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THE BOGOMILS

*A STUDY IN
BALKAN NEO-MANICHAEISM*

BY

DMITRI OBOLENSKY

M.A., PH.D.



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To

MY MOTHER

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PREFACE

The Bogomil movement has come to be recognized as one of the major problems of south Slavonic and Byzantine history. The influence it has exercised on the history of the Balkan peoples—on their church and state, on their society and literature, on their religion and folk-lore—make the study of Bogomilism essential for Byzantinist and Slavist alike. To scholars and students in other fields Bogomilism still offers many unexplored, or half-explored, possibilities. The theologian and the philosopher can find in Bogomilism one of the most interesting examples of the growth on European soil in the Middle Ages of a pattern of thought and a way of life which may be termed ‘dualistic’. A detailed study of Bogomilism should help Western medievalists to shed new light on the still somewhat obscure problem of the historical connections between Asiatic Manichaeism and the dualistic movements of western Europe, particularly of the Italian Patarenes and of the Cathars or Albigenses of southern France. This connection, if successfully established, would in its turn enable Church historians to regard the Bogomil sect as the first European link in the thousand-year-long chain leading from Mani’s teaching in Mesopotamia in the third century to the Albigensian Crusade in southern France in the thirteenth. Moreover, the study of the Bogomil movement has its own, and by no means negligible, part to play in the investigation of the cultural and religious links between eastern and western Europe, the importance of which is increasingly perceived at the present time.

The study of Bogomilism has a fairly long, but not uniformly successful, history. In the eighteenth century Bogomilism began to attract the attention of German scholars. Some, like J. C. Wolf, regarded the Bogomils as heretics, while others, like J. L. Oeder, tried to prove that they were the bearers of a ‘pure’ Christianity and were unjustly persecuted by a corrupt Byzantine Church. Their investigations were necessarily limited by their ignorance of the *non-Byzantine* sources, which led them to take a view of Bogomilism at its best incomplete and in some cases false. In

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England, about the same time, Gibbon was able to dismiss the Bogomils in a peremptory footnote of his *Decline and Fall* as 'a sect of Gnostics, who soon vanished'.

Bogomil studies received a fresh impetus and a new orientation in the second half of the nineteenth century, owing to the discovery of Slavonic documents which conclusively pointed to Bulgaria as the original home of the Bogomil sect. The study and publication of these manuscripts was carried out with great success by the Russian scholar M. G. Popruzhenko. In 1869 and 1870 the Croatian scholar F. Rački published his *Bogomili i Patareni*, a work which still remains an indispensable guide, although a number of its conclusions now stand in need of correction or revision. More recently, Slavonic scholars have shown a keen interest in the subject and have approached Bogomilism from several new angles, but, on the whole, they have tended to limit themselves to specific details and have not attempted to re-examine the whole problem from the historical point of view. However, the important place occupied by Bogomilism in the history of Bulgarian literature is stressed by Prof. I. Ivanov, who has analysed and edited the literary monuments of the Bulgarian Bogomils.

The study of Bogomilism has, in my opinion, suffered unduly from the preconceived or erroneous notions of many investigators. For example, several modern Balkan historians have over-emphasized the political significance of Bogomilism, often to the detriment of its importance as a religious movement, by regarding it primarily as a nationalistic attempt of the Slavs to resist the encroachments of Byzantine imperialism. The present study, it is hoped, may serve to show that this view, though justifiable within certain limits, has sometimes been grossly exaggerated. Moreover, the historians of Bogomilism have, for the most part, considered Bogomilism as a static phenomenon, and have unhesitatingly attributed to the sect at the very beginning of its history features which in fact only developed at later periods. At the same time they have usually failed to draw sufficiently clear distinctions between the Bogomils and other medieval Balkan sects, a failure which often leads them to erroneous conclusions regarding the former. Hoping to remedy these mistakes, I have decided to abandon the traditional plan, in which the

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history, doctrines and customs of the Bogomils were divided into separate chapters, and have adopted the method of studying the different aspects of Bogomilism simultaneously, period by period. In this manner a clearer picture may perhaps be obtained of the gradual evolution of the doctrines, ethics, ritual, customs and organization of the sect under the influence of historical circumstances. Moreover, in order to dispel the confusion often made between the Bogomils and other contemporary Balkan sects, I have been obliged to deal at some length with the latter, particularly with the Paulicians and the Massalians.

Like most other medieval sects, the Bogomils are known to us very largely from the evidence of their enemies. This would seem to render the task of impartial criticism a delicate one, particularly since the number of sources directly concerned with the Bogomils is not large. And yet the information of Orthodox Churchmen on the subject is, on the whole, fairly reliable: a comparison between the evidence supplied by writers widely separated in space and time reveals almost unanimous agreement on the essential features of Bogomilism. In these circumstances, an objective reconstruction of the doctrines and practices of the Bogomils is by no means impossible.

The present book was, in substance, completed in 1942 and its publication has been delayed mainly by the circumstances of war. The same circumstances prevented me from having any knowledge of the works by Mr S. Runciman on the Manichaean movement and by MM. H.-C. Puech and A. Vaillant on Cosmas's treatise against the Bogomils, until both books were in proof form. I am indebted to Mr Runciman and M. Puech for permission to consult the proofs of their books.

My thanks are due first of all to Trinity College for enabling me to pursue the research which led to the writing of this book. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr Elizabeth Hill, without whose encouragement and help this book would not have been written, to the Rev. Prof. F. Dvornik, who has unstintingly allowed me to benefit from his knowledge of Byzantine and Slavonic history, and to Prof. Sir Ellis Minns, who read the work in manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. I am much indebted to my wife for her help in compiling the index and reading the proofs. I wish

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also to thank the staff of the British Museum for innumerable kindnesses and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for their assistance in the publication of this book.

In order to simplify typographical problems in the quotations in Old Church Slavonic I have substituted for the letters А, Ꙗ, Ѡ, the modern я, ѣ, and ю respectively, I have omitted all accents, and transcribed abbreviated words in their complete form.

DMITRI OBOLENSKY

TRINITY COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE

29 October 1946

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Abh. bayer. Akad. Wiss.* *Abhandlungen der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.* München.
- Abh. böhm. Ges. Wiss.* *Abhandlungen der böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften.* Prague.
- Abh. preuss. Akad. Wiss.* *Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.* Berlin.
- Bull. Acad. Belg.* *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique.* Bruxelles.
- B.* *Byzantion.* Paris, 1924- .
- B.I.B.* *Bŭlgarska Istoricheska Biblioteka.* Sofia, 1927- .
- B.Ž.* *Byzantinische Zeitschrift.* Leipzig, 1892- .
- C.E.H.* *Cambridge Economic History (The).* Cambridge, 1941- .
- C.M.H.* *Cambridge Medieval History (The).* Cambridge, 1911-36.
- C.S.H.B.* *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae.* Bonn, 1828-97.
- Denkschr. Akad. Wiss. Wien.* *Denkschriften der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien.*
- D.T.C.* *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique.* Paris, 1923- .
- G. Soc. Asiat. Ital.* (n.s.) *Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana.* (Nuova serie.) Firenze, 1887- .
- G.S.U.* *Godishnik na Sofyskiya Universitet.* Sofia, 1904- .
- I.R.A.I.K.* *Izvestiya Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Instituta v Konstantinopole.* Odessa, 1896-1912.
- J.A.* *Journal Asiatique.* Paris, 1822- .
- J.R.A.S.* *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.* London, 1823- .
- Kh. Ch.* *Khristianskoe Chlenie.* St Petersburg, 1821-1918.
- Mansi.* *J. D. Mansi, Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio.* Florence, 1759-98.
- Mém. Acad. Belg.* *Mémoires de l'Académie royale de Belgique.* Bruxelles.
- M.G.H.* *Monumenta Germaniae historica.* Hanover, 1826- .
- P.G.* *J. P. Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeco-latina.* Paris, 1857-66.
- P.L.* *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina.* Paris, 1844-55.
- P.O.* *Pravoslavnoe Obozrenie.* Moscow, 1860-91.
- P.S.* *Periodicheskoe Spisanie na Bŭlgarskoto Knizhovno Druzhestvo.* Braila, 1870-6.
- Rad* *Rad Jugoslavenske Akademije Znanosti i Umjetnosti.* Zagreb, 1867- .
- R.E.* *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche.* Leipzig, 1896-1913.
- Rec. Univ. Gand.* *Recueil de travaux de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, Université de Gand.* Gand, 1888- .
- R.E.S.* *Revue des Études Slaves.* Paris, 1921- .
- R.H.R.* *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions.* Paris, 1880- .
- R.Q.H.* *Revue des Questions Historiques.* Paris, 1866- .
- S.B.A.N.* *Spisanie na Bŭlgarskata Akademiya na Naukite.* Sofia, 1911- .
- S.B. bayer. Akad. Wiss.* *Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.* München.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- S.B. preuss. Akad. Wiss. Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.* Berlin.
- S.L. Sbornik statey po slavyanovedeniyu, sostavlenny i izdannyy uchenikami V.I. Lamanskogo.* St Petersburg, 1883.
- S.N.U. Sbornik za Narodni Umotvoreniya, Nauka i Knizhnina (i Narodopis).* Sofia, 1889–1936.
- S.R. Slavonic and East European Review (The).* London. 1922– .
- V.V. Vizantiysky Vremennik (Βυζαντινὰ Χρονικά).* St Petersburg, 1894–1928; 1947– .
- Wiss. Mitt. Bosn. Herz. Wissenschaftliche Mittheilungen aus Bosnien und der Hercegovina.* Vienna, 1893– .
- Zh.M.N.P. Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya.* St Petersburg, 1834–1917.