

SLAVICA HELSINGIENSIA 35
С ЛЮБОВЬЮ К СЛОВУ
Festschrift in Honour of Professor Arto Mustajoki on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday
Ed. by Jouko Lindstedt et al.
Helsinki 2008
ISBN 978-952-10-5136-4 (paperback), ISBN 978-952-10-5137-1 (PDF), ISSN 0780-3281

Antoaneta Granberg
(University of Gothenburg)

Transferred in Translation: Making a State in Early Medieval Bulgarian Genealogies

Introduction

This article deals with texts from medieval Bulgaria which were written on parchment between the 10th and the 12th centuries. These texts¹ were created within a polity located in a territory south of the Danube delta and north of the Balkan Mountains. This polity, called Bulgaria, was ruled by *khans* until 864 AD, when the ruling elite converted to Christianity and the ruler, the *khan*, started to be referred to as *knjaz* ‘prince’ (Василев 1991, 3–6).

A philological viewpoint will be presented on how the creation of texts could be seen as a way of creating identities². The creation of these texts could even be seen as a way of mobilizing these identities for political reasons. However, the article focuses mainly on how texts were created rather than why they appeared. What handicraft mechanisms produced texts that were to express group identity?

The sources I discuss differ regarding the material they were created on; they also belong to different genres; they are written in different languages and with different alphabets. What is common to them all is that in some way they contain elements of a genealogy.

The *List of Bulgarian ruling dynasties* (Москов 1981) until 765 AD is part of a book containing historical texts – the so-called *Bulgarian Chronograph* – written at the time of Prince Simeon, who ruled Bulgaria between 893 and 927 or during the reign of his son Petăr (927–967) (Пеев 2007). The *Chronograph* is preserved only in late Russian manuscripts from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries (Горина 2005, 27–31).

¹ Except for the anonymous Latin Chronograph, see excerpt (5) below.

² See also on this topic Granberg (2008, 11–23).

Excerpt (1)³

1. “**Avitohol** lived 300 years. His **clan was Dulo**. His year was the year of the snake, in the ninth month.
2. **Hernac** lived 150 years. His **clan was Dulo**. His year was the year of the snake, in the ninth month.
3. **Gostun**, being deputy, was ruler 2 years. His **clan was Ermi**. He became ruler in the year of the pig, in the ninth month.
4. **Kurt** ruled 60 years. His **clan was Dulo**. He became ruler in the year of the buffalo, in the third month.
5. **Bezmer** – 4 years. His **clan was Dulo**. He became ruler in the year of the buffalo, in the third month.
6. *These 5 Princes held the government on the other side of Danube River for 515 years, together with the shaved heads.*
7. *And after that Prince Isperih came over to the other side of the Danube River. It remains the same even today.*
8. **Isperih** knjaz – 60 and one year. His **clan was Dulo**. He became ruler in the year of the dragon, in the thirteenth month.
9. **Tervel** – 21 years. His **clan was Dulo**. He became ruler in the year of the ram, in the seventh month.
10. (The beginning of the text is missing) [...] in the ninth month.
11. (The beginning of the text is missing) – 28 years. His **clan was Dulo**. He became ruler in the year of the hare, in the eighth month.
12. **Sevar** – 15 years. His **clan was Dulo**. He became ruler in the year of the chicken, in the sixth month.
13. **Kormisoš** – 17 years. His **clan was Vokil**. He became ruler in the year of the buffalo, in the ninth month.
14. This Prince changed **the clan Dulo**, *with other words, he was a usurper.*
15. **Vineh** – 7 years. His **clan was Vokil**. He became ruler in the year of the buffalo, in the thirteenth month.
16. **Telec** – 3 years. His **clan was Ugain**. He became ruler in the year of the mouse, in the sixth month.
17. *He also became ruler instead of someone else.*
18. **Umor** – 40 days. His **clan was Vokil**. He became ruler in the year of the snake, in the fourth month.”

The phrase ‘his clan was (name)’ is given in bold and the calendar information in Hunno-Bulgarian (year and month) is underlined. The comments by the Christian redactor and editor of the text are in italics. The numeration has been added to simplify the reading and discussion of the text.

³ The translations of all excerpts given in the article are my own, AG.

The *Chronograph* contained many ‘blocks’ of text. These ‘blocks’ built a common chain of narratives with an interesting structure – they all consisted of two different parts: *translations from Greek* (part A) *compiled with texts written by Bulgarian authors* (part B).

A text block with two text bodies:	The Third Book of the Kings
	The Fourth Book of the Kings
	A list of the ruling dynasties in Bulgaria

The block structure of the *Chronograph*

An important detail is that the *List* begins immediately after the last word of the fourth Book of Kings in the Old Testament. There is no separate title, nor any other kind of indication that the list is a new and different text. The ‘block’ structure allows the narration of Bulgarian history to become part of a narration of world history. The compiling author, by putting these two text bodies together, suggests that the order of consequent shifting of the rulers as well as the change of the ruling clans and even alteration of the kingdoms existed in the Old Testament as well as in the history of Bulgaria. In other words, Bulgarian history is part of world history; it could even be seen as a continuation of the history of Judea after the fall of Jerusalem in the fourth of Kings.

It is most plausible that the *List* was originally written in Greek and, like all other inscriptions from that time (Бешевлиев 1979), it was engraved on stone in the pagan period, most probably in the middle of the 8th century⁴. The text must have been translated into Old Church Slavonic after the conversion to Christianity (864 AD)⁵. It was redacted and included in the *Chronograph* book during the 10th century (Пеев 2007). The pagan text thus came to be reused in a Christian milieu. The usage of the block structure in the *Chronograph* made the Bulgarian ruling dynasties successors of the rulers of Judea and gave them stronger political and religious legitimacy.

The transmission of the *List* in Slavonic contains the following elements:

- 1) Changing the language and the alphabet from Greek into Slavonic;

⁴ Five Bulgarian inscriptions written in Greek have been discovered from the eighth century. From the ninth century, where the state formation process resulted in higher literacy production, 51 inscriptions are preserved (Бешевлиев 1979). It could be speculated that the *List* was written in the ninth or tenth century, but the main argument against this chronology is that the *List* ends in the middle of the eighth century.

⁵ The linguistic analysis I have done confirms this conclusion (Делева 1999, 65–71).

- 2) The proper names of the khans as well as their clan names and the calendar information (which is underlined in excerpt (1)), are in Hunno-Bulgarian and were preserved without changes;
- 3) Adding comments to the *List* (in italics). An example of adding such comments is paragraph 6 in excerpt (1): *These 5 Princes held the government* (in the text *knjaženie* ‘princehood’) *on the other side of Danube River for 515 years*. This comment contains new vocabulary; it adds new political terminology to the original pre-Christian text in order to adapt the text to the new social reality after Christianisation.

There is another comment in paragraph 7 in excerpt (1): *And after that Prince Isperih came over to the other side of the Danube River. It remains the same even today*. This comment stresses the idea of the continuity of the political power within the Bulgarian polity. The idea of the ruling clan’s right to political power was expressed by comments in paragraphs 14 and 17 in excerpt (1): 14. This Prince changed the clan Dulo, *with other words, he was yihun*. 17. *He also became ruler instead of someone else*.

The text analysis indicates that the way of translating an older pagan text into the language of the new Christian culture, as well as the way of annexing the text into the Old Testament’s books of the Kings and adding some comments in it, was the way to transfer ideas and express claims about the origin of the political power of the ruling dynasties in the Bulgarian polity.

In the text tradition there is also evidence of another transfer procedure used in order to express group identity. That is the addition of short comments while translating chronicle texts from Greek:

Excerpt (2): “By the way, Illyrians, Dalmatians and Dacians, now called Bulgarians, live at Ister” [on the Danube – *AG*].

This one is also a comment made by a Bulgarian translator of Joseph Flavius’ (Joseph ben Mathias) book *Judea’s war*, written in the second half of the first century. The translation into Old Church Slavonic, and inclusion in the *Bulgarian Chronograph*, was made in Bulgaria in the first half of the tenth century (Мещерский 1958).

There is another example which is not a result of an interpolation made by the translator to Old Church Slavonic:

“This Achilles had his own army, which at that time was called Myrmidons and now is called Bulgarians and Huns.” (Malalae 2000, 71)

This is an example from the fifth book of Johannes Malalas’ *Chronograph*, written in the sixth century. The translation into Old Church Slavonic (Истрин 1994, 122), and inclusion in the *Bulgarian Chronograph*, was

made in Bulgaria in the first half of the tenth century. It is obvious that excerpt two follows the same pattern in adding information about the Bulgarians. In excerpt two as well as in the example from Malalas, the comments, made by the translator in the first case and by the writer in the other, were introduced by a word meaning 'now': "**now** called Bulgarians". The translator and completer of Joseph Flavius' book managed to link up to the present the authorities from the past. He transformed their power and their rights into new political claims. Even in the *List*, in the seventh paragraph there is a similar expression: *It remains the same even today* contains the same kind of transmission.

Other interesting details, which could not be discussed in this article, are the importance of the geographic information and the river Danube for the identification of the Bulgarian polity, mentioned in the *List* and the translation of *Judea's war* (excerpts one and two). Another detail is the claim of being of Hunnic origin, which could be seen in the *List* where Attila's son Hernak is included in the *List* as belonging to the ruling clan *Dulo*.

To conclude, excerpt two represents another kind of technique of text creation: translating historical narrations about old and well-established authorities and adding comments in order to annex them, to take possession of them in a new political situation.

A third way of creating identities by making texts in order to express claims about the origin of the Bulgarian polity and the origin of political power is represented in excerpt three. The text is written by John Exarch, who worked as translator, compiler and writer while composing his text *Hexameron* 'Six days period' (Aitzetmüller 1958–1975). This work, dated to the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth century, was included in the Bulgarian *Chronograph*, just like the texts from excerpts one, two and three. The main Byzantine sources for his work were *Hexameron*, written by Basil the Great in the fourth century and *Hexameron*, written by Severianus in the beginning of the fifth century (Горина 2005, 93–130).

John Exarch in his *Hexameron* (note the genre!) adds a lot of comments, discussing rulers and the transmission of political power in world history, as well as in the history of Bulgaria. This kind of text is more or less an attempt to build a theoretical basis for establishing political ideas in Bulgaria after the conversion.

Excerpt (3):

"In many countries the rulers – tsars, princes and kings – become rulers not by connection with the zodiac symbol, not because of the power of the stars, but by birthright, i.e. according to the Law, according to the distance and nature of the relationship. The son comes after the father and the brother comes after his brother, as it

was at the time of David. Beginning with him his clan continued ruling in Judea until Zerubabel. The same took place among Persians and Medians [...] And among Bulgarians as well the princes from the very beginning were chosen by succession – the son after the father and the brother after his brother. We found out that it was the same among the Khazars.” (Aitzetmüller 1958–1975, 140b.21)

This excerpt from John Exarch’s Hexameron is not a translation from Greek, even if it contains some details taken from Greek sources. This text introduces important political vocabulary, such as for example clans, rulers, tsars, princes, kings, and discusses the rules of succession. The point that these rules “are exactly the same as they were at the time of David” shows once again a time shifting. Even the syntax of the expression is identical: *And among Bulgarians as well the princes from the very beginning were chosen by succession – the son after the father and the brother after his brother* (see also excerpt four below).

Excerpt (4):

“Books of the Old Testament, testifying about the truth of the descriptions in the New Testament, translated from Greek into Slavic by Gregory Presbyter at the time of Bulgarian prince Symeon, *son of Boris* [...]” *Colophon written by Gregory Presbyter*, fol. 199a (Николова 1984, 115–116)

The excerpt is part of the *colophon* written by Gregory Presbyter and placed in the translation from the Old Testament in the *Bulgarian Chronograph*.

To conclude, including the passage from excerpt three in a text which presents how God created the world in six days, gives it much higher value. The rules of succession in the Bulgarian polity are presented as part of the common political order of the world. How? By the character of the genre and by the technique of temporal adverbs or expressions being used in the text – *as it was at the time of David* – as well as expressions meaning similarity as ‘*the same was*’ or ‘*as well*’.

Excerpts five and six deal with the claim about the holy origin of Bulgaria. In these texts the Bulgars are presented as descendants of Noah’s son Shem.

Excerpt (5):

“From the first son of Noah – Shem – originated 25 peoples. They live in the east. The names of the sons of Shem are:

Elam, from whom are the Elamites;
Asyr, from whom are the Assyrians;
Arfaksad, from whom are the Chaldeans;
[...]

[...]

Avimelekh, from whom are the Hyrcanians;

Sabebi, from whom are the Arans;

Mamsuir, from whom are the Armenians;

Eiulat, from whom are the gymnosophists;

Ziezi, from whom are the Bulgars.” /Ziezi ex quo Vulgares/ (Mommsen 1892, 105).

The Chronograph from 354 AD (Mommsen 1892, 13–196) was written in Latin and in one of its versions the sentence about Vulgares has been added at the end of the list enumerating the people descending from Noah’s oldest son Shem. This text has never been part of Bulgarian literary tradition. The addition *Ziezi ex quo Vulgares* follows precisely the syntax of the other sentences in the list, trying to seem identical to them. This technique is rather aggressive, compared to that one used in excerpt two.

Expressing identity through adoptive redaction, with interpolations in a Greek text, can be seen in excerpt six, where the Bulgars are among the five Orthodox peoples originating from Sham.

Excerpt (6):

“*Question*: Tell me about the origin of the Orthodox people?”

“*Answer*: Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. God sent an angel to the sons and daughters of Shem so they began to reproduce themselves by looking to each other. They gave birth to the five Orthodox peoples: Syrians, Georgians, Greeks, **Bulgars** and Russians.”

“From Japheth descend twelve half-faithful people: Fruzes [Franks – AG], Latin people, Ugres [Magyars – AG], Armenians, Arcadians, Czechs, Poles, Germans, Croats, Arbanases, Sakulates, Hisies.” (ИВАНОВ 1970, 249–250)

The book *Razumnik-ukaz*, the code of laws, was written in Bulgaria during the eleventh or twelfth century. The book is a compilation of Greek texts, which were translated into Old Church Slavonic, and original texts written by Bulgarian authors (ИВАНОВ 1970, 249–253). The textual technique used in excerpt six is similar to that used in the Latin text from excerpt five: i.e. that an addition was made without anything indicating that this was done. *They gave birth to the five Orthodox peoples: Syrians, Georgians, Greeks, Bulgars and Russians*. A possible explanation is that these interpolations were made later, around 200 years after the conversion to Christianity. The enthusiastic efforts to establish the new Christian identity in the Bulgarian society after the conversion often resulted in additional comments indicating the transmission of texts and ideas. Excerpt six is different because it shows

a new kind of self-confidence: Bulgars as already one of the Orthodox peoples.

The last excerpt is from the *Anonymous Bulgarian chronicle*. This text was written in Bulgaria during the late eleventh or twelfth century (Търкова-Займова & Милтенова 1996, 192–206). The chronicle is an apocryphal apocalyptic chronicle – this kind of chronicle was rather popular in Bulgaria and Byzantium during the 11th century. What is common to such texts is that God speaks to the people using the voice of a prophet, most often Isaiah or Daniel. The narration in the apocryphal apocalyptic chronicles concerns the last days before the Judgement Day.

Excerpt (7):

1⁶. “I, the prophet Isaiah, [...], came here, because thus was the will of God, to tell you what is going to happen to the people at the end of this world.”

2. “Then I heard a voice telling me: ‘Isaiah, my beloved prophet, go west – up there to the most distant parts of Rome, take one third of the Khumans, who are *called Bulgars*, and populate the land of Karvuna, which Romans and Greeks left empty’.”

3. “I populated the land of Karvuna, *which is now called Bulgaria*. The Greeks left this land 130 years ago. I populated the **land** with many people, from the Danube River to the Black Sea, **and put a tsar over them**. He was one of them, his name was **Slav**.”

4. “After his death, his son Boris took over the Bulgarian realm. He was truly faithful and loved God. **He baptised all of Bulgaria** and built many churches. He **was crowned** on the Bregalnitsa River, where he built many beautiful white churches. He died in Dobritch. He ruled for 16 years without any sin and without any wife. **God blessed his realm**.”

5. “His brother had the realm after him. He built big cities by the sea and also Preslav, where he was **crowned**. Tsar Symeon ruled for 130 years, and gave birth to Saint Peter, **the Bulgarian tsar who was a holy man**. Under the time of his ruling the taxes were really low: one fleece of wool, one spoon of oil and one egg.”

6. “After his death his son Peter took over the realm. He was **tsar over the Bulgars and the Greeks**. He ruled for 12 years without any sin and without any wife. **His realm was blessed by God**.”

7. “At that time, when the Bulgarian tsar Petar was ruling, there was a woman who was a widow, a really wise woman who loved God. Her name was Elena. She gave birth to **tsar Constantine – a holy man**.”

⁶ The numeration of the paragraphs does not belong to the original text but has been added to the text of the excerpt in order to make it easier for references.

His father was Constantine the Green, called Porphyrogenitus, who was a Roman tsar. **Tsar Petar and tsar Constantine loved each other.**” (Тъпкова-Займова и Милтенова 1996, 192–206).

The technique of composing a text, used in this genre, allows the presentation of the Bulgarian state as created by the will of God, so that the political power of Bulgarian rulers was holy and divine (paragraphs 2–6 in the excerpt seven). The text of this *Anonymous Bulgarian chronicle* is an original text; it is not a translation from Greek, but there are some influences from similar Greek texts to be found in it. However, this is an original text, which was created in order to express not only group identity, but also the sacred origin of political power in Bulgaria.

Conclusions

The source materials analysed here have included several different genres: lists, questions and answers, apocalyptic chronicle and theological treatise.

The techniques of textual composition used in the sources vary and depend on the chronology of the texts and their purpose. These techniques are: interpolation without any indication, interpolation with indications like temporal adverbs and phrases, translation with compilation, and creation of original texts.

Creating texts by translating, composing and compiling and by using different techniques of adopting and transferring meanings was the way to express genealogy claims, while adapting pre-Christian texts to the new Christian milieu or adapting Byzantine texts by translating and redacting them.

Author's email address: antoaneta.granberg@slav.gu.se

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