The Bohemian School of Church Slavonic

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The rise of the first Slavic literary language, known as Church Slavonic, has been discussed in philological terms for almost two centuries, and there is still considerable disagreement on the very fundamentals. The creation of its alphabet, adapted to the Slavic sound system, remains the most controversial problem, permitting many possible philological conclusions. At the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, linguistically disciplined scholarship saw in Constantine-Cyril the inventive creator of the glagolitic alphabet and an ingenious codifier of the first Slavic literary language, conceived by him as a tool for missionary activity among the Moravian Slavs and the speakers of other Slavic dialects. The achievements of the Moravian School were then interpreted as the basic step in the development of literacy among the Bulgars, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, and Russians, as well as Czechs. Although this concept was closely concerned with intrinsic facts, it did not settle the problem in a permanent manner.

The emphasis on the creative role of an ingenious individual does not seem to satisfy those who believe that the creation of an alphabet is a slow cultural process involving the collective participation of a speaking community. From such a point of view, Constantine-Cyril appears as a user and potential reformer of an already-existing alphabet created over the centuries by the Slavic people. Hence, this concept does not recognize the second part of the ninth century as the beginning of the literary culture among the Slavs, and conclusions free of that temporal boundary give the green light for speculative expedition into dark prehistory. In this way, the beginning of Slavic literary culture has been shifted back

1 V. Jagić, Entstehungsgeschichte der kirchenslavischen Sprache, Berlin, 1913; N. Durnovo, "Mysli i predpoloženija o proisxoždenii staroslavjanskogo jazyka i slavjanskix alfavitov", Byzantinoslavica, I (1920); N. S. Trubetzkoy, Altkirchenslavische Grammatik (Wien, 1954).
to the time before the evangelization of the Slavic people — and even before the birth of Christ.²

Some theoreticians concerned with the prehistory of Slavic literacy prefer to assume a primitive stage for the cyrillic alphabet. There are some others, however, who postulate a primeval stage of the glagolitic letters, so that the problem of the primacy between the two Slavic alphabets now has new facets.³ Although the impact of the Greek alphabet on the cyrillic writing system is commonly accepted, the prototypes of the glagolitic letters are still sought in oriental or Latin sources.

In general, the impact of the Greek and Latin literary cultures remains the most essential question in the discussion of both the Moravian and the Bohemian Schools of Church Slavonic. The original activity of Constantine and Methodius, of their pupils in Moravia in the ninth century, and of their followers in Bohemia in the tenth and eleventh centuries is still questioned, and even the scope of their translations from Greek and Latin has not been established to any general satisfaction.⁴ Although Western Slavic participation in the oldest preserved glagolitic manuscript, the Kiev Leaflets of the tenth century, is almost generally recognized, there is still some question as to whether it was during the Moravian or Bohemian period that the text was translated from Latin and whether the preserved manuscript was copied in Bohemia in the tenth century, before it came into the hands of the Croatian Glagolits, who participated in its newer parts. There can be no doubt, however, that this oldest preserved Slavic text is a direct translation from Latin, since some parts of it correspond almost word for word to a known Latin source. The influence of not only the grammatical but also the phonological peculiarities of Latin is so evident in some passages that a Greek mediation between the Latin source and the corresponding translation is out of the question. Hence, the language of the Kiev Leaflets serves as an example of a latinized version of well-mastered Church Slavonic with some systematic reflexes of the Czech sound system.

The systematic reflexes of the Czech sound system also characterize in a decisive manner the Prague Glagolitic Fragments, which are, however, much later than the Kiev Leaflets from both the linguistic and the paleographic points of view.⁵ The text does not display the same type of

² V. A. Istrin, 1100 let slavjanskoj azbuki (Moskva, 1963).
⁵ J. Vajs, Rukovet' hlaholske paleografie (Práha, 1952); F. V. Mareš, "Pražské zlomky
regularity with regard to the Old Church Slavonic norm. On the other hand, the impact of the Czech sound system is even more pronounced, e.g., *tj>c PRISNOTEKUCЬ, *dj>z UTVRLZENIE, *vsoi>-š VЪŠЕ b, *-dl-> -dl- MODLITVУ, etc.

There is no complete agreement on the dating of the fragment consisting of two leaves, one of which is evidently older than the other. Nevertheless, the eleventh century seems to be the most feasible date on the basis of all available evidence, although one leaf, a palimpsest, has traces of much older glagolitic writing. The lower level of the palimpsest still awaits a thorough investigation by modern photographic means, while the second, newer level provides clear evidence of the usage of Church Slavonic by the Glagolits of Czech origin.

The parchment leaves with the fragments were found in the St. Vitus Cathedral library in Prague. They were pasted into a Latin book from the twelfth century and partly destroyed in the process. The placing of these two parchment leaves with a glagolitic text in a Latin book illustrates the fate of glagolitic writing in Bohemia after the liquidation of the last known stronghold of the Slavic church at Sazava monastery in 1097, more than two centuries after the introduction of Church Slavonic to the Western Slavic area. In the twelfth century, Latin became the main tool of literacy in Bohemia and the usage of Church Slavonic was banned, although the Prague Glosses in Roman letters, discovered by Patera,⁶ and the Vienna Glosses, analyzed by Jagić,⁷ witness that knowledge of Church Slavonic was retained even by scribes of Czech origin who were no longer trained in glagolitic writing and had to use Latin.

The role of the Bohemian School of the first Slavic literary language is of particular interest in connection with the numerous Church Slavonic documents commemorating the martyrdom of the Czech prince, St. Wenceslaus, who was murdered in the year 929 in Boleslav. Where these literary pieces were written and whether they were originally composed in Church Slavonic are questions still unanswered. Investigators are also curious about the fact that the commemoration of St. Wenceslaus appears in the oldest Church Slavonic documents written in Russia, and also in the missals and breviaries of the Croatian Glagolits, but not in the Church Slavonic manuscripts originating in Bulgaria and Serbia. How and when the cult of St. Wenceslaus reached the Russians and Croats is unclear,

⁷ V. Jagić, Kirchenslavisch-böhmische Glossen sec. XI.-XII., (Wien, 1903).
although it is frequently postulated that this happened during the tenth and eleventh centuries through the Bohemian School of Church Slavonic.

A collection of church songs which was copied in Novgorod one hundred and fifty years after the death of St. Wenceslaus, at the end of the eleventh century (1095/6), contains a eulogy on the martyrdom of the Czech prince and on the transfer of his relics to Prague. It is a liturgical service with several hymns strictly following the highly formalized Byzantine genre. Their Greek models are partly known, but the Greek version of the eulogy on St. Wenceslaus has not been found and very probably never existed. Although the Novgorod collection has close parallels in Bulgarian manuscripts, the eulogy on St. Wenceslaus does not appear in any of them. It is therefore quite possible that the eulogy was composed either in Russia or, perhaps, in Bohemia by a writer who was well-trained on the Byzantine models and was capable of using Church Slavonic in a creative manner.

The most peculiar linkage of this text to the Slavic West is the word ROVANIE (a grace, a gift), which also appears in the Kiev Leaflets, but not in the other Church Slavonic texts. Nahtigal derives this word from the assumed Old High German form ARVANI. Most frequently, however, the word ROVANIE is explained as a distortion of the form DAROVANIE, which is well attested in the same sense in other Church Slavonic manuscripts. The distortion could easily have taken place in the process of copying, because the word appears in the text of the Kiev Leaflets at the beginning of a prayer, where the readability of the original text could have been affected by frequent usage. As a matter of fact, in the Kiev Leaflets, many initial as well as final, letters of the lines have been wiped out exactly in that manner. The occurrence of the word in the Novgorod manuscript would, of course, mean that the distorted form became a part of the Church Slavonic vocabulary.

It is obvious that the composer of the eulogy on St. Wenceslaus knew about the death of the Czech prince and the transfer of his body to Prague from either oral or written sources. He could have used some of the legends of St. Wenceslaus, but none of those which are known can be identified as a direct model. Nevertheless, comparison of the Novgorod text with the known Slavic legends of St. Wenceslaus provides certain indications that the so-called Second Life, translated from the Latin text

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written by Gumpold, could have influenced the composer of the eulogy in some instances.

The Second Slavic Life strikingly deviates from the so-called First Slavic Life by detailed enumeration of miracles releasing prisoners from bondage. The theme of miraculous liberation is developed more than once both in Gumpold and the Slavic translation. In the Novgorod eulogy on St. Wenceslaus, from the end of the eleventh century, this theme is so worded that direct impact of the Slavic translation of Gumpold (i.e., the Second Slavic Life of St. Wenceslaus) is quite possible

Novgorod Text
... razdrēšaja svězanyja bes pravdy ...
(releasing those who were unjustly shackled)

Second Slavic Life
XXIX:  O voevodo ... moljus?, okaannyi, da mene nezabudeši svězana, no milostiju svoeju nynē razrēšiši.
(O duke ... I, pitiable, pray so that you would not forget me in shackles and would now release me through your compassion.)
XXIV:  ... ruki i nogy ix razrēšišasę ...
(their hands and legs became untied)
XXVII: ... i razrēšiše i pustiša ...
(after having untied him they let him go)

Wenceslaus figures as a canonized saint both in the Novgorod text and in the Second Slavic Life, whereas in the First Slavic Life he is neither a saint nor a miraculous liberator, but simply an honest man of good belief. This very fact seems to suggest that the First Slavic Life had been written before the canonization of its hero, before Gumpold's Life and its Slavic translation, as well as before the eleventh-century copy of the eulogy, e.g.,

Novgorod Text
stogo mčika Večeslava / ste Věčeslave / тело твоє стое
Second Slavic Life
presvětomu mučeniku / свětyi Věčeslavъ / тело свєтє
First Slavic Life (Glagolitic N)
prvdnago mža Veψєs'laβa / blagover'nago i dobrago mža Veψєs'laβa / čas'tno tlo Veψєs'law'le
Furthermore, events in the First Slavic Life take place V' ČESEXЪ (V ČEAX / V ČEXEX), whereas those in the Second Slavic Life and the Novgorod copy of the eulogy use the Church Slavonic equivalent of the Latin name, Bohemia; e.g.,

Novgorod Text
vž zemli boem'ščě
The Novgorod copy of the eulogy on St. Wenceslaus, which is preserved in a dated text from 1095/6, serves as a marker to the relative chronology of the other undated Church Slavic texts commemorating the martyrdom of the Czech prince. The year 1095 is the same date used by the Sazava chronicler for his reference to the fact that the Sazava monastery in Bohemia possessed the symbolic relics of the Russian martyrs Boris and Gleb, grandsons of the first baptized Russian princess Olga, who were killed in 1015 and canonized in 1072. The martyrdom of Boris and Gleb is compared in the earliest Russian sources to the martyrdom of St. Wenceslaus and, as a matter of fact, certain passages in the oldest preserved text of the tale of Boris and Gleb contain clearly detectable echoes of the *Second Slavic Life* of St. Wenceslaus, whose martyrdom is explicitly mentioned. This oldest preserved copy appears in the *Uspenskij sbornik* of the twelfth century, together with the *Life of Methodius* and the *Life of St. Vitus*, to whom Prince Wenceslaus consecrated the Prague cathedral.

The translation of the symbolic relics of Boris and Gleb at the end of the eleventh century to Sazava clearly implies that the Slavic Church in Russia had close contacts with the Slavic monastery in Sazava, probably to the very end of its existence. The Slavic monks were expelled from Sazava for the last time in 1097, only two years after the date which was used by the Sazava chronicler in his note about the relics of Boris and Gleb.\(^\text{11}\) The attested contacts between Bohemia and Russia in the eleventh century provide, of course, many possibilities for philological postulations. Hamm\(^\text{12}\) recently suggested that the founder of Sazava monastery, Procopius (Prokop), might have visited Russia as the confessor of a Czech princess married to a ruler of Kiev. On that occasion, he might have learned the cyrillic alphabet and introduced it subsequently at Sazava monastery in addition to the glagolitic and Roman alphabets. On the other hand, Čiževskij’s study\(^\text{13}\) about the impact of Gumpold on the early literature in Russia concluded that Nestor, the renowned writer of the Pečersk monastery personally participated in the mission which bore


\(^{12}\) Hamm, p. 48.

The relics of Boris and Gleb from Kiev to Bohemia. In fact, the attested contacts make it quite plausible that some of the Russian monasteries became a refuge for the Slavic monks from Sazava, particularly after their final exodus in 1097, so that certain Western phenomena in the early documents of literacy in Russia could have been a reflection of their activity.

The role of the Western recension of Church Slavonic from the Moravian and Bohemian period in the early stages of Russian literacy has certainly not been a recent topic in philological discussions. More than half a century ago, Sobolevskij published a whole series of studies about the Church Slavonic translations from Latin such as the Lives of St. Benedict, St. Kliment, and St. Apollinarius, the Martyrdoms of St. Stefan and St. Anastasius, and, particularly, the Sermons (Besédy) by Gregory the Great, the Pseudogospel of Nicodemus, and the prayer to St. Trinity with the names of St. Wenceslaus, St. Adalbert (Vojtěch) and St. Procopius. Sobolevskij’s studies are primarily concerned with lexical comparisons; he tries to distinguish typical Western Slavic or Czech features in the Church Slavonic vocabulary of the preserved Russified documents. In 1903 Sobolevskij published the Life of St. Vitus, preserved in a cyrillic version in the Uspenskij sbornik from the twelfth century. This ancient copy has striking parallels in a glagolitic fragment of a service found in Prague and published by Vajs in 1901. Although the glagolitic fragment originated in the fourteenth century, it is lexically, morphologically, and syntactically so close to the corresponding passages in the cyrillic text from the twelfth century that only assumption of a common Church Slavonic source provides a wholly logical explanation for the parallels.

The parallels appearing in the cyrillic and glagolitic versions also imply a common Church Slavonic source of the First Slavic Life of St. Wenceslaus. The cyrillic version was preserved in several Russified copies from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Seven of them are almost identical, whereas one deviates in some instances from the others, so that all the

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17 J. Vajs, “Hlaholský zlomek nalezený v Augustiniánském klášteře v Praze”, ČČM (1901).
cyrillic texts can be classified as two variants of a single version. The deviant text was published one and a half centuries ago by Vostokov, and it is known as the \( V(ostokov) \) variant as opposed to the \( M(eneum) \) variant, denoting the best copy among the other cyrillic texts.

The three principal glagolitic texts are from the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Although they have a common source of deviations, they are so closely related to the cyrillic texts that it would be a linguistic miracle if the glagolitic and cyrillic versions of the First Slavic Life of St. Wenceslaus were two independent creations or, perhaps, two independent translations of an unknown source. The mutual relationship, expressed on all grammatical levels, provides entirely sound evidence that all preserved cyrillic and glagolitic texts of the Life were derived from a single source by the process of direct copying and recopying. Only complete disregard of the linguistic facts and of the concreteness of the manifested correspondences could lead to a different conclusion.

There are some instances, however, where only the Vostokov cyrillic variant agrees with the glagolitic version, and there are, on the other hand, cases where the Meneum variant is closer to the glagolitic copies, e.g.,

\[ \text{Glagolitic} + \text{Cyrillic-V contra Cyrillic-M} \]

GLA: dnevi stogo Im'rama k' nemuže bê obêtañ Vëgeslavь
C-V: dñt stgo Emsraama k nemu že obëyanь Vëčeslavь
C-M: dñt stgo Avraama k nemu že bê blažennyi obêtь svoi tvoreše then came the day of St. Emmeram, to whom Wenceslaus was pledged.

\[ \text{Glagolitic} + \text{Cyrrillic-M contra Cyrillic-V} \]

GLA: kr'v že ego po tri d'ni ne rači v zemlju iti
C-M: krovь ego po tri dni ne rači v zemlju iti
C-V: krovi že ego ne xoτeψi po tri dni v zemlju iti
(for three days his blood did not want to go into the ground)

One feature common to all cyrillic manuscripts of the Life pertains to the date on which the body of the murdered prince Wenceslaus was translated to Prague. According to the historical sources, the translation took place on the 4th of March. In the glagolitic system, the number 4 is denoted by the letter \( G \), which has a numerical value of 3 in the cyrillic system. The fact that all cyrillic copies of the Life use the letter \( G \) indicates that the scribe of the common cyrillic source copied without change a glagolitic text where the letter \( G \), meaning number 4, was properly used for the date of the translation. It is noteworthy that many cyrillic copies of the Russian calendar of the canonized saints, called
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Prologue, properly placed the abbreviated version of the Life under the 4th of March.18

The individual points of agreement and disagreement of the various glagolitic and cyrillic copies provide good insight into the derivational history of the First Slavic Life of St. Wenceslaus. Both the cyrillic and the glagolitic texts preserve evidence of their single common source in many traces which are mixed together in accord with the intentional and unintentional deviations of the copyists. The features common to the cyrillic copies and absent in the glagolitic copies had a common source of deviations. The same is also true of those features which are common to all glagolitic copies and absent in the cyrillic copies. These two common sources, in turn, were derived from the original text of the First Slavic Life of St. Wenceslaus written by a Glagolit.

The publication of the glagolitic copies of the First Slavic Life of St. Wenceslaus in the beginning of the twentieth century provided a new source of evidence about the activity of the Bohemian school of Church Slavonic which was discussed for years. In his analysis of the Vatican glagolitic copy of the Life, Jagic commented at that time: “I really would not know what additional proof could be desired to support the conviction that ... shortly after the death of Wenceslaus, a tale of his martyrdom was written in glagolitic in Bohemia itself.”19 Yet, there are many questions which must still be answered in order to designate the role of the Bohemian school of Church Slavonic and the scope of its activity. Many of the relevant glagolitic and cyrillic manuscripts were never published, and many of them are not easily accessible, if not entirely inaccessible. The thorough study of the first Slavic literary language is still in its infancy, and lack of knowledge permits the most controversial conclusions and hazardous theories. Thus, only a free access to the oldest documents and systematic analysis with modern linguistic methods of investigation can restrict the guessing and standardize the interpretation of the early history of Slavic literacy in Bohemia.