

nation. When it achieves its full consolidation, its historians will no longer find it necessary to write history with such passion and purpose. And when that time comes, much of the *History of the Macedonian People* will be revised. But for the time being, despite the defects to which we have alluded, these volumes represent a step forward in the rapidly expanding Macedonian historiography.

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BITOLSKI NADPIS NA IVAN VLADISLAV SAMODŪRZHETS BŪLGARSKI: STAROBŪLGARSKI PAMETNIK OT 1015–1016 GODINA.

By *Jordan Zaimov* and *Vasilka Zaimova*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bŭlgarskata akademiia na naukite, 1970. 160 pp. + 11 plates.

In 1956 a marble block serving as part of the threshold of a sixteenth-century mosque in Bitola was discovered to contain a badly worn Slavonic inscription. The text clearly must have spilled over to a lost block on the left, and to one or more blocks at the top. Yet the twelve preserved lines refer to "John, autocrat of the Bulgars" and, later, "son of Aron." The historian and paleographer Vladimir Mošin published the text (in *Makedonski jazik*, 1966), with a bold series of conjectures and emendations arguing that the inscription included reference to Samuel's defeat in 1014 and had been set up by Ivan Vladislav, Samuel's nephew (ruled 1015–18). The Zaimovs confidently "restore" most of the text, including dates, and proceed to take their wish-thoughts as incontrovertible proof of a number of historical events otherwise unknown.

Unfortunately there is no even remotely reliable set of criteria for dating early South Slavic Cyrillic, and epigraphic material is sparse and extremely controversial. I must respectfully disagree with Mošin's estimate that this text fits in the early eleventh century. Zaimov's paleographic and linguistic arguments are inaccurate and naïve.

One basic point: Mošin clearly records the fact that the date he confidently reconstructs as 6522 (1014) has been worn away ("datata e izližana"; p. 39 in *Slovenska pisemnost*, ed. P. Ilievski, Ohrid, 1966). Indeed it does not show up in any published photographs (note that the Zaimovs' plate 2 has been doctored in an unspecified manner, and plate 3 is frankly a drawing), nor is it found in a latex mold made by Professor Ihor Ševčenko of Dumbarton Oaks. Assuming that this spot does contain a date, one can grant the 6 and the final 2, and a vertical line with a partial crosspiece that could be Φ (500) but looks much more like Ψ (700), and is followed by a space wide enough even for M (40). If one then conjectures the numbers as 6742, the date would be 1234. This fits beautifully with the orthography and language, and it identifies Ivan as Asen II, who gained power over Macedonia in 1230. Yet it also demolishes the intricate historical explanations elaborated by the Zaimovs and generally diminishes the light that this inscription allegedly throws on an obscure period of Macedonian and Bulgarian history. The crucial questions remain open.

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