

The Conversion of the Visigoths and Bulgarians Compared

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This paper is written to bring out various themes relevant to the subject of this book. It is not the first time such a comparison has been made, for in the ninth century A.D. Pope John VIII warned the Bulgar ruler not to get his Christianity from the Greeks, who 500 years earlier had consecrated a heretical bishop for the Visigoths.¹ This was all a very long time ago and in a part of Europe unfamiliar to most readers.

There are significant differences in the conversion of the Visigoths and Bulgarians which it is hoped will prove illuminating, but the similarities which suggested this comparison in the first place are as follows. First, the same geographical region is involved. Most of the area of early Visigothic settlement, prior to the Visigothic migration into western Europe, lay within the later Bulgar khanate. The region in question is around the lower Danube, west of the Black Sea, where Romania and Bulgaria are today. Almost certainly the residual Christian minority ruled by the Bulgars included some descendants of Visigoths who hadn't gone west, but they may no longer have been ethnically distinct.² Second, there is also a geopolitical congruence. The fourth-century Visigoths and ninth-century Bulgarians had the same southern neighbour: the Roman Empire, with

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¹ '... ne forte vobis, quae genti contigit Gothorum, contingat, quae, cum a paganorum errore cuperet liberari Christianae fidei sociari, episcopum incidit formam pietatis habentem virtutem autem eius abnegantem, qui eos, dum a paganismo liberat, Aarii blasphemii implicat' (ed. E. Caspar, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*, vol. VII, Weidmann, 1974, p. 60).

² The ninth-century Western writer Walafrid Strabo was told that a German liturgy was in use on the west coast of the Black Sea (*De exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum*, 7, ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. II.3, Hannover, 1897, p. 481); but cf. E. A. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila*, Oxford, 1966, p. 23, and H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. T. Dunlap, University of California Press, 1988, p. 411, n. 300.

which they fought, treated and traded.³ Although by the ninth century the Empire was much smaller, mainly Greek-speaking and ruled from Byzantium, it was confident in its Roman identity and radiated an aura of awesome cultural superiority, especially to its barbarian north.⁴

The eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, unlike the Latin West, had a polyglot ecclesiastical tradition, and this brings me to the third, most important similarity between the conversion of the Visigoths and the Bulgarians. Presumably for the reason just mentioned, both were allowed to develop a native church with a vernacular Bible, liturgy and literature, respectively in Gothic and what became known as Old Church Slavonic. This similarity in the relation of religious change and culture is otherwise unparalleled in the conversion of Europe.⁵ The presence of rival Christian interpretations in the mission-field is a fourth and final common factor otherwise negligible in much medieval conversion,⁶ but it operated differently in each case.

One major difference between our two cases is that most Visigoths went out into the wider world and got their Christianity there, whereas the wider world and Christianity came to most Bulgarians. While the circumstances are debated, historians agree that most Visigoths converted after raiding Huns forced them from their homeland into the Roman

³ For example, Roman restrictions of trade with the Visigoths in 369 and Bulgarians in 894 were regarded as critical at the time (E. A. Thompson, 'The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila', *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*, 5, 1961, p. 17, and R. Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, London, 1975, pp. 58-9, respectively).

⁴ My allusion in the Editor's Preface to the Industrial Revolution as having made a difference in the relation of conversion to civilisation in the modern world (i.e. by increasing the cultural distance between missionary and convert from what it had been in earlier societies) is perhaps a twentieth-century viewpoint which privileges technology above all else. The elite Roman view privileged educated culture. Christianity was readily combined with either.

⁵ Anglo-Saxon England, where textual literacy accompanying Christianity was applied to vernacular as well as Latin writing, is an intermediate case. Yet, aside from the Psalms, the Bible remained untranslated and the liturgy also in Latin.

⁶ Making full allowance for the propensity of nervous missionaries to build up differences in practice where none in belief existed (the erroneous notion of 'the Celtic Church' is ultimately their creation), the Bulgarian case of medieval conversion is atypically akin to the modern situation described by one of my students in reference to New Guinea, where rival missionaries say of each other to potential converts: 'Don't listen to them or you'll go to Hell'. Pope John VIII in the ninth century was more urbane, but his message amounted to the same thing.

Empire (after 375 A.D.).⁷ Moreover, their kind of Christianity spread widely among other migrating peoples destabilised by the Huns. The Bulgarians, on the other hand, had a reasonably stable albeit primitive polity which was capable of transformation into a Christian state, as their ruler or khan was quick to realise. Most of them converted as the result of outside pressures creatively managed by their ruler, Khan Boris (after 862 A.D.).⁸

Thus a second major difference between the conversion of the Visigoths and the Bulgarians is that the latter was mainly a 'top-down' conversion, where the ruler converts and the people willingly or unwillingly follow, while the former was mainly a 'bottom-up' conversion in which Christianity spread by a variety of informal contacts. Initially the two cases are actually very similar with a Christian minority including Roman captives and their descendants,⁹ a classic scenario for bottom-up conversion. Eventually the Visigoths also were to experience a classic top-down conversion when their king Reccared opted for Catholic Christianity in 589 A.D., but that was in the established kingdom of Visigothic Spain. The intervening Migration Period for the Visigoths and their neighbours was even more fragmented, unstable and insecure than indicated by typical arrows on maps of 'The Fall of the Roman Empire' indicating 'where the barbarians went'. Peoples splintered and ethnogenesis occurred, rulers' authority was militarily-based and even in that area open to challenge.¹⁰ If one group of Visigoths led by Fritigern was required to convert to the emperor's variety of Christianity as a condition of their entry into the Empire in 376,¹¹ then an element of top-down conversion was present;

⁷ See n. 11 below.

⁸ R. E. Sullivan, 'Khan Boris and the Conversion of Bulgaria: A Case Study of the Impact of Christianity on a Barbarian Society', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3, 1966, pp. 55-139; Browning, *op. cit.*, chs 3 and 8.

⁹ In both cases there were instances of persecution by the authorities: Athanaric's from 369-72 produced the Catholic Visigothic martyr St Sabas; Bulgar Khan Malamir's in 833 resulted in the martyrdom of his own brother (Thompson, *The Visigoths*, ch. 3; Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 144).

¹⁰ See in general L. Musset, *The Germanic Invasions*, trans. E. and C. James, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975, and H.-J. Diesner, *The Great Migration*, trans. C. S. V. Salt, Leipzig, 1978; and for a specific case of the limitations of Visigothic royal control in chaotic circumstances of migration see Paulinus of Pella, *Eucharisticus*, lines 343-405, in the Loeb edition of the works of Ausonius, vol. II, 1967, pp. 330-7.

¹¹ For: P. J. Heather, 'The Crossing of the Danube and the Gothic Conversion', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 27, 1986, pp. 289-318; against: E. A. Thompson, 'The

however, Visigothic conversion was clearly far more complex.¹² My overall impression is of a broadly-based conversion effected by spiritual leaders, not secular ones.

A third major difference between the conversion of the Visigoths and the Bulgarians is the association of the former with Arian Christianity. While Khan Boris of Bulgaria exploited the mutual suspicion of Greek and Latin Christians in the ninth century, this was a choice between views identified with external powers.¹³ Arian Christianity, on the other hand, despite its fourth-century Roman origins, was to become identified exclusively with Visigoths and other barbarians.¹⁴ This makes the case of the Visigoths a very special one in the history of conversion, and one deserving particular attention here. In order to appreciate the significance of this point, even before it is explained, an excursus into anthropological theory is necessary.

Robin Horton's theory of African conversion is a useful analytical tool for examining conversion outside of Africa and even in the distant past, if care is exercised. Basically the theory relates people's cosmology and religious needs to their environment.¹⁵ It distinguishes between the microcosm, the small world of village and familiar fields, and the macrocosm, the wider world. This analysis is not very controversial, and widely applicable. What R. Browning has written about Bulgarian conversion runs along similar lines:

The traditional religions of Slavs and Bulgars were a disadvantage to them in a world in which the only powerful and durable states were

Date of the Conversion of the Visigoths', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 7, 1956, pp. 1-11 (also in a later version as Thompson, *The Visigoths*, ch. 4), placing their main conversion between 382 and 395.

¹² Wolfram, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-85. It will be considered further in conjunction with the next point.

¹³ Boris in his quest for a Bulgarian patriarchate turned from Constantinople to Rome in 866, but finding the Pope unhelpful he returned to the Byzantine fold in 870.

¹⁴ The Arian-barbarian connection is discussed by Musset, *op. cit.*, 184-9, and J. C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 140-5, a new book not seen before this paper was drafted. When Attilus, the Visigoths' puppet Roman emperor, converted from paganism to Arian Christianity it was a sign of how completely he had thrown in his lot with them (Musset, *op. cit.* p. 39).

¹⁵ See the previous and following papers in this book. His article 'On the Rationality of Conversion', Part I, *Africa*, 45, 1975, pp. 219-55, is probably the best thing to read, beginning as it does with a summary of his thesis.

Religious Change, Conversion and Culture

either Christian or Moslem, in that they isolated their adherents. Both at individual and at state level they presented all kinds of problems. How was an oath to be administered? How could a marriage be celebrated between a pagan and a Christian? How were treaties to be guaranteed? And so on. Unlike the great monotheistic religions they could not provide universally valid sanctions for the conduct of individual or community, or endow their adherents with the conviction that their lives formed part of a process of cosmic importance. Closely linked with family and clan, with particular persons and places, traditional religion was of no help to a man once he was removed from his familiar environment.¹⁶

In terms of the African situation Horton is addressing, the macrocosm can come to people in the form of a British administrator or a missionary, or they can go into it as workers to a city. As already intimated, this paper relates the former type of contact to the Bulgarians and the latter to the Visigoths.

Horton argues that people's cosmology and religious needs adjust to suit their circumstances. In an early article, he wrote about the Kalabari people of Nigeria, whose religion had been concerned mainly with the local spirits of the microcosm, with only a vague awareness of greater forces.

The practice of varying one's level of theory with the range of phenomena one is trying to cope with also, perhaps, makes it understandable why the unitary *tamuno* and *so* [roughly 'the creator god' and 'fate'] were not actively approached in traditional Kalabari religion. For together they provided some sort of interpretation of the creation and life-course of the world as seen as a whole; and though Kalabari were aware of a wide world surrounding their own little enclave, it did not greatly impinge on their activities and they found small cause for coming to terms with it. This view of the matter is supported by subsequent Kalabari readiness to identify their unitary *tamuno* with the Christian God, and to give it active worship in such a guise. For Christian evangelism coincided with a growing irruption of

¹⁶ Browning, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-3. He does not cite Horton. The only medieval historian I know who has used Horton is Michael Richter (in conversation). Russell should have in his reasonably theoretical work cited in n. 14 above.

Visigoths and Bulgarians

the wider world outside into the narrow enclave of village life, and hence with a growing need to come to terms with this wider world.¹⁷

This is seen as essentially a case of change to indigenous religion into which Christianity fits dynamically. Horton's theory about what is going on in people's heads may be impossible to prove,¹⁸ but if there is any chance that it is correct it should be kept in mind when studying religious change. For one thing, it gets away from consideration of 'mere imitation' of one religion by another. More importantly, it focusses attention on the convert. In cases where people seem to be converting themselves, one may suspect that something like the processes which Horton describes are in operation.¹⁹

Here the Arian Visigoths and their fellow barbarian trekkers through the macrocosm on both sides of the disintegrating northern frontier of the Roman Empire become relevant, because basically they converted themselves. We know this from the state of Roman-barbarian relations, from their religious use of the Gothic language, and above all from their Arian Christianity, which after a point in the late fourth century hermetically sealed their conversion from Roman agency. These factors will now be explained.

In what is arguably the best thing he ever wrote, the historian E. A. Thompson points out that Roman antipathy to barbarians meant that Romans were not motivated to spread Christianity outside the Empire.²⁰ Where this occurred, there was some ad hoc circumstance like captivity, exile, even shipwreck to account for it. The relevant example here is Ulfila, who was descended from Christian Romans taken prisoner by Visigothic raiders in the third century. He took considerable steps to convert his fellow-Goths to Christianity. When Ulfila attended the Arian council of Antioch in 341, Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia consecrated him

¹⁷ 'The Kalabari World View: An Outline and Interpretation', *Africa*, 32, 1962, p. 214.

¹⁸ D. Schreuder and G. Oddie, 'What is "Conversion"? Christianity and Religious Change in Colonial Africa and South Asia', *Journal of Religious History*, 15, 1988-9, pp. 505-6 and 517-18.

¹⁹ Cf. R. M. Eaton, 'Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas, 1876-1971', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 21, 1984, pp. 1-44. Missionaries were astonished to find how Christianity had spread among the Sema Nagas when they toured the region.

²⁰ 'Christianity and the Northern Barbarians', *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*, 1, 1957, pp. 3-21; reprinted in A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 56-78.

bishop and thus supported his 'mission'.²¹ Thompson however cites three instances where antipathy to barbarians seems to have found its way into a Roman Arian commentary on Matthew.²²

Romans were remarkably slow to convert groups of barbarians even once these were within the Empire.²³ Driven out by Visigothic persecutors in 348, Ulfila subsequently ministered to Christian Visigoths living in the Roman province of Moesia Secunda. This established Christian community within the Roman Empire played a significant role in the conversion of the Visigoths who entered the Empire after 375.²⁴ Ulfila was by no means the only person to spread Christianity among the Visigoths, but it was he who translated the Bible (or most of it²⁵) into Gothic, and he is the heretical bishop referred to by the pope cited at the beginning of this paper. The diffusion of these apparently inseparable elements of the Gothic scriptures and Arian Christianity is what shows that barbarians essentially converted other barbarians.

Of course Christianity originated in the Roman Empire, and so did the Arian heresy, which persisted in a modified form for much of the fourth century, enjoying intermittent imperial favour until the death of the last Arian emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378 and succession of the very orthodox Theodosius I saw its permanent eclipse in Roman

²¹ Wolfram, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-8. He was of course made bishop of an existing Christian community. Thompson's argument draws a contrast with Pope Gregory the Great's mission to the pagan Anglo-Saxons ('Christianity', p. 61, specifically as different from the case of Frumentius in Axum).

²² *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*, Homilies 1, 35 and 41, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca*, vol. LVI, Paris, 1859, cols 626, 824 and 864, respectively. In the second of these, the image of evil priests delivering the word of God to 'unlearned, undisciplined and barbarian peoples who neither seek nor hear it with judgement and who have the name of Christians but the manners of pagans' is striking, but it is used to make a moral point, not to criticise the Gothic mission as easily could be inferred from its quotation in Thompson's article, p. 69. On prejudice cf. P. J. Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332-489*, Oxford, 1991, pp. 181-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-8; cf. Musset, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-9, and pp. 82-3 for the Alamans settled north of the sub-Roman enclave of Chur whose conversion was late and mainly by intrusive Irish monks. The Britons whom Bede reproached for not proselytising the Anglo-Saxons (*Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. Mynors, Oxford, 1969, L22, pp. 68-9) were just carrying on the Roman tradition.

²⁴ Wolfram, *op. cit.*, pp. 81, 84-5.

²⁵ Philostorgius says that Ulfila left out the Books of Kings, because the Visigoths were warlike enough (trans. P. Heather and J. Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, Liverpool University Press, 1991, p. 144).

circles.²⁶ Yet from this point on in barbarian circles Arian Christianity spread and spread: beyond the Roman Empire, along what one of my students called the 'barbarian thoroughfare' of the Danube basin, among all of the barbarian peoples in the West except the most northern ones.²⁷ Writing too close to the Visigoths for comfort in southern Gaul in the early 440s, the priest Salvian knew Arianism as the barbarians' Christianity.²⁸

What Salvian says about barbarian Arian Christianity is very interesting and worth quoting at length. For one thing, he states the doctrinal difference nicely:

We are certain that they do injury to the divine begetting because they say the Son is less than the Father. They think we injure the Father because we believe the Father and Son are equal.

Salvian maintains that the barbarians are religiously well-meaning but ignorant, and he explains why:

You say they read the same writings which are read by us. How are those writings the same which are badly interpolated and badly translated by authors formerly evil? Therefore they are not the same, because those things cannot be said to be whole which are corrupted in any part. ...

... To be sure, the other nations either do not have the Law of God, or they have it in a weakened and maimed way, and, therefore, as I have said, they have it in such a manner that they do not have it at all. For, if there are any barbarian nations who in their books seem to have the Holy Scriptures less interpolated or torn into shreds than others, nevertheless they have them as they were corrupted by the tradition of their old teachers. Therefore, they have tradition rather than Scripture. They do not keep what the truth of the Law teaches, but what the wickedness of a bad tradition has inserted.

²⁶ Diesner, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3 and 95; Musset, *op. cit.*, p. 184; Wolfram, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5. The Arian heresy concerns the nature of Christ, *q.v.* Salvian below.

²⁷ Thompson in 'The Conversion of the Visigoths to Catholicism', *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*, 4, 1960, p. 35, writes: 'For forty years, from 476-516, a great belt of Arianism stretched half-way across Europe', to which should be added Vandal North Africa.

²⁸ The quotations which follow are from *On the Governance of God*, V.2, trans. J. F. O'Sullivan, The Catholic University of America Press, 1947, p. 129-31.

Indeed, the barbarians, being deficient especially of Roman more than educational tradition, know nothing unless they hear it from their teachers. Thus, they follow what they hear, and they who are ignorant of all literature and knowledge and know the mystery of the divine Law by teaching rather than by reading must necessarily retain the teaching rather than the Law. Thus, to them, the tradition of their teachers and their long-standing teaching are, so to say, law for them because they know only what they are taught.

Their books, their teachers: small wonder that Arian Christianity became a sort of cultural badge.²⁹

Of course Ulfila's translation efforts contributed to the development of Visigothic, northern barbarian Christianity. The Gothic language was undoubtedly thereby enhanced as a vehicle of cultural expression in the face of Roman civilisation and the enormous population imbalance in favour of indigenous ex-Romans over barbarian newcomers, even if the latter were in charge. Indeed it is thought that Arian Christianity kept the Gothic language alive.³⁰ The Visigoths possessed books to be burnt upon their conversion from Arianism to Catholicism in late sixth-century Spain.³¹

When all is said and done about Roman antipathy to barbarians and their language,³² it is their Arianism that ensures that, as time went on and the scene shifted further West, no self-respecting Roman would have touched their conversion with a ten-foot-pole. So why did the Visigoths and other northern barbarians convert so readily through their own efforts and on their own terms? Horton's theory can be applied usefully in this case

²⁹ So complete was the identification that objection was raised by Arian clergy in Vandal Africa to people dressed in barbarian clothes attending Catholic churches; this was resisted 'because a huge number of our Catholics who served in the royal household used to go in dressed like Vandals' (trans. J. Moorhead, *Victor of Vita: History of the Vandal Persecution*, Liverpool University Press, 1992, II.8, p. 27).

³⁰ E.g. Musset, *op. cit.*, p. 45, on Visigothic Spain.

³¹ So a seventh-century Frankish source (*The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, 8, trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Nelson's Medieval Classics, 1960, p. 7); however, Roger Collins is sceptical about the Arian use of Gothic in Spain (*Early Medieval Spain. Unity in Diversity, 400-1000*, Macmillan, 1983, pp. 40-1).

³² Cf. Sidonius Apollinaris, *Poems and Letters*, letter V.5, in the Loeb edition, vol. II, 1965, pp. 180-3, having some fun with an acquaintance who had actually learned the Burgundian language in fifth-century Gaul, with the result that 'te praesente formidet linguae suae facere barbarus barbarismum'.

(which in turn may have useful implications for the theory) to suggest that in the disrupted and expanded world they were trying to cope with, the migrating barbarians' cosmology and religious needs were altered so that the universal religion of Christianity with its omnipotent God seemed very attractive.³³ They coped pretty well: Salvian wrote *On the Governance of God* in order to convince Roman Christians that God was still in charge when the barbarians were winning.³⁴

The case of Bulgarian conversion can also be analysed usefully with reference to the Horton theory; however, the focus here is on Khan Boris himself. It is important to realise that Boris' initial approach to the Franks (the more distant of his potential allies/opponents) in 862 was said to have included an offer of conversion. The nearer Byzantines forestalled this by sending an army, with the result that Boris agreed to accept Christianity from them; but conversion was his idea.³⁵ While the religious sincerity of rulers is not of much historical usefulness, real belief by Boris in the Christian God can be inferred from Pope Nicholas I's replies to his questions and by his eventual retirement to a monastery.³⁶ Horton's argument that the existing leadership especially is apt to be affected by contact with the macrocosm and thus to become leaders in religious change³⁷ is applicable to Khan Boris and all others responsible for top-down conversions in medieval Europe.

This comparison of the conversion of the Visigoths and Bulgarians has not covered all of the similarities and differences between them. By the

³³ One early medieval source which offers some insight into how people were thinking is the letter of Bishop Daniel of Winchester advising Bishop Boniface on how to convert pagan Germans upon whom Frankish imperialism was impinging in the early eighth century (trans. C. H. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany*, London, 1954, pp. 75-8). First attention is called to macrocosmic cosmology, and later to the macrocosm of the wider, rich, civilised world. The heathen are being encouraged to 'think big'.

³⁴ His argument is that the Romans, who know better but still do wrong, are getting their just deserts. The barbarians, being either pagans or heretics for the reasons given above, cannot know any better. Of the latter he also writes: 'In what manner, for this erroneous and false belief, they are to be punished on the day of judgement, nobody can know but the Judge. I think God bears patiently with them in the meantime because He sees that, although their belief is incorrect, they err through the acceptance of a seemingly correct opinion. He knows that they act in this manner because they are ignorant.'

³⁵ Boris was baptised in 864 or 865 (Sullivan, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70; Browning, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-7).

³⁶ The papal correspondence is discussed very fully in Sullivan, *op. cit.*

³⁷ See the previous paper.

ninth century when the Bulgarians converted, the great innovation of Pope Gregory I's mission to a purely pagan people in 597 had borne fruit in an aggressive conversion policy in the Latin West. Even in the East, although Byzantium continued the essentially defensive late Roman foreign policy, the role of conversion in establishing a Christian northern buffer zone of on-side barbarian kingdoms was better appreciated than in the fourth century.³⁸ An important similarity which there is not space to explore lies in the relationship of Christian conversion to the generation of ethnic identity: as already stated, Arian Christianity limited the cultural cringe of barbarians to Romans; later Visigothic kings used Catholicism to unite their ethnically diverse subjects into one Spain, and Khan Boris did the same with his ruling Bulgar and subject Slav populations.

A final similarity is of great importance for understanding medieval Christianity. As the religion primarily of linked urban communities in the ancient world, early Christianity was a religion of the macrocosm. While its universality was never lost, Christianity as it spread to the countryside and all over Europe became the religion of profoundly rural societies. Meeting the religious needs of peasants made Christianity more microcosmic. As the Visigoths settled and their and Bulgarian Christianity was consolidated, it took on the local colouring typical of the many small worlds of medieval Christianity.

³⁸ This zone is the subject of D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, London, 1971; see esp. chs 2-3, and ch. 5 for the Moravian mission which is of great significance, for when it was expelled by the Franks, followers of Sts Cyril and Methodius brought the Slavic Bible and liturgy to the Bulgarians. With the subsequent conversion of Serbia and Russia, the area in which Slavic was elevated to a sacred language was very large. The impact on Slavic culture was enormous, especially as it was buttressed in the regions most to be affected by later Mongol and Turkish invasions.