

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

For centuries the attention and interest of a wider public than that of scholars only has been held by the question of the Great Moravian Empire, — one of the most significant and interesting power formations of early medieval Europe, and the second West-Slavonic state of extensive international influence and importance — and above all by the question of the so-called Byzantine Mission of 863—885, which brought fame to the territory of the Old Moravians and to the era of the Moravian princes Rostislav and Svatopluk, while at the same time putting into the shade the actual fate of Great Moravia itself. In the year 1963, in connection with the extensive archaeological finds in Southern Moravia and the eleven-hundredth anniversary of the arrival in Moravia of the two brothers from Salonika, interest was once more focussed on these two questions, namely the fate of the Great Moravian Empire and the significance of the Byzantine Mission. Both these problems, i. e., that of Great Moravia and that of the mission of Cyril and Methodius, were the subject of several international conferences during the year 1963: that at Salzburg in June, 1963, the Fifth Congress of Slavonic Studies in Sophia in September and the international conference held in Brno and Nitra in October. The general tendency of the Salzburg conference obviously was to endeavour to emphasize the role of Salzburg as the intellectual and christianizing centre for the Central Danube region in the 9th century and thus for the region of Great Moravia too, a centre to which the Slavs dwelling in the eastern parts of Central Europe allegedly owe much, if not everything, and to whose influence is said to be due, thanks to the Scoto-Irish and Franko-Bavarian missionaries who arrived via Salzburg, the fact that these Slavs entered the European sphere, i. e. the sphere of Western civilization. According to the conception of the organizers of the Salzburg Conference, Cyril and Methodius carried out a great work of civilization. But it was held that they were able to do so only on the foundations laid by the metropolitan see of Salzburg and its Scoto-Irish and Franko-Bavarian missionaries. It was suggested that Western Christianity and its representatives, namely the Archbishopric of Salzburg and its missions, set their seal upon the Slav culture which Cyril and Methodius founded in Great Moravia.

No mention was made of the fact that Christianity and the beginnings of medieval culture had reached these parts long before 863 and from various directions, "both from Italy, from Greece and also from Germany", as the Pannonian legend expresses it characteristically, placing the German missionaries (undoubtedly with justification) third in order. No mention was made of the fact that it was precisely Salzburg and other German localities which did most to destroy the activity of Constantine and Methodius and render their efforts vain. Nor was any mention made of the fact that the centre of European civilization

in 9th-century Europe was not in Salzburg or anywhere else in the West, but in Byzantium and the provincial centres of the Byzantine Empire. The mistaken idea was entertained at this conference that Europe was then divided into Western and Eastern, a concept which in spite of the growing disputes between the East Frankish and the Byzantine Empire, between Rome and Byzantium, was still foreign to the 9th century. The incorrect theory was pronounced to the effect that the merit of Constantine and Methodius lay in the fact that they "brought to Slavism the contribution of Western civilization", that their life-work meant the beginning of Slavonic civilization, starting from Western Christianity, that through their contribution at length Western Christian Slavonic culture was enabled to develop in Central Europe and in this country.

At the Fifth International Congress of Slavonic Studies in Sophia, one of the questions on which interest centred was that of the roots of the oldest Slav writing and the place of origin of the first texts of Old Church Slavonic literature. On the one hand the Congress stressed the valuable work of the Old Bulgarians in this field, pointing out that what was brought to Moravia was already a completed work, which had originated earlier in Old Bulgaria, that Constantine and Methodius had worked among the Bulgarians even before they left for Moravia, while on the other hand the idea was put forth that the embassy sent by the Moravians and Prince Rostislav to Byzantium in 862 or 863 actually expressed no request for a Slav language and that there was no mention of language, further that the origin of the oldest Slav writing and the first Old Church Slavonic texts must be fixed long before 862—863, that the original development cannot be associated either with the needs of Moravia or with the territory of Moravia, that the writing as well as the oldest Old Church Slavonic texts originated on the territory of the Byzantine Empire, somewhere in the milieu of the Greek Slavs and specifically for them. — It was perfectly justifiable that in these circumstances the question should be raised, as to whether anyone had proved such an ancient origin of the writing and of the Old Church Slavonic texts on Byzantine territory and it could be stated, also with justification, that the practice of conversion to Christianity by means of a comprehensible language was known to and also made use of by some of the 9th century Roman missionaries rather than the Byzantine.

At the international conference on Great Moravia held at the beginning of October, 1963 in Brno and in Nitra differences of opinion appeared regarding the following: the assessment of the archaeological finds from Great Moravia for the period before and after 863, the assessment of local possibilities and foreign models in Great Moravian culture, the determination of the routes along which foreign models travelled to Moravia and of the places from which they came, the significance of Great Moravia in the assessment of these paths of development, and in relation to the question of the critical assessment of the life-work of Cyril and Methodius, the role of Old Church Slavonic and other languages (Latin, Greek) in the development of new national languages in the Middle Ages, especially of the Slav languages.

Difference of opinion was also expressed in the jubilee celebration literature published in this country and abroad in the year 1963 or shortly before.

If the literature relating to the Great Moravian and Cyrillo-Methodian period was too vast to be easily mastered as early as 1934, when Ilyinskii published his book on Cyrillo-Methodian bibliography, today it is even greater and many

contradictions are to be found in it, many differences of opinion, in spite of all the progress that has taken place in research into the Cyrillo-Methodian question in the most varied directions (archaeology, linguistics, literary research, history); we meet here with such varied combinations, speculations and inferences as we find in few other problems in the field of medieval history. A whole library could be filled by the works dealing with the question of whether Cyrillo-Methodian literature is a natural link in cultural development, going back to old historical roots or not. Again and again bold hypotheses are pronounced to the effect that the Salonika brothers were the followers of this or that predecessor. Such achievements are laid to the credit of their earlier predecessors that one begins to wonder what there could have been really new in Cyrillo-Methodian culture itself. There is practically not a single point relating to the so-called Byzantine Mission which is accepted with the general agreement of all Czechoslovak and foreign scholars.

It is against this background that the members and research workers of the Philosophical Faculty of Brno University undertook the task of contributing to our knowledge of the Great Moravian and Cyrillo-Methodian questions. It was considered necessary to do so by issuing a special publication. This decision is undoubtedly justifiable. For from its very beginning the work of Cyril and Methodius was intended above all for Moravia, for Great Moravia. Old Church Slavonic was at first intended above all for the Slavs of Great Moravia. From the political aspect the Byzantine Mission was above all interested in the requirements of the Moravian Slavs. The milieu of Great Moravia, the Great Moravian Prince Rostislav, provided the immediate impulse for the rise of the Slav age of written culture, which of course when eventually the Great Moravian milieu no longer could ensure its further development, became a great heritage in the medieval development of all the Slavs. Archaeologists, philologists, literary scholars, art historians and historians in the proper sense of the word, all collaborated on the task at issue. The need to deal with the given problem by means of different specialist sciences turned out to be more essential here than with many other scientific problems. In dealing with Cyrillo-Methodian problems, the problems of Great Moravia are approached with the conviction that without Great Moravia there would not have existed the work of Cyril and Methodius.

In many cases the authors of the individual studies differ in their conclusions. This is natural, since the problem under discussion is a very complicated one. In the works so far dealing with it, there are many gaps, obscurities, differences and inaccuracies. Old Church Slavonic has not yet been investigated as a linguistic system and so far its systematic analysis has not been begun. Equally deserving of study are textual questions, questions of the relationship of Old Slavonic texts to Byzantine and to Western Latin literature, questions relating to the beginnings of written culture on Great Moravia. — What has been preserved to us of the wealth of Old Slavonic literature are texts of a one-sided content, an accidentally preserved, though remarkable torso. So far we lack preparatory studies relating to the individual local redactions of Church Slavonic; many texts have not been made available and thus we are unable to gain an exact picture of the development of Old Church Slavonic language and literature in the various Slav lands nor can we fully recognise the structure of the local variants of the Old Slavonic tongue. — Nor will we yet find complete agreement as regards the interpretation of the large-scale archaeological finds from Great Moravia. — As regards the

solution of the actual historical problems, the initial stages of Christianity in this country are often wrongly associated with the Western Scoto-Irish missions on the one hand, on the other with Franko-Bavarian missionaries. The reference given in the biography of Methodius from the end of the 9th century, according to which before 863 missionaries came to this country "both from Italy and Greece", is sometimes either considered as unimportant or its meaning is considered secondary. At the same time matters are wrongly explained, as if in one or the other case it was merely a matter of missionaries travelling from Northern Italy or from the Adriatic-Dalmatian neighbourhood, and not from Byzantium itself and from other spheres of their influence.

Only in the solution of a few historical problems has a certain degree of unity been attained. It was actually not until the connection with the 863—1963 jubilee arose, that literature in this country began to pay adequate attention to the fact that the Moravian state in the period of Svatopluk, and thanks to the ability of Methodius, found itself in a special relationship to the Roman Curia, with which there commenced — through the contribution of Svatopluk and Methodius — a new phase in the fight of the Moravians for recognition and for the securing of the independence of the Moravian State in the international European world of that time. It is recognised that in connection with the Byzantine Mission the power politics of Great Moravia thus developed so to speak in a classical manner.*

* This volume went to press in February 1964. For this reason the authors have not taken into consideration the literature of the subject which has appeared in print since that date.