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The Byzantines in the service of the Bulgarian rulers in the first half of the 9th century

The Byzantines who lived in Bulgaria in the first half of the 9th century can be roughly divided into the ones who arrived due to the mass forced displacement and those who came as a result of their own, personal decisions¹. The first group includes prisoners of war who came under Bulgarian control during armed operations and the people deported to Bulgaria from the seized Byzantine territories. Such situations were recorded during the wars that Khan Krum fought against Nicephorus I and later against his successors: Michael I and Leo V. It is known that a large number of Byzantines found themselves in the hands of Bulgarians in consequence of events such as the conquest of Serdica in 809, the massacre of the Nicephorus I's army in July 811 or the conquest of Byzantine fortresses: Develtos, Mesembria and Adrianople in the years 812–813². Some of them returned to Byzantium relatively fast

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¹ On the subject of the Byzantines in Bulgaria during the period of interest see R. Browning, *Byzantines in Bulgaria – Late 8th–Early 9th Centuries*, [in:] *Studia Slavico-Byzantina et Medievalia. In memoriam Ivan Dujčev*, vol. I, eds P. Dinekov et al., Sofia 1988, pp. 32–36; R. Rašev, *Vizantijskite v Bălgarija do pokrăstvaneto*, [in:] *Civitas divino-humana. In honorem annorum LX Georgii Bakalov*, eds C. Stepanov, V. Vačkova, Sofija 2004, pp. 151–162; V. Angelov, *Njakolko slučaja na čuždenci begălci v Părvata Bălgarska Dăržava*, “Bulgaria Mediaevalis” 2015, vol. VI, pp. 321–330; Y.M. Hristov, *Prisoners of War in Early Medieval Bulgaria (Preliminary Remarks)*, “Studia Ceranea” 2015, vol. V, pp. 73–106.

² On the aforesaid forced displacements see R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, pp. 153–154; K. Stanev, *Deportiranite romei v Bălgarija 812–837 godina*, [in:] *Ottuka zapo-*

due to the exchange of prisoners between the Empire and Bulgaria. Others, however, were not bought out of captivity or did not manage to escape from it and became subjected to the rule of Bulgarian khans for good.

In the presented article, I would like to address the Byzantines who, for various reasons, provided service to the Bulgarians in number of ways. It was not a particularly large group and consisted of the Byzantines who settled in Bulgaria of their own free will and those who became prisoners of war or were forced to resettle.

Constantine Patzikos (Πατζικος)³. A Byzantine who, during the period in question, had the strongest record of accomplishments in Bulgaria was Constantine Patzikos. He was married to Krum's sister, unknown by name. It has not been established when exactly he arrived in Bulgaria and why he left the territory of the Empire. An anonymous author, writing about the events of the year 813, stated that Constantine Patzikos had fled to Bulgaria many years before⁴. Taking into account that in 813 his son was grown enough to participate in Krum's war expedition and he was entrusted with a highly responsible task of guarding Khan's horse at the meeting with the Emperor Leo V, Constantine's son is believed to have been at least 12 years old at that time. It leads to the conclusion that Constantine Patzikos got married to Krum's sister around 800 at the latest⁵. Since the beginnings of Krum's reign are dated 802 or 803, the marriage must have taken place before Krum became the ruler of Bulgaria. Nonetheless, it would be reasonable to approach this assumption with reservations as it is not clear when Krum indeed started ruling. The last piece of information on the reign of his predecessor Kardam dates back to 796⁶. Thus, one cannot rule out the

čva Bālgarija. Materiali ot vtorata nacionalna konferencija po istorija, archeologija i kulturen turizām "Pātuvane kām Bālgarija" – Šumen, 14–16.05.2010 godina, ed. I. Jordanov, Šumen 2011, pp. 183–196.

³ On the topic of Constantine Patzikos see R. Browning, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–35; R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, p. 155; *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. I. Abteiling (641–867)* [further on: *PMB*], eds F. Winkelmann *et al.*, Bd. II, Berlin–New York 2000, pp. 558–559 (3920); Y.M. Hristov, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴ *Scriptoris Incerti Historia de Leone Bardae Armenii filio*, [in:] *Leonis Grammatici Chronographia*, rec. I. Bekker, Bonnae 1842, p. 343 [further on: *Scriptor Incertus*].

⁵ R. Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁶ M.J. Leszka, *Wizerunek władców pierwszego państwa bułgarskiego w bizantyńskich źródłach pisanych (VIII – pierwsza połowa XII wieku)*, Łódź 2003, p. 31.

possibility that Krum took over shortly afterwards and Constantine entered into a marriage with the sister of the ruling khan. This would clearly indicate that Constantine Patzikos belonged to the Bulgarian elite. In any case, Constantine seems to have appeared in Bulgaria some time before 800 and to have earned the trust of Kardam, and later of Krum, and to have won Krum over. Robert Browning associates his coming to Bulgaria with Kardam's victory over the Byzantine armies in the Battle of Marcellae in 792⁷. Yet, this presumption is not based on any source materials. We do not know anything about Constantine's fortunes before his appearance in Bulgaria. Since he gained himself acclaim in the Bulgarian court, it might be assumed that he had belonged to the Byzantine elite and that he had held particular office or had military command before fleeing to Bulgaria. His knowledge and experience became particularly important to the Bulgarians in 807 when the confrontation between the Empire and Bulgaria started and intensified sharply in 811–814⁸. Given that the Khan made him his companion at the meeting with Leo V in 813, Constantine Patzikos must have gained Krum's absolute trust. Apart from him, Krum was only accompanied by Constantine's son, who was already mentioned, and a Bulgarian kavhan – logothete, of the unknown name⁹. Surely, Constantine was supposed to serve as a translator during the meeting. As it is commonly known, Leo V decided to use the opportunity of encounter and plot Krum's assassination. The attempt failed and the Bulgarian ruler managed to escape. Constantine and his son were captured. They probably paid the highest price for their loyalty to Krum, though the sources do not explicitly state anything more than the fact that Constantine and

⁷ R. Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 35; P. Sophoulis, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831*, Leiden 2012, p. 253.

⁸ On the subject of Bulgarian-Byzantine conflicts during the reign of Khan Krum see V.N. Zlatarski, *Istorija na bālgarskata dāržava prez srednite vekove*, vol. I.1 (*Pārvo Bālgarsko Carstvo. Epoha na chuno-bālgarskoto nadmoštje*), Sofija 1994, pp. 247–292; P.E. Niavis, *The Reign of the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I (AD 802–811)*, Athenes 1987, pp. 221–254; W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival 780–842*, Stanford 1988, pp. 157–160, 168–189, 201–207; I. Božilov, V. Gjuzeev, *Istorija na srednovekovna Bālgarija VII–XIV vek*, Sofija 2006, pp. 126–137; D. Ziemann, *Vom Wandervolk zur Grosmacht. Die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7. bis 9. Jh.)*, Cologne–Weimar–Vienna 2007, pp. 241–288; P. Sophoulis, *op. cit.*, pp. 173–264.

⁹ *Scriptor Incertus*, p. 344.

his son fell into hands of the Byzantines and that the Bulgarian logothete was killed on the spot¹⁰.

Eumathios (Εὐμάθιος)¹¹. In 809, Khan Krum took Serdica by stealth, slaughtering a portion of its inhabitants and six thousand soldiers¹². When Nicephorus I set off to Serdica, he met a group of magnates (archons) that had managed to save themselves. The Emperor refused to grant them immunity, which they have requested. Consequently, fearing for their lives, the archons decided to flee to the Bulgarian territory¹³. Eumathios, a capable engineer experienced in the art of mechanics, was among them¹⁴. His subsequent fortunes are unknown, but one can suspect that his skills were put into use, as it happened in the case of an Arab engineer, unknown by name, who seems to have converted to Christianity in the Byzantine Empire, and for some time, was in the Byzantine service¹⁵. The conflict arose between him and the Emperor Nicephorus. The engineer had allegedly demanded a pay raise from the Emperor who rejected his request and punished him in a severe way. Hence, the Arab engineer decided to flee to Bulgaria where he gained Krum's recognition. He is believed to have taught the Bulgarians about the construction of siege engines which were used, for example, to seize Mesembria in October 812. We cannot be certain when exactly the Arab engineer joined the Bulgarians. Yet, it is assumed that it must have happened during the reign of Nicephorus I and probably after the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict had escalated. Some researchers suggest that the figure of the mentioned engineer should be associated with Eumathios¹⁶. Such hypothesis cannot be, however, confirmed.

¹⁰ *Scriptor Incertus*, p. 344.

¹¹ *PMB I*, Berlin–New York 1999, pp. 532–533 (No. 1676).

¹² Theophanes, *Chronographia*, rec. C. de Boor, vol. I, Lipsiae 1883, p. 485 [further on: Theophanes].

¹³ Theophanes (p. 685) does not directly state that the leaders escaped to Bulgaria but it seems to clearly follow from the context of his narration – he writes that “they fled to the enemy” (tr. A. Brzóstkowska – *Testimonia najdawniejszych dziejów Słowian*, Greek Series, issue 3, eds A. Brzóstkowska, W. Swoboda, Warszawa 1995, p. 71); see P.E. Niavis, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

¹⁴ Theophanes, p. 485.

¹⁵ Theophanes, p. 498; R. Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 34; R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁶ The issue is analyzed by V. Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 325; see P.E. Niavis, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

Leo, Bardanes, Ioannis, Kordyles, Gregorius. The Bulgarian service was joined by a group of Byzantine leaders. Besides the ones mentioned above, the runaways from Serdica¹⁷, most of them are known only from the Veselin Beševliev's inscription No. 47 (from Hambarliy, today: Malamirovo)¹⁸ which records the situation in 813 or 814. We find in it the names of Greek strategists: Leo (Λέων), Bardanes (Βαρδάνης)¹⁹, Ioannis (Ἰανῆς)²⁰, Kordyles (Κορδύλης)²¹ and Gregorius (Γρηγοῤῃς)²². According to the inscription, Leo (*strategos*) was subordinate to Krum's brother who commanded the central Bulgarian forces, Bardanes and Ioannis to ichirgu-boila Tzukos²³ who led the right flank of the army while Kordyles and Gregorius to boyar-kavhan Iratais²⁴. What were the identities of those strategists? Some scholars link them with the Byzantine leaders who, after surrendering Serdica in 809, did not receive pardon from Nicephorus I and fled to the Bulgarians²⁵. Robert Browning has already dismissed this claim, arguing that Krum would not have delegated such an important military task to the people who, in the given circumstances, had just recently joined his forces²⁶. The argument is not conclusive. As traitors, they might have been afraid of going back to the Byzantine side. What is more, at least four years had passed from the moment they deserted till the event mentioned in the inscription which could have provided enough time to win the Bulgarian ruler's trust. Other scholars insist that the Byzantine leaders mentioned in the inscription joined the Bulgarian side in 812²⁷ which clearly demonstrates that they do not share Browning's views. In any case, due to the current condition of the source material, it is impossible to decide whether the run-

¹⁷ Although Theophanes does not describe their fortunes in Bulgaria, we cannot rule out the possibility that Krum made them join his army in order to make use of their experience.

¹⁸ V. Beševliev, *Pārvobālgarski nadpisi*, Sofija 1979, pp. 173–174.

¹⁹ *PMB* I, p. 254 (No. 768).

²⁰ *PMB* II, p. 322 (No. 3198).

²¹ *PMB* II, pp. 600–601 (No. 4060 and 4061).

²² *PMB* II, p. 47 (No. 2337).

²³ *PMB* V, Berlin–New York 2001, p. 67 (No. 8542).

²⁴ *PMB* II, p. 407 (No. 3462).

²⁵ For example: V. Beševliev, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

²⁶ R. Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 34; see P. Sophoulis, *op. cit.*, p. 274. Logically, such a stance expresses the view that the Byzantine leaders joined the Bulgarian service already during the reign of Khan Kardam.

²⁷ R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–156.

aways from Serdica and the leaders mentioned in the inscription of Malomirovo were the same people.

Another line of argument suggests that we can learn about the fortunes of some of the leaders²⁸. Leo and Ioannis are said to have displeased the Bulgarian Khan and, as detailed in *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, lost their lives during the persecution of the Byzantine population. They became the martyrs of their faith – it is believed they were decapitated by Bulgarians²⁹. The person of Kordyles is identified with Kordylas, a stratelates, head of the displaced Byzantine people living by the river Danube. He is presumed to have organized their return to homeland in the thirties of the 9th century³⁰. Bardanes is associated with Bardas³¹, the son of Korylas (i.e. Kordyles). However, these assumptions about their identities must be approached with care since they are based only on the similarity of names.

Turdatzis (Τουρδατζις). Under No. 66, the inscription published by V. Beševliev mentions Turdatzis, a candidate and *threptós ánthropos* of Omurtag, who “died inside”³². As reported by Rasha Rashev, he was of Armenian origin and a member of the court guard (*kandidatos*) protecting one of the Byzantine emperors. For unknown reasons, he fled to Bulgaria, took service at the Khan’s court and died under Omurtag’s reign³³. It should be emphasized that the Rashev’s concept is founded on the premise that the name Turdatzis is of Armenian origin and on the use of the Greek term (*kandidatos*) which leads the author to conclusion that first, he must have been a member of the Byzantine service and then, must have deserted from it. Leaving aside the etymological question of the Turdatzis name’s origin, which Beševliev identifies as Proto-Bulgarian³⁴,

²⁸ V. Beševliev, *op. cit.*, pp. 176–177; T. Wasilewski, *Bizancjum i Słowianie w IX wieku. Studia z dziejów stosunków politycznych i kulturalnych*, Warszawa 1972, p. 57.

²⁹ *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. H. Delahaye, Bruxelles 1902, kol. 416; R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, p. 156; P. Sophoulis, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39, 302–303.

³⁰ On the subject of these events see T. Wasilewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–87.

³¹ *PMBI*, p. 261 (No. 79).

³² V. Beševliev, *op. cit.*, p. 221. This inscription was found in Pliska in 1970. On the function of *threptós ánthropos* see M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Carstwo bułgarskie. Polityka, społeczeństwo, gospodarka, kultura, 866–969*, Warszawa 2015, p. 218 (including further literature).

³³ R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³⁴ V. Beševliev, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

the use of the term *kandidatos* does not necessarily imply that Turdatzis once served this function at the Byzantine court. Instead, it can demonstrate that according to the author of the inscription – which was, after all, written in Greek – the duties Turdatzis performed in the Bulgarian court, at least at some point, resembled those of the Byzantine *kandidatoi*³⁵. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Omurtag, by whose initiative the inscription was made, wanted to commemorate the fact that prior to becoming his *threptós ánthropos*, Turdatzis was at the service of Byzantines.

As Rashev observes, the group of the Byzantine Emperor's subjects who sided with the Bulgarians were of non-Greek origin (mostly Armenians). It led him to speculate that people's descent was a factor prompting them to desert the Byzantine forces. Yet, the Bulgarian scholar's line of reasoning appears to be going too far. Setting aside the questions of how representative the available source materials are and how loyal the Byzantine people were to Constantinople, it is important to point out that during the period in question, the Armenians constituted a large part of the Byzantine army commanders³⁶ and, if only for this reason alone, they could have been threatened with punishment relatively frequently which became their reason for joining the Bulgarian side.

Byzantios (Βυζάντιος)³⁷. In 811, during Nicephorus I's military expedition to Bulgaria, when the Byzantine army camped under Marcellae, a man named Byzantios fled to the Bulgarian ruler with the Emperor's robe and a significant amount of gold (100 pounds)³⁸. We do not know what role he had been performing by the Emperor's side. Theophanes, who describes the situation, defines his position as as *ἐπιστήθιος οἰκέτης*³⁹, that is, to put it simply, a trusted inhabitant of the court/servant. Just as Browning rightly asserts, even though Byzantios must have been a commoner by birth, it does not mean he had been a slave⁴⁰. The Byzantine author did not inform

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ P. Charanis, *Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*, "Byzantinoslavica" 1961, vol. XXII, pp. 200–204; M.J. Leszka, *Uzurpacje w cesarstwie bizantyńskim w okresie od IV do połowy IX wieku*, Łódź 1999, p. 60.

³⁷ *PMB* I, p. 348 (No. 1054); W. Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p. 411; P.E. Niavis, *op. cit.*, p. 237; P. Sophoulis, *op. cit.*, p. 19 (considers Byzantios a fictional character but does not justify such a view).

³⁸ Theophanes, p. 490.

³⁹ Theophanes, p. 490.

⁴⁰ R. Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

why the man decided to flee to the Bulgarians. Displeasing the Emperor and fear of severe punishment or a general willingness to find better life conditions might have been two of his possible motivations. Yet, the latter sounds less probable, especially in the light of the military expedition that could have ended with the Byzantines' victory and the subjugation of Bulgaria to Constantinople. In that case, the circumstances of Byzantios, who, after all, was a traitor, would not have improved and would surely have had a tragic end. Considering the weight of gold Byzantios took with him, Browning upholds that he must have run away with at least one more person⁴¹. But given that Byzantios most likely used draft animals for the transport instead of carrying the load on his own back, it is a disputable claim. Nothing is known on how he was accepted in Bulgaria.

Although the scholars generally recognize Theophanes' story as a real account of events, it is advisable to approach it with a certain degree of skepticism. To Theophanes, the presented story foreshadows a failure of the expedition. He claims that "many people saw Byzantios' escape as a bad sign for Nicephorus"⁴². In his writing, he adopts a hostile attitude towards the Emperor⁴³. The portrayal of Nicephorus' most trusted servants abandoning him and, on top of that, stealing his robes was undoubtedly meant to create the negative image of the Emperor. What is more, one should consider the difficulties that Byzantios would have had to face while trying to leave the military camp, in particular during the military expedition. Hence, we cannot completely rule out that Theophanes' story was made up.

Kinamon⁴⁴. In his work entitled *Historia martyrii XV martyrum Tiberiopolitanorum*⁴⁵, Theophylact, the Archbishop of Ohrid includes a story of Kinamon, a pious, well-educated man, one of the inhab-

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Theophanes, p. 490 (tr. A. Brzóstkowska – *Testimonia...*, p. 73).

⁴³ On Theophanes' attitude towards Emperor Nicephorus I see I.S. Čičurov, *Feofan Ispovednik – publikator, redaktor, autor? (v svjazi so statej C. Mango)*, "Vizantijskij Vremennik" 1981, vol. XLII, p. 82; on how Theophanes created the image of Nicephorus I see F. Tinnfeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Nicetas Choniates*, München 1971, pp. 75–78.

⁴⁴ On the subject of Kinamon, see *PMB* II, p. 466 (No. 3647).

⁴⁵ *Theophylacti Achridensis Archiepiscopi Bulgariae Historia martyrii XV martyrum Tiberiopolitanorum*, 29–30, ed. I.G. Iliev, Serdicae 1994 (= *Grăcki Izvori za Bălgarskata Istorija*, vol. IX, 2).

itants of Adrianople who were resettled in Bulgaria by Krum. The Bulgarian Khan is believed to have allowed Kinamon around his son Omurtag, to whom he might have served as a tutor or a teacher. Omurtag admired the Byzantine and held him in high esteem; yet, it bothered him that Kinamon was a Christian. When Omurtag became the Khan of Bulgaria, he decided to convince Kinamon to reject Christianity. Theophylact recounts the conversation between the two men which resulted from the attempts to persuade Kinamon to paganism. Provoked by Omurtaga's insistence, Kinamon made confession of faith, proclaiming the only true religion – Christianity, and readily dismissed paganism. Kinamon's statement made Omurtag so furious that he began to threaten him with torture⁴⁶ and eventually had him imprisoned. As told by the hagiographer, Kinamon remained in prisoned till the end of Omurtag's reign. During the reign of Malamir, the successor of Omurtag, Kinamon provided companionship to Enravota, the brother of Khan. Kinamon is believed to have convinced Enravota to convert to Christianity, for which Enravota was sentenced to death by Malamir. Most likely Kinamon shared his fate, though it is not stated in any source⁴⁷.

The story of Kinamon, the pious man who, having spent years in the court of the Bulgarian khans, not only refused to reject his religion, but also converted the member of the Khans' family to Christianity, undoubtedly includes numerous elements which are far from true. On the other hand, in the context of the subject of this article, Kinamon's story can stand as testimony to the fact that the Byzantines could have been and were found in the company of the Bulgarian rulers and, for different reasons, were revered by them.

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⁴⁶ *Theophylacti Achridensis Archiepiscopi Bulgariae Historia...*, 30.

⁴⁷ The scarcity of source materials does not allow us to establish whether rejecting a pagan religion was indeed the only reason for Enravota's death or whether his death was, at least to certain extent, a consequence of fights for the Bulgarian throne. The second assumption could be supported by the fact that not only Enravota but also Zvinitza (Presian?) were not granted the right to succession. Regardless of the real reasons why Enravota did not take the throne, he became the first Christian martyr of Bulgaria. See P. Georgiev, *Măčeničeskijat kult kăm Enravota: kriticizăm, čiperkriticizăm i realnost*, "Godišnik na Sofijskija Universitet. Naučen centăr za slavjano-vizantijski proučvanija Ivan Dujčev" 2001, vol. XCI (X), pp. 79–91; M.J. Leszka, *Wizerunek władców...*, p. 60, pp. 70–71; Ja. Christov, *Bjalo pole v rannata bălgarska agiografija. Enravota, Svetec-măčenic ili obeznasleden princ*, "Minalo" 2007, vol. XIV.1, pp. 33–37; D. Ziemann, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

The presented individuals exhaust the list of the Byzantines who in the first half of the 9th century were to be found (or could have been found) in the circles of the Bulgarian elite, in direct contact with the Khan's court⁴⁸. While they are certainly only a small group of the Byzantine Emperor's subordinates who happened to be in Bulgaria during the period in question, their cases appear to be of unique and sporadic nature.

Although the available source material is rather limited, I would like to draw a few conclusions. When it comes to the reasons why particular individuals decided to resettle in Bulgaria, their choices principally resulted from conflicts with the Emperor and the willingness to avoid the punishment from his hand by leaving Byzantium. It occurs that the Byzantine emigrants managed to blend in with the Bulgarian society only sporadically, as in the case of Constantine Patzikos. Religion surely hindered the process of assimilation during this period of time. Refusing to renounce Christianity, the Byzantines remained strangers. On top of that, they were faced with language barriers. Also, the runaways may have hoped that in the future, when for example some else takes the throne, they will be able to return to their homelands. Not without significance is the fact that Khan and his companions must have approached the incomers with suspicion, especially at the time of armed conflicts between Bulgaria and Byzantium. It was evidently manifested in the execution of two Byzantine leaders, after they had already served the Khan for some time.

The Bulgarians were able to use the Byzantines' skills and knowledge for their own benefit and, for instance, improve their military art, owing to the Byzantine engineers who taught them how to construct siege engines.

⁴⁸ On the list of the Byzantines who came to Bulgaria before the Baptism and are mentioned in the sources see R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–160.

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