

MISSION AND CONVERSION IN THE LIVES OF CONSTANTINE-CYRIL AND
METHODIUS

By

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In the last third of the ninth century, the brothers Constantine-Cyril and Methodius embarked upon their mission to the Khazars, a Turkic polity that controlled parts of the Crimea and Black Sea region at the time, and the Moravians, a Slavic-speaking polity located between the Frankish and Byzantine Empires. As conversion mission, the Khazar mission is commonly regarded as a failure, whereas the Moravian mission is regarded as a success that paved the way for the spread of Christianity through the Slavic language. For the ultimate results of the Cyrillo-Methodian endeavor, one must go beyond Moravia, because when Methodius died in 885, his disciples were expelled. Methodius could not continue teaching without the patronage of the local ruler, which was easily lost in the midst of impermanent alliances of the ninth century. Similarly, the small number of conversions made by Constantine-Cyril in Khazaria were unconnected to the diplomatic success of procuring prisoners from the ruler of the Khazars. I reached this conclusion by comparing the two hagiographical texts, reading them through the lens of several conversion models. I make use of Richard Bulliet's theory of individual conversion as social conversion. Such a conversion exhibits

mundane details, such as relocating to or being accepted by a concrete new community of co-religionists. However, this model is only feasible in a few cases throughout this study, and the historicity of such accounts as described in the texts cannot be attested. Indeed, Karl Morrison's theory of individual conversion as a metaphor rather than a historical conversion is more applicable throughout the text. Such a lens fits well with the nature of the hagiographical texts, probably written for a Slavic-speaking audience which was already Christian, and not a diplomatic account of Constantine-Cyril's mission. Bulliet's model of group conversion is applicable to the two-hundred Khazars, To determine the extent of conversion, I used Bulliet's model, which stipulates that for conversion to have occurred, there must be a recognition of a spiritual authority, autonomy of the religious authority such as a church having jurisdiction over legal affairs, and a merging of language with religion, during which a liturgical language comes into use. None of this occurs during or following the conversion of the Khazars, indicating that this conversion was not a lasting one. I note a further complication, because several figures that Constantine-Cyril met simply promise to convert, and he simply accepted it. Such promises of conversion occurred where there was initial, but not irremediable hostility of the would-be convert towards Constantine-Cyril. If the group or individual were implacably hostile towards Constantine-Cyril, confrontation and triumph over that group or individual would be the only option. The portrayal of the Khazars as potential converts shifted to a portrayal of the Khazars as irremediable in the time of Methodius's biographer, as the Khazars had become a dangerous enemy to the Byzantine Empire. The hostile tone of Methodius's biographer is visible at several points in the disputation with the Jews as well, leading me to believe that some portions

in the disputation were added later. Later interpolations also encompass the linguistic portion of the *Life of Constantine*, because of the reference to the anachronistic Slavic letters. Similarly, portions of *The Life of Methodius* appear to have been written later than the late ninth century. The *Life of Constantine* contains one thread of continuity, that of the Samaritan and his son converting to Christianity, which foreshadows the hardness of the Jews' hearts during the disputation. I have not dealt with this significance with adequate thoroughness and more research needs to be done on the significance of this contrast. Through the course of my research, I was able to provide some possible answers for these important questions of authorial perspective as well as address my central argument: the conversions in both these texts had no bearing on the diplomatic thrust of imperial missions to the frontier.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Mission and conversion have long been, and continue to be a preoccupation among historians. Mission as understood in this paper refers to an individual or group traveling outside of their land to achieve a purpose, whether it be instruction, securing peace, or conversion. Conversion can take many forms. It can be individual or involve a group or part of a group. Individual conversion may be a deeply internal, individual phenomenon involving an abandoning of old beliefs, or a more mundane event. The latter, as Richard Bulliet wrote in his *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*, can be gauged by shifting in the convert's place in society, resulting in him leaving the community of his old religion and relocating to an area where his co-religionists are more numerous, sometimes out of necessity because he became legally or economically dead to his former co-religionists, and/or was recognized as a member of the new community upon conversion. Bulliet developed this concept and called it social conversion. A third type of conversion, elaborated upon by Karl Morrison in *Understanding Conversion*, the specific historical circumstances of which may be lost amidst the concerns of author and contemporary audience, acts as a metaphor for underlying processes, not necessarily referring to a historical conversion. Conversions of a group or part of a group may indicate a single event or process in which the baptism of a ruler also changes the religious orientation of his subjects. Bulliet also provides a model for observing mass conversion, or at least conversion of a group. For conversion of a group to take place, a measure of local autonomy is needed along with the presence of a formal authority structure, a fusion of language with religion, and a

religious authority that speaks on behalf of a community.¹ In what follows, I will use Morrison and Bulliet's idea in order to complicate the portrayal of conversion in the *Lives* of Constantine and Methodius.²

¹ Karl Morrison. *Understanding Conversion*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 5. Richard Bulliet. *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period. An Essay In Quantitative History*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 33.

² In the debate on conversion, it is impossible to refrain from referring to the foundational work by Arthur Darby Nock. *Conversion: the old and the new in religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). He defined conversion as a psychological turning, and an abandonment of one faith for another. Nock focused on the individual conversion of intellectuals writing on their conversion experiences. Standing in direct contrast is Ramsay MacMullen's *Christianizing the Roman Empire*. (A.D. 100-400). (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1986. He deals with mass conversions of armies, involving little more than a public acclamation of having become Christian. An example of conversion of a people as a process, rather than an event, would be Bonnie Effros's "De *partibus Saxoniae* and the Regulation of Mortuary Custom: A Carolingian Campaign of Christianization of the Suppression of Saxon Identity?". *Revue Belge de Philologie et d' Histoire* 75 (1997): 267-286. Karl Morrison's *Understanding Conversion* forces a closer reading of what conversion actually means, usually dictated by time and place, gender, social status, and a host of other considerations. Such a concept of conversion attacks generalizations and undermines a universal definition of conversion.

CHAPTER 2 ARGUMENT

It is scarcely possible to speak of Christianity among the Slavs without citing the famous mid ninth-century mission of Constantine-Cyril and his brother Methodius to Moravia. ¹ In 863, Rastislav, the Moravian prince, requested an embassy to instruct the Moravians in the Christian faith.² Modern historians and the author of the *Life of Constantine* laud Constantine, referred to as the Philosopher. His creation of Glagolitic and translation of the liturgy into the Slavic language facilitated the propagation of Christianity in the Slav lands. ³ For the above reasons, his mission is rightly viewed as having a permanent impact on the Christian world. In 861, Constantine and Methodius were sent on an embassy to the Khazars.⁴ However, historians such as Constantine Zuckerman consider the mission a failure from a conversion standpoint, and thus are inclined to marginalize its significance.⁵ The Khazar mission is significant in that it was a diplomatic mission to secure Khazar military aid. Constantine supposedly sealed a Byzantine-Khazar alliance by means of an exchange of prisoners.⁶ Several times during

¹ The top-down method of conversion usually supposes harmony between power and conversion, and there is no doubt that Constantine's work in Khazaria and Moravia and Methodius's work in Moravia were top-down missions.

² Francis Dvornik. "Photius et la Reorganisation de l'academie patriarchale," in *Photian and Byzantine Ecclesiastical Studies*. (London: Varorium Reprints, 1974), 105.

³ Ivan Duichev, *Kiril and Methodius*, trans. Spass Nikolov (New York: Columbia University Press , 1985), 23.

⁴ Marvin Kantor. Introduction. *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1983), 5. The Old Church Slavonic *Lives* have been dated to the 870s and 890s respectively, and they are held to be authentic. The English translation is based on the fifteenth century text that has been copied from the ninth-century text.

⁵ Constantine Zuckerman, "The Khazars And Byzantium: First Encounter" in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives. Selected Papers From the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*. Eds. Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai & Andras Rona-Tas. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 400.

⁶ There is not enough evidence to interpret the two-hundred captives as synonymous with Khazar converts. Although captives could refer to captives of God, or Christians, prisoners and converts (students from Moravia and Pannonia) are clearly differentiated in the Moravian part of the *Life*. As to how

the Moravian mission, the aim was also diplomatic, to forge a Byzantine-Moravian alliance.⁷ Both missions were diplomatic, but the Moravian mission went beyond a temporary stay in a foreign land for negotiations. Indeed, after several reversals, Methodius remained in Moravia and made significant headway in establishing Byzantine-supported Christianity in the land, picking up from where Constantine had left off. However, being an imperial mission, it could only achieve conversions with support from an authority that could organize the missions, fund them, and hold the authority structure there when it had been established. However, with the fickleness of shifting alliances, it was not possible to sustain Byzantine-supported Christianity in Moravia, and the mission dispersed. In this paper, I will examine the evidence—primarily the *Lives* of Sts. Constantine and Methodius—to see whether their mission was at all necessary for establishing an alliance with Moravia, and then later on, for keeping the peace and patronage of the local ruler. More specifically, I will ask whether promises of baptism, or an actual conversion were at all necessary for achieving the diplomatic aim of the Khazar and Moravian missions.

the captives came to be captive, it could be through war, slave raids, hostages, or some other method, but there is very little, if any material evidence for slavery in the early Middle Ages,. The topic has been covered extensively by Michael McCormick almost exclusively on the basis of written sources. Archaeological sources—shackles, chains, and neck collars—are also difficult to interpret, and in any case do not apply to the episode of Constantine’s release of prisoners from Khazar captivity. Ihor Ševčenko. “Religious Missions Seen From Byzantium” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12 (1988), 12, argues that the nature of the Khazar mission was diplomatic, although disguised as a request sent from the local leader.

⁷ Dmitri Obolensky. *Byzantium and the Slavs*. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994) 44.

CHAPTER 3 APPROACH

In this paper, I will first provide an overview of Constantine's life, followed by a discussion of the two texts of the *Lives*, which are texts with different concerns and emphases. In order to substantiate my argument, it is necessary first to compare the two accounts of the Khazar mission and determine what were important issues to the biographers, account for the geographical and temporal distance that made some issues relevant or irrelevant, and try to get a sense of each biographer's perspective, because that determines the way that the biographers presented mission and conversion, as to whom could be converted, whom the brothers were aiming to convert, whom were they avoiding and who was an inveterate enemy that could not be converted. If no conversion occurred, the individual promised that he or she would be baptized. Such situations were far more common than explicit conversions or conversions that can be discerned in Bulliet's and Morrison's model. Finally, the texts indicate whether or not the brothers or their biographers found the promise of baptism satisfactory, or if they were specifically aiming to achieve conversion then and there.¹ If an individual baptism occurred, I look to see if discernible signs of leaving or joining communities are present. If such details about the impact of the individual conversion are absent, whether on a mundane or spiritual level, then it is better to use Morrison's idea of conversion as a metaphor since the particular meaning for the convert is absent and we are left with the biographer's perspective. Concerning groups, if conversion was achieved, I will Bulliet's model to try to assess its success in the long-term. I then

¹ Stephan Nikolov. "The pagan Bulgars and Byzantine Christianity in the eighth and ninth centuries," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 13, no. 3 (2000): 342. Nikolov complicates the matter of conversion and baptism, arguing that baptism can occur before official conversion, like in the case of the pagan Bulgars, whose leader Boris was baptized before Bulgaria became a recognizably Christian realm.

examine each incident's relation to the diplomatic thrust of the mission to determine if it was necessary or not, if the conversion produced by the encounter was incidental, or if a conversion earlier in the mission contributed to the success of the diplomatic ends of the mission. I compare the Moravian portions of the *Lives of Constantine and Methodius*, which overlap at the beginning, and then examine each of Methodius's encounters with non-Byzantine individuals or groups, resulting or not resulting in baptism, a promise of baptism, or an actual baptism, and determine if these were incidental or necessary for the success of the diplomatic aims of the mission. To this end, I am drawing on pertinent historical arguments but focusing mainly on the texts.

CHAPTER 4 CONSTANTINE-CYRIL AND THE *LIFE*

Constantine-Cyril was born in 826 in Thessaloniki to a high-ranking officer in imperial service. Because of the high status of his father, he was also destined for imperial service, but opted to continue his scholarly enterprises. Constantine-Cyril was appointed patriarchal librarian.¹ At that time, there was a dispute in the last third of the ninth century, over which faction would control the patriarchy. There were the radicals, who were violently opposed to the old iconoclasts and wanted monastic reform. Bardas, the brother of the emperor, wishing to regain influence over the patriarchy, assassinated Constantine's protector, Theoctistus, and Constantine fled for his life.² In the early 850s, he renounced the world and joined Methodius in a monastery on Mount Olympus as a monk. In 860, the Rus' attacked Constantinople while Michael III was on campaign against the Arabs. Before departing for Cherson or while at Cherson, Constantine learned Hebrew. He returned to Constantinople and soon after that, under the patronage of Photius, he and Methodius traveled to Khazaria to form an alliance against the Rus', as suggested by modern historians, such as Martin Hurbanič,³ After his return to Constantinople, Constantine-Cyril taught philosophy. In 862, the Moravian prince asked the emperor to send a delegation to Moravia to curb the influence of the Frankish

¹ Francis Dvornik. *Byzantine Missions Among the Slavs*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 57. This post rendered Constantine-Cyril the representative of the patriarch. It was essentially an administrative position, and one may wonder if this initial administrative experience contributed partly to his being chosen to participate in the embassy to the Khazars.

² Dvornik, 121. Shaun Tougher. *The Reign of Leo VI (886-912). Politics and People*. (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 76. Dvornik casts late ninth-century ecclesiastical affairs as a struggle between Extremists and Moderates. Shaun Tougher puts forth a different view, according to which the Constantinopolitan clergy acted mainly out of individual impulses and interests.

³ Martin Hurbanič, "The Byzantine Missionary Concept and its Revitalisation in the 9th Century. Some Remarks on the Content of Photius' Encyclical Letter *Ad Archiepiscopales Thronos per Orientem Obtinentes*" .*Byzantinoslavica* 63 (2005) 112.

church. Constantine gave the Slavic letters to the Pope and died in Rome at age 42 in 869. ⁴*The Life of Constantine* was written by an anonymous Slavic-speaking biographer under the guidance of Methodius in 870, either during his captivity at the hands of the Frankish bishops or when he was teaching and spreading Christianity in Moravia. The account included Constantine's writings as well, or at least that is what the biographer seems to imply. Also, some parts appear to have been written in the 880s. At least in part, the text seems to be, given the volatile confessional context, a justification for the use of Slavic in the liturgy and a defense of the right the Byzantine, Slavic-teaching missionaries had to work in Moravia. The conflict with the Frankish bishops had been exacerbated by Methodius's time, and made this defense of Byzantine missionary work necessary. If the Slavic-speaking audience was convinced by the text, the Frankish clergy was not dissuaded from protecting their jurisdiction in the Slavic lands, because the issue did not disappear in *The Life of Methodius*.⁵ The audience of the *Life* probably consisted of literate Slavic Christians.⁶

⁴ Marvin Kantor, trans., *Life of Constantine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1983), 18:37, 79. After his death, Methodius administered the church in Moravia, until he died in Moravia. Some historians believed that he was killed by the Frankish bishops. His Slavic followers were reportedly sold to Venice, whence they were returned to Constantinople. In this paper, I subscribe to Shaun Tougher's argument that Methodius's disciples, or at least some of them, became refugees in Bulgaria. Tougher, 137. I acknowledge that I am using a translation of both texts, and as a result it is impossible to grasp the full nuances of the original text.

⁵ Dvornik, 154.

⁶ Dvornik, 62.

CHAPTER 5 METHODIUS AND THE *LIFE*

Not much is known about Methodius's early life. He was well-born, and well-spoken of by the nobles of Thessaloniki. The Emperor put him in charge of an administrative unit which was inhabited by Slavs, and accustomed him to teaching them. While Constantine-Cyril veered towards the philosophical, Methodius sought the more practical application of Church law. After ruling the unit for a while, he became a monk on Mt. Olympus where we do not hear about him until the Khazar mission and Constantine come into the story. His participation in the mission to the Khazars was secondary. After Methodius and Constantine returned from Khazaria, Michael III and Photius reportedly forced him to become the archbishop of one of the monasteries at Mt. Olympus.¹ He did not ostensibly come into his own until after 869, when his brother was no longer able to participate in the Moravian mission. The princes of Pannonia, Nitra, and Moravia requested that Methodius undertake the mission to Moravia. He established a following in Moravia, but the power of the Frankish bishops initiated a backlash against the usage of Slavic in the liturgy. The *Life* of Methodius purports that the Frankish bishops insisted that only Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were fit to be used as sacred languages. Methodius was tried in front of Emperor Louis the German for having usurped the diocesan rights of the Bavarian bishops, then imprisoned and released only at the intervention of the pope. He died in 885.²

¹ Marvin Kantor, trans., *Life of Methodius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1983), 4:15, 134, fn. 36. The translation reads the monastery of Polychron. I do not know if this is geographical confusion on the biographer's part.

² Methodius died either by natural causes or at the hands of the Frankish bishops. If the latter is true, it would have been his second time in captivity at their hands. Dvornik, 62.

The *Life* of Methodius is usually ascribed to Kliment of Ochrid, one of Methodius's disciples entrusted with the task of carrying on Methodius's work of translating and teaching after he died. Kliment, or to whom from now on we will refer as Methodius's disciple or the biographer, wrote it, while probably in exile in Bulgaria, as a commemoration and an account of Methodius's life. The author prefaces the biographical portion with an abbreviated Old Testament genealogy and the mission of the Apostles, as well as the Roman Emperors' role in eradicating paganism.³ The central issue of the *Life* is a continuation of the use of Slavic in the liturgy, but the work also deals with Methodius's conflict with the Frankish bishops, while glossing over the earlier events of Constantine-Cyril's *Life*. Constantine's youth and early lifetime events (such as the refusal of the Logothete's gifts) are absent altogether from the *Life of Methodius*. This is understandable, given that this is after all a biography of Methodius. The only overlap refers to periods in Methodius's life during which he and his younger brother worked together, specifically for the Khazar and Moravian missions.

³ Ihor Ševčenko. "Three Paradoxes of Cyrillo-Methodian Mission" in *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World*. (London: Variorum, 1982), 19.

CHAPTER 6 THE KHAZAR MISSION IN THE *LIVES* OF CONSTANTINE AND METHODIUS

The accounts of Khazar mission in the *Lives* of Constantine and Methodius are significantly different in length and content. By far the most detailed account is in the *Life of Constantine*. It begins with Constantine's arrival in Khazaria and describes the events prior to Constantine's arrival at the kagan's residence, including the actual disputation, broken up over several meetings, the conversion of two-hundred Khazars, and the destruction of the sacred tree at Phoullae in Byzantine-held Crimea.¹ Each part of the Khazar mission is of interest because even before arriving at the kaganal residence, Constantine had conversations with several individuals or groups but these interactions did not result in stated conversion: this included a Khazar commander, Magyars, and a cunning and resourceful Khazar. By contrast, the *Life of Methodius* treats the Khazar mission very briefly, and in one part. All the various figures that Constantine met before his arrival at the kaganal residence are now treated indiscriminately in a single category as "Jews", who were "blaspheming the Christian faith beyond measure".² The Emperor sent Methodius and Constantine to end that blasphemy with no other details given. Constantine and Methodius had in fact been sent by the Emperor to put an end to that blasphemy. In the *Life of Constantine*, by comparison, the Emperor sent the brothers in response to a Khazar request of a learned person to participate in a religious disputation with Muslims and Jews. The

¹ Thomas S. Noonan identifies Phoullae as a Byzantine area in the Crimea, near Chersonesus. See Thomas S. Noonan, "Why Orthodoxy did not Spread among the Bulgars of the Crimea during the Early Medieval Era: An Early Byzantine Conversion Model," in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*. eds. Ian Wood and Guyda Armstrong. (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2000), 17.

² *Life of Methodius*, 4:4, 109.

Khazars were the initiators of the mission, not the Byzantines.³ The Emperor wanted Constantine to “preach and answer for the Holy Trinity”⁴, indicating a mission of instruction with a theological bent. Furthermore, the Emperor urged Constantine, who wished to go on the mission in the manner of a humble disciple, to go “honorably and with imperial help.”⁵ While emphasizing Constantine’s humility, the biographer insists on the imperial endorsement of the mission, viewed both as diplomatic embassy and as a mission of theological instruction. By contrast, the version in the *Life of Methodius* draws no distinction between the imperial and the missionary goals: they are of one mind. Methodius’s humility is apparent not so much in his approach to the mission as in the obedience showed to the emperor who asked him to accompany his brother, and his willingness to accept martyrdom. In other words, what seems to be of greater significance here is not Methodius’s humility, but his willingness to accept martyrdom. Methodius proclaims that he is “prepared to die for the Christian faith”⁶ The reference to martyrdom is not present in the *Life of Constantine*. Constantine is barely in any

³ According to Ševčenko, missionaries’ disputations with Muslims and Jews usually fall under the imaginary category of mission, and are a hagiographical motif in various accounts of mission. As I will deal with the religious geography of Khazaria, I take the accounts of disputations as genuine, though biased. Another trope that Ševčenko identifies is the Byzantine diplomacy masked as *requests* from barbarians. Ševčenko’s treatment of this problem implies that the neighbors of Byzantium had absolutely no stake in the political and military affairs involving them. I subscribe to the alternative view apparent in the works of Peter Golden, Thomas Noonan, and Stephen Nikolov, who acknowledge the agency of Byzantium’s neighbors. Ihor Ševčenko. “Three Paradoxes of Cyril-Methodian Mission” in *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World*. (London: Variorum, 1982), 12. Peter Golden, “The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism” in *The World of the Khazars, New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*. Eds. Peter Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai et. Al. (Leiden: Brill) 2007.

⁴ *Life of Constantine*, 4: 14, 43.

⁵ *Life of Constantine*, 4:18, 43.

⁶ *Life of Methodius*, 4: 6, 109.

danger, except from attack by the Hungarians, which seems to be unrelated to the threat potentially posed by the “Jews” of Khazaria in the *Life of Methodius*.

There are several possible explanations as to why the Khazar mission differs so starkly in the two *Lives*. There is the fact that the *Life of Methodius* was composed later when the biographer either did not remember or have access to the specifics of the Khazar mission. The result is a more impressionistic account of the mission.

Furthermore is the possibility that the Khazar mission was a prelude to the mission to the Slavs, but by the time the *Life of Methodius* was composed, the Khazar mission had become irrelevant to what the biographer thought the Slavs should know: his focus was on the Moravian mission. These first two do not seem likely because Methodius's biographer would have been familiar with *The Life of Constantine*. Because of his struggles against the Frankish bishops in Moravia, it is more likely that the biographer's reference to martyrdom was in anticipation of Methodius's difficulty with the bishops.

CHAPTER 7 THE KHAZAR AND MORAVIAN MISSIONS – SUCCESSES?

Before examining the Khazar mission in the *Life of Constantine* in more detail it is important to address the historiographical issue of whether the two missions to the Khazars and to Moravia were successful. This is necessary to know in order to establish if conversion was necessary at all for the mission, or if it was, to what extent. Given the emphasis of the right Byzantine missionaries had to preach in the Slavic lands, it would seem that the *Lives* should reflect the triumph of the mission in Moravia, if not in Khazaria. Modern historians have traditionally treated the Moravian mission as successful and thus in sharp contrast to that of the Khazars, which was seen as a failure. Others have gone so far as to call the Moravian mission a failure as well.¹ The goal of the Khazar mission is believed to have been an exchange of prisoners. Byzantium and Khazaria were neighbors, and had often been allies against their common enemy, the Arabs.² After the Rus' attacked Constantinople in 860, the Khazars and the Byzantines allied for mutual defense against them.³ This was an exception to the rule, for the Khazars and Byzantines had usually been antagonistic to each other.

¹ Edward G. Farrygaum, Robert F. Taft, Gino K. Piovesana. *Christianity Among the Slavs: The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius*. (Rome: *Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium*), 1988. and Ševčenko, "Three Paradoxes", 10. According to those views the Methodian mission was a failure not only because it did not reach its intended purpose (to teach the Moravians through translations of religious books into Slavic), but also because it angered the Frankish missionaries and led to Methodius's imprisonment. The Frankish bishops viewed Moravia as part of their diocese, and they had been instructing Moravians in Latin. It is not hard to understand why they reacted unfavorably to Byzantine encroachment.

² Veselina Vachkova, "Danube Bulgaria and Khazaria as Parts of the Byzantine *Oikoumene*," in *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans* ed. Florin Curta and Roman Kovalev. (Boston: Brill, 2008), 351. Vachkova presents Khazaria as a buffer state to repel advances from the Muslims.

³ Hurbanič, 113.

Relations had deteriorated by 860 to the point where the kagan had gathered a number of Byzantine prisoners at his court.⁴ Byzantium's relationship to Khazaria in the 860s was very similar to that between Byzantium and the Caliphate, ten years earlier. At that time, the Emperor had sent Photius and Constantine to Samarra, in order to facilitate an exchange of prisoners.⁵ At the kagan's court, Constantine asked that instead of the gold, which the kagan had offered him, two-hundred Greeks be released from captivity. This apparently marked the Khazar mission as a success from a diplomatic standpoint. The meaning of the Old Church Slavonic word *pob* used in this context is not very clear. However, the word may be a cognate of the modern Russian word *pobeda*, which means "victory over something or someone, obtained by means of conquest". An alternative possibility, though purely hypothetical, is that the "captives" were in fact defectors, not prisoners of war. In this case, *pob* would be a cognate of *pobeg*, "flight." There actually is a historical precedent supporting this interpretation. During the war between Bulgaria and Byzantium (811-815), a relatively large number of people defected to the Bulgars. One such defector was Byzantios, who fled Constantinople and moved to Bulgaria to put himself in the service of the Bulgar khan Krum.⁶ No such precedent is known for Khazaria, but given the ambiguity of the situation, it remains unclear whether the "captives" were at the kaganal court against their will or as refugees from Byzantine Crimea. In any case, the mission must be

⁴ Jonathan Shepard. "The Khazars' Adoption of Judaism," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 31 (1998): 24. Shepard relates that the construction of the fort at Sarkel did not prevent enmity between Byzantium and Khazaria. The presence of prisoners, most likely of war, is indicative of this.

⁵ Dvornik, 287.

⁶ Nikolov, 331. Defectors are not unusual in times of war, and provided a source of Christianity outside the Empire. These were Christians who had chosen to live in other lands as opposed to the ones that were moved there against their will.

viewed as successful from a diplomatic point of view. The diplomatic aspect was more volatile in the case of the Moravian mission, as the circumstances changed considerably between the arrival of Constantine and Methodius and the expulsion of Methodius's disciples.

If one takes into account only conversion as a missionary goal, then both missions utterly failed. Constantine may have succeeded in converting two-hundred Khazars and the kagan may have promised to have his subjects baptized, but this was hardly a successful conversion. Similarly, although the Moravian mission is generally viewed as a success, in that the Slavs were converted and the groundwork was laid for Eastern Christianity in Slavic lands, Methodius's disciples were eventually expelled from Moravia, and the mission in that country died together with Methodius. The mission was initially successful: the success was temporary. In conclusion, both missions were diplomatic successes, but did not achieve conversion to Christianity. However, Constantine's biographer tried to cast the Khazar mission more positively regardless of its actual failure, and the Moravian mission was still in progress when Constantine died, and was making headway. Regardless of whether or not Constantine achieved a conversion of the individuals or groups that he encountered in Khazaria and Moravia, the interactions between Constantine and the would-be converts were generally positive and the latter were portrayed as receptive to what Constantine had to teach, even though they were ultimately not convinced to convert. Even during the actual dispute, despite the hostility between the parties involved, the language of the disputation remained civil. Intellectually, Byzantium and Khazaria appear to be on good terms, good enough for a disputation to occur, whether or not its description in the *Life* is just a

hagiographical trope. However, the biographer of Methodius saw not just the victory of Constantine and Methodius, and the defeat of a single group of unbelievers. He wrote of a triumph over an enemy, without any mention of instruction. By contrast, in the Moravian mission, the locals were much more receptive to missionary instruction. Clearly, there was a strong shift in attitude towards Khazaria from Constantine's biographer to Methodius's biographer, from more neutral in Constantine's time to more hostile in the time of Methodius's biographer, and to an extent, Constantine's biographer.⁷

⁷ Parts of the *Life of Constantine* reflect the political circumstances during Constantine's lifetime, while others reflect the changes which took place at the time its author wrote the text.

CHAPTER 8 KHAZARIA – WEAKENED POLITY OR DANGEROUS ENEMY?

One way to explain the hostility against Khazaria in *The Life of Methodius*, aside from the geographical and temporal distance, is to point to the deterioration of Byzantine relations with Khazaria. Two interpretations have been offered for this sudden political change. First, relations deteriorated because Khazaria was a weaker polity in the late ninth century, with no ability to protect the northern frontier of Byzantium against the Rus', Pechenegs, and other northern polities. The Khazars had thus lost their position in the *oikoumene*, the sacred space composed of Byzantium, its neighbors that safeguarded it, and the rest of the world.¹ The military power of Khazaria on which the protection of the northern frontier of Byzantium depended, diminished considerably when in 838, the Magyars occupied the western Khazar territories.² This decline continued into the tenth century, to the point that in his *De Administrando Imperio*, Constantine Porphyrogenitus listed the Khazars among the barbarians that could be attacked by other barbarian groups; Other scholars believe, however, that Khazaria had become a too powerful and dangerous enemy for Byzantium. This interpretation is based on the new balance of power in the steppe lands, which was radically altered by the Khazar's ability to recruit new clients, such as the Magyars and, at least initially, the Rus'. The Magyars in turn offered for some time a solid defense on the eastern frontiers of Khazaria, at least until their defeat at the hands of the Pechenegs in the tenth

¹ Vachkova, 340. The *oikoumene*, which placed the Byzantine emperor at the center of the civilized world, was a purely theoretical construct, not linked to historical experience.

² Shepard, 24. See also Roman K. Kovalev. "Creating Khazar Identity Through Coins: The Special Issue Dirhams Of 837/838," in *Early Central And Eastern Europe In The Early Middle Ages*. ed. Florin Curta. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 236, who points to the Magyar problem and the revolt of the Khwarazmian cavalry guard as two of the reasons for the Khazar beg to convert to Judaism.

century.³ On the other hand, some historians believe that Rus' attack on Constantinople took place at the Khazar initiative, even though the Khazars are not mentioned in the attack. Nor are they mentioned in Photius's encyclical about the mission to the Rus'. The Khazars as orchestrators of the Rus' attack on Constantinople would probably preclude cooperation between the two powers, particularly against the Rus', so the Rus' probably attacked Constantinople independently of the Khazars.

Speculation about the strength of the Khazars in the ninth century derives from the Khazars' potential to organize and control various nomadic polities. James Howard-Johnston argues that the Magyars served the Khazars in a military capacity well before the ninth century. Only a long period of time, several hundred years, would account for the great number of Turkic loan words in Hungarian. On the basis of the written and archaeological evidence, it has been surmised that the territory of the Magyars was on the eastern frontier of Khazaria, against any intruder from the steppe corridor. The movement of the Magyars into the steppes north of the Black Sea was followed by the construction of the fort at Sarkel, commonly regarded as a Khazar defensive maneuver involving the know-how from Byzantium. Evidence of destroyed Saltovo-Mayaki settlements in the region of the rivers Don and Donets indicates that the Khazars were unable to offer protection to their subjects, or that the Pechenegs were already independent in the late ninth century. Further weakness resulted from the revolt of the Kabars, a splinter group of the Khazars, against their lords, prompting a unification of

³Andras Rona-Tas. "The Khazars and the Magyars" in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*. Eds. Peter B. Golden et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 275. Shepard, 26. Jonathan Shepard. "Closer encounters with the Byzantine World," in *Pre-Modern Russia and its World*. eds. Kathryn L. Reyerson et. al. (Wiesbaden: Harasowitz Verlag, 2006), 26. Jonathan Shepard endorses the mention of the Kabar revolt against the Khazars and their alliance with the Hungarians. This view shows the Hungarians asserting themselves against the Khazars.

the Kabars and the Magyars and further erosion of Khazar control. The Byzantines started to seek the assistance of the Alans, Rus', and the Pechenegs, because Khazaria was no longer as important to Byzantine diplomacy. By contrast, Howard-Johnston rejects the authenticity of the Kabar revolt, and argues that, according to Hungarian sources, the Khazars were in indirect control of the two groups before and after their unification. Some mention would have been made of them opposing the revolt. At the time of the formation of the Hungarian dynasty, the Hungarian sources state that the dynasty belonged to a tribe. Howard-Johnston infers that this tribe can only be the Khazars, still the most powerful nomadic polity in the ninth century. He sees the unification of the Kabars and the Magyars as a Khazar administrative reform, the goal of which was to increase the Khazar control over the Magyars while assimilating them into a Turkic, instead of Finno-Ugric, group.⁴ Howard-Johnston, observes that in 897 the Pechenegs were called in by Symeon of Bulgaria to drive out the Magyars from the Pontic steppes and into the Carpathian basin. However, a description of the Pecheneg organization suggests that a more powerful group imposed a structure of organization from outside, a capability which for Howard-Johnston, can only be the Khazars. He thus believes, with good reason, that the Pechenegs attacked the Magyars at the orders of the Khazars, who thus broke their relations with Byzantium. This may also explain why the Khazars are given such a cavalier treatment in the *De Administrando Imperio*.⁵ The Khazars, who were so instrumental to the balance of power in the steppes, were implacable enemies of Byzantium in the last decade of the

⁴James Howard-Johnston. "Byzantine Sources for Khazar History," in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*. Eds. Peter B. Golden et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 187.

⁵Shepard, 29.

ninth century and early tenth century. Byzantium therefore enlisted client states such as the Pechenegs to break the power of Khazaria, before the Rus', arguably on their own initiative, destroyed Khazaria in the 960s, because it was a dangerous enemy to Byzantium.

Applying this interpretation to the *Life of Methodius*, one notes the lack of nuance with which Methodius's biographer treats the Khazars. Methodius defeats the Jews in Khazaria through prayer, and Constantine defeats them through eloquence. No reference is made to instruction or teaching, as in the *Life of Constantine*. Methodius's biographer simply related the brothers' grandiose victory over the enemies of Christianity in Khazaria, which he viewed as one undifferentiated group. This triumph over a clearly defined enemy, a non-Christian polity, is similar to Constantine's victory over the Hagarites (Muslims). The Hagarites were cruel barbarians, but not in the same grouping as the Magyars in the *Life of Constantine*, who could be calmed, were clearly independent of any monotheistic authority, and attacked without any apparent or declared reason. By contrast, after the theological disputation, the Hagarites tried to poison Constantine, because of his successful attempt to diminish the importance of the wealth of the lord of the Saracens. We are even told that the Hagarites resorted to their "old ways," a remark, the implication of which was that the audience was familiar with a long-standing enemy and with the stereotypical description of the Arabs as an overbearing or abject enemy.⁶ Similarly, there was the threat of danger in Khazaria from the Jews and Muslims, enemies in the confessional competition between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. A polity in which Islam and Judaism were predominant but

⁶Ševčenko, 226. The stereotyping stems from Byzantine condescension towards the illiterate neighbors of Byzantium, who could not speak Greek. This attitude targeted Arabs, but not the Slavs.

not official was targeted for conversion by the Byzantines, and those of the competitive faiths were treated as unconvertible. The Slavs, in sharp contrast, appear in the text as simple, but pliable and ready to be instructed in the faith, which opens the possibility of their conversion. Byzantium tended to convert only groups that could be used as friends and allies, such as the Alans bribed to attack the Khazars in the early tenth century, but also targeted for conversion.⁷ There was no need to overawe the Slavs, but there was definitely a need to triumph over the Khazar Muslims (*Life of Constantine*) and Jews (*Life of Methodius*). However, in the *Life of Constantine* the tone of the disputation appears to be civil, with flares of heated debate and the biographer's commentaries about the triumph over the enemy. There are examples of diplomatic exchanges between Byzantium and Sasanian Persia, in which the objective appears to have been a display of intellectual skills and knowledge in a non-violent competition.⁸ This is definitely not the case for the late ninth and early tenth century when Byzantium viewed Khazaria as a dangerous enemy to be defeated and when nothing good could be said about the land. Therefore, whereas the *Life of Constantine* reflects some enmity between Byzantium and Khazaria in the form of Byzantine prisoners either captured by the kagan or seeking refuge in a power somewhat hostile to Byzantium, this hostility does not preclude dialogue in the form of theological disputations and missions to convert, or military cooperation with Byzantium. If the Rus' attacked Constantinople with

⁷Thomas S. Noonan. "Why Orthodoxy Did Not Spread Among the Bulgars of the Crimea during the Early Medieval Era: An Early Byzantine Conversion Model," in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*. eds. Ian Wood and Gyuda Armstrong. (Turnhout, Brepolis, 2000), 24.

⁸Jonathan Shepard. "Overlapping Circles," in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21-26 August 2006. Volume I: Plenary Papers*. (Oxford, 2006), 15. Shepard limits this intellectual competition to secular scholars, but as intellectual, learned men with classical knowledge, it would seem that this non-violent competition could also apply to the disputation in the *Life of Constantine*.

no support from Khazaria, then the attack would have encouraged a mutual alliance against the Rus' and a temporary truce. Conversion or at least the promise of conversion sealed the promise of military cooperation. Reasonably good relations between Khazaria and Byzantium invite a reading of the *Life of Constantine* as an intellectual discussion as well as confessional rivalry. Conditions had changed by the time of the *Life of Methodius*, and prior to the composition of *De Adminstrando Imperio*. The Khazars were ascendant, upsetting the balance of power in the steppes, and the *Life of Methodius* reflects full-blown hostility between the two powers, giving the mission the sole purpose of triumphing over the enemies of Christianity, through Methodius's prayer and Constantine's eloquence, excluding Khazaria as a possible land to convert. The difference of the attitude towards conversion of the Khazars in the *Lives* reflects these changed conditions, showing the possibility of conversion and its bearing on the diplomatic initiative in the *Life of Constantine*, and the improbability of conversion attempts and diplomatic overtures in the *Life of Methodius*.

CHAPTER 9 PROMISES OF BAPTISM, BUT NO CONVERSION

We can now turn to Constantine's encounters in Kherson and in Khazaria proper. I start with Kherson because it was near the city in which Constantine first met the Khazars. The aim in this section is to determine which conversions were necessary for gaining the military assistance of the Khazars, because very few encounters resulted in conversion. Some explanations will be made as to why Constantine converted some individuals or groups and not others. The encounters are episodic and have no relation to each other. No figures he has met earlier show up later in the text to prove some point. He deals with each of them separately and then moves on.

In Kherson, Constantine first meets a Samaritan, who came to debate with him.¹ Prior to debating with the Samaritan, Constantine had learned the Hebrew language and was thus able to prepare for his eventual debate with the Jews at the Khazar court.² The Samaritan brought Constantine Samaritan scriptures and he read them having received understanding from God. This impressed the Samaritan and he exclaimed that those who "believe in Christ receive Grace and the Holy Spirit".³ The Samaritan was of a monotheistic faith and is baptized into Christianity, after his son. The baptism of the Samaritan his son seems to be a variation on the Apostles' mission to preach to all peoples in their own tongues, given the ability to be understood by the Holy Spirit. However, instead of directly preaching, Constantine showed that he had the grace of God by reading the Samaritan's own scriptures. In other words, the Samaritan was

¹There is no scholarly commentary that I could find on the episode of the debate with the Samaritan.

²Kantor, fn. 32.

³*Life of Constantine*, 8:32, 43.

brought into the fold not by being taught the values of Christianity, but by being convinced of Constantine's ability to learn about his (the Samaritan's) faith. These are the only details which the biographer provides: there is no explicit community, no details regarding how the baptized Samaritan would function in society, if he is already lives in a Christian community, or if his former co-religionists would now isolate him. The story is told for the benefit of Christians reading or hearing the text. At first, it seems as if this episode merely extols Constantine's language skills, with no bearing on the disputation. However, the Samaritan is portrayed in stark contrast to the majority of Jews of the disputation. Adhering to a familiar biblical trope, the Samaritan is open to conversion and the grace of God, but the Jews' hearts are hard. The biographer raises up the figure of the provincial Samaritan as exemplary, since he was willing to accept the grace of God whereas the Jewish elite in the kagan's court were immovable. The conversion of the Samaritan is thus metaphorical.

The next encounter was with a man in Kherson. He spoke Slavic, and by comparing it to Greek and by praying to God, Constantine was able to "read and speak".⁴ Constantine thus developed an alphabet for Slavic speakers in Kherson. The reference to the Gospels in Russian letters might be a later interpolation by another writer who wanted to give an earlier date for the emergence of Slavic literacy. In any case, the speaker of Slavic is not baptized, but simply "was amazed at him and praised God"⁵. Without any further contextual information, it is very difficult to interpret this episode. Were the speakers of Slavic in Kherson Christian or not? Again, the emphasis

⁴*Life of Constantine*, 8:39, 43.

⁵*Life of Constantine*, 8:40, 43.

seems to be more on Constantine's linguistic abilities than on the man's confessional identity. The very different narrative structure, particularly in contrast to the episode of the Samaritan which refers to a theological debate, and to specific details pertaining to the Samaritan, strongly suggests that the encounter with the speaker of Slavic is a later addition. There is considerably less detail in this account than in any other in the *Life of Constantine*, and the only possible parallel is the description of the Khazar mission in the *Life of Methodius*.

Constantine next met a Khazar commander in an unspecified location in a Khazar province. The commander was in the process of besieging a "certain Christian city".⁶ This is the first indication in the *Life of Constantine* that relations between Byzantium and Khazaria were periodically turbulent. The reasons for the siege are unclear. Constantine was undoubtedly in that part of Crimea which was under Khazar control.⁷ There is little archaeological evidence of organized Christianity outside Byzantine Crimea.⁸ However, the lists of episcopal sees known as *notitiae* show the existence of a bishopric of Gothia inside that part of Crimea which was under Khazar control. Moreover, the Byzantines appear to have begun to build a network of episcopal sees to serve the needs of the Christian communities under Khazar rule.⁹ The appearance of the Khazar commander in the *Life* points to Khazaria sending troops to

⁶*Life of Constantine*, 8: 52, 43.

⁷Noonan, 17. Noonan holds that the Crimea was Byzantine-held, but Byzantium and Khazaria had co-religionists among the Crimean Bulgars to use as a vehicle to spread their Christianity and Judaism, respectively.

⁸Florin Curta. "Before Cyril and Methodius: Christianity and barbarians beyond the sixth- and seventh century Danube frontier," in *East Central & Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 183.

⁹"Shepard. Khazars' Adoption of Judaism". 19. The sees were established in the south-eastern region of Crimea, but the *Notitiae* indicate the existence of a bishopric in the very Khazar capital in Itil.

attack a Christian city within its borders. Shepard concludes that the Khazars were reacting adversely to missions to establish Church hierarchies in provinces under their purview.¹⁰

¹⁰Noonan, 18.

CHAPTER 10 THE OFFICIAL CONVERSION TO JUDAISM: 837/838 OR 860S?

In 837 and 838, the kagan of the Khazars issued coins with Arabic inscriptions, but Jewish messages. A mint which produced these coins is thus attested in Khazaria, which produced these coins. This demonstrates that the ruler of Khazaria, and his elite converted to Judaism.¹ In the wake of the Magyar encroachments, the adoption of Judaism may have been one of the measures taken to boost the morale of the military, particularly the Khwarazmian cavalry guard. Historians such as Roman Kovalev note that the Jewish coins would not have offended anyone in Khazaria. Why the Muslim Khwarazmian cavalry guard would not have been offended by the Moses coins is not clear.² Furthermore, the Jewish Radhanites, merchants facilitating the movement of goods through Khazaria northward to central and western Europe, were instrumental in the kagan's decision to adopt Judaism.³ This most certainly was not accompanied by a mass conversion of Khazaria. The Judaism of (presumably) all Khazars is attested only later, in 861 (after Constantine's Khazar mission) by Christian of Stavelot, who stated that Khazaria's conversion to Judaism was complete, whereas Bulgaria's conversion to Christianity was only partial. This complements al-Faqih's statement that Khazaria was composed of Jews.⁴ The archaeological evidence is ambiguous in this respect. A radical change in burial customs, away from the horse sacrifices of the ninth century,

¹Curta, 191. Nikolov, 334.

²Kovalev, 236.

³Kovalev, 239.

⁴Shepard, 16. Shepard argues that Al-Faqih, Christian of Stavelot, and the *Life of Constantine* are three independent, tenth-century sources pointing to the conversion to Judaism in the 860s. However, Kovalev takes the 837/838 dirhams as evidence of conversion. See also David J. Wasserstein. "The Khazars and the World of Islam" in *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*. Eds. Peter B. Golden et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 377.

took place in the Saltovo-Mayaki culture only after 900. Whether this change was caused by the adoption of Judaism is, of course, a matter of speculation.⁵ Based on this rather patchy evidence, it may be possible to argue for temporary conversion to Judaism in 837/838, followed by a more lasting conversion in the 860s. Roman Kovalev has explained the disappearance of the “Moses dirhems” after 838 by means of a desire to attract Rus’ merchants to Khazar markets. However, the Rus’ did not read Arabic and any ideological message based on the alteration of the *shahadah* would have been lost to them. There was therefore no need anymore to disseminate the message of conversion through dirhems. The other audience of the message on those coins must have been the Muslims living in or outside Khazaria. However, trade coming through Khazaria was usually redirected immediately northward to the Rus’ and from them to the Baltic Sea. The difficulty of communicating this message discouraged further minting of the special coins.⁶ Interesting, what is not at issue is the ideological message of the Moses coins. Kovalev states that it is unlikely that the dirhems would have offended the Khwarazmian guard, even though they were Muslim.⁷ There are various reasons to believe that that may have indeed been the case, for up to and during the Khazar mission, Khazaria was a multi-confessional polity in which different faiths coexisted. For example, there were different judges for Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Khazaria.⁸ At the time of the Khazar mission, Khazaria was composed of Christian

⁵Shepard, 16.

⁶Kovalev, 239.

⁷Kovalev, 239.

⁸Irina G. Konalova. “Khrisantsvo v Khazarii,” in *Khazary. Vtoroi Mezhdunarodnyi Kollokvium. Tesizy*, eds. Vladimir Ia. Petrukhin and A.M. Fedorchuk (Moscow: *Institut slavianovedeniia RAN/Evreiskii Universitet v Moskve*, 2002), 60. Ibn Khordadbekh, a ninth-century Muslim author, described the separate judges in Itil.

communities in the provinces and in the capital of Itil, Muslims and Jews in the capital and other cities. The Jews were most firmly entrenched at the court as a result of the adoption of Judaism in the 830s. Also, there were Khazars and various other nomads who were shamanistic. Most historians assert that the Khazars in *The Life of Constantine* were only shamanistic, and must be distinguished from the Jews and the Muslims. It would follow from that only the pagans were candidates for conversion. However, if we believe the story of the baptism of the Samaritan, or at least the intentions Constantine's biographer had when narrating that episode, it does not seem unlikely that non-pagans could also become the target of conversion. Jews and Muslims were just as likely to convert to Christianity as believers in Tengri and shamanism.⁹

Following the Khazar mission, sometime in the 860s, the official and lasting conversion of Khazaria to Judaism occurred. This triggered a wave of missions in the tenth century, under Nicholas Mystikos.¹⁰ It remains unclear whether those missions were aimed to shore up Christianity in Khazaria or just for conversion. Some historians believed that the Khazars' official conversion to Judaism provoked a backlash against Jews living in Constantinople under Romanus Lecapenos, but others disputed that theory.¹¹ Even so, missions were being sent to a now-officially Jewish polity, not eliminating the possibility that the 861 Khazar mission was beyond attempting to convert the Jews when Khazaria still held no official religion.

⁹Morrison, 5.

¹⁰Shepard, 21.

¹¹Peter.B. Golden. "The conversion of the Khazars to Judaism," in *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium Hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute* eds. Peter B. Golden, et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007),161. Shepard, 29.

CHAPTER 11
CONSTANTINE'S ENCOUNTERS IN THE KHAZAR PORTION OF THE *LIFE*
CONTINUED

That brings us back to the question of the Khazar commander. His religion is unspecified, but because the terms Khazar and Christian are juxtaposed, he must have been Jewish, Muslim, or a worshipper of Tengri. In any case, after Constantine calmed him with “edifying words”¹, the Khazar commander promised to be baptized. It is unspecified if his troops follow suit, and this was the first of several promises of baptism. What Constantine succeeded in achieving was the security of the city, because his words calmed the Khazar commander. Presumably, the promise of baptism ceased the Khazar commander’s attacks against Christian communities, but it is not stated that the embassy secured the Khazar commander’s alliance with Byzantium through this promise of baptism and ceasing of hostilities against an isolated Christian city. More so, the promise of baptism reduced the chance of conversion even more, because Constantine did not witness it. There is no acceptance of his authority, and no mention of an established church hierarchy. Constantine simply went on his way, and his biographer moved to the next episode.

. The next encounter of Constantine was with the Magyars, who without any warning, make an attempt on his life. Describing the Magyars as descending upon Constantine like wolves is a worn trope applied to rapacious and violent barbarians attacking the Empire.² There was no middle ground: when they attacked, the Magyars appear to be wolves, but when Constantine prayed and God’s design calmed them,

¹*Life of Constantine*, 8:62, 45.

²Jonathan Shepard. “Spreading the Word,” in *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 234.

“they began to bow to him”.³ No baptism or promise of baptism resulted from this encounter.⁴ The Magyars were not easily subdued, and though subject to Khazaria, were capable of putting a dent in its northern trade. The construction of the fort at Sarkel could serve as an observation point to curb the traffic of Hungarian marauders as well as the attacks of the Rus’.⁵ The mobility of the Magyars and their defiance of a central authority in the mid and late-ninth century made them a dangerous enemy, and unreceptive to conversion.⁶ The most that Constantine could hope from the Magyars was for them to let him and his companions go free. The embassy accidentally ran into the Magyars, who were therefore not targeted for conversion. Their conversion was not necessary for securing the military help of the Khazars against the Rus’.

Constantine’s meeting with the cunning Khazar occurred in Khazaria, where the Byzantine envoys arrived by way of the Meotis Sea and the Caspian Gates.⁷ Unlike the conversation between Constantine and the Magyars, on one hand, or Constantine and the Khazar commander, on the other hand, the biographer put words in the Khazar’s mouth that remind one of Constantine’s encounter with the Samaritan. The Samaritan stands as a contrast to the general unreceptivity of the Khazars to baptism. The Khazar, said to be a cunning man, asked Constantine why do [the Byzantines] rely so much

³*Life of Constantine*, 8:61, 45.

⁴Sergei Ivanov. “Casting Pearls Before Circe’s Swine: the Byzantine View of Mission,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 14 (2002): 299. Baptism, in Byzantine ideology had the power to transform beasts into humans. In this instance, however, Constantine only had to calm the Magyar wolves, in order to subdue them.

⁵Shepard, 24. Shepard observes that there is no indication of a connection between the Khazar commander and the Hungarians that attacked Constantine.

⁶Ivanov, 300.

⁷*Life of Constantine*, 9:2, 45.

on the written Scriptures. The Khazar described what has been seen as an oral tradition of transmitting knowledge. They “take all wisdom from the chest as if swallowed”.⁸ The oral transmission of the Scriptures implies that the Khazar is a Tengrist nomad from the steppes,⁹ who came from an oral rather than a written tradition. Constantine held the opinion that the written tradition was the only indicator of correct knowledge, as he asked the Khazar how many generations there were between Adam and Moses.¹⁰ The Khazar’s failure to answer indicated Constantine’s triumph. The Khazar simply remained speechless, but inside Khazaria, no conversion of the steppe nomad occurred. Constantine could only defeat him through his superior knowledge of the Scriptures, the written tradition triumphing over the oral tradition. Even so, we might expect there to be a conversion or promise of baptism. However, the cunning Khazar is shown to be hostile from the beginning. He criticized the Byzantine custom of replacing emperors with emperors of different lineages. The tone of the Khazar’s questioning of Constantine is clearly confrontational: “Why do you keep the evil custom of replacing one emperor with another of a different lineage...?”¹¹ Unlike the Khazar commander, who promises to accept baptism, the cunning Khazar was openly hostile to the world and culture from which Constantine and his companions were coming. It is unclear why he was not shown as promising to accept baptism. Instead, like the beast-like Magyar, he is subdued and “tamed,” defeated and shamed, but not viewed as worthy of conversion.

⁸*Life of Constantine* 9: 14, 89 fn. 41.

⁹Francis Butler, “The Representation of Oral Culture in the *Vita Constantini*,” *Slavic And East European Journal* 39 (1995): 368. Butler refutes P. Lavrov and Francis Dvornik’s assertion that the cunning man is a Jew, for that would presuppose knowledge of the Old Testament. It is regrettable that his study does not address the Khazar commander’s religion.

¹⁰*Life of Constantine*, 9:20, 45.

¹¹*Life of Constantine*, 9:5, 45.

There are therefore in the Khazar portion of the *Life of Constantine* four encounters of Constantine prior to the theological disputation at the kaganal court. None of them was necessary for securing large-scale Khazar military cooperation. In two cases, that of the Magyars and that of the cunning Khazar, there is no mention of baptism. With the Khazar commander, we get at least a promise that he would accept baptism. Baptism actually took place only in the episode of the Samaritan. This episode, adhering to religious narrative conventions, prepares the reader for the theological disputation and serves as a contrast to the unreceptive Khazars, the cunning Khazar and, for the most part, the Jews and Muslims at the Khazar court.

CHAPTER 12 THEOLOGICAL DISPUTATION - FIRST PHASE

The disputation at the kagan's court involved several figures and groups, including the Kagan, his first councilor (beg),¹ Jews, and Muslims. The kagan was both a participant and the detached arbiter, and he had the final say on who the victor was in the theological dispute, as well as on whether Khazaria would cooperate with Byzantium in the future. The theological debate was crucial in gaining conversions at the court level, an exchange of prisoners, and kaganal support against the Rus', as the victor in the debate influenced the decision makers at the top of the Khazar hierarchy. The biographer insists that Constantine debated the Jews and Muslims for the souls of the "undecided" and pagan Khazars, who were presumably in the audience of the debate. However, as his previous encounters have shown, Constantine did not shy away from attempts to convert Jews or Muslims. In fact, the evidence of the *Life of Constantine* shows that Jews and Muslims were just as receptive to Constantine's arguments as the uncommitted Khazars. The belligerent, hostile tone of the Jewish participants is first clear in the debate with the kagan on the subject of the Trinity. The kagan is not depicted as Jewish. The intention may have been to show him taking the same confessional position of the cunning Khazar. Although he had obtained knowledge of the Scriptures, he adhered to neither Judaism, Islam, or Christianity, but was considering all three as possibilities for the official religion of his polity. The initial debate on the Trinity with the kagan ended in victory, as Constantine defended the Virgin as the Mother of God in an answer to the Jews in which he drew an analogy to the kagan: just

¹But see Omeljan Pritsak's "Turkological Remarks on Constantine's Khazar Mission in the *Vita Constantini*" in *Christianity among the Slavs: The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius*, eds. Edward G. Farrugia, Robert F. Taft, & Gino K. Povesena. (Rome, 1998), 298.

as it would be irrational to say that the beg could not entertain the kagan, while the lowest Khazar can, so it was irrational to say that God could not be contained in man.² Constantine further mentioned a Jew who translated the Old Testament into Greek, thereby denigrating Jewish belief with the words of a Jewish authority.³ There was no particular hostility between the parties in either one of those initial debates, for the confrontation consists simply of questions and answers. The benign tone of the first disputation lent itself to intellectual discussion rather than heated debate, which matched the spirit of the political circumstances of 861. The first phase of the disputation ended with the victory of Constantine and the participating parties convinced on the individual points.

²*Life of Constantine*, 9:57, 47.

³*Life of Constantine*, 9: 69, 47, fn. 48.

CHAPTER 13 THEOLOGICAL DISPUTE – SECOND PHASE

The second phase of the disputation seems to indicate that the Jews were not the target of conversion. This phase involved only Jews, in the presence of the kagan and of the Khazar chieftains. If one may assume, on the basis of the first phase of the disputation, that the Jewish debaters were receptive to Constantine's arguments, the biographer makes it clear that his main audience and target of conversion in the second part were the Khazar chieftains, distinguished from the Jews. The debate became more heated when it turned to the subject of iconoclasm. The Jews asked, "How can you who worship idols pretend to please God?"¹ Constantine's answer was testy: "Learn first to distinguish the nouns, what an image is and what an idol, and considering this, do not assail Christians."² Another moment of the tension was when the debate turned to who was to be regarded as blessed, the Jews or Christians. The Jews argued that they were blessed, since they were "of the blessed seed of Shem, blessed by our father Noah."³ Constantine's reply was simple: Shem was indeed blessed, but Christians descended from Japheth, whom "God shall enlarge...and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem" (*Genesis* 9:26-27).⁴ The biographer intervenes in the story, and assures his audience that "[in Constantine's writings], there one shall see the power of words inspired by God's grace, which like a flame burns opponents"⁵ The inconvertible enemy in the second phase of the disputation in the second phase is thus clearly identified: the Jews.

¹*Life of Constantine*, 10: 188, 57.

²*Life of Constantine*, 10: 189, 57.

³*Life of Constantine*, 10: 138, 57.

⁴*Life of Constantine*, 10: 143, 55.

⁵*Life of Constantine*, 10: 215, 59.

They are in clear contrast to the Khazar chieftains, who were illiterate, although still yearned for Constantine to “bring peace to our souls”⁶ The chieftains did not say that they would accept the Christian faith, as the Khazar envoys to Byzantium did (or reportedly did, according to the Byzantine Emperor). In the second part of the disputation Constantine appeared to have won the disputation, and he managed to obtain approval for Christianity.

The biographer claims to have abridged Constantine’s own account of the disputation: “Thus, having condensed this from much, we set it down briefly for remembrance sake. And he who wishes to seek the actual discussions in their entirety can find them in Constantine’s writings, which our teacher, Archbishop Methodius, translated and divided into eight discourses.”⁷ If we are to believe the author of the *Life of Constantine*, the account of the second phase of the disputation is therefore a summary of an original report written either by Constantine himself or by someone who had firsthand knowledge of the disputation of 861. The intervention of the biographer in the narrative, which is meant to authenticate the account of the theological disputation and abridge and preserve them for posterity, shows that the biographer’s intention was to direct attention to specific doctrinal matters. The account of Constantine’s victory over the Jewish enemy reminds one of the hostility shown to Khazars in the *Life of Methodius*.

⁶*Life of Constantine*, 10: 226, 59; Butler, 376. Francis Butler believed that the biographer had no understanding of the oral culture of the Khazar chieftains and thus wrongly attributed a rudimentary knowledge of Scripture to those who claimed to be illiterate. But the two aspects do not necessarily exclude each other. At the court of the kagan, the presence of the Christians may have resulted in an exchange of ideas with the oral traditions of the nomadic culture.

⁷*Life of Constantine*, 10: 215, 57.

CHAPTER 14 THEOLOGICAL DISPUTATION – THIRD PHASE

The idea that the account of the second phase of the disputation was inserted into the *Life of Constantine* at a later time is supported by the great similarities between the accounts of the first and the third phases. While the second phase is about the contrast between two faiths, the first and the third phase are simply intellectual discussions. Both Jews and Muslims participate in this debate and are treated as a collective. There is no intervention of the authorial voice at all. At the request of the Jews and Muslims, Constantine proceeded to demonstrate “through parables and reason which faith is best of all.”¹ The debaters agreed or questioned in a non-argumentative way, displaying their own erudition and explaining their arguments. Eventually someone “who knew well the malice of the Saracens”,² either a Muslim, or a Khazar converted to Islam, asked Constantine why he did not support of Mohammed. In his reply, Constantine called for the kagan as an arbiter in the disputation. The kagan, however, remained silent. “Many of them,” presumably Jews, began to denigrate Mohammed, at which point the beg intervened to tell Muslims that “with God’s help this guest has dashed all the pride of the Jews to the ground, but yours he has cast to the other side of the river like filth.”³ Although the Jews present seemed to be more numerous, Muslims emerged as the main adversaries in the third phase of the

¹*Life of Constantine*, 11: 3,59.

²*Life of Constantine*, 11: 38, 61.

³*Life of Constantine*, 11:54, 61.

disputation. Unlike the previous phases, the beg now appeared to be the arbiter, with the kagan receding into the background.⁴

⁴ Pritsak, 298. Omelian Pritsak believed that the first phase of the disputation, which put all the power in the hands of the kagan and completely ignored the beg, was a later interpolation by an author who had no knowledge of the structure of the Khazar government.

CHAPTER 15 THE CONVERSION OF TWO-HUNDRED KHAZARS

In the aftermath of the disputation, we are told that Constantine left Khazaria with two-hundred baptized Khazars and two hundred Greek prisoners which he took with him to Constantinople, in addition to Khazar military aid.¹ Earlier in the narrative, the Khazar envoys, beset by Jewish and Muslim proselytizers, requested a learned man from Byzantium to explain the faith to them, and “should he prevail over the Jews and Saracens, we shall accept your faith.”² The expectation was therefore that after Constantine’s visit, the Khazars would convert *en masse*. The purpose of Constantine’s mission seems to have been participation in the grand theological disputation. But in the end, all that Constantine could get from the Khazars was a double pronouncement: “We are not our own enemies: but gradually, he who can, for thus do we command, may he be baptized voluntarily, if he wishes even from this day. But those among us who bow to the west, or pray in the manner of Jews, or keep the Saracen faith, shall soon be put to death by us.”³

The person uttering those words was hidden behind a general “they,” but one can presume that such authoritative pronouncements were made by either the beg or the kagan. To the latter is attributed a second statement in the form of an epistle to the Byzantine Emperor:

“Lord, you have sent us a man who in word and deed has shown us that the Christian faith is holy. We are ‘convinced it is the true faith and, in the hope that we too shall attain it, we have commanded all to be baptized

¹*Life of Constantine*. 11: 86, 61.

²*Life of Constantine*, 8:11, 42.

³*Life of Constantine*, 11: 68, 60.

voluntarily. We are all friends of your Empire and are at your service whenever you require it.”⁴

There is hardly veiled contradiction between the initial statement and the command for all to be baptized, which appears in the kagan's letter. The token oath of retribution against those who are not baptized seems to act as the biographer's hasty attempt to save face for a mission that did not convert all Khazars.

On the other hand, the biographer was not particularly grieved over the limited number of baptisms. Why? One needs to keep in mind that the *Life of Constantine* is first and foremost a work of hagiography, which exhibits certain stock conventions that may modify an existing reality in order to reflect the earthly workings of the divine. This may well be the explanation for the effort to downplay the role of the beg, as the kagan is presented as the spiritual leader of Khazaria. In other words, the author of the *Life* expected the kagan, and not the beg, to have the ultimate word in matters of Khazar cooperation. Constantine only needed the kagan's approval of Christianity to secure the release of the captives and the military support of the Khazars.⁵ There are at least four motifs in the *Life* which appear also in earlier hagiographical texts in Greek:⁶ the recovery of relics, the controversy with Jews, the destruction of a pagan cult, and the

⁴*Life of Constantine*, 11: 77, 61.

⁵M. van Esbroeck, “Le substrat hagiographique de la mission khazare de Constantine-Cyrille,” *Anallecta Bollandina* 14 (1986): 339. Vachkova, 354. The account of the martyrdom in Najran, which may have been known to the author of the *Life*, is an excellent parallel to this particular episode. The early sixth-century Jewish leader Dhu Nuwas plays a role similar to that of the Jews and Muslims in the *Life*. The assumption in both accounts is that if Gregory or Constantine can defeat Dhu Nuwas or the Jews and Muslims, then the king of Aksum or the Khazar emissaries will convert to Christianity.

⁶Van Esbroeck, 349. No direct evidence exists that either Constantine or Methodius read those works, but Van Esbroeck believes that their wide circulation in prominent monasteries made it likely that the two brothers were familiar with these texts.

denigration of elements of Jewish faith.⁷ The biographer regards the relatively small number of baptisms following the mission as sufficient, because according to him, Constantine's primary target for conversion were the uncommitted Khazars at the kagan's court.⁸ The Jews and the Muslims were receptive to Constantine's teachings but in the end did not convert. There is therefore consistency in this account, for the same people who asked for instruction, having sent emissaries to the Emperor, eventually received baptism. They were "baptized, having cast off heathen abominations and lawless marriages".⁹ The biographer's satisfaction at the apparently limited results of Constantine's mission is therefore justified: he had baptized the people who had asked for that, and in addition defeated the Jews and the Muslims in the theological disputation. The kagan, though acknowledging the Christian faith (a deviation from the hagiographic standards), was not baptized, but the biographer does not consider that to be a failure. Could these two hundred baptisms be viewed as an equal number of conversions? The mention of those baptized casting off heathen abominations suggests the adoption of Christian rituals, if not mode of life. If we suppose that there was a Christian community in Itil, and we further assume that the Byzantines were influential, then the audience of the *Life of Constantine* may have been left to believe that Christian community in Itil would provide for the new converts. This conversion, however, is a lot more tenuous than the specific establishment of a Church

⁷The biographer does not mention anything about the kagan himself being Jewish, but the religion of the kagan does not seem to matter for the goal of the mission.

⁸There has been at least one more Byzantine embassy to Khazaria prior to that of Cyril and Methodius. Petronas came to Khazaria in 840, but it remains unclear whether he had any missionaries with him. See V.E. Naumenko. "Tserkovno-politicheskie kontakty Vizantiskoi imperii khazarskogo kaganata v seredne IX v. in *Khazary. Vtoroi mezhdunarodny kollokvium. Tesizy*. (Moscow, 2002), 75.

⁹*Life of Constantine*, 11: 74, 61.

hierarchy in Moravia. The baptism of the two-hundred was a different level than the baptism of the Samaritan in Kherson. It is clear that, unlike Moravia, the mission to Khazaria was not intended for a long term: as soon as Constantine obtained the release of the prisoners, he left. He won the kagan's approval for Christianity but not his conversion; he administered baptisms, but did not bother to stay any longer in order to cement the new faith through teaching. The account of the Khazar mission, therefore, draws a sharp distinction between conversion and mission. Mission was necessary to achieve the diplomatic aims of Empire, but conversion, even of the ruler, was unnecessary for that.

CHAPTER 16 PHOULLAE – PREVIOUS BAPTISM

The destruction of the sacred tree at Phoullae has also been included in the Khazar component of the *Life*. As with every non-Christian that Constantine met, he engaged in conversation with the tree-worshipper in Phoullae. The biographer attributes to the latter the explanation of their own pagan beliefs: “We have not just begun to do this, but have taken it from our fathers. All our requests are fulfilled by it, most of all rainfall, and much else.”¹ Constantine introduced the Gospel to them, and told them, “Behold the Gospel of God’s New Covenant in which you too were baptized.”² Apparently, this group had been Christian for awhile, and Noonan notes that the passage points to the persistence of pagan practices in an area long Christianized.³ Since they had already been baptized, the tree-worshippers did not need another baptism. Their elder kissed the Gospel and then whole community followed Constantine in procession carrying white candles to the place where he intended to chop down the tree. Unlike the Samartian’s conversion, the biographer includes much ceremony to indicate the pagans’ acceptance into the Christian community, coming closer to the concept of Bulliet’s social conversion, without any mundane changes in mode of life. This does not preclude the metaphorical or symbolical functions of the “return” of the pagans at Phoullae to the Christian fold. The destruction of a pagan cult, the last component of the hagiographic tradition, is presented in the *Life* on the last leg of Constantine’s journey. Constantine achieved the physical destruction of the tree,

¹*Life of Constantine*, 12: 26, 63

²*Life of Constantine*, 12: 44, 65.

³Noonan, 17. Nikolov refers to the group as semi-pagan. Nikolov, 357, fn. 104.

prefacing it with his usual Scripture-based conversations that have by now become very familiar to the reader. With the exception of the conversion of the local chief, the Phoullae incident is entirely in agreement with the hagiographic tradition. Now that Constantine had achieved the diplomatic ends of the mission, retrospective conversion did not seem to be essential.

CHAPTER 17 THE MORAVIAN MISSION IN THE *LIVES*- SUMMONING

The Moravian mission overlaps in the *Lives of Constantine* and *Methodius*, reflecting the different contexts in which the texts were composed: *the Life of Constantine* in the 860s and 870s when the Moravian mission was still ongoing, and the immediate political players and motivations were known; and the *Life of Methodius* in the 880s and 890s, when the impact of the spread of the Slavic liturgy needed more emphasis. The creation and use of the Slavic alphabet had to be justified and legitimized in the *Life of Constantine*. Once created, and disseminated, the alphabet is taken by the biographer as a given fact. He no longer has to justify its creation, but it does have to justify its dissemination in the liturgy and defend it more so from its opponents. The atmosphere in the *Life of Constantine* is triumphant, whereas in the *Life of Methodius* it is more subdued and rife with conflict, which Methodius, unlike Constantine, expects and encounters more frequently.

The *Life of Constantine* describes Rastislav taking council with his Moravian princes and appealing to Emperor Michael for a teacher to explain Byzantine Christianity, so that “other countries which look to us might emulate us.”¹ In response, the emperor summoned Constantine, and he stated that he would go on the mission on condition that they have a script for their language. Constantine then brought up the possibility of him being branded a heretic if he created a new (Slavic). He also insisted that it was dangerous to preach without a written text, since erroneous teaching could

¹*Life of Constantine*, 14: 8, 65.

and would result.² To legitimize the brothers' project, Constantine's biographer then portrayed God giving the Slavic script to Constantine. The emperor sent Constantine with many gifts to Rastislav, asking his cooperation for supporting Constantine's work. If he did this, the emperor reminded Rastislav that he would leave his memory to future generations like Emperor Constantine.³

The *Life of Methodius* glosses over God revealing the Slavic script to Constantine, perhaps because in *the Life of Constantine*, the Slavic script was already justified as being God-given. In the *Life of Methodius*, the initiative for mission came from the Moravians, except that, in this case, both Svatopluk and Rastislav asked for the missionaries. *The Life of Methodius* is more specific about the origin of the missions from Italy, from the Greeks, and from the Germans. It points to previous missionary activity among the Slavs in foreign languages that they could not understand.

Methodius's biographer, like Constantine's biographer, writes that the emperor also sends Constantine with many gifts, but instead of focusing on Rastislav's legacy, he told the brothers that since they were from Thessalonike, they spoke pure Slavic, like all Thessalonians. This simply meant that they were bilingual and fluent in a Slavic dialect spoken in the environs of Thessaloniki.⁴ Methodius's biographer may have introduced this particular detail in relation to missionaries coming from the Greeks, Italians, and Germans. The brothers were spreading Christianity, initially, on behalf of the

²Butler, 338. Francis Butler supports I. Duichev's view that Constantine was referring to the danger of preaching without a written language, Dvornik supports that Constantine was anticipating the later criticism that the Slavic alphabet would endure. P. Lavrov subscribes to both interpretations.

³Martin Hurbanič, "The Byzantine missionary concept and its revitalization in the ninth century: some remarks on the content of Photius' encyclical letter *Ad archiepiscopales thronos per orientem obtinentes*," *Byzantinoslavica* 63 (2005): 114. Martin Hurbanič argues that Photius was the author of the comparison of Rastislav's potential legacy to Emperor Constantine.

⁴Kantor, 134. fn, 38.

Byzantines. What made them different from previous Greek missions to the Slavic lands? The missionary approach had hitherto been inadequate to accommodate the Slavs. The Eastern Franks had been in Moravia and were evangelizing there, without much success. Because Methodius's disciples were commemorating Methodius as the spiritual father of Christianity in the Slavic lands, the fact that the brothers could speak Slavic already set them up to be adequate missionaries in the Slavic lands. This anticipation gives the *Life of Methodius* a more retrospective air, as if the biographer is looking to past events from the perspectives of the 880s and 890s when the impact of Methodius's teaching in the Slavic lands was more palpable.

CHAPTER 18
THE MORAVIAN MISSION IN THE *LIVES* – IN MORAVIA

While the *Life of Constantine* has an eye for the exchange between the emperor and the local ruler in Moravia, Methodius's biographer focuses entirely on the teaching. Both sources refer to the confessional rivalry of the 870s and 880s. In the *Life of Constantine*, Rastislav received Constantine with great honor, and gathered students for instruction. In the *Life of Methodius*, the brothers trained disciples during the three years that they remained in Moravia.¹ Rastislav and Michael III saw advantage in the spread of Christianity under Byzantine auspices to Moravia, because Rastislav saw Byzantium as an ally against the Franks and Bulgars. The Byzantine Emperor wished to undercut Frankish ambitions in Pannonia and the expansion of the Frankish Empire to the east.²

The Devil roused the Latin clergy who opposed Constantine's mission in Moravia on the grounds of his use of vernacular for the translation of the Scripture and the holy books. At this point, the biographer intervenes; comparing Constantine's confrontation with his adversaries to David's battling the Philistines: he "defeated them with words from Scriptures, and called them trilinguists."³ The insertion of this Biblical reference reminds one of the biographer's earlier commentary in the second part of the Khazar disputation, in which he adopted a much more hostile tone. Constantine's accusation against the trilinguists went beyond the issue of language: they have taught other impieties and allowed shameful marriages. "Cutting all this down like thorns,

¹*The Life of Methodius*, 5:27, 111.

²Przemyslaw Urbanczyk, "Early State Formation in East Central Europe," in *East Central Europe in the Early Middle Ages*. ed. Florin Curta. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 145. Lounghis. 65.

³*The Life of Constantine*, 15:20, 69.

Constantine burned them with the fire of Scripture.”⁴ The *Life of Methodius* includes the same account relating the Frankish clergy to the heresy of trilingualism, but the mention of trilingualism occurs only after the brothers’ departure for Rome and Pope Nicholas I’s consecration of Methodius to the priesthood. As a matter of fact, the phrase “trilingualism” was coined by Pope Nicholas, who condemned its supporters. Francis Thomson has long demonstrated that, besides the *Life of Methodius*, there is no evidence of any Latin cleric advancing what the biographer called the “trilingualist heresy.” He suggests that the accusation was concocted by the author of the *Life of Methodius*, who attributed it to the Frankish bishops. The reason for this fabrication (so Thomson) was that trilingualism was perceived as opposing the invention of the new alphabet.⁵ The two *Lives* still reflect different preoccupations: the *Life of Constantine* is more attuned to the political players, and the *Life of Methodius* emphasizes teaching. Where they agree is in their description of the vehement opposition of the Frankish clergy. A new heresy is invented, and used to accuse the Frankish churchmen, in order to combat their apparent opposition to the Slavic alphabet. Even the pope protests against the detractors.

⁴*The Life of Constantine*, 15: 30, 69.

⁵Francis J. Thomson. “SS. Cyril and Methodius and a Western heresy: trilingualism: “A contribution to the study of patristic and mediaeval theories of sacred languages”. *Analecta Bollandiana* 110 (1992): 75.

CHAPTER 19 LEAVING MORAVIA

Constantine and Methodius spent three years in Moravia according to both accounts, and then they left. The biographer does not dwell long on the departure in the *Life of Methodius*. In the *Life of Constantine*, he left to ordain his disciples. Telemachos Lounghis believes that the bluntness of the account of this departure obscures the political circumstances of the regime change in Constantinople, which prompted the Moravian mission to be withdrawn. This warrants further comment.

Basil I took power in 867. Initially, the Byzantine Empire, under Michael III, was opposed to the Papacy. Basil I reversed the policy when he sought an alliance with the Papacy as well as the Eastern Franks in order to stop Arab raids on the Italian coast. The presence of Byzantine missionaries in Moravia encroached on Papal territory and territory of the domain of the Eastern Franks, and Basil did not want to upset either party. At the same time, Basil deposed Photius, who was virulently hostile towards the Papacy whose assistance Basil was now seeking. Also, Photius had a hand in organizing the Khazar and Moravian missions, the latter clearly intended to achieve conversion in keeping with his universalist policies of disseminating Christianity and extending patriarchal control to the Slavic lands.¹ The deposition of Photius and the shift in imperial policy ended the Byzantine phase of the Moravian mission, reflected in

¹Hurbanič, 113; Telemachos C. Lounghis, "Bulgaria instead of Moravia: evidence of major political changes," in *Byzantium, New Peoples, New Powers: The Byzantino-Slav Contact Zone, from the Ninth to the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Miliana Kaimakamova, et al. (Cracow: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Historia Iagellonica", 2007), 66. Hurbanič states that Photius did not mention the Khazar mission in his encyclical of 867 because of its purely diplomatic nature, and the Moravian mission because of its uncertain status in 867.

the *Lives* by silent introduction of the figure of the Pope and the account of the brothers' departure from Moravia.²

² Lounghis, 66.

CHAPTER 20 KOCEL IN THE *LIVES*

Following the withdrawal of the brothers from Moravia, they arrived in Pannonia. Perhaps the greatest difference in the accounts of the *Lives* consists of their treatment of the reception offered to Constantine and Methodius by Kocel, Prince of Pannonia. In the *Life of Constantine*, it is only Kocel who received Constantine. In the *Life of Methodius*, Kocel, Rastislav, and his successor Svatopluk received both brothers. Kocel first learned the Slavic letters and then gave Constantine students to be taught. Constantine's request for nine hundred captives to be released immediately brings to mind the Khazar mission. This is perhaps the biographer's way of saying that Constantine was on a diplomatic mission. It is unclear whether those were prisoners from Moravia or from Pannonia. No mention of any of this is made in the *Life of Methodius*, which deals first with Pope Nicholas I's summons of Constantine and Methodius. The pope blessed their teachings, and then consecrated Methodius to the priesthood. The next episode takes place after Pope Nicholas's death in 867, as Kocel now asked Pope Hadrian II to send Methodius to him. The Pope sent Methodius not only to Kocel but to Rastislav, Svatopluk, and Kocel, to "all of the Slavic lands".¹ Methodius's disciples extended Methodius's work beyond the lands of Kocel and defended the brothers' rights to be in those lands. When learning that Pannonia was under papal jurisdiction, they went to Rome carrying with them the relics of Saint Clement. The relics were important for legitimizing their work in the papal lands. In addition, they solidified their alliance to the Papacy, under whose jurisdiction the Moravian mission now found itself. Kocel accepted the missionaries with great honor

¹*Life of Methodius*, 8: 4, 113.

and sent them to be consecrated by the Bishop of Pannonia. Whereas the *Life of Constantine* reflects the diplomatic nature of the mission to the Slavic lands, *the Life of Methodius* reflects the Roman reorientation of the mission, and insists on the mission's spread to all Slavic lands. From the *Life of Constantine*, we see that the Moravian mission, right before it stopped being under Byzantine auspices, was a diplomatic mission to enlist Moravia's cooperation against the Franks and the Bulgars. There is no mention of conversion before, during, or after the exchange of prisoners. If conversion was on the agenda, it must have been abandoned as soon as Emperor Basil I terminated the mission.

CHAPTER 21 OVERVIEW OF THE REST OF MORAVIAN MISSION

Before discussing the relation between conversion and the diplomatic aims of the mission, it is necessary to trace Methodius's movements in and out of Moravia. Methodius returned to Moravia several times after the shift in imperial alliances. He alternated between teaching and the restoration of friendly relation in Moravia. In 864, Rastislav was defeated and Svatopluk came to power. The regime change in Moravia hindered the Moravian mission in ways that Constantine did not experience. Without the backing of a local power, Methodius fell prey to the Frankish bishops in 870, who tried him and then condemned him to jail in a Swabian monastery. He was released in 872 at the intervention of the pope. In 873, there was a Frankish campaign against Moravia, in which the Byzantine diplomacy may have been involved as a result of Basil's overtures to the Frankish Empire. After Photius was reinstated as Patriarch, the Byzantines convinced Prince Boris of Bulgaria to convert to their version of Christianity, which caused the hostility of the Franks. Methodius was sent back in 882 to re-establish friendly relations with Moravia. In the same year, Pope John VIII died, which put the Moravian mission in great danger. Without either imperial or papal backing, Methodius did not stand a chance in his confrontation with the Frankish clergy. He died in 885, and his disciples were promptly expelled from Moravia. They moved to Bulgaria, where Methodius's biographer is believed to have written the *Life*.¹

¹ Hurbanič, 113. Sullivan, 19. Lounghis, 69. Tougher, 175.

CHAPTER 22 METHODIUS'S ENCOUNTERS – EXPULSION AND RETURN

From the summary presented above, three areas are apparent in which conversion could occur: diplomatic overtures to establish or restore good relations with the ruler; defense against accusers; and teaching. The latter required that Methodius stay in Moravia for an extended period of time, and depended on maintaining good relations with the local ruler. I have already argued that lasting conversion did not occur in Khazaria. To find if successful and presumably lasting conversion took place in Moravia, I will now turn to Methodius's encounters. If any conversion occurred, I will then attempt to verify whether the conversion was necessary: to the limited, diplomatic aims of mission, which was now establishing or restoring the Byzantine-Papal alliance with its neighbors; to the defeat of the enemies; or to the more long-term task of maintaining the favor of the local ruler.

The first encounter of Methodius in the second phase of the Moravian mission was with the Frankish bishops and the Moravian king. Methodius was now a papal legate in charge of the territory under their control. While in the first phase of the Moravian mission, the detractors were simply the Latin clergymen, Methodius' enemies are now specifically mentioned as the Frankish bishops. Even though it is not specifically mentioned who the Moravian king was who sided with the Frankish bishops against Methodius, the chronological sequence of events forces us to see Svatopluk behind this rather vague description. The main argument of Methodius's adversaries was that that they were teaching in their own territory. Methodius replied by showing that both Moravia and Pannonia were under papal jurisdiction. The Frankish bishops

were displeased with this answer and began to threaten him: “You shall come to evil”.¹ Besides preparing the audience for Methodius’s imprisonment, which immediately follows this exchange, the biographer’s insistence upon the hostility of the bishops may reflect their dissatisfaction with the Byzantine-Roman alliance.² Methodius’s response suggests that he was ready to become a martyr: “But work your will upon me. For I am no better than those who lost their lives through many torments for speaking the Truth”.³ This is a major departure from the hagiographic standards set by the *Life of Constantine*.

Equally interesting is the biographer’s portrait of the Moravian king as “devious”, when he asked the Frankish bishop not to trouble Methodius, “for he is already covered with sweat as though he were next to a stove.”⁴ The remark pointed to Methodius’s fragile position: although a papal legate, he was nonetheless in hostile territory. One wonders whether the episode is to be treated as symbolic, since up to this moment, the biographer refers to the Moravian and Pannonian monarchs by name. The dramatic way in which the accusations of the Frankish bishops and the Moravian king are presented might indicate that this passage either was written later by a disciple who had second or third-hand knowledge of the events or is an indication that Methodius’s disciple felt that the Moravians were acting in concert with the Frankish bishops. Still another reason would be that this passage simply reflects the hostile attitude of

¹*Life of Methodius*, 9:13, 117.

²Lounghis, 65.

³*Life of Methodius*, 9:18, 117.

⁴*Life of Methodius*, 9:23, 117.

Svatopluk towards the Moravian mission.⁵ Combining the third and first view, this passage might have been written later while still reflecting contemporary events. Even though Pope Hadrian and Basil supported Methodius's missionary work, he must have lost support of Svatopluk and thus his shield against the Frankish bishops. In this hostile situation, Methodius did not achieve any conversions of his enemies.

The Pope intervened on Methodius's behalf with an interdict against the bishops, who died shortly after that it was a just retribution, in the eyes of the biographer, for Methodius's imprisonment. The biographer also sees it as the turning point during which the Moravians drove out "all the German priests who were living among them, sensing that they did not accept them but forged discord against them."⁶ Now this appeared as a particularly favorable moment to embrace Christianity from the Byzantines under papal authorization and to reject Christianity from the Latins.⁷ Much ink has been spilled over the meaning of a particular passage, in which the Moravians ask that "since our fathers once received baptism from Saint Peter, give us Methodius as archbishop and teacher."⁸ Some have taken the statement at face value: Methodius was a papal legate, with authorization from the pope, who was the successor of Saint Peter.⁹ But such an interpretation is at variance with the biographer's favorable attitude towards the Byzantines.

⁵Hurbanič, 115.

⁶*Life of Methodius*, 10:12, 119.

⁷Ihor Ševčenko. "Religious Missions," 16. Thus, if contacts with Christianity existed before the arrival of the missionaries, only support of the ruler solidifies it and makes conversion official.

⁸*Life of Methodius*, 10:13, 119.

⁹Kantor, 136. fn. 61. This interpretation is Dvornik's, found in Kantor.

Whatever the interpretation one accepts for that passage, the Pope did indeed send Methodius to Moravia a second time, most likely after his release and the Moravians, now ruled by Svatopluk, entrust both churches and clergy to Methodius. As a result of his teaching, the number of priests in Moravia grew,“ and for that reason Moravians began to grow and multiply,.” no doubt a reference to Christianized Moravians. Conversion is implied here, but not specifically mentioned: “pagans believe in the true God, casting aside their lies”.¹⁰ For the first time in either one of the two *Lives*, mention is made of church-building and the establishment of a Church authority. The establishment of a Church hierarchy is particularly important at this point, because the initial request of the Moravians was for Methodius as their archbishop, and not just teacher. Moreover, in the meantime Moravia expanded territorially, while gaining political independence. Archbishop Methodius was therefore the head churchmen in a rising polity. If applying Bulliet’s criteria for group conversions, one sees Methodius’s second mission to Moravia appears as successful in terms of conversion. The converted pagans were most likely not those who have accepted Latin Christianity, since the latter are carefully distinguished in the *Life of Methodius* from pagans. It remains unclear, though, whether the pagans in question were those of Moravia proper, or residents of the lands into which Svatopluk expanded his rule. The positive note of the conversions suggests that something of the nature of time contraction is at work in the text, with decades of varying success reduced to moments. There seems to be no reason to believe that the conversions, however long they took, coincided in time with the territorial expansion of Moravia. The establishment of a formal ecclesiastical

¹⁰*Life of Methodius*, 10:21, 119.

structure, of churches and priests, and the fact that Moravia was expanding into the lands to the east at the same time as Methodius was working towards the conversions of many leaves the impression that in Moravia, conversions were necessary in order for Methodius to maintain the favor of the ruler.¹¹

¹¹Curta, 182. Florin Curta postulates that the Rastislav harnessed the organizational power of conversion to further his political ambitions. Success was tied to the appeal it had for the ruler to extend his power.

CHAPTER 23 THE PAGAN PRINCE ON THE VISTULA

Another encounter resulting in baptism, but not conversion, was that between Methodius and a powerful pagan prince in the valley of the Vistula river, who is said to have begun “mocking Christians and doing evil”.¹ This was most certainly not a Moravian prince. Moreover, the text suggests that Methodius had to go beyond the eastern borders of Moravia in order to meet the man. In fact, he even told the pagan prince that “it would be better for you to be baptized of your own will in your own land, so that you will not have to be baptized against your will as a prisoner in a foreign land.”² Some have seen this as evidence of the Moravians raiding the lands of their neighbors to the east in order to sell their captives into slavery.³ However, Methodius may have alluded here to the threat of the Frankish aggression and to the imposition of conversion onto conquered people, as in the case of the Saxons under Charlemagne. However, nothing is known about Methodius’s opinion of Charlemagne and his conversion of the Saxons, if he ever knew about it. He may have known, however, that Michael III had threatened Boris with military action if not accepting baptism at the hands of Byzantines.⁴ In fact, the most plausible explanation is that Methodius had in mind the likely possibility of the pagan prince being defeated and captured in battle, and then sold into slavery. The fate of the pagan prince was ambiguous. At this point, the initial diplomatic drive of the mission seems to have shifted from Moravia to polities

¹*Life of Methodius*, 11:6, 119.

²*Life of Methodius*, 11:10, 121.

³Paul M. Barford, “Silent Centuries: The Society and Economy of the Northwestern Slavs” in *East Central & Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 73.

⁴Nikolov, 325.

outside Moravia, in order to bring them into the Moravian orbit. For that, putting an end to hostilities as well as the continued autonomy of the local ruler was equated with voluntary baptism. The baptism of the prince might indicate the extension of Moravia's power outside its lands, but again, we do not know if the pagan prince accepted baptism or was forcibly baptized outside of his territory. From what we have seen in earlier episodes, the inclusion of this episode most likely serves as edification for the Slavic Christian audience.

CHAPTER 24 SECOND CONTROVERSY

Methodius's success brought a second wave of accusations against him, this time centered upon the issue of the *filioque*. The Byzantines rejected the addition of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father in the Nicene Creed.¹ The accusers, though incited by the Devil, are not identified except as ("certain people").² This precaution as well as the mention to Methodius as having "all Slavic lands in his hands"³ may be an indication that the events in question took place during the biographer's own time. The precaution seems to have applied to all levels of political decision, which is why nothing is known about Svatopluk's involvement in Methodius's second expulsion. Methodius's accusers claim that they had authorization from the pope "to drive out this man and his teaching."⁴ We are led to believe that presumably Frankish churchmen wanted to make it seem that the pope no longer approved of Byzantine missionaries teaching in the Slavic lands. The circumstances of this change of attitude may be those surrounding the submission of Bulgaria to the jurisdiction of the patriarch in Constantinople (880).⁵ However, John VIII remained friendly to Methodius, primarily because he was the head of a diocese under papal jurisdiction. Emperor Basil I must have also been interested in the continuation of the mission, for Methodius returned from Constantinople in 882 with imperial envoys carrying the message of peace and friendship for Svatopluk.⁶ Despite

¹Life of Methodius, 12:5. 121. Kantor, 137. Fn, 67.

²Life of Methodius, 12:2, 121.

³Life of Methodius, 12:18, 123.

⁴Life of Methodius, 12:8, 121.

⁵Lounghis, 69.

⁶Imre Boba. "The Episcopacy of St. Methodius". *Slavic Review* 26 (Mar., 1967), 88. Lounghis, 65.

Methodius's enemies' claims to the contrary, Basil was in fact not hostile to Methodius's mission in Moravia.

CHAPTER 25 MEETING THE KING OF “HUNGARY”

The last encounter Methodius has in the Slavic lands was with whom Marvin Kantor believes to have been Emperor Charles the Fat. The biographer calls him the king of Hungary, which may indicate confusion on the biographer’s part, an indication that Hungary had fallen within the Frankish orbit, or that this scene is a later interpolation when Hungary had become a political entity. The aim of this meeting was, as Basil had intended, to make peace between the Franks and the Moravians. Methodius may have in fact accompanied Svatopluk to his negotiations with Charles the Fat.¹ By 882, Methodius appears to have been able to broker the re-establishment of friendly relations between the Franks and Moravia. He was now working towards concluding another Byzantine alliance with Moravia, as well as with the Frankish emperor, all against Bulgaria, which Tougher argues that the Byzantines attacked in 895.² However, in between Byzantine conflicts with Bulgaria, they were allies.³ Charles received Methodius with honor, conversed with him, and then dismissed him with “an embrace and many gifts.”⁴ This encounter did not result in conversion, nor was conversion to Christianity from Byzantine missionaries in any way necessary to conclude a peace between the Moravian and Frankish rulers.

¹Kantor, 138, fn. 76.

²Tougher, 190.

³Vachkova, 350.

⁴*Life of Methodius*, 16:8, 125.

CHAPTER 26 THE MISSION OVERALL

In the *Life of Methodius*, the biographer celebrates Methodius's life and work. He is said to have defeated his opponent, Wiching, the Bishop of Nitra.¹ At his death, the funeral service was performed in Latin, Greek, and Slavic, symbolically burying the confessional disputes in the Slavic lands. However, the biographer gives a clue that this victory was either incomplete or fleeting: "...deliver thou thy disciples from all danger, spread thy teaching and dispel the heresies..."² This is quite different from the *Life of Constantine*, which ends in triumph and satisfaction, with miracles and rendering glory to God. Although Boris has allowed Methodius's disciples to spread Byzantine Christianity in Bulgaria, Methodius's disciples were aware that heresy still existed, which may be an oblique reference to the sharp reversal in Moravia. Methodius's death was followed by the rejection of Gorazd, Methodius's disciple, as bishop of Moravia, in favor of Wiching, Methodius's main enemy. This was brought about by the pope who succeeded John VIII after his death, and who was not at all favorable to the spread of Byzantine Christianity in Moravia. The ousting of Gorazd also removed Svatopluk's support for the Methodian mission. Without imperial, papal, and local support, Methodius's disciples were doomed: some were sold into slavery and others were expelled to Bulgaria.³ Even though the former were eventually released at Emperor Basil's request, there would be no other attempts to establish Byzantine Christianity in the Moravian and Pannonian lands. Though conversion was necessary to keep good

¹*Life of Methodius*, 138, Fn. 78.

²*Life of Methodius*, 17: 41, 129.

³Francis Dvornik. "The Patriarch Photius, Scholar and Statesman," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7. (1953) 55; Sullivan, 19.

relations with the Moravian prince, ultimately it did not matter in the face of strong confessional opponents and powers withdrawing or not renewing their support for the mission.⁴

⁴ Sullivan, 26.

CHAPTER 27 CONCLUSION – CONVERSION ONLY DOES SO MUCH

What can this analysis of The *Life of Constantine* and *Methodius* reveal about the ninth-century Byzantine mission to Byzantium's northern neighbors? Firstly, a comparison of the two texts can reveal widely differing accounts of the same events, indicating changing geographical foci and an intensifying conflict between confessions. Sometimes the heated battles of the 880s and 890s came to bear upon the earlier text. At a time of fierce confessional competition, the personal stakes to Constantine were not as high, while Methodius meets danger at every turn, in the form of the four bishops, and then Wiching, who ultimately won over his disciples. Such battles in both texts brought no baptism, promise of baptism, or conversion. When conversions were achieved, as in the case of Methodius' second mission, they were made permanent by means of establishing a formal hierarchy with imperial, papal, and local support, the use of the Slavic language in the dissemination of religious texts, and a stable base protected by the local ruler from which to spread the texts. Ultimately, however, conversions were useless without the support of the local ruler. Shifting alliances changed the scene in which Byzantine-spread Christianity would take root, away from Moravia and into Bulgaria. The Khazar situation as portrayed by the text was even less permanent. With no sign of a formal authority structure, the new converts were left to their own devices in Khazaria, and Constantine, having gained approval for Christianity from the kagan, left together with the released prisoners and converts. In Moravia, on the initial diplomatic mission, Constantine received prisoners, and did not receive converts. Conversion, at least in the Cyrillo-Methodian mission described by the

hagiographical texts, was truly an ephemeral thing, so often presented as the currency of peace but insufficient to stabilize the turbulent landscape of the ninth century.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melanie Aurora Quintos was born in 1986, in Long Island, New York. She is the oldest of three children. During the course of her life, Melanie has moved between Upstate New York and Florida. Melanie earned a Bachelor of Arts at Binghamton University in History, double-majoring with medieval studies, and minoring in French language and literature. She has a love for modern languages, especially Russian. Her love for Russian language and culture prompted her to spend four weeks in Siberia, where her knowledge of and appreciation for Russia grew.

In the last year of Melanie's undergraduate studies, she narrowed her concentration on the Early Medieval period, and in her second year of graduate studies at the University of Florida, she approached the topic to which would devote a year of effort, the Cyrillo-Methodian mission. When she will have completed the graduate program at UF, she plans to leave academia and enter a new field, but may eventually be inclined to work on this topic again at a later date.