



The Fall of the Yers

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The Slavic languages are a family of languages spoken in Central and Eastern Europe, and form a branch of the Indo-European family. Below are some words in two modern Slavic languages, as well as in Old Church Slavonic – the oldest recorded Slavic language. The symbols ь and ъ are taken from the Cyrillic alphabet and represent unique sounds in Old Church Slavonic. The symbols oN and ě represent specific OCS vowels (like “on” in French “ton” and like “a” in English “hat,” respectively).

OCS	Bulgarian	Russian	English meaning
днь	den	den'	day
градъ	grad	gorod	city
дъждъ	dăžd	dožd'	rain
boNdoN	băda	budu	I am / I will be
igrajoN	igraja	igraju	I play
дньсь	dnes	dnes'	today / nowadays
сьпъ	săn	son	sleep
дни	dni	dni	days
poNтъ	păt	put'	path
oNgьль	ăgăl	ugol	corner
бѣль	bjal	bel	white
obědъ	objad	obed	lunch
mrazъ	mraz	moroz	frost
nesoN	(do)nesa	nesu	I carry
kostъ	kost	kost'	bone

Assignment 1: Fill in the following table.

OCS	Bulgarian	Russian	English meaning
	bera	beru	I gather / I take
		korol'	king
кгъвь			blood
zoNbъ			tooth

Assignment 2: In modern Russian, which is written in Cyrillic, the symbols ъ and ь are silent, though they affect the pronunciation of the previous consonants. However, linguists think that these letters were not silent in Old Church Slavonic. What kinds of sounds do you think these consonants represented (consonants or vowels)?