

ABERCIOUS, THE PRINCIPAL SCRIBE OF THE HILANDAR MENOLOGIUM, THE
LARGEST EXTANT SOUTH SLAV MENOLOGIUM

Between 1622/3 and 1625/6 a menologium was copied in eight volumes, six of them by Abercius, a monk of Hilandar, while the other two were copied by an anonymous scribe. In addition to these six codices Abercius copied ten or possibly eleven other manuscripts. Virtually all that is known about him is what he himself wrote in the colophons of his manuscripts.

1. The first codex is a panegyricon for the months of September to December, now codex 54 in the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church at Belgrade. At the end of the manuscript is a text of seven lines, each containing a somewhat banal gnome, which is followed by the colophon that begins by pointing out that the seven lines reveal the name of the scribe of the codex and indeed the initial letters of the lines form the acrostic $\text{À}\text{À}\text{À}\text{Ð}\text{È}\text{,}\text{~}\text{~}$, viz. his name was Abercius. In the colophon he writes that he copied the manuscript in 7123 (1614/5) as a gift for the monastery of the Annunciation at Dobrun, near Višegrad in south-eastern Bosnia, when Habakkuk was abbot.

2. The next manuscript contained a triodion and was codex 1349 in the collection of the Serbian National Library at Belgrade, which was destroyed in an air raid in the night of 6-7 April 1941, although prior to that the colophon preceded by the same seven gnomes as in the first codex had been published. The colophon reveals that he copied the manuscript in 7124 (1615/6) at the monastery of St Nicholas, one of several small monasteries in the Ovčar gorge.

3. The third manuscript is a psalter with an abridged octoechus, a combination known in Slavonic as $\text{СЛІДОВАННА- ГАЛТИРЬ}$, which was copied by five scribes, now codex Q.I.90 in the Russian National Library at St Petersburg. Abercius copied ff. 3^f-114^f, 138^f-161^v and 228^f-291^f including the colophon, which reveals that it had been copied in a cave above the Studenica river in 7126 (1617/8), viz. in the hermitage of St Sabas of Serbia near the monastery of the Deipara Euergetis by the Studenica, where he also copied the next two manuscripts.

4. Codex IX.H.8 in the National Museum at Prague is a florilegium copied by no fewer than ten scribes and is a composite manuscript with folia of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Abercius copied the major part of the codex, viz. ff. 1^f-74^f and 79^f-117^f, in the hermitage of St Sabas in 7127 (1618/9). His folia contain the typicon of the monastery by the Studenica, the vita of Despot Stephen Nemanja of Serbia, in religion Symeon, by his son Rastko, in religion Sabas, and two minor entries. Historically speaking, this codex is the most important of Abercius' manuscripts as it is the best witness to the Studenica typicon and also the sole witness to the complete text of Sabas' vita of his Symeon.

5-7. Codices 436-438 in the collection of Hilandar contain a synaxarium for the entire year and the colophon in the final volume for March to August reveals that Abercius had moved to the hermitage of St Sabas, a dependency of Hilandar, at Karyes on Athos, where he had copied the three manuscripts in the course of 7129 (1620/1). He remained at the hermitage for at least the next twelve years, during which time he copied twelve manuscripts between 1620/1 and 1632/3. This codex is one of the many manuscripts vandalized by Bishop Porphyry Uspensky (1804-1885), who ripped out the folio with the ending of the *vita S. Eudociae Heliopolitanae* and the beginning of the *vita S. Domninae martyris*, which is now in his collection in the Russian National Library at St. Petersburg, F.I.636.

8-13. Codices 439-444 in the Hilandar collection contain the months of September to April of the largest South Slav menologium ever compiled, which took Abercius four years to copy.

8. The colophon of the first volume with the month of September, codex 439 finished in 7131 (1622/3), shows that the menologium was compiled by the monks of Hilandar under the supervision of abbot Hilarion. Abercius refers to the manuscript as a panegyricon, which was the common South Slav term for a menologium since it contains not merely vitae but also festal homilies and eulogies. This codex also suffered from the ravages of Porphyry Uspensky, who tore out the folio with the ending of Symeon Metaphrastes' *Vita S. Charitonis confessoris* and the beginning of the *Vita SS. Gregorii Armeni et sociorum*, now in his collection in the Russian National Library, F.I.639.
9. The colophon of codex 440 with the month of October shows that it was finished in the following year 7132 (1623/4).
10. Codex 441 with the month of November was also finished in 7132. In the colophons of both of these manuscripts Abercius mentions the work of the abbot and monks of Hilandar on the compilation of the menologium.
11. Codex 442 with the month of December was finished in the following year 7133 (1624/5) and in the colophon Abercius states that if there is a mistake in a word such as a missing letter or if the orthography of the same word varies in the codex the reader should not to correct it if elsewhere it is correctly written. The claim that he is encouraging the reader to do exactly the opposite, viz. correct the word, is an erroneous interpretation of the passage. He also urges his readers not to mark a passage to be read with wax but to place a marker "as does your father the Greek." In the colophon Abercius calls himself "a monk from Hercegovina." Once again Uspensky has removed a folio, this time with the ending of the *Passio S. Eleutherii episcopi Illyrici* and the beginning of the Biblical tale of Daniel and Susanna, now in his collection, F.I.640.
12. In the colophon of codex 443 with the month of January finished in 7134 (1625/6) Abercius states he has been using eight manuscripts for the compilation of the menologium.
13. In the colophon of Codex 444 containing the months of February to April, also finished in 7134, he states that the months of May to August have been copied by somebody else, viz. codices 445-446 in the Hilandar collection with the months of May to June and July to August respectively. The name of the scribe of the two codices is unknown and they are undated but must have been finished by 1625/6 because Abercius refers to them as finished. Abercius then says that the supervisor and driving force behind the compilation of the menologium had been abbot Hilarion and that each volume had been based upon seven or eight exemplars and that the monastery had purchased other things which Hilandar did not have. He also expresses his disappointment that he had had no time to illuminate even one initial letter but he had had to copy 255 quires, not to mention the 107 quires of the synaxarium.
14. Codex 9 in the collection of the Orthodox bishopric of Arad, which contains forty-nine entries for movable feasts from the last Sunday after Epiphany until Trinity Sunday, does not have a colophon but a lengthy inscription by hieromonk Anthony, a former hieromonk of the monastery of the Presentation of Our Lady at Gomionica, who states that it was copied for him by Abercius in the hermitage at Karyes in 7134 (1625/6).
15. Five years elapsed before Abercius copied his next manuscript in 7140 (1631/2), a Lenten quadragesimale, in the hermitage at Karyes when Phillip was abbot of Hilandar. He refers to it as a Zlatoust, the Slavonic equivalent for the Greek term Chrysostomicon, literally a book containing homilies by John Chrysostom, but by the sixteenth century at the latest the Slavonic term was used as a general term to denote a homiliary, especially a Lenten quadragesimale. He states that this manuscript together with "the others" meant that he had copied 535 quires. This

codex too was a victim of Uspensky's habit and one folio with the ending of an unidentified homily for the Saturday after Passion Sunday and the beginning of the *Sermo in ramos palmarum et in pullum asini* by Sophronius of Jerusalem, in Slavonic – as in some Greek MSS – ascribed to Cyril of Alexandria, was torn out and is now in his collection, F.I.633

16. Codex 21 (135) in the collection of the monastery of the Annunciation at Žitomislijić, Hercegovina, contained the *Vita Barlaam et Joasaph*, the colophon of which shows that it was copied at the hermitage at Karyes in the following year, 7141 (1632/3). The monastery and its collection of manuscripts were destroyed during the Second World War and the number of its folia is unknown.

17. The colophon of an undated seventeenth-century Serbian codex containing a November menaeum in the collection of the monastery of Iviron on Athos states that it was copied at Sotir, the Saviour, by “the sinful and lazy Abercius”, while an inscription on the reverse of the last folio reveals that it already belonged to Iviron on Sunday 4 December 7171 (1662). The Saviour was an Athonite cell which was a dependency of St Paul's monastery on Athos founded by Serbs in the fourteenth century and which remained Serbian until the eighteenth century. The manuscript has been ascribed to the Abercius who copied all the other manuscripts but this must remain an unsubstantiated hypothesis until the ductus of scribe of the manuscript has been compared with that of Abercius' other manuscripts.

From the information in these colophons it is known that he came from Hercegovina and since the ductus of the the earliest of his manuscripts of 1614/5 already reveals a skilled hand the codex was clearly not his first attempt at copying, so that it can be concluded that Abercius was born at the latest in the mid 1590s. Since the codex is also the sole manuscript which he donated, it is possible that it was an expression of his gratitude for having been tonsured or trained as a scribe, or both, at the monastery of the Annunciation at Dobrun in south-eastern Bosnia, which is not far from Hercegovina. By the following year, 1615/6, he was at St Nicholas' monastery in the Ovčar Gorge near Čačak in western Serbia, a hundred or so kilometres east of Dobrun. From there he moved to the hermitage of St Sabas of Serbia about eight kilometres from the monastery of the Deipara Euergetis by the Studenica, a tributary of the Ibar, and it was there that he copied the next two manuscripts in 1617/8 and 1618/9. Two years later in 1620/1 he was on Athos in St Sabas' hermitage, a dependency of Hilandar at Karyes, where he remained for at least the next twelve years.

It has been claimed that at least three other scribes worked at the hermitage during that period but two of the scribes were definitely not there and the third, an anonymous scribe who in 7135 (1626/7) copied a synaxarium for the months of September to February for hieromonk Joannicius at Karyes in “the cell of Hilandar”, may perhaps not have been there since in no single manuscript in the Hilandar collection associated with the hermitage is it called “the cell of Hilandar”, cf. “the cell of St Sabas”, “the hermitage of St Sabas”, “the tower and hermitage of St Sabas” and “the tower of St Sabas”. Abercius does refer to the hermitage as “the tower of Hilandar” at Karyes (№ 7) and “the tower” at Karyes (№№ 8, 10-11 and 15), while in one (№ 9) he calls it “the pillar” at Karyes and in the last one (№ 16) “the keep, that is the pillar” at Karyes, but never “the cell”. The claim that the anonymous scribe who had copied the two volumes of the menologium with May to June and July to August at the same time that Abercius was copying his volumes was working with him at the hermitage is unlikely in view of the confusion in his work: the entry for 1 July is found among the entries for June 30 in codex 445 so that codex 446 with July to August begins with the entry for 2 July, while the entry for 25 July precedes the entry for 20 July and the entry for 12 August is appended to that for August 31, all

copied nothing for some five years (1626/7-1630/1) points not so much to a pedant as to someone who for six years (1620/1 to 1625/6) had obediently copied 4278 folia, an annual average of 713 per year, but had not particularly enjoyed doing so. Not for nothing did he complain in the colophon of the last volume of the menologium which he copied (№ 13) that he had not had time to illuminate any of the initial letters.

The date of his death is not recorded but an attempt to calculate it has been made on the basis of data contained in the register of the principal events at the hermitage at Karyes in codex 518 of the Hilandar collection, which covers the period from 1645 to 1836. In 1645 Dionysius, the superior of the hermitage at that time, began new lists of those to be commemorated at the hermitage by copying names from previous diptychs and leaving folia blank for the addition of more names. There are folia for archbishops, bishops, hieromonks, monks, priests, nuns and for others not included in any of these categories. The names of the hieromonks have been written by Dionysius in three columns and the name Abercius occurs as the second name in the very first column. It has been concluded that since Dionysius compiled the lists of names in 1645 and Abercius' name occurs at the beginning as the second name on the list of the deceased and again a little later on he must have died in 1645 or 1646. This conclusion is unsafe since the name Abercius does not occur twice but no less than five times, the first four times written by Dionysius. Clearly Dionysius was not mindlessly repeating the names of a few monks time after time and the occurrences obviously refer to different monks with the same name which he had found in the diptychs which he was copying. There is thus absolutely no certainty that any of the references to Abercius refers to the scribe of the menologium. Indeed the reverse is the case since all five cases involve hieromonks, whereas not only does Abercius refer to himself as a monk and not as a hieromonk (№ 11) but hieromonk Anthony, formerly of Gomionica, for whom Abercius copied the homiliary in 1625/6, also refers to him as a monk and not as a hieromonk (№ 14) and since the name Abercius does not occur in the list of monks, as opposed to hieromonks, copied by Dionysius into the register, the inference must be that Abercius was still alive in 1645. Be that as it may, rather than giving his dates as mid 1590s-after 1645, it is safer to give fl. 1614/5-1632/3.

To sum up, Abercius was an obedient monk who copied the menologium in accordance with the instructions of his abbot even when he disagreed about the inclusion of a particular entry. Indeed, the extent to which he himself chose the entries to be included is unknown and the claim that he compiled the menologium as opposed to copying it remains unproven. Although it is sometimes referred to as Abercius' menologium, he himself made it quite clear that the driving force behind the project was abbot Hilarion of Hilandar (1622/3-1627/8) so that it could with equal justice be called Hilarion's menologium. Abercius several times states that the monks at Hilandar contributed to it under the supervision of Hilarion and also once that the monastery met the expenses incurred by obtaining texts which were not in its collection. For these reasons the most appropriate name for the largest South Slav menologium is "The Hilandar Menologium". Abercius may have played a more modest role in the actual selection of the entries to be included than that with which he has hitherto been credited, but despite this it remains a fact that without his selfless diligence and painstaking and unremitting toil over a period of some four to five years the menologium would not exist.