

THE OCHRID LITERARY SCHOOL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BULGARIAN CULTURE

*By Professor EMIL GEORGIEV**

Like the cultural center at Preslav, the literary center at Ochrid was a heart of Bulgarian culture, based on the writings of the church, school system, and on the works of talented writers and pedagogues. The literary culture of the Bulgarian people strongly influenced the literary development of Russia, Serbia and Rumania and it has rightly been said that the center at Ochrid transcended the boundaries of medieval Bulgaria and its impact influenced the literary and cultural development of all Slavonic countries.

The literary school was founded in the Ninth Century, when Kliment, Naoum and other followers of Cyril and Methodius were forced to flee from Greater Moravia and settled on the attractive shores of the Ohrid Lake. Led by Kliment, these enterprising educators dedicated their efforts to the creation in Bulgaria and on the territories of the Southern Slave a cultural center which would continue the movement for spreading enlightenment, which had been frustrated by alien forces in Moravia.

A brief account of the background of the movement would be useful. Methodius's sickness and death in 885 encouraged the enemies of the Orthodox Church and of Slavonic educational institutions and literature, which Cyril and Methodius and their pupils had created in Greater Moravia in the course of more than two decades.

Kliment and Naoum were chained and imprisoned. After long sufferings, hungry and destitute, they made their way towards Bulgaria. Kliment's biographer mentions their confidence that Bulgaria would receive them well. Their hopes were not in vain. The ruling prince gave them a most friendly welcome. In the words of the chronicler: *"When they arrived in the presence of Boris, they were received with due honor and were asked to relate what had occurred."*

Appraising the opportunities created by the arrival of these two highly educated men, Boris (immediately, or gradually) conceived the idea of setting up two cultural centers in his kingdom: the one at Preslav, while Kliment, who expressed the desire of returning to the locality of his birth, was assigned the task of organizing a cultural center in the southwestern part of the Bulgarian State.

Kliment was very active as a pedagogue, metropolitan bishop, writer and church builder. In his Brief Biography we read that *"he spent most of his time at the Illyrian city of Lychnidon, metropolitan city for the surrounding country, which in the Mysian tongue is called Ochrid. . ."*

The literary school grew in importance and had to have a center to direct the spread of culture to the whole region. During the lifetime of Prince Boris, Kliment had started building a monastery at Ochrid, which he dedicated to Saint Panteleymon, whom Boris had chosen as patron saint of the monastery at Preslav. Boris was the principal donor of the monastery and cultural center at Ochrid.

However, the building soon proved too small for its extensive religious, educational and literary work, and a second monastery had to be built. Naoum's biographers tell us that he built it in the year 905

"at the outlet of the Ochrid Lake, including a church dedicated to the Archangel Saints." The means were furnished by the Bulgarian princes Boris and Simeon.

The chronicler describing the event notes: *"A great abode and a temple were built . . . with means provided by the righteous Bulgarian King Mihail-Boris and his son, King Simeon."* The image of King Boris-Mihail, painted as church warden, has been preserved in ancient frescoes of the monastery church. The establishment and activities of Klirnent, Naoum and their disciples at Ochrid was not accidental. The social conditions in Bulgaria were at this time ripe for a new turn in the country's cultural development. The literary school at Ochrid was an institution of the medieval Bulgarian state. Without the social conditions existing in Bulgaria and the prior establishment of a sound state administration, the adoption of Christianity and the progress made by written culture (Bulgaria was the only country on the Balkan Peninsula, outside Byzantium, to make such astonishing progress) the establishment of the Ochrid Literary School would not have been possible.

This cultural institution was set up as a result of the foresight of the enlightened ruler Boris and it flourished during the reign of his son, Simeon. He was the first Bulgarian ruler to realize the significance of Christianity for every medieval state and he abolished the pagan rites. He was not afraid of the opposition of his Boyard nobility and crushed all dissenters, although many of them were his closest friends and followers. He did not hesitate to deal mercilessly with his own son, Vladimir.

King Boris I appointed Slav dignitaries to high offices in his realm. The account which Theophilactus of Ochrid gives of the creation of the Literary School at Ochrid notes the wisdom and statesmanship of the Bulgarian sovereign, King Simeon, succeeding Boris, strengthened the administration of the country and nominated Kliment as the first bishop of Slav-Bulgarian descent.

Kliment and the pedagogues at his school in Preslav worked according to a program given them by the Bulgarian sovereigns Boris and Simeon. In the memory of the people the leader of the school, Kliment, remained as one of the most eminent Bulgarian educators. His biographer called him, *"The first bishop in the Bulgarian language"* and at another place, *"This great and enlightened forefather of the Bulgarians was born of European Mysians, commonly known as Bulgarians."*

Kliment and his assistants at Ochrid worked among people who considered themselves to be an integral part of the rest of the population in the state of Bulgaria. The Yugoslav author D. Tashkovsky claims that there is no document to show that Kliment and his collaborators were Bulgarians. He says that the name "Bulgarians" — among which Kliment and his Ochrid school worked was first mentioned after the destruction of the realm of Samuil in 1018 by Basil II Bulgarochton. The Byzantine Emperor (in the opinion of Tashkovsky) erroneously called Macedonia Bulgaria, while the "real" Bulgaria was to the North of the Balkan Mountain — called Paristrion, or Paradunavon. The Yugoslav author contends that the Patriarchy at Ochrid was also wrongly called Bulgarian, and that this mistake "dragged on" until its closure in 1767. Tashkovsky's views are contradictory to facts. The population among which Kliment and his school worked was called Bulgarian (as far as Mount Athos) even before the conquest of Samouil's kingdom by Basil II. Thus, a charter given by Emperor Roman to the Mount Athos monastery Yoan Kolovsky in the year 6468 from the creation of the World (960 A.D.) notes that in the district around the town of Yeric on the Isthmus linking Mount Athos with the mainland was inhabited by Bulgarian Slavs. The gift made to the monastery included 40 estates which were exempted from paying taxes, in exchange for the land which had belonged to the monastery, and which has been occupied by Bulgarian Slav settlers around Yeric.

The earliest chroniclers mention that Kliment worked among Bulgarians. His biographer - the Metropolitan Bishop of Ochrid, Theophilactus, 11th to 12th Century - notes *"Kliment has given*

us, Bulgarians, everything in the church which glorifies God and his holy saints, everything which is pleasing to the soul."

Theophilactus was himself a Greek, and we have no reason to doubt that it was his desire to be partial to the Bulgarians. Inscriptions on stone pillars at the Southwestern boundary of the Bulgarian State under Boris and Simeon mention that *"the Bulgarian Prince Boris was baptized together with the people given him by the will of God, in the year 866."*

What is the contribution of the Ochrid Literary School to what is known as the Golden Age of Bulgarian culture and literature? In the first place, Kliment gave the orientation and worked out a program for the cultural development of the Bulgarian people in these early times. A militant at heart, after the death of Cyril and Methodius, he continued to work as a leading educator among the Slavonic peoples. His chronicler tells us that he tried to do what his teacher, Methodius, did as bishop and archbishop in Pannonia and Moravia. Kliment was a capable organizer and mobilized an adequate number of enlightened educators to solve the problems involved in his program, showing the way in which these problems could give best results.

Another pupil of Cyril and Methodius — Naoum -- was Kliment's closest assistant and served to establish a direct link between the literary schools at Preslav and Ochrid. Between 886 and 893 Naoum proved his qualities as an outstanding pedagogue. One of the members of the Preslav School, Constantine Preslavski, states that Naoum inspired him in his literary work. His teaching led to the formation of many talented young writers in the Bulgarian capital, who came mostly from the Slav feudal nobility supporting Boris and his policies.

Naoum circulated copies of translations made by Cyril and Methodius of the basic books used in Bulgarian church services. When in 893 King Simeon appointed Kliment as Bishop of Ochrid, he sent Naoum there to replace him in his teaching activities. The Ochrid Literary School was strongly supported by many of the younger pupils of Kliment and Naoum, arriving from Greater Moravia. This explains why the School continued its activities after the death of Kliment and Naoum.

These enlightened educators resisted all foreign encroachments. Thanks to them the Greek language was gradually eliminated from church services, from the schools and in literary developments. The priests and school teachers who had been under Byzantine influence gradually adopted the Slav tongue in church, and literature.

The activities and significance of the Ochrid cultural center were not confined to the Golden Age of Bulgarian culture. The inertia of the start was felt for centuries, even during the days when Bulgaria fell under Ottoman rule for five whole centuries.

Historical documents show that the Slav alphabet and Slav literary developments struck deep roots in

the Bulgarian state and that they placed the organization of the state itself on solid foundations.

A stone inscription which Samouil ordered in 993 shows his desire to protect the Bulgarian state from

the Byzantine Emperor Basil II Bulgarochtonos.

Yoan Vladislav reigned between 1015 and 1018. He, too, had to defend his country against Byzantine aggression. An inscription which he ordered to be made on a stone column mentions him as a *"Bulgarian Sovereign . . . Bulgarian by birth . . . building a fortress to protect the lives*

of the Bulgarians.” These monuments show the Bulgarian traditions in Macedonia, just as the Bulgarian element is expressed on other monuments in Macedonia from the Middle Ages and from the National Revival period.

The literary progress of the School created by Kliment and Naoum during the Ninth and 10th Centuries is illustrated by several major works. In the first place we have the biographies of the founders of the literary center at Ochrid, and interesting accounts of their works. These leading pedagogues were inspired in their work in Macedonia to defend the interests of the Bulgarian state and people against foreign encroachments, attempts at decentralization, and against Greek attempts to assimilate the local population.

The Full Biography of Kliment was written in Greek, while the brief Account of Kliment’s life exists in two versions — Old Bulgarian and Greek. They were written by the Metropolitan Bishops of Ochrid — Theophilactus and Demetrius Homatianus.

Why did the bishops write them ? Both Theophilactus and Homatianus lived among a compact Bulgarian population and called themselves Bulgarian Archbishops. Noting the veneration of the people for Kliment and Naoum, the high clergymen thought it advisable to do something which would create a favorable link with their parishioners. In this way their work formed part of the development of the literary traditions initiated by the Ochrid Literary School.

The writings of Kliment and Naoum reveal the Bulgarian character of the language used by Cyril and Methodius, while the biographies left us by Theophilactus and Homatianus confirm this view regarding the writings of Kliment and Naoum. We should remember that when Cyril and Methodius, accompanied by their disciples had gone to Rome, Pope Adrian had blessed the books they brought with them -- *“translated from Greek into the Bulgarian language.”*

The traditions of the Ochrid Literary School kindled the patriotic spirit and national consciousness of the Bulgarian people during the long centuries of Ottoman rule. The same is true of more recent time — against alien attempts to assimilate the local population.

Editor's Note:

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He was Corresponding Member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Head of Department at the Literary Institute of the Academy, team leader at Bulgarian Encyclopedia, Director of Center for Bulgarian Studies, Deputy president of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, also contributing editor of *Slaviani*, a monthly publication on matters of Slavonic civilization and culture.

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