

5.8 The Konikovo Gospel and the Macedonian Identity in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

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The Konikovo Gospel is a document of tremendous significance in the development of modern Macedonian identity as we understand it today. At the same time, we must set this invaluable work in its historical context in order to appreciate fully its sociolinguistic significance. In this article, I attempt to do just that. While the document itself must be understood in terms of its own time and place, its relevance for the present as well as its meaning in the past can best be grasped if we begin with Slavic-Greek contacts during the middle ages, after the establishment of Slavic states in the Balkans.

Before turning to that period and its consequences, however, we must stress immediately that during that pre-Ottoman past the modern Balkan nation-state identities as we understand them today did not exist. Moreover, we do not suggest that such identities “slumbered” during the Ottoman period, to be subsequently “reawakened” or “reborn” around the time of the Konikovo Gospel. Rather, the Konikovo Gospel represents a specific phenomenon in a course of historical development which today includes a distinct Macedonian national identity, the most important element of which, it can be argued, is precisely language. As Monova (2002, 465–466) writes of the Aegean Macedonians of Tušim, a Macedonian-speaking village in the Greek part of the Meglen whose residents fled *en masse* in 1948 (in the wake of the Greek Civil War) to what was then the Peoples Republic of Macedonia: “*Mais pour tous, les vraies retrouvailles se font avec la langue – celle qui fut dans leur pays d’origine la cause du rejet et des persécutions, celle qui est dans l’Etat macédonien le dénominateur commun avec la population locale. La langue devient ainsi un véritable lieu géographique, un territoire qui définit le Macédonien en général et dans cet ensemble ces autres Macédoniens – les Egejci.*” [But for all, real self-discovery is made by means of language — that which in their country of origin was the cause of rejection and persecution, that which in the Macedonian state was the common denominator with the local population. Language thus becomes a veritable geographic location, a territory that defines the Macedonian in general, and within this group, these other Macedonians — the Egejci.] So much for the present; let us now turn to the past.

Although Byzantium, in which Greek was the language of the state and of religion, favored the creation of Slavonic ecclesiastical literature at the time of Constantine/Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century, when Slavic-speaking empires represented a serious political challenge and when competition with Rome over politico-religious jurisdiction was still taking place in a pre-Schism (1054) Europe, the situation changed radically with the return of Byzantine control of the Balkans in the eleventh century. According to Fine (1983, 220), citing Mošin (1963, 54–69), the utter paucity of Slavic-language sources prior to 1180 in the regions controlled by Byzantium can quite reasonably be attributed to a deliberate destruction of Slavic-language books and manuscripts. The evidence that it was Byzantines and not Ottomans that erased the evidence is the fact that Greek manuscripts dating back to the ninth and tenth centuries have been preserved in Ohrid, and several hundred manuscripts from the second Bulgarian Empire

have been preserved in Bulgaria. If the Ottomans and not the Greeks had been responsible, then one would expect no such texts to have survived. In other words, the policy of Greek opposition to literacy in Slavic in the Balkans has a long history, and while the origins of the Konikovo Gospel are many centuries after Byzantine rule, it probably represents an opposition to such policies, policies that were so effective that the knowledge of the Cyrillic alphabet had more or less disappeared from southern Macedonia by the end of the eighteenth century, if not sooner (Koneski 1967, 26).

As just indicated, the opposition of the Greek Church to Slavonic liturgy in Macedonia (and elsewhere) goes back many centuries. The details of the ecclesiastical struggle for the control of Macedonia need not concern us here (see Apostolski 1969, 63), but its general context and results are important for our understanding of the sociolinguistic significance of the Konikovo Gospel that is the focus of this essay. We know from both internal and external data that the Konikovo Gospel must have been written in what is today Greek Macedonia in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, when that territory was part of the Ottoman Empire. At that time, Ottoman citizens were identified by *millet*, a term which can be translated literally by the English ‘nationality’ (moreover, *millet* was the gloss for Macedonian *narod* ‘nation, people’ used by Joakim Krčovski in his writings in the early nineteenth century [Koneski & Jašar-Nasteva 1989, 78–79]). In Ottoman Europe, however, a *millet* was a religiously defined community. The principle *millets* of the southwest-central part of what was the *Eyalet of Rumeli* in the early nineteenth century (and after 1865 the *vilayets* of *Manastir* and *Selânik*) were *Türk*, *Rum*, *Yahudî*, *Ermenî*, literally ‘Turkish, Romaic, Jewish, Armenian’ but in religious terms ‘Muslim, Greek Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Armenian Christian.’ The main languages spoken in that region, however, were Macedonian and Turkish, as well as Greek, Albanian, and Aromanian, Judezmo, Romani, and also Armenian and Circassian (cf. Kănčev 1900, 116–117). In this region Greek, like Turkish, was a language of commerce and religion (as well as the home language in some southern regions and coastal towns), the dialects that today we call Macedonian were, together with Turkish and Albanian (in the western part), the predominant languages of the countryside. (The complexities and distributions need not concern us here, see Kănčev 1900.) The shift from religion to language as the source of identity among Ottoman Christians was beginning precisely around the time the Konikovo Gospel was composed.

That the local population was aware of the difference between language and religion as the source of identity can be seen in ethnic jokes from central Macedonia collected by Marko Cepenkov in the mid-nineteenth century. The humor in these jokes depended on the dissonance created by the fact that rural Macedonian-speaking Muslims identified as “Turks” but did not speak Turkish. Even if these jokes resulted from the expression of urban/rural tensions, however, their very focus on the disconnect between language and religion in the *Türk millet* pushes our knowledge of the awareness of the difference between religion and language as sources of identity back at least to the early nineteenth century, since we can assume that these jokes were already in circulation in the Prilep marketplace and elsewhere prior to the time when Cepenkov collected them (see Friedman 1995 for details).

Among the lacunae in our knowledge is the actual mode of use of the manuscript of the Konikovo Gospel. As Lindstedt (2006, 238) makes clear, the document shows signs of frequent use, but we do not know if those reading from the Konikovo Gospel used both the Greek and Macedonian sides or only the Macedonian side in public performance. We know from practices in other religions, e.g. the period of the Aramaic Targum (literally ‘translation’) of the Jewish Bible, that it has sometimes been the practice to read the sacred scripture in sacred language and

then in a language comprehensible to the congregation. On the other hand, however, we also know that there have been times and places where only an incomprehensible sacred language was permitted in sacred function (such has sometimes been the position of Latin in the Roman Church or Arabic in Islam). Then again, the missionary activities of the Eastern Church in the middle ages, like that of the Protestant church in the Reformation and again in more recent missionary movements, to which can be added the decision of Vatican II, have favored the use of the vernacular in all sacred functions. The fact that the Greek side of the text is in Vernacular Greek rather than New Testament Greek suggests that it was also intended for public reading, but we do not know whether or not that was its purpose in the Konikovo Gospel.

There is no evidence as to the identity of the original author of the manuscript of the Konikovo Gospel aside from the quite reasonable supposition that he was a Christian and a native speaker of a dialect that today we can call Macedonian, a dialect whose speakers have called themselves Macedonians at least since the early twentieth century (Upward 1908, 202–206).¹ We do not know what he called his language. He may have called it *našinski* or some variant thereof. The version published by Pavel Božigropski in 1852 calls the language *bogarski*.

Since we do not know exactly how the Konikovo Gospel was used, it would possible to speculate that it might have had an intention like that of the famous *Tetraglosson* (*Četirijazičnik*) of Hadži Daniil of Moschopolis (Mac. Moskopole, Alb. Voskopoja), i.e. the Hellenization of the indigenous non-Greek speaking populations of Macedonia. The purpose of the *Tetraglosson* is made clear by Daniil in his preface (Daniil 1802, 7; English verse translation from Wace & Thompson 1913):

*Alvanoì, Vlákhoi, Voulgari, Allóglōssoi kharéte,
K' etoimasthēte óloi sas Rōmaíoi nà genéte.
Varvarikèn afénontes glōssan, fōnèn kai èthē
Opoù stoùs Apogónous sas nà fainōntai sàn mûthoi.*

Albanians, Bulgars, Vlachs and all who now do speak
An alien tongue rejoice, prepare to make you Greek,
Change your barbaric tongue, your customs rude forego,
So that as bygone myths your children may them know.

If such were indeed the case, then the position of the Konikovo Gospel in the formation of Macedonian national identity would be no different from that of Daniil's *Tetraglosson*. The translator in question would have been using a bilingual form of the Gospel in order to teach his Macedonian flock Greek, with a view to the general elimination of Macedonian. It seems unlikely, however, that this was the Konikovo Gospel's author's intent, and it was clearly not the intent in the 1852 published edition, which is only in *bogarski*.

¹ "On the second day of my stay in Vodena I made an excursion with Mr. Kalopathakes to two villages [...] Vladova, the first village, was reached after a two-hours' ride. [...] I sent out for a man who seemed to be a leading spirit in the place, and he came into the guard-house and answered my questions freely... I asked what language they spoke and my Greek interpreter carelessly rendered the answer *Bulgare*. The man himself had said *Makedonski*! I drew attention to this word, and the witness explained that he did not consider the rural dialect used in Macedonia the same as Bulgarian and refused to call it by that name. It was Macedonian, a word to which he gave the Slave [sic!] form *Makedonski*..." (Upward 1908, 202–206)

While it can be argued that the very act of putting a non-Greek language in writing had the potential to create a non-Greek consciousness based on that language, i.e. the opposite effect intended by Daniil in his *Tetraglosson*, in the case of the manuscript of the Konikovo Gospel the changes introduced by the second hand, that of Pavel Božigropski, are of particular significance, a subject to which I shall return below. It is Božigropski's changes, combined with what is known of texts such as the Kulakia Gospel (Mazon & Vaillant 1938) and the general context of the ecclesiastical struggle (see above) that suggest that Slavic-speaking clerics in the territory that eventually became Greece were well aware, in the terms of their times, of what we can today call the ethnocidal and linguicidal consequences of Greek ecclesiastical (and, later, political) policies; moreover, these clerics were attempting to counter them by translating essential (holy) texts into the language that both they and their congregations spoke, namely what we can call today Macedonian.

To be sure, we do not have any direct evidence that the original Konikovo Gospel had as its intent anything more political than the Aramaic Targum, i.e. the attempt to render holy text in a language comprehensible to the worshippers hearing it. But there are two very important differences between the Aramaic of the *Targum Arami* and the Macedonian of the Konikovo Gospel. In the case of the Targum, Biblical Hebrew, the holy language being translated, was neither a vernacular language nor the potential vehicle of modern-day conceptions of the nation state (see Zuckerman 2006 on the evolution of modern Israeli Hebrew). As noted above, the time at which the Konikovo Gospel was composed was a time when the Greek Church was already actively attempting to Hellenize Slavic-speaking populations in its jurisdiction. In this context, therefore, the Konikovo Gospel might well represent an act of resistance related to those of other Slavic clerics and educators further north in what is today Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia.

It is not accidental that I mention the early modern (in the Balkan context) East South Slavic clerics and educators together. At the time they were writing, they called their language *bălgarski* or *slavjanobălgarski*. As the divisions between eastern (Bulgarian) and western (Macedonian) East South Slavic deepened, the differences that today serve as the bases for separate languages and identities became foundational for what is now a situation quite different from that of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On the one hand, it is anachronistic to impose twenty-first-century modes of thought on people writing on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially when it comes to issues of language and identity. On the other hand, it is equally inaccurate to deny that the kinds of motivations of those writing at that time eventually served as the inspiration for the situation as we have it today. What I am arguing for here is a viewpoint that neither imposes the present on the past nor denies the relevance of the past for the present. Too often scholarship relating to the formation of national identities attempts to do either the one or the other.

The dialect on which the Konikovo Gospel is based is part of a continuum that today we call "Macedonian," and what is more, modern-day speakers themselves call it *makedonski*. As I noted above, we do not know how the original writer of the dialect referred to it. What we do know, however, is that at the time he was writing, Modern Greek was called *Romaika*, i.e. 'Roman', a reference to Byzantium as the second Rome. As Herzfeld (1986) has shown, the shift to *Ellēnika* "Hellene" as an identity label took place in the context of modern West European nationalism, among a people who found the pagan past to which it referred embarrassing until contact with Western Europe caused them to think otherwise. And yet today, no one has any problem using the label "Greek" to refer to everything from the language of

Mykenai to that of Cavafy and Kazantzakis. Qualifying adjectives such as "Homeric", "Attic", "Koinē", "New Testament", "Modern", etc. are freely used when a time period needs to be specified. The relative simplicity is due in part to the fact that the Attic Koinē wiped out all the Ancient Greek dialects except the remnant or Doric preserved today in Tsakonian, and, moreover, the very significant differences among, e.g. Pontic, Cappadocian, and Italian Greek have not served for the development of separate national identities owing to specific sociopolitical circumstances. As is the case with Chinese, it could be argued that a common historical writing system divorced from actual pronunciation and endowed with historical prestige has been an important element in this perceived unity. The case of Slavic, especially South Slavic, is more complex, and arguably resembles that of modern Scandinavia in some respects. Particularly at issue here, however, is the name of the language of the Konikovo Gospel. It is without a doubt a dialect of what is today known as Macedonian. That a version was published in 1852 under the name *bogarski* is of historical interest, but in the absence of any concrete data we can only speculate on the term used by the original author. In any case, in today's terms the language is Macedonian, just as *Romaic* is Greek – with the understood caveat that here *Macedonian* is a modern term referring to an eighteenth or nineteenth century dialect whose modern descendent is highly endangered owing at least in part to Greek government policies (see Kōstopoulos 2000 for details).

As to the identity of the writer, it seems fair to say that he was a Christian and aware of the fact that he and his parishioners spoke a language other than Greek; as I was once told by a woman in 1974 in the village of Višeni, now Visineá in the Kastoria (Mac. Kostur) region of Greece: *Velat deka sme gǎrci ama ne sme* 'They say we are Greeks, but we're not.' The person who uttered those words had been born at the end of the nineteenth century. Most of her relatives in America identified as Bulgarians, but her baby brother identified as Greek. Identity had been determined by who controlled the schools. People from Višeni now living in Australia identify as Macedonians. In modern linguistic science, there is no question: the Slavic dialects of the Kastoria (Kostur), Florina (Lerin) and Edhessa (Voden) regions, as well as regions to the east, are Macedonian. That they were called different things at different times in the eighteenth and nineteenth century is important for the historian of ideas and how they develop, but they do not effect the classifications of the twenty-first century. As for the significance of the Konikovo Gospel in the formation of Modern Macedonian national identity, it is reasonable to speculate that by using the native language of his parishioners, the author of the Konikovo Gospel contributed to their awareness of the following three facts: 1) that the language that they spoke was not Greek, 2) that the language that they spoke was a language and not gibberish, 3) that the language that they spoke could be written and used to preach the Word of God. That much speculation is so reasonable as to be incontrovertible. From there it is not very far from speculating that linguistic awareness could lead to other types of awareness, but the manuscript of the Konikovo Gospel does not permit us to go beyond mere speculation.

It is here that we must return to the alterations introduced by the second hand, that of Pavel Božigropsi. For the most part, these changes consist of changing <u> to <o> and <i> to <e> when the high vowels represent the reflexes of the mid vowels as a result of the raising of unstressed vowels characteristic of the Lower Vardar dialects of Macedonian (see Mazon & Vaillant 1938, 37). The corrections are not consistent (e.g. *videluto* for original *videlutu* (p. 112) which would be *vidéloto* in western Macedonia [here 'light'] or *sfetut* left unchanged for western *svetot* [or *sfetot*] 'world'). In a few places, the second hand has replaced what is probably a Church Slavonicism (rather than a dialectal archaism) with a more colloquial form,

either Slavic or Turkish, e.g. *otveštá* > *otgovorí* 'answer 3sg pres.' (p. 7), *ótvet* > *karsilak* (Turkish *karşılık*) 'answer subst.' (p. 5). The form *otgovorí* also implies an awareness of morphophonemic orthography, such as was practiced in Church Slavonic and ultimately in Bulgarian, as do changes to the spelling of automatic final devoicing, e.g. *Gospót* > *Gospód* 'Lord' (p. 1), although in other places final devoicing is spelled and left unaltered, e.g. *Gospodýnuf* 'the Lord's adj. masc.' (p. 6) left unchanged. Similarly, progressive devoicing of /v/ is not indicated in words associated with Church Slavonic, e.g. *cárstvutu* (changed to *cárstvuto* [p. 74]) but is spelled in ordinary words, e.g. *zatforia* (changed to *zatvoría*) 'they closed' (p. 71). Similarly the assimilation of etymological /dn/ > /nn/ is altered regularly, e.g. *kí sénnat* > *kí sédnat* 'they will sit' (p. 49), *záino* > *záidno* 'together' (p. 46), etc. A number of points come out of the forms as they occur in the original and in the changes introduced by Božigropski.

First, with respect to the original, we must note that the Greek orthographic Macedonian tradition is considerably more colloquial than the Cyrillic one. Works such as those of Hadži Joakim Krčovski and Kiril Pejčinović are basically a colloquialized Church Slavonic (e.g. Pejčinović's *Utešenje grešnim* or Krčovski's *Različna poučitelna nastavljenija*), whereas Greek-letter texts such as the Konikovo Gospel are almost purely colloquial with the occasional Church Slavonicism. We thus have an irony: the Greek destruction of the knowledge of Cyrillic and the Church Slavonic tradition in southern Macedonia led to the production in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of manuscripts on that territory that preserve for us more consistently the specific peculiarities of the actual spoken Macedonian dialects of the region. (The sixteenth-century Kostur Lexicon [Giannelli & Vaillant 1958] is a different type of text that also preserves such evidence.)

Second, with respect to the alterations, we can distinguish five types:

1) simply correctional, e.g. *bimbašítata* > *gíozbasiata* (Turkish *yüzbaşı* 'centurion') (p. 49), or replacing a Church Slavonicism with a colloquialism (see above)

2) morphophonemic vs. etymological orthography where the pronunciation would be the same regardless of dialect, e.g. *Gospót* > *Gospód* 'Lord' (p. 1)

3) changes similar to those in (2) which do not have a narrowly defined dialectal base *zatforia* > *zatvoría*) 'they closed' (p. 71). Similarly the assimilation of etymological /dn/ > /nn/ is altered regularly, e.g. *kí sénnat* > *kí sédnat* 'they will sit' (p. 49), *záino* > *záidno* 'together' (p. 46),

4) changes specifically aimed away from the original dialectal base, mainly the spelling of unstressed mid vowels

5) changes pointing to a West Central Macedonian model, e.g. *úmremi* > *úmriime* (p. 113)

It is points (4) and (5) that are of particular interest in defining the position of the Konikovo Gospel in the development of Macedonian language and identity. It is well known that when the West Central Macedonian dialects were selected as the basis for the standard language in 1944–45, there was already complete consensus among those participating in the codification (Friedman 1993). It is also well known that this same base was proposed by Krste Misirkov in 1903, and while his original work was not available to Macedonians until 1946, the review published by Teodorov-Balan (1904) basically summarized all of Misirkov's arguments, and that review was read by Blaže Koneski during his studies in Sofia prior to 1943 (B. Koneski, p.c.). Moving further back in time, in 1857, Partenij Zografski advocated a unified Macedo-Bulgarian literary language that would have a West Central Macedonian dialectal base (for which he was attacked by those favoring an East Bulgarian base). Although Zografski was born

in Galičnik, in the Western dialect area, Misirkov was born in Postol (Greek Pélá) in the lower Vardar dialect region. As Lunt (1984, 125) points out, the reason standard Macedonian was so easily accepted by the population and progressed so rapidly in its standardization was that a West-Central-based dialectal koine was already in use.

To be sure, a number of works of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century show many non-West Central traits, and writers as recently as the 1920's and 1930's were not always consistent in their treatment of competing dialect features (cf. Kramer 2008). Nonetheless, Božigropski's changes, and particularly his spelling of unstressed mid vowels and the West Central confusion of the *e-* and *i-* conjugations points to a tendency to try to develop a broader-based version of a Slavic language to be used in both reading and writing which, ultimately, became standard Macedonian as we know it today. This is not to say that this ultimate result is what the composer of the Konikovo Gospel or Božigropski had in mind at the time, but what the composer of the Konikovo Gospel did do was give written form to his native Macedonian dialect, and in all likelihood he did so to resist Greek and not to promote Greek. What Božigropski did with his alterations was give us an indication that already at this early stage there was enough communication among Greek-educated and/or Church Slavonic-educated Macedonian-speakers (regardless of what they called their language) that they were aware of each others' dialectal differences and, moreover, even at this early date there seems to have been a favoring of dialects that did not raise unstressed mid vowels, a favoring of morphophonemic orthography (which was later modified under the influence of the same phonemic principles that influenced Vuk's reform of Serbian orthography), and apparently even some specifically West Central influences (perhaps owing the prestige of Ohrid and Bitola [Manastir] – and possibly also Prilep and Veles – as centers of learning, administration, and commerce).

Our knowledge of the development of Macedonian language and identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is thus significantly enriched by the Konikovo Gospel, since it pushes back to this period the date at which tendencies that ultimately were at the base of standard Macedonian first make their appearance. This is not to imply a specifically unbroken connection from the Konikovo Gospel to 1944–45, the documentation that we have attests to the fact that processes were complex, multidirectional, and even parallel. Nonetheless, the Konikovo Gospel ranks with Krčovski and Pejčinovič among the earliest works intended to use colloquial Macedonian (as opposed to Greek or Church Slavonic) as a written language, and it surpasses both those authors in its closeness to the colloquial, while the hand of Božigropski points to an early attempt at a process that forms part of what today we call norm selection.

Greek opposition to Macedonian in Greece continues to this day, despite the availability of *Nova Makedonija* at a news kiosk in *Omonia* square in Athens or the republication of the 1925 *Abeceđar* in Thessalonica (Vinožito 2006). That same year, on 29 September also in Thessalonica, at the inauguration of an exhibition of primers from all over the world by collector Juris Cibuls of Latvia, a Macedonian primer published in the Republic of Macedonia was removed by the organizers at the orders of the Deputy Mayor for Culture and Youth of that city (J. Cibuls, p.c.). The fear that Macedonians experience in speaking their native language in public, especially in the villages of the region where the Konikovo Gospel was produced, was witnessed in 2006 by some of the contributors to this volume (see also HWR 1994). It is to be hoped that by reclaiming this important part of the Modern Macedonian past in what is now the Modern Greek state we can further the understanding of Macedonian history in general.

