

Towards a Critical Edition of Peter Mohyla's *The Book of the Soul Called Gold*

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Abstract. This article examines *The Book of the Soul Called Gold*, a Ruthenian translation of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis attributed to Peter Mohyla. It survives only in a handwritten copy dated 1661. The text is believed to derive from a Polish printed edition of 1608 or 1616. The manuscript has not been subjected to detailed linguistic analysis and lacks a scholarly edition. Building on previous studies of the manuscript, the author plans to conduct a detailed comparison of the Ruthenian text with its Polish source and the Latin original and to prepare a critical edition of *The Book of the Soul Called Gold*. The study will pay particular attention to spiritual and religious lexical correspondences, as well as to problematic readings, including omissions and scribal errors, and will also examine the linguistic features of the Ruthenian text in relation to its sources. Furthermore, the study will include a transcription and an English translation of the text, thereby making the manuscript accessible for further research and facilitating its use in comparative and linguistic studies. In doing so, it aims to establish a foundation for further study of the Ruthenian translation of *The Imitation of Christ* and its historical and linguistic context.

Keywords: Peter Mohyla, medieval manuscript, Ruthenian translation, Ruthenian language, *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis, scholarly edition, *The Book of the Soul Called Gold*.

Link Petro Mohylos *Sielos knygos, vadinamos auksu*, kritinio leidimo

Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas Petrui Mohylai priskiriamas Tomo Kempiečio knygos *Kristaus sekimas* vertimas į rusėnų kalbą, žinomas kaip *Sielos knyga, vadinama auksu*, kurio išliko tik 1661 m. rankraštinis nuorašas. Manoma, kad šis rusėniškas tekstas remiasi 1608 m. arba 1616 m. lenkišku spausdintiniu leidimu. Rankraštis neturi nei detalaus lingvistinio tyrimo, nei mokslinio leidimo. Remdamasi ankstesniais rankraščio tyrimais, autorė planuoja atlikti išsamų rusėniško teksto palyginimą su jo lenkiškuoju šaltiniu ir lotyniškuoju originalu, bei parengti kritinį *Sielos knygos, vadinamos auksu*, leidimą. Tyrime ypatingas dėmesys bus skiriamas dvasinei ir religinei leksikai, probleminėms teksto vietoms, įskaitant praleistus žodžius ir perrašinėtojo klaidas, bei kalbiniams rusėniško teksto bruožams palyginti su šaltiniais. Be to, darbe bus pateikta teksto transkripcija ir vertimas į anglų kalbą, siekiant palengvinti rankraščio naudojimą tolesniuose lyginamuosiuose ir lingvistiniuose tyrimuose. Tokiu būdu bus sudarytas pagrindas tolesniems rusėniškojo *Kristaus sekimo* vertimo ir jo istorinio bei lingvistinio konteksto tyrimams.

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Reikšminiai žodžiai: Petras Mohyla, viduramžių rankraštis, rusėnų kalba, *Kristaus sekimas*, Tomas Kempietis, mokslinis leidimas, *Sielos knyga, vadinama auksu*.

К критическому изданию «Книги души, нарицаемой злото» Петра Могилы

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается перевод на русскую мову труда Фомы Кемпийского «О подражании Христу», выполненный Петром Могилой и известный как «Книга души, нарицаемая злото», от которого сохранилась лишь рукописная копия 1661 года. Считается, что русскомоновный текст основан на польском печатном издании 1608 или 1616 года. Рукопись не имеет ни подробного лингвистического исследования, ни научного издания. Основываясь на предыдущих исследованиях рукописи, планируется провести детальное сравнение русскомоновного текста с его польским источником и латинским оригиналом, а также подготовить критическое издание «Книги души, нарицаемой злото». Предполагается уделить особое внимание духовной и религиозной лексике, проблемным фрагментам текста, включая пропуски и ошибки переписчика, лингвистическим особенностям русскомоновного текста в сравнении с источниками, а также представить транскрипцию текста и его перевод на английский язык. Таким образом, будет заложена основа для дальнейших исследований русскомоновного перевода трактата «О подражании Христу» и его исторического и лингвистического контекста.

Ключевые слова: Петр Могила, средневековая рукопись, русская мова, «О подражании Христу», Фома Кемпийский, научное издание, «Книга души, нарицаемая злото».

Peter Mohyla, who served as Metropolitan of Kyiv between 1632 and 1647, played a crucial role in the development of education and the institutional life of the Orthodox Church in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. According to Vladimir Peretz, Mohyla was regarded as a founder of schools, an organizer of ecclesiastical life, a publisher of books, a defender of Ukrainian culture, as well as a writer, journalist, and preacher [Peretz 1962, 117]. Mohyla was born in 1596 into the ruling family of Moldavia. Following the defeat of the Mohyla family and their subsequent exile in 1612, he settled in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth under the patronage of his influential and affluent relatives. The question of Peter Mohyla's education remains unresolved. Several hypotheses have been proposed, yet due to the scarcity of documentary evidence, they remain largely conjectural. On the basis of Mohyla's writings, particularly their language, classical allusions, symbolic vocabulary, and the ease with which he engages with ideas characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition but largely absent from contemporary East Slavic intellectual discourse, Liudmila Sharipova has suggested that he may have received his education at a Jesuit college. Such an educational background would have been controversial, given the widespread hostility toward Catholic institutions within Orthodox circles [Sharipova 2003, 237–238].

Before entering ecclesiastical life, Mohyla initially pursued a military career. In 1627, he was elected Archimandrite of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra despite not yet having been ordained, a decision that provoked considerable

controversy and conflict until his position was confirmed by royal charter. In 1632, King Władysław IV Vasa selected Mohyla from among two candidates to serve as Metropolitan of Kyiv [Флоря, Тимошенко 2019, 570–580; Ж[ите]цькій 1898, 484–485].

The writings of Peter Mohyla have not yet been studied comprehensively, and the extent of his authorship remains uncertain in a number of cases. L. Sharipova divides the publications associated with Mohyla into three broad categories: works of prayer and devotion, texts pertaining to ecclesiastical law, and translations of Christian moralistic literature. *The Book of the Soul Called Gold* belongs to the third category. It represents a translation of the well-known devotional work *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis [Sharipova 2003, 241–242].

According to Leonid Ushkalov, despite its relatively modest size, *The Imitation of Christ* became one of the most widely circulated religious texts in Christian history, second only to the Bible in popularity. The work was also widely known in Ukraine, where it served as standard reading in institutions of higher education regardless of confessional affiliation: Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. The original Latin text was translated into numerous European languages [Ushkalov 2015].

Based on her analysis of Mohyla's translation, L. Sharipova has demonstrated that the Ruthenian text was almost certainly based on the Polish translation produced by Jan Wielewicki. She further suggests that Mohyla most likely relied on editions published by Andrzej Piotrkowczyk in 1608 and 1616, citing similarities in the reader's preface and specific lexical combinations [Sharipova 2003, 250–251].

This abbreviated translation of *The Imitation of Christ* only survives as a later handwritten copy dated 1661, presumably based on an earlier printed edition [ibid., 241]. The manuscript is currently held in Lviv, Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine, Central Basilian Archive and Library collection (f. 3), nr. 3, ff. 1–68 r. Besides *The Book of the Soul*, the codex contains a range of religious texts, including works on confession, monastic rules, as well as patristic and polemical writings [KD 1661]. It is openly available via Hill Museum & Manuscript Library Online Reading Room (<https://www.vhmml.org/readingRoom/view/130302>).

The date of the original *The Book of the Soul* remains uncertain, as the 1661 rewritten copy contains the title “Archimandrite” alongside Peter Mohyla's name and the year 1623, although he did not assume this title until 1627 or early 1628 [Peretz 1962, 135–136]. According to L. Sharipova, Peter Mohyla himself may have decided not to distribute the printed publication to its intended audience due to a recent scandal in Kyiv involving the Uniate and Orthodox Churches and his alleged association with the Uniate Greek Catho-

lic Church. The translation of *The Imitation of Christ* may have posed a risk to his reputation and interfered with his aims, as he could have been perceived as attempting “to apply a Catholic devotional text as an instrument of spiritual perfection for the Orthodox” [Sharipova 2021, 499–500].

Despite its significance, *The Book of the Soul* has not yet been studied in detail. The work lacks not only a scholarly edition but even a facsimile reproduction. L. Sharipova and collaborators have prepared Ukrainian and Russian translations of the Ruthenian text accompanied by a brief scholarly analysis [Іванов, Шаріпова, Буряк 2007]. The same scholar has also examined the source text underlying Mohyla's translation [Sharipova 2003, 237–261]. Earlier, Peretz published an overview of this work by Mohyla, providing insights into the contents, sources, and linguistic and historical context [Peretz 1962, 117–136]. This work has also been discussed in academic articles by other scholars in overviews of Cyrillic translations of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, including N. Saveljeva [Saveljeva 2018, 65–82] and M. Chistyakova [Chistyakova 2026], addressing certain aspects of the text from a historical and linguistic standpoint.

Nevertheless, the absence of a reliable scholarly edition remains a major obstacle to further research. As part of a forthcoming PhD dissertation, the author intends to prepare a critical edition of *The Book of the Soul Called Gold* by Peter Mohyla. The research will aim to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To identify the exact Polish text underlying the Ruthenian translation. This stage entails a comparative textual analysis between the Ruthenian text and printed editions of *The Imitation of Christ* in Polish to determine the specific source used for the translation. The analysis will seek to distinguish passages translated from Polish from those that may derive directly from the Latin original, as well as to identify possible additions or editorial interventions attributed to Peter Mohyla.
2. To compare the spiritual and religious Ruthenian vocabulary of *The Book of the Soul Called Gold* with Polish and Latin sources. This objective involves a detailed lexical and semantic analysis of key terms related to spirituality and religious practice. The study will examine how theological and ascetic concepts are rendered in the Ruthenian text in comparison with both the Polish translation and the Latin original, focusing on shifts in meaning, calques, adaptations, and contextual usage. This comparison will help illuminate broader patterns of confessional and cultural translation. Particular attention will also be paid to the use of such vocabulary in Mohyla's other works to determine whether specific lexical choices are unique to this text or characteristic of his broader usage. The analysis will be supported by reference to relevant lexicographical and scholarly sources on sacral vocabulary, including,

for example, a dictionary prepared by Laurentius Zizanius [Зизаний 1596].

3. To present a transcription of the manuscript with word separation. This task involves producing a scholarly transcription of the manuscript that introduces consistent word separation. The transcription will preserve all significant graphical and orthographic features of the source, including abbreviations, superscript signs, and variant spellings, while enhancing readability for modern researchers. Particular attention will be paid to establishing clear and consistent principles for representing ambiguous or problematic readings.
4. To produce an English translation closely aligned with the original, presented alongside the transcribed Ruthenian text with footnote-style commentary. The project aims to provide a translation that prioritizes philological accuracy over literary fluency, reflecting the syntax, vocabulary, and stylistic features of the original text as closely as possible. The English translation will be presented in parallel with the transcribed Ruthenian text to facilitate direct comparison. Footnote-style commentary will accompany the translation, offering explanations of difficult passages, and alternative interpretations where relevant.
5. To provide commentary on uncertain readings in the Ruthenian text. A critical apparatus will be developed to address problematic areas in the manuscript, including omissions, scribal errors, unclear readings, and graphical irregularities. For each case, reasoned emendations or alternative readings will be proposed, supported by evidence from parallel Polish and Latin texts where applicable, along with an explanation of the possible causes of textual corruption.

Thus, in conclusion, it should be noted that the implementation of these objectives will enable the establishment of a scholarly edition of *The Book of the Soul Called Gold* and clarify its linguistic and historical features. Collectively, these tasks aim to produce a structured presentation of the manuscript, combining a transcription, translation, and commentary with a systematic comparison of its Ruthenian, Polish, and Latin forms with emphasis on the spiritual and religious vocabulary. This study will facilitate the understanding of the relationship between the Ruthenian text and its sources, as well as the linguistic choices reflected in the Ruthenian translation. By bringing together the transcription of the manuscript, its translation, and explanatory commentary in a single edition, the study seeks to make the text accessible for further research while preserving its original characteristics. Hence, the study aims to provide a foundation for further research on the Ruthenian translation of *The Imitation of Christ* and its historical and linguistic context.

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