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Goodness and Cruelty: The Image of the Ruler of the First Bulgarian Empire in the Period of Christianisation (Ninth Century)

1 Introduction

As in other medieval societies that converted to Christianity during the early Middle Ages, the image of the good Christian ruler in the First Bulgarian Tsardom was closely linked to the process of Christianisation, which took place in the ninth and early tenth centuries. The main virtues of the Christian ruler were naturally derived from the Byzantine world, where the process of (re-)Christianisation started. While during the short period between 866 and 870 Western and mainly papal influences played a significant role, the main role model of the Christian ruler in Bulgaria was the Byzantine emperor. The Bulgarian ruler aimed at imitating and, as in the case of Symeon the Great (893 – 927), even surpassing the image of his great neighbour.[1] Despite dependence on the Constantinopolitan model in terms of Christian virtues, however, the image of the good Christian ruler in Bulgaria developed in a specific and particular way that served as a role model for later centuries. Especially after the decline and fall of the First Bulgarian Tsardom in 1018 and its renaissance at the end of the twelfth century, the first Christian rulers were taken as good examples of Christian rulership in order to create political continuity and stability.[2]

The Christian ruler was, in fact, not much different from his pagan predecessor. The successful ruler justified his rule through military victories, though the role of the Roman Emperor changed after the adoption of Christianity from emphasizing

1 Concerning the image of the ruler, see Georgi Bakalov, Srednovekovnijat bălgarski vladetel (titulatura i insignii). Sofia 1995; Georgi N. Nikolov, Centralizăm i regionalizăm v rannosrednovekovna Bălgaria (kraja na VII–načaloto na XI v.). Sofia 2005; Angel N. Nikolov, Političeska misăl v rannosrednovekovna Bălgarija (sredata na IX – kraja na X vek). Sofia 2006; for Symeon the Great, see: Ivan A. Božilov, Car Simeon Veliki (893 – 927). Zlatnijat vek na srednovekovna Bălgarija. Sofia 1983; Jonathan Shepard, 'Symeon of Bulgaria – peacemaker', *Godišnik na Sofijskija universitet, "Sv. Kliment Ohridski" Naučen centăr za slavjano-vizantijski proučvanija "Ivan Dujčev"* 83 (1991), no. 3, p. 9 – 48; Angel Nikolov, Carskata titla na Simeon I kato istoriografski i političeski problem, in: Treti meždunaroden kongres po bălgaristika, 23 – 26 maj 2013 g. Krăgla masa "Zlatnijat vek na car Simeon: Politika, religija i kultura". Sofia 2014, p. 30 – 40.

2 Ivan A. Božilov / Vasil T. Gjuzelev, Istorija na srednovekovna Bălgarija VII–XIV vek. Sofia 1999 (Istorija na Bălgarija v tri toma, T. 1), p. 426 – 429; Alexandru Madgearu, The Asanids: The political and military history of the second Bulgarian Empire (1185 – 1280) (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450 – 1450 vol. 41). Leiden 2017, p. 64 – 65.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110725612-016

the aspect of military leadership towards the supplicant who prays for his troops.[3] This image contained, however, some flexibility, as examples like Emperor Heraclius (610 – 641) represents a more active Christian ruler.[4]

The ruler relied on severe punishment of his enemies; a successful rule was mostly accompanied by fear and terror for those who might challenge it.[5] In many cases, Christianisation did not change the mechanisms of rule. The Christianisation itself was frequently embedded into a narrative of victory over opponents; God intervened in favour of the Christian ruler. These mechanisms sometimes posed a challenge for Christian church authorities who were involved in the conversion process and tried to convey a model of a good Christian ruler who was supposed to govern with mercy, humility, and peacefulness. This paper discusses the ambiguous relation between pagan and Christian elements in the image of the ruler by referring to the pagan rulers Krum and Omurtag and Boris/Michael, the first Christian ruler.

In order to clarify the historical setting, the paper starts with a brief summary of the main political events between the seventh and early eleventh century.[6]

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3 Olivier Hekster, Fighting for Rome: the emperor as a military leader, in: Lukas De Blois, Elio Lo Cascio, Olivier Hekster, and Gerda De Kleijn (eds.), *Impact of the Roman army (200 BC–AD 476): economic, social, political, religious, and cultural aspects:* Proceedings of the Sixth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, 200 B.C.–A.D. 476), Capri, March 29–April 2, 2005, (Impact of empire (Roman Empire, 27 B.C.–A.D. 406), 6), (Leiden, Boston (Mass.), 2007), p. 91 – 105.

4 Walter E. Kaegi, The Heraclians and holy war, in: Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (eds.), *Byzantine war ideology between Roman imperial concept and Christian religion:* Akten des internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.–21. Mai 2011) (Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung, 30/ Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 452), Vienna 2012, 17 – 26.

5 For the pagan ruler, see: Bakalov (cf. fn. 1) p. 107 – 131; Veselin Beševliev, Părvobălgarite. Istorija, bit i kultura. Plovdiv 2008, p. 275 – 281; Nikolov (2006, cf. fn. 1) p. 29 – 38.

6 The following section summarises the political history of the First Bulgarian Empire; there is abundant literature on the topic. For a more detailed account of the history of the First Bulgarian Empire, see Vasil N. Zlatarski, Istorija na bălgarskata dăržava prez srednite vekove. Tom. 1: Părvo bălgarsko carstvo. Čast 1: Epoha na huno-bălgarskoto nadmoštie. Sofia [3]2002, idem, Istorija na bălgarskata dăržava prez srednite vekove. Tom. 1: Părvo bălgarsko carstvo. Čast 2: Ot slavjanizacijata na dăržavata do padaneto na părvoto carstvo. Sofia [3]2002; Dimităr Angelov / Petăr Petrov / Borislav Primov (eds.), Istorija na Bălgarija. Tom vtori: Părva bălgarska dăržava. Sofia 1981; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 74 – 338; Georgi Bakalov (ed.), Istorija na Bălgarite. Tom 1: Ot Drevnostta do kraja na XVI vek. Sofia 2003, p. 177 – 322; Georgi Atanasov / Veselina Vačkova / Plamen Pavlov (eds.), Bălgarska nacionalna istorija Tom III: Părvo bălgarsko carstvo (680 – 1018). Veliko Tărnovo 2015; for the pagan period, see also Veselin Beševliev, Die protobulgarische Periode der bulgarischen Geschichte. Amsterdam 1981; for the period until the end of the ninth century, see Daniel Ziemann, Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht. Die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7. –9. Jahrhundert) (Kölner historische Abhandlungen, Bd. 43). Cologne 2007; for an overview in English concerning the archaeology, see Uwe Fiedler, Bulgars in the Lower Danube Region. A Survey of the Archaeological Evidence and the State of Current Research, in: Florin Curta / Roman Kovalev (eds.), The other Europe in the Middle Ages. Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450 – 1450, 2). Leiden, Boston 2008, p. 151 – 236; the period from 775 – 831 is the topic of Panos Soph-

2 Historical Background

While the territory of the First Bulgarian Tsardom had been already Christianised in late antiquity, the invasions and political changes of the fourth to sixth century CE drastically changed the landscape of the Roman provinces of Mysia inferior and Scythia, the heartland of what later became the First Bulgarian Empire. In this region it is quite likely that a complete exchange of the population took place and, consequently, a drastic rupture in terms of culture, religion, and economy. The Roman infrastructure collapsed and was not even reused by the new invaders.[7] The central places of the First Bulgarian Empire like Pliska and Preslav had no Roman or Greek past; Pliska was not situated on a Roman road.[8] It was not until during and after the ninth century, when the Bulgarians expanded towards the Byzantine Black Sea coast and the province of Thrace south of the Balkan Mountains, that they took over a still-intact Roman and Byzantine infrastructure and reused it. It was during this expansion into deeply Romanised and Christianised territories that more and more Christian elements entered the Bulgarian realm.

The First Bulgarian Empire – if one can use this expression at all – was founded in 680/1, when a peace treaty was concluded between the Bulgarians and the Byzantines under Emperor Constantine IV. The peace treaty was the consequence of a severe military defeat of the Byzantine army at a place called Onglos, probably near the mouth of the Danube River. As a result, the Bulgarians invaded the region between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains. In this peace treaty, the Byzantine Emperor recognised the Bulgarians as the rulers of the territories between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains and agreed to pay a regular tribute. From that time on until the end of the tenth century this area was the political centre of the First Bulgarian Empire.[9]

OULIS, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831 (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, v. 16). Leiden, Boston 2011.

7 Florin CURTA, Invasion or inflation? Sixth- to seventh-century Byzantine coin hoards in eastern and southeastern Europe, *Istituto Italiano di Numismatica. Annali* 43 (1996), p. 65–224 (concerning the numismatic evidence).

8 A resource on Pliska that is still very useful is Karel ŠKORPIL / Feodor I. USPENSKIY, Materialy dlja bolgarskih' drevnostej, Aboba-Pliska. *Izvestija Russkogo arheologičeskogo družestvo v Konstantinopole* 10 (1905); for more recent overviews, see: Ljudmila DONČEVA-PETKOVA / Joachim HENNING (eds.), Părvoprestolna Pliska. 100 godini arheologičeski proučvanija. Frankfurt am Main 1999; Janko DIMITROV / Rašo RAŠEV, Pliska. Šumen 1999; Rašo RAŠEV, Bălgarskata ezičeska kultura VII–IX vek. Sofia 2008, p. 45–105; Andrej ALADŽOV, Arheologičeska karta na Pliska. Sofia 2014; concerning Preslav see: Totju K. TOTEV (ed.), 1100 godini Veliki Preslav = 1100 Jahre Veliki Preslav. Velikopreslavski naučen săbor (16–18 septemvri 1993 g.). tom 1/2. Šumen 1995.

9 The main sources for these events are Carl de BOOR (ed.), Theophanis Chronographia vol. 1: Textum graecum continens. Leipzig 1883, p. 356–360; Cyril MANGO (ed.), Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople. Short history (DOT 10). Washington, D.C. 1990, 35–36, p. 86–91; for the secondary literature, see the respective passages in the literature of fn. 4.

The newly established political entity consisted of a social stratum of warriors, mostly of Protobulgarian or Bulgar origin, and Slavic groups who most likely paid tribute and were obliged to participate in military campaigns. The so-called "Protobulgarians" or "Bulgars" received their name in scholarship in order to distinguish them from the later Christian "Bulgarians" who spoke a Slavic language. It is generally assumed that from the seventh and eighth century onwards the Bulgars slowly merged with the Slavs and original inhabitants of the territory, finally forming a common people mainly referred to as "Bulgarians."[10]

The origins of the Bulgars are highly debated in both Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian scholarship. They probably came from Central Asia; scholars have suggested different theories for their origins and migration.[11] Bulgars appear in Byzantine and Latin sources at the end of the fifth century. The term Bulgars, mostly Boulgaroi in Greek and Vulgares in Latin sources, might be some sort of umbrella term for different groups like the Kutrigurs, Utigurs and others who dwelt north of the Black Sea around the sixth and seventh century. Other groups that were called Bulgars in the available sources formed part of the Avar Empire and joined the Avars in their military campaigns, e. g., the siege of Constantinople in 626. A Bulgar ruler called Kubrat is mentioned in Byzantine sources. He supposedly reigned over the so-called "Great Bulgarian Empire" north of the Black Sea in the middle of the seventh century. The Byzantine chroniclers apparently condensed a more complex situation into the story of Kubrat and his five sons, who did not keep united and parted from each other after their father's death.[12] The third son, called Asparuch, was supposedly the leader of the group that entered the territory between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains and defeated the Byzantine army under Emperor Constantine IV in 680/1. After the peace treaty the Bulgars remained in this area and consolidated their political entity.[13] Khan Tervel, c. 701–721, supported the effort of the Byzantine

10 Dimităr Angelov, Obrazuvane na bălgarskata narodnost. 2. preraboteno i dopălnitelno izdanie. Sofia 1981.

11 Ivan Šišmanov, Kritičen pregled na văprosa za proizhoda na prabălgarite ot ezikovo gledište i etimologite na imeto "bălgarin", *Sbornik za Narodni Umotvorenija, Nauka i Knižnina* 1900 (16–17), p. 505–753; Alexandăr Burmov, Kăm văprosa za proizhoda na bălgarite, in: idem (ed.), Izbrani proizvenedija v 3 toma. Tom 1: Srednovekovnata istorija na Bălgarija. Sofia 1968, p. 19–49; Beševliev (cf. fn. 6) p. 303–313; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 32–38; for a recent summary on the discussions about the origins, see: Rašo Rašev et al. (eds.), Bălgarska nacionalna istorija Tom II: Drevnite bălgari, Starata Velika Bălgarija i nejnite naslednici v iztočna Evropa prez srednovekovieto. Veliko Tărnovo 2013, p. 15–82.

12 Daniel Ziemann, Zwischen Geschichte und Mythos: Großbulgarien unter Khan Kubrat (7. Jh.), *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* 1 (2010), p. 17–49, for the more widespread view, see Zlatarski (2002a, cf. fn. 6) p. 7–71; Angelov (cf. fn. 10) p. 1–211; Beševliev (cf. fn. 6) p. 299–328; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 23–90; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 57–73; Bakalov (ed.), Istorija na bălgarite. Tom 1: Ot drevnostta do kraja na XVI vek, p. 11–33; Rašev (cf. fn. 11) 107–248.

13 On the exact dating, see Giuseppe De Gregorio / Otto Kresten, Ἐφέτος – "In diesem Jahr". Zur Datierung des Bulgarenfeldzugs des Kaisers Konstantinos IV. (Sommer/Herbst 680), *RSBN* 43 (2006), p. 21–56.

Emperor Justinian II to regain his throne and was rewarded with a great amount of gold.[14] During the second half of the eighth century, the Bulgarian Empire underwent a period of political instability. Military defeats by the Byzantines, who frequently invaded Bulgaria under Emperor Constantine V, led to inner turmoil and frequent replacement of the ruling khan.[15]

The turning point came at the beginning of the ninth century. In 811, a disastrous military campaign led by Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros (802–811) ended in a complete defeat at one of the passes of the Balkan Mountains.[16] The Bulgarian khan, Krum (c. 803–814), used the victory to enter the Byzantine provinces and proceeded as far as the walls of the imperial city, which he could not conquer. One of Krum's successors, Khan Omurtag (c. 815–c. 831), started a large-scale building program in Bulgaria. He adopted Byzantine models of imperial representation and called himself "ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων" (ruler by [the grace of] God).[17]

During his reign, Bulgaria and Byzantium concluded a 30-year peace treaty, the so-called "deep peace," that allowed for more intensive mutual contacts on various levels. These contacts helped to increase Christian missionary activities in Bulgaria, mainly from Byzantium, but also partially and on a smaller scale, from the West. One of Omurtag's sons, Enravota, may have become a Christian. Theophylact of Ohrid, in the early twelfth century, tells the story of Enravota dying as a martyr.[18]

The official Christianisation took place in 864/5 under Khan Boris (852–889), who, under Byzantine military pressure, was baptised together with at least some of his nobles. He adopted the Christian name Michael from his godfather, the Byzan-

14 de Boor (cf. fn. 9) p. 374–375; Mango (cf. fn. 9) p. 102–105; Ada Adler (ed.), Suidae Lexicon. Leipzig 1928–1938, beta, Βούλγαροι (Bulgars), 423, p. 483.

15 Zlatarski (2002a, cf. fn. 6) p. 207–234; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 120–129; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 114–118; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 213–234; Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) p. 15–17, 89–103.

16 de Boor (cf. fn. 9) p. 490–491, an English translation and commentary: Cyril A. Mango / Roger Scott / Geoffrey Greatrex (eds.), The chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern history, AD 284–813. Translated with introduction and commentary. Oxford, New York 1997, p. 672–673, 675–676; Francesca Iadevaia (ed.), Scriptor incertus. Testo critico, traduzione e note. Introduzione di Emilio Pinto. Messina 1987, p. 27–33; Ivan Dujčev, La Chronique byzantine de l'an 811, in: idem (ed.), Medioevo bizantino-slavo vol. 2. Saggi di storia letteraria (Storia e letteratura. Raccolta di studi e testi, 113). Rome 1968, p. 425–489; Zlatarski (2002a, cf. fn. 6) p. 255–260; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 134–138; Beševliev (cf. fn. 6) p. 240; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 128–131; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 247–258; Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) p. 191–216.

17 Veselin Beševliev, Părvobălgarski nadpisi. Sofia ^{2}1992, p. 77–80.

18 Theophylacti Achridensis historia martyrii XV martyrum Tiberiupolitanum, in: Ilija Iliev (ed.), Theophylakti Achridensis archiepiscopi Bulgariae scripta ad historiam Bulgariae pertinentia, secunda pars (Grăcki izvori za bălgarskata istorija, 9, 2). Sofia 1994, 42–79, ch. 29–33, p. 63–67; new edition: Eirini-Sophia Kiapidou (ed.), Θεοφύλακτος Αχρίδος, Μαρτύριο των Δεκαπέντε Μαρτύρων της Τιβεριούπολης; Κριτική έκδοση απόδοση στα νέα ελληνικά και υπομνηματισμός/ Théophylacte d'Achrid, Martyre des quinze martyrs de Tibérioupolis; édition critique, restitution en grec moderne et commentaire. Athens 2015.

tine Emperor Michael III (842–867).[19] A rebellion against the neophyte by members of the nobility was suppressed.[20] Soon after the suppression of the rebellion in 866, Boris/Michael invited papal missionaries to Bulgaria and distanced himself from the Byzantine Church. This short period of papal influence came to a sudden end in 870. At a meeting in Constantinople, the Bulgarians decided to bring Bulgaria under the jurisdiction of the Byzantine Church; the crucial point was clearly the degree of independence. While the popes, first Nicholas I (858–867) and then Hadrian II (867–872), refused the consecration of an archbishop, the Byzantines seem to have granted, at least in the long run, an autocephalous Bulgarian Church under a patriarch.[21]

During the reign of Boris/Michael the students of Cyril and Methodius, Clement, Naum, Angelarius, and others, were received in Bulgaria after their expulsion from Moravia. They were involved in creating ecclesiastic structures in Bulgaria and implementing what later developed toward a Slavic Orthodox liturgy. The Glagolithic and later Cyrillic alphabet allowed for writing in the Bulgarian language. Theological and other works were translated into Old Bulgarian and a network of monasteries grew quickly with the special support of Boris/Michael, who took the monastic habit himself after 889.[22]

The rule of the oldest son of Boris/Michael, Vladimir, also called Rasate, probably from 889–893, might have intensified the links to the Eastern Frankish Empire. He was accused of planning to abandon the Christian faith, but this remains uncertain. Vladimir was deposed from the throne and replaced in 893 by Symeon, Boris/Michael's third son, who ruled from 893 to 927. He intensified the translation of Greek literature and theology and enabled the establishment of an intellectual circle, the so-called school of Preslav.

During a considerable period of his reign, Symeon was in conflict with the Byzantine Empire. He started to attack the Byzantine Empire after the decision to move the trade from Constantinople to Thessalonica in 894. Later on, the Bulgarians had to endure a devastating invasion by the Hungarians, who crossed the Danube River on Byzantine ships, probably in 895/6. Symeon managed to retaliate, invade, and destroy the dwelling places of the Hungarians and Pechenegs and instigated the move of the Hungarians to the Carpathian basin.[23]

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19 A good overview of the sources and the abundant literature can be found in Gerhard Podskalsky, Theologische Literatur des Mittelalters in Bulgarien und Serbien 865–1459. Munich 2000, p. 48–53.

20 Daniel Ziemann, The rebellion of the nobles against the baptism of Khan Boris (865–866), in: Joachim Henning (ed.), Post-Roman towns, trade and settlement in Europe and Byzantium (Millennium-Studien, v. 5/2). New York 2007, p. 613–624.

21 Vasil Gjuzelev, Knjaz Boris I. Bălgarija prez vtorata polovina na IX v. Sofia 1969, p. 178–260; Hans-Dieter Döpmann, Die Bedeutung Bulgariens für die Trennung der östlichen und westlichen Christenheit. Theologische Habilitationsschrift Universität Berlin. Berlin 1965.

22 For Climent see Krasimir Stančev, Kliment Ohridski, in: Petăr Dinekov (ed.), Kirilo-Metodievska Enciklopedija 2 1995, p. 320–335 with the sources and literature; Ilija Iliev, Sv. Kliment Ohridski (Srednovekovna biblioteka 4). Plovdiv 2010.

23 Božilov (cf. fn. 1); Shepard (cf. fn. 1).

In 913, a famous ceremony took place; Byzantine sources relate that Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos crowned Symeon with his own *Epirriptarion*, a cloth with which the patriarch covered his head. At the same time, both sides agreed on a marriage between Symeon's son and a daughter of the Byzantine emperor. After these events Symeon called himself Emperor of the Romans. But soon afterwards a change in the Byzantine government annulled the treaty and returned to a more aggressive policy. From 914 until Symeon's death in 927, both sides engaged in frequent wars; most battles ended with victories for Symeon. The most important of these battles was the one near Acheloi close to the Black Sea coast in 917.[24] With Symeon's death in 927, both parties finally reached a long-lasting peace and a marriage took place between Peter, Symeon's son and successor, and the Byzantine princess Maria, who was probably named Irene (meaning "peace") after the marriage.

With Tsar Peter (927–969), Bulgaria entered a period of decline. Territorial expansion came to a halt while raids by the Hungarians continued. The Bulgarians were dealt a decisive blow between 968 and 971, when the Kievan Rus under Svjatoslav invaded Bulgaria and conquered its capital, Preslav. In 971, the Byzantine emperor John Tsimiskes, entered Bulgaria, defeated the Rus, conquered the important administrative centres, and deposed the Bulgarian Tsar Boris II (969–971). Bulgaria became a Byzantine province. Nevertheless, during the years after the death of Emperor John Tsimiskes in 976, a certain Samuil (997–1014) and his brothers headed a movement of rebellion against the Byzantine rule. In 986, the Byzantine army was severely defeated at Trajan's gates, near today's Ihtiman in Bulgaria. After his brothers died (or he murdered them), Samuil managed to establish an independent rule centred in the south-western region of the Bulgarian territory near Prespa and Ohrid in today's Macedonia. Samuil managed to create a powerful tsardom and tried to link his image to that of previous Bulgarian tsars. After a period of military success, the tide turned toward the Byzantines roughly after the year 1000. In 1014, the Bulgarians suffered a heavy defeat at the battle of Kleídion, (also referred to as the battle of Belasica). Samuil died soon afterwards.[25] In 1018, the First Bulgarian Empire came to an end when the Byzantine Emperor Basileios II entered the centres of power in triumph and turned Bulgaria into a Byzantine province.

24 On Aheloi, see: Angel Nikolov / Nikolaj Kănev (eds.), Simeonova Bălgarija v istorijata na evropejskija jugoiztok: 1100 godini ot bitkata pri Aheloj/ Emperor Symeon's Bulgaria in the History of Europe's South-east: 1100 Years from the Battle of Achelous. I. Sofia 2018.

25 Srđan Pirivatrić, Samuilovata dăržava. Obhvat i harakter. Sofia 2000; Anton Săbotinov, Bălgarija pri car Samuil i negovite naslednici (976–1018 r.), Tom 1. Sofia 2008; Vasil T. Gjuzelev / Georgi N. Nikolov (eds.), Evropejskijat jugoiztok prez vtorata polovina na X – načaloto na XI vek. Istorija i kultura: meždunarodna konferencija Sofia, 6–8 oktomvri 2014 g. Sofia 2015.

3 The Image of the Bulgarian Khan as a Pagan Ruler

The title of the pagan ruler of Bulgaria was *khan* ("kana" in the Protobulgarian inscriptions).[26] For the late seventh and eighth century, Byzantine chroniclers do not present many details about the Bulgarian rulers. Additional information is only available about Khan Tervel, who helped Emperor Justinian II to regain the imperial throne in 705. As a reward for his support, Tervel received the title of *kaisar*.[27] The Suda (a tenth-century encyclopedia) even mentions material compensation.

> In the reign of Justinian Rhinotmetos Terbelis [Tervel], the chieftain of the Bulgars flourished; and this same Justinian and Constantine, the son of Heraclius, were tributary to him. For he laid on its back the shield that he had had in war, and his own whip that he used on his horse, and started pouring money in until he covered both of them. Having stuck his spear in the ground up to the end and put plenty of silk garments at its length and having filled boxes with gold and silver he started giving it away to the soldiers, using his right hand for the gold and the left one for the silver.[28]

The Suda is, of course, a dubious source for events at the beginning of the eighth century,[29] but it conveyed a certain image, in this case that of the typical barbarian

26 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) p. 72–74; Ivan Venedikov, Voennoto i administrativnoto ustrojstvo na Bălgarija prez IX i X vek. Sofia 1979, p. 14; Beševliev (cf. fn. 5) p. 275–281; Cvetelin Stepanov, The Bulgar Title KANASUBIGI: Reconstructing the Notions of Divine Kingship in Bulgaria, AD 822–836, *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001), no. 1, p. 1–19.

27 Mango (cf. fn. 9) 102–105; a lead seal mentions the title of *kaisar:* Georges Zacos / Alexander Veglery, Byzantine Lead Seals. Volume I. Part 3: Nos. 2672–3231 – Imperial and allied seals: V to XIV centuries; non-imperial seals: VI to IX centuries. Basel 1972, No. 2672, p. 1441; Nicolas Oikonomidès, A collection of dated Byzantine lead seals. Washington, D.C. 1986, p. No. 26, p. 39; for Tervel, see: PmbZ 7250; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 180–210.

28 Adler (ed.), Suidae Lexicon, beta, 423 Βούλγαροι (Bulgars), p. 483: ὅτι ἐπὶ Ἰουστινιανοῦ τοῦ Ῥινοτμήτου ἤκμαζεν ὁ Τέρβελις, ὁ τῶν Βουλγάρων ἀρχηγός: καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς Ἰουστινιανὸς καὶ Κωνσταντῖνος, ὁ Ἡρακλείου υἱὸς, ὑπόφοροι τούτῳ ἦσαν. τὴν γὰρ ἀσπίδα, ἣν εἶχεν ἐν πολέμῳ, ὑπτίαν ἔθηκε καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μάστιγα, ᾗ ἐχρῆτο ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου, καὶ ἕως οὗ ἐσκέπασεν ἀμφότερα, χρήματα ἐνετίθει. καὶ τὸ δόρυ ἐν τῇ γῇ παρεκτείνας μέχρι τῶν περάτων καὶ ἐς ὕψος πολὺ σηρικὴν ἐσθῆτα ἐτίθει, καὶ κιβώτια πλήσας χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου τοῖς στρατιώταις ἐδίδου, τὴν μὲν δεξιὰν χρυσίου πληρῶν, τὴν δὲ λαιὰν ἀργυρίου; the translation is taken from: https://mcl.as.uky.edu/suda-line-database-complete.

29 Herbert Hunger, Was nicht in der Suda steht, oder: Was konnte sich der gebildete Byzantiner des 10./11. Jahrhunderts von einem "Konversationslexikon" erwarten?, in: Wolfram Hörandner / Erich Trapp (eds.), Lexicographica Byzantina. Beiträge zum Symposion zur byzantinischen Lexikographie (Wien, 1.–4. 3. 1989) (Byzantina Vindobonensia, 20). Vienna 1991, p. 137–153; Giuseppe Zecchini (ed.), Il lessico Suda e la memoria del passato a Bizantio. Atti della giornata di studio (Milano, 29 aprile 1998) (Munera. Studi storici sulla Tarda Antichità, 14). Bari 1999.

chieftain who received great quantities of money and expensive goods as a reward for his military support.

Other rulers of the eighth century are mainly described within the accounts of the numerous military confrontations, mostly expeditions against the Bulgarians by emperors Constantine V (741–775) and Leo IV (775–780).[30] In the case of the Bulgarian Khan Telerig (768–777), Theophanes relates that he asked Emperor Constantine V to send him a list with the names of the emperor's friends in Bulgaria as he wanted to flee to Byzantium and needed the help of these friends. After he received the list, the chronicler confirms that he ordered the capture and killing of these people while Constantine V, angry about his own naiveté "plucked his grey hairs for a long time."[31] In this example, the cunning and cruelty of the Bulgarian khan is emphasised and combined with the naiveté of Constantine V, whose whole reign Theophanes depicted quite negatively.

The Bulgarian ruler became the focus of Byzantine historiography at the very beginning of the ninth century, when Bulgarian armies expanded into Thrace and along the Black Sea coast and threatened the empire. After 811, with the Bulgarian expansion and the constant military threat to Constantinople, Byzantine authors focused more on the paganism of the Bulgarians and emphasised the contrast between Christian *Romaioi* and pagan invaders.

In 813, Khan Krum (c. 803–814) launched a large-scale expedition against the imperial city and besieged it. According to Byzantine chroniclers, he celebrated pagan rites in front of the walls of Constantinople. Theophanes and the so-called *Scriptor incertus* mention sacrifices in front of the Golden Gate. Theophanes says about Krum that after "performing his foul demonic sacrifices in the coastal meadow of the Golden Gate he requested the emperor to affix his spear in the Golden Gate itself. When the latter had refused he returned to his tent."[32] The *Scriptor incertus* has a longer description of the rites, including sacrifices of men and animals and the acclamation of his army while Khan Krum marched between his wives, who had formed two lines and offered him praise and adoration.[33] How far these accounts present a trustworthy insight into pagan cults is dubious. What the passage does show are the literary strategies of the author. Krum is a counter-model, someone

30 Petăr D. Angelov, Bălgarija i bălgarite v predstavite na vizantijcite (VII–XIV vek). Sofia 1999, p. 160–161; for the events see Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) p. 143–172.

31 de Boor (cf. fn. 9) 448; Mango / Scott / Greatrex (cf. fn. 14) p. 618.

32 de Boor (cf. fn. 9) p. 503; Mango / Scott / Greatrex (cf. fn. 14) p. 686; Ilse Rochow, Byzanz im 8. Jahrhundert in der Sicht des Theophanes. Quellenkritisch-historischer Kommentar zu den Jahren 715–813. Berlin 1991 (Berliner Byzantinistische Abeiten, 57) p. 320–321.

33 Iadevaia (cf. fn. 16) p. 50–52; Staffan Wahlgren (ed.), Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae chronicon (Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae, Vol. 44). Berlin, New York 2006, p. 46*; Zlatarski (2002a, cf. fn. 6) 271; Beševliev (cf. fn. 6) 255; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 139; Angelov (cf. fn. 30) p. 163–168; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 135–136; Warren T. Treadgold, The Byzantine revival, 780–842. Stanford 1988, p. 200–201; Warren T. Treadgold, A history of the Byzantine state and society. Stanford, CA 2000, p. 431.

who performs the contrary of what a good Christian ruler is expected to do. Furthermore, the aim of the passage seems to be directed against the Byzantine emperor, who was unable to prevent the Bulgarians from appearing with a great army before the gates of Constantinople and celebrating their rituals without interference. Both Theophanes and the *Scriptor incertus* emphasise the contrast between pagans and Christians. According to them, the Bulgarians are pagans and their military success is the result of the sinfulness of the Christians in Byzantium at that time.

This scene reappears under slightly different conditions a few years later. Now, the Byzantine emperor, Leo V (813 – 820) is directly involved; he initiated the second period of iconoclasm in Byzantium, which earned him bad press in Byzantine historiography.[34] The scene takes place in the framework of the conclusion of a peace treaty with the Bulgarians around 816. Genesios relates that, "Leo cared little for Christian practices, and in fact confused them in the peace treaties he made with the Huns, by assigning the performance of our customs to them, and imposing their religious practices upon himself and his subjects."[35] Theophanes Continuatus' text reveals an even greater degree of discontent with these rituals:

> In matters of the faith he was affected with a mighty rage and to such an extent that he thought it wrong even to utter the name of God. For, arranging in sworn manner the thirty-year treaty and negotiating the accords for peace with those Huns who are called Bulgars, when it came time to confirm and ratify these through oaths, he did not use our oaths by God and the heavenly Powers or by her who became the mother of Christ God in the flesh as overseers and witnesses of what was said and transacted. But, like some barbarous soul estranged from the reverence of God, he used dogs and the things to which lawless nations make sacrifice as witnesses of what was transacted, and he cut off the bits whereof the latter delight in taking their fill and did not feel disgust at putting these in his mouth as confirmation; and he thus commended to the Bulgars, so it seemed, the Christian faith, to which they would one day be brought through us.[36]

34 Leslie Brubaker / John F. Haldon, Byzantium in the iconoclast era c. 650 – 850. A history. Cambridge [etc.] 2011, p. 366 – 385.

35 Joseph Genesius, Regum libri quattuor. Berlin 1978 (Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae, v. 14, ser. Berolinensis), I, p. 20 – 21; the English translation is from Anthony Kaldellis, Genesios on the reigns of the emperors (Byzantina Australiensia, 11). Canberra 1998, p. 24.

36 Michael Featherstone / Juan Signes Codoñer, Chronographiae Quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Libri I–IV. Recensuerunt Anglice verterunt indicibus instruxerunt Michael Featherstone et Juan Signes-Codoñer, Nuper repertis schedis Caroli De Boor adiuvantibus (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae. Series Berolinensis, Volumen LIII). Boston, Berlin 2015, book 1, ch. 20, p. 50: περὶ δὲ τὴν πίστιν ἐμαίνετο κραταιῶς, καὶ τοσοῦτον ὡς μὴ δὲ θεὸν ὀνομάζειν ἐδόκει τούτῳ καλόν. καὶ γὰρ τὰς τριακοντούτας σπονδὰς τοῖς Οὔννοις δὴ τούτοις τοῖς καλουμένοις Βουλγάροις ἐνωμότως ποιῶν καὶ εἰρηνικὰς συμβάσεις καταπραττόμενος, ἐπεὶ δι' ὅρκων ταύτας ἔμελλε βεβαιοῦν τε καὶ ἐμπεδοῦν, οὐ τούτοις δὴ τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἐχρῆτο, θεὸν καὶ οὐρανίους δυνάμεις ἢ τὴν κατὰ σάρκα γενομένην μητέρα Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, τῶν λεγομένων τε καὶ πραττομένων ἐφόρους καὶ μάρτυρας· ἀλλ' οἷά τις ψυχὴ βάρβαρος θεοσεβείας ἀπῳκισμένη, κύνας μὲν, καὶ οἷς τὰ ἄνομα ἔθνη θύουσιν ἐχρῆτο μάρτυσι τῶν πραττομένων, καὶ ἀπέτεμνεν καὶ διὰ στόματος ἄγειν οὐκ ἐμυσάττετο εἰς βεβαίωσιν, οἷς ἐκεῖνοι χαίρουσιν ἐμφορούμενοι, τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν δὲ πίστιν ἐκείνοις μέλλουσί ποτε ἐφ' ἡμῶν διαβιβάζεσθαι πρὸς ἐκείνην, ὡς ἔοικε, κατεπίστευσεν, the translation p. 51.

It is possible that during the ceremony the Bulgarians performed Christian rites while the emperor performed Bulgarian ones in order to consolidate the treaty.[37] Whether the Bulgarian khan was present is not mentioned, though he would be the natural counterpart for the performance of pagan rites by the emperor. It is therefore not clear whether the text implies the performance of Christian rites by the Bulgarian ruler himself or just by an embassy of high dignitaries. In any case, the passage from Theophanes Continuatus is hardly a reliable source as to the details of the rite. Instead, the text is mainly concerned with vilifying the emperor and focuses once again on the otherness of the Bulgarians as pagans who perform ridiculous and disgusting rites.

4 The Bulgarian Ruler as a Persecutor of Christians

If a Bulgarian khan engaged in the persecution of Christians, it would have been Khan Omurtag (c. 815–c. 831). His image in some later sources is that of a persecutor of Christians;[38] this image is closely connected to the military defeats that the Byzantines experienced during that time. A growing interest in their neighbours increased with the military threat that was imminent from 811, when Emperor Nikephoros' army was heavily defeated in one of the passes of the Balkan Mountains, which became a traumatic event for Byzantium.[39] A historic account of the disastrous campaign written not long after the events was, some scholars suggest, later reworked into a commemorative piece that resembled a hagiographic text to commemorate the Christians who had died in the battle. The final version of the text that contained an additional concluding paragraph was written after 864, some decades later than the events.[40] It does not accuse the Bulgarian ruler of having initiated the killing of Christians, but it was in line with other, mostly later, texts that dealt with the destiny

37 The passage is also mentioned in Carolus DE BOOR (ed.), Nicephori Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula Histoica. Accedit Ignatii Diaconi Vita Nicephori. Lipsiae 1880, p. 206–207, which might have been used by other sources, see ZLATARSKI (2002a, cf. fn. 6) p. 303–304; BEŠEVLIEV (cf. fn. 6) p. 376–380; ANGELOV / PETROV / PRIMOV (cf. fn. 6) p. 148; BOŽILOV / GJUZELEV (cf. fn. 2) p. 145; ZIEMANN (cf. fn. 6) p. 299–301; SOPHOULIS (cf. fn. 6) p. 283–284.

38 ANGELOV (cf. fn. 30) p. 169–174; Georgi ATANASOV / Veselina VAČKOVA / Plamen PAVLOV (eds.), Bălgarska nacionalna istorija. Tom III: Părvo Bălgarsko Carstvo (680–1018). Veliko Tărnovo 2015, p. 178–179.

39 SOPHOULIS (cf. fn. 6) p. 216–217.

40 DUJČEV (cf. fn. 16); Paul STEPHENSON, "About the Emperor Nikephoros and How He Leaves His Bones in Bulgaria": A Context for the Controversial "Chronicle of 811", *DOP* 60 (2006), p. 87–109; Panos SOPHOULIS, The Chronicle of 811, the Scriptor incertus and the Byzantine-Bulgar wars of the early ninth century, *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* 1 (2010), p. 381–388; for a different dating, see Athanasios MARKOPOULOS, La Chronique de l'an 811 et le Scriptor incertus de Leone Armenio: problèmes des relations entre l'hagiographie et l'histoire, *REB* 57 (1999), p. 255–262.

of Christian prisoners in Bulgaria. The motif of the persecution of Christians by the Bulgarian ruler was used in these later texts.

Examples of these texts are the life of Basileios, later Emperor Basileios I (867–886),[41] some *synaxaria* for the martyrs who died as Christian captives in Bulgaria at the hands of their persecutors,[42] and hagiographic texts like Theophylact of Ohrid's *Martyrdom of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis*.[43] This text relates how Khan Omurtag (who is called Mortagon) killed his own son Enravota for his refusal to abandon his Christian faith. All of these texts were written after the Christianisation of the Bulgarians.

The life of Basileios refers to the campaign of Khan Krum in 813 and the conquest of Adrianople. It describes the death of Archbishop Manuel of Adrianople, who, together with his flock

> preserved their Christian faith in all its purity and converted many Bulgarians to the true faith in Christ (for that nation had not yet been converted to the right belief); they sowed the seeds of Christian teaching in many places, drawing the Scythians away from their pagan error and leading them toward the light of the knowledge of God. For this reason, Mutragon [most probably Omurtag, D.Z.], Krum's successor, was moved to anger against them, and, after subjecting them to much torture, delivered the most holy Manuel, and many others similarly denounced, to a martyr's death, for he failed in his attempts to persuade them to abandon Christ. And thus it happened that many of Basileios' relatives attained the glory of martyrdom, so that he, too, shared in the honour coming therefrom.[44]

41 Ihor Ševčenko (ed.), Chronographiae Quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Liber V Quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris Amplectitur (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae Series Berolinensis, 42). Berlin 2011, p. 18–23.

42 Hippolyte Delehaye (ed.), Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi adiectis synaxariis selectis opera et studio. Propylaeum ad acta sanctorum Novembris. Brussels 1902, p. 415–416; Menologion Basilii, in: Patrologia Graeca 117, 20–613, col. 276D–277A. Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) p. 270–275.

43 Iliev (cf. fn. 18) ch. 29–30, p. 63–64; Dimo Cheshmedjiev, Notes on the Cult of the Fifteen Tiberioupolitan Martyrs in Medieval Bulgaria, *Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Center for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe* 2011 (1), p. 143–156; Eirini-Sophia Kiapidou, Critical remarks on Theophylact of Ohrid's Martyrdom of the fifteen martyrs of Tiberiopolis: the editorial adventure of a text from the Middle Ages, *Parekbolai* 2 (2012), p. 27–47.

44 Ševčenko (cf. fn. 41) ch. 4, p. 18–21: ἔντα τὴν οἰκείαν τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστιν ἀνόθευτον διασώζοντες, ὅ τε θαυμάσιος ἐκεῖνος ἄρχιερεὺς καὶ ὁ σὺν αὐτῷ λαός, πολλοὺς τῶν Βουλγάρων πρόςτήν ἀλητῆ πίστιν μετήγαγον τοῦ Χριστοῦ (οὔπω γὰρ ἦν τὸ ἔθνος μετηγμένον πρός τὴν εὐσέβειαν), καὶ πολλαχοῦ τὰ τῆς χριστιανικῆς διδασκαλίας κατεβάλοντο σπέρματα, τῆς ἐθνικῆς τοὺς Σκύθας πλάνης μεθέλκοντες καὶ πρὸς τὸ τῆς θεογνωσίας μετὰγοντες φῶς. ἐφ' οἷς πρὸς ὀργὴν κατ'αὐτῶν κινηθεὶς Μουτράγων ὁ τοῦ Κρούμου διάδοχος, αὐτόν τε τὸν ἱερώτατον Μανουὴλ καὶ πολλοὺς τοὺς ἐπι τούτῳ ἐνδεικνυμένους, ὡ⟨ς⟩ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν πειράσας πεῖσαι ἀποστῆναι Χριστοῦ, μετὰ πολλὰσ αἰκίας τῷ διὰ μαρτυρίου θανάτῳ παρέπεμψεν. καὶ οὕτω συνέβη πολλοὺς τῶν τοῦ Βασιλείου συγγενῶν μαρτυρικῆς εὐκλείας τυχεῖν, ὡς μηδὲ τῆς ἐντεῦθεν σεμνότητος αὐτὸν ἀμοιρεῖν.

Other texts, like the synaxarion of Constantinople, present similar accounts.[45] Some of them were later translated into Old Church Slavonic. This synaxarion presents several Bulgarian rulers as persecutors of Christian captives:

> This Krum captured forty thousand people, among them the most holy bishop. He had the bishop thrown on the ground and stamped all over the poor wretch. After Krum ended his life in an evil way, Dukum took the power. He too, died in torments. Then Ditseng, a severe and merciless man, became commander of the Bulgarians. He cut up the great churchman Manuel in two, cut off his arms at the shoulders, and threw him to the dogs. Wounded by blindness [Ditseng] was then killed by his own [people]. Mertagon took power and dealt inhumanely with all Christians who did not forsake Christ. He took the life of others, torturing them with ropes and chains. He had the holy churchmen George of Deultum and Bishop Peter, who professed [their faith in] Christ our God and persisted in keeping with Christ's pious injunctions beaten with rods in an inhuman and beastly way and their saintly heads cut off by the sword. And a great many people, three hundred and seventy seven in number, he condemned to be put to the sword. The officers John and Leont were cut down with the sword. He had Leont, the saintly eunuch and bishop of Nicea, pierced with a sword through the thighs. And Parod, the holy priest, condemned to stoning. Many others, after subjecting them to different tortures, he had put to death. Indeed, not only the wicked Mertagon but the other rulers as well who inherited the rule over the Bulgarians put to torture and death many Christians thus soliciting for them eternal life.[46]

45 Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 283; Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) p. 270 – 271.

46 Delehaye (cf. fn. 42) 415 – 416: Ἐπεὶ δὲ Κροῦμος, ὁ Βουλγάρων ἔξαρχος, ἐγκρατὴς ἐγένετο τῆς πόλεως, ἐξέβαλεν ἔξω πάντας, χιλιάδας τὸν ἀριθμὸν τεσσαράκοντα· σὺν αὐτοῖς δὲ καὶ τὸν ἁγιώτατον ἐπίσκοπον ἐκβαλὼν κατὰ τοῦ αὐχένος ὑπὸ γῆν ῥιφέντα πεπάτηκε. Κρούμου δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἀπορρήξαντος, Δούκουμος τὴν ἀρχὴν δέχεται· καὶ αὐτοῦ κατὰ πόσας τεθνηκότος, Δίτζευγος ἄρχων τῶν Βουλγάρων γνωρίζεται, δεινὸς καὶ στυγητός· ὃς τὸν μέγαν ἀρχιερέα Μανουὴλ μέσον διχάσας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας τοῖς ὤμοις ἀποτεμὼν βορὰν τοῖς κυσὶ παρέδωκεν. Ὃς ἀορασίᾳ πληγεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκείων ἀναιρεῖται, Μουρτάγων δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν δεξάμενος, ἅπαντας τοὺς χριστιανοὺς μὴ πειθομένους τὸν Χριστὸν ἀρνήσασθαι, ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ποιεῖ, καὶ οὓς μὲν δεσμοῖς καὶ στρεβλώσεσιν ὑποβάλλων, οὓς δὲ ἀπανθρώποις αἰκίαις τιμωρούμενος, τῆς παρούσης ζωῆς ἀπερρήγνυε. Τὸν δὲ ἐν ἁγίοις ἀρχιερέα Δεβελτοῦ Γεώργιου καὶ Πέτρον ἐπίσκοπον ῥάβδοις ἀπανθρώπως κατακόψας, ψίφει τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν ἀπέτεμε, Πάρδον δὲ τὸν ἱερώτατον πρεσβύτερον λιθολευστούμενον θανάτῳ πικρῷ κατεδίκασεν· ὡσαύτως καὶ ἕτερον πλῆθος τριακοσίων ἑβδομήκοντα ἑπτὰ ἢ καὶ πλεῖον ὑπαρχόντων τῇ θέσει εὐνούχου, ξίφει τὴν γαστέρα διέρρηξε· καὶ ἕτερον Λέοντα καὶ Ἰωάννην τοὺς τῶν χριστιανῶν στρατηγοὺς καὶ Γαβριὴλ καὶ Σιόνιον μαχαίρᾳ ἀπέτεμε· Γεώργιον τὸν γενναιότατον καὶ ἑτέρους πολλοὺς διαφόροις αἰκίαις τιμωρησάμενος ἐθανάτωσεν. Οὐ μόνον γὰρ οὗτος ὁ μιαρώτατος Μουρτάγων ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ κατὰ διαδοχὴν Βουλγαρικοὶ γενόμενοι ἄρχοντες πάντας τοὺς; τὸν Χριστὸν ὁμολογοῦντας ἀνῄρουν. Translation from: Kiril Petkov, The voices of medieval Bulgaria, seventh–fifteenth century. The records of a bygone culture (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450 – 1450, vol. 5). Leiden 2008, p. 13 – 14 who refers to Christo H. Kodov, Opis na slavjanskite răkopisi v bibliotekata na Bălgarskata Akademija na naukite. Sofia 1969, p. 141.

5 The Pagan Ruler and the Usage of Christian Elements

While the image of Khan Omurtag as a persecutor of Christians was well established in some later Byzantine sources, an interesting counter-image of the same ruler was used in contemporary Bulgarian sources. These are sources that reflect the ruler's vision of himself and the way he wanted to be presented.

The presence of a Christian population might have caused the Bulgarian khan to integrate Christian elements into his self-representation. However, the main reason seems to be the use of the Byzantine emperor as a role model. After the 811 victory over the Byzantine army of Nikephoros I, the Bulgarian ruler made increasing use of Byzantine elements as an integral part of the image of himself that he intended to create. In some of the inscriptions that he ordered to be carved at central places in Bulgaria, he called himself "ruler by [the grace of] God" (ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων).[47] The title was taken up by his followers as well. The title ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων appears mainly in important places in the power centres of northern Bulgaria, but also at some places in the south. The title can be found, e. g., at monuments in Pliska, one of the central places of the Bulgarian realm and one of the main residences of Khan Omurtag. Scholars have debated which god Khan Omurtag meant, the Christian God or maybe Tangra, who was the highest deity of the pagan Bulgars, and maybe related to the Turkic god Tengri. There is no definite answer to this question. The title does not appear alone and is normally accompanied by "kana sübigi"; sometimes the latter title is used without the Greek one. Various interpretations have been suggested for the meaning of "kana sübigi" and the use of both titles. For Josef Marquart, "kana sübigi" was the translation of the Old Turkic title "tängridä bolmyš qan" or "tängri jaratmyš qan," the khan appointed by heaven.[48] But this interpretation is just one among others.[49] Veselin Stepanov has expressed the opinion that "kanasubigi" means "Ruler from (by) God/Heaven," while ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων is simply a translation of this title.[50]

Some hints point to the Christian god, however. There are parallels to the Byzantine emperor and how he called himself (ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ βασιλεύς), as is seen on Byzantine

47 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) p. 77–80.

48 Josef Marquart, Die Chronologie der alttürkischen Inschriften. Mit einem Vorwort und Anhang von Prof. W. Bang in Löwen. Leipzig 1898, p. 40–42, fn. 1.

49 An Indo-Iranian origin is suggested by: Tatjana Slavova, Vladetel i administracija v rannosrednovekovna Bălgarija. Sofia 2010, p. 278–279.

50 Stepanov (cf. fn. 26); concerning this problem, see also Florin Curta, Qagan, khan, or king? Power in early medieval Bulgaria (seventh to ninth century), *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 37 (2006), p. 1–31; Stefan Yordanov, Srednovekovnijat bălgarski apokrifen vladetel i kolegijata na hana i kagana v političeskata praktika na Părvoto bălgarsko carstvo. II. Hanăt/ kanăt v titulnata praktika i socialno-političeskata dejstvitelnost na srednovekovnoto bălgarsko obštestvo, *Epohi* 23 (2015), no. 1, p. 65–80.

coins and seals.[51] A gold medallion shows Khan Omurtag with insignia that were also quite frequent on coins with a depiction of the Byzantine emperor minted in Byzantium.[52] The connection of these imperial insignia with the Christian faith in Byzantium was certainly not unknown to the Bulgarian court. Furthermore, the inscriptions carved in the Greek language assume a readership that read primarily Greek, which might not have been the case for most of the inhabitants, although it is quite likely that Christians living in Bulgaria could understand Greek.[53] It is therefore possible that the title ὁ ἐκ θεοῦ ἄρχων addressed a Greek-speaking, maybe mostly Christian, audience, while "kana sübigi" satisfied the need to have the traditional Protobulgarian title as well.

As these examples demonstrate, the presence of Christians and Christian elements in Bulgaria and at the khan's court is well attested. The pagan ruler followed patterns of self-representation that were not much different from those of a Christian ruler. How long pagan traditions from earlier historical periods survived is much debated. Some Protobulgarian inscriptions suggest how the khan would like to be seen by his people. An inscription by Khan Malamir 831/2–836 has the following passage:

> The ruler gave to the Bulgars to eat and drink many times and to the boilas and bagains [he gave] great presents. May god grant to the ruler from god to live one hundred years together with kavhan Isbul.[54]

This inscription is not only interesting from the point of view of probable Christian elements; it also gives an interesting insight into the way the ruler wanted to be seen. He is emphasizing his generosity and respect for the different social ranks. *Kavhan* Isbul is presented as co-ruler, suggesting some sort of dual rulership. *Kavhan* is the title of a high-ranking official, usually the highest military commander, in medieval Bulgaria.[55]

Pointing to Christian elements in the inscriptions does not imply that the khan converted to Christianity, as one inscription makes a clear distinction between Christians and others. This inscription, from the time of Khan Presian (c. 837–852), com-

51 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) p. 77–80.

52 Škorpil / Uspenskiy (cf. fn. 8) 387 with fig. 51; Petăr Slavčev / Ivan Jordanov, Zlatni medaljoni na chan Omurtag (814–831), *Arheologija* 21 (1979), no. 2, p. 25–31, p. 26 with fig. 1; Beševliev (cf. fn. 17) No. 86, p. 249 and fig. 185 and 186; Violeta Neševa, Izobraženija na vladeteli ot Părvoto bălgarsko carstvo, in: Prinosi kăm bălgarskata arheologija 1. Dekemvrijski dni na bălgarskata srednovekovna arheologija "Prof. d-r Stančo Vaklinov". Sofia 1992, p. 125–130, 127, and 128, fig. 3; Fiedler (cf. fn. 6) p. 192–193.

53 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) p. 47–49.

54 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) No. 58, p. 224–226: κὲ ὁ ἄρχον πολάκης ἐδοκεν τοὺς Βούλγαρης φαγῖν κὲ πῖν κὲ τοὺς βοιλαδας κ(ὲ) βαγαινους ἔδοκεν μεγάλα ξένηα. ὐ Θ(εό)ς ἀξηόση ζίσιν τὸν ἐκ Θ(ε)οῦ ἄρχονταν ἔτι Ἰσβουλον τ[ον καυχανων; the translation in Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 12.

55 Beševliev (cf. fn. 5) p. 283–292; Vasil Gjuzelev, Kavhanite i ičirgu boilite na Bălgarskoto hanstvo-carstvo. Plovdiv 2007; Tatjana Slavova, Vladetel i administracija v rannosrednovekovna Bălgarija. Sofia 2010, p. 5–12.

pares the reliability of the Bulgars with that of the Christians, in this case certainly meaning mainly the Byzantines:

> When someone tells the truth, god sees. And when someone lies, god sees that too. The Bulgars did many favors to the Christians, but the Christians forgot them. But god sees.[56]

Christian elements were adopted during the course of the ninth century as part of an attempt to establish a more centralised way of governing. The title, the inscriptions, the gold medallion of Khan Omurtag with its similarities to Byzantine customs, all have to be seen in a broader context of the re-organisation of the army and large building programs which left traces in the impressive archaeological remains of Pliska and Preslav, the two main centres of early medieval Bulgaria.[57] It may be misleading, however, to subsume these developments under the heading of Christian elements. It seems that the driving force was political and social, the monopolisation of power and creation of a more densely organised administration. The representation of the ruler by means of inscriptions, buildings, and coins reflected a changing concept of rulership that focused more on the person of the ruler himself than on the consensus with the higher social strata. The nobility, the higher ranks of the Protobulgarian families, continued to lose their influence on the politics of the realm. This becomes even clearer after the conversion of the khan, which was badly received by the higher nobility. This new centralised way of governing found a natural role model in how the Byzantine emperor shaped his image as a ruler.[58] It is therefore quite natural that some elements that were known from the Byzantine emperor found their way to the Bulgarian court. Christian aspects were a key component of the image of the emperor; they were inseparably connected with other non-Christian elements. Taking over the model of the Byzantine emperor made the adoption of Christian components unavoidable. This could entail the mere usage of symbols and signs without referring to their content. In the long run, however, it turned out to be impossible to ignore the intrinsic implications of these symbols. The title "ruler by God" sooner or later led to a redefinition of this God.

While the image of the pagan ruler discussed in this section was mainly based on sources that reflected the self-image of the khan, the image of the Christian ruler depended on the view from the outside, meaning sources derived from neighbouring Byzantium, and, at least for the reign of Khan Boris/Michael, Western sour-

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56 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) No. 14d, p. 140–151: Ἤ [τη]ς τὴν ἀήθηαν γυρευη, ὁ θ(εὸ)ς θεορῖ.κ(έ), ἤ της ψεύδετε, ὁ θ(εὸ)ς θεορῖ. Τοὺς Χριστιηανοὺς οἱ Βούλγαρις πολα ἀγαθὰ ἐπυισα(ν) κ(ὲ) οἱ Χριστηανοὶ ἐλησμόνησαν, ἀλλὰ ὁ θ(εὸ)ς θεορῖ; the translation in Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 12–13.

57 Zlatarski (2002a, cf. fn. 6) p. 318–331; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 161–188; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 153–157; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 306–309, 317–332 (concerning Pliska); Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) p. 298–306.

58 Georgi Bakalov, Vizantijskijat culturen model v idejno-političeskata struktura na Părvata bălgarska dăržava, *Istorija* 3 (1994), 4–5, p. 13–27.

ces. This does, not, however, mean that he did not consciously create an image of himself. He did so as much as his predecessors, as will be discussed below.

6 Christians in Bulgaria before 864/5

The image of the good Christian ruler was naturally connected to the baptism of the Bulgarians and the creation of ecclesiastic structures. Boris, who called himself Michael after his baptism in 864/5, was able to appear as a new Constantine.[59] Very soon after his death he was – probably – venerated as a saint.[60] His conversion was not a spontaneous act; it was the outcome of a longer development that has to be seen in a broader European context as it coincided with similar developments in East Central Europe.[61] Inside Bulgaria, too, there were movements that prepared the way for the official conversion.

With the decisive defeat of the Byzantine army led by Emperor Nikephoros in 811, Bulgaria expanded into the Byzantine province of Thrace. As noted above, military campaigns of the Bulgarian Khan Krum during the following years led the Bulgarians to the walls of Constantinople. While the imperial city itself remained inaccessible, the Bulgarians devastated the hinterland, conquered the city of Adrianople, and took many Christian prisoners.[62] Furthermore, the territorial expansion included former Byzantine regions that became part of the Bulgarian realm. With the inhabitants of the newly incorporated territories and the captives from the military expeditions, the Bulgarian khan ruled over a considerable number of Christians who mostly spoke Greek. In an inscription from 813 or 814, Greek Christian names appeared on a list of high ranking military officers.[63] Theophanes mentions the *spatharios* Eumathios, an expert in siege engines who fled to the Bulgarian court during the campaign of Emperor Nikephoros in 809.[64] At least during the ninth century, there seem to have been Byzantines or Greek-speaking inhabitants not only at the court but also in other spheres and areas of the Bulgarian khanate. The phenomenon of the "Protobulgarian inscriptions" that were carved using Greek as the language of choice has already been mentioned. The expansion of the Bulgarian realm paved the way for Byzantine

59 Podskalsky (cf. fn. 19) p. 60; Dimo Češmedžiev, Imperator Konstantin Veliki i knjaz Boris I Mihail: Pobedata nad ezičnicite, in: Miša Rakocija (ed.), Niš i Vizantija. Šesti naučni skup, Niš, 3. – 5. Jun 2007. Dani Sv. cara Konstantina i carice Jelene. Zbornik radova 6. Niš 2008, p. 357–368.

60 See Angel Nikolov, Problemăt za kanonizacijata na knjaz Boris-Mihail, in: Nikolov / Kănev (eds.), Simeonova Bălgarija, p. 214–221.

61 For a broader picture, see the respective passages in Florin Curta, Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250 (Cambridge medieval textbooks). Cambridge, New York 2006.

62 Zlatarski (2002a, cf. fn. 6) p. 247–292; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 130–147; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 126–143; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 241–287; Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) p. 217–286.

63 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) no. 47, p. 186–193.

64 de Boor (cf. fn. 9) p. 485, Mango / Scott / Greatrex (cf. fn. 14) p. 665.

cultural influence, which was intrinsically connected to Christianity. It is quite likely that Christians lived continuously in Bulgaria and were able to practice their religious customs undisturbed during the eighth and at the beginning of the ninth century.[65] It was only under the rule of Khan Omurtag (c. 815–c. 831) that persecutions of Christians are mentioned.[66] There were certainly limits to the free exercise of religion, however, as the building of churches cannot be proven for the period before the Christianisation in 864/5.[67]

7 Boris/Michael – The Zealous Fighter

Although the Christianisation of Bulgaria was embedded in a longer process of contacts and interconnections, the baptism of the Bulgarian ruler Boris appears to have been an expected but sudden event. It marked a significant change but was not a surprise and not a completely new start. A few years before the baptism, a letter from Boris (852–889, † 907) to King Louis the German (843–876), to which pope Nicholas I (861–867) alluded, revealed that Boris had already planned to convert to Christianity.[68] Boris's new name, Michael, was taken from his godfather, the Byzantine Emperor Michael III (842–867). The baptism took place in 864 or 865, the result of Byzantine military pressure, but the exact circumstances of the baptism are not entirely clear; where it happened and who was present are still debated.[69] The available sources present slightly different versions of the event.[70] The decision, however, turned out to be irreversible; Bulgaria remained a Christian empire. During his reign, Boris/Michael strongly supported the spread of the Christian faith in Bulgaria.

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65 Peter Schreiner, Das Christentum in Bulgarien vor 864, in: V. Gjuzelev/ R. Pillinger (eds.), Das Christentum in Bulgarien und auf der übrigen Balkanhalbinsel in der Spätantike und im frühen Mittelalter: 2. Internationales Symposium, Haskovo (Bulgarien), 10.–13. Juni 1986. 1987, p. 51–61; Bistra Nikolova, Rannoto hristijanstvo v Bălgarija predi pokrăstvaneto. Teorii i realnost, in: Totev (ed.), 1100 godini Veliki Preslav I, p. 182–194; Georgi Bakalov, Hristijanski tradicii po bălgarskite zemi do pokrăstvaneto, in: Vasil Gjuzelev / Hristo Trendafilov (eds.), Preslavska knižovna škola. Tom 5. Izsledvanija v čest na prof. d. ist. n. Totju Totev. Sofia 2001, 22–31; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) 345–348.
66 Sophoulis (cf. fn. 6) 270–274.
67 Ljudmila Dončeva-Petkova, Arheologičeski svedenija za hristijanstvoto v Bălgarija predi i neposredstveno sled pokrăstvaneto, in: Totev (ed.), 1100 godini Veliki Preslav I, p. 196–205.
68 Ernst Perels, Nicolai I. papae epistolae, in: idem (ed.), Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistulae VI, Karolini aevi IV. Berlin 1925, p. 257–690, 293.
69 For the most detailed overview of the sources and the literature concerning the baptism, see Podskalsky (cf. fn. 19) p. 52–53; see also Zlatarski (2002b, cf. fn. 6) p. 1–43; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 213–219; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 171–175; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 356–365.
70 Anni Lesmueller-Werner / Ioannes Thurn (eds.), Iosephi Genesii Regum Libri quattuor (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae – Series Berolinensis, 14). Berlin, New York 1978, IV, 16, p. 69; Featherstone / Signes Codoñer (cf. fn. 36) IV, 14 p. 232–235; Wahlgren (cf. fn. 33) 131, 25, p. 243; Pseudo-Symeon in Immanuel Bekker (ed.), Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon magister, Georgios monachus. Bonn 1838, p. 665; Iliev (cf fn. 18) ch. 34, p. 67–68.

A Bulgarian embassy who presented 115 questions to Pope Nicholas I initiated a four-year period of Latin missionary work.[71] At the end, however, Boris/Michael was left disappointed by not having been granted his chosen candidate, Formosus of Porto, as patriarch of Bulgaria. He therefore returned to the church of Constantinople, which was much less hesitant to grant the Bulgarian church a certain degree of independence. At a meeting with a papal embassy and the Byzantine emperor after the fourth council of Constantinople in 870, the final decision was made in favour of the Eastern church.[72] With some short interruptions in the twelfth and thirteenth century, Bulgaria remained an Orthodox country.

The conversion had an impact on governance and the relationship between the ruler and the nobility who did not always welcome the new religion.[73] Boris/Michael used the new religion to centralise his power structures and reduce the influence of noble families. Instead, Byzantine clerics became influential at the ruler's court. In the questions to Pope Nicholas, these clerics are held responsible for the merciless punishment of the rebels. The role model for a new interpretation of the ruler's position was the Byzantine emperor. Some interesting aspects from the habits at court demonstrate this relationship:

71 Ernst Perels, Responsa Nicolai papae ad consulta Bulgarorum, in: idem (ed.), MGH Epp. VI, Karolini aevi IV, p. 568 – 600; concerning the Responsa Nicolai papae ad consulta Bulgarorum see Josef Hergenröther, Photius, Patriarch von Konstantinopel; sein Leben, seine Schriften und das griechische Schisma. Nach handschriftlichen und gedruckten Quellen, vol. 1 – 3. Regensburg 1867 – 1869, I, p. 607 – 616; Dimităr Dečev, Răkopisite na tăj narečenite "Otgovori na papa Nikolaj I po dopitvanijata na bălgarite", *Izvestija na Bălgarskija Arheologiceski Institut* 7 (1933), p. 322 – 340; Dimităr Dečev, Otgovorite na papa Nikolaj I po dopitvanijata na bălgarite (Responsa Nicolai papae I ad consulta Bulgarorum anno 866). Tekst i prevod. Vtoro izdanie (Universitetska biblioteka, 213). Sofia 1940; Ivan Dujčev, Die Responsa Nicolai I. papae ad consulta Bulgarorum als Quelle für die bulgarische Geschichte, in: idem (ed.), Medioevo bizantino-slavo Vol. 1. Studi di storia politica e culturale. Rome 1965 (Storia e letteratura Raccolta di studi e testi, 102), p. 125 – 148; Ivan Dujčev, I Responsa di papa Nicolò I ai bulgari neoconvertiti, in: idem (ed.), Medioevo bizantino-slavo Vol 3. Rome 1971 (Storia e letteratura Raccolta di studi e testi, 119); Hristo Kolarov, Otgovorite na Papa Nikolaj I po dopitvanijata na bălgarite kato istoričeski izvor za razprostranjavaneto na hristijanstvoto v Bălgarija prez IX v., *Trudove na Vissija pedagogičeski institut Veliko Tărnovo* 5 (1968), p. 3 – 34; Peter Leisching, Der Inhalt der Responsa Nikolaus I. ad consulta Bulgarorum im Lichte westkirchlicher Quellen, *Kanon, Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für das Recht der Ostkirchen* 3 (1977), p. 240 – 248; Lothar Heiser, Die Responsa ad consulta Bulgarorum des Papstes Nikolaus I. 858 – 867; ein Zeugnis päpstlicher Hirtensorge und ein Dokument unterschiedlicher Entwicklungen in den Kirchen von Rom und Konstantinopel. Trier 1979; Podskalsky (cf. fn. 19) p. 55 with fn. 233; Tamás Nótári, Some Remarks on the Responsa Nicolai papae I. ad consulta Bulgarorum, *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Legal Studies* 4 (2015), no. 1, p. 47 – 63.
72 Zlatarski (2002a, cf. fn. 6) p. 43 – 152; Angelov / Petrov / Primov (cf. fn. 6) II, p. 219 – 228; Božilov / Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 2) p. 175 – 186; Ziemann (cf. fn. 6) p. 370 – 412.
73 Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 21) p. 102 – 122; Ziemann (cf. fn. 20).

> Article 42. You state that when your prince sits at the table to eat according to custom no one sits next to him, even his wife, but all of you sit on low chairs at a distance from him and eat on the ground.[74]

The answers of Pope Nicholas I recommend sitting together with the others and alludes to the example of Jesus. Imitating the Byzantine *basileus* clearly meant breaking with long-established customs, although exactly how the pagan ruler interpreted his position is unknown. It seems, however, that the role of the higher nobility was more prominent during the pagan period. Some inscriptions might even suggest a dual rulership, but this is debated.[75] The new Christian ruler emphasised his authority and it seems that converting to Christianity was a way for him to establish a different, more autocratic, way of governing that reduced the role and influence of the leading families.

Immediately after the baptism, a revolt led by some leading noble families broke out. The available sources, which were certainly derived from the Bulgarian court, present a model of pagan resistance against the new faith. Whether this was really the whole story is difficult to say, but it seems that the new religion was associated with a diminished role for the nobility, the driving force of the rebellion. The description of the rebellion uses the well-known model of the Christian ruler who defeats pagan resistance with the help of God.

The events are known mainly from Western sources, *the Annals of Saint Bertin*, and the responses of Pope Nicholas I to the Bulgarians' questions from 866. The responses to the 115 questions that were posed to Pope Nicolas by a Bulgarian embassy in Rome concern general questions about the Christian faith. They also comprise questions about normal life, habits, customs, behaviour, and how much they should be changed after Christianisation. Thus, the responses also provide abundant information about Bulgarian society.[76] Among many other issues, they mention the rebellion led by some noble families and Boris/Michael's cruel revenge:

> And so, you tell us how with God's mercy you accepted the Christian faith and how you made all your people convert, but how after they converted they rose unanimously against you with great hatred arguing that you gave them no good law and they wanted to kill you and install another prince, and how you, fortified with God's power, overcame them and captured them all with your own hands ordinary people and magnates, and how all the leaders and nobles were put to the sword with all their kin, and the less noble and the not so distinguished suffered no harm....[77]

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74 Perels (cf. fn. 71) ch. 42, p. 583: *Asseritis, quod rex vester cum ad manducandum in sedili, sicut mos est, ad mensam sederit, nemo ad convescendum, etiam neque uxor eius, cum eo discumbat, vobis procul in sellis residentibus et in terra manducantibus*; the translation in Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 27.

75 Beševliev (cf. fn. 5) p. 283–292; Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 55).

76 Perels (cf. fn. 71); Heiser (cf. fn. 71).

77 Perels (cf. fn. 71) ch. 17, p. 577: *Igitur referentes, qualiter divina clementia Christianam religionem perceperitis qualiterque populum vestrum baptizari omnem feceritis, qualiter autem illi, postquam baptizati fuerunt, insurrexerint unanimiter cum magna ferocitate contra vos, dicentes non bonam vos eis*

The *Annals of Saint Bertin*, compiled by archbishop Hincmar of Reims, under the year 866 have even a more elaborate version with God interfering in the battle more or less directly:

> But his leading men were very angry and stirred up his people against him, aiming to kill him. All the warriors there were in all the ten counties of that realm came and surrounded the king's palace. But he invoked Christ's name and came forth against that whole multitude with only forty-eight men who, burning with zeal for the Christian faith, stayed loyal to him. As soon as the king came out from the city gates, there appeared to him and his companions seven clerics, each holding a burning candle in his hand, who thus advanced ahead of the king and his men. Now to the rebels it seemed that a great flaming mansion was falling on them, and the horses of the king's men, so it seemed to their opponents, advanced walking on their hind legs and struck them down with their front hooves. Such great terror gripped the rebels that they could not get themselves ready either to flee or to fight, but flung themselves on the ground unable to move. The king killed fifty-two of the leading men who had been most active in stirring the people up against him, but he let the rest of the people go away unharmed.[78]

While the *Annals of Saint Bertin* present the image of the Christian ruler who defeats the enemies of the Christian faith with the help of God, the responses by Pope Nicholas I do not join in glorifying the image of Boris/Michael. He clearly expected to be praised for killing just the leaders and nobles while he spared the others and, under the pressure of his advisors, the Bulgarian khan asked whether the slaughter of the rebels together with their families had to be counted as a sin. The pope was clear in his answer, assuring him that it was indeed a sin to kill innocent people. According to Pope Nicholas I, such a severe punishment was not in accordance with the Christian way of life.

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legem tradidisse, volentes etiam vos occidere et regem alium constituere, et qualiter vos divina cooperante potentia adversus eos praeparati a maximo usque ad modicum superaveritis et manibus vestris detentos habueritis qualiterque omnes primates eorum atque maiores cum omni prole sua gladio fuerint interempti, mediocres vero seu minores nihil mali pertulerint; for a commentary, see Heiser (cf. fn. 71) p. 421–422; the English translation in Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 25.

78 Felix Grat / Jeanne Vielliard / Suzanne Clémencet (eds.), Annales de Saint-Bertin, publiées pour la société de l'histoire de France. Paris 1964, p. 133: *Quod proceres sui moleste ferentes, concitaverunt populum adversus eum, ut illum interficerent. Quotquot igitur fuerunt intra decem comitatus, adunaverunt se circa palatium eius. Ille vero, invocato Christi nomine, cum quadraginta tantum octo hominibus, qui erga christianam devotionem ferventes sibi remanserant, profectus est contra omnem illam multitudinem; et mox ut portas civitatis exiit, apparuerunt ei et his qui cum eo erant septem clerici, et unusquisque eorum tenebat cereum ardentem in manu sua, sicque praecedebant regem et illos qui cum eo erant. Eis vero qui contra eum insurrexerant visum erat, quod magna villa ardens super eos caderet, et equi eorum qui cum rege erant, sicut contrariis videbatur, erecti incedebant et cum anterioribus pedibus eos percutiebant; tantusque timor eos apprehendit, ut nec ad fugiendum nec ad defendendum se praepararent, sed prostrati solo se movere nequibant. Rex autem ex proceribus, qui populum maxime adversus eum incitaverunt, interfecit numero quinquaginta duos, reliquum autem populum inlaesum abire permisit*; the English translation can be found in Janet Nelson, The Annals of St Bertin: Ninth Century Histories, vol. 1 (Manchester medieval sources). Manchester, New York 1991, ad an. 866, p. 137.

> ... and you wish to know if, on account of those who lost their lives, you had committed a sin. Indeed, this could not have been done without sin and without guilt on your part, since you had the younger generation, which had not shared in the plans of their parents and did not rise in arms against you slaughtered, the innocent perishing alongside the guilty. ... But because you sinned on account of your zeal for Christianity or out of ignorance rather than vice, you shall receive absolution and grace by Christ's mercy as soon as you do penance.[79]

The question of guilt faded with time and the image of Boris/Michael as a staunch defender of the Christian faith came to form an essential element of his later holiness. Patriarch Nicholas refers to Boris/Michael's victory against the rebels in one of his letters to Symeon, Boris/Michael's son and successor. The letter was written in 922/3 in the context of the military confrontation between the Bulgarians and Byzantium. Patriarch Nicholas wants to prevent Symeon from continuing the war against Byzantium and refers to his father as a saint and good example, "who kept peace with the Romans and lived a pious life." In this context he also remarked that Boris/Michael, "by the Divine Power... triumphed over those who would have murdered him."[80]

By this time, the story of divine support for the neophyte against his adversaries was already established and part of cultural memory. In the tenth century, on 28 March, the Bulgarian church celebrated Prince Michael's victory over the rebellion that had been instigated against him because of the Christianisation.[81]

A miracle of Saint George, perhaps from the tenth century, emphasises the baptism and also depicts Boris as chosen by God in the context of his zealous fight for the true faith. The relevant passage still has traces of the memory of the resistance:

> I am from the newly converted Bulgarian people, whom God enlightened through His chosen one, Prince Boris, called in the holy baptism Michael. With Christ's strength and the sign of the cross he overcame the tough and unyielding Bulgarian tribe and illuminated with the light of understanding their hearts darkened by the evil-scheming satanic endeavor; turned them away from the dark, deceiving, stinking, and abominable to God sacrifices and led them from darkness to light and from falsehood and iniquity to the truth; cast out their reeking

79 Perels (cf. fn. 71) ch. 17, p. 577: *de his nosse desideratis, qui vita privati sunt, utrum ex illis peccatum habeatis. Quod utique sine peccato evasum non est nec sine culpa vestra fieri potuit, ut proles, quae in consilio parentum non fuit nec adverus vos arma sustulisse probatur, innocens cum nocentibus trucidaretur ... Verum quia zelo Christianae religionis et ignorantia potius quam alio vitio deliquistis, poenitentia subsequente per Christi gratiam indulgentiam de his et misericordiam consequemini;* Petkov (cf. fn. 46) 25.

80 Romilly J. H. Jenkins / Leendert G. Westerink (eds.), Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople. Letters. Washington, D.C. 1973 (DOT 2), No. 25, p. 174: εἰ καὶ διὰ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως ὑπέρρος γέγονε τῶν φονευτῶν, p. 175 (English translation).

81 Nikolov (cf. fn. 60) 217; A. Turilov, Dve zabytye daty bolgarskoj cerkovno-političeskoj istorii IX v. (K voprosu formirovanija bolgarskogo varianta cerkovnogo mesjacoslova v epohu Pervogo carstva), *Palaeobulgarica/Starobălgaristica* 23 (1999), no. 1, p. 19; A. Turilov, Slavica Cyrillomethodiana. Istočnikovedenie istorii i kul'tury južnych slavjan i drevnej Rusi. Mežslavjanskie kul'turnye svjazi epohi srednevekov'ja. Moskva, p. 120.

> and polluted foods and destroyed their sacrificial tables; strengthened them in the Orthodox Christian faith with the holy books....[82]

The image of Boris/Michael as a zealous fighter for the Christian faith was connected to more events. Besides the rebellion of the nobles, the image is used to describe events that happened some decades later, after Boris/Michael resigned from the throne in 889 and decided to become a monk. He left the throne to his oldest son, Vladimir, also called Rasate, who did not follow his father's path. Regino of Prüm describes it in his account:

> Meanwhile his son, whom he had made king, retreated far from his father's intentions and deeds and began to act like a despoiler, giving himself over to drunkenness, carousing and lust, and making every effort to recall the recently baptised people to the pagan way of worship. When the father heard about this he was incensed with great anger. He removed his holy habit, took up his sword-belt, put on his regal clothing and, gathering the God-fearing to his side, pursued his son. He soon captured him without difficulty, gouged out his eyes and imprisoned him. Then he summoned an assembly of the whole kingdom and established his younger son as king, threatening him in front of everyone that he would suffer a similar fate if in any way he deviated from correct Christianity.[83]

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82 Editions of the text: Hrisanf Loparev, Čudo svjatogo Georgija o bolgarine. Pamjatnik vizantijskoj, perevodnoj literatury, St. Petersburg 1894, p. 19–24; B. St. Angelov, Skazanie za železnija krăst, *Staroobălgarska literatura* 1 (1971), p. 121–155; p. 141–143; Hristo Kodov, Opis na slavjanskite răkopisi v bibliotekata na Bălgarskata Akademija na Naukite. Sofia 1969, p. 143–144; the following passage has been taken from Mirosław J. Leszka, "Opowieść o krzyżu żelaznym" jako źródło do dziejów wojny bułgarsko-węgierskiej z lat. 894–896, in: Slavia Antiqua 57 (2016), p. 77–96, here: 85–86: дзь г҃и о҃ц҃е петре игоумене. ѡ҃ езыка новопросвѣ҃наа бльгарскаа. егоже просвѣти бг҃ъ, с҃тꙑ к҃рщениѥ҃. вь наша лѣта изъбранꙑникѡ҃ свои҃ борисомь. егоже нарекоше вь с҃тѣ҃ к҃рщени михаиль. иже силою х҃вою, побѣ҃ды крьстны҃ оружиѥ҃. и вел҃ми непокоривы роѣ҃ бльгар҃скы. и омрачена ср҃ца. злокьзын҃наго дїавола дѣиствомь. свѣтѡ҃ бг҃оразоумїа просвѣти и ѡ҃ тьмн҃и и бг҃омрьскы҃и жрьтьвь ѡ҃врати изв҃ѣ ис т҃мы на свѣть. ѡ҃ лъсти крив҃ды на истинꙋ҃. с҃мрад҃наа брашнаа и нечиста. и тр҃ѣбыца и҃ расип҃. и оутв҃рьдї е с҃тими книгамы; the translation can be found in Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 44; Podskalsy (cf. fn. 19) p. 476 with further literature; Ančo J. Kalojanov / Marija A. Spasova / Todor D. Mollov (eds.), "Skazanie za železnija krăst" i epohata na car Simeon. Veliko Tărnovo 2007; Yanko Hristov, Za njakoi momenti v cikăla razkazi "skazanie za železnija krăst", *Naučni izvestija* 6 (2010), 1–2, p. 89–93; Yanko Hristov, Shtrihi kăm "Skazanie za železnija krăst". Blagoevgrad, 2012.

83 Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi. Recognovit Fridericus Kurze (Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum). Hannover 1890, p. 95–96: *Interea filius eius, quem regem constituerat, longe a paterna intentione et operatione recedens predas cępit exercere, ebrietatibus, comessationibus et libidinibus vacare et omni conamine ad gentilitatis ritum populum noviter baptizatum revocare. Quod cum pater audisset, nimio zelo accensus sacrum habitum deposuit et militiae cingulum resumpsit et cultu regio indutus, adsociatis sibi Deum timentibus, filium persecutus est: quem mox absque difficultate cępit, oculosque eius effodit, et in carcerem misit; deinde convocato omni regno suo filium iuniorem regem constituit, interminatus coram omnibus, similia fore passurum, si in aliquo a recta christianitate deviaret*, the English translation in Simon MacLean, History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe. The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg (Manchester Medieval Sources Series). Manchester, New York 2009.

Regino is the only detailed source for these events. Apart from Regino, only Constantine of Preslav, in his *Učitelno evangelie* (didactic gospel), mentions difficult times for Christians, but without mentioning any names. He recommends upholding the fulfillment of the divine order without fearing kings and refers to the martyrs as examples.[84]

The credibility of the accounts in both cases, the rebellion of the nobles and the reign of Boris/Michael's son Vladimir, is difficult to ascertain. Whether the main goal in both cases was indeed to abolish Christianity is not entirely clear. Instead, what is important here is the message that these texts convey: the image of the Christian ruler who defends the Christian faith against his enemies without hesitation. In the first case, Boris/Michael enjoys divine support, while in the second one, it is mainly his own effort that brings him his victory. His pious way of life in a monastery is, nevertheless, a precondition for acting against his successor. This is what Regino of Prüm's text emphasises. It seems that the first accounts about the rebellion of the nobles stem from the Bulgarian court itself. While the responses of Pope Nicholas merely quote a report that was presented to the pope, the *Annals of Saint Bertin* seem to reflect the official version of the events. The second case, the reign of Vladimir, was certainly not transmitted directly; I will return to this point below. At least in the first case, one can assume a more or less conscious creation of an image by Boris/Michael and his followers. This image eventually paved the way for his sanctification.

In this regard, an interesting passage appears in another Western source, the *Annals of Fulda*. For the year 896 the *Annals of Fulda* describe the calamities of the Hungarian invasion, when Boris/Michael's son Symeon ruled Bulgaria. According to the *Annals of Fulda*, after losing two battles against the Hungarians and seeing many people killed, the suffering Bulgarians turned to Michael, asking him for advice. He recommended three days of penance to repent the injustice against Christians and ask for God's help. Finally, the Christians prevailed in a hard battle where they suffered serious losses.[85] In this case, the ex-ruler no longer acted as a ruler but as a religious man who is already a mediator between men and God. The *Annals of Fulda* are otherwise well informed about Bulgaria and present information that cannot be found in other sources.[86]

Michael as a military leader is perhaps also represented in passages from Old Bulgarian apocalyptic literature, namely, the *Vision of Daniel*, the *Interpretation of Daniel*, and the *Narration of Isaiah*. All these texts are generally dated to the eleventh century, the time of the Byzantine occupation of Bulgaria. The texts are normally

84 Arhiepiskop Antonij, Iz istorii hristianskoj propovedi: Očerki i izsledovanija. Sankt-Peterburg ^{2}1895, p. 272; Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 21) p. 464.

85 Georg Heinrich Pertz / Friedrich Kurze (eds.), Annales Fuldenses sive annales regni Francorum orientalis (Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 7). Hannover 1891, p. 129–130.

86 This refers to an embassy of the Bulgarian ruler Pertz / Kurze (cf. fn. 85) 121–122.

transmitted in later manuscripts and make use of previous examples from this genre by applying the motifs to a Bulgarian historical setting using figures from Bulgarian history.[87] The models come from Greek sources, translated and transformed. One example is the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius*, which was translated and used for the composition of other texts.[88] In some of the texts, Michael is the last king, who fulfils deeds that are normally associated with last kings or last emperors in various eschatological texts. In most of these cases, it remains unclear whether the figure of the historical Michael has left any traces or whether other rulers with the same name played a greater role.[89]

According to the *Interpretation of Daniel*, a *Michail kagan* appeared among the Bulgarians "when the beginning of the evils for the whole world came."[90] Since they did not give him the Bulgarian tsardom, he had to take it by force. Symeon and Peter succeeded him.[91] This passage seems to reflect the historical Michael to a certain extent.

Later, the same text tells the story of a tsar called Michael, who is described like the last emperor. He comes from Thessalonica; an Angel of God awakens him. Later Tsar Michael enters Rome. He defeats the "blond beards" at Glavinitsa. The text continues:

> And two torturers will arise from the east. With the first he will meet at Ovche Pole; and he will massacre the soldiers of Skopje at the Kiev spring. He will return here, and here will come two hordes of Ishmaelites and will conquer the whole of the Bulgarian land, and when the Kagan sets off he will join them near Sredets; and there will be a slaughter twice. And he will say in Boyana: 'Leave the loot here. Go to your homes.' And the Ishmaelites will start speaking: 'We will not give it up but we will fight!' And a great battle will occur – there is a spring with two spouts in that place. And there will be a great bloodshed so that a three-year-old stallion could drown in the blood. Here the Ugrians will defeat him and slaughter all his soldiers. And he will flee to Velbăzhd. And there again he will call together orphans and priests and deacons and monks – on the Vitosha Mountain, where many [holy relics] of saints from all over the world are gathered. And they will go forth against Ishmael bearing crosses. The patriarch will march ahead of them. The Ugrians will be afraid and will abandon the loot.[92]

87 Vassilka TĂPKOVA-ZAIMOVA / Anisava MILTENOVA, Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria. Sofia 2011, p. 27–46.

88 Ibid., p. 33–34.

89 Ibid., p. 87–118.

90 Ibid., p. 89, 173, 181 (English translation).

91 Ibid., p. 173, 181 (English translation).

92 Ibid., p. 174–175: и въстанета в м(у)телѣ · ѿ въстока · и с прьвьмь срѣщеть се на Ѡв'чи поли · изьбиѥть скопьские вое · на Киевѣ стоуден'ци · тоу же в'звратить се · и тоу пакы приде · двѣ чести из'маильтѣнь · и попълънить всоу землю блъгарьскоую · и шьдь каганъ съставить е на Срѣдьци · и тоу створіть сѣча два · и речеть оу Боанѣ ѡставите тоу плѣнь · идѣте же домомь · и начноуть гл҃ати измаильтене · не дадимь мы нь биемь се · и тоу строрет'/l/ раз'бои великь · и ѥсть же тоу стоуденць двоа врата имы · [и] боудеть пролитие крьви мнозѣ · ѥко оутоноути оу крьви ждрѣбьцоу трилѣтьноу · и тѣ оудолѣють немоу игры · из'биють немоу вое · а самь оубѣжить вь Вельблоуж(д)ь · и тоу пакы сбереть сироты · и попе · и диѧкы · и мниҳы · вь Витоши горѣ · идѣже соуть събрани

In this case, there might be a reflection of the Hungarian invasions at the end of the ninth century, but if there is a memory of the historical events, it is barely visible. A different historical context would be also conceivable. The *Vision of Daniel* presents similar information; it is quite close to the *Interpretation of Daniel*. Michael is also presented as the last king. He is also one who fights against the enemies of the Christian God, which might be seen as a trace of the historical Michael. But a historical echo is barely noticeable. Other rulers called Michael could also have served as models:

> And when the month of August comes and the first day breaks, Michael will seize the kingdom; and the mountains will start opening, the fish will die in the rivers, and God will be forever with him. And he will enter Thessalonica from the west. And he will reign over his kingdom with huge force, and he will humble his enemies under his feet, and his scepter will rule in Thessalonica for thirty-three years. And his whole ire and wrath will be against the ones denying the Lord. And there will be peace all over the earth.[93]

The legend of the last king is also taken up by the *Narration of Isaiah*, in which King Michael goes to Rome and defeats the "blond beards."[94] As already mentioned, it is unclear how much the apocalyptic texts really refer to Boris/Michael. The motif of the zealous fighter might or might not be connected to his name, but other aspects of his image survived, namely, his pious conduct and retreat to a monastery.

8 Boris/Michael – The Pious Ruler

Soon after his baptism, Boris/Michael received advice about how to rule as a good Christian ruler from both Pope Nicholas I in Rome and Patriarch Photios in Constantinople (858–867 and 877–886). The responses noted above to the questions of the Bulgarians did not provide a mirror for princes or general rules of conduct. The responses refer strictly to the questions posed, answering them one by one.[95] Reading all the answers to the 115 questions gives the impression of a piece-by-piece construction of a picture of how a Christian ruler should behave. There is no systematic ap-

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мнози · сѣ҃ти ѿ всѣхъ земль · и поидоуть' съ кр(с)ты на Измаила · патиѣарьхъ҃ поидеть прѣд ними · нач'ноуть боꙗти се ѥгры, p. 182 (English translation).

93 Ibid., p. 158: м(с)ца авьгоуста · настаюцаго · поидеть прьвы дн҃ь · Михаиль цр(с)тво вьзьмь · и вьчноуть горы растоупати се · рыби измирати вь рѣкахъ · и г҃ь боудеть с нимь вьсвсег(д)а҃ · и вынидеть вь Солоунь ѿ запада · и дрьжить · цр҃ьство свое всею силою · и смѣрить враги свое под' нозѣ свои · и цр(с)твоуѥть скипетрь вь Солоунѣ · лѣ(т) ·л·г· и боудеть вса ꙗрость его · и на гнѣвь его · и на ѿметавшее се г҃а · и оумирить се вса землѣ, p. 167 (English translation).

94 Ibid., p. 125 (on the "blond beards"), the text (Narration of Isaiah) p. 202, 213 (English translation); concerning the blond beards, see A. A. Vasiliev, The Emperor Michael III in Apocryphal Literature, *Byzantina Metabyzantina* 1 (1946), p. 237–248, 247sq.

95 Heiser (cf. fn. 71).

proach; instead, the broader context – the basic principles – have to be extracted from the concrete situations to which the questions refer.

The letter by Patriarch Photios of Constantinople, who wrote to Boris/Michael soon after his baptism, presents a different picture. In his letter, Photios produced a traditional mirror for princes (Τί ἐστιν ἔργον ἄρχοντος). The letter is quite long and contains an account of the seven general councils. After this dogmatic section, Photios turns to a didactic part, a detailed description of how a Christian ruler should behave. He should build churches and he should aim at being a part of the church and praying together with others. He should attend to his appearance; he should style his speeches in a moderate, ordered, and exalted way. He should not offer friendship too easily, but once made he should preserve it carefully. From friends he should ask for the truth, not for flattery. He should avoid envy but be envied by others. He should educate his people for the better. As soon as a ruler can compose himself, he can be regarded as a true ruler.[96]

With the responses and Photios's letter, Boris/Michael had information about how to behave as a good Christian ruler. The sources do not allow ascertaining whether Boris/Michael followed the advice or how far he regarded the letter by Photios as a personal guide for his governing. How his way of life was presented and how his deeds were integrated into the narrative of a good Christian ruler can be seen in lead seals from his time with inscriptions like "Lord God, help Michael, ruler of Bulgaria," "Christ, help your servant Michael ruler of Bulgaria" and "Mother of God, help your servant Michael ruler of Bulgaria." One lead seal refers to the time when he had already entered a monastery (889 – 907) ("Mother of God help your servant Michael the monk, from God, ruler of Bulgaria"). The lead seals show Boris/Michael's official title in Greek, ἄρχων Βουλγαρίας and all of them have a Christian connotation.[97]

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96 Leendert G. Westerink / Vasileios Laourdas, Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia. Leipzig 1983 – 1988 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), I, p. 2 – 39, see: Joseph R. Berrigan / Despina S. White, The Patriarch and the Prince. The letter of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople to Khan Boris of Bulgaria (The Archbishop Iakovos library of ecclesiastical and historical sources, no. 6). Brookline, Mass. 1982; Venance Grumel / Jean Darrouzès, Les regestes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople. Vol. I: Les actes des patriarches, fasc. 2 – 3: Les regestes de 715 à 1206, 2e éd. revue et corr. par Jean Darrouzès. Paris 1989, No. 478; Hergenröther (cf fn. 71) I, p. 601 – 604; Zlatarski (2002b, cf. fn. 6) p. 71 – 73; Ivan Dujčev, Au lendemain de la conversion du peuple bulgare. L'Épître de Photios, in: idem (ed.), Medioevo bizantino-slavo vol. 1, p. 107 – 123; Bonju Angelov, Poslanie Patriarha Fotija bolgarskomu knjazju Borisu, *Byzantinobulgarica* 6 (1980), p. 45 – 50; Gjuzelev (cf. fn. 21) p. 186 sq.; Günter Prinzing, Beobachtungen zu "integrierten" Fürstenspiegeln der Byzantiner, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 38 (1988), p. 1 – 31; Liljana Simeonova, Diplomacy of the letter and the cross. Photios, Bulgaria and the papacy 860s–880s (Classical and Byzantine Monographs, 41). Amsterdam 1998, p. 112 – 156; Podskalsky (cf. fn. 19) p. 53 – 54 with fn. 228 – 229; PmbZ 6253, fn. 69 (p. 681).

97 Ivan J. Jordanov, Korpus na pečatite na srednovekovna Bălgarija. Sofia 2001 (Monetosečenija i monetna cirkulacija na Balkanite, 6), p. 31 – 36, e. g.: Χ(ριστ)ὲ βοήθη Μηχαὴλ ἄρχοντα Βουλγαρίας or Θ(εοτό)κε βοήθη Μηχαὴλ ἄρχοντα Βουλγαρίας; Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 33.

An inscription from Balshi in today's Albania, now lost, perhaps commemorated the date of the baptism: "... [Boris] christened Michael, with the people given to him by God in the year 6374 [866 CE]."[98]

Boris/Michael followed the advice to build churches and support missionary work. A Latin inscription from Preslav, the residence of the Bulgarian ruler at least from the time of Boris/Michael's son Symeon onwards (893), seems to attest to the short duration of the Latin mission.[99] Later, after the expulsion of the disciples of Methodius from Moravia in 886, Boris/Michael invited the disciples of Cyril and Methodius, Kliment, Naum, and Angelarius.[100] The *Life of Climent* praises the Bulgarian ruler for receiving these holy men.[101] Bishops were appointed and ecclesiastical structures were built up. Archaeological research has examined monasteries and churches, many of which might be dated to his reign.[102] Boris/Michael created at least an image of himself which tried to emphasise his piety and eagerness to fight for the new faith. This image finally laid the foundations for his canonisation; the image was even spread during his lifetime.

The account of Regino of Prüm (mentioned above) emphasises the pious conduct of the Bulgarian ruler:

> It is said that after he had received and understood the grace of baptism, the king of the Bulgars began to live with such perfection that, although by day he went among his people clothed in the trappings of royalty, by night he dressed in a sack and secretly entered the church and lay down prostrate in prayer on the stone floor, spreading only a blanket beneath him.
>
> Not much later he was moved by divine inspiration to give up his earthly realm so that he might reign with Christ in heaven for eternity. After appointing his elder son in his place he had his hair cut, took up the dress of the holy way of life and became a monk, dedicated to alms, vigils and prayers by day and night.[103]

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98 Beševliev (cf fn. 17) No. 15, p. 151–152: [+ Ἐβαπτίσθη ὁ ἐκ θ(εο)ῦ ἄρχων Βουλγ]αρίασ Βορης ὁ μετονομασθεὶς Μιχαὴλ σὺν τῶ ἐκ θ(εο)ῦ δεδομένω αὐτῶ ἔθνει ἔτους στοδ′-; Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 36.

99 Škorpil / Uspenskiy (cf. fn. 8) 509, fn. 1 (plate XCVIII 8); Veselin Beševliev, Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien. Berlin 1964, No. 54, p. 39–40.

100 For one of the most detailed overviews about the literature on Kliment, see Stančev (cf fn. 22); see also Iliev (cf. fn. 22); on Naum: Stefan Kožuharov, Naum Ohridski, in: Dinekov (ed.), Kirilo-Metodievska Enciklopedija (cf fn. 22) 2, p. 795–798.

101 Ilija Iliev, Theophylakt von Ochrid, The Long Life of Saint Clement of Ohrid. A Critical Edition, *Byzantinobulgarica* 9 (1995), 62–120, ch. 48, p. 97.

102 Dončeva-Petkova, Arheologičeski svedenija za hristijanstvoto; Rossina Kostova, Bulgarian Monasteries, ninth to tenth Centuries: Interpreting the Archaeological Evidence, *Pliska – Preslav* 8 (2000), p. 190–202; Kazimir Popkonstantinov / Rossina Kostova, Architecture of Conversion: Provincial Monasteries in the 9th–10th Centuries, Bulgaria, in: D. D. Elšin (ed.), Arhitektura Vizantii i Drevnej Rusi IX–XII vekov. Materialy meždunarodnogo seminara (17–21 nojabrja 2009 goda) (Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Ėrmitaža, 53). Sankt-Peterburg 2010, p. 118–132.

103 Kurze (cf fn. 83) p. 96: *Ferunt autem de huius gentis rege, quod a tanta perfectione post perceptam baptismi gratiam cęperit, ut diebus ornamentis regiis indutus coram populo procederet, noctibus vero sacce vestitus latenter ecclesiam intrans super pavimentum ipsius basilicae substrato sibi tantum cilicio prostratus in oratione iaceret. Non post multum tempus divina inspiratione commonitus regnum*

After this passage, Regino continues with the part noted above in which he describes how Boris/Michael's son Vladimir/Rasate attempted to deviate from his father's path and how Boris/Michael managed to depose him from the throne. Regino continues with how Boris/Michael spent the rest of his life:

> Having accomplished these things, he put down his sword-belt and, resuming the dress of holy religion, he entered the monastery and spent the rest of his earthly life in holy monastic conduct.[104]

Regino of Prüm is one of the few writers who shape the life of Boris/Michael according to the model of a good Christian ruler. It is unclear where Regino received his information. The part about the pious life of Boris/Michael and the short reign of his son is the second part of a longer passage on events that have something to do with Bulgaria. Regino put this second part into a passage for the year 868, linking it to the Christianisation of the Bulgarians, which actually happened between 864 and 866.

The second part, however, refers to a much later period. The reign of Vladimir/Rasate has to be dated from 889 to 893. That means that Regino did not know where to put the information he received about Boris/Michael entering a monastery and the deposition of his son. He decided to insert it under the year 868, certainly because of the Bulgarians as the common topic. The information about the Christianisation in the first part might have come from the court of Louis the German, who is explicitly mentioned, as well as from the papal court since the papal mission to Bulgaria is also briefly mentioned.[105] The events before and after 889 in the second part certainly have a different origin. Perhaps the information did not directly come to Prüm from the Bulgarian court. It is possible that the source of Regino's information was Constantinople, from where it might have passed to Lotharingia, possibly through Rome, although direct contacts with Bulgaria were also possible at the end of the ninth century.

At least in the eastern Frankish kingdom, information about the Bulgarians was available. Interestingly, the *Annals of Fulda* mention an embassy of King Arnulf of Carinthia to a Bulgarian king, Laodomir, in the year 892 to renew a peace treaty. The passage is presented in connection with the war against Zventibold (Svatopluk) of Moravia, where Arnulf even engaged the Hungarians.[106] Laodomir is generally interpreted as Vladimir, the Bulgarian ruler and son of Boris/Michael, who – according to Regino – wanted "to recall the recently baptised people to the pagan way of wor-

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terrenum dimisit, ut in caelis aeternaliter regnaret cum Christo; et ordinato in suo loco regem filium suum maiorem natu, comam capitis deposuit habituque sanctae conversationis suscepto monachus effectus est, elemosinis, vigiliis et orationibus die noctuque intentus.

104 Ibid., p. 96: *His ita patratis, deposito cingulo et resumpto sanctae religionis habitu in monasterium ingressus in sancta conversatione reliquum vitae presentis tempus duxit.*

105 Ibid., p. 95.

106 Pertz / Kurze (cf. fn. 85) p. 121–122.

ship."[107] This is one of the few traces of Vladimir's reign in the sources, which means that there was a direct link to Bulgaria from the eastern Frankish kingdom at the end of the ninth century. Thus, the information presented by the *Annals of Fulda* about the monastic life of Boris/Michael might have come from Bulgaria more or less directly.

The image of Boris/Michael as the good Christian ruler is complemented by other elements, such as the building of churches. The 28th of April was later celebrated for the blessing of the church of Saint Peter in Bulgaria, probably the so-called Great Basilica of Pliska.[108] The main achievement connected with him, remained, however, the conversion to Christianity. The monk Tudor Doksov, who also notes the date of Boris/Michael's death, remarks:

> That same year, on the second day of the month of May, on a Saturday night, died the servant of God, the father of the prince, who lived with pure faith in the orthodox confession of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, our great, honest, and pious Bulgarian prince Boris whose Christian name is Michael. This Boris converted the Bulgarians in the year 6374 [864] in the year eht behti. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.[109]

Boris/Michael probably became a saint in the Orthodox Church shortly after his death. He is commemorated on the day of his death, the 2nd of May. The assumption that he was sanctified shortly after his death is not unanimously accepted;[110] scholars who assume a canonisation have debated when and how this happened.[111] Looking at the available sources, it is quite likely that he was venerated as a saint fairly early. Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos (901–907, 912–925) already referred to Boris/Michael as a saint. In a letter from 922/3 he calls him "holy" and emphasises his struggle for peace: "... your holy father devoted much toil on behalf of those things pertaining to peace between Romans and Bulgarians...."[112]

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107 Kurze (cf fn. 83) p. 95–96; the English translation in MacLean (cf fn. 83).

108 Nikolov (cf. fn. 60) p. 218.

109 André Vaillant (ed.), Discours contre les Ariens de Saint Athanase. Version slave et traduction en français. Sofia 1954, p. 6–7. The words етхъ бехти refer to an Old Bulgarian dating system; Zlatarski (2002b, cf. fn. 6) p. 30–31 and 345; Kazimir Popkonstantinov / V. Konstantinova, Kăm văprosa za černorizec Tudor i negovata prepiska, *Starobălgarska literatura* 15 (1984), p. 106–118; the translation in Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 43.

110 For example, Ivan Biliarsky considers tsar Peter (927–969) as the only canonized Bulgarian ruler: Ivan Biliarsky, Nebesnite pokroviteli: Sv. Car Petăr, *Istoričesko Bădešte* (2001), no. 2, 32–44; idem, St. Peter (927–969). Tsar of the Bulgarians, in: Vasil Gijuzelev / Kiril Petkov (eds.), State and church. Studies in medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium. Sofia 2011, p. 173–188, p. 175, 183.

111 See Nikolov (cf. fn. 60).

112 Jenkins / Westerink (cf. fn. 80) 176–177: ...τοῦ σοῦ ἁγίου πατρὸς ἐν τοῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης πράγμασιν τῆς μεταξὺ Ῥωμαίων καὶ Βουλγάρων πολλὰ καμόντος ἀπολαύειν ὑμᾶς ἀκολούθως τῶν ἐκείνου καμάτων ...

Earlier in the same letter he refers to Boris/Michael as "your father, of blessed memory."[113] In another letter, Patriarch Nikolaos mentions "the agency of your holy father"[114] and recalls the "time of peace [meaning the period of the 30 years peace that was concluded in c. 816] you were born to your holy father."[115] In the ruler's church in Preslav, the residence of Boris/Michael's successor, Symeon, M. Vaklinova has suggested that a sarcophagus with the letters MH from the archaeological site in Preslav would have fit well in a prominent place on the southern façade. The sarcophagus had been discovered 80 years previously at an unknown place.[116]

Miniatures with inscriptions identify Boris/Michael as a saint.[117] A later *služba* (service) for him can unfortunately not be dated exactly.[118] As noted above, the Bulgarian apocryphal literature presents Michael, whoever this name might refer to, as the last king. While he is often depicted as a warrior, he is also described as the king under whom the people enjoyed peace. The *Interpretation of Daniel* predicts peaceful years after the mythological King Michael defeats his enemies:

> And they will burn the arms for three years. And there will be good years under this king; and there will be life, which never existed nor will ever exist. And when he comes he will rebuild the holy churches, he will make silver altars. And all captives will return to Stroumitsa, and others in Glavinitsa for this land is called mother of all lands....[119]

Apart from peace, this text also takes up the motif of building churches. Similar observations can be made for the *Narration of Isaiah*, where King Michael goes to Rome and defeats the "blond beards." After he returns to his lands, called "New Jerusalem," he rests his crown. He is a king of peace:

> In those days [King Michael] will come to consecrate the holy churches and will build altars of silver, and he will give the people a knife instead of arms. Then he will beat the arms into tools, and the swords into sickles. Then [the common] people will be like boyars, the boyars – like voivodes, and the voivodes – like kings.

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113 Ibid., No. 25, p. 172–173.

114 Ibid., No. 27, p. 186–187.

115 Ibid., No. 27, p. 188–189.

116 M. Vaklinova / I. Štereva, Knjaz Boris I i vladetelskata cărkva na Veliki Preslav, in: Pavel Georgiev (ed.), Hristijanskata kultura v srednovekovna Bălgarija. Materiali ot nacionalna naučna konferencija, Šumen 2–4 maj 2007 godina po slučaj 1100 godini ot smărtta na Sv. Knjaz Boris-Michail (ok. 835–907 g.). Veliko Tărnovo 2008, p. 185–194; Nikolov (cf. fn. 60) p. 220–221.

117 Ivan Dujčev, Slavische Heilige in der byzantinischen Hagiographie, in: idem (ed.), Medioevo bizantino-slavo 2, p. 207–223, p. 215 sq.; Asen Vasiliev, Bălgarski svetci v izobrazitelno izkustvo. Sofia 1987, p. 41–47; Podskalsky (cf. fn. 19) p. 60 and fn. 258.

118 Podskalsky (cf. fn. 19) p. 60–61; N. Georgieva, Kăm văprosa za počitaneto na knjaz Boris I kato svetec, *Kirilo-Metodievski studii* 8 (1991), p. 178–188.

119 Tăpkova-Zaimova / Miltenova (cf. fn. 87) p. 175: и ижⷣегоуть wрѫжиꙗ ·г̈· лѣ(т) · и боудоуть лѣта добра вь того цара и боудеть жизнь · ꙗкоже не била николиже · ни имать быти · и пришьдь wбновить црькви сѫтыхь · створит сребрьные wлътаре · и вьзьвратеть се плѣньници вьси вь Строумицоу · а дроугꙁи вь Главьницоу · тѣ бо земли наричета се мати вьсѣмь земламь, p. 182 (English translation).

> After that Michael will go to his throne and will put his crown on the cross and will give up his spirit to God. Then the angels, secretly, will take his body and will lift it up to heaven.[120]

The so-called "Bulgarian Apocryphal Annals" from the eleventh century mention him as well. The broader historical context of its composition is probably the time when Bulgaria was a Byzantine province. The notion of "annals" is misleading since the original title is "The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah, How He Was Taken Up to the Seventh Sky by an Angel." It presents Boris/Michael in the following way:

> And after the death of king Izot again his son Boris took over the Bulgarian Kingdom and most pious and right-believing he was. And this king baptised the Bulgarian land and erected churches all around the Bulgarian land and on the Bregalnitsa River and here taking the kingdom over, he built white churches in Ovche Polje. And he marched to Dobrich and his life ended there. And he reigned for sixteen years without sin or woman. And his kingship was blessed, and he died at peace with God.[121]

The building of churches on the Bregalnitsa River is also mentioned in the *Life of the Martyrs at Tiberiopolis* compiled by Archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid (1088/92 – after 1126).[122] The *Synodicon* of Tsar Boril was translated during the time of Tsar Boril (1207–1218), who held a synod against the Bogomils on 11 February 1211; it keeps the baptism as the main element of his reign: "To Boris, the first tsar of the Bulgarians, called in the holy baptism Michael, who brought the Bulgarian people to knowledge of God through the holy baptism...."[123]

If one takes the importance of Boris/Michael for Bulgaria into account, it might be surprising that the sources about his life as well as his memory are, if we consider the whole picture, quite limited. The proofs for his veneration as a saint during the time after his death are also not abundant and some scholars use this fact to challenge the assumption altogether. But compared to the remains of the First Bulgarian Realm, this impression has to be reversed slightly. While Bulgarian sources for the

120 Ibid., p. 201: вь тїе дни пр҃їидеть встити стїе црквы и съзиж(д)еть олтари сребрьнїе · и да(с) лю(д)мь ножь мѣсто wрѫжїа · тог(д)а расковеть wроужїа на надѣлателное wрѫжїе · а мѵеве на срьпове · тог(д)а бѫ(д)ть лю(д)е ѫбози ако боларе · а боларе ако воеводи · а воеводи ако цр҃ѣе · … потомь Миха(л) поидеть къ пр҃столѫ · и положить вѣнць свои на кр(с)ть и пр҃да(с) дх҃ъ свои г҃ви · тог(д)а пр҃їимоу(т) аг҃ли неви(д)мо · и понесоу(т) тѣло его на нб҃о, p. 213 (English translation).

121 Ibid., p. 281–282: И по смр҃тїю же Изота цр҃ꙗ паксы пр(ѣ)емь цр(с)тво ба'гар'ское · сн҃ь е(г) Борись · и бы(с) бл҃гоч(с)тивь · и бл҃говѣр'нь зѣло · и тьи цр҃ь кр(с)ти в'сѫ зем(л)ю ба'гарьскѫю · и съз(д)а цр҃кви по зем(л)и бльгар'стѣи · и на р(ѣ)цѣ Брѣгал'ници · и тѫ пр҃їем' цр(с)тво на Wв'чи поли · съз(д)а вѣли цр҃кви · и пр҃їиде на Добри(ч') · и тамо скон'ча живо(т) свои · и цр(с)твов(а) же лѣ(т) ·ѳ҃і· грѣха не имѣе ни женїи · и бы(с) бл(с)вено црь(с)тво его · и скон'ча се сь миро(м)ь о г҃и, p. 292 (English translation); see also Petkov (cf. fn. 46) p. 196.

122 Iliev (cf. fn. 70) ch. 37, p. 69.

123 M. G. Popruženko (ed.), Sinodik carja Borila. Sofia, 1928, p. 77; Ivan Božilov, Anna-Maria Totomanova, Ivan Biljarski, Borilov sinodik. Izdanie i prevod. Sofia 2010 (online available at http://histdict.uni-sofia.bg/textcorpus/show/doc_33 last accessed on 19/01/2019): Борѫсѫ прьво́мѫ цр҃ь бльгарскомѫ нарече́нномѫ въ с҃тѣмь кр҃ще нїи михаиль. и҆же бльга́рскый рѫ̀ къ бг҃о разѹ́мїю с҃тый кр҃щенїе́ приве́шомь …

whole period have mostly disappeared, the traces that the figure of Boris/Michael left in Bulgarian as well as foreign annals, chronicles, saints' lives, apocalyptic texts, and so on, is still quite remarkable. Bulgarian apocalyptic literature testifies to his presence in the cultural memory during the following centuries. The remains of his image as the first Christian ruler are, however, not very detailed. While the memory of the pagan revolt faded in time, his name remained connected to the baptism and the building of churches. The development of his sanctity was perhaps overshadowed by that of his grandson, Tsar Peter I (927–969), who was probably canonised shortly after his death.[124]

Concluding Remarks

The image of the good Christian ruler during the First Bulgarian Realm cannot be separated from broader developments in the Latin West and especially in Byzantium. Shortly after the Christianisation the neophyte Boris/Michael received in different forms clear instructions about how the good Christian ruler should behave. While Patriarch Photios sent a mirror of princes, a detailed account of how a good ruler should behave and govern his empire, Pope Nicholas answered questions posed by the Bulgarians, where he had to find a balance between praising the effort to promote and defend Christianity and condemning the execution of the rebellious nobles together with their families. The responses of Pope Nicholas I showed how different the image of a Christian ruler was from the ideals of a pagan one, but this refers to the level of ideals and images, not to the early medieval reality. The transition might not have been as drastic as the sources suggest.

The conversion to Christianity did not come as a sudden event. Long before the baptism, Christian elements had entered the self-representation of the ruler. Thus, the good Christian ruler was not a completely new invention. Christian elements were used earlier in the framework of self-representation and ideology during the pagan period, but these might have remained on the surface, e. g., on the level of representation, images on coins, inscriptions, and buildings. The requirements for the good Christian ruler refer to an inner attitude. Symbols and signs are not sufficient. Whether Boris/Michael internalised Christian attitudes is dubious. His brutal reaction against the rebels seems to suggest that the principles of government did not change fundamentally. It is hard to determine whether his decision to leave the throne and to enter a monastery is connected with the idea of penance for the cruel suppression of the rebellion.

124 Miliana Kaymakamova, The Cult of the Bulgarian Tsar Peter (927–969) and the Driving Ideas of the Bulgarian Liberation Uprisings against the Byzantine Rule in the 11th–12th Century, in: The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I, ed. by Mirosław Leszka and Kirił Marinow. Translated by Lyubomira Genova, Marek Majer, Artur Mękarski, Michał Zytka (Byzantina Lodziensia XXXIV). Łódź, Kraków 2018, p. 457–478.

As far as the image of the good Christian ruler is concerned, however, his self-representation and afterlife were more important and influential. Boris/Michael seems to have consciously promoted his image as a zealous fighter for Christianity and as a pious ruler. This image left its traces mainly in Western sources. His canonisation was probably prepared during his lifetime, but it was not as successful as it could have been although he was an ideal candidate for a popular saint. Though he finally became a saint, the traces of his cult are limited, for reasons that are not completely clear. Nevertheless, his image remained as the one who converted the Bulgarians to Christianity. Later sources also remembered him as a builder of churches. Some traces of the historical figure were transformed into the motif of the last king in the apocalyptic literature, but it is unclear how far it was he who served as a role model. Although Boris/Michael does not portray the full-fledged image of a good Christian ruler, he was the first Christian ruler of Bulgaria, who laid the foundations for Bulgaria as part of the Orthodox world.