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The History and Culture of Bulgaria in the 7th–12th Centuries: Between Two *East*s and Two *West*s



It is well-known that *East* and *West* are not just purely geographical concepts, when used in a cultural and historical context. In such a case they are laden to a greater extent with a cultural/civilizational meaning and encompass various mentalities, stereotypes of behaviour and traditions, as well as economical characteristics and conditions, etc. As a result, there will always be difficulties with the adjustment of criteria – in this specific case – based on geography and, subsequently, culture. Too many topics are intertwined here:

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those relating to topography and geography, the issues of *diffusion* and *reception*, those of the ‘challenge and response’, etc. But despite all these difficulties, researchers have never ceased to be interested in this type of positioning, implicitly containing within itself a hidden subtext, of *acceptance* and *opposition*, of *contact* and *conflict* (with regard to influences, ideas, even technologies, etc.). This is not the place for presenting extensive examples in this aspect, which is why, along with naming several Bulgarian authors that have dealt with both the issue of the *East* and the *West* during the so-called European Middle Ages¹ and with the positioning of the Bulgarians between the *East* and the *West*², I shall only note the names of two colleagues from the Czech Republic and Slovakia who have tried to position Great Moravia in a similar way, Vladimír Vavřínek and Martin Homza³.

When talking about medieval Bulgaria, the stereotype which we are accustomed to sounds approximately thus: Bulgaria is located between the *East* and the *West*, i.e. it is a ‘crossroads culture’, since it is situated at ‘crossroads’, but it is also a ‘contact zone’ between the *East* and the *West*. Regarding the latter, I have quoted Bulgarian historian, namely Khristo Matanov⁴.

¹ For instance see, П. Мутафчиев, *Изток и Запад в европейското средновековие*, [in:] *idem*, *Изток и Запад в европейското средновековие. Избрано*, ed. В. Мутафчиева, София 1993, pp. 125–158; Ив. Дујчев, *Influences orientales et occidentales dans les Balkans aux X^e–XII^e siècles*, *ByzS* 2, 1975, pp. 103–121; Ив. Божилов, *Изток и Запад в европейското Средновековие*, [in:] *Средновековна християнска Европа: Изток и Запад. Ценности, традиции, обичуване*, eds. В. Гюзелев, А. Милтенова, София 2002, pp. 307–312.

² А. Николов, *Между Рим и Константинопол. Из антикатолическата литература в България и славянския православен свят (XI–XVII в.)*, София 2016; Ив. Божилов, *История на средновековна България*, vol. I, *Варварска България*, Пловдив 2017, pp. 61–68.

³ V. Vavřínek, *Great Moravia between Byzantium and the Latin West*, [in:] *ΓΕΝΝΑΔΙΟΣ: К 70-летию академика Г.Г. Лутавина*, ed. Б.Н. Флоря, Москва 1999, pp. 39–55; М. Homza, *La Grande Moravia tra Oriente e Occidente*, [in:] *I Santi Cirillo e Metodio e la loro eredità religiosa e culturale ponte tra Oriente e Occidente. Raccolta di studi in occasione del 1150 anniversario della missione dei santi Cirillo e Metodio nella Grande Moravia (863–2013)*, eds. Е. Храбовец, Р. Пиатти, Р. Толмео, Città del Vaticano 2015, pp. 23–33; in that same direction, see also the title of a book published in Russia: *Византия между Западом и Востоком*, ed. Г.Г. Литаврин, Санкт-Петербург 1999.

⁴ See Хр. Матанов, *Средновековие и българска историческа съдба*, *Ист* 1, 1993, pp. 36–43, esp. p. 39, 41, and *idem*, *В търсене на средновековното време. Неравният път на българите (VII–XV в.)*, София 2014, esp. on the aspect of geopolitics – pp. 12–16, 90–91, 100, and on the contact zone – p. 12. Regarding Byzantium, e.g. *East*, also see П. Мутафчиев, *Книга за българите*, ed. В. Гюзелев, София 1987: the Romans have been for many decades seriously involved in wars with the Arabs and because of this fact the Bulgar(ian)s profited of this super powers’ clash thus managing to firmly establish their state in South-Eastern Europe.

As to the time period preceding the conversion to Christianity, in my opinion, at that time Bulgaria was not so much a 'contact zone' with regard to Byzantium⁵, but rather a 'zone of contacts', since Bulgarian culture was not of the same type as the Byzantine one, the latter being so noticeably marked by the *sea*, *Christianity* and *openness*. In contrast to it, the culture of the Bulgars is seen mostly as 'continental' and 'Scythian'. Moreover, the Bulgar cultural model of that time was of the 'closed' type, it was a separate 'entity', which had very little in common with Byzantine culture, with any similarities occurring after the initial decades of the 9th century. In addition, the Bulgar model, at least until the beginning of the 9th century, was of the 'closed' type; it was a separate 'universe' which had very little in common with the Byzantine model (of civilization); and last but not least, it was in opposition to that of Byzantium⁶. Therefore, there could hardly have been a contact zone, i.e. an actual *dialogue* on a cultural level (as per Yu. Lotman and L. Batkin), like that which was visible between the Byzantines and the Armenians during the 9th–10th centuries, and even later⁷.

If we were to look at Bulgaria's positioning in this way, we would have to assume *a priori* that this is a reference which is geopolitical by nature. This is how it is also explicitly called by Matanov, when speaking about 'geopolitical elements'⁸, or about a 'geopolitical situation'⁹. Also geopolitical in nature is the starting point of Gennadii G. Litavrin in his attempt to position Byzantium between the 7th and the 12th centuries in one of his studies¹⁰. But this would mean that we would be giving priority and a principal place and role to the geographic and political-military factors in its development. In addition, in a way we would be initially referencing the development of the cultural processes in Bulgaria from the 860s up to the 12th century mostly through the prism of the well-known division of the Church into an Eastern one (centred in Constantinople)

⁵ On the difference between 'contact zone' and 'zone of contacts', see В. А р у т ю н о в а - Ф и д а н я н, *К вопросу об основных характеристиках контактной зоны*, [in:] *Контактные зоны в истории Восточной Европы: Перекрестки политических и культурных взаимодействий*, ed. А. М. Н е к р а с о в, Москва 1995, pp. 42–61.

⁶ Ив. Б о ж и л о в, *Раждането на средновековна България (нова интерпретация)*, ИП 48.1/2, 1992, pp. 3–34; i d e m, *История...*; Цв. С т е п а н о в, *Власт и авторитет в ранносредновековна България (VII – ср. IX в.)*, София 1999, pp. 124–126, 129–132; i d e m, *Periphery as Universe*, Bsl 59.2, 1998, pp. 247–254.

⁷ Details, see in В. А р у т ю н о в а - Ф и д а н я н, *Византия и Армения в X–XII вв.: зона контакта*, [in:] *Византия между Западом и Востоком...*, pp. 380–408; I. A u g é, *Les Arméniens et l'Empire byzantin (1025–1118)*, ТМ 21.2, 2017, pp. 789–808.

⁸ Хр. М а т а н о в, *Средновековие...*, pp. 38–39.

⁹ I d e m, *В търсене на средновековното време...*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Г. Г. Л и т а в р и н, *Геополитическое положение Византии в средневековом мире в VII–XII вв.*, [in:] *Византия между Западом и Востоком...*, pp. 11–47.

and a Western one (centred in Rome). The latter, however, would not be valid for the period prior to 1054 and in some aspects it would not be entirely definitive for the political and cultural development even after this point in time. Thus, after choosing a period of several hundred years beginning with the 7th century, we may need to look for reference frameworks other than the above-mentioned, which are not that consistent with subsequent specifics and divisions. Of course, such a goal cannot be achieved in its entirety in a single conference article, which is why the presentation will be reduced to the analysis of several examples only, at the same time being somewhat schematic in nature.

And so, **my thesis** is as follows: there are two segments of the *East* and, respectively, the *West* in the cultural and historical development of Bulgaria during the Early Middle Ages, in which the various geographic and cultural dimensions overlap and sometimes blur. Subsequently, I feel that we could achieve a deeper immersion into that time period if the combination of geographical conditions and cultural phenomena, factors, etc. would enable us to also draw from other interpretational 'networks'.

The abovementioned 'crossroad-ness' has its variations between an 'opening' and a 'closing' towards the *Others* during specific periods in the development of Bulgaria and its culture¹¹. Usually, the opposition between the *opening* vs. *closing* is seen through the prism of: wars, diplomacy, cultural influences (mostly from Byzantium), economic aspects, etc. The period after 681 and until the Bulgarian conversion to Christianity in the 860s is considered as the most evident example of such a 'closing'¹². Examples of a sought – and found – balance between an *opening* and a *closing* are the years after the arrival of the disciples of St. St. Cyril and Methodius, as well as part of the 10th century, especially during Tsar Simeon's reign¹³; the Byzantine rule (between 1018 and 1186) illustrates well an absolute *opening*.

But this is so only if we regard the Bulgarian cultural and historical development solely from the viewpoint of the Byzantine referent. And what of the other referents? This refers, firstly, to the northern segment of the *West*: in chronological order, the relations with the Avars (7th–8th centuries) and some 'local power

¹¹ See Ив. Божилов, *Раждането...*, pp. 3–34; *idem*, *История...*, *passim*; Хр. Матанов, *Средновековие...*, p. 39; Цв. Степанов, *Власт и авторитет...*

¹² Ив. Божилов, *Раждането...*, pp. 3–34; *idem*, *Културата на средновековна България*, София 1996, pp. 45–46, 54; Цв. Степанов, *Власт и авторитет...*; *idem*, *Periphery...*, pp. 247–254; Хр. Матанов, *Средновековие...*, pp. 36–43. Cf. also the phrases used to denote this 'closing': 'own model of own past' and 'closed system' (Ivan Bozhilov), and separate 'universe' (Tsvetelin Stepanov), respectively.

¹³ Хр. Матанов, *Средновековие...*, p. 40.

centers' close to Avaria, as Panos Sphoulis calls them¹⁴, with the Franks (the 820s and 830s) and, respectively, the Eastern Franks (Germans) after 843 and until 892, and, finally, the Magyars (10th–11th centuries). Secondly, the southern segment of the same *West*, i.e. the Papacy (and at the same time, the southern parts of the Apennines, i.e. in Campania, Apulia and Calabria, experienced a strong Byzantine presence up till 1071 and the fall of Bari into the hands of the Normans¹⁵; such was also the case in Sicily, until its capture by the Arabs in 878. And, thirdly, the northern segment of the *East*, i.e. the steppe region north of the Black Sea, as well as the Crimean peninsula in particular, which was of special interest in the 8th–9th centuries not only in view of the division of power between the Khazars and the Byzantines in the region, but also with regard to the presence of a considerable number of Bulgars there.

For some authors, Byzantium – despite having some eastern elements – cannot be viewed as an *eastern type* of society in relation to the Bulgarians, since it was not such a society neither in a religious sense, nor as a state structure¹⁶.

At the same time, the Byzantine state is divided into an *East* (Gr. *Anatoli*) and a *West* (Gr. *Dysis*). In the words of Liliana Simeonova, this division existed since the times of the tetrarchy, wherein the Balkan Peninsula was part of the *West*¹⁷. It is, however, also evident that a considerable part of this *West* ended up in Bulgarian hands after the beginning of the 9th and during the following 10th century¹⁸. This means that it was modelled according to the visions of the Bulgarian rulers until 1018. It has yet to be explored in full to what extent the Byzantines re-modelled it in accordance to their own cultural visions and stereotypes in the years following 1018 and before the 1180s.

¹⁴ P. Sphoulis, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831*, Leiden–Boston 2012, pp. 117–128, esp. pp. 123–124.

¹⁵ For instance, see J.-M. Martin, *L'Italie Byzantine au XI^e siècle*, TM 21.2, 2017, pp. 733–748.

¹⁶ Хр. Матанов, *Средновековие...*, p. 41; also see the work of A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic. People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge, Mass.–London 2015, which stays away from the usual traditions of Byzantine historiography.

¹⁷ Л. Симеонова, *Крепостта Видинис/Бдин и „завръщането на Византия на Дунава”: реализация и крах на една имперска мечта*, SB 32, 2017, pp. 61–93, esp. p. 61.

¹⁸ From the recent research, see for instance В. Вачкова, *Понятието „Запад” в историческата аргументация на средновековна България*, SB 25, 2006, pp. 295–303; Тс. Степанов, *Imagining Byzantium from Dysis. Some 'Topoi' in Bulgarian Apocalyptic Literature, 11th–13th Centuries*, [in:] *Византия в собствените ѝ очи и в очите на Другите*, eds. В. Вачкова, А. Миланова, Цв. Степанов, София 2007, pp. 108–118; V. Vachkova, *Danube Bulgaria and Khazaria as Part of the Byzantine 'oikoumene'*, [in:] *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars and Cumans*, ed. F. Curta [with the assistance of R.K. Kovalev], Leiden–Boston 2008, pp. 339–362, esp. pp. 345–351.

In my opinion, the *East* – as an array of cultural phenomena and reflections – was clearly present in the Byzantine civilization during the period following the 7th century and up until 1204. This, of course, does not make Byzantium a typical eastern state. In connection with the above, according to Khristo Matanov, the Bulgarians viewed as *East* only the territory north of the Black Sea and north-east of the Danube Delta, i.e. the world of the nomadic and semi-nomadic societies. In Matanov's words, that was also the direction from which came the main attacks on Bulgaria at various moments in history: from the Khazars (sic?), the Magyars, the Pechenegs, the Uzes, the Cumans, and the Tatars¹⁹.

In view of all of the above, let me sum up some preliminary starting points:

- 1) there is no single *East* or single *West* with regard to the development of Bulgarian culture until the 12th century; each one of them has a minimum of two segments, which I have tentatively named here as a 'northern' and 'southern' one;
- 2) we should not be talking of a permanent overlapping of geography and cultural/social and similar phenomena, but instead view the *East* – in its two main segments – as actively present in the Bulgarian historical and cultural development and at times, even if it seems paradoxical at first glance – as invading from the western geographical direction [the example of Byzantium as the 'southern' segment of the *East*: through its influence from its territories in present-day Southern Italy; the example with the Avars and Magyars, associated with the 'northern' segment of the *East*, despite being ethnicities from Central Europe²⁰; therefore, geographically speaking they were again situated to the west of the Bulgar(ian)s, though their cultural and political traditions place them in the 'East'; cf. esp. the self-appellation of the Magyar kingdom as *Tourkia* during the 11th century (i.e. even after the conversion of the Hungarians), a name which – quite possibly – emerged with some Byzantine assistance after the 10th century];
- 3) The task of always pursuing non-alternative overlappings between *geography* and *culture* is a rather difficult undertaking, since the cultural content is much larger than the geographical one;
- 4) The southern segment of the *East*, i.e. the Byzantine state and its civilization, is not culturally homogeneous, since Byzantium was an empire and therefore had at least four main centres/cores: the Constantinopolitan (metropolitan) culture, the cultures of Asia Minor and the Middle East (of Syrians, Copts, Armenians, etc.), and the Southern Italian one; these centres/cores all had their own specific projections on the culture of Bulgaria, especially during the period after the 880s (in the stone plastics and the ornamentation of Glagolitic manuscripts, for example, which will be discussed below as a way to illustrate this case).

¹⁹ Хр. М а т а н о в, *Средновековие...*, pp. 41–42.

²⁰ As regards the Magyars, this became a reality only after AD 896.

I. Politico-military and diplomatic aspects to the topic

Viewed through this prism of the *realia* and from the viewpoint of foreign policy and diplomacy prior to the beginning of the 11th century²¹, the situation could be presented in a concise way thusly:

A/. Northern segment of the *West*:

1/. It began with the **Avars** in the 7th–8th centuries²²,

2/. after which came the **Franks** during the 820s and 830s (mainly relations with emperor Louis the Pious) and the **Eastern Franks**/Germans (during the first half of the 860s: between Khan/Prince Boris-Michael of Bulgaria and Ludwig the German, and from the 880s until 892 – between Boris-Michael and Arnulf and, respectively, Boris-Michael's son, Vladimir-Rasate and Arnulf)²³;

3/. and the **Magyars** followed (after 896 and later up until 1000/1, i.e. until the alliance between King Istvan I (St. Stephen) and the Byzantine basileus Basil II against the Bulgarian Tsar Samuel, and subsequently in the 11th–12th centuries)²⁴.

All these political formations were situated to the west of the Bulgarians, but only the Franks were originally 'western', both in terms of geography and with regard to their economy and culture! Regarding any potential influences on Bulgarian culture during the 7th–11th centuries, in view of the above 'cultural' references, fitting examples would be the belts and belt jewellery in Bulgaria, which, most

²¹ For the foreign policy and diplomacy, details see in П. Ангелов, *Българската средновековна дипломация*, София 1988.

²² More see in, S. Szádeczky-Kardoss, *Avarica. Über die Awarengeschichte und ihre Quellen*, Szeged 1986; W. Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n. Chr.*, München 1988; P. Städel, *Avar Chronology Revisited, and the Question of Ethnicity in the Avar Qaganate*, [in:] *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages...*, pp. 47–82; O. Heinrich-Tamaska, *Avar-Age Metalworking Technologies in the Carpathian Basin (Sixth to Eighth Century)*, [in:] *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages...*, pp. 237–262.

²³ V. Gjuselev, *Bulgarisch-fränkische Beziehungen in der ersten Hälfte des IX. Jhs*, BBG 2, 1966, pp. 15–39; idem, *Средновековна България и Западна Европа (IX–XI в.)*, [in:] *България 1300. Институции и държавна традиция*, vol. II, ed. Е. Буцашки, София 1982, pp. 271–284; А. Данчева-Василева, *Западноевропейската политика на средновековна България през IX–XI в.*, Стар 1, 1999, pp. 69–79; Б. Примов, *Византия, Франкската империя и България*, ИП 37.3/4, 1981, pp. 203–212; V. Ronin, *The Franks on the Balkans in the Early Ninth Century*, EB 21.1, 1985, pp. 39–57.

²⁴ Хр. Димитров, *Българо-унгарски отношения през Средновековието*, София 1998, pp. 44–92.

probably, followed to some extent the Avar fashion²⁵, as well as possible loans in the sphere of title practice from Avaria²⁶. And the Franks were merely present in the field of diplomacy. With regard to the Magyars, the borrowing of the so-called Magyar sword may be assumed, as part of a widespread version of military tactics²⁷, but in general, and especially following the research of Géza Fehér from the first half of the last century, it is clear that the influence was more likely exercised in the opposite direction – by the Bulgarians over the Hungarians.

B/. Southern segment of the *West*:

It is clear that this segment refers to the **Papacy**. The Holy See had a very strong presence at a ‘high’ culture level in Bulgaria between 866 and 870, and a sporadic one, in the form of exchanged correspondence and missions, up until 882²⁸. It is therefore evident that this influence was considerably limited. There are still too many uncertainties regarding the so-called Dalmatian influence over the southwestern territories of Bulgaria after the mid-9th century, as well as during the rule of Tsar Samuel (997–1014) and his descendants. This part of the Adriatic was within the spiritual and political reach of the Papacy and could be viewed as a special region from the so-called southern segment of the *West*. Perhaps the studies of church architecture in Bulgaria and the specifics of some Slavic (Old Bulgarian) manuscripts, in comparison with the same phenomena in this region, should be deepened and clarified in the future.

²⁵ See М. И н к о в а, *Аварски иновации в старобългарската култура?*, [in:] Проф. д.и.н. Станчо Ваклинов и средновековната българска култура, eds. К. Попконстантинов, Б. Борисов, Р. Костова, Велико Търново 2005, pp. 99–112; Ст. Станилов, *Художественият метал на българското ханство на Дунав (VII–IX век)*, София 2006; Р. Р а ш е в, *Българската езическа култура VII–IX век*, София 2008, pp. 158–159, 162–163, with the cited literature.

²⁶ В. Б е ш е в л и е в, *Първобългарите. Бит и култура*, София 1981, p. 43, 52; i d e m, *Първобългарски надписи. Второ преработено и допълнено издание*, София 1992, pp. 68–69, 71; also see Ж. В о й н и к о в, *Титли и имена в Първата българска държава. Сравнителен анализ*, Велико Търново 2018, pp. 216–224.

²⁷ V. I o t o v, *A Note of the “Hungarian Sabers” of Medieval Bulgaria*, [in:] *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages...*, pp. 327–338.

²⁸ Details, see in В. Г ю з е л е в, *Съчинения в 5 тома*, vol. III, *Папството и българите през Средновековието*, София 2013, pp. 99–149, 257–281; L. С и м е о н о в а, *Diplomacy of the Letter and the Cross: Photios, Bulgaria and the Papacy, 860’s – 880’s*, Amsterdam 1998; Х.-Д. Д ъ о п м а н, *Значението на България за разделянето на източното и западното християнство. Принос към историята на Фотиевата схизма*, transl. Р.П. Чолаков, София 2018.

An indirect influence could be sought regarding a later period, via the Crusades (between the First one and the Third one, i.e. between 1096 and 1189), but this question has not yet been sufficiently analysed. Besides, (1), Bulgaria was under foreign rule then and did not exist as an independent state, i.e. in such an analysis we would have to note the lack of a 'high' Bulgarian culture, and (2), we would have to take into account the difficulties in any real communication between the Western knights and the Bulgarian population, in view of the language barrier.

With regard to this segment, several Bulgarian enclaves in present-day Italy (Altsek's/Alzeko's Bulgars, among others) would also have a special place, but they are of no interest to me here, since these Bulgars did not create a state.

C/. Northern segment of the *East*:

1/. The **Khazars** – very problematic in terms of culture and from the viewpoint of visible influences in the culture of Danube Bulgaria prior to the 960s, when Khazaria succumbed to the attacks of Prince Sviatoslav's Kievan Rus'. Traditionally, comparisons with the so-called Saltovo-Mayaki archeological culture²⁹ are made in this connection, but it is common for the culture of the Khazar Empire, while the Bulgar(ian)s and Alans in the khaganate were in fact founding ethnicities there, standing alongside the Khazars in the narrow sense of the word. In this instance, the unity of the culture and the everyday life is a long-proven fact³⁰ and it is therefore quite difficult to assess whether there were any significant direct influences on the population of Danube Bulgaria, or whether it is a question of a community in the culture of the same population in both states. Rasho Rashev, for instance, especially emphasizes the lack of influence from the belt from Khazaria on the specimens found in Danube Bulgaria³¹;

2/. The **Magyars** from the 830s to the end of the 9th century, when they were still north of the Black Sea and especially along the lower reaches of the rivers

²⁹ For different aspects there, see Св. Плетнева, *От кочевий к городам. Салтово-Маяцкая культура*, Москва 1967; eadem, *Очерки хазарской археологии*, Москва–Иерусалим 2000; И. Баранов, *Таврика в эпоху раннего средневековья*, Киев 1990; Р. Рашев, *Българската езическа култура...*; В. Михеев, *Подонье в составе Хазарского каганата*, Харьков 1985; В. Флеров, „Города” и „замки” Хазарского каганата. *Археологическая реальность*, Москва–Иерусалим 2011; В. Флерова, *Образы и сюжеты мифологии Хазарии*, Москва–Иерусалим 2001; В. Zhivkov, *Khazaria in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, Leiden–Boston 2015.

³⁰ Св. Плетнева, *Очерки...*, p. 4, 207.

³¹ Р. Рашев, *Българската езическа култура...*, p. 162, and on the belts, see esp. pp. 156–163.

Dnieper, Dniester and Southern Bug and were under the auspices of the Khazar Khaganate³². As with the *case* of the Avars, here, too, the archeologists have the prevailing say, as their discoveries could fill the lack of direct data from the written sources. However, it is important to take into account the geographical proximity of the Magyars in this particular region not only to the so-called Black Bulgaria, but also to the Crimean possessions of Byzantium and, accordingly, of Khazaria and hence – the possible influences on the culture of the Magyar tribes by these two imperial structures;

3/. The so-called **late nomads** (the Pechenegs, Uzes and the Cumans) – between the 10th and the 12th centuries. It is questionable whether the first two powers gave anything to the Bulgarians in a cultural sense, while the late nomads really did contribute, though it is still difficult to distinguish their specific components in Bulgarian culture during the 11th–12th centuries and the following ones, since these nomads were assimilated in Bulgaria during the 11th–12th–13th centuries³³.

D/. Southern segment of the *East*:

1/. **Byzantium**, being a multiethnic empire, was not homogenic in terms of its culture, and its lands housed ethnicities with a very ancient culture and former statehood (Copts, Syrians, Armenians, etc.). Particularly interesting for us are the Syrian Monophysites and Armenians that were displaced by the basileus Constantine V (mid-8th century) and his son Leo IV (the very end of 770s) to Eastern Thrace. However, a large number of them became part of the Bulgarian territories after 815. It would be logical to wonder how this population influenced the cultural development of the Bulgar(ian)s who settled in Eastern Thrace at the end of the 9th and especially during the 10th century³⁴. It is evident

³² Details, see in Хр. Димитров, *Българо-унгарски отношения...*, pp. 21–43; V. Iotov, *A Note...*, pp. 327–338.

³³ For details, see for instance В. Стоянов, *Куманите в българската история (XI–XIV век)*, ИП 61.5/6, 2005, pp. 3–25; idem, *Куманология. Опит за реконструкция*, София 2006; Пл. Павлов, *Куманите в обществено-политическия живот на средновековна България (1186 – началото на XIV век)*, ИП 46.7, 1990, pp. 16–26.

³⁴ More, see in Р. Рашев, *Поселищният живот в Северна Тракия през ранното Средновековие*, [in:] *Североизточна Тракия и Византия през IV–XIV век*, ed. Д. Овчаров, София–Сливен 1993, pp. 101–116; Д. Момчилов, *Опит за демографска характеристика на Североизточна Тракия VII–X век*, [in:] *Проф. д.и.н. Станчо Ваклинов...*, pp. 305–309; idem, *Култура и политика на Първото българско царство в североизточна Тракия*, Варна 2007; idem, *Приемственост и противопоставяне в Северна Тракия до IX век (Археологически наблюдения и бележки върху религиозното, политическото и културното развитие)*, [in:]

that the Byzantine state's influence in the field of culture and political ideology was especially strong during the rule of Tsar Simeon (893–927) and his son Tsar Peter (927–969), described as the 'golden age' in the development of early medieval Bulgaria, and that the *East* dominated the cultural processes and most of the phenomena in the spiritual life of the Bulgarians during the decades after the end of the 9th century;

2/. The heritage of **Sassanid Iran** and the Iranian world in general, which was present as a 'player' in some Bulgar(ian) cultural processes during the earliest Middle Ages (including through a Caucasian mediation, 7th–8th centuries), its influence gradually waning with time and especially after the Arab conquest of Iran in the mid-7th century. Some aspects in this regard have already been studied by Oksana Minaeva³⁵, but a number of details and mechanisms which have contributed to the manifestations of this influence have yet to be specified.

II. The same topic from the prism of imagination-and-imaginings

This can be seen, for example, in Bulgarian historical apocalypticism from the 11th–12th centuries³⁶. It is of utter importance to view the dimensions of these geographical and cultural references in this imaginative direction in particular

Средновековният човек и неговият свят. Сборник в чест на 70-та годишнина на проф. д.и.н. Казимир Попконстантинов, ed. Р. Костова, Велико Търново 2014, pp. 141–148.

³⁵ See O. Minaeva, *From Paganism to Christianity: Formation of Medieval Bulgarian Art (681–972)*, Frankfurt am Main et al. 1996, with the older literature on the topic cited there; eadem, *Ранносредновековното българско изкуство и пътят на коприната: бележки към проблематиката и изследванията в българската наука*, МИФ 15, 2010, pp. 106–132.

³⁶ More see in, В. Търкова-Займова, А. Милтенова, *Историко-апокалиптичната книжнина във Византия и в средновековна България*, София 1996; В. Търкова-Займова, А. Милтенова, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria*, Sofia 2011; Цв. Степанов, *В очакване на Края: европейски измерения ок. 950–ок. 1200*, София 2016; I. Biliarsky, *The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah. The Destiny and Meaning of an Apocryphal Text*, Leiden–Boston 2013; Н. Шиваров, *Есхатологични представи в старобългарски писмени творения в края на първото хилядолетие. Характеристика и задачи в изследванията*, [in:] *Средновековна християнска Европа...*, pp. 291–304; idem, *За някои пророчески и апокалиптически есхатологични влияния в старобългарската литература*, [in:] *Сборник в чест на проф. д-р Георги Данчев по случай 70-годишнината му. Международна научна конференция, Велико Търново, 13–14 декември 2002 г.*, ed. Д. Кенанов, Велико Търново 2004, pp. 564–576; idem, *Есхатологични акутни виждания и активности*

and to compare them with the above *realia*. In this type of works (which in their essence are ‘Visions’ in the names of the prophets Isaiah and Daniel), the Bulgarians are positioned as a God-chosen people between the *East* (Byzantium) and the *West* (Rome and the Papacy), which is especially visible in the story in the so-called *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* about the times of the St. Tsar Peter of Bulgaria (927–969)³⁷. At the same time, the real Western (Holy Roman) Empire of the Ottonians is not present in these literary works! The texts, however, reveal a distinct manipulation of the (heritage) of the ‘northern’ segment of the *East* – the so-called Steppe Empire (the texts of this kind often mention ‘Michael Khagan’!), where the Bulgar(ian)s originated from. Thus, the image of this ‘Michael Khagan’ reveals a composite figure made up of the Baptizer of the Bulgarians, Boris-Michael (852–889; † 907), St. Michael the Archangel, some Byzantine basilei with the same name, but also the ‘steppe tsar’³⁸. In other words, in these works written by unknown Bulgarian monks we can see a reactivation of the ‘northern’ segment of the *East*. The aim, obviously, was to preserve the memory of the Tsardom of the Bulgarians and their positioning at the ‘centre of the world’.

III. Some case studies with multi-geographical dimensions that deal with cultural phenomena, i.e. cases that are not easily-defined

These and other similar *cases* (essentially phenomena) of the Bulgarian medieval culture do not fall into the so-called easily identifiable relations with the *East* or the *West*. The difficulty of naming them *Eastern* and / or *Western* is obvious. I shall discuss the first one of them at greater length, and simply mention an additional two.

на Запад и на Балканите през XI–XII в., ГСУ.НЦСВПИД 98 (17), 2013, pp. 121–136; Ts. Stepanov, *Waiting for the End of the World: European Dimensions, 950–1200*, Leiden–Boston 2020.

³⁷ В. Тъпкова-Займова, А. Милтенова, *Историко-апокалиптичната книжнина...*, pp. 192–206; I. Biliarsky, *The Tale...*, passim.

³⁸ Цв. Степанов, *България между 822 г. и края на XI в.: „разбуждането” на един традиционен образ*, [in:] *Mediaevalia Christiana: Власт – Образ – Въобразяване*, eds. Г. Казакон, Цв. Степанов, София 2005, pp. 182–199; idem, *From ‘Steppe’ to Christian Empire, and Back: Bulgaria between 800 and 1100*, [in:] *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages...*, pp. 363–377.

I. Illuminated Glagolitic manuscripts (10th–11th centuries) and their ornamentation:

The ornamentation reveals them as asynchronous to the development seen in the scriptoria of Byzantium's capital. The Bulgarian ones show a distinct affinity towards conservatism and traditionalism, something which was inherent to Byzantine art from the iconoclastic period. In the Glagolitic manuscripts the ornamentation is eclectic, with a strong graphic basis, and allows for the reconstruction of techniques and methods that were typical for manuscripts from the eastern Byzantine provinces (that further developed Coptic, Syrian and other codex traditions), in addition to those from Byzantine regions in present-day Southern Italy. At the same time, they have long been found to have similarities with certain codices from the Latin-speaking world. Thus, the question is: what came from the East and what – from the West? Or, is it more likely that this (codex) phenomenon initially enabled a strong influence from the southern segment of the *East* in its Syrian-Palestinian and Coptic dimensions, which in turn also reflected on Byzantine southern Italy, and from there – on the Latin West. Nevertheless, let us not forget that in the Middle Ages, books 'travelled' over extremely long distances. Thus, according to Axinia Dzhurova, the ornamentation of Glagolitic Bulgarian codices (in addition to an isolated number of early Cyrillic ones) cannot be studied adequately without connecting it to the development of the illumination in both Byzantium and in Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque art in Western Europe³⁹.

II. Stone plastics from the late 9th–10th centuries in the metropolitan centres Pliska and Preslav:

Should we seek the influence of Constantinople here, of the Western European *South*, the Middle East, Asia Minor and especially Armenia, or all of these centers simultaneously?⁴⁰ Or maybe Albena Milanova is quite close to the

³⁹ Details together with the older literature on the topic, see in А. Джурова, *Въведение в славянската кодикология. Византийският кодекс и рецепцията му сред славяните*, София 1997, p. 161, 166, 168–169, 171–172, 192; eadem, *1100 години българска ръкописна книга. Фрагмент и миниатюра*, София 1981, p. 17, 18, 19, 20–21, 28; also see В. Иванова-Мавродинова, *Украсата на старобългарските глаголически ръкописи*, Изк 15.7, 1965, p. 10–16, and eadem, *За украсата на ръкописите от Преславската книжовна школа*, Пр.Сб 1, 1968, pp. 80–124.

⁴⁰ From the research from the recent years, see М. Ваклинова, *Велики Преслав – някои пластични идеи в украсата на сградите му*, ПБА 2, 1993, pp. 40–51; eadem, *Материали и производство на преславската каменна пластика*, Пр.Сб 5, 1993, pp. 68–100; eadem, *Някои особености на скулптурно-декоративната практика във Велики Преслав през IX–X век*, [in:] *Древнерусское искусство. Балканы. Русь*, eds. А.И. Комеч, О.Е. Етингов, Санкт-Петербург 1995, pp. 142–162; Ал. Миланова, *Каменната пластика в средновековна България между Византия и Западна Европа*, СВ 32, 2017, pp. 203–226, esp. pp. 206–214; eadem, *Българско средновековие в образи*, vol. I, *Зооморфна каменна пластика от VIII до XIV век*, София 2017, pp. 38–52.

truth when she states that, despite the formal parallels between the Preslav sculptures and both the *East* (Asia Minor and the Caucasus) and the *West* (Dalmatia, France and Italy), the Preslav masters actually *worked in the best Byzantine traditions without always directly copying prestigious designs*⁴¹.

III. Palatial architecture in Bulgaria in the time prior to the construction of the Preslav palaces:

It is clear that the *West* neither has a visible influence here, nor a direct participation in the erection of the palaces in Pliska and in the smaller *aulae*. But then which segment of the *East* is present in this *case*? The Crimea and the Northern Black Sea region or Constantinople, i.e. the Byzantine building practices and especially those stemming from the Late Antiquity and characterized by the widespread use at the time of ashlar construction? Or, maybe, the Armeno-Caucasian traditions; or those of the Arabic caliphs, which further developed some of the older Roman/Byzantine building and planning concepts between the 630s and the 750s?⁴²

Lastly, at this point our **main conclusion** is this: until 1018, and even until the 12th century, the two segments of the *West* had only a sporadic role in the shaping of the Bulgar(ian) cultural 'destiny'. The main role, in fact, belonged to the two segments of the *East*, with the 'southern' one of them (i.e. Byzantium in its entirety) pushing out many specifics of the 'northern' one (i.e. steppe Eurasia) after 1018, especially in the so-called high culture. Despite this, at the level of administration and title practices, until the fall of Bulgaria under Byzantine rule in 1018, a number of elements were preserved from the so-called Steppe Empire, i.e. from the northern segment of the *East*. The problem lies in the 'low' Bulgarian culture during the 11th–12th centuries and the extent to which the 'northern' segment of the *East*, i.e. the late nomads, have changed some characteristics of the everyday life of the Bulgarians.



⁴¹ Ал. Миланова, *Каменната пластика...*, р. 213.

⁴² For different opinions, see Ст. Ваклинов, *Формиране на старобългарската култура VI–XI век*, София 1977; М. Ваклинова, *Дворците на средновековна България*, [in:] *България 1300...*, pp. 255–263; Ст. Бояджиев, *Архитектурата на българите от VII до XIV век (в три тома)*, vol. I, *Дохристиянска архитектура*, София 2008; Р. Рашев, *Тронната палата в Плиска*, ППРе 8, 2000, pp. 35–43; *idem*, *Българската езическа култура...*; Г. Атанасов, *Тервел, хан на българите и кесар на Византия*, Силистра 2004; Т. Чобанов, *Свещените дворци на българските канове*, София 2008.