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Armed Forces and the Defence System of Peter's State



The reign of tsar Peter I (927–969), albeit long, did not bring about many events of militaristic nature, which would have allowed the creation of a clear image of the conditions and activities of the Bulgarian army during that period. The Bulgarian ruler showed greater initiative in this regard at the very beginning of his reign, however these anti-Byzantine activities were soon abandoned, and a lasting peace was concluded with the southern neighbour. Only the very end of Peter's rule saw an increase in martial activity, due to the incursion of the Rus' prince Svyatoslav, although the information about the Bulgarians themselves is at a scarcity, since the chronicles describing these events were focusing on the Byzantine-Rus' struggle. In this situation, in order to re-construct the organisation, strategy, and tactics of the Bulgarian army, one needs to reach both into the earlier period (primarily tsar Symeon I's era), as well as to the times Cometopouloi following Peter's reign, and beyond.

I. The Army and its Organisation

Recruitment. During the discussed era, Bulgarian armed forces consisted of: the ruler's *druzhdina* (bodyguard) or central military forces, most likely stationed in the capital, the garrison troops of individual strongholds, and border guards. In case of a larger mobilisation, most likely organised on territorial basis, i.e. the existing system of *comitates* (and particular villages and urban areas within), the aforementioned units were supplemented with the necessary number of subjects able to bear arms. Individual strongholds and cities had been (likely) managed by *zhupans*, or *comites* (of bolyar status), who formed garrisons from among the local populace and were obliged to conduct territorial defence¹. Taking into account two facts: that the Bulgarian territory was divided into two areas – the interior and the exterior, and that the bolyars were divided along the same lines into ‘internal’ and ‘external’, one may assume that the latter would have been responsible for organising and effectively guarding the

¹ Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно изкуство през феодализма*, София 1958, pp. 44–47; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна история от Античността до втората четвърт на Х в.*, София 1983, pp. 136, 137–138; Б. Чолпанов, Е. Александров, *Военна история на Първата българска държава (681–1018)*, [in:] *История на българите*, vol. V, *Военна история на българите от древността до наши дни*, ed. Д. Зафиров, Е. Александров, София 2007, pp. 57–59; Ж. Жеков, *България и Византия. Военна администрация VII–IX в.*, София 2007, pp. 92–97, 276, 282; Т. Славова, *Владетел и администрация в ранносредновековна България. Филологически аспекти*, София 2010, pp. 153–158. See also: Г. Баласчев, *Върху държавното и военно устройство в старобългарската държава*, Мин 1.2, 1909, pp. 203–216; V. Gjuzelev, *Allgemeine Charakteristik und Etappen der Errichtung der Militärischen und Administrativen Verwaltung des ersten bulgarischen Staates (VII. bis XI. Jh.)*, EB 14.3, 1978, pp. 71–77; И. Венедиков, *Военното и административното устройство на България през IX и X век*, София 1979; Д. Ангелов, *Административно-военна уредба*, [in:] *История на България*, vol. II, *Първа българска държава*, ed. idem, София 1981, pp. 169–181; Д. Христов, *Корените на българската военноотбранителна доктрина (681–1018 г.)*, BC 63.1, 1993, pp. 5–20; Л. Симеонова, *Крепостта Видинис / Бдин и „завръщането на Византия на Дунава“: реализация и крах на една имперска мечта*, SB 32, 2017, pp. 76–77.

state's borderland areas². It is difficult to say specifically, however, which of them fulfilled this duty. The matter of protecting Bulgaria's internal territory appears to be somewhat clearer, since in the light of some of the source remarks it is clear that the one responsible for it was the so-called *ichirgu boila* (ἡτζίργου βoίλα), the third most important state dignitary³.

The army consisted of both light and heavy cavalry, and infantry. These were formed in units according to decimal division⁴, while the entire army was divided into three parts: the centre, and two wings, left and right. In addition to this, there were also the baggage trains.

The fleet. During the period in which I am interested, the Bulgarians did not have their own sea-faring war fleet, and the few mentions of activity the on sea relate to capturing Byzantine ships by ruse, their crews tricked by Bulgarians into attacking some coastal areas⁵. We do however have information about the use of a river flotilla⁶, although it cannot be ruled out that the event was incidental. Nonetheless, the dominant view in Bulgarian scholarship is that the functioning of the harbours on the Păcuil lui Soare and in Dristra attests to the regular patrolling of the Danube⁷.

² Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, p. 141.

³ В. Гюзелев, *Кавханите и ичиргу боилите на българското ханство-царство*, Пловдив 2007, pp. 24–30, 168–172, 174–188, 190–191; G.N. Nikolov, *The Bulgarian aristocracy in the war against the Byzantine Empire (971–1019)*, [in:] *Byzantium and East Central Europe*, ed. G. Prinzling, M. Salamon, assist. P. Stephenson, Cracow 2001, p. 144; Т. Славова, *Владетел и администрация...*, pp. 21–29.

⁴ Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, p. 138.

⁵ Е. Трѳјарски, *Protobulgarzy*, [in:] К. Дąbrowski, Т. Najgrodzka-Majchzyk, Е. Трѳјарски, *Hunowie europejscy, Protobulgarzy, Chazarowie, Pieczyngowie*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1975, pp. 321–322; Р. Рашев, *Първото българско царство и морето*, [in:] *Средновековна България и Черноморието (Сборник доклади от националната конференция Варна – 1980)*, ed. А. Кузев, Т. Йорданов, Варна 1982, pp. 47–56; К. Магиров, *Zadania floty cesarskiej w wojnach bizantyńsko-bulgarskich (VII–XI w.)*, [in:] *Byzantina Europea. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, ed. М. Кокоско, М.Ј. Леска, Łódź 2007, pp. 381–392.

⁶ *The Royal Frankish Annals*, AD 827, p. 216.32–34; *The annals of Fulda*, AD 827, p. 359.31–33.

⁷ Cf. D. Oвчаров, *La forteresse protobulgare sur l'île danubienne Păcuil lui Soare*, [in:] *Dobrudža. Études ethno-culturelles*, ed. i d e m, Sofia 1987, pp. 57–68; А. Кузев,

While in case of the first of these harbours the discovered archaeological material does indeed show some building investments, dated to the early tenth century and associated with the activity of tsar Symeon I, both the construction of the aforementioned harbour and the discovered artefacts relate to the Byzantine presence on the island, dated to the time of the conquest of Bulgaria by John I Tzymiskes⁸. Therefore, they cannot constitute evidence of its use by Bulgarians during Peter I's reign.

Leadership. The army was of course commanded by the ruler himself, who often led his troops to battle in person, or entrusted this task to another high-ranking aristocrat, most often the *kavkhan*, who was the ruler's deputy commander of the armies. Of the other high ranking commanders, one needs to mention the *ichirgu boila* and *kana boila kolobra* (?). There were also commanders of lower ranks: various *tarkhans* and *bagains*⁹. The so-called *minik* was most likely a cavalry commander¹⁰. The variety of names with which the sources (primarily native) denoted Bulgarian military commanders gave some scholars the basis to think that Bulgaria had a developed (and strictly adhered to) hierarchy of command¹¹.

Дръстър, [in:] *Български средновековни градове и крепости*, vol. I, *Градове и крепости по Дунав и Черно Море*, ed. idem, В. Гюзелев, Варна 1981, pp. 177–185.

⁸ Г. Атанасов, *Началото на "българската флотилия" и военноморските експедиции на деспот Добротица*, [in:] *Великите Асеневици*, ed. П. Павлов, Н. Кънев, Н. Хрисимов, Велико Търново 2016, pp. 292–295. More on the fortification and harbour existing on the island – P. Dixon, D. Vilceanu, *Păcuiul lui Soare*, vol. I, Bucureşti 1972.

⁹ Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, pp. 58–59; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, pp. 139–140; Т. Славова, *Владетел и администрация...*, pp. 10–15, 53–59, 67–70, 63–86.

¹⁰ Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 8, p. 401.3–5; G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. II, *Sprachreste der Türk völker in den byzantinischen Quellen*, Berlin 1958, p. 189; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, p. 141; Т. Славова, *Владетел и администрация...*, pp. 105–109.

¹¹ Cf. Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, p. 58; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, pp. 141–142.

Armaments, riding equipment, and military technology. In the light of the source relations and the results of archaeological studies, the Bulgarian offensive armaments included: a) hand-held projectile weapons – javelins, bows, slings, and lassos (for capturing animals or opponents); b) melee weapons: swords and sabres; c) polearms – spears and axes; d) blunt weapons: pickaxes and maces. The defensive equipment traditionally included: chain or lamellar armour, a shield, and a helmet (pointed, leather or metal). Riding equipment and horse tack consisted of: a saddle, reins with a bit or curb bit, stirrups, spurs and horseshoes; the rider's dress included a knee-length, narrow-sleeved jerkin, girded with a leather belt with metal studs. The dress was complemented by a crested leather cap and tight trousers¹².

¹² Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, pp. 60–78, 84–87 (collectively for the entire period of the Middle Ages); Z. Kurnatowska, *Elementy uzbrojenia i oporządzenia jeździeckiego z wczesnośredniowiecznego grodziska w Styrmen w Bułgarii*, SA 20, 1973, pp. 87–124; E. Гугарски, *Protobułgarzy...*, pp. 312–313, 316; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, pp. 142–143, 145–146; Й. Чангова, *Перник*, vol. III, *Крепостта Перник VIII–XIV в.*, София 1992, pp. 166–198; С. Витлянов, Я. Димитров, *Защитно въоръжение от Преслав*, Пр.Сб 5, 1993, pp. 165–177; В. Йотов, Г. Атанасов, *Скала. Крепост от X–XI век до с. Кладенци, Тервелско*, София 1998, pp. 88–92; Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Одърци. Селище от Първото българско царство*, vol. I, София 1999, pp. 107–114; И.Х. Джамбов, *Средновековното селище над античния град при Хисар*, Асеновград 2002, pp. 57–58; Б. Чолпанов, Е. Александров, *Военна история...*, pp. 60–66; Ж. Жеков, *България...*, pp. 85–88. For more information about the Bulgarian armaments in this period, see: С. Витлянов, *Старобългарско въоръжение (По археологически данни от Плиска, Мадара и Велики Преслав)*, София 1996; *Оръжие и снаряжение през късната античност и средновековието IV–XV в. Международна конференция Варна 14–16 септември 2000*, ed. В. Йотов, В. Николов, В. Славчев, Варна 2002; В. Йотов, *Въоръжението и снаряжението от българското средновековие (VII–XI век)*, Варна–Велико Търново 2004; Д. Рабовянов, *Средновековни предпазители за меч от България*, ПБА 7, 2013, pp. 99–114; М. Петров, Н. Хрисимов, *Едноострите клинови оръжия от територията на България и византийската военна традиция*, ДобСб 30, 2015, pp. 337–358. While Deyan Rabovyanov (*За употребата на пращката като оръжие в средновековна България*, [in:] *Laurea. In honorem Margaritae Vaklinova*, ed. Б. Петрунова, А. Аладжов, Е. Василева, vol. II, София 2009, pp. 261–269) dismissed the use of slings by the Bulgarian army, his arguments are not entirely convincing.

The army had excellent siege capabilities. We have information from as early as the 820s that the Bulgarians made use of a variety of engines designed for destroying, scaling and bypassing walls. Those named include i.a. scorpions (for shooting arrows), rams, siege towers, catapults for hurling incendiary materials and stones, ladders, pickaxes (for tunnelling), etc.¹³ The effectiveness of the Bulgarian army in this regard is evidenced by the numerous Byzantine cities and strongholds captured during tsar Symeon's times.

Army training. Military discipline. Emperor Leo VI mentioned the particular significance which Bulgarians (similarly to the so-called Turks, i.e. Hungarians) attached to horseback riding and having the riders master archery¹⁴. Even this information alone undoubtedly proves that during peacetime the army conducted exercises. This would have been true of the troops stationed directly by the ruler's side, as well as of the garrisons and border forces. High morale in the ranks – emphasised by the Byzantine authors – was also sustained through good physical training, harsh punishments of those of the soldiers who failed in their duties, and by rewarding those who distinguished themselves in combat. Particular importance was given to the condition of the equipment, and training of the mounts – negligence towards the arms, and riding a warhorse during peacetime were punished by death. This penalty was also prescribed for: spying, betrayal and joining the enemy, refusal to participate in a battle, fleeing from the battlefield, inciting mutiny, and surrendering one's troops to the enemy. Harsh punishments also befell those who were meant to be guarding the camp but abandoned their post to loot the enemy after

¹³ *Scriptor incertus de Leone Armenio*, pp. 347.11 – 348.2. See also: Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, pp. 78–83; Е. Тугарски, *Protobulgarzy...*, pp. 316–318; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, pp. 143–145, 149, 155–156; Д. Рабовянов, *Раждането на българската полиоркетика*, ИРИМВТ 20, 2005, pp. 150–159; Б. Чолпанов, Е. Александров, *Военна история...*, pp. 66–68.

¹⁴ Leo VI the Wise, XVIII, 41, p. 452.223–226; XVIII, 43, p. 454.233–234; XVIII, 47, p. 454.253–254; XVIII, 49, p. 454.257–258; XVIII, 59, p. 458.295–298; XVIII, 61, p. 458.302–304; XVIII, 73, p. 462.350–352.

a victory. Theft of a mount during military operations resulted in the perpetrator being sold into slavery, while theft of armaments was punished with flogging¹⁵.

Provisioning. The main concern of the authorities lie in supplying the army with the best quality armaments. To a certain extent each of the participants in a fight had to secure for himself appropriate weapons, making use of i.a. weapons captured from the enemy, manufactured by oneself, or by a home town artisan. The majority of the armaments, however, came from the state workshops, distributed around the capitals or administrative centres of the state. This solution guaranteed an adequate quality of the arms, and allowed the state to keep control of their distribution – the authorities knew how many armed men, with a good equipment at that, they could rely on to be available. Sustenance and accommodation were provided partly (and frequently) at the expense of the local populace, and with supplies carried on the baggage train¹⁶.

The strategy and tactics of military operations. Before embarking on any military operations, Bulgarian rulers made attempts to secure the borders of their state, ensuring peaceful relations with their neighbours (excepting the one with whom the fighting was intended or whose incursion was anticipated). This was particularly crucial in the light of the fact that it was, for example, a common Byzantine practice to instigate nomads from the steppes north of the Black Sea to attack Bulgaria in the ‘rear’, while it was involved in fighting in the south. Taught by the bitter experience of the war of 894–896 (specifically, by the Hungarian raids), tsar Symeon and his successor, Peter, made efforts to maintain close relations with the Pechenegs who, at any time, were able to threaten

¹⁵ Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, pp. 88–91; Е. Тгујарски, *Protobulgarzy...*, pp. 315–316; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, pp. 146–148; Б. Чолпанов, Е. Александров, *Военна история...*, pp. 70–71.

¹⁶ Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, pp. 142–143; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, p. 148.

Bulgarian territory, primarily due to efforts of the Byzantine diplomacy¹⁷. Furthermore, it was intended to prevent a construction of a wider anti-Bulgarian coalition. Such diplomatic activity was also employed to gain allies in a fight against an enemy (e.g. Symeon's attempts at convincing the Arabs to move against the Byzantines). In planning an incursion into an enemy country, attempts were made to exploit its difficult position, both at the international stage (engagement in exhausting armed struggle at a different front, e.g. the Byzantine clashes with the Arabs), and internal (fighting for the throne, ruler's minority). The strategic goal was usually extension of the Bulgarian dominion in the Balkans (Symeon), or the preservation of an already existing *status quo* (Peter). Of course, the immediate goal when fighting was to weaken the enemy and to deprive him of the demographic and economic base, the extermination of his human and animal reserves, and thereby exerting pressure on him, to force the acceptance of Bulgarian demands¹⁸. In fighting Byzantium, the control of the Adrianople fortress, on the one hand a staging ground for the Byzantine imperial army's northbound expeditions, on the other the gate from which road led to the Byzantine capital, was crucial. For this reason Bulgarians most often directed their armies to the south, along the rivers Tundzha and Maritsa, and from there towards Constantinople. The Thracian theatre of war therefore appears as the most important one in the Bulgarian-Byzantine military struggle, since not only it was there that the Byzantine capital was located, but the occupation of that territory also allowed the cutting off of the Balkan Byzantine territories from their Asia Minor base – both in purely economic terms, as well as militarily (Asia Minor was the 'reservoir' area from which recruits were drawn). This naturally meant the military activity taking place in other areas was of lesser importance¹⁹.

¹⁷ Nicholas Mystikos, 9, p. 58,98–112; Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 5, p. 52.1–13.

¹⁸ Cf. П. Ангелов, *Военна сила и дипломация в средновековна България*, ВС 52.5, 1990, pp. 3–13.

¹⁹ Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, p. 98; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, pp. 150–152.

Military actions were preceded by a thorough reconnaissance of the future area of conflict; the size of the forces and the opponent's intentions were evaluated not only by scouts, but also through the use of spies who were active in the hostile army's rear.

The Bulgarian battle formation was characterised by its considerable fragmentation, both frontal and in depth. At the very front there were the scouting parties and the vanguard. Behind them, there were two battle lines, then the reserves, and finally the camp's protective troops located 1.5–3 km behind rest of the army. The first battle line was primarily comprised of a dense horse archer formation, occupying the flanks, and to a lesser extent of infantry, concentrated in the centre²⁰. The second line duplicated the arrangement of infantry and horse, improved the formation's stability and was tasked with repulsing a potential attack of the enemy, weakening – thanks to its depth – the impetus of the strike. The enemy was at first harassed by consecutive attacks of the riders who, approaching the front line, showered the enemy with arrows and retreated towards friendly troops. If this course of action did not compel the enemy to give chase and, through breaking his formation, allow an easier victory, then after achieving the desired effect (exhaustion) a frontal attack of all the Bulgarian forces followed, preceded by another powerful archery barrage. According to a testimony from the period, the attacking Bulgarians raised incomprehensible and terrifying cries²¹. Generally, however, they preferred to fire projectiles at the enemy from a distance, feign flights, encircle the opponent and draw him into ambushes²². For the latter, they preferred to use convenient to organise mud traps, forested or hilly terrain, as well as mountain passes. It is worth noting that according to the Byzantine authors Bulgarians excelled at fighting in mountainous areas – and the imperial historians considered them to have been in part mountain dwellers²³.

²⁰ Cf. Leo VI the Wise, XVIII, 53–55, p. 456.268–280.

²¹ Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 8, p. 401.15–17.

²² Leo VI the Wise, XVIII, 54, p. 456.271–273; XVIII, 56, p. 456.281–283; С. Хаджииванов, *Засадите в старобългарското военно изкуство*, ВС 23.4, 1954, pp. 36–57.

²³ For more on this subject, see the following chapter of the present monograph – Part Two, Chapter VI.

Of course, they also gave battle to their enemies in an open field. They chased the defeated enemy down when possible, until his full destruction²⁴. This must have been surprising to the Byzantines, for the majority of their opponents, after achieving victory, immediately threw themselves into looting the battle field and the baggage train²⁵. Leo VI even advised that when the Bulgarian army was broken, it should not be pursued at any cost, for Bulgarians usually fiercely fought back even when retreating from the battlefield²⁶. In addition, a disorganised pursuit could lead the victorious army into a previously prepared or an *ad hoc* ambush. It has already been mentioned that during the discussed period Bulgarians were fully versed in the art of besieging and capturing fortified settlements. They besieged a city and waited until its supplies ran out; they attempted to negotiate with defenders, promising them inviolability in case of surrender, or on the contrary – threatened the inhabitants with cruel consequences if they do not surrender the city willingly. They often used tricks that allowed them to gain entry into a city, or lured out the defenders beyond their fortifications. A full-on assault was the final resort.

Similarly, the Bulgarians made efforts to effectively defend their own towns and strongholds, and in case of an external threat offered shelter behind their walls also to the rural population. In those cases they traditionally made sallies into the enemy camps, mainly to destroy supplies and burn down siege engines²⁷.

The number of Bulgarian troops. Despite appearances, this question is one of the most difficult when it comes to interpreting the accounts of mediaeval authors. While the Byzantine writers – who in this matter

²⁴ Cf. Leo VI the Wise, XVIII, 57, pp. 456.284 – 458.288.

²⁵ Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българското военно...*, р. 108; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, р. 154.

²⁶ Leo VI the Wise, XVIII, 72, р. 462.343–346.

²⁷ Cf. Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна...*, pp. 153–156. For more on the Bulgarian strategy and tactics, see: Щ. Атанасов, И. Дуйчев, Д. Ангелов, Г. Цанкова-Петкова, Д. Христов, Б. Чолпанов, *Стратегия и тактика на българската армия през епохата на феодализма*, ВС 26.4, 1957, pp. 39–72.

are our main source of information – quite often mentioned various numbers, their relations tend to obscure the image rather than offer specific and trustworthy calculations. Large, round numbers (e.g. 30 000 soldiers) appear most often, which allows us merely to establish that they wanted to inform their readers that many Bulgarians had been present, i.e. their armed forces were numerous. Helpful in this regard – through analogy – may be calculations regarding Byzantine armed forces during the same period. Firstly, we have reliable information regarding the Empire: in the so-called strategikons, the works devoted to the art of war. In the light of the relations of the tenth-century Byzantine polemologists, the customary size of the active military force numbered several thousand troops, sometimes exceeding ten thousand soldiers (both cavalry and infantry)²⁸. The entire military potential of Byzantium during the Middle Byzantine period is estimated at ca. 70 000 – 80 000 men. Therefore it is assumed that the maximum number of troops attacking enemy territory – and this is assuming that the strategic goal was of utmost importance – reached 20 000 – 25 000 soldiers²⁹. How these estimates could relate to Bulgaria? One first has to remember that the economic potential and available manpower, and therefore the ability to mobilise soldiers, of Bulgaria was smaller than that of its southern neighbour. Therefore the total number of Bulgarian troops had to be lower as well. On the other hand, the operational units may have been of similar size, and as such number between several and over ten thousand soldiers. The defensive forces in turn, of course when considering the entirety of Bulgaria, were at least twice as large³⁰. In some cases the Bulgarians could obviously have

²⁸ J.F. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians: an administrative, institutional and social survey of the Opsikion and Tagmata, c. 580–900*, Bonn 1984, pp. 276–297; H.-J. Kühn, *Die Byzantinische Armee im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert. Studien zur Organisation der Tagmata*, Wien 1991, pp. 56–60; J.-C. Cheynet, *Les effectifs de l'armée byzantine aux X^e–XII^e s.*, CCM 38.4, 1995, pp. 319–320; W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army 284–1081*, Stanford 1995, pp. 64–86; M. Whitton, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1996, pp. 181–193; J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204*, London 1999, pp. 99–106.

²⁹ M. Whitton, *The Making...*, p. 191; J. Haldon, *Warfare...*, p. 106.

³⁰ Cf. В. Кескаров, *Войни на Българите в Тракия 689–972 г.*, София 1940, p. 164; Б. Чолпанов, Е. Александров, *Военна история...*, pp. 57–58.

had a somewhat larger military force – in situations when they enlisted the aid of numerous allied troops, e.g. the Pechenegs. Nonetheless, it needs to be emphasised that all these estimates are highly hypothetical in nature.

2. The Defence System of the Bulgarian State

At the beginning of this brief argument I need to note that it is not my goal to carefully reconstruct the defence system of the tenth-century Bulgarian state, especially when in the field of archaeological study, despite visible progress, much remains to be done in this matter. Here, I am more interested in the Bulgarian defence doctrine (if one indeed existed and was being consciously implemented) than its material realisation, even though the latter subject is extremely interesting.

The effectiveness of the defence of the Bulgarian territory consisted of three basic elements.

Firstly, the skilful use of the natural elements demarcating the border, provided by the shape of the terrain itself. This was primarily the Haimos Mountains range, which during the discussed period constituted an internal barrier i.e. located entirely within the Bulgarian territory and several tens of kilometres distant from the southern border of the state, guarding access to the most vital regions of Bulgaria. This massif also constituted the southern border of Bulgaria's *internal territory* during the seventh–tenth centuries period, and because of this one may assume that the previously mentioned *ichirgu boila* also commanded the military units that guarded the mountain passes. He was most likely also responsible for maintaining the local fortifications, whether earthwork, wooden, or stone³¹. It would appear that his duties also included

³¹ И. Д у й ч е в, *Проблеми из средновековната история на Преслав*, [in:] *иде м, Проучвания върху средновековната българска история и култура*, София 1981, pp. 25–26; В. Г ю з е л е в, *Кавханите...*, p. 29.

constructing bridges over rivers. Another natural demarcation feature was the Danube, which delineated the northern border of the internal area of the Khanate-Tsardom. The other mountain massifs and rivers and lakes that lay within – or along – the borders undoubtedly served a similar role. Bulgaria's eastern border was defined by the Black Sea shore.

Secondly, the enhancement of the natural land and sea barriers through raising fortifications, providing further defensibility³². Originally this role was served by long earthwork ramparts, located in the most threatened and most easily accessible parts of the country – in Dobruzha, where raids of Asiatic nomads were expected, along the Black Sea coast, where Byzantine army landings were likely, and in the mountain passes of Stara Planina, athwart the direction of the empire's attacks by land. It appears that similar, but masonry fortifications were raised in Dobruzha during the tenth century. While the chronology of these monuments is strongly debated in the academic literature, it should be noted that the scholars often focus exclusively on the north-eastern

³² For example, see: К. Шкорпил, *Укрепления на Първата българска държава в Северна Добруджа край Дунава и Черноморския бряг*, ИБИД 16/17, 1940, pp. 525–535; J.-Ch. P o u t i e r s, *A propos des forteresses antiques et médiévales de la plaine Danubienne (Essai de reconstruction du réseau routier entre Iskär et Ogosta)*, EB 11.2, 1975, pp. 60–73; Д. Овчаров, *Към въпроса за укрепителната дейност на българската държава по долен Дунав през IX–X в.*, ВС 48.2, 1979, pp. 96–106; Ц. Дремсизова-Нелчинова, Д. Иванов, *Археологически паметници в Русенски окръг*, София 1983 (Danube); П. Мутафчиев, *Стари градища и друмове из долините на Стряма и Тополница*, [in:] *Идеи*, *Избрани произведения в два тома*, vol. I, ed. Д. Ангелов, София 1973, pp. 286–396; А. Попов, *Ролята на военноукрепителната система в Източната и Централната част на Стара Планина през време на българската средновековна държава*, ВС 37.4, 1968, pp. 61–72, specifically pp. 61–64, 71–72; *Идеи*, *Крепости по Сърнена гора*, ИБИД 31, 1977, pp. 39–50; *Идеи*, *Военнотопографският фактор при изграждането на отбранителните съоръжения по Южния склон на Стара Планина*, ВС 47.2, 1978, pp. 110–129; Д. Момчилов, *Средновековните крепости в южните части на Ришкия и Върбишкия проход*, ВС 59.5, 1990, pp. 14–43; И. Георгиев, *Военни пътища и преградни съоръжения в Ришкия проход*, ВС 62.2, 1993, pp. 5–23; *Идеи*, *Ранновизантийски и средновековни български укрепления за отбраната на Айтоския проход*, ВС 64.2, 1995, pp. 7–27 (Haimos). For the later period, see: А. Попов, *Старопланинската укрепителна система за защитата на средновековния Търновград*, ИОИМВТ 5, 1972, pp. 65–121.

earthworks, omitting analogous fortifications from the areas in Haimos, or the famous Erkesiya, the Bulgarian provenance of which has not yet been questioned. Construction of camps and earthwork fortifications along the main communication routes, which allowed movement across Bulgarian territory and access to its capital centres, was another solution employed in country's defence³³. Such fortifications were therefore located along the most frequented routes, such as the ones leading through the Varbitsa and Rish passes of Stara Planina, and then further north up to the Danube Delta.

Even though during the discussed period the military engineering had generally made a shift from wood and earth fortifications to masonry defences³⁴, it would be a mistake to assume that the old (by then) fortifications were no longer being used, or that no new bulwarks of this type (wood and earthwork) had been raised. This can be seen from, for example, the fact that 'mixed' – stone, earth and wood – fortifications were being built when tsar Samuel was fortifying the area between the Ograzhden and Belassitsa mountain ranges, in Macedonia, at the beginning of the eleventh century³⁵. Of course, it is true that during the latter half of the ninth, and during the tenth century, primarily stone

³³ On the subject of these fortifications and the entire debate surrounding them, see the seminal work of the best expert on the subject: Р. Р а ш е в, *Землената укрепителна система на Първото българско царство*, ППрез 2, 1981, pp. 99–103; see also: i d e m, *Раннобългарски землени укрепителни съоръжения*, [in:] *Български средновековни градове...*, pp. 16–44; i d e m, *Старобългарски укрепления на Долния Дунав (VII–XI в.)*, Варна 1982; i d e m, *Българската езическа култура VII–IX в.*, София 2009, pp. 140–143.

³⁴ See i d e m, *Преходът от землена към каменна фортификация в Първото българско царство*, [in:] *Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на акад. Васил Гюзелев*, ed. М. К а й м а к а м о в a et al., София 2006, pp. 301–310.

³⁵ On the subject of these fortifications, see: Б. Ц в е т к о в, *Ключката отбранителна линия на цар Самуил от 1014 г. – научни постижения, проблеми и нови данни*, ПБА 1, 1992, pp. 87–91; Г. М и т р е в, *Самуиловата крепост. Битката при с. Ключ през 1014 г.*, [s.l., s.a.], pp. 1–18; Ц. К о м и т о в а, *Самуиловата крепост при Беласица – история и археология*, София 2015; Г. М и т р е в, *Самуиловата крепост-дема в Ключката клисура – нови теренни проучвания и наблюдения*, [in:] *Европейският Югоизток през втората половина на X – началото на XI век. История и култура*, ed. В. Г ю з е л е в, Г.Н. Н и к о л о в, София 2015, pp. 432–450.

fortifications were being raised, as they were better suited for the role of guarding and controlling of a given area. A particularly dense grouping of strongholds can be seen in Dobrudzha and Moesia Inferior: in the most important areas surrounding the capitals³⁶. A considerable share of the stone fortifications had been created on the sites of the former, early Byzantine, strongholds; this was especially true of the ones rebuilt – or still being used – along the old Roman *limes* along the Danube and the Black Sea coast. In the area between the valley of Danube and the Stara Planina foothills the most strategically important strongholds were: to the south, the capital Preslav, and to the north, the riverside Dristra. This became particularly clear through the actions of the Rus' prince Svyatoslav in the years 968–971, when during the war with the Byzantines this ruler concentrated his forces in these two centres.

The situation to the south was somewhat different, as the ownership of Northern Thrace was divided between the two countries – Bulgaria and Byzantium – although one may indicate that its hinterland belonged to the former, while the latter held the Black Sea coast. During the tenth century the ports of Mesembria and Anchialos ended up within Bulgarian borders, which had a considerable significance for the country's defensibility: in the earlier times, when these centres remained in the Byzantine hands, they were used for naval operations against Bulgaria. An important defensive line also ran along the Belgrade – Naissos – Sredets (Serdica) – Philippoupolis route. A notable role was also played by the centres surrounding the Northern Thrace area – i.a. Beroe, Markellai, Develtos. The multi-year struggle of tsar Samuel against emperor Basil II in Macedonia and the contesting of the mountain strongholds therein evidence the existence of a system of fortifications intended to secure the topographically crucial sites in the given area³⁷.

³⁶ Д. Рабовянов, *Извънстоличните каменни крепости на Първото българско царство (IX – началото на XI век)*, София 2011; idem, *Традиции и влияния в крепостното строителство на Първото българско царство в периода X – началото на XI век*, [in:] *Европейският Югоизток...*, pp. 423–431.

³⁷ See: Г.Н. Николов, *Централизъм и регионализъм в ранносредновековна България (края на VII – началото на XI в.)*, София 2005, pp. 169–191; Д. Момчилов, *Ролята на Анхиало и Маркелли при военните конфликти между България и Византия*

Thirdly, none of the above elements would have been able to provide a sufficient defence for the Bulgarian lands if it were not for the state's sufficient economic and demographic hinterland. Provision of the necessary financial (securing equipment and sustenance for the soldiers) and human resources – a sufficient number of soldiers able to man the defences – were vital.

As can be therefore seen, strongholds were raised and used along the rivers, sea coast and communication routes – including those which allowed crossing mountain barriers. The country was protected by attempting to control the roads which ran through it, allowing access to the hinterland. Aside from major centres of government, such as Pliska, Preslav and Ohrid, the majority of Bulgarian strongholds were nonetheless small³⁸.

през периода на Първото българско царство, [in:] Великотърновският Университет "Св. св. Кирил и Методий" и българската археология, vol. I, ed. Б. Б о р с о в, Велико Търново 2010, pp. 437–448.

³⁸ Cf. e.g.: Г. Б а л а с ч е в, *Укрепителните работи на старобългарската войска*, Мин 3.10 (1), 1918, pp. 1–44; К. Ш к о р п и л, *Старобългарска съобщителна мрежа около Преслав и крепостите по нея*, БИБ 2.2, 1929, pp. 80–111; И. В е л к о в, *Няколко тракийски и средновековни крепости по Средна Арда*, ИБИД 16/18, 1940, pp. 70–78; И. Б о г д а н о в, *Български твърдини. Книжовни средища, крепости, манастири в София и Софийско*, София 1971; Д. О в ч а р о в, *Археологически аспекти на българската ранносредновековна фортификация*, ВС 42.1, 1973, pp. 54–71; П. С. К о л е д а р о в, *Отбранителната и граничната система на България от 681 до 1018 г.*, ВС 47.3, 1978, pp. 109–123; *Български средновековни градове и крепости*, vol. I, *Градове и крепости по Дунав и Черно Море*, ed. А. К у з е в, В. Г ю з е л е в, Варна 1981; М. А. Х а р б о в а, *Отбранителните съоръжения в българското средновековие*, София 1981; С. В а к л и н о в, *Архитектура*, [in:] *История на България в четиринадесет тома*, vol. II, *Първа българска държава*, ed. Д. А н г е л о в, София 1981, pp. 423–426; i d e m, *Бит, строителство и изкуство*, [in:] *История на България...*, pp. 184–187; i d e m, *Втората българска столица Преслав*, [in:] *История на България...*, pp. 296–300; Д. С. О в ч а р о в, *Византийски и български крепости V–X век*, София 1982; Н. Г и з д о в а, *Средновековни крепости в Родопите на територията на Пазарджишки окръг*, ИМЮБ 9, 1983, pp. 69–78; Б. Д и м и т р о в, А. Х а д ж и й с к и, *Каменните щитове на България*, София 1988; *Материали за картата на средновековната българска държава (територията на днешна Североизточна България)*, ed. Р. Р а ш е в, ППре 7, 1995, pp. 155–332; С. Б о я д ж и е в, *Крепостно строителство през Първото българско царство*,

[in:] П. Балабанов, С. Бояджиев, Н. Тулешков, *Крепостно строителство по българските земи*, София 2000, pp. 135–186; В. Генадиева, С. Чохаджиев, *Археологически паметници от Кюстендилско*, vol. I, *Археологически паметници от Кюстендилското краище*, Велико Търново 2002; *idem*, *Археологически паметници от Кюстендилско*, vol. II, *Археологически паметници от Каменица*, Велико Търново 2003; Н. Овчаров, Д. Коджаманова, *Перперикон и околните твърдини през Средновековието. Крепостното строителство в Източните Родопи*, София 2003; Б. Чолпанов, Е. Александров, *Военна история...*, pp. 68–70; Н. Бояджиев, *Крепостната система в Средните Родопи през късната античност и средновековието*, [in:] *Laurea...*, vol. I, София 2009, pp. 103–110; С. Попов, *Замъкът в Европа и България през Средните Векове*, София 2011.

