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**Solun (Thessalonica) brothers**

**Constantine and Methodius, Solun brothers**, came from one of the most important centres of Byzantium, **Solun** or **Thessalonica**. Their father Leo, was an important state officer in the position of a deputy county administrator. Their mother Mary was probably of Slavic origin, that is why the siblings knew the Slavonic language, but also mastered Greek and Latin. Even though there were seven children in the family, they both received excellent education.

**Constantine (826/ 827- 14 February, 869)**

Constantine was the youngest of the siblings.When he was 14, their father died but in Byzantium it was customary that the children of high-ranking state officers were taken care of by the state. That is why after finishing secondary school he began to study at the most prestigious college adjacent to Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, where later the future Emperor Michael III studied as well. Constantine had the best teachers, he mainly focused on the studies of philosophy, dialectics, rhetoric, grammar and others. After finishing his studies, he was offered a marriage which he refused because he wanted to dedicate his life to books and studies. And so, he became the secretary of the Patriarch and a librarian at the college where he studied.

These functions were probably not fulfilling enough because he vanished and for half a year he was hiding in a monastery and didn't want to return to his previous occupation of a secretary. Due to the fact that both brothers had some influential friends, shortly after, Constantine was offered to become a professor at the same college where he studied a short time before. The professors however had to perform different state conducted missions and tasks, so Constantine went on some diplomatic missions e.g., to Baghdad.

**Methodius (815- 885)**

Methodius was the oldest of the seven siblings and as the firstborn he received excellent education. After finishing the secondary school, he continued to study law in Constantinople as he wanted to become a high state officer. After finishing the studies, he succeeded in that and he was appointed the provincial administrator in Macedonia. Here lived many Slavs so Methodius had the opportunity to learn their habits, manners and also to perfectionise his Slavic language knowledge.

In **855** the young Emperor **Michal III** succeeded to the throne which brought significant changes. After 10 years Methodius leaves his function and finds refuge in a monastery on the Olympus Mountain. Shortly after that his brother Constantine joins him in the monastery. Again, thanks to their influential friends they managed to avoid the political influence and they were authorised to implement a missionary expedition to **Khazars** in **860** as far as the Caspian Sea. On their way they found the relics of **St. Clement** which they brought to Great Moravia and were later given to the Pope on their visit to Rome. At the Khazars they conducted disputes with the Jews, christened 200 Khazars so that 200 Byzantine slaves could be released. The Khazar ruler even wrote a letter of gratitude to the Byzantine Emperor in which he thanked for the mission.

Several months later after returning to Constantinople, messengers from Prince Rastislav of Great Moravia were sent to Byzantium with the request for missionaries to evangelize his Slavic subjects. Michal III authorised Constantine and Methodius with this mission. So, the **Byzantine mission**, closely bound to our history, began.

Solun brothers came to Great Moravia in **863**, they created the **Glagolitic alphabet**, translated liturgical books into **Slavic language, the Holy script, Act of the Apostles, Letters of the Apostles, they established a college, educated, spread the Christianity, brought by the legal norms**, etc.

From Great Moravia they had to take part on a journey to **Rome in 867**, where they had to **defend the Slavic language** as liturgical language **in front of the “trilinguals''** (those who only recognized Latin, Greek and Hebrew) **and the Pope** himself, who authorised Slavic a new liturgical language. He **ordained Methodius a priest, later a Bishop and Archbishop for Pannonia and Great Moravia** which was met with reluctance of Bavarian priests administrating in Great Moravia. Together with Methodius, several of their students were ordained, too.

Constantine never returned from Rome, he fell ill, entered a monastery, accepted the name **Cyril,** and on **February 14, 869** he died.

Methodius´ return to Great Moravia was far from being easy. He was captured and tortured by Bavarian priests. He came free from his torturers thanks to **Pope John VIII**. After returning to Great Moravia his working conditions as the archbishop were made even tougher because of the influence of one of the German priests **Wiching** who was close to Svatopluk and plotted against Methodius. He then had to travel once again to Rome to defend his deeds and teaching. He succeeded, Pope John VIII issued **the papal letter** **Industriae tuae**, **approving the Old Church Slavonic but just after the Latin**. **Wiching** became **bishop** and in Great Moravia he became **the archbishop of Nitra.**

Before his death Methodius appointed his successor **Gorazd**, but when **Methodius died in 885**, his **disciples were banished from Great Moravia**, the **Slavonic liturgy became forbidden** and Great Moravia got again under the Church administration of the Franks.

Solun brothers however, left a significant message in our as well as European history. Their activities had an impact on **education, spreading of Christianity, political development in Great Moravia and other European countries**. Although their work and the work of their students is mainly religiously oriented and largely represents translations of religious books, they brought their own work as well.

In the field of literature creation **Constantine was more active** being the author of the first ever **Old Slavonic poem written in Glagolitic**. It was the poem **Proglas**. It was a 110-verse long preface to the Gospel.

Methodius started writing after Constantine's death. Important pieces of his works include **Admonition of the Rulers** – reflecting on the immoral life of Svatopluk or rather a work addressed to all the rulers. Another important literary work is **Zakon Sudnyi Liudem** which was the oldest preserved Slavic legal text of our ancestors. It was derived from the customary law of the Slavs but it also reflects Byzantine law that followed the law of the Roman Empire. It contains 32 legal texts, defines infringements and penalties for them.

The students of Constantine and Methodius focused mainly on translations, but their pens were also the source of important documents and works that serve as the depiction of the society of the era. It is for example **The Life of Constantine** which was written by **Kliment** and **The Life of Methodius** that was probably written by **Gorazd**. Mainly The Life of Methodius is full of important information about the functioning of our first state unit. The biographies of Solun brothers are known under the name **Moravian – Pannonian Legends**. The set of 38 prayers written in Glagolitic Old Slavonic are the **Kyev Letters**. Their authorship isn´t clear but it could have been **Kliment or Constantine himself**.

Thanks to their legacy, Constantine and Methodius influence the generations till this day. **On 31 December 1980 they were named the patrons of Europe by Pope John Paul II**.