The Origin of м/μ in Cyrillic Alphabet

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The Bulgarian paleoslavist Klimentina Ivanova's article “The Ancient Bulgarian Glagolitic Alphabet” in “Science and Techniques” magazine, issued in May, has actually become the reason for writing of these notes. The authoress, glorifying the scientific and cultural exploit of the two Thessaloniki brothers, alongside with the analysis of the sacred symbols of the letters, created and borrowed, when created by Constantine the Philosopher, shares her opinion: “Just the letter III, standing for a sound, missing in the Greek, was borrowed from the Hebrew alphabet without any change”(9:19). Emil Georgiev earlier shared this statement as well, expanding the borrowing, “For the sounds III, Ч and Ц, which the Greek alphabet was completely unaware of, assistance was searched from the Hebrew alphabet”(7:69). Other research workers shared the same opinion, as well. (16:93). As the Glagolitic letters, indicated for graphic models, have unconvincing similarity and their resemblance with the Hebrew characters is rather approximate, it is worth making a comparison with the ancient alphabets, accessible for the knowledge of that time. The hypothesis that the graphics of III was not borrowed from the Hebrew alphabet, cannot exactly be proved by documents, thus the undoubted comparison is just the analysis.

Even though the issue of the model of the graphic shape is not of a primary importance, as far as the shape of the letter characters is provisional and not functional, clarification of the sources of borrowing could help for other problems explanation as well.

The modern concept for the alphabet, made up in 855 and known among scientists as “Glagolitsa” (from the ancient Bulgarian verb “glagolati” – speak), is that it is an original graphic writing, creative work of Constantine the Philosopher, who as a monk, accepted the name Cyril, shortly before his death. To render sanctity to the new Slavic characters, St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher, created a new graphic system with the symbolic signs of the holly Christian Trinity – a triangle, a cross and a circle (16:93), supposed to suggest the almighty power, the infinity and perfection of God (or the Sun, identical to Christ, Heaven and Eternity and the holly Trinity, as to Kl. Ivanova -12:18). After the iconoclastic period of time, when the idea of the divinity of icon images overcame, the fighter for the
Trinity worship, created the holly 38 signs, reflecting all the sounds in the Slavic speech. For the fourteen specific Slavic sounds Constantine-Cyril invented new letters. Chernorizets Hrabur (the Brave) in his “Za Bukvite” (“About the Letters”) - О писменехъ affirmed, that the Slavic enlightener created some of the letters “like the image and shape of the Greek letters, others – in compliance with the Slavic speech”. Being aware of the language sounds, he created written characters (letters), which thoroughly rendered all its phonemes. The most original deed, however, is not entirely original, as far as it is preceded by some tradition. Undoubtedly, Constantine the Philosopher was influenced by the alphabets in his time, he was aware of. What is more, the graphics of the letters III/ІІ are in obvious “dissonance” with the whole emblematic symbols of the Glagolic alphabet. (This, of course, does not refer to the Croatian angle glagolic alphabet, which is a later stage in the progress of the glagolic writing, where the silhouette of III is quite in harmony with the rest of the letters (see for exp. 26:347-351). This version of the glagolic alphabet was widely used until 18th century, even in modern Croatian church publications).

Yet P. Shafarik – one of the pioneers of Slavic studies, thought that the author of the Glagolic alphabet was an eminent Orientalist, being aware of many Eastern alphabets. Which were those alphabets?

Constantine the Philosopher got the best education for his time in the Magnaur School in Constantinopolis, so he knew Hebrew and Syrian.

During the time when the Slavic first teacher invented the Glagolic alphabet, the tumultuous disputes on corner-stones issues for the Christian religion, concerning the two-sided essence of God, the divinity of his icon image and his image in general, had already passed. In the Magnaur School, founded by Theodosiy II in 5th C (425), worldly sciences were mainly taught in the two stages -trivium и quadrivium – covering the whole knowledge, preserved in ancient times. Teachers in that higher school were the regents Michael III – Varda and Theocrite, later Leo the Mathematician, former Metropolitan in Thessaloniki (15:259). The future Patriarch Fotiy, who would further be twice the Head of the Patriarchate in Constantinopolis, was Constantine’s teacher and mentor and later on a friend and a counsellor. It was undoubtely the time of blossom of Byzantium culture and science. The university in Constantinopolis when Leo the Mathematician was a rector and the philosophic department of Fotiy was already established, turned into a centre of the antique and Hellenic researches.

Constantine the Philosopher, having his astonishing abilities, being very young then, 17, received a free access to the Emperor’s Court, then he
became a librarian (hartophilax) of the Patriarch in “St. Sophia”’s cathedral. When he was 24, he was elected for the opponent in the dispute with Anniy, a patriarch-iconoclast. However, he left his worldly career and honours and withdrew in “St. Polychrone” monastery in the Olympus mountain in Asia Minor. His elder brother, then occupying a high religious order (archon) in a Slavic principality, not mentioned by the biographer, who “witnessed many tumults and crime in life”, had already withdrawn in the same monastery, having taken monastic vow under the name of Methodius and living with his books only (книгахь прилежа), as it is mentioned in his full-life detailed Biography (Kliment Ohridski, Collected Works, 3, p. 78-79).

The mountain of Olympus in Asia Minor in the then called Vytiniya (the ancient Lykiya), was made famous by Homer and Pindar, for its myth for Belerophont, who restrained the winged Pegasus and triumphed over the monstrous fire-breathing Chimera.

During the time when the two brothers were there, the 50-ies of 9th century, (26:71), there were thirty large monasteries in Olympus, founded in 7th century. Their abbots, belonging to the Byzantium spiritual aristocracy, played a considerable role in the political life and in the struggles against the iconoclasts. The biographers mentioned only that after his Saracen (Arab) mission, Constantine the Philosopher refused a lecturer’s desk in the Magnaur School, spent a long time in seclusion and started for the monastery where his brother Methodius was “…and remained to live there, praying to God and conversing only with books. Both brothers were occupied with the same thing…” (Full-Life Biography, p. 19). It is considered that there, in the monastery in Olympus, the two brothers started inventing the alphabet, or at least they finished what Constantine the Philosopher had started before that. Most probably, the idea of the invention of a Slavic alphabet came to his mind and he shared it with Fotiy during their Saracen (Arab) mission. As to the full-time detailed Biography of Methodius, “…then God appeared in front of the Philosopher and showed the Slavic characters (writing) and he, when created the letters, wrote [the Gospel] lecture” (Kl. Ohridski, III, p. 136). St. “St. Polychrone” monastery was among the greatest centres of Byzantium monkshood. Methodius became an abbot in it after he refused the archbishop’s rank, offered by both the emperor and the patriarch (26:72).
The men of letters, no doubt, disposed of the necessary literature, not only theological, but quite diverse as well, in this monastery\textsuperscript{1}. It is considered by paleoslavistics, that the period before the Moravian mission of the two brothers, was the time when the first Slavic alphabet (Glagolitic) was invented, as well as the time when the basic Christian books were translated (7:59). Constantine the Philosopher had the existing alphabets, known for that time, at his disposal.

The educated Hellenists knew, that their writing, as well as a lot of practical achievements, had originated in the East (6:220). Patriarchs, whom Constantine the Philosopher knew, were the reference point towards comprehension of the divine will, of the cosmic order and getting acquainted with the Christian universe and human salvation. The works of John Chrysostom, Vassiliy the Great, Cyril Alexandriyski, Grigoriy the Theologian, Atanassiy Alexandriyski, belong to the higher Christian authorities. The new letters were created for the glorification of the divine creation – the single unified Logos, leading the mankind to the supreme truth – awareness of the divine. Our contemporary way of living does not belong to the “code” of that thinking and it is difficult for us to touch upon the apostles’ endeavor of Constantine the Philosopher – to invent the holly letters of the Slavs, so that they could worship God in their own language.

During his Hazar mission, Constantine the Philosopher translated in eight parts the grammar of Dionysus the Thracian (Dionysus the Grammarian) from Hebrew into Greek. That was the standard reference textbook for all European grammars until 18\textsuperscript{th} century (1:153).

In the article, mentioned above, Kl. Ivanova, is reminding of the opinion of the Middle Ages erudites for the Syrian as being the primary language for the mankind before the Babel (12:18). Her opinion, however, is that “it is senseless and wrong to associate at all costs the Glagolitic alphabet with some transitional graphic structure (again there). Comparing III character in Syrian, Hebrew, Samaritan and Aramaic tables from the long article for the Hebrew alphabet, (11,II:36-78), we can observe a progress in its writing from \textit{\textbf{W}} in \textit{\textbf{W}} next to \textit{\textbf{W}} for 4\textsuperscript{th}, 5\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th} centuries (1219) (in Table I, p. 59-60). The sign \textit{\textbf{V}} in versions (but with the earliest writing \textit{\textbf{W}})(11:61-62) is typical for the Aramaic period of the pre-Christian age. Concerning Palestine, Palmyra, Italy and Aden, the tables point out that same sign \textit{\textbf{V}} becomes closer and closer to the contemporary writing of the

\textsuperscript{1} The locality of this famous and rich for its time monastery, is not known. P. Dinekov locates it “not far from Olympus, in an area, called Sygriana”(26:72).
Hebrew letter shin-$\Psi$(11: 63-64). It is known that the Hebrew alphabet originated from the Phoenician ancient Semitic writing, traces of which can be spotted in all contemporary alphabets. “The Hebrew alphabet is most closely connected with the Phoenician alphabet, with its primary signs” as to the Jewish Encyclopaedia, issued in many volumes (11, II :36).

The most ancient written monuments belong to the pre-Babylonian time and they are “rather from the Samaritans, than from the Jews” (again there: 39, 41). The oldest preserved inscription, known as the Stone of the Moabitish king Mesha, was discovered in 1868 in the area around Dibbon in Moabite, where his glorious campaigns against Israel were described as well as his victorious deeds. The sign III in this inscription is $\Psi$. It is known that in pre-Babylon time in Palestine, Hebrew was spoken and Hebrew alphabet was used for writing and only the higher classes were speaking and writing in Aramaic. A considerable change in the language occurred after the Babylonian conquest. The Aramaic language, spread all over Asia Minor and used alongside with the local dialects, gradually, together with the characters, started to be used by the Jews as well (11:39). Thus, “the contemporary Hebrew alphabet has an Aramaic origin” (11:41). The Aramaic letter in all historic tables looks like the Babylon-Phoenician - with graphics of $\Psi$ (21:Fig. 69,79).

The mission, well-known by the biographers, in which Constantine the Philosopher was sent to the Saracens, besides the concrete political tasks (release of captives), had also cultural and mainly theological goals. The first one from his diplomatic missions – in the Arabic caliphate, was probably in 851-854, during the rule of Caliph al-Mutauakkille (1:93), known as the most ambitious chaser of people with different religions among his predecessors (again there: 89-91), and that mission was of extreme importance for the Christian enlightener. That was a meeting between two cultural worlds in time not only of wars, but also of intellectual competition on both theological and scientific levels.

It was a kind of a “collision” between two emperor’s scientific schools-Constantinopolis Higher Magnaur School and the Baghdad “House of Wisdom”(1:88). Constantine the Philosopher, in polemics with the most enlightened and progressive clerics, poets, thinkers and scientists in the caliph’s court, moved from Baghdad to Samara (1:86), deepened his knowledge and gained experience in the pure religious and scientific disputes. He got to know the Arabic language and writing, considered as valid for the caliphate, with the canonic eight Arabic characters (1:92) for 9th – 10th centuries. S. Averintsev, a Russian literature theoretician and critic,
considers that the circle of scholars, poets, interpreters, non-Muslims, whose merits played an important role for the progress of the Arabic culture, were of extremely significance for the Slavic enlightener. As to the same author, the Syrians considered the languages of the three-language inscription over Jesus’ head – Hebrew, Greek and Latin – for being desecrated by the sin of God’s killing languages, and theirs, the Syrian language – was clean. As to the Bulgarian follower of Constantine’s deed, Chernorizets Hrabur (the Brave), Adam was already speaking in Syrian...

Because the attempts to find a model of the graphics of III in the Syrian alphabet do not obviously lead to a solution, another possibility, that has recently been spread in Bulgaria, should also be verified. Reference is made to the so called “Runic characters” from the thirty stone inscriptions in the proto Bulgarians’ languages, published by V. Besheveliev in 1984. It was then, that the researcher paid attention to the high cultural level of Khan Asparouh’s Bulgarians, who had migrated from Phanagory and he mentioned the writing tradition, preceding their moving to inhabit the Balkans (2:170-171). “The Runic characters” (9:34) are the subject of investigation of P. Dobrev in his “The Stone Book of the Proto Bulgarians”, published in 1992, where the author attempts to decipher and read the script over the epigraphic monuments and he defines it as consisting of letters, written from left to right (9:39). The author used a computer model HF for the deciphering of the 38 characters (following the row of letters in the Cyrillic alphabet), which helped him to ascertain the sound identity of more specific and rare characters. The writing of the characters 33II and У (9:41) were interesting in that first Bulgarian alphabet. The author considers that these inscriptions were written by the “lines and cuttings”, which Chernorizets the Brave mentioned in his work “On the Letters” (О писменех): Νь чьртами різазами писаахон и гатаахон погани сонште (they were writing with lines and cuttings and were speaking as pagans).

The key that P. Dobrev used in deciphering of the scripts of the proto Bulgarians, are the deciphered writings of Alans and Ossetians, who lived once near Kubrat’s Bulgarians (9:44) and were their neighbours. The author’s thesis refers to the transfer-borrowing of the written characters of the East – from the mountains of Pamir (the ancient Imeon) and Hindu Kush. The written characters of the regions, once inhabited by the proto-Bulgarians, were compared and the author mentioned ψ (p. 67) for the written character of II, ψ/ゅ (p. 75),  GridBagConstraints (p.77). The possibilities for writing are various. They grow in number with the deciphering of the inscription over the seven-rays rosette from the first Bulgarian capital
Pliska: \( \checkmark \) and \( \checkmark \) for “имо” and \( \checkmark \) for “им” (9:85), i.e. the first two characters are topological and bi-phonemic, the second is monophonemic. P. Dobrev points out a character \( \checkmark \) with the sound identity of “им” among the eight diphthongs and ligatures. The differences can be explained with the “two-variants of the same writing”, the first variant as “more ancient, drifting closer to the alphabets of Elam and Parthia, the second – appearing later, originated in the way to character improvement and standardization of the original ancient Bulgarian script “ (p. 85). The Elam script has not yet been deciphered and its analogues are not appropriate. The character \( \checkmark / \checkmark \) which the author deciphers as “имо” has its approximate analogue in the Cyprus syllable writing, partly deciphered by J. Smith, an Asyrologist: for “so” syllable in the table of the deciphered characters stands the character \( \checkmark \) (14:267), but it cannot be accepted as borrowed, having in mind the area and time, in which the proto Bulgarians appeared on the historical stage. “The letter \( \Pi \) appears for the first time” in one of the inscriptions, published by P. Dobrev, discovered in the town of Sarkel on the river Don, which letter was used, as to the author, in the shape of a modern written character in Cyrillic (9:150). It is present in one more script from the same region (again there:149). A character, similar to it, appears in an inscription on a rock by the road, leading to the village of Kalugeritz, Shoumen region, Bulgaria - \( \Psi \) (10:147). These are signs, preceding the invention of the Slavic alphabet. P. Dobrev is still alone in his attempts to decipher this script. The researcher supposes for the characters of the inscriptions in North Caucasus and Ukraine, similar to these found in Bulgaria later, that “some archaic modification of the proto Bulgarian script, from which, with the time passing, sprang that version, which the inscriptions in Pliska, Murfatlar and other early Bulgarian dwellings show us” (9:72).

Attempts are made in the Bulgarian literature to find out the roots of this “Runic” script aiming at deepening the knowledge for the script origin and in this context guesses are made for borrowings even from the Chinese hieroglyph script. The borrowed from it hieroglyph \( \Pi \) standing for \( \Pi \) character with sound equivalent to [шъ] and the meaning - “mountain” (see P. Goliyski, Ziezi, from where the Bulgarians come, Tangra, Sofia, 2003, page 265 etc.). It is known that the millennium old Chinese script was unified during the epoch of Tsin-Syao-Chzhuhan in 221 B.C. The similarity in the way of writing of the Chinese hieroglyph and of the Cyrillic/Glagolic letter is obvious. It might be assumed that the Proto Bulgarians in their contacts with the Chinese Empire might have “borrowed” the way of
writing of III, when they started from their ancient motherland in the Imeon (the Pamirs) mountain, similarly to the Germans who – influenced by the Latin Script and opposed to it, created their own Runic characters in their constant contact - both peaceful and military – with the Roman legions in the Southern Rhein area, in the beginning of the new era. However, until this moment there is no explanation which way this “borrowing” took place and how the creator of the Slavic alphabet Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher got acquainted with it, so that he included it in the Slavic alphabet.

The Copts, like the Syrian concepts for the holiness of their own language, had similar ones as well (quotations on 1:91). This argumentation was certainly of help to the compiler of the Glagolic characters for the Slavic sounds, to look for a model in the Copts’ alphabet. At the same time, the Alexandrian church made the establishment of the first theological Christian school possible, the Catechistic School, which was then the living connection between the antique knowledge and Christianity. Egypt was the place of origin of the script. Platon in Phileb (18 c-d) wrote, “Toth comprehended that there was a cohesive connection, which had brought everything to some unification”. Maybe to render more divine sacredness to the new alphabet, he turned to the origin of letters...

In spite the Old Testament negative connotations with Egypt about the biblical Exodus, the ancient land of pharaohs, was one of the cradles of human culture, that gave birth to the holy “words of god” – mdw ntr. Joseph’s family with the newly-born Jesus escaped to that land of God, as the millennium tradition for God, born with a human face – the king, was there. Jesus was there “at home”. This also was the land of the monks-hermits as to the example, given by St. Antonio and by the first monks monasteries. There Panthen, according to the legend, invented the Copts alphabet in 2nd century A.D., borrowing the 24 Greek letters for the similar phonemes and adding seven letters for the specific Copt ones. ... Though being separated from the rest of the Christian world after the Chalcedonian Ecumenical Council in 451, the Alexandrian church retained its influence and authority, being the place of origin of the patriarchs. The creator of the first Slavic alphabet was well aware of the history of the church. He also knew the Copts alphabet as one of the numerous peoples’ alphabets: in the polemic dispute in Venice in 867 against the trilingual heresy and in defense of the Slavic letters, he advanced his arguments and mentioned other scripts as well – these of Armenians, Suri, Persians, Avazians, Iberians, Sugdians, Goths, Obrians, Thirsians, Khasarians and Arabs (as to the full life
biography of Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher, Kliment Ohridski, Collected Works, III, p. 138). The very name of the letter III as to the oldest Abecedaries, that contains the letters names, the Paris Abecedarium bulgaricum of 11th – 12th century and the Bandurich one of 13th century, in Latin and Greek it is sa/ssa = ma. The old Bulgarian names, except a few of them, originated independently from the Greek ones. Not related, as if random words from different grammatical forms were chosen: nouns, verbs, adverbs, pronouns. The names of the letters originated from the words, which were in the beginning of each line of an Alphabetic Prayer, whose prototype was actually the famous poetic eulogy, which was ascribed to Constantine Preslavsky (of Preslav) (7:133), i.e. originates from an ancient acrostic. The designation of III in those later ABCD books was “IIIA”, which in the old Bulgarian does not imply any meaning. III has almost the same designation in the Copt’s alphabet – “.ma(ﬁ)”. It comes from new Egyptian into Copt and is designated with the hieroglyph III with the phonetic value of s3j. (Alongside with the rest of the meanings, s3i is the word for destiny in Egyptian, a notion, which appeared in the beginning of 18th dynasty (Wb,V, 403), which later on embodied the God of Destiny as well.) This hieroglyph occupies a place in the subsystem of the diphthong characters in the overall phonetic-ideographic system of the Egyptian script (18:7), which K. Sethe defines as diphthongs (zweikonsontig) and partly “words”(25:39) (as Griffith (The System of Writing in Ancient Egypt, JAS, 1900, vol. 30, pp.153-159) – into two-letter (bi-letteral) or “syllabic” characters). It is notable that both in the Copt and in the Glagolian alphabets the letter III has no numeric value, which is difficult to be taken as a pure coincidence.

The letter III, graphically close to III, is not considered as a ligature of III and T, because, as the Bulgarian paleoslavists convincingly prove, “it meant [шчъ] or [шътъ] in Cyril-Methodius language (5:106 и 8:246). This letter reflects [шчъ]/ [шътъ] for the proto-Slavic *t̥j, *kt̥, as the data from the Slavic toponymy in present-day Greece and Albania, undoubtedly show. This letter in the old Bulgarian monuments is among the rest of [ш] type of consonants (5:106), and the consonant group was once a phonetic whole (monophoneme) of a voiceless consonant, inherited from the proto Slavic *t̥j (5:107). This fact makes Constantine the Philosopher not only the first teacher of the Slavs, but also the “first dialectologist” (8:246).

A hypothesis for the borrowing of the graphics of the letter III (and that of the letter III, which is closer to its meaning and writing) in the Glagolitic and in the Cyrillic alphabet as well, covers a quite large geographic
and time area — starting from Egypt, one of the cradles of human written tradition, up to the borders of the Chinese Empire, through millennia of diverse cultural influences and language variegation. The location where the Slavic alphabet was created, is a region of a mixture of a great number of written traditions. What happened in 9th century, the creation of a new alphabet in the Byzantium monastery in Asia Minor, was a great human achievement preserved and transferred through the ages - the script, so that “all the Slavs could read the books”. The Egyptian way of writing of III seems to be the “fatal” connection (because “fatal” means “fate”) among the scripts, which “brings everything towards a kind of unification”.
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