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The Byzantine Consort of the Bulgarian Ruler: Maria Lekapene



According to some of the scholars attempting to recreate the biographies of Bulgarian tsaritsas, the character of the relevant medieval sources can be most fully summarized with the principle: *do not mention them, or speak of them poorly*¹. This also applies to Maria Lekapene, wife of tsar Peter. While the former part of the statement seems to pertain primarily to contemporary authors, the latter is common among modern historians, constructing their narratives based on exceedingly small source material and accusing the tsaritsa of an unambiguously negative impact on the events taking place in the Bulgarian state during the 10th century².

¹ В данните от изворите и от специализираната литература по отношение на повечето от българските владетелки важи принципът “Или нищо, или лошо”. Поемайки тежестта на короната, те сякаш се дематериализират до степенята на безплътни сенки на своите съпрузи или пък се митологизират като разюздани юди самовили, обсебени от сатанински егоцентризъм, алчност, коварство и всякакви низки щения [In source texts and specialist literature alike, most Bulgarian female royals are subject to the principle: “Do not mention them, or speak of them poorly”. Accepting the burden of the crown, these women seem to dematerialize into disembodied shadows of their husbands; alternatively, they are mythologized as unbridled witches and demons, obsessed with diabolical egocentrism, greed, treachery, and all sorts of base desires.], (В. Игнатов, *Българските царици. Владетелките на България от VII до XIV в.*, София 2008, р. 6).

² В.Н. Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I/2, *Първо българско Царство. От славянизацията на държавата до падането на*

1. Origins and Early Years

We do not know when Maria Lekapene was born. Considering that in 927 she was considered to be of suitable age to enter into marriage, as well as to be betrothed to Peter, her birth can be tentatively dated between 907 and 915³. She was the daughter of Christopher Lekapenos, the eldest son of emperor Romanos I and his wife Theodora (Christopher was elevated to the position of co-emperor and third co-ruler of the empire in May 921⁴). As a descendant of the Lekapenoi family, Maria had Armenian blood in her veins. However, curiously enough, her background also includes a Slavic ancestor: according to Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, her mother Sophia was the daughter of Niketas Magistros, a Slav from the Peloponnesos⁵. The latter is also mentioned in the *Continuation of George the Monk*, the *Chronicle*

Първото царство (852–1018), София 1927, pp. 535–536; П. Мутафчиев, *История на българския народ (681–1323)*, София 1986, p. 201.

³ Jonathan Shepard suspects that Maria was about twelve years old in 927 (J. Shepard, *A marriage too far? Maria Lekapena and Peter of Bulgaria*, [in:] *The Empress Theophano. Byzantium and the West at the turn of the first millennium*, ed. A. Davis, Cambridge 1995, p. 136), while Vassil Gyuzelev dates her birth to 911, which would make her sixteen years old at the time of her marriage to Peter (В. Гюзелев, *Значението на брака на цар Петър (927–969) с ромейката Мария-Ирина Лакапина (911–962)*, [in:] *Културните текстове на миналото – носители, символи, идеи*, vol. I, *Текстовете на историята, история на текстовете. Материали от Юбилейната международна конференция в чест на 60-годишнината на проф. д.и.н. Казимир Попконстантинов, Велико Търново, 29–31 октомври 2003 г.*, София 2005, p. 28). Cf. also M. J. Leszka, K. Marín, *Carstwo bulgarskie. Polityka – społeczeństwo – gospodarka – kultura. 866–971*, Warszawa 2015, p. 156, where our protagonist's birth is dated to ca. 912.

⁴ Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 1, p. 398. Cf. S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and His Reign. A Study of Tenth-Century Byzantium*, Cambridge 1969, pp. 65–66; A. R. Bellinger, Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. III, *Leo III to Nicephorus III. 717–1081*, Washington 1993, p. 528.

⁵ Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *On the Themes*, p. 91. Cf. В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, s. 28; А. Николов, *Политическа мисъл в ранносредновековна България (средата на IX-края на X в.)*, София 2006, pp. 273–274; PMZ II, vol. V, pp. 20–22, s.v. *Niketas* (#25740).

of *Symeon Logothete*, the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon Magistros* and the *Continuation of Theophanes*⁶.

The future Bulgarian tsaritsa was most likely the eldest child of Christopher and Sophia, who married prior to Romanos I Lekapenos's ascension to power⁷. Since Maria's father was crowned in 921, and her mother was only elevated to the rank of *augusta* in February 922 (after empress Theodora's death)⁸, our heroine did not enjoy the prestigious title of *porphyrogennete*, i.e. imperial daughter 'born in the purple'.

Maria had two younger brothers, neither of whom was to play any significant political role: Romanos, who died in childhood, and Michael. The latter had two daughters – Sophia and Helena (who married an Armenian, Gregory Taronites)¹⁰. Particularly notable among Maria's influential relatives was her aunt, Helena Lekapene, who in 919 married Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, remaining by his side until 959. Two of Maria's uncles, Stephen and Constantine, also donned the imperial purple when they were elevated by Romanos I to the position of co-rulers in 923, whereas the third uncle, Theophylaktos, became the patriarch of Constantinople (933–956)¹¹.

⁶ Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 905, 908; Symeon Logothete, 135.30; 136.16.48.54; Pseudo-Symeon Magistros, 36, p. 742; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 22, 25, pp. 413, 417.

⁷ S. Runciman, *The Emperor...*, p. 64.

⁸ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 894; Pseudo-Symeon Magistros, 24, p. 733; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 9, s. 402; John Zonaras, XVI, 18, p. 471. Cf. S. Runciman, *The Emperor...*, p. 67; J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 136; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 28; А. Николов, *Политическа...*, p. 274.

⁹ S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses in Bulgaria*, BBg 9, 1995, p. 167.

¹⁰ S. Runciman, *The Emperor...*, pp. 78, 234; J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 136.

¹¹ S. Runciman, *The Emperor...*, pp. 64–67; G. Minczew, *Remarks on the Letter of the Patriarch Theophylact to Tsar Peter in the Context of Certain Byzantine and Slavic Anti-heretic Texts*, SCer 3, 2013, p. 115. Among Maria's relatives who held high state offices one might also take note of the *protovestiaros* and *parakoimomenos* Basil Lekapenos – illegitimate son of Romanos I from his relationship with an unnamed woman of Slavic or Bulgarian origin (И. Йорданов, *Печати на Василий Лакапин от България*, [in:] *Средновековният българин и "другите". Сборник в чест на 60-годишнината на проф. дин Петър Ангелов*, ed. А. Николов, Г.Н. Николов, София 2013, pp. 159–166).

There are several key questions to be asked regarding Maria's origins, position and connections: How many years did she spend in the palace in Constantinople? What kind of education did she receive there? To what extent did she have an opportunity to familiarize herself with court ceremonies and the Byzantine ideology of power? Consequently, how justified is it to view her as consciously transplanting certain elements of Byzantine political culture onto Bulgarian soil?

Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos had told Maria's grandfather that he, born and raised outside of the imperial court, lacked a sufficient understanding of its rules and thus also the basic competencies required for being a ruler¹². The same judgement could also be applied to Christopher Lekapenos, who crossed the threshold of the palace in Constantinople as a fully mature man, by then both a husband and a father¹³. This leads to the next question: when did Maria herself enter the palace? The latest possible date seems to be February 922, when our protagonist's mother, Sophia, was elevated to the rank of *augusta*. The ceremonial court duties associated with this promotion¹⁴ necessitated permanent residence in the capital city and the palace. The Bulgarian tsaritsa-to-be, then, spent at least five years at the imperial court. It is worth adding that she was a teenager at the time – the period in life in which one's personality, habits and preferences are shaped most deeply.

It is difficult to determine how thorough Maria's education was. Analyzing several anonymous commemorative poetic texts written after Christopher's death, Jonathan Shepard concluded that he valued knowledge and considered it important to ensure that his children obtain an education worthy of their standing. Thus, Maria's curriculum during her

¹² Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 13, p. 72. Cf. S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, p. 167; Т. Тодоров, *Константин Багренородни и династичният брак между владетелските домове на Преслав и Константинопол от 927 г.*, ПКШ 7, 2003, p. 393.

¹³ S. Runciman, *The Emperor...*, p. 64; A.R. Bellinger, Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue...*, p. 528.

¹⁴ J. Herrin, *Theophano. Considerations on the Education of a Byzantine Princess*, [in:] *The Empress Theophano. Byzantium and the West at the turn of the first millennium*, ed. A. Davids, Cambridge 1995, pp. 72–73 [= J. Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence. Women and Empire in Byzantium*, Princeton 2013, p. 245].

stay at the palace may have been extensive, covering both religious and lay matters (fundamentals of law and general familiarity with the imperial Byzantine court ceremonial, as well as rules of diplomacy)¹⁵. Judith Herrin goes even further, assuming that Maria's relatives hoped that her marriage would render her a *sui generis* representative of Byzantine interests at the Bulgarian court¹⁶. Thus, she may have been actively prepared for this role. The British scholar attempts to compensate for the lack of source material concerning Maria by comparing her biography with that of another Byzantine woman married to a foreign ruler – Theophano, wife of emperor Otto II. According to Herrin, Theophano's later political activity attests to the education she received before her marriage, one which was intended to prepare her comprehensively for the role of an imperial wife and mother. No less interesting (from the perspective of our subject) seems to be the case of Agatha, one of the daughters of Helena Lekapene and Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos: she was sufficiently competent and knowledgeable in matters of state to assist her father in chancery work, helping him not only as a secretary, but also as a trusted adviser and confidant¹⁷.

Even if Maria Lekapene was not as profoundly erudite as her cousin, her stay at the imperial court in Constantinople must have resulted in her gaining experience that would help her adapt to the role of the Bulgarian tsaritsa. Spending time in the chambers of the Great Palace, Christopher's daughter likely had numerous opportunities to familiarize herself with both the official court ceremonial and with the unwritten rules observed by those in the highest echelons of power. Our protagonist had no dearth of positive examples to follow: we must not forget that her aunt Helena, her grandmother Theodora as well as her mother Sophia all wore the imperial purple. Spending time in their company and observing them, Maria had favorable circumstances to develop an understanding of what it meant to be a Byzantine empress.

¹⁵ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, pp. 137–138. Cf. M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 156.

¹⁶ *She represents the out-going Byzantine princess, who had to perform an ambassadorial role in the country of her new husband* (J. Herrin, *The Many Empresses of the Byzantine Court (and All Their Attendants)*, [in:] Eadem, *Unrivalled Influence...*, p. 229).

¹⁷ Eadem, *Theophano...*, pp. 248–253.

2. The Year 927 – a Wedding among Peace Negotiations

The sequence of events from Maria Lekapene's life best illuminated by the sources comes from the period during which she became married (October 8th, 927). The matrimonial knot was to guarantee the peace concluded several days earlier between the empire and Bulgaria. Interestingly, as correctly observed by Jonathan Shepard, Maria was the only 10th century Byzantine woman of high status who married a foreign ruler, and whose marriage was not only noted by the native historiographers, but also described by them in detail¹⁸. In comparison, the marriage of Anna Porphyrogenete (*nota bene*, the daughter of Maria's cousin – Romanos II) to Kievan prince Vladimir I is only mentioned by John Skylitzes in his chronicle in passing, where the author states that emperor Basil II turned the ruler of Rus' into his brother-in-law in order to secure his military support¹⁹.

Therefore, we get to know Maria at a time when she is being presented to the Bulgarian envoys as a potential wife for their ruler. The anonymous Continuator of George the Monk – as well as other Byzantine writers following in his footsteps – noted that Christopher's daughter filled George Sursuvul and his companions with delight²⁰. This statement, however, should not be used to draw far-reaching conclusions concerning her appearance or other qualities. Quite simply, it seems, it would have been inappropriate for foreign guests to display any other emotions during a meeting with an imperial descendant and relative, who was soon to become their own ruler. We could hardly expect the Byzantine authors to have characterized Maria in a negative manner.

¹⁸ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 127.

¹⁹ John Skylitzes, p. 336. Cf. John Zonaras, XVII, 7, p. 553. The chronicler also mentions the marriage of Anna and Vladimir I as well as the death of the Porphyrogenete in another part of his narrative: John Skylitzes, p. 367.

²⁰ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 905; Symeon Logothete, 136.48; Leo Grammatikos, p. 316; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 22, p. 413. John Skylitzes (p. 223), contrary to the earlier chroniclers, directly stated that Maria was indeed exceptionally beautiful.

Interestingly, the mission of bringing Peter to Constantinople was entrusted to Maria's maternal grandfather – the aforementioned Niketas Magistros²¹. Our heroine was not present for her fiancé's ceremonious welcome in the Byzantine capital (which took place in the northern part of the city, Blachernai); neither did she take part in the peace negotiations.

On the day of her marriage – October 8th, 927 – Maria Lekapene proceeded to the Church in the Monastery of the Holy Mother of the Life-Giving Spring, located beyond the Theodosian walls, accompanied by *protovestiarios* Theophanes, patriarch of Constantinople Stephen II as well as numerous state dignitaries and courtiers²². Interestingly, the church chosen may have reminded the Byzantines and the Bulgarians of their earlier, troubled relations: after all, the temple had been set on fire on Symeon's orders, and it was in its vicinity that the peace negotiations between this ruler and Romanos I had taken place in 923²³. Furthermore, it was Maria's grandfather who ordered the rebuilding of the ravaged church²⁴. The marriage ceremony between the church's restorer and Symeon's son, then, may have had a clear propaganda significance. It suggested that Romanos I Lekapenos was the one who managed to neutralize the Bulgarian threat and perhaps – to some extent – repair the damage the Bulgarians had inflicted on the empire's lands in the past²⁵.

²¹ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 905; Symeon Logothete, 136.48; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 22, p. 413.

²² Continuator of George the Monk, p. 905; Symeon Logothete, 136.49; Leo Grammatikos, p. 317; Pseudo-Symeon Magistros, 34, p. 741; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, p. 414; John Skylitzes, p. 223.

²³ Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 893–894; Symeon Logothete, 136.31; Pseudo-Symeon Magistros, 29, p. 736; Leo Grammatikos, p. 311; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 15, p. 406; John Skylitzes, p. 219; John Zonaras, XVI, 18, pp. 470–471. Cf. M. J. Leszka, *Wizerunek władców pierwszego państwa bułgarskiego w bizantyńskich źródłach pisanych (VIII – pierwsza połowa XII w.)*, Łódź 2003, p. 118; idem, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*, Łódź 2013, p. 207; idem, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 157.

²⁴ A. Kompa, *Konstantynopolińskie zabytki w Stambule*, [in:] *Z badań nad wczesnobizantyńskim Konstantynopolem*, ed. M. J. Leszka, K. Marinow, A. Kompa, Łódź 2011 [= AUL.FH 87], p. 167.

²⁵ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 129.

Byzantine chroniclers agree that the rite of the sacrament of marriage was personally performed by patriarch Stephen II. He blessed Maria and Peter and put the marriage crowns on their heads (this is sometimes interpreted in historiography as the crowning ceremony of the newlywed couple)²⁶. The ceremony was witnessed by George Sursuvul and *protoves-tiarios* Theophanes. A wedding feast followed, after which Maria returned to the palace accompanied by Theophanes²⁷.

On the third day after the wedding, Romanos I Lekapenos organized another reception, which took place on a magnificently decorated ship anchored off the Pege coast. The anonymous Continuator of George the Monk stresses that the emperor feasted at the same table as Peter, his son-in-law Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos and his own son, Christopher. The participating Bulgarians are reported to have asked Romanos I for a favor: if we are to believe the chronicler, they wanted the father of their new tsaritsa proclaimed second co-ruler of the Empire. The emperor readily agreed to elevate the status of his eldest son (likely having suggested the request to his guests himself, during the earlier talks), thus reducing Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos to the third position among the empire's rulers²⁸. We do not know whether Maria was present at this reception. Considering the requirements of the Byzantine court etiquette, we may assume that she was elsewhere at the time, in the quarters reserved

²⁶ В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 29; Т. Тодоров, *България през втората и третата четвърт на X век: политическа история*. София 2006 [unpublished PhD thesis], pp. 169–173.

²⁷ Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 905–906; Symeon Logothete, 136.49; Leo Grammatikos, p. 317; Pseudo-Symeon Magistros, 34, p. 741; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, p. 414; John Skylitzes, p. 223.

²⁸ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 906; Symeon Logothete, 136.49–50; Leo Grammatikos, p. 317; Pseudo-Symeon Magistros, 34, p. 741; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, p. 414; John Skylitzes, pp. 223–224; John Zonaras, XVI, 19, pp. 474–475. Cf. J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 132; Т. Тодоров, *Константин Багренородни...*, p. 396; П. Павлов, *Години на мир и "ратни беди" (927–1018)*, [in:] Г. Атанасов, В. Вачкова, П. Павлов, *Българска национална история*, vol. III, *Първо българско царство (680–1018)*, Велико Търново 2015, p. 412.

exclusively for ladies – celebrating her marriage in the company of her mother Sophia, aunt Helena and other female relatives and high-ranking women.

Once all the wedding-related events were over, the newlyweds departed for Bulgaria. Christopher, Sophia and *protovestiaros* Theophanes accompanied them to the Hebdomon, where the imperial couple ate their final meal with their daughter and son-in-law. Afterwards came the time for the sorrowful parting: Maria's tearful parents hugged her, bade farewell to Peter, and returned to the city. The newlyweds, in turn, made their way to Preslav. As mentioned by the Continuator of George the Monk, Maria brought with her innumerable riches²⁹; besides, she was likely accompanied by several trusted people who would advise and assist her in the new environment³⁰.

Curiously, in the account of the authors contemporary to the events of 927, there is a unique passage related to Maria's farewells with her parents. The Byzantine chroniclers attempt to describe Maria's internal experiences and present her personal views on her marriage with the Bulgarian ruler, discussing her mixed feelings during the journey to her new country. Maria was sad to be separated from her mother, father, relatives and the palace in Constantinople, which she by then considered her family home. At the same time, however, she was filled with joy – not only because she had married a man of imperial status, but also because she had been proclaimed a Bulgarian ruler herself³¹.

The titlature and status of Peter's wife at the Preslav court will be discussed in detail in a later part of this chapter. At this point, however, it is interesting to point out a different circumstance. According to the Byzantine sources, Maria was far from perceiving her marriage with the Bulgarian monarch as a misalliance unacceptable for a woman of

²⁹ Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 906–907; Symeon Logothete, 136,51; Leo Grammatikos, p. 317; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, pp. 414–415; John Skylitzes, p. 224.

³⁰ M.J. Leszka, *Wizerunek...*, p. 125; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 29.

³¹ Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 906–907; Symeon Logothete, 136,51; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, p. 415.

her standing, nor did she see it as dictated by the need of reaching a compromise. Moreover, she did not consider Symeon's son a barbarian, and departing for Bulgaria by no means filled her with dread. It is useful to compare the passage under discussion with the narrative about another 'female experience,' associated with an analogous situation from the 10th century – Anna Porphyrogenete's attitude towards her prospective marriage with Vladimir I, as portrayed in the Old Rus' historiographical text known as the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. The text as we know it today was redacted in the 1110s, i.e. at a time when, in Rus', Svyatoslav's son was considered worthy of comparison with Constantine I the Great – a thoroughly Christian ruler. Thus, the source informs us that the sister of Basil II and Constantine VIII was most reluctant to wed the Kievan ruler, arguing that such marriage meant a fate little better than captivity, or perhaps even death. According to the anonymous author, Anna's two brothers pleaded with her to act according to their will, and even had to force her to board the ship that was to take her to Cherson. Much like our protagonist, the Porphyrogenete parted with her close ones in tears, but her emotions were quite different from Maria's conflicting feelings³².

Interestingly, none of the extant sources mention Peter's view of Maria and the marriage arranged by George Sursuvul. In other words: how prestigious, honorable and politically advantageous was it for the young Bulgarian tsar to tie the knot with a woman from the Lekapenos family, who did not carry the title of *porphyrogenete* and was not even a daughter of the emperor (who, incidentally, was neither 'born in the purple' nor the sole ruler)?

The chroniclers from the so-called circle of Symeon Logothete, who had personal ties to the court of Romanos I, and other writers well-disposed towards this ruler (e.g. Arethas of Caesarea or Theodore Daphnopates, considered the author of *On the Treaty with the Bulgarians*) present the agreement of 927 – whose stability was, after all, guaranteed by the marriage of Maria and Peter – as a substantial diplomatic achievement of the Lekapenos emperor, ensuring the long-desired peace on the northern border of Byzantium and neutralizing the Bulgarian threat for a long

³² *Russian Primary Chronicle*, AM 6496, pp. 111–112.

time³³. Traces of this approach – no doubt propagandist to some extent – are also visible in the account of Constantine VII, although he was fully open about his aversion towards the Lekapenoi and their policies³⁴. Even in the Bulgarian *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, we find the statement that Peter lived in cordial friendship with the Byzantine emperor, ensuring prosperity for his subjects for many years³⁵.

Liudprand of Cremona's remark on Maria's adopting her new name upon entering marriage should most likely be considered in the context of this 'pacifist' propaganda of the Byzantine court. After all, what we find in the *Antapodosis* is an exaggeration of the idea expressed in all of the above-mentioned texts: that Romanos I achieved the neutralization of Symeon's expansionist, anti-Byzantine plans, as well as the creation of a firm association between the Bulgarians and the Empire through signing a peace treaty advantageous for Constantinople. The originality of Liudprand's approach lies in his particular underscoring of Maria's role in this process: her marriage, according to the bishop of Cremona, became the foundation of a long-lasting friendship between Byzantium and Bulgaria. Therefore, according to the western diplomat, naming

³³ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, pp. 130–131; A. Николов, *Политическа...*, pp. 237–238; A. Brzóstkowska, *Kroniki z kręgu Symeona Logotety*, [in:] *Testimonia*, vol. V, p. 64; K. Marinow, *In the Shackles of the Evil One. The Portrayal of Tsar Symeon I the Great (893–927) in the Oration On the treaty with the Bulgarians*, SCer 1, 2011, pp. 157–190; idem, *Peace in the House of Jacob. A Few Remarks on the Ideology of Two Biblical Themes in the Oration On the Treaty with the Bulgarians*, BMD 3, 2012, pp. 85–93; M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, pp. 160–162.

³⁴ Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 13, p. 74. Cf. T. Тодоров, *Константин Багренородни...*, p. 395.

³⁵ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 17: тогда же во дни и лѣта сѣго Петра цря бльгарьскѣмъ бысть изъобильиѣ во всего. сирѣчь пшеница и масло и меда же и мѣлка и вина, и во всего дарованіа бжїа ворѣше и кипѣше. и не бѣ вскъдѣнїе ни во цюмъ. Нъ бѣ ситость изъобильство во всего до изволенїа бжїа (*In the days and years of St. Peter, the tsar of the Bulgarians, there was plenty of everything, that is to say, of wheat and butter, honey, milk and wine, the land was overflowing with every gift of God, there was no dearth of anything but by the will of God everything was in abundance and to satiety*). Cf. K. Marinow, *Kilka uwag na temat ideologiczno-eschatologicznej wymowy "Bulgarskiej kroniki apokryficznej"*, FE 4. 6/7, 2007, pp. 70–72; M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 162.

young Maria with an appellation meaning ‘peace’ was dictated by the desire to underline her special status as a *custodes pacis*³⁶.

It is worth noting that the ideological meaning of names of empresses was occasionally used by them for propaganda purposes. Irene, for instance, masterfully used this aspect of her name by establishing an iconographic program of coins bearing her image, or by changing the name of Beroe (a border town located in a previously troubled area) to Eirenoupolis (‘City of Irene’ / ‘City of Peace’) in 784³⁷. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that no source except for Liudprand’s account contains the information about Maria Lekapene changing her name to Irene. If such an act indeed took place, it ought to be treated as strictly symbolic. Had Peter’s wife decided to formally change her name, the official *sigilla* used in Bulgaria in the years 927–945 would have borne the name of Irene, whereas, on surviving artifacts of this kind, we invariably find the name Maria³⁸.

However, let us return to the issue of what political benefits and prestige Peter may have gained through marrying a representative of the Lekapenos family. The consequences of the peace treaty of 927, including the unquestionable elevation of the Slavic ruler’s status in the international

³⁶ Liudprand of Cremona, *Retribution*, III, 38, p. 86. Cf. S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, p. 166; J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 126; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 30; А. Николов, *Политическа...*, p. 234.

³⁷ J. Herrin, *Women in Purple. Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, London 2002, p. 81; К. Котсис, *Defining Female Authority in Eighth-Century Byzantium: the Numismatic Images of the Empress Irene (797–802)*, JLA 5.1, 2012, pp. 199–200.

³⁸ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, pp. 141–143; Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите на средновековните български владетели. Корони, скиптри, сфери, оръжия, костюми, накити*, Плевен 1999, pp. 98–99; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на печатите на Средновековна България*, София 2001, pp. 58–60; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 27; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на средновековна България. VII–XIV в.*, София 2006, pp. 275–276; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, pp. 156–159; idem, *Владетелският статут и титла на цар Петър I след октомври 927 г.: писмени сведения и сфрагистични данни (сравнителен анализ)*, [in:] *Юбилеен сборник. Сто години от рождението на д-р Васил Хараланов (1907–2007)*, Шумен 2008, pp. 99–101; С. Георгиева, *Жената в българското средновековие*, Пловдив 2011, pp. 313–315; M. J. Leszka, K. Marínov, *Carstwo...*, pp. 159–160.

arena (associated with Byzantium's recognition of his right to the title of emperor/tsar of the Bulgarians), are discussed elsewhere in this monograph. Here, on the other hand, we shall deal with a few questions of another kind, such as: Did Peter consider the opportunity to marry Maria an honor? Was this view shared by those around him, as well as by other contemporary European rulers?

Both of the above questions should, in fact, be answered in the positive. There can be no doubt that Maria and Peter's marriage was an unprecedented event – never before had such a high-ranking Byzantine woman, daughter and granddaughter of emperors, been married to a foreign monarch, ruling a people that had only become Christian some sixty years earlier. The momentousness of this act was hardly diminished by the fact that the young tsar's fiancée was not 'born in the purple'³⁹. The Byzantine-Bulgarian marriage was likely the talk of European courts, becoming a source of inspiration for rulers of other countries to aim for similar arrangements.

This assertion is confirmed by two sources: chapter 13 of the treatise *On the Governance of the Empire* by Constantine VII and the account by Liudprand of Cremona. The former work, written before 952, includes a series of specific arguments with which a *basileus* – Romanos II, to whom the work is dedicated, and his successors – should reject claims of foreign rulers who, referring to what happened in 927, should wish to arrange a marriage with a woman from the imperial family (either for themselves or for one of their sons). The Porphyrogennetos advised that, during such negotiations, Romanos I should be presented as a simpleton, who not only lacked the knowledge about the most basic customs of the Empire, but in fact knowingly disregarded them. Moreover, he ignored the law of the Church and the prohibition of Constantine I the Great, who supposedly strictly forbade his sons to enter into marriage with representatives of any of the foreign peoples, to the exception of the Franks. Constantine VII also advised emphasizing the low position of Christopher Lekapenos,

³⁹ S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, p. 167; B. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 30; M.J. Leszka, K. Marínów, *Carstwo...*, p. 158.

who was – according to him – merely the third in the hierarchy of the rulers, thus lacking any actual power⁴⁰.

In this part of the narrative, Porphyrogennetos undoubtedly vented his personal antipathy and resentment⁴¹. On the other hand, it is also clear from his reasoning that, during his reign, the tendency among foreign rulers to seek dynastic marriages with Constantinople had indeed increased; the 927 arrangement served as a pivotal precedent here. Reading chapter 13 of the treatise *On the Governance of the Empire*, one might even conclude that the rulers of the northern peoples, among them the Rus' and the Khazars, sought concessions on three specific points from the emperors: they wished to be sent imperial regalia, have the Byzantines disclose the secret formula for 'Greek fire,' and have them agree to a marriage between a Byzantine woman of high status with a representative of their own house⁴².

Having died in 959, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos did not live to see further such marriages, which he considered so abominable: Theophano only married Otto II in 972⁴³, while Constantine's own

⁴⁰ Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 13, pp. 70–74. Cf. Г. Литаврин, *Константин Багрянородный о Болгарии и Болгарах*, [in:] *Сборник в чест на акад. Димитър Ангелов*, ed. В. Велков, София 1994, pp. 30–37; J. Herrin, *Theophano*..., p. 242; S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses*..., p. 167; Т. Тодоров, *Константин Багрянородни*..., pp. 391–397; В. Гюзелев, *Значението*..., pp. 30–31; A. Pagon, "Trzeba, abyś ty mi oto słowami odpart i to niedorzeczne żądanie" – wokół *De administrando imperio* Konstantyna VII, [in:] *Causa creandi. O pragmatyce źródła historycznego*, ed. S. Rosik, P. Wiszewski, Wrocław 2005, pp. 345–361; M. J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo*..., p. 158; П. Павлов, *Година на мир*..., p. 411; С. Звездов, *Договорот от 927 година между България и Византия*, Н.В.И.Е 23.3, 2015, p. 268; idem, *Българо-византийските отношения при цар Петър I*, София 2016, pp. 17–18.

⁴¹ Д.И. Полывынный, *Царь Петр в исторической памяти болгарского средневековья*, [in:] *Средновековният българин и "другите"*. Сборник в чест на 60-годишнината на проф. дин Петър Ангелов, ed. А. Николов, Г.Н. Николов, София 2013, p. 139.

⁴² Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 13, pp. 68–74.

⁴³ On the political and cultural consequences of this marriage see: I. Ševčenko, *Byzanz und der Westen im 10. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Kunst im Zeitalter der Kaiserin Theophanu. Akten des Internationalen Colloquiums veranstaltet vom Schnütgen-Museum*,

granddaughter Anna married Vladimir I in 988/989. Some scholars are of the opinion that, in his last years, the ‘purple-born’ emperor had to counter the ambitions of another Rus’ ruler – princess Olga, who sought to marry her son Svyatoslav to one of the emperor’s descendants (either daughter or granddaughter). Seeking consent for such a marriage may have been one of the goals of her visit to Constantinople (most likely in 957). The Kievan ruler’s plan was not well received by Constantine VII, however. The fiasco of the marriage negotiations likely deepened Olga’s dissatisfaction with the results of her diplomatic mission, stressed by the author of the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. The memory of her far-reaching intentions did, however, survive in the Old Rus’ historiographical tradition. According to experts on the matter, it may be reflected in the above-mentioned oldest Kievan chronicle, whose extant form dates back to the early years of the 12th century: it includes a seemingly completely improbable story of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos proposing to marry Olga⁴⁴.

Neither Romanos II nor his successors heeded the advice laid out in the treatise *On the Governance of the Empire*, as can be seen from Liudprand of Cremona’s account of his diplomatic mission to Constantinople in 968: his objective was to win Nikephoros II Phokas’s approval for the marriage between the son of emperor Otto I with a member of the Byzantine

ed. A. von Euw, P. Schreiner, Köln 1993, pp. 5–30; H.K. Schulze, *Die Heiratsurkunde der Kaiserin Theophanu. Die griechische Kaiserin und das römisch-deutsche Reich 972–991*, Hannover 2007; M. Smorąg Różycka, *Cesarzowa Teofano i królowa Gertruda. Uwagi o wizerunkach władczyń w sztuce średniowiecznej na marginesie rozważań o miniaturach w Kodeksie Gertrudy*, [in:] *Gertruda Mieszkówna i jej rękopis*, ed. A. Andrzejuk, Radzymin 2013, pp. 129–133.

⁴⁴ *Russian Primary Chronicle*, AM 6463, pp. 61–64. Cf. J.P. Arrignon, *Les relations internationales de la Russie Kéviennne au milieu du X^e siècle et le baptême de la princesse Olga*, [in:] *Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l’enseignement supérieur public. 9^e congrès*, Dijon 1978, pp. 172–173; Г. Л и т а в р и н, *Византия, Болгария, Древняя Русь (IX–начало XII в.)*, Санкт-Петербург 2000, pp. 198, 211; А. В. Н а з а р е н к о, *Древняя Русь на международных путях. Междисциплинарные очерки культурных, торговых, политических связей IX–XII вв.*, Москва 2001, p. 302; F. Tinnfeld, *Zum Stand der Olga – Diskussion*, [in:] *Zwischen Polis, Provinz und Peripherie. Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. L.M. Hoffmann, A. Monchizadeh, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 557.

imperial family. The diplomat admitted that, during the negotiations, he brought up the marriage between the daughter of Christopher Lekapenos and Bulgarian tsar Peter. The argument, however, was rejected by the Greek side, as Liudprand was told that Maria's father was not a *porphyrogennetos* – a remark that could almost have been taken directly from Constantine VII's work⁴⁵.

To sum up, Peter could be confident that he was obtaining an honor that many other monarchs had sought in vain. It was most likely the desire to boast of his Byzantine wife that led him to consistently include her image (and in some cases – also her name) on official Bulgarian seals during the period 927–945. Notably, this was a wholly new practice in the self-presentation of the Preslav court – none of the female Bulgarian rulers before Maria (and none after her) were honored in this manner⁴⁶.

What is more, the marriage was not only a source of splendor for Peter, but also brought tangible political benefits with it. By marrying Maria in 927, Symeon's son entered the family that produced four of the five Roman emperors ruling at the time: Romanos I and his sons Christopher, Stephen and Constantine. Through his marriage to Maria, Peter also became closely tied to Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. In 933, the list of his politically influential connections was further extended by Theophylaktos, the new patriarch of Constantinople. Thus, the alliance with the ambitious 'Lekapenos clan' may have appeared to the young Bulgarian ruler as having a considerable political potential.

Consequently, we should probably agree with those scholars who view the previously mentioned seals (depicting Peter and Maria) as artifacts

⁴⁵ Liudprand of Cremona, *Embassy*, 16, p. 194. Cf. J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 122; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 31.

⁴⁶ S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, pp. 167, 201; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 27. Only a few of the later Bulgarian royal women could boast such a distinction. Irene Palaiologina, wife of John Assen III (1279–1280) used her own seal. Among women depicted on coins were, e.g., Irene Komnene, regent for her son Michael I Assen (1246–1256); Theodora Palaiologina, wife of two consecutive tsars – Theodore Svetoslav (1300–1321) and Michael III Shishman (1323–1330); Theodora, second wife of John Alexander (1331–1371) and Anna, married to John Stratsimir (1356–1396). Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 190–192; В. Игнатов, *Българските...*, pp. 85–87, 89–90; С. Георгиева, *Жената...*, pp. 320–323, 348, 352–354.

of a commemorative and propagandist nature. The *sigilla* were created to commemorate the peace treaty of 927 as well as to highlight the significance of this event for the Bulgarian state and its ruler⁴⁷. It is also possible that Symeon's son wanted to use them to show how much he valued the family connection with Romanos I. One more thing is worth noting in this connection – the name and depiction of Maria disappear from Peter's seals after 945 (at the time when the Lekapenos family was removed from power and when Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos began his sole rule)⁴⁸. One may, therefore, get the impression that both Maria's inclusion into the self-presentation scheme of the Bulgarian ruler in 927, as well as her removal in 945, were dictated by diplomacy and foreign policy: in both cases, it was a bow to the reigning *basileus*⁴⁹.

3. Maria Lekapene as a Mother

There is no doubt that Maria fulfilled what medieval people considered the basic duty of a wife and empress consort – she gave Peter male offspring, providing him with an heir. Relating the events that occurred at the close of the 10th century, Byzantine chroniclers (among them John Skylitzes and John Zonaras) mention two of Maria and her husband's sons, who reigned in Bulgaria in succession: first Boris II, then

⁴⁷ И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История...*, p. 276; M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 159; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на средновековните български печати*, София 2016, p. 89.

⁴⁸ S. Runciman, *The Emperor...*, pp. 229–237; Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, p. 100; Т. Тодоров, *Константин Багренородни...*, pp. 396–397; А. Николов, *Политическа...*, pp. 269–278; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, p. 159; Г. Атанасов, *Печатите на българските владетели от IX–X в. в Дръстър (Силистра)*, [in:] *От тука започва България. Материали от втората национална конференция по история, археология и културен туризъм "Пътуване към България", Шумен 14–16.05. 2010 година*, ed. И. Йорданов, Шумен 2011, p. 289.

⁴⁹ И. Йорданов, *Корпус на печатите...*, p. 63; M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 160.

Roman⁵⁰. The couple had at least one more child, however. This is clear from the information included in the *Continuation of George the Monk*, as well as in the *Chronicle of Symeon Logothete*, and repeated in the *Continuation of Theophanes*: after the death of her father, Maria embarked on her final journey to Constantinople, taking her three children with her. Interestingly, while the phrasing in the original Greek version of these works does not specify the sex of the tsaritsa's children (μετὰ παίδων τριῶν)⁵¹, the 14th century author of the Slavic translation of the *Chronicle of Symeon Logothete* altered the source's information, stating that she arrived in the city on the Bosporos with her three sons (съ тримы сѣновы)⁵².

Thus, in the literature on the subject we occasionally encounter the view that Maria and Peter had a third son aside from the male offspring noted by the Byzantine sources. He would have been Plenimir, whose name appears in the laudatory part of the *Synodikon of tsar Boril*, directly after the mention of Peter and before that of Boris and Romanos⁵³. It cannot be ruled out that Plenimir was the first child of the imperial couple, who – because of a premature death or poor health – did not play any significant role in the history of the Bulgarian state. Consequently, he would not have been noted by the Byzantine chroniclers⁵⁴.

Ivan Duychev, in an article devoted to this character, drew attention to another interesting question: while both of Peter and Maria's sons present in the Byzantine chronicles bore the names of their great-grandfathers

⁵⁰ John Skylitzes, pp. 255, 288, 297, 310, 328, 329, 346; John Zonaras, XVI, 23, p. 495; XVII, 1, p. 522; XVII, 2, p. 529; XVII, 4, p. 536; XVII, 6, p. 547; XVII, 8, p. 560.

⁵¹ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 913; Symeon Logothete, 136.67; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 35, p. 422. A similar wording is found in the oldest translation of the *Continuation of George the Monk* into Slavic (as well as in the Old Rus' *Hellenic and Roman Chronicle* of the second redaction, based on the latter): с тримѣ дѣтѣи. Continuator of George the Monk (Slavic), 10, p. 566; *Hellenic and Roman Chronicle*, p. 501.

⁵² Symeon Logothete (Slavic), p. 140.

⁵³ *Synodikon of Tsar Boril*, pp. 149–150; В. Игнатов, *Българските царици...*, p. 14; M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 187.

⁵⁴ И. Дуйчев, *Българският княз Пленимир*, МПР 13.1, 1942, pp. 19–20; S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, pp. 168–169.

(Bulgarian prince Boris-Michael and emperor Romanos I Lekapenos), the couple's hypothetical firstborn child would have been given the exceedingly rare Slavic name Plenimir⁵⁵. It may be useful to examine the etymology of this anthroponym here. Excluding the possibility of an error on the part of the scribe who completed the late, 16th-century copy of the *Synodikon of Tsar Boril* in which we find the laudation, we could assume that the name had the shape **Плѣнимиръ**⁵⁶. This is a compound consisting of two Old Church Slavic nouns: **плѣнъ** ('captivity, prize of war') and **миръ** ('peace'). As we saw earlier, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos and the author of *On the Treaty with the Bulgarians* claim that one of the consequences of the peace of 927 was the exchange of prisoners, owing to which many Byzantine soldiers held in Bulgarian captivity could return to their homeland⁵⁷. Perhaps this took place at the time (928) during which the Bulgarian imperial couple's firstborn entered the world? Maria Lekapene, aware of the propaganda significance of rulers' names (according to Liudprand of Cremona, she became known as Irene in 927), may have arranged for her eldest child to receive a symbolic name – one referring to the peace treaty concluded a few months earlier, and to the accompanying exchange of prisoners of war.

Maria and Peter may also have had one or several daughters. In the historiography, the two girls from the Bulgarian 'royal family' (βασιλικὸν γένος) who – according to Leo the Deacon – were sent to Constantinople in 969 as the spouses-to-be of Basil II and Constantine VIII have occasionally been considered to have been Maria and her husband's children⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ И. Д у й ч е в, *Българският княз...*, p. 20. John Skylitzes (p. 346) adds that Romanos was also called Symeon, in honor of his grandfather.

⁵⁶ *Synodikon of Tsar Boril*, pp. 149–150.

⁵⁷ Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 13, p. 74; *On the Treaty with the Bulgarians*, 5, p. 260.105–110. Cf. Т. Т о д о р о в, *Константин Багренородни...*, pp. 395–396; К. М а r i n o w, *In the Shackles...*, p. 178; *idem*, *Peace...*, p. 85; М. J. L e s z k a, К. М а r i n o w, *Carstwo...*, p. 156; С. З в е з д о в, *Договорът...*, p. 267; К. М а r i n o w, *Византийската имперска идея и претенциите на цар Симеон според словото "За мира с българите"*, КМС 25, 2016, p. 347, fn. 25; С. З в е з д о в, *Българо-византийските отношения при цар Петър I...*, pp. 13–14.

⁵⁸ Л е о т е Д е а с о н, V, 3, p. 79; И. Д у й ч е в, *Българският княз...*, p. 18; В. И г н а т о в, *Българските...*, p. 14.

Similar views have been expressed concerning the anonymous Bulgarian woman who became one of the wives of Vladimir I, prince of Rus', and who bore him two sons (the elder received the rather telling name of Boris-Romanos⁵⁹). Both of these hypotheses, however, have to be rejected for chronological reasons. Rather, the princesses mentioned above may have been Maria's granddaughters and Boris II's daughters: born ca. 960, they may have been considered of appropriate age to become the fiancées of the sons of Romanos II and Theophano⁶⁰. Similarly, even if we were to assume that Vladimir's Bulgarian wife was a very late child of Maria, it would be difficult to accept that she was the mother of prince Gleb-David, most likely still a teenager in the year of his death (1015). The woman in question – if we were to acknowledge the hypothesis of her Preslav origin in the first place – may have been a granddaughter of the Bulgarian tsaritsa (e.g. a child of Boris II, or of one of her daughters)⁶¹.

⁵⁹ *Russian Primary Chronicle*, AM 6488, p. 81. А.А. Молчанов, *Владимир Мономах и его имена. К изучению княжеского именника Рюриковичей X–XII вв.*, Слав 2004.2, pp. 81–83; А.Ф. Литвина, Ф.Б. Успенский, *Выбор имени у русских князей в X–XVI вв. Династическая история сквозь призму антропонимики*, Москва 2006, pp. 477–478.

⁶⁰ S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, p. 169; G. Atanasov, *On the Origin, Function and the Owner of the Adornments of the Preslav Treasure from the 10th century*, ABU 3.3, 1999, p. 91; idem, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 234–235; M.J. Leszka, K. Marínov, *Carstwo...*, p. 190.

⁶¹ Based on anthroponomical material, certain contemporary Russian historians are inclined to consider the mother of Boris-Romanos and Gleb-David to have been a descendant of the Bulgarian royal family, albeit without specifying their exact relation to Maria Lekapene and Peter (А.А. Молчанов, *Владимир Мономах...*, pp. 81–83; А.Ф. Литвина, Ф.Б. Успенский, *Выбор...*, pp. 477–488). The literature on the subject, however, features several other views on her origins. Among other things, it has been assumed that she came from Volga Bulgaria (Е.В. Пчелов, *Генеалогия древнерусских князей IX–начала XI в.*, Москва 2001, pp. 202–204; В. Игнатов, *Българските царици...*, p. 109). An interesting point of view has also been put forth by Polish scholar Andrzej Poppe. He argues that the Bulgarian woman mentioned in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* is in fact the Byzantine Anna, and that the term used there should be considered not so much an ethnonym as a sobriquet. It would have been given to the 'purple-born' imperial daughter in Constantinople or in Rus' due to her connections to the court in Preslav – after all, tsaritsa Maria Lekapene was her aunt (А. Поппе, *La naissance du culte de Boris et Gleb*, CCM 24, 1981, p. 29; idem, *Walka o spuściznę po Włodzimierzu Wielkim 1015–1019*, KH 102.3–4, 1995, pp. 6–10). This view is shared by

Georgi Atanasov theorizes that the small diadem found in the so-called 'Preslav treasure' (which contained the imperial family's jewelry, hidden during the war of 969–971) may have belonged to one of the daughters of Maria Lekapene. The Bulgarian scholar is of the opinion that the girl accompanied her mother on one of her journeys to Constantinople, and that the diadem was an exquisite gift from her Byzantine relatives⁶² – one of the many treasures that the tsaritsa, according to the aforementioned chroniclers, received from Romanos I Lekapenos⁶³.

In the literature on the subject, there have been occasional attempts to establish the time at which Maria's two sons (as well as the third, unnamed child) were born, based on the above-mentioned accounts in the Byzantine sources. After all, the anonymous Continuator of George the Monk and the authors dependent on him state that when the Bulgarian tsaritsa arrived in Constantinople for the final time, her father was no longer among the living⁶⁴. Considering that Christopher Lekapenos died in August 931, one should assume that Maria's visit took place in the autumn of that year at the earliest. Numerous scholars tend to use this date to argue that the relations between the Empire and Bulgaria became cooler in the later period, so that Maria stopped visiting her relatives⁶⁵. It should be pointed out, however, that the relevant sources do not suggest

Ukrainian researcher Nadezhda Nikitenko (Н.Н. Никитенко, *София Киевская и ее создатели. Тайны истории*, Каменец-Подольский 2014, pp. 106–107). A different opinion is presented e.g. by Alexandr Nazarenko (А.В. Назаренко, *Древняя Русь...*, p. 449). Finally, one should mention the rather controversial suppositions of certain Bulgarian historians that Boris-Romanos and Gleb-David were Vladimir and Anna's children, but that Anna, contrary to the testimony of Byzantine and Old Rus' chroniclers, was the daughter or perhaps granddaughter of Maria Lekapene and Peter (in the latter case, she would have been Boris II's daughter); И. Добрев, *Българите за руския народ, държава и култура*, София 2011, pp. 562–576.

⁶² G. Atanasov, *On the Origin...*, pp. 91–92; *idem*, *Инсигниите...*, p. 235.

⁶³ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 913; Symeon Logothete, 136.67; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 35, p. 422.

⁶⁴ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 913; Symeon Logothete, 136.67; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 35, p. 422.

⁶⁵ И. Дуйчев, *Българският княз...*, p. 19; Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, p. 99; А. Николов, *Политическа мисъл...*, p. 244; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, p. 159; *idem*, *Владетелският...*, p. 101; Г. Атанасов, *Печатите...*, p. 289.

that Maria's final visit to the Byzantine capital took place immediately after her father's death. According to the chroniclers, the official reason for the Bulgarian tsaritsa's journey was the wish to visit her grandfather – therefore, all that we can conclude is that it took place prior to 944, when Romanos I Lekapenos was deposed⁶⁶. Accordingly, the imperial couple's three children could have been born at any time between 928 and 944.

Maria, like many other medieval royal consorts, most likely wanted to fulfil her duty as soon as possible. At the time of Christopher's death, therefore, she could easily have been a mother of three already. It is difficult to say, however, whether she would have decided to take them on the rather long and exhausting journey as early as 931. They would have been between one and three years old at the time; it is doubtful that a responsible mother would have exposed an infant to hardships that could result in serious health issues. Rather, we should assume that Maria's final visit to Constantinople took place in 933/934, when her children were at the ages of three to six⁶⁷.

On the other hand, it cannot be completely ruled out that Boris and Roman were born considerably later than is commonly thought⁶⁸. It should be borne in mind that Leo the Deacon, relating the events of 971, clearly mentions that Boris was a father of two infant children at the time⁶⁹. Had he been born soon after his parents' wedding in 927, one would expect that in the 970s his children would have been fully grown.

⁶⁶ И. Д у й ч е в, *Българският княз...*, p. 19; S. G e o r g i e v a, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, p. 168.

⁶⁷ The remark about Maria's visits to Constantinople was placed by the Continuator of George the Monk (and, following him, by Symeon Logothete and the Continuator of Theophanes) between the information on Theophylaktos Lekapenos's elevation to the patriarchal see of Constantinople (February 933) and the note on the marriage of his brother Stephen as well as on the first raid by the Hungarians (April 934). Continuator of George the Monk, p. 913; Symeon Logothete, 136.67; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 35, p. 422.

⁶⁸ It is possible that they were not among the children taken by Maria to Constantinople in 933/934 at all. Conversely, she may have been accompanied by her daughters, the prematurely deceased Plenimir, or another son who died before reaching adulthood.

⁶⁹ Leo the Deacon, VIII, 6, p. 136.

In summary, the existing source material does not unequivocally settle the question of how many children Peter and Maria had; the exact time of their birth likewise remains uncertain. In all likelihood, the imperial couple had three sons (Plenimir, Boris and Roman) and several daughters, whose names we do not know.

4. On the Bulgarian Throne at Peter's Side

Maria Lekapene was Bulgarian tsaritsa from October 927 until her death, most likely in the early 960s. Thus, she would have been on the Preslav throne for about thirty-five years. It is worth asking what role Maria Lekapene came to play in her new homeland, and what position she occupied as the wife of tsar Peter in the contemporary power structures.

Significantly, none of the surviving written sources mention Maria's activity in public affairs. We find no traces of the tsaritsa's independent actions even in the sphere traditionally assigned to a Christian empress consort: there are no accounts of her charitable or foundation activities, or of propagating and strengthening Christianity (such evidence exists in relation to the Rus' princesses of the same period, Olga and Anna Porphyrogenete).

Thus, the common view in older Bulgarian historiography according to which the tsaritsa enjoyed an exceptionally high position at the Preslav court – including real political power and the ensuing possibility of influencing Peter's decisions⁷⁰ – could only find confirmation in the sphragistic material. The latter includes, for example, the aforementioned lead *sigilla* from 927–945, on the reverse of which we find the depiction of the royal couple (based on the Byzantine model). The creation of

⁷⁰ В.Н. Златарски, *История...*, pp. 535–536; П. Мутафчиев, *История...*, p. 201. Cf. Г. Бакалов, *Средновековният български владетел. Титулатура и инсигнии*, ²София 1995, p. 183; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 27; В. Игнатов, *Българските царици...*, p. 14.

such artifacts can hardly be considered the result of Maria's personal ambition and independent efforts, not consulted with her husband and his advisers. The seal images in question were certainly not a reflection of the status of Peter's spouse as an actual co-ruler, as some researchers think⁷¹. As previously mentioned, such items served primarily to commemorate the events of 927. They were also a convenient means of propaganda, through which the Bulgarian ruler was able to express his attachment to the Lekapenoi family; finally, they served to legitimize Peter's title. In this context, Maria – granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor – was merely a rather passive vehicle of imperial status; it was thanks marrying her that the Bulgarian monarch gained the formal right to use the title of tsar/emperor⁷².

It is worth noting that in the social realities of the 10th century, the expression of appreciation for the spouse's lineage – and the desire to flaunt it to one's subjects, as well as other courts – was by no means equivalent to granting her even the slightest degree of tangible political power. In fact, it did not even guarantee fulfilling elementary obligations and being respectful towards her. Let us refer once again to the relationship between the prince of Rus' and Anna Porphyrogenete, described in the sources in much more detail than that of the Bulgarian royal couple. Much like Peter, Vladimir I put his wife in the limelight of public

⁷¹ S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, p. 168; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на печатите...*, p. 59; С. Георгиева, *Жената...*, pp. 313–314; Д.И. Польшинный, *Царь Петр...*, p. 138; П. Павлов, *Година...*, p. 413; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на средновековните...*, p. 89.

⁷² Г. Бакалов, *Царската промугация на Петър и неговите приемници в светлината на българо-византийските дипломатически отношения след договора от 927 г.*, ИП 39.6, 1983, p. 36; F. Tinnfeld, *Byzantinische auswärtige Heiratspolitik vom 9. zum 12. Jahrhundert*, Bsl 54.1, 1993, p. 23; Г. Бакалов, *Средновековният български владетел...*, p. 170; Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 96–98; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на печатите...*, p. 59; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История...*, p. 276; А. Николов, *Политическа...*, p. 239; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, p. 163; P. Bogoń, *Kniaziowie, królowie, carowie... Tytuły i nazwy władców słowiańskich we wczesnym średniowieczu*, Katowice 2010, p. 40; С. Георгиева, *Жената...*, p. 314; M. J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, pp. 159–160; С. Звездов, *Договорът...*, pp. 267–268; idem, *Българо-византийските отношения при цар Петър I...*, p. 14; Z. A. Brzozowska, *Rola carcy Marii-Ireny Lekapeny w recepcji elementów bizantyńskiego modelu władzy w pierwszym państwie bułgarskim*, VP 66, 2016, p. 452.

life, making it clear that she was ‘born in the purple’ – daughter and sister of Constantinopolitan emperors. While no seals of this ruler survive, while the golden and silver coins minted by this him only show the enthroned prince himself⁷³, it is nonetheless known that princess Anna’s name was mentioned in official documents (e.g. in the short redaction of the so-called *Church Statute of prince Vladimir*)⁷⁴; besides, her painted image adorned the Church of Divine Wisdom in Kiev⁷⁵, and the memory of her imperial origins survived in later Rus’ historiography.

On the other hand, the ambiguous chronology of the birth of Vladimir’s sons has allowed certain researchers to speculate that the Rus’ prince may have moved away from Anna due to her infertility. Such opinions might be considered exaggerated, although one other issue is clear – even if the Porphyrogennete remained the sole official spouse of Vladimir I until her death in 1011/1012, it did not hinder her husband from pursuing erotic relationships with (numerous) other women⁷⁶.

There is also no evidence in the source material to support the claim, advanced by certain Bulgarian scholars, that Maria served as a ‘Byzantine spy’ at the Preslav court⁷⁷. Such views are based wholly on the aforementioned enigmatic remark by the Continuator of George the Monk (further repeated by Symeon Logothete and the author of the *Continuation of Theophanes*) on how the tsaritsa traveled to Constantinople several times, accompanied by her children, to visit her father and grandfather – the latter being emperor Romanos I Lekapenos⁷⁸. It goes without saying

⁷³ М.П. Сотникова, И.Г. Спасский, *Тысячелетие древнейших монет России. Сводный каталог русских монет X–XI вв.*, Ленинград 1983, pp. 60–81, 115–180.

⁷⁴ Я.Н. Щапов, *Княжеские уставы и церковь в Древней Руси XI–XIV вв.*, Москва 1972, pp. 115–127; idem, *Древнерусские княжеские уставы XI–XV вв.*, Москва 1976, p. 66. For a summary of the discussion on the authenticity of the *Church Statute of Prince Vladimir* and selected works on the subject cf.: G. Podskalsky, *Chrześcijaństwo i literatura teologiczna na Rusi Kijowskiej (988–1237)*, transl. J. Zychowicz, Kraków 2000, pp. 270–272.

⁷⁵ Н.Н. Никитенко, *София Киевская...*, pp. 75–117.

⁷⁶ А.Ю. Карпов, *Владимир Святый*, Москва 2004, pp. 287–288.

⁷⁷ В.Н. Златарски, *История...*, pp. 535–536; П. Мутафчиев, *История...*, p. 201; В. Игнатов, *Българските царици...*, p. 14.

⁷⁸ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 913; Symeon Logothete, 136.67; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 35, p. 422.

that, during such visits, Maria might have provided her Byzantine relatives with information about the plans and doings of her husband; however, we do not have sufficient source material to determine what was discussed during her sojourns in the Byzantine capital. It should be emphasized that Maria and her children's journeys to Constantinople could not have taken place without Peter's knowledge and consent. It would have been unlikely for the tsar to be amenable to such undertakings – and to allow them – had they been detrimental to the Bulgarian reason of state.

Unfortunately, the paucity of source material renders it impossible to prove another hypothesis. As I have mentioned before, the Byzantine historians agree that Maria, both in 927 and during her later visits to the empire's capital, received innumerable riches from her relatives⁷⁹. One is led to wonder whether these goods were not offered for a specific purpose: after all, with their aid, coupled with a modicum of diplomatic skills, Maria could have won over many of the people surrounding Peter, thus gaining some influence over his policies.

A view that needs to be debunked as a historiographical myth concerns the alleged far-reaching Byzantinisation of Old Bulgarian culture during Maria Lekapene's presence at the court. As correctly pointed out by Jonathan Shepard, Bulgaria had been drawn into the sphere of Byzantine civilization much earlier, while the reception of the elements of Byzantine traditions was a long-lasting process. Thus, in 927, our heroine arrived in a country whose political and intellectual elites were already quite familiar with the culture of Eastern Christianity, as well as with the views on monarchy prevalent in Constantinople⁸⁰. Suffice it to say that during the reign of Peter's father Symeon I the Great – a ruler educated in Constantinople and undoubtedly fascinated with the Eastern Roman ideals of imperial power⁸¹ – several Greek legal compilations had already been adapted in Bulgaria. These included fragments of the

⁷⁹ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 907, 913; Symeon Logothete, 136.51; 136.67; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, 35, pp. 415, 422.

⁸⁰ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 140.

⁸¹ M.J. Leszka, *The Monk versus the Philosopher. From the History of the Bulgarian-Byzantine War 894–896*, SCer 1, 2011, pp. 55–57; idem, *Symeon...*, pp. 29–34.

Ekloga, *Nomokanon of Fifty Titles* and *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles*⁸², as well as deacon Agapetos's *Ekthesis*, 72 chapters of advice to emperor Justinian I the Great (a brief treatise providing a synthetic exposition of Byzantine 'imperial theology'), translated into Slavic⁸³.

The fact that, by the year 927, the Preslav court was well-acquainted with the accomplishments of Byzantine civilization does not, however, exclude the possibility of Maria's personal impact on her new milieu. The tsaritsa most likely attempted to embed in the Bulgarian capital the customs and elements of court ceremonial that she knew from the Constantinople palace⁸⁴; nevertheless, due to insufficient source material, we are unable to determine the scope of her influence. Most likely, it did not extend beyond the walls of the tsar's seat and the narrow circle of people directly surrounding her⁸⁵. The archaeological material (e.g. the aforementioned 'Preslav treasure' as well as the most recent discoveries of Bulgarian researchers) allows us to conclude that during Maria's time, Byzantine models of female fashion became commonplace in Preslav; in that period, jewelry produced in the workshops of Constantinople came to be greatly desired by ladies from the highest social circles⁸⁶.

Maria and Peter's reign did see, however, a fundamental shift in the manner in which medieval Bulgarians perceived their tsaritsa and her role within the state. Until 927, women occupying the throne in Preslav – unlike contemporary Byzantine empresses – had been almost invisible

⁸² Г. Бакалов, *Средновековният...*, p. 136; K. Maksimovich, *Byzantine Law in Old Slavonic Translations and the Nomocanon of Methodius*, Bsl 65, 2007, p. 10; Т. Славова, *Юридическа литература*, [in:] *История на българската средновековна литература*, ed. А. Милтенова, София 2008, pp. 195–197.

⁸³ А. Николов, *Старобългарският превод на "Изложение на поучителни глави към император Юстиниан" от дякон Агапит и развитието на идеята за достойнството на българския владетел в края на IX – началото на X в.*, Pbg 24.3, 2000, pp. 77–85; idem, *Политическа...*, pp. 214–230, 250–268.

⁸⁴ J. Shepherd, *A marriage...*, pp. 140–141; M. J. Leszka, *Wizerunek...*, pp. 124–125; idem, *Образът на българския цар Борис II във византийските извори*, SB 25, 2006, p. 146.

⁸⁵ П. Павлов, *Години...*, p. 416.

⁸⁶ G. Atanasov, *On the Origin...*, pp. 85–92; idem, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 193, 230–235; С. Тодорова-Чанева, *Женският накит от епохата на Първото българско царство. VII–XI в.*, София 2009, pp. 26–28.

in the public sphere: they were not mentioned in official diplomatic correspondence, nor were their images included on coins or seals. The sole predecessor of our protagonist whose name survived in historical texts is another Maria, wife of Boris-Michael; meanwhile, both of Symeon I the Great's spouses (including Peter's mother) will forever remain anonymous⁸⁷. As Magda Hristodulova and Sashka Georgieva rightly observe, Maria Lekapene should be considered the first medieval Bulgarian female royal to enter the public sphere⁸⁸. This elevation in the status of the Preslav tsaritsa during this era can be associated with the introduction of the Byzantine view regarding the role of the empress within the state to Old Bulgarian culture⁸⁹.

There can be no doubt that Maria's titulature was modeled on the appellations used by Constantinopolitan empresses. On the official seals of the Bulgarian royal couple, produced soon after 927, we find a Greek inscription in which Maria and Peter are titled emperors of the Bulgarians: Πέτρος καὶ Μαρίας βασιλεῖς τῶν Βουλγάρων⁹⁰. During the 940s, the writing accompanying the images of the couple was modified somewhat; the most likely reconstruction is Πέτρος καὶ Μαρίας ἐν Χριστῷ αὐγουστοι βασιλεῖς or Πέτρος καὶ Μαρίας ἐν Χριστῷ αὐτοκράτορες βασιλεῖς Βουλγάρων⁹¹. Thus, the analysis of the sigillographic evidence allows us to state that

⁸⁷ Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 182, 184; В. Игнатов, *Българските царици...*, pp. 9–12.

⁸⁸ М. Христовулова, *Титул и регалии болгарской владетельницы в эпоху средневековья (VII–XIV вв.)*, ЕВ 1978.3, p. 142; С. Георгиева, *Жената...*, pp. 312, 352.

⁸⁹ J. Herrin, *The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium*, PP 169, 2000, pp. 5–35 [= J. Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium*, Princeton 2013, pp. 161–193].

⁹⁰ It should not be considered surprising that Maria and Peter are described here with the term βασιλεῖς. In Byzantine sphragistics and numismatics, this was the accepted form of describing two co-rulers, regardless of their sex. For example, on the coins minted in the years 914–919, Zoe Karbonopsina and her minor son Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos were titled βασιλεῖς Ῥωμαίων (A.R. Bellingier, Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue...*, p. 12).

⁹¹ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 142; Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 98–99; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на печатите...*, pp. 58–60; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, p. 27; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История...*, pp. 275–276; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, pp. 156–159; idem, *Владетелският...*, pp. 99–101; С. Георгиева, *Жената...*, p. 313; M.J. Leszka, K. Marínov, *Carstwo...*, pp. 159–160; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на средновековните...*, pp. 90–95.

Maria used the titles conventionally worn by women reigning in the Byzantine capital: *basilissa* and *augusta*⁹².

We also find some interesting information in the works of Byzantine chroniclers. The anonymous Continuator of George the Monk, Symeon Logothete and – dependent on both of them – the Continuator of Theophanes noted a particularly significant detail: Maria Lekapene, just after her marriage with Peter, was proclaimed ‘ruler of Bulgarians’ (δέσποινα Βουλγάρων) in Constantinople⁹³. It is worth nothing that the term found here – *despoina* – was, according to numerous researches, an appellation used by Byzantine empresses interchangeably with the titles of *augusta* and *basilissa*⁹⁴.

The sources mentioned above do not, however, allow us to provide a definitive answer to the question of how Maria’s Slavic subjects addressed her. Given that the tsaritsa does not appear in a single original medieval Bulgarian text, a scholar studying the titulature of Peter’s wife is forced to rely on the analysis of Slavic translations of Byzantine chronicles. The author of the oldest translation of the *Continuation of George the Monk*, writing – as mentioned before – at the close of the 10th century or during the first decades of the 11th century, translated the passage about the title granted to Maria in 927 with extreme fidelity. The Greek term *despoina* is – in accordance with its etymology – rendered as *vladyčica*, i.e. ‘female ruler’ (причѣтасѧ моужю црю и владычица блѣгаром нарѣна)⁹⁵.

⁹² Z.A. Brzowska, *Cesarzowa Bułgarów, Augusta i Bazylisa – Maria-Irena Lekapena i transfer bizantyńskiej idei kobiety–władczyni (imperial feminine) w średnio-wiecznej Bułgarii*, SMer 17, 2017, p. 18.

⁹³ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 907; Symeon Logothete, 136.51; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, p. 415.

⁹⁴ S. Maslev, *Die staatsrechtliche Stellung der byzantinischen Kaiserinnen*, Bsl 27, 1966, p. 310; E. Bensammar, *La titulature de l’impératrice et sa signification. Recherches sur les sources byzantines de la fin du VIII^e siècle à la fin du XII^e siècle*, B 46, 1976, pp. 270, 286–287; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses. Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204*, London–New York 1999, p. 2; B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025–1204. Power, Patronage and Ideology*, New York 1999, pp. 102–117; L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, Leicester 2001, pp. 118–127; Z.A. Brzowska, *Cesarzowa...*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Continuator of George the Monk (Slavic), 7, p. 562; A. Николов, *Политическа...*, pp. 134, 236.

In another Slavic translation of this chronicle, completed in the Balkans in the 14th century, we find a notable semantic shift: the text states outright that Maria was called *carica* (tsaritsa, empress) of the Bulgarians (црѣю припражесѧ мѧжѧ и царица Бѣлѣгаромѣ наречесѧ)⁹⁶. One can suspect that the latter term was the most popular appellation used in Preslav when referring to Peter's wife. At that time, it most likely took the form *cēsarica*. In the subsequent centuries, it went through several phonetic changes (*cēsarica* ≥ *cesarica* ≥ *cbsarica* ≥ *carica*), acquiring its final form known from later works: *carica*⁹⁷.

The *Book of Ceremonies* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos confirms that during the 10th century, the Bulgarian tsaritsa was listed in the official diplomatic protocol. The imperial author, who was one of the eyewitnesses of the ceremonies that accompanied the signing of the 927 peace treaty, admitted that the status of the Preslav monarch had changed during his reign: he had become a 'spiritual son' of the *basileus*. Notably, however, the 'purple-born' author does not mention any alteration in the Bulgarian tsaritsa's titulature that would have accompanied this – according to him, both before and after 927 she was to be addressed by *God archontissa of Bulgaria* (ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀρχόντισσα Βουλγαρίας)⁹⁸.

The placing of Maria's image on the lead seals from the years 927–945 should also be considered a result of transplanting Byzantine traditions onto Bulgarian soil. Scholars who claim that portraying the ruler's wife

⁹⁶ Symeon Logothete (Slavic), p. 137; А. Николов, *Политическа...*, pp. 134, 236.

⁹⁷ G. Moravcsik, *Zur Geschichte des Herrschertitels "caesar">царь*, ЗРВИ 8, 1963, p. 234; L. Moszyński, *Staro-cerkiewno-słowiańskie apelatywy określające osoby będące u władzy*, BP 2, 1985, p. 44; Г. Бакалов, *Средновековият...*, pp. 155–158; Z.A. Brzozowska, *Geneza tytułu "car" w świetle zabytków średniowiecznego piśmiennictwa słowiańskiego*, WS 46, 2012, pp. 36–38; eadem, *Car i caryca czy cesarz i cesarzowa Bułgarów? Tytułatura Piotra i Marii-Ireny Lekapeny w średniowiecznych tekstach słowiańskich (Jak powinniśmy nazywać władców bułgarskich z X stulecia)*, WS 62, 2017, pp. 17–26.

⁹⁸ Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, II, 47, pp. 681–682; М. Христовулова, *Титул...*, p. 142; Г. Бакалов, *Царската...*, p. 37; i dem, *Средновековият...*, pp. 171–172; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, p. 152; i dem, *Владетелският...*, p. 95; Р. Бороń, *Kniaziowie...*, pp. 40–41; M.J. Leszka, K. Marín, *Carstwo...*, pp. 206–207.

on an official *sigillum* was a phenomenon characteristic only of 10th-century Bulgaria, with no analogue in Byzantine sigillography or numismatics, are mistaken⁹⁹. The tradition of portraying empresses (mothers, sisters, wives and daughters of the *basileis*) on coinage and seals was cultivated in Byzantium – albeit with interruptions – since the 4th century. It is worth noting that the depiction of the empress had only disappeared from the coins and sigillographic material created within the Empire a few years before the signing of the 927 peace treaty, due to the 919 deposition (termination of regency) of Zoe Karbonopsina, mother of Constantine VII¹⁰⁰. Still, the practice was not discontinued in the later period: towards the end of his life, Peter could see Byzantine coins and seals with the image of empress Theophano, as regent for her minor sons¹⁰¹.

The similarity between the seal images of the Bulgarian royal couple and the analogous depictions of Zoe and Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos from 914–919 is striking. Nearly all of the gold coins and lead *sigilla* produced on Zoe orders were made according to one and the same design, with the obverse portraying Christ or the Mother of God, and the reverse – a likeness of the rulers. Constantine is on the left side of the composition, with Zoe to the right; they are holding the patriarchal cross between them, and on some of the artifacts, the mother's hand is above that of her son. The images are accompanied by an inscription identifying them as βασιλεῖς Ῥωμαίων. One is, therefore, led to conclude that the creators of the Bulgarian *sigillum* modeled it on the Byzantine artifacts from 914–919¹⁰².

⁹⁹ Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 98, 184; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, pp. 162–163; idem, *Владетелският...*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁰ S. Maslev, *Die staatsrechtliche...*, p. 325; Ph. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, London–Berkeley–Los Angeles 1982, pp. 179–184; A.R. Bellinger, Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue...*, pp. 12, 530–569; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses...*, pp. 120–121; Z.A. Brzozowska, *Cesarzowa...*, p. 16.

¹⁰¹ S. Maslev, *Die staatsrechtliche...*, p. 326; Ph. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins...*, p. 184; A.R. Bellinger, Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue...*, p. 12; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses...*, p. 271; Z.A. Brzozowska, *Cesarzowa...*, p. 16.

¹⁰² J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, pp. 143–144; Z.A. Brzozowska, *Cesarzowa Bulgarów...*, pp. 16–17.

Curiously, a dig in Preslav uncovered a lead *sigillum* from the 10th–11th century layer, almost entirely devoid of figural elements, belonging – according to the inscription – to *basilissa* Maria (Μαρία βασίλισσα). Some scholars are of the opinion that the artifact could be Maria's personal seal, manufactured after 945¹⁰³. The use of a dedicated *sigillum privatum* by the Bulgarian tsaritsa would provide another piece of evidence suggesting that Byzantine ideas concerning the role of the imperial spouse became widespread in 10th-century Preslav. Suffice it to say that there are extant 10th–11th century seals of Byzantine empresses (e.g. Theodora), of eminent Constantinople ladies (usually titled *zoste patrikia*)¹⁰⁴, and of Rus' princesses (e.g. of Maria, daughter of Constantine IX Monomachos), the latter far from ignorant of the status of women at the palace in Constantinople¹⁰⁵.

Seal depictions are also the sole type of sources based on which one might attempt to reconstruct the official court dress of the Bulgarian tsaritsa in the 10th century, along with her insignia. No such data is available from archaeological digs, even from the aforementioned 'Preslav treasure.' As Georgi Atanassov's research shows, the diadem found in the collection could not have belonged to Maria, as it was intended for a very young woman – one of the daughters or granddaughters of the tsaritsa¹⁰⁶.

Since Maria and Peter were depicted on all of the *sigilla* holding the patriarchal cross, we are unable to conclude whether the Bulgarian

¹⁰³ Т. Михайлова, Печат на "Мария Василиса" от Преслав, НСЕ 3.2, 2007, pp. 39–41; Т. Тодоров, Владетелският..., pp. 101–102; И. Йорданов, Корпус на средновековните..., pp. 119–121.

¹⁰⁴ S. Maslev, *Die staatsrechtliche...*, p. 324; Ph. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins...*, pp. 175, 178; A.R. Bellinger, Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue...*, pp. 12, 428, 457–465; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses...*, pp. 102–103; В.С. Шандровская, Печати титулованных женщин Византии, АДСВ 33, 2002, pp. 89–101; J. Herrin, *Women in Purple...*, p. 191; Н. Кънев, Византийската титла патрикия-зосте (IX–XI в.). Приносът на сфрагистиката за попълване на листата на носителките на титлата, Истор 4, 2011, pp. 191–198.

¹⁰⁵ В.А. Янин, *Актовые печати Древней Руси X–XV вв.*, vol. I, Печати X – начала XIII в., Москва 1970, pp. 17–19, 33, 130, 173, 183–184, 210–211.

¹⁰⁶ G. Atanassov, *On the Origin...*, pp. 81–94; idem, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 224–243.

tsaritsa used a scepter and a sphere, i.e. the insignia we find in depictions of Byzantine empresses of the 8th–9th centuries. The diadem and robes worn by Maria as portrayed on the artifact under examination do bear a marked resemblance to the elements of clothing depicted on seals and coins of Zoe Karbonopsina (914–919), as well as on a mid-10th century ivory tablet showing a full-figure Byzantine imperial couple: Romanos II and Bertha-Eudokia¹⁰⁷.

The diadem on Maria's head is a middle Byzantine *stemma* of the female type, differing from the male variant in its ornamentation. On many of the seals of Maria and Peter from 927–945, we see long, shoulder-length *prependoulia* (triple pearl pendants), as well as a richly decorated headband with a cross on top and two conical pinnacles on each side¹⁰⁸. Due to the poor state of preservation of the seals' outer parts, it is significantly more challenging for scholars to ascertain what type of robe the tsaritsa is wearing: according to some researchers, it is a *loros*, according to others – a *chlamys*¹⁰⁹. Both of these, we may note, were a part of the official court attire of Byzantine empresses¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁷ Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 99, 186, 256; M.G. Parani, *The Romanos Ivory and the New Tokali Kilise: Imperial Costume as a Tool for Dating Byzantine Art*, CAr 49, 2001, pp. 15–28; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, p. 163; *idem*, *Владетелският...*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁸ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 144; Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, pp. 185–186; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на печатите...*, pp. 58–59; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, pp. 162, 255–256; *idem*, *Владетелският...*, p. 103; Г. Атанасов, *Печатите...*, p. 287; Н. Кънев, *Четири непубликувани оловни печата от района на Шумен*, Истор 5, 2012, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 144; Г. Атанасов, *Инсигниите...*, p. 186; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на печатите...*, pp. 58–59; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, pp. 162, 255–256; *idem*, *Владетелският...*, p. 103; Г. Атанасов, *Печатите...*, p. 287; Н. Кънев, *Четири...*, p. 63; П. Павлов, *Години...*, p. 432.

¹¹⁰ A.R. Bellinger, Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue...*, pp. 122–123; J. Herrin, *The Imperial Feminine...*, p. 16; M.G. Parani, *The Romanos Ivory...*, p. 18; Z.A. Brzozowska, *Cesarzowa...*, p. 18.

5. Maria's Death

Two Byzantine authors mention Maria's death in their chronicles: John Skylitzes and John Zonaras (relying on the former). The account of interest to us is located in the part of the narrative devoted to the final stage of emperor Romanos II's life¹¹¹. Thus, several scholars are inclined to assume that Peter's wife died at the same time as Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos's son, i.e. in 963¹¹².

Nonetheless, the particulars of the two chroniclers' narrative need to be taken into account. They mention Maria's demise in a somewhat incidental manner, focusing their attention on something rather different: Peter's efforts to renew the peace treaty of 927. The necessity to reconfirm the provisions of the treaty – by then decades old – was the result of the accession of a new emperor in Constantinople, not of the Bulgarian tsaritsa's death¹¹³. Hence, the year 963 should be considered a *terminus ante quem* of Maria's death, rather than its specific date. Perhaps, then, those scholars who argue that Maria departed this life in the early 960s are correct¹¹⁴.

An interesting aspect of the issue of dating Maria's death has been illuminated by Todor Todorov. The scholar draws attention to the following fact: Liudprand of Cremona, who mentioned Symeon I the Great, Romanos I Lekapenos, Christopher, Maria and Peter in his *Antapodosis* (written in the years 958–962), pointed out that the Bulgarian tsar was the only one still of among the living. Perhaps, then, the tsaritsa – like her father-in-law, grandfather and father – died somewhat earlier than

¹¹¹ John Skylitzes, p. 255; John Zonaras, XVI, 23, p. 495; John Zonaras (Slavic), p. 146.

¹¹² S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses...*, pp. 169–170; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, p. 160; idem, *Владетелският...*, p. 102; С. Звездов, *Българо-византийските отношения при цар Петър*, Мин 2016.3, p. 15.

¹¹³ M. J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 174.

¹¹⁴ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 147; С. Звездов, *Българо-византийските отношения при цар Петър...*, p. 15; idem, *Българо-византийските отношения при цар Петър I...*, pp. 44–45.

is commonly assumed, i.e. sometime before the bishop of Cremona started writing his account¹¹⁵.

At this point, it is also worth noting that the literature on the subject features occasional attempts to link Maria's death with the removal of her name and images from the official seals of the Bulgarian monarch. If one were to accept this assumption, one would have to date Maria's demise significantly earlier, around 945¹¹⁶. However, it would be rather difficult to reconcile such dating with John Skylitzes' account.

We do not know anything about the circumstances of Maria's death. We can only guess that she ended her life as a lay person, without donning monastic robes in her later years. It seems that if the tsaritsa had decided to undertake such transition, it would have been noted by Bulgarian writers, who devoted their attention primarily to those female royals who ended their earthly existence in a monastery¹¹⁷.

The fact that Maria showed no interest in living in a monastic community may have been one of the reasons why she was almost entirely absent from the historical memory of medieval Bulgarians. It is worth asking what other factors determined why Maria, a woman who hailed from an imperial family and whose marriage to Peter was a point of pride for him and his subjects, was forgotten during subsequent centuries.

Among the causes of this phenomenon, one should indicate primarily the lack of a native, Old Bulgarian historiographical tradition. After all, there is not a single extant chronicle from tsar Peter's times that would include a description and evaluation of his rule. It should be pointed out that the memory of the role of princess Anna Porphyrogenete, wife of Vladimir I, in the process of Christianization of East Slavs survived in medieval Rus' writings mainly owing to the account in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (the work that inspired the creators of the subsequent annals). The Old Bulgarian authors, on the other hand, did not create

¹¹⁵ Т. Тодоров, *България...*, р. 161; *идем*, *Владетелският...*, р. 103.

¹¹⁶ J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, р. 147; В. Гюзелев, *Значението...*, р. 27; Т. Тодоров, *България...*, рр. 160–161; *идем*, *Владетелският...*, рр. 102–103.

¹¹⁷ Г. Николов, *Български царици от Средновековието в "ангелски образ"*, ГСУ. НЦСВПИД 93(12), 2003, рр. 299–303.

their own vision of Peter and Maria's reign, one that would have been independent of Byzantine chronicles translated into Slavic.

The fact that the sources dedicated to tsar Peter as a saint of the Bulgarian Church are silent on the subject of Maria may be explained by the specific character of this ruler's cult. It has been noted repeatedly in the literature on the subject that, contrary to many other monarchs from the sphere of *Slavia Orthodoxa*, he was worshipped not as the one responsible for Christianizing his country, but as the saint who deepened the Christian piety of Bulgarians. For this reason, works devoted to Peter focus on monastic themes in particular. They highlight the spiritual connection between the ruler and St. John of Rila, as well as his personal predilection for monastic life and the fact that he accepted the Little Schema near the end of his life¹¹⁸. There were even frequent efforts, for example in the *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah* or in the 13th century *Service of St. Tsar Peter*, to paint the picture of Symeon's son as a man who lived a semi-ascetic life and remained unmarried¹¹⁹. In this model, there was simply no room for a woman or wife, even one of such high birth as Peter's Byzantine consort – a daughter and granddaughter of Constantinopolitan emperors.



¹¹⁸ I. Biliarsky, *Saint Jean de Rila et saint tsar Pierre. Les destins des deux cultes du X^e siècle*, [in:] *Byzantium and the Bulgarians (1018–1185)*, ed. K. Nikolaou, K. Tsiknakis, Athens 2008, pp. 172–174; idem, *St. Peter (927–969), Tsar of the Bulgarians*, [in:] *State and Church. Studies in Medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium*, ed. V. Gjuzelev, K. Petkov, Sofia 2011, pp. 187–186; M.J. Leszka, *Rola cara Piotra (927–969) w życiu bułgarskiego Kościoła. Kilka uwag*, VP 66, 2016, pp. 435–437.

¹¹⁹ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 17; *Service of St. Tsar Peter*, p. 392. Cf. Д.И. Пoлывянный, *Царь Пётр...*, pp. 143–145.