Syrian Shadows behind the Back of Cyril and Methodius:
Vaillant-Jakobson's Hypothesis Revisited

Syrian roots of some traditions within the ancient Slavic writing are so far a rather uncommon topic, even though it became completely legitimate, in the eyes of the Slavists, since, at least, 1935 or 1943—if not 1913. These three dates correspond to some key publications in the field. In 1935, André Vaillant (1890–1977) put forward the first outline of his hypothesis that the famous "Russian" letters which, according to the long Slavonic *Vita Constantini* (ch. 8), became known to St Cyril in Chersonese[1], are in fact Syriac ones, due to a relatively common, in Slavonic, confusion between "Russian" (with the root *rus-*) and "Syriac" (*sur-*)[2]. In 1943, Roman Jakobson (1895–1982) supported (and partially corrected) Vaillant with an extremely influential paper of his own—where he mentioned, among others, the 1913 proposal by Alexander Grigoriev that the Slavonic *Aḥiqar* is a direct translation from Syriac[3]. Vaillant-Jakobson's hypothesis about the "Russian" writings/letters is now the most largely accepted[4], despite a hard problem posed by the fact that all the 58 presently studied manuscripts of the *Vita Constantini* are in complete agreement on the reading "Russian"[5].

Be this as it may, Vaillant-Jakobson's hypothesis attracted scholarly attention to other Syrian connexions of the *Cyrillomethodiana*. Most of them are to be taken into account even if this hypothesis is false. The purpose of the present note is to review the arguments raised by Vaillant and Jakobson in the light of the presently available data. I will refrain, however, from any discussion of the possible channels of Syrian influence on the early Slavic cultures in general, trying to focus myself only on the topics mentioned by these two authors in their narrowest context.

It was another important study of André Vaillant that became the next event in this story. In 1948, he published a new reconstruction and a new interpretation of the so-called Macedonian Leaflet (or Folio)—a Cyrillic parchment folio of the 11th or 12th century with a poorly preserved text[6]. Known from the middle of the 19th cent., it was formerly misinterpreted as a work of the early tenth-century Bulgarian author John the Exarch of Bulgaria. Vaillant demonstrated that it is an earlier work of the late ninth century, namely, a preface to a new Slavonic translation of the

---

[1] This mediaeval city near the modern Sebastopol is often called "Cherson" in the Western literature but I will avoid this name in order to prevent confusion with the modern Ukrainian city Cherson. The fragment in question is, according to the majority of manuscripts, the following: "And Constantine found there the Gospels and the Psalter written in Russian letters. And he also found a man who spoke that language. And having conversed with him and acquiring the power of his speech by comparing it to his own language, he distinguished letters (разлоучи писмена), vowels and consonants, and offering a prayer to God, he soon began to read and speak" (tr. by Marvin Kantor in [KANTOR 1983, 43]). A great part of manuscripts gives a slightly different meaning in the following fragment: "...by comparing to his own language different letters (*or* difference of letters: различнаа писмена / различие писмень), vowels and consonants..."; cf. below, the completely different readings of the four mss forming the sub-branch γ according to Ziffer.

[2] [VAILLANT 1935].

[3] Written in 1943 and published as [JAKOBSON 1939–1944/1985]. Jakobson (p. 157) refers to [ГРИГОРЬЕВЪ 1913]. François Nau independently from Grigoriev and a bit earlier (in 1909) have considered the same hypothesis. It became largely accepted, but only as a hypothesis, after Grigoriev. I tried to verify it in [LOURIÉ 2013] (s. here the complete bibliography on the Slavonic version).

[4] Cf. reviews of scholarship in [ИВАНОВА 1969/2004; ФЛОРЯ 1981, 115-117; BIRNBAUM 1997–1999, 9-15].

[5] Especially stressed, in the current scholarship, by Anthony-Emil Tachiaos (but also by many scholars before him, including, since the 1950s, a Bulgarian academician Emil Georgiev): cf. [TACHIAOS 2001, 45]; cf. earlier [TACHIAOS 1993–1994, 61-71]. Cf. also [BIRNBAUM 1997–1999, 13-15]. In the eyes of Giorgio Ziffer, the hypothesis still holds but the complete lack of the reading "Syriac letters" in the manuscript tradition shows, according to him, that all present branches of tradition go back to a common East Slavic ("Russian") archetype: [ДЗИФФЕР 1994, 65-66]. For the number of manuscripts 58, s. [ZIFFER 1992, 372, fn. 9].

[6] [VAILLANT 1948].

Gospels explaining author's principles of translation, which was later paraphrased by John the Exarch in his genuine work. According to Vaillant, its author was Constantine-Cyril himself. Now, Vaillant's interpretation is commonly accepted, whereas his attribution to Constantine-Cyril is sometimes challenged (mostly in favour of either Methodius or some of his direct disciples)[7]. Thus, it became commonly accepted that the leaflet explains the principles of the first Slavonic translation of the four Gospels.

These principles turned out to be useful to eventually explain why the supposed Cyril's knowledge of Syriac could be so important. In the lines *recto* 5-13/14[8] of the leaflet, the author justifies himself for using some translations made by heretics. He adds (ll. 10-12) a quote from Cyril of Alexandria, with an explicit reference to his epistle to presbyter Eulogius: "Because not everything that the heretics say one should avoid and reject: they, in fact, confess many things that we confess as well"[9]. Given that the heretics in Cyril of Alexandria's letter are the Nestorians, Vaillant makes a far-reaching conclusion: it is known that the Nestorians used the Diatessaron by a heretic Tatian, whereas this form of Gospels was also used by some Orthodox; *therefore*, the author of the Slavonic leaflet used a Nestorian Syriac version of the Diatessaron to elaborate his own principles of translation from Greek into Slavonic[10].

Cyril of Alexandria said no word on the Diatessaron. In the letter, he simply explained why and in what context one can tolerate the wording of "two natures" in Christology. Thus, Vaillant's inference concerning the Diatessaron, not to say in Syriac, was completely arbitrary. But it catalysed a chain reaction of observations and hypotheses put forward by other scholars, who took it uncritically—first of all, by Roman Jakobson. All of them became sure that Constantine-Cyril knew Syriac and used the experience of translators into Syriac for his own translations into Slavonic[11].

Two Jakobson's observations made in the context of Vaillant's 1948 ideas are of special importance. First, he took attention to the short Slavonic synaxarian *Life* of Constantine-Cyril, where it is explicitly said "...that he mastered four languages: 'both Greek and Latin, Syriac and Hebrew'"[12]. Second, he reinterpreted an observation by Nicolaas van Wijk concerning one reading in Slavonic version of Mt 13:48, where Greek συνέλεξαν is rendered with a Slavic word whose meaning is not "collected" but "selected"[13]. Nicolaas van Wijk's attention to this peculiar

---

[7] Cf. a new reconstruction based on a more exact reading, with a palaeographical study, by Angelina Mincheva in [Минчева 1978, 76-89]; cf., among the most important studies of the contents: [Матхаузерова 1976 , 30-34; Dostálová 1985]. A. Mincheva and I. Dobrev (both in 1981) argued anew for an early tenth-century Preslav attribution, while Dobrev, unlike Mincheva and all other contemporary scholars, specifies the author as John the Exarch. Among the most recent works related to the Macedonian leaflet, cf. Vukoja 2010: 846-848. The Cyrillic writing of the Leaflet reveals, at least, twice some traces of a Glagolitic protograph (using two times the Glagolitic letter for ю instead of Cyrillic).

[8] The first half of l. 14 is lost, but it supposedly contained the end of the sentence.

[9] *Ep.* 44, *Ad Eulogium presbyterum Constantinopolitanum*; *PG* 77, 224D-228D (225A): ὅτι οὐ πάντα, ὅσα λέγουσιν οἱ αἱρετικοὶ, φεύγειν καὶ παραιτεῖσθαι χρή· πολλὰ γὰρ ὁμολογοῦσιν ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμολογοῦμεν.

[10] Cf.: "…il [the author] déclare que même les traductions des hérétiques ne sont pas à rejeter. Il répond donc à une objection possible : ne sont-ce pas surtout les chrétiens séparés de l'Église orthodoxe qui usent de ces traductions ? La phrase de Cyrille d'Alexandrie, qui est souvent citée <…>, vise expressément les Nestoriens, et ils utilisaient la version syriaque de l'*Harmonie des Évangiles (Diatessaron)* de l'hérétique Tatien ; ce qui n'a pas empêché l'œuvre de Tatien d'être estimée chez les orthodoxes, et même traduite en allemand au IXᵉ siècle" [Vaillant 1948, 7]. "L'auteur invoque les traductions antérieures à la sienne, y compris les traductions hérétiques, et il doit s'agir particulièrement de la traduction syriaque des Nestoriens" [Vaillant 1948, 11].

[11] One of the monuments of this euphoria is an often quoted article by a renown Czech Slavist Karel Horálek: [Горалек 1956]. Horálek followed the line of Jakobson's 1954 paper (s. next fn.).

[12] [Jakobson 1954/1985, 185]. Jakobson refers to the edition by Alexander Teodorov-Balan: [Теодоровъ-Баланъ 1934, 34-37 (34 text, 35-36 variant readings)]; this text is basically the same (but taking into account some additional manuscripts) as in the standard Russian edition: [Лавров 1930/1966, 101-102 (101)]. All witnesses of the text mention the same four languages.

[13] This is the normative reading in the Slavonic bible from the earliest time until the currently used "Bible of Elizabeth" (1751); cf. a critical edition according to the earliest manuscripts: [Алексеев 2005, 77]: избраша "selected" (or its orthographical and morphological variants) in most manuscripts; two 14ᵗʰ-cent. mss have събьраша "collected" but they represent a later recension.

reading was attracted by a study of Daniel Plooij on the same reading in the Diatessaron[14]. However, van Wijk preferred to explain this peculiarity with a hypothetical influence of Vulgate's *elegerunt*[15]. Jakobson turned the tables: he explained the phenomenon applying Vaillant's fresh approach, as an influence of the Diatessaron in Syriac[16]. Ten years later, this explanation has been convincingly, to my opinion, criticised by Bruce Metzger[17].

Putting aside a rather unhelpful idea concerning the Diatessaron, we have not to overlook the fact of agreement between Syriac and Slavonic against Greek. The Syriac reading in question (ܚܒܘ) is present in all other recensions of Syriac Gospels[18], including Peshiṭta and the early seventh-century (finished in 616) Ḥarqleian version[19]. The latter fact is worth noting because, as it became known quite recently, some earliest Slavonic manuscripts share with that version its peculiar reading in Mk 15:23[20].

Jakobson was the first, and Karel Horálek the second who traced some Syriac features in the earliest Slavonic Gospels, even though Horálek himself erroneously gave the palm of priority to Kapiton Ivanovich Nevostruev (1815–1872)[21] (but even this Horálek's mistake could be not without profit for further development of his idea[22]).

Horálek provided one more example: Mt 5:18, where many ancient manuscripts read "letter" (писма or писмо) instead of "iota"[23]. This reading is similar (but not identical: Horálek's observation needs to be taken with a caution) to the Old Syriac text that disagrees here with those of Peshiṭta and Ḥarqleian (the two latter follow the Greek one) and has "one letter *yud*" (ܚܕܐ ܐܬܘܬܐ ܝܘܕ) instead of "one *yud*" (ܚܕ ܝܘܕ) of other recensions. A reading without

---

[14] [PLOOIJ 1931].

[15] [VAN WIJK 1931].

[16] [JAKOBSON 1954/1985, 186]. Moreover, Jakobson added a parallel provided by Dietrich Gerhardt [GERHARDT 1953] from Thegan's *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, 7 (*PL* 106, 409C) that Charlemagne on the very last day of his life corrected the four Gospels *cum Graecis et Siris* (*in ultimo ante obitus sui diem cum Graecis et Siris optime correxerat*). Gerhardt and, after him, Jakobson understood this as an editorial work, analogous to that attributed by them to Constantine-Cyril.

[17] [METZGER 1963, 74-75, esp. fn. 7]. Metzger's main argument is inaccessibility, to his knowledge, of the Syriac Diatessaron in the ninth century West; moreover, the data of textual analysis do not provide "a hint that the Apostle to the Slavs had ever seen in any language a Harmony even remotely related to Tatian's". Concerning Gerhardt's parallel with Charlemagne, Metzger recalls the latter's difficulty in learning to write, and so, concluded that "...Thegan is probably to be understood as meaning no more than that Charlemagne asked Greeks and Syrians questions regarding the Gospels. In any case, the incident has nothing to do with the question of whether Cyril knew Syriac and used Tatian's Diatessaron" [METZGER 1963, 88-89, fn. 2].

[18] As it has been noticed already by Plooij and now could be verified with [KIRAZ 1996, I:196] (four main Syriac versions without the Diatessaron).

[19] [WHITE 1778, 67].

[20] S. Excursus 1 below.

[21] Horálek's [ГОРАЛЕК 1956, 232 and fn. 8] reference to Nevostruev is a (memory?) mistake: «В старославянском евангелии можно было привести и другие варианты, к которым существуют только сирийские параллели, так как [*to read* «так, как» = «таким образом, как»?] на это в свое время обратил внимание уже К. И. Невоструев» ("One could refer to other variant readings, in the Old Slavic Gospel, to whom there are Syriac parallels only, as once noticed K. I. Nevostruev"), with a reference (without specification of pages) to the whole text of Nevostruev's article, where there is no mention about Syriac readings at all: НЕВОСТРУЕВЪ 1863. In the same footnote, Horálek refers, moreover, to Franc Grivec ("Срав. [Ср.] F. Grivec, *Slovo* 3, Zagreb, 1953, стр. 32"). Here [GRIVEC 1953] Grivec expresses his sympathy toward the recent attempts (including Horálek's ones) to explain some variant readings in the Slavonic Gospels through Cyril's using of Syriac translations.

[22] S. Excursus 2 below.

[23] [ГОРАЛЕК 1956, 233]. These readings are not accepted in the main text of the modern edition (which follows, for this place, the text of the "Typographic" Cyrillic Four-Gospel book, 12th cent., which is far from being the most ancient among the preserved copies) but are quoted in the apparatus: [АЛЕКСЕЕВ 2005, 33]. The reading писма has been accepted, however, as Horálek points out (*ibid.*), in Josef Vajs' reconstruction of the earliest Slavonic text of Matthew (1935), who referred, for comparison, to the Curetonian Syriac only.

mention of *iota* at all, as we see in Slavonic, is to be found neither in the Curetonian and *Sinaiticus*, nor in the ancient Syriac authors[24].

Horálek quotes as well a gloss to Mt 5:22 (to the word рака = ῥακά), allegedly from the South Slavic Karpinsko gospel (13th cent., Cyrillic): рака бо речет сѧ сурьски оплъванъ ("Because *raka* is called in Syriac 'the one on which one have spat'"). Horálek's argumentation in favour of possible Constantine-Cyril's authorship of this gloss is erroneous: the source is Theophylact of Bulgaria[25], and the gloss hardly demonstrates a good knowledge of Syriac[26].

Let us turn back to the Macedonian Leaflet, its lines *recto* 5-8, immediately before the reference to the letter of Cyril of Alexandria. In these lines, the new reading by Angelina Mincheva provided several additional letters and some new interpretations of the signs which were previously read differently (s. Table 1; the spaces between words are introduced by the editors; the text of the line 5 is reproduced only in the part after the colon which marks a new period).

Table 1.

Ed. Mincheva and English Translation	Reconstruction / Translation by Vaillant
и еже сѫть па **5** /////ши мѫжи ськазаниѥ· аште и неправовѣр **6** ///////ськазаниѥ сь ними то обаче добрѣ сѫть **7** ////////ба ны ѥсть не отьметати ськазаниѣ ихь **8**	и еже сѫть по <ложили> … мѫжи ськазаниѥ· аште и неправовѣр <ьно……..н>аказаниѥ сь ними то обаче добрѣ сѫть ……….. иже* ѥсть не отьметати ськазаниѣ ихь * Vaillant's note: Lire <тѣм>же ?
And the translation/interpretation that is .... <provided> by the men... even though <they were *or* it was> unorthodo[x]... translation/interpretation with them, but, nevertheless, they <interpreted> good... we... have not to reject their translation/interpretation	Et l'interprétation que des hommes… ont (donnée), même si l'enseignement n'<est> pas orthodoxe avec eux, pourtant ils ont bien <interprété. et ainsi ?> il ne faut pas rejeter leur interprétation

The key word here is ськазаниѥ (with a spelling variant ськазаниѣ), which I translate "translation/interpretation" (according to its main meanings attested to, among others, in the *Vita Constantini*; other meanings are "(story)telling" etc.[27]), and Vaillant translates "interprétation". The word "enseignement" in Vaillant's translation corresponds to his reconstruction [н]аказаниѥ, but this word, too, is now read as ськазаниѥ.

---

[24] [KIRAZ 1996, I:54]. Ephrem the Syrian quotes Mt 5:18 in both forms; the Old Syriac reading is also attested to in fourth-century texts by Aphrahat and the *Liber Graduum*: [LELOIR 1958, 8 and fn. 14].

[25] [ГОРАЛЕК 1956, 233]. Horálek adds (*ibid.*), moreover, a mysterious reference: "подобное объяснение есть о [*instead of* в] одном древнерусском евангелии-апракосе" ["there is a similar explanation in one Old Russian Aprakos-Gospel"]. In fact, as Anna Pichkhadze explained to me, Horálek's reference to Karpinsko Evangeliary is a mistake (it does not contains such gloss; Anna Pichkhadze was the person responsible for collation of the Karpinsko Evangeliary for the edition [АЛЕКСЕЕВ 2005]), whereas this gloss does occur in the following mss: Dobrilov Evangeliary, AD 1164, Cyrillic, and Tretiakov Evangeliary, late 12th–early 13th cent., Cyrillic [АЛЕКСЕЕВ 2005, 33, apparatus]. Moreover, as Francis Thomson noticed (I owe to Anna Pichkhadze for this reference), this gloss occurs as well in the Mstislav Evangeliary (between 1103 and 1117) and goes back to the Slavonic translation of the *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* by Theophylact of Bulgaria († *ca* 1126; Thomson argues that the Slavonic translation was made during Theophylact's lifetime): нѣции же <глаголютъ *add. by the editor*> ракка сѵрьскы вплеванъ толкуетсѧ (N. P. Popov (ed.), [ВМЧ 1910: col. 2210], with simplified spelling) = Τινὲς δὲ τὸ « Ῥακά, » Συριστὶ, κατάπτυστόν φασι σημαίνειν (*PG* 123, 196A); cf. [THOMSON 1999, *Addenda*, 24].

[26] Cf.: "The Old Slavic explanation does really convey the Syriac meaning of the root of the word, and so, it was hardly introduced to the text by the scribe. In the Slavic milieu, it is easiest to explain this as a reflex of Constantine's knowledge of Syriac" ("Старославянское объяснение действительно передает сирийское значение основы слова и едва ли было внесено в текст переписчиком. В славянской среде это легче всего объяснить как рефлекс знания Константином сирийского языка"). In fact, Syriac has not only the loanword (Aramaic or Hebrew through Greek) ܪܩܐ (with two short /a/) "empty fellow, full" which is used in all versions of the Gospel, but also its complete homograph (in the consonant writing) ܪܩܐ (with two long /ā/ in the Eastern pronunciation or /ō/ in the Western one)—one of the forms of active participle of the verb ܪܩ "to spit", that is, "spitting one". Thus, the author of the gloss confounded two homographs, not to say—as Horálek noticed himself—that his translation of ܪܩܐ would be correct for the root only but not for the word itself.

[27] [SJS IV, 269-271], *s.v.* ськазати.

Other differences in two reconstructions are rather minor. The last letter in the line 5 is not *o* but *a*; this prevents from Vaillant's reconstruction по<ложили> "ont (donnée)" but does not affect the general sense: the author deals with a translation/interpretation which he took from some unorthodox men. The text allows us to complete неправовѣр in line 6 with an ending in different manners, as either adjective applied to the "men" (неправовѣрни etc.) or an adverb applied to their way of translation (неправовѣрнѣ), but this, again, does not make a great difference in the meaning of the whole passage.

Therefore, the new reading of the text approves and even enforces previous Vaillant's understanding of this passage: the author deals with an earlier translation/interpretation—but a larger context shows clearly that it is a translation of the Gospels—made by some heretics but, nevertheless, good enough. Then (in lines 9-12), he justifies himself, with the words of Cyril of Alexandria, for making usage of this translation.

Vaillant's supposition that this translation has been the Diatessaron in Syriac is to be rejected, and, moreover, there is no hint at all that the text was in Syriac. However, the rigid core of Vaillant's hypothesis still holds: the publisher of the first Cyrillo-Methodian Slavonic Evangeliary, be this Constantine-Cyril himself or not, used some previous translation made by some heretics and needed to explain his reasons to some, potential or actual, critics.

Now, it is time to put forward some rather natural considerations. The need of apologising is hardly compatible with any supposition that the language of this "heretical" translation could be any other than Slavonic. In any other case, the auditory could hardly notice the very fact of a purely philological usage of a work of "heretical" predecessors. Moreover, such a fact would never be imputable unless it was aggravated by accusation of conveying some specified heretical ideas—but the latter did not take place. Such technical matters could never imply a danger of Church quarrels. Such a danger would be, however, quite obvious, if the usage of a "heretical" text is not coverable—as it, indeed, would be, were this "heretical" translation Slavonic.

One can wonder why these considerations have never been discussed by either Vaillant and Jakobson themselves or any other since 1948—and, in this way, one can appreciate the force of the prevailing conviction that no Slavonic translations before Cyril and Methodius were possible[28].

It is not a place here to resolve the riddle of the Macedonian Leaflet definitely—so far as we are limited here to dealing with the texts referred to by Vaillant and Jakobson. However, we can, at least, compare our conclusion about the literal meaning of the leaflet with the data of the *Vita Constantini* as they are available to us, whereas were not yet available to Vaillant and Jakobson.

According to the studies of Giorgio Ziffer, the earliest and genuine readings are often preserved in the Ruthenian branch of the manuscript tradition (subdivided, in turn, into two sub-branches, **γ** and **δ**), which is independent from the majority of manuscripts[29]. One of the readings peculiar to **γ**, although, according to Ziffer, not necessarily genuine, is of special interest[30]. It is the famous place in ch. 8 containing the mention of the "Russian letters". The peculiar reading deals with another part of the same period. Constantine, as Ziffer summarises it, "...elimina dal Vangelo e Salterio scritti in lettere russe le parti eretiche e contrarie alla dottrina della Chiesa e riordina invece quelle che sono a essa conformi"[31]. The word гласнаа is changed to

---

[28] Even though there ware and still are some scholars who, for various reasons (mostly incompatible with the present author's viewpoint), believe in the existence of Church Slavonic writings before Cyril and Methodius; s. n. 4 for reviews of the relevant publications.

[29] [ZIFFER 1992; ДЗИФФЕР 1994]. Cf., among his latest studies: [ZIFFER 2012; ZIFFER 2013].

[30] Ziffer does not include it into his list of the genuine readings of the Ruthenian tradition and does not object Capaldo's argumentation against its genuineness: "...potrà non esserlo [*sc.* genuina] la lezione del cap. VIII..., che del resto non avevo incluso nel novero delle lezioni genuini del 1° gruppo rutena [*sc.* γ], e di cui mi ero limitato a rilevare l'interesse" [ZIFFER 2012, 151].

[31] [ZIFFER 1992, 395]. S. above, fn. 1, for translation of the whole passage according to the mss other than γ.

несъгласная, and the resulting pair несъгласная and съгласная are no longer to be translated as, respectively, "vowels" and "consonants" but as "disagreeing" and "agreeing" with the Orthodox faith.

Mario Capaldo already put this reading into some connexion with the Macedonian Leaflet. This is the third (from four) Capaldo's argument against its genuineness. Capaldo, considering the leaflet to be written by Constantine-Cyril (although being aware that this position is open to criticism), thinks that "Ziffer's interpretation" is "in contrasto" with the quotation from Cyril of Alexandria in the leaflet[32]. Capaldo does not unpack his thought further, but his words "in contrasto" would have any sense only if he saw some "contrast" in Cyril of Alexandria's claim that the heretics have "many things" conform to the Orthodox faith and the alleged action of Constantine according to "Ziffer's interpretation". However, I am unable to see how the words of Cyril of Alexandria could prevent from selectivity in adoption of "heretical" writings.

The Macedonian leaflet is not only far from being a witness against "Ziffer's interpretation", but, if we take it in "Lourié's interpretation" provided above, goes along with it. If the author of the preface to the first Cyrillo-Methodian Evangeliary referred to some previous Slavonic translation made by heretics, it would be in complete conformity with the witness of sub-branch γ. If so, in Chersonese, Cyril found the Gospels and the Psalter in a previously existing Slavonic translation made by heretics and, then, edited them himself.

Let us look closer at the four manuscripts of the sub-branch γ. Below I quote (Table 2) the relevant passage in a literal translation from the manuscript of Vilnius (*Vil*) and the text of this manuscript completing a *saut même au même* according to all other manuscripts in the <pointy brackets>; the peculiar reading is underlined:

Table 2.

And [Constantine] found there the Gospels and the Psalter written in Russian letters (роусьскыми писмены). And he also found a man who spoke that language. And having conversed with him and acquiring the meaning [силоу, *lit.* power] of his speech by comparing it to his own language, <u>he took off the letters disagreeing ones and arranged the agreeing ones and, with praying to God assiduously,</u> he soon began to read and speak.	Обрѣтъ же тоу е҃улие и ѱалтырь роускыми писмены писано, и ч҃лка wбрѣ(тъ) г҃лща тою <бесѣдою и> бесѣдова с ни(мъ) и силоу рѣчи прїимъ своеи бесѣде прикладаѧ <u>разлоучи писмена несъгласнаѧ и съгла(с)наа оучини и къ б҃гоу въ м҃лтвѣ прилежа(въ)</u> въскорѣ (же) на(ча)тъ чести и сказати.

The three remaining manuscripts of the sub-branch γ do not affect the picture, although Capaldo thinks otherwise and even finds here his second argument against the genuineness of the whole passage in the sub-branch γ[33].

Given that, at least, two from four arguments against the genuineness of the passage do not work, we are in position to look closely at the two remaining Capaldo's arguments.

They are of uneven force, but I must confess that, in these two points, I agree with Capaldo. The decisive argument is, to my opinion, the fourth one. Namely, the whole passage is

---

[32] [CAPALDO 1992, 339, cf. 340].

[33] Ms *Bod* adds, after оучини ("arranged") and the following sentence break sign: са(мъ) же к б҃гоу во м҃лтве прилежа(въ) ("And himself, with praying to God assiduously..."). The differences here are limited to stylistics and spelling. Ms *Vat* omits и съгласнаа and puts differently the break sign between the sentences: разлоучи писмена несъгласнаѧ оученикъ [*sic!*] б҃гоу (an obviously corrupted reading because of a common mistake in Cyrillic, к *pro* в: оученикъ "disciple" instead of оучинивъ "having arranged"). Ms *Pog* has the sentence break sign in the same place as *Vat*, but its text is almost identical to that of *Vil*: …оучини къ б҃гоу. во м҃лтвѣ прилежа(въ)… ("…the suitable ones arranged to God. With praying assiduously..."). The resulting phrase "arranged to God" is also a corruption. Capaldo considers this phrase, however, as the reading of the sub-archetype of the four manuscripts. He reads *Vil* in a different way than Ziffer omitting the conjunction и ("and") after оучини (оучини къ б҃гоу, въ м҃лтвѣ прилежа(въ). …arranged to God, praying assiduously."), and so, dismisses the reading of *Bod* as an innovation. This is his second argument against the genuineness of the reading in question [CAPALDO 1992, 337, 339]. Regardless of the actual reading of *Vil*, one cannot see why we should ascribe to the sub-archetype an obviously erroneous reading if there is, at least, one manuscript (*Bod*) where the corresponding place is perfectly understandable.

dedicated to Constantine's studies in this "Russian" (whatever it means) language and is finished with the phrase "...he soon began to read and speak". Thus, there is no room, within this passage, to describe Constantine's editorial work[34].

The first Capaldo's argument is also of importance, whereas not decisive. The word писмены used in the passage two times has, at the first time, certainly the meaning "letters" ("signs of alphabet"). Indeed, the Slavonic word (as well as the Greek word γράμματα) could have meaning "writings" but, nevertheless, in this passage at the second occurrence of писмены such word as, e.g., съказания or simply substantivated adjectives in neutrum plural would to be expected—were the meaning of γ the genuine one[35].

Nevertheless, the reading of γ, even if not genuine, is very early. It expresses some early tradition preserving a memory of editorial work or, at least, censorship by Constantine-Cyril on some heretical writings. This tradition agrees with the testimony of the Macedonian Leaflet. In the eyes of the editor responsible for the sub-archetype γ, the "Russian letters" found by Constantine in Chersonese were pre-Cyrillian Slavonic translations made by heretics. Thus, we have here an authoritative voice in favour of the hypothesis that these "letters" were some Slavonic pre-Cyrillian writing[36]—but this is still not a logically strict demonstration.

Be this as it may, the sub-branch γ provides an independent from the Macedonian Leaflet witness that Cyril edited some earlier Slavonic translations made by "heretics". Other data collected by André Vaillant and Roman Jakobson, regardless of their understanding of the mysterious "Russian letters", point in direction of Syrians[37].

Excursus 1: Mk 15:23 in Slavonic and Syriac

The problematic reading is "wine vinegar (*lit.* vinegred wine)" оцьтьно вино codd. *Marianus* (early 11th cent., Glagolitic) and *Zographensis* (10/11th cent., Glagolitic) with an orthographical variant оцьтѣно вино *Liber Savvae* (11th cent., Cyrillic), cp. in Ḥarqleian: ܚܠܐ ܕܚܡܪ "myrrhed vinegar", with a marginal gloss to the latter word ܕܡܙܝܓ ܒܡܘܪܐ "mixed with myrrh" [WHITE 1778, 252] — instead of the normative "myrrhed wine" ἐσμυρνισμένον οἶνον / ܚܡܪ ܕܡܙܝܓ ܒܡܘܪܐ "the wine mixed up with the myrrh" Peshiṭta / озмьрено вино *cod. Assemanianus* (11th cent., Glagolitic) in agreement with the most of the subsequent Slavonic tradition. Cf. [ALVARADO, SANTOS MARINAS 2006]. According to these authors, "[s]in embargo, estos podrian estar reproduciendo alguna hipotetica variante griega no recogida por las ediciones criticas al uso" [*ibid.*, p. 68]. The readings similar to that of the *Marianus* are quite widespread in the early Slavonic manuscripts of Mark, as it will be shown in the edition of Mark according to these manuscripts, which will be hopefully published soon (I was able to consult the work in preparation due to the amiability of Anna Pichkhadze). The marginal gloss in Ḥarqleian could reflect either early 6th-cent. Philoxenian recension or Greek variant reading known to Thomas of Ḥarqel or both; cf. BROCK 1981: 343, fn.67. It is most likely that the variant reading "vinegar" goes back beyond Thomas of Ḥarqel to the circle of Philoxenus of Mabbug in the early sixth century. To the same circle, as I tried to demonstrate elsewhere, goes back one piece of anti-Jewish polemics known only in Slavonic but written in Syriac (and, most probably, translated directly from Syriac into Slavonic), the so-called Eleutherian recension of the *Narration of the 12 Fridays*; cf. [LOURIÉ 2012].

Excursus 2: Lk 15:2 and John 7:17 in Slavonic, Coptic, and Syriac

Nevostruev mentions [НЕВОСТРУЕВЪ 1863, 223] two correspondences between Slavonic and Coptic Sahidic: "Въ древнемъ переводѣ есть варіанта четыре, вовсе необъяснимые изъ извѣстныхъ по изданіямъ документовъ Новозавѣтнаго текста, если не брать во вниманіе нѣкоего Сагидскаго (Египетскаго) перевода, съ коимъ два изъ нихъ (Іоа. 7, 17. разумѣетъ *ученіе*, Лук. 15, 2. роптаху *вси* приб.) имѣютъ странное сходство" ["In the ancient translation, there are about four variant readings that are completely unexplainable from

---

[34] Cf. [CAPALDO 1992, 339].

[35] [CAPALDO 1992, 338-339].

[36] This hypothesis is known under different forms, often aggravated with very specific, to say the least, ideas about the nature of the pre-Cyrillian Slavic writing. According to the most balanced variant of such hypothesis put forward by Nikolai Konstantinovich Nikol'skij (1893–1936), these "Russian letters" were Glagolitic: [НИКОЛЬСКИЙ 1928].

[37] The author is very grateful for their continuous help to Anna Pichkhadze, Nikolai Seleznyov, Alin Suciu, and Giorgio Ziffer.

the witnesses of the New Testament text known from editions, if only one does not take into account some Sahidic (Egyptian) translation with whom two of them (John 7:17: he shall know *doctrine*; Luke 15:2: murmured *all (of them)* added) have a strange similarity"). Such reading in Luke 15:2 is not presented in the Syriac texts known to me, but it does present in Sahidic: THPOY "all" (*sc.*, Pharisees and Scribes) is added [HORNER 1911, 292-293; WILMET 1958, 939], whereas it disappears from the later mediaeval Bohairic version [HORNER 1898, 210-211].

As to John 7:17, the reading omitting περὶ before τῆς διδαχῆς (quite widespread in the early Slavonic manuscripts: cf. [АЛЕКСЕЕВ 1998, 33, apparatus]) is attested to in Old Syriac (in both *Sinaiticus* and Curetonian) and Peshiṭta but corrected against Greek (with adding the preposition ܡܢ) in Ḥarqleian: [KIRAZ 1996, IV:134]. Surprisingly, *pace* Nevostruev, this reading is absent from both Sahidic (where normally the preposition ETBE is used: [HORNER 1898: 112-113; QUECKE 1984, 121.20; cf. WILMET 1957, 112] and Old Bohairic (preserved in a 4th-cent. papyrus) versions (the same preposition but in the form EΘBE: [KASSER 1958, 11]), although is present in the late medieval Bohairic [HORNER 1898, 410-411]. Only one early Sahidic manuscript, M 569 [7/8th-cent. Evangeliary, later than the 5th-cent. ms PPalau Rib. 183 and ms Chester Beatty 813 (*ca* AD 600) while roughly contemporaneous to the 7th-cent. ms 814] is somewhat dubious because it uses the preposition E- [QUECKE 1984, 121, variant reading] which could correspond to περί but could be used as well as a mark of a direct object [WILMET 1957, 87, cf. 78] and, therefore, to lead to the same interpretation of the place as in the later Bohairic recension. It is thus possible that the old Slavonic reading in John 7:17, which has been pointed out by Nevostruev as similar to Sahidic but has almost nothing to do with the Sahidic tradition of the text, is in fact influenced by the Syriac version and/or its hypothetical lost Greek original.

Bibliography

ALVARADO, SANTOS MARINAS 2006
    S. ALVARADO, E. SANTOS MARINAS, Vino *versus* vinagre en pasajes de la Pasión de Cristo dentro de la traducción de los Evangelios en antiguo eslavo, *Ꞌlu Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 11, 2006, 63-69.
BIRNBAUM 1997–1999
    H. BIRNBAUM, Some Remaining Puzzles in Cyrillo-Methodian Studies, *Slovo* 47-49, 1997–1999, 7-32.
BROCK 1981
    S. BROCK, The Resolution of the Philoxenian/Harclean Problem, in: B. M. METZGER (ed.), *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis*, London, 1981, 325-343.
CAPALDO 1992
    M. CAPALDO, Sulla *Vita Constantini.* Questioni minori di metodo, di esegesi, di critica testuale, *Europa Orientalis* 11, 1992, 295-340.
CSCO — Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium; Copt — Scriptores Coptici; Subs — Subsidia.
DOSTÁLOVÁ 1985
    R. DOSTÁLOVÁ, Antike und byzantinische Voraussetzungen der ältesten slawischen Übersetzungstheorien, *Listy filologické / Folia philologica* 108, 1985, 189-198.
GERHARDT 1953
    D. GERHARDT, Goten, Slaven oder Syrer im alten Cherson?, *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 4, 1953, 78-88.
GRIVEC 1953
    F. GRIVEC, Dikcija Assemanijevega glagolskjega evangelistarja [Elocution of the Assemanius Glagolitic Evangeliary], *Slovo* 3, 1953, 5-34.
HORNER 1898
    G. W. HORNER, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect...*, vol. II: *The Gospels of S. Luke and S. John*, Oxford, 1898.
HORNER 1911
    G. W. HORNER, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect...*, vol. II: *The Gospel of S. Luke*, Oxford, 1911.
JAKOBSON 1939–1944/1985
    R. JAKOBSON, Saint Constantin et la langue syriaque, *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves* [New York], 7 (1939–1944) 181-186, repr. [JAKOBSON 1985, 143-158].
JAKOBSON 1954/1985
    R. JAKOBSON, Minor Native Sources for the Early History of the Slavic Church, *Harvard Slavic Studies* 2 (1954) 39-73, repr. [JAKOBSON 1985, 159-189].
JAKOBSON 1985
    R. JAKOBSON, *Selected Writings*, vol. VI: *Early Slavic Paths and Crossroads*, ed. by S. RUDY. Part 1: *Comparative Slavic Studies. The Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition*, Berlin—New York; Amsterdam, 1985.
KANTOR 1983
    M. KANTOR, *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*, Ann Arbor, 1983.
KASSER 1958
    R. KASSER, *Papyrus Bodmer III. Évangile de Jean et Génèse I-IV,2 en Bohaïrique*, CSCO 177; Copt 25; Louvain, 1958
KIRAZ 1996

G. A. KIRAZ, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels. Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshîṭṭâ and Ḥarklean Versions*, vols. I–IV, New Testament Tools and Studies, XXI/I–IV; Leiden—New York—Köln, 1996.

LELOIR 1958

L. LELOIR, *L'Évangile d'Éphrem d'après les œuvres éditées. Recueil des textes*, CSCO 180; Subs 12; Louvain, 1958.

LOURIÉ 2012

B. LOURIÉ, Friday Veneration in Sixth- and Seventh-Century Christianity and Christian Legends about the Conversion of Naǧrān, in: C. A. SEGOVIA, B. LOURIÉ (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, Orientalia Judaica Christiana, 3; Piscataway, NJ, 2012, 131-230.

LOURIÉ 2013

B. LOURIÉ, The Syriac *Aḥiqar*, Its Slavonic Version, and the Relics of the Three Youths in Babylon, *Slověne* 2, 2013, Nr 2, 64-117.

METZGER 1963

B. METZGER, *Chapters in the History of the New Testament Textual Criticism*, New Testament Tools and Studies, 4; Leiden, 1963.

PG

J.-P. MIGNE, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca.*

PL

J.-P. MIGNE, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina.*

PLOOIJ 1931

D. PLOOIJ, Matthew XIII. 48[B] in the Textual Tradition, *Mededeelingen der koninklijke Akademie van wetenschappen*, Afdeeling letterkunde, deel 71, serie A, 1931, № 1, 1-10.

QUECKE 1984

H. QUECKE, *Das Johannesevangelium Saïdisch. Text der Handschrift PPalau Rib. Inv.-Nr. 183 mit den Varianten der Handschriften 813 und 814 der Chester Beatty Library und der Handschrift M 569*, Papyrologica Castroctaviana, 11; Rome—Barcelone, 1984.

SJS

J. KURZ, Z. HAUPTOVÁ (eds.), *Slovník jazyka staroslověnského*, 4 vols., Prague, 1966–1997 [repr. St. Petersburg, 2006].

TACHIAOS 1993–1994

A.-E. TACHIAOS, Some Controversial Points Relating to the Life and Activity of Cyril and Methodius, *Cyrillomethodianum* 17/18, 1993–1994, 41-71.

TACHIAOS 2001

A.-E. TACHIAOS, *Cyril and Methodius of Thessalonica: the Acculturation of the Slavs*, Crestwood, 2001.

THOMSON 1999

F. J. THOMSON, *The Reception of Byzantine Culture in Mediaeval Russia*, Collected Studies Series CS 590; Ashgate, 1999.

VAILLANT 1935

A. VAILLANT, Les « lettres russes » de la *Vie de Constantin*, *Revue des études slaves* 15, 1935, 75-77.

VAILLANT 1948

A. VAILLANT, La préface de l'Évangéliaire vieux-slave, *Revue des études slaves* 24, 1948, 5-20.

VAN WIJK 1931

N. van Wijk, Eine Vulgatalesart im slavischen Evangelium, *Byzantinoslavica* 3, 1931, 89-91.

VUKOJA 2010

V. VUKOJA, Očitovanje prevoditeljskih načela u nekim starocrkvenoslavenskim i hrvatskim crkvenoslavenskim prijevodnim obrascima [Manifestation of Translational Principles in Some Old Church Slavonic and Croatian Church Slavonic Translational Patterns], *Slovo* 60, 2010, 841-865.

WHITE 1778

J. WHITE, *Sacrorum Evangeliorum versio syriaca philoxeniana*, t. I, Oxford, 1778.

WILMET 1957

M. WILMET, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament Sahidique. II. Les mots autochtones*, 1, CSCO 173; Subs 11; Louvain, 1957.

WILMET 1958

M. WILMET, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament Sahidique. II. Les mots autochtones*, 2, CSCO 183; Subs 13; Louvain, 1958.

ZIFFER 1992

G. ZIFFER, La tradizione russa sud-occidentale della *Vita Constantini*, in: M.-L. FERRAZZI (ed.), *Studi slavistice offerti a Alessandro Ivanov nel suo 70. compleanno*, Collana dell'Istituto di Lingue e Letterature dell'Europa Orientale, Università di Udine, 13; Sezione di slavistica, 4; Udine, 1992, 370-397.

ZIFFER 2012

G. ZIFFER, Una palinodia costantiniana?, *Studi Slavistici* 9, 2012, 149-156.

ZIFFER 2013

G. ZIFFER, Intorno al subarchetipo β della *Vita Constantini*, in: M. GARZANITI *et al.*, *Contributi italiani al XV Congresso Internazionale degli Slavisti (Minsk, 20-27 agosto 2013)*, Biblioteca di Studi slavistici, 19; Florence, 2013, 11-22.

АЛЕКСЕЕВ 1998

А. А. АЛЕКСЕЕВ *et al.*, *Евангелие от Иоанна в славянской традиции* [A. A. ALEKSEEV *et al.*, *The Gospel of John in the Slavonic Tradition*], Novum Testamentum Palaeoslovenice, 1; St. Petersburg, 1998.

АЛЕКСЕЕВ 2005

А. А. АЛЕКСЕЕВ *et al.*, *Евангелие от Матфея в славянской традиции* [A. A. ALEKSEEV *et al.*, *The Gospel of Matthew in the Slavonic Tradition*], Novum Testamentum Palaeoslovenice, 2; St. Petersburg, 2005.

ВМЧ 1910

Великія минеи четіи, Ноябрь, 16, fasc. I, Moscow, 1910.

ГОРАЛЕК 1956

К. ГОРАЛЕК, Св. Кирилл и семитские языки [St. Cyril and Semitic Languages], in: M. HALLE, H. C. LUNT, H. MCLEAN, C. H. VAN SCHOONEVELD (eds.), *For Roman Jakobson: Essays on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday*, *11 October 1956*, The Hague: Mouton, 1956, 230-234.

ГРИГОРЬЕВЪ 1913

А. ГРИГОРЬЕВЪ, *Повѣсть объ Акирѣ Премудромъ* [A. GRIGORIEV, *A Narration on Akir the Wise*], Moscow, 1913.

ДЗИФФЕР 1994

Дж. ДЗИФФЕР, Новые данные о традиции и тексте пространного Жития Константина [G. ZIFFER, New Data concerning the Tradition and the Text of the Long *Vita Constantini*], *Славяноведение*, 1994, Nr 1, 60-66.

ИВАНОВА 1969/2004

Т. А. ИВАНОВА, Еще раз о «Русских письменах». (К 1100-летию со дня смерти Константина-Кирилла) [T. A. IVANOVA, Once more about the "Russian writings". (Toward the 1100th Anniversary of the death of Constantine-Cyril)], *Советское славяноведение* (1969) Nr 4, 72-75; repr. in Т. А. ИВАНОВА, *Избранные труды*. Под ред. С. А. АВЕРИНОЙ. Ars philologica; St Petersburg, 2004, 33-37.

ЛАВРОВ 1930/1966

П. А. ЛАВРОВ, *Материалы по истории возникновения древнейшей славянской письменности* [P. A. LAVROV, *Materials on the History of Creation of the Oldest Slavic Writing*], Труды Славянской комиссии АН СССР, т. 1; Leningrad, 1930; repr. in the series "Slavic Printings and Reprintings", vol. 67; The Hague—Paris, 1966.

МАТХАУЗЕРОВА 1976

С. МАТХАУЗЕРОВА, *Древнерусские теории искусства слова* [S. MATHAUSEROVÁ, *Old Russian Theories of the Word Art*], Prague, 1976.

МИНЧЕВА 1978

А. МИНЧЕВА, *Старобългарски кирилски откъслеци* [A. MINCHEVA, *Old Bulgarian Cyrillic Fragments*], Български езикови паметници, I; Sofia, 1978.

НЕВОСТРУЕВЪ 1863

К. И. НЕВОСТРУЕВЪ, Записка о переводѣ Евангелія на славянскій языкъ, сдѣланномъ св. Кирилломъ и Меѳодіемъ [K. I. NEVOSTRUEV, A Notice concerning the Translation of the Gospel into Slavic Made by Sts Cyril and Methodius], in: М. ПОГОДИНЪ (ed.), *Кирилло-Меѳодіевскій сборникъ Въ память о совершившемся тысящелѣтіи славянской писменности и христіанства въ Россіи* [M. POGODIN (ed.), *A Cyrillo-Methodian Collection. In the Memory of the Completed Millenary of the Slavic Writing and Christianity in Russia*], Moscow, 1863, 209-234.

НИКОЛЬСКИЙ 1928

Н. [К.] НИКОЛЬСКИЙ, К вопросу о русских письменах, упоминаемых в Житии Константина Философа [N. Nikolsky, Toward the Question of the Russian Letters Mentioned in the *Life of Constantine the Philosopher*], *Известия по Отделению русского языка и словесности Академии наук СССР* (1928) Т. 1, кн. 1, 1-37.

ТЕОДОРОВЪ-БАЛАНЪ 1934

А. ТЕОДОРОВЪ-БАЛАНЪ, *Наша книжнина и езикъ. Сбирка отъ производи на старото и на новото време*. 1. *Кирилъ и Методи. Свезка друга*, *Набоженъ поменъ и исторични свидетелства за Кирила и Методия* [A. TEODOROV-BALAN, *Our Literature and Language. A Collection of Works of the Ancient and Modern Times*. 1. *Cyrill and Methodius*. Fasciculus Two, *Liturgical Commemorations and Historical Evidence concerning Cyril and Methodius*], Sofia, 1934.

ФЛОРЯ 1981

Б. Н. Флоря, *Сказания о начале славянской письменности* [B. N. Florea, *Narrations about the Beginning of the Slavic Writing*]. Памятники средневековой истории народов центральной и восточной Европы; Moscow, 1981, 115-117 [repr. with a different pagination: St. Petersburg, 2000].