

THE BULGARIANS – THE FIRST TRANSLATORS INTO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE IN MEDIAEVAL EUROPE

A new European state, Slav-Bulgarian in ethnic composition, came into being in the Balkans in the seventh century owing to the alliance between the Eastern group of the Southern Slav tribes and the proto-Bulgarian tribes. From its very foundation this state took the name of Bulgaria. Forced to live together on the same territory, bound by common interests, the two ethnic elements, differing greatly in numbers (the Slavs predominated as a mass) and in language (proto-Bulgarian belonged to the group of Turkic languages), differing in religion as well, the Slavs and the proto-Bulgarians chose the road of union and understanding. In the course of several centuries they became a new nationality, Bulgarian in name and Slav in language.

At this period the language of the Eastern (Bulgarian) group of Southern Slavs, inhabiting the geographical regions of Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia, already differed in linguistic traits from the remaining Slavs in the Balkans, differentiated in the Western group, to which the Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian languages belonged. Sufficient evidence of this has been at the disposal of science for a very long time. Compact masses of Slavs belonging to the Eastern group (Bulgarian in linguistic traits) inhabited the region around Salonica, where the first literary Slav language appeared, created by the two Salonica brothers who, with a group of their pupils, translated into the Salonica dialect the most necessary liturgical books, creating a special alphabet for the purpose, known as *Glagolitic*; soon afterwards they departed for Moravia and Pannonia. The Marovian-Pannonian mission was eventful, involving many trials and sacrifices. It lasted about 20 years and ended tragically for the missionaries, who had come to preach Christianity to the Moravian and Pannonian Slavs in a language close to their own. The death of Constantine (Cyril) The Philosopher in Rome, the cruel persecution of his brother Methodius and his death far from his own country are linked with the destruction of the books which they translated and wrote. The Moravian mission would have remained a historical episode of mediaeval European history, if the

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surviving disciples of the two brothers, headed by Clement of Ohrid, had not found protection and excellent conditions for their work in Bulgaria. By the end of the ninth century, according to the researches of specialists in history, the process of creating the Bulgarian nationality was already to be considered as completed, as was the process of creating the national consciousness and national language connected with it, as a linguistic formation uniting the individual Bulgarian dialects.

The question of the character of the literary language which Cyril and Methodius founded has been studied more than once. This language is usually called *Old Slavonic* or *Old Church Slavonic*. These names have a certain justification. The name *Old Slavonic* indicates that a literary language is in question here which was able to serve all Slavs. The term *Old Church Slavonic* indicates more precisely that this language served the needs of the Church together with the other languages recognized at that time, such as Hebrew, Greek and Latin. However, both terms are very general and do not exactly indicate the national appurtenance of the language, they do not characterize it as a particular Slav language, nor do they pay any attention to its development; for even at the time of Cyril and Methodius it was no general Slav *koine*, no artificially created literary language, equally distant and equally alien to all Slav languages, nor was it only a church language, i.e. a *lingua sacra*. From its very appearance the language of Cyril and Methodius was Bulgarian, it was the *Old Bulgarian language*, built on a living Slav-Bulgarian dialect.

During the period of the Moravian mission another very important process was accomplished in Bulgaria, that of Christianizing her population. The Bulgarian ruler Knyaz (Prince) Boris, realized the great importance of Christianity for a country which aspired to play an important role in the European world of that time. He also realized the internal-political importance of the official adoption of Christianity by the Bulgarian people, most of whom had already been unofficially Christianized. The presence of three religions: Christianity, the proto-Bulgarian pagan faith and the Slav pagan faith, was harmful to the confirmation of the Bulgarian nationality. The only answer was the adoption of Christianity, which would introduce new, common religious and moral norms, a new united world outlook and new customs.

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However, the process of Christianizing Bulgaria hid a great danger, of which the ruler was also well aware: the danger of Byzantine Greek invading the country as the language of Christian liturgies. It was at this precise moment that the disciples of Cyril and Methodius asked for shelter and protection in Bulgaria. Boris received them with inexpressible joy; he provided them with excellent conditions for literary and educational work, at first, in Preslav, and he later sent Clement to organize a centre of scholarly and educational work in Ohrid, which was at that time the most distant part of Bulgaria. The disciples of Cyril and Methodius brought the alphabet and a literary language to Bulgaria. Having been created on the basis of the Salonica dialect, which belonged to the Eastern Bulgarian type of dialects, the first literary Slav language found itself once again on its native soil, and began its life as the literary language of the Bulgarian nation. The foundations laid with genius by the two brothers showed their exceptional qualities. This language was viable, ready to be developed and enriched, to serve not only religion and the Church, but also literature, administration and culture, because it was based on a living Bulgarian dialect. For these reasons, not only Bulgarian scholars but also a number of foreign Slavists are entirely right in preferring to call this language *Old Bulgarian*, in accordance with its national appurtenance and its historical life in Bulgaria. Its international function as the literary language of other Slav and also of non-Slav peoples was in no way impaired by this.

Above all, Old Bulgarian made it possible to create the Old Bulgarian literature. Its beginnings are rightly associated with the names of Cyril and Methodius, who not only translated parts of the Old and New Testament, liturgical texts, prayers, etc., but also certain homiletic works (eulogies and sermons), necessary for a preacher who had to elucidate the Christian teaching, to guide his listeners in the ways of the true faith, and to depict for them the image of the martyr whose feast day was being celebrated.

Many writers and scholars were at work in the literary centres of Preslav and Ohrid, men who devoted their talent and energy to the work of a preacher and a teacher. The period from the ninth to the eleventh century was the so-called Golden Age of Slav letters, literature and culture, of the development of the Old Bulgarian literary language. The names of Old Bulgarian writers were widely known: Clement of Ohrid, Nahum, Constantine of Preslav,

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John the Exarch, Chernorizets (the Monk) Hrabur, Gregory the Presbyter and Mnih, the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon himself and Cosmas the Presbyter. Anonymous works which have come down to us also show the existence of many more authors and translators.

After a century of Byzantine bondage Bulgaria was once more free in the early twelfth century, and literature flourished there once again. It filled the thirteenth and particularly the fourteenth century, to die out gradually in the activity of the Bulgarian scholars, who found a refuge from Ottoman persecution in neighbouring Serbia, Wallachia or Russia. Five centuries of Ottoman bondage failed to conquer the Bulgarian spirit, which attained two supreme heights in the development of mediaeval Bulgaria—Golden Age in the tenth and eleventh centuries and the Turnovo School with Mount Athos in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, did not admit that it had been conquered. Although to a modest extent, literary activity continued under the Turkish yoke until the Bulgarian national revival in the eighteenth century.

Old Bulgarian literature, like other mediaeval literatures, was, above all, religious in trend. The translation and copying of canonical books connected with the Eastern Orthodox rite held an important place in the activity scholars. A still unsolved question is whether the already translated parts of the Scripture were translated a second time in Preslav, and later also in Turnovo and Mount Athos, or whether the old translations were edited and collated with the Greek originals. The second supposition is the more probable one. There is some evidence for a *second edition Simeon's* (after the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon) of the Gospel translation, and a similar supposition prevails as to the *Apostle*. It is known that the Old Testament was completed in Preslav, a number of previously untranslated parts of the Bible being translated there. There are indications that this was done by the Old Bulgarian scholar, Gregory the Presbyter and Mnih. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was tremendous activity to 'purge the Holy Books of heresies' in Turnovgrad and Mount Athos. The names of hitherto unknown Bulgarian are still being discovered to this day.

But Old Bulgarian literature was far from being only canonical, and that is why its language cannot be considered a *lingua sacra*. A vast non-canonical literature was created in the same Old Bulgarian language. Epigraphical material of considerable volume has also

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been preserved, showing that literacy was widespread in Bulgaria as early as the tenth century. Thus, for instance, a number of inscriptions have been found, which are quite ordinary in content and are connected with the daily life of people. Ceremonial inscriptions have also been found on tombs, such as that of Mostich in Preslav; on the tomb of the Bulgarian Tsar Samuïl's parents on Prespa; inscriptions which mark important events in Bulgarian history, such as the eleventh century inscription of Tsar Ivan Vladislav (the Bitolya inscription); the inscription of Tsar Ivan Asen II dated 1230 (the Klokotnitsa inscription), etc. The Royal Charters, such as that of Dubrovnik, the Virginska Charter and many others were all written in the literary Old Bulgarian language into which features of the later development of the spoken language had already made their way.

Old Bulgarian literature treated a very great variety of themes, and was also developed in genre. It did not lack poetic works, such as the *Alphabetical Prayer*, the *Introduction to the Gospels*, etc. According to the most recent researches Nahum of Ohrid was the author of original church hymns, while Constantine Preslav, as was quite recently established, was the author of original parts of the *Triod*.

Old Bulgarian literature was also rich in dogmatic and polemical works with which it combated heresies and elucidated Christian dogma. Many of these works were translations from the Greek. No less common were translations of homiletic, hagiographic and historical works, novellas, short stories, apocrypha, etc. Old Bulgarian literature is rich in scientific works as they were understood at that time, for instance works on grammar and stylistics, the structure of the universe, man, Nature, etc.

Bulgarian literature did not change its character in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It now reflected the predominant trends of the Late Middle Ages which had specific features in the Balkans, especially hesychasm with its distinctive ideas, style and means of expression. Once again Bulgarian literature responded to its time and the Bulgarian scholars wrote original works in the spirit of hesychasm, or translated Byzantine authors of the time. Tremendous literary activity was carried on by Patriarch Euthymius, Gregory Tsamblak, Josaph of Bdin and their adherents, and in this period there were many more translators whose names have been swallowed up in the darkness of time.

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When characterizing Bulgarian literature of the ninth-tenth and the fourteenth-fifteenth century: it should be borne in mind that the Old Bulgarian writers and scholars were, above all, popularizers, preachers of Christianity and its dogmas, fighters against heresies and perversions, against deviations from official religious dogma. Consequently they were bound to bring to the notice of their readers and listeners the achievements of Byzantine scientific thought, above all, of their dogmatics and homiletics, together with the rhetoric characteristic of the time. They created, translated or compiled literature with a definite purpose, subjected to a utilitarian principle. In the Middle Ages compiling was not considered a sterile phenomenon, on the contrary, it was encouraged by the Church and the Church Councils. The important thing was not to have the individual scholar express himself by creating original works, but to popularize the thought and the words of the most eminent Church Fathers, recognized as good interpreters of Holy Writ. And it is no accident that only works recognized by the official Church should have come down to us. There is no doubt that 'heretical' literature was also written, and it must have been subjected to persecution and destruction. Thus, with the exception of several Old Bulgarian tales in which parts of the Bogomil teaching are displayed, the Bogomil books have not been preserved in their Old Bulgarian originals. For instance, the *Secret Book*, the fundamental book of Bogomilism, has only been preserved in a Latin copy. At the same time, however, in Simeon's *Miscellany*, known in a copy as *Svetoslav's Selection*, date 1073, there is a translation of the *Index* of forbidden books (the apocrypha, which had not yet even been translated into Bulgarian).

Of course. Old Bulgarian scholars left us original works as well, such as the *Eulogy of Constantine-Cyril* by Clement of Ohrid, an original poetic talent. The *Alphabetical Prayer* and the *Introduction to the Gospels* are also original works, although their authorship is still disputed, and also certain parts of the *Hexameron* and *The Heavens* by John the Exarch, although the principal parts of these works are translations.

The Old Bulgarian translators found it quite natural to make a selection in translating a work, cutting out whole parts of it, and on the other hand, adding their own work. Sometimes they used several works to create one which was predominantly a translation. This is the case with John the Exarch's *Hexameron*, for instance. The translation of

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Constantine of Preslav's *Teaching Gospel* or his *Istorkii* was also compiled from selections. Many examples can be quoted. More than a few miscellanies of sermons (*Homiliars*) have come down to us from the Old Bulgarian and Middle Bulgarian periods, such as, for instance, the Old Bulgarian Suprasuliensis MS Tsar Simeon's *Flow of Gold*, miscellanies dated 1073 and 1076, copied from Russian editions, the Gherman Miscellany in a mediaeval copy date 1359, Yagić's *Flow of Gold*, a Serbian edition, etc. It is of interest that not one of these miscellanies corresponds to a Byzantine miscellany with exactly the same content. These manuscripts are a special kind of anthology, created on Bulgarian soil by compiler-translators, who included in them sermons by Old Bulgarian writers.

Old Bulgarian translators, who were at the same time authors and compilers, took their work of translation very seriously. In the ninth-tenth century it is already possible to speak of traditions of translation, the founders of which were indisputably the two Salonica brothers. Palaeoslavistic and Old Bulgarian studies have long recognized the high quality of translations made by their disciples. Although the oldest surviving MSS, did not come from the pen of the first translators but are copies made 100–150 years later, their skill can be seen in the Gospels and the *Apostle*, and also translations of sermons such as the Glozianus MS. It has long been recognized that the first translators and those who followed them deserve admiration for their skill in deriving forms of expression from the modest material which the Salonica dialect offered them. They succeeded in organizing this material in such a way as to express the complex and lofty thought contained in the texts which they translated, resorting to much word-formation, copying the numerous intricate words characteristic of Greek, but making moderate use of them, and showing a really profound knowledge of the word-forming possibilities of the language into which they translated. They also succeeded in deriving syntactic models, often quite independent of Byzantine models, from the comparatively poor syntactic material of the dialect, particularly in the sphere of complex sentences. One is also impressed by the word order in the first translations, entirely independent of the word order in the Greek original. In general, it can be said that their work is free from any suspicion of literal translation, which one would have expected under these conditions, as witness for instance the Gothic translation of the Bible by Wulfila. All that

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remained systematically untranslated was the official language of ecclesiastical-dogmatic terminology. But even this points to a conscious intent and not the helplessness of the translator. It may be that, realizing the responsibility that rested on them, the first translators consciously avoided translating specialized terms but rightly thought that in the following centuries such terminology would gradually grow clearer and become established, thus entering naturally into the translated texts.

The first translators laid the foundations of the literary Bulgarian language and blazed the trail for a vast work of translation, through which Old Bulgarian literature became the transmitter of ancient culture, art and philosophy; they also fought for the right of every people to read and hear the Word of God in its own native language. Called to stand his trial by the 'trilinguists' in Rome, Cyril the Philosopher defeated them with the force of his conviction. His plea was for its time a revolutionary act which secured to the young European peoples the right to build their own national culture. Cyril and Methodius and their disciples were the founders of an excellent school of translators which was very close in its qualities to our ideas of skill in translation today.

While zealously continuing the work of Cyril and Methodius, the scholar-translators of the Preslav school in the tenth and eleventh centuries introduced certain changes in the manner of translating and in the theory of translation, preferring a philologically exact translation which is undoubtedly closer to the original and may even suggest a literal translation at some places. The Preslav translators did their best to transmit the special features of the original as regards morphology, syntax and word order, and to preserve the structure of the Greek phrase. We cannot, of course, blame them for this retreat from the older school of translation. To understand them we should try to understand the epoch with its care for the 'purity' of texts and fear of 'perversions' and 'heresies', because very often deviations from an official dogma were based on a new shade of meaning introduced into the sense of the canon, and this led to infringement of the dogma. These are the reasons which led to the creation of the second Old Bulgarian school of translation, that of Preslav. Its efforts to translate into Old Bulgarian the specialized terms left untranslated by the first translators were a characteristic feature, of this school. They obviously made great efforts

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and were not always very successful in finding a genuinely Bulgarian term to replace the untranslated Greek one. In the Preslav translations the special terms were, indeed, translated, but in a very synonymous way. In the early years of our century this called forth the adverse criticism of the German palaeoslavist August Leskin, who, when examining John the Exarch's art of translation, draws attention to many cases in which one and the same Greek word was translated in a different way in John the Exarch's work. For a long time, and even tho this day, Leskin's prestige cast a shadow on the work of this Old Bulgarian author. But this criticism was unduly severe, particularly in suggesting that we have reason to accuse the translator of ignorance of the Greek language, particularly after he had set about translating the most difficult scientific and theological dogmatic works of his day. We ought rather to allow that the Exarch followed his inclination to make use of the rich lexical synonyms even where no specialized terminology was in question.

A third school of Bulgarian translation flourished in Turnovo and Mount Athos in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—the mediaeval Bulgarian school. Considerable linguistic and textual changes had made their way into the liturgical books translated into Old Bulgarian in the course of several centuries, during which they had been copied many times; these the scholars in Turnovo and Mount Athos set about removing. Many translating 'workshops' of scholars began the systematic work of collating the Bulgarian texts with the Greek originals which, at almost the same time and for the same reasons, had been corrected and rid of errors in Byzantium. In their fear of 'heresies', fighting as they were, above all for purity and precision of expression, the Bulgarian scholars of Turnovo and Mount Athos preferred to bring the Bulgarian translation as close as humanly possible to the Greek original, and sometimes went to extremes in doing this. Thus a new type of 'Graecized' translation appeared, one in which Greek syntax, word order and the structure of the whole phrase was kept to, as well as the use of cases and prepositions etc. the Turnovo translators were closer in method to those of Preslav, but they reflected the new norms of the literary Bulgarian language of the late Bulgarian Middle Ages. This was a most interesting and extremely rich literary language which kept the Old Bulgarian norms, resisting all new traits, which had made their way into colloquial Bulgarian in those several centuries, such as

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analytism, the use of the article, etc. Some structures not particularly frequent in Old Bulgarian, such as the ablative absolute and the *dativus cum infinitivo* are to be found in great abundance in the Middle Bulgarian translations and original works, along with all kinds of participial forms and structures. The language of the Late Bulgarian Middle Ages is an Old Bulgarian brought to perfection, similar to the classical languages of that time, Greek and Latin. The Turnovo translators, particularly when editing earlier versions were inclined to restore an untranslated term or, which was more frequent, looked for new translations in which they copied not only the word, but very often also the combination in which it was used.

In their original work the writers of the Turnovo School fully held to the tradition of their Old Bulgarian predecessors. They compiled, became co-authors in their translations, created original anthologies of translations and original works, submitting, of course, to the taste and aesthetic demands of their time.

In order to characterize completely the Bulgarian translators of the Middle Ages we should pay attention to their attitude to translation in general. They were aware of their great responsibility, venerated the work which they had begun, usually at others instigation while, on the other hand, they felt that as Christians and Bulgarians they were bound to works in this sphere, which was often quite beyond them. That is why in Constantine of Preslav's *Introduction to the Teaching Gospels* we read: "That is why I, the unworthy one, being impelled, as I said, to translate the interpretation of the Holy Gospels from Greek into Slavonic, I was afeard and trembled, seeing words that were not according to my understanding and power, but fearing the future death, that I should be punished for disobedience, and being unable to write everything, I began to write only the statutory Sunday Gospels." John the Exarch was of the same opinion, and he even set forth his theory of translation: "Do not find fault, brothers", he wrote, "if you do not find the same word somewhere, because the same sense is place in it... The Hellenic language cannot always be translated in the same way into another, and it is the same with every language when it is translated into another. One word or expression may be beautiful in one language, and not in another; what is terrible in one language, is not terrible in another; in one language the

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word may be masculine and in another feminine. The sense has to be observed, because we translate these books for their sense.”

As the first translators into their native language in mediaeval Europe, the Old Bulgarian scholars and writers had to cope with extremely great difficulties, which were due not only to an insufficiently elaborated language, into which they translated—because the Bulgarian literary language was still being formed at the time when the most responsible translations had to be made—but also with the difficulties offered by the highly developed Greek language, which had in ancient times acquired a perfect form and attained an exceptional wealth of means of expression. If to this we add the heavy, rhetorical, mediaeval phrase, full of figures and tropes, that was typical of Byzantine works, the heavy, vague thought, full of contradictions, we shall be able to imagine at least partly what a feat translation was, what a great love of their people and what a strong faith these Bulgarian scholars had to possess, who gave up everything in life in order to devote themselves to their work of translation. We shall thus be best able to appreciate their pioneering work, and to understand the charm of their translations, copied with veneration for centuries all over the Slav world.

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