Slavic Alphabets and Identities
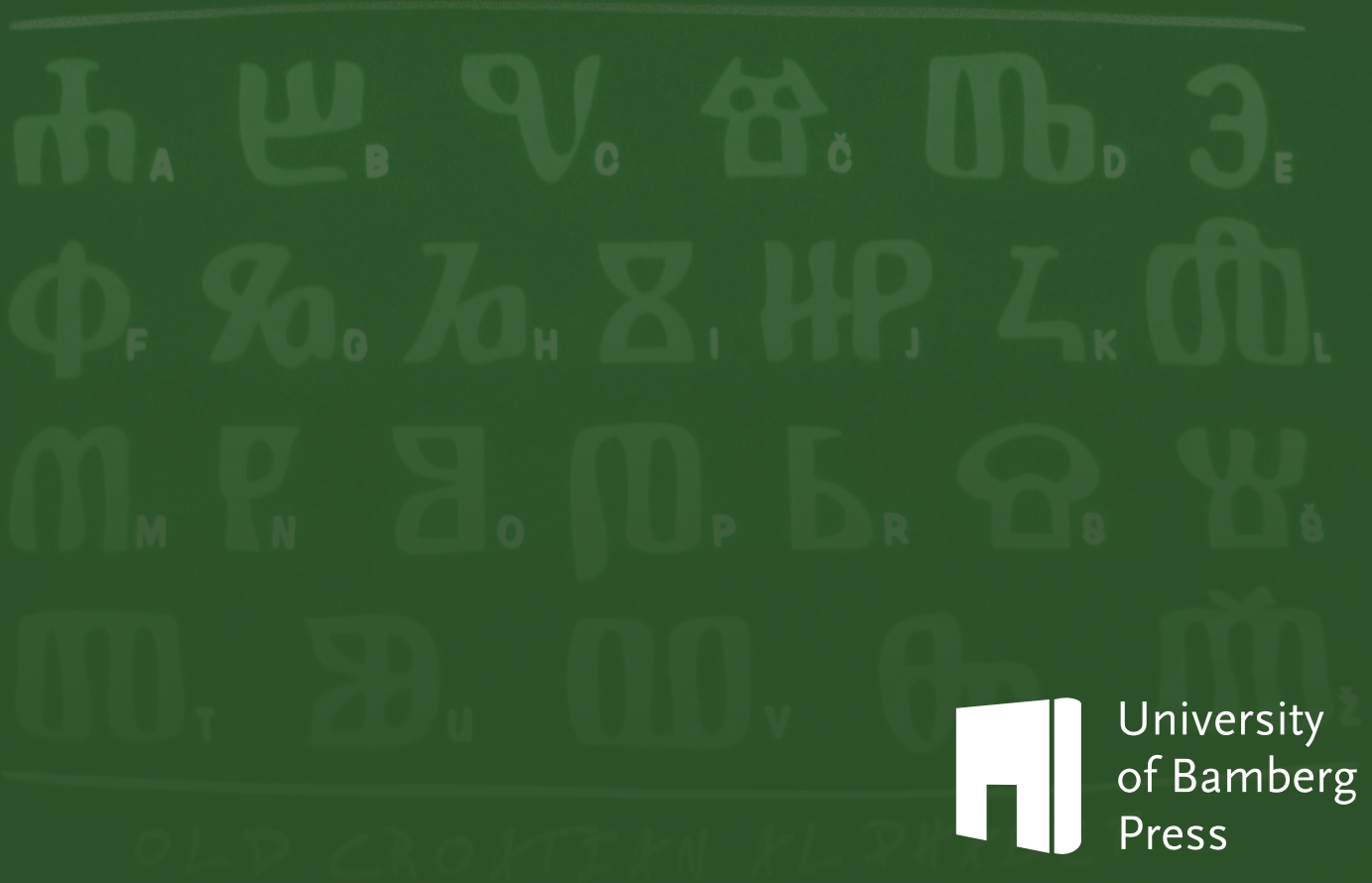
Sebastian Kempgen, Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri (eds.)

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hg. von Sebastian Kempgen, Thomas Becker (†),
Martin Haase, Geoffrey Haig, Manfred Krug und
Patrizia Noel Aziz Hanna

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Introduction

With their entry into Christendom the Slavs got acquainted with different rituals, sacred languages and, consequently, written traditions. After some unsuccessful attempts at applying the Greek and Latin alphabets to the graphic representation of Slavonic, as stated in the famous treatise "On the letters" by the monk Chrabăr, the creation of a genuine Slavonic alphabet by Constantin the Philosopher, better known under his monastic name of Cyril, marked a new era in the cultural and written history of the Slavs. "Naked are indeed all those nations without their own books" ("Nazi bo vьsi / bez kъn'igъ języki"; Jakobson 1985 [1963]: 196, 197; "Nаꙁи бо вьси бес кънйигъ ꙗꙁъꙩи"; Toporov 1979: 30), wrote Constantin himself or his homonym from Preslav in the Prologue (*Proglas*) to the Gospels; in this "manifesto", which lies at the foundation of the Christian and, more generally, cultural history in the Slavonic world, we find the quintessence of Slavonic written culture. In the words chosen by Constantin one immediately recognizes the strong linguistic and ideological link between language and ethnos, on the one side, and written (Christian) culture on the other. Some centuries later, in a totally different spirit and cultural context, Ferdinand de Saussure expressed a similar position, pointing to the dangerous influence of the written word ("tyrannie de la lettre"; Saussure 1931: 53). Therefore, writing cannot be considered as "merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks", as once stated by Bloomfield (1933: 21).

Today, however, it is widely recognized that on the contrary, writing has a perceptible function within a given speech community and can serve to visually decrease or increase the distance and demarcate boundaries from other languages and/or communities (Coulmas 2013: 53).

The topic of the present volume, which continues our previous work (Tomelleri & Kempgen 2015) not only ideationally, is the strong ideological connection between the choice of writing system and linguistics or ethnic identity not only among Slavs, but also among other linguistic groups living within their territorial boundaries.

The intimate connection between written word and people is reflected in one of the interpretations of the ethnonym *Slověnin*, which, according to a rather disputable etymology, is related to the word *slovo* 'word'. Ro-

land Marti (**Das Volk des (geschriebenen) Wortes? Die slavischen Schriften und ihre nichtlinguistischen Aspekte**) provides a thorough historical overview of the three main Slavonic alphabets, namely Glagolitic, Cyrillic and Latin, showing their symbolic functions and the huge emotional charge that they still have nowadays. The cultural and political relevance of the written history of the Slavs is also documented by Holger Kuße (**Slavische Schriften. Dokumentation einer Ausstellung**) in a short presentation of a poster exhibition, organized by students and addressed to a broader public, about the development and the contemporary situation of Slavonic alphabets.

Several contributions to this volume deal with the tendency to project the contemporary situations and/or attitudes to the depiction of the past, or, not less anachronistically, to selectively search in the past a legitimization of the current situation. Katharina Tyran (**Deutungen kroatischer Schriftkultur: Schreibsysteme als nationale und kulturelle Symbole**) discusses the promotion of the Glagolitic alphabet in Croatia, where it is employed today, not without exaggeration, in everyday life, to the role of graphic marker of national identity, and this notwithstanding the much more relevant role played by the Cyrillic script, now associated almost exclusively with Serbian, in the Croatian culture. With this respect, Ljiljana Reinkowski (**Zwischen Philologie und Ideologie: Die kyrillische Schrift im heutigen Kroatien**) describes the contrasting attitudes of philologists and political forces towards the acceptance or refusal of Cyrillic.

In contrast to its 'demotion' in Croatia, the Cyrillic script was strongly defended in Macedonia a decade ago, whereby the specific 'Macedonian' character of the script has been underlined. Sebastian Kempgen (**„Го чувам своето" – Spuren einer makedonischen Schriftkampagne**) documents this campaign in defense of Cyrillic through original photographic material and painstaking "excavations" of a now defunct webpage. The main idea of this action, which makes use of Christian references mixed with advertising methods, is that only the preservation of the Cyrillic script can save the Macedonian language and people.

The contemporary situation is even more complex in Bosnia and Hercegovina, where one can observe four scripts (with the addition of the Arabic script) and three variants of Cyrillic. Daniel Bunčić (**Konfessionen und ihr Schriftgebrauch in Bosnien-Herzegovina**) tackles the historical

distribution of this variance, which over time lead to the replacement of the Cyrillic script with the Latin one, used today independently of the religious beliefs of the people involved. The author provides a very interesting picture of the graphic situation in this multiconfessional region, which during the Ottoman period was characterized by the use of different forms of the same script.

The use of all three major Slavonic scripts in several editions of the Apostles' Creed printed in Rome by the Congregation for Propagation of Faith (*Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*) is examined by Per Ambrosiani (**Slavic alphabets and languages in publications by the Propaganda Fide during the 17th and 18th centuries**). Here, different orthographical features of the published texts are carefully compared with the aim to identify more or less pronounced linguistic tendencies and to match them with certain East or South Slavic models. Ambrosiani further proposes to combine intra-script and inter-script comparison, in order to disentangle the complicate picture of textual (in a linguistic and orthographic sense) variants.

Questions of identity related to the synchronic resp. diachronic use of two different scripts and orthographies among the minority speech community of the Carpatho-Rusyns are highlighted in the contribution by Achim Rabus (**Zweischriftigkeit bei den Karpatorussinen**). In the area of conflict between script choice and struggle against assimilation he observes an interesting interplay of different orientations, which, as a rule, do not take into account their target groups. Elena Rudenka (**Восточнославянские латинографичные тексты Великого княжества Литовского**) refers to a special chapter of biscriptality in Belorussian. She concentrates her attention upon the earliest text written in the so-called "prosta mova" and in Latin letters, showing that they were not simply transliterations from Cyrillic originals. An interesting case-study within the domain of the interaction of script and identity is without any doubt represented by the struggle for a new Latin alphabet in the Soviet Caucasus with respect to a non-Slavic language. Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri (**Г. А. Дзагуров: Новая осетинская графика на латинской основе. Наборное переиздание текста**) gives an introduction to the reprint of a short brochure by Grigorij Dzagurov, originally pub-

lished in 1923, in which the substitution of the old Cyrillic-based alphabet is discussed and approved.

Examples of mostly Latin-based orthographic projects for the Romani communities, spread all over Central and Eastern Europe, are presented in the paper by Anna-Maria Meyer (**The creation of orthographies for Romani by means of 'Slavic' alphabets**). In trying to answer the difficult question on the grade of acceptance of such attempts, the author detects a preference of these minorities for the orthographic rules and conventions of the majority languages of the countries where they live.

The ten papers contained in this volume, written in three languages (German – 6, English and Russian – each 2), do not obviously pretend to cover every aspect of the multifarious alphabetic world of the Slavs, nor to answer all questions related to the topic expressed in the title. We are, however, quite confident that the present tome is a worthy companion to the previous one, and that the reader will find in them useful information on concrete cases and inspiring ideas for further research.

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Sebastian Kempgen, Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri