
PETER IVANIČ, *The Life of St Constantine-Cyril and the Veneration of His Relics / Život sv. Konštantína-Cyrila a úcta k jeho relikviám*. Rome: Istituto storico slovacco di Roma / Pontificio istituto slovacco dei Santi Cirillo e Metodio 2024. 208 pp. – ISBN 979-12-210-6352-3

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This book consists of two parts. The first is an account of the life of St Constantine-Cyril. Being addressed to the intelligent non-specialist, it follows very much the generally accepted view of events, and conventional assessment of their significance, not attempting to break new ground, while not shying away from contentious issues. On some questions, such as that of the liturgy used by the saint, the author gives his opinion for one side or the other (while giving a fair summary of the contrary arguments); others, such as the date of the mission to Samarra, he leaves open. Taking a similarly traditional view of the creation of a written Slavonic language as the major achievement of Cyril's activity, he proceeds to a survey of the existing Old Church Slavonic texts, again aimed at readers not familiar with the field.

The second part of the book, after a brief explanation and history of the cult of relics, is essentially a catalogue of all the relics of St Cyril recognised as genuine by the Roman Catholic Church. (It also provides some information on relics that can no longer be located, and on one or two others that lack such authentication.) The reliquaries in which the relics are contained are described in detail, as is their particular significance for the churches and other institutions in which they are kept. The book is extensively illustrated, the illustrations being principally of the reliquaries and *monilia* in which the relics are housed, allowing the reader to appreciate how they have been cared for over the years and how they are presented to the faithful today. For most of the relics there are also reproductions of the certificates of authenticity issued by the Church authorities.

The relics of St Cyril as they exist today are very fragmentary, both because little of the saint's remains survives, and because that little has frequently been divided, so that many of the relics described measure only a few millimetres. There is nothing like the 'os brachii integrum' seen by Theodore Moretus at Brno in or shortly before 1558. Though there is no reason to impugn their authenticity, their acceptance is nevertheless a matter of faith.

There is no doubt of a continuing cult of St Cyril beginning immediately after he was interred at San Clemente, but there are considerable gaps in the historical record, between the presumed translation of the relics when the church was reconstructed at the beginning of the twelfth century and the next mention of them in 1420, and between their removal for safekeeping in 1798 and their return to San Clemente in 1963. IVANIČ discusses this history in some detail, drawing (like everyone who has addressed this subject in the last fifty years) extensively on the work of Fr LEONARD BOYLE, though the arrangement and scope of the book do not allow for an exhaustive historical account, for which the reader will still return to Fr BOYLE's publications. It is also noticeable (but not discussed in detail) that the understanding of the relics over the years has been influenced by mediaeval and early modern traditions regarding the life and work of St Cyril that are now regarded as without historical foundation, so that the labels accompanying the relics of St Cyril ('and Methodius' in some instances!) may identify him as a bishop and even as a martyr.

Division of relics has meant that San Clemente has been the source of relics of St Cyril now held elsewhere, particularly in recent years. It has also been suggested that Charles IV obtained relics of St Cyril there during his visit to Rome in 1355; while this belongs to the realm of possibility rather than established fact, he did present such relics to Prague Cathedral at some time during the next decade.

The other main source of the relics in modern times has been the Benedictine abbey at Rajhrad, which has possessed them since 1764, when they were obtained from the Collegiate Church (now the Cathedral) at Brno, where they had been only since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Their earlier provenance is unknown; both Prague and Rome have been suggested. It is probable that the relic at Nitra (in turn the source for relics elsewhere in Slovakia), obtained from Rome in 1926, represents part of the Rajhrad relics that remained in Rome after they were sent there for authentication and division in 1881. Most mysterious is the origin of the reliquary with supposed relics ('s predpokladanými ostatkami') of St Cyril at Rajec, which was apparently acquired in Rome (though it is not known precisely where) in 1847.

Underlying this book is the concept that St Cyril, as one of the apostles of the Slavs and co-patrons of Europe, has a more universal relevance, and the veneration of his relics is of more than local significance. Accordingly, the original Slovak monograph is accompanied by a parallel text in English. It

is surprising, and unfortunate, that this was not more professionally done. The style is uneven, and sometimes inappropriate for a work of this kind, proper names frequently diverge from the accepted English form, and technical terms may not be rendered by their correct equivalents. This is, however, the only significant flaw in a book which represents a comprehensive and detailed survey of its subject, based on many years of painstaking study of the objects themselves and the archival data concerning them. Although the author modestly suggests that ‘problematiku nemožno považovať za uzavretú’, his work will certainly become the essential point of reference on the subject of the relics of St Cyril for many years to come.

Keywords

Apostles of the Slavs; cult of relics