

CyrTUG '93 and some more

Oct 4th–7th, Pereslav'-Zaleskiĭ, Russia

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Meeting the people

1 Introduction

This meeting of the Cyrillic T_EX User Group was the third since their founding meeting in 1990 on the day of Slavonic writing, the day of Kirill and Mefodii. Previous accounts of the activities of CyrTUG have been done on EuroT_EX '91 (Russian T_EX, T_EXniques in Siberia), EuroT_EX '92 (On T_EX experience in MIR Publishers, Russian T_EX: new eight bit fonts and IBM PC equipment), TUG '93 (Russian T_EX issues: looking about and outlook, T_EX in the Ukraine report), and in TTN 0,0 (T_EX in the Soviet Union), TTN 1,1 (CyrTUG, SibTUG), TTN 1,2 (Estonian User Group), TTN 2,1 (News about CyrTUG and Russian T_EX users, uk → ue), TTN 2,2 (T_EX waves from Estonia).

I became aware of this meeting at Aston, where Irina Makhovaya and Irina Gorbunova persuaded me to come by showing their beautiful booklet about Pereslav'-Zaleskiĭ, the conference site and a national reserve. They could not possibly know that I sympathize a lot with Russia and that I have been there twice. So, they caught me in the belief that I could go there by car and travel around a bit. Alas, not yet, because you still need a visa, and more importantly you must describe which route you will take, where and when you will stay at what place and so on. While being there and looking back it is not so much of a surprise, because for a foreigner who does not speak the language, it is next to impossible to get around or find places to stay.

When time passed by some email¹ reminded me of my promise, and I had not yet made any steps towards obtaining a visa.²

In spite of the political upheaval—and strengthened by Irina Gorbunova's soothing words—I was on my way on Sunday 3 October, armed with my Moscow

guide book of 1968 and a trunk loaded with T_EX-related material to give away next to some software to copy. The flight was easy and on arrival passing some time-consuming formalities—my host Irina Gorbunova and her husband were there to welcome me into Moscow under a beautiful blue sky. We had the usual chat about peculiarities of the city while their friend drove us in his Lada to their place. After some tea—'tsai' is the national folk drink next to Vodka, I presume—we went for a bird's eye view of the city to the closeby television broadcast tower. Arriving at the spot we found that anti-Yeltsin people had gathered and were about to occupy this vital communication plant. Telling this story over-and-over at the conference made the three of us the heroes of the day.

I enjoyed revisiting the city especially the Economic Achievements surroundings and the beautiful underground stations to name but two.³

The next morning we set off for Pereslav'.⁴ The trip in a slightly old and smelly bus was ok, and I enjoyed the scenery. The conference site—a children's computer camp of the Program Systems Institute—was located by Lake Pletsjewo, to be reached only by a sandy road. Perfect to walk on but shaky when done by a truck-like and too small bus. The inroads to T_EX are full of surprises!

2 Conference

The conference was attended by some 65 members and essentially about the Cyrillic aspects of using T_EX.⁵ It had a one-stream schedule. Next to that there was a L^AT_EX course for beginners, and a workshop for those who just liked to demo and to discuss (La)T_EX matters, or to exchange software.

¹ Please do remember and take note that email *to and from* Russia is expensive for them: inbound and outbound mail is charged by the kilobyte! Moreover they can't email easily because they have dial-up connections only from their working place at the moment.

² The other foreigner at the conference, John Roseman, from New York, who lives and works in St Petersburg explained to me that obtaining a visa is in reality a matter of tax, and you can get it faster if you pay more.

³ At rush hours it is impossible to find your way in the underground. For travelling by (trolley) bus or tramway you really need to be a local. No maps!

⁴ Because Moscow is such a huge city we needed 1.5 hours to get at the bus station. Yeltsin had already commanded to remove the parliament from the 'white house.' No discussions about that in the underground. People just went to their work and hoped for the best.

⁵ The usual things: fonts, hyphenation, ligature-like issues, and with respect to L^AT_EX the generic approach of reserved words.

The equipment consisted of some 386-based PCs with emTeX and $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{M}\mathcal{S}$ -TeX on it as basis.

At the opening, Christina Thiele's 'Greetings from the TUG president' was read aloud and well-received. A paper copy was taped to a pillar as well so that people could read it at leisure afterwards. The paper by Yannis Haralambous about the standardization of Cyrillic fonts was also taped to the pillar as was the message from the CyrTUG president. They all could not make it to attend.⁶ With respect to Cyrillics I was told that there are three popular versions around. With the expected growth of the number of Russian TeX users it makes sense to standardize on one. It was therefore a great pity that Yannis was not there. It was also a pity that no delegate from the Ukraine was present,⁷ nor from Estonia or Lithuania.

The people enjoyed the conference very much⁸ if only for the *two* magnificent sight-seeing trips to Pereslav'-Zaleskiĭ and Rostov, marvels of the necklace of historical places better known as the Golden Ring. They said it was great to meet TeX-active people who work in the same direction. Scientists working at universities are very underpaid and in relation to that they experience TeX as a hobby to dive into. I found it difficult to follow the lectures because they were done in an extemporaneous way: just spoken, and furthermore no transparencies (slides), and all in Russian. This in spite of my personal interpreter Irina Gorbunova, translating the main things. However, I was impressed by the implementation of yet another shell—QSH⁹—for the PC in the UNIX spirit, and influenced by TeX's flexible approach. A generic shell which can be customized. I 'presented' my 'What is TeX and METAFONT all about?' Later I could also talk about BLUe's bibliography. Both were simultaneously translated by Irina Gorbunova. The papers were well-received and in phase with the stage of development CyrTUG and its members are in. A year earlier Dean Guenther happened to be around in Moscow and had pointed out the relevance of various TeX issues already in 'teaching the teachers.'

The conference banquet had a cosy atmosphere. Typical Russian and friendly. Many toasts were given, for example one to the health of Don Knuth and one to the Ladies present. I toasted on the friendship of CyrTUG and NTG and on the cooperation with TUG. I drank friendship with at least three Irinas. After dinner we had our Russian round dance and those present at Stanford '89 would not be surprised to hear that I enjoyed it very much. I will assume that this was the reason for me being invited to become a honorary member of CyrTUG—number 190.¹⁰

The reading table contained many nice contributions: some publications in Russian like the translation of the Joy of TeX, and one of Martin Gardener's mathematical puzzles books. A proof of the *TeXbook in Russian!*¹¹ and an introduction to PostScript. From the other User Groups there were on display: TUGboat (and its supplementary resource guide), DANTE's Die TeXnische Komödie, GUTenberg's lettres, NTG's MAPS (and the two specials: PR Set and Salomon's Courseware). From MIR one could also buy the Joy of TeX and related books.

3 Corridors

An issue communicated to me by Irina G had to do with the sheer size of Russia. Within CyrTUG local groups will spawn¹², for example to start with the already existing group in Siberia and a new group to be founded in St Petersburg to facilitate that TeXies can meet each other in those remote areas.

With respect to TUGboat redistribution¹³ Irina Gorbunova explained to me that reproducing TUGboat was not so much needed. The table of contents of each issue in electronic form is extremely useful. Given this table members can ask the CyrTUG office for a paper copy of what they want to peruse. Later Irina Makhovaya said that 'paper' is a problem in Russia, and that the (scientific) contents—read the articles—of TUGboat can better be redistributed in electronic form, read send the members disquettes with the files, of just that what they

⁶Other friends like Sosja Samarin and Tolja Urvantsev could not make it either, alas.

⁷Yuri Melnichuk had planned to attend but died suddenly from a heart attack while on tour in the UK after TUG '93.

⁸In spite of the cold, the difficulties in reaching the site, no showers (on Tuesday we had our Russian sauna however), no overhead projector, the limited number of computers, there was no complaint heard. Apparently each and every participant knows about the difficulties in organizing these kinds of meetings.

⁹This work was done by Edward Timoshenko and Yuri Kuznetsov of Moscow State University.

¹⁰More realistic is that they recognized that I was behind all the free exchange of information by secretaries of LUGs, to exchange bulletins. In Paris '89 I proposed that LUGs offer secretaries of other LUGs a membership, and to have organized exchange of information in this way. Ever since, NTG ships off the MAPS to known secretaris, the TUG office included.

¹¹During the conference some 25 orders were made.

¹²It is not easy to start an association in Russia. It is said to me that recommendation letters will help a lot. People from St Petersburg therefore asked me to send a letter of recommendation for starting their chapter of CyrTUG. Of course I will do this with pleasure.

¹³A general issue which has kept the Europeans busy for quite some time in the past, despite that it was explained that it is *impossible* to have TUGboat in electronic form. I have heard that before and agree in principle with it when striving after its full generality. But when looking at it from the contents, let us say to scientific point of view it is possible to provide the functionality for let us to 80% or so. I have some disquettes of MAPS issues, so there is a way. The idea is to spread the good information whatever that may be, and if there comes an exception on your way, that can be easily settled.

want. Another possibility could be to allow for local advertising—that is by companies active in Russia—in the TUGboat version to be redistributed within Russia. This is prompted by the fact that people don't have computers at home, and use \TeX at their work. Only half of the CyrTUG members have access to email. FTP is expensive because of that every kilobyte has to be paid for and salaries are still very modest, read low.

I also understood that before formulating a proposal for a formal agreement between for example TUG and CyrTUG it is vital to have informal discussions and to judge the possibilities, simply because well-intended but non-appropriate proposals can hardly be refused.

It is so useful to really understand the background of each other. To know and understand the context! That is why I was so interested to go, to stay at friends, to feel and experience the context, how Russians live.

Furthermore, if TUG hires people for composing TUGboat, for example, we might consider hiring people in financial disadvantaged countries, because it is a stimulus to them in using \TeX if not financially, and certainly not more expensive for us.

Finally, Irina G told me that CyrTUG has been discussing the idea of starting their bulletin too.¹⁴ Hopefully their bulletin will see the light of day next year, be it in electronic form (on disquettes) or on paper. Undoubtedly it will be released on a special date to commemorate a historical event in relation to publishing.

4 Social life

Although a bit out of place it might make sense to communicate some flavours of the social life in Moscow.

It is very difficult to find your way around on your own. The underground is not as clearly marked as I'm used to, and for using the ample bus lines or tramways one really has to be a Muscovite.¹⁵

The shopping is much different from what I'm used to. Here one first orders what one wants—for primary goods in Russian—then pays at the special cashier the amount and finally collect your purchases.¹⁶

I was repeatedly told that inflation goes up by the hour. The Pushkin Fine Arts Museum and the Tretyakov Galleries have two entrance fees, one for Russian people and one for foreigners differing by a factor of thirty.

¹⁴Actually along with the delegate pack I found CyrTUG Bulletin #1 (16p), which contained among others a survey of available tools, ordered according to functionality. Because they are all zip files I presume these can be obtained from the CyrTUG office.

¹⁵In spite of the fast underground typical commuting takes one hour and a half either way, because of the waiting time for bus connections.

¹⁶Primary goods such as food can be bought around the corner. For secondary things like books, kitchen machines, furniture, and luxury articles, it is much harder to find a shop. The best bet is the Arbat Street area, the Ukraine Hotel area, and the Economic Exhibition grounds. They have their price, and it is only hoped that the superfluous importing of goods won't kill the local industry, but will stimulate the Russians to produce similar things cost-effectively *for and by* themselves.

¹⁷A message takes some five hours to arrive!

Scientific workers at the universities have been promised that their salaries will be corrected because of the inflation. Not so! This is a factor in the emerging of private universities, which will attract gifted people at the danger of enlarging the gap with deprived people. I'm afraid there is no other way. So much has to be done to overcome the lagging behind.

5 The week after

Moscow is a huge city with nine million inhabitants. Much to see and to enjoy. I enjoyed especially the Russian circus, and was very touched by the service of the Russian Orthodox Church to commemorate the victims of the 'White House' upheaval.

Downtown is as usual like a village and can be strolled through. After the conference the guiding me through town was taken over by Sergeĭ, Irina's husband. Many details of who lived where, and what the buildings are used for now has been explained to me like a fall in a hot summer. I have the feeling that I know Moscow now like London or Paris.

During the evening my little knowledge of Russian culture—remember that we grew up with the iron curtain—was enlarged by miles. Sergeĭ with an art academy background was an irrepressible source, we paged through many an art book.

5.1 MIR Publishers

A visit to MIR publishers—the driving force behind CyrTUG—was of course on the agenda. After World War II this publishing house was founded with the task to translate literature from and into Russian. It employs a few hundred people. MIR has many departments with Irina Makhovaya's one active in the translation of math-oriented scientific books. Her group is equipped with a dozen or so PC's, and a special (dial-up) email system.¹⁷ There is no connecting LAN for sharing the files, programs or printers. Her staff consists of a few full-timers and there are some 10 to 15 part-timers. Some \TeX translations are underway, for example, Concrete mathematics, and \TeX ing Math by example. Irina Makhovaya welcomes the cooperative attitude of authors. At the moment she is negotiating the translation of the \LaTeX book.

5.2 Meeting the CyrTUG board

For the evening I was invited to meet the CyrTUG board officially, at Irina Makhovaya's place. This meeting—quite informally though—was held while having a nice

Russian supper. Again many a toast was given.

After the main dish Irina as the executive director explained what we had talked about during the afternoon.¹⁸

This approach was welcomed as reasonable.

Also next year's meeting was discussed, several suggestions were made, and Irina was given again the freedom to make something out of this. In the meantime, supper continued and everybody felt satisfied.

It was not difficult to be open-minded under these circumstances, and to listen carefully to what was said and taste everything that was offered.

Sergeĭ Strelkov was interested whether there was a version of em \TeX which runs without errors under OS/2. He also liked to work with WEB under C but did not know of a public domain C compiler for the PC, and especially did not know how to get it. I whispered something about LINUX. . . He also was interested in cooperation for Russian people with people in the West. I pointed to the L \AA \TeX call for volunteers, and to the list of TUG working groups.

After some photographs and the inevitable evening tsai the meeting ended at roughly nine o'clock and everybody went home, feeling happy! Very pleasant indeed this meeting à la Russe.

In the night after dreaming it all through I composed the opening sentences of my Publishing with \TeX book, and I decided definitely about its approach and scope.

5.3 Sergeĭ Posad

At the meeting Irina G was approached by Andreĭ Slepouchin. He lives at the monastery of St Sergeĭ, at the place which was named Zagorsk by the Soviets. Recently the name was changed back into its old name Sergeĭ Posad.¹⁹ This place is the religious centre of the Russian Orthodox Church, and has several cathedrals within its walls. It also has a Theological Academy where Andreĭ studies.

I had been there already in 1968, but now I could see it from the other side, from the inside. And I saw it from the inside indeed. First we were guided to the

holy wells, and drank some of the water. No tourist was to be seen there. Then I got a magnificent guided tour by one of his 'colleagues,' a student who spoke English perfectly.²⁰ Finally Andreĭ showed us his working place, a tower with in every niche some advanced computer.²¹ He loves to work with computers and this is the only way he can do so, in the Theological Academy via a so-called free study program. His background is computer algebra and object oriented programming. He whispered also something about (picture) data compressing via fractals?!?

The idea is that this religious centre will in future be the publishing house of all Russian Orthodox Churches, taking care of all of the publications to be made. Impressive, and bound to become important.

When leaving us at the train he made the suggestion that it might be possible to have a CyrTUG meeting here. He also welcomed cooperation on the fonts issues, for example with Yannis Haralambous. I understood the hint and promised that I would in some way communicate this to Yannis.

5.4 Parting gift

My hosts organized a party for me leaving. A la Russe as can be guessed. From Olga Lapko (MIR publishers) I got their Cyrillic fonts, and from Irina Makhovaya their Call for Membership.²² I enjoyed it very much and I offered my guests my gratitude. I hope they can have a PC at their home next week.²³ Thank you Sergeĭ and Irina for the hospitality received and the friendship shared!

6 Conclusion

The program was well-done. The attendees enjoyed the meeting. It was a success. Absolutely spoken it can be improved as always.

Next year the meeting will be held in summer and probably in the same place. It was decided that CyrTUG will reserve some funds to buy an overhead projector. If you plan to attend next year's meeting take your walking boots with you next to your morning slippers. Contribute a nice paper if not for some software to share (or hardware to give away). And don't forget your Cyrillic

¹⁸TUGboat in Russia via redistributing the articles for non-commercial use either in printed form but then only feasonable when Russian advertisements can be added, or in electronic form.

Can TUG (or users) help in getting the files from the archives? Starting from the CD ROM and the TUGboat articles on disquettes. Then only the most recent additions have to surface-mailed once in a while. A call for volunteers will be made—loud and clearly—in for example TTN. NTG's files of MAPS will be sent as will be 4(all) \TeX , let us say with X-mas.

¹⁹This changing of names is also a difficulty for a foreigner to get around, as I also had experienced at Prague.

²⁰My question about the main difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church was well-taken and very clearly answered. The main difference comes down to that the Patriarch is the 'primus inter pares' that is the first under equals, while the Pope is infallible.

²¹He works on fonts. En-passant he showed 3B2 a 'WSYIWYG' \TeX system. The source and the result each in a window, with editing from the *result* as well! I have seen a similar functionality before in the GRIF project, but then two data files were maintained, and Andreĭ assured me that here there was only one.

²²As said my trunk was loaded on arrival. On departure it was even heavier! So many souvenirs were given to me.

²³I decided to 'pay' my host for my stay. Enough for a second-hand 286 machine at their home; that will help them a lot.

font charts! To know the Cyrillic alphabet is an absolute necessity in order to move around.

As a member I will join next year's meeting and in order to walkabout easier I decided to give my learning of Russian a retry.

I can only congratulate CyrTUG for this successful

meeting and thank them and MIR²⁴ for having invited me, and having made me a honorary member. And I like to thank Irina Gorbunova for translating so much for me and being my inseparable help. I like to thank NTG for reimbursing the trip costs.

Let's go for a double number of attendees next year.

DO YOU HAVE ANY DIFFICULTIES in publishing your scientific papers in Russian?

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Now you have an idea, don't you?

You really do need Cyrillic T_EX!

You need

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CyrTUG

By joining *CyrTUG* you will be able

- ★ to obtain the base sets of the Cyrillic version of the T_EX (public domain);
- ★ to communicate with Russian scientists who work in T_EX;
- ★ to participate in conferences organized by *CyrTUG*;
- ★ to publish the findings of your T_EXdevelopments in the bulletin of *CyrTUG*.

We would like to help you enter *CyrTUG* if you communicate with us.

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Издательство "Мир", *CyrTUG*, Маховая И.А.

Typeset by $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{M}\mathcal{S}$ -T_EX

²⁴MIR means world and also peace. And peaceful the meeting was for sure.