that is, the Ascension], and commemorate according to the ancient [tradition] how our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven to the Father with glory on the fortieth day. This is how it was.

That church is made long in size, because it is eighty⁹³ *sazhens* from its front wall to the choir (or 'to the altar', Russian 'altar'), while in width it is twenty⁹⁴ *sazhens*. The choir of that church is fifteen *sazhens* long, while in the width it is ten *sazhens*. And in the middle of this church there is a similar [platform], just as in the previously described Church [of the Annunciation], yet the Church of the Annunciation and its monastery are outside the town, while this Church of the Ascension is in town.

⁸⁹ Far from being a Bluebeard-like attribute, the axe here is a symbol of Joseph's profession as a carpenter, see Robert Campin's *Mérode Altarpiece* (1427), now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; it often appears in medieval Western iconography of the Flight into Egypt, from a Romanesque capital in the church of Saint-Pierre de Rucqueville near Bayeux (with Joseph carrying an axe on his shoulder) to Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of c. 1501–02 (with Joseph at work with an axe). I am grateful to Marjorie Burghart, Université Lumière Lyon 2, for the last reference.

⁹⁰ Amended from Popov; Prokofiev instead: 'Archangel Gabriel is sent [...]'.
⁹¹ Popov and Troitskii 801 add: 'which I have seen'.

⁹² Cotton instead: 'There is another most wondrous spectacle we have seen in the same most eminent city Florentia', fol. 151v.

⁹³ Amended from Cotton; Prokofiev's edition has '30'.

⁹⁴ Amended from cotton; Prokofiev's edition has '70'.

Its platform is made of stone, on stone pillars. This platform is arranged to be four *sazhens* high and twenty *sazhens* wide. On the left hand side of that platform there is built a small town of stone, exceedingly marvellous, with towers and walls, in the name of the holy city of Jerusalem. Opposite this town by the first wall there is made a hill one and a half *sazhens* high; from it steps are built approximately two hand-spans high from the ground. And this mountain is draped with beautiful cloths, and above this tall mountain, about eight *sazhens* high, is arranged a platform of wooden planks, with each side measuring four *sazhens*, also adorned in various ways, panelled with boards on all sides, and decorated exceedingly wonderfully with Italian-style paintings underneath and on either side.

In the middle of that platform a big round hole has been made, about two *sazhens* in diameter, covered with blue cloth. On that cloth there is a painting of the sun and the crescent, with many stars around them: this is made to imitate in everything the first celestial sphere. This circle is, that is to say, heaven, and the previous [structure] is also made to represent heaven.⁹⁵ It opens up on two sides at the top, that is to say, as the celestial gates are opened, and then all people see through those gates of heaven a man dressed in a chasuble and a crown, in every way reflecting the likeness of the Father, held right over those gates of heaven by an intricate device. He is looking down towards the Mount of Olives, at his Son and the Most Pure [Virgin] and the apostles, sending them a blessing with his hand. And it cannot be seen in any way at all, how and by what thing he is kept there — just as if he is sitting on the air. Around him there is a multitude of little children, to represent the heavenly powers, with pipes and psalteries and great rattle. Among them there is a multitude of burning candles. Also around the Father and those little children upon that large opening, that is to say, heaven, a parchment disc is made, with one [bottom] side attached to the opening⁹⁶ and the other attached at its top. And on this disc there are paintings of angels, the size of a human being. From the top through this heaven down to the aforementioned Mountain of Olives there go seven strong ropes with intricate and incomprehensible swivels. To these a young man is attached, in the name of (i.e. to represent) Christ, wishing to ascend into heaven to the Father.

Above the same⁹⁷ altar, under the church ceiling, there is a stone chamber attached to the wall of the altar, square, with its sides measuring three *sazhens* each, separated from the church with a red curtain; on that curtain there are made the sun and the crescent and the stars in gold, and behind the curtain in that chamber, just as we have seen in the previous spectacle, there is made a throne, and around⁹⁸ that throne there is a multitude of little children held by an intricate device, that is to say, to represent the cherubim. On them the sovereign throne is resting, and next to it and to the children there are seven circles, as if they were wheels, the smallest measuring two cubits from side to side, and [each] next one two spans bigger.

And near these seven wheels there are over a thousand oil lamps burning. And on the large circle between those lights in four parts sit, one by one, little children, dressed in robes and diadems, like angels, opposite each other, and holding [in their hands some cymbals, some fiddles, others timbrels, yet others]⁹⁹ pipes. This all is made to imitate seven high heavenly planets and the unflickering divine and angelic light. This arrangement is covered with the abovementioned curtain. Also from that place,

⁹⁵ Cotton: 'time' instead of 'heaven'.

⁹⁶ Cotton: 'to the heaven'.

⁹⁷ Amended from Cotton; Prokofiev's edition has 'lesser'.

⁹⁸ Amended from Cotton (fol. 208^r); Prokofiev's edition has 'near'.

⁹⁹ Supplied from Cotton. In this performance the children are not said to be playing these instruments, only singing; one wonders if the instruments' main purpose on this occasion was to make a visual reference to the iconography of the musical angels.

that is to say, through¹⁰⁰ the middle of the church platform, there come three thin and strong ropes, with the fourth below these three and the platform. Between the platform and the altar there are very thin strings.

At the top of this church hangs a large circle at the same level as that platform, painted with many different colours. In the centre of this circle there has been cut a lifelike figure of Christ, with a cross in His left hand, his right hand turned to the people with a blessing. Around him along the edges of that circle apostles are arranged, cut in the same wondrous way as Christ. A large crown is made over Christ's head, with gold and precious stones, like a royal one. All over this crown there are lifelike paintings of cherubim and seraphim. This crown is rotating incessantly hither and thither by an intricate device, and does not stop for a moment. And all this is wondrous and exceedingly marvellous, and arranged cleverly and quite inexpressibly.

In the ninth hour of the day the multitudes of people come to the church to attend this most glorious and intricate spectacle. And once the church is filled with people, they grow silent, looking up to the middle of the church platform and the arranged place above it. On that platform appear four children, made to look like angels by their hair-dress and garments, only without wings, holding in their hands beautiful branches with different flowers. After that in the same place a man appears, dressed up like the Son of God, and goes to the above-mentioned town, that is to say Jerusalem, with the four said angels walking before him. After he arrives to Jerusalem, he dwells there for a little while and then goes back from Jerusalem. Whence he is followed: that is to say, by the Most Pure Mother of God, and after her goes Mary Magdalene: they are represented by two youths dressed up as if they were women.

After that the Son of God approaches Jerusalem and takes from there the supreme apostle Peter and after him all his disciples, and goes with his Mother and the apostles to the Mount of Olives, and those four angels again walk before the Son of God everywhere. The apostles are barefoot and the garments over their shoulders are exactly like the robes they are usually painted in, and one has a big beard, and another has a small one, just as it is fitting for the apostles to look like. And when Christ comes, that is to say, to the Mount of Olives, he stands by that mountain, facing Jerusalem, with his mother Mary and Mary Magdalene on his right side. Then Peter approaches and throws himself at Jesus's feet, and, arising, receives a blessing from Him and goes to stand at his place, and after that all the disciples do the same and stand to the right and to the left [of Jesus] one by one, each according to his place.

Then Jesus gives them gifts — a fishing net to Andrew: 'Thou, says he, shall be a fisher of men' [Matthew 4. 19], and to another a book, and to one more a sword, saying: 'From this, by my name, you will not receive any harm'. After that Jesus comes to the aforementioned Mount of Olives and stands by the mountain on a specially-made step. His Mother and Mary Magdalene [stand] to his right, and all the apostles [stand] by the mountain on that same step. Jesus says unto them: "Since everything has already happened to me as it has been written, I go to your Father and my Father, and my God and your God". And he steps away from them to the very top of that afore-mentioned mountain. The apostles begin to lean on each other, crying and sorrowing, while saying: "Lord, do not leave us orphans". He then says unto them: "Do not cry, I shall not leave you orphans, but I go up to my Father and will pray to the Father and he will send you a comforter, the spirit of truth, and it will teach you about all the truth; if I do not go, the comforter will not come" [Cf. John 14. 16–26]. This he says and much else.

Immediately a great thunder sounds from above over that mountain, and when [they] look up, [they] see the heaven opened and the Father above it, held by an intricate device. And [he] is lit with a great light, through the said multitude of candles, and the little children, that is to say the Heavenly

¹⁰⁰ Amended from Cotton; Prokofiev's edition has 'from'.

Powers, walk briskly to and fro incessantly around him, producing a loud rattle, and beautiful singing, and frightening noises; and the abovementioned large angels painted on the parchment are constantly rotating, appearing plainly as if they were real. And something like a cloud comes down from the Father above, that is to say, from the gates of heaven, along those previously described seven ropes, in a very crafty and incomprehensible way, filled with much beauty and complexity.

It is made to be circular in form, and around it there are many discs, which incessantly move swiftly hither and whither; on its right and left sides there are two young adolescents, adorned with hair and garments to imitate those of angels, with gilded wings. When that cloud comes down half way to the bottom, the said Son of God takes two large gilded keys and says to Peter: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And lo, I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' [Matthew 16. 18–19]. And, having blessed him with these keys, puts them into his hands and begins ascending towards the cloud, standing, by means of those aforementioned seven ropes, sending his blessing to his Mother and the apostles.

And this spectacle is marvellous to see and inexpressible. These ropes are made [to be hidden] behind his back in a very intricate and incomprehensible way, through the iron swivels, as if it is not through them he is lifted up, but walks that height himself, without swinging sideways. And the swivels are made so that they cannot be seen.

His Mother and the apostles are looking up at him walking, and when he approaches the cloud the two angels on his right and on his left bow down to him. And the multitude of candles inside that cloud is suddenly lit in the nick of time, producing a great light. He, then, enters that cloud together with the two angels and ascends to the Father, that is to say, to the heavenly gates, and that heaven soon closes, and the thunder ceases, and nothing can be seen there anymore. After that the Most Pure [Virgin] and the apostles and all the people begin to look up to that place arranged over the altar. While they watch, the curtains of that arranged place, that is to say, of the highest heaven, are promptly opened, and there is a great light from the previously described glass oil lamps, and there is the Father, sitting solemnly on the throne, with the Son seated on his lap, that is to say in the bosom of the Father, adorned with the same garments and the crown as the Father.

Meanwhile the wheels of fire are constantly moving, and upon them there are four children, that is to say, angels, constantly walking round upon those wheels up and down, one beating cymbals, another a tympanum, yet another something similar, all in musical ensemble, and there is great thunder, and this spectacle is in every way wondrous and marvellous and impossible to express through my limited wit, since this performance was so exceedingly good.

And from the Father and the Son above descend two little children upon the aforementioned four ropes, bumping into each other with their shoulders, and made to look, with their gilded hair and garments, just like angels, with gilded wings and angelic stoles over each of them, singing quietly with tender voices, and they come to the Most Pure [Virgin] and the apostles to the middle of the church platform, and say unto the apostles: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven" [Acts 1. 11]. And the Father and the Son from above send their blessing with their hand to the apostles and to the people gathered below. Once they have said that, they go back up to that arranged high place on the same ropes, singing, looking round, trembling and flapping their wings. And through this it appears as if they are flying. And when they enter that most wonderful place to the Father, the curtains are again closed. And [the apostles] go to the aforementioned Jerusalem from the mountain called the Mount of Olives, honouring each other with love, and then disappear

above behind that covered arranged place,¹⁰¹ that is to the Father, because they are [Christ's] beloved [disciples].

I have written as I could, for I cannot have such an intricate sight be consigned to oblivion, but written in order to have it remembered, for this spectacle is marvellous and unutterable. And it is filled with joy more than anything I have ever seen, [that] it is impossible to describe in writing or in words. As I could, I have written.

Appendix 2: Manuscripts of Bishop Abraham's Travels: List¹⁰² and Tentative Stemma

[Table 1 goes here or at end of this section: full page, landscape]

1) *Pogodin 1571*: St Petersburg, GPB MS Pogodin 1571, mid-sixteenth century (probably soon after 1552). Contains *Annunciation* and the opening paragraph of *Ascension* (the rest is lost due to manuscript having been damaged), fols 81^v–89^v.

2) *Zabelin 419*: Moscow, GIM MS Zabelin 419, mid-sixteenth century (probably late 1550s). Contains *Annunciation* on fols 60^r–64^r.

3) *Popov*: A sixteenth-century manuscript from A. Popov's collection, edited by him in 1875; its current location is unknown. Contained *Annunciation*.

4) *Pogodin 1952*: St Petersburg, GPB MS Pogodin 1952, seventeenth century. Contains *Annunciation* (defective, missing the beginning; the text starts with the description of the youth who plays the Virgin), fols 20^{r/v}–24^{r/v}. Also contains excerpts from the Itinerary of Ignatius of Smolensk.

5) *Troitskii 801*: Moscow, RGB (formerly, GBL) MS Troitskii 801, seventeenth century. Contains *Annunciation* (with the same reference to San Marco as Pogodin 1571) on fols 169^v–180^r, copied straight after the *Itinerary of the Anonymous Suzdalian*.

6) *CGADA 591*: Moscow, CGADA, fond 18 MS 591, seventeenth century. Contains *Annunciation*, fols 671^r–683^v.

7) *Celepi 50*: St Petersburg, BAN MS Celepi 50, seventeenth century. Contains *Annunciation* on fols 50^r–55^v. Also includes a version Simeon of Suzdal's *History*.

8) *Zabelin 451*: Moscow, GIM MS Zabelin 451, late seventeenth century. Contains *Annunciation* on fols 625^r–634^r. Also includes a version Simeon of Suzdal's *History*.

9) *GPB F. XVII. 38*: St Petersburg, GPB MS F. XVII. 38, second half of the seventeenth century. Contains *Annunciation* (with some later linguistic changes) on fols 230^v–234^r.

10) *GPB Q. I. 788*: St Petersburg, GPB MS Q. I. 788, seventeenth century. Contains *Annunciation* on fols 1^r–7^r. A different heading ('A marvellous vision of Abraham, bishop of Suzdal, when he travelled to the [land of] Fryagi').

11) *BAN text. post. 496*: St Petersburg, BAN MS text. post. 496, dated 1717 by the scribe and owner of this commonplace book, A. M. Ponomarev from Ustiug (Northern Russia). Contains *Annunciation* on fols 179^r(181^r)–182^v(184^v), heading as in no. 10, and *Ascension* (copied as a separate item; the only known complete version of the text) on fols 182^v(184^v)–187^r(189^r).

12) *CGADA 13/14*: Moscow, CGDA fond 181, MS 13/14, dated 1736. Contains *Annunciation* on fols 63^v–66^r.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Acts 1. 12–13.

¹⁰² Based on Kazakova, "Iskhodzhenie" Avraamiia Suzdal'skogo'. Dates are given only for the parts containing Bishop Abraham's *Travel*.

- 13) *Uvarov 1547*: Moscow, GIM MS Uvarov 1547, early nineteenth century. Contains *Annunciation* on fols 19^r–22^r. Similar updates of the obscure words in GPB F. XVII. 38.
- 14) *Novikov*: A manuscript used by Novikov for his 1791 edition. Location unknown. Contained *Annunciation*, with some updating of the obscure wording.
- 15) *Pogodin 1572*: St Petersburg, GPB MS Pogodin 1572, mid-sixteenth century (soon after 1547). Contains *Ascension* (incomplete, stops mid-sentence in the description of the ropes going through the wooden platform).
- 16) *Cotton Vitellius F X*: London, BL MS Cotton Vitellius F X, mid- to late-sixteenth century. Contains *Ascension* (incomplete, stops mid-sentence in the same place as Pogodin 1572) on fols 151^v and 208^r, with 208^v left blank).
- 17) *Tikhonravov*: A seventeenth-century manuscript used by Tikhonravov for his 1876 edition. Location unknown. Contained *Ascension* (incomplete, stops mid-sentence about one page before the end of the text).
- 18) *GPB Q. XVII. 321*: St Petersburg, MS GPB Q. XVII. 321, mid-seventeenth century. Contains *Ascension* on fols 324^v–328^r (incomplete, stops at the same point as *Tikhonravov*; although opens slightly differently).
- 19) *Synod 272*: A mid-seventeenth-century manuscript from Moscow, GIM MS Synod 272, used by Popov to collate his edition of *Annunciation* (fols 331^r–335^v). The location of the manuscript is currently unknown.

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