BULGARIAN ROUNDED GLAGOLITIC  CROATIAN GLAGOLITIC  OLD CYRILLIC
Fonts Glagolitic Round and Glagolitic Croatian (angular) are developed in two versions (provisionally titled “antique” and “grotesque”) with two styles – normal and bold. The Cyrillic font is only an “antique” version – normal and bold. The most popular now typefaces Glagolitic Round and Cyrillic have only one style, I do not know of a “grotesque” version. With these three fonts, the density of the letter stems is matching the contrast of the stems in the Tempora (HermesSoft) and Universum (HermesSoft) typefaces, respectively, excluding the bold style in Glagolitic Round (“antique” and “grotesque”), where the above conformity is impossible. The height (“the eye”) of the letters is also maintained, as well as the letters’ normal-to-bold proportion, the way they are in the fonts Tempora (HermesSoft) and Universum (HermesSoft). In these three fonts, some letters with variations are also developed, as well as the most popular two- and three-letter ligatures (for the “antique” style). Some of the ligatures have counterparts in the three alphabets (e.g. ἄ – ṿ). Most counterparts are between Glagolitic Round and Glagolitic Croatian, where the ligatures are developed mainly based on Jagic (“Glagolitic...”). In the Cyrillic typeface, the ligatures have been styled according to various sources.

The font Glagolitic Round (българска обла глаголица) is developed against a preset module grid (matrix). The letters and characters in “antique” and “grotesque” are “assembled” from two building blocks – circles of various sizes (“tabs”) and connecting stems. Main source for the approximate proportions and the shape (construction) of the letters in the “antique” style is the Asseman Gospel (10th c.).

The font Glagolitic Croatian (angular) (хърватска ъглеста глаголица) is developed against a preset module grid (matrix). The letters and characters in “antique” are “assembled” from two building blocks – stems and a connecting element, which through rotation and horizontal or vertical flips takes different positions to build the shape of the various letters.

The “grotesque” version is built much simpler – just by filling certain parts of the module grid. Sources for the approximate proportions and the shape (construction) of the letters in the “antique” style are the Rheims (Emmaus) Gospel (14th c.) and a few breviaries from 14th-15th c.

Сирилица (кирилица). The font is based mainly on the cursive of the Suprasal Collection (11th c.). Letter proportions are set according to the “wide O”. In the normal style, the proportion of the characters (height to width) as well as the width of the stem to the height of the letter are approximately the same as those in the manuscript. The proportions (image) of many of the lowercase letters (e.g. O, H, λ, Ε, K, Γ, Κ, Ν, Π, Τ...) match exactly or almost exactly the letters from the manuscript. However, the font does not claim to be an exact replica of the cursive! The letters and the characters, in general, have been stylized quite strongly. They have been built with a several (minimal number) universal geometric elements, which are repeated in a number of letters. Not all letters (e.g. Μ) follow the construction of the letters in the manuscript. In some letters (e.g. ξ) there are more or less significant corrections, made to maintain the stylistic integrity of the typeface. The versions (different shapes) of some letters, even if not present in the Suprasal Collection, are developed according to the same stylistics. The bold style follows the characteristics of the normal style. Apart from the different variations developed for a number of letters, for those with higher ascents or lower descents there are special versions for above-the-line set (with or without a title). For the most common above-the-line letters (with or without a title), with more specific or characteristic shapes, there are versions developed directly as letter titles. The mix of regulation and semi-regulation forms, as well as the versions of some letters with certain specific modifications in their writing, make the font a more universal one, rather than an exact replica of scribe Retko’s handwriting.

All this makes it possible to suggest through type, even if approximately, certain typical paleographic characteristics of manuscripts dating from various periods. The font has been developed in such a way that set with a standard leading of 120% (e.g. 10/12, 11/13.2, 12/14.4, 13/15.6 pt, etc.) the descents are not overlapping the ascent diacritics and the above-the-line letters under a title (the so called letter titles). Apart from that, the above-the-line letters are of the largest possible size (60% of the height of the lowercase characters). The titles are
two kinds – short and long, positioned at “two floors” – at the accent fields of the lowercase and uppercase letters – and can be positioned above a letter or between two letters. The same applies to the above-the-line letters and the letter titles. The “two floors” make it possible for a title to be typed on top of an above-the-line letter, title on top of a title, or title on top of any other diacritic. Titles on top of high-ascent letters (e.g., χ, χι, ϊ...) are chosen from the “top floor”, that is from the set of titles for uppercase letters. All titles, aspirations, and other diacritics have equal contrast for the normal and bold uppercase and lowercase letters. Various (normal and bold) starting, dividing, closing, and other characters are also developed.

One can compile a rather complete chronology of the emergence and the development of the Glagolitic and Cyrillic typefaces from the book В. Йончев, “Шрифтът през вековете” (see also Е.Ф. Карский, “Славянская…”). I give below (taken from В.Й.) only a few of the more important dates: 1483 – the first Glagolitic typeface (Croatian); 1491 – the first Cyrillic typeface of Sweipolt Fiol and Rudolf Borsdorf; 1564 – the first book printed in a semi-regulation type by Iv. Fyodorov in Russia; 1838 – the first attempt to engrave and found a typeface in Bulgarian lands (for Theodosi Sinaiatski’s print shop); 1853 – by P. Љafarik’s appointment, type round Glagolitic letters after the Asseman and Marin gospels were made. Our Renaissance literature from Sofroniy Vratchanski’s “Неделник” (1806) to the Liberation in 1878 was printed in Cyrillic type of better or poorer quality. Some of these typefaces were preserved (as a lead type) almost until the mid-20th century. For instance, in Iv. Kadela’s catalogue of the Royal Court Press, one of them could be found under the rubric “letters: Slavic”; in a catalogue of the State Press (the one after the Liberation of 1878) shown were Bulgarian Glagolitic (most probably Ŷafarik’s Glagolitic type), Old Slavic Cyrillic and Old Bulgarian Cyrillic (Ŷafarik). These typefaces are long gone. The longest preserved (and used) as a lead type and in phototypesetting (ECPT) until about 10 years ago, is Monotype’s Old Bulgarian Slawjanski typeface. It is probably that very typeface (judging by the style), engraved and founded after the cursive of the Suprasal Collection, ordered by Yagitch for his edition of the Bologna Psalter (1907). This typeface (under a different name), Ŷafarik’s Cyrillic and Glagolitic (?) as well as some other redesigned versions can be found in some computers of today.

For the development of this project, I owe a lot to Prof. Vasil Yontchev, who many years ago revealed to me the vast universe of literature and raised my interest towards the history of the typeface. I am extremely grateful also to Hristo Kodov, Bozhidar Raikov and Stefan Kozhuharov, whom I deeply respect, for our earliest attempts together and for the work to complete this project. Unfortunately, they are no longer with us. My heartfelt thanks to Boryana Veltcheva and Vasya Velinova for their patience and our fruitful collaboration. I also thank to Aksinia Jourova for the opportunity to use the library of the Prof. Ivan Duitchev Center, to Boryana Hristova for her assistance for the presentation of the typefaces in the St. St. Cyril and Methodii National Library, and to Maria Kostova, who discovered rare old editions in the library of the University of Sofia St. Kliment Okhridski.

Short bibliography:


See also works by:

Е. Георгиев, К. Мирчев, П. Ивец, А. И. Соболевский, П. А. Лавров, Н. Щепкин, Л. В. Черепнин и др. Interesting ideas and works on the Glagolitic and Cyrillic letters can be found also in В. Йончев “Азбука от Плиска, кирилицата и глаголицата”. София, 1997.


English translation by Alexander Vantchev
Asseman Gospel (10th c.) page 122b / Асеманиево евангелие, л. 122б
дбенъ је стъ яковъ домовнтугъ. јже
износитъ о съкровници скоего. но
вла и кетхдал. и стъ егда съконула
исть притури сиж. прёди о тхдал.
и пршеугъ къ отъстькъ скоег. оно
уале ела. на съньмнмнници къ ны-

Мила огто є мнеге стад алупа вомъ.
єк є нега гла рку. схмин множество къ.
єя нмате къ нмал его. нег енм. амнепс.

Мила огто ж стуюю мкъ. сертак и кахъ.
єка є лоу. гла си. рев гь сконвъ аўтен.
кынелкъ тъ укъ. къ дил екъ. ен еп.

Мила огто ал. стуъ ойя па архипъ ѣркъ градъ.
нектарна арска. аянка иесиина. е стуъ ойя
на тяж. ѣго же епма. бънволаго къ нн.
къ вторнчекъ. е є мъ гла икъ. рев гь скон.
кън естъ екъ. къ. къ ѣрткъ нсмъ. нег еп.

Мила огто бъ стуъ мкъ. папунъ расенъ апа.
єла и дровнкъ нн. екъ о лоу гла алъ.
ревъ гь. бьсъ елико хоштетъ ал.
tворатъ камъ ялън. ѣ кън.
tворите нмъ такожъ. се ео.

єтъ. закопъ и пиръ. кънъ.
тє. жъзыкънин крату. тк
ко пространал крата. ѣ ши.
рокъ пєтъ. къводъ къ паго.
єкъ. нмоси етъ къхда.
штъ нмъ. коль жъзыкъ крата.


Въ лъто осмонадесато ичъ персъка сакъ- корня: гоненне къистъ на цръкънъ хрнстосо- кътъ. И на уткъштвелъ къседръжителя бо-

Suprasal Collection (11th c.) p 527/ Супрасълски сборник, 254 (по Йордан Заимов (София, Т. I, с. 527)
The font sets Glagolitic Round, Glagolitic Croatian (angular) and Cyrillic are produced in two formats – Open Type (OTF) and PostScript Type 1.

The usage of OTF was necessary for a number of reasons:

1) The large number of signs in a single style – for the various types of Glagolitic, the average number of characters per style is 300, while for the Cyrillic it is almost 700.

2) The support of complete kerning information (character spacing) is possible only in OTF, because standard PostScript fonts with their 256-character limitations do not allow kerning to be maintained, for instance between versions of letters Α/α and Ω – 16 at the same time

(Αω, Ωω, ΛΩ, ΛΘ, ΛΘ, ΛΩ, ΛΘ, ΛΘ).

3. OTF is platform-independent, that is applications with full OTF support, such as Photoshop or InDesign, are capable of reading a document created on a different platform. E.g. from Windows to Macintosh, and vice versa.

4. Only OTF in combination with Adobe InDesign allows the full utilization of all functional capabilities of the font sets

Except in OTF, the above font sets are available also in “standard” PostScript Type 1, where the Glagolitic sets are in two files, while the Cyrillic sets are in three. This “distribution” is necessary because of the 256-character limitation in the “standard” font.

The different font sets are used much in the same way, with Cyrillic having a bit more complicated structure, due to the presence of many titles, above-the-line letters, letter titles, aspirations, accents, et al. All styles within the Glagolitic and Cyrillic sets have the same mappings for matching letters, including titles, above-the-line signs, ligatures, et al. It is strongly recommended to use Adobe InDesign, which has a special “Insert Glyph” palette. From this palette, all characters in a certain style can be selected.

All styles are defined in such a way that the titles, the above-the-line letters, the letter titles, as well as all accents can be positioned:

1. between two letters – this is done automatically, using the standard character metrics

(ΫΛΨΗ, ΕΚΤ, ΓΛΛ, ΝΛ, ΠΡΙΒΡΕΘΝΑΙ, ΡΟΣΚΕΣΤΕΘ).

2. above a letter – in order to position an element above a letter (title, above-the-line letter, letter title, etc.) there are a number of special characters defined replacing the numerals 1-9. These are characters with negative widths and various sizes, as well as the matching widths with positive metrics. At first, we position the cursor before the letter, above which we want to place an element (title, above-the-line letter, letter title, etc.), then we position the respective element using the special characters from 1-9, and then with the same positive metrics we “push” the cursor ahead, to restore the normal word spacing.

(ΠΡΙΚ, ΜΝΗΣ, ΜΚ, ΝΛ, ΝΕΛΑ, ΠΡΙΒΗΝΑΓΩ).

This way of typing allows a very precise positioning of an element (title, above-the-line letter, letter title, etc.) above letters with varying base widths.

(Ι, Σ, Φ, Ψ, Ω, ΩΩ, ΩΩ).

We are not aware of any practical solution to position above-the-line characters with such a precision in other typefaces.

Ivan Neytchev, HermesSoft