From November 30 to December 2, 2017, the Second Cyrillo-Methodian Meeting took place at Ca’ Foscari in Venice. Celebrating 1150 years of the Venetian Dispute, this international convention was dedicated to the topic Languages of Christian Prayer: History and Contemporaneity. Splendidly organized by Alexander Nau-mow and his co-workers, the meeting was held in an organic succession of sessions, of which here follows a brief account.

The introductory session focused on the dispute mentioned in Vita Constantini. It opened with an acute philological contribution made by Giorgio Ziffer (Udine) “Venice, Constantine and the Trilinguists”. The scholar started by analyzing the codicological traditions of the Vita and focused the attention on the variants regarding the designation of the location where the dispute is said to have taken place. By confining himself strictly to the textual evidence and the reality of Venice in that early stage of its history, the scholar justifiably suggested that the original topographic indication did not refer to Rialto but to the ancient Roman territory of the Venices, in which prestigious ecclesiastical centers existed. The next contribution by Cristiano Diddi (Salerno) “The significance of the Venetian Dispute (VC 16) in the ideological horizon of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission” aimed at shedding light on the complexity of the account in question, which forms an ample apologetic text, whose singular aspects were highlighted (starting from the use of the term trilinguists) as well as its doctrinal density (as shown in the concern of reaffirming, against any magical or pagan perception, the sacramental nature of the Christian cult). The first session was closed by the contribution of Marcello Garzanti (Florence) “ἩΘΠΟΥΠΙΑΤΤΛΓΗΟΣ ΟΣΕΞΛΑ... ‘I would rather say five words...’: speaking in tongues in the Cyrillo-Methodian mission and in the Byzantine tradition”, which demonstrated how the use of the long quotation from Paul (1Cor 14:5–40) is notable for accentuating the opportunity of pronouncing in church words that are comprehensible to everyone and are therefore able to instruct the audience, rather than on the topic of speaking in tongues. The speaker showed how such a criterion reflected certain missionary guidelines which were firmly rooted in the circles of Constantinople and were also expressed by Photios.

The following session intended to document the concrete development of the presence of Greek, Latin and Slavonic in the life of the Christian churches in the High Middle Ages, but not only.
B a r l i e v a (Sofia) (“Linguistic problems in the synodal documents of the 9th–10th c.” duly illustrated how the topic of the language of worship was delineated in the East and in the West, starting with the most ancient practice in the first Christian communities. The contribution illustrated the split between vernaculars and the sacral Latin by the Carolingian texts up to the councils of Split and their condemnation of the use of spoken idioms in the liturgy. A n d r e a G r i l l o (Savona/Roma) (“On the relationship between Latin and national languages: translation and tradition according to Liturgiam authenticam, Summorum Pontificum and Magnum principium”) documented the debates that actually unfolded in the Latin Catholic environment with reference to the translation of texts of worship into national languages promoted by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The attention was brought back to the Cyrillo-Methodian subject by the contribution of A l e s s a n d r o M. B r u n i (Venice) “The Cyrillo-Methodian translation of the Psalter: the problem of the sources”, which traced the complex methodological questions of the Slavonic recensions of the Psalter and of the links with other textual traditions (not only Greek but also Latin and Georgian) that are found there.

The third extensive session intended to embrace the concrete experience of pluri-lingualism in the history of the Christian oecumene and the spiritual and cultural heritage of this experience in different environments. In the first part of the session the vast contribution of V i t t o r i o B e r t i (Padua) “The stages of the Syro-Oriental liturgy: Syrian from the language of paradise to a language of translation” was based on the most ancient exegetical traditions regarding the language of Eden to the Syrian recensions of religious texts and the interactions with the Greek environment. Particularly rich ideal was the message in the contribution of R i c c a r d o P a n e (Bologna) “The spiritual value of the book in the Armenian language”, in which the speaker documented with particular efficacy the significance that the scriptural fact assumed in the Armenian context. Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the alphabet, who is perceived as a new Moses descending from Sinai; the translators who were considered a specific hagiological category; the books as an object of veneration, kept in a corner of the home like the icons in the Orthodox environment; the assimilation between martyrs and manuscripts in the tragedy of the Genocide, were some of the aspects manifesting the specifics of Armenian spirituality. Dedicated to the Georgian environment, the contribution of G a g a S h u r g a i a (Venice/Roma) appears to be well synthesized by its title “...As all the mystery lies in this language”. Language and Christianity in medieval Georgia” inspired by a manuscript colophon in which the whole history of the Georgian people is summed up in its language. The first part of the session was closed by the wide study of G i a n f r a n c e s c o L u s i n i (Naples) on the complex linguistic configuration of the Holy Scriptures in the Ethiopian environment “Bibles of Africa: fifteen centuries of translations of the Scriptures in Eritrea and Ethiopia”. In fact the Aksu-mite Christianity which spread rather precociously between 340 and 350 under King Ezana initially resorted to the Scriptures in Greek. The translations into the local language, Ge'ez, were only finished in the middle of the 6th c. Particularly interesting in this regard is the creative exegesis found in these texts, with variants, interpolations, and paraphrases. Only in a very advanced stage the contact with the Coptic patriarchate led to the influence of scriptural texts in Arabic. The textus receptus dates
from the middle of the 18th century when the use of the Aramaic language was established as the language of the king and of the intellectual elite next to the language of the Scriptures – Ge’ez. The translation of the Scriptures in the Aramaic language appeared in 1840.

The second part of this session was specifically devoted to the various linguistic and national components of Southeastern Europe. The first contribution of Barbara Lomagistrò (Bari) “Plurilingualism and Christianity in the Western Balkans” was of particular methodological importance. It built on the findings that Christianity was already deeply rooted in Dalmatia and in Illyricum before the migrations. So the institutional perspective was to integrate the new realities into the ancient systems of the imperial tradition. In this context the scholar returned to the question of the bishop of Nin, drawing a clear distinction between the ecclesiastic organization and the linguistic question. She underlined the new meanings that the littera specialis attributed to St. Jerome, assumed in the Balkan context between the 19th and the 20th c.

The contribution of Marco Scarpà (Mesina/Sofia) “The gifts of the spirit in the Venetian controversy” developed an attentive proposed a new approach regarding the sources inspiring the appeal in Vita Constantini, from ch. XIV of the First Epistle to the Corinthians; the fact that a significant parallelism can be found only in the Latin Ambrosiaster raises questions, which the speaker discussed in the light of the codicological tradition of the latter text. The two following papers were dedicated to Romanian environment. Cesare Alzati (Milan) “Language of evangelization and languages of worship in the Romanian space” spoke of the Latin linguistic substrate of the evangelization of the peoples that would eventually form the Romanian people, as well as about the full participation of the latter in the ecclesiastic tradition of Constantinople in its Slavonic branch, and the Romanian translations of the Slavonic books of worship, prompted by the protestant authorities in Transylvania; Constantin Buzău (Oxford) thoroughly reviewed the latter phenomenon by comparing the ektenia and the Lord’s Prayer in the Slavonic recension of Macarie (Târgoviște 1508) and in the Romanian versions of Coresi (Brașov 1570), of Dosoftei (Iași 1679), and of Antim Ivireanul (Târgoviște 1713): “The Lord’s Prayer between the 16th and the 18th cc.” The last two papers concentrated the Albanian environment: Giuseppina Turrano (Venice) “The missal of Gjon Buzuku: the mother tongue in Albanian liturgical praxis” presented the first known printed book in Albanian, extant now as a codex unicus in the Vatican Library; Paolo Muner (Trieste) clarified some features of Orthodoxy in Albania and the interaction between confessional and linguistic phenomena there “Linguistic and nationalistic aspects of Orthodoxy in Albania.”

The third part of the session comprised the papers of Sergejus Temčinas (Vilnius) “The Hebraic tradition in Christianity: the project of the union of the two Israels (Kiev, second half of the 15th c.)”; of Jan Stradomski (Krakow), dedicated to the usage of the Slavonic language in Orthodox and Greek Catholic liturgy and the reliability of the translations of the soteriological religious practices among the Slavs (“The question of the liturgical language in the religious polemic in the Polish-Lithuanian state”); of Marzanna Kuczynska (Poznań), discussing the problems of “national” languages in the Slavonic churches (“Liturgical languages of the Slavonic churches. Norm and praxis”); of Viviana Nosilia (Padua) who delivered a paper on the versions of homilies by John Chrysostom, published
by the Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv in 1623–1624 (“Church Slavonic and Ruthenian in the prefaces of printed books the in early modern age”).

The whole section was closed by a concise contribution by K r a s s i m i r S t a n- t c h e v (Roma) “The languages in the liturgical and predicatory praxis of Bulgarian Catholics (17th–19th cc.)” where he addressed the question of the linguistic means used in the religious life of the Paulicians from the villages of Zhelezna, Chiprovtsi, Kopilovtsi and Davudzhevo. These were bialphabetic communities (they used Latin and Cyrillic characters) until the definitive establishment of the Latin script in the 19th c., which at that point became a matter of identity for the Paulicians.

The closing session, presided over by Georgios Ploumidis (Director of the Hellenic Institute for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies in Venice) approached the topic of Multilingual Venice. In this context A l e s s a n d r o S c a r s e l l a (Venice) illustrated the “Polyglossia of the sacred in Venetian publishing between the 15th and the 16th cc.” with special emphasis on the work of Aldo Manuzio, while M o n i c a F i n (Pa-dua) splendidly documented the presence of “Serbian books in Venice between the 16th and the 18th cc”, particularly the activity of the Teodosio publishing house, which practically held a monopoly over the Serbian-orthodox book market through the 18th c.

The Round Table with which the meeting closed allowed for a succinct discussion of other aspects related to the topic of the languages of Christian prayer:

Thus brother A d a l b e r t o M a i n a r- d i spoke of “The debate on the liturgical language in the Russian Orthodox church a century after the Council of Moscow (1917–1918)”, presenting the question of the liturgical language in the Russian Orthodox Church, identifying its historical and linguistic roots. After a quick overview of the debate during the local council of Moscow of 1917–1918 and its evolution in the Soviet period he examined the discussions on liturgical language at the end of 20th-beginning of the 21st century about the problem of the Russian version of the Church Slavonic liturgy that have appeared so far; Father A l e x e j Y a s t r e b o v (Venice) placed himself “In the footsteps of the Holy brothers”, retracing the experience of the community from the Moscow Patriarchate to Venice; G i o r- g i o P l o u m i d i s (Venice), reviewing “The activity of father Bartolomeo Kout- loumousianos” in Venice in the first half of the 19th c., recalled the need to promote religious education – even through linguistic form – in a higher spiritual awareness.

M a r i n a E s k a n d a r (Padua), referring to the Coptic communities in Egypt, spoke about “The Arabic language in a Christian liturgical environment” trying to answer the question whether we should we insist in praying in unknown languages or whether we have to pray in new languages?

Other contributions were read by father N i c o l a M a d a r o from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and by father N i c u ş o r Pî- r u from the Romanian Patriarchate.

The international scholarly conference held in Ca’Foscari University of Venice witnesses the ongoing vitality of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition, not only in an academic context but also in the concrete liturgical and pastoral life of the Church. It was one of the important scholarly events preparing the celebration of the 1150th anniversary of the consecration of the Slavic books by Pope Adrian II.

Cesare Alzati, Ambrosian Academy