

# Slavic Themes in the Works of Scientist and Scholar of Slavic Studies A.F. Hilferding

## Based on the Collection of A.F. Hilferding's Works "Russia and the Slavic People"

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### ABSTRACT

The article explores scientific endeavours of A.F. Hilferding, who was a prominent Slavophile and scholar of language at his time. Historic and cultural ties between Russia, southern Slavic nations, Polabian Slavs, Poles and others were the cornerstone of his focal area. A.F. Hilferding promoted the idea of crucial role of Russia in the existential development of the Slavic nations in the historic realities of the 2nd half of the XIX century. Such role should have been exercised through aegis of national languages, cultures, development of bilateral communication between Russia and the Balkan nations.

**Keywords:** A.F. Hilferding, V.A. Panov, Slavic question, South Slavs, Russia, Slavophilism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 1840-1850s were characterized by sharp interest of the Russian scientific community to the Slav nations. During this period a lot of academics and scholars of language undertake scientific voyages across the Slav-populated regions, depicting language peculiarities, traditions, national traits and meetings with eminent local scientists.

### 2. "SLAVIC QUESTION" IN THE WORKS OF THE RUSSIAN SCIENTISTS IN 40-50S OF THE XIX CENTURY

Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin (1800-1875) was the first Russian scientist to include the Slavic question into his professional field of interests. He undertook four overseas trips in the years preceding 1848, having familiarized himself with the manners and traditions of the Slavs and getting acquainted and strengthening professional cooperation with scholars of language, namely: Pavol Jozef Šafárik (1795-1861), follower of the prominent scholar Josef Dobrovský (1753-1829), Ján Kollár (1793-1852) [1], the founder of the "Slavic reciprocity"

concept and others. M.P. Pogodin expounded on the results of his travels in the journal titled "A Year in the Foreign Lands" published in 1844.

Izmail Ivanovich Sreznevsky (1812 – 1880) who was philologist, scholar of Slavic languages, paleographer and folklorist also undertook a European trip in 1849. He described peculiarities of Slavic languages, various traits and manners of Slavic peoples, cultural heritage etc. in his work "Traveler's letters ... from the lands of the Slavs 1839-1842 (St. P, 1895).

It is worth to reveal considerations of professor of the Kazan University and Novorossiysk University Victor Ivanovich Grigorovich (1815-1876), who was one of the founders of the Russian Slavophilism and undertook a long expedition across the Balkan provinces of Turkey. Having given a thorough consideration to the phenomenon of the Czech national movement, the scientist came to the conclusion that it is the language of a certain nation that can fully embrace and reveal events of public life, while national literature ringfences the ideas that become the stratum of a nation's existence. The idea that "each national language is

intimately related to the fate of a nation" echoed through the works of V.I. Grigorovich [2].

Alexander Fedorovich Hilferding (1831 – 1872) was one of the key contributors to the development of the Russian Slavonic studies.

### **3. SCIENTIFIC ENDEAVOURS OF SCHOLAR OF LANGUAGE AND PAN-SLAVONIC STUDIES A.F. HILFERDING**

A.F. Hilferding was a major scientist in the field of Slavic studies, historian, diplomat, ethnographer, folklorist, corresponding member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences (since 1856), Chairman of the St. Petersburg branch of the Slavonic charity committee (since 1869), Chairman of the Ethnographic division of the Russian Imperial Geographic Society (since 1870), deputy to the State Secretary of the National Council, gather of epic tales. He was the only Russian scientist who developed a unified pan-Slavic alphabet as means of unification of the Slavic world.

A.F. Hilferding was born in 1831 in Warsaw to a family of Russianized ethnic Germans who faithfully and loyally served the Russian Tsars: his grandfather tutored German at the Moscow University, while his father served as Director of the diplomatic chancellery under the Office of the Imperial Viceroy of the Kingdom of Poland (1830-1831). Alexander was christened as an orthodox even though his father was a devoted catholic and a good friend of A.S. Khomyakov.

Upon joining the faculty of history and philology at the Moscow University, A.F. Hilferding immediately became member of the Slavophile union. The article "On cognition between Slavic and Sanskrit languages" became his first publication, followed by the article "History of the Baltic Slavs" (1854), "Tussles between the Slavs and the Germans in the Baltic region and Pomerania during the Middle Ages" (1861) etc. were published in a number of Moscow scientific journals.

At the age of 25 he was appointed to the position of consul in Bosnia (1856) which was under Turkish rule at that time. A.F. Hilferding was actively defending political interests of Russia and local Slavic population, while also continuing his scientific research through collection of ancient Slavic manuscripts. The latter became foundation for the book titled "Eastern Slavs" (publish in French in 1858) regarding the ethnographic traits of

the Russian nation, followed by the book "Bosnia, Herzegovina and Old Serbia" which covered the foreign Slavs. In 1867 he became the Chairmen of the Slavic Committee.

A.F. Hilferding was convinced by the idea of pan-Slavism. It is reasonable to agree with the viewpoint of S.V. Lebedev that "pan-Slavism" should be defined as "political ideology and practice in the field of cultural and, as the final step, political bonding of nations" [3], [12]. It was in fact a public movement that was supporting "orthodox and monarchist values of the Russian daily life" [3].

The following works of A.F. Hilferding can be considered to be the most important: "On cognition of the Slavic language with the kindred languages" (1853), "the History of the Baltic Slavs" (1855), "Letters on the history of the Serbs and the Bolgars" (1855), "Bosnia, Herzegovina and Old Serbia" (1859), "Hungary and the Slavs" (1860), "Essay on the history of Czechia" (1862), "The spirit of the Serbian people", "Views on Russia of the West Slavs" (1862), "The Polish Question" (1863).

### **4. CORE MESSAGE OF THE WORKS OF A.F. HILFERDING ABOUT SLAVIC NATIONS, AS WELL AS ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSIA**

On top of the afore-mentioned scientific works of A.F. Hilferding, it is vital to mention a number of other historic and op-ed articles on the Slavic questions, which cover various fields, from peculiarities of a given language to manners and customs of a nation. It is crucial to point out that it was professor of the Kazan University V.I. Grigorovich who validated the transfer of his colleague A.F. Hilferding from the philology ("well-established preliminary ordeal") to chronicles, namely to the history of Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria and the Baltic Slav [4]. Works of A.F. Hilferding have yet another layer of value as they raise an important issue about the role and significance of Russia in the history of Slavic nations.

The scientist's interest in the language, history, traditions and connections of the Polabian Slavs with Russia was no amiss: his ancestors came to Russia from the Upper Saxony where in the lands to the East from the river Elba (which is called Laba in the Slavic language) originally settled by the Slavs, who Ce under reign of the Germans in

the XII century. Even today a significant group of ethnic Slavs (Lusatian Serbs) – descendants of the Polabian Slavs – dwell in the region of Lusatia.

A.F. Hilferding provided a thorough analysis of the origins of the dwellers of that region in his articles "History of the Baltic Slavs" (1855), pointing out such traits of character as: "hind heart, Slavic sociability, amiability, agape" [5]. The scientist considered that, distinguishing from the Danube Slavs, the Polabian Slavs were closely related with the Baltic Slavs and constituted a separate branch that was intimately connected with the Czech [6].

The other article titled "Lithuania and Samogitians" (1863) emphasized the historic connection between the Lithuanians and the Russians and the importance of studying of the Lithuanian language because: "...it is important for the whole Slavic world due its intimate connection with the Slavic speech..." [6].

The above-mentioned discourse was the foundational drive behind the scientist's strong message to have separate departments opened at the Russian universities which would promote study of the Lithuanian language, as well as broad support of the orthodox ethnic Lithuanians and a vital necessity to separate the Lithuanians from the Polish and German influence, which was one of the cornerstone policies of Russian in respect of the Polabian Slavs.

The scientist also underlined the importance of comprehensive support to be rendered by Russia to the Southern Slavs. His essays "Slavic nations of Austria and Turkey" (1860), "What supports the orthodox faith among the Southern Slavs?" (1860), "Spirit of the Serbian people" (1860) etc., extensively covered deep spiritual connection between Russia and the Balkan Slavs. First and foremost, this pertains to the orthodox religion. The author was of opinion that the authenticity of the orthodox faith was the foundation of the edifice of the Southern Slavic nations, especially bearing in mind the political environment on the Balkans during that time period. Distinguishing from Russia, where the basis of the orthodox faith is naturally translated into new generations through clergy, spiritual literature, nations of the Balkans live under enormous pressure from both the Turkish rulers and representatives of the Western Church.

Unlike for the Russians, the Southern Slavs live through intense propagation of the "...idea of the true Mohammedi faith", significant impact from the

Catholic priests and English missionaries. For instance, A Serb in Austria must convert to the catholic faith if he intends to occupy any significant office.

A.F. Hilferding outlines other objective prerequisites for the retention of faith by the Southern Slavs, namely: small number of churches and monasteries, poor education of the lower ranks of the clergy, absence of orthodox colleges, poor access of common peoples to the religious literature which is only supplied from Russia.

These observations made by A.F. Hilferding coincide with those made earlier by other Slavophiles: chief editor of the "Moscow Articles" V.A. Palov (1819-1849), who visited Central and South-Eastern Europe in the 1840s. In his "Letters from Ayapana to mother M.A.Panova from the Central and South-eastern Europe (1841-1843)" [8], he painfully stipulates the drastic conditions of the orthodox Christians and the influence exerted by Catholicism, for instance, a "Latinized version of the Eucharist was delivered..." in the Zdras district at the church of St.Spyridon.

Vivid portrayal of the above lulled a Russian traveler that the Russian society cannot remain indifferent to a fellow believer, especially bearing in mind that adherence to a given religious community was much more important compared with one's ethnic background in the Balkan Peninsula.

While being invited to the vesper service in a Balkan orthodox family, V.A. Panov was surprised to notice that local people still retained the conciliarism of the relationships, when "...people do not distinguish between a person and his extended family.... so that toasting my health they were simultaneously toasting your, Mother, health as well..." — as underlined by the scientist [8].

A.F. Hilferding came to the conclusion that notwithstanding quite challenging historic environment in the Balkans, the "...orthodox faith remains strong with the Southern Slavs..." He does not fail to emphasize those were the people of Serbia and Bulgaria who preserved orthodox religion.

For instance, the whole history of Serbia confirms the idea that even the most tragic events turn out to be purifying effect on a nation, preparing it "for the future". Serbs emerged as "pure and strong: out of the 400-year reign of the Turks, with their "orthodox faith cementing its

positions as being the major source of support at times of misfortunes" [9].

The author was of opinion that the strength of faith among the Southern Slavs is driven by the fact that "the essence of the orthodox faith is in line with the traits of the Slavic spirit and way of life, with the notions of freedom and unanimity acting as the basis of the morality..." [11]. The author outlined, that a Bulgarian or a Serb would refer to themselves with the vernacular name not due to pride, but due to sheer fact that the orthodox faith became the basis of their self-identification and the cornerstone of the national spirit ("... the national character would definitely collapse in case it is deprived of the orthodox faith...") [12]. The above fact was one of the keys that connected the Southern Slavs with Russians.

V.A. Panov provides the following argument in favour of the importance of Russia for all the Slavs as a major power on the European continent: "The Western Slavs have seen emergence of self-reverence and ... such awakening of national spirit among our fellow Slav-brothers is important to us as it would provide for better understanding of our own mission..." [13]. The author separately emphasizes the importance of the Southern Slavs for Russia: V.A. Panov quotes a certain Right Reverend that "...each and every Montenegrin would sincerely protect each Russian ..." and used to say "...Hail to Russia!" [14].

## 5. CONCLUSION

In his works Slavonic scholar A.F. Hilferding broadly covered traditions, manners, historic and cultural realities of the Slavs. The crucial importance of the works was in the fact that A.F. Hilferding was familiar not only with the past, but also with the present status of the Slavic world. He was inspired by the sense of universal national identity of the Slavs. Similar to his associate - Slavonic scholar V.A. Panov - A.F. Hilferding repeatedly underlined the responsibility of Russia for the destiny of the whole Slavic world. It is important to reference statement of I.S. Aksakov, who (describing the nature of works of A.F. Hilferding and another outstanding Russian scientist V.I. Dal) outlined that "...both Hilferding and Dal, though not being Russian by origin and blood, give us reasons to rejoice at the moral traction and impetus of the Russian ethos that managed not only adopt both of those foreigners, but also engage them in the creative process of exploration of its intellectual treasures and inspire

their non-Russian diligence with Russian thought and sensibility".

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Natalya Bondarenko.

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