

## NOTAE

### THE PRAYER “GOD OF THE SPIRITS...” A BRIEF HISTORICAL AND LITURGICAL ANALYSIS

Auctor huius studii explorat nonnullas facies historiae orationis *Deus spirituum...*, quae ab antiquo inter hymnos orationesque Ordinum exsequiarum byzantinae traditionis invenitur.

#### 1. The Prayer “God of the Spirits...” – Text

Our concern here is with the prayer “God of the Spirits...”, which occurs among the prayers for the dead in the Byzantine liturgical tradition. Before analyzing some of the historical and other aspects of the prayer,<sup>1</sup> we believe it is necessary and useful to reproduce the text in its entirety:<sup>2</sup>

Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός, ὁ τὸν θάνατον καταπατήσας τὸν δὲ διάβολον καταργήσας καὶ ζωὴν τῷ κόσμῳ σου δωρησάμενος, αὐτός, Κύριε, ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κεκοιμημένου δούλου σου (N), ἐν τόπῳ φωτεινῷ, ἐν τόπῳ χλοερῷ, ἐν τόπῳ ἀναψύξεως, ἔνθα ἀπέδρα πᾶσα ὀδύνη, λύπη καὶ στεναγμός. Πᾶν ἀμάρτημα τὸ παρ’ αὐτοῦ πραχθὲν ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἔργῳ ἢ διανοίᾳ, ὡς ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος Θεὸς συγχώρησον· ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ὃς ζήσεται καὶ οὐχ ἀμαρτήσῃ· σὺ γὰρ μόνος, Κύριε, ἐκτὸς ἀμαρτίας ὑπάρχεις, ἡ δικαιοσύνη σου, δικαιοσύνη εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, καὶ ὁ λόγος σου ἀλήθεια.

O God of the spirits<sup>3</sup> and of all flesh,<sup>4</sup> Who has trodden down death, destroying the power of the devil,<sup>5</sup> bestowing life on Your world,<sup>6</sup> to the soul of

<sup>1</sup> See Ioan Stoicu, “Rugăciunea Dumnezeului duhurilor și a tot trupul” [*The Prayer: God of the Spirits and of All Flesh*], in *Mitropolia Banatului [Metropolitan of Banat]* 14/1-3 (1964) 77-82. Unfortunately, this article does not contain essential data on the origin and antiquity of the prayer; see also Nicolae Preda, “Rânduiala rugăciunii ce se face după ieșirea sufletului din trup”, conform *Psaltirii de la 1818 (Chișinău): (noțiuni de liturgică [The Ordinance of the Prayer to be Made after the Soul left the Body, according to the Psalter from 1818 (Kishinev): Notions of Liturgy]*, Basilica Publishing, Bucharest, 2015, pp. 208-266.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the biblical references mentioned in the translation do not appear in the original text.

<sup>3</sup> *Revelation* 22:6.

<sup>4</sup> *Numbers* 16:22; 27:16.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Hebrews* 2:14. Cf. also Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, *L’Eucologio Barberini gr. 336. Seconda edizione riveduta con traduzione in lingua italiana*, CLV-Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma, 2000 (= *Bibliotheca “Ephemerides Liturgicae” “Subsidia”* 80), p. 235 and Demetriou B. Tzerpos, *Ἡ Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Νεκρωσίου Εὐχελαίου κατὰ τὰ χειρόγραφα Εὐχολόγια τοῦ ἰδ’-ἰς’ αἰ.*, Ἴδρυμα Βυζαντινῆς Μουσικολογίας, Ἀθήνα, 2000 (= “*Λατρευολογήματα Ι*”), p. 244.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Mark* 3:35; *John* 6:33. Cf. also Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, in *Ἐκκλησιαστικός Φάρος* 36 (1937). 189.

Your departed servant (Name), do You Yourself, O Lord, give rest<sup>7</sup> in a place of light, in a place of green pasture, in a place of refreshment,<sup>8</sup> from where pain and sorrow and mourning are fled away.<sup>9</sup> Every sin by him committed in word or deed or thought, do You as our good God, lover of mankind,<sup>10</sup> forgive, seeing as there is not one man that shall live and sin not,<sup>11</sup> Lord, for You are alone without sin: Your righteousness is righteousness for ever, and Your word is truth.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. The Prayer “God of the Spirits...” – Name

Although it seems to be a “common prayer”, devoid of any particular characteristic, given its repeated presence in the burial ordinances,<sup>13</sup> yet the origin of the prayer “God of the Spirits...” has always a title, of explanatory character. Some of its forms are as following:

- a) Εὐχή ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος;<sup>14</sup>
- b) Εὐχή ἑτέρα εἰς κοιμηθέντας;<sup>15</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Matthew* 11:28. Cf. also Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ο Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Genesis* 8:9; *Numbers* 10:33, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Isaiah* 35:10; 51:11.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Exodus* 34:6; *Luke* 18:19. Cf. also Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ο Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, p. 190.

<sup>11</sup> *2 Chronicles* 6:36. Cf. Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ο Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, p. 189.

<sup>12</sup> *Psalms* 118:142, *John* 17:17. Cf. *Psaltirea*, În Exarhiceasca Tipografie a Basarabiei, Chişinău, 1818, p. 305r.

<sup>13</sup> “Questa preghiera, presente in quasi tutti gli eucologi, è praticamente l’ unica oggi in uso, ripetuta più volte, in tutti gli uffici di defunti”: Miguel Arranz, “Le preghiere per i defunti nella tradizione bizantina. I sacramenti della restaurazione dell’antico Eucologio costantinopolitano II-6”, in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 63 (1997) 102, note 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Barberini gr.* 336 [*L’Eucologio*, sec. VIII]: 248r, cf. S. Parenti and E. Velkovska, *L’Eucologio*, p. 235; see also Themistoclis S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία κατὰ τοὺς χειρογράφους κώδικες 10ου-12ου αἰῶνος [The Funeral Service according to Manuscript Codices from the 10th to 12th Centuries]*. Τόμος Β’. Εἰσαγωγικά, Κωδικολογικά καὶ Παλαιογραφικὰ Κείμενα, Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Προφήτου Ἡλιοῦ Θήρας, Ἐκδόσεις Θεσβίτης, 2005, p. 487; *Sinai gr.* 959 [*Euchologium*, saec. XI]: 101β, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 497; see also Elena Velkovska, “Funeral Rites according to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources”, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001) 25; and Aleksej Afanasevič Dmitrievskij, *Описание литургических рукописей, хранящихся в библиотекахъ Православнаго Востока*. Томъ II. *Εὐχολόγια*, Типографія Императорскаго Университета Св. Владимира, Киевъ, 1901, p. 57; *Sinait. gr.* 958 [*Euchologium*, saec. XI]: 96α: *Εὐχή ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος*, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 478; *Crypt. gr.* Γ.β. II [*Eucologio*, sec. XII]: 104β-105α: *Εὐχή ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος*, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 486; *Crypt. gr.* Γ.β. XI [*Εὐχολόγιον*. (XII αἰ.)]: 16α-16β, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 487; *Sinait. gr.* 971 [*Euchologium*, saec. XIV]: 157, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 501.

<sup>15</sup> *Leningr. gr.* 226 [*Eucologio*, sec. XI]: 129r, cf. André Jacob, “L’Euchologe de Porphyre Uspenski. Cod. Leningr. gr. 226 (X<sup>e</sup> siècle)”, in *Le Muséon* 78 (1965) 199; see also T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 477; and E. Velkovska, “Funeral Rites”, p. 24.

- c) Εὐχή ἄλλη ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος;<sup>16</sup>  
 d) Εὐχή ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος κοσμικοῦ;<sup>17</sup>  
 e) Εὐχή εἰς κοιμηθέντας;<sup>18</sup>  
 f) Εὐχή ἐπὶ τελευτησάντων;<sup>19</sup>  
 g) Εὐχή ἐπὶ κολλύβων ἀδελφοῦ κεκοιμημένου;<sup>20</sup>  
 h) εὐ. ἐπὶ τελειοθέντος;<sup>21</sup>  
 i) Εὐχή ἐπὶ τελευτῶντος παντὸς κοσμικοῦ<sup>22</sup>;  
 j) Εὐχή ἐπὶ κολλύβοις κοιμηθ<έν>τ<ος>;<sup>23</sup>  
 k) Εὐχή ἐπιτάφιος καθολική.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Sinai* gr. 961 [*Euchologium*, saec. XIII]: 84a: Εὐχή ἄλλη ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος. cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 498; see also E. Velkovska, "Funeral Rites", p. 26; and A.A. Dmitrievskij, *Opusculum liturgiccheskixъ rycopisceŭ*, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Coisl.* 213 [*Euchologium Strategii presbyteri*, (a. 1027)]: 88v, cf. James. Duncan, *Coisl. 213. Euchologe de la Grande Eglise*. Dissertatio ad Lauream, Pontificium Institutum Orientale, Romae, 1983, p. 136; and Miguel Arranz, *L'Eucologio Costantinopolitano agli inizi del secolo XI. Hagiasmatarion & Archieratikon (Rituale & Pontificale) con l'aggiunta del Leiturgikon (Messale)*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma, 1996, p. 309; see also E. Velkovska, "Funeral Rites", p. 27; T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 504 and Metropolitan Athenagoras, "Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων", p. 194; *Grottaferrata gr.* G. b. 1 [*Euchologium*, sec. XI]: 115β-116α, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 484; *E.B.E.* 662 [*Εὐχολόγιον τὸ μέγα*, sec. XII]: 192α, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 490; *Euchologium Sinaiticum*: [89]; *EYXH ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος κοσμικοῦ*, cf. Jean Frček, *Euchologium Sinaiticum. Texte slave avec sources grecques et traduction française*, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. XXIV, fasc. 5, Firmin-Didot, Paris, 1933, p. 773; "Preghiera per un laico deceduto (τελευτήσαντος κοσμικοῦ)": M. Arranz, "Le preghiere per i defunti...", p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> *Messin. Bibl. Univ. S. Salvat. gr.* 172 [*Σχηματολόγιον*, ἔτ. 1179]: 190β: Εὐχ(ή) εἰς κοιμηθέντας, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 406; *Vat. gr.* 1836 [*Σχηματολόγιον*, (XI-XII αἰ.)]: 79α, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 407; *Barb. gr.* 431 [*Εὐχολόγιον*, (XI-XII αἰ.)]: 132α, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 475; *Konstam.* 19 [*Εὐχολόγιον*, sec. XV]: 104, cf. A.A. Dmitrievskij, *Opusculum liturgiccheskixъ rycopisceŭ*, p. 497; *Coisl.* 214 [*Euchologium*, sec. XII], cf. J. Frček, *Euchologium Sinaiticum*, p. 773, note 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Vat. gr.* 1811 [*Euchologium*, an. 1147]: 36α, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 474.

<sup>20</sup> *Par. gr.* 328 [*Εὐχολόγιον*, (XII αἰ.)]: 80-82, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 503.

<sup>21</sup> *Parma Rot.* [*Raccolta di preghiere*, sec. XI], parte a doua, cf. Emidio Martini, *Catalogo di manoscritti greci esistenti nelle biblioteche italiane*. Vol. I. Parte I., Ulrico Hoepli, Milano, 1893, p. 169.

<sup>22</sup> *Sinai* 1036 [*Εὐχολόγιον*, saec. XII-XIII]: 68, cf. A.A. Dmitrievskij, *Opusculum liturgiccheskixъ rycopisceŭ*, p. 148.

<sup>23</sup> *Paris* C367 [*Eucologio*, sec. XIII-XIV], cf. J. Frček, *Euchologium Sinaiticum*, p. 773, note 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Paris* 324 [*Eucologio*, sec. XIV], cf. J. Frček, *Euchologium Sinaiticum*, p. 773, note 1.

### 3. The Prayer "God of the Spirits..." – Historical Issues

The prayer "God of the Spirits...", due to its age in particular,<sup>25</sup> but also to the fact that it is still found in all funeral orders today,<sup>26</sup> is considered by experts as one of the most longstanding Christian prayers for the dead.<sup>27</sup>

I. Guidi "finds" it among the ancient Christian prayers, calling it "antique",<sup>28</sup> A. Baumstark assigns it the appellation of "venerable",<sup>29</sup> A. Dumont considers it "veritable",<sup>30</sup> and Metropolitan Athenagoras counts it as a "Christian and national prayer par excellence".<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> "La place qu'occupe notre prière dans l'ἀκολουθία νεκρώσιμος montre assez son antiquité et son importance": Henri Leclercq, "Âme", in Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (edd.), *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie, t. I, première partie: A-Amende*, Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1924, col. 1536.

<sup>26</sup> "As we can see, both the prayer in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, as well as that summarized in the description and explanation of the funeral service from *On Church Hierarchy*, contain the same ideas and expressions we find in the prayer 'God of the Spirits and of all flesh' (Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων), specific to all the funeral services of today's Byzantine rite": Ene Braniște, *Liturgica Specială pentru institutetele teologice (Special Liturgy for Theological Institutes)*, Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 2nd edition 1985, p. 550.

<sup>27</sup> D.B. Tzerpos, *Ἡ Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Νεκρώσιμου*, p. 76; "Pour l'Orient, un des témoins les plus intéressants du thème du *refrigerium* est la prière 'Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων', 'Dieu des esprits' [...] C'est peut-être la plus ancienne prière pour les morts": Bernard Botte, "Les plus anciennes formules de prière pour les morts", in Alessandro Pistoia and Achille Maria Triacca (edd.), *La maladie et la mort du chrétien dans la Liturgie, Conférences Saint-Serge, XXIe Semaine d'études liturgiques, Paris, 1er-4 juillet 1974*, Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma, 1975 (= *Bibliotheca "Ephemerides Liturgicae" "Subsidia" 1*), p. 92; see also E. Braniște, *Liturgica Specială (Special Liturgy)*, p. 550, note 71; "Τὴν εὐχὴ αὐτὴ ὁ π. J. Tabet τὴ θεωρεῖ ὡς μὰ ἀπ' τὶς πρὸ παλιῆς εὐχῆς καὶ πηγὴ τῆς τὸ βιβλίον τῶν Ἀριθμῶν τῆς Π. Διαθήκης 16, 22 καὶ 27, 16": T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία κατὰ τοὺς χειρογράφους κώδικες 10ου-12ου αἰώνος*, Τόμος Α'. Γενικὴ Εἰσαγωγή, Κατάλογοι, Πίνακες, Ἱερά Μονὴ Προφήτου Ἡλίου Θήρας, Ἐκδόσεις Θεσβίτης, 2005, p. 187.

<sup>28</sup> "Per comodità di confronto trascrivo qui dal Sacramentario di Scrapione (Funk, *Didasc.* II, p. 192) e dall'Euclologio greco le due antiche preghiere corrispondenti a queste del Mashafa genzat: [...] Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός": Ignazio Guidi, "Due antiche preghiere nel Rituale abissino dei Defonti", in *Oriens Christianus*, nuova serie 1 (1911) 22; see also Vitaliano Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote nel rito bizantino, secondo gli Euclologi manoscritti di lingua greca*. Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 1972 (= *Pubblicazioni dello Studium Biblicum Franciscanum: Collectio Minor 14*), p. 147, note 235.

<sup>29</sup> "Comme exemples, nous citerons la conclusion d'une des prières de l'*Εὐχέλαιον* [...] etc, et celle de la vénérable oraison pour les morts *Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός* dont le texte est conservé dans toute une série d'inscriptions de l'ancienne Nubie chrétienne": Anton Baumstark, *Liturgie comparée: Principes et méthodes pour l'étude historique des liturgies chrétiennes*, Éditions de Chevetogne, Chevetogne and Paris, Troisième édition 1953, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> "La nouvelle découverte [...] a un autre mérite: elle nous conserve en entier une véritable prière qui n'était spéciale ni à l'Égypte, ni à la Nubie, dont nous pouvons déterminer la haute antiquité et qui a eu, à toute époque, une place très particulière dans le rituel de l'Église grecque": Albert Dumont, "Fragment de l'office funèbre de l'Église grecque sur une inscription d'Égypte", in Théophile Homolle, *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'épigraphie*, Ernest Thorin, Paris, 1892, pp. 585-586.

<sup>31</sup> "Ἡ τόσον συγκινητικὴ καὶ ἐπιβλητικὴ αὕτη εὐχὴ ἢ ἀποπνεύουσα ὅλον τὸ ἄρωμα τῶν

It appears for the first time in *Barberini gr.* 336 (8th century),<sup>32</sup> a manuscript considered by G. Mercati “il più vecchio ms. dell’*Euclologio costantinopolitano*”,<sup>33</sup> but its text is much older,<sup>34</sup> as is evident from some sources and certain funerary inscriptions.<sup>35</sup>

Beginning with the ninth century, it would no longer be lacking in the manuscripts<sup>36</sup> containing a single prayer for the dead,<sup>37</sup> being always indicated as the first<sup>38</sup> in the manuscripts that render the cathedral tradition,<sup>39</sup>

θείων Γραφῶν· ἡ ἱερά αὐτῆ εὐχή δι’ ἧς ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποστολικῶν χρόνων, δι’ ὅλων τῶν αἰώνων, μυριάδες μυριάδων τευνεώτων πιστῶν προϋπέμφθησαν εἰς τοὺς κόλπους τοῦ Ἀβραάμ [...] ἡ κατ’ ἐξοχὴν χριστιανικὴ καὶ ἐθνικὴ μας εὐχή, δι’ ἧς ἡ τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἐκκλησία ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδρύσεως αὐτῆς, ἐν ταῖς θείαις αὐτῆς Λειτουργίαις, ἰκετεύει [...] ὑπὲρ τῶν κεκοιμημένων αὐτῆς, πράγμα ἀπίστευτον! κινδυνεύει νὰ καταργηθῆ ἐν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ, ὡς ἄχρηστος ἐν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις τοῖτοις χρόνοις!!”: Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, pp. 177-178.

<sup>32</sup> *Barberini gr.* 336: 248r-248v, cf. S. Parenti and E. Velkovska, *L’Euclologio*, p. 235.

<sup>33</sup> Giovanni Mercati, “Una preghiera antichissima degli eucloghi medievali”, in Giovanni Mercati, *Opere Minori raccolte in occasione del settantesimo natalizio sotto gli auspicii di S.S. Pio XI. Volume IV. (1917-1936)*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1937 (= *Studi e Testi* 79), p. 8; see also V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147 and p. 147, note 238.

<sup>34</sup> “Ἡ εὐχὴ αὐτὴ ανατρέχει στους πρώτους χριστιανικούς αἰῶνες”: Ν. Ελ. Εμμανουηλίδης, *Τὸ δίκαιο τῆς ταφῆς στο Βυζάντιο*, Ἀθήνα, Ἐκδόσεις Ἀντ. Σάκκουλα, 1989, p. 36, note 17.

<sup>35</sup> A. Baumstark, *Liturgie comparée*, p. 75; “V. Bruni presenta altre redazioni di questa preghiera secondo un papiro palestinese e secondo varie lapidi tombali della Nubia”: M. Aranz, “Le preghiere per i defunti...”, p. 102, note 7; “αὐτὴ ἡ εὐχὴ ἀπὸ πολὺ παλιὰ ὑπάρχει μὲ μικρὲς παραλλαγὲς στοὺς παπύρους καὶ σὲ πολλὰς ταφικὲς ἐπιγραφές”: Τ.Σ. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185; “τό κείμενο τῆς ὁμοῦ μᾶς εἶναι γνωστὸ ἀπὸ ἐπιτάφιας ἐπιγραφῆς καὶ ἄλλες πηγές”: D.B. Tzerpos, *Ἡ Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Νεκρωσίου*, p. 77; “Τὸ κείμενο τῆς εὐχῆς αὐτῆς συναντᾶται καὶ σὲ πολλὰς ἐπιτύμβιας ἐπιγραφές”: Ν. Ελ. Εμμανουηλίδης, *Τὸ δίκαιο τῆς ταφῆς στο Βυζάντιο*, p. 36, note 17; “Its text is found not only in the ancient Greek manuscripts - the Euchologion [...], and formulas from it are found reproduced in a whole series of older inscriptions in Nubia”: E. Braniște, *Liturgica Specială (Special Liturgy)*, p. 550; V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, pp. 148-157. We should like to emphasize that V. Bruni’s analysis is impressive and deserves special attention.

<sup>36</sup> “Τολμοῦμε νὰ ποῦμε, ὅτι λίγα εἶναι ἐκεῖνα τὰ χειρόγραφα ποὺ δὲν παραδίδουν αὐτὴν τὴν εὐχὴ”: Τ.Σ. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 184.

<sup>37</sup> *Parma Rot.*, second part, cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 239; see also E. Martini, *Catalogo di manoscritti greci*, p. 169; *Paris* 328: 80-82, cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, nota 239; *Sinai* 1036: 68, cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 239; see also A.A. Dmitrievskij, *Описание литургических рукописей*, p. 148; *Vat.* 782 [*Typicōn di S. Saba-Euclologio contenente*, sec. XIII-XIV]: 219v-220, cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 239; *Konstam.* 19: 104, cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 239; see also A.A. Dmitrievskij, *Описание литургических рукописей*, p. 497.

<sup>38</sup> “Τὴν εὐχὴ αὐτὴ τῆ βρισκουμε ἤδη στὸ πιὸ παλαιὸ χειρόγραφο *Εὐχολόγιο τὸν BAR I*, ὅπου κατέχει καὶ τὴν πρώτη θέση”: Τ.Σ. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185; see Τ.Σ. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 487 and S. Parenti and E. Velkovska, *L’Euclologio*, p. 235.

<sup>39</sup> *Barberini gr.* 336: 248r-248v, cf. S. Parenti and E. Velkovska, *L’Euclologio*, p. 235; *Sinai*, gr. 958: 96a, cf. Τ.Σ. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 478; *Sinai gr.* 959: 101v-102, cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 240; *Vat. gr.* 1811: 36a, cf. Τ.Σ. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 474; *Paris* 330 [*Euchologium*, sec. XII]: 184-185, cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 240.

and as the second<sup>40</sup> in those representing monastic tradition.<sup>41</sup> The manuscripts indicated by V. Bruni and by Father Themistoclis Hristodoulou are just a few of the many existing examples.<sup>42</sup>

Although this prayer is not lacking in the manuscripts containing even only one prayer for the dead, however, according to the observations of V. Bruni,<sup>43</sup> it is missing from the manuscript *Ger. Sab. 377*,<sup>44</sup> which presents no less than seven prayers for the dead.

The prayer "*God of the Spirits...*" appears also in the old *Sinaitic Slavic*<sup>45</sup> *Euchologion*.

These considerations are of great help when addressing the origin of this prayer, as confirmed by V. Bruni.<sup>46</sup>

We would also like to point out that our analysis of the origin and the length of this prayer will not be extensive, since there already exists an account, extremely well presented, by V. Bruni.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> E.B.E. 662: 192a, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 490; *Coisl.* 213: 88v-89r, cf. J. Duncan, *Coislín 213*, pp. 136-137; *Grottaferrata gr. G. b. 1*: 115β-116a, cf. T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. II), p. 484; see also V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 241.

<sup>41</sup> "Ἡ εὐχή 'Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός...' κατέχει τὴν πρώτην θέσιν στὰ χειρόγραφα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἀπηχοῦν τὴν παράδοσιν τοῦ ἀσματικοῦ τύπου, ὅπως γιὰ παράδειγμα BAR 1, Π 1, SINA 1, EBE 2, καὶ τὴ δευτέρα θέσιν στὰ χειρόγραφα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἀπηχοῦν μοναχικὴν παράδοσιν POR 3, COI 2, BES 2": T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, notes 239, 240 and 241 and T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185. It should be noted that some of these indices are not entirely accurate, as can be seen from the descriptions of the manuscripts to which we have had access, which is why we have retained only those which are correct.

<sup>43</sup> V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 241.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. A. Παπαδόπουλος-Κεραμιέως, *Ἱεροσολυμιτικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη ἤτοι Κατάλογος τῶν ἐν ταῖς βιβλιοθήκαις τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου ἀποστολικοῦ τε καὶ καθολικοῦ ὀρθοδόξου πατριαρχικοῦ θρόνου τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ πάσης Παλαιστίνης ἀποκειμένων ἐλληνικῶν κωδίκων*. Τόμος Δεύτερος, Ἐν Πετρούπολει, Ἐκ τοῦ τυπογραφείου Β. Κιρσπάουμ, 1894, pp. 506-507; "Nel cod. *Ger. Sab. 377* (sec. XIV), che ai ff. ρκ'-ρκγ' ha sette orazioni per defunti, la preghiera non si trova. Salvo errore da parte nostra, è l'unico caso del genere": V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147, note 241.

<sup>45</sup> *Euchologium Sinaiticum*: [89], cf. J. Frček, *Euchologium Sinaiticum*, p. 772; "Τὴν εὐχὴν 'Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων...' τὴ συναντοῦμε καὶ σ' ἓνα παλιὸ Σλαβικὸ Σιναϊτικὸ Εὐχολόγιον καὶ φέρει τὸν τίτλον: 'Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ τελευτήσαντος κοσμικοῦ'": T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185; "L'Euchologium ne possède que quatre prières pour les défunts [...] La Ire est l'actuelle prière commune pour tous les défunts: *Dieu des esprits et de toute chair* [...] Dans notre codex elle est acéphale, son début se trouvant à la fin du deuxième cahier perdu": M. Arranz, "La liturgie de l'Euchologe slave du Sinaï", in *Christianity among the Slavs. The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Acts of the International Congress held on the Eleventh Centenary of the Death of St. Methodius, Rome, October 8-11, 1985*, Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Roma 1988 (= *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 231), p. 46; see also T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185, note 385.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 147.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, pp. 146-158; "Σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν ἱστορία αὐτῆς τῆς εὐχῆς, ὑπάρχει ἡ μελέτη τοῦ V. Bruni, ὅπου ἀναφέρει σχετικὰ: ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ εὐχὴ ἀπὸ πολλῶν

#### 4. The Prayer “God of the Spirits...” – In Sources

The most interesting document<sup>48</sup> where we find this prayer is, by far, the papyrus discovered at Nessana, dated back to 600<sup>49</sup> and published by C.J. Kraemer in a study from the year 1958. This papyrus is also mentioned by specialists who have dealt with the prayer “God of the Spirits...”<sup>50</sup>

Equally interesting, even surprising, seems to be V. Bruni’s observation as to how this prayer found its place in the papyrus:

In questo papiro la nostra orazione si trova nel verso; mentre nel recto vi è il testo di un contratto. Forse qualche buon cristiano della regione, avendo ascoltato questa preghiera durante gli uffici religiosi, ha voluto copiarla per suo uso personale, rendendoci così un grandissimo servizio.<sup>51</sup>

Among the sources that testify regarding the length of this prayer are found, as we mentioned above, also funeral inscriptions,<sup>52</sup> some of them dated shortly after the Nessana papyrus.<sup>53</sup>

V. Bruni’s analysis of funeral inscriptions with which he compares the prayer “God of the Spirits...” is a detailed one, as is that of H. Leclercq. Bruni writes:<sup>54</sup>

παλιά υπάρχει με μικρές παραλλαγές στους παπύρους και σε πολλές ταφικές επιγραφές, ενώ δείγματα αυτής έφθασαν μέχρι των ημερών μας με δημοσιεύσεις και μελέτες αξιόλογων επιστημόνων”: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Η νεκρώσιμη ακολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185.

<sup>48</sup> “Perciò il più antico documento certo che attesti l’esistenza dell’orazione in questione, resta il papiro dell’anno 600 circa”: V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 151; “Ωστόσο το αρχαιότερο κείμενο που περιέχει την ευχή είναι ο πάπυρος του 600 μ.Χ.”: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Η νεκρώσιμη ακολουθία* (vol. I), p. 186.

<sup>49</sup> “Both recto and verso were probably written around 600”: Casper John Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana. Volume 3. Non-Literary Papyri*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1958, p. 310; “Its text is found not only in the ancient Greek manuscripts [...], but even in a previous document, that is the Papyrus from Nessana around the year 600”: E. Braniste, *Liturgica Specială (Special Liturgy)*, p. 550; “Η αρχαιότερη πληροφορία που άντλοῦμε γι’ αυτήν την ευχήν προέρχεται από ένα πάπυρο που χρονολογείται το 600 μ. Χ. και βρέθηκε το 1958 από τον Kraemer στη Nessana της Παλαιστίνης”: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Η νεκρώσιμη ακολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185; “La più antica testimonianza in questo senso ce l’offre la papirologia e risale all’anno 600 circa. Si tratta di un papiro trovato a Nessana (Sud Palestina) una trentina d’anni fa e pubblicato dal Kraemer nel 1958. Il testo dell’orazione [...] è quasi completo e nell’insieme identico alla redazione attuale. Le necessarie ed inevitabili varianti ne confermano in certo senso l’autenticità”: V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 148; cf. also B. Botte, “Les plus anciennes formules”, p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> See also D.B. Tzerpos, *Η Ακολουθία του Νεκρωσίμου*, p. 77, note 116.

<sup>51</sup> V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 148.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. B. Botte, “Les plus anciennes formules”, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> “The first oration of the series, *God of the spirits and of all flesh*, is also found in the Armenian and Coptic traditions and seems to be very ancient, being attested as early as the famous papyrus of Nessana (ca. A.D. 600) and by a large number of epigrapha from the end of the seventh century on”: E. Velkovska, “Funeral Rites”, pp. 23-24.

<sup>54</sup> H. Leclercq; “Âme”, pp. 1525-1536.

Se la papirologia ci offre questo prezioso documento,<sup>55</sup> l'epigrafia dal canto suo conferma l'esistenza di questa preghiera come comune in tutta la regione della Nubia già in tempi remoti. Infatti, a partire da un'epoca leggermente posteriore a quella del papiro di Nessana, vi troviamo tutta una serie di lapidi funerarie – con o senza data – che riproducono l'orazione in questione, a volte parzialmente e a volte addirittura con delle aggiunte.<sup>56</sup>

Given that the studies on these funerary inscriptions are to be considered conclusive,<sup>57</sup> we would like to mention here at least two of the inscriptions: one considered by experts as the oldest,<sup>58</sup> dated around 692<sup>59</sup> and discovered by the Count of Vidua, around 1820, at Colasucia, in Nubia,<sup>60</sup> and the other, equally interesting and important for the origin of the prayer "God of the Spirits...", but which poses great problems with dating,<sup>61</sup> and which seems to come also from

<sup>55</sup> This is the Nessana papyrus, dated around 600.

<sup>56</sup> V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 148.

<sup>57</sup> See also E. Branîște, *Liturgica Specială (Special Liturgy)*, p. 550 and T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), pp. 185-186.

<sup>58</sup> "La più antica di esse, trovata verso il 1820 a Colasucia (Nubia) dal Conte di Vidua, risale forse all'anno 692": V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 149.

<sup>59</sup> "L'építaphe a été découverte à Colasucia, en Nubie. Elle est datée de l'ère des martyrs. Kirchhoff propose l'année 492, Letronne, 692. Le Blant la juge postérieure au Ve siècle", H. Leclercq, "Âme", col. 1529; see also H. Leclercq, "Âme", col. 1530, note 4.

<sup>60</sup> "Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιγραφικὴ ἔχουμε δείγματα ὑπάρξεως τῆς εὐχῆς ἀπὸ τὸ 692 μ.Χ. στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς Colasucia τῆς Νουβίας τοῦ Κόντε τῆς Βίδουας ποὺ βρέθηκε τὸ 1820": T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 185.

<sup>61</sup> "Centro di interesse e di discussione tra gli specialisti è la datazione, i cui estremi oscillano tra il 344 e il 1243": V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 150; see also *ibidem*, p. 150, note 257; "M. Néroutos remarque que l'inscription de Shenoûdi est de l'année 344, 60e année de l'ère des martyrs, c'est-à-dire la Basse Nubie, n'a pas été évangélisée que sous Justinien, depuis l'année 548". Il problema dell'evangelizzazione della Nubia è stato ripreso dal Monnet, profondo conoscitore dei fattori storici concernenti questa regione. Egli prova, sulla base dell'evidenza storica, che la prima evangelizzazione dalla Nubia non può aver avuto luogo anteriormente ai primi anni del sec. VI. Perciò la data 344 non pare sostenibile. Oltre questa ragione di ordine storico [...], ce n'è un'altra di ordine interno, risultante dalla lettura della lapide: la preghiera è troppo completa per essere tanto antica e il testo sembra molto vicino a quello delle lapidi tardive": V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 151; see also A. Dumont, "Fragment de l'office funèbre de l'Église grecque", p. 587, note 5 and H. Leclercq, "Âme", col. 1535; "L'inscription de Colasucia n'est pas d'ailleurs le monument le plus précieux de la série. Une pierre trouvée au Caire, mais qui paraît provenir de l'Égypte méridionale, nous offre un nouveau texte qui mérite d'être transcrit.": H. Leclercq, "Âme", col. 1531; see also *ibidem*, col. 1531, note 1; "Γιὰ τὴν εὐχὴ ὑπάρχουν διάφορες μελέτες σχετικά μὲ τὴ χρονολόγησι.



Nubia, purchased from a Cairo bazaar, around year 1870, by Daninos Pasha.<sup>62</sup>

### 5. The Prayer “*God of the Spirits...*” – Origins

Although these latter indications are able to bring extra light to a possible origin of the prayer “*God of the Spirits...*”, yet the opinions of the specialists remain divided.

The Constantinopolitan origin of the prayer is maintained without reserve by Father Themistoclis Hristodoulou:<sup>63</sup> “Τέλος, κλείνοντας τὰ σχετικά μὲ τὴν παροῦσα εὐχή, θὰ πρέπει νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ εὐχή εἶναι Κωνσταντινουπολίτικης προέλευσης.”<sup>64</sup>

V. Bruni, more cautious,<sup>65</sup> states that it is quite difficult to fully support the hypothesis of a possible Constantinopolitan origin of the prayer. He maintains that Antioch (which also incorporates elements of Cappadocian origin) would actually be the reference point of the Byzantine cult, but not only.<sup>66</sup>

La preghiera è dunque nata nell’ambiente costantinopolitano? E’ un po’ difficile dirlo. Quello che sappiamo di certo è che la liturgia bizantina si riallaccia originariamente ad Antiochia, con l’aggiunta di elementi provenienti dalla Cappadocia.<sup>67</sup>

“Ἐτσι, ἄλλοι χρονολογοῦν τὴν εὐχή τὸ 344, καὶ ἄλλοι τὸ 1243”: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 186.

<sup>62</sup> V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 150.

<sup>63</sup> He also states that this view is shared by V. Bruni and Stefano Parenti: “Τὴν ἄποψη αὐτὴ ὑποστήριξε καὶ παραπάνω ὁ V. Bruni, ὅπως ἐπίσης καὶ ὁ St. Parenti, Tesi, σ. 150-151”: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 188, note 393.

<sup>64</sup> T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 188.

<sup>65</sup> Father Themistoclis Hristodoulou states that V. Bruni seems convinced of the Constantinopolitan origin of the prayer: “Σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν προέλευση αὐτῆς τῆς εὐχῆς ὁ V. Bruni διαπιστώνει ὅτι προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, διότι καὶ στὴν παράδοση αὐτὴ ὑπάρχουν στοιχεῖα Ἀντιοχειανῆς καὶ Καππαδοκικῆς παράδοσης. Τὴν ὑπόθεση του αὐτὴ στηρίζει στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Διονυσίου Ἀρεοπαγίτου ‘Περὶ Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Ἱεραρχίας’ τὸ ὁποῖο θεωρεῖται ἔργο πὺ μεταφέρει πολλὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς Ἀντιοχειανῆς παράδοσης, καὶ πὺ φέρει δείγματα ὑπάρξεως αὐτῆς τῆς εὐχῆς”: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), pp. 186-187.

<sup>66</sup> “Nous relevons dans cette prière la même formule que nous avons analysée en parlant de l’Office syrien: *Dieu des esprits et de toute chair*. Ceci démontre une parenté liturgique et théologique entre les différents rites qui appartiennent, au point de départ, à la même tradition d’Antioche”: Jean Tabet, *L’office des morts*, Notes à l’usage privé des auditeurs, Année académique 1984-1985, Institut de Liturgie, Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, 1984, p. 68; “Ὁ π. J. Tabet σχετικά μὲ τὴ συχνότητα τῆς εὐχῆς στοὺς ἀνατολικοὺς λειτουργικοὺς τύπους ἀναφέρει ‘ὅτι τὸ γεγονός αὐτὸ δείχνει μιὰ λειτουργικὴ καὶ θεολογικὴ συγγένεια μεταξύ των(!) πὺ ὑπανίσσεται τὴν κοινὴ ρίζα ὄλων αὐτῶν τῶν παραδόσεων, πὺ εἶναι ἡ Ἀντιόχεια””: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 188.

<sup>67</sup> V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 157.

Another important aspect, mentioned previously, is that the prayer "God of the Spirits..." is also present in the rituals of burial in other Eastern liturgical rites, such as those of the Armenian tradition,<sup>68</sup> the Antiochian tradition (Syro-Jacobites and Maronites)<sup>69</sup> and the Alexandrian tradition (Copts<sup>70</sup> and Ethiopians).<sup>71</sup>

#### 6. The Prayer "God of the Spirits..." – The Author

Returning to the issue of the origin of the prayer "God of the Spirits...", we wish to recall that the article of Metropolitan Athenagoras emphasizes at one point that the old manuscripts rendered it as an anonymous prayer: "Ἡ εὐχή αὕτη εἰς τοὺς ὀνομασθέντας ἀρχαίους κώδικας<sup>72</sup> φέρεται ἀνωνύμως".<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> "Mentre nel rito armeno la troviamo già nel sec. IX": V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 158; see also V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 158, note 280; "The first oration of the series, 'God of the spirits and of all flesh', is also found in the Armenian and Coptic tradition": E. Velkovska, "Funeral Rites", pp. 23-24; "Στὰ Ἀρμενικά εὐχολόγια τῆ βρισκουμε ἀπὸ τὸν 9ο αἰ. Ἡ εὐχή αὕτη στὸ ἄρμενικὸ τυπικὸ ἀρχίζει ὡς ἑξῆς: 'Θεὲ Δημιουργε τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ τῶν σωμάτων': T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 187; see also T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 187, note 390; "Anche nella Liturgia funebre secondo il rito armeno, si trova una formula, molto simile, che inizia una preghiera dei funerali: *Dio Creatore degli Spiriti e dei corpi...*": Giuseppe Munarini, "I funerali secondo la tradizione liturgica bizantina – Le esequie dei laici", in *Oriente Cristiano* 32/2-3 (1992). 13; see also G. Munarini, "I funerali secondo la tradizione liturgica bizantina", p. 13, note 36.

<sup>69</sup> "Αὕτη ἡ εὐχή βρίσκεται στὸ πρῶτο συριακὸ χειρόγραφο (Vat. syr. 59, ἔτ. 1266) στὸ τέλος τῆς 'νεκρωσίμου ἀκολουθίας εἰς κεκοιμημένους ἀρχιερεῖς (ἐπισκόπους) καὶ λαϊκοὺς' τοῦ Συροαντιοχειανοῦ τυπικοῦ, ὅπως ἐπίσης καὶ στὶς Συρο-Ἰακωβιτικὲς καὶ Μαρωνιτικὲς νεκρώσιμες ἀκολουθίες": T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), pp. 187-188; "Nous trouvons l'expression qui ouvre cette prière dans bien des textes syriaques jacobites et maronites": Jean Tabet, *L'office des morts*, p. 65; "A questo proposito, rammento che il p. J. Tabet ha ben messo in evidenza l'importanza della formula iniziale assai arcaica [...], ma che si riscontra anche in una delle preghiere finali dei funerali di Rito Siro antiocheno, nel rito della benedizione episcopale ed al *Memento* dei morti di qualche anafora, per esempio quella di San Giacomo fratello del Signore, che il lettore può leggere direttamente in italiano ed, infine, in molti testi siro-giacobiti e maroniti": G. Munarini, "I funerali secondo la tradizione liturgica bizantina", p. 12; see also *ibidem*, p. 12, note 33.

<sup>70</sup> "The first oration of the series, *God of the spirits and of all flesh*, is also found in the Armenian and Coptic traditions": E. Velkovska, "Funeral Rites", pp. 23-24.

<sup>71</sup> "A ciò si aggiunga la constatazione che anche l'eucologia funeraria etiopica ci presenta dei manoscritti contenenti la nostra preghiera, la cui traduzione è stata fatta direttamente sulla base del testo greco": V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 158; see also *ibidem*, p. 158, note 279; "Ἡ εὐχή αὕτη βρίσκεται καὶ στὰ Αἰθιοπικὰ εὐχολόγια γιὰ τὶς νεκρώσιμες τελετὲς κατ'ἐπίδραση καὶ εἰσαγωγή ἀμέσως ἀπὸ τὸ ἑλληνικὸ εὐχολόγιο": T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. I), p. 187.

<sup>72</sup> This is a series of manuscripts mentioned in this article [see Metropolitan Athenagoras, "Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων", p. 194].

<sup>73</sup> "Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων", p. 194.

However, the prayer “*God of the Spirits...*”, whose presence is evident in the manuscripts and about which many have written, is very old and is attributed by a codex written in 1522 to Saint Basil the Great († 379):<sup>74</sup>

D'altra parte la tradizione eucologica manoscritta, rappresentata da un codice del *Metochion* del santo Sepolcro a Costantinopoli, attribuisce – benché in epoca molto tardiva – questa preghiera a S. Basilio il Grande che è un cappadoce.<sup>75</sup>

Metropolitan Athenagoras, speaking of the length of this prayer, states that it existed even before the epoch in which St. Basil the Great lived:

Ὅτι δὲ ἡ ἱερωτάτη ἡμῶν εὐχή εἶναι προγενεστέρα τοῦ Μ. Βασιλείου καταφαίνεται καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὅτι ἀπαντᾶται εἰς τὰς Λειτουργίας καὶ εὐχὰς ἀρχαιοτέρας ἢ καὶ συγχρόνους τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου τούτου ἀνδρός.<sup>76</sup>

In our opinion, the study of A. Dmitrievskij is the first in which the prayer “*God of the Spirits...*” is attributed to St. Basil the Great, which is why many of the specialists will refer to him.<sup>77</sup>

### 7. The Prayer “*God of the Spirits...*” – Other Liturgical Particularities

Regarding the inscriptions in our liturgical studies, related to the historical aspects of this prayer, it should be noted that they are quite few.

<sup>74</sup> Constant. 789 [Εὐχολόγιον σὺν Θεῷ ἁγίῳ, (anno 1522)]: Ὁ ἱερεὺς λέγει τὴν εὐχὴν τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου: Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων..., cf. A.A. Dmitrievskij, *Opusculum liturgico-cerimoniale rycnonice*, p. 734; “Ἡ εὐχὴ αὕτη [...] εἰς ἓνα μόνον κώδ. τοῦ ἐν Κων)πόλει ἁγιοταφ. Μετοχ. 675 (757) χρονολογούμενον ἀπὸ τοῦ 1522 φέρεται ἐπ’ ὀνόματι τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου”: Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, pp. 194-195; “L’Euchologium ne possède que quatre prières pour les défunts [...] La 1re est l’actuelle prière commune pour tous les défunts: *Dieu des esprits et de toute chair*, notre [5]D; quelques chercheurs l’attribuent à saint Basile”: M. Arranz, “La liturgie de l’Euchologe slave...”, p. 46; “V. Bruni presenta altre redazioni di questa preghiera a secondo un papiro palestinese e secondo varie lapidi tombali della Nubia; si cita anche un manoscritto del sec. XVI che attribuisce la preghiera a s. Basilio”: M. Arranz, “Le preghiere per i defunti...”, p. 102, note 7; “Σὲ μεταγενέστερο χειρ. κώδ. τοῦ 16ου αἰ. Μετοχίου τοῦ Παναγίου Τάφου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως 789 ἀποδίδεται αὐτὴ ἡ εὐχὴ στὸν Μ. Βασίλειο: Ὁ ἱερεὺς λέγει τὴν εὐχὴν τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου: Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν Πνευμάτων...”: T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. 1), p. 187; “Ἐνδεικτικὸ τῆς ἀρχαιότητος τῆς εὐχῆς εἶναι καὶ τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ἀπὸ τὸν κώδικα 789 τοῦ Μετοχίου τοῦ Παναγίου Τάφου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (ἔτος 1522) ἀναφέρεται ὡς εὐχὴ τοῦ Μ. Βασιλείου”: D.B. Tzerpos, *Ἡ Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Νεκρώσιμου*, p. 77; “Τὴν εὐχὴν ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων ἀπαντῶμεν ἐν τῇ πράξει τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπὸ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἡμῶν μέχρι τοῦ Μ. Βασιλείου ὑπάρχει μάλιστα, ὡς θα ἴδωμεν μετ’ ὀλίγον, καὶ ἀρχαῖος Κώδιξ ἀναγράφων ταύτην ὡς ἔργον τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου”: Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, p. 181.

<sup>75</sup> V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 157; see also V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 157, note 275.

<sup>76</sup> Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, p. 182.

<sup>77</sup> See Metropolitan Athenagoras, “Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων”, p. 195; D.B. Tzerpos, *Ἡ Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Νεκρώσιμου*, p. 77, note 117 and T.S. Hristodoulou, *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία* (vol. 1), p. 187, note 389.

Father Professor Ene Braniște refers in a study<sup>78</sup> to certain archaic expressions in the *Apostolic Constitutions* and in the work *On Church Hierarchy* of Saint Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite (5th century), close to those of the present prayer.<sup>79</sup> Father Braniște also recalls some further ancient sources (such as the Nessana papyrus and the funerary inscriptions discovered in Nubia) and some of the important manuscripts.<sup>80</sup>

V. Mitrofanovich's indications seem to be rather pastoral and theological, and in no way strictly liturgical, since he calls it a "prayer of absolution":

Now, the spiritual father approaches his spiritual son for last time and reads to him the prayer of absolution: *God of the Spirits and of all flesh...*, imploring for the dead forgiveness of all sins.<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusions

Among the hymnographical compositions and the prayers of the *Funeral Ordinances* we find the prayer "*God of the Spirits...*", about which a good deal has been written, though unfortunately nothing concerning the historical aspects (in particular as related to certain manuscripts).

While this prayer might seem to be a common prayer, without any special characteristics, in reality it has a certain interest, given its

<sup>78</sup> "For the seniority of this prayer, see the similar prayers in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (cart. VIII, chap. 41), and from the *Church Hierarchy* of Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite (VII, 3, translated into Romanian by Fr. Cic. Iordăchescu, p. 144), where we encounter the same expressions as in the text of today's prayer": *Liturgica Specială (Special Liturgy)*, p. 538, note 24.

<sup>79</sup> On such similarities, see also: "Διονύσιος ὁ Μέγας ἐπίσης Ἀλεξανδρεὺς ὁ ἀπὸ Βουλευτῶν καὶ Ἀρεοπαγιτῶν κατὰ τὰς ἀρχὰς τοῦ Γ' αἰῶνος ἐν τοῖς ἀδημοσιευτοῖς αὐτοῦ ἱεροῖς ἔργοις ἀναγράφει τὴν 'ἱερωτάτην εὐχὴν' τοῦ ἱεράρχου ὑπὲρ τῶν κεκοιμημένων τῇ θεαρχικῇ ἀγαθότητι: Πάντα μὲν ἀφεῖναι τὰ δι' ἀνθρωπίνων ἀσθενειῶν ἡμαρτημένα τῷ κεκοιμημένῳ· κατατάξαι δ' αὐτοὺς ἐν φωτί, ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων, ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, ἐν τόπῳ οὗ ἀπέδρα ὀδύνη καὶ λύπη καὶ στεναγμός": Metropolitan Athenagoras, "Ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων", pp. 184-185; see also V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 157, note 273.

Likewise: "In questo contesto ci limitiamo ad osservare che nel cap. VII della *Gerarchia ecclesiastica* dello Pseudo-Dionisio, che riferisce piuttosto gli usi antiocheni del sec. V-VI, ci pare di vedere una vaga testimonianza dell'esistenza di questa orazione. Se tale osservazione corrispondesse a realtà saremmo ricongiunti al mondo delle Costituzioni Apostoliche": V. Bruni, *I funerali di un sacerdote*, p. 157.

<sup>80</sup> "As it can be seen, both the prayer in the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the one summarized in the description and explanation of the funeral service from the Church hierarchy, contain the same ideas and expressions we find in the prayer: *God of the Spirits and of all flesh...* (Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων) [...] Its text is found not only in the ancient Greek manuscripts (Barberinus gr. 336, sec. VIII and Cod. gr. 226 from the Leningrad Public Library), but even in a previous document, namely the Papyrus from Nessana from around year 600, and formulas from it are found reproduced in a whole series of older inscriptions in Nubia": *Liturgica Specială (Special Liturgy)*, p. 550.

<sup>81</sup> *Prelegeri academice despre Liturgica Bisericeii Dreptcredincioase Răsăritene*, The Bucovina Printing Company, Chernivtsi, 1909, p. 809.

repeated presence in the *Funeral Ordinances*, and also the fact that it originally almost always had a title, as is apparent from the older liturgical manuscripts.

The prayer is, moreover, very ancient and a codex written in 1522, even attributes it to Saint Basil the Great († 379). Due to its antiquity in particular, but also to the fact that it still exists in all the *Funeral Ordinances*, the prayer is considered by experts as one of the most long-standing Christian prayers for the dead.

Finally, a particularly important aspect is that this prayer is also present in the burial rituals of other Eastern liturgical rites, being found in the Armenian tradition, the Antiochian tradition (Syro-Jacobites and Maronites) and the Alexandrian tradition (Copts and Ethiopians).

Nicolae PREDA

#### SUMMARIA

The A. treats certain aspects of the history of the prayer ‘O God of the spirits...’, which since ancient times has been among the hymns and prayers of the Funeral Ordinances of the Byzantine tradition.

L’A. considera alcuni aspetti della storia della preghiera “Dio degli spiriti...”, che si trova da tempi antichi tra gli inni e le preghiere degli Ordini esequiali di tradizione bizantina.

El Autor considera algunos aspectos de la historia de la oración “Oh Dios de los espíritus...”, que desde tiempos antiguos se encuentra entre los himnos y las oraciones de los rituales de exequias de tradición bizantina.

L’A. expose certains aspects historiques de la prière “Ô Dieu des esprits...”; depuis l’antiquité, celle-ci est présente parmi les hymnes et les prières des rites funèbres de la tradition byzantine.

Der A. beschäftigt sich mit einigen Aspekten des Werdegangs des Gebets „Oh Gott der Geister...“, das seit der frühen Zeit der byzantinischen Tradition unter den Hymnen und den Gebeten der Bestattungsliturgie vorliegt.