

SLAVONIC AND EAST EUROPEAN MEDIÆVAL STUDIES GROUP

Spring Bulletin 1995

The last meeting took place on 18th March 1995 in the Senior Common Room on the first floor of the SSEES Annexe, 21, Russell Square. Papers were read by Joy Bache on "The prayers of Princes Vladimir I and Vladimir Monomach: a comparison" and by Francis Thomson on "The myth of the journey of St Anthony of Kiev to Athos and the true history of the origins of the Kievan Caves Monastery: a paper dedicated to Simon Franklin".

After lunch there was a round table discussion on the teaching of mediæval Slavonic topics in our universities, chaired by Dr Faith Wigzell, a summary of which is included in this bulletin.

The editorial board of *Slavia* have taken up the suggestion of the late Professor Mareš that Slavists throughout the world should be asked for their views on the directions in which Slavonic Studies (which is taken to mean linguistic and literary studies, including poetics, stylistics, textology &c., and related disciplines such as ethnography, folklore and cultural history) ought to be developing. One of those approached has been Veronic Du Feu, who has offered to include in her submission the views of other members of SEEMSG who have not been approached individually. Anyone who has an answer to the question "Jaké jsou dnešní aktuální problémy slovanské filologie?" is accordingly invited to send it to Dr Du Feu at 1, Arlington Avenue, Leamington Spa CV32 5UA. It would probably be advisable to reply by the end of May at the latest, in order to allow her to incorporate it into her submission, which is due in the middle of June.

The Department of Slavic and East European Languages at Penn State University is pleased to announce a conference to be held at the University Park campus on March 24-5, 1996: "The Medieval Slavic World and its Impact on Present-Day Eastern Europe and Russia." The conference will include 9 speakers as well as a keynote address. Topics will cover a number of fields: history, linguistics, literature, religion, musicology, ethnography, folklore, the visual arts, etc. Besides scholarly presentations, the conference will include art exhibits, choral music, and dance presentations. For more information and inclusion on the mailing list call 814-865-1675 or 865-1352. Or e-mail us at: MMN3@PSUVM.PSU.EDU.

The British ICS representative, Dr John Dunn, has responded to some of the concerns expressed at recent meetings of SEEMSG. He has provided a report of the latest meeting of the Committee, of which the following extracts are relevant to the points raised.

It was agreed that approx. 75% of the papers at the 1998 Congress would be organised in the traditional way, with approx. 25% following the panel system [Note: details of this arrangement were circulated in the BASEES Newsletter for November]. It was reported that no decision had yet been reached on the precise location of the 1998 Congress. The Committee rejected the suggestion of a "split-site" Congress, with the literature section in Cracow and the language section in Warsaw. It was agreed to retain the requirement to publish papers for the Conference in advance, either in a special volume or in a national periodical. It was agreed that unpublished papers would be accepted if the publication was delayed for technical reasons and there was a written guarantee that publication would ensue.

National associations were obliged to supply each of the other national associations with one copy of its own Congress papers.

The Obštestvo za izučavane na slavjanskata starina announces its sixth conference, which will take place in Plovdiv on 1st-4th June 1995 on the theme of Граници и култура. Anyone interested in contributing should contact, theoretically by May 20th but I expect they'll be prepared to stretch a point, Факултет славянски филологии, деканат - стая 230, СУ "Св. Климент Охридски", бул. Цар Освободител - 15, 1504 София. There are also various telkephone numbers (all in Sofia) to ring: 713 30 55, 39 82 64, 87 10 68 or 584 684.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION ON TEACHING MEDIAEVAL SLAVONIC STUDIES

SEEMSG, 18th March 1995

We began by attempting to focus on the problems that face us in this area. Starting with the general unawareness of the Middle Ages in contemporary society and the lack of a mediæval dimension in much academic activity, we quickly began to concentrate on specific problems, which seem to be in history chiefly the patchy coverage of the area in English (serious, given that many of the students speak no Russian), and in literary studies the fact that the students have very little historical background, and many know no Church Slavonic. A general concern was the sheer size of the period: with so many centuries to cover, how does one ensure both a sufficiently comprehensive approach and a proper awareness of the issues involved, particularly when any course is likely to be only one among a multitude of commitments that the students have?

There is also a problem of recruitment onto the courses. Students have no experience of mediæval studies in school, which means that numbers are likely to be small and that the courses have to be actively promoted to generate interest. This raises the further question of whether we think that all students following degree programmes in the Slavonic area should have some knowledge of the mediæval period.

An instructive contrast was drawn with practice in Belgium, where all students in the field must study both Russian and either a South or West Slavonic language, and also have at least a basic grounding in both history from the earliest times and (Old) Church Slavonic. The degree structure in British universities recognises that the vast majority of students are not going to become Slavists and hence focusses on more popular (and sometimes vocational) subjects.

It follows that a certain amount of marketing is required, particularly where universities impose minimum numbers below which options may not run. One solution is to run joint courses (e.g. a course in mediæval Russian history which could be taken by students reading for a degree either in Russian or in History), with assessment suitably flexible to cater for both groups, though even this may raise problems as university financial structures may militate against cross-faculty teaching. More fundamentally, students, who are under pressure of time and are reluctant to go for anything "adventurous" or "not mainstream", need to be made aware that these subjects exist and that they are interesting. A "missionary endeavour" is needed in order to sensitise students to this area of culture.

A number of people commented favourably on the use of compulsory first-year courses which include a mediæval element as part of a much broader syllabus. Such courses (though non-specialist colleagues may be reluctant to teach even this much!) can successfully raise students' awareness of the mediæval period and its culture, and are to be encouraged. Another area in which a number of us have been involved is the translation for students' use of mediæval texts into English; bearing in mind that we are dealing with students with no previous knowledge of Russian, the teaching even of literature in translation is justified. It was suggested that this is an area in which collaboration between colleagues at different institutions could be fruitful.