

SLOVAK STUDIES IN RUSSIA: THE CURRENT STATE

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Abstract: The article introduces readers to the current state of Slovak studies in Russia. The fate of Slavic studies in Russia is complicated and it has had its ups (late 19th and early 20th century) and downs (1920s and 1930s), but until now there has been a multidisciplinary tradition of studying all Slavic peoples, their languages, literature, history and culture. The article focuses on the study of Slovak language, literature, history and culture at Moscow State University, the Institute for Slavic Studies in Moscow, and Saint-Petersburg State University. It deals with the main researchers and their work and publications. The article is based on general research into the history of Slavic studies carried out by leading Russian scientists.

Key words: history of Slavic studies; Slovak studies in Russia, Slovak language; Slovak literature; Slovak culture.

Being an integral part of Slavic studies, studies on Slovak language, literature, history, culture, ethnography and folklore—or *Slovak studies*—have already had quite a long tradition in Russia. The history of Russian Slavic studies and especially Slovak studies has been described in a number of special publications (Lapteva 2005, 2012; Robinson 2004; Bernshtein 1967; Venediktov 1983; Dostal’ 2003, 2004; Kondrashov 1957, 1958; Smirnov 1987, 1995 and others).

The first research on Slovaks appeared when interest in Slavs in other countries was just emerging in Russia (P. I. Keppen’s travels and the Slavic magazine he produced). Knowledge on Slovak dialects, folklore and the way of life, culture and history of the people was gathered by the first Russian Slavists sent by universities to Slavic lands “with research tasks” (O. M. Bod’anskiy, I. I. Sreznevsky and others). In the 19th century, Russian Slavist philologists laid solid foundations for scientific knowledge on the language, history and culture of Slovaks—and contemporary specialists in Slovak studies gratefully cherish the memory of scholars such as M. P. Petrovsky (1833-1912), T. D. Florinsky (1854-1919), A. I. Stepovich (1857-1935) and N. V. Yastrebov (1869-1923).

Within the limits of this short article it is impossible to embrace the broad range of investigations and numerous papers that have been devoted to this theme within a period of over more than two centuries. Thus, we focus on the contemporary state of Slovak studies in the main centers in Russia in this article, and the historical aspect of the issues will be dealt with in another article (to be published in *Slavica Slovaca*, 2013).

The main centers of Slovak studies in Russia today are Lomonosov Moscow State University, Saint Petersburg State University and the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The Slavic Department at the Faculty of Philology, Moscow State University was opened in 1943, during World War II. It began specializing in Slovak language and literature in 1949. Today, a new cohort of Slovak studies students begins every five years. The language is studied for all five years of the degree and lecturers are also specially invited from Slovakia.

All courses in Slovak linguistics and culture taught in the Slovak language at Moscow State University are taught by Professor K. V. Lifanov and literary studies is taught by Professor A. G. Mashkova. Special courses are given by scholars from the Institute of Slavic Studies. The lecturers write textbooks and study guides and carry out their own research in the best traditions of university education.

K. V. Lifanov's research interests include the history and grammar of the Slovak language and the history of the Slovak literary language. He is the author of more than 70 academic papers and books, such as *The Morphology of the Slovak Language* (Lifanov 1999), *The Language of the Spiritual Literature of Slovak Catholics* (Lifanov 2000) and *The Genesis of the Slovak Literary Language* (Lifanov 2001). In his latest book published in 2001 the author provides evidence suggesting that the Slovak written tradition has differed from that of Prague since the 16th century, which contrasts with earlier suppositions made by Slovak linguists. Changes that took place in the Czech written tradition after the 1530s were not adopted by Slovak writers. They established their own tradition—at first, in ecclesiastic writing (both Catholic and Lutheran) and later in administrative texts. The developing written tradition retained some grammatical peculiarities, which had already become outdated in Czech, and was codified to include Slovak features that differed from Czech ones. Lifanov believes that at that time there was only one generally acknowledged literary language based on Western Slovak dialects and that the “style guide” produced by Bernolák in the 1790s was not a new standardization but rather a codification of what had been developing since the beginning of the 17th century. In 2012, K. V. Lifanov also published another study guide entitled the *Dialectology of the Slovak language*.

Professor A. G. Mashkova is a literature theorist and translator. Her interests include 20th century Slovak prose, Slovak Naturism, Slovak-Russian and Slovak-European literary relations, and Slovak culture. A. G. Mashkova is the author of more than 150 academic publications, including three books on *Slovak Naturism (1930s–1940s)* (Mashkova 2005) analyzing the philosophical roots, the influence of west European writers, and national sources as well as the poetics of naturist prose in the work of L. Ondrejov, M. Figuli, D. Chrobák, and F. Švantner; *Slovak Naturism in Time and Space* (Mashkova 2009) and *Slovak-Russian Literary Relations: Fragments of History* (Mashkova 2012).

A. G. Mashkova was one of the authors who wrote a new textbook called *Slovak Literature: Part 1: Early to Late 19th Century*. She also co-authored a study guide – *Slovak Literature: 1945–1985 – Prose* (1987) and was academic editor of *Slovak Literature: Part 2: The 20th Century* (2003), which was written by a group of Russian and Slovak specialists.

The history of Slovakia is taught and studied at the Department of Southern and Western Slavic History at the History Faculty, Moscow State University. The Department was set up in 1934 but did not begin operating until 1939. Nowadays, there is a similar department

at Saint Petersburg State University and a course on the History of Other Slavic Peoples is taught at almost all “classical” universities in Russia.

In order to specialize, students must undertake advanced studies in one or several of the Slavic languages provided by the Department of Slavic languages at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Moscow State University. At the Department of History, a course on the History of Southern and Western Slavs is held for students of the Philological Faculty, Moscow State University.

Academics at the department successfully combine teaching and methodological work with research. Z. S. Nenasheva, an associate professor, deals with the history of the Czech Republic and Slovakia; the history of the social ideas of the Slavic peoples of Austria-Hungary in the 19th and 20th centuries; the history of the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg Empire during World War I, and so on. Associate professor E. F. Firsov’s research interests include *T. G. Masaryk and Russia; and Slovaks, Serbians, Slovenes, Croatians and Czechs in Russia*. He is the author of *Review of the History of Slovakia: the 20th and early 21st centuries in Slovak Literature* (2003); *The Historiography of the Southern and Western Slavs* (1988) and many others. N. V. Volostnova concerns herself with the contemporary history of Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Transcarpathia; and the history of the Resistance movement during World War II.

At Saint Petersburg State University, in addition to the Department of the History of Slavic and Balkan Countries, there is also a Department of Slavic Philology at the Philological Faculty. Official approval for the department was gained in 1943, but the department did not in fact begin operating until 1944. There was no Slovak language specialization until the 1970s (Mesherskij, Dmitriev 1969).

Nowadays, Slovak language teaching at the faculty is associated with Dr R. K. Tugusheva, who co-authored a university textbook (1981) and wrote *Essays on the Comparative Lexicology of the Czech and Slovak Languages* (2003) amongst others.

The main academic institution that deals with Slovak studies is the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Here experts explore philological, historical and cultural themes in the field of Slavic studies.

For many years L. N. Smirnov (1928–2001) was primarily engaged in linguistics including a wide range of issues concerning the history and contemporary state of the Slovak language, Slavic lexicography, the history of Slavic studies, and Russian-Slovak scientific and cultural relations. He wrote books such as *Verbal Morphogenesis in Modern Slovak Literary Language* (1970), and *Slovak Literary Language in the Epoch of National Renaissance* (2001). L. N. Smirnov is the author of chapters in *National Renaissance and Formation of Slavic Literary Languages* (1978), *The Development of the Ethnic Self-Consciousness of the Slavic Peoples in the Epoch of Mature Feudalism* (1988) and others. He was one of the first academics in Russia to begin exploring issues relating to the formation of Slovak literary language. He supervised research on *The Role of Biblical Translations in the Emergence and Development of Slavic Literary Languages* (he was also the author of the Introduction and a chapter on Slovak) (2002). L. N. Smirnov contributed much to Slovak lexicography and national historiography.

E. N. Ovchinnikova worked in the field of Slovak dialectology and Carpathian linguistics.

M. M. Valentsova studies issues in ethnolinguistics, the relationship between language

and consciousness, and language and traditional folk culture, primarily relating to Slovak and more broadly Slavic materials. She is also concerned with linguistic aspects of Carpathian studies, collecting and analyzing the vocabulary and terminology of the traditional culture of the Slovaks and comparing it to other Slavic traditions. M. M. Valentsova is the author of about 180 academic papers and she is one of the co-authors of an ethnolinguistic dictionary entitled *Slavic Antiquities* (1995-2012) and the encyclopedia *Slavic Mythology* (1995).

Pure linguistics and also translation and poetry are the concerns of D. Y. Vashchenko (Anisimova). She is interested in semantics, grammar, linguistic poetics, ethnolinguistics, social linguistics and Slovak-Hungarian language contacts. She has translated fiction from Slovak and Hungarian into Russian.

Y. V. Bogdanov, I. A. Bogdanova, L. S. Kishkin, N. V. Shvedova and L. F. Shirokova have studied the literary process in Slovakia. Yury V. Bogdanov (1932-2010) was a first-rate Russian specialist on Slovak literature. A colleague of his, the well-known expert on Polish literature, professor V.A. Khorev, succinctly described his creative work thus: "He was one of the main creators of *The History of Slovak Literature* (1970), one of the co-authors of three volumes of *The History of the Literature of Western and Southern Slavs* (2001), and two volumes of *The History of Literature from Eastern Europe* (2001). The chapters he wrote in these fundamental general texts portray the genesis and development of Slovak literature in its entirety. Y. V. Bogdanov wrote a number of papers on historical and literary topics as well as on theoretical matters. These were published in edited volumes and collections of papers, including *Slovak Literature in a European context (The Problems of Synchronization of National and General European Literary Development)* (2006), *On the Perception of Russian Literature in Slovakia* (2009). Y. V. Bogdanov was also known for actively promoting and popularizing Slovak literature—he translated Slovak books into Russian, and authored introductions and notes, and compiled collections and anthologies of Slovak fiction and poetry.

Nineteenth and twentieth century Slovak literature, mainly Slovak poetry, features uppermost amongst N. V. Shvedova's interests: Romanticism, Symbolism and Surrealism in Slovak literature, Slovak-Russian literary connections including typological issues in Slovak and Russian Symbolism, philosophical aspects of poetry of the 1880s to 1940s. In 2005 she published *Philosophical Motives in Slovak Poetry (Late 19th to the First Half of the 20th century)*. N. V. Shvedova is the author of chapters on Slovak literature of the 18th century and of the 1880s in the edited *The History of Literature of the Western and Southern Slavs* (1997) and several chapters in the textbook *Slovak Literature* (1997-2003). N. V. Shvedova also translates poetry from Slovak and Polish.

L. F. Shirokova is a specialist in 20th century Slovak literature. She studies the peculiarities of Slovak Post-Modernism in the 1990s, modern Slovak drama, the latest trends in the Slovak literary process. She is the author of *The Artistic World of V. Šíkula* (2006) and chapters about Slovak drama in *The History of Literature from Eastern Europe after World War II* (1995-2001). number of works by Slovak writers have been translated by L. F. Shirokova.

L. S. Kishkin (1918-2000) studied the work of Czech, Slovak and Russian poets, artists and other cultural figures. He investigated Russian-Czech and Russian-Slovak cultural links. One of his books was *Slovak-Russian Literary Contacts in the 19th Century: Investigations, Research, Reports* (1990).

Issues in Slovak literature were the primary interest of S. V. Nikoľsky, a specialist in 19th and 20th century history of Slavic literature and inter-Slavic literary connections, especially the history of Czech and Slovak literature.

Projects on the history of the Slovak people and the state are implemented at the Institute of Slavic Studies. M. Y. Dostaľ wrote much about Russian-Czech and Russian-Slovak cultural and scientific relations. She is the author of *I. Sreznovsky and His Contacts with Czechs and Slovaks* (2003), "On the History of Russian-Slovak Scientific Relations in the First Half of the 19th Century" (1988), "O. M. Bod'anskiy in the Range of J. Kollar's Ideas" (2003), "The 'History of the Language and Literature of the Slovaks' in M. T. Kachenovsky's Lectures of 1838" (2005) and others.

Throughout her years in academia, V. V. Mar'ina studied the history of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. She was particularly interested in the state of the peasantry in Czechoslovakia and other Central and South-Eastern European countries. She investigated the following issues: Czechs and Slovaks during World War II (1939-1945), Czechoslovakia during the "People's" Democracy of 1945-1948, and Building Socialism and Czech and Slovak Historiography.

G. P. Mel'nikov is a specialist in the history and culture of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the Middle Ages and in Early Modern Times. He also studies the history and the contemporary state of foreign Slavic cultures. He is the author of the textbook *The Culture of Foreign Slavic Peoples* (1994) and corresponding chapters in the textbook *The History of the Culture of Western European Countries in the Renaissance* (2001).

E. G. Zadorozhniuk specializes in the contemporary history of the Czech Republic and Slovakia as well as that of the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. She studies the history of dissident and opposition movements and the "Velvet Revolution" in Czechoslovakia, problems of post-Socialist development in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and historical figures. She is the author of a number of books and co-author and editor of volumes, including *The Czech Republic and Slovakia in the 20th Century: Essays on History* (2005), *Revolutions and Reforms in the Countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe: Twenty Years After* (2011) and others.

The history of the Czech Republic and Slovakia is the focus of research by E. P. Serapionova. Amongst other things, she analyses the situation regarding national minorities in the interwar Czech Republic, Russian-Czech and Russian-Slovak relations and issues of Russian emigration in Czechoslovakia. Some of her work is devoted to the life and activities of Czech and Slovak politicians: T. G. Masaryk, E. Beneš, M. Štefánik. E. P. Serapionova is the author of chapters on the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the 20th century in the study guide *The History of the Countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe in the 20th century* (1997) and some essays in a general volume on *The Czech Republic and Slovakia in the 20th Century: Essays on the History* (2005).

The ethnographic aspect of studying Slovak people is the concern of the Institute of Ethnography at the Russian Academy of Sciences. The most competent scholar in this field is N. N. Gratsianskaya. Her work includes a book entitled *The Slovaks: On Problems in Ethnocultural History* (1994) and corresponding chapters in *The Calendar Rites and Customs in Other European Countries* (1973-1983) and *The Birth of a Baby in Customs and Rites: Other European Countries* (1997).

In Moscow, Slovak language and other aspects of Slovak studies are taught at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations which trains specialists for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions. As the first foreign language, Slovak has been taught here since 1990 at the Department of Languages of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Specialists in international affairs with a knowledge of Slovak graduate from the Faculties of International Journalism, International Relations and International Law.

At other Russian universities with Slavic (or Russian-Slavic) Departments (for instance, at Voronezh, Nizhny Novgorod and Tyumen State Universities and at Bashkir State University there are no courses on Slovak. However, academics from cities and research centers in Russia have covered Slovak topics. For instance, Professor G. V. Rokina at Mari State University has conducted a significant amount of work in this field. Her publications include the *Theory and Practice of Slavonic Reciprocity in the History of Slovak-Russian Relations in the 19th Century* (2005), *Ján Kollár and Russia: the History of the Idea of Slavic Reciprocity in Russian Society during the First Half of the 19th Century* (1998) and others.

Developing Slovak studies in Russia became the focus of greater activity after 1993 when Slovakia became a sovereign state. The new realities gave rise to new problems and new approaches. The traditional humanities-focused research (linguistics, philology, history, ethnology, ethnolinguistics, social linguistics, Slovak-Slavic and Slovak-non-Slavic cultural relations) were supplemented with social and political topics stemming from the livelier political and economic interaction. In turn, these topics, stimulated study of the Slovak language and prompted new interest in the culture of Slovakia.

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