THE SLAV RECEPTION OF GREGORY OF NYSSA’S WORKS: AN OVERVIEW OF EARLY SLAVONIC TRANSLATIONS

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Although a lot has been written about the “translatio” of Byzantine Christianity in the mediaeval Slavia orthodoxa, advancing a critical assessment of the Slav reception of the Greek Fathers remains a precarious undertaking. Although the mere listing of patristic texts in Slavonic translation obviously falls short of the demands of the subject, a notion of the corpus of translated texts is called for. The modest aim of the present article, which deals with the reception of Gregory of Nyssa among the orthodox Slavs, is first and foremost to establish the nature and the range of the material reception of his writings by means of an overview of Old Slavonic translations of his works and of substantiated traces of influence of his writings on Slavonic texts, from the time of the Moravian mission (863) throughout the Slav Middle Ages and up to the 16th century.

After the Moravian Mission and the ensuing Cyrillic-METHODIAN PERIOD during which liturgical texts and parts of the Bible were made available for the Christianization of the Slavs, the next locus of

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1 Research into Slavonic translation literature is often hampered by practical obstacles such as the poor cataloguing of Slavonic manuscripts, erroneous ascriptions of texts both in manuscripts and manuscript catalogues, a lack of comprehensive inventories and incipitaria etc.; cf. Christian Hannick: Maximos Holobolos in der kirchenslavischen homiletischen Literatur. Wiener byzantinistische Studien 14 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 25: “An eine ‘Clavis patrum slavicum’ oder an eine ‘Bibliotheca hagiographica slavica’ zu denken—so erwünscht auch immer derartige Unternehmen wären—, gehört für unsere Generation dem Bereich der Träume an.” However, Francis Thomson has pursued the compilation of a bibliography “of all translations into Slavonic from the dawn of Slav letters down to the death of Peter the Great in 1725” since the Nineteen-sixties; see the introductory remarks in Francis Thomson: The Reception of Byzantine Culture in Mediaeval Russia. Collected studies series 590 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), ix–xxii.

2 This contribution owes much to previous scholarship, particularly to the work of Francis Thomson, who was so kind as to allow the author to use his personal library and card catalogue.

3 For Cyrilus and Methodius and the origins of Slavonic translation literature, see e.g. Gerhard Podskalsky: Christentum und theologische Literatur in der kiefer Rus: (988–1237) (München: Beck, 1982), 56–61.
flourishing translation activity was 10th-century Bulgaria, ruled by the cultivated “half-Greek” Symeon (893–927) and his son Peter (927–969). Numerous homilies of Greek Church Fathers, including Gregory of Nyssa, were translated as well as *Vitae* and *Passiones* of saints, the selection of which was based on the rules of the liturgical and monastic typikon. In this “Golden Age” of Old Slavonic book culture, literary activity was primarily driven by the need of the nascent Bulgarian Church to proclaim and consolidate the basic principles of Christianity. This is exemplified, for instance, by the way in which John the Exarch (9th–10th century) accommodated parts of Gregory of Nyssa’s writings to his intentions by including them in his main works, viz. a partial translation of John Damascene’s *Expositio fidei* called *Bogoslovie* or “Theology” and a work on the six days of creation, the Šestodnev or “Hexaemeron”, both meant to buttress the new faith and to defend it against heresy. Not only classical Greek philosophy but also learned dogmatic theology was lost on the Slav neophytes and accordingly none of Gregory of Nyssa’s important dogmatic writings—nor indeed any of his ascetical or exegetical works—was translated in full in this period. Translations of legal texts, on the contrary, were needed to regulate both the civil and the ecclesiastical apparatus, and Gregory’s

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4 See infra part 4.


6 For John the Exarch see e.g. Gerhard Podskalsky: *Theologische Literatur des Mittelalters in Bulgarien und Serbien 865–1459* (München: Beck, 2000), 228–233.


8 *Das Hexaëmeron des Exarchen Johannes*, ed. by Rudolf Aitzetmuller, 7 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1958–1975); for a description of this compilitory work, the main sources of which are Basil of Caesarea’s *Homiliae IX in Hexaemeron* and Severian of Gabala’s *In cosmogoniam orationes VI*, see Podskalsky: *Theologische Literatur des Mittelalters in Bulgarien und Serbien 865–1459* (see note 6), 228–232.

9 See infra parts 1 and 2.3.