

# Liturgical Translation in Europe's Medieval East: Matters of Civilization and Textual Praxis

Taras Shmiher

Volume 10, numéro 1, 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1099098ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus699>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies University of Alberta

ISSN

2292-7956 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Shmiher, T. (2023). Liturgical Translation in Europe's Medieval East: Matters of Civilization and Textual Praxis. *East/West*, 10(1), 137–154.  
<https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus699>

Résumé de l'article

The paper focuses on the medieval period of the history of liturgical translation in Ukraine and Poland. In the ninth century, the evangelizing mission of SS Cyril and Methodius brought Christian translations to the east of what was then Europe. Although religious translations were not cherished in Moravia and Poland, they flourished in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Ukraine. The Roman corpus of liturgical texts existed only in Latin, and socio-political conditions stimulated the emergence of translations from Latin to Polish. The Byzantine corpus was introduced in Old Church Slavonic, which was understood by and accepted among Slavs. Different nations modified these texts according to their local visions and the necessities of their churches. Poland's and Ukraine's liturgical praxis under the aegis of the Roman and Byzantine Mother-Churches defined the shaping of different corpora of liturgical books, but the quality of translations was high in all Slavonic translations. The (typically) negatively judged strategy of literalism prepared a foundation for lingual experimentation in semantic expression and helped to spread the local melodies of liturgical tradition. The Church Slavonic language gave a more fruitful impetus to the development of early Ukrainian literature than the Latin language provided to early Polish literature. In fact, the Latin language restrained a similar development of early Polish literature for two centuries.



# Liturgical Translation in Europe's Medieval East: Matters of Civilization and Textual Praxis<sup>1</sup>

**Taras Shmiher**

*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv*

**Abstract:** The paper focuses on the medieval period of the history of liturgical translation in Ukraine and Poland. In the ninth century, the evangelizing mission of SS Cyril and Methodius brought Christian translations to the east of what was then Europe. Although religious translations were not cherished in Moravia and Poland, they flourished in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Ukraine. The Roman corpus of liturgical texts existed only in Latin, and socio-political conditions stimulated the emergence of translations from Latin to Polish. The Byzantine corpus was introduced in Old Church Slavonic, which was understood by and accepted among Slavs. Different nations modified these texts according to their local visions and the necessities of their churches. Poland's and Ukraine's liturgical praxis under the aegis of the Roman and Byzantine Mother-Churches defined the shaping of different corpora of liturgical books, but the quality of translations was high in all Slavonic translations. The (typically) negatively judged strategy of literalism prepared a foundation for lingual experimentation in semantic expression and helped to spread the local melodies of liturgical tradition. The Church Slavonic language gave a more fruitful impetus to the development of early Ukrainian literature than the Latin language provided to early Polish literature. In fact, the Latin language restrained a similar development of early Polish literature for two centuries.

**Keywords:** religious translation, liturgical translation, Christianization, liturgical books, literalism.

---

<sup>1</sup> This publication was made possible through Scholarship Grant No. 52110864 from the International Visegrad Fund. The project was implemented at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (Lublin, Poland) under the supervision of Dr. Habil. Magdalena Mitura.

*All of us are humans, but humanness is not always present in wartime.  
Dedicated with gratitude to all Canadians and Americans  
who supported Ukraine and its people  
during the darkest time of 2022.*

**I**nhabitants of medieval Polish and Ukrainian lands were converted to Christianity around the same time: the Duchy of Poland (aka Civitas Schinesghe) in 966 and Rus' (aka Kyivan Rus') in 988. However, the establishment of national literatures, the popularization of literacy, and the raising of a cultural mentality influenced *Slavia Orthodoxa* and *Slavia Catholica* differently.

Christianity brought literacy to Slavonic lands and stimulated the development of national literatures. Early Bulgarian, Serbian, Czech, and Ukrainian literatures depended heavily on religious translations of liturgical texts.<sup>2</sup> The oldest sample of Glagolitic writing that testifies to the existence of liturgical translations among western Slavs is the “Kyiv Missal” (or the “Kyiv Glagolitic Folios”) of the tenth century from Moravia. This manuscript, written in Old Church Slavonic, must have been one of many other sources of the liturgical Roman Rite.

The Old Church Slavonic language (aka Old Bulgarian) was easily comprehended by Slavs, and it encouraged the development of other Slavonic languages and literatures where it was used as a language of the Church. In Ukrainian territory it acquired a local form and was transformed into an independent written standard. The written language paralleled the development of the vernacular from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries. Until the thirteenth century, the written Old Ukrainian variant depended heavily on the Church Slavonic. More vernacular elements appeared in the written Middle Ukrainian language from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Latin performed similar functions in Polish territory. It paralleled the development of the Polish language until the eighteenth century. The Latin language contributed to Polish literature: poetry, literary prose, and non-literary prose were mostly written in Latin. Despite the close contacts of the languages, and the similar borrowing of numerous concepts from the Latin, Polish was not so stimulated by the usage of Latin. This partially explains why religious translation with the various stages of lingual orientation and experimentation was abundant and well-known in medieval Ukraine but not in medieval Poland.

---

<sup>2</sup> The register of some existing texts can be seen in Ohiienko; *Svodnyi*; and *Inwentarz*.

## METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A comparative setting is applied to liturgical translation in central eastern Europe in the Middle Ages. A comparison of translation histories and techniques in the literary circles using different languages for evangelization (Church Slavonic and Old Ukrainian vs. Latin and Polish) reveals important differences between the two spheres and their individual impacts on the development of local literary cultures. The methodology of historiographical description and textual translation studies involves the application of three key principles: the study of the existing academic climate, immanence, and correspondence. They make it possible to explain and substantiate the historical dynamics and reception of retranslated texts. Historiographical analysis involves the interpretive study of vocabulary from the point of view of semantics, language history, and literary poetics, which help characterize the reasons for and the effects of textual and lexical diversity.

Although a lot has been written about the early stages of Polish and Ukrainian literatures (especially in the domains of Biblical translation and hagiographical and historical retranslations), there are gaps in the research of liturgical literature in eastern Europe that a translation scholar can fill in. The dynamic formation of liturgical books in Church Slavonic (Pentkovskii) must have impacted liturgical praxis in Poland but medieval sources are lacking (Koziara; Mironowicz). Case studies of various genres (Meshcherskii; Kristians; Krivko; Temchin; Shumylo; Dzhydzhora) demonstrate a long-term general acceptance of translation principles. The semantic field of "translation" (Shmiher) is complemented with new data from Polish dictionaries and corpora. Book repertoires (*Svodnyi; Inwentarz; Katalog*) and literary and ecclesiastical histories (Sczaniecki; Lewański; *Istoriia*) have also added to this study.

How did liturgical translation develop in two neighbouring countries that recognized different rites representing western and eastern Christianity? What were the factors in and the consequences of liturgical retranslations? What translation strategies dominated in the works of medieval scribes and writers?

## REPERTOIRES OF LITURGICAL LITERATURE

The earliest mentions of liturgical translations in the Slavonic world were recorded in the ninth century with regard to the lives of SS Cyril-Constantine and Methodius, Byzantine Christian Moravian missionaries, who are honoured as "Apostles to the Slavs." "As soon as all the church offices were accepted [translated], he [Cyril-Constantine] taught them Matins and the

Hours, Vespers and the Compline, and the Liturgy” (Kantor 69). “The Life of Methodius” refers to the same topics:

Deriving threefold joy therefrom, we considered the matter and decided to send to your lands our son Methodius, an Orthodox man accomplished in mind, whom we consecrated with his disciples in order to teach, as you requested, and to explain fully in your language the Scriptures and holy Mass, that is, the liturgy, as well as Baptism according to the entire Church Office, just as Constantine the Philosopher had begun through the grace of God and the prayers of Saint Clement. (Kantor 69)

For previously he had translated with the Philosopher (Cyril-Constantine) only the Psalter, the Gospel together with the “Apostolos,” and selected church liturgies. He then translated the “Nomocanon,” that is, the Rule of the Law, and the Books of the Fathers. (Kantor 125)

The quotations above subscribe to the view that the translated Liturgy is to be understood as a unity of all the liturgical books that are necessary for yearly and occasional servicing.

The liturgical life was not unified in that form; its framework was stabilized several centuries later and is now fully accepted. Various liturgies spread to and were celebrated in Christendom. Since Moravia had experienced contact with the Roman Church, St. Cyril could have adapted the Greek translation of the Latin Mass (called the Liturgy of St. Peter) to the Church Slavonic language, and also could have propagated the Byzantine liturgy (Dostál 77–84). The Archbishopric of Moravia used the Slavonic liturgy briefly, and it might have reached southern Poland. Unfortunately, Pope Stephen V prohibited the use of the Slavonic liturgy in 885 (after St Methodius’s death). The prohibition was repeated in 968, and an appeal for permission was declined in 1080. This means the Slavonic liturgy survived somewhere in a clandestine condition, but no favourable conditions existed for the liturgical translation of the Roman Rite, and Latin was the main language in use.

After St Methodius’s disciples were exiled in Moravia, they settled in Bulgaria where they produced the first fully-Byzantine corpus of liturgical books in Old Church Slavonic. Among them was St Clement of Ohrid who is credited with the translation of the Pentecostarion. The Bulgarian Archbishopric legitimized the use of Old Church Slavonic as a liturgical language. This liturgical legacy was transferred northward to the Kyivan Rus’ at the turn of the eleventh century, and came to be known as “the first South Slavonic influence.” St Clement’s corpus of liturgical books contained all four book groups: lectionary texts (Gospel, Epistle Book, Psalter, Prophetologion); hymnographic texts (Menaion, Lenten Triodion, Pentecostarion, Octoechos); euchographic texts (Liturgicon, Euchologion);

homiletic texts (Pentkovskii 58). Most were translated from Greek, though rare translations from Latin and Old High German have been traced (Pentkovskii 60). This testifies to the initially unstable liturgical canon within a single ecclesiastical institution and to the creative influences of other liturgical traditions, especially those of Jerusalem, Palestine, southern Italy, and western Byzantium.

In the history of Ukrainian religious translation, the year 1037 is described in the "Primary Chronicle" as follows: "He [Grand Prince Iaroslav the Wise of Kyiv] assembled many scribes, and translated from Greek into Slavic. He wrote and collected many books through which true believers are instructed and enjoy religious education" (*The Russian* 137). The chronicler highlighted the importance of the translation enterprise, being part of the large-scale program of translating, retranslating, and localizing texts for the benefit of the church and the state. In the entry for the year 1051, the Chronicle mentions the monastic and cathedral rule of the Studion, which replaced the earlier rule of Constantinople (*The Russian* 142). The Studion rule (edited by the Ecumenical Patriarch Alexios Stoudites) existed until the fifteenth century when it was replaced by the rite of Jerusalem. Such replacements were followed by adjusting—retranslating and editing—the existing liturgical texts according to the newly-accepted demands of liturgical life. By the middle of the eleventh century, the Festal Menaion was already stable, but the General Menaion was extended from the Greek original and began to include hymns of local origin. The Liturgies of SS John Chrysostom and Basil the Great had not been unified by the late eleventh century, and in medieval Ukrainian liturgical praxis, some texts of the essential liturgies were used from earlier times, especially those that were created using the influence of western Bulgarian prototexts. When the texts of liturgies were revised in Constantinople, it became necessary to retranslate them in Ukraine (Afnas'eva 276–79). Besides, the twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries were productive for specifically local liturgical activities.

The repertoire of the earliest manuscripts reveals that all the liturgical genres from the corpus were present at that time (*Katalog*). The fact that it contains translations of texts from the western Church means that Kyivan Christianity was open to all the traditions of Christendom. Translations of hagiographic and euchologic writings are found among the oldest early Ukrainian literature (*Istoriia* 114–16).

The Second South Slavonic influence was a result of social, cultural, and political conditions. The Mongol invasions in the mid-thirteenth century prompted an active churchly life in the fourteenth century. The rises and falls of the Metropolitanates of Halych and Lithuania; the split of the Metropolitanate of Kyiv between the Great Duchy of Lithuania and the Great Duchy of Moscow; the appointments of metropolitans of Bulgarian and

Greek origins; and ecclesiastical reforms in Constantinople that stimulated the rearrangement of liturgical life in eastern Slavonic territory and reactivated contacts with southern Slavs, all influenced the orthographic and linguistic reforms by St. Evtimii of Tarnovo, which included the correction of translated texts.

St Evtimii of Tarnovo and Cyprian Tsamblak (a Metropolitan of Kyiv at the turn of the fifteenth century) were literalists who typically translated morpheme-by-morpheme and paid attention to a word's structure and the primary sense of the Greek root (Afanas'eva 282). Still, they introduced some lexical changes connected with denoting important theological concepts, and in this way, their translations were different from those that were produced in Athonite monasteries.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the Kyivan metropolitanate, liturgies co-existed in Old Bulgarian versions of earlier Greek texts, preserving some ancient prayers from south Italian liturgies that are not found in the then Greek euchologia (Afanas'eva 283). Cyprian reformed liturgical praxis, so the corrected versions of liturgies created after the late fourteenth century are identical to Greek euchologia. New services, compiled in the Great Church Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, were translated and distributed in novel Church Slavonic variants. The complete list of reformed texts covers those of the Liturgicon, the Euchologion, the Psalter, the Horologion, and the Synaxarion with troparia and kontakia.<sup>3</sup> However, it took a long time before the whole Church accepted it.

The late medieval period of Polish history does not record the fact that the strong social authority of the Polish language was fundamental to the existence of the state and the people. The reverberations caused by SS Cyril and Methodius must have reached Poland, and some historians claim that the Liturgy co-existed in Latin and Church Slavonic (Koziara 21; cf. Mironowicz). The lack of written sources complicates the identification of features and facts that contributed to ecclesiastical history and religious translation, though the repeated emergence of churches and monasteries and a large number of Church Slavonic ecclesiastical terms testifies to a thoroughly established religious life.

The first official Polish liturgical translation was recognized in 1248 when the synod of Wrocław decreed to pronounce "Pater noster" and "Credo" in Polish during the Mass (*Średniowieczna* xiii). This was a reaction to the German expansion that was regarded as a danger for both the Church and the nation. A similar decision was made at the synod of Łęczyca in 1285 and approved of again in 1287. This stance also stimulated the creation of Polish religious songs and the use of more religious translations in public

---

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of all the liturgical changes, see Mansvetov.

life. In the late thirteenth century, some prayers were announced in Polish at the Poor Clare monastery in Stary Sącz: before leaving the church, St Kinga prayed ten psalms in the vernacular and added a prayer for the good of the Universal Church (*Średniowieczna* xiv).

Although liturgical translation in medieval Poland did not enjoy official support from the state as it did in medieval Bulgaria and Ukraine, paraliturgical song writing stimulated the expansion of singing practices during the Mass and other religious ceremonies. It is not surprising that liturgical tropes were sung not only in Latin, but partially in Polish. The sources were Latin hymns that were translated to Polish from the original versions via German and Czech translations. The 1365 gradual from Płock cathedral records four tropes (Michałowska, *Literatura* 829–31): (1) “Chrystus z martwych wstał” is the translation of Stanza 3 of the Czech hymn “Buoh všemohuci,” written according to the melody of the German song “Christ ist erstanden” and later translated into Latin as “Deus omnipotens a morte resurgens” (Michałowska, *Literatura* 464; cf. Woronczak 362–63); (2). “Przez twe święte zmartwychwstanie” is a translation from the trope group “Salve, fiesta dies” via Czech (Michałowska, *Literatura* 727); (3) “Przez twe święte wskrzeszenie” is supposed to be a translation of the Czech hymn “Pro tvé svaté vzkřísenie” (Michałowska, *Literatura* 727); (4) “Krystus z martwych wstał je” is the translation of Stanza 3 of the Czech trope “Buoh všemohuci.”

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, two Polish translations of the trope “Surrexit Christus hodie,” two Polish translations of the Latin sequence “Mittit ad virginem” (originally written in the twelfth century in England or France), and Polish translations of the Latin sequence “Grates nunc omnes” appeared. In the sixteenth century, Polish literature acquired (via translation) St TOME of Aquinas’s sequence “Lauda Sion salvatorem,” the Easter sequence “Victimae paschali laudes” (written in the eleventh century in Germany), and the Pentecost sequence “Veni Sancte Spiritus.”

In the late fourteenth century, another source of liturgical translation was liturgical drama. Mystery plays containing Latin antiphons and responsories were supposedly followed—sung or recited—by free Polish translations, as in the 1377 “ludus paschalis” staged in Kazimierz (now part of Cracow) (Lewański 141, 147). This was in the mainstream of paraliturgical song creation. These songs were later included in—and afterward excluded from—the liturgy.

The Marian hymn and the antiphon “Salve Regina” were popular prayers, and twenty translations to Polish survived from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The version from the 1435 hymnal of Jan of Przeworsk was translated from the Czech language. In private prayer-books, some prayers were written in the Polish language; for example, the prayer “Ave Maria” was discovered in the late fifteenth-century Nawojka Prayer-book.



Finally, Polish-language masses were added to the translation practice, though it was more on a private level than on a national level. The number of medieval translations of the mass canon is approximately seven (Sczaniecki 116–118). They come from the first half of the fifteenth century and were actually translations “for internal use”; they served the private needs of clerics who were learning the Latin text of the Mass. Before the fourteenth century, similar texts might have existed in the form of glosses that were finally turned into coherent texts. Nevertheless, the translations performed their main function: teaching future clergy the Mass. Interestingly, one of the earliest translations was a 1424 manuscript written in Lviv, then the capital of the “Kingdom of Rus” (the Principality of Halych and Volyn’), which was already incorporated into the “Polish Crown.” The Roman-Catholic Archdiocese in Ukrainian territory was founded in Halych only in 1375 and transferred to Lviv in 1412. Because Catholicism was just beginning in Lviv, translations like the 1424 manuscript were specifically helpful to the clergy.

#### PATHS TO TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES

Medieval Slavonic translation theory developed indirectly under the influence of circulating translation ideas. Manuscript culture imposed physical limitations on the dissemination and exchange of translation views. Nevertheless, a deficiency of theoretical judgments on translation praxis in medieval Ukraine and Poland can be explained by the simple fact that manuscripts that discussed or even mentioned translation matters might not have survived. Statements by Balkan—mainly Bulgarian—writers (St Cyril the Philosopher in the ninth century, St John the Exarch and Chernorizets Hrabar at the turn of the tenth century, and Constantine of Kostenets at the turn of the fifteenth century) are known. Balkan views include those recorded in writings by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (Shmiher 31). Western Slavs who leaned toward the Roman Church, might have been familiar with the translation views of SS Jerome and Augustine. Thus, the dichotomy of sense-for-sense and word-for-word translations, the problems of interpreting source and target texts, and the issues of untranslatability could have been in the scope of their knowledge.

Today’s translation historians overlook how well the medieval theory of translation was developed. The ninth-century Macedonian Folio, attributed to St Cyril, contains a deep understanding of interlingual asymmetry and the importance of a cultural interpretation of textual symbols. A good example of this understanding is found in the story of Jesus Christ’s Nativity: the masculine Greek noun “ἄστήρ” is rendered as the feminine Slavonic noun “звѣзда,” and the symbolical meaning of an angel, which is usually perceived

as a man, is lost. In other words, what the Magi saw was not a real celestial body, but a guiding angel, and this idea is obliterated in the Slavonic translation. In addition, the scribes applied a term to represent the notion of *equivalence* “истовъ” (see more in Shmiher 32). This term testifies to the scribes' advanced theoretical discussions on translation matters. These ideas, along with religious literature, were brought to Ukraine as the result of two south Slavonic influences, and they were creatively used by scribes. These ideas could also have existed in Poland, which was close to the territories where major translation projects were realized. However, translation discussions were not vigorous in Poland at that time, as there is an absence of translations into Old Polish at the turn of the second millennium.

The lexical networks that describe translation activities provide additional ways to examine medieval language translation. The Old Ukrainian lexical network of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries contains nine lexemes that designate translation activities:

Old Ukrainian Lexeme	Origin	Meaning
прекладати, прѣкладати	Slavonic	translate
прѣложити, преложити		
тълмачити, толмачити	Turkic	interpret
тълковати, тлъковати, тълъковати	Celtic	explain
прѣводъ	Slavonic	translation
тълкъ, толкъ	Celtic	interpretation
тълкование, тлъкование, толкование	Celtic	explanation
тълкаръ	Celtic	interpreter
тълмачъ, толмачъ	Turkic	

The different etymological origins of lexical terms reflect an active intercultural communication between medieval Ukrainians and neighbouring lingual communities. The co-existence of lexical terms suggests that interpreting and translating were separate activities, with interpreting being dominant. The Turkic derivatives are puzzling, as they repeat the system of terms; this suggests an active co-operation between medieval Ukrainians and Turkic nomadic nations. Translation activities focused on interpretation—oral and written—and religious translation. Middle Ukrainian documents of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are scarce; that is why the two recorded lexemes cannot express the real richness of translation in this region. Here, the whole “city of translators”—*Tovmach* (or *Tlumach* in the Ivano-Frankivsk region), meaning

“interpreter”—existed supposedly in honour of the guild of translators and interpreters (Shmiher 33).

Early Middle Ukrainian Lexeme	Meaning
преложити	translate, interpret
тольмачъ	translator, interpreter

Similarly, the network of Old Polish translation terms in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did not represent all the needs of translation in medieval Poland:

Old Polish Lexeme	Meaning
Tłumacz, Tolmacz, Tułmacz	interpreter / translator
łumaczka	female interpreter / translator
Tłumaczyć	interpret from one language into another
Przykładanie	giving a pattern, comparison or translation, interpretation

The Old Polish texts do not apply derivatives on the basis of the Latin words for “interpret” and “transfero,” and the interlingual synonym or “translator’s false friend” “*przekład*” signifies postponement, whereas in the cognate Ukrainian language it is a translation. It is interesting that sources written in Polish record female interpreters whose professional status was often neglected, or even ignored.

#### CHARACTER OF EARLY RELIGIOUS TRANSLATIONS

The quality of Old Slavonic liturgical translations was once assessed and summarized by A. Dostál:

The liturgical texts disclose also the fact that the new literary language was adequate for the enormous task of expressing Greek theological and philosophical terminology in terms that would conform to the spirit and the structure of the new literary idiom. Liturgical texts presented the greatest difficulty for the translators. They were composed in poetic language, often according to a metrical system. It was especially difficult to translate the religious songs in a manner which would appeal to the faithful who would be present at the services, but we are justified in saying that the translators achieved this. (72)

Modern Slavists give most of their attention to religious terms and to the melodic structure of the original text. They prescribe a two-fold approach to the translation of religious texts: literal translation and equirhythmic translation. Literal, or word-for-word, translation was utilised in all the four types (lectionary, euchologic, hymnographic, homiletic) of religious texts. However, the application of this principle in the translation of hymnographic texts caused a change in the number of syllables in a stanza and violated the rhythmic structure of the Greek original. As a result, the melody of the Greek original could not be used in the translation (Pentkovskii 74–75). As equirhythmic translation helped to preserve the rhythmic structure and melody of the Greek original, it was used for rendering one-stanza texts. In the tenth century, paraphrased metrical translations were substituted for literal translations (Krivko 738). An accentuation of the literalness of a translation was a reaction to its deviations from the original, although these deviations contributed to the launch of independent national literary traditions in the region.

In a ceremony performed in two languages, the structural organization of the text was a centre of attention for Polish translators who wished to preserve the original rhyme and rhythm of the hymnographic poetry. Translation enterprises brought a new stimulus to literary development, especially for religious poetry that moved from a sentence verse (difficult for choral performance) to the syllabism required to merge text and music (Woronzak 367). Medieval Ukrainian translators faced this problem, too. However, the limited usage of Polish necessitated a reconsideration of semantic, cultural, and theological asymmetries.

Some biblical translations contributed to the translations of other high-authority religious texts. The best example is the Saint Florian Psalter (between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries) whose scribes incorporated Latin, Polish, and German texts of the Creed by St Athanasius into Psalm 118 (*Psalterz* 77–280, 387–88).

In medieval Ukraine, scribes followed the Ciceronian dichotomy of word-for-word and sense-for-sense translation types. Belles-lettres and academic treatises were texts of lower authority, and translators were granted license to deal with a text in a freely artistic way. In contrast to literary and scientific translations, translations of liturgical texts (prayers, hymns, homilies by St Gregory of Nazianzus) and translations by John the Exarch of Bulgaria were extremely literal: a Greek text was rendered into Church Slavonic word-for-word by copying the syntactical order and constructions of the Greek original (Meshcherskii 75–76). This does not mean that this type of translation ruined the text of liturgical hymns. In Slavonic translations of Byzantine hymns, the translators attempted to preserve the genre form and the accurate meanings of Greek words, while deviating from the original in the verse recital. Unlike Greek and south

Slavonic hymns compiled according to a certain poetic meter and acrostic, old Ukrainian hymns—translated and original—were based on a rhythmical oration and were not acrostic (Dzhydzhora 11–12).

This partially contradictory and somewhat conciliating summary of general judgements does not define the typical quality of religious translations. A. Dostál even wonders whether the rendered text was a translation or a mere adaptation: “the authors of the Slavonic texts may have not only translated but also adapted the Greek original for Slavic consumption” (72). The key term here is “consumption,” and that enables us to think about the numerous parameters of reception and perception in intercultural textual communication. The more criteria designed to assess a translation, the more insightful the analysis. The plurality of definitions of adaptation in translation studies creates indefiniteness and indecisiveness.<sup>4</sup> Scholars discuss various parameters and facets of this complex phenomenon, especially from the viewpoint of textual functionality. However, other features, like place and standard, disclose the nature of deeply inner alterations in secondary texts.

The recent terms “appropriation” and “localization” are cogent in the classification of early religious translations. However, the phenomenon of collective translatorship can appear very similar—and similarly problematic—to collective authorship: in early Ukrainian literature, collective authorship dominated, and each scribe contributed to a text’s existence. The necessity to adapt the Greek originals to the new milieu appeared at the time of the birth of the Slavonic liturgy, as testified by the Kyiv Glagolitic Folios (Dostál 86). Sometimes a translator became an original author by “plagiarizing” one text in order to generate another text. This is the case of the Service for translating the relics of St. Bartholomew the Apostle, which was allegedly composed by Joseph the Hymnographer in Byzantine, then translated into Old Church Slavonic, and later adapted into the Service for translating the relics of St. Nicholas of Myra (Temchin). St Cyril of Turiv incorporated the sticheron from the litany of the 4th Sunday after Easter into his “Homily on the Paralytic”: the sticheron became a literary source for a writer; the writer developed its ideas and created a partial adaptive translation (Shumylo). K. Stanchev grouped the translated texts into three categories: (1) translation proper (those that did not intrude on the structure and imagery of the original); (2) compilation (texts were borrowed from other original and translated texts); (3) adaptation (e.g., a service on the feast day of one saint is adapted to a service on the feast day of another saint) (46).

---

<sup>4</sup> See highlights of these theoretical discussions in Milton.

Dostál claims that “subsequent studies have shown that very often the translators did rearrange the Greek texts in a more or less original and independent fashion” (72), but the quality of these translations was not compromised. As Dostál posits,

The quality of the Old Church Slavonic texts has been analyzed many times, and it has been repeatedly confirmed that the Slavic version represents a highly artistic text, a poetic text fit for recitation and exegesis as the basis of Christian doctrine. In this case Constantine almost literally translated the original text . . . . Nevertheless, even this text was to some degree adapted. First of all, he adjusted the text of all four Gospels linguistically (the linguistic differences which can be found in the Greek version between the Gospels disappeared in the Church Slavonic text). The direct speech of the text was respected: the spoken language with its simple turns and metaphors is reflected in the arrangement of the translation into sections and in its dialogue, which is so frequent in the Gospels. This Slavic text had in its original form some words borrowed from the Greek and Slavicized. However, this fact should not be understood as meaning that the vocabulary of the Slavic language was insufficient to convey the meaning of the text, for other quite varied and demanding texts translated into Slavic show, on the contrary, great lexical richness. These foreign words, probably, were quite familiar to Byzantine Slavs (as, for instance, *vlasvimisati*, *skandalisati*, etc.). In newer transcripts these Grecisms decrease because to Western Slavs and in other non-Byzantine areas these Byzantine words were unknown. It is surprising that the first Slavic version of the Gospel is of such high quality from the point of view of the translation itself, the textual arrangement, and the artistic form. (72)

Thus, the acquisition of Greek among the Slavs was not a rare and restricted fact, and it explains why Greek originals were adapted into Church Slavonic quite freely and easily. Meanwhile, the very quality of translation was not endangered by such adaptations.

Because no two languages are identical, the lexical and semantical asymmetry of two different languages can stimulate the development of target languages. Slavonic cultural contexts are no exception to this circumstance.<sup>5</sup> The high level of the Old Church Slavonic could render all the semantic and stylistic features of the Greek language. A good translation of a biblical text could influence the way a liturgical text used the biblical excerpts and followed its lexis. A knowledge of languages must also have contributed to the quality of translation in those times. The translations of Flavius Josephus's “Jewish War,” which circulated in Rus', indicate that medieval Ukrainian translators were good connoisseurs of both Old Greek

---

<sup>5</sup> For the influence of Christian vocabulary on the medieval Ukrainian worldview, see Shmiher 168–70, 189–91.

and Byzantine dialects, and even included them in the texts of their translations (Meshcherskii 71–72). A good knowledge of the source language is imperative for the production of a good translation.

In the historical dynamics, equal rhythm in translation was a bridge to the formation of national liturgical traditions. At first, translations from the Greek language were equirhythmic and preserved the Greek melody. Later, literal (word-for-word) translations corresponded more to the Greek originals, but the original Greek melody had to be modified to accommodate singing and the local singing traditions developed in the Liturgy (Pentkovskii 76). Later, equirhythmic translations of the Greek melody ceased to be in active use.

Isosyllabism (an identical number of syllables in each verse fragment) was a successful criterion for evaluating religious translations; it was fundamental in preserving the original rhythmic construction and, thus, reproducing the original melody. R. Krivko shows how a target text is a continuation of the original literary and stylistic tradition, and which new metrical demands were made to the translators before the religious translation entered Ukrainian cultural space (718–41).

It was not always possible to preserve an accurate pattern of Byzantine melody in translation. Here, the translation judgements were opposite: earlier Bulgarian translators stressed that the original melody should be exactly preserved and this interfered with the target text; later, Ukrainian translators modified Byzantine singing patterns to fit the Slavonic text, the latter of which usually contained more syllables than the Greek original (Kristians 47). The target text melody as a criterion for translation quality is not often addressed in scholarship dedicated to religious translation, although work to elaborate local chants began during the first steps of acquiring the Liturgy.

Polish sources of early religious translations are scarce. The quality of early Polish translations of hymns is variable; it appears that some translations came to Polish recipients via Czech translations (Woronzak 366, 367, 369, 373). Religious poetry reflected aesthetical forms of spiritual expression and its translations were of various quality. Some poem translations were rendered in prosaic form, enriched with new imagery and poetical expression that set higher standards for future generations of translations. Some other poetical features were neglected in translations, too. Rhyming (feminine rhyming) and syllabism (oriented at the original precise poetics) are essential in keeping the melody of a source text, but they were not always re-expressed in medieval translations. As a result, target texts sometimes also exhibited unfortunate semantic obscurity.

Christianity stimulated the development of national literatures. Original literature written in the vernacular appeared much earlier in Ukraine (early eleventh century: e.g., homiletic and panegyric writings by Hilarion of Kyiv)

than in Poland (late thirteenth century: “Bogurodzica” and “The Holy Cross Homilies”), although, initially, both Greek (in Ukraine) and Latin (in Poland) were also languages of original writings (for more, see *Istoriia*; Michałowska, *Średniowiecze* 39, 44). The reason for this might be that religious languages dominated: Latin was understood by a much smaller number of Poles than Old Church Slavonic was understood by Ukrainians. The speakers of the older versions of Slavonic languages understood Church Slavonic translations much better than today's Slavs comprehend them, and poetic forms in Old Church Slavonic inspired verbal activities in other Slavonic languages.

## CONCLUSIONS

Christianity evolved in Ukraine and Poland in different ways. When Ukrainians tried to combine their religious traditions with borrowed religious traditions, a “dual faith” emerged, i.e., syncretic folk Orthodoxy. The Poles were uneasy about converting to Christianity, and that led to pagan rebellions during the 1030s. In the short-term, the national languages of Ukraine and Poland made the acquisition of a Christian heritage easier (in the Ukrainian context) or harder (in the Polish context). Although Old Church Slavonic was accessible to and understood by all Slavs, Latin became more valuable over the long term. The religious rite was not the most decisive force in stimulating the development of national cultures. At the earliest period, liturgies were themselves unstable and multiple in their forms, and the texts in eastern and western churches were translated into Church Slavonic.

The phenomenon of retranslation was well-exemplified in medieval Ukraine: the liturgical reforms in the Mother Byzantine Church were immediately echoed in new translations within Slavonic churches. Various layers co-existed in the texts used and opened way to unpurposed or purposed localization of the translations brought from the South Slavs or producing the own ones. In Poland, multiple translations of the same prayers were private attempts that testified to the demand of individuals for such translations; under favourable conditions such translations could have turned into public matter.

Early Ukrainian translators accepted the literal approach to translating hymnographic texts. Literal translations were not inferior to the paraphrasing approach. On the contrary, the literal approach was a newer and subtler method which could incorporate isosyllabic features of the Greek original. The same can be said about early Polish translators from Czech or Latin. Even though the number of special manuscripts gives no ground to speak about translation theory per se, translation principles were



different for rendering the Bible and liturgical texts. Even though translation activities were more dynamic in Bulgaria and Ukraine than in Poland, the idea that translations were value added was apparently widespread.

Translations of religious poetry laid a foundation for the spread of epic and lyric poetry. Such translations opened door to an expanding expressive poetics that was common in the existing European literary civilization. The usage of ecclesiastical languages—Latin and Church Slavonic—strengthened the development of national cultures. As this study shows, Church Slavonic had more potential to contribute to local cultures and to boost mutual understandings among the inhabitants of Slavonic lands in the Middle Ages.

## Works Cited

- Afanas'eva, T. I. *Liturgii Ioanna Zlatousta i Vasiliia Velikogo v slavianskoi traditsii (po sluzhebnykh XI–XV vv.)*. Universitet Dmitriia Pozharskogo, 2015.
- Dostál, A. "The Origins of the Slavonic Liturgy." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 19, 1965, pp. 67–87.
- Dzhydzhora, Ie. V. *Himnografiia XI–XIII st.: strukturne tsile kanonu mineinoho tsykladu*. Astroprynt, 2018.
- Inwentarz rękopisów do połowy XVI wieku w zbiorach Biblioteki Narodowej*. Biblioteka Narodowa, 2012.
- Istoriia ukrains'koi literatury: U 12 t.* Vol. 1, Naukova dumka, 2014.
- Kantor, M. *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*. Ann Arbor, 1983.
- Katalog pamiatnikov drevnerusskoi pis'mennosti XI–XIV vv. (Rukopisnye knigi)*. Dmitrii Bulanin, 2014.
- Koziara, S. "Język i liturgia słowiańska u zarania chrystianizacji Polski—dawne i nowsze fakty, hipotezy, dyskusje." *Studia Pigioniana*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2018, pp. 15–29.
- Kristians, D. "Ot podrazhaniia forme k doslovnomu perevodu: printsipy parallel'noi adaptatsii melodii v tekstakh vizantiiskikh pesnopenii v slavianskoi traditsii." *Vestnik PSTGU. Serii 3: Filologiiia*, no. 11, 2008, pp. 26–53.
- Krivko, R. N. "Perevod, parafraz i metr v drevnikh slavianskikh kondakach." *Revue des Études Slaves*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2011, pp. 169–202; no. 4, pp. 715–43.
- Lewański, Ju. *Dramat i teatr średniowiecza i renesansu w Polsce*. PWN, 1981.
- Mansvetov, I. D. *Mitropolit Kiprian v ego liturgicheskoi deiatel'nosti*. Moskva, 1882.
- Meshcherskii, I. A. *Istoriia iudeiskoi voiny Iosifa Flaviiia v drevnerusskom perevode*. AN SSSR, 1958.
- Michałowska, T. *Literatura polskiego średniowiecza. Leksykon*. PWN, 2011.
- . *Średniowiecze*. PWN, 1999.
- Milton, John. *Handbook of Translation Studies: In 4 Vols.* Vol. 1, edited by Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer, John Benjamins, 2010, pp. 3–6.
- Mironowicz, A. "The Methodian Mission on the Polish Lands until the Dawn of 11th Century." *ELPIS*, vol. 15 (26), no. 27 (40), 2013, pp. 17–32.
- Ohienko, I. *Istoriia tserkovno-slov'ianskoi movy*. Vol. 5, pts. 1–3, Warsaw, 1929.
- Pentkovskii, A. M. "Slavianskoe bogoslužhenie vizantiiskogo obriada i korpus slavianskikh bogoslužhebnykh knig v kontse IX–pervoi polovine X vekov." *Slověne*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, pp. 54–120, [http://slovene.ru/2016\\_2\\_Pentkovskiy.pdf](http://slovene.ru/2016_2_Pentkovskiy.pdf). Accessed 27 Oct. 2022.
- Psalterz Florjański łacińsko-polsko-niemiecki: rękopis Biblioteki Narodowej w Warszawie*. Zakł. Nar. im. Ossolińskich, 1939.
- The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*. The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953.
- Szczaniecki, Paweł O. *Służba Boża w dawnej Polsce: Studia o Mszy św.* Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1962.
- Shmiher, T. *Perekladoznavchyi analiz—teoretychni ta prykladni aspekty: davnia ukrains'ka literatura suchasnymy ukrains'koiu ta anhliis'koiu movamy*. LNU imeni Ivana Franka, 2018.

- Shumylo, S. M. "Bogoslužebnye pesnopeniia v 'Slove o rasslablennom' Kirilla Turivskago." *Drevniaia Rus'. Voprosy medievistiki*, no. 66, 2016, pp. 103–08.  
*Średniowieczna pieśń religijna polska*. Ossolineum, 1980.
- Stanchev, K. "Problema original'nosti drevneslavianskoi gimnografii." *Fontes Slavicae Orthodoxae*, no. 1, 2017, pp. 43–55.  
*Svodnyi katalog slaviano-russkikh rukopisnykh knig, khраниashchikhsia v SSSR, XI–XIII vv.* Nauka, 1984.
- Temchin, S. Iu. "Drevneishaia vostochnoslavianskaia sluzhba Pereneseniiu moshchei sviatitelia Nikolaia Mirlikiiskogo (9 maia) kak pererabotka perevodnoi sluzhby Pereneseniiu moshchei apostola Varfolomeia (24 avgusta)." *Slavistica Vilnensis*, vol. 59, 2014, pp. 17–29.
- Woronczak, Je. "Tropy i sekwencje w literaturze polskiej do połowy XVI wieku." *Pamiętnik Literacki*, vol. 43, nos. 1–2, 1952, pp. 335–74.