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SYRIAN AND ARMENIAN CHRISTIANITY IN NORTHERN MACEDONIA FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE EIGHTH TO THE MIDDLE OF THE NINTH CENTURY*

Syrian and Armenian influence has been felt in the Old Bulgarian culture by different scholars, such as archaeologists and architecture historians as well as historians of the earliest Bulgarian writing and manuscripts. Some of them, looking for a possible source of this influence, pointed to resettling a large Syrian and Armenian population from the former Roman Armenia's lands in the Caliphate to northern Macedonia in the 750s. An exhaustive overview of the literary sources related to this resettlement (in Greek, Syriac, Arabic, and Armenian) demonstrates that took place a *translatio urbis* of Theodosiopolis/Karin (modern Erzurum) together with a great part of Christian population of the Great Armenia and Melitene. The immigrants created new cities where preserved and developed their local cults, including the famous cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Theodosiopolis/Strumica.

Key words: Northern Macedonia, Early Slavic Christianity, Hagiography, Strumica, Syrian Christianity, Armenian Christianity, Baptism of Bulgaria.

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СИРИЙСКОЕ И АРМЯНСКОЕ ХРИСТИАНСТВО В СЕВЕРНОЙ МАКЕДОНИИ ОТ СЕРЕДИНЫ ВОСЬМОГО ДО СЕРЕДИНЫ ДЕВЯТОГО ВЕКА

Сирийское и армянское влияние на древнейшую культуру Болгарии отмечалось разными учеными в разных областях, включая археологию и историю архитектуры, а также историю древнейшей славянской письменности и книжного дела. Некоторые ученые в поисках источника этого влияния указывали на имевший место в 750-е годы факт переселения сирийского и армянского населения из бывших армянских провинций Византии, находившихся тогда в составе Арабского халифата, на земли нынешней северной Македонии. Предпринятый впервые в настоящей работе исчерпывающий анализ исторических свидетельств об этом переселении (сохранившихся на греческом, сирийском, арабском и армянском языках) показывает, что имело место *translatio urbis* — «перенесение» бывшей столицы провинции Великая Армения Феодосиополя (армянское название — Карин, современное турецкое — Эрзерум), который дал свое имя городу Струмица в Македонии. В этом переселении участвовала значительная часть христианского (армянского и сирийского) населения бывших армянских провинций, особенно окрестностей городов Феодосиополя и Мелитены. Иммигранты создавали новые города, в которых сохраняли и развивали свои локальные культы святых, одним из которых стал знаменитый культ Пятнадцати мучеников Тивериупольских в Струмице.

Ключевые слова: Северная Македония, начало христианства у славян, агиография, Струмица, сирийское христианство, армянское христианство, крещение Болгарии.

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1. Introduction

The present study will be focused on a phenomenon known relatively long ago but still not fully appreciated — Syrian and Armenian compact communities, not just diaspora appeared in the middle of the eighth century in the northern Macedonia. Now I will not exhaust this topic either. I hope, nevertheless, to provide a “critical mass” of data demonstrating that the relevance of the phenomenon we are dealing with was so far underestimated. The nature of the earliest Bulgarian Christianity is not understandable without its background in local communities of Syrian and Armenian Christians.

The archaeologists and historians of architecture were the first ones to notice the relevance of these communities for the local architecture and, therefore, pointed to some literary witnesses related to their appearance in the lands of the modern Republic of Macedonia. Nevertheless, according to the *a priori* supposition held by the consensus of historians, any somewhat important Church building in the territory devastated by the Avars *ca* 580 and belonged to the Bulgarian kingdom in the time of its conversion in the 860s could not be dated to the period in between these dates.

Oddly enough, I have never met an archaeological study where a possibility of dating a church construction in Macedonia to the eighth or the first part of the ninth century would have been taken seriously. Neither have I met an explicit statement substantiating impossibility of such dating for the territories of the modern state of Macedonia, which were a part of a Christian Empire before the 830s. Such a possibility is never disproved but simply never discussed. The simple question where are the churches of the resettled there Syrians and Armenians is so far never formulated.

My present purpose is, after having summarised the findings and conclusions proposed so far by archaeologists and architecture historians, to review the relevant historical witnesses in an exhaustive manner.

2. The Palaces in Pliska and Their Architects

In 1968, Anatoly Leopoldovich Yakobson (1906—1984) published a seminal paper on the influence of the Syrian and Armenian architectural traditions on the earliest architecture in the Bulgarian Kingdom¹. Then, he was dealing mostly with the early ninth-century palaces in Pliska: Yakobson noticed that these palaces had the closest parallels in palaces constructed in Armenia during the seventh century; these palaces were then recently excavated and not widely known.

Realising that his data are severely limited, Yakobson formulated his conclusion as a new hypothesis but the most plausible among the available ones. His ideas were adopted by Stancho Vaklinov (1921—1978) in his influential book (Vaklinov 1977: 108—109) and by Rasho Rashev in his definitive monograph on the excavations in Pliska², but still without any additional substantiation.

The main conclusion by Yakobson is worth to be quoted *in extenso*:

¹ (Yakobson 1968). This topic has been only briefly mentioned in his posthumous monograph (Yakobson 1987: 103). Yakobson then confirmed his adherence to his earlier hypothesis but still without having new data to substantiate it.

² (Rashev 2008: 87); however, Rashev's reference to predecessors of Yakobson (Fehér, Miyatev, Vasilev) ascribing to some of them (without saying exactly to whom) an idea of Syrian origin of such architecture is not correct.

Therefore, a direct communication of the Bulgarians with Armenians and Syrians (incidentally, the born masons) would have occurred (and, undoubtedly, did happen) precisely during the period of intensive construction works in the Bulgarian capital Pliska. Direct participation in this construction of Armenian and Syrian architects is more than probable³.

According to Jakobson, these Armenians and Syrians who were in contact with the Bulgarian khan's court were the people resettled under Constantine Copronymus (741—775) (Jakobson 1968: 205—206). He did not discuss the manner in which such contacts would have been effectuated—through the inter-state border between the Byzantine Empire and the Bulgarian Kingdom. These Armenians and Syrians would have hardly been subjects of the khan already in the epoch of Khan Krum (803—814); their territories were conquered by Bulgarians under Khan Presian in the late 830s⁴, that is, certainly later than the palaces in Pliska were built.

Jakobson died in 1984, in the same year when Blaga Aleksova (1922—2007) discovered the two churches in Krupište, Macedonia, near the river Bregalnica and at the site that she identified with that of the city of Raven known from the *Legend of Thessalonica* only⁵. This finding was calling for revisiting Jakobson's hypothesis but neither Aleksova nor few other archaeologists who studied these churches after her recalled Jakobson's 1968 paper.

The new findings in Macedonia substantiate Jakobson's claim very much. Indeed, these “born masons” who constructed palaces for a foreign pagan ruler would have certainly constructed churches for themselves. All Macedonian churches datable archaeologically to the period from the eighth to the tenth century must be investigated as possibly constructed by these Syrians and Armenians in the late eighth or in the first half of the ninth century. For our present study, however, only two localities with three such churches are especially interesting: Strumica with one church and the site of Krupište with two churches.

Apparently without knowing Jakobson's hypothesis, Blaga Aleksova recognised a Syrian pattern in the plan of one church in Krupište and even provided a close parallel with a church in Maipherkat.

The bigger church from two churches in Krupište (Aleksova called it “cathedral church”) has a very similar plan to that of the early seventh-century Theotokos church in Maipherkat⁶. Aleksova, who discovered this church in 1984, and some archaeologists after her (Mikulčík 1996: 347—348) considered this church as a late ninth- or early tenth-century Bulgarian/Slavic construction. They were facing the choice between a pre-Avaric (pre-580) Byzantine construction and a Bulgarian one. Given that a pre-Avaric date was excluded on archaeological grounds, the Bulgarian alternative was chosen.

In fact, there is a need to take into account the third possibility—that there were some constructions remained from the late eighth- and ninth-century activity of the Armenian and Syrian immigrants. The “cathedral” church in Krupište could be interpreted as a building made not only after the common pattern with that of the church in Maipherkat but also by the descendants of the Byzantine Armenia themselves (Maipherkat/Martyropolis was the second centre of the former

³ (Jakobson 1968: 206): “Таким образом, непосредственное общение болгар с армянами и сирийцами (кстати сказать, прирожденными каменщиками) могло происходить (да, несомненно, и происходило) как раз в период интенсивного строительства в болгарской столице Плиске. Непосредственное участие в этом строительстве армянских и сирийских зодчих более чем вероятно”. This formulation reveals his subjective confidence in what he called his “hypothesis”.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the historical data and historiography, see (Koledarov 1979: 41—42).

⁵ On the *Legend of Thessalonica*, see (Lourié 2019).

⁶ As well as to the famous but much later (eleventh- or twelfth-century) basilica in Ćurlina [read *Churlina*] near Niš in Serbia: (Aleksova a 1989: 93, 137; 277, ill. 103; 283, ill. 118 and 119); for the Maipherkat church, see (Grabar 1946: 327 and 617, fig. 92). Aleksova quotes Grabar without addressing directly his source, (Bell 1913: 88—92, Pl. XV—XIX).

Byzantine province Great Armenia after its capital Theodosiupolis/Karin, modern Erzurum). According to the purely archaeological considerations, this church is now dated to the eighth or ninth century (Natsev 2013: 281) which is in the perfect accord with this possibility.

Indeed, a possibility that some post-Byzantine Christian buildings in Macedonia are constructed by these Armenians and Syrians during the century preceding the conversion of Bulgaria in the 860s, is not limited to a unique church, and it should be checked properly by specialists. Let us add that it is still hard to explain why these churches are constructed after non-Byzantine Syrian patterns if they would have been constructed after the conversion of Bulgaria into the Byzantine Christianity.

These observations corroborates Yakobson's hypothesis on Syrians and Armenians as the constructors of the palaces in Pliska. These palaces, if they were constructed by the masters who belonged to Syrians and Armenians resettled in Macedonia, must have corresponded to some monuments in Macedonia. Not palaces, of course—because there was no need in palaces there,—but what was the most necessary for masters' own use, that is, churches.

Thus, one can figure out how much Yakobson would have enjoyed Aleksova's publications on Krupište were he alive then.

3. The Literary Sources

The available literary sources are mostly related to the events of 752/754 (there are some problems with precise dating)—the resettlement of Christian Armenian and Syrian population from two regions of the Arab Caliphate to the depopulated region of the Byzantine Empire near the Bulgarian border. Nevertheless, a part of the sources refers to the early ninth-century situation of the resettled people.

3.1. Theodosiupolis

Theodosiupolis, the former capital of the Roman Armenia, was the most important locality dealt with in our sources.

According to the often-quoted passage of Theophanes the Confessor under AM 6247 = AD 754/755⁷, the following took place:

ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος Σύρους τε καὶ Ἀρμενίους, οὓς ἤγαγεν ἀπὸ Θεοδοσιουπόλεως καὶ Μελιτηνῆς, εἰς τὴν Θράκην μετέκτισεν, ἐξ ὧν καὶ ἐπλατύνθη ἡ αἵρεσις τῶν Παυλικιάνων⁸.

The emperor Constantine transferred to Thrace the Syrians and Armenians whom he had brought from Theodosiupolis and Melitene and, through them, the heresy of the Paulicians spread about⁹.

There are parallel communications in Nicephorus of Constantinople, which add some little details to Theophanes¹⁰; we will return to them later.

⁷ The exact date of the event is somewhat problematic, but, at least, it took place within the interval between 752 and 754; cf. bibliography of the discussion in (Łewond 2015: 144, fn. 703; cf. 141, fn. 694; 144, fn. 702).

⁸ (de Boor 1883/1963: 429.19—22). For the main facts and bibliography related to the Byzantine historians referred to in the present study, one can consult the recent reference book by Leonora Neville (Neville 2018).

⁹ (Mango, Scott 1997: 593). Tsankova-Petkova's supposition that the name Theodosiupolis could design here Syrian Rēš 'Aynā whose Byzantine name was also Theodosiupolis (Beshevliev, Tsankova-Petkova 1960: 269, com. 18) is untenable, especially in the light of the Eastern chronicles (s. below) which clearly point out Theodosiupolis in Armenia.

¹⁰ Nicephorus, *Breviarium* 73 (Mango 1990: 144/145) txt/tr.; *idem*, *Antirrheticus* III, 72 (written between 815 and 828); PG 100, 508 D—509 A.

Theophanes was writing in the early 810s using the materials collected by his friend and another Byzantine chronographer Georges Synkellos¹¹. This means that the temporal distance from the events described was not especially big; however, the geographical and cultural distance was substantial. The Byzantine authors were certainly well informed about the locality where these migrants were settled within the Byzantine territory. However, we need a help of eastern historians in order to look at the event from an “eastern” point of view evaluating the scale of this migration.

The eastern chronographers said about the devastation of Theodosiupolis and, at least, a very serious damage to Melitene. They form two groups, Syrian and Armenian.

The representatives of the Syrian group wrote in different languages (Syriac and Arabic) and belonged to different faiths (the Melkite dyothelete and the Severian anti-Chalcedonian) but were not mutually independent. For the period we are interested in their data go back to the lost Syriac chronicle of a Syrian scholar, a court astrologer of the caliph, Theophilus of Edessa¹². He belonged to the Syrian Melkites (Chalcedonian dyothelete, that is, he accepted the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680/681¹³) and died *ca* 785 at the age of ninety. The earliest preserved witness of his work is the world chronicle by Agapius († 941/942; Ἀγάπιος is the Greek calque of his Arabic name Maḥbūb), who was a Melkite (Chalcedonian) bishop of the Syrian Hierapolis (Arabic Manbiğ, Syriac Mabbug) and wrote in Arabic.

The main point which is interesting for us in these sources is the claim that the population of the city of Theodosiupolis was removed totally. Thus, we read in Agapius:

Then Constantine, the king of Rome, attacked Qālīqlā [Arabic name of Theodosiupolis] and conquered it and took in captivity its population.

تم ان قسطنطين ملك الروم غزا قاليقلا وفتحها
وسبأ اهلها¹⁴.

Then the Arabs soon (in 756/757¹⁵) rebuilt the ruined Theodosiupolis (Vasiliev 1912: 279).

The parallel passage, also depending on Theophilus of Edessa, is preserved in the Syriac chronicle by the Jacobite (Severian anti-Chalcedonian) patriarch of Antioch Michael the Great († 1199), book XI, ch. 25. He is more precise in an important detail: Emperor Constantine attacked Theodosiupolis and, then, Vasiliev

...and, after having submitted it, he took in captivity the whole its population and left it deserted¹⁷.

وحد حصصه من حمله حكامه وجمعهم
في قلاية¹⁶.

Thus, the whole population of the city was taken to Byzantium. Michael the Great, writing in the same language as his source, used a disambiguating wording.

¹¹ Cyril Mango puts forward a plausible hypothesis that the *Breviarium* as an *œuvre de jeunesse* de Nicephorus written in the 780s; his sources were identical or very similar to those available to Theophanes through Georges Synkellos (Mango 1990: 11—12).

¹² The reconstruction of his work provided (in translation) by Robert G. Hoyland (Hoyland 2011) is very useful but, as we will see, could not be used without checking the original texts. For the mutual relations between the sources of the Syrian (in both Syriac and Arabic) and Armenian chronographers on the Iconoclastic epoch, see esp. (Gero 1973: 199—209) (Appendice 4).

¹³ If the sympathies of Michel the Great and the anonymous author of the *Chronicle to 1234* to Constantine Copronymus (s. below) go back to him as their common source (which is quite possible but not certain), we have to suppose that he shared iconoclastic convictions, that is, he considered himself in communion with the pre-787 Byzantine state Church.

¹⁴ (Vasiliev 1912/1982: 278). English translation from Arabic here and below is mine.

¹⁵ For this date, see (Ter-Gevondyan 1978: 100). There is an English translation of (Ter-Gevondyan 1978).

¹⁶ (Chabot 1899—1924: vol. 2, 473, centre column).

¹⁷ Here my translation is in agreement with that of Chabot “...emmena tout le peuple en captivité...” (Chabot 1899—1924: vol. 2, 521—522) but not with Hoyland who omitted حمله “whole its” (Hoyland 2011: 300).

The destiny of Theodosiupolis in these events occupied chapter 29 of the *History* by the Armenian vardapet (priest and monk in the non-Chalcedonian Armenian Church) Lewond. He was writing in non-Byzantine Armenia (independent or in some dependence on the Arabs), probably, in the late ninth century¹⁸. Expectedly his account is the most detailed, even though not necessarily the most trustworthy. The relevant part of chapter 34 (29).16—21, is the following:

Եւ իբրեւ յական թօթափել՝ կործանէր զղղեակ պարիսպ ամրոցին արքայն Կոստանդին, որ էր որդի Լեւոնի: Եւ բացեալ գտուն գանձուցն՝ բառնայր բազում կշիռ ոսկոյ եւ արծաթոյ, գտանէր ի գանձի անդ զնշան տէրունեան խաչին, զոր առեալ տանէր ընդ ինքեան: Նա եւ [զ]գորսն քաղաքին եւ զբնակեալսն ի նմա Սառակինոսս բառնայր նոցին ընտանեալք յաշխարհն Յունաց: Եւ բազումք ի բնակչաց գաւառացն խնդրեալ յարքայ[յ]էն, զի ընկեացն զանուր լծոյ ծառայ[յ]ութեանն Իսմայելի յանձանց եւ զնացն զկնի նորա:

Եւ նորա տուեալ հրաման, վաղվաղակի հանդերձեալ զաղիս իւրեանց խաղացին յառաջ, ապաւինեալք ի զարութիւն տէրունեան խաչին եւ ի փառս արքայ[յ]ին: Թողին զերկիր ծննդեան իւրեանց, եւ հատուածեալք անկան ի կողմն արքայ[յ]ին բարեպաշտի¹⁹:

Upon arrival they destroyed the walls of the citadel and Emperor Constantine, son of Leo, opened the treasury and withdrew a large amount of gold and silver. He also found in that treasury a fragment of the Lord's Cross, which he removed and took with him. He also took to Greek territory the city's troops and Saracen population with their families. Many residents of the surroundings [quasi in plural] beseeched the emperor to remove their yoke of servitude to the Ismaelites. And they too departed along with him.

Receiving [the emperor's] permission they quickly prepared their belongings, taking strength from the power of the Lord's Cross and the emperor's glory. They left their birthplace and, separating [from their own people], joined the pious emperor's side²⁰.

It is important that Lewond, being independent from Theophilus of Edessa, confirmed his account of migration of the entire Christian population of Theodosiupolis and its neighbourhood, regardless of whether Lewond's information about resettlement of a part of the local Muslims is true or not. It is also interesting that Lewond described resettlement of Christians as a free act initiated by themselves. For an anti-Chalcedonian Lewond, the Chalcedonian Constantine is, nevertheless, a “pious emperor”²¹. The Syrian chronicles, which authors were also sympathetic to Constantine, called this operation as “taking in captivity”, thus emphasising its forcible character.

¹⁸ Thus according to (Greenwood 2012). Previously Lewond's death was dated to the late eighth century, after the last date in his *History* that covers the period from 640 to 788. The later date would correspond to an independent Armenian state, whereas the earlier one to a dependent.

¹⁹ (Lewond 2015: 143, 145).

²⁰ Translation from (Bedrosian 2006) with little changes. Bedrosian translates զաւանոց as “of the district”. The normal equivalents of զաւան in Greek are *χώρα*, *περίχωρος*, *πατρία*, or Latin *regio*, *provincia*, *patria* (Աւետիքեան *et al.* 1836—1837: 533), my translation would correspond to the Greek *χωρίων* or *χώρων*.

²¹ Tim W. Greenwood does not realise the real difficulty of this evaluation of Constantine by Lewond: “What is so striking about this passage is the positive assessment of Constantine V; for an iconoclast emperor to be described as ‘pious’ is most unexpected. It has also proved difficult to interpret. It may derive from an underlying source [that remains unknown to us. — *B. L.*] and been retained by error by Lewond but this contention is conjectural” (Greenwood 2012: 140). Lewond himself was not an iconoclast (cf. his positive mentions of icons in chapters 5 and 16), but the iconoclasm of Constantine's father Leo has had roots in the very official teaching of the late seventh- — early eighth-century Armenian Church (van Esbroeck 1995). Therefore, it would have been hardly considered as especially criminal by an educated clergyman of the Armenian Church. The attitude toward the Council of Chalcedon was, however, a true problem... Michael the Great (*Chronicle* XI, 24) has also esteemed Emperor Constantine V: “The Chalcedonians hate this Constantine and call him icon-hater [ܡܚܬܐܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܬܐ; a rendering of *εικονομάχος*?] because he convened this council [of 754. — *B. L.*] in which he determined that one should not worship icons and anathematised John, George of Damascus and George of Cyprus [in fact, John of Damascus, George of Cyprus, and Germanos of Constantinople. — *B. L.*], for they maintained the doctrine of Maximus [the Confessor; the council of 754 also maintained the same doctrine, but it was considered heretical not only by the Monotheletes but also by the anti-Chalcedonians “monophysites”. — *B. L.*]. King Constantine was a cultured man, who adhered firmly to the mysteries of the orthodox faith, which is why the Chalcedonians hated him”; tr. from (Hoyland 2011: 292—293) with changes; cf. original in (Chabot 1899—1924: vol. 4, 473) and Chabot's translation with notes in (Chabot 1899—1924: vol. 2, 521). The anonymous Jacobite author of the

Nicephorus of Constantinople—albeit in his later work only—described the same events in a heavily biased manner: according to him, Constantine never led wars against the non-Christians (although earlier Nicephorus himself described such wars against the pagan Bulgarians (Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, 73 (Mango 1990: 144/145) txt/tr)), and, therefore, he attacked these cities of Armenians and Syrians only because they were Christian. (Thus, Nicephorus denied even the obvious fact that this military operation was directed against the Caliphate.) Constantine persuaded these Christians to accept his troops peacefully and, then, broke his oaths and forcibly took the captive population to Thrace. “I think that for breaking these oaths the Thracian region is taking revenge today (ὥν τῆς παραβασίας δίκας τὸ Θρακικὸν πέδον, ὥς οἶμαι, τινύει τὸ σήμερον)”, concluded Nicephorus with an allusion to the ongoing or quite recent wars with Bulgaria (807—815) (Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* III, 72; *PG* 100, 508 D—509 A). One has to mark that the reference to the current warfare theatre in Thrace makes clear that the removed people were settled in the basin of the river Struma (Strymon) or nearby.

Indeed, Nicephorus’ whole later account looks as an anti-iconoclastic mythology, especially in the light of Nicephorus’ own information in the *Breviarium*. However, this Nicephorus’ opinion could reflect a Byzantine view on the presence of Armenians and Syrians among the population of the theatre of the Byzantino-Bulgarian wars in the first third of the ninth century.

Łewond’s picture of the resettlement of the entire Christian population of Theodosiupolis and its neighbourhood taking with them a part of the True Cross is certainly a *translatio urbis*. It is somewhat at odds with not only the Byzantine but also the Syrian chronographers who considered this operation as forcible. Łewond’s ultimate sources, however, would have been the closest to the resettled population itself—at least, in its Armenian part.

3.2. Melitene... and Theodosiupolis again

For the operation against the Melitene, we have witnesses of Syrian historians; Łewond did not mention it.

Agapius said about the raid against Melitene in the same terms as about the raid against Theodosiupolis, almost verbatim, whereas, for his source, it was a different and somewhat earlier campaign (placed chronologically earlier than the iconoclast council in Constantinople, 754, and dated by the modern historians to either 751 (Hoyland 2011: 289) or 752 (Ter-Gevondyan 1978: 100):

...the king of Rome attacked Malatyā [= Melitene] and conquered it and took in captivity its population and returned. And in the same year, Kusān [= Gusan in Armenian] the Armenian Catholicos took the majority of the people of Armenia and transported them to the land of Rome.

غزا ملك الروم ملطية وفتحها وسبى اهلها ورجع
وفي هذه السنة أخذ كوسان جاثليق الارمن عامة أهل ارمينية
وأدخلهم بلاد الروم.²²

In fact, Gusan was a layman, the Byzantine general of Armenian origin who led the Byzantine campaign against the Armenian territories occupied by the Caliphate²³. A similar account (about

Chronicle to 1234 (ch. 183) characterised Constantine as “a man wise and fearful to the enemies” (Հակոբ Տեղադր. Կոստ. 183); (Chabot 1916/1953: 336); cf. Chabot’s tr. (Chabot 1937: 262). For a positive image of Constantine in the Armenian and Syriac chronography, see, in more details, (Gero 1977: 176—178 and 179—188), Appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

²² (Vasiliev 1912: 271).

²³ (Ter-Gevondyan 1978: 100). Vasiliev carefully translated “chef arménien” (Vasiliev 1912/1982: 271) but Hoyland translated “patriarch of the Armenians” with no commentary (Hoyland 2011: 289); the term جاثليق is a transcription of “catholicos”. Hoyland inexactly translated عامة أهل as “all the people” instead of “the majority, the most of” etc.

³² The best candidate among their known sources would be, of course, the lost Syriac *History* of Ignatius, metropolitan of Melitene († 1094); cf. (Gero 1973: 201–202). Both Michael's passages quoted above, however, belong to the central column of his *Chronicle*, which contents was tentatively identified by Gerö with the lost *Chronicle* of Dionysius Tel Mahre (773–845, Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch in 818–845), who, in turn, followed Theophilus of Edessa knowing him first-hand; the contents taken from Ignatius was tentatively identified by Gerö with the inner column of Michael (Gero 1973: 205–208). Therefore, there are two possibilities: (1) either the central column of Michael contains some material of Ignatius as well or (2) the author of the *Chronicle to 1234* deliberately omitted the account on the campaign against Theodosiupolis, whose existence we have to postulate, in this case, in Ignatius. The third possibility—that the confused account on “Claudia” belongs to Dionysius Tel Mahre—remains highly unlikely (due to his direct knowledge of Theophilus of Edessa and no specific attraction to the Melitene region).

well some other source on Theodosiupolis³³, which was ultimately going back to Theophilus of Edessa.

Such an exaggeration of the role of the modest town Claudias in featuring the resettled population becomes especially striking if we accept—as Stephen Gerö does³⁴ — Chabot’s emendation of ܟܠܕܝܐ to ܟܠܕܝܐ in the account of the failed Constantine Copronymus’ attempt to conclude a Church union with “the captive inhabitants of *Claudia* [*ms* ܟܠܕܝܐ]” (Chabot 1901: 523, n. 2; cf. vol. 4, 473 inner column), where the two sides allegedly discovered that, at least, they share the same faith³⁵. Here the entire resettled population is equated with the inhabitants of “Claudia” *tout court*. Even if this is a metonymical *pars pro toto*, such a metonymy would have had some reason to become understandable to the readers. In fact, if there was a unique city that would have had right to be chosen for naming the homeland of the migrants, it was certainly Theodosiupolis. Nevertheless, there is a serious reason to suppose that the correct emendation of ܟܠܕܝܐ would be ܡܪܥܫ “Mar‘aš”, that is, Germanicia Caesarea; we will discuss this possibility later (section 3.4).

To my opinion, “Claudia” (ܟܠܕܝܐ) appeared here as a corruption of the Syriac equivalent of the Arabic name of Theodosiupolis—or maybe it is a corruption of the original Syriac toponym for Karin that has been later preserved in Arabic; the Arabic name of the city would have been borrowed in Syriac. Indeed, Arabic قاليقلا would correspond to Syriac ܡܠܝܬܝܢ³⁶. These forms, especially the latter, would have been easily corrupted to ܟܠܕܝܐ, especially in the mind of a Syrian writer who knew well the Melitene region and was interested in it rather than that of Theodosiupolis. The name of Theodosiupolis is perfectly fitting with the context. Nevertheless, this “Claudia” appeared as a corruption of a source ultimately going back to the same Theophilus of Edessa.

3.3. The Faith of the Resettled People

Theophanes’ mention of the Paulicians is not without interest to us, because it might reveal some tensions in religious matters with the population mentioned, although we know that it was in a large part Chalcedonian. Nina Garsoïan did not object to this Theophanes’ opinion on the penetration of Paulicianism into the Balkans, although without, of course, considering this resettlement as the only or the principal way (Garsoïan 1960: 46, fn. 77 *et passim*). Indeed, it is quite likely that, among the resettled people, there were some Paulicians. Nevertheless, in Armenia, the Paulicians were a minority. Regardless of the possible contribution of these hypothetical Paulicians resettled in the Balkans by Copronymus, the majority of the resettled population was sharing the main confessions of their homeland. These confessions were Severian Monophysitism and Monothelete Chalcedonism.

Theodosiupolis/Karin became in 631 the place of another (after 591) epochal council when the mainstream Armenian Church headed by Catholicos Ezra accepted the union with the Byzantines and the Council of Chalcedon³⁷. This Theodosiupolis council became a major event in

³³ I wrote “most probably”, because the *argumentum ex silentio* does not authorise us to exclude a possibility that the author of the *Chronicle to 1234* deliberately omitted the whole account related to Theodosiupolis.

³⁴ (Gero 1977: 179, fn. 6). Without an emendation, one would understand ܟܠܕܝܐ as Mūd, modern Turkish Mut, historical Claudiopolis in Isauria, but such a location is certainly unfitting with the context pointing to Syria.

³⁵ (Chabot 1899—1924: vol. 4, 473—474), see the full translation and an analysis of the account in (Gero 1977: 179—181).

³⁶ This form is, however, hypothetical. What we read in Syriac sources, are forms with the intermediary *-n-*, such as ܡܠܝܬܝܢܐ (Michael the Syrian, to whom this name was Greek; he himself used the name Theodosiupolis) or ܡܠܝܬܝܢܐ and ܡܠܝܬܝܢܐ (Pseudo-Dionysius Tel Mahre, Bar Hebaeus); cf. (Chabot 1899—1924: vol. 2, 521, n. 8, vol. 4, 473 middle column).

³⁷ See (Lange 2012: 571—575), with further bibliography, including the discussion of the exact date of the council.

the Monothelete strategy by Emperor Heraclius³⁸. In 701, Theodosiupolis fell to the Arabs. Theodosiupolis will be never regained by the Byzantines until the successful siege by general John Kourkouas in 949³⁹. These historical facts mean that, to the time of Theophanes, the population of Theodosiupolis never received a proper “anti-Monothelete treatment”, which the population of Byzantium received, at least, after the final condemnation of the Monotheletism in 714⁴⁰. It is also obvious that some part of these resettled population belonged to some “monophysite” factions (at least, to the Severian Jacobite, but some other are not to be excluded⁴¹). Thus, the population removed from Theodosiupolis and Melitene was certainly problematic from the viewpoint of Theophanes’ Byzantine Orthodoxy.

Another Byzantine chronographer, Gregory the Monk (“Hamartolos”) who wrote after Theophanes without being especially depending on him and often following the same source (Theophilus of Edessa) more carefully⁴² preserved, as it seems, a more realistic approach, when the resettled people were considered simply as Christians, without any dogmatic charges, and their resettlement was evaluated as a positive act, despite the overall negative attitude toward Constantine Copronymus. All this means that, if not for George himself, then, at least, for his source (presumably, Theophilus of Edessa), this resettled population was mostly orthodox.

However, such an approach is featuring only the original Gregory’s text written between 845 and 847 and now preserved only in a unique eleventh-century manuscript *Coislinianus* 305⁴³. A very similar (for this part of the *Chronicle*) recension is preserved also in a fourteenth-century South Slavic (Bulgarian?) translation⁴⁴, which original was the second recension of the *Chronicle* datable to the period from 847 to 867 and completely lost in Greek. The two earlier recensions were replaced, in Byzantium, with the third one, the so-called *Vulgate*⁴⁵, which became extremely popular. It is datable to the period shortly after 867, most probably before 886⁴⁶. Here, a dogmatic charge appeared but it is limited to the standard Monophysitism. It is especially interesting to us that the Byzantine editor referred to the Armenian and Syrian Monophysites in Thrace as his contemporaneous.

Original Text of Gregory the Monk [with Variant Readings in Slavonic]

The *Vulgate* Text of the *Chronicle*

εἰ δέ τι μικρὸν καὶ οὐ πᾶν ἀξιόλογον [и не зѣлѡ достоино
оукоризнѣ] ἔδρασεν, τοῦτο ἐστίν. τοὺς γὰρ πρὸς ἀνατολὰς
οἰκοῦντας βαρβάρους ἀκηκοὺς περὶ τοὺς οἰκείους ἡγεμόνας
διαστασιάζοντας καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἐμφύλιον πόλεμον ἀσχολουμένους,
ληστρικώτερον πῶς μᾶλλον ἢ στρατηγικώτερον ὡς λήσων ἐπιὼν
τοῖς τῆς Ἀρμενίας χωρίοις τῶν ἐκείνη φρουρίων αἶρει ὁμολογία
τῶν προσοικούντων· οὐ γὰρ ἐχθρῶν ἀλλοφύλῳ ὑπηγνῆται πώποτε,

Τῶν δέ γε Σαρακηνῶν κατ’ ἀλλήλων
μαχομένων ἀκούσας ἐκστρατεύει πρὸς τὰ
μέρη τῆς Συρίας καὶ διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην
πρόφασιν τε καὶ ἄδειαν προσλαβόμενος
λόγῳ τοὺς συγγενεῖς αὐτοῦ Ἀρμενίους καὶ
Σύρους αἰρετικούς εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον
μετόπισεν, ὧν οἱ πλείους οἰκοῦντες ἐν τῇ

³⁸ See esp. (Garitte 1952: 278—350).

³⁹ For the historical frame, see (Ter-Gevondyan 1977).

⁴⁰ After the first condemnation of the Monotheletism at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, 680—681, it was re-established as the official confession of the Empire during the reign of Vardan-Philippikos (711—713) and eventually condemned at the council of Constantinople in 714. For the religious history of the period, see, e.g., (Auzépy 1995).

⁴¹ Such as the Severian Paulianist; cf. (Lourié 2017).

⁴² Cf. especially (Afinogenov 2012).

⁴³ This text is unpublished. I will quote it according to the provisional unpublished edition prepared by Dmitry Afinogenov, to whom I express my deepest gratitude. For the details of the textual history of the *Chronicle*, see especially (Afinogenov 2004) [French tr.: (Afinogenov 2004)], (Afinogenov 2018), with further bibliography.

⁴⁴ Published phototypically according to one manuscript dated to 1386. See the quoted fragment at (Lětovnik” 1881: f. 347^v).

⁴⁵ Quoted according to the critical edition (de Boor 1904/1978: 752).

⁴⁶ See (Afinogenov 2018) and another paper by Afinogenov under preparation.

ἀλλὰ τούτους αὐτοὺς Ἀρμενίους καὶ Σύρους χριστιανούς
ὑπάρχοντας διὰ λόγου καὶ ὀρκομοσίας ἐπὶ τὴν Θράκην μετέγαγεν.

Θράκη μέχρι νῦν Θεοπασχῖται κατὰ
Πέτρον εἰσὶ τὸν δειλαιον.

Nevertheless, if he accomplished (, at least,) anything insignificant and not especially remarkable [*Slavic*: and not quite worthy of disapproval], it is the following. After having heard that the barbarians living in the east are quarrelling about their leaders and are preoccupied with the civil war, he somewhat like a robber rather than a warrior, as if hiding himself, came upon regions of Armenia, overtaking the guards therein with approval of the local population. Thus, he did never confront foreign enemies, but (, instead,), (operating) with word and oaths⁴⁷, he translated to Thrace these Armenians and Syrians themselves, who were Christians⁴⁸.

But after having heard that the Saracens were fighting between themselves, he marches out to areas of Syria, and taking advantage of the situation and safety, took his relatives Armenians and Syrians, heretics and resettled them in Byzantium. Many of them are living in Thrace until now, being Theopaschites according to Peter the cursed⁴⁹.

The anonymous editor of the *Vulgate* provides us with a realistic picture of how the resettled population looked like in the eyes of a ninth-century Byzantine anti-iconoclast. Macedonia was conquered by Bulgarians in the early 840s, and so, this point of view was rather a remoted one. Nevertheless, the anonymous author, unlike his Byzantine followers, did not claim that the heresies of the migrants in Macedonia and of Constantine were the same (this claim occurred for the first time in the paraphrase of this *Vulgate* passage in the *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete [ch. 122, 5], composed after 948 and certainly before 1013⁵⁰, and then became often repeated in Byzantine historiographical works).

The authentic George provided, however, much more positive picture, going to an account closer to the events of the 750s.

For the sake of completeness, it is interesting to quote one more witness of Nicephorus, from his post-815 work, pertaining to the faith of the resettled people:

γυναῖκες γάρ τινες, κατὰ τὴν Ἀράβων χώραν
τυγχάνουσαι, οἷα δὲ ἀμύηται τῆς παρ' ἡμῖν
ιερουργουμένης μυσταγωγίας τὸν τρόπον, καὶ
δογμάτων θεῶν ἀμέτοχοι, ἐπ' ὀνόματι τῆς ἁγίας
παρθένου θεομήτορος κολλυρίδα προσέφερον· αἱ
δὲ ἐκ τῆς Θρακίας γῆς, μεταναστᾶσαι ἐκείθεν,
συμμετήγαγον τὸ ματαιοπόνημα καὶ τοῦτο ἐν
εἰδωλοποιῖας εἶδει γινόμενον ὑπετόπαζεν.

There are some women, in the country of the Arabs, who despite being uninitiated to the mode of our sacred mysterious liturgy and with no knowledge of the divine doctrines, produce, nevertheless, eye lap in the name of the saint virgin Mother of God. Thus, the people of the Thracian land who were resettled from there [*sc.*, the country of the Arabs], join them in this vain practice, and this falls under the notion of idolatry.

...However, continued Nicephorus, we do not practice anything similar, and, therefore, the charges of idolatry to us are unfounded⁵¹. This passage is interesting in respect of popular, low level religiosity, which has been, too, somewhat different.

⁴⁷ Cf. the above account of Nicephorus mentioning oaths as well.

⁴⁸ I omit the final where it is said that Constantine with his army took to flight from a limited contingent of Muslim troops.

⁴⁹ Nina Garsoïan is hesitating which Monophysite patriarch, whether Peter the Fuller or Peter Mongus is meant here (Garsoïan 1960: 46, fn. 77). In fact, the mention of "Theopaschites" points to Peter the Fuller, Patriarch of Antioch (three times between 469/470 and 488), who introduced the "Theopaschite" formula "Who was crucified for us" into the Trisagion and provoked a new Christological schism.

⁵⁰ (Wahlgren 2006: 190): the resettled "heretics" μέχρι τοῦ νῦν τὴν αἵρεσιν τοῦ τυράννου διακρατοῦσιν "hold on to the heresy of the tyrant until now". For the disputed question of the date and the authorship of the work as well as for the ramification of its derivatives, see (Wahlgren 2006: 3*—8*).

⁵¹ Nicephorus, *Refutatio et eversio*, ch. 194 (Featherstone 1997: 310).

purely ideological or Church political reasons⁵⁶, the Armenian region of Theodosiupolis with another Syrian region.

3.5. *Translatio urbis*

From the eastern chronographers it becomes clear that the population of the Theodosiupolis and Melitene regions was resettled without dissolution within the local people but preserved as compact groups. Nicephorus confirmed this impression saying that they created new cities in “Thrace”, which Emperor Constantine successfully defended against Bulgarian attacks⁵⁷. This place is especially important to us and needs to be quoted in more details. As a historical source, the *Breviarium* of Nicephorus is reliable. Here we have a witness that the immigrants to Macedonia established new towns (in plural):

...Κωνσταντῖνος ἤρξε δομεῖσθαι τὰ ἐπὶ Θράκης
πολίσματα, ἐν οἷς οἰκίζει Σύρους καὶ Ἀρμενίους, οὓς
ἔκ τε Μελιτηναίων πόλεως καὶ Θεοδοσιουπόλεως
μετανάστας πεποιήκε, τὰ εἰς τὴν χρεῖαν αὐτοῖς
ἀνήκοντα φιλοτίμως δωρησάμενος. ταῦτα τοίνυν οἱ
Βούλγαροιός ἐπολιζόντο θεασάμενοι, φόρους ἤτουν
παρὰ βασιλεῖ δέξασθαι.

...Constantine started building towns in Thrace in
which he settled Syrians and Armenians, whom he had
transferred from Melitene and Theodosiupolis and
bountifully endowed with all necessities. When the
Bulgarians saw these towns founded, they demanded
taxes from the emperor.

What follows is the history of the successful war led by Constantine against the Bulgarians for defending these towns. It will be never recalled by Nicephorus in his post-815 polemical works.

Nicephorus mentioned “towns”, in plural, which were constructed in “Thrace” for the resettled Armenians and Syrians. Moreover, he added that Emperor Constantine “bountifully endowed” these towns “with all necessities” (τὰ εἰς τὴν χρεῖαν αὐτοῖς ἀνήκοντα φιλοτίμως δωρησάμενος). A. L. Yakobson aptly pointed out that Nicephorus said here about “towns” (πολίσματα) but not “fortresses” (κάστρα) (Yakobson 1968: 206, fn. 41). It is simply impossible that these towns were without stony churches that would have been no less “bountifully endowed”. The earliest post-Byzantine churches in Macedonia patterned after Oriental prototypes are certainly to be attributed to these Syrians and Armenians and not to Slavs and Bulgarians. The dates of their construction must be later than the 750s but not later than 850s and probably even no later than the late 830s (when northern Macedonia became a part of the pagan Bulgarian kingdom).

Theophanes in the parallel place (de Boor 1883/1963: 429) mentioned κάστρα—however, without attributing their construction specifically to the needs of the immigrants. These fortresses were certainly built without any φιλοτιμία (“bountifulness”). Therefore, these accounts of Nicephorus and Theophanes are only partially overlapping and referring to different types of settlements.

The meaning for the Bulgarian culture of the towns mentioned by Nicephorus was especially undermined due to Vasil Zlatarsky who one-sidedly followed Theophanes and, therefore, considered these Syrian and Armenian immigrants to be Paulicians resettled on border fortresses⁵⁸. Zlatarsky’s approach to the data related to these Syrian and Armenian immigrants contributed to the marginalisation of their historical role in the eyes of the modern historians.

⁵⁶ Throughout the whole ninth century, the official (non-Julianist) Armenian Church has been overshadowed with the Syrian Jacobite one, being *de facto* not independent from the Syrians even in her connexions with the Byzantine Church under Patriarch Photius. Cf. (Ter-Minassiantz 1904: 91—93) and, especially (on the activity of Nonnus of Nisibis as the main theologian speaking for the Armenians), (Dorffmann-Lazarev 2004: s. index).

⁵⁷ Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, 73 (Mango 1990: 144/145) txt/tr.

⁵⁸ (Zlatarsky 1918: 267); repeated even by Stancho Vaklinov who was perhaps the first Bulgarian scholar recognising the importance of these immigrants (Vaklinov 1977: 108).

4. Concluding Remarks: *Translatio cultus*

The *translatio urbis*, in our case, is applied to Theodosiupolis and not Melitene. Only the population of Theodosiupolis is reported to be removed in full. Even the Syrian chronographers, not only Lewond, acknowledged the preponderance of Theodosiupolis people within the resettled groups. We have to conclude that a “New Theodosiupolis” must have been appeared in Macedonia shortly after 754.

In such circumstances, we have to expect the local cults of Theodosiupolis and Melitene reappeared and reshaped in Macedonia. There is no room here to discuss this ample topic, but one observation should be provided.

An important local cult in Macedonia is that of the Fifteen Martyrs of Theodosiupolis. This Macedonian Theodosiupolis is localised in the modern city of Strumica. According to their *Passion épique BHG* 1149, the leader of their group was some Bishop Theodore (without his see being named), and their commemoration date is November 28⁵⁹. However, in the calendar of Constantinople that is traceable back to the year 900 approximately, on this day is commemorated Theodore, the bishop of Theodosiupolis in the Great Armenia (Delehay 1902: col. 264). This fact alone is sufficient to demonstrate that the “new” Theodosiupolis in Macedonia was a replica of the “old” Theodosiupolis in the Great Armenia (Karin, Erzurum) and not any of the two *Theodosiupoleis* in Asia Minor, as it was thought previously. The local cult of Bishop Theodore of Theodosiupolis in the Roman Armenia, the main figure of the Council of Theodosiupolis in 591, when the Armenian Chalcedonian Church was established and its first Catholicos John was elected⁶⁰, was transmitted to northern Macedonia, where it became the kernel of the new local cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Theodosiupolis/Strumica.

The cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Strumica is a complicated phenomenon that must be studied *per se*. However, the above data are sufficiently representative to say that this new cult appeared as a tree planted in the grounds of the earlier cult of Theodore of Theodosiupolis/Karin translated from the Great Armenia to Macedonia.

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⁵⁹ *BHG* 1199, § 25; (Κιαπίδου 2015: 134); cf. (Hristova-Shomova 2012: 321—327).

⁶⁰ See, on Theodore of Theodosiupolis, esp. (Garitte 1969/1980).

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