

## VII

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# Last Years of Peter's Reign (963–969)



Since the autumn of 927, throughout the 40 years of Peter's reign the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations were peaceful. Unfortunately, beside this general observation little else can be said of them. For the Byzantine historians, who still remain the main source of information on the history of Bulgaria of this period, they were not sufficiently interesting or important to be discussed. The native Bulgarian sources do not contain information on the subject, either.

We do know that the Preslav court maintained contacts with Constantinople. The visits of Maria-Irene to Constantinople, during which she met with her family, are a trace of this<sup>1</sup>, much like the correspondence between Peter and Theophylaktos, the patriarch of Constantinople, regarding the Bogomil heresy<sup>2</sup>. However, it was only during the 960s that the Bulgarian-Byzantine political contacts intensified. Perhaps it

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<sup>1</sup> Z.A. Brzozowska wrote more on this subject in the chapter devoted to Maria (Part One, chapter IV, points 3–4).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on this subject, see Part Two, chapter VII, point 3 of the book. A seal of this leader of the Byzantine Church, found most likely during an archaeological dig in Preslav, is a trace of the aforementioned correspondence – И. Йорданов, *Печат на византийския патриарх Теофилакт (933–956), намерен в Преслав*, [in:] *Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70. годишнината на Акад. Васил Гюзелев*, ed. М. Каймакавова et al., София 2006, pp. 353–557.

was in 963, during the empress Theophano's regency<sup>3</sup>, and after the death of Maria-Irene, the peace of 927 was renewed.<sup>4</sup> Another view present in the academic works is that at that time Peter's sons were sent to Constantinople as hostages<sup>5</sup>. It needs to be noted, however, that this view – based on a passage from John Skylitzes' work – should be treated with considerable caution. It cannot be ruled out that Peter's sons arrived in the Byzantine capital much later – or not at all<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> On Theophano's regency – M. J. Leszka, *Rola cesarzowej Teofano w uzurpacjach Nicefora Fokasa (963) i Jana Tzymiskesa (969)*, [in:] *Zamach stanu w dawnych społecznościach*, ed. A. Soltysik, Warszawa 2004, pp. 228–231.

<sup>4</sup> Such conclusion can be drawn from the relation of John Skylitzes (p. 255: *When the wife of Peter, the emperor of the Bulgars, died, he made a treaty with emperors ostensibly to renew the peace, surrendering his own sons, Boris and Romanos, as hostages. He himself died shortly afterwards, whereupon the sons were sent to Bulgaria to secure the ancestral throne and to restrain the 'children of the counts' from further encroachments* (transl. p. 246). It needs to be pointed out, however, that the Byzantine historian is far from being precise in this passage, as he combined in practically one sentence events that occurred over the course of six years. The reason for the renewal of the treaty is also doubtful. If anything, it should have been associated with the death of Romanos II, not of Maria-Irene, as the renewal of a peace treaty occurred with the new ruler's ascension to throne. Regarding the credibility of John Skylitzes' relation, see i.a.: И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на средновековна България VII–XIV в.*, София 2006, pp. 305, fn. 25, and 307, fn. 51. It cannot be ruled out that this fragment is an interpolation.

<sup>5</sup> В.Н. Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. 1/2, *Първо българско Царство. От славянизацията на държавата до падането на Първото царство (852–1018)*, София 1927, pp. 569, 592. Nikola P. Blagoev (Н.П. Благоев, *Българският цар Роман*, МПР 6.3, 1930, pp. 19–22), thought that in 963 Peter's sons remained in Constantinople not as hostages, but in relation to Romanos II's death. Plamen Pavlov, in turn (П. Павлов, *Векът на цар Самуил*, София 2014, pp. 27–28), thought that the young princes travelled to the Byzantine capital to obtain education, much like their grandfather Symeon did a century before. John Skylitzes (p. 328) included intriguing information that Romanos was supposedly castrated on the orders of the *parakoimomenos* Joseph, who is identified with Joseph Bringas, the mainstay of Theophano's regency, which would have indicated that the deed was committed in 963. This information, too, raises doubts. It was included alongside the description of Romanos' flight from Byzantium in the 970s or 980s, therefore some scholars who treat John's relation seriously place this event right after 971, and explain it with a fear that the potential offspring of Romanos (let us remind here that he was a great-grandson of Romanos Lekapenos) could be used in future in fight for the imperial throne. An Armenian author, Asochik, also writes about Romanos as of a eunuch, although without mentioning his name (Asochik, pp. 185–186).

<sup>6</sup> John Skylitzes, p. 255; cf. John Zonaras, p. 495. If one were to take this fragment literally, one would need to state that Peter's sons arrived in Constantinople

## 1. The Crisis in Bulgarian-Byzantine Relations

In the winter of 965/966 or 966/967 there had been a drastic change in the Bulgarian-Byzantine relations<sup>7</sup>. During that time, Peter sent envoys to Constantinople with the mission of reminding the Byzantines to pay the annual tribute to Bulgaria, which was guaranteed in the peace treaty of 927. As Leo the Deacon relates, Nikephoros Phokas reacted to this demand very sharply. Not only did he call Bulgarians *wretched and abominable Scythian people*, and Peter himself as *thrice a slave and leather-gnawing ruler*

soon before their father's death, which would allow linking this event with 968, rather than with 963, since Peter died on 30<sup>th</sup> of January 969.

<sup>7</sup> The dating of this event is uncertain. There are two main views in the scholarship on this matter: 965/966 or 966/967. It would seem that the latter date is more likely. The arguments for each of the positions (or backing of one of the other) can be found by the Reader in i.a. the following works: М. Д р и н о в, *Началото на Самуиловата държава*, [in:] *Идеи*, *Избрани съчинения в два тома*, vol. I, *Трудове по българска и славянска история*, ed. И. Д у й ч е в, София 1971, pp. 398–399; В.Н. З л а т а р с к и, *История...*, pp. 570, 572, 577–578, fn. 4; Н.П. Б л а г о е в, *Критичен поглед върху известията на Лев Дякон за българите*, МПр 6.1, 1930, pp. 27–31; S. R u c i m a n, *The History of the First Bulgarian Empire*, London 1930, pp. 198–201; П. М у т а ф ч и е в, *Маджарите и българо-византийските отношения през третата четвърт на Х в.*, [in:] *Идеи*, *Избрани произведения*, vol. II, София 1973, pp. 463, 468, 471, 474; Р.О. К а р ы ш к о в с к и й, *Охронологию русско-византийской войны при Святославе*, ВВ 5, 1952, p. 138; A.D. S t o k e s, *The Background and Chronology of the Balkan Campaigns of Svyatoslav Igorevich*, SEER 40/94, 1961, pp. 44–57; R. B r o w n i n g, *Byzantium and Bulgaria. A comparative studies across the Early Medieval Frontier*, London 1975, pp. 70–71; С.А. И в а н о в, *Византийско-болгарские отношения в 966–969 гг.*, ВВ 42, 1981, p. 90; В. Т ъ п к о в а - З а и м о в а, *Падане на Североизточна България под византийска власт*, [in:] *История на България*, vol. II, *Първа българска държава*, София 1981, p. 389; А.Н. С а х а р о в, *Дипломатия Святослава*, Москва 1982, pp. 102, 108; J.V.A. F i n e, *The Early Medieval Balkans: a Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor 1983, pp. 163, 181–182; И. Б о ж и л о в, В. Г ю з е л е в, *История на средновековна България. VII–XIV в.*, София 2006, pp. 295, 306, fn. 36; J. В о н а г е к, *Przyczyny i cele bulgarskich wypraw Światostawa a polityka Bizancjum w latach sześćdziesiątych X w.*, SH 39, 1996, p. 77, ргзур. 183; А. Н и к о л о в, *Политическа мисъл в ранносредновековна България (средата на IX – края на Х в.)*, София 2006, p. 280; Т. Т о д о р о в, *България през втората и третата четвърт на X век: политическа история*, София 2006 [unpublished PhD thesis], p. 228; П. П а в л о в, *Години на мир и “ратни бедни” (927–1018)*, [in:] Г. А т а н а с о в, В. В а ч к о в а, П. П а в л о в, *Българска национална история*, vol. III, *Първо българско царство (680–1018)*, Велико Търново 2015, p. 432.

*clad in a leather jerkin* and an archon, what without a doubt was a grave insult, he also ordered the envoys to be slapped in the face<sup>8</sup> and emphatically rejected Bulgarian claims. The emperor was said to have been so irritated by the occurrence that almost immediately after the envoys' departure he organised a military expedition against the Bulgarians.

The above relation of Leo the Deacon and, in general, the reasons for the eruption of hostility between Peter and Nikephoros Phokas, while have been analysed multiple times by scholars, did not find a universally accepted interpretation. For example, Vassil N. Zlatarski considered Peter's move to have been fully conscious. The Bulgarian ruler wanted to shrug off the humiliating position in which he found himself (sending his sons to Constantinople as hostages) after renewing the peace in 963, and did so by using his alliance with the Hungarians<sup>9</sup>. Sir Steven Runciman raised the possibility that Peter was counting on Nikephoros to be fully occupied fighting the Saracens, which would have made it impossible to deny the Bulgarian demands<sup>10</sup>. Plamen Pavlov, however, accepted that it was a provocation on the part of the Bulgarian ruler that was intended to make the Byzantine emperor aware that his successes on the eastern front were possible only thanks to the peaceful relations with Bulgaria<sup>11</sup>. According to another view, the Bulgarian mission arrived at an unfavourable moment – the emperor was celebrating his successes in fighting the Arabs in the East, and found the Bulgarian demands demeaning. In this case, a degree of happenstance is assumed; an unfortunate coincidence that influenced the course of events<sup>12</sup>. Other scholars think that Nikephoros himself sought confrontation, as a reaction to the conclusion of an anti-Byzantine Bulgarian-Hungarian alliance<sup>13</sup>. It also cannot be

<sup>8</sup> Лео the Deacon, IV, 5 (transl. 110).

<sup>9</sup> В.Н. Златарски, *История...*, pp. 569–570.

<sup>10</sup> S. Runciman, *The History...*, pp. 198–199.

<sup>11</sup> П. Павлов, *Векът...*, p. 29; *идем*, *Години...*, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> *Идем*, *Забравени и неразбрани. Събития и личности от Българското средновековие*, София 2010, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> В. Гюзелев, *Българските пратеничества при германския император Отон I в Магдебург (965 г.) и в Кведлинбург (973 г.)*, [in:] *Civitas Divino-Humana. In honorem Annotum LX Georgii Bakalov*, ed. Ц. Степанов, В. Вачкова, София 2004, p. 387.

ruled out that the emperor's actions were pre-emptory, and were linked to the Bulgarian preparations for a move against Thessalonike and its surroundings, which has been discussed above.

Setting aside the questions that raise justified doubts in the above propositions – the matter of the treaty of 963, the sending of the Bulgarian ruler's sons as hostages to the Byzantine capital, or the conclusion of a Bulgarian-Hungarian alliance – it would seem that there are two elements of the source relations that are indisputable. Firstly, the Bulgarian envoys arrived as every other year (let us remember that such missions must have occurred also during the previous years, and already during the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas) for the tribute that was their due, and guaranteed by the treaty of 927. Secondly, from the perspective of the Empire, the problems with their northern neighbour had already been brewing for some time, and the matter that was the most irritating was the ineffectuality of the Bulgarian authorities in stopping the Hungarian expeditions. Perhaps the emperor decided that the Bulgarians have not been fulfilling the part of the agreement of 927 regarding the military support for the Empire, in this case understood as taking upon themselves the role of a buffer for the Byzantine territories. What would have been the meaning of the peace with the Bulgarians if the Balkan areas of the Empire were harassed by raiders? A no less important question in the context of the emperor's policy of reclaiming lands of the Empire was the matter of re-establishing relations with the Bulgarians in a truly imperial spirit, perfectly illustrated by the words that Leo the Deacon put into the emperor's mouth:

the most mighty and great emperor of the Romans is coming immediately to your land, to pay you the tribute in full, so that you may learn, O you who are thrice a slave through your ancestry, to proclaim the rulers of the Romans as your masters, and not to demand tribute of them as if they were slaves<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Leo the Deacon, IV, 5, (transl. p. 110).

This ruled out any obligations towards the northern neighbour and, because of this, it would seem that Nikephoros's stance should be read as termination of the 'deep peace' of 927.

In the light of the rest of Leo the Deacon's relation, the emperor, outraged by the Bulgarian envoys, led an expedition against Bulgaria. He was said to have conquered a number of border strongholds, however after reaching the mountains of Haimos and familiarizing himself with the local conditions, abandoned further action. He was concerned that the Byzantine army, unprepared for action in the mountainous conditions, could be wiped out by the Bulgarians. This worry stemmed from the emperor realizing that: *on several previous occasions the Romans came to grief in the rough terrain of Mysia, and were completely destroyed*<sup>15</sup>.

There is no doubt that Leo the Deacon referred primarily to the defeats suffered by the Byzantines in the *kleisourai* – fortified mountain passes – of Haimos, in particular the incident on July 811, when the emperor's namesake and one of his predecessors on the throne, Nikephoros I, perished<sup>16</sup>. Some scholars cast doubt on the value of the entirety of Leo's relation, as in their opinion it is not likely that such a consummate and experienced commander as Nikephoros, who fought in the mountainous terrain throughout his entire life, would have been reticent to venture into Bulgarian *kleisourai*. They do not accept Leo the Deacon's statement that the emperor learned of the nature of the mountains' formation only during the expedition, once he reached the border with Bulgaria. They also do not believe that the inaccessibility of the territories occupied by the Bulgarians became the chief motive for abandoning the rest of the campaign. When it comes to discussing the described events, these

<sup>15</sup> Leo the Deacon, IV, 6 (transl. p. 111). See also: A.-M. Talbot, D.F. Sullivan, *Introduction*, [in:] Leo the Deacon, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> М.И. Сюзюмов, С.А. Иванов, *Комментарий*, [in:] Лев Диакон, *История*, transl. М.М. Копыленко, ed. Г.Г. Литаврин, Москва 1988, p. 182, fn. 22; Р. Мутафчиев, *Лекции по история на Византии*, vol. II, ed. Г. Бакалов, София 1995, p. 250. Other propositions (С.А. Иванов, *Византийско-болгарские...*, p. 93; *The History of Leo the Deacon...*, p. 111, fn. 42) associated, i.a., with the past of the Phokas family itself, including the Byzantine defeat at Anchialos in 917. It is worth noting that Leo himself attested to his knowledge of both the defeat of Nikephoros I, and of the battle of Anchialos, in another part of his work – Leo the Deacon, VI, 9; VII, 7.

scholars give primacy to the (later than Leo the Deacon's) account of John Skylitzes, according to whom Nikephoros was merely visiting the border strongholds of the Empire, and his actions against Bulgaria were limited to sending a letter to tsar Peter with the demand: *to prevent the Turks [that is, the Hungarians] from crossing the Danube to raid Roman land*<sup>17</sup>. According to them, therefore, there had been no Byzantine expedition into Bulgaria during the late spring and early summer of 967, since at the time the emperor was pursuing a campaign in the West (as far as Macedonia) due to the threat to territories in Italy posed by Otto I's armies<sup>18</sup>. The emperor's impulsive reaction to the Bulgarian envoys' demands, and his supposed expedition into Bulgaria were a result of the official imperial court propaganda, aimed at increasing the largely diminished authority of the Byzantine ruler. There had been riots in Constantinople against the ruler, and a tragic accident in the hippodrome which caused the deaths of many of the capital's inhabitants<sup>19</sup>. The emperor wished to divert attention from the poor situation – if not by achieving some quick and easy success, then by at least spreading rumours of one. Leo, the later author of *History*, became one of the victims of this propaganda, accepting it at face value<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> John Skylitzes, pp. 276–277 (transl. p. 163). The quoted letter was sent by the emperor from the border, and not some time later, after visiting Greece – this view is held by Vassilka Tapkova-Zaimova (В. Тъпкова-Займова, *Падане...*, p. 389).

<sup>18</sup> On the threat to the Byzantine holdings in Italy, see: R. Jenkins, *Byzantium. The Imperial Centuries AD 610–1071*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 1966, p. 285; T. Wolínska, *Konstantynopolitańska misja Liutpranda z Kremony (968)*, [in:] *Cesarstwo bizantyjskie. Dzieje. Religia. Kultura. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi przez uczniów na 70-lecie Jego urodzin*, ed. P. Krupczyński, M.J. Leszka, Łask–Łódź 2006, pp. 207–208; J. Shepard, *Western approaches (900–1025)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. idem, Cambridge 2008, p. 542sqq.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Leo the Deacon, IV, 6; John Skylitzes, pp. 275–276.

<sup>20</sup> С.А. Иванов, *Византийско-болгарские...*, pp. 91–93, 94–96, 98–100; М.Й. Сюзюмов, С.А. Иванов, *Комментарий...*, p. 182, fn. 18, 21; cf. Р.О. Карышковский, *О хронологии...*, p. 133. The generally positive opinion of Phokas and Tzymiskes, found also in other sources, indicates the propaganda success of both of these rulers – А.-М. Талбот, D.F. Sullivan, *Introduction...*, p. 32. The credibility of the claim that Nikephoros became afraid of the dangers lurking in Bulgaria is also questioned by Tapkova-Zaimova (В. Тъпкова-Займова, *Падане...*, p. 389) and Ivan Bozhilov, Vassil Gyuzelev (И. Божиллов, В. Гюзелев, *История на*

It would seem that these doubts are not entirely substantiated. First and foremost, Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes both agree that after sending away the Bulgarian envoys (although one might have doubts as to whether the event really happened in the atmosphere presented by Leo the Deacon<sup>21</sup>), the emperor was indeed present at the Bulgarian border. One may point to several important reasons for which the Byzantine ruler appeared there. It seems logical and natural that the emperor was visiting the areas threatened by the Hungarian raids, especially since he could expect that Peter, in response to having his demands refused, would once again allow the Hungarians venturing towards Byzantium to pass through Bulgarian lands without resistance<sup>22</sup>. Displaying the might of the Byzantine army at the Bulgarian border was certainly intended to make it clear to Peter that the empire's intervention was possible at any time. The goal of this demonstration may have been to exert pressure on the tsar so that he would abandon the possibility of co-operation with Hungarians (even if it consisted only of silent acquiescence to them crossing the borders of the Tsardom), and contacts with emperor Otto I<sup>23</sup>. The expedition to the Bulgarian border was undoubtedly intended to raise the emperor's authority. It was not, however, risky, since the border lay within

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*Добруджа*, vol. II, *Средновековие*, Велико Търново 2004, pp. 64–65, in particular fn. 53). It is accepted as true, in turn, by Pavlov (П. П а в л о в, *Залезът на Първото българско царство (1015–1018)*, София 1999, p. 31).

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting that the violent reaction of the Byzantine rulers to Bulgarian demands of tribute can be found in multiple Byzantine sources, for example in the cases of Constantine VI (796) or Alexander in 912. This creates an impression that it might be a *topos*.

However, some scholars treat the information about Nikephoros Phokas's reaction seriously. Some time ago an interesting, if difficult to accept, proposition for rationalising Nikephoros Phocas' vehemence was presented by Todor R. Todorov (Т. Т о д о р о в, *България...*, pp. 231–236). He indicated that the emperor's outburst was a reaction to claims of tsar Peter (a son-in-law of a Byzantine emperor, and a father to sons born from a Byzantine imperial princess) to the imperial throne.

<sup>22</sup> П. П а в л о в, *Година...*, pp. 434–435. Cf. J. S h e p a r d, *Bulgaria: the Other Balkan "Empire"*, [in:] *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. III: c. 900 – c. 1204, ed. T. R e u t e r, Cambridge 1999, p. 583.

<sup>23</sup> On the contemporary Bulgarian-Hungarian relations and negotiations of tsar Peter with emperor Otto, see above.



the distance of only a few days' march from the capital, and following the execution of the plan, Nikephoros was able to inform the public opinion in Constantinople of the success<sup>24</sup>. At the time the Byzantines were chiefly concerned with opposing German aggression in the west, and the display of military might on the Bulgarian border was undoubtedly an act towards deterrence in that regard. Exerting pressure on the Bulgarians did not have to indicate that actual military action occurred<sup>25</sup>. We do not rule out that during that time Nikephoros strengthened the garrisons of the cities and strongholds he visited, as there is surviving information attesting

<sup>24</sup> Presented differently by Sergiey A. Ivanov (С.А. И в а н о в, *Византийско-болгарские...*, pp. 98–99). This author's view, according to which the news of the supposed victory over Bulgarians was proclaimed while the emperor was locked up in the palace, is not convincing.

<sup>25</sup> We express this opinion despite the source information indicated by Petar Tivchev (П. Т и в ч е в, *За войната между Византия и България през 977 г.*, ИП 25.4, 1969, pp. 80–88; П. К о л е д а р о в, *Политическа география на средновековната българска държава*, vol. I, *От 681 до 1018 г.*, София 1979, p. 50; i d e m, *Цар Петър I*, ВС 51, 1982, pp. 202–203; П. П а в л о в, *Векът...*, pp. 29–30. The monastic donations pointed out by Tivchev, in which we find a reference to Nikephoros's war with Bulgarians is a forgery, which exaggerates the emperor's actions. Cf. С.А. И в а н о в, *Византийско-болгарские...*, p. 100, fn. 95. In turn, Yahya of Antioch (7.118, pp. 122–123), while a fairly reliable historian, did occasionally mix up various events related to the Bulgarian-Byzantine relations from the second half of the tenth century – in this particular case he mirrored, it seems, the official position of the imperial court, which was reflected in the Greek sources, which he most likely used to some extent. Cf. comment by В.Н. З л а т а р с к и, *История...*, p. 572, fn. 2; П. М у т а ф ч и е в, *Маджарите...*, p. 471, fn. 51; С.А. И в а н о в, *Византийско-болгарские...*, p. 99; А. Н и к о л о в, *Политическа...*, p. 280, fn. 139. As Pavlov (П. П а в л о в, *Година...*, p. 435) thinks, neither is the 'logic of events' a sufficient argument for the view about a military confrontation Cf. Romilly J.H. J e n k i n s (*Byzantium...*, p. 280), who does not inform at all about Nikephoros's expedition towards the border, and Mark W h i t t o w (*The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1996, pp. 294, 326), who in mentioning the events of 967 limited himself to stating that there had been *a military demonstration on the Bulgar frontier in Thrace*, and referred to the events being examined as *the Bulgarian crisis of 967*. Ivan Bozhilov has doubts regarding the nature of the emperor's moves – И. Б о ж и л о в, В. Г ю з е л е в, *История на Добруджа...*, pp. 64–65, in particular fn. 54. Angel Nikolov (А. Н и к о л о в, *Политическа...*, p. 280), however, presents a chain of logic similar to ours.

that the emperor was fortifying the borderland areas<sup>26</sup>. Therefore the accusation that the emperor started a war with Bulgaria only to immediately abandon it and move further west, leaving the northern border of Byzantium open to Bulgarian retaliation, does not seem to be well supported<sup>27</sup>. Nikephoros Phokas rightly assumed that tsar Peter did not feel powerful enough (or simply had no reasons) to attack Byzantium for the sole reason that imperial army was briefly stationed by the border<sup>28</sup>, especially since the Bulgarian ruler received the letter, mentioned by John Skylitzes, from Nikephoros.

This raises a question, however: why Nikephoros did not attack a weaker opponent if he was not worried about retaliation? It seems we can point to two basic reasons. The first one is that the emperor was focused on anti-German operations, with the present eastern matters being relegated to the background<sup>29</sup>. The second comes down to the fact that facing a weaker opponent in an open field and on one's own territory was rather different from venturing into enemy's mountainous terrain, where the numerical advantage lost a lot of its significance, and the shape of terrain put Bulgarians in a more favourable position. It was the aforementioned experience of the gruelling warfare in the mountains of Cilicia that told Nikephoros not to engage his forces in military operations in the area of Haimos. Why would he throw Byzantine soldiers into an always uncertain mountainous combat, when the Bulgarians could be

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<sup>26</sup> This can be attested by the epigraphic material from Philippi. This stronghold was said to have been rebuilt during Nikephoros Phokas's reign by one Leo, a *tourmarches*, an underling of a *strategos* of the Strymon theme whose name we do not know. Paul L e m e r l e (*Philippes et la Macédoine orientale à l'époque chrétienne et byzantine. Recherches d'histoire et d'archéologie*, Paris 1945, pp. 141–144) dates this undertaking to 965–967; cf. П. К о л е д а р о в, *Политическа...*, p. 50; С. П и р и в а т р и њ, *Самуилова држава. Обим и карактер*, Београд 1998, p. 43, fn. 40; see also J. S h e r a d, *Other...*, p. 583.

<sup>27</sup> С.А. И в а н о в, *Византийско-болгарские...*, pp. 94–96.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. В о п а г е к, *Przyczyny...*, p. 291. Differently – X. Д и м и т р о в, *Българо-унгарски отношения през средновековието*, София 1998, pp. 77–78, who thought that the Hungarian raid on the Aegean Macedonia in 968 was inspired by the Bulgarians.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. i.a. К. И р е ч е к, *История на българите. С поправки и добавки от самия автор*, ed. П.Х. П е т р о в, София 1978, pp. 211–212, fn. 2.

attacked without unnecessary risk? As a consummate strategist he must have known that Bulgaria was more easily entered from the north than through the passes of Stara Planina.

It seems that even if one were to set aside the aforementioned reasons, Nikephoros did not intend to become involved in military action against Bulgaria, and decided to use others for this purpose. He sent the patrician Kalokiros with a diplomatic mission to the prince of Kiev, Svyatoslav, to convince him to raid the Bulgarian Tsardom from his direction<sup>30</sup>. He was therefore driven not by fear of entering Bulgaria, but by reason and pragmatism<sup>31</sup>. After all, he was still waging a war in the East<sup>32</sup>, which – despite the newly-reached agreement with the Arabs – was far from over<sup>33</sup>. He was therefore aware that fighting on two fronts, in both cases on difficult terrain was, in the long run, risky<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, the conflict with

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. the comments of i.a.: М. Д р и н о в, *Началото...*, p. 399; W.K. H a n a k, *The Infamous Svyatoslav: Master of Duplicity in War and Peace?*, [in:] *Peace and War in Byzantium. Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S. J.*, ed. T.S. M i l l e r, J. N e s b i t t, Washington 1995, pp. 141–142; С. П и р и в а т р и ћ, *Самуилова...*, p. 43; P. S t e p h e n s o n, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204*, Cambridge 2000, p. 48. More on the other aspects of Kalokiros' mission – А.Н. С а х а р о в, *Дипломатия...*, pp. 108–112, 127–130; J.V.A. F i n e, *The Early...*, pp. 181–182.

<sup>31</sup> Even a disciplined army, acting in accordance with all the rules of war, having forced the enemy to retreat was reluctant to follow him through hard-to-reach places, due to the possibility of falling into ambush – cf. the example of Isaac I Comnenos in 1059 – M i c h a e l P s e l l o s, VII, 70. Cf. also the advice in the polemological literature – M.J. L e s z k a, K. M a r i n o w, *Carstwo...*, pp. 181–182, fn. 125.

<sup>32</sup> J. В о н а р е к, *Przyczyny...*, pp. 290, 292–293; M. W h i t t o w, *The Making...*, p. 326; С. П и р и в а т р и ћ, *Самуилова...*, p. 43; W. T r e a d g o l d, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford 1997, p. 502; M. S a l a m o n, *Państwa słowiańskie w kręgu kultury bizantyńskiej*, [in:] *Wielka historia świata*, vol. IV: *Kształtowanie średniowiecza*, ed. i d e m, Kraków 2005, p. 490.

<sup>33</sup> В.Н. З л а т а р с к и, *История...*, p. 573; С.А. И в а н о в, *Византийско-болгарские...*, p. 96.

<sup>34</sup> R.J.H. J e n k i n s, *Byzantium...*, p. 280; В. Т ъ п к о в а - З а и м о в а, *Падане...*, p. 389; J. В о н а р е к, *Przyczyny...*, p. 290; P. S t e p h e n s o n, *Byzantium's Balkan...*, p. 48.

emperor Otto I was becoming further inflamed<sup>35</sup>. It cannot be also ruled out that the fame of Bulgarians as spirited highlanders and vanquishers of the Byzantines, in particular of one of their emperors<sup>36</sup>, had played a role. It is therefore possible that they were considered to have been a far more dangerous foe in mountainous terrain than the Arabs, with whom the Byzantines were fighting in the mountains of Asia Minor<sup>37</sup>.

Peter, undoubtedly, observed the actions of Nikephoros Phokas. Perhaps he was surprised by the sharp reaction to his policy. There is no doubt that the tsar was not seeking war with the Empire, and that he wanted to preserve peace – however he did want, like many of his predecessors, Constantinople's respect for Bulgarian interests and independence.

### 1.1. Testimony of the *Life of St. Phantinos the Younger*

In 1993 Enrica Follieri published a previously unknown work about an important personage in the Byzantine monastic life of the tenth century:

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<sup>35</sup> On Nikephoros Phokas' policy towards Otto I, see: – С.А. Иванов, *Византийско-болгарские...*, pp. 94–96, and the works cited in the note 18.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. П. Павлов, *Залезът...*, p. 31; idem, *Векът...*, p. 31. The defeat of Nikephoros I reverberated throughout both the Christian *oikoumene* and the Muslim world – W. Swoboda, *Nicefor I*, [in:] *SSS*, vol. III, p. 372; J. Wrobley, *Legends of Byzantine Disaster of 811*, B 50, 1980, pp. 533–562; P. Schreiner, *Das Bulgarienbild im Europäischen Mittelalter*, EB 18.2, 1982, p. 67.

<sup>37</sup> On the subject of the contemporary opinion of Bulgarians see i.a.: P. Schreiner, *Das Bulgarienbild...*, pp. 58–68; T. Moriyasu, *Images des Bulgares au Moyen Age*, [in:] *Studia Slavico-Byzantina et Mediaevalia Europensia. In memoriam Ivan Dujčev*, vol. I, ed. П. Динев et al., София 1988, pp. 41–43; J. Bonarek, *Romajowie i obcy w Kronice Jana Skylitzesa. Identyfikacja etniczna Bizantyńczyków i ich stosunek do obcych w świetle Kroniki Jana Skylitzesa*, Toruń 2003, pp. 128–156, 169–171, 175–176; J. Shepard, *A marriage too far? Maria Lekapena and Peter of Bulgaria*, [in:] *The Empress Theophano. Byzantium and the West at the turn of the first millennium*, ed. A. Davids, Cambridge 1995, pp. 131, 134, 136–137, 138–139.

The above conclusions regarding the borderland expedition of the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas in 967 have been drawn from the work of K. Marino, *Hémos comme barrière militaire. L'analyse des écrits historiques de Léon le Diacre et de Jean Skylitzès au sujet de la campagne de guerre des empereurs byzantins Nicéphore II Phocas en 967 et de Jean I Tzimiscès en 971*, BMD 2, 2011, pp. 443–466, specifically pp. 444–454.

*Life of St. Phantinos the Younger*<sup>38</sup>. This work, written by an anonymous author, was most likely written between 986–996, soon after its protagonist's death<sup>39</sup>. Phantinos, born in Calabria (most likely in 902), near the end of his life settled near Thessalonike. It is during this period of his life a certain episode took place which, as some scholars think, sheds new light on tsar Peter's policy towards Byzantium around 965. For, as the author of the *Life* stated, Bulgarians wished to pillage the area around the city in which the saint resided, which terrified the then governor of the city, *doux* Pediasimos<sup>40</sup>, who, not having sufficient military force to counter the aggression, decided to set everything within the city's walls to torch, so that the invaders would have nothing to plunder, no shelter, and no sustenance. This decision indirectly affected the Saint, who lived in one of the monasteries near Thessalonike. Phantinos, inspired by the Holy Spirit, convinced the dignitary to abandon his idea for, he prophesied, Bulgarians shall be defeated, without the use of mortal weapons. This indeed came to pass, as many of the Bulgarians died by God's will, which thwarted their aggressive plans towards Thessalonike. The fulfilment of the prophecy attested to the Saint's exceptional gift<sup>41</sup>.

The discussed relation was treated by the abovementioned scholars seriously. They think that between 965 and 967 the tsar of Bulgaria planned military action into the Byzantine territories located to the southwest of the empire's borders – the ones located near the aforementioned metropolis<sup>42</sup>. Due to the inability of a more precise dating of this episode it is not known whether it was supposed to happen before the Bulgarian

<sup>38</sup> *Life of St. Phantinos the Younger*, 49, p. 456. On the subject of this source: E. F o l l i e r i, *Introduzione*, [in:] *Life of St. Phantinos the Younger*, p. 359q.

<sup>39</sup> The date of Phantinos' death is not certain. It may have occurred in 967, but it cannot be ruled out that it happened in 974 (on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November). On this subject, see: *PMZ II*, vol. V, pp. 435–436, s.v. *Phantinos* (#26576); В. Г ю з е л е в, *Сведения за българите в Житието на свети Фантино Млади от Х в.*, Pbg 36.2, 2012, p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> *PMZ II*, vol. V, pp. 350–351, s.v. *Pediasimos* (#26401).

<sup>41</sup> *Life of St. Phantinos the Younger*, 49, p. 456.

<sup>42</sup> P. Y a n n o p o u l o s, *La Grèce dans la vie de S. Fantin*, B 65, 1995, pp. 484–493; В. Г ю з е л е в, *Сведения...*, pp. 34–36; Г.Н. Н и к о л о в, *Българският цар Самуил*, София 2014, p. 13. The dating of this event to 965–967 is a consequence of accepting the view that Phantinos settled near Thessalonike in 965, and died in 967.

diplomatic mission to Nikephoros II Phokas, to be discussed below, or after this event. It is therefore impossible to specify whether it was a reaction to the Byzantine ruler's refusal to pay tribute to Bulgarians, which was guaranteed by the peace treaty of 927. Had that been the case, then the expedition of the Byzantine ruler towards the Bulgarian border would have had a preventive character – its goal would have been to pre-empt a possible Bulgarian attack<sup>43</sup>. It cannot be, however, ruled out that the Bulgarian plans were a response to the actions of the Byzantine autocrat, or to the conclusion of an anti-Bulgarian Byzantine-Rus' treaty, and the statement in the text that it was not through the armed force but because of a Divine action that the Bulgarians perished in large numbers is more general in nature and does not refer to some presumed defeat of their armies near Thessalonike, but to the invasion of Rus' on their state (this will be discussed below).

If one were to accept the relation of the *Life* at face value and locate it, as the aforementioned scholars do, near the end of Peter's reign, then on the one hand it would be contrary to the rather commonly held view about tsar Peter's passivity in the military sphere, at the same time shedding new light on his relations with Nikephoros II Phokas (and perhaps also on the causes of the conflict between the two). On the other hand, it would indicate that the contemporary Bulgarian expansion was focused on the south-westerly direction, rather than on that of Constantinople<sup>44</sup>.

It should be clearly emphasised, however, that the hagiographic, most non-specific, nature of this account, and the impossibility of precise dating of the event presented in the *Life*, does not allow for making such far-reaching conclusions and attempts at reconstructing contemporary events<sup>45</sup>. This is especially the case considering the source itself mentions

<sup>43</sup> P. Я а н н о р о у л о с, *La Grèce...*, p. 491; cf. Г. Н. Н и к о л о в, *Българският...*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> В. Г ю з е л е в, *Сведения...*, p. 35; Г. Н. Н и к о л о в, *Българският...*, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Vassil Gyuzelev (В. Г ю з е л е в, *Сведения...*, pp. 35–36) thinks that this relations attests to the Bulgarian looting raids on the area near Thessalonike and an expansionist policy aimed at this Byzantine metropolis, which became one of the reasons for the worsening of relations with Byzantium and undertaking of aggressive policy towards his northern neighbour by Nikephoros Phokas. This is an interesting idea, however due to lack of other sources, impossible to verify.

that these were merely rumours, supposed wishes (plans) of organising the aforementioned expedition by the Bulgarians, and their thwarting was accomplished by a Divine intervention. Furthermore, the intent of the author, who was writing his work *post factum* (during the 986–996), was to indicate the prophetic ability of St. Phantinos, who foretold the Bulgarian defeat<sup>46</sup>.

## 2. The Invasion of Svyatoslav (968)

The incitement of the Kievan prince Svyatoslav against Bulgaria was of particular significance for the country's future fortunes. Some of the scholars asked: why didn't the Byzantines involve Pechenegs in this matter? After all, they already had some experience in this, and the Byzantine-Pecheneg relations were good at the time. It cannot be ruled out that the decision was to some extent influenced by the Byzantines' knowledge of the efficacious overtures of the Bulgarian diplomacy working towards maintaining peaceful relations with these nomads; nonetheless it appears that the crux of this decision lie in something else: the lack of trust towards the Pechenegs, and the desire to turn the Rus' into a permanent ally in the long run<sup>47</sup>.

Much has already been written about the reasons for which Nikephoros Phokas turned to the prince of Kiev with the proposal of organising a military expedition against Bulgaria, as well as of the reasons for which it was accepted, and about the goals which Svyatoslav set for himself when he moved against the Bulgarians.

One cannot really doubt that on Nikephoros's part, this was an attempt at neutralising Bulgaria at the time when he was facing a conflict with

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<sup>46</sup> M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo...*, p. 176.

<sup>47</sup> П. ПАВЛОВ, *Безъм...*, p. 31; A. PAROŃ (*Pieczynowie. Koczownicy w krajobrazie politycznym i kulturowym średniowiecznej Europy*, Wrocław 2015, pp. 330–331) rightly draws attention to the latter topic. We wrote of the Bulgarian-Pecheneg relations earlier.

Otto I and the permanent conflict with the Arabs. The emperor was worried about Peter's contacts with Otto, and arranging peaceful relations<sup>48</sup> with the Hungarians, without taking into account Byzantine interests. Perhaps Nikephoros Phokas wanted to teach the Bulgarians a lesson, which would have been made all the easier for being accomplished through someone else. It cannot be ruled out that by choosing the Rus', the emperor also wanted to engage the Bulgarians with an enemy that was both powerful and less known to them – at least in direct confrontation. In this manner, he would have accomplished his goal without spilling Bulgarian blood himself, which would have made a later Bulgarian-Byzantine agreement easier. What is even more important, by making use of a previously developed strategy of attacking Bulgaria from the north (e.g. during the years 894–896<sup>49</sup>) with the aid of the peoples inhabiting the steppes surrounding the Black Sea, he was not risking spilling Byzantine blood. Furthermore, if it became necessary to involve his own military forces, he would have been in an advantageous position, as the Bulgarians would have been forced to fight on two fronts; this pincer manoeuvre would have manifestly made the coordination of the military effort more difficult, and weakened Bulgarian resistance<sup>50</sup>.

It has been pointed out that Nikephoros Phokas's request for assistance from Svyatoslav is sometimes explained by the desire for having the latter being prevented from acting against Byzantine interests in Crimea and the Azov Sea region<sup>51</sup>.

Notably, despite the mutual tensions, the diplomatic relations between Constantinople and Preslav were being maintained. It is known, for

<sup>48</sup> П. П а в л о в, *Бекъм...*, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> For more information on this conflict, see i.a. – M.J. L e s z k a, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*, Łódź 2013, pp. 76–96.

<sup>50</sup> On the tradition of this type of activity see: K. M a r i n o w, *Zadania floty cesarskiej w wojnach bizantyńsko-bułgarskich (VII–XI w.)*, [in:] *Byzantina Europea. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, ed. M. K o k o s z k o, M.J. L e s z k a, Łódź 2007, pp. 381–392.

<sup>51</sup> В.Н. З л а т а р с к и, *История...*, p. 545; А.Н. С а х а р о в, *Дипломатия...*, p. 127; legitimate concerns regarding this question – J. B o n a r e k, *Przyczyny...*, p. 293.



example, that near the end of June of 968 – at the time when Svyatoslav was either finishing the preparations for his expedition into Bulgaria, or after it has already started – a Bulgarian envoy was present in the Byzantine capital. His presence was noted by Liudprand of Cremona, Otto I's envoy<sup>52</sup>. Unfortunately, we do not know the purpose of the Bulgarian envoy's visit<sup>53</sup>.

Svyatoslav, involving himself in the Bulgarian enterprise, was in a fairly comfortable situation. He received a generous payment from the Byzantines (15 *kentenaria* of gold), and in the case of a success against the Bulgarians he would have been able to gain many times more in loot. Should the campaign fail, he could return to Kiev and satisfy himself with the Byzantine reward. The matter of Svyatoslav's resettlement to Dobrudzha and the building of his own state there is a matter of some discussion in the academic works<sup>54</sup>. An interesting proposition, in this context, was presented over twenty years ago by a Polish scholar Jacek Bonarek. According to him, the aim of Nikephoros Phokas's agreement with Svyatoslav was to break Bulgaria apart into two separate states – the northern territories were to become a Rus' state ruled by Svyatoslav, while the southern Bulgaria was to be fully subject to Byzantium, and therefore devoid of any threat to Constantinople. It would have become a buffer against raids from the north, including from the Rus' themselves<sup>55</sup>. Leaving the matter of whether the hypothesis is correct aside, we would like to draw attention to the doubts we have regarding one of the core arguments brought forth by the scholar in its support. Bonarek thought that the reason for which Svyatoslav did not take action in southern Bulgaria while Nikephoros II Phokas was still alive was adherence to an understanding he had with the latter. It would seem that it was not so

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<sup>52</sup> Liudprand of Cremona (*Embassy*, 19) saw him during his visit in Constantinople near the end of June 968.

<sup>53</sup> П. П а в л о в, *Годину...*, p. 439. The author suspects that the Bulgarian envoys' goal may have been investigating of the Byzantines' intentions. He explains the good reception of the Bulgarian envoy in Constantinople and creating hope of co-operation with a desire to mislead the Bulgarians.

<sup>54</sup> J. B o n a r e k, *Przyczyny...*, pp. 294–296.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

much the desire to follow the letter of the agreement with the emperor that stopped the Kievan prince from taking this action, but rather the lack of time for such an undertaking while the Byzantine ruler was still alive. It needs to be said that the dating accepted by the Polish scholar for the first expedition of Svyatoslav to year 967 is far from certain. There are weighty arguments for dating it instead to the late summer of 968<sup>56</sup>. If this is correct, then the prince of Rus', who in the same year returned to Kiev, would not have been physically able to take action in southern Bulgaria, since despite the original successes his position was uncertain and unstable. The situation in 969, when Svyatoslav returned to the Danubian regions during the summer, was similar. It is worth pointing out that regardless of whether an agreement regarding the partition of Bulgaria had been made, if Svyatoslav wanted to subordinate to himself the entirety of Bulgaria, he would have to face a Byzantine reaction<sup>57</sup>.

Regardless of the aims that the Rus' and Byzantines had – the Bulgarians had to offer resistance to Svyatoslav's invasion. According to Leo the Deacon, the prince of Kiev led sixty thousand men against Bulgaria<sup>58</sup>. This number would undoubtedly have been large if we were to take it literally. Scholars doubt it is correct, and for a good reason, since from the perspective of the mobilisation potential of mediaeval European states

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<sup>56</sup> There are two views in the scholarship regarding the dating of Svyatoslav's first expedition. The arguments for the year 967 have been presented most fully by Stokes (*The Background...*), and his arguments have been shared by i.a.: J.V.A. Fine, *The Early...*, p. 182; D. Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, New York 1971, pp. 128–129; J. Bonarek, *Przyczyny...*, p. 297. The dating of the expedition to year 968 was widely substantiated by Karishkovskiy. His arguments were further developed by С. Пириватрић, *Два хронолошка прилога о крају Првог бугарског царства*, ЗРВИ 34, 1995, pp. 51–55.

<sup>57</sup> For a different argument against Bonarek's hypothesis see: A. Paroń, *Pieczynowie...*, p. 331, fn. 67, according to which *Fokas zapraszając Rusów na stałe na Balkany złamałby jedną z fundamentalnych zasad polityki Bizancjum, która sprzeciwiała się ruskiemu osadnictwu na wybrzeżach Morza Czarnego* [In permanently inviting the Rus' to the Balkans, Phokas would have broken one of the fundamental rules of the Byzantine policy, which opposed the Rus' settlement along the Black Sea coast].

<sup>58</sup> Leo the Deacon, V, 2. This author talks of sixty thousand 'burly men', and in addition there would also have been some mercenaries present. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* in turn makes a mention of ten thousand (AM 6479, p. 71).

– in particular when organising expeditions into enemy territory – it would have been unrealistic, and should only be understood as a general description of the size of the Rus' army, meaning it was very numerous. Some scholars however think that the number may be treated seriously, but rather in association with Svyatoslav's attempt to settle in Dobrudzha. There would have been sixty thousand of those who went with the prince of Kiev towards the Danube<sup>59</sup>, but soldiers would have been only a part of it<sup>60</sup>.

Hearing of the Rus' expedition, Peter sent his army against them. The first clash between the invaders and the Bulgarian forces occurred on the banks of Danube, in August 968. It likely happened in the vicinity of Dristra (Dorostolon) soon after the Rus' disembarked from the boats in which they crossed the river<sup>61</sup>. Despite their difficult position, the invaders managed to defeat the Bulgarians, who retreated to Dorostolon. It seems that their success was a result of either surprise, or underestimating of the attacking forces by the Bulgarians<sup>62</sup>. Tsar Peter did not have enough time to move forces sufficient to stop the Rus' making their way across the Danube. This initial defeat influenced the further course of conflict. Bulgarians – as the sources would have it – were pushed to the defensive. John Skylitzes informs that: *They [the Rus' – M.J.L., K.M.] laid waste many of the Bulgarians' cities and lands, collected a large amount of booty and then to their own lands*<sup>63</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> М.И. С ю з ю м о в, С.А. И в а н о в, *Комментарий...*, p. 188, fn. 10; J. B o n a r e k, *Przyczyny...*, p. 295; W.K. H a n a k, *The Infamous...*, p. 141, fn. 10. Aside from the objections raised in the literature of the subject, it is also worth noting the fact that Leo the Deacon, who as the only one provided this number, juxtaposed it with a force of Bulgarian warriors exactly half their size, who attacked the Rus' after the latter made their way to the southern shore of the Danube. It would seem that by using these numbers Leo the Deacon wanted to tell the readers that the Rus' have been numerous, and the Bulgarians were half their strength in number – and nothing more. Cf. Г.Г. А т а н а с о в, *О численности русской армии князя Святослава во время его походов в Болгарию и о битве под Дристрой (Доростолом в 971 г.)*, ВВ 72, 2013, pp. 86–102 (on pp. 86–90 an analysis of the sources and scholars' views); see also: П. П а в л о в, *Векът...*, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> J. B o n a r e k, *Przyczyny...*, pp. 295–296.

<sup>61</sup> L e o t h e D e a c o n, V, 2. П. П а в л о в, *Векът...*, p. 34, indicates the vicinity of Pereyaslavets as the location of the first clash.

<sup>62</sup> It cannot be ruled out that Peter, fearing the Byzantines' attack, left some of his forces to defend the border with the Empire (cf. П. П а в л о в, *Векът...*, p. 34).

<sup>63</sup> J o h n S k y l i t z e s, p. 277 (transl. 266 – with minor change – M.J.L., K.M.).

*Russian Primary Chronicle*, in turn, tells that eighty of the Bulgarian cities were captured, and that Svyatoslav made Pereyaslavets (?) into his own command centre and, moreover, was receiving tribute from the Greeks<sup>64</sup>.

The Bulgarians' situation was becoming difficult, but certainly not hopeless. Svyatoslav was unable to defeat the main Bulgarian forces, or to capture the capital Preslav, which could have resulted in the Bulgarian forces' offensive. Further clashes, however, did not come to pass, for upon hearing the news of the Pecheneg siege of Kiev, Svyatoslav departed to relieve the city, carrying away, as both the Byzantine and Rus' sources claim, plentiful spoils of war<sup>65</sup>.

Some of the scholars think that in 968, just after Svyatoslav's first expedition and still during Peter's reign, there was a rapprochement between Bulgaria and Byzantium<sup>66</sup>. Emperor Nikephoros Phokas, worried about

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<sup>64</sup> *Russian Primary Chronicle*, AM 6475, p. 66. In the light of the above doubts regarding the credibility of this fragment of *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the information contained therein should be treated with a dose of scepticism. Georgi Atanassov (Г.Г. Атанасов, *О численности...*, p. 87, fn. 2) thought that there could be a grain of truth in the relation. He indicated that in Dobrudzha and north-eastern Bulgaria, and therefore the lands where the main military activity of the war of 969–971 had been taking place, in the second half of the tenth century there had been more than fifty strongholds, and the Dobrudzha stone wall incorporated thirty fortified points. The Bulgarian scholar's calculations are meant to indicate that, potentially, there had been a sufficient number of strongholds of various sizes and significance that the Rus' could have had captured. It is doubtful whether the anonymous author had information that was this precise regarding the number of captured strongholds, and most likely he merely wanted to convey that they were numerous. Cf. П. П а в л о в, *Векът...*, p. 34. Information about the payment of tribute by the Byzantines should be treated with reserve, unless it referred to the promised payment for raiding Bulgaria.

<sup>65</sup> John Skylitzes, p. 277; *Russian Primary Chronicle*, AM 6476, pp. 66–68. Some scholars do not rule out that the Pecheneg raid on Rus was a result of the Bulgarian diplomatic activity. This hypothesis, referring not so much to the sources but to the earlier co-operation of the Pechenegs and Bulgarians during Symeon's times, is not possible to verify. Cf. И. Б о ж и л о в, В. Г ю з е л е в, *История на Добруджа...*, p. 67; P. S t e p h e n s o n, *Byzantium's Balkan...*, pp. 48–49; A. P a r o ń, *Pieczynowie...*, pp. 332–333.

<sup>66</sup> E.g.: V. S t o k e s, *The Background...*, p. 54; J. B o n a r e k, *Przyczyny...*, p. 298; Т. Т о д о р о в, *България...*, p. 236. The former two however place Svyatoslav's expedition in 967.

a potential Bulgarian-Rus' alliance, sent envoys to Preslav: patrician Nikephoros Erotikos and Philotheos, the Bishop of Euchaita<sup>67</sup>. As Leo the Deacon wrote, they were welcomed in the Bulgarian capital, as the Bulgarians were counting on Byzantine assistance against Svyatoslav<sup>68</sup>. The Bulgarian-Byzantine alliance was renewed, and it was to be sealed through the marriages of the Bulgarian princesses (?) with Basil and Constantine, the sons of Romanos II and Theophano<sup>69</sup>. It would seem, however, that the scholars who point out that the envoys were sent to Preslav in 969<sup>70</sup>, already during the reign of Boris II, are correct. The argument for this view is offered by Leo the Deacon's relation, from which we may surmise that little time has passed between the Byzantine diplomatic mission in Preslav and the arrival of the Bulgarian princesses in Constantinople<sup>71</sup>. The latter occurred shortly before the death of Nikephoros Phokas, who was murdered in the night between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of December. John Tzymiskes, his killer and successor, rejected the planned marriages.

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<sup>67</sup> John Skylitzes (p. 310) mentions that the Archbishop of Euchaita participated in 371 in the negotiations conducted by the Byzantines with the Pechenegs after the battle of Dristra (Dorostolon). His name, however, was Theophilos. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* (AM 6479, p. 73) noted in this context the name of the Byzantine envoy, Theophilos, who is referred to as *synkellos*. On the subject of how Philotheos of Leo the Deacon became Theophilos of John Skylitzes and of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* – M. R a e v, *The Russian-Byzantine Treaty of 971. Theophilos and Sveneld*, REB 64/65, 2006/2007, pp. 329–338. See also: A. P a r o ń, *Pieczyn-gowie...*, pp. 335–337.

<sup>68</sup> Leo the Deacon, V, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Leo the Deacon, V, 3. The Byzantine historian mentioned that one of the arguments for renewing the alliance was religious in nature. The Byzantines and Bulgarians were united by the common faith, which the Rus', at the time still pagans, did not share with them. The author also pointed out that the common faith was also brought up during the negotiations as a factor uniting the two sides. We do not know the names, or parents, of the prospective brides-to-be of Basil and Constantine.

<sup>70</sup> М.И. С ю з ю м о в, С.А. И в а н о в, *Комментарий...*, p. 190, fn. 21.

<sup>71</sup> Leo the Deacon, V, 3: *The Mysians accepted the deputation, put the girls of royal blood on the cart... and sent [them] to Emperor Nicephoros*, (transl. p. 111).

### 3. Death of Peter

Defeats in the war with the Rus' were said to have impacted on tsar Peter's health. Supposedly upon hearing the news of the first defeat he suffered an epileptic seizure<sup>72</sup>. He then decided to become a monk and enter a monastery<sup>73</sup>. Soon afterwards – on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 969 – he passed away<sup>74</sup>. The illness and death of the experienced ruler contributed to some extent, one may suppose, to the lack of preparation of the Bulgarians in their subsequent clash with the Rus'. Boris II, Peter's successor, was not able to organise an effective defence, nor gain a measurable assistance from the Byzantines.

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<sup>72</sup> *Leo the Deacon*, V, 2. The worsening of Peter's health was to have taken place upon hearing the news of the first setback in the conflict with the Rus'. It is difficult to say how much of this information is true. It cannot be ruled out that at the time of Svyatoslav's expedition Peter was already seriously ill, and the defeat merely contributed to the further development of the disease. It is striking that the circumstances of Peter's death resemble those accompanying Symeon's, his father's, death, or those of Samuel, a West Bulgarian ruler. Symeon was said to have died as a result of receiving news about the Bulgarian defeat in a battle against the Croats (cf. M.J. Leszka, *Symeon...*, pp. 227–230), while Samuel – after the shock he received after the disastrous battle of Belassitsa and seeing the Bulgarian warriors that had been blinded at Basil II's orders (John Skylitzes, p. 349; the question of the blinding of Bulgarian soldiers was recently analysed by Peter Schreier (*Die vermeintliche Blendung. Zu den Ereignissen von Kleidion*, [in:] *Европейският Югоизток през втората половина на X – началото на XI век. История и култура*, ed. В. Гюзелев, Г.Н. Николов, София 2015, pp. 170–187), who concluded that it did not actually take place (see *ibidem* for further reading).

<sup>73</sup> Peter likely accepted the so-called Small Schema, which allowed him to keep the name given to him during baptism. It is possible that he entered into the monastery traces of which have been discovered near the Golden Church, and which, as was mentioned above, are associated with the ruling dynasty. Some scholars doubt whether Peter has taken monastic vows; this is discussed in the present book.

<sup>74</sup> It is commonly accepted that Peter's death occurred on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, for on this day he was venerated in the liturgical calendar of the Bulgarian Church. We know from *Leo the Deacon* (V, 2) that the death happened soon after Svyatoslav's first expedition. There is a discussion regarding the year of this event – whether it happened in 969 or 970. It would seem that this problem was solved by a Serbian scholar, Srdjan Pirivatrić (С. Пириватрић, *Два хронолошка...*, pp. 55–62), who presented convincing arguments for the year 969.