

A CHAPTER FROM THE HISTORY OF RESEARCH ON CONSTANTINE-CYRIL AND METHODIUS

Milan Fryščák

“So that light and order may be brought into the dark and confused history of the two brothers Cyril and Methodius, it is necessary, above all, to conduct a rigorous cross-examination of the witnesses, to scrutinize the statements of the earlier witnesses while taking their trustworthiness into account, to collate the more recent reports with the earlier ones and, unless the former corroborate the latter, to reject them relentlessly or at least to ignore them.”

Thus reads the opening passage of the work in which Josef Dobrovský, the prominent pioneer of Slavistics, summarized his research—the comprehensive volume *Cyrrill und Method der Slaven Apostel*.¹ In this work and in his *Mährische Legende*² his Cyrill-Methodiana reaches its apogee.

Dobrovský's writings on Cyrillo-Methodian topics occupy a prominent and at the same time problematic place among his scholarly works: flashes of brilliant insight and passages bespeaking impressive erudition alternate with peculiar displays of hypercriticism and intellectual inflexibility. True, such fluctuations may be found in other writings of Dobrovský as well. Nonetheless, his Cyrillo-Methodiana suffers from unevenness of this kind particularly severely. Possibly for this reason it has attracted less attention than other parts of Dobrovský's scholarly legacy. This is unfortunate for, despite the problems, these writings are of key significance for our evaluation of Dobrovský's contribution to the nascent discipline of Slavic philology and cultural history and for our understanding of the individual stages of his own development as a scholar and as a Slavist.

The beginnings of Dobrovský's scholarly career go back to his university years in Prague. A graduate of the Philosophical Faculty at the age of eighteen, with a Master of Philosophy degree with distinction (*nobilis de lauro*), Dobrovský continued his studies at the Theological Faculty, where he was attracted by the field of oriental languages. As early as one year after his graduation from this Faculty (1777) he established contact with Johann David Michaelis, editor of the *Orientalische und exegetische Bibliothek* in Göttingen, where his first brief contribution appeared shortly thereafter.³ This contribution was followed one year later by a more extensive work, *Fragmentum Pragense Evangelii Sancti Marci*.⁴ The subject of this monograph of some fifty pages was a much venerated manuscript acquired by Emperor Charles IV in the mid-fourteenth century and kept at St. Vitus' Cathedral in Prague. To the dismay of the Church authorities, Dobrovský proceeded to demonstrate that the manuscript was much younger than believed, going back to the fifth or sixth century only. In his opinion, it represented the missing part of St. Mark's gospel from a tetraevangelion known as the *Cividale Books of Gospels*.⁵

Thanks to the beneficial influence of Michaelis and of Dobrovský's former professor of Hebrew Václav Fortunát Durych, the young scholar continued to expand his knowledge of the Oriental languages. His close contact with Durych proved to be particularly valuable: together they began to study Arabic and to discuss problems of Biblical translation. Both Michaelis and Durych pointed out to Dobrovský the importance of Slavic translations of the Bible, and soon the focus of Dobrovský's attention shifted from Oriental languages to Church Slavonic. A major impetus that further strengthened Dobrovský's research interests

was provided by the milieu in which he found himself after completing his studies at the Theological Faculty. Foregoing ordainment, which would in all likelihood have led to the post of parish priest in the provinces, Dobrovský sought employment as a tutor in the house of a prominent member of the Prague nobility, Count Nostic. There he worked closely with the head tutor František Martin Pelcl, who was to become the first professor of the newly-established chair of the Czech language and literature at Prague University. During his tutorship he met a number of leading scholars and intellectuals who came as frequent guests of the Nostic family, and he studied extensively, taking advantage of his employer's excellent library. It was at this time that Dobrovský began to familiarize himself with issues in Czech language and literature, and became immersed in the study of Czech history while assisting Pelcl in his research on two rulers of the Luxembourg dynasty, Charles IV and Wenceslas IV.

Dobrovský's entry into Bohemica turned out to be no less clamorous than his début in Biblical studies. It was occasioned by a controversy generated by the publication of two editions of a seventeenth century manuscript that had been suppressed during the author's lifetime. One edition of this work, Bohuslav Balbín's *Bohemia Docta*—an important source for Czech literary history—was prepared by Karel Rafael Ungar; two of his three volumes appeared between 1776 and 1778. The other edition was published in 1777 by Candidus a Sancta Theresia. Of the two editors, only the latter consulted Dobrovský prior to publication. When the two scholars exchanged acrimonious remarks about each other's edition, Dobrovský entered the exchange by attacking Ungar. Before long he became deeply involved in the controversy which continued a very long time.

The gradual shift of Dobrovský's scholarly activity to the field of Czech history (and from it to literary history and philology) can be traced to the early years of Dobrovský's stay with the Nostic family; this is a period in which he was recognized as a scholar of rapidly growing stature. In the year 1782 he received a major distinction by being elected to membership in the prestigious *Privatgesellschaft* that had been founded in Prague some ten years before. Having become a member of this Society, Dobrovský availed himself of the opportunity to contribute to its Proceedings (*Abhandlungen*). He published an article that was his first major treatment of a Cyrillo-Methodian topic, "Über das Alter der böhmischen Bibelübersetzung."⁶ In addition to a discussion of the subject indicated in the title (which Dobrovský concludes with the assertion that the Bible was not translated into Czech until the end of the thirteenth century) this article contains a wealth of information on a number of related topics. One finds, for example, a concise chronological survey of writings of the Cyrillo-Methodian period and Dobrovský's assessment of the influence of Old Church Slavic (and Church Slavonic) on Old Czech literature. A fairly large section is devoted to the problems of Slavic alphabets of the early period. Dobrovský gives a detailed presentation of the activities of Constantine-Cyril which led to the compilation of an alphabet utilizing Greek letters (cyrillic). He, his brother Methodius, and a group of their disciples are regarded by Dobrovský as responsible for having translated certain parts of the Bible, and the liturgical books. These they brought with them to Moravia, and from there their translations spread to other parts of the Slavic world. Not long afterwards translations of the entire Bible became available to the Slavs. It is interesting to note that Dobrovský did not believe that Old Church Slavic writings reached Bohemia during the time of the Moravian Mission (863-885). In his opinion they were not introduced there until the founding of the Sázava Benedictine Monastery (c. 1032). Dobrovský rejected the speculation that Constantine-Cyril and Methodius ever visited Bohemia as missionaries. In discussing the various opinions concerning the provenance of the glagolitic alphabet,

Dobrovský resolutely rejected Dobner's theory which regarded glagolitic as the earlier of the two alphabets, i.e., the writing system devised by Cyril and Methodius. Dobrovský's conclusion—initially also accepted by his friend Durych—was that the glagolitic alphabet was compiled and introduced only after the cyrillic alphabet had spread.

Dobrovský's earlier interest in Slavic translations of the Bible received a major stimulus in the year 1792. Travelling through Jena, en route to Sweden and Russia, Dobrovský met the prominent German Biblical scholar Johann Griesbach (1745-1812). Dobrovský learned about Griesbach's intention to publish a variorum edition of the New Testament and was asked to participate in the project. A substantial part of the research which Dobrovský undertook during the study trip sponsored by *Privatgesellschaft* (now renamed *Královská česká společnost nauk*)—especially during his stay in St. Petersburg and Moscow—had to do with Griesbach's project.⁷ When this work was published,⁸ it contained the texts provided by Dobrovský; they were accompanied by his descriptions and introductory remarks. Later, Dobrovský utilized his valuable experience with Church Slavonic Biblical texts in another project which he completed after extensive research in the Vienna libraries. The results were published in 1798 under the title "Über den ersten Text der böhmischen Bibelübersetzung, nach den ältesten Handschriften derselben, besonders nach der Dresdner." In this work Dobrovský established a chronology of the Czech manuscript Bibles and formulated an important conclusion: his collation of Old Czech Biblical texts with Church Slavonic texts failed to establish any connection between the two. In other words: Slavonic texts were not used when translations of the Bible into Old Czech were being made.

In 1803 the *Společnost nauk*, in its *Proceedings*, published the first part of a series conceived by Dobrovský: *Kritische Versuche, die ältere böhmische Geschichte von späteren Erdichtungen zu reinigen*. This first part had the title "Bořivojs Taufe. Zugleich eine Probe wie man alte Legenden für die Geschichte benutzen soll." The incident under examination concerns the baptism of the Bohemian prince Bořivoj as described in the chronicle of the monk Christian (allegedly from the end of the twelfth century; this dating is now generally accepted.) Dobrovský rejected the alleged baptism of Bořivoj by Methodius and called it sheer invention. He could find no historical evidence, other than Christian's assertions, that Bořivoj had traveled to Moravia, or that Methodius had undertaken a journey to Prague. In the final part of the essay Dobrovský disputed the traditional view, that the Slavonic rite was introduced to Bohemia by the founders of the Moravian Mission.

Another contribution to Dobrovský's Cyrillo-Methodiana is an extensive treatise published as a supplement to the final (1807) issue of Dobrovský's short-lived journal *Slavín*, "Glagolitica. Über die glagolitische Literatur, das Alter des Bukwitz, ihr Muster nach welchem sie gebildet worden, den Ursprung der römisch-slavischen Liturgie, die Beschaffenheit der dalmatischen Übersetzung, die man dem Hieronymus zuschrieb, usw.." Written as a systematic summary of Dobrovský's views on the subject of the Slavic alphabets, this work had a lasting impact on Slavic philology. By this time the renown of Dobrovský in the Slavic field was such that there were very few to challenge his view that the cyrillic alphabet was adopted before the glagolitic: the learned world recognized him as the supreme authority on the subject, and the contrary views of Dobner and Durych (both by then dead) were thus laid to rest.

Fifteen years passed between the publication of this definitive work and the appearance of Dobrovský's *opus magnum*, a comprehensive grammar of 'the Ancient Slavic Dialect,' as he dubbed the language of the earliest Slavic texts and that of their successors—texts of which he had studied extensively, there being very little available to him in Old Church Slavonic proper. The publication of this work⁹ was hailed as a major event in Slavic philology

and further enhanced Dobrovský's renown. The author, however, and his close collaborator on the project, Jernej Kopitar (1780-1844), were not satisfied with the outcome of their efforts, each for his own reasons. Eventually their disagreements concerning the question of the provenance of the language used by Constantine-Cyril and Methodius in Moravia (Dobrovský's rejection of Kopitar's Pannonian theory) and the question of the relationship between the two alphabets (Kopitar's rejection of Dobrovský's view that cyrillic preceded glagolitic) prevented the realization of Dobrovský's plans to publish a new, revised edition of the Church Slavonic grammar.

The final chapter in Dobrovský's *Cyrillo-Methodiana* is contained in the two major works mentioned in the introductory paragraphs above. The first of them, *Cyrill und Method*, appeared just one year after the publication of *Institutiones* — in 1823. Somewhat polemic in parts, especially those that dealt with the details that must be considered when accepting or rejecting the Pannonian theory, this volume presents Dobrovský's final statement on the subject, a summary of his lifetime research. In his quest for the historical truth he reviewed references to Cyril and Methodius found in the early sources, domestic as well as foreign, and discussed some of the more extensive treatments of the two brothers contained in works by individual authors such as the sixteenth-century chronicler Václav Hájek z Libočan, or the late seventeenth-century patriotic Jesuit Tomáš Pešina. Of the more recent authors, Dobrovský paid special attention to two. Hirschmentzel (1638-1703), a Silesian monk, wrote a number of works relating to the Moravian Velehrad;¹⁰ as a writer, he was endowed with a rare gift for fantasy. Not a few of his fabrications were borrowed by his young colleague Středovský (1679-1713), who concluded naively that Hirschmentzel's *Cyrillo-Methodiana* was based on his research into historical sources at Velehrad, where he had spent the last years of his life. Thus Středovský's own work¹¹ can hardly be regarded as an improvement. Regrettably, Dobrovský speaks with almost equal disdain of the contribution by one of his contemporaries, the German historian August Schlözer (1735-1809), who devoted a chapter in his *Nestor* to Cyril and Methodius.¹² This chapter was based on a menologion of the Rostov Metropolitan Dimitrijck, published in 1700 in the third volume of his *Minei čet'i: žitija svjatyx* that Schlözer chanced upon. Dimitrij's version (which Schlözer dubbed the "Russian legend") was merely an abridged compilation from major treatments of the lives of the brothers, the so-called "Pannonian" (later known as the "Moravo-Pannonian") vitae. Dobrovský's hypercritical reaction to Schlözer's discovery became a setback for Cyrillo-Methodian studies. It took two more decades to demonstrate the importance of the source discovered by Schlözer and to put Cyrillo-Methodian studies on a firm base. (The turning point was a study by the Russian scholar Aleksandr V. Gorskij (1812-75), "O svjatom Kirille i Mefodii."¹³ Gorskij was the first to publish the vitae as two separate texts, as they are known today.) The most valuable part of Dobrovský's work on Cyril and Methodius can be found in paragraphs devoted to the discussion and evaluation of historical documents (e.g., the letter from Librarian Anastasius to Bishop Gauderich of Velletri, and the letter from Pope John VIII to Prince Svatoopluk of Greater Moravia). A substantial part of the volume deals with topics treated by Dobrovský in earlier articles; thus, Methodius's alleged journey to Bohemia; the number of his suffragans; the dating of the cyrillic and glagolitic alphabets. Dobrovský's conclusions did not depart significantly from the views he expressed previously. However, an important clarification appears in the passage dealing with the origin and home of Old Church Slavic: for the first time he names its ancestral home, placing it in the Serbo-Bulgaro-Macedonian area.

Dobrovský's final contribution to the study of Cyril and Methodius, and at the same time one of the last projects he was able to complete, was the *Moravian Legend* (1826). Intended as an appendix to the Cyrillo-Methodian work of 1823, it presents a Latin legend that has affinities with the treatment of the two brothers' lives found in the Chronicle by the Monk Christian and in the legend *Diffundente sole iustitiae radios*. The original Latin text, provided with variants, is accompanied by Dobrovský's German translation and commentary. Just as he did previously, in his article on the baptism of Bořivoj, here too Dobrovský expressed serious reservations about Christian's historical context, and because of the affinities of Christian's work with the Czech chronicle of Dalimil (fl. c. 1320), Dobrovský placed Christian as late as the fourteenth century. This is another example of Dobrovský's excessively cautious attitude toward historical sources. In this instance, however, Dobrovský had a larger following. In fact, it took almost a century to clarify the dating of Christian, and even now there are scholars who reject the widely accepted view that he was a literary figure of the late tenth century just as vehemently as Dobrovský did, and who consider that Christian's chronicle derived from the legends *Diffundente sole iustitiae radios* and *Oriente iam sole*. This volume by Dobrovský also includes the shorter Church Slavonic vita of the two brothers, the so-called "Prologue Legend" that K.F. Kalajdovič had included in his *Ioann Ėkzarz Bolgarskij* (Moscow, 1824), Constantine's *Confession of Faith* and the Monk Chrabr's *Defense of Slavic Letters*, as well as Dobrovský's appraisal of these writings.

In Dobrovský's lifetime his works on Cyril and Methodius and the issues of the earliest literary languages of the Slavs strengthened his reputation as the most knowledgeable specialist and the leading pioneer in Slavistics. After his death, however, this segment of his scholarly output began to lose its attraction, as subsequent research produced results that frequently did not bear out his earlier conclusions. The test of time has been considerably more benign to other parts of Dobrovský's scholarly legacy, and these—especially his Bohemica—have continued to sustain his renown as patriarch of Slavic studies.

Although the concrete contribution made by Dobrovský to our knowledge in this particular area of Slavistics is relatively modest, there is no justification for viewing his Cyrillo-Methodiana as a peripheral area of his work. For one thing these writings are notable as one of the first attempts at a synthetic approach to scholarly problems that called for extensive expertise in several disciplines. For another, his Cyrillo-Methodiana is closely linked to the individual phases of his scholarly career and thus is of essential importance for a better understanding of his development as a scholar and for a thorough evaluation of the positive and the negative aspects of his scholarship, of the qualities that reveal the magnitude of his genius as well as the extent of his limitations.

New York University

REFERENCES

1. Josef Dobrovský, *Cyrrill und Method der Slawen Apostel* (Prague, 1823) 3: "Um in die dunkle und verworrene Geschichte der zwey Brüder Cyrrill und Method Licht und Ordnung zu bringen, ist vor allem nothwendig, ein genaues Zeugenverhör vorzunehmen, die Aussagen der älteren Zeugen nach ihrer Glaubwürdigkeit zu prüfen, die neuern Berichte mit den ältern zu vergleichen, und jene, wenn sie diese widersprechen, ohne Schonung zu verwerfen, oder wenigstens nicht zu beachten."

2. J. Dobrovský, *Mährische Legende* (Prague, 1826), comprised a German translation of the second (Latin) Cyrillo-Methodian legend accompanied by an extensive commentary.
3. J. Dobrovský and Václav F. Durych, "Pragische Fragmente Hebräischer Handschriften," *Orientalische und exegetische Bibliothek* 12 (1777) 101-111.
4. J. Dobrovský, *Fragmentum Pragense Evangelii Sancti Marci vulgo autographi* (Prague, 1778).
5. Named after Cividale del Friuli/Čedad, in the patriarchate of Aquileia/Oglej. The tetraevangelion was kept here both originally and after the seven quaternions that comprised the complete text of St. Mark's Gospel were excised from it sometime in the late eighteenth century. Of these seven quaternions, Emperor Charles obtained the final two in 1354. The first five were later transferred to Venice and then (save one small fragment that remained in Venice) to Fréjus, France.
6. J. Dobrovský, "Über das Alter der böhmischen Bibelübersetzung," *Abhandlungen einer Privatgesellschaft in Böhmen* 5 (1782) 300-22.
7. See Dobrovský's own report of his travels, published as *Litterarische Nachrichten von einer Reise nach Schweden und Russland* (Prague, 1796) 100-115.
8. *As Novum Testamentum graece*, 2 vols (Halle/London, 1796, 1806).
9. J. Dobrovský, *Institutiones linguae slavicae dialecti veteris* (Vienna, 1822).
10. Among them: Kristian Gottfried Hirschmentzel, *Vita SS. Cyrilli et Methodii archiepiscoporum Moraviae sive vetus Velehrad* (Prague, 1667).
11. Jan Jiří Střádovský, *Sacra Moraviae historia, sive Vita SS. Cyrilli et Methodii* (Sulzbach, 1710).
12. August Schlözer, *Nestor. Russische Annalen in ihrer slavonischen Grundsprache verglichen, übersetzt und erklärt*. III (Göttingen, 1805) 233-40.
13. Published in *Moskvitianin* 3 (1843) 405-34.

POVZETEK

IZ ZGODOVINE RAZISKOVANJA CIRILA IN METODA

Članek obravnava zgodnjo cirilmetodiano, bistveno pisanje kakor tudi krajše članke izpod peresa Josefa Dobrovskega (1753-1825), pomembne osebe v dobi nastajanja slovanske filologije. Avtor ugotavlja razvoj pogledov Dobrovskega na take teme, kot sta lociranje narečja, ki je bila osnova starocerkvenoslovanščini, in izvor glagoljaške abecede ter njene zveze s cirilico. Potem ocenjuje vpliv pogledov Dobrovskega na porajajočo se slovansko filološko vedo in na slovansko kulturno zgodovino. Tako se cirilmetodiana Dobrovskega kljub omejitvam, ki izvirajo iz notranjih in zunanjih vzrokov, kaže kot pomembno področje njegovih znanstvenih dejavnosti.