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The Internal Situation



1. Fighting Internal Opposition

1.1. John's Plot

Peter, soon after concluding peace with Byzantium and arriving with Maria in Preslav, found himself faced with a plot headed by his brother John. This event likely happened in 928¹. John's goal was to remove Peter from the Bulgarian throne, and its takeover.

The fundamental source of information about this endeavour is the Byzantine text discussed herein. It states the following:

¹Based on the sources at our disposal, it is not possible to precisely date this event. The Byzantine authors placed it in their narratives between the conclusion of peace with Byzantium (October 927) and Michael's rebellion. The latter is traditionally dated to 928, on the assumption that it was a rapid reaction to the conclusion of peace with Byzantium. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the plot happened later, in 929 or even in 930. It had to have happened before Michael's rebellion, but this is dated only vaguely to 930 (without indicating even the time of year). Assuming that the rebellion started as a consequence of the discovery of John's plot, it is possible that it happened shortly after that event.

An attack on Peter the Bulgarian was attempted by John, along with other dignitaries of Symeon (μεγιστάνων Συμεών). When this was revealed, John was flogged and locked in prison, and the others were subjected to unprecedented tortures.²

This relation is used to describe John's actions as an expression of disagreement with Peter's peaceful policy towards Byzantium. This is supposedly seen from the statement that John was supported by Symeon's notables, seen as the anti-Byzantine 'war party.' Such nature of John's actions would have also been indicated by the fact that both he and Benjamin (Bayan), as is mentioned, *still wore Bulgarian dress*³.

In our view, the Byzantine relation should be approached with considerable caution. The anonymous author, as well as other Byzantine sources, does not after all mention any reasons for the attempted coup, and only state that such an event took place. Who were these Bulgarian notables described as 'Symeon's dignitaries?' Does this appellation alone really allow seeing them as the representatives of the 'war party?' We cannot have certainty here.

On the one hand, one might somewhat mischievously say that at the time when the rebellion was stirring, all of the Bulgarian notables could have been described as 'Symeon's.' Peter had not been ruling for long enough to build support that would have been his own. Whatever backing he had was inherited from his father, and thus Peter's environment necessarily included 'dignitaries of Symeon,' with George Sursuvul in the lead. It is also worth noting, as I mentioned, that in the final years of Symeon's reign his policy was not aimed at direct military confrontation with Byzantium, and undoubtedly at least some of his collaborators did not share the anti-Byzantine sentiment⁴. On the other hand, it

² Continuator of Theophanes, p. 419; cf. Symeon Magister, 136.60; John Skylitzes, p. 225.

³ Continuator of Theophanes, p. 412; Symeon Magister, 136.45; John Skylitzes, p. 225.

⁴ M.J. Leszka, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*, Łódź 2013, p. 208–214.

seems likely that for the Byzantine author, writing with a hindsight that unambiguously presented Symeon as an enemy of Byzantium, the phrase ‘dignitaries of Symeon’ referred to those who were hostile towards the Empire. Furthermore, from the Byzantine author’s perspective the fact that ‘dignitaries of Symeon’ were active meant that there have been, after all, some ‘dignitaries of Peter,’ in whose favour the former have lost their previous positions, which they did not want to accept. The line dividing the two groups was not necessarily dictated by their attitudes towards Byzantium, but also by Symeon’s decision regarding succession, as a result of which George Sursuvul and his associates became more significant.

We also have no basis for quantifying the size of this group. The term ‘dignitaries of Symeon’ may have equally well meant a narrow group of Symeon’s close collaborators, for some reason set aside by Peter, as well as a more numerous group of magnates who, for various reasons, did not support the new ruler⁵.

⁵ On the subject of this agreement see also: Т. Тодоров, *Вътрешнодинастичният проблем в България от края на 20-те–началото на 30-те години на Х в.*, Истор 3, 2008, p. 271. For more information on the subject of John’s possible supporters see: В.Н. Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I/2, *Първо българско Царство. От славянизацията на държавата до падането на Първото царство (852–1018)*, София 1927, p. 536–537; И. Божилов, *Българите във Византийската империя*, София 1995, p. 308; К. Попконстантинов, *Епиграфски бележки за Иван, Царсимеоновият син*, БСП 3, 1994, p. 73; П. Павлов, *Братята на цар Петър и техните заговори*, Ист 7.4/5, 1999, p. 2–3. Ichirgu-boila Mostich, one of the most influential collaborators of Symeon, was to be found among them. On the subject of Mostich, see С. Станчев, В. Иванова, М. Балан, П. Боев, *Надписът на чъргубия Мостич*, София 1955; Й.А. Йорданов, В. Гюзелев, *Чъргубия Мостич (костни останки, образ, гроб)*, [in:] Проф. Д.и.н. Станчо Ваклинов и средновековната българска култура, ed. К. Попконстантинов, Б. Борисов, Р. Костова, Велико Търново 2005, p. 211–215; В. Гюзелев, *Кавханите и ичиргу боилите на българското ханство-царство*, Пловдив 2007, according to index; И. Лазаров, *Мостич*, [in:] Й. Андреев, И. Лазаров, П. Павлов, *Кой кой е в средновековна България*, ³София 2012, p. 503–504. The hypothesis about Mostich’s participation was put forward by, e.g. К. Попконстантинов, *Епиграфски.....*, p. 73. This hypothesis has no basis in the sources. It is also worth noting that according to Gyuzelev Mostich and George Sursuvul are one and the same person.

Based on the analysed text, the actions taken by John appear to have been a court plot that was defused through its discovery⁶. From time to time, however, attempts are made to paint a different picture of John's plot as a more serious undertaking that reached beyond the capital city of Preslav. Four inscriptions, or rather their fragments, of which one was found in Preslav, one in Ravna and two in Murfatlar, constitute the source base for this view. These inscriptions, according to i.a. Kazimir Popkonstantinov, ought to be associated with John's coup. The most critical for the re-interpretation of John's coup is the inscription found in an old rock church of a monastery by Murfatlar. It is written, like the other three, in Slavic script and is read as: **ИВАН ЦАР**. This is taken as indicating that John was proclaimed ruler of Bulgaria, and that he had supporters in, i.a., northern Dobrudzha⁷. It is not certain, however, that this inscription refers to John the son of Symeon. Other people who may have been meant here include John Tzymiskes, the Byzantine emperor. As such, both the question of John being proclaimed tsar and attempts to view his coup as something more than a local Preslavian undertaking have to be shelved unless other sources can be found.

John's plot was discovered, and both he himself and its other participants were punished. Peter treated his brother mercifully (John was flogged, imprisoned and probably forced to become a monk), and dealt more harshly with his supporters⁸.

⁶ One might conclude that the plot had no repercussions beyond the capital. Byzantine authors would likely have mentioned it, had that been the case, as they did regarding Michael's rebellion against Peter in 930, which happened outside of the capital (Continuator of Theophanes, p. 420; John Skylitzes, p. 226).

⁷ К. Попконстантинов, *Епиграфски...*, p. 73–74; П. Павлов, *Векът на цар Самуил*, София 2014, p. 20–21; *idem*, *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. 418. Cf. Т. Тодоров, *Вътрешнодинастичният...*, p. 269–270.

⁸ Continuator of Theophanes, p. 419; cf. Symeon Logothete, 136.60; John Skylitzes, p. 225.

1.1.1. John's Fate after the Plot

Sometime after the plot had been dealt with, John⁹ left Bulgaria for Constantinople. According to Byzantine sources, he was supposedly transported by the Byzantine envoy John the rector without Peter's knowledge¹⁰. In the empire's capital, John broke monastic vows, marrying a certain Armenian, and receiving wealth from the emperor. Romanos Lekapenos imparted exceptional significance to the wedding of Symeon's son, as it was witnessed by Christopher, the son and co-emperor of Romanos as well as Peter's father-in-law, and by the aforementioned John the rector¹¹.

It is difficult to believe that John, until recently a pretender to the throne, travelled to Constantinople without Peter's approval¹². The latter perhaps did not want him in Bulgaria, where he would have been a potential threat to his rule. A possible execution, blinding or long-term imprisonment of the plotter in Bulgaria, created the potential threat of a new rebellion by John's supporters. Abroad, without the support of Bulgarian dignitaries, John was far less dangerous. Besides, his inclusion into the Byzantine aristocracy may have compromised the erstwhile pretender to Bulgarian crown in the eyes of his supporters, if he really had been championing anti-Byzantine policies. Romanos Lekapenos' attitude towards John may be explained by the fact that John was, after all, the brother of Christopher's son-in-law, which would likely explain

⁹ It is possible that until that time he was imprisoned in Preslav in one of the towers located by the eastern part of the inner walls (К. Попконстантинов, *Епиграфски...*, p. 75).

¹⁰ Symeon Magister, 136.60; Continuator of Theophanes, p. 419; John Skylitzes, p. 225.

¹¹ Symeon Magister, 136.60; Continuator of Theophanes, p. 419; John Skylitzes, p. 225.

¹² Similarly – П. Павлов, *Братята...*, p. 4; Л. Симеонова, *Щрихи към историята на тайната дипломация, разузнаването и контраразузнаването в средновековния свят*, [in:] *Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70. Годишната на Акад. Васил Гюзелев*, ed. М. Каймакамова et al., София 2006, p. 504–506; П. Павлов, *Векът...*, p. 21.

the co-emperor's presence at John's wedding. Additionally, the emperor was thusly securing the stability of the freshly concluded peace with his northern neighbour. Some scholars, however, accept the Byzantine authors' story at its face value; accordingly, John would become a kind of a spectre, a threat hovering over the Bulgarian ruler¹³. Even if this were so, John was never actively used in this role. We know nothing about his later fate. One could say that sending John to Byzantium removed him from the picture.

Sending John to Constantinople appears to indicate that the Byzantines were not involved in his plot. Following a lengthy war, Byzantium needed a lasting peace with Bulgaria, and from Constantinopolitan perspective, it was Peter, related by marriage with the Lekapenos dynasty, who guaranteed it. Undermining his position would have threatened the peace, concluded with difficulty, and thus the Byzantine interests.

1.2. Michael's Rebellion

It is possible that the failure of John's plot had spurred Michael, Symeon I the Great's firstborn son (who remained in a monastery at the beginning of Peter's reign), into action. It was most likely in 930¹⁴ that

¹³ E.g. J.V.A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans: a Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor 1983, p. 162; И. Божилков, В. Гюзелев, *История на средновековна България. VII–XIV в.*, София 2006, p. 278; cf. M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 153; П. Павлов, *Братята...*, p. 5; idem, *Години...*, p. 419–421. This hypothesis, however, cannot be positively verified. It is often forgotten in this context that Peter's wife was Christopher's daughter, and it is difficult to imagine that her father, potentially Romanos' heir, would have wanted to move against her husband – although of course one cannot rule out the possibility.

¹⁴ The date is approximate: none of the sources inform us when it happened. Since both in Continuator of Theophanes and in John Skylitzes it precedes an event from March 931 (misfortunes that befell Constantinople Continuator of Theophanes, p. 420; Symeon Magister, 136.61; cf. John Skylitzes, p. 226, which presents the same events, but without dates), it is accepted it happened in 930 (В.Н. Златарски, *История...*, p. 840). Regarding the *terminus post quem*, the problem is more serious, since we only have the information that Michael's rebellion happened after John's plot which, as previously mentioned, is dated only approximately, most commonly to 928.

Michael moved against Peter. The information at our disposal about this event comes from two Byzantine sources: *Continuation of Theophanes* and from John Skylitzes¹⁵. Because of their importance for this topic, we quote them in full:

Continuator of Theophanes (p. 420):

However also the monk Michael, brother of Peter, attempting with all strength to gain power over the Bulgarians, started a rebellion in a certain Bulgarian fortress. To him flocked Scythians, who refused to obey Peter's rule. After his [Michael's] death, they attacked Roman territories, that is they went from Maketidos through Strymon to Hellas, entered Nikopolis and there plundered everything.

John Skylitzes (p. 226; transl., p. 218, with minor changes – M.J.L., K.M.):

Now Michael, Peter's other brother, aspired to become ruler of the Bulgarians. He occupied a powerful fortress and greatly agitated the Bulgarians lands. Many flocked to his banner but, when he died shortly after, these people, for fear of Peter's wrath, entered Roman territory. They reached Nikopolis by way of Macedonia, Strymon and Helladikon theme, laying waste everything that came to hand, and there, finally, settled (καὶ τέλος ἐν αὐτῇ σαββατίσαντες). In due course and after a number of reverses, they became Roman subjects.¹⁶

¹⁵ Continuator of Theophanes, p. 420; John Skylitzes, p. 226.

¹⁶ John Skylitzes, p. 226 (transl. J. Wortley, p. 248 with a change in translation of the word σαββατίσαντες). John Wortley, the author of the translation, proposed the reading σαββατίσαντες, derived from σαββατίζω – *took a Sabbath rest*. It seems however that John Skylitzes used the word σαββατίζω in the meaning 'to settle', 'to find rest'; *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, besonders des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts*, vol. VII, ed. E. Trapp, Wien 2011, p. 1518 ('zur ruhe kommen'; 'sich niederlassen'). Cf. В.Н. Златарски, *История...*, p. 837 (*се настанили*); John Skylitzes (Bulg.), p. 257 (*се установили*). See also *Testimonia*, vol. VI, p. 157 (*obchodzili szabat*); John Skylitzes (French) (*ils observèrent le repos comme pour un sabat*). The remark of Anna Kotłowska that it referred to celebrating Holy Saturday does not appear to be correct in this context (*Testimonia*, vol. VI, p. 156, fn. 79).

The quoted sources present the rebellion's progress in a fundamentally similar manner. They only differ in specifics. The most important differences are in the names used to describe Michael's supporters, and the territory which they crossed first during their flight after Michael's death. In *Continuation of Theophanes* his supporters were called 'Scythians' (Σκύθαι), while in John Skylitzes' work – Bulgarians. In *Continuation* the first Byzantine territory through which the refugees passed was called Μακέτιδος, while in Skylitzes – Μακεδονίας. We will discuss these differences below.

As can be seen from the quoted sources, our knowledge about Michael's rebellion is very modest. We do not know where the uprising began. The only hint that can be drawn in this regard is from information about his supporters' initial flight from Bulgaria; however, here we encounter a problem. As we mentioned, *Continuation of Theophanes* informs that they went through Maketidos, while John Skylitzes, that through Macedonia. It is not entirely clear which territories the anonymous author meant using the name Maketidos¹⁷, and on what basis John Skylitzes used the term Macedonia instead. Vassil N. Zlatarski thought that Maketidos referred to the territories of historical Macedonia (most likely between Struma and Mesta), and Michael's rebellion took place in *Струмската област* [Struma region]¹⁸. This idea found a relatively common acceptance in later academic literature and nowadays it is thought, albeit sometimes with a degree of caution, that the areas where Michael's rising was happening were in contemporary south-western Bulgaria¹⁹. Supporters of this idea think that the fortress which became Michael's temporary headquarters may have been the central point of one of the local comitates, e.g. Devol²⁰. Those scholars who take as

¹⁷ It needs to be clearly emphasised that this name was used in book VI of *Continuation of Theophanes* only once, and in a context that does not allow clarification as to which area it referred.

¹⁸ В.Н. Златарски, *История...*, p. 838.

¹⁹ П. Мутафчиев, *История на българския народ (681–1323)*, София 1986, p. 201; J.V.A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor 1983, p. 162; П. Павлов, *Братята...*, p. 5.

²⁰ See e.g. J.V.A. Fine, *The Early...*, p. 162–163; П. Георгиев, *Титлата и функциите на българския престолонаследник и въпросът за престолонаследията при цар*

the basis for their considerations about the place of Michael's rebellion the account of John Skylitzes (who claimed that the refugees first entered Macedonia) are in a clear minority. This is mainly due to the fact that book VI of *Continuation of Theophanes* was created far earlier than Skylitzes' account, as well as due to Zlatarski's authority. We have to keep in mind that Skylitzes meant Macedonia as it was understood by the Byzantines, which indicates that one ought to seek the location of the rebellion's beginnings either in the Bulgarian part of Thrace, or perhaps even somewhere in the vicinity of Bulgarian main centres – Preslav and Pliska²¹. The reliability of the *Continuation of Theophanes* and John Skylitzes' accounts has relatively recently been thoroughly examined by Todor Todorov, who pointed out that while John's account appears to be the more logical in terms of the route of the flight of Michael's supporters (they would have consistently travelled in the south-westerly direction), one should nonetheless give primacy to *Continuation of Theophanes*. According to Todorov, Skylitzes did not understand the meaning of the name Maketidos – which does not appear in his work – as used by the author of the book VI of *Continuation*, identifying it instead with Macedonia (in its Byzantine form), since this fitted with his view of the progression of Michael's supporters. In turn, the use of the archaic name Maketidos in *Continuation of Theophanes* is explained by Todorov as a tendency – common throughout the entire work, and also seen in book VI – for employing archaic names. In the passage about Michael we find not only Maketidos, but also the Scythians making an appearance, and we find an explanation, reaching into the distant past, of how the city of Nikopolis got its name²². Although Todorov's arguments cannot be disregarded,

Симеон, ИП 48. 8/91992, р. 11; И. Божилков, В. Гюзелев, *История...*, р. 278–279; П. Павлов, *Братята...*, р. 5–6.

²¹ Т. Тодоров, *Вътрешнодинастичният...*, р. 275; cf. П. Коледаров, *Цар Петър I*, ВС 51, 1979, р. 199; Х. Димитров, *История на Македония*, София 2004, р. 60. On the extent of the territory of Macedonia as understood by the Byzantines, see П. Коледаров, *Македония*, [in:] *КМЕ*, vol. II, р. 592–593; T.E. Gregory, *Macedonia*, [in:] *ODB*, vol. II, р. 1261–1262.

²² *Continuator of Theophanes*, р. 420. Nikopolis was to have received its name to commemorate the victory of Octavian Augustus over Antony and Cleopatra, the result of which was, as the author of book VI of the *Continuation of Theophanes* writes,

they do not, however, allow one to definitively reject Skylitzes' account. Simply because the name of Maketidos did not make an appearance in his work, it does not necessarily follow that he did not understand its meaning. The use of the term Macedonia may have been a conscious move stemming from knowledge that the author of *Continuation of Theophanes* used the appellation Maketidos either incorrectly, incomprehensibly or, which cannot be ruled out, in an entirely correct manner²³. This awareness may have been a consequence of the fact that John Skylitzes had a wider relation about this event, the trace of which is inclusion of information that was not given by the anonymous author of book VI of the *Continuation*. The fragment in question states that after Nikopolis was captured, the refugees: *finally, settled. In due course and after a number of reverses, they became Roman subjects*²⁴.

It is noteworthy that the monastery in which Michael resided after being removed from the line of succession may have possibly been the one in Ravna. One might expect that he had links with it even at the time when he was Symeon's official heir. After all, it is here that six of the seven known seals that are linked with his name have been found²⁵. It cannot be ruled out that his father allowed Michael, after replacing him with another heir and forcing monasticism upon him, to spend his life there. Considering the geographical location of this monastery, it seems more logical that he would have sought – and found – support for his rebellion against Peter in its vicinity, and therefore near Pliska and Preslav and the lands of Thrace, rather than in south-western Bulgaria.

subjugation of Egypt to Rome. This is an obvious reference to the battle of Actium in 31 BCE, however this is not mentioned *expressis verbis* in the Byzantine source.

²³ Let us repeat once more that the Byzantine author used the name Maketidos only once. Therefore, there can be no certainty as to how he understood it. One should be reminded that the suggestion of V.N. Zlatarski is only a hypothesis.

²⁴ John Skylitzes, p. 221; transl. p. 248.

²⁵ Б. Николова, *Печатите на Мицхаил багатур канеиртхтин и Йоан багатур канеиртхтин (?)*. Проблеми на разчитането и атрибуцията, [in:] *Средновековният българин и "другите"*. Сборник в чест на 60-годишнината на проф. Дин Петър Ангелов, ed. А. Николов, Г.Н. Николов, София 2013, p. 127; И. Йорданов, *Корпус на средновековните български печати*, ed. П. Георгиев, София 2016, p. 140–143.

The above considerations force us to treat the question as to which territories Michael's rebellion spread as impossible to definitely answer at this time.

The question of the support of Michael's rebellion is also far from resolved. It is thought, for example, that Michael was backed by some part of the Bulgarian magnates, as well as by members of other social groups²⁶. This statement, however, lacks a basis in sources. John Skylitzes writes very generally that Michael was supported by many, without specifying who they were. Even greater confusion into this matter is introduced by *Continuation of Theophanes*, in which we read: *To him flocked Scythians, who refused to obey Peter's rule*²⁷. Not only does it not clarify in any way which social groups supported Michael, but also introduces the ethnonym Σκύθαι to describe them. This caused a long debate on the subject of who these Scythians could have been. Assuming that the name was used to differentiate Michael's supporters from Bulgarians, and assuming that his rebellion was happening on Macedonian territories (in the sense proposed by V.N. Zlatarski), one would see them as the Bulgarians from the Kouber group²⁸, or even Serbs, who were relocated to Bulgaria after 924²⁹. It would seem that neither the first, nor the second view is correct. It does seem appropriate to agree with Todorov that the use of the ethnonym Scythians' was due to a preference for archaic language, visible in this passage of *Continuation of Theophanes*, and that in this case one ought to give precedence to John Skylitzes' narrative, where Michael's supporters are seen simply as Bulgarians³⁰. It is worth noting that attempts to see these Scythians as ethnically different from Bulgarians would be at odds with the logic of the argument of the *Continuation of Theophanes*' anonymous author. He writes, after all, that Michael wanted to gain power over Bulgarians and that he took control

²⁶ И. Божил ов, В. Гюзелев, *История...*, р. 279.

²⁷ Continuator of Theophanes, р. 420.

²⁸ В.Н. Златарски, *История...*, р. 838–839; П. Павлов, *Братята...*, р. 5.

²⁹ О.В. Иванова, *Восстание в 930 г. в Болгарии и болгаро-византийские отношения*, [in:] *Славяне и их соседи. Международные отношения в эпоху феодализма*, ed. Г.Г. Литаврин, Москва 1989, р. 34–44.

³⁰ Т. Тодоров, *Вътрешнодинастичният...*, р. 277.

of a particular Bulgarian fortress. In this context it would appear obvious that those who joined him must have been Bulgarians who renounced their allegiance to Peter. Had the Byzantine author meant anyone else than Bulgarians when referring to the Scythians, we could have expected to find some words of explanation. Let us remember that in book VI of *Continuation of Theophanes* this name appears only once, which means it had not been used in any context other than Bulgarian. One should note that throughout the entire work known as *Continuation of Theophanes* the ethnonym 'Scythians' appears only six times³¹. That for Byzantine authors of the tenth century it was possible to interchangeably use the ethnonyms Bulgarians and Scythians can be attested by a passage from book V of *Continuation of Theophanes (Life of Basil)*, which was written, it is thought, by Constantine Porphyrogenetos³².

The view that the Byzantine author meant Bulgarians when using the name Scythians was strengthened by Todorov by referring to Romanos II's chrysobull related to the Kolovou monastery. In it, we find some Σκλάβοι Βούλγαροι, who settled on the lands belonging to said monastery³³. Further evidence is found in the document of the patriarch Nicholas Chrysoberg from April 989, in which we read about another monastery (τοῦ Ὁρφανοῦ), the lands of which suffered looting during the raids of τῶν ἐκ γειτόνων οἰκούντων Βουλγάρων³⁴. Because the monasteries, both located on the Chalkidike Peninsula, are merely 10 km apart, one may assume the same Bulgarians were involved. Ivan Bozhilov considered these Bulgarians to have been Michael's supporters, who after leaving Bulgaria first settled in Epirus, and subsequently may have been relocated – or moved of their own volition – to the Chalkidike Peninsula³⁵. This hypothesis of Bozhilov is accepted by Todorov, which allows him to strengthen the view (in our opinion correct) that the Scythians

³¹ Continuator of Theophanes, p. 11, 13, 217, 284, 288, 420.

³² Continuator of Theophanes, p. 216–217.

³³ F. Dölger, *Ein Fall slavischer Einsiedlung im Hinterland von Thessalonike im 10. Jahrhundert*, SBAW.PHK I, 1952, p. 7; G. Soulis, *On the Slavic settlement in Hierissos in the tenth century*, B 23, 1953, p. 67–72; *Acts of Iviron*, I, p. 11; II, 32, 1, 12–13.

³⁴ *Acts of Lavra*, I, 8, p. 117.11.

³⁵ И. Божиллов, *Българите...*, p. 17.

in *Continuation of Theophanes* are simply Bulgarians. It needs to be strongly emphasised, however, that Bozhilov's view is only a hypothesis, although a plausible one. One might note that the two sources are separated by over a quarter of a century, and in the case of patriarch Nicholas Chrysoberg, the text may have been referring to not so much the direct participants of the rebellion, but to their descendants. Either way, it cannot be ruled out that the long journey of Michael's supporters came to a close when they settled at the end of 950s and beginning of 960s on the Chalkidike Peninsula, in the vicinity of Hierissos.

It would seem that, based on the current source base, one may formulate a general hypothesis that Michael's rebellion had a local character, and that its supporters included the inhabitants of the taken fortress and the nearby populace. Contrary to what some scholars say³⁶, no large scale (if any at all) military activity took place during the rebellion. It cannot be ruled out that the only fortress captured by Michael fell into his hands not as a result of fighting, but as a result of a betrayal arranged through some earlier agreements. Furthermore, Michael's supporters left Bulgarian territory not as a result of action on the part of Peter's army but, as the sources inform³⁷, out of fear of them.

One might wonder whether Michael's rising really did constitute a more serious threat to Peter's reign than John's plot, as some scholars think³⁸. Considering specific actions (taking of a fortress) this was indeed the case, however it would seem that if John's plot, involving Bulgarian elites and active in the very heart of the country, entered its active phase, then it would have had a better chance of success than Michael's local uprising, which likely would have been crushed without much difficulty by forces loyal to Peter.

It does not appear that Michael's rising was inspired by the Byzantines, who in this way would have been destabilising situation in Bulgaria, and thus weakened its position relative to their own. The clearest indication that this was not the case lies in the fact that while

³⁶ Т. Тодоров, *Вътрешнодинастичният...*, p. 274.

³⁷ *Continuator of Theophanes*, p. 420; John Skylitzes, p. 226.

³⁸ Т. Тодоров, *Вътрешнодинастичният...*, p. 274.

Michael's supporters sought refuge within the Empire, they were not welcomed there with open arms, and their march towards Nikopolis resembled a looting raid. The Byzantines were only able to enforce their dominion over them with the use of military might. Had the rebels been in prior communication with the Empire, one might have expected that they would have been supported by the Byzantines during their flight, and would have been peacefully settled on the indicated territory.

* * *

Michael's rebellion failed. His sudden death³⁹ made any further action of his supporters against Peter pointless. This is a clear indication that the rising of Symeon's eldest son was solely an expression of the fight for power within the ruling family. Michael's death ended the several-year period of struggles for the Bulgarian throne after Symeon's death. Peter emerged victorious, and from that point onward his position in the Bulgarian state was secured.

2. Characterisation of Domestic Policy

It is quite remarkable that once Michael's attempt failed, Peter virtually disappeared from the Byzantine sources for a period of over thirty years. As a consequence, our knowledge of his rule at the time when Maria was by his side is very limited (which, in fact, also holds true for the later period); what we do know mainly concerns religious issues, the Bogomilist heresy being regarded as the most important among them⁴⁰. Although

³⁹ That this happened at an advantageous moment, from Peter's perspective, and to a man still relatively young, might, and does, raise suspicion. However, the fact that Byzantine authors, to whom it also must have been obvious that Michael's death was a boon for Peter, made no such aspersions makes one refrain from any speculations on this subject.

⁴⁰ On Bogomilism see e.g.: D. O b o l e n s k y, *The Bogomils*, Cambridge 1948; Д. А н г е л о в, *Богомилството в България*, София 1961; S. R u n c i m a n, *The Medieval*

the heresy unquestionably deserves attention, its significance has been blown out of proportion by scholars. Its emergence is usually linked with Peter's reign, although in fact it can be traced back to Symeon's times. We are able to determine neither its social base nor the measures which were taken against it, inspired by both lay and church authorities. The fact that Peter turned to Theophylaktos Lekapenos, patriarch of Constantinople and Maria's uncle⁴¹, for help and counsel, indicates that he took note of it and considered it a threat. Nevertheless, it must be noted that this deeply religious ruler, driven by the commitment to the idea of the purity of the religion adhered to by his subjects, may have dealt with the movement in a manner incommensurate with its actual strength and size⁴². It should also be kept in mind that Bogomil views – those regarding theology as

Manichee. A Study of the Dualist Heresy, Cambridge 1982; S. Bylina, *Bogomilizm w średniowiecznej Bułgarii. Uwarunkowania społeczne, polityczne i kulturalne*, BP 2, 1985, p. 133–145; А. Ангелов, *Богомилство*, София 1993; Y. Stoyanov, *The Other God. Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, New Haven 2000, p. 125–166; 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. 113–130; idem, *Słowiańskie teksty antyheretyckie jako źródło do poznania herezji dualistycznych na Bałkanach*, [in:] *Średniowieczne herezje dualistyczne na Bałkanach. Źródła słowiańskie*, ed. G. Minczew, M. Skowronek, J.M. Wolski, Łódź 2015, p. 13–57.

⁴¹ *Letter of the Patriarch Theophylact to Tsar Peter*. The letter was recently analyzed by: G. Minczew, *Remarks on the Letter...* (the work includes the bibliography devoted to this issue).

⁴² It must not be forgotten that according to the Byzantine doctrine of power, the ruler was obliged to ensure the purity of his subjects' faith as fundamental to their salvation. This principle became instilled in Bulgaria right after its conversion to Christianity. Interestingly, Peter was reminded of it in a letter that he received from the patriarch of Constantinople: *A faithful and God-loving soul is such a great treasure – our spiritual son, the best and the most notable of our relatives – especially if it is the soul of the ruler and leader which, as Yours, can love and worship what is good and beneficial. By leading a prudent life and by behaving well, it not only secures good for itself but, surrounding everyone under its authority with great care, gives them everything that is important and that concerns their salvation. Can there be anything more important and more beneficial than the uncorrupted and sincere faith and the healthy concept of divinity thanks to which we worship one God, the purest and holiest God, with clear consciousness? And that is the most important element of our salvation* (*Letter of the Patriarch Theophylact to Tsar Peter*, p. 311). See also: А. Николов, *Политическа мисъл в ранносредновековна България (средата на IX – края на X в.)*, София 2006, p. 245–269.

well as those expressing criticism of the existing social order – must have been an issue of concern for the ruler even if they were not shared and perpetrated by a significant number of people.

The need to return to the ideals of the first Christians and to establish an intimate relationship with God was reflected in the development of the monastic movement, especially in its eremitic version⁴³. Although one could hardly claim any detailed knowledge of the issue, Peter's ties to monasticism were clearly very strong. Bearing witness to this is his acceptance of the Little Schema shortly before his death, as well as the fact that his cult as a saint flourished mainly in connection with his monastic activity⁴⁴. Peter is known to have held monks in high regard, especially John of Rila, Bulgaria's most famous saint, an anchorite and the founder of the monastic community that gave rise to the celebrated Rila Monastery⁴⁵.

⁴³ For more on Bulgarian monasticism in the century in question see: Б. Николова, *Монашество, манастири и манастирски живот в средновековна България*, vol. I, *Манастирите*, София 2010, p. 41–270.

⁴⁴ On this issue see: И. Билярски, *Покровители на Царство. Св. Цар Петър и св. Параскева-Петка*, София 2004, p. 21–24; idem, М. Йовчева, *За датата на успението на цар Петър и за култа към него*, [in:] *Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на акад. Васил Гюзелев*, ed. М. Каймакавова et al., София 2006, p. 543–557; Д. Чешмеджиев, *Култът към български цар Петър I (927–969): монашески или държавен?*, [in:] *Аубав према образовању и вера у Бога у православним манастирима*, 5. Међународна Хилендарска конференција. *Зборник изабраних радова* 1, Beograd–Columbus 2006, p. 245–257; Б. Николова, *Цар Петър и характерът на неговия култ*, *Pbg* 33.2, 2009, p. 63–77; idem, *Монашество...*, vol. II, *Монасите*, София 2010, p. 826–843; М. Каймакамова, *Култът към цар Петър (927–969) и движещите идеи на българските освободителни въстания срещу византийската власт през XI–XII в.*, *ВМд* 4/5, 2013/2014, p. 417–438; Д. Чешмеджиев, *Кутовете на българските светци през IX–XII в. Автореферат*, Пловдив 2016, p. 13–15.

⁴⁵ John was born around 876. We have no certain information about his origin and the reasons for which he decided to settle in the Rila Mountains to live the life of a hermit – one that gave him the fame and reputation which he did not seek. In any case, he founded the community of which he became the first hegumen. He died as a hermit; in all probability, his life came to an end in 946. For more on John of Rila's life see: И. Дуйчев, *Рилският светец и неговата обител*, София 1947; I. Dobrev, *Sv. Ivan Rilski*, vol. I, Linz 2007; Б. Николова, *Монашество...*, p. 790–815; Й. Андреев, *Иван Рилски*, [in:] idem, И. Лазаров, П. Павлов, *Кой кой...*, p. 270–275.

Thoroughly impressed by John's holiness⁴⁶, the ruler – according to his hagiographers – went to a lot of trouble trying, unsuccessfully, to secure a meeting with the holy hermit; after the latter's death, he saw to it that his remains were transferred from his hermitage in Rila to Sofia⁴⁷.

There is no doubt that Peter took care of the Church and provided material support to it. However, we are not able to adduce any details regarding this aspect of his activity. It cannot be ruled out that scholars such as Plamen Pavlov⁴⁸ are right in claiming that Peter was not easily influenced by the clergy, as well as that his policy towards the Church was rational and consistent with the interests of his state. He sought, for example, to hinder the Church from excessively increasing its holdings – an approach modeled on the policy used by Byzantine emperors.

Peter's reign is often described as a period of a deteriorating economy and a resulting impoverishment of the masses of the Bulgarian society, especially the peasants. However, the picture is based not on reliable sources but on arbitrary assumptions, arising from the interpretation of the growth of the Bogomil movement as a reaction to the material deprivation of the Bulgarian society. Without engaging in a detailed polemic with this view, it is worth noting that there is historical evidence to suggest that Bulgaria's economic situation was not as poor as usually described. This is borne out by the fact that the Bulgarian lands became a tasty morsel for Svyatoslav I, prince of Kievan Rus', who not only displayed much zeal in plundering them but, as some scholars believe, was even going to settle there. We may point to the well-known description of Pereyaslavets on the Danube, reportedly uttered by the prince – a picture quite at odds with the notion of Bulgaria's economic decline:

⁴⁶ И. Д у й ч е в, *Рилският...*, p. 123sq; *Ziemscy aniołowie, niebiańscy ludzie. Anachoreci w bułgarskiej literaturze i kulturze*, ed. G. M i n c z e w, Białystok 2002, p. 19. Cf. Б. Н и к о л о в а, *Монашество...*, p. 274–285; 626–628, 790–815.

⁴⁷ Naturally, detailed information to be found in hagiographic accounts must be treated with caution. Then again, there seems to be nothing surprising about the notion of a pious ruler willing to meet a hermit. Doubts have been raised as to whether Peter had a hand in transferring John's remains to Sredets (nowadays Sofia); the problem has been analyzed by: И. Д у й ч е в, *Рилският...*, *passim*. Cf. Д. Ч е ш м е д ж и е в, *За времето на пренасяне на мощите на св. Йоан Рилски от Рила в Средец*, *ВМд* 6, 2015, p. 79–89.

⁴⁸ П. П а в л о в, *Векът...*, p. 55–57.

не любо ми естъ в Кіевѣ быти. хочю жити с Переяславци в Дунаи.
яко то естъ середѣ в земли моеи. яко тѣ всѣ бѣгѣа сѣдѣтсѣ.
ѿ Грекъ злато паволоки. вина [и] швошчеве розноличныя. и-Щехъ же
из Урогъ сребро и конюни. из Рѹси же скорѣ и воскъ медъ. и челоуд.

I do not care to remain in Kiev, but should prefer to live in Pereyaslavets on the Danube, since that is the centre of my realm, where all riches are concentrated; gold, silks, wine, and various fruits from Greece, silver and horses from Hungary and Bohemia, and from Rus' furs, wax, honey, and slaves.⁴⁹

This description, not to move too far away from the letter of the source, can be treated at least as evidence proving that trade in the Bulgarian territories was not in decline. The problem is, however, that scholars analyzing the source recently raised doubts as to the account's reliability. In their opinion, as far as Svyatoslav's expeditions are concerned, the account confuses Pereyaslavets with Veliki Preslav. In reality, the source needs to be regarded as reflecting the role of the first city as a trading center in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; the description of the emporium's central location and the goods that flowed into it from all directions is based on biblical accounts regarding the significance and wealth of Tyre and Jerusalem⁵⁰.

The account found in the *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah* testifies to the fact that, despite the skeptical remarks regarding the previous passage, Peter's

⁴⁹ *Russian Primary Chronicle*, AM 6477, p. 68 (transl., p.86). Cf. A. K i j a s, *Stosunki rusko-bulgarskie do XV w. ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem stosunków kulturalnych*, BP 2, 1985, p. 115; М. Р а е в, *Преслав или Переяславец на Дунае? (Предварительные замечания об одном из возможных источников ПВЛ и его трансформации)*, НЗУІЗНС 20, 2008, p. 37–40. See also: J. B a n a s z k i e w i c z, *Jedność porządku przestrzennego, społecznego i tradycji początków ludu. (Uwagi o urzędzeniu wspólnoty plemiennie-państwowej u Słowian)*, PH 77, 1986, p. 448–449.

⁵⁰ И. Д а н и л е в с к и й, *Повесть временных лет: герменевтические основы изучения летописных текстов*, Москва 2004, p. 163–167; В. Р ы ч к а, *Чью славу переяславца? Переяславца? НЗУІЗНС 16, 2005, p. 129–134; М. Р а е в, Переяславец на Дунав – мит и действительность в речта на княз Святослав в Повесть временных лет, ГСУ. НЦСВПИД 95.14, 2006, p. 193–203; M. J. L e s z k a, K. M a r i n o w, *Carstwo...*, p. 166.*

reign was indeed remembered as a period of prosperity – or at least that people chose to remember it that way. In the *Tale*, we read:

ТОГДА́ ВЕО ВЪ ДНИ И ЛѢТѢ́ СТОГО ПЕТРА ЦРЯ БЪЛГАРСКАГО БЫ́ ИЗЪВѢЫЛѢ́
Ѡ́ ВСЕГО. СНОРѢ́ЧЬ ПШЕНИЦА И МАСЛО И МЕДА́ ЖЕ́ И МЛѢ́КА И ВИНѢ́, И Ѡ́ ВСЕГО
ДА́РОВАНІА БЖІА́ ВРѢ́ШЕ И КИПѢ́ШЕ. И НЕ БѢ́ ВСКВѢ́ДѢ́НІЕ НИ Ѡ ЦО́Ѣ. НЪ
БѢ́ СИТОСТЬ ИЗЪВѢЫЛѢ́СЬ ВЕО Ѡ́ ВСЕГО ДО ИЗВОЛЕНІА БЖІА́

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 satiety⁵¹.



⁵¹ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 17.