

ON THE HISTORICITY OF OLD CHURCH SLAVONIC

Številne študije stare cerkvene slovanščine ne upoštevajo v celoti dejstva, da je to bil knjižni jezik, in pogosto zanemarjajo zgodovinski pogled, ki je potreben za zvesto rekonstrukcijo njegovega dejanskega delovanja.

Many studies of Old Church Slavonic do not seem to take into full account its nature as a literary language and often neglect the necessary historical perspective needed for a more faithful reconstruction of its concrete functioning.

Before introducing the subject of my talk, I wish to stress that I will not be speaking today about the main topic of the Conference, i.e. the history of Slovene. I could of course ask for leniency and remind you that there was a time when Old Church Slavonic was in fact called »Old Slovenian«; but this took place long ago and would be of little assistance for our present purposes.¹

Leaving aside the problem of the different names given to that language even nowadays (in addition to 'Old Church Slavonic', we find the concurrent terms of 'Old Slavic' and 'Old Bulgarian'), I prefer to reveal the main argument of my article: despite the fact that Old Church Slavonic is universally recognized as the first literary language of the Slavs, it is very often evaluated from a narrow historical-comparative perspective that does not take into full account its characterizing features as a true literary language. The cause and effect of this state of affairs, as I will try to show, is the lack of historicity (i.e. the lack of a sufficiently historical approach) in a great deal of the scholarship devoted to the Old Church Slavonic language.²

¹ Apart from minor changes that have been made to eliminate certain expressions used in the oral presentation of my paper and to add the necessary bibliographic information, this text faithfully reproduces the paper that I gave at the Conference.

² 'Historicity' corresponds here to the German 'Geschichtlichkeit' as defined by P. VON POLENZ in his *Die Geschichtlichkeit der Sprache und der Geschichtsbegriff der Sprachwissenschaft, Sprachgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung* 1, hrsg. W. Besch – O. Reichmann – S. Sonderegger, Berlin – New York, 1984, 1–8.

More than seventy years have already elapsed since the publication of the Prague Linguistic Circle's *Theses*, which marked a milestone in the development of twentieth-century linguistics and which proved of paramount importance for the study of standard (or literary) languages.³ Much water has gone under the bridge since then; and as the landscape of linguistics as a whole has been transformed, so has the field of Slavic linguistics undergone considerable changes. However, in the area of Church Slavonic linguistics this may be only partially true. I would even venture to say that the fourth *Thesis* proclaimed by the Prague Linguistic Circle has lost little of its relevance. This *Thesis* – which bears the title *Les problèmes actuels du slave d'église* and the background of which (especially in regard to the role played by Trubeckoj and Durnovo in its genesis) was brilliantly elucidated a few years ago by Helmut Keipert⁴ – deals with several aspects of Church Slavonic: namely, the presence of Church Slavonic elements that are to be found in Slavic literary languages, above all in Russian; the need for a scientific history of Church Slavonic from its origins until modern times; and, more specifically, the study of the history of Old Church Slavonic – defined as the language which was used by the »Slavic apostles« and their disciples for liturgical needs and which between the tenth and the twelfth centuries became the literary language of all Slavs employing the Slavonic liturgy – in accordance with the principles that apply to the history of every literary language. Like the other *Theses*, so the fourth one, too, also has a strong programmatic character and does not go much into details; all its authors do when speaking of the oldest stage of Church Slavonic is hint at the need for a thorough study of the different local »recensions« (or »literary dialects«) of Old Church Slavonic (including the Czech »recension« in addition to the South Slavic and Russian variants).

And yet, strange as it may seem – especially if we bear in mind the considerable renown of the *Theses* – their impact on subsequent studies was rather minor. Among the few exceptions, we might cite the name of Georgij A. Khaburgaev who in a posthumous and insightful booklet – in explicitly quoting the Prague *Theses* – made exactly the same point.⁵ In the field of Old Church Slavonic, the faint echo of the *Theses* was (and still is) reflected in the enormous weight given to the »Old Church Slavonic canon« and in the attention paid to those few »classical« codices that were produced earlier than the year 1100 and that appear to be relatively »correct« (i.e. that seem more or less to correspond to an alleged »ideal norm« of Old Church Slavonic). This norm, as is well known, is defined above all in orthographic and phonetic terms (i.e. the preservation of nasal vowels and jers), and its elaboration was essential in determining the dialectal basis of the Old Church Slavonic language.

³B. HAVRÁNEK e altri, *Tesi*. Pubblicate sul primo numero dei »Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague« del 1929, a cura di E. Garroni e S. Pautasso, trad. di S. Pautasso (Naples, 1979).

⁴H. KEIPERT, Die Kirchenslavisch-These des Cercle linguistique de Prague, *Festschrift für Klaus Trost zum 65. Geburtstag*, hrsg. E. Hansack – W. Koschmal – N. Nübler – R. Večerka, Munich, 1999, 123–133.

⁵G. A. KHABURGAEV, *Pervye stoletija slavjanskoj pis'mennoj kul'tury*, Moscow, 1994, 12–18.

The veneration shown to the few »canonical« codices has been accompanied by a neglect of many of those literary works that are certainly not younger than those contained in the »canonical« codices, but that have had the misfortune of being handed down exclusively in younger testimonies. Notwithstanding the fact that we do have some encouraging examples of scholars who have decided to make use of some old works even if they are preserved only in later manuscripts, the overwhelming majority of Slavists still focus their analysis of Old Church Slavonic on the »canonical« monuments. Let me cite one of the explanations given in order to justify this exclusion: »However, all these works [i. e., the *Apostolus*, the *Lives* of Constantine and Methodius, the *Proglas*, the *Alphabet Acrostic*, etc.] have come down to us in a language which has been modified to suit the tastes of later scribes and which we therefore do not consider in the linguistic study of Old Church Slavonic«.⁶

If the above-mentioned texts concerned were limited in number and therefore somehow exceptional, this type of exclusionary process would involve certain methodological interests and practical concerns but would not be essential for the study of Old Church Slavonic itself. The main difficulty here, however, is that the above-cited examples are not merely exceptions. On the contrary, they seem to represent the rule. In other words, the vast majority of the ancient Old Church Slavonic works have in fact been handed down in much later codices, dating normally from the fourteenth century (in the case of South Slavic manuscripts) or from the fifteenth century (when they are preserved in East Slavic testimonies). Of course, we sometimes have an older copy going back to the twelfth or thirteenth century, but usually the rest of the manuscript tradition will not be older than the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It would be an easy task to make a list of works whose documentation corresponds to this chronology;⁷ at this point, I would merely prefer to emphasize the well-known fact that we do not have a single direct source relating to the Cyrillo-Methodian mission represented in the »canon«. It goes without saying that no historian would ignore these sources. But, if this is so, why should the linguist ignore them? Are the linguistic modifications characterizing the texts that Horace Lunt and several others specialists have invoked a sufficient reason for excluding this enormous body of literary works which go back to the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century?

They certainly appear to be a sufficient reason if we are interested in the phonetics and morphology of Old Church Slavonic. Indeed, in the area of phonetics and morphology, Old Church Slavonic really »has been modified to suit the tastes of

⁶H. LUNT, *Old Church Slavonic Grammar*,⁷ Gravenhage, 1968, 9.

⁷On so-called »Cyril-Methodian literature«, see G. ZIFFER, La tradizione della letteratura cirillo-metodiana, Contributi italiani all'XI Congresso Internazionale degli slavisti (Bratislava 30 agosto – 8 settembre 1993), *Ricerche slavistiche* XXXIX–XL, 1992–1993/1, 263–289. On the literary production of the First Bulgarian Empire, see A. A. TURILOV, Bolgarskie literaturnye pamjatniki èpokhi Pervogo carstva v knižnosti Moskovskoj Rusi XV–XVI vv. (zametki k ocenke javlenija), *Slavjanovedenie* 3 (1995), 31–45.

later scribes«, as Lunt put it in the above-quoted passage. Still, should this process of exclusion, with its emphasis on linguistic change, be applied when it comes to vocabulary, word-formation, and syntax? The fact is that, whereas the long course of textual transmission deeply affected the phonetic and orthographic features of the language, it had far less of an impact at other levels.⁸ Although different scribes would modify, here and there, the texts they were copying, the text of several Old Church Slavonic literary works seems to be admirably well-preserved even in codices dating from the fifteenth century (and even later centuries). In these codices – which we should no longer call »late« or »recent«, for they represent the bulk of our manuscript tradition – we might even find (and we in fact do find) ancient and dialectal features that we miss in the classical codices that form the Old Church Slavonic »canon«. However heretical these words may sound to the ears of believers in the »canon«, they come from the scholar who more than anyone else played an essential role in defining the »canon«, August Leskien.⁹

As we must always remember that from a logical standpoint the traditional definition of Old Church Slavonic rests on phonetic and morphological criteria, and that it therefore should not be automatically extended to other levels of this language, so we must never forget that even the oldest monuments of the »canon« are not as old as we perhaps would desire and that they cannot be identified with alleged »original texts«. In other words, the texts from the most ancient »canonical« codices also represent copies (and copies which, in some cases, are much more »incorrect« than other, more recent copies). We should constantly bear in mind that, apart from inscriptions and epigraphs, we are dealing not with originals of the kind, for example, that we have in the case of the Novgorod Birchbark documents,¹⁰ but rather with »copies« that often may well be copies of copies of earlier testimonies, and so forth. What happens to the vocabulary of Old Church Slavonic when we limit our attention only to the »canonical« monuments is best evidenced by comparing the *Prague Dictionary* to its smaller counterpart published in 1994 in Moscow.¹¹ The *Moscow Dictionary* is based only on the »canon« and does not consider either the Cyrillo-Methodian literature or the texts of supposed Czech origin. It is in reality more the sum of a series of glossaries to the »canonical« monuments than a real Old Church Slavonic dictionary (as is most convincingly demonstrated by the impressive amount of *hapax legomena*). Permit me to draw a comparison: it would be as if we were to try to reconstruct the vocabulary of classical Latin by making use only of texts handed down in codices not younger than the fourth century. The similarity is derived from the circumstance that most of the Latin classical authors are to be found in codices not older than the Carolingian Renaissance, that is, from the end of the eighth century onwards,¹² whereas the difference resides in the fact

⁸ V. ŽIVOV, *Pervyj literaturnyj jazyk slavjan, Ricerche slavistiche XLV–XLVI* (1998–1999), 119–120.

⁹ A. LESKIEN, *Handbuch der albulgarischen Sprache*. Neunte Auflage, Heidelberg, 1969, VIII.

¹⁰ See above all, A. A. ZALIZNJAK, *Drevnenovgorodskij dialekt*, Moscow, 1995, 223–580.

¹¹ See *Slovník jazyka staroslověnského*, Prague, 1966–1997, and *Staroslavjanskij slovar'*, Moscow, 1994.

¹² *Texts and Transmission. A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds, Oxford, 1983.

that there is no classicist pleading for the exclusion of classical Latin authors because of the chronological parameters of their manuscript tradition.

The fact that we still know so little about the manuscript tradition of most of the literary works produced in the ninth and tenth centuries and transmitted in codices from the fourteenth century on, should not really come as a surprise, for it is a direct consequence of the paramount importance attributed to the so-called »canon«. Yet, when it comes to ancient works that are to be found in the »canonical« monuments, the lack of interest devoted to the history of their manuscript tradition is truly astounding. Suffice it to mention, for example, all the homiletic and hagiographic texts preserved in the largest »canonical« monument, namely, the *Codex Suprasliensis*. A century and a half after the publication of the *editio princeps*, we still lack a complete image of its parallel tradition; and this would most certainly yield several important insights into its text and would undoubtedly resolve some linguistic problems raised by the *Suprasliensis* itself. Permit me to recall, in this regard, the important evidence represented by the *Homily of the 40 martyrs of Sebaste*, where we now know for certain that the text preserved in the *Suprasliensis* conflates two different translations.¹³

The plain fact is that many scholars still seem to consider the *Suprasliensis* a *codex unicus* without parallels, as if it were a manuscript without a history;¹⁴ and the same holds true for other »canonical« monuments as well. Indeed, the manuscript tradition of most Old Church Slavonic texts is still a *terra incognita* waiting for its explorers. Until all the extant documentation is included within our scope of enquiry, it will be impossible to unearth the history of the oldest layer of Old Church Slavonic literature, and its geographic subdivisions as well will remain largely enshrouded in mystery. What we read in the Prague *Theses* about the need for a thorough study of the traces of the Czech »recension« might be said for all of »West Old Church Slavonic«,¹⁵ for with some exceptions (e.g., the *Kiev Leaflets* or some parts of the *Euchologium Sinaiticum*, and presumably the new *Missale Sinaiticum*

¹³M. CAPALDO, Zur linguistischen Betrachtungsweise der Komposition des Codex Suprasliensis (Die Passio der vierzig Märtyrer von Sebaste), *Contributi italiani all'VIII Congresso Internazionale degli slavisti*, Rome, 1978, 23–60; H. KEIPERT, Eine Übersetzungskontamination im Codex Suprasliensis, *Proučvanija vārchu Suprasālskija sbornik*, Sofia, 1980, 18–35; Nochmals zur Kontaminationsproblematik in Nr. 5 des »Codex Suprasliensis«, *Prace filologiczne XLIV* (1999), 275–280.

¹⁴Hopefully, the resumption of the publication of Metropolitan Macarius' Čet'i-Minei might make scholars more aware of the problem and provide a new impulse for this line of research. See now the two excellent studies by Chr. Voß, *Zwei albulgarische Übersetzungen der Vita des Johannes Hesychnastes. Zur Frage der Archaizität des martyrologischen Textbestandes für den Monat März im Codex Suprasliensis und im Uspenskij spisok der VMČ*, and *Die Mariä-Verkündigungshomilie Pálin charás euaggélia in Sborniki des 11.–16. Jahrhunderts. Zu den typikarischen Lesensammlungen im Zweiten südslavischen Einfluß*, in *Abhandlungen zu den Grossen Lesemenäen des Metropoliten Makarij. Kodikologische, Miszellenologische und textologische Untersuchungen* 1, ed. Chr. Voss – H. Warkentin – E. Weiher, Freiburg, 2000, 297–336, 337–375. See also H. KEIPERT, Nochmals zur Kontaminationsproblematik in Nr. 5 des »Codex Suprasliensis«.

¹⁵A. VAILLANT, Le vieux slave occidental, *Zbornik za filologiju i lingvistiku* 9 (1966), 7–10; H. MIKLAS, Litterae palaeoslovenice, *Saeculum* XL (1989), 253–271.

discovered on Mount Sinai in 1975), the great majority of the texts of Western origin are preserved only in later copies.

As is well known, one of the features of a literary language is the existence of close ties to other literary languages. In the case of Old Church Slavonic, one immediately thinks of its relationship to Greek and the enormous impact that this language had on the structure of Old Church Slavonic. We should not forget, however, that at the very beginning of the Church Slavonic tradition we find also a certain presence of Latin and of Old High German influence. In fact, we are so used to the pervasive influence of Greek that we sometimes pay insufficient attention to the role played by these two languages. Truly, their influence can even be detected in the »canonical« texts. One needs only take two revealing examples (as demonstrated quite recently): the important words *milosrūdŭ* and *troica* are of High Old German and of Latin origin respectively.¹⁶ One could also mention at this point the Western influence discernible in the *Sinai Psalter* and *Sinai Euchologium*. The problem is that these ties are more evident in those texts of Western origin that, with the exception of the above-mentioned *Kiev Leaflets*, are not preserved in the most ancient manuscripts (e.g. the *Homilies* by Gregory the Great and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*).

Notwithstanding the important and lasting results obtained in the study of Old Church Slavonic, our image of this language still appears far too abstract and modelled on an ideal norm as defined in grammars and dictionaries. As I have tried to show, several problems are more or less directly connected with its (not always acknowledged) nature as a literary language. If we wish to restore a faithful picture of Church Slavonic from its origins onwards, we have to take into account this essential feature in a broader and more multi-dimensional historical perspective.

O ZGODOVINSKOSTI STARE CERKVENE SLOVANŠČINE

POVZETEK

Od objave Tez Praškega lingvističnega krožka, ki velja za mejnik v razvoju jezikoslovja 20. stoletja in je izrednega pomena za preučevanje slovanskih knjižnih (oziroma standardnih) jezikov, je minilo več kot 70 let. Nobenega dvoma ni, da je od takratne objave slavistika doživela precejšnje spremembe, kar pa le delno velja za preučevanje stare cerkvene slovanščine, saj se na odločen poziv k novemu in širšemu pristopu pri obravnavi cerkvene slovanščine kot specifičnega knjižnega jezika, poziv, ki je bil jasno izražen v praških Tezah, niso odzvale ne takratne ne poznejše generacije učenjakov.

Tako lahko na področju stare cerkvene slovanščine še vedno opazimo velik poudarek na t. i. normah in posledično čaščenju redkih pravilnikov, ki so nastali pred letom 1100 našega štetja in ki ustrezajo t. i. »idealni normi« stare cerkvene slovanščine, kot jo določamo na podlagi glasoslovnih

¹⁶R. GUSMANI, Il modello del paleoslavo milosrūdŭ, *Incontri Linguistici* 8 (1982/1983), 103–109 (reprint in R. GUSMANI, *Saggi sull'interferenza linguistica*, 2nd ed., Florence, 1986, 355–363); A. DE VINCENZ, Zur Herkunft von aksl. *troica*, in »*lie meis manibus gestati saepe libelli*«. *Studia slavica Ioanni Schultze ... dedicata*, ed. W. Lehfeldt, Göttingen, 1995, 37–40.

kriterijev. Pri tem pa poznavalci pogosto zanemarjajo knjižna dela, ki bi lahko bila enake starosti kot dela, ohranjena v »kanonskih« pravilnikih, a so bila žal posredovana v poznejših rokopisih. Zaradi opisanega metodološkega pristopa vemo več o glasoslovju in oblikoslovju stare cerkvene slovanščine kot o njenem besedišču, besedotvorju in skladnji in naši podatki o tradiciji rokopisov najstarejših knjižnih besedil v stari cerkveni slovanščini, vključno s »kanonskimi« besedili, ostajajo nepopolni. Poleg tega se še vedno (vsaj delno) ne menimo za zemljepisni izvor več starih knjižnih spomenikov v stari cerkveni slovanščini. Nenazadnje, če se ponovno navežemo na nauke praške jezikoslovne šole v zvezi z razmerjem med jezikom in drugimi jezikovnimi tradicijami, ugotovimo, da se vse do danes nismo dokončno prepričali, kakšen je bil dejanski vpliv jezikov, kot sta latinščina in stara visoka nemščina, na staro cerkveno slovanščino.