

THE PROTESTANT MOVEMENT AND THE QUESTION
OF THE GLAGOLITIC ALPHABET IN THE
SOUTH SLAVIC CULTURAL TRADITION

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The Protestant movement played an important role in the history of glagolism. On the one hand it had an exciting and vital effect on glagolitic literature, and that at a time when it had reached a stagnant period on Croatian territory. On the other hand it was precisely Protestantism which spread glagolitic writing in the west even throughout part of Slovene territory.

Glagolitic literature blossomed in Croatia from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century. Then it lost its dominating position in Croatian literature and therefore also in the cultural awareness of Croats. The sixteenth century produced first a stagnation and then a crisis of glagolism. The glagolitic printing press on Croatian territory, whose origins can be traced back to the last half of the fifteenth century and which had achieved unbelievable results during its period of activity, did not produce a single book after 1531. Later glagolitic books were occasionally produced, but only in Venice. The latin alphabet gradually began to replace the glagolitic. Many historians of literature and culture connect the crisis of glagolism with the danger of the Turks and search for the reasons for the crisis in that direction. In my opinion the crisis of glagolism is the logical result of Humanism, that same Humanism which had contemporarily stimulating effect on the beginnings of Croatian literature in Dubrovnik and southern Dalmatia.

So this was the position in which glagolitic writing and literature found itself in the middle of the sixteenth century, at that time when, in Protestant circles in Germany (Primož Trubar, P. P. Vergerio and others) the possibility of producing Protestant books in Croatian was considered. For this reason it seems strange that the Protestants should have considered glagolitic for their enterprise. Quite rightly one may ask why it was that the practically minded Protestants, who wanted to reach pragmatic goals with their writings, chose an alphabet which was falling into disuse. The actual situation in Croatia at this time proves, however, that the Protestants behaved pragmatically in their preference for glagolitic. At this time a Croatian literature in latin letters and in the common people's language was blossoming in Dubrovnik and southern Dalmatia, but this was confined only to these regions and was as yet unknown in Slavonia, inland Croatia and Istria. In these areas, and de-

spite everything, glagolitic writing and literature was a cultural reality. Actually Trubar was very undecided, in 1550, as to the choice of alphabet, when he started to plan his future as translator and editor. Even then he took into consideration Croatian Protestant books as well as Slovene and for both languages he found the latin alphabet most suitable. He also made a written attempt but soon after he changed his mind and then spoke only of the "Croatian language and writing," meaning by this glagolitic, as if they were one and the same thing. Only later, when for Protestant propaganda reasons the whole Balkan Peninsula was taken into consideration, did he consider using cyrillic. In fact, at the printing press founded in Urach near Tübingen for printing Slovene-Croatian Protestant books, cyrillic as well as glagolitic and latin was used.

Trubar's preference for glagolitic was purely for practical reasons. One must not presume there were other ideological or emotional reasons for preferring this alphabet. It was not as others seem to think; that this choice was made because both Protestantism and glagolitic were opposing Latin as the language used in religious services. Trubar made such use of glagolitic because it was the most sensible thing to do, although he was always aware that Latin writing would soon take over from glagolitic. This permitted him to be recognized as Director of the Slovene-Croatian press in Urach, where glagolitic was preferred for Croatian books. But this was no longer so towards the end of this activity. The first Croatian book, *Tabla za dicu* (1561) was printed only in glagolitic and cyrillic, 2,000 copies of each. The second book, *Katekizam* (1561) was printed in glagolitic, cyrillic and latin. Both glagolitic and cyrillic editions were of 2,000 copies each whereas the Latin edition was only printed in 400 copies. Towards the end of this activity we notice the following results: of *Bramba Augustanske spovedi* (1564) the glagolitic editions were 400, Latin 500 and none in cyrillic. The last Croatian book printed in latin letters in Urach, *Govorenje vele prudno* (1565), gave directions as to the pronunciation of the latin letters as well as transliteration examples of glagolitic letters for those readers who could read only glagolitic.

As regards the history of glagolitic writing, the Protestant theoretical and practical considerations are, of course, irrelevant. It is important that glagolitic was used for their theological and propagandistic writings in great quantity in the Croatian language. The Slovene-Croatian press in Urach produced twenty-five Croatian Protestant books in its five years of activity from 1561 to 1565. Of these, twelve are in glagolitic, six in latin and seven in cyrillic. Apart from these books, two proof pamphlets were printed beforehand, one in glagolitic and one in cyrillic. The first pamphlet, as also the first printing, was glagolitic. Even when a book was printed in different alphabets, the first to appear was always the

glagolitic edition. So not only the priority given when various editions in different alphabets were printed, but also the number of publications in that alphabet, prove that glagolitic was preferred. One realizes that the Protestants achieved magnificent results, not without effect on the fate and development of glagolitic writing, if one considers that the Protestant printing press in Urach in five years produced nearly the same number of books as the glagolitic printers on all of Croatian territory (Kosinj, Senj, Rijeka) in almost half a century, and that the number of glagolitic books printed in Germany reached the amazing total of 13,700, which was remarkable in itself for that age.

The Protestants even had new glagolitic letters forged in Nuremberg for their press. These were well formed and even differentiated themselves (in minor details) from the glagolitic letters used in glagolitic book printing, especially the capital letters. The Protestants brought about major changes particularly in the speech. Whereas the glagolitic books which had been produced till then were Croatian Church Slavic, the language used for Protestant glagolitic books was the common people's language, which conveyed the Protestant ideology. This puts printed glagolitic books in an entirely new light. From a historical point of view the meeting of Protestantism, so vital and full of idealism, with the stagnating glagolism, was culturally and literally important in that it allowed glagolitic writing to survive in Croatia.

Even if the Protestant movement in Croatia, religiously speaking, never was able really to take hold, the Protestant glagolitic activity in Urach had great influence on glagolism in Croatia. Not only in a practical sense — that the glagolitic capital letters formed by the Protestants were then also used in glagolitic handwriting — but also ideologically and theoretically; for the first time the language problem in glagolitic literature was faced, that is: should the common language of Church Slavic be used.

The Counter-Reformation defeated Protestantism relatively easily, but this was not so with the cultural heritage relative to glagolism and glagolitic writing which was brought by the Protestant movement. Even the spreading of glagolitic writing in the west in the Slovene language area can be attributed to the Protestant movement. It occurred independently of the Protestants and was not in accordance with their strategy, but it was a consequence of the religious, spiritual and cultural upheaval caused by the Protestant movement.

The carriers of glagolism throughout the Slovene language area were not the local Slovenes but the Croatian *glagoljaši* who came from Istria and northern Dalmatia. The *glagoljaši* came into the area during the Reformation on two completely different occasions and with totally different motivations. The first wave came during the first phase of Protestantism among the South Slavs and it was made up of those *glagoljaši*

who had accepted the Lutheran teachings. As life came more and more difficult and dangerous for Protestants in the Venetian area of Istria and northern Dalmatia, many of them fled to the northern Slovene areas of Inner Austria to escape their persecutors. There the religious atmosphere was quite different as the Diet of Carniola supported the Lutheran teachings. In fact the most important Croatian Protestant writers, like Stjepan Konzul Istran, Antun Dalmatin, Juraj Juričić, were Protestant preachers in Ljubljana and other Slovene cities before they moved to Germany to work in the Printing Office of Urach. The number of Protestant *glagoljaši* who had come into Slovene territory must have been considerable, as Trubar in the German preface to *Ta prvi deil tige noviga testamenta* (1577) expressly says that his Slovene translation of the first part of the New Testament would cause, in his opinion, some priests, who everywhere in Slovene territories read Mass, to learn the latin alphabet and translate such writings into their own language. The *glagoljaši* left traces behind on Slovene territory which have never been the object of intense research. The existing documentation regarding this question does not permit any clear affirmation as to whether glagolitic writing was in use there.

The second wave of *glagoljaši* in the Slovene lands occurred somewhat later and did not settle in the center of the Slovene language area as had the first, but rather on the fringes from the Croatian-Slovene language frontier in Istria to the Slovene-Italian language frontier in the area of Trieste, Gorizia and Cividale. In this case it concerns Catholic priests who with the consent of their Catholic followers, replaced the Slovene priests in the area of Trieste, Gorizia and Cividale, the majority of whom had passed over to Protestantism. Thus it involves areas which were under the influence of the Patriarch of Aquileia. These were never well disposed towards the Slovene language; on the contrary, they tried to hinder it. In this situation of need the *glagoljaši* were welcomed, so that in 1583 for example the Bishop of Udine came personally to Kamne, a town near Gorizia, to celebrate a Slovene-glagolitic Mass. The *glagoljaši* were only tolerated as long as they served a purpose. When Protestantism in Interior Austria finished being a menace and as the Counter-Reformation was in full swing, then the religious tolerance towards the *glagoljaši* was over. In 1596 the Bishop's Synod of Aquileia notified them that in the usual church rites Latin was to be used, which within a short time did in fact take place.

The second wave of *glagoljaši* in the Slovene language area was a very important factor for glagolism and glagolitic writing. The *glagoljaši* during their stay in the Slovene language area, used exclusively glagolitic writing and their Croatian language; and not only in church spheres but also publicly; registers, christening registers, wills, notifications on church doors and private houses were in glagolitic as we can see from glagolitic books and other historic sources.

Even if the carriers of glagolitic writing in the Slovene areas were not the local Slovenes themselves, and also the time span of this writing is limited to the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, it is proof of the existence of glagolitic writing in the Slovene population of this area because it was used fairly regularly not only in church but also in administrative circles. Historically this reality is not to be underestimated, as it permits us to establish that the use of glagolitic writing in the West did not reach, as is usually thought, the Slovene-Croatian frontier, but it stretched as far as the Italian-Slovene language frontier in the areas of Trieste, Gorizia and Cividale.

It seems natural that Protestantism would influence glagolism so very positively if one considers that both Protestantism and glagolism had great influence over the population, their aim not being that of reaching the elite but the population as a whole. The co-existence of Protestantism and glagolism in a particular geographical area is based on the same tendencies, namely to assert itself on the masses of the population.

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