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## An Old Bulgarian Inscription as Evidence of Cross-Cultural Transfer<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

This article proposes a new reading of an inscription on a pitcher discovered in 1955 in Pliska by Stamen Mihaylov. The inscription is read as a mixed Cyrillic and runic text. One of the runes used in the inscription is present in the runic script from the Yenisey Basin in Siberia and thus connects the Proto-Bulgarians that inhabited Danube Bulgaria with this Asian region.

**Keywords:** inscription, Pliska, pitcher, rune, Proto-Bulgarians, Yenisey River, Yenisey script

In the mid-twentieth century, the Bulgarian archaeologist Stamen Mihailov, excavating the site of the first Bulgarian capital Pliska, discovered a clay pitcher with an inscription on the handle (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Text on the handle of a pitcher from Pliska (Ваклинов 1977: 224).

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<sup>1</sup> The article was translated from Bulgarian into English by Viktoriya Kovacheva and Regina Koycheva.

No one familiar with the image disputes that it is a text, but it is written in such a way as to allow for divergent interpretations. Several readings of the inscription have been proposed in scholarship, some of which differ drastically from one another. There is a dispute not only about the meaning of the text, but even about what language it was written in. In other words, the problem lies in the interpretation of the shape of the script, which seems to allow it to be accommodated in different cultures. This is why some researchers read the inscription as Proto-Bulgarian (or Hunno-Bulgarian; i.e., non-Slavic),<sup>2</sup> and others as Old Bulgarian (i.e., Slavic), which I will join by proposing a new reading of the text.<sup>3</sup> My reading passes through linguistic research and eventually reveals a striking medieval case of intercultural transfer mediated by the script and its shape.

At the beginning of the inscription is the famous Proto-Bulgarian sign  $\text{rYI}$ . Stanko Vaklinov includes this in the group of generic tamgas or production signs “used as distinctive marks in various cases to denote ownership and origin” (Ваклинов 1977: 153–154). More often, however, the image is considered a sacred symbol with a protective function, “a summarizing sign of the Proto-Bulgarian religious pantheon, equivalent to the Christian Cross” (Иванов & Минкова 2010).

The letters after this typical beginning of the inscription can be recognized as Cyrillic. The Slavic readings generally vary only concerning the last character of the text. Because the interpretation of the final sign is particularly difficult, I deal with this issue separately at the end of the article, and for now I focus on the main part of the inscription, which according to the deciphering so far reads:  $\text{показовъ криѡг-}$  [pokazovə kriʃag-] (Михайлов 1955: 82; Попконстантинов & Kronsteiner 1994: 155; Смядовски 1993: 80; Попконстантинов & Добрев 1995: 245).

The unpretentious nature of the script is striking (cf., e.g., the touching between the adjacent  $\text{ч}$  and  $\text{д}$  in the last line), as is the seemingly careless positioning of the letters. These features give the impression that the text was not written by a professional. The only “regularity” that can be detected is that the characters in each successive line increase by exactly one: from three (if the Proto-Bulgarian symbol  $\text{rYI}$  is considered as composed of

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<sup>2</sup> See Иванов and Минкова (2010) and the bibliography there.

<sup>3</sup> This study was presented for the first time in Veliki Preslav at the International Symposium Епиграфика и медиевистика (Epigraphy and Medieval Studies) in 2019 and published in a short version in Bulgarian in the series Преславска книжовна школа [Preslavska knizhovna shkola] (Shumen), vol. 20, 2020, within the article Старобългарската химнография и епиграфика като езикови документи [“Old Bulgarian Hymnography and Epigraphy as Language Documents”], p. 43–50. An extended and supplemented version of the study is offered here.

three elements) to six, respectively:

Characters	Text
3	У1
4	ПОКА
5	ЗОВЪК
6	РИУАГА

Table 1. Number of characters per line of text.

One must admit, however, that this regularity is hardly intentional. If it were, it might explain why, if the reading is correct, the second word (криуаг-) does not begin on a new line, but in the most illogical manner (from a modern point of view) only its first letter is left on the previous line. The fact is that such word divisions are a normal phenomenon in Old Bulgarian epigraphy. For example, the accusative form of the personal pronoun for the first-person singular м[а] is split in two in the inscription from the village of Tsar Asen near Silistra, with the first letter at the end of one line and the second at the beginning of the next (Попконстантинов 1982: 46).<sup>4</sup> In those times, writing followed the principle of *scripta continua*, and so the notion of word boundaries was not as sharp as it is today.

Thus read, the phrase consists of two word-forms not recorded in classical Old Bulgarian codices (e.g., codices earlier than the twelfth century).

First, криуаг- is interpreted as another phonetic variant of the word known from the manuscripts as крѣуагъ ‘clay pot, jug, pitcher’ (Старославянский словарь 1999: 296), which according to some etymologists is a Proto-Bulgarian loanword from the Proto-Slavic era (Москов 1981: 83; Granberg 2009: 21). The different vowel in the form from the inscription cannot be a reason to deny that the word криуаг- is a variant of крѣуагъ, especially because it is inscribed on the handle of a jug. However, for Ivan Ivanov and Mariana Minkova, this phonetic difference has become one of the reasons for rejecting the Slavic-language reading of the text. One cannot fail to notice that even they themselves cite parallels of the same lexeme in other languages in which the loanword has a front vowel in its first syllable; namely, Hungarian *hírgit* ‘pot, pitcher’ and Albanian *kertšak/gertšak* (Иванов & Минкова 2010). It is known that Old Bulgarian ъ derives from Proto-Slavic [u]. Therefore, the root vowel ъ in the form крѣуагъ should come from [u]. Oleg Mudrak points out that Proto-Bulgarian [u] may be a successor of [ü] (Мудрак 2005: 88), which, in turn, can in principle change not only into [u] but also into [i]. Furthermore, Mosko Moskov suggests that the alternation of short [i] with [u] (a phenomenon which is also known

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Prof. Kazimir Popkonstantinov for drawing my attention to this feature of Old Bulgarian epigraphy.

from Slavic languages) was characteristic of Proto-Bulgarian (for example, *ichirgu* versus *ichurgu* because) “this alternation occurs in several words from Turkic runic inscriptions” (Москов 1981: 99). Therefore, the variants *кръчар-*/*кричар-* suggest that the first vowel in the respective proto-word was possibly [ü], which later changed into both [u] and [i], both of which entered Old Bulgarian, but only the [u] variant took hold. Only etymological studies can show whether these speculations have any basis.

The question can also be raised whether the form *кричар-* [kriʃʁag] could be a contamination between *кръчаръ* [krəʃʁagə] and *криница* [krinitsa], which have the same meaning.

Second, in previous publications, *показовъ* is interpreted as a possessive adjective derived from the proper name *Показъ*.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the entire phrase translates as ‘Pokaz’s pitcher’ (i.e., ‘a pitcher belonging to a man named Pokaz’). Placing this reading in the sequence of other similar inscriptions of belonging on objects, as Stefan Smiadovski has done, undoubtedly makes the conjecture extremely convincing. Such are *владимирова лъжица* ‘Vladimir’s spoon’, *валинова лъжица* ‘Balin’s spoon’, *ходоровъ пръстенъ* ‘Khodor’s ring’, *ватомировъ(ъ?/ь?) пръстенъ* ‘Vatomir’s ring’, *вesarов/добрoславoвъ/калоянoвъ пръстенъ* ‘Besar’s/Dobroslav’s/Kaloyan’s ring’, and so on, and to them can be added *показовъ кричар* ‘Pokaz’s pitcher’ (Смядовски 1993: 79–80).

However, it should be pointed out here that the interpretation of the inscription as a marking of belonging is not, to my knowledge, provided in the scholarly literature with evidence for the existence of the proper name *Pokaz*. Therefore, I propose another interpretation; namely, the understanding of the phrase *показовъ кричар-* as ‘exemplary pitcher’, ‘model pitcher’; that is, ‘a pitcher (a clay pot) that serves as a model in the manufacture of similar pottery’. In such a sense, I regard the adjective *показовъ* as formed not from a proper name but from the common noun *показъ* with the presumed meaning ‘model, exemplar’ and the suffix *-овъ*, as in the modern Bulgarian pair *образец – образцов* ‘exemplar’ – ‘exemplary’. The noun *показъ* is not known from the Old Bulgarian monuments, but in Grigoriy Dyachenko’s Church Slavonic dictionary it is indeed present with the related meaning ‘example’: *пока́зь* 1. ‘occasion, reason’, 2. ‘example’ (Дьяченко 1998: 446). In addition, in modern Bulgarian the word *показ*, which means ‘exposing something to view; showing, demonstrating’ (Български тълковен речник 1976: 655), is close in meaning to ‘a model intended for copying’. In addition, the suffix *-овъ*, which is most often add-

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<sup>5</sup> Михайлов (1955: 82), in which *показовъ* is defined as “the genitive case of the proper masculine name *показъ*,” but the author is hardly referring to the plural genitive form following the *ŭ*-declension; rather, he means the possessive adjective; Popkonstantinov and Kronsteiner (1994: 155); Бояджиев (2008: 74 no. 69).

ed to names for persons and animals, can also be attached to names for objects (Грамматика на старобългарския език 1991: 219–221); for example, the Old Bulgarian adjectives юговъ ‘southern’ from югъ ‘south’, сѣверовъ ‘northern’ from сѣверъ ‘north’, аддовъ ‘of hell’ from адъ ‘hell’, громовъ ‘thundery’ from громъ ‘thunder’, тръновъ ‘thorny’ from трънъ ‘thorn’, and so on. Such usage is known even today; for example, the modern Bulgarian мостов ‘of bridges’, винтов ‘of screws’, релсов ‘of rails’, and so on.

This reading of the inscription connects the pitcher from Pliska with a specific technical procedure in pottery: the manufacture of clay vessels according to a pattern. Indeed, excavations in the outer city of Pliska have uncovered pottery studios.

Either way, both readings of показовъ криѹаг– rely on some hypothetical claims, the only drawback of the interpretation ‘Pokaz’s pitcher’ being the lack of a search for whether there is a proper name *Pokaz*, and the only advantage of the interpretation ‘model pitcher’ being the lexical motivation of the stem показ-.

Undoubtedly the most difficult is deciphering the last character of the inscription. This is why three different interpretations have already accumulated in scholarly literature; namely, криѹага, криѹага, and криѹаг + a runic or rune-like sign.

The first possibility is показовъ криѹага; that is,  =  (Михайлов 1955: 80; Popkonstantinov & Kronsteiner 1994: 155). Paleographical speaking, the last mark of the text on the handle of the pitcher does indeed have the shape of the little *yus* in several Cyrillic inscriptions (Добрев, Попконстантинов 1985: 665–666; cf. also Попконстантинов & Тотоманова 2014: Приложение [Supplement] 1 no. 11). However, this reading stumbles over the linguistic fact that the phonetic combination гѹ [gĕ] is uncharacteristic of Old Bulgarian because, through the effect of the Slavic first palatalization, the front nasal vowel would palatalize the preceding velar and turn it into ж [ʒ’]. Nonetheless, combinations of г [g], ħ [g] or ѹ [g] + a letter for a front vowel do occur in the manuscripts up to the eleventh century, but only in “foreign words that passed into Old Bulgarian as literary borrowings” – e.g., ѹена, георгии, etc. (Грамматика на старобългарския език 1991: 114–115). The word криѹагъ was borrowed from Hunno-Bulgarian in the Proto-Slavic era. Therefore, it is not a literary borrowing and should not have remained unaffected by the first palatalization. In addition, one may recall that only neuter nouns end in an –ѹ [ĕ] in the nominative singular, which is the form implied by the inscription (i.e., криѹага), whereas the adjective показовъ has a masculine ending, and gender agreement is obligatory in this case. All these considerations suggest that the  sign may have been used here with a meaning other than that of the little *yus*. It would be most logical to suppose that this mark replaced

here the final **ъ** of the word, as noted by Stamen Mihailov (Михайлов 1955: 82). However, no such examples are known. Moreover, the letter **ъ** in its familiar Cyrillic form is attested in the penultimate line of the inscription on the handle of the pitcher.

The second possibility is **показовъ криѹага**; that is, **⚡** = *A* (Попконстантинов & Добрев 1995: 245). This is the shape of the letter *A* in some graphic variants of the Greek alphabet (Granberg 2005: 135). However, as the discoverer of the inscription, Stamen Mikhailov, correctly notes, the letter **Λ** is documented twice in the same inscription (on the second and fourth lines), both times written differently. From this point of view, it does not seem likely that the last character is also an **Λ** (Михайлов 1955: 82). Of course, there are also mixed practices in which the same phoneme is written in different ways. This is the case, for example, for the tenth-century lead amulet found in 1998 and published by Kazimir Popkonstantinov, on which the vowel [a] is represented by both the Glagolitic letter and the Cyrillic one, e.g., **сѡтаго глигоѹѣ** (Попконстантинов 2010: 512).

The more important thing is that again there are linguistic obstacles to deciphering **⚡** as *A*. The reading **криѹага** is probably associated with the group of Slavic masculine nouns ending in *-a*, such as today's Bulgarian words *юначага* and *смелчага*, Russian *мужчина* and *дедушка*, Slovak *sudca* and *hovorca*, and so on (a pattern characteristic not only of Slavic languages – cf. Latin *collega*). Such an assumption harmonizes with the masculine form of the adjective **показовъ**. This interpretation, however, clashes with the fact that no masculine nouns ending in *-a* and denoting objects (in this case, 'pitcher, pot') are attested in classical Old Bulgarian monuments. This pattern is possessed only by names for persons, such as **слѡуга** 'servant', **воѡвода** 'voivode, leader', **прѣдѡтеча** 'predecessor', **ѹародѣница** 'witch', **ѡубница** 'killer woman', **пиѡница** 'alcoholic', and so on. It is true that, in Sreznevsky's dictionary of Old Russian, the forms **кърѹага/корѹага/къръѹага** are mentioned, but no information is given about the gender of these lexemes, which by default numbers them among feminine nouns (Срезневский 2003: column 1411).

The third possibility is **показовъ криѹаг** + rune; that is, **⚡** = a runic (or rune-like) sign (Михайлов 1955: 81–82; perhaps Смядовски 1993: 80). The possible interpretation of the last sign on the pitcher's handle as runic also belongs to Stamen Mihailov, who reports that "the same sign is also found in the so-called runic inscriptions from the Nagy-Szentmiklós treasure" (Михайлов 1955: 81; see also Granberg 2005: 135 no. 8–NSM). Stefan Smiadovsky, in his study on Bulgarian Cyrillic epigraphy, reads the noun of the inscription simply as **криѹаг** without a final **ъ**. This reading suggests that he may be inclined to accept the assumption of a rune

(Смядовски 1993: 80). Ivan Ivanov and Mariana Minkova also note that this sign is inscribed “in a manner uncharacteristic of the Cyrillic alphabet and resembles a Proto-Bulgarian rune” (Иванов, Минкова 2010). The mixed nature of the inscription is not unusual; Antoaneta Granberg, in her study of the Balkan runes, stresses that “plenty of ‘mixed’ scripts exist, runic and Greek or runic and Latin” (Granberg 2005: 130).

Numerous archaeological excavations have long documented the presence of runes on pottery (see, e.g., Ваклинов 1977: 152–153). Other inscriptions are also known to have been made on the handles of jugs or other vessels (see, e.g., Кызласов 1994: 174, 275; Кызласов 2000: 13). One of them was discovered in 1983 by Anna F. Kochkina during excavations of the settlement of Bilyar in Volga Bulgaria. The vessel found there dates back to the eleventh to twelfth century and is decorated with a Kuban runic inscription, which, according to researcher Igor Kizlasov, is reliable evidence of “the Bulgarian provenance of the Kuban runic script” (Кызласов 2000: 13). It is interesting to note some similarities between the two inscriptions on the pots’ handles; namely, the angular shape of the writing, especially of the letter  $\emptyset$  (with the upper part erased) in the Old Bulgarian one, which letter is parallel in shape to the fourth rune (from right to left) in the Kuban one, and the genetic relationship between the  $\text{⚡}$  mark and the third rune (from right to left), which is the  $\Delta$  sign rotated 90 degrees (Figure 2).

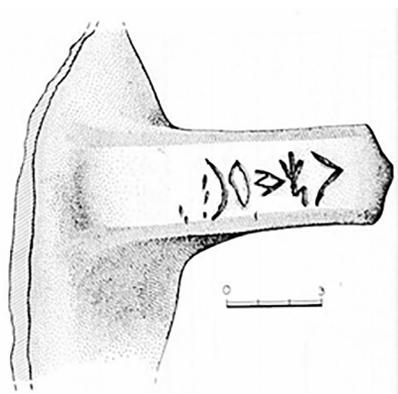


Figure 2. Handle of a clay vessel from the eleventh to twelfth century with a Kuban runic inscription, discovered during excavations at the settlement of Bilyar in Volga Bulgaria (Кызласов 2000: 11).

Everything mentioned so far points to the probability that the Old Bulgarian inscription on the amphora handle not only begins with a runic sign but also ends with one. Indeed, the latter sign ( $\text{⚡}$ ) is documented in runic

inscriptions from northeastern Bulgaria, Hungary (Granberg 2005: 135 no. 8), and Kherson (Романчук 2005: 177); it is present in one of the ancient Turkic runic scripts. Igor Kizlasov’s research, in which the Don, Kuban, South Yenisei, Achiktash, Isfari, Yenisei, Orkhon, and Thalass runic alphabets are compared, clearly shows that the last sign of the Old Bulgarian inscription on the pot handle from Pliska is attested in exactly the same form in one of these alphabets, the Yenisei, used in some of the inscriptions found in the basin of the Siberian Yenisei River in Asia (Кызласов 1994: 40 Table 14, 16 Table 16, 69–72 Table 23).

Eurasian runic alphabets				Asian runic alphabets			Phonetic value	
Don	Kuban	South Yenisei	Achik-tash	Isfari	Yenisei	Orkhon		Thalass
								b <sup>2</sup> [b’]

Table 2. Extract from Igor Kizlasov’s comparative table of Eurasian and Asian runic alphabets (Кызласов 1994: 69–70, Table 23).



Figure 3. One of the runic inscriptions from the Minusinsk Basin of the Yenisei River (the  rune occurs twice in the last line). The picture of this inscription is taken from the website <http://bse.sci-lib.com/particle009150.html>

This finding is consistent with historical data on the origin of the Proto-Bulgarians. Recall that in the First Bulgarian Kingdom “the ruling Bulgarian dynasties spoke an archaic Altaic language called Hunno-Bulgarian” (Granberg 2005: 128; see also Granberg 2008c) “belonging to the Turkic group” (Granberg 2008b: 259; see also Бешевлиев 2003: 242), and that the territory of Altai is not far from the Yenisei River.

What could be the meaning of this sign in the context of the Old Bulgarian inscription? As indicated in the excerpt from the comparative table,

Turkic studies experts that have specialized in runic scripts associate the rune with the sound [b], in particular with palatal [bʲ] (Айдаров 1971: 57), which in itself still does not answer the question of the specific meaning of the rune in the text under study. Regarding the runes on archaeological finds in Bulgaria, Mosko Moskov concludes that “the marks on pottery vessels (bottom, neck, etc.) are potters’ trademarks. In origin, these marks (building, ceramic) may be generic marks of ownership. Some of the signs (especially on rings, amulets, rosettes, jewelry) are magical symbols of a cultic nature” (Москов 2003: 257–258). This most general characteristic might provide some guidance for interpretation. It is noteworthy that, whereas the ɪYɪ sign is separated on its own line before the rest of the text, the final  sign is not. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the final character is closely related in meaning to the text of the inscription, whereas the initial ɪYɪ sign is not. Thus, if ɪYɪ has the sense and textual position of a general symbol of the Proto-Bulgarian religion (similar to the cross at the beginning of a Christian text), then the final rune could be the bearer of more specific information – for example, the initial letter *B* of the name or trademark of the pitcher’s maker. In such a sense, the meaning of the inscription *показовъ криѳаг * could be interpreted, for example, as ‘B...’s model pitcher’ (i.e., ‘an exemplary pitcher made by and/or belonging to a craftsman whose name begins with the letter *B*’).

The text can also be understood in another way. Gubaydolla Aidarov notes that the  rune is also used alone to convey the Old Turkic word for ‘home’ (Айдаров 1971: 56–57, 86). In this case, the meaning of the inscription could be rendered as ‘model of a pitcher for the home’; that is, ‘a clay pot that serves as a model in the making of similar household pots’. The qualification ‘household, domestic’ may be intended to distinguish it from other types of amphorae (e.g., funerary). It is conceivable that this particular inscription from Pliska shows an archaic type of use of the rune as a conceptual sign because Antoaneta Granberg concludes that the Balkan runes constitute an alphabet (Granberg 2005: 128, 132), i.e., each rune represents a separate phoneme.

A mark similar to , as was mentioned, is drawn on the bottom of a vase of the Proto-Bulgarian golden treasure from Nagy-Szentmiklós.<sup>6</sup> A future study could compare the use of the sign in the two monuments, which may also lead to hypotheses about its meaning.

Of course, only specialists in runic Turkic writing can refine the possible interpretations, but what has been said so far is enough to draw several significant conclusions:

The inscription on the handle of the pitcher found in Pliska is mixed – Cyrillic and runic. The scribe seems to have been a Proto-Bulgarian that

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<sup>6</sup> On the Proto-Bulgarian origin of the treasure, see Добрев (2005).

knew both graphic systems. The presence of the last character of the Old Bulgarian epigraphic monument (𐌆) in the Yenisei Turkic alphabet traces an important historical-geographical trajectory, linking the Proto-Bulgarians of northeastern Bulgaria with the area around the Siberian Yenisei River in Asia. The identical 𐌆 form of the little *yus* in several Old Bulgarian epigraphic monuments may be rooted in the association of the sign for the front nasal vowel (ⱱ or Ⱳ) of the new alphabet, the Cyrillic one, with the similar rune 𐌆 of the old Yenisei script, which was apparently known in Bulgarian territory, if not entirely, at least partially. The same appearance of the letter *A* in some Byzantine sources is probably also not a coincidence, but the result of intercultural transfer (see, e.g., Granberg 2008a: 17–20).

Whereas the discoverer of the amphora, Stamen Mihailov, linked its inscription to the eleventh to twelfth century, Kazimir Popkonstantinov and Otto Kronsteiner moved the date of the epigraph back in time; namely, to the tenth century (Михайлов 1955: 82; Popkonstantinov & Kronsteiner 1994: 155). The identification of the last sign of the monument as a rune testifies to a missing final *ъ* in the second word (криѿар). This narrows the date of the inscription, in all likelihood excluding the beginning of the tenth century, when the weak *yers* were still firmly in place.<sup>7</sup>

Having said all this, it is now clear how this study contributes to the development of the topic of image and text as a cross-cultural transfer, which in this case is seen from a linguistic-paleographic point of view. Both the image and the text are the object of research because it is the image of the text that is interpreted and that presents not only graphic (paleographic) challenges, but above all linguistic challenges; that is, it throws doubts on how to interpret what is seen.

The mixed Cyrillic and runic nature of the inscription testifies to contamination between different cultures. The deciphering that the polysemous final sign of the inscription belongs to a runic script leads to the more general question of the migration of letter images from one writing system to another. The Greek (Hellenic) alphabet is the mother of both the Latin (Roman) alphabet and the Cyrillic one, which is essentially an adapted Greek alphabet with additions for specific Slavic sounds. Common signs link the Greek, Latin, Cyrillic, and Glagolitic scripts with the runes (Granberg 2005: 131, 2008a: 18–21). According to some scholars, the *рушьки писмена*, which St. Cyril, the creator of the Glagolitic alphabet, became

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<sup>7</sup> For more on this question see: Койчева, Регина 2020. Старобългарската химнография и епиграфика като езикови документи. // Преславска книжовна школа, т. 20, с. 38–43 [Koycheva, Regina 2020. Starobalgarskata himnografiya i epigrafika kato ezikovi dokumenti. // Preslavska knizhovna shkola, vol. 20, p. 38–43].

acquainted with in Kherson, were a kind of runic writing (Костова 2003: 502). The Glagolitic letters ш and ѡ are also registered among the runic characters (Granberg 2005: 131, 137 no. 18, 138 no. 27).

Whether a letter, passing from one writing system to another, retains its meaning or acquires a new one, becoming a bisemous or polysemous image, is another matter. The final sign from the Pliska inscription under consideration is known to have at least four different meanings: [a] in specific graphic variants of the Greek alphabet, [ě] in the Cyrillic alphabet, [b'] and also a sign for the word 'home' in Turkic runic writing. It is difficult to precisely determine why a letter image changes its meaning during its intercultural transfer. This likely happens under the influence of association with familiar images. In the context of the Greek alphabet, the rune for [b'] most closely resembles majuscule A, and in the context of the Cyrillic alphabet it resembles the sign for nasal [e]. Considering the recorded function of the same Turkic rune to mean 'home', one could see the outline of a triangular tent house in its shape: . The same symbol has also been documented turned 90° and could then be associated with a fish: .

Cross-cultural transfer is usually preceded by a purely geographical relocation of the image. The same graphic variant of the rune under study was found in inscriptions from the Yenisei Basin to Kherson, Bulgaria, and Hungary, marking the path of the Proto-Bulgarians. With such a spread, this shape of the rune can be read as a hieroglyph that has compressed into itself an entire historical narrative about the transmission of a particular culture across the Earth's space and historical time.

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