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### **Fate, politics and forgeries – the case of the relics of SS Cyril and Methodius**

Medieval history is full with saint's bones, heads, ashes and digits, wooden particles or strange textiles. When not in precious reliquaries they are of minimal material but of immense symbolic value. Relics have a mighty religious charge, or at least an ideological one. Although small in size, "relics are material triggers for affective engagement with cosmological and scriptural truths" (Smith 2014: 8) and are rightly and facetiously defined as "portable Christianity" by Julia M.H. Smith (Smith 2010: 143-167). She finds them not only readily portable, but also capable of delimiting cultural and religious boundaries and therefore "good to think with in debates about religious and cultural identity" (Smith 2010: 144). In her remarkable study J. Smith comments on relics in the care of the early medieval papacy as a case study of how they were identified and preserved. In some way the present notes regard the same topic – the late medieval inventories of the S. Vitus cathedral in Prague and how the entries for the relics of a saint were changing in course of time fitting the political and ideological trends in the Bohemian kingdom. It is about the relics of St. Cyril, venerated as confessor and enlightener of the Slavic peoples. Next historical periods echoed the ideological use of the S. Cyril's remains motif, suggesting various arguments towards identity questions or new political prospects.

The worship of SS Cyril and Methodius is one of the most important phenomena in the cultural tradition of Central and East Europe, officially identified as pan-European since 1980 when S. Pope John Paul II declared them patron saints of Europe, but first and foremost they are now regarded as an enduring symbol of Slavic intellectuality. In

the course of time the figures of the two Slav apostles became the object of more or less intense 'appropriation', which runs in parallel with the development of the cult and actually marks its peak times in different areas of the European cultural space (Barlieva : in print). I would like to comment here upon a particular appearance of this phenomenon, related to its "west" manifestation and associated with the relics of the two Slavic apostles, especially those of St. Cyril.

Fundamentally, the worship of s. Cyril in the western Church is connected primary to the believe, that he has brought the remains of s. Clemens pope back to the saint's native place, donating their blessing to the city of Rome. The most ancient Latin narratives on s. Cyril stress that these relics were enshrined with honors (*honorifice*) in the church of S. Clemens by the pope and the assembled population of Rome; not many days later S. Cyril was buried there himself and his remains has begun to perform miracles. Chronologically these events fall in the time when "a Roman ordo for depositing relics (nature unspecified) in an altar gives an indication of the ritual which had evolved by the middle of the eighth century ... and John the Deacon reports having seen it performed during the pontificate of Hadrian II (867-72)" (Andrieu 2014: 179-205) Besides the topoi of conversion of Czechs and Bulgarians by Constantine-Cyril and those of the Holy Brothers as praesules of the "national churches", there is another commonplace that promotes the connection with the apostles and aims at strengthening the national identity. It is linked to the respect for their relics, and the desire to make them available to their own people. This is not about the problematics of the presence of these relics and the works that glorify them or describe their fate, but rather about how the theme of the relics has become one of the supporting elements of the cults of the Czech saints, initiated and maintained by Bohemian king<sup>1</sup> Charls IV of Luxembourg (1316-1378) and the following Czech rulers. In this sense, the legends *Quemadmodum* and *Tempore Michaelis imperatoris*, the so called Moravian legend sound

almost programmatically for the further cult of the relics of the two saint brothers in Bohemia.

They describe how St. Methodius, heading to his diocese, asks the Pope for his brothers' remains '*pro augenda devocione gentis Moraviae et fidei Christianae per eos susceptae confirmacione*' (in order to increase the religious devotion of the Moravian tribe and to strengthen their Christian faith acquired through them). Multiple evidence from the period after the middle of the fourteenth century shows the implementation of this 'programme'.

The Latin hagiographic readings about the holy brothers, originating in the Czech lands, contain the motif of the relics as a detailed narrative explaining absence of the relics from the Czech lands. The narrative tells how St. Methodius took secretly the body of his brother out of San Clemente, despite the opposition of the Pope (*clam ... corpus sancti Cyrilli occulte recepit et secum illud versus Moraviam deportavit*), but after the theft the holy relics could not be lifted. In response to the prayers of his brother to reveal his will, St. Cyril raised his hand and pointed back to Rome; taken back, he was greeted with jubilation by the Pope and the people of Rome. In both versions of the narrative, the text about the relics has almost the same words.<sup>2</sup>

The Polish version of the Moravian legend, also called the Krakow legend, generally follows the content of the prototype, with the difference that it claims the Pope's consent for the removal of the relics of St Cyril from Rome (*cuius petitioni cum papa anniusset, Sanctus Metudius ingrediens ecclesiam sancti Clementis, corpus fraternum tulit et versus Moraviam deportare voluit*) (Polkowski 1885: 64). It also mentions that at the end of his life Methodius returned to Rome and was buried there next to his brother (*Postea sanctus Metudius iterum Romam visitavit, et ibidem cum suo fratre in Domino requievit*).

This new element in the motifs we have discussed is in line with the tendency emerging at the end of the fourteenth century, and especially in the fifteenth century, influenced by the idea that the two saints had a common grave, to form a circle of hagiographies supporting such an idea. It is evidence of the way in which a promulgated institutional cult (such as the Latin Cyrillo-Methodian cult in the West Slavic lands) quickly modifies its original content, and the newly emerging elements in the respective hagiographic traditions can be used as chronological landmarks of the time of their creation. In the case of the Krakow legend, this confirms the re-dating of the text from the fourteenth century to the fifteenth century (a date based on paleographic studies).

There are other elements emerging in the Polish Cyrillo-Methodian sources which complement the motif of the relics and provide evidence of some instability in the cult between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. These changes were initiated by the Czech king: for example, the date when St. Cyril was buried in San Clemente '*during the eighth day before the Ides of March*' in the version of the *Quemadmodum* legend in the fifteenth century manuscript in the University Library in Wroclaw. This change may of course be explained by a confusion about the date of the death of St. Methodius on April 6 – on the eighth day before the Ides of April - or by a misinterpretation of the date of the holiday of the Slavic Apostles on 9<sup>th</sup> March, the seventh day before the Ides of March. A further significant change was the date given for the death of the two Slavic apostles, 383 - in the transcript of the same legend from the fifteenth century in the PAN Library in Kórnik. In this case, perhaps there is contamination from the tradition of Patriarch Cyril of Jerusalem, who died in 386.

The inventory lists describing the temple treasury of the Metropolitan St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague are interesting testimonials to the efforts of the ruler to ensure that his 'national' cults were reinforced by various relics. Even in the first years of his reign Charles IV donated relics to the temple, many of them sent to his capital city during his

travels in Germany and Italy between 1354 and 1355. The Czech aristocracy and bishops were no less generous to the Metropolitan Church of Prague. For many of the relics documentary evidence has been preserved for their donation to the temple treasury - evidence such as endowment deeds and accompanying letters. There are however no such sources for the relics of St. Cyril. Information about them appears in the third preserved inventory of the holy treasury of St. Vitus Cathedral (Inv. 260/3). The inventories are stored in the archives of the Office of the President of the Republic in Prague (signature 'Inv. 260 / 1-7.')

The first two lists are respectively from 1354 and 1355.

The third inventory (from 1365) consists of 7 parchment sheets (195 x 259 mm), the first of which has an old signature 'T.III.I' marked with '*Inventarium rerum ecclesiae Prag.*' The following is added to the main text, after number 152: '*Item monstrantia cristallina, circumdata argento deaurato cum gemmis, in qua sunt reliquiae sancti Cyrilli*' (Another crystal monstrance, covered with gold-plated silver with gems, containing the relics of St. Cyril). This note was referred to in the study on the treasury of the S. Vitus Cathedral (Šittler / Podlaha 1903: xxv) to which it may be added that the note is in a script which differs from the main one, on l.5 of the inventory. In the inventory of 1368, it is added after a blank space on l. 7, with the same handwriting as the main one, but with a lighter ink and worse pen. A list of the monstrances in the inventory of 1368 shows an interesting change in the content of the note in question. Besides mentioning a figure of an angel in the decoration of the reliquary, it also mentions the relics not only of St. Cyril, but also of Methodius (l. 2) '*Item monstrantia argentea deaurata cum XI gemmis in pede; in summitate VI gemmae, cum crystallo, continens in se reliquias sanctorum Metudii et Cyrilli cum angelo in summitate.*' (Also a silver monstrance, gold-plated, with 11 gems at [its] base, with crystal, containing relics of the saints Cyril and Methodius, with an angel at the top). Chronologically the next inventory, that of 1374, contains (l.6) the same note as that in the inventory of 1368, written with the same handwriting, but with a

description of the losses in the decoration of the monstrance: *'Monstrantia argentea deaurata cum XII [sic] gemmis in pede; in summitate deficient V gemmae et VI lectulus deficiens gemma, continens in se reliquias sanctorum Metudii et Cyrilli cum angelo in summitate'*. This record is repeated in the inventory of 1387 (l. 5), where it is imported into the main text with an insignificant difference in the grammatical form. The list of 1396 mentions: *Item in monstrancia habens reliquias Cyrilli et Metudii, sub corona deficiunt tres lectuli cum gemmis, supra coronam unus lapis lectulo remanente, de summitate angelorum, dominus Wenczeslaus habet*. In later inventories and in the lists of valuables of " St. Vitus" evacuated from Prague during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the reliquary cannot be identified precisely: for example the list of relics moved to Karlstein Castle mentions a gilded silver monstrance with an angel, but without the names of the saint whose relics it contains.

These inventory notes are an interesting example of how legendary information (with some documentary basis) about the saints is created and imposed, and how afterwards 'official' cults, to some extent artificially introduced, quickly died or altered. Here our purpose is not to comment on whether fragments of the relics of St. Cyril were actually brought to the Czech kingdom at the time of Karl IV - as happened with the relics of many other saints. What is significant for us is the merging of the two saints in a common cult, which led to the notion of connectivity even in terms of their relics. These few inventories clearly show the evolution of this idea and could serve as a chronological guide for the creation of the hagiographic readings of the two saints, which originated in the Czech lands in the fourteenth century.

It is not clear how the information on a fragment of the relics of Cyril and Methodius, which appeared in the inventories of 'St. Vitus', became the subject of official correspondence. The Archbishop of Olomouc, Stanislaw Pawlowski, in a letter dated 20 October 1575 to Cardinal Ptolemy, made a request for the relics of the holy brothers

(Vatican, Secret archive, fund Lett. di vescovi e prelati, vol. 10, fol.111). Apparently left without response, that request was repeated in 1580 in a message from Emperor Rudolf II (1576-1611) to Pope Gregory XIII (Vatican, Secret archive, fund Lit. principium, vol 35, fol 36), who in the following February sent a careful refusal to Archbishop Stanislaw, mentioning the troubled times and the threat to expose the relics to derision (Vatican, Secret Archives, Reg. Vat. 2020, Reg. Gregorii papae XIII. IX, ep. 97, fol 382). It is obvious that during the sixteenth century the famous 'forcing' of the cult implemented in the previous period at the initiative of Charles IV gradually faded, but the tradition survived and provided the inspiration for the exercise of the cult as part of a national Czech movement in the post-Tridentine era. It is worth to mention that the petition provides the information that only the remains of St. Methodius are in San Clemente while those of St. Cyril are in the Dodici Apostoli church (Boyle: 1978, p.24, n.35).

The information that the relics of both holly brothers are in Rome is accepted as proved in XVIII c. Although in 1762 the historian Thomas de Brugo, Irish Dominican<sup>3</sup>, doubts that the chapel by the sacristy, in his times dedicated to St. Dominic, has been erstwhile dedicated to St. Cyril (Boyle: 1978, p.25) For uncertain reasons a decade later he claims, that in the chapel in question a marble urn is placed, which contains "the sacred remains of S. Cyril and Methodius" (Boyle: 1978, p.25). There is also a notice testifying that this urn was transferred to the Chiesa Nova on 18 August 1798 and placed beside the body of St. Philip Neri (Boyle: 1978, p. 27).When the sacristan of Chiesa Nova describes what was brought from the suppressed by the Roman government<sup>4</sup> church of San Clemente, he mentions "a urn with two bodies of saint martyrs – St. Cyril and St. Methodius" (*dentro un'Urna due Corpi de Santi Martiri, cioè S. Cirillo e S. Metodio*)<sup>5</sup> (Gasbari, Giuntella: 1958, 101)

In the next years the relics, still labeled as “SS Cyril and Methodius”, were transposed in San Giovanni in Laterano church, because “S. Clemente was ceded to the Lateran” and this way was saved from the demolition (Boyle:1978, 31). The relics were taken to the Lateran by *camerlengo*<sup>6</sup> Lorenzo, duke of Mattei on 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1799 and precisely he was responsible for their restituting to San Clemente after the fall of the Republic. Obviously the relics weren't brought back to San Clemente and when the millenary of the death of St. Cyril approached, it was no trace of them there.

It is well known that the Slavs celebrated the thousand jubilee of St Cyril's and St. Methodius' among the Slavs in eager confrontation between the two Slavic leading centers – Moscow and Višegrad. The anniversary induced religious hostility and political opposition instead of uniting. In such a controversy the relics of St. Cyril (and Methodius) would be an extremely important argument in the combat for leadership.

In this prospect no wonder that when being in Rome 1853, the Czech historian and writer Beda Dudík searched for the relics in San Clemente. He couldn't find anything there as witnessed in his Itinerary of 1852-1853 (Dudík: 1855). In the same time (1855) however a particle of the relics was donated to the University of Moscow by M.P. Pogodin, who received it from the canon of the Prague Cathedral (St. Vitus) Václav Pešina. As we have seen, the “relics” still disappeared from the inventories of the Prague capitul in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. and in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. the emperor asks them from the pope. Nevertheless the canon handed some remain to Pogodin after his persistent request in the presence of tree Czech patriots, writers and famous Slavists: W. Hanka, P. J. Šafárik and J. Kollár. A reportage of I.S. Aksakov in “Moskovskie vedomosti” (N 106, 1862) describes this and the pilgrimage to the University chapel in Moscow, where the relics were exposed on 11 of May - the feast of SS Cyril and Methodius, labeled as: “De brachio sancti Cyrilli, qui liturgiam Slavicam scripsit” (Aksakov: 1865, 357). On the same occasion the priest of the University chapel prof. Serpevskij Nikolaj Sergievskij



thinks the reason for this donation in his sermon to the feast of 11 of May – whatever it was, it served as reminder to a forgotten value („Ne možem skazat' s kakoju imenno celju bylo sdelano e'to prinošenie: kak by to ni bylo, ono poslužilo napominaniem zabytogo-dorogogo") (Aksakov: 1865, 358)

How could be this donation estimated? Is it a goodwill gesture or an attempt to as an attempt to legitimize as belonging to St. Cyril some relics, which were so far after 16th century not only unknown in Bohemia, but even they are requested from Rome??

It is not hard to make such an irreverent assumption, keeping in mind that Václav Hanka is the author of several “old-Czech” text – forgeries created to support the idea of the antiquity of Czech cultural tradition<sup>8</sup>. If we trust the message in “Moskovskie vedomosti”, another part of the presumable relics of St. Cyril was taken simultaneously with the donation for Moscow and prepared to be sent to “the Moravian archbishopric”. Probably a proof of it are some sacred objects in the Cathedral of Olomouc: a golden reliquary of St Cyril (fig. 1); a monstrance and a calix with the names of the two saint brothers (fig. 2)<sup>9</sup>

Obviously the 1863 jubilee was equipped with relics for the both centers of the Cyrillo-Methodian festivities. Unlike Moscow and Olomouc, there were no relics of St. Cyril found in Rome and even in 1880, when Pope Leo XIII introduced their feast into the calendar of the Roman Catholic Church, the prepared chapel remains empty<sup>10</sup>.

Although the excavations of De Rossi in 1858 unveiled the medieval frescos of SS Cyril and Methodius in the lower church, it was clear that the remains of St. Cyril weren't in San Clemente. Almost a century later, pending the next anniversary, historical research was done and the father Leonard Boyle, the future prefect of the Vatican Library, was able to track the relics of St. Cyril to the archive of the Antici-Mattei family in Recanati. He find out that they were not being restituted to San Clemente by Lorenzo Mattei, who

was responsible to do that. On 27 October the relics were taken by Cardinal Andrej Grutka and transported to Rome. The solemn return was celebrated on 14 November 1963, beginning the commemorations of the 11th centenary of the Moravian mission. Father Boyle himself was very cautious in his final conclusions. He only writes “ On the following Sunday (17 November )Pope Paul held a Cappella at San Clemente to bring to a close the celebrations for the 11<sup>th</sup> centenary of the conversion of the Slav people, and to witness the solemn return of a part of the *presumed* remains of St Cyril to San Clemente” (Boyle: 1978, 35).

The Bulgarian Catholic church of Byzantine order feasts this event with a special festival: “The Translation of the relics of St. Cyril”. The festival was introduced in 1980 by monsignor Metodi Stratiev, then Bulgarian Catholic exarch. The festival was scored with a liturgical service, written by father Gorazd Kurtev and celebrated first time on 17 November 1980 in Plovdiv<sup>11</sup>. The sister of f. Gorazd depicted the act of the Translation in an oil painting (fig. 3). The service was distributed anonymously on the Conference of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, dedicated to the 1100 anniversary to the death of St. Methodius in 1985. We have to remember that it was only two decades after the we must remember that this happens only two decades after the terrible blow dealt by communist “justice” against the Bulgarian Catholic Church, when the trial against 32 Catholic priests ended with four death sentences while the rest were sentenced to various prison terms. The reappearance of the relics of St. Cyril in San Clemente and the participation of representative of the Bulgarian Catholics<sup>12</sup> in the solemn mass on depositing the relics in the chapel of St. Cyril is perceived as an act of support for the humiliated Catholic Church in communist Bulgaria.

The text of the service is designed in the prospects of the new vision on the role of SS Cyril and Methodius and their veneration in the contemporary world – as expressed by the pope’s encyclical epistle “Antiquae nobilitatis” from 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1969 (Naumow:

2002, 209-212) and the speech of Pope Paul VI in San Pietro on 14<sup>th</sup> February.

Addressing first of all the hierarchs and the religious of Czechoslovakia, suffering the invasion of the Warsaw pact, the pope points out the saint brothers as fruitful example, capable to revitalize the ousted Christian idea in the suppressed Soviet dominions with Slav population.

The Bulgarian Catholic service mentions also the sanctity of the Slavic alphabet, invented to serve to the truth of God. It warns against using the alphabet "for vicious purposes", contradicting to the "eternal Salvation" and proclaims St. Cyril symbol of the Slavic tribe.

The relics of St. Cyril have been use many times as bargaining chip in various political situations and relations. It should be mentioned the donation of Pope Paul VI to the Patriarch Demetrios I of Constantinople of a part of St. Cyril's relics intended for the future SS Cyril and Methodius Church in Thessaloniki, made in 1976. It was only short before Demetrios proclaimed the establishment of the official theological dialogue between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church, at that time led by Pope John Paul II. No doubt the relics were donated as a symbol of the desire for greater reconciliation between the two Churches after the restoring communion between Rome and Constantinople by Patriarch Athenagoras's meeting with Pope Paul VI 1964 in Jerusalem.

The state authorities of Bulgaria have had also ever the will to receive part of the St. Cyril's remains, especially in the post-socialist times. Via diplomatic channels the possibility was discussed 2002 on the occasion of Pope John Paul II's visit to Bulgaria. Then the pope John Paul II donated the right humerus of Dasius, taken from the Ancona relics<sup>13</sup> to the church of Silistra.

Next attempt was made by President Pärvanov. At the traditional visit to the tomb of St. Kyrill on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2005 he was received in private audience by Pope Benedict XVI and has expressed the desire a part of the relics to be sent to Bulgaria<sup>14</sup>.

Recently Prime-minister Borisov, visiting Rome on the same occasion 10 years later (on 24 may 2015), have declared the wish of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to receive a part of the remains of St. Cyril<sup>15</sup>. The synodal fathers probably will make an official request to the curial authorities' despite the hostile attitude to the Vatican of many of them. In case of positive answer the more than ten century long cult of SS Cyril and Methodius among the Bulgarians will be at last equipped with relics. It is hard to believe that such an act will help the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to resolve some problems it suffer from. Deep isolation from the public problems, abdication from social welfare projects, corruption and distrust can't be overcome through the relics of St. Cyril. However the acquisition of such a sacral treasure would be a symbolic support for the Bulgarian Christian congregation and another strong pillar of the Bulgarian cultural identity.

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(Šittler / Podlaha 1903: xxv)

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<sup>1</sup> Bohemian king and after 1355 Holy Roman Emperor.

<sup>2</sup> This is a classic theft relic motif, where the narratives are often linked formally and echoed each other, but at the same time each was constructed around specific circumstances and within particular social, political, and economic contexts, as Richard Geary (Geary 1990: p. IX and 129-132)

<sup>3</sup> Since 1677 San Clemente belongs to the Irish Province of the Dominican Order.

<sup>4</sup> The government of the New Roman Republic declared by Napoleon in 1798.

<sup>5</sup> C. Gasbarri e V.E.Giuntella. *Due Diari della Repubblica romana del 1798-1799*. Roma 1958, p. 101 – quoted after Boyle, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Chamberlain of the Holy Roman Church - the chief officer in the Apostolic Camera, the Financial Council of the Pope (Lunadoro: 1656, 318-320).

<sup>7</sup> As we could guess, being aware of the Letter of Emperor Rudolf II, or the inquiries of Beda Dudik in Rome.

<sup>8</sup> Although “Rukopis Královédvorský”, “Rukopis Zelonohorský”, “Evangelium Svatojanské” and some other mystifications are only forgeries pretending to belong to the XIII and XIV c., they have played critical role in creating the Czech national consciousness – (Atanassova 2003, 367-371).

<sup>9</sup> <https://frtimpike.wordpress.com/page/3/>

<sup>10</sup> The chapel was constructed with funds from Pope Leo XIII and the Croatian Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer; 1886 it was depicted by Salvatore Nobilli (<http://www.istitutomatteucci.it/it/dizionario-degli-artisti/nobili-salvatore>).

<sup>11</sup> First published by A. Naumow (Barlieva, Naumow: 2005, 140-144) and (Naumow: 2008, 307-314).

<sup>12</sup> The exarch of the Bulgarian Catholics bishop Cyril Kurtev was one of the three prelates who concelebrated the mass together with Pope Paul VI.

<sup>13</sup> St. Dasius was martyred in Durostorum, today's Silistra in Bulgaria, about the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> c. Since 6<sup>th</sup> c. Dasius' relics were deposited in the Cathedral of Ancona, Italy.

<sup>14</sup> An article of very low quality and containing numerous errors, lists this request in petulant manner and with a catch line “Greece is given, we are not - because Macedonia



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will also demand". The article represents also some of Božidar Dimitrov's franc lies and mystifications about his stay in the State of Vatican. (Săbčev, Nikolova: 2015).

<sup>15</sup> [http://frognews.bg/news\\_91762/Premierat-ni-chestiti-ot-Rim-iska-chastitsa-ot-moshtite-na-Sveti-Kiril/](http://frognews.bg/news_91762/Premierat-ni-chestiti-ot-Rim-iska-chastitsa-ot-moshtite-na-Sveti-Kiril/)