

to so-called 'holy harlots'. By presenting the first English translation of this medieval Bulgarian

SESdiva this contribution wants to give the reader an idea of

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Article Text Editions Bibliography

The Life and Deeds of Saint Thaïs

(trans. Michel De Dobbeleer & Alexandre Popowycz)

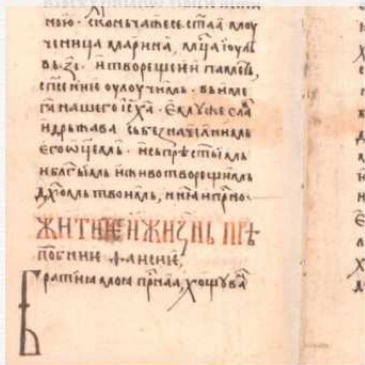
My dear brothers, I want to tell you the bright and wondrous life of the blessed Thaïs, how she started and ended it, and gained renown. Since for those who really want to repent their sinful deeds, this story is both useful and humbling.

This blessed woman had a mother who lived in the flesh. Already as a girl, Thaïs was really a beauty to the eye. From childhood on her mother took and installed her in a place of depravity. The fame of her beauty spread everywhere, and from far and wide everybody came to see her. They might stare as much as they could, they could not get enough of the beauty of her face. Many of them sold the belongings of their fathers, and brought along much gold, because they wanted to fulfil their desire with her; and others their clothes, because they wanted to do the same.

Having heard of her, that with her beauty she drew many men into depravity, father Paphnutius put on a white laymen's shirt, took a gold coin with him and went to her. And having arrived at her place, he saw her, took the gold coin and gave it to her. She took it and spoke to him: "Enter the room." He took her with him and went inside. After they had entered, he saw a high made-up bed. And after she had climbed into the bed, she called the old man. And he climbed in and sat next to her. He spoke to her: "Is there no other, more inner room than this one, for us to go in and lie there?" The blessed spoke to him: "Well, if it is people you are ashamed for, no one can see you in this place. Or if it is God you are afraid of: wherever we go, God will see."

Having heard these words, the old man spoke to her: "So you know that God exists?" She spoke to him: "Yes, I know that God exists, and His reign and suffering." The old man said to her: "So, if you know this, then why did you ruin the sons of men?" Having heard this, she threw herself at the feet of the old man and spoke: "This I know, that repentance suits those who commit sin, but wait for me just three hours, and do to me whatever you want for the bad things I have done. Having ordered her where he wanted to find her, he let her go.

Then, having taken all that she had earned by the deeds of the flesh, she burned it in the middle of the city and said: "Come and see, all you who have made love to me; see the thing



The Life of Saint Thaïs in Bulgarian Translation

The following translation has been made with the help of the 1973 edition by Scharpé and Vyncke and the high-resolution scans from the [Ghent-Pittsburgh Bdiniski sbornik collaboration](#).

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Then, having taken all that she had earned by the deeds of the flesh, she burned it in the middle of the city and said: "Come and see, all you who have made love to me; see the things I gained burning right now. The value of what she burned equalled four hundred pounds of gold.

And she went to the old man. And he took her by the hand and led her into the monastery of the Virgin. Having asked for a dark and small cell, he locked the blessed in it, and nailed the door and sealed it with lead. And there was a small window, through which she was to receive food. And he ordered to give her bread and water every day. The blessed spoke: "Father,

where do you order me to relieve myself?" "In your cell, as befits you." She spoke to him again: "How do you order me to pray to God, so that He would forgive me?" The old man said to her: "You are neither worthy to pray to Him, nor to pronounce His name with your mouth, nor to raise your hands to Him, because your mouth is foul and impure, and your hands have defiled themselves among the lawless. But just sit down and look eastward, do not say anything apart from these words: "You Who have created me, have mercy upon me."

She spent three years in her little cell. The old man, though, felt pity for her and went to father Anthony to see whether God had forgiven her or not. Paphnutius arrived and told him what had happened to her. Then father Anthony spoke to his disciples: "Each of you, lock yourselves in your cells tonight, so that we might see to whom of us He reveals this news for which father Paphnutius has come here. They locked themselves in as had been ordered to them, and Paul, the youngest disciple of the old father, had a vision. And lo, open skies, a bed standing there made up, and great splendour around it, and three virgins with candles guarding the bed, and an imperishable wreath lying on top of the bed. Having seen this, he spoke: "No one is worthy of this splendour of this bed and wreath except father Moses." And a voice came, saying: "It is not father Moses's, but Thaïs's, the harlot." Morning came, and he told the vision which he had seen.

And having returned with joy, the old Paphnutius entered the monastery and unsealed the door, aiming to lead her out. Having seen him, she begged with the following words: "Leave me in this cell until I die, for manifold are my sins, so that God may forgive them to me." The old man said to her: "Look, the Lover of mankind has accepted your repentance." And he led her out. And the blessed spoke to him: "Believe me, father, that since I entered this cell, until this hour no breath came out of my nostrils without sins coming out of me." The old man said to her: "Not because of your repentance has God forgiven you your sins, but because of the thought you have had."

Having thus repented during fifteen days, she fell ill, and after living three more days, she found rest in the glory and grace of God, having accepted the reign of heaven with all those who have pleased Him forever. O great praise to the repentance of Thaïs: how she died and found herself dead and revived, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, glory and honour to Him forever. Amen.

<https://sesdiva.eu/en/virtual-rooms/popular-saints/item/189-life-saint-thais-en> > Text

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image captions

1. The vita of St Thaïs in the *Vidin Miscellany*
2. First folio of the first vita (Mary, Abraham's Niece) in the *Vidin Miscellany*
3. Editio princeps of the *Opere Hrotsvite* (1501; ill. Albrecht Dürer)
4. Anatole France's *Thaïs* (1890)
5. Original poster for Jules Massenet's opera *Thaïs* (1894)
6. Saint Thaïs (modern icon [PravIcon.com])