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SAINT METHODIUS: LIFE AND CANONIZATION

Nowadays, we have access to a lot of research on the lives and deeds of St. Cyril and St. Methodius. Nevertheless, we cannot claim to know either all or even almost all facts around their lives and work. Besides, there is significant discrepancy between our knowledge about St. Cyril and the things we know about St. Methodius, and this imbalance is not accidental. The main sources for the lives and work of the holy brothers – or at least those among them that we may consider credible enough – are dated from their contemporary or near-contemporary times and can be grouped into two categories:

1. The so-called ‘documents’ are written in Latin and belong to the epistolary genre. Among these are papal letters and the letter of Anastasius the Librarian to Gauderich, the Bishop of Velletri.

2. Vitae, panegyrics and services required to celebrate the religious feasts of the saints, are written in Old Church Slavonic (Old Bulgarian). This second group, unlike the first one, could have emerged only after the death and the subsequent canonization of the saint. Moreover, these are religious literary works that must follow the standard requirements of the respective genres, and the information that they contain, should be analyzed in the light of these preconditions.

We must add here that the close association of Constantine Cyril with the cult of St. Clement, the Pope of Rome, is related to the appearance of an important literary work written in Latin, known as the Italian Legend, which is the last part of the vita of St. Clement and contains a narrative about finding St. Clement’s relics by St. Cyril in Kherson and their transfer to Rome. The life story, however, is built upon a much extensive plot, and St. Cyril the Philosopher is a main protagonist. Taking into account the content, some scholars consider the Italian Legend the Latin vitae of St. Cyril. However, this assumption could be applied to its content only and not to the form or functions of the text which do not correspond to the characteristics of the vita as religious literary genre. Here, we have to highlight that Methodius also appears in the Italian Legend, with a mention of his ordination as a bishop.

The papal letters feature several pivotal moments, mostly related to Methodius' bishopric (the symbol of faith, liturgical language, his trial and restoration), and shed some light on specific moments without painting the whole picture which can be usually found in the vitae. The scope and accuracy of the information that is found in the vitae, undoubtedly, depends on the period of canonization of each of the brothers – the conditions differ a lot between the two.

First, we have to emphasize that in the first centuries of its existence, the Christian church had no specific process to declare someone a saint, and the so-called canonization was rather a spontaneous unregulated act. This situation continued until the end of the 10th century for the Roman Catholic Church (the first canonization (by a Pope) that followed a specific procedure was the one of St. Ulrich Habsburg in 993). For the Orthodox Church, this period extended until the second half of the 14th century when St. Gregory Palamas became the first saint, whose sainthood was specially argued and subsequently accepted by a Church Council.

With this in mind, we cannot expect any official act of proclamation either for Cyril or for Methodius, and the lack of a clear, regulated and universal procedure considerably complicated the situation. Therefore, the inclusion of their names in the synaxarion was of utmost importance. Their names are found in the Codex Assemanianus, a gospel of the 10th century (Cyril on the 14th of February, f. 142b; Methodius, on the 6th of April, f. 142b). The texts used for the proclamation and establishment of their cult were of overriding significance. The vita is the first testimonial text and the first step towards canonization. Then, for establishing the cult, a panegyric and a service are needed. The existence of these texts is a reliable proof for a canonization in effect.

Considering all testimonials available, Constantine Cyril had immediately shined as a saint. We know where he was buried, to the right of the altar as seen by the narthex, in the Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome. According to the Italian Legend, miracles started immediately happening at his tomb, and according to the letter of Anastasius the Librarian, dated before 882, his vita was already in the process of composing – most probably the *Extensive Vita of Cyril*, as it is known nowadays.

This was not the Methodius' lot, though. We do not know where he was buried – the place is not mentioned anywhere. His death was followed not by miracles but by a cruel persecution against his heritage and his disciples, with the youngest ones being sold at the slave market in Venice. The elders were first thrown into prison and then eventually expelled from the country. As claimed by Krassimir Stantchev and Anna Vlaevska-Stancheva¹, for the Roman Catholic Church Methodius not

¹ К. СТАНЧЕВ, А. ВЛАЕВСКА-СТАНЧЕВА, *От еретик до светец: еволюция на методиевия образ в западната традиция*, [in:] *Проблеми на Кирило-Методиевото дело и на Българската култура през IX–X век*, ed. Б. ВЕЛЧЕВА, Е. ДОГРАМАДЖИЕВА, С. НИКОЛОВА, Г. ПОПОВ, С. БЪРЛИЕВА, София 2007 [= КМс, 17], p. 691–692.



Translation of relics of St. Clement, part of the 11th-century fresco from the Basilica of San Clemente, Rome

only had not immediately shined as a saint, but after his death, at the end of 885, the new Pope, Stephen V, accused him of inconsistency of faith, violation of oaths and tolerance to prejudice, and forbade the Slavic language liturgy under threat of excommunication. About 40 years later, Pope John X instructed the bishop of Split, Dalmatia, not to succumb to the doctrines of Methodius which were not found in the books by the holy fathers, and forbade the appointment of Slavic priests. In 1061, Pope Alexander II confirmed the edicts of the Church Council of Split in 1059/1060 in which Methodius, who had already been called heretic, was mentioned as the inventor of the Slavic letters and founder of a false teaching against the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.

Considering all this, it is not surprising to find an 11th century fresco in the narthex of the Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome, which depicts the transfer of the relics of St. Clement St. Cyril and St. Methodius are depicted as two Eastern monks on both sides of the Pope, who is identified in the inscription as Nicholas I (in fact this is Adrian II). However, only one of the two has a nimbus over his head, which confirms that in the 11th century in Rome Methodius was not considered a saint.

In the West, the joint cult of the two brothers was established much later, in 1345, with the edict of Charles IV, the Emperor of the Sacred Roman Empire, which established the famous Benedictine Emmaus Monastery in Prague. The edict is based on a mixture of the Dalmatian Legend of St. Jerome as the creator of the Glagolitic alphabet, and the Czech Legend of Cyril and Methodius that is reflected in the so-called Christian Legend. In 1880, Pope Leo XIII promulgated them as Apostles of Christianity; 100 years later, Pope John Paul II proclaimed them co-patrons of Europe along with St. Benedict. In other words, for the 11th century Roman Catholic Church, Methodius was not a saint, but rather a heretic and he would not be introduced into the list of saints until the 14th century.

On the other hand, we have the *Extensive Vita of St. Methodius*, a panegyric dedicated to the two brothers (for the 6th of April, the feast day of St. Methodius), and a service dedicated to Methodius, all written in Old Church Slavonic (Old Bulgarian). These are early texts, no doubt composed before 12th century, as their oldest copies are dated in the 12th century. Hence, we have to determine their occurrence in time and space.

In the first texts written in Slavic in Bulgaria we can observe the change in the treatment of Methodius as opposed to that of Cyril.

In the Codex Assemanianus, on f. 142b, Cyril is referred to as 'saint' (сѣаго оца нѣ кѣрила философа) while Methodius is 'Reverend Bishop of Great Moravia and brother of the Reverend Cyril the Philosopher' (и пѣ оуспенѣ рѣнаѣ оца нѣго мѣфодіа. архпа вѣшнаго моравѣи. бѣа рѣго кѣрила философа).

In the treatise *O pismenex* (*On the Letters*) dated ca. 893, there is the following statement:

аще ли въпросиши словѣньскѣа боукара глагола кѣто вѣи писмена сътвориа естъ ли кѣнигы прѣложиа. то вѣси вѣдаа и отъвѣщавае рѣжѣ. свѣтъи константиѣ философѣ нарицаеи кѣриа. тѣ наи писмена сътвори и кѣнигы прѣложи. и мѣфодии братѣ его. сѣтъ бо еи живи иже сѣтъ видѣли ихѣ.

If you ask the Slavic students, saying, "Who has created the letters and translated the books for you?", (they) all know and answer, "Saint Constantine the Philosopher, called Cyril, and his brother Methodius; those who have seen them, are still alive".

The same attitude is attested in the Prologue to the translation of the *Fountain of Knowledge* of John of Damascus made by John the Exarch – the text is known as *Nebesa* (“Heaven”) in the Slavic literary tradition. Donka Petkanova² was the first to observe this difference. John the Exarch confessed in the *Prologue* that he had made the translation on the explicit insistence of the monk Dox, the brother of Prince Boris, most likely in the 890s.

Because the holy man of God, Constantine the Philosopher – I tell you – worked hard to create the letters for the Slavonic books and to translate a selection from the Gospel and the Apostle until he could, while living in the present dark world; he translated that much and entered the endlessness and light and accepted the reward for his deeds, being with them, and left the great Archbishop of God, Methodius, his brother, in this world. He translated all the rest 60 books from the Hellenic language, i.e., Greek, into Slavonic... those 60 books Methodius had already translated, as I heard.

The structure of the service for the feast day of Methodius, which was probably a collective work by his disciples, includes two canons with the following acrostics:

1. ДОБРО МЕТОДИЕ ТЪ ПОИЖ КОНСТАНТИНЪ (*Good, Methodius, I sing to you, Constantine*). (This reading of the acrostic which is widely accepted today, was offered by D. Kostić³).
2. ІАЗЪ (І АЗЪ) К(Л)ІАН (Х)В(А)ЛНАМИ ПІСНАМИ П(О)ИЖ АР(Х)ІЕР(Е)ІА МЕРТО(Д)ІІА ([And] I, Clement, with glorious songs, chants for the archpriest Methodius).

³ D. Kostić, *Бугарски епископ Константин – писац службе Методију*, Bsl 7, 1937/1938, p. 189–211.

The first acrostic has been known since 1936 when it was first discovered by J. Pavić⁴, who offered a slightly different reading. The canon is found in a service, found in two Bulgarian parchment manuscripts from the end of the 13th century that are associated with the Bulgarian Monastery of Zograph on Mount Athos. These are two menaia: one is known as the Menaion of Dobrian (also Zograph Menaion), kept nowadays at the library of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Petersburg (BRAN, f. 31, the main collection); the other is the so-called Menaion of Dragan, with an unknown location as of today.

The second acrostic was deciphered in 2001 by Georgi Popov after Moshkova and Turilov had discovered the text of the canon and other stichera of the service in the manuscript no. 156 of the Chludov Collection at the State Historical Museum in Moscow (Chludov 156), and published them in 1998. The two authors had found the acrostics and managed to decipher more or less the second part but without the name of the author. However, they assumed that the alleged author might have been St. Clement of Ochrid on the basis of the stylistic similarities between this text and some of his known works. This is the only manuscript that contains the text – it is a menaion for the period of March – August, dated ca. the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century, Serbian redaction⁵.

The two canons show the devotion to the cult of Methodius by Bishop Constantine of Preslav, who was among Methodius' disciples, and Bishop Clement of Ochrid, who was a disciple of the two brothers. They are the first two bishops of the Slavic language in Bulgaria that had been supported by the Bulgarian kingdom in establishing the cult in Slavic language. Moreover, as the scholars have already proved in the last decades, they are the two most famous authors working in Bulgaria at the end of the 9th century who had also collaborated on various literary projects of great scope and significance. In his convincing study, G. Popov proved that the two canons might have been part of a single service, jointly co-authored by the brothers' disciples, with the other stichera remaining anonymous according to the contemporary literary tradition. The affiliation of the two canons to a single service is also based on the voice harmony: the second voice in the canon of Constantine and the sixth voice in the canon of Clement. In the manuscripts, these canons are accompanied by a group of shared stichera, which is a sign that a large original shared text might have existed⁶.

It is interesting that the title of the service in the Menaion of Dobrian states: *ПАМЯТЬ ПРЕПОДОБНАЕГО МЕТОДИЕ ОУЧИТЕЛѢ СЛАВѢНСКОУ АЗЪКОУ* (In the Memory of the Reverend Methodius, Teacher of the Slavic People), while the service

⁴ J. Pavić, *Staroslovenski pjesnički kanon u čast sv. Metodija i njegov autor*, BSm 24, 1936, p. 59–86.

⁵ The text in Chludov 156 is given acc. to http://histdict.uni-sofia.bg/textcorpus/show/doc_120 [7 I 2019], and the text in Dobrian follows the publication in: Т. СЛАВОВА, И. ДОБРЕВ, *Collection of Old Bulgarian Texts*, София 1995, p. 86–90.

⁶ Г. ПОПОВ, *Службата за славянския първоучител Методий в Хлудовия миней 156*, СЛ 32, 2001, p. 14–20.

of Cyril has the title of *ПАМЯТЬ СВАТАГО К҃РИЛА ФИЛОСОФА О҆УЧИТЕЛ҃А СЛАВ҃ЬНЫСКО҆ АЗ҃ЫКО҆* (In the Memory of Saint Cyril, Teacher of the Slavic People). In the text, Cyril is most often recognized as 'saint'. However, in the addresses to Methodius in the service dedicated to him, 'saint' is not the most common address:

I. Anonymous stichera

1. Beginning

1^a sticheron in Dobrian: *СВАТИТЕЛ҃Ю МЕТОДИЕ*

1^a sticheron in Chludov 156: *МЕТОДИЕ БЛАЖЕНЕ* = 2^a sticheron in Dobrian

2^a sticheron in Chludov 156: *МЕТОДИЕ; О҆ТЪЧЕ МЕТОДИЕ* = 3^a sticheron in Dobrian

3^a sticheron in Chludov 156: *С҃ТЛЬ БО МЕТОДИЕ*

Troparion (тропáριον) in Dobrian after 3^a = sticheron (also in some menologia): *СВАТАГО ТИ О҆УЧЕНИКА О҆ТЪЦА НАШЕГО*

2. Anonymous sticheron after 3^o song of the canon of Constantine and the canon of Clement: *М҃ЖДРА О҆УЧИТЕЛ҃А МЕТОДИЕ* (Chludov 156 = Dobrian); *БЛАЖЕНЕ* (Chludov 156 = Dobrian)

3. Anonymous sticheron after 6^o song of the canon of Constantine (Dobrian)

Kontakion: *БОЖЕСТВЕНА И В҃ЪРНА МЕТОДИЕ; ПАСТЫР҃А ВЕЛИКАЕГО СЛОВ҃ЬНОМ҃А СЛО҆УЖИТЕЛ҃А Ч҃СТНА ПРОГОНИТЕЛ҃А ЕРЕСИ*

Oikos: *ПАСТЫР҃А Ч҃СТНА; МЕТОДИЕ СВАТИТЕЛ҃Ю*

4. Anonymous sticheron after 9^o song of the canon of Clement (Chludov 156):

О҆ТЪЧЕ МЕТОДИЕ;

Б҃ГО БЛ҃ЖНЕ;

Б҃ГО БЛ҃ЖНЕ О҆ТЪЧЕ МЕТОДИЕ;

С҃ТЕ О҆ТЪЧЕ МЕТОДИЕ;

БЛ҃ЖНЕ

II. Canon of Constantine of Preslav (Dobrian):

Song 1^a: *ДА СВАТИТЕЛ҃А ТИ В҃ЪСХВАМ҃А МЕТОДИЕ; О҆ТЪЧЕ; О҆УЧИТЕЛ҃Ю МЕТОДИЕ*

Song 3^a: *ПР҃ЕСЛАВЕНЕ... МЕТОДИЕ; МЕТОДИЕ СВАТЕ*

Song 5^a: *МЕТОДИЕ СВАТИТЕЛ҃Ю; О҆ТЪЧЕ... СВАТЕ*

Song 6^a: *СВАТЕ... СЛАВ҃ЬНЫИ МЕТОДИЕ; СВАТИТЕЛ҃Ю*

Song 7^a: *О ВАЮ СВАТА҃... КИРИЛЕ СВАТЕ И МЕТОДИЕ; БЛАЖЕНЕ* (2 occurrences); *СВАТЕ*

Song 8^a: *ТАКЛОМЕНИИТ҃А СВАТЕ МЕТОДИЕ ТЫ Б҃ЫСТ҃А; СЛАВЕНЕ О҆УЧИТЕЛ҃Ю ПР҃ЪМ҃ЖДРЕ; АРХИЕРЕИ ТЫ Б҃ЫСТ҃А; БЛАЖЕНЕ... РЖКАМА СИ СВАТЫИМА*

Song 9^a: *БЛАЖЕНЕ; СВАТИТЕЛ҃Ю; СВАТА҃... КИРИЛЕ ПР҃ЪПОДОБЕНЕ МЕТОДИЕ СВАТИТЕЛ҃Ю; О҆УЧИТЕЛ҃Ю СВАТЕ*

III. Canon of Clement (Chludov 156):

Song 1^a: *БЛАЖЕНЕ*

Song 3^a: *ПРИСНОБЛАЖЕНЕ С҃ТЕ*

Song 4^a: *БЛАЖЕНЕ МЕТОДИЕ* (2 occurrences); *ПР҃ЪБЛАЖЕНЕ*

Song 5^a: БЛЖЕ; прѣБЛЖЕНЕ; ТАКО ТЫ ВЪ СТЬХЪ СТИТЕЛЬ БЛА'Ь СЯ МЕТОДИЕ

Song 6^a: БЛЖНЕ

Song 7^a: СТѢ

Song 8^a: ОУЧИТЕЛЮ; БЛЖНЕ МЕТОДИЕ

Song 9^a: БЛЖЕ (2 occurrences); СТѢ (2 occurrences)

In the anonymous stichera, the words БЛАЖЕНЪ 'blessed' and ОТЬЧЕ 'father' are of the same frequency, with 5 occurrences of each, along with 3 occurrences of СВАТИТЕЛЬ 'bishop', and 2 occurrences of ПАСТЫРЬ 'shepherd' – both belonging to the same semantic group; there are 3 occurrences of ВѢРНЫ 'faithful' ('faithful servant', 'faithful shepherd') and 2 mentions of СВАТЪ 'saint' (СВАТАЕГО ТИ ОУЧЕНИКА ОТЬЦА НАШЕГО and СТѢ ОТЬЧЕ МЕТОДИЕ). In Clement's work, there is an overall dominance of БЛАЖЕНЪ 'blessed' – 11 mentions against 4 of СВАТЪ 'saint' (two in the last song), 1 occurrence of СВАТИТЕЛЬ 'bishop' and 1 occurrence of ОУЧИТЕЛЬ 'teacher'. Constantine of Preslav seems to prefer wordier addresses to Methodius, frequently using two-word phrases. In his work, we find: СВАТЪ (6 occurrences), СВАТИТЕЛЬ (5 occurrences), БЛАЖЕНЪ 'blessed' (4 occurrences), ОУЧИТЕЛЬ 'teacher' (3 occurrences), СЛАВЬНЪ 'glorious' and its derivatives (3 occurrences), and ОТЬЧЕ 'father' (2 mentions).

Regardless of the personal preferences of the authors and the changes that could have been made in the process of copying the text – both Chludov and Dobrian are dated at the end of the 13th century at the earliest – it is evident that БЛАЖЕНЪ 'blessed', with 20 occurrences in the service, is the most used term. The use of СВАТЪ 'saint' is typical for the work of Constantine of Preslav, which is also the only one to introduce, twice, the two brothers as saints, in dualis: in 7 song (о ВАЮ СВАТАѢ... КИРИЛЕ СВАТЕ И МЕТОДИЕ), and in 9 song (сВАТАѢ... КИРИЛЕ прѣПОДОбЕНЕ МЕТОДИЕ СВАТИТЕЛЮ).

In the light of the evidence discussed above, it is highly unlikely that a service dedicated to Methodius (with canon of Clement of Ochrid) had been written in Moravia, and that a two-canon service had been composed in Bulgaria for the first anniversary of his death⁷. On the other hand, the second claim of Moshkova and Turilov that the canonization of Methodius was associated with the early period of the activity of his disciples in Bulgaria cannot be disputed⁸.

It is obvious that in these first years, there was a difference, and while the cult of Methodius was in the process of establishment, Cyril had already been recognized as a saint with an established religious tradition, and his figure was used in support of the holiness of his older brother, born later for eternal life.

⁷ The first claim is defended by L. МОШКОВА and A. ТУРИЛОВ (Л. МОШКОВА, А. ТУРИЛОВ, *Моравские земле велеи гражданин (неизвестная древняя служба первоучителю Мефодию)*, Слав 4, 1998, p. 14), and the second – by G. РОРОВ (Г. ПОПОВ, *Службата...*, p. 16–17).

⁸ Л. МОШКОВА, А. ТУРИЛОВ, *Моравские замле...*, p. 15.

Thus, at the beginning of the commemoration of Methodius, when there was no panegyric dedicated to him, the gap had to be filled by a panegyric dedicated to Cyril but moved to April 6, as attested in the Codex of Sevastian, a Bulgarian manuscript from the beginning of the 14th century. Later no panegyric of St. Methodius appeared, as one could expect, but a shared panegyric which was dedicated to the two brothers to set the path to their joint cult.

Thus, the beginning of the cult of Methodius in Bulgaria can be traced back to the end of the 9th century or the beginning of the 10th century, after the treatise *On the Letters* and after the translation of the *Nebesa* by John the Exarch – and with much certainty at the time of Constantine of Preslav and Clement of Ochrid (+916).

We do not know when the *Extensive Vita of Methodius* had been written in the preparatory stage to the procedure for the canonization. Its structure differs a lot from the typical structure of the genre – it seems to be composed of two unequal parts, one is disproportionately long and introduces the theological content and the church history, and the other sums up the life of the saint but leaves much more questions than is expected for a contemporary saint. We do not know at what age he died and when he was born. We learn that he was the elder brother of Cyril, or one of his elder brothers – the *Vita* does not cover this story, but he could have been neither the first nor the third son in the family. There is also not much information about his childhood, nor about his education. The second chapter of the *Vita* mentions his appearance to correspond to what was expected based on his origin, and his intellect, as the intellectuals of the city were happy to debate with the young man.

The author of the *Vita* did not mention anything about his life as a family man before his retiring to a monastery. The information that he had been married and had children is included in 1^a song of the canon of Constantine of Preslav. We can be relatively sure that this information is true not only because the author was a disciple of Methodius and might have had known facts that had been little known to others but also because nothing in the genre implies the need of such information. We know from the *Vita* that at that time he was a governor of the Slavic region in the Byzantine Empire, before being appointed abbot of an important monastery. However, his obedience to his younger brother during the two missions they shared was repeatedly highlighted; while he was still alive, Methodius discreetly remained in the background which is rather strange for a man who was a governor, then an abbot, and later ordained as bishop by the Pope. One may assume that the author of the *Vita* had chosen this position intentionally in order to highlight his holiness by emphasizing the harmonious relationship with his widely recognized brother who was a saint.

It really seems that his active work commenced only after Cyril's premature death. His organizational and intellectual achievements in the sixteen years after Cyril's death, were so impressive that we can assume that without him the shared

goal would not have been successfully accomplished. It is almost impossible to imagine the difficulties of translating the Old Testament, without dictionaries and earlier models – and Methodius had accomplished this for 6 or 8 months. The same is true for the translation of the legal text of Nomocanon, with all the associated difficulties in terminology.

The Glagolitic alphabet is the true achievement of Cyril, and the same can be said of the first translations in a language without any literary tradition. But if it were not for Methodius' methodical strive and good deeds, none would have had a future. Methodius succeeded in creating a critical mass of translations and educated disciples. Accordingly, the written Slavic language was able to outlive all the vicissitudes following his death.

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Abstract. The article discussed the time and place of the canonization of Methodius and the difference in the treatment he received in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Bulgarian Church. The study highlights the overall distinct treatment of the two brothers while tracing the changes in the attitude to Methodius as opposed to that to Cyril in the first texts written in the Slavonic alphabet, in Bulgaria. Two canons and anonymous stichera from the service on the feast day of Methodius indicate that his disciples played a significant role for establishing the cult of Methodius. In the earlier years, there was a difference – the cult of Methodius was in the process of establishment, while Cyril had already been recognized as a saint whose cult was supported by an established tradition and whose figure had been used to support the holiness of his elder brother, later born to eternal life. The study also determines the time of the beginning of the cult of Methodius in Bulgaria at the end of

the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century, after the treatise *On the Letters* and after the translation of the *Nebesa* ("Heaven") by John the Exarch in Old Bulgarian, most likely at the time of Constantine of Preslav and Clement of Ochrid.

Keywords: St. Methodius, St. Cyril, cult of saints, canonization, Bulgaria

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