

Foreword



Tsar Peter I (927–969) had not previously been the subject of a monograph. This is despite the fact that he was the longest reigning monarch in the history of mediaeval Bulgaria, and being counted among the saints by the Bulgarian Church. There had been, however, works discussing the reigns of his two predecessors – Boris I and Symeon I – his grandfather and father, and also the life of the most popular anchorite living in his times, St. John of Rila.

On the one hand it appears to be understandable, since the scarcity of the sources relating to his reign does not allow constructing a full image of either Peter himself, nor of his reign. Despite the appearances, however, the silence of the sources from his era did not shield this ruler from numerous negative judgements about him, formulated by generations of scholars. They spoke of his lack of character, torpid governance and his focus on religious over political matters. He was accused of being a protégé of Constantinople and serving the Byzantine cause, and leading the state into a social breakdown, which manifested itself through, i.a., the Byzantinisation of the court and the development of the Bogomilist heresy. Finally, counted amongst his failures was the political disintegration which resulted in the state's downfall – under Rus' and Byzantine

pressure – near the end of his reign and during the reign of his son and successor, Boris II.

These evaluations suffered from a one major methodological fault – assessing Peter primarily from the perspective of the accomplishments of the aforementioned two great predecessors. Boris-Michael led to Bulgaria's Christianisation and an instilling among his subjects a new literary and liturgical language with which they could express their faith and through which they adapted the grand cultural achievements of the Christian Byzantium for their own use. These two elements had a powerful influence on the final consolidation of the state and the subjects of the Bulgarian rulers. Symeon, who not only contributed to the great cultural growth of Bulgaria, but was primarily remembered on the pages of history as an able and ambitious ruler who led Bulgaria to the apex of military might, establishing the country as a power at the international arena and in the political sphere. In comparison with them, the reign of their descendant appeared indistinct at best, or outright decadent – devoid of any great territorial gains or major cultural developments.

On the other hand, from the mid-twentieth century, there had been burgeoning attempts at re-interpreting the reign of this ruler, rightly questioning the portrayal of Peter's reign fixed by the classic Bulgarian mediaevists (and others), while the research into (widely understood) material culture is providing increasingly more information about Bulgaria of his time. For these reasons it seems to be fully justified to finally undertake larger scale research into Peter's portraiture and the country he ruled. In other words, to fill the existing gap in historiography regarding this matter, and at the same time restore Peter to his rightful place in history.

This task, realised within the framework of the National Science Centre (NCN), Poland, research grant was undertaken on the following pages by an international team of scholars: employees of the Department of Byzantine History and the Ceraneum Centre of the Łódź University (Poland) and of the Department of History of Bulgaria of the St. Clement of Ohrid University of Sofia (Bulgaria), with the minor participation of the Department of Old and Medieval History of the St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria). In our research we made two fundamental assumptions – that the original sources required

a new reading taking into account the most recent achievements of the worldwide Byzantine and mediaeval Bulgarian studies, and that the portrayal of Peter and his reign would be presented in fullest against the backdrop of the Bulgarian state between 930s and the 960s.

We hope that this monograph is going to contribute to the preservation of a more balanced and generally positive evaluation of Peter I's role in the history of mediaeval Bulgaria.

* * *

We would like to thank our Colleagues from *Ceraneum* and from the Department of Byzantine History and the Department of Slavic Studies, all of University of Łódź (Poland), for the supportive attitude towards our work: Prof. Maciej Kokoszko, Prof. Georgi Minczew, Prof. Teresa Wolińska, Prof. Sławomir Bralewski, Prof. Ivan Petrov, Dr. Paweł Filipczak, Dr. Agata Kawecka, Dr. Andrzej Kompa and Dr. Małgorzata Skowronek. We thank Professor Jarosław Dudek from the University of Zielona Góra for the meticulous and positive editorial review. We thank Dr. Michał Zytka for editing and proofreading the English text. We would also like to give thanks to Elżbieta Myslińska-Brzozowska for providing the illustrations (drawings) for this volume.

* * *

This book was written as part of a research project financed by the National Science Centre (Poland). Decision number: DEC-2014/14/M/HS3/00758 (*The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I the Pious*).

The Editors

