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## THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE KOMITOPULES AND THE PEOPLES OF THE STEPPES OF EASTERN EUROPE A VAIN HOPE FOR AN ALLIANCE\*

**Abstract.** Medieval Bulgaria maintained relations with the Pontic nomadic communities. The times of the rule of the Komitopules were not exceptional in this respect. In the face of a difficult war with Byzantium, the Hungarians and Pechenegs could prove to be valuable allies. Relations with the former deteriorated during the construction of the feudal kingdom of the Arpads, associated with Latin Christianity. Only John Skylitzes writes about the would-be alliance of the Bulgarians with the Pecheneg tribes. It was supposed to take place in 1017, but the Pechenegs gave up supporting the Bulgarians. The reason could have been the actions of the Byzantines, who, by intervening in Black Sea Khazaria or exerting diplomatic pressure, could have persuaded the Pechenegs to withdraw. It cannot be ruled out that the Pechenegs were threatened by Rus' or actions taken by Bolesław I the Brave, who after the mission of St. Bruno entered into closer relations with the Pechenegs. After all, Bulgaria after 1017 could not count on the support of potential northern allies.

**Keywords:** Bulgaria and Byzantium in 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century, Komitopules (*Komitopouloi*) dynasty, Hungarians, Pechenegs, Khazaria, Rus', Bolesław I the Brave, Bruno of Querfurt

The history of medieval Bulgaria is strongly linked with the peoples of the Pontic-Caspian steppes. This concerned both subsequent Bulgarian states at that time. Already Asparukh (681–701) and his people had abandoned their steppe

\* The article is based on the paper entitled “The Bulgarian state and the steppe peoples of the Black Sea in the time of Samuel and his successors” delivered at the conference devoted to Emperor Samuel Komitorul – “1010 години от смъртта на българския цар Самуил († 6 Октомври 1014). Самуилова България – история и култура / Samuil's Bulgaria: History and Culture”, Petrić, 6 October 2024, organized by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia University of St. Clement Ohrid, the Macedonian Institute and the City of Petrić.



homeland due to the expansion of the Khazars. The immediate and distant successors of this khan not only closely observed the political changes in this part of Eastern Europe. By making alliances with selected countries and peoples of the western edge of the Great Steppe or acting against them, they achieved political profits. In this way, the eastern periphery of the fallen Avar Khaganate could become part of the Bulgarian state. The diplomatic activity of Simeon the Great (893–927) can also be appreciated. The first Bulgarian emperor not only had to defend himself against a surprise attack by the Hungarians, but he also managed to use another steppe people, the Pechenegs, to counter Constantinople's diplomatic attempts to undermine the integrity of his country's northern borderlands. Similar goals were faced by the rulers of the reborn Bulgaria after 1185. The Asenids used the Cumans to oppose the Byzantines and Latins. On the other hand, the power of the Chinggisids hung over the heirs of the Asenids like the sword of Damocles. The rulers of Tărnovo had to reckon with a direct threat from the Golden Horde, and even with the attempts of the mighty Nogay and his family to their throne<sup>1</sup>.

### Searching for allies among the steppe peoples

During the reign of the Komitopules (ca. 976–1018), Bulgaria's contacts with the peoples inhabiting the western part of the Great Steppe do not seem to be as spectacular as in the times of Simeon or after 1185. When the Byzantines conquered the eastern part of the Bulgarian state in 971, its western peripheries retained some forms of independence. The sons of *komes* Nicholas, who ruled them, cannot be accused of passivity in diplomacy. The deputies sent to Quedlinburg in 973, presumably on their own initiative, maintained Bulgaria's earlier contacts with the powers of Europe at that time<sup>2</sup>. Samuel and his brothers tried to take advantage of the new opportunities opened up by the growing interest of the rulers

<sup>1</sup> See the collection of articles entitled *Българи и Хазари през ранното средновековие (Bulgarians and Khazars in the Early Middle Ages)*, ed. Ц. СТЕПАНОВ, София 2003, *passim*; П.Л. ПАВЛОВ, *Българо-хазарски взаимоотношения и паралели*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 114–141; Тs. СТЕПАНОВ, *Bulgars and the Steppe Empire in the Early Middle Ages. The Problem of the "Others"*, Leiden–Boston 2010 [= ЕСЕЕМА, 8]; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *България и Печенезите (896–1018)*, ИП 29.2, 1973, p. 37–62. In a broader perspective: Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *България и номадите до началото на XI век*, Пловдив 2011; M.J. LESZKA, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bulgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*, Łódź 2013 [= BL, 15], p. 90–92. The problem of relation to the second Bulgarian Empire was presented by i.a. I. VÁSÁRY, *Cumans and Tatars. Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365*, Cambridge 2005; F. DALL'AGLIO, *The Military Alliance between the Cumans and Bulgaria from the Establishment of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom to the Mongol Invasion*, AEMA 16, 2006, p. 29–54.

<sup>2</sup> This is confirmed by the testimony of Ibrahim ibn Jakub, who in the previous decade met the Bulgarian envoys at Otto's court in Magdeburg. See: *Relatio Ibrahim ibn Jakub de itinere Slavico, que traditur apus Al-Bekri*, rec. Th. KOWALSKI, Cracoviae 1946 [= MPH, n.s., 1], p. 51.

of the Western Empire in the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, and the tradition of contacts with the steppe peoples inherited from their Preslav predecessors. It seems unlikely that the Bulgarians who came to Quedlinburg represented their former emperor Boris II. The context of the sources shows that the Bulgarians appeared before the emperor Otto I the Great (936–973) together with the Hungarians and representatives of other peoples of this part of Europe<sup>3</sup>. The German chroniclers did not explain the purposes of these legations and instead limited themselves only to a general statement about their peaceful finale, therefore it was rather out of the question to obtain the support of the emperor of the West in a possible war with Byzantium. This is understandable because of Otto's peaceful relations with John I Tzimiskes (969–976) after Theophano's arrival in the west. It is possible that the Bulgarians and Hungarians jointly wanted to establish bonds of friendship (*amicitia*) with the emperor, analogous to the relations of Otto I with the Polish Mieszko (ca. 960–992), the Bohemian Bolesław II the Pious (967–999), the Danish Harald "Bluetooth" (958–987) or even with the Yaropolk from Kiev (972–978). In these circumstances, the leaders of the Hungarians and Bulgarians emphasised their political autonomy between the territorially undefined spheres of influence of Byzantium and the Germany in Central and Eastern Europe. Such a demonstration was probably important for the Hungarians and Bulgarians, especially after the blows they suffered in the recent past (the defeat at the Lech River in 955 or the dethronement of Boris II in 971). It was difficult for the Byzantine envoys, who were also present at the congress in Quedlinburg, to oppose such contacts directly before Otto, especially since the centre of gravity of Constantinople's policy had clearly shifted to the eastern frontier<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> *Lamperti Herselfeldensis Annales*, 973, [in:] MGH.SRG, rec. O. HOLDER-EGGER, Hannoverae–Lipsiae 1894, p. 42: *Otto imperator senior cum iuniore venit Quidelinburg ibique celebravit sanctum pascha X. Kal. Aprilis. Illucque venerunt legati plurimarum gentium, id est Romanorum, Graecorum, Beneventorum, Italorum, Ungariorum, Danorum, Sclavorum, Bulgariorum atque Ruscorum, cum magnis muneribus; Thietmari Chronicon*, II, 31, [in:] MGH.SRG, Nova Series, rec. R. HOLTZMANN, Berlin 1935 (cetera: THИЕТМАР), p. 76: *Dehinc ivit ad Quidilingeburg proximum pascha divinis laudibus humanisque peragens gaudiis. Huc confluebant inperatoris edictu Miseco atque Bolizlavo duces et legati Grecorum, Beneventorum, Ungariorum, Bulgariorum, Danorum et Scлавiorum cum omnibus regni totius primaries; consummatisque pacifice cunctis, didati muneribus magnis reversi sunt ad sua laetantes.*

<sup>4</sup> See Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения (927–1019)*, ИП 50–51.2, 1994–1995, p. 15–16; T.C. LONGHIS, *Les ambassades Byzantines en Occident. Depuis la foundation des États barbares jusqu'aux Croisades (407–1096)*, Athens 1980, p. 181, 206–207, 209, 215; V. GJUZELEV, *Bulgaria a państwa i narody Europy Środkowej w X w.*, trans. K. MARINOW, [in:] *Byzantina Europaea. Księga Jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, ed. M. KOKOSZKO, M.J. LESZKA, Łódź 2007 [= BL, 11], p. 133–139. The term "amicitia" in the political context of the time had a wide meaning, ranging from the supervision of the ruler of the Reich over neighbouring princes to relations signifying a kind of patronage of the emperor of the West with friendly monarchs. See L. TYSZKIEWICZ, „*Amicitia*” jako stosunek wzajemny między państwami wczesnego średniowiecza, [in:] *Niemcy–Polska w średniowieczu*, ed. J. STRZELCZYK, Poznań 1986, p. 265–269; Th. ZOTZ, *Amicitia und Discordia*.

This relative stabilisation of the spheres of influence and interests of both empires would soon come to an end following the premature deaths of Otto II (983) and John Tzimiskes (976). The lands between Germany and the Balkans clash with recent hegemon. An uprising breaks out in the Slavic Polabian, Bohemia and Denmark contest the power of the empress regents: Adelaide and Theophano. The Bulgarians openly oppose the young Basil II, who begins his personal rule. His primary political goal is to complete the conquest of Bulgaria. Under these circumstances, the alliance with Hungary became increasingly important for the Komitopules, although its maintenance proved to be as difficult as during the reign of Peter I (927–969). This is documented by the changing fate of the marriage of Samuel's successor – Gabriel Radomir (1014–1015) with an anonymous Hungarian princess. The genesis and disintegration of this relationship at the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> century have been given numerous interpretations. This is not facilitated by the fact that we learn about this event from the gloss of Michael of Devol to the chronicle of John Skylitzes, written at the beginning of the twelfth century<sup>5</sup>. It is most often assumed that Gabriel Radomir's wife was the daughter of Géza I (ca. 970–997), and the reason for her being sent back to her homeland was the collapse of the alliance and the philo-Byzantine policy of Stephen the Great (997–1038)<sup>6</sup>. There have also been suggestions by researchers (e.g. J. Leśny) that Gabriel Radomir's wife may have come from another ruling clan. Its marginalisation or liquidation put an end to the traditional political organisation of the Hungarians. Certainly, at the same time, the relations between Stephen I and the Bulgarians deteriorated. The liquidation of the Komitopuls state by Basil II in 1018 resulted not only in a common Hungarian-Byzantine border. It also meant the

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*Zu einer Neuerscheinung über das Verhältnis von Königtum und Adel in frühottonischer Zeit*, FOG 16.1, 1989, p. 169–175; V. VON EPP, *Rituale frühmittelalterlicher "amicitia"*, [in:] *Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 2001, p. 11–24; L. KÖRNTGERN, *The Emperor and his Friend: the Ottonian realm in the year 1000*, [in:] *Europe around the year 1000*, ed. P. URBAŃCZYK, Warsaw 2001, p. 465–488; A. PLESZCZYŃSKI, "Amicitia" a sprawa polska. Uwagi o stosunku Piastów do Cesarstwa w X i na początku XI wieku, [in:] *Ad fontes. O naturze źródła historycznego*, ed. S. ROSIK, P. WISZEWSKI, Wrocław 2004, p. 49–58; M. WOŁOSZYN, *Zwei Episoden aus der Geschichte der polnisch-byzantinischen Kontakte des 10. bis 12. Jahrhunderts*, [in:] *Byzantine et Slavica Cracoviensia*, vol. V, *Byzantium, New Peoples, New Powers. The Byzantino-Slav Contact Zone, from the Ninth to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. M. КАЙМАКАНОВА, M. SALAMON, M. SMORAĞ-RÓŻYCKA, Cracov 2007, p. 163–175.

<sup>5</sup> B. PROKIĆ, *Die Zusätze in der Handschrift des Johannes Skylitzes codex Vindobonensis hist. graec. LXXIV. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des sogenannten westbulgarischen Reiches*, München 1906, No. 24 (60), 62, 64, p. 31, 36; *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. THURN, Berlin–New York 1973 [= CFHB.SBe] (cetera: IS), p. 350, 56–59, p. 409, 89, 95–96, p. 411.

<sup>6</sup> G. GYÖRFFY, *Święty Stefan I. Król Węgier i jego dzieło*, trans. T. KAPTURKIEWICZ (after the edition of *Istvan király és műve*, Budapest 1977), Warszawa 2003, p. 342–348; Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения...*, p. 17; С. ГЕОРГИЕВА, *Брачният живот на Гаврил Радомир – любов или политика*, ИП 49.1–2, 2013, p. 3–19.

revival of ancient communication routes in the 11<sup>th</sup> century used by diplomats, pilgrims and merchants following the land route through Hungary to Constantinople<sup>7</sup>. The evolution of Bulgarian-Hungarian contacts was unlikely to result from the randomness of the political situation. It can be assumed that it was the result of cultural changes in the northern neighbour of the Bulgarian state. A number of factors (the Christianisation and sedentarisation of the Hungarian peoples, the initiation by Géza I's successor of the construction of a feudal monarchy modelled on the Frankish one) mean that the relations between the Komitopuls and the Arpads after 976 should be treated as a separate research problem beyond the scope of this study.

In the case of the other steppe peoples, Bulgaria could only have contact with the Pechenegs in the times of the Komitopuls. After the fall of the *Pax Khazarica* in the 960s, they certainly became the dominant steppe people north of the Black Sea. Other ethnic groups such as the Alans, Uzes or Cumans, due to the remote location of their then settlements or the lack of factors conducive to closer contacts with Bulgaria, were definitely out of the question.

The Pechenegs had great military potential, which allowed them to dominate the Pontic steppes long before the fall of the Khazar Khaganate. As Constantine Porphyrogenitus emphasised, for most of his neighbours – Rus', Hungarians or Byzantium – the Pechenegs remain or potentially can become a dangerous neighbour<sup>8</sup>. A hundred years ago, their importance for the history of early medieval Central and Eastern Europe was exposed by Carlile A. Macartney (1895–1978):

Without the Pechenegs, the Magyars might never have invaded Hungary, the northern and southern branches of the Slavs would never have been divided; without them, the early Principality of Kiev might have grown so powerful that in the tenth century it would have sacked Byzantium and destroyed the main centre of European civilization; without them, Alexius Komnenos might have single-handedly repulsed the Seljuk Turks, and the crusades could have been postponed or even abandoned altogether<sup>9</sup>.

Even if we admit that his words exaggerate the importance of this people, in the part referring to the relations between the Pechenegs and the Bulgarians, they correspond to reality. This was further confirmed by the events of the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the Pechenegs, persuaded by Simeon's envoys, successfully

<sup>7</sup> J. LEŚNY, *Państwo Samuela a jego zachodni sąsiedzi*, BP 2, 1985, p. 88–96; G. GYÖRFFY, *Święty Stefan I...*, p. 202–218.

<sup>8</sup> CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENNITUS, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. MORAVCSIK, trans. R.J.H. JENKINS, Washington 1967 [= *CFHB.SW*] (cetera: *DAI*), p. 2–5, 16–28, 50–52. He quotes the Hungarian chiefs of the early tenth century, who refuse to fight with the Pechenegs because their country is large, and they are numerous. See 48, 148, 156, E. MALAMUT, *L'image byzantine des Petchénègues*, BZ 88.1, 1995, p. 107–115.

<sup>9</sup> E.A. MACARTNEY, *The Pechenegs*, SEER 23, 1929, p. 342.

attacked the steppe dwellings of the Hungarians, then allied with Emperor Leo VI<sup>10</sup>. Their involvement changed the course of the war for the benefit of the Bulgarians.

Although we do not have a Bulgarian equivalent of *DAI*, it should be emphasised that in this work, unlike the Pechenegs' contacts with the Hungarians, Rus and Uzes, relations with the Bulgarians are presented separately. It was emphasised that due to the reasons for their close proximity, the nomads could be a dangerous opponent for the Bulgarians. For these reasons, the latter strived to always keep peace with the Pechenegs. Due to the silence of other later sources on this issue, it can be assumed that the successors of Simeon the Great probably maintained peaceful relations with the Pechenegs, and that the Komitopules followed this tradition<sup>11</sup>. The image of the Pechenegs as "infidels, godless" violating the rights of the invaders, ravaging the lands of Christian Bulgarians, could have been created in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest. This probably took place after their arrival in the lands located south of the lower Danube. The Bulgarians, as subjects of *basileus*, suffered in a series of Pecheneg wars<sup>12</sup>.

Indeed, the Pechenegs were hardly likely to qualify as predictable allies. Various factors contributed to the fact that they abandoned their allies at a critical moment, sometimes going over to the enemy side. Such unreliability to some extent was the result of the lack of cohesion of their political structure. The internal diversity of the Pecheneg's federation and its complicated hierarchy of prestige forced the Byzantines to negotiate separately with the individual peoples of the "Patzinakia". The absence of a centralised authority, and the loose structure of the federation divided into tribal and ancestral segments, all these factors were definitely not conducive to the development of more lasting relations. An additional obstacle was the location of the core of the Komitopules state in the mountainous part of the western Balkans. Contact with the Pechenegs could have been difficult in circumstances when the Byzantines occupied fortresses on the lower Danube. Despite the above difficulties, the Komitopules had some possibility of winning over the Pechenegs against Basil II<sup>13</sup>.

### The Pecheneg allies of the Bulgarians (1016–1017)

In the chronicle of John Skylitzes, the theme of the alliance between the Bulgarians and the Pechenegs, initiated during the reign of John Vladislav (1015–1018), occurs only once. According to the chronicler's account:

<sup>10</sup> M. J. LESZKA, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum...*, p. 90–93.

<sup>11</sup> *DAI*, p. 52, 10–13. See И. БОЖИЛОВ, *България и Печенезите...*, p. 40–41, 45–46, 52–55, 59–61.

<sup>12</sup> В. ТЪПКОВА-ЗАИМОВА, А. МИЛТЕНОВА, *Историко-апокалитичната кнжнина във Византия и в средновековна България*, София 1996, p. 198, 202; А. PAROŃ, *Pechenegs. Nomads in the Political and Cultural Landscape of Medieval Europe*, trans. Th. ANESSI, Leiden–Boston 2019, p. 334–341.

<sup>13</sup> А. PAROŃ, *Pechenegs. Nomads in...*, p. 159–160.

AM 6524, [Emperor Basil II, Spring-Summer 1016] in the fourteenth year from the indication, the emperor left the capital and went to Triadica, where he encamped in front of the fortress of Pernikos and besieged it. [...] He received a letter from the commander of Dorostolon, Tzotzikios, son of the patrician Theudatos of Iberia, in which he reported that Krakras had gathered a large army and joined forces with John. As soon as he enlisted the cooperation of the Patzinaks, he intended to storm Roman lands. Alarmed by this letter, the emperor returned in haste, capturing and burning the fortress of Vosograd on the way, as well as taking Berroia. Having ravaged and burned the village surrounding Ostrovos and Moliskos, he refrained from further expeditions, as it was reported to him that the attack on Roman territory, planned by Krakras and John, had been thwarted by the Patzinaks, who had not provided them with allies<sup>14</sup>.

This alliance was so dangerous for the Byzantines that their ruler was ready to change his war plans against the Bulgarians. The direction and purpose of a potential Pecheneg invasion was not precisely defined by Skylitzes. However, it can be assumed that since the warning was given to the emperor by the *strategos* of Dristra, the invaders planned to move south to the Roman lands after crossing the Danube. On the Bulgarian side, Krakras was responsible for coordinating these military operations, and he negotiated an alliance with the Pechenegs. This excellent commander was not only the commander of the Pernik fortress, which he had so far successfully defended against the Byzantines. He was also subordinate to other leaders of a group of strongholds located on the eastern borders of the Komitopules state, which gave him the status of an autonomous grand governor<sup>15</sup>. Skylitzes did not specify what arguments the Bulgarians could use to persuade the Pechenegs to form an alliance. John Vladislav had considerable material resources

<sup>14</sup> IS, p. 355, 11–14: Ἐξακισχλιοστῶ δὲ πεντακοσιοστῶ εἰκοστῶ τετάρτῳ ἔτει ἰνδκτιῶνος τεσσαρεσκαδεκάτης, ἀπάρας τῆς βασιλίδος ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀπεισιν εἰς Τριάδιτζαν, καὶ τὸ φρούριον Πέρνικον περικαθίσας ἐπολιόρκει, [...] p. 356, 27–36: ἐδέξατο γὰρ καὶ γράμμα τοῦ στρατηγούντος ἐν Δοροστοόλῳ Τζοτζικίου, τοῦ νιού τοῦ πατρικίου Θευδάτου τοῦ Ἰβηρος, ὡς ὁ Κρακράς λαὸν ὄτι πλεῖστον ἀθροίσας καὶ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ ἐνωθεῖς, προσλαβόμενοι δὲ καὶ Πατζινάκας, μέλλουσιν εἰσβολὴν κατὰ Ῥωμανίας ποιήσασθαι. τούτῳ τῷ γράμματι θορυβηθεὶς ἐπανήει διὰ ταχέων. ἐν τῷ παριέναι δὲ τὸ τε φρούριον εἶλε τὰ Βοσόγραδα καὶ ἐνέπρησε, καὶ τὴν Βέρροϊαν ἐπικτύσας, δηῶσας δὲ καὶ κατερειπῶσας τὰ περίξ Ὀστροβοῦ καὶ Μολισκοῦ, ἔστη τοῦ προωτέρῳ ἰέναι. ἀπηγγέλη γὰρ αὐτῷ, ὡς ἡ μελετωμένη τῷ Κρακρά καὶ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ κατὰ Ῥωμαίων ἔφοδος ἐνεπίδισθη, τῶν Πατζινάκων μὴ δόντων συμμαχίαν αὐτοῖς; JOHN SKYLITZES, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, ed. et trans. J. WORTLEY, Cambridge 2010, p. 336, 337.

<sup>15</sup> Pernik, by virtue of its location on the upper Struma River, near the sensitive mountain passes of Stara Planina, was an important staging point on the old Roman *Via Militaris* from Sardica (Tra-ditza) to Adrianople. Its administrator presumably also monitored the defence of the eastern borderlands of the Komitopol state. See *PmbZ* no. 24188: *с.в. „Кракράс“*; Г.Н. НИКОЛОВ, *Централизъм и регионализъм в ранносредновековна България*, София 2005, p. 141–143, 163, 167–169; ИДЕМ, *Кракра – защитникът на Перник и неговата роля българската история началото на XI век*, [in:] *Кракра*, vol. I, ed. В. КРУМОВА, София–Перник 2020, p. 9–25; А. НИКОЛОВ, *Кракра – герой или колабационист?*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 51–58. About the defensive qualities of the Pernik fortress during the Komitopol era. See О. РАЧЕВ, *Средновековният Перник и Кракра*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 59–67.

inherited from his predecessors, and the possibility of one of his numerous sons marrying the daughter of one of the leaders of the Pechenegs cannot be ruled out. In the history of Bulgarian diplomacy, there was a tradition of such projects, such marriages<sup>16</sup>.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus <sup>17</sup>	John Skylitzes <sup>18</sup>
<p>The whole of Patzinacia is divided into eight provinces (θέματα) with the same number of great princes [...]. The eight provinces are divided into forty districts, and these have minor princelings over them. that is to say, lie beyond the Dnieper river towards the eastern and northern parts that face Uzia and Chazaria and Alania and Cherson and the rest of the Regions. The other four clans lie on this side of the Dnieper river, towards the western and northern parts, that is to say, that the province of Giazichopon is neighbour to Bulgaria,</p>	<p>The Patzinak people are Scythians belonging to the so-called “Royal Black-birds”. There are numerous and no other people of the Scyths is able to withstand them alone. They are divided into thirteen tribes (γενεαί), all of which share the same common name, but each tribe has its own name inherited from its own ancestor and chief. They graze on the plains that stretch beyond the Danube from the Borysthenon River to Pannonia, because they are nomads who always prefer to live in tents.</p>

<sup>16</sup> John Skylitzes wrote about the treasury in Ohrid, seized by Basil II in 1018, which consisted of, among other things, precious metals and coins. Quoted: IS, p. 359, 14–16. According to Patriarch Nicholas I the Mystic (912–925), Simeon the Great was to make a proposal of family affinity to the Pechenegs’ leaders. See *Nicolai I Constantinopolitani Patriarchae Epistoli*, no. 9, ed. I.G. WESTERINK, Washington 1981 [= *CFHB.SW*], p. 58, 111–112, p. 60, 1–3.

<sup>17</sup> *DAI*, p. 166, 15–19, p. 168, 39–49: Ἰστέον ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ Πατζινακία εἰς θέματα ὀκτώ διαιρεῖται, ἔχουσα καὶ μεγάλους ἄρχοντας τοσοῦτους. Τὰ δὲ ὀκτώ θέματα διαιροῦνται εἰς τεσσαράκοντα μέγρη, καὶ ἔχουσι καὶ ἐλάττους ἄρχοντας. p. 168, l. 39–49: Αἱ δὲ ἄλλαι τέσσαρες γενεαὶ κείνται ἔνθεν τοῦ Δανάπρεως ποταμοῦ πρὸς τὰ δυτικώτερα καὶ ἀρκτικώτερα μέρη, τουτέστιν τὸ θέμα Παζιχοπὸν πλησιάζει τῇ Βουλγαρίᾳ, τὸ δὲ θέμα τοῦ κάτω Γύλα πλησιάζει τῇ Τουρκίᾳ, τὸ δὲ θέμα τοῦ Χαραβόη πλησιάζει τῇ Ῥωσίᾳ, τὸ δὲ θέμα Ἰαβδιερτίμ πλησιάζει τοῖς ὑποφόροις χωρίοις τῆς Ῥωσίας, τοῖς τε Οὐλτινίοις καὶ Δερβλενίοις καὶ Λενζενίοις καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς Σκλάβοις. Ἀπώκισται δὲ ἡ Πατζινακία ἐκ μὲν Οὐζίας καὶ Χαζαρίας ὁδὸν ἡμερῶν πέντε, ἐκ δὲ Ἀλανίας ὁδὸν ἡμερῶν ἕξ, ἀπὸ δὲ Μορδίας ὁδὸν ἡμερῶν δέκα, ἀπὸ δὲ Ῥωσίας ὁδὸν ἡμερᾶς μίας, ἀπὸ δὲ Τουρκίας ὁδὸν ἡμερῶν τεσσάρων, ἀπὸ δὲ Βουλγαρίας ὁδὸν ἡμέρας τὸ ἡμισυ, καὶ εἰς Χερσῶνα μὲν ἔστιν ἔγγιστα, εἰς δὲ τὴν Βόσπορον πλησιέστερον.

<sup>18</sup> IS, p. 455, 32–39: Τὸ ἔθνος τῶν Πατζινακῶν Σκυθικὸν ὑπάρχον, ἀπο τῶν λεγομένων βασιλείων Σκυθῶν, μέγα τέ ἐστι καὶ πολυάνθρωπον, πρὸς ὃ οὐδὲ ἔν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ Σκυθικὸν γένος ἀντιστήναι δύναται. διήρηται δὲ εἰς τρικαίδεκα γενεάς, αἰτνες καλοῦνται μὲν πᾶσαι τῷ κοινῷ ὀνόματι, ἔχουσι δ’ ἐκάστη καὶ ἴδιον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑαυ τῆς προγόνου καὶ ἀρχηγοῦ τὴν προσηγορίαν κληρωσαμένη. νέμονται δὲ τὰς πέραν Ἰστρου ἀπὸ τοῦ Βορυσθένου ποταμοῦ καὶ μέχρι Παννονίας ἠπλωμένας πεδιάδας, νομάδες τε ὄντες καὶ τὸν σκηνίτην διὰ παντὸς ἀσπαζόμενοι βίον; JOHN SKYLITZES, *A Synopsis...*, p. 426–427.

<p>the province of Kato Gyla is neighbour to Turkey, the province of Charaboï is neighbour to Russia, and the province of Iabdiertim is neighbour to Russia, to the Oultines and Dervlenines and Lenzenines and the rest of the Slavs. Patzinacia is distant a five days journey from Uzia and Chazaria, a six days journey from Alania, a ten days journey from Mordia, one days journey of Russia, four days journey from Turkey, half a day's from Bulgaria; to Cherson its very near and to Bosphorus closer still.</p>	
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Under these circumstances, the combined forces of the Bulgarians and Pechenegs, invading eastern Thrace, could cut off the army of Basil II, which was then fighting in the western Balkans, from Constantinople. The successful attack by the allies had a chance of success, which could have deprived the Byzantines of their military initiative, noticeable after the defeat of the Bulgarians at Belasitsa in July 1014. In the end, the implementation of the planned alliance did not come to fruition, the Pechenegs gave up the attack on the Byzantines. Skylitzes does not specify whether this was due to the actions of the *strategos* Tzotzikios or of unidentified Byzantine diplomats. Bishop Michael of Devol, an interpolator to his chronicle, recording the deeds and images of the Komitopules, also remains silent on this subject. Less than a year later, after the events described, when John Vladislav died at the walls of Dyrrachion in February 1018, the Bulgarians soon capitulated.

Potentially, the alliance with the Pechenegs could have changed the course of the war between the Bulgarians and Byzantium, so there is a need to look at the circumstances of this bold project. Due to the internal diversity of the Pecheneg confederation, it remains important to establish more detailed information about the identity of Bulgaria's allies.

This factor may have played a role in the collapse of the project of John Vladislav and Krakras. We have two accounts by Byzantine authors that describe the residences of the Pechenegs and their political structures in the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The first is a fragment of *DAI* written before 959. The description of the Pecheneg land contained in it probably refers to the second quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The author of the second was John Skylitzes, who completed his chronicle probably after 1070. His account refers to the location of the Pechenegs before 1040. There are significant differences between the two sources regarding the location of the Pechenegs' lands, the number of their tribes, and their political structures. They were probably due to new circumstances caused by the migration of the Uzes,

the expansion of Rus' or civil wars among the Pechenegs. It is debatable which of these descriptions was closest to the real organization of "Patzinakia" in the years 1016–1017.

Some researchers suggest that the structure of the Pechenegs described by Constantine Porphyrogenitus changed quite quickly, possibly even at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The reason was the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate after the expeditions of Sviatoslav Igorevich after 965<sup>19</sup>. However, there is no direct confirmation that the changes also affected their western group, especially the tribes bordering Bulgaria. We have only a brief description of the Pecheneg country written at the beginning of the eleventh century. It is a letter of the German missionary – Brun of Querfurt written shortly before his death in 1009 and addressed to king Henry II (1002–1024). Brun, after his stay at the courts of the rulers of Hungary, Poland and Rus', went on a mission to the Pechenegs at the beginning of 1008. He stayed among them for five months (February–August), trying to convince them to adopt Christianity. In his letter, he informs the king about missionary successes in the Pecheneg land. For the needs of the proselytes, he ordained a bishop, and he also received good news about new Christians in three of the four parts of their country: *Qinque menses in eo populo stetimus, tres partes circuiuimus, quartam non tetigimus*<sup>20</sup>. Brun does not mention any of the lands of the Pechenegs by name, but according to his account, in 1008 it consisted of four parts (*partes*). This is confirmed by the earlier account of Constantine Porphyrogenetus, according to which the western half of "Patzinakia" was divided into parts he called "provinces (θέματα)": "Giazichopon (Γιαζιχοπόν)", "Kato Gylia (κάτω Γύλα)", "Charaboï (Χαραβόη)", "Iabtirtim (Ίαβδιερτίμ)". Brun managed to visit three of the "provinces/partes", certainly those that were adjacent to Rus' and Hungary, i.e. the first three from the list included in the *DAI*. He omitted the fourth "province", but did not explain the reasons, stating only that unspecified envoys of the leader (*de qua meliorum nuntii ad nos uenerunt*) had reached him from there<sup>21</sup>. It could have been in connection with missionary progress or a positive change in the circumstances of their implementation<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> See A. PAROŃ, *Pechenegs. Nomads in...*, p. 281–292, who even states that their previous system was "shattered" and they underwent a significant displacement.

<sup>20</sup> *Brunonis Querfurtensis Epistola ad Henricum regem*, ed. J. KARWASIŃSKA, [in:] *MPH*, s.n., vol. III–IV, Warszawa 1974 (cetera: BRUNO), p. 100, l.

<sup>21</sup> BRUNO, p. 100, 7.

<sup>22</sup> J. DUDEK, *List Brunona z Kwerfurtu do Henryka II i „De administrando imperio” (cap. 37) Konstantyna Porfyrogenety. Próba rekonstrukcji trasy misyjnej Brunona do kraju Pieczyngów*, [in:] *Bruno z Kwerfurtu. Osoba – dzieło – epoka*, ed. M. DYGO, W. FAŁKOWSKI, Pułtusk 2010, p. 241–254; IDEM, *Bruno of Querfurt's Mission to "Patzinacia" (1008). New Information about the Bulgarian-Byzantine War?*, *Bsl* 3, 2010, p. 47–57. Cf. A. PAROŃ, *Brunona z Kwerfurtu wyprawa do Pieczyngów – aspekty misyjne i polityczne*, *SA* 54, 2013, p. 98, fn. no. 1, p. 114, fn. 72; S. KOLDITZ, *Petschenegen-Kiptschaken-Tataren. Beobachtungen zu grieschischen un polnischen Quellennachrichten für die Geschichte der Slavia Asiatica*, [in:] *Geschichte der Slavia Asiatica. Quellenkundliche Probleme*, ed. Ch. LÜBKE, I. MIFTAKHOVA, W. VON SCHELICHA, Leipzig 2013, p. 179.

According to the author of *DAI*, the “province” bordering Bulgaria was called “Giazichopon”. What makes it difficult to interpret this account is determining what the border between the Bulgarians and the Pechenegs could have looked like in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Constantine Porphyrogenitus is not very consistent. In one of his descriptions, it appears to have ran at an unspecified distance north of the Danube delta; in the other, it clearly states that the “province of Giazichopon” bordered with the Bulgarian Dristra, i.e. along the river<sup>23</sup>. Despite these differences, it can be assumed that at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century there was still the “province of Giazipochon” adjacent to the lower Danube. Its northern borders have not been specified, but it can be assumed that in the west it ended at the height of Dristra, while in the east it probably reached the region called “Onglos”, and in the early modern era “Budjak/Budjak”. Both terms referred to the land located north of the Danube delta, surrounded by the currents of the lower Prut and Dniester<sup>24</sup>. The term “Giazichopon”, as researchers have been unanimously emphasising for almost a century, was of Turkish origin and presumably reflected the status of the group inhabiting it in the hierarchy of the Pecheneg community<sup>25</sup>.

Undertaking a large-scale war against Byzantium was beyond the military capabilities of one of the eight Pecheneg groups. The Bulgarians themselves certainly sought to use the combined forces of the steppe coalition partners in the conflict with Basil II. If the whole of “Patzinakia” could not be involved, then the tribes of the western part of the country were involved. Brun’s letter shows that the Pechenegs met at assemblies (*consilia*), in which, in addition to the nobles (*maiores terrae*), ordinary warriors (*maior populus*) also participated. They discussed relations with neighbours or matters related to various aspects of the life of their community<sup>26</sup>. The planned invasion across the Danube in 1017 could be presented to the participants of such a gathering of the four western tribes of “Patzinakia”. It remains an open question whether support for the Bulgarians and the start of the war against Basil II was accepted by such a gathering, or whether the Pecheneg leaders abandoned this project as a result of new, unforeseen events.

<sup>23</sup> *DAI*, p. 54, 5–7, p. 182, 20–21.

<sup>24</sup> A. PAROŃ, *Pechenegs. Nomads in...*, p. 250.

<sup>25</sup> K.H. MENGES, *Etymological notes on some Păcănăgs names*, B 17, 1944/1945, p. 266–267; Gy. MORAVCSIK, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. II, *Sprachreste der Türkvolker in den byzantinische Quellen*, Berlin 1983, p. 112–113 (truth. tur. forms – Yazıqapan, \*jazy Kapan, Qapan); S.A. ROMASHOV, *The Pechenegs in Europe in the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ROr 52.1, 1999, p. 26–27; P.B. GOLDEN, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples. Ethnogenesis and State Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*, Wiesbaden 1992, p. 266.

<sup>26</sup> BRUNO, p. 99, 16–19, p. 100, 1–5. At the end of the eleventh century, it was referred to as “comenton (κόμεντον)”. See Gy. MORAVCSIK, *Byzantinoturcica...*, p. 163. According to O. PRITSAK, *The Pečenegs. A Case of Social and Economic Transformation*, [in:] *Studies in Medieval Euroasian History (Variorum Reprints)*, London 1981, p. 13, 16–17, the place of such a gathering for the entire western “Patzynakia” was located in the area of the “province of Iabtiertim”. Cf. M. PARCZEWSKI, *Problem Lędzian a kształtowanie się polsko-ruskiej rubieży etnicznej*, [in:] *Civitas Schiginesghe cum pertinentiis*, ed. W. CHUDZIAK, Toruń 2003, p. 160–161, who located the place of such a gathering at the junction of the Podilia Upland and the Dnieper Upland. Cf. A. PAROŃ, *Pechenegs. Nomads in...*, p. 149–150.

### Reasons for the dissolution of the alliance in 1017

Skylitzes does not explain why the Pechenegs abandoned the expedition to Byzantine lands, although he does emphasise that in the aftermath Basil had more freedom to continue the war with the Bulgarians. The chronicler's information about the would-be alliance did not arouse much interest among historians. Most of them, probably due to the quick end of the war and the triumph of Basil II, pass over this event as a matter of course, possibly attributing the credit for the pacification of the Pechenegs to Dristra's *strategos* – Tzotzikios<sup>27</sup>. However, this seems unlikely, given that Byzantine rule over the lower Danube was not yet as secure as it would become in later years, during the reigns of Basil II's successors. Even the fortification of the border and the stationing of military garrisons there did not prevent attacks by the Pechenegs after 1026<sup>28</sup>. Rather, the argument in the form of internal conflicts in the Pechenegs confederation should be ruled out. Certainly, their tribal union was not strongly consolidated; it could have been exposed to friction, but reliable information about disputes among them, even taking the form of a civil war, falls on a later period<sup>29</sup>. Some scholars believe that this was caused by a covert operation of Byzantine diplomacy<sup>30</sup>. Hristo Dimitrov links the resignation of the Pechenegs to the expedition of the Byzantine fleet to the northern shores of the Black Sea in January 1016, although he does not explain this thread in more detail. A brief description of this event was included in the Skylitzes chronicle:

The Emperor returned to Constantinople in January AM 6524 and sent a fleet against Khazaria under the command of Mongos, son of Andronicus, prince of Lydos. In cooperation with Sphengos, Vladimir's brother and brother-in-law of the Emperor, he subdued the region and captured its archon, George Tzoule, in the first clash<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I.1, София 1971, p. 727; И. БОЖИЛОВ, В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *История на средновековна България VII–XIV век*, vol. I, София 1999, p. 328–329; P. DIACONU, *Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube*, Bucarest 1970, p. 39; В. ТЪПКОВА-ЗАИМОВА, *Долни Дунав – граничната зона византийския Запад. Към историята на северните и североизточните български земи, края X–XII в.*, София 1976, p. 55–56, 71; С. АНТОЛЈАК, *Самоиловата държава*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Средновековна Македонија*, vol. I, Скопје, 1985, p. 569; С. ПИРИВАТРИЊ, *Самуилова държава. Обим и карактер*, Београд 1997, p. 127; P. STEPHENSON, *The Balkan Borderland of Byzantium. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204*, Cambridge 2000, p. 81; Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения...*, p. 20–21; P.M. STRÄSSLE, *Krieg und Kriegführung in Byzantia. Die Kriege Kaiser Basileios II. gegen die Bulgaren (976–1019)*, Köln 2006, p. 82, 162–163, 465, who, if they comment on this event, limit themselves to mentioning the key role of the strategist Dristra, to whom they attribute the credit for the retreat of the Pechenegs.

<sup>28</sup> See P. STEPHENSON, *The Balkan Borderland...*, p. 82–89.

<sup>29</sup> A. PAROŃ, *Pechenegs. Nomads in...*, p. 322.

<sup>30</sup> P.M. STRÄSSLE, *Krieg und Kriegführung in Byzantia...*, p. 334: “etwa byzantinische Geheimdiplomatie?”

<sup>31</sup> IS, p. 354, 88–94: ‘Ο δὲ βασιλεὺς ἀπελθὼν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει, κατὰ τὸν Ἰαννοάριον μῆνα τοῦ ἐξακισχλιοστοῦ πεντακισιοστοῦ εἰκοστοῦ τετάρτου ἔτους, στόλον εἰς Χαζαρίαν ἐκπέμπει, ἔξαρχον

A sudden winter expedition to the northern shores of the Black Sea in alliance with the ruler of the Rus' was dictated by the situation in the land described by the chronicler as "Khazaria". For older generations of Byzantine chroniclers, the term Khazaria was associated with the territory of the vast Khazar Khaganate in Eastern Europe<sup>32</sup>. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the geographical location of Khazaria was no longer so clear, partly due to the disintegration of the territory of the former khaganate into enclaves located in its former south-western borderlands. The coasts of southern Crimea were known as "Khazaria" or "Gazaria" until the Ottoman era<sup>33</sup>. This is not the only option, as we also have evidence in the form of a certain Byzantine lead bull, which can be dated to an unspecified period after 1083, the issuer of which was supposed to be the archon "...of Matracha, Zichia and Khazaria". The first two geographical names referred to cities and lands located on the current Taman Peninsula or in its vicinity. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that the term "Khazaria/Gazaria" was used in a broader sense, in reference to the coasts of both peninsulas and their adjoining areas<sup>34</sup>. However, regardless of these nuances, and the inconsistency with the chronology of the Old Russian chronicles, it is clear from the record of Skylitzes that Mongos' ally during the expedition to Khazaria was the brother of the ruler of the Rus', and moreover, as a result, the local archon George Tzoula was imprisoned and deported to Constantinople. In the light of the preserved sphragistic materials, it appears that the Tzuoles family was connected with the Byzantine Crimea and maintained its influence in this region also

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έχοντα τὸν Μογγόν, υἱὸν Ἀνδρονίκου δουκὸς τοῦ Λυδοῦ καὶ τῆ σφεργία Σφέγγου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ Βλαδιμηροῦ, τοῦ γαμβροῦ τοῦ βασιλέως, ὑπέταξε τὴν χώραν, τοῦ ἀρχονος αὐτῆς Γεωργίου τοῦ Τζούλη ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ προσβολῇ συλληθέντος; JOHN SKYLITZES, *A Synopsis...*, p. 336. See Хр. ДИМИТРОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения...*, p. 242–243.

<sup>32</sup> J. DUDEK, *Bizantyńskie odkrywanie Chazarii (VII–XI w.)*, [in:] *Totius mundi philohistor. Studia Georgio Strzelczyk octuagenario oblata*, ed. M. DELIMATA-PROCH, A. KRAWIEC, J. KUJAWIŃSKI, Poznań 2021, p. 159–174.

<sup>33</sup> The term "imperio Gazarie" was officially used to describe the Genoese possessions on the northern coast of the Black Sea. See A.В. ДЖАНОВ, *Татаро-генуэские договоры 1380 и 1381 годов*, ЗО 8, 2020, p. 675–713; M. BALARD, *La Romanie génoise*, vol. I, Genowa 1978, p. 369–370; R. HRYSZKO, *Z Genui nad Morze Czarne. Z kart genueńskiej obecności gospodarczej na północno-zachodnich wybrzeżach Morza Czarnego u schyłku średniowiecza*, Kraków 2004, p. 13, 105–107; *История Крыма*, vol. I, ed. A.В. ЮРАСОВ, Москва 2018, p. 341.

<sup>34</sup> V. BULGAKOVA, *Byzantinische Bleisiegel in Osteuropa. Die Funde auf dem Territorium Altrussland*, Wiesbaden 2004, p. 238–241: Κ[ύρ]ιε βοήθει Μιχῆλ ἀρχοντ[ι] Matrάχ[ων], Ζιχίας καὶ πάσες Χαζαρί[ας]. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that in the Byzantine nomenclature the term "Kher-son" was used to describe the southern part of Crimea, which remained under the administrative control of Constantinople from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and which was formally reflected in the founding of Kherson in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century. In the case of the Taman Peninsula, a similar attempt was made (the planned creation of "Matracha" in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century), which, however, did not bring lasting results. For more information, see: С.А. РОМАШОВ, *Историческая география хазарского каганата (V–VIII вв.)*, ч. 5–7, АЕМА 14, 2005, p. 142–150; В.П. СТЕПАНЕНКО, *Еще раз о локализации Хазарии*, МАИАСТ 19, 2014, p. 368–378; В.Н. ЧХАИДЗЕ, *"Хазария" XI века: к вопросу о локализации (по данным византийских мотивдовулов)*, Москва 2016.

after the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>35</sup>. The situation is different on the Taman Peninsula, which has transformed into one of the domains of the Rurik family. An important city in the region – Tmutorakan (ant. Hermonassa) becomes the centre for the Rus' on the Black Sea. The Principality of Tmutorakan played an important role in the relations of the Rurik family with the world of the steppes and with Byzantium until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>36</sup>. This can be seen in the fate of the aforementioned archon “of Matracha, Zichia and Khazaria”, who turned out to be Oleg Sviatoslavovich, prince of Tmutorakan (1083–1093) and Chernihiv (1093–1115). He may have played the role of a key intermediary between the Byzantine Empire and the Cumans before the Battle of Mount Leunion (29 April, 1091), which resulted in the liberation of the Balkans from the Pechenegs' threat. The Byzantine victory would have been impossible without the military support of the Cumans, of which Togortak was one of the chiefs. According to some, he can be identified with Tugorkan, the chief of the Cumans, known in the old Russian tradition of chronicles<sup>37</sup>.

The biography of prince Oleg only partially resembles the fate of Georg Tzoula. When he first tried to take possession of Tmutorakan, he was deported to Byzantium, where he spent more than two years in captivity on the island of Rhodes (1080–1083). However, he was able to secure the favor of emperor Alexius I Komnenos (1081–1118) and returned to Tmutorakan, which he ruled afterwards unhindered for a whole decade. The Byzantine-Cumans alliance might have been more difficult without Oleg's connections<sup>38</sup>. The case of Georg Tzoula seems to be similar, although the consequences were the opposite. Basil II not only secured the Byzantine possessions in the north of the Black Sea. The alliance with Rus' was

<sup>35</sup> В.Н. ЧХАИДЗЕ, “Хазария” XI века..., p. 4–6.

<sup>36</sup> When the Mongols fleet sailed to “Khazaria” Vladimir the Great (†1015) had already been dead for almost half a year. Meanwhile, according to latopisarian tradition, Tmutorakan came under the rule of the Rurik family at an unspecified time before 991, after Basil II concluded an alliance with the Rus'. However, the first Rus' chieftains probably came to Tmutorakan as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century. See *Повесть временных лет*, AM 6496, vol. I, ed., trans. Д.С. ЛИХАЧЕВА, Б.А. РОМАНОВА, В.П. АДРИАНОВОЙ-ПЕРЕЦ, Москва–Ленинград 1950 (setera: PVL), p. 83; А.Л. МОНГАЙТ, *О границах тмутороканского княжества в XI века*, [in:] *Проблемы общественно-политической истории России и славянских стран. Сборник статей к 70-летию академика М.Н. Тихомирова*, Москва 1963, p. 54–61; J. SHEPARD, *Closer Encounters with the Byzantine World. The Rus at the Straits of Kerch*, [in:] *Pre-Modern Russia and its World. Essays in Honor of Thomas S. Noonan*, ed. K.L. REYERSON, Th.G. STARVROU, J.D. TRACY, Wiesbaden 2006, p. 16–77.

<sup>37</sup> *Anna Komnena Alexias*, VIII, 4, ed. D.R. REINSCH, A. КАМВЫЛИС, Berlin 2001 [= *CFHB.SBe*], p. 243, 38; PVL, AM 6602, 6604, p. 143, 145. Cf. АННА КОМНИНА, *Алексиада*, trans., comm. Я.Н. ЛЮБАРСКОГО, Москва 1965, p. 541, footnote no 835; Gy. MORAVCSIK, *Byzantinoturcica...*, p. 181, 316; E. MALAMUT, *L'image byzantine des Petchénègues...*; M. ANGOLD, *The Byzantine Empire 1025–1204*, London–New York 1984, p. 110–111.

<sup>38</sup> See J. DUDEK, *Prince Oleg-Michael Sviatoslavovich in the Byzantine Captivity, 1079–1083. A Few Remarks on the Pontic Policy of the Byzantine Empire in the Second Half of the Eleventh Century*, [in:] *Byzantine et Slavica Cracoviensia*, vol. V..., p. 201–209.

maintained and strengthened, which threatened the group of tribes of the western “Patzinakia” and forced their leaders to abandon their plans to provide military assistance to the Bulgarians. In these circumstances, the Komitopules were losing the support of their last serious ally.

Theoretically, the cases of Georg Tzoulas and Oleg-Michael can be treated as a model implementation of the counsels contained in the *DAI* on how to reduce the threat from Byzantium’s dangerous neighbours. In 1017, the Bulgarians were in a position, and they were later replaced in this role by the Pechenegs. Limited military operations on the northern shores of the Black Sea were sufficient for the implementation of these projects, but intensified diplomacy was the best result. This may give rise to the belief in the omnipotent influence of Byzantine diplomacy on the barbarian peoples of Eastern Europe, which, however, is wishful thinking<sup>39</sup>. We have no evidence that Basil II or Alexius I Komnenos followed the instructions taken from *DAI*. Although there is evidence of a possible reception of the text by one of the eleventh-century emperors, the vast majority of Byzantine rulers limited themselves to ad hoc reactions to threats from this geographical direction<sup>40</sup>. It cannot be ruled out that the problem of the Pechenegs’ participation in the war with Basil II was solved without the active participation of Byzantine diplomats.

Some researchers, trying to determine the reason for the abandonment of allies by the Pechenegs, drew attention to other potential external circumstances. Vladislav Ivanov, in his article on the role of nomads in the Balkans at that time, briefly referred to the potential reason for the Pechenegs’ refusal to support the Bulgarians. It could have been involvement in the struggle for the throne of Kiev after the death of Vladimir the Great in 1015. The Pechenegs were allies of his eldest son Svatopolk, who was expelled from Kiev by Yaroslav the Wise, aided by Scandinavian mercenaries<sup>41</sup>. In addition to the steppes, his father-in-law, Polish ruler Bolesław the Brave (992–1025), was also involved in the civil war in Rus’, who, m.in, with the support of the Pechenegs, reintroduced Svatopolk to Kiev in the summer of 1018. In connection with this expedition, Thietmar of Merseburg wrote about the extraordinary message that Bolesław was to send to Basil II at that time. He declared his goodwill towards him, but if the emperor did not wish to be his friend, then Bolesław would be his determined enemy:

<sup>39</sup> A. PAROŃ, *Śmierć księcia Światosława Igorewicza a mit wszechmocnej dyplomacji bizantyńskiej*, [in:] *Historicae viae. Studia dedykowane Profesorowi Lechowi A. Tyszkiewiczowi z okazji 55-lecia pracy naukowej*, ed. M. GOLIŃSKI, S. ROSIK, Wrocław 2012, p. 151–165.

<sup>40</sup> One of the oldest of the few surviving manuscripts of the text (*codex Parissinus 2009*) was intended for the young emperor Michael VII Dukas (1071–1077). See *DAI*, Gy. MORAVCSIK, *Introduction*, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> V. IVANOV, *Eurasian Nomads and the Balkans in the Early 1000s.*, [in:] *1000-godišnjica svetog Jovana Vladimir. Zbornik radova sa naučne konferencije 21. Oktobar 2016. godine*, ed. Đ. BOROZAN, Podgorica 2017, p. 65–75, especially 73–74.

Ad Greciam quoque sibi proximam nuncios misiit, qui eiusdem imperatori bona, si vellet fidelis amicus haberi, promitterent; sin autem, hostem firmissimum ac invincibilem fieri intiment<sup>42</sup>.

No Byzantine source confirms the arrival of Polish envoys to the Bosphorus. In the summer months of 1018, the emperor stayed in the western Balkans, taking over power over successive centres of capitulating Bulgaria. He returned to the capital only in 1019, while Bolesław the Brave quickly left Kiev. Thietmar († 1 December 1018) died before he had time to write about when the embassy returned to Poland and what the result of the mission was. However, due to the high credibility of the chronicler, his information cannot be ruled out as fictitious<sup>43</sup>. The message of the bishop of Merseburg inspired a discussion in the circles of Polish historians, but none of them suggested a more serious role of the Pechenegs in the implementation of the threat of the Polish ruler<sup>44</sup>. However, it cannot be ruled out that the Pechenegs were one of the elements of Bolesław's potential pressure on Constantinople. The missionary expedition of Bruno could have strengthened the contacts of the Polish ruler with the chiefs of the western "Patzinakia" or at least provided Bolesław with specific information about the military capabilities of the steppes. According to Thietmar, at least twice, in 1013 and 1018. Bolesław concluded an alliance with the Pechenegs, directed against the rulers of Kiev, who were hostile to him<sup>45</sup>. The civil war for the succession to Vladimir the Great absorbed the Pechenegs, either as a threat or as a prospect for easier conquests than the expedition against Basil II. Therefore, it could be a reason to give up the alliance with the Bulgarians.

<sup>42</sup> THIETMAR, VIII, 33, p. 531–532.

<sup>43</sup> G. PRINZING, *Polens Byzantinische Aspekte der mittelalterlichen Geschichte*, B 64.2, 1994, p. 463–465; IDEM, *Bizantyjskie aspekty średniowiecznej historii Polski*, Poznań 1994, p. 10–11.

<sup>44</sup> Most of them, such as O. HALECKI, *Le Pologne et l'Empire Byzantine*, B 7, 1937, p. 41–67, especially 44–46; A.F. GRABSKI, *Bolesław Chrobry. Zarys dziejów politycznych i wojskowych*, Warszawa 1966, p. 266–271; K. KOLLINGER, *Polityka wschodnia Bolesława Chrobrego (992–1025)*, Wrocław 2014, p. 211–226 suggest that the legation was a manifestation of the prestige of the Polish ruler or emphasising his influence on the migration of Varangian mercenaries to Byzantium as a result of the invasion of Kiev. On the other hand, M. SALAMON ("Amicus" or "hostis": *Bolesław the Valiant and Byzantium*, Bsl 54.1, 1993, p. 114–120) presented the hypothesis that it was an attempt by Bolesław to establish contacts with Byzantium as a result of the rapprochement of the spheres of influence of both countries in 1018.

<sup>45</sup> THIETMAR, VI, 91; VIII, 32, p. 382, 32–35; p. 530, 6–9. See: S. KOLDITZ, *Petschenegen-Kiptschaken-Tataren...*, p. 179–180.

## **Conclusions**

Bearing in mind these circumstances, it should be taken into account that the rulers of Bulgaria in the years 976–1018 had to take into account the military potential of the steppes from Eastern Europe in their political projects or current calculations. Therefore, it would be a difficult fact to explain that the Hungarians and Pechenegs should not be counted as potential allies in the deadly struggle against Byzantium.

The relatively short history of the Komitopules monarchy does not facilitate research on its contacts with the Pontic steppes. The main political goal of Samuel and his successors was to liberate themselves from Byzantine domination and oppose its oppression. Not only were the military resources of the reborn state used for this purpose, but also its diplomacy was directed towards the search for new allies. In contrast to the descriptions of the war struggles in the years 976–1018, we have only fragmentary knowledge about the search for external allies by the Komitopules. Byzantine authors, such as the chronicler John Skylitzes, although they did not spare descriptions of various details of emperor Basil II's numerous Balkan military campaigns, were reticent when it came to discussing the enemy's alliances.

They presented the context of the long and difficult war with the Bulgarians from their own perspective, and they wrote about the contacts of their enemies with other peoples or states when they were related to current events. Other Armenian, Hungarian, German or Old Russian authors did not pay much attention to the Komitopules either. With the exception of Dukla, Bulgaria was distant from their countries, and relations with its rulers at the time were episodic. Besides, even in the case of the chronicle of the archbishops of Bar, the memory of the lords of Prespa was preserved because of their connection with St. John Vladimir. However, the sparse surviving information allows us to conclude that the Komitopules, confronted with powerful Byzantium, were looking for contacts with neighbouring peoples that were to improve their difficult situation. They were not only brave commanders, but they also looked for allies with determination.

*Translated by Piotr Dudek*

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