

THE MEMORY OF SAINTS CYRIL AND METHODIUS IN THESSALONIKI

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Abstract: DELIKARI, Angeliki. *The memory of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Thessaloniki*. The cult of Saints Cyril and Methodius began soon after their death and spread quickly among the Slavs. Despite the fact that the Saints were Byzantine missionaries and thus plenty of hagiographic works about them existed at that time, a feast day dedicated to them was not established officially in Constantinople itself. In the Liturgical Calendar of the Metropolis of Thessaloniki their feast day was introduced in 1957. In 1966, the Metropolis of Thessaloniki organized several events with a panorthodox and oecumenical character in honour of the two Apostles of the Slavs. Since then there have been numerous efforts and activities (e.g. the foundations of centres, churches and monuments, publications, and much more) from several institutions to establish in Thessaloniki the tradition and memory of the two Thessalonian brothers. In June 2011, the Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Cyril and Methodius (www.kyrillos-methodios.gr) has been established in Thessaloniki, promoting research into the life and work of Saints Cyril and Methodius both in Greece and abroad.

Keywords: *Cyril, Methodius, Thessaloniki, relics*

I would like to begin this article with a quote by the late Prof. Antonios-Aimilios Tachiaos about the cult of Saint Cyril and Methodius, as a small token of my respect for him as a person and for his work (Tachiaos 2013, 141): „There are many distinguished saints throughout Christendom whose cults, though centuries old and well-known all over the world, nevertheless do not have the particular characteristics of the cult of Cyril and Methodius. While other saints are venerated only for the sanctity of their lives or for their importance as doctors or Church leaders, the two brothers are also honoured for certain other virtues ascribed to them by those who venerate them; they are for instance the “teachers of the Slavs”, the “enlighteners of the Slavs”; Methodius himself is “the Archbishop of the Slavs”. On reading the Cyrillomethodian sources, one immediately realizes that in the case of the two brothers a broader spectrum of factors defines the nature of their cult”.

The cult of Saint Cyril began soon after his death in Rome in 869 and spread quickly among the Slavs (Krüger 1991, 105-126; Tachiaos 1992, 231-249; Barlieva – Naumow, 2005, 126-144; Tachiaos 2008, 163-166; Nichoritis 2013, 149-152, 158; Valais 2014, 440-446; Barlieva, 2017, 229-241). After they had been expelled from Rome, the disciples of the two Thessalonian brothers first took their cult to Bulgaria. Later on, Cyril and Methodius became famous all over the Slav world (Ivanič – Hetény 2016, 215-250; Hetényi – Ivanič 2021, 417). But in Byzantium and then in Greece things followed, more slowly, a different course. Despite the fact that they were Byzantine missionaries and plenty of Greek hagiographic works about them existed (most of them in the area of the Archdiocese of Ohrid, but also on Mount Athos (Nichoritis 1986, 11-50; Nichoritis 2013, 188-196), at that time, their feast day was not established officially in Constantinople itself (Valais 2014, 447).

In Thessaloniki, the birthplace of the two Saints, their cult was first introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century by the Bulgarian community of the city (Metallinou-Tsiomou, 1957, 139-142; Valais 2014, 447-448). The first Bulgarian chapel in Thessaloniki was dedicated to Saints Cyril and Methodius. It was located near Egnatia street, in the Panaguda mahala. Initially it was a small building, but later it was repeatedly renovated and refurbished. Every year on the 11th of May, the Bulgarians celebrated the memory of the two Saints. The celebrations culminated at the Bulgarian gymnasium for boys, which was also called “Saints Cyril and Methodius” (I Makedonia 1885, 1-4, 45-53; Kontogiannis 1910, 180; Tachias 1968, 130-131; Aggelopoulou, 2003 – 2004, 47-77)¹. After the departure of the Bulgarians from Thessaloniki in 1913, the celebrations in honour of Saints Cyril and Methodius were not taken up again in Thessaloniki for a long time. In the Liturgical Calendar of the Metropolis of Thessaloniki their feast day was introduced in 1957 by Metropolitan Panteleimon I. He established the celebration of all famous saints from Thessaloniki first on the second Sunday of Matthew and later on the Sunday of the Holy Bearers of Myrrh. For this purpose Gerasimos Mikragiannanitis, a monk on Mount Athos, composed a special Office². There, on 11th May, the feast of the Apostles of the Slavs was introduced. In order to make their missionary work more widely known, the Director of the Institute of Balkan Studies Vasileios Laourdas made a speech about the significance of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission all over the Slav world in the Society of Macedonian Studies (Laourdas 1966). It is highly likely that this interest of the ecclesiastical and scientific communities of Thessaloniki regarding the establishment of the cult of Cyril and Methodius in Thessaloniki was sparked by the influence of the Slavs in this city, who venerated Cyril and Methodius with all the honours. In 1963, on the occasion of the 1100th anniversary of the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission in Great Moravia, the Metropolis of Thessaloniki decided to organize together with Theological School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki events in honour of the two Apostles of the Slavs. These events took place three years later from 22 – 26 October 1966 and had a panorthodox and oecumenical character in the presence of representatives of the Orthodox Churches and of other faiths. In an interview on 30th September, the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki declared that Greece had never forgotten the Thessalonian brothers and just now they are commemorating them in a festive way and these celebrations are meant to highlight their contribution, not only in Greece but also on a European scale. This is why they invited scholars from all over Europe ... etc. (Apo 22as mechris 27 Oktovriou 1966, 3; Valais, 2014, 453-456). One of these events was an International Conference. The Proceedings were published in two volumes (Anastasiou 1966; Anastasiou 1968). On that occasion, a commemorative medal was struck (O en Thessaloniki 1966, 702). On the observe side we read «863: Κύριλλον και Μεθόδιον άξιους του έλληνικοϋ γένους υιούς», on the reverse, «έπι τή συμπληρώσει ένδεκα αιώνων ή γενέτειρα Έκκλησία Θεσσαλονίκης, Παντελεήμονος άρχιερατεύοντος, άγαλλομένη τιμη: 1966» (Fountoulis 1986, 210).

¹ Valais 2014, 447-451 (with rich bibliography). The members of the Bulgarian community sought to establish the two Saints as symbols of their national idea in order to bolster nationalistic aspirations on their part. This was probably one of the main obstacles to the acceptance of the feast on the part of the Thessaloniki's Orthodox Community, and often led to frictions with the Orthodox Greeks because of various nationalistic slogans. For this reason, the procession on the feast day of Cyril and Methodius was always accompanied by policemen or sometimes was even forbidden in order to avoid disturbances.

² There we can find a short Synaxarion of Saints Cyril and Methodius: «Οί άγιοι οϋτοι αυτάδελφοι ισαπόστολοι εγεννήθησαν έν Θεσσαλονίκη. Γενόμενοι πλήρεις σοφίας και χάριτος του Παρακλήτου, απέστάλησαν παρά του μεγάλου Φωτίου, εις τὰ Σλαϋικά έθνη κήρυκες τής αληθείας, ένθα, μετά πολλάς θλίψεις και κόπους και στενοχωρίας, κηρύξαντες τὸ θεϊον Εϋαγγέλιον, και πολλούς λαούς φωτίσαντες, άπηλθον προς Κύριον, αποστολικώς τον δρόμον τελέσαντες, ό μὲν άγιος Κύριλλος τῷ 869, ό δὲ άγιος Μεθόδιος τῷ 885. Αμφοτέρων ή μνήμη τελείται τή 11η Μαΐου» (Fountoulis 1986, 206-209).

Gerasimos Mikragiannanitis also wrote a new Office for the Saints (Akoulouthia 1966, 499-508; Theodorou 1966, 136; Fountoulis 1986, 210-212; Nichoritis 2013, 194; Valais 2014, 456).

At that time, the wish for the erection of a church in Thessaloniki dedicated to Saints Cyril and Methodius was expressed.

In order to make the lives and the missionary activities of Saints Cyril and Methodius more widely known, many popular publications about them appeared and Greek stamps were dedicated to their memory.

With the intention to promote the cult of the two saints among the population of Thessaloniki, an event named “Kyrilleia” was established in 1972. This comprised philanthropic activities as well as sports events organised by the Democritus School, with the participation of a number of European teams, mainly from the Balkans³.

Two years later, in 1974/1975, the old church of Saint Nikolaos of Xirokrini, an area near the railway station in west Thessaloniki, was renamed after Saints Cyril and Methodius and has celebrated the day of their feast since then.

When the Bishop of Thessaloniki learned that in Rome the holy relics of Saint Cyril existed (Boyle 1964, 159-193; Oi agioi Kyrillos kai Methodios 1985, 258; Boyle 1988, 75-82; Tachiaos, 2008, 139-140; Barlieva – Naumow, 2015, 15-31), he asked for the intervention of the Oecumenical Patriarch for the translation of these relics to the church that was being built at that time. On November 30, 1974, Pope Paul VI donated a part of Saint Cyril’s relics intended for the future Saints Cyril and Methodius church in Thessaloniki to the Patriarch Demetrios I of Constantinople. The Patriarch kept the relics in the patriarchal chapel and on February 7, 1976 offered them to the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, Panteleimon II, by way of Meliton, Metropolitan of Chalkedon. The relics were kept temporarily in the church of Saint Demetrius, where a Great Festive Vesper was celebrated (Valais 2014, 459-462). In the meantime, Pope John Paul II, considering the grateful veneration enjoyed for centuries by the holy Brothers from Thessaloniki, especially among the Slavs, proclaimed Saints Cyril and Methodius Co-Patrons of Europe by the Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis* of 31 December 1980.

The church of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Thessaloniki was inaugurated on March 27, 1983, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, but opened its doors officially on May 12, 1985, during the three-day celebration of Saints Cyril and Methodius, dedicated to the 1100th anniversary of the death of Saint Methodius and, at the same time, the 2300th anniversary of the founding of Thessaloniki. The relics of Saint Cyril were deposited in the newly erected church. At that time, the hymnograph Gerasimos Mikragiannanites made changes to the Office of Cyril and Methodius and added references to the relics and the new church (Valais 2014, 463-466). The above events were also accompanied by Theological Conference about Cyril and Methodius, held from 13 – 15 May 1985 under the auspices of the Metropolis of Thessaloniki (Praktika Synedriou 1986).

Only a few months ago, a third church in Thessaloniki, located in Nea Politeia, a district in Evosmos (Evosmos is a suburb in west Thessaloniki), was dedicated to Saints Cyril and Methodius.

In the year 2000, on the initiative of Dionysios, at that time Metropolitan of Neapolis and Stavroupolis, the parish was established. Its existence began in the sixth Elementary School of Evosmos, also called the School of Cyril and Methodius. At the same time, the construction of the catacomb was initiated, which functioned as a church from 2006. The inauguration of the new church by the Metropolitan Neapolis and Stavroupolis, Varnavas, took place on September 15, 2018. The church is a basilica with three naves. The interior and exterior of the church have not yet been completed in full.

³ Valais 2014, 458 (with rich bibliography).

Over the last years there is a tendency, mainly of the Slav nations, to dedicate monuments of historical memory in the city of Thessaloniki. For example, in the New Promenade of the town we can see a large cross, engraved in a circle, decorated with figurative church reliefs on one side and the names of Cyril and Methodius on the other, in Cyrillic letters, saying «Πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς: ἀφ’ ὑμῶν γὰρ ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος Κυρίου» (“To the people of Thessaloniki, because from you the Word of the Lord has come (to us)”). Likewise, on the premises of the church of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Thessaloniki, a monumental column “Book-Temple”, created by the sculptor Dimitra Stavrinidou, was placed. It has the shape of an open book, whose pages form the images of Saints Cyril and Methodius. The gate at the bottom symbolizes the gate of knowledge opened by the two brothers with their missionary work (www.elliniko-fenomeno.gr/2008/01/αφιερωμένη-στους-αγιους-κυριλλο-και-μεθ/).

Furthermore, on May 24, 2013, on the other side of the grounds of the church, a statue of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the work of the sculptor Alexej Archipov, donated by the National Society of Greeks of Sankt Petersburg, was placed (www.voria.gr/article/ena-doro-apo-tin-agiapetroupoli-gia-tin-thessaloniki). In the same place, on the next day (May 25, 2013), the park of Slovakia was founded (www.thestival.gr/society/item/100531).

Celebrating the passing of 1150 years since their mission to Great Moravia, the City of Thessaloniki declared 2013 as the year of Saints Cyril and Methodius. An international conference “Cyril and Methodius: Byzantium and the World of Slavs” was organised, highlighting the life, activity and cultural wealth that the Thessalonian Saints Cyril and Methodius had bequeathed to the world of Slavs. It was held from 28 to 30 November in the two amphitheatres of the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki. More than 75 experts and researchers in Slavonian Studies from universities around the world participated in the conference. The Proceedings of the conference were published two years later, in 2015 (Delikari 2015).

An exhibition titled “Ex Thessalonica Lux” which took place in the Museum of Byzantine Culture coincided with the conference. The exhibition, mainly photographs, meant to present the events and developments which took place during the Middle Byzantine period (8th – 12th centuries), including the contribution of Thessaloniki (the city that shaped Cyril and Methodius, and their birthplace), the diplomatic-apostolic-cultural activities of these two Saints among the Slavs, as well as their contribution to the invention of the Glagolitic alphabet. Much emphasis was also placed on the refining of the Cyrillic alphabet by the disciples of both men and the subsequent gradual “Byzantinification” and the conversion of the Slavs to Christianity (Ex Thessalonica Lux. 2014).

A photographic exhibition of manuscripts called “The Light of Letters” was also hosted during that time in the same temporary exhibition wing on the first floor, organised by the Museum of Byzantine Culture in collaboration with the General Consulate of the Republic of Bulgaria in Thessaloniki and the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies of the University of Macedonia. This exhibition was created by the Elena and Ivan Dujčev Foundation and the Institute of Culture of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (mbg.gr/en/exhibitions/“-light-letters”).

In June 2011, the Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Cyril and Methodius (www.kyrillos-methodios.gr) was founded by the late Prof. Antonios-Aimilios Tachiaos in Thessaloniki. The establishment of this Centre served the need to promote research into the life and work of Saints Cyril and Methodius both in Greece and abroad. The absence of such a centre in Greece, until recently, gave the impression that the oeuvre of these two great figures, who are deeply honoured by the entire Slavic and European world was not sufficiently known in Greece.

The Centre has a purely scientific mission and carries out collaboration with other academic institutions in Greece and abroad. Its main objectives are to draw attention to the cultural influence

of Hellenism among Slavic peoples, to promote spiritual, cultural and ecclesiastical relations between the Greek and Slavic worlds, as well as to study Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art and its expressions in the regions influenced by the activities of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Publication of books, both academic and popular, dealing with the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Greek world throughout the Slavic lands is yet another goal of the Centre.

One of the first publications of the Centre, soon to be freely available on the internet, is republishing of the journal *Cyrrillomethodianum*. In the past, 18 volumes of this journal were issued (from 1971 to 1994) and in the last years three more. All of these issues are digitally available, so that they can be accessible to the entire scientific community (www.kyrillos-methodios.gr). Republishing of this annual journal, which brought Hellenic Slavic Studies to the fore of international research in the field, is entirely necessary. In *Cyrrillomethodianum* the studies of Greek and foreign scholars are published, including book reviews and presentations. Through the exchange of *Cyrrillomethodianum* with other journals from abroad, the Centre's collaborators are given the opportunity to remain up-to-date with respect to on-going research in Slavic and other countries. The editorial board of *Cyrrillomethodianum* is made up of distinguished scholars from Greece, the USA, Russia, Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Serbia, Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria.

Through its many activities, the Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Cyril and Methodius Greece has become an international hub for the study of Greco-Slavic cultural and spiritual relations.

Every year since 2016, the church of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Thessaloniki and the Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Cyril and Methodius have jointly organized Symposium to Memory of Saints Cyril and Methodius in May (Oι Thessalonikeis agioi 2017; I apichisi 2018; O ekchristianismos ton Slavikon Laon. 2019; Delikari, Angeliki – Stambliakas, Ambrosios (ed.) 2021a; Delikari, Angeliki – Stambliakas, Ambrosios 2021b).

All these events, conferences, publications, centres, monuments, etc. constitute a new link in a long line of activities about Saints Cyril and Methodius and the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission in the city of Thessaloniki. As the new scientific Director of the Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Cyril and Methodius and Editor-in-Chief (together with Prof. Dr. Roland Marti / Saarbrücken, Germany) of the journal *Cyrrillomethodianum*, I hope for mutual cooperation which would continue the work of Prof. Tachiaos in Thessaloniki, the birthplace of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

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