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Creative Initiatives of Brothers Constantine and Methodius in Slavic Liturgy and Slavic Choral in Great Moravia

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Pilsen**CREATIVE INITIATIVES OF BROTHERS CONSTANTINE
AND METHIDIUS IN SLAVIC LITURGY AND SLAVIC CHORAL
IN GREAT MORAVIA**Key words: *musical culture, choral singing, Great Moravia***1. Introduction**

Little can be found about the musical culture of Great Moravia in a number of musical-historical publications of an encyclopaedic character, although this area and this period form the characteristic watershed and milestone between the cultures of the eastern and western Christians¹.

The archaeological discoveries show the extraordinary level of the metalworking industry of Great Moravia and excellent building techniques, so the state must have had an advanced immaterial culture as well, especially secular folk singing and music composed in the conditions of class and cultural differentiation of the Great-Moravian society for the needs of the ruling classes. If one turns his or her attention to the liturgies of that period, then the latest archaeological finds have confirmed that Christianity had been widespread in the territory of our country already in the 9th century, passing smoothly to the period of Great Moravia². But there was a completely new element based on the initiative of Great-Moravian Prince Rostislav, giving birth to a Slavic Christian rite and thereby also to Slavic liturgical signing as a separate branch of the Early-Medieval Christian choral.

2. Religious Influence in the Territory of Great Moravia

There were various missions, especially from Western Europe, that strove to gain a religious influence in Great Moravia. The Byzantine Mission, however, developed

¹ U. Michels, *Music Atlas. Czech translation*, Praha 2000.

² P. Kopeček, *Slavic Liturgy in Great Moravia*, <http://docplayer.cz/4617807-Slovanska-liturgie-na-velke-morave.html> [accessed on: 27/12/2015].

the greatest initiative to create an original form of liturgical text and signing, for which it was well prepared. Slavic liturgical singing did not evolve as a simple adaptation of models but as a systematic synthesis of what was suitable most for the local people and their needs. Thus, the choral of Great Moravia combined the elements of the eastern and western traditions. Let's now concentrate further on this progressive development line.

The generation of Slavic liturgy and liturgical singing is associated with the activities of the Byzantine Mission headed by brothers Constantine (who adopted the name of Cyril later) and Methodius. The Mission came to Great Moravia in 863 or 864. The rationale for the Mission's activities was especially the internal political situation and the international relations and obligations of Great Moravia. The establishment of an independent church organization by the Thessalonian brothers aimed at strengthening independence on Frankish bishoprics, which task was only then followed by the reasons of religious needs. Great Moravia was part of the area of interest of Rome where the Frankish missionaries, representatives of the western Latin ritual, enjoyed a strong position³.

3. History of Liturgical Singing in Great Moravia

The authors of Slavic liturgical singing, dignitaries of the imperial court in Constantinople, Greeks Constantine and Methodius, were prepared very well for their new task of founders of a new type of liturgy and liturgical singing. Both were educated in music, the education of Constantine being even above average. They also had practical experience in composing liturgical songs. Byzantine Church, contrary to that of Rome, was not against the introduction of new liturgical languages, so both brothers delved into their task with no restraints and with great enthusiasm and feeling for the needs of local people⁴.

One has to realize that the ninth century when the Slavic rite developed in our country was in the whole Christian Europe the period of unification and settlement of the forms of liturgical singing and of the first crystallization of the forms that later served as a core for the medieval choral in Byzantium and Western Europe. At that time, Constantine and Methodius had no fixed and uniform types of church singing available, but local variants and rudimentary forms only. One cannot see, therefore, the modest extent of the early Slavic liturgical singing to be a manifestation of backwardness but to correspond to the time and place of laying the foundations of church life and liturgical practice.

The Christian divine service in the 9th century was based on the Mass and officium, and the oldest elements of Slavic liturgical singing had to be bound to these two forms. The singing was based on the liturgical books translated by Constantine and Methodius into Slavic language. The books were accepted and consecrated by the Pope, and it is obvious from the period records that the new Slavic liturgical texts

³ *Czechoslovak National History*, collective of authors, part IX: *Art*, vol. 3: *Music*, Praha 1971.

⁴ Š. Horký, *Slavic Liturgy Impulses for the Current Liturgical Practice*, "Theological texts" 2012, no. 2, www.teologicketexty.cz/casopis/2012-2/Impulzy-slovanske-bohosluzby-pro-soucasnou-liturgickou-praxi.html [accessed on: 27/12/2015].

were really sung. This is also witnessed in two types of manuscripts – the translations of Gospels (such as *Asseman's Gospel Book*) where passages of Gospels were delivered during the Mass in the form of cantillation, i.e. melodic chants based on established interpreting phrases. More developed was the singing of psalms, also bound with established models (e.g. the Glagolitic *Sinai Psalter*).

The idea of Constantine and Methodius to introduce a Slavic rite of an eastern origin in Great Moravia is reflected in the fragments of the *Sinai Euchologium*, an eastern rite missal. The different melodic style and synthesis of Byzantine and western elements are well apparent here. Finally, however, the brothers decided for a compromise solution, finding it in the form of the Liturgy St. Peter, which is the Greek translation of the Latin Divine Liturgy of St. Gregory. This process of development of a different interpretation of liturgical songs mostly under the influence of the Great-Moravian tradition continued later in southern and eastern Slavs.

This liturgy is connected with one of the rarest antiquities of the Great-Moravian Slavic liturgy – Glagolitic *Kiev Missal*. For the history of music, the interesting thing in it is that the interpretation of some mass chants is introduced with a specific type of notation - lection signs used for cantillation. There are signs of both Byzantine and western origin, which fact, similarly as their contents and language, testifies to the synthetizing character of the Great-Moravian Slavic liturgy.

4. Example of a Favourite Canon

The extension of the foundation work of Constantine and Methodius and their helpers is documented in the preserved materials. They reveal that the Byzantine models, especially the then favoured canons, were the sources of the Great-Moravian religious chorals. One example of a Great-Moravian canon is the officium in honour of St. Cyril, the likely author of which was Sava, one of his disciples. The canon begins as follows (Czech translation by J. Vašica⁵):

1
*Otevřu ústa svá a naplnění budou duchem
 Přiložil's své božské rty k číši moudrosti
 a napil ses nápoje spásy, rozumem zdál se být světlem
 a jazykem sekerou vytínající lest ďábelskou.*

2
*Bůh náš, dárce světla, rozžal tě jako svítilnu
 a označil tě za učitele celému světu
 a poslal tě učit knihami zákona temné národy západní.
 Atd.
 B Dům tvé duše, převyšující spanilé nebeské síly,
 stal se božím. Neboť ona nosila v svém životě –
 panenská hora přesvatá – tebe, našeho Boha.*

Translation:

⁵ Czechoslovak National History..., p. 29.

1

*I will open my mouth to be filled with spirit
 You have put the chalice of wisdom to your divine lips
 and drank the potion of salvation, the mind seemed to be the light
 and the tongue to be the axe cutting out the devil's tricks.*

2

*Our Lord, the giver of light, lighted you up as a lamp
 and named you the teacher of the whole universe
 and sent you to teach the ignorant nations of the west.
 Etc.*

*B The house of your soul, towering above the gracious heavenly forces,
 became the one of God. Because she - the most holy virgin mountain - had been-
 bearing you in her life - you, our Lord.*

The final verse introduced with the letter “B”, celebrating the Mother of God, was put at the end of each ode (B being the abbreviation for “Bogorodičen”).

The beginning of the text (“I will open my mouth”) is the reference to a hirmos, the leading melody opening the ode. As we can find references to a great number of old-Slavic hirmoses in the known Great-Moravian canons, we can assume surprisingly that foundations to Slavic hirmology, one of the most important collections of liturgical singing, were already laid during the Great-Moravian period. Although it is not possible to reconstruct the melodies of the Great-Moravian Slavic choral, one can believe that foundations of Slavic liturgical singing were laid already in our country, not later in Bulgaria and by East Slavs.

5. Conclusions

The Great-Moravian era was a period of extensive creative activities in the whole area of education level development and in music. The complete work of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius was not originated in peaceful times but during the incessant struggle of the Slavic liturgy for its right to live. The cultivation of the Slavic rite and singing continued for as many as several centuries in some places even after the death of Methodius (885) and after the official victory of the Latin rite and choral. We have got proofs of it from the Benedictine Monastery at Sázava, for instance, where, thanks to the Abbot St. Prokopius, the Slavic rite was cultivated as late as until 1097, which was possible due to the contacts of the monastery with Kievan Rus. In addition to this, a Glagolitic officium of a western type was established in Bohemia in the 11th century in honour of St. Cyril.

In spite of the fact that Great-Moravian Slavic liturgical singing did not last very long in our country for political reasons, it has become a relevant part of the cultural traditions of the Czech and Slovak nations.

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Summary

CREATIVE INITIATIVES OF BROTHERS CONSTANTINE AND METHODIUS IN SLAVIC LITURGY AND SLAVIC CHORAL IN GREAT MORAVIA

The article deals with the musical culture of Great Moravia in the period of the Byzantine Mission that influenced greatly both liturgical texts and choral singing. The texts of this music were also influenced highly by the work of Constantine (who adopted the name of Cyril later) and Methodius. The singing of Great Moravia thus combined the elements of both the eastern and western traditions. The article also includes an example of a canon in honour of St. Cyril, the authorship of which is attributed to one of the pupils of this scholar.

Key words: *musical culture, choral singing, Great Moravia*