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Chernorizets Hrabar’s Treatise ‘О письменех’ (O pis’menekh’) as an Assertion of the Emergence of a New Academic Community

Certain historical texts possess the power to affect societies throughout the centuries, although the ways in which those societies are affected vary according to the time periods in which the texts are examined. Every historical context imparts on the readers a new interpretation, of as well as a new experience, of the text. In this respect, critical analysis of a text’s meaning and function presupposes not only an examination of the context of its composition, but also careful consideration of its reception and propagation. The present paper aims to bridge the gap between literary and historical analyses by using a method that coincides with post-structuralist tendencies, particularly the New Historicism of the 1970s. In other words, this paper assumes that a written text is not simply a reflection of the historical reality in which it was produced, but also a constituent part of it because a text both represents its immediate context and helps to construct social meaning. By carefully reading a text, we can thus begin to decode the context.¹

The text in question here, which is still capable of awakening the interest of contemporary audiences through its wealth of ideas and emotional content, is the treatise ‘О письменех’ (O pis’menekh) or “On the Letters” written by Chernorizets Hrabar in late ninth-, early tenth-century Bulgaria. According to traditional interpretations, the treatise represents a turning point in Slavic cultural self-identity because it defends a Slavic written alphabet—the Glagolitic.² This document was produced during a crucial period of transition for medieval

¹ Spiegel, 61–68.
² The present paper uses the Old Bulgarian version of the treatise from the fourteenth-century Codex Laurentianus, which according to linguistic and historical analysis is closest to the original version of the treatise. Its transcription can be found in Kuev’s edited volume: pp. 187–91. For simplicity, all passages are quoted in English translation and
Bulgaria. By accepting Christianity in 864 from Byzantium, Bulgarian rulers moved to replace traditional pagan values and ideas with a framework of Christian thought. The cultural and literary policies implemented by Bulgarian rulers, especially Boris (852–889) and his son Symeon (893–927), promoted the development of an Old Slavonic literary tradition. The majority of the texts produced at this time were religious or spiritual in nature and intended to educate the newly-Christianized society through sermons, hymns, prayers, biblical, and patristic texts. Most of these texts were translated from Greek into Old Slavonic. There were a few exceptions, however, including Hrabar’s treatise, an original text written in Old Slavonic.

Numerous historiographical surveys of the treatise conducted by such nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian historians as Kalaidovich, Bodianski, and Lavrov, and such twentieth-century Bulgarian historians as Zlatarski, Kuev, Aleksandrov, and Petkanova, among others, have focused on establishing the precise date and authorship of the treatise. However, questions still remain. Such research could indeed illuminate more about the content of the treatise and its aims, but finding information about the author and determining the exact date of the text’s composition has proven extremely difficult, and scholars have been unable to reach a consensus for the past 150 years. It is, therefore, necessary to consider alternative ways of understanding the primary intent of the work. In order to further clarify the importance of the text, this paper investigates the link between the recipients for whom the treatise was originally intended and its ideological content.

the corresponding passages from a modern Bulgarian version are given in a footnote. The entire treatise in modern Bulgarian can be found in Ivanova and Nikolova, also available at: http://promacedonia.org/zv/zv3_9.html.

3 Dinekov, 75–82; Shepard, 241–45.
4 Petkanova, Българска средновековна литература, 28–29.
5 Kalaidovich, 189–92; Bodianskii, 187; Lavrov, 13–15; Zlatarski, 853–60; Kuev, 38–44; Gechev, 87–101; Pekhlivanov, 18–22.
Nearly all historians acknowledge the pan-Slavic value of the treatise and its impact on the creation of a new Slavic cultural identity fostered by the appearance of a new written language. However, although the polemico-apologetic tone that persists throughout the treatise succeeds in defending the new Glagolitic alphabet against the Greek alphabet, the work was intended for a more salient purpose. In other words, the defense of the Glagolitic alphabet was not the ultimate objective of the treatise. As demonstrated below, the treatise reflects a high degree of linguistic skill and historical awareness. These features were intended to highlight the competence and knowledge of the emerging community of Slavic scholars in Bulgaria. The identity that the treatise actually defends is, therefore, not necessarily that of an entire Slavic people, but rather that of an academic community. The treatise’s ultimate aim was to defend and assert the place of this new Slavic academic community in European scholarship.

Literacy rates in the ninth and tenth centuries were extremely low and encompassed only a small community of religious scholars and select members of the political elite. Texts belonging to the so-called “declamation poetry” genre, such as hymns and prayers, were read to the uneducated masses because of their relatively simple structure and content. The content of Hrabar’s treatise, however, suggests that the text might have been too sophisticated to be understood by an ordinary crowd. Instead, only a minority of educated people and some members of the high elite probably read the work. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the main recipients of Hrabar’s treatise were the academic communities. This paper argues that Hrabar’s treatise demonstrates such a mastery of rhetoric and exceptional textual education that it could only have been intended to be used as a tool by the developing Slavic community of erudite scholars in their effort to assert intellectual equality, or perhaps even superiority, to the experienced and well-reputed community of Byzantine and Latin scholars. In this respect, the
birth of a new Slavic linguistic identity, as witnessed by the treatise’s *leitmotif*, should be examined in the context of the scholarly power struggle of the late ninth and early tenth centuries.

From Hrabar’s treatise we can begin to learn about the ways in which this new academic community perceived itself. Hrabar is often associated with other documented Slavic scholars of the ninth and tenth centuries, including Constantine-Cyril, Constantine Preslavski (one of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius’s pupils), Chernorizets Dok (Tsar Simeon’s brother), and even Tsar Simeon. Some more recent studies argue that Hrabar might have been the name of yet another important scholar, especially since the use of pseudonyms was uncommon at that time in the Balkans.⁶ What is certain, however, is that his treatise clearly manifests his sense of belonging to a specific social group, namely, a new community of scholars active in medieval Bulgaria and composed of first- and second-generation students of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius.⁷ The identity of Hrabar’s community was strongly linked to and defined by the figures of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius. Constantine-Cyril is, in fact, the central character of the treatise and the centerpiece of its entire argumentative framework. Hrabar writes:

[…] God, the lover of humanity, […] showed mercy to the Slavic nation and sent them Constantine the Philosopher, called Cyril, a sincere and righteous man. And [he] composed for them thirty-eight letters—some following the order of the Greek language, others according to the Slavic language […].⁸

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⁶ Petkanova, *Starobŭlgarska literatura*, 220.
⁷ It is generally accepted that the brothers Constantine-Cyril and Methodius were involved in the creation of the first Slavic alphabet—Glagolitic—and completed several translations of Christian texts, including the Bible. Their activities were financed and supported by the Byzantine Empire, which intended to expand its zone of influence in Slavic lands by allowing the Slavs to observe the Christian rite in their own language. The mission of the brothers was later continued and largely expanded by their pupils, many of whom migrated to Bulgaria in the 880s. The Bulgarian rulers were patrons of the scholars. For more details on the missions of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius, see Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions*.
⁸ [...] човеколюбецът Бог, [...] смилил се над славянския род, изпрати им Константин Философ, наречен Кирил, мъж праведен и правдив. И [той] им състави тридесет и осем букви — едини по реда на гръцките букви, а други според славянската реч [...]. Ivanova, “Chernorizets Khrabŭr.”
Hrabar portrays Constantine-Cyril’s work as divine in nature and presents him as a messenger of God sent to create a new alphabet with thirty-eight letters. He implies that under Constantine-Cyril’s guidance Slavic literary production entered its third and final phase, which he classifies as distinct from and superior to the previous two phases. Constantine-Cyril and his brother Methodius’ literary works and translations seem to have been well known by the azbukarchetata, a small group of literate Slavs who were most likely students of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius. The success of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius was owed largely to the support and assistance of their students, who always accompanied them on their missions, including those to the Caucasus, Rome, and Great Moravia. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius’ works were therefore a symbiotic outcome of common efforts and reciprocal relations with their students.

In the tenth century, scholars working in Bulgaria saw themselves as the natural inheritors and continuers of the brothers’ mission.

Hrabar attempted to show that the promotion and use of the Glagolitic alphabet was an inherently educational enterprise. He mentions that the letter “alef,” the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, means “to educate oneself” or “learn!” The Greeks reappropriated “alef” in their own alphabet and named it “alpha,” which means “seek!” (implying seeking knowledge and wisdom). In a similar fashion, Constantine-Cyril created the first letter of the Glagolitic alphabet – “A” pronounced as “aʒ” (äz), which is the only letter that opens the mouth thus connoting liberation from spiritual muteness. The treatise states:

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9 Petkanova, “Ideino i emotsioniano sënürzhanie,” 216. The first phase was characterized by the use of the runic script. The second phase was known for its use of Greek and Latin during the early period of Christianization in Bulgaria in the 860s and 870s.
10 Dinekov, 210–11.
11 Karpenko, 162.
[…] since “az” is first among the letters and is given by God to the Slavic nation to open the mouth of those learning letters and reason, it is pronounced with a wide open mouth [...].

Each letter of the Glagolitic alphabet possessed a symbolic meaning that would have been familiar to the scholarly community in which the text was circulating. It represented a system of codes that enabled communication on a higher level. The new alphabet allowed for the expression of Christian nuances in Slavic terms. In this respect, the Slavs could better integrate themselves into the ecumenical Christian community and simultaneously maintain their own identity via the use of their own written language. This cultural and linguistic freedom resulted from Constantine-Cyril and Methodius’ mission and its continuation by their students.

After the death of Methodius in 885, the students of the two brothers were forced to flee Great Moravia because of changes in foreign policy. Svetopolk, the ruler of Great Moravia, decided to disrupt contact with Byzantium, welcome Frankish missionaries, and return to the Latin rite. Many of the students moved to continue Constantine-Cyril and Methodius’ mission in the Balkans. It is possible that the vast majority of them were of Slavic origin and might have accompanied the two brothers on their earlier missions in the Balkans, such as the one to Bregalnitsa River in the Bulgarian province of Macedonia in the 850s. Some students may also have been aware of Knyaz Boris I’s earlier ambitions to create an autocephalous Bulgarian church in order to gain independence from the patriarch in Constantinople. His plans were expressed by his representatives during their visit to the papal court, which coincided with Constantine-Cyril and Methodius’ mission to Rome in 868.

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12 [...] но понеже “аз” е първа от буквите и е дадена от Бога на славянския род за отваряне устата на учещите се на грамотност към разум, произнася се с широко отваряне на устата [...]. Ivanova, “Chernorizets Khrabûr.”
13 Kuev, 82–83.
15 Dragova, 81–86.
The first wave of students reached the frontier between Moravia and Bulgaria in 886. They were welcomed by the governor of the fortress of Belgrade and sent to Boris’s court. A second group of students is believed to have come to Bulgaria via Constantinople after being transported there by Venetian traders.16 Boris most likely viewed the arrival of the students as a perfect occasion to promote the creation of a Slavic intelligentsia, which could not only strengthen the state culturally, but also politically, by helping to establish Bulgaria as an autonomous zone of cultural and linguistic influence, independent from the Byzantine Empire.17 The newly arrived scholars were therefore obligated to build trust with an audience that knew them only indirectly through stories and rumors. Boris’s hospitality was not automatic, but conditional on the scholars’ ability to show that their linguistic project could be used as a tool to gain political autonomy from Byzantium. As a deputy for his scholarly community, Hrabar was charged with writing a text that would conform to the expectations of the existing social and political context. In the words of Gabriel Spiegel, he imbued the text with a “social logic.”18 The text’s content and aesthetic character were inextricably related to the social environment in which it was created, namely, that of the developing academic community. Quickly gaining recognition and status among the Bulgarian political elite, the academic community became a cultural and political agent for the Bulgarian state.

Turning to the question of the treatise’s intended audience, it is first helpful to consider the supposed origin of the text. Hrabar is thought to have been among the scholars of Tsar Simeon’s royal court in the Bulgarian capital of Preslav.19 Preslav became the new administrative capital of Bulgaria in 893 after the Council of Preslav. The treatise is often

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16 Dinekov, 214.
17 Georgiev, 74–75.
18 Spiegel, 78–83.
19 Petkanova, *Starobŭlgarska literatura*, 220.
thought to have been composed for this occasion. The council addressed several crucial aspects of political, cultural, and religious life in Bulgaria. Simeon was proclaimed the new ruler of Bulgaria, and Kliment Ohridski and Constantine Preslavski were appointed bishops, thus fully replacing the Byzantine clergy with a native Bulgarian one.\textsuperscript{20} Most importantly, the Slavic language was declared the official administrative language of the state. It thus follows that an argumentative treatise, intended to convince the public of the superiority of the Slavic language and provide justification for the council’s decision, would have been composed at this important turning point in Bulgarian history.

This raises a major question: Who was the audience present at the Council of Preslav? This question presents a challenge because no credible historical records of the council exist today. Even the historicity of the council has recently been disputed.\textsuperscript{21} Nevertheless, the aforementioned decisions were definitely made, whether at one specific event, such as a council, or over a period of time. Due to the nature of the decisions, one can assume that the audience was predominantly domestic and most likely did not include a significant Byzantine clerical presence. Judging from similar events, such as the Photian Council of 879, religious scholars and politicians were probably the main participants.\textsuperscript{22} The originality of the new Slavic letters and the benefits of the new alphabet needed to be explained first and foremost to a domestic audience. Vojtěch Tkadlčík claims that a strong argument for the use of the Glagolitic alphabet was required because the literate Bulgarian community was hitherto unfamiliar with it, accustomed as it was to using Greek letters, and reluctant to change its habits.\textsuperscript{23} Hrabar set out

\textsuperscript{20} Kliment Ohridski and Constantine Preslavski were two of the most active pupils of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius in Bulgarian lands and were probably leaders of major cultural and literary centers.

\textsuperscript{21} Nikolov, 229–40.

\textsuperscript{22} Giuzelev, 137–39.

\textsuperscript{23} Tkadlčík, 85–86.
not only to defend the use of the letters themselves, but also the entire work of the community of scholars to which he belonged. The treatise states:

If somebody claims that he [Constantine-Cyril] did not make them correctly, because they are still being corrected, we will answer them in the following way: “Greek [Scripture] was also corrected multiple times by Aquila and Simmachus [translators of the Bible from Hebrew to Greek in the second century CE], and afterwards by many others.”

In the above passage, the pronouns “them” and “they” do not refer to the letters of the Glagolitic alphabet, but to the translated Old Slavonic text of the Bible. The fact that “they are still being corrected” suggests that translations of biblical and patristic text were still being produced after the death of Constantine-Cyril. Taking into account the context in which this treatise first appeared, this remark points to the ongoing nature of literary activity in Bulgaria. The treatise was intended to clarify to its audience—the high elite—the place of the academic community in Bulgaria. It asserted Bulgarian religious autonomy by emphasizing the fact that the Bible was now available in a vernacular language—Old Slavonic—in effect liberating the country from having to rely on the Greek version. Religious “liberation” implied political “liberation” as well. Hrabar was thus defending the existence and necessity of his community. He hoped to first gain strong domestic support before directly confronting foreign academic competitors.

The treatise reflects Hrabar’s sense of self-confidence. In addition to addressing a domestic audience, it shows that the new Slavic intelligentsia aspired to respect and recognition from abroad. The fact that Hrabar’s work exhibits a strong emotional quality suggests that the text could transcend international relations of power. Most studies attribute its emotional content to an expression of patriotic ties to the Slavic people as a whole, and the Bulgarian nation in

particular. An over-emphasis of its Bulgarian nationalistic tone, however, is anachronistic. In the second half of the ninth and the first half of the tenth century, Bulgarian identity underwent a crucial period of re-definition from an originally pagan society to a newly Christianized one. The Bulgarian state also experienced a significant geographical transformation. Thus, it is highly unlikely that the treatise was intended to promote an emotional connection to a Bulgarian identity because no such identity had yet been properly defined. The treatise is much more predisposed to the Slavic people in general. For instance, the adjective славянски (slaviANSki), or “Slavic,” is repeated several times in the treatise. This attests to a pan-Slavic orientation of the text and not exclusively to a Bulgarian one. Hrabar, however, might have equated Slavic identity with Bulgarian. This would have been a serious political statement affirming Bulgarian ambitions to govern all Slavic peoples and would, indeed, have pleased the tsar. Moreover, it would have demonstrated the leading role of the scholarly community in elevating the position of the Bulgarian state above other Slavic polities.

This raises another question: What specific emotions does one find in the treatise? Hrabar clearly expresses his joy and pride in Constantine-Cyril’s achievements, presenting them as exceptional in comparison to those of Greek scholars:

[…] Saint Constantine, called Cyril, created the letters and translated the Books [Scripture] in a few years, whereas they [the Greek scholars] were many and did the same in many years.25

The expression “many years” is repeated several times throughout the treatise in order to highlight the discrepancy between the length of time that it took to “collect” the Greek alphabet and the short period of time in which the Slavic alphabet was “created.” This difference underscores the intellectual capacity and efficiency of Constantine-Cyril and, by extension, that

25 […] свети Константин, наричан Кирил, [той] и буквите създаде, и Книгите преведе за малко години, а те — мнозина и за много години. Ibid.
of the scholars who followed him. The text demonstrates that Hrabar felt pleased with the achievements and ongoing activities of his academic colleagues. The emotional content implicit in Hrabar’s work indicates a connection to a specific “emotional community,” which Barbara Rosenwein defines as a community “having its own particular norms of emotional valuation and expression.” Hrabar’s emotional community was composed of intellectuals, and his treatise raised confidence within the community, motivating members to pursue their work. His response to the Byzantines was dictated by emotional expectations coming from within this community, which had been offended because the Byzantines treated it as intellectually inferior. In order to avoid a reputation of passivity, Hrabar felt the need to reciprocate. He therefore initiated an emotional fight aimed at deflating the ego of the Byzantines. In this context, it appears that the treatise does possess the polemico-apologetic tone traditionally attributed to it by historians. Rather than merely a manifesto proclaiming the excellence of the Slavic versus the Greek alphabet, it is a manifesto highlighting the competence of the Slavic academic community and its superiority to the Greeks.

The style and form of the treatise are based on a series of theses and antitheses. Hrabar’s assertion of the superiority of the Slavic alphabet is progressive. To counteract the first reproach to the alphabet for containing thirty-eight letters instead of twenty-four letters as in the Greek alphabet, Hrabar claims that the Greek alphabet also possesses thirty-eight letters:

Others say: “Why did he create thirty-eight letters? One can write with fewer as Greeks do with twenty-four.” But they do not know with how many letters the Greeks write with! Because although there are twenty-four letters, they are not the only ones found in the books. Greeks also added eleven diphthongs and

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26 Petkanova, “Ideino i emotsionalno südŭrzhanie,” 223.
27 Rosenwein, 844.
28 See for instance Petkanova, Starobŭlgarska literatura, 228–331.
three numbers: 6, 90 and 900. And altogether thirty-eight letters were collected. In the same way Saint Cyril created thirty-eight letters.29

Hrabar acknowledges that the Slavic alphabet imitates the Greek tradition in terms of the number of letters but also proves that the Greeks are not superior to the Slavs because both alphabets have an equal number of letters.

The next reproach consists in dismissing the trilingual doctrine according to which liturgies could only be performed in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew30:

Others say: “What purpose do Slavic books serve? They have neither been created by God, nor are they original like books in Hebrew, Roman, and Greek that are primordial and accepted by God.”31

To this Hrabar responds that “all things come from God,”32 and that “God first created neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, but Syriac […].”33 His response suggests that he aimed to highlight the lack of accurate philological knowledge on the part of his Greek competitors. He goes on to contrast the Greek and Slavic alphabets. He says that the former was събран (sŭbran) or “collected” in separate and disjointed pieces by many people over “many years,”34 whereas the latter was сътворен (sŭtvoren) or “created” in the span of a few years by a single person—Constantine-Cyril. The difference between the verbs “to create” and “to collect,” or сътворити (sŭtvoriti) and събрати (sŭbrati), should be noted as a way of re-emphasizing not only the

29 Други пък казват: „Защо е създал тридесет и осем букви? А може да се пише с по-малко от този [брои] както и гьрците пишат с двадесет и четири.” Но не знаят колко пишат гьрците! Понеже има, прочее, двадесет и четири букви, ала не се изпълват с тях книгите, но са прибавили единадесет двугласни, та и три в числота: шест, деветдесет и деветстотин. И общо се събират тридесет и осем. По подобие на това и по същия начин свети Кирил създал тридесет и осем букви. Ivanova, “Chernorizets Khrabŭr.”

30 Obolensky, 250.

31 Други казват: „Защо са славянските книги? Нито Бог ги е създал, нито са изначални, както еврейските, и римските, и елинските, що са изконни и са от Бога приети.” Ivanova, “Chernorizets Khrabŭr.”

32 всички неща […] стават от Бога. Ibid.

33 Бог, прочее, не е създал първо ни еврейския език, ни елинския, ни римския, но сирийския […]. Ibid.

34 много години. Ibid.
originality of the alphabet but also the level of Constantine-Cyril’s ingenuity and, implicitly, that of his entire community.\footnote{Vlasto, 176.}

Furthermore, by claiming that the Slavic alphabet was ultimately the work of a saint, rather than of pagans, as the Greek was, Hrabar presents the text and, by extension, the entire scholarly community, as sanctified:

The reason why the Slavic letters possess more holiness and dignity is because a saint created them, whereas the Greek letters were made by pagans.\footnote{Затова славянските букви са по-свети и по-достойни, понеже свят мъж ги е създал, а гръцките — елински езичници. Ivanova, “Chernorizets Khrabŭr.”}

Finally, he explains that, unlike the Slavs, none of the Greek scholars seem to know exactly who created their alphabet:

If you ask a Greek scholar: “Who created your letters, or translated the Books, or when,” not many will know. If you, ask, however, Slavic literates: “Who created your letters or translated the Books,” all of them know and they will answer: “Saint Constantine, the Philosopher, called Cyril.”\footnote{Ако пък попитааш гръцки книжовник, казвайки: „Кой ви е създал буквите, или превел Книгите, или в кое време,“ то немного от тях знаят. Ако ли попитааш славянски грамотни [хора], казвайки: „Кой ви е създал буквите или превел Книгите,“ то всички знаят и, отговаряйки, ще рекат: „Свети Константин Философ, наречен Кирил.“ Ibid.}

Through a careful comparison of the benefits of the Slavic alphabet in relation to the Greek alphabet, the Slavic scholarly community emerges as superior. The irony and ridiculousness with which Hrabar presents the Greeks is intentionally belittling.\footnote{Petkanova, “Ideino i emotsionalno sŭdŭrzhanie,” 228.} Slavic scholars were trying to fight back against the Greeks with the same emotions with which they were being attacked. Thus, as Donka Petkanova claims, the treatise was intended to be used as a powerful “ideological weapon.”\footnote{Petkanova, Chernorizets Khrabŭr, 61.} It was fueled by an emotional conflict between two academic communities. The conflict was not a violent or physical fight, but an abstract battle of ideas corresponding to the academic practice of \textit{disputatio}, commonly used in Constantinople, the court of Charlemagne, or
the Abbasid court in Baghdad. The treatise was not intended to incite anti-Greek animosity, as argued by Tkadlčík. It served merely as a tool of academic debate.\textsuperscript{40}

Hrabar’s academic intent is underpinned by his extensive knowledge of Greek history and philology as well as his mastery of rhetoric, skills that could only have been acquired at institutions such as the University of the Palace Hall of Magnaura in Constantinople. Stefan Gechev supports this hypothesis. He has found a striking similarity between parts of Hrabar’s text describing the process of the construction of the Greek alphabet and Pseudo-Theodosius’ text included in Comitas’s Venetian codex. The treatise reads:

But before that, the Greeks did not have letters in their own language, but recorded their speech with Phoenician letters. And this continued for many years. And Palamidis […] discovered only sixteen letters for the Greeks. Cadmus of Miletus added three other letters, […]. And then Simonides found and added two letters. Eparchius […] found and added three letters and altogether twenty-four were collected. And after many years Dionysus the Grammarian discovered six diphthongs, then another person five more, and another three numbers.\textsuperscript{41}

Comitas was a well-known grammar teacher at the University of Constantinople in the second half of the ninth century. If Hrabar studied there, it would have been at this time. He would thus have had access to Comitas’s works.\textsuperscript{42} Khristo Trendafilov, by contrast, considers the main sources of Hrabar’s treatise to have come from Tsar Simeon’s library. This would mean that the work was published at a slightly later date, 915–920, as an anti-Greek propaganda piece during the Bulgarian-Greek wars. Trendafilov sees a clear connection between the text and the introduction to Nebesa, the Old Slavonic translation of the third part of John of Damascus’

\textsuperscript{40} Tkadlčík, 83.
\textsuperscript{41} Но преди това елините нямаха букви на своя език, ала записваха речта си с финикийски букви. И така беше много години. А Паламид, […] изнамери за елините само шестнадесет букви. Кадъм Милисий пък им добави три букви […]. И после Симонид намери и добави две букви. Епихарий, […] намери и прибави три букви и се събраха двадесет и четири. След много години Дионис Граматик изнамери шест двугласни, после друг — пет, и друг — трите числения. Ivanova, “Chernorizets Khrabŭr.”
\textsuperscript{42} Gechev, 89.
Fountain of Knowledge, which was written in ternary argumentative form similar to the form of Hrabar’s treatise.\footnote{Trendafilov, 285–89.} He fails, however, to discern any correlation in the content. Evidence of similar structure is not sufficient to draw conclusions about similar ideological focus. It only confirms that members of the same community who share a common education could, and did, display similar writing styles. If Hrabar was educated at the University of Constantinople, then he must have participated in philological discussions. His treatise, therefore, might very well be an accurate reflection of scholarly debates going on in Constantinople at that time.\footnote{Techev, 97.} By presenting his treatise in Preslav, he portrayed the new Bulgarian academic community as the new center not only of literary translation and writing, but also of scholarly debate.

Therefore, the treatise should not be analyzed in isolation. It represents the ideas of a much larger community of scholars residing in ninth-century Bulgaria who promoted the mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius. They were trying to legitimize their position domestically and show themselves as superior to their Greek competitors. They wanted to gain authority for themselves and make the mission their own by claiming recognition for creating the Slavic словото (slovoto) or “the word.” A ninth-century hymn known as Proglas kám Evangelieto (“The Prologue to the Gospels”) claims that the “word” opens the “doors” to reason:

Listen, all Slavic people,
listen to the Word that came from God,
the Word that nourishes the human souls,
the Word that strengthens all hearts and reason,
the Word that prepares everyone to know God.\footnote{Слушайте, цял славянски народе, / слушайте Словото, що от Бога дойде, / Словото, що кърми душите човешки, / Слово, що укрепва сърца и умове, / Слово, подготвяще всички да познаят Бога. Ivanova, “Proglas kâm Evangelieto.”}
By creating a Slavic written literary tradition, Cyrillo-Methodian scholars created a system of sacred “words.” Hrabar portrays them as God’s representatives on earth because they established a Slavic identity and gave it life through books. The prologue states:

As without light, there will not be happiness
for the eye, [...] [...] in the same way every soul without a book,
cannot see well the Law of God,
the Law—written and spiritual. 46

Scholars working in Bulgaria at this time considered themselves to be earthly saviors of the pan-Slavic community and believed that their literary activity would constitute the basis of a new written linguistic and national identity. This would take time, however, because the texts had to circulate among different, already literate Slavic peoples, notably the East Slavs.

In the late ninth and early tenth centuries, the treatise’s primary purpose was to integrate the new scholarly community into the high elite of the royal court in Bulgaria by showing that their knowledge, skills, and mastery of rhetoric could constitute a powerful weapon for Bulgaria against foreign influences. Most of all, the invention of the Slavic or Glagolitic alphabet allowed for linguistic freedom, which in turn meant political freedom for Bulgaria. In this respect, the Old Slavonic text of Hrabar’s treatise is inseparable from its context. Bulgarian scholars wanted to assert their unique status among other European scholarly communities and show their distinction. The treatise pointed to the divine origin of the Slavic letters and, thus, the Slavic “word.” As a result, it implied the divine nature of scholarly production in Old Slavonic in contrast to the Greek script, which had been created when the Greeks were still pagans. Hrabar’s treatise is therefore a salient example of the emergence of the Slavs as new players on the European scene, where their cultural achievements were intertwined with political ones.

46 Както без светлина и радост не ще има / за окото, [...] / [...]всяка душа без книги, / невиждаща добре Закона божи, / Закона — писмен и духовен. Ibid.
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