The Beginning of Bulgarian Printing (On the Occasion of its 500th Anniversary)

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The history of Bulgarian printing is to a large extent the history of modern Bulgarian culture. Thus, it is rather curious that not only ordinary people but many experts are not aware of the correct answer to the question: which was the first Bulgarian printed book? The aim of this article is to prove that the Targovishte Slouzhebnik of 1508 is the first printed Bulgarian and Romanian book. The development of book printing, whose pioneer in the Balkans was Hieromonk Macarius, contributed to the preservation of the faith, language, literature and fine arts of the Southern Slavs under the conditions of recently imposed foreign political and religious domination. These publications not only continued and enriched the local cultural tradition but also consolidated the sense of distinctive identity and the collective memory of lost independence among the conquered Balkan peoples. The notes in the Rousse copy of the Slouzhebnik (1508) which are discussed below prove that the bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who were almost exclusively Greek by origin, freely used its text in worship and did not impose the Greek language to their Slavonic flocks. What Bulgarian jingoist propaganda often qualifies as Greek “persecution” of Bulgarian culture during the Ottoman period actually began in earnest only after the independence of Greece in 1829 and the resurrection of the notorious Megale Idea.

It is certain that the printed books of Hieromonk Macarius strongly stimulated the development of Balkan printing. The first printed Missal in the world (Officium missae) was Latin and was brought out in Magdeburg in 1483. The Slouzhebnik of Macarius was followed by a Serbian one printed by Bozhidar Gorazhdanin in 1519 and

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1 D. Medakovich, Graphika..., 196-197, tabl. XXI-XXII. A. Nikolski is mistaken in claiming that the Slouzhebnik printed in Gorazhde was the first edition of this book in any Slavonic language (“Istoriya pechatnogo Slouzhebnika Rousskoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi”, Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarkhii, No 7 (1978), p.
a Greek one in 1525. The first Byelorussian printer Francis Skorina calls himself in a letter “a secretary to the king of Dacia” and perhaps he was a disciple of Hieromonk Macarius. The Târgoviște printing press preceded those in Prague (1517), Belgrade (1522), Moscow (1564) and Ostrog (1580). Two Serbians, Demetrius Lyubavich and Hieromonk Moses, built a second printing press in Târgoviște in 1544-1547 while another one, set up by Hieromonk Laurentius, operated in the Plumbuita monastery near Bucharest (1573-1582). Slavonic printing presses soon sprang up in Transylvania. They belonged to Philip the Moldavian (Sibiu, 1544-1553) and to Deacon Koresi (Brasov, 1556-ca. 1582).

At least four opinions identifying the first Bulgarian printed book are current and they are based on different criteria. The philologists Nina Voutova and Anisava Miltenova insist that the first Bulgarian printed books were produced by Jacob Kraykov in the 16th century. Indeed, he disclosed in his books that he was Bulgarian and a descendant of a priestly family from Kamena reka in the Kyustendil region but his ethnical provenance does not determine the national attribution of his book production. There were numerous cases during the 19th century when original Bulgarian titles were brought out by Austrians, Armenians, Greeks, Romanians, Russians, Serbs etc.

Other experts suggest that the first Bulgarian book is Abagar by Bishop Philip Stanislavov. Printed in Rome in 1651 and intended to be used only by the Roman Catholic minority, this book is a tiny brochure consisting of 5 pages. It contains prayers used by the converted heretical Paulicians as amulets. The original element in Abagar

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is the epilogue of the author who asserts his Bulgarian identity. Even if it is accepted that Stanislavov’s work holds status as the first printed book in vernacular Bulgarian (influenced by Croatian), it should be ascertained which is the first printed book in literary Bulgarian. It is not reasonable to expect that it is printed by a Bulgarian printing press because the first one was founded as late as the 19th century. The condition that the author or the printer have Bulgarian blood in their veins is also relative because the main criterion for identification is the language of the text.

In spite of the claims of some historians of culture, the first Bulgarian printed book is not *Kyriakodromion sirech Nedelnik* by Bishop Sophronius of Vratsa which was published for the first time in Romnicul Volea (Romania) in 1806 and during the early Revival period was distributed in the Bulgarian lands more widely than the Bible. The *Kyriakodromion* can be determined as the first printed work in New Bulgarian which is a valuable witness to the state of the colloquial language almost two centuries ago. But which was the first Bulgarian printed book ever?

The steel safe of the Holy Trinity cathedral in Rousse (Northern Bulgaria) holds the only, hitherto unknown, copy of the first Bulgarian printed book that is available in the country itself - the *Slouzhebnik* of Hieromonk Macarius of 1508. In fact, Macarius is the first Balkan printer in Cyrillic. He began his activity in Cetine (Montenegro) in 1493.

On 4th January of the next year he put the final touches to the first part of the *Octoechos* (Manual of the 8 tones) and in 1495 he brought out a *Psalter*. Probably at the same time Macarius produced the second part of the *Octoechos* and a *Molitvenik* (Prayer book). Then the menace of Ottoman invasion loomed large over the Montenegrin mountains. With part of the equipment of the printing press Macarius escaped to Venice but later left for Wallachia where he largely changed the type and renewed his previous occupation. His first work on Romanian territory was the aforementioned *Slouzhebnik* (Missal). In the epilogue, “the humble monk and priest Macarius” said that he completed

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the book on 10th November 1508 under the Voivode Ion Mihnea. In reality, printing began during the reign of the Voivode Radu the Great who was largely responsible for setting up the printing press. He is remembered as a donor of the Mount Athos monasteries of Roussikon, Philotheou, Koutloumousiou and Zographou, as well as of other cloisters such as Holy Trinity near the former Bulgarian capital of Veliko Tarnovo and Pshina, Decani, Sopochani in Serbia. In the past, many thought that he built the Bulgarian Kremikovtsi monastery in 1493 and had it decorated. This hypothesis is no longer supported by art history science. In the early 16th century the Wallachian capital was Targovište and the printer probably resided at the Dealu monastery near the town because the text of the Slouzhebnik specifies that it is intended for cloister worship.

Some researchers reject the identification between Hieromonk Macarius of Cetine and Hieromonk Macarius of Targovište but in my view this opinion is not correct. The text of the proskomidia (preparation rite for the liturgy) and the great ekteneia (a series of prayer calls) is expected to feature the title of the Wallachian ruler ("gospodar") but instead of it one comes across the phrase: "îblagochestivikh i bogohraminih careh nashih" (about the pious and God-kept Tsars of ours). It is not typical of the Romanian palace and liturgical etiquette but reflects Byzantine and Bulgarian reality during the second half of the 14th century when power was shared by two or more Tsars (Emperors) simultaneously. Another eloquent testimony to the identity of both printers is discovered in the finishing prayer of the proskomidia. It appeals to the saints Sava of Serbia, Athanasius of Athos and Symeon of Serbia who were venerated by believers in the Serbian and Bulgarian lands but were not popular in Wallachia. The inclusion of St. Athanasius, founder of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos in 963, perhaps points to the fact that the printer had taken monastic vows on Athos - an all-Orthodox center during the late Middle ages, now often referred to as "The Vatican of the East".

Macarius’ book has preserved every trait of the Bulgarian literary language of the 14th century and the Tarnovo orthography reformed by Patriarch Euthymius. In Cetine the printer faced different conditions and his publications had to follow the peculiarities of the Resava (Serbian) orthography but some mistakes in them betray his non-Serbian, probably Bulgarian, origin. In comparison, the language and orthography

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of the Trgoviête Slouzhebnik are distinctively Middle Bulgarian. Marin Drinov was resolute that Father Macarius relied on a copy of the Slouzhebnik of Patriarch Euthymius brought by his disciples to Wallachia after the Ottoman invasion in the late 14th century.

The Rousse copy of the Slouzhebnik is the eighth in the world. Four others are kept in Bucharest and there is one in Sibiu, Budapest and Moscow respectively. Evidence is available about copies whose whereabouts now are unknown. For instance, in Kratovo (Macedonia) in 1891 Ephrem Karanov came across the Slouzhebnik of Macarius and copied its entire afterword. The Rousse volume is sized 305 x 145 mm and includes 127 leaves of thick yellowish paper made in Italy. The book has got partly wet. The seventh leaf of the 13th quire has been cut out by a barbarian hand in recent times. The first numbered quire contains 4 leaves followed by 15 quires of 8 leaves each, while the last one is of 4 leaves. Pagination by pages or leaves was not popular in the Balkans in the early 16th century. Numbers are put only in the lower margin center of the first and last leaf of every quire. The type which is clear, neat and skillfully cast applies two colors (black and red) in 15 lines per page. The full text page contains 15 lines as most Bulgarian manuscript Slouzhebniks of the Middle Ages do. The type resembles that of the earlier Cyrillic publications of Sweipolt Fiol in Krakow from the 1490s. Peter Atanasov even claimed that Hieromonk Macarius had studied with Fiol which can not be confirmed. But while Fiol’s type was made by a single master, Macarius’ letters were obviously created by several craftsmen from Sibiu or Bra_ov. Some researchers point out that the letter M in Macarius descends under the line which is not common in Montenegrin and Serbian printed books until the late 16th century.

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In my opinion, the configuration of this letter was borrowed from the Moldavian liturgical semiuncial writing. Both the Cetine and Trgoviête publications use filling materials and punctuation marks in order to divide the words and even the length of the lines. Another rare peculiarity of the composed matter, typical of the Cetine Psalter of 1494 and the Trgoviête Gospels of 1512, is that the closing words or syllables of a paragraph which are superfluous in a page are arranged under its last line. That is why the number of lines is not constant.

The individual articles, offices and prayers are headed by large initial letters. They are woven of white ribbons against a black background after the Balkan ornamentation common during the late Middle Ages and imitate the decoration of Middle Bulgarian manuscripts. Three vignettes drawn in the same style alternate at the beginning of the articles. There is a direct link between the engraved decorations of the Cetine and the Wallachian books. The Cetine vignettes were used with insignificant changes in the Trgoviête publications. Their size was slightly enlarged, the fields between the details in some cases were widened and filled in with geometrical and vegetable ornaments, and the Montenegrin coat of arms in the center of the vignettes (a two-headed eagle) is replaced by the Wallachian coat of arms (a crow holding a cross in its beak). The Cetine Octoechos for the 5-8 tones of 1494 (?) comprises a miniature with the images of three Christian hymnographers in front of the old church of the Cetine monastery. The same illustration is found in the Wallachian Octoechos of 1510 but the cathedral in the background is the one of Trgoviête. One should mention the royal crowns as well which are added symmetrically on both sides of the vignettes in the Trgoviête books. They are a heterogeneous element taken from the Venetian incunabula. The eminent researcher in the field of old printed books Vera Loukyanenko firmly believes in the continuity between the Cetine and Trgoviête printing efforts and writes: “The comparison between the large vignettes of the Gospels [of Trgoviête] and

21 The illustrations of the Cetine books are published by D. Medakovich, Graphika srpskikh shtampanikh kn’iga XV-XVII veka (Beograd, 1958), 189-196, tabl. I-XVIII.
22 Ibidem, p. 44.
the analogous decorations of the Psalter [of Cetine] precludes any suggestion of borrowing or imitation. Rather, it testifies to a creative development of a single artist forced to adopt himself to different conditions and tastes. The engraved ornaments of the Gospels discussed and at least some of the vignettes and initials of the Cetine publications were made in all probability by one and the same craftsman. The unity of the technical manner in all compared publications and the distinct individuality which is evident in the composed matter of the Gospels and the Cetine Psalter also support the assumption for one and the same Macarius...”

The Slouzhebnik of 1508 has the following contents:
1. Admonition of St. Basil the Great to the priest for the divine service.
2. Contents of the book by chapters.
3. Rule of the divine service.
4. Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.
5. Liturgy of St. Basil the Great.
7. Deacon’s prayer during the procession (entry) of the great vespers.
8. Release prayer read by a bishop or a cleric.
9. Cherubico (cherubims’ song) for Holy Saturday.
10. Cherubico for the daily liturgy.

The watermarks of the fly-leaves of the Rousse copy are three crescents and a trifoliate figure between B-A and B-M countermarks. They are distinctive of Western (mainly Italian) types of paper made during the 17th century when the book was bound. The binding consists of thin wooden boards dressed in skin. The hasps have disappeared. A large gilded Crucifixion enclosed in a double frame is stamped on the front cover and an octagon is put on the back one. A similar front cover with a silver cross on it preserves the manuscript Gospels of Hieromonk Daniel of 1625 which is kept in the Varna museum of the Bulgarian Revival. A manuscript supplement with some liturgical services, which are lacking in the book, is bound in its middle. The writing is

calligraphic semiuncial in black and cinnabar ink with golden dots sometimes added for finer effect. The supplement includes ordainments of readers and singers, hypodeacon, deacon, priest, bishop, metropolitan and patriarch. Its paper is most probably Italian of the mid-17th century if one judges by the filigrees: a crown with a crescent, an anchor in a circle with a trifoliate pattern and A-C, A-L, G-3 countermarks. They date it to the period between 1633 and 1654. At the end of the manuscript supplement is written a note in calligraphic cursive. It reads: + sia [li]tur[g]lia [v]ladika Gerasima hilandar’c’ uze’ za T [300] aspri v leto 1654” [This liturgy (belongs) to Bishop Gerasim of Hilandar, he took (bought) it for 300 aspras in the year 1654]. As a comparison it may be pointed out that a smaller Bulgarian manuscript Slouzhebnik consisting of 92 leaves was priced in 1640 at 200 aspras.

The owner has also affixed his personal seal which is 17 mm in diameter and on which the mounted St. George is depicted encircled by the following inscription: + vlandika Gerasima Hil[andarec]. Especially interesting in this laconic text is the linguistic form of vlandika which echoes the Bulgarian nasal pronunciation preserved to this day in some dialects in the Rodopi mountains and in Macedonia. In order to venerate St. George, this cleric as a child was probably named after him and was renamed Gerasim when he took vows. Indeed, during the first half of the 17th century several abbots of the Hilendar monastery managed to acquire a bishop’s rank but this practice was soon discontinued under pressure from the Ecumenical patriarchate because it was foreign to the traditions of Mount Athos. The note quoted is the only existing evidence of the Hilendar bishop Gerasim.

Another note is written in new cursive on the back fly-leaf: “1822: znaenno tvoriu kako...” [1833: Let it be known how...]. It may be surmised that the book reached Rousse from Hilendar via the Cherven and Dorostol Metropolitan Gregory (1828-1898) who

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became a monk in this monastery in 1846 and later ruled his diocese with his throne being in Rousse.\(^{30}\)

After it Hieromonk Macarius went on to print Octoechos (1510) and Gospels (1512) which were welcomed also in the Balkan lands just ravished by the Ottoman invasion. A copy of the Octoechos is kept in the Hilendar cloister\(^{31}\) and copies of the Gospels are housed in Sofia, Plovdiv, Rila monastery libraries.\(^{32}\) The subsequent fate of Macarius is veiled in darkness. Serbian historians presume that he retired to the Hilendar monastery where he was elected abbot in 1526. They also insist that he dabbled in geography and compiled a description of Dacia.\(^{33}\) Romanian scholars are convinced that he was identical with the Wallachian Metropolitan Macarius II who headed his church ca. between 1512 and 1521.\(^{34}\) All these hypotheses remain in the realm of guesswork. In a recent article Karola Petkova takes for granted the hypothesis that the printer Macarius is identical with Metropolitan Macarius who is known to have assisted the Wallachian ruler Niagoe Basarab. This agreed, she proceeds to make the false conclusion that Macarius was connected with the traditions of the Moldovan literary school.\(^{35}\) It should be noted that in the early 15\(^{th}\) century Wallachia and Moldova were two distinct entities and they should not be mixed. The language used in the Moldovan school has its peculiar features and it is not fully identical with the Middle Bulgarian one used in the Slouzhebnik of 1508.

It is nice to see that some historians of the Bulgarian printed book have at long last adopted 1508 as the year of its beginning. A long overdue catalogue of the books


