Ralko, I. D. *Biełaruski vierš. Staronki historyi i teoryi. 'Vyšejšaja škola'*, Minsk, 1969. 232 pages. Index of names.

Ralko's book represents the first monograph ever to be devoted to the problems and history of Byelorussian versification, and it would, therefore, be unreasonable to expect a complete survey of the subject. In fact, the author limits himself to two main topics, both of which relate to periods of major significance in the history of Byelorussian prosodic development. The first part of the book, 'Origins (16th — early 17th centuries)' (pp. 5-77), analyses the role of Simiaon Połacki in introducing syllabic verse to Byelorussia and Russia; the second part, 'Accentual Verse (19th — early 20th centuries)' (pp. 78-220), outlines the basis of accentual verse in the versification systems of the Slavonic languages as a whole, with particular reference to those of Byelorussia, Russia and the Ukraine.

The author's approach is a vigorous-polemical one, particularly in the first part of the book where much of the matter is still controversial. Here he demonstrates convincingly that Połacki's introduction of syllabic verse to the East Slavs was far from the mechanical process it is conventionally held to have been. Ralko discovers 'national' elements in Połacki's earliest verses and traces their roots, in part, to the Polish poet Kochanowski whose verse structures often appear to imitate popular models. The development of the Leonine verse and its importance in the history of Slavonic versification is also fully described with copious examples, as is the growth of the trochaic cadence in cultivated poetry, and the tendency towards trochaic rhythms within syllabic prosody. Here the author finds himself in general agreement with Tredjakovskij's assertion (supported by subsequent phonetic and physiological research) that the trochaic cadence is 'the most

natural' for Russian (and the other East Slavonic languages).

One of the most interesting sections of the book is that dealing with the influence of Byelorussian and Ukrainian on old Polish versification, although our comparative ignorance about many aspects of the latter renders much of Ralko's argument speculative rather than definitive. This section is also amongst the most polemical, particularly on the question of the origins of masculine rhymes in Polish poetry, where the author attempts, with partial success, to refute the hitherto generally accepted theories of Professor Kryżanowski.

The second part of the book offers a very scholarly comparative analysis of the basis and development of accentual verse amongst the Slavs, with particular reference to the role played by Ševčenko. But although the Ukrainian poet's influence on Janka Kupała is demonstrated very clearly, it is a pity that more attention is not paid to Kupała's Byelorussian predecessors, many of whom (Barščeŭski, Čačot, Dunin-Marcinkievič, for example) made extensive use of the *kalamyjk* verse form which was so important in the creation of accentual verse. The role of Bahuševič, too, is rather understated, although the author gives due weight to Bahdanovič and his 'vierš biełaruskaha składu'.

In general, this is an admirable little book, soundly based and with a wealth of examples. It presents a refreshingly broad and uninhibited view of a subject that has for too long languished in neglect, and may, thus, be recommended to all who take more than a superficial interest in the art of poetry.

Arnold B. McMillin

Bułyka, A. M. *Raźvićcio arfahrafičnaj sistemy starabiełaruskaj movy*, Minsk, 1970. 176 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography of sources.

One of the most difficult tasks in historical grammar is to present a simple and readable account of the evolution of the orthography. The earliest period in the literacy of a nation is usually one in which an existing system is taken over and gradually adapted to its new role.

Innovations and reforms, partly dictated by the writer's perception of the sounds of living speech, partly prompted, especially after the development of printing, by considerations of economy and rationalisation, meet with constant resistance and even reversal. Where the existing