

MIROSLAW J. LESZKA

INSTITUTE OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF ŁÓDŹ

MIROSLAW.LESZKA@UNI.LODZ.PL

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0003-2643-4520](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2643-4520)

THE BULGARS AND THE SLAVS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL BULGARIA. THE PERSPECTIVE OF BYZANTINE SOURCES*



The history of the Danube Bulgaria begins with the incursion of the Proto-Bulgarian hordes, led by Asparuh, into the area of Moesia Inferior and Scythia Minor, the old Roman provinces.¹ This event occurred as a result of the failure of Constantine IV's expedition against Asparuh and his people, who by that time had occupied the lands on the lower Danube known as Onglos.² The reasons usually

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1 The beginnings of the Bulgarian statehood have aroused significant interest among scholars. Consequently, the literature devoted to it is quite rich. Here, I cite only the most recent publications where the reader can find further bibliographical references: P. Petrov, *Obrazuvane na Bălgarskata Dăržava*, Sofia 1981; G.G. Litavrin, *Formirovanije i razvitije ranniefudalnogo bolgarskogo gosudarstva*, in: *Ranniefudalnyje gosudarstva na Balkanach VI-XII v.v.*, Moskva 1985, pp. 132-188; idem, *K problemie stanovlenija Bolgarskogo gosudarstva*, in: idem, *Vizantijskija i slavjanenie*, Sankt-Peterburg 1999, pp. 192-217; P. Koledarov, *Săbitijata okolo vāznikvaneto na bālgarskata dăržava*, „Istoričeski Pregled” 42 (1986) 8, pp. 60-72; *Bălgarskata nacionalna istorija*, vol. 3, *Părvo bālgarsko carstvo (680-1018)*, ed. P. Pavlov, Veliko Tărnovo 2015, pp. 13-67; I. Božilov, *Istorija na srednovjekovna Bălgaria*, t. 1, *Varvarska Bălgaria*, Plovdiv 2017, pp. 205-220; Ts. Stepanov, *Evoljucija na bālgarskata dăržavnost IV–IX vek*, Sofija 2023, pp. 72-87.

2 On the location of this area, see I.S. Čičiurov, *Vizantijskie istoričeskie sočinienija: Chronografia Feofana, Breviarij Nikifora*, Moskva 1980, p. 116; *Testimonia najdawniejszych dziejów Słowian, seria grecka*, vol. 3, ed. and transl. A. Brzóstkowska, W. Swoboda, Warszawa 1995, p. 92, footnote 37; I. Božilov, Ch. Dimitrov, *Protobulgarica (Zametki po istorii protobolgar do serediny IX v.)*, „Byzantinobulgarica” 9 (1995), pp. 37-39; on Constantine's expedition

given to explain why the Byzantine ruler failed in his struggle against a weaker opponent are far from convincing. The fact remains that the Proto-Bulgars seized control of the areas that, while not being directly ruled by the Byzantines, were inhabited by the Slavs who recognized the loose authority of the empire. Seeing the weakness of the empire and not expecting, as can be assumed, strong resistance from the Slavs, the Bulgars decided to settle in the area for good. Further bold actions against Byzantium forced it to recognize *faits accomplis* and conclude a peace agreement with Asparuh (681).³ This fact is regarded as the symbolic beginning of the Bulgarian statehood.

The nature of the relations between the victorious Bulgars, and the Slavs who had for some time been inhabiting the areas that had now been taken over by the Bulgarian newcomers, has been intensely debated by generations of scholars. Drawing on the same very scarce source material, various authors have arrived at mutually exclusive conclusions. It should be added that in some periods, this long-running debate has been affected by ongoing politics.⁴

Generally, there are two views of the relations between the Bulgars (Proto-Bulgars) and the Slavs inhabiting the areas that were taken over by the former. According to the first view, the Bulgars and the Slavs reached an agreement or an alliance, as a result of which there emerged a federated state in which both ethnoses enjoyed equal rights. This view was held by Lubor Niederle⁵ and Vasil Zlatarski.⁶ According to the second, the Slavs were subjugated by the Bulgarian invaders to whom they were made to pay tribute, a fact reflected in Byzantine sources. In the newly created state, the Slavs were thus subject to the Bulgars. This view was first put forward by Ivan Dujčev.⁷ Both views were developed

against Asparuh's horde, e.g.: A.N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. 4 (668-685), Amsterdam 1978, pp. 101-113.

3 The most significant stipulation of the treaty was for the empire to make tributary payments to the Proto-Bulgars and to recognize their presence in the old Byzantine lands. On the peace treaty of 681, see: S. Penkov, *Bulgaro-Byzantine Treaties during the Early Middle Ages*, "Palaeobulgarica" 5 (1981) 3, pp. 42-43; E.K. Kyriakis, *Byzantio kai Boulgaroi (7os-10os ai.)*. *Symbole sten eksoterike politike tou Byzantiou*, Athens 1993, pp. 162-174; F.K. Filippou, *To proto Boulgariko kratos kai he Byzantine Oikumenike autokratoria (681-852)*, Athena 2001, pp. 35-41.

4 There is a wealth of literature on the relations between the Slavs and the Proto-Bulgars after the latter's takeover of Moesia Inferior and Scythia, e.g.: W. Swoboda, *Powstanie państwa bułgarskiego w Dolnej Mezji. Słowianie - federaci czy trybutariusze Protobułgarów*, "Slavia Occidentalis" 22 (1962), pp. 49-66; idem, *Powstanie państwa bułgarskiego na tle słowiańskich procesów państwowotwórczych na Bałkanach*, in: *1300-lecie państwa bułgarskiego 681-1981. Materiały z sesji naukowej*, ed. T. Zdancewicz, Poznań 1983, pp. 67-76; I. Božilov, V. Gjuzeev, *Istoriija na srednovekovna Bălgaria VII-XIV vek*, Sofija 1999, pp. 90-92; S. Stanilov, *Slavjanite v Părvoto carstvo*, Sofija 2002, pp. 49-54.

5 L. Niederle, *Slovanske starožitnosti*, vol. 2, Praha 1907, pp. 407 ff.

6 V. Zlatarski, *Istoriija na bălgarskata daržava prez Srednite vekove*, vol. 1, *Istoriija na Părvoto bălgarsko carstvo*, part 1, *Epoha nachuno-bălgarsko nadmoštije (679-852)*, Sofija 1918, pp. 142-143.

7 I. Dujčev, *Protobulgares et Slaves*, "Seminarium Kondakovianum" 10 (1938), pp. 145-154.

and modified, and both have found their supporters among scholars.⁸ However, it seems that the second opinion has ended up gaining the upper hand.

The purpose of this article is not to answer the question of how Bulgarian-Slavic relations actually unfolded. Given the scarcity of sources on which to draw in dealing with the topic, one can hardly hope to say anything new about it. Instead, the article aims to resolve the issue of what Byzantine historians, from Theophanes and Nicephorus, (eighth/ninth centuries) to John Zonaras (the first half of the tenth century⁹), knew about the Bulgarian-Slavic relations as existing within the Bulgarian state until Krum's rise to power (796/802).¹⁰ It also aims to establish how important those historians considered the relations to be in the periods in which they created their works. My focus is on the information pertaining to the Bulgars' settlement on the Danube River.

Nicephorus and Theophanes. Testimonies that are reflective of the Byzantines' view of the Bulgarian-Slavic relations and that are of crucial importance for establishing the nature of those relations are to be found in Nicephorus' *Historia Syntomon*¹¹ and Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronographia*.¹²

8 Among those who support the first view, one should mention such scholars as: P. Petrov, *Obrazuvane...*, pp. 228-229; S. Stanilov, *Slavjanite...*, p. 49-60; V. Beševliev, *Pǎrvobǎlgarite. Istorija, bit i kultura*, Plovdiv 2008, p. 79; the second view is supported, among others, by: T. Wasilewski, *Bizancjum i Słowianie w IX wieku. Studia z dziejów stosunków politycznych i kulturalnych*, Warszawa 1972, p. 41; W. Swoboda, *Powstanie państwa bułgarskiego w Dolnej Mezji...*; idem, *Powstanie państwa bułgarskiego na tle...*; I. Božilov, *Istorija...*, p. 79; Ts. Stepanov, *Evoljucija...*, p. 83.

9 John Zonaras, who closes the list of the writers dealt with in this text, is the last historian (the twelfth century) to pass us accounts from unpreserved sources whose authors lived during the era of the First Bulgarian state. This cannot be said of the writers who came after Zonaras - M.J. Leszka, *Wizerunek władców pierwszego państwa bułgarskiego w bizantyńskich źródłach pisanych (VIII – pierwsza połowa XII wieku)*, Łódź 2003, p. 5.

10 Krum's reign is generally considered to have been the breakthrough period in which the nature of the Slavic-Bulgarian relations underwent a significant change. The change found its expression in the increasingly important role that the Slavs began to play in the Bulgarian state. Cf. e.g.: T. Wasilewski, *Bizancjum...*, p. 49; Ts. Stepanov, *Evoljucija...*, p. 83.

11 Covering the period from 602 to 769, the work was created between 780 and 792. On Patriarch Nicephorus and his *Historia Syntomos*, see: E. Lipšic, *Nikifor i jego istoričeski trud*, in: eadem, *Očerki istorii vizantijskogo obščestva i kultury VIII – pervaja polovina IX veka*, Moskva-Leningrad 1961, pp. 268-296; I.S. Čičurov, *Vizantijskie istoričeskije sočienija: Chronografija Feofana, Breviarij Nikifora*, Moskva 1980, pp. 145-150; C. Mango, *The Breviarum of the Patriarch Nicephorus*, in: *Byzance. Hommage à A. Stratos*, vol. 2, Athens 1986, pp. 539-552; I. Ševčenko, *The Search for the Past in Byzantium around the Year 800*, "Dumbarton Oaks Papers" 46 (1992), pp. 284-287; A. Kazhdan A. in collaboration L.F. Sherry, Ch. Angelidi, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650-850)*, Athens 1999, pp. 211 f.; W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, New York 2013, pp. 26-30; L. Neville, *Guide to Byzantine historical writing*, with the assistance of D. Harrisville, I. Tamarkina, Ch. Whatley, Cambridge 2018, pp. 72-77.

12 Covering the years 284-813, Theophanes' *Chronographia* was brought into being soon after 813. Theophanes' role in creating it is open to debate. It has recently been suggested

Both testimonies are based on the same source known as the Great Chronograph.¹³ Because of their importance to the line of argument presented here, I will take the liberty of quoting them below in full.

Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople's testimony: Furthermore, they [Bulgars] subjugated (κρατοῦσι) the neighbouring Slavonic tribes, some of them they directed to guard the area in the vicinity of the Avars and others to watch the Roman border. So, fortifying themselves and gaining in strength...¹⁴

Theophanes' testimony: [Bulgars] Having, furthermore, subjugated (κυριευσάντων) the so-called Seven Tribes of neighbouring Sklavinian nations, they settled the Severeis from the forward mountain pass of Beregaba in the direction of the east, and the remaining six tribes, which were tributary to them (ὑπὸ πάκτον ὄντας), in the southern and western regions as far as the land of the Avars.¹⁵

It is clear, at first glance, that Theophanes' account is more detailed than that of Nicephorus, while both are consistent with each other in terms of their essential message. The Byzantine reader, who did not conduct a modern scholarly analysis, found the message to be quite clear: After taking over the lands inhabited by the Slavs, the Bulgars subdued and resettled them. The Slavs were deployed to defend the captured territory against the Avars and the Romans. The Bulgars were in a position to push through this arrangement since the Slavs remained in their power. Bearing witness to this are the verbs used by the Byzantine authors, κρατέω (to rule, to govern¹⁶) and κυριεύω (to be a lord, to dominate¹⁷). Theophanes also adds that

that the work's material, while published under his name, was actually collected by George Synkellos. There is a great wealth of literature on Theophanes and his work. Here, I cite only the most recent publications where the reader can find references to older literature: C. Mango, R. Scott, *Introduction*, in: *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern history A.D. 284–813*, transl. and ed. iidem with the assistance of G. Greatrex, Oxford 1997, pp. XLIII–C; A. Kompa, *Gnesioi filoi. The Search for George Syncellus and Theophanes the Confessor's Own Words and the Authorship of Their Oeuvre*, "Studia Ceranea" 5 (2015), s. 155–230; W. Treadgold, *The Middle...*, pp. 38–77; *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. M. Jankowiak, F. Montinaro, Paris 2015; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 61–71; K. Marinow, *Asparuh and His People on the Lower Danube through the Eyes of Theophanes, or a Story that Was Not Meant to Happen*, "Studia Ceranea" 8 (2018), pp. 167–191.

¹³ On the *Great Chronograph*, see: L.M. Whitby, *The Great Chronographer and Theophanes*, "Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies" 8 (1982) 1, pp. 1–20; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 85–86.

¹⁴ Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, text, transl. and commentary C. Mango, Washington 1990, 36, p. 90, transl. p. 91 (hereafter: Nicephorus, patriarch Constantinople).

¹⁵ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6171, ed. C. de Boor, vol. 1, Lipsiae 1883, p. 359 (hereafter: Theophanes), transl.: *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor...*, p. 499.

¹⁶ *Słownik grecko-polski*, vol. 3, ed. Z. Abramowiczówna, Warszawa 1962, p. 709.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 738.

the Slavs (Seven Tribes, Severeis) became the Bulgars' tributaries, which most certainly meant that the latter received monetary benefits from the former. This was probably the way in which the word *πάκτον*¹⁸ was understood by Theophanes' readers, especially in view of the fact that it appears in the same fragment in reference to the empire's obligations to the Bulgars.¹⁹ It seems that Byzantine readers of the works of Nicephorus and Theophanes harboured the idea of the ethnic dualism existing in the lands captured by the Bulgars and of the unequal position occupied by both ethnic groups there. For the Byzantines, it was the Bulgars, referred to by Nicephorus as the Huns,²⁰ who were the dominant ethnos.

It thus seems that Nicephorus' *Historia Syntomos*, and especially Theophanes' *Chronographia*, became the basis of the Byzantine reader's knowledge of the rise of the Bulgarian state on the Danube River and its ethnic relations in the period under consideration. What knowledge of these phenomena could be obtained from Byzantine historians' works that were created later than those mentioned above?

George the Monk. Active in the mid-ninth century, that is, not long after Nicephorus and Theophanes, George the Monk is the author of *Chronicon syntomon collected, combined, and interpreted from various chroniclers by George the Monk and Sinner*. The work belongs to the world history genre and covers the history from the creation of the world until 843.²¹ The Monk referred to the events described by Theophanes and Nicephorus and pertaining to the Bulgars' crossing into the Byzantine territory after the failure of Constantine IV's expedition. He was the first and closest in time to the Byzantine historians mentioned above to omit information about the Bulgars's contact with the Slavic population inhabiting the territory in question.²² His account concludes with a reference to the peace treaty under which the Byzantines were obliged to make tributary payments to the Bulgars.²³ We do not know

18 On the meaning of the term *πάκτον* see: *Testimonia...*, pp. 96-97, footnote 45 (there, further literature).

19 Theophanes, AM 6171, p. 359.

20 Nicephorus, patriarch Constantinople, p. 148.

21 On the author: J. Ljubarskij, *George the Monk as a Short-Story Writer*, "Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik" 44 (1994) pp. 255-264; D. Afinogenov, *Le manuscrit grec Coislin. 305: la version primitive de la Chronique de Georges le Moine*, "Revue des études byzantines" 62 (2004), pp. 239-246; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 87-92; Z.A. Brzozowska, M.J. Leszka, *George the Monk (Hamartolus), Chronicle*, in: Z.A. Brzozowska, M.J. Leszka, T. Wolińska, *Muhammad and the Origin of Islam in the Byzantine-Slavic Literary Context. A Bibliographical History*, Łódź-Kraków 2020, pp. 190-197.

22 *Georgii Monachii Chronicon*, vol. 2, ed. C. de Boor, Lipsiae 1904, pp. 728-729 (hereafter: Georgius Monachus). The lands taken over by the Bulgars were referred to as the country of Christians.

23 *Ibidem*, pp. 728-729.

what motivated him, but his testimony is hardly surprising. George was a compiler, he often literally quoted his sources, but his original contribution is evident. *Chronicon* was written without any care for the chronology of events, with a tendency to present stories of a moralistic and anecdotal character.²⁴ Moreover, it is believed that he did not make direct use of Theophanes' *Chronographia*, but drew on its unknown epitome.²⁵

Genesios. A brief reference to the Bulgars' settlement in the Byzantine territory can be found in Genesios' *On the Reigns of the Emperors*. Created during Constantine VII's independent rule, that is, between 946 and 959,²⁶ the work covers the period from 813 to 886, thus leaving the rise of the Bulgarian state outside the scope of its interest. However, the issue came up in the author's account of the Bulgarian-Byzantine conflict that took place during Theodora's regency, Michael III's mother.²⁷ Genesios writes that 'the Bulgars, descended from both Avars and Khazars who took their name from some lord named Bulgaros, had received from the Romans the land around Dorystolon and Mysia in which to dwell'.²⁸ As we can see, this succinct remark contains no reference to the Slavs, let alone their relations with the Bulgars.

Symeon Magister and Logothete. *The Chronicon* by Symeon the Magister and Logothete is another source that provides information about the Bulgars' settlement on the Danube River. We know almost nothing about the author. Holding the title of Magister and Logothete, he was probably active from the reign of Romanus I Lecapenus (919-944) to the beginnings of the time of Basil II (976-1025).²⁹ *The Chronicon* by Symeon the Magister and Logothete is known in two variants: A redaction, the older one, presents

24 Z.A. Brzozowska, Leszka M.J., *George the Monk...*, p. 191.

25 Ibidem.

26 On the author and the sources on which he drew see - F. Barišić, *Les sources de Génésios et du Continuateur de Théophane pour l'histoire du règne de Michel II (820-829)*, "Byzantion" 31 (1961), pp. 257-271; T. Wasilewski, *Macedońska historiografia dynastyczna X wieku jako źródło do dziejów Bizancjum w latach 813-867*, „*Studia Źródłoznawcze*” 16 (1971), pp. 59-83; A. Markopoulos, *Quelques remarques sur la famille des Génésioi aux IXe siècles*, „*Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*” 24-25 (1986), pp. 103-108; J. Signes-Codoner, *Constantino Porfirogéneto y la Fuente Comun de Genesio y Theophanes Continuatus I-IV*, „*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*” 86-87 (1993-1994), pp. 319-341; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 95-100.

27 *Iosephi Genesii Regum libri quattuor*, ed. A. Lesmueller-Werner, H. Thurn, Berolini 1978 (hereafter: Genesios), IV, 7.

28 Genesios, IV, 7; transl.: Genesios, *On the Reigns of the Emperors*, transl., comm. A. Kaldellis, Canberra 1998 p. 77. See, e.g.: *Testimonia...*, vol. 3, p. 417, footnote 43.

29 On the author: S. Wahlgren, *Symeon the Logothete*, „*Byzantion*” 71 (2001), pp. 251-262; W. Treadgold, *The Middle...*, pp. 203-218; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 118-123; Z.A. Brzozowska, M.J. Leszka, *Symeon Magister and Logothete, Chronicle*, in: Z.A. Brzozowska, M.J. Leszka, T. Wolińska, *Muhammad...*, pp. 240-245.

a description of the events from the creation of the world to 948. It was written after that year, perhaps after the death of Constantine VII (959). The later redaction B contains a lecture on the history of Byzantium, extended with additional details, which covers the time until 963. It was probably written during the reign of Nicephorus Phokas (maybe in 968).³⁰ The earlier version of Symeon the Logothete's chronicle corresponds to the *Georgius Monachus Continuatus* in redaction A and the writings of Leo the Grammarian and Pseudo-Theodosius Melissenus, while its later version - to its variant B. There are links between Book VI of *Theophanes Continuatus* (the so-called Text III) and the work by Symeon Logothete. Separate in textological terms although related in terms of their content are: the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon* and *Chronicon Ambrosianum*.

In Symeon's work we can see the use of different sources, depending on the period.³¹ It is believed that with regard to the seventh and eighth centuries, that is, to the period with which I am concerned in this text, the main source on which Symeon drew was Theophanes' *Chronographia*. The view that his *Chronicle* was also indebted to the work of George the Monk is presently rejected.³²

Symeon the Magister and Logothete recounted the Bulgars' settlement in the Byzantine territory. He also referred to the failure of Constantine IV's expedition and the conclusion of the humiliating peace treaty.³³ However, like George the Monk, he provided no information about the Slavs. All he said was that the Bulgars had captured the Romans' land (τὴν ῥωμαϊκὴν χώραν).

Leon the Deacon. Leon the Deacon is the author of *History* that covers the years 959-976³⁴ and, like the work by Genesios, does not range over

³⁰ The earlier version of Symeon the Logothete's chronicle corresponds to the *Georgius Monachus Continuatus* in redaction A and the writings of Leo the Grammarian and Pseudo-Theodosius Melissenus, while its later version – to its variant B. There are links between Book VI of *Theophanes Continuatus* (the so-called Text III) and the work by Symeon Logothete. It is believed to be a combination of two texts, the so-called Text IIIa (886-948) and Text IIIb (944-963). Text IIIa is meant to form part of Symeon Logothete's redaction B. Text IIIb is said to be based (albeit with some changes) on redaction A. Separate in textological terms although related in terms of their content are: the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon* and *Chronicon Ambrosianum*.

³¹ On Symeon's sources: *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, ed. S. Wahlgren, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2006, pp. 118*-120* (hereafter: Symeon Magister); cf. *Hronika Simeona Magistra i Logofeta*, transl. L.Ju. Vinogradov, ed. P.V. Kuzenkov, Moskva 2014, pp. 20-22.

³² Symeon Magister, p. 119*.

³³ Ibidem, 113, 6. Contrary to his predecessors, Symeon indicates that Constantine IV's expedition came as a result of the Bulgars' settlement in the area of Varna. The remark does not pertain to the city, but (probably) to the valley of the Provadiya River. However, the fact still remains that Symeon's account is at odds with other testimonies, according to which the area in question was taken over only after the failure of Constantine's expedition.

³⁴ On Leon the Deacon's life and work see N. Panagiotakes, *Leon ho Diakonos*. A: *Ta Bibliografika*, B: *Cheirografia kai eksdosis*, Athenai 1965; S.A. Ivanov, *Polemičeskaja napravlennost*

the period in which I am interested here. Leon referred to the issue of the rise of the Bulgarian state while recounting the conflict between Byzantium and Sviatoslav, Prince of Kiev. He presented two versions of the circumstances in which the Bulgars had settled in the Byzantine land. The first drew on Genesios' testimony mentioned above. The Byzantine author wrote that "[the Mysians] "migrated from their own territory, wandered into Europe, and occupied and settled this land, when Constantine, with the sobriquet Pogonatos, was emperor of the Romans; they called the land Bulgaria after the name of their chieftain, Boulgaros".³⁵ In the following passage, he presented a different version, linking the Bulgars' settlement on the Danube River to the assistance they offered to Emperor Justinian to return to power: "They received from him, once he again obtained imperial rule, the land that the Istros borders within Macedonia. After moving there...".³⁶ It is clear that neither version suggests that the Bulgars settled in the lands inhabited by the Slavs.

Kedrenos. At the end of the eleventh or at the beginning of twelfth century, there appeared another work containing a reference to the rise of the Bulgarian state on the Danube River - *Synopsis Historion* by George Kedrenos.³⁷ Covering the history from the creation of the world until 1057, it has the character of a compilation and in respect of the period dealt with in this article, it is believed to be indebted to works by George the Monk, Pseudo-Symeon, and Symeon Logothete.³⁸ What did Kedrenos write about the Bulgars' settlement on the Danube River? He just repeated, in a slightly abridged version, Symeon the Logothetes' account, thus making no reference to the Bulgarian-Slavic relations.³⁹ According to Kedrenos' testimony, the Bulgars simply seized the Roman lands (τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν χώραν).⁴⁰

<<Istorii>> *Lva Diakona, „Vizantijskij Vremennik”* 43 (1982), pp. 74-80; M. Ja. Sjuzumov, *Lev Diakon i jego vremena*, in: *Lev Diakon, Istorija*, transl. M.M. Kopylenko, comment. M.Ja. Sjuzumov, S.A. Ivanov, Moskva 1988, pp. 137-165; *The History of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, introd., transl., annot. A-M. Talbot, D.F. Sullivan, with assistance G.T. Dennis, S. McGrath, Washington 2006, pp. 9-52; A. Kazhdan, *History of Byzantine Literature (850-1000)*, ed. Ch. Angelidi, Athens 2006, pp. 278-286; W. Treadgold, *The Middle...*, pp. 236-246; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 124-127.

35 *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae*, VI, 8, rec. C.B. Hase, Bonnae 1828 (hereafter: Leo), transl.: *The History of Leo the Deacon...*, pp. 153-154.

36 Leo, VI, 9, transl.: *The History of Leo the Deacon...*, p. 154.

37 On George Kedrenos' life and work see: W. Treadgold, *The Middle...*, pp. 339-341; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 162-168.

38 W. Treadgold, *The Middle...*, p. 341; L. Neville, *Guide...*, p. 163.

39 Georgius Cedrenus, Ioannis Scylitzae, *Ope*, ed. I. Bekker, vol. 1, Bonnae 1838, p. 770 (hereafter: Kedrenos).

40 Kedrenos, p. 770. Here, Constantine IV's expedition is presented as a reaction to the occupation of Varna, cf. footnote 34.

John Zonaras. John Zonaras' *Epitome historiarum* is the last source to be dealt with in this article. Covering the history from the creation of the world until 1118, it was created not long after that year,⁴¹ that is, at the time when the Bulgarian lands were already part of the Byzantine empire. In dealing with the period in the history of the Bulgarian state, with which we are concerned here, Zonaras drew on Theophanes' account, clearly abridging it. He recounted the failure of Constantine IV's expedition against the Bulgars, the latter's crossing into the Byzantine territory, and the conclusion of the peace treaty. What matters in the context of the topic under consideration is of course the fact that he provided no information about the Slavs, let alone their relations with the Bulgars.⁴²

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The above overview of the Byzantine sources containing references to the rise of the Bulgarian state and its history until the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries shows that, except for the works by Theophanes and Nicephorus, none of those sources referred to the Slavs' presence in the lands captured by the Bulgars at the end of the seventh century and the Slavic-Bulgarian relations. How can this be explained? Generally speaking, to Byzantine historians, it was mainly Byzantine history that was important. They wrote more about other ethnic groups while recounting conflicts or diplomatic negotiations that Byzantium conducted with them. The Slavic-Bulgarian relations clearly did not fall into this category – either in the period under investigation, or later.

Containing unique information about the Slavs at the time of the creation of the Bulgarian state, Nicephorus' *Historia Syntomos* and Theophanes' *Chronographia* were certainly known and used by other Byzantine authors. However, with the passage of time, they were not used directly. It sufficed for the intermediary chronicler to omit the passage pertaining to the Slavs and, consequently, it did not find its way into later works that referred to the rise of the first Bulgarian state. As the source material presented above shows, the first known Byzantine author to make such an omission was George the Monk, as long as of course he can be assumed to have drawn directly on Theophanes's testimony and not on the epitome of his work (the Monk was active half a century later than Theophanes).

⁴¹ On John Zonaras' life and work - I. Grigoriadis, *Linguistic and literary studies in the Epitome Historion of John Zonaras*, Thessaloniki 1998; T.M. Banchich, *Introduction*, in: *The History of Zonaras from Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great*, transl. idem, E.N. Lane, New York 2009, pp. 1-19; W. Treadgold, *The Middle...*, pp. 388-399; L. Neville, *Guide...*, pp. 191-199.

⁴² *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome historiarum libri XIII-XVIII*, ed. Th. Büttner-Wobst, Bonnae 1897, pp. 226-228.

For the authors active during the latter half of the tenth century, beginning with Genesios and ending with Leon the Deacon, the issue of Bulgaria's ethnic dualism may have already become difficult to grasp,⁴³ regardless of where their knowledge of the beginnings of the Bulgarian statehood originated. For Kedrenos and Zonaras, it was already the past, just as the Bulgarian state that was eventually conquered by Basil II and incorporated into the empire. At the time, the Bulgars had become the emperor's Slavic subjects.

Translated by Artur Mękarski

ABSTRACT

The article aims to resolve the issue of what Byzantine historians, from Theophanes and Nicephorus (eighth/ninth centuries) to John Zonaras (the first half of the tenth century), knew about the Bulgarian-Slavic relations as existing within the Bulgarian state until Krum's rise to power (796/802).

The Byzantine sources containing references to the rise of the Bulgarian state and its history until the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries shows that, except for the works by Theophanes and Nicephorus, none of those sources referred to the Slavs' presence in the lands captured by the Bulgars at the end of the seventh century and the Slavic-Bulgarian relations. Containing unique information about the Slavs at the time of the creation of the Bulgarian state, Nicephorus' *Historia Syntomos*, and Theophanes' *Chronographia*, were certainly known and used by other Byzantine authors. However, with the passage of time, they were not used directly. It sufficed for the intermediary chronicler to omit the passage pertaining to the Slavs and, consequently, it did not find its way into later works that referred to the rise of the first Bulgarian state. As the source material presented above shows, the first known Byzantine author to make such an omission was George the Monk, as long as, of course, he can be assumed to have drawn directly on Theophanes's testimony and not on the epitome of his work (the Monk was active half a century later than Theophanes).

Keywords: Medieval Bulgaria, Byzantium, the Bulgars, the Slavs, Byzantine Literature

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⁴³ The process of the 'Slavization' of the Proto-Bulgars is believed to have come to an end in mid-tenth century.

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