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Conference

**The Byzantine Empire, Bulgaria and
the Birth of New Writing Systems**

Speaker

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Abstract

The holy brothers St. Constantine-Cyril and St. Methodius were the founders of the first and *par excellence* Slavic alphabet, known as the Glagolitic script. For the importance of their heritage they were proclaimed by Pope John Paul II as co-patron saints of Europe along with St. Benedict. The disciples of the holy brothers found favorable welcome in the Bulgarian Empire, where they continued with education, translation and thus creation of a new sacred language of Christian Europe, along with Latin and Greek. For that purpose a new alphabet was created in Bulgaria, probably in the region of the capital Pliska, and later Preslav, named Cyrillic in honor of St. Cyril, although not created by him. The new alphabet was easier to learn and spread quickly, substituting the Glagolitic script. The Cyrillic script was created according to a tested model of the Coptic and Gothic scripts. Modified few times, the Cyrillic alphabet is used nowadays by Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Russians, as far as Central Asia.

Extended abstract

St. Constantine-Cyril and St. Methodius are considered according to the tradition as the "Apostles" of the Slavs and the founders of the "Slavic" alphabet. The story passed through centuries colored by the rising Pan-Slavism from the Baroque times up to the modern era. The inheritance of the two brothers, proclaimed by Pope John Paul II as co-patron saints of Europe along with St. Benedict, provoked also many discussions and disputes. That is why a professional historical insight is needed out of the topical problems of the day.

The holy brothers were born in the early 9th century Thessalonica, being probably by Slavic origin, but certainly Byzantines (*Rhomaioi*) in political sense and sons of a high-ranking officer. Because of their erudition and diplomatic skills they were sent on different mission, the most famous being that to Great Moravia. Even before that mission they had invented a script, known later as Glagolitic, the first and *par excellence* Slavic alphabet. The brothers were, moreover, used as political emissaries to improve the relations between Rome and Constantinople. Their disciples, however, had because of certain political circumstances to leave Moravia, finding favorable welcome in the Bulgarian Empire, ruled then by the skilled diplomat Boris I (852-889). In Bulgaria they continued the deed of their teachers by actively educating pupils and making translations from Greek and Latin into the new literary language, known as either Old Church Slavonic or Old Bulgarian. For that purpose a new alphabet was created in Bulgaria, probably in the region of the capital Pliska, and later Preslav, named Cyrillic in honor of St. Cyril, although not created by him. The new alphabet was easier to learn and use, being based on the Greek uncial letters with other signs from the Glagolitic, Coptic and Hebrew script to present sounds not existing in Greek or Latin. The Cyrillic was not exceptionally unique, being the last example of that model of creating script for Christian liturgical use, like was the case with the Coptic script or the Gothic script, created by the bishop Wulfila in the 4th century. Thus, the new literary language became the third main sacred language of Medieval Europe. Modified few times, the Cyrillic alphabet is used nowadays by Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Russians, as far as Central Asia.

The speaker

Associate Prof. PhD Dimitar Y. Dimitrov is a lecturer in Byzantine and medieval Balkan history and culture at *St. Cyril and Methodius University* in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria. The main fields of Dimitar Dimitrov's study comprise the history, philosophy and culture of Late Antiquity, including the problems of Neoplatonism and Christianity, the so called *Dark Ages* in Byzantium and the Balkans as well as the Byzantine historical and polemical literature in general. Along with many and different articles in Bulgarian, English, and Slovakian, Dimitar Dimitrov is an author of four books: *Pagans and Christians in the IV Century: Modes of Behavior* (2000, in Bulgarian); *Philosophy, Culture and Politics in Late Antiquity* (2005, in Bulgarian); *The Dark Ages of Byzantium* (2005, in Bulgarian); *Byzantium between East and West* (2014, in Bulgarian). He is also a co-author in the general volume *Byzantium and the Byzantine World* (2011, in Bulgarian). He is an author, too, of different translations from Ancient and Byzantine Greek, Latin, and English, including the epistles (both authentic and non-authentic) of Clemens of Rome, the works of Synesius of Cyrene and Symmachus as well as excerpts from the writings of Emperor Julian, Iamblichus and Themistius. He is also one of the translators from English to Bulgarian of the theological studies of Kallistos Ware of Diokleia.

Since 2015 Prof. Dimitrov is a Vice-Rector for International Relations of *St. Cyril and Methodius University* of Veliko Tarnovo.