Modern Bulgaria is an heir to a high ancient culture, created in the Middle Ages. The history of this culture is extremely complicated. Its complexity stems from several factors: diverse ethno-cultural components out of which the Bulgarian nationality on the Balkan Peninsula was formed; the effect of different cultures, and above all, of the Byzantines; and the complicated historical road the Bulgarian state has covered. The two basic ethno-cultural elements which form the Bulgarian nationality are the Slavs and the Proto-Bulgarians. The culture the Slavs brought over from their initial settlements in Eastern and Central Europe was predominantly agricultural. The Proto-Bulgarians, who are of Turkic origin, arrived from Inner Asia and the Black Sea regions with their nomad culture as a tribe, smaller in number than the Slavs. In A.D. 681, on the Balkan Peninsula where the Bulgarian state was established, the Slavs and the Proto-Bulgarians found a Hellenized and Romanized Thracian population with many ethno-cultural mixtures and their own Thracian culture. In science, an ever greater stress is currently being laid on the part played by the Thracian element in the formation of the Bulgarian nationality. Still another aspect is of exclusive importance: neighboring on the Byzantine Empire, a powerful state with a rich culture, exerted considerable influence on Bulgarian culture.

Paramount in regard to Bulgaria as the oldest center of Slav culture is the ninth and tenth century development of Bulgarian literature, which played a significant part in the history of the other Slav literatures and in European literature in general. Created in the second half of the ninth century, it rapidly reached a heyday, and for this reason literary historians termed its early period The Golden Age a long while ago.

Neither the Proto-Bulgarians nor the Slavs brought any writing from their lands of origin when they settled on the Balkan Peninsula. There is only one interesting communication in the work Of Letters by the Bulgarian writer Chernorizets Hrabur of the ninth and tenth centuries. He wrote: “At first the Slavs had no books, but read and guessed with lines and notches, being still pagans. When they were converted, they had to write down the Slav speech with Greek and Roman letters without arrangement.” The Bulgarians were converted to Christianity in 865; hence, before this date they used some system of lines and notches. This information has been repeatedly discussed in science; certain scholars saw in it evidence for the existence of Slav runes. However, it seems that these were primitive signs of writing for everyday needs.
On the oldest architectural monuments in the territory on which the Bulgar-
ian state was formed (between the Lower Danube and the Balkan Mountain
Range), traces of “lines” and “notches” have been found, but one cannot
speak about an organized, developed alphabet and writing. The lines and
notches of Chernorizets Hrabur have remained a mystery to this day.

The newly established Bulgarian state at the end of the seventh century
needed a form of writing for its administration and for its relations with for-
eign countries. Due to the lack of a writing of their own, they had to use a
foreign one; in this case, writing went hand in hand with speech. The largest
state with which Bulgaria maintained realtions and with which it had a fron-
tier in common was Byzantium. It was natural for the Bulgarian state to use
Byzantine (Greek) writing and the Byzantine (Greek) language. So, actually,
the Greek language was introduced in state offices. There is important evidence
of this: so far, about one hundred stone inscriptions in Greek have been found
in Bulgaria and are related to the life of Bulgarian society in the eighth and
ninth centuries. The inscriptions deal with construction, international rela-
tions, wars, establishment of state frontiers, etc. and possess a vast importance
as historical sources. According to tradition, they were assessed thus, until
the question of their value as literary monuments was raised. Today, Bulgarian
science considers these inscriptions as literary works as well, in accord with
their contents and form, despite their laconism. Frequently they have the na-	ure of brief, historical chronicles, but philosophical thoughts and poetic ef-
fusion are not strange to them. For instance, the inscription of Khan Omur-
tag for the construction of a palace reads in part as follows: “Man also lives
well, dies and another one is born, let he who is born last on looking at this
remember him who made it.” Investigations show that Bulgarian stone in-
scriptions, written in the Greek language, found in the territory of the Bul-
garian state, reflect not only Greek and Roman traditions by their composi-
tion and style, but also the traditions of the Proto-Bulgarians, brought over
from their distant land of origin in Central Asia.

The written culture, developed in Bulgaria in the eighth and ninth centuries
in the Greek language, is not related to the cultural development of the rest
of the Slav peoples. However, gradually the Slav component, who were more
numerous, absorbed the Bulgarian, and the Slav language won the upper hand
as the common language of the new Bulgarian nationality (only the names
Bulgarian and Bulgarians are preserved). In the second half of the ninth cen-
tury a Bulgarian writing and literature in Slav develops, i.e., the Old-Bulgarian
language, and it is this country that is the cradle of Slav culture and its oldest
center. The Old-Bulgarian literature presents the oldest period of the history of
Bulgarian culture; it marks the beginnings of the Bulgarian national literature
and plays an important role in the cultural development of the Slav peoples.

When we speak of its emergence, two exclusively important events in the
middle of the ninth century are worthy of notice: the conversion to Christian-