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Peter's Way to the Bulgarian Throne



Peter, the protagonist of our book, came from the family that ruled Bulgaria from the early ninth century, and whose progenitor was khan Krum (?802–814)¹, a great commander and lawgiver, and a conqueror of the Byzantines. His line also gave rise to several other exceptional, broad-minded rulers who gave impetus to the dynamic development of the state they governed. Boris I (852–889)², Peter's grandfather, may certainly be counted among them: accepting baptism in 866, he introduced Bulgaria into the sphere of Christian civilisation. Similarly Symeon I the Great (893–927)³, our protagonist's father, a political visionary, an excellent commander, and an educated man with understanding of cultural matters.

¹ On the subject of this ruler's reign, see i.a.: P.E. N i a v i s, *The Reign of the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I (AD 802–811)*, Athens 1987; P. S o p h o u l i s, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831*, Leiden 2012.

² Vassil Gyuzelev's work about this Bulgarian ruler remains the classic on the subject (В. Г ю з е л е в, *Княз Борис Първи. България през втората половина на век*, София 1969).

³ Symeon was the subject of the works of i.a. И. Б о ж и л о в, *Цар Симеон Велики (893–927). Златният век на Средновековна България*, София 1983; M.J. L e s z k a, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*, Łódź 2013; *Българският златен век. Сборник в чест на цар Симеон Велики*

Symeon took the reins of power in 893, in rather particular circumstances. His predecessor and elder brother, Vladimir-Rasate, had been removed from power by his father, Boris-Michael, who only in 889 gave up the throne in Vladimir's favour. Vladimir-Rasate's four-year reign (889–893)⁴ had not been appreciated by Boris I, most likely because of the former's abandonment of his father's foreign policy, and personal incompetence of the young ruler. Boris-Michael deprived Vladimir of the throne, had him blinded⁵ and imprisoned, which ended in the former ruler's death⁶. The effectiveness of Boris I's actions attests that his position, despite the four-year 'retirement', had still been strong, which might suggest that he retained, despite residing in a monastery, certain attributes of power. A symbolic expression of the exceptional position

(893–927), ed. В. Гюзелев, И.Г. Илиев, К. Ненов, Пловдив 2015. See also: Х. Трендафилов, *Цар и век. Времето на Симеона. Четири инсталации*, Шумен 2017.

⁴ See the recent work on the subject of the reign of Vladimir-Rasate: M.J. Leszk a, *Symeon...*, pp. 44–58 (further bibliography within).

⁵ On the blinding as a penalty towards dethroned rulers or usurpers, see: Г. Владимиров, *Византийско-българският културен диалог в светлината на едно наказание*, Мин 5.3, 1998, pp. 15–19. The scholar noted that blinding had not been used as a punishment in Bulgaria during the pagan period. The sole case thereof, and a rather peculiar one, that we can find in the sources relates to khan Krum. *Menologion of Basil II* (col. 276) states that he became blind by the will of God, which was supposed to have been the punishment for the cruel treatment of Manuel, the Archbishop of Adrianople. According to this relation, the Bulgarian ruler was subsequently strangled. Georgi Vladimirov, following in Yurdan Trifonov's footsteps (Ю. Трифонов, *Достоверен ли е разказът за ослепяване на Борисовия син Владимир*, УП 26, 1927, pp. 864–890), thinks that there can be no certainty on the matter of Vladimir-Rasate's blinding. Even if it did take place, then this type of penalty, likely borrowed from Byzantium, did not gain popularity in Bulgaria. On blinding as a punishment in Byzantium: J. Herrin, *Blinding in Byzantium*, [in:] *Polypleuros nous. Miscellanea für Peter Schreiner zu seinem 60 Geburtstag*, ed. C. Scholtz, G. Makris, München–Leipzig 2000, pp. 56–68.

⁶ Such information can be found in Theophylaktos, the Archbishop of Ohrid, in the *Life of Clement* (XIX, 60). We read there: *after him [Boris-Michael] the power went to his son Vladimir, who died after four years* – that is, in 893. Nikolay Kochev (Н. Кочев, *Народният събор в Преслав през 893/4*, [in:] *1100 години Велики Преслав*, ed. Т. Тотев, vol. I, Шумен 1995 pp. 50–51) thinks that in this passage Theophylaktos did not speak of Vladimir's physical demise, but rather of his death to the community of the faithful. This interpretation however seems a too far-fetched one.

of Boris-Michael within the state post-889 was the title he was using: *monk and a ruler of Bulgaria* (μοναχός; ἐκ Θεοῦ ἄρχων Βουλγαρίας)⁷. His role would have therefore fit in the strongly established in Bulgarian tradition (as some would have it) institution of diarchy⁸.

Nearly all of the sources at our disposal see Boris-Michael as the sole cause of Vladimir-Rasate's downfall, and elevating Symeon to the throne. There is however a single, most laconic at that, relation which presents the matter in a different light. In the *Miracle of St. George with the Bulgarian* we find this information: *yet the blessing of God and of Michael was upon Symeon, who having deprived his brother of power had taken his throne*⁹. We are not however able to determine whether this is an expression of a true causal role of Symeon in his brother's dethronement. It seems certain that Symeon knew both Vladimir's policies, and Boris-Michael's attitude towards it rather well, and was not merely a tool in his father's hands. It is doubtful that Boris would not have discussed with Symeon that he would become the ruler of Bulgaria after Vladimir's removal. Such a move, after all, was quite exceptional. Firstly, Symeon had been a monk, and to take the throne he needed to break his vows¹⁰. The situation was made complicated and awkward by the fact that accepting a monastic schema made seeking any lay dignities (not to mention ruling a state) impossible. Both Boris and Symeon must have been aware of this. In Byzantine literature, we can find a condemnation of the abandonment of monastic

⁷ И. Йорданов, *България при Борис I (852–889, †907). Приносът на сфрагистиката*, [in:] *Християнската култура в средновековна България. Материали от национална научна конференция, Шумен 2–4 май 2007 г. по случай 1100 години от смъртта на Св. Княз Борис-Михаил (ок. 835–907 г.)*, ed. П. Георгиев, Велико Търново 2008, pp. 43–44.

⁸ On the functioning of this institution: В. Бешевлиев, *Първобългарите. Бит и култура*, София 1981, pp. 45–50.

⁹ *Miracle of St. George with the Bulgarian*, p. 143: *ВѢ БЛВЕНИЮ БЖІЕ И МИХАНЛЕ НА СМѢШНѢ. И ПРѢЮ СТОЛЬ СГНАВЪ БРА*. Cf. В. Гюзелев, *Княз Борис...*, pp. 466–467; Е. Александров, *Интронизирането на княз Симеон – 893 г. (Дипломатическоправни проблеми)*, Pbg 15.3, 1991, p. 13.

¹⁰ A monastic schema was accepted until the end of one's life. There was no law or regulation that determined the procedure of abandoning it (М. Спасова, *На коя дата и през кой месец се е провел преславският събор от 893 година*, ПКШ 8, 2005, p. 89, fn. 25).

life in favour of gaining power in such works as, e.g., *Spiritual meadow* by John Moschos, translated into Old Bulgarian near the end of the ninth or during the early tenth century. Bulgarian readers would have found in it the following words:

And the Elder had said: Believe me children, when I say that a great glory and fame [await] those, who forsake the empire and become monks, for that which is knowable with mind is more worthy of respect than that what is sensual. It is therefore a great shame and disgrace when a monk abandons his condition and becomes an emperor.¹¹

It cannot be ruled out that some would have read this as a commentary on the recent event, and that they would have shared this opinion.

The seizing of power by Symeon caused controversy also because he was not the eldest, nor even the second eldest of Boris' sons. It is thought that the inheritance law regarding the Bulgarian throne involved the two eldest male offspring of the ruler¹². The firstborn son was titled *kanartikin* (καναρτικείνος), the second – *bulias-tarkan* (βουλίας тарκάνος)¹³. In the light of this rule, the power should have gone to Gabriel, Boris' second son. Our knowledge of him is very scarce¹⁴, therefore finding the reasons for

¹¹ John Moschos (Slavic text), p. 250.9–14: Рече паки старьць віроу иміте мн чада глаголющоу тако велика хвала и велика слава цѣрѣ отъ нещюущѣхъ са и бывающоу мннихоу поне же чьстниша сѣть разумнага чювьствьныхъ (ἐπειδὴ τιμώτερά ἐστι τὰ νοητὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν). тако и великъ срамъ юсть и вѣчєстїє мннихоу. оставляющю мннишєскыи чинь. и бывающю црѣю. Greek text: John Moschos, col. 3020B–C. On this source testimony: А. Николов, *Политическа мисъл в ранносредновековна България (средата на IX–края на X в.)*, София 2006, p. 121.

¹² Й. Андриев, *Йоан Екзарх и някои въпроси във връзка с наследяването на царската власт в средновековна България*, ПКШ 1, 1995, pp. 309–310. On the titulature and the rights of the heirs to the throne: П. Георгиев, *Титлата и функциите на българския престолонаследник и въпросът за престолонаследнието при цар Симеон (893–927)*, ИП 48.8/9, 1992, pp. 3–12.

¹³ I. Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria*, Leiden–Boston 2011, pp. 218–219.

¹⁴ Of Gabriel, we know only that he was the second son of Boris and Maria. There have been attempts to identify him with known figures of the time, but these have not been met with a common agreement. Cf. Й. Андриев, *Гаврил*, [in:] *idem*,

which he did not succeed the eldest of the brothers cannot move beyond the realm of conjecture. The simplest explanation of the matter would be that by 893 he was simply no longer alive. Otherwise, potential factors that could have come to the fore were Symeon's abilities, appreciated by Boris, or perhaps a particularly strong bond between the two.

The fact that Symeon had taken power after his brother caused doubts among his contemporaries. These are attested by a fragment of John the Exarch's *Hexameron*, in which we read that *among the Bulgarians the power passes not only from father to son, but from brother to brother. We know that this was the case also among the Khazars*¹⁵. The author from Symeon's circle clearly formulated the view about the legality of such transmission of power. A reference to the Khazars, and also showing in the preceding passage that this tradition had ancient roots was intended to provide a stronger basis for this statement. John reached for such reasoning because he clearly could not find examples of such practice in Bulgaria's history. Stressing that one could inherit from his brother perhaps resulted not only from the fact that Vladimir was deprived of power, but also because he lacked a male heir who could have inherited the throne from his father.

To conclude these brief considerations regarding the seizing of power by Symeon (the father of the present monograph's protagonist), one might say that he became a Bulgarian monarch on the initiative and with active participation of Boris-Michael, that he acquiesced to it, and maybe even in part brought it about thanks to his own actions. It does not seem that the new ruler of Bulgaria was a mere tool in his father's hands. It must be remembered that Symeon was at the time nearing thirty years of age, he

И. Л а з а р о в, П. П а в л о в, *Кой кой е в средновековна България*, София 2012, p. 129. From the formal point of view, Vladimir's son should have become his successor. While we do not know if he even had one, one might suspect that Rasate, who in 893 was around forty, already had children of an age appropriate for taking the reins of power.

¹⁵ John the Exarch, pp. 241.14–245.1 (140a.21–28, 140c.1), 243.21–28. On this passage: Й. А н д р е е в, *Йоан Екзарх...*, pp. 313–315; Г.Н. Н и к о л о в, *Прабългарската традиция в християнския двор на средновековна България (IX–XI в.). Владетел и престолонаследие*, [in:] *Бог и цар в българската история*, ed. К. В а ч к о в а, Пловдив 1996, pp. 125–126; А. Н и к о л о в, *Политическа мисъл...*, pp. 121–123. On the subject of succession of power among the Khazars, see: J. D u d e k, *Chazarowie. Polityka – kultura – religia, VII–XI w.*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 278–282.

knew the situation within the country, and although he was not being prepared for taking the throne, he must have possessed intellectual qualities that gave hope he would soon gain the appropriate experience and sophistication that would allow him to master the difficult art of ruling a country¹⁶. It is not entirely out of the question that Boris-Michael's decision to remove Vladimir and elevate Symeon was subsequently confirmed by an assembly of church and state dignitaries¹⁷.

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I hope that the somewhat wider presentations of the circumstances in which Symeon I the Great took power will allow the reader to visualise the fact that Peter's complicated path to regal power, and the fight to maintain it – which are going to be discussed below – was not something unprecedented in the history of contemporary Bulgaria. A reflection that Symeon's personal experiences affected his decision regarding the setting of the matter of succession would also have not been without basis. The man who in taking the reins of power broke a number of rules would certainly have found it easier to, e.g., bypass his eldest son when contemplating succession. Furthermore, Boris-Michael made it clear that the ruler's will on the matter was the deciding factor.

It would seem that soon after abandoning the monastic robes and taking the throne Symeon got married. We do not know the name of his first wife; we only know that she gave him at least one child – Michael¹⁸. After her death, Symeon re-married. His chosen was a sister of George Sursuvul, his close collaborator¹⁹. We do not know her name, either. The

¹⁶ M.J. Leszka, *Symeon...*, pp. 58–63.

¹⁷ This did not, however, happen during the so-called Council of Preslav, dated to 893/894, which most likely is only an invention. Cf. *Ibidem*, s. 64–65.

¹⁸ Continuator of Theophanes, p. 412; Symeon Logothete, 136.45; cf. John Skylitzes, p. 225.

¹⁹ On the subject of George Sursuvul, see: П. Павлов, *Георги Сурсувул*, [in:] Й. Андреев, И. Лазаров, П. Павлов, *Кой кой...*, pp. 139–143. This author supposes that George may have been a son of the *kavkhan* Theodore, and his successor. *Kavkhan* was the second person in the state after the ruler, his closest adviser, and as some scholars think – even his co-ruler. This dignity was for life, and may

high position of her brother indicates that she came from a powerful family. It was from this union that Peter was born²⁰. There is no source information that would allow us to determine when it happened. Considering that in 927 Peter was still unmarried, and that in the same year he was able to marry and take power (formally, he needed to be 16), one should accept that he was born no later than in the early 910s.²¹

We know practically nothing about Peter's history until the point in which he took power after his father in 927. It can be assumed that Symeon, who was thoroughly educated and displayed wide intellectual interests²², had taken care to ensure that his son was a well-educated man and had an understanding of (widely understood) cultural matters.

Peter had three brothers: Michael, John and Benjamin (Bayan), but the question of seniority among them is not entirely clear. Only a single

have been hereditary. More about the role of a *kavkhan* in the Bulgarian state, i.a.: И. В е н е д и к о в, *Военното и административното устройство на България през IX и X в.*, София 1979, pp. 28–41; Ц. С т е п а н о в, *Власт и авторитет в ранно-средновековна България (VII – ср. IX в.)*, София 1999, pp. 85–86; В. Б е ш е в л и е в, *Първобългарски надписи*, София 1992, pp. 67–69; В. Г ю з е л е в, *Кавханите и ичиргу боилите на българското ханство-царство*, Пловдив 2007, pp. 51–121; Т. С л а в о в а, *Владетел и администрация в ранносредновековна България. Филологически аспекти*, София 2010, pp. 10–15.

²⁰ C o n t i n u a t o r o f T h e o p h a n e s, p. 412; S y m e o n L o g o t h e t e, 136.45; cf. J o h n S k y l i t z e s, p. 225.

²¹ Thus e.g. Pavel Georgiev (П. Г е о р г и е в, *Превратът през 927 г.*, ПКШ 10, 2008, p. 429). He thinks this may have occurred in 911. Plamen Pavlov maintains that this happened ca. 907, since according to him, at the time when Peter was taking the power he may have been ca. twenty (П. П а в л о в, *Георги...*, p. 140). It would not seem that the information that in 913 Symeon was accompanied in his expedition to Constantinople by his sons (ὑἱοί – C o n t i n u a t o r o f T h e o p h a n e s, p. 385) or children (παῖδες – J o h n S k y l i t z e s, p. 200) was of any help in determining even a hypothetical date of Peter's birth. None of the accounts mention the names of Symeon's progeny, nor their number. We are also aware that, beside the fact that Michael was Symeon's eldest son, the seniority of the others is uncertain. We also do not know whether there was some age boundary beyond which a child could have participated in such an undertaking. In a situation where we cannot even be sure whether Peter was accompanying his father, the accounts of *Continuation of Theophanes* and of John Skylitzes should be considered of no value where determining Peter's age is concerned.

²² On the subject of Symeon's education, see: M. J. L e s z k a, *Symeon...*, pp. 29–34. Cf. X. Т р е н д а ф и л о в, *Цар и век...*, p. 157sqq.

tradition provides us with a source regarding this matter; it is of Byzantine provenance. In the *Continuation of Theophanes*, we read:

Symeon died in Bulgaria; overcome by dementia and ravaged by a heart attack, he lost his mind and unjustifiably violated the law, putting forward his son Peter, born from his second wife, the sister of George Sursuvul, as the archont; he also made him the guardian of his sons. Michael, his son from his first wife, he ordered to become a monk. John and Benjamin, in turn, the brothers of Peter, still wore Bulgarian dress (στολῇ Βουλγαρικῇ).²³

Although apparently well-versed in these events, the anonymous author of this account (found in the sixth book of the *Continuation of Theophanes*) followed the trend visible in Byzantine literature and limited themselves to the basic information only²⁴. From the Byzantine author's perspective, the key point was that there had been a conflict over the matter of succession after Symeon. For some reason, the latter decided to remove Michael – his eldest son (by his first wife) and the original heir²⁵

²³ Continuator of Theophanes, p. 412. Cf. Symeon Logothete, 136.45; John Skylitzes, p. 225.

²⁴ On the subject of the authorship and source base of the sixth book of the *Continuation of Theophanes* see: chapter *Sources and Modern Scholarship*.

²⁵ Apart from narrative sources (Continuator of Theophanes, p. 412; Symeon Logothete, 136.45; John Skylitzes, p. 225), the sigillographic material also confirms that Michael had been designated as heir by Symeon – И. Йорданов, *Корпус...*, pp. 140–143. There are seven seals associated with Michael. Unfortunately, they are not well preserved, so that it is not easy to decipher and interpret their inscriptions, as well as to determine their definitive association with Michael. This matter was recently analyzed e.g. by Т. Тодоров, *България през втората и третата четвърт на Х век: политическа история*, София 2006 [unpublished PhD thesis], pp. 86–88; Б. Николова, *Печатите на Михаил багатур канеиртхтин и Йоан багатур канеиртхтин (?)*. Проблеми на разчитането и атрибуцията, [in:] *Средновековният българин и "другите"*. Сборник в чест на 60-годишнината на проф. Дин Петър Ангелов, ed. А. Николов, Г.Н. Николов, София 2013, p. 127–135; И. Йорданов, *Корпус...*, pp. 140–143. The latter author, despite the stated reservations, concluded (p. 143) that they most likely belonged to the *baghatur* and heir to the throne – *kanartikin* (βαγατοῦρ κανε ἡρτχι θινος) – and not to the *baghatur* of the heir to the throne, nor to the *baghatur* of *khan* 'Irtchithuin'.

– from the line of succession²⁶. To prevent Michael from making potential claims to the throne, Symeon had him become a monk, following the Byzantine custom in this matter²⁷. He also designated Peter, his son by his second wife, as the heir. Since at the moment of his father's death Peter was very young²⁸ and relatively inexperienced, he was entrusted to the care of George Sursuvul, Symeon's brother-in-law and collaborator. From the Byzantine perspective, John and Benjamin (Bayan) – the other two sons of Symeon – took no part in this contest for their father's power.

As regards the order in which Symeon's sons entered the world, the account only provides us with a sufficient basis to state that Michael was the firstborn son of the Bulgarian ruler. It does not offer any indication as to the order of seniority among the remaining three sons. One might only speculate that John – since he was mentioned first – was older than Benjamin. Whether Peter was older or younger than his brothers, or whether he was born between them, is impossible to determine. The account in question does not rule out the possibility that the other three sons were full brothers rather than half-brothers. The Byzantine author, as I emphasized above, only stated that Michael's mother was the first wife of Symeon, and Peter's – the second. Unlike Michael, John and Benjamin

²⁶ We do not know the name of his mother or the date of his birth. He must have been born after 893, and perhaps prior to 907 (П. Георгиев, *Превратът...*, p. 429).

²⁷ We do not know when this happened. It has been suggested that this event was associated with the supposed disagreement between Symeon and his eldest son, caused by another escalation of the conflict with Byzantium in 924–925 (or rather in 923–924). The available source material does not, however, allow the verification of this conjecture. On this subject see e.g.: П. Георгиев, *Титлата...*, pp. 10–11; П. Павлов, *Братята на цар Петър и техните заговори*, *Ист* 7.4/5, 1999, p. 2; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, pp. 88–100. As regards the monastery in which he lived, it may have been the monastery in Ravna, which had strong ties to the ruling dynasty. It was located relatively close to Pliska (specifically, 25 km to the south-east). On this monastery see: Б. Николова, *Монашество, манастири и манастирски живот в средновековна България*, vol. I, *Манастирите*, София 2010, pp. 188–255.

²⁸ There are no sources to answer the question of when Peter was born. Given the fact that in 927 he was still unmarried, but on the other hand old enough to get married and seize power (formally he was allowed to do this at the age of 16), he must have been born in the early 910s at the latest. Georgiev (П. Георгиев, *Превратът...*, p. 429) believes that he was born in 911.

are unambiguously described as Peter's brothers, which might suggest that Michael's relation to Peter differed from that of the other two. Nonetheless, one should probably not ascribe particular significance to this. Besides, it should be borne in mind that, having eliminated Michael, Symeon could designate any of his sons as his successor, regardless of his age.

The passage under examination closes with the surprising statement that John and Benjamin continued to wear Bulgarian dress. It is commonly thought that it was an expression of their attachment to the proto-Bulgar tradition²⁹. If we accept this information at face value we could consider it – as was recently suggested – as the reason for which the two sons got stripped of their power by their father: by cultivating the Old Bulgarian tradition, they would have opposed Symeon's efforts to shape Bulgaria after the Byzantine model, even if they shared their father's vision of fighting the southern neighbor. The younger Peter may have been more enamored with Byzantine culture, so dear to his father. However such an assumption is highly hypothetical – whereas, in fact, it seems that a far more prosaic explanation for the passage is at hand. It may be that the Byzantine authors, who favored Peter, intended to discredit his brothers by pointing out their barbarity. In this manner, they could justify the fact that he came to power instead of his brothers³⁰. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that we simply do not understand the nature of this passage, which may be of idiomatic or proverbial nature.

It follows from the above considerations that John was most likely the second or third son of Symeon. After Michael was removed from the line of succession, he was not designated as his father's heir any longer. While the opinion that Symeon did appoint him as his successor (*kanartikin*) is present in the scholarship on the subject, it should be stated outright that the basis for such a hypothesis is fairly shaky³¹. Another view, advanced

²⁹ It is also associated with the account of Liudprand of Cremona (*Retribution*, III, 29), which mentions that Bayan was supposedly a user of magic and could turn himself into a wolf.

³⁰ M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo bulgarskie. Polityka – społeczeństwo – gospodarka – kultura. 866–969*, Warszawa 2015, p. 152, fn. 13.

³¹ К. Попконстантинов, *Епиграфски бележки за Иван, Цар Симеоновият син*, БСП 3, 1994, pp. 72–73. This is to be seen from the sphragistic material, i.e. the

by Todor Todorov, holds that John may have been appointed heir to Peter. Based on the same sphragistic material as the aforementioned hypothesis, the claim is likewise rather doubtful.

Peter had taken power after his father's death³², at the turn of May and June of 927. As can be seen from the earlier considerations, it happened after Michael, Symeon's firstborn, was deprived of his right to the throne, which constituted a departure from the practice that was the most common in Bulgaria³³. The available source material is not sufficient to answer the question as to the reasons for Symeon's decision. Logical reasoning, rather than source analysis, leads researchers to the judgement that it was a consequence of the influence of Peter's mother, the second wife of the Bulgarian ruler, and of her brother, George Sursuvul³⁴. This view can

seals associated with John (И. Йорданов, *Корпус...*, pp. 135–139; П. Георгиев, *Титлата...*, p. 9sqq). See also: П. Георгиев, *Превратът...*, pp. 432–433. He may have held the dignity of *kanartikin* as early as 926, and was previously titled *boilatar-kan*, as was usually the case with the ruler's second son. The question of the reliability of the sigillographic sources related to John has been analyzed by Bistra Nikolova (Б. Николова, *Печатите...*, pp. 127–135). The author points out the uncertainty of their readings as well as their very association with John. She concludes, as does the present author, that the *sigilla* associated with John should instead be linked with some dignity by the same name from the 9th or 10th century.

³² It is commonly accepted that Symeon died on the 27th of May 927. E.g.: В.Н. Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I/2, *Първо българско Царство. От славянизацията на държавата до падането на Първото царство (852–1018)*, София 1927, p. 513; S. Runciman, *The History of the First Bulgarian Empire*, London 1930, p. 177; И. Божилов, *Цар Симеон...*, p. 146; А. Николов, *Политическа мисъл...*, p. 151. Nonetheless, it is also possible that it occurred several days later, at the beginning of June. On this subject, see: М. J. Leszka, *Symeon...*, p. 227.

³³ On the subject of the takeover of power in Bulgaria, see: Г.Г. Литаврин, *Принцип наследственности власти в Византии и в Болгарии в VII–XI вв.*, [in:] *Славяне и их соседи*, vol. I, Москва 1988, pp. 31–33; Г.Н. Николов, *Прабългарската...*, pp. 124–130; Т. Тодоров, *Към въпроса за престолонаследието в Първото българско царство*, ППР 8, 2000, pp. 202–207; П. Георгиев, *Титлата...*, pp. 10–11; П. Павлов, *Братята...*, p. 2.

³⁴ E.g. Г. Бакалов, *Царската промулгация на Петър и неговите приемници в светлината на българо-византийските дипломатически отношения след договора от 927 г.*, ИП 39.6, 1983, p. 35; J.V.A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans: a Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor 1983, p. 160.

be modified to state that Sursuvul, taking advantage of Symeon's illness, convinced him to transfer power over to Peter, who then became declared his father's co-ruler. Pavel Georgiev, the creator of this hypothesis, thinks that this constituted a form of a *coup d'état*³⁵. Another view present in the scholarship would have it that Symeon declared Peter his co-ruler several years before his death, adopting a traditional Byzantine practice. In this case, our protagonist would have served in this role since 924³⁶.

Regardless of the particular circumstances in which Peter had taken power, the available source material only allows us to state that his elevation to the throne was done on Symeon's initiative, or with his permission, and with depriving at least the eldest of his sons of his right to succession. This situation constituted a potential threat to the new ruler.

Peter began his reign in Bulgaria at a difficult time, facing the failure of the campaign in Croatia and an unresolved conflict with Byzantium.



³⁵ П. Георгиев, *Превратът...*, р. 433; П. Павлов, *Векът на цар Самуил*, София 2014, pp. 15–16.

³⁶ Т. Тодоров, *България...*, р. 100; *idem*, *За едно отражение на свладетелската практика в Първото българско царство през втората половина на IX – първите десетилетия на X в.*, [in:] *България, българите и Европа – мит, история, съвремие*, vol. IV, Доклади от Международна конференция в памет на проф. д.и.н. Йордан Андреев "България, земя на блажени...", В. Търново, 29–31 октомври 2009 г., ed. И. Лазаров, Велико Търново 2011, pp. 173–181. According to this author, Peter became his father's co-ruler after Michael was removed from power.