

AUFSÄTZE

WIENER SLAVISTISCHES JAHRBUCH, Band 51/2005, 7–20
© 2006 by Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien

ADELINA ANGUSHEVA

Ancient Medical Knowledge of the Woman's Body in the Medieval Slavic Context: the Case of the Prague Manuscript IXF10

Sergei Averincev in memoriam

S. S. Averincev, one of the greatest Russian scholars of Late Hellenistic and Byzantine culture in the twentieth century, had undoubtedly broadened modern understanding of the cultural transition, changes and transformations at the birth of medieval Christian thought (Averincev 1977). In this article I explore a rather specific case of the relation between ancient and medieval culture: the spread of ancient medical concepts about the formation of the female body and its functions in the medieval South Slavic milieu through the mediation of the Byzantine culture. Thus I endeavor to establish an important instance of the influence of Graeco-Roman medicine on a tradition (such as the South Slavic one) that was connected, however remotely, with the ancient heritage. To this end, after a short survey of the manuscripts with the medical texts evidenced in the South Slavic milieu, I proceed to study the picture of the formation of the female embryo, of the female body and its functions as represented in the short gynecological treatises, attested in a late medieval Serbian manuscript from the Prague National Museum; I also examine the Greek sources of these treatises and compare the latter with similar texts from the Byzantine and Latin tradition.

1. MEDIEVAL MEDICAL TEXTS AND THE SOUTH SLAVIC MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

1.1. It is possible to distinguish between two general types of medieval manuscripts concerning healing: (a) manuscripts containing learned medical texts, medical treatises as well as recipes, on the one hand, and on the other (b) codices with more practical applications consisting only of recipes, incantations and instructions for curative practices. The latter type was sometimes used in the Middle Ages as an

amulet-book and was designed for a broader audience, while the former was mainly distributed among educated medical practitioners. In contrast to the Byzantine and the Latin traditions, codices of the first type were not typical of the South Slavic manuscript production, where popular healing recipes and incantations were predominant. To my knowledge there is only one extant South Slavic manuscript (dated from the fifteenth century, now kept in the Serbian Hilandar monastery at Mount Athos) which is entirely made up of medical treatises and recipes (Milinchevich – Katich 1980-1989).

Healing recipes and incantations translated from the Greek penetrated the South Slavic domain no later than at the end of the ninth or the early tenth century, as the lead amulets found in northeastern Bulgaria prove (Konstantinova – Popkonstantinov 1987). Further evidence of early South Slavic translation of Byzantine herbal remedies could be found in the tenth-century short Glagolitic manual *Vrachba Kozmina – The healing of Cosmas* (i.e. St. Cosmas who together with St. Damian is venerated as powerful saint healer) incorporated in *Psalterium* of Dimiter, kept in the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount of Sinai (the texts are edited by Tananidis 1988 and Vecheva 1991).

However, neither the lead amulets nor *The healing of Cosmas* contain any specific texts related to women's health. Even in later codices, such as the late fourteenth-century translation of recipes (*Iatrosophy*) in manuscript 462 from the Hilandar monastery at Mont Athos there is no text concerning women's health.¹ As late as the thirteenth century, a number of recipes and magical practices dealing with the reproductive abilities of the woman, advising the readers on physical beauty and the preparation of aphrodisiacs, or designed to heal male impotence gradually began to appear in the South Slavic manuscripts. From the fifteenth century onwards the manuscripts containing only healing recipes (both herbal remedies and magical texts), the so called *Lechebniki*, gained popularity in the South Slavic milieu (Sprostranov 1906-7). Some of the above-mentioned recipes dealing with sexual health, women's beauty and wellbeing were copied and spread in *Lechebniki*.

1.2. Equally, there is a palpable difference in the dissemination of the gynecological treatises among the southern Slavs, in comparison to Byzantium and the Latin West. While these treatises were widely spread in Greek and Latin manuscripts, they remained unknown to the Slavic reader. The Byzantine and Latin medieval codices concerning women's health drew mainly on the Hippocratic medical tradition, which was later reworked by the late Hellenistic medical practitioners, such as Galen and Soranus, to form the ground of medieval medical commentaries. As a rule, the ancient medical tradition represented and understood the female body by focusing on the reproductive abilities of the woman. Late antique gynecology became a traditional part of the medieval medical handbooks (Cf. for instance the

¹ I express my gratitude to the monastic community of the Hilandar monastery, Mont Athos and the Hilandar Research Library and Resource Center for Slavic Studies at Ohio State University for the opportunity to work with a microfilm of this manuscript.

catalogues of A. Beccario 1956 and Wickersheimer 1966). An interesting example in this respect is the ninth-century Latin manuscript (Codex Lat. F.V.VI. 3.) from the Russian National library in Petersburg which contains only texts concerning female health (Dobiaš-Rozdestvenskaia 1934, Egert 1936, Latinskie rukopisi 1983).

In short, in the South Slavic tradition the texts concerning the health of the woman appeared rarely and predominantly as part of manuscripts containing various other works unrelated, or only remotely related, to medicine. This fact suggests that the South Slavic manuscripts were not produced for particular medical schools or exclusively for medical practitioners, but rather appeared as a branch of other activities of the literate part of the monastic or lay population. At the same time, the Slavic texts, being grounded in the Byzantine medical discourse, are an important and relevant source for the study of the Graeco-Roman notions of the human body which had over time gained currency in the Balkans.

1.3. Possibly the only South Slavic manuscript containing treatises concerning the female body and women's health is the fifteenth-century Serbian miscellany IXF10, henceforth IXF10 (Vajs – Vašica 1959: 212-218)² kept in the National Museum of Prague (known as Hodoshki miscellany, after the name of the Serbian Orthodox male monastery Hodosh, now in Romania, with which it was associated). A marginal note in the manuscript (f.109r) informs the reader that in the town of Pesht the monk Theophan Topovec Rasoder gave the codex to priest Theodor from Beligrad, which suggests that the manuscript was long in use in monastic and clerical communities.

The manuscript contains Church rules and canons against magic and witchcraft, and, surprisingly in this context, a huge collection of books of divination such as Thunderbook, *Kalendologion*, Lunary, *Zodiologion*,³ predictions about the egress of the illness,⁴ various recipes (ff.151r-162r) and treatises on the development of the em-

² Some of the texts (such as the Prediction according to the position of the moon) are omitted in the description by Vašica and Vajs 1959: 215. This particular prediction is edited in translation by A. Angusheva 1996: 174. I am grateful to the Medieval Studies Department, Central European University, Budapest and to Prof. V. Vavřinek for the opportunity to work with the original manuscript. The medical texts from IXF10 were edited and translated into Modern Serbian by Katich (1990: 3-23, 57-79). The date of the manuscript was much debated. Since it is not the subject of this article, I shall mention only in brief that I am following here the conclusion of Andreeva 1931 and of Vajs – Vašica 1959: 212, who attributed the manuscript to the fifteenth century on the ground of the watermarks. Katich (1990: XXIV) also pointed out that the watermarks defined the manuscript as fifteenth century one, but somewhat misleadingly accepted the year 1396, found in the text on the circles of the year, as a date of the manuscript (1990: XXIII, 93-95). The translations into English from IXF10 in this article are mine.

³ Some of the books of divination from this *codex* were edited: Jagić 1878, Speranskii 1899, Andreeva 1931 and Katich 1990.

⁴ In the manuscript there are five different types of texts predicting the egress of the illness: Two books of prognostication predicting (a) by each day of the Lunar month or (b) by each day of the week according to the start of the sickness; two descriptions of magic practices according to which the sick person will survive (c) if after a prayer he turns on his right side, or will die if he turns on his left one, (d) or he will get well if a dog eats a leaven that has been in contact with the patient's body, or will die, if the dog refuses to eat

bryo in the womb (ff.145v), the factors determining the sex of the offspring (146v) as well as an instruction how to foretell this sex (f.147v). The Prague manuscript IXF10 displays many resemblances with the content of the Greek manuscript 2316 from the National Library in Paris, also from the fifteenth century: similar types of books of divination and divinatory practices for predicting the egress of the illness, instruction for predicting the sex of the unborn child, medical recipes and treatises are attested in both manuscripts. Regardless of their likeness, however, the Greek codex could not be regarded as a direct prototype of the Slavic one: these are rather two manuscripts equally representative of the “repertoire” of the popular late medieval medical knowledge in the Balkans.

2. THE TEXTS ON THE FORMATION OF THE EMBRYO IN MS IXF10

2.1. Here, for the reader’s convenience I will give a brief account of the content of the texts in question from the Prague manuscript IXF10. The short treatises on the formation of the embryo and the sex of the child are placed after a text concerning the four humors in the human body and the periods of the human life in which each of them prevails (f.145v). The beginning of the texts dedicated to the development of the embryo is related to this topic, since it indicates, although obliquely, the connection between man’s physical appearance and the humor predominant in the hour of conception. The following account, titled “About [the question] how does the semen change in the woman’s womb, and in which days does it become alive” (Katich 1990: 80), informs the reader that the embryo is created in the third day after the semen enters the womb; on the ninth day the flesh is formed, as well as the members, while on the fortieth day the fetus is already shaped, and in the third month it starts to move. It is worth mentioning that, according to the text, the semen is not inanimate; this notion was formed in conformity with the Hellenistic medical tradition and in contrast to the ninth-century Bulgarian writer John the Exarch’s views (and those of the Byzantine patristic authors he followed) who believed that it was God who grants to the inanimate semen the power to develop (Aitzetmüller 1958- 1971, Ioan Ekzarh 2000: 255). Thus, in the South Slavic milieu the church authorities in the ninth century and the monastic circles in the fifteenth century had a different understanding of the human procreative processes, which – although based on the ancient medical notions – interpreted differently the forces that regulate the development of the embryo.

According to the next short chapter (“Where does the male or female sex come from?”) the temperature and the thickness of the semen determine the sex of the fetus. When the embryo starts moving in the womb, then the milk is formed in the breast. The form of the womb, the semen that comes from both the mother and the

it; and (e) a divinatory practice, broadly spread in Byzantium and in the Latin West, in which the letters of the name of the ill person are counted and compared with the letter-numbers in so-called circle of life and death.

father,⁵ and the placement of the semen in the womb are discussed in connection with the features and the sex of the embryo. First the blood feeds it, and later it is nourished through its navel, the text states.

Two practices of foretelling the sex of the yet unborn child are represented in the text: when observed a woman pregnant with a boy will step first on her right foot, whereas a woman bearing a girl would first step on her left foot; a drop of milk from a pregnant woman will fall to the bottom of a vessel full of water if she is going to have a boy, and will stay on the surface, if she bears a girl.

The texts consist only of short statements which are not explained or discussed. In this respect they differ from the writings of both ancient and medieval physicians, such as Hippocrates, Galen or Stephan of Athens, thus suggesting a piece of instruction designed for a more heterogeneous public or for practitioners lacking a thorough medical education and in need of a general idea rather than a precise interpretation of accounts and cases. The incoherent structure of the treatises demonstrates that they were compiled from excerpts of other medical books (or were the written record of the oral discourses of various medical teachers).

2.2. The formation of the female offspring

2.2.1. The first distinction between the formation of male and female child in the gynecological texts of miscellany IXF10 is made on the basis of the character of the male semen. It is said that if the semen is thick and coagulates easily, the baby will be male. According to the text, the male embryos develop more rapidly than the female, and in the fortieth day the male ones are fully formed, while female are not completely shaped yet. Moreover, the male embryo starts to move in the womb in the third month, while the female only a month later. The concept that the female fetus is formed through the weak male semen is inherited in the medieval medicine from the Hellenistic tradition. However, the Slavic compilation contains only a simplistic, "popular" version of what was, among the ancient writers, a thorough philosophical examination of the powers of creation.⁶ The concept that the male offspring is conceived from a 'strong' sperm is also expressed by women authors, such as Hildegard of Bingen in her medical writings, although she associated the sex of the child not only with the semen but also with the love between man and woman, noting that the child will be male when the semen is strong, when the two parents

⁵ While all the medical authorities in the Antiquity recognized the function of the male sperm in the formation of the fetus, only some of the doctors believed in the existence of a semen produced by the female body. For instance, unlike Aristotle and Athenaeus, who thought that the embryo is formed only by the male semen and the menstrual blood, Galen argued that the female body produced semen, similar to the males one, which played a role in the development of the fetus. According to him the female semen receives its powers from the menstrual blood. See Galen 1993: 158-164.

⁶ Aristotle associated two fundamental living principles (forces), the active and the passive (material) one, with the male semen and the menstrual blood, respectively. Galen, by contrast, stated that both the menstrual blood and the male semen shared passive (material) and active principles, though the former one prevailed in the blood, and the latter in the semen. Cf. Galen 1993: 170.

have affectionate passion for each other, or when the man loves the woman more than she loves him (Hildegard of Bingen 1999: 51-52). Hildegard expanded the number of the procreative, sex-determining factors from the physiological area (sperm) to draw on the sphere of individual emotions, thus suggesting a greater role for the woman in this process.

2.2.2. Another explanation of the reason for the sex of the embryo, offered in Ms IXF10, concerns the place of the semen in the womb. According to the text, if the semen goes to the right part of the womb, the child will be male, and vice versa. The text renders here in a slightly distorted form Hippocrates' aphorism 49, in his Book V of Aphorisms, according to which the male embryo usually lies on the right side of the womb, while the female is on the left (Hippocrates 1943: 165).

The opposition between right and left side, projected to the gender differentiation between male and female, was a constant topos in the ancient medical discourse.⁷ As part of it, this Graeco-Roman belief was broadly shared by medieval medical writers, such as Stephan of Athens, a Byzantine physician who left a commentary on most of Hippocrates' works about women's health. He not only repeats aphorism 49, but also adds that man came from the right sinus of the womb, because it is warmer and is nourished with pure blood (Stefanus of Athens 1995: 122-123). Stephan of Athens also discusses Hippocrates' aphorism 38 which is not attested in the Slavic text, but which reflects the same understanding of the female body: If the woman expects twins, and one of her breasts becomes thin, it means that she had lost one of the children; and if it is the right breast she had lost the male child, if it is the left – the female one (Stefanus of Athens 1995: 123). Undoubtedly, the association of the woman with the left side implies a notion of weakness, similarly to the statement that the female offspring is created by the weak sperm. In addition, it is appropriate here to mention John the Exarch, according to whom the heart is placed on the left side of the body, because it is the weaker one and needs more of the strength that the heart can provide (Ioan Ekzarh 2000: 262).

The Slavic translator (or the initial compiler, be he a Greek or a Slav) of the text did not point out any possible contradiction between the belief that the female sex originates from the left part of the womb and the statement that it is produced by a weak sperm, nor did he discuss how these two principles interacted. For example, he does not enlighten the reader what the sex of the embryo will be if strong sperm goes to the left part of the uterus. This fact suggests a more or less mechanical combination of various sources, and also reflects the ancient medical practice in which more than one component was regarded as gender generating.

To sum up, in Ms IXF10 the woman was believed to originate from weak sperm and from the left part of the womb. This view was modeled on a socially regulated pattern which placed the woman on the weak and sinister side.

⁷ Hippocrates is a good example in this respect, since most of his writings were based on medical practice and observation, but his views were undoubtedly shaped by the Greek understanding of the world (Cf. S. Oberhelman 1990: 141-160).

2.3. The influence of the female body on the formation of the embryo

2.3.1. According to the treatise from IXF10, "if the semen of the woman is more than that of the man, the child will resemble his mother, and vice versa." This statement simplified and synthesized Galen's thorough and profuse study of the interaction between male and female semen in the formation of the embryo (Galen 1993: 170-190). Galen suggests that the ovaries are female testicles which also produce semen. He discusses the generating powers of the female semen, questioning whether it forms only the female sexual features, or rather contributes to the development of the body as a whole, thus causing resemblance with the mother regardless of the sex of the child (Galen 1993: 86, 158, 170).

As has already been mentioned, not all ancient medical authorities agreed that the woman produced semen and that this semen could be a factor in the embryo formation. Therefore the notion of female semen undoubtedly links the Slavic text to Galen's writings. Furthermore, the idea that the child will resemble the mother if the female semen prevails, shows that in the South Slavic milieu the concept of the formative powers of the woman was known and accepted.

2.3.2. Similarly, the Slavic compilation contains Hippocrates' and Galen's opinion that the embryo is nurtured in the womb by menstrual blood. Not all ancient and medieval medical authorities shared this view. That the embryo may be nurtured by menstrual blood is established in the Slavic treatise as a reason for the weakness of the child in the cases when the pregnant woman bleeds. This is the only place in the treatises of Ms IXF10 where the compiler refers to Hippocrates by name.

The Hippocratic corpus evidences two aphorisms which comment on the bleeding during pregnancy. In aphorism 31 of Hippocrates' Book V it is said that if the woman has bleeding (φλεβοτομηθείσα) there is a danger of miscarriage, and the risk is higher when the embryo is bigger (καὶ μάλλον ἦτιμι μείζον τὸ ἔμβριον) [Hippocrates 1943, 166]. The Slavic text, however, echoes a commented version of aphorism 60, according to which if the pregnant woman has a monthly bleeding (καθάρσεις πορεύονται), the child will not be healthy (ἀδύνατον τὸ ἔμβριον ὑγιαίνειν) [Ibid. 175]. Hippocrates clearly distinguished between these two conditions (bleeding and menstruation). At the first glance, the Slavic text is somewhat misleading in relation to the two aphorisms, because the condition *krъnbъ pustitъ* (bleeds) renders literally the term used in the aphorism 31 (i.e. any bleeding, not just menstruation). However, in the recipe against infertility from the same manuscript the word *krъno-tečenie* (bleeding) denotes precisely menstruation, and therefore the phrase *krъnbъ pustitъ* in the text appears to be a verb derivation from the Slavic term for the regular monthly periods.

2.3.3. In his aphorisms Hippocrates paid little attention to the influence of the female body on the embryo, noting only that the inability to conceive among women suffering from obesity is due to the fact that the stomach mass suppresses the womb. It is Galen who in *De semine* discussed the form of the womb in relation to the development of the fetus. In several instances, he uses the process of baking as a meta-

phor for the conception and formation of the embryo. Galen compares the development of the fetus in the womb with the rising of the dough according to the form of the vessel (the womb) [Galen 1993: 79].

The text from the miscellany IXF10 contains a short simplified version of Galen's concept of the form of the womb and its influence on the development of the fetus: "If the womb is narrow, the embryo will be weak; if the womb is broad and large, the embryo will be robust and thriving." The text of this treatise evidences that Bulgarians and Serbs in the fifteenth century were familiar with some of Galen's ideas concerning the formation of the embryo, which were widely popular in the Byzantine medical discourse, but gave them a more popular and less exact rendition.

2.4. Humors

The main concept of the ancient medical tradition, the theory of the four humors (blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm) that regulate the processes in the human body, is poorly attested in the medieval South Slavic sources.⁸ In Ms IXF10, however, in addition to a short text about the predomination of different humors in the various periods of the human life, it is noted that if a child is conceived in the first three hours of the day, when the blood prevails, s/he will be "ruddy, pink-cheeked, all the veins will be thick and full of blood, the eyes will be lackluster and the eye veins will be full of blood, and the mouth will be soft and ruddy." An interesting detail of the Slavic translation is the fact that different hours of the day and night are associated with the prevalence of one of the humors, while the ancient physicians coordinated the humors mainly with the four seasons of the year. Thus the hour of conception (and the humor linked with it) appeared to be a factor in predicting the physical appearance of the person.

In both the ancient and the medieval medical practice the humors were regarded as an indicator of the woman's ability to conceive. Hippocrates' writings are representative of this tradition; he linked the four humors with the elements dry, wet, hot and cold, and noted that women whose wombs are wet, or excessively hot, or extremely dry could be unable to conceive, in contrast to those whose wombs are a combination of extremely hot and dry (aphorism 62, Book V). Soranus shared a similar understanding, and in trying to define the woman's ability to conceive asso-

⁸ This conclusion is grounded on my observations of the codices containing medical texts, kept in some of the major collections of South Slavic manuscripts such as the National Library and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Library, Sofia, the National Library, Plovdiv, Rila Monastery Library (all four in Bulgaria); the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (HAZU) Library, Zagreb (Croatia); the Serbian National Library and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Library, Belgrade (Serbia); and National Museum, Prague (Czech Republic); similar Slavic manuscripts from the Hilandar and Iviron monasteries at Mount Athos should be added to this list (I was able to study the microfilms of the manuscripts of these two monasteries thanks to the Hilandar Research Library at Ohio State University). With respect to the notion of humors, the Hilandar medical codex (edited by V. Milinchevich and R. Katich 1980-1989) is an exception in the South Slavic domain, in the sense that it provides, unlike other South Slavic codices, specific information on the humors (but with no reference to the female body).

ciated it with the character of the woman. Hildegard of Bingen also defines four types of women in connection to the humor which prevails in them and concludes that only melancholic women (corresponding to the cold and wet) are not able to conceive (Hildegard of Bingen 1999: 63-64).

This idea, though broadly attested in the medieval medical tradition, is absent in Ms IXF10. In contrast to all medical authorities mentioned above, both Hellenistic and medieval, the compilers of the treatises in IXF10 appeared to have been unfamiliar with the idea of the relation between conceiving and the humors prevailing in the female body. They restricted the influence of the humors to the moment of the conception and to the future physical appearance of the child. Thus in the South Slavic tradition, the humors were related to the precise time of the conception, and were not associated with the specificity of the woman's body.

2.5. Human milk

2.5.1. According to the text of miscellany IXF10, the milk appears in the mother's breast when the embryo starts to move in the womb. It is said to come from the food and drink that the mother receives, and that "warmed in the chest, it is white and sweet."⁹ The Slavic text displays a more commonsensical understanding of the origin of the milk, which differs substantially from Hippocrates' notion of milk produced through the uterus (Hippocrates 1995: 122). The curative qualities of the human milk are attested in two recipes from the same manuscript. According to them, deafness could be healed by a mixture of either rabbit's or heifer's gall and woman's milk. The human milk was widely used as a healing ingredient by the ancient physicians. Dioscorides, one of the major ancient authorities on the curative powers of natural products, pointed out that it is good for the eyes but should be avoided by epileptics and those who have headache (Gunter 1959: 110). He also mentioned in his *Herbal* that the woman's milk is sweet and most nourishing. Although Dioscorides may not have been a direct source for the recipes in Ms IXF10, it is obvious that the Slavic text represents the common interpretation of the notion of the human milk as a natural cure, which does not mention cases where its use could be harmful.

2.5.2. Unlike all the other medical concepts, the above mentioned divinatory practices for foretelling the sex of the child, described in Ms IXF10 – the divination by a drop of milk and the prediction according to the leg on which the pregnant woman first steps – are of folkloric origin, irreducible to borrowings from particular authors (Hippocrates, Galen, etc.). The second of these two prognostications is broadly attested in South Slavic popular almanacs from the late eighteenth century onwards (Kirilova – Miltenova 1993: 14). While this popular prognostication penetrated the Slavic revision of the medical texts, the ancient medical writings as well

⁹ The idea that the human milk comes from the consummated food is a standard *topos* even in the Byzantine hagiography, where some saints refused in their infancy their mother's milk if the mother had eaten meat or fat food, the refusal being a sign of the saint's primary inclination to ascetic life.

as the medieval commentaries usually pointed to changes in the female body as a sign for the sex of the baby. In aphorism 42, book V, Hippocrates pointed out another portent, stating that if a woman is going to have a boy, she looks well (εὖχρως), in contrast to her appearance when she is pregnant with a girl (Hippocrates 1943: 168, Stefanus of Athens 1995: 129). The common feature between the Slavic divinatory practices and Hippocrates' text is that they are constructed on oppositions, in which the female is placed on the sinister, repugnant side.

3. REMEDIES, BEAUTY CREAMS, INSTRUCTIONS, AND INCANTATIONS

3.1. In the chapter "Where does the male or female sex come from?" a herb is mentioned that enables the woman to conceive only male or female children. The name of the herb is not given but the reader is instructed that three seeds of it should be taken in the morning before the first meal. Information about such potions could be found even in non-medical medieval works such as John Chrysostom's sermon against evil women. In the eighteenth-century revision of this sermon by Joseph Bradati (ca. 1714-ca. 1758), a monk of the Rila Monastery in Bulgaria, women who seek to obtain herbs from a witch in order to conceive only male children are stigmatized. Ironically enough, given that these sermons were broadly spread and preached even to the illiterate, it is very likely that many Christians learned about the herb from the sermons stigmatizing its use, rather than from the medical texts. A recipe for conceiving a male or female baby is mentioned in the Byzantine medical treatise on women's health attributed to an enigmatic figure of Metrodora. Marie Helene Congourdeau notes that there is no data about the authorship of the treatise. The text was written at some time between the sixth and the twelfth centuries, and the participles in the feminine show that it is either addressed to a woman practicing medicine or directly to a woman patient (Congourdeau 1993). The collection of Metrodora is a medical handbook in the general sense. Along with recipes for healing inflammations, ulcers, and other diseases of the breast and the womb, as well as prescriptions for conceiving or easy delivery, it contains recipes for stomach ache, antidotes, aphrodisiacs, perfumes, beauty creams, instructions how to discern a virgin, and recipes for male sexual problems. In contrast to the Serbian miscellany IXF10, where the pharmacological recipes are at times accompanied by incantations and magical practices, Metrodora's treatise is entirely in the tradition of the late Hellenistic curative manuals, where recipes based on Mediterranean plants and natural products are used. Most of these ingredients could be found in the standard Byzantine botanical texts (Frisk 1949, Aber 1953, Delatte 1961, Breakman 1981).

3.2. The collection of remedies (ff.151r-162r) [Katich 1990: 8-23, 62-77] from Ms IXF10 addresses a number of common diseases (such as tooth-, stomach- and headaches, sore eye, deafness, cough, calvities, hydrophobia etc.). It does not offer a great variety of remedies concerning the health and beauty of the woman. However, two recipes for a "young looking" face are attested there. It is not deliberately stated in the recipes that they are only for women, but we could assume that the potential

female users will have been most interested in them. The recipes do not coincide with any of Metrodora's texts. In the first of them, the frequent application of a mixture of sesame oil and goose fat is suggested, and beans flour is recommended in the other. In Metrodora's beauty creams, aromatized wine, honey and soil from the island of Chios are mentioned. It is obvious that in this case the Slavic translation is based on a text, in which the traditional Southeastern Mediterranean components are applied to a lesser degree and a preference is given to ingredients from the continental part of the Balkans.

3.3. In the recipe against infertility in Ms IXF10, morning baths with a dried rabbit's womb (*lozhe*, – womb)¹⁰ filled with water are administered during the woman's monthly bleeding. Metrodora's remedies for conception consist mainly of edible natural products or spices, such as honey, tamarisk oil and pomegranate juice.¹¹ The Slavic text, however, represents a distorted version of the remedy for conception from the *Herbal* of Dioscorides, according to which rabbit's rennet mixed with butter should be used for purging baths during menstruation to cause pregnancy. In the remedy attested in Ms IXF10, the replacement of the 'rennet' (stored in the stomach) with a 'womb' results, more likely than not, from a belief in the sympathetic magical influence of the rabbit's fecundity.

In the prescription for preventing the death of a child in the womb from Ms IXF10 it is suggested that a mixture of goat milk, wine and honey be given to the pregnant woman. The honey and wine are mentioned in many of Metrodora's recipes and are described by Dioscorides as curative (Gunter 1959: 109-110, 124, 603-607).

3.4. The instructions for easy child delivery (as well as those for male impotence) in Ms IXF10 are based on a sympathetic magic in which the power of the sacred texts is used, thus representing the interference of the Christian culture in the early medical writings that influenced the medieval healing practices. While Metrodora's remedies for easy delivery are mainly based on natural ingredients, the instruction in the Serbian manuscript calls in fact for the performance of a magical act: A piece of paper with a short quotation of the Bible, referring to the opening of the Gate of heaven, should be placed on the back of the delivering woman.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to conclude that the medical treatises from Ms IXF10 represent a shortened, simplified medieval survey of the ideas of Hippocrates and Galen, to which some later interpolations based on popular beliefs were added. Since the medical treatises and recipes are only a small part of the content of this manuscript, it could be concluded that it was not designed for the learned medical practitioner but was rather meant as a manual for the general public or for healers within the

¹⁰ The Old Church Slavonic (Old Bulgarian) word *ложe* (*lozhe*) initially means 'bed,' but also 'cave,' 'burrow,' 'womb' and 'inner parts'.

¹¹ There is a great variety of magical practices and recipes for conceiving in medieval Europe. In Italy broadly spread are recipes with verbena and rosemary. In *Lacunga* mainly, on the other hand, magical practices are mentioned (Grattans – Singer 1952).

monastic milieu who needed a concise informative guide and instruction for treating different illnesses, so that they could be of help not only to their brethren but also to the visitors of the monastery, be they men or women.

As it becomes clear from the texts discussed above, these treatises and recipes acquainted the South Slavic reading audience with ideas which descended from the ancient medical authorities (such as Galen, Hippocrates and Dioscorides), and were broadly spread in Byzantium (in the works of Stephan of Athens and Metrodora's manual) and in the Latin West (Hildegard of Bingen). The recipes from Ms IXF10 show, however, that the translator had deliberately often adapted the Byzantine sources by choosing remedies prepared from ingredients typical for the continental part of the Balkans.

Although the ancient Greek and Latin medical writings were very poorly known among the Southern Slavs, the small number of Greek gynecological texts that were translated in the Slavic milieu shaped the notions of the female body through a number of inevitable modifications of the ancient medical corpus. In these translated treatises the female body is characterized only on the ground of its reproductive organs and functions, and the woman is seen as belonging in the left (weak, slow, ugly, sinister) part of the body (the left part of the womb, the left leg, and in Hippocrates' and Stephan of Athens' writings the left breast and the unpleasant appearance of women pregnant with girls). The medieval Slavic notions of the female body followed closely Hippocrates' binary principle and was in debt to Galen's writings on the semen. As Paula Manuli (1980: 397) correctly suggested, all these medieval gynecological treatises understand women only as trapped in the dichotomy of fertile and barren, virgin and mother, wife and widow. These dichotomies were framed in the more general opposition between male/right and female/left at work in both the ancient and medieval culture. Seeing any culture, be it ancient or medieval, in the perspective of strictly defined dichotomies simplifies its diversity and complexity, but it was indeed this understanding of the place of the woman that dominated these two epochs and determined the variations, different approaches and answers to the questions concerning the female body and the health of the woman.

For the medieval culture, however, there was one more frame that structured the picture. It is the biblical narrative of Eve created from Adam's rib that exemplified the archetypal origin of the woman, while the medical interpretation explained the later reproduction of the female offspring. Therefore, it is not surprising that a Christian author such as John the Exarch of Bulgaria talked not only about the creation of Eve but also about the role of the semen in the creation of the embryo. In this respect, the presence of the medical texts in the Serbian manuscript should not be regarded as a deviation from the Christian norms, since they involved only questions of human reproduction (and not of creation). They differed only in a couple of points from the traditional Christian views: they understood the human semen as animated and represented the hour of conception as a physiological determinant with regards to the embryo. The crucial contradiction appeared when medical texts of-

ferred ways of changing and manipulating the natural course: herbs to conceive a child of a particular sex; or incantations to ease the childbirth. Although the earlier Bulgarian text by John the Exarch differs from the medical treatises in the late medieval Serbian manuscript in the understanding of the sperm as animated, their main common feature is that they represent the female body only in terms of its difference, both physical and functional, to the male one.

If we have to summarize the views on the female body attested in the South Slavic domain, we have to say that the female offspring appears from weak sperm, from semen that lies on the left side of the womb, or, much to the dislike of the Church fathers, by taking a special herb. In the womb it would develop less rapidly than the male embryo. In the process of procreation, however, the female body does not perform a passive role only: the physical qualities of the embryo depend on the form of the womb, and on the blood that nourishes the fetus, but it is the prevailing of the female semen over the male one that makes the child resemble the mother. The human milk, both nutritive and curative, comes from the food and testifies to the usefulness of the woman's breast versus the beauty of the male one, thus representing the perfection in God's creation. Both nature and magic were applied to form, embellish, enhance and evoke the powers of the female body.

R e f e r e n c e s

- Aitzetmüller 1958-1971: Rudolf Aitzetmüller, *Das Hexaemeron des Exarchen Johannes*, 7 vols., Graz
- Andreeva 1931: Мария Андреева, Политический и общественный элемент византийско – славянских гадательных книг, *Byzantinoslavica* 2, 430-461
- Angusheva 1996: Аделина Ангушева, *Гадателните книги в старобългарската литература*, София
- Arber 1953: A. Arber, *Herbals. Their Origin and Evolution*, Cambridge
- Averincev 1977: Сергей Аверинцев, *Поэтика ранневизантийской литературы*, Москва
- Beccario 1956: Augusto Beccario, *I codici di medicina del periodo Presalernitano, Storia e letteratura, Raccolta di studi e testi*, Roma
- Braekman 1981: Willy Braekman, 'Here men may see the virtues of herbes' by Pol Grymonpres, *Scripta* 3
- Congourdeau 1993: Marie Helene Congourdeau, 'Métrodōra' e son œuvre, in: *Maladie et Société à Byzance*, ed. E. Patlagean, Spoleto, 57-97
- Delatte 1961: Armand Delatte, *Herbarius recherches sur le cérémonial usité chez les anciens par la cueillette de simples et des plantes magiques*, Bruxelles
- Dobiaš-Rozdestvenskaia 1934: Ol'ga Dobiaš-Rozdestvenskaja, Histoire de l'atelier graphique de Corbie de 651 à 830 reflétée dans les *Corbeiensis lenopolitani*, Académie des sciences de l'URSS. Travaux de l'Institut de l'histoire de la science et technique, 145-150
- Egert 1936: F. Egert, *Gynäkologische Fragmente aus dem frühen Mittelalter nach einer Petersburger Handschrift aus dem VIII-IX Jahrhundert zum ersten Mal gedruckt, Abhandlungen zur Gesch. der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften*, Berlin
- Frisk 1949: G. A. Frisk, *Middle English Translation of Macer Floridus de Viribus Herbarium*, Uppsala

- Galen 1993: Galen, *De semine*, Book II., A bilingual edition, ed. & transl. by Philip de Lacy, Berlin
- Grattans – Singer 1952: J. H. Grattans – C. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, Oxford
- Gunter 1959: Robert Gunter, *The Greek Herbals of Dioscorides*, illustrated by Byzantine A. D. 512, englished by John Goodyer A. D. 1655, New York
- Hildegard of Bingen 1999: Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine*, ed. & transl. Margaret Berger, Cambridge
- Hippocrates 1943: Hippocrates, *Aphorisms V*, A bilingual edition, transl. in English by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical library 4, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Hippocrates 1995: Hippocrates, *Glands V*, A bilingual edition, transl. in English by P. Potter, Loeb Classical library 8, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Ioan Ekzarh 2000: Ioan Ekzarh, *Shestodnevi*, transl. Nikolai Kochev, Sofia
- Jagić 1878: Vatroslav Jagić, *Opisi i izvodi iz nekoliko južnoslavinskih rukopisa*, *Starine X*, 81-117
- Katich 1990: P. B. Катих, *Медицински списи художког зборника*, Београд
- Kirilova – Miltenova 1993: Ани Кирилова – Анисава Милтенова, *Колелото на живота*, София
- Konstantinova – Popkonstantinov 1987: Величика Константинова – Казимир Попконстантинов, *Апокрифна молитва от X век върху оловна пластина*, *Die slawischen Sprachen 13*, 45-54
- Latinskie rukopisi 1983: Латинские рукописи V-XIIв. Государственной публичной библиотеки имени Салтыкова-Щедрина, Ленинград
- Manuli 1980: P. Manuli, *Fisiologia e patologia del femminile nei scritti ipocratici dell'antica ginecologia greca*, in: *Hippocratica, Actes du Colloque hippocratique de Paris*, ed. M. D. Grmek, Paris, 393-405
- Milincevich – Katich 1980-1989: Васо Милинчевич – Релја Катих, eds., *Хиландарски медицински кодекс*, 2 vols., Београд
- Oberhelman 1990: Stephan Oberhelman, *The Hippocratic Corpus and Greek Religion*, in: *The Body and the Text. Comparative Essays in Literature and Medicine*, Eds. Bruce Clarke and Wendell Aycock, Texas, 141-160
- Tarnanidis 1988: Iannis Tarnanidis, *The Slavonic Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount of Sinai, Thessaloniki*
- Soranos 1988: Soranos d'Éphèse, *Maladies des femmes*, ed. & transl. Paul Burguiere, Danielle Gourevitch, Yves Malinas, Paris
- Speranskii 1899: Михаил Сперанский, *Из истории отреченной литературы*, т. 2. Трелетники, Памятники древней письменности и искусства, Петербург
- Sprostranov 1906-7: Евтим Спространов, *Народни лековници*, Сборник са народни умотворения, наука и книжнина 22-23, София
- Stefanus of Athens 1995: Stefanus of Athens, *Comentary on Hippocrates' Aphorisms V-VI*. *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum editit Academia Berolensis et Brandeburgensis cum academiis Havniensi atque Lipsiensi*, Text & translation Leedert G. Westerim, Berlin
- Vajs – Vašica 1959: Josef Vajs – Josef Vašica, *Catalogus Codicum Palaeoslovenicorum Musei Nationalis Pragae*, Praha
- Velcheva 1991: Борјана Велчева, *Новооткрит лекарственник*, написан с глаголица, *Старобългарска литература* 25-26, 95-97
- Wickersheimer 1966: Ernest Wickersheimer, *Manuscripts Latins de médecine du Haut Moyen age dans les bibliothèques de France*, Paris

Adelina Angusheva
 Department of European Languages and Cultures
 Bowland North, Lancaster University
 Lancaster LA1 4YT, UK