

Ts. Stepanov

STATE-FORMATION IN DANUBIAN BULGARIA, AD 681–865: RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS*

The aim of this article is to look at the historiography and methods of study of the religion(s) in pagan Danubian Bulgaria, i. e. the main hypotheses existing in nowadays Bulgarian scholarship, namely Tengrism, Zoroastrianism, and Mithraism. Is it possible to claim that all these three religions co-existed in Danubian Bulgaria prior to AD 865 and played a vital role in the formation of the Bulgar state and its political ideology? Or, if existing written and archeological evidence are taken into account, it would be more correct to consider that there was only one pagan religion in the Bulgar lands before AD 865?

What is the historiographical situation up to this moment? Using one and the same sources but viewing and interpreting them through different «glasses» and methods scholars claim different «truths» and make different conclusions. Therefore the question, why it happens like that, is absolutely reasonable. Given that situation with evidence available, one may ask is it more correct to search for a differentiation-and-separation of religiosity amongst the different strata in the Bulgar society. If so, scholars could expect — using for instance the theoretical model of George Dumézil and his followers — that amongst the different strata of the Bulgar society there were different cults, too¹. Yet another question is that of the Christian faith on Bulgar territory until AD 865; I shall also pay attention to it at the end of this article. At the moment, there is one thing that can be stated for sure: the religion of Danubian heathen Bulgaria was not a

* This article is based largely on two papers, the first one presented at the Conference dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Prof. Dr. Sc. Nikolai Genchev (at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, November 2011) and the second one — in the American Research Center in Sofia (March 2012).

¹ For the Christianity in heathen Danubian Bulgaria see the last part of this article. For details concerning historiography, see: *Степанов Ц.* Болгары и христианство до 864 года: Историкографический ракурс (1989–2009) // *Славяноведение*. 2010. № 4. С. 3–10.

monotheistic one, although some scholars are claiming this, or, to say it more carefully, are ready to insist that the Bulgar religion was a «primitive» (*sic!*) monotheism. In my opinion, the Bulgar pagan religion can be viewed as a supremotheistic (or, henotheistic) one.

I. Tengrism

This (hypo)thesis has many followers in Bulgaria, for instance Vesselin Beshevliev, Stancho Vaklinov, Zhivko Aladzhev, Rasho Rashev, Dimitar Ovcharov, Anani Stoynev², to mention but a few, who are following the ideas of some eminent ex-Soviet scholars such as Sergey Klyashtornyj, Leonid Potapov and others³ as well as the fundamental book on the Turkic religion of the famous French scholar Jean Paul-Roux⁴. The weakness of this claim, as to the Bulgars, is well-known everybody: it is based on a single source, namely a seriously damaged stone inscription from Madara ritual complex in Bulgaria dating back to the time of *khanasybigi* Omurtag (814–831). On a part of this inscription the late professor V. Beshevliev deciphered the name «Taggra» and it was linked to the well-known Turkic Sky deity — «Tengri»/«Tängri». The latter, under the form «Tengri-khan», is known from Movses Daskhuranc’i / Movses Kalankatuac’i, an author from 10th century who wrote about the Caucasian Albania and on the mission of the bishop Israel amongst the «Caucasian Huns» living in the eastern parts of the Caucasian Mountains, in particular. This mission, according to many scholars, happened to be in AD 682. Movses Daskhuranc’i pointed out that the population there believed in a huge and dreadful deity in the form of a horse-rider called «Tangri-khan whom the Persians called Aspandiat» and made him horse sacrifices; also, this deity had «*kapishta* and temples». Along with this god, that same Caucasian Huns at that time being under the supreme rule of the Khazar khagan, believed also in another gods: in «some deity of the roads», in the Sky thunder, in a female deity who was named by Daskhuranc’i ‘Aphrodita’, and in a god called Kuar. In Daskhuranc’i’s words, they also believed in Moon and Sun, and made sacrifices to water and fire⁵. Thus it becomes clear that these were people who were performing rites characteristic to a supremotheistic religion in which one could easily find out signs typical for the ancient Indo-Iranian beliefs as well as Altaic ones, the latter put over the former. But who were all those people in the eastern parts of the Caucasian Mountains who were object of a missionary interest in the 680s? Some scholars claim,

² *Бешевлиев В.* Първобългарите: Бит и култура. София, 1981; *Ваклинов С.* Формиране на старобългарската култура VI–XI век. София, 1977; *Аладжов Ж.* 1) За един тип изображения на Тангра // Музеи и паметници на културата. 1983. Т. I. С. 22–24; 2) За култа към Тангра в средновековна България // Археология. 1983. № 1–2. С. 76–85; *Рашев Р.* Българската езическа култура VII–IX век. София, 2008; *Овчаров Д.* Прабългарската религия. Произход и същност. София, 1997; *Стойнев А.* Светогледът на прабългарите. София, 1985.

³ *Кляшторный С.* Праболгарский Тангра и древнетюркский пантеон // Сборник в памет на проф. Станчо Ваклинов. София, 1984. С. 18–22; *Кляшторный С., Султанов Т.* Государства и народы евразийских степей. Древность и средневековье. СПб., 2000; *Потопов Л.* Алтайский шаманизм. Л., 1991; *Басилов В.* Избранники духов. М., 1984.

⁴ *Roux J.-P.* La religion des Turcs et des Mongols. Paris, 1984.

⁵ *Каланкатуаци М.* История страны Алуанк. Ереван, 1984. С. 124–131.

and this without serious doubt, that the main part of them were the so-called Sabirs/Savirs people who, according to the written sources from the Eastern Roman Empire, became famous in the course of the 6th century with (indeed the typical for the semi-nomads) trimming between the two ‘great powers’ of that time, namely Sassanian Iran and Byzantium. But whether Bulgars and Sabirs had shared common ancestors is still a question under debate! Moreover, the Sabirs were living in lands which before them, at least from the 2nd century AD on, were populated by different Indo-European peoples and some small autochthonous *ethnoi* speaking Caucasian languages as well. So all the deities mentioned by Movses Daskhuranc’i and their different names are in fact a proof of this ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the peoples living in this part of the Caucasus. No doubt, some of them were speaking Iranian dialects, while others — Altaic ones.

For the existence of such a hypothesis there are many reasons and proofs and most important among them is the fact that the Persians called «Tengri-khan» with the unambiguous Iranian name «Aspandiat», i. e. «the horse-rider» (from Iranian «aspa», «horse»). This adding of «Aspandiat» made by Daskhuranc’i, in my opinion, clarifies the situation quite enough: in the regions of the old Caucasian Albania, long before the 7th century, there was a contamination of different beliefs and different people, namely of Caucasian, Iranian, and Altaic origin. Thinking exactly in this direction one may compare the belief in Hormusta/Hormuste in Central Asia among different Altaic peoples — in fact, Hormusta is a version of the well-known Iranian god Ahura Mazda in its later linguistic form Ormuzd/Ormazd, but this obvious relationship is also connected to the steppe deity called Tengri, with its typical Central Asian characteristics. Amongst the above mentioned Caucasian Huns Daskhuranc’i noted the cult of the deity Kuar, i. e. epiphany of Sun and the ‘white light’ (the lightning — as a sign of Kuar — is mentioned explicitly by Daskhuranc’i), which can be linked with the Iranian «xvar», «Sun» (after W. Henning) and some other names that are in the same semantic field, namely Old Iranian «hvarenah»/«hvarnah», or Ossetian «farn» — have meanings such as «light», «good luck», «happiness» and «good chance/destiny»⁶.

At the same time, apart from Tengri-khan, there are not any other data in the sources which might be linked with possible Turkic deities in pre-Christian Bulgaria. It should be underlined that the other two main deities in the so-called 3-vertical archaic model in the Turkic khaganates, namely the female goddess Umaj and the god Erklig, so far are not attested in Danubian Bulgaria. Umaj is well-known amongst the early Turks since, according to the stone inscriptions dating back to the time of the two Turkic khaganates, it always goes ‘hand in hand’ with the Sky god Tengri. Umaj was not only a goddess of birth but of the sacred, heavenly mountain too, which was called by the Turks «Otügen» and viewed as their core territory. Umaj was also regarded as the heavenly archetype of the wife of the Turkic khagan called «qatun» and almost everywhere in the stone

⁶ More see in: *Stepanov Ts. The Bulgar Title ΚΑΝΑΣΥΒΙΓΓΙ: Reconstructing the Notions of Divine Kingship in Bulgaria, AD 822–836 // Early Medieval Europe. 2001. Vol. 10. Nr. 1. P. 1–19* (presented there are the opinions of scholars such as Omeljan Pritsak, Peter Golden, etc.).

inscriptions found in Inner Mongolia and dating back to the Second Turkic khaganate the «qatun» is mentioned together with the «khagan» as the earthly incarnations of the male and female heavenly Gods. So far, no stone inscription from Bulgaria shows such a connection, neither mentions the name Umaj or that of Erklig!⁷ This «gap», seems, can not be filled in by the Bulgarian folklore too, where no one has yet found data about the existence of the Turkic female deity Umaj⁸. Of course, this does not mean that the Bulgars did not have a supreme female God, something like an «heir» of the Great Mother goddess of the Neolithic age (and, possibly, a home hearth's master). Still, her name as well as that of the god of the under-earth Erklig is not known to us. Could it be that the name of the supreme female deity in heathen Bulgaria was close to the Middle Asian goddess Nana(j) (cf. the noun «nenki», «nursing breasts», in some contemporary Bulgarian dialects; cf. also «Anna», «Annaš», «mother», in some Semitic languages)? Nana(j) was the supreme female goddess in some parts of a vast area in Eurasia known after the 2nd millennium B. C. as Iranian-speaking area of Turan, in today Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in particular. Or, maybe, it had a name close to the Alanian female goddess of the home hearth who, after the conversion to Christianity in Alania in the first half of the 10th century, was called *Mady* Mairam, i. e. Mother Maria? Or, maybe, her name originated from the Iranian female goddess «Ardivisura Anahita» known not only from Iran but also from that same ancient Turan?⁹ For many centuries, this region was very important one for the so-called steppe empires, with its religious and trade traditions as well as ethno-political models¹⁰. Starting from the Early Middle Ages, it was exactly in this region where these traditions would face further development thus reaching later a real symbiosis between *Iranian/Turanian* and *Turkic* on the level of

⁷ More see in: *Степанов Ц.* Древната българска религия: подходи и проблеми // Християнство, ислям и източни религии: Нормативен текст и социокултурен контекст. Съставител и научен редактор С. Евстатиив. София, 2011. С. 255–268.

⁸ This thesis is taken as truthful by: *Овчаров Д.* Прабългарската религия. Произход и същност. София, 1997. Also see: *Овчаров Н.* 1) Съществувала ли е богинята Умай в прабългарския пантеон? // Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура. София, 1989. С. 430–439; 2) Съществувала ли е тюркската богиня Умай в прабългарския пантеон? // Мадара. Шумен, 1992. Т. 3. С. 159–168. For another hypothesis, namely Turanian roots of the female Bulgar goddess, see: *Живков Б.* 1) Свещената царска власт и култът към Великата Богиня в Хазария // Минало. 2009. № 3. С. 21–31; 2) Хазария през IX и X век. София, 2010. С. 124–154.

⁹ On the links of Ardivisura Anahita with Turan, i. e. Middle Asia, and the area between the rivers Amu Daria and Syr Daria and around the Aral Sea in particular, see: *Снесарев Г.* Хорезмские легенды как источник по истории религиозных культов Средней Азии. М., 1983. С. 80–100, 159–168. For the region also see: *Толстов С.* 1) По следам древнехорезмийской цивилизации. М.; Л., 1948; 2) По древним дельтам Окса и Яксарта. М., 1962; *Кузьмина Е.* 1) Древнейшие скотоводы от Урала до Тянь-шаня. Фрунзе, 1986; 2) Откуда пришли индоарии? Материальная культура племен андроновской общности и происхождение индоиранцев. М., 1994; *Вайнберг Б.* Этногеография Турана в древности. VII в. до н. э. – VIII в. н. э. М., 1999.

¹⁰ See more details in: *de la Vaissière, E.* Histoire des marchands Sogdiens. Paris, 2002.

language, economy, and ideology¹¹. At the moment, as regards the name of the supreme Bulgar female deity, all the questions posed above are indeed a mere speculation.

Given that situation with the «Tengrist» sources, is it possible to use the information about a rite so typical for Steppe Eurasia, namely the dogs' sacrifices; could such evidence fill in the «gaps» thus helping scholars to reconstruct the Bulgar religion as a Turkic one¹². This topic has been for a long time a main issue of the research in Bulgar religion, so here I do not intend to go in depth into it. But it should be noticed that dogs' sacrifices were well-attested practice in Steppe Eurasia and what is more, it was not typical for the Turkic world only but for the Indo-Iranians, too¹³. A well-known *passage* from Theophanes the Continuator concerning the Bulgars and Byzantines, and the treaty signed by Omurtag and the basileus Leo V in AD 815 in particular, reads¹⁴: the peace treaty between the Romans and Bulgars had to be sealed «by oaths», but Leo V did not make the typical for a Christian invoking the Heavenly forces and the Holy Mother, but «as if being a barbarian alien to God's truth, he even cut off dogs, whom the lawless peoples are making sacrifices, and thus he used them as witnesses of what has been done».

Here also are the words of deacon Ignatius, a contemporary of the events of AD 815¹⁵: Leo V, says the deacon, «used their rites and they used ours», i. e., «with his [Leo's] own hands» he poured on the earth «water from a cup», turn round (or upturn?) «with his own hands horse saddles», and touched «to a triple bridle», and raised «grass» over his head towards Sky, while the Bulgars touched the Christian symbols and swear in their power.

What can we reconstruct from these sources on *structural* level, through the prism of the *cosmogram*? Obviously, there are enough signs of esteem to *water* (i. e., to the under-world), to the *horse*, *saddle* and *bridle* (i. e., to the middle-world/earth), and to the *grass* elevated towards the Sky (i. e., to the upper world), and all this was manifested through pouring water, through rituals where saddles and bridle were used both being parts of the horse equipment (that is, on the principle '*pars pro toto*') as well as grass elevated toward the Sky. But were all those practices and rituals typical for the Turks only? Let me remind here what the Iranian-speaking Scythians living north of the Black Sea had

¹¹ For more details see: Кляшторный С., Султанов Т. Государства и народы евразийских степей. Древность и средневековье. СПб., 2000; Sinor D. (ed.). The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia. Cambridge et al., 1990; Golden P. An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples. Wiesbaden, 1992; Stepanov Ts. The Bulgars and the Steppe Empire in the Early Middle Ages: The Problem of the «Others». Leiden; Boston, 2010.

¹² See: Дякон Игнатий. Житие на св. патриарх Никифор // Гръцки извори за българската история. Т. 4. София, 1961. С. 36–37, as well as data in the so-called Theophanes Continuatus (see here n. 14).

¹³ Details see in: Sinor D. Taking an oath over a dog cut in two // Sinor D. Studies in Medieval Inner Asia. Aldershot, UK, and Brookfield, 1997 [Variorum. Vol. XVII].

¹⁴ Theophanes Continuatus. Chronographia // Гръцки извори за българската история. Т. 5. София, 1964. С. 113.

¹⁵ Гръцки извори за българската история. Т. 4. София, 1961. С. 36–37.

sent to the Achaemenid ruler Darius when he was preparing himself for intruding into their lands. According to Herodotus (IV, 127), they sent a *frog*, i. e. sign of water/underworld, a *mouse*, i. e. sign of earth/middle world, and a *bird*, i. e. sign of the Sky/upper world. Is it possible then to reveal similar symbolism in the Bulgar rituals mentioned above? Pouring water from a cup is also mentioned in connection to another Bulgar ruler, the father of Omurtag, Krum (802–814), during the Bulgar siege of Constantinople headed by that same Krum: the Bulgar ruler, it is said in the so-called *Scriptor Incertus*, after making sacrifices outside the Golden Gate, put his legs into the sea, and after that sprinkled his soldiers with water and «run out water to the sea»¹⁶. A connection to the similar running out water from a golden cup made by the Achaemenid ruler Xerxes has long been made by some scholars. The Iranian king did it just before the sunrise when the Persians were ready to move into Europe through the Hellespontos (Herodotus, *History* VII, 54). But it should be noticed that not only the Persians but the Central Asian Xsiung-nu and the Turks celebrated water, too. Therefore this act of Krum can not be viewed through a single prism, i. e. as typical for the Iranian or Altaic world only. The same could also be said about the well-known cult of predecessors which was typical for the pre-modern societies in Eurasia, including the Bulgars. Almost everywhere such kinds of cults were practiced in caves, regardless of the languages spoken by the local elites that performed the rites.

II. Zoroastrianism

In the recent five to six years it is Todor Chobanov who is the main exponent of this in fact old thesis¹⁷, since it has been put forward by some Bulgarian scholars in the 1920s/30s, namely Andrei Protich, Bogdan Filov, and Nikola Mavrodinov, and after them — in the 1960s — by the late Stancho Vaklinov. All of them using mostly data from the art history and archaeology, highlighted the Iranian, *stricto sensu* Sassanian, influence in some Bulgar stone buildings and their plans (mainly the heathen fire temples and palaces built by big stone *quadrae*) as well as artistic evidence¹⁸. This sphere of historical knowledge definitely needs wider research so as to move forward our knowledge of the Bulgar religion(s) in that exact direction. Moreover, whoever starts working in this direction, should be well aware with the books and articles written by Ernst Herzfeld, Roman Ghirshman, Andre Godard,

¹⁶ *Scriptor incertus* // Гръцки извори за българската история. Т. IV. София, 1961. С. 20.

¹⁷ Чобанов Т. 1) Наследството на Сасанидска Персия у българите на Долния Дунав. София, 2006; 2) Свещените дворци на българските канове. София, 2008; 3) Изследвания върху културата на старите българи. София. 2010. С. 115–126 (on the dog); 127–140 (on the Bulgar sites with a form of a circle); 141–162 (on the so-called sharaptash).

¹⁸ Протич А. Сасанидската художествена традиция у прабългарите // Известия на Българския Археологически институт. 1926–27. Т. IV. С. 211–235; Миятев К. Българското изкуство през IX и X век // България 1000 години 927–1927. Т. I. София, 1930. С. 145 f.; Ваклинов Ст. Изтокът в старобългарското изкуство от VII до XI в. // Трудове на Висшия Педагогически Институт «Братя Кирил и Методий». Велико Търново, 1967–1968. Т. V. С. 125–160.

Erich Schmidt, Mary Boyce, Frantz Grenet, Geo Widengren, Richard Frye, Vladimir Lukonin, Boris Marshak, Boris Litvinsky, Genadii Koshelenko, to mention but a few names of excellent scholars who are well known for their expertise in Iranian art, religions, architecture, etc.¹⁹

What are, in my opinion, the difficulties with such a hypothesis? Firstly, let us ask ourselves, do we have any data from the Byzantine sources regarding Zoroastrian beliefs in heathen Bulgaria prior to 860s. For many years this had been the religion (together with Manichaeism) against which the *Rhomaioi* had concentrated all their efforts so as to confront Christianity towards it, since it was Sassanian Iran, with its Zoroastrianism, that was the main rival of the Byzantines. Given that situation, it is absolutely clear that they had excellent knowledge of Zoroastrian doctrine and if it was the religion of the Bulgars, they would hardly miss the chance to note such a fact. But they did not! Secondly, do we have any data in the Bulgarian folklore for (at least some hints of) the existence of some typical Zoroastrian festivals such as those characteristic to, for instance, NuRōz/Naurūz (i. e., New Year), or Mihragan (i. e., dedicated to Mithra/Mihr), or feasts dedicated to Vaju, or Anahita, and other Zoroastrian deities for whom we have idea not only from Iranian folklore data but also from an eminent scholar like al-Biruni, for instance? Thirdly, do we have any firm data as to the celebration of the spring equinox in Danubian Bulgaria, i. e. 21st/22nd of March, which was indeed the New Year (above mentioned NuRōz/Naurūz) for the Iranians? What we do have are not so much feasts (if any at all) dedicated to March 21st, but to March 1st, i. e. the typical beginning of the New Year for Rome and the South-East Europe, as a whole (let me also remind the most popular celebration of this beginning even today in Bulgaria (and partly in Rumania) marked by wearing of the so-called (white-and-red) ‘martenitsa’²⁰. It is then not strange that according to the 62nd canon of the Trullo council of AD 692 not only *kalendae* and *rousalii/rosalii* were condemned but the spring feast of New Year celebrated on March 1st as well. But it should also be mentioned that before celebrating March 1st to become a reality it was most probably the day that is directly connected with

¹⁹ Amongst the multitude of titles dealing with the topic see: *Herzfeld E.* Zoroaster and His World. Princeton, 1947; *Ghirshman R.* Perse. Proto-Iraniens, Medes, Achemenides. Paris, 1963; *Boyce M.* 1) A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism. Oxford, 1977; 2) Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. London, 1979; 3) Зороастрийцы. Верования и обычаи. Пер. с англ. и примеч. И. М. Стеблин-Каменского. М., 1987; *Grenet, F.* Iranian Gods in Hindu Garb: The Zoroastrian Pantheon of the Bactrians and Sogdians, Second–Eighth Centuries // Bulletin of the Asia Institute. 2010. *Sinor D.* Taking an oath over a dog cut in two. Vol. XX. P. 87–99; *Widengren G.* Die Religionen Irans. Stuttgart, 1965; *Frye R.* The Heritage of Central Asia. From Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion. Princeton, 1996; *Луконин В.* Искусство древнего Ирана. М., 1977; *Литвинский Б.* Семиреченские жертвенники (индоиранские истоки культа огня) // Проблемы интерпретации памятников культуры Востока. М., 1991. С. 66–87; *Кошеленко Г.* Ранние этапы развития культа Мифры // Древний Восток и античный мир. М., 1972. С. 75–85.

²⁰ For the «martenitsa» and its meanings see: *Степанов Ц.* Мартеницата (из символния «език» за изначалието у българите) // *Studia Protobulgarica et Mediaevalia Europensia* (Материали от Международната научна конференция в чест на 100-годишнината на чл. кор. Веселин Бешевлиев, май 2000, Велико Търново). Велико Търново, 2003. С. 391–397.

the winter solstice on December 21st/22nd, i. e. December 22nd being, most probably, the New Year for the Bulgars (it is also named «Ednazhden»/«Edinak», i. e. a single, and more importantly, specific day in the year cycle!)²¹. Moreover, the fire as one of the main elements of universe and creation, has been apprehended as sacred almost everywhere, including the autochthonous population of the Caucasus Mountains who, with view of its genesis, is neither Iranian, nor Altaic²². Almost the same is the situation with the water celebration since water, together with fire, is one of the four main elements mentioned above (with air and earth, in addition).

We may continue asking the next question: do we have data as to the existence in Bulgaria of the Iranian deity of the under-earth, Jima? And all answers to all these questions will sound «no»! It is also clear that a weak side of this hypothesis is the peculiar, that is, warm attitude towards the dogs typical for the Bulgars, a fact that is not so much characteristic for the Zoroastrian Iranians²³. As for this attitude in Bulgaria, we do have evidence not only for the Danubian Bulgar(ian)s, but for Volga Bulgaria as well, especially by the Arab writer Ibn Fadlan who visited the latter in AD 921/2⁴. According to him, amongst the Volga Bulgars that same positive attitude towards the snakes existed as well; and again, this last information in Ibn Fadlan is also typical for the Caucasian peoples!

Another weak side of the Zoroastrian hypothesis may also be added. Zoroastrians in Middle Asia do bury their dead people in the so-called *ossuarii*. As for the burial rites, one may also compare the available data as to the Zoroastrian burial customs of Sassanian Iran in Theophilakt Symocatta and Agathias of Mirineia, both of them Byzantine authors from 6th–7th century²⁵. Such practices were not characteristic for the Bulgars. For them, typical were *inhumation* (closer to the burial customs of the so-called late Sarmatians living near the coast of Black Sea and sea of Azov in the period after the 3/4th century AD) or *cremation* (characteristic also for the ancient Turks at least up to the 630s).

At the same time, the Zoroastrian hypothesis has also its strong sides. For instance, the plans of the heathen temples in Danubian Bulgaria — a square or quadrangle (so far 6 found in Bulgaria: 2 in Pliska, 2 in Preslav, 1 in Madara, and 1 in Silistra, i. e. ancient Durostorum called in the medieval period Drăstăr or Dorostolon). To all these six temples from nowadays Bulgarian territory one can also add two more temples, the first one from Central Caucasus (in Khumara) and the second one — in the so-called

²¹ Добрев П. Преоткриването на прабългарския календар. София, 1994. С. 179–182; Добрев П. Царственик на българското достолепие. София, 1998. С. 50–56; also see: Вълчев Й. Календар и слово. София, 1986.

²² More see in: Гаджиев Г. Доисламские верования и обряды народов Нагорного Дагестана. М., 1991. С. 81–87.

²³ Отран Ш. Митра и Заратустра. София, 1998. С. 30, note 2: the so-called Magi did not view the dog a sacred animal; it was believed that the dog was preserved for the God himself and exactly in this belief one could see the roots of a Mithraic ritual.

²⁴ Ибн Фадлан. Пътешествие до Волжска България 921–922. София, 1992. С. 48: «[the Volga Bulgars] believe that the barking of the dogs is a good omen, and they enjoy it and think that it is going to bring about a year of abundance, blessing, and prosperity».

²⁵ Агафий Миринейский. О царствовании Юстиниана. М., 1996. С. 69–70 (Вк. II, 22–23).

Saltovo-Mayaki archeological culture (which was indeed a culture left by Alans and Bulgars in the 8th–9th century, both of them living at that time in the Khazar khaganate). All of these pagan temples are dated most probably from the first half of the 9th century²⁶. As is well-known, the plans were typical for the Iranian Zoroastrian temples of fire²⁷. But the question is, what was the ritual performed in the Bulgar temples; and was it identical to that typical for the Sassanians? One may suppose that in heathen Bulgaria, it was just an *imitatio* of the Iranian fire temples, in order Bulgars to build an appropriate architectural form for the Bulgar «king's» cult. Pliska, Preslav, Madara, and Silistra were the main places of khan's power in heathen Bulgaria (and the palaces of the khans are situated there!); and the khan was the supreme Bulgar priest at that time. *Temple* and *palace* are the «centers» *par excellence* and they, in principle, were connected with rituals performed by the king and oriented towards New Year festival, this Day meaning the end of «dis-order»/«chaos» and beginning of «order»/«cosmos»! And such rituals, almost everywhere, are strongly bound to *fire* and *water*!

We should also bear in mind that in Eurasia, since ancient times, there was a cult to the fire of the «king's» charismatic clan as well as a cult to the fire of the society, the latter viewed as a synthesis of different *ethnoi* and strata (cf. also the so-called «tzar's/king's Hestia» amongst the Scythians of Herodotus where Hestia is the Greek name of the Scythian goddess of the home-hearth as well as the fire celebration as a wide-ranged ritual among both the steppe Iranians and the Turks in the Early Middle Ages, not to mention the well known dynastic fires in Sassanian Iran which were established with

²⁶ On this problem there are several titles. See for instance: *Рауев Р.* Българската езическа култура VII–IX век. София, 2008; *Дончева С.* Езическите храмове — опит за архитектурно-семантичен анализ // Българските земи през Средновековието (VII–XVIII в.). Варна, 2005. С. 73–94 [Acta Musei Varnaensis. Т. III. Vol. 2]; *Георгиев П.* Големият езически храм в Плиска // Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура. 1989. № 1. С. 338–353; *Теофилов Т.* Нов опит за вникване в същността и функциите на прабългарските езически храмове // 1100 години Велики Преслав. Т. 1. Шумен, 1995. С. 296–306; *Степанов Ц.* Власт и авторитет в ранносредновековна България (VII – средата на IX в.). София, 1999. С. 156–160; *Овчаров Д.* Прабългарските капища — произход и предназначение // Векове. 1983. № 2. С. 56–62; *Станолов С.* Езическите центрове в Първата българска държава // България 1300. Т. 2. София, 1982. С. 225–234; *Биджиев Х.* Поселения древних болгар Северного Кавказа VIII–X вв. (по материалам Карачаево-Черкесии и Ставропольской возвышенности) // Ранние болгары в Восточной Европе. Казань, 1989. С. 34–45; *Винников А., Афанасьев Г.* Культурные комплексы Маяцкого селища. Воронеж, 1991. С. 118–140; *Чобанов Т.* Свещените дворци... С. 60–65, 77, 82, 99.

²⁷ Among so many articles and books on this topic see: *Boyce M.* 1) On the Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians // Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies. 1968. Vol. XXXI. P. 52–69; 2) On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire // Journal of the American Oriental Society. 1975. Vol. LXXXV. P. 454–465; *Shkoda V.* The Sogdian Temple: Structure and Rituals // Bulletin of the Asia Institute. 1996. Vol. X. P. 195–206; *Кошеленко Г.* Царская власть и ее обоснование в ранней Парфии // История Иранского государства и культуры. М., 1971. С. 212–218; *Рапен К.* Святилища Средней Азии в эпоху эллинизма (Состояние вопроса) // Вестник древней истории. 1994. № 4. С. 128–139; *Сарианиди В.* Происхождение иранских храмов огня // La Persia e l'Asia Centrale da Alessandro al X secolo. Roma, 1996. P. 319–329.

every shahin-shah's accession on the Sassanian throne)²⁸. Thus among the Scythians, it was in the person of the king where the «good luck» of the whole kingdom rested; and this 'hvarena' was directly linked to the sacred king's hearth, i.e. fire whose first and supreme priest was that same Scythian king²⁹. Indeed the beliefs in fire and Sun are to be seen almost everywhere and amongst the Caucasian-speaking peoples, in particular. So the precise study of the Bulgar religion exactly in this Zoroastrian aspect is, obviously, a question of future investigation so as one to reach levels of detailed interpretation that are going beyond the well-known common typologies.

III. Mithraism

This (hypo)thesis has been put forward in the last decade by Alexander Alexiev-Hofart³⁰. No doubt there are several strong arguments for such a (hypo)thesis. At the same time, in my opinion, it's more appropriate to speak about Indo-Iranian realities-and-relictæ among the Bulgars than of Mithraism, for when one is going to think of it not in the framework of the Balkan contexts but in Turanian ones, there might appear some misunderstanding: it's well known that the Roman transformations and connotations are easily visible in Mithraism and because of this, there could be many difficulties with the strict application of terms and criteria with pointing out not to the Bulgar specifics in religion but to the generic term *Mithraism*. This last claim is especially important as to the existence of a real Roman domination over the lands of South-East Europe for more than five centuries and of Mithraism here after the 2nd century AD, in particular.

If this hypothesis is the valid one for the Bulgar religion, then we should also have in mind that for many years there has been such term for this religion as 'astral'. In fact, the cult of Indo-Iranian Mithra was in close, even direct connection with the planets/stars, Moon and Sun, for which we do have at our disposal the well known passage in the «*Vita* of the 15 martyrs from Tiberiopolis» of the archbishop of Ohrid Theophylaktos who mentioned exactly this belief as typical amongst the Bulgars in the 820s, during the reign of Omurtag. Of course, we should also point out, at least as existing on the level of popular Bulgar culture, a widespread cult of the Polar star and its seasonal substitute — the Pleiads constellation, a fact well known thanks to scholars such as Todor Mollov and Ancho Kaloyanov³¹. All these beliefs are

²⁸ See: Байраков К. Культ огня на Сырдаре // Известия Академии Наук Казахской ССР, Сер. общественных наук. 1987. № 5. С. 51–61, esp. 60–61, who cited the well known evidence on the fire rituals amongst the Turks (see data from the Byzantine envoy Zemarchos, in AD 568, and evidence by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang, around 630), in Middle Asia, even after the successful Islamization in the region (see data in al-Biruni); Байраков also speaks about the high esteem towards the heart typical for the Sufi mystics as well as the naming of the fire «fire-Mother» in Kazakhstan; amongst the Kirgiz people that same cult has been interwoven and sometimes even fused with the cult of Umaj. On the dynastic fires in Iran see: Бойс М. Зороастрийцы. Верования и обычаи. С. 79.

²⁹ According to: Бессонова С. Религиозные представления скифов. Киев, 1983.

³⁰ Алексиев-Хофарт А. 1) От звездите към кръста. София, 2004; 2) Митраизмът и древните българи (Културен архетип). София, 2009.

³¹ Details see in: Калянов А. 1) Старобългарското езичество. Мит, религия и фолклор в картината за свят у българите. Велико Търново, 2000; 2) Българското шаманство. София, 1995; Моллов Т. Мит — епос — история. Велико Търново, 1997.

well documented amongst many peoples in steppe Eurasia and the Bulgars who are definitely one of them.

At the same time, it's hard to support all interpretations made by A. Hofart, especially when he is almost ready to say that between «shamanism» and «Turks» a sign of equality can be put. Thus he underestimates the essence and specifics in Turkic religiosity presenting it as if marked by shamanism only³². As is well known, the «shamanism» is typical for that stage of society's organization (or polity) called clans' level. But it's not appropriate for the more sophisticated levels of state organization, i. e. steppe empire/imperial confederacy (to point out to terms used by Thomas Barfield³³; and exactly in such periods of state «modification», the Turks during the early Middle Ages usually «switched on» to some of the so-called world religions, namely Buddhism, or (Nestorian) Christianity, Manichaeism, and later Islam. There are several examples of this transformation during the existence of the two Turkic khaganates (552–630s/650s; 680s–744), as well as in those of the Uighurs (745–840). Sometimes the elites of these semi-nomadic confederacies were inclined to change their state religion in order to adapt themselves more easily to the changing situation. The Uighurs after AD 840 are a typical example of such a transformation: after the crush of their steppe empire, many of them moved westwards to the Kocho/Qočo state and there they changed Manichaeism with Buddhism; thanks to this new religion, in their new state the Uighurs managed to reach unbelievable heights in culture until the Mongols' appearance in this Central Asian region³⁴.

It seems to me that in this, indeed, Indo-Iranian direction of research the most appropriate for a comparative study are the North-Caucasian Alans (today called Ossetians) as well as some people who are now living in Middle Asia. Of course, it is well known that such kind of study is a risky one, because of the lack of clear data. Nevertheless, I shall point out to some interesting parallels amongst the Ossetians today and among the Digor people, in particular (although some of these rituals and practices are also present amongst other mountainous people in Caucasus). Firstly, the specific attitude towards those killed by thunders (cf. this notion with that same belief in Volga Bulgaria mentioned by Ibn Fadlan); and secondly, a tradition in South Ossetia where in the night before the New Year (!), the chain in the home hearth was bound by a string/rope (!) so as the family be sure that this way the mouths of the wolfs would be also bound during the whole year³⁵. Let me remind again the fact about the special attitude towards the home hearth and especially the rites and beliefs connected to the hearth's chain there, especially typical for the regions of today Kabardino-Balkaria in Central

³² Алексиев-Хофарт А. Митраизмът... С. 211; *passim*.

³³ Barfield Th. 1) The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757. Oxford, 1989; 2) The Nomadic Alternative. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1993.

³⁴ Details see in: Степанов Ц. 1) Българите и степната империя през Ранното средновековие. Въпросът за Другите. София, 2005; 2) The Bulgars and the Steppe Empire in the Early Middle Ages. The Problem of the «Others». Leiden; Boston, 2010. Especially for Qočo see: Gabain A. von. Das Leben im uigurischen Königreich von Qočo (850–1250). Wiesbaden, 1973.

³⁵ Калоев Б. Осетини. Историко-этнографическое исследование. 3-е изд., доп. и перераб. М., 2004. С. 358.

Caucasus³⁶, and that same beliefs dating from the time of the Scythian domination in the Caucasus area as a whole, in monuments and sites from the region of Pyatigorie and Dagestan, now in Russian Federation; as for the time of the Sarmatian domination there, such sites are known from today Chechnya³⁷.

All these data are comparable with notions typical for Bulgaria's folklore, especially those linked with some beliefs and practices performed during the so-called wolfs' days, namely «binding wolfs' mouths». It was Dimitar Marinov who reported an interesting practice in the region of Plovdiv a century ago. It was performed in the eve of the so-called 'wolfs' feats' when «the mouth of the oven was blocked up so as the mouth of the wolf to be locked». And this act was made through putting into the oven of three objects: the waist-cloth (with this waist-cloth the oven was usually cleaned), of the pair of tongs and the shovel using which one can get out the loaves of bread from the oven. As for the deep respect to the hearth and fire, one should agree with K. Baypakov's thesis put forward as to the Turkic-speaking population living in the south region of Kazakhstan during the Middle Ages: along with Islam, Baypakov says, amongst the local people there existed some «ancient notions and beliefs with roots coming down to the traditions of Saka and Kangyui periods»³⁸, i. e. to the ancient Indo-Iranian notions and rituals for it's well known that the middle-Asian Scythians were called «Sakas» by the ancient Greeks.

What then can we say as a conclusion with regard to the heathen religion(s) in pre-Christian Bulgaria?

It should be stressed that it's absolutely clear that one must make a differentiation between «state» cults and those typical for the clans only³⁹. It seems very important scholars to think through the prism of the social strata, and the ruler's retinue in particular, which usually had different cults — the example with the pagan pantheon of the Rus' konungr (later knyaz) Vladimir of AD 980 is typical! Since such a specific trend is very common feature of the early Medieval polities, it would not be strange then if we find it also in Bulgaria, especially in the years after AD 802 and before AD 864/5. For it is a well known fact that the processes of power centralization had their start in Bulgaria exactly with the coming to the throne of Krum, i. e. after AD 802; and as a rule, such processes of centralization are almost everywhere connected with a religious syncretism, i. e. cults' «centralization» and modification. Besides, one can see exactly the same syncretism in some cults in Central Asia⁴⁰, although in this area, understandably, scholars can not

³⁶ On this see in: *Степанов Ц.* Поглед към някои древни вярвания и представи у българите (два примера) // *Търсене на истината.* Професор Николай Генчев: Юбилейно издание по случай 70 години от рождението на професор Николай Генчев / Съст. П. Митев; науч. ред. Е. Дроснева. София, 2002. С. 71–75, esp. 71–73.

³⁷ *Прокопенко Ю.* Элементы культа очага в погребальной обрядности населения Предкавказья в сарматское время // *Российская археология.* 2001. № 4. С. 162.

³⁸ *Байпаков К.* Культ огня на Сырдаре. С. 61.

³⁹ For the same differentiation see: *Калоев Б.* Осетины... Ch. 6: Cults typical for all of the Ossetians, as well as cults typical only for some valleys, villages, and clans (i. e., Iron and Digor), etc.

⁴⁰ See *Heissig W., Klimkeit H.-J.* (Hrsg.). *Synkretismus in den Religionen Zentralasiens.* Wiesbaden, 1987; *Кызласов Л. Р.* Культурные взаимосвязи тюрков и иранцев в VI–XIII вв. (язык, письменность, религия) // *Этнографическое обозрение.* 2004. № 6. С. 3–13.

expect to find out serious traces of the cultural heritage and traditions of ancient South-East Europe.

Needless to say, one of the most important questions is that of the methods and methodologies used in such a research, namely one to try getting closer to the so-called adequate analysis. What I mean is, firstly, adequate analysis according to epochs of the Bulgars' history in Europe, i. e. between 5/6th century AD and the mid-9th century (one should be very cautious when using data from ancient Iran of the 2nd millennium, for instance); secondly, adequate analysis according to regions, i. e. searching for parallels mainly in societies which were close neighbours of the Bulgars and first of all in North Caucasus and Caucasian Albania as well as between the Aral Sea and the rivers Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya in Middle Asia. In the latter area, i. e. the lands of ancient Kangha and Sogdiana where different peoples speaking eastern-Iranian dialects had been living for many centuries until the Turks' invasion there after the mid-6th century, there had not been any centralized state compared to that of Sassanian Iran, Richard Frye and Boris Litvinsky⁴¹ claimed. And thirdly, we should also search for adequacy on the level of the written sources, namely one should take into consideration that in the region west to the Volga River, starting from the 460s, there were movement to Europe of several Oguric, i. e. Altaic-speaking, tribes (Ogur, Saragur, Hunugur, etc.); this means that there, in the area north of the Caucasus and around the coasts of Black and Azov Seas, we will have «alluviums» upon the local Sarmato-Alanian tribes known from the 3rd century BC up to the 2nd century AD as well as upon the so-called late Sarmatians of the 2nd–4th century AD on behalf of these Altaic invaders. Last but not least, we should always have in mind that the religions in Middle Asia were called «local» by Boris Litvinsky⁴². Many of the scholars working in this scientific field mark the influence of Zoroastrianism upon the «local» religions thus noting the Sassanian success in taking over the lands between the rivers Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya during the 5th–6th century, but they refrain of speaking of the classical Zoroastrianism's existence in this area! There, one could see traces of fire temples as well as temples with idols of gold and silver put inside them, as mentioned by different Arab writers. That same B. Litvinsky claimed that the religion of Sogd can be termed as «native Iranian paganism», upon which Zoroastrianism left its imprints, adding also that «between the Central Asian and Persian Zoroastrianism» there existed «considerable differences»⁴³.

Thus one can say for sure that at the moment the problem with the religion (or, religions?) of the heathen Bulgars is far from a definite and clear solution.

⁴¹ *Frye R., Litvinsky B.* The Northern Nomads, Sogdiana and Chorasmia // *History of Humanity*. 1996. Vol. 3. P. 467. Also see: *Litvinsky B.* Christianity, Indian and Local Religions // *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*. 1996. Vol. 3. P. 421–431, and esp. P. 428, where it is explicitly noted that the people and the king of Samarkand were not followers of Buddhism but of the fire cult.

⁴² See: *Litvinsky B.* Christianity... P. 428 f.

⁴³ *Litvinsky B.* Christianity... P. 429, 431.

IV. Christianity

In pagan Bulgaria, and especially after the beginning of the 9th century, some Christian influence can be testified, too⁴⁴. It came mostly due to Byzantine captives in the Bulgar court as well as a consequence of the Bulgars' successes on the battleground which made possible the speedy enlargement of the Bulgar state. Thus after AD 809 and until AD 850s Bulgaria doubled, at least, its territories, especially in western, north-western, and southern direction. Most of these newly acquired lands were populated by Byzantines, i. e. Christians. Because of this fact, some scholars in Bulgaria, the late Ivan Venedikov, Georgi Atanasov, and Bozhidar Dimitrov amongst them in particular⁴⁵, are inclined to take as granted that the number of Christian population in Bulgaria was quite serious even before AD 865. But some other scholars, for instance Georgi Bakalov, the late Rasho Rashev, and the author of this article⁴⁶, are more cautious in such claims although it was an eminent British byzantinist, the late professor Robert Browning, who wrote that the Byzantine captives in the Bulgar court were only the «tip of the iceberg»⁴⁷. It is absolutely clear that there was an anti-Christian policy in Bulgaria during the time of Omurtag which lasted, most probably, until the death of his son Malamir in AD 836⁴⁸. Some Christians who were taken captives during the Bulgar campaigns in Thrace before AD 815, most of them established ones in the Byzantine society in this region, died as martyrs⁴⁹. But it is absolutely clear, too, that there were no serious and massive persecutions of Christians in Bulgaria at that time⁵⁰. Moreover, some of those who were

⁴⁴ Details see in: *Шрайнер П.* Християнството в България преди 864 г. // Шрайнер П. Многообразие и съперничество. Избрани студии за обществото и културата във Византия и средновековна България. София, 2004. С. 215–224; *Рашев Р.* Византийците в България до покръстването // *Civitas divino-humana*. В чест на 60-годишнината на професор Георги Бакалов / Съст. и ред. Ц. Степанов и В. Вачкова. София, 2004. С. 151–162; *Степанов Ц.* Болгары и християнство до 864 г. С. 3–10.

⁴⁵ *Венедиков И.* Прабългарите и християнството. Стара Загора, 1995; *Атанасов Г.* 1) За кесарската промоция и владетелските инсигнии на хан Тервел // *Епохи*. 1995. № 3. С. 61–72; 2) Християнският Дуросторум-Дръстър. Доростолската епархия през Късната Античност и Средновековието, IV–XIV в. Варна, 2007; *Димитров Б.* Ранна християнизация в България. VII – средата на IX век // *История на българите: потребност от нов подход. Преоценки*. Част II. София, 1998. С. 65–70.

⁴⁶ Details see in: *Степанов Ц.* Болгары и християнство до 864 года. С. 3–10.

⁴⁷ *Browning R.* Byzantines in Bulgaria — late 8th – early 9th centuries // *Studia Slavico-Byzantina et Mediaevalia Europensia*. Sofia, 1988. Vol. 1: In Memoriam Ivan Dujčev. P. 32–36. The same opinion is shared by: *Nikolov S.* The Pagan Bulgars and Byzantine Christianity in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries // *Journal of Historical Sociology*. 2000. Vol. 13. Nr. 3. P. 325–364.

⁴⁸ Details see in: *Николова Б.* Ранното християнство в България преди покръстването: Теории и реалности // 1100 години Велики Преслав / Ред. Т. Тотев. Т. 1. Шумен, 1995. С. 182–194; *Nikolov S.* The Pagan Bulgars and Byzantine Christianity. P. 325–364.

⁴⁹ Details see in: the Constantinopolitan *Synaxarion*, 414–416 (for January 22nd) and *Menologion* of the Byzantine basileus Basil II (d. 1025), 276D–277A. Also see: *Sophoulis, P.* Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831. Leiden; Boston, 2012. P. 38–39, *passim*.

⁵⁰ *Николова Б.* Ранното християнство... С. 188–189; *Рашев Р.* Българските ханове и християнството // Християнската култура в средновековна България. Материали от национална научна конференция, Шумен 2–4 май 2007 година / Отг. ред. Павел Георгиев. Велико Търново, 2008. С. 35–41, and esp. 39.

moved from Thrace into the so-called «Bulgaria beyond the Danube» in AD 813/4, were later taken back by the Byzantine fleet in AD 837, i. e. they stayed somewhere in the area between Danube and Dniester rivers for 23 years only. It should also be stressed that such a relocation of people was a typical policy not only for the Bulgars but for the states during the Early Middle Ages as a whole, including Byzantium; as usual, such men and women were settled down far away from their homeland. One of the most typical examples of this policy was the relocation of Syrians and Armenians in the *themes* of Thrace and Macedonia, i. e. against the Bulgars, during the reigning years of Constantine V, in AD 740s/750s in particular⁵¹. But the most important fact that should be stressed is that there is neither solid written data nor archeological evidence that could prove the strong Christian presence in the Bulgar lands north of the Haemus Mountain (today Stara planina) before the massive baptism undertaken by Boris-Michael in AD 865. The situation with the southern parts of Bulgaria after AD 809 was different — there was obviously a «critical mass» of Christian subjects of the Bulgar khans who were to be run accordingly. Thus pagan Bulgaria became a «hostage» of its expansion in southern and south-western direction. Dominating over quite a high number of Christian (ex-Byzantine) subjects and large territories overloaded with Roman imperial and Christian memory, after the mid-ninth century the Bulgar elite had, in my opinion, no real choice: either to persist opposing the older Bulgar deities to Christianity and Byzantium, or to embrace the Christian faith⁵². And the choice, as is well-known, was made for the latter option. It is thus clear that after the 820s, as regards the territory of the present-day South Bulgaria, the Bulgars faced a specific situation, namely the meeting of cultures, obviously seen by the Bulgars as a source of internal change as well as external religious clash with the Byzantine Christianity⁵³. This «challenge-and-response» situation, if one is inclined to follow the theory of Arnold Toynbee, most probably urged the Bulgar elite to undertake a serious centralization of the religious cults, a process which soon proved itself inadequate and the Bulgars embraced Christianity within a period of one or two generations.

To sum up, we may suppose that there were some, and not one, religions in pagan Bulgaria and this is indeed the typical situation during the Early Middle Ages with the regions and peoples of the so-called Steppe Empire which were known for their religious tolerance. With Christianity in the Bulgar lands we do not face any problem — there were Christians living there after AD 809; the problem is in fact the total number of them.

⁵¹ Рашиев Р. Византийците в България до покръстването // *Civitas divino-humana*. В чест на 60-годишнината на професор Георги Бакалов / Съст. и ред. Ц. Степанов и В. Вачкова. София, 2004. С. 151–162.

⁵² *Stepanov Ts.* The Bulgars and the Steppe Empire. P. 81–82.

⁵³ Cf. the passage of a stone inscription from the time of the Bulgar khan Persian (836–852) found at the so-called basilica 'B' in Philippi in Southern Thrace, now in Greece, and dated AD 837. Here, the Bulgars are openly opposed to the Christians, i. e. Byzantium: «When someone tells the truth, God sees. And when someone lies, God sees that too. The Bulgars did many favors to the Christians, but the Christians forgot them. But God sees». English translation of the text by: *Petkov K.* The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh–Fifteenth Century. The Records of a Bygone Culture. Leiden; Boston, 2008. P. 13.

In my opinion, and considering the processes of centralization and «modernization» in Bulgaria, the most serious problem is that with the answer of another question, namely, was there only one pagan religion amongst the Bulgars, especially in the years after the first decade of the 9th century. This last question is linked with another one, i. e. the interconnection between the state-making processes and religion(s). As regards heathen Bulgaria on the Danube, it is obvious that after the reign of Krum (802–814) Bulgaria made its move towards a typical «barbarian» state. What is important to be stressed here is the fact that the Bulgar state was not of the type well known as «Germano-Roman» synthesis but of a synthesis of both *steppic* (Irano-Turkic) and carefully «adapted» *Roman* features and traditions. In fact, this is the main and specific Bulgar contribution to the protracted process of establishment of the early states in Medieval Europe⁵⁴.

Данные о статье

Автор: Степанов, Цветелин Йорданов, кандидат исторических наук, доцент, Софийский университет «Св. Климент Охридски», stepanov64@yahoo.com

Заголовок: Государственное развитие Дунайской Болгарии (681–865): Религиозные специфики

Резюме: Цель настоящей статьи, во-первых, представить основные гипотезы о праболгарской религии (или религиях?) в современной болгарской историографии до крещения праболгар в 864/5 г. Во-вторых, сделать попытку связать процессы централизации Болгарии с развитием религиозных культов. За последние 20–25 лет были выдвинуты три главные гипотезы относительно сущности праболгарской религиозной системы: а) тенгризм; б) зороастризм; в) митраизм, параллельно с признанием факта наличия известного числа подданных болгарского кана, исповедующих христианство. Автор отмечает, что традиционная гипотеза называет религию праболгар *тенгризмом*, но одновременно с этим подчеркивает хорошо известный факт, что данная гипотеза базирована на одной-единственной каменной надписи в Мадаре, к тому же сильно испорченной и фрагментарной, где было прочитано слово ТАГГРА (*sic*). Серьезной слабостью зороастрийской гипотезы автор считает факт, что ни в одном домашнем или чужом источнике праболгары не упомянуты как исповедующие зороастризм, хотя их храмы (на сегодняшний день на территории современной Болгарии были открыты шесть таких храмов) определенно следуют плановым концепциям т. н. иранских храмов огня. Что касается третьей гипотезы, то автор предлагает обозначать ее термином «индоиранской», а не «митраистской». Допускается вероятность, что в начале IX в., когда зарождаются процессы централизации и «модернизации» предхристианской Болгарии, культы огня, солнца и воды, основные в древнеиранской/индоиранской религиозной системе, получают архитектурную визуализацию в виде постройки храмов огня (в форме квадрата или прямоугольника) в основных центрах языческой Болгарии, т. е. в Плиске, Преславе, Мадаре и Силистре — главных резиденциях болгарских канов. Не исключается возможность восприятия в качестве «дружинного культа» и популярного в «степной империи» культа к светлому небу Тенгри. Какова бы ни была правда о религиозной системе дунайских праболгар, с точностью на данный момент ясно, что на теоретическом уровне она может быть представлена понятием-концептом «супремотеизм».

⁵⁴ Степанов Ц. Болгарские государственные образования IV–IX вв.: От вожества к раннему государству // Древняя Русь и Средневековая Европа: Возникновение государств. Материалы международной конференции. М., 2012 (in press).

Ключевые слова: праболгары, язычество, супрематеизм, зороастризм, тенгризм, митраизм

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Information about the article

Author: Stepanov, Tsvetelin Yordanov, Ph. D. in History, Docent, Sofia University «St. Kliment Ohridski», stepanov64@yahoo.com

Title: State-formation in Danubian Bulgaria, AD 681–865: Religious dimensions

Summary: The purpose of this article is first to present the main hypotheses about the Bulgars / Bulgar religion in modern Bulgarian historiography before the baptism in the Proto-Bulgarians

in 864/5. Second, make an attempt to link the processes of centralization of Bulgaria to the development of religious cults. Over the past 20–25 years, there were three main hypotheses about the nature of the Bulgar religious system: a) Tengriism; b) Zoroastrianism; c) Mithraism; in parallel with the recognition of the fact of the existence of a certain number of subjects to the Bulgar khan who practiced Christianity. The author notes that the traditional hypothesis calls the Bulgarian religion the Tengrism, but at the same time emphasizes the well-known fact that this hypothesis was based on a single stone inscription in Madara, greatly damaged and fragmented besides, on which the word TAGGRA (sic) was read. The author considers that a major weakness of the Zoroastrian hypothesis is the fact that in none of the native or foreign sources the Bulgar are mentioned as the followers of Zoroastrianism, though their temples (to this date six such temples were found on the territory of modern Bulgaria) definitely follow the planning concepts of so-called Iranian fire temples. As to the third hypothesis, the author proposes to define it by the term «Indo-Iranian» and not «Mithraic». An existence of a possibility is allowed that at the beginning of the 9th century, when the processes of centralization and «modernization» of the pre-Christian Bulgaria were just being born, the cults of fire, sun and water which were which was amongst the most important in the ancient Iranian and Indo-Iranian religious systems, produced an architectural visualization in the form of the construction of the temples of fire (square shaped or rectangular) in the main centers of pagan Bulgaria, such as Pliska, Preslav, Madara and Silistra — which were the main residences of the Bulgar Khans. Also, one cannot rule out the possibility of perception of the popular cult of the «steppe empire» to Tengri, the bright sky, as the cult of the Bulgar «Männerbunde». Whatever the truth of the religious system of the Bulgar on the Danube is, it is very clear today that, on a theoretical level, it can be represented by the concept of «supremotheism».

Keywords: Bulgars, paganism, supremotheism, Zoroastrianism, Tengrism, Mithraism

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