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*INVENTING SLAVIA*  
*ИЗОБРЕТЕНИЕ СЛАВИИ*

Proceedings of the workshop held and organized  
by Slavonic Library (Prague, November 12<sup>th</sup> 2004)

Сборник материалов заседания, организованного  
Славянской библиотекой (Прага, 12 ноября 2004 г.)

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The issue addressed in this collection is the emergence (including its preconditions, causal agents and intentions, the teleology) and development of what one might call a ‘Slavonic ideology’, or, to be more concise: ‘Slavonicism’. In other words, we dealing with ideologically charged concepts of Slavic language(s) and literature(s), Slavic nation(s), mutuality (see the paper of Diana Pavlová), a Slavonic world etc. Terms such as “panslavism”, “slavophilism” et.al., which played an important historical role in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (and also to a certain degree still in the 21<sup>st</sup>, predominantly in unofficial or paraofficial nationalistic communities around the Europe) are concrete manifestations of a more general phenomenon which can be seen as positing and implementing supposed common traits, interests and political agendas (territory, mentality, culture, history, interests, enemies etc.) of all of the Slavs or a particular part of them (e.g. Illyrism – cf. Eva Jelínková’s paper). The extreme case of ‘Slavonicism’ is the supposition that all Slavs are members of a one common nation, ethnos, people or ‘race’ to be (politically, socially, spiritually, linguistically, culturally etc.) united in the (more or less near) future. The goal and shape of this unification differs fundamentally in singular historical periods and cultural-political discourses, but often appears as an opposing force against Germanic – or germanoromanic – world or against all of Western Europe, locally against Turks, Habsburgs, et.al. The new impact (but not without continuity with the older stages) occurs during the Cold War period of Soviet Ideology, i.e. in post-war Stalinism leading among other things to the extreme condemnation of the ‘Slav rebel’ Tito (cf. Ekaterina Velmezova’s paper on the Stalinist “Slavic Committee” and its Journal *Slavjane*, (Russ. “Slavs”).

The name we have given the collection – “Inventing Slavia” – communicates its particular take on this issue. “Slavia” is inconceivable without “inventing”, and our concept of “Slavia” is dependent on a particular take on “inventing”. The two terms are interdependent. To invent means according to the Dictionary of the English Language (Fourth Edition, ©2000) “to create by mental act, to produce or contrive (something previously unknown) by the use of ingenuity or imagination.” This is what happens at the beginning of 19th Century with ‘Slavonicism’ and its retrospective as well as prospective

heritage (some of medieval ties with the so-called 'Slavic cultural milieu' are the topic of Světa Mathauserová's paper). Recent theory (mainly since sixties of 20th century) explores thoroughly the context-based, creative and fictional aspect of phenomena like nation, race, ethnic (national) culture and even language. Luckmans *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Andersons *Imagined Communities* (1983) and the research of nationalism (Kohn, Gellner, Hroch and others) demonstrate convincingly that Slavic ideology is a product of strategies one can detect, identify (to read more about it in first part of Tomáš Glanc's paper). E. J. Hobsbawm (*Nations and Nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge 1990) speaks – referring also to Gellner – about “artefact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations” (p. 10). The concept of (Slavic) artificiality refers Nikolaj Savický in his note delivered at the conference. We see our task in reading texts and strategies, interpreting artefacts governing and managing the Slavic topic and Slavic studies during last approximately 200 years.

We are taking the rhetorical term *inventio* in “invention” seriously and literally. As Holt Meyer underscores in his piece in this collection, finding and analyzing the rhetoricity of the texts which ground and found ‘Slavonicism’ is a key element in the study of how they work. This method can also be a way to approach the rhetoricity of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (national) philology. The specific traits of *inventio*, which can be applied here, are:

- the use of *topoi* both in the sense of motivic ‘commonplaces’ and of argumentative structures
- the finding of the arguments in the material at hand which make it most convincing (cf. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* §123)
- finding and assembling the elements of a *narration* which makes the story of the Slavs lead (teleologically) towards the desired goal – a *grand récit* based, for instance, on the ‘slavish manacle’ and need for ‘awakening’ of ‘peaceful Slavs’ and their ‘natural struggle’ against the ‘warlike’ Germans (about Herders impact on this narrative see details in Tomáš Glanc’s paper).

Nevertheless, a broader concept of “inventing” should also be brought to bear the fiction, fantasy and the fantastic in general, including an inventiveness, which is attributed to the Slavs themselves as a kind of their national character.

“Slavia” is an invented country, territory or spiritual-linguistic union, which is envisaged by ‘slavonicist’ projects. It is an “imagined community”

which is implied, assumed, but also in extreme cases actually posited (in the mythic past or projected future) as a (more or less real) perspective. “Slavia”, as Vladimír Svatoň pointed out in his paper, has no significant correspondence in a project called “Romania”, “Finno-Ugria” or “Germania” (to a certain extent during the Nazi period, but even here with no real programmatic consistency) and appears from the very beginning (Šafařík, Kollár) as a project of an ancient civilization, a complex society which is naturally superior to less complex societies and there is a task of scholars to justify the superiority, antiquity (*Slovanské starožítosti*), uniqueness and importance (and also the extent and populousness) of Slavonic civilization.

“Slavia” as a territory provokes a multiplicity of geopolitical imaginations. Long before Friedrich Ratzels *Politische Geographie* (1897) or Karl Haushofers *Bausteine zur Geopolitik* (1928), the idea of *Lebensraum* (Ger. space to live) was a natural footing for dreams about an “own” cultural, (power)political and territorial identity. Strategies of separatism (cf. the *Vertreibung*, i.e. the expulsion of German-speaking people from East Central Europe after the WWII), confrontation, rivalry, imperialism and xenophobia seem to be unequivocally pejorative in contemporary cultural and political vocabulary. But from a historical point of view a lot of means known today from the social periphery did have a completely different status, connected with the rhetoric of national and ethnic self-determination, revival and a new, just (social, national) order, in which exploitation, inequity and occupation would theoretically be overcome. Marek Přihoda describes one of the exciting examples of more or less “democratic” utopia of Slavia as a future state of affairs in his paper on Karel Kramář. In the realm of linguistics, which plays a crucial role for everything in Slavic studies and in its ideologies (after all, language was and is the only concrete evidence of Slavic community as a unit), Patrick Sériot elaborates in his paper the intricate story of belonging and identity.

Research of this kind has to be very sensitive to take a critical and distanced stance towards former ideologies (some of them are nevertheless a part of current conceptions and programs, including the curriculum of Slavic studies at universities). At the same time, it would be near-sighted to ignore discursive roots and problematic features of configurations based in specific time and under specific circumstances.

We are going to continue the research which was initiated by the collaboration of the Institute of Slavic and East European Studies at Charles University in Prague with the University of Lausanne, namely with prof. Patric

Sériot several years ago. At this point, we are working in a small international group, and the collection of papers from our briefing, a one day conference<sup>1</sup> organised by Slavonic Library at November 12, 2004 in the Klementinum, the main seat of the National Library of the Czech Republic, is a first separately printed output of these activities. In the period 2003–2004 3 seminars on Inventing Slavia took place at the Charles university and the acceptance of students as well as the multitude of refreshing and innovative final essays they delivered supports, encourages also this younger generation of scholars to continue a course of investigation which seems to be inevitable.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Cf. its review by E. Velmezova in *Slavjanovedenie*, 2005, No. 5, p. 116–118.

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