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At the Intersection of Textual Transmission and Linguistic Interpretation: Cases from the Czech Church Slavonic Tradition*

"Denn, was etwa verborgen ist, interessiert uns nicht"
"For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us"

(Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Philosophische Untersuchungen, 126)

1. *Preliminary remarks*

According to the periodization proposed by František Václav Mareš (1922-1994), whose contribution to Slavic philology cannot be underestimated (Vintr 1982; Hannick 2013; Vintr 2013), Old Church Slavonic, a liturgical and literary language "elaborated and codified" in the second half of the 9th century, can be divided into at least four stages, reflecting both the historical and geographical dynamics that contributed to its transnational character. These phases also illustrate the language's development across various (not only) Slavic regions and periods, shaped by local linguistic features and socio-cultural factors in its role as a written medium (Mareš 1979: 11-13):

- 1) PROTO-CHURCH SLAVONIC, labeled *Urkirchenslavisch* by Trubetzkoy (1936: 88) and *soluňská staroslověňština* by Tkadlčík (1963: 347, n. 30), a language based on the living Slavic dialect of Thessaloniki and relying on the Greek literary tradition, intended to serve the Moravian mission of 863, but not directly attested in any sources;
- 2) OLD CHURCH SLAVONIC, with two main variants: 1) Moravian or Moravian-Pannonian Old Church Slavonic, an also unattested language, perhaps with the Kiev Leaflets as its only possible candidate, can be considered Proto-Church Slavonic with additional influences from other (non-Macedonian) local Slavic dialects, and 2) Macedono-Bulgarian Old Church Slavonic, also known as canonic (9th-11th centuries);
- 3) CHURCH SLAVONIC, functioning as the literary form of native Slavic dialects. It can be classified into six distinct and well-defined varieties, called redactions or recensions: 1) Czech, 2) Middle Bulgarian, 3) Serbian, 4) Croatian Glagolitic, 5) Russian, and 6) Romanian;

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- 4) NEW CHURCH SLAVONIC, used exclusively for liturgical purposes and coexisting with fully developed literary Slavic languages.

Among the six redactions of Church Slavonic¹, the Czech one is placed first. This is no coincidence, given the subject of the monograph from which this classification is taken, *An Anthology of Church Slavonic Texts of Western (Czech) Origin*, in which the status of Czech Church Slavonic is established, or at least explicitly supported and directly linked to the previous, Moravian period. Indeed, the study of Czech Church Slavonic was his lifelong favorite subject, to which he devoted several papers (Hauptová 2006: 23). Its very existence, however, remains a matter of debate, as does the number of texts attributed to it (Reinhart 2009: 277; for a prudently critical assessment, see Birnbaum 1985, 1991a).

In recent decades, Czech Church Slavonic has received increasing attention and undergone careful investigation, resulting in numerous new text editions and linguistic analyses (e.g., Konzal 2005 and 2006; Vepřek 2006; Čajka 2011; Konzal 2015; Vepřek 2022; Spurná 2023). These studies support the idea of a direct link between the Moravian heritage and the Czech tradition, seen as a continuation of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission. Notably, philologists have generally endorsed the notion of continuity from Great Moravian to Bohemia in the 10th-11th centuries, while historians have approached it with greater skepticism (Turilov, Florja 2002: 427-428; Vepřek 2006: 9). The core issue resides in the fact that, unlike the other five redactions of Church Slavonic, no manuscripts of the Czech redaction have survived, except the *Prague Glagolitic Fragments*, two Glagolitic folios copied from an East Slavic Cyrillic antigraph, which in turn originates from a Bulgarian exemplar. Consequently, a Czech origin can only be inferred on the basis of thematic or cultural elements, as well as certain linguistic features, primarily, though not exclusively, lexical.

The Czech redaction of Church Slavonic can be characterized as Old Church Slavonic enriched by Czech linguistic elements across all aspects of the language, with a much stronger presence of these elements than in Old Church Slavonic². Functioning alongside Latin as a literary language in Great Moravia and (perhaps) Bohemia, Old Church Slavonic developed under the influence of the West Slavonic environment, ultimately giving rise to the emergence of its Czech redaction (Mareš 1961: 17; Knoll 2017: 216). However, the incorporation of these elements is inconsistent, varying in degree; at times, Czech words, forms, or syntactic structures appear, while in other instances, the traditional Old Church Slavonic equivalents are employed:

¹ Večerka (2012: 405) dates the beginning of Church Slavonic to around 1100; before that, he prefers to refer to the language as Old Church Slavonic, distinguishing various local varieties (for a schematic illustration of the multiple stages in the development of Old Church Slavonic up to the end of the 11th century, see also Večerka 1976: 119 and 1999: 99).

² According to Mareš (2000 [1970]: 11), who represents here a rather traditional view, the penetration of local linguistic elements was considerably more pronounced in Church Slavonic (*církevní slovanština*) than in Old Church Slavonic (*staroslověnský jazyk*), whose chronological boundary is placed between the 11th and 12th centuries.

Českou církevní slovanštinu jako celek můžeme definovat asi takto: je to staroslověňština, do níž pronikají české prvky ve všech oblastech jazyka, a to mnohem hojněji, než tomu bylo ve velkomoravské staroslověňštině; uplatňují se však nedůsledně, tu více, tu méně, v jednom a též případě se někdy setkáváme se slovem, tvarem nebo syntaktickým spojením českým, jindy se staroslověnským (Mareš 2000 [1970?]: 264).

The linguistic levels involved include phonetics and orthography, morphology, syntax, and lexicon, occasionally extending to distinctive meanings of commonly shared words. In the study of Old Church Slavonic, particular attention has been given to the so-called Moravisms (and Pannonisms): with this term, scholars usually refer to lexical items that originated from the pre-Cyrillo-Methodian missionary efforts among the Western Slavs (Huťanová 1998a: 76-98, 1998b; Krivko 2021, 2025)³. They are elements of the local speech characteristic of the disciples of Constantine and Methodius, which have no parallels in Proto-Old Church Slavonic, based, as already stated, on the South Slavic dialect spoken in Thessaloniki, the native city of the Apostles of the Slavs. These linguistic features, incorporated into translated or originally composed texts in Moravia as full-fledged lexical units appear sporadically and unsystematically: they are attested in both canonical manuscripts and later copies of works from the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition. However, the preservation of these features was not fully ensured during the transmission of Church Slavonic texts in different parts of Slavia and at different times, resulting in a gradual reduction of their original number:

Jsou to většinou řídké nebo ojedinělé jazykové jevy moravského znění, neboť v novém prostředí, v němž jsou teprve fakticky zapsány, byly při posledních opisech vystavovány jednak příslušnému nářečně slovanskému přelivu, jednak unifikaci spisovného jazyka vůbec, takže v nich může být jejich počet ve srovnání s výchozím moravským stavem už nižší (Večerka 2014: 14).

Therefore, we face a superimposed layer of various regional versions of Church Slavonic, which likely contributed to the assimilation of external linguistic elements in later copies of texts originally written or transcribed in Bohemia. This peculiar situation poses a dual challenge to philologists: identifying such linguistic elements in the extant (Old) Church Slavonic monuments is a major task, while simultaneously offering clues to postulate a Western Slavic provenance for a given text. The gradual decline of linguistic features poses an additional and significant obstacle to scholars, confronting them with both philological and linguistic dilemmas: what did the original text sound like, or, given that its written form must be reconstructed, what did it look like? This question is central not only to ecdotic practice but also to linguistic analysis, serving as a tool to trace the geographical

³ The classification of Moravisms has at times been criticized, with its most strongly polemical expression found in a series of articles by Rostislav Stankov later compiled into a substantial monograph (Stankov 2016).

complexities, and even vagaries, of Church Slavonic texts, as well as their composition and transmission along the temporal and spatial axis.

In this regard, scholars have observed a gradual variation in the conservativeness of linguistic features: the lexical level appears to be the most stable in textual transmission, undergoing less change than other linguistic levels (Vepřek 2006: 9; 2022: 34); in contrast, phonetics and orthography tend to change more rapidly over time, and to a greater extent than morphology and syntax (Mareš 1974: 34 = 2000 [1974]: 147)⁴.

In the following exposition, I shall present several philological examples drawn from two different compositions of alleged West Slavonic origin: the Office for Saint Wenceslaus (Mareš 1979: 45-49), an original composition included in the liturgical Menaion, and the longer (Cyrillic) version of the *Passio sancti Viti* (Mareš 1979: 135-145), a legend describing the martyrdom of Saint Vitus, translated from Latin (pace Dobrev 1981: 28-29 = 2018: 70-72).

Both texts, written in Old Church Slavonic and closely connected to the West and partly to the South Slavic traditions, were transmitted and received almost exclusively within the East Slavic cultural and linguistic context. The intertwining of such diverse geographical and cultural elements not only highlights the aforementioned transnational nature of Church Slavonic but also underscores the difficulties involved in determining the place of the text's composition and in tracing its subsequent textual history. Here, the literary nature of Old Church Slavonic fully emerges in all its complexity. As a language without a native-speaking population (Keipert 2014: 1212-1213), it exhibits an extreme mobility of texts and the traditions they convey, counterbalanced by a pronounced linguistic conservatism. However, this conservatism ought not to be understood as immobility, but rather as a factor that complicates the task of localization:

Sometimes it is difficult to localize either the language of an Old Church Slavonic text or the work itself, for the unity of the Old Church Slavonic linguistic and literary pattern often gained the upper hand over regional particularities. [...]. Even when the topic of the work is connected with a definite country, doubts may remain, as evidenced, for instance, by the bitter discussion whether the mass to St. Wenceslaus, preserved in an eleventh-century Novgorod manuscript, was composed in Russia, in Bulgaria, || or in Bohemia. Texts can acquire a markedly inter-Slavic character through migrations from one country to another, or they can have it from the start (Jakobson 1953: 40-41 = 1985: 37).

Jakobson's precise observations highlight the complexity of the issue regarding the origin of the liturgical office in honor of the martyred Bohemian prince. Together with the previously mentioned *Kiev Leaflets* and the *Prague Glagolitic Fragments*, it would form a

⁴ On the extremely conservative nature of syntax and lexicon in textual transmission compared to morphology and, even more so, to phonetics and orthography, see Mareš 2000 [1970]: 10 and 2000 [1970?]: 264, 266. On the methodology of identifying lexical Bohemisms in Czech Church Slavonic, see Reinhart 1980 and the criticism by Hamm 1981.

corpus of liturgical texts of possible Moravian or Czech origin (Vepřek 2013: 195). However, despite its Bohemian theme and sources (Rogov et al. 1976: 22), the hymnographic text's distinctly Byzantine form and style, as observed by Čajka (2011: 35), have led some scholars to question its Czech origin and consider a South Slavic or even East Slavic provenance.

Due to the transnational nature of the Church Slavonic tradition, as just outlined, it is far from easy to precisely identify the original place of composition of a text based solely on linguistic considerations. The linguistic criterion, usually regarded as the strongest and most decisive⁵, “yields disappointing and contradictory results” (Diddi 2007: 185). The relay-like transmission of works within *Slavia Christiana* has transformed the manuscripts preserving them into a kind of palimpsest, rich with mixed linguistic and cultural traces that are difficult to discern. Over time and across different geographical contexts, the phonetic-orthographic, morphological, lexical, and syntactic features of the original text may have undergone partial adaptation (sometimes intentional, sometimes spontaneous or even involuntary), manifested through more or less automatic substitutions. This process has naturally resulted in the accumulation of new “linguistic layers”, thereby making it considerably more difficult to identify and differentiate the various textual strata.

From a phonetic-orthographic perspective, both texts appear in an orthographic form that reveals the characteristic features of the East Slavic redaction, which partly correspond to the West Slavic (Czech) reflex: the evolution of nasal vowels, which have lost their nasal articulation, is reflected in the absence of the *jus bolšoj* (Ѣ), regularly replaced by the letter *uk* (у, Ѹ), and in the non-etymological use of the *jus malyj* (Ѧ) and of *az jotirovannyj* (Ѧ), which alternate according to distribution principles that are not always consistent, as well as the sporadic lack of distinction between the graphemes *jest'* (ѣ) and *jat'* (ѣ); the group *d+j* has produced the East Slavic outcome *z* (ж), while *t+j* is graphically rendered as *ч*. Evidence for *cokan'e* and second pleophony is also attested. Morphology and syntax also provide no distinguishing Czech elements (however, see below the interpretation of example 7). Therefore, aside from a possible phonetic feature to be discussed in the § 2.2., and for methodological reasons related to editorial practice, the lexicon, being less susceptible to change over time and across regions, has generally played the most significant linguistic role. However, even in this case, several issues persist (for a detailed examination of certain lexical features of the *Passio*, see Diddi 2007: 194-196).

2. On the Office for Saint Wenceslaus

Dedicated to a central historical figure of Bohemian Christianity (West Slavic), the *Office for Saint Wenceslaus*⁶ exhibits a hymnographic style and compositional structure,

⁵ See e.g. Večerka (2012: 406): “Für mich als Linguisten sind mit entscheidender Beweiskraft allein linguistische Argumente ausgestattet”.

⁶ In scholarly literature, as well as in the Prague Dictionary of Old Church Slavonic – where the abbreviation *CanVenc* in the list of sources is correctly expanded as *Cantus liturgici et Canon de s.*

is written in the linguistic tradition of Old Church Slavonic (South Slavic), and has been preserved exclusively in three East Slavic manuscripts, currently housed in Moscow and St. Petersburg, all of which are now available in digital form:

- 1) [T] Moscow, Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents, fund 381, Synodal Typography Library Collection, No 294, end of the 11th century, first published by Jagič (1886: 0213-0222), <http://rgada.info/kueh/index2.php?str=381_1_84> (last accessed 24.05.2025);
- 2) [Sin] Moscow, Russian Historical Museum, Synodal collection, No 159, 12th century, first edited by Nevostrujev (1872: 166-169), <<https://catalog.shm.ru/entity/OBJECT/165146?query=служебная%20миная%20сентябрь&index=39>> (last accessed 24.05.2025);
- 3) [Sof] Saint Petersburg, Russian National Library, fund 728, Novgorod Sophia Library Collection, No 188, early 12th century, first published by Sreznevskij (1863: 189-191), <<https://nlr.ru/manuscripts/RA1527/elektronnyy-katalog?ab=B21740B7-DEE0-474A-90C1-5FA7B362E62F>> (last accessed 24.05.2025).

2.1. *From Lexic...*

Due to its liturgical nature and distinct Byzantine style, the office for St. Wenceslaus does not offer any relevant data regarding the lexicon, except, possibly, for two particular words, *rovanije* and *zvoljutyňz*, which, for different reasons, are somewhat questionable (Tomelleri 2017)⁷.

In his analysis of the lexicon of Czech Church Slavonic Vepřek identifies only eighteen lexemes from the office, which fall into one of the following three relevant groups: 1) hapax legomena, 2) lexemes attested more than once in the same work, and, finally, 3) lexical correspondences between different texts of supposed Czech provenance in the corpus under examination (Vepřek 2006: 121). The distribution based on the list provided in the appendix to the text (Vepřek 2006: 172-192) is as follows: thirteen *hapax legomena* (a), three lexemes attested more than once (b), and two lexemes shared with *Gregory's Forty Homilies on the Gospel* and the *Kiev Leaflets*, respectively (c). Below is the full list:

Venceslao (SJS 1966: lxvi) –, the term *canon* is usually adopted for brevity. This designation, though perhaps more evocative, is technically imprecise and incomplete, as the canon is part of a broader liturgical complex, the *akoluthia* (ἀκολουθία), or *služba*, of which it is, nonetheless, undoubtedly the most important component. The *Canon* alone has been published in two instances (Gorskij, Nevostruev 1917: 13-16 and Angelov 1967: 72-74).

⁷ A discussion of a key yet problematic Moravism, the enigmatic word *rovanije*, is presented by Tomelleri 2021; a more recent etymological attempt has been put forward by Diweg-Pukanec 2024, who, however, did not consider the preceding philological literature.

(a) *Hapax legomena*

БОГОБЛАЖЕНЪ – *divinely blessed* (second troparion of the first ode)
 БОГОПОДОБНО – *in a godlike manner* (theotokion of the fourth ode)
 ВЪСЕСЪСТЪНЪ – *most venerable* (sticheron in the eighth tone)
 ДОСТОСЛАВЕНЪ – *praiseworthy* (second troparion of the third ode)
 ЗЪЛОЛЮТЕНЪ – *tormenting* (theotokion of the sixth ode)
 НЕМАЛЪЧНО – *incessantly* (first troparion of the seventh ode)
 ОУРЪВИТИ – *to turn red* (third troparion of the seventh ode)
 ПРЪСВАЩЕНЪ – *most holy* (sticheron in the eighth tone)
 ПРЪСЪЩЕНО – *supernaturally* (theotokion of the third ode)
 СЛОУЖИТЕЛЬСТВО – *service* (sticheron in the eighth tone)
 СЪВЕРЬНИИ (only in T)⁸ – *northern* (sticheron in the eighth tone)
 ХЛАДОДАВНИЦА – *dew-bringing* (first troparion of the seventh ode)
 ХОДАТАНИЦА – *mediator* (third troparion of the first ode)

(b) *Lexemes attested more than once in the text*

ЕРМОСЪ – *hirmos* (in the introductory rubric of each ode)
 ПРЪВЪЗНОШАТИ – *to extoll* (second and third troparia of the eighth ode)
 ПРЪОУДЪНЪ – *miraculous* (sticheron in the eighth tone, sticheron in the fourth tone, first troparion of the first ode)

(c) *Lexemes shared with other texts of supposed Czech origin*

ПРИНОШАТИ – *to bring* (third troparion of the seventh ode / *Gregory's Homilies on the Gospel*)
 РОВАННИИ/РОВАННІЕ (only in Sof) – *gift* (kontakion / *Kiev Leaflets*)

In the following, I will not be able to discuss these in detail. Still, I will limit myself to underline, as Vepřek himself has already pointed out, the non-representative nature of these lexical units. As can be clearly observed, the material obtained from this analysis, based on specific lexemes according to the three adopted criteria, is not particularly fruitful. Most of the examples above are translations of Greek terms commonly used in the hymnographic genre and are not unique to the liturgical composition dedicated to the Bohemian prince and martyr, as its text fully adheres, both lexically and syntactically, to the Byzantine-Slavic style (Vepřek 2006: 127). On the one hand, these are not particularly significant words, as they are also documented in the dictionaries of Miklošič and Sreznevskij, for instance, НЕМАЛЪЧНО (*incessantly*), ОУРЪВИТИ (*to turn red*) and ХОДАТАНИЦА (*mediator*); on the other hand, the ‘alleged’ cases of single attestation are largely due to the well-known limitation of

⁸ This reading is somewhat comparable to that discussed below (examples 2 and 3), with witness T possibly featuring (or preserving) a phonetic Bohemism, namely the adjective characterized by a stem ending in a soft nasal consonant (ЗАПАДОУ и СЪВЕРЬНИИМЪ СТРАНАМЪ), in contrast to the later manuscripts Sin and Sof, which read ЗАПАДОУ и СЪВЕРЬНИИМЪ (Sof СЪВЕРЬНИИМЪ) СТРАНАМЪ.

the corpus to a very restricted set of texts (manuscripts) in the Prague Old Church Slavonic dictionary, resulting in a striking number of hapaxes (Ziffer 2003: 632).

Let us take as an example the liturgical technical term and loanword *ѣрмоуѣ*, which is classified as a *hapax legomenon* of the *Office for Saint Wenceslaus*. Such an interpretative naivety stems from the mechanical application of a principle that only holds when the selected corpus of textual sources is well-balanced – a condition that does not apply to the hymnographic genre, which is notoriously underrepresented in this otherwise essential lexicographic repertoire. Therefore, it is not lexicologically accurate to classify this item, as well as other similar lexical units, as *hapax legomena* or as lexemes unique to the Czech tradition of Church Slavonic.

This status must likewise be denied to the lexeme *ѣзюлѣтънѣ* ‘cruel’ (SJS 1966: 687, <<http://gorazd.org/gulliver/?recordId=4539>>, 04.03.2025), which is, however, noteworthy for entirely different reasons: the theotokion of the sixth ode in which it appears is associated with the textual tradition of the Oktoechos (Pop-Atanasov 2011: 138) and constitutes a markedly aberrant translation of the Greek original, *δεινὸς καὶ ἄστατος* (Stern 2002: 179; Tomelleri 2017: 34).

With this in mind, our analysis will focus on several linguistic issues, both phonetic and grammatical, that pertain to textual criticism, editorial work, and lexicographic practice.

2.2. ...to Phonetic Bohemisms

To highlight the mismatch between historical phonetics, textual transmission, and editorial practice, I will present three distinctive readings that have been, or could be, interpreted as potential evidence of Czech origin⁹. As a starting point of the exposition, the *stemma codicum* proposed in a recent article by Tomelleri (2023: 128)¹⁰ will be reintroduced. The reciprocal relationships among the three witnesses can be represented as in **FIGURE 1**, with the Greek letter omega denoting the primary source or, more likely, the East Slavic archetype (the distinction is not pertinent to the present discussion)¹¹.

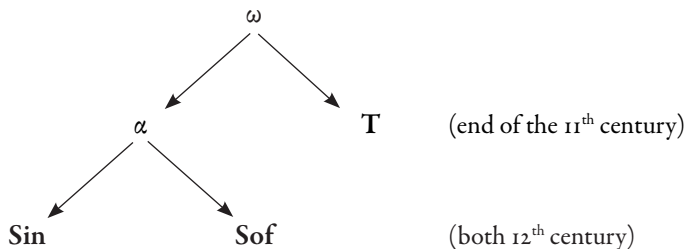
In this bifurcated stemma, **T** represents an autonomous branch independent from the hyparchetype from which **Sin** and **Sof** are derived. In this configuration, each *varia*

⁹ For a concise presentation of arguments supporting the Bohemian origin of this liturgical monument, the reader is referred to Čajka’s talk, *Kánon ke cti sv. Václava v dobových souvislostech* (‘The canon in honor of Saint Wenceslaus in its historical context’), delivered in 2012 and available online: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-Gzck9gIV4>> (last accessed 09.02.2025). The proceedings of this conference, edited by Vepřek 2014, do not include this presentation.

¹⁰ This article also offers an overview of the manuscript tradition and relevant scholarly work.

¹¹ On the possibility that the *Office*, as attested by the extant witnesses, is the product of the compilation of two distinct canons, one commemorating the saint’s death (September 28) and the other his relics’ translation to Prague (March 4), which only received its final form on East Slavic soil, see Pražák 1972: 219 = 1996: 66 and Tomelleri 2023: 133–134.

FIGURE 1
Stemma codicum of the Office for Saint Wenceslas



lectio permits the determination of the original reading (or that of the archetype) by applying the principle of cross-majority, which holds only when there is agreement between two witnesses belonging to distinct branches of the stemma: the alignment of **T** with **Sof** (against **Sin**), or with **Sin** (against **Sof**), is decisive for establishing the original reading with a reasonable degree of confidence.

What follows presents a typical case study of the difficulties involved in producing a critical edition of a text. Let us now examine the fourth troparion of the first ode (we have adopted **Sin** as the base manuscript, recording in the apparatus all variants, including orthographic ones, from the other two witnesses):

(1) Fourth troparion of the first ode

- (1) КЪТО¹ ИСПОВѢСТЬ² ТВОЯ ЮДЕСА • ³
 (2) СЛАВЬНЕ⁴ АЖЕ⁵ | ТВОРИШИ •
 (3) ВЪ МИРѢ⁶ БЕЦИСА •
 (4) ВЪИНОУ⁷ БО | ВЪСѢМЪ⁸ • ⁹ ВЪРЪНЪИМЪ ¹⁰ВБИЛНО¹¹ • ¹⁰
 (5) АДЕШИ И | ЦѢЛЕНІА¹² ☩

Sin 243v (sub neum.); **T** 166r; **Sof** 124v ■ 1: **TSof** Кт-; 2: **T** add. •; 3: **Sof** om.; 4: **TSof** add. •; 5: **TSof** ѡж-; 6-6: ☩ **TSof** трансп. твориши въ мирѣ •; 7: **TSof** въин-; 8: **Sof** -сем-; 9: ☩ **TSof** om. fort. recte; 10-10: ☩ **TSof** трансп. • вбилю fort. recte; 11: **Sin** ☩ вбило, em. **TSof** вбилю; 12: **Sof** ицеления, ☩ **T** исцѣление.

‘Who, O glorious one, will declare the miracles which you perform on earth without number? For you always give¹² ample healing to all the faithful’ (English translation by Kantor 1990: 97)

¹² Since the Slavic original uses the present tense, I adjusted Kantor’s translation by substituting *performed* with *perform* and *have given* with *give*.

In the last two verses, we read the following passage, which appears to be quite unproblematic in every respect, both grammatically and lexically:

(2) Healing or healings?

ВЪЗНИОУ БО ВЪСѢМЪ ВЪРЪНЪИМЪ ОБИЛНО ДАЮШИ ИЦѢЛЕНІА (variant readings: Sof
ИЦЕЛЕНІА, T ИЦѢЛЕНІЕ)

‘For you always bestow **healings** abundantly upon all the faithful’ (translation mine)

Based on the stemma (fig. 1), the textual tradition (excluding the presence or absence of the sibilant fricative in the verbal prefix *iz-* before the voiceless affricate; see on this Georgievski, Makarijoska 1989: 61) exhibits the typical pattern of variations that do not alter the overall meaning of the passage, requiring the philologist’s choice. Here, we encounter a notable textual difference: the reading ИЦѢЛЕНІЕ appears in the oldest surviving manuscript of the text (T), whereas the variant ИЦѢЛЕНІА is found in the other branch of the bifurcated *stemma*, represented by Sin and Sof. This variation cannot be definitively settled on either stemmatic grounds or grammatical ones: both readings are equally attested in the two branches [1 vs. 1] and are syntactically acceptable, as they can each serve as the direct object (singular in T vs. plural in Sin, Sof) of the ditransitive verb form ДАЮШИ. While the singular form conveys ‘healing’ as a general activity or habit, the plural, probably more appropriate, suggests a series of individual healing events.

This is likely how both an early and modern (not only) East Slavic reader would interpret each of the two readings, without any difficulty or hesitation. The question arises, however, of how to handle this in a critical edition of the troparion. My suggestion is to highlight the variant found in the oldest witness T (ИЦѢЛЕНІЕ) in the apparatus with a special symbol (⚡), as it might be genuine and therefore original:

(3) Plural vs. singular?

Sof ИЦЕЛЕНІА, ⚡ T ИЦѢЛЕНІЕ *fortasse recte*.

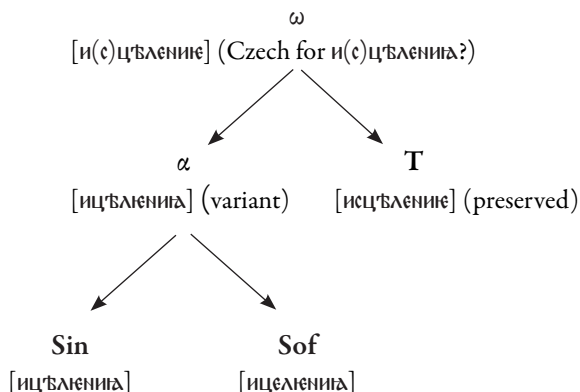
Curiously, this reading, which, as noted earlier, functions well as an accusative singular, has been considered ‘originally identical’ to the accusative plural form found in the other two witnesses. This interpretation rests on the assumption that the Genitive ending underwent a phonetic process characteristic of the Czech language, specifically, the transition of *-ija* to *-ijä* (orthographic *-ije*), thereby linguistically confirming, or at least suggesting, its Czech origin through the phonotactic pattern of the consonant *j* + vowel (Mareš 1949-1950 = 2000 [1949]: 349; Večerka 1963: 414-415; Vintř 2006: 141). This form has generally been associated with two examples from the *Prague Glagolitic Fragments*, that were initially, and erroneously, considered possible instances of Old Czech metaphony *dusä* > *dušě*:

(4) Prague Glagolitic Fragments

a. ПАНЪТИКОСТНЕ СЪДѢ ГРѢ | ДѢТ(Ь) I B/4-5 (Vondrák 1904: 88)

‘Holy Pentecost is coming’ (English translation by Kantor 1990: 51)

FIGURE 2a
Distribution of the variants



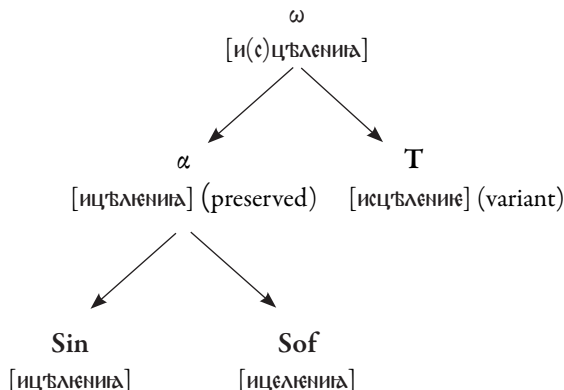
b. *єѣа дара цѣлєнїє тѣа лиши* II A/23 (Vondrák 1904: 89)

μη τοῦ χαρίσματος τῶν ἰαμάτων ἐστέρησε ('Has it perhaps taken away your gift of healing?')
'For you were deprived of the gift of healing' (English translation by Kantor 1990: 52)

Example (4a), however, was questioned by Weingart (1949: 69), who saw in it a possible vocative case used as a nominative; on the other hand, (4b) could be nothing more than a scribe's error, like several others found in this otherwise brief text (Oblak 1896: 110). In any case, significant uncertainties persist in interpreting these data, particularly if one considers the chronology of Czech metaphony, which occurred roughly a century later, during the latter half of the 12th century (Bergmann 1921: 223-230; Mareš 1959: 140, 1963: 425 = 2000: 374) or around the year 1200 (Reinhart 2000: 166). From a stemmatic point of view, even if we postulate an initial Bohemian-like plural form in *-ije*, the resulting picture remains quite clear. Since both textual variants have correct grammatical and lexical meanings, no doubts emerge, the only and fundamental question being whether this linguistic single variant can be invoked to demonstrate that the office was originally composed in Bohemia. Given that an East Slavic copyist would almost certainly have treated *исцѣлєнїє* as singular, the plural form attested in **Sin** and **Sof** should be considered a perhaps unconscious alteration of the text that took place at the level of the hyparchetype *α*, indeed a possible scenario (FIGURE 2a).

However, this does not exclude the possibility that the situation was completely different, with a plural form *и(с)цѣлєнїа* in the original composition that was later replaced by *исцѣлєнїє* in **T**, especially since it is far from certain that *исцѣлєнїє* would have been understood as a plural even in the region where it is presumed to have originated (FIGURE 2b).

FIGURE 2b
Another plausible scenario



A stronger candidate for a phonetic Bohemism may be found in the first troparion of the third ode, which presents a linguistically and philologically more complex and intriguing case than the one previously discussed. Below, the full critical text is given:

(5) First troparion of the third ode

- (1) ЛЮБЪВИЮ¹ ХРИСТОВОЮ² •
- (2) ПРИСНО РАЖИЗДЯЕМЪ³ • 4 |
- (3) КЪ⁵ ЦРКЪВИ⁶ СВАТЪИ⁷ •
- (4) ИДЕ ЖЕ⁸ ПРЪВЛАЖЕНЕ⁸ • |
- (5) ВЪЗЖИРА⁹ < • >⁹ ІАКО АГНЬЦЪ НЕЗЪЛОБИВЪ¹⁰ •
- (6) НЕПРА | ВЪДЫНАДО¹¹ ТИ ОУБЫЕНИѧ¹² ☩

Sin 2.4.4r (sub neum.); T 166r; Sof 12.4v ■ 1: Sof -вую; 2: TSof хѣ-; 3: TSof -жди-; 4: T om.; 5: ☩ Sin err. въ, em. TSof; 6: T црѣкѣ, Sof црѣкѣ-; 7: TSof сѣт-; 8: T прѣв-, Sof прѣвѣж; 9: ☩ TSof om. fort. recte; 10: Sin незл (inter litteras з et л habetur neuma), em. TSof -зъл-; 11: T -наг; 12: T оубиєнїѧ, ☩ Sof var. оубиєнїє.

‘Always burning with love for Christ, you went to the holy church, O most blessed one, observing your unjust killing like a meek lamb’ (translation mine)¹³.

¹³ Kantor’s translation is unconvincing: ‘Ever enkindled by Christ’s love for the holy Church, there did you behold your unjust slaughter like a meek lamb’ (Kantor 1990: 97). See also the comment on the next footnote.

In the last verse¹⁴, particular consideration deserves the textual variant of the witness **Sof**, i.e. **оубиѣниѣ**. Instead of postulating, in this case, a simple copyist's error (*lapsus calami*), scholars have observed in this form the same Bohemian phonetic evolution mentioned above, i.e. *ubijenija* > *ubijenijä*, spelled *ubijenije* (Večerka 1976: 111; Čajka 2011: 36). This form can be interpreted and explained with greater certainty, as the adjectival attribute **неправдынааго** leaves no doubt regarding the morphosyntactic rection (genitive singular) of the *verbum sentiendi* **вззирати**:

(6) Simple copyist's mistake or significant phonetic clue?

вззирѣѣа іако агньць незлобивъ неправдынааго ти оубиѣниѣа

Watching your unjust killing like an innocent lamb

(**T** **оубиѣниѣа**, **Sof** var./err. **оубиѣниѣ**)

The modern Church Slavonic version of the text in the edition of 2003 seemingly supports the reading found in **Sof**; however, the form **убиѣние**, though formally identical, occurs in a completely different syntactic context: it functions as an accusative singular, serving as the direct object of the transitive verb **претерпѣти**, whereas in the old translation, a genitive singular dependent on the verb of perception **вззирати** is attested: *яко агнецъ незлобивъ, неправедное претерпѣл еси убиѣние* (МОЗ: 848).

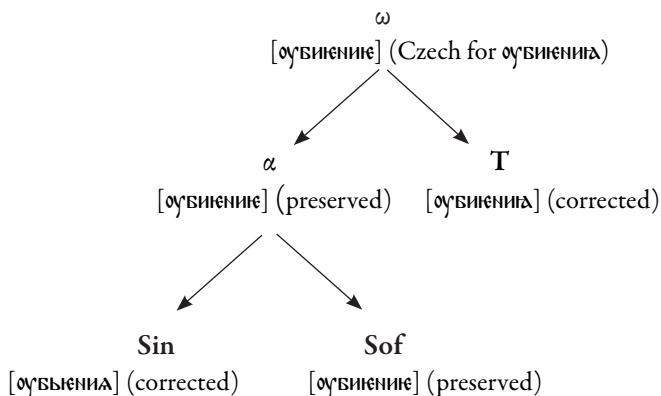
In example (6), if we assume the form **оубиѣниѣ** in the (Bohemian) original, we are compelled to acknowledge that both **T** and **Sin**, independently of each other, would have corrected the morpho-syntactic 'mistake', which is defensible on philological grounds.

In contrast, **Sof**, despite its position in the stemma, would have preserved the archetypal and, as probably seen through the eyes of an East Slavic scribe, inappropriate spelling, perhaps merely by chance. Although not implausible, this transmission path entails a more intricate and entangled stemmatic development (see **FIGURE 3**).

We also expect that the syntactically incorrect noun phrase (at least from the perspective of an East Slavic scribe) might have been detected and corrected independently during the copying process in both **T** and **Sin**. As fascinating as this linguistic interpretation may be, it significantly complicates the overall picture and runs counter to philological reasoning, since the stemmatic distribution of the witnesses (**T** and **Sin** against **Sof**), based on the majority principle (2 vs. 1), supports the grammatically 'correct' reading and justifies the rejection of the 'incorrect' one.

¹⁴ In the fourth verse, at the level of the (East Slavic?) archetype, one observes a copyist's misinterpretations of the archaic root aorist **иде** (here 2sg), which was mistaken for a local adverb. This led, only in **Sin**, to the substitution of the preposition **къ**, indicating motion towards a place, with **въ**. The later (?) addition of the clitic **же** gave rise to the relative local adverb **идеже**, which significantly distorted the text and also influenced some modern translations (e.g., Vajs 1929: 141; Rogov 1970: 123; Kantor 1990: 97, but not Vašica 1942: 75; Rogov *et al.* 1976: 230); notice that in the modern edition of the Office the relative local adverb *идеже* was replaced by *тамо* (МОЗ: 848).

FIGURE 3
Chronological distribution of the variants



Another intriguing linguistic feature (or simple grammatical inconsistency?) of **Sof**, which, according to the *editor princeps* of this text, features exceptionally well-preserved archaic forms and a more carefully copied text than even the witness **T** (Jagič 1882: 227), can be detected at the beginning of the third troparion of the first ode. Specifically, the form **СЗМЪРТИ**, if read not as a genitive or dative singular, but rather as a nominative/accusative, could be prudently considered a Bohemism. This form would join the only known example of a singular accusative in *-i* for stems in *-i* (Mareš 1963: 426 = 2000: 376)¹⁵, alongside the much more frequent instances of the singular nominative:

(7) An accusative form in *-i*?

СЗМЪРТЬ ХОДАТЯЦОУ ЖИЗНИ ПРИ | ИМЪ
*Having accepted death as the mediator of life*¹⁶
 Variant reading: **Sof** СЗМЪРТИ

Thus, the linguistic analysis does not take into account the philologically significant fact that these two or three forms occur only once, and in two different manuscripts, **T** and **Sof**. Although suggestive and thought-provoking, such fragmentary and isolated examples are stemmatically difficult to trace back to the archetype or the lost original (assuming the stemma is correct), especially in the case of **Sof**. It is quite clear and understandable that no editor would be willing to include these readings from **Sof** in the main text of a critical

¹⁵ In the *Forty Gospel Homilies of St. Gregory the Great* (98aα 5): великоу • млѣти (!) бжїю (Konzal 2005: 438).

¹⁶ Kantor's translation, 'Having accepted death, O mediator of life' (Kantor 1990: 97), is inaccurate and should therefore be rejected.

edition, as elevating such isolated and sometimes 'grammatically incorrect' forms to the status of the *Urtext* would not be straightforward.

This philological consideration recalls what was previously observed about the sporadic nature of the alleged Moravisms and Bohemisms in later manuscripts: these are largely uncommon or exceptional linguistic features associated with Moravian (Bohemian) phonetics (Večerka 2014: 14). In the new context where they were transcribed, the latest copies underwent both an adaptation to the local norms and a broader unification of the written language; as a result, the occurrence of these features may be reduced compared to the original Moravian state. We are thus, so to speak, faced with a superstratum of various territorial versions of Church Slavonic, which likely facilitated the insertion of foreign linguistic elements into later copies of texts originally composed or copied in Bohemia (Mareš 1974: 98 = 2000: 478), these elements surviving only sporadically as isolated remnants.

Here, in all its seriousness, arises the difficulty of reconciling purely linguistic reflections on historical phonetics with stemmatic considerations related to the evaluation of witnesses and text transmission. Random occurrence of archaic linguistic features, fossils that have escaped the usual transmission process, are undoubtedly valuable linguistic clues. However, from a critical-textual and partly stemmatic perspective (as illustrated in the examples from *Sof*), they oscillate between being considered presumptive variants and *lectiones singulares*, thus offering either decisive or, conversely, minimal or no assistance in reconstructing the archetype or original text.

In Slavic medieval studies, there remains the need for philologically and linguistically reliable critical (and not just diplomatic) editions, alongside comprehensive dictionaries, to ensure accurate textual analysis and understanding. Lexicographical repertoires, as well as linguistic analysis, lose their credibility when they rely on potentially corrupted sources lacking a clear textual tradition or on editions where it is unclear what belongs in the main text and what should be placed in the apparatus (Didi 2007: 189). These tools are essential for evaluating the findings and establishing (or reconstructing) texts with precision, clarifying linguistic features, and providing the necessary context for scholarly work, especially when dealing with complex or fragmented sources. Expanding our knowledge means considering diverse texts and contexts, while enriching the material involves deep textual analysis. Together, these factors enhance our understanding of language, texts, and their historical significance, all of which are essential for producing a trustworthy and well-informed edition.

In this regard, I would like to present a revealing example that, in my opinion, demonstrates both the challenges to be overcome and the insights that can be gained through a careful philological and linguistic approach.

3. *Between Lexicon and Morphosyntax: the Martyrdom of Saint Vitus*

The focus now shifts to a morpho-syntactic issue regarding the (in)transitive use of a Church Slavonic verb in the Slavic translation from Latin of the *Martyrdom of Saint Vitus*, a text possibly translated in Great Moravia (Bláhová 2005: 248, 2006: 227) or Bohemia and preserved in both an East Slavic version (edited by Sobolevskij 1903, reprinted

in Mareš 1979: 135-145) and a shortened version of a Croatian Glagolitic office (discovered and published by Vajs 1901; see also Mareš 1979: 145-150 and Birnbaum 1991b).

In a dialogue between the young Vitus and his pagan father, who, deeply concerned about his son's religious devotion, persistently tries to turn him away from Christianity, Vitus, moved by pity for his father, now blind because of divine punishment, addresses him with the following words:

(8) Passive vs. active?

Scio quod obduratum est cor tuum, sed propter populum astantem faciam tecum misericordiam [BHL 8712].

ВѢДѢ ІАКО ОЖЕСТИЛЪ ІЕСТЬ СРДЦЕ ТВОЕ, НЪ ЛЮДИИ РАДИ СТОЯЩИХЪ СЪТВОРЮ СЪ ТОБОЮ МИЛОСТЬ (Tomelleri 2024: 365)

'I know that your heart has hardened, but for the sake of the people standing here I will have mercy upon you' (English translation by Kantor 1990: 118).

The Church Slavonic translation features a perfect tense verb with a resultative meaning *ожестилъ іестъ*, but it shows incorrect agreement between the subject (the neuter singular noun *сръдцѣ* 'heart') and the participle form *ожестилъ* (masculine singular). This wrong reading was challenged by the first editor of the text, who cautiously presented his emendation *ожестило іестъ* in the form of a question (Sobolevskij 1903: 287, fn. 8). His suggestion was later adopted in the Prague Old Church Slavonic Dictionary and endorsed by Mareš (1979: 140)¹⁷, who largely reproduced the text of Sobolevskij's edition almost without any interventions (Diddi 2007: 182)¹⁸.

However, even after restoring grammatical agreement between subject and predicate, the text remains somewhat awkward. The Latin original employs a passive construction, whereas the verb *ожестити*, which is inherently transitive and active, makes little sense in this context. It is therefore worth mentioning that a modern Czech translation of this passage by Josef Vařica (1884-1968)¹⁹ inadvertently (?) replaces the passive voice with the active, shifting the subject to the second person singular, i.e., the addressee of Vitus' speech:

¹⁷ This is also evident in the index card (s.v. *ожестити*), where the main lemma is rendered as *zativrditi se* (see <http://gorazd.org/gorazd_viewer/?image=SS2-05A004156a.jpg&envLang=cs>, 07.06.2025), which may trace back to Mareš's lexicographical work at the Dictionary Department of the Slavonic Institute (Vintr 2013: 340), during which he worked on the *Forty Gospel Homilies of St. Gregory the Great*, preparing the text for inclusion in the Prague Dictionary of Old Church Slavonic (Hannick 2013: 343).

¹⁸ Despite occasional criticism for lacking a critical approach, this anthology continues to serve as a fundamental reference for discussions on Czech Church Slavonic issues and remains an essential handbook for anyone engaged with this subject (Hauptová 2006: 27).

¹⁹ On Vařica's major contributions to Old Church Slavonic studies, see Večerka 1985 (a short bio-bibliographical survey is provided by Pavera 2001; for a complete list of his publications see Sokolová 1995).

(9) Czech translation

Vím, že zatvrdil srdce své. Avšak pro lid okolo stojící učiním s tebou milosrdenství (Vašica 1942: 91)²⁰

‘I know that you have hardened your heart. However, for the sake of the people standing around, I will show you mercy’

According to this translation, the father, Hylas, is held responsible for the hardening of his heart due to his contemptuous attitude toward his beloved son’s Christian faith. It may be tempting to ascribe this syntactic shift – from passive to active – to the medieval Slavic translator, who, adhering to the “spirit of the language” (avoiding the passive and replacing it with an active construction), sought to emphasize the active role of Vitus’s father in the development of his feelings; accordingly, one might consider restoring the form *ожестилъ еси* as an editorial emendation, but this hypothesis cannot be convincingly demonstrated.

Such an interpretation of the obscure passage is perhaps supported by another text of Bohemian provenance, the *Prayer of Saint Gregory*, recently published by Vepřek (2013), in which the same pattern and lexical collocation appear, albeit in a corrupted, lexically, and grammatically flawed form:

(10) Prayer of Saint Gregory (Vepřek 2013: 38 and 114)

a. *изъѣи въ мнѣ слезы ѿкоже изъѣалъ еси земли дождь ѿко встѣилъ еси срѣце мое ѿко и камень*

‘Make my tears flow as you made the rain of the earth flow, for you have hardened my heart like stone’

b. *Effunde mihi lacrimas sic(ut) fudisti terre aquas. quia obduratu(m) e(st) cor meu(m) quasi petra*

‘Make my tears flow as you poured out the waters of the earth, for my heart has been hardened like a stone’

One may ask whether example (10a) once again illustrates a shift in perspective, comparable to that in the preceding passage, through the Slavic translator’s conscious use of an active form for a Latin passive (10b); should this be the case, we would be justified in emending the probably corrupted form *встѣилъ* by adding the missing syllable *же*, thus restoring the verb *l*-form *ожестилъ* (it cannot be ruled out the possibility that the original reading was misinterpreted as an abbreviated form of the verb *освятити* ‘to sanctify’, with the *titlo* Ɀ omitted; however, this remains purely speculative).

²⁰ The Polish translation, admittedly based on Vašica’s text, is not indicative in this respect (*translatio descripta*): *Wiem, że zatwardziłeś swoje serce. Ale dla ludu wokół stojącego uczynię miłosierdzia* (Paner 1995: 177).

We are well aware that conflating two distinct textual traditions, despite their possible connection through a common Czech origin, to interpret a text and reconstruct its original form carries a significant risk of producing ghost forms; furthermore, the enduring of the heart would be here attributed not to a pagan figure, like in the episode from the *Martyrdom of Saint Vitus*, but to God Himself.

Indeed, commenting on the corrupted form in the base manuscript, its editor took a different and entirely philologically acceptable approach. He argued that the later manuscript **M** preserves a syntactically and semantically superior reading that precisely corresponds to the Latin original (*obduratum est*) and should therefore be considered the genuine one (“*původnější čtení*”): the intransitive (anticausative) form, marked by the reflexive clitic *se* [s’a], **ожестило са ѿ** (Vepřek 2013: 38-39). Consequently, he suggested that the perfect form **встѣлъ ѿи** found in the base witness **Jar** is likely a corruption that emerged during the transmission of the prayer, a clear demonstration of Pasquali’s famous motto: “The more recent are not necessarily the worse!” (*Recentiores non deteriores!*). The reading **ожестило са ѿ** might also be the original form of example 8.

To complicate matters further, we might consider an alternative explanation, which may, in some respects, appear even more logical and clear-cut. This interpretation, once again grounded in linguistic (orthographic) considerations, takes into account the continuous circulation of texts within the *Slavia Christiana* and beyond. In the case of the “transitive” verb form **ожестити**, we may be dealing with a “simple” graphic confusion between the letters *jat’* <ѣ> and *iže* <и>, likely reflecting a dialectal feature, specifically, the convergence of these phonemes, as occasionally observed in Northern East Slavic manuscripts. Both perfect forms mentioned above would receive a correct interpretation, aligning perfectly with the Latin text, if they were considered forms of the intransitive verb **ожестѣти** (SJS 1973: 522, <<http://gorazd.org/gulliver/?recordId=37529>>, last accessed 07.02.2025). This lexeme is indeed attested in a highly significant representative of the Czech redaction, namely the *Forty Gospel Homilies of St. Gregory the Great*, within a context displaying a clear resultative meaning, expressed in the Latin model through the adjective *dur-us*, *-a*, *-um*:

(11) Intransitive verb (Konzal 2006: 692)

мѣсль члѣка • не ѿцюцаго • лица творца своего • злѣ ѿжестѣла ієсть • іако в себе сама • превзымаієть • ст[(р)]оудена

Mens namque hominis conditoris sui speciem non querentis male dura est, quia in semetipsa remanet frigida

‘The mind of a man who does not seek the image of his Creator is grievously hardened, because it remains cold within itself’.

Accepting a layered development of both examples, influenced by phonetic-orthographic factors, we arrive at the following textual schema:

(12) Transmission scenario

Original (Bohemian?) form	–	ожестьѣло ѣсть
Dialectal feature (on East Slavic soil)	–	ожестило ѣсть
Textual transmission	–	ожестило са ѣсть

As we can see, this completely overturns the previous interpretation, as the final form is not the original, but rather a later correction of an intermediate textual stage by a mindful scribe.

4. *Some Conclusions*

From this brief analysis of randomly selected examples, we can now attempt to draw some broader conclusions.

First, identifying older linguistic elements in later manuscripts is far from unequivocal, as such features are often eliminated or altered over time by copyists from different periods and regions.

Second, any residual traces of these elements are typically dismissed by modern scholars (just as they were by medieval readers and scribes) as mere variant readings or scribal errors, generally considered to lack diagnostic value for the *stemma codicum*, yet potentially relevant for linguistic reconstruction.

Finally, editing Old Church Slavonic texts requires navigating a delicate balance. On one hand, textual criticism aims to establish the text in its most accurate form, striving to get as close as possible to the original version or, at the very least, to the archetype, whenever possible, based on the position of extant witnesses within the stemma; on the other hand, isolated linguistic features can offer valuable insights, but may also complicate or impede the stemmatic representation of the text's transmission, as they might reflect the original phrasing of the text or, conversely, arise from minor scribal errors, corrections, or regional variations rather than from the original version itself.

Abbreviations

МОЗ:	<i>Mineja sentjabr'</i> . Moskva 2003.
SJS 1966	<i>Slovník jazyka staroslověnského / Lexicon linguae palaeoslovenicae</i> , I. a-h, Praha 1966.
SJS 1973:	<i>Slovník jazyka staroslověnského / Lexicon linguae palaeoslovenicae</i> , II. k-o, Praha 1973.

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Abstract

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At the Intersection of Textual Transmission and Linguistic Interpretation: Cases from the Czech Church Slavonic Tradition

This article offers a methodological contribution to the complex relationship between the critical editing of Old Church Slavonic texts and their linguistic interpretation. It focuses in particular on the challenges of reconciling textual criticism with both the reconstruction of a text's original form and the identification of its place of composition. Given the unique nature of these texts and their transmission across different regions, editors often face considerable difficulties in accounting for historical linguistic shifts and manuscript alterations while attempting to restore an original version (*Urtext* or archetype). The study examines specific complications that emerge when textual variation, scribal interventions or errors, and diachronic linguistic developments intersect in the editorial process. Through the analysis of concrete examples from texts of probable or possible Czech provenance, it explores the challenges of restoring texts shaped by transmission across different territories and historical periods. These issues, in turn, raise critical questions about the creation of comprehensive and reliable dictionaries based on such editions, or used to justify specific linguistic decisions. Together, these two dimensions of editorial work create a dual dilemma, one that is particularly difficult to resolve, as it requires balancing textual restoration through a *stemma codicum* with rigorous linguistic analysis.

Keywords

Czech Church Slavonic; Office for St. Wenceslaus; Martyrdom of St. Vitus; Textual Criticism; Manuscript Transmission; Philological Interpretation; Linguistic Analysis.