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Source: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 7, Okeanos: Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students (1983), pp. 3-4

Published by: [Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41036078>

Accessed: 19/10/2014 07:20

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Ihor Ševčenko as a Byzantino-Slavicist and Historian

What makes Ihor Ševčenko a unique scholar in the vast field of Byzantino-Slavic studies? The question could have a score of answers. Certain to be among them are his astounding philological knowledge of Church Slavonic idioms — Moravian, East European, Balkan — paired with an extraordinary expertise on Byzantino-Slavic ideas, terms, idioms, and tropes. These Ihor sees within the spectrum of universal history and through the prism of the history of ideas. All his studies benefit from an intimate and comprehensive knowledge of both the Byzantine and the Slavic manuscript traditions, which allows him to consider aspects from the palaeographical to the art historical.

Byzantino-Slavica as a discipline begins with study of the mission to the Slavs of the brothers Cyril and Methodius from Thessalonica in the ninth century. There is hardly an aspect of this subject that Ihor has not addressed — from the social background of the father of Cyril and Methodius, the source of the unusual (for Byzantine Greeks) spirit of equality with which the brothers conducted their mission, and the origin of the Slavic (i.e., Glagolitic) script that they created, to the quality of their literary output, the models for the make-up of the earliest Glagolitic manuscripts, and the artistic influence received by the Slavic Balkans from South Italy.

Political ideology has always been a crucial factor in shaping man's history. This was especially true in pre-modern society, both in the West and in the East. A Byzantine “mirror of princes,” allegedly from the times of Justinian I (sixth century), had an unprecedented career as a transmitter of political thought. The emerging Kievan intelligentsia included excerpts from an Old Church Slavonic translation of it in Prince Svjatoslav's *Izbornik* of 1076. Centuries later, in 1628, during the rebirth of Rus'-Ukrainian culture, it was retranslated into Slavic and published in Kiev by the prelate (later metropolitan) Peter Mohyla.* The tract also

* “The Many Worlds of Peter Mohyla” is the title of one of Ihor's most recent studies, to appear in the Spring 1984 issue of *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, devoted to the Kiev Mohyla Academy.

provided Muscovite bookmen with the rudiments of a political ideology. In 1509, soon after printing was invented in Western Europe, the same tract also appeared there. Its *editio princeps* was published in Venice in the Greek original and in Latin translation. The pamphlet was greeted with exceptional enthusiasm by the nascent West European reading public, from erudites to princes, and became one of the most widely read books of the epoch. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it appeared in at least 61 editions and translations.

It took Ihor Ševčenko to trace the remarkable career of “Agapetus,” this “mirror of princes” that traveled from Byzantium to Kiev and then to Western Europe over several centuries.

I cannot mention here all the many other topics that Ihor has studied with similar detective skill, but one subject that I personally am very grateful he investigated is the diffusion of Byzantine scientific and pseudo-scientific knowledge among the Orthodox Slavs.

In 1969 Ihor wrote a historiosophical essay in which he characterized two varieties of historical writers: “the brightly colored butterfly flitting about over a flowerbed” and “the crawling caterpillar whose worm’s eye view covers the expanse of a single cabbage leaf”—in other words, the vivid historian versus the technical. The year A.D. 1450 was taken to be the usual divide between the interests and work of these two types of historians.

Since Ihor’s historical work focuses on Byzantium prior to its demise in 1453, he would seem to belong in the caterpillar category, an *erudit* who has “mastered the auxiliary sciences and who meticulously polishes his copious footnotes.” Nevertheless, while conducting very specialized palaeographical or epigraphical research, he never loses sight of the universal cultural and historical context and always explains his discoveries in terms of their contribution to mankind’s knowledge as a whole.

If we are to characterize Ihor’s creativity in terms of his own simile of fourteen years ago, we must conclude that Ihor is that rarity, a butterfly who is at once his own caterpillar.

OMELJAN PRITSAK