

Re-thinking the *Life of Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher*

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THE body of work devoted to the study of the lives of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius as inventors of the Slavonic alphabet and acclaimed apostles to the Slavs is almost boundless.¹ Their legacies are intertwined with complex national myths and constructions of modern identities, and continue to inspire geo-political controversy.² Vladimir Putin's statement to the Macedonian president on 24 May 2017 (the official 'Day of the Slavonic Alphabet') that 'the Slavic alphabet and literature came to us from Macedonian soil' caused sufficient uproar to necessitate Russian minister and chess player Anatolii Karpov's public clarification.³ Karpov insisted that 'in Russia we know, that the Cyrillic alphabet came from Byzantium'.⁴ This only caused more uproar and led the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Boiko Borisov, to cancel a meeting with Karpov, who had travelled to Bulgaria to

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¹ For a pertinent example of the sheer volume of work on Cyril and Methodius, see Grigorii A. Ilinski, *Opyt sistematicheskoi kirilomefodievskoi bibliografii*, Sofia, 1934 (updated and reprinted as Svetlina Nikolova [ed.], *Kirilo-Methodievska bibliografiia, 1516–1934*, Sofia, 2003); *Kirilometodievska bibliografiia za 1934–40 god.*, Sofia, 1942 (updated and reprinted as Svetlina Nikolova [ed.], *Kirilo-Methodievska bibliografiia, 1934–44*, Sofia, 2010); Ivan Duichev, Angelina Kirmagova and Anna Paunova (eds), *Kirilometodievska bibliografiia, 1940–1980*, Sofia, 1983 (as of yet un-updated).

² For instance, Svetlina Nikolova and Peter Zhenyukh (eds), *Kirilo-Methodievskoto kulturno nasledstvo i natsionalnata identichnost*, Sofia, 2011.

³ Mariia Cheresheva, 'Putin's Homage to Cyrillic Makes Bulgarians See Red', *Balkan Insight*, 2017 <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kremlin-s-stance-on-cyrillic-origin-angers-sofia-05-25-2017>> [accessed 1 March 2020] (para. 2 of 15).

⁴ 'Anatolii Karpov v Bolgarii: V Rosii myi znaem, chto kirillitsa prishla iz Vizantii', *Novinite*, 2017 <<http://www.novinite.ru/articles/26221/Анатолій+Карпов+в+Болгари+и+3А+В+Росии+мы+знаем+2С+что+кириллица+пришла+из+Византии>> [accessed 1 March 2020] (para. 1 of 6).

meet with the head of state, citing his statements about the alphabet as the reason for doing so.⁵

This level of contestation of basic statements concerning the birth of the Slavonic alphabet is found both in contemporary political discourse, where the invention of Slavonic plays a key role in modern nationalisms and in professional historiography. Contestation emerges from uncertainties which permeate the complex yet limited corpus of the medieval sources, often difficult to date, at times contradictory or not aligned with surviving inscriptions, and completely unmentioned, together with the alphabet invention they record, in the otherwise much vaster body of contemporary Byzantine Greek sources. But alongside this contestation, we also find widespread celebration of Cyril and Methodius, as apostles to the Slavs, in monuments, dedicated universities, libraries, schools, passport pages and annual state-and-church funded celebrations from Prague to Vladivostok.⁶

The significance of Cyril and Methodius to modern nation states, and the more general, but certainly not inevitable success and longevity of the Slavonic alphabet today has led to the growth of a vast body of scholarship seeking to recover the beginnings of Slavonic culture. In order to do this, however, given the patchiness of records, historians often merge the information provided between the few relevant texts into a unified narrative of the invention of Slavonic, indiscriminately reconciling at times contradictory information. This practice and its consequences are usefully summarized by Ian Wood, albeit describing the state of study of missionary hagiography in the Latin West:

⁵ Vera Aleksandrova, 'Nov rund: Kirilitsata – ot Vizantiia? Borisov vurna Karpov ot MS', *Dnes*, 2017 <<http://www.dnes.bg/politika/2017/06/19/nov-rund-kirilicata-ot-vizantiia-borisov-vyrna-karpov-ot-ms.344771>> [accessed 1 March 2020].

⁶ Schools and universities: 'Univerzitet Sv Kiril i Metodij vo Skopije' <<http://www.ukim.edu.mk/>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; 'Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Travne' <<https://www.ucm.sk/>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; 'Veliko turnovski universitet sv. sv. Kiril i Metodii' <<http://www.uni-vt.bg/bul/>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; 'Institut teologii imeni sviatykh Mefodiia i Kirilla' <<https://www.theology.bsu.by/>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; 'Osnovna shkola Ćirilo i Metodije, Beograd' <<http://www.oscirilo.edu.rs/index.php?jezik=sr&strana=naslovna>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; 'Osnovno uchilishte Sv. Kiril i Metodij, Bitola' <<https://oukimbt.webs.com/>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; 'Římskokatolická farnost sv. Cyrila a Metoděje, Praha' <<https://farnost-karlin.cz/cz/>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; 'Narodna biblioteka Ćirilo i Metodije, Prijedor' <<https://www.bibliotekaprijedor.com/>> [accessed January, 2020]. Statues: 'Pamiatniki Kirillu i Mefodiiu v Rossii' <<https://moskray.livejournal.com/385302.html>> [accessed 1 March 2020]. Celebrations: 'Den slavianskoi pis'mennosti i kul'tury otmetiat na Krasnoi ploshadi', *Mos.ru*, 2018 <<https://www.mos.ru/news/item/40528073/>> [accessed 1 March 2020]; '24 mai – den na Bulgarskata prosveta i kultura i den na slavianskata pismenost', *My Sofia*, 2018 <<http://mysofia.bg/whatwherewhen/24-may-den-na-slavyanskata-pismenost-i-kultura/>> [accessed 1 March 2020].

I had come increasingly to believe that the purposes of our sources had been ignored in earlier, often pious, attempts to construct the Grand Narrative of Mission, and that those purposes could be best understood by considering the relationship between texts.⁷

Replacing ‘Grand Narrative of Mission’ with the ‘Grand Narrative of the Birth of Slavonic Culture’ offers an apt summary of much of the work done on the late ninth-century *Life of Constantine-Cyril* (henceforth, *VC*), and that of his brother, the *Life of Methodius*.

Given its greater length, richer detail and earlier date of composition, the *VC* has taken centre stage not only in modern political discourse, but also in academic studies of the invention of the Slavonic alphabet, the ninth-century Byzantine mission to Moravia and the conversion of the Slavs more broadly. As such the text is often used as the backbone account to which additional information can be added from other sources such as the *Life of Methodius* to offer a narrative of the events of the invention, and on the historicity of Cyril’s deeds, his ethnicity, commitments or personal character (‘his love of anonymity [...] and his love for adventure’).⁸

The impact of this contemporary and politicized image of Cyril on the *VC* as a text has been profound. It is assumed almost universally: that the text itself is primarily about Cyril’s invention of the Slavonic alphabet, his greatest achievement; that it is primarily a defence of this act and, finally, that all other activity in the text is in some way subordinated to this eventual invention. In the most recent thorough study of the papal politics of Cyril and Methodius’s mission to Moravia published in 2014, Maddalena Betti notes that the *VC* had two aims. The first was:

to define the holiness of Constantine by representing the life of this New Apostle who participated in the process of redemption thus showing the Slavs the way to salvation through the will of God. The second aim was to defend the Slavic alphabet, the Slavonic translation of the Holy Scriptures and the Slavonic liturgy. The Slavic language which was consecrated by the saintliness of Constantine was the main theme of the *Life of Constantine*.⁹

⁷ Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050*, Harlow, 2001, p. xi.

⁸ Thomas Butler, ‘Saint Constantine-Cyril’s “Sermon on the Translation of the Relics of Saint Clement of Rome”’, *Cyrrillomethodianum*, 17–18, 1993–94, p. 21.

⁹ Maddalena Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia (858–882): Papal Power and Political Reality*, Leiden, 2014, p. 76.

This hegemonic view is not too dissimilar from the conclusion of Vladimir Vavřínek's 1963 monograph, *Staroslověnské životy Konstantina a Metoděje*, which is the most thorough study to date of the VC as a literary text:

The main aim of the VC was to prove that Constantine was a saint by the will of God, and was granted with extraordinary learning and wisdom by him, and that he was predestined to work in Moravia, and that his work — the introduction of Slavonic liturgical literature — fully corresponded to the Church's interests and the teachings of Scripture.¹⁰

Both of these positions take it as a given that even if we accept the VC as in some sense a Byzantine hagiography in form and style, its purpose or argument was a Slavonic one. In other words, it is assumed that this is the 'first original written Slavonic text', or in the words of Dmitri Obolensky, that the text is 'imbued with a strong Slavic patriotism'.¹¹

This reading appears obvious if viewed from the richly saturated landscape of Cyrillo-Methodian memorabilia in Central and Eastern Europe. But it may appear somewhat startling to a reader approaching the text with no prior knowledge of the subsequent spread of Slavonic. The VC is made up of roughly twenty pages of A4 in a modern printed edition, of which a mere two deal with Slavonic, one page with the Moravian ruler Rastislav's letter to Michael asking for a teacher and for the invention of the alphabet, and another page devoted to Cyril's time in Moravia.¹² As calculated by Vavřínek himself, over half (54 per cent) of the text is taken up by cited disputations between Cyril and Jews, Muslims, Latins, heretics or pagans.¹³ Eight full pages of the text discuss the invitation of the Khazar ruler, Cyril's travels to Khazaria and his disputation at the Khazar court with Jewish scholars and men said to know a lot about Islam.¹⁴ The disputation alone covers six pages.¹⁵ In sheer volume this section is clearly the centre piece of the text. Another potential centre piece at least as prominent as the invention of the alphabet is the discovery and translation of the relics of Pope Clement, which Cyril finds in the Crimea on his route

¹⁰ Vladimir Vavřínek, *Staroslověnské životy Konstantina a Metoděje*, Prague, 1963, p. 81.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 53. Dmitri Obolensky, 'Father Francis Dvornik', *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 2, 1954, p. 5.

¹² Printed on A4 in Kliment Ohridski, *Subrani Suchineniia*, eds Boniu Angelov and Khristo Kodov, vol. 3, Sofia, 1973, pp. 89–109, dealing with the alphabet: 14, pp. 104–05; 15, pp. 105–06.

¹³ Vavřínek, *Staroslověnské životy*, p. 66.

¹⁴ Kliment, *Subrani*, pp. 95–103.

¹⁵ Ibid., bottom of pp. 96–103.

to and from Khazaria. The discovery, celebration of the relics in Rome and the decision to bury Cyril in the Basilica of St Clement take up roughly a page of text altogether, and in the order of the narrative are the culmination of Cyril's life's work.¹⁶ After Cyril has taken the relics to Rome, he is buried in the Basilica of St Clement by the pope with all the Greeks and Romans processing in his honour. There is no mention of Slavonic here, whereas in the *VM*, his brother Methodius's death is celebrated in Latin, Greek and Slavonic.¹⁷

On viewing its varied and disparate contents it is by no means clear that the text understands Cyril primarily as an inventor of the Slavonic alphabet, or that it considers this his teleological destiny. By contrast, for modern historians and national institutions, Cyril is primarily the inventor of the Slavonic alphabet, which they deem to be of more value than the relics of St Clement or a long disputation treatise against Judaism.

It is not the purpose of this article to offer a general study of the *VC* and of the historicity of Constantine-Cyril. Such work has been pursued for over a century, and it is unlikely that another study would offer much that is new or fruitful.¹⁸ What I seek to do instead is to approach the *VC* as a monument of intellectual history, namely as a text which seeks to make a particular intervention to contemporary discourse. I propose an argument concerning what the *VC* is *about* and what it is trying to do, by shifting focus away from Cyril and to the text.

Texts have a multitude of purposes and can be analysed within a plethora of contexts: no contextualization or interpretation can claim to be total. However, I will focus on two key themes, which make up the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 107–09.

¹⁷ *Vita Constantini* (hereafter, *VC*), 18.14. No recent critical edition of the *VC* exists, so I have referred to a number of editions when citing the text. The main two are František Grivec, Franc Tomšič (eds), *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicensis. Fontes*, Zagreb, 1960, pp. 95–143, and Kliment, *Subrani*, pp. 30–159. I have also referred to Christiano Diddi's editions of individual manuscript traditions especially to the South Slavic ones. Generally, the editions do not disagree on word choice, but often on morphology. *Vita Methodii*, 17.11. The *Vita Methodii*'s textual history is simpler. I use the edition in Kliment, *Subrani*, pp. 185–92. All translations are my own.

¹⁸ Here are only a few foundational studies which do this: Franc Grivec, *Slovanští apoštolé sv. Cyril a Metoděj*, Ljubljana, 1927; Viktor A. Istrin, *1100 Let slavianskoi azbuki*, Moscow, 1963, 3rd edn, 2010; Alexis Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom: An Introduction to the Medieval History of the Slavs*, Cambridge, 1970; Boniu Angelov, *Kiril i Metodii. Slavianski i bulgarski prosvetiteli*, Sofia, 1977; Francis Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs: SS Constantine-Cyril and Methodius*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1980; Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, London, 1971; Boris Floria, *Skazaniia o nachale skavianskoi pismenosti*, Moscow, 1981, 2nd edn, St Petersburg, 2000, pp. 1–157. More recent scholarship takes the broad narrative strokes of these works as given and tends to focus on much narrower questions.

vast majority of the *VC* and its contents but which remain largely understudied or sidelined by studies concerned with the alphabet: that is, the textual representations of the parallel processes of, on the one hand, Cyril's learning, and his disputations on the other. It is my contention that learning and disputation form a tightly-knit narrative argument concerned with the role of education in missionary activity, and that this narrative forms the dominant ideological thrust of the *VC* as a text. Whilst, as I shall demonstrate, the invention of Slavonic is one part of this larger argument, other scenes or episodes in the text pursue or cover different agendas or topics.

Nonetheless, I maintain that the primary concern of the author of the *VC* is not to celebrate Cyril as apostle to the Slavs, but rather as a Christian philosopher and monk, whose 'outside' learning permits him access to Christian understanding. And that this synthesis, of outside learning and Christian piety, is aimed specifically at a ninth-century Byzantine audience, where the issue of education and missionary activity was a matter of current tension. As such, I point to a Greek-speaking intellectual milieu dwelling in Rome as the most probable textual community to have produced this text.

I refer throughout to 'the author' in the singular because I argue that in large part this text is coherently and consciously organized, and that it advocates a largely internally consistent intellectual position. This is purely a functional term, however, as it remains perfectly plausible that more than one person was involved in the text's production, and a body of people were certainly involved in its transmission.¹⁹ Thus, I refer to this author as 'they' both as a gender neutral shorthand and as a recognition of the potential plurality of a textual community.

The starting point of this study is the work, amongst others, of Ihor Ševčenko, who has insisted that the lives of Cyril and Methodius 'are Byzantine documents', that they 'glorify two Byzantines' and they 'rest in part on Byzantine texts written in Greek'.²⁰ The *VC* author propagates a Byzantine imperial universalism freely. This is done through Cyril, who insists to his Muslim interlocutors that 'all arts came from us', namely the

¹⁹ My use is akin to the use of 'author-function' in Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Ithaca, NY, 1977, pp. 124–27.

²⁰ Ihor Ševčenko, 'Religious Missions Seen from Byzantium', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 12–13, 1988–89, p. 13; Sergei Ivanov, *Vizantiiskoe missionerstvo: možhno li sdelat' iz 'Varvara' khristianina?*, Moscow, 2003, p. 149; Vladimír Vavřínek, 'Staroslověnské životy Konstantina a Metoděje a panegyriky Řehoře z Nazianzu', *Listy filologické*, 85, 1962, pp. 217–24.

Hellenic arts, and through the mouths of the foreign rulers.²¹ Moravian Prince Rastislav's request for religious preachers in Slavonic was because, as the author has him say, 'it is from you [i.e. the Romans] that good law is given to all regions'.²² It is made clear in the text that 'we' are the Romans or Byzantines, and all others, Slavs, Khazars, Saracens, Venetians are on the outside — like the Moravians whose leader is informed by Emperor Michael that God 'made letters in *your* language appear, now in *our* times' (my emphasis).²³ This Byzantine imperialism, together with the recent argument that the earliest church service in honour of Constantine-Cyril was written in Greek, strongly point to the fact that, although often posited and dismissed, the *VC* was most probably originally written in Greek.²⁴

This article therefore approaches the *VC* as a monument of Byzantine textual and intellectual history, and not as a text which self-consciously promotes or defends its own Slavonic identity. But I seek to go further than Ševčenko, by acknowledging that the *VC* is not simply Byzantine literature because it alludes to Byzantine matters and motifs, but because it communicates its agenda through the language and framework of a Byzantine education, and because this agenda is about the purpose of (Byzantine) education in the Christian realm.

The contention of this article is threefold. Firstly, I argue that the text is broadly organized around two intertwined narrative trajectories of Cyril's learning and his disputes. Cyril undergoes three phases of learning in the *VC*: in Hellenic arts, in Old Testament languages and in Slavonic letters. He also performs three major disputations: with Muslims, trained in Hellenic arts at the Caliph's court, with Jewish bookmen at the Khazar court, and with 'tri-lingual' Latin priests and bishops who deny the use of Slavonic. Secondly, I maintain that Cyril's three phases of learning, and the three major disputations it prepares him for, form a significant and controlled narrative structure which moves the narrative on, temporally, in the life of Cyril, universally, in phases of Christian history (from Hellenism, to the Old Testament prophecies, to New Testament realization) and geographically (from Constantinople to Baghdad or Samara, from the

²¹ 'А ѡТЪ НАСЪ СѡУТЬ ВЪСА ХѡУДОЖЕСТВІА ИЗЫШЛА', *VC*, 6.53.

²² 'ѡТЪ ВАСЪ БО НА ВСЕ СТРАНЫ ДОБРЪ ЗАКОНЪ ИСХОДИТЬ', *ibid.*, 14.5.

²³ 'НЫНЯ ЕЪ НАША ЛѢТА ЯВЪЛЪ БѢЖЪ ВЪ ВАШЪ КЪЗЫКЪ', *ibid.*, 14.16.

²⁴ Sergei Temchin, 'O grecheskom proiskhozhdenii drevneishei sluzhby Kirillu Filosu', in Hans Rothe, Dagmar Christians (eds), *Liturgische Hymnen nach byzantinischem Ritus bei den Slaven in ältester Zeit*, Paderborn, 2007, pp. 328–39. Formerly it has been proposed that the text or parts of it were originally written in Greek. André Vaillant, *Textes Vieux-Slaves*, vol. 2, Paris, 1968, p. 25; Ricardo Picchio, 'Compilazione e trama narrativa nelle "Vite" di Costantino e Metodio', *Ricerche Slavistiche*, 8, 1960, pp. 61–95.

Crimea to Khazaria and from Moravia to Venice). And thirdly, I suggest that the disputes are rhetorically structured through and with Cyril's education, to dissolve the tension between 'outside knowledge' and the Orthodox faith. Each disputation, therefore, whether organized through rhetoric or resting on knowledge acquired through grammar, is in its very formulation an argument for the use of 'outside knowledge' in missionary activity.

In what follows, I present the three phases of learning, and the three disputations that succeed them in turn. While this article is intended primarily as a close textual study of the argument of the *VC*, I conclude with some preliminary remarks on the consequences of this study. I briefly point to one way of locating the argument of the *VC* within Byzantine intellectual discourse by highlighting the types of texts and literature I believe the text to be engaging with.²⁵

1. Learning Perfecting Grace

i. The Hellenic arts

Vladimír Vavřínek has calculated that Cyril's disputations with Jews, Muslims and Venetians, and his shorter encounters with an iconoclast patriarch, some bandits in the area around Crimea and the like make up over half of the text (56 per cent).²⁶ It is hard to argue, therefore, that the *VC* is not a text fundamentally about argument. More particularly, however, three disputations stand out in the text for being much longer than the others, and for building upon, as I will seek to demonstrate, an educational phase that usually closely precedes them: these are with Muslims (two out of twenty pages in the modern A4 edition), with Jews (seven pages) and the Latins in Venice (two pages).

Whilst each disputation has received plenty of study, it has remained unnoticed even by the closest of textual studies on the *VC* that each major disputation comes after an educational experience, in which Cyril acquires understanding of various kinds of knowledge through learning and prayer. Thus, in order to understand the role of argument in the text, it is essential to understand the role of the learning which forms a necessary prerequisite to the art of disputation.

²⁵ A more elaborate study of the learning and disputations of Cyril, together with an extensive effort to situate the text amidst Byzantine intellectual culture, can be found in Mirela Ivanova, 'Inventing Slavonic: Cultures of Writing between Rome and Constantinople', unpublished DPhil dissertation, University of Oxford, 2020.

²⁶ Vavřínek, 'Staroslověnské životy', p. 111.

The VC presents Cyril's first educational phase as the study of the Hellenic arts. This is occasioned by him 'learning by heart the books of the holy Gregory the Theologian'.²⁷ Soon, he struggled with Gregory's works, and 'delving into many orations and into their great wisdom, not being able to understand [*razoumieti*] their depth [*gl'bin*]", he was deeply disheartened'.²⁸

The VC offers a simple solution to this internal conflict — grammatical education. It notes Cyril found an old grammarian in his home town of Thessaloniki and begged him on his knees: 'Teach me the art of grammar well!'²⁹ The man refused, but God soon granted it that Cyril was called to Constantinople, where he pursued a full education of the so-called 'earthly wisdoms'. He first turned to grammar, and then to Homer and geometry under Leo, a well-known Byzantine scholar, and all 'philosophical teachings' from Photius, the controversial Patriarch of Constantinople (858–67, 877–86), including rhetoric and arithmetic, astronomy, music and 'all other Hellenic arts'.³⁰

The portrayal of classical education as being a prerequisite for the comprehension of Christian writings is not uncommon in Byzantine literature. The VC shares the position of Basil of Caesarea, in his influential treatise on Greek literature:

Now to that other life the Holy Scriptures lead the way, teaching us through mysteries. Yet so long as, by reason of your age, it is impossible for you to understand the depth of the meaning of these, in the meantime, by means of other analogies which are not entirely different, we give, as it were in shadows and reflections, a preliminary training to the eye of the soul.³¹

For Basil, as for the VC, the young mind is 'unable to understand the depth' of Christian teaching, and therefore requires training in the Hellenic arts.³² Basil's treatise remained significant in the Byzantine period. It was cited and excerpted by John Damascene, as well as in the collection of maxims from St Basil ascribed to Symeon Metaphrastes.³³ It is this kind

²⁷ 'оуче се изъ оустъхъ книгами светаго Григориа Богослова', VC, 3.17.

²⁸ 'въшъдь же въ многыи бесѣды и оумъ вели, не могъзы разоумѣти глѣбиннь в оумныи велико възпаде', *ibid.*, 3.21.

²⁹ 'добрѣ наоучи ме хѣдожьствѣдъ граматицьскомѣдъ', *ibid.*, 3.23.

³⁰ 'Философийскыи оученіемъ [...] и всѣмъ прочинимъ един'скыи хѣдожьствомъ', *ibid.*, 4.2.

³¹ Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 249–368. On Greek Literature*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Martin P. McGuire, Cambridge, MA, 1934, p. 383

³² 'не могъзы разоумѣти глѣвиннь', VC, 3.21; 'epakouein tou bathous tēs dianoias autōn ouch oion te', Basil, *Letters*, II. 6–10.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

of dissemination, rather than some direct textual connection, that most probably lies behind the allusion in the VC.

It is significant that Gregory of Nazianzus is enlisted to legitimize the first phase of Cyril's education: the study of Hellenic arts. This forms part of a much wider preoccupation in the VC to harmonize 'outside knowledge' with Orthodox piety, by demonstrating how outside knowledge can be put to use in service of the right faith. Gregory, arguably the 'most important figure in the synthesis of Greek rhetoric and Christianity', is a solid rock to base such an argument on, given that his own career also started in classical education before he was baptised and later made Bishop of Constantinople.³⁴ Moreover, interest in him was resurgent in ninth-century Byzantium.³⁵

ii. Cyril and the Old Testament language(s)

Cyril's classical education sufficed for his dispute with the Muslims which will be discussed below. The trip to the Khazars, however, necessitated a second wave of learning in the VC in three phases, which seem united by their association with the Old Testament and early Christian history. The VC notes that, 'having come to Kherson, he taught himself Jewish orations and books, translated the grammar in eight parts and from this, received understanding [*razoum'*].'³⁶ There is a strong narrative similarity between this passage and the account of Cyril's earlier education. Cyril does not understand (*razoumieti*) the depth of Gregory's orations, and asks for grammatical education. With Hebrew, understanding (*razoum'*) is once again predicated on grammar. The 'eight parts' of grammar here are most probably an allusion to the eight parts of speech of Dionysius Thrax's second-to-first century BC textbook, *Techne Grammatike*, which formed the backbone of Byzantine grammatical education.³⁷

This process of receiving wisdom through grammar alone is immediately provided with a pious counterbalance in the text:

³⁴ George Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, Princeton, NJ, 1994, pp. 261–63.

³⁵ See Leslie Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, Cambridge, 1999.

³⁶ 'и Херсона дошѣдь наоучи се тоу жидовскои бесѣдѣ и книгамъ, осем чѣсти прѣложи грамастикю и вѣтъ того рѣзѣмъ възсприемъ.' VC, 8.10.

³⁷ Robert Robins, *The Byzantine Grammarians: Their Place in History*, Berlin, 1993, pp. 58–59; Gustav Uhlig, *Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 1.1, Leipzig, 1883 repr. Hildesheim, 1965, p. 23: 'Speech is a combination of words in prose or verse expressing a complete thought. There are eight parts of speech: noun, verb, participle, article, pronoun, preposition, adverb and conjunction.'

And a Samaritan who was living there, went to him and was arguing with him, and he brought Samaritan books and showed them to him. The philosopher asked for them from him [the Samaritan], shut himself in a room and committed himself to prayer, and having received understanding [*razoum'*] from God, he began to read the books without error.³⁸

Cyril learns to read Samaritan books entirely through prayer but receives the same 'understanding' (*razoum'*). This is rather inconsistent with his initial acts of learning, in which grammatical education alone sufficed. In a final act of learning before the Khazar debates, Cyril acquires a language that may be Syriac by synthesizing these two approaches:³⁹

[...] and he found a Gospel and a psalter, written in *ros'sky* letters, and he found a man, who spoke with this speech and he spoke with him, and he received the force of the words comparing the different letters, vowels and consonants, with his own speech, and having addressed a prayer to God he soon began to read and speak.⁴⁰

This description of learning can be divided into two stages. In the first, Cyril receives the 'force of words' by comparing his own speech with the vowels and consonants of the other. In light of the allusion to the eight parts of grammar found in Byzantine grammatical textbooks, the reference to vowels and consonants here also suggests grammatical influence. Cyril receives, or achieves, the power of the words, in the New Testament sense of the 'meaning' or significance of the words through a study of

³⁸ 'Самьрѣнинъ' же нѣкои тоу живѣаше и приходе къ нѣмоу стезаше се съ нимъ и принесе книги самарѣнскыи и показа је емоу. Испрошь је оу него философъ, затвори се въ храминѣ и на молитвѣ се наложи и штъ бога раздѣль приѣмь, ч'тати научеть книги вес порока.' VC, 8.10.

³⁹ As with most aspects of the VC, vast quantities of scholarship have been dedicated to the language '*ros'sky*'. Broadly scholarly consensus rests on a corruption of the word Syriac, through a consonantal swap. While this would work well with the argument that I propose, it remains possible that the word is corrupted beyond recovery by a later pious Rus monk. For a bibliography on the Syriac question, see Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions*, p. 66 n.35. For a slightly more recent summary of the debate, albeit arguing the implausible claim that this was in fact proto-Russian, see Anthony-Emil Tachiaos, 'Some Controversial Points Relating to the Life and Activity of Cyril and Methodus', *Cyrrilomethodianum*, 17–18, 1993–94, pp. 45–70. The word occurs slightly differently in different manuscript traditions, e.g.: '*roush'kym*' in Kliment, *Subrani*, p. 96, and '*rōs'sky*' in Diddi, 'Materiali', p. 150.

⁴⁰ 'и обрѣт' же тоу еѣаггеліе и ѣсалтир, росьскы писмень писано, и чловѣка обрѣтѣ, глаголюща тоу всебдою и всебдовавъ съ нимъ и силоу рѣчи приѣмь, своиъ всебдѣ прикладане, разлічїе писмень, гласнаа и съгласнаа, и къ богѣ молитвѣ дръже и въскорѣ научать чїсти и сказати.' VC, 8.15. I am grateful to Professor Catherine Mary MacRobert for her assistance with this passage.

their grammatical components.⁴¹ The latter statement, and second part of the process of achieving meaning in language is entirely due to divine intervention: through simple prayer, Cyril begins to ‘read and speak’. Thus, in the third consecutive passage describing Cyril’s learning of languages, we find a harmony between the previous two. He learned Hebrew using the art of grammar alone. He learned Samaritan using only prayer. But he learned the ‘ros’sky’ or possibly Syriac under question here through both the use of grammatical concepts translated from Greek grammatical textbooks *and* through prayer.

Cyril as a learner is not simply represented as a harmonizer of worldly wisdom and pious learning whose classical education is built upon by his education in the Old Testament scripture and assists it. This process of acquiring ‘outside knowledge’, guided by divine intervention, is also performed to a particular end, a pious telos — the refutation of heathens.

iii. Cyril, Slavonic and Creation: The New Testament

The extremely brief account of the creation of the Slavonic alphabet ought to be considered within this broader narrative trajectory of Cyril’s acts of learning, and the ways in which those acts prepared him for different audiences and different stages in his disputations. The acts of learning so far have been passive in nature. They described processes through which Cyril acquired or received understanding before enacting his knowledge in disputation. Cyril first learned orations by Gregory by heart. He then learned all the ‘Hellenic arts’, and refused a wife and gold, because for him ‘there is nothing better than learning’.⁴² He also learned to read Hebrew books and orations, and then the books of the Samaritans. With the assistance of grammar and prayer he begins to ‘read and speak’ the ‘ros’sky’. There is no mention of Cyril writing, or creating anything anew throughout this process, besides an invocation to Gregory of Nazianzus to become his teacher.

Therefore, it is rather unsurprising at a closer look of the relevant passages in the *VC* that Cyril himself is not directly credited with the creation of the Slavonic alphabet. The emperor notes that no-one could carry out the Moravian mission as Cyril would, which has been taken to allude to his already complete creation of the letters or knowledge of Slavonic.⁴³

⁴¹ *Lexicon Linguae Palaeoslovenicae*, 4 vols, Prague, 1966–97, pp. 273–74. ‘If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying [*těn dynamin tēs fōnēs*], literally “the power of their voice”, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me.’ 1 Corinthians 14:11.

⁴² ‘А мнѣ волшєне оучєніа нѣсть ничѣгоже ино.’ *VC*, 4.14.

⁴³ ‘не можеть инь никто исправити якоже ты.’ *Ibid.*, 14.8.

But Michael also says this to Cyril before his mission to the Khazars even though at this point in the narrative he does not know Hebrew.⁴⁴

The Slavonic letters are only made to appear to Cyril by God, in what is undoubtedly best considered a third act of learning. This is the full explanation of the creation of the Slavonic alphabet in the life, and it follows Cyril's customary withdrawal to prayer:

[...] and soon, God made the letters appear to him, having listened to the prayer of his servant, and he immediately put together the letters and began to write the words of the evangelist: in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and so forth.⁴⁵

Rather than there being an act of creation on Cyril's part, God reveals the letters for Cyril to learn, 'put together' (*slozhiti*) and utilize to further the words of God. This closely aligns with the divine agency of prayers used by Cyril for the Samaritan and 'ros'sky' letters. Prayer grants access to knowledge or understanding, and in turn permits reading in the case of the Samaritan, reading and speaking in the case of 'ros'sky' and writing in the case of Slavonic.

God is also given complete agency in the letter Michael supposedly sends to Rastislav to announce the success: 'God [...] having seen your faith [...] made letters in your language appear now in our times.'⁴⁶ Cyril is described only subsequently as the man sent by Michael, 'to whom God made them [the letters] known'.⁴⁷ On a number of occasions, therefore, the author of the VC explicitly avoids granting Cyril creative agency.

It becomes clear within the confines of the VC that Cyril is not sent to Moravia because he invents the Slavonic alphabet. He is sent, rather, because he is best educated in the *method* of debate as both a grammarian and a rhetorician and in the *content* of faith to use words to refute the opponents of the orthodox faith. As such the mission to Moravia does not stand apart from Cyril's encounter with Jews, Samaritans and speakers of 'ros'sky'. Cyril's final stage of learning, or final acquisition of understanding, demonstrates a difference of degree rather than kind. This difference is the active omission of the role of rhetorical or grammatical education in

⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.7.

⁴⁵ 'вѣскоупѣ же не емоу богъ яви, послушаніе молитвъ своихъ рабъ, и дѣниѣ сложи писмена и научать всебѣдѣ писати еуангелскѣ: испрѣва бѣ слово и слово бѣ оу бога и богъ бѣ слово и прочене.' Ibid., 14.13.

⁴⁶ 'богъ [...] видѣвъ вѣрѣ твою [...] нынѣя въ наша лѣта явлѣ бѣкъвы въ вашъ ѣзыкь.' Ibid., 14.16.

⁴⁷ 'немоужѣ не богъ яви.' Ibid.

the account of his acquisition. Why Cyril is presented as purely receiving letters and the sacred texts to write with them (i.e. the Gospel of John) from God, can only be explained when the tri-partite disputational cycle for which Cyril's education prepares him is explored as a whole.

2. *Cyril's Disputations: Words and Deeds*

As noted above, it is impossible to study the disputations before first understanding how the VC presents Cyril's preparation for dispute through learning. Thus, having explored the representation of the three phases of education in the VC — classical, Old Testament and New Testament — it is crucial to turn to the value and content of words in the text. Cyril's individual speeches have received plenty of scholarly attention, including a full monograph on his dispute with the Khazars.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, scholars have sought to analyse speeches attributed to Cyril as actual speeches he gave or as direct citations from his (no longer extant) works.⁴⁹ Vladimír Vavřínek's 1963 monograph, *Staroslověnské životy Konstantina a Metoděje*, is the closest to a study of the cycle of disputations as a whole, but although closely engaging Byzantine formal and textual influence, considers parts of these speeches as direct quotes, and their collective whole as a multi-faceted defence of Slavonic culture.⁵⁰ This article seeks to be, therefore, the first comprehensive study of the rhetoric of the disputations as a connected, accumulative, argumentative whole which formulates a particular argument not reducible to an apology for Slavonic, but concerned more broadly with education and orthodoxy.

In turn, I will focus on how the disputations are framed in the VC, in light of their respective audiences, topics of discussion and rhetorical

⁴⁸ On his dispute with the Muslims, see Vladimír Vavřínek, 'A Byzantine Polemic against Islam in Old Slavonic Hagiography', in Vassilios Christides, Theodoros Papadopoulos (eds), *Graeco-Arabica VII-VIII. Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Graeco-Oriental and African Studies*, Nicosia 2000, pp. 535-42. With the Venetians, see Iulian Velikov, "'Venetsianskiiat disput" na Sveti Kiril Filosof v svetlinata na antichnata ritorika', in *Starobulgarskata rukopisna kniga – sudba i misiia. V pamet na prof. Kuio M. Kuev po sluchai 100-godishninata ot rozhdenieto mu*, Veliko Turnovo, 2012, pp. 113-26; Sava Sivriev, 'Oratorskoto umenie na venetsianskata rech na Konstantin-Kiril', *Palaebulgarica*, 3, 1993, pp. 48-51. With the Iconoclast patriarch, see Petr Balcárek, 'Some Remarks to the Response to Iconoclasm in the Old Slavonic *Vita Constantini*', *Studia patristica*, 48, 2010, pp. 355-59, and on the Khazars: Tatsuiia Moriasu, 'Khazarskaia missiia Konstantina (ee znachenie v ZHK)', *Starobulgarska literatura*, 10, 1981, pp. 39-51; Khristo Trendafilov, *Khazarskata Polemika na Konstantin-Kiril*, Sofia, 1999.

⁴⁹ For instance, *ibid.*, pp. 34-76; Anthony-Emil Tachiaos, 'Neskol'ko zamechani otnositel'no konchino Konstantina-Kirilla v Rime', *Vspomogatel'nye istoricheskie discipliny*, 30, 2007, pp. 160-68.

⁵⁰ See Vavřínek, *Staroslověnské životy*, pp. 53-84.

organization of the discussion. Here, as elsewhere, I argue that this organization is not random, but seeks to achieve a tri-partite division in the life of three temporal spheres which require three different types of education, and three different methods of argumentation. The VC maintains that the third phase, of the indisputable New Testament, is the final, but it also insists that the former two, of classical and Old Testament education, and of disputes with other Abrahamic religions' representatives, are crucial for the achievement of the third. To assist the reader, I provide some tables which summarize the contents of each major disputation (Tables 1–3).

Table 1: Debate at the Court of the Caliph with Muslim scholars

Lines of Dispute	Topic of Dispute
6.1–4	Saracens challenge Holy Trinity, ask for a man to dispute with
6.4–9	Emperor sends Cyril
6.10–13	Cyril sees demons on the doors of Christians, they challenge him to understand them
6.14–25	Accused that Christians do not follow Christ's laws, whilst Muslims do
6.26–32	Challenge of the Holy Trinity
6.33–39	Accused that Christians do not follow Christ's precept to turn the other cheek
6.40–47	Accused that Jesus paid his taxes, but Christians do not pay to the Arabs
6.48–53	Asked how he knows so much
6.54	He explains how the Caliph's garden grows by itself
6.54–55	Cyril is unimpressed by the wealth and palaces of the Caliph
6.57	They try to poison him

i. The Caliph's court

As Vavřínek has noted, the anti-Islamic polemic in the treatise is not particularly extraordinary, nor does it demonstrate a deep knowledge of Muslim doctrine.⁵¹ Rather than addressing Cyril's Muslim interlocutors on their own terms, therefore, the author integrates them in the world of Roman education, stressing that he debated 'wise men, learned in the books of geometry and astronomy and other such teachings'.⁵² Framing the Muslim scholars thus is a clear allusion to a Hellenic education, of the sort Cyril himself received earlier in the text.

The categorization of Muslim scholars and their particular interest in Hellenic learning aligns with the current historiographical consensus that the revival of many Hellenic arts such as astrology at the Byzantine court in the ninth century were in part inspired by the translation movement at the Abbasid court.⁵³ The VC attests to a very pertinent contemporary concern on the part of the Byzantine intellectual elite about the intellectual rivalry or even supremacy of the Abbasid caliphate. Thus, Cyril sits comfortably amid a number of narratives about Byzantine intellectuals, such as John the Grammarian, flowing between the imperial and caliphal courts and seeking to impress or embarrass their Muslim interlocutors.⁵⁴

A significant part of Cyril's encounter with the Muslims is spent not addressing doctrine in any great detail but demonstrating his rhetorical abilities and his education. This demonstration reveals that the core of Cyril's case for Byzantine superiority is intellectual, on the one hand, and state-territorial on the other. The natural conclusion to this superiority is that the Christian religion is itself superior, for its longevity has made it more sophisticated and intellectually challenging.

The first argument concerning intellectual superiority is asserted most clearly when the Muslim scholars ask Cyril how he has answers to all their questions:

⁵¹ Vavřínek, 'A Byzantine Polemic against Islam', p. 538.

⁵² 'моща раа ѣдѣь, книгѣ научѣна гешметрии и астрономии и прочимъ оученемъ.' VC, 6.14.

⁵³ Paul Magdalino, 'Astrology', in Anthony Kaldellis, Niketas Sinioussoglu (eds), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, Cambridge, 2017, p. 203.

⁵⁴ Paul Magdalino, 'The Road to Baghdad in the Thought World of Ninth Century Byzantium', in Leslie Brubaker (ed.), *Dead or Alive? Byzantium in the Ninth Century*, Aldershot, 1998, pp. 195–213; Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)*, London, 1998.

A certain man having drawn some water from the sea, was carrying it in a skin, and was boasting, saying to strangers: 'Do you see the water, which no one has but me?' But a man came who was a sailor, and he said to him: Are you not ashamed to speak like this, bragging with only this stinking skin? While we have the whole sea. And you do the same, when all arts came from us.⁵⁵

It is clear that the arts that 'came from us' are the same arts which the VC notes the Muslim scholars are trained in, namely astronomy and other Hellenic arts. Thus, the text makes an explicit association between the Middle Byzantine polity and its people, and the intellectual tradition of Hellenic education. This association is used to argue against the Caliphate. Muslim scholars can only receive from outside, something that is internal to the history of Byzantine culture, and thus they cannot match Cyril in learning.

The second strand of Byzantine superiority is the claim to state-territorial historical continuity. When accused that Christians do not follow Christ's precepts, because Jesus paid his taxes and they do not, Cyril argues that they do, because 'we all pay taxes to the Romans'.⁵⁶ This statement wrongly implies that Christians under Arab rule pay taxes to the Byzantine state. It also associates the medieval Byzantine polity directly with the Roman state which controlled the land Jesus lived upon.

These two historic continuities, according to the VC, result in the intellectual superiority of Christianity as a religion. When accused that Christians only follow Christ when it suits them, but Muslims follow Muhammad more loyally, Cyril replies that 'our God is like some great sea-being' and many will dive into these depths to find him.⁵⁷

[...] and those strong in mind, with his [God's] help, receive a wealth of understanding [*razoumnoie bogat'stvo*], swim through, and return, but the weak ones try to tame [the sea] with rotten ships, and while some sink, others barely breathe with great difficulty, dragging themselves with helpless lethargy.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ 'ЧЛОВѢКЪ НѢКОИ ПОУРЪПЪ ВЪ МОРИ ВОДОУ, ВЪ МѢШИНЪЦИ ПОШАШЕ Ю И ГРЪДѢШЕ СЕ, ГЛАГОЛѢ КЪ СТРАННИКОМЪ: ВИДИТЕ ЛИ ВОДѢ, ЮЖЕ НИКТОЖЕ НЕ ИМАТЬ РАЗВѢ МЕНЕ? ПРИШЪДЪ ЖЕ ЕДИНЬ МОУЖЬ ПОМОРНИКЪ РЕЧЕ КЪ НЕМОУ: НЕ СТЫДИШИ ЛИ СЕ, СЯ ГЛАГОЛѢ, ХВАЛЕ СЕ ТЪКМО СМРДѢШИМЪ, А МЫ СЕГО ПЪЧИНЪ ИМАМЪ ТАКО И ВИ ДѢТЕ А УТЪ НАСЪ СОУТЬ ВЪСА ХОУДОЖЬСТВѢА ИЗЫШЛА.' VC, 6.51-3.

⁵⁶ 'РИМАЛЯНОМЪ ВЪСИ ДАЕМЪ ДАНЬ.' Ibid., 6.40

⁵⁷ 'БОГЪ НАШЪ ЯКО И ПОУЧИНА ЕСТЬ МОРСКА.' Ibid., 6.17.

⁵⁸ 'И СИЛНЫИ УМОМЪ ПОМОЦИНУ НЕГО БОГАТСТВО РАЗЪМНОЖЕ ПРИЕМАЮЩЕ ПРѢПЛАВАЮТЬ И ВЪЗВРАЩАЮТЬ СЕ, А СЛАБИИ ЯКО И ВЪ СЪГНИЛѢХЪ КОРАБЛИХЪ ПОКОУШАЮТЬ СЕ ПРѢВНИТИ, ОВИ ИСТАПЛЯЮТЬ, А ОВИ СЪ ТРѢДОМЪ НЕДАВА УТЪДЫХАЮТЬ, НЕМОЩНОЮ ЛѢНОСТНОЮ ВЛАЮЩЕ СЕ.' Ibid., 6.19.

This is an allusion to the kind of interventions God makes elsewhere in the *VC*, assisting Cyril with understanding or wisdom (*razoum*). Such interventions only come to those strong in mind (*sil'nyi umom*). This clearly points to the view expressed by the *VC* and Basil of Caesarea that the mysteries of divine writings require intellectual training and education. The idea of 'depth' of understanding, both in Cyril failing to understand Gregory of Nazianzus's homilies prior to his education (*gl'bini*), and in Basil of Caesarea's advice to young men ('bathos') is realized in this metaphor of God as the 'depths' of the sea. Christianity, therefore, is for those strong in mind, and as made clear through the education of the saint, this strength comes through Hellenic education in youth for the individual.

In the totality of Cyril's disputations with Muslim scholars the author barely resorts to scripture. They use one short citation from the Old Testament to further the case that God is like the depth of the sea, although that specific metaphor is not found in the scripture (Isaiah, 53:8).⁵⁹ Cyril's only use of the New Testament is prompted by the Muslim scholars' accusation that Christians do not turn the other cheek, in which *they* quote from Luke 6.27–29.⁶⁰ His response is rather unpersuasive, but cites two short passages from Luke (6.28) and John (15.13).⁶¹ The contrast between this and his more liberal use of scriptural quotations or close allusions at the Khazar court and against the Venetian priests and monks is striking. In both cases, interspersed citation dominates Cyril's words. These citations number forty in the prolonged Khazar disputes and sixteen in the long speech against the Venetians, some of which are over ten lines long.⁶²

In short, the authorial organization of Cyril's rhetoric against the Muslims at the Caliph's court is marked by its defence of the heritage of the Roman state, as tax collector, and Hellenic education, coming from 'us'. Thus, the arguments put forth by the text stress that the Byzantine empire's superiority and legitimacy come from the fact that it pre-dates Islam and the Caliphate both in historic territorial control, and their older educational models. The consequences of this are intellectual and concern the 'depths' of the Romans' religious superiority. Namely, in inheriting both education in Hellenic arts from 'us', or the Romans (the very education Cyril himself received prior to arriving at the court of the Caliph), Muslims have not developed the necessary strength 'in mind'.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.17–18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.34.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.38.

⁶² These are identified by the editors of the edition of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The numbers are my own. Kliment, *Subrani*, pp. 120–41.

ii. *The Khazar debates*

The debates at the Khazar court are not only the longest but the broadest and most versatile in content, (see Table 2). They occur not long after the second wave of Cyril's education in Hebrew and Samaritan speech and books. Although the Khagan speaks, as do speakers identified as knowing a lot about the Muslim faith, but not explicitly as Muslims, the bulk of this debate is with Jewish scholars.

It seems clear that contemporary literature and tensions within the Byzantine polity probably influenced the length and centrality of this dispute in the VC. The ninth century saw both the failed mission to convert the Khazars and a surge in anti-Jewish writing, made sharper by the association between Jews and iconoclasm.⁶³ Khristo Trendafilov's aforementioned monograph devoted to the Khazar polemic sought to illuminate the sources of the disputations and concluded that no direct sources are identifiable.⁶⁴ I take the disputation, therefore, as an original authorial composition of otherwise standard anti-Jewish tropes and works in Byzantine literature. In so doing, I part with the bulk of scholarship which has focused in getting closer to Cyril as a man, and attributed authorial agency to him directly in parts of the text reported as his speech. Thus, where scholars have often done this at the expense of authorial intention and agency in the collation and organization of the text, I seek to elevate the author at the expense of Cyril and focus on the rhetorical framing and structure of the dispute as it stands within the VC.

The dispute at the Khazar court, with Jewish scholars in particular, engages broadly in two types of question. The first are dogmatic disagreements on specific issues like the Trinity (9.15–22), pork and rabbit (10.89–94), and idol-worship (10.82–88), which albeit fairly controversial are

⁶³ Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople*, Washington, D.C., 1958, p. 15; Jonathan Shepard, 'The Khazars' Formal Adoption of Judaism and Byzantium's Northern Policy', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 31, 1998, p. 20; Robert Bonfil, 'Continuity and Discontinuity (641–1204)', in Robert Bonfil, Oded Irhsai, Guy Stroumsa and Rina Taglam (eds), *Jews in Byzantium: Dialects of Minority and Majority Cultures*, Leiden, 2014, p. 76; Averil Cameron, 'Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period', in Gerrit J. Reinink and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout (eds), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East: Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures*, Leuven, 1991, p. 107; Katherine Aron-Beller, 'Byzantine Tales of Jewish Image Desecration: Tracing a Narrative', *Jewish Culture and History*, 18, 2017, pp. 209–34.

⁶⁴ '[T]his search for more or less likely parallels with Christian hagiographical literature can continue, but it seems to us, its results are unlikely to go beyond the near coincidence of individual scenes, recurrent formulae and analogical themes.' Trendafilov, *Khazarskata Polemika*, p. 104.

Table 2: Debate upon arrival in Khazaria and at the Court of the Khazars with Jews and Muslims

Lines of Dispute	Topic of Dispute
8.1-10	Khazar invitation, Emperor dispatches Cyril
8.10-25	Journey: learns Hebrew, Samaritan, <i>Ros'sky</i> , discovers the relics of Clement
9.1-3	Upon arrival, Khazars send a 'cunning' man to dispute with him
9.3-4	Asked why the Romans appoint leaders from different families
9.5-9	Asked why Christians use the bible, rather than have their beliefs memorized
9.10-14	Arrives at the Khagan's court
9.15-22	Challenge of the Holy Trinity by Khagan
9.23-35	Challenge of Mary's ability to give birth to God
10.1-2	Cyril invites more debate at second sitting
10.2-35	Which is the oldest law — Noah or Moses?
10.36-63	Has the holy kingdom of Christians come yet?
10.64-67	Jews are blessed descendants of Shem, but the Christians of Japheth (Gen.9.26-27)
10.68-74	Are Christians blessed for putting their faith in a man, Jesus?
10.75-81	Why do Christians turn away from circumcision when Jesus did not denounce it?
10.82-88	Why do Christians worship idols?
10.89-94	Why do Christians eat pork and rabbit?
10.95-96	This is abbreviated from Cyril's discussions, translated by Methodius in eight parts
11.1-20	Third sighting: Khazars ask why Christianity is the holiest religion
10.21-29	An advisor who knows Islam asks: Why do Christians not respect Muhammad?
10.30-46	Advisor tells Jews and Muslims Cyril has refuted them, many promise to convert

dealt with rather briefly. The second are slightly lengthier debates, about the validity of the New Testament and the legitimacy of Christians as the inheritors of the true religion. In all these matters, and in the dispute as a whole, Cyril does not use any citations from the New Testament. Instead, his materials come precisely from the Hebrew and Samaritan books he acquired in the second phase of his education — that is purely the Old Testament. Thus, in this phase of the narrative, the author adapts Cyril's material to suit his audience, since Old Testament peoples would not be persuaded by New Testament words.

An argument concerning the Trinity occurs at both the Caliph's court and at the Khazar court in the same two-fold fashion and illustrates this point clearly. The first question is to do with the worship of more than one entity and therefore more than one God, and the second is to do with the belief that Mary, a woman, could not have given birth to God. Muslim scholars at the Caliph's court therefore first assert that worshipping more than one entity is the worship of more than one God. To this, Cyril replies that 'we are taught well from the prophets and [Church] fathers and teachers to praise the trinity, Father, and Word and Spirit, three *hypostases* in one essence'.⁶⁵

This pure allusion to evidence is not supported by scriptural quotation — in part because in the VC Muslims are not acquainted with the scriptures, and in part because Cyril himself has not yet acquired the Old Testament languages. When speaking at the Khazar court however, the same question is answered rather differently:

In this way, we do better, by demonstrating this [i.e. the legitimacy of the trinity] with examples, listening to the prophets. For Isaiah said: 'Hear me, Jacob, and Israel, whom I have called, I am the first, I endure in the ages [48.12], and God now sent me and his spirit [48.16].'⁶⁶

When debating with Jewish scholars, therefore, Cyril turns to Old Testament prophecy to support the truth value of his statement. Different epistemological standards for proof can be taken in different circumstances, as different audiences and their level of knowledge require different methods of argumentation. And furthermore, these different audiences

⁶⁵ 'мы оубо добръ есмы навьклии вть пророкъ и вть отьць и вть оучительь троицоу славити, отьць и слово и доухъ, трии ипостаси въ единомъ соуществѣ.' VC, 6.30.

⁶⁶ 'тъмъ же мы бол'шеи творимъ вѣщ'ми сказаноуе и пророкъ слышаноуе, рече бо Исая: слышанте мене, Іакѡве, Ізраило, еже азъ зовоу, азъ есмь пръвыи, азъ есмь въ вѣкы, ныня господь посла ме и доухъ его.' Ibid., 9.21–22.

necessitate Cyril's education; he cannot argue with Old Testament scripture until he has learned the Old Testament languages thoroughly.

Whilst questions such as that of the Trinity take up some of the debate with the Jews, as noted at the start of this section, the lengthier debates focus on questions about the legitimacy of Christianity as inheritor of the true religion. These questions cover a series of topics. The Jews' claim that they follow the oldest law of God (10.2–35) and the question of whether the kingdom of God has come yet (10.36–63) take up the longest in the discussion. But whether Jews as the people of Shem will inherit the kingdom (10.64–67) and whether it is right to abandon circumcision (10.75–81) are also a part of it.

This section in the text is extremely significant, as Cyril's disputation has to be framed completely differently from that with the Muslims. The author can no longer rely on historic legitimacy through former territorial control, or on an older Hellenic educational system and a precursor religion which is intellectually superior because it is older. Rather, in this section, the text leaves Cyril defending the younger religion, change over time and the adoption of customs which pre-date those who have adopted them. In a sense, therefore, in the VC Christianity's relationship to Islam is parallel to Judaism's relationship to Christianity.

Ultimately, as Robert Bonfil notes, 'issued from Judaism, Christianity never succeeded in denying such filiation'.⁶⁷ Thus, Cyril's disputation is largely concerned with the legitimization of Christianity as a successor. Much like the Islamic scholars who had learned the Hellenic arts from the Greeks to question him, Cyril speaks only in Old Testament scripture to refute the Jews. He is enabled by his Hellenic education on the one hand to formulate syllogistic argumentation, and by his education in Hebrew and Samaritan, to do this with the Old Testament text. This defence of inheritance is most evident on the question whether the kingdom of God has come or not.

As Hristo Trendafilov has acknowledged, Cyril's rhetoric with the Khazars contradicts a claim he makes to the Muslims.⁶⁸ In discourse with Muslim scholars, Cyril's claims for the legitimacy of Christianity came from their association with the Roman empire and its historic continuity: 'we all pay taxes to the Romans.'⁶⁹ In dispute with the Jewish scholars at the Khazar court, however, Cyril insists that Jerusalem has fallen, animal

⁶⁷ Bonfil, 'Continuity and Discontinuity', p. 74.

⁶⁸ Trendafilov, *Khazaraskata Polemika*, p. 62.

⁶⁹ VC, 6.47.

sacrifices have ceased, and the prophecies of the Old Testament have all been realized.⁷⁰ The Jews ask, in turn, if this is true, then ‘how is it that the Roman kingdom holds power till now?’⁷¹ Cyril’s answer repudiates the Roman association altogether:

It does not, for it has passed as the former ones [...] our kingdom is not Roman, but Christian [...] The Romans worshiped idols, but now, one from one, and one from another people and tribes, rule in the name of Christ.⁷²

This statement, equating Byzantium with the fifth monarchy, or kingdom without end, was not an uncommon rendering of the Old Testament prophecy of Daniel.⁷³ But paired with a direct claim to Roman continuity against the Muslims only a few pages prior in the narrative, Cyril’s rhetoric once again shows flexibility — not only in method as above, but in content too. It is possible to make contradictory statements, therefore, in order to make the most persuasive argument for Christianity, as the truth of Christianity operates beyond the truth or consistency of individual statements made by Christians. This conclusion aligns with George Kustas’s assessment of the development of Christian rhetoric. The Christian rhetor, no longer dealing with what is possible or feasible, was dealing with divine truth.⁷⁴ This afforded the rhetor the use of both clarity and obscurity at different times for different purposes, because both were ultimately revealing the same.⁷⁵

But there is more to this statement than contradiction. As noted in the introduction, this article seeks to demonstrate that the order of these disputes, and the information that they utilize (whether scriptural or not) is not random. Rather, on the grand scale of the narrative of Cyril’s education and the disputations it prepares him to perform, the order realizes universal Christian temporality. Cyril moves from an argument

⁷⁰ ‘Что си прѣдлагаете, видице, яко Иеросалимъ съкрѣшень несть и жрътвы прѣстали соуть и възсе се се несть събыло, теже соуть пророци прорекли в васъ.’ Ibid., 10.36-37.

⁷¹ ‘како римское царство доселѣ дръжитъ владычество?’ Ibid., 10.51.

⁷² ‘не дръжитъ се, мимошло бо несть яко и проча [...] наше бо царство нѣсть римско нъ Христово [...] римляне идолѣхъ прилежахѣ, си же овъ втъ сего овъ отъ иного языка и племени въ Христово име царствѣють.’ Ibid., 10.52-56.

⁷³ See Milton Anastos, ‘Political Theory in the Lives of the Slavic Saints’, *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 2, 1954, pp. 17-29; ‘Introduction’, in Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (eds), *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, Washington, D.C., 2006, pp. 14, 20-24, 28.

⁷⁴ Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Thessaloniki, 1973, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 95.

based on Hellenistic education and Roman territorialism with Muslims, through to an argument entirely concerned with the prophecies of the Old Testament with Jewish scholars. In these different temporalities, it is not simply the content of his argumentation that changes to contradict itself — in different temporalities, different things stand true. Thus, the disputes occur in different times, from the state of the Romans in the Muslim debate, we transition into the successor state of the Christians which came to realize the prophecies of the Old Testament in his dispute with the Jews. The final dispute, inevitably, must be with New Testament Christians: a move from what Kustas aptly described as the ‘obscurity’ of the Old Testament, whose events were both real and immediate, but also ‘veiled foreshadowings’ of the ‘clear and revealed light’ of the New Testament to come.⁷⁶ This final stage in Cyril’s geographical, rhetorical and temporal journey is addressed below.

iii. The debate in Venice

There is an almost comical disparity between the breadth of topics Cyril disputes with Jews and Muslims, and the narrowness of those discussed with Latins, above all the issue of trilingualism (see Table 3).⁷⁷

Table 3: Debate with the Latins in Venice

Lines of Dispute	Topic of Dispute
16.1–58	Why do you preach in Slavonic — there are only three holy languages?
16.59	Ashamed, the Latins went on their way

In some senses, this is not obvious given that the VC’s compilation dates to a period of papal-patriarchal schism over Photius and the conversion of Bulgaria, and the formalization of anti-Latin literature in the mid-ninth century.⁷⁸ In some ways, the late ninth century is as good a time for anti-Latin literature as it is for anti-Jewish literature in Byzantium. Equally peculiar is the idiosyncrasy of Cyril’s charge against the Latins. As Francis

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See Tables 1–3.

⁷⁸ On these more general topics, see Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend*, Cambridge, 1948, repr. 1970; Liliana Simeonova, *Diplomacy of the Letter and the Cross: Photios, Bulgaria and the Papacy, 860s–880s*, Amsterdam, 1998; Tia Kolbaba, *Inventing Latin Heretics: Byzantines and the Filioque in the Ninth Century*, Kalamazoo, MI, 2008.

Thomson has demonstrated, tri-lingualism was in some sense an invented heresy.⁷⁹ It is only referred to as a term in other later Greek sources unrelated to the mission.⁸⁰ In the West the situation is more complex, and while popes changed their minds about Slavonic in particular in the few decades after Cyril's death, there is little evidence in the VC that the pope objected to Slavonic in particular at the time of its composition, and the use of vernacular languages in the liturgy in the West is indeed attested.⁸¹ In short, it seems difficult to imagine this was a matter of contemporary widespread and fervent dispute, rather than a textual construction, not least because of its peculiar narrowness.

The question of the dispute and its topic's historicity, however, ought not to distract from its significance in the structure of Cyril's disputations. As noted above, a discourse with Christians is the natural conclusion to Cyril's spatial and temporal transition from Hellenic arts and pagan imperialism, through Old Testament prophesies and peoples. The style and method of disputation is key, therefore, to expressing this.

First and foremost, as noted above, only one issue is under discussion in the VC, and that is whether or not there should be only three holy languages. The audience, 'bishops, priests and monks' in Venice, only offer one accusation and do not intervene or respond again.⁸² As ever, the author's presentation of Cyril's method of argumentation is not random. At first, he resorts to contemporary reality. The list of peoples here included itself suggests a world centred on Byzantium and looking outward, and eastward to its neighbours:

For we know many peoples who have knowledge of books and praise God in their own language, it is known that these are: Armenians, Persians, Abkhazians, Iberians, Sougdians, Goths, Avars, Turks, Khazars, Arabs, Egyptians and many others.⁸³

⁷⁹ Francis J. Thomson, 'SS. Cyril and Methodius and a Mythical Western Heresy: Trilingualism. A Contribution to the Study of Patristic and Mediaeval Theories of Sacred Languages', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 110, 1992, pp. 67–122.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 94–95.

⁸¹ The best account of the shifting papal position in the 880s–90s is Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, pp. 109–206. On the use of vernaculars see, for instance, Mary Garrison, Arpad P. Orban and Marco Mostert (eds), *Spoken and Written Language: Relations between Latin and the Vernacular Languages in the Earlier Middle Ages*, Turnhout, 2013, and in the liturgy in particular, the work of Helen Gittos on Anglo-Saxon England in Helen Gittos and Alban Gautier (eds), *The Vernacular in the Long Ninth Century* (forthcoming).

⁸² 'сѣбраше се на нь епископи и попове и чрѣноризци.' VC, 16.1.

⁸³ 'мы же роды знаемъ книги оумвѣюще и богоу славу въздающе своимъ языкомъ къждо. Явѣ'

This is the first instance in the *VC* in which the author formulates Cyril's arguments through current states of affairs. Against the Muslims, Cyril's legitimacy comes from what used to be; against the Jews he sought to argue through interpreting past prophecy that the Kingdom of God they believe is yet to come, has in fact come already. It is only once arguing with the Latins, in this third stage of his disputational cycle, that he is truly in the present.

This kind of category of evidence, however, Cyril fears is wasted on his interlocutors, and so he notes: 'If you do not wish to understand from these [examples], then at least know [God's] judgement from the [holy] writing.'⁸⁴ Two full pages of scriptural citations concerned with the significance of the spreading of faith follow. The citations are simply connected by the phrase 'and again', or 'also Mark says' (see Table 4 for a list of all quotations).

Table 4: Scriptural quotations used in the debate with the Latins in Venice

Lines of quote	Source of Quote †
16.10	Psalm 95.1
16.11	Psalm 97.4
16.12	Psalm 65.4
16.13	Psalm 116.1, 150.6
16.14	John 1.12
16.15	John 17.20–21
16.16	Matthew 28.18–20
16.17	Mark 16.15–17
16.18	Matthew 23.13
16.19	Luke 11.52
16.21–57	1 Corinthians 14.4–40

† As identified in Kliment, *Subrani*, pp. 138–39.

же соут си: армени, перси, авазгы, ивери, соугди годи, ивери, тѣрси, козари, даравляне, егупти и инни мнѣзы.' *Ibid.*, 16.7.

⁸⁴ 'аще ли не хощете въть си хъ разѣмѣ, понѣ въть книгъ познайте соудію.' *Ibid.*, 16.9.

As is evident, this is in no way like the method of disputation Cyril uses against Muslims and Jews. There are no logical, or syllogistic steps, no argumentative structure, no induction or interpretation, and no opposition from his interlocutors. Rather, this is an argument entirely based on the accumulation of citations. As Cyril shares the holy texts with his audience, he does not need to persuade them, but rather simply point them to the revealed truth. There is a sense, therefore, that scriptural proof is given rather than debated because it is indisputable.

It is no surprise either that the education Cyril receives prior to this argument is one of unequivocally divine intervention — God reveals Slavonic letters to him, and with them Cyril himself writes the Gospel of John. The dominance of the New Testament, and specifically the Gospels, although the Psalms too are included, suggests that just as his education needs no assistance from grammar or rhetoric, their clarity also requires no additional comment or explanation in the process of argumentation. As such, Cyril's education in Hellenic arts or the Old Testament languages is not relevant when arguing with Christians. Because in this final stage, both geographically and temporally, having arrived in the kingdom of God, it is essentially impossible to refute or disagree with the words of the Bible.

The stance of the chosen quotations is crucial. In one way or another, every citation promotes the expansion of Christianity, and reprimands those who oppose it. They insist all people glorify God, in all lands and all languages, and they encourage apostolic activity: 'go unto the whole world and preach the gospel to all living things' (Mark 23.13).⁸⁵ More than a third of the speech, and its conclusion, is a passage on the intelligibility and good order in worship from the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, 14–40. The significance of languages, and learning languages to spread the words of God is key in the passage, and alludes to Cyril's own education in Hebrew, *Ros'sky* and Samaritan. This formulation of scriptural quotations in the shape of a manifesto for missionary activity, therefore, is a defence precisely of the first two stages of Cyril's life and disputations — his transitions through non-Christian lands and education in non-Christian languages and learning. Internally, therefore, the text argues that it is not possible to achieve un-disputable clarity in Christian truth without acknowledging, learning and disputing through the former phases of Hellenism and Judaism. And further, it argues that once such a status is achieved as it is in the third phase of disputation, missionary activity and

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.17.

the outside knowledge required to perform it, and to debate with non-Christians remains the responsibility of Christians.

3. *Conclusions*

To conclude therefore, this article has sought to argue three things. Firstly, that the *VC* is primarily organized around a tri-partite narrative trajectory of learning and disputation. Hellenic education is followed by a dispute with Muslims educated in the Hellenic arts, education in Old Testament languages is followed by a disputation with (mostly) Jewish scholars, and education in the New Testament and Slavonic letters is followed by a disputation with Christian bishops and priests. Secondly, that the learning/disputation pairing propels the narrative forward in a number of controlled ways, across the biological life of Cyril, across an over-arching Christian temporal framework from the Roman kingdom, to its collapse and replacement with a Christian one, and across the known geographic world from the Middle East, to the Steppe and to the Latin West. And thirdly, that each disputation is organized through and with the 'outside education' Cyril acquires, whether that is his study of grammar to acquire new languages, or of rhetoric to formulate arguments syllogistically, but also an education in foreign languages and scriptures to dispute with Old Testament peoples using Old Testament words. As such, each stage in Cyril's life journey is an argument for the utilization of knowledge not always considered a part of a pious Byzantine education to spread the right faith. In the dispute with the Latins the text makes it clear that it is the duty of Christians to spread faith, to learn languages and travel to the ends of the world to do so. The conclusions of the *VC*'s arguments, therefore, offer an internal justification for the narrative trajectory of the *VC* itself.

It is not possible within the scope of this article to offer an in-depth study of the implications of the *VC*'s argument within the context of wider Byzantine intellectual culture. However, in brief, I point to two kinds of discourse about learning and piety in ninth-century Byzantium which can help us better situate the *VC* and the intervention of its author.

The *VC* is best located between two poles of discourse about education in Byzantine intellectual culture in the ninth century. On the one hand, Cyril as an educated and disputing saint is by no means unique. The construction of his sanctity resembles representations of patriarchal sanctity from the early ninth century, most pertinently that found in the *Life of Patriarch Nikephoros* (c.843–46). This early ninth-century iconophile text, written by Ignatios the Deacon, explicitly stresses the usefulness of

Nikephoros's 'outside' education in refuting iconoclast arguments, and offers an account of a disputation between Nikephoros and the emperor Leo.⁸⁶ There are no clear direct textual connections between the *Life of Nikephoros* and the VC, but there is a shared understanding of the ability of outside learning to strengthen piety, and both texts use logical textbooks as sources to make this case.⁸⁷ By the late ninth century however, Byzantine discourse concerning education had undergone some changes. More particularly, a counter-opinion against the use of outside knowledge had come to the fore, as it is found solidified in the corpus of so-called anti-Photian texts.⁸⁸ This antithetical position on learning is expressed most clearly in the early tenth-century *Life of Patriarch Ignatios*, Photios's rival, which makes explicit the incompatibility between worldly wisdom and piety, by juxtaposing the education of Photios and Ignatios, whose learning was confined to the monastery.⁸⁹ The growing assumption that learning is irrelevant or incompatible with piety is also made evident more subtly in the surviving lesser hagiographies of the late ninth-century in Byzantium. These focus overwhelmingly on ascetic monks and devote little if any attention to their education.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Carl de Boor (ed.), *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani opuscula historica*, Leipzig, 1880; Ignatios the Deacon, 'The Life of Patriarch Nikephoros I of Constantinople', trans. Elizabeth Fisher, in Alice-Mary Talbot (ed.), *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saint's Lives in English Translation*, Washington, D.C., 1998, pp. 25–142.

⁸⁷ See Talbot, *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, pp. 149.5–8. Compare with VC, 3, and the discussion in Part 1 of this article. Logical textbooks in Nikephoros are Oksana Yu. Goncharko, Dmitry N. Goncharko, 'A Byzantine Logician's "Image" within the Second Iconoclastic Controversy: Nikephoros of Constantinople', *Scrinium*, 13, 2017, pp. 291–308, and in the VC, Ihor Ševčenko, 'The Definition of Philosophy in the Life of Saint Constantine', repr. in his *Byzantium and the Slavs in Letters and Culture*, Cambridge, MA, 1991, pp. 93–106.

⁸⁸ This sentiment is found across a number of texts, for example, Pseudo-Symeon, *Chronographia*, in Immanuel Bekker (ed.), *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, Bonn, 1838, pp. 667–74, discussed in Jonathan Shepard, 'Photius' Sermons on the Rus Attack of 860: The Questions of his Origins, and of the Route of the Rus', in Alexander Beihammer, Bettina Krönung and Claudia Ludwig (eds), *Prosopon Rhomaikon. Ergänzende Studien zur Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, Berlin, 2017, pp. 113–14; Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Epistolae sive Praefationes*, ed. Erich Caspar, Berlin, 1912–28, p. 407, discussed in Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, p. 92.

⁸⁹ See Nicetas David, *The Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, ed. and trans. Andrew Smithies, Washington, D.C., 2013, pp. 21.30–35 (Photios's education); pp. 9.7–16 (Ignatios's education), discussed in Martha Vinson, 'Rhetoric and Writing Strategies in the Ninth Century', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, Aldershot, 2003, p. 11.

⁹⁰ For example, *The Life of Joseph the Hymnographer*, in Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.), *Sbornik grecheskikh i latinskikh pamiatnikov, kasaiushtikhia Fotiia patriarkha*, St Petersburg, 1901, pp. 1–14; *The Life of Euthymios the Younger*, ed. and trans.

Thus, it is best to understand the *VC* and its learned, Byzantine author, as seeking to intervene in this changing discourse about learning within a Byzantine contemporary milieu. Within this, the *VC* is best understood as a radical intervention, offering a third way of sanctity, which seeks once again to harmonize the opposing poles of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ learning, as they had been fossilized in anti-Photian textual production in the late ninth century. It is precisely this conciliatory agenda that explains the text’s unwillingness to go on the offensive — it neither defends Photios, whom it only mentions as teacher not patriarch, nor does it attack monasticism. Cyril as both philosopher and saint, both monk and diplomat, demonstrates the value of learning in defending the orthodox faith against heathens. And this learning permeates his disputations, both in terms of the kinds of content the author chooses to use — namely not to use the New Testament when arguing with Jewish scholars — but also in the form, whether syllogistic or simply accumulative.

This article has sought to offer a framework for re-thinking the *VC* which moves away from the standard questions that have long shaped the study of the text. In doing so, I hope to have shifted the focus away from what the *VC* became, which is a source for pan-Slavic or local-national identity, and toward what the *VC* was intended to be — that is a contribution, expressed in hagiographical form, to ongoing ninth- and tenth-century Byzantine preoccupations with the role of outside education in spreading faith. And with this, I hope to have destabilized the image of Cyril as the apostle of the Slavs he became in later Slavonic texts and modern historiography, and to have offered in its stead a Byzantine diplomat whose life was used to present an *exemplum* of the compatibility of ‘outside’ learning and faith in missionary activity.

Alice-Mary Talbot, in Alice-Mary Talbot and Robert P. H. Greenfield, (eds), *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, Washington, D.C. 2016, pp. 1–165; *The Life and Miracles of Saint Luke of Steiris: Text, Translation and Commentary*, eds and trans Walter W. Connor and Carolyn L. Connor, Brookline, MA, 1994, discussed in Stefanos Efthymiadis, ‘Hagiography from the “Dark Age” to the Age of Symeon Metaphrastes’, in Stefanos Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 1, Farnham, 2011, p. 110.