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Studia Ceranea : journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe 1, 55-70

2011

Studia Ceranea 1, 2011, p. 55-70

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The discussion presented herein should begin by explaining the title it was given: who is the figure termed 'the Monk' and to whom does the title of 'the Philosopher' refer? This is not, of course, a particularly puzzling mystery; nevertheless, an explanation is in order in this case. The Monk is, of course, Symeon, the Bulgarian ruler (893–927), while the Philosopher is the Byzantine emperor Leo VI (886–912), who went down in history under this cognomen. Sometimes, he is attributed the moniker of the Wise. Thus, the discussion shall be devoted to the clash between these two men, and not the confrontation the world of knowledge with the world of faith. Both rulers were deeply religious and in equal measure, as one might assume, gifted with something that should be called *sophia* – wisdom. Firstly, however, I would like to explain myself as regards one more thing, namely, the expression "from the history of war". I have to disappoint those of my readers who reached for the text hoping to learn the course of the war between Bulgaria and Byzantium in the years 894–896, that they would be told about the issues of organization, armament and tactics of both armies. No. Such knowledge is not to be found in this paper. However, this does not mean that military issues are to be absent entirely. No. It will not be so, either. I will present the outcome of the war, but only to the extent that I will need it in order to present a matter which lies at the heart of my argument, namely, how Symeon and Leo the Philosopher looked at this war, what place it took in their life experiences, and, finally, how it was inscribed in the concept of relations between countries whose inhabitants follow the same religion.

In the case of the Bulgarian-Byzantine war of 894–896, we are in a very fortunate position, as the main characters this paper describes spoke about it, and – what is particularly important – some of their writings on the subject survived. Although these are not long texts, still, they provide a unique source when it comes to issues of Bulgarian-Byzantine relations. Leo VI devoted some of his thoughts to it, which he included in his work entitled *Tactica*[1], constituting a military manual,

[1] *The Tactica of Leo VI*, ed. et trans. G.T. Dennis, Washington 2010 (cetera: *Tactica*).

while Symeon left behind three letters[2] written at the time of warfare. I will return to these two sources later in the text.

Here, I shall briefly present the fate of my heroes until the moment when they had to wage war against each other.

**The Monk**. Symeon was the third son of Boris-Michael. He was born around the mid-860s.[3] As a teenager, was sent by his father to Constantinople, where, for about 10 years, he studied, while at the same time securing peaceful relations between Byzantium and Bulgaria, which had already been Christian but still remained uncertain and dangerous. Staying in the capital of the Byzantine Empire had undoubtedly a strong influence on the mentality of the future tsar. Not only did he receive a traditional classical education[4], which made him half-Greek, as Liudprand of Cremona wrote[5], he also had a chance to look at the life of Constantinople[6], the city which was the embodiment of the power of the Empire, and the conquest of which became his chief purpose, once he became the ruler of Bulgaria.

Symeon, while in the Byzantine capital, took religious vows – in fact, he was preparing for a career as a man of the Church. His father, it seems, saw him as the future head of the Bulgarian Church[7], for the independence of which he had been fighting so fiercely; the rule of the country was meant for Vladimir, Symeon's older brother. It should be noted that Symeon was well versed in theological matters. He broadened his expertise in this field also after returning to the country, which occurred in the late 880s. He settled then, as it is believed, in the monastery of St. Panteleimon at Preslav[8]. In 889, Boris-Michael resigned and handed the rule to Vladimir, but he betrayed his father by promoting paganism and pro-German foreign policy[9]. In that situation, in 893, Boris-Michael left the

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[2] *Léon Choerosphactès, magistre, proconsul et patrice. Biographie – corrèspondance,* ed. et trans. G. KOLIAS, Athen 1939 (cetera: Leo CHOIROSPHACTES, *Ep.*). Letters from Symeon to Leo: 1, p. 77; 3, p. 79; 5, p. 81.

[3] It probably took place between 863 and 865 – И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Цар Симеон Велики (893–927): Златният век на Средновековна България*, София 1983, p. 33.

[4] More on the subject of Symeon and his fate until 893 – *ibidem*, p. 34–36; Х. ТРЕНДАФИЛОВ, *Младостта на цар Симеон*, София 2010, p. 10–49.

[5] LIUDPRAND, *Antapodosis*, III, 29 (*Die Werke Liudprands von Cremona*, ed. J. BECKER, Hannover–Leipzig 1915).

[6] More on the subject of Symeon's probable experiences during his stay in Constantinople – A. ILIEVA, T. TOMOV, *The Shape of the Market: Mapping the Book of the Eparch*, BMGS 22, 1998, p. 105–116.

[7] J.V.A. FINE, *Early Medieval Balkans: a Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor 1983, p. 132; С. РЪНСИМАН, *История на първото българско царство*, trans. М. Пипева, София 1993, p. 115.

[8] J.V.A. FINE, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[9] More on the subject of Rasate-Vladimir's rule and his fall – В. Гюзелев, *Княз Борис Първи*, Со-

monastery to which he had gone after his abdication and removed his son from the throne. Symeon was proclaimed the new ruler of Bulgaria.

Interestingly, although this is rarely – if ever – mentioned in this context, Symeon's abandonment of his monastic life was not met with universal approval. We have evidence of the criticism of this move. In the Slavic translation of John Moschus' *Limonarion*, dating from the turn of the ninth and tenth century, we read: (...) *glory and great fame to the tsar who resigns* [of power] *and becomes a monk* (...) *Indeed, and great shame and disgrace to a monk who leaves the cowl and becomes a tsar.*[10]

Indisputably, the seizure of the throne must have been a shock for him. His past life up to that point had not predestined him to take such a challenge. It seemed that he had been destined for a career as the clergyman and a scholar, for which he had been exceptionally well prepared and showed a great ability. In the Old Bulgarian literature, Symeon is compared to Ptolemy II (285–246), the founder of the Alexandrian library, and king David, a lover of art and literature[11]. In his circle there were such writers of the Old Bulgarian culture as Clement of Ohrid, Naum, Constantine of Preslav or John the Exarch.

**The Philosopher**. Leo VI was born on September 19th, 866[12]. He was the second son of Basil I. He was associated on the throne on July 30th, 870. The successor of his father was to be Constantine, it was not until his death in 879 that Leo was made Basil's successor. He began his independent rule on July 30th, 886. Leo received excellent education and demonstrated a predisposition for scholarly work. He was referred to as 'the wise' (*sophós*), he was a prolific writer and an erudite, but as it was also thought that he had the gift of prediction and prophecy. It is worth noting that he was compared to king Solomon[13].

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фия 1969, p. 459–470; Е. Александров, *Интронизирането на княз Симеон – 893 г.*, Pbg 15.3, 1991, p. 10–17; Х. Трендафилов, *Детронизацията на Владимир-Расате в плана на формата*, [in:] *Литература и култура*, София 1992, p. 84–93; И.Г. Илиев, *Управлението на княз Расате (Владимир) (889–893). Един неуспешен опит за европейска преорентация във външната политика на България*, [in:] *Средновековна християнска Европа: Изток и Запад. Ценности, традиции, общуване*, ed. В. Гюзелев, А. Милтенова, София 2002, p. 407–410.

[10] After: А. Николов, *Политическа мисъл в ранносредновековна България (средата на IX – края на X век)*, София 2006, p. 121. Although Symeon was no longer a monk, as a ruler he still kept simple and abstemious life to which he was used while living in the monastery.

[11] Р. Рашев, *Отношението на преславските книжовници към бойните подвизи на цар Симеон*, [in:] idem, *Цар Симеон. Щрихи към личността и делото му*, София 2007, p. 42–51; more on the subject of Symeon's library: Н. Гагова, *Владатели и книги. Участието на южнославянския владетел в производството и употребата на книги през Средновековието (IX–XV в.): рецепцията на византийския модел*, София 2010, p. 40–79.

[12] More on the subject of the fate of Leo VI until his confrontation with Symeon – S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912). Politics and People*, Leiden–New York–Köln 1997, p. 42sq.

[13] C. Mango, *The Legend of Leo the Wise*, ЗРВИ 6, 1960, p. 59–93; S. Tougher, *The wisdom of Leo*

He wrote sermons and speeches. He was a hymnographer. He wrote, among other works, the hymn sung at the procession during which the relics of St. Lazarus were transferred to Hagia Sophia. He is the author of a military manual, *Tactica*. His influence is visible in the legislation. He also completed the work on the *Basilica* and new laws were included in the *Novels*[14]. It was in his time that the final version of *The Book of the Eparch* was completed[15].

As may be gathered from the above arguments, my heroes had a lot in common: starting from their age, through education, intellectual ability, but also the fact that originally they had not been intended to inherit the throne.

**The causes of the war**. Boris-Michael had to recognize that Symeon was a good candidate for an executor of his political program. However, in a relatively short time after obtaining approval for his ascension from the assembly of Church officials and lay lords (the so-called Council of Preslav)[16], Symeon decided on a military confrontation with the Byzantine Empire. What were the reasons? Apparently, the answer is simple, and was presented most clearly it in the work functioning as *Theophanes Continuatus*:

A message came that Symeon, the archon of Bulgaria, will go up in arms against the *Romaioi*, with the following excuse (*próphasin*) to fight. Basileopator Zaoutzes had a eunuch, a slave named Musikos. He became friends with merchants, greedy for profit and money, coming from Hellas, named Staurakios and Kosmas. It was them, eager to benefit from trading with Bulgarians, that moved its place, through Musikos, from the capital to Thessalonica, and encumbered Bulgarians with [higher] taxes. When Bulgarians told Symeon about that, he presented the issue to the Emperor Leo. He, succumbing to the influence of Zaoutzes,

*VI*, [in:] *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries. Papers from the Twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews, March 1992*, ed. P. MAGDALINO, Aldershot–Brookfield 1994, p. 171–179; IDEM, *The Reign...*, p. 110sq; IDEM, *The imperial thought-world of Leo VI, the non-campaigning emperor of the ninth century*, [in:] *Byzantium in the Ninth Century. Dead or Alive*, ed. L. BRUBAKER, London 1998, p. 51–60; Д. ШЕПЪРД, *Владетел като учител, свещенник и мъдрец: византийският император Лъв VI и българският цар Симеон*, [in:] IDEM, *Неспокойни съседи. Българо-византийска конфронтация, обмен и съжителство през средните векове*, trans. Л. Генова, София 2007, p. 71sq.

[14] G. OSTROGORSKI, *Dzieje Bizancjum*, trans. H. EVERT-KAPPESOWA et al., Warszawa 1968, p. 194.

[15] K. ILSKI, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Księga eparcha*, trans. et com. A. KOTŁOWSKA, Poznań 2010, p. 7.

[16] The event usually dated to the year 893. Recently, the issue has been addressed by: A. КАЛОЯНОВ, *Преславският събор през 893 година – от предположенията към фактите за едно от най-значимите събития в историята на християнска Европа*, [in:] *Християнската идея в историята и културата на Европа*, София 2001, p. 101–113; IDEM, *Славянската православна цивилизация. Началото: 28 март 894 г., Плиска*, Велико Търново 2007, p. 54sqq (the author dates the Council to 894) and M. СПАСОВА, *На коя дата и през кой месец се е провел Преславският събор от 893 година*, [in:] ПКШ, vol. VIII, Шумен 2005, p. 84–101 (who disagrees with A. Kalojanov's arguments and dates the beginning of the Council to February 893).

considered this to be nonsense. Thus, a frenzied Symeon took up arms and went against the *Romaioi*[17].

This text, which is, to a large extent, repeated in other sources[18], led scholars to conclude that the war between Bulgaria and Byzantium was primarily based on economy. Hence, some called it the first economic war in the history of medieval Europe. But was the very fact of moving the Bulgarian market from Constantinople to Thessalonica and introducing higher fees for Bulgarian goods so important that the Bulgarian ruler risked military conflict with his powerful eastern neighbour? Scholars usually agreed as to the fact that the move of Leo VI decidedly worsened the conditions for the Bulgarian merchants conducting trade with Byzantium. This was expressed on the one hand in raising its costs and not only due to the newly introduced fees, but also because of the increasing of the distance from the Danube Bulgaria to the new market in Thessalonica. Not only the route followed by merchants was longer, it also became more dangerous[19]. It would not, therefore, be surprising that they would turn to Symeon to defend their interests.

New light on the issue of the Bulgarian trade in Thessalonica was shed by two Greek scholars: Nikolaos Oikonomides[20] and Joannes Karayannopoulos[21]. The former believed that only a portion of trade was moved to Thessalonica, where high fees were applied to it. The latter, in turn, thought that the Bulgarian merchants were not moved from Constantinople to Thessalonica but excluded from among other merchants and charged with higher fees. Both scholars emphasize, therefore, not so much the issue of transferring the Bulgarian markets

[17] Theophanes Continuatus, VI, 9, ed. B.G. Niebuhr, rec. I. Bekker, Bonnae 1838 (cetera: Theoph. Cont.).

[18] *Leonis Grammatici Chronographia*, rec. I. Bekker, Bonnae 1842, p. 266–268 (it places greater emphasis than *Theoph. Cont.* on the greed of Byzantine merchants, who wanted to get rich at the expense of Bulgarians); *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, 133, 15, rec. S. Wahlgren, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2006, p. 275. Cf. *Tactica*, XVIII, 42; *Annales Fuldenses*, ed. G. Pertz, [in:] MGH.SS, vol. I, p. 412. The last two accounts suggest that the reason for the outbreak of the war was the Byzantine-Hungarian alliance. More on the subject of these indications and problems with interpretation thereof – J. Howard-Johnston, *Byzantium, Bulgaria and the Peoples of Ukraine in the 890s.*, [in:] *Материалы по археологии, истории и этнографии Таврии*, vol. VII, ed. А.Й. Айбабин, Симферополь 2000, p. 348, 350–353.

[19] Г. Цанкова-Петкова, *Първата война между България и Византия при цар Симеон и възстановяването на българската търговия с Цариград*, ИИИ 20, 1968, p. 174. These arguments are only valid if the Bulgarian merchants were indeed banned from Constantinople.

[20] N. Oikonomides, *Le kommerkion d'Abydos, Thessalonique et la commerce bulgare au IX^e siècle*, [in:] *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin*, t. II, *VIII^e –XV^e siècle*, ed. V. Kravati, J. Lefort, C. Morrisson, Paris 1991, p. 246–247 [= Réalités byzantines, 3].

[21] J. Karayannopoulos, *Les causes des luttes entre Syméon et Byzance: Un réexamin*, [in:] *Сборник в чест на акад. Димитър Ангелов*, ed. В. Велков, София 1994, p. 58–60.

from Constantinople to Thessalonica, but charging the Bulgarian merchants with high fees.

An important question is: when did the change of the position of Bulgarian merchants in Byzantium occur? Some scholars situate this event in the year 893 or even the 894. G. Cankova-Petkova dated it as early as 889[22], which she associated with the proclamation of Stylianos Zaoutzes, discussed in the above-mentioned *Theophanes Continuatus*, a Basileopator. However, this event, in the light of research by R.J.H. Jenkins, should be dated in August 891[23]. T. Wasilewski, bearing in mind R.J.H. Jenkins' research, opted for the year 892 as the date Leo VI introduced disadvantageous decisions against Bulgarian trade[24]. The outcome of research by scholars mentioned above lead to important conclusion that the issue of the worsening of the position of Bulgarian merchants occurred in Byzantium during the reign of Vladimir-Rasate – and Symeon inherited it from his predecessor.

Scholars are also not in agreement as to what led Leo VI, following the promptings of his advisers (assuming the reliability of sources). There are several standpoints that can be listed. Firstly, the emperor's decision should be understood as a repression against Bulgarians, which was, according to some, a response to Vladimir's anti-Byzantine policy or, as others claim, a reaction to the elimination of the Greek language and priests from the Church of Bulgaria[25]. Symbolic expression of the latter process would be making, by the decision of the Council of Preslav of 893, the Slavonic language the language of both the state and the Bulgarian Church[26]. The second viewpoint places the move of Leo VI in the sphere of his economic policy, one aspect of which was promoting the development of Byzantine trade, not only in the largest of its centers – Constantinople[27].

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[22] Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

[23] R.J.H. JENKINS, *The chronological accuracy of the „Logothete" for the years A.D. 867–913*, DOP 19, 1965, p. 104.

[24] T. WASILEWSKI, *Bizancjum i Słowianie w IX wieku. Studia z dziejów stosunków politycznych i kulturalnych,* Warszawa 1972, p. 223. The author believed that the war began before 17 May 893, although military action was taken in the spring of 894 (in this respect, the Polish researcher follows the findings of – among others – Г. Цанкова-Петкова, *op. cit.*, p. 178).

[25] E.g. В. ВАЧКОВА, *Симеон Велики – пътят към короната на Запада*, София 2005, p. 53–54. Proponents of this view place Leo's VI decision on the Bulgarian trade in time of the rule of Symeon.

[26] The belief that the Council of Preslav of 893 made the decision to make the Slavic language "official", despite the lack of serious source grounds, is strongly present in scholarship. Arguments denying the validity of this view – T. WASILEWSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 212; J. KARAYANNOPOULOS, *op. cit.*, p. 54. Proponents of this view inevitably date the "mercantile affair" to the year 893. See also the discussion by A. НИКОЛОВ (*op. cit.*, p. 115–123) devoted to the basic issues addressed at the Council – the authorization of the elevation of Symeon.

[27] Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *op. cit.*, p. 172–174; cf. J. KARAYANNOPULOS, *op. cit.*, p. 54sqq.

Proponents of the third perspective follow the letter of the source quoted above, explaining the actions of Leo by his susceptibility to environmental influences.

Byzantium' one-sided decision to introduce new conditions of trade[28], which had not been approved by the Bulgarians, had to provoke a response from Symeon. It seems that he was not interested settling these issues by force, since he had undertaken negotiations with Byzantium[29]. The unyielding attitude of the Byzantines was what finally pushed him to take military action. However, was the decision to go to war merely a consequence of the desire to protect the interests of Bulgarian merchants? In general, answer to this question is provided in the source cited above. An anonymous author wrote very clearly that the issue of the merchants was only a πρόφασιν – a pretext for Symeon to take action. The Bulgarian ruler was provoked by the Byzantines to take military action because they, without any prior discussion, had imposed unfavorable business conditions on the Bulgarian merchants and not wanting to withdraw this decision, compromised the authority of the Bulgarian ruler. Symeon, being at the beginning of his rule, could not afford to leave this matter unattended. He had to demonstrate that he was a strong ruler, capable of defending interests of his subjects and the independence of his own state. Some scholars believe, however, probably overly modernizing the issue, that Symeon wanted to show his subjects clearly that despite his strong ties with Byzantium and the aura of a return to good neighbourly relations with it, he was not a Byzantine nominee[30]. The proponents of the view that the Byzantines reluctantly, if not even with overt hostility, looked at the development of the Bulgarian Church independent of Constantinople and the dynamic growth of Slavic literary culture, show Symeon's strong reaction as a desire to defend the nascent Bulgarian Slav identity[31].

Whatever the personal motives of Symeon's decision to undertake military operations, it seems that he was forced to it by the unyielding attitude of the Byzantines. What was its cause? It seems that Leo VI did not appreciate the new Bulgarian ruler, thinking that at the beginning of the rule, he would not take on

[28] Some scholars believed that Leo's move broke the rules of the peace treaty between Bulgaria and Byzantium. The problem is, however, that we do not know of any regulation of Byzantine-Bulgarian relations, in which Constantinople would be indicated as the only place in Bulgarian-Byzantine trade (J. KAYANNOPOULOS, *op. cit.*, p. 54).

[29] Some scholars believe that Symeon had not exhausted all possibilities of a peaceful settlement of the dispute (M. WHITTOW, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1996, p. 286; P. РАШЕВ, *Цар Симеон*, [in:] IDEM, *Цар Симеон. Щрихи...*, p. 52–53; see also S. TOUGHER, *The Reign...*, p. 173–174), thereby suggesting that the Bulgarian ruler for some reason pushed for war. It is impossible to accept the view of J. KARAYANNOPULOS (*op. cit.*, p. 61) that Symeon, from the beginning of his rule sought *la création d'un «Saint Empire de la Nation Bulgare» avec pour capitale la Nouvelle Rome* and sought a pretext to launch a war with Byzantium.

[30] J. SHEPARD, *Symeon of Bulgaria-Peacemaker*, ГСУ.НЦСВПИД 83.3, 1989, p. 16.

[31] В. ВАЧКОВА, *op. cit.*, p. 31–33, 54.

such a risky solution as war. The emperor certainly knew that Symeon was not prepared by Boris-Michael to the role of the ruler, which was most clearly evidenced by the fact that even while in the Byzantine capital, he became a monk. After returning from Constantinople, he stayed in the monastery and was not involved in the court life. Leo could believe that the recent monk would not willingly go to war with the Empire because of something which, from the perspective of Constantinople, was a relatively trivial issue.

**The war**. After Leo's negative reaction to the request made by Symeon, the Bulgarian ruler marched with his army against the Byzantines[32]. Against him, Leo sent an army under the command of stratelates Procopios Krinites. The confrontation took place in eastern Thrace, which then was a part of Macedonia. The Byzantines were defeated. The expedition leader was killed along with many soldiers. There is no basis for determining losses. It seems that the Bulgarians were also decimated in this battle and consequently they returned to their own territory. In the context of this Byzantine-Bulgarian clash, an episode appears which shows Symeon in a seemingly surprising light. According to some Byzantine sources, Khazars, who were a unit of the palace guard, fell into the hands of Symeon. Some of them died during the battle and some, at the behest of the Bulgarian ruler, had their noses cut off and were sent to Constantinople[33]. This act of cruelty was probably calculated to discourage the Byzantines from further acts of war and starting negotiations. This also indicated that the former monk would act firmly and would not hesitate to use even such drastic methods, which were far from the ideals of Christianity. On the other hand, one could say that Symeon showed some leniency because the Khazars' lives were spared. There is one more important element, namely the action was taken against Khazars and not against Christians – Byzantines. Symeon did not want to offend the Byzantines' pride and excluded from his "surgical" actions his brothers in faith. If Symeon believed that he would exert pressure on the Byzantines and force them to make peace, he made a mistake. Let us once again listen to the author of *Theophanes Continuatus*: *The Emperor, when he saw them, he angrily sent Nicetas called Skleros to the Danube with dromons to gain the favor of the Turks with gifts in order to fight Symeon*[34].

Nicetas Skleros persuaded Arpad and Kusan, the Magyar chieftains (they are disguised under the name of *Turks*) to invaded Bulgaria. Hungarians were to be transported to the north-east Bulgaria using the Byzantine fleet, while from

[32] More on the subject of the course of war – Г. Цанкова-Петкова, *op. cit.*, p. 178sq; T. Wasilewski, *op. cit.*, p. 223–226; И. Божилов, *op. cit.*, p. 88–94; Д. Ангелов, С. Кашев, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна история от Античността до втората четвърт на X в.*, София 1983, p. 255–263.

[33] Even the Khazars of the Emperor Leo's heteria squad were taken captive by Symeon, he had their noses cut off to disgrace the Romaioi and sent them to the capital – Theoph. Cont., VI, 9.

[34] Theoph. Cont., VI, 9.

the south the campaign was to be taken by the ground forces of the Byzantines.

The question of the use of Hungarians against the Bulgarians was a problem for the Byzantines. Magyars were heathens. Pitching them against the Christian Bulgarians, Byzantines' brothers in faith, was a move that at first glance was difficult to justify. And it was this very matter that Leo VI addressed, finding justification for this step. In his military treaty *Tactics*, the emperor referred to the issue of using the pagan Magyars to fight the Bulgarians. He decided that spilling Christian blood is undoubtedly wrong but thanks to the Divine Providence which sent pagan allies of Byzantium against the Bulgarians who broke the peace, the *Romaioi* did not defile themselves voluntarily with the blood of their brethren in the faith[35]. The emperor – who was aware that the responsibility for the outbreak of the war rested not only on the Bulgarians and that using pagans against them was a wrong move for religious reasons – found the best excuse possible. It was God's will. Reality showed that a shared religion did not protect against an armed confrontation between Bulgarians and Byzantines, but the emperor thought that it did not have to mean that this would not be so in the future. The decision, made reluctantly – which needs to be emphasized – to use the pagans was an attempt to blur the responsibility for the spilling Christian blood and was to be a chance for lasting peaceful relations in the future. The emperor explicitly writes that he would not be arming against the Bulgarians and present methods of fighting them because in doing so he would act against God who does not want bloodshed among brothers in faith. An argument rationalizing this reasoning is an assertion that the Bulgarians do not want war either and they promise that they would listen to the *Romaioi* advice[36].

Leo VI wrote these words after the war of 894–896 had ended, knowing its outcome – let us add that it was disadvantageous to the Byzantines. The impression remains that it was only the failure that led him to conclude that the Bulgarians are a dangerous opponent with whom it is better to seek an agreement than be at war. For an author of a military manual and a man regarded as wise and having the ability to predict the future – the assertion is not very revealing. The emperor must have known that in the past the Byzantines had often been defeated by the Bulgarians.

Following the subsequent course of the war, it seems that Symeon, in turn, was learning relatively quickly and acquired experience, although this does not mean that the ultimate success came easily. We must recall the dramatic episodes associated with fighting with Hungarians. During their first intervention in Bulgaria, Symeon's army was shattered, and he had to take refuge in the fortress Mundraga (perhaps Tutrakan, or the fortress on the island Ploska). Hungarian

[35] *Tactica*, XVIII, 42.
[36] *Tactica*, XVIII, 44.

army did not have infantry and besieging machines, therefore, they did not attempt to conquer Bulgarian fortresses. Hungarians were satisfied with their spoils of war and returned to their homes. The second invasion of Hungary followed a similar course (in the spring or summer of 895). Again, the action was successful, although the Bulgarians tried to prevent them from getting across the Danube. This time, Symeon fled and took refuge in Dorostolon. Perhaps, as the last time, Hungarians settled for their loot and returned to their homes. It is worth noting that these dramatic events forced Boris-Michael to leave his monastery and support his son.

Symeon's ability to draw conclusions and learn may be demonstrated by the following facts. When, in a situation difficult for Symeon, threatened by the Hungarian and Byzantine army, Leo VI sent an emissary in the person of the Quaestor Konstantinakes, the Bulgarian ruler, rather than go into negotiations, ordered him imprisoned. The move was, as can be judged, calculated on waiting out the situation which was not very favorable for the Bulgarians. It clearly indicated that Symeon would negotiate peace only if he is in a position to achieve favorable terms thereof. Another fact. Following the Byzantine footsteps, Symeon looked for allies. He found them in the form of Pechenegs, who were pagans, and whom he pitched against Hungarians, also pagans, with whom he could not cope for some time. It should be noted, without jumping to any hasty conclusions, however, that Symeon decided not to direct pagans against Christians, as Leo VI did. In the spring of 896, a Bulgarian–Pechenegian expedition was organized against the Hungarian lands, which turned out to be successful. Hungarians were forced to leave their existing lands and resettle in the middle reaches of the Danube basin, where they live today. About the same time another Byzantine envoy was sent to Symeon.

The Byzantine emissary was Leo Choirosphaktes, descended from aristocracy, and related to the imperial family through his wife. In his youth, he received an excellent legal education and for many years he had played an important role at the imperial court[37]. Symeon treated him just like his predecessor, the Quaestor Konstantinakes, namely, he ordered him imprisoned in the fortress Mundraga, not even meeting with him. From Mundraga, Leo wrote to Symeon. Eleven of his letters to Symeon survived, and, what is of particular interest, so

[37] More on the subject of Leo's career, see G. KOLIAS, *Biographie*, [in:] *Léon Choerosphactès...*, p. 15–73; М.А. ШАНГИН, *Византийские политические деятели первой половины X века*, [in:] *Византийский сборник*, ed. М.В. Левченко, Москва–Ленинград 1945, p. 228–248; R.J.H. JENKINS, *Leo Choerosphactes and the Saracen Vizier*, [in:] IDEM, *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and 10th Centuries*, London 1970, art. XI, p. 167–175; P. MAGDALINO, *In Search of the Byzantine Courtier: Leo Choirosphaktes and Constantine Manasses*, [in:] *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. MAGUIRE, Washington 1997, p. 146–161.

did three letters of the latter addressed to Leo[38]. Copies of these letters were created at the end of the tenth or early eleventh century, and they were discovered in the late nineteenth century on Patmos[39]. The correspondence concerned the issue of the release of the Byzantines, who were in captivity in Bulgaria and begins with a letter from Symeon to Leo written after 7th June in the year 896[40]. In order to achieve this, Leo Choirosphaktes refers to something that today could be called humanitarianism and, at that time, was described by the term φιλανθρωπία and which the Byzantine ascribes to Symeon. In his letters, he describes Symeon as the most people-loving among the archons[41], speaks of his kindness to the people[42]. Is this only a measure calculated to stir the conscience of Symeon? Or was it an expression of the Byzantine doctrine of power, according to which one of the basic attributes of a ruler should be φιλανθρωπία? And finally, perhaps it was a reflection of the real opinion that Symeon had in Byzantium? The question to this last question at first glance appears to be negative. Although between the seizing of power by Symeon and Choirosphaktes' mission only a short period of time passed, surely, the actions of the Bulgarian archon during this period could not become the basis for such an opinion to arise. One might say perversely that the symbolic expression of his kindness to people was the mutilation (cutting off noses) of the Khazars serving in the Imperial Guard, and who found themselves in Bulgarian captivity. But surely, it would be too great a simplification. Perhaps, the ground for the opinion about Symeon's kindness to the people was the fact that just until recently he had been a monk, what had to attest to his religiousness which entails the love of one's neighbour. Certainly, the memory of that was overshadowed during the war but Choirosphaktes could recall it while not being read by Symeon only as a flatterer. Undoubtedly, the view of Symeon's philanthropy, functioning in reality, perfectly harmonized with the Byzantine model of a ruler[43], which, as can be judged, was deeply embedded in the consciousness of

[38] Leo Choirosphaktes, *Ep.* Letters of the Byzantine envoy to Symeon: 2, p. 77; 4, p. 79–81; 6, p. 81–83; 7, p. 83; 8, p. 83–85; 9, p. 85; 10, p. 85–87; 11, p. 87; 12, p. 89; 13, p. 89; 14, p. 91.

[39] Е. Александров, *Документы дипломатической практики первого болгарского государства*, Pbg 12.3, 1988, p. 16.

[40] G. Kolias, *op. cit.*, p. 33–34; *Testimonia najdawniejszych dziejów Słowian. Seria grecka*, vol. 4, *Pisarze z VIII–XII wieku*, ed. A. Brzóstkowska, W. Swoboda, Warszawa 1997, p. 157 (cetera: *Testimonia 4*).

[41] Leo Choirosphaktes, *Ep.* 2, p. 77 (ἀρχόντων φιλανθρωπότατε); 4, p. 79.

[42] Leo Choirosphaktes, *Ep.* 7, p. 83; 9, p. 85. In letter 6 (s. 81–83) he writes explicitly: *You protect justice [while maintaining] the kindness to people, w h i c h m a n y e m p h a s i z e* [spaced out by M.J.L.].

[43] Leo Choirosphaktes even urged Symeon to follow the Byzantine emperor – *Ep.* 2, p. 77. W. Swoboda is right, contrary to the opinion of Bulgarian scholars (П. Ангелов, *България и българите в представите на византийците (VII–XIV век)*, София 1999, p. 196 – without quoting any arguments, he repeats Zlatarski's thesis), arguing that the expression "divine father"

the Bulgarian archon.

These considerations do not mean at all that Choirosphaktes, frequently mentioning Symeon's philanthropy and making it the chief argument to persuade him to release the prisoners, was convinced of it himself. Three surviving letters of the Bulgarian ruler had to leave him disillusioned. In the first letter from Symeon, he suggests that he would release prisoners if the Emperor Leo succeeds in predicting his decision on the issue[44]. In the subsequent letter he states that he would not release the prisoners because the emperor failed to predict his ruling on the matter[45] and, what is significant, states: *Even your emperor and meteorologist do not know the future*[46]. One may think that this idea was not born in the mind of Symeon only when writing the second letter, which is something that Choirosphaktes also could consider. In response to this letter, he is trying to justify the view that the meaning of his letter was misread by secretaries, and the emperor's special expertise lies in peaceful proceedings[47]. In the last preserved letter, Symeon writes: *Magister Leo, I have not promised you anything as regards the prisoners; I said nothing to you* [about it]*; I shall not send* [them] *especially because we do not know exactly* [what awaits us] *in the future*[48]. After such a pronouncement, Choirosphaktes had no illusions, that is if he still had any, as to Symeon's kindness to the people and certainly to the Byzantines.

The fact that he had no such illusions is evidenced by the tone of his letters. It would be stating the obvious to say that in his correspondence, Leo could not afford to show the recipient in unfavorable light. This does not mean that he did not made allusions between the lines that his assessment of Symeon is not positive. The letter 9, the Byzantine envoy wrote: *We do not believe, therefore, that you are bad and this is why we can be pleasantly treated, and as we are loved we can achieve that which we find pleasant*[49].

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should be understood as emperor Leo VI, not Symeon's own father, Boris-Michael – *Testimonia* 4, p. 157, an. 3. This is clearly demonstrated by the use of this term in the later portion of the correspondence – e.g. *Ep.* 13, p. 89; *Ep.* 14, p. 91. As it is known, in the Byzantine family of rulers, the Bulgarian archon was called the "spiritual son".

[44] Symeon mentions in this letter that Leo VI had foreseen a Sun eclipse at one point, not only when it would occur but also how long it would last (*Ep.* 1, p. 77). In letter 3 (s. 79) he calls Leo a meteorologist. The term refers to a person well versed in disciplines such as astrology and astronomy.

[45] *Ep.* 3, p. 79.

[46] *L. cit.* This direct reference to Leo VI is filled with aversion. This is not necessarily surprising as it is difficult to expect a positive attitude to the ruler of the country with which one is at war. In this case, however, a note of envy can be detected of the fame of a scholar which surrounded Leo VI.

[47] *Ep.* 4, p. 79–81. Cf. W. SWOBODA – *Testimonia* 4, p. 157–158, an. 5.

[48] *Ep.* 5, p. 81. It seems that this last phrase expresses Symeon's distrust as to the peaceful intentions of the Byzantines.

[49] Leo CHOIROSPHAKTES, *Ep.* 9, p. 85.

This sentence, I think, is the key to understanding the attitude of Leo to the Bulgarian ruler. The Byzantine does not believe, of course, only in the texts of his letters, the evil to be inherent in Symeon. He postulates that by depicting Symeon in a good light, with flattery, he will be able to achieve his purpose. Therefore, he is searching Symeon's explicitly hostile words referring to the Byzantines, for even minor inconsistencies, or a possibility of formulating another interpretation, positive for the Byzantines, providing perspective of sustaining the hope of achieving the objective. Leo seems to be blind and deaf to the consistent position of the Bulgarian ruler[50]. He sees the influence of Providence, which, according to Leo, prevents Symeon from being hostile towards the Byzantines and thus doing evil not only do the latter, but also to himself[51]. The reader, watching Leo attempts, with each subsequent letter concludes that to the Byzantine envoy, Symeon is a man of treacherous and deceitful nature. It also seems that the Byzantine envoy treats Symeon's deeds in terms of a personal insult. In letter 13, Leo writes that he is not offended by the fact that Symeon suggests to emperor something that he denies himself. He calls himself a slave to the emperor and says, I think, with sarcasm: *As for us, you shall make sure not only that we are not sad as those who have not been pushed, but you shall even bring us honor for the successful representation*[52].

If the issue of prisoners had been solved in a direct correspondence between the emperor and Symeon, there would not be any merit by Leo. His mission would have ended with his personal failure.

The correspondence between Leo and Symeon makes an impression, at least from the viewpoint of the former, an intellectual entertainment of a kind, a play with words, although its subject is very serious. The Bulgarian ruler in this game is the party dictating terms, while Leo exerts all his eloquence to find a way out of the seemingly hopeless situation. Letters of these two people only in some places resemble "normal" diplomatic correspondence. Symeon, making conditions impossible to fulfill, not only wants to gain time, as some scholars believe, but he is clearly mocking his interlocutor, indicating that he would decide on the conditions of a possible settlement with the Byzantines. How else can one treat the

[50] Particularly symptomatic in this context was Symeon's letter which Leo mentions in letter 14 (p. 91). This letter, as it seems, made earlier agreements invalid; it is disown by the Byzantine envoy due to the fact that it was not bearing the sign of the cross. Leo treats the letter as a joke and hypocritically expresses admiration for the intelligence of Symeon, who by the omission of the cross clearly suggested that the letter does not reflect his true intentions.

[51] Leo Choirosphaktes, *Ep.* 8, p. 83–85: *Here is God who puts you to the test and sets the hand in motion so that it writes one thing instead of another in an ambiguous way, in spite of you, or rather, almost in your favor*. Cf. letters 10–12, p. 85–89, in which Leo constructs a thesis that one's true intentions do not necessarily have to be explicitly expressed in words.

[52] Leo Choirosphaktes, *Ep.* 13, p. 89.

request that the emperor Leo VI predicts whether he – Symeon – releases or does not release the Byzantine captives. It is obvious here, even apart from whether the Bulgarian ruler believed in the ability of Leo VI to predict the future that no matter what the Byzantine emperor said, Symeon would still say that this is a mistake. The Bulgarian's action was calculated, I think, for bargaining the best conditions of the agreement by showing that, in fact, he was not particularly interested in negotiating. At the same time, the reader inevitably concludes that to Symeon, the correspondence with Leo Choirosphaktes was of no special importance. The Byzantine envoy was interned by the Bulgarian archon, his freedom of action was limited, and also the flow of information was certainly not sufficient to carry out a diplomatic mission. We also know that Symeon carried direct correspondence with the emperor[53] and as its result, an agreement was reached[54]. Overestimating the importance of Leo Choirosphaktes' mission is a consequence of, as often happens, the state of the sources. His letters survived but it did not happen to the correspondence between Symeon and Leo VI. In addition, Leo made himself an advertising of a kind, because in a letter 23, addressed to Emperor Leo VI, from his exile, he recalls his diplomatic achievements, including a mission to Symeon. He writes in it that it the release of 120 thousand Byzantines who had been in Bulgarian captivity was his success[55].

The correspondence between Symeon and Leo Choirosphaktes shows the former as a skillful political player, maybe even cynical, capable of employing a variety of methods to achieve his goals. On the other hand, he can be seen as an intellectual who takes pleasure in conducting correspondence with the undoubtedly sophisticated Leo. It is, after all, doubtful for the Byzantine envoy to be creating his intricate arguments if they were not to be understood for their intended recipient. When an agreement was reached between Symeon and Leo VI, the Byzantine envoy was released and returned to Constantinople, accompanied by a *kaukhan* Theodore, Symeon's envoy. The Bulgarian envoy was to return to his homeland with the Bulgarian prisoners, whom the emperor ransomed from the hands of Hungarians. Negotiations conducted on this occasion did not end with

[53] Leo CHOIROSPHAKTES, *Ep.* 13, p. 89. Leo CHOIROSPHAKTES writes about it himself: *You have informed his father and the emperor that you would return – as I have recently learned – the prisoners kept in captivity*. This passage clearly proves that the Byzantine envoy belatedly learned about Symeon's actions undertaken for the agreement with the emperor. Cf. S. TOUGHER, *The Reign...*, p. 180.

[54] S. TOUGHER, *The Reign...*, p. 180. More on the subject of methods employed by Symeon in diplomacy – E. АЛЕКСАНДРОВ, *Дипломатическоправна практика на цар Симеон*, Век 1988, 2, p. 15–25.

[55] Leo CHOIROSPHAKTES, *Ep.* 23, p. 113. Leo mentions three envoys. Regarding the first one, he mentions that he took many captives from Bulgaria and signed a peace treaty. Although W. SWOBODA (*Testimonia 4*, p. 159, an. 24) rightly noted that it is not at all obvious that this information concerns the Bulgarian mission, the letter still leaves the impression that all the Bulgarian missions were successful, which was the personal merit of Leo Choirosphaktes.

the signing of peace treaty and the truce was soon broken by Symeon. Both sides were gearing up for the final battle. In late summer or early fall, Symeon once again went to the north-eastern Thrace. Leo VI sent an army against him commanded by Leo Katakalon, *domestikos ton scholon,* and Theodosius, patrician and protovestiarius. The battle took place at Boulgarophygon, a village whose location has not been established so far. The battle ended with the Bulgarian victory. Patrician Theodosius died and the Byzantine army was scattered. Arab sources reported that Symeon went to Constantinople. However, it seems that they confuse it with the events of the year 913, when, indeed, Symeon went on an expedition to Constantinople. This battle ended the war conflict. The result of the Bulgarian success was probably signing of a peace treaty, in which the Byzantines agreed that the Bulgarian markets be returned to Constantinople and agreed to paying an annual tribute[56].

**Conclusion**. The war of the years 894–896 showed that Symeon was not only a cabinet scholar and a former monk, but a statesman, a gifted leader, skillful and ruthless negotiator. This war made him realize his own strength and gave him an opportunity to test his skills as a leader and a ruler. The war also demonstrated to the Byzantines that the Bulgarians, although they were Christians, were still dangerous opponents[57]. Leo VI, a wise man and a scholar suffered a great defeat in dealing with just as scholarly but much more determined and gifted with military talents Bulgarian ruler. The former Monk defeated the Philosopher. As it turned out, the of war 894–896 became a prelude to the great challenges that Symeon would throw to the Byzantine Empire in the future, when he attempted to build a new universal Slavic-Greek empire. His opponent, however, was not to be Leo VI.

**Abstract**. The article is devoted to a few problems: 1. how Symeon and Leo the Philosopher looked at the Bulgarian-Byzantine war of 894–896; 2. what place it took in their life experiences; 3. how it was inscribed in the concept of relations between countries whose inhabitants follow the same religion.

The war of the years 894–896 showed that Symeon was not only a cabinet scholar and a former monk, but a statesman, a gifted leader, skillful and ruthless negotiator. This war made him realize his own strength and gave him an opportunity to test his skills as

[56] T. Wasilewski, *op. cit.*, p. 225–226; I. Božilov, *A propos des rapports bulgaro-byzantines sous le tzar Syméon*, BBg 8, 1986, p. 80; Ε. Κυριάκης, Βυζάντιο και Βούλγαροι 7ος-10ος αι. Συμβολή στην εξωτερική πολιτική του Βυζαντίου, Αθήνα 1993, p. 211–212.

[57] More information on the Byzantine hopes for peace with Bulgarians based on a common religion – M.J. Leszka, *Stracone złudzenia. Religijny kontekst stosunków bizantyńsko-bułgarskich w latach 863–927*, [in:] *Religijna mozaika Bałkanów*, ed. M. Walczak-Mikołajczakowa, Gniezno 2008, p. 32–39.

a leader and a ruler. The war also demonstrated to the Byzantines that the Bulgarians, although they were Christians, were still dangerous opponents. Leo VI, a wise man and a scholar suffered a great defeat in dealing with just as scholarly but much more determined and gifted with military talents Bulgarian ruler. The former Monk defeated the Philosopher.

*Translated by Katarzyna Gucio*

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