

Why OT (Ǫ)? Why nOT?

A Note on the Development of a Cyrillic Letter

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1. Introduction

Sometimes it can be fruitful to ask yourself very basic questions, and once such a question has been put forth, it is quite astonishing to find that nobody seems to have touched upon it before. In the present paper, I will ask one such simple question – and I will try to give an equally simple answer.

In grammars or manuals on Old Church Slavonic (OCS) one will sometimes find assertions such as “the preposition *ot* is always being written as **Ǫ**”. In addition, in the world-wide character encoding standard, Unicode, this letter (in its uppercase and lowercase forms, **Ǫ ǫ**) is defined as a separate character in the Cyrillic section – but not in the Glagolitic section, which was added to the Unicode standard later than the Cyrillic part. Because all characters that are being added to Unicode have to go through a long process of application and approval, this status quo supposedly reflects current philological knowledge.¹ Fig. 1 shows the Cyrillic Old Church Slavonic portion of Unicode.

0460	0461	0462	0463	0464	0465	0466	0467	0468	0469	046A	046B	046C	046D	046E	046F
Ǫ	ω	Ѡ	ѡ	Ѣ	ѣ	Ѥ	ѥ	Ѧ	ѧ	Ѩ	ѩ	Ѫ	ѫ	Ѭ	ѭ
0470	0471	0472	0473	0474	0475	0476	0477	0478	0479	047A	047B	047C	047D	047E	047F
Ѯ	ѯ	Ѱ	ѱ	Ѳ	ѳ	Ѵ	ѵ	Ѷ	ѷ	Ѹ	ѹ	Ѻ	ѻ	Ǫ	ǫ
0480	0481	0482	0483	0484	0485	0486	0487	0488	0489	048A	048B	048C	048D	048E	048F
Ѽ	ѽ	Ѿ	ѿ	ѿ	ѿ										

Fig. 1: Old Church Slavonic portion of the Cyrillic Unicode character table

So the simple question to ask is ‘why?’ Why *ot* and not another preposition? Is there a convincing explanation that could be given to a student asking such a question? Of course, one cannot be sure from the outset that this question *can* be fully answered, but one can nevertheless try to reconstruct some of the reasons that could have led to the development of this letter, and maybe offer new insights on how it developed.

¹ This does not mean, however, that there cannot be any mistakes in Unicode and the decisions leading to the inclusion of individual characters. The Cyrillic omega is the best example of this: in a rare exception to its policies, Unicode, Inc. changed the shape of characters number 047C and 047D in a recent revision from *omega with titlo* to the correct form, *omega with ‘velikij apostrof’*.

2. Classical Grammars

Let us first take a look at some classical grammars, manuals, text books and primers of Old Church Slavonic (OCS), how they introduce the Cyrillic alphabet and what they are saying with regard to these letters, the Cyrillic omega, **Ѡ**, and the ‘ot’, **Ѡ̄**.

2.1. In his classic “Manual of Old Bulgarian”, *Leskien* uses a table to introduce the OCS Cyrillic and Glagolitic alphabets along with Greek correspondences. Leskien does not mention **Ѡ̄** at all. However, he wisely choose to present the two shapes the Greek Omega had at the time when the Slavic alphabets were developed (see Fig. 2).

Ω, ω	Ѡ	800	Ϟ	700	ο, ω	ѠТЪ
	Ѡ̄, Ѡ̅, Ѡ̆		Ϝ	800	št	ѠТѦ

Fig. 2: Omega and ot in Leskien’s alphabet chart (1969, 4)

In the glossary of his book, Leskien writes the preposition as well as the prefix as **ѠТЪ**, while the texts themselves give **ѠТЪ** and **ѠТЪ**, when they are transliterated from Glagolitic, like *Zogr.*, but the Cyrillic sources are typeset using only **ѠТЪ** (*Supr.*, *Sava*). Leskien has a sample of **Ѡ̄** in a heading from *Assem.*, but the same page – actually a photomechanical reproduction of a page from the edition of Kurz (1955, 2) – has quite a few instances of the preposition *ot* being written as **Ѡ̄**:

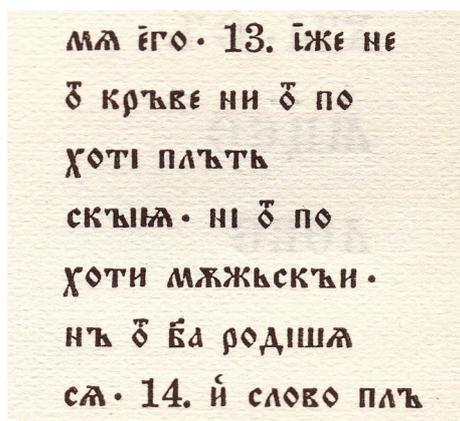


Fig. 3: Superscript OT from *Ass.* (Kurz 1955, 2)

2.2. *Kul’bakin* has a chart of the Glagolitic letters with their Cyrillic counterparts (1913, 16) which means **Ѡ̄** is missing. He tries to demonstrate how **Ѡ̄** might have been composed from **Ѡ** and **Т** both in Glagolica and Kirillica (**Ѡ̄**), and he offers an interesting observation regarding **Ѡ̄**: covering Cyrillic OCS texts, he comments with regard to *Und.* (end of 11th century) that **Ѡ̄** appears more frequently than in earlier texts. Indeed it is logical that the frequency of **Ѡ̄** cannot be higher than the frequency of **Ѡ** itself, while theoretically every occurrence of **Ѡ̄** could at the same time be an occurrence of **Ѡ̄**.

2.3. *Trubetzkoy* (1968) includes a long chapter on the writing systems, their development, the derivation of Cyrillic letters from Glagolitic ones etc.; he introduces both the Glagolitic and the Cyrillic alphabet on their own, but in his work, too, **Ѡ̄** is completely missing! Interestingly, however, he says “Im mäßigen Gebrauche von Ligaturen stimmen die kyrill.

Denkmäler mit den glagol. überein. [...] ist auch in den kyrill. ⸑ [...] die einzige oft gebrauchte Ligatur” (1968, 42).²

2.4. In his “Old Church Slavonic Grammar”, *Lunt* also has a chapter on the writing systems (1959, 14–23); he introduces the Glagolitic alphabet in the form of a table, and lists the Cyrillic correspondence for each Glagolitic letter. The Cyrillic OCS alphabet is not introduced as such, and the consequence of his approach is that ⸚ is never mentioned. *Lunt* mentions the (Glagolitic and Cyrillic) letters ѡ/⸚ and the hypothesis that they could be interpreted as a ligature of ѡ and Ѣ (1959, 21), but nothing more.³

2.5. The “Old Slavonic Grammar” by *Bielfeldt* (1961) introduces the sounds and letters of the language, but ѡ is completely missing from the corresponding table (1961, 24) and the following pages which, of course, also means that ⸚ is missing – an astonishing fact.⁴ In the grammar section and in the texts, the preposition is simply spelt as ѡѢ.

2.6. So, reviewing these classical grammars shows that none of them even mentions glagolitic ⸚ / ⸚ or Cyrillic ⸚ / ⸚ either as a special writing convention nor as a letter-like character. In other words: these manuals, which are still in use today and by no means are only of historical importance, do not answer our question at all.

2.7. Some information can be gleaned from *Schaeken/Birnbaum* (1999, 80), who mention the Glagolitic and Cyrillic Omega and illustrate the letters with a sample from *Assem*. They state: „In den altkirchenslawischen Handschriften kommt die graphische Variante ѡ/⸚ nur in beschränktem Maße vor, und zwar hauptsächlich bei der Interjektion ѡ! (gewöhnlich im Unterschied zur gleichlautenden Präposition ѡ), in griechischen Wörtern und Namen [...]), bei der Präposition oder bei dem Präfix ѡѢ(Ѣ) – meist in Form der Ligatur ⸚ bezeugt – und außerdem als Zierbuchstabe (Initiale) am Satzanfang.“ In addition, they comment that apart from ⸑ and ⸚, Cyrillic OCS rarely uses ligatures (1999, 82).

² When he notes the origin of ⸑ from two separate letters, one could rightly ask whether it is correct to write these two separate letters using OCS Cyrillic. It could be argued that this ligature has not been composed from these two *Cyrillic* letters but that it has been borrowed as a complete entity from Greek writing, and that, in Greek, it developed as a vertical ligature of *o* und *v*.

³ By the way, typographically it does not make real sense to use the modern form ѡ in this context, as *Lunt* does – in this context one should use only the old form (⸚).

⁴ A strange solution is found in this book to typeset the ⸚: a Greek *psi* (ψ) is used instead of the Cyrillic letter, and a Greek *v* is used for the *izhica* (Ѣ)! Actually, once you think of it, there is an optical relationship between the ⸚ and the ψ – graphically, the Cyrillic letter could be derived from the *psi* simply by making its bottom straight, not curved. So far, the Cyrillic letter has rather been perceived to be a ѡ with an added stroke going down, which has led to the hypothesis that is a ligature of a ѡ with a Ѣ; with the *psi* in mind, it could indeed also be described as consisting of a long central stem with two arms. However, it is unlikely that this is the origin of the Cyrillic ⸚, because the alphabet also has its own ‘true’ version of the *psi*, i.e. Ѣ.

These observations are in stark contrast to the early grammatical tradition. As even a cursory look at the material presented by Jagić (1896) proves, in the works from the centuries following the period of Old Church Slavonic, **Ѡ** had often simply replaced **Ѣ** in alphabet charts, i.e. it was a common character in these works on OCS.

3. Glagolitic Texts

3.1. Let us now turn to the text themselves. *Diels* states that Glagolitic **Ѡ** and Cyrillic **Ѣ** sometimes reproduce a Greek **Ω/Ϟ**, but otherwise serve only aesthetic purposes (1932, 24). He describes very precisely the distribution and occurrence of the two o-letters in Glagolitic and Cyrillic manuscripts (1932, 40f.). According to him, we find **Ѡ** in Glagolitic texts mainly at the beginning of sentences and/or in headings, and also in Greek *o!* and *osanná!* He then goes on to say that *Ril.* sometimes has **Ѡ** in word-initial position, similarly *Grig.* and *Ass.*, while in *Kij.* and *Ochr.* the letter is missing completely (1932, 41). From his observations he infers that **Ѡ** does not correspond specifically to Greek Omega, although this character's shape could have been its origin, but rather fulfills an aesthetic purpose. For Cyrillic texts, *Diels* notes that the findings are not identical in every respect. According to him, *Savva* regularly uses **Ѡ** in the preposition **ѠѢ** in headings (see 4.2, below). He notes the generally wider use of **Ѡ** in *Sava* and *Supr.*, the absence of this letter in *Chil.*, *Hilf.* and *Lavr.*, and concludes his paragraph by noting that the use of this letter is restricted to **ѠѢѠ** in *Und.* and in *Slu.*

3.2. Let us illustrate *Diels*'s observations with a few samples of actual manuscripts; first, an example from *Zogr.* of the preposition *ot* being written as linear **ѠѠѠѠ** in a heading (see Fig. 4):⁵



Fig. 4: Linear OT in Zographensis (Jagić 1911, tabl. III, 5c)

⁵ The Cyrillic lines above the graphic are interesting from a paleographical perspective, as they contain a stroked (!) Cyrillic I (see the first letter of *iskoni* 'in the beginning'), a character so far not encoded in Unicode as a separate Cyrillic letter.

Another header from *Zogr.*, however, uses the Omega-O for the preposition, see Fig. 5.

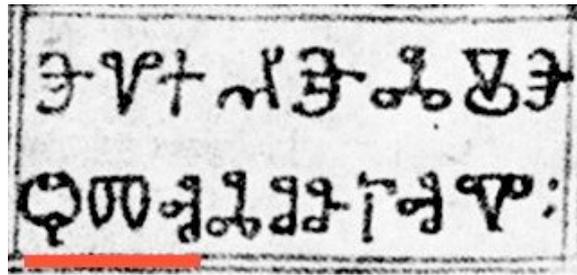


Fig. 5: Omega-OT in a header in *Zogr.* (Ev. Lukas.)

Trubetzkoy (1968, 27) asserts that in the oldest texts, the Omega-Ω was only used for the injection *o!*, while the preposition *o* was written using the ‘normal’ graph for *o*, i.e. Glagolitic Ω.⁶ The restricted use mentioned by Trubetzkoy is, however, not true any longer for later texts: there are cases where the preposition *o* is written with Omega-Ω, see the preceding figures as well as the beginning of the second line in the following example (Fig. 6):

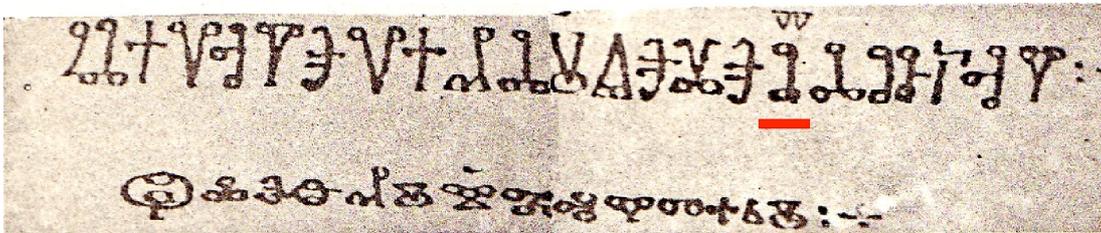


Fig. 6: Superscript-OT in *Zographensis* (Jagić 1911, table III, 5c)

Fig. 6 also shows, that *Zogr.* uses the linear variant as well as the superscript-OT in headings. The same superscript-OT is also to be found in *Ochr.* (see Jagić 1911, table VII, 13); next, an example from *Mar.* showing the linear form twice (see Fig. 7):

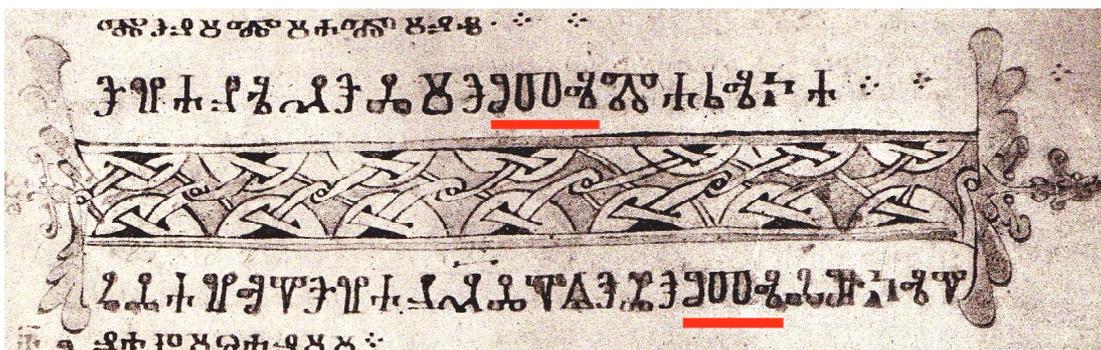


Fig. 7: *Marianus*: Linear OT (Jagić 1911, tabl. III, 6a)

Now let’s have a look at *Assem.*, the text mentioned by Diels among those using the Omega-O. In Fig. 8, there is an example of a header, and in Fig. 9 of a sentence-initial use of a superscript-OT using the Omega-O.

⁶ The question, by the way, why OCS needed the Omega at all, if it had such a restricted use, can and should be answered not only with regard to aesthetics. As Vaillant (1955, 21) correctly points out, the character is essential theologically to encompass everything ‘from Alpha to Omega’.



Fig. 8: Assem. Omega-O superscript (fol. 41)

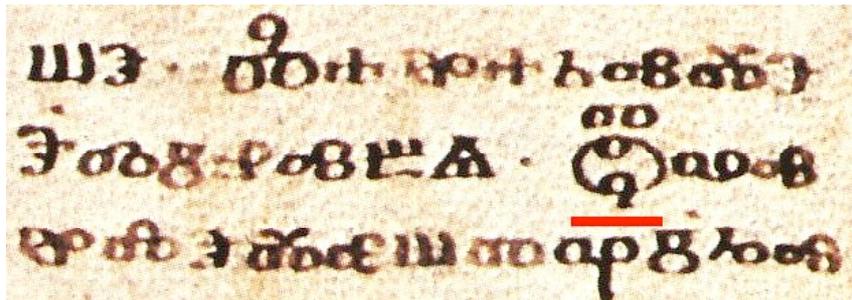


Fig. 9: Assem. Omega-O with superscript, sentence-initial position

Assem. has a certain tendency to having $\overline{\text{O}}$ in headlines, but often we can find $\overline{\text{O}}$ instead:



Fig. 10: O with superscript T (Assem. fol. 24)

Thus, in headings we find both $\overline{\text{O}}$ and $\overline{\text{O}}$, and we also find $\overline{\text{O}}$ at the beginning of sentences; however, in running text we mainly find $\overline{\text{O}}$ – but sometimes $\overline{\text{O}}$, too – there is no complete consistency.

3.3. Let us sum up the review of Glagolitic texts: Here, we find $\overline{\text{O}}$ as well as $\overline{\text{O}}$ for the preposition *ot*. If the texts make any distinction at all, $\overline{\text{O}}$ is used in headlines and at the beginning of sentences, while $\overline{\text{O}}$ appears in running text. This also explains why $\overline{\text{O}}$ should be more frequent than $\overline{\text{O}}$, but $\overline{\text{O}}$ has the more prominent place because of its occurrence in headlines. Neither combination, however, is considered to be a fixed letter-like combination: they occur alongside other superscripted characters, especially in headlines. Figs. 8 and 10 are very instructive in this respect: they show that the superscripted OT occurs in headlines where every word has a superscript; so these headings are no proof with respect to the preposition OT. The use of the superscript at the beginning of sentences, however, is distinctive.

In other words: *in Glagolica the superscript-OT is not a fixed entity but still an O with a superscript T*. However, there had already developed a certain tendency to write the preposition OT as $\overline{\text{O}}$ in headlines, and the distribution of these characters are clearly better described for each text and not for the alphabet system as such. It is logical, then, that – as we have seen from the short overview of some classical grammars – nobody claims that the Glagolitic alphabet had a separate letter $\overline{\text{O}}$ -superscript, although the combination itself, just as

That is, in *Savv.* the omega is always used in headings except in one case. In other words, the shift in using $\overline{\omega}$ in Cyrillic as opposed to using both $\overline{\omega}$ and $\overline{\omicron}$ in Glagolitic texts has already been taken place in this text. Fig. 13 (touched up to make the characters better visible) shows the single instance of $\overline{\omicron}$ and a sample of $\overline{\omega}$ – on the same page, in the same phrase.

Fig. 13: Two OT-ligatures in *Savvina kniga* (fol. 134b)

Ščepkin (1901, 44), by the way, does not seem to be aware of the one instance of $\overline{\omicron}$ in the headings, but he mentions one occurrence of $\overline{\omega}$ in the running text where the authors of *Savvina kniga 1999* claim it wasn't used at all. Fig. 14 shows this occurrence:

Fig. 14: $\overline{\omega}$ in running evang. text in *Savvina kniga* (fol. 87)

Diels states (see section 3.1) that *Suprasl.* uses ω more often (for example, in the preposition *o*). This may be true in general, but does not include a specific use of the preposition *ot* – superscripted or not – which other texts exhibit. The reason is simple: *Suprasl.* consists mainly of ‘žitija’ and ‘slova’ whose headlines have a linguistic structure which differs from those characteristic of the gospels: they don't use the preposition *ot* at all! They use either none or *v*, *na*, or *o*. Therefore, in *Suprasl.*, the ω does not stand out optically at all, and it surely does not play an important aesthetical role. In other words: the use of $\overline{\omega}$ in headings depended heavily on the liturgical character of the text itself, at least in the beginning, and on the layout that was chosen for the text in question: if anything, in *Suprasl.* the headers are *smaller* in type than the rest of the text, see Fig. 15, lines 1–3 below the divider.

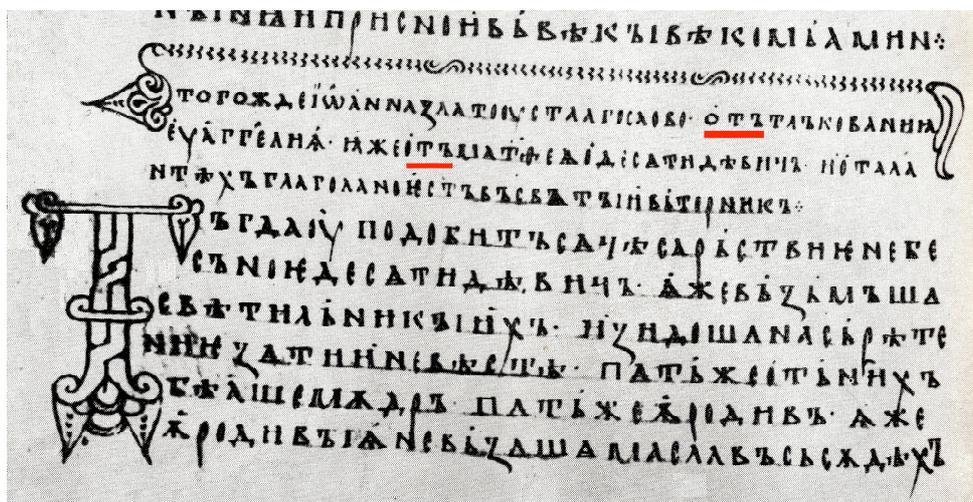


Fig. 15: Header with $\overline{\omicron}$ in *Suprasl.* (chapter 32)

In Fig. 15, we have a rare example of a header where $\overline{\omicron}$ is used twice, and thus had a chance to use the ‘headline form’ $\overline{\omega}$ – but uses the linear form instead. The ‘broader use’ of ω

itself can, at the same time, be seen in the name ИГДААНЪ (first line). In contrast to this, all Gospels with their prominent and fixed header structure of ‘Evang’elie отъ [name_{Gen.}]’ offered an ideal position for the systematical use of the digraph **Ѣ** and making it popular – from there it could later spread to other uses.

4.3. In other words, already in some of the oldest Cyrillic texts, like *Savva*, we find a strong tendency to use the digraph **Ѣ** in headers, and the normal linear form **ѠѢ** in running text. We have to speak of a tendency, because various deviations from this general rule occur. In headers, Cyrillic **Ѣ** is often used where Glagolitic texts still had a mixture of **Ѣ** and **Ѣ̄**. Not all texts, however, are uniform in this respect, and some texts completely do without **Ѡ**, while others, like *Suprasl.*, simply have no prominent and no suitable headlines where the digraph could be put to good use.

5. Why OT? Why nOT?

This leads us back to our initial question, why it is the preposition OT that developed its characteristic superscript shape, and the picture is beginning to become somewhat clearer. First, as we have seen, a certain tradition of writing exactly the preposition OT using the Omega-O is already present in Glagolitic texts, in some texts more prominent than in others. Second, the preposition OT occurs indeed much more frequent than other prepositions in the most prominent place, the headings of the Gospels. This should answer why it is the preposition OT and not another preposition, such as *do* ‘to’. Third, as we have seen, in Glagolitic texts the superscripted occurrences of OT cannot be interpreted as a ligature or as a special character on its own. This clearly is a development of the newly introduced Cyrillic alphabet. Fourth, there is one reason that certainly has affected the history of the superscripted OT becoming a fixed entity with a character-like status, and it is astonishing that grammars do not mention this at all: O and T are not only the *elements* of this complex character, OT is also the *name* of the character **Ѣ** itself – but also the name of **Ѡ**. It is very probable that the name ‘ot’ which was at the same the most characteristic occurrence of the letter itself, i.e. as the superscripted preposition *ot*, influenced the basic shape of the letter so much that in the later tradition, it simply replaced it – instead of **Ѡ** we find **Ѣ** in alphabet charts. The case of **Ѣ** is the only such case in the Cyrillic alphabet where the name of the character names all parts that make up the character itself. The Glagolitic alphabet did not have the character **Ѣ** as such, and so the name ‘ot’ for the Glagolitic character was chosen for another reason (if it is the original name at all). Moreover, one cannot be completely sure what came first: the name or the shape. We have reason to assume though that the shape came first: the word ‘ot’ is no good example for the ‘hard words’ that are the names of the neighbouring characters in the alphabet, and so doesn’t serve the purpose of the section of the alphabet (see Trunte 2004 for more details). More important than this, however, is the fact that once the name had been coined and had become widespread, it supports the writing, and the writing supported the name.

We can now word our question a bit more precisely. In the light of the already existing Glagolitic tradition, we have to answer the following question: is there anything special about **Ѣ** **Ѣ** that caused it to develop a life of its own, so to speak, that could be attributed to the Greek origin and influence of the new Cyrillic alphabet and writing habits? In our view, yes. If one assumes that the development of the Cyrillic alphabet had a political background with Byzantium becoming more powerful, this will only make the argument stronger.

6. Greek

6.1. First let us quickly sum up some established about the Greek language during the time of the development of the Slavic alphabets.⁷ First, there no longer was a phonetic difference between *omikron* and *omega* – they both denoted the same sound, [o]. Greek writing had thus evolved into a morphological and etymological, not purely phonetical, writing system. Second, at this time the Greek Omega was written using the W-shape (Ω) that the Kirillica borrowed; this wasn't a development that took place in the history of Cyrillic writing, see Fig. 16:

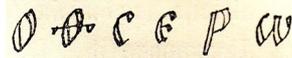


Fig. 16: Greek uncial forms, 10th cent. (Gardthausen 1911, 48)

This, by the way, is also the reason why it is better for any manual on OCS not to compare the Slavic alphabets to standard classical *printed* forms of the Greek alphabet (such as Ω) but to *written* forms of Greek from the same time, just as Leskien did (see Fig. 2).⁸

During the so-called Byzantine period of Greek writing, uncials predominated until the ninth century, and during the ninth and tenth centuries the minuscule was developed, fully formed and became customary. The so-called younger minuscule of the tenth century saw, among other things, a revival of the uncial and careful writing of individual letters.

6.2. Let us take now take a look at some Greek sources. Fig. 17 shows a headline from the so-called ‘Theodore Psalter’, which was written in 1066 in Constantinople. Here we see a very prominent ligature Ω in a heading. There are other identical samples.⁹



Fig. 17: Greek ligature Ω (Theodore Psalter, 11th century, fol 27v)

The next illustration (Fig. 18), although from the 13th or 14th century (see Trobisch 2003), is also remarkable. The writing is Greek minuscule, but the ligature Ω and the digraph Ω are very carefully written and are easy to identify as such. The sample also shows the general tendency

⁷ Still the most complete source on the subject is Gardthausen (1879), and in connection with the origin of Slavic writing also Gardthausen (1911).

⁸ The same also holds for other characters: the Slavic Δ seems to differ somewhat from the classical printed Greek Δ – but is identical to written Greek from the ninth century (see Gardthausen 1879, 161f.)!

⁹ The illustration is available online at: <http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary/>, record number 18999; an identical ligature occurs in the same Psalter on f.28, see record number 11311.

of the ‘T’ to be written with a high stem, even if it stands alone – we find the same in Cyrillic manuscripts.

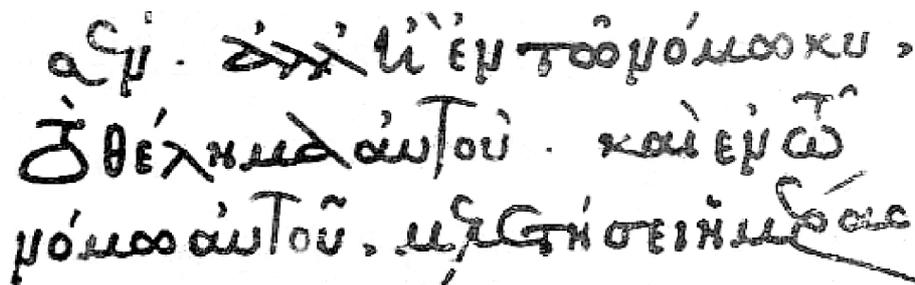


Fig. 18: Greek ligature ϛ and ϛ̄ (Dresden Gospel, XIV century)

Fig. 18 serves as an ideal illustration for a central argument of the present paper. And once one has seen the point, it seems so obvious that it is astonishing nobody has come up with the observation before. The clue is: one simply has to change the reading direction of the Greek words to get the Slavic word, from top-down to bottom up:

Greek reading direction:	ϛ̄↓	ϛ̄↓
Slavic reading direction:	ϛ̄↑	ϛ̄↑

In fact, the top-down direction of TA, TO, TOY, Tϛ seems to be an exception in Greek because Gardthausen (1879, 114f.) stresses that Greek abbreviations always have to be read bottom-up and that only these ligatures differ in that respect. In other words, when switching from Glagolica to Kirillica, Slavic scribes continued using superscripts, but at the same time they narrowed their use down to a well-known character shape that was present in Greek and thus was a familiar feature for any Greek looking at an OCS manuscript – it certainly made them look more Greek-like! And because ϛ and ϛ̄ (ϛ̄) were the most prominent vertical ligatures in Greek, and both were carried over to the newly developed Cyrillic alphabet, this means that the basic set of Greek uncial vertical forms in use in the 10th century was also used in Cyrillic. The selection between ϛ̄ and ϛ̄ had already been predetermined by Glagolitic writing traditions (ϛ̄ and ϛ̄ mainly in headings, at the beginning of sentences and/or in the preposition OT, with ϛ̄ rarely occurring in running texts) and was further supported by the fact that Cyrillic was developed under the influence of Greek uncial forms, not minuscule forms.

6.3. The idea proposed here can be supported by more observations. The superscripted Greek forms do not occur in manuscripts only, but also in frescoes and on icons. The inscription in Fig. 19 is actually a very good illustration because it is part of a famous 11th century mosaic from the Hagia Sophia, i.e. from the heart of Byzantium, depicting the emperor Constantine and his wife Zoe. Here, the ϛ̄ is a superscript, and it is an article. Fig. 20, also from the Hagia Sophia, is interesting, because it shows the use of ϛ̄ as well as ϛ̄ in ligature form in the word ‘avtokrator’ on the left – but this time, in the first line we have the linear form Tϛ̄. In other words: the digraphs or ligatures ϛ̄ and ϛ̄ were used in Greek not only when writing inflectional forms of the article ‘the’, but also when these character sequences occurred as such in other words. Another illustration (see Fig. 21) is the famous ‘Pantokrator’ mosaic from the

12th century Cathedral of Monreale (Sicily) where we also find the ligature Ϡ . Of course, it was never obligatory to use these ligatures in Greek.



Fig. 19: Greek article Ϡ in a mosaic from Hagia Sophia (first half of 11th cent.)

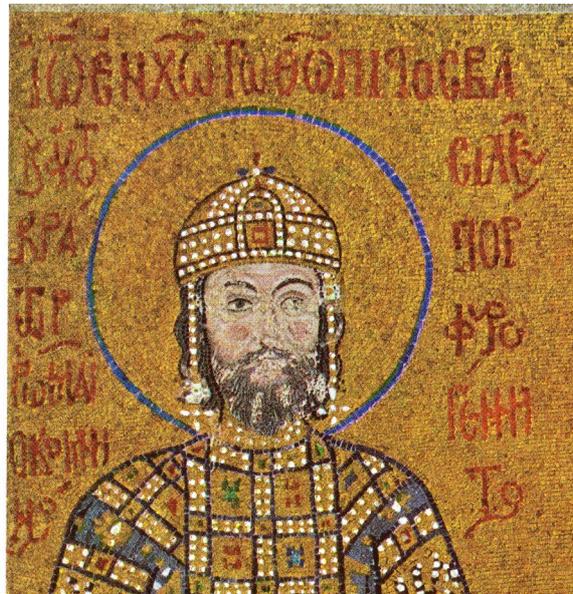


Fig. 20: Greek ligatures Ϡ and Ϡ in another mosaic from Hagia Sophia (1118)

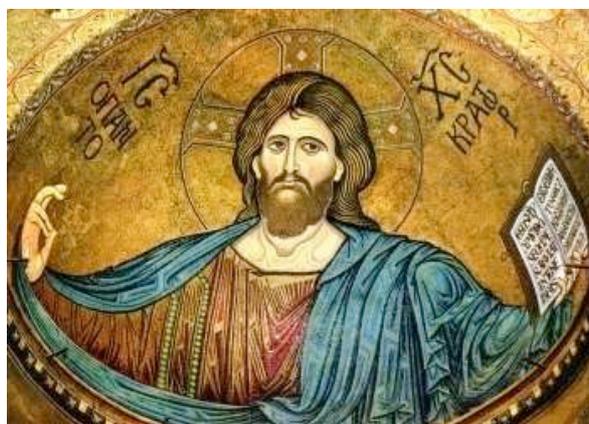


Fig. 21: Greek ligature Ϡ in a mosaic (Monreale, Sicily, 12th cent.)

6.4. The similarity between Greek and Slavic goes deeper, actually, than just writing. In Greek, the forms of the article, $\bar{\text{O}}$ and $\bar{\text{Ω}}$, are actually very frequently used word-forms and occur in prominent positions in headlines or titles, as we have seen – the Slavic preposition is well-known to occur in every heading of the four Gospels.¹⁰ And, to stress this basic fact once again, both in Greek and in Slavic, these shapes are complete *words*, not just characters which means they are equal on this level, too.

6.5. There is an interesting small difference between Greek and Slavic, though: in Greek, the superscript **T** seems to play the more important in the shape of the character while in Slavic it's just the opposite: the **T** is usually (but not always) small – but at least it is not larger. First, this is a clear consequence of the reading direction: In Greek, the *T* is the root of the word and thus important, while the *Omega* or *O* is the desinence and of lesser importance. But what about the Slavic writing? Here, we have two forms: in running text, both are either of the same size, being of equal importance for the word, or the **T** is smaller. However, in headings we typically have a small superscript. To me, this is clearly an influence from Glagolitic writing where the superscript **T** was always used in its low variant, i.e. $\overline{\text{т}}$. Superficially, the Glagolitic superscript **T** and the Cyrillic superscript **T** could even be thought of to be the same character, with Glagolica just using the outline, not the solid form:

Glagolitic shape:	$\overline{\text{т}} \overline{\text{Ѡ}}$
Cyrillic shape:	$\overline{\text{O}} \overline{\text{Ω}}$

Thus, the OCS Cyrillic header forms are a continuation of how the superscript **T** was actually written in Glagolitic texts (i.e. low), but it was the Greek article and its use that served as the blueprint for positively selecting the Slavic preposition *ot* to stand out among the otherwise mainly linear writing of the early manuscripts.

6.6. Stressing the reading direction of the Cyrillic superscripts (bottom up) could possibly also be used as a case in point against interpreting the $\overline{\text{Ѡ}}$ as a ligature of $\overline{\text{Ѡ}}$ and $\overline{\text{т}}$ because it would have to be read top-down, which seems less usual for Cyrillic.¹¹

Preposition $\overline{\text{Ѡ}}$:	$\overline{\text{Ѡ}} \uparrow$
“ligature” $\overline{\text{Ѡт}}$:	$\overline{\text{Ѡт}} \downarrow$

¹⁰ I am not sure if this has been noticed before, but I am under the impression that the use of the preposition itself could have been influenced by Greek, where the headings of the gospels usually start with “TO EYAGGELION KATA [name]” or “TO KATA [name] [HAGION] EYAGGELION”. Isn't it one of the reasons to use the Slavic preposition *ot* in the first place to to mimic the Greek preposition *kata*?

¹¹ Regardless of whether this is the true origin of the character or not, it is a fact that Slavic scribes did not ‘see’ these two components in the letter any more. As Ščepkin (1901, 36) points out, there is one case in *Savv.*, where the scribe corrected a $\overline{\text{Ѡ}}$, which should have been a $\overline{\text{Ѡт}}$, by using a superscript $\overline{\text{т}}$ instead, i.e. he wrote $\overline{\text{Ѡт}}$, in other words: he followed the same reading direction as in $\overline{\text{Ѡ}}$.

6.7. Another argument supporting our claims regarding the Greek influence on the **ϞϚ** ligature can be derived from Greek. Around the time the Cyrillic alphabet was devised, Greek went through a period of important changes and began to develop its many minuscule ligatures. The ligature **ϛ** is the oldest among all Greek ligatures, being already attested in the 6th century; in the 10th century, ligatures for the inflectional forms of the article began to spread (**Ϛ̄ ϛ̄ Ϟ̄**). In other words: at the time we are talking about, when the Greek **Ϟ̄** helped to serve as a blueprint for Cyrillic **Ѡ**, there was not yet have an abundance of uncial ligatures in the Greek language, which would need an explanation why certain were chosen and others were not. That obviously still was not the case; Greek had few firmly established and common uncial ligatures at the time, and from them *all those* that made sense as Slavic words (prepositions) were taken over into Cyrillic, namely **ϛ** and **Ϟ̄**. If we take the history of Greek itself into account, this will, by the way, also explain, why Kirill could use a ligature for OU in Glagolica: because the same ligature already existed in Greek while others did not. Obviously, the superscripted **Ϟ̄** was not yet considered a ligature in Greek at the time, but when the Cyrillic alphabet was developed, this view seemed to change.

If we take a look at tables of Greek minuscule ligatures, we can discern a clear fact: of all the many forms listed in such tables, practically only **Ϛ̄** and **Ϟ̄** can easily be reinterpreted and reused as South Slavic words simply by changing the reading order, and these (along with older **ϛ**) are indeed exactly the ligatures which were taken over into the Cyrillic alphabet – not a result that seems to have happened by chance, it seems, but a fact that can be systematically explained.

7. Summary

The present article has tried to outline the development of the ligature or digraph **Ѡ**, from a simple superscripted form **Ϟ̄** (along with **ϛ̄**) in Glagolitic texts to a fixed entity **Ѡ** in Cyrillic manuscripts (and ultimately being recognized as such in Unicode, the universal character encoding standard). While we cannot claim to have found uniformity in all manuscripts, those manuscripts that do use the character exhibit certain tendencies: from being invented for Greek loanwords and Greek names, the **Ϟ̄** spread to gospel headpieces and to sentence-initial positions, and the high frequency of the preposition *ot* in these headings helped to change the combination **Ϟ̄** from a superscript into a fixed entity. The fact, however, that not all superscripts that were used in Glagolitic texts turned into ligatures or digraphs in Cyrillic texts, can in our view be explained or at least can be supported by Greek writing traditions, and by the correspondence of Cyrillic **Ѡ** to Greek **Ϟ̄** – where only the reading direction has to be changed to change Greek into Cyrillic. In other words: the prominent use of the digraphs **Ϟ̄ Ѡ** (along with **ϛ̄ ϛ**) certainly helped to make a Cyrillic text look even more like a Greek text, when Slavic scribes switched from Glagolitic to Cyrillic in the 10th century at Preslav.

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