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# Theological Education in Bulgaria during the Middle Centuries

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# 1. *The influence of Byzantium*

- ▶ Bulgaria adopted Christianity from the Church of Constantinople took place in the 9<sup>th</sup> century; its education history began in parallel with the adoption of Christianity by the Bulgarian nobility.
- ▶ The peculiar synthesis between the Hellenistic cultural tradition and the institutional culture of Latin Rome produced what we now call Byzantium.
- ▶ Usually, in private or municipal schools, one started with grammar, went through rhetoric and completed his studies with philosophy.
- ▶ Theological education takes place in ecclesiastical or monastery schools under the guidance of educated monks who carry this task by the order of the bishop or the abbot of the monastery.
- ▶ Prince Boris-Mihail's correspondence with Patriarch Photius and Pope Nicolas the 1<sup>st</sup>.

## 2. *During the First Bulgarian Kingdom*

- ▶ The "Golden Age" of the Medieval Bulgarian Literature (9-11 c.).
- ▶ Translations of the liturgical tradition of Constantinople in authors such as Theodore Studite (759-826), Clement the Studite (9<sup>th</sup> century) and Joseph the Hymnographer (813-886), strongly influenced by the hymnographers of the Holy Lands such as Cosmas of Maiuma (c. 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c.), John of Damascus (c. 7<sup>th</sup>-c. 8<sup>th</sup> c.), Andrew of Crete (675-740) and Theophanes the Branded (778- 845).
- ▶ Parts of the Byzantine *Synaxaristes* – short lives used in the liturgy.
- ▶ Lives of saints: St. Anthony, St. Pancratius of Tavromenia, the Life of St. John Chrysostom by George of Alexandria, the Lives of St. Niphon of Constantia, of St. Sava the Consecrated, of St. Theodore of Edessa, of St. Theodore the Studite and of St. Paul of Thebes. Excerpts from the lives of St. Theodora of Alexandria and St. Xenophon were preserved in and the lives of St. Codratus and St. Thecla.

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- ▶ The rhetorical prose is represented by translated festal homilies of John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea. To them were added translations later of works by Gregory of Nyssa, John Damascene and Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople.
  - ▶ St. Andrew of Crete was presented in a translation of his three homilies on the Assumption of our Lord, made by Clement of Ohrid. The Slavonic text was abridged, edited and adapted. Athanasius of Alexandria was presented with the four *Discourses against the Arians*.
  - ▶ Ephraim the Syrian was also translated, but from a version of his writings that circulated in Byzantium.
  - ▶ John the Exarch – *Hexaemeron* and *Heavens*.
  - ▶ *Four Dialogues of Caesarius*.
  - ▶ Excerpt from the *Book of Laws and Countries*, attributed to Bardaisan of Edesa.
  - ▶ The collection *Chrysostomica* (Zlatostruy), composed of compiled excerpts from John Chrysostom, as well as the *Teaching Gospel* of Constantine of Preslav, composed of excerpts from interpretive writings of John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria.

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- ▶ The only work from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, translated in this period of the development of Old Bulgarian literature, was the *Homily on the Palm Sunday* by Patriarch Photius.
  - ▶ Since the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the *Catechetical homilies* of Cyril of Jerusalem used to be read publicly in Bulgaria.
  - ▶ Christian Creed texts with or without commentary were also circulated in the First Bulgarian Empire, but the most famous commentary on the Creed, was translated from Greek and it was a work Michael Syncellus from the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Similar to it was the collection *Questions and Answers Interpretation of the Gospel Parables*, which was known in two early translations, and represented a compilation of the writings of Athanasius of Alexandria and John Chrysostom.
  - ▶ The book known as the *Arrangement of the Sacred Words*, which also dates from that early era and was attributed to Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John the Theologian.
  - ▶ in the 10<sup>th</sup> century were translated for educational purposes parts of the Byzantine book *Physiologist*.
  - ▶ In the First Bulgarian kingdom, 7 *Patericons* or *Desert Fathers collections* were translated.

### 3. *During the Second Bulgarian Kingdom*

- ▶ In 1018, after long wars between Byzantium and the Bulgarian Kingdom, Emperor Basil the 2<sup>nd</sup> finally entered the new capital of Bulgaria Ohrid, and re-annexed the Bulgarian territories to the Byzantine Empire. Those of the aristocracy who survived were taken to Constantinople. Thus, First Bulgarian Empire was ended. In 1185, after the capture of Thessaloniki by the Crusaders and the beginning of internal conflicts in Constantinople, two Byzantine provincial military nobles of Bulgarian origin – Assen and Peter declared the independency of their domains from Byzantium in today's Northern Bulgaria.
- ▶ The monastic communities of the Kelifarevo monastery near the capital Tyrnovo, the monasteries around Sofia, the Rila monastery, the Bachkovo monastery, the monastery in Paroria in Thrace.
- ▶ Euthymius, Patriarch of Tyrnovo, Gregory Tsamblak, Konstantin Kostenechki and many others.

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- ▶ Translated writings of Symeon Seth and Michael Psellus.
  - ▶ "Symposium" of Methodius of Olympus.
  - ▶ *Corpus Dionysiacum/ Areopagiticum*.

## 4. *During the Ottoman era*

- ▶ During the Ottoman era, theological literacy in Bulgaria in Slavonic language gradually declined, although it was not forgotten.
- ▶ . The Patriarchate in Tyrnovo was abolished in 1404 with the death of Patriarch Euthymius, who was exiled by the Ottoman authorities to the Bachkovo Monastery in 1393 when the capital Tyrnovo was captured.
- ▶ In general, the Ottoman authorities were distrustful towards Christian education in any language, so few Christian schools remained in function within the empire until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

# Conclusion

- ▶ From the scant information we have about theological education in Bulgaria during the Middle Ages, it is clear that it follows the Byzantine educational system, based on four educational degrees – 1) γραμματική, 2) ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία and 3) ῥητορική, at last – 4) φιλοσοφία, i.e. sciences and the four arts: ἀριθμητική, γεωμετρία, μουσική, ἀστρονομία.
- ▶ **Theological education** in the field of canon law, liturgy, biblical studies and the Church Fathers is a training with highly stressed practical aspects. Theology was studied as a higher spiritual practice, which, however, over time became more independent from the previous classical training. In Bulgaria, we see exactly that – purely Christian education, which lacks the ancient classical propaedeutics. Complex theological dialogues and disputes were absent from the curriculum, and more basic writings of a catechetical and practical character were included in it. As a whole, the sample texts translated from Greek in both the First and Second Bulgarian kingdom between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century had rather a missionary value and we cannot consider them complex and sophisticated theological literature.