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WORD AND ORNAMENT. ARTISTIC FORM OF MATTHEW THE TENTH'S CODEX[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a formal analysis of the biblical codex by Matthew the Tenth, a seminal object of Eastern Christian art from the northern territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The production of the manuscript was a multi-stage process initiated in Vilnius in 1502 and continued at the Supraśl Monastery from approximately 1503–1504 until its completion in 1507, with supplemental folios appended later. Comprising 550 leaves, the codex features a sophisticated decorative program, including one full-page miniature preceding the Psalter, 20 headpieces, and over 700 varied initials in multi-color, bi-color, and monochrome formats. A distinguishing characteristic of the work is the scribe's semantic

1 The present paper has been created as an element of the *Supraśl Liturgical Antologion of Matthew the Tenth from 1507: Academic Study and Translation into Polish of the Oldest Liturgical Manuscript from Supraśl* Project financed from the state budget awarded by the Minister of Science within the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities in 2024-2029, Project No. NPRH/DN/SP/0143/2023/12. In the paper the font used was 'FedorovskUnicode_Mateusz10' prepared for the Project.

application of colored script – e.g. utilizing vermillion, gold, and sky-blue to differentiate specific textual categories - thereby synthesizing the manuscript's aesthetic and liturgical dimensions. Comparative analysis reveals that the Supraśl portions of the codex are artistically more elaborate than the Vilnius section, suggesting that Matthew the Tenth had access to a wider array of models during his tenure at the Supraśl monastery, including Balkan (Bulgarian and Serbian), as well as Western traditions. A study of the codex's visual program underscore the author's creative ingenuity and individual artistic solutions, which were likely inspired by the cultural confluence of Eastern and Western traditions in Vilnius. Ultimately, the codex is identified as a liturgical work intended for the Supraśl monastic community and stands as a significant testament to the artistic and intellectual connections between Vilnius and Supraśl at the dawn of the 16th century.

KEYWORDS: Matthew the Tent, Biblical codex, Supraśl Monastery, Manuscript ornamentation, Orthodox art.

Research into Orthodox art of the northern territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania before 1569 (namely the year when the Union of Lublin was signed) is hampered for several reasons. Firstly: only relatively few artistic objects created before the late 16th century in that territory have been preserved. Secondly: due to the lack of preserved local analogies in literature they have been compared and analysed in relation to works from entirely different contexts. Owing to this, for a long time they were not regarded as works stemming from the common source and of local character, as distinct from the artifacts coming from the southern territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. However, researchers have come to realize that, although the identification of its specificity was challenging, Vilnius being a big and important city must have played an essential role as the centre of Eastern Christian art.

And it was only a relatively short time ago that attempts at the historical and artistic analysis of Vilnius Orthodox artifacts or those

related to Vilnius were undertaken.[2] One of the opportunities that might allow to deepen such research can be seen in the studies of the Supraśl manuscript of Matthew the Tenth,[3] a book that for a long time has been the subject of interdisciplinary studies,[4] and whose content has been recently thoroughly described by Serghei Temchin,[5] Artem Zhukov,[6] Anatoly Alexeiev,[7] Florentina Panchenko,[8] Aleksander Naumow,[9] and others. The book is currently the topic of a collective Project analysing the codex from various perspectives. As one of its aspects, the Project's leader Marek Ławreszczuk

2 See e.g. Н. Комашко, 'Об истории и иконографии Иконы Богоматери Одигитрии Виленской', in: *Wielkie powroty. Tom rozpraw międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej Wielkie powroty. O dziełach sztuki, zbiorach bibliotecznych, archiwalnych i świętościach polskiego prawosławia utraconych i wywiezionych w czasie I i II Wojen Światowych*, 15–17 października 2021 roku, Monaster Św. Onufrego Wielkiego w Jabłecznej, Jabłeczna 2021, pp. 15–33.

3 Facsimiles of the book in the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Cat. No. 24.4.28. Call No. BAN, Sreznevsky's collection, II.75) published in 2020: *Библия Матфея Десятого 1507 года из собрания Библиотеки Российской Академии Наук*, vol. I. *Факсимильное воспроизведение рукописи*, ed. А. А. Алексеев, А. Е. Жуков, Ф. В. Панченко, Санкт-Петербург 2020. Earlier a publication containing four Gospels had been published (*Библия 1499 года и Библия в синодальном переводе*, т. 7. *Господа нашего Иисуса Христа Святое Евангелие от Матфея, Марка, Луки, Иоанна*, Москва 1992), and then the Psalter: *Библия 1499 года...*, т. 4. *Псалтирь*, Москва 1997).

4 The studies were summed up in the publication: *Славянская Библия в эпоху раннего книгопечатания: К 510-летию создания Библейского сборника Матфея Десятого*, ed. А. А. Алексеев. Санкт-Петербург 2017.

5 С. Темчин, 'Роль Матвея Десятого в православной культуре Великого Княжества Литовского', *Latopisy Akademii Supraskiej*, I, 2020, pp. 27–34.

6 А. Е. Жуков, 'Матфей Десятый и его труд', in: *Библия Матфея Десятого 1507 года из собрания Библиотеки Российской Академии Наук*, vol. II. *Исследования и материалы*, ed. А. А. Алексеев, А. Е. Жуков, Ф. В. Панченко, Санкт-Петербург 2020, pp. 9–44.

7 А. А. Алексеев, 'Рукопись Матфея Десятого', in: *Библия Матфея Десятого 1507 года...*, vol. II, pp. 45-70; idem, 'Библия Матфея Десятого: комментарии', in: *Библия Матфея Десятого 1507 года...*, vol. II, pp. 71–120.

8 These works are of a particular importance for the research into the historical and artistic context of the codex. Ф. В. Панченко, 'Концепт художественного оформления Библейского сборника Матфея Десятого', in: *Славянская Библия...*, pp. 124–136; eadem, 'К прочтению миниатюры библейскоо сборника Матфея Десятого 1507 года', *Новое искусствознание*, no 3, 2020, pp. 101–112; eadem, 'Художественное оформление рукописи', in: *Библия Матфея Десятого 1507 года...*, vol. II, pp. 121–187.

9 A. Naumow, 'Biblia Matfieja Dziesiątego w Supraślu (1507) i jej petersburskie wydanie (2020)', *Бельскі гостінэць*, 2/2021, pp. 2–16.

has identified the book's respective elements and described in detail the structure of its content.[10] Further studies will undoubtedly extend our knowledge of various issues related to the manuscript.

Thanks to the to-date findings, based particularly on the long autobiographical note contained in the book we know the author: Matthew, who calls himself the Tenth (fols. 476v–477v [Fig. 1]);[11] he started writing the codex in Vilnius in 1502. The scribe's note

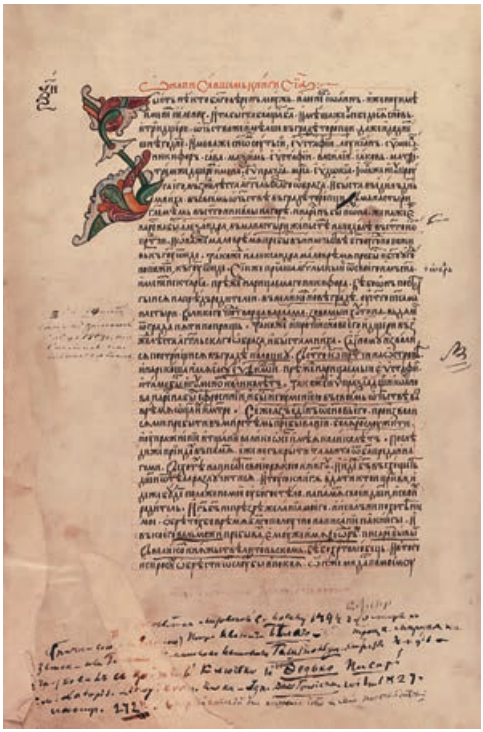

FIG. 1. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, beginning of 16th c. Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Cat. No. 24.4.28. Call No. BAN, Sreznevsky's collection, II.75. Beginning of the *About the author of these books*, fol. 476v. [Public domain]

10 M. Ławreszuk, *Spis zawartości „Antologionu Mateusza Dziesiątego" – supraskiego rękopisu Mateusza Dziesiątego z 1507 roku: Biblioteka RAN St-Petersburg nr kat. 24.4.28. Sygn. BAN, zbiór Srezniewskiego, II.75,* https://doi.org/10.18150/WNSY7S (Accessed: 4 May 2025).

11 *O tym, kto napisał te księgi*, see Naumow, 'Biblia Matfieja Dziesiątego...', pp. 3–7; Ławreszuk, *Spis zawartości „Antologionu..."*, p. 23; see Жуков, 'Матфей Десятый и его труд', p. 12.

thus points to the fact that the manuscript may constitute a testimony to book painting of that centre in the very early 16th century. The book, however, sets other challenges to us, which results from the fact that in ca 1503–1504 (though the precise date remains uncertain) the author moved to the Monastery in Supraśl, where he continued his work (the point in the book related to the fact will be retackled in due course), and there, in 1507, he made the above-mentioned note, seemingly as if crowning his work on the manuscript.[12] Nonetheless, the latter's description and evaluation are complicated due to the fact that following the autobiographical fragment there appear subsequent folios: from 478r to 550v, which must have been created later. The existence of this very part encouraged scholars to seek one more author of the book: supposedly Matthew's disciple.[13] Today, however, a different concept has prevailed claiming, following Aleksander Naumow's suggestion, that upon the arrival at the Supraśl Monastery, Matthew continued the work on the book for the already existing orthodox church of St John, concluding it with the autobiographical note; however, he wrote several dozen folios (fols. 478r–550v) placed after the note already later on: for the new orthodox church of the Annunciation. This may be testified to by the fact that the part in question begins with the description of this very holiday.[14] Since it is assumed that the brick church dedicated to the Annunciation at the Supraśl Monastery was completed in 1510–1511,[15] these dates may demark the timeframe for the creation of the last part of Matthew's manuscript.

The issue of the codex's authorship in relation to its historical and artistical context has been raised by Florentina Panchenko,

12 Naumow, 'Biblia Matfieja Dziesiątego…', p. 4.

13 E.g., according to Temchin his work is the fragment on fols. 299r–303v (except for the last 6 lines on 303v) and in the later supplements to the codex containing feast liturgy fols. 478r–542v, 544r, 545r. Темчин, 'Роль Матвея Десятого…', p. 32.

14 See Naumow, 'Biblia Matfieja Dziesiątego…', p. 11. The suggestion appeared in the course of the discussion on the present article.

15 Арх. Н. Далматовъ, *Супрасльскій Благовѣщенскій монастырь. Историко-статистическое описаніе*, Санктпетербургъ 1892, p. 45.

who emphasizes that in the case of such an ample writing artifact, whose creation process lasted for as long as precisely the discussed book's, it is not obvious that the scribe as well as the author of the ornaments and illustrations is the same person. She thus poses the question whether Matthew the Tenth, a scriptor and painter, could be the author of both the texts and the artistic design of the codex.[16] When analysing the circumstances of the creation of the manuscript and its character, while particularly referring to the above-mentioned autobiographical note, the scholar decides, however, that it would be unimaginable for Matthew to regard an incomplete book to be his life oeuvre.[17] This argument seems decisive as for the work's artistic authorship, particularly up to leaf 477v which ends the autobiographical note. Furthermore, it is worth discussing the cohesion of the respective elements of the book, and particularly its decoration, bearing in mind the potential differences not only between the Vilnius and Supraśl parts, but also the dissimilarities within the latter one (up to the autobiographical note and following it).

The above differences seem of key importance for further studies of the codex, also those referring to the artistic aspects. It can be assumed, following the codex's researchers, that the first (Vilnius) part (fols. 1–146v) covers the following books of the Old Testament: 16 Prophets, Book of Job, Solomon's Proverbs, readings from Kings, Book of Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, while the second (Supraśl) part contains (starting as of ca a third of l. 146v) the following books: Sentences of Meander, Wisdom of Sirach, Psalter, New Testament (four Gospels, Apocalypse, Acts of the Apostles), Typikon followed by Matthew's autobiography (up to fol. 477v), with the Menaion and Supraśl Triodion following (fol. 478r–550v).[18] We can thus assume that the first 146 leaves were created in Vilnius, while the

16 Панченко, 'Концепт художественного оформления…', pp. 124–125.

17 Ibidem, pp. 125–126.

18 Темчин, 'Роль Матвея Десятого…', p. 32; see. A. Naumow, 'Biblia w kulturze Rusi polsko-litewskiej w XVI wieku', *Slavia Meridionalis*, 16, 2016, pp. 36–37; Ławreszuk, *Spis zawartości „Antologionu…"*, p. 2.

remaining ones: a predominant majority, as we are talking here about over 400 leaves (!), were executed in Supraśl, of which the last 72 ones were produced and attached to the codex slightly later. However, the content of the book testifies unequivocally to its liturgical purpose, with its target destination being the Supraśl monastic community.

To recapitulate the issue of where the book was created it can be said that the codex of Matthew the Tenth is on the one hand an artifact connected with Vilnius, while on the other, it represents the Supraśl artistic circle, which initially may have been formed by Matthew himself alone. On the other hand, the book can be regarded as an example of the relations: not merely intellectual, but also (which is particularly important in this case) artistic ones between Vilnius and Supraśl. Thus, what it contains shows the direction of cultural influences of key importance for the formation and shaping of the intellectual and artistic aspects of the Supraśl centre. Therefore, Matthew's works can be regarded as one of the oldest artistic artifacts connected with Supraśl; only afterwards there appeared subsequent ones, including the excellent wall paintings from the orthodox church of the Annunciation, created before 1557,[19] yet today preserved only in residual fragments, this testifying to the direct bonds between the Supraśl Monastery and Serbia.[20]

Bearing in mind all the above doubts, we could continue multiplying the codex-related questions, though we would not always be able to answer them satisfactorily. The questions would concern both the artist and his work. Let us, therefore, consider whether the fact that Matthew the Tenth came from Toropets in the Smolensk Land had any impact on the artistic form of the codex. This

19 A. Siemaszko, 'Malowidła ścienne cerkwi Zwiastowania w Supraślu. Rekonstrukcja programu ikonograficznego', in: *Freski supraskie. Relikty XVI-wiecznego malarstwa postbizantyńskiego w kolekcji Muzeum Ikon w Supraślu*, Białystok 2019, p. 207.

20 See S. Petković, 'Nektarij Serb. Malarz z XVI wieku i jego działalność w klasztorze w Supraślu', in: *Freski supraskie…*, pp. 192–203.

may be an essential issue, yet in view of little knowledge of the art of that town it is doomed to remain unanswered, although the situation may change in the future. Actually, it cannot be ruled out that Matthew's writing style was formed only in the chancellery of the Grand Duke in Vilnius, where he was to work for the clerk Fiodor,[21] meaning that as an artist he was mainly shaped by the Vilnius circles. On the book's pages it can be seen how he evolved as an artist over the years. Assuming that his manuscript was created at two locations, namely that it is composed of two parts, of which the latter also seems to be divided, let us decide whether on the artistic level parts or layers created in the subsequent periods are discernible. In other words, whether artistically the Vilnius part can be distinguished from the Supraśl one, and whether in the latter the division into two more sections is discernible. This approach seems to be far more promising than studies in the author's artistic formation. We might move closer to the answer to the previously-asked question helped by the analysis of the major artistic aspects in the book's presentation.

Importantly, the final appearance of the codex results from various elements, spread unevenly and of varied quality. The work of Matthew the Tenth, composed of 550 leaves, contains only one full-page miniature placed on leaf 173v, thus approximately in a third of the book [Fig. 2]. However, the actual decoration of the codex is made up of 20 headpieces preceding certain parts of the text, including a preparatory drawing for a headpiece which was not eventually completed (fol. 478r [Fig. 3]). However, what strikes most are 254 multi-colour initials, 37 smaller tri- or bi-colour ones, and 451 smaller monochrome ones: golden, vermillion, sky-blue, and black. Furthermore, the book contains 20 bi-colour and 91 monochrome signs in the margins and 14 monochromatic drawings with the index finger.[22] Nonetheless, the artistic layout of the

21 See: Жуков, 'Матфей Десятый и его труд', p. 17.

22 See: 'Каталог орнаментики', in: *Библия Матфея Десятого 1507 года…*, vol. II, pp. 222–257.



FIG. 2. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, miniature preceding the Psalter, fol. 173v. [Public domain]

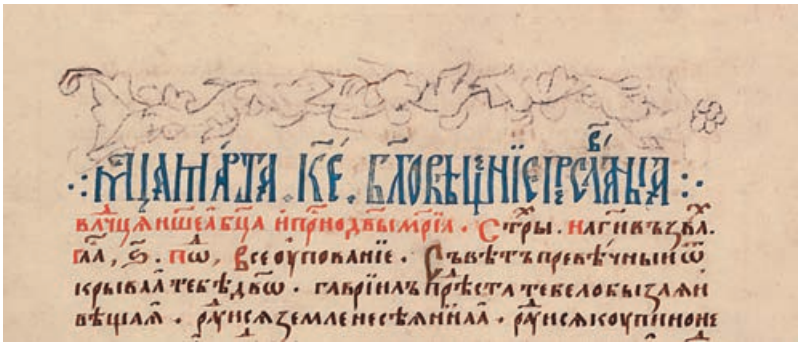

FIG. 3. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, beginning of the Menaion for March, The Annunciation, fol. 478r. [Public domain]

codex does not only boil down to few presentations and a more elaborate ornamentation, since the whole expression of the work is parallelly contributed to by the colourful text organized according to some rules. Not only does it constitute the conveyor of the content, but it also contains a definite aesthetic charge.[23] In her article dedicated to the artistic layout of the book, Panchenko asks about its attribution, but also about the following issues: were the decorative elements created parallelly to the written text, did there exist from the beginning an overall artistic concept, or were the decorations created simultaneously, as if on an on-going basis? Were there existing models from other works used in the process?[24]

An element essential for the analysis of the sources of artistic forms for the codex is the knowledge of the book resources available to Matthew at subsequent stages in his work. Sergey Temchin observes that when active in Vilnius Matthew did not have access to many Old Testament books, and it was a painstaking job to put them together.[25] In the further course of his work what must have played an important role was the collection of books in the Supraśl Monastery. On the grounds of the oldest source that recalls it, namely the 1557 description by Sergius Kimbar, it is known that the library boasted at least 129 liturgical books.[26] Furthermore, it is believed that prior to 1532 the Monastery had had 56 liturgical books, these including 13 Psalters, 12 Menaions, and 67 works of religious literature, including e.g. *The Book of Prophecies* and biblical commentaries, as well as *Catechetical Lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem.*[27]

23 See: Z. Vitković, 'Stranični postav u „Drugome novljanskom brevijaru": Vizualna organizacija teksta u kasnosrednjovjekovnim hrvatskoglagoljičnim liturgijskim kodeksima', *Croatica Christiana periodica*, vol. 48, no. 98, 2024, pp. 47–63.

24 Панченко, 'Концепт художественного оформления…', p. 125.

25 Темчин, 'Роль Матвея Десятого…', p. 30

26 Idem, 'Сколько книг было в Супрасльском Благовещенском монастыре в 1532 году', *Здабыткі*, 12, 2010, pp. 68–73. Matthew's Book was actually introduced there secondarily. Ibidem, pp. 70–71

27 A. Mironowicz, 'Manuskrypty bułgarskie w zbiorach biblioteki monasteru Supraskiego do połowy XVI wieku', *Търновска книжовна школа*, X, 2015, p. 24. Many of these books are now in the resources of the Vilnius Library of the Academy of Sciences, see Н. Морозова, С. Темчин, 'Древнейшие рукописи Супрасльского

At the same time, both Aleksander Naumow and Sergey Temchin share the conviction that as much as the first part of the text written in Vilnius is more related to East-Slavic sources, the fragments written in Supraśl feature stronger Balkan qualities, which yields the supposition that when in the Supraśl library Matthew could use Bulgarian and Serbian books, both those belonging to the Supraśl Monastery and the ones that came from other nearby centres, such as Bielsk.[28] From the point of view of the history of art the key question is whether at all, and if so, how, such an impact can be observed in various fragments of the codex's decoration and in the presentations it contains. The analysis of the influence does not necessarily have to consist in pointing to direct models, since it is also worth analysing certain general tendencies, similarities, and common features in view of different groups of works known from the region of Central and Eastern, as well as Southern Europe.

In this context, let us emphasize that in the course of the study of the codex its scripture has been analysed. Sergey Temchin points to the semantic changeability of its kind. Three different alphabets appear in the book: the dominating Cyrillic one, but also the Greek one (in the titles of some biblical books), and the Hebrew alphabet (the letters in the margin of the Book of Jeremiah).[29] The main text in Cyrillic is written in semi-uncial, the most typical form of the Cyrillic alphabet at the time of the creation of the book; the short summary of the Acts of the Apostles and the Apostles' Epistles are written in another form of decorative semi-uncial with elements of cursive script, while the quote from the New Testament at the

Благовещенского монастыря (1500–1532 гг.)', in: *Z dziejów monasteru Supraskiego. Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej „Supraski monaster Zwiastowania Przenajświętszej Bogurodzicy i jego historyczna rola w rozwoju społeczności lokalnej i dziejach państwa". Supraśl-Białystok, 10–11 czerwca 2025,* Białystok 2005, pp. 120–121; cf. 'Katalog rękopisów supraskich', ed. A. Mironowicz, N. Morozowa, M. Czistiakowa, E. Kierejczuk, E. Mironowicz, N. Nikołajew, [in:] Rękopisy supraskie w zbiorach krajowych i obcych, ed. A. Mironowicz, Białystok 2014, pp. 85–373.

28 Naumow, 'Biblia Matfieja Dziesiątego…', p. 11; Темчин, 'Роль Матвея Десятого…', p. 32.

29 Ididem, pp. 30–31.

end of the colophon is written in an elegant cursive script.[30] Both Sergey Temchin and Aleksander Naumow distinguish the meaning of the most frequently used script colours in the text: speeches of Jesus, quotes from the Old Testament, and other major texts, e.g., *O All-praised Mother* in the *Akathist* are written in vermillion and gold, while sky blue represents direct speech. Vermillion also serves for rubrics.[31]

A good example illustrating this model is leaf 222v and the subsequent ones, containing the Gospel of Matthew, where black, sky blue, vermillion, and gold can be seen, all performing, as mentioned above, the semantic role [Fig. 4]. A similar procedure is visible on

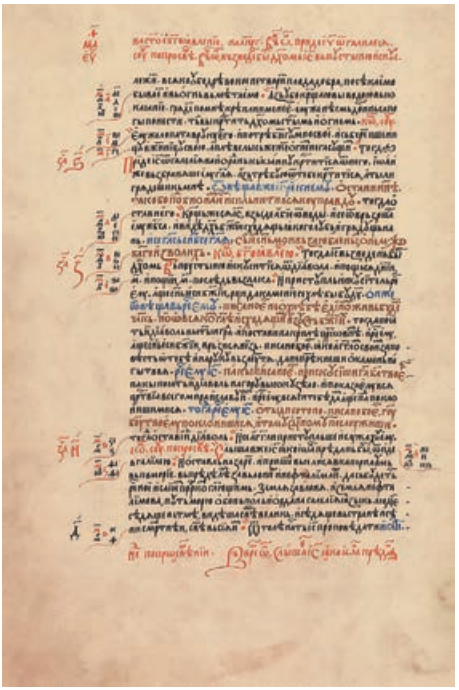

FIG. 4. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, fragment of the Gospel of Matthew, fol. 222v. [Public domain]

30 Ibidem, p. 30.

31 Naumow, 'Biblia Matfieja Dziesiątego...,' p. 11; Темчин, 'Роль Матвея Десятого...', p. 30.



FIG. 5. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, beginning the Acts of the Apostles, fol. 307r. [Public domain]

ornamental leaf 307r beginning the Acts of the Apostles [Fig. 5]. However, at other places, as we observe at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke (fol. 255r), sky blue and gold colours of the letters seem to perform merely a decorative function [Fig. 6]. Similarly, at the beginning of the Gospel of John (fol. 275v) four colours appear in the title: vermillion, gold, sky blue, and black, this arrangement repeated in the inscription filling in the whole verse [Fig. 7]. Such an approach to text is similar to that in some artifacts coming from the time when the discussed codex was created, among which we can count e.g., the Typikon from Leżachów (Jerusalem uncial) from Poland's National Library, though in its case the structuring of the book's form with letter colours is limited only to black and vermillion ink [Fig. 8].[32]

32 Warsaw, National Library, Rps 12168 III. https://polona.pl/preview/0329340e-b2c5-4939-be1d-e1cdd2420097 (accessed: 19 May 2025).



FIG. 6. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, beginning of the Gospel of Luke, fol. 255r. [Public domain]



FIG. 7. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, the beginning of the Gospel of John, fragment of fol. 275v. [Public domain]



FIG. 8. The Typikon from Leżachów, 16th c., Warsaw, National Library, Rps 12168 III, fol. 75r. [Public domain]

Furthermore, it goes without saying that the Supraśl fragments of the codex of Matthew the Tenth as compared to the Vilnius part are evidently richer in the variety of script forms and in the colour of single letters or words. The source of such an approach to scripture can be found in South Slavic or Moldavian manuscripts from an earlier period, since there the application of various scripture colours was present, particularly as of the 14th century.[33] Making the script and letter colour, as well as the colour of respective words, and further, sentences, or longer sections, etc., more attractive, seems to be one of the most characteristic features distinguishing the Vilnius part from the two Supraśl sections, which once again may confirm the fact that the author had a greater access to various books and models when working in Supraśl, while on the other hand, it might demonstrate the artistic progress made by the decorations' author.

When analysing respective fragments of the book it can be stated, and actually without any doubt, that if treating the codex as a whole, it shows little cohesion, while its respective parts are shaped in the way demonstrating a changing attitude to the question of decoration. The comparison might be the most effective when the beginnings of respective books and the use of initials in them are juxtaposed. The whole codex begins with the leaves containing relatively modest decorative elements. The latter are particularly concentrated on the fragments opening subsequent sections of the text, e.g., on fol. 3r, where the Book of Hosea begins, one can see letter Ꙁ; it is composed of four elements of whose ends developing plant forms grow, forming above a headpiece [Fig. 9]. On the following leaves the same formula is repeated; there, however, the decoration is formed mainly by plaited initial shapes which are both coloured and monochrome (vermillion as a rule).

33 See: e.g., München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod.slav. 4. https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb00106322 (accessed: 16 May 2025); Warsaw, National Library, Rps 11801 IV https://polona.pl/preview/6bad9214-29ee-4739-904e-2899a9959808 (accessed: 19 May 2025).



FIG. 9. Matthew the Tenth's Codex.
Beginnig of the Book of Hosea, fol. 3r. [Public domain]

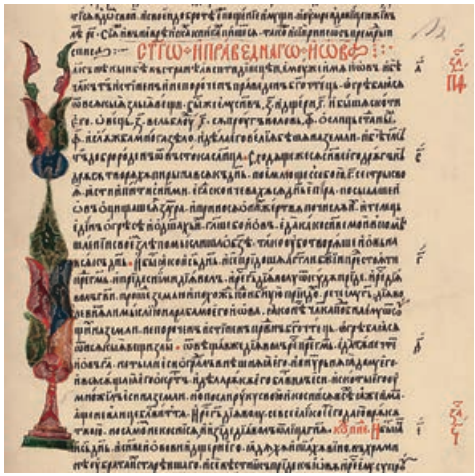

FIG. 10. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, the first leaf of excerpts from the Book of Job, fol. 122r.
[Public domain]

In the subsequent fragments of the Vilnius part of the book of Matthew the Tenth, on leaf 61r, we can see an elaborate multicolour Н initial whose upper part is shaped like a corolla; meanwhile, on leaf 122r there appears letter Ч in a very extended form echoing a tree, in red, green, dark blue, and ochre [Fig. 10]. Letter П on leaf 136v is a relatively small initial; folding leaves grow from its left stem [Fig. 11]. Meanwhile, in the case of letter П on leaf 152v, a floral fanciful sky-blue-red-and-ochre form grows from the let-



FIG. 11. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, the beginning of the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, fol. 136v. [Public domain]



FIG. 12. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, an introduction to the Psalms by St Basil the Great, fol. 165v. [Public domain]

ter's horizontal top. What is more, on leaf 165v an energetically executed letter Н features twisting coloured runners with leaves resembling acanthus emerging from its left stem. Similar forms can also be seen on the top crownings of the initial [Fig. 12].

As for the Supraśl fragments of the book, on leaf 178r, we can find initial Н opening Psalm 19 (18); its stems feature a lighter plant or-



FIG. 13. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, Psalter, initials of Psalms 26 (25), 27 (26), fragment of fol. 180r. [Public domain]

nament painted against dark-blue background, with three multicoloured leaves growing from the top of the left stem. Similar leaves grow from letter Ⱄ opening Psalm 26 (25) (fol. 180r), both from its upper and lower sections. The letter itself is built of organic forms tied approximately in the middle of the letter's height [Fig. 13]. Psalm 28 (27) on the reverse of that leaf (fol. 180v) begins with a wide-stretched letter Ⱪ composed of a stem formed of coloured node-shaped forms and rings, with floral elements at the ends and a band wreathed in the middle, made up of geometrized sky-blue and green ribbons [Fig. 14]. On leaf 181r, Psalm 31 (30) opens with letter Ⱨ from whose left stem there come out abundant leaves partly resembling acanthus with corolla forms. On leaf 187r, letter Ⱪ opens Psalm 50 (49), while letter Ⲡ begins the following one. The first initial has a relatively schematic form, while the second clearly stands out: it remains enclosed within a square-like shape of which leaves, runners, and flowers come out. Both letters form an elaborate decorative composition in the margin [Fig. 15]. On leaf 307r, beginning the Acts of the Apostles, letter Ⲡ is composed of both rings, interwoven sprouts, forming nodes, as well as plant sprouts coming out from the bottom



FIG. 14. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, Psalter, initials of Psalms 28 (27), 29 (28), 30 (29), fol. 180v. [Public domain]

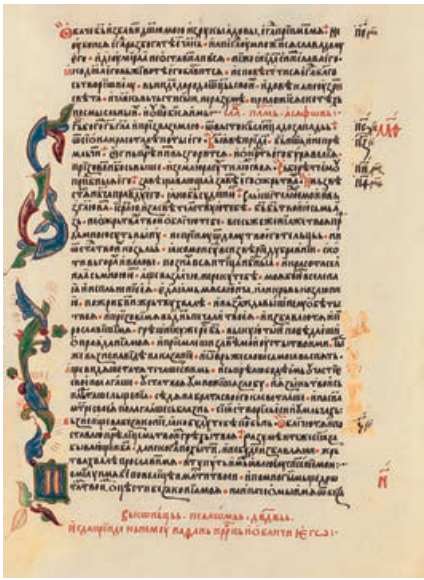

FIG. 15. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, Psalter, initials of Psalms 50 (49) and 51 (50), fol. 187r. [Public domain]

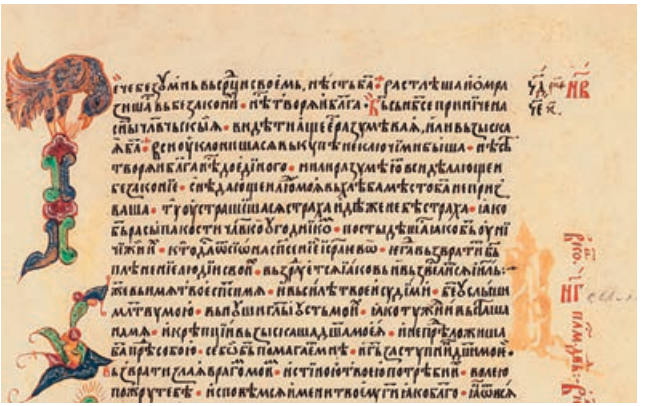

FIG. 16. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, Psalter, initials of Psalms 53 (52), 54 (53), fragment of fol.188r. [Public domain]

part of the letter, and a crowning in its upper part where there appears a decorative tangle of creepers [Fig. 5].

Coloured initials are first of all made up of stylized ornamental elements whose fragments are composed of stylized 'rings'[34] [Figs. 6, 11, 13, 14, 16]; they also contain motifs of plaiting: geometrical and floral[35] [Figs. 14, 15, 17, 18]. Both forms are found in manuscripts between the 11th and 16th century, and both served as models for the initials in Matthew's codex. Today, however, it is hard to identify the existing historic writing artifacts which may have had the direct impact on his manuscript. Nonetheless, definite tendencies revealed in the discussed book can be pointed to. In the territory of Orthodox Slavs, the concept of such initials is known; they are made up of smaller parts: rings, semirings, often tied, with nodes, and edges unfolding into leaf shapes, coloured in their whole, since respective forms are covered with contrasting colours, e.g., the 14th-century Kyiv Psalter[36] or the 1499 Gospel Book from the Us-

34 So-called коленчатые инициалы. И. В. Левочкин, *Инициалы XI–XVI веков*, Москва 1983, pp. 13–14, fig. On p. 18.

35 So-called плетеные инициалы. Ibidem, p. 16, fig. on p. 21.

36 *Киевская Псалтир 1397 года из Государственной Публичной библиотеки имени М. Е. Салтыкова-Щедрина в Ленинграде [ОЛДП F 6]*, Москва 1978, passim.



FIG. 17. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, fol. 221r. [Public domain]



FIG. 18. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, beginning of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans, fragment of fol. 345v. [Public domain]



FIG. 19. Gospel Book of Jakov of Serres, Serbia, 1354–1355, beginning of the Gospel of Mark, British Library Add. 39626, fol. 89r. [Public domain]

pensky Cathedral in Moscow.[37] However, the initials in Matthew's codex seem to have been strongly inspired by the kind of the artistic language which yielded the initials in the Serbian Gospel Book of Jakov of Serres dating to 1354–1355[38] [Fig. 19]; similarly, they are present in other 14th-century Serbian heritage pieces, also those related to Mount Athos[39] as well as the Bulgarian Tomić Psalter from ca 1360, [40] and in a version slightly more provincial in the Gospel

37 Г. В. Попов, 'Орнаментация рукописи 1499 года из Московского Успенского собора', in: *Древнерусское искусство. Рукописная книга*, Москва 1972, fig. on pp. 231, 238.

38 British Library, Add. 39626, fols. 5r, 89r, 145r. A. Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen. Schätze der Buchmalerei vom 4. Bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, Milano 2001, fig. 187 on p. 223; https://blogs.bl.uk/european/2021/04/the-gospels-of-metropolitan-jakov-of-serres.html (accessed: 21 May 2025).

39 Nikola Staničevic Gospel (Hilandar 14), Gospel Book (Hilandar 13), and Tetraevangelion (Hilandar 21), Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen...*, figs. 202 and 203 on p. 241, fig. 204 on p. 242.

40 Moscow, State Russian Museum, GIM 2752. Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen...*, fig. 214 on p. 248; See: А. Джурова, *Томичов Псалтир*, vols. 1–2, София 1990.



FIG. 20. The Book of 16 Prophets, Rus', late 15th century, headpiece of Book of Haggai, St Petersburg, Russian State Library, f. 173.I no. 20, fol. 69r. [Public domain]



FIG. 21. The Book of 16 Prophets, Rus', headpiece of Book of Zechariah, fol. 72r. [Public domain]



FIG. 22. The Book of 16 Prophets, Rus', headpiece of Book of Isaiah, fol. 87r. [Public domain]



FIG. 23. The Lavriv Gospel Book, 1500–1520, beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, Warsaw, National Library, Rps 11805 IV, fol. 21r. [Public domain]

Book from ca mid-14th century from the Archaeological Museum in Sofia.[41] They are also close to the initials found in numerous manuscripts dated to the late 15th and 16th centuries, particularly the early 16th century. They appear, e.g., in the Book of 16 Prophets in the Russian State Library from the late 15th century [Figs. 20, 21, 22].[42] From among the works that are worth pointing out let us also mention the Lavriv Gospel Book at the National Library in Warsaw dated to 1500–1520 [Figs. 23, 24, 25].[43] Finally, they can be seen in the

41 ACNO 356. И. Гергова, Й. Гатев, И. Ванев, *Християнско искуство в Националния Археологически музей – София. Каталог*, София 2012, fig. VI.2.в.–VI.2.е.

42 St Petersburg, Russian State Library, f. 173.I no. 20, https://lib-fond.ru/lib-rgb/173-i/f-173i-20/#image-100 (accessed: 6 June 2025); See: В. А. Кучкин, Г. В. Попов, 'Государев дьяк Василий Мамырев и лицевая Книга пророков 1489 года', in: *Древнерусское искусство. Рукописная книга. Сборник второй*, Москва 1974, pp. 107–145.

43 Warsaw, National Library, Rps 11805 IV, https://polona.pl/preview/2087edce-9b99-431c-a2b5-0cdafb0474f6 (accessed: 11 May 2025).



FIG. 24. The Lavriv Gospel Book, beginning of the Gospel of Luke, fol. 219r. [Public domain]



FIG. 25. The Lavriv Gospel Book, beginning of the Gospel of John, fol. 350r. [Public domain]



FIG. 26. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, the first leaf of Psalter, fol. 174r. [Public domain]

margins of the Psalter and the horologion by Mikhail Medovartsev, an associate of Maximus the Greek.[44]

In the codex of Matthew the Tenth it is the leaf opening the Psalter (fol. 174r) that is extensively decorated; a headpiece appears there, and additionally we can see initial Ѓ and two others: Ѕ and Ґ. They are elaborately developed, forming intricate curving plant forms, climaxing in a voluminous large corolla, which fill up the majority of the margin [Fig. 26]. In this respect an affinity can be seen with the artistic language of the above-mentioned Lavriv Gospel Book [Figs. 23, 24, 25, 27]. The same concept for book decoration can also be found in e.g., the Bulgarian Tetraevangelion from

44 Moscow, Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents, f. 381, collection of Synodal Typography 223, fol. 21r. И. В. Синицына, 'Книжный мастер Михаил Медоварцев', in: *Древнерусское искусство. Рукописная книга*, p. 304.



FIG. 27. The Lavriv Gospel Book, initial on fol. 276v. [Public domain]



FIG. 28. The Tetraevangelion from the late 15th c., beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, Warsaw, National Library, Rps 11802 III, fol. 1r. [Public domain]

the Cherepish Monastery, dated to the turn of the 16th century.[45] At this point, mention can also be made of the Tetraevangelion from the late 15th century from Warsaw's National Library where on leaf 1r, starting the Gospel of Matthew, there appears foliage connected with the headpiece, as well as that placed in the margins, remaining in no relation to other elements [Fig. 28].[46] Similarly as in its case as in the earlier-mentioned works, the characteristic feature of the leaf beginning the Psalter in Matthew the Tenth's codex is the appearance of extremely developed plant elements, this possibly reflecting the impact of modern Western art.

An example similar to the leaf opening the Psalter can be seen in a particularly elaborate decoration of the first sheet of the Gospel of Matthew (fol. 221r). Letter К beginning the sentence: Книгы рѡжьдства... features longer and shorter creepers that grow out of it. The one that comes out from the central part of the letter develops upwards creating an ample headpiece with abundant foliage resembling an acanthus featuring several corollas. Below the headpiece composed of creepers, leaves, and flowers the title of the Gospel Ѿ Матфеꙗ... is written in vermillion *vyaz.* Furthermore, there are stalks with a foliage growing from the initial's bottom part, filling up the lower part of the leaf. It is precisely these four elements: the book's title, the elaborate initial, and the headpiece above together with the stalk and leaves in the bottom section of the margin that create an extensive artistic decoration of the sheet [Fig. 17]. They show affinity to the models from several codices from Warsaw's National Library, among which let us enumerate the above-mentioned Lavriv Gospel Book [Figs. 23, 24, 25] as well as the Tetraevangelion from the late 15th century with plaited initials and abundant plant patterns in the margins [Fig. 28].[47] Letter

45 Vratsa, Orthodox Church of St Nikolas, no. 1. Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen...*, fig. 202 on p. 257; М. Стоянов, *Украса на славянските ръкописи в България*, София 1973, kat. 173, fig. on p. 23, 107–108.

46 Warsaw, National Library, Rps 11802 III, https://polona.pl/item-view/00fd8dc5-7730-4983-9ab9-eb938dbb2884?page=32 (accessed: 15 May 2025).

47 Ibidem III https://polona.pl/preview/00fd8dc5-7730-4983-9ab9-eb938dbb2884 (accessed: 11 May 2025).



FIG. 29. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, beginning of St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, fragment of fol. 370r. [Public domain]

П on leaf 370r enclosed within a rectangular frame filled with sky blue with two plant sprouts [Fig. 29] also echoes some initials from the Lavriv Gospel Book, although the latter's initials are more elegantly elaborated [Fig. 23, 27]. The very concept of decorative letters with plant sprouts growing out of them seems, first of all, to be associated with Bulgarian miniature painting where such forms can be found both in 15th-century works[48] and in 16th-century ones.[49]

Several initials which we can come across in the codex by Matthew the Tenth feature more fanciful forms, since they are accompanied by presentations of animals. They have been quite thoroughly described by Florentina Panchenko,[50] however, it seems that they still deserve more thorough analyses, particularly in the context of the content in which they appear. Within the impact of the Byzantine culture zoomorphic initials can be regarded as a luxury quality of the books created already between the 9th and 11th centuries,[51] while their motifs and patterns were frequently repeated. In Matthew's book the biggest number of imaginative initials are found in the Psalter.

48 See 15th-c. Gospels, Sofia's National Library, СНБ 479. Стоянов, *Украса на славянските ръкописи…*, Cat. 101, fig. on p. 87.

49 See: ibidem, cat. 204, 216, 235.

50 Панченко, 'Художественное оформление рукописи', pp. 126–130.

51 See: e.g. Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen…*, figs. 34–35 on p. 35; fig. 61 on p. 69.

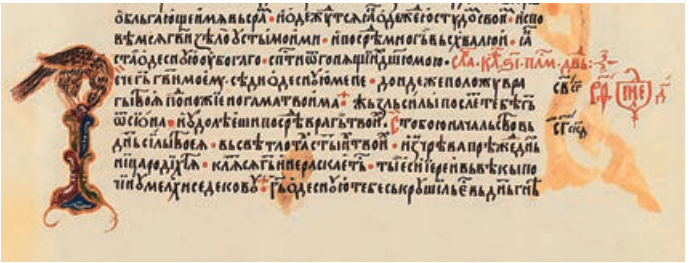

FIG. 30. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, Psalter, initial of Psalm 110 (109), fragment of fol. 204r. [Public domain]

And so, in the upper part of leaf 188r, Psalm 14 (13) begins with letter Р (Рече безꙋмнь вь сердци своемъ, нѣстъ бг҃а, 'The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."'[52]). Its basis is plaited, while the upper part formed by a figure of a bird of prey which, according to Panchenko, can be identified as a falcon:[53] its head is lowered, its beak opened, maybe because it is feeding the nestlings [Fig. 16]. A similar bird figure, only with slightly differently arranged wings, in this case gently raised, forming a part of letter Р, can be found on leaf 204r beginning Psalm 110 (109): Рече гь҃ гв҃и моему... ('The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand"') [Fig. 30].[54] Thus, in both cases the letter refers to the word Рече ('said'), and possibly repeats the same model known from a substantial number of analogies, among which let us mention such well-known Moscow works as Khitrovo Gospels (the 1390s), or Koshka Gospels (ca 1392), as well as the Fedieiev Psalter (the 1480s, where actually the figures of birds appear by the same Psalms: 14 (13) and 110 (109). According to Florentina Panchenko, it is precisely the initials from the Koshka Gospels that may be considered as prototypes of those in the codex of Matthew the Tenth.[55] However, it needs to be observed that apart from a similar form of several initials in Matthew's book there is nothing that his codex and the Koshka

52 Psalm translations after *The Bible...*, Revised Standard Edition, The British & Foreign Bible Society, Collins Clear Type Press.

53 See: Панченко, 'Художественное оформление рукописи', p. 126.

54 See: Ibidem, p. 126.

55 Ibidem.

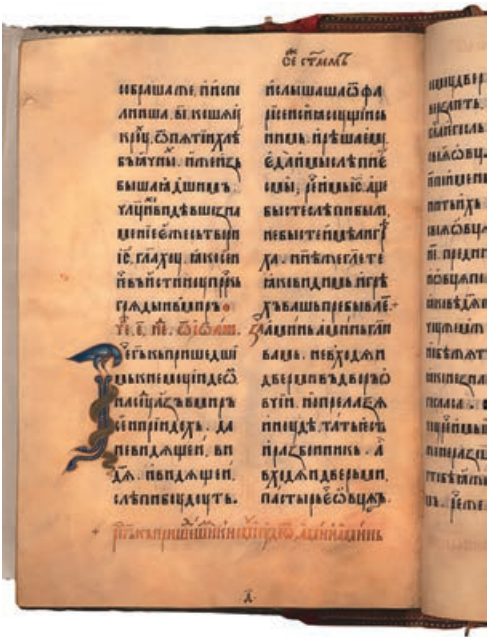

FIG. 31. The Koshka Gospels, Rus', ca 1392, St Petersburg, Russian State Library, f.304, III, No 4, fol. 32v. [Public domain]

Gospels have in common [see Fig. 31].[56] Furthermore, the question that remains unanswered is whether Matthew the Tenth had the chance to view the latter book. In his manuscript there also appears a form of initials with a human face, these associated by Panchenko with similar initials from the Ostromir Gospels (1056–1057),[57] yet, importantly, this formula is present in 12th-century Balkan codices, e.g., Slepche Apostle from the latter half of the century.[58] Therefore, Matthew the Tenth may have found his inspiration in the Balkan environment.

56 St Petersburg, Russian State Library, f.304, III, No 4. https://lib-fond.ru/lib-rg-b/304-iii/f-304iii-4/ (accessed: 7 May 2025).

57 Панченко, 'Художественное оформление рукописи', pp. 124–125.

58 Ivan Vazov Public Library in Plovdiv, Call No. 25(62). https://digital.libplovdiv.com/bg/view/642b0b36a556affbd1cd4686?page=1 (accessed: 6 July 2025); Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen…*, fig. 121 on p. 155.

It might seem most appropriate at this point to emphasize the fact that in the biblical codex of Matthew the Tenth there are various forms of initials, this particularly visible when different designs of the same letters are compared: in view of their size, shape, and plaiting forms of which they are composed, as well as of the colour schemes,[59] but also taking into account such additional elements as bird figures. This variety may be considered a premise claiming that the author drew from various sources and used numerous models, however, substantially applying his own personal invention. The analysis of the first of the two issues, namely the application of various artistic models, may be useful in further studies concerning the change of location where the scribe worked and his access to certain characteristic models. The second question related to Matthew's artistic creativity seems more challenging, particularly in view of the fact that Eastern-Christian art is generally attributed lack of individualism. Nonetheless, the discussed codex definitely displays features that confirm the artist's inventiveness, if only to mention here the use of different-colour scripture, which best testifies to his ingenuity and ability to introduce individual solutions [Fig. 6, 7].[60] It thus cannot be ruled out that Matthew's stay in Vilnius, the city where the Eastern and Western traditions encountered, inspired the author from Toropets to adopt certain elements characteristic of Western art not merely as artistic models he began to use in his work, but also as models of a creative approach he began to follow.

Therefore, if the colour scheme of the scripture in Matthew's codex reveals essential semantic qualities, it seems also likely that the initials, particularly those appearing in the text of the Psalter, may play a similar role: drawing attention to some psalms or their certain selected contents. Interestingly, however, on leaf 186r, for unknown reasons (by a simple oversight?) the author omitted initial Ѣ meant

59 See catalogue of coloured initials: 'Каталог орнаментики', pp. 226–243.

60 Темчин, 'Роль Матвея Десятого...', p. 30; Naumow, 'Biblia Matfieja Dziesiątego...', p. 11.



FIG. 32. Matthew the Tenth's Codex, Psalter, Psalms 46 (45) without initial and initial of Psalm 47 (46), fol. 186r. [Public domain]

to begin Psalm 46 (45) [Fig. 32]. This fragment, as a matter of fact, deserves more attention, since it testifies to the individual working mode on the codex in which the basic text was executed first, while all the decorative and complementary elements afterwards.

It is worth emphasizing that in the book's parts containing the Typikon and a fragment of the Menaion and Triodion (thus leaves 407r–550v) the only very decorative initial is that on leaf 476v beginning the fragment speaking of the book's author: an imaginative and highly refined form of letter Ѣ. Undoubtedly, it was to draw attention to this portion of the codex [Fig. 1]. As a matter of fact, the discussed part of the book together with the initial will become the topic of a separate study;[61] similarly as the monochrome initials

61 This motif was developed in my paper: *'Praise Him with the Timbrel and Dance'. Selected Motifs from the Iconography of the Psalter in the 16th-century Biblical Codex of Mattew the Tenth* delivered at the Conference *Psalms and Psalters in Culture and*

[see e.g., Figs. 11, 29] which constitute a separate artistic question inside the book, and which can initially be considered as pointing to the affiliation to 15th-century Bulgarian miniature painting.[62] Additionally, the codex contains numerous quite skilfully drawn hands with the index finger: they, too, are meant to emphasize certain elements in the texts. And they can also be associated with the Balkan tradition.[63]

As much as the initials filling the codex of Matthew the Tenth display a substantial variety, a big number of homogeneous forms characterize the relatively few headpieces. Some of them (fols. 255r [Fig. 6], 345v [Fig. 18], 395r) seem to directly echo the Byzantine forms known from the 14th century.[64] They contain both geometric and plant motifs. One is a complex many-sided polygon placed in the upper part of leaf 307r beginning the Acts of the Apostles. It is filled with a plant ornament with antithetically placed elements featuring plant sprouts, leaves, and flowers growing from the external corners [Fig. 5].[65] Six headpieces: beginning the Prophecy of Hosea (fol. 3r) [Fig. 9], Gospel of Matthew (fol. 221r) [Fig. 17] and of Mark (fol. 242r), Introduction on 12 Apostles (fol. 299r,), General Epistle of James (fol. 329r), Second Timothy (fol. 389v), and one incomplete (at the beginning of the Menaion for March, The Annunciation (fol. 478r)) [Fig. 3]; they are all unframed plant forms, which may seem to echo modern West European book painting.[66] When pointing to this variety of headpieces it can be noticed that this feature is often encountered in Cyrillic manuscripts in the 15th and 16th centuries, and seen against this background Matthew's codex does not seem particularly exceptional. As an example close

Literature from the Commonwealth until the Late 19th Century (Supraśl, 12–13 February 2026), which will also appear in print in Conference proceedings.

62 See Стоянов, *Украса на славянските ръкописи…*, pp. 90–106.

63 Ibidem, Cat. 163, fig. on p. 104; Cat. 253, fig. on p. 146.

64 See Sofia, St Kliment Ohridski University, Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies 'Prof. Ivan Dujčev', MS D. gr 177 (Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen…*, fig. 60 on p. 104) and MS D. gr. 132, fol. 112v (ibidem, fig. 153 on p. 206).

65 'Каталог орнаментики', p. 223.

66 Ibidem, pp. 222–225.

to Matthew the Tenth's codex let us point to e.g., Book of 16 Prophets with explanations from the late 15th century in the collection of the Russian State Library,[67] where, similarly as in the discussed manuscript, some headpieces are enframed, while others feature no borders [il. 20, 21, 22].

When comparing various writing artifacts and referring them to the discussed codex what strikes most is the substantial liberty the author takes when developing decorative elements which fill the book. This is the factor that makes us ponder over the role played in the production of the manuscript by the artist's creativity. One of its symptoms can be observed in the change of the codex's decoration different for the parts created in Vilnius and Supraśl. It can be thus clearly seen that floral elements appear at the very beginning of the book, in the first headpiece [Fig. 9], while the subsequent, more elaborate headpieces containing geometric elements are found only in the sections created already in Supraśl. This may suggest that when at the Supraśl Monastery and on this stage of his work, the author had a greater access to decorated manuscripts which he applied as models. On the other hand, however, the presence of floral forms inspired by Western art at the beginning of the Vilnius part also seems very symptomatic, since they may have been motifs popularized in Vilnius in the early 16th century.

An important element creating the artistic expression of the book by Matthew the Tenth can be undoubtedly seen in its only full-page miniature contained in the Supraśl part of the manuscript (on fol. 173v): extremely rich both iconographically and artistically [Fig. 2]. Within the environment of Eastern Christian art, miniatures, if scarce, as a rule appear at the beginning of a book. This situation is different, since the illustration is as if hidden inside the codex. Its position, however, is not accidental, since in this way the Psalter is exposed. The reason most likely being the exceptional place it takes among the Old Testament books caused

67 In this case it is even larger, since e.g., the headpiece of the Book of Daniel contains animal presentations. St Petersburg, Russian State Library, f. 173.I no. 20, fol. 328r. https://lib-fond.ru/lib-rgb/173-i/f-173i-20/ (accessed: 11 May 2025).

by its very special liturgical status. When compared with other portions of the codex of Matthew the Tenth, the Psalter seems to be particularly richly developed with respect to decorative elements, especially the initials, the topic already discussed above. The very miniature preceding the Psalter displays a very complex structure, since, composed of three registers, it is within a frame, and additionally to its left two presentations of men dancing and in a characteristic headwear are shown: they are Jedutun, i.e., Etan and Asaf, some of David's musicians, authors of certain Psalms.[68] In the upper part of the main section of the miniature the scene of young David's anointing to become king is presented. One can see in it Old-Testament priest Samuel (his person distinguished with a nimbus around his head, as well as a ciborium visible in the background), who touches David's forehead with an oil-filled horn. Bowing David receives the anointing with visible humbleness. Behind his back an angel is lifting his right hand above the king's head in a praying gesture; there is also a wingless figure wearing a white gown, whose head is surrounded by a nimbus made up of two rhombi; the figure can be interpreted as Sophia, Divine Wisdom. In the following scene David is presented as a mature man (his face is surrounded by a shortish round grey beard, and a diadem can be seen on his head); behind his back the same Sophia is visible. David is shown here as a writer, with all the attributes proper to this role. In the lower register, in turn, a scene with a dance procession is to be found; the cavalcade is participated by seven young men. They are dancing *kolo/choro* (Greek: *choros*), a dance typical of southern Slavs.[69] Next to them there is enthroned David and musicians standing in front of him. The lower register

68 Jedutun is a musician mentioned in the headings of Psalms 38, 61, 76, while Asaf in Psalms 49, 72–82 ; their images can be found in the psalter, previously housed in the library in Supaśl. Э.А. Гордиенко, С.А. Семячко, М.А. Шибаев, *Миниатюра и текст: К истории Следованной псалтири из собрания Российской национальной библиотеки F.I.738*, Санкт-Петербург 2011, p. 166 (fols. 19v, 20v).

69 See: S. Zdravkova Djeparoska, 'Performance and Religion: Dancing Bodies in Macedonian Fresco Painting', *Arts*, 10 (4), 88, 2021, https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/10/4/88 (Accessed: 6 June 2025).

repeats the scene with six dancing men. This register also features the scene of wise men debating.

Let us emphasize here some particular features of the miniature, such as e.g.: the three-register layout allowing to structure a certain narrative,[70] showing figures in various views in which movement, often very dynamic, is accentuated. Some of the shown poses are quite surprising, e.g., in profile, such as that of one of the dancing men in the red robe: in a leap with his body turned in the opposite direction than the figures' movement and the centre of the scene itself made up of the dance cavalcade. This yields the effect of vigorous dynamism and variety, strongly accentuated by the arrangement of the figures' clothes, and particularly by the characteristic rolls of flowing robes. All these features fully coincide with the tradition of art which drew both from the Middle and Late Byzantine heritage. Let us now focus on the to-date analyses of the miniature in question. In earlier studies the position of Dmitry V. Aynalov , published already in the 1930s, who referred this presentation to the 15th-century art of Veliky Novgorod, was quoted on this aspect.[71] When reflecting on the environment with which the miniature may have been associated, being (as all the premises allow to think) the scriptorium at the Supraśl Monastery, this track should be considered intriguing. Interestingly, some elements of the above-described presentation seem close to the composition *Wisdom Has Built a House for Herself*; this very topic can be associated precisely with the painterly tradition of Veliky Novgorod, although we must not forget that it has its direct prototypes in the Balkans.[72] And if we were to agree that the Psalter forming part of the codex of Matthew the Tenth was copied in Supraśl, this very direction seems particularly important for our search.

70 See: e.g., L. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-century Byzantium. Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus,* New York 2001, passim.

71 П. А. Лавров, 'Библейские книги 1507 года', *Slavia. Časopis pro slovanskou filologii*, XII, 1933–1934, p. 104; See: Ф. В. Панченко, 'Миниатюра: Сюжеты и ихиконогра-фические параллели', in: *Библия Матфея Десятого 1507 года...,* vol. II, p. 147.

72 See: A. Sulikowska-Gąska, *Spory o ikony na Rusi w XV i XVI wieku,* Warszawa 2007, p. 261.



FIG. 33. King David inspired by Holy Ghost (Sofia, Holy Wisdom), The Serbian Psalter, 14th c., München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod.slav. 4, fol. 7v. [Public domain]

The characteristic tri-register quality is known both in Byzantine and Balkan miniature painting.[73] However, one of the most significant iconographic motifs in the discussed miniature is the presentation of a writer standing behind the figure of Sophia, and appearing in Balkan 14th-century Psalters [Fig. 33] as well as Gospel Books of later time [Fig. 34].[74] in which Sophia sometimes accompanies all the subsequent Evangelists.[75] Furthermore, what attracts attention are scenes of group dances, quite common in

73 Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning…,* figs. 7, 9–10, 16, 18, 19, 21–23, 35, 38–41, 45–46; Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen…,* fig. 166 on p. 214

74 See: Moscow State University, MGU 2 Bg. 42. Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen…,* fig. 2 on p. 41.

75 Like in the Benchevo Tetraevangelion. Skopje, National and University Library 'St Kliment Ohridski', nos. MS 17, 167, 168, 169, 171.



FIG. 34. Mark the Evangelist inspired by Holy Ghost (Sofia, Holy Wisdom), The Gospel Book, St Petersburg, Russian State Library, f.I.35, fol. 102v. [Public domain]

Byzantine and Slav Psalters[76] owing to the Book's ideological content, although the dance forms can assume various formats. In the codex by Matthew the Tenth what seems of key importance is that the figures are shown dancing in a circle, which quite obviously echoes Balkan customs. So the discussed miniature can be, on the one hand, compared to the Bulgarian Tomić Psalter from the State Historical Museum in Moscow,[77] while on the other, the Serbian Psalter from the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich [Fig. 35].[78] Both are dated to the 14th century, which also allows to confirm

76 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Gr 752, f. 449v. (Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen...*, fig. 62 on p. 106); Vat. Gr 746, f. 194v (ibidem, fig. 68, p. 110); Barb. Gr 372, fol. 249r (ibidem, fig. 69, p. 111); Kiev Psalter. *Киевская Псалтир 1397 года...*, fol. 204v; also with the motif of playing instruments. Ibidem, fol. 206r.

77 А. Джурова, *Томичов Псалтир*, op. cit.

78 München, Bayerische Staatssbibliothek, Cod.slav. 4 https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb00106322 (accessed: 16 May 2025).



FIG. 35. Scene of dancing dancing kolo/choro. Miniature of The Serbian Psalter, fol. 184v. [Public domain]

the direction for the search of the context for Matthew the Tenth's work.

As stated above, this only miniature opening the Psalter is quite elaborate. It contains scenes which convey the story of David, the Psalms' author, as well as images of other psalmists; on the other hand, these presentations as if introduce us into the Book's atmosphere by showing dance and individuals playing instruments. The images find numerous analogies in the iconography of the time, although what seems of key importance is the affiliation to the Balkan tradition.[79] It should not be overlooked that from the artistic perspective, and particularly with its refined line and colour scheme, the miniature clearly differs from the initials or the headpieces as well as the remaining elements decorating the codex, slightly simpler both in view of the drawing and colours. This difference may suggest that it cannot be ruled out that there was another artist who contributed to the codex by working on this miniature only, which would, however, be a topic for a separate study.

79 See: Zdravkova Djeparoska, 'Performance and Religion', passim.

The present paper focuses, first of all, on the analysis of the selected decorative elements scattered throughout the whole biblical codex of Matthew the Tenth, particularly the numerous initials, however, emphasis has also been put on the characteristic features of the headpieces, the only miniature in the manuscript, and other ornamental elements. Even on the basis of such an overview certain general conclusions can be reached. The comparison of the artistic elements distributed through the whole codex displays a certain randomness, a compilatory character of Matthew's work, this best seen in the varied forms of the initials and headpieces which do not undergo a clear stylistic evolution over time, while generally their forms throughout the whole book show the greatest affinity to what is defined as Balkan[80] or so-called Neo-Byzantine ones.[81] At the same time, the artistic language of the only miniature in the codex, whose iconographic and stylistic sources reach back to 14th-century Balkan artifacts, is not adequate to such elements of a book decoration as the above-mentioned initials or headpieces. Since they actually seem to fit well more with the artistic context of the artifacts from the late 15th – very early 16th century. What is more, the default observed is a certain lack of consistency in terms of working out a system of decorating the leaves beginning respective fragments or books contained in the manuscript. What could all this mean?

The varied character of the system and decoration forms is frequently considered the result of unfinished work on a book. Nonetheless, in the case of the codex by Matthew the Tenth the reasons must have been different, if only for the fact that no empty sheets or spaces to be later filled with miniatures were left. Actually, the manner of writing subsequent Gospels, which is continuous, excludes here placing miniatures with the Evangelists, ranking, af-

80 Džurova, *Byzantinische Miniaturen…*, fig. 221 on p. 250; See: Э. В. Шульгина, 'Балканский орнамент', in: *Древнерусское искусство. Рукописная книга. Сборник второй*, pp. 240–264.

81 See: Л. М. Костюхина, 'Нововизантийский орнамент', in: *Древнерусское искусство. Рукописная книга. Сборник второй*, pp. 265–295.

ter all, among the most frequently encountered presentations in books [Fig. 17, 6, 7]. This clearly testifying to the fact that the author from the beginning decided that the subsequent books of the New Testament would not feature illustrations.

The comparison of the manner in which the initials were executed on the first 146 leaves of the codex with the subsequent ones does not justify the statement that the parts: the Vilnius one (fol. 1–146v) and the two Supraśl ones (the first: starting from ca 1/3 of leaf 146v to 477v; the second: from 478r to 550v) differ significantly in their artistic form, namely as far as the drawing and the colour-scheme are concerned. A certain stylistic difference is visible from the point where the Psalter begins: from leaves 173v–174r [Figs. 2, 26], since as of here the initials become more frequent and more varied, thanks to which the whole codex becomes more decorative. However, a question can be asked whether this does not simply result from the structure of the Psalter's text accumulating relatively short separate texts that psalms are. Another essential aesthetic change appears when the autobiographic form ends, namely in the part beginning on leaf 478r. In this respect, too, the reason may be found in the change of the character of the texts following the autobiography of Matthew the Tenth.

In the Church Slavonic tradition the system of a book decoration is created equally by various elements: lettering, the manner of writing texts, colour scheme of respective fragments, the manner of developing the initials, the method of composing ornamental headpieces, and last but not least, the presentations visible in a miniature or miniatures. In the case of the codex of Matthew the Tenth its artistic form in the two Supraśl parts (from ca one third of leaf 146v) shows clearly the possibility that the author was able to access a larger number of artistically richer codices than in the Vilnius period. These may have been available in the Supraśl library and scriptorium. It is the likely reason why in the two Supraśl parts a stronger reference to both Balkan and Western models can be observed when compared to other references we know from other codices coming from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and dated to

the similar period, namely the 15th and early 16th century. The very codex itself, owing to its not uniform artistic layer may thus testify to the variety of books which were available in Supraśl in the early 16th century or were there if only for a brief period of time (possibly in order for its copy to be made).

All the elements which bestow the manuscript of Matthew the Tenth with the artistic character fulfil predominantly the function of enframing, emphasizing, and highlighting senses contained in the message of the work constructed of subsequent biblical books, and completed with the Supraśl Menaion and Triodion. Although we cannot be certain what the original intentions of the author were when he began his work in Vilnius, the whole content of the codex[82] together with its artistic layer show that as of a certain moment: when Matthew the Tenth moved to Supraśl, the codex was created to serve the very community there, possibly as a book used in daily liturgy.

Translated by Magdalena Iwińska

82 Particularly the Menaion opening with March and the Annunciation, the Patronal Feast of the Supraśl Monastery, see: footnote 13.