

PETER CHARANIS

THE SLAVS, BYZANTIUM,
AND THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE FIRST BULGARIAN KINGDOM

In 1873 R. Roesler put forth the thesis to the effect that the settlement of the Balkan peninsula south of the Danube and the Save by the Slavs could not have taken place before the reign of Phocas (602-610)¹. That thesis had virtually died out when in 1963 it was revived with some modifications by the Rumanian scholar Ion Nestor. In a study devoted to the examination of the literary sources which relate to the subject Nestor wrote: «The penetration of the Slavs in the Balkans and Greece acquired thus a general and real historical significance only at the beginning of the seventh century. In their turn the Slav establishments in the Balkan peninsula towards the last twenty years of the sixth century constitute only a hypothesis and maximal concession»². In Nestor's view there were really no substantial Slav settlements either in Greece proper or elsewhere in the Balkan peninsula before the end of the sixth century.

Some five years ago the Greek scholar, Maria Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou, published a study remarkable for its analysis of detail in which she tried to show that the chronology of the activities of the Avaro-Slavs in the Balkan peninsula during the last ten years of the reign of Maurice (582-602), generally accepted, is in error³. She suggested several corrections, including the date of the invasion of Dalmatia by the Avars. This she shifts from 596-599, the date given for it by Hauptman⁴, to the end of 595, middle of 597. According to her the shift is of significance because it makes possible the appearance of the Avars before Thessalonica in September 597 and as a consequence removes the objection of some scholars to the acceptance of 597 as the year of

1. R. Roesler, «Über den Zeitpunkt der slavischen Ansiedlung an der unteren Donau», *Sitzungsberichte d. Kai. Akad. Wissenschaften, Philos. - Hist. Klasse*, 73 (1873), 77-126.

2. Ion Nestor, «La pénétration des Slaves dans la péninsule Balkanique et la Grèce continentale», *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 1 (1963), 67.

3. Maria Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou, «Συμβολή εις τὴν Χρονολόγησιν τῶν Ἀβαρικῶν καὶ Σλαβικῶν ἐπιδρομῶν ἐπὶ Μαυρικίου (582-602)», *Σύμμεικτα* 2 (1970), 145-206.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171, 203.

the great siege of Thessalonica¹. Nystazopoulou speaks of isolated settlements of Slavs established south of the Danube during the early years of the reign of Maurice, but she does not examine this problem in detail. Nevertheless the underlying assumption of the study is clear; no Slavic settlements of consequence and continuity were established in the Balkan peninsula south of the Danube before the reign of Phocas.

In the meantime Paul Lemerle and his group devoted some time to the study of the short chronicle known as the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* and in 1963 Lemerle published the results. The essence of these results is this, that while the references of that chronicle to the attack of the Slavs against Patras during the reign of Nicephorus I and the action taken by that emperor following the Byzantine victory can be shown to be based on a good historical tradition and as a consequence should be accepted as true, those which refer to the invasion of the Peloponnesus and the occupation of the western part of it by the Slavs during the first decade of the reign of Maurice cannot be authenticated and for that reason they should be considered dubious². «The chronicler,» he writes, «basing himself, in the absence of documents, on some local tradition, probably goes too far in putting the greater part of the Peloponnesus in the hands of the Slavs as early as 587/8»³. And again: «It is not established . . . that the Peloponnesus was effectively invaded and occupied by the Avaro-Slavs as early as the end of the sixth century»⁴. Lemerle's position on this point is, of course, the opposite of what I have long held⁵ and it has been questioned by others⁶, but it has been now completely undermined by the publication of a new datum. This is a brief chronological notice, independent of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, which, like that chronicle, puts the foundation of Monemvasia during the reign of Maurice. The notice had been available for some

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 172 ff. On the chronological data about this siege and how various scholars have interpreted it: Peter Charanis, *Studies on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire*, London 1972, study II, p. 37, n. 37 [Variorum Reprints, CS 8]. The study referred to here was originally published in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), 25-44. Hereafter referred to as *Studies on the Demography*.

2. Paul Lemerle, «La Chronique improprement dite de Monemvasie: Le contexte historique et légendaire», *Revue des Études Byzantines* 21 (1963), 5-49.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

5. Charanis, *op. cit.*, studies: X, XI, XIII, XIV, XVI.

6. For instance, V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, «Sur quelques aspects de la colonisation slave en Macédoine et en Grèce», *Études Balkaniques* 1 (1964), 111-123.

time, but no one caught its historical significance until it was elucidated by Peter Schreiner¹. Schreiner writes: «The data of the 'Chronicle of Monemvasia' on the invasions of the barbarians during the reign of Maurice and the establishment of the Avars and Slavs in the Peloponnesus as early as 587 are confirmed by our new source as well as by the researches of M. F. Barišić who, with the aid of a comparison of several historical works (Simocatta, Theophanes, *Miracula S. Demetrii*), has sought to verify the indications of the 'Chronicle of Monemvasia'². If the foundation of a fortress became necessary in the first years of the reign of Maurice that is because then and perhaps already in the times of his predecessor, Tiberius, barbarian peoples ravaged the Peloponnesus. Their establishment in 587, following the great invasions of 585/86 pointed out by Barišić is a historical datum beyond any doubt»³.

The brief notice as interpreted by Schreiner has already been used by a number of scholars: Charanis⁴, D. Zakythinos⁵, Bohumila Zástěrová⁶, and others, for instance, the young English scholar, Judith Herrin, who, commenting on the large-scale emigration from the Peloponnesus to Sicily and southern Italy under the pressure of the Avaro-Slav invasion, writes⁷: «The scale of this emigration may be exaggerated but there can be no doubt that many Greeks abandoned their homes and settled in southern Italy and Sicily. The Chronicle also records what happened to those who could not escape by sea — they sought refuge in the most inaccessible parts of the Peloponnese, where they built new fortified sites, such as the city of Monemvasia... Recently

1. Peter Schreiner, «Note sur la fondation de Monemvasie en 582-583», *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970), 471-475.

2. F. Barišić, «'Monemvasijska' hronika o doseljavanu Avaroslovena na Peloponez 587», *Naučno društvo Bosne i Hercegovine*, Godišnjak 3, *Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja*, knj. 1., Sarajevo 1965. The reference to Barišić is as cited by Schreiner. I did not see the work.

3. Schreiner, *op. cit.*, 475.

4. Charanis, *op. cit.*, author's preface.

5. D. Zakythinos, *Byzance: État - Société - Économie*, London 1973, study IV, p. 13 [Variorum Reprints, CS 25]. This study was originally published in 1972.

6. In her review of my *Studies on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire*, *Byzantinoslavica* 35 (1974), 220-224, Madame Zástěrová writes (p. 224): «Earlier, tending to accept the arguments put forward by Lemerle, I treated with reservations the exact date of Slavonic settlement of the Peloponnesus given by the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* and other sources... I now feel that Schreiner's discovery is an important argument in favour of that date».

7. Judith Herrin, «Aspects of the Process of Hellenization in the Early Middle Ages», *The Annual of the British School of Archaeology at Athens* 68 (1973), 118.

the foundation of the city has been dated to the years 582-3 by a combination of archaeological and documentary evidence».

In a note the same scholar adds further¹: «The migration of the city of Patras with its bishop, mentioned in the Chronicle... is confirmed by the acts of the Seventh Oecumenical Council held in Nikaia in 787. This Council was attended by bishops from several Aegean islands, including Aigina, Euboia, and Skopelos, but not from the mainland centres, Thessalonike, Larissa, Athens, and Corinth. Patras, however, was represented by Ἰωάννης μοναχὸς καὶ ἐκ προσώπου Πατρῶν, who signed after the bishop of Reggio (Calabria) and before the group of Sicilian bishops...».

It is generally held, even by scholars who believe that substantial settlements were established in the Balkan peninsula during the last twenty years of the sixth century, that the extensive occupation of that peninsula by the Slavs did not take place until the beginning, and in the course, of the seventh century. «The stream of Slavic colonization», writes Ostrogorsky, «which had begun in some places at the end of the sixth century, had poured in an irresistible flood over the whole Balkan peninsula early in the seventh, after the failure of the Danubian campaign of Maurice and the complete collapse of the old system in the time of Phocas»². Yet Barišić, who devoted a special study to the Avaro-Slavs in the time of Phocas, aside from the general statement of Theophanes that the Avars devastated Thrace, found no evidence of any massive Slavic settlement³. Some episodes, the piratical expedition undertaken by a number of Slavic tribes when John was bishop of Thessalonica⁴, the siege of Thessalonica by the Slavs under the leadership of a certain Hatzon⁵, should all most probably be dated some time in the second decade of the seventh century, but the Slavs involved in them seem to have been settled on imperial territory already for some time. A number of other incursions into imperial territory by the Avars in which Slavs were involved are recorded to have taken place dur-

1. *Ibid.*, p. 118, n. 31.

2. G. Ostrogorsky, «The Byzantine Empire in the World of the Seventh Century», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), 4 [= G. Ostrogorsky, *Zur byzantinischen Geschichte. Ausgewählte kleine Schriften*, Darmstadt 1973, p. 81].

3. F. Barišić, «De Avaro-Slavis in Phocae imperatoris aetate», *Recueil de Travaux, Institute d'Études Byzantines* 4 (1956), 73-88. I do not know Serbian, but I consulted the Serbian text with the aid of Traian Stoianovich of Rutgers University.

4. *Miracula S. Demetrii*, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 116, pp. 1325 ff.

5. *Ibid.*, 1328 ff.

ing the reign of Heraclius, but it is not clear to what extent these Slavs came from beyond the frontiers of the empire. In some instances, at least in the siege of Thessalonica, after Hatzon had failed to take that city, the Slavs involved had been settled in the empire already for some time¹. It was indeed at their invitation that the Avars had come and attempted to take the city. But in this instance and in others too there were Slavs and Bulgars in the Avar forces who had been brought from afar, most probably from beyond the frontiers of the empire. To what extent, as the Avar forces withdrew carrying away with them thousands of natives², these Slavs stayed behind and settled for good on imperial territory is really an open question. The presumption is that they did and that in due course they were joined by other Slavs who came and occupied the devastated imperial territories, but the sources are really silent on this point. It may be, therefore, that the decisive phase of the establishment of the Slavs in the Balkan peninsula, particularly in certain parts of Thrace, of the two Macedonias and of the regions to the South, including, of course, the Pelopoponnese, should be associated with the great invasions of the last two decades of the sixth century. The invasion of Kouver³ which took place sometime between 680 and 688 did not affect in any serious way the ethnic complexion of any of the regions involved. In the northwestern regions of Illyricum, in the interior of Dalmatia and the territories to the south-east of the latter (the old province of Prevalitania) the situation may have evolved differently. There the Avars, until they were replaced by the Croats and the Serbs, both slavonized Iranian tribes⁴, were in con-

1. *Ibid.*, 1336 ff.

2. The Slavs and other ethnic groups included in the Avar forces which besieged Constantinople in 626 had apparently been brought from beyond the frontiers of the Empire. On the siege: F. Barišić, «Le siège de Constantinople par les Avars et les Slaves en 626», *Byzantion* 26 (1954), 371-395. In 619 the Avars in their devastation of Thrace carried away with them, according to a Byzantine chronicler, 270,000 natives: Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Opuscula Historica*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig 1880, pp. 12-14; cf. *Chronicon Paschale*, Bonn 1832, vol. I, pp. 712-713; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig 1883, vol. I, pp. 301-302.

3. On Kouver: P. Charanis, «Kouver, the Chronology of his Activities and their Ethnic Effects on the Regions around Thessalonica», *Balkan Studies* 11 (1970), 229-247 [= P. Charanis, *Studies on the Demography*, study XX].

4. On the primitive origins of the Croats and Serbs with reference to the literature: F. Dvornik, *The Making of Central and Eastern Europe*, London 1949, pp. 268 ff.; *idem*, *The Slavs, their Early History and Civilization*, Boston 1956, pp. 26ff., 28, 58; *idem*, in R. J. H. Jenkins, editor, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio*, vol. II, Commentary, London 1962, pp. 104-116.

trol and no doubt promoted the continued settlement of these regions by Slavs under their dominance. It has been shown that in his *Etymologies* Isidore of Seville takes *Graecia* to mean Illyricum and as a consequence his observation that «at the beginning of the fifth year of Heraclius (615 A.D.) the Slavs took *Graecia* from the Romans» most probably refers to the north-western regions of Illyricum¹. A possible confirmation of this may be found in the statement of Constantine Porphyrogenitus that native Romans of these regions of Illyricum had been driven out by Avars during the reign of Heraclius².

It has been noted that Ostrogorsky refers to the Slavic colonization of the Balkan peninsula as a stream which poured in an irresistible flood submerging the entire peninsula³. Ostrogorsky's expression is, of course, a figure of speech, but behind that figure of speech lies the view generally accepted that the Slavs had come into the Balkan peninsula in overwhelming numbers. The fact that by far the major part of the peninsula was slavonized is taken to speak in favor of that view. But the sources which deal with the period of the invasions offer little concrete information on the point. The few figures which they give are no doubt grossly exaggerated. It is hardly possible to believe the author of the *Miracula S. Demetrii* that the forces of Slavs and Avars which besieged Thessalonica in 586 numbered more than 100,000⁴. That this figure is a gross exaggeration may be inferred from the nature of the source—the greater the numerical strength of the enemy, the more marvellous the miracle of the saint—, but more concretely from the statement of the author to the effect that the forces in question dried up rivers and other sources of water wherever they camped and turned into deserts the regions through which they marched. This reminds one of the stories about the armies of Xerxes at the time of the Persian invasion of Greece. The figure given of the number of the Avar and Slav forces which besieged Constantinople in 626 is probably also exaggerated. One of the sources contemporary with the siege gives certain elements which make possible the calculation of the size of the Avar forces, and this calculation puts those forces at more than a million, a figure which

1. On this see: P. Charanis, «*Graecia* in Isidore of Seville», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 64 (1971), 22-25 [= *Studies on the Demography*, study XIX].

2. *De Administrando Imperio*, edited by Gy. Moravcsik and translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, revised edition, Washington, D. C., Dumbarton Oaks, 1967, p. 148.

3. See page 8, note 2.

4. *Op. cit.*, 1288.

is, as Barišić observes, absolutely preposterous¹. George of Psidia² gives the more modest figure of 80,000 but still most probably an exaggeration, for under the circumstances that George's discourse was composed it was only natural to overestimate the strength of the enemy. Besides, here too the miraculous played some role. The defeat of the Avars was attributed to the Virgin; the enhancing of the size of their forces enhanced the miraculous power of the Virgin.

So much for figures. What gives the impression that the Balkan peninsula was inundated with torrents of Slavs was the use of certain indefinite expressions of the sources which referred to them. «Infinite multitude», «numberless multitude» are two expressions particularly used by them to denote the size of the invading barbarian forces³. These expressions need, of course, not to be taken seriously. Such expressions represented then, as they do today, the immediate reactions of viewers to a concentration or movement of people and mean nothing more than this, that in the opinion of the viewers the number of the people involved in the concentration or movement is large. In the case of the sources which use these expressions in their references to the Slavs it is possible to check at least one of them. The author of the second book of the *Miracula S. Demetrii* writes at the beginning of his work, «It happened, therefore, as has been stated, that during the bishopric of John of blessed memory, the nation of the Slavs was aroused. An infinite multitude was drawn from the Drogubites, Sagudates, Belegezêtes, Bajunêtes and others. Armed, they launched themselves on the sea on ships carved out of single pieces of timber, and pillaged all Thessaly and the islands about it and those about Hellas»⁴. Obviously this multitude with its devastations by sea and on relatively small boats, however infinite it may have appeared to the viewers, must have been very finite indeed. The slavonization of the major part of the Balkan peninsula implies a numerical strength of consequence, but there are details in the process, which are not known and there may have been other factors involved. Besides the survival of the Greeks and other natives, the ancestors of those who later appeared as Albanians and Vlachs indicate that the

1. F. Barišić, «Le siège de Constantinople par les Avars et les Slaves en 626», *Byzantion* 24 (1954), 379, n. 7.

2. George of Psidia, *Poemi, I, Panegirici Epici*, ed. A. Pertusi, Ettal 1959, p. 186 [= *Bellum Avaricum* V, pp. 218-219].

3. *Chronicon Paschale*, Bonn 1832, vol. I, pp. 712-713; *Miracula S. Demetrii*, P.G. 116, pp. 1337.

4. *Ibid.*, 1325.

influx of the Slavs must not have been so overwhelming after all. The number of Slavs involved in that influx was most probably not as great as is generally believed and their settlements not as widespread and as dense, certainly not in the coastal Macedonian and southern regions of the peninsula as it may be assumed. The various Sclavinias referred to in the Byzantine texts were not contiguous territories¹. One should be careful, however, not to move to the opposite extreme. If anyone is inclined so to move he ought to be reminded of the fact that in the eighth century Constantine V transferred 208,000 Slavs from Europe to Asia Minor². Whatever that figure may mean, it means also this, that the Slavs who settled in the Balkan peninsula totaled into a number of consequence.

There is an episode described in the *Miracula S. Demetrii*, chronologically belonging to the reign of Constantine IV (668-85), which refers to the activities of a certain Perbundus, chieftain of the Rynchine Slavs who had settled not far from Thessalonica³. The Rynchines, we are told, were at peace with the empire, at least on the surface, and Perbundus was in Thessalonica when, on instructions from the emperor he was arrested by the imperial authorities and sent to Constantinople bound in irons. The charge was that he was planning to unite the various Slavic tribes and lead a general attack against the empire. An embassy composed of Slavs and natives of Thessalonica, was sent to Constantinople to intercede with the emperor on his behalf. The emperor was then busy preparing a campaign against the Arabs and as a consequence deferred any action on Perbundus, saying that he would deal with him after the campaign against the Arabs was over. Perbundus, who spoke Greek and dressed like a Greek, managed to escape and found refuge among the Slavs located near the city of Vizye in Thrace. He was eventually apprehended and brought back to Constantinople, but when detected trying to escape again, he was put to death. His execution

1. On the Sclavinias: P. Charanis, «Observations on the History of Greece during the Early Middle Ages», *Balkan Studies* 11 (1970), 11ff. [= *Studies on the Demography*, study XXI].

2. Nicephorus, *Opuscula Historica*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig 1880, pp. 68ff. On the figure given by Nicephorus, see P. Charanis, *Studies on the Demography*, study I, p. 12, n. 8.

3. The text of this episode given in Migne, *P.G.* 116, p. 1349ff. is defective. One should consult the text given by Abbé A. Tougaard, *De l'histoire profane dans les Actes grecs de Bollandistes*, Paris 1874, pp. 154ff; cf. P. Lemerle, «La composition et la chronologie des deux premiers livres des *Miracula S. Demetrii*», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 46 (1953), 357.

aroused the Slavic tribes in the regions of Thessalonica, and, combining, they laid siege to the city; but St. Demetrius and the timely defeat of one of the Slavic tribes—the Strymonians—by an imperial army turned them back and saved the city. During the siege the authorities of Thessalonica tried to get supplies from the Velegezêtes, a Slavic tribe which had settled in Thessaly in the regions of Thebes and Demetrias and had by now established commercial relations with Thessalonica.

In the description of this episode by the author of the *Miracula S. Demetrii* there are certain things about the Slavs in the regions of Thessalonica which are worthy of note. These Slavs are made up of a number of different tribes: the Strymonians whose settlement was located some distance to the east of Thessalonica, along the lower stretches of the river Strymon; the Rynchines, Drogubites and the Sagudates, who had settled to the west of the city; and finally the Velegezêtes to whose exact location in Thessaly reference has already been made. Apparently still pagan, still prone to violence, these Slavs had learned by now how to live and how to conduct themselves peacefully, at least on the surface, in their new environment. They circulated among the natives, transacted business with them and carried on commerce. But more important, some of them had already begun to dress like Greeks and to speak the Greek language. This is explicitly stated to have been so in the case of Perbundus and most probably was also so in the case of those who participated in the embassy which had been sent to Constantinople to intercede with the emperor in favor of Perbundus. They had begun in other words to yield to the process of hellenization, succumbing thereby to the cultural forces, the principal one of which was the Greek language, of their new environment. This is not to say, however, that they were already on the verge of abandoning their own ways of life and their own language.

There is a reference to the effect that Byzantine emperors may have deliberately tried to make Greek speakers out of the Slavs. In his *Taktika*, Leo VI the Wise has this to say about his father, Basil I: «Our

1. Leo the Wise, *Taktika*, Migne, P.G. 107, 969A: «Ταῦτα δὲ [δηλαδή τὰ σλαβικὰ ἔθνη] ὁ ἡμέτερος ἐν θεῇ τῇ λήξει γενόμενος πατὴρ τῶν Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτωρ Βασίλειος τῶν ἀρχαίων ἔθων ἔπεισε μεταστῆναι, καὶ γ ρ α ι κ ὡ σ α ς καὶ ἄρχουσι, κατὰ τὸν Ῥωμαϊκὸν τύπον, ὑποτάξας καὶ βαπτίσματι τιμήσας, τῆς τε δουλείας ἡλευθέρωσε τῶν αὐτῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ στρατεύεσθαι κατὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων πολεμούντων ἔθνων ἐξεπαίδευσεν, οὕτω πως ἐπιμελῶς περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα διακείμενος. Διὸ καὶ ἀμερίμνους Ῥωμαίους ἐκ τῆς πολλάκις τῶν Σλάβων γενομένης ἀνταρσίας ἐποίησε, πολλὰς ὑπ' ἐκείνων ὀχλήσεις καὶ πολέμους τοῖς πάλαι χρόνοις ὑπομείναντας».

father Basil, the emperor of the Romans... persuaded the nations of the Slavs to give up their own traditions. He *graecized* them and placed them under rulers according to the Roman way. He honored them with baptism, freed them from the burden of their chieftains and taught them to campaign against the nations at war with the Romans. In this way he freed the Romans from the concern which these Slavs by their frequent uprisings caused them. In the past the Romans had suffered numerous disturbances and wars inflicted upon them by these Slavs».

This is an interesting passage, interesting because it shows how the Byzantines sought to turn hostile tribes into friendly ones and eventually perhaps assimilate them. But the passage presents problems, of which the principal one lies in the use of the participle *graecusas* (γραικώσας), which I have rendered *graecized*, more of a transliteration than a translation. In fact no one word translation of the term is possible, for the difficulty lies in the meaning of the term itself. Some scholars, most recently Arnold Toynbee¹, have taken it in the sense of hellenized, meaning that Basil made Greek speakers of these Slavs.

This interpretation has not remained unchallenged. One scholar sees no connection at all between the participle in question and anything Greek. He traces its origin to the Latin *grex*, herd, and renders it in its verbal form, «to gather», «to subdue». According to him, therefore, the relevant sentence in Leo's text should be read to say that Basil subdued the Slavic tribes in question and not that he hellenized them in the sense that he made them Greek speakers².

Another scholar, G. Tsaras, associates *graecusas* with the term *graecus* (γραικός), Greek, but sees no linguistic significance in the context in which it was used by Leo. According to him, *graecusas* as used by Leo should not be taken to mean that the Slavs affected became Greek speakers, but rather that they adapted themselves to the Greek ways of life³. Leo's text should be read, therefore, to say that Basil «persuaded the nations of the Slavs to give up their own traditions, made them accept the ways of life of the Greeks, etc. . ». I think Tsaras is right. The Byzantine emperors, certainly those who came after Justi-

1. Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World*, London and New York 1973, p. 98.

2. G. T. Kolias, «Ἡσκησεν ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ Βασίλειος ὁ Α' ἐξελληνιστικὴν πολιτικὴν ἔναντι τῶν Σλάβων», *Κυρίλλω καὶ Μεθοδίω τόμος ἐδοχίως ἐπὶ τῇ χιλιοστῇ καὶ ἑκατοστῇ ἐτηρίδι*, vol. I, Thessaloniki 1966, pp. 233-239.

3. G. Tsaras, «Τὸ νόημα τοῦ 'γραικώσας' στὰ Τακτικὰ Λέοντος ΣΤ' τοῦ Σοφοῦ», *Βυζαντινὰ* 1 (1969), 135-157.

nian, whatever their ethnic origins, were all Greek speakers and at times took measures, the transfer of peoples from one province to another, for instance, which created conditions facilitating the spread of the Greek language, but at no time did they deliberately make it a point of policy to propagate the use of that speech. Conversion to orthodoxy was the usual way by which they sought to assimilate the alien peoples which had found their way into the empire.

Nevertheless peoples alien to Greeks in time became Greek speakers. This is what gave to this multinational state which was the Byzantine empire its Greek character. This was true of Asia Minor as well as, up to a point, of the European provinces. In Asia Minor the spread of Greek had been promoted by the Seleucids and the Attalids and was further encouraged by the Romans who brought the entire peninsula under their effective jurisdiction. Cicero called the Lydians Greeks and Strabo says that in his time Lydian had ceased to be spoken in Lydia itself, although it was still used along with Pisidian and Greek in Cibyra. Under the impact of Christianity Greek, which in early Roman times was very much restricted to towns and among the natives tended to be spoken only by the rich and the educated, in time spread into villages and hamlets and became the speech of the poor and the uneducated. There is some evidence to the effect that some of the ancient native languages were still spoken as late as the sixth century and perhaps the seventh, but their survival much beyond that is highly questionable. In the meantime the foreign peoples settled in Asia Minor, Goths, Vandals, Mardaïtes, Slavs had already yielded or were beginning to yield to Greek. The Vandals, Goths and Mardaïtes were relatively few, but the Slavs may have numbered as many as 300,000. Settled in Asia Minor towards the end of the seventh century and again about the middle of the eighth, they began very early to yield to Greek. Thomas the Slavonian is said to have been eloquent, no doubt eloquent in Greek, for the reference is in connection with his public career. The monk Ioannikes (754-846), tender of hogs, soldier and finally monk was, as Speros Vryonis has shown, a Greek-speaking Slav. In the case of Thomas, the army, in the case of Ioannikes, the army and the church were the two forces for the use of Greek. But the milieu also played an important role. Isolated from the general body of Slavdom, converted early to Christianity, and exposed to the Greek language and letters, the Slavs in Asia Minor abandoned their speech and became Greek speakers. The process was not, of course, completed overnight, but by

the end of the ninth century it must have gone very far¹.

The situation in the Balkan peninsula evolved quite differently. There Greek had never been everywhere the spoken speech. The general use of Greek during the Roman period according to the accepted view did not extend beyond a line whose one end was on the Adriatic coast, roughly at the mouth of the Shkumbi, the ancient Genesius, and the other on the coast of the Black Sea at Varna, the ancient Odessus. In between, the line followed the course of the Shkumbi to Lake Ochrida, passed by Praesidium (the Greek Parembole, about 16 km. slightly northwest of Monastir) and proceeded east-north-east to the south of Skoplje. It reached Sardica at a point somewhat west of the city, then followed the northern slopes of the Haemus, ending finally at Varna². North of that line the general language in use was Latin. This demarcation, however, must be viewed more as a zone than a line in the geometric sense of that term, for under the circumstances then existing the linguistic frontier in question could hardly have been so precise. Greek no doubt was spoken beyond that line and Latin on the other side of it. Indeed, according to one scholar, Latin had made such an inroad into Macedonia that that province had become perhaps bilingual³. This lends some support to the view held by Greek scholars, that the Vlachs now in that country are actually the descendants of Latinized Macedonians and as a consequence Greeks by origin⁴.

The Avar devastations and the consequent settlement of Slavs changed all this. Latin, though still spoken in some localities at the end of the seventh century, in time disappeared and the territorial extent where Greek was the general language of speech was curtailed. Some of the natives were exterminated, others were driven away, still others

1. On this see my paper, «Cultural Diversity and the Breakdown of Byzantine Power in Asia Minor». The paper is scheduled to appear in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 29.

2. Pierre Skok, «Byzance comme centre d'irradiation pour les mots Latins des langues Balkaniques», *Byzantion* 4 (1931), 371ff. For other references see H. Mihăescu, «La diffusion de la langue Latine dans le Sud-Est de l'Europe», *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 1 (1971), 497ff.

3. According to Carl Patsch as quoted by Mihăescu, *ibid.*, p. 498.

4. S. N. Liakos, *Ἡ καταγωγή τῶν Βλάχων (ἢ Ἀγυρνίων)*, Thessaloniki 1965. I cite Liakos' book with some hesitation because the author's handling of the sources is somewhat childish, but he knows toponyms and in any case believes the Vlachs in present day Greece are descendants of latinized ancient Macedonians. But see also the scholarly work of A. E. Vacalopoulos, *The Origins of the Modern Greek Nation, 1204-1461*, New Brunswick, N. J., 1970, pp. 12ff.

changed their locale. Administratively, in the central and northern regions of the peninsula, the imperial system collapsed and in the coastal regions where it persisted details about its effectiveness are lacking¹. But then with the exception of Egypt, where the papyri yield considerable information, details on the administrative effectiveness in any imperial territory for any period in the history of the empire are lacking. For some time during the seventh century the old administrative arrangement in the Balkan peninsula still obtained, but before that century was over it began to give way to the new, the *theme* system. Thrace was organized into a *theme* sometime before 687; Hellas, whose northern boundary extended far enough to include Thessaly, sometime between 687 and 695: the Peloponnesus, in my opinion, sometime during the first half of the eighth century as a result of the break-up of the Carabisiani; Macedonia, actually western Thrace, but, until the creation of the *theme* of Strymon sometime after 842, extending westward to the river Strymon, between 789 and 802: and finally Thessalonica, created into a *theme* possibly during the reign of Nicephorus I, but certainly before 842. If the settlement of Slavs in these regions had caused any looseness in the administrative machinery which had governed them, that looseness was now eliminated by the establishment of these *themes*².

In the meantime the Slavs settled in these regions adjusted themselves to their environment and, though still prone to violence, they gave themselves more and more to the arts of peace. Reference has already been made to the *Velegezêtes*, the Slavs settled in Thessaly, from whom Thessalonica sought to get supplies when it was besieged by other Slavs following the arrest and execution of Perbundus³. A few years later, c. 685, the Drogubites, pacified once more, were ordered by the imperial authorities to provide to Kouver and his followers the provisions which they needed and the Drogubites did so⁴. In the ninth century Drogubites and Sagudates, living together in what Caminiates calls mixed villages located in the region between Thessalonica and Veroia, paid taxes to the authorities in Thessalonica and carried on

1. The last reference to the old administrative system in Thessaloniki, c. 796: S. P. Kyriakides, *Θεσσαλονίκη Μελετήματα*, Thessaloniki 1939, pp. 24.

2. On Hellas and the Peloponnesus: P. Charanis, *Studies on the Demography*, study XXI, pp. 4ff., 6ff.; on the others, P. Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macédoine orientale*, Paris 1945, pp. 120ff.

3. See page 12, note 3.

4. P. Charanis, *Studies on the Demography*, study XX, p. 231.

commerce with it¹. The Strymonians, known at the beginning of the ninth century for their arts of banditry and piracy², by the end of that century were expected to serve in the army as auxiliaries and did so, though somewhat reluctantly³. At the same time that they were giving themselves to the arts of peace, these Slavs were also succumbing to the cultural forces of the empire. The most powerful of these forces was no doubt Christianity. Details of how Slavs of these regions were converted to Christianity are lacking, but the process must have begun soon after they had adjusted themselves to their new environment and was most probably completed by the end of the ninth century. The church, at times the state, but primarily the milieu, i.e. the influence of the native Christian population, reinforced in some instances by new settlers, generally Greek speakers, brought from other parts of the empire, constituted the principal factors making for conversion. Lemerle's statement to the effect that in the seventh and eighth centuries all of Macedonia was more Slav than Greek is, of course, incapable of proof⁴. Much more reasonable is the way the late F. Dvornik has put it, that in Epirus, in Thrace, in Macedonia, in Hellas, the native Christian population did not entirely disappear, that it served as the nucleus for the propagation of Christianity among the invaders⁵. If this was indeed so, and there is no reason to doubt that it was so, the Christian population which survived the invasions must have been considerable.

Conversion to Christianity opened the way to Greek, for Greek was, of course, the language of the church in these regions. In actual fact, however, the dissemination of Greek had begun much earlier when these Slavs were still pagans. Reference has already been made to Perbundus that he spoke Greek and dressed like a Greek⁶. The Bulgar Maurus, the associate of Kouver who sometime before the end of the reign of Constantine IV sought to seize Thessalonica, besides Bulgar

1. John Cameniates, *De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, ed. G. Bohlig, Berlin 1973, p. 8.

2. F. Dvornik, *La vie de saint Grégoire le Décapolite et les Slaves macédoniens au IX^e siècle*, Paris 1926, pp. 31ff.

3. J. Cameniates, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 38.

4. P. Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macédoine orientale*, p. 116.

5. F. Dvornik, *Les Slaves, Byzance et Rome au IX^e siècle*, Paris 1926, pp. 84ff., 99, 100.

6. See page 12, note 3.

and Slavic, spoke also Greek and Latin¹. As these Slavs settled down, gave themselves to the arts of peace, circulated more and more among Greek speakers, the number among them who tended to speak Greek no doubt increased. The army and the administration served also as inducements towards that end. The process was accelerated by Christianity, but education, which in these regions was, of course, in Greek, also helped.

There is a passage in the *De thematibus*, a book usually attributed to Constantine Porphyrogenitus², which refers to Peloponnesians who boasted of their high birth (the author says they were of low birth) and how one of them was scoffed at by the famous grammarian Euphemius with the verse: «that wily fellow with Slavic traits»³. The passage has often been cited as evidence for the slavonization of the Peloponnesus, but its real importance lies elsewhere, among the evidence of Greek civilization, including, of course, the Greek language. The fellow scoffed at by Euphemius was Nicetas, a figure of some importance in the political life in Constantinople during the first quarter of the tenth century and whose daughter Sophia was married to Christopher, son of Romanus Lecapenus, and later himself emperor⁴. Nicetas was a native of Larissa in Thessaly, but in one of his letters, a letter full of references to Lycurgus and Solon, he refers to himself proudly as Spartiate in origin on his father's side, as Athenian, on his mother's⁵. Nicetas was no doubt one of the best educated men of his generation. His letters are replete with references to Homer, Demosthenes, Plutarch, Plato, Sappho even.

It is generally assumed that Thessalonica, because of its position as a commercial and cultural center, served as the base for the dissemination of Greek among the Slavs in the surrounding regions. Larissa in Thessaly too may have served a similar purpose. In any case towards the end of the ninth century Larissa was the home of at least one cultivated family, the family of Gregory who later served as bishop of Thessalonica. Nicetas as a boy in Larissa was very much impressed

1. P. Charanis, *Studies on the Demography*, study XX, p. 231.

2. According to A. Pertusi, the latest editor of the *De thematibus*, the book as we have it was a compilation made after the death of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, c. 998: A. Pertusi, *Constantino Porphyrogenito de Thematibus*, Vatican City 1952, p. 48.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

4. L. G. Westerink, *Nicetas Magistros, Lettres d'un exilé (928-946)*, Paris 1973, pp. 23ff.

5. *Ibid.* letter no. 2 (p. 57).

with the culture of this family. He says that much in a letter to Gregory dated by the editor in the winter of 945/946¹. It may be that Nicetas owed the first stages of his education to Gregory's family.

It may be safely assumed that the dissemination of Greek continued to spread and that in time most of the Slavs in question had become Greek speakers. In the thirteenth century there were still localities in the regions involved mentioned by the sources for their Slavic settlements. Byzantine historians noted in particular the Slavic nature of the population of the villages of the Rhodope mountains² and the territory between the Strymon river and the Strumitsa stream³. It is quite possible that remnants of the Strymonians inhabiting villages around Serres, and of Smoleans inhabiting villages in the valley of the Arda, may have still existed in the thirteenth century⁴. According to a document of 1184 Bulgarians along with Vlachs are mentioned among the peasants of Moglena, near Edessa⁵, and according to another, dated 1336, some of the villages belonging to the episcopal see of Stagos, modern Kalabaka, north of Trikkala in Thessaly, were inhabited by Vlachs, Bulgarians and Albanians⁶. Remnants of the Slavs known to have existed in the area of Hierissos on the northern boundary of the peninsula of Mount Athos in the end of the tenth century may have continued on into the later centuries though no known direct evidence on the point exists⁷. There is some evidence to the effect that in the Peloponnesus Slavic was still spoken in the fifteenth century⁸. The Rhodope villages were decidedly hostile to the Greeks; others were mixed and the fact that among their inhabitants there were Slavs, some of whom moreover may have been latecomers, does not seriously affect the general charac-

1. *Ibid.*, letter no. 23 (pp. 111ff; cf. p. 25).

2. George Acropolites, *Annales*, Bonn 1836, p. 114.

3. Nicephorus Gregoras, *Historia*, Bonn 1829, vol. 1, p. 378.

4. On the Smoleans: Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macedoine orientale*, pp. 134ff; F. Dvornik, *Les Slaves, Byzance et Rome au IX^e siècle*, p. 13. A *theme*, called the Smolean *theme*, existed at least to the end of the twelfth century: Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, Bonn 1835, pp. 680, 708.

5. P. Lemerle et al., *Archives de l'Athos, V, Actes de Lavra*, Paris 1970, p. 344.

6. F. Miklosich et J. Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi*, vol. V, Vienna 1887, p. 271.

7. G. Soulis, «On the Slavic Settlement in Hierissos in the Tenth Century», *Byzantion* 23 (1953), 67-72; cf. Ivan Dujčev, *Medioevo Bizantino-Slavo*, vol. I, Rome 1965, pp. 487ff. [= «Le mont Athos et les Slaves au Moyen Age»].

8. Max Vasmer, *Die Slaven in Griechenland*, Berlin 1941, p. 18.

ter of the regions in which these villages were located. That character, however it might have been affected by the settlement of Slavs late in the sixth century and possibly early in the seventh had by now become once more Greek¹.

In the meantime the rest of the Balkan peninsula evolved quite differently. There Latin, except for the influence which it may have exerted in the formation of Roumanian and its impact, however slight, on Albanian², in time disappeared. Greek for a time continued to be used, especially for inscriptions and as the official tongue of the Bulgar state and in the very early years of the Bulgarian church; it continued also to be spoken here and there³. But in time Greek too as general speech ceased to be of any significance. Albanian and Vlach always excepted, Slavic rooted itself as the speech of the land and no power could thereafter uproot it. Byzantium did eventually impose its jurisdiction over most of this part of the Balkan peninsula and was able to maintain this jurisdiction for more than a century and a half, but at no time during this period, despite the hellenizing tendencies of church and administration, did it effect any basic changes in the Slavic character of the land. It was considered so foreign indeed that Greek ecclesiastics did not like to serve there because their barbarian flocks, as they put it, might turn them themselves into barbarians⁴. Greek as ordinary speech had minimal if any impact. The reasons for this are not far to seek.

In an essay distinguished by brilliance D. Zakythinos, without by any means neglecting the linguistic aspects of the work of Constantine, the apostle of the Slavs, makes it a point to emphasize the Byzantine inspiration and the sources of that work at the same time referring to early Slavic literature as Byzantine in the Slavic tongue⁵. This may be

1. «Nel corso di alcuni secoli questa popolazione slava [the Slavs who had settled in Thrace, Byzantine Macedonia and Greece] fu assimilata completamente, dal bizantinismo — per lasciare di sé soltanto alcune centinaia e migliaia di toponimi, sparsi in regioni nei tempi posteriori totalmente grecizzate»: Dujčev, *op. cit.*, p. 6; cf. André Guillou, *La civilisation Byzantine*, Paris 1974, p. 23.

2. On this most recently, H. Mihăescu, «Les éléments latins de la langue albanaise». *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 4 (1966), 5-33, 323-353.

3. V. Beševliev et H. Grégoire «Les inscriptions protobulgares», *Byzantion* 25-27 (1955-57), 872ff.

4. Ihor Ševčenko, «Three Paradoxes of the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission», *Slavic Review* 23 (1964) 229, n. 32.

5. D. Zakythinos, *Byzance: État - Société - Économie*, London 1973, study IX. For a view to the effect that early Slavic literature was something more than just Byzantine literature in the Slavic tongue see the interesting observations by

correct. It is precisely in this, however, that the literary accomplishment of the Byzantines could be put in Slavic, where the significance of the work of Constantine, his brother Methodius and their disciples lies. By the system of writing and the idiom of expression which these men created they furnished to the Slavs of the Balkan peninsula (the Croats excepted) the necessary elements which made it possible for them to develop their own literary and national traditions¹. This helped them to face any advances that another culture might have tried to make among them. Left to themselves, without an identity of their own, and with no spiritual sustenance except what they could draw from Byzantium and that in Greek, the Slavs in question might have succumbed to the latter and in time disappeared. Not to speak of the Slavs who very early came under the effective jurisdiction of Byzantium one may, in this connection, refer to the ancient peoples of Asia Minor which had never developed a literature of their own, how in time they succumbed completely to Greek and as peoples ceased to exist. The Armenians on the other hand who drew their sustenance from their own cultural tradition long rooted in writing survived.

It should be quickly observed, however, that this development, the growth of a literary and cultural tradition of their own among the Slavs of the Balkan peninsula, most probably would not have taken place were it not for another force already active for several centuries. Details of the foundation about 681 of the Bulgar state south of the Danube, its territorial extent, the ethnic composition of the regions which at first composed it are lacking. But in general the regions involved extended from the Danube to the Balkan mountains in the south and perhaps as far west as the Timok river in present day Yugoslavia, and their population consisted besides the Bulgars, who may have been more numerous than is generally believed, to a considerable extent of Slavs, the so-called seven tribes, of various ethnic groups of a mixed character, and also of Greek speakers². For a century and a quarter

B. St. Angelov, «Sur les relations littéraires bulgaro-byzantines», *Études Balkaniques* 1 (1964), 97-110.

1. G. C. Soulis, «The Legacy of Cyril and Methodius to the Southern Slavs», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 19 (1965), 19-43.

2. Dujčev, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-65; V. Beševliev - H. Grégoire, *op. cit.*, 872ff.; cf. I. Dujčev, *Medioevo Bizantino-Slavo*, III, Rome 1971, pp. 30-42, where the point is made that substantial elements of the original Thracian population had survived the invasions and in time merged with Slavs and Bulgars to form the Bulgarian people.

the new state had had a precarious existence, but it accomplished two things: 1) it prevented Byzantium from recovering the territories lost to it at the time of its formation, and 2) it accustomed the Slavs, some of whom had not always been friendly to their masters¹, the Bulgars, to accept more willingly their rule. These two things were very important. Recovery of these territories by Byzantium would have opened them to the process of Byzantinization at a time when the Slavs, with no cultural tradition of their own were more susceptible to the cultural influences of Byzantium. On the other hand the tendency among the Slavs to accept more and more the Bulgars as their rulers and to cooperate with them laid the basis of the eventual fusion of the two races. Moreover, had the Byzantines destroyed the Bulgar kingdom in the eighth century, something which apparently they tried to do, they would have eliminated the one power which later proved to be the most formidable obstacle to the extension of their effective administrative machinery beyond the coastal regions into those of the interior, in the regions of upper old Macedonia. Towards the beginning of the second quarter of the ninth century the Bulgars, revitalized by Krum, turned under his successors to the west-southwest and by the middle of that century extended their domain so far as to include the regions of upper Macedonia and beyond². At about the same time the fusion between Bulgars and Slavs which had been going on for some time ended in the formation of one people with one language, the Slavic, and with common institutions. To be complete, however, this formation needed one more thing: a national identity backed by a national cultural tradition. That was furnished by the disciples of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius, but their work would have been of no avail had it not been for the encouragement and active support of the Bulgarian kings.

It is now time to pull together what may appear as a series of disjointed notes. I have tried to make a number of points: that Slavic settlements in Greece proper, including the Peloponnesus, and the inner coastal regions of the northern Aegean, were established in the last two decades of the sixth century; that the Slavs involved were numerous, but probably not as numerous as is generally believed; that despite their proneness to violence, they adjusted early to their new environ-

1. Dujčev, *Medioevo Bizantino-Slavo*, vol. I, pp. 67-82.

2. By 842 Ochrida and Prespa were part of the Bulgarian realm according to P. Mutafchiev as cited by D. Obolensky, *The Cambridge Medieval History, IV, The Byzantine Empire, Part I, Byzantium and its Neighbours*, Cambridge 1966, p. 498.

ment, gave themselves to the arts of peace, and began to succumb to the cultural influences of the Greeks; that in the penetration of this influence among them, the milieu, i.e. the native population which had survived the invasions, played an important role; that this penetration was accelerated by the more effective administrative system introduced by Byzantium and by the conversion of the Slavs to Christianity; and that finally the regions involved became again Greek in character, however that character might have been affected by the invasions late in the sixth century. This point has also been made, that the creation of the Bulgar state in the interior of the Balkan peninsula in the seventh century, its expansions westward to include the Slavs of upper Macedonia and beyond, the fusion between Bulgars and Slavs, and the development of a national tradition among the Slavs of these regions rendered these regions definitely Slavic. These various points are obviously related and this relation explains the most important aspect of the ethnic evolution of the Balkan peninsula in the Middle Ages. The failure of Byzantium to impose its authority on the Slavs of the interior of the Balkan peninsula and little by little bring about their Byzantinization as it did with the Slavs of the coastal regions is to be attributed in the final analysis to the persistent opposition of the First Bulgarian Kingdom and the role which that kingdom played in the formation of these Slavs into a people. Herein lies I think its historical significance.

Rutgers University