

How Charon's Life was Entwined
with the Christian East:
Kniga Bytija Moego:
*Mémoires Autobiographiques*¹

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The first explicit mention of the autobiography of Jean-François-Joseph Charon (also known as Cyrille Korolevskij) is found in a short abstract about the establishment of the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Rome. It was published by Alphonse Raes, former dean of the Institute, on the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation.³ The abstract is taken from Charon's incomplete autobiography, which Raes, prefect of the Vatican Library, placed in its manuscripts section at Pope Paul VI's direction.

Charon's typewritten text was subdivided into five codices.⁴ The title, *Kniga Bytija Moego* ("The Book of My Life"), had been given by the bishop of Cighirin, Porphyrij Ouspenskij, to the collection of his diaries and memoirs, as

¹ Cyrille Korolevskij, *Kniga Bytija Moego* (Le Livre de ma vie) *Mémoires autobiographique*, Texte établi et annoté par Giuseppe M. Croce, 5 tomes (Cité du Vatican: Archives Secrètes Vaticanes, 2007).

² *Editor's Note*: This essay is an edited version of an original Italian essay written by the Jesuit Vincenzo Poggi in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 74 (2008): 501–518. The Rev. Prof. George Gallaro of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh kindly arranged this translation, for which the editors are very grateful.

³ In *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 33 (1967): 5–46.

⁴ Vat. Lat. 14627, 14628, 14629, 14630, 14631, which now are numbered 1592, 1593, 1594, 1595, 1596.

Korolevskij mentions in the first lines of his preface (I, 1).⁵ In Charon's autobiographical presentation, one detects an exceptional talent not just of describing the moods of his own soul in lucid and incisive French but also of delving deeply into the virtues and faults of the persons he came to know during his lifetime. He is well aware of this himself when he writes: "In my spare times ... I've begun to jot down the presentation of my personal events" (III, 173). Charon considers those personal events "matter of a dramatic narrative ... that will become a literary work" (III, 175).

In the twentieth chapter of his autobiography, the last he wrote, Charon reveals a capacity to relive a plot he himself defines as a kind of "police novel." Accused of being a spy on behalf of the enemy before a French military court, he barely succeeded in explaining some strange traits of his personality and his imprudence in leaving himself open to suspicion for corresponding with a diplomat of an enemy power who was friendly with the Ukrainian Catholic Archbishop of Lviv, Andrey Sheptytsky. At the same time, however, he is surprisingly successful in a kind of "suspense" genre by keeping the reader guessing until the final denouement of the painful episode.

It was necessary to edit that valuable autobiographical text, although still unfinished. Questioned on the matter, Vittorio Peri, the *Scriptor Graecus* of the Vatican Library, was of the same opinion. Étienne Fouilloux, who wrote the preface to this work of Croce, when he came to Rome to recover some documentation for his own work, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*, was also advised by Raes to consult the codices of Charon's autobiography. A simple reading was sufficient for him to come up with the clear idea in favour of publication: "Reading his autobiography and lamenting that it was unfinished, I straightway suggested to Raes that it deserved to be published" (I, XIII).

⁵ Quotations are from the original texts of Croce's works; Roman numerals refer to the chapters and the Arabic to the pages. All further citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

Annotated Edition and Enriched Text

The project of editing Charon's unfinished autobiography has been brilliantly completed, beyond all expectations. Giuseppe Croce did not limit himself to editing the work but wrote an introduction and a commentary. He also enriched it with documentation, including correspondence, thus giving us a monumental work in five volumes, just like the five Vatican codices that contain the original text. In his first two volumes, Croce edited and commented on the text written by Charon. Volumes III and IV contain documents, both written by Charon and by his correspondents. The fifth volume contains various indexes which make the entire work easily accessible as a kind of encyclopedia of the Christian East in the first half of the twentieth century.

It has been already mentioned that Charon's writing stops at chapter 20. Croce also published the plan for the remaining chapters which Charon had in mind to continue. He had stopped writing after he had published what he called "a thriller" (detective story) under the title "1914–1919: World War I. Austrian Spy and Bolshevik Agitator. Six Months in a French Jail. Return to Rome." He had anticipated the titles of an additional twenty-one chapters to begin with his happy return to Rome once he was acquitted by the military court and after the bitter experience in France at the end of World War I. Croce discovered the titles of the chapters, planned but not written, in the archives of the Benedictine Monastery of Chevetogne, Belgium, and used them as a guide to describe the rest of his life, illustrating it with the letters both of Charon and his correspondents. This second part of Charon's biography, which he did not write, includes important stages, such as Charon's employment at the Vatican Library; and his six-year stint with the review *Stoudion*, founded and published by him in Rome. It also deals with the years when the Jesuit Michel d'Herbigny was dean of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in 1926 as well as president of the Pro Russia Commission founded on 20 June 1925.

D'Herbigny enjoyed the full trust of Pope Pius XI, who arranged for his secret ordination as bishop at the hands of