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CELIBACY, PRIESTHOOD, MARRIAGE, PUBERTY AND POPULAR CULTURE IN THE WORKS OF 14TH CENTURY TARNOVO AUTHORS

Abstract. This article explores several real examples of celibacy, marriage and puberty in the works of 14th century Tarnovo authors. It explores several key issues: celibacy in both its manifestations – the orthodox and the heretical, among medieval Bulgarians, the interpretation of different problems concerning marriage, puberty, priesthood and spiritual brotherhood in these works, including the conflicts between church and popular culture. Evidence about promiscuity and other deviations is also discussed. Conclusions have been drawn based on analysis of different writings: letters, treatises, biographies of saints, panegyrics, apocryphal works and medieval breviaries.

Keywords: celibacy, marriage, puberty, popular culture, heresies, priesthood, brotherhood

If the priest is, and is called an angel of the Lord Omnipotent, according to the words of the great Dionysius, and [if] he is a part of the heavenly hierarchy when he prays over the divine gifts [the communion], he [the priest] is obliged to be an angel in his life, to have dignity and to be merciful¹.

This fragment from the second letter of St. Euthymius, the last patriarch of the medieval Tarnovo patriarchy, to his contemporary St. Nicodemus of Tismana, illustrates the idealistic views of the medieval Tarnovo writers and scribes regarding priesthood and monasticism. They were expressed in biographies,

¹ Е. КАЛУЖНИАКИ, *Werke des Patriarchen von Bulgarien Euthymius*, Wien 1901, p. 221–222; ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения*, София 1990, p. 227.



panegyrics and litanies written in the 13th and 14th century and were addressed to the saints celebrated in Tarnovo. These works (via the cult of saints) often proclaimed the unity between the Heavenly Kingdom and the Earthly Kingdom, which includes the state, the church and the ordinary people. However, other works by the same authors indicate the existence of essential ideological and cultural differences among the leaders of the church, on the one hand, and the ordinary priests and people, on the other. These differences ran so deep that they reduced the proclaimed unity to a literary fiction.

Celibacy – the choice of saints, anchorites and heretics

In an age when marriage was an obligatory and inevitable event in the life of nearly the entire population, the works of the medieval Tarnovo authors glorified the saints who deliberately had chosen celibacy and the preservation of virginity. The exact number of people who embraced chastity remains unknown, but all of them seemed to have changed their social status to become monks². For instance, according to the biography of St. Romilus (written in the second half of the 14th century), in order to avoid a forced marriage imposed on him by his parents, he escaped from his home in Bdin and took refuge in one of the Tarnovo monasteries where he started a new life as a monk³. St. Kozma of the Zograf mon-

² The case of David, the oldest brother among the Komitopulis, who in the 970s were the *de facto* rulers of Bulgaria, is particularly interesting. Historical sources mention nothing about a wife and children. The fact that he was buried together with his parents and that his name was included in their epitaph erected by his brother Samuel indicates that he was unmarried. Perhaps Tsar Peter IV (1185–1197), the older brother of Asen I and Kaloyan, was unmarried, too – the sources also do not give any information about a wife and children. It seems that only the holders of supreme power in medieval Bulgaria could avoid marriage and preserve their initial social status. However, David, centuries after his death, was proclaimed a tsar and a saint – his cult appeared among the Bulgarian monks on Mount Athos and in some monasteries in modern Northern Macedonia. Most likely, it was based on some currently lost writings of apocryphal origin. The Bulgarian monk Hristofor Zhefarovich included the image of David among the South Slavic Saints in his stematography issued in 1741. Three decades later the anonymous author of the Bulgarian Zograf history and Bulgarian Athonite monk Paissii in his *History* (1762) presented David as a Bulgarian tsar who abandoned his office and became a monk – Й. ИВАНОВ, *Зографска българска история*, София 1970, p. 9; *История славъноболгарская собрана и нареждена Паисиемъ Геромонахомъ в лето 1762*, София 1914, p. 31, 63. In the next decades an icon of the Bulgarian tsar St. David depicted as a monk, appeared in many churches in what are now Western Bulgaria and Northern Macedonia, including the main churches of the Zograf, Troyan and Rila monasteries. His cult influenced the national and political revival of local Bulgarians to a certain extent. However, the information about his monkhood was incorrect – David never abandoned his office and never became a monk. Therefore, the status of David was changed *post mortem* in accordance with the concept of celibate-monkhood established in the Middle Ages.

³ *Пространно житие на Роман Видински от ГРИГОРИЙ Доборписец*, [in:] *Стара българска литература*, vol. IV, София 1986, p. 470.

astery was another Bulgarian anchorite from the same period who also avoided marriage leaving his family and becoming a monk on Mount Athos⁴.

According to the biographies of the Tarnovo saints, avoidance of arranged and undesirable marriages was not the only reason for their choice of celibacy and anchoritism. The intolerant and even hostile attitude of their families and social milieu toward the manifestations of their pietism are often mentioned. St. Euthymius asserts that the most famous Bulgarian saint, St. John of Rila (9th–10th century), left his home village because his compatriots ignored and offended him and considered him incapable of social life⁵. Most likely this information was borrowed from the Byzantine biography of St. John of Rila written by John Skylitzes in the 12th century: he said that the people from the home village of St. John of Rila despised and ignored him⁶. It seems that both works do not exhibit the standard opposition between the spiritual and the physical, which is typical of many biographies of saints, since the unknown author of the 12th century apocryphal biography of St. John of Rila also described the attempts of his brother and compatriots to discourage him⁷. Another example in this respect is the biography of Saint Paraskeva written by St. Euthymius. According to the author her parents scolded and beat her because she tried to follow the gospels giving her clothes to poor people⁸. The analysis of the text shows that this part of the biography has no parallels with the other biographies of St. Paraskeva and was inserted by St. Euthymius⁹. Probably, this part reflects similar occurrences in medieval society. Kalist I, the patriarch of Constantinople, who was the supposed author of a biography of the most well-known 14th century Bulgarian anchorite St. Theodosii of Tarnovo, claimed that St. Theodosii avoided his relatives and that he preferred to sadden his parents than to retreat from God¹⁰.

The rejection of the “natural duties” of a woman is one of the main points in the biography of St. Philotea. According to St. Euthymius, she was married against her will at the age of 14, but she convinced her fiancé to preserve their virginity, referring to arguments ascribed to the Egyptian anchorite Amun¹¹. St. Philotea was one of the female saints of Byzantine (Anatolian) origin whose relics were carried

⁴ I. DUJČEV, *La vie de Kozma de Zographou*, X3 2, 1971, p. 62.

⁵ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 42–43.

⁶ ГЕОРГИ СКИЛИЦА, *Житие на светия и преподобен наш отец Йоан, рилския пустинослужител*, [in:] Й. ИВАНОВ, *Жития на свето Ивана Рилски*, София 1936, p. 41.

⁷ *Житие и живот на преподобния наш отец Йоан рилския пустинослужител и за пренасянето на мощите му (Народно житие)*, [in:] Й. ИВАНОВЪ, *Жития на свети Ивана Рилски*, София 1936, p. 28, 30.

⁸ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 84–85.

⁹ К. ИВАНОВА, *Житието на Петка Търновска от Патриарх Евтимий (Източници и текстологични бележки)*, СЛ 8, 1980, p. 31–32.

¹⁰ В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *Житие и жизнь преподобнаго отца нашего Θεωδοσία ἁγιου в Тръновѣ постнѣчьствовашиго*, СЛУНК 20, 1904, p. 10.

¹¹ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 99–100.

to Tarnovo, the Bulgarian capital, during the military campaigns of the Bulgarian Tsar Kaloyan in the early 13th century. Byzantine documents about her life have not been preserved¹², and it is unclear if this part of her biography followed an original Greek text or was introduced by Bulgarian biographer(s). It is remarkable that the arguments against marriage considered the difficulties and pain accompanying pregnancy, giving birth and bringing up children. In fact, these “natural duties” of a woman are presented as real death in contrast to virginity and celibacy leading to eternal life¹³. Yoasaf of Bdin, who wrote an apology in honor of the same female saint in 1394–1395, also glorified the decision of spouses to keep their virginity¹⁴. In this way, in the late works of the Tarnovo authors, a new model of family life was introduced, but there is no information about couples who in the 14th century actually followed this model.

Besides, the Tarnovo writers in respect of St. Paraskeva and St. Philotea, as early as the 13th century widely used the motif of heavenly marriage¹⁵ – i.e. “marriage of a virgin devotee to Christ”. The subsequent development of this motif in 14th century works was closely related to the cult of these female saints.

One of the interesting moments in the biographies of saints translated from Greek was a phenomenon which could be labeled with the term “restoration of celibacy”. That is the case when the future anchorite and saint left his wife and went to the “desert”. For instance, John, one of the characters in the biography of St. Simon the Holy Fool¹⁶, translated into Bulgarian in the 10th century and preserved in several Middle Bulgarian manuscripts¹⁷, abandoned his young wife and became an anchorite in the Syrian desert together with his friend. His wife knew nothing about the decision of her husband but subsequently she also became a nun. Presbyter Kozma, a 10th century Bulgarian author, explicitly noticed that there were men who left their families and went to monasteries because they could not bear the burdens of family life¹⁸. Most likely texts such as the biography of St. Simon the Holy Fool ensured the social legitimacy of this phenomenon. However, the consequences were tragic; Presbyter Kozma spoke about abandoned children who were dying of starvation and cursing their parents. Kozma sharply criticized these men/monks and called them “worse than pagans”¹⁹. The Tarnovo

¹² С. КОЖУХАРОВ, *Проблеми на старобългарската поезия*, София 2004, р. 97.

¹³ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, р. 99–100.

¹⁴ ЙОАСАФ БДИНСКИ, *Похвално слово за Филотея*, [in:] *Стара българска литература*, vol. II, *Ораторска проза*, София 1982, р. 187–200.

¹⁵ С. КОЖУХАРОВ, *Проблеми...*, р. 99.

¹⁶ The original Greek title of biography is *Ὁ βίος τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεῶν τοῦ διὰ Χριστὸν Σαλοῦ*.

¹⁷ С. ИВАНОВ, *Неизвестный древнеболгарский термин «ВЛОГЪЖУПАН»*, [in:] *Восток и запад в балканской картине мира. Памяти Владимира Николаевича Топорова*, Москва 2007, р. 180.

¹⁸ *Беседа противъ новооявилата се богомислка ересь отъ недостойния презвитеръ Козма*, [in:] В. КИСЕЛКОВ, *Презвитеръ Козма и неговитъ творения*, София 1943, р. 63.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

authors did not include “the restoration of celibacy” in their works and obviously did not support the abandonment of one’s family in the name of the “desert”, but probably the translations from Greek continued to exert an influence on many people; the large number of copies of the abovementioned biography and other similar texts support this assumption.

Judging from the writings of Presbyter Kozma (from the mid-10th century) and from the inscriptions from the rock monasteries in Krepcha and Murfatlar dating back to the first decades of the 10th century²⁰, it can be concluded that celibacy gained some popularity among people as early as the first half of the 10th century. Besides, many of the saints and anchorites of the medieval Bulgarian church originated from the ordinary urban and rural populations. The works of popular scribes show that the glorification of celibacy was a widely spread phenomenon in medieval Bulgarian literature, irrespective of the social origin and education of the authors. For example, the compilers of the 12th century *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, a typical work of popular Christian literature, explicitly focused on the celibacy of two Bulgarian rulers canonized by the church, Boris I (830s – 907) and Peter I (the beginning of the 10th century – 969): they “had not sinned with a woman”²¹.

The *Edict of our Lord Jesus Christ*, another representative narrative from 13th or 14th century Bulgarian apocryphal literature, divided the world nations into three groups: the righteous (the Orthodox peoples – Bulgarians, Greeks, Syrians, Georgians and Rus’), the semi-righteous (12 nations, belonging to Catholicism and Non-Chalcedon churches) and the unbelievers. According to this apocrypha, the righteous nations originated from the sons and daughters of Shem who intentionally avoided sexual intercourse²², so God permitted them to reproduce in a non-sexual way²³. On the one hand, it could be suggested that this unusual idea was

²⁰ К. ПОПКОНСТАНТИНОВ, *Два старобългарски надписа от скалния манастир при с. Крeпчa, Търговишки окръг*, Архе 3, 1977, p. 19–27.

²¹ *Български апокрифен летопис*, [in:] Й. ИВАНОВ, *Богомилски книги и легенди*, София 1970, p. 283–284. Both rulers were not unmarried but at the end of their lives they became monks.

²² It is interesting that the unknown author chose Shem to be the forefather of “the righteous peoples” instead of Japheth, who usually was considered the progenitor of non-Jewish peoples in Europe. For instance, the author of a biography of Constantine Cyril, one of the earliest works of Old Slavonic and Bulgarian literature, described a dispute with Jewish scholars. One of the disputed problems was the blessing of Noah over Shem (the forefather of the Jewish people) and the lack of a similar blessing over Japheth, the forefather of Christians. *Житие и деяния на блажения наш учител Константин Философ*, [in:] *Пространни жития на светите братя Кирил и Методий*, София 1971, p. 27. The unusual appearance of Shem could be a result of Jewish influence. It is well-known that a large Jewish community inhabited Tarnovo, and according to the biography of St. Theodosii of Tarnovo in the mid-14th century they actively propagated their religious doctrines among Bulgarians – В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *Житие и жизнь...*, p. 24–25.

²³ *Слово на Господа нас Исус Христос*, [in:] *Стара българска литература*, vol. I, *Апокрифи*, София 1982, p. 341.

influenced by Messalian or Bogomil doctrines, but another explanation also seems possible. Bulgarian folk culture has always condemned any kind of incest especially that between brother and sister. According to popular beliefs, it could cause the destruction of the social and cosmological order. Most likely the anonymous scribe rewriting the Biblical story of Noah, and his sons tried to erase any trace of incest in the genealogy of Bulgarians and other “righteous” peoples.

Outside the Orthodox Church, celibacy became an essential part of the doctrines of different heretical teachings, such as Bogomilism. Some of them practiced very radical forms of celibacy, for example, in 1350s two monks, Lazar and Cyril Bosota, influenced by Messalianism and Bogomilism appeared in Tarnovo. Cyril Bosota preached against the family and insisted on dissolving legal marriages and even on mutilation of the reproductive organs. It is interesting that he gained popularity among the population and was followed by one of the Tarnovo priests named Stefan. These circumstances forced the church and secular authorities to call a council against them, but even then, Cyril and Stefan did not abandon their teaching²⁴.

In her investigation into medieval Orthodox Slavic societies, Eve Levin asserts that they did not accept sexuality as an “innate” phenomenon.

The medieval Orthodox Slavs [...] believed that the desire for sex came from outside the human being and was not part of God's original creation. They saw sexuality as an evil inclination originating with Satan, dangerous to the individual and to society, best kept within strict bounds if it could not be eliminated altogether²⁵.

This assertion corresponds much more to the doctrine of Bogomilism, which rejected any kind of sexual contact and marriage and considered children “little devils”²⁶ regarding them entirely as a result of sexual intercourse. According to their teaching, male lust was the most universal way of propagating original sin and the evil of Satan²⁷. This radical rejection of sexuality was typical of the Messalians, too, a Syrian monkish sect, which also preached against the family and childcare²⁸. Since the 11th century many Byzantine authors tended to see a connection between both heresies – Bogomilism and Messalianism. Euthymius Zigabenus asserted that the Bogomils borrowed from the Messalians part of their demonology, and more exactly the notion that devils live inside every man²⁹. The Byzantine monk, Euthymius of Akmonia, and the patriarch of Nicea, Germanos II

²⁴ В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *Житіе и жизнь...*, p. 20–21.

²⁵ E. LEVIN, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700*, Ithaca–London 1989, p. 13.

²⁶ *Беседа противъ...*, p. 47.

²⁷ *Тайната книга (Liber Sancti Iohannis)*, [in:] Й. ИВАНОВ, *Богомилски...*, p. 78–79.

²⁸ S. IOANNIS DAMASCENI, *За ересите накратко. Fons scintiae*, Sofia 2014, p. 274–275.

²⁹ EUTHYMIUS ZIGABENUS, *De haeresi Bogomilorum narratio*, [in:] FGHB, Sofia 1980, p. 65.

(1175–1240), in practice completely equated both heresies³⁰. Other Byzantine authors also shared similar views³¹. Therefore, it was not surprising that patriarch Kalist I, the author of the biography of St. Theodosii³², called Cyril Bosota “Messalian”³³. According to the testimony of St. John of Damascus, Messalians allowed self-castration³⁴. Obviously self-castration was practiced in both groups and was part of their radical sectarian negativism toward sexuality.

Since the appearance of Bogomilism in the first half of the 10th century, church writers constantly defended marriage and family. During the council against Lazar, Cyril Bosota and Stefan, St. Theodosii of Tarnovo explicitly emphasized “the purity of marriage and the nuptial bed”³⁵ – a church euphemism for sexual relations within family and marriage. The defense of these relations against the attacks of Bogomilism has a long history which started with the work of Presbyter Kozma in the mid-10th century. His arguments in favor of marriage were used in an 11th century polemical compilation against Theodor, a monk who preached against physical intimacy between spouses. This monk said, “do not sleep with (your) wife”. Yuri Begunov tended to identify him with one of the followers of the priest Bogomil, Theodore, whose name is mentioned in the Synodicon of Tsar Boril³⁶. However, in the compilation, Theodore was called only a monk, not a heretic, and he did not share any dualistic views. Having in mind that many works of the Tarnovo writers called for preservation of virginity it could be also supposed that Theodore was representative of some radical monastic groups which tried to impose their ethics on society at large.

Similarly to the Bogomils, 14th century Orthodox Bulgarian authors excluded sexuality from the nature of the future heavenly man. They glorified saints as people who realized this heavenly ideal on Earth, and celibacy as a way leading to heaven, but there is no proof that they considered sexuality as an abnormal phenomenon coming from Satan. For instance, in one of his letters St. Euthymius wrote that desire and wrath were given to the human soul by God so that it could use wrath as a weapon against the attempts of Satan to trick and subjugate it again. Desire was gifted to the soul so that it could aspire to the divine world, not for

³⁰ EUTHYMIUS MONAHO COENOBII PERIBLIEPTAE, *Epistula invectiva contra phundagiagitas sive bogomilos haereticos*, [in:] FGHB, Sofia 1980, p. 10; GERAMNOS PATRIARCHAE CONSTANTINOPOLITANI, *Epistola ad Constantinopolitanos contra Bogomilos*, [in:] FGHB, Sofia 1980, p. 78.

³¹ Д. БИРЮКОВ, *Книга еретиков: антология*, ПХГА, 2011, p. 307.

³² This biography is preserved only in a Middle Bulgarian variant. Its supposed Greek original remains unknown. Because of this and some other reasons some researchers in the past have questioned the authorship of Kalist I and considered this biography an original Bulgarian work. Contemporary researchers accept the authorship of Kalist I.

³³ В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *Житие и жизнь...*, p. 19.

³⁴ S. IOANNIS DAMASCENI, *За ересите...*, p. 276–277.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

³⁶ Ю. БЕГУНОВ, *Козма Презвитер в славянских литературах*, София 1973, p. 33, 122.

sensual things. However, when the soul realizes its aspiration, desire shall disappear³⁷. Indeed, by comparison with 10th century Bulgarian authors such Presbyter Kozma, who argued that man could save or lose his soul in both cases, i.e. in celibacy and matrimony, the 14th century authors promoted celibacy as the preferred way of salvation. The latter is usually attributed to Hesychasm, a monastic doctrine which emerged on Mount Athos and since the 1350s exerted an essential influence on the development of the Byzantine and Bulgarian churches. Another factor effecting this change was the spread of some chiliastic ideas. In the 12th century, Joachim of Fiore, an Italian monk, as a result of a mystical experience proclaimed the advent of a new epoch, that of the Holy Spirit in which “spiritual men” / monks dominated³⁸. In the next decades his ideas gained popularity in Europe. The above-mentioned anonymous 13th century Bulgarian work presented the Bulgarian state as the tsardom of the Holy Spirit³⁹. Besides, the Synodicon of Tsar Boril shows that during the reign of John Alexander (1331–1371) monks occupied high positions in the state and royal court⁴⁰.

The evidence from the biography of St. Theodosii of Tarnovo, the most famous Bulgarian anchorite in the mid-14th century, provides some rough estimation about the number of people who chose celibacy. His biographer noticed that around 50 men settled in his monastery located near Tarnovo and followed his ascetic way of life⁴¹. Almost a century earlier, in 1272, there were 21 monks⁴², who inhabited the Bulgarian Zograf monastery on Mount Athos, actively supported by the Bulgarian rulers. Indeed, during this period the number of monasteries was high, but most people became monks after the death of their spouses, or after divorce. According to the evidence of Rayner Sakkoni, in the mid-13th century the leading Bogomil communities in Europe, *Bulgaria* and *Dragovitia*, both located within Bulgarian territory, included approximately 500 people⁴³.

On this basis, it could be concluded that the average number of people who chose celibacy at that time was minimal. Therefore, in spite of the church and popular piety, the glorification of celibacy in the official and popular literature and its spread in different social strata, and in spite of the Bogomil and Messalian rejection of sexuality and marriage, there is no doubt that they continued to dominate the social and personal life of 14th century Bulgarians. Some aspects

³⁷ E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 215; ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 213.

³⁸ B. WHALLEN, *Joachim of Fiore, Apocalyptic Conversion, and the 'Persecuting Society'*, HCom 8/7, 2010, p. 354; M. ELIADE, *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*, vol. III, *De Mahomet à l'âge des réformes*, Paris 1983, p. 119.

³⁹ *Слово на Господа нас Исус Христос...*, p. 341.

⁴⁰ М. ПОПРУЖЕНКО, *Синодикъ царя Борила*, София 1928, p. 90.

⁴¹ В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *Житіе и жизнь...*, p. 18.

⁴² *Мъчение на Зографските монаси*, [in:] *Стара българска литература*, vol. IV..., p. 284.

⁴³ RAYNER SAKKONI, *Summa fratris Raynerii de ordine fratrum praedicatorum, de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno*, [in:] *FLHB*, София 1981, p. 170.

of marriage and puberty and their relation to priesthood were discussed in the letters of the last Tarnovo patriarch, St. Euthymius, revealing a very different reality from celibacy and lifelong virginity.

The letter of St. Euthymius to the Ugro-Wallachian metropolitan Antimos

This letter (Tarnovo recension) dates from the 1380s and was written in Old Slavonic (Bulgarian). The name of the author is given as Euthymius⁴⁴, Patriarch of Trûnov⁴⁵. The same name and title appear in the copies of the other letters of St. Euthymius and apparently this correctly renders his original signature. The name and title of the addressee is “the holiest metropolitan of Ugro-Wallachia, mister Antim”⁴⁶. This letter is preserved in a manuscript from 1479⁴⁷. There, St. Euthymius defends the decision of the Tarnovo patriarchy to exclude the rite of *venchanie* (coronation of the newly married) from the church ceremony when one of the newlyweds or both of the newlyweds were marrying for a second or third time. According to the evidence of the patriarch, many people complained about this situation, in which their second or third marriages were considered invalid and accused the church of legitimising fornication⁴⁸. Based on the seventh rule of the Council of Neo-Caesarea, the writings of the church fathers St. Gregory of Nissa and St. Gregory the Theologian, and the Gospel story of the wedding at Cana, St. Euthymius asserted that only the first marriage could be considered holy, and only then, the newlyweds (being virgins) could receive wreaths (crowns)⁴⁹ and communion. He described any subsequent marriages, especially when one of the betrothed couple entered into marriage for the first time, as a victory of lust over virginity and, therefore, the newlyweds subjugated by desire could not demand wreaths. Referring to the

⁴⁴ The name of the patriarch in Bulgarian sources is recorded as *Евѣнмїѣ*. This variant is the medieval Bulgarian adoption of the Greek name *Ευθύμιος*. In the article I have used the English transcription of the Greek name.

⁴⁵ The exact title of the patriarchs of Tarnovo in medieval Bulgarian sources is given in different ways. For example, the author(s) of the Synodicon of Tsar Boril used two variants: “patriarch of the royal city of Trûnov, saved by God” and “the holy patriarch of Trûnov” – М. ПОПРУЖЕНКО, *Синодикъ...*, p. 91. Patriarch Theodisii II in 1348 calls himself “Theodosius, by the grace of God, patriarch of the royal city of Trûnov and all Bulgarians” in the books given by him to the Bulgarian Zograf monastery on Mount Athos – Й. ИВАНОВ, *Български старини в Македония*, София 1970, p. 235. Tarnovo scribes called his predecessor, Simeon, “the holy patriarch of the royal city of Trûnov, saved by God, and of all Bulgaria” – К. КУЕВ, *Съдбата на старобългарската ръкописна книга през вековете*, София 1986, p. 246.

⁴⁶ E. KAŁUŹNIAKSI, *Werke...*, p. 240.

⁴⁷ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 298.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 220; E. KAŁUŹNIAKSI, *Werke...*, p. 241.

⁴⁹ Eve Levin notices that the Orthodox authors shared different opinions about the role of crowns: according to St. John Chrysostom, *the nuptial crowns symbolized victory over the flesh. According to another text, the crown symbolized martyrdom: marriage was portrayed as a voluntary sacrifice of the self for the greater glory of God* – E. LEVIN, *Sex and Society...*, p. 94.

writings of another early Christian theologian, St. Vasilus the Great, the patriarch also insisted on one or two years of prohibition (penance) before receiving communion⁵⁰. He firmly rejected any attempts at reaching a compromise solution to the problem suggesting the wreaths to be not put on the heads but on the shoulders⁵¹.

The content of the letter indicates that the cases where one of the newlyweds got married for the first time and the other for the second, were relatively widespread phenomena at this time. Besides, it was not always men who were getting married for a second time; widows also created new families with virgin men. Even in these cases, the patriarch, following the church doctrine of marriage (according to which both spouses formed a new union), forbade priests to give communion to the virginal spouses in these couples. According to him, virgins had to marry virgins. Priests who gave communion to the virgins in such a marriage deprived themselves of their priestly dignity.

In his letter, St. Euthymius repeated several times the seventh rule of the church council in Neo-Caesarea prohibiting priests from taking part in the wedding banquet of people who were married for a second or third time. According to him, they had to leave the wedding immediately after the end of the church ceremony. It remains unknown whether all the priests of the Tarnovo patriarchy obeyed this prohibition, but two other mentions concerning the priests shed an unexpected light on the family relations in this diocese. St. Euthymius noticed that some people “had lived together in fornication” before their first marriage. Some of them had not been “catechized in time” and in this case the patriarch allowed the rite of *venchanie* to be performed even though these people “did not deserve it”⁵². It remains unclear who these people were. The only information about them is that they were not catechized and baptized “in time” – a circumstance that could be interpreted in different ways, but most likely they lived out of reach of church institutions. They could be identified with the different pastoral and rural communities inhabiting the high mountains of the Balkan Peninsula or with the descendants of the steppe population (Cumans and Alans) who settled in Bulgaria in the second part of the 13th and at the beginning of the 14th century and were partially Christianized.

Apparently, the other group of people who lived “together in fornication” were catechized and baptized Christians, who, contrary to the rules, created families without the sanction of the church. In another passage, the patriarch unequivocally blamed some priests for performing the rite of *venchanie* not only on people married for the second and third time, but also on “fornicators” – Christians who

⁵⁰ The Tarnovo patriarchy strictly obeyed this rule; for example, at the end of the 13th century patriarch Joachim III deprived the Bulgarian Tsar Georgi Terter from receiving communion for several years because of his divorce and second marriage.

⁵¹ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 225–226; E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 249–250.

⁵² ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 223; E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 245–246.

had lost their virginity before their first marriage. He categorically condemned this practice as a “big violation of the rules and the Gospel”⁵³.

Some evidence in the works of other Tarnovo authors from this period can shed further light on the social profile of these Christians. Grigorii Tsamblak, in his panegyric written in honor of St. Euthymius around 1405–1406, wrote about a monastery named after the Virgin Mary located near Tarnovo. Every year in the summer the whole population of the town, “together with children and women” gathered around the monastery and for eight days celebrated a holiday:

They gathered because of the holiday and supposedly prayed, but the place (the monastery) and its wilderness encouraged the lust of fornicators, and they (the population) indulged in sin and in every kind of vices and attracted God’s resentment.

The patriarch canceled the holiday and forbade the gatherings and *thus, he saved many souls from death*⁵⁴.

In the Christian calendar, there are no summer holidays lasting for 8 days. In another work, Tsamblak noticed that the young girls in Tarnovo usually did not leave their homes; however, in exceptional instances they “forgot the shame” and walked outside⁵⁵. In this case, Tsamblak referred to a religious event, but the abovementioned holiday must have been one of these exceptional circumstances. Tsamblak described an orgiastic tradition of popular origin. The duration of the holiday, its mass character, and the season of celebration indicate a connection with the festivals of archaic agricultural societies. The holiday could be identified with the celebrations of the summer solstice. One of the articles in the Synodicon of Tsar Boril explicitly proclaimed anathema on everyone who participated in the pagan rituals performed on the day of St. John the Baptist (24 June). Indeed, the article was translated from the letter of the patriarch of Constantinople Kozma II to the bishop of Larissa, but the holiday was widespread throughout the Balkans⁵⁶. During similar festivals, the social order turned into social disorder, and promiscuity was one of the manifestations of this disorder. This story obviously shows that the influence of the church doctrine of marriage and virginity on the population of the capital city was limited.

The case of Theodosii, described in the biography of St. Theodosii of Tarnovo (30 years before the patriarchate of St. Euthymius) also confirms the popularity of orgiastic practices among the population of the central part of the Second Bulgarian Tsardom. According to the dates of the biography, he was a monk who

⁵³ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 225; Е. КАЉУЖНИАСКИ, *Werke...*, p. 249.

⁵⁴ ГРИГОРИЙ ЦАМБЛАК, *Похвално слово за Евтимий*, ed. П. РУСЕВ, И. ГЪЛБОВ, А. ДАВИДОВ, Г. ДАНЧЕВ, София 1971, p. 190–191.

⁵⁵ ИДЕМ, *Похвално слово за Киприан*, [in:] *Стара българска литература*, vol. II..., p. 211.

⁵⁶ А.-М. ТОТОМАНОВА, И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Държава и църква през XIII век*, София 1999, p. 124.

preached in “villages and towns” for “women to leave their husbands and men to leave their wives”. Theodosii practiced a ritual nudity; he and his followers stripped off their clothes and walked completely naked around “bleak landscapes and caves” and spent the nights together in common accommodation⁵⁷. The group of Theodosii included many women and teenage boys and several men⁵⁸. Most likely, Theodosii wanted to create a new monastic community based on Gnostic ideas⁵⁹, but undoubtedly many of his followers, especially the teenage boys, must have been inspired by their natural instincts⁶⁰. However, the fact that many of the members of this community were married women who left their families can explain this phenomenon as a female and teenage revolt against forced and arranged marriages and the traditional dress restrictions imposed on women. Constantine of Kostenechki, another Tarnovo author from this period, asserted that women “completely deprived of virginity” covered their heads with veils and wreaths, and only the little girls who were “not subjugated to debauchery and fornication” did not veil their heads⁶¹.

In the mid-10th century presbyter Kozma noticed that many women refused sexual contacts with their husbands and because of that these men sought similar contacts out of their families and became fornicators. Kozma called these women “evil and moronic” and asserted that their sexual abstinence became the reason for the fall of their husbands⁶². Most likely this behavior of women also resulted from the forced and arranged marriages which dominated traditional societies and could also be regarded as a spontaneous female revolt against them.

The 13th century collection of copies and extracts of divorce documents relating to the diocese of the neighboring Bulgarian Archbishopric of Ohrid also confirmed the existence of divorces initiated by men and women, divided families and non-married couples among the ordinary population⁶³. This evidence refers to the reigns of Theodor Komnin and John Assen II from the first half of the 13th century, indicating that the phenomenon did not start in the 14th century.

⁵⁷ The existence of similar groups has been a well-known phenomenon since Late Antiquity. St. Augustine of Hippo was the first Christian author who mentioned their presence in North Africa in the 4th and 5th century AD – AUGUSTINE, *Arianism and Other Heresies*, New York 1995, p. 39. In the 12th and 13th century their appearance is registered in Flanders – N. СОHN, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists in the Middle Ages*, New York 1970, p. 180.

⁵⁸ В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *Житіе и жизнь...*, p. 23–24.

⁵⁹ I explored the similarities between the doctrine and rituals of the group described in the biography of St. Theodosii and one of the Gnostic Gospels in a separate article published in Bulgarian in 2020.

⁶⁰ According to the researchers of similar phenomena in Western Europe, sexual relations existed between the members of these groups – N. СОHN, *The Pursuit...*, p. 180.

⁶¹ КОНСТАНТИН КОСТЕНЕЧКИ, *Сказание за буквите*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Съчинения*, ed. А.-М. ТОТОМАНОВА, София 1993, p. 56.

⁶² *Беседа противъ...*, p. 72–73.

⁶³ Y. HRISTOV, *Marriage and Divorce Law in the Vardar Valley of the Thirteenth Century*, SI-H 2, 2013, p. 94–98.

In this context, the information in the letter of St. Euthymius about couples who lived in fornication before a first marriage does not seem so surprising. Perhaps, some of them thus tried to avoid forced and arranged marriages and their alternatives, celibacy and monkhood, or followed some popular wedding traditions in which the church ceremony was the last and perhaps non-obligatory stage of marriage. The letter also suggests that at least some of these couples subsequently returned to the church to undergo the rite of *venchanie*, and there were priests who allowed it and had a compromising attitude towards these couples.

The second letter of St. Euthymius to St. Nicodemus of Tismana

The letter is a part of a correspondence between the patriarch of Tarnovo and St. Nicodemus who introduced the hesychastic and monastic tradition in (Ugro)-Wallachia⁶⁴ and was the founder of a monastery in Tismana (modern Western Romania). The correspondence dates from the 1380s and was initiated by St. Nicodemus, who addressed different questions to St. Euthymius. The first letter concerned problems relating to demonology and angelology. The second letter is preserved fragmentarily, only one question and its answer, in two copies⁶⁵. The language of the letters is Old Slavonic (Bulgarian) – Tarnovo recension. The original text was published by Emil Kaľuźniacki in 1901⁶⁶.

St. Nicodemus informed the patriarch that according to the rules of the Holy Fathers of the Church men were responsible for sexual sins after becoming 15. However, he found that many young boys under this age have committed different sexual acts – automanipulation or had sexual contacts with men (homosexuality) and even with animals (bestiality). St. Nicodemus questioned if it was possible for men who had committed similar acts before their 15th year to be inducted into the priesthood, i.e. become priests⁶⁷.

The occurrences described in the question of St. Nicodemus happened in regions (most likely the region of Tismana) that were outside the diocese of the Tarnovo patriarchy. The answer of St. Euthymius on one hand reflected the official attitude of the church authorities in Tarnovo during this period toward similar cases, and the practices of ordinary priests which differed from the views of the

⁶⁴ Ugro-Wallachia was the original term used in the Bulgarian written tradition in this and later periods. It designated the Wallachian principality created in the first half of the 14th century north of the Danube by the Wallachian groups who left the region of the Carpathian Mountains in the same period and migrated to the plains north of the Danube. The problem is that different regions of the Medieval Balkans were also called Wallachia, and even the Second Bulgarian Tsardom (1186–1396) in the 12th and 13th centuries in many sources is called Wallachia and its population Wallachians. However, these Wallachia(s) included population different from those of the 14th century Wallachian principality. To avoid any ambiguity, I used the term (Ugro)-Wallachia.

⁶⁵ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 299.

⁶⁶ Е. КАЉУЏНИАКЦИ, *Werke...*, p. 221–224.

⁶⁷ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 227; Е. КАЉУЏНИАКЦИ, *Werke...*, p. 221.

patriarch. Several points can be highlighted in the answer. In the introductory part St. Euthymius focused on the attitude of the ordinary priests:

This problem requires a lot of attention and caution because some (priests) led by excessive compassion (can) fall into the Mallesian heresy. Others, because of excessive insistence, (can) accept Navat's illusion. Even in our times, there are priests, who led by compassion, treat their parishioners with mercy. However, the careful keeping of the divine rules denies this (attitude)⁶⁸.

St. Euthymius rejected two attitudes toward the problem, that were according to his opinion wrong and extreme. The first one was excessive indulgence, and the second was the ultimate condemnation of the sinners. He identified this kind of behavior with Mallesian heresy. This term is usually interpreted as *messalian*⁶⁹. In his works, St. Euthymius, in reference to the Armenian church, or heresies such as iconoclasm and Paulicianism, usually relies on the *Panoplia Dogmatica* by Euthymius Zigabenos. In this case, a direct connection between the mention of Mellasian and the second chapter of *The Fountain of Knowledge*, "Concerning Heresy", cannot be excluded at all. Its author, St. John of Damascus noticed that Messalians accepted many sinners and soon after that declared them "pure" from any sin. "Using fraud", they convinced some bishops to ordain these sinful priests⁷⁰.

St. Euthymius identified the second erroneous attitude with the views of the 3rd century Roman theologian Novatius, who insisted on lifelong penance for those Christians who performed pagan rituals during the anti-Christian processions in the Roman Empire⁷¹. The letter indicated that the first attitude was spread among the priests at this time.

Surprisingly, St. Euthymius resorted to a typical psychological explanation of early sexual activity. He divided young boys into two groups: those who had a "hot nature" and those with a "cold nature":

Therefore, the young boys must be protected not according to their age, but because of their lust. Some of them, due to their hot temperament, not in their fourteenth, neither in their fifteenth year but still in their thirteenth and twelfth year are urged by nature

⁶⁸ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 227; E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 221.

⁶⁹ М. ЦИБРАНСКА-КОСТОВА, *Вечните теми на православието: Патриарх Евтимий и Евтимий Зигавин за иконоборството (езикови аспекти)*, *Slov* 11.2, 2022, p. 70.

⁷⁰ S. IOANNIS DAMASCENI, *За ересите...*, p. 275.

⁷¹ At first glance the phonetic form of the name in the text of the letter – Наватъ (Navat) shows a connection with the work of St. John of Damascus, *Concerning Heresy* (the 8th century). Here the name is given in the variant Ναβάτος in the rubric of Cathars: *They are allied to Navatos the Roman. They completely reject these who are getting married for a second time and do not accept repentance*, S. IOANNIS DAMASCENI, *За ересите...*, p. 254–255. However, the same name, in the same phonetic form appeared in an Old Bulgarian manuscript dating back to the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century, *Старобългарски речник*, София 1999, p. 900. Therefore, the connection with other Old Bulgarian and Byzantine sources seems quite possible.

to ejaculation. I, personally, saw a boy who before turning his twelfth year had debauched a virgin girl⁷². Do not be skeptical because there are many witnesses who live among us yet. Those whose nature is cold, not after their fifteenth, neither after their sixteenth year and some of them even after their eighteenth year have not (sexual) desire because the stirring that generates lust does not exist (in them)⁷³.

St. Euthymius insisted that only the young boys who had “a cold nature” must be accepted for priests. According to him, those who committed automanipulation could become priests but after “many efforts, tests and spiritual reflections” because the excessive mercy shown to similar people could become the reason for their doom. The patriarch completely excluded the option of men who in adolescence had committed sin with other men and animals to be inducted into the priesthood. To justify his denial, he expressed his views on priesthood: it was a part of the heavenly hierarchy and even the angels and death were subjugated to priests, therefore, they must live like angels and keep their bodies pure. The sexual act was specified as a pollution of body: *How can a body which poured out its dirt onto another body during the immoral intercourse be called pure?*⁷⁴ He determined the behavior of men during similar intercourse as “ferocity”⁷⁵ and concluded that *everyone who wants to be a priest must have a pure life, and an undefiled body so that he can attain angelic dignity*⁷⁶.

In the second part of the answer, St. Euthymius used a long quote from the canonical rules of St. Ioannes the Faster, the patriarch of Constantinopol (582–595), who forbade priesthood only for those men who committed anal intercourse because it destroyed the virginity of a passive man but allowed it for men who committed other kinds of homosexual acts after enduring church punishment (ἐπιτιμία)⁷⁷. This quote to some extent disagrees with the strong statement of St. Euthymius, who, in the first part of his answer, rejected any possibility for priesthood irrespective of the nature of a homosexual act. Homosexuality and bestiality⁷⁸ as matters for discussion appeared for the first time in original Bulgarian works. Bulgarian medieval authors avoided these topics and the careful reading of the letter shows a certain confusion about this problem in the diocese of the Tarnovo patriarchy; St. Euthymius spoke about the different approaches of priests in similar cases. The quote in question indicates certain hesitations, too. It is also significant

⁷² It is interesting that in this case the responsibility is entirely ascribed to the hot nature of the teenage boy.

⁷³ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 227–228; E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 221–222.

⁷⁴ Often the sin of the active participant in a homosexual act was considered more grievous than this of the passive – S. VOJANIN, *Homoseksualnost u Srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, [in:] *Među nama*, ed. J. BLAGOJEVIĆ, O. ĐIMIĆIJEVIĆ, Beograd 2014, p. 30. E. LEVIN, *Sex and Society...*, p. 201.

⁷⁵ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 228; E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 222.

⁷⁶ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 229; E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 222.

⁷⁷ ПАТРИАРХ ЕВТИМИЙ, *Съчинения...*, p. 229; E. KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Werke...*, p. 222.

⁷⁸ In fact, the patriarch did not discuss bestiality as a separate topic.

that St. Euthymius, in his argumentation, relied on an example of an early teenage heterosexual act. Perhaps he had no information about early homosexual acts in his diocese, or because for some unknown reason consciously avoided commenting on them. However, it is obvious that the personal opinion of the patriarch in respect of the possibility of men who had experienced any kind of homosexual contact of becoming priests was categorically negative.

Early Christian authors since the time of Saint Paul the Apostle considered homosexuality and other sexual deviations as an entirely negative phenomenon completely inconsistent with the divine order and Christian belief. They regarded different manifestations of homosexual behavior as mortal sins and as extreme forms of sexual debauchery, but at the same time, they ascribed them to pagan mythologies and societies which did not know the true God (Rom. 1: 21–28)⁷⁹. However, in this case, the references to pagan mythologies and customs did not seem convincing, because the church authorities faced the same phenomena in a Christian milieu. Therefore, St. Euthymius resorted to an explanation reassembling Galen's theory of human temperaments and including all cases of sexual activity not sanctioned by the church. The latter differentiates the "psychological explanation"⁸⁰ of St. Euthymius from the usual medieval categorization of the sexual sins into two groups: those which are in accordance with nature (heterosexual sins) and those which are against it (homosexuality and bestiality)⁸¹. Eve Levin notes that Bulgaria, Serbia and Russia, in different periods, had their autocephalous churches, but *although they agreed on all major tenets of faith and practice, they differed in minor ways*⁸². Perhaps, this was one of these differences⁸³.

⁷⁹ For example: JUSTIN MARTYR, *The First Apology*, London 1889, p. 20–21, 36–37; CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, London–New York 1919 [= LCL, 92], p. 47–49, 69; ARNOBIUS OF SICCA, *The Case Against the Pagans*, New York 1949, p. 415–420 etc.

⁸⁰ In fact, this "psychological explanation" was popular in Bulgaria as far back as the early Middle Ages. The 10th century Bulgarian author Petar Chernorizets was the first who noted it, however, he denied its validity: *Many use shameful excuses, saying: "Some people are made of matter, they are hot and cannot overcome lust, unlike others who are made of slime, have cold bodies and can restrain themselves"*. Petar Chernorizets refuted these arguments – *Поучение на Петър Черноризец за душевното спасение*, [in:] P. ПАВЛОВА, *Петър Черноризец. Старобългарски писател от X век*, София 1994 [= КМс, 9], p. 413.

⁸¹ S. BOJANIN, *Homoseksualnost...*, p. 30. E. LEVIN, *Sex and Society...*, p. 198. At first glance, it is strange that St. Nicodemus did not include the disallowed heterosexual connections in his question. However, the letter is preserved fragmentarily. Perhaps, the problems of illicit heterosexual contacts were included in another question in accordance with the abovementioned categorization.

⁸² E. LEVIN, *Sex and Society...*, p. 18.

⁸³ Actually, the differences were not minimal. For example, in the mid-14th century the Bulgarian (Tarnovo) patriarch did not mention the names of Constantinople, and the other Eastern patriarchs during the liturgy, the Bulgarian church performed the rite of baptism in a different way from those in the Byzantine church and took chrism from a different source.

The explicit mention in the question of St. Nicodemus that young boys and men were involved in homosexual intercourse refers to the rites of initiation in male communities. They are rooted in prehistory and are widespread phenomena in the cultures of different ethnical, social and religious communities. This prompts me to think that the type of homosexual connections discussed in the letter from the perspective of the traditional communities inhabiting the region of Tismana⁸⁴ was not a deviation, but an integral part of their folk culture. Since the very beginning, the Christian church was confronted with this kind of homosexuality⁸⁵, but medieval authors saw in it only lust⁸⁶ and ignored the tradition, unlike the early Christian authors, who paid significant attention to traditions and to the social environment where similar contacts were realized: mythology, festivals, the mysteries of the pagan deities, the forms of education of youth in Roman and Greek societies, etc. This discontinuity between ancient and medieval authors resulted from the formal abolition of pagan religions and customs after the formal Christianization and from the artificial “symphony” imposed in the relationships between state, church and society. It shifted the focus entirely onto lust and this change became the other source of the psychological explanation suggested by St. Euthymius.

Constantine of Kostenets and the practices of “same-sex unions”

The book of the late American historian, John Boswell, *Same-sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe*, introduced to scholastic debates a highly disputed hypothesis about the nature of ceremonies of creating “spiritual brotherhood” which took place in the practices of the medieval church(es) via a separate church ritual. The rite established a spiritual connection (fraternity) between two men. Boswell suggests that the ceremonies in question resembled the marriage ceremonies and in practice they legalized and socialized homosexual connections⁸⁷.

The earliest Old Slavonic record of such a ritual is registered in the 11th century Glagolitic *Euchologium Sinaiticum*⁸⁸. A variant of the same ritual, very similar to those in the *Euchologium Sinaiticum* is found in the Middle Bulgarian Zaykovski

⁸⁴ The ethnic composition of the region of Tismana at this period is unclear. It could be suggested that it was inhabited by Hungarian and South Slavic people, Serbs and Bulgarians, and of course, by (Ugro)-Wallachians who probably formed the majority of the population.

⁸⁵ These kinds of contacts were explicitly prohibited in one of the earliest Christian documents – the Didache (1st century AD): *thou shall not kill; thou shall not commit adultery; thou shall not corrupt the youth; thou shall not commit fornication* – *The Didache or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, ed. Ch. HOOLE, London 1894, p. 76.

⁸⁶ S. BOJANIN, *Homoseksualnost...*, p. 25, 28–32.

⁸⁷ J. BOSWELL, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, New York 1994, p. 162–198.

⁸⁸ *Euchologium: glagolski spomenik manastira Sinai brda*, Zagreb 1882, p. 16–21.

typicom dating from the 14th century⁸⁹. However, the analysis of its linguistic characteristics indicates that it was created in areas which in the 14th century were outside the diocese of the Tarnovo patriarchy⁹⁰. The only medieval Bulgarian author who mentioned the rite was Constantine of Kostenets. He was one of the last followers of St. Euthymius and faced the practices of same-sex unions in the Serbian principality of Stefan Lazarevich. Here he sought asylum at the beginning of the 15th century after he left Plovdiv and the Bachkovo monastery, which were destroyed during the war between Bayazid's sons. Like other Bulgarian writers from the same period, he had great respect for the personality of St. Euthymius and the literary language of Tarnovo. He expressed this respect several times in his first work *A Treatise on the Letters*⁹¹ written between 1424–1426⁹². In the same work he presented himself as “a foreigner from the area of Tarnovo”⁹³ and glorified the former capital of the Second Tsardom as a place where “every bad thing is first corrected”⁹⁴. He spoke about “the men of Tarnovo”, who enlightened the surrounding and distant lands and who were a symbol of Christian erudition⁹⁵. From the position of a “man of Tarnovo” he confronted local priests and people. Urged by Stefan Lazarevich, he wrote *A Treatise on the Letters*, where he presented his views on all controversial issue: orthography, the education of children, social morals, etc. In several chapters (26–29) he listed and criticized the heresies widespread among the priests and accepted even by some high clergymen in the principality of Stefan Lazarevich. Actually, part of them were deeply embedded in popular culture and were widespread among the entire population – eating of (human?) blood⁹⁶, paying of great respect to a clairvoyant woman, her visions (the Virgin Mary prayed to Satan not to kill children), and following her instructions⁹⁷, exploring animal voices, etc.⁹⁸ The other “heresies” related to the corruption of the church rites and

⁸⁹ М. ЦИБРАНСКА-КОСТОВА, Е. МИРЧЕВА, *Зайковски требник от XIV век. Изследване и текст*, София 2012, p. 145.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 165–168.

⁹¹ КОНСТАНТИН КОСТЕНЕЧКИ, *Сказание...*, p. 16–17, 124.

⁹² П. ЛУКИН, *Письмена и Православие. Историко-филологическое исследование «Сказания о письменах» Константина Философа Костенецкого*, Москва 2001, p. 29–30.

⁹³ КОНСТАНТИН КОСТЕНЕЧКИ, *Сказание...*, p. 13.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 13, 16–17, 53.

⁹⁶ According to the testimony of Constantine, eating human blood became the main field of confrontation with the local priests and people. Many people who disagreed with the sermons of Constantine against the eating of blood told him to leave their land and to go to Constantinople and to preach there – *ibidem*, p. 91. It seems that it was a widespread tradition among the priests and laymen – *ibidem*, p. 89. Constantine spoke about people who fasted and consumed blood. It was given also to children; *ibidem*, p. 97. The church authorities tried to eradicate this tradition but failed – *ibidem*, p. 89.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 89, 99.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 99.

customs: many priests could not cross themselves correctly⁹⁹, participated in “the destruction of the churches” during the Easter holidays¹⁰⁰ and used the church dishes in their everyday life¹⁰¹.

Constantine saw “spiritual brotherhood” as a heresy¹⁰², but his arguments were not completely comprehensible. He pointed out that all Christians were brothers and sisters, and, therefore, the ritual of spiritual brotherhood violated one of the key social concepts in Christianity:

Do you know that we are brothers by the blood of God? [...] Does he who follows the practice of brotherhood not hear the words found everywhere in the apostolic book, stating that we are brothers and sisters through holy Baptism? And are not our mothers truly sisters in the cross?¹⁰³.

However, he asserted that the ritual “reduplicated” God:

The fifth heresy is that of those who preach of two Gods, [two Johns preachers of penitence], two Messiahs, two baptisms, that is to say, the heresy of brotherhood [...] is the Christian who turns to disbelief and then returns to the faith not baptized again?¹⁰⁴.

Nothing in the text of the different variants of the ritual known from Slavic and Byzantine manuscripts, leads to a similar conclusion. Some researchers of the works of Constantine on the basis of this evidence proposed the hypothesis that during this period the ritual in the principality of Stefan Lazarevich was accompanied by a second baptism¹⁰⁵.

An apocryphal work whose authorship is ascribed to the 11th century Bulgarian priest Jeremiah, can shed light on the problem. One of the stories included in the work concerns Prov who became a spiritual brother with Jesus while bathing in a river near Jericho. At the end of the story the author called on the people to become brothers following the example of Prov and Jesus¹⁰⁶. The work enjoyed popularity in Bulgaria and Serbia in the 13th and 14th century¹⁰⁷ and probably

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 100, 104. According to Kuyo Kuev and Georgi Petkov, Constantine had in mind some popular rites or banquets having taken place in the churches at Easter – К. КУЕВ, Г. ПЕТКОВ, *Събрани съчинения на Константин Костенечки. Изследване и текст*, София 1988, p. 64.

¹⁰¹ КОНСТАНТИН КОСТЕНЕЧКИ, *Сказание...*, p. 102.

¹⁰² КОНСТАНТИН КОСТЕНЕЧКИ, *Сказание...*, p. 101.

¹⁰³ H. GOLDBLATT, *Orthography and Orthodoxy: Constantine Kostenecki's Treatise on the Letters (Skazanie iz' yavleno o pis'menekh)*, Florence 1987, p. 169.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 169. The fragment ‘two Johns preachers of penitence’ from the original text (К. КУЕВ, Г. ПЕТКОВ, *Събрани съчинения...*, p. 188) is absent from the English translation by Harvey Goldblatt.

¹⁰⁵ К. КУЕВ, Г. ПЕТКОВ, *Събрани съчинения...*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁶ *Повест за кръстното дърво от поп Йеремия*, [in:] *Стара българска литература*, vol. I..., p. 283.

¹⁰⁷ Д. ПЕТКАНОВА, *Старобългарската литература IX–XVIII век*, София 1992, p. 263.

influenced the rituals for the “creation of brothers”. Perhaps, Constantine interpreted as a “second baptism”, a water rite added to the ritual under the influence of apocryphal literature. However, it is obvious that Constantine condemned the ritual entirely in the context of *adelphopoiesis*, and in spite of his negative attitude towards it he mentioned nothing about its supposed homosexual connotations.

To sum up, several conclusions can be drawn. The first one relates to celibacy. It was practiced by a small group of people of different social origins. It was a typical Christian phenomenon and was introduced to Bulgarian land in its Eastern Christian (Byzantine and Near Eastern/heretical) manifestations – anchoritism, monasticism¹⁰⁸, messalianism, dualism and the preservation of virginity within marriage and family. The reality of the latter is a controversial problem; probably it was only a literary fiction. Celibacy was not a typical example of the confrontation between high and popular culture because it was widely mentioned in many works of popular literature. It also formed an essential part of the identity of some heretical groups such as the Bogomils. A pietism that was a source of celibacy was unacceptable to a traditional society, dividing families and communities belonging to different social strata – villagers (St. John of Rila), inhabitants of provincial towns (St. Romil of Bdin), the high aristocracy (St. Theodosii of Tarnovo), etc. The Tarnovo authors and scribes following the Gospel, the fathers of church and the examples of Byzantine monastic tradition and literature defended this pietism in its conflict with traditional society. However, they were in a paradoxical situation because, on the other hand, they should defend the traditional family and its main aim, reproduction, against the pietism of the Bogomils and the Messalians.

Some of the other conflicts between the church and popular culture described in the works of 14th century Tarnovo authors related to marriage and different aspects of sexuality. The church authorities tried to regulate, manage or cancel its different manifestations, but in many cases their arguments could not influence the population and their control over the emotions often failed. Constantine’s work *A Treatise on the Letters* indicates that the situation in other spheres did not essentially differ. The most common explanation of these phenomena suggested by the medieval authors was the ignorance of the people and the ordinary priests.

¹⁰⁸ Anchoritism was spread in the region of present-day Bulgaria during Late Antiquity. For instance, a Latin inscription relating to anchorite practices (building of rock churches) and dating from the 5th–6th century was found during archeological excavations in Northern Bulgaria – И. ДУЙЧЕВ, *Латински надпис от ранновизантийската крепост при Килифаревския манастир*, Архе 1, 1978, p. 35–37. Rock monasteries from Late Antiquity were also investigated. However, the connection between late antique Balkan and medieval Bulgarian anchoritism remains a unclear and under-researched problem. Another unsolved problem relating to early medieval Bulgarian anchoritism concerns the inscriptions from the 10th century rock monastery of Murfatlar, in present day South-eastern Romania. Written in an unknown alphabet and probably in a language different from Old Slavonic, their decipherment could shed additional light on early manifestations of this phenomenon in medieval Bulgaria.

This motif can be traced back to the works of 10th century authors like Presbyter Kozma, St. John of Rila, John Exarch, etc. Constantine explicitly emphasized this factor as the main reason for the heresies which he described and criticized¹⁰⁹. Unlike the other Tarnovo authors who followed the traditional understanding of heresy of the church, formulated in the apostles' letters, the works of St. John of Damascus, Euthymius Zigabenus and other authors, Constantine called *heresy* every manifestation of popular culture in Serbia. Most likely it was due to his sharp conflicts with Serbian priests who obviously did not support his purism and even participated in rituals and practices condemned by Constantine. He tried to solve these problems pointing to the importance of the literacy and education of children. However, in spite of his efforts, in the next centuries popular culture continued to be the most significant challenge for all church officials¹¹⁰. It is interesting that this confrontation led some authors to the idea of common depravity and peccancy that changed their attitude to the others: *We ascribe more than 60 heresies to the Roman Catholics, but firstly we must erase our own heresies and then we will see them (the Roman Catholics) saved on the Gospel Road*¹¹¹. This statement of Constantine appears to be part of the entire revision of the inherited models of relationships with others, which took place among Balkan intellectuals in the 15th century. Undoubtedly, the most important factor affecting this revision was the Ottoman conquest of the peninsula, but the contradictions with popular culture prompted these processes, too.

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¹⁰⁹ КОНСТАНТИН КОСТЕНЕЧКИ, *Сказание...*, p. 97.

¹¹⁰ For instance, in the 17th century not the remains of the dualistic doctrines and beliefs of Paulicians, but their traditional culture became the main challenge for Catholic missionaries – S. NOTARFONSO, *Religious Imagery, Conflict and Coexistence in the Seventeenth-Century Balkans*, [in:] *Eloquent Images, Evangelization, Conversion and Propaganda in the Global World of the Early Modern Period*, ed. G. CAPRIOTTI, P.-A. FABRE, S. PAVONE, Leuven 2022, p. 249–250. In the 18th century another Bulgarian monk, Yosif Bradati, wrote or translated Greek polemics against magical rituals, superstitions and alcoholism. According to his testimony these mortal sins were widespread among the Bulgarians.

¹¹¹ КОНСТАНТИН КОСТЕНЕЧКИ, *Сказание...*, p. 100.

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