

ON THE CRAFTS IN THE FIRST BULGARIAN KINGDOM

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The crafts, well known by Slavs and ProtoBulgarians for a long time, already from their original home lands, still took great part in the economic life of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Their further development was determined mainly from the common economical progress and the constantly increasing needs of the young Bulgarian state.¹ The agricultural nature of the Bulgarian early medieval town not only includes but also determines the development of the crafts, which are based on the excess of agricultural production, which tends to concentrate in the town. That concentration, in the hands of the representatives of the state system led to the formation, at the beginning, of close relations between the handicraft trades and the economic development of the urban centers.

For a period of three centuries, the Bulgarian state annexed vast areas to its territory. The stabilization of the military, political and economical state of the country in the IX Century enables the Bulgarian rulers to start construction works of large dimensions in the capital and bigger urban centers. Its constantly increasing needs demand the necessity of building palaces, public buildings, roads, castles, making of great amount of military equipment, arms and accoutrements, that needs skilled craftsmen. That stimulates the development of all handicraft trades and creates preconditions for the development of commodity production and turns the capitals of Pliska and Preslav into great craft and trade centers of economical interest for the Bulgarian state.

In one of the important written resources on the crafts of the First Bulgarian kingdom – *Shestodnev* – the Bulgarian writer from the X Century Yoan Ekzarh,² among other things, mentions a number of crafts such as coppersmith's trade, goldsmith's trade, weaving trade, stone-cutting trade, brick-making trade, dyeing trade, shipbuilding and others. The description of the palaces and churches in the

¹ Za razvitiето na занajatchijskoto proizvodstvo prez Parvoto bulgarsko tsarstvo com.: Shkorpil 1905, 308–321; Mavrodinov 1949, 164–165; Mihajlov 1963, 19; Milchev 1975, 246 and next; Vuja-rova 1960, 393–405; Djingov 1963, 47–69; Djingov 1960, 6; Akrabova-Jandova 1955, 487–511; Akrabova-Jandova 1959, 223–239; Rashev 1970, 13–16; Vitlyanov 1980, 137–145; Vitlyanov 1995, 92–100; Vitlyanov 2002, 713–719; Doncheva-Petkova 1984, 95–103; Balabanov 1980a, 27–36; Balabanov 1983, 228–241; Balabanov 1980b, 91–98; Balabanov 1981, 4, 34–39; Bonev 1983a; Totev 1996, 226; Totev 1998, 138; Totev 1982a.

² Com.: Kristanov – Dujchev 1953, 94–95; Mijatev 1959, 11 and next.

capital of Preslav, as well as the clothing of the Bulgarian tsar and his court show that there were different craftsman's trades and craftsmen with various qualifications. Yoan Ekzarh mentions "big buildings, decorated with stone and wood and painted", churches decorated "from inside with marble and bronze", the knjaz (prince), dressed in pearl dalmatika (a long tight tunic with long sleeves made of thick material) with a necklace and bracelets, and others.

The adopting of Christianity as an official religion further develops the craftsman's trades. The new ideology, during the second half of the IX Century, requires massive building works: building of churches and monasteries, making of various church plates, priest clothing, various cult accessories, icons and iconostases (icon-stands) and other works of man that the new cult needs. That naturally led to the need of different craftsmen from different spheres of trades (stone-masons, stone-cutters, jewelers, blacksmiths, icon-painters and others).

The progress of the handicraft trades in the First Bulgarian Kingdom comes also as a result of the constantly increasing needs of the newly-established Bulgarian feudal aristocracy in IX–X Centuries, who eagerly strives for imitating the Byzantine court etiquette. That led to the formation of new crafts connected mainly with making of fine and expensive products of colored metal, glass, bone and other that were mainly used by the members of the ruler's family and the members of the court.

The development of the crafts in the boundaries of the Bulgarian state comes, to a great extent, as a result of the common economical progress of the country, the great need of tools and equipment in agricultural work and cattle-breeding, the great need of clothes and furniture for the population.

Great priority for the development of the handicraft trades was the fact that in the boundaries of the Bulgarian state there were regions rich in ore deposits, which had been earlier exploited, since Tracian and Roman times. The Balkan province of geological prospecting was mainly connected with the extraction of iron, gold, copper, lead, zinc and other metals.³ The favorable prospecting conditions provided raw material for all branches of metal-working. There were such ore deposits in Stara Planina, The Rodopes, Rila and in some mountains in Macedonia. Despite the limited number of archeological data, there is no doubt that if not all, at least some of these ore deposits were exploited in the Middle Ages as well. The ethnic changes in the Balkans in the VI Century did not lead to decline of mining, as some scientists try to prove.⁴ It is possible for a short period of time that trade to have been stopped.

However, there are facts, which show, that soon after the establishment of the Slavs on the territories of the Byzantine empire, that trade was reestablished.⁵

³ Jovchev 1963.

⁴ Simic 1961, 14.

⁵ Mamzer 1988, 204.

Some ancient Slav toponyms prove the existence of ore deposits (mines) in that period, for example: Rupchos (a region in the Rodopes), Rupe (a region in Kraishteto), Rudishte, Rudnik and other places, as well as the names rupa (ore mine), rupnitsi (miners), rudina (the place where the ore was tooled), rudishte, rudnik, razsovach (a raw ball of melted metal), plakalnitsa (the place where the ore was cradled), samokov, valmo (the samokov's hammer), and many others, which prove a well-developed metallurgical trade.⁶

The existing ancient production traditions had a great importance for the development of the craft trades in the lands of the newly-established Bulgarian state. Despite the fact that there were numerous barbarian inroads, this tradition was not broken. On the contrary, a number of results from different archeological research works in recent years show undoubtedly that this tradition was adopted and included in the social-economical life of the Slavs and Protobulgarians after their establishment on the Balkan peninsula and the foundation of the Bulgarian state. An important fact in that respect is the typology of the tools that were made, as well as the circumstance that one part of the ancient ore / mine centers was still active in the Middle Ages.⁷

When The Slavs and Protobulgarians settled in the territories of the Bulgarian lands of today, they brought their traditions in the development of a number of handicraft trades. In that way, the direct contact with the old native people of the lands, who lived south of the Danube, led to rich production traditions.⁸

The available written resources and mostly the archeological research data show that main centers of handicraft trades in IX–X Century are the existing at that time towns and mainly the capital centers of Pliska and Preslav, which have been profoundly researched by now.

The archeological research data testify to the development of a great number of crafts, such as: pottery-making trade, iron-making trade, coppersmith's trade, goldsmith's trade, stone-mason trade, masonry trade, bone-making trade, production of works of glass, brick-making trade, tile-making trade, dyeing trade, carpentry trade, weaving trade, rope-making trade, fur-dressing trade and others. Even the enumeration of the separate craft trades can show the parameters of the handicraft works in the capital workshops.

The analysis of the handicraft works testify that those crafts which need particular conditions for development concentrate in the urban quarters: a relatively small built-up area that is sufficiently far away from the residential areas (in case

⁶ Mihajlov 1955, 73 and next.

⁷ Konjarov 1953, 20; Konjarov 1940, book 3–4; Georgiev 1978, 11–20; Georgiev 1955, 70; Radoslavov 1948, 28; Mihajlov 1955, 73 and next; Jovchev 1963, 193, 196 and next, Jovchev 1953, 85–88.

⁸ Za njakoi mimenti ot vlijanieto na kusnoantichnata proizvodstvena traditsija varhu bulgarskoto zanajatchijsko proizvodstvo prez rannoto srednovekovie com.: Hening 1987, 177–186; Herman 1987, 189–199.

of pollution and fires) and close to water and material resources, etc. This includes the following trades: pottery-making trade, fur-dressing trade, blacksmith's trade and metallurgic trade. The latter does not have a strong connection with the urban craftsman's trades. The great amount of cinder (slag) and plaster that can be found in different places in the Internal towns of Pliska and Preslav does not testify that that was a result of metallurgic works, as some researchers claim; this is a result of blacksmith's works. We could not talk about classical melting furnaces in the urban centers. The absence of own urban metallurgic basis supposes, at the presence of blacksmith's trade, that the iron was received in towns under the form of *zago-tovka* (raw material) from the ore deposit centers.

The biggest and most truthful number of data concern the pottery-making trade.⁹ And that is not accidental. Its development in the capital centers was closely connected with the presence of constant water resources and rich deposits of potter's clay of good quality in the surroundings of Pliska and Preslav. That trade consists of two separate craftsman's trades – pottery-making trade and ceramic works for building constructions. These two crafts are one of the best-developed during the Middle Ages. That trade was greatly developed in the capitals of Pliska and Preslav. The whole process of that large-scale production can be studied from the pottery workshops that have remained since those times and the materials found there, along with the production waste, semi-manufactured materials and ready-to-use objects. It is important to be mentioned here that from the very beginning of its development this large-scale production turned into a separate trade. In that respect a crucial moment turns to be the fact that the manual home production is changed by a potter's circle. The ready-to-use production varies in form and style of making.

That difference is undoubtedly connected with the preserved pottery-making trade traditions of the different components – Slavs and Protobulgarians and the original native population, as well as due to the lack of the standardized pottery-making production. It can be viewed some kind of standartization in the ceramic works of building constructions. Such production workshops may have existed in order that purpose to be achieved, which was organized and worked mainly to satisfy the needs of the central state power. Though, the available data concerning the organization of the pottery-making trade are quite limited. An exception to that fact is a fragment of an object found during archeological research works of Pliska, on which the Greek word *φυλε* (*φυλήκ*) – “craftsman, fila” / is cut and written in wrong way and most possibly the explanatory word “*κεράμεά*” is added with the

⁹ Vitlyanov – Dimitrov 1996, 238–256; Gospodinov 1937; Akrabova-Jandova 1959, 223–236; Stanchev 1959, 239–241; Stanchev 1948, 129–149; Totev n. n. 48–50; Bakurdjiev 1956, 24–26; Georgieva 1953, 625–635; Nikolova 1968, 163–191.

meaning – professional organization,¹⁰ which is not present now, as the fragment was broken off just before the initial letter of the word. It is no doubt that in IX–X Century in Pliska there was a very well explicit differentiation of the crafts, which, as it is seen from the fragment with the inscription, were organized in professional groups according to their specializations.

The pottery-making trade reached a high level of development. Here along with the traditional mass production of household pottery works, a new kind of artistic pottery-made production appeared for the first time – making of decorative wall and floor tiles.¹¹ It was a new trade with complicated technology, which required precise work when the materials were preparing, exact dosage of the coloring agents (dyes), a stable hand in painting the decorative elements and finally, enough working experience in firing the objects in the furnaces. The paintings and relief icons that were found testify the artistry of the ceramic (pottery-made) icon painting of Preslav¹² and the great achievements the masters had reached.

The craftsmen of Preslav along with the decorative ceramic works, made various painted pottery objects for everyday use. Again, great attention should be paid on the artistic making of the object. It is surprising, even for the modern connoisseur of art, the fleetness and the inexhaustible imagination of the craftsman of those times, the way he combined the decoration with the form of the object.

An important craft from those times, which was wide-spread in the capitals of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, is the metallurgic trade.

The available archeological data testify that from very early years of that trade in the capitals of Pliska and Preslav, that craft was very well known by the native people.¹³ The products satisfied the needs in all branches of the craft production. An important fact showing the achievements in that trade are the quality and the quantity of the ready-to-use products that were found. All kinds of working tools were made, as well as craftsman's tools, arms and horse trappings, household objects and some others. It is important to mention here, that among these numerous blacksmith's products we can find objects with artistically made elements. That fact shows that the blacksmiths did not only have technical skills and habits, but they also showed some artistic preferences and styles. The ornaments, used in that decoration are connected mainly with the production traditions of the gold-

¹⁰ Mihajlov 1963, 19.

¹¹ Mijatev 1936, 156; Akračova-Jandova 1962, 25–30; Akračova-Jandova 1948, 101–128; Changova 1972, 33–39; Changova 1972, 285–289; Totev 1976a, 8–115; Totev 1976b, 25–28.

¹² Totev 1988, 86.

¹³ Shkorpil 1905, 308–321; Mavrodinov 1949, 164–165; Milchev 1975, 246 and next; Vujarova 1960, 393–405; Vitlyanov 1980, 27 and next; Vitlyanov 1995, 92–100; Vitlyanov 2002, 87–93; Doncheva-Petkova 1984, 95–103; Doncheva-Petkova 1995, 34–42; Balabanov 1980a, 27–36; Balabanov 1983, 228–241; Balabanov 1980b, 91–98; Balabanov 1981, 34–39; Bonev 1983a; Totev 1996, 226; Totev 1998, 138; Totev 1976.

smith's trade, founding trade, coppersmith's trade and a number of other artistic and jeweller's techniques. In that respect the blacksmith-masters from Pliska and Preslav take some artistic elements from the splendid ornaments and images of the old Bulgarian toreutics, as for example the objects and utensils from the golden treasure of Nadsentmiklosh, the Sevin'cup from Preslav, or the jeweller's works connected with the belt ornaments of Madara and the golden dressing decorative ornaments from Preslav¹⁴ that were found recently.

Some of the already mentioned golden and metal ornaments are really unique and one of a kind. They show the great achievements of the artistic crafts in both capitals. Their precise studying and comparison can lead to some basic conclusions concerning the high technological and artistic skills of the Bulgarian craftsmen.

There is a great number of various artistically made objects and tools made of bone, stone, glass and other materials. A great part of the ready-to-use products made of bone, along with their utilitarian character, served to satisfy the aesthetic tastes and needs of the medieval citizen. Here we can mention the different types of frames, inlaid and appliqué works, works of plastic arts and some others, which were made according to the rich artistic repertoire of the old Bulgarian culture of arts.¹⁵

But the top place among the stone plastic works during the First Bulgarian state could be given to the stone decorative-sculptural tiles and capitals of Preslav, made of animal, plant and geometrical ornaments.¹⁶ The love for ornaments of the stonemason-masters of Pliska and Preslav is not due to the influence of the Byzantine court and church stone plastic works, but it is also closely connected with the old artistic traditions of the Slavs and Protobulgarians.

Citing Yoan Ekzarh's *Shestodnevo*, who talks about tzar Simeon "painted with dyes on a wall", we can say that there were skilful masters of monumental mosaic. That written information is also proved by the already found considerable amounts of colourful mosaic small cubes scattered in almost all regions of Preslav. After a complete research work, these remains reveal almost a full identity with the mosaic materials used by the world famous mosaic works from Solun, Ravenna and Tsarigrad. Hardly could we imagine these masters from the past from Pliska and Preslav and their artistically made works. Even in the hardest years of inroads and bloody wars the clang of the anvil and hammer could be heard in the auls (a kind of settlement) and settlements of the Bulgarian state; skilful masters revived a piece of wood or a deer's horn and the hand of man moulded wonderful models of the Bulgarian applied art, made of clay, iron, gold, silver and copper. Due to the well-developed and organized craft trades at the end of IX Century and especially

¹⁴ Totev 1982b, 101; Vaklinova 1972, 52–56.

¹⁵ Totev 1982b, 101; Vaklinova 1972, 52–56.

¹⁶ Totev 1993, 109–116; Bonev 1983a; Bonev 1983b, 149–158.

in the golden X Century Bulgaria reached in many respects the splendid grandour of the Byzantine arts and was among the most prosperous and developed countries in Europe of those days.

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