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The Beginning of Christianization of Carpatho-Dniestrovian Rus'

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Начало христианизации Карпато-Днестровской Руси

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The question of the beginning of Christianization of Rus' (of Medieval Russia's population) is still problematic. The theme of the adoption of Christianity by the population of Carpathian-Dniester lands which had been the region of the Rusins/Ruthenians ethnogenesis before the official act of the baptism of Rus' is continuously raised, including discussions in the international historical journal "Rusin".

Christianity, or, rather, its "right doctrine" (Orthodoxy), has long been one of the main components of Russian ethnicity. Not incidentally, at the mention of christening Czech Count Borzivoi I by Archbishop Methodius of Vyshehrad it was stressed in the Chronicle of Dalimir: "Ten arcibiskup Rusín bieše, mšiu svú slovensky síúžieše" ("That Archbishop, being a Rusin, held the Divine Service in Slavonic"). The Chronicle of Dalimir was the first chronicle in the Czech language, written at the beginning of the 14th century. In that case holding the church service in the Czech language meant not ethnicity but the fact that he professed Christianity of the Eastern rite. At that time it was believed that only Rusins could be Orthodox in the Carpathian-Dniester lands. The ethnonym "Rusnak (Rusniak)" which emerged later was opposed to the ethnonym "Pole"; Rusniak is an Orthodox (or Uniat) vs Pole is a Catholic.

The process of adoption of Christianity by the ancestors of the Rusins/Ruthenians can be divided into three stages. The first stage

lasted from the 1st century through to the 8th century, when the Slavs, Antes, and later the tribes of the Ulichy and the Tivertsy contacted with the Ancient World in the north-west Black Sea coast. In that case, it might mean a small number of the baptized. The second stage was connected with missionary activities of Cyril and Methodius in Great Moravia (the second half of the 9th century), influencing the population of Carpatho-Dniestrovian Rus'.

And the final stage associated with the baptism of Rus by Prince Vladimir was a mass conversion to Christianity of the population in the Carpathian-Dniester lands which became part of the Old Russian State (Kievan Rus').

The Slavs came in contact with the Ancient World in the 1st century AD, appearing in the lower reaches of the Dniester and the Danube and coming to the borders of the Roman (later Eastern Roman) Empire.

Slavic tribes of the Antes (4th – 7th centuries) lived in the territory between the Prut and the Dniester. They appeared there later than the Slavs and were formed of several ethnic components including the Iranian (Sarmatian) component. The bulk of the Antes lived in the Dniester area. The north of the Prut-Dniester interfluvium and the valleys of adjacent Dniester left-bank tributaries (Seret, Zbruch) were most densely populated.

The Scythian Diocese was the first to appear in the lands inhabited by the ancestors of the Rusins. The city of Tomis/Tomyris (now Constanța, Romania) was the seat of the diocese administration. The diocese was located in so-called Scythia Minor and not only covered the Black Sea coast to the south of the Istra (Danube), but also extended beyond the northern arm of the Danube, as some researchers suggested. The Scythian Bishop Evangelicus was first mentioned in the last quarter of the 3rd century AD. Later, Gothic Bishop Wulfila who preached Arianism in the territory of Great Scythia, had had his chair until the persecution of Christians by the Goths started in 348 AD. Great Scythia was the region north of the Danube, which covered part of present-day Romania, Moldova and Ukraine.

Hermias Sozomenus (Ermias Sozomen) wrote in his Ecclesiastical History (circa 444 AD) that a number of the Antes had already adopted Christianity by the 5th century.

As early as in the 3th – 4th centuries AD, Christians lived in the lower Danube territory and Christianity spread over to the left bank of the Lower Danube and the northern bank of the Danube.

In the 5th – 6th centuries, Byzantine historians wrote about prominent Byzantine military leaders of the Antes descent who, most probably, were Christians. In 425 AD Emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III

issued an edict addressed to Amatus, the prefect of Gaul. According to the edict, Jews and pagans were forbidden to engage in judicial activities and to be in public office. Although the law had not been always respected, it concerned senior officials and army commanders-in-chief.

The presence of the Christian population in the Prut-Dniester interfluvium was confirmed by archeological data.

In the 7th to 9th centuries, Antes tribes of Croats, Ulichy and Tivertsy inhabited the Carpathian-Dniester lands. As 'The Tale of Bygone Years' describes it, "Ulichy and Tivertsy seated themselves along the Dniester banks and were in close proximity to the Danube".

The Tivertsy settled in the Prut-Dniester interfluvium as far as the Danube, and a large part of the Ulichy population moved to the Bug-Dniester interfluvium, probably, after the capture of their tribal centre Peresechen by Svengeld in 971 AD. The Croats who lived in Subcarpathia were the northern neighbours of the Ulichy and the Tivertsy.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, describing the area of settlement of the Pechenegs in the middle of the 10th century, mentions the empty fortresses built "on this side of the Dniester River in the region facing Bulgaria" where "some remains of churches and the crosses carved into sandstone can be found".

At the end of the 9th century, the Pechenegs drove the Hungarians from the steppes in the northern part of the Greater Black Sea area to the Prut-Dniester interfluvium which was the location of the Tivertsy and Ulichy tribes with whom the Magyars developed good-neighbourly relations. Then, under the pressure from the Pechenegs, the Magyars were forced to migrate to the Carpathian Basin. A number of the "Ruthenians" relocated together with the Hungarians to Pannonia.

Despite the early missionary work of the Byzantine Church among the Hungarians, the early Christian terminology does not contain words of Greek origin. That is, the Hungarians had been Christianized to a certain degree when they arrived in Transylvania and the Danube region, moreover, they had been converted to Christianity by the Slavs. The Hungarian language preserved a large number of Slavic linguistic borrowings relating to the religious and ecclesiastical sphere. It means borrowing the Russian (Rusin) Christian terminology by the Hungarians. This is another evidence of Hungarian-Christian Rusin contacts that existed in the Prut-Dniester interfluvium as well as in Pannonia. Abundant information indicates the existence of Russian settlements in Hungary throughout its history.

The second phase of Christianization of the Carpathian-Dniester lands dates back to the second half of the 9th century AD. Researchers

in Tsarist Russia took a critical approach to Latin sources mentioning “Russians” living in the territory of Great Moravia, Czechia, Poland and Hungary. It could be explained by insufficient information on the history of Carpathian Rus’, available at that time.

Moravia Proper and adjoining Hungary, Bohemia, White and Red Croatia (Little Poland), Upper Silesia and Red Russia were part of Great Moravia where Cyril and Methodius introduced Christianity according to the Eastern rite.

Ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the boundary of the Moravian Archbishopric were extended to Lesser Poland and the Carpathian Mountains.

After the termination of missionary activities by Cyril and Methodius, Christianization of Rusins continued in Great Moravia and in the First Bulgarian Empire when both countries adopted Christianity as their official Christian religion in 864 AD. At the end of the 9th century, their missionaries vied with German Latin missions, Benedictines and Irish monks for influence. However, shortly after Methodius’ death (885) the new Pannonian Archbishop Wiching, a German native, and his supporters persuaded Pope Stephan V to forbid worship in the Slavic language.

After Great Moravia had been defeated by Hungarians, several lands inhabited by Croats became part of the Duchy of Bohemia (Prague), sometimes also referred to as the Czech Duchy.

21 years before the official Christianization of Rus’, Pope John XIII (965 – 972) issued a special papal bull in 967 by which, allowing the establishment of the Prague bishopric, he forbade to appoint any person to govern the Episcopal. See if the said person belonged to “the rite or a sect” of the Bulgarian and Russian nations, at the same time prohibiting to conduct a church service in the Slavic language.

The third period was the final Christianization of the Rusins’ lands that became part of the Old Russian State. Most of the territory inhabited by the ancestors of the Rusins finally joined the Old Russian State by the end of the 10th century and became subordinate to the Kiev Mitropolis in terms of religion. Later, at the end of the 11th century, these lands became a separate Galician Principality.

Keywords

Rusin, Rusnak, Rus’, Carpatho-Rus’, Christianity, Orthodoxy, Cyril, Methodius, Carpathian-Dniester Lands, Antes, Tivertsy, Uliches, Croatsians.

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