

# Texts and Transmission: Studies In Slavic And Medieval Latin Philology

## Introduction

This special issue of "Studi Slavistici" investigates problems of transmission, textual criticism, and editorial techniques in (Old) Church Slavonic literature in dialogue with Medieval Latin philology. The proposed approach is part of a research strategy promoted by the project *The Transmission of Old Church Slavonic Texts* (<<https://tocst.unior.it/>>), funded under the "PRIN 2022" grant scheme, which was awarded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (CUP Master H53D23006810006, CUP G53D23005950006, and CUP D53D23015080006). This represents a collaborative effort involving three affiliated institutions: the "Orientale" University of Naples, with Alessandro Maria Bruni as the principal investigator, and the Universities of Turin and Udine, with Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri and Giorgio Ziffer as associate researchers.

The primary goal of the TOCST-project is to reposition Slavic Philology within a scholarly tradition that is firmly grounded in the principles of textual criticism. Since the emergence of the field of Palaeoslavistics as an academic discipline two centuries ago, and the initial scholarly engagement with Old Church Slavonic language and literature, considerable progress has been made in our understanding of the earliest period of the Slavic literary tradition. Numerous texts have come to light, spanning a wide range of genres – namely, biblical, liturgical, apocryphal, hymnographic, homiletic, hagiographic, and historical writings. Several of the most significant works have been published, and many manuscripts have undergone a thorough palaeographical and codicological analysis. Nevertheless, most editions are not truly critical, and a comprehensive, methodologically sound study of the transmission of each single work has hitherto been only rarely attempted. This lack of advancement in scholarship can be attributed to multiple factors. First, priority has been given to date to earlier or seemingly more complete manuscript evidence. This has resulted in a marked tendency to overlook lexical and syntactic features found in later copies. Second, even when a particular manuscript tradition has been thoroughly examined, the analysis has often failed to adhere to a rigorous text-critical method. Consequently, Slavic philology continues to suffer from a longstanding isolation, a relative backwardness in comparison with other disciplines, and a severe dearth of strict and clear conceptual methodological guidelines, insofar as textual criticism is concerned. In this field, in contrast with the study of Classical, Biblical, Medieval-Latin, German, and Romance philology, there has been a failure to implement the fundamental principles of modern philological scholarship.

To fill this gap in the study of the transmission of early Church Slavonic texts, the TOCST project adopts a methodology designed to address the complexity of the issues at stake. More specifically, our approach aims at a systematic examination of the literary corpus produced within the context of early Slavic literary civilization, referred to as *Slavia Christiana*. This implies investigating most works produced between 863 and the late 11<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of later codices, mostly dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the case of South Slavonic manuscripts, and from the 15<sup>th</sup> century in regard to East Slavonic manuscripts. As a rule, the textual transmission confronts us with several challenging issues that still await a response. These include the process of survival and preservation of texts centuries after their creation as well as their circulation and dissemination in different parts of the Slavic world, such as Moravia, Pannonia, Bohemia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kievan Rus', Croatia and Serbia, and even in territories stretching beyond the Slavic-speaking world, such as Mount Athos, Constantinople, Palestine, Sinai, and, in later times, Moldavia and Wallachia. Other key issues involve how these texts were transcribed, the extent to which they remained faithful to the originals, and the degree to which the scribes allowed themselves a free hand in their work. A further important point is the question of whether the Church Slavonic manuscript legacy differs significantly from other traditions, or exhibits, on the contrary, features comparable to the transmission of Classical, Biblical, Byzantine, Medieval Latin, German, and Romance texts.

These core issues in Slavic philology constitute the objects of primary concern in the TOCST-Project, which attempts both to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and promote new methodological approaches. A first step towards achieving this goal is represented by several authored and edited papers, published in the journal of the Old Church Slavonic Institute in Zagreb ("Slovo: časopis Staroslavenskoga instituta u Zagrebu", LXXIII, 2023). These articles, written by leading experts in the field, explore 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>-century works across a wide range of literary genres such as hagiography, hymnography, and homiletics, and provide new insights into the reconstruction of their transmission and textual history. This collection of papers sought to bridge the gap in our understanding of (Old) Church Slavonic textual transmission and to offer analytical models applicable to other works of the literature of *Slavia Christiana*.

This special issue of "Studi Slavistici" goes a step further by providing an interdisciplinary posture. The inspiration for viewing Slavic philology from a comparative perspective dates back to a conference, organized in January 2020, thanks to the generous support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and held at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice (*Probleme mittelalterlicher Überlieferung und Textkritik: europäische Philologien im Vergleich*). The lively engagement from colleagues across various disciplines, as well as the many questions that remained partially unanswered in our discipline, inspired further investigations into both methodological and practical questions within a broader comparative framework. The present volume, which was conceived as an attempt to promote interdisciplinary dialogue, brings together ten articles written in three different languages (English, German, and Italian). They explore textual-critical issues across both (Old)

Church Slavonic and Medieval Latin traditions, offering insights and analytical models to illuminate the complexities of Medieval (and Early Modern) textual transmission.

The idea of comparing Slavic philology with Medieval Latin philology is by no means accidental. In fact, the oft-proposed parallelism between Latin and Old Church Slavonic does not hold, either for genetic or functional reasons. Whereas Latin, was once a language of empire and later exposed to view a transnational medium that was spoken natively and then preserved as a written, school-based language conveying law, science, culture, and religion, Old Church Slavonic was a literary and liturgical language without a native community and was transmitted for centuries without formal schooling. Nonetheless, it is possible to observe some interesting parallels in their subsequent textual traditions. In both cases, texts were written and copied in a language that was either no longer spoken as a vernacular (Latin was used as a means of oral communication only in narrow scholarly circles) or had never been native to the copyists.

In the Middle Ages, a twofold and partly parallel scenario can be observed: Medieval Latin in Romance-speaking areas functioned much like (Old) Church Slavonic in the Slavic world, serving as a primary written medium; Latin's role as a written language in German- and Slavic-speaking regions resembles that of (Old) Church Slavonic in non-Slavic settings, such as in Moldavia and Wallachia, where it operated as a literary and liturgical language. For the history of texts, this undoubtedly represents a major challenge. Moreover, it is important to highlight the supranational nature of both traditions, as well as the value of a comparative perspective for the approaches adopted in both patrimonies. Another noteworthy similarity between (Old) Church Slavonic and Medieval Latin traditions concerns a methodologically significant point. In Romance and Germanic philology, in which vulgar texts are the main focus, scholars have often embraced Bédier's scepticism about reconstructing an "original" text, favouring instead the approach known as "New Philology," which shows undeniable yet coincidental similarities to the manuscript-centred method introduced in the Soviet Union by D.S. Lichačev's *Tekstologija*. In Slavic philology, this method continues to hold sway, even if it proves less suited for the study of biblical and liturgical texts, as well as of translations in general. It is telling that only thirty-three pages out of 588 in Lichačev's monograph are devoted to translations, which in fact constitute the bulk of the Medieval Slavic textual tradition. In this respect, Medieval Latin, although less often associated with translations than Medieval Slavic, offers comparable challenges and insights into understanding the transmission of Slavic texts, particularly of "literary" works that do not necessarily reflect the spoken language. Furthermore, Medieval Latin philology, which benefits from a more advanced state of research in textual reconstruction compared with Slavic studies, has achieved a better balance between addressing methodological questions and proposing concrete solutions. For this reason, it can serve as a valuable reference point for developing effective research strategies in Palaeoslavistics.

The ten papers collected here, seven written by specialists in (Old) Church Slavonic and three by scholars of Medieval Latin, can therefore be read in the form of a dialogue aiming at a mutually beneficial exchange between two different disciplines. On the one

hand, the papers address certain theoretical aspects (viz., they focus primarily on methodological issues related to manuscript analysis and textual reconstruction); on the other hand, they concentrate on specific problems in the study of individual textual traditions.

The first three articles discuss both traditional problems in Slavic Philology and the fresh research perspectives provided by the growing field of Digital Humanities. The volume begins with Giorgio Ziffer's article (*Per la storia della tradizione della letteratura della Slavia Cristiana*), representing a sort of thematic overture featuring a critically condensed reflection on the transmission history of Old Church Slavonic literature (863-late 11<sup>th</sup> century). The author highlights the still-limited state of knowledge in the textual tradition of both original and translated works dating from this period. In contrast to Greek and Latin philology, Slavic studies continue to lack a comprehensive survey of the manuscript transmission. To fill this lacuna, Ziffer proposes the application of the method of "indicative errors" and draws attention to such phenomena as contamination, scribal corrections, and glosses; their systematic investigation is shown to be not only necessary but suitable for illuminating the dynamics of textual variation and circulation. Moreover, he challenges the conventional definition of Old Church Slavonic, traditionally confined to the corpus of the earliest preserved manuscripts, and advocates a historically reconstructed perspective that can more adequately capture the complexity of the transmission of Old Church Slavonic literature. Roland Marti's article (*Textus reconstructus, Normalisierung: Anathema für die Philologie der Slavia orthodoxa?*) deals with a long-standing problem in Slavic philology, according to which scholars have avoided text-critical reconstruction, putting their efforts into preparing diplomatic editions of single manuscripts, which feature a great deal of orthographic peculiarities. Marti criticizes the conservative editorial practice wherein scholars are reluctant to introduce conjectures or normalize the language (partly because of the late and translated makeup of many Church Slavonic texts. He convincingly argues that reconstruction and normalization, grounded in classical Old Church Slavonic, are at once possible and appropriate. The impact of recent AI-assisted technological advancements, focusing on the transformative role of Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) in philological studies, is explored in the paper co-authored by Achim Rabus and Martin Meindl (*The Digital Revolution in Slavic Manuscript Studies: HTR Technology and its Impact on Philological Research*). By showcasing the capabilities of such programs as *Transkribus* and *eScriptorium*, they discuss several AI-based HTR models, the use of which can lead to significant savings in time and cost compared to manual transcription.

The next three articles focus on the transmission of Medieval Latin texts. Roberto Gamberini's paper (*Die mittellateinische Philologie zu dem Begriff "Codex / Recensio deterior": Einige Überlegungen zur eliminatio codicum descriptorum auf der Grundlage von Walafrid Strabo's Visio Wettini und Petrarca's Variae*) addresses the problem of *eliminatio codicum descriptorum* in Medieval Latin philology by investigating two case studies – Walafrid Strabo's *Visio Wettini* and Petrarch's *Epistle 3* of the *Variae*. As Gamberini observes, the label *deterior* is unjustified in textual criticism, as it oversimplifies manuscript interrelations. The scholar therefore calls for stemmatic analysis, cautioning against the re-

duction of traditions for convenience and urging reliance on textual evidence, supported by modern tools rather than outdated editorial models. Lucia Castaldi's essay (*Who Bears the Burden of Proof? Discovering Codices Descripti in Mediaeval Latin Text Transmission*) undertakes a thorough examination of the issues surrounding the identification of *codices descripti*. The study examines Paul Maas's treatment of textual dependence according to his relevant statements published in 1927, 1937, and 1957. Castaldi applies Maas' approach to John the Deacon's *Vita Gregorii* in order to demonstrate how stemmatic relationships and *codices descripti* can be established in practice. Valeria Mattaloni's contribution (*Between Emendation and Error: The Use of Sources in Medieval Latin Texts and the Philologist's Choices*) examines how Medieval Latin authors engaged with their sources, stressing the intertextual character of writing from excerpts, glosses, and reinterpretations and tackling the challenge of editing corrupted quotations. Drawing on Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*, the author shows how misquotations, variants, and editorial choices shape interpretation and how intertextuality and textual criticism are crucial in reconstructing Medieval philological practice.

The remaining four articles address theoretical and practical questions related to specific Old Church Slavonic textual traditions. Mary MacRobert's paper (*Aims, Methods and Problems of Editing Church Slavonic Biblical Texts with Special Reference to the Psalter*) suggests that the classical reconstructive critical edition is inappropriate for the Church Slavonic Psalter because of the frequent linguistic revisions and corrections made against the Greek sources. The author explores other options, which include critical reconstruction of specific redactions or variorum editions that may contextualize a specific testimony or redaction among related versions. Alessandro Maria Bruni's article (*Die Überlieferung der altkirchenslavischen Übersetzung der Bücher der Könige: Probleme und Forschungsperspektiven*) offers fresh insights into the transmission of the complete, non-liturgical Old Church Slavonic translation of the Books of the Kingdoms (1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings in the Hebrew Bible). The author reassesses the extent of the manuscript corpus, demonstrates the need to reconsider the current hypothesis regarding the Glagolitic origin of the tradition, and focuses on significant methodological shortcomings of previous research devoted to textual criticism. Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri's paper (*At the Intersection of Textual Transmission and Linguistic Interpretation: Cases from the Czech Church Slavonic Tradition*) examines the challenge of determining the origin of Czech Old Church Slavonic texts by exploring phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and lexical shifts across time and place, thereby complicating any attempt to reconstruct the original. Drawing on examples from the office for St. Wenceslaus and the *Passion of St. Vitus*, he discusses issues in interpreting forms regarded as Bohemisms, which may have undergone changes or reflect corruption or regional influence, and emphasizes the need for reliable critical editions and comprehensive lexicographic tools. Lora Taseva's contribution (*Die Edition des serbischen Versprologs als Herausforderung*) examines the South Slavonic translation of the Byzantine verse *Synaxarion*, stressing the absence of a critical Greek edition and the fragmentary nature of the Slavonic tradition. The author advocates for a diplomatic edition with a critical

apparatus based on two Serbian manuscripts and Greek sources, allowing errors to be identified, missing forms reconstructed, and translation inconsistencies detected.

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