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SOME REMARKS CONCERNING THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE SLAVS IN GREECE

The history of the Slavic invasions into Byzantine provinces under the administration of the Prefect of Illyricum is well-known.¹ I have sketched the progress of these invasions and the devastation of the Byzantine political and religious organizations which followed in my book *Les Slaves; Byzance et Rome au IX^e siècle*.² All of ancient Macedonia and Thrace was penetrated by Slavic elements to such an extent that the Byzantines called these regions simply Sclavinias.

The Byzantines tried several times to regain control over these lands. In 658 Constans II³ invaded the Slavic regions and captured a great number of prisoners, bringing the tribes under his control; but political troubles in Byzantium prevented him from taking advantage of this success. Justinian II concentrated his efforts on Macedonia. In 688/89 he succeeded in subjugating many Slavic tribes which he transferred, according to the old Roman and Byzantine practice, into Asia Minor, settling them in the thema of Opsikion, where they were expected to produce a military levy of 30,000 men.⁴ The Macedonian Slavs were, from that time on, under Byzantine influence. When the Arabs besieged Constantinople in 717—718, the Macedonian Slavs with the Bulgars helped the Byzantines defend the capital. This alliance was, however, not lasting, and in 756 Constantine V was again at war with the Bulgarians. In 762 he settled a great number of Slavic refugees from Bulgaria in Bithynia in Asia Minor.⁵

The Empire could not leave these two countries definitely outside its influence. The region which the Slavs occupied separated Byzantium from Dalmatia and blocked its way to the Adriatic Sea, where Byzantium still held control over the coastal cities and the islands. The names of these Slavic tribes are not known, with the exception of the Timočans and the Moravians who lived on the river Morava. We have better information on the Slavic tribes in the region of Thessalonica. The Smolians had settled north of the city, on the river Mesta, extending

¹ For details see L. Niederle, *Slovanské starožitnosti* [Slavic Antiquities]. Historical part, vol. 2. Praha 1906—1910.

² *Les Slaves, Byzance et Rome au IX^e siècle*. Paris 1926, 4 ff. Cf. also I d e m, *The Slavs, Their Early History and Civilization*. Boston 1956, 3 ff.

³ Theophanes, *Chronographia*. Ed. Bonn 1839, 530; ed. de Boor, I, 347.

⁴ I b i d e m. Bonn, I, 557; ed de Boor, I, 364.

⁵ Nicephorus, *Historia syntomos*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig 1880), 69,1 puts the number of the Slav settlers at 208,000. The exactness of his figure seems to indicate that he obtained this information from official sources.

as far as the river Arda. Both sides of the river Strymon were occupied by the Strumians as far as the lake of Langaza. In the city's environs lived the Rychnians and Sagoudates who extended their seats to the neighbourhood of Mount Athos. The Dragounitians settled between the city of Berrhoea and Thessalonica, and in the center of Macedonia lived the Verzitians. The Velegeitians occupied the territory between the cities of Thebes and Demetrias. Small Slavic settlements also reached into Greece proper — Boeotia, Etolia, Euboea and an area near Athens.⁶ From 578 the Slavs began to penetrate into the Peloponnesos. The Milingi and Ezerites settled on the Taygetus. The defeat the Slavs had suffered in 805 when besieging the city of Patras slowed down their penetration, but Slavic was still spoken on the Taygetus in the fourteenth century.

The best way of saving the Greek provinces in the Empire from the Slavic danger was to bring the new barbarians into the fold of the Byzantine Church. This was a formidable task. The invasions had almost completely destroyed the ecclesiastical organization of Macedonia and other Greek provinces. Only a few cities were able to keep bishops during the invasions and to start their apostolic work among the new inhabitants. Thessalonica was the most important ecclesiastical center which could exercise a religious influence over the Slavs. After their defeat at the walls of the city which the Slavs had tried to capture several times (584, 586, 616, 618), the Slavic chiefs realized that it would be more profitable to live in good relations with the Greek populations. The Legend of St. Demetrius, patron saint of the city, to whose intervention the liberation of the city was ascribed, refers to the fact that the Slavic chiefs used to make friendly visits to the city.⁷ The expedition of Staurakios against the Slavs in Greece in 783 contributed, of course, to the Slavs' change of attitude. The slow Christianization of the Slavic tribes around Thessalonica started in the eighth century and was to end in the ninth. St. Methodius of Thessalonica, the future apostle of the Slavs, was without a doubt actively engaged in the Pacification and Christianization of the Slavic communities. His biographer says that he was archon of a Slavic district. This could have been most probably the region of Strymon, created in an archontia which had become in the tenth century a thema, governed by a strategos in whose hands all administrative and military powers were concentrated.⁸ It was almost certainly during this missionary activity at the end of the eighth and in the first half of the ninth century that the first attempts at the transliteration of Slavic sounds into the Greek alphabet were made. The difficulties which the missionaries encountered in their work prompted St. Constantine-Cyril, Methodius' brother, to invent a new alphabet for the Slavs before he left for the Moravian mission. We are entitled to suppose that he profited from the first attempts made by the Greek missionaries among the Slavs in the neighbourhood of Thessalonica.

The first Slavic bishopric was, however, established not in Macedonia, but in Asia Minor at an early date. We know of a list of bishoprics called *Notitia* of

⁶ For details see Dvornik, *Les Slaves*, I. c., 12 ff.

⁷ On the Slavs in the neighbourhood of Thessalonica see *S. Demetrii Acta. Miraculorum libri tres*, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, cols. 1204—1425. On the visits of the Slavic chiefs, *ibid.*, col. 1363 ff.

⁸ Cf. Dvornik, *Les Légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance*. Prague 1933, 16—18.

Epiphanius,⁹ which existed in the seventh century. When describing the bishoprics of Bithynia, under the metropolitan of Nicaea, the author quotes three bishoprics: that of Modrine, of Linoe and that of the Gordoserbs. It is not certain whether the see of Modrine (although recalling the Slavic root Modra) was founded for the Slavs; but that of the Gordoserbs was certainly established for the Slavs who had been transferred to Asia Minor in the seventh century. The Bishop Neophytos of Gordoserbia signed the Acts of the Seventh Oecumenical Council in 787.¹⁰ The Slavs who, in 805, had made a vain attempt to conquer the city of Patras, were converted by the metropolitan of that city whose serfs they had become on defeat at the order of the Emperor Nicephorus. The see of Patras became a metropolis with three suffragan bishops: that of Methone, Lacedemon and Coronea. The Slavs in this region were all Christianized and slowly Hellenized. The Christianization was speeded up during the reign of Michael II when his general Theoctistos, appointed as strategos of Peloponnesos, had subjugated all Slavic tribes of that country, even penetrating to the seats of the Milinges and Ezerites. Unwilling to risk guerilla warfare in the Taygetus Mountains he contented himself with imposing only tribute on the two tribes which remained almost independent.¹¹

The Christianization of the Slavs in Macedonia and Thessalia, the two provinces of Epirus, and in Greece proper, made great progress after the victory of the Church over the iconoclastic heresy and was terminated at the end of the ninth century under the patriarchate of Photius and during the reign of Basil I. Special bishoprics had to be erected for the new converts. We find mention of the first Slavic sees in the Acts of the Photian Council of 879/880. The see of the Bishop Agathon of Moravia had been founded for the Slavs who had settled on the river Morava in modern Serbia. The bishop of Ezero, who was also present at that council, had under his jurisdiction the Slavic tribe of the Ezerites.¹² It appears that a part of this tribe stayed in Hellas. This is also confirmed by the catalogue or list of bishoprics from the reign of Leo the Sage (beginning of the tenth century). The bishopric of Ezero is listed among the sees of the metropolis of Larissa in Hellas.¹³ In the same Acts of the Photian Councils we find the Bishop Peter of Drugobitia,¹⁴ who was without doubt the bishop of the Slavic tribe which had settled between Berrhoea and Thessalonica. The existence of this see is also confirmed by the list of Leo the Wise. This list gives also the results of the pastoral work of the metropolitan of Thessalonica among the Slavs. He had five suffragans, two of whom were bishops of two Slavic tribes, that of the Drougobitians and of Serbians.¹⁵ The latter had been settled by Heraclius near Thessalonica, according to Constantine Porphyrogenitus. The majority of the Serbs, however, left the region of Thessalonica and settled in the land which became modern Serbia.

⁹ H. Gelzer, *Ungedruckte und ungenügend veröffentlichte Texte der Notitiae*. Abhandlungen der I. Kl. der Akademie. Munich, vol. 21, 1901, 534.

¹⁰ J. D. Mansi, *Concilia XIII*, col. 392. Stephen of Gordoserbia was present at the Council of 869, Mansi XVI, cols. 144, 191, 193.

¹¹ Cf. Dvornik, *Les Slaves*, I. c., 41-44.

¹² Mansi, I. c., XVII, cols. 373, 376.

¹³ Gelzer, I. c., 557.

¹⁴ Mansi, I. c., XVII, col. 376.

¹⁵ Gelzer, I. c., 554. Cf. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, vol. 2 (Commentary), ed. R. J. H. Jenkins (London 1962), commentary by F. Dvornik, 132, 133.

Other Slavic bishoprics are listed under the metropolis of Philippi in Macedonia, namely that of the Ljutitsi and of Velikia. The new sees of Joanitsa and Dramitsa under the same metropolis were also populated mostly by converted Slavs. In Thrace, under the metropolis of Philippopolis, we find other bishoprics of Velikia and of the Slavic tribe of Smolenians.¹⁶ At the end of the ninth century the hierarchy of Epirus was also reorganized. Under the metropolis of Naupactos there were eight suffragans, mostly new foundations for the Greek population. One of these sees, that of Bounditsa, recalls the name of a converted Slavic tribe. It replaced the see of Dodona which had disappeared during the invasions. The metropolis of Dyrrhachium had four suffragans, the see of one of these, that of Khounabia, must have been erected for a Slavic tribe.¹⁷

We can quote a few examples explaining how the Greek missionaries provided places of worship for the new converts and for the native populations which had survived the invasions. The first instance can be seen in the Peloponnesos in the city of Epidaurus.¹⁸ The city had an early Christian basilica, dating from the fourth century, which was destroyed during the Slavic invasions. Its apse survived the destruction and, in the Byzantine period, was used for the construction of a small church dedicated to St. John. This could have happened only when the danger from the Slavs had subsided, perhaps after their defeat at Patras. It illustrates, at the same time, the method used during the Christianization of the new population. The ruined sanctuaries from the early Christian period were used for worship. To the apse which had survived, a simple quadrangular nave was added. It was a curious accomodation of the early Christian basilica style to urgent modern needs.

A similar practice was followed in Eleusis. The basilica of the fifth century was destroyed, but on the ruins, inside the presbytery, was later built a small church dedicated to St. Zacharias. It consisted of an oblong nave with an apse similar in form to the apse of the destroyed basilica. Another example of this new practice can be found on the island of Lemnos. Its two early Christian basilicas from the fifth or sixth century were destroyed during the invasions. After the pacification of the Slavic invaders, the Byzantines constructed another church on the second basilica, using three small apses, again in imitation of early Christian architecture. The early Christian basilica of Thebes in Thessalia was destroyed by the Slavs during their siege of Thessalonica. They occupied a great part of the building, but only the area of the apse was later used for worship. A new construction inside the building combined the apse and some columns which had survived for making a small church with an apse and a nave. This new sanctuary could have been erected only after the victorious expedition against the Slavs in Thessalia and Hellas by Staurakios, as mentioned above.¹⁹ We can assume that this new construction was in connection with the Christianization of the Velegezites.

A similar case can be quoted from Macedonia. Between the years 1931—1937, ruins of an old Christian basilica were discovered in Suvodol, near Bitolj. The basilica was destroyed by the Slavs, probably at the end of the sixth century.

¹⁶ Cf. Dvornik, *Les Slaves*, l. c., 237.

¹⁷ Gelzer, l. c., 557, 558.

¹⁸ See P. Kabadia, *Ἀνασκαφαὶ ἐν Ἐπιδαύρῳ*; [*Excavation in Epidaurus*]. *Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς*. Athens 1918, part. 4, 115—154.

¹⁹ Cf. A. Soteriou, *Αἰπαλαιοχριστιανικαὶ βασιλικαὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος* [*Early Christian Basilicas in Hellas*]. *Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς*. Athens 1929, 198—201.

Later, most probably during the Christianization of the Slavs, the church was readapted for worship in a diminished form. Only the middle nave was used with the bema and the septum. The partitions between the surviving columns were filled with the ruins of the old basilica, and a small apse seems to have been added in imitation of the apse of the old basilica.²⁰

These few examples were hardly exceptions. Similar adaptations for missionary purposes were undoubtedly accepted in other places in Greece. These primitive architectural methods have not yet been noticed by specialists, although they may be of some importance for the development of church architecture in Byzantium in the ninth century. It appears that a new type of missionary architecture was developing in Byzantium, which, because of its simplicity, was best fitted for the mission lands. It should be stressed that this new method was related to the early Christian artistic traditions in Greece through the preservation of apses from the destroyed buildings to which small naves were added.

At least one case can be quoted in support of this assumption. During his excavations in the Caucasian region, T. M. Minajeva²¹ found, on the confluence of the river Liča with the river Kuban, the ruins of a small church with an apse and one small nave. This region was inhabited by the Indo-European people of the Alans. Their conversion to Christianity had started in the ninth century, probably on the initiative of the Patriarch Photius, and ended under the Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus in the tenth century. It appears that the Greek missionaries used this kind of architecture in the area from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. The question arises whether analogous church architecture was also used by Byzantine missionaries in other lands? It will be the task of the art historian to give a proper answer to this question, especially concerning Moravia where a similar type of church has recently been found.²²

²⁰ See Francè Mesesnel, *Die Ausgrabung einer altchristlichen Basilika in Suwodol*. Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique bulgare 10, 1936. Actes du IV^e Congrès international des études byzantines, 184—194.

²¹ T. M. Minajeva, *Archeologičeskie pamiatniki na r. Giljac v verchovijach Kubani*. Materialy i issledovanija po archeologii SSSR 23, 1951, 273—301: The plan of the church on p. 293. On p. 300 the author enumerates ruins of several other churches of the same type in the region of Kuban.

²² For more details see chapter IV of my forthcoming book *Byzantine Slavic Missions: Constantine-Cyril and Methodius*.

POZNÁMKY O KRISTIANISACI SLOVANŮ V ŘECKU

Pokřesťanštění Slovanů usedlých na řeckém území začalo v 8. století a bylo skončeno koncem devátého století zároveň s hellenizací většiny Slovanů. První slovanské biskupství bylo založeno v Malé Asii pro Slovanů přestělné tam r. 688—689 Justinianem II (biskupství Gordoserbia). V Macedonii se šířilo křesťanství mezi slovanské kmeny ze Soluně. Na koncilu r. 879—880 byli přítomni tři preláti z biskupství Moravia (Srbská Morava), Ezero (Hellas) a Drugobitia. Ze začátku 10. století mezi pěti sufragány soluňské metropole jsou biskupství Drugobitia a Serbia. Pod metropolí ve Philippi jsou dvě nová biskupství pro Slovanů, Ljutitia a Velikia, pod metropolí Philipopolis biskupství Velikia a Smoljania. V Eplru Bundica a Chunabia asi byly též zřízeny pro Slovanů.

Můžeme také najít některé náznaky, jak byly zřizovány nové kostely pro obrácené Slovanů. V Epidauru, v Eleusis, na ostrově Lemnos, v Thébách a v Suvodolu u Bitolje bylo použito zřícenin starokřesťanských bazilik pro misijní kostely. K apsidám, které se zachovaly, byly přistavěny malé lodě. Tak vznikal nový sloh misijních kostelů. Podobné misijní kostely s apsidou a malou lodí byly zřizovány od 9. do 10. století pro Alány na Kubáni. Je otázka, užívali-li podobných konstrukcí i byzantští misionáři na Moravě.