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978-0-521-10758-7 - The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom: An Introduction to the
Medieval History of the Slavs

A. P. Vlasto

Frontmatter

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A. P. VLASTO

*Lecturer in Slavonic Studies in the
University of Cambridge*



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The saints who from generation to generation follow by the practice of God's commandments in the steps of those saints who went before . . . make as it were a golden chain, each of them being one link, each joined to the preceding in faith, works and love, so as to form in the One God a single line which cannot easily be broken.

—St Symeon the New Theologian
(κεφάλαια πρακτικὰ καὶ θεολογικά, ρ)

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PREFACE

The survey of early Slav history which I have attempted in this book covers roughly the period A.D. 500–1200. It is primarily a narrative describing how the various Slav peoples entered Christendom, moved by the currents reaching each of them from outside and guided by the great men who most furthered the transformation.

No one embarking on such a narrative could have the temerity to assert with Ranke's crude optimism that he would tell the story *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. This would be impossible even if our sources were many times more voluminous and more evenly distributed than they are. There are 'probablys' and 'possiblys' at every turn; there should be more. I have tried to avoid being tedious without being unscrupulous. The reader must always bear in mind that many passages are little better than construction laced with surmise. The few books in English which treat this period of Slav history often impart a spurious air of precision.

In a general survey of this kind discussion of every variant hypothesis at every step is ruled out in advance, but I hold it necessary to make clear to the reader what is relatively certain and what is not, and to give some account of rival theories at points of special importance. Even this required strict selection. Some parts of the story are better documented, some of wider historical interest, some of more particular interest to me personally. Therefore the degree of detail will be found to vary considerably, but not, I trust, to the detriment of the story as a whole.

In this connection I have taken the risk, at a few especially important points, of interrupting the narrative in order to present in some detail the documentary evidence from which the pages which follow have to be pieced together. These portions are printed in smaller type and may easily be omitted by those who have not the need or the leisure to enter into the minutiae of the historical sources.

Many things which we should particularly like to know are ignored in contemporary writings. This is of course the common false perspective of history. Men are not prone to dissect the mechanism of their life as long as it is working well nor the axioms of their thought as long as they are deemed secure. We cannot therefore expect the many planes of intellectual and practical life to receive equal illumination at all times and in all places. A historian must build on what is given, sometimes on

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one plane, sometimes on another. Moreover I have had to ignore certain fields with which I am not properly equipped to deal and have intruded into others, more angelically than foolishly, where it could not be avoided.

I regret the lack of figures in the text, which would in particular have made some passages involving architectural developments easier to follow. There are instead full references to the most accessible works on this subject.

NOTES

1. One uniform system of transliteration for all Slav personal and place names is neither possible nor desirable. For those Slav Languages which use the Latin alphabet (Czech, Polish) the standard modern spelling is normally used (a few exceptions in the case of Czech are specially noted). Serbian names, normally in Cyrillic, are given according to their equivalent transcription in the Croat form of the Latin alphabet, the languages themselves being no more than regional variants of 'Serbo-Croat'. The languages which use forms of the Cyrillic alphabet (see pp. 38 ff.)—Russian, Bulgarian, Old Church Slavonic (OCS)—appear in Latin transcription, with the exception of occasional Russian words and phrases. The conventions for OCS and Old Russian are generally the same as for Czech or Croat, with the addition of *ž*, *ǰ* for the two *jers* or ultra-short vowels (Cyrillic ѣ, ѥ). In Russian and Bulgarian ж, х, ц, ч, ш are rendered *zh*, *h*,* *ts*, *ch*, *sh*. Bulgarian ъ appears as *ǰ*. In Russian *y* represents the vowel ы only and *ě* is to be read *yo*; final -ий, -ій are simplified to *-y*, *-i*. Further, the palatalisation of a consonant is not always noted: Russian scholars will supply it where it would appear fussy in transcription; those who are not will lose very little. Palatalisations are also built into Polish spelling; this is not the place to explain their acoustic effect. Finally, the sign *j* invariably represents the same sound in all transcriptions, viz. the English consonantal *y* approximately, and the sign *ě* should be read as a long open *e*. The table below gives the equivalents for the more troublesome sounds.

In general I have retained Greek quotations in the Greek alphabet. Names in the text are transcribed in a form rather nearer to the actual Byzantine pronunciation than is usual: I do not see any good reason for retaining the fiction that Greek words look better in Latin dress.

* *Kh* is retained in personal names in the bibliography since this corresponds to the transcription in most catalogues.

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Czech, Serbo-Croat, Old Russian and OCS	Polish	Russian and Bulgarian
<i>c</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>ts</i>
<i>č</i>	<i>cz</i>	<i>ch</i> (± as in <i>church</i>)
<i>h</i> (Czech <i>ch</i>)	<i>ch</i>	<i>h</i>
<i>j</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>j</i> (± as in <i>yes</i>)
<i>š</i>	<i>sz</i>	<i>sh</i>
<i>ž</i> (Czech <i>ř</i> is also close to this)	<i>ż</i> (also <i>rz</i>)	<i>zh</i> (± as in <i>measure</i>)

I have taken the liberty of indicating the position of the stress on many names, on their first appearance, since English speech-habits are liable to introduce an unnecessary deformation. This is not necessary in Czech and Polish: in Czech the stress is always on the initial syllable, in Polish always on the penultimate. At the risk of offending philologists I have used the usual symbol of stress (') on Serbo-Croat names also, despite the fact that this has a more restricted significance in an exact transcription of that language (namely stress plus long rising tone); but this is irrelevant for the present purpose. No indication is necessary in a disyllable since final syllables cannot take stress.

Place names which have a generally accepted English form are so given, e.g. Cracow, Prague (not Kraków, Praha). If a place name has widely differing forms in different languages, I give both, at least on its first appearance, since maps are not always fully informative. This is particularly common in Dalmatia, e.g. Serbo-Croat *Zadar* but Italian *Zara*, etc. Further, to obviate confusion between very similar Slav forms certain names are retained in a medieval Latin shape, e.g. Boleslas for Czech Boleslav (Polish Bolesław).

2. Many of the dates given must be treated as unreliable: the evidence of the sources is often insufficient or contradictory. Only at certain important points is it appropriate—since sequence of events bears on our interpretation of them—to enter into a discussion of the chronology. Otherwise I have adopted what seems in the present state of our knowledge to be the most probable date or alluded in a note to alternative opinions.

Throughout the period covered by the narrative several concurrent systems of time-reckoning were in use, especially in the East. It must suffice to remind the reader that the 'Constantinopolitan' system reckoned from the Creation of the World in 5508 B.C., but the 'New Alexandrian' or 'Antiochene'—the more ancient and apparently the

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more common till the tenth century—from 5500 B.C.* The latter was used by several prominent Byzantine historians. The widespread practice of excerpting led to portions of the one chronology becoming embedded in the other. The reckoning from the Birth of Christ, which early became general in Western Europe, was rare or unknown in Orthodox lands.

In the Byzantine Empire the Constantinopolitan New Year started on 1 September (Russian сентябрьский год). The old Roman civil year began, as ours still does, on 1 January. But years starting in March were widely current; rarely on 1 March, usually (as in the Alexandrian system) on the Feast of the Annunciation or Lady Day, 25 March (Latin *annus ab annuntiatione*; Russian благовещенский год)—hence called the Marian Year. Moreover there were two variants of this—one beginning some six months *later* (мартовский год) and one beginning some six months *earlier* (ультрамартовский год) than the corresponding September year. In early Russian annals the Marian year appears to have been frequently coupled with the Constantinopolitan era. It will be readily seen that, other uncertainties apart, many dates will be subject to an error of ± 1 if the exact month of the event is not ascertainable from other circumstantial evidence.†

Numerical errors have crept into Slav texts as a result of transcription from the Glagolitic into the Cyrillic alphabet. The correction is usually but not invariably obvious. For further details see pp. 38–9 and A. Vaillant, *Manuel du vieux slave*, tome 1, pp. 23–4.

3. The superior arabic *figures* in the text refer to the main body of notes (quotations, references to authorities, and the like), which will be found together towards the end of the book, pp. 320–406. The superior *letters* in the text refer to notes appearing at the foot of the page, and are reserved for cross-references and certain biographical, geographical and linguistic information which, I believe, the reader will find more convenient to have directly under his eye.

Selwyn College, Cambridge
September 1969

A.P.V.

* The 'Old Alexandrian' reckoning (not needed here) was from 5493 B.C., so that the 'New' is the mean between this and the 'Constantinopolitan'.

† Consult: E. I. Kamentseva, *Русская хронология* (Moscow, 1960); N. G. Bereztkov, *Хронология русского летописания* (Moscow, 1963).