

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10179-0 - The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith

G. J. Cuming

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE MISSION OF SS. CYRIL AND METHODIOS AND ITS AFTERMATH IN CENTRAL EUROPE

by A. P. VLASTO

THE achievement of SS. Cyril and Methodios may be summarized as follows: in 863 the Byzantine emperor sent to the Prince of Moravia, at the latter's request, a mission led by the brother saints to develop the evangelization of his lands, since Frankish missionaries were becoming politically more and more *personae non gratae* in Moravia. By the time that the surviving brother Methodios died in 885, as archbishop and papal legate in Moravia, the principle of the mission had not only been maintained in the face of constant opposition but also accepted, if only partially and grudgingly, elsewhere. This principle was that any people, especially neophyte, must be allowed to praise God in its own language: only through one's native tongue can one fully understand the promises of baptism, the liturgy, and the Holy Scriptures. During those twenty years a form of the Slav language was elevated to literary status and recorded in a specially designed alphabet, and many clerks had been trained in it. From Moravia its use spread first to those lands which came under Moravian rule in the 870s and 880s—Bohemia, Pannonia, and (very probably) south Poland. On Methodios's death the Frankish clergy regained the upper hand in Moravia and dispersed the saints' colleagues and disciples, who then found support for their ministry in yet other Slav lands, namely Croatian Dalmatia and Bulgaria.

The Cyrillomethodian principle was a purely linguistic one. The *Lives* of SS. Cyril and Methodios and the earliest surviving Slav texts make it clear enough that during their lifetimes the bulk of translation was done from Greek liturgical and biblical texts; but it is also clear that the brothers had no intention of suppressing or limiting the concurrent use of Latin texts nor of forbidding

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10179-0 - The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith

G. J. Cuming

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## A. P. VLASTO

their translation into Slav, for Latin Christianity was already established in Moravia, Slovakia, and Pannonia before 863.

The evidence is not sufficient to estimate the proportion in actual use of Greek and Latin liturgies, both in Slav translation, in Moravia and its dependencies, but the work of Cyrillomethodian refugees in their new fields after 885 points to the same readiness to fall in with whatever best furthered Christian life in those parts, namely to adopt the more or less exclusive use of Slav versions of the Latin Mass in Bohemia and Dalmatia, but of the Greek liturgy in Bulgaria. Further, the original script, St Cyril's own invention, later called the Glagolitic alphabet, continued to be used in Bohemia and Dalmatia, but was soon rejected in most of Bulgaria in favour of an alphabet more closely modelled on the Greek, the so-called Cyrillic, which took shape there in the last decade of the ninth century.

It had been touch and go whether this Slav ecclesiastical language would survive its infancy. Papal support was probably decisive. The Franks were always opposed to it. It was Wiching, Bishop of Nitra under Methodios but a Latinophile Frank, who in 885 engineered the expulsion of those who adhered to the Cyrillomethodian principle. We do not know how complete this expulsion was nor how rigorous the suppression of Church Slavonic (as it is commonly called) throughout the Moravian state. Consequently it is difficult to pronounce, in default of explicit documents, on the subsequent practice of the Moravian Church, especially after about 898, when Pope John IX agreed to the restoration of the archbishopric with three subordinate sees. It is not even perfectly clear that this independent hierarchy was fully established.

Then came the irruption of the Magyars. By 906 they had destroyed the Moravian state, bringing Christian institutions to the verge of extinction. Bohemia and south Poland alone were beyond the limits of their conquest. It is, however, probable that the more mountainous parts of Moravia and Slovakia escaped the worst of their ravages, being country unattractive to steppe horsemen; here and there Christian communities may have survived the débâcle. Moravia, the cradle of the Cyrillomethodian mission, re-

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10179-0 - The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith

G. J. Cuming

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The mission of SS. Cyril and Methodios*

mains a blank for half a century. Only after the Battle of the Lechfeld in 955 were the Magyars confined to the approximate boundaries of modern Hungary; thereafter the rehabilitation of Moravia and the evangelization of the Magyars themselves could be undertaken.

Our present concern is then, in what parts of Europe outside the Balkans did Church Slavonic survive in liturgical use? Were such communities mere scattered relics soon to perish, or were some sufficiently vigorous, not merely to maintain the practice and continue to train a Slav priesthood, but even to expand and form as it were a second wave of Cyrillomethodian missionary activity? There is a considerable divergence of opinions. Two scholars who advocate a high level of vitality of Church Slavonic in Central Europe, specifically in Poland, have fairly recently made known the results of their researches in English.<sup>1</sup> It is important therefore to try to give an impartial review of the question in the light of much other work published in Slav languages which may not be accessible to the English reader.

For much of Central Europe the tenth century is an obscure period about which the annals of more fortunate lands have little to say. Because of its closer involvement in German affairs the history of Bohemia alone is rather better illuminated. Here the Latin and Slav languages existed side by side in ecclesiastical use, if not from the adoption of Christianity by the rulers of Prague towards the end of the ninth century, then certainly from the time of St Wenceslas in the early tenth. Bohemian Christianity developed first under the aegis of Bavarian Regensburg. From 973, with the erection of the see of Prague, and its inclusion in the archdiocese of Mainz, Bohemia's political and ecclesiastical life was more and more dominated by the Empire. Yet the use of Church Slavonic held its own, indeed became more vigorous towards the end of the tenth century, apparently under the

<sup>1</sup> K. Lanckorońska, *Studies on the Roman-Slavonic rite in Poland* (Rome 1961; = *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 161); H. Paszkiewicz, *The Making of the Russian Nation* (London 1963), developing his earlier *The Origin of Russia* (London 1954).

## A. P. VLASTO

encouragement of the Czech St Adalbert as bishop of Prague, and was not seriously threatened until the middle of the eleventh century. Papal and Imperial pressure then brought about its suppression within the next fifty years.

The survival of the Cyrillomethodian principle in Bohemia is a well-authenticated fact. But how far can we go with the extreme partisans of a 'Cyrillomethodian theory' in their belief that Church Slavonic found a no less favourable soil in south and east Poland, that Christianity in those parts so flourished in its Slav form as to lead to the creation of a separate Cyrillomethodian metropolis in south Poland, at least in the first quarter of the eleventh century, and to project its influence even as far east as Kiev?

The geographical aspect of this conception is in itself favourable. At its greatest extension in the 880s the Great Moravian State had embraced Bohemia, south Poland and an indefinite area further east, reaching towards the purely Russian lands. More important, one of the great trade-routes of tenth-century Europe linked the three towns of Prague, Cracow, and Kiev. Trade follows the flag; it is no less true that missionary activity follows trade.

Let us first examine Poland. The early spread of Christianity to south Poland can be accepted. For the tenth century this is confirmed by the earliest strata of building on the Wawel (or citadel) of Cracow and from archaeological evidence elsewhere in the Upper Vistula valley. We may even accept Methodian missions from the late 870s, as suggested in the *Vita Methodii*, but absolute continuity from this early date falls short of proof. But it does not follow that such missions necessarily involved the propagation of Church Slavonic: the earliest of all may rather have been entrusted to the Latinophile Wiching. Similarly, during the short-lived restoration of the Moravian Church during the first years of the tenth century, which may have envisaged and possibly even established a bishopric at Cracow, the availability of priests and teachers in Church Slavonic is problematical. Against this, though some of the refugees from Moravia may well have settled in south Poland after 885, none of the five chief disciples known by name did so: to be exact, four established themselves in Bulgaria, and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10179-0 - The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith

G. J. Cuming

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The mission of SS. Cyril and Methodios*

the fate of the fifth is unknown.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the tenth century south Poland became, owing to its central position on the important trade-route, a bone of contention between Prague and the new state of Poland in process of formation to the north, whose centres were Gniezno and Poznań. Cracow changed hands several times, to be permanently attached to Poland only from the very end of the tenth century.

The first ruler of central Poland to be baptized, Mieszko, received Christianity together with a Christian wife from Prague in 965. Nothing in the meagre records suggests that this was not an extension of the Latin Church. But clearly the use of Church Slavonic in some measure can never be excluded in the tenth century from Bohemian work and the same applies to evangelization which may have been carried out by Bohemians in the disputed lands in between—south Poland and Silesia. There is some far from reliable evidence of bishops at Cracow, possibly also at Silesian Breslau, before the year 1000, but no clear indication to what hierarchy they belonged or what liturgical language they favoured. The little that is known of the diocese of Prague does not help to resolve the uncertainty: we have nothing but a tendentious document of 1086 claiming that its jurisdiction had originally extended over south Poland and lands even further east—a specious claim obviously motivated by Prague's pretensions to aggrandizement at a moment when the Bohemian and Polish crowns were temporarily united. It is far more probable that the diocese of Prague was confined to Bohemia, with the occasional addition of Moravia and conceivably Cracow when it was in Czech hands. On any showing, then, a stable bishopric at Cracow, especially one serving as a Church Slavonic centre, is a very frail assumption. The most that we can say is that the language may have been used by some Christians in south Poland.

<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested (see Z. Dittrich, *Christianity in Great Moravia*) that this fifth disciple, Gorazd, whom Methodios intended as his successor, did in fact become Archbishop of Moravia about 899 when the Pope restored the hierarchy; and further, that he withdrew on the Magyar conquest to south Poland (Cracow?), where he was able to develop Christianity in Cyrillomethodian form. This is held to account for the appearance of Gorazd in a late Polish calendar from Wiślica. Both points are quite unsubstantiated and remain nothing more than interesting speculations.

## A. P. VLASTO

In contrast the history of Mieszko's Poland is tolerably clear. There is no good reason to doubt the so-called Donation of Poland to the Holy See in 992, a move designed to counter continuing German ambitions to dominate the country both politically and ecclesiastically. It was followed in the year 1000 by the creation of the Latin archbishopric of Gniezno, the fruit of Otto III's political wisdom and veneration for his martyred friend, St Adalbert of Prague. This was an act agreed at the highest level between the Emperor, the Pope, and Bolesław of Poland. Gniezno became both capital and primatial see. The bishopric of Poznań was left for the moment on one side not, as some have contended, because it came under Magdeburg, but because this had been hitherto the original Polish missionary bishopric and its incumbent could not be persuaded to accept what he regarded as a curtailment of his rights. Under Gniezno were placed Latin bishoprics of Cracow and Breslau for the provinces of Little Poland and Silesia respectively, which were by then at least semi-Christian; and, more hopefully, a bishopric for the still largely pagan Pomeranians at Kolberg on the Baltic, which was found within a very few years not to be viable. But Polish lands now extended a long way east till they met those of Vladimir of Kiev somewhere in Galicia. Why was no further provision made? The more cautious historian concludes that the eastern lands were still almost untouched by Christianity and did not yet rate even the consideration given to Pomerania: the dioceses of Gniezno and Cracow were left with indefinite eastern limits. Partisans of the 'Cyrillomethodian theory' would have us believe that there already existed in those parts one or more flourishing Cyrilomethodian sees, even a metropolis, which it was considered impolitic or impossible to displace. Yet the fact is nowhere mentioned. It is difficult to see any good reasons why any of the three parties to the Act of Gniezno should have objected to the use of the Slav ecclesiastical language in part of the Polish Church—Otto as the friend of the Slav Adalbert who, as Bohemian history makes clear, was certainly no narrow Latinophile; Bolesław as an empire-builder who hoped to enlarge, and did for a short time enlarge, the Polish state by the conquest of Bohemia and Moravia;

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10179-0 - The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith

G. J. Cuming

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The mission of SS. Cyril and Methodios*

and the Pope as one who is not known to have attacked the use of Church Slavonic either in Bohemia or Dalmatia. If Bolesław and his father Mieszko had tolerated this use in Poland, what need for a separate metropolis for the Slavophiles and why this improbable silence? Would not also that loyal Saxon, Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg, with his bias against Poland and indeed against all Slavs, who was loath even to accept a Latin Polish Church independent of the Empire as legitimate, have had something derogatory to say about an even more strongly Slav ecclesiastical body? Yet he is one of the few contemporary sources who tells us about Gniezno in some detail.

The alleged evidence is all of later date and highly circumstantial. On the death of Bolesław in 1025 Poland went through a period of profound internal disorder. To this can be conveniently ascribed all the deficiencies of our sources. Later Latin chroniclers tend to attribute these civil wars to the revolt of the still pagan parts of east Poland. Here we are right to be suspicious, for the so-called 'Anonymus Gallus' also speaks of 'falsi christicolae' and of those 'a fide catholica deviantes'. This could not be said of pagans, but much more credibly of Cyrillomethodians who were obstinately defending their use of Church Slavonic. We have also to reckon with his statement that at the time of Bolesław's death there were two metropolitan sees in Poland. This is apparently supported by Master Vincent about a century later, who alludes to Bolesław's 'gemina metropolis'. But the passage is not altogether clear and probably also not independent of the earlier writer.

The first point supports what there is no call to deny, that Christians using Church Slavonic were to be found in south and probably east Poland, deriving the use either direct from Moravia or from Bohemia. But few will go all the way with Paszkiewicz in seeing the rebellious Maślawa of Mazovia as the champion of a large body of staunch Cyrillomethodians resisting Latin uniformity in the eastern provinces, whose cultural level at this time can scarcely have been comparable with central Poland, so much more strongly exposed to Bohemian and German influences.

The second point is, I believe, a misconception. Order was



## A. P. VLASTO

gradually restored in Poland from the end of the 1030s, when Kazimierz, called the Restorer, imposed his rule with German military backing and summoned Western clergy in large numbers to reorganize the Church. During the troubles Gniezno had been destroyed. Cracow now became the chief town in Church and State. Kazimierz's primate, Aaron of Cologne, and his successors at Cracow, were thus the important figures until Gniezno was fully rehabilitated in 1136. The bald lists given in various Polish annals not infrequently confuse the names of Gniezno and Cracow prelates. It is a great deal more probable that Cracow has been unduly magnified in antiquity and dignity than that a Cyril-lomethodian metropolis was constituted (how and by whom remains a mystery) at a place which neither the chronicles of Poland nor of any other country record. Cracow and Gniezno were two metropolitan sees, but not in fact at the same time.

Kazimierz was undoubtedly a Latinist; in the later eleventh century we should certainly expect a policy of Latin uniformity to be intensified, as in neighbouring Bohemia. Whether certain Polish rulers after him favoured Church Slavonic again, as some assert, is a question which cannot be pursued here. It is difficult to believe that its use was ever deep-rooted in Poland. Thus, not a single Church Slavonic manuscript of Polish provenance has survived, nor any evidence of the use of the Glagolitic alphabet there. Church Slavonic books were thoroughly purged from Bohemia by the Latinists at the end of the eleventh century, yet enough have survived, chiefly in Russian copies, to prove the vitality of the Cyrillomethodian tradition in Bohemia. It is at least odd then that they should have successfully travelled from Bohemia to Russia but not at all from Poland. Again, whereas Polish religious vocabulary contains not a few Church Slavonic words, they are all loans from Bohemia, whose spoken and written language for long exerted a considerable influence on Polish; there is no sign of direct loans from Moravian, or for that matter Russian, Church Slavonic. In other words, one can adduce no linguistic facts to demonstrate that the language was widely cultivated in Polish lands. Lastly it has yet to be proved, though it is likely, that here and there Church Slavonic was cultivated in Polish monasteries,



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10179-0 - The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith

G. J. Cuming

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The mission of SS. Cyril and Methodios*

as it was for example in the Benedictine house of Sázava near Prague, and less certainly at Břevnov and elsewhere. The foundation dates of Polish monasteries are very imperfectly known, their affiliation with Cyrillomethodian houses in Bohemia or Moravia not demonstrable. For this to be an important factor, we should have to show that, as in Bohemia, they could provide the training in Church Slavonic and the *scriptoria* without which the continuance of the Cyrillomethodian tradition in either country would have been problematical.

It is not possible here to evaluate every point brought in support of this theory. All the evidence is circumstantial, and it must be remembered that for Poland virtually all documentary evidence dates from after 1100, much of it long after. The danger in trusting later medieval references to Church Slavonic in Poland, and even in Bohemia, lies in the fourteenth-century revival of Slav letters in Bohemia under the patronage of Charles IV. He summoned Benedictines competent in Church Slavonic and the Glagolitic script from the one region where the Cyrillomethodian tradition was still alive in a Catholic church—Dalmatia. Earlier texts were rewritten and embellished, documents falsified to enhance the precocious Slav culture of the time of St Wenceslas, the national patron saint. The movement spread to Poland too, whose literature was still under Bohemian influence. We must therefore be wary of accepting at its face value any and every remark favourable to the theory. Where even circumstantial evidence is lacking it is easy to say that the rabid Latinists of the twelfth century and after were bent on suppressing all record of a hated rival. For there is an outstanding example of this attitude in Cosmas of Prague, who died in 1125: he does not so much as mention the coming of Church Slavonic to Bohemia nor its continued use there down to his own lifetime.

Let us now turn to Russia—to Kiev. Throughout the ninth- to eleventh centuries Kiev was the centre of Russian culture. In reconstructing early Russian Christianity we have to rely mainly on Byzantine historians and Russian chronicles. There are in both what seem to us arbitrary omissions, which again have been held to suggest some deliberate reticence on one side or the other.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10179-0 - The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith

G. J. Cuming

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## A. P. VLASTO

The first Greek approaches to Kiev date with high probability from the time of Patriarch Photios, whose wide-ranging missionary activity in support of Byzantine diplomacy in the 860s included the sending of SS. Cyril and Methodios to Moravia and the conversion of Bulgaria. But the military control of Kiev and the whole trade-route from the Baltic to Constantinople by pagan Scandinavians nullified or greatly reduced this promising start during the rest of the ninth century. Texts of commercial treaties with Constantinople in 911 and 944, which appear reliable, show that Christianity was rapidly gaining strength in Kiev during those decades; but there is no indication of who was responsible for the work. The critical moment comes, as in Poland, in the mid-tenth century. Olga, as regent for her son Svjatoslav from 945 to 962, was a Christian princess, whose reception in Constantinople in 957 is recorded by the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus. She took her chaplain with her, but we do not know whether there was a bishop in Kiev then. Russia would have been recognized as a Christian state from that time, had it not been for the recalcitrance of her son Svjatoslav and the troubles which followed his death in 972. The final stage was reached when his son Vladimir, called to play a decisive part in Byzantine politics, was converted and imposed Christianity on his people in the years 987–9.

This seems a straightforward story. The most formative influences on the Russians came from the Greeks and the Bulgarians. Russia was drawn into various wars between Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire from the last years of the ninth century; Russia aided and abetted the Empire in crushing the Bulgarian state in the 970s. It was from tenth-century Bulgaria, then at the height of its prosperity, that Russia received the Cyrillic alphabet—a Bulgarian invention—and the Slav liturgical language. There can be little doubt that both were known in Kiev from the beginnings of organized Christian life there in the earlier tenth century. Russian trading parties resided in Constantinople for several months each summer from at latest 944, but Greek influence was probably the lesser until the time of Vladimir's conversion. Unfortunately no Byzantine sources illuminate the process.