

**BY THE WILL OF GOD – THE POWER OF THE PRE-CHRISTIAN
WORLDVIEW**

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***Abstract:** The present Report pays attention to the specific connection between the individual and God in the pre-Christian medieval Bulgarian society. This is the basis on which we present the building up of the moral characteristics of the society of that time, the ties between the members of the social units, the functioning of the state apparatus and the process of making sense of the strength of Providence. An attempt of a parallel in this respect between the Volga Bulgarians and the Danube Bulgarians is made hereby.*

***Keywords:** God, Providence, pre-Christian medieval Bulgarian society, moral, Volga Bulgarians, Danube Bulgarians*

INTRODUCTION

Religion is a basic supporting point in the moral and world perceptions of each society, regardless the epoch it lives in. It leaves its inevitable mark on the building and cultivation of each individual's morality, and on the worldview and state political views.

We used to refer with pride to the historical sources evidence, describing the Bulgarians as brave, valiant, self-respecting, but these moral foundations are being affirmed and carried out in the time through the prism of the strong bond between the personality in the society of that time and God. The individual of that time reflects each of his/her actions namely through it. Not a small part of the today's rites and customs are a proof of the individual's striving for spiritual purification, improvement and searching for a way to reach God. Even nowadays the personal failures, the family misfortunes, the social cataclysms are explained with the power of Providence and its interference in the things and faiths of people. The religious views in the pre-Christian Bulgarian society are much more earnest, deeply preserved and strictly adhered to.

PRESENTATION

The members of the then society use time-tested methods of regulation of the relations between each other. The presence of strict behavioral norms and rules which are binding for each individual, belonging to a certain clan, tribe or patriarchal community, the mutual dealing with internal and external threats favours the uniting of all members of the society. The respect towards the elderly in the person of parents, relatives and elders outlines a mandatory moral behavior, the caretaker of which is God. Any attempt of modifying or not observing it results in isolation of the individual from a certain social group and public edification of such individual.

The existence of the patriarchal community (an extended family consisting of a few generations) represents mainly behavioural rules and generally accepted norms. All of its members

bear collective responsibility and then in the family and clan there are similar rules (bringing to justice of all habitants of a certain village – in case of an attempt of bringing back the old pagan ways or sanctioning of the whole clan – the riot of the 52 boyars).

Before conversion to Christianity the Bulgarian strongly believes and strictly follows the God's signs which he/she interprets in two main directions: as patronizing and as edifying.

In the epoch of the Early Middle Ages people are convinced that they can predict the future and influence it. It is no coincidence that specific persons, initiated into these actions, are responsible for making a connection with God. The graphical images in Madara and Pliska from the period 8th-9th century, presenting shamanic rituals, give information about the religious practices of the Bulgarians in the pre-Christian epoch. Having the ability to communicate with invisible spirits, the shamans are the connection between the two worlds – the visible and the invisible one. By performing specific ritual dances, beating drums and so on, these initiated people declare their talent to cure, to predict the future, to provoke the favorable course of certain actions.

The old religious views of the pagan Bulgarians include the cult of fire, sun, water, certain animals – totems of the clan, and sacred stones. In this sense their religion is defined in the historiography as primitive monotheism which cannot exist independently, but in unison with animistic, totemic and shaman beliefs.

In the ruler's court the magic actions are carried out by the boil kolobar – the third in importance dignitary who observes the location and the change of the heavenly bodies in order to understand the God's will. The significance of the heavenly bodies for the pre-Christian Bulgarian is stated in "Shestodnef" by John the Exarch. Probably the seven rays of the Pliska Rosette also mark the belief of the old Bulgarians in the seven heavenly bodies-Gods: Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Saturn and Venus. Other historical evidence also supports this: the use of plural form when naming god in the work "Biography of the 15th Tiberiopolis martyrs", as well as the evidence in "The Responses of Pope Nicholas I to the Questions of the Bulgarians".

Deeply believing in the strength of an oath, the priest colobar also makes a vow. He is the one who acquaints the throne heir *καναρ τικείνος* (kanartikin) with the niceties of the religious practice. The inscriptions give evidence of the dual role of the kolobars (1992:132-133). The khan boil kolobar (*καναβοηλακουλοβρος*) participates in the battles together with the kavkhan and the ichirgu-boil. Considering the three title terms, it is possible that his responsibilities combine military and religious functions, and belonging to the boil class, he is a priest or a magus of the ruler. The same number of terms is found in the title of Chepa, bagatur boil kolobar (*βογοτορ βοηλα κουλοβρος*) of Khan Malamir. Probably he is a priest or a magus of the leader of the bagaturs.

At the very moment the Bulgarians occupy the Balkan territory, they prove their unbreakable fighting spirit. A careful review of the evidence in the foreign historical sources which describe the Bulgarian warrior, leads to conclusion which are neglected very often. It is of notice that the warrior strives for honesty in the engagements which is rarely found. There is almost complete absence of evidence of inhuman actions, unlike the evidence which presents the savagery of the Byzantine warriors. The Bulgarians fight mostly with the purpose to protect their own territory and to protect the agreements with the Eastern Roman Empire that violates these agreements quite often with the good excuse that the empire does not shed brotherly Christian blood. It is no coincidence that the byzantine historical sources themselves point out that Krum is "outraged" by the deed of Leo V the Armenian, when he understands that the Byzantine emperor not just violated the agreement between them, but goes even further by planning the murder of the Bulgarian ruler.

There are many examples that confirm that the Bulgarian medieval warrior attracts neighbouring tribes and peoples not only because of his battle competencies but also because of his exemplary valor and honor. This fact favours the consolidation of Slavs and Bulgarians into a united and stable state structure. It is the factor that makes warriors, who have ethnical and religious differences, to stay side by side for the protection of Bulgaria (When fighting with the Byzantines, the Bulgarian attracts on their side Slavs, Arabs, Armenians, Syrians, Kumans and others). Such

qualities and morality of the individual are undoubtedly related to the religious worldview encoded in the inscription of Murfatlar: "The sky remembers".

The topic for the God's interference in the peoples' things is already considered in the Bible, in the Old Testament. The Jewish enjoy the God's mercy, when they follow God's commands, and vice versa – if they violate them, they shall experience His rage.

The home epigraphic sources give us evidence of the significance of religion and belief in God's interference in the human deeds. Observing the moral duty and striving for moral existence, the Bulgarian ruler leaves the judgment of each deviation from the accepted behavior in the hands of God. Among all examples for this is the inscription of Omurtag which says: "... if the emperor forgets the oaths, *may God gives him...*"(1992:178)

The chronicle inscriptions (Hambarli inscription and Silistra inscription) of Krum (803–814) show that the Bulgarian ruler connects the conquering of many fortresses such as Serdica, Develt, Constantia, Versinikia, Adrianopole and others with the help of God. The first epigraphic monument notes the violation of the given oath by the Byzantine emperor, respectively the loss of the territories is connected with the punishing function of God towards the Byzantines, and His patronizing function towards the Bulgarians. The texts of Theophanes the Confessor state that the Byzantine losses are also connected with the "punishment of God". God is also mentioned in one of the inscription of the Madara Rider related to the rule of Omurtag. The building inscription of Omurtag show the strength of the religious-providential views of the then Bulgarians through begging for health and long life of the ruler. The inscription in the Forty Martyrs Church in Veliko Tarnovo reads: "The Great Khan Omurtag, while still living in his old home, built a splendid palace on the Danube... *May God give him a hundred years to live.*" (1992:208) This practice as a wish construction is typical for the texts of the Byzantine emperors and for our rulers in later times.

Many findings contain the sign *IYI*, depicted on the seven-ray bronze rosette from Pliska: tiles, bricks, stone blocks, clay pots and other things. The bronze plate with the same sign, found in Preslav, has a ring for wearing. Probably it is used as an amulet. If we accept the already imposed opinion that the symbol has apotropaic (protective) significance, then its image undoubtedly has the purpose to appease God, and the fundamental of this belief is the fear and the inner conviction that each sin is being punished from Above. The lead seal, dated in the 7th century, that was found in a great necropolis in the 80th-90th of 20th century in the Middle Volga Region, which contains the so called "Tangra sign" – *IYI*, gives opportunity for stating that there is great similarity when both Danube Bulgarians and Volga Bulgarians give meaning to the religious practices and the significance of God. Such opinion is supported by the evidence of Ibn Fadlan who describes his travel to Volga Bulgaria in 921. In his work the Arabian writer describes the practice of the Volga Bulgarians to leave a home, struck by a thunder, considering that this is punishment of God. The belief of the pagan Bulgarian that he/she can appease God is in the basis of making sacrifices.

The epigraphic monuments from the time of Presian support the opinion for the significant role of God and His interference in the life of the medieval pre-Christian Bulgarian: "... Whoever may search for the truth, *God sees*, and whoever lies, *God sees...*". (1992:141-142) The judicial and patronizing function of God is inevitable part of the life and traditions of the individuals of that time – for the ordinary peasant as for the ruler. There are lots of examples in our medieval history which prove that a given event is being interpreted as God's punishment or God's support. The first leads to various consequences: from leaving the home if it is being struck by a thunder, as it is now considered punished from Above, to revision of diplomatic views after personal misfortunes (an example for this is Tsar Ivan Asen II who lost his wife and his minor child), and others.

An interesting moment when concluding the 30-year peace treaty between Omurtag and emperor Leo V in 815, is the exchange of religious practices between both rulers: Omurtag swears in adhering to the agreements in a Christian manner, while the Byzantine swears in a pagan manner. The used symbolism again leads us to the role of God and the strength of Providence if the oath is violated. Similar things are found in the course of events when Omurtag and Michael II Balba conclude the peace treaty between each other.

The laws of Krum: “If one blames someone else, he shall not be listened to before being tied and questioned. And if it turns out that he slanders and lies, he shall be murdered” (1964:310), envisaging physical obstacles for the slanderer, probably suggest the idea that God has the right to determine the faith of the defendant through the principle of ordalia (ordeal for the body with a view to finding out the truth by God’s command). There is similarity with the religious-providential views of the Volga Bulgarians who used to hang some quite energetic and knowledgeable person on a tree and wait to see if he survives or not. Thus they make a conclusion is God merciful to him or shall God take him to Himself to serve Him. With such a practice the Bulgarian society shows its specific position for the religious-moral views, the main purpose of which is to preserve and keep the deep connection between the man and his Creator.

The value of human life is measurable to the deeds of the individual and the trace he/she leaves behind. Despite the complicated conjuncture, the vicissitudes and the darkness of the epoch, the difficulties to announce and preserve themselves, the pre-Christian rulers leave a light trace as a quite moral appeal for the coming generations. In the church “Holy Forty Martyrs” in Veliko Tarnovo we can the building inscription of Khan Omurtag: “A man may live well, but he dies and another one is born. May the newborn, when looking at this inscription, remembers the one who made it.”

The inscription from Murfatlar, saying “*The sky remembers*”, reminds of the religious-providential view which makes sense even today: whatever you do, you cannot hide from God, because He sees everything. Or: “God delays, but never forgets”.

CONCLUSIONS

Of all stated above we can make the conclusion that the Bulgarians strongly believe in God, specifically in Providence, and in themselves as God’s instrument. When there are disasters (natural or social), they explain them with punishment from Above due to deeds not in compliance with God’s rules. That is why they search for a way to get back God’s grace. They strive for achieving peace with themselves and with God again.

In the pagan period, when the first written laws are not yet created, man lives by those norms that the community itself considers moral. Not many of the Bulgarians of that time would violate the established order. First of all, they would experience the anger of the entire family, and second of all, “God sees” for sure. All this determines the exceptional role of the religious-providential views as a moral regulator of the human relationships in the pagan state period of the medieval Bulgarian history. The unbreakable tie between God and man is one of the leading priorities of the Bulgarians. The Christian Bulgarian continues to observe it as strictly and with the same enviable perseverance, as in the old times.

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