

News of the Profession

SOFIA INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SLAVISTS

The Fifth International Congress of Slavists, which took place in Sofia on September 16-23, 1963, can be said to have marked a new stage in the international development of Slavic scholarship. Of the nearly 550 papers that were included in the program of the congress, more than 40 per cent came from non-Slavic countries and just under 25 per cent came from countries outside of the East European area. So important, indeed, have Slavic studies become today that even the original somewhat parochial pattern of organization, which provided for the congresses to be held every five years on a rotating basis in the capitals of the various Slavic countries, was called into question at Sofia. While there was never any question about the acceptance of the Czechoslovak delegation's invitation to have the Sixth Congress meet in Prague in 1968, the West European suggestion that some future congress might be held somewhere in the West met with unmistakable enthusiasm.

Unlike practically all other international scholarly meetings, the international congresses of Slavists are organized strictly on the basis of national delegations, each of which is responsible for the selection and the advance publication of the papers its members will present at the congress. Each national committee of Slavists is represented on the International Committee of Slavists, the presidency of which goes automatically to the president of the national committee in whose country the congress is to be held.

It was inevitable, of course, that the postwar political changes in Eastern Europe should have an influence on the character of the international congresses of Slavists. Perhaps it is surprising, and certainly it is encouraging, that the tradition of independent scholarship has survived the new orthodoxy as well as it has. At the Sofia congress, as at the Moscow congress in 1958, the linguistic sessions were freer than any others from ideological intrusions. Even in literature, however, there was nothing at Sofia comparable to the attacks on American scholarship that were made at the Moscow congress by Roman Samarin and V. R. Shcherbina, whose general reputation is well known to Slavists abroad.

As more than five hundred papers were presented at the congress, well over half of them in literature and folklore, any effort by a single reviewer to comment on the literary papers is doomed in advance to frustration. In order to present this huge number of papers in six days of sessions it was necessary to schedule seven hours and a half of meetings a day and at times to schedule as many as five literary sessions simultaneously. In many sessions only ten minutes were allowed to each participant for a summary of his paper and only ten minutes to the whole audience for a discussion of it. A further difficulty arose from the failure of many national committees to publish their papers far enough in advance of the congress for all participants to receive them before the congress opened. The provision for advance distribution of papers is of great importance in the international congresses of Slavists not only because of their multilingual nature (papers

may be read in any of nine Slavic languages or in English, French, German, or Italian) but also because it permits commentators to prepare their remarks on the basis of the full text of the papers rather than of their oral summaries.

While a number of the literary papers, especially the ones devoted to socialist realism, were too politically theological in nature for this reviewer's secular taste, many others make an interesting and valuable contribution to our knowledge of the various Slavic literatures, and particularly of their relation to one another and to the literatures of Western Europe. In this connection it was disappointing to find no papers by such outstanding Soviet scholars as Academician M. P. Alekseev and Professor V. M. Zhirmunsky, who were absent from the Sofia congress.

This was the second international congress of Slavists in which American scholars have participated. The American delegation to Sofia totaled twenty-five, eleven of them presenting papers in literature or folklore. The continual encroachment of politics upon scholarship at the Moscow congress in 1958 led several American Slavists to stay away from the Sofia meeting, but there seems to be general agreement among those who attended that the Bulgarian hosts made an admirable effort to assure that the 1963 congress should be a genuinely scholarly affair. No doubt the intrusion of nonscholarly considerations into the congresses of Slavists will continue to be a problem as long as Communist doctrine insists on excluding any possibility of ideological coexistence. It should never be overlooked, however, that Communist doctrine exists only in the minds of human beings; and the contradictions between doctrine and scholarship can create their own dialectical process. Therein lies our real hope of overcoming the ideological barriers to worldwide understanding among scholars.

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SLAVIC LINGUISTICS AT THE CONGRESS

Although the Sofia congress was the largest of all Slavic congresses, some delegations did not come in full strength. For example, the absence of the very active younger Soviet linguists was disappointing. More papers were prepared for this than for the four previous congresses; there were 86 papers at the first congress (in Prague), 147 at the second (in Warsaw), 125 at the third (which was supposed to be held in Belgrade), 253 at the fourth (in Moscow), and about 500 papers in Sofia.

The linguistic papers presented a wide spectrum of problems, which were distributed in three sections: the history of Slavic literary languages, historical and typological problems, linguistic leagues and onomastics. These were the questions that figured also at the Fourth Congress in Moscow, but in Sofia they received a broader treatment and a more elaborate interpretation.

The cultural import and structure of Old Church Slavonic were discussed in the papers of J. Kurz, K. Mirčev, L. Moszyński, J. Hamm, A. Dostál, V. Machek, and others. The formation and historical interrelations of the Slavic literary languages attracted wide attention; these questions were taken up in their theoretical and historical aspects by V. V. Vinogradov,