



**PATRISTIC EXEGETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE
ORTHODOX HOMILETIC TRADITION: THE
UČITEL'NO EVANGELIE (DIDACTIC GOSPEL) BY
CONSTANTINE OF PRESLAV**

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THE PATRISTIC HERITAGE

When we read them [i.e. the Fathers of the Church] we are immersing ourselves in the tradition of the Church. This is not the only way of immersing ourselves in the tradition of the Church: the liturgical services of the Church are also a repository of tradition, but we think of that, too, as patristic. We regard the two principle Eucharistic liturgies as compositions of two of the Fathers, St John Chrysostom and St Basil the Great, and very many of the songs and *troparia* we sing are composed by Fathers of the Church, such as St John Damascene, and furthermore are composed of passages taken from patristic writings, especially the homilies of St Gregory the Theologian (Louth 2023: 23-4).

OVERVIEW

Introduction

I. Greek New Testament Catenae: A Brief Overview

II. *Učitel'no evangelie (Didactic Gospel)* by Constantine of Preslav

Conclusion

I. Greek New Testament Catenaes: A Brief Overview

TERMINOLOGY

- In the Medieval Greek tradition:
 - ἐξηγητικάι ἐκλογαί, exegetical extracts;
 - συναγωγή τῶν ἐξηγητικῶν ἐκλογῶν, collection of exegetical extracts;
 - συναγωγή ἐξηγήσεων, collection of exegeses (Dorival 1985: 210).
- The term 'catena' (from Latin 'chain')
- *Catena aurea*, compiled by Thomas of Aquinas.
- *Catena sexaginta quinque Patrum græcorum in S. Lucam* (Antwerp, 1628) and *Catena Patrum græcorum in S. Joannem* (Antwerp, 1630), edited by Balthasar Corderius.

THE ORIGINS OF GREEK BIBLICAL CATENAE

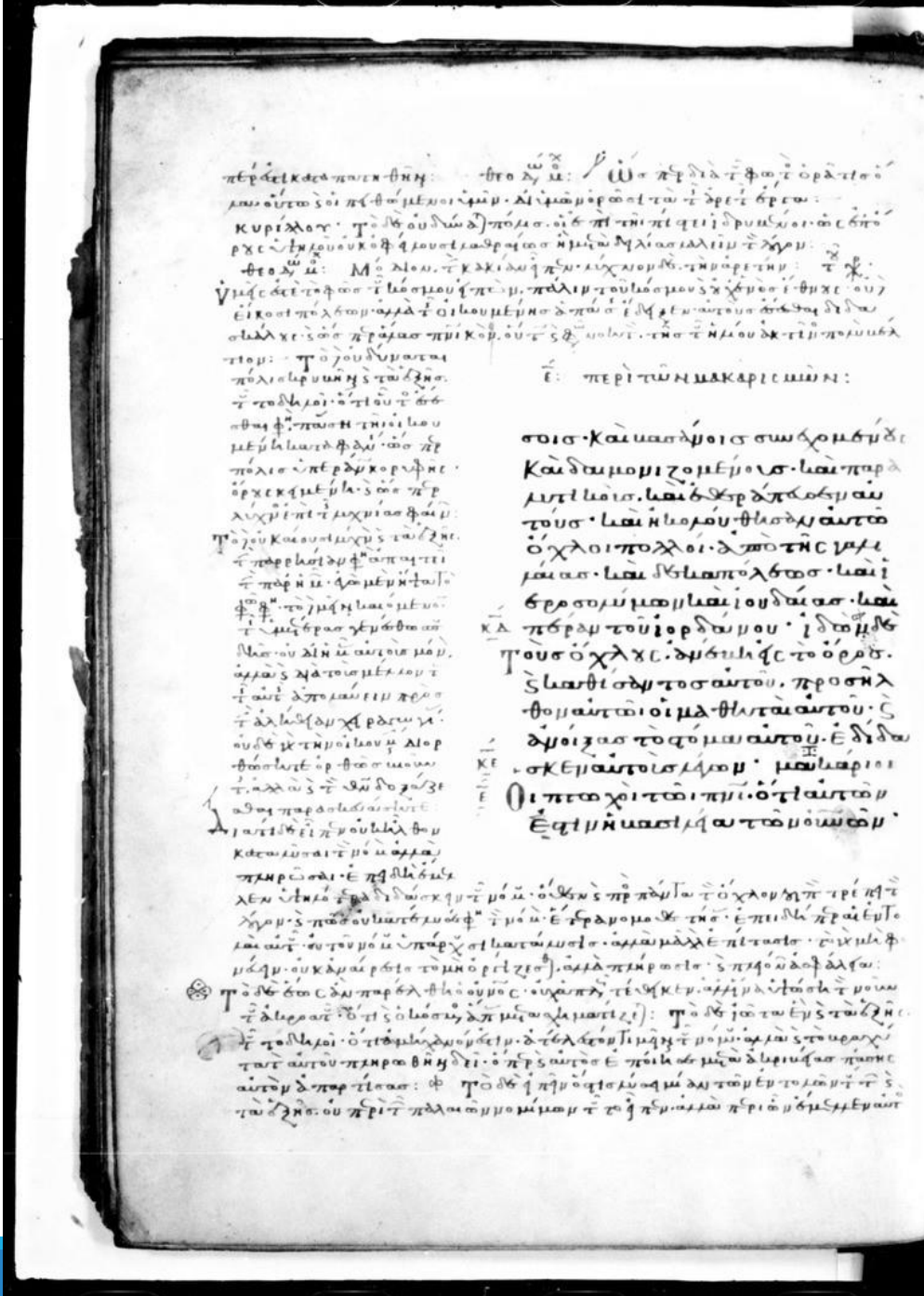
Ἦδη μὲν καὶ πρότερον [...] τὰς καταβεβλημένας ἐκ τῶν πατέρων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων εἰς τὴν Ὀκτάτευχον ἐξηγήσεις συνελεξάμεθα ἐξ ὑπομνημάτων καὶ διαφόρων λόγων ταύτας ἐρανισάμενοι. ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ τὰς ῥήσεις αὐτὰς τῶν ἐκθεμένων ἐπὶ λέξεως ἐξεθέμεθα, εἴτε σύμφωνοι πρὸς ἀλλήλας ἐτύγχανον εἴτε καὶ μή, καὶ πρὸς πλῆθος ἄπειρον ἡμῖν ἐντεῦθεν τὸ σύγγραμμα παρετείνετο, συνείδον νῦν πρὸς μέτρον εὐσταλὲς συνελεῖν τὴν γραφὴν ἐπειγόμενος, εἰ μὲν τι σύμφωνον εἴρηται ἅπασιν, τοῦτο προσάπαξ εἰπεῖν· εἰ δέ τι διάφορον, καὶ τοῦτο συντόμως ἐκθέσθαι πρὸς τὸ διὰ πάντων ἐν γενέσθαι σῶμα τῆς συγγραφῆς ὡς ἑνὸς καὶ μόνου τὰς ἀπάντων ἡμῖν ἐκθεμένου φωνάς. προσθήσομεν δέ τι καὶ ἔξωθεν εἰς τρανοτέραν ἔσθ' ὅτε παράστασιν. οὐκοῦν συνεργὸν ἡμῖν τὸν θεὸν γενέσθαι καλέσαντες ἐντεῦθεν ἀρξώμεθα (Procopii Gazaei, *Commentarius in Genesin* – PG 87/1: col. 21A–24A)

MARGINAL/ FRAME CATENAE

- The biblical text in the centre of the folio or closer to the inner margin.
- The biblical text in larger characters or in ink of different colour; the commentary in smaller script.
- The predominant form of Greek New Testament catena until the very end of the eleventh century.

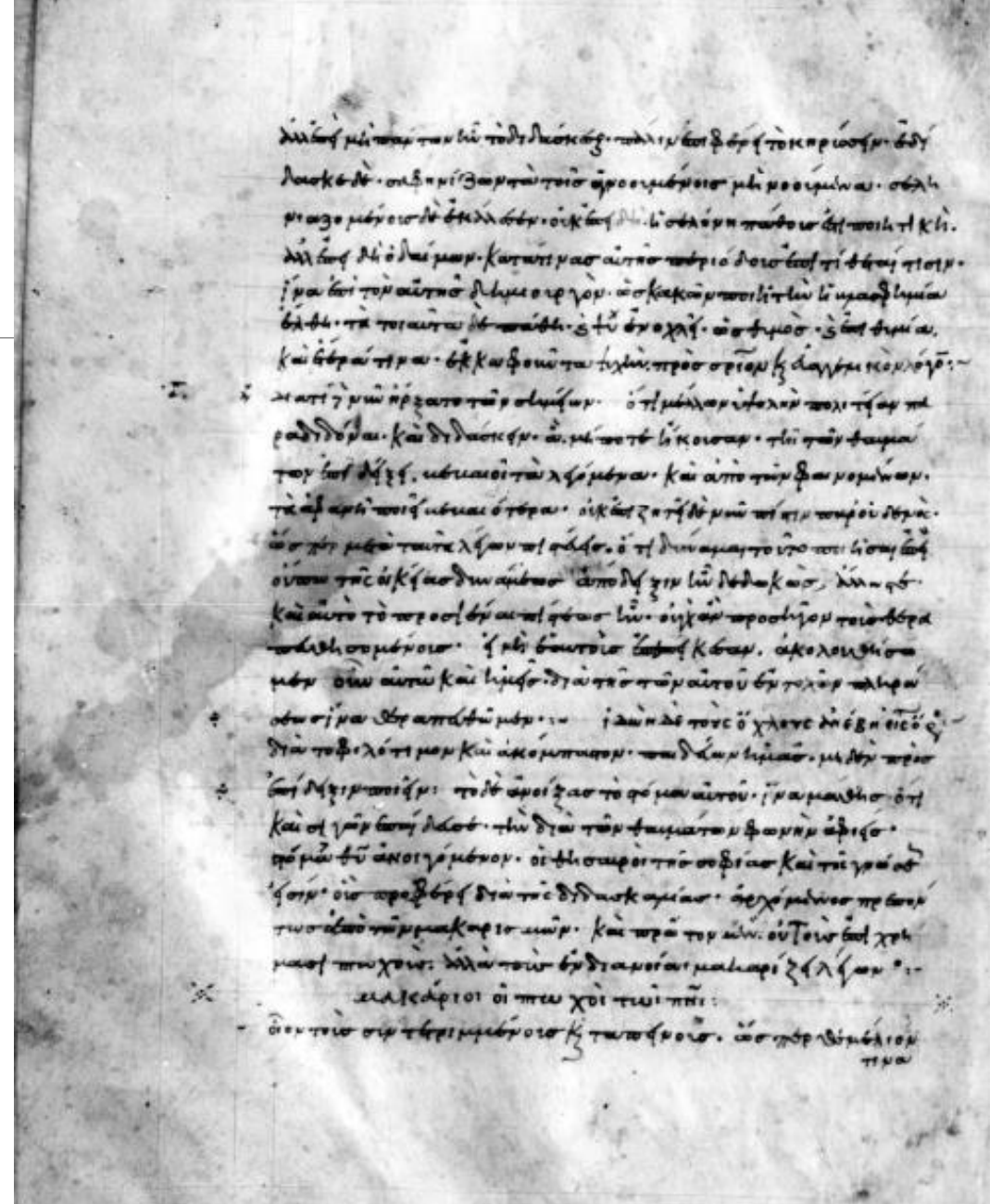
Cod. Coislin. gr. 23 (11th c.), f. 14v

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b110001366/f18.item>



ALTERNATE(ING) CATENAE

- A biblical verse or a couple of verses, stylistically marked, and followed by exegetical extracts.
- Widely spread from the twelfth century onwards.



Cod. Coislin. gr. 602 (11th – 12th c.), f. 19r, containing *Catena* in *Matthaeum* (CPG C110-C116):

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b110001188/f22.item>

THE USAGE OF BIBLICAL CATENAE IN BYZANTIUM

“The catenae were a logical and, in some ways, necessary response to the intense and voluminous exegetical production of the previous centuries. No individual or single school, church, or monastery could have a library containing all the exegetical writings of the church fathers. In addition to this, these writings were neither easy to study nor to reference. The catenae, on the other hand, which were compiled under the direction of competent textual critics, exegetes, and theologians, were eminently useful for study, for the preparation of sermons, and, not least, for the clarification of disputes concerning the meaning of a biblical passage and the refutation of theological heresies (Constas 2021: 117).”

THE ACCOUNT OF PHOTIUS

Ἀνεγνώσθη Προκοπίου σοφιστοῦ ἐξηγητικαὶ σχολαὶ εἰς τε τὴν Ὀκτάτευχον τῶν παλαιῶν γραμμάτων καὶ εἰς τὰς Βασιλείας καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ Παραλειπόμενα. Πολύχους μὲν οὗτος καὶ πολύστιχος ὁ ἐξηγητής, πλὴν οὐκ εἰς περιττάς τινας καὶ ἐξαγωνίους ἀποδιατρίβων παρεκδρομάς, ἀλλὰ τῷ διαφορὰς δοξῶν περὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ὑποθέσεως ἀναγράφειν πολλάκις.

(Photius, *Bibliotheca*; cod. 206)

THE TRANSFORMATION OF BIBLICAL CATENAE

“Ce phénomène consiste à opérer la transformation de la forme caténales en une forme exégétique traditionnelle, commentaires, homélies ou scholies. Ce processus de transformation, dont la date d'apparition reste incertaine, est bien attesté à partir du 10^e siècle. Il reste productif jusqu'à une période tardive de l'empire byzantin. Grâce à lui, l'on peut dire que les chaînes occupent une place centrale, médiatrice, dans l'histoire de l'exégèse byzantine : élaborées à l'origine à partir de commentaires, d'homélies et de scholies, les chaînes permettent à leur tour de fabriquer des commentaires, des homélies et des scholies” (Dorival 1985: 213).

Byzantine homilies based on biblical catenae (Dorival 1985):

- 1) *On Psalms 101-107* (prior to 750 AD), attributed to St John Chrysostom (PG 55, cols. 635-674);
- 2) *On Psalm 118* (prior to 850 AD), attributed to St John Chrysostom (PG 55, cols. 675-708);
- 3) *On Psalms 1-150* (after the 11th c.), preserved in a group of manuscripts, e.g. *Cod. Vaticanus gr. 525* (11th c.).

II. THE *UČITEL'NO EVANGELIE* ('DIDACTIC GOSPEL') BY CONSTANTINE OF PRESLAV

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE IN SLAVONIC: CONSTANTINE OF PRESLAV

- Constantine of Preslav
 - a disciple of Methodius, active in Great Moravia;
 - after 885: imprisoned by the Germanic clergy in Great Moravia and sold as slave in Venice;
 - ca. 886: moved to Bulgaria serving as a priest in the capitals Pliska and, then, Preslav.
- Writings
 - Authored the *Istorilii vŭ kratŭcě* ('Outline of History'), based on the Χρονολογία σύντομος by Nikephoros, patriarch of Constantinople;
 - Translated the *Contra Arianos* by Athanasius of Alexandria;
 - Composed several ecclesiastical hymns, preserved in South Slavonic *Triodion* manuscripts.
 - Composed the *Učitelno evangelie*

THE *UČITELNO EVANGELIE* (DIDACTIC GOSPEL)



- **Date:** Compiled in the period between 886 and 894.
- **Content:**
 - 51 homilies for each Sunday of the ecclesiastical year for the period from Easter to Palm Sunday.
 - Follows the gospel lectionary system of the Great Church in Constantinople (Gallucci 2001).
- **Manuscripts:**
 - *Cod. Mosquensis. Sin. Slav. 262* (11th/12th c.);
 - *Cod. RGB Gilf. 32* (1286);
 - *Cod. Vindobonensis Slav. 12* (14th c.);
 - *Cod. Athoniensis, Hilendar. Slav. 385* (1344).

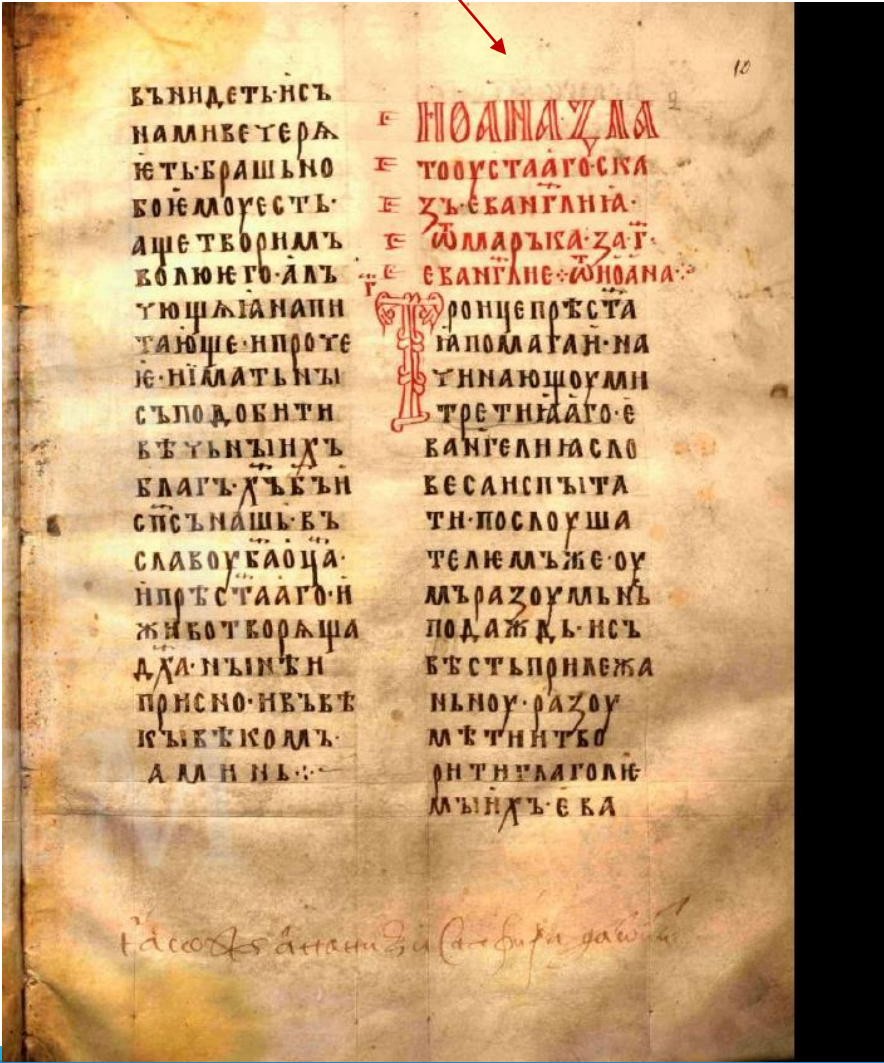
THE SOURCES

The *prologue* to the *Didactic Gospel*:

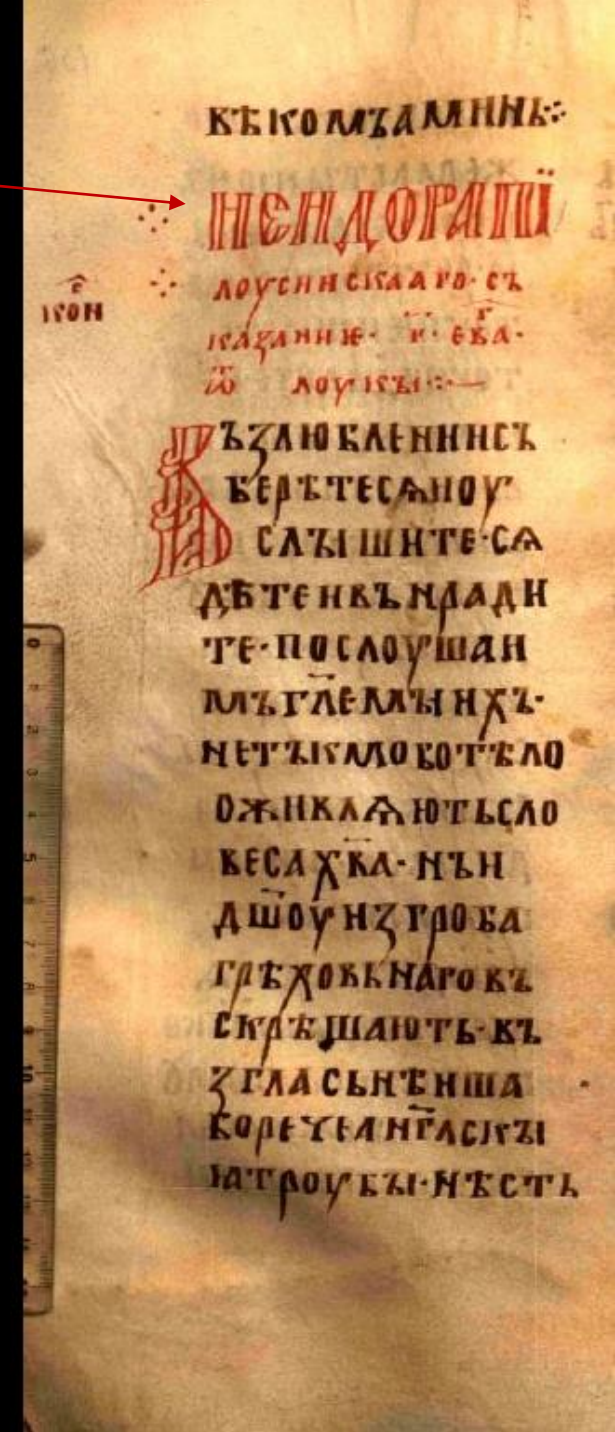
“It is good, brethren, always to begin with God and finish with God, as Gregory the Theologian said, to instruct ourselves in the divine law day and night [...] For that reason I, the humble Constantine, reassured by your pleading as well, brother Naum, and by the commandments mentioned above, bowed to your humility. And you, brothers, fathers, and sons who desire instruction do not criticize me, the daring one, but try to enjoy it and be prepared to listen. [...] **Therefore I, the humble one, urged, as I said, to translate the interpretation of the Holy Gospel from Greek into Slavonic and as I saw words so much above my understanding and powers, feared and trembled.** However, [...] I began with [...] the Sunday Gospels” (Petkov 2008: 58-59, with some modifications).

John Chrysostom

Isidore of Pelusium



1. Greek exegetical homilies: Alexander Gorskiy and Kapiton Nevostruev (1859)
2. Greek New Testament Catenae: Anthoniy Vadkovskiy (1885) and Maria Tihova (2012)
3. Both: Ivan Petrov (2022), Dobriela Kotova (2022a,b, 2023), and Georgi Mitov (2022).



ρεγε βο σηце• ιαко градъ него съде глетъ евангли
 стъ• капернаоумъ• вηθλεομηъ βο прηнесе него• а
 назареѳъ въспитѣ• капернаоумъ же нмѣаше жи
 воуца въннотъ • подоваатъ же съмоотрпнѣ• н
покореннѣ владѣцѣ• н невелнчаннѣ• ιαко въ
корабль вълѣзъ прѣидаше• могън прѣшъ
прѣждатн• н ιαко гадараннѣн отъгънанъ не
протнвн сѣ• нъ отънде не далече же•

This said the Evangelist “He calls Capernaum his own city, for Bethlehem brought him forth, Nazareth raised him, but Capernaum had him dwelling continually. It is also fitting to observe the master’s gentleness and humility, that although he could have crossed on foot, he entered a boat and crossed. Moreover, when he was cast out by the Gadarenes, he did not resist but withdrew, though not far away.”

Ἰδιαν δὲ αὐτοῦ πόλιν τὴν Καπερναοῦμ λέγει ἐνταῦθα ἢ γὰρ Βηθλεὲμ ἤνεγκεν αὐτὸν, ἢ δὲ Ναζαρέτ ἔθρεψεν. ἢ δὲ Καπερναοῦμ εἶχεν οἰκοῦντα διηνεκῶς. Χρηὲ δὲ σκοπεῖν καὶ τὸ ἐπιεικὲς τοῦ δεσπότου καὶ ἄτυφον, ὅτι εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβὰς, διέβαινε, δυνάμενος καὶ πεζῇ διαβαίνειν καὶ ὅτι ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Γαδάροις ἐκβληθεὶς, οὐκ ἀντέτεινεν, ἀλλὰ ἀνεχώρησε μὲν, οὐ μακρὰν δέ.

Ἰδιαν αὐτοῦ πόλιν ἐνταῦθα τὴν Καπερναοῦμ λέγει. Ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἤνεγκεν αὐτὸν, ἢ Βηθλεὲμ· ἢ δὲ ἔθρεψεν, ἢ Ναζαρέτ· ἢ δὲ εἶχεν οἰκοῦντα διηνεκῶς, ἢ Καπερναοῦμ (not present in the text of the homily).

INTRODUCTORY PART

Exclamations:

ВЪЗЛЮБЛЕННИ• ТАИНОУ ЦРЮ СЪКРЫВАТИ ДОБРО ІЕСТЬ• А ДѢЛА БЖІА ПРОПОВѢДАТИ• = ‘**Beloved**, it is good to conceal the secret of the king, but it is glorious to reveal the works of God.’ (homily 6, 31d12–32a5);

БРАТЬЕ• НСПЫТНО НЩЕМЪ ВЪ ДЪНЬШЪНН ДЪНЬ• = ‘**Brethren**’ (homily 11, 60b9–60c3);

ХОЛЮБЦИ• ГЪ НАШЬ Н БЪ ІУ ХЪ РЕЧЕ• = ‘**Christ-lovers**’ (homily 12, 66c6–8).

Exhortations: КЪ ВАМЪ ГЛЮ• РАДОУИТЕ СѦ W ГН ВЪСЕГДА• БОГАТЪСТВѢ БО WТЪ СВАТЪИHXЪ КЪНИГЪ ПРННОШЮ• = ‘I say unto you “Always rejoice in the Lord because I bring unto you treasure from the holy books.”’ (homily 46, 206a10-21 – 206b1-2).

Payers:

Тронце прѣстага помаган• наунающоу ми третиаго• евангеліа слова испытати• послушателіемъ же• оумъ разумьнъ подаждь• и свѣсть прілежаньноу• разумѣти и творити глаголіемъихъ• евангліемъ снмъ• сѣказаніемъихъ же оцемъ снмъ• мѣнѣ же слово даждь пространо• и разумьно• хытро же и моудро• въ наслаженіе послушатель• творити заповѣди твоя• тако свѣльникъ(!) ногама монма законъ твои• и свѣтъ стѣзамъ монмъ• въраднмъ же прілежно• и разумѣнмъ (homily 3, 10b6–10d1).

O Most Holy Trinity, help me, who am beginning to explain the words of the third Gospel [reading]. Grant understanding and intelligent minds to the listeners, and a diligent conscience to comprehend and do what is spoken in this Gospel. To these fathers who have gathered, give wisdom, and to me, grant speech that is clear, insightful, skilful, and wise, so that the listeners may delight in fulfilling your commandments. For your law is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths. Therefore, I will diligently and intelligently study and understand (tr.: Georgi Mitov).

Main Exegetical Part

Catena types:

- Commentaries on Matthew and John:
 - *catena prima* (Geerard 1980: 228, 242) or *die Grundform catena* (Reuss 1941: 8-19, 148-154).
 - *catena integra* (Geerard 1980: 229, 243–244)/ *die auf der Grundform aufgebaute volle Katene* (Reuss 1941: 42–52, 165–6): Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Isidore of Pelusium, Origen, and Titus of Bostra.
- Commentaries on Luke:
 - *Catena prima/ typus A* (CPG C 130), [cf. Kotova 2021, 2022]: excerpts from the homilies of John Chrysostom, as well as the writings of Isidore of Pelusium, and other ecclesiastical authors.

One Example: The Thirty-Fifth Homily

- Homily, given on the 25 Sunday after Pentecost (Lk 10:25-37).
- Attributions in the manuscript tradition
 - *Cod. Mosquensis Sin.* 262: ТОГОЖЕ СЪКАЗАНИЕ • И • ЕВНЛИГА • ѿ ЛОУКЪ (159b14-16, 317).
 - *Cod. RGB Gilf.* 32: ѿ • злѡустагъ исидора сказаниѣ;
 - *Cod. Vindobonensis Slav.* 12: и ѿа • злѡустагъ • ісѣра съка;
 - *Cod. Athoniensis, Hilendar. Slav.* 385: и ѿана • злѡустаго исидора слѡ

A Tapestry of Patristic Texts

1. The first part (f. 159d20-161b15, 318-321): John Chrysostom:

Τίνος ἔνεκεν ὁ Ματθαῖος φησὶν, ὅτι πειράζων ἠρώτησεν οὗτος ὁ νομικὸς, ὁ δὲ Μάρκος τὸναντίον· εἰδὼς γάρ, φησὶν, [...], ὅτι νουνεχῶς ἀπεκρίθη, εἶπεν αὐτῷ, οὐ μακρὰν εἶ ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ ; οὐκ ἐναντιούμενοι ἑαυτοῖς οἱ Εὐαγγελισταὶ τοῦτο εἶπον, ἀλλὰ καὶ σφόδρα συνάδοντες· ἠρώτησε μὲν πειράζων παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποκρίσεως ὠφεληθεὶς, ἐπηνέθη· οὐδὲ γὰρ παρὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐτὸν ἐπήνεσεν, ἀλλ' ὅτε εἶπεν, “ὅτι τὸ ἀγαπᾶν τὸν πλησίον, πλεον ἐστὶ τῶν ὀλοκαυτωμάτων,” τότε ἤκουσεν ὅτι “οὐ μακρὰν εἶ ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας” [...]

2. Brief insertion from the exegetical homilies of Cyril of Alexandria:

Ἐπαινεθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ Σωτῆρος ὁ νομικὸς, τὴν ἀλαζονείαν ἐξέρρηξεν, οὐδένα εἶναι πλησίον αὐτοῦ τιθέμενος, ὡς οὐδενὸς ὄντος αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐφραμίλλου. τοῦτο γὰρ ἐδείκνυτο ὁ Εὐαγγελιστῆς εἰπὼν, “ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιοῦσαι αὐτὸν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν εἶπε, τίς ἐστὶ μου πλησίον;

The third section (f. 161b15-162a6, 321-323): an exegetical letter by Isidore of Pelusium (ep. 1959/ lib. IV, ep. 123):

3. {*add. Πηλοτσιώτου ἐπιστολῆς 'αλνε'*} ὁ νομικὸς πλησίον μόνον ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι τὸν δίκαιον τῷ δικαίῳ, τὸν ὑψηλὸν τῷ ὑψηλῷ, κατ' ἀρετὴν, φημί. οὐ γὰρ τῇ οὐσίᾳ μιᾷ οὕση τὸ ὑψηλὸν ἐκρίνειν, ἀλλ' ἢ τοῖς ἀξιώμασιν, ἢ ταῖς πράξεσιν· διὸ θέλων αὐτὸν δικαιοῦσαι, τουτέστι δίκαιον ἀποδείξαι, ὡς ὑψηλὸς εἶη κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἢ μέγας κατὰ τὸ διδάσκαλον εἶναι φησὶ „καὶ τίς ἐστὶ μου πλησίον; δεῖξόν μοι τὸν οὕτω μέγαν.” [...] After this short insertion from the letters of Isidore of Pelusium, another commentary by John Chrysostom follows.

