



Quaderni di ricerca

Grammatica e insegnamento linguistico

Approccio storiografico:
autori, modelli, espansioni

a cura di

Félix San Vicente



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[12]

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Teaching Slavic languages in Italy at a university level (from 1864 to 1918)

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RIASSUNTO: il presente articolo si prefigge di ricostruire i primi tentativi di avviare corsi di lingue slave in Italia, e osservare la situazione dell'insegnamento delle lingue slave all'università dal 1864 al 1918. Il lavoro è basato principalmente su fonti poco conosciute o mai studiate in precedenza.

PAROLE CHIAVE: storia, insegnamenti linguistici, università italiana, lingue slave.

ABSTRACT: the purpose of this article is to reconstruct the early attempts to establish Slavic languages courses in Italy, and provide an overview of the teaching of Slavic languages at university level from 1864 to 1918. The article is based mainly on little known or never previously studied sources.

KEYWORDS: history, language teaching, Italian university, Slavic languages.

0. Introduction

According to *The Great Russian Encyclopaedia*, Slavic Studies ("*slavyanovedenie*") consist of

a scholarly interdisciplinary field uniting several disciplines, including past and present history, language, literature, ethnography, folklore, economy, culture, and religion of the Slavic peoples. Within each Slavic country, the history, culture, and language of that country are not included within the framework of Slavic Studies but are studied as part of that country's own history, philology, and other branches of the social sciences. Disciplines, such as Bohemian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Sorbian, Ukrainian studies, and so forth, are included within the framework of Slavic Studies. Russian, Balkan and Byzantine studies are also adjoining Slavic Studies. (BRÉ 2004-2017, "*slavyanovedenie*")

* This article transliterates Cyrillic words into British Standard Romanisation 2979:1958.

Arturo Cronia (1896-1967), a highly renowned Italian Slavist, sought to reconstruct the history of Italian Slavic Studies in depth.¹ He published two important works on the history of Slavic Studies: *For the History of the Slavic Studies in Italy* (Cronia 1933) and *The Knowledge of the Slavic World by Italians* (CRONIA 1958). *For the History of the Slavic Studies in Italy* attempted to describe the pre-history of Slavic Studies with no mention of the developments covered in this article while his monumental *The Knowledge of the Slavic World by Italians* identifies the year 1920 as the watershed moment in which Slavic Studies were first taught at university level in Italy:

The “Birth certificate” of Slavic Studies in Italy could be considered the foundation of the chair of Slavic Philology at the University of Padua on October 1920, a month after Lo Gatto had published in Naples the first issue of his journal *Russia*, and six months before the *Institute for Eastern European Studies [Istituto per l’Europa Orientale]* in Rome had started the publication of the journal *Eastern Europe [L’Europa Orientale]*. (CRONIA 1958: 649)

Cronia is referring to Giovanni Maver (1891-1970),² who was appointed lecturer of Slavic Philology at the University of Padua in 1920 (from 1925 this position became a full-time appointment). This appointment was the first in a series of rapid developments in the field of Slavic Studies in Italy. In 1922 Ettore Lo Gatto (1890-1983) was appointed lecturer of Russian language and literature at the University of Rome, and would go on to be lecturer of Slavic languages and literature at the

¹ Cronia graduated at the University of Padua with a thesis on “Dante in Serbo-Croatian literature” (Cronia 1921). Later, in 1922, he published his *Serbo-Croatian Grammar book* (Cronia 1922), and in 1924 he qualified to become a lecturer of Serbo-Croatian language. From 1929 to 1936 he moved abroad, teaching at the universities of Prague, Brno and Bratislava. From 1936 he was appointed professor of Slavic philology at the universities of Padua, Bologna and Venice, and from 1940 he was officially appointed full professor of Serbo-Croatian language and literature at the university of Padua.

² He supervised Cronia’s thesis on “Dante in Serbo-Croatian literature” (Cronia 1921).

University of Naples from 1927 to 1930. In 1923 a chair of Polish language and literature was established in Rome (lasting until 1928), with Roman Pollak (1886-1972) appointed as lecturer. In 1929 Pollak was replaced by Maver, who in turn was succeeded by Lo Gatto at the University of Padua.

Focusing specifically on Slavic Studies at the Oriental Institute of Naples (Istituto Orientale di Napoli), Cronia states that “the foundation for future [language] teaching had been laid” there, making “Naples one of the main centres for Slavic Studies in Italy” (Cronia 1958: 651). However, despite Cronia being one of the forefathers of modern Slavic Studies in Italy, his statements dating the birth of Slavic Studies in Italy at university level to 1920 are, at best, highly debatable: Slavic Studies had been present at university level since some fifty years earlier.

The purpose of this article, which draws on rarely used or never previously studied sources, is to reconstruct the early history of Slavic Studies in Italy (focusing on the teaching of Slavic languages and literatures at university level) and to provide an overview of the evolution of the study of single Slavic languages (Russian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian and Old Church Slavonic) and cultures in Italy over the last forty years of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. This article develops a presentation I gave at a conference held on 12th-13th April 2018 by CIRSIL and supported by HoLLTnet at the University for Foreigners of Siena (Università per Stranieri di Siena), Italy.

1. The 1860s

1.1. Lignana at the Royal University of Naples

The first documented case of Slavic languages being taught at university level in Italy dates back to the Royal University of Naples in the 1860s. Giacomo Lignana (1827-1891) was professor of Comparative languages and literatures at the Royal University of Naples from 1861 until 1871. He taught ‘Comparative Grammar’, the former term for ‘Comparative Linguistics’ (Dovetto 1991: 106). Sanskrit, Persian, and Slavic languages were subjects that were commonly taught at Lignana’s philological school at the University of Naples. Starting in the 1863-64 academic year and for

the three ensuing academic years Lignana indubitably taught Slavic languages and literature classes. In 1863-64 he taught Slavic philology, analysing several arguments concerning Polish and Russian literature. In his classes Lignana also paid close attention to the real condition of Polish people in the Russian Empire after the failure of the 1863 Polish Uprising. In the 1864-65 academic year he taught Russian language and literature with a view to promoting a better image of Russia to Italian students. Finally, in the 1865-66 academic year he analysed Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian (as a direct result of a previous study of Old Church Slavonic) in his lessons and set a final examination of Yugoslavian literature, especially in translation, focusing particularly on “Serbian epic rhapsodies”.

One source for this information is Gherardo De Vincentiis, a former scholar of the philological school at the University of Naples. In his 1892 letter to the famous Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce,³ De Vincentiis describes the Slavic courses taught by Lignana during the 1860s. The use of the expression “Serbian epic rhapsodies” by De Vincentiis was undoubtedly influenced by Domenico Ciampoli’s (1852-1929) (Ciampoli 1889: 86-92) recent interpretation of the works of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864).

Lignana usually divided his courses into two different cycles of lectures. Throughout his courses during the 1860s Lignana clearly put into practice, according to Dovetto, his beliefs in the “intimate fusion of philology and linguistics”, and “the genetic unity of the Indo-European languages” (Dovetto 2001: 24-25). In 1864 an article dealing with the Italian university system and focusing mainly on humanistic studies was published in the Moscow daily *Moskovskie vedomosti*. The unknown correspondent, simply named “G.”, informed Russian readers that the first cycle of Lignana’s yearly lectures was devoted to the study of Sanskrit, as “the main ground of the [F. Bopp’s and A. Schleicher’s] Comparative Grammar, [...] ingeniously expounded [...] like a substratum of Aryan Comparative Philology, or Aryan Glottology”, whilst in the

³ ABC, correspondence, 1892, n. 85, G. De Vincentiis to B. Croce, 9/03/1892.

second cycle the Italian professor analysed Slavic languages and literature.

1.2. De Vivo at the Royal Asiatic College

From 18th June 1867 to 25th November 1868 Lignana worked on reforming the Chinese College in Naples in collaboration with Giuseppe Gagliano (see: Galiano 1868) and Giovanni Maria Falanga, respectively father superior and father consultor of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Jesus Christ. The reformed College, later formally renamed the Royal Asiatic College,⁴ included an external Lay School of Living Oriental Languages directed by Lignana and attended by students mostly from the University of Naples.

From the 1868-69 academic year to 1870 Domenico De Vivo (1839-1897), a former scholar of Lignana's philological school at the Royal University of Naples, worked as appointed professor of Russian and English at the Lay School. He also generally supervised the teaching of foreign languages at the Lay School (Fatica 2005: 187; 2011: 244-245). Napoleone La Cecilia (1835-1878), professor of Geography of Asia at the Lay School, as well as preserving the 1868 course timetables in his *Programma* (La Cecilia 1868: 24), states that:

The method of teaching the [extant] languages [in the lay school] will be totally practical and planned, so that in a fairly short period of time our young students will be able to express themselves in a manner that is comprehensible, write a business letter and understand an easy text written in Chinese, Mongolian, Persian, Hindustani, English or Russian language. Later those young students will be more comfortable spending some time in the country of the chosen extant language in order to improve its knowledge. (La Cecilia 1868: 12)

In 1870 De Vivo chose to leave Naples for Russia, where he would go on to spend four years. The Royal Asiatic College file preserved in the Italian Ministry of Public Education archives testifies that after De Vivo's

⁴ Legally formalized as Royal Asiatic College by the Royal decrees n. 5290 and 5291 (12th September 1869), the so-called Bargoni's reform ("riforma Bargoni").

departure the teaching of Russian disappeared from the Royal Asiatic College subject list and was indefinitely suspended.⁵ One legacy of the Russian language course program was the publication of De Vivo's *Russian Grammar for Italians* (De Vivo 1882). I go into further depth on this textbook in several works on De Vivo (Cifariello 2017a; 2017b; 2018a; 2019b).

1.3. Budmani (probably) at the University of Naples or the Royal Asiatic College

While De Vivo was teaching Russian language at the Royal Asiatic College, there is some evidence that there was a certain degree of interest in appointing Petar "Pero" Budmani (1835-1914) as a possible professor of Slavic languages and literature at the College or the University of Naples. Budmani had been known among Italian scholars since 1867, due to his self-published *Serbo-Croatian (Illyrian) Grammar book* (Budmani 1867). Budmani's grammar book was intended for Italian students in Dalmatia – especially in the Dubrovnik area – learning Serbo-Croatian. Like most citizens of Dubrovnik at the time, Budmani was perfectly fluent in Italian. Italian was the main language used for teaching purposes in Dubrovnik schools and was also the language spoken by learned Dalmatians (Rešetar 1926: 107; Ivetic 2012: 77). In accordance with the reforms of the time Budmani sought to establish Serbo-Croatian as the official language for some of the subjects taught at the Dubrovnik grammar school. Later, in autumn 1868, he was finally appointed teacher of Serbo-Croatian at the grammar school (Rešetar 1926: 96)

In a long article published in 1926 in memory of Budmani's life and works, Milan Rešetar (1860-1942) states that Budmani's grammar book was so well-known in scientific circles in Italy that an unidentified scholar from Naples considered appointing Budmani as professor of Slavic

⁵ ACS-MPI, General Direction of Higher Education: Universities and Higher University Institutes, 1860-1881, folder 64, file 35; see also: ABC, correspondence, 1892, n. 85, G. De Vincentiis to B. Croce, 9/03/1892.

Studies (which would have meant Serbo-Croatian language and literature). Documents certifying Budmani's appointment in Naples have not been preserved so it is therefore not possible to verify the identity of this scholar (possibly Lignana), whether Budmani was actually appointed as professor of Serbo-Croatian language, nor when this hypothetical appointment took place – be it in the 1869-70 or 1870-71 academic year (the last academic year Lignana spent at the University of Naples).

In 1870 the minister of public education Cesare Correnti (1815-1888) gave the Asiatic College back to the Society of Jesus. Lignana, who had always been in disagreement with the Jesuits' initiatives, in November took the decision to leave the Royal Asiatic College permanently⁶ and asked to be transferred to the University of Rome (Dovetto 1992: 13). The request was accepted in February 1871.

The potential timeframe in which Budmani could have taught at the University of Naples was therefore extremely limited. It could only have occurred, if Lignana was involved, after 16th July 1870. That was the date on which Lignana received a letter from the Croatian bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1905) which the latter stated also included an attached letter from Budmani (Ferraro 1906: 17). Unfortunately Budmani's letter has not been published or even preserved, but its existence indicates that Budmani and Lignana had never met before that date. Hence while it is possible that Lignana could have had future plans for him in Naples, it is highly unlikely that Budmani could have taught Serbo-Croatian at the Royal University of Naples or at the Royal Asiatic College.

⁶ AsSGI-FA, Cristoforo Negri, presidential fond, correspondence, 1870 – Oct.-Dic., sub-fond 78: Lignana Giacomo, letter dated 20th October 1870, from Naples.

2. The 1870s and the 1880s

2.1. Slavic languages and literature (probably) at the University of Padua

In January 1870 Correnti delegated Lignana to represent him at an official meeting with Strossmayer – on the margins of the Ecumenical Council meeting Vatican I (8th December 1869 – 18th July 1870) – in order to hear the opinion of the Croatian bishop on the possible opening of a chair of Slavic languages and literature at the University of Padua. The dilemma facing Correnti was how to choose which Slavic language would be taught without offending the representatives of the Slavic languages that were not chosen. The ideas of the Slovakian poet Ján Kollár (1793-1852) about the literary dignity of only four languages – Russian, Czech, Polish and Serbo-Croatian – were an important influence on the concepts of the Slavists (Stančić 1997). Infused with the spirit of the Italian Risorgimento Correnti sympathised with the Polish rebels of the November Uprising (1830-31) and had openly supported Poland since the 1850s. He had even embarked on a project to write a history of Poland. He would surely have chosen Polish language for the Chair at Padua (see: Massarani 1890: 437-449; Brignoli 1973: 383-392; Biliński 1973: 393-414; Brignoli 1990: 19-25).

Correnti's hopes, however, were dashed by Strossmayer's influential authoritative advice. Strossmayer recommended Serbo-Croatian language as the available teaching on offer. The Croatian bishop had the further task of suggesting possible candidates to be appointed as the professor of Slavic languages and literature. Strossmayer was asked to choose his candidate several times and each time he picked a name from a list of three Croatian intellectuals:

1. Imbro Tkalac-Ignjatijević (1824-1912), at the time already employed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Italy; once he became naturalized Italian, he would embark on a diplomatic career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see: Tamborra 1966; 1983: 63-84).
2. The aforementioned Petar Budmani; he, though, was rejected in

late 1870.

3. Armin Pavić (1844-1914), a scholar who played an active role in Strossmayer's and Rački's Yugoslavian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Pavić's name was put forward for the position of professor of Slavic languages and literature between the end of October and the beginning of December 1870.⁷

Though Strossmayer had advised that a Serbo-Croatian scholar should teach Slavic languages and literature at Padua, there is no evidence that the Slavic languages and literature courses ever started at the University of Padua. If these "Slavic classes" had ever been approved, then they would initially have been named as a generic "Compared languages and literature" course, as had already happened some years earlier at the University of Naples. On 27th May 1874 at a Italian parliamentary session it was highlighted that even though the law equalising the University of Padua with the other Italian universities had been implemented, the university administration nevertheless still had not made any arrangement in order to let "the teaching of Compared languages and literature" start (Atti 1874: 4013). A "Compared languages and literature" course appears in the Padua Faculty of Letters and Philosophy university yearbook for the first time in the 1873-74 and 1874-75 academic years (RUP 1873: 66-67; RUP 1874: 68-69, 72-73). However, no teacher had yet been appointed – in the place of a professor's name there is the abbreviation "N.N.", standing for *Nomen nescio* – literally meaning "I do not know the name". There is consequently no indication of any possible lesson schedule. In the 1875-76 yearbook no single extant languages nor any "Compared languages and literature" are cited – so

⁷ A-Hazu, O.I. Strossmayer fond, A,1/Vor. n. 60: draft copy, Josip Strossmayer to Nikola Voršak (Đakovo, 1st December 1870). See also: Šišić 1928: 115-116. From 1877 Pavić was officially appointed as professor of Croatian language and literature at the University of Zagreb, laying the foundation for the modern Academic Croatian Studies; later he was appointed as dean at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, and finally rector at the University of Zagreb for the 1896-97 academic year (see: HE 1999-2009, "Pavić Armin").

apparently the course of “Compared languages and literature” had definitely been removed (RUP 1876: 122). It has not been possible to locate any record in the historical archive of the rectory of the University of Padua of Slavic languages and literature – either as a single language or as the more generic “Compared languages and literature” – having been taught in the years in question. However, hopefully in the near future further research will cast light on the question of the chair of Slavic languages and Literature at the University of Padua.

2.2. De Vivo at the Philological Circle in Naples

From 1876 to 1878 De Vivo held conferences on Russian language at the Philological Circle in Naples. Founded by the professor of Comparative Literatures at the University of Naples Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), the Philological Circle promoted the diffusion of foreign languages, considered as being essential to establishing in Naples intellectual communities typical of major European cities, regardless of the individuals’ specific ideological and political orientations at national level. Even though the name of De Vivo is not mentioned in the opening speech about the activities of the Circle, De Sanctis proudly stated that, besides the English, French and German languages courses, two additional courses of extant languages were offered – Russian and Spanish (De Sanctis 1972: 366-367). In his personal file preserved in the Archives of the Italian Ministry of Public Education, De Vivo himself recalled that he was appointed professor of Russian language at De Sanctis’s Philological Circle. Unfortunately, the records of the conferences held in the first two years – precisely when De Vivo worked at the Circle – have not been preserved. Our information is thus only directly based on the autographic documents of De Vivo, and indirectly on De Sanctis’s opening speech.

2.3. Slavic languages and literature (probably) at the University of Bologna

In *For the History of the Slavic Studies in Italy* Cronia provides some information about the extra-curricular classes on “Slavic literatures” that

were taught by the Polish poet and sculptor Teofil Lenartowicz (1822-1893) at the University of Bologna in the 1879-80 academic year (Cronia 1933: 110-111). The course was part of a series of activities promoted by the Adam Mickiewicz Academy of Polish and Slavic History and Literature (*Accademia Adamo Mickiewicz di storia e letteratura polacca e slava*), a permanent centre for Slavic Studies that was founded at the University of Bologna in 1879 and lasted informally for almost forty years (see: Bersano-Begey 1955:-1956: 31-46; Lewanski 1983: 53-60; Piotrowska 1983: 61-79; Wos 1987: 38-43; Lewanski 1991: 69-88). The fact that the Academy library acquired books in Russian and Polish in order to facilitate their study strongly suggests that Lenartowicz was involved in teaching not only Polish language and literature, but also Russian language and literature (Lewanski 1983: 53-54). There was also an unsuccessful attempt by Domenico Berti (1820-1897) to introduce an official chair of Slavic languages and literature at the University of Bologna, as testified by the March 1883 records of the Parliament Chamber of Deputies. Berti had already made an unsuccessful attempt as Minister of Public Education almost twenty years earlier, from 1865 to 1867, to introduce a chair of Slavic languages and literature in one of the universities or institutes of one of three major Italian cities of the time – in Turin, Florence, or Naples (Cifariello 20119a: forthc.). Berti's 1883 budget request for the introduction of a "chair of Slavic literature at the University of Bologna" was rejected by Ferdinando Martini (1841-1928), deputy and member of the State General Budget and Administrative Accounts Committee (29th November 1882-7th May 1884), because he considered "budgeting the sum of money for that chair" futile due to the fact "that teaching is provided in Bologna by" the Adam Mickiewicz Academy and he could therefore see no reason why "a chair of Slavic letters should have opened" (Atti 1883: 1622). Martini had undoubtedly been previously lobbied by Lignana about introducing a chair of Slavic languages. In a letter dated 2nd March 1883 Lignana reminded Martini about his Slavic languages and literature teaching activities some twenty years earlier at the University of Naples. Lignana proudly describes his former Philological school as the place that produced "all the scholars

who later dealt with Slavic Studies”.⁸ If some Slavic courses took place at the University of Bologna, they would therefore have consisted of cycles of conferences of Polish and Russian language and literature held by the Adam Mickiewicz Academy and not of courses ordained by the ministry. This would have been the case until at least 1888 when the Academy changed venue and moved to its founder’s house (Bersano-Begey 1955-1956: 45). Unfortunately there is no trace of those courses in the documents preserved in the Italian Ministry of Public Education archives.

2.4. *Grzymała Lubański at the University of Rome*

Starting in 1882 Henryk Grzymała Lubański (1816-after 1892)⁹ gave “scientific” conferences on Russian at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Rome. He may also have taught Polish off the record at the university. At the start of his teaching activities in Rome, Lubański, probably in contact with the Adam Mickiewicz Academy, made a written request to be considered in the near future for the appointment of professor of Slavic languages and literature at the University of Bologna¹⁰ or the Royal Asiatic College of Naples.¹¹ The moment Lubański started teaching at the University of Rome coincided with the period Lignana was not only ordinary professor, but also dean of the entire Faculty of Humanities at the same university. On 10th June 1883 the official faculty meeting under Lignana’s deanship clarified the role of the teachers of extant languages: they were not appointed as professors of extant

⁸ BNCf, Martini’s correspondence, 16, 15 (Lignana-Martini 1880-1885), Giacomo Lignana to Ferdinando Martini (2nd March 1883).

⁹ For a complete biography of Lubański and other information about him, see: Cifariello 2018a; Cifariello 2018b.

¹⁰ ACS-MPI, Direzione Generale per l’Istruzione Superiore (1891-95), position 23, folder 150, Rome 1892, Università, Facoltà letteraria, Letter of the ministry attached to one note of the Chamber of Deputies (Rome, 31st March 1882).

¹¹ ACS-MPI, Direzione Generale per l’Istruzione Superiore (1891-95), position 23, folder 150, Rome 1892, Università, Facoltà letteraria, E. Grimala Lubanski to G. Baccelli (Rome, 3rd April 1882)

languages, but they were “masters”, or “lectors”, of foreign languages (Monsagrati 2000: 417-418, 435). From the 1883-84 academic year onwards the so-called free classes of extant languages were renamed “scientific lectures”. In the 1891-92 academic year Lubański gave his last “scientific lectures on the Russian language” at the University of Rome. After that academic year we lose trace of Lubański’s life, and there would be no further conferences – or “scientific lectures” – on the Russian language for a couple of years.

2.5. Ciampoli at the University of Catania

In the 1887-88 academic year, Domenico Ciampoli (1852-1929) – today known as one of the first translators of Russian literature (he translated writers including Dostoevskiĭ, Turgenev, Tolstoĭ, and Gorkiĭ) – gave a celebrated series of lectures on Slavic literature at the University of Catania. However, in the introduction to his work on Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, and “Yugo-Russian” (which means Ukrainian) literature, Ciampoli addressed “to the rulers of the Nation a prayer that the absence of the teaching of these [Slavic] languages must not endure” in major Italian Universities (Ciampoli 1889: 1). Ciampoli’s words indirectly refer to the previous unsuccessful attempts to introduce a chair of Slavic languages and literature in Italy.

3. The 1890s and the 1900s

3.1. Rydzewski at the University of Rome

“Scientific” lectures on Slavic languages – given by the lawyer Giuliano (de) Rydzewski – were reintroduced at the University of Rome in the 1894-95 academic year according to the university yearbook. They lasted until the 1898-99 academic year. In terms of literary activity, Rydzewski is known only for his translation from Russian into Italian of M. I. Dragomirov’s 1897 military-historical essay *Napoleon and Wellington* (Dragomirov 1897). The Rydzewskies were a noble family of Polish

descent,¹² registered in the list of the noble families originally from the Mogilëv Governorate (ASDR 1908: 4). Thus, like many other representatives of the Polish nobility or *Szlachta*, some of the Rydzewskies lived in St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, and spoke Russian fluently. This possible St. Petersburg connection and the translated Russian book constitute potentially convincing evidence that Rydzewski's course was focused on the teaching of Russian and Polish languages. Unfortunately it is not possible to unearth the history and content of Rydzewski's conferences at the University of Rome from the documents available in the Ministry of Public Education archives. The documents pertaining to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Rome, preserved by the Central Archives of Italy, do not contain Rydzewski's personal file at all.¹³ The 1895 folder in the archives does report a joint deliberation made by all the University of Rome faculties to suspend the teaching of extant languages at the university.¹⁴ This deliberation made the reintroduction of the Slavic languages and literature courses at the University of Rome impossible for several years.

Though there is no sign of Rydzewski's personal file in the archives there is a sub-folder for the year 1898 with a reference to a file related to Slavic languages taught by a "Niccolini-Tonkovich". The file and the information on this teacher are also missing¹⁵ but the name "Niccolini-Tonkovich" probably refers to Ruža Tonković in Nicolini (1835-?),¹⁶ who was possibly appointed lecturer of Serbo-Croatian language at the

¹² RGIA, fond 1343, inventory 51, folder 607: Tretii Department Senata, Spiski dvoryan (1725-1841).

¹³ ACS-MPI, Direzione Generale per l'Istruzione Superiore, 1891-1895, folders 350 (1894) and 459 (1895); ACS-MPI, Direzione Generale per l'Istruzione Superiore, 1896-1910, folder 59 (1896-1900).

¹⁴ ACS-MPI, Direzione Generale per l'Istruzione Superiore, 1891-1895, folder 459 (1895).

¹⁵ ACS-MPI, Direzione Generale per l'Istruzione Superiore, 1896-1910, folder 59 (1896-1900).

¹⁶ See: Geni, A MyHeritage Company, s.v. "Nicolini Tonković", <<https://www.geni.com>>.

University of Rome. The possible appointment of Tonković in Nicolini as “master of Serbo-Croatian language” would have been aided by the presence of the Montenegrin princess Jelena Petrović-Njegoš (the future Italian queen Helen) in Rome. In October 1896 Jelena Petrović-Njegoš married the Prince of Savoia, and thus became a member of the Italian royal family. Queen Helen would use her influential position some twenty years later to promote the study of Slavic languages at the Regina Elena Institute of Foreign Languages in Rome.

3.2. Slavic languages at the Oriental Institute of Naples

Federigo Verdinois (1844-1927) – today best known as a writer and as a translator from Russian and Polish into Italian – was a journalist and expert on Slavic languages. He was initially appointed professor of English language and literature at the Oriental Institute of Naples, and from 1906 until 1913 was professor of Russian – and Ruthenian, as he wrote in his memories – language and literature. Ettore Lo Gatto himself learnt the basics of Russian in Verdinois’s classes at the Oriental Institute (Lo Gatto 1946). Unfortunately Verdinois’s personal file is missing from the Ministry of Public Education section at the Central Archives of Italy and the Oriental Institute section in the historical archives of *L’Orientale* University in Naples.

Verdinois left the Oriental Institute in 1913 when the Ministry of the Colonies (which was set up just one year earlier) decided it was necessary to hire specialized personnel. This coincided with the end of a ten-year process of reformation of the Oriental Institute. The Royal decrees n. 1165 and 1166 of 8th September 1913 for the new didactic reorganisation authorised the Oriental Institute to issue two kinds of degree – one in Colonial Culture and the other in Interpretation and Translation. Moreover decree n. 1165 listed the six fundamental and nine complementary languages that could possibly be taught at the Oriental Institute, of which two were Slavic: Russian and Serbian (Fatica 2011: 247). Despite Russian being named one of the nine complementary languages, Russian language specialists and the financial resources

needed to cover their appointment were missing. Therefore, the Sinologist Guido Amedeo Vitale (1872-1918), who in the 1916-1917 academic year became director of the Oriental Institute, also covered the role of professor of Russian language. He taught the subject until his tragic death in 1918 when he was killed by mistake by some criminals in the neighbourhood near the Institute. After a two-year hiatus the teaching of Russian started again in 1920 with the appointment of Nina Friedländer (Fatica 2011: 247). Her name does not appear in the classical reconstructions of the history of Russian studies, probably due to her personal differences with Giovanni Maver, as documented in the archives of the *L'Orientale* University of Naples.¹⁷

The Serbo-Croatian course started in the 1914-15 academic year with the appointment of Bruno Guyon (1868-1943). The teaching of Serbo-Croatian language was later grouped together with the teaching of Slovenian language. Guyon's speciality was, actually, Slovenian. In 1902, in fact, he had published his *Slovenian Grammar Book, with Exercises and a Dictionary* (Guyon 1902). In 1918 the annual renewal of Guyon's position was suddenly interrupted.

4. Conclusions

After a fifty-year period and several attempts to introduce a chair of Slavic languages and literature a breakthrough only came in 1920 with the appointment of Maver at the University of Padua as professor of Slavic philology and Friedländer's appointment at the Oriental Institute of Naples as professor of Russian language and literature. This article thus demonstrates the importance of the year 1920 in the history of Slavic Studies not as a birthdate but as a culmination of a fifty-year struggle in which politicians and academics had been fighting for the recognition of the value of a university-level teaching chair of Slavic languages and literature. In addition, through this article it is possible to compare the attempts in the young Italian kingdom to introduce the teaching of extant

¹⁷ AsUniOR, Personal Files, Ad Nomen: Nina Friedländer.

languages (including the Slavic languages) to the Italian universities with the history of the teaching of extant languages at universities in other European countries. We can also discern three different paths during these fifty years, each one starting from a single personality: Lignana and the teaching of Russian, Strossmayer and the teaching of Serbo-Croatian, and Correnti and the teaching of Polish. However, notwithstanding the diplomatic and commercial importance of modern foreign languages – including the Slavic languages – in 19th century Europe, it is also evident that interests in other major fields hindered their introduction in Italian universities. This general malaise afflicting Italian universities in this period was due mostly to the low budgets available for opening new chairs and covering the expenses of the ones who were already working (Cifariello 2018b: forthc.). The 1895 Faculty decision to suspend the teaching of extant languages at the University of Rome exemplifies this dilemma. In a moment of difficulty the first subjects to be eliminated were the modern foreign languages. This leads one to reflect upon how poorly other academic fields tended to consider the teaching of extant languages at universities.

The year 1920 represents not only the end of a seemingly interminable fifty-year struggle to introduce Slavic languages and literature at university level, it also marks an end to their ongoing precarious status in post-unification Italy. In 1920 Slavic Studies finally achieved a level of acceptance and dignity at university level in Italy.

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ACS-MPI: Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Roma (The Italian State Central Archives, Minister of Public Education – Rome)

A-HAZU: Arhiv Hrvatska Akademija Znanosti i umjetnosti – Zagreb (Archives of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts – Zagreb)

ASGI-FA: Archivio storico, Società Geografica Italiana, Fondo amministrativo – Roma (Historical Archive, Italian Geographic Society, Administration Fond – Rome)

AsUniOr: Archivio storico, Università degli Studi “L’Orientale” di Napoli (Historical Archive, University “L’Orientale” of Naples)

BNCF: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (National Central Library of Florence)

RGIA: Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiĭ Archiv – Sankt Peterburg (Russian State Historical Archive – St. Petersburg)

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