

The Croatian Glagolitic Rule of St. Benedict

Croatian medieval culture held a specific position between the East and West, where Central Europe meets the Mediterranean. It partly inherited works belonging to the common Slavic tradition, but it was also open to influences from the Latin West from very early on. Indeed, the Latin language was "the mother tongue" of Croatian medieval literacy (1).

Texts from a wide range of fields (liturgy, law, epigraphy, literature, and education) were written in the Glagolitic alphabet. Creating an alphabet and literary language for the Slavic peoples was a magnificent cultural achievement of the Thessalonikan brothers SS Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century. In its specific "angular" form, the Glagolitic alphabet has been the fundamental part of written culture, which clearly defined and delineated the Croats as an individual ethnic entity throughout the Middle Ages. However, the striking "otherness" of the alphabet should not create the impression that Croatian Glagolism (glagoljaštvo, in Croatian) was excluded from contemporary European cultural and intellectual movements (2).

Croatian Glagolitic literacy and literary production was on the rise until the battle at Krbavsko Polje in 1493. It flourished in an area that included Istria, Kvarner, Dalmatia, Lika, and Krbava in the inland, as well as areas along the rivers Kupa and Una. The local population managed to preserve Glagolitic script and Croatian Church Slavonic language in holy service and writing until the 19th century (3). Only in Croatia did the Catholic Church allow liturgy to be held in a language other than Latin, all throughout the Middle Ages and later on (3).

The activity of Benedictine monasteries (of which there was about a hundred in the 13th century) along the Croatian littoral played a crucial role in the literacy and culture in this part of Europe. As an echo, there is a preserved Rule of St. Benedict (*Regula sancti Benedicti*) in the angular Croatian type of Glagolitic script and in Croatian Church Slavonic language, with elements of the contemporary spoken vernacular Čakavian. It was compiled probably by three scribes in the monastery of SS Cosmas and Damien in Čokovac on the island of Pašman in Northern Dalmatia in the last quarter of the 14th century (4).

Philologists have pointed out that this manuscript is a younger copy of a much older manuscript, which had been translated from Latin in the 12th cen-

tury, perhaps even earlier (5). The Rule, written originally about 529 AD, consists of 73 chapters grouped into three parts (three being a very significant number in Biblical and Christian theology). Chapter 36 is devoted to the care of sick brethren, ie, monks. The style in which the Rule is written reflects, in a typical medieval manner, the importance and elevation of the text itself.

Chapter 36, in Latin transliteration, reads: *Ot nemoćne bratije: Nemoćnu bratiju više vsega obarovati jest, v istinu i kako Hrstu im služite. I ošče On pravi: "Nemoćan bih i pohodiste me" i proč: "Čto učiniste bratji mojej, mani učiniste." Manšei a nemoćnici viduće da im Boga cić služit se, breznadni ne budite bratji svoei ka im služe. Ako li ki nemoćnik derezliv naidet se, trpite jego za Boga jere ot Boga veći najam tako se vzdaj. Tagda opat usilno obaruj da potribu vsačasku imjejte. Nemoćna bratija o sebi imijte komoru narejenu i službenik ih Boga se boj i ljubveno služi im. A kupelj nemoćnikom kom potribna est vzdaj se, a zdravim i mlajim kasnije vzdaj se. A mesojija usilno nemoćnim i malomoćnim do ozdravljenja moći vzdaj se, a koliko poozdravet se, toliko mesa ne jijte. Primisalje veliko imij opat da ot ključara ili ot inih službenikov nemoćnici ne budite ponevedovani, are k njemu gleda čto ljubo učenici sagriše.*

Of sick brethren: Before all things and above all things care must be taken of the sick, so that they may be served in very deed as Christ himself; for he said, "I was sick and ye visited me", and "What ye did for one of these least ones ye did unto me." But let the sick on their part consider that they are being served for the honor of God, and not provoke their brethren who are serving them by their unreasonable demands. Yet they should be patiently borne with, because from such as these is gained a more abundant reward. Therefore let the abbot take the greatest care that they suffer no neglect. For these sick brethren let there be assigned a special room and an attendant who is God-fearing, diligent and careful. Let the use of baths be afforded to the sick as often as may be expedient; but to the healthy, and especially to the young, let them be granted seldom. Moreover, let the use of fleshmeat be granted to the sick, who are very weak, for the restoration of their strength; but, as soon as they are better, let all abstain from fleshmeat as usual. Let the abbot take the greatest care that the

sick be not neglected by the cellarers and attendants; for he must answer for all the misdeeds of his disciples. (6).

The quoted passage from the Rule of St. Benedict clearly shows how much attention the abbot had to devote to the care of the sick monks. They were allowed to have daily baths and to eat meat, they had to have separate quarters and were to be treated with utmost solicitude. Chapter 36 describes and prescribes a certain regimen to guide the lives not only of sick monks, but also of those serving them, as well as dietary prescriptions and sketchy deontological instructions. There is an interesting terminological detail here, which shows the Croatian Church Slavonic translation to be true to its Latin original: the monk looking after the ailing is referred to simply as "službenik" (servitor in Latin, attendant in English).

A whole segment of medieval medicine is referred to as monastic medicine because cloisters and monasteries were the main places of healing and medical treatment. Sometimes thaumaturgy (miracle healing at saints' shrines) and empirical medical procedures were happening at the same place. This monastic (or "pre-Salernitan" or "early medieval" medicine) of Western Europe sprung from Benedictine monasteries. As had been ordered by St. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.540), Benedictine monasteries should house hospitals, hospices, a kind of pharmacy, and gardens in which medicinal plants were cultivated. The monk Cassiodorus (c.490-585) founded at the monastery of Vivarium a school of copying and translating works from Antiquity. He urged that special attention be paid to medical works. It is therefore not surprising that Benedictine libraries held not only theological, liturgical, and philosophical, but copious medical codices (7,8). Medical views were based on humoral pathology, and form almost a unique line from Walafrid Strabo and his "Hortulus" (9th century) to Hildegard of Bingen and her "Liber compositae medicinae" (the 12th century). Less attention was given to theoretical and physiological issues because the stress was on compiling various recipe collections. Nonetheless, the importance of the Benedictine order in preserving parts of the medical heritage of Antiquity (and of Arabic authors) and of passing it on its paramount.

It may be a coincidence that the monastery in which the Croatian Glagolitic Rule of St. Benedict was written is devoted to SS Cosmas and Damien, patron saints of physicians (and of pharmacists). They "cured for God, without asking for pay" ("ki za Boga ličahu a mita ne pitahu," in Croatian), as was recorded in the late 17th century by a Glagolitic priest, who arguably wanted to stress the contrast between

them and his contemporary physicians/doctors (9). The monks in Čokovac followed Cosmas' and Damien's example by the principle of caritas. Throughout the Middle Ages, attending the sick was seen as one of the most important ways of serving God.

Croatian Glagolitic monks can be called Benedictines from the 13th century on. For earlier periods there are no precise foundations for calling them so (10). These monks are doubtless a curiosum in the European medieval context. Namely, they were carriers of the Western (Roman) liturgy, but in the (Croatian) Church Slavonic language and in Glagolitic script. This is a phenomenon specific of medieval Croatia and is of great historical and cultural importance. In this light, the Croatian Glagolitic Rule of St. Benedict is a synthesis which unites the strivings of St. Benedict, as well as of "the Slav Apostles" SS Cyril and Methodios – the three patron saints of Europe.

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References

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