

III

Nikolay Hrisimov

Everyday Life



To judge by the evidence at our disposal, the day-to-day existence during the long reign of tsar Peter can hardly be considered as a separate entity, independent from the overall reality of the First Bulgarian Empire. Accordingly, the present text provides a generalised picture of the life of mediaeval Bulgarians in the period following Christianisation; the circumstances pertaining specifically to the time of tsar Peter were, of course, taken into account whenever possible. The analysis covers the basic components that determined all of the remaining aspects: the climate and the environmental characteristics; the status of men, women and children; the issues of housing, food, holidays, and celebration.

I. Climate and Environment

Depending on which part of the world a human being inhabits, he or she is surrounded by particular kinds of flora and fauna, atypical for other latitudes. This, in turn, determines his or her dietary habits and clothing. The territory of early mediaeval Bulgaria was situated primarily in a region

characterised by a moderate continental climate; the extreme south and south-west territories are characterised by a Mediterranean climate, while the north-east parts of the erstwhile First Bulgarian Empire display to a certain extent a continental climate. However, as regards the climate during early Middle Ages, it has been believed in recent decades – following the study by H. Lamb¹ – that it was warmer than in the 20th century; this phenomenon is known as the Second Climate Optimum, the Viking Interval², or the Mediaeval Warm Period³. The chronological extent of the Mediaeval Warm Period is defined variously by different groups of scholars. According to one school of thought, the period began around 750/800 CE and ended around 1200/1250 CE⁴; other researchers situate it between ca. 900/950 CE and 1200/1250 CE⁵. Irrespective of which of the two estimates is closer to the truth, the onset of the warmer period would coincide with a time at which the First Bulgarian Empire visibly flourished. In the former case, that would be the Bulgarian expansion in the Balkans, beginning with the victorious campaigns of conquest led by khan Krum and his successors; in the latter case, it would overlap with the apogee of the Bulgarian state in the entire mediaeval period – the *Pax Symeonica*. The same chronological stage of early mediaeval Bulgaria corresponds to the settlement of territories situated in the foothills and ranges of the Balkan Mountains⁶; the occupation of the higher-situated territories began already in the 9th century⁷. This is an indirect indication

¹ H. Lamb, *Climate, History, and the Modern World*, London–New York 1995.

² Г. Балтаков, Р. КендEROва, *Кватернерна палеогеография*, Варна 2003, p. 198.

³ H. Lamb, *Climate...*

⁴ W.S. Broecker, *Was the Medieval Warm Period Global?*, *Science* 291 (5508), Feb. 23, 2001, pp. 1497–1499; M.K. Hughes, H.F. Diaz, *Was there a “Medieval Warm Period”, and if so, where and when?*, *Climatic Change* 26.2/3, p. 109–142; P.D. Nunn, *Climate Environment and Society in the Pacific during the last Millennium*, Amsterdam 2007, pp. 12, 59–86; Г. Балтаков, Р. КендEROва, *Кватернерна...*, p. 198.

⁵ P.D. Jones, M.E. Mann, *Climate Over Past Millennia*, *RG* 42, 2002/2004, pp. 19–20.

⁶ Р. Рашев, *Появата на средновековни селища във високите части на Стара планина*, ШУЕКП.ТКИБ 1, 1997, pp. 108–113.

⁷ Н. Хрисимов, *За времето на усвояване на предпланинските и планинските райони в Първото българско царство*, ИРИМГ 2, 2015, pp. 55–69.

that the population of the country had grown, so that new lands were being sought for cultivation to ensure subsistence.

During the early Middle Ages, Europe was significantly less populous than in the Classical Period and late Antiquity. The factors responsible for this population decrease are numerous and diverse. In any case, in the early mediaeval period – in view of the substantial depopulation – inhabited areas were largely limited to plains situated roughly 300 m above sea level. This fact is evident from the mapping of settlements and necropolises from the time of the First Bulgarian Empire as presented in the work by Uwe Fiedler: it clearly shows that plains were compactly occupied on both sides of the lower course of the Danube, with isolated points outside of the clearly defined areas here and there⁸. Regardless of the mode of existence – sedentary or mobile (nomadic) – these territories remained the most desirable for habitation. Typically, these areas contained the most fertile soils, yielding ample crops and thus ensuring a relatively secure subsistence. It should be borne in mind that the basic livelihoods of the two main components of the Bulgarian nation – agriculture in the case of the Slavs and livestock-breeding in the case of the Proto-Bulgarians – were likewise principally connected with plains. Even the earthen ramparts barring the mountain roads leading to Byzantium were not positioned on the ridges of the Balkan Mountains, but rather in their foothills⁹, which once again confirms the association of the population of the First Bulgarian Empire primarily with the plains it inhabited.

The early mediaeval Bulgarian was perfectly familiar with – and able to distinguish – the characteristics of each time of year. In the *Sermon on the Fourth Day* from John the Exarch's *Hexameron*, we find spot-on descriptions of the four seasons as they appear in moderate latitudes, along with an attempt at an explanation of each of them. Even the subtleties of calculating the difference between the solar and the lunar year are described, as well as the five basic climates of the earth¹⁰.

⁸ U. F i e d l e r, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6.–9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau*, I, Bonn 1992, p. 335, tab. 115.

⁹ Cf. P. P a ш e в, *Старобългарски укрепления на Долния Дунав VI–XI в.* Варна 1982.

¹⁰ J o h n t h e E x a r c h (transl. H.Ц. К о ч e в), pp. 172–191.

2. Society

The Middle Ages were a time dominated by men in politics as much as in everyday life. In fact, this holds true for all Eurasian societies whose life was governed by monotheistic religions. In the case of Christianity, this ‘right’ of men was derived from the ‘fundamental law’ of the time, i.e. the Holy Scripture: it is the Bible that determines the Middle Ages as a time fully monopolised by men in Christian-populated territories. Thus, the man was the ‘protagonist’ of the period: all political and religious power was concentrated in his hands, with rare exceptions (for this very reason, he will remain slightly off the main narrative). However, along with the above-mentioned ‘powers’, conferred on the man by the religion, his life was burdened by all the basic responsibilities on the level of both society and family. He was the one who held authority. He was the one who fought (a warrior); he was traditionally described as the producer of goods in a mediaeval society (a craftsman and merchant); he was expected to supply food for his family (a farmer and livestock-breeder). During the Christian period of the First Bulgarian Empire, he was the intermediary between the people and God (a priest). All these activities and duties of the man made him a ‘public figure’ of the Middle Ages. Accordingly, the man is either directly or indirectly present in all chapters of the present work.

Unlike in the classical western societies of the period, the early mediaeval Bulgarian society – or rather its male part – cannot be conveniently divided into three sharply defined groups (cult officials, warriors and workers), all of them subordinate to the ruler. According to Ivan Bozhilov, these only developed in Bulgaria in the 14th century¹¹. On the other hand, in the early mediaeval Bulgarian society (even in the 9th century), only two of the aforementioned three groups were clearly identifiable: the warriors (aristocracy) and the common people. Cult officials – to the extent they can be distinguished from the remainder of the aristocracy in the first place – initially did not constitute a separate social class. They

¹¹ И. Б О Ж И Л О В, *Българското общество през 14. век. Структура и просопография*, Пловдив 2014, pp. 64–141.

only transformed into one in the centuries following Christianisation, fulfilling the developing need for a class of cult officials organised into an effective, hierarchically arranged system. They can be further divided into those directly associated with the cult and those who – as related by Cosmas the Priest – found an easier way of living in the monasteries. In order to achieve a fuller picture of the role and functions of the man in the period under discussion, we need to revisit the structure of the contemporary society. This largely amounts to restating what has already been said above, as the picture of the society presented so far is based entirely on data pertaining to the men of the period. This is caused by the nature of the sources at our disposal: the Byzantine and Latin traditions also derive from the Christian perspective of the world, where, as has already been said, the basic roles were assigned to men. Women and children were only mentioned when their presence somehow enhanced the narrative concerning the primary subject. Needless to say, an exception to this general rule is found in the lives of female saints.

2.1. Women

In early mediaeval Bulgaria, the woman was excluded from the context of the primary course of events; this was a regular situation in the entire mediaeval world, dominated by religion. Responsible for the original sin according to the Scripture, and a symbol of sinfulness herself, the woman was bound to remain in the shadow of the man. Furthermore, while the life of the early mediaeval western European woman may be reconstructed with considerable precision based on the surviving sources (especially laws¹²), for her Bulgarian counterpart the extant information is most scanty. The reconstructions proposed by Sashka Georgieva¹³ and Donka Petkanova¹⁴ represent more of an idealised image of the woman, as considered appropriate by ecclesiastical authors and particularly in the extant

¹² Н. Христова, *Жените в Западна Европа, V–IX век*, Велико Търново 2004.

¹³ С. Георгиева, *Жената в българското Средновековие*, Пловдив 2011.

¹⁴ Д. Петканова, *Разноликото Средновековие*, Велико Търново 2006, pp. 131–159.

legal texts; as a matter of fact, however, this picture is rather far removed from that of an actual mediaeval woman. In the Bulgarian tradition, just like in Byzantium, the presence of women in source texts is a rarity; to the extent that they were mentioned at all, the women in question were almost invariably members of the aristocracy¹⁵.

The crucial rituals and practices connected with marriage in the period under discussion were prescribed by ecclesiastical laws; nonetheless, certain specifically Bulgarian traits are visible too, aptly described in the *Response of Pope Nicholas I to the Bulgarians* (some of the relevant phenomena also echo in late 19th – early 20th century folk culture). This pertains e.g. to the dowry, described in responses III and XLIX¹⁶, the premarital relations between the families and reaching marriage-related settlements (III)¹⁷, the regulations concerning who can(not) marry whom (II, XXXIX)¹⁸, the relations among the ‘spiritual’ fathers and sons (II)¹⁹, the performance of the wedding ritual (III)²⁰, and second marriage due to widowhood or another reason (III)²¹. The concept of a second marriage did exist in the life of mediaeval Bulgarians, although it was only possible for men – following the death of the first wife (III)²² or her act of adultery (XCVII)²³. As regards widows, they were expected to join a monastery (LXXXVII) – a custom to which the pope firmly objected, explaining that it was a form of violence against women²⁴.

¹⁵ I. Kalavrezou, *Images of Women in Byzantium*, [in:] *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, ed. D. PapaNIKOLA-Bakirdzi, Athens 2002, p. 241.

¹⁶ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 10–15, 58–60.

¹⁷ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 10–15; cf. Л. Старева, *Български обичаи и ритуали*, София 2005, pp. 139–141.

¹⁸ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 8–11, 46–47; Д. Маринов, *Българско обичайно право*, София 1995, pp. 150–153; Л. Старева, *Българско...*, p. 132.

¹⁹ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 8–11; Д. Маринов, *Българско...*, p. 153.

²⁰ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 10–15; Д. Маринов, *Българско...*, pp. 157–158.

²¹ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 12–15; Д. Маринов, *Българско...*, pp. 165–167.

²² Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 12–13.

²³ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 94–95.

²⁴ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 90–91.

According to one survey of the legal situation of women and children in the newly Christian Bulgarian state, based on the extant legal texts of the period in question, the Bulgarian society underwent a ‘revolution of sorts’ encompassing institutions, administration of justice, social order, marriage, and proprietary relations: it was the time when written regulations replaced customary laws²⁵. This ‘revolution’ is also said to have engendered far-reaching changes in the life and status of the woman in the early mediaeval Bulgarian society, as manifested in the fact that *the new laws (the ЗАКОНЪ СЪДНИЙ ЛЮДМИЪ [Law for Judging the People] as well as the Slavic Ekloga) provided women and children with extensive legal protection, as a result of which the husband, his father or other male relatives were no longer able to deal with them as they wished*²⁶.

No Eurasian society (be it classical or barbarian, sedentary or nomadic) known from historical sources from Antiquity or the Middle Ages fails to display some kind of protection of private property and marriage (either to one or to multiple wives). This can be conveniently illustrated by the fact that each and every offense connected with family life and relations between the sexes known from mediaeval Bulgaria had a counterpart in the Byzantine society; the relevant transgressions had, in fact, been incriminated already in the pagan Roman laws, long before the Roman Empire became a Christian state²⁷. This latter fact plainly demonstrates that this regulatory force was hardly introduced by Christianity; rather, it is embedded in every society, independent of its religious beliefs.

In view of the facts described above, it can scarcely be claimed that an actual ‘revolution’ swept the Bulgarian society due to its accepting Christianity as the official religion. No phenomenon like this can be observed in the institutions, which generally retained their customary Proto-Bulgarian names; in the rare cases when these were changed

²⁵ Л. Симеонова, *Правна защита на жените и децата в новопокръстеното българско общество (Закон за съдене на хората, Еклога)*, SB 27, 2009, p. 117.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

²⁷ Cf. Г. Петрова, *Престъпленията в средновековна България*, София 1992, pp. 81–130.

(the introduction of the imperial title would serve as the prime example here), this can be ascribed to certain quite specific circumstances. Similarly, no substantial change is discernible in the sphere of administration of justice.

The non-revolutionary character of the period in question is conspicuous in the cycle of miracles of St. George known as the *Tale of the Iron Cross*, where it can be observed that a Bulgarian woman enjoyed significantly more rights than her Byzantine sister. In two successive instances in the *Tale* – to wit, in the 6th miracle (i.e. the *Miracle of the Possessed Youth*) as well as in the transition to the following, 7th miracle – the narrative mentions the division of property within the family; in both cases, women participate in the process actively. In the first example, the woman in question is a widowed mother dealing with her son, and in the second – a wife dealing with her husband²⁸. In the former case, the division is described thus:

Some days later, the youth came to an agreement with his mother and, having bid farewell to her, he left. And taking half of the possessions, he gave it away, freeing four people who had been his subjects, and became a monk.²⁹

The second split – between a married couple – had the following form: *The two of us have divided our possessions and freed our subjects – about 15 people, giving them the necessary means of subsistence...*³⁰ Thus, in the first of the divisions under discussion, we may note the fully equal status of both of the surviving members of the family – the widowed mother and the son; no discrimination based on gender or age is applied. Although not described as explicitly as the first case, even the second one is arguably likely to represent an instance of equal division of the property in half, given the way the splitting is described (as a common act, administered together). Based on these two accounts, then, it could be asserted that – as far as possession is concerned – women in the early mediaeval Bulgarian society were on equal terms with men.

²⁸ *Tale of the Iron Cross*, pp. 201–202.

²⁹ *Tale of the Iron Cross*, p. 201.

³⁰ *Tale of the Iron Cross*, p. 202.

In the times following the adoption of Christianity in Bulgaria, the geographical proximity of Byzantium as well as the common religion resulted in numerous similarities in the sphere of daily life in the two states. Accordingly, the existing information concerning Byzantine women is potentially of use for analysing the situation in Bulgaria. In the Byzantine Empire, as in the Christian world in general, women were strictly barred from public (let alone political) life. There was no place for them in either state or church hierarchy. They were allotted a more active role in the private sphere, however – particularly within the family. A ‘good’ woman was expected to proceed through four roles: virgin, wife, mother and widow; the ‘bad’ ones were those who did not fit into the above model in any way, especially prostitutes³¹. The most vital social role of the woman was motherhood³². It is by no means coincidental that the most revered figure in Christianity aside from Christ himself is his mother – the Theotokos, with the focus precisely on her maternal role. The second most important function of the woman, subordinate only to motherhood, was that of caring for the home³³. This role entailed providing food for the family (preparing the basic products) as well as the production of clothes, etc.

In medieval literature, as in the contemporary society in general, there existed two parallel stereotypes to which women were compared: Eve (symbolising sin) and the Theotokos (symbolising motherhood, mercy and the hope for salvation). There were also numerous aphorisms concerning the two types of women – ‘good’ and ‘bad’; depending on the point of view of a given compiler, the former or the latter type dominated³⁴. These two entirely opposed perspectives of the woman can also be observed at the level of everyday life, as evidenced by epigraphy and graffiti. Among the many mundane objects unearthed during the excavations in Preslav, we find a seemingly ordinary spindle whorl; it would hardly attract any attention were it not for the fact that it bears an inscription. Carefully engraved by someone’s hand, it reads: **ЛОЛИНЪ ПРАСЛЕНЪ**

³¹ L. James, *Men, Women, Eunuchs: Gender, Sex, and Power*, [in:] *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. J. Haldon, Oxford 2009, p. 35.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Д. Петканова, *Разноликото...*, pp. 11, 132.

(*Lola's whore*)³⁵. On the other hand, even more interestingly, a graffito reading **МАРИНА СОУКА СОУКА ЧРИБАВА** (*Marina, bitch, pregnant bitch*) has been found in what is perhaps the least expected place – among the ruins of a monastery, namely the one near Ravna³⁶.

When discussing the Bulgarian women of the period, it is interesting to note a remark by Byzantine historian Leo the Deacon – a contemporary ‘onlooker from the side-lines’ – concerning female members of the aristocracy. Recounting the wedding of two minor Bulgarian princesses to Byzantine emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII, he mentions that the two girls were put on carts, adding that: *it is customary for Mysian [i.e. Bulgarian] women to ride on wagons*³⁷.

In the social life of early cultures, one of the principal aspects distinguishing women according to position and status was dress. An ethnographic analysis of the clothing of a Bulgarian woman from the previous century enables us to produce her ‘portrait’ – that is, to determine her region of origin, her financial status, whether she is a ‘maiden’, wife or widow, etc.³⁸ It should be assumed that women’s clothing in the First Bulgarian Empire conveyed all of this information as well; however, the scarcity of the pertinent pictorial and archaeological data makes it challenging to reconstruct early mediaeval women’s attire and image with any greater precision.

In a man’s world such as the Middle Ages, where women only rarely found their way to written sources, their social status connected them first and foremost with motherhood and home life. Apart from these unalienable duties, however, the life of a Bulgarian woman during the pagan period would sometimes involve certain typically masculine actions and behaviours such as participation in the defence of the country. Bigamy was not uncommon among the population. On the other hand, as opposed to the women of the Byzantine Empire, Bulgarian women enjoyed

³⁵ К. Попконстантинов, О. Кронстайнер, *Старобългарски надписи*, vol. I, Salzburg 1994, p. 189.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 220–221.

³⁷ Leo the Deacon, V, 3, p. 80 (transl. p. 131).

³⁸ Р. Ганева, *Знаците на българското традиционно облекло*, София 2003, pp. 7–161.

considerable property rights; they paralleled those of men, as testified to by both legal and narrative sources. The imposition of Christianity by the Bulgarian state and the accompanying introduction of new church laws did not bring about immediate changes in day-to-day existence, whose pivotal aspects continued to be regulated by customary law until as late as the beginning of the 20th century. As regards the everyday life of women, it was – save for a handful of privileges – mostly regulated by a great number of prohibitions of both utilitarian and superstitious/religious character. Women's dress of the period was characterised by comfort and practicality in the case of the ordinary population and by exquisiteness in that of the aristocracy.

2.2. Children

Children during the Middle Ages remained deep in the shadow of their parents; it may, in fact, be more correct to call them their shadows. They were instructed to behave like adults from their early years. All of their activities, their play, and even their dress mimicked that of their parents.

Christianity teaches that the conception of each human being occurs in sin; but on the other hand, the Church clearly trusted that the growth of 'God's children' turned them into living symbols of the Lord's glory³⁹. Giving birth – due to the lack of proper knowledge in this sphere among the population, and in view of the level of popular medicine – was tremendously perilous both for the mother and the new-born child. Not infrequently, the outcome would be fatal for both. The first few hours were crucial for the new-born's adaptation and survival. This was presumably the reason behind arranging an 'incubation period' of sorts for the mother and her baby. In this connection, we may mention answer LXVIII from the *Response of Pope Nicholas I to the Bulgarians*, where the question concerns the number of days following birth after which the mother may

³⁹ Р. Ф о с и е, *Обикновенният човек през Средновековието*, transl. В. Б о я д ж и е в а, София 2009, p. 40.

enter the church⁴⁰. In the popular tradition, the period between giving birth and the reintegration with the remainder of the community was limited to 40 days.

The subsequent key moment in the life of a child in mediaeval Bulgaria was baptism. After it was carried out, the child became part of the Christian community. Even if it managed to survive the first forty days, the child was bound to confront a whole array of deadly diseases, quite often leading to a premature death. The data from early mediaeval necropolises show a stunningly high rate of child mortality, reaching 63% at some burial sites⁴¹. Thus, due to their fragility, children were viewed as particularly precious in the Bulgarian society; they were carefully raised and scrupulously protected. This is evident from the abundant number of apotropaic objects discovered with children's burials in cemeteries⁴².

Having survived all the potential complications of infancy – which, due to natural selection, was exclusively the privilege of the most viable individuals – young people of both sexes faced the transition to the category of adults⁴³. They had to demonstrate that they were fit to occupy the appropriate place among the adults of the society to which they belonged, with full rights. This was done in accordance with special initiation rituals, which were simultaneously a form of trial for the youngsters, designed to show to what extent they were ready to be accepted to the group of adults. However, the existence of initiation rituals among Bulgarians of the period under discussion is only attested to by indirect data⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ Nicholas I (ed. Д. Дечев), pp. 76–77.

⁴¹ С. Ангелова, Л. Дончева-Петкова, М. Даскалов, *Двубредният ранносредновековен некропол край село Топола, Каварненска община*, [in:] *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура*, vol. III, ed. Р. Рашев, Шумен 1997, p. 143; Е. Коматарова-Балинова, *Децата в обществото на средновековните българи (по данни от езическите некрополи)*, [in:] *Eurika. In honorem Ludmilae Donchevae-Petkovaе*, ed. В. Григоров, М. Даскалов, София 2009, pp. 185–186.

⁴² Е. Коматарова-Балинова, *Децата...*, p. 195.

⁴³ Initiations in various contexts, in diverse geographical settings and in different variants have been studied, the most fully by Mircea Eliade. Cf.: М. Элиаде, *Тайные общества. Обряды, инициации и посвящения*, Москва–Санкт-Петербург 1999, pp. 23–253.

⁴⁴ Н. Хрисимов, *За прехода от детство към зрелост в българското Ранно средновековие*, *BalkF* 19.1/2, 2016, pp. 92–100.

The life of each child was filled with various sorts of games and play, as it mostly still is nowadays. Bulgarian children would play both all the games known from the adult world – such as draughts (Bulg. *dama*), knucklebones (or jacks; Bulg. *ashitsi*), or backgammon and chess in the case of aristocracy – and a whole range of typical children’s games, largely consisting in imitating the activities of adults. Toys – the ‘trademark’ of childhood – were manufactured from various materials; in view of the exceptionally poor level of preservation to our times, it may be surmised that they were generally not durable. Although no toys made of organic materials are extant in Bulgaria, we may illustrate this point with similar objects that have survived in related contemporary cultures, such as Rus’ or the Alans (in the Caucasus)⁴⁵. They show that, irrespective of the geographic location, toys replicated the form of objects used by adults, while children’s play imitated the behaviour of their parents and was aimed at developing habits that would become useful in their later lives.

In the Proto-Bulgarian tradition, the firstborn heirs to the throne as well as their younger brothers (who might potentially inherit the throne too) bore special titles. These were ὁ κανάρ τικείνος and βουλίας ταρκάνος – i.e., respectively, *kanartikin* and *boila tarkan* (*vulia tarkan*). In Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos’ *Book of Ceremonies*, they are mentioned next to one another immediately following the ruler and his consort⁴⁶. Royal children would – just as their ‘regular’ counterparts – generally spend their time playing. Next to that, however, they were educated so that they could, one day, fulfil their prospective duties. We have reliable information on these matters from the time following Christianisation.

⁴⁵ Cf. Н.А. Морозова, *Игрушки Древнего Новгорода*, [in:] *Новгород и Новгородская земля. История и археология. (Тезисы научной конференции)*, vol. III, ed. И.Ю. Акундинов, Новгород 1990, pp. 69–71; А.А. Йерусалимская, *Кавказ на Шелковом пути*, Санкт-Петербург 1992 (№ 23, 24); eadem, *Моцеевая Балка: необычный археологический памятник на Северокавказском Шелковом пути*, Санкт-Петербург 2012, p. 205, ill. 122/a–г. It is also worth noting that, like clothes worn by children, even clothes of dolls are not assigned to a separate category, but rather included in the general gender-based classification introduced by the author.

⁴⁶ Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, II, 47, p. 681.

A special compilation of texts – dubbed the **КЪНЯЖИИ ИЗБОРЪНИКЪ**⁴⁷ (*Knyazhii Izbornik*, i.e. ‘Prince’s Miscellany’) by William R. Veder – was created in order to serve as a handbook for the heirs to the throne. This was a gnomology miscellany, i.e. an anthology comprising aphorisms and wisdoms. Its conception as well as the use of a question-and-answer format unmistakably show that the *Izbornik* had pedagogical purposes and was envisaged as personal instruction from father to son. This is also evident from the fact that the most common verbal form used in the *Izbornik* is the second-person imperative. Emphasis in these texts is laid on Christian dogma and ethics⁴⁸.

As indicated above, the text also makes it possible to determine the addressee of the miscellany more exactly. It is clear that he belonged to the young generation of an affluent family; but the fact that the final part of the work is modelled on the *Mirror for Justinian* (a ‘mirror of princes’ written for emperor Justinian I) directly indicates that it was meant for the heir to the throne. Another clue pointing in this direction is the exchange ЦЪСАРЬ – КЪНЯАЗЪ (‘emperor’ – ‘prince’) in the forms of address used in the text⁴⁹.

Through the analysis of certain textologically related works, Veder traces the stages of the development of the *Prince’s Miscellany* and hypothetically reconstructs the following three redactions:

- 1) the so-called *Menaion Izbornik*, compiled ca. 900 for *kanartikins* Michael and Peter;
- 2) the *Knyazhii Izbornik*, compiled ca. 930 for *kanartikin* Boris (II);
- 3) the *Izbornik of John the Sinner* compiled ca. 960 for the heir of tsar Boris II⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ У. Ф е д е р, **КЪНЯЖИИ ИЗБОРЪНИКЪ** за възпитание на канартикина, vol. I, *Увод и показалци*, vol. II, *Текст*, Велико Търново 2008.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 10. Further details on the *Prince’s Miscellany* and *Izbornik 1076* can be found here, in the chapter 7.1.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 12; W.R. V e d e r, *A Certain Father’s Edifying Words to His Son*, [in:] У.Р. Ф е д е р, *Хиляда години като един ден*, София 2005, p. 139–144; i d e m, *За една*

The reconstructed date of the completion of the *Menaion Izbornik* makes it plain that its author must have been none other than tsar Symeon himself.

The latest of the three – the *Izbornik of John the Sinner* – was stolen from the royal library in Preslav in 971 and served as the protograph of the *Izbornik of 1076*, also known as the *Second Izbornik of Symeon* or as the *Izbornik of Svyatoslav*⁵¹.

In view of the concrete addressee of the miscellany, its circulation was apparently limited to one exemplar per generation; this type of dynasty-internal imperial pedagogy is a quite exceptional phenomenon, without parallel in other mediaeval European cultures⁵². In Byzantium, for example, the so-called ‘mirrors of princes’ would enter the court from outside (to the exception of the *Counsels on Imperial Conduct*, written ca. 1406–1413 by emperor Manuel II Palaiologos⁵³), whereas here the author of the earliest *Izbornik* may be identified as tsar Symeon himself.

If the children of the Bulgarian imperial family spent their time on activities and play useful for their future, the childhood of ordinary Bulgarians was hardly as pre-planned. Their life abounded in adversities and hardships both in its earliest stages and later on.

The existence of such moments of serious trouble is testified to by the practice of *izgoystvo*, i.e. selling one’s own children, known from pagan Bulgaria. The existence of the custom is attested e.g. in the so-called *Foreword to Repentance*, a recently identified text dating back to the period shortly after Christianisation⁵⁴. One of the later redactions of the *Foreword*, preserved in the *Miscellany of Paisiy* of the 14th century, differs from the original primarily by certain stylistic corrections; but there are also three essential modifications, showing the mitigation of the harsh

тълкувателна творба, преведена от Методиевите ученици, [in:] *idem*, *Хиляда...*, pp. 145–150; *idem*, *The Izbornik of John the Sinner: A Compilation from Compilations*, [in:] *idem*, *Хиляда...*, p. 185–199.

⁵¹ *idem*, *За една тълкувателна...*, p. 145.

⁵² *idem*, *ВЪНАЖНИ ИЗБОРНИКЪ...*, vol. I, p. 12.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 12, fn. 7.

⁵⁴ А. К а л о я н о в, *Славянската православна цивилизация. Началото: 28 март 894 г.*, Плиска–Велико Търново 2007, pp. 32, 299.

requirements of the time immediately following Christianisation. The passage concerning the practice of *izgoystvo* is shortened and fitted out with a new ending, based on the *Sermon on Spiritual Benefit* by Peter the Monk. This addition of a part of Peter the Monk's work indicates that the redaction under discussion arose later than the middle of the 10th century; this is confirmed by the softened tone. The above-mentioned alterations show which of the two variants represents the original text and to what period it should be dated⁵⁵. Even if we were to retain certain reservations about this text's belonging to the output of the very founders of ecclesiastical life in the First Bulgarian Empire – and, consequently, about the presence of the practice of selling one's children in their time – there is blatant evidence for the phenomenon from a slightly later period: an Old Bulgarian source from the 11th–12th century mentions it directly. The text in question is a later addition found in a richly decorated lectionary gospel written in Greek, dating back to the 9th–10th century⁵⁶. The Bulgarian text is an 'agreement' between an anonymous priest – presumably the one writing – and a woman by the name of Dobrina, the head of the family, who 'donates' her child (of unspecified sex) to him. The full text reads:

I, Dobrina, have donated my child to the priest, and [received?] the 'Field of the Good Guests' near Drazhil's field. Let none of my children nor anyone of my family get confused [argue] with the priest, also concerning the fact that he gave him... Because he also gave me 7 ells of cotton cloth and 5 [ells] of linen and 3 orbs [measures, bushels] of wheat.⁵⁷

Clearly, then, the practice of 'donating' children was known in mediæval Bulgaria, which should be associated with nothing else but the above-mentioned institution of *izgoystvo*. A mother who resorted to 'donating' her child was no doubt in particularly severe predicaments. In traditional Bulgarian culture, such a child is referred to as a *braneniche*

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 33–34.

⁵⁶ И. Ду й ч е в, *Български спогодбен акт от епохата на византийското владичество*, [in:] *id e m*, *Българско средновековие*, София 1972, pp. 209–215.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 211, 213.

(‘fosterling’)⁵⁸. By giving away the child, the family would secure its future. The passage from the lectionary gospel provides a firm piece of evidence suggesting that the practice is considerably old – harking back to pagan times and only changing its name in the subsequent centuries.

The death of a family member – whether already adult or not – was a common occurrence. There was no dearth of perilous situations, e.g. during hunting or war for men and during childbirth or due to attacks of wild animals for women; thus, the risk of death was quite high at all times for both sexes. Having lost one of its parents, a child would receive its share of the family property. The text concerning the division of property between a widow and her son, discussed earlier above, illustrates this practice⁵⁹.

All characteristics of the life of children in mediaeval Bulgaria picture them as equal members of the society, preparing from their youngest years to occupy a given social sphere and copying the actions of adults at a proportionally smaller scale. Children’s clothes likewise resembled those of adults.

3. Food and Nutrition

In order to understand what food in the First Bulgarian Empire was like, it is first necessary to review the foodstuffs that were certainly familiar to the people of the time and area in question.

Among foods of plant origin, grains were among the most commonplace. Traditionally, the most widely used grain was wheat⁶⁰; traces of rye are commonly found in excavations as well⁶¹. Millet was the main raw

⁵⁸ Д. Маринов, *Българско обичайно...*, p. 123.

⁵⁹ *Tale of the Iron Cross*, p. 201.

⁶⁰ Ц. Попова, *Каталог на археоботаническите останки на територията на България (1980–2008)*, ИИЗ 20/21, 2009, pp. 141–142.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 141; К. Шкорпил, *Домаиний вид и промысел*, ИРАИК 10, 1905, p. 316; Й. Панайотов, М. Михов, *Кратка характеристика на основните*

material for the production of bread used by the poor population until corn appeared in Bulgarian lands; its presence is also testified to by paleobotanical findings⁶². The use of barley⁶³ and spelt⁶⁴ is attested as well. The consumption of rice by the aristocracy is confirmed by the presence of the lexeme in the short version of *The Romance of Alexander*⁶⁵. As far as vegetables are concerned, those of the subfamily *Allioideae* (onion, garlic and leek) were the most widespread. Used both as staple foods and as spices in various dishes, they were apparently the only vegetables carefully distinguished from others. John the Exarch mentions bean plants in the *Hexameron*⁶⁶, while remnants of lentils and peas have been found in paleobotanical material⁶⁷. The *Life of St. John of Rila* (from the *Dragan's Miney*) features one further plant of the bean family: *slanutak*⁶⁸, which is the name under which chickpeas are known in Bulgarian dialects (standard Bulgarian *nabut*)⁶⁹. Direct written or archaeological evidence for the consumption of the plants of the cruciferous family by the Bulgarian population is wanting; nevertheless, given their use in Byzantium⁷⁰, we can also suspect their presence on the Bulgarian table. Besides, it is likely that the Old Bulgarian counterpart of the modern Bulgarian word *zele*, nowadays meaning 'cabbage', had collective value and designated all green vegetables from its family⁷¹.

продоволствени и технически култури, [in:] *Дуранкулак*, vol. I, ed. Х. Тодорова, София 1989, p. 216.

⁶² Ц. Попова, *Каталог...*, pp. 141–142; Й. Панайотов, М. Михов, *Кратка...*, p. 216.

⁶³ Й. Панайотов, М. Михов, *Кратка...*, p. 216.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ *Hellenic and Roman Chronicle*, p. 142; *Словарь русского языка X–XVII вв.*, vol. XIII, Москва 1987, p. 68.

⁶⁶ John of Exarch (transl. Н.Ц. Кочев), p. 122.

⁶⁷ Ц. Попова, *Каталог...*, p. 142; Й. Панайотов, М. Михов, *Кратка...*, p. 218.

⁶⁸ *Prologue Life of St. John of Rila*.

⁶⁹ Н. Геров, *Речник на българския език*, vol. V, Пловдив 1904, p. 190.

⁷⁰ Д. Димитров, *Масата събира, масата разделя: храната и храненето във Византия и различията по отношение на хранителните навици през Средновековието*, [in:] *Стандарти на всекидневието през Средновековието и Новото време*, ed. К. Мутафова et al., Велико Търново 2012, p. 24.

⁷¹ I. Tarnanidis, *The Psalter of Dimitri the Oltarnik*, [in:] *idem, The Slavonic Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai*, Thessaloniki

Like in Byzantium, wild plants such as dock, lettuce and nettle were used for culinary purposes⁷².

The chief application of herbs (including spices) at the time was for healing purposes. Herbs were widely used for treating various diseases and wounds. This is evident from the only book of cures dating to the period in question found thus far. It is preserved on three inserted pages in the so-called *Psalter of Dimitri the Oltarnik*, discovered in St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai (f. 141 A, B and C)⁷³. Among the items found there are *рѣпѣн* (burdock), *лѡуѣнъ* (onion), *корень* (root) and others.

A reliable picture of the fruit known and consumed in mediaeval Bulgaria may be gleaned from John the Exarch's *Hexameron*, a work in which apples⁷⁴, grapes⁷⁵, figs⁷⁶, pears⁷⁷ and other items are mentioned in various contexts. Paleobotanical evidence confirms the presence and use of cherries⁷⁸ and mulberries⁷⁹. Some evidence for the use of melons and muskmelons is available⁸⁰. The possibility should not be excluded that wild berries such as raspberries, blackberries, rosehips and others (all found in forests of the entire Balkan Peninsula until today) were consumed too. The use of walnuts and almonds is, again, mentioned in the *Hexameron*⁸¹. Wild hazelnut probably occurred as well. The above-mentioned survey certainly does not exhaust the full range of foods of plant origin actually consumed in mediaeval Bulgaria, but the written sources, supported

1988, pp. 91–100; Б. Велчева, *Новооткрити ръкописи в Синайския манастир "Св. Екатерина"*, Pbg 12.3, 1988, pp. 126–129.

⁷² Д. Димитров, *Масама...*, p. 25.

⁷³ I. Tarnanidis, *The Psalter...*, pp. 91–100; Б. Велчева, *Новооткрити...*, pp. 126–129.

⁷⁴ John of Exarch (transl. Н.Ц. Кочев), pp. 106, 108, 111, 129.

⁷⁵ John of Exarch (transl. Н.Ц. Кочев), pp. 105–107, 126, 129 etc.

⁷⁶ John of Exarch (transl. Н.Ц. Кочев), pp. 106, 108, 111, 128.

⁷⁷ John of Exarch (transl. Н.Ц. Кочев), p. 108.

⁷⁸ Ц. Попова, *Каталог...*, p. 142.

⁷⁹ Т. Порова, *Archaeobotanic data about the Origin of the Fruit Trees on the Territory of Bulgaria. A View of the Past*, ABu 9.1, 2005, p. 41, tab. 1.

⁸⁰ С. Станчев, *Разкопки и новооткрити материали в Плиска през 1948 г.*, ИАИ 20, 1955, p. 192.

⁸¹ John of Exarch (transl. Н.Ц. Кочев), pp. 106, 110, 127.

by paleobotanical data (extremely limited in the case of early mediaeval Bulgaria), yield such a picture.

The aristocracy (especially the royal court) also made use of various imported items, supplied from different regions, predominantly from the Byzantine Empire. The diversity of food of plant origin in the southern neighbour of the First Bulgarian Empire is eloquently documented by the *Geoponika*⁸², a Byzantine agricultural encyclopaedia; additional material is provided by modern research⁸³.

Based on the frequency of references to different kinds of crops in the *Farmer's Law* – one of the first Byzantine laws to be translated and implemented in the Bulgarian state – it could be argued that the primary focus of the Bulgarian farmer in the period following Christianisation was on fields with cereal crops (of various kinds) and vineyards. Fruit trees and their cultivation remained somewhat peripheral to the interests of both the farmers themselves and those who attempted to do damage to them⁸⁴.

Food of animal origin comprised meat, items made of milk, and bird eggs. Meat provided the early mediaeval man with basic nutritional proteins and fats. The chief way of obtaining meat in the period was by raising livestock⁸⁵. Slaughtered animals also provided the population with a wealth of other materials and resources necessary for everyday life, such as hides (used for clothing, footwear, elements of weapons and tools, etc.), wool (for clothing), tallow (for lighting), or bones and horn (for various items of everyday use as well as elements of tools and weapons). Additional ways of procuring meat in early mediaeval Bulgaria were hunting and fishing. However, osteological evidence from bones recovered from various early mediaeval settlements indicates that meat obtained through hunting and fishing generally constituted no more than 3–4% of the total⁸⁶; situations in which these sources accounted for as much as

⁸² *Geoponika*.

⁸³ G. S i m e o n o v, *Obst in Byzanz. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ernährung im östlichen Mittelmeerraum*, Saarbrücken 2013.

⁸⁴ *Farmer's Law*.

⁸⁵ Л. Н и н о в, *Някои аспекти на животновъдството през Средновековието*, ИИЗ 17, 1990, pp. 95–96.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, tab. 1 and 2.

15% of overall animal consumption were exceptional⁸⁷. Early mediaeval Bulgarian farms primarily kept mammals as sources of food and materials: cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, horses, and donkeys⁸⁸. Certain kinds of poultry were raised too (chickens, ducks, and geese)⁸⁹; nevertheless, mammals dominated, amounting to over 90% of domestic animal populations⁹⁰. Among mammals, cattle had the largest share (oscillating between 50% and 60% in individual settlements), followed by pigs. Small ruminants (sheep and goats) occupied the third position, the share of sheep being at all times much higher than that of goats⁹¹. Domesticated fowl, as indicated above, only constituted an insignificant percentage of the animals raised, rarely exceeding 5%⁹², from which over 80% were chickens. The generalised data show that beef was by far the most widely consumed meat item in early mediaeval Bulgaria, eaten overwhelmingly more often than

⁸⁷ В. В а с и л е в, *Животновъдство и лов в живота на населението от средновековното селище край Дуранкулак*, [in:] *Дуранкулак...*, p. 243. 16.34% of the overall number of bones found belong to wild animals, constituting 21.85% of the minimal number of individuals.

⁸⁸ Л. Н и н о в, *Някои аспекти...*, tab. 1 and 2; В. В а с и л е в, *Животновъдство и лов...*, p. 227, tab. 1.

⁸⁹ В. В а с и л е в, *Животновъдство и лов...*, p. 227, tab. 1; Н. И л и е в, З. Б о е в, *Птиците в храната на населението от Вънния глад на Велики Преслав (IX–X в.)*, ИИЗ 17, 1990, pp. 91–94.

⁹⁰ С. И в а н о в, *Животински костни остатъци от селището в местността Джеджови лозя при с. Попина*, [in:] Ж. В ъ ж а р о в а, *Славянски и славянобългарски селища в българските земи от края на VI–XI век*, София 1965, p. 208, tab. 2; Л. Н и н о в, *Домаините и дивите животни от средновековното и укрепено селище край с. Хума, Разградски окръг*, [in:] Р. Р а ш е в, С. С т а н и л о в, *Старобългарското укрепено селище при с. Хума, Разградски окръг*, РП 17, 1987, p. 173, tab. 1; Л. Н и н о в, *Животновъдна и ловна дейност на обитателите на крепостта*, [in:] В. Й о т о в, Г. А т а н а с о в, *Скала. Крепост от X–XI век до с. Кладенци, Тервелско*, София 1998, p. 330, tab. 1. An exception in this respect is furnished by the settlement on the island near Durankulak, where their share in the population of household animals is ca. 80%.

⁹¹ Л. Н и н о в, *Домаините и дивите...*, p. 178.

⁹² Н. И л и е в, З. Б о е в, *Птиците в храната...*, p. 91; С. И в а н о в, *Животински костни...*, p. 208, tab. 1; Л. Н и н о в, *Животновъдна и ловна...*, p. 330, tab. 1. Again, the settlement near Durankulak turns out to be exceptional with regard to the statistic in question: here, the percentage of poultry relative to other kinds of domestic animals is higher, while chickens are less numerous than ducks (В. В а с и л е в, *Животновъдство и лов...*, p. 227, tab. 1).

any of the remaining ones. The second and third most popular choices were pork and lamb, respectively, while poultry was a rare delicacy. This hierarchy of importance and preference among various kinds of meat in the period under discussion is reflected in the *Tale of the Iron Cross* cycle, specifically in the *Miracle of St. George with the Bulgarian*. Leaving for battle, the protagonist, George, says:

Before leaving for war, I summoned the priest and a service was held.
I slaughtered the most valuable [the most beautiful] ox as well as 10 sheep
and 10 pigs; I gave them away to the poor and left for war.⁹³

As regards wild mammals, the following ones were used for food: wild boars, deer, hares, aurochs, bison, as well as – in coastal areas – dolphins⁹⁴. Certain birds were also hunted for food, such as swans, pelicans, pheasants and eagles (?)⁹⁵.

Fishing covered part of the nutritional needs as well. Depending on what type of water basin a given settlement had access to, various kinds of fish were used as food: carp, catfish, sturgeon and others. In view of the poor durability of their bones, the traces discovered are exceptionally scanty⁹⁶.

Domesticated mammals were the source of milk and its products. Cows probably provided the bulk of the milk, considering the generally large numbers of cattle and the high milk yield relative to other mammals.

⁹³ *Tale of the Iron Cross*, p. 199.

⁹⁴ В. Василев, *Животновъдство и лов...*, р. 227, таб. 1; С. Иванов, *Животински костни...*, р. 208, таб. 2; С. Иванов, *Храната от животински...*, р. 212, таб. 1; Н. Спасов, Н. Илиев, *Костни останки от зубър (Bison Bonasus L.) в средновековното селище край с. Гарван, Силистренски окръг*, [in:] Ж. Вържарова, *Средновековното селище с. Гарван, Силистренски окръг VI–XI в.*, София 1986, р. 68; Л. Нинов, *Домаините и дивите...*, р. 173, таб. 1; Л. Нинов, *Животновъдна и ловна...*, р. 330, таб. 1.

⁹⁵ В. Василев, *Животновъдство и лов...*, р. 227, таб. 1; С. Иванов, *Животински костни...*, р. 209; З. Боев, *Костни останки от птици*, [in:] Ж. Вържарова, *Средновековното...*, р. 68; Н. Илиев, З. Боев, *Птиците в храната...*, р. 92.

⁹⁶ С. Иванов, *Животински костни...*, р. 209; В. Василев, *Животновъдство и лов...*, pp. 227 (tab. 1), 243.

The milk of small ruminants followed second in importance. As concerns poultry, the principal product other than meat were eggs; their remnants are frequently recovered as grave goods in pagan burial grounds⁹⁷. Evidence from the Preslav court shows that – unlike for the ordinary masses – chicken was the meat of choice there, consumed overwhelmingly more often than in ordinary settlements⁹⁸. Sturgeon and shark were further luxurious items in the palace menu⁹⁹; also noteworthy is the preference for lamb and goat meat, followed by pork, and only in the third place by beef¹⁰⁰.

The primary source of the necessary sugars was wine, as well as bee honey. The latter's widespread presence, production and use during the period is documented in the *Book of the Eparch* – it is mentioned as one of the foremost Bulgarian export products sent to the markets of Constantinople, alongside linen fabrics¹⁰¹.

Following the harvest, the crops were threshed on threshing boards¹⁰². The grain was stored in pots or, more often, in hollows carved out in floors of dwellings. Before it could be turned into bread, grain first had to be ground into flour. Depending on their social status, the various classes of society consumed bread of different quality and composition. It appears probable that aristocracy ate wheat bread, while the bread of ordinary people was made of flour obtained from wheat mixed with other grains (rye, barley, oats, millet), or from yet different grain crops. Grinding grain into flour was done in mills¹⁰³. The use of the most primitive method of grinding grain – with quern-stones – is attested archaeologically across

⁹⁷ See numerous examples in: Ж. В ъ ж а р о в а, *Славяни и прабългари по данни на некрополите от VI–XI в. на територията на България*, София 1976.

⁹⁸ С. И в а н о в, *Храната от животински произход на обитателите на Южната порта в Преслав*, ИАИ 22, 1959, p. 212, tab. 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 212 tab. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 212.

¹⁰¹ *Book of the Eparch*, IX, 6.

¹⁰² M i c h a e l t h e S y r i a n (p. 17) informs us about the use of threshing boards, but for purposes quite different from threshing, by emperor Nikephoros I during his stay in the Bulgarian capital in 811. He recounts that the atrocities of the emperor went as far as ordering the use of threshing boards for crushing small children.

¹⁰³ *Farmer's Law*, 82.

the territory of Bulgaria¹⁰⁴. In view of the small size (and consequently, weight) of these quern-stones, the grain was ground quite coarsely, yielding a kind of flour rather similar to fine groats. The Old Bulgarian word *връшкно* denoted ‘food, something to eat’¹⁰⁵. Based on this broader meaning of the word, one could try to connect it with other possibilities of the culinary use of grains – such as, for example, boiling it directly to achieve a kind of porridge. The resulting product could be consumed on its own, alongside meat, or in yet other ways¹⁰⁶. The consumption of porridge in early mediaeval Bulgaria is attested in the writings of John the Exarch¹⁰⁷. Bread consumption may be associated with different population groups, but not categories. Following the adoption of Christianity as the official religion through Constantinople, the consumption of unleavened bread was hardly possible¹⁰⁸. Bread was baked in *podnitsas* (traditional earthenware vessels) or on ante-furnace platforms within dwellings¹⁰⁹. The comparison of the way of making bread and porridge from grains leads to

¹⁰⁴ Т. Михайлова, *Сгради и съоръжения на запад от Тронната палата в Плиска – X–XI в.*, ППре 5, 1993, pp. 170–184; Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Сгради при южния сектор на западната крепостна стена на Плиска*, ППре 5, 1993, p. 133, ill. 27; С. Михайлов, Г. Джингов, В. Вълков, В. Димова, *Ранносредновековно селище при с. Стърмен*, РП 7, 1982, pp. 17 (ill. 3, 8, 9, 10), 26 (ill. 18–20); Х. Тодорова, *Архитектурата на средновековното селище*, [in:] *Дуранкулак...*, pp. 45–48, ill. 12, 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Старославянский словарь (по рукописям X–XI вв.)*, ed. P.M. Цейтлин, P. Вечерка, Э. Благова, Москва 1994, p. 101; М. Цибранска-Костова, *Покаяната книжнина на Българското средновековие IX–XVIII век*, София 2011, pp. 72–73.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Н. Хрисимов, *Храната в Първото българско царство*, [in:] *Стандарти...*, pp. 212–215.

¹⁰⁷ John the Exarch (transl. Н.Ц. Кочев), p. 108.

¹⁰⁸ Д. Димитров, *Масама...*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁹ Apparently, the consolidation of bread as a staple food of the Bulgarians should be dated to the time of Byzantine rule and ascribed to Byzantine influence. In the 12th century, Gregory Antiochos already writes about several different types of bread among the Bulgarians, the most common being the one with ashes sticking to it, i.e. bread baked in a *podnitsa* or in the ante-furnace space. Cf. Gregory Antiochos, p. 280; Г. Цанкова-Петкова, П. Тивчев, *Нови данни за историята на Софийската област през последните десетилетия на византийското владичество*, ИИИ 14/15, 1964, pp. 315–324.

the conclusion that the population of the First Bulgarian Empire subsisted predominantly on porridges¹¹⁰. They are much quicker to prepare, and when combined with meat they are also significantly more nutritious than the traditional bread. Besides, the plants from the bean family – lentils, broad beans, peas and chickpeas (all well-known to, and widely used by, the population of the First Bulgarian Empire), are also convenient and were widely used to make porridges and soups.

Osteological research shows that after parts of animals were consumed, their bones were crushed so that marrow could be extracted. This is prime evidence for the fact that even the smallest bits of the animal carcass were considered of vital importance and consumed¹¹¹.

Meat – apart from being prepared using the easiest methods (with porridge, i.e. boiled) – was also probably *grilled, roasted and singed*, as remarked at a later period by Theophylaktos of Ohrid¹¹². Incidentally, the latter author also observes that Bulgarians knew how to prepare jerked meat¹¹³.

Another product of animal origin used for cooking and other household needs is butter, whose use during the reign of tsar Peter is indirectly confirmed by evidence from later times¹¹⁴. Byzantine emperor Romanos I Lekapenos mentions ‘dairy’ in a letter to tsar Symeon¹¹⁵. The word *сѣръ* was known during the period in question; it is attested in the *Codex Suprasliensis*¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁰ Н. Хрисимов, *Храната...*, pp. 212–215.

¹¹¹ С. Иванов, *Храната от животински...*, pp. 209–210; Л. Нинов, *Домаините и дивите...*, pp. 173–174; *idem*, *Животновѣдна и ловна...*, p. 329.

¹¹² Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Letters* (transl. Симеон Варненски), 5, p. 7.

¹¹³ Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Letters* (transl. Симеон Варненски), 5, p. 58.

¹¹⁴ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 401d.

¹¹⁵ Theodore Daphnopates, 5. Whether the word is used here in a literal or figurative sense is irrelevant; the very occurrence of the lexeme is crucial. However, in note 4 on page 303 of *FGHB*, vol. IV it is suggested that the word *mandri* may refer to fortresses.

¹¹⁶ *Старославянский словарь...*, p. 676.

Next to wine, certain other, more special kinds of drinks were used as well. Mead was the traditional drink of all Slavs¹¹⁷. The *Tale of the Iron Cross* cycle furnishes information on a few further drinks, to wit: *шпсимъ*, *оукропъ* and *пиво* (*питиѹ/питиѹ*)¹¹⁸.

The preparation and serving of all of the above-mentioned foods and drinks required the application of appropriate dishes. The ordinary population mostly made use of clay and wooden dishes, while those used by the aristocracy and the members of the court were made either of ceramic materials (with fine details) or of metal, sometimes even noble metals.

Ceramic dishes used in the early Middle Ages are divided by scholars into three large groups, depending on their purpose – storage, cooking, or dining¹¹⁹. Storage ceramic vessels (cruses and amphorae) were used for keeping various food and drink products¹²⁰.

Water used for the preparation of food, as well as for drinking in the household, was carried in ceramic¹²¹ or wooden buckets with metal fittings¹²². Various kinds of drinks were also carried in ceramic vessels¹²³ or in leather sacks with bone valves¹²⁴.

¹¹⁷ И. Павлов, *Присъствия на храненето...*, p. 76.

¹¹⁸ More on these drinks cf. in: Y.M. Hristov, N. Hrisimov, *Aspects of everyday life in the Old-Bulgarian hagiographical cycle of stories "A Tale of the Iron Cross"*, ДСБ 10, 2017, pp. 110–120.

¹¹⁹ Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Българска битова керамика през ранното средновековие*, София 1977, pp. 33–110; Р. Рашев, *Българската езическа култура VII–IX век*, София 2008, pp. 175–185.

¹²⁰ Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Българска битова...*, pp. 98–104.

¹²¹ See on those in: Л. Бобчева, *Две грънчарски пеци в ранносредновековното селище при с. Топола, Толбухински окръг*, ИНМВ 13 (28), 1977, pp. 172–176; eadem, *Глинени котли от ранносредновековното селище при с. Топола, Толбухински окръг*, ИНМВ 16 (31), 1980, pp. 126–130.

¹²² See on those in: Д.И. Димитров, *Новооткрит раннобългарски некропол при Девня*, ИНМВ 7 (22), 1971, p. 68, ill. 13; Ж. Вържарова, *Славяни и прабългари...*, p. 174; В. Йотов, Г. Атанасов, *Скала...*, p. 85, tab. LXXIX/142–145; Р. Рашев, *Българската езическа...*, p. 175.

¹²³ Р. Рашев, *За глинениите бѣклици в средновековна България*, ППрепр 1, 1979, pp. 206–209. The use of these vessels followed the ancient tradition.

¹²⁴ On their use among Avars see: C. Balogh, *Avar kori tömlővégek*, KDMK 22, 2016, pp. 193–216.

On the other hand, cooking and dining ceramics differed both with regard to form and to the material used. Cooking ceramics included pots and the lids that belonged to them, as well as pans and cauldrons with internal handles¹²⁵. Pots were used for cooking; they were placed on the top part of household stoves (designed especially for holding vessels¹²⁶), or directly over the embers, spread out in the ante-furnace part of the dwelling. Cauldrons with internal handles were used for cooking over open fire.

Dining ceramics included jugs, pitchers, amphora-like pitchers, cups, bowls and similar dishes¹²⁷. Drinks were poured from the larger vessels into cups or bowls, made not only from clay, but also from wood, sometimes with metal fittings added¹²⁸. Such a dish was known as a *кръгчагъ*, a word attested both in 10th-century literary texts¹²⁹ and in graffiti inscriptions from the same period¹³⁰. Bowls were used for serving the ready food on the table.

Some of the names of dishes used in the period in question are preserved in the so-called *Sinai Patericon* of the 11th–12th century, which is a copy of a translation (completed in the 10th century in Bulgaria) of the Greek *Λειμών πνευματικός* by John Moschos¹³¹. Thus, the vessels used on a daily basis by monks, mentioned in this patericon, are the following: *сосуды* – vessels, *гръньць* – pot, ceramic vessel, *комърогъ* – large (presumably clay) vessel, *коновъ* – cauldron, *нъцьви* – tray, kneading trough, *скоудѣлъ* – large water vessel with a narrow neck, large bottle, *чаша* – cup, *коквалъ* – (large) cup, *тыкы* – gourd, and *палица* – wooden dish (plate or bowl)¹³².

¹²⁵ Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Българска битова...*, p. 35.

¹²⁶ Т. Балабанов, *Селище в югозападната...*, pp. 140–141 and ill. 33/ 2, 3.

¹²⁷ Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Българска битова...*, p. 69; Р. Рашев, *Българската езическа...*, p. 181.

¹²⁸ С. Станчев, С. Иванов, *Некрополът до Нови Пазар*, София 1958, tab. XXXIII/ 1; Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Нови данни за некропол № 3 при Балчик*, ППИК 4.2, 2007, p. 138 and ill. 4/2.

¹²⁹ *Старославянский словарь...*, p. 296.

¹³⁰ К. Рорконтантинов, О. Кронстайнер, *Старобългарски...*, vol. I, pp. 154–155, 204–205.

¹³¹ Е. Зашев, *Наименования на съдове за течности и храни в Синайския патерик*, Ист 13.2/3, 2005, p. 91.

¹³² *Ibidem*, pp. 97–98.

People would eat both using their hands alone (a fact confirmed by numerous ethnographic parallels with various regions around the world, both in modern times and in the past) and with utensils. The aristocracy used metal spoons and forks, the latter principally for serving¹³³. It is conceivable that the ordinary population used the same utensils too, only made of non-durable materials such as wood, which would correspond to the picture known from ethnographic material¹³⁴.

4. Dwellings

The traditional dwelling in early mediaeval Bulgaria was a semi-dugout. The surface of these dwellings – usually rectangular in shape¹³⁵ – normally amounted to between 10 and 15 m², only exceptionally exceeding 20 m².¹³⁶ This suggests that they were inhabited by no more than a single family. Gable roofs were used, tailored to the existing resources and built from neutral materials (thatch). They were supported by beams whose bases were dug into the floor of the dwelling. Walls were sometimes lined with wooden planks¹³⁷. Heating equipment (stoves) would be installed next to walls, on the side opposing the entrance¹³⁸. Not infrequently, dwellings

¹³³ К. Константинов, *Прибори за хранене от Велики Преслав*, Пр.Сб 6, 2004, pp. 273–280; *idem*, *Прибори за хранене и приготвяне на храна от Плиска*, *Истор 1*, 2006, pp. 275–283.

¹³⁴ Д. Маринов, *Народна вяра и религиозни народни обичаи*, София 1994, p. 193.

¹³⁵ Р. Василев, *Функции и развитие на масовото жилище-полуземлянка в средновековна Плиска*, ППРе 8, 2000, p. 103.

¹³⁶ К. Миятев, *Жилищната архитектура в България през IX и X в.*, ИАИ 23, 1960, pp. 1–21; Д.И. Димитров, *Някои въпроси във връзка с изучаването на старобългарското масово жилище от VI–XI в. в Североизточна България*, [in:] *Архитектурата на Първата и Втората българска държава*, ed. Г. Кожухаров, София 1975, pp. 212–245.

¹³⁷ С. Михайлов, *Разкопки в Плиска през 1959–1961 г.*, ИАИ 26, 1963, pp. 12–13; Р. Василев, *Функции...*, p. 104.

¹³⁸ Р. Василев, *Функции...*, p. 103.

were also heated by centrally located hearths¹³⁹. The floor of a dwelling featured carved-out hollows used for different household purposes, primarily storing grain¹⁴⁰.

Homes of the aristocracy (or at least those that may be identified as such without doubt) were located in the capitals Pliska and Preslav, universally built from stone in *opus quadratum*. Typical of the 10th century is the construction not of individual aristocratic dwellings, but of so-called secular complexes (it should be noted that some of the sites identified as monastic complexes in earlier scholarship may be safely considered secular¹⁴¹). Numerous such complexes were located within or in front of the fortifications of Veliki Preslav, in the so-called agglomeration¹⁴²; apart from residential buildings and a church, each comprised various utility buildings and other structures, the whole complex surrounded with a stone wall¹⁴³.

5. Holidays and Celebration

Although the ordinary workdays of early mediaeval Bulgarians were filled primarily with toil, there was also a wealth of feast days; holidays were often filled chiefly with celebration and games. Folk holidays were invariably accompanied by games, singing and dancing. Regrettably, for

¹³⁹ Т. Балабанов, *Жилища покрай северната и източната крепостна стена на Плиска*, ППРе 5, 1992, p. 152.

¹⁴⁰ I d e m, *Селище в югозападната част на Външния град на Плиска*, ППРе 10, 2010, p. 140.

¹⁴¹ Cf. К. Попконстантинов, *Граждански комплекси в Плиска и Преслав*, [in:] *Средновековният български град*, ed. П. Петров, София 1980, pp. 117–128.

¹⁴² С. Бонев, *Столицата Велики Преслав през Х в. – не просто град, а агломерация*, [in:] *Градът в българските земи (по археологически данни). Материали от националната научна конференция посветена на живота и делото на ст.н.с. Вера Антонова. Шумен, 31 октомври – 1 ноември 2013 г.*, ed. П. Георгиев, Шумен 2014, pp. 273–277.

¹⁴³ Cf. Р. Рашев et al., *Материали за картата на средновековната българска държава (територията на днешна Североизточна България)*, ППРе 7, 1995, № 162, 169, 170, 175, 176, 180, 197–199, etc.

the period in question we lack data concerning the songs and dances associated with particular feast days – be it in Byzantium and the Balkan area or in the Western Europe¹⁴⁴.

Despite the adoption of Christianity in the middle of the 9th century, Bulgarian folk culture did not undergo any drastic changes; this state of affairs brought upon the nation severe criticism from the clergy, as may sometimes be seen in literary works written by the latter. In the time following Christianisation, a large number of new holidays connected with the recently adopted religion started being celebrated – Christmas, Easter, commemorations of various moments from the life of Christ, and feast days of particular saints – all accompanied by solemn liturgy and processions. Folk holidays, however, remained outside of the context of these ‘official’ ones. With its 102 ecclesiastical regulations, the 692 Council in Trullo introduced copious new, harsh restrictions and prohibitions both for members of the clergy and for lay people. Thus, for example, canon 24 of the council banned members of the clergy from attending any kind of horse racing events and theatrical performances¹⁴⁵. The nomocanon further explains that horse races, performances, or whatever kind of spectacles (subsumed under the general term *позорища*) shall not be held on the Lord’s day (Sunday) or any of the Lord’s holidays¹⁴⁶. Thus, life during the period was entirely controlled by Divine laws (church regulations), as neatly illustrated e.g. in Cosmas the Priest’s *Sermon Against the Heretics*¹⁴⁷. The celebration of St. George’s Day in a manner similar to the one known to us today – involving animal sacrifice (the killing of a lamb in the saint’s honour) – is referenced in the 7th miracle of the *Tale of the Iron Cross* cycle. A shepherd sells a lamb to a poor widow, only to subsequently tell her that it was devoured by a wolf. She asks him: *Is this true or are you lying?*, to which he responds *By God, it is true*. Her response ensues: *You know that I am poor. If you tell a lie, God and St. George will hold you accountable*;

¹⁴⁴ Р. Ф о с и е, *Обикновеният...*, pp. 214–215.

¹⁴⁵ *Canons of the Quinisext Council*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ А. К а л о я н о в, *Славянската православна...*, p. 198 – quotation from the *Ryazan Rudder*.

¹⁴⁷ C o s m a s t h e P r i e s t.

for it is the latter to whom I promised that I would slaughter the lamb, for his holy feast day¹⁴⁸.

Folk holidays were expressed through dancing, just like in the later, ethnographically documented times. Dances and feasts were organised in the evening, as described in the *Sermon on the Holy Scripture* published by Bonyo Angelov (according to whom the various characteristics of the text allow us to date it to the first decades after Christianisation)¹⁴⁹. Who created a pleasant atmosphere at these events is clear from the *Sermon on the Drought* from the *Zlatostruy* miscellany. No Greek archetype for this sermon has been found, which suggests a local, Bulgarian author and composition during the reign of tsar Symeon (who ordered the creation of the whole collection). The author of the work writes that people are moved away from God and deceived by **тРОУВАМИ И СКОМРАХЪ. И НИЧЕМИ ИГРЪМИ ВЛѢБИ КЪ СОВѢ. ГОУСЪМИ. СВИРЪЛАМИ. ПЛАСАНИИ САНЪХЪ**¹⁵⁰. The *Sermon on the Interpreter* mentions not only *gusle* and pipes, but also numerous further instruments as well as a vivid description of dances from the period; all of this helps us gain a fuller picture of their general characteristics and the way they functioned during the early Middle Ages: **ЕЛИНЪСКИА ЛЮБВЕ, БОУВЕНЪНАГО ПЛЕСКАНИА, СВИРИЛИНИ ЗВОУЦИ, ПЛАСАНИА СОТОНИНА, ФРАЖЪСКИА СЛОНЪНИЦА И ГОУСЛИ, МОУСИКИА И ЗАМАРА, ИЖЕ БЪСАТЪСА**¹⁵¹ (*Hellenic love, the beating of tambourines, the sounds of pipes, Satanic dances, Frankish slonnitsa and gusle, music and reed pipe and people in ecstasy*; boldface – N.H.). All of the above-mentioned instruments are relatively simple devices, offering rather limited musical possibilities. The lyre represents a primitive form of a harp; this is confirmed by archaeological findings from mediaeval Novgorod¹⁵². The *gusle*, likewise, only allowed for an extremely narrow range of sounds, spanning no more than two octaves – it is a crude, one-stringed predecessor of

¹⁴⁸ *Tale of the Iron Cross*, p. 203.

¹⁴⁹ *Sermon on the Holy Scripture*, pp. 256–268.

¹⁵⁰ *Sermon on the Drought*, p. 325.

¹⁵¹ *Sermon on the Interpreter*, p. 38.

¹⁵² Б.А. Колчин, *Инструментальная музыка древнего Новгорода*, [in:] *Четвърти международен конгрес по славянска археология. Доклади и съобщения*, vol. I, ed. Д. Ангелов, София, 1992, p. 542.

the fiddle. The pipe – as well as the *zamara* – made it possible to fill the more rhythmic kinds of music with other sounds: their melodies could be easily accompanied by the beats of the rhythm-providing instruments, such as tambourines and drums. The horns, in both of the above-mentioned variants, could probably emit only a single sound and should therefore be counted among the rhythm-providing instruments as well.

The *Sermon on the Drought*, referred to above, mentions not only musical instruments but also another inseparable element of mediaeval celebration – the *skomrachs* (or *skomorochs*, buffoons, clowns). Scholars are unanimous in that the earliest information about them is of Bulgarian provenance and dates back to the times of tsar Symeon¹⁵³. It is from there that the phenomenon spread to Rus', although it did not become widespread before the 13th century. According to Zoya Vlassova, the origin of the *skomrachs* as a phenomenon should be sought in Byzantium¹⁵⁴. Probably, in this case, Sergey Ivanov is correct in thinking that the word *скомраxъ* did not only denote a joker or clown but should be connected with the circus spectacles held at the Hippodrome in Constantinople. In Old Bulgarian works and translations, the word was used to denote mimes, charioteers, and even particular *dimas*. This semantic complexity led to the ambiguity of the term *скомраxъ* in Old Bulgarian texts¹⁵⁵. Based on the above assumptions, we may surmise that the *skomrachs* appeared in their original form as an element of elite culture – as court entertainment for the ruler and his entourage; only from there, quite late and probably already in Rus' territory, the phenomenon spread among the ordinary population as well.

Next to holidays filled with general celebration, even regular days saw a number of diverse games being played for entertainment in time free from work. It is conceivable that many of them were the same ones that the direct ancestors of the Bulgarians enjoyed at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century; however, which of these games were already known in the First Bulgarian Empire is not certain. The obstacle here

¹⁵³ А.А. Б е л к и н, *Русские скоморохи*, Москва 1975, pp. 39–41; S.A. I v a n o v, *Slavic Jesters and the Byzantine Hippodrome*, DOP 46, 1992, pp. 129–132.

¹⁵⁴ З.И. В л а с о в а, *Скоморохи и фольклор*, Санкт-Петербург 2001, p. 155.

¹⁵⁵ S.A. I v a n o v, *Slavic Jesters...*, p. 131.

is the Church's ban not only on playing, but also on mentioning games, administered by the Council in Trullo: as a result of this prohibition, the names are missing from the works (even translations) by contemporary Bulgarian ecclesiastic writers. One game that might be supposed to have been present at the time is the so-called *chelik* (Tur. 'steel'), well-known from folk culture; however, even in this case, direct traces are lacking (due to objective reasons). A game that was certainly widespread during the period under discussion, however, is the one known in Bulgarian ethnography as *ashitsi* (i.e. knucklebones or jacks; also referred to as *astragali*, from Latin). It was played using animal bones from the ankle or hock (usually of sheep, although the use of deer, hare, dog or fox bones is documented too)¹⁵⁶. Dice were used in early mediaeval Bulgaria either for playing the eponymous game or as an ancillary element of the game of backgammon¹⁵⁷. Finds of backgammon pieces are concentrated in the territory of the two mediaeval capitals Pliska and Preslav (in their central parts, to be precise)¹⁵⁸ and in other places where the presence of members of the aristocracy is documented (even after their withdrawal from the secular society – in monasteries)¹⁵⁹. Another game with clear ties to aristocratic circles was chess. As opposed to backgammon, no full chess set has been discovered so far; the finds are limited to individual pieces (three from Preslav and one from Pliska)¹⁶⁰. The topography of these discoveries points to a direct connection with the dwellers of the palaces and their surroundings. Yet another factor linking these forms of entertainment with the palaces and the aristocracy is the fact that the very concept of both games resembles a scaled-down model of two opposed armies and the military actions between them¹⁶¹. Unlike these two 'aristocratic' pastimes, one game enjoyed huge popularity among the general

¹⁵⁶ Д.И. Димитров, *Погребалният обред на раннобългарските некрополи във Варненско*, ИАИ 34, 1974, р. 65; U. Fiedler, *Studien...*, р. 214.

¹⁵⁷ Д. Овчаров, *Още за игрите в средновековен Преслав*, ППРе 7, 1995, р. 136.

¹⁵⁸ С. Станчев, *Материали от Дворцовия център в Плиска*, ИАИ 23, 1960, р. 29, ill. 3Б/3; П. Георгиев, *Разкопки южно от Големия басейн в Плиска*, ППРе 10, 2004, р. 56, ill. 33а.

¹⁵⁹ Т. Тотев, *За една игра в средновековна България*, Архе 14.3, 1972, pp. 33–41.

¹⁶⁰ Iđem, *Шахмат в средновековна България*, ШМ 33.1, 1980, pp. 23–25.

¹⁶¹ Д. Овчаров, *Още за игрите...*, pp. 136, 141.

population: draughts. Lined playing areas have been found both in fortress walls of the two capitals and in various settlements across the territory of the First Bulgarian Empire¹⁶².

The chief amusement of male members of the aristocracy during all periods was hunting. The *Folk Life of St. John of Rila* features a description of how tsar Peter, upon first hearing about John, dispatched nine experienced hunters to search for the saint¹⁶³. Here, it is not the ruler himself who is depicted as a hunter; but the fact that the hunters are sent personally by the monarch suggests that they belonged to his suite or at least to the highest aristocratic circles. Moreover, it would be quite unexpected for tsar Peter to appear in the narrative as a hunter himself, given the humble, meek and peaceable temper that he displayed according to the description¹⁶⁴. For the ordinary population, hunting was scarcely a form of entertainment; rather, along with gathering, it was a way of securing food.

The above data concerning the everyday life during the time of tsar Peter amount to a picture of the Bulgarian society rather similar to that of contemporary Byzantium; this is chiefly due to the fact that Bulgaria received Christianity from Constantinople. On the other hand, it bears its own special characteristics, later to be passed on to other regions of the *Slavia Orthodoxa*.



¹⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 140.

¹⁶³ *Folk Life of St. John of Rila*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁴ К. Иречек, *История на българите*, София 1978, p. 198.