**Giuseppe Praga’s Cyrillic Collection at the Marciana Library: A Source for Iconographic Studies of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Editions**

Alina Kondratiuk, PhD,

Senior Researcher in the ERC-funded TYPARABIC project

at the Institute of Southeast European Studies, Romanian Academy (Bucharest)

**Abstract**

This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 883219-AdG-2019 – Project TYPARABIC). The paper examines the significance of the Giuseppe Praga Collection housed in the National Marciana Library (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana) in Venice for advancing the study of iconography in early editions associated with the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. The National Marciana Library holds several significant editions associated with the Vuković printing press and its successors. Several illustrations originating from this press served as patterns for imitation in some editions issued by the Kyiv-Pechersk printing press during the first third of the seventeenth century

**Keywords:** Venice; Marciana National Library; Giuseppe Praga; Božidar Vuković; old Cyrillic books; Kyiv-Pechersk Printing Press; iconography; style

**Колекція кириличних стародруків Джузеппе Прага у Національній бібліотеці Марчіана як джерело дослідження іконографії видань Києво-Печерської лаври**

Аліна Кондратюк, к. мист.,

старша наукова співробітниця ERC-проєкту TYPARABIC,

Інститут досліджень Південно-Східної Європи Румунської академії (Бухарест)

**Анотація**

Це дослідження є частиною проєкту, що отримав фінансування від Європейської дослідницької ради (ERC) у межах програми досліджень та інновацій Європейського Союзу Horizon 2020 (Грант № 883219-AdG-2019 – Проєкт TYPARABIC). У статті розглядається значення колекції Джузеппе Прага, що зберігається в Національній бібліотеці Марчіана (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana) у Венеції, для досліджень іконографії ранніх видань Києво-Печерської лаври. Національна бібліотека Марчіана володіє кількома важливими виданнями, пов’язаними з друкарнею Вуковича та його наступників. Деякі ілюстрації з книг цієї друкарні стали зразками для наслідування в кількох виданнях, випущених Києво-Печерською друкарнею в першій третині XVII століття.

**Ключові слова:** Венеція; Національна бібліотека Марчіана; Джузеппе Прага; Божидар Вукович; кириличні стародруки; Києво-Печерська друкарня; іконографія; стиль

This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 883219-AdG-2019 – Project TYPARABIC). The paper examines the significance of the Giuseppe Praga Collection housed in the National Marciana Library (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana) in Venice for advancing the study of iconography in early editions associated with the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.

Among the distinguished holdings of the Marciana National Library, particular prominence is given to the collection of Cyrillic early prints, acquired relatively recently—in the second half of the twentieth century—from the descendants of Giuseppe Praga (1893–1958), a renowned collector, scholar, and librarian originally from Zadar. The collection comprises seventeen items, including complete volumes, excerpts, and fragments of books printed in Cyrillic script between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Venice, the Mileševa Monastery, and Scutari.

Venice played a pivotal role in the development of Cyrillic printing during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, rendering the acquisition of this private collection especially significant for the Marciana Library. Until the mid-twentieth century, the library possessed virtually no Cyrillic paleotypes; only a single edition—the 1638 Psalter (Psaltir Davidov. Venezia, Bartolomeo di Marco Ginammi, 1638)—had been part of its holdings since the time of its publication. The composition of the collection, the reconstruction of its formation history, and a catalog featuring detailed bibliographical descriptions of the publications are presented in the comprehensive studies of the Italian scholar S. Pelusi (2018)

The editions contained in this collection are of considerable importance for the study of the iconography found in early publications of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. This subject is not new to Ukrainian book historians: P. Popov (1924) was among the first to observe that certain illustrations from the Vuković printing press were reproduced in several editions issued by the Kyiv-Pechersk press during the first third of the seventeenth century. He provided specific examples of iconographic borrowings, noting that the greatest number of compositional parallels to Vuković’s illustrations appear in the Lavra’s 1619 edition of the *Anthologion*. Subsequent scholars, including D. Stepovyk (1989) and I. Dudnik (2012), largely reiterated Popov’s findings, while enriching them to some extent through art-historical analysis.

Nevertheless, this topic remains far from exhausted. A comprehensive comparative analysis of the entire corpus of publications from the Vuković printing press and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra press—particularly from the standpoint of iconography and stylistic development—has yet to be undertaken. This line of inquiry is especially significant, as our current understanding of the artistic culture of Kyiv during the first half of the seventeenth century remains approximate. Among the surviving monuments of the time, architecture and engraving dominate, while book illustration occupies a prominent position due to the relatively large number of extant examples. By contrast, virtually no icons of Kyiv origin from this era have survived. The sole preserved monumental ensemble is the mural decoration of the Church of the Savior at Berestove, dating to the 1640s. Yet this is insufficient to determine when and how the stylistic reorientation of Ukrainian art in the early modern period occurred. This question lies at the heart of broader inquiries into the foundations of Ukrainian artistic and spiritual culture.

The illustrations and ornamentation of early editions from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra should be examined within the broader context of contemporary icon painting and book miniature. It is essential to consider iconographic material not only from western regions of Ukraine but also from other countries within the Orthodox tradition. However, parallel studies of book graphics are equally important. In the early decades of the 17th century, book illustration, like iconography, continued to follow traditional models rooted in Byzantine art, but, at the same time, Western influences were already clearly noticeable in both areas. For this reason, it is important to compare early Lavra engravings with the illustrations found in Vuković’s editions. These works preserve stylistic and iconographic affinities with Orthodox iconography, yet, like the icon painting of the Cretan school, they already reflect the influence of Western European art.

It can be assumed that, at the beginning of the 17th century, new artistic trends from Western Europe began to emerge within the artistic culture of Kyiv—partly due to the circulation of printed books received from the Stryatin printing press. Archimandrite Elisej Pletenetskyj purchased both the printing equipment and the associated library, facilitating the transfer of stylistic and typographic innovations. According to G. Kolyada (1972), the Stryatyn press library included at least three Venetian editions by Božidar Vuković: the *Trebnik* (Euchologion, ca. 1540), the *Psalter* (1519), and the *Zbornik* or *Praznični Minej* (Menologion, 1538). I. Dudnik later proposed that these volumes were incorporated into the library of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra press. The presence of various Cyrillic Venetian publications in the Lavra press collection is further evidenced by the artistic and typographic features found in its printed output, which reflect the influence of South Slavic and Venetian design traditions.

A particularly compelling question is why certain illustrations from Vuković’s books were repeatedly reproduced by Kyiv masters, while others from the same editions were not adopted as models. Prior to addressing this, it is necessary to investigate the nature of borrowings within the Vuković printing press itself. In various publications, the same set of illustrations was reused, although the number of images varied.

The activities of the Vuković family press and its successors are extensively covered. The publishing house operated from 1519 to 1521, and resumed activity in 1536. Vincenzo, son of Božidar Vuković, published books intended for Orthodox audiences and also offered his services to the Vatican. After 1561, Vincenzo sold or leased the printing press to other publishers, among them Jacob “of the Stone River” in 1566 and Ieronymus Zagurovich in 1569–1570. Ieronymus (“Hierolimus”) Zagurovich continued to make use of Vincenzo’s printing materials.

In 1572, the publisher was Yakov Kraikov from Sofia; in 1597, it was Giovanni Antonio Rampazzetto. Some researchers, notably the Moscow scholar T. Guseva, suggest that Yakov “of the Stone River” and Yakov Kraikov may be the same individual. As subsequent owners of the printing press continued to utilize Vuković’s equipment and woodblocks, it is often challenging to distinguish between original Vuković editions and those produced by their successors. In any case, identical illustrations recur across multiple editions—appearing in the publications of Božidar Vuković, in the works issued by Vincenzo, and in the books by Yakov Kraikov.

The *Časoslov* (Book of Hours), published by Yakov Kraykov in 1566, was one of the most richly illustrated editions from this press. It contains 31 illustrations with a wide thematic range. There is reason to believe that this edition was among the most frequently copied by Kyiv masters in the first half of the 17th century.

The number of Venetian editions in Kyiv during the first half of the 17th century, as well as the specific features of the creative process employed by Ukrainian engravers who drew on Venetian models, remain subjects that require further investigation. However, resolving these questions is complicated by the limited number of library collections that provide a comprehensive view of the Vuković printing house’s output.

This is why the Cyrillic collection of Giuseppe Praga, which only recently became widely accessible for research, holds particular significance. The Marciana Library holds several significant editions associated with the Vuković printing press and its successors. These include the *Služabnik* (Service Book, 1519), *Molitvenik* (Prayer Book, 1521), and *Praznični Minej* (Festal Menaion, 1538) published by Božidar Vuković; the *Oktoih Petoglasnik* (after 1560) and *Molitvenik* (1560) by Vičenco Vuković; the *Časoslov* (Book of Hours, 1566) and *Različni* *Potrebi* (Services for Different Needs, 1571–1572) by Jakov Kraykov; as well as editions printed by Giovanni Antonio Rampazetto.

As demonstrated, this collection includes unique and rare editions from this press. Notably, the 1521 copy of *Molitvenik* (Prayer Book) by Božidar Vuković represents a previously undocumented variant, unknown to bibliographers. Likewise, the 1538 edition of *Praznični Minej* (Festal Menaion) published by Vuković belongs to an exceptionally rare variant, with only three known copies recorded in bibliographic sources. However, despite the significance and rarity of individual items, the collection as a whole is not among the largest of its kind.

Individual publications from this press are held in libraries around the world, including the National Library of Serbia, SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, and other collections in Bulgaria. However, in terms of both the quantity and quality of Vuković press editions, Russian libraries hold a leading position. Among these, the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg stands out. For obvious reasons, Russian collections are not easily accessible for research. Although they were thoroughly studied in the past, available publications and online resources now allow this gap to be partially bridged.

Ukrainian collection of South Slavic and Venetian editions is likewise among the most notable. Although the exact number of Cyrillic Venetian editions in early modern Kyiv remains unknown, a considerable quantity was held in the library of the Kyiv Theological Academy by the 19th century. An inventory of the library’s holdings was published by P. Popov (1924). Today, most of these editions are preserved in the collection of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, which contains a total of 15 Cyrillic editions issued by various Venetian printers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Although the Kyiv collection is substantial, it does not comprehensively represent all periods of the Vuković press.

Thus, the most extensive collections of publications from the Vuković press are preserved in the Russian National Library, the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, and the Marciana National Library in Venice. Each of these collections offers unique materials that, when considered together, provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Vuković printing legacy. Ideally, they should be studied in conjunction. However, such a comparative study is not yet feasible.

The Giuseppe Praga collection still awaits a comprehensive scholarly examination, including from the perspective of art history. A notable feature of certain editions within this collection is the presence of colored engravings, such as those found in *Molitvenik* by Božidar Vuković, published in 1521. Color lends the otherwise ascetic graphic images a greater sense of elegance and festivity. Some researchers suggest that the illustrations in Vuković’s books held in the Marciana collection were colored at the initiative of the publishers. However, this hypothesis requires further investigation.

Almost all editions from the Praga collection contain marginalia; some include extensive texts on the flyleaf. In several cases where the printed text has been lost, substantial handwritten inserts are present, and some volumes feature drawings of various kinds. S. Pelusi published a small portion of these texts and images, yet this subject remains in need of thorough scholarly investigation. The inscriptions left by former owners and readers undoubtedly hold valuable information that can illuminate not only the history of this particular collection but also broader patterns in the history of libraries and collecting practices. It is also crucial to emphasize that examining this collection is indispensable for identifying and interpreting the distinctive features of early publications produced by the Kyiv-Pechersk printing press.