

## VALUE OF HUMANITIES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH. EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF BYZANTINE VALUE SYSTEM IN SLAVIC ENVIRONMENT

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**Abstract:** The aim of the contribution is to draw attention to the value of study of humanities and to humanities research. As an example we use the research of Byzantine values and their impact on the European regions. The Byzantine Empire as a medieval power influenced the political and cultural-social development, and for a long time secured economic and social stability in much of the Mediterranean and the adjacent areas. The influence of Byzantium on the Slavic environment can be seen at different levels. Comparing Byzantine values with current values and monitoring of their impact on the formation of Slavic identity in Great Moravia and Slovaks in contemporary Europe enables to explore the transformation of values and the changes of individuals in social relationships. Globalization in the post-modern era has raised fundamental questions addressed to the global society that deal not only with the development of technology, or economy but also with important problems of national culture, cultural heritage and other cultural segments, their preservation and development.

**Keywords:** humanities, values, education, history, Byzantium, identity, cultural heritage, research.

### Introduction

We are the witnesses of massive investments into science and new technologies during the last decades and the discussions about the meaning of humanities are like never-ending story. There is a kind of silent struggle between science and humanities. Do humanities still matter in the current world? Do we really need them? The research itself in the field of humanities is not considered to be enough empiricist, scientific and at the same quality level as the research in sciences and technologies. Perhaps the answer seems to be very simple, but it is not so easy. The fact is that more broadly framed humanities stay underestimated and

underfinanced<sup>1</sup>. Opponents usually do not see any important meaning of humanities, because they do not bring huge financial profits. But on the other hand there exists those, who advocate very important role of humanities in the life of society and in the life of individuals. Moreover, surveys have shown that capital invested into education in long term perspective brings more profits than capital invested into industry.

Jeffrey C. Evans (<https://www.researchgate.net/...>) from Bucknell University thinks that “humanities and social sciences are a valuable part of a balanced educational experience because they contribute to understanding the context of problems and development of skills in critical thinking” (Evans). Michal Stehlik, former dean of Faculty of Arts of the Charles University in Prague, argues that terminology used by humanities is dangerously close to the terminology of applied sciences and it seems as we resign to the meaning of humanities. “The meaning of humanities cannot be squeezed into economic parameters”, says Stehlik and thinks that “humanities develop the character of the society, they influence human relationships and cultivate the society, help to know and understand identity, culture and diversity... we cannot want humanities to bring economical profits... The world is in social, religious, national and ethnical problems and I am not sure, if the production of nanotechnologies can help us”<sup>2</sup>. Richard Smith argues to use two approaches: “to pursue vigilant criticism of the rampant instrumentalism and scientism of our time, and to emphasize the importance of that distinctive feature of humane inquiry: interpretation” (Smith, 2015, p. 739).

## 1. Value of humanities research

Paul Holm talks about several values of humanities research in connection with humanities: intrinsic value, social value, understanding cultural heritage, promoting economic value, contribution to other academic disciplines, promoting critical thinking and innovations, personal and spiritual development and aesthetic appreciation (Holm, Jarrick, Scott, p. 12):

*Intrinsic value:* humanities research has a value in and of itself.

*Social value:* the humanities benefit society in a number of ways. They help create tolerance and understanding between citizens, thereby leading to social cohesion. They aid decision-making, especially on the complex ethical issues that confront society as a whole.

*Cultural heritage:* the humanities enable citizens to understand, preserve and sometimes challenge their national heritage and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> The special commission that visited Slovak Ministry of Education and Slovak Academy of Science last year strongly recommended the Slovak government to support financially humanities much more.

<sup>2</sup> The whole interview is available from: <https://euractiv.sk/...>

*Economic value:* there are direct economic benefits from humanities research, for example in publishing, media, tourism and, of course, the training humanities scholars provide to their students, who go into the job market across a wide range of professions.

*Contribution to other disciplines:* humanities research feeds into other fields, most obviously the social sciences, but also into medicine, computer science and engineering/design.

*Innovation:* the humanities deal with questions of motivation, organisation and action, which are essential components of creativity and entrepreneurship, and so the humanities promote a culture of innovation.

*Critical thinking:* it is of the essence of the humanities to develop critical thinking. This is epitomised by the Socratic tradition in philosophy, but by no means confined to that discipline.

*Personal and spiritual development:* humanities research can enhance one's personal and spiritual wellbeing through the study of different texts and traditions – religious, philosophical or spiritual.

*Aesthetic appreciation:* literary research, art history and musicology promote aesthetic discrimination, enhancing the appreciation and enjoyment of artistic works” (Holm, Jarrick, Scott, pp. 12-13).

In the context of preserving cultural memory and identity as well as confronting and coping with the past, as an example we examine the research of Byzantine value system and seek its influence in Europe<sup>3</sup>. The crisis of identity appears as a very important phenomenon for a long time. Rediscovering cultural identity has got crucial meaning in the process of understanding the way of creating national history. Contemporary democratic societies are characterized by increasing differentiation and the presence of various socio-philosophical, moral and political concepts. European countries brought together many nations of Europe and created the ways for coexistence of different people with different cultures. Slovakia, like many other countries, which were formed under the influence of both Western and Eastern culture, faces many challenges. Cultural development of ethical values in Slavic environment was influenced particularly by conservative approach that is based on the traditional understanding of values, based primarily on Christian thought. In Slovakia socialistic (or Marxist) approach reflects the changes after the World War II. Liberal approach reflects changes after 1968 and especially after 1989.

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<sup>3</sup> The research is conducted at the Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. The leading subject is the Department of Philosophy. The research is registered under the contract No. APVV-16-0116 (2017-2021). Other participants: members from the Department of Ethics, Department of Sociology, Department of Slovak language and The Institute of st. Cyril and Methodius.

## 2. Research on the Byzantine value influence in the Slavic environment

Although the Byzantine Empire lasted for eleven centuries and was the most powerful political entity in all Europe of that period, the tasks of Byzantine philosophy and ethics (including the value system) remain at the periphery of academic research. The interest about the Byzantine studies has increased in the last years, but lots of contributions remain focused on the wide description of the Byzantine heritage and are based especially on study of history and archaeological sources, not on the deep analyse of philosophical and theological texts. The research of Byzantine thought and its influence on the region of Central Europe from the time of Great Moravia until present day should be considered a highly important issue, as it can significantly help to understand Byzantine culture, which continually influenced Slavic environment since the mission of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius to Great Moravia. Louis R. Bréhier states that “Constantinople performed a very similar role in relation to Slavs as Rome did for Germanic tribes” (Bréhier, 1901, pp. 33-34).

The reasons of neglecting the study of Byzantine philosophy, theology and ethics are different; first of all there is a lack of ability to study the original texts in Greek language, therefore the richness of Byzantine thought remains for many academics undiscovered. Alain de Libera begins the first chapter of his book *La philosophie médiévale* with an evaluation of the scientific development of study of Byzantine thought and claims that it „has been mainly ignored and misunderstood, and has not been deeply studied”. The works of Byzantine authors are written in Greek language, so for deep understanding of Byzantine thought it is necessary to read these texts in original. Necessity of specific language knowledge and inability to read the original texts in Greek language creates the major obstacle in the scientific exploring of Byzantine thought and it is also the reason why it is not explored enough in Slovakia. Next problem is Western mind-set of many countries that marginalize East thought heritage. This leads to the paradox, that even elaborated articles based on long years research are accepted by philosophical journals only in very small amount, because they find these topics literally strange.

Byzantium significantly influenced political and socio-cultural development and for a long time provided economic and social stability in a large part of the Mediterranean and adjacent regions. In the past decades, research has proven that the Byzantine Empire significantly influenced the European civilization, but “the process of one culture permeating into and influencing another is a very complicated phenomenon if we do not wish to view it purely as a certain contact, ephemeral effect, but to see in it a phenomenon of a longer duration, as a more permanent incorporation of certain attributes moving from the sending into the receiving culture” (Avenarius, 1992, p. 11). Therefore, we consider the scientific research of Byzantine values, culture, thought and their influence and impact on the region of Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the present as highly relevant.

Research on the Byzantine value influence in the Slavic environment is focused primarily on the sources and literature in the archives and libraries, and cooperation with foreign and home institutions. These sources are critically analysed with the aim to specify their historical value and credibility to the historical reality (e.g. authenticity, time and author origin, analysis of content credibility). Causal and structural analysis and reconstruction of monitored historical, philological and art processes will be realised through philological, comparative, typological, statistic, geographic and other methods. An integral part of the examination of Byzantine thought is the analysis of its understanding within modern Europe. Comparison of Byzantine values with current value systems and following their influence on the creating the identity of the Slavs in Great Moravia and Slovaks in contemporary Europe allows to monitor such issues as the transformation of values, perception of values, enhance the change of status of the individual in the social relations, issues of increasing population migration and its consequences for the inhabitants the whole Europe.

### **3. Byzantine studies**

In the former Czechoslovakia the research of Byzantine cultural heritage has got a long tradition. The Institute of Slavonic Studies in Prague began its work in 1928 where the Byzantine questions were examined. The Institute publishes the internationally recognized journal *Byzantinoslavica*. The result of many years of research of its workers in the field of linguistics was the Dictionary of Old Slavonic language. Currently, the researchers of Institute of Slavonic Studies of the ASCR (The Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic) are working also on the Greek-Old Slavonic index. In the context of Byzantine studies, we can mention František Dvorník (1893-1975), the only one strong world-wide recognised personality working in our environment, who reached more comprehensive approach to Byzantine studies, particularly in the relation to the development of such an inquiry, which tended to affect even the current cultural and social perspective in our area. In the context of Czechoslovakia, however, we can mention also other researchers who have paid their attention to Byzantine issues. Well-known professor Alexander Avenarius (1942-2004) was particularly interested in the Avar-Byzantine and Byzantine-Slavic issues. Among the major Byzantine researcher belong Ružena Dostalová, Vladimír Fiala, Ľubomíra Havlíková, Viera Hrochová, Milan Loose, Oldřich Tůma, Vladimír Vavřínek and Bohumila Zástěrová. Some of Alexander Avenarius students successfully contribute to the development of Byzantine studies in Bratislava, especially at the Comenius University. As a result of their efforts we can mention the journal *Byzantinoslovaca* that is led by Martin Hurbanič. It is necessary to mention the historian Karel Müller, Ružena Dostálová and other interpreters, as well as the

book of F. Dvorník *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs* (1970, in Czech translation) and *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy* (1966).

Several authors led by B. Zástěrová participated in the issue *History of Byzantium*, 1992. In 2011 V. Vavřínek in collaboration with P. Balcarek released *Encyklopedie Byzance* (*Encyclopedia of Byzantium*). Among the Slovak authors devoted to the history of Byzantium we can mention A. Avenarius monographs *Byzantská kultúra v slovanskom prostredí v VI.-XII. storočí*, 1992. *Byzantský ikonoklazmus: storočie zápasu o ikonu*, 1998. (*Byzantine culture in the Slavic area in VI.-XII. Century*, 1992. *Byzantine iconoclasm: Century of fight for icons*, 1998. For the younger generation there is the work of M. Hurbanič *Posledná vojna antiky*, 2009. *História a mýtus – Avarský útok na Konštantínopol roku 626 v legendách*, 2010. *Stredoveký Balkán. Kapitoly z politických, sociálnych a hospodárskych dejín juhovýchodnej Európy v 6.-15. storočí*, 2010. (*The last war of Antiquity*, 2009. *History and Myth – the attack of Avars on Constantinople in 626 in legends*, 2010. *Medieval Balkans. Chapters from political, social and economic history of Southeast Europe in the 6th to 15th centuries*, 2010).

#### 4. Study of Byzantine philosophy

The worldwide pioneer work exploring the Byzantine thought and the unique masterpiece is considered the work of B. Tatakis *La philosophie Byzantine* (1949). Tatakis' book has been translated into English by N.J. Moutafakis (Indianapolis, 2003) as *Byzantine Philosophy*<sup>4</sup>. Tatakis' book *Χριστιανική και βυζαντινή φιλοσοφία* (*Christian and Byzantine philosophy*) was published in the second edition in Greece (2007<sup>2</sup>, 1952<sup>1</sup>) and his *Η ελληνική πατερική και βυζαντινή φιλοσοφία*, 2000<sup>2</sup>, 1969<sup>1</sup> (*Greek Patristic and Byzantine Philosophy was published*. The book *Ιστορία της βυζαντινής φιλοσοφίας* (*History of Byzantine philosophy*) by N. Matsoukas was published in 1998 and a book written by K. Niarchos *Η ελληνική φιλοσοφία κατά την βυζαντινήν περίοδον* (*Greek philosophy in the Byzantine period*) was published in 2009. D. Angelis in his book *Στις πηγές της βυζαντινής φιλοσοφίας*, 2007 (*In the flames of Byzantine philosophy*) pays his attention to the analysis of philosophy into thinking of Greek apologists. The contemporary situation in the study of Byzantine philosophy describes L. Benakis in his article *Current Research in Byzantine Philosophy* (Oxford, 2002) and M. Trizio in the article *Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project* (Leuven, 2007).

In the Slavonic environment it can be mentioned a book by G. Kapriev *Византийска философия*, 2011<sup>2</sup> (*Byzantine philosophy*) in Bulgarian language and book in Russian language written by M. Lurje *История Византийской философии*, 2006 (*History of*

<sup>4</sup> Tatakis' book has been already translated into Spanish, Greek, Slovenian, Serbian, English, Romanian and Polish languages. The original is written in French.

*Byzantine philosophy*). The older work of S. Averincev has only informative character and often omits very important personalities and topics. In Czech language R. Dostálová slightly mentions Byzantine philosophy in her work *Byzantská vzdělanost*, 1990 (Byzantine education). As a strong scientific attempt is considered a book by P. Milko *Úvod do byzantské filosofie*, 2009 (*The introduction to Byzantine philosophy*) in Czech language. In Slovakia there is the only book dealing with the Byzantine thought, *Byzantská filozofia (Byzantine philosophy)*, 2017) by Jan Zozulák and the same author has published several articles on that topic.

## Conclusion

The lack of understanding of the value of the humanities has got a lot of negative aspects. Richard Smith writes that “in higher education in the UK, they are marginalized for similar reason, on the grounds that they neither appeal to the lucrative overseas student market nor constitute the significant source of grant income from research councils, industry, or other funding sources. While their place in educational research is still defended in many quarters, the increasing demand that research should have impact can leave the humanities appearing ineffectual” (Smith, 2015, p. 739). André Lardinois says that the very similar situation like in Europe is in the whole western society – humanities are valued less and less, and have been funded more and more poorly. The change is in the interest not only of the humanities but also of society itself<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the strong pressure of instrumentalism and scientism, humanities are incredibly important for society. As we shown on the example of the above mentioned research, the role of humanities and a research in humanities is unique and crucial in many ways. They cultivate human being, support imagination; help to understand the cultural and historical heritage, develop own personal culture and identity. Richard Smith says, there is the “great power” of humanities – interpretation, showing there is not only just the world, but there are views of the world and it is not “a weakness in comparison with the greater propensity of scientific explanation to settle a problem and move on. Interpretation can make progress, even if sometimes it doubles back on itself and asks if progress has really been made” (Smith, 2015, pp. 753-754).

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<sup>5</sup> The lecture of professor A. Lardinois from radboud University in Nederland *The Flower of Science: the Importance of the Humanities in Society* is available on: [www.ru.nl, 280514\\_andre\\_lardinois\\_dies\\_natalis\\_radboud.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/280514_andre_lardinois_dies_natalis_radboud.pdf).

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