

Athanasios G. N. Lois

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

loisath99@gmail.com

THE ORIGINS OF THE SLAVS AND THEIR EARLY CULTURAL FORMATION¹

Abstract: This study examines the historical development of the Slavs from their initial settlement in Europe to the formation of their first state structures. Through an analysis of the Eastern, Western, and Southern Slavs, the research explores the factors that contributed to the shaping of early Slavic societies, including internal social structures, migratory movements, and geopolitical transformations. Particular emphasis is placed on the interactions between the Slavs and the Roman and Byzantine Empires, as well as the influences of other groups, such as the Scandinavians in Rus' and the Proto-Bulgars in the Haemus Peninsula. The study also examines the process of Slavic ethnogenesis, focusing on the integration of various populations and the linguistic and cultural formation of the first Slavic states. By analyzing historical sources such as the *Primary Chronicle*, *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, and other significant texts, the research highlights the role of the Slavs in medieval European history. The study concludes by exploring the cultural impact of Byzantium on the Slavic world, setting the foundation for a deeper analysis of Byzantine-Slavic relations.

Keywords: Slavs, Ethnogenesis, Migration, Byzantine Empire, Kievan Rus', Proto-Bulgars, Normanist Theory, Great Moravia, State Formation, Cultural Interaction

The Slavs occupy a distinct and significant place in both European and global history. Early Slavic studies emerged primarily as linguistic and philological inquiries. As early as 1833, Slavic languages were classified as part of the Indo-European family,² a categorization that remains widely accepted in modern scholarship.³ Johann Gottfried Herder's concept of *Volksgeist*—the idea that a nation's spirit is inherently reflected in its language—established linguistics as a crucial tool for tracing Slavic history.⁴

Building on Herder's ideas, Pavel Josef Šafárik (1795–1861) played a pivotal role in shaping Slavic studies, leaving a lasting influence on future scholars. He viewed the Slavs as an integral branch of the Indo-European lineage, arguing that their historical presence predated their first recorded mention in written sources. His perspective was rooted in the broader belief that

¹ This study is part of my master's thesis titled: *"Η επίδραση του Πολιτισμού της Ανατολικής Ρωμαϊκής Αυτοκρατορίας στον κόσμο των Σλάβων"* (The Cultural influence of the Eastern Roman Empire on the Slavic World).

² Bopp 1833; Lubor 1923, 4.

³ Μαλιγκούδης 2006, 74.

⁴ Herder was the first to describe the Slavs as victims of German warriors since the time of Charlemagne. He prophesied that the wheel of history would turn relentlessly, and one day, the hardworking, peaceful, and happy Slavs would awaken from their subjugation and lethargy to revitalize the vast region from the Adriatic to the Carpathians and from the Dnieper to the Moldava River. Herder 1994, 58, 277–280.

all modern nations could trace their origins back to antiquity.⁵ One of the key sources he relied upon was *Getica*, written by Jordanes in 551 CE. In this work, Jordanes identified the Sclaveni and Antes with the Veneti (or Venedi), a people mentioned in much earlier accounts by Pliny the Elder, Tacitus, and Ptolemy. Using this connection as a foundation, Šafárik sought to incorporate the Veneti into the broader Slavic historical narrative. He strongly criticized Tacitus, arguing that he had mistakenly categorized the Veneti among the Germanic tribes. According to Šafárik, they spoke a Slavic language—one that Tacitus likely failed to recognize.⁶ Moreover, in contrast to theories portraying Slavic expansion as the result of violent conquests, Šafárik depicted the early Slavs as agricultural communities that spread peacefully through settlement rather than warfare. He pointed to Procopius' descriptions of Slavic society as inherently democratic, suggesting that this social structure was a key factor in their successful expansion across Europe.⁷

Šafárik not only shaped the historical narrative of the Slavs but also introduced a robust methodological approach to exploring their undocumented past: language. In the absence of written records, linguistic analysis became a crucial tool for historians attempting to reconstruct the early stages of Slavic history. Following Herder's framework, which emphasized language as a defining factor in shaping a civilization's identity and worldview, scholars sought to reconstruct Proto-Slavic—an unwritten language before the mid-9th century—using modern Slavic languages. This linguistic reconstruction, in turn, provided insights into the social and cultural life of the early Slavs before the emergence of written documents in their language.

Polish scholar Tadeusz Wojciechowski (1839–1919) was the first to utilize toponyms as a means of retracing Slavic history.⁸ Building on this approach, A. L. Pogodin attempted to locate the Slavic *Urheimat* (original homeland) by analyzing river names. He put forward a highly influential theory, arguing that the Slavic homeland was in Podolia and Volhynia, as these regions contained the oldest known rivers with Slavic-derived names.

The linguistic method was further expanded by Polish botanist J. Rostafiński, who incorporated botanical evidence into the debate. He observed that Slavic languages lacked native words for certain trees, such as beech, laurel, and yew—suggesting that these species were absent from the original Slavic homeland and that their names were later borrowed from Germanic languages. In contrast, all Slavic languages contained an ancient word for the cornelian cherry, indicating that the Slavic *Urheimat* must have been within the natural range of this tree. Based on the current distribution of these species, Rostafiński identified the Slavic homeland in the marshlands along the Pripyat River, in the Polesie region.

Jan Peisker (1851–1933) took Rostafiński's theory to its logical extreme. For him, the Slavs were not merely inhabitants of the marshlands but rather “sons and products of the swamp,” emphasizing the deep connection between their environment and their cultural development.⁹

⁵ Šafárik 1844, 1. Šafárik, who opened the Pan-Slavic Congress in Prague in June 1848, shared these views with his colleague František Palacký. See Palacký 1868, 74–89. For the Manifesto to the European Nations penned by Palacký and adopted by the Slavic Congress, see Pech 1969, 133. For Palacký's vision of the early Slavs, see Frederick 1970, 84–85.

⁶ Šafárik 1844, 75, 78. There is still no comprehensive study on the impact of Šafárik's ideas on modern linguistic theories of Common Slavic. These ideas were not entirely original. Before Šafárik, the Polish historian Wawrzyniec Surowiecki (1769–1827) used Pliny's *Natural History*, Tacitus' *Germania*, and Ptolemy's *Geography* as sources for Slavic history.

⁷ Curta 2001, 7.

⁸ Wojciechowski 1873. See Szafran-Szadkowska 1983, 115

⁹ Curta 2001, 8.

Despite strong criticism, these theories remained widely popular and continue to appear in modern narratives of early Slavic history. Another crucial region for understanding the history of the early Slavs is the Balkan Peninsula, historically known as the Haemus Peninsula.

The Haemus Peninsula, as it is referred to in historical Greek sources, forms the southeastern extremity of Europe, now commonly known as Southeastern Europe. The term "Balkans" originates from the Ottoman word *balkan*, meaning "mountain," and was adopted following the Ottoman conquest of the region in the 14th century. The Haemus Peninsula is the third largest in Europe, following the Iberian Peninsula (which includes Spain and Portugal) and the Italian Peninsula. Unlike the first two, which are separated from the rest of Europe by mountain ranges, the Haemus Peninsula is delineated by the Sava¹⁰ and Danube rivers, which serve as natural water boundaries.

Before the arrival of the Slavs, the Haemus Peninsula had been inhabited by various Illyrian, Celtic, and Thracian tribes,¹¹ which is why it was originally referred to as Illyricum. Over time, Roman power expanded beyond the Italian borders, eventually incorporating the Haemus Peninsula into the empire.¹² Roman rule lasted for approximately four centuries, bringing significant transformations and establishing a strong administrative system.¹³

However, by the 3rd century CE, the Roman Empire began to show signs of decline and stagnation. Between 235 CE and the following fifty years, the imperial throne changed hands twenty times. Meanwhile, plagues, famine, continuous warfare, labor shortages, and declining birth rates exacerbated the crisis, deepening the sense of instability. In this weakened state, even relatively minor barbarian groups managed to launch incursions into the empire's eastern frontier, crossing the Danube and attacking its southern territories.

Initially, the Romans were able to repel invasions and push back enemy forces. However, as attacks became more frequent and intense, the Roman army struggled to contain them—especially against the Goths, who crossed the Danube from the south, pillaging and destroying everything in their path.¹⁴ Although the Romans successfully expelled the Goths in 269 CE, the Haemus Peninsula remained vulnerable to continuous raids from various barbarian groups.¹⁵ The region's strategic importance grew significantly after 330 CE when the empire's

¹⁰ The Sava River (Sávos or Sávvas), approximately 550 kilometers in length, is a tributary of the Danube. Its sources are located in the Alps, and it was the largest river of the former Yugoslavia.

¹¹ The Illyrians controlled the largest and most extensive part of the former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, the Thracians occupied the area extending between the Morava and Axios rivers to the east, as well as the Rhodope mountain range in the southern regions.

¹² With the expansion of the Roman Empire, Roman culture spread among various peoples and tribes that had already been influenced by Greek civilization. This process advanced slowly, as the local population strongly resisted Roman efforts. Eventually, however, Roman culture prevailed.

¹³ New roads and bridges were constructed, new cities and fortresses were established, and industry and trade developed. This growth peaked in the 2nd century AD. Many modern cities of the peninsula trace their origins back to the earliest Roman colonies, including Adrianople, Nicopolis, Sofia (formerly Serdica), Niš in Serbia (formerly Naissus), Belgrade (formerly Singidunum), and others.

¹⁴ The Goths were a Germanic tribe who, during the second half of the 2nd century AD, abandoned their ancestral homelands in the Scandinavian regions and initially moved to the Baltic Sea before eventually settling near the Black Sea. In 267/268 AD, the Goths advanced south of the Dniester River with an enormous army, unprecedented for the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Estimates of their fleet's size vary, with some sources suggesting 500 ships, while others estimate up to 2,000. In total, their force included 320,000 infantry units. Although the accuracy of these figures remains uncertain, it is certain that this military force was the largest to have ever invaded Roman territory in the 3rd century AD. The decisive confrontation with the Roman legions took place in the ancient city of Naissus, present-day Niš in Serbia, where the Romans managed to repel them.

¹⁵ Станојевић 1926, 4-5.

capital shifted from Rome to Constantinople. This transformation elevated the Haemus Peninsula to a leading imperial province, with Thessalonica emerging as a prominent center, known as the Co-Empress of the Empire.

During the 5th century, the Haemus Peninsula proved more resilient to barbarian invasions compared to the western provinces of the Roman Empire. However, certain groups, such as the Visigoths, managed to breach the Roman defenses along the Danube and launch devastating raids into the region. Around 400 CE, the Visigoths moved westward, advancing into Italy and eventually reaching Rome, which they sacked in 410 CE. In the following decades, various barbarian tribes—including the Franks, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Suebi, Heruli, Burgundians, Angles, and Saxons—carried out invasions across the western provinces of the empire. In 476 CE, Odoacer, the leader of the Heruli, forced the last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, to abdicate, marking the definitive collapse of the Western Roman Empire.¹⁶

In the eastern part of the empire, as recorded by the historian Procopius, numerous attempts were made to restore unity and revive the past, though none achieved lasting success. One of the most significant efforts was led by Justinian (527–565), who managed to reclaim Africa from the Vandals, Italy from the Ostrogoths, and part of Spain from the Visigoths. However, within a century of his death, the western provinces were permanently lost.¹⁷ During the same period, the Haemus Peninsula saw the arrival of the Avars, Huns, Bulgars, and large groups of Slavs crossing the Danube. Meanwhile, Arab tribes, inspired by the teachings of Muhammad, expanded across North Africa and advanced toward the borders of Asia Minor. Under this mounting pressure, the already weakened empire continued to deteriorate. As a result, the first half of the 7th century marked the transformation of the Eastern Roman Empire into a Greco-Roman state. The most significant development for Southeastern Europe during this time was the large-scale settlement of the Slavs in the region.

The period from the early 6th century, when the Slavs first emerged on the diplomatic and political stage of the Byzantine Empire, to the mid-9th century, when they had become a significant political force both along the northern borders and within the empire itself, marks the most crucial phase in Byzantine-Slavic relations. This era was defined, on one hand, by the rapid development of Slavic societies, which transitioned from tribal organization to structured states, and on the other, by the shifting geopolitical focus of Byzantium. The empire gradually distanced itself from its Roman heritage, evolving into a medieval state with its center of gravity in Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, and the Middle East.¹⁸

During this same period, new groups emerged on the international stage, including the Huns and the Avars, who originated from Mongolia and advanced into the Haemus Peninsula from the Asian steppes. The Slavs, already settled north of the region, initially suffered under the Avars' expansion. However, after 558 CE, some Slavic groups allied with the Avars and joined their military campaigns against Byzantium, though without achieving decisive results. Despite these assaults, the Danube remained the empire's stable northern frontier until 582 CE.¹⁹

¹⁶ Odoacer was the first barbarian who reigned over Italy, over a people who had once asserted their just superiority above the rest of mankind." Edward 1998, 716.

¹⁷ Procopius was the most prominent historian during the reign of Justinian in Byzantium. He was born in Caesarea of Palestine between 490 and 507 and passed away around 562. His most significant work on the subject is *Υπὲρ τῶν πολέμων* (*De Bellis*). It consists of eight books, the first seven of which (written in 551 AD) recount Justinian's wars against the Persians, Vandals, Goths, and other barbarian tribes. Νυσταζοπούλου – Πελεκίδου 1995, 10.

¹⁸ After the works of P.J. Šafárik and L. Niederle, see Łowmiański 1963; Eisner 1966.

¹⁹ In the year 582, the Avars captured the city of Sirmium, known today as Sremska Mitrovica. This conquest created a significant gap in the defense of the northern borders, exposing all the southern regions of the peninsula, including the Peloponnese. According to the professor and Byzantinist Georgiy

Meanwhile, the Avars' arrival in the northern Haemus Peninsula led certain Slavic tribes to migrate further north, choosing to escape Avar domination rather than submit to foreign rule.

The 6th century marks the first documented historical references to the Slavs and the beginning of their officially recorded history. Byzantine sources from this period refer to them as *Sclavenoi*, *Sklavoi*, or *Sthlávai*, while Western sources from the 7th century use the terms *Scloveni* or *Sclavi*.²⁰ However, the Slavs themselves referred to their people as *Sloveni*, though the exact etymology of the name remains unknown. According to Latin and Byzantine sources from the 6th century, the Slavs were divided into three major groups: the *Veneti*, the *Antes*, and the *Sloveni*. These Slavic populations had already settled in the forested and steppe regions north of the Black Sea. Gradually, they began migrating southward, following the course of the Danube, establishing settlements in its central basin, and advancing further toward the borders of Pannonia.

The Slavs sought permanent settlement in fertile and cultivable regions such as Moesia, Thrace, Macedonia, and the Peloponnese.²¹ However, at the time, Byzantium lacked the necessary military and economic resources to confront them effectively. The empire was already engaged in conflicts with the Persians and, from the 7th century onward, faced growing threats from the Arabs. Additionally, the potential loss of its eastern provinces and the internal crisis—intensified by the century-long period of Iconoclasm—prevented Byzantium from exerting control over its immediate territories, both in the 8th century and the first half of the 9th century.

Despite these challenges, there are indications of a new Byzantine policy that acknowledged the growing influence of Slavic societies, which had become increasingly receptive to external influences, particularly in material culture. At the time, material culture was not tied to a single ethnic identity. In the broader region of the Black Sea and Pannonia, a transethnic cultural sphere known as "Martynovka" had emerged, shaped by the contributions of various groups. This cultural development was influenced by Byzantine models, which spread through trade, diplomatic gifts, and even taxation. As a result, Byzantine material culture left a significant imprint on Slavic traditions. This influence became particularly evident in the first half of the 9th century, when Slavic culture began to gain greater autonomy and establish its own artistic identity.²²

A defining characteristic of Slavic society was the patriarchal family structure, with multiple families forming larger communal units known as *zadruga*. These communities were led by a ruler, referred to in Byzantine sources as a *Rigas*, *Archon*, or *Exarch*.²³ Unfortunately, knowledge of Slavic prehistory up to the early Christian centuries remains limited, as they left behind no definitive archaeological traces that can be attributed to them with absolute certainty.²⁴ However, it is known that their primary economic activities revolved around agriculture and livestock farming. The Slavs held deep respect for women, who were primarily responsible for household tasks, weaving, and child-rearing. Additionally, monogamy was a fundamental principle in their social structure.

As previously mentioned, the history of the Slavs and their settlements begins in the 6th century CE, characterized by the waves of migration and efforts to establish permanent communities. Before delving into a more detailed analysis of the individual Slavic groups, it is

Ostrogorsky, the settlement of the Slavs in the region began in the 6th century and continued with a large influx of Slavic settlers in the early 7th century. Ostrogorski 1970, 38.

²⁰ Νυσταζοπούλου – Πελεκίδου 2000b, 33 – 34.

²¹ See Hauptmann 1979-1981, 137; Lemerle 1979-1981.

²² Avenarius 2008, 34.

²³ Јиречек 1952, 42.

²⁴ For references to sources on the history of the Slavs, see Litavrin 1991; Византијски Извори за Историју Народа Југославије 1986; and Атлагић & Милутиновић 2002.

useful to first present a general categorization that will facilitate their study. According to modern classifications, the Slavs are divided into three major groups: the Eastern Slavs (Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians), the Western Slavs (Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks), and the Southern Slavs (Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Bulgarians, and other Slavic populations of the Haemus Peninsula).²⁵

One of the defining aspects of Slavic history is the continuous fragmentation of their peoples, leading to the formation of an increasing number of distinct nations. For instance, while medieval sources refer to only three Slavic groups in the Haemus Peninsula—Serbs, Croats, and Bulgarians—today, this number has expanded to seven, with the addition of Slovenes, Slavo-Macedonians, Bosniaks, and Montenegrins. A similar process occurred with the Slavic languages. Old Church Slavonic, which was widely understood by Slavic communities across Central and Southeastern Europe during the medieval period, has since been replaced by distinct languages such as Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Slavo-Macedonian, and Bulgarian. The renowned Polish linguist Baudoin de Courtenay (+1929) argued that "there is no single Slavic culture common to all Slavs." This assertion stems from the fact that the widespread dispersion of Slavic groups, many of whom lived in primitive social structures, led to significant cultural differentiation among them.²⁶

Today, the Slavs constitute the majority population in thirteen European countries, with an estimated total of approximately 280 million people. These countries include Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and the Republic of North Macedonia. Furthermore, the three main Slavic tribes mentioned before will be examined in greater detail.

Eastern Slavs (Modern Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine)

The ancestors of modern Russians and other Eastern Slavs belonged to various Slavic tribes, which, according to some scholars, originated from the forested marshlands of Pinsk (Pripyat) in present-day Belarus.²⁷ Their migration into western Russia occurred gradually in two distinct waves. The first wave moved from Kyiv toward the regions of Suzdal and Murom, while the second originated from Polotsk (in modern Belarus) and led to the settlement of populations in Novgorod and Rostov.²⁸ By the 7th century, the Eastern Slavs had become the dominant population in western Russia. Over time, through a slow and peaceful process, they assimilated the local Finno-Ugric peoples, including the Merya, Muromians, and Meshchera.²⁹

The oldest known Russian source is *The Russian Primary Chronicle (Povest Vremennykh Let)*, dating back to 1116.³⁰ This work, which combines historical and literary texts, traces the history of Russia from its early political formations up to the era of Vladimir. Scholars who have studied the *Primary Chronicle* are divided into two opposing schools of thought regarding the role of the Scandinavians in the formation of the first Russian state. Proponents of the "Normanist" theory argue that the Scandinavians played a crucial role in shaping the political and cultural life of Russia, directly contributing to the establishment of the first Russian state in Kyiv.³¹ In contrast, the "anti-Normanist" perspective maintains that the Kievan state emerged

²⁵ Νυσταζοπούλου – Πελεκίδου 2000b, 13.

²⁶ Λόης 2017, 55.

²⁷ Curta 2001, 8.

²⁸ Christian 1998, 6–7.

²⁹ Reuter 1995, 494–497.

³⁰ *Povest Vremennykh Let*, Lihačev & Romanov 1950.

³¹ The Kievan Rus state encompassed present-day Belarus, the northern half of Ukraine, and the central and

organically as a result of the gradual development of the Eastern Slavs themselves, rather than external influence³²

In reality, both processes likely played a role in the formation of the first Russian state. Since both schools of thought rely on the same source—the *Primary Chronicle*—neither can completely dismiss the other nor claim exclusive credit for the founding of Kievan Rus. I believe that the political unification of the region occurred in the 9th century under Scandinavian leadership, but it was based on the already established and developed Slavic cities of Novgorod and Kyiv.

Western Slavs (Modern Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia)

The region corresponding to present-day Poland was a site of various invasions from the early centuries of the Christian era. However, from the late 5th to early 6th century, Slavic tribes began settling in the lowlands of the Vistula and Oder rivers, where they established the first organized communities.³³ By the 9th century, a form of statehood had started to take shape, but it was not fully consolidated until the late 10th century, when Mieszko I of Poland unified the region, founding the Piast dynasty.³⁴

Slavic tribes settled in what is now Slovakia during the 5th century. By the 7th century, western Slovakia had become the center of Samo's empire.³⁵ In the 8th century, a Slavic state known as the Principality of Nitra emerged, with its ruler, Pribina, establishing the first recorded Christian church in present-day Slovakia in 828.³⁶ By 833, this principality, together with neighboring Moravia, formed the core of Great Moravia.³⁷ The most flourishing period of this Slavic empire began in 863 with the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius during the reign of Duke Rastislav.³⁸

Southern Slavs (Modern Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Other Slavic Peoples of the Haemus Peninsula)

For the first two centuries following their settlement in the Haemus Peninsula—from the 7th to the 9th century—historical records are scarce. Initially, the Serbs,³⁹ Croats, Bulgarians, and other South Slavic tribes were collectively referred to simply as Slavs. One of the most important sources on their history is *De Administrando Imperio*,⁴⁰ written by Emperor and historian Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959). According to this work, the Serbs were referred to as "Serbloi." Emperor Heraclius (610–641) was the one who, after 626 CE, permitted the settlement of the Serbs and Croats in the depopulated regions of Illyria and Pannonia within the Haemus Peninsula. This decision was primarily strategic, as Heraclius sought to use the Slavs as allies against the growing threat of the Avars, who were exerting pressure on the empire.

northwestern part of European Russia. The inhabitants of these three regions constitute the Eastern Slavs. The Kievan Rus (*Kievskaja Rus*) collapsed between 1237 and 1240 due to the Mongol invasions.

³² Klejn 2009.

³³ Buko 2014, 36, 62; Brather 2004, 78–81.

³⁴ Dabrowski 2014, 21–22.

³⁵ Curta 2001, 109.

³⁶ Granatir 2005, 288.

³⁷ Drulák 2012, 91.

³⁸ Λόης 2017, 358.

³⁹ For references to sources on the history of the Serbians, see: Λόης 2017; Атлагић – Милутиновић 2002, 68–73; Popović & Kusovac & Desanka Milošević 1992; Новаковић 1981.

⁴⁰ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* (*Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ρωμανόν*).

The Croats settled in the Haemus Peninsula in the 7th century CE, having been invited by Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610–641).⁴¹ They established themselves in Pannonia, corresponding to present-day mainland Croatia, as well as along the Adriatic coast, where they encountered remnants of Illyrian and Celtic populations, with whom they gradually integrated. Their name, meaning "highlanders," suggests an origin in the Carpathian region, although Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus does not clearly define their original homeland. One of the earliest Croatian rulers mentioned in historical sources is Višeslav, who reigned between the late 7th and early 8th centuries CE. His seat of power was the coastal town of Nin, near present-day Zadar.⁴²

Valuable sources for studying Croatian history include several chronicles and historical texts written across different periods. One of the most notable is the *Historia Salonitana* by Archdeacon Thomas of Split, composed between 1201 and 1268. Equally significant is the *Chronicle of Korčula*, dating back to the 12th century, as well as the *Chronicon Zagradiense* (*Chronicle of the Diocese of Zagreb*), which originates from the 14th century. Another important source is the *Chronicon Regnum Sclavorum*, also known as the *Ljetopis popa Dukljanina*, attributed to the Priest of Duklja.⁴³

The Slovenes settled in the region around present-day Trieste in the 6th century. Initially, they successfully resisted the Avars for an extended period, but by the late 8th century, they had succumbed to Charlemagne and were later incorporated into successive Germanic kingdoms. During the Middle Ages, the Slovenes were unable to establish an independent state. However, unlike other Balkan peoples, they were never conquered by the Ottomans and did not suffer from prolonged warfare.⁴⁴

In the late 7th century, the Bulgars, led by Asparuh (c. 644–701 CE), established themselves in the region between the Haemus Peninsula and the Danube. Although the Slavic population was predominant in the area, the Proto-Bulgars⁴⁵ managed to retain control for another two centuries.⁴⁶

Launching their raids from the Danube estuary, the Bulgaro-Slavs conducted aggressive incursions into Byzantine territories between 670 and 680 CE. These continuous attacks forced Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV (668–685 CE) to negotiate a treaty with Asparuh in 681 CE, officially recognizing the establishment of an independent and self-governing Bulgarian state on former Byzantine lands. As a result, 681 CE is considered the founding year of the First Bulgarian State. Over time, the process of ethnogenesis gave rise to the Bulgarian identity through the gradual merging of the Proto-Bulgars, the Slavs, and the local population, which included Romans and Hellenized Thracians. The Proto-Bulgars contributed their name to the new nation, while the Slavs shaped its linguistic identity.⁴⁷

The history of the Slavs is a complex and dynamically evolving process, beginning with their initial settlement in Europe and extending to the formation of their first political structures. From the Eastern, Western, and Southern Slavs to the emergence of powerful state entities, their trajectory has been shaped by migrations, cultural interactions, and geopolitical transformations.

The establishment of the first Slavic states was driven by both internal social developments and external influences, including interactions with the Roman and Byzantine

⁴¹ For references to sources on the history of the Croats, see: Ferjančić 1996, 117–154; Pavličević 2007.

⁴² Λόης 2014, 405.

⁴³ Λόης 2014, 406.

⁴⁴ Νυσταζοπούλου – Πελεκίδου 2000, 172–173.

⁴⁵ The Proto-Bulgarians originated from Central Asia and belonged to a Turanic tribe.

⁴⁶ Ταρνανίδης 2005, 14.

⁴⁷ Λόης 2015, 338–339.

Empires as well as conflicts with barbarian and Germanic tribes. Additionally, the political and military expansion of various groups—such as the Scandinavians in Rus' and the Proto-Bulgars in the Haemus Peninsula—played a crucial role in shaping early Slavic societies.

Between the 7th and 10th centuries, the Slavs developed distinct identities and state structures, while their interactions with other civilizations contributed to their ethnogenesis. Within this context, Byzantium's role in shaping the cultural and political identity of the Slavic world was pivotal.

Bibliography

Sources

Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando Imperio* (Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ρωμανόν), Immanuel Bekker, Bonn 1840.

Povest Vremennykh Let (Το Ρωσικό Χρονικό του Νέστορα), Dmitry Lihačev – Boris Romanov, Moscow - Leningrad 1950.

Византијски Извори за Историју Народа Југославије (1986), Vizantološki Institut SANU, Special Editions, vol. 18, Belgrade.

Research Aids

Greek-Language Sources

Avenarius Alexander (2008): *Ο Βυζαντινός πολιτισμός και οι Σλάβοι*, Μετάφραση – Επιμέλεια: Δεληκάρη Αγγελική, Εκδόσεις Δημ. Ν. Παπαδήμα, Αθήνα.

Λόης Γεώργιος – Νεκτάριος (2017): *Ιστορία της Σερβίας – Πολιτική και Εκκλησιαστική*, εκδόσεις Έννοια, Αθήνα.

Λόης Γεώργιος – Νεκτάριος (2014): «Ο εκχριστιανισμός των Κροατών. Απόψεις για τη ζωή και το έργο των διαφωτιστών των Σλάβων Κυρίλλου και Μεθοδίου», *Προβληματισμοί Εθνικοί και Θρησκευτικοί επίκαιροι*, τ. γ', Χριστιανική Μακεδονία. Η ενδοχώρα της στον κόσμο της Ορθοδοξίας της Χερσονήσου του Αίμου, ΙΕΘΠ, Θεσσαλονίκη, σσ. 404-427.

Λόης Γεώργιος – Νεκτάριος (2015): «Σύντομη ιστορία της Βουλγαρικής Ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας», *Επιστημονική Επιθεώρηση του Μεταπτυχιακού Προγράμματος «Σπουδές στην Ορθόδοξη Θεολογία»*, Σχολής Ανθρωπιστικών Σπουδών - Ελληνικού Ανοικτού Πανεπιστημίου, Τόμος ΣΤ', Πάτρα, σσ. 335-358.

Μαλιγκούδης Φαίδων (2006): *Ελληνισμός και Σλαβικός Κόσμος*, Εκδόσεις Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη.

Νυσταζοπούλου – Πελεκίδου Μαρία (2000): *Οι βαλκανικοί λαοί, Από την Τουρκική κατάκτηση στην εθνική αποκατάσταση (14ος – 15ος αι.)*, Ίδρυμα Γουλάνδρη – Χόρν, Αθήνα.

Νυσταζοπούλου – Πελεκίδου Μαρία (1995): *Πηγές Βαλκανικής Ιστορίας 6^{ου}-10^{ου} αιώνας (Επιλογή κειμένων)*, Εκδόσεις Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη.

Νυσταζοπούλου – Πελεκίδου Μαρία (2000b): *Σλαβικές Εγκαταστάσεις στη Μεσαιωνική Ελλάδα – Γενική επισκόπηση*, Ίδρυμα Γουλάνδρη – Χόρν, Αθήνα.

Ταρνανίδης Ιωάννης (2005): *Ιστορία των Σλαβικών Ορθόδοξων Εκκλησιών*, τ. Α': Ιστορία της Βουλγαρικής Εκκλησίας, Εκδοτικός Οίκος Αδελφών Κυριακίδη, Θεσσαλονίκη.

Foreign-Language Sources

- Атлагић Марко & Милутиновић Бранислав (2002): *Извори за историју Срба до XV века*, Косовска Митровица – Рача.
- Brather Sebastian (2004): "The Archaeology of the Northwestern Slavs (Seventh To Ninth Centuries)", *East Central Europe*, Advisory Editor: Maciej Janowski, Brill - Schöningh, Netherlands.
- Buko Andrzej (2014): *Bodzia. A Late Viking-Age Elite Cemetery in Central Poland*, Brill, Leiden.
- Christian David (1998): *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Curta Florin (2001): *The Making of Slavs – History and Archaeology of the lower Danube region c. 500-700*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Dabrowski Patrice (2014): *Poland: The First Thousand Years*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Drulák Petr (2012): "Czech geopolitics: struggling for survival", *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe? - Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises*, Advisory Editor: Guzzini Stefano, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Edward Gibbon (1998): *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chapter XXXVI, Wordsworth, London, (originally published between 1776 and 1788).
- Eisner Jan (1966): *Rukovet' slovanske*, Academia Nakl. Ceskoslov. Akad., Prague.
- Ferjančić Božidar (1996): «Dolazak Hrvata i Srba na Balkansko poluostrvo», *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 35, Beograd, st. 117-154.
- Franz Bopp (1833): *Vergleichende Grammatik des Sanskrit, Send, Armenischen, Griechischen, Lateinischen, Litauischen, Altslavischen, Gothischen und Deutschen*, Ernest Dümmler, Berlin.
- Frederick Zacek Joseph (1970): *Palacky. The Historian as Scholar and Nationalist*, Mouton, The Hague and Paris.
- Granatir Alexander June (2005): "Slovakia". In Frucht, Richard (ed.). *Eastern Europe: An Introduction to the People, Lands and Culture*. ABC Clio.
- Hauptmann Ludmil (1979-1981): «Les Rapports des Byzantins avec les Slaves et les Avars pendant la seconde moitié du VI siècle», *Le monde Byzantine*, т. 1-2, Paris.
- Herder Johann Gottfried (1994): *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XVII, Olms-Weidmann, Hildesheim and New York.
- Јиречек Константин (1952): *Историја Срба*, т. I., Београд.
- Klejn Lev (2009): *Spor o varjagach. Istorija protivostojanija i argumenty storon*, St. Peterburg.
- Lemerle Paul (1979-1981): *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint-Demetrus et la penetration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, [Le monde Byzantine], т. 1-2, Paris.
- Litavrin Gennady (1991): *Svod pismennyh izvestij o slavianach*, Moskva.
- Lowmianski Henryk (1963): *Poczatki Polski*, v. 1-2, Warszawa.
- Lubor Niederle (1923): *Manuel de l'antiquité slave. L'histoire*, Champion, Paris.
- Новаковић Релја (1981): *Где се налазила Србија од VII до XII века*, Belgrade.
- Ostrogorski Georgiy (1970): *Vizantijsko carstvo i okolni svet u VII veku*, Beograd.
- Palacky Frantisek (1868): *Die Geschichte des Hussitentums und Prof. Constantin Höfler kritische Studien*, F. Tempsky, Prague.
- Pavličević Dragutin (2007): *Povijest Hrvatske*, VI izdanje, Zagreb.
- Pech Stanley (1969): *The Czech Revolution of 1848*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Popović Nikola & Kusovac Nikola & Milošević Desanka (1992): *Illustrated History of the Serbs. The settlement of Serbs on Balkans and the first state*, Belgrade.

Reuter Timothy (1995): *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, V. 3, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Schafarik Paul Joseph (1844): *Slawische Alterthümer*, 2 vols, Wilhelm Engelmann, Leipzig.

Станојевић Станоје (1926): *Историја српскога народа*, Belgrade.

Szafran-Szadkowska Lucyna (1983): *Zagadnienie etnogenezy słowian w historiografii polskiej w okresie od średniowiecza do końca XIX stulecia*, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Powstańców Śląskich, Opole.

Wojciechowski Tadeusz (1873): *Chrobacja. Rozbiór starożytności słowiańskich*, Akademia Umiejętności, Cracow.

Атанасиос Г. Н. Лонс

ПОЧЕЦИ СЛОВЕНА И ЊИХОВО РАНО КУЛТУРНО ОБЛИКОВАЊЕ

Ова студија проучава историјски развој Словена од њиховог првобитног насељавања у Европи до формирања првих државних структура. Анализом источних, западних и јужних Словена, истраживање разматра факторе који су допринели обликовању раних словенских друштава, укључујући унутрашње друштвене структуре, миграционе токове и геополитичке трансформације. Посебна пажња посвећена је интеракцијама Словена са Римским и Византијским царством, као и утицају других народа, попут Скандинаваца у Кијевској Русији и Протобугара на Балканском полуострву. Студија такође разматра процес етногенезе Словена, фокусирајући се на интеграцију различитих популација и језичко-културну формацију првих словенских држава. Анализом историјских извора као што су *Несторов летопис*, *De Administrando Imperio* Константина VII Порфирогенита и других значајних текстова, истраживање наглашава улогу Словена у средњовековној европској историји. Студија се завршава истраживањем културног и црквеног утицаја Византије на словенски свет, постављајући темеље за дубљу анализу византијско-словенских односа.