

AND THESE ARE THE FRIDAYS

Apocrypha, Church Folksongs

In church folksongs of Orthodox Russians, Friday appears in two forms. In the songs entitled “Friday”¹, the day appears in a personified form as Friday Woman (Piatnica). In certain of its aspects, this figure may be related to Mokosh, the chief goddess of the pagan pantheon erected by Vladimir I Sviatoslavich in Kiev.²

Although preserving some traits of pre-Christian Slavic beliefs, the cult of the Friday Woman fused with the tradition that emerged around the figure of the Greek martyr St. Paraskeva³ (“Friday”). However, in some cases the character of the Friday Woman is identical with the Mother of God of Christianity.

In Russia, some of the taboos related to Friday (e.g. one should not make lye out of ashes, wash clothes or the dishes, bathe children, etc.) certainly came from the apocrypha and then became part of folk beliefs as well as church folksongs.

In the Russian church folksongs and prose texts which are called “On the twelve Fridays”, the day appears in an entirely different role⁴. The Russian cultic veneration of the twelve Fridays can be traced back to the apocryphal writing “Sage of the Twelve Fridays” attributed to St. Clemens, a Roman⁵. From the numerous writings preserved under his name, only one can be considered authentic, the “Letter to the Corinthians”⁶. The apocryphal “Sage of the Twelve Fridays” of St. Clemens, which was rooted in a Roman Catholic religious-cultural background, was well-known throughout Europe⁷. Variants of the texts of the Clemens-group appear in French, Provencal, Latin, Greek, German, Hungarian German, Italian, English and Hungarian languages⁸.

¹ Bessonov 1861–1864: II/6. 160–174., No 592–604.; Kireevskii 1983: I. 137–138., No 293.

² Ivanov 1976: 268–287.; Rybakov 1981: 386–388.; Tokarev 1991–92: II. 357.

³ L’vovskii 1902: II. 198.; Tokarev 1991–92: II. 357.; Maksimov 1903: 516.

⁴ Bessonov 1861–1864: II/6. 120–157., No 579–586. (folksongs), No 587–590. (prose texts); L’vovskii 1902: II. 197–198. (one prose text); Maksimov 1903: 510–512. (one prose text); Kireevskii 1983: I. 220–221., No 491. (one folksong)

⁵ Veselovskii: 1876. 328.

⁶ Vanyó 1988/a: 97–99.; Vanyó 1988/b: 103.; Szántó 1987: I. 58.

⁷ Veselovskii 1876: 328–329.

⁸ Veselovskii 1876: 329–334.

However, the legend of the twelve Fridays exists in another type as well. This is the Eleftherios-group. The group is named so because in these versions the list of the twelve Fridays is preceded by an introductory part, which is about the religious dispute between Eleftherios (Eleferie, Ieleverii, Ielferii), a Christian and Terasios (Terasie, Tarasie, Tarsei, Tarasii, Taraska), a Jew⁹.

The Russian church folksongs and some of the prose texts belong to the Clemens-group¹⁰. The indirect Western origin of the folksongs and legends is supported by the fact that the name of the Roman Pope Clemens has been preserved in them at several points.

The stories of the twelve Fridays from the Eleftherios-group were also known in Old Russian literature¹¹. A few text variants prove that the Eleftherios-type also existed among the Romanians, and the type can be found among Romanians living in Hungary to this day¹².

The text variants of the Eleftherios-group in various European languages can be traced back to a Byzantine apocryphal legend, which is basically a story of how the Christian Eleftherios got the secret of the twelve Fridays out of Malho, the son of the Jewish polemist Terasios¹³. Of Byzantine origins, the story of Eleftherios spread across the Slavic lands, indeed further than the frontiers of the Orthodox religion and reached Catholic Germany, where it provided the basic plot in the Middle Ages for Hans Rosenplüt (15th century) in a Carnival Night play: “Ein disputaz eins freiheits mit eim Juden” (The Debate of a Freeman with a Jew)¹⁴.

The common source of the various European text variants of the Eleftherios-group was an ancient story, which was originally about the rivalry between the Greeks and the Romans.¹⁵ Its protagonists appear in the Friday-texts of the Eleftherios-group as Terasios and Eleftherios. The Greek-Roman antagonism, which may be regarded as the basic underlying level of the plot was later replaced by Jewish-Christian religious polemics. Transplanted from the Orthodox Byzantine culture into the European lands, the text began to develop into new directions. During its literary adaptations the names of the protagonists changed in the following way: the stupid Roman = Eleftherios, later *skomorokh* in Russia and *Freiheit* in

⁹ Veselovskii 1876: 334., 346–347., 349–350.

¹⁰ Veselovskii 1876: 346–347.

¹¹ Buslaiev 1861: 485., 500–501., 503.; In: Shchapov 1859: 449 i sled.; Tikhonravov 1861: 70–78.

¹² Cartoian 1938: 181–182.; See also the Romanian manuscript from Hungary: *lată istoria cielor 12 vineri...* Citichaz anul 1962. XII. 15. (I received this text from Zsuzsanna Erdélyi.)

¹³ Tikhonravov 1861: p. 69.

¹⁴ Tikhonravov 1861: 67–69. A reference to this work in: *Fastnachtspiele aus dem fünfzehnten Jahrhundert*. III. Stuttgart, 1853: 1115–1119.

¹⁵ Tikhonravov 1861: 67.

Germany; the Greek philosopher = Terasios (with his deformed name), or simply the Jewish philosopher.

As regards the church festivals related to Fridays and the mainly Old Testament biblical stories, the Russian Eleftherios-legends are relatively close to the Romanian texts, while other aspects, the elements of vivid gestures and beatings during the debate connect them with the German texts.

The texts of the Eleftherios-group transplanted from Byzantium to Russia could not develop into church folksongs, because their complicated structure and rigid style did not make them suited for this transformation. They existed and spread in a written form, and, as a result, they preserved the specific features of the Old Russian language. The Friday-lists of the Clemens-group, which came originally from Western Europe and contained promises of indulgence were brief and simple in structure. The predominantly New Testament events related to Friday were typically narrated in a shortened form in them. Strange as it may seem, in the melting pot of Orthodox folk-beliefs these Russian church folksongs came into being based on apocryphal Friday-texts borrowed from Roman Catholicism. During the process of Russification, the word *indulgence* was filtered out from them, just as from the legends, because the Western Catholic practice that the word indicated was unacceptable for the Orthodox Russians.

The Friday-texts basically served the spiritual well-being of the believers in the Christian world; however, the same people used them for magical purposes as well¹⁶. If we compare the last lines of the European text variants of the Clemens-group, we may find that the Russian endings offer a far richer and more multifold store of worldly goods to the pious believer than the parallel European texts. The Russian texts contain references to so many worldly goods as well as such a variety of practices of protection that we may safely conclude that unlike the European variants, in the Russian church folksongs and legends entitled “Of the twelve Fridays” the emphasis shifts much more towards the magical sphere.

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¹⁶ Ieleonskaia 1917: 18.

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Дьёрдь Орос

Знаменательные пятницы в апокрифах и в духовных стихах

Резюме

В духовных стихах православных русских пятница встречается в двух значениях. В стихах с названием «Пятница» выступает этот день в персонифицированной форме: Женщина Пятница. В стихах и прозаических текстах с названием «О двенадцати пятницах» мы узнаём день пятницу совсем в другой роли. Исходной точкой культового почитания двенадцати пятниц служило у русских апокрифическое описание под названием: «Учение о двенадцати пятницах», – которое приписывается по традиции римскому Святому Климентию. Это «Учение о двенадцати пятницах» Святого Климения, культурной и религиозной основой которого был католицизм, распространилось по всей Европе. Варианты этого текста, называемые группой текстов под именем Климения, имеются на французском, провансальном, латинском, греческом, немецком, венгеро-швабском, итальянском, английском и венгерском языках. Легенда о двенадцати пятницах существует и в другом виде. Это – группа текстов под именем Елферия. Это название основывается на том, что описанию пятниц предшествует вступительная часть, в которой рассказывается о религиозном диспуте между христианином Елферием и жидом Тараской.