

Bulgaria and Byzantium in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries: Symeon, Peter and the Byzantine Princess

The article will outline the political history of Bulgaria during the ninth and tenth centuries with a special focus on Bulgarian-Byzantine relations in order to provide the historical context for the Preslav Treasure. The close cultural contact with the Byzantine world plays a decisive role in the interpretation of the Preslav Treasure. This is, of course, true for almost the whole history of the First Bulgarian Empire. All important developments in Bulgaria were somehow linked to its south-eastern neighbour. While the available sources emphasise numerous military confrontations, the cultural, economic and religious contact between Byzantium and Bulgaria had a much deeper impact on the region by providing the preconditions for the unfolding of a specific type of Slavo-orthodox culture that outlived the downfall of the First Bulgarian Empire in 1018. The close cultural ties between Bulgaria and Byzantium had their roots in the eighth century and became more intensive during the ninth century, long before Preslav Treasure found its way to the place where it was hidden for centuries to come.

The Christianisation under Boris / Michael

This short overview of the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations in the ninth and tenth centuries will start with the Christianisation. Though a peace treaty between the two neighbours marked the beginning of the First Bulgarian Empire in 680/681, the Christianisation of Bulgaria can be taken as a new period in the history of south-eastern Europe. While the Byzantine influence increased in the ninth century, the way in which the new faith was transmitted and implemented laid the foundations for a new type of culture that spread from Bulgaria to other regions of south-eastern and eastern Europe. It is

therefore justifiable to take the baptism of Khan Boris in 864 or 865 as a starting point¹.

As in other realms in East Central and Eastern Europe, especially in regions beyond the former boundaries of the Roman Empire, Christianisation was a top-down phenomenon, a process that was promoted by the ruler and the ruling elites who were connected with their peers outside their own political entity. Although the core territory of the First Bulgarian Empire – situated between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains – had been a Christianised region within the former Roman Empire, the upheavals of the fifth to seventh centuries largely effaced the traces of its Roman Christian past. The population of this region was obviously ethnically and linguistically different from the former inhabitants and had entered the region from the North². When the First Bulgarian Empire was established in 680/681, the population, as well as the settlements, had no or very little connection to the Roman Christian past. What remained were the ruins of cities such as Markianopolis³. From the beginning of the ninth century, at least, *spolia* from antique ruins were used for the large-scale building programmes that were conducted by the Khans Krum (803-814) and Omurtag (c. 815 - c. 831). One of the most prominent examples is the town of Pliska, a key site and the location of the rulers' residences from the beginning of the ninth century⁴. The usage of antique *spolia* led some scholars to the assumption that Pliska was originally a Roman foundation, but this view is no longer current as there are no traces of any settlement before the Early Middle Ages⁵.

The beginning of what is generally called »The First Bulgarian Empire« was the result of military success: the defeat of the Byzantine army led by Emperor Constantine IV in 680 or 681 by the invading Bulgars, a group that had its origins most

1 The exact date of the baptism of Khan Boris is debated: the abundant literature on this topic is listed in Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur* 51-53; see also Cankova-Petkova, *Contribution* 21-39; Praschniker, *Zwei mittelalterliche Inschriften* 73-81; Beševliev, *Die protobulgarischen Inschriften* 175 no. 15; *Chron. min.* 50, l. 6-7; *Chron. min.* 2, 104-105; Hannick, *Die byzantinischen Missionen* 279-359; Ziemann, *Wandervolk* 361-364; Ivanov, *Pearls Before Swine* 95-100; Nikolov, *Christianisierung der Bulgaren*.

2 Concerning the onomastic sources see, Schramm, *Ein Damm bricht*.

3 Soustal, *Markianopolis* 305.

4 Concerning Pliska see: Škorpiľ/Uspenskiy, *Materialy dlja bolgarskih'* 30-172; the contributions of the journal *Pliska-Preslav*, vols. 1-13; Dimitrov/Rašev, *Pliska*; Dončeva-Petkova/Henning, *Pärvoprestolna Pliska*; Prinzing, *Pliska in the view*, 241-251; Rašev, *Bälgarskata ezičeska kultura* 45-104; Aladžov, *Arheološkička karta*; Prinzing, *Pliska*; Browning/Schwartz, *Pliska*.

5 See the history of the excavations summarized in Dončeva-Petkova/Henning, *Pärvoprestolna Pliska*; Dimitrov/Rašev, *Pliska*.

probably in Central Asia⁶. Scholars use the term »Bulgars« or »Protobulgarians« in order to distinguish them from the »Bulgarians« of later periods after Christianisation in the middle of the ninth century when the great majority spoke a Slavic language and adopted the Christian religion⁷. The Bulgars of the seventh and eighth centuries, however, probably spoke a Turkic language and were pagans, with a religious belief that might be reconstructed by comparing it with religions of Central Asia. Scholars assume that the highest god was Tangra, and archaeologists have interpreted some buildings in Pliska as pagan temples, though some doubts remain⁸. Interesting information on pagan beliefs is provided by the Responses of Pope Nicholas I to the questions of the Bulgarians from 866, a list of questions presented by the Bulgarians soon after their conversion. These questions give insight into various customs among the Bulgarians, some of which are certainly related to religious beliefs⁹.

While the information about the pagan religion is somewhat limited, it seems that even inside the realm of the pagan Bulgars, some Christian elements and traditions persisted. Christians from the Byzantine Empire may also have entered the Bulgar realm in various ways. Already at the beginning of the ninth century, we find high military functionaries with Christian names, maybe Byzantines who worked for the Bulgar khan or maybe people stemming from a local population with a Christian-Byzantine background¹⁰. Despite the numerous military conflicts between the two neighbours, the cultural contacts with Byzantium remained quite strong. The military expansion towards the Black Sea coast and the territory of Thrace¹¹, south of the Balkan Mountains, intensified the influence of Christianity and Byzantine culture as the Bulgars now ruled over inhabitants who had lived inside the Byzantine Empire. This Christian Byzantine influence is visible most significantly in the architecture of the building projects in Pliska and elsewhere that were conducted under the rule of Khan Krum (c. 802-814) and – more intensively – under Khan Omurtag (c. 815-831)¹². The ruler himself took over Byzantine models of self-representation as can be seen in a medallion of Khan Omurtag, where he is styled like a Byzantine Emperor, including the Christian cross¹³. In Protobulgarian inscriptions,

one of the rare sources that stem from inside the Bulgarian realm, the ruler calls himself, *khana sūbigi* and ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων, »ruler by the grace of God«¹⁴. It is debated, which god is meant by this formulation. What is striking, however, is the fact that this title has its origin once again in the title of the Byzantine Emperor¹⁵. Crosses as decorative elements can be found in some inscriptions, which are, by the way, mostly written in Greek, which poses the question of the audience of these inscriptions as they were carved at central places of the Bulgar realm¹⁶.

In the course of the military campaigns, when the inhabitants of Thracian towns, such as Adrianopolis¹⁷, were deported to the Northern core regions of the Bulgars, we read about the persecution of Christians. One of the most prominent Christians who apparently died for his faith was the eldest son of Khan Omurtag, Enrabotas¹⁸. Some scholars interpret a building, which was later extended to the so-called »basilica« and a monastery next to it, as the burial place of Enrabotas, who may have been venerated as a martyr after the Christianisation¹⁹. This interpretation has not been conclusively proven. It is likely, however, that the Christianisation process was prepared for by missionary activities conducted by Byzantine captives and other Christians living in the Bulgarian realm. From the middle of the ninth century, we find the first traces of missionary activities from the West, mainly from the Eastern Frankish kingdom of Louis the German. Shortly before the conversion of Khan Boris to the Christian faith, a letter by Pope Nicholas I seems to suggest that the Bulgarian ruler communicated his wish to convert in his correspondence with Louis the German²⁰.

The conversion itself was the result of a successful military campaign by the Byzantines against Bulgaria²¹. Additionally, some Byzantine sources also mention a famine in Bulgaria²². With the promise to convert to Christianity, Boris achieved peace. He was baptised together with some of his nobles and changed his name to Michael, the name of his godfather, the Byzantine Emperor Michael III (842-867)²³. The exact date – either in 864 or 865²⁴ – and the circumstances of the baptism are not clear. A partially destroyed inscription from Ballsh in Albania mentions a great event in 865 that could refer to the

6 On the origins of the Bulgars and the respective discussions: Atanasov/Rašev/Vojnikov, *Balgarska nacionalna istorija* 2, 15-106; Bakalov, *Istorija na balgarite* 1, 15-46; Momčilov, *Pismeno-ezikov*; Vasilev, *Drevnite balgari*. – For a general overview of the origin and prehistory of the First Bulgarian Empire Zlatarski, *Istorija* 7-71; Angelov, *Obrazuvane na balgarskata narodnost* 1-211; Beševliev, *Protobulgarische Periode* 299-328; Angelov/Petrov/Primov, *Istorija na Balgarija* 23-90; Božilov/Gjuzelev, *Istorija* 57-73; Ziemann, *Wandervolk* 9-66. – For the discussion of the exact year 680 or 681 see: Gregorio/Kresten, *Ἐπέτοç* 21-56.

7 Bulgarian scholars use different terms for the Bulgars like »prabalgari« (Rašev, *Prabalgariite prez V-VII vek*), »pārvobālgari« (Beševliev, *Pārvobālgarski nadpisi*), or »drevnite balgari« (Vasilev, *Drevnite balgari*). – In English-speaking scholarship the term Bulgars is frequently used, see, e. g., Fiedler, *Bulgars in the Lower Danube Region* 151-236.

8 Moskov, *Prabalgarski* 15-22.

9 Nicol. resp. 568-600. – Dečev, *Otvorite*. – Heiser, *Responsa*. – Dujčev, *Responsa* 125-148.

10 Beševliev, *Die protobulgarischen Inschriften* 220-229 no. 47.

11 For Thrace under Bulgarian rule see Soustal, *Thrakien* 74-95.

12 Dončeva-Petkova/Henning, *Pārvoprestolna Pliska* 8-11. – Rašev, *Balgarskata ezičeska kultura* 70-97.

13 Škorpil/Uspenskiy, *Materialy dlja bolgarskih'* 151. – Slavčev/Jordanov, *Zlatnite medaljoni* 25-31. – Jordanov, *Korpus* 23-26.

14 Beševliev, *Die protobulgarischen Inschriften* 76-77 no. 56, 260-265. – Beševliev, *Pārvobālgarski nadpisi* 216-217. – Stepanov, *The Bulgar Title KANASUBIGI* 1-19.

15 Beševliev, *Die protobulgarischen Inschriften* 71-72.

16 See the introduction in Beševliev, *Die protobulgarischen Inschriften* 84-86. 91-92. – Beševliev, *Pārvobālgarski nadpisi* 47-49. 94-95.

17 Soustal, *Thrakien*, 161-167.

18 PmbZ 1518. – Theophyl. Achrid., *Hist. martyr.* 42-79, 63-64.

19 Georgiev, *Martiriūmāt*.

20 *Annal. Bertin.* 72, a. 864.

21 *Ios. Genes.* IV, 16, 69. – Symeon mag. chron. 131,25, 243.

22 *Ps-Symeon* 665.

23 *Ios. Genes.* IV, 16, 69. – Symeon mag. chron. 131,25, 243.

24 The discussion with the literature is easily accessible in Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur* 51-53; Cankova-Petkova, *Contribution*; see also the literature in n. 1.

baptism²⁵. Some Byzantine sources mention that the baptism took place in Constantinople²⁶.

The immediate motivation for the conversion has also been elaborated in a novelist way by some sources who consider the sister of Boris, who lived as a hostage at the Byzantine court, as crucial for the decision. Another version mentions a painting of the last judgement that frightened Boris when he saw it in his palace²⁷. Be this as it may, the consequences were far reaching. Boris/Michael invited clerics from Byzantium and entrusted them with the Christianisation of his people. Some of these clerics, however, stayed at his court as advisors and achieved positions of a considerable influence on the ruler's policy. Boris/Michael used the conversion for centralising governance and reducing the previously significant influence of his nobles²⁸. This attitude is also revealed in minor details such as the new dining custom by which the ruler sat at a separate table instead of joining his nobles at a common table as he had before²⁹. Immediately after the baptism, Boris/Michael, as well as many in his entourage, was uncertain about the requirements and benefits of the new faith. Shortly after the baptism, resistance among the nobles resulted in a revolt against the neophyte, which was quickly and brutally suppressed³⁰. The sources presented the ruler's victory over the rebels as a typical miracle story. Terrified by deceptive appearances the large army of rebels was unable to resist the ruler and his small entourage of Christian companions³¹. Boris/Michael ordered the execution of the principal leaders of the rebellion, who belonged to the highest ranks, together with their families. He seems to have been proud of having saved the lesser participants from such a punishment, considering such a deed to be in line with a Christian spirit³².

Soon after the suppression of the rebellion, the Bulgarians turned to the papal court with 115 questions on the Christian way of life. This original document has not survived, but the answering text re-states them³³. They comprise the request to have a patriarch ordained for Bulgaria, as well as a question about what sign to use when going on a military campaign, or on what days to fast, and so on³⁴. It seems that the turn to Rome and the pope was the result of a growing dissatisfaction with the Byzantine clerics present in Bulgaria. Boris/Michael and his entourage hoped to get an easier form of Christianity from Rome than from Byzantium, perhaps together with more privileges and independence.

While the responses of Pope Nicholas I were direct answers to the Bulgarians' many questions, Boris/Michael received detailed instructions on how to behave as a Christian ruler from the Byzantine Patriarch Photios. In a long letter, he outlined the history of the ecumenical councils before presenting a type of »mirror of princes« describing the ideal virtues of a Christian ruler. The letter is a good example of the erudition of Photios. It was relatively popular and was later copied and translated into other languages³⁵. The effect it had on Boris/Michael is, however, difficult to ascertain. It is telling that in the period shortly after the rebellion, Boris/Michael turned to Rome instead of Constantinople.

Between East and West

After the Bulgarian embassy to Pope Nicholas I, a papal mission led by Bishop Formosus of Porto was sent to Bulgaria. The Latin missionaries were probably quite successful³⁶. An inscription from Preslav in northern Bulgaria testifies to the presence of the Latin missionaries³⁷. The crucial point was, however, the ordination of a patriarch or an archbishop for Bulgaria. For Boris/Michael this point was important, because he obviously hoped for the creation of a more or less independent Christian church in Bulgaria, independent from Rome as well as from Constantinople. Pope Nicholas I rejected this request, desiring to wait for the results of the mission³⁸. After the first mission returned, Boris/Michael repeated his request and even suggested a candidate, bishop Formosus of Porto, the leader of the first missionary envoy to Bulgaria³⁹. The request was denied and, instead, another mission was dispatched under the leadership of Dominicus of Trivento and Grimoald of Polimartium. Boris/Michael was told to select another candidate from the papal missionaries⁴⁰. Pope Hadrian II (867-872), who succeeded to the papal throne after the death of Nicholas in November 867, continued in the same spirit. Though Boris/Michael indeed suggested another candidate, Cardinal Deacon Marinus (a member of the first mission), Pope Hadrian refused his wish. Instead, Hadrian tried to promote a certain Sylvester, who did not get the approval of the Bulgarian ruler⁴¹. He was quickly sent back to Rome. The attitude towards Rome had changed in the meantime. Now, after some failed attempts to get Formosus or another

25 Praschniker, *Zwei mittelalterliche Inschriften*.

26 Symeon mag. chron. 131,25, 243.

27 Theoph. Cont. chron. 230-235.

28 Ziemann, *Rebellion of the Nobles* 613-624.

29 Nicol. resp. 42,583.

30 Annal. Bertin. 85-86, a. 866. – *Annales de Saint-Bertin* 133. – Zlatarski, *Istorija* 51-59. – Gjuzelev, *Knjaz Boris* 114-122. – Angelov/Petrov/Primov, *Istorija na Bălgarija* 218-219. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, *Istorija* 176.

31 See n. 28.

32 Nicol. resp. 17, 577.

33 See n. 9.

34 Heiser, *Responsa*.

35 Phot. Epist. 1-39 no. 1. – Berrigan/White, *The Patriarch and the Prince* 7-90. – *Regestes de Constantinople I* no. 478. – Hergenröther, *Photius* 601-604. –

Zlatarski, *Istorija* 71-83. – Gjuzelev, *Knjaz Boris* 186-187. – Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur* 53-54 with n. 228-229. – *PmbZ* 6253, n. 69.

36 Anast. interpr. synod. – Anast. epist. 395-442, 412. – Gjuzelev, *Knjaz Boris* 209-240. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, *Istorija* 180-184. – Ziemann, *Wandervolk* 390-392.

37 Škorpiil/Uspenskiy, *Materiali dlja bolgarskih'* 509, n. 1, pl. XCVIII, 8. – Beševliev, *Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften* 39-40, no. 54. – Dujčev, *Testimonianza* 183-192.

38 Nicol. resp. 72-73, 592-593; 92-93, 596-597. – Ziemann, *Wandervolk* 387-389.

39 Lib. pontif. II, 107,73-74; 165.

40 Lib. pontif. II, 107,74; 165.

41 Lib. pontif. II, 108, 61-62, 185. – Hergenröther, *Photius* 150. – Zlatarski, *Istorija* 126. – Gjuzelev, *Knjaz Boris* 239. – Ziemann, *Wandervolk* 398.

candidate of Boris/Michael's choice as patriarch or archbishop for the Bulgarian church, the Bulgarians lost their patience.

In 870, at a meeting of the papal and the Bulgarian envoys with the Byzantine Emperor after the eighth ecumenical council in Constantinople, it was decided that Bulgaria would belong to the Byzantine hemisphere⁴². The decision was made by the Byzantine Emperor and the oriental patriarchs who were present at the meeting, but it is unlikely that this was possible without Boris/Michael's consent. The decision was a final one. The protests of the papal legates were of no avail. Boris/Michael had made his choice. Despite short periods under Roman obedience, mainly at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century, Bulgaria remained an Orthodox country, keeping close contact with the church of Constantinople. This result was most probably attained by some compromises on the part of the Byzantines, certainly affording a degree of independence, perhaps even the autocephality of the Bulgarian church, which may have been acknowledged some years later⁴³. An archbishop of Bulgaria is mentioned in some sources, although his name is not entirely clear, as some have Josif and others mention Stephan⁴⁴. The first archiepiscopal see was most probably in Pliska⁴⁵; seals of an archbishop have been discovered in Pliska, but they refer to later archbishops⁴⁶. What is important is the fact that the Bulgarian church now started to develop more or less independently, while at the same time, it was structurally still dependent on its neighbour.

Boris/Michael made use of the – at least practical – independence and took the chance of letting the students of Cyril and Methodius, Naum, Climent, Angelarius and others to Bulgaria in order to spread the Christian faith and to build up ecclesiastical structures⁴⁷. Climent was later promoted as bishop of Dremvica and Velica in Macedonia, a region in the south-western part of the country. Once at the margins of the Bulgarian Empire, the region now became increasingly important. The most enduring effect was the creation of new scripts for the Slavic language of the Bulgarians that were developed to adapt them to the specific needs of the language. Inscriptions from Bulgaria testify to the usage of these scripts, first Glagolitic then more and more Cyrillic⁴⁸.

These developments were accompanied by other activities, the building of monasteries and churches that soon spread over the whole realm⁴⁹.

Boris/Michael's later years were turbulent ones. Probably in 889, he decided to take the monastic habit and to cede the throne to his son Vladimir (also called Rasate in some sources)⁵⁰. According to the Western chronicler Regino of Prüm, Vladimir intended to abandon the Christian faith and return to the old beliefs⁵¹. Scholars often link this event with sources mentioning contact with the Eastern Frankish kingdom under Arnulf of Carinthia and suggest a complete change of Bulgaria's political orientation after the abdication of Boris/Michael. However, whether this was really the case and whether it was connected to Vladimir's assumed rejection of Christianity is difficult to ascertain⁵². The source material does not allow for a more detailed analysis.

What we know is mainly what Regino of Prüm tells us about the events. He continued by describing how the old Boris/Michael left his monastery, put on his sword, deposed his son and ordered his blinding. Then he elevated Symeon, his third son, to the Bulgarian throne⁵³. Scholars date this event to 893⁵⁴. Whether the events happened in the way Regino presented them is hard to say. The role of Boris/Michael, who, after having accomplished these things, returned to his monastery and lived there until 907⁵⁵, is dubious and possibly not as prominent as Regino described it. It may have been more of a fight between brothers. Scholars see in the events of 893 more than just the deposition of Vladislav and the enthronement of Symeon. Most believe that this was done at a general assembly of the people, who also decided to move the capital from Pliska to Preslav and to declare Old Bulgarian as the official language⁵⁶. For the last point, there is absolutely no evidence, no source confirms this assumption. The relocation of the capital is also not mentioned. Pliska's prominent role in the ninth century has already been mentioned and Preslav became the centre of Symeon's Empire in the tenth century, this seems to be clear, but an official relocation did not take place, there is no source that could affirm such an assumption. The situation may have been more complex, perhaps with several centres, which were then slowly replaced by a single capital⁵⁷.

42 Anast. interpr. synod. – Anast. epist. 413-414. – A longer version is presented in Lib. pontif. II, 108, 46-58, 182-184. – Hergenröther, Photius 63-75. – Zlatarski, Istorija 133-140. – Hans-Dieter Döppmann, Bedeutung Bulgariens 96-104. – Gjuzeev, Knjaz Boris 183-185. – Ziemann, Wandervolk 404-408.

43 See the discussion in Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 67 with n. 284; Oikonomides, Les listes de préséance byzantines 137. 245.

44 Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 67 n. 285; these two different names appear in manuscripts containing the so-called »Miracle of St. George with the Bulgarian«, see Loparev, Čudo svjatago Georgija; Snegarov, »Čudo na sv. Georgi s bălgarina« 220, 225.

45 Georgiev/Vitjanov, Archiepiskopijata.

46 Totev, Dva novootkriti 198-199.

47 The building of churches is mentioned in the life of Climent of Ochrid by Theophylakt of Ochrid: Theophyl. Achrid. Vita S. Clementis (BHG 355) 99, XIX, 60, 101, XXIII, 67; Dončeva-Petkova, Archeologičeski svedenija 196-205. – For Climent of Ochrid see the abundant literature listed in Stančev, Kliment Ohridski 320-335 and Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 104 with n. 415; PmbZ 23704;

Iliev, Kliment. – For Naum: Kožucharov, Naum Ochridski 795-798; Pop-Atanasov, Naum Ochridski 1024-1025; PmbZ 25501. – For Angelarios, see PmbZ 20422.

48 An edition of numerous inscriptions can be found in: Kronsteiner/Popkonstantinov, Altbulgarische Inschriften.

49 Kostova, Bulgarian Monasteries 190-202. – Popkonstantinov/Kostova, Architecture of Conversion 118-132. – Kostova, Topography of Three Early Medieval Monasteries 108-125.

50 Zlatarski, Istorija 243-252. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 221-224.

51 Regino chron. 96.

52 Annal. Fuld. 125, 130.

53 Regino chron. 96.

54 Zlatarski, Istorija 253. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 224-225.

55 Gjuzeev, Knjaz Boris 496-497.

56 Zlatarski, Istorija 253-258. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 224-225 without mentioning the change of the language.

57 Ziemann, Pliska and Preslav 172-187.

The Restless Ruler: Bulgaria under Symeon

Symeon's reign is regarded as the most splendid one of all Bulgarian rulers of the First Bulgarian Empire⁵⁸. Due to his military successes, he expanded the territory of his realm and controlled regions that his predecessors had never reached. While his military successes faded away shortly after his death, the cultural achievements had a more sustainable future. His reign is commonly called »The Golden Age«, which refers mainly to the intellectual culture and the remaining architectural objects.

The beginning of Symeon's reign was turbulent. The dislocation of the trade station of the Bulgarian merchants from Constantinople to Thessaloniki together with higher customs duties caused major dissatisfaction on the part of the Bulgarians. The Byzantine sources present a detailed and complicated story about the people involved in this action⁵⁹. The result was a major campaign by Symeon in 894 and a victory on the battlefield. Symeon, however, did not continue to march towards Constantinople. Instead, he ordered that the captured *hetaireia*, a corps of bodyguards of the emperor (mostly Khazars), have their noses cut off.

The Byzantine court reacted with large-scale diplomatic activity. They persuaded the Hungarians who had settled north of the Danube to take up arms against the Bulgarians. Ships were organised to transport the Hungarians to the southern shore of the Danube, from where they invaded Bulgaria. The Bulgarians were defenceless against the fast-moving horsemen as they devastated the land. The Bulgarian forces were defeated. Symeon himself had to hide behind the walls of Silistra or Mundraga until the Hungarians left his realm. He managed, however, to induce the Pechenegs, the northern neighbours of the Hungarians, to invade the Hungarians' homeland and lay waste to it while their armies were absent on campaign. According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the Hungarians decided to move to the West and to settle in the Carpathian Basin after finding their territory devastated.

It is difficult to ascertain whether this happened exactly in the way described by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. The Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin was probably a more complex process. The Bulgarians, however, were indeed relieved from the dangerous neighbour. By 896 Symeon was

able to gather an army and march against Constantinople. At Bulgarophygon, the Bulgarians managed to defeat the Byzantines once again. Many Byzantine soldiers fell captive to the Bulgarians⁶⁰. It is unclear whether a peace treaty was concluded in the aftermath of the campaign⁶¹. An inscription that has been found in Narăș (Nea Philadelphieia), 22 km north of Thessaloniki, mentions the year 6412 (904) and outlines the frontier between Byzantium and Bulgaria⁶². This may well have been the outcome of a specific peace treaty.

The following years seem to have been peaceful. There are only a few hints to potential conflicts. After Leo of Tripolis sacked Thessaloniki in 905, Symeon may have considered occupying the city, but this plan was not realised⁶³. The Byzantine diplomat Leo Choerosphaktes mentioned that he managed to prevent Symeon from taking the thirty forts of Dyrrhachium (Durrës) in today's Albania⁶⁴. There are no signs of larger military confrontations.

The situation changed with the death of Emperor Leon VI in 912. Alexander⁶⁵, the brother and successor of Leon, initiated confrontation by humiliating Bulgarian ambassadors. Consequently, Symeon marched his army towards Constantinople. As they approached, the young emperor, who ruled only one year and 22 days, suddenly died. When Symeon reached the walls of Constantinople with his army, negotiations started under the direction of Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos. They resulted in some sort of agreement, which, due to the following events, is not entirely clear. The agreement obviously contained a proposed marriage between one of Symeon's daughters and the young emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus⁶⁶, who had officially assumed rule, but was still a minor as he was born in 905⁶⁷. What followed after the negotiations was a famous and intensively discussed ceremony, which remains, however, enigmatic. What we learn from the sources is that Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos put his own *epirription*⁶⁸, a scarf-like cloth, with which the patriarch covered his head, on Symeon's head⁶⁹. Scholars debated the meaning of this ceremony⁷⁰. Was it the coronation as emperor or *kaisar*? There are no sources that definitely confirm this assumption. On the other hand, it is likely that the sources might have presented the events in a distorted way as they were written long afterwards when the traces of the agreement had already been eradicated. Seals from Symeon

58 For Symeon (PmbZ 27467) see the following monographs and chapters: Božilov, Simeon; Zlatarski, Istorija 278-515; Angelov/Petrov/Primov, Istorija na Bălgarija 278-335; Shepard, Bulgaria 567-585; Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 229-270; Leszka, Symeon I; Atanasov/Rašev/Vojnikov, Bălgarska nacionalna istorija 2, 313-402; Nenov/Gjuzelev/Iliev, Bălgarskijat zlaten vek.

59 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 16-17. – Georg. Hamart. chron. 771-772. – Io. Scyl. syn. hist. 175-176. – Symeon mag. chron. 275-276. – Zlatarski, Istorija 282-289. – Božilov, Simeon 87-89. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 247. – Oikonomides, Le kommerkion d'Abydos 241-248.

60 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 20-21. – Io. Scyl. syn. hist. 176-178. – Symeon mag. chron. 276-277. – Const. Porph. admin. imp. 40,174-177. – Zlatarski, Istorija 292-342. – Božilov, Simeon 89-94. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 247-248. – Shepard, Bulgaria 570.

61 Zlatarski, Istorija 320-323. – Koledarov, Politička 46. – Božilov, Simeon 94-95. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 249.

62 Beševliev, Părvobălgarski nadpisi 170-172.

63 Kolias, Léon Choerosphactès 6.

64 Kolias, Léon Choerosphactès 113. – Zlatarski, Istorija 324-325. – Božilov, Simeon 94-95. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 249.

65 PmbZ 20228.

66 PmbZ 23734.

67 Treadgold, History of the Byzantine State 471-473.

68 For epirription see LBG 1: A-K, 579: s. v. ἐπιρριπτάριον, τό. – John Skylitzes, A Synopsis, 194-195 fn. 22.

69 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 70-73. – Leon Gramm. Chronogr. 292. – Symeon mag. chron. 301.

70 Dölger, Reg. I no. 572. – PmbZ 25885 (Nikolaos I. Mystikos), n. 24-25. – Loud, »Coronation« of Symeon 109-120. – Shepard, Symeon of Bulgaria 22. – Drews, Grenzen der Legitimationskraft 125-140 with further literature. – Vučetić, Missverständnis.

that have been dated roughly to this period might suggest that Symeon started to call himself emperor, *basileus*⁷¹. Whatever agreement had been concluded, it did not last.

Empress Zoë Karbonopsina took over the regency and excluded Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos from the government. Concerning the Bulgarians, Empress Zoë switched to a policy of confrontation. The result was most probably another campaign by Symeon, possibly resulting in the conquest of Adrianople, which was bought back from the Bulgarians by the empress later in 914⁷². The attempt to invade Bulgaria in 917 under the general Leon Phokas⁷³ resulted in disaster for the Byzantines. Symeon marched towards Byzantium and achieved a major victory near the river Acheloos at the Black Sea coast, close to today's town of Pomorie⁷⁴. The Bulgarians continued their campaign and sacked the suburbs of Constantinople. In 918 and 919, further campaigns were conducted, reaching the Gulf of Corinth⁷⁵. In 919, Zoë⁷⁶ was expelled from her position by her son Constantine Porphyrogenitus and Emperor Romanos I Lakapenos (r. 920-944)⁷⁷, who became the leading figure in Byzantium for the next decades⁷⁸. Romanos' daughter Helene⁷⁹ married the young Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus. It was, therefore, Romanos Lakapenos who took over the role that might have been envisaged by Symeon in 913.

The following years were marked by constant military campaigns by Symeon. Large areas of Thrace were plundered and devastated, but the imperial city remained unreachable. Symeon's attempt to conclude an alliance with the Arab rulers and to conquer Constantinople by land and sea could not be realised. In 924, a meeting took place between Symeon, Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos and Romanos Lakapenos near Constantinople, but it ended without any significant result⁸⁰. Symeon, however, began to call himself »Emperor of the Romans«⁸¹. In a letter to Symeon, Romanos Lakapenos rebuked him for calling himself »Emperor of the Bulgarians and Romans«⁸².

The policy of expansion was not limited to the south-eastern border with Byzantium. Symeon also extended his rule to the west. In 917, Symeon invaded Serbia and installed a certain Paul as the Serbian ruler⁸³. In 924, the Bulgarians again undertook a campaign in Serbia, this time against Prince Zacharias⁸⁴. Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote about how the Bulgarians captured the inhabitants and depopulated the whole region⁸⁵. Towards the end of Symeon's reign, the Bulgarians suffered from a significant defeat against the Croats under Prince Tomislav⁸⁶. A peace was negotiated through papal missionaries.

Symeon died on 27 May 927⁸⁷. At the time of his death, Bulgaria was a leading political power in south-eastern Europe, but its resources were exhausted. Symeon's son and successor Peter I was not able to maintain the sequence of successful military campaigns and he finally reached a peace agreement with Byzantium that would last for more than three decades⁸⁸.

The Golden Age

Much of Symeon's reign was dedicated to military campaigns and war against Byzantium. The battles and campaigns sometimes overshadow the periods of peace, e.g., during the first 13 years of the tenth century, and the manifold paths of cultural exchange. The period of Symeon saw the flourishing of the so called »school of Preslav«, a circle of intellectuals probably gathered around Symeon's court in Preslav, who translated mostly theological works from Greek to Old Church Slavonic (sometimes referred to as Old Bulgarian). They also produced original works of their own. Although preserved in later manuscripts, they can be traced back to the figures at Symeon's court⁸⁹. The most prominent representatives of this circle are Constantine of Preslav, with his »didactic gospel book«⁹⁰, and John the Exarch, with the

71 Gerasimov, Tri starobalgarski 350-356. – Beševliev, Die protobulgarischen Inschriften 330-331. – Jurukova/Penčev, Bălgarski srednovekovni 30. – Jordanov, Korpus 46-54. – Nicol. patr. ep 10, 33-37.

72 PmbZ 28506. – Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 76-77. – Leon Gramm. Chronogr. 293. – Io. Scyl. syn. hist. 211. – Treadgold, History of the Byzantine State 473-474.

73 PmbZ 24408.

74 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 78-81. – Leon Gramm. Chronogr. 294-296. – Io. Scyl. syn. hist. 203-204. – Symeon mag. chron. 304-305. – Zlatarski, Istorija 383-388. – Angelov/Petrov/Primov, Istorija na Bălgarija 287-288. – Božilov, Simeon 124-126. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 258-260. – See the contributions of the proceedings of the conference held at the 1100th anniversary of the battle of Anchialos: Nikolov/Kănev, Simeonova.

75 Zlatarski, Istorija 392-395. – Angelov/Petrov/Primov, Istorija na Bălgarija 289. – Božilov, Simeon 126. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 256-257.

76 PmbZ 28506.

77 PmbZ 26833.

78 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 82-89. – Symeon mag. chron. 308. – Georg. Hamart. chron. 1141.

79 PmbZ 22574.

80 For the events from 922-927: Zlatarski, Istorija 430-515; Angelov/Petrov/Primov, Istorija na Bălgarija 292-295; Božilov, Simeon 138-148; Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 258-260.

81 Jordanov, Korpus 48-49. – Jordanov, Pečatite na car Simeon I Veliki 77-114.

82 Regestes de Constantinople I 5,59.

83 PmbZ # 26399. – Const. Porph. admin. imp. 32,156-159. – Zlatarski, Istorija 388. 392-395. – Božilov, Simeon 123. 126. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 256-257.

84 For Zacharias: PmbZ 28480. – Atanasov/Vačkova/Pavlov, Bălgarska nacionalna istorija 3, 398.

85 Const. Porph. admin. imp. 32,158-159.

86 Mandić, Croatian King 32-43.

87 For a connection between the defeat against the Croats and Symeon's death: Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 116-119; other Byzantine chronicles just mention the death of Symeon, see, e.g., Symeon mag. chron. 326.

88 The Bulgarian State in 927-969. The epoch of Tsar Peter I, ed. by Mirosław J. Leszka and Kiril Marinov. Byzantina Lodziensia 34 (Łódź 2018).

89 See the publications of the series Preslavka knižovna škola vol. 1-18 (1995-2018), there, e.g., Georgiev, Văznikvaneto 7-18; Graševa/Slavova, Preslavsko knižovno središte 312-327. One of the most recent overviews: Anguševa/Gagova/Miltanova, Knižovnostta po vremeto 213-276.

90 Graševa, Konstantin Preslavski 426-440. – Konstantin Preslavski, Starobalgarskoto.

Slavic version of the Hexaëmeron that had originally been composed by Basil the Great⁹¹. Chernorizets Hrabăr wrote an apology of the Old Bulgarian language and scripture called »O pismenekh'«⁹². The so-called »Symeonov sbornik«, which contains Byzantine works in Slavic translation, could have been compiled by Symeon himself⁹³. He was probably also involved in the compilation of sermons called »Zlatostruj« (in Greek »Chrysorrhoes«)⁹⁴.

Still visible today are the ruins of Symeon's residence, the city of Preslav⁹⁵. There is no clear mention of Preslav as Bulgaria's capital, but archaeological research has delivered sufficient evidence for assuming that it was at least the most important city of Symeon's empire. As it has already been mentioned, the question of capitals and residences is less clear than is presented in some textbooks on Bulgarian history. In the course of Symeon's rule, however, Preslav seems to have attained the status of some sort of capital.

Preslav has an outer and an inner city surrounded by stone walls. The outer city comprises an area of 3.5 km². In the middle of this fortified area, a second fortification surrounds the inner city. The most impressive building is the so-called Golden Church or Round Church. It has a round nave and twelve niches in a semicircle form. It is also mentioned by the monk Tudor Doksov⁹⁶. Preslav was certainly a splendid and richly ornamented city. The role model was Constantinople, the imperial centre where Symeon was brought up before he returned to Bulgaria. Preslav has many interesting features, which are connected to its function, such as the aqueduct, which supplied the city with drinking water. Archaeologists have also excavated a building complex that is commonly interpreted as the palace of Symeon. Seals and other remains of administrative activities have been found⁹⁷; however, most of these findings belong to the period of Byzantine occupation after the end of the First Bulgarian Empire.

The cruel and brutal wars against Byzantium seem sometimes to be incompatible with the admiration for Byzantine culture, literature and architecture, but this is an anachronistic view. Symeon was raised in Byzantium, Liutprand of Cremona called him a »half-Greek«⁹⁸. For him, Bulgaria and Byzantium belonged to the same common world, his continuous attempts to be accepted, not just as the Bulgarian, but also as the Roman Emperor reveal that he considered himself to be both, a Roman and a Bulgarian ruler, which was no contradic-

tion for him. He obviously styled himself as a pious man and displayed certain forms of religiosity⁹⁹ while at the same time, he ordered the cruel treatment of captives and inhabitants of conquered regions, as well as a systematic destruction of precious buildings. His image is, of course, distorted by the Byzantine perspective, the only perspective that has left literary traces and, therefore, the only perspective that is accessible to historians¹⁰⁰. He himself wanted to be seen as a peace maker¹⁰¹. Therefore, scholars have attempted to reverse the image provided by the Byzantine sources and to emphasise the idea of peace, but this might sometimes just replace one fiction with another¹⁰². It is difficult to put Symeon's reign under one coherent term, as the contradictory tendencies have to be left unsolved.

The Peace of 927 and Maria, the Byzantine Princess

The transition to the Bulgarian throne was turbulent. John¹⁰³, another son of Symeon, rebelled against the succession of his brother Peter¹⁰⁴; the nobility was divided. That the conflict had something to do with the future policy towards Byzantium is possible, but it has to be acknowledged that we lack detailed information about the struggles within Bulgaria. It is likely that many factors unknown to us played a role. Peter finally prevailed and immediately started to conduct the next campaign against Byzantium, but things quickly changed. Negotiations started and, finally, both sides reached an agreement¹⁰⁵. The details have not been transmitted by the historians, but the outcome is quite clear. Peter married a Byzantine princess, Maria Lakapene¹⁰⁶, a granddaughter of Romanos Lakapenos and the oldest daughter of Christophoros Lakapenos¹⁰⁷ and Sophia¹⁰⁸. By this marriage, Peter acknowledged the position of Romanos Lakapenos and accepted him as legitimate Emperor. This means that at the same time the position of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in principle the legitimate ruler, was no longer relevant for the Bulgarians. It was only Liutprand of Cremona who stated that Maria was renamed Eirene, meaning »peace«¹⁰⁹. All other sources call her simply Maria, including seals from Bulgaria¹¹⁰.

Maria Lakapene was renowned for her beauty; this is what Byzantine chronicles tell us¹¹¹. The wedding took place on 8

91 Ikononova, Joan Ekzarch 169-194. – Ioh. Exarch. Hexaem.

92 Graševa, Černorizets Hrabăr 497-505. – Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 237-241 with the most relevant editions (239).

93 Ivanova, Izbornik ot 1073, 50-59. – Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 474-475.

94 Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 194-195.

95 For Preslav see Prinzing, Preslav; Browning, Preslav; Totev, Preslav 301-311 with the abundant literature; Vaklinov, Vtorata bălgarska stolica Preslav 49-76; most recently: Vaklinova, Vėliki Preslav 12-17, and the articles in the journals Preslav vol. 1-8 (1968-2019) and Pliska-Preslav vol. 1-13 (1979-2018).

96 Kovačeva, Tudor Doksov 200-202. – Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur. – Athan. apol. c. Arian. 52,6-7.

97 Jordanov, Pečatite na car Simeon I Veliki 77-114.

98 Liutpr. legat. 185-218, III,29, 66. – von Falkenhausen, Symeon.

99 Nicol. patr. ep 14,94.

100 Angelov, Obrazăt na Car Simeon 331-346.

101 Jordanov, Korpus 46.

102 Božilov, Simeon 106-117.

103 PmbZ # 22903.

104 PmbZ # 26409.

105 Zlatarski, Istorija 516-525. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, Istorija 271-273. – Leszka, Peter's Way 23-34. – Dölger, Reg. I no. 612 with further literature.

106 PmbZ 24919.

107 PmbZ 21275.

108 PmbZ 27152.

109 Liutpr. antap. 5-150, III,38, 86.

110 Jordanov, Korpus 58-60.

111 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 120-121. – Symeon mag. chron. 327. – Io. Scyl. syn. hist. 223.

October 927, lasting for several days, in the church consecrated to the Mother of God in Pegai near Constantinople¹¹². Patriarch Stephanos conducted the ceremony¹¹³. The *protobestiarios* Theophanes¹¹⁴ and the whole senate of Constantinople were present and entered the church together with the bridal couple. Theophanes and Georgios Sursubules¹¹⁵, a high Bulgarian functionary, acted as witnesses to the marriage. After three days, Maria returned to Constantinople, and after the banquet, Maria and Theophanes returned to Constantinople. After a feast on the third day in Pegai, the Bulgarians caused a scandal by insisting on hailing Christophoros, the co-emperor and son of Romanos Lakapenos, before Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus who nominally had the higher rank¹¹⁶. Christophoros was, of course, Maria's father, his pre-eminence would reflect on his daughter Maria as the new Bulgarian empress.

Maria left for Bulgaria after the end of the celebrations. Theophanes and her parents accompanied her to the Hebdomon. The chronicles mention that she was sad to leave her parents but happy to rule over the Bulgarians. It is explicitly mentioned that she took much treasure and accoutrements with her¹¹⁷, which provides us with a possible background for the Preslav Treasure.

Though it is not explicitly mentioned, it is quite likely that the Byzantines officially recognised the imperial title of Peter, *basileus* in Greek and *tsar* in Bulgarian, during the course of the peace treaty¹¹⁸.

Maria played a special role in Bulgaria, possibly a more prominent role than previous wives of Bulgarian rulers. One seal mentions her together with her husband as emperor and empress¹¹⁹. She had four children with Peter, two daughters and two sons, Boris¹²⁰ and Romanos¹²¹. In 931, she visited Constantinople together with three of her children to visit her father and grandfather. Her father was, however, already dead. She returned to Bulgaria with presents from her grandfather Romanos Lakapenos, something that would also provide a possible background for the Preslav Treasure¹²². The sources remain silent about the rest of Maria's life. She probably died in 963, which means that she did not witness the downfall of the Bulgarian Empire. Archaeological research provides some further information mainly in form of seals that

have been found, depicting Maria with her husband Peter¹²³. Compared to their predecessors, the number of seals is quite significant.

Tsar Peter and the Decline of the Bulgarian Empire

The peaceful relationship between Byzantium and Bulgaria turned the interest of Byzantine historiography away from their northern neighbours. Archaeology cannot compensate for this lack of information. In Preslav, building activities seem to have increased: monasteries flourished and churches were built¹²⁴. Peter himself seems to have supported monastic communities. He might have played a role in promulgating the cult of John of Rila, whose body was transferred to Sofia after John's death in 946¹²⁵. One of the versions of the life of John of Rila mentioned a meeting with Tsar Peter¹²⁶; Peter called himself a pious ruler on one of his seals¹²⁷. The period of Peter's rule is also associated with the emergence and dissemination of the Bogomils, an ascetic sect with a dualist theology that may have been influenced by neo-Manichaean ideas¹²⁸. The name stems allegedly from a priest called Bogomil. As in similar cases, the theology of the Bogomils has to be reconstructed through the sources of their persecutors. In 972, a presbyter called Cosmas wrote a treatise against the Bogomils that now serves as one of the most important sources¹²⁹. According to the available information, the Bogomils regarded material things as an outcome of the Devil's activities and promoted an extreme form of asceticism. Theophylaktos of Constantinople (933-956) mentioned the Bogomils in Bulgaria in a letter to Tsar Peter¹³⁰. Cosmas criticised, not only the Bogomils, but also the Orthodox Church and the conduct of their representatives. Some characteristics of the Church and certain clerical behaviour could have influenced the emergence of the sect.

Towards the end of Peter's reign, especially, signs of political decline were visible. A constant threat were the Hungarians, who now dwelt in the north-west of Bulgaria. After the battle of Lechfeld, the way to the West was closed. It seems that the Hungarians increasingly turned to the south-

112 The events are described in: Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 118-123; Georg. Hamart. chron. 831-834; Symeon mag. chron. 327-329. – See the more recent research in: Shepard, A Marriage Too Far 121-149; Brzozowska, Byzantine Consort 55-90 esp. 60-63.

113 PmbZ 27245.

114 PmbZ 28087.

115 PmbZ 22137.

116 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 122-123. – Georg. Hamart. chron. 833. – Symeon mag. chron. 328. – Leonis, Grammatici Chronographia 317. – Shepard, A Marriage Too Far 132. – Brzozowska, Byzantine Consort 62.

117 Georg. Hamart. chron. 834; see the sources concerning her departure in PmbZ 24919 n. 1; Bosselmann-Ruickbie, Byzantinischer Schmuck 18f. 34-40.

118 Bakalov, Srednovekovnijat bălgarski vladetel 169-172. – Atanasov, Insigniite 96-99. – Nikolov, Politicheska 234. – Todorov, Vladetelskijat statut i titla na car Petăr I, 93-108. – Leszka/Marinov, Peace 47-53 esp. 51.

119 Jordanov, Korpus III, 58-60.

120 PmbZ 21198.

121 PmbZ 26847.

122 Theoph. Cont., lib. VI, 136-137. – Symeon mag. chron. 334. – Georg. Hamart. chron. 840. – Brzozowska, Byzantine Consort 75.

123 See the discussion and literature in Brzozowska, Byzantine Consort 84-87.

124 Brzozowska/Nikolov, Culture 347-400 esp. 380-391 with further literature.

125 Dinekov, Ivan Rilski 25-33. – Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 105-108.

126 Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 289. – Leszka, The Portrayal of Peter 405-434 esp. 421-425.

127 Jurukova/Penčev, Bălgarski srednovekovni 34. – Jurukova, Srebären 3-12.

128 Leszka/Wolski, Church 303-345 esp. 335-345.

129 Popruženko, Kozma Presviter. – Begunov, Kozma Presviter. – Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur 134-141.

130 Regestes de Constantinople I 223-224 no. 789. – Petrovskii, Pis'mo patriarcha Konstantinopol'skogo Feofilakta 356-372.

east, towards Byzantium. To reach Byzantium, the Hungarians had to cross Bulgarian territory. Byzantine sources mentioned Hungarian incursions in 934 and 943. A certain *patrikios* Theophanes negotiated with them and reached some sort of agreement¹³¹. We find Hungarians in Thrace in 958/959, 961/962, and 968, plundering and devastating the region¹³². Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969)¹³³ accused Tsar Peter of allowing the Hungarians to cross the Danube. Peter's situation was, however, quite hopeless¹³⁴. He complained that he was left alone without any support against the Hungarians. He felt himself, therefore, obliged to honour the agreements with them. It was certainly not a voluntary act to let them cross the Bulgarian lands, but a lack of necessary means to provide protection. Scholars have speculated whether in 965 the Bulgarian embassy at Emperor Otto's court in Magdeburg or Merseburg looked for support against the Hungarians, a mission, for which Otto the Great seemed to have been the right addressee. The sources, however, mentioned just the presence of the Bulgarian ambassadors and nothing more¹³⁵.

The final blow for the Bulgarian Empire, at least for its north-eastern parts came from an unexpected direction. Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas contacted the Kievan Rus', then under the rule of Svjatoslav of Kiev¹³⁶, and suggested a campaign against the Bulgarians. The outcome exceeded, however, even the aims of Nikephoros Phokas. In the summer of 968, the Kievan Rus' invaded Bulgaria, plundered the territory and seized several towns. It was only the news of a Pecheneg incursion that persuaded Svjatoslav to return. But after having reached an agreement, the Kievan Rus' returned¹³⁷. Tsar Peter had died in the meantime (969), leaving Bulgaria in a disastrous situation. His son Boris II¹³⁸ succeeded him, but he was unable to defend his Empire against the second invasion of Svjatoslav, who soon controlled large parts of the country.

This was, however, not in accordance with the agreement with Byzantium, where the goal had been to weaken Bulgaria, not replace it with another dangerous neighbour. In 971, the Byzantine Emperor John Tsimiskes organised a campaign against Svjatoslav. The Byzantine army crossed the Balkan Mountains and took Preslav and Silistra, forcing the Kievan Rus' to return to the regions north of the Danube. Some Bulgarians had joined the Kievan Rus' and John Tsimiskes's intention was, not to restore Bulgaria to Tsar Boris II, but to

incorporate it into the Byzantine Empire as a province. Tsar Boris II and his family were captured and taken to Constantinople. Preslav was renamed Ioannoupolis, but remained the administrative centre of the new province. Boris was forced to remove his imperial insignia and had to be content with the title of *magistros*¹³⁹. The Bulgarian Empire survived in its south-western regions under the reign of the Komitopuli with Tsar Samuil¹⁴⁰, but Preslav and the north-east became, with some temporary exceptions, a Byzantine province.

Concluding Remarks

The outline of some aspects of the political events of the ninth and tenth centuries tried to focus on the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations in order to contextualise the Preslav Treasure and to provide the general background for its interpretation. While Christianisation occurred during a period of political weakness in the middle of the ninth century, Bulgaria regained its strength during the second half of the ninth century, especially under the rule of Symeon the Great, whose military successes against the Byzantine neighbour were unrivalled. During the reign of Tsar Peter, Bulgaria had already passed its political and military peak. It is, however, still an unsolved problem why, after the long and peaceful reign of Tsar Peter and his wife Maria, Bulgaria collapsed so quickly under the attack of the Kievan Rus' and Emperor John Tsimiskes¹⁴¹ in 971.

The influence of Byzantine culture has a long history, starting long before Christianisation. When Maria arrived in Bulgaria in 927, specific forms of representing the ruler had already been practiced at the Bulgarian court for a century. It is, therefore, not clear whether the arrival of Tsaritsa Maria really increased the »Byzantinisation« of Bulgaria. Her role was certainly specific and more powerful than that of her predecessors, but it is doubtful whether it had a significant impact beyond the Bulgarian court. While the sources are less abundant concerning the rule of Tsar Peter, it seems that some cultural and religious trends developed quite independently in Bulgaria. In terms of art and culture, Bulgaria had already created a specific character that made it distinct from all other regions in south-eastern Europe.

131 PmbZ # 28087.

132 Ziemann, *Der schwächelnde Nachbar* 367-382. – Dimitrov, *Bälgaro-ungarski otnošenija* 74-78. – Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars*.

133 PmbZ # 25535.

134 Dölger, *Reg. I* 130, no. 710. – *Io. Scyl. syn. hist.* 276-277.

135 Jacob, *Arabische Berichte* 11-12.

136 PmbZ # 27440.

137 Zlatarski, *Istorija* 567-587. – Angelov/Petrov/Primov, *Istorija na Bälgarija* 389-390. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, *Istorija* 295-297.

138 PmbZ # 21198.

139 Zlatarski, *Istorija* 587-632. – Angelov/Petrov/Primov, *Istorija na Bälgarija* 390-397. – Božilov/Gjuzelev, *Istorija* 297-300.

140 Pirivatrić, *Samuilovata dăržava*. – Säbotinov, *Bälgarija pri car Samuil*; see also the contributions of the proceedings of a conference in 2014: Gjuzelev/Nikolov, *Evropejskijat*.

141 PmbZ # 22778 (Ioannes Tsimiskes).

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Summary / Zusammenfassung / Résumé

Bulgaria and Byzantium in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries: Symeon, Peter and the Byzantine Princess

The proximity to the Byzantine Empire was, in many respects, a decisive factor in the development of the First Bulgarian Empire, founded in 680/681. While the history of the Bulgarian state until its fall in 1018 was marked by recurring conflicts with its powerful south-eastern neighbour – whose actions ultimately contributed to its demise –, it was also profoundly shaped by cultural and religious interactions with Byzantium. A key moment in this process was the Christianisation of Bulgaria in the mid-ninth century, largely orchestrated by Byzantium. This event marked a crucial epochal shift, initiating the formation of ecclesiastical structures and fostering the emergence of a distinct Bulgarian culture, expressed across literature, art, and architecture. A particularly notable

example was the literary activity of the Preslav School, which played a central role in translating and producing important theological texts. It is noteworthy that the heyday of this school coincided with the expansionist policy of the Bulgarian Tsar Symeon the Great (893-927), a period marked by frequent military conflicts between Bulgaria and Byzantium. This period is regarded in Bulgarian historical memory as the »Golden Age«. In 927, Symeon's son, Tsar Peter I (927-969), signalled his intent for a lasting peace with the Byzantine Empire by marrying the Byzantine princess Maria Lakapene. Her lavish endowments mentioned in the written sources could provide a background for the Preslav Treasure. The long reign of Tsar Peter I nevertheless marked the beginning of the Bulgarian Empire's decline.

Bulgarien und Byzanz im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert: Symeon, Peter und die byzantinische Prinzessin

Für die Entwicklung des 680/681 gegründeten Ersten Bulgarischen Reiches war die Nachbarschaft mit dem Byzantinischen Reich ein in vieler Hinsicht entscheidender Faktor. Während die Geschichte des Ersten Bulgarischen Reiches bis zu seinem von Byzanz vollzogenen Ende im Jahre 1018 durch zahlreiche Konflikte mit dem südöstlichen Nachbarn gekennzeichnet war, sind zugleich die kulturellen und religiösen Einflüsse und Wechselwirkungen unübersehbar. Die maßgeblich von Byzanz organisierte Christianisierung Bulgariens Mitte des 9. Jahrhunderts stellte dabei eine entscheidende Epochen-grenze für das Erste Bulgarische Reich dar, da sie den Beginn nicht nur der Errichtung kirchlicher Organisationsstrukturen darstellte, sondern auch im Zusammenspiel von bulgarischen und byzantinischen Elementen zur Entstehung einer eigenen und in ihrer künstlerischen Ausgestaltung speziellen bulgarischen Kultur führte, die sich auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen wie der Literatur, Kunst oder Architektur widerspiegelte. In literarischer Hinsicht mag hierbei die Schule von Preslav, die für die Übersetzung und Abfassung wichtiger, vor allem theologischer Texte verantwortlich war, als herausragendes Beispiel dienen. Dabei ist es bezeichnend, dass die Blütezeit dieser Schule mit der Expansionspolitik des bulgarischen Zaren Symeon des Großen (893-927) zusammenfiel, die durch zahlreiche militärische Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Bulgarien und Byzanz gekennzeichnet war. Im bulgarischen Geschichtsbewusstsein wird diese Zeit als »goldenes Zeitalter« bezeichnet. Symeons Sohn, Zar Peter I. (927-969), setzte im Jahr 927 mit der Heirat der byzantinischen Prinzessin Maria Lakapene ein Zeichen für den angestrebten dauerhaften Frieden mit dem Byzantinischen Reich. Die in den schriftlichen Quellen erwähnte reiche Ausstattung der byzantinischen Prinzessin könnte einen Hintergrund für den Schatz von Preslav liefern. Dennoch mündete die lange Regentschaft Zar Peters I. schließlich in den beginnenden Niedergang des bulgarischen Reiches.

La Bulgarie et Byzance aux IX^e et X^e siècles: Syméon, Pierre et la princesse byzantine

Le voisinage avec l'Empire byzantin a constitué, à bien des égards, un facteur décisif pour le développement du Premier Empire bulgare, fondé en 680/681. Si l'histoire de ce royaume a été marquée, jusqu'à sa fin en 1018, par de nombreux conflits avec son voisin du sud-est (qui causa sa chute ultime), les influences et interactions culturelles et religieuses n'en sont pas moins manifestes. La christianisation de la Bulgarie au milieu du IX^e siècle – entreprise en grande partie sous l'égide de Byzance – représente une césure majeure dans l'histoire du Premier Empire bulgare: elle marque non seulement le début de l'instauration d'institutions ecclésiastiques, mais conduit également, par l'interaction entre éléments byzantins et bulgares, à l'émergence d'une culture spécifiquement bulgare, originale dans ses formes artistiques, et visible à travers la littérature, l'art et l'architecture. Sur le plan littéraire, l'école de Preslav, responsable de la traduction et de la rédaction de textes majeurs – notamment théologiques –, constitue un exemple particulièrement remarquable. Il est significatif que l'apogée de cette école ait coïncidé avec la politique expansionniste du tsar bulgare Syméon le Grand (893-927), marquée par de nombreux affrontements militaires entre la Bulgarie et Byzance. Dans la mémoire historique bulgare, cette époque est désignée comme »l'âge d'or«. En 927, le fils de Syméon, le tsar Pierre I^{er} (927-969), manifesta sa volonté de paix durable avec l'Empire byzantin en épousant la princesse byzantine Marie Lécapène. La dot somptueuse de cette dernière, évoquée dans les sources écrites, pourrait fournir un arrière-plan possible au trésor de Preslav. Malgré tout, le long règne du tsar Pierre I^{er} aboutit finalement au début du déclin du royaume bulgare.