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# The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century

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Published by

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection

Washington, D. C.

in three volumes as number 39 in the series

Dumbarton Oaks Studies

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www.doaks.org/etexts.html

## **Preslav**

## Ivan Jordanov

In the year 6477 (969), Svjatoslav is reported as saying, "I . . . should prefer to live in Pereiaslavets on the Danube, since that is the center of my realm, where all riches are concentrated: gold, silks, wine, and various fruits from Greece, silver and horses from Hungary and Bohemia, and from Rus' furs, wax, honey, and slaves." (Russian Primary Chronicle, XI C. "Povest' vremennykh let"). Medieval Preslav was situated south of the modern town of the same name. The name Preslav is mentioned in the written sources—inscriptions, seals, and Byzantine and Bulgarian chronicles—in various forms: Γραλι Πρεσθλάβα, Πρεσθλάβα, Ἰωαννούπολις, Πρεσθλαβίτζα, Μεγάλη Πρεσθλάβα, Βεληκίι Γραλι Πρεσθλάβα, Εski Stamboul.

Judgments about the place and role of Preslav in medieval Bulgaria, Byzantium, and the world of the time can be reached on the basis of the information provided by contemporaneous sources and of the data from archaeological excavations. Regular archaeological excavations have been conducted in Preslav for nearly a hundred years, and the picture of life in the city they suggest is summarized here.

The medieval settlement of Preslav was founded during the eighth to ninth century. Before being proclaimed the capital of Bulgaria, it had been a strategic fortress. It was the residence of one of the chief assistants of the ruler, the *Icergü Boila* (ἡτζίργων βωϋλε)—a military commander and diplomat—and it had a strong garrison and stores for heavy armaments (chain-mail and helmets) to equip a large part of the Bulgarian army.¹ Preslav was proclaimed the capital of Bulgaria in 893. It was captured in 969 by Sviatoslav of Kiev and in 971 by John I Tzimiskes. The Bulgarians reoccupied it in ca. 986, and the Byzantines about the year 1000. Thus it was under Byzantine rule from 971 to 986 and from 1000 to 1185. Under the second Bulgarian empire (1185–1393), Preslav remained an important city until its capture by the Ottoman Turks in 1388. This discussion of the economy of Preslav covers both the period when Preslav was a capital city and the period of Byzantine rule. The chronology of the archaeological finds is not always easy to establish.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I. Venedikov, Voennoto i administravnoto ustroistvo v Srednovekovna Bŭlgaria prez IX i X vek (Sofia, 1979), 23–24, 39–40.

Preslav acquired the status of a central settlement when the state capital moved there. The capital consisted of an inner and an outer city. The inner or royal city (Fig. 1, A) was situated on a higher terrace, which served as a citadel. It was the location of the main state institutions: the palace of the Bulgarian ruler, the cathedral, the residence of the Bulgarian patriarch, and the various departments of the central state administration. The inner city was surrounded by a white defensive wall of stone, 12–14 m in height. There were gateways at each of the four cardinal points connecting the palace with the rest of the world.

The outer city had an area of 3.5 km² and lay between the citadel and the outer defensive wall. This was the town per se, but because of the rough, broken terrain, the density of the population was not high. Furthermore, the outer city consisted of several sections that varied substantially in their social functions. The northern section (Fig. 1, B) was the most extensive. In its lower part, along the Rumska River, was the quarter of the artisans. Probe excavations there have identified the presence of workshops (belonging to blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, and jewelers) producing commercial articles for the market. Of interest here is the etymological interpretation of the name of the river. Some scholars link it with the Bulgarian ethnonym *romei* (= 'Pωμαίων, Byzantines), suggesting that the artisans'quarter may have been connected by origin, or by production, with Byzantium. Regrettably, it has not been possible to corroborate this hypothesis to date since the efforts of the archaeologists have not yet focused on this part of Preslav.² Although this was the main productive part of the city, it has not yet been the object of sustained study.

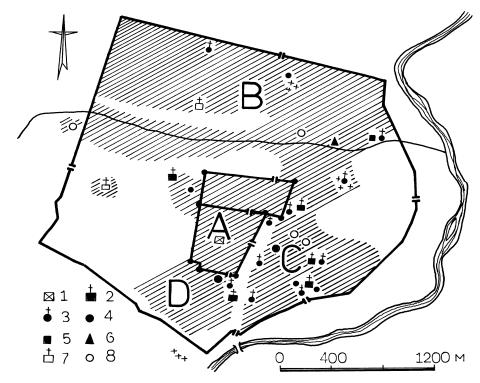
A second large section, distinct from the first, was located along the Tica River on a flat terrace called Selishte (Fig. 1, C). It was the location of monastery complexes, feudal estates, and large houses. Manufacturing equipment has also been found there, but it can be presumed to have been for private use.

South of the inner wall was a third and smaller section (Fig. 1, D). The most significant architectural monument there is the Round Church, a major monument of Bulgarian art. Of special interest here, however, is the large marketplace that has been discovered. It consists of eighteen commercial premises, equal in size, attached to the south defensive wall and in front of the South (and main) Gate on the road leading to Constantinople (Fig. 2). The material found in these buildings confirms that they were shops, selling various local and imported goods. There were a great number of Byzantine amphoras for transporting liquids (most probably high-quality wines) from Constantinople.<sup>3</sup>

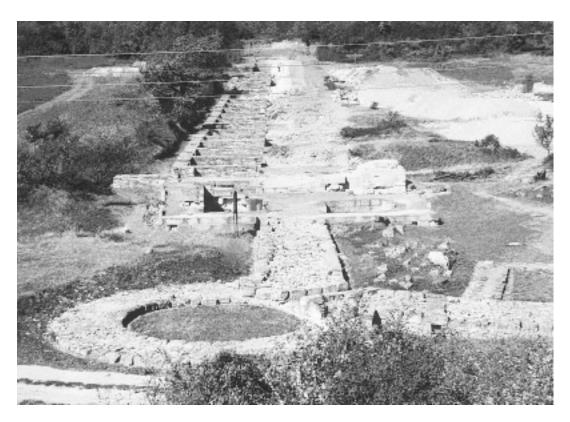
In and around the outer city of Preslav, many monasteries and estates have been excavated. These monasteries were the center for the production of the painted deco-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> D. Ovcharov, "Vŭznikvane i oformiane na Preslav kato srednovekoven grad," in *Srednovekovniiat bŭlgarski grad* (Sofia, 1980), 110–11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> I. Changova, "Tŭrgovskite pomesteniia krai iuznata krepostna stena na Preslav," *Izvestiia na arkheologicheskiia Institut* 22 (1957), 233–90.



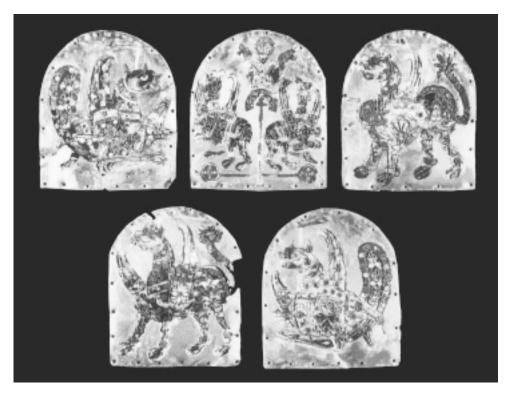
1. Map of Preslav in the 10th century (B. Petrova)



 $2. \ \ Preslav, chain \ trade \ premises \ in \ front \ of \ southern \ defense \ wall \ (photo: H.\ Karagyozyai)$ 



3. Two-sided necklace from the Preslav treasure (photo: H. Karagyozyai)



 $4.\,$  Gold diadem plaques with cloisonné enamel decoration from the Preslav treasure (photo: H. Karagyozyai)

rative ceramics (in porcelain clay), floor and wall mosaics, and other applied art objects for which Preslav was well known.<sup>4</sup> Outside the capital, in settlements within a radius of 10 km or more, such as Nadarevo, Kralevo, or the villages now beneath the Vinitza artificial lake, there were centers (workshops) specializing in the production of bricks, tiles, water pipes, cast metal, and other items needed for the buildings in the capital city.

#### Local Manufacturing

The traditional occupations of the area were agriculture, livestock breeding, and above all viticulture. Materials have been found that testify to almost all kinds of manufacturing: ironwork, pottery, ceramics for everyday use, luxury ceramics, painted ceramics, glasswork, jewelry, ivory, and marble.

#### Imported Items

Imported items must be those to which the Russian prince Sviatoslav was referring when he stated that "all riches are concentrated" there. Most of the imports were Byzantine luxury goods, such as ceramics, cups, plates, and small art objects in white porcelain clay. In general, they date from the tenth century or the first half of the eleventh. Scores of well-preserved vessels and hundreds of fragments have been documented. Their high quality and style testify both to the achievements of the producer and to the good taste of the user who placed the order for the items. Their quantity, not differing greatly from that of the local luxury ceramics, indicates that regular imports were made from Constantinople and workshops in other parts of the empire. The same applies to the objects of the jeweler's art, which are well represented in the so-called Preslav Treasure, which obviously belonged to members of the royal family (Figs. 3, 4).<sup>5</sup> Church plate and objects in fine glass were also imported. Though found rarely in Preslav, ninth- and tenth-century pottery from the Near East should also be mentioned. Imports from and exports to Byzantium were under state control, exercised by the *kommerkia* of Develtos.<sup>6</sup>

#### Circulation of Money

Commerce in the first Bulgarian kingdom (681–971) was on a barter basis. This is one of the main reasons why the Bulgarian rulers of the time had no coinage. In trade with Byzantium, however, Byzantine coins were used. A considerable number of single coins and occasional hoards have been found in the vicinity of Preslav. The number of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> T. Totev, Manastirŭt v Tuzlalŭka: Centŭr na risavana keramika v Preslav prez IX–X v. (Sofia, 1982); idem, Preslavskata keramichna ikona (Sofia, 1988).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> T. Totev, "Vnosna keramika, stŭklo i nakitni predmeti v Preslav," *Srednovekovna Bŭlgaria i moreto* (Varna, 1982), 79–81; idem, *The Preslav Treasure* (Shumen, 1993).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> I. Jordanov, *Pechatite ot komerkiiariiata Develt* (Sofia, 1992).

Dating	AE	AV	AR	Total
879-886	2	6		8
886-912	97	_	_	97
913-971	80	5	_	85
971–976	51	_	8	59
976-1028	170	2	2	174
1028-1041	80	_	_	80
1041-1092	59	1	1	61
1092-1118	3	_	_	3
1118-1143	5	1	_	6
1143-1180	12	_	_	12
1185-1195	15	_	_	15
1195-1203	12	_	_	12
1203-1261	340	3	3	346
1261-1300	67	_	5	72
1301-1393	22	2	34	58
Total	1,015	20	53	1,088

Table 1
Byzantine Coins Found in the Vicinity of Preslay, 879–1393

these coins is changing thanks to archaeological finds in recent years.<sup>7</sup> The figures in Table 1 represent finds made up to 1989. Chronological analysis of the 1,088 single coin finds is an indication of a series of processes and, most of all, of life in Preslav. These finds can be classified in three chronological groups: 886–971, 971–1203, and 1203–1393.

The first group corresponds to the period when Preslav was the capital of the state. There are more than 180 Byzantine coins and one silver Arabian dirham. In the case of the gold coins only, we can hypothesize that these came from dealings between Bulgarian traders and Byzantium, that is, they were hoarded. But the majority of the coins are copper (folles), used in everyday transactions. They are evidence that Byzantine coins played a definite part in everyday life and in the money exchanges of Preslav, which, as the capital city, differed from the rest of the country.

The largest numbers of single coins (395) come from the period when Preslav, and Bulgaria, belonged to the empire (971–1185). This is natural, given that Bulgaria had joined the advanced money economy of Byzantium. However, the attestation is not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> I. Jordanov, "Kharakter na monetnata tsirculatsiia v srednovekovnite bŭgarski stolici Preslav i Tŭrnovo," *Srednovekovniiat bŭlgarski grad* (Sofia, 1980), 229–43; idem, *Moneti i monetno obrastenie v Srednovekovna Bŭlgaria*, 1081–1261 (Sofia, 1984), 122–24, 200–202.

balanced for the entire period. Most of the coins are from the period between 971 and 1028 (233 specimens), which can be explained not only by the general prosperity of Byzantium but also by the fact that even after 971 Preslav retained its role as an important military, administrative, and economic center. After the middle of the eleventh century, the whole of northeast Bulgaria, including Preslav, was frequently the target of aggression from the new nomadic tribes (Pechenegs, Uzes, and others). Indeed, Preslav fell to the Pechenegs in 1053. This is the main reason (apart from the general political and economic crisis that affected the entire empire) for the sharp reduction in money exchanging in Preslav: only 61 coins date from this period, as opposed to 313 from the previous period.

In Preslav, unlike many other settlements in northern Bulgaria, there is attestation to money exchanges into the twelfth century. During the first half of the century, such exchanges were on a relatively low level, as a result not only of unfavorable conditions in the city but also of the withdrawal from circulation of the earlier, full-value, billon trachea.<sup>8</sup> During the second half of the century, the number of coins is considerably larger, but still lower than those found in such cities as Athens and Corinth, an observation that corresponds to the impressions of contemporaries (e.g., al-Idrisi, Niketas Choniates).<sup>9</sup> There was considerable economic growth in Preslav during the first half of the thirteenth century, when it was the second most important and second-largest city in the restored Bulgarian state.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> M. F. Hendy, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire*, 1081–1261 (Washington, D.C., 1969), 170–71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Nicetae Choniatae Historia, ed. J. L. van Dieten (New York–Berlin, 1975), 372, 45.2; B. Nedkov, Bŭlgariia i sŭsednite zemi prez XII vekspored "Geogra fiiata" na Idrisi (Sofia, 1960), 81.