

REES 5100 / COML 5180. Old Church Slavonic: History, Language, Manuscripts

Instructor: Prof. Julia Verkholtantsev
Course Schedule: Wednesdays 1:45PM –4:44PM with a 10-minute break.
Office Hours: via Zoom and in person by appointment.
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Course Workload and Assignments at a Glance

- For most of class meetings, the homework consists of background readings (history and grammar of OCS) and working with OCS texts: reading, analysis of grammar and structures, and translation (RAT: Read, Analyze, Translate).
- Three take-home RAT tests
- One or two short presentations and response to home reading (depends on class size)
- During the two final weeks: work on final projects

Course Description

The language that we know today as Old Church Slavonic (OCS) was invented, along with the Slavic alphabet(s), in the 9th century by two Greek scholars, Sts. Cyril and Methodius. They were tasked by the Byzantine Emperor with bringing Christianity to the Slavs of Great Moravia, a powerful state in central Europe. From there, literacy spread to other Slavs, and even non-Slavs, such as Lithuanians and Romanians. The oldest texts of Orthodox Christians who today live in Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Poland, Slovakia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Ukraine, are composed in Church Slavonic and its later regional variants. Knowledge of this language and tradition aids in understanding the cultural, literary, and linguistic history of any modern Slavic people. In some Slavic languages, Church Slavonic has a role similar, and even greater, than the role of Latin and Greek roots and structures in modern Germanic and Romance languages. For historical linguists, Church Slavonic provides unique material for comparison with other Indo-European languages, such as Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. For medievalists and cultural historians, it opens the door into the Slavic Orthodox tradition that developed in the world of Byzantine Commonwealth.

The course introduces students to the linguistic basics of OCS and its later variants, paying special attention to their cultural and historical contexts and their material culture – manuscripts and icons. It is conducted in an hands-on style: at the end we will work with an original manuscript from Penn library.

Previous Experience

The course is suitable for all students, from freshmen to dissertating grads. However, previous experience with learning foreign languages, understanding how language grammar works, and especially the knowledge of modern Slavic languages, or ancient languages, such as Greek, Latin, or Old English, helps with learning OCS.

Learning Goals

Students begin with reading annotated published texts and by the end of the semester work with original manuscripts, or with images of original manuscripts. At the end of the course students will:

- learn about the history and challenges of creating literacy among the Slavs (alphabets, translations, original compositions);
- learn the script(s) and the basics of the OCS grammar. (There is an option for students who wish to gain a deeper knowledge of OCS grammar and Common Slavic to develop an individualized plan.);
- learn basic paleographic skills in order to read original manuscripts and inscriptions on icons;
- be able to read, understand and translate a Church Slavonic text. (Competence at the end of the course depends on students' personal effort and previous experience.)
- form an understanding of the history of Slavic writing and the evolution of Old Church Slavonic into regional varieties.

Course Materials

Most materials are available on the Canvas course website in digital copies. For the grammar reference, we use Boris Gasparov, *Old Church Slavonic* (Lincom Europa, 2001). The choice of specific texts for reading will depend on participants' interests and background, determined during the first seminar.

Course Work and Policies

For each class, students complete homework, which consists of reading, grammatical analysis, and translation (RAT: read, analyze, translate). Grammatical analysis includes identifying grammatical forms and meanings of all individual words and the text as a whole. At home, students work on analysis and translation in writing, according to the model discussed at the first meeting. The goal is not to get everything correct and produce flawless translation and analysis, but to try to do it and to learn in the process. Only written work constitutes proof of class preparation and will be used in evaluation for credit, which will be given for each class.

Once or twice during the semester (depending on class size), each student will present a reading, assigned in advance and optional for the rest of class.

There will be no quizzes for background and historical readings, but for each such assignment students will post their home notes in a joint Google document, which we will use to discuss the readings.

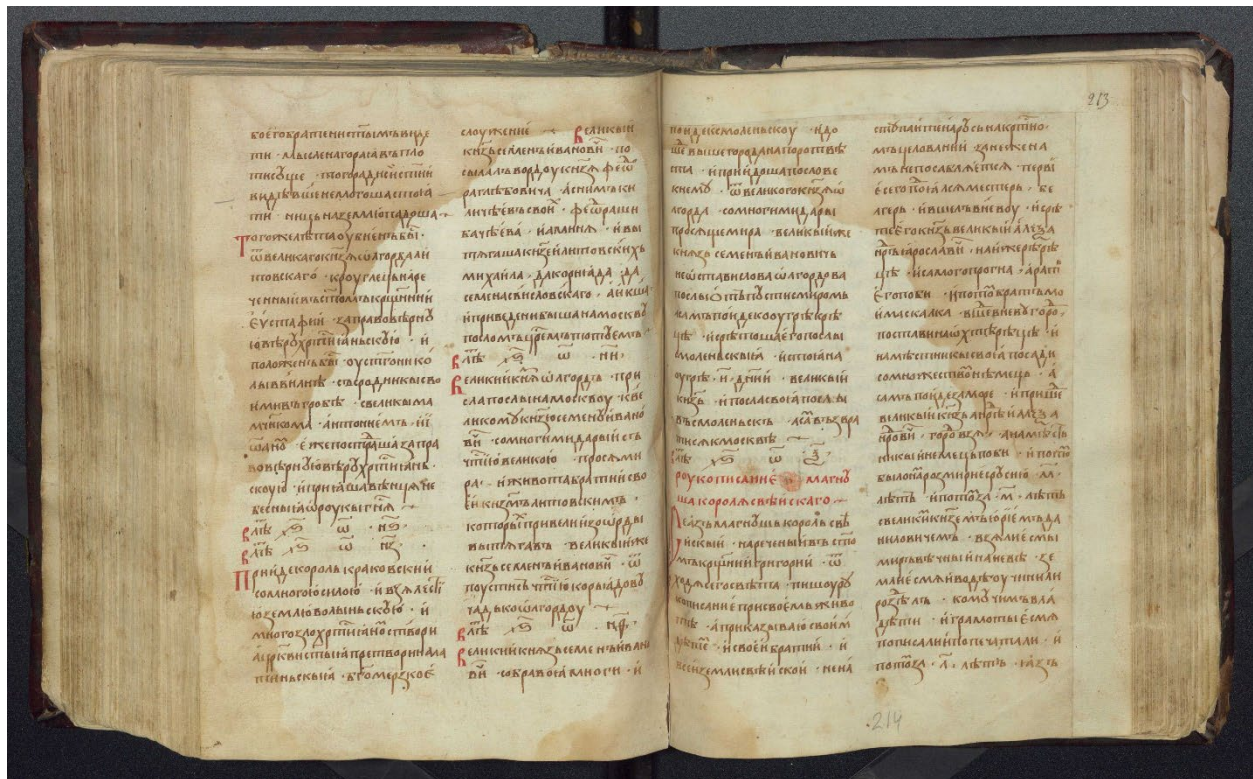
Students are expected to inform professor of any absences in advance. After the first meeting, no more than ONE absence for whatever reason will be excused without affecting the participation part of the course grade. All additional absences lose points and must be made up for credit. Similarly, students will not receive full credit for a class, for which they are unprepared and are unable to demonstrate preparation by written work.

Take-Home Translation Tests

There will be three take-home tests, in which students demonstrate the skills that they have learned in class.

Final Project

For the final project, students will work with original manuscripts from the Penn Library or images, and produce a transcription, description and translation of assigned portions of a manuscript. One of the last class final projects was on translating the “Testament of King Magnush” from the *Sofia First Chronicle*, a Rus chronicle written in the 15th c. and associated with the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod.



Credit Calculation for Final Grade:

Attendance, preparation and work in class	40%
Presentation(s)	10%
Three translation tests	10% x 3
Final project: work with a manuscript	20%