

SAINT DIMITRY,
THE METROPOLITAN OF ROSTOV
AND HIS MULTI-VOLUME WORK
“THE BOOK OF THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS”¹

Abstract:

The article is devoted to the creative activity of the Metropolitan Dimitry of Rostov (Daniel Savich Tuptalo), one of the most famous Slavic writers of the late 17th — early 18th centuries. He entered into the history of Russian literature as an author of a multi-volume work on the Lives of the Saints (1689–1705). This work has been translated from Church Slavonic into many foreign languages and has become an important source for spiritual reading for millions of people around the world.

Keywords:

St Dimitry, Metropolitan of Rostov, hagiography, the Lives of the Saints, Menaions.

Аннотация: Л.Л. ЩАВИНСКАЯ. «Святой Димитрий, митрополит Ростовский и его многотомный труд “Книга житий святых”».

Статья посвящена творчеству Димитрия, митрополита Ростовского (Данилы Саввича Туптало) — одного из самых известных славянских писателей конца XVII — начала XVIII в. Он вошел в историю русской литературы как автор многотомного издания «Книги Житий святых» (1689–1705). Этот труд был переведен с церковнославянского языка на многие иностранные языки и стал одним из важных источников духовного чтения для миллионов людей в мире.

Ключевые слова:

Святитель Димитрий, митрополит Ростовский, агиография, многотомная «Книга житий святых».

The Great Menaions or *The Book of the Lives of the Saints*, compiled by St Dimitry, Metropolitan of Rostov, is the largest work of Slavic literature. It is a huge collection, containing, in contrast to secular almanachs, texts for instructive extra-liturgical reading, arranged by months and days of a year. The basis of Dimitry of Rostov’s work was laid by the Great Menaions Reader of Macarius, Metropolitan of Moscow, drawn up by his order in the 16th century.

Dimitry of Rostov was born as Daniil Savich Tuptalo in 1651 near Kiev into the family of a Cossack Sava Grigorievich Tuptalo. He received his primary education at home. After the family moved in 1660 to Kiev, Daniel, at the age of twelve, entered the Kiev College Monastery. In 1668, he was tonsured at the Kirillov Monastery under the name Dimitry and after a few years became wide-

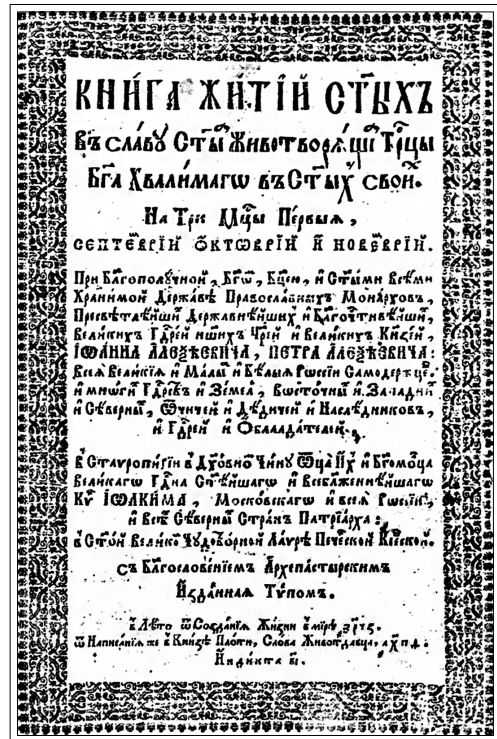
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ly known as a talented preacher and writer. In 1677, in Novgorod-Seversk, his first book, *The Miracles of Virgin Maria*, was published, and seven years later he began work on the main business of his life: the multi-volume *Book of the Lives of the Saints*, which glorified its creator for centuries.

By a decision of the council of elders of the Kievo-Pechersk Monastery, Dimitry of Rostov began work on *The Book...* in 1684 and worked intermittently on it for 20 years, until 1704. It consists of four voluminous books, each of which contains lives for three months. The first volume from September to November (September was considered the first month of the new year) was published in Kiev in 1689. The second volume, for December, January and February, appeared five years later, and the third volume for March, April and May was published in 1700.

In 1701, by personal order of Peter I, Dimitry was appointed Metropolitan of Siberia. In March of the same year, Dimitry, who came to Moscow from Ukraine, was consecrated as Metropolitan. Soon, taking into account Dimitry's poor health, the Tsar revoked his previous decree, ordering Dimitry to live in Moscow. However, already in 1702, he, as Metropolitan of Rostov and Yaroslavl, arrived in Rostov the Great. This period of his life in this city has become one of the most fruitful. Here he completed the last volume of *The Book...* (for June, July and August), which was printed in 1705. Dimitry managed to found a special, purely humanitarian school in the city with more than 200 students: it was his pet project. In conjunction with it, he created a theater for which he wrote several plays. In later years Dimitry worked on new works, including the voluminous *Cell Chronicler*. To work on it, he drew on numerous domestic and foreign sources in several foreign languages. Dimitry of Rostov died on 28th October of 1709, and was buried in the Trinity Cathedral of the St. Jacobe Monastery.

According to the academic D.S. Likhachev, Dimitry of Rostov was "the last writer who had the greatest importance for all of Orthodox Eastern and Southern Europe." He was a writer for all of Slavdom and played a huge role in the development of many continental literatures. His *The Book of the Lives of the*



The title page of the first edition of "The Book of the Lives of the Saints" by St. Dimitry of Rostov.

Vol. I. Kiev, 1689

Saints, the most extensive hagiogram of the history of the Christian world, was compiled with exceptional care. As an Orthodox writer, he was able to combine in his work the literary achievements of two branches of Christianity: eastern and western. Dimitry of Rostov's *The Book...* was read not only in the age of the Enlightenment, but also during the Slavic revival. Many writers drew inspirations for their own works from this grandiose work about the saints throughout the nineteenth century. It is enough to mention the figures of two such giants of Russian literature: A.S. Pushkin and L.N. Tolstoy. A feature of the wide reception of the literary heritage of Dimitry of Rostov was that in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus' (and to a lesser extent in Bulgaria and Serbia), his work was perceived as part of each nation's own national culture and literature. The writer's main book, his famous *The Book...* especially contributed to this perception and understanding. This huge collection of short biographies of three centuries has been a favorite subject of reading among eastern and southern Slavs. Numerous translations of this work into foreign languages and its repeated reprints in the 18th–19th centuries testify to its great impact on the consciousness of many Slavic Orthodox peoples who lived through the era of the national revival.

The multi-volume *The Book of the Lives of the Saints* by Dimitry of Rostov played a special role in the spiritual and cultural life of the South Slavic, Moldavian and Romanian peoples. Along with dozens of different printed editions of these Four Issues dating from the 17th–20th centuries, which were widely dispersed in the multinational Orthodox environment, many of them lived in manuscript form. They were copied by local Orthodox scribes, as well as other works of the Prelate, including his *Cell Chronicler*. The latter in particular to this day is stored in a manuscript copy and is read on Mt. Athos in several monasteries. The writings of Dimitry of Rostov, including the hagiographical ones, exerted a clear influence on the Bulgarian authors of historical works of the late 18th century. This can be seen for example, in the *History of the Slovenian-Bulgarian People* of the second half of the 18th century from the Zograph monastery. *The Book...* ultimately determined the date of the celebration of the memory of the Thessalonica brothers, the Slavic enlighteners Cyril and Methodius. The date indicated in their Life by Dimitry of Rostov, of 11 May according to the old style and 24 May according to the new one, was adopted as the date of the Day of Slavic Writing and Culture. Here is how the famous Bulgarian Slavacist K. Kuev wrote about this: “In the adoption of 11 May as a holiday of the two brothers Cyril and Methodius, a large role was played by the book of Dimitry of Rostov ... from which information was drawn by some of our revivalists ... That's how this purely church holiday on 11 May from 1857 became a national holiday of the Bulgarian enlightenment, national unity, and national culture. From then and to this day, the entire Bulgarian nation honors the memory of the creators of Slavic writing and Slavic written culture on 11 (24) May.”

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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