In the area of Byzantine civilization we can find churches dedicated to Sophia – the Wisdom of God. This phenomenon has always caused a lot of interpretational difficulties for researchers, resulting for example in the diversity of translations for Hagia Sophia temples in the literature (church/cathedral of the Holy Wisdom, God’s Wisdom, Divine Wisdom or even – incorrectly – St. Sophia). Nevertheless, the problem to whom, in the mind of the Byzantines themselves, the sanctuaries of that name were dedicated – is worth a closer look. It is even more interesting when we take into consideration the cathedral church in Constantinople, the most important temple of the empire and the whole East Christian civilization\(^1\): built in 360 by the emperor Constantius II and then rebuilt between 532 and 537 by Justinian I the Great, the famous Hagia Sophia\(^2\) was dedicated to Sophia – the Holy Wisdom.

\(^1\) This article has been written under the research project funded by the National Science Centre (Sofia – the Personification of Divine Wisdom: the History of the Notion in the Byzantine-Slavonic Culture, nr 2011/03/N/HS2/00890).

\(^2\) The literature is dominated by the view, supported by testimonies of many Byzantine chroniclers (e.g. Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen and an anonymous author of the Paschal Chronicle and Zonaras), that the first church dedicated to the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople was built during the reign of Constantius II and consecrated on 15\(^{th}\) February 360. In older historiography, one will come across an argument, based on the text of Description of the Church of the Holy Wisdom and George Cedrenus’s reports, attributing the foundation of the original Hagia Sophia to Constantine the Great. This attribution, however, should be regarded as legendary. The final form of the cathedral was achieved during the reconstruction after the fire which destroyed the basilica on 15\(^{th}\) January 532, during the Nika
The presentation of the historical and architectural foundations of the so-called Great Church in Constantinople falls much beyond the theme frames of this article. It also possesses a fairly extensive literature. The issue which will be of primary importance for our discussion is to find out how the Byzantines themselves interpreted the name of their cathedral, i.e. to whom, according to their opinion, it was dedicated.

Modern scholars generally agree that the temple of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) could be understood by the medieval inhabitants of Constantinople, generally well acquainted with the views of the Fathers of the Church, only as a church dedicated to Christ – the Incarnate Logos. This thesis is confirmed by many Byzantine sources. Socrates Scholasticus (ca. 380–440), a church historian living in the first half of the 5th century mentions only the fact that in his times the Great Church was called just the Temple of Wisdom (ἡ μεγάλη ἐκκλησία ὄνομαζομένη Σοφία). The experts emphasize that in the era of great Christological revolt. The solemn re-consecration took place on 27th December 537 with the participation of the emperor Justinian the Great.


disputes the identification of the Son of God with Sophia was so common that the question of the dedication of the Constantinopolitan basilica no longer required, according to Socrates, any additional explanation.6

The understanding of the Hagia Sophia cathedral as a temple dedicated to the Son of God is also characteristic of several writers contemporary to the founder of the reconstruction of the Constantinopolitan basilica – Justinian I the Great. Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500 – ca. 560) repeatedly mentions in his writings that the main metropolitan church was known as the church of the Holy Wisdom, because it was a name recognized at that time by the Byzantines as the most suitable for God as a name of his sanctuary7. At the same time, however, he explicitly states that the Hagia Sophia is a temple dedicated to Christ: τὸ ἱερὸν Χριστοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ8. In a similar tone speaks also Paul the Silentiary, the author of a description of the church of Hagia Sophia (Εὐφρασίας τοῦ ναού τῆς Αγίας Σοφίας) characterized by a panegyric tone, written specially for the occasion of the re-inauguration of the Constantinopolitan cathedral, which took place after the completion of the dome reconstruction, on the Christmas eve of 562, with the participation of emperor Justinian I the Great9.

Analyzing the works made on the occasion of consecration of the newly rebuilt Hagia Sophia in 562, we must devote at least a few words to another source from the 6th cent. – the anonymous kontakion, often attributed in the literature to Romanus the Melodist or one of his disciples10. This short hym-

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6 Z. Licharewa, Hagia Sophia w Konstantynopolu, Or 5, 1937, p. 106; Г. Флоровский, О почитании Софии, Премудрости Божией, в Византии и на Руси, [in:] Идем, Дозмат и история, Москва 1998; С. Золотарев, О храмах во имя Софии…, p. 16; Идем, София Премудрость Божия…, p. 241. In the older historiography one could find a suggestion that the dedication of the Constantinopolitan cathedral to Divine Wisdom resulted primarily from the tendency to build churches of abstract invocations (see Hagia Eirene – Peace of God in the capital of the empire) characteristic of the early Christian culture. Now such interpretations are generally rejected. С. Золотарев, София Премудрость Божия…, p. 242.

7 Procopius Caesariensis, De bellis, III, 6, 26; G. Downey, op. cit.; G. Dagron, op. cit., p. 231; M.L. Fobelli, op. cit., p. 168; С. Золотарев, София Премудрость Божия…, p. 243.

8 Procopius, De bellis, III, 6, 26; Procopius, De aedificiis, I, 2, 18; G. Downey, op. cit., p. 38; G. Dagron, op. cit., p. 231; M.L. Fobelli, op. cit., p. 168; С. Золотарев, София Премудрость Божия…, p. 243.


10 A. Palmer, The inauguration anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: a new edition and translation with historical and architectural notes and a comparison with a contemporary Constantinopolitan kontakion, BMGS 12,
nographic piece of writing was created at the same time as Paul the Silentiary’s panegyric, and was publicly delivered a few days earlier than the Ἐκφρασις τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας. Probably the first performance of the kontakion took place on the 24th December of 562, during the inaugural ceremony of the temple. On the other hand, Paul the Silentiary presented his work on the day of Epiphany, the 6th of January11. In the text of the work we can find parts containing a fairly comprehensive explanation of the Constantinopolitan cathedral dedication. First of all, the author of the kontakion expressly states that Hagia Sophia is a church dedicated to Christ12. What’s more, by intertwining in his poetic discourse some references to the Book of Proverbs, he does not hesitate to emphasize that the Wisdom personified in the Old Testament is nothing else but the Son of God. It is particularly noteworthy in the part referring to the famous passage from the Book of Proverbs 9, telling how the personified Sophia builds a house for herself. In this case Pseudo-Melodist has no doubt that the “House of Wisdom”, mentioned in the Old Testament, should be interpreted primarily as a symbol of the Incarnation of Logos in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth13.

An interesting composition, containing a detailed description concerning the construction of the temple of Hagia Sophia, was written probably during the reign of emperor Basil I (867–886) and entered the corpus of sources as Διήγησις περὶ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐπονομαζομένης Ἁγίας Σοφίας14. In this work we can discover a number of essential components of East Christian sophiology. First of all, just like in the case of Byzantine writers of the 5th–6th cent., the anonymous author of Διήγησις says that the Constantinopolitan basilica was (in the eyes of the inhabitants of the empire) a church dedicated to the Only Begotten Son and Word of God15. Moreover, in the same source we also find an element quoted on the pages of many works of Byzantine historiography, including John Malalas’s Chronographia and Theophanes Continuatus: we can read that Justinian, moved by the magnificence of the Great Church, would exclaim: Solomon, now I have surpassed you!, corresponding to

15 In that way it took its name: the Church of Divine Wisdom (Hagia Sophia), expressed [in the matter] the Word of God – Narratio de structura, 10, p. 418; Г. Флоровский, op. cit.; С. Золотарев, София Пре- мудрость Божия…, p. 244.
the Old Testament eulogist of Divine Wisdom and the builder of the temple in Jerusalem\textsuperscript{16}.

Particularly noteworthy, however, is another aspect of that work. It should be noted that \textit{Διήγησις} is one of the few Byzantine sources containing a detailed description of the epiphany of personified Divine Wisdom. According to it \textit{Sophia} was to be revealed as a vision to a fourteen-year-old son of the chief architect in the form of an angel with a flaming face, which resembled a palace eunuch\textsuperscript{17}. This theme is worth remembering: it was exposed in a particular way in Old Church Slavonic copies of the story, thus contributing to the emergence of particular ideas about the Wisdom in the territory of \textit{Slavia Orthodoxa}\textsuperscript{18}.

The belief that \textit{Hagia Sophia} is a church dedicated to Christ – the Incarnate Logos, can be found on the pages of many other works as well. For example in \textit{Theophanes Continuatus} we can read about the Constantinopolitan basilica: τῷ μέγαλῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου τεμένει; ἁγία Σοφία; ἁγία Σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησία; τῇ μεγάλῃ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησία; ἁγία τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφία\textsuperscript{19}.

In the 11\textsuperscript{th} century an attempt to explain the invocation of the Constantinopolitan cathedral – an amazing construction to foreigners – was undertaken by a West European author. An anonymous traveler from Tarragona in his description of the capital of Byzantium emphasized that its main temple is dedicated to the Son of God, and the name \textit{Hagia Sophia} points to one of the attributes of the Creator, the Wisdom of God (Latin \textit{Sancta Sapientia}), and not – as it was claimed in the West in his times – a saint named Sophia\textsuperscript{20}:

\begin{quote}
Edificata est ergo ecclesia mirifice Deo cooperante a Iustiniano imperatore et consecrata est in honore sancte Sophie que latine dicitur Sancta Sapientia, que est Dei filius (…) Est autem nomen filii Dei non, ut quidam putant, nomen sancte mulieris.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

The mentioned itinerary would constitute one of the earliest chronological pieces of evidence of the incorrect identification (in the Western civilization) of \textit{Sophia} with a female saint, worshiped both in Constantinople and in Rome, a half-legendary mother of three martyrs: Faith, Hope and Love\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{16} Narratio de structura, 27, p. 427; E. Wellesz, op. cit., p. 187; L. Brubaker, op. cit., p. 85, 87.
\textsuperscript{17} Narratio de structura, 10, p. 417.
\textsuperscript{18} Z. Licharewa, op. cit., p. 109; С. Золотарев, София Премудрость Божия..., p. 243.
\textsuperscript{19} Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker, Bonnae 1838, p. 154, 354, 384, 399, 402; G. Downey, op. cit., p. 38.
\textsuperscript{20} К.Н. Циггаар, Une Description de Constantinople dans le Tarragonensis 55, REB 53, 1995, p. 129–130; Таррагонский аноним, О граде Константинополе. Латинское описание реликвий Константинополя XI в., ed. Л.К.М. Синчес, [in:] Реликвии в искусстве и культуре восточно-христианского мира, Москва 2000, p. 165; С. Золотарев, София Премудрость Божия..., p. 244.
\textsuperscript{21} De Constantinopolis civitate, 321–325, [in:] К.Н. Циггаар, op. cit., p. 126.
\textsuperscript{22} V. Tsamakda, Darstellungen der Hagia Sophia bzw. der Weisheit Gottes in der kretischen Wandmalerei, BZ 101, 2008, p. 216–220.
A clear statement that *Hagia Sophia* is a temple dedicated to the Son of God can also be found in a medieval Byzantine normative source. A *Chrysobull* by Emperor Manuel Comnenus, dated 1153, states that the Constantinopolitan cathedral was built in honour of the Saviour\(^{23}\).

The Christological interpretation of the dedication of the most important temple of the Byzantine capital is also given on the pages of the chronicle by John Zonaras (d. about 1160), who repetitively calls the Great Church a temple of God or God’s Word (τὸ Θείον τέμενος τοῦ μεγάλου ναοῦ; τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου Σοφίας)\(^{24}\). Similar terms in relation to the Constantinopolitan *Hagia Sophia* were used also by later historiographers, such as George Pachymeres (1242 – ca. 1310): μεγάλου τεμένους τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου Σοφίας\(^{25}\).

Interestingly, the theme also appears on the pages of a 13\(^{\text{th}}\)-cent. source of Slavic provenance (Old Russian), known as the *Pilgrim’s Books* (Книги Паломник), written by Dobryna Jadrejkovič from Novgorod the Great, also known in the literature under the monastic name (Anthony of Novgorod), who traveled to Constantinople between 1200 and 1204\(^{26}\). In the *itinerary* written after the return, he described many Byzantine objects of the capital, including the *Hagia Sophia* basilica, whose name according to him should be understood as the Temple of Wisdom and Word of God\(^{27}\) (святыя Софии, иже глаголется Предврежесть, Присносущное Слово).

Late medieval authors, more or less involved in the hesychastic controversy, also speak similarly about the Great Church. Emperor John VI Cantacuzenus says in a letter to bishop John that he ordered to convene a synod in the Basilica of “Wisdom of God’s Word”\(^{29}\). Constantinopolitan Patriarch Callistus I in the *Life of St. Gregory of Sinai* mentions the cathedral as the church of “God’s Word and Wisdom”\(^{30}\), while in the work dedicated to Theodosius of Târnovo the author calls the Constantinopolitan *Hagia Sophia* – a temple of the “Wisdom of God’s Word”\(^{31}\).

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\(^{27}\) C. Horuzhiy, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

\(^{28}\) С. Золотарев, София Премудрость Божия…, p. 244.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned reviews of Byzantine sources from 5th to 14th cent. it is apparent that the temple of Sophia was for centuries conceived primarily as a church dedicated to Christ – the Incarnate Logos. Another piece of evidence supporting this thesis can be provided by the analysis of iconographic representations adorning the interior of the Constantinopolitan cathedral.

The literature usually mentions one iconographic source, dated to the turn of the 9th and 10th cent., a mosaic located above the main entrance from the narthex to the nave of Hagia Sophia, showing a Byzantine emperor (probably Leo VI) in a proskynesis in front of the Saviour. The centerpiece of the image is – of course – the figure of an impressive size depicting the Son of God visualized in an enthroned position, in the type of Christ the Pantocrator, prevalent in the Christian iconographic art, between the portraits of Mother of God and archangel Gabriel, placed in the medallions. On the pages of an open book, held by the Saviour in his left hand, there is a quote from John 8, 12, pointing to the Son of God as the source of spiritual enlightenment to mankind. It is of no surprise then that experts propose interpreting the image of Christ as one of the chronologically earliest representations of God’s Wisdom in Byzantine art.

A fundamental question should be raised at this point: if indeed the Constantinopolitan Hagia Sophia was a church dedicated to the Son of God, why do we not find His image in some more exposed place inside, other than the narthex? Many researchers, relying inter alia on an excerpt from the homily of Patriarch Photius of 29th March 867, hold that such representations did exist but they have not survived until our times. Most probably, beginning in the 9th cent., the face of...
Christ the Pantocrator looked at the faithful gathered inside the cathedral – like in many later East Christian temples – from the very top of the dome. Moreover, Leonid Uspensky tends to assume that during the pre-iconoclastic period the image of Christ was located in the apse of the Constantinopolitan basilica (similar images have survived also inside several other 5th–6th cent. buildings, such as in the church of Sts. Cosmas and Damian in Rome, San Vitale in Ravenna, the temple dedicated to St. David of Thessalonica or in the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai). And its replacement in the iconography of the altar by the figure of Mother of God took place after the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, and was due to a significant displacement of accents in the Byzantine ideas about Sophia, characterized by the growing importance of Virgin Mary, perceived as the incarnate “house of Wisdom”.

Another element to support the thesis of the Christological dedication of Hagia Sophia, generally accepted in the literature, is the fact that over the centuries the holiday of the Constantinopolitan cathedral was celebrated in the proximity of Christmas: 22nd–24th December. However, one should approach this idea with some caution, as probably until the 14th cent. the Byzantine ecclesiastical tradition did not know the rite of patronal holiday (celebrated on day of liturgical commemoration of the person to whom a church was dedicated). The ceremony dedicated to the temple was therefore celebrated either on the anniversary of its consecration, or on the date of its re-ordination (gr. ἐγκαίνια). In the case of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, completed originally on 27th December 537, and then re-consecrated – after the reconstruction of the earthquake-damaged dome – on 24th December 562, setting the date of the church

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40 The famous mosaic, depicting the Mother of God with Child, adorning the apse of the capital Hagia Sophia was made probably in the second half of the 9th cent., the period in which Photius held the office of Patriarch of Constantinople – C.A. Mango, *Documentary Evidence…*, p. 400; L. Uspienski, op. cit., p. 168, 171.

41 It is worth mentioning that G.P. Majeska, based on the descriptions of the interior of Hagia Sophia by Russian travelers from the 13th–14th cent., is willing to assume that the mosaics presenting the image of Christ were at least in two places in the Constantinopolitan cathedral: in the north-eastern part of the church and above the so called “Imperial Gate” in the west end of the main nave. Both images would be destroyed when Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque under the Ottoman Turkish rule – G.P. Majeska, op. cit., p. 285, 294.


43 С. Золотарев, *София Премудрость Божия…*, p. 245.

holiday at Christmas was thus somehow natural\(^45\). We can only speculate that setting the official dedication ceremony of the most important church of Constantinople to coincide with the great Christian holiday was not coincidental (either in 537 or in 562).

In the conclusion, another question is worth emphasizing: the Constantinopolitan Hagia Sophia was not the only East Christian church dedicated to Divine Wisdom. On the contrary, it became a kind of a model for many churches (mostly cathedrals) erected in later centuries both in the empire and in other countries under the influence of the Byzantine civilization\(^46\). And so, as early as at the turn of the 4th and 5th cent., a basilica of Sophia was built in Ephesus\(^47\), and in the mid-5th cent. – in Jerusalem\(^48\). The time of edification of the famous church of Hagia Sophia in Thessalonica is not precisely given (it is usually dated from mid-7th cent. to the 30s of the 8th cent.)\(^49\). In the mid-Byzantine era, many Christian centers could pride themselves of temples dedicated to the Divine Wisdom, including that in Nicaea\(^50\), Edessa (built between 543–554, and completely destroyed in 1031)\(^51\), Trebizond (13th cent.)\(^52\).

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\(^{45}\) C. Золотарев, София Премудрость Божия..., p. 245.


\(^{47}\) C. Золотарев, О храмах во имя Софии..., p. 16; idem, София Премудрость Божия..., p. 247.

\(^{48}\) D.F. Fiene, op. cit., p. 451; Г. Флоровский, op. cit.; О. Этингоф, op. cit., p. 59; C. Золотарев, О храмах во имя Софии..., p. 16; idem, София Премудрость Божия..., p. 247.


\(^{50}\) J. Meyendorff, L’iconographie de la Sagesse Divine..., p. 259; idem, Тема «Премудрости»..., p. 245; D.F. Fiene, op. cit., p. 451; П.И. Яснов, Культура Никейской империи, [in:] Культура Византии. Вторая половина XV в., Москва 1991, p. 46; Г. Флоровский, op. cit.; O. Этингоф, op. cit., p. 59; C. Золотарев, О храмах во имя Софии..., p. 16; idem, София Премудрость Божия..., p. 247.


Mistra\textsuperscript{53}, Arta\textsuperscript{54}, Vize\textsuperscript{55} and even Benevento (late 8\textsuperscript{th} cent.)\textsuperscript{56} or Nicosia, Cyprus (13\textsuperscript{th}–15\textsuperscript{th} cent.)\textsuperscript{57}.

Needless to say Sophia cathedrals used to be built also in the area of Slavia Orthodoxa. A basilica dedicated to the Wisdom of God in Serdica (Sofia) comes probably from the era of the first Bulgarian state, although a number of researchers believe that it should be dated much earlier – to the 4\textsuperscript{th} cent.\textsuperscript{58} At the turn of the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} cent., a temple under the same invocation was built in Ohrid\textsuperscript{59} and some time later in Sliven\textsuperscript{60}. The most spectacular temples of Pre-Mongol Rus’ were also dedicated to the Divine Wisdom\textsuperscript{61}. The construction of the Sophia cathedral in the capital of Rus’ – Kiev, began probably in 1037\textsuperscript{62}. The temple of the Holy Wisdom in Novgorod the Great was built
between 1045 and 1050 (probably in the place of an earlier wooden church under the same invocation, which had been erected as early as in 989)\textsuperscript{63}. Moreover, in the 1060s foundations for a third Old Russian cathedral of \textit{Sophia} at Polotsk were being prepared\textsuperscript{64}.

Unfortunately the amount of source material is not sufficient to clearly answer the question to whom exactly the churches mentioned above were dedicated. Some researchers, on the basis of the belief that those temples were built on the model of the Constantinopolitan cathedral, are inclined to conclude that – similarly to Justinian’s \textit{Hagia Sophia} – they must have been dedicated to Christ – the Incarnate \textit{Logos}\textsuperscript{65}. This issue, especially regarding the \textit{Sophia} cathedrals known to us from the \textit{Slavia Orthodoxa} area, is a much more complex problem, which deserves a separate study.

The question about \textit{Hagia Sophia} in Constantinople looks different. The preserved source material justifies the thesis that in Byzantium, regardless of the era, the cathedral basilica was conceived primarily as a temple dedicated to Christ – the Incarnate Word of God. The belief that the church was dedicated to St. Sophia must be rejected as unquestionably wrong. No Byzantine source interprets the invocation of \textit{Hagia Sophia} in this way. The anonymous Western European author from Tarragona leaves no doubts that the belief, that the cathedral was dedicated to St. Sophia, was born in the circle of the Latin culture and was certainly the result of a simple misunderstanding. In the Byzantine historiography one can solely find interpretations more or less explicitly linking the Divine Wisdom with the Son of God. Additional evidence to support this thesis is provided by the preserved iconography and liturgical practice of the Great Church in Constantinople. What is more, when attempting to explain the question of the dedication of the church of

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**Hagia Sophia** one ought to take into consideration a wider cultural context, i.e. the fact that most of the Eastern Church Fathers and later Byzantine writers (Justin the Martyr, Athenagoras of Athens, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Methodius of Olympus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret, Athanasius the Sinaite, patriarch of Constantinople Germanus, Theodore the Studite, Symeon the Metaphrast, Symeon the New Theologian and Philotheus Coccinus) leave no doubt to the readers that the personified Wisdom of God they meet in the *Old Testament*, is a symbolic representation of Christ – the *Logos* before Incarnation.

**Abstract.** The article attempts to answer the question of how the name of the most important Byzantine church of Constantinople, the basilica of *Hagia Sophia*, built in the mid-4th cent., and then rebuilt during the reign of Justinian the Great was understood and interpreted. The problem has been presented on the basis of the views of Byzantine writers from the 5th to the 14th cent. (Socrates Scholasticus, Procopius of Caesarea, Paul the Silentiary, John Zonaras, George Pachymeres, Patriarch Callistus I). The analysis of the above sources allows an assumption that according to the Byzantines themselves the Constantinopolitan cathedral was dedicated to the Divine Wisdom, commonly identified with Christ, the Incarnate Word. The evidence supporting this thesis has been provided by both iconography (e.g. the mosaic from the turn of the 9th and 10th cent. from the tympanum over the main entrance from the narthex to *nave* of *Hagia Sophia*, depicting Christ the Pantocrator) and the liturgical practice of the basilica, which can now be reconstructed on the basis of the temple *typicons*, preserved until today. The final part of the article names some other churches dedicated to the Divine Wisdom, built in the area of the Byzantine *ecumene* (Ephesus, Jerusalem, Thessalonica, Nicaea, Edessa, Trebizond, Mistra, Art, Benevento, Nicosia on Cyprus, Serdica (Sofia), Ohrid, Sliven, Kiev, Novgorod the Great and Polotsk).

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