

**Title:** The *Izbornik Sviatoslava*

**Date:** 1073

**Geography:** Kyiv, Ukraine

**Culture:** Rus'

**Medium:** Parchment

**Dimensions:** 260 folios, 33.6x24.8 cm

**Current Institution:** State Historical Museum (Gosudarstvennyĭ Istoricheskiĭ Muzeĭ)

**Shelfmark:** Moscow, State Historical Museum, Син. 1043

**Link to object:**

<https://catalog.shm.ru/entity/OBJECT/178472?query=%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%20%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0&index=1> [last accessed 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024]



Fig 1. Moscow, State Historical Museum, Син. 1043, 3v. Church fathers in an ornately decorated church, following the dedicatory poem of the manuscript and precedes the main text.  
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alt="Churchmen dressed in traditional vestments inside of a church, with two peacocks on top"

**Keywords:** Kyivan Rus', Rus', manuscripts, florilegium, patristic

**Citation:** Daniel Berardino, "The *Izbornik Sviatoslava*," in "The Material Culture of the Medieval Black Sea," *Medieval Black Sea Project*, edited by Teresa Shawcross et al.,

The *Izbornik Sviatoslava* (1073) (hereafter *Izbornik*) is the second-oldest surviving book in Slavonic, antedated only by the *Ostromir Gospels* (1056/7). Compiled for the Grand Prince of Kyiv, Sviatoslav II (r. 1073-76), it appears to have been intended as an introduction to the Christian faith fit for the ruler of a Christianizing land. In its extant form, the manuscript is a florilegium composed of: selected homilies of the church fathers (4r-23r); a short overview of the church councils (23r-27r); the "Questions and Answers" of Anastasios of Sinai (27r-223r); and further assorted patristic writings (223r-263v). Unlike most similar books in Slavonic, the *Izbornik* is lavishly illustrated. Based on inscriptions, we know that these images were illuminated by two monks—one of whom was named "Ioan the Precentor," while the name of the other is not known. They include a portrait of the prince's family bringing gifts (1v) to an image of Christ enthroned (2r); four images of church fathers in a lavishly decorated church (3r-v, 128r-v); and miniatures of zodiac signs in the margins (250v-251r). Today, the manuscript is on display at the State Historical Museum in Moscow, Russia, and is fully digitized in high-resolution images available for [download](#).

Due to its status as one of the earliest manuscripts in Slavonic attributed to the lands of Rus', the *Izbornik* has attracted a vast amount of scholarship over the last two centuries. Much of the recent work on the manuscript has been produced by Russian scholars and falls into two categories: analysis of the manuscript's linguistic features and of the style and iconography of its illuminations. The linguistic approach has attracted more attention than the art-historical, even though the manuscript is exceptionally rich in artistic terms. Scholarship dedicated to linguistic analysis of the manuscript have sought to identify the text's origin based on its morphology. Earlier scholars thought that the *Izbornik* was a copy of a Slavonic translation of a Greek collection of religious texts dedicated to the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon I (r. 893-927). They argued for this conclusion based on the fact that the manuscript contains many morphological elements that are typical of the Bulgarian recension of Slavonic and that the last ruler listed in a table of rulers (264r-266r), the Byzantine Empress Zoe Karbonopsina (r. 913-20), was a contemporary of Simeon I.<sup>1</sup> Despite these observations by earlier scholars, a more recent study of the manuscript has made the case that the iconography and citation regime of the text suggest a direct translation from a Byzantine original rather than from a Bulgarian one.<sup>2</sup>

The debate regarding the origin of the texts included in the manuscript is important for understanding the nature of Byzantine cultural influence on early Rus'. On the one hand, if the content of the *Izbornik* was transmitted via Bulgaria to Rus', then Rus' would have to be

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Whitman, "The 1073 *Izbornik*: The Manuscript and Its Sources," *Indiana Slavic Studies* 4 (1967): 252–68; Svetlana Mengel, "“Изборник 1073 года на фоне древнеболгарской древнерусской словообразовательной синонимии [Izbornik 1073 goda na fone drevnebolgarskoj drevnerusskoj slovoobrazovatel'noj sinonimii]," *Russian Linguistics* 16, no. 2/3 (93 1992): 203–9.

<sup>2</sup> М.О. Новак, "Характер Цитирования Апостола в Изборниках 1073 и 1076 годов [Karakter tsitirovaniia apostola v izbornikakh 1073 i 1076]," *Вестник Волгоградского Государственного Университета [Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta]* 9, no. 2 (2010): 62–66.

identified as a receiver of Byzantine culture only indirectly. This would mean that the coming of Christianity, and hence of learned culture to Rus', was primarily an intra-Slavic story. On the other hand, if the *Izbornik* was a direct translation from Greek that took place in a Rus'ian context, then this would have necessitated a degree of bilingualism suggestive of more direct cultural contact and exchange with Byzantine centers of learning in the early Kyivan period. In any case, whether translated from Slavonic translations of Byzantine originals via Bulgaria or directly from the Byzantine texts themselves, the nature of the collection reflects the two sources of intellectual culture that made their way to Rus' from Byzantium in the eleventh century. The contents of the *Izbornik* represent the reception of both the Christian patristic and the Hellenized Roman traditions that contributed to the written and visual culture in Rus'.

An example of the first type of inheritance is the primary text of the collection, the "Questions and Answers" of Anastasios of Sinai: a series of responses to a variety of questions arising from the encounter between Christianity and Islam in Egypt at the end of the seventh century. Among the questions addressed in this work are several concerning the nature of Christ, sexual sin, and the permissibility of certain occult practices such as divination. The work is didactic, serving to instruct the reader through the answering of questions in a systematic way. Its content constitutes an artifact of seventh-century Byzantium in which classical pagan thought had been almost completely dominated by a more Christianized framework in response to Islam than had been the case before the Islamic conquests.<sup>3</sup> This text, when combined with the collections of patristic homiletics and the images of the church fathers, thus foregrounds the intellectual culture of the Byzantine church as elaborated in ecclesiastical and monastic circles.

The *Izbornik* was also a vector for the transfer of the tradition of the Hellenized Roman political and scientific intellectual tradition to Rus', albeit in a limited form. Two components of the collection represent this tradition. The first is the illuminated miniatures of the zodiac signs (250v-251r) that serve to illustrate a short tractate on the procession of the planets.<sup>4</sup> The second is a list of the succession of Roman emperors from Augustus to Zoe (264r-266r). However, although these components would seem to be non-ecclesiastical in content since the zodiac is attested in the works of Ptolemy (c.100-c.170) and the list of Roman emperors includes even the pagan ones, both were transmitted in a heavily Christianized form. The treatise on the planets was written by an author within the ecclesiastical administration, while the list of Roman emperors is limited to the role played by each emperor within sacred history; for instance, the reader is told that Augustus ruled when Christ was born and that Vespasian ordered the capture of Jerusalem. Thus, while the *Izbornik* transmitted a few ideas that were secular in origin, their presentation was thoroughly Christian. The *Izbornik* was meant to provide the ruler of Kyiv with an explanation of the faith, history, and world so that he could govern Rus' for the good of his increasingly Christianized subjects, not to transmit non-Christian knowledge for its own sake.

## Biography

*Daniel Berardino is a PhD student in History at the University of California-Berkeley, where he studies the intersection of political religion, nationalism, and socialism in modern East Central*

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<sup>3</sup> John Haldon, "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, Volume I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 107–47.

<sup>4</sup> Vasilij Putsko, "Знаки зодиака на полях Изборника Святослава 1073 года [Znaki zodiaka na poliakh Izbornika Sviatoslava 1073]," *Paleobulgarica* 8, no. 2 (1984): 65–77.

*Europe and Russia. Before coming to Berkeley, Daniel received his MA in Medieval Studies from Fordham University in 2023 and has studied Slavonic paleography at The Ohio State University.*

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