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# Christianisation as Cultural Guilt: The Bulgarian Experience

“through the delicate crust of the present  
emerges the exalted horror of the past”

Ani Ilkov, *Chiasmus* (Илков, 2014)

There is a theory that the establishment of Christianity in the ninth century in medieval Bulgaria resulted in a social split between the palace elite and the people, which ultimately led to a decline in public life.<sup>1</sup> This view is most clearly illustrated by Hristo Botev in two articles published with a four-year gap: “The People: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”, published in 1871 in the first two issues of the newspaper *Дума на българските емигранти* [Word of the Bulgarian Immigrants], was followed in 1875 by “Is Our Disease Curable?”, which was the introductory piece in the tenth issue of the newspaper

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*Знаме* [Flag]. This theory is ignored by the Bulgarian researchers of the nineteenth century, probably because it was subversive and shook the populace's faith in their core Christian beliefs.<sup>2</sup> An expert in cultural studies, Encho Mutafov, was the only author who placed a special focus on Botev's subversion theory of Christianisation and the Golden Age at a later period.<sup>3</sup> His article "The Intellectual Destiny of Botev and Rakovski" was published in its entirety at the second attempt in 2003 in *LiterNet* after the censored first version in the *Литературен форум* [Literature Forum] newspaper (Мутафов, 2003).<sup>4</sup> His aim was to provide a vivid and clear explanation of the ideas and dialogue between Botev and Rakovski.<sup>5</sup> Encho Mutafov believes that the theories of these two eminent authors, Botev and Rakovski, have been deliberately ignored: "The same is happening with Botev. No one has touched upon his remarkable statement that 'the Golden Age of the Bulgarian culture under Simeon is "the apex of our lethal disease" because the Byzantine leprosy is already inside the Bulgarian body'" (Мутафов, 2003). Mutafov's article, taken from a native perspective, argues against the self-colonising principles of self-knowledge and collective self-acceptance. His dismissal of these principles is a result of his belief in a Bulgarian culture, "which has not experienced its cycle in antiquity" (Мутафов, 2003). The unwelcome enforcement of different systems of religion and power will inevitably disrupt the traditional sacred order. It is no coincidence that a core theme in both the poetry and scholarly writings of Rakovski is the lost brightness of medieval Bulgaria. In Mutafov's opinion, the arrested course of civilisation is not due to a culture that has "fallen behind": it is due to "a culture which has not experienced its

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<sup>2</sup> About the relationship between religious identity and national identity, see Aretov (Аретов, 2011). The author stresses the problem-free and harmonious co-existence between "religious" and "national", particularly in the context of the new boom of nationalism in late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century.

<sup>3</sup> In Bulgarian medieval history, "Golden Age" refers to the culmination of culture under Tsar Simeon the Great (893–927). This is the period after the official Christianisation under his father, Knyaz Boris Mikhail, and after the enlightening mission of the Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolai Chernokozhev discusses the problem of Botev's radicalism, which regards Christianity in a broader context with other authors from the Bulgarian National Revival period: Paisius, Sophronius, Bozveli, Voinikov, Drumev, etc. (see Чернокожев, 2001, p. 88).

<sup>5</sup> Georgi Rakovski (1821–1867) and Hristo Botev (1848–1876) were outstanding poets and revolutionaries of the National Revival. After the liberation from Ottoman rule, Hristo Botev was identified as a national icon of that time. He was powerfully influenced by the poetry, political ideas, and visions of Rakovski.

forms” (Мутафов, 2003). Despite this, Mutafov stipulates that this theory was promoted in the late 1920s by the right-wing historian Petar Mutafchiev, an expert in Byzantine and medieval studies. Mutafov makes clear his disappointment in Mutafchiev’s theory that the act of Christianisation is justified as reasonable, if untimely. Still, we cannot ignore the fact that Mutafchiev considers Christianisation to be a tragic event, because it resulted in the coercive disruption of the pagan tradition but also in the cultural and, above all, political dependence on the Byzantine Empire:

It was equally impossible, on the other hand, to also embed on Bulgarian soil the real values of the sophisticated Byzantine culture. It had its roots in classical antiquity, and the heritage of the latter in particular remained *incomprehensible* and *unachievable for the Bulgarian people*, who, only thanks to Christianity, joined the period of true civilisation. Along with everything else, by the way, the Byzantine theological wisdom which Simeon wanted to implant remained alien to the Bulgarians. It not only failed to enrich the national spirit of true creativity, but it was also incapable of answering the simple questions *which befuddled the national awareness, cut off from the faith of their forefathers*. (Мутафчиев, 1994а, p. 353; author’s italics)

Furthermore, in his essay, in which the very title promises a contribution “to the philosophy of the Bulgarian history”, Mutafchiev discusses how the catastrophic nature of Christianisation is evident in the destruction of the original creativity of the Bulgarian people. With this view, he declares all Bulgarian medieval literature to be an imitation (cf. Мутафчиев, 1994а, p. 355).

By focusing mainly on the dialogue of the ideas between Botev and Rakovski, the aim of this article is to reconstruct the theory of Christianisation as a cultural guilt in a broader and more event-related context. Bulgaria’s nineteenth century is based primarily on a concept of guilt. A long time ago Paisius, author of the remarkable *История славянобългарска* [Slavic-Bulgarian History] (1762), described the Greek cultural domination as the Bulgarians’ “guilt”: “where many [Bulgarians, my note, S. D.] turned to the Greek culture and education, failing to pay close attention to their own education and language. This guilt originates from the Greek spiritual power” (Паисий Хилендарски, 2006, p. 111).<sup>6</sup> What is “guilt” for the monk of Hilendar is “madness”

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<sup>6</sup> I deliberately cite a popular issue of Paisius’ *History*, intended for students. In the transcripts and translations into modern Bulgarian, the word *вина* ‘guilt’, as it is in the original (cf. Паисий Хилендарски, 2012, p. 314), is not always preserved. In Доyno Gramatik’s transcript, for example, the word has been replaced by *глупост* ‘folly’ (Доyno Граматик, 1784, p. 200), while in the latest translation into modern Bulgarian, Dimitar Peev has decided to translate

for Rakovski (Grecomania) and “disease” for Botev. A brief history of anger during the National Revival could also capture the links between Botev and Bozveli.<sup>7</sup> It is of vital importance that both perceived their contacts with Greek culture as a “disease”.<sup>8</sup> In the dialogue “Плач бедния мати Болгарии” [Weeping Poor Mother Bulgaria], the discourse on the disease is involved in an extravagant series of affective definitions. Grecomania has been described as a “venomous, deleterious, contagious, pernicious, severe and bitter, lethal and all-devastating disease” (Бозвели, 1968, p. 183). Without being as radical as Botev, Bozveli concluded via his own life experience that Christianity is the medium of Grecomania (“It has possessed and is possessing through the Christian faith”) (Бозвели, 1968, p. 143). No matter how lavish, powerful, even excessive his language, the image of Mother Bulgaria is portrayed to the very end of the dialogue as a spokesperson of Christian morality.

It is hard to consider the concept of Christianisation as cultural guilt, as proposed by Botev in an entirely local context. This idea is also well known by Marin Drinov and Lyuben Karavelov, members of the Moscow-based Bulgarian set.<sup>9</sup> I assume here that it was formed under the influence of the German historiographical tradition, in particular Johann Christian von Engel, who was

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“guilt” as “lack of interest” (Паисий Хилендарски, 2012, p. 315), explaining the authentic word in a footnote. These different translation versions in some contexts exaggerate the meaning as in “folly”, while others counterbalance the disapproving nature. This is Christian in essence, as is the case with “lack of interest”, and speaks of the inevitable circumstances of each period of the cultural biography of Paisius’ *History* – from the time it was written to this day. It is curious that in the most representative translation into modern Bulgarian for socialist nationalism, which was written by Petar Dinekov, the word “guilt” has been preserved. I am certain that this is because the lexical meaning “folly” appears in other transcripts (cf. Гладичов, 2012, p. 261) and is an absolutely unacceptable judgement of the careful conception of the term “people”. Albena Hranova proved that it appeared to be attached later to Marin Drinov’s authentic text, translated by Petar Dinekov, through Vazov and other scholars. For the people, as a “teleological target” in the translations of Paisius’ *History* into modern Bulgarian, see (Хранова, 2011, p. 339).

<sup>7</sup> Neofit Bozveli (1785–1848) is a Bulgarian monk, teacher, and ideologist of the Movement For Church Independence in the 1840s. Author of the political pamphlet “Weeping Poor Mother Bulgaria”, he took a stand against the Greek clergy and Bulgarian ignorance.

<sup>8</sup> Inna Peleva examines in great detail the discourse on the disease in Botev’s texts in her book *Ботев. Тялото на национализма* [Botev: The Body of Nationalism]. See chapter “Disease and old age” in the National Revival dictionary of repression (Пелева, 1998, pp. 172–192). Peleva defines the disease as a “rhetorical approach to ‘the national-biased’ description of the present, past and future – a project of Bulgarians and others” (Пелева, 1998, p. 172).

<sup>9</sup> In another text, I will study the topicalisations of this plot by Lyuben Karavelov, the most prolific writer and publicist of the high National Revival.

connected with the Russian educational institutions and whose essays were known to the Bulgarian elite of the 1860s and 1870s. Of particular significance to understanding present-day problems is the set of texts and events by which Botev develops his anarchistic profile. Rakovski's decadent theory about the end of the First Bulgarian Empire is asserted more sparingly compared to religion in relation to political exaggeration and is based on the establishment of Greek titles in the Bulgarian medieval hierarchical system, immediately after Christianisation. The decadent version, which I will explore here, was developed by the two authors in essays of a completely different nature that were, however, in agreement about the problems of the present.

### **Theoretical digression: *the history of the present***

I need to make a brief theoretical digression regarding the concept of "the history of the present", which appeared for the first time at the end of the introductory chapter of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1995). Neither in this nor in his later research was the concept developed systematically. In *Discipline and Punish*, he marks his intention to describe "a political technology of the body" (Foucault, 1995, p. 30), formed to a great extent by the problems of the present rather than the lessons of the past.

In his article "What is a 'History of the Present'? On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions", David Garland, an American professor of law and sociology from New York University, effectively outlines the link between Foucault's project of a "history of the present" and the genealogical approach (Garland, 2014). He precisely distinguishes *genealogy* from *archaeology*: archaeology wants to show the structural order – the structural differences and breaks which distinguish the present from its past; genealogy tries to show "origin" and "emergence", and how unexpected circumstances with these processes "continue to shape the present" (Garland, 2014, p. 371). It follows from here that it is the methods of genealogy which can premise a "history of the present". As Garland notes, the very use of the "history of the present" concept is provocative. The inconsistency of the concept sets the stage for criticism of the present through an analysis of the past. If we have to think in examples, we could note that Rakovski, in seeking historical disruptions, behaves like an archaeologist in his historiographical essays. However, Botev

is an affective eyewitness to the present because his approaches to it are largely connected with retrospective analytical operations. In spite of this operational distinction, it is crucial to remember that Rakovski writes not because of the lack of historical essays in general, but because he makes use of current social discussions. For example, his historical book *Няколко речи о Асеню Първому, великому царю българскому и сину му Асеню Второму* [A Few Words About Assen I, the Great Bulgarian Tsar and His Son Assen II] (1860) emerges in the context of the inceptive discussion about the unity within the Bulgarian press at the time.

## **Christianisation as cultural guilt: the nature and context of the idea**

It is no surprise that Botev's published works feature the core principle of "the history of the present": "To make someone believe that this manner of persuasion and method of healing benefits no one, it is enough to cast a glance at today's condition of the people, count the years since he joined the avenue of progress, and draw an analogy between his past and present" (Ботев, 1976, p. 87). This interpretation of the analogy between past and present is supposed to reveal the causes of the morbid condition of the Bulgarian people. In an article in the *Zname* newspaper, issue 10, published in 1875 immediately after "Is our disease curable?", Botev sees the source of the disease in the catastrophic discrepancy between the forced labour under the dictate of the sovereign and the forced progress for the Empire. In the next issue of *Zname*, Botev embarks on the more complex task of searching for the causes of the disease in history. He discovers them in the Bulgarian Middle Ages:

Ever since the beginning of their existence in the Balkan Peninsula, they were industrious, vibrant, and open-minded people. But the course of history which threw them into closeness and struggle against the then rotting old world brought them to a state, upon the adoption of Christianity, which infected them with the disease of the then decaying and vicious Byzantine Empire. The never-ending struggle to survive, the matrimonial alliances between the Bulgarian tsars and the Byzantine emperors, and the adoption of the then idiotic orthodox culture of the Byzantine Empire, on the one hand prevented our people from developing their national character and building the strong foundations of their future; however, this separated one part of them, creating the Bulgarian aristocracy, which was notorious for its profligacy and

debauchery. In the sanctity of their own homes, the people continued to believe in their pagan gods, followed their tsars whenever they fought against the Byzantines and the other neighbouring peoples only out of hate for the foreigners and love of their riches, and paid little heed to lofty affairs. Only the palace elite, the aristocracy and the clergy lived politically, for whom the marriage struggles with the Byzantine Empire set the stage for Bulgaria's death. Under Simeon, that is, the time of Bulgaria's Golden Age, Bulgaria had reached not only the peak but also the apogee of its deadly disease. Engel is right in saying that after the death of the semi-Greek, his state was in the same situation as France after the death of Louis XIV. (Ботев, 1976, p. 91)

The subject of Christianity as a cause of the rift in society and the decline of public life in modern European culture was introduced most powerfully before Nietzsche by the English historian Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) at the end of the eighteenth century. In his major work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1787), Gibbon points to the hostile attacks of the Barbarians and Christians (Гибън, 2003, p. 489) as an important cause of the destruction of Rome. He is insistent that the establishment of the Christian cult is a consequence not of the people's unrest, but the emperors' decrees (Гибън, 2003, p. 493).

In this particular case, Botev reveals his source of information about public life during the Middle Ages as Johann Christian von Engel (1770–1814), a German historiographer and author of the comprehensive study from the period of the Enlightenment *Geschichte des ungarischen Reichs und seiner Nebenländer* [History of Imperial Hungary and the Neighbouring Regions] (1797). He was popular in Bulgaria in the nineteenth century on account of his theory on the Tatar lineage of the Bulgarians, which was opposed by both Rakovski and Botev. He is a disciple of August Ludwig von Schlözer, whose works were translated twice during the National Revival. The study contains a detailed part entitled "History of the Bulgarians in Moesia", which was translated into Bulgarian relatively recently by Nadezhda Andreeva, an expert on German studies (Енгел, 2009). Engel has described in detail the Christianisation of Bulgarians.<sup>10</sup> What makes an impression in Boris' profile is the emphasis on fear. The reader is left with the impression that the Christianisation of the Palace and the people happened because of the ruler's personal fear. And here follows the well-known story: instead of a pagan plot, the painter Methodius paints a picture of Domsday onto the walls of Boris' hunting palace and, scared,

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<sup>10</sup> The story of the Christianisation of Preslav Palace is very popular in German literature. See Андреева, 2004.

immediately converts to Christianity. The next emphasis on fear refers to the Baptists' withdrawal from power as it is connected with the concern about "the future after death" (Енгел, 2009, p. 122), which made Boris become a monk. There is no doubt that Methodius, who is mentioned by Paisius, is also Cyril's brother in Engel's story. This is because the Moravia Mission is mentioned, along with the audience the two brothers had in Rome, where they were held to account as to why they took the liberty of introducing the Slavic language during liturgy. This combination of both a Baptist and writer adopted at home, probably under Russian influence,<sup>11</sup> is an interesting enough component in the plot of Christianisation. For the historiographers of this period, the invention of the alphabet in a supernatural way by God's will seemed normal ("God's rain of letters")<sup>12</sup> and was synchronised with religious missionary activity. A similar, undifferentiated interpretation stresses that Christianisation is part of a greater cultural task. It is no coincidence that when the two enlighteners were called to Rome, they were held to account over "Their somewhat oriental principles" (Енгел, 2009, p. 117). The Bulgarian point of view from Paisius to Dobri Voynikov's play *Покръщение на Преславският двор* [The Conversion to Christianity of Preslav Palace] (1866),<sup>13</sup> seems to find that the combination of the figures of the Baptist and the cultural apostle is a factor in stabilising the myth of the national identification, while the Western view sees imperial cultural invasions in the same plot.

Engel does not fail to note that the establishment of the Christian cult may be attended by "secular political benefits" (Енгел, 2009, p. 112). In his opinion, the act of conversion to Christianity means subjugation; he even assumes that

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<sup>11</sup> Boyko Penchev follows the plot of the identification of the painter Methodius with Methodius, Cyril's brother, in his article "Въздишката на Муртагон. Паисий и произходът на една историческа легенда" [The Sigh of Mourtagon/Omurtag: Paisius and the Origin of a Historical Legend]. Without ruling out the fact that Paisius may have shown imagination that was worthy of the national-ideological narrative, Penchev discovers that he probably knew texts based on the famous Russian twelfth-century chronicle "A Novelette of the Past Years", in which Methodius, as well as painting a picture of Doomsday, also manifests himself as its interpreter. He concludes: "The most exciting thing of all, however, is that in a way 'the Russian trace' in Paisius could in fact be the 'return' of something born in an old Bulgarian context" (Пенчев, 2016, p. 114).

<sup>12</sup> The citation is from "Азбучна молитва" [Alphabetical Prayer], an acrostic work which glorifies the Bulgarian ninth-century alphabet. It is assumed that its author is the medieval bookman Konstantin of Preslav.

<sup>13</sup> Dobri Voynikov (1833–1878) is the most outstanding ideologist and playwright of the National Revival theatre.



what was done by Boris Mikhail may be interpreted as voluntary accession to the Byzantine Empire (Енгел, 2009, p. 109).

In any case, the German historiographer's negative attitude towards the Greeks can also be sensed within his curious story. He thinks that the Byzantines' "pedantic pseudo-reverence (in stark contrast even to this day with their meek, perfidious, bloodthirsty nature)" is edifying for history (Енгел, 2009, p. 115). Stereotypes of Greeks have been based on a similar dual nature since time immemorial. Engel pays close attention in his story to the mixed marriages that allied the Bulgarian aristocratic court to the Empire's dynasty. Decades later, Rakovski would bring this observation to an end, seeing the causes of the fall of the Bulgarian Empire not, as Engel insists, in the resulting exhaustion after the numerous wars of the "semi-Greek" Simeon, the widespread famine and the grasshopper plague, but in becoming allied by marriage to the Byzantine civilisation. Here is Engel's description of the decline, almost literally cited by Botev: "After Simeon's death, Bulgaria was in a situation similar to that in France after Louis IX's death – full of glory inside, and exhausted and devastated outside" (Енгел, 2009, p. 145). There is no doubt that Botev's theory about the dialectic between the apogee and the crash under Simeon (called "semi-Greek" for the first time by chronicler Liutprand of Cremona) is an echo of Johann Christian von Engel's study. Botev probably knew Engel from the essays of the first professional Bulgarian historian Marin Drinov (cf. ДРИНОВ, 1911, p. 29), but Rakovski also knew Engel (cf. РАКОВСКИ, 1983, p. 340). Botev's genealogical analysis, however, does not end with borrowing ready-made concepts. He combines the knowledge of history with specific theories of the present (anarchism, populism) in order to arrive at the retro-utopia of the patriarchal life and return to the "National fundamentals" (Ботев, 1976, p. 18).<sup>14</sup> This theory was displayed in his article "The People: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" in 1871, where for the first time he opens up about the "harm" of Christianity:

Just have a look at the history of the Bulgarian Empire from Boris until its fall under the Turks, and you will see that all of the historical and political past of our people was more or less purely Byzantine, and in it lived only tsars, boyars and clergymen, while the people themselves have always been separated thanks to their profound

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<sup>14</sup> The Polish expert in cultural and Bulgarian studies, Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, notes that Botev expresses a positive attitude to Bogomilism (see Шват-Гълъбова, 2010, p. 90). On the other hand, Svetlana Stoycheva recently suggested the idea that Botev's poem "My Prayer" may be considered to be read as New Bogomil poetry (Стойчева, 2017, p. 104).

social morality from their government's corruption, which, along with Christianity, sneaked into the nation's upper circles. (Ботев, 1976, p. 17)

Here, the word that also stands out is "corruption", which along with "disease" and "death" outlines a descriptive system which has a strictly determined use for "corruption" that relates solely to the palace aristocracy. In this sense the word "corruption" marks the relationship between sexual exaggeration and power. Botev was probably influenced by the anarchists' position on religion. For example, Mikhail Bakunin describes the Church as "a licentious woman" (Бакунин, 1892, p. 34) in the popular pamphlet "The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State" (1871). But "corruption" also means "profligacy" and lack of "destiny". This meaning was noted by Nayden Gerov, who interpreted the adjective "corrupt" with the semantically similar words "depraved, indecent, wayward, dishonest lewd man" (Геров, 1978, p. 14).<sup>15</sup> As far as the anarchists are concerned, under their influence Botev developed the most stable dialectic pair in his published works: the master and the slave. Particularly interesting in this dialectic is the formula "slaves to themselves" (Ботев, 1976, p. 93), which emerged in the context of self-induced immaturity, based on uncritical adherence to external civilisation models.

Now I have to discuss Rakovski's attitude to the conversion to Christianity. He raised this issue in the notes to "Горски пътник" [The Forest Traveller] (1857):

After converting to Christianity, the inner structure of the Bulgarian government and civil laws gradually changed in accordance with the spirit of Christianity. The matrimonial alliances with the Byzantine palace changed the national spirit as well: contagious luxury and other slavish things stole across Bulgaria, then villages, subjugated to work for them by monasteries, could be seen! But they were excluded from other taxes; then, new titles slipped into Preslav Palace, and above all into Turnovo Palace; since then the Bulgarian people, too, gradually began to slide into decline! (Раковски, 1983, p. 381)

Four years later, Rakovski published this passage in his historical book "A Few Words About Assen I, the Great Bulgarian Tsar and His Son Assen II" (1860), dedicated to the most successful tsar of the Second Bulgarian Empire. However, it is not a direct auto-citation, but a detailed interpretation. The second version incorporates the image of the stylish Greek women:

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. with the speech of wise Momchil in "Горски пътник" [The Forest Traveller]: "Supercilious Greeks had fallen/ into profligacy, luxury; in disgusting sodomism/ possessed by debauched passions/ all reasoning was gone!" (Раковски, 1983, p. 233).

The matrimonial alliances with the Byzantine palace gradually changed the Bulgarian national spirit because not only Bulgarian tsars married Greek women, but many voivode and eminent Bulgarians also did the same, as was proven by Byzantine stories and our folk songs [...]. Then new Greek ranks, titles and Grecomania sneaked into Preslav palace, but above all into Turnovo palace, transferred and suggested to the Bulgarians by stylish Greek women, whom the Byzantine palace gave to Bulgarians to serve their future purposes! (Раковски, 1984, p. 43)

It is at this point that Botev follows Rakovski very closely. Greece's "dynastic craftiness" will be discussed later in his essay on the Assen dynasty (Раковски, 1984, p. 78). It is well known that the Bulgarians' nineteenth-century identification myth is based on rejected otherness. A number of texts during this period confirm it. But it is hardly a coincidence that it was with Rakovski that this idea manifested itself for the first time – that Christian culture was instrumental in the gradual decline of the First Bulgarian Empire. This conclusion in the historical essay on the Assen dynasty comes after a detailed description of the titles in medieval Bulgaria, burdened by necessity with new titles and ranks upon the establishment of Christianity. A change like this in the hierarchy results in hesitation and uncertainty about the strictly regulated relations between the authorities and the people, and an inevitable change in law making. Along with everything else, Rakovski seems to imply that Christianisation brings about new forms of subjugation (employment for monasteries), stressing that there were no slaves in Bulgaria before.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, Rakovski's interpretation of the origin of the crash of the Bulgarian Empire happened in the context of a large-scale idea, as introduced in his poetry: the Bulgarians' lost antiquity. His poem "The Forest Traveller" sustains the myth about the disappeared annals that was drawn up as early as Paisius: "The Bulgarians before Christianity had not just rich mythology, but also well-developed and comprehensive letters and literature; however, black destiny had a different plan for them – to fail and lose their precious antiquity!" (Раковски, 1983, p. 317). In the context of notes on the poem "The Forest Traveller", Rakovski does not agree with the theory of the German historiographer on the Bulgarians' Tatar origin (Раковски, 1983, p. 340). And the mere fact that Botev translated Dmitry Ilovaysky's essay "The Slavic Origin of the Danube Bulgarians" in 1875 shows

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<sup>16</sup> About the semantic link between the words *работа* 'work' and *робство* 'slavery', see Rakovski (Раковски, 1984, p. 117). Cf. also Stoyan Mihaylovski, who reflects upon the forcible imposition of Christianity (Михайловски, 1941, p. 22), as well as Hranova (Хранова, 2011, pp. 460–477).

that Engel's theory in the nineteenth century was very popular in our lands.<sup>17</sup> It is impossible for such significant authors not to be interested in the problem of the origin of the Bulgarians. Cultural disruptions and the origin of ethnic groups are part of the foundation on which cultural history is built. Both the archaeological potential of the scholarly writings and Rakovski's poetry consist in marking and interpreting the significant historical disruption which took place during the First Bulgarian Empire. The replacement of the fundamentals of faith and the obliteration of the original literary heritage according to Rakovski gave rise to the motive motif of the lost brightness in the poem "Горски пътник" [The Forest Traveller]:

How did we fail then?  
Which was the main reason?  
Why did we lose our Empire?  
How did our brightness die??

(РАКОВСКИ, 1983, p. 231)

The character's questions develop an archaeological strategy that interprets the past. A counterpoint to the idea of "the lost brightness" comes from the etymology of the name Assen, the man who restored the Empire in the historical book which Rakovski dedicated to him: "реч Асен е съставена от *a* отрицателно равно 'не' и от сѣнь – засенение, тъмнота. А-сѣнь значи *нетъмний, незасенений, светлий преносно*" (The word "Assen" is made up of negative *a*, equal to "no", and from сѣнь – *shadow, darkness*) (РАКОВСКИ, 1984, p. 99; author's italics). The idiosyncratic interpretation of the tsar's name, which is based on the opposite to lost brightness, i.e. light, is part of the discussion concerning the cultural gap between the First and Second Bulgarian Empire. But in this narrative Rakovski does not behave like an archaeologist at the end. He actively joined the inceptive discussion about Uniatism in the published press. What is more, he wrote an entire book in response to the anonymous article "A Look at Bulgarian History", which propagandised Uniatism and was published in "Menology of the Bulgarian Literature" in 1857. Uniates recognise the Pope as the spiritual leader of the Bulgarians. Later it became clear that the author of the article was Dragan Tsankov, a graduate of the college of Bebek, or the "Bebek Jesuit factory", as Rakovski calls it (РАКОВСКИ, 1984, p. 93). This topical context of the rise of the historical book on the Assen dynasty has been carefully

<sup>17</sup> In a detailed case study with her translation of "History of the Bulgarians in Moesia", Nadezhda Andreeva assumes that Yuriy Venelin's essay "Ancient and Today's Bulgarians" was written "on the occasion of, because of, and against Engel's essay" (Андреева, 2009, p. 53).

studied by Katya Staneva in her book on Rakovski, *Апология на българското* [An Apology for Bulgarianness] (1996). In the debate over Uniatism, which gained momentum after the Crimean War (1853–1856), the author sees a reason to “instrumentalise the past” (Станева, 1996, p. 121). Building on the topical debates, Rakovski thinks of the populace as a collective subject of belonging to a glorious past. As part of this collective subject, at the end of the book the author commits himself in a special appeal to the Bulgarian people by warning the new missionaries, namely the “Catholics”, the “seceders” (*papistaş*), and the “reavers of the Christian pack of wolves” (Раковски, 1984, pp. 96, 98). It is curious that the nature of the appeal to the Bulgarians is an apology of the faith:

Our faith has always been our best and sweetest comfort and our dearest national character; if we have kept it so far, we owe it to our forefathers’ faith, which we have precisely kept and are keeping! Otherwise, we would have lost our nationality, and the word Bulgarian would have been substituted for something else! Betrayal of our forefathers’ faith means wiping out the nationality and, above all, the people who are not free but depend on others! (Раковски, 1984, p. 96)

But does such a valuation not contradict the Orthodoxy by means of the theory of the crossing of the world’s pagan picture? As a theoretician of the cultural disruptions, Rakovski never sets himself the aim of annihilating the value status of Orthodoxy; on the contrary, he pays tribute to it in the cultural memory. He approaches history through an archaeological set of tools, aiming to study the “sediments of time” and depict amongst them the Bulgarians’ obliterated antiquity. The theory that the medieval Bulgarian Empire gradually lost its autonomy under the dictate of the civilisational (Christian) Universalism is odd enough for nineteenth-century Bulgaria. It implies that the establishment of Christianity in the ninth century in medieval Bulgaria was a revolution from outside and the beginning of the big “disenchantment” with the native Cosmo-mythos-logos.

## **Instead of conclusion: the “New National Revival” – magicians, dualists, anchorites**

Although the topic of this text is “guilt”, which is subject to historicisation, nineteenth-century public languages also contain rhetoric which is free of guilt. The people are “the scapegoat” of the authorities. Evil is above all an invasion of ethnic otherness. It is no coincidence that the decadent version of Chris-

tianisation was introduced in the 1920s, and especially in the 1930s during the time of the “New National Revival”.<sup>18</sup> Above all, this was from the point of view of a well-organised valuation of what was native on the thousandth anniversary of the most famous shaman and poet, Benjamin of Bulgaria (known also as Boyan the Magician, Bayan), who, ironically, was the son of Christian Simeon I the Great. During those years, Benjamin was predominantly a mystic, or to be precise, a dualist.

The historical concept that the heresies led to the catastrophe of the First Bulgarian Empire is too stereotypical. However, the theory of Bogomilism as “a counteraction of the firmly established Byzantinism of public life” (Дринов, 1930, p. 67) is also well known. This idea belongs to Marin Drinov and has been consistently developed in view of his story about the weakening of the Bulgarian Empire under the son of Tsar Simeon, Tsar Peter, the implementation of the Byzantine set of titles over the Bulgarian clerical hierarchy, and the discontent of the masses over the Empire’s foreign policy. In the meantime, Drinov put special emphasis on Tsar Peter as inactive, contemplative, and inclined to “the spiritual and ascetic life” (Дринов, 1930, p. 55). Later, in the historiography committed to the nationalism of the “New National Revival”, people of contemplative nature were exposed as figures of denial, represented above all by Bogomils and anchorites. The theory of Bogomilism as an antidote to medieval Byzantinism was also introduced in the 1930s by Petar Mutaфchiev, an expert in Byzantine and medieval studies, in his project on the philosophy of Bulgarian history (cf. Мутафчиев, 1994a). He described Bulgaria at the time after Tsar Simeon’s death as a “clay colossus” who experienced shock upon meeting the inexperienced paganism and growing Bogomilism (Мутафчиев, 1994a, pp. 352–353).

Bringing Benjamin of Bulgaria close to Bogomilism was a purely literary move that was undertaken for the first time by Stoyan Mihaylovski in his project “Нашите деди (Боян Магесникът, Поп Богумил)” [Our Forefathers (Benjamin of Bulgaria, Priest Bogumil)] (1884) and was quite deliberately brought back later by Ivan Grozev, Anton Strashimirov, and in particular Nikolay Raynov in three of his books: *Богомилски легенди* [Bogomil Legends] (1912), *Видения из Древна България* [Visions Across Ancient Bul-

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<sup>18</sup> Albena Hranova describes the debate in the *Отец Паусий* [Father Paisius] magazine (1934, October issue) on the series of “New National Revivals” that happened after the liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878 (cf. Хранова, 2011, pp. 81–90).

garia] (1918), and Книга за царете [The Book of the Tsars] (1918). Benjamin became completely withdrawn from his status as a pagan-shaman and instead was pulled towards Bogomil cosmogony, with Gnostic dualism as a contributing factor to this highly meaningful gesture. Unlike historiography, which focuses mainly on the social impact of the character, literature is interested mainly in its metaphysical nature and the charisma connected with it. Thus, Benjamin of Bulgaria is depicted as an embodiment of what it is to Bulgarian/Bogomil, and as a supranational phenomenon (cf. Стойчева, 2017, p. 211; Шват-Гълъбова, 2010, pp. 125–141).

As far as historiography is concerned, we read about the problem of nationalism in the 1930s via Petar Mutafchiev, who unequivocally sees a deficiency of symbols in the medieval emblems. Reflecting upon the characters of Priest Bogomil and John of Rila – two opposite figures – he criticises not only the lack of interest in creation on the part of the leader of the Bogomils, but also the desert-like self-isolation from life of the Rila recluse. The Bogomils are the target of a historiographer like Mutafchiev’s criticism because in his reading they are apathetic and indifferent to social changes, above all because of their contempt for the world of creatures as a creation of Satan. Anchorites, on the other hand, are seen as traitors to the tasks of the present because they spend their days in *akidia*, that is laziness and negligence caused by frequent and tiring fasting.<sup>19</sup> The incentive for this comparative analysis of the two medieval figures is social and political rather than “from the point of view of national interests” (Мутафчиев, 1994b, p. 364). Therefore, reclusion and Bogomilism are suspected of being deprived of “all kinds of national elements” (Мутафчиев, 1994b, p. 365). Above all, this goes against the usual type of writing by Drinov, who stresses the social activity of the Bogomils when he speaks about the existence of Bogomil municipalities and in general insists that they possess political sensitivity (cf. Дринов, 1930, p. 67).

Consequently, both Priest Bogomil and the categorical axiology of the desert are labelled “figures of denial” because they did not produce “other, more joyous and fruitful ideas” (Мутафчиев, 1994b, p. 368). Therefore, the clear right-wing nationalism “deprives” of meaning those symbols which have gained enough cultural and literary memory to stabilise the relationship between national and religious identity, thus leading to the description of

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<sup>19</sup> About *akidia* as “a spiritual form of melancholy” and “the daylight demon”, see the end of Vladimir Grudev’s essay “С цвят на пепел” [In the Colour of Ashes] (Градев, 2017).

the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as the only correct symbol of the time for that purpose.<sup>20</sup> Mutafchiev's dissatisfaction comes from the belief that the medieval church had not established itself as "an institution for self-preservation of the state and the nation" (Мутафчиев, 1994b, p. 368). That is why, after the Golden Age and the Easter action that occurred during the National Revival, the church was freshly established as being an identifying symbol throughout the Middle Ages. However this was quite short-lived because of the coup on 9 September 1944. The communist ideology then engulfed the role of religion by rejecting it because it was the new regime that monopolised the radical restructuring of reality. It is highly likely that Mutafchiev used Anton Strashimirov's symbolist drama *Свети Иван Рилски* [Saint John of Rila] (1911) as a reason for his reflections. This centres on Benjamin of Bulgaria, who was depicted as a dualist and particularly as a Manichaeist, and ultimately as a heretic who was burned at the stake at the end of the play.

But there is something else which is also important. In his scholarly writings, Mutafchiev consistently insists on identifying with leaders, not institutions. After painstakingly unearthing symbols from the remote past in the 1920s and 1930s, he seemed to take the lonesome position of an intellectual, revealing the deficiency of the symbol's meaning. He ends his essay about Priest Bogomil and Saint John of Rila with the pessimistic finding that the real emblems, which are necessary for the present day, had not yet been discovered. Thus, paradoxically, the time of thorough resurrection of medieval figures has been interpreted as a crisis of symbols.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. the apology of Knyaz Boris in Mutafchiev's later essay, which Encho Mutafov considers to be inconsistent with his theory about the cultural disruption. Cf. Мутафчиев & Мутафчиева, 1998, pp. 133–134.



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## Chrystianizacja jako wina kulturowa. Doŭwiadczenie bułgarskie

W niniejszym artykule postawiono sobie za cel kontekstualizację idei chrystianizacji jako winy kulturowej na gruncie bułgarskim, znanej od czasów bułgarskiego odrodzenia narodowego. Teza ta została najbardziej radykalnie wyrażona w dziełach publicystycznych wybitnego rewolucjonisty i poety odrodzenia narodowego, Christa Botewa. Poddano tu analizie genezę tej idei poprzez jego dialog kulturowy z tekstami Georgiego Rakowskiego, innego wybitnego rewolucjonisty i poety z tego samego okresu, aby udowodnić, że dekadenccka wersja chrystianizacji jest znana wśród bułgarskiej elity, uformowanej głównie w rosyjskich instytucjach oświatowych, dzięki esejom niemieckiego historyka Johanna Christiana von Engela. Pod jego wpływem chrystianizacja jest uważana za inwazję kulturową i polityczną cesarstwa bizantyjskiego. W tym kontekście w dziełach literackich odrodzenia narodowego pojawia się motyw utraconej świetności bułgarskiego średniowiecza. Wartościowanie średniowiecznych symboli zatartej starożytności bułgarskiej ma swą kulminację w okresie międzywojennym, w latach 20. i 30. XX wieku. W tym czasie poszukiwano tożsamości narodowej u magów, dualistów, anachoretów, co ostatecznie nie przyniosło pożądanego efektu dla oficjalnego mitonacjonalizmu, lecz spowodowało kryzys symboli.

**Słowa kluczowe:** chrystianizacja, Christo Botew, Georgi Rakovski, Johann Christian von Engel, Bojan Mag, bogomiłowie, nacjonalizm

## Christianisation as Cultural Guilt: The Bulgarian Experience

This article contextualises the idea of Christianisation as cultural guilt within the Bulgarian context, particularly at the time of the Bulgarian National Revival. This theory has been most radically depicted in the published works of the outstanding revolutionary and poet of the National Revival, Hristo Botev. The origin of this idea is studied through his cultural dialogue with the texts of Georgi Rakovski (another eminent revolutionary and poet from the same period) to prove that the decadent version of Christianisation was known amongst the Bulgarian elite, most of whom were educated at Russian institutions, where they became familiar with the essays of the German historiographer Johann Christian von Engel. Under his influence, Christianisation is considered to be a cultural and political invasion on the part of the Byzantine Empire. In this context, the motive of the lost brightness of the Bulgarian Middle Ages emerges from the literary works of the National Revival. The valuation of the medieval symbols of the obliterated Bulgarian antiquity culminated in the 1920s and 1930s. During that period, aspects of national identification were sought from magicians, dualists, and anchorites, which ultimately did not yield the desired result for the official nationalism but rather caused a crisis of symbols.

**Keywords:** Christianisation, Hristo Botev, Georgi Rakovski, Johann Christian von Engel, Benjamin of Bulgaria, Bogomils, nationalism

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