

CALL FOR PAPERS

Enigma in Medieval Slavic Culture

Symposium

14th-16th November 2019

The Slavic Institute, University of Cologne

Organiser: Agnes Kriza PhD (Alexander von Humboldt fellow, University of Cologne)



“A wise man will understand both a parable and a hidden saying, both wise words and riddles” (Prov. 1:6). These words of King Solomon’s Proverbs had special relevance for the culture of medieval Rus and, more broadly, for the Orthodox Slavs. According to the ninth-century Life of Saint Cyril, before creating the Slavic letters, the Apostle of the Slavs had solved the riddle of the inscription on King Solomon’s chalice in the Constantinople Hagia Sophia. The earliest extant book from Rus, dated 1073, consists of riddles embedded in a Byzantine compilation of questions and answers. In Church Slavonic literature “parables and hidden sayings” existed either explicitly, in questions-and-answers, theological commentaries, or implicitly, inserted in different narratives. The riddles, however, appeared not only textually, but also visually. A remarkable phenomenon of the fifteenth century is the appearance of novel, extremely complex and barely comprehensible images in Russian art, often accompanied by written commentaries. In 1553 an icon-debate erupted in Moscow, because “parables” had replaced the icons of Christ and the saints in the Kremlin churches. Riddles thus had primary relevance in medieval Russian and Orthodox Slavonic epistemology, cognition and learning.

The last decades have seen the appearance of hermeneutical and semiotic approaches in historical studies as a response to the emerging problems of obscurity and incomprehensibility of texts and images in medieval Rus. To decipher textual and visual evidence and to decode phenomena of everyday life or symbols of power, they applied innovative methodologies inspired by hermeneutics, semiotics, literary structuralism, phenomenology and iconology. Not only texts and objects of art, but also historical phenomena have been studied, including liturgical and para-liturgical rites, processions or gestures that convey complex symbolical meaning and have historical significance. Despite their relevance for modern historiography the problems of medieval riddles have never been subject of specific analysis in early Slavonic studies.

This interdisciplinary conference aims to create a forum for discussion between scholars of different disciplines: Slavonic and Byzantine philology, history, theology, as well as art history. Through case studies across disciplinary and medial boundaries, it aims to find methodologies by which medieval enigmas, both textual and visual, can be deciphered. It seeks to identify their common characteristics, but also their transformation across space and time.

The conference's main topics and research questions include but are not limited to the following problems:

- Patristic allegorical exegesis and its implications for medieval Orthodox Slavic culture
- "Questions-and-answers" in Slavic literature
- Liturgy and enigma
- Riddles and learning in Slavia Orthodoxa
- Enigma and the semiotics of medieval Russian culture
- Decoding medieval Slavic texts
- Riddles on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine icons and images
- Russian iconographic innovations after the fifteenth century
- Iconography of Russian Old Believer icons

The conference will include a visit to the Icon Museum in Recklinghausen. Depending on the funds available, travel and accommodation expenses will be partly or fully covered.

To apply, please send a proposal of up to 250 words for a 20-minute paper, together with a CV, to agnes.kriza@uni-koeln.de no later than **13th January 2019**.