

BYZANTINE EMPIRE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE IN GREAT MORAVIA

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Abstract: This article deals with the analysis of school systems on the territory of the Byzantine Empire in the 9th century. It determines the cultural and historic environment out of which the mission sent by the emperor Michael III came. This act brought not only Christianity to our territory but also the concept of education as well. Yet it was not possible to apply all the components directly as the Slavonic countries were under the influence of the western culture. This text analyzes where the educational centres were established in Byzantium and their possible places on the territory of Rastislav's realm.

Keywords: Great Moravia, Byzantium, Cyril, Methodius, education

1 Preface

In the second half of the 9th century the ruler of Great Moravia wants to curtail the activities of the Frankish missionaries in his realm. On one hand, they conduct all liturgical ceremonies but on the other, they primarily conform to the Frankish king, whom they make well informed about all happenings in the country they stay in. Thus Prince Rastislav turns to Rome and asks for an archbishop to be able to start building an independent Moravian diocese. However, the Pope refuses his requirement because in these times he is having dissension with West Francia and does not want to lose a powerful ally – East Francia.

Thus Rastislav sends a delegation to Byzantium. In 862 the Byzantine Emperor Michael III answers by sending back a mission whose occupation is to spread Christianity. As for the fact that Great Moravia was not fully Christianized at that time, there was no archbishop in the mission. In the centre of the mission were two important figures – brothers Cyril and Methodius.

What could the Byzantine Empire offer to Great Moravia in the field of education? Let's leave aside the political and theological aspects of the mission for a while and point out, that Byzantium complied with Rastislav's request out of political reasons as well. They considered Great Moravia a possible ally. V šabloně jsou přednastavené styly pro název příspěvku, jméno autora, abstrakt, klíčová slova, dvě úrovně nadpisů, normální text, nadpis literatury, seznam literatury, nadpis kontaktních údajů a text kontaktních údajů.

2 Byzantium and its role

Although the Byzantine Empire was one of the most powerful ones in Europe in the 9th century, it had to deal with extensive problems that resulted in two groups standing against each other – the iconodules and the iconoclasts – i.e. those who supported and favoured religious images and those who were against the use of religious images. Struggles between iconodules and iconoclast were put an end only by regent Theodora (842-856), who proclaimed the restoration of icons in 843.

In spite of these internal conflicts, the Byzantine Emperor still considered himself the head of all Christians and had the right to intervene into all ecclesiastic matters. The patriarch of Constantinople was subordinate to him and in the eyes of Byzantium not even the Pope could stand above the emperor. This type of rule is known as caesaropapism.

Rastislav's delegation comes to a town that prides in flamboyance and pomposity that has no counterpart in its times. At the same time, the delegates are aware of the uneasy position

of the empire. It is threatened from several sides: by the Arabs, by the restoring Bulgarians, and even from Russians.

Emperor Michael III perceives it an opportunity to secure at least the east borders of his realm and that is why he complies with Rastislav's request.

3 Educational system in the Byzantine empire

The basic skill was the ability to read. "All Byzantine Emperors – except for Justinian I and Basil I – were able to read, and even to write on their own. Also it was common for military commanders to take portable bookcases to campaigns with them. These contained books about tactics, meteorology and dream interpretation. The legislation also required the ability to sign one's name." (Zástěrová a kol., 1992, p. 365) The whole Byzantine system was based on achievements and abilities, not on hereditary privileges. Literacy was not restricted only to higher social layers as it was in the West. It was for everyone, for broad masses. Moreover, every judge and higher clerk had to go through the whole system of education.

The system consisted of three levels. Elementary education lasted for three years. The teacher, who was called *grammatistes*, taught reading from the Bible, writing and basics of arithmetic. This education was available at schools that existed within village churches. The second level was lead by *grammatikos*. At its basis was reading and philological interpretation of Homer's poetry. Homer and the Bible formed the very core of all Byzantine education. Teachers of the third level were called *rhetors* and their teaching focused on rhetoric, philosophy and mathematics. There was an opportunity to take additional studies of laws and medicine. The whole education lasted from eight to nine years.

Since the 9th century, natural sciences are being introduced into the system of education. This is considered to be an influence of Arabian education. For example, the mathematical sciences consisted of mathematics, geometry, arithmetic, and harmony (Zástěrová a kol., 1992, p. 366).

As already mentioned, elementary education was available to everyone. Higher education was realized only in big towns: Athens – philosophy, Alexandria – philosophy and medicine, Beirut – laws, and later on Constantinople – philosophy.

Although the emperor had power over the Church, higher education did not include theology at all. Church was left with some freedom in this field and the education was realized predominantly at monasteries. Only in the 12th century, secular and theological education began to merge and theology became a part of higher education studies.

As far as secular education is concerned, an interesting display of authors can be found here. They are: Homer, Démosthenes, Isokrates, Thukydidés and some of Greek authors of tragedies. However, it is important to remind that Byzantine education was never concerned with temporary literary development, neither was it interested in the authors of preceding eras.

4 Specific literary compositions

Graduates of schools should have been well prepared mainly in the field of stylistics. To achieve this goal, teachers had a set of literary compositions students had to handle. Among these were: a fable (usually about animals, *mythos*), a short narration (usually of a mythological character, *diegma*), a short instructive and moralizing anecdote (*chreia*), an essay about a statement (*gnome*), demonstration of evidence and counter-evidence of a maxim or a story (*anaskeue* and *kataskeue*); frequently introduced statement (*koinos topos*); praise and dispraise (*enkomion* and *logos*); comparison of two characters, towns,

activities etc. (*sykrisis*), characteristics of a historical or mythological figure (*ethpoiia*); description of persons, actions, periods, or places (*ekfrasis*); theses about technical or practical questions; draft law (Zástěrová a kol., 1992, p. 366).

All compositions were based on rather conservative topics. Even in the 12th century it was quite common to write essays about themes like the following: “What would a sailor say if he saw an Ikarus flying in the air.”

5 Further development

In spite of considerable territorial losses in the 6th century when the Arabian invasion caused the loss of more than 470 towns in Syria, Egypt and Palestine, the educational system was still able to produce sufficient amount of qualified graduates. In the 9th century, Micheal III reestablished universities in Constantinople with one university in the emperor’s palace itself. It was led by the eminent Lev Matematik. He might have been a supporter of iconoclasm but he possessed such an extensive knowledge, that the emperor’s court gladly turned the blind eye on this personal trait of his.

Utility of the whole system is proven by the fact that in the 9th and 10th century between fifty to hundred students graduated from universities in Constantinople every year (in those times Constantinople had about 1 million citizens).

If we compare this system to the western one, we realize that the eastern is far more elaborate. However, ecclesiastic education of monks consisted mainly on memorization of chants even in the East.

6 Contributions to Moravia

The Prince Rastislav called for an archbishop whom he never got. Instead, he gained people who proved themselves far more important in the end – teachers, who taught pupils in his country. He further requested (and received as well) legal regulations, whose interpreter could have been Methodius conveniently, as he was originally a lawyer. When the mission started to translate the Gospels, they must have been pleasantly surprised with the considerably developed Christianity on our territory. Naturally, it was not possible to start with establishing universities straight away. The first step was to teach the pupils to read and write.

Centres of education were being established within churches and monasteries, as we can analogically see in the neighbouring countries. Whether the mission wanted to fulfill the Byzantine practice, it seems probable that it would aim at every person being able to sign his or her name on official documents. We mustn’t forget that Great Moravia was in such a state of economic and historical development that it could hardly work without writing – tax collection and comprehensible record of the country’s main ideology (i.e. Christianity) was unambiguously conditioned by the creation of suitable writing.

7 Baptism

In early middle ages, a number of European rulers started to understand, that the only way to legally anchor their right to rule was to adopt baptism. Common people were forced to make a substantial change of mind as well. Till the arrival of the missionaries, their lives were predominated by invariant laws of nature. Their gods gave crops to them as an exchange for regular sacrifices. They considered this system as well functioning and now strangely dressed people wanted them to dispense it. It is thus understandable that their worries about crops were significant. That is why baptized people went to the church, but still secretly brought sacrifices to pagan gods at the same time (Třešník, 2010, p. 129).

The culprit can be seen in the conception of education, which was particularly noticeable on our territory. The problem was not in insufficient language knowledge –many of the prayers were translated into the Slavic language and the terminology was

taken over by the Byzantine missionaries. It were the insufficient requirements imposed that created the problem. It is obvious if we compare requirements for bestowing baptism in the West and the East.

In the West it was quite sufficient for the applicant to learn by heart the prayer to God the Father and Credo. Often the requirement was lowered to mere repeating after the priest. Then the person was bestowed baptism and his or her further education comprised of the Ten Commandments, explanation of sins and virtues, and eternal rewards and punishments. The whole learning process should have been longer than seven days but shorter than two weeks. Knowledge shouldn’t have been assessed too strictly. Polygamy, popular mainly with the aristocracy, was being overlooked by the Bavarian monks. Probably because of the existence of so called proprietary churches, that belonged to the person on whose private ground they were built.

The mission from Byzantium chose different, quite opposite strategies. Baptism was bestowed only after thorough education. During his or her preparation, the applicant was not allowed to step into the church – they had to stay in a so called narthex (the entrance or lobby area of a church). (Měřínský, 2006, p. 288). The mission was also against the practice of polygamy by the aristocrats. The practice of proprietary churches was also unsustainable. From the legal point of view – according to the Byzantine law all churches belonged to the Church only, no secular power should have any control over its organization.

8 What was adopted by Great Moravia?

As for the fact that Great Moravia was so far from the Byzantine Empire and Constantinople, its patronage was unthinkable. Nevertheless, it became a source of inspiration – as an economic superpower, whose success was caused, among other factors, by substitution of Greek language for Latin. On the Slavonic territory (e.g. in Thessaloniki) it was required that the clerks should speak Slavonic (they even tried to register Slavonic names). On the territories where Byzantium spread Christianity it was common to translate liturgical texts into the vernacular. There was fundamental discrepancy between the concepts of public and church administration. On one hand, there was a stress on the Latin language (in liturgy accompanied with Greek and Hebrew). On the other hand, it was important to conduct the public administration and liturgy in a comprehensible language.

It must have been the requirement of comprehensibility that was so appealing to Rastislav and his successors. Moreover, the realm gained independence and even recognition of its liturgy. Subsequent rulers gradually gave up this privilege later on. They started to follow the example of the Frankish kings and their Latin Church. However, at least southern and eastern Slavs managed to fully exploit the achievements of the mission to their own good.

9 Conclusion

Great Moravia gained a powerful ally in the Byzantine Empire and its position among other European countries improved considerably. Great Moravia took over not only the eastern arrangement but also the whole concept of education in a comprehensible language. The mission must have taken into account the already translated books (from Latin and old German) and adapt the lexical aspects of the new translations to the existing situation. People willingly abandoned the Bavarian priests and happily welcomed priests of their own kind. Old Church Slavonic became one of the most important liturgical languages of the Christian world. The system of education was inspired by Byzantium; schools were established at almost every larger chapel. First, teaching of writing and the language itself started, and then independent Old Church Slavonic works started to emerge. However, thorough education was restricted only to people of higher social layers. The full implementation of the Byzantine scheme – everyone can read and write – was not achieved.

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