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## GUSLA: THE ORIGIN AND BEYOND<sup>1</sup>

*Анстракт:* Во сите светски енциклопедии и учебни помагала е запишано дека музичкиот инструмент *гусла* на Балканот е донесен од Истокот, потекнувајќи од арап. *rabab*. Анализата на потеклото на тамбурата и гудалото, и нивното ширење во Источниот Медитеран, покажуваат дека тие не нашле место во хеленската музичка традиција и подоцна во Византија. Се смета дека во Византија и Иберискиот Полуостров овој инструмент бил донесен во XI век н.е. Скудните литературни сведоштва, етимологијата на зборот *гусла*, и особено честата употреба на овој збор од страна на св. Кирил и Методиј при преводот на називите на жичените инструменти во Светото Писмо на црковнословенски јазик, процес кој се одвивал во IX век н.е., укажуваат дека овој музички инструмент пристигнал на Балканот со Словените, како дел од нивната музичка традиција која ја донеле од својата прататковина.

1. The *gusla* as a term for a string instrument is present among all Slavic people, but what this term stands for in musicology is a one-string fiddle, which the South Slavic epic singers used as accompaniment to their songs.<sup>2</sup> What aroused a particular interest for the *gusla* and *guslars* was Milman Perry's research of Homer's epic poems compared with the Balkan epic tradition between the two World Wars, and especially Albert Lord's<sup>3</sup> research carried out in Montenegro, southern Serbia, and in Macedonia, which to a large extent revealed the issues concerning the creation

<sup>1</sup> Most of my research has been presented in the International Conference *The Balkan Peninsula as a Musical Crossroad*, Struga, 20–23 September 2007. This paper is a revised and expanded version of the original text published in 2008 ("On the Origin of Gusla in the Balkans", *The Balkan as a Musical Crossroad*, SOKOM: Skopje 2008, pp. 207–215).

<sup>2</sup> The Russian *gusli*, the Ukrainian *housli* are zither-like instruments, while in the Czech Republic *housle* is a name for a violin. It is possible that in Western Ukraine and Belorussia the term *husli* refers to a bowed instrument. In the Balkans, the *gusla* was also an instrument of the Albanian epic singers, under the name *lahuta*, especially in the northern mountainous parts of Albania. There are also certain variations of the *gusla*'s form in certain parts of the Balkan, for example, in Bosanska Kraina and in Lika the instrument had two strings.

<sup>3</sup> A. B. Lord, *The Singers of Tales*, Cambridge–Massachusetts 1960.

of the epic songs, how they were carried across throughout the centuries, the manner in which they were created, as well as the issue of the techniques used by the epic singers while performing their songs. Throughout the last several decades, numerous works have been written exploring the manner in which the South Slavic bards performed their songs with a *gusla*<sup>4</sup>, at the same time, studying the other European epic traditions and the meter, in an attempt to discover a common Indo-European background which would explain the similarities between the Greek, the South Slavic, the Vedic, and the Celtic epic traditions,<sup>5</sup> etc. However, all these studies have paid scant attention to the *gusla*, the musicological aspect of the performance having been played down, which largely distorts the image of the Balkan *guslars*,<sup>6</sup> since the research was focused more on their epic character and not on the *guslars* as musicians, and the least on the *gusla* as their instrument, on its origin and on the question as to why it was the most appropriate instrument for the Balkan epic singers.

2. It has been generally accepted that the *gusla* originated from the Middle East, from the Arabic instrument *rabab*. The oldest evidence of this instrument dates back to the end of the IX century. It has also been mentioned in the early medieval Arabic texts of Al-Jāhiz, Ibn Khurdadhbih, who claim that the *rabab* is similar to the Byzantine lyre, and of Al-Fārābī (870–950), who conveys the information that it is performed “by strings drawn on other strings”<sup>7</sup>, which is probably the oldest evidence on the existence of a bowed lute.<sup>8</sup> It is believed that the instrument was bro-

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, Indiana University Press 1995; “Guslar and Aoidos: Traditional Register in South Slavic and Homeric Epic,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 126, 1996, pp. 11–41; *Homer’s Traditional Art*, Pennsylvania 1999; K. Reich (ed.), *The Oral Epic: Performance and Music*, Berlin 2000, etc.

<sup>5</sup> R. Jakobson, “Studies in Comparative Slavic Metrics,” *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 3, Oxford 1952; M. L. Gasparov, *A History of European Versification*, Oxford 1996; M. L. West, “Indo-European Metre,” *Glotta* 51, 1973, pp. 161–187; C. Watkins, “Aspects of Indo-European Poetics,” *Polomé* 1982, pp. 164–180; “Indo-European Metrics and Archaic Irish Verse,” *Celtica* 6, 1963, pp. 194–249; J. C. Franklin, “Structural Sympathies in Ancient Greek and South Slavic Heroic Singing,” in E. Hickmann – R. Eichmann, eds., *Musikarchäologische Quellengruppen: Bodenurkunden, mündliche berlieferung, Aufzeichnung, Studien zur Musikarchäologie* 4, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Berlin, 2004, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. Duev, “Homer and the South-Slavic Epic Singers”, *Annuaire de la Faculté de Philosophie de L’Université “St. Cyrille et Methode” de Skopje*, vol. 59 (2006), pp. 343–352.

<sup>7</sup> Al Farabi, *Kitabu al Musiqā to al Kabir*, trans. Baron Rodolphe d’Erlanger, Paris 1959.

<sup>8</sup> H.G. Farmer, *Studies in Oriental Musical Instruments*, London 1931.

ught to Byzantium and Spain in the XI century, being known as *rebec* during the medieval period in Europe, an instrument out of which all contemporary bowed instruments originate.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, there are various views regarding the period when this instrument was brought over to Europe and whether it was a bowed instrument, since the term *rabab* also referred to an instrument of the lute type, which was played by striking the strings,<sup>10</sup> as well as to a number of other similar bowed instruments.<sup>11</sup> As opposed to the *kamancheh*, which has Persian origins (Persian: ‘a bow’), the etymology of the *rabab* remains unknown. The arrival of the Arabs in Spain began around 711, thus an earlier presence of the *rabab* in Europe should be anticipated. It is still uncertain in what form and at what point of its development this instrument arrived in Europe.<sup>12</sup> If indeed it was a bowed instrument, and according to Ibn Khurdadbih (820–912), the *rabab* is similar to the Byzantine lyre, it turns out that bowed instruments were already present in Europe, to the contrary of all claims that the musical bow is an innovation of the X century.

3. The string instruments underwent a lengthy period of development in the Mediterranean, beginning at the end of the fourth millennium in the Middle East, especially in Sumer.<sup>13</sup> According to its form, the *gusla* belongs to the lute-type instruments. Like the lyre and the harp, the lute had been very popular in the East Mediterranean since the end of the third millennium B.C. Along with the other Western-Semitic instruments, it was used by the Hittites as far as the second half of the second millennium, and especially by the Egyptians, where it was very popular according to the numerous archeological evidence.<sup>14</sup> But, it seems that this instrument arrived in the Balkans much later. The first piece of evidence dates back to the IV century B.C., i.e., during the period of Hellenism, when, following the conquests of Alexander

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Muzička enciklopedija*, Zagreb 1974, s.v. *gusle i guslari*; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. *gusla, rabab, rebec*; R. Saoud, *The Arab Contribution to Music of the Western World*, Manchester: FSTC Limited 2004, p. 13; etc.

<sup>10</sup> H. G. Farmer 1931, pp. 103ss.; R. Saoud (2004, n. 81) thinks that this instrument arrived in Europe in the X century along with the *kamancheh*, a short-necked fiddle with three strings, known as *kemane* in Macedonia and as *gadulka* in Bulgaria. It is interesting to note that some kinds of *kamancheh* closely resemble the Balkan *gusla*.

<sup>11</sup> H. G. Framer, *A History of Arabian Music*, London 1929, p. 210.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. F. Salvador-Daniel, *Arab Music and Musical Instruments*, London 1915, pp. 229–239.

<sup>13</sup> M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music*, Oxford 1991, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> For more see L. Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, London 1991.

the Great, the cultural boundaries had disappeared.<sup>15</sup> It is very probable that the Hellenes knew about this instrument, but it may not have met the needs of the musicians and their traditional music, like the lyre and the *kithara* did. After the period of Hellenism, the Greek *pandoura*<sup>16</sup> became very popular in Rome, and in Byzantium, a fact which has been recorded in numerous inscriptions, manuscripts, frescos, and reliefs.

There is no evidence concerning the musical bow from the Early Bronze Age until the X century. Although the hunters' and the warriors' bow has a long history, it is believed that its musical role as a string that creates sound was discovered very early,<sup>17</sup> but its use as a musical bow came much later. It is generally accepted that the principle of creating a sound with the string instruments by dragging a bow appeared for the first time among the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, the Huns and the Mongols, who were renowned for their horse breeding, their archery skills, as well as their horsemen-warriors, and thus from the X century it simultaneously spread to China, Java, North Africa, the Middle East and in the Balkans.<sup>18</sup> However, since horse-breeding has a long history in the East Mediterranean, from the second millennium B.C., connecting it only to those nomadic tribes puts the theory in the domain of feasible assumptions.

4. There is no credible written or archeological evidence concerning the existence of the *gusla* in the Balkans until the IX century. There is no evidence on the existence of a similar musical instrument in Ancient Greece and in Byzantium. The dilemma with the bowed Byzantine lyre is that the first piece of evidence of the existence of a bowed pear-shaped lute originated from the Byzantine illuminated manuscripts from the XI century.<sup>19</sup>

It is possible that the oldest record of this kind of musical instrument was discovered in the writings of Bishop Sidonius Apollinarius, in the V century, where it was referred to as the

<sup>15</sup> M.L. West, 1991, pp. 79–80. For more on the appearance of lutes in Greek art see R. A. Higgins – R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Lute-players in Greek Art," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 85, 1985, pp. 62–71.

<sup>16</sup> The Hellenic term *pandoura* has Semitic origins from the Sumerian *pan-tur*, "little bow".

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. L. West, "Music Therapy in Antiquity, in P. Horden (ed.), *Music as Medicine. The History of Music Therapy since Antiquity*," Aldershot, 2000, pp. 51–63.

<sup>18</sup> S. Sadie–J. Tyrrell, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Oxford 2001, s.v. By waxing the bow's string, made of horse hair, to provide for elasticity and wholeness of the string, which led to the discovery of the musical bow.

<sup>19</sup> see J. Braun, "Musical Instruments in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts", *Early Music* 8/3, 1980, pp. 312–327.

*fides* (*fiddle*)<sup>20</sup>, which coincides with the first Slavonic invasion of Thrace and Macedonia.<sup>21</sup> But it remains unclear whether the Bishop used the Latin term *fides* to refer to a bowed instrument, since the basic meaning of the word in Latin is ‘a string, a string instrument’.<sup>22</sup>

The most referred to and cited piece of evidence is the one from the Byzantine historian Theophylactus Simocatta – although infrequently paraphrased – in his work *Historiae*, where he writes about an event in 583 when the Byzantines captured three Slavs carrying musical instruments instead of weapons, which the author terms *kitharas* (κιθάρας) and *lyres* (λύραις):

„...Τῇ δὲ ὑστεραία ἄνδρες τρεῖς Σκλαυηνοὶ τὸ γένος μηδέν τι σιδήρου περιβαλλόμενοι ἢ ὀργάνων πολεμικῶν ἔαλωσαν ὑπὸ τῶν τοῦ βασιλέως ὑπασιπιστῶν· κιθάραι δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ φορτία, καὶ ἄλλο τι οὐδὲν ἐπεφέροντο... κιθάρας τε ἐπιφέρεισθαι διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐξησκήσθαι ὄπλα τοῖς σώμασι περιβάλλεσθαι, τῆς χώρας αὐτοῖς ἀγνοούσης τὸν σίδηρον κἀντεῦθεν τὸν εἰρηναῖον καὶ ἀστασίαστον παρεχομένης τὸν βίον αὐτοῖς, λύραις τε καταψάλλεσθαι περιλαλεῖν οὐκ εἰδότας ταῖς σάλπιγξιν· οἷς γὰρ ὁ πόλεμος ἦν ἀνιστόρητος, εἰκότως ἂν ἔφασκον ἀγρότερά πως ὑπεῖναι τὰ τῆς μουσικῆς μελετήματα...“ (*Hist.* VI. 2)<sup>23</sup>

... On the following day, three men, Sclavenes by race, who were not wearing any iron or military equipment, were captured by the emperor's bodyguards. Lyres were their baggage, and they were not carrying anything else at all... they carried lyres since it was not their practice to gird weapons on their bodies, because their country was ignorant of iron and thereby provided them with a peaceful and trouble-free life; they made music on lyres because they did not know how to sound forth on trumpets. For they would quite reasonably say that for those who had no knowledge of warfare, musical pursuits were uncultivated...<sup>24</sup>

The statements of the three Slavs, as Simocatta presents them, are certainly suspicious, and they were probably spies dis-

<sup>20</sup> H. Reimann, *Muzik-Lexikon*, Berlin 1922, p. 504.

<sup>21</sup> A. Linin, *Narodnrite muzički instrumenti vo Makedonija*, Skopje 1986, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> M. Remnant writes that the word *fides*, for example, means ‘a harp string’ in *Catholicon Anglicum*, etc. (“Rebec, Fiddle and Crowd in England”, *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 95th sess., Oxford University Press 1968–1969, p. 15).

<sup>23</sup> *Historiae*, C. de Boor (ed.), *Theophylacti Simocattae historiae*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1887 (repr. Stuttgart: 1972), pp. 20–314.

<sup>24</sup> *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, An English translation with introduction and notes: Michael and Mary Whitby, Oxford University Press 1986.

guised as musicians.<sup>25</sup> Concerning Theophylactus Simocatta's statement and its credibility, scholars consider him to be a very erudite man and a very important source on the Byzantine wars against the Slavs and the Avars.<sup>26</sup> However, what is most important about this statement is that it is the first written piece of evidence concerning the existence of musical instruments among the South Slavs. Yet, it remains problematic as to what kind of instruments he was referring to with the terms *kithara* and *lyre*. In the later editions of this work, the instruments are called *kitharas* and *guslas*.<sup>27</sup> Many authors take Simocatta's statement as the earliest record of the term *gusla*, since he lived and worked in the VII century. I. Kachulev's opinion is that it probably referred to *gusla*, as the name *lyre* referred to a bowed instrument in medieval Europe, even today in Greece and Dalmatia.<sup>28</sup> But, the assumption that the *gusla* of the VII century is a bowed instrument refutes all the arguments that the musical bow and the bowed instruments are related to the Arabic society of the IX and X centuries, and the appearance of the musical bow in Central Asia. Of course, there is still the possibility that the *gusla* from this period was also similar to the *kithara* or to a kind of *zither*, which this term refers to in Russia and the Ukraine.

In the IX century there is already credible written evidence regarding the existence of the *gusla*: Cosmas the Priest accuses the Bogumils: "Likewise they are not Christians who drink wine with guslas, dances and devilish songs,"<sup>29</sup> and, of course, in the translation of the Bible into Old Slavonic by Ss. Cyril and Methodius.

5. It is believed that the *Psalter* was one of Cyril and Methodius' first translations, done between 863 and 869. However, the original translation has not been preserved. The oldest manuscripts date from the XI century, while at least three different editions of the original translation were recorded.<sup>30</sup> The analysis of the manuscripts of the XI to the XV centuries reveals differen-

<sup>25</sup> B. Grafenauer, "Nekaj vprašanj iz dobe naseljevanja južnih Slovanov," *Zgodovinski časopis* 4, 1950, p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. M. Marković, „O izvorima *Quaestiones physicae* Teofilakta Simokate,“ *Živa Antika* 4/1, 1954, pp. 132–135; B. Grafenauer, 1950, pp. 62–74.

<sup>27</sup> I. Kachulev, "Gadulkas in Bulgaria", *The Galpin Society Journal*, vol. 16, 1963, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> I. Kachulev, 1963, p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> A. Linin, 1986, p. 6; S. Kuhač, *Prilozi za povjest glazbe*, Rad JAZU, Zagreb 1876, kn. 38; I. Kachulev, 1963, p. 95, etc.

<sup>30</sup> C. MacRobert, "The Textual Tradition of the Church Slavonic Psalter up to the Fifteenth Century," *Interpretation of the Bible*, Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1998, pp. 921–940.

ces within the text, but not in the translation of the musical instruments, which probably means that the original translation was done by the Holy Brothers.

If we analyze the translation of the musical instruments in the *Psalter*, we will notice that Constantine the Philosopher simply transcribed the Greek terms into Old Slavonic,<sup>31</sup> except the translation of *kithara* as *gusla* and *salpingos keratinēs* – τρῦβυ ροζάνη (Ps. 98:6). If we further analyze the translations of the rest of the Old Testament texts, apart from little differences, they do not substantially deviate from the solutions offered in the *Psalter*.<sup>32</sup> Yet, the question remains as to why Constantine the Philosopher replaced the Semitic *kinnōr*, Greek *kithara*, with the Slavic instrument *gusla*? If we analyze the translations in the *Psalter*, he duly translates these terms with *gusla* because he generally followed the Greek *Septuagint*, and in Psalms 49:5, 137:2, and 149:3 he accepts the mistakes of the Greek translator (see Table 1). The same may be seen in the rest of the Old Testament texts (see Table 2). This is also evidenced in the oldest manuscript, *Psalterium Sinaiticum*, dating from the XI century.<sup>33</sup>

Table 1	Translation of <i>kinnōr</i> in Psalter		
	Septuaginta	Vulgata	БНБАНѢ
Ps. 33 : 2	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛЕУХЪ
Ps. 43 : 4	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛЕУХЪ
Ps. 49 : 5	ψαλτηρίῳ	psalterio (cithara)	ΨΑΛΤΗΡΗ
Ps. 57 : 9	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛН
Ps. 71 : 22	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛЕУХЪ
Ps. 81 : 3	μετα κιθάρας	citharam	СЪ ГѸСЛЬМН
Ps. 92 : 4	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛЕУХЪ
Ps. 98 : 5	κιθάρα x 2	cithara	ГѸСЛЕУХЪ x 2
Ps. 108 : 3	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛН
Ps. 137 : 2	ὄργανα	organa (citharas)	ѠΡΓΑΝΥ
Ps. 147 : 7	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛЕУХЪ
Ps. 149 : 3	ψαλτηρίῳ	psalterio (cithara)	ΨΑΛΤΗΡΗ
Ps. 150 : 3	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѸСЛЕУХЪ

<sup>31</sup> *κιθάροις* – кнмвалѣхъ (Ps. 150:5 etc.), *τυμπάνῳ* – тнмпанѣ (Ps. 150:4 etc.), *ὄργανῳ* – Ѡрганѣ (Ps. 150:4 etc.), *ψαλτήριον* – ψалтнрь (Ps. 81:3 etc.).

<sup>32</sup> *κιθάροις* – кнмвалѣхъ (Ps. 150:5 etc.), *τυμπάνῳ* – тнмпанѣ (Ps. 150:4 etc.), *ὄργανῳ* – Ѡрганѣ (Ps. 150:4 etc.), *ψαλτήριον* – ψалтнрь (Ps. 81:3 etc.).

<sup>33</sup> Slavic translations as *αυλοι* – цѣвннцѣх (2 S. 6:5), *σωφῆλ* (1 S. 10:5) are rare, thus I feel, by analyzing the translations of all the musical instruments in the Old Testament, that the solutions are the work of the Holy Brothers, and not of the later editors of the translations.

Table 2	Translation of <i>kinnôr</i>		
	Septuaginta	Vulgata	БНБАНѢ
Gen. 4 : 21	κιθάραν	cithara	ГѢСЛН
Gen. 31 : 27	κιθάρας	cithara	ГѢСЛМН
1 S. 10 : 5	κινύρα	citharam	ГѢСЛН
1 S. 16 : 6	ψάλλειν ἐν κινύρα	psallere cithara	ПѢТН ВЪ ГѢСЛН
1 S. 16 : 23	κινύραν	citharam	ГѢСЛН
2 S. 6 : 5	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
1 K. 10 : 12	κινύρας	citharas	ГѢСЛН
1 Ch. 13 : 8	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
1 Ch. 15 : 16	κινύραις	lyris	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
1 Ch. 15 : 21	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
1 Ch. 15 : 28	κινύραις	citharis	КИФАРЫ
1 Ch. 16 : 5	κινύραις	lyras	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
1 Ch. 25 : 1	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
1 Ch. 25 : 3	κινύρα	cithara	ГѢСЛН
1 Ch. 25 : 6	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
2 Ch. 5 : 12	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
2 Ch. 9 : 11	κιθάρας	citharas	ГѢСЛН
2 Ch. 20 : 28	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛМН
2 Ch. 29 : 25	κινύραις	citharis	ГѢСЛМН
Neh. 12 : 27	κινύραι	citharis	ГѢСЛЕХЪ
Job 21 : 12	κιθάραν	citharam	ГѢСЛН
Job 30 : 31	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѢСЛН
Isa. 5 : 12	κιθάρας	cithara	ГѢСЛМН
Isa. 16 : 11	κιθάρα	cithara	ГѢСЛН
Isa. 23 : 16	κιθάραν	citharam	ГѢСЛН
Isa. 24 : 8	κιθάρας	citharae	ГѢСЛЕН
Isa. 30 : 32	κιθάρας	citharis	ГѢСЛМН
Ezk. 26 : 13	ψαλτηρίων	cithararum	ПѢВНИЦЪ

As a teacher at the Magnaura School, he was very familiar with classical Greek literature, and especially with Homer's epics. From an analysis of the first Slavonic alphabet, the *glagolica*, it is known that Constantine the Philosopher was familiar with the Semitic script and Hebrew.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that he knew that the *kinnôr* was the instrument which accompanied the chanting of the Levites in the Temple and which gave rise to the Greek *kithara*, the instrument of the *aidoi*, which corresponded to the

<sup>34</sup> P. Hr. Iliovski, *The Origin and Development of Writing: with Special Regard to the Beginnings of Slavonic Literacy*, MANU 2001, p. 123.

*gusla* of the South Slavic epic singers.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, in spite of the fact that the three instruments were a part of these people's epic tradition, it remains unclear whether it refers to a bowed *gusla*, or some kind of a lyre. Certainly, the *gusla* must have been very popular in the IX century, which contributed to its involvement in St. Cyril's translation, since it is highly improbable that the Slavs did not have names for other kinds of instruments, as well (wind, percussion), which could be used in the translation by the Holy Brothers. This may be due to the peculiarity of the *gusla*, or to its similarity to the *kithara*.

6. Summarizing the hereinabove scant evidence of the existence of the *gusla* in the Balkans and comparing it to its later feature – the XV-century image of a one-stringed *gusla* on the carved doors of the Slepche monastery near Bitola – one is faced with the dilemma whether it is the same instrument as the one in the VII century Simocatta records, translated by the Holy Brothers in the IX century, or whether during the period of the Slavonic invasion of the Balkans it was a different instrument: a kind of a harp or a zither which had been brought from their homeland.

The name of the instrument has a clear Slavic etymology. *Gusla* originates from the Old Slavonic root *god-ti*, *gos-ti*, and the *gud-alo* (bow) developed from the post-adverbial *gud*. P. Skok believes that the singular form *gusla* is rare, as compared to the much more frequently used plural form *gusli*, because the term refers to an instrument of the harp or zither-type, with several strings.<sup>36</sup> Yet, there is no evidence within the Old Church Slavonic manuscripts, and even within the modern Slavic languages, that the root means "a string", which would justify this argument.<sup>37</sup> I. Kachulev feels that the Old Slavic root *god-o* means "I emit sound".<sup>38</sup> In my opinion, the root *god* represents an onomatopoeia of the bow's sound, to which other words that derive from this root as, for example, *gudeti*, which means "to mourn, to lament", also point. The nasal vocal in the root *go<sup>n</sup>d* points to the duration of the sound caused by the drawing of the bow against the string of the *gusla*.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, even if we start from the meaning of *gusti*, which indicates the pulling of a string (a

<sup>35</sup> Cf. R. Duev, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> P. Skok, *Etimologijski rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, Zagreb 1972, s.v. *gusti*.

<sup>37</sup> It is more probable that the plural form *gusli* resulted from the translation by the Holy Brothers of the plural forms *kitharai* and *lyrai*, or from the fact that a band of musicians consisted of several *guslars*.

<sup>38</sup> I. Kachulev, 1963, p. 95. A. Sterjovski (*Poslednji ohridski guslar*, Skopje 1994, p. 6) mentions *gega/gaga* as the ancient Slavonic name for the *gusla*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. R. Duev, "\*tu-qa-no? – tympanon", *Živa Antika* 52, 2002, p. 140.

rope, etc.) over another string or a linear object (in a circle, cf. *gusenica*), it will take us back to the concept that the *gusla* acquired its name because it was played with a musical bow (*gudalo*).

It is also possible that the *gusla* was a modification of some kind of a Semitic instrument that the Slavs came across in their original homeland or through their contacts with the other nomadic people in Central Asia and which, due to its popularity and alterations, distinguished itself by its name, as well. For example, lyres had a long tradition in the eastern Mediterranean, especially the Semitic *kinnôr*, which gave rise to the *kithara*, or the *phorminx* of the *aidoi*.<sup>40</sup> In the hands of skilled musicians, the instrument changed its form to meet the requirements of their music. Thus, from an instrument with 7 to 12 strings, the *phorminx* had only 4 to meet the needs of the musicians of the geometric period.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the Semitic *kinnôr* had disproportional arms, which turned proportional during the transformation of the instrument into a *kithara* in the Balkans. Later, during the period of Hellenism, a reverse influence of the Hellenic *kithara* over the Semitic *kinnôr* took place, which, with its proportionality, began to resemble the *kithara*. Perhaps the *gusla*, in the hands of the Slavonic epic singers, underwent a similar process.

7. What may be certainly maintained is that the South Slavs brought the *gusla* to the Balkans from their original homeland during their migration in the VI century. The etymology of the instruments undoubtedly points to the conclusion that it was a bowed instrument.

Also, the translation of the Greek *kithara* as *gusli* by Ss. Cyril and Methodius in their translation of the Old Testament in the IX century, besides the fact that the other instruments were transcribed, indicates the great popularity of the *gusla* among the Macedonian Slavs in the Thessaloniki vicinity. This piece of evidence is important because the analysis of the first Slavonic script – the *glagolica*, reveals that the Holy Brothers had significant knowledge of the Slavonic language and culture. It is very improbable that Methodius, being the Bishop of Bregalnitsa, was not familiar with the Slavonic musical instruments. The translation of the Greek *kithara* as *gusli* does not necessarily mean that this instrument was a kind of a lyre, but more a sense of the epic tradition on which was exclusively related to the *kinnôr*, the *kithara*, and

<sup>40</sup> On the origin and development of the various types of lyres see R. Duev, "Za mikenskata lira," *Annuaire de la Faculté de Philosophie de L'Université "St. Cyrille et Methode" de Skopje*, vol. 56 (2003), pp. 341–362; cf. M.L. West, *Ancient Greek Music*, Oxford 1992, pp. 48–70.

<sup>41</sup> For more see R. Duev, "Muzikata kaj Homer," *Annuaire de la Faculté de Philosophie de L'Université "St. Cyrille et Methode" de Skopje*, vol. 57 (2004), pp. 394–5.

the *gusla*. If the *gusla* was a kind of a lyre, lute, or a zither, the Holy Brothers could simply transcribe the Greek terms. The fact that only the *gusla* is a term for a Slavonic string instrument in their translation indicates the particularity of the instrument and its significance to the Slavs.

That leaves only Theophylactus Simocatta's evidence in his work *Historiae* from the VII century as a debatable issue. If it may be proven that the edition of his text featuring the *guslas* and *kitharas* is older than those featuring *lyres* and *kitharas*, then it would be the oldest record of the presence of the *gusla* in the Balkans in the VI or VII century. On the other hand, the mention of the captured Slavs' instruments both as *lyres* and as *kitharas* indicates that Simocatta was not very certain as to what kind of instruments they were.

Although the general position within musicology is that all musical instruments originate from the Middle East, it is still possible that in the case of the *gusla* – at least regarding the way it was played, with a bow – that it was a Slavic innovation or a modification of a similar instrument. The theory of the bow's origin from the nomadic people of Central Asia does not exclude the Slavs, who were in their vicinity and lived in a similar manner.

The etymology of the term is the strongest proof concerning the specificity of the *gusla*. Compared to the other similar instruments, their names subsisted with certain variations among all the people who adopted them. For instance, the Sumerian *pan-tur* in Greece and Byzantium became *pandoura* and *pandura* in Rome, then the Semitic *kinnor* became *kinyra*, *kithara* in Greece, the Arabic *rabab* became *rubab*, *rabob*, *robab*, *ribab*, *rbab*, *rababa*, in Europe *rebec*, etc. It may be expected that the Slavs had some kind of a transcription of the *rabab*, the *zither*, or the Byzantine *lyre*, not their own terms which managed to subsist in spite of the strong influences of the musical traditions of the powerful empires throughout the medieval era and up to modern times.