




Kostiantyn Bardola (Kharkiv)
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6617-7963>

“THE UNBROKEN FELLOWSHIP” WHAT DID KHAN BORIS AND EMPRESS THEODORA AGREE UPON?

Abstract. This article presents a novel hypothesis regarding the events surrounding the Christianization of Khan Boris of Bulgaria. The author proposes the possibility of a marriage between Empress Theodora and Khan Boris, primarily through a reinterpretation of two passages from the Theophanes Continuatus, which also appear in slightly altered forms in the works of other Byzantine authors. These passages have often been dismissed as mere legends lacking historical significance. However, the author contends that they can be viewed as distorted remnants of authentic plans, inviting a reevaluation of their historical value. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship dynamics that influenced the region’s political landscape during this era, challenging previous interpretations that have often underestimated the intricate interplay of power, diplomacy, and personal relations in medieval statecraft.

Keywords: Khan Boris, Empress Theodora, Theophanes Continuatus, Bulgaria, Byzantium

Now the ruler of Bulgaria – this was Bogoris – comported himself with great insolence when he heard that a woman reigned over the empire. He, therefore, sent certain messengers to her, saying that he was breaking his treaties and leading an army against the land of the Romans. But the Empress, thinking no feminine or unmanly thoughts, informed him, ‘You shall find me, too, leading an army against you. I hope to gain mastery over you, but if – Heaven forbid! – you should vanquish me, even so, shall I surpass you, receiving conspicuous victory, for you shall have defeated a woman and not a man’¹.

¹ *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Libri I–IV*, IV, 13, ed. J.M. FEATHERSTONE, J. SIGNES-CODONER, Boston–Berlin 2015 [= *CFHB*, 53] (cetera: THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS).

In this way, Theophanes Continuatus begins the account of the diplomatic correspondence between Khan Boris and Empress Theodora. Although Theodora's response is frequently cited in numerous chronicles, most scholars have dismissed it as merely a historical anecdote, thus largely neglecting the narrative. However, considering the complex structure, the precise attribution of almost all the main characters, and the presence of many quite particular details, it is reasonable to assume that the narrative was based on an actual historical fact. Furthermore, the numerous comments and corrections of the narrative by various authors indicate that they also took the information in the text literally and attempted to interpret it in their own way. Therefore, this story warrants a more detailed analysis as a historical illustration of the Bulgarian-Byzantine relations in the mid-9th century, precisely the period just before the beginning of Bulgarian Christianization. Since this approach contradicts the currently dominant historiographical tradition, the following arguments should be considered hypothetical and need further critical discussion.

Narrative 1. Part 1. Introduction to the negotiations

The epistolary exchanges between Boris and Theodora are documented in several chronicles and compilations from that period. The most comprehensive version appears in the chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus. This account has been incorporated into the historical works of Pseudo-Symeon, Skylitzes, and Zonaras with minor modifications². Genesios, the primary opponent of Theophanes Continuatus, significantly abbreviated this narrative in alignment with his ideological objectives, retaining only the account of the Empress's legendary response³. Likely due to the same ideological reasons, the narrative was omitted from the Chronicle of Symeon Logothetes⁴.

Nevertheless, both the brief and full versions of the narrative commence similarly, with the Bulgarian Khan sending envoys to Theodora. These messengers delivered Boris's message, which included threats to attack the Empire. Theodora quoted the legendary reply attributed to the Amazonian queen, Thalestris⁵. After

² *Iosephi Genesii Regum libri quattuor*, IV, 7–9, rec. A. LESMUELLER-WERNER, Berolini 1978 [= CFHB, 14] (cetera: GENESIOS); *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, VII, 9, ed. I. THURN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1973 [= CFHB, 5] (cetera: SKYLITZES); IOANNES ZONARAS, *Epitome historiarum libri XIII–XVIII*, 387.4, ed. T. BUTTNER-WOBST, Leipzig 1897 [= CSHB, 49] (cetera: ZONARAS); *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister [Pseudo-Symeon], Georgius Monachus*, 664.19, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonn 1838 [= CSHB, 33].

³ GENESIOS, IV, 9.

⁴ Symeon Metaphrastes developed his concept of Boris's conversion, with the Byzantine invasion as pivotal. *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, rec. S. WAHLGREN, Berolini 2006 [= CFHB, 44] (cetera: SYMEON LOGOTHETES).

⁵ The reply of Thalestris was well-known in Byzantium due to the widespread popularity of the *Romance of Alexander: Recensio Byzantina poetica (cod. Marcianus 408)*: S. REICHMAN, *Das byzanti-*

receiving the response, Boris ceased his hostile actions. This marks the conclusion of Genesios's account and the first part of Theophanes Continuatus's narrative.

The quote from the mythical Amazon queen's response likely served as the primary reason for perceiving this narrative as a "naive legend" or "anecdotal fabrication by the authors", which, "in both its content and form, should hardly be taken literally"⁶. However, admittedly, Byzantine officials often employed various historical, biblical, or legendary allusions to smooth over the rough edges of diplomatic correspondence⁷. Moreover, Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus, viewed Theodora favorably and assessed her activities positively. Considering this, the rhetorical effect of choosing such a response might have been perceived as potentially harmful, thus compelling the chroniclers to add defensive comments. The story is absent from Theodora's hagiographic biography, probably because it was not entirely appropriate for rhetorical purposes⁸. Consequently, it is plausible that Empress Theodora sent the message to Boris deliberately quoting Thalestris' legendary response, having pretty rational reasons for doing so. Examining the political situation that had developed at that time is necessary to identify these reasons.

After ascending to the Khan position in 852, Boris pursued an active foreign policy to reaffirm existing peace agreements and improve their terms whenever possible. This approach was standard then and frequently adopted following changes in ruling leadership. Boris also undertook similar "declarative" military campaigns against neighboring states, which typically concluded swiftly by establishing new agreements⁹. The diplomatic "notification" of an impending attack

nische Alexandergedicht nach dem codex Marcianus 408 herausgegeben, 5545, Meisenheim am Glan 1963 [= BKP, 13]; Recensio φ: Γ. ΒΕΛΟΥΔΗΣ, *Ἡ φυλλάδα τοῦ Μεγαλέξαντρου. Διήγησις Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνο*, 216.1, Ἀθήνα 1977. *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture*, ed. R. STONE-MAN, Cambridge 2022.

⁶ I. DUJČEV, *Légendes byzantines sur la conversion des Bulgares*, SFFBU 10, 1961, p. 65; В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Княз Борис Първи*, София 1969, p. 60–61; С. ИВАНОВ, *Византийское миссионерство. Можно ли сделать из "варвара" христианина?*, Москва 2003, p. 165.

⁷ J. SHEPARD, *The Uses of 'History' in Byzantine Diplomacy: Observations and Comparisons*, [in:] *Porphyrogenita. Essays on the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honour of Julian Chrysostomides*, ed. C. DENDRINOS et al., Aldershot 2003, p. 105–107; P. MAGDALINO, *The History of the Future and its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda. The Making of Byzantine History*, [in:] *Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*, ed. R. BEATON, C. ROUECHÉ, Aldershot 1993, p. 3–34.

⁸ *Life of St. Theodora the Empress*, [in:] *Byzantine Defenders of Images. Eight Saint's Lives in English Translation*, trans. M.P. VINSON, Dumbarton Oaks–Washington 1998.

⁹ The *Annales Fuldenses* testify that Boris also sent an embassy to the court of Louis II the German in 852: *Annales Fuldenses*, anno 852, [in:] *MGH*, vol. VII, Hannover 1891; Probably at the same time, Boris presumably renewed agreements with the Serbs and Croats: *Annales bertiniani*, anno 853, ed. G. WAITZ, Saint-Omer 1883; CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, XXXI, ed. G. MORAVCSIK, trans. R.J.H. JENKINS, Washington 1993 [= CFHB, 1; DOT, 1] (cetera: CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*); В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I–II, София 1927 (repr. 2007), p. 9–11; T. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Sloveni i Romeji. Slavizacija na prostoru Srbije od VII do XI veka*, Beograd 2000, p. 100; N. KLAČIĆ,

sent by Boris to Theodora likely did not surprise Byzantine officials. The somewhat unexpected response from the Byzantine empress could have been motivated by two factors. First, it is possible that most imperial forces were engaged in clashes with Muslims, and the government preferred to avoid even minor skirmishes with the Bulgars. Second, Theodora and her advisers may have had far-reaching political intentions regarding the Khan of the Bulgars. In both cases, such a diplomatic response was thoughtful and judicious.

Upon first examining Theodora's reaction, what stands out to a researcher – and likely also caught Boris's attention – was the emphasis on gender in the message¹⁰. Using a quotation from the legendary response of Thalestris, the female ruler of the Amazons, where decisions were made without male participation, was a notably extravagant and controversial move within the Byzantine aristocracy, where men dominated both military and civil bureaucracies. Furthermore, the letter's content amplified this dynamic by framing international relations in "male-female" terms. Consequently, chroniclers such as Genesios, and later Skylitzes and Zonaras had to diligently mitigate the potential negative impact on their readership. They emphasized that Theodora did not rule alone but jointly with her son Michael, underscoring a shared governance approach¹¹. Moreover, Skylitzes and Zonaras, following Theophanes Continuatus, felt compelled to clarify that there was nothing "shameful or feminine" about Theodora's response¹².

However, the most crucial meaning of the message might have been hidden between the lines. It is worth recalling that, according to legend, the relationship between Thalestris and Alexander the Great extended beyond their diplomatic correspondence. Notably, the Amazon queen offered to bear a child for Alexander, a Macedonian ruler¹³. Byzantine officials and some of Khan's diplomats were likely familiar with this storyline from the popular *The Romance of Alexander*¹⁴. It is reasonable to assume that Empress Theodora hinted at the possibility of discussing a dynastic marriage between the two sides through her message. The Boris's advisors likely understood this implication. Theophanes Continuatus reports that after receiving the message, the Khan maintained peace,

Povijest Hrvata u ranom srednjem vijeku, Zagreb 1975, p. 227–229; Д.Е. АЛИМОВ, *Этногенез хорватов. Формирование хорватской этнополитической общности в VII–IX вв.*, Санкт-Петербург 2016, p. 204; S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Srbi u srednjem veku*, Beograd 1998, p. 16.

¹⁰ It is surprising how little attention this text has been given by gender history researchers: L. GARLAND, *Byzantine Empresses. Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204*, London–New York 1999; J. HERRIN, *Unrivalled Influence. Women and Empire in Byzantium*, Princeton 2013.

¹¹ GENESIOS, IV, 7; SKYLITZES, III, 7; ZONARAS, p. 387.5–10.

¹² THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 13; SKYLITZES, III, 7; ZONARAS, p. 387.5–10.

¹³ Probably Theodora's advisors also considered the regional ambitions of the young Khan Boris.

¹⁴ For instance, *Excerpta De Sententiis*, [in:] *Excerpta Historica Iussu Imp. Constantini Porphyrogeniti Confecta*, vol. IV, Berlin 1906 (repr. 1985), p. 198.5.

restrained his ambitions (μηδὲν τολμήσας νεανιεύεσθαι), and renewed a truce (τὰς ἀνενέου σπονδάς) as a sign of reciprocated (future?) affection (τῆς ἀγάπης αὐθις)¹⁵. No evidence suggests that a final peace treaty was signed then. However, the Bulgars' movement was suspended, and negotiations between Theodora and Boris advanced into a more substantive phase.

Although Theodora's proposal seems unconventional, it is well-documented that imperial diplomacy sometimes resorted to proposing dynastic marriages when facing severe external threats¹⁶. The details of the possible marriage could have been negotiated over extended periods, allowing the Byzantine government ample time to devise a solution¹⁷. Indeed, the previous history of Bulgar-Byzantine relations already included a similar case¹⁸. In this context, it remains uncertain whether Theodora and her favorite, Logothetes Theoktistos, genuinely aimed to formalize a dynastic union or were merely buying time, nudging Boris towards a military alliance. At any rate, Theodora's initial message constituted a diplomatic milestone, transforming the dynamics from military confrontations to diplomatic negotiations.

On the other hand, it should be noted that this diplomatic approach had its drawbacks. The idea of the dynastic marriage between Byzantine and non-Byzantine rulers was generally unpopular among high officials, who feared their positions at the imperial court might be jeopardized. This concern led the Constantinopolitan nobles to resist such negotiations actively, occasionally resulting in conspiracies¹⁹. Furthermore, even the mere suggestion of a dynastic marriage could inspire political ambitions in barbarian rulers, potentially compromising the Empire's border security. In this instance, despite the extensive experience of Bulgarian diplomats in dealings with their Byzantine counterparts, the ultimate allure of such an arrangement was so compelling that Boris continued to pursue the negotiations.

Thus, mutual distrust and confidentiality were significant challenges for both parties in these negotiations. The details of their subsequent interactions vividly

¹⁵ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 13. The translation of this phrase as "and renewed once again the treaties of friendship" does not seem precise, as the expression "renewed again" seems like either a stylistic or historical inaccuracy.

¹⁶ К. Бардола, *Этапы переговоров о династическом союзе в практике византийской дипломатии*, ВХНУ.І 53, 2017, p. 17–25.

¹⁷ Empress Irene (780–803) initiated comparable diplomatic talks with Charlemagne: THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, AM 6294–6295, rec. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883 (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 478–479.

¹⁸ For instance, the relationship between Emperor Justinian II and Khan Tervel: *Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani breviarium historicum*, 42, 60, ed. C. MANGO, Washington 1990 [= *CFHB*, 13]; THEOPHANES, p. 374.2.

¹⁹ For example, the diplomatic talks with Charlemagne caused the conspiracy against Empress Irene I: THEOPHANES, p. 478–479.

demonstrate the capability of Byzantine diplomacy to address such complex issues. According to the central part of the narrative, the monk Kupharas and Boris's enigmatic "sister" played crucial roles in navigating the diplomatic challenges²⁰.

The Narrative 1. Part 2. The mission of Monk Kupharas and Boris's "sister"

According to Theophanes Continuatus, Empress Theodora initiated a widespread search for a certain Monk Kupharas for reasons unknown. Fortunately, the monk was found in captivity with Khan Boris and managed to introduce him to essential Christian sacraments. Simultaneously, by a fortunate coincidence, an unknown sister of Boris had acquired significant knowledge of Christian liturgy while in captivity with the Byzantine Emperor. A diplomatic exchange occurred through mutual initiative, after which the process of preparing Boris for baptism intensified significantly²¹.

The story does not appear solid, raising doubts not only among researchers but also among Byzantine chroniclers. It contains too many unbelievable coincidences. First, Theodora's sudden urge to find Monk Kupharas by any means seems inexplicable. Moreover, the subsequent "prisoner exchange" appears so unequal that even later compilers felt compelled to provide clarification. They offered additional comments about the nobility and value of Kupharas²².

Even more questions arise when trying to identify Boris's sister. The likelihood that the text refers to Boris's real sister is slim²³. Of course, it is conceivable that some real sister of the Bulgar Khan had previously been captured, which remained unnoticed by sources. It also might be suggested that she was neither ransomed nor exchanged by Khan Presian and spent a long time at the imperial court. While it is doubtful, it is still possible that the captive Bulgarian "princess" received an education remarkable, even by Byzantine standards, sufficient to understand the details of the Orthodox liturgy. However, what seems utterly improbable is that, after describing such an extraordinary woman's characteristics and her successful mission in Pliska, both Byzantine and Bulgarian authors failed to mention her name, even indirectly. The chroniclers made every effort to name other participants in the negotiations. Theophanes Continuatus deliberately mentions the name and nickname of the unknown monk, Theodore Koupharas, but does not

²⁰ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 14.

²¹ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 14.

²² ἡ μὲν περὶ τινος Θεοδώρου τὸ ἐπὶ κλην Κουφαρᾶ, ἀξιολόγου τινὸς ἀνδρὸς καὶ χρησίμου τῷ πολιτεύματι...; SKYLITZES, III, 7; ἄνδρα τῶν λογίων Θεόδωρον τὸν Κουφαρᾶν... ZONARAS, p. 387.5–10.

²³ Regrettably, researchers have uncritically accepted this account from Theophanes Continuatus, assuming it possesses a legendary character. Nevertheless, the "Boris's sister" narrative has become part of the prevailing conception of Bulgaria's Christianization. See J. SHEPARD, *Slavs and Bulgars*, [in:] *The New Cambridge Medieval History, c. 700–c. 900*, ed. R. McKITTERICK, Cambridge 1995, p. 240.

speculate about the name of Boris's sister. Researchers know nothing more about Boris's "sister"; the sources provide no information about her name, age, or subsequent life.

The simplest explanation for Boris's sister's appearance in the narrative is that Theoktistos's department deliberately fabricated this version to obscure the true nature of the negotiations. Their specifics could have required exchanging trusted individuals to make secret communication between Boris and Theodora more convenient and practical. To avoid arousing the Emperor's suspicion, Theoktistos might have devised a scheme involving a fake prisoner trading, designating one of the exchanged individuals as Boris's "sister"²⁴. On the other hand, Theoktistos had total control over the diplomatic service and could easily ensure confidentiality. Therefore, such a complex exchange scheme would have been unnecessary.

The mention of Boris's sister in the story may have a different explanation related to the specifics of the historical narrative. The multi-layered narrative structure has evolved over centuries. The story's core may originate from an unknown primary source whose author was either indirectly familiar with the correspondence or had access to some excerpts. It is also plausible that the primary account was derived from the memories of those directly involved. This would explain the presence of characteristic introductory phrases like "he wrote to the Empress" (γράφει δὴ πρὸς τὴν δέσποιναν) and "she informed him" (αὐτῷ κατεμήνυνεν), which precede either a quotation or detailed information within the text. Later, Byzantine chroniclers reported this story, supplementing the narrative with extensive notes and amendments, sometimes significantly altering its original meaning.

Moreover, since the source addresses Boris's conversion to Christianity, many terms and expressions in the text might originally have had liturgical meanings, which significantly broadens the range of possible interpretations. For example, in the current interpretation, the captivities of Monk Kupharas and Boris's "sister" along with their subsequent exchange, have determined the translation of many ambiguous phrases and sentences. However, there is ample reason to believe the "captivity" storyline was developed later, and many terms initially had other senses.

First, Theophanes Continuatus reports that Empress Theodora searched for the monk everywhere, implying that she was unaware that Kupharas had been captured and detained by Boris²⁵. Therefore, the chronicler's comment that he does not know the Empress's reason for the intensive searches seems consistent. However, after that, the author reports that Kupharas had been in captivity for a long time, indicating that the monk's location was well-known and suggesting a possible reason for his search. One of these statements appears superfluous. The discrepancy between the two comments was evident to Scylitzes and Zonaras and probably

²⁴ The author used to support this opinion earlier. K. BARDOLA, *The Birth of the Myth About the Byzantine-Bulgarian War of 863*, SCer 13, 2023, p. 191–214.

²⁵ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 14.

prompted them to omit the first²⁶. Besides, two explanations for Theodora's actions in the text, with the first being nonessential, suggest that the second "captivity" comment was added later. In this case, it can be speculated that the term "captivity" could have been used with a liturgical meaning and later transformed into the current text version. The expression "redemption (repurchase) from captivity" (ἀμαρτιῶν ἀπολύτρωσιν) was a famous metaphor for the conversion process, which was actively used during preparatory prayer procedures²⁷.

For the sake of narrative completeness, the comment about the captivity of Kupharas was likely supplemented with two remarks about the captivity of Boris's sister, which also appear to be later additions due to their similar form and repetitive nature²⁸. It is unclear whether all these "corrections" were added with a specific purpose or if the author was trying to give a simple explanation for a complex-to-understand text. As a result, the narrative underwent a complete shift in meaning through the simple yet effective technique akin to a naive, childish game, in which the multiple added exact phrases change the statement sense. In this way, the myth about exchanging "missionary Theodore Koupharas" for the Bulgarian Khan's sister appeared.

The simplest way to test this hypothesis is to exclude the apparent comments of later authors from the interpretation and attempt to reconstruct the original text's meaning in this way.

So, according to the account, Theodora inquired everyone and everywhere (δὴ ζήτησιν τινα καὶ πολλὴν ἔρευναν) about a monk named Theodore with the nickname Koupharas. Then she sent him to build a relationship with the Bulgarian ruler Boris (ἡ Θεοδώρα πρὸς τὸν ἄρχοντα Βουλγαρίας ἐποίει) assessing his (Boris) merit and piety according to the instructions (rules, Scripture) (αὐτὸν ἡξίου διὰ γραμμάτων ἀνερευνῆσαι καὶ τιμῆς ὅσης)²⁹. She also wished to find out if he

²⁶ SKYLITZES, III, 7; ZONARAS, p. 387.5–10.

²⁷ See: Tit 2: 14; ἀμαρτιῶν ἀπολύτρωσιν: 62nd Canon; or τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπολυτρώσεως: 82nd Canon, *Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2 in Trullo habitum (Concilium Quinisextum)*, ed. H. OHME, Berlin–Boston 2013 [= ACO, 3.4] (cetera: *Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2*); In the prayer during the «catechumenate» of pagans. For instance, see: τοῦ Χριστοῦ σου υπάρχοντα ὄν **ἐλυτρώσω τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας** των ἀθεων ἐχθρων; or **ὡς αἰχμάλωτοι** στήκετε οὕτω γάρ υμᾶς ὁ Χριστός αγοράζει: M. АРРАНИ, *Таинства Византийского Евхология*, [in:] IDEM, *Избранные сочинения по литургике*, vol. I, Москва 2003, p. 269, 305; σύ γάρ εἶ (2); **μόνος λυτρωτής** τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν, IDEM, *Евхология Константинополя в начале XI века*, [in:] IDEM, *Избранные сочинения по литургике*, vol. III, Москва 2003, p. 294, 516, 542, 566, 579.

²⁸ ...πρὸ πολλοῦ αἰχμαλωτισθέντος, ...**μὲν αἰχμαλωτισθείσης ποτέ**, ...**τὸν τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας παιδευθεῖσα καιρόν**: THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 14.

²⁹ "ὅσος" is a term often used in the context of the catechumenate, such as in the final part (*dismissio*) of catechumens. For instance, see Οσοι κατηχοῦμε<νοι> προέλθετε: M. АРРАНИ, *Таинства Византийского Евхология*..., p. 198; διὰ γραμμάτων – following the Scripture (instructions). For instance, see, ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης οὐ **γράμματος** ἀλλὰ πνεύματος τὸ γὰρ **γράμμα** ἀπο-

(Boris) would want to redeem himself (his soul?) [from captivity τῆς αιχμαλωσίας?]³⁰ for her sake (καὶ βούλοιτο ἀπολυτρώσασθαι τοῦτον αὐτῇ). And he was found worthy... (ἡξίου δὲ καὶ οὗτος)³¹.

Such a version of the text interpretation follows the general logic of the negotiations between Theodora and Boris, the final objective of which is the conclusion of a dynastic marriage. Of course, establishing such a marriage was only possible if the main obstacle had been eliminated. The Orthodox Church recognized marriage as legitimate if it was only between Christians, meaning the Khan would have had to convert to Christianity. However, the sudden conversion might have been too risky for Boris, considering the preceding anti-Christian campaign in Bulgaria. In this case, the Khan's belief shift could have caused significant dissatisfaction among the conservative Bulgarian nobles. To pacify the local aristocracy, Boris needed to offer substantial incentives, such as land grants or incorporation into the upper layers of the Byzantine elite. Since this could have only happened after the marriage procedure was completed, the secrecy and the action sequence were paramount for the Bulgars' ruler. Besides, Theodora also had compelling reasons to exercise caution in the negotiations. Her legitimacy among the imperial bureaucracy relentlessly diminished as her son Michael matured. It pushed the Empress and her trusted advisor, the Logothetes Theoktistos, to seek allies to support them both on the military front and in the corridors of the Constantinople court. Khan Boris was able to provide similar support. However, there was a high probability that such diplomatic talks could potentially alienate various factions within the imperial army and civil officials. It looks like, to address the mutual mistrust, Theoktistos devised a "roadmap" consisting of step-by-step actions designed to pave the way for the dynastic marriage as a part of the ultimate political agreement.

The success of the diplomatic operation was based on the specific features of Christian practices surrounding baptism and matrimony, both of which entail phased procedures.

So, the 72nd Canon of the Quinisext (Trullan) Ecumenical Council (691/692) permitted a Christian to marry a pagan, provided the latter vowed to be baptized shortly³². In public space, such an intent could be formalized through the "instructing" or "catechumenate", the official preparatory procedure before final baptizing. The 95th Canon of the Quinisext Council set forth three stages for the pagans' baptizing procedure: *And on the first day we make them Christians, on the second*

κτέννει τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζῳοποιεῖ: Cor 3: 6. Also see: **γραμματεῖον** in the Catechesis of the Byzantine Euchologion: *ИДЕМ, Таинства Византийского Евхология...*, p. 304.

³⁰ The "captivity" (τῆς αιχμαλωσίας) probably was relocated to the later comment.

³¹ Ἄξιον ἐστὶ ("It is Worthy" or "Deserving") is an important phrase in Byzantine liturgical practice, used at the beginning of hymns or prayers. See, for instance, Εἶτα τελουμένων πάντων των ἐπὶ τῷ βαπτίσματι νενομισμενων <ἀξιοῦνται τη> *ibidem*, p. 247, 252.

³² 72nd Canon, *Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2*.

*Catechumens, then on the third day we exorcise them, at the same time also breathing thrice upon their faces and ears; and thus, we initiate them, and we make them spend time in church and hear the Scriptures; and then we baptize them*³³. It should be noted that the “day” in this context has no chronological but symbolic meaning and might span years until the candidate was prepared entirely. Therefore, Boris, yet to be baptized, could technically be regarded as a Christian-in-waiting, eligible to commence the legal marital process, starting with the betrothal procedure. In this case, the final “roadmap” stop for the Bulgarian-Byzantine diplomatic deal might have been projected to be Boris’s baptism and subsequent wedding coronation with Theodora in Constantinople. An additional clause, such as Boris eventually ascending to the vacant position of Caesar, may have also been part of the secret talks.

Theodora and Theoktistos needed trustworthy and qualified individuals to implement such a complex plan. So, the extensive search for Monk Koupharas can be explained by the need to send the envoy, who was confident and familiar with liturgy and the local language. Theoktistos’s embassy journey to the Bulgarian border, as depicted in the Life of St. Evaristus, might have had one of the tasks of finding Koupharas. The Life notes that Evaristus was looking for monks familiar with the Bulgarian dialect; then he met them, and they subsequently spent six months engaged in various “divinely inspired” activities³⁴.

As Theophanes Continuatus informed, Koupharas successfully minimal educated and “introduced” Boris to the Mysteries (μικρά τινα παιδευθεὶς καὶ τῶν μυστηρίων κατηχηθεὶς)³⁵. Overall, the monk’s activity corresponded to the first stage of the catechumenate procedure. This phase, occasionally termed the “first day”, was also known as the “pre-catechumenate”. The pre-catechumenate signified testing the candidate’s genuine interest in Christian basic principles, his commitment to rejecting misconceptions from prior beliefs, and an evaluative interview to determine readiness for conversion. In line with this, the narrative’s account suggests that Koupharas approached Boris to measure his “piety and worthiness” by specific standards (guidelines? Scripture?), and his aspiration for ultimate “redemption” matches the intentions of such a process.

In the same way, we can try to reconstruct the primary text dedicated to Boris’s “sister” activity.

So, perhaps the successful completion of the first phase served as a basis (reason) (ἀφορμὴν ἐκ τούτου λαβὼν) for getting a personal (older?) sister (περὶ οἰκείας

³³ 95th Canon, *Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2*: καὶ τὴν πρώτην ἡμέραν ποιοῦμεν αὐτοὺς Χριστιανούς· τὴν δὲ δευτέραν, **κατηχομένους**· εἶτα τὴν τρίτην, ἐξορκίζομεν μετὰ τοῦ ἐμφυσᾶν τριτον εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον, καὶ εἰς τὰ ὦτα, καὶ οὕτω κατηχοῦμεν αὐτοὺς, καὶ ποιοῦμεν χρονίζειν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ ἀκροᾶσθαι τῶν Γραφῶν, καὶ τότε αὐτοὺς βαπτίζομεν.

³⁴ *La vie de S. Évariste higoumene à Constantinople*, ed. Ch. VAN DE VORST, AB 41, 1923, p. 301; GIBI, IV, p. 315.

³⁵ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 14.

αὐτοῦ πρεσβεύειν ἀδελφῆς) from the Romans (for preaching or teaching?) who was instructed (being kept) under the Emperor's court. The phrase "περὶ οἰκειίας αὐτοῦ πρεσβεύειν ἀδελφῆς" is ambiguous because the verb πρεσβεύειν has several possible meanings, each of which is appropriate in this context. Whether it meant "negotiate", "preach", "teach", or "act as an elder", the verb denoted the definite task of the "sister's" arrival. Therefore, it conflicts with the logic of a simple prisoner exchange³⁶.

Then Theophanes Continuatus reported that the "sister" was instructed (catechized or kept?) at the Emperor's court (κατεχο[υ?]μένης δὲ νῦν ἐν τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως αὐλῇ)³⁷. Indeed, she was safely delivered as a sign of trust (to settle the faith?) (αὕτη δὴ οὖν πρὸς τὴν πίστιν καλῶς μετενεχθεῖσα). After that, following the guidelines (Scripture?) (καὶ γράμματα κατὰ), and in accordance the Christian order (taxis), both in worship and in glorification of God (τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν τάξιν τε καὶ περὶ τὸ θεῖον αἰδῶ τε καὶ δόξαν), with exceptional admiration (θαυμάζουσα διαφερόντως), she successfully concluded the spiritual rebirth procedure for the "brother" (τῆς ἐπανάδου τῆς πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν τετύχηκεν)³⁸, sowing the seeds of faith in God (σπέρματα καταβάλλουσα τῆς πίστεως πρὸς αὐτόν), without gap between the praising and the supplicating (οὐ διέλιπεν ἐκθειάζουσά τε καὶ παρακαλοῦσα)³⁹.

With that in mind and considering the diplomatic goals set by Empress Theodora and the characteristic features of the narrative, it can be presumed that the term "sister" was also used with a religious, liturgical meaning. Therefore, Theodora's emissary might have been a female person who had the task of preparing the "brother" Boris for the second part of the catechumenate⁴⁰. It is known that within the Orthodox church hierarchy, women could perform a limited range

³⁶ For instance, see καὶ δὴ καὶ πρεσβεύειν ἢ καὶ ἐτέρους διδάσκειν ἐπιχειρεῖν: CYRILLUS ALEXANDRINUS, *Commentarii in Joannem*, 1, [in:] *Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini*, ed. A.Ph.E. PUSEY, Oxford 1872 (repr. 1965), p. 87.6; Ἔργον γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐστίν, ἅγιοι, πρεσβεύειν ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτωλῶν: EPHRAEM SYRUS, *Reprehensio sui ipsius et Confessio* (Ὁσίου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα), 1, ed. K. PHRANTZOLES, Thessalonica 1988 (repr. 1995), p. 353.6: Το περιβόλι της Παναγίας.

³⁷ Κατεχομένης = (κατεχο[υ]μένης)? For instance, see καὶ γινώσκεις τὸ θέλημα καὶ δοκιμάζεις τὰ διαφέροντα κατηχούμενος ἐκ τοῦ νόμου: Rom 2: 18.

³⁸ "ἐπάνοδος" is the term that Plato once used to denote the process of spiritual rebirth, and subsequently, it has often been employed when describing the baptism procedure. For instance, see: EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 13.13.63, *Eusebii Caesariensis Opera*, vol. I–II, Leipzig 1867; καὶ τοὺς μηδέποτε χαροποιθέντας ἀγγέλους ἐπὶ σοὶ νῦν διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὸν δεσπότην ἐπανάδου χαροποίησον· εὐφροσύνην ποιήσον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ: IOANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS, *Oratio de Hysparante*, ed. E. BICKERSTETH, OCP 32, 1966, CPG 4756, BHG 1972–1972b, p. 72. 9.

³⁹ "Παρακαλέω" is a verb often used in the orthodox "supplicatory" prayers and litanies, which some liturgical procedures (including betrothal) began with. For instance, see M. АРРАНЦ, *Таинства Византийского Евхология...*, p. 190.

⁴⁰ According to Orthodox Canons, deaconesses were allowed to teach and preach privately, i.e., personally. For instance, see С. Троицкий, *Диакониссы в Православной Церкви*, Санкт-Петербург 1912.

of duties as “widows” or presbyterids (older sisters) and later known as deaconesses (ἡ διάκονος)⁴¹. Besides other auxiliary functions, they were responsible for women’s baptism preparations, specifically for the Christian doctrine teaching (catechesis)⁴². For that reason, deaconesses must have had a certain level of liturgical education to handle such duties. Although their typical students were women, deaconesses were sometimes allowed to prepare men for baptism⁴³. The “sister” sent to Boris possessed all the necessary competencies and probably was instructed at the Basileus court⁴⁴.

Theodora’s decision to choose a deaconess instead of a deacon or priest could have been driven by several reasons. Firstly, it is highly probable that the female envoy was a trusted associate of the Empress, possibly serving as a private spiritual guide and assistant. Secondly, according to Church canons, women’s access to administering sacraments was significantly limited; they were allowed only to prepare candidates and assist priests. Such limitations might have aligned with Theoktistos’s plans and ensured that Boris could not bypass stages of the negotiation process, which the Byzantine government meticulously controlled. The final step of Boris’s conversion and a potential coronation ceremony was intended to conclude the military-political agreement between the Bulgars and the Byzantines, not precede it.

One way or another, the “sister” accomplished her task, and “brother” Boris underwent the Christian “catechumenate” procedure, or at least a significant part

⁴¹ One of the possible interpretations of the phrase “πρεσβεύειν ἀδελφῆς” could be “to act as an elder sister”, which can indirectly refer to the spiritual rank of a female envoy or emissary. 12th Canon of the Council of Carthage in 398 A.D. refers to these presbyteresses as “viduae vel sanctimoniales” (widows or consecrated women) and states: *eliguntur ad ministerium baptizandarum mulierum, tam instructae sint ad officium, ul possint apto otsano sermone docere imperitas et rusticas mulieres, tempore, quo baptizandae sunt, qualiter baptizatori interrogatae respondeant et qualiter accepto baptismo vivant*: 12th Canon, [in:] *Documenta iuris canonici veteris, Saeculo V, PL*, vol. LVI, ed. J.-P. MIGNE, Paris 1846.

⁴² 72nd Canon, *Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2*; 40th Canon of the Quinisext Council (also known as the Trullan Council) states that women were ordained as deaconesses after the age of 40 and after a certain examination) οἱ δὲ ἱεροὶ κανόνες, τεσσαράκοντα ἐτῶν τὴν διακόνισσαν χειροτονεῖσθαι παραδεδώκασι, τὴν ἐκκλησίαν χάριτι θεῖα κραταιοτέραν γινομένην, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσω βαίνουσιν ἑωρακότες, καὶ τὸ τῶν πιστῶν πρὸς τὴν τῶν θείων ἐντολῶν τήρησιν πάγιόν τε καὶ ἀσφαλές: 40th Canon, *Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2*.

⁴³ THEODORET OF KYROS, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 10, [in:] *NPFC*, Second Series, vol. III, ed. Ph. SCHAFF, H. WACE, New York 1892.

⁴⁴ The verbs κατηγέω and κατέχω are close in sound and spelling, and errors or corrections were quite possible. See, for instance: Ἡ κατεχομένη γυνή, φησὶν: Μ. ΑΡΡΑΝΙ, *Таинства Византийско-го Евхология...*, p. 230. Although the general meaning of the text does not change radically in both cases, we believe that the liturgical meaning of “instructed” is more appropriate. That is, the phrase “she was held at the court of the basileus” (κατεχομένης δὲ νῦν ἐν τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως αὐλῇ) probably initially sounded like “she was instructed at the court of the basileus” (κατηχομένης δὲ νῦν ἐν τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως αὐλῇ).

of it. Afterward, the Khan sent the "sister" home (ὁ δὲ τοῦτο(ν) μὲν ἀποστείλας τὴν οἰκείαν), and for this she received reward (ἐλάμβανε μισθὸν), or it happened in reverse order. It is unclear if Boris completed the "renunciation" procedure and "union with Christ". However, according to Theophanes Continuatus, he remained "as before, engulfed in disbelief, worshiping his gods"⁴⁵.

As we can see, it is unlikely that any prisoner exchange operation took place. After completing her tasks, the "sister" probably was returned to the Empire. As for the monk Kupharas, he likely remained at Boris's court. It can be assumed that his career ended dramatically after Boris severed ties with the Byzantine government. He could be the individual Boris referred to in his message to Pope Nicholas I, describing him as "a deceitful Greek" who baptized people without being a priest (*Graecus mentiens fateretur se presbyterum esse, cum non esset*). Subsequently, he was deprived of his ears and nose and exiled after being beaten⁴⁶.

The mention that the "sister" did not pause between the glorification and the supplication might also mean that apart from Boris's catechumenate procedure, the deaconess performed some betrothal worship, which, according to the Euchologion of Constantinople, began with a litany⁴⁷. However, without additional proof, this can only be considered an assumption. In this case, the third part of the narrative could be regarded as evidence that a betrothal agreement was indeed carried out.

The Narrative 1. Part 3. The final phase of the negotiations

The ambiguous interpretations, multiple comments, and interpolations were not the only factors that added complexity to the narrative. In addition, the story about the correspondence between Theodora and Boris was intricately woven into a unified text with other legends associated with the conversion of the Bulgarian Khan⁴⁸. Theophanes Continuatus sacrificed chronological and logical sequence to integrate all the legends he knew into a single narrative, returning to the negotiation story after this brief deviation⁴⁹.

In the last part of the narrative, the chronicler reports that after turning to divine piety (ἐπεὶ γοῦν μετετέθη πρὸς θεοσεβείαν), Boris wrote to Theodora about

⁴⁵ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 14.

⁴⁶ NICOLAI I ΠΑΡΑΕ, *Epistolae*, 14, ed. E. PERELS, [in:] *MGH.Ep.*, vol. VI, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, vol. IV, Berlin 1902–1925 (repr. Munich 1978) (cetera: *Responsa*).

⁴⁷ М. АРРАНЦ, *Введение в Таинства Византийской традиции*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Избранные сочинения по литургике*, vol. V, Москва 2006, p. 294.

⁴⁸ The connective phrase τὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοδώρου μὲν πολλάκις καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ ἀδελφῆς Θαυμαζόμενo τε καὶ σεβόμενον was composed of words from the previous excerpt: περὶ τὸ θεῖον αἰδῶ τε καὶ δόξαν, ὡς ἔστι, θαυμάζουσα διαφερόντως, ἐπεὶ τῆς ἐπ' αὐτῇ τῆς πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν τετύχηκεν.

⁴⁹ Since these stories are different in genre, style, and chronology, they were created independently and should be considered separately.

the land⁵⁰. It is essential to point out that the author still avoids mentioning the term “baptism” (βάπτισμα) in this storyline⁵¹. Therefore, the discourse pertains to the period preceding the final conversion of the young Khan. After that, Theophanes Continuatus added a typical explanatory comment about the cause of such a request, stating that Boris was “oppressed by people”, which was merely a figure of speech. The chronicler then introduces another quote from the correspondence, which should be considered in the context of the previous stages of negotiations. Boris’s statement that *from now on, they are not two but one, inseparably bound in love and faith* (ὡς ἤδη ἓν ἀλλ’ οὐ δύο ὄντων αὐτῶν, πίστει τε καὶ φιλίας συνδεθέντων τῇ ἀρραγεί) looks like direct evidence that the marital process had commenced, at least in the form of betrothal. This quote almost entirely reflects the Christian Church’s vision of the spousal bond between a man and a woman, as documented in canonical and legal sources⁵². But more importantly, similar expressions were used in prayers during the Christian betrothal and pledge ceremonies⁵³. In this context, the interpretation of the expression “ἐαυτὸν ὑποθήσειν καθυπισχεῖτο” as meaning that Boris “promised to submit” to Theodora looks not correct. It would have opposed the request’s overall “bold” message’s tone⁵⁴. It is more appropriate to interpret this as “he gave a promise on his behalf to ensure, as a deposit” of the establishment of eternal and indissoluble peace (εἰρήνην ἐργάσασθαι αἰδιδόν τε καὶ ἀδιάπτωτον). This way, the land transfer from Theodora and Boris’s approval of the military-political alliance might have been considered by the negotiating parties to be mutual “pledge gifts” also associated with the marital process (ἀρραβῶν).

According to Theophanes Continuatus, Theodora kindly agreed to transfer the requested lands to the Bulgarian Khan⁵⁵. It indicates that the negotiations were nearly finished, and the treaty on a military-political alliance was ready to be

⁵⁰ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 15.

⁵¹ The term appeared in the “Methodius painting” legend, THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 16: νυκτῶν ἄωρι τοῦ θείου μεταλαγχάνει βαπτίσματος. On the other hand, the term “θεοσέβεια” entirely aptly fits Boris’s status as “catechumen”.

⁵² For instance: “and the two will become one flesh” (καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν), Ef 5: 31; Γάμος ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς συνάφεια καὶ συγκληρωσις πάσης ζωῆς, θείου τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνου δικαίου **κοινωνία**: Πανδέκται, 23, 2. Νομ. I. 2 (*Nuptiae sunt conjunctio maris et feminae et consortium omnis vitae, divini et humani juris communicatio*, Dig., 23.2); Theodore the Studite on a marriage union: πῶς τὸ μὲν ἓν μετέξει τῆς **κοινωνίας**, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον οὐ; ἐπεὶ περ ἓν ἐπιτιμίαις; εἴ γε καὶ εἴη τοῦτο ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἀνὴρ κεφαλὴ γυναικὸς καὶ εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἄμφω τὰ συνελθόντα· μεταλήψεται τὸ λοιπὸν σῶμα, ἡ κεφαλὴ δὲ οὐ: THEODORE THE STUDITE, *Epistulae*, (1) Ep. 22, ed. G. FATOUROS, Berlin 1992 [= CFHB, 31].

⁵³ “...στήριζον τον αρραβώνα αυτών ἐν πιστει και αγαπη...”; “...σύνδεσμον διαθέσεως(I) τιθεὶς ἀρρηκτον...”; “...και ζευξας αὐτούς εἰς κοινωνίαν...”: Μ. АРРАНИЦ, *Таинство Византийского Евхология...*, p. 556–559.

⁵⁴ M. HURBANIČ, *The Byzantine Missionary Concept and its Revitalisation in the 9th Century*, Bsl 63.1, 2005, p. 110.

⁵⁵ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 15.

signed. Of course, the chronicler could not leave Theodora's "gift" without a "post-factum" remark. He noted that the territories were depopulated and frontier territories, trying, in this way, to reduce the wrong impression of this action. Moreover, in his opinion, after the land transfer, "all of Bulgaria" was converted to Christianity because Boris urged his subjects to acknowledge God (θεοῦ πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν μετακαλεσαμένου γνώσιν αὐτούς). Then, the narrative was finalized by the conclusion that all happened due to "minor sparks and «guts»" (blowings) after the Roman land transfer (καὶ οὕτω γῆς τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων) and other given pledges (ὡς ἄλλης τινὸς ἐπαγγελίας ἀξιοθέντες) about the unbroken unity (fellowship) (πρὸς κοινωνίαν ἄρρηκτον), which they had committed to each other about (καθυπέβαλον ἑαυτούς)⁵⁶. The text in this part of the account contains phrases commonly used during betrothal prayers. One cannot help but assume that at least Boris believed the dynastic uniting process would soon be completed.

Undoubtedly, the agreements between Boris and Theodora placed subsequent emperors in a very delicate position and significantly complicated the imperial diplomacy activity. The Byzantine side likely began to dispute the validity of the marriage fact even during Boris's lifetime. Byzantine officials asserted that the final marriage could only be considered valid after the wedding coronation procedure. Not coincidentally, ten years later, Boris decided to clarify this issue with Pope Nicholas I, who responded quite plainly. The Pope confirmed that mutual consent was sufficient for Christian marriage and that there was no need "to wear a band made of gold, silver, or any other metal on the head", as the "Greeks" claimed⁵⁷. However, the Byzantine emperors were advancing their agenda. Under Leo VI the Wise (866–912), the wedding coronation had already become mandatory for concluding a marriage between reigning individuals⁵⁸. Moreover, Constantine VII was compelled to issue the well-known passage about the impossibility of dynastic marriage between Byzantine emperors and foreigners⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 15.

⁵⁷ *Responsa*, 3.

⁵⁸ In general, the story of the "uncompleted" marriage between Boris and Theodora could have significantly stimulated the changes in the Byzantine official matrimonial procedure that occurred at the turn of the 9th to 10th centuries: A.E. LAIOU, "Consensus facit nuptias – et non": Pope Nicholas I's *Responsa* to the Bulgarians as a Source for Byzantine Marriage Customs, [in:] EADEM, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium*, London 1992, p. 189–201; Ph.L. REYNOLDS, *How Marriage Became One of the Sacraments: The Sacramental Theology of Marriage from its Medieval Origins to the Council of Trent*, Cambridge 2016, p. 27–28; J. MEYENDORFF, *Christian Marriage in Byzantium: The Canonical and Liturgical Tradition*, DOP 44, 1990, p. 106; M.L.D. RIEDEL, *Leo VI and the Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity. Writings of an Unexpected Emperor*, Cambridge 2018, p. 113–114. D.C. MOROLLI, *Leo VI (866–912) and Marriage Law: some Historical-juridical Hints*, SOC 24.2, 2020, p. 49–61.

⁵⁹ Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus also made several rather dubious claims concerning Bulgarian history CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, XIII, p. 74; XXXI, p. 147–149; XXXII.

The official statements by the authorities inevitably influenced the main contributors to Byzantine historiography. As a result, chroniclers adapted the passage in their own way. For instance, the author of the Pseudo-Symeon chronicle moved the request and transfer of Byzantine lands to the period of Michael III's sole rule, thus significantly altering the narrative's meaning⁶⁰. Scylitzes explained that the desperate circumstances of his subjects drove Boris's plea for lands, and he promised not only to establish perpetual and irrevocable peace but also to unite the two nations without specifying how⁶¹. Zonaras omitted any mention of personal relations between Boris and Theodora, describing the transfer of Byzantine territories as part of a political agreement between the two governments. Consequently, he refrained from naming Theodora and Boris in the section dedicated to this event⁶². Indeed, it was a logical and common occurrence in Byzantine history for a barbarian ruler to seek peace with Byzantium and receive lands in return. However, in this case, the military-political union with the Byzantine government was part of a complex political deal between the two rulers. This agreement included a dynastic marriage, Boris's conversion, and likely other issues.

Other authors, such as Genesios and Symeon Logothete, chose to omit this narrative⁶³. They also removed all other mentions of allied interactions between the Bulgars and the Byzantines during that period⁶⁴. Furthermore, these two authors sequentially have developed versions of Boris's conversion that portrayed the Empire as a dominant political force⁶⁵.

⁶⁰ PSEUDO-SYMEONIS, *Chronographia*, praef., trans. et comm. G. CANKOVA-PETKOVA, Serdicae 1964 [= *FGHB*, 5], p. 169–182.

⁶¹ ὑπὸ σχυοῦμενος ἐνοποιῆσαι τὰ ἔθνη καὶ εἰρήνην ἐργάσασθαι αἰδιὸν τε καὶ ἀμετάβλητον: SKYLITZES, III, 7.

⁶² ZONARAS, p. 387.5–10.

⁶³ There is a long and intricate history of evaluation of the chronicles of Theophanes Continuatus and Genesios as historical sources. В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава...*, p. 2–3; P. KARLIN-HAYTER, *Études sur les deux histoires du règne de Michel III*, B 41, 1971, p. 452–496; А.П. КАЖДАН, *История византийской литературы (850–1000 гг.)*, Санкт-Петербург 2012; J.N. LJUBARSKIJ, *Theophanes Continuatus und Genesios. Das Problem einer gemeinsamen Quelle*, Bsl 48, 1987, p. 12–27; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, New York 2013, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Genesios and Symeon Logothetes omitted information about the Bulgars' role in the Byzantine victories over the Arabs in 862–863. Besides, Genesios changed the legend about the future emperor Basil's wrestling with a Bulgar opponent. In contrast to Theophanes Continuatus, who referred to the Bulgar guests in this legend as "allies" (friends), Genesios did not mention the ethnic identity of the wrestlers, only retaining the Slavic term for the wrestling move, "podrezan" (πόδρεζαν): GENESIOS, IV, 26; Symeon Logothetes did not use the "wrestling" story.

⁶⁵ Thus, Genesios preceded the story of Theodora's response with an extra commentary that the Bulgars did not initially possess local lands but had got them as voluntarily granted by the Byzantines: GENESIOS, IV, 7; Besides, he stated that the victory of Roman arms over the Arabs impacted Boris so much that he decided to embrace Christianity: GENESIOS, IV, 16; In his turn, Symeon Logothetes contrived a legend about a Byzantine invasion of Bulgaria in 863 that forced Boris to embrace Christianity: SYMEON LOGOTHESES, p. 238.15.

In this context, it is hard to overstate the significance of the information provided by Theophanes Continuatus. Despite numerous commentaries, corrections, and overlaps with other stories, the extended narrative version allows us to suggest how the primary source text might have looked. The specific details of the narrative indicate that the primary source could have been based on diplomatic-liturgical instructions or memoir-like reports from direct participants, complete with detailed descriptions of the religious procedures performed. This raises the question of how these documents, intended for a very narrow audience, became broadly publicized and transformed into a well-known story. Examining another historical narrative related to the main actors in the negotiations may help answer this question. This story concerns the conspiracy and assassination of Logothetes Theoktistos, presumably the supervisor of the talks.

The Narrative 2. The death of Theoktistos

The conspiracy against Empress Theodora's closest associate, adviser, and former head of the regency council, Logothetes Theoktistos, was an extraordinary event, even by Byzantine standards. The assassination of arguably the most influential official of that period created significant ripples, as reflected in numerous chronicles. However, the authors drew from various sources, resulting in noticeable variations in their accounts. With many unique and often contradictory details, researchers find it difficult to pinpoint the actual sequence of events. Nonetheless, within the scope of this research, the story of Theoktistos's death is intriguing for two key reasons. The first is the motivation of the co-conspirators, particularly Emperor Michael III. The second is the nature of the allegations against Theoktistos.

Bardas, Theodora's brother, was an avowed enemy of the Logothetes and undeniably played a central role in his accusation and assassination. Yet, he seemingly had lost favor at the imperial court and largely lacked his prior influence by the time of the conspiracy. Therefore, he did not have abilities to orchestrate the plot without Emperor Michael III's direct support. By this period, Theoktistos had almost complete executive authority in the Empire, exploiting the Empress's unwavering support. Given this, there must have been compelling reasons for the young and often vacillating Emperor to take such a drastic and, in some ways, desperate political move.

Some researchers believe Michael III was deeply harmed by Theodora and her adviser's pressure regarding his marriage, pushing him to back Bardas's scheme⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ J.B. BURY, *The Eastern Roman Empire (717–1453)*, [in:] *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. IV, ed. IDEM, J.R. TANNER, C.W. PREVITÉ-ORTON, Z.N. BROOKE, London 1923, p. 156; G. OSTROGORSKY, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, München 1963, p. 185–186. This peculiar version remains popular to this day. For instance, see W. TREADGOLD, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford 1997, p. 406; T.E. GREGORY, *A History of Byzantium*, Oxford–Carlton 2005, p. 211; A. KALDELLIS, *The New Roman Empire. A History of Byzantium*, Oxford 2023, p. 504.

Indeed, Theodora insisted that her son choose a bride to counteract the negative influence of his mistress, Eudokia Ingerina. Nonetheless, the probability that this pressure caused much discontent and thus became a decisive factor in Michael's decision appears unconvincing. No authors highlight the Emperor's evident discontent over this matter. Moreover, there was no reason for him to change the current situation. Despite his marriage with Eudokia Dekapolitissa, Michael maintained his relationship with Ingerina unchanged. Furthermore, he sustained his marriage ties with Eudokia even after Theoktistos's death and Theodora's exile, showing his apparent indifference to the issue⁶⁷.

Theophanes Continuatus offered another version of the Emperor's motivation, which Skylitzes and Zonaras repeated⁶⁸. He reported that Theoktistos supposedly hindered the career promotion of Michael's "domestic tutor". According to the text, the Logothetes of the Drome accompanied his refusal with the offensive remark that "only the worthy should govern the state"⁶⁹.

The "domestic tutor" legend was probably a result of a funny misunderstanding. The description of the "teacher" (παιδαγωγός) given by Theophanes Continuatus is close to that of Bardas in the Life of Patriarch Ignatius. Both are characterized as arrogant, cold-hearted, "far from noble manners", and intriguing against Theoktistos and Theodora⁷⁰. Niketas the Paphlagonian, the author of the Life of Patriarch Ignatius, named the Bardas' official position as a Domestikos of the Scholae (δομέστικος τῶν σχολῶν). It seems that Theophanes Continuatus used some lousy, probably Latinized, version of Bardas's description in which the term "Domestikos of the Scholae" was mistakenly transformed into the "home teacher" (*scholaris domesticus*)⁷¹.

Moreover, the sources have not preserved the name of the "tutor", and the idea of an adult and already married Michael III was still receiving an education does not align with his character and status. In this context, Theoktistos's critical remark about the "ruling abilities" was not related to Michael III but was directed personally against Bardas, Domestikos of the Scholae⁷². In this case, Bardas's claim could be associated with a high official post, Caesar's position. Of course, the eunuch's humiliating refusal must have deeply hurt the Emperor's uncle and pushed him into decisive action.

⁶⁷ C. MANGO, *Eudocia Ingerina, the Normans, and the Macedonian Dynasty*, 3PBI 14–15, 1973, p. 17–27.

⁶⁸ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 15; ZONARAS, p. 391.9–10; SKYLITZES, III, 9, 20.

⁶⁹ ἐπαξίως λέγων καὶ οὐκ ἀναξίως τὰ τῆς βασιλείας δεῖν διοικεῖν: THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 19.

⁷⁰ οὐκ ἀγαθός δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν πικρός καὶ ἀπάνθρωπος: *Nicetae Davidis Vita Ignatii Patriarchae* = NICETAS DAVID, *The Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, XVII–XIX, trans. A. SMITHIES, notes J.M. DUFFY, Washington 2013 [= CFHB, 51; DOT, 13]; ἀνάγωγός τε καὶ πόρρωθεν τρόπων τῶν εὐγενῶν: THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 19.

⁷¹ For instance, "Bardam scholarem domesticum": ANASTASIUS BIBLIOTHECARIUS, *Interpretatio Synodi VIII generalis*, [in:] PL, vol. CXXIX, ed. J.-P. MIGNE, Paris 1844, col. 10.

⁷² It is remarkable that Bardas later used a mirrored accusation against Theoktistos.

While Bardas's motivation seems clear, Michael III must have had more substantial and possibly life-essential causes for such a bold political step. His personal security concerns might have been the real reason for his action, especially given the information that his mother was negotiating a diplomatic marriage with Boris. Both chroniclers, Theophanes Continuatus and Genesios asserted that Bardas informed the Emperor about a potential marriage involving Theodora or one of her daughters and warned him about the possible consequences⁷³. The precedent of Emperor Constantine VI's dethroning by his mother, Empress Irene, was not from the too-distant past. That is why the information was enough to wake Michael's deep-seated fears and catalyze a conspiracy against Theoktistos. Echoes of Michael's concern even reached Arab historians. Al-Tabari, for instance, claims that the Logothetes (Theoktistos) was assassinated because the Emperor suspected his mother and considered him complicit⁷⁴. The conspiracy's meticulous preparation also proves that participation represented a significant political decision for Michael III. The failure would have posed a severe threat to the conspirators. The chronicle accounts are filled with diverse details that often confound researchers. However, there is enough information to describe the conspiracy in step-by-step detail.

It seems that Bardas, previously exiled from the Emperor's court, somehow received secret intelligence about the negotiations for the marriage between Boris and Theodora⁷⁵. After that, he asked Chamberlain Damian for an audience with the Emperor to share the new information⁷⁶. At the meeting, the young Michael III was imbued with Bardas's concerns, and they discussed two options for action: the covert assassination of Theoktistos or his exile⁷⁷. The Emperor was probably not entirely convinced by Bardas's words. He was hesitant about the covert assassination, which might have led to an unpredictable reaction from his supporting officials. As a result, they decided first to interrogate Theoktistos.

Almost all sources separate the subsequent events into two parts: the Emperor's meeting with Theoktistos at the Lausiakos and his assassination in the Skyla. The Lausiakos was not a perfect place for murder but a good one for official investigation procedures. Exactly this task determined the logic of Bardas's actions, which looked chaotic at first glance. Firstly, he called disgruntled civilian and military officials. Their reluctance to personally partake in physical violence over Theoktistos

⁷³ GENESIOS, IV, 9; THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV.19.

⁷⁴ AL-ṬABARĪ, *The History. Incipient Decline. The Caliphates of al-Wathiq, al-Mutawakkil, and al-Muntasir A.D. 841–863/A.H. 227–248*, New York 1989, p. 264.

⁷⁵ It could be suggested that the "source" was his sister Kalomaria, who was close to Theodora and later took part in the conspiracy against Theoktistos.

⁷⁶ Damian's involvement in the conspiracy seems logical, especially considering Bardas's prior dismissal from the court. However, this information is provided only by Symeon Logothetes: SYMEON LOGOTHETES, p. 236.2.

⁷⁷ ποιῆσαι δολοφονίαν τινὶ ἢ ὑπερορίαν, THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 22; δολοφονῆσαι ἢ μᾶλλον ὑπερορίσαι τοῦτον: GENESIOS, IV, 9.

proves that they agreed to be gathered only as witnesses or jury. Theodora's and Bardas' sister, Kalomaria, was also summoned, presumably to testify in the process of bringing charges against Theoktistos (τῷ Θεοκτίστῳ ἐπιτιθέμενον)⁷⁸. Furthermore, sources indicate that the conspirators deemed executing their plan at a specific moment essential. Theophanes Continuatus stated that they awaited Theoktistos after the management of governmental reports (ἐξέρχεσθαι μετὰ τὴν τῶν ἀναφορῶν διοίκησιν), and it was only afterward that the Emperor planned to detain him⁷⁹. According to Genesios, Bardas had to wait patiently until the Logothetes left Theodora's chambers⁸⁰. Another notable element was the involvement of a woman designated to signal the Emperor when the Logothetes appeared⁸¹. Nearly all chroniclers referencing the conspiracy against Theoktistos mentioned the "reports" (τῶν ἀναφορῶν διοίκησιν), which were probably to become a part of the allegations. Once the Logothetes completed his report to Theodora and left her chambers, the Emperor detained him with the support of Bardas and other officials. Then, Michael III compelled him to read these reports. Symeon the Logothetes recounted that Theoktistos read them with great reluctance and, after, "left in tears and with heavy sighs"⁸². The information from the reports seemed to provide sufficient evidence for severe accusations against Theodora's favorite⁸³. Genesios emphasized that Theoktistos was detained as the Logothetes of the Dromon, so the "unfortunate" reports probably had a diplomatic specificity⁸⁴. According to the nature of the indictment, the reports probably included details or updates on correspondence between Theodora and Boris. This version explains Theoktistos' evident despair and the unwavering determination of the conspirators. It also sheds light on how the classified information was leaked and became available to the chroniclers. Moreover, as the reports were voiced in front of the audience just once, witnesses memorized the most vivid parts, and their memoirs might have become the core of the narrative.

⁷⁸ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 22; GENESIOS, IV, 9. Theodora's elder sister, Kalomaria, played an uncertain role in these proceedings. After her husband's death, she had long committed herself to Church service, possibly becoming a deaconess. Given this, her direct involvement in the conspiracy and Theoktistos' assassination seems unlikely. However, it is plausible that she possessed pertinent information and could have testified covertly or through gestures during the accusations against Theoktistos. There is a temptation to suggest that Kalomaria might have been the "sister"–deaconess dispatched to Boris, though this remains a bold assertion without corroborative evidence from the sources.

⁷⁹ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 22.

⁸⁰ GENESIOS, IV, 9.

⁸¹ It is unlikely that this woman was Kalomaria. The chronicler notes that the signal was given by a "watching woman" τῇ σκοπῷ γυναῖκι, without naming her: GENESIOS, IV, 9. The Empress's sister would undoubtedly have been named.

⁸² SYMEON LOGOTHETES, p. 236.2.

⁸³ One should remember that Theodora granted imperial lands as a personal gift (pledge) to the Bulgarian khan. This was undeniable evidence of "unworthy" governance of the state.

⁸⁴ GENESIOS, IV, 9.

After the disclosure of this correspondence, Theoktistos's career was shattered, and he was soon killed in custody. As a result, the marriage negotiations were terminated, at least for some time. Theodora and even her daughters were sent to a monastery to eliminate the possibility of fulfillment of the marriage agreements⁸⁵. Nevertheless, despite the negotiation's failure, Boris did not wholly abandon his ambitions, and the details of the dynastic marriage were discussed several times in the following decades.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to analyze the narrative of the correspondence between Khan Boris and Empress Theodora, which was hypothetically based on a report of actual diplomatic negotiations. To explain two "legendary" elements of this story – specifically, Theodora's citation of the response from the Amazonian ruler Thalestris, as well as the diplomatic exchange of the monk Kupharas for Boris' "sister" – a reinterpretation of the passage from the Continuation of Theophanes was undertaken, along with an attempt to reconstruct the text of what is presumed to be the source of this narrative. Undoubtedly, such reinterpretation involves many speculations and requires critical discussion among specialists with diverse expertise.

Nevertheless, the other essential elements of the story go beyond a single narrative and resonate with evidence from different sources, allowing us to make more confident assumptions.

Firstly, the body of indirect evidence, as well as the specifics of the political situation, allow us to suggest a high likelihood of diplomatic negotiations between Khan Boris and Empress Theodora, with Logothete Theoktistos's active participation.

Secondly, there is a high probability that the negotiations' main agenda was the terms of concluding a long-term military-political alliance, which could be based on a dynastic marriage between Boris and Theodora. Furthermore, it can be assumed that certain agreements were reached, which allowed Boris to claim that a dynastic marriage had been formally concluded. This possibility offers a new perspective on the motivation behind Bulgarian Christianization's initial steps, although this hypothesis requires further study.

Thirdly, there are grounds to suggest that the negotiations regarding the dynastic marriage were the main reason for the conspiracy against Logothete Theoktistos and his subsequent assassination. As a result, the diplomatic operation was halted, although the topic of a dynastic marriage between the Bulgarian and Byzantine ruling courts was repeatedly discussed over several subsequent decades.

⁸⁵ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, IV, 22.

Furthermore, the new interpretation helps to explain the discrepancies in sources regarding the date of Boris's conversion. It also clarifies why Byzantine authors tried to omit many details of this complicated process.

Finally, the research could be considered a foundation for reevaluating foreign policy strategies in the interaction process between Bulgaria and Byzantium, at least up to the beginning of the 10th century.

Appendix 1

The reconstruction of the possible primary narrative text related to the negotiations between Khan Boris and Empress Theodora. The comments and interpolations of the later authors were highlighted and excluded from the interpretation.

Theophanes Continuatus IV, 13–15

(13) “Ο γε μὴν ἄρχων Βουλγαρίας [(Βώγωρις οὗτος ἦν)] θρασύτερον ἐξεφέρετο γυναῖκα τῆς βασιλείας κρατεῖν διακηκώς· ὅθεν καὶ τινὰς ἀγγέλους ἀπέσταλκεν πρὸς αὐτήν, τὰς συνθήκας λέγων καταλύειν καὶ κατὰ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐκστρατεύειν γῆς. [ἀλλ’ αὐτὴ μὴδὲν θῆλυ ἐννοοῦσα ἢ ἀνανδρον] “καὶ ἐμὲ” αὐτῷ κατεμήνυνεν “κατ’ αὐτοῦ εὐρήσεις ἀντιστρατεύουσιν. καὶ ἐλπίζω μὲν κυριεύσαι σου· εἰ δὲ μὴ γένηται καὶ ἐκνικήσεις με, καὶ οὕτω σου περιέσομαι, τὴν νίκην ἀρίδην ἔχουσα· γυναῖκα γὰρ ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἄνδρα ἕξεις ἡττηθέντα σοι.” διὰ τοῦτο μὲν οὖν καὶ ἐφ’ ἡσυχίας ἔμεινεν, μὴδὲν τολμήσας νεανιεύεσθαι, καὶ τὰς τῆς ἀγάπης αὐθιγὰν ἐνέου σπονδὰς.

(14) καὶ δὴ ζήτησιν τινα καὶ πολλὴν ἔρουναν περὶ τίνος μοναχοῦ, οὕτω καλουμένου Θεοδώρου τοῦ ἐπὶ κλην Κουφαρᾶ, [εἴτε ἔκ τινων ὀνειράτων καὶ ὄψεως εἴτε ἄλλως πως, πρὸ πολλοῦ αἰχμαλωτισθέντος] ἢ Θεοδώρα πρὸς τὸν ἄρχοντα Βουλγαρίας ἐποίει, καὶ αὐτὸν ἡξίου διὰ γραμμάτων ἀνερυνῆσαι καὶ τιμῆς ὅσης καὶ βούλοιο ἀπολυτρώσασθαι τοῦτον αὐτῇ. ἡξίου δὲ καὶ οὗτος, ἀφορμὴν ἐκ τούτου λαβὼν, περὶ οἰκείας αὐτοῦ πρεσβεύειν ἀδελφῆς παρὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων [μὲν αἰχμαλωτισθείσης ποτέ], κατεχομένης δὲ νῦν ἐν τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως αὐλῇ. αὕτη δὴ οὖν πρὸς τὴν πίστιν καλῶς μετενεχθεῖσα, καὶ γράμματα κατὰ [τὸν τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας παιδευθεῖσα καιρόν], καὶ ἄλλως τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν τάξιν τε καὶ περὶ τὸ θεῖον αἰδῶ τε καὶ δόξαν, ὡς ἔστι, θαυμάζουσα διαφερόντως, ἐπεὶ τῆς ἐπανόδου τῆς πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν τετύχηκεν, οὐ διέλιπεν ἐκθειάζουσά τε καὶ παρακαλοῦσα καὶ σπέρματα καταβάλλουσα τῆς πίστεως πρὸς αὐτόν. ὁ δὲ ἦν γὰρ παρὰ [τοῦ εἰρημένου Κουφαρᾶ] μικρά τινα παιδευθεὶς καὶ τῶν μυστηρίων κατηχηθεὶς τοῦτο(ν) μὲν ἀποστείλας τὴν οἰκείαν ἐλάμβανε μισθὸν ἀδελφῶν· [πλὴν ἔμενεν ὅπερ ἦν, ἀπιστία κατισχημένος καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ θρησκείαν τιμῶν]...

(15) ...[ἐπεὶ γοῦν μετετέθη πρὸς θεοσέβειαν], γράφει δὴ πρὸς τὴν δέσποιναν περὶ γῆς, [πλήθει στενούμενος τῷ ἑαυτοῦ], καὶ ἀξιοὶ παρὰ ταύτης παρρησιαστικώτερον ὥς ἦδη ἐν ἄλλ’ οὐ δύο ὄντων αὐτῶν, πίστει τε καὶ φιλίᾳ συνδεθέντων τῇ ἀρραγεῖ, καὶ ἑαυτὸν

ὑποθήσειν καθυπισχνεῖτο καὶ εἰρήνην ἐργάσασθαι αἰδιὸν τε καὶ ἀδιάπτωτον. ἡ δὲ εὐμενῶς τε ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ, καὶ δέδωκεν ἐρήμην οὖσαν τηνικαῦτα τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς Σιδηρᾶς, [ταύτης δὴ τότε ὄριον τυγχανούσης Ῥωμαίων τεκαὶ αὐτῶν, ἄχρι τῆς Δεβελτοῦ, ἣτις οὕτω καλεῖται Ζάγορα παρ' αὐτοῖς. οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἅπανα ἡ Βουλγαρία πρὸς εὐσέβειαν μετερρυθμίσθη, θεοῦ πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν μετακαλεσαμένου γνῶσιν αὐτούς], καὶ οὕτως ἐκ μικρῶν σπινθήρων τε καὶ πληγῶν· καὶ οὕτω γῆς τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὡς ἄλλης τινὸς ἐπαγγελίας ἀξιωθέντες πρὸς κοινωνίαν ἄρρηκτον καθυπέβαλον ἑαυτούς.

* * *

13. Now the ruler of Bulgaria comported himself with great insolence when he heard that a woman reigned over the empire. He, therefore, sent certain messengers to her, saying that he was breaking the treaties and leading an army against the land of the Romans. But the Empress informed him, "You shall find me, too, leading an army against you. I hope to gain mastery over you, but if – Heaven forbid! – you should defeat me, even so shall I surpass you, receiving conspicuous victory, for you shall have defeated a woman and not a man". Thus, he remained at peace, curbing his zeal and renewed a truce as a sign of reciprocated love.

14. [Theodora] questioned everyone about a monk named Theodore, nicknamed Kupharas, and sent him to the archon Boris to test the measure of his virtue and piety according to the rules. She also wanted to find out if he would redeem his soul for her. And he proved worthy... And, this served as a reason to send to him a sister from the Romans, who had been catechized at the imperial court. Indeed, she was successfully delivered as a sign of trust. Following the rules as well as the Christian order of worship and glorification, she, with exceptional admiration, successfully completed the procedure of spiritual rebirth and sowing the seeds of faith in God, making no break between the thanksgiving and the supplication prayer. This man, who he had already been taught and instructed a little in the mysteries, sent the sister home, where she received a reward for this...

<the passage with other stories about Boris's conversion>

15. ...he wrote to the Empress regarding the land. He openly declared to her that since they were no longer two but one, inseparably bound by faith and feelings, and for his part, he offered as a pledge the conclusion of an eternal and indissoluble peace. And she graciously accepted what he said and granted him the then desolated lands near Sidera, and thus [it happened] from tiny sparks and breaths, as well as after the transfer of Roman land and other pledges of an unbreakable alliance, which they gave to each other.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- AL-ṬABARĪ, *The History. Incipient Decline. The Caliphates of al-Wathīq, al-Mutawakkil, and al-Muntasir A.D. 841–863/A.H. 227–248*, New York 1989.
- ANASTASIOS BIBLIOTHECARIUS, *Interpretatio Synodi VIII generalis*, [in:] *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, vol. CXXIX, ed. J.-P. MIGNE, Paris 1844.
- Annales Bertiniani*, ed. G. WAITZ, Saint-Omer 1883.
- Annales Fuldenses*, [in:] *Monumenta Germaniae historica*, vol. VII, Hannover 1891.
- ARRANTS M., *Evkhologiy Konstantinopolya v nachale XI veka*, [in:] M. ARRANTS, *Izbrannye sochineniya po liturgike*, vol. III, Moskva 2003.
- ARRANTS M., *Tainstva Vizantiyskogo Evkhologiya*, [in:] M. ARRANTS, *Izbrannye sochineniya po liturgike*, vol. I, Moskva 2003.
- ARRANTS M., *Vvedenie v Tainstva Vizantiyskoy traditsii*, [in:] M. ARRANTS, *Izbrannye sochineniya po liturgike*, vol. V, Moskva 2006.
- Canons of the Council of Carthage in 398 A.D.*, [in:] *Documenta iuris canonici veteris, Saeculo V, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, vol. LVI, ed. J.-P. MIGNE, Paris 1846.
- Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Libri I–IV*, ed. J.M. FEATHERSTONE, J. SIGNES-CODONER, Boston–Berlin 2015 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 53].
- Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2 in Trullo habitum (Concilium Quinisextum)*, ed. H. OHME, Berlin–Boston 2013 [= *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum, Series Secunda II: Concilium Universale Constantinopolitanum*, 3.4].
- CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, ed. G. MORAVCSIK, trans. R.J.H. JENKINS, Washington 1993 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 1; *Dumbarton Oaks Texts*, 1].
- CYRILLUS ALEXANDRINUS, *Commentarii in Joannem*, [in:] *Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini*, ed. A.Ph.E. PUSEY, Oxford 1872 (repr. 1965).
- EPHRAEM SYRUS, *Reprehensio sui ipsius et Confessio* (Οσίου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα), ed. K. PHRANTZOLES, Thessalonica 1988 (repr. 1995).
- EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, [in:] *Eusebii Caesariensis Opera*, vol. I–II, Leipzig 1867.
- Excerpta De Sententiis*, [in:] *Excerpta Historica Iussu Imp. Constantini Porphyrogeniti Confecta*, vol. IV, Berlin 1906 (repr. 1985).
- GENESIOS, *On the Reigns of the Emperors*, trans. A. KALDELLIS, Canberra 1998.
- IOANNES ZONARAS, *Epitome historiarum libri XIII–XVIII*, ed. T. BUTTNER-WOBST, Leipzig 1897 [= *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae*, 49].
- Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. THURN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1973 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 5].
- Iosephi Genesis Regum libri quattuor*, rec. A. LESMUELLER-WERNER, Berolini 1978 [= *CFHB*, 14].
- IUSTINIANUS, *Digesta Iustiniani*, ed. T. MOMMSEN, P. KRÜGER, A. WATSON, Berlin 1872 (Philadelphia 1985).
- IOANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS, *Oratio de Hypapante*, ed. E. BICKERSTETH, “*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*” 32, 1966, p. 56–76.

- Life of St. Theodora the Empress*, [in:] *Byzantine Defenders of Images. Eight Saint's Lives in English Translation*, trans. M.P. VINSON, Dumbarton Oaks–Washington 1998.
- Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani breviarium historicum*, ed. C. MANGO, Washington 1990 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 13].
- NICETAS DAVID, *The Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, trans. A. SMITHIES, notes J.M. DUFFY, Washington 2013 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 51; Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 13].
- NICOLAI I PAPAE, *Epistolae*, ed. E. PERELS, [in:] *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolarum*, vol. VI, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, vol. IV, Berlin 1902–1925 (repr. Munich 1978).
- PSEUDO-SYMEONIS, *Chronographia*, praef., trans. et comm. G. CANKOVA-PETKOVA, Serdicae 1964 [= *Fontes graeci historiae bulgaricae*, 5].
- Romance of Alexander*, Meisenheim am Glan 1963 [= *Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie*, 13].
- Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, rec. S. WAHLGREN, Berolini 2006 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 44].
- THEODORE THE STUDITE, *Epistulae*, ed. G. FATOUROS, Berlin 1992 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 31].
- THEODORET OF KYROS, *Ecclesiastical History*, [in:] *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. III, ed. Ph. SCHAFF, H. WACE, New York 1892.
- THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, rec. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883.
- THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Liber quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris amplectitur*, ed. I. ŠEVČENKO, Berlin–Boston 2011 [= *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*, 42].
- Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister [Pseudo-Symeon], Georgius Monachus*, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonn 1838 [= *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae*, 33].
- La vie de S. Évariste higoumene à Constantinople*, ed. Ch. VAN DE VORST, "Analecta Bollandiana" 41, 1923, p. 288–325, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.ABOL.4.02779>

Secondary Literature

- ALIMOV D.E., *Etnogenez khorvatov. Formirovanie khorvatskoy etnopoliticheskoy obshchnosti v VII–IX vv.*, Sankt-Peterburg 2016.
- BARDOLA K., *The Birth of the Myth About the Byzantine-Bulgarian War of 863*, "Studia Ceranea" 13, 2023, p. 191–214, <https://doi.org/10.18778/2084-140X.13.28>
- BARDOLA K., *Etapy peregovorov o dinasticheskom soyuze v praktike vizantiyskoy diplomatii*, "Вісник Харківського національного університету імені В.Н. Каразіна. Історія" / "Visnik Kharkivskogo natsionalnogo universitetu imeni V.N. Karazina. Istoriya" 53, 2017, p. 17–25.
- BURY J.B., *The Eastern Roman Empire (717–1453)*, [in:] *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. IV, ed. J.B. BURY, J.R. TANNER, C.W. PREVITÉ-ORTON, Z.N. BROOKE, London 1923.
- ĆIRKOVIĆ S., *Srbi u srednjem veku*, Beograd 1998.
- DUJČEV I., *Légendes byzantines sur la conversion des Bulgares*, "Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity" 10, 1961, p. 7–17.
- GARLAND L., *Byzantine Emperresses. Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204*, London–New York 1999.

- GREGORY T.E., *A History of Byzantium*, Oxford–Carlton 2005.
- GYUZELEV V., *Knyaz Boris Parvi*, Sofija 1969.
- HERRIN J., *Unrivalled Influence. Women and Empire in Byzantium*, Princeton 2013, <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691153216.001.0001>
- A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture*, ed. R. STONEMAN, Cambridge 2022.
- HURBANIČ M., *The Byzantine Missionary Concept and its Revitalisation in the 9th Century*, “Byzantinoslavica” 63.1, 2005, p. 103–116.
- IVANOV S., *Vizantiyskoe missionerstvo. Mozhno li sdelat iz – „Varvara” khristianina?*, Moskva 2003.
- KALDELLIS A., *The New Roman Empire. A History of Byzantium*, Oxford 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197549322.001.0001>
- KARLIN-HAYTER P., *Études sur les deux histoires du règne de Michel III*, “Byzantion” 41, 1971, p. 452–496.
- KAZHDAN A.P., *Istoriya vizantiyskoy literatury (850–1000)*, Sankt-Peterburg 2012.
- KLAIĆ N., *Povijest Hrvata u ranom srednjem vijeku*, Zagreb 1975.
- LAIΟΥ A.E., “Consensus facit nuptias – et non”: Pope Nicholas I’s Responsa to the Bulgarians as a Source for Byzantine Marriage Customs, [in:] A.E. LAIΟΥ, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium*, London 1992, p. 189–201.
- LJUBARSKI J.N., *Theophanes Continuatus und Genesios. Das Problem einer gemeinsamen Quelle*, “Byzantinoslavica” 48, 1987, p. 12–27.
- MAGDALINO P., *The History of the Future and its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda. The Making of Byzantine History*, [in:] *Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*, ed. R. BEATON, C. ROUECHÉ, Aldershot 1993, p. 3–34.
- MANGO C., *Eudocia Ingerina, the Normans, and the Macedonian Dynasty*, “Зборник Радова Византолошког Института” / “Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta” 14–15, 1973, p. 17–27.
- MEYENDORFF J., *Christian Marriage in Byzantium: The Canonical and Liturgical Tradition*, “Dumbarton Oaks Papers” 44, 1990, p. 99–107, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1291620>
- MOROLLI D.C., *Leo VI (886–912) and Marriage Law: some Historical-juridical Hints*, “Studi sull’Oriente Cristiano” 24.2, 2020, p. 49–617.
- OSTROGORSKY G., *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, Munchen 1963.
- REICHMAN S., *Das byzantinische Alexandergedicht nach dem codex Marcianus 408 herausgegeben*, Meisenheim am Glan 1963 [= Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, 13].
- REYNOLDS Ph.L., *How Marriage Became One of the Sacraments: The Sacramental Theology of Marriage from its Medieval Origins to the Council of Trent*, Cambridge 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316536445>
- RIEDEL M.L.D., *Leo VI and the Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity. Writings of an Unexpected Emperor*, Cambridge 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107281967>
- SHEPARD J., *Slavs and Bulgars*, [in:] *The New Cambridge Medieval History, c. 700–c. 900*, ed. R. McKITTERICK, Cambridge 1995, p. 228–248, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521362924.012>
- SHEPARD J., *The Uses of ‘History’ in Byzantine Diplomacy: Observations and Comparisons*, [in:] *Porphyrogenita. Essays on the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honour of Julian Chrysostomides*, ed. C. DENDRINOS et al., Aldershot 2003, p. 91–115.
- TREADGOLD W., *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford 1997, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804779371>

TREADGOLD W., *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, New York 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137280862>

TROITSKIY S., *Diakonissy v pravoslavnoy tserkvi*, Sankt-Peterburg 1912.

ZLATARSKI V., *Istoriya na Balgarskata dърzhava prez srednite vekove*, vol. I–II, Sofija 1927 (repr. 2007).

ŽIVKOVIĆ T., *Sloveni i Romeji. Slavizacija na prostoru Srbije od VII do XI veka*, Beograd 2000.

Kostiantyn Bardola

kostiantyn.bardola@gmail.com