

KOUVER, THE CHRONOLOGY OF HIS ACTIVITIES AND THEIR ETHNIC EFFECTS ON THE REGIONS AROUND THESSALONICA

The historical significance of the hagiographical texts known as the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* is well known.¹ The following is one of the more important passages.²

I

Translation

Concerning the Civil War Planned Secretly Against the City by the Bulgars Mauros and Kouver

*As you know, lovers of Christ, we have related in part, in what has
proceeded, about the Slavs, the one called Chatzon, and also the Avars:
that having ravaged virtually all Illyricum and its provinces, I mean*

1. Among the various studies devoted to the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* either directly, or in connection with something else, the following are the most important: V. Laurent "Sur la date des églises Saint-Demetrius et Saint-Sophie à Thessalonique", *Byz. Zeitschrift*, 4 (1895), pp. 420-434; A. Pernice, "Sulla data del libro II dei *Miracula S. Demetrii Martyris*", *Bessarione*, anno VI, t. II (1901-1902), pp. 181-187; H. Delehaye, "Les recueils antiques de Miracles des Saints", *Analecta Bollandiana*, 43 (1925) pp. 57-64; A. Burmov, "Les sièges de Thessalonique par les Slaves dans *Miracula Sancti Demetrii Martyris* et leur Chronologie", *Annuaire de l'Université de Sofia. Faculté de Philosophie et Histoire. Livre I, histoire*, 47 (1952) (in Bulgarian); P. Lemerle, "La composition et la chronologie des deux premiers livres des *Miracula S. Demetrii*", *Byz. Zeitschrift*, 46 (1953), pp. 349-361; F. Barišić, *Miracles de St. Demétrius comme source historique* (Académie Serbe de Sciences) Monographie CCXIX. Institut d'Etudes Byzantines, 2 (Belgrade, 1953); Sp. Chrysanthopoulos, *Tà Βιβλία Θαυμάτων τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου*, (Athens, 1958). Published also in *Θεολογία*, 24 (1953), 25 (1954), 26 (1955), 27 (1956). In Barišić's book I consulted the French summary and also a Greek translation in typescript made by A.A. Angelopoulos for the Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessalonike, Greece; I did not consult Burmov's study.

2. A new edition of the *Miracula* has been promised by P. Lemerle; another one is

the two Pannonias, as well as the two Dacias, Dardania, Mysia Prevalin, Rhodope, and also Thrace and the regions along the long walls of Byzantium, and having taken the rest of the cities and towns, they lead the people to a place near the Danube in the direction of Pannonia whose metropolis had been formerly the aforementioned Sirmium.³ It was there, as it is said, that the aforementioned Chagan settled all the people he had captured to be henceforth his subjects. There they intermarried with Bulgars, Avars, and other peoples, had children with them, children whom they brought up according to the traditions of the Romans, and so through orthodoxy and the holy and life-giving baptism the race of the Christians increased and became numerous as had that of the Hebrews in Egypt under the Pharaoh. And as each related to the other concerning the residence of their ancestors, they fired in each other's heart the desire to return.

After some sixty and more years had passed following the devastations which affected their ancestors, another and new people evolved, and in time the greatest number of them became free. Finally the Chagan, considering them to constitute a people with an identity of its own, put, in accordance with the custom of his race, a chieftain over them, a man by the name of Kouver. When Kouver learned from some of his most intimate associates the desire of the exiled Romans for their ancestral homes, he gave the matter some thought, then took them together with other peoples, i.e. the foreigners who had joined them as it said in the Book of Moses about the Jews at the time of their exodus, with all their baggage and arms. According to what is said, they rebelled and separated themselves from the Chagan. The Chagan, when he learned this, set himself in pursuit of them, met them in five or six battles and, being defeated in each one by them, took flight and retired to the regions further north. After the victory Kouver, together

now in preparation in Thessalonica. Meanwhile we shall have to be content with the old edition of the Bollandists which in many ways is not satisfactory; *Acta Sanctorum* Oct. IV (Paris-Rome 1866) pp. 187-197 and Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 116 (Paris, 1864), pp. 1174-1384. This particular passage, however, is included by l'Abbé A. Tougard in his excerpts of hagiographical texts; it is Tougard's text that I have used: *De l'histoire profane dans les Actes grecs de Bollandistes* (Paris, 1874), pp. 186-205.

3. Tougard, *op. cit.*, 186: πρὸς Παννονίαν ἡστίνος ἐπαρχίας πάλαι μητρόπολις ὑπῆρχεν τὸ λεχθὲν Σερμείον. We take this to refer to the time of the events described and not to the time of the composition of the second book of the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* where it appears.

with the aforementioned people, crossed the aforementioned river Danube, came to our regions, and occupied the Keramesion plain. Once there, the people, those in particular who were orthodox, sought their ancestral cities, some, our city of Thessalonica, protected by the martyr, others, the most prosperous and queen of cities, and still others, the cities in Thrace which still stood.

This is what the people wanted. But counsellors of mischievous intent conceived the following evil advice: that no one among the people achieve what he desired, but that Kouver remain their chieftain and Chagan, mixed as they had come. For if they tried to go to the one who had obtained from God the scepter to rule over us and he received and dispersed them, Kouver would be thereby deprived of his authority. Accordingly, an embassy was sent to the bearer of the scepter requesting that he [Kouver] be allowed to remain, together with his people, where he was, and that the nation of the Drogubites, situated near us, be ordered to furnish him in sufficient quantity the necessary provisions. And this was done. Accordingly, when most of them went among the huts (σκηνὰς) of the Slavs in order to provision themselves and when, upon asking, they ascertained that our city was not very far, most of those of Roman origins, with wives and children, began to enter our city saved by God. The administrative officials immediately sent them by ship to the capital.

When Kouver learned this, as he could not reveal the perfidy which lay in his heart, he took counsel with his advisers about his own thought and loss (οἰκεία ἀπωλεία καὶ γνώμη) and came to this secret resolve: that one of his most remarkable and clever chieftains, a man, to speak briefly, replete with the machinations of the devil, who knew our language, that of the Romans, Slavs, and Bulgars, should feign to have rebelled against Kouver. He should, like the rest, approach our city guarded by God and, pretending to offer himself as the servitor of the emperor, introduce among us the greatest part of his people, those who shared his evil design. And so in this way through a civil war he would take the city. After its occupation Kouver, with baggage and the rest of his chieftains, would openly establish himself there and then. Having fortified himself, he would attack the surrounding nations, and, having become master of them, he would war against the islands and Asia and even against the emperor himself.

Following the consultation and this decision confirmed, it appears, by oath, one of the chieftains, a man by the name of Mauros, found

refuge in our city. There, using fine but deceptive words confirmed by oaths, persuaded those in power to bring to the most pious emperor a report about him which was most favorable and worthy of belief. The emperor, the benefactor of all, persuaded by what was reported to him, sent to them a written act designating Mauros⁴ consul as a mark of honor and offering him a standard as gift. He ordered further that all the Keramesians who had fled from Kouver be put under his command. When this order became public and was inserted in the register of matriculation, all the people who had fled here were put under the command of Mauros and he became their general. However, some among the Romans, knowing that Mauros never kept any faith, but that by his machinations, deceptions, and perjuries he was always evil in his ways and had thus ravaged many places and peoples, advised that one should have no faith in him. When Mauros learned this—he learned it from charges made by those who were close to him in their ways of thought and manner of acting—he cut off the heads of those who were revealing in secret his terrible design and sold their wives and children wherever and as he pleased.

Thus, the rest of the Christians, not daring to reveal the ambushade being set up against the city, bemoaned their fate and that of the city. No one dared to offer resistance. Moreover, those who were in power then seemed to fear him. For this Mauros had designated as centurions, decurions, and officers at the head of fifty men those persons who shared his evil design; and his armed men, provided for at the public expense, watched day and night wherever there were courageous men. His plan was this, that, during the night of the great feast of Holy Saturday when the city, with all, would be celebrating the joyous resurrection of the Saviour Christ, he would with his men experienced in war incite civil war, set fires in certain official places, and thus take possession of the city.

But he who had received the power from God by an invisible inspiration and sign, according to what is written, that the heart of the king is in the hand of God, diverting it as water wherever he wishes, consider-

4. Cf. Ivan Dujčev, "Un passage obscur des 'Miracula' de S. Démétrius de Thessalonique", in Dujčev, *Medioevo Bizantino-Slavo*, I (Rome, 1965), pp. 46-53. The article was originally published in *Byzantion*, 13 (1938) pp. 207-216: As against Tougard, who renders (p. 192) ὁπατίωνα ὑπάτου "manteau de consul", Dujčev would render it "act" of nomination; in this case, the act nominating Mauros consul.

ed it good, without yet knowing of the evil planned against the city, to order Sisinnios, then commander of the ships, a man wise in his words and ways and in all things confiding in God, to come to this city, guarded by the glorious athlete, together with the soldiers of the ships under his command. He was to watch over the aforementioned Mauros and those who had gathered about him, to the end that with such an army as his here present, those about the aforementioned Kouver would be more eager in seeking refuge in the city. This illustrious Sisinnios, wishing to execute this order, departed from the regions of Greece (Hellas) and reached the island of Skiathos, now for many years uninhabited, on Sunday before Holy Easter, a Sunday which is celebrated in all orthodox cities and is called Palm Sunday. And finding one of the holy churches located there overgrown with shrubs and trees, he ordered his obedient soldiers to have part of it cleared in order to celebrate the holy liturgy. And this was done.

On the following day, which was the Holy Monday of the Lord's passion, as the winds were not favorable for sailing towards us, this most virtuous man assembled all his army and said to them that they should not be negligent, that they should clear the rest of the church and the baptistry that was there, and that they should prepare themselves to hear the words of Christ and celebrate the holiday as was customary. Having heard the speech, they put themselves most willingly, each one urging the other, to the task of clearing the church and the baptistry. Some among them occupied themselves with the preparations for the holiday; others fished, while still others hunted; in a word, each hoped to contribute what appeared to him best in the preparations for the holiday. Meanwhile, they were all ignorant of what was in the mind of the aforementioned Kouver, Mauros, and their associates. Now, after the divine liturgy for this Holy Monday was celebrated, after all had dined and according to custom rendered thanks to God, they were ordered by that most praiseworthy man, after he had taken care of everything that pertained to the watch, to rest.

As for him, as soon as he fell asleep, there appeared before him not in dream but in reality the one who ever works and cares for unworthy servants and country, who manages all well for our salvation, the glorious martyr of God, Demetrius, and spoke to him thus: "Arise, why do you sleep? Put sail, the wind is favorable." Thereupon Sisinnios, considering this vision as most real, asked the guardian of the ship what was the wind. And he replied: "it is contrary and more violent

than yesterday." He was again about to sleep, when the same saint reappeared and, arousing him quickly and touching his side, said: "Arise I told you, put sail, the wind is favorable." Aroused thus again, he asked those who slept nearby and those in charge of the watch who it was who had spoken to him and had awakened him in order to depart. As everyone denied having seen anybody or to have heard anything about the matter at all, he asked again if the wind was favorable. Everyone said that it was contrary. Perplexed by what was said and seen, he was, because of his great preoccupations,⁵ about to fall asleep again, when the martyr approached him for the third time and, not without some concern and annoyance, said to him:

"Do not be negligent, arise, set sail, the wind is favorable; here you are sleeping, while others sail." This admirable man, a true friend of God and the martyr, now got up, realized that such an exhortation to sail was a divine revelation, not a thing imagined, and began, without making any inquiries, to move quickly about the ships, ordering them to set sail towards us. There were some who objected to this, asking why, since the winds were unfavorable and they were busy preparing for the celebration of the holiday, he wished to transport them to another place still more deserted. But he, assured by the third appearance of the martyr, i.e. the vision of the protector of our city, Demetrius, and his persistent belief that the sailing would be favorable, gave orders to row in order to put to sea. Just then he saw a ship, seeming to come from the regions of Chalcidice, sailing towards them and he recalled what was said to him in the revelation.

The ships, propelled by the oars, moved towards the open sea, facing, as we said, the wind, when suddenly the wind, through a sign of God, thanks to the intercession of the saint, began to blow behind them. And so, sailing smoothly and happily, they reached this city, delivered by God thanks to its defender Demetrius, on Holy Wednesday of the Holy Week, at the seventh hour. Thus, the drama of the civil war, cruelly conceived and planned by Mauros and his followers, was avoided. Mauros, frightened and discouraged, was seized by a fever which put him to bed for many days. Indeed, he would have passed away had not the aforementioned man, the ever praiseworthy general, unaware of what he had meditated, reassured him by words and oaths. As regards to the appearance of the martyr and his urgings on him to set

5. This rendering has been influenced by that of Tougaard, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

sail, all this the general related to most of the citizens, emphasizing the concern and providence which the martyr had for the city. He gave orders finally that Mauros with all the following which had come to him from Kouver, as well as the army of the ships under his own command, withdraw from the city and encamp in the regions to the west of it in order that the Keramesians, who wished to get away from the Slavs and come here, might do so freely and without fear.

Now, after this, when an imperial order and the vessels intended to transport the Keramesians, so often mentioned, had reached the aforementioned God-loving general in charge of the ships referred to, this Mauros, together with those who had fled with him, joined the emperor, crowned by God, and, having been received by him, was named archon. But not even in this did the providence of the saint inspired by God remain lax, but through the son of the same Mauros he made known to the pious ears the evil project which Mauros and Kouver had formulated against our city, revealing thus to him, (i.e. the emperor) the treachery of the so often mentioned Mauros; and also this, that in the regions of Thrace, he had resolved in his treachery even to turn against his life. That these things appeared to be truly so is shown by this: that, the often mentioned Kouver, observing what had been agreed between him and Mauros, did no harm to any of the men or property of Mauros. Furthermore, not only did he allow the wives of Mauros to retain their honors, but had these honors increased. The aforementioned pious emperor, who puts the affairs of the empire into the hands of God, the source of his power, did not put Mauros, whom God had now abandoned to him, to death, but, stripping him of his honors, deprived him of the command and his army, and confined him in a suburb under the watchful eyes of reliable men.

Who will not admire, dear and Christ-loving brothers, the passion, the solicitude and the help of Demetrius of everlasting memory, protector and liberator of our city? We were without concern and in ignorance with regard to the capture of our city and he, through God, put it into the heart of the emperor to send the fleet here for the help and salvation of the city; and, as the day of the planned civil war and our unexpected and inescapable death approached, he aroused the general, turned the wind from unfavorable to favorable, inducing thereby a smooth and happy sailing and so destroyed the plans and hopes of those who had thought to capture this city, his servant.

II

The Historical Setting of the Episodes Described in this Text

The ethnic significance of this text is quite obvious. Not so obvious, indeed extremely difficult to determine, is the historical setting to which the episodes described by it belong. The problem is, of course, chronological. The chronological information given by the text is very vague and there are very few other references to which one may turn. For these reasons the episodes have been variously dated.⁶ Some put them shortly after the reign of Heraclius, others in the seventies or eighties of the seventh century; and still others sometime during the first half of the eighth century.⁷

There are five references in the text which may be considered to have some chronological significance: the reference that Sirmium had been, long before (πάλαι) the removal of the ancestors of the followers of Kouver to the Danubian regions, the metropolis of Pannonia; the description of Skiathos as uninhabited, for some time past; the implied assertion that the Drogubites, at the time of the arrival of Kouver, were under the effective jurisdiction of the empire; the statement that the rebellion of Kouver against the Avars took place "some sixty and more years" after the removal of the ancestors of his followers from their homeland; and finally, the reference to Hellas. In these five references may lie the clue to the chronology, at least in approximate terms, of the episodes described by the text.

Sirmium, now Metroviča, on the Save, some thirty-seven miles from the

6. For reference to these various views, see H. Grégoire "L'origine et le nom des Croates et des Serbes," *Byzantion*, 17 (1944-1945), pp. 104-116. Grégoire, himself, agreeing with Pernice (*op. cit.*) and also with L. Niederle (Grégoire, p. 111 fn.27), puts the migration of Kouver at the very end of the reign of Heraclius. H. Gelzer puts it slightly later, about 645, but the basis of his calculations is the same; H. Gelzer, *Die Genesis der byzantinischen Themenverfassung* (Des XVIII. Bandes der Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Könige Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, No. 5), 49. Lemerle (*op. cit.*) agrees with Grégoire: Cf. Lemerle, "Invasions et migrations dans les Balkans depuis la fin de l'époque romaine jusqu'au VIII^e siècle," *Revue historique*, 221 (1954), p. 299. On the other hand, Laurent (*op. cit.* pp. 429-30), puts the events in question sometime between 680-690, Barišić (*op. cit.* pp. 135-136, 152), between 680 and 685, and Chrysanthopoulos (*op. cit.* pp. 62-67) distinguishing chronologically between the rebellion of Kouver against the Avars and the plot of Mauros to take Thessalonica, puts the former about 635 and the latter sometime between 680 and 690.

7. For references see Barišić, *op. cit.*, p. 134, fn. 171; Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 2nd. edition (Berlin, 1958), 2:165: Κοῦβερ Heerführer der unter avarischer Herrschaft stehenden Bulgaren (A. VIII. Jh.)... Er wurde mit Κοβῆρος identifiziert, doch kann man aus Inser. Bulg. M darauf schliessen, dass er ein Sohn von Κοβῆρος war.

confluence of that river with the Danube, was an important Roman frontier town. A center of administration, it became also in the course of the fourth century an important ecclesiastical see.⁸ The foundation of Justiniana Prima⁹ by Justinian as an administrative and ecclesiastical center did not much reduce its lustre, but the invasions of the barbarians during the fourth quarter of the sixth century brought about its decline. Sirmium actually fell to the Avars in 582.¹⁰ Its last metropolitan was a certain Sebastianus.¹¹ Now, Sirmium, at the time of the deportation of the Romans to Pannonia by the Avars referred to in our text, was not and had not been for some time past, the metropolis of that former Roman province. It follows, therefore, that the Avar invasions of the Balkan peninsula, which our text associates with that deportation, could not have been those which took place during the reigns of Tiberius and Maurice.

Skiathos, at the time when Sisinnios and his fleet reached it, had not been inhabited for some time. Whether this condition was brought about as the result of one single blow or developed gradually over a number of years because of the existence of continued danger of invasion, our text, of course, does not say. It is obvious, however, that the churches, whatever the reason for the desertion of the island may have been, had not been destroyed by a single blow but had just deteriorated; once cleared of the overgrowth, they could still be used for liturgical purposes. There are two possibilities for the desertion of the island. The piratical expeditions launched by the Slavic tribes of the Drogubites, Sagudites, Belegezêtes, Bajunêtes, Berzêtes, and others had resulted, according to another passage of the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, in the pillage of "all Thessaly, and the islands about it and those about Hellas."¹² The date of this event is variously fixed. Some scholars, juxtaposing this text with that of Isidore of Seville, according to which "in the fifth year of the reign of Heraclius, the Slavs took away Greece (Illyricum) from the Romans," put it in 615; others put it more generally in the first quarter of the seventh century.

8. Fr. Dvornik, *Les Slaves Byzance et Rome au IX^e Siècle* (Paris, 1926) pp. 75 f.

9. B. Granić, "Die Gründung des autokephalen Erzbistums von Justiniana Prima durch Kaiser Justinian I im Jahre 535 n. Chr.," *Byzantion*, 2 (1925), pp. 123-140. Later bishopric lists put Sirmium as a metropolitan see under the jurisdiction of Justiniana Prima, indicating, of course, that the metropolitan status of Sirmium was not changed by the foundation of Justiniana Prima: H. Gelzer, "Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistümerverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche", *Byz. Zeitschrift*, 1 (1892), p. 257.

10. Dvornik, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *S. Demetrii Martyris Acta*, Migne, *Pat. Gr.*, 116:1265.

ry, a general dating which does not appear unreasonable.¹³ The other possibility is the general danger which came to prevail in the Aegean as the result of the naval depredations of the Arabs following the defeat of the Byzantine fleet off the coast of Lycia in 655.¹⁴ If the second possibility is the one which corresponds to the reality of things, then the rebellion of Kouver must have taken place sometime after 655. That the second possibility does indeed correspond to the reality of things cannot, however, be stated as a fact. In any case, Kouver's rebellion, on the basis of what is said about Skiathos, could not have taken place before 626.

The Drogubites were a Slavic tribe which had joined a number of other tribes in the piratical expedition referred to above and, shortly thereafter, participated in a siege of Thessalonica under the leadership of the Avars. These Slavs eventually settled not far to the west of Thessalonica,¹⁵ where they lived in primitive habitations and eked out their living as cultivators of the soil. Such was their situation when Kouver arrived near them. By that time, however, they were under the effective jurisdiction of the empire. This is the only interpretation that can be given to the statement in our text to the effect that Kouver requested the emperor to order the Drogubites "to furnish him in sufficient quantity the necessary provisions" and that "this was done." When exactly the Drogubites were subjugated by the emperor is not known, but, on the basis of what is known, this may have been no earlier than 658 when Constans II is reported to have attacked the "Sklavinias" where "many were taken prisoner and brought under his control."¹⁶ If this is so, then, the arrival of Kouver in the regions of Thessalonica took place sometime after 658.

The term *Hellas* appears three times in the second book of the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, the book which includes the passage about Kouver. The first of these references is in the text already cited about the piratical expedition.¹⁷ The entire text reads: "It happened, therefore, as it has been stated, that during the bishopric of John of blessed memory, the nation of the Slavs, a countless multitude, was aroused. This multitude was drawn from the

13. Peter Charanis, "Observations on the History of Greece during the Early Middle Ages," *Balkan Studies*, 11 (1970), p. 23 fn. 66, 67.

14. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 2nd. English edition (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), p. 116.

15. Lubor Niederle, *Manuel de l'Antiquité Slave: Tome: L'Histoire* (Paris, 1923), p. 106. The source is the *Miracula*, the passage on the piratical expeditions of the Slavs (above, note 12) and our text.

16. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed., C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), p. 347;

17. In note 12.

Drogubites, Sagudites, Belegezêtes, Bajunêtes, Berzêtes, and others. First to invent ships carved out of single pieces of timber, they launched themselves on the sea armed, and pillaged all Thessaly and the islands about it and those about Hellas. They pillaged also the Cyclades, all Achaea, Epirus, and the greatest part of Illyricum and parts of Asia." The source of this text, it is generally agreed, was some written document contemporary with the archbishop John (first quarter of the seventh century), and Hellas, as used here, most probably refers to the country of Hellas, the Hellas of classical antiquity. Of the other two references, the first is the one which appears in our passage and the other, in connection with the report about the capture of an African bishop, Cyprian by name, by the Slavs.¹⁸ Cyprian, we are told, while on his way to Constantinople, was captured unexpectedly around the regions of Hellas by Slavs and was taken to their country as a slave. Neither in the case of our passage nor in that about Cyprian are there modifiers or explanatory remarks indicating what the author in the two passages may have meant by Hellas. It may be observed, however, that these two passages derive from an oral tradition far removed from the written documents contemporary with archbishop John, and that the second book of the *Miracula* was written towards the end of the seventh century, perhaps even at the beginning of the eighth. It is quite probable, therefore, that Hellas in these two passages may not refer to the country of Hellas, the Hellas of classical period, but to the *theme* Hellas, a *theme* created by Justinian II sometime between 687 and 695.¹⁹ If this is so, then the arrival of Kouver in the region of Thessalonica must be placed at the earliest after 687. But for other reasons this seems very improbable.

The one element of some chronological definiteness in our passage is the statement to the effect that "some sixty and more years" had elapsed between the rebellion of Kouver against the Avars and the devastations of the Balkan peninsula by the latter and the consequent removal from their homes of the ancestors of the Christian followers of Kouver. But even this is very vague. The source from whence it derives is oral, and the expression "some sixty and more years" leaves much to be desired. But more serious is the problem of determining which invasion of the Balkan peninsula is meant. On this point there has been a wide difference of opinion. Some have taken the invasions which took place during the reigns of Tiberius and Maurice to be meant and,

18. Migne, 1380 (For full reference, above, note 2).

19. On the meaning of Hellas and the creation of the *theme* Hellas: Peter Charanis, "Hellas in the Greek Sources of the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Centuries," *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.* (Princeton, N.J., 1955), pp. 161-176.

as a consequence, put the migration of Kouver towards the end of the reign of Heraclius, or, at the latest, the beginning of that of Constans II; others place these invasions some time between 615 and 626 and so push the date of the migrations past the end of the third quarter of the seventh century.²⁰

Among the chronological elements of our text analyzed above, there are three which bear decisively on the problem: the reference to Sirmium; the status of the Drogubites *vis-à-vis* the empire; and the statement to the effect that "some sixty and more years" had elapsed between the deportation of the Romans referred to in the text and the revolt of Kouver against the Avars. The reference to Sirmium puts the deportation of the Romans sometime after 582, but, on the basis of what is known about the Avar devastations of the Balkan peninsula, not later than 626; the subject status of the Drogubites *vis-à-vis* the empire puts the arrival of Kouver in the Keramesion plain sometime after 658; the statement to the effect that "some sixty and more years" elapsed between the deportation of the Romans and the revolt of their descendants under Kouver, taken in conjunction with 568, confirms what has been inferred from the text on Sirmium that the invasions which led to the deportation in question could not have been those which took place during the reigns of Tiberius and Maurice.

Now, turning to our text we read: when Kouver arrived at the Keramesion plain, "the people, those in particular who were orthodox, sought their ancestral cities, some, our city of Thessalonica, protected by the Martyr, others the most prosperous and queen of cities, and still others, the cities in Thrace which still stood." In other words, the ancestors of this people had been, before their deportation by the Avars, inhabitants of the regions of Thessalonica, Thrace, and the immediate surroundings of Constantinople. Juxtaposing this information with that furnished by the chroniclers to the effect that in 619 the Avar khan, having failed to trap Heraclius, ravaged Thrace, including the immediate surroundings of the capital, and deported to the regions of the Danube 270,000 people (men and women),²¹ we may safely conclude that this deportation is the one referred to by our text of the *Miracula*.²² It follows

20. For the invasions during the reign of Tiberius and Maurice: Pernice, Gelzer, Grégoire, Lemerle; for the later period: V. Laurent, Barišić, Chrysanthopoulos. For reference to their works see above, note 1.

21. *Chronicon Paschale* (Bonn, 1832), 2: 712-13; Theophanes, *op. cit.*, 1:301-2; Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Opuscula Historica*, ed., C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1880), pp. 12-14.

22. Chrysanthopoulos (*op. cit.*, p. 62) thinks that this is the invasion meant, but puts it in 623.

as a consequence that the migrations of Kouver could not have taken place earlier than 680 or later than 688.

It has been suggested, on the basis of a proto-Bulgarian inscription, that the Byzantine emperor referred to in our passage was Justinian II. The text of the inscription is fragmentary, but the most intelligible part of it, as deciphered and translated by its editor, V. Beševliev, reads:²³ "Bulgars and ... came to Tervel. My uncles did not believe the emperor with the slit nose in Thessalonica and came to (the villages) Kisin by a treaty the *archon* Tervel gave to the emperor five thousand and [the emperor with me won a great victory]."

The emperor with the slit nose is, of course, Justinian II, and Tervel the ruler of the Bulgaria (702-718), the Bulgar state south of the Danube which his father, Asparuch (681-702), had founded. That part of the inscription which speaks about the troops which Tervel gave to Justinian and the victory which he helped him to win presents no problem at all. It refers, without a doubt, to what the chroniclers also report,²⁴ that Justinian, in his efforts to regain the throne, turned to Tervel for help and with that help succeeded in realizing his objective. Much more difficult to interpret is the part of the inscription which reads: "My uncles did not believe the emperor with the slit nose in Thessalonica."

In Beševliev's view, the inscription was erected by Tervel. The possessive "my", therefore, refers to him, and as a consequence the "uncles" of the text were his uncles. Who were they? Now, Tervel's father had four brothers, of whom two remained in the Russian regions of their homeland, while the other two moved westward. Neither the one nor the other of the latter is named by the chroniclers,²⁵ but one of them is said to have gone to Italy, while the other, "going to Pannonia of Avaria, remained subject to the Chagan of the Avars." This latter, according to Beševliev and others before him, must have been the Kouver of the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, hence an uncle of Tervel,²⁶ the man

23. V. Beševliev, "Zur Deutung und Datierung der Protobulgarischen Inschrift vor dem Reiterrelief von Madara, Bulgarien", *Byz. Zeitschrift*, 47 (1954), pp. 117 ff.; "Les Inscriptions du relief de Madara", *Byzantinoslavica*, 16 (1955), pp. 224 ff.; *Die Protobulgarischen Inschriften* (Berlin, 1963), pp. 95 ff.

24. Theophanes, *op. cit.*, p. 374; Nicephorus, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

25. Nicephorus, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34; Theophanes, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-57.

26. This identification has been accepted by G. Moravcsik, but he relies for his support on Beševliev: *Byzantinoturcica*, 2nd. edition (Berlin, 1958), 2: 165 (entry under Κοῦβερ). It was also the view of V. N. Zlatarski, the national Bulgarian historian. But Sir Steven Runciman, who based his history of the first Bulgarian kingdom on Zlatarski, expressed himself as follows: "But it seems best to attempt no embroidery on the known facts, and to

also who, according to the inscription, did not believe Justinian II in Thessalonica.

Chronologically the interpretation given to the inscription by Beševliev is possible. In 688/89 Justinian II was in Thessalonica²⁷ and while there he may have entered into negotiations with Kouver, who, in our view, had already been there. But to see things the way Beševliev sees them is to ignore certain serious difficulties. In the first place, the text of the inscription has "uncles" and not "uncle". To be sure, one may get around this difficulty by giving to the term $\theta\epsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$ (the text has $\theta\iota\omicron\varsigma$) a wider meaning to include, besides one's father's or mother's brothers, other close relatives, in this instance the sons of Kouver, if he had any. This is possible. There are, however, other difficulties. According to both texts, that of the inscription and that of the *Miracula* the Byzantine emperor did indeed enter into negotiations with Bulgars stationed in the region of Thessalonica. In the case of the inscription, however, where the Byzantine emperor is identified as Justinian II, these negotiations were carried on while the emperor was in Thessalonica; in the case of the text of the *Miracula* whoever the emperor may have been, he was not in Thessalonica when Kouver opened and carried on his negotiations with him. This difficulty is insurmountable. The Bulgars, therefore, who did not believe Justinian in Thessalonica could not have been the Bulgars of Kouver. Who then were they? No doubt the Bulgars of Thrace, whom Justinian on his way to Thessalonica had encountered and pushed back, intending to subjugate them later.²⁸ What probably happened was this: these Bulgars, aroused by Justinian's triumphant march against the Slavs on his way to Thessalonica, decided to come to an understanding with him and so sent ambassadors, possibly brothers of Tervel's mother, to negotiate with him in Thessalonica. These ambassadors, whatever it was that Justinian II said to them, did not believe him and fled. The attack reported by the chroniclers, which the Bulgars of Thrace launched against Justinian while he was on his way back from Thessalonica, an attack which inflicted considerable losses on the forces of Justinian and from which he himself barely escaped,²⁹ was most probably the sequel to this failure of negotiations.

Justinian II defeated Bulgars and Slavs and at times was defeated by them.

leave Kuber unconnected by relationship to the name of king Kubrat." *A History of the First Bulgarian Empire* (London, 1930), p. 20.

27. Charanis, "Observations," pp. 11-12 & fn. 39.

28. Theophanes, *op. cit.*, p. 364; Nicephorus, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

29. Theophanes, p. 364.

He negotiated with them also. But Kouver and his followers do not seem to have been among them. The light punishment meted out to Mauros after his treacherous intentions had been revealed is so much at variance with the ruthlessness of Justinian's behavior towards his enemies that it alone eliminates him as the emperor with whom Kouver and Mauros dealt. That emperor was no doubt Constantine IV. It was he with whom Kouver negotiated, who nominated Mauros consul, who gave orders to Sisinnios to sail to Thessalonica, who made Mauros commander of his Bulgar followers with the title of *archon* and who later removed him from his command and had him confined in a suburb. The precise year or years when all these things took place cannot be determined; most probably, however, this was sometime between 680 and 685.

A Mauros, surnamed Bessus, and a Sisinnios, surnamed Rhendacis or Rhendacios, are mentioned by the chroniclers in connection with the struggle for the imperial throne early in the eighth century. They were both patricians. Mauros, we are told, commanded a fleet sent by Justinian II to punish Cherson and there joined the conspiracy which led to the proclamation of Bardanes (Philippicus) to the throne. Following the overthrow of Justinian, Mauros was commissioned by the new emperor to destroy Tiberius, the son of Justinian II, and he did so.³⁰ Nothing more is said about this Mauros by the chroniclers.

Sisinnios, according to the account of the same chroniclers, was sent by Leo III to seek the assistance of the Bulgar Tervel in his fight to save the capital from the Arabs. While there, he received word from Anastasius II, the deposed emperor exiled in Thessalonica, asking him to persuade Tervel to help him recover his throne. Sisinnios did so and soon joined the deposed emperor with a contingent of Bulgars. The two, with their Bulgar force and some boats—the ones called *monoxyla*—which they had brought from Thessalonica, went as far as Heraclea, but there they were betrayed by their Bulgar allies. The Bulgar decapitated Sisinnios and sent his head to Leo III; Anastasius they turned over to the same emperor alive, and he had him executed.³¹

Now, the *Miracula* as it ends its account of the episodes involving Sisinnios and Mauros, leaves both of these men alive. Chronologically, therefore, it is quite possible that the Mauros and the Sisinnios of the chroniclers are the same as the Mauros and the Sisinnios of the *Miracula*. But it is also possible that they are different persons. The Mauros of the chroniclers may well have been the son of the Mauros of the *Miracula* that son who had exposed his

30. Nicephorus, *op. cit.*, p. 46-47; Theophanes, *op. cit.*, pp. 377, 379, 380.

31. Theophanes, p. 400; Nicephorus, pp. 55-56.

father's treachery against the emperor and was no doubt rewarded for it; and Sisinnios is not an unusual name in the annals of Byzantium.³² But even if the Sisinnios and the Mauros of the chroniclers are the same as the Sisinnios and the Mauros referred to in the *Miracula*, their activities, as related by the chroniclers, are quite independent of what transpired in Thessalonica as told by the *Miracula*. No emperor mentioned by the chroniclers can, therefore, be identified with the unnamed emperor of the *Miracula*. This has, indeed, been tried. The activities in Thessalonica of Kouver, Mauros, and Sisinnios, it is said, related to the efforts of the deposed emperor Anastasius II to regain the throne.³³ This is, of course, impossible; impossible because the emperor with whom Kouver and Mauros negotiated was not in Thessalonica; because the ships sent to transport the Keramesians to Constantinople came from that city; because the Bulgars from whom Anastasius II sought to obtain help were those of Tervel; and finally because Sisinnios, when Anastasius wrote to him, was not with his fleet in the waters of Hellas, but was sojourning among the Bulgars of Tervel.

There is a third mention of a Mauros, this time in a document much more official than either the *Miracula* or the chroniclers. The document is a seal, in the possession apparently of Father V. Laurent, but, as far as I know, not yet published. The legend inscribed on it, however, was communicated by Father Laurent to Professor Hélène Ahrweiler who has quoted it in her book, *Byzance et la Mer*, to bolster her hypothesis, referred to above, that the unnamed emperor in the *Miracula* was none other than Anastasius II. Following is the full quotation of Professor Ahrweiler's note: "An unedited source furnishes us the confirmation of this hypothesis: this work was in the press when Father V. Laurent called to my attention a 'seal dated surely in the eighth century as belonging to *Mauros, patrician and archon of the Sermisianoï Bulgars*,' the same as the chief of the Keramesianoï of the *Miracula S. Demetrii*."³⁴

The Mauros of the seal may indeed be the Mauros of the *Miracula*. This does not, however, confirm Professor Ahrweiler's hypothesis. For that hypothesis presupposes that Mauros was made *archon* in Thessalonica by an emperor, in this instance Anastasius II, who at that time was also there. But this is not what the *Miracula* says. According to that account, Mauros did indeed meet the emperor and the emperor did make him *archon*, but all this took place in Constantinople. From Constantinople he was sent to Thrace, no doubt

32. In the index of de Boor's edition of Theophanes there are listed six Sisinnioi.

33. Hélène Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer* (Paris, 1966), p. 27 ff.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 29, fn. 7.

as the *archon* of his Bulgars. In Thrace he conspired against the emperor and, as a consequence, lost his command and also his honors. Now, if the Mauros of the seal is indeed the Mauros of the *Miracula*, then that seal must have been struck when he was still in possession of his command and honors. Its date, therefore, is very important. But, what is that date? It may be inferred from the expression "*daté surement*" used by Professor Ahrweiler that the seal itself bears no date and that the date "eighth century" assigned to it was arrived at on the basis of other factors: the physical appearance of the seal, the forms of the letters inscribed on it; and some external evidence, in this case, the reference of the chroniclers to a Mauros. All these factors, however, can be made to justify equally well an earlier date, on the basis of the *Miracula*, the general date to which we have assigned the activities of Kouver, Mauros and Sisinnios in Thessalonica. For, if the "Sermisianoï" of the seal are indeed the "Kermesianoï" of the *Miracula*, then the seal confirms at least in part the story of the *Miracula*. Therein lies its historical significance.

III

The Ethnic Effects of the Activities of Kouver on the Regions of Thessalonica

It was a motley crowd that Kouver brought with him to the regions of Thessalonica. It consisted of Bulgars and various other barbarians including perhaps some Slavs, though no such Slavs are specifically mentioned. But the bulk of this crowd was made up of the offspring of mixed marriages, the one party of which had been Roman deportees. Brought up among the Avars according to Roman traditions, including Christianity, the offsprings of these mixed marriages no doubt spoke some kind of Greek or Latin and probably also some other language spoken in their midst. It was in this milieu most probably that Mauros learned to speak, besides Bulgar, which was his native tongue, also Slavic, Greek and Latin. The adherence of this people to the Roman traditions, including Christianity, gave them, while still in the Avar camp, an identity of their own. They became thus a distinct people among other distinct peoples ruled over by the Khan. In consequence they were given, as was the custom among the Avars, a chieftain of their own, the Bulgar Kouver. But what this people wanted most of all was to return to their Roman ancestral homes. This desire was to be the principal factor in Kouver's subsequent career: its exploitation enabled him to revolt successfully against the

Avars, and made him head towards Thessalonica. His plan was to use this people to carve out a principality of his own.

Things, however, did not work out the way Kouver had hoped, because the moment he reached the regions of Thessalonica the Christians among his followers began to desert him, threatening thereby to leave him a chieftain without a people. He tried to stop this and for this reason sent Mauros to Thessalonica. The plan was for Mauros, perhaps with the cooperation of some of the influential citizens of the city, to seize Thessalonica and so give new strength to Kouver and his Bulgar associates. The timely arrival of Sisinnios prevented this.

What happened, one may now ask, to the people which Kouver had brought to the region of Thessalonica? On this point our text is quite clear: they were dispersed. Where? That too, to a certain extent, is made clear: they were shipped to Constantinople. Shortly after their arrival at the Keramesion plain, we read in the text of the *Miracula*, "most of those of Roman origins with wives and children began to enter our city saved by God. The administrative officials immediately sent them by ship to the capital." Sisinnios, we read further, gave orders to the effect that Mauros and his followers, as well as his own troops, should withdraw from the city "in order that Keramesians who wished to get away from the Slavs and come here [*i.e.* Thessalonica] might do so freely and without fear." Now, not long after this, our text continues, "the vessels intended to transport the Keramesians arrived." As for Mauros and his Bulgar followers, they were eventually transported somewhere in Thrace where some time later Mauros was arrested and confined in a suburb. What happened to Kouver is not known. The suggestion that he succeeded Tervel as the Khan of the Bulgars has no supporting evidence at all.³⁵ The family name of Kouvi-ares met with among the Bulgars in the ninth century may be related to the name Kouver, but that it is the Kouver of the *Miracula* remains to be demonstrated. The same thing may be said about such names as Γοῦμερ and Γοῦβερ that some Byzantines are known to have borne.³⁶

Thus, the people whom Kouver had brought to the regions of Thessalonica were shipped away. It is quite possible, of course, that some few may have stayed, but in general Kouver's sojourn in the Keramesion plain affected very little the demography of the regions around Thessalonica. In view of this, it is, to say the least, misleading to state, as has been done by a distinguished French

35. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

36. Moravcsik, *op. cit.*, p. 165, entries Κοῦβερ and Κουβριάνης.

scholar in a recent publication,³⁷ that “a Slav fugitive, Mauros, [was] officially put at the head of the Slavs of Thessalonica, but the emperor [sent] the admiral Sisinnios with a detachment of marines to watch over him. Thessalonica and Macedonia were Slavonized, no doubt, but seem to have remained in the hands of their civil administration thanks perhaps to the admirable cohabitation of the local and Slav notables.”³⁸ Mauros and his followers were, of course, Bulgars and not Slavs; and the text, a text of the *Miracula*, rendered here “local and Slav notables” actually reads ἀρχοντες ἐγχώριοι, ἀρχοντες ξένοι. *Xenos*, of course, means stranger, a man from another region or city of the empire, and many such strangers, refugees from cities that had been devastated by the barbarians, had fled and became domiciled in Thessalonica in the course of the seventh century.³⁹ There is, therefore no justifiable reason at all why in this instance the term should have been rendered “Slavs”. Slavs, of course, did settle in the regions around Thessalonica, and many of the inhabitants of the city became in due course bilingual, but to say that Thessalonica was Slavonized is to do serious violence to the texts. At no time during its long history did Thessalonica become Slavic either in language or by the dominance of Slavs in its population.

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37. André Guillou, *Régionalisme et indépendance dans l'empire byzantin au VII^e siècle. L'Exemple de l'exarchat et de la pentapole d'Italie* (Rome, 1969), p. 250 f. No more accurate is Runciman's statement, *op. cit.*, p. 21.: “anyhow, after the long, divinely frustrated siege [of Thessalonica], we hear no more of Kuber. His tribes mingled and were absorbed with their allies, the Slavs, and thus laid the first foundation of the Bulgar claims to Macedonia.”

38. Examples, *Miracula* edition Migne, 1336, 1337.

39. The statement of Michael III which appears in the Slavic life of Methodius to the effect that “all the Salonians speak Slavic well” cannot, of course, be taken to mean that Slavic was the language of Thessalonica: Fr. Dvornik, *Les Légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vue de Byzance* (Prague, 1933), p. 386.