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ESSENCE AND WAYS OF INFILTRATION OF THE PAULICIAN HERESY IN THE MEDIEVAL BULGARIAN LANDS*

Abstract. Paulicianism in Bulgaria has its origins in the forced resettlement of Paulicians from Asia Minor and the eastern regions of the empire to Northern Thrace by the authorities of the Eastern Roman Empire in the 8th–10th centuries. The first settlement of Paulicians in the Balkans was established in the 8th century by Emperor Constantine V Copronymus (741–775), who began a long campaign to recolonize the depopulated and demilitarized areas along the border with Bulgaria in Thrace. This policy was continued by subsequent iconoclast emperors, who considered the Paulicians their allies and established their military colonies in various border areas and in the capital, Constantinople. The last major deportation was in 970, when Emperor Ioannes I Tzimiskes (969–976) resettled 200,000 “Manicheans” from Syria to the area of Philippopolis. These “Manicheans” were probably Paulicians or their associated Tondrakites. The Paulician heresy is first mentioned in Greek sources in the 9th century, associated with Manichaeism and Masalianism. Hence the doctrines and practices of the Paulicians are a peculiar mixture of dualism, demiurgism, docetism, mysticism, and resemble in many respects the Gnostic system of Marcion. However, their main principle is dualism. After spreading into the Balkan Peninsula, the Paulicians nearly disappear, suggesting they were either converted or at least partially absorbed by another known heresy – Bogomilism.

Keywords: paulicianism, manichaeism, masalianism, bogomilism, dualism, Orthodox Christianity, Christian heresies, Church Fathers, Byzantine emperors, medieval Bulgarian lands

The Church of Christ, established on Pentecost (cf. Act 2: 3), from the very beginning of its existence, was accepted as the guardian of Divine revelation – both transmitted and written – and it alone was authorized to expound it under

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the gracious help of the Holy Spirit. One of Christianity's first problems was to distinguish itself in the pluralistic culture of Hellenism from syncretic religions such as Gnosticism and Manichaeism, which mixed Christian dogmas, in whole or in part, with other religious ideas and views of their own. A few centuries later, in the 7th century, Paulicianism successfully developed and spread the ideas of Manichaeism within the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. It originated in eastern Armenia and is undoubtedly heretical in nature due to its syncretic character. Its origins are not fully understood, and it is mentioned for the first time in Greek sources in the 9th century¹, being associated with Manichaeism² and Messalianism³.

The oldest Byzantine evidence of the Bogomil movement is a letter from the Patriarch of Constantinople Theophylact (933–956) to the Bulgarian Tsar Peter from the middle of the 10th century. The letter was discovered by the Benedictine Bernard de Montfaucon in the archives of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana as early as the end of the 17th century. Initially, the authorship of the letter was wrongly attributed to the Archbishop of Ohrid, Blessed Theophylact of Ohrid. Only in the 19th/20th centuries was the true author of the letter established⁴. The appearance and spread are also mentioned in an old Bulgarian manuscript, found in the Adjarian Bulgarian manuscript with handwritten copies and transcripts from the 17th century, used in the village of Adjar (now Svezhen⁵), Plovdiv region. The work is kept in the manuscript collection of the National Library “St. st. Cyril and Methodius”, number 326⁶. The same story has been preserved in a new Bulgarian edition, in the

¹ THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, [in:] *FGHB*, vol. III, София 1960 (cetera: THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*); PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio atque eversio. Haereseos manichaeorum qui et pauliciani dicuntur bulgariae archiepiscopo nuncupata*, [in:] *PG*, vol. XCIX, ed. J.-P. MIGNÉ, Paris 1857 (cetera: PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*), col. 1246–1305.

² More about the two heresies see: IOANNES DAMASCENUS, *De haeresibus liber*, [in:] *PG*, vol. XCIX, ed. J.-P. MIGNÉ, Paris 1864, col. 717, 729: Μανιχαῖοι, οἱ καὶ Ἀκονῖται. Οὗτοι Μάνη τοῦ Πέρσου μαθηταί, Χριστὸν μὲν σχήματι λέγοντες ἥλιον δὲ σέβοντες, καὶ σελήνην, ἄστροις, καὶ δυνάμεσι, καὶ δαίμοσιν εὐχόμενοι, ἀρχὰς δύο εἰσηγούμενοι πονηρὰν τε καὶ ἀγαθὴν αἰεὶ οὐσας, Χριστὸν δὲ δοκῆσει πεφηνέναι καὶ πεπονθέναι, Παλαιὰν Διαθήκην βλασφημοῦντες, καὶ τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λαλήσαντα Θεόν, κόσμον οὐ τὸν πάντα, ἀλλὰ μέρος ἐκ Θεοῦ γεγενῆσθαι ὀρίζομενοι.

³ According to Skylitzes and Kedrenos messalianism has many names: Quod vide: *FGHB*, vol. VI, София 1965, p. 199: τούτοις τοῖς χρόνοις ἀνέφυν καὶ ἡ τῶν Μασσαλιανῶν αἵρεσις εἰτ' οὐν Εὐχιτῶν καὶ Ἐντουσιαστῶν Λαμπετιανῶν καὶ Βογομίλων (πολυώνημος γὰρ ἐστὶν αὐτή).

⁴ G. MINCZEW, *Remarks on the “Letter of the Patriarch Theophylact to Tsar Peter” in the Context of Certain Byzantine and Slavic Anti-heretic Texts*, *SCer* 3, 2013, p. 113.

⁵ During the 16th and 17th centuries, Adjar (now Svezhen) emerged as a successor to the Tarnovo School of Literature following the fall of Bulgaria under Ottoman rule. This school specialized in transcribing, illustrating, and binding manuscripts primarily focused on ecclesiastical content, such as gospels, menaia, and damascenes. Notably, the school also transcribed the “History of Slavonic Bulgaria” by St. Paisii Hilendarski. Quod vide: Н. ДОНЧЕВА-ПАНАЙОТОВА, *Адджарски книжовници – илюстратори от XVII век*, Велико Търново 1998.

⁶ Й. ИВАНОВ, *Произход на павликяните според два български ръкописа*, [in:] *Списание на БАН*, vol. XXIV, София 1922, p. 20.

Trojan Damascene from the 18th century, entitled – *Homily of Saint John Chrysostom how the Paulicians arose according to their faith*⁷. The analysis shows that the Trojan transcript is a literal translation from the Adjarian transcript.

In Bulgarian historiography, the classifications of notable Byzantine theologians are traditionally maintained, who categorically define Paulicianism as “Manicheanism”, arguing their thesis with the presence in it of heretical, dualistic principles and positions incompatible with Orthodoxy. In this sense, the words of Euthymius Zygavinus are not accidental, that *this teaching is part of the madness of the Manichaeans...*⁸

All sources reveal that the teaching of the Paulicians shows some Gnostic influence, probably from Marcion or Paul of Samosata⁹. Many of their adherents lean towards Adoptionism. The Paulicians especially valued the Gospel of St. Luke and the Epistles of St. Paul. In general, they rejected the Holy Sacraments, although they accepted Holy Baptism, but not in its fullness. They were not icon worshippers and did not approve of the extreme asceticism characteristic of the Orthodox Church. By the 7th century, the heresy spread to the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire, where it was strongly persecuted. In the 8th century, persecutions against the Paulicians began, but initially, the emperors of the Isaurian dynasty were tolerant towards them, allowing them a free existence and even settling them as allies in Thrace. Renewed persecution led them to side with the Muslims against Byzantium¹⁰. The Arabs usually offered hospitable shelter to the Paulicians, as they became the main enemy of the Byzantines and knew the area well and thus could serve as guides during the Muslim campaigns against Byzantium¹¹.

By the middle of the 9th century, at the height of their power, the followers of the heresy established a Paulician state¹² in Tefrica (present-day Divrik, Turkey, on the Chalta-Cay River, an upper tributary of the Euphrates River¹³), under the leadership of Karbeas or Korbeas. In 871, the Byzantine emperor Basil I Macedonian ended the power of this state, and the surviving Paulicians fled to Syria and Armenia¹⁴. Later, in 970, the Paulicians in Syria were deported to the Balkans,

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ EUTHYMIUS ZIGABENOS, *Panoplia dogmatica*, [in:] PG, vol. CXXX, ed. J.-P. MIGNE, Paris 1865, col. 1189–1190: τῶν Παυλικιανῶν αἵρεσιν συνεστῆσαντο, μοῖραν μὲν τῆς Μανιχαίων μανίας οὖσαν / *tum Paulicianorum haeresim quae Manicheorum insaniae pars est*.

⁹ Paul of Samosata was a bishop of Antioch who was condemned by the Church at the Council of Antioch in 268 for heretical views. Quod vide: К. МАКСИМОВИЧ, *Павликиане*, [in:] *Православная энциклопедия*, vol. LIV, Москва 2019, p. 144–1145.

¹⁰ Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликианството между легендите и историята VII–XVII век*, ПИФ 1.2, 2017, p. 44.

¹¹ T. WOLIŃSKA, *Sergius, the Paulician Leader, in the Account by Peter of Sicily*, SCer 9, 2019, p. 133.

¹² It is assumed that this Paulician state was established in 843/844. More on this issue see: Р. БАРТИКЯН, *Источники для изучения истории павликианского движения*, Ереван 1961, p. 89.

¹³ Й. ИВАНОВ, *Богомилски книги и легенди*, София 2024, p. 28.

¹⁴ Дж. НОРУИЧ, *Кратка история на Византия*, София 2021, p. 258.

where they united with the Bogomils¹⁵, and those in Armenia were identified with a secondary sect, the Tondrakites¹⁶. After the 11th century, the Paulicians ceased to be a threat to the Orthodox and did not survive into modern times. But we have to agree with Mariyana Tsibranska-Kostova, who says in the introduction to her article *Paulicians Between the Dogme and the Legend*:

As concerns the Paulicianism, at first place it finds expression in a very strong nominative tradition, which survives despite the historical transformations of the former times medieval heretic movement into an ethno-confessional and linguistic-dialect community of the Bulgarian Paulicians Catholics as a product of the Modern Times and the Catholic propaganda in the Bulgarian lands from the beginning of the 17th century¹⁷.

Initially, the Paulician area was limited to the territory of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As has been emphasized, it developed mainly in Armenia, where Christianity came into conflict with Parsism¹⁸ and mixed with already existing dualistic ideas. It would not be wrong to suggest that Paulicianism probably inherited some traditions from the Manichaeans and Marcionites¹⁹. According to Peter of Sicily, the founder of the movement was the Armenian Constantine²⁰, who later took the name Silvanus, mentioned in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. He initially lived in Mananalıs²¹ and later moved to the fortress of Kivosa, near Colonia²².

¹⁵ ANNA COMNENA, *Alexiad*, XV, <https://shorturl.at/eivQZ> [15 IV 2024]: Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τοῦ ἔτους... διηπεύοντος τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ μέγιστον ἐπεγείρεται νέφος αἰρετικῶν, καὶ τὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως εἶδος καινόν, μήπω πρότερον ἐγνωσμένον τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ. Δύο γὰρ δόγματα συνελθέτην κάκιστα καὶ φαυλότατα ἐγνωσμένα τοῖς πάλαι χρόνοις, Μανιχαίων τε, ὡς ἂν τις εἴποι, δυσσέβεια, ἦν καὶ Παυλικιανῶν αἵρεσιν εἴπομεν, καὶ Μασσαλιανῶν βδελυρία. Τοιοῦτον δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ τῶν Βογομίλων δόγμα, ἐκ Μασσαλιανῶν καὶ Μανιχαίων συγκεῖμενον.

¹⁶ The Tondrakians are a Christian religious movement that originated in the Armenian village of Tondrak (in modern Turkey) in the 9th century and is a modified continuation of Paulicianism. Its ideologist was Sămbat Zarekhvatsi. Quod vide: Д. МИТЕВ, *Инславни изповедания*, Варна 2005, p. 25.

¹⁷ M. TSIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA, *Paulicians Between the Dogme and the Legend*, SCer 7, 2017, p. 229.

¹⁸ Parsism is the religion of the Parsis, followers of Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism, who left Persia (Iran) after the Arab conquest and the spread of Islam in the 6th–8th centuries (authors' note).

¹⁹ Peter of Sicily considers the Paulicians to be identical to the Manicheans: Cf. PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, I, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1239–1242: *constitui deinceps ad vos scribere de Manichaeorum, qui et Pauliciani dicuntur, delectanda haeresi; undenam, et quomodo, et quomobrem in hanc furiose defectionem evaserit.*

²⁰ Constantine (Silvanus) was the chief of the Paulician church at Kibossa, in the theme of Colonia, from 660 to 687. He died during the persecutions against the Paulicians. Quod vide: *FGHB*, vol. IV, София 1961, p. 111.

²¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, XXIV, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1277–1280: Οὗτος τοίνυν ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος, ὁ καὶ Σιλουανός, τὴν Μανάναλιν καταλείψας, ἐλθὼν κατώκησεν εἰς Κίβοσσαν τὸ κάστρον, πλησίον Κολωνείας, λέγων ἑαυτὸν εἶναι τὸν ἐν ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου ἐμφερόμενον Σιλουανὸν ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ὡς πιστὸν μαθητὴν Παύλος εἰς Μακεδονίαν.

²² М. ПОСНОВ, *История на православната църква*, vol. II, Анубис 1993, p. 330.

He claimed that the apostle Paul sent him to “Macedonia” (Kivosa) as his close disciple. His origin is disputed. Prof. M. Posnov defines him as a Syrian who came from a Marcionite environment in Mananalis, but according to a more ancient author, such as Peter of Sicily, he was an Armenian from Mananalis near Samosata²³.

In Kivosa, Emperor Constantine IV Pogonatus (668–685) sent his messenger Simeon²⁴ with the task of destroying the newly emerging heresy (ἡ νεοφανῆς αἵρεσις)²⁵. The local ruler, Tryphon helped him capture all the heretics and take them to the southern end of the Colonia fortress. The execution of Constantine-Silvan, along with his supporters, was arranged there by order of the emperor²⁶.

Regarding their name, it may be supposed that it derives from their preference for the holy apostle Paul, whom they hold in high esteem among the apostles²⁷. They borrow the names of their leading teachers from Paul’s disciples (Silvan, Titus, Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphroditus) and name their congregations after Paul’s communes (Corinth, Philippi, Achaia, etc.)²⁸. Another suggestion is that it comes from two brothers, Paul and John, sons of the Manichaean Callinica²⁹ of Samosata, theme Armenikon³⁰, or even from Paul of Samosata himself³¹. Mavro Orbini rejects the claim of the Greek researchers that the Paulicians were connected with the heresy of Paul of Samosata³². We can agree with him, because today it is clearly known that Paul of Samosat is a conductor of another Christological heresy – Ebionism. St. John of Damascus says of the Ebionites that they hold that Christ

²³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, XXIII, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1275: *Constantino Heraclii nepote imperium tenente, exstilit Armenius quidam, nomine Constantinus, in Samosatensis regionis pago Mananali, qui pagus nunc quoque Manichaeos alit.*

²⁴ A few years later, this Simeon, having become a Paulician and taken the name Titus, a famous disciple of Paul, was also executed along with many other Paulicians. Quod vide: Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликянството между...*, p. 41.

²⁵ G. Minczew examines in detail the expression newly emerging heresy: See G. MINCZEW, *Remarks on...*, p. 117–128.

²⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, XXVII, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1282: *At episcopus sine mora omnia haec Just niano post Heraclium imperanti significavit: quibus imperator cognitis, mandavit de omnibus simul congregatis quaestionem fieri, et in errore pertinaces flammis tradi, quod et factum est: nam prope illum appellatum acervum grandi rogo incenso, cunctos omnino exusserunt.*

²⁷ Й. ИВАНОВ, *Богомилски...*, p. 23.

²⁸ Д. ОБОЛЕНСКИ, *Студия върху балканското новомъченичество*, София 1998, p. 41.

²⁹ ANNA COMNENA, *Alexiad*, XIV, <https://shorturl.at/eivQZ> [15 IV 2024]: Ἀλλὰ τούτους δὴ τοὺς ἀπὸ Μάμεντος καὶ Παύλου καὶ Ἰωάννου, τῶν τῆς Καλλινίκης.

³⁰ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, XXIII, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1275: *Sane quaedam habuerit nefaria haec haeresis initium, copiose jam diximus, ubi de Manete et aliis, et de Paulo Samosatensi, Callinicae filio, ejusque fratre Joanne verba fecimus.*

³¹ Р. БАРТИКЯН, *Источници...*, p. 135. Quod vide: М. ПОСНОВ, *История на...*, p. 330.

³² Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство в българските земи – архетип и повторения VII–XVII век*, София 2015, p. 536–537.

indwelled Adam and at a certain time stripped that Adam and clothed him again. That is, when he appeared in the flesh he clothed man³³.

By the beginning of the 8th century, the Paulician movement spread widely in Eastern Armenia and the Byzantine region of Asia Minor. Most Paulicians were from small settlements, while others belonged to the poorer urban strata. The movement was anti-feudal in character, directed against serfdom and state oppression. By the middle of the 8th century in Armenia, Paulicianism had become a national liberation movement against the caliphate.

The fate of the movement varied according to the policies of the Byzantine emperors. The iconoclast, Leo III the Syrian (717–741), did not disturb them and gave the leader of the heresy, Gegenesius³⁴, a letter of protection (*imperatore sigillo*) against persecution after a trial of faith by the patriarch Germanus I. In this case, Gegenesius answered the patriarch's questions with cunning, succeeded in deceiving him, and was declared to hold the true faith (*fitii expers creditus est*). Gegenesius spent the last years of his life preaching in Mananalis, where Constantine-Silvanus originated. He died of the plague after leading the impious heresy (*impiae sectea*) for 30 years³⁵.

Under Emperor Constantine V, Copronymus (741–775), there occurred the first major resettlement of Paulicians in Thrace³⁶, after attacks on the lands of Syria and Armenia³⁷. The main reason for their resettlement was the great plague of 752, which depopulated Thrace:

In the 11th year, Constantine captured Theodosiopolis together with Meletina, capturing all their inhabitants. Under the pretext of a plague, he relocated to Constantinople and Thrace related heretics, namely Armenians and Syrians. These heretics preserve to this day the heresy of the tyrant. It was through them that the Paulician heresy spread³⁸.

³³ Й. ДАМАСКИН, *Извор на знанието*, vol. I, София 2014, p. 243: τὸν δὲ Χριστὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐν τῇ ἐνσάρκῳ αὐτοῦ παρουσία ἐνδεδύεσθαι, ὡς ἔφη.

³⁴ Renamed after Timothy, who founded the Paulician church in Mananalis. Quod vide: *FGHB*, vol. IV, София 1961, p. 111.

³⁵ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, XXIX, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1283–1286: *Deinde multos annos ibi commoratus, et in summam insaniam actus, iramque et rabiem atque anxietatem sibi ab angelis malis immixta experiens, bubonea; Deo percussus interiit, postquam integris triginta annis impiae sectea prae fuerat.*

³⁶ Quod vide: Т. КОЕВ, *Павликянски и месалиански религиозни елементи в богомилството*. *Известия*, vol. II, София 1984, p. 76.

³⁷ GEORGIUS MONACHUS, *Chronica*, [in:] *FGHB*, vol. IV, София 1961, p. 52–53: ὡς λήσων ἐπιὼν τοῖς τῆς Ἀρμενίας καὶ Σύριας χωρίοις τῶν ἐκείνην φρουρίων αἰρεῖ ὁμολογίαν τῶν προσοικούντων καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν Θράκην αὐτοὺς μετῆγαγεν. Vide quoque, К. ИРЧЕК, *История на българите*, София 2015, p. 282; В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I, *Първо българско царство*, pars 2, *От славянизацията на държавата до падането на Първото царство*. Трето фототипно издание, София 2002, p. 62.

³⁸ SKYLITZES-KEDRENOS, *Historiarium Compendium*, [in:] *FGHB*, vol. VI, София 1965, p. 217. Vide quoque Й. ИВАНОВ, *Произход на...*, p. 23.

Nicephorus I Genicus (802–812), who, according to Theophanes the Confessor in his work *Chronographia*, was a supporter of the Paulicians³⁹ and, as a warlike emperor, patronized them in order to utilize them in wars against the enemies of Byzantium. In this context, he resettled many inhabitants of the Asia Minor themes to the Slavized lands of the Balkan Peninsula, where the new settlers were obligated to participate in protecting the imperial borders⁴⁰. Emperor Leo the Armenian (813–820) organized an expedition for their conversion. Those who disobeyed the emperor's order were threatened with the death sentence⁴¹. Empress Theodora, who restored the veneration of icons, persecuted them severely. During her short reign in 844, about 100,000 Paulicians were killed by sword, hanged, or burned, and their property was confiscated in favor of the state⁴². This large number probably includes quite a few iconoclasts.

Provoked by these cruelties, the Paulicians revolted under the leadership of Carbeas. Later, he fled with five thousand men to the Saracens, built a strong fortress at Tefrica on the Arab border, and in alliance with the Muslims, made successful military incursions into Byzantine territory. His son-in-law, Chrysocher, continued as far as Nicaea, Nicomedia, and Ephesus, but was killed by beheading by the Byzantines in 871–872⁴³. His head was sent to Emperor Basil as a trophy⁴⁴. In 878, Byzantine troops captured Tefrica, and the movement was forced to submit to Emperor Basil I the Macedonian. The surviving Paulicians took refuge in Armenia, where the Tondraks became their successors (in Byzantine sources, they are often called Paulicians). Both in the 8th and 9th centuries, the Byzantine government resettled the Paulicians several times in the Balkans (mostly in and around Philippopolis), where they played a significant role in the rise of the Bogomil sect. Basil I the Macedonian sent the monk Peter of Sicily among them, who thus became acquainted with their doctrine and collected material for his work, *History of the Manichaeans (Historia Manichaeorum)*, where he defined the Paulicians as a vile heresy, which, among other earlier heresies, carved out a fatal abyss within the Church⁴⁵. Bulgaria has also been the arena of various heresies since the early centuries. This forced Knyaz Boris to ask Pope Nicholas what to do against the various preachers who came from Byzantium and Armenia. Bulgaria has also been

³⁹ Quod vide: THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, p. 280 (footnote).

⁴⁰ Г. ОСТРОГОРСКИ, *История на Византийската държава*, София 2013, p. 267.

⁴¹ T. WOLIŃSKA, *Sergius, the Paulician Leader...*, p. 132.

⁴² Дж. НОРУИЧ, *Кратка история...*, p. 236.

⁴³ Г. ОСТРОГОРСКИ, *История на Византийската...*, p. 321.

⁴⁴ J. HAMILTON, B. HAMILTON, Y. STOYANOV, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650 – c. 1450*, Manchester 1998, p. 97.

⁴⁵ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1240–1241: Οὐ γὰρ ἄλλοι οὗτοι, καὶ ἄλλοι ἐκεῖνοι, ἀλλ' οἱ αὐτοὶ Παυλικιᾶνοι καὶ Μενιχαῖοι ὑπάρχουσιν, τοῖς τῶν προηγησαμένων αἰρέσεσι τὰς ἐξευρεθείσας αὐτοῖς μυστὰς αἰρέσεις ἐπισυνάψαντες καὶ ἐν ἀπωλείας βάραθρον ἐπορύζαντες γὰρ καὶ τῶν αἰσχροουργιῶν αὐτῶν εἶσιν, ὡς αὐτοὶ φασιν, ἀμέτοχοι, ἀλλὰ τῶν αἱρέσεων αὐτῶν ἀκριβεῖς εἰσι φύλακες.

the arena of various heresies since the early centuries. This forced Knyaz Boris I to ask Pope Nicholas what to do against the various preachers who came from Byzantium, Armenia and other countries⁴⁶.

After these events, the movement lost its political significance and gradually faded from history. The second major resettlement of Paulicians in and around Philippopolis (περὶ τὴν Φιλιππούπολιν) in Thrace took place under Emperor John Tzimiskes (969–976) in 970⁴⁷. They were taken as border guards and received favorable treatment from the empire⁴⁸. Constantine IX succeeded in persuading or forcing thousands of Paulicians to renounce their erroneous views. Under the emperor Alexius Comnenus (1081–1118), it is believed that the heresy came to an end. During his sojourn in Philippopolis, he engaged in debates with their leaders and succeeded in reconciling all or nearly all of them with the Church, rewarding the converts and punishing the obstinate⁴⁹. It would be an exaggeration to say that from that moment the Paulicians are no longer present in history. On the contrary, they leave clear traces of themselves. After the 12th century, they began to migrate to different regions of today's Bulgaria – Tarnovo, Vidin, Nikopol, Chiprovtsi⁵⁰. It is known that during the centuries of Ottoman rule, some Paulicians in the Ottoman Empire accepted Orthodoxy, others accepted Islam, but a large part of them accepted Catholicism as a result of the activity of the Order of St. Francis and the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Nations (Congregatio pro Gentium Evangelizatione). In the 18th century, a part of the Catholic Paulicians left the Ottoman Empire and settled in the Banat region, which was then located within the borders of the Austrian Empire⁵¹. In Bulgaria, the sect of the Bogomils (Βογόμιοι), which existed during the Middle Ages and spread to the West in the form of Cathars, Albigensians and other Manichean heresies,

⁴⁶ СТЕΦАН, ЕКЗАРХ, *Богомилите и презвитер Козма*, София 2012, p. 58.

⁴⁷ ANNA COMNENA, *Alexiad*, XIV, <https://shorturl.at/eivQZ> [15 IV 2024]: ὁ ἐν βασιλεῦσιν ἐκείνος θαυμάσιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Τζιμισκῆς πολέμῳ νικήσας, ἔξανδραποδισάμενος ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας, ἐκείθεν ἀπὸ τῶν Χαλύβων καὶ τῶν Ἀρμενιακῶν τόπων εἰς τὴν Θράκην μετένεγκε. Καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Φιλιππούπολιν αὐλίξεσθαι κατηγάκασεν, ἅμα μὲν τῶν ἐρυμνοτάτων πόλεων καὶ φρουρίων, ἃ κατεῖχον τυραννιώντες, ἀπαγαγών, ἅμα δὲ καὶ φύλακας ἐπιστήσας ἀσφαλεστάτους τῶν σκυθικῶν ἐκείνων διεκδρομῶν, ἃς ὑπο σύγχως ὑπὸ βαρβάρων τὰπὶ Θράκης ἐπεπόνθει χωρία.

⁴⁸ ANNA COMNENA, *Alexiad*, XIV, <https://shorturl.at/eivQZ> [15 IV 2024]: Ὁ δὲ Τζιμισκῆς Ἰωάννης τοὺς ἐκ τῆς Μανιχαϊκῆς αἰρέσεως ἀντιμάχους ἡμῖν ποιησάμενος συμμάχους κατὰ γε τὰ ὅπλα ἀξιόμαχους δυνάμεις τοῖς νομάσι τούτοις Σκύθαις ἀντέστησε· Vide quoque M. ПОСНОВ, *История на...*, p. 332.

⁴⁹ ANNA COMNENA, *Alexiad*, XV, <https://shorturl.at/eivQZ> [15 IV 2024]: Καὶ τινες μὲν τούτων μετέβαλον ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον καὶ τῆς φρουρᾶς ἀπελύθησαν, οἱ δὲ τῇ σφῶν ἐπαπέθανον αἰρέσει ἐν εἰρκταῖς κατεχόμενοι, τροφῆς μέντοι καὶ ἀμφίων δαψιλῇ τὴν χορηγίαν ἔχοντες. Vide quoque Й. ИВАНОВ, *Богомилски...*, p. 43.

⁵⁰ M. TSIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA, *Paulicians Between...*, p. 230.

⁵¹ H. SALDZHIEV, *Continuity between Early Paulicianism and the Seventeenth-Century Bulgarian Paulicians: the Paulician Legend of Rome and the Ritual of the Baptism by Fire*, SCer 9, 2019, p. 665.

is considered a continuation of Paulicianism. The most comprehensive description of the Bogomil teaching can be found in *The Sermon Against the Heretics* by Cosmas the Priest⁵² and in one well-known work by Euthymius Zigabenus⁵³. At the beginning of the 13th century the Crusaders encountered some remnants of the Paulician movement when they captured Constantinople⁵⁴. Also at that time, according to G. Villehardouin, after Tzar Caloyan captured King Baldwin I, he appeared before the walls of Philippopolis, where the local inhabitants, Paulicians, offered him the surrender of the city⁵⁵.

Ancient sources clearly testify to the influence of Manichaeism and Mazdaism (Zoroastrianism) on the religious and philosophical doctrine of the Paulicians⁵⁶. This influence, in turn, shaped Bogomilism, extensively studied by Euthymius Zygavinus (p. 1050–1122) in his work *Panoplia Dogmatica* (Πανοπλία Δογματική), as reported by Anna Komnina, daughter of Emperor Alexius Komnenos⁵⁷. Euthymius Zygavinus' study references the most representative works of the dogmatic corpus of Byzantine literature and serves to some extent as a continuation of the dogmatic writings of St. John Damascene. In its 28 sections (titles), *Panoplia Dogmatica* systematizes the dogmatic knowledge of its time. Particularly valuable are titles 23 through 26, wherein the views of 12th-century heresies – Armenian, Paulician, and Messalian – are refuted⁵⁸.

In their philosophical views the Paulicians were dualists, believing in a good god, the heavenly father, and a god of evil, Satan. They accepted Satanael and the demons who were subject to him⁵⁹. According to Paulician doctrine, the entire world is entrenched in an implacable struggle between good and evil, with the good, bright god destined to triumph over the evil principle at the end of time, establishing a kingdom of light and justice⁶⁰. Christ was considered one of the angels and the son of the god of goodness. Following the destruction of the god of evil, regarded as the creator of the visible world and humanity, the good god would reign over the earth, as per Paulician teachings. The Paulicians did not venerate the Mother of God, the prophets or the saints. They also rejected the church, clergy

⁵² КОЗМА, ПРЕЗВИТЕР, *Беседа против богомилите*, “ЕТ Кирил Маринов” 1998: *Sermon against the Bogomils* is a polemical work of Old Bulgarian literature, written by Presbyter Kozma, a church writer who was probably close to Tzar Peter I (authors' note).

⁵³ EUTHYMIUS ZIGABENOS, *Panoplia dogmatica*, PG, vol. CXXX, col. 1189–1274.

⁵⁴ Й. ИВАНОВ, *Богомилски...*, p. 40.

⁵⁵ Ж. ВИЛАРДУЕН, *Завладяване на Константинопол*, ed. И. БОЖИЛОВ, София 1985, p. 114.

⁵⁶ Cf. Д. ПЕТКАНОВА, *Старобългарска литература IX–XVIII век*, София 1997, p. 303.

⁵⁷ ANNA KOMNENA, *Alexiad*, XV, <https://shorturl.at/eivQZ> [15 IV 2024]: Παραπέμπω δὲ τοὺς βουλομένους τὴν ὀλην αἵρεσιν τῶν Βογομίλων διαγνῶναι εἰς τὸ οὕτω καλούμενον βιβλίον «Δογματικὴν πανοπλίαν» ἐξ ἐπιταγῆς τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς συντεθεῖσαν. Καὶ γὰρ μοναχὸν τινα Ζυγαβητὸν καλούμενον.

⁵⁸ К. ИВАНОВА, *Догматическо всеоръжие (Паноплия догматика)*, [in:] *Старобългарска литература. Енциклопедичен речник*, Велико Търново 2003, p. 143.

⁵⁹ СТЕФАН, ЕКЗАРХ, *Богомилите...*, p. 56.

⁶⁰ К. МАКСИМОВИЧ, *Павликиане...*, p. 145.

and particularly monasticism. The only book considered holy was the New Testament, excluding the epistles of the apostle Peter. The Paulician doctrine was formulated in the first half of the 9th century by the heresiarch Sergius-Tychicus⁶¹. He was Greek by birth, brought up as an Orthodox Christian in the village of Ania near Tabia (Tavius) in Galatia and received a good education⁶². Sergius called himself Tychicus, mentioned in the epistles of St. Paul, and instructed his disciples to address him as the Holy Spirit. Sergius-Tychicus fervently propagated his heresy and proudly declared that he had spread his gospel *from east to west and from north to south*. He was killed in 835 by a resident of the Nikopol – Tsanion fortress⁶³.

In the West, various heretical sects are spreading, characterized by their heterogeneous nature – ranging from dualistic-Manichean to pantheistic-mystical beliefs, among others. Despite their internal differences, they are united in their hatred toward the Roman Church and its hierarchical system. These sects emerge for diverse reasons: remnants of pagan ideas and earlier heresies, opposition to the moral decline of the church and clergy, and dissent from the authoritarian rule of the Pope. During the 12th and 13th centuries, they proliferated astonishingly from Bulgaria to Spain, particularly across Italy and southern France, activating the full force of the papacy, especially under pope Innocent III, to be deployed for their forceful eradication. The Paulicians, frequently brought under Byzantine control from Thrace and Bulgaria into the Greek provinces of Italy and Sicily, thus disseminating the seeds of their dualism, Docetism, and hatred toward the papal institution⁶⁴.

The doctrine and practices of the Paulicians are known to us primarily through the studies of their Orthodox adversaries. They represent a peculiar amalgamation of dualism, demiurgism, Docetism and mysticism, bearing resemblance in many respects to the Gnostic system of Marcion. However, their central tenet is dualism: the good God created the spiritual realm, while the malevolent god (πονηρὸς Θεός) or the demiurge fashioned the material world (τοῦ δὲ τοῦ κόσμου ποιητὴν τὴν τε καὶ ἐξουσιαστήν)⁶⁵. The former is venerated by the “Paulicians”, or the true Christians, despite their rejection of crucial Christian dogmas such as the creation of the world by the one and all-good God and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Conversely, the latter is revered by the “Romans” or Orthodox Christians⁶⁶. In contrast to the Paulicians and the Bogomils, the Orthodox Church, adhering to monotheistic principles, upholds the belief that all creation is the work of one God⁶⁷. Another

⁶¹ Д. ОБОЛЕНСКИ, *Студия...*, p. 41.

⁶² T. WOLIŃSKA, *Sergius, the Paulician Leader...*, p. 128.

⁶³ Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликянството между...*, p. 44.

⁶⁴ Й. ИВАНОВ, *Богомилски...*, p. 48–51.

⁶⁵ Д. АНГЕЛОВ, *Богомилството в България*, София 1961, p. 73; Vide quoque Д. МИТЕВ, *Инславни...*, p. 25.

⁶⁶ Д. ОБОЛЕНСКИ, *Студия...*, p. 42.

⁶⁷ Т. КОЕВ, *Павликянски и месалиански...*, p. 77.

distinctive aspect of Paulician doctrine is their contempt for materiality. They view the body as the abode of evil desire and inherently impure, constraining the divine soul within it like a prison. The Bogomilism also adheres to dualism. His characteristic views are the identification of the Lord God with the Devil, the rejection of the Old Testament, the church hierarchy and sacraments, the negative attitude towards the cult of saints, relics, etc.⁶⁸

The Paulicians, akin to the Docetes, held the belief that Jesus Christ appeared to be human only in appearance and lacked a genuine human essence, possessing only temporary actions (energies) and manifestations⁶⁹. According to their doctrine, Christ descended from heaven in an ethereal body, passed through the womb of Mary merely as a conduit, appeared to suffer but did not truly experience suffering, and initiated the process of redeeming the spirit from the fetters of material existence.

The position of the Holy Mother of God is greatly underestimated in their teaching, as she is not acknowledged as the “Mother of God” and is perceived to have a purely external relationship with Jesus. According to Peter of Sicily, they did not even grant her a place among the ranks of good and virtuous women. Instead, the Paulicians assert that the true Mother of God is the heavenly Jerusalem, from which Christ ascended and to which he returned⁷⁰.

They reject the Old Testament, viewing it as the work of the demiurge, and dismiss the Epistles of the apostle Peter, deeming him a false apostle due to his denial of Jesus, his preaching of Judaism over Christianity, his adversarial relationship with the apostle Paul (Gal 2: 11), and his role as a pillar of the Catholic hierarchy. However, they accept the four Gospels, the Acts of the Holy Apostles, the fourteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul, and the Epistles of the Apostles James, John and Jude⁷¹. At a later period, they appear to have restricted themselves, akin to Marcion, to the writings of the Apostles Paul and Luke, possibly adding to them the Gospel of the Apostle John. Additionally, they claim possession of the Epistle to the Laodiceans, though it likely corresponds to the Epistle to the Ephesians. Their interpretive approach is primarily allegorical in nature.

Their attitude toward the priesthood, the holy sacraments, the veneration of saints and holy relics and the sign of the cross⁷² (except in cases of severe illness) is decidedly negative, rejecting all external elements in religion. They view Communion with the body and blood of Christ solely as a communion with His word

⁶⁸ J.M. WOLSKI, *Autoproscopae, Bogomils and Messalians in the 14th Century Bulgaria*, SCer 4, 2014, p. 234.

⁶⁹ Cf. Й. РОМАНИДИС, *Кратка православна светоотеческа догматика*, Руенски манастир 2007, p. 81.

⁷⁰ Д. ОБОЛЕНСКИ, *Студия...*, p. 40.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁷² PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, I, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1256: Τὸ τὸν τύπον καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ δύναμιν τοῦ τιμίου καὶ ζωοποιοῦ σταυροῦ μὴ ἀποδέχεσθαι.

and teaching⁷³. Instead of priests, the Paulicians had teachers, pastors, scribes, and itinerant missionaries (known as synecdymes). Rather than temples, they congregated in meeting houses referred to as “oratories”, with founders and leaders esteemed as “apostles” and “prophets”.

Criticism is also leveled against the Paulicians regarding their stance on morality, as it appears to be relativistic to them. Their objective was to liberate the spirit from the dominion of the material body, without outright condemning marriage or the consumption of meat. However, among certain factions, such as the Baanites, an opposite extreme emerges – an antinomian indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh, including licentious behavior and even incest. In these extremes, they bear resemblance to various Gnostic sects. Peter of Sicily condemns the Paulicians as wicked (*impuram*), accusing them of unscrupulously abandoning their faith on the pretext that lying is justified in pursuit of a noble end⁷⁴.

In conclusion, the Paulician heresy, originating in 7th-century Armenia and spreading across Asia Minor, sought to revive early Christianity with its characteristic religious communities, primarily depicted in the Acts of the Holy Apostles and the Epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul. Initially aligning with Byzantine imperial policies, the Paulicians faced persecution under Michael I (811–813) and Theophilus (829–842), leading them to form alliances with the Arabs against Byzantium and conduct raids as far as Ephesus. Following their final subjugation in 875, they were resettled in Thrace, where they guarded the border against the Bulgarians. Those remaining in Armenia were also relocated to Thrace in 970. Their name initially vanished from the Balkan Peninsula, suggesting conversion or partial absorption by Bogomilism. This new “ascetic” community, named after the priest Bogomil⁷⁵, displayed significant similarities with the Paulicians in their teaching, which propagated Manichean dualism, despite some differences, and spread from the middle of the 9th century in the Balkan Peninsula, and finally reached northern Italy and France (the cathars). Persecuted by the Orthodox Church, in this case the Bulgarian Church, and during the persecutions, some of the Paulicians-Bogomils accepted Orthodoxy, others Catholicism, and still others even Islam. The antagonism between the Orthodox state church and Bogomilism was forcibly ended after the conquest of Bulgaria by the Ottoman invaders. After the successful missionary activity of the Franciscan monks from the 17th century onwards, only one denominational name remained from the Paulician heresy that passed through Christian history⁷⁶.

⁷³ К. МАКСИМОВИЧ, *Павликиане...*, p. 145.

⁷⁴ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio*, I, PG, vol. CIV, col. 1242. Vide quoque, М. ПОСНОВ, *История на...*, p. 332.

⁷⁵ БОРИЛОВ СИНОДИК, *Издание и превод*, ed. И. БОЖИЛОВ, А. ТОТОМАНОВА, И. БИЛЯРСКА, София 2012, p. 24.

⁷⁶ Й. ИВАНОВ, *Произход на...*, p. 26.

The path of Paulism, as a kind of religious community with a clearly established identity, marked from the 7th to the 17th century the space from Asia Minor through the Balkans to Sicily. But the most lasting is his trace embedded in the ethnic, cultural and political development of the Bulgarian lands⁷⁷.

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⁷⁷ Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 475.

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