

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

THE WORK OF CONSTANTINE AND METHODIUS IN MORAVIA:
AN IMPORTANT FOUNDATION FOR THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY TO RUSSIA

Since Christianity predated the formal beginning of Kievan Russia by eight centuries, plausible multiple influences on its introduction to the Dniepr River region cannot be dismissed entirely.¹ Even so, the lone source of historic value for the period, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, firmly attributes Russia's Christian origins to Byzantine roots. Whatever else might have predisposed the pagan Rurik dynasts to assimilate the belief about a crucified Jesus, along with its attendant source, the fact of immediate Byzantine primacy cannot be denied. But a grand transition took place with the syncretistic assimilation of Greek patterns of religious thought on non-Greek, barbaric soil.

Not only were church dogmas reframed in a much different cultural context, one that was quite "backward" when compared with refined Byzantine society, the tenets of Christian faith were recast in a completely new linguistic framework. As with most advances of Christianity into heathen territory, a distinct form of the faith emerged, albeit not without recognition as "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) by virtue of the church's historic biblical message and its static ecclesiastical apparatus.

¹There is evidence of Christianity's existence along the Dniepr prior to Vladimir's baptism. See Henry Paszkiewicz, *The Making of the Russian Nation* (London: Henry Regnery, 1963), 76ff.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

Two individuals, in particular, emerged as notable precipitators of this remarkable transition of Christian faith to Russian soil—the brothers Constantine, also known as Cyril,² and Methodius. Legends about the two circulated in medieval lore, and it remained uncertain whether either of the brothers even set foot in Kievan Russia, as their primary work dealt with the Moravians. Nevertheless, their mission among the Slovenes, or southern Slavs, put in place important changes in Christian practice that made its adaptation to the evolving situation in Kiev easier.

Some time after the demise of Hun control in Eastern Europe during the fifth century, the Slavs migrated westward to areas of the Elbe and Danube Rivers, the Baltic Ocean, and the Adriatic and Black Seas. By the time of Charlemagne, these “well-speaking”³ Sarmatians or Scythians, as they were called by classical authors, occupied Eastern Europe from the Baltic Ocean to the Balkan Peninsula. This great mass of “Slavdom” contained no political core, only temporary kingdoms that flourished for a time and then fell such as those in Moravia, Bulgaria, Bohemia, Poland, and Russia. Socio-cultural differences kept the kingdoms distinct except that from a religious viewpoint they all worshiped nature and nature’s gods, and this reflected their common agrarian bond. They were people of the earth with varying deities, some vicious and

²This is the name he assumed when he became a monk in Rome at the very end of his life in 868. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 370.

³This is the meaning of the Slavic appellative *slowo*.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

some serene, but from the Christian viewpoint they were pagans who knew neither God nor his creation.

Constantinople and Rome had tried to effect Slavic conversion but with little success. The chaotic and ever-shifting political conditions of the Slavic peoples hindered the development of any satisfactory agreement under which Rome or Constantinople could orchestrate a firm mission effort. The growing competition between Eastern and Western churches, because of variations of dogma and petty jealousy, weakened the church internally and its missionary zeal by sapping vital resources. Furthermore, this factionalism discredited the church and the relevancy of its message in the eyes of many Slavic chiefs. And the missionaries themselves found the language of the Slavs to be a difficult barrier, and with no firm linguistic base upon which to communicate liturgy and scripture to the populace, the Christian effort could not advance.⁴ It was to resolve this latter problem that church authorities sent out two brothers around the middle part of the ninth century.⁵

⁴See Philip Schaff's discussion in *Medieval Christianity: From Gregory I to Gregory VII, A.D. 590-1073*, Vol. IV of *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 124-126.

⁵That the Byzantine church had success among the Slavs might very well coincide with a remarkable recovery of the empire's foreign policy at this time. The political and cultural renaissance that followed the defeat of Iconoclasm in 843 turned the empire's focus outward, so that Byzantine civilization penetrated deep into Eastern and Central Europe and affected a large part of the Slavic world. So David Knowles and Dimitri Obolensky, *The Middle Ages*, Volume Two of *The Christian Centuries*, eds., Louis J. Rogier, et al. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 19-20.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

The so-called “Apostles of the Slavs,” Constantine and Methodius, grew up in a Greek, senatorial family from Thessalonica in Macedonia. At that time, numerous Slavs were settled near the city which was bilingual and second in importance only to Constantinople. So the two brothers grew up acquainted with the Slavic dialect spoken in the region. This language familiarization greatly impacted the direction of their mission endeavors later in life.

Unfortunately, medieval chroniclers preserved only sketchy and often contradictory details concerning their careers, but the reports all agreed on some main themes. Methodius, the older of the two, was born about 815 and began the typical trek toward equestrian status as an administrator or *archon* of one of the Slavic principalities in Macedonia. At age thirty-five, however, he took up the monastic life, renounced his civic position and his wife, and withdrew to Mount Olympus in Bithynia that was second only to Constantinople as a monastic center in Byzantium. Here he later became leader of the Polychron monastery.

Constantine was born about 826 and went to Constantinople to study philosophy. He possibly tutored under Leo the Mathematician and Patriarch Photius. He then devoted himself to theology and became librarian of the Santa Sophia Church in the city. He later taught philosophy and theology as the successor to Photius at the university and became known as The Philosopher. Influenced by the example of his older brother, he too dedicated himself to asceticism and

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

became a zealous missionary. In 860, he traveled to Kazaria, along the Sea of Azov, and started a church among the Finno-Turkish people settled there.⁶

While in Cherson, a Byzantine possession in the Crimea, Constantine possibly acquired a thorough knowledge of Hebrew as he prepared for discussions with Jewish scholars in the area. Through dialogue with a Sarmatian, he also assimilated enough of the language to read the Sarmatian translation of the Old Testament. Another significant experience for Constantine during his stay in Cherson was his discovery of “a copy of the Gospel and the Psalter written in ‘rus’skymi’ letters and a man speaking that language,”⁷ but such an episode has been disputed. If this actually occurred, the letters represented a prototype Slavic script utilized by Constantine later as he advanced linguistic adaptations of liturgy and scripture during his mission to the Moravians.⁸

In 862, circumstances opened a door for Constantine, as well as Methodius, to spread Christianity among the Moravians. During the first half of the ninth century, the Moravian Slavs had been subjugated by Charlemagne who had utilized the Christian mission of Frankish priests from Salzburg and Passau for political ends. The Slavs resented this ploy and kept alert for any

⁶An earlier mission to the Saracens in either Melitene or Baghdad, based on slender and questionable evidence, must surely be legendary and not fact. See Vatroslav Jagic, “Conversion of the Slavs,” *The Eastern Roman Empire (717-1453)*, Vol. IV of *The Cambridge Medieval History*, ed., J. B. Bury (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 218-219.

⁷Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 397.

⁸Some scholars conjecture the script to be of Syrian origin, since the Crimea at that time belonged to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Syrian church in Antioch. *Ibid.*, 398.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

possible release from Western domination. Although Moymir, the chief of the Moravian princes, converted to Christianity, Ludwig the German, the Bavarian king, suspected him of rebellion and had him replaced with Rastislav. Rastislav, however, only completed what Moymir had begun. He established an independent Slavic kingdom by defeating Ludwig, then he immediately severed ecclesiastical ties with the Germans and requested Michael III, the Byzantine Emperor who was known as “The Drunkard,” to send missionaries to Moravia.⁹ *The Russian Primary Chronicle* preserved this important communique:

When the Moravian Slavs and their princes were living in baptism, the Princes Rostislav, Svyatopolk, and Kotsel sent messengers to the Emperor Michael, saying, “Our nation is baptized, and yet we have no teacher to direct and instruct us and interpret the sacred scriptures. We understand neither Greek nor Latin. Some teach us one thing and some another. Furthermore, we do not understand written characters nor their meaning. Therefore send us teachers who can make known to us the words of the scriptures and their sense.”¹⁰

The emperor, who was better known for his dissipation than for his piety, acknowledged Rostislav’s request, assembled Patriarch Photius and his scholars, and reported to them the message from the Slavic princes. The scholars suggested to the emperor that the sons of Leo of Thessalonica be sent, since they were learned men who knew the Slavic language. The court immediately summoned Methodius and his brother Constantine to the Imperial City where they were commissioned for the mission and dispatched promptly to Moravia.

⁹Schaff, *Medieval Christianity*, 128.

¹⁰Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans. and eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, The Medieval Academy of America, Publication No. 60 (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1973), 62.

Two Slavonic sources, the so-called Pannonian legends entitled *Vita Constantini* and *Vita Methodii*, preserve a generally reliable and complete account of the Moravian mission.¹¹ In 863, the Moravians welcomed the brothers, and they began to instruct pupils who came to them. In order to facilitate Slavic participation in the instruction and public worship, Constantine, according to the *Vita Constantini*, immediately translated “the ecclesiastical order” and other liturgical materials into the Moravian vernacular. He also began to train some of the initiates for clerical orders.

The Slavic mission continued in earnest for some three and one-half to four and one-half years but not altogether without controversy. *The Russian Primary Chronicle* observed that “some zealots began to condemn the Slavic books, contending that it was not right for any other nation to have its own alphabet apart from the Hebrews, the Greeks, and the Latins, according to Pilate’s superscription, which he composed for the Lord’s Cross.”¹² The novel use of the vernacular in the liturgy had no precedent nor sanction in the West. Customary practice prescribed only the biblical languages—Greek, Latin, or Hebrew—for use in divine worship. Since the bishops of Passau and Salzburg claimed spiritual sovereignty over Moravia, the introduction of the Byzantine rite sung in the language of the Slavs amounted to no less than heresy. Furthermore, the German prelates feared Slavic independence and loss of German ecclesiastical control over the region.

¹¹A shorter Latin legend, the so-called *Translatio S. Clementis*, supports this double tradition. See Vatroslav Jagic, “Conversion of the Slavs,” *Eastern Roman Empire*, 216.

¹²Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Russian Primary Chronicle*, 63.

The two popes, John VIII and Hadrian II, settled the charges against Constantine and Methodius in their favor.¹³ They approved the use of Slavonic in worship, but they directed that the scripture lessons be read first in Latin and then followed by the vernacular translation.¹⁴ This important linguistic concession, though, created an important beginning point for the establishment of a Christian Slavic culture, separate from both Rome and Constantinople, that later became a foundation for the introduction of Christianity into Kievan Russia.

After this time in Moravia, both Constantine and Methodius set out toward the south, but their reasons for doing so were not at all apparent. Passing through Pannonia, now western Hungary, they found enthusiastic support from prince Kotsel who ruled under Frankish suzerainty. The prince himself learned the Slavonic letters and allowed about fifty of his subjects to tutor under the brothers. Shortly after this, when they were in Venice, Constantine defended his use of vernacular languages in a dispute with local Latin clerics. The clerics espoused what came to be called “the trilingual heresy” that advocated use of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin as the

¹³According to the text of the chronicle, the pope at Rome issued a strong rebuke to the agitators by appealing to scriptural affirmations about the universality of God’s praise: “He rebuked those who murmured against the Slavic books, saying, ‘Let the word of the Scripture be fulfilled that *all nations shall praise God* (Ps. lxxi, 17), and likewise that *all nations shall declare the majesty of God according as the Holy Spirit shall grant them to speak* (cf. Acts ii, 4). Whosoever condemns the Slavic writing shall be excluded from the Church until he mend his ways. For such men are not sheep but wolves; by their fruits ye shall know them and guard against them. Children of God, hearken unto his teachings, and depart not from the ecclesiastical rule which Methodius your teacher has appointed unto you.’” Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Russian Primary Chronicle*, 63. Apart from questions concerning the veracity of this report, by affirming the western pope’s support, the chronicler affirmed the Slavic mission’s legitimacy that depended on its continuity with historic Christianity.

¹⁴Metzger, *Early Versions of the New Testament*, 399.

only legitimate liturgical languages.¹⁵ It was while they were in Venice that the brothers received an invitation from Pope Nicholas I to come to Rome.

They arrived in Rome about 867 and received a warm welcome from Hadrian II, the new pope, who was confronted with a peculiar dilemma. Constantine and Methodius were friends of Patriarch Photius, whose authority the papacy did not recognize, and word about the *coup d'état* succession of Ignatius as patriarch had not yet come to Rome. Regardless, Hadrian II decided to support fully the two brothers whose prestige was high. Not only did they bear the relics, as it was believed, of Saint Clement of Rome,¹⁶ they also enjoyed the favor of the Slav rulers of Central Europe. The papacy, therefore, did not want to lose this opportunity to wrest Moravia and Pannonia from the Frankish ecclesiastical domain. So Hadrian II authorized the ordination of the disciples of Constantine and Methodius, the celebration of the Mass in Slavonic in four churches, and the deposit of Slavonic liturgical books in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore.¹⁷ Soon after this formal acknowledgment of his work, the younger brother fell deathly ill, and this prodded him to assume monastic vows that included for him a new name—Cyril. He would not work again with the Slavs, since he died in February 869 and was buried in the Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome.

¹⁵See Knowles and Obolensky, *Middle Ages*, 23.

¹⁶Constantine discovered these relics while in Cherson, or Kherson, in 860 and subsequently took them to Rome. Paul A. Hollingsworth, "Constantine the Philosopher," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. 1, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 507.

¹⁷See Knowles and Obolensky, *Middle Ages*, 23.

As for Methodius, he returned to Pannonia in response to a request from Prince Kotsel to the pope. The pope sent with Methodius authorization to Kotsel, Rastislav, and Svyatopolk, who was the nephew of Rastislav, for the use of the Slavonic liturgy in their lands. Before the end of 869, Methodius returned to Rome, and he was consecrated archbishop of Sirmium. This probably included the region of Moravia. This new ecclesiastical presence, in an area of ceaseless juridical dispute by both eastern and western prelates, conflicted with the wishes of the Bavarian hierarchy. Renewed polemical debate erupted, and eventually this resulted in the arrest of Methodius by the Franks. A local synod overseen by the archbishop of Salzburg condemned Methodius as a usurper of episcopal rights, for which he suffered imprisonment in a Swabian monastery for over two years. In 873, the situation for Methodius reversed after Pope John VIII finally heard about his imprisonment and gained his release.¹⁸ The Slavonic rites were reinstated in Moravia, but this was not to last very long.

Pressure from the Franks forced Methodius to work even harder to maintain the native church in Moravia. Unwilling to risk major conflict with the Frankish church, John VIII soon rescinded his approval of the acceptance of Slavonic liturgy in Methodius' diocese. Methodius summarily ignored this change, and he continued to build the Slavic church on the vernacular by translating parts of scripture, liturgical rites, a Byzantine work of canon law, and numerous patristic works. But harassment from Frankish clergy, plus the indifference of Prince Svyatopolk, hindered the work. When the Franks accused him of reciting the creed without the

¹⁸Ibid.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

Filioque, Methodius returned to Rome in 880 to defend his orthodoxy. His defense persuaded the pope once more to affirm the validity of the Slavonic liturgy.¹⁹

The friendly interests of Byzantine authorities, now reconciled with Rome, bolstered the mission of Methodius. In 882 during his return to Moravia, Methodius visited Constantinople at the request of Emperor Basil I and gained additional support from Patriarch Photius.²⁰ But this return to Moravia under the auspices of the secular sovereign did not remove the sting of a sharp decline in the mission and its eventual defeat. After John VIII's death, the papacy did little to avert interference by the Germans. After the death of Methodius in 885, his main antagonist, Bishop Wiching of Nitra, hurried to Rome to obtain from Pope Stephen V a condemnation of the Slavonic liturgy. With papal sanction, the German clergy obliterated the Slavic mission a few months later. They forbade use of vernacular liturgy and arrested, exiled, and even sold into slavery the disciples of Methodius, including Gorazd, the appointed successor of Methodius. It was this exodus of religious refugees from Moravia that carried Slavic Christianity to other lands such as Russia.²¹

¹⁹The pope's bull reiterated sentiments similar to those from an earlier vicar. "It is certainly not against faith or doctrine to sing the Mass in the Slavonic language, or to read the Holy Gospel or the divine lessons of the New and Old Testaments well translated and interpreted, or to chant the other offices of the hours, for He who made the three principal languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, also created all the others for His own praise and glory." Knowles and Obolensky, *Middle Ages*, 24.

²⁰Paul A. Hollingsworth, "Methodios," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. 2, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1355.

²¹See Knowles and Obolensky, *Middle Ages*, 24.

The followers of Methodius initially headed south and established cultural centers in Bulgaria and Macedonia. With the collapse of the Bulgarian state to the Byzantines around 970 and the crushing of independence in Macedonia by the same about 1015, southeastern Europe ceased to be an environment for flourishing Slavic culture.²² Even though isolated remnants of Slavic learning remained in Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, and a few Croatian monasteries, the only dynamic center of Slavic culture was in Russia. As a result of the baptism of Prince Vladimir in 988, the Kievan state accepted Christianity as its *modus vivendi*.²³ As such, Russia became a ready repository for the evolution of Slavic Christianity.²⁴

Generally speaking, the work of Cyril and Methodius advanced a distinct Slavic identity and brought about a separation of Eastern European civilization, based on a Byzantine model, from that of Western European society, based on its Roman model. This separation allowed Byzantine thought and ideas to survive in new milieus, such as Russia, after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in the mid-fifteenth century. As an important force for cultural distinction, Slavonic literature and culture left its mark throughout the Balkans and

²²In Moravia and Slovenia, Latin eventually replaced Slavonic, but a particular style of Glagolitic continued in Croatia, as it did in Serbia and Bulgaria. See S. C. Gardiner, *Old Church Slavonic: An Elementary Grammar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 3.

²³Paszkievicz argues cogently that Vladimir accepted Christianity according to the Slavonic rite of Cyril and Methodius. See Henry Paszkiewicz, *The Origin of Russia* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 44ff.

²⁴During the last half of the ninth century, Byzantine authorities recruited Slavic-speaking priests and collected Slavonic books for missionary endeavors in the Balkans and Russia. See Knowles and Obolensky, *Middle Ages*, 25; compare Schaff, *Medieval Christianity*, 140-142.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

eastward into Russia. This, no doubt, wielded a chief influence in the historic struggle of the Slavs to preserve their national identity as well as their political independence. That the work of Cyril and Methodius so unified the Slavs, seemingly for all time, cannot be denied.

The two missionary brothers achieved this, first of all, by giving the Slavs their own written language and, in particular, a religious language designed to bring the masses together through the bond of a common faith. Second, they interwove an integral part of cultural identity—language—with a powerful sociological institution—the Orthodox Church. Third, they created a linguistic, conceptual language that could serve as a receptor to absorb certain aspects of other languages and, at the same time, maintain its own basic structure and avoid assimilation. The legacy of their remarkable linguistic achievements—the kindred bond of all Slavs—has endured the passing of centuries.

For this important task, Cyril focused on one of the basics of any language—its alphabet. Cyril had acquired an understanding of the Slavic dialect during his childhood days. He later realized that the most important step to make a spoken language available for literary purposes lay in the creation of a suitable alphabet. Cyril combined Greek letters, along with Sarmatian and Hebrew, and also certain Slavic characters to devise what came to be known as Glagolitic.²⁵ Commonly but erroneously called Cyrillic, that developed considerably later and was designed only for uncial (or all-capital-letter) manuscripts, the Glagolitic alphabet contained thirty-eight

²⁵This term derives from *glagolu* that means “word.”

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

letters that were suited well to the culture of the Slavs.²⁶ Cyril modeled with this development the elaborate Greek minuscule (or all-small-letter) script of the ninth century and enhanced his artistic work by “adopting also several Latin and Hebrew (or Sarmatian) signs, and used his inventive powers to devise an assortment of stylized and symmetrical characters made up of little quadrangles, triangles, and circles with appendages.”²⁷

The resulting Old Church Slavonic survived in a few texts from the tenth and eleventh centuries of the Gospels, various liturgies, lives of saints, and some homilies.²⁸ Though fragmentary in nature and limited in scope, these texts preserved precisely what the ruling Slavic princes deemed necessary to unify the people—a distinct but common church language. In spite of variations in spoken dialects among the Slavs, the church language remained the same in different regions. This centralizing feature under the umbrella of the church, an institution with certain independence of princely political control, gave the Slavs a sense of commonality regardless of their specific geographic location or local political allegiance. This permitted the Slavs to transport freely their religious heritage, along with its language and customs, to Russia in the latter part of the tenth century.

²⁶For a comparison of Cyrillic and Glagolitic characters, see Gardiner, *Old Church Slavonic*, 16-17.

²⁷Metzger, *Early Versions of the New Testament*, 402.

²⁸The extant manuscript evidence unfortunately is fragmentary. For a list of manuscripts with details, see Gardner, *Old Church Slavonic*, 5-11. Compare Horace G. Lunt, *Old Church Slavonic Grammar*, 5th ed. (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1968), 5-9; and Metzger, *Early Versions of the New Testament*, 404-413.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

During the tenth and eleventh centuries, changes occurred in several Slavic dialects. The literary manuscripts also witnessed variations in spelling and grammatical forms that afterwards could be identified as Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, or Russian. After about 1100, these derivative regional offshoots supplanted the Old Church Slavonic. But minor textual variations, that produced clearly recognizable traits, in no way disrupted the overall trend toward a common literary heritage for the Slavic peoples. Even after use of Slavonic declined in the Balkans, the rise of its use in Russia, that occurred over a vast span of time, created a repository for the flow of Slavic culture. In this cultural interchange, the church took a leading role. The scriptures, the liturgies, the hagiographies, the patristics, and the legal codes of the church helped to bring about an original native literature, both sacred and secular. As a result of these influences, Slavic writers of the early Middle Ages developed an incipient nationalism that viewed Slavic peoples dedicated collectively to the service of God in response to the call of Christian faith and in concert with special gifts of grace.

One of these special gifts involved the missionary propagation of Christianity to other peoples of Slavic origin. This endeavor was aided tremendously by the usefulness of Cyril's language system and especially by its flexibility to fuse the words, phrases, and idioms of a living language into what was basically a Greek, Byzantine syntax. Of course, precise delineation of "what was combined with what" linguistically cannot be determined with certainty. But, in the case of Old Church Slavonic, the end result of the superimposition of one linguistic system upon another remains clear. Russian literary language, as well as the standard oral language, resulted

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

from the assimilation of Old Church Slavonic by Old Russian.²⁹ Church Slavonic passed on to Russia a very colorful literary language with original Slavic features that were intermingled with purely Russian characteristics, and it remained the official literary language in Russia until the end of the seventeenth century.³⁰

A certain benefit for the Russian experience necessarily followed. By way of contrast with Catholic Germans or Catholic Poles, the Russians did not need to learn a foreign language such as Greek or Latin to assimilate the Christian religion and its corresponding culture. The Russians received a rich Byzantine heritage, with its available ecclesiastical and secular literature, and this advantage launched early Russian letters. Sermons by preachers in Novgorod and Kiev appeared as early as forty or fifty years after Russia's Christianization. Significant works of enduring value, such as *The Russian Primary Chronicles*, the primary source for early Russian history, and the *Lay of Igor's Campaign*, the masterpiece of Russian heroic epics, had been committed to writing and widely circulated, for the *Chronicles*, less than one century after the turn of Russia to Christianity, and for the *Campaign*, less than two centuries.³¹

²⁹Robert Auty believes that because of this infusion it would be correct to label Old Russian of the tenth and eleventh centuries as Old East Slavonic. See Robert Auty, "The Russian Language," *An Introduction to Russian Language and Literature*, Volume 2 of *Companion to Russian Studies*, eds., Robert Auty and Dimitri Obolensky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 36-38.

³⁰See Serge A. Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, rev. ed. (New York: Meridian, 1974), 2.

³¹*Ibid.*, 3.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

But an important negative impact also followed the flow of Slavonic culture to Russia. Since the Russian priests utilized only Church Slavonic in the life of the church, they failed to study Greek, and so left the populace except a few elite without exposure to classical and Byzantine civilizations. This isolated Russia from a wealth of valuable intellectual, humanistic, scientific, and philosophic traditions until the late seventeenth century. This shaping of Russia from Byzantium through the Old Slavonic legacy, brought about by the work of the two missionaries Cyril and Methodius, remained, at best, limited to artistic, political, and religious spheres.³²

³²Ibid., 4.

David W Fletcher, Spring 2000

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Auty, Robert, and Dimitri Obolensky, eds. *An Introduction to Russian Language and Literature. Volume 2, Companion to Russian Studies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Bury, J. B., ed. *The Cambridge Medieval History. Vol. IV, The Eastern Roman Empire (717-1453).* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936.
- Cross, F. L., and E. A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Cross, Samuel Hazzard, and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans. and eds. *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text.* The Medieval Academy of America, Publication No. 60. Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1973.
- Gardiner, S. C. *Old Church Slavonic: An Elementary Grammar.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Kazhdan, Alexander P. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium.* 3 Vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Knowles, David, and Dimitri Obolensky. *The Middle Ages. Volume Two of The Christian Centuries.* Edited by Louis J. Rogier, et al. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968.
- Lunt, Horace G. *Old Church Slavonic Grammar*, 5th ed. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1968.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1977.
- Paszkievicz, Henry. *The Making of the Russian Nation.* London: Henry Regnery, 1963.
- Paszkievicz, Henry. *The Origin of Russia.* New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.
- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church. Vol. IV, Medieval Christianity: From Gregory I to Gregory VII, A.D. 590-1073.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Zenkovsky, Serge A. *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, rev. ed. New York: Meridian, 1974.