

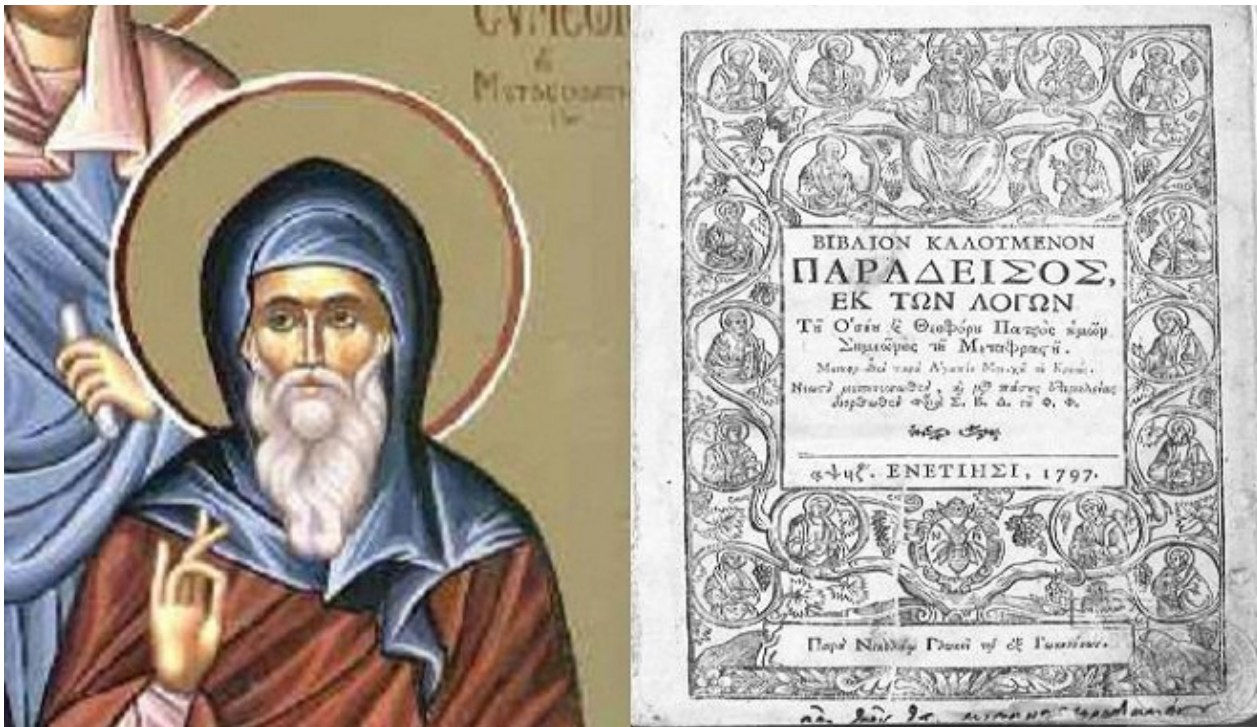
Saint Simeon the Translator (Metaphrastis)

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In the ninth century a man's concern for a biographical record of the saints of the Church up to his day led to a monumental work of scholar-ship and research to the degree that he himself was rewarded with sainthood. This most literate luminary of his time was St. Simeon the translator, so named for his in depth study of the Church and its saints, a prodigious labor of love which entailed a great deal more than a mere translation.



Endowed with a tremendous intellect, St. Simeon rose to prominence as chief magistrate and advisor to Emperor Leo the Wise, who was indeed wise enough to heed the counsel of his magistrate. The talents of Simeon included those of tact and diplomacy, which were to stand the ninth century Byzantine Empire in good stead, for those were times when an astute diplomat could avoid bloodshed at the hands of the hostile hordes outside the civilized empire, particularly those of the Middle East.

The non-Christian Arab tribes with their militaristic chief-tains posed a constant

threat to the eastern flank of the Empire. At this time the island of Crete, so near the Asian coast, was being ravaged by Arabs swooping upon islanders in vicious forays. Leo the Wise saw the need for diplomatic intervention in lieu of military action and called upon Simeon.

Simeon brought about a peaceful solution to the problem largely through his consummate skill as a diplomat. He returned in triumph to Constantinople to be hailed as the most able statesman of his day. Leo the Wise was prepared to lavish upon Simeon the highest laurels the Empire could bestow, as well as generous gifts and estates. Simeon, however, asked the monarch that he be granted one request for which he had longed -to be allowed to withdraw from public life for one of meditation and prayer. A reluctant Leo the Wise granted Simeon his wish, whereupon Simeon launched a career in scholarly research unparalleled in the history of the Church.

Simeon, a devout Christian from birth, had nurtured a desire for many years to seek out all the facts about the saints and martyrs of the Church whom he had admired from a distance while a layman in the service of the Emperor. Through an exhaustive combination of research and scholarship, which he funded himself from whatever wealth he had accumulated, he compiled his magnificent «Lives of the Saints» which has taken its place as part of our religious heritage.

Sparing no effort or expense, Simeon gathered a great abundance of material, writings in every form and in every language from every part of the Empire and beyond. He sifted through documents, recorded data, civil and Church records and various accounts which might shed some light on the life and times of the great figures of ecclesiastical history. After long research, he put his remarkable book into the Greek language. The translation from many tongues into the Greek was perhaps the least of his labor, but nonetheless this' earned him the title of Simeon the Translator.

While literature was undeniably his forte, his talent in music as well was such that many of the hymns he composed remain in the Orthodox Church services. This prolific servant of God saw the fulfillment of his life's ambition and accepted with humility the deep respect of Christianity to the end of his well-numbered years.

Source: Poulos George, Orthodox saints, Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, c 1976 pp 167-168.