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НИКОЛАЙ ХРИСИМОВ, *България и европейският Запад през първите десетилетия на IX век* [NIKOLAY HRISIMOV, *Bulgaria and the European West in the First Decades of the Ninth Century*], Изток–Запад, София 2023, pp. 294.

The author a distinguished Bulgarian scholar from the St. Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, aimed to present the Bulgars' relations with the Avars (until the end of the latter's statehood) and the Franks (until the end of the third decade of the eleventh century).

The work is divided into six essential parts, enhanced with a foreword by Plamen Pavlov (*Когато България беше Велика сила в Европа*, p. 7–9), a preface (p. 11–14), conclusions (p. 247–252), a bibliography (p. 253–280), a list of abbreviations (p. 283), an annex (p. 283–287), and a summary in English (p. 281–294).

The first chapter (*За панонския произход на кан Крум и „Крумовата династия“*) [*On the Pannonian origin of Khan Krum and “Krum’s dynasty”*, p. 17–24] deals with the well-established view that Khan Krum was descended from the Pannonian Bulgars and was the founder of a new dynasty. The author points out that there is no evidence to support this view, which was first put forward at the end of the eighteenth century by the Austrian scholar, Johann Christian von Engel. However, there are reasons to believe that Krum was related to Kardam, the last known Bulgar ruler before Krum.

Chapter 2 (*България и авари в отношенията си в периода на съществуване на ранносредновековната българска държавност*) [*Bulgaria and the Avars in their mutual relations in the early Middle Ages*, p. 25–87] is devoted

to the history of Avar-Bulgar relations (which are unevenly reflected in primary sources), focusing on the controversy surrounding the Bulgars' participation in the eradication of the Avars' state.

Chapter 3 (*Какво цели кан Крум сподновяване договора от 716 г. Западната връзка*) [*What were Krum’s goals in resuming the agreement of 716. The Western context*, p. 89–104] discusses Krum's demand in 812 to resume the Bulgar-Byzantine agreement of 716. According to the author, the agreement contained a reference to the title of Caesar held by Tervel. The demand in question may have arisen as a result of Michael I Rangabe's recognition of Charles I's imperial title in April 812. We are told that Krum found this to be the right moment to secure for himself, under the renewed Bulgar-Byzantine agreement, the title reflecting the position of the Bulgarian ruler after the victory over Nikephoros I in 811.

Chapter 4 (*Българо-франкийският сблъсък в Централна Европа през 20–30-те години на IX век*) [*The Bulgaro-Frankish clash in Central Europe in the 820s and the 830s of the 9th century*, p. 105–174] analyses the causes and course of the conflict that arose in the 820s between Bulgaria and the Franks over the areas that had once been part of the Avars' Khaganate. As a result of the annexation of the lands of the Slav tribes, who sought to win and preserve their independence, the Bulgars began to border with the Franks, with whom

they first engaged in long negotiations and then in an armed conflict.

Chapter 5 (*За произхода на комитатите в ранносредновековната българска държава и някои проблеми, свързани с тях*) [*On the origin of the komitaty in Early Medieval Bulgaria and on some of the problems that arise in this connection*, p. 175–197] offers N. Hrisimov's perspective on the origin of "komitaty" (counties) in the Bulgarian state. The widely held view is that the komitaty were modelled on Byzantine themes. However, the author provides serious arguments in favour of linking them with the Franks' marches.

The sixth and final chapter (*Земите на Първото българско царство през IX век на север и запад от Карпатите – безспорно и спорно*) [*The Lands of the First Bulgarian State to the north and west of the Carpathian mountains – indisputably and arguably*, p. 198–246] is devoted to the issue of Bulgaria's north-western border in the ninth century. The author's analysis is based mainly on archaeological evidence. In dealing with this issue, one can hardly hope to offer clear-cut answers. According to the author, beyond the Carpathian mountains, Bulgarian influences can certainly be identified as having existed in the present Romanian city of Alba Iulia. N. Hrisimov takes a definitely

negative view of the widely held opinion that the lands between Tiša and Danube belonged to the Bulgarian state in the early Middle Ages. He points out that the only territories west of Tiša that could have been annexed to the Bulgarian state were those located east of the so-called Great Roman rampart in Bačka.

The book under review is a successful attempt at showing Bulgaria's relations with its western neighbours: the Avars and the Franks (until the end of the third decade of the ninth century). The author has provided a thorough analysis of the available sources, arriving at original conclusions, which often contradict earlier findings. I am convinced that Hrisimov's book will inspire further discussion of Bulgarian rulers' western policy in the first three decades of the ninth century.

Translated by Artur Mękowski

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