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Glagolitic Script as a Manifestation of Sacred Knowledge

1. The question concerning the origin of the Glagolitic alphabet could be called a *questio diabolica* of Slavistics. It is difficult, indeed, to indicate another field in our studies in which so many lances have been broken with so little result achieved. Moreover, it is hardly possible to find a definitive solution of the question: this would presuppose a discovery of new historical sources which does not seem probable and cannot be an object of a purposeful research. We are compelled to look for new approaches, rather than new sources.

All the suggestions concerning the origin of the Glagolitic alphabet have by necessity a hypothetical character.

There are two contrasting hypotheses concerning this question: one of them suggests a *natural* origin for the Glagolitic letters, while the other presumes an *artificial* origin. The first hypothesis may be defined as *palaeographic*, the second as *ideographic*. Indeed, the first hypothesis presupposes a palaeographic development, whereas the second implies an ideographic explanation.

2. According to the first hypothesis the Glagolitic alphabet goes back to some previous, more ancient alphabet (or perhaps represents an unification of several ancient alphabets): in other words, it is a sort of elaboration of some other alphabet (or alphabets).

However no attempt to trace the historical roots of the Glagolitic script, i.e. to connect the Glagolitic alphabet with any other alphabetical system has proved successful. There exist a number of suggestions of this kind, but no convincing results have been achieved.

It is true that in many cases Glagolitic letters may remind us of graphemes of other alphabets. Thus, for example, they may evince a certain resemblance to Ethiopian letters¹. However the similar signs are not correlated phonetically, nor have they the same numerical or symbolic value: the similarity in form is not motivated, it is unsupported at the level of substance and, consequently, has to be recognized as coincidental. A further example: Ihor Ševčenko has pointed to a striking resemblance between certain Glagolitic letters and marginal reference signs found in numerous Greek manuscripts². Again, we cannot be sure

¹ See: Prochorov 1992: 185-190.

² See: Strakhov 2011.

that this resemblance is not coincidental: we see no apparent motive for transforming these signs into letters. As Robert Auty put it, “The laws of probability alone make it likely that fortuitous similarities will frequently arise between letters of different systems”³.

The resemblance in form between Glagolitic letters and those of other alphabets must be supported at some different level, let us say, at the level of content as opposed to form. Similar signs must have something in common – they have to express similar sounds, or have to have the same numerical value, and so on. In other words, we are obliged to present explanations for the similarity of graphemes belonging to different languages, otherwise it is not convincing.

In some particular cases examples of this kind could be found in the Glagolitic alphabet. Indeed, some Glagolitic letters are very close to those of other alphabets with similar pronunciation. One could refer to the Glagolitic *sha* (Ш) which recalls the Hebrew *shin* (ש). Another example is the Glagolitic *dobro* (Ѧ) which corresponds to the Greek minuscule *delta*⁴. In both cases the correlating letters, Slavonic and Hebraic in the one case, Slavonic and Greek in the other, reveal similarities both in form and in pronunciation.

However these are only isolated cases. And isolated cases do not carry us very far.

3. An alternative hypothesis suggests that the Glagolitic alphabet was created artificially, i.e. independently of existing alphabets. According to this hypothesis the Glagolitic letters for the most part were composed of three sacred symbols: the cross, the circle and the triangle.

The cross is obviously a symbol of Christ, the circle can be regarded as a symbol of the infinity and omnipotence of God the Father and the triangle becomes a symbol of the Holy Trinity. At the same time the circle as a solar symbol may also be associated with Christ as “sol justitiae” (“the sun of righteousness” – Malachi IV, 2).

The author of this hypothesis is Georg (Jurij) Tschernochvostoff, a Russian emigré scholar who died prematurely. He was a student of Valentin Kiparskij and it was Prof. Kiparskij who posthumously published his findings⁵.

Today this hypothesis have become increasingly popular among scholars. However, it is necessary to seek further arguments in support of the theory, otherwise it may be considered a question of belief which can be neither proved or rejected. The idea is clearly too abstract, too arbitrary – it requires some additional argumentation.

³ Auty 1971: 42.

⁴ One could quote also the Glagolitic letters *fert* (Ф) and *fita* (Ѧ) which correspond to the Greek *phi* and *theta*, but these cases are not so representative: Greek letters were obviously borrowed for the correct spelling of words of the Greek origin.

⁵ See: Tschernochvostoff 1995; Kiparskij 1958; Kiparskij 1964; Kiparskij, 1968. The hypothesis of Tschernochvostoff, until recently accessible in the exposition of Kiparskij, received the positive response of a number of scholars. Apart from the quoted articles of Kiparskij, see in particular: Samilov 1970: 98; Auty 1971: 41-42; Tolstoj 1998: 53; Vereecken 1995: 7; Marti 1999: 178, note 13.

4. One argument of this kind was indicated by Tschernochvostoff himself.

He pointed out that the Glagolitic letters *izē* (Ѣ) and *slovo* (Ѧ) present in reality the same figure, each being in an upside-down position in relation to the other. And he connected this with the abbreviated form of the name of Jesus: ѢѦ⁶ which corresponds to the Cyrillic and Greek abbreviations of this name⁷:

Glagolitic	Cyrillic	Greek
ѢѦ	ІС	ΙΣ

This idea bears conviction and is also stimulating. It allows us to see in the abbreviated Slavonic form of the name of Christ a special theological meaning which is not revealed in the corresponding Greek and Latin forms. The name of Jesus in the Glagolitic script constitutes a cycle, a full circle, and this indicates the word of God:

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end⁸.

⁶ Tschernochvostoff 1995: 146; Kiparskij 1958: 316; Kiparskij 1964: 400; Kiparskij 1968: 93; Auty 1971: 44; Ivanova 1977: 29.

A supralinear bar over the letters is a sign of contraction: it signalizes a hidden meaning (also letters used as ciphers have this sign). Later on for the sake of simplicity I will omit the bar; it will be preserved, however, in quotations.

⁷ There are two homophonic letters in the Cyrillic alphabet with the phonetic value of [i]: и and і; both letters may be called *izē* (Uspenskij 1997: 252, 275, notes 36, 37). In the Glagolitic alphabet there are even three letters, but two of them probably may be considered to be variants of the same letter: Ѣ and Ѣ/Ѣ. These letters did not differ in pronunciation, their value was exclusively orthographical. They have been introduced in the Slavonic alphabet as signs for transliterating Greek words, mostly proper names. Thus in the Cyrillic alphabet і obviously corresponds to the Greek *iota* (Ι) while и corresponds to the Greek *eta* (Η). In Byzantine Greek the letters *iota* and *eta* had the same phonetic value, but it was considered necessary to distinguish them in spelling.

The Glagolitic Ѣ may correspond in Old Church Slavonic Cyrillic texts both to і and и. In the Cyrillic manuscripts the abbreviated name of Christ is usually written with і (as іс) and only rarely with и (as ис). However in the Glagolitic manuscripts the abbreviated name of Christ is usually written with Ѣ (as ѢѢ) (see: Sill 1972: 107–112 and especially Table 10; Čremošnik 1925: 261; Strakhov 2011: 7–8). Only this form is attested in the Codex Assemanius and in the Kievan Missal; in the Euchologium Sinaiticum it occurs 37 times, while the alternative abbreviation with Ѣ/Ѣ is found only 4 times. The same form (ѢѢ) prevails in the Codices Marianus and Zographiensis, as well as in the Ochrid Gospel and the Ochrid Folia; it is present also in the Codex Clozianus (fol. 3v/II, 75) although it does not prevail there. In general it may be said that this form is attested in all Church Slavonic Glagolitic manuscripts where an abbreviated form of the name of Jesus is present.

In Greek the abbreviated name of Christ was written with the initial *iota* (ΙΣ or ΙΗΣ, ΙΗ), never with *eta* (*ΗΣ), and the Glagolitic abbreviation ѢѢ (as well as the Cyrillic іс) obviously renders the Greek abbreviation ΙΣ. Thus we may conclude that the Glagolitic Ѣ was originally correlated with the Greek *iota*, while the Glagolitic Ѣ/Ѣ was correlated with the Greek *eta*. Concerning the correspondence between Ѣ and и, on the one hand, Ѣ and і, on the other, see: Vrana 1964; cf. also: Dobrev 1980: 43; Tkadlčik 2000: 24–25 (for a different point of view see, in particular: Durnovo 2000: 592–593).

⁸ Rv XXI, 6, XXII, 13, cf. I, 8, 17, II, 8. Cf. also: Is XLI, 4, XLIV, 6, XLVIII, 12.

The Glagolitic representation of the name of Christ appears then as a sort of an ideogram, which corresponds visually, i.e. ideographically, to what Christ says of Himself in the Book of Revelation.

It should be remembered that the abbreviated form in itself is a sign of sacredness: only sacred names (*nomina sacra*) were abbreviated in ancient writing. – the fact evidently goes back to the Tetragrammaton in the Hebrew script⁹.

It is also important to note that the Tetragrammaton – contrary to the etymology of the word – could be written not only with four letters (as *yhw̄h* יהוה) but also with two letters (as *yy* יי or *yh* יה). The two-letter abbreviation of the name of God in the Hebrew Bible (the Tetragrammaton) was probably reflected in the two-letter abbreviation of the name of Christ – first in Greek and Latin and then in Slavonic writing.

5. The interpretation of the symmetrical relations between the letters *iže* (Ѣ) and *slovo* (Ѧ) seems quite plausible, and, moreover, appears very attractive. However, in order to accept this interpretation we must explain the analogous relation between the Glagolitic letters *dobro* (Ѣ) and *vědi* (Ѧ).

Indeed, in the Glagolitic script there are two pairs of letters presenting the same figure in a direct and an inverted position: *iže* (Ѣ) and *slovo* (Ѧ), on the one hand, *dobro* (Ѣ) and *vědi* (Ѧ), on the other. The relation between the members of each pair is the same. In each case we have one and the same figure, each being in the inverted position in relation to the other. In both cases the two letters – *iže* and *slovo* in the one case, *dobro* and *vědi* in the other – are contrasted at the horizontal axis.

It is necessary to stress that these are the only known cases of the symmetrical organization of Glagolitic letters: no other pair of letters reveals such a relation.

If the forms of the letters *iže* (Ѣ) and *slovo* (Ѧ) go back to the abbreviation of the name of Christ, an analogous structure of the letters *dobro* (Ѣ) and *vědi* (Ѧ) cannot be casual. We must suppose that behind this analogy there is a significance. But what sort of significance?

In the opposite case, if the symmetrical relation of the letters *dobro* (Ѣ) and *vědi* (Ѧ) is casual and meaningless we are not entitled to find a concealed sense in the corresponding relation of the letters *iže* (Ѣ) and *slovo* (Ѧ).

The absence of an explanation for the relationship between the letters *dobro* (Ѣ) and *vědi* (Ѧ) turned out to be the weak link in the theory of Tschernochvostoff, throwing doubt on his interpretation of the relationship between the letters *iže* (Ѣ) and *slovo* (Ѧ) – i.e. throwing doubt on the connection between the forms of the letters *iže* and *slovo* and the abbreviated form of the name of Christ¹⁰.

⁹ Cf.: Traube 1907; Dobiaš-Roždestvenskaja 1936: 188-190; Hurtado 1998: 660-663.

¹⁰ See in this connection: Vlasto 1970: 43, note *c*. Michael Samilov (1970: 101) suggested that the association between the Glagolitic letters *dobro* (Ѣ) and *vědi* (Ѧ) is based on the semantic association of the Slavonic words *вѣра* “faith” and *добро* “good”. This explanation is unconvincing.

6. I believe that the analogy between the two pairs of letters can be explained.

This analogy reflects the association of Jesus Christ and King David in which David is regarded as a typological (old testamental) prototype of Christ.

This association is very evident both in Greek and Latin writing where the name of David, like the name of Jesus is regularly presented in an abbreviated form, as a sacred name (*nomen sacrum*) – while all other names are given in the full form¹¹! Ludwig Traube wrote in this connection: “Daß eine Kurzschreibung für ΔΑΥΕΙΔ aufkam, erklärt sich wieder aus messianistischen Anschauungen und scheint ursprünglich, wenn wir die Wortbilder ins Auge fassen, eher vorchristlicher Zeit anzugehören, als bereits der typologischen Beziehung von David auf Christus graphischen Ausdruck zu geben”¹².

Whereas in Greek the name of David is usually written as ΔΑΔ, in Latin it is written as DD – in two letters, like the name of Jesus, cf. Latin abbreviations for the name of Jesus: IC or IS, HS¹³. In Old Church Slavonic the name of David may be written as ДАД/ѡѡѡѡ (as in Greek), ДД/ѡѡѡ (as in Latin) and ДДА/ѡѡѡѡ¹⁴, but in the Glagolitic manuscripts we also come across the abbreviation ѡѡ (= ДБ)¹⁵.

¹¹ See: Traube 1907.

¹² *Ibidem*: 104. The form ΔΑΥΕΙΔ, together with ΔΑΥΙΔ, is attested in early manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. In particular, it occurs in Tischendorf’s edition consulted by Traube.

¹³ Discussing the abbreviation ΔΔ in a later Greek manuscript, Ludwig Traube remarks: “Wir glauben nicht zu irren, wenn wir diese Form für eine Anlehnung an θς oder vielleicht schon an ις halten” (Traube 1907: 105).

¹⁴ See: Sill 1972: 99-100 and Table 7; Čremošnik 1925: 259; Strakhov 2011: 10.

¹⁵ Cf. ДБѢ Nom. Sg. in the Codex Marianus, fol. 9v (Jagić 1883: 37), ДБѢ Dat. Sg. in the Psalterium Sinaiticum, fol. 17v; these abbreviations are not mentioned in the book of Ute Sill (1972) dedicated to the Old Church Slavonic abbreviated forms of *nomina sacra* and the first one is missing in the paper of Strakhov (2011: 10). Cf. also abbreviations of the possessive adjective in the Codex Marianus: ДБѢ Nom. Masc. Sg., fol. 6, 10v, 25 (Jagić 1883: 28, 39, 73), Acc. Masc. Sg., fol. 81 (Jagić 1883: 196), ДБѢ Gen. Masc. Sg., fol. 123v, 148 (Jagić 1883: 292, 346), ДБѢ Loc. Masc. Sg., fol. 81v (Jagić 1883: 197). Such abbreviations of the possessive adjective are attested also in the Psalterium Sinaiticum (ДБѢ Nom. Masc. Sg., fol. 11, 24v, 27, 27v, 28v, 32v, 33v, 39; ДБѢ Nom. Fem. Sg., fol. 16), in the Codex Zographensis (ДБѢ Nom. Masc. Sg., fol. 115, see: Jagić 1879, p. 70), in the Euchologium Sinaiticum (ДБѢ Nom. Masc. Sg., fol. 33v) and in the Codex Clozianus (ДБѢ Nom. Masc. Sg., fol. 1/I, 38). Corresponding abbreviations of the possessive adjective are also present in the Cyrillic Liber Sabbae transcribed from Glagolitic original: ДБѢ Nom./Voc. Masc. Sg., fol. 44v (bis), 47v, 66, 84v (bis), 137, Acc. Masc. Sg., fol. 137v, ДБѢ Gen. Neutr. Sg., fol. 28, 137v, ДБѢ Loc. Masc. Sg., fol. 138 (Ščepkin 1903: 26, 29, 51, 72, 133, 134, 7, 134, 134).

Glagolitic manuscripts are usually published in the Cyrillic transliteration. When quoting such editions here and further on I reproduce Church Slavonic words (originally spelled with Glagolitic letters) in Cyrillic.

This abbreviation reveals a full analogy with the abbreviation $\text{Ѹ}\text{Q}$ (= ic) for the name of Jesus: in both cases we have a configuration of letters which present the same figure in a direct and a reversed position¹⁶.

It corresponds also to the two-letter spelling of the Tetragrammaton – which is reflected both in the name of Jesus and in the name of David.

Significantly we find this abbreviation ($\text{db}\text{p} = \text{ДВ}$) in most ancient Glagolitic manuscripts. We may suppose that it is the most ancient abbreviation of the name David in Slavonic writing. It is possible that originally this name could be written in the nominative case without a final letter *er* (z). The writing without a final *er* would have made the analogy with the abbreviated form of the name Jesus even more evident (cf. the abbreviations $\text{Ѹ}\text{Q}/\text{ic}$ – without *er* – for Jesus).

Similar to the Greek and Latin manuscripts only two names in Old Slavonic manuscripts appear in an abbreviated form: Jesus and David: these two names alone were treated as *nomina sacra*¹⁷.

It should be noted that, contrary to the Greek and Latin abbreviations, the Slavonic abbreviation $\text{db}\text{p}\text{db}$ (= ДВА) corresponds to the Hebraic form of David: דָּוִד .

In the Life of St Cyril we read that the saint studied Hebrew (Ch. VIII, cf. also Ch. X)¹⁸ and we have sound grounds to believe that it was true¹⁹. Supposedly the acquaintance with Hebrew was reflected in the elaboration of the Glagolitic alphabet: some Glagolitic letters – in particular, the letter *sha* (Ш) – seem to be taken directly from the Hebrew alphabet²⁰. This acquaintance may have stimulated the abbreviation of the name of David as $\text{db}\text{p}\text{db}$ (= ДВА).

At the same time the abbreviation dbp (= ДВ) appears as a specific Slavonic abbreviation. It is explained by the association of Jesus and David. The Glagolitic form of both names – Jesus and David – manifests a symmetrical construction, which initiates and con-

¹⁶ The abbreviation ДВ occurs also as an abbreviated form of the word ДѢВА “virgin”. One could surmise that the symmetrical organization of the Glagolitic letters *ize* (Ѹ) and *slovo* (Q), on the one part, and *dobro* (db) and *vědi* (p), on the other part, is based not on the association of Christ and David but on the association of Christ and Mary. However this does not seem probable. The abbreviation of the name David is much more frequent in the Old Church Slavonic texts than the abbreviation of the word ДѢВА . Besides, the abbreviation of ДѢВА , as a rule, is present almost exclusively in the Cyrillic manuscripts, not in the Glagolitic (the only exception being ДѢЗ Gen. Pl. in Euchologium Sinaiticum, fol. 88, where the word does not refer to the Mother of God: $\text{МОУСИКИНСКЪ ДѢЗ СЛЪШАТИ ГЖЕЛИ}$). See: Sill 1972: 93, 168 (the author mistakenly quotes two forms ДѢЗ as an abbreviation of ДѢВА in the Euchologium – only one case of this kind is attested in the manuscript).

¹⁷ See: Sill 1972.

¹⁸ Lavrov 1930: 11, cf. 20; Kantor 1983: 43, cf. 57; Florja 1981: 77, cf. 83.

¹⁹ See: Minns 1925: 94-95. He probably knew also other Semitic languages (Aramaic, or Syriac), see: Jakobson 1944; Horálek 1956.

²⁰ See: Lavrov 1915: 11; Minns 1925: 96; Auty 1971: 43; Ivanova 1977: 22.

cludes with the same sign (in a direct and a reversed position), symbolizing the idea of a circle – the same idea which is expressed in the divine words:

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

As a matter of fact the abbreviation $\delta\delta\psi\delta\delta$ (= $\Delta\mathfrak{B}\Delta$) can be explained both as a borrowing from Hebrew and as a development of the idea of the circle. The two interpretations are not in contradiction – they rather supplement one another, creating an effect of resonance, of mutual reinforcement²¹.

7. As was mentioned above there are at least two cases in which a Glagolitic letter reveals a striking resemblance to a letter of another alphabet of similar pronunciation: the Glagolitic *sha* (\mathbb{H}) resembles the Hebraic *shin* (Ψ), while the Glagolitic *dobro* ($\delta\delta$) resembles the Greek minuscule *delta*.

Concerning the Slavonic *sha* (\mathbb{H}) we may suppose that St Cyril took it from the Hebrew alphabet. Analogously we may assume that the Glagolitic *dobro* ($\delta\delta$) goes back to the Greek *delta*. At the same time the Slavonic *vědi* (ψ) was created artificially, by turning *dobro* upside down: St Cyril presented *vědi* (ψ) as an upside-down *dobro* ($\delta\delta$). The point of

²¹ My interpretation of the Glagolitic abbreviation of the name of David (which was presented at the Vienna Slavistic conference “Wien und die slawischen Sprachen und Literaturen” in October of 1999) was not accepted by Prof. Heinz Miklas who suggested that the form $\delta\delta\psi\delta\delta/\Delta\mathfrak{B}\Delta$ were “individual” cases which have to be explained as contraction of the form $\delta\delta\psi\delta\delta/\Delta\mathfrak{B}\Delta$ (see: Miklas, 2007: 72, note 60; Miklas, 2007b: 15, note 52). According to Prof. Miklas this contraction was due to the lack of space. I find it hard to agree with this opinion. I do not believe that we are justified in defining a form as “individual” if we find it several times in different manuscripts. In the manuscripts available to me (Psalterium Sinaiticum and Codex Marianus) there is no lack of space when the name of David is presented as $\delta\delta\psi$ (= $\Delta\mathfrak{B}$): contrary to Prof. Miklas’ conjecture, the letters are set freely and there are no traces of letter supraposition. (One of the manuscripts, namely, Psalterium Sinaiticum is available in a facsimile edition, see: Altbauer 1971).

Rejecting my explanation Prof. Miklas puts forward his own. He suggests to transliterate the Cyrillic abbreviation иѣ ‘Jesus’ which occurs in Codex Suprasliensis (иѣсѣ Dat. Sg., see: Severjanov 1904: 351) into Glagolitic letters. As a result of this operation he obtains the form $\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{P}\mathfrak{Q}$. This form, according to Prof. Miklas, represents the Crucifixion with Christ between the two thieves: on our right we have the Good Thief, and on our left the Bad Thief crucified upside down (the circle below allegedly representing his head). It is impossible to take this seriously. First of all the abbreviation иѣ in Codex Suprasliensis is a *unique* case (it is attested only in one manuscript and occurs only once there). Besides, we find this abbreviation in a *Cyrillic*, not Glagolitic manuscript, a fact of no minor importance; it may well be that the Cyrillic и corresponded to the Glagolitic $\mathfrak{X}/\mathfrak{P}$ while the Cyrillic ѣ corresponded to the Glagolitic \mathfrak{Q} , in which case the transliteration of иѣ would produce quite a different configuration of Glagolitic letters, and then we cannot refer to a representation of the Crucifixion. Finally, the Good Thief is normally represented on the right of Christ, not on our right; and there is no indication that the Bad Thief was crucified upside down. See: Miklas 2003: 190; Miklas 2004: 397; Miklas 2007a: 70-72; Miklas, 2007b: 15.

departure in the last case was, one may surmise, the abbreviated form of the name David symbolizing the idea of a circle: if the first letter of the abbreviation coincides with the initial letter of this name in Greek, the second appears as its reverse.

Returning to the problem formulated earlier in this paper – whether the Glagolitic alphabet has a natural or an artificial origin – we may conclude that the truth lies between. In some cases St Cyril could take letters from other alphabets (occasionally we may identify the ornamentalization of Greek minuscule script), in other cases he could create Glagolitic letters artificially, presenting them as the result of a certain transformation. This transformation as we have seen could be based on the association of the letters suggested by their combination in the form of a sacred name.

In some cases St Cyril could invert Greek letters. Thus the Glagolitic б (“rtsi”) may be treated as the Greek Ρ (“rho”) turned according to the axes, vertical and horizontal (upside down and from right to left). Analogously the Glagolitic Ѣ (“jest”) can be regarded as the Greek Ε (“epsilon”) turned according to the vertical axis (from right to left). The inversion of letters generally is characteristic of cryptography. This may be in conformity with the hypothesis of Eugenia Granstrem who suggested a connection between the Glagolitic script and Greek magical writing with alchemical and cryptographic signs²².

However in the majority of cases the letters seem to be created, not borrowed, in the Glagolitic alphabet. This corresponds to what is said in a eulogy on Cyril and Method where the saint brothers are named *new* apostles who invented *new* letters for a *new* language they created²³.

8. The symmetrical images of letters – *iže* (Ѹ) and *slovo* (Ѻ), *dobro* (Ѣ) and *vědi* (Ѱ) – manifest a tendency to ascribe theological meanings to the Slavonic letters.

Characteristically the first letter of the Slavonic alphabet *azb* (Ѧ) appears as a cross which is obviously a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ, “The Word”, who, according to St John the Theologian, was “in the beginning” (Jn 1, 1) and is “the beginning” (Jn VIII, 25; Rv 1, 8). Placing the cross at the beginning of his alphabet St Cyril began it with a symbol of Christ²⁴.

The identification of Christ with the Cross is clearly manifested in the Slavic languages in which the word for cross (крѣтъ) goes back to the name of Christ (a borrowing from Old High German *krist*, *christ* “Christ”)²⁵.

²² See: Granstrem, 1955.

²³ “...Быста проповѣдника и новага ап[о]с[то]ла, не на тоужемь основании свое дѣло полагаюца, нъ из нова писмена въображыша, и съвършиста въ языкъ новъ” (see: “Слово похвально на памат[ь] с[в]а[т]ыма и прѣславныма оучителема словѣньскоу языкоу сътворышомоу [sic!] писмены ѿмоу, прѣложышема новыи и ветъхыи законъ въ языкъ ихъ, блаженомоу Курилоу и архиеп[и]с[ко]поу Паноньскоу и [sic!] Медодиню”, in: Kniazevskaja *et al.* 1971: 203, fol. 112r).

²⁴ See: Granstrem 1955: 307.

²⁵ In the Freising folia (written in Latin letters in Old Slovenian between 972 and 1039, most likely before 1000) – the oldest Slavic manuscript which reflects the tradition preceding the cre-

Georg Tschernochvostoff noted that the letters *izē* and *slovo* ѠѠ (= ιϵ) symbolically forming the name of Jesus Christ are present in the first word of the Gospel of St John (Іϵ КОНИ БѢ СЛОВО... “In the beginning was the Word...”, Jn I, 1) which appears in the Paschal liturgy and which was the first word translated by St Cyril the Philosopher (in the Aprakos Gospel, the first book translated by him)²⁶. As a matter of fact this word stands at the beginning of the Slavonic literary tradition²⁷.

Both the Slavonic Gospel and the Slavonic alphabet begin with a symbolic designation of Christ: the Slavonic Gospel begins with the name of Christ, the Slavonic alphabet begins with the sign of the Cross. A symbol of Christ appears to be at the beginning of both the paradigmatics and the syntagmatics of the Slavonic literature: indeed, it opens both the system of writing and the first text utilizing this system – the text of the Paschal cycle.

9. But how are we to explain the name *azъ* for the first letter of the Slavonic alphabet (*azъ* meaning “I”, “myself” in Slavonic)? Why was the pronoun of the first person singular chosen as a name for this letter?

We could suppose that choosing the name of the first letter of the Slavonic alphabet St Cyril proceeded from the words Ἐγὼ εἶμι (Slavonic АЗЪ ЕСМЬ, i.e. “I am”), which appears in the Bible as a self-definition of God (Jn VI, 20, VIII, 24, 28, 58, XIII, 19, XVIII, 5, 6; Mk VI, 50, XIII, 6, XIV, 62; Lk XXI, 8, XXII, 70-71; Mt XIV, 27; Dt XXXII, 39; Is XLI, 4, XLIII, 10, 25, XLV, 18, 19, XLVI, 4, XLVIII, 12, LI, 12, LII, 6)²⁸. In its turn the Greek phrase (Ἐγὼ εἶμι) goes back to the Hebrew *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* from the book of Exodus (Ex III, 14), i.e. the name of God in the Hebrew Bible which God reveals to Moses on Mount Sinai: it reveals the definition of Christ as God, His identity with *Yahweh*.

ation of the Slavonic alphabet by St Cyril – Christ is called *Cruz* (derived obviously from Latin *crux* “Cross”) (Isačenko 1943: 77; II, 89). Thus in some Slavic languages the name for the Cross goes back to the name of Christ, while in Old Slovenian, vice versa, the name of Christ goes back to the word meaning “Cross”.

It was German missionaries who brought the word *кръстъ* to Slavs (with the original meaning of Christ) and in that context this word acquired the meaning of Cross. When St Cyril the Philosopher and St Methodius translated the Bible and the liturgical texts into Old Church Slavonic in the 9th century they used this word with the meaning of the Cross.

²⁶ See: Tschernochvostoff 1995: 147; Kiparskij 1958: 316; Kiparskij 1964: 400; Kiparskij 1968: 93-94. The Life of St Cyril describes (Ch. XIV) how the Philosopher having created the Slavonic alphabet began writing in Slavonic: “And immediately Constantine composed letters and began to write the language of the Gospel, that is: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [Jn, I, 1] and so forth” (Lavrov 1930: 27; Kantor 1983: 67; Florja 1981: 87).

²⁷ The same word appears in the beginning of the Slavonic Pentateuch, i.e. the Old Testament Bible: Іс прѣва сътвори Богъ небо и земляѣ “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1,1). See: Dobrev 1980: 43.

²⁸ See: Fossum 1995: 127-129; Fossum 1985: 124-128; Wetter 1915; Zickendraht 1922; Manson, 1947; Zimmermann 1960a; Zimmermann 1960b; Williams 2000; Floss 1991.

The original Hebrew phrase of the response of God looks as a tautology. It means literally “I am who I am” (and so it is translated in the Vulgate: *Ego sum qui sum*) or “I am what I am” (and so it is translated in the Slavonic Ostrog Bible of 1581: *АҌЪ ЕСМЪ ЕЖЕ ЕСМЪ*)²⁹; as a matter of fact, God says: “I am I” affirming His identity with Himself. Characteristically, in the next phrase of the Biblical text “I am” appears as a proper name: “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, – God says to Moses, – I AM (*’ehyeh*) hath sent me unto you” (Ex III, 14).

At the same time the Hebrew phrase may equally mean “I am the one who exists” and such is the translation in the Septuagint: *Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν*³⁰; this is reflected in the traditional text of the Slavonic Bible *АҌЪ ЕСМЪ СЫИ* (or, sometimes, *АҌЪ ЕСМЪ СОУЦИИ*). In the next phrase, consequently, we have then: *Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς*; or in the Slavonic Bible: *СЫИ ПОСЛА* (or: *ПОУСТИ*) *МА КЪ ВАМЪ*³¹. Thus the phrase in question may express both the absolute existence of God and the idea of God as absolute subject³².

The translation of the passage under discussion by St Cyril has not reached us and, most probably, it was not translated at all in the initial version of the Slavonic Bible³³.

²⁹ Bible, 1581, fol. 26. The text of Ex III, 14 in the Ostrog Bible does not correspond to the text of the Septuagint and it is not excluded that the editors of the Ostrog Bible translated this verse from Hebrew (see: Arranz 1991: 500; Arranz 1993: 14). It should be stressed that they could not depart from the text of the Vulgate, because we have in the Ostrog Bible the relative pronoun *ježe* “what” (in the case of translation from the Vulgate one should expect the pronoun *iže* “who”). The basic source of the Ostrog Bible was the Gennadian Bible of 1499 (State Historical Museum in Moscow, Synodal collection MS 915) the text of which was received by the Ostrog editors from Moscow (see: Alekseev 1999: 204). However in the Gennadian Bible we have a different reading (“*АҌЪ ЕСМЪ СЫИ*”, fol. 34v) which corresponds to the text of the Septuagint. In this context a deviation from the text of the Gennadian Bible seems very significant: it means that this text did not satisfy the editors of the Ostrog Bible. There is some evidence that they could consult the Hebrew Bible (see: Lebedev 1890: 353; cf.: Evseev 1916: 86, note 2; Alekseev 1990: 70-71; Thomson 1998: 654, 680-681, cf. 652); probably they used the Antwerp polyglotta of 1569-1572 (see: Alekseev 1990: 67; Nemirovskij 1985: 450).

Characteristically in Russian manuscript Bibles of the 15th-17th centuries the phrase in question (*’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*) could be written in Hebrew (in Cyrillic transcription or transliteration). See: Uspenskij 2012.

³⁰ In order to express this idea, the translators of the Septuagint had to introduce a form of present participle, changing the syntactic structure of the phrase. As a result there is no tautology in the Greek translation, which is so evident in the Hebrew original.

³¹ See examples from a large body of manuscripts: Uspenskij 2012: 94-95.

³² The possibility of different interpretations of the phrase *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*, is conditioned by the ambiguity of the second verbal form *’ehyeh*. It can be understood as a repetition of the same form which stands in the beginning of the phrase; then the second *’ehyeh* has the same meaning of copula which has the first one. In this case the phrase means “I am what I am”. Otherwise the second *’ehyeh* could be understood as a verb with an autonomous meaning of being, existence; then the phrase means “I am the one who exists”.

³³ St Cyril translated only those texts of the Old Testament which are read in the Church, i.e. Prophetologium and Psalter. The passage under discussion (Ex III, 14) is not included in the

However St Cyril presumably was acquainted not only with the Greek and Latin translations of the Bible but also with the original Hebrew text. Realizing the possibility of different interpretations of the phrase in question (*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*) he could understand it as a definition of God as absolute subject. This may have been reflected in the name of the first letter of the Slavonic alphabet.

Thus the first letter of the Slavonic alphabet appears as a cross (⌘) and means “I”, the pronoun of the first person. Both the form and the name of this letter refer to Christ.

10. The Slavonic *azb* is correlated with the Greek *alpha*: both are names of first letters, *azb* being the first letter of the Slavonic alphabet, *alpha* being the first letter of the Greek alphabet. At the same time *alpha* is related to Christ, because He says “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end”. Both *azb* and *alpha* represent the beginning and at the same time both letters turn out to be associated with Christ..

In this way we can understand what Khrabr, a learned Bulgarian monk, says about *azb* and *alpha* in his treatise “On Letters”, a eulogy of the Slavonic alphabet of the 10th century. According to Khrabr, St Cyril creating the alphabet for Slavs “began with *azb* like Greeks begin with *alpha*: so, – Khrabr concludes, – both [alphabets] begin with *azb*”³⁴. As we see, *azb* and *alpha* are identified by Khrabr.

Khrabr says also: “The Jews have as their first letter *aleph* which means “study!”. The child who is first brought to school is told: *study!*; this is *aleph*³⁵. The Greeks in imitation say *alpha* [...]; for they say to a child in school: *seek!*, as *alpha* means “seek” in Greek. In a like manner Cyril made the first letter [of the Slavonic alphabet] *azb*”³⁶. The beginning of this passage goes back to a scholium to the grammar of Dionysius Thrax where there is a tale about the creation of the Greek alphabet³⁷. So the comparison of the names *alpha* and *aleph* has a Greek source; the original part of this discourse is the comparison of the Slavonic *azb* with the names *alpha* and *aleph*.

Thus the identification (or, rather, juxtaposition) of *alpha* and *aleph* is justified semantically since the names of the letters are acknowledged to have a similar meaning. The identification of *azb* and *alpha* can be deduced from the sentence “I am Alpha and Ome-

liturgical lessons and evidently was not translated. Later on Methodius translated the canonical books of the whole Old Testament but his translation only partly survived. At the beginning of the tenth century a new translation of the Octateuch was made in Bulgaria by the order of Tsar Symeon. The survived Slavonic manuscripts go back to this translation (see: Alekseev 1988: 134-135; Pičhadze 1996: 10). The translation of Ex III, 14 in these manuscripts correspond to the Greek text of the Septuagint; this doesn't tell us how St Cyril could understand the phrase in question.

³⁴ Jagić 1896: 9, 12; Lavrov 1930:162; Kuev 1967: 189 *et al.*; Florja 1981: 102.

³⁵ In a manuscript Russian Bible of the fifteenth century (Russian State Library in Moscow, Rumiantsev collection MS 31) the names of the Hebrew letters in the Lamentations of Jeremiah are accompanied by translations. *Aleph* (Lam. I, 1) is translated as “teaching” (Vostokov 1842: 56).

³⁶ Jagić 1896: 9-10, 12-13; Lavrov 1930: 162; Kuev 1967: 189 *et al.*; Florja 1981: 103.

³⁷ See: Dostál 1963: 242, 244; Ziffer 1995: 564-567; Florja 1981: 178. So also Eusebius of Caesarea (see: Dornseiff 1925: 27-28).

ga...” (in Slavonic: *Azъ jesmь Alpha i Omega...*). Finally the correlation between *azъ* and *aleph* can be based on their form: both *azъ* (⚡) and *aleph* (⌘) have a form of a cross. All the three letters are associated with the idea of beginning, and this is especially obvious in the case of the Slavonic *azъ* which appears as a sign of the Cross, i.e. a symbol of Christ who is “the beginning” (Jn VIII, 25; Rv I, 8).

In the Christian thought the Cross is generally connected with the idea of beginning. It is usual to make the sign of the Cross when starting something³⁸. It was habitual, in particular, to make the sign of the Cross before learning the alphabet and, ideographically, this corresponds to the symbol of the Cross at the beginning of the Slavonic alphabet. A Slavic child in the Middle Ages beginning his studies was obliged to draw the Holy Cross before writing the letters of the alphabet, saying: “Holy Cross, help me!”. Analogously before learning to read, it was considered necessary to write down the prayers “Lord Jesus Christ, our God, take pity on us” and “By the prayers of our Holy Fathers” – writing these prayers in the form of a cross³⁹.

In a way this corresponds to the Byzantine and Irish custom of consuming letters before learning the alphabet. The letters of the alphabet were written with ink on a paten, then washed out with wine and the child beginning his studies drank the wine⁴⁰. An analogy with the Holy Communion seems obvious: in a way it was a sort of communion with the Alphabet which was analogous to communion with Christ. As Herbert Thurston puts it, “the alphabet is to be regarded as symbolic of Christ because it is the expansion of the A and Ω of the Apocalypse [...] In apparently all Western languages the alphabet was closely associated with the Cross and shared in the sacred character attributed to the latter”⁴¹. Characteristically in the rite of consecrating a church the bishop wrote down the letters of the alphabet on the floor or on a wall of the church in the form of cross⁴². And the names of the letters of the Slavonic alphabet probably form a text of the confession of faith⁴³.

³⁸ It was also usual to put a cross at the beginning of a document, see: Granstrem 1955: 307; Lavrov 1915: 26.

³⁹ See: Jagić 1896: 143-149; Jacimirskij 1917: 49-55. About the special prayer to the Cross before the study of grammar, see: Čistovič 1868: 51; concerning the phrase “Holy Cross, help me!” see: Samilov 1970: 101.

⁴⁰ See: Pradel 1907: 381; Averincev 1977: 205 (about the Byzantine custom); Thurston 1910: 625 (about the Irish custom). Cf. the motif of eating a book, which symbolizes the acquisition of knowledge: Ezk II, 8-III, 5; see in this connection: Loparev 1910: 30; Jacimirskij 1917: 54; Averincev 1977: 204-205. Characteristically in many countries it is usual to make cakes in the form of a letter (see: Dornseiff 1925: 17).

⁴¹ Thurston 1910: 629, cf. 630.

⁴² See: Thurston 1910; Dornseiff 1925: 74-75. Sometimes three alphabets were written: Hebrew, Greek and Latin (the three languages on the titulus of Christ’s cross).

About an apotropaic function of alphabet see: Jacimirskij 1917: 54.

⁴³ See: Eriksson 1970.

11. The words “I am Alpha and Omega” emphasize the sacred nature of the alphabet and it is no wonder that they acquire a special significance for St Cyril: God as Logos is defined in terms of letters – as the entire body of letters.

It remains to be said that these words were presumably pronounced by Christ in Aramaic or Hebrew. Christ most probably spoke Aramaic (or “Syriac” as it was called) – or, at least, such was the common opinion in the Middle Ages – and hence the Aramaic language was considered sacred⁴⁴.

Then in the original phrase – whether Aramaic or Hebrew – there stood *aleph* and *tav*, instead of *alpha* and *omega*, i.e. the names of the first and the last letters of the Hebraic (and, correspondingly, the Aramaic) alphabet⁴⁵.

As has been mentioned before, the figure of the letter *aleph* (א) can be seen as a representation of the Cross. But also *tav* could be associated with the Cross. In Old Hebrew and Phoenician script this letter was presented as a cross, and this is reflected in the figure of the Greek letter *tau*: τ.

St Cyril certainly was aware that the Greek alphabet goes back to the Phoenician and he could reconstruct the original form of the Hebraic *tav* basing it on the form of the Greek *tau* – in any case he could associate these letters⁴⁶.

Christian exegesis connects the words of the Book of Revelation about people with “the seal of the living God” on their foreheads with the words of Ezekiel about righteous men with *tav* (mark, sign) on their foreheads (Ezk IX, 4, 6). Originally *tav* meant a sign (cf. also: Gn I, 15) but it was identified with the sign of the Cross⁴⁷.

Thus both the Hebraic letter *tav* and the Greek *tau* appear as symbols of the Cross⁴⁸.

In this context the words “I am Alpha and Omega” may be read as “I am (the) Cross”. This may be an additional basis for the definition of both the form and the name of the first letter of the Slavonic alphabet, as suggested above.

12. It may be seen that the Slavonic alphabet invented by St Cyril the Philosopher was intended as an ideographical manifestation of sacred truth.

The monk Khrabr in his treatise “On Letters”, quoted above, argues that the Church Slavonic language is more holy than the Greek. Indeed, he says, Church Slavonic was creat-

⁴⁴ See: Uspenskij 1996, p. 62. Cf.: Borst 1957-1963, I: 193, 254, 263-265, 276, 281-282, 287-290, 304, 332, 337, 346; II/1: 449; III/1: 1079, 1129, 1142, 1181, 1185, 1215, 1245; III/2: 1497, 1751.

⁴⁵ See: Dobrev 1980: 42; Ivanova 2004: 87.

⁴⁶ Also Khrabr in the cited treatise “On letters” says that the Greek letters derived from the Phoenician (Jagić 1896: 11, 14; Lavrov 1930: 163; Kuev 1967: 190 *et al.*; Florja 1981: 104) – the source being the scholium to the grammar of Dionysius Thrax mentioned above (see: Dostál 1963: 243; Ziffer 1995: 564-567).

⁴⁷ There is a tradition of tracing the cross on one’s forehead: Rondet 1954.

⁴⁸ See: Daniélou 1961: 143-152; Haman 2000. Concerning the association of the Greek “tau” with the Cross see especially: Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, III, 22; cf. also: Rahner 1953; Dölger, 1958-1967, II: 15-22; Vogel 1963: 39-40.

ed by a holy man – St Cyril the Philosopher – whereas Greek was created by pagan philosophers⁴⁹. This thesis is usually understood in the context of the competition between Greek and Church Slavonic. It may however be taken literally: the Church Slavonic language was created by a saint and the system of writing created by him expresses Christian teaching. In this way a Christian philosopher was opposed to pagan philosophers.

When the Byzantine Emperor (Michael III) declared his intention to send two brothers – Cyril (he bore the secular name Constantine at the time) and Methodius – to Moravia as missionaries, Constantine-Cyril stressed that without an alphabet the effort would be in vain. And he added that if one invents an alphabet it is very easy to be accused of heresy (Life of St Cyril, Ch. XIV)⁵⁰. The reason is clear: because according to St Cyril an alphabet for Holy Writ was intended to manifest Christian teaching.

Abbreviations

Bible 1581 (Ostrog Bible):	<i>Biblija sirěč' knigy vetxago i novago zavěta, po jazyku slovensku, Ostrih 1581.</i>
Codex Assemanius:	See: Kurz 1929-1955.
Codex Clozianus:	See: Dostál 1959.
Codex Marianus:	See: Jagić 1883.
Codex Suprasliensis:	See: Severjanov 1904.
Codex Zographensis:	See: Jagić 1879.
Euchologium Sinaiticum:	See: Nachtigal 1941-1942.
Freising folia:	See: Isačenko 1943.
Kievan Missal:	See: Nimčuk 1983.
Liber Sabbae:	See: Ščepkin 1903.
Ochrid Folia:	See: Iljinskij 1915.
Ochrid Gospel:	See: Grunskij 1906.
Psalterium Sinaiticum:	See: Severjanov 1922; Altbauer 1971.

⁴⁹ Jagić 1896: 11; Lavrov 1930: 164; Kuev 1967: 190 *et al.*; Florja 1981: 104.

⁵⁰ Lavrov 1930: 27; Kantor 1983: 67; Florja 1981: 87.

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Abstract

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Glagolitic Script as a Manifestation of Sacred Knowledge

It is argued that the Glagolitic alphabet was constructed as an ideographic illustration of sacred knowledge. The author attempts to demonstrate some basic ideas encoded in the forms of the letters. At the same time the alphabet seems to reveal the acquaintance of the inventor of the Glagolitic alphabet – St Cyril the Philosopher – with Semitic languages.

Keywords

Glagolitic Letters; Sacred Symbolism; *Nomina Sacra*.

