



# Bishop Michael of Devol as a Witness of the Memory of Komitopules<sup>1</sup>

Biskup Michał z Dewolu jako świadek pamięci o Komitopulach

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**Abstract:** The appendices of Michael of Devol to the chronicle of John Skylitzes are a valuable testimony in the knowledge of the Balkan wars of emperor Basil II and the first century of Byzantine rule in Bulgaria. They also provide important information on the biographies of individual members of the Komitopules family or the process of assimilation of Bulgarian elites in the geographical area of Macedonia under Byzantine rule in the XI-XII centuries.

**Keywords:** Michael of Devol; John Skylitzes; Komitopules dynasty (*Komitopouloi*); Byzantium and Bulgaria X-XII centuries; Macedonia

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Maintaining Byzantine rule over the Bulgarian lands for a long period (1018-1186) would have been impossible if it had been based solely on violence. In the accounts reporting the conquest, there is no shortage of descriptions of the brutality of the victors or the manifest humiliation of the defeated<sup>3</sup>. However, they refer rather to the first decades

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the article was based on the paper entitled “Ideological legitimization of Byzantine rule over Bulgaria” as part of the VI National Byzantine Conference “Theoretical and practical dimension of cardinal virtues in Byzantine culture” (Chapel of the Holy Trinity at the Castle, Lublin 17-18 November 2022).

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<sup>3</sup> In the first place, this refers to the blinding of a large group of Bulgarian prisoners by order of emperor Basil II after the battle of Belasica in July 1014. Three times the triumphs over the subjugated Bulgarians were publicly celebrated in Constantinople. First in 971, when emperor Boris II was dethroned, then in 1019 showing the inhabitants of the capital the captured family of the late John Vladislav, and in 1041 leading the blinded Peter II Delyan in chains. See Leo Diaconus Caloënsis, *Historiae libri decem* IX 12, ed. C.B. Hase, (CSHB) Bonn 1828, p. 158-159; Ioannes Scylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn, (CFHB.SB V) Berlin – New York 1973 (cetera IS), p. 349, 310, 364-365, 414; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. I. Pérez Martin, Madrid 2002, p. 7-8; Michaelis Psellii

of Byzantine domination over Bulgaria. In later times, especially after the collapse of the last attempt to regain independence in the years 1072-1073, the position of the rulers towards the defeated seems to be characterized by a certain restraint, noticeable especially in the difficult times of the late eleventh century<sup>4</sup>. This attitude will be consolidated and visible until the end of Byzantine rule. Even in the advice of Kekaumenos (ca 1018-ca 1081), among the medieval Romans (*Rhōmaïoi*) from the former border with Bulgaria, the memory of old conflicts was still vigorous. However, on the example of the same author, it can be seen that gradually a new narrative appears even in these circles, signaling the extinction of old feuds<sup>5</sup>. Such an attitude can be seen even more clearly in the case of the Byzantine imperial Komnenos dynasty in the twelfth century, where even the affinity with the last Bulgarian ruling family – the Komitopules (*Komitopuloi*) – is emphasized<sup>6</sup>.

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*Chronographia* IV 49, 50, v. 1, ed. E. Renauld, Paris 1926, p. 82; Ioannes Zonaræ *Epitome Historiarum* XVII 4, ed. T. Büttner-Wobst, (CSHB) Bonnæ 1897, p. 536. Cf. J. Bonarek, *Romajowie i obcy w Kronice Jana Skylitzesa. Identyfikacja etniczna Bizantyńczyków i ich stosunek do obcych w świetle Kroniki Jana Skylitzesa*, Toruń 2003, p. 132-133, 148-156; M.J. Leszka – K. Marinow, *The Year 971*, in: *The Bulgarian State in 927-969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I*, ed. M.J. Leszka – K. Marinow, Łódź – Kraków 2018, p. 169-170; G. Prinzing, *Das Bamberger Gunthertuch in neuer Sicht*, Bsl 54 (1993) p. 218-231; J. Dudek, *Hebdomon w ideologii cesarskiej Nowego Rzymu według tekstu kroniki Jana Skylitzesa*, BP 20 (2013) p. 34; M.B. Panov, *The Historiographic Debates about Samuel Cometopoulos and His State (10 th-11th Century)*, *Blinded State*, Leiden – Boston 2019, p. 38-100.

<sup>4</sup> The then pretender to the Bulgarian throne, the Serbian prince Konstantin Bodin of Dioclea, proclaimed as emperor Peter III in Prizren, was captured by the Byzantines. However, he was spared the fate of Delyan. He was content with exile to distant Antioch, from where he managed to escape and return to his homeland, over which he ruled in the years 1081-1101, skillfully maneuvering between Constantinople and the Latin West. See. *Ioannes Skylitzes Continuatus* (Η συνέχθεια της Χρονογραφίας του Ιωαννου Σκυλιτζη), ed. E. Tsolakes, Thessalonike 1968 (cetera SC) p. 165-166; *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*, v. 1, ed. T. Živković, Beograd 2009, p. 158-160, 162-168; J. Leśny, *Studia nad początkami serbskiej monarchii Nemanicóów (połowa XI – koniec XII wieku)*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1989, p. 40-51, 66-78, 91-106; J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)*, Paris 1990 (cetera Cheynet), p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> Kekaumenos, describing the military advantages of his relatives, did not hide family affiliations with the Bulgarians, quoted terms in their language, commented with appreciation on the military stratagems of their ruler's commanders. See *Book of Advice of Kekaumenos*, ed. G.G. Litavrin, Sankt-Petersburg 2003, p. 136, 176, 188, 196, 198, 266, 298.

<sup>6</sup> *Nicephori Bryennii, Historiarum libri quattuor* III 6, ed. P. Gautier (CFHB.Brux IX), Bruxelles 1975, p. 219, 15-20; *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. D.R. Reinsch – A. Kam-

In the meantime, in Balkan circles of the medieval Romans, messages are being created confirming the growing interest in the past of the Bulgarian elite. Bishop Michael of Devol can be considered the author of one of them. From a formal point of view, Michael made a number of additions to one of the manuscripts of the work of John Skylitzes (ca. 1040-after 1101) and its continuation<sup>7</sup>. Regardless of the discussion on the authorship of the continuation after 1056, the work of Skylitzes entitled *Synopsis Historion* remains to this day a very valuable source for the history of the Balkan Peninsula before 1079, especially since the part of the Skylitzes work devoted to this period was written on the basis of lost texts<sup>8</sup>.

The appendices to *Synopsis Historion* have not been edited in a uniform form, a large part of them are standard voices, corrections of spelling of names or updates of the text of the Skylitzes, but there are also interpolations among them, taking the form of quite extensive commentaries

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bylis, (*CFHB. Ber. XL/1*) Berlin – New York 2001 (cetera *Alexias*) VII 3, VIII 4, p. 210, 21-22, p. 244, 83-84. Regarding this evolution, the observations of M.J. Leszka, *Gabriel Radomir (1014-1015) i Jan Władysław (1015-1018), władcy państwa bułgarskiego w źródłach bizantyńskich*, BP 25 (2018) p. 43-51, are noteworthy; M.J. Leszka, *Obraz cara bułgarskiego Samuela w źródłach bizantyńskich (XII w.)*, “*Studia z dziejów średniowiecza*” 23 (2019) p. 134-142; M.J. Leszka, *Obraz cara Samuela w źródłach bizantyńskich (koniec X-XII w.)*, in: *Widmo Mahometa, cień Samuela. Cesarstwo Bizantyńskie z przedstawicielami innych religii i kultur (VII-XV w.)*, ed. Z.A. Brzozowska – M.J. Leszka – K. Marinow – T. Wolińska, Łódź 2020, p. 111-123.

<sup>7</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze in der Handschrift des Johannes Skylitzes codex Vindobonensis hist. graec. LXXIV. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des sogenannten westbulgarischen Reiches*, München 1906, p. 28-37 (cetera B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*), who identified 70 additions in one of the Viennese manuscripts. He was inclined to acknowledge Michael's authorship in the case of 66 entries concerning the years 976-1057, the author of the last four was to be unknown. The critical edition of the 1973 also includes earlier interpolators. Cf. *Einleitung. Die Interpolationem im Text des Skylitzes*, in: IS, p. XXIX-XXXIV; *Dobavki na episkop Michail Devolski ot 1118 g. kãm “Istoričeski svod” na Joan Skilica (XI v.)*, in: V. Gjuzelev, *Izvori na srednovekovnata istorija na Bãlgarija (VII-XV v.) v avstrijskite rãkopisni i archivi*, v. 1: *Bãlgarski, drugi slavjanski i vizantijski izvori*, Sofija 1994, p. 45-57; V. Tãpkova-Zaimova, “*Bãlgari rodom...*” *Komitopulite, car Samuil, njegovite potomci spored istoričeskite izvori i istoriografskata tradicija*, Sofija 2014, p. 95-102; *ODB* sv. “Skylitzes, John”, “Skylitzes Continuatus”, v. 3. p. 1914.

<sup>8</sup> J. Shepard, *A suspected source of Skylitzes’ “Synopsis Historion”: the great Catechism of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*, BMGS 16 (1992) p. 171-182; P. Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*, Cambridge 2003; C. Holmes, *Basil II and the governance of Empire (976-1025)*, Oxford – New York 2005, p. 394-428.

presenting the views of their author. Probably hence the discrepancy in their assessment as a possible separate transmission, which became visible as research on the manuscripts of the Skylitzes intensified, especially those not included in the compilation of George Kedrenos (XI-XII centuries)<sup>9</sup>. Božidar Prokić had already put forward the hypothesis that the appendices primarily concern the history of the new Slavic kingdom in Macedonia, as he defined the West Bulgarian state at the turn of the X-XI centuries. Since the authors of other historiographical texts dealing with this issue are less interested in this issue, the text of Skylitzes, combined with Michael's additions, is of key importance here<sup>10</sup>. There have been opinions, such as the opinion expressed by Henri Grégoire, that we are dealing with a valuable authentic text of Skylitzes himself, lost due to the carelessness of other copyists<sup>11</sup>. Other scholars, accepting the authorship of Devol's bishop, treat his appendices as loose commentaries on the Balkan campaigns of Basil II and subsequent events, recognizing that they do not form a coherent whole and remain subordinated to the narrative of the Skylitzes<sup>12</sup>. And Peter Schreiner, the nestor of byzantine annalistic studies, recently stated that the bishop's supplements form their own narrative not incoherent. According to the scholar, the appendices can even be considered as *a sui generis* separate chronicle composition. By completing *Synopsis Historion*, Michael created a coherent message far beyond the work of a copyist or interpolator. According to Schreiner, his message is even a remnant of a local chronicle (*eine lokale Chronistik*) describing various dramatic events in the history of the western Balkans in the X-XI centuries. This makes it similar to other local works of medieval Byzantine annalistics devoted to the history of regions (Thessaly, Cyprus) or cities (Mesembria, Corinth, Mytilene). The source used by Michael was to be written in Greek and describe the circumstances of the collapse of the Komitopul's state from a medieval Romans per-

<sup>9</sup> Georgius Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum*, v. 1-2, ed. I. Bekker, Bonnae 1838-1839.

<sup>10</sup> B. Prokić, *Postanak jeden slovenske carevine u Makedoniju u X veku*, Glas SKA 46 (1908) p. 245.

<sup>11</sup> H. Grégoire, *Du nouveau sur l'histoire bulgare-byzantine. Niketas Pegonites vicar of the Bulgarian king John Vladislav*, B 12 (1937) p. 290.

<sup>12</sup> C. de Boor, *Zu Johannes Skylitzes*, BZ 13 (1904) p. 366-369; Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, p. 25-26; J. Ferluga, *John Scylitzes and Michael of Devol*, in: *Byzantium on the Balkans. Studies on the Byzantine Administration and the Southern Slavs from the VIIth to the XIIIth Centuries*, Amsterdam 1976, p. 163-176; Leszka, *Obraz cara bułgarskiego Samuela*, p. 135.

spective<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately, Schreiner did not refer to the circumstances in which this work could have been written, nor did he explain its possible message.

## 1. Michael of Devol as bishop

The identity of Michael's as the author of the appendices is directly confirmed by a note placed on the page of one of the Viennese manuscripts of Skylitzes: "Written by Michael, bishop of Selasophoris, now Devol, April 24, 6623 [1118 AD] (ἐγράφη χειρὶ Μιχαὴλ ἐπισκόπου Σελασφόρου ἤτοι (Διαβόλεως), ἐτελειώθη δὲ μηνὶ Ἀπριλλίῳ κδ', ἰνδ. ια', ἔτους ζ'κγ)"<sup>14</sup>. It shows that Michael remained bishop of Devol in April 1118. In the Middle Ages, it was an urban center located in the Gramos Mountains, west of Prespa, at the crossroads of several communication routes. In the time of bishop Michael of Devol was a city with a rich history dating back to the beginning of the reign of the khans of Bulgaria in these lands even before the adoption of Christianity. Three centuries later, under Byzantine rule, due to its location, it still remained a sensitive center of provincial administration (*thema, provintia*)<sup>15</sup>. After the christianization of Bulgaria, Devol was one of

<sup>13</sup> P. Schreiner, *Die Chronik des Michael von Devol (1118), Eine neue Einschätzung der Wiener Skylitzes-Handschrift hist. gr. 74*, in: *Laudator Temporis Acti. Studia in Memoriam Ioannis A. Božilov*, v. 1: *Religio. Historia*, ed. I.A. Biliarsky, Serdicae 2018, p. 240-252. See *Chronica Byzantina Breviora*, ed. P. Schreiner (*CFHB.SV XII/1*), Vienna 1975, p. 189-371.

<sup>14</sup> *Die Interpolationem im Text des Skylitzes, (Vindobonensis His. Gr. 74, BL. 106v)* in: IS, p. XXVI.

<sup>15</sup> Now it is probably a small settlement known as Zvezda (R. Albania) The medieval name is probably a Slavic calque of the Greek "Selasoforos", a term established in ancient times. Even then, the Greek form "Diabolis" or the Latin "Diaboli" adopted in the Middle Ages by the Macedonian Slavs as "Devol" were used. This name definitely had nothing to do with the "demonic" nature of the place, it derives from the Thraco-Illyrian word \*dhēw-olā/ \* dhēw-ulā meaning the verb "to flow, to escape". Its genesis is probably related to the presence of the ancient Eordiai people in these lands. The tribes of Slavic Bersites and Velesites settled in the local lands were conquered in the first half of the ninth century by the Bulgarians, who established their administrative unit (*comitatus*) on these lands, the center of which was located in Devol. See *Tabula Imperia Romani (K 34, Naisus-Dyrrhachion-Scupi-Serdica-Thesalonike)*, Ljubljana 1976, p. 42; V. Zlatarski, *De namiral gr. Devol?* in: V. Zlatarski, *Izbrani proizvedenija*, v. 2, Sofija 1984, p. 89-106; P. Koledarov, *O mestonachoždenii srednevekovogo goroda Devol i predelach odnoimennoj*

the most important ecclesiastical centers in the western Balkans. From the first "Life of St. Naum" we learn that until the second decade of the tenth century it was managed successively by four Slavic bishops, which testifies to the intense reception of Cyrillic methodist ideas in these lands. In the time of the Komitopules (after 976-1018), the bishopric was merged with the neighboring eparchy of Kastoria, which was confirmed by the privilege of Emperor Basil II from 1019. Only later decades of Byzantine rule brought a revival of the bishopric. Again we hear about the local bishops: first Theodosius (1078), then Michael (1118). In the next century, Devol would become a dynamic ecclesiastical center under the autocephalous archbishop of Bulgaria based in Ohrid<sup>16</sup>.

Unfortunately, it is not known when Michael became bishop of Devol and how long he remained so. No other source mentions anything about him. It is possible that he was one of the collaborators of archbishop Theophylact. In the set of preserved correspondence of Theophylact we find a letter to an anonymous bishop "Diabologyres" dated by the publisher to 1093/1094<sup>17</sup>. It is uncertain whether a quarter of a century later Michael could still be the bishop. Even if this has not yet happened, the possibility that he had previously been in Ohrid in the archbishop's entourage cannot be ruled out. It is not known exactly when and under what circumstances Theophylact ceased to be archbishop in Ohrid<sup>18</sup>. However, if Michael be-

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*oblasti. (I část) Ob imeni "Devol" i mestonachoždenii oblastej Bolšoj i Malyj Devol*, Pbg 6/1 (1982) p. 87-101; P. Koledarov, *O mestonachoždenii srednevekovogo goroda Devol i predelach odnoimennoj oblasti. (I část) O mestonachoždenii srednevekovogo goroda*, Pbg 6/2 (1982) p. 75-90.

<sup>16</sup> *P'rvo (naj-staro) žitije na sv. Nauma*, in: J. Ivanov, *Bălgarski starini iz Makedonija*, Sofija 1931, p. 307; *Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitane*, No 13<sup>835</sup>, ed. J. Darrouzès, Paris, p. 371-372; S.C., p. 182<sup>15-18</sup>; *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles*, p. 182-183. See B. Nikolova, *Ustrojstvo i upravljenje na bălgarskata pravoslavna c'rkva (IX-XIV vek)*, Sofija 1997, p. 81-92.

<sup>17</sup> *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, No. 15, ed. P. Gautier, (*CFHB.Sth XVI/2*), Thesalonique 1986, p. 53-54, 178-179. The origin of the letter is cautiously dated to 1093-1094. Certainly, this is not the actual name of the bishop, probably for unclear reasons (copyist's mistake?) the term characterizing him as the leader of the church of Devol has been preserved. Cf. M. Mullet, *Theophylact of Ochrid, Reading the letters of a Byzantine Archbishop*, Aldershot 1997, p. 238-239, 272.

<sup>18</sup> Mullet, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 69-70. During Byzantine rule, such attitudes did not apply only to the clergy. According to the account of a probable relative of Skylitzes from the twelfth century, the future emperor Roman Diogenes, serving as governor in Sardica before 1068, patronized the cult of St. John of Rila (tenth century), popular even

came bishop only after the departure of Theophylact (between 1108 and 1126), then interpolating of Skylitzes he referred to some initiatives of the head of the autocephalous Bulgarian church. He was certainly familiar with the complex ethnic realities of this part of the Balkans, he knew the local Slavic dialects well<sup>19</sup>. Such qualities could be useful to him in the environment of the Bulgarian archbishops involved in the revival of old traditions from the beginning of Christianity in the western Balkans<sup>20</sup>.

## 2. Michael's message: structure

According to the arrangements, the additions to John Skylitzes (and its continuation) consisted of seventy additions. They differ from each other in size and form. Some are classic corrections to the text, which consist of short interjections regarding the names of the characters, chronological and topographical details. We also find commentaries that are in fact a development of the original Skylitzes work. They allow to determine the purpose bishop of Devol.

First of all, one can see Michael's concern for the tradition of the archbishopric, confirmed by emperor Basil II in the years 1019-1020 on the foundations of the former Bulgarian Patriarchate of the tenth century<sup>21</sup>. In the Middle Ages, he was the first to provide evidence for the identification of the Church of Ohrid with the archbishopric of Justiniana

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before the conquest. See V. Zlatarski, *Georgi Skilica i napisananoto ot nego "Žitije na sv. Ivan Rilski"*, in: V. Zlatarski, *Izbrani proizvedenija*, v. 2, Sofija 1984, p. 240-266; *ODB* sv. "Skylitzes, George", v. 3, p. 1913-1914.

<sup>19</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, no. 34 (where Michael quotes and corrects the words of Bulgarian warriors calling on their ruler to seek refuge in flight), no. 51 (describing the diverse ethnic composition of the central part of the Komitopuls state, also inhabited by Armenian and Byzantine prisoners); *IS*, p. 356 46, 363 54.

<sup>20</sup> M. Nystazopoulou-Pélékidou, *La domination byzantine en Bulgarie (1018-1185). Introduction à la problématique*, in: *Byzantium and the Bulgarians (1018-1185)*, ed. K. Nikolau – K. Tsinakis, Athens 2008, p. 13-23.

<sup>21</sup> In the list of property granted to the archbishop and bishops, Basil II emphasizes the reference to the possessions under Peter I and Samuel. See H. Gelzer, *Ungedruckte und wenig bekante Bistümerverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche. I*. *BZ* 2 (1893) p. 42-64; *Gramoti na Vasilija II za pravata na Ochridskata archiepiskopija*, in: J. Ivanov, *Bългарски starini iz Makedonija*, Sofija 1931, p. 555, 566. Cf. I. Snegarov, *Istorija na ochridskata archiepiskopija*, v. 1: *Ot osnovaneto i zavladjavaneto na Balkanskija poluostrov ot turchite (Vtoro fototipično izdanije)*, Sofija 1995, p. 167-168. Recently e.g. G. Prinzing,

Prima, founded in the sixth century. Describing the ecclesiastical initiative of Basil II in conquered Bulgaria, he comments:

The emperor again confirmed that the archbishopric of Bulgaria was autocephalous as it had been formerly under Romanos the Elder. His was because he drew the conclusion from the constitutions of the emperor Justinian that it was Justiniana Prima which that emperor claimed to be his fatherland and which then Kastellion s its bishop<sup>22</sup>.

The reference to the connection of the new archbishopric with the ecclesiastical initiative of Justinian I (527-565) can serve as proof of Michael's belonging to the circle of hierarchs of Byzantine origin. Subsequent authors who speak on this issue, the editors of the list of bishops (*notitia episcopatum*) from the mid-twelfth century, Patriarch Teodor Balsamon (?-1195), archbishop Demetrius Chomatenos (?-1235), began their ecclesiastical careers in the imperial city<sup>23</sup>.

Could Michael also come from this environment before coming to Bulgaria and acquire his skills there? Some of the supplements to the Skylitzes prove their author's involvement in the problems of the Byzantine state<sup>24</sup>. However, they are relatively few in comparison with commentaries on events taking place in the Western Balkans. The largest group of additions was devoted to events from the history of the western part of the former Bulgarian state between 976 and 1073. We will find there facts or topographical details supplementing the descriptions of the expeditions directed against the Bulgarians.

However, the key data are the data on the family ruling over the West Bulgarian state – Komitopules. The bishop shows almost no signs of interest in the fate of the last representatives of the old Bulgarian dynasty –

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*The autocephalous Byzantine ecclesiastical province of Bulgaria/Ohrid. How independent were its archbishops?* „Bulgaria Mediaevalis” 3 (2012) p. 358-360, 364-366.

<sup>22</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 57; IS, p. 36<sup>58-11</sup>; John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, tr. J. Wortley, Cambridge 2010 (cetera tr. J. Wortley) p. 345.

<sup>23</sup> See G. Prinzing, *Entstehung und Rezeption der Justyniana Prima-Theorie im Mittelalter*, BBG 5 (1978) p. 269-287. Former bishop of Devol may have been included in this milieu as a potential student of the Constantinopolitan school of patriarchy, which began to flourish at the beginning of the twelfth century. R. Browning, *The patriarchal school at Constantinople in the twelfth century*, „Byzantion” 32 (1962) p. 167-202; 33 (1963) p. 11-40.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 2, 18; IS, pp. 329<sup>70-71</sup>, 346<sup>58-59</sup>.



Boris and Roman<sup>25</sup>. It is the Komitopules who definitely attract Michael's attention. This is confirmed by a large number of appendices (39 in total), in which genealogical or prosopographical data related to this family are included. The bishop's apparent interest in the past of the Komitopules seems to be a rare case compared to other medieval Byzantine authors. Although John Skylitzes knew the names of the family members of the rulers of Bulgaria, especially after the adoption of Christianity. However, Skylitzes and other writers did not pay as much attention to any family ruling over Byzantium's neighbors as the bishop of Devol Komitopules. Additions to the latter allow for a faithful reconstruction of the genealogy of the first four generations of this family, starting with the confirmation of the identity of Samuel's parents and his brothers and ending with a complete list of numerous male descendants of John Vladislav (1015-1018)<sup>26</sup>. We owe Michael the knowledge about the identity of the wife of the progenitor of the family – *komes* Nicholas<sup>27</sup> and data related to the origin of the wives of emperor Samuel (approx. 990-1014) and the<sup>28</sup> future ruler Gabriel Radomir (1014-1015)<sup>29</sup>. This allows for a better understanding of the birth of the West Bulgarian state, the genesis of its separation from the previous political centre of Bulgaria, associated with the centres in Pliska and Preslav. The names of the members of the new dynasty and data about their marriages make it possible to discern the ancestral relationships, references to the local Christian tradition. They provide evidence of the ethnic diversity of the state elites, their connections with Hungary and Byzantium. In the latter case, this is especially true of the daughters of the two Komitopules. In the first case, we are dealing

<sup>25</sup> It only recalls the name of one of them killed while trying to escape from Constantinople to Bulgaria. See B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 3; IS, p. 32974; *PmZ*, sv. "Boris II" No. 211988.

<sup>26</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 49; IS, p. 360<sub>51</sub>; tr. Wortley, p. 340: "Praesianos, Alousianos, Aaron, Trajan and Radomir". See *PmZ*: sv. "Prusianos", No 26775; sv. "Alusianos", No 20263; sv. "Aaron", No 20004; sv. "Traianos", No 28368; sv. "Rodomir", No 26826.

<sup>27</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 1; IS, p. 328<sub>62</sub>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 312: "Nicholas by name, their mother was Ripsime". See *PmZ*: sv. "Nikolaos", nr 26038; sv. "Hrip'sime", nr 22633.

<sup>28</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 22; IS, pp. 349<sub>50-51</sub>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 332: "by Agatha, daughter of John Chryselios, *proteuon* of Dyrrachion", where the Skylitzes account of misidentifying Samuel's wife is corrected. See *PmZ*: sv. "Agathe", No. 20171.

<sup>29</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 24, 62; IS, p. 350<sub>56-58</sub>, 409<sub>95-96</sub>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 332. See *PmZ*: sv. "Anonymous", nr 22032.

here with an attempt to possibly gain a possible opposition against Basil II, in the second case, the marriage of one of them became an element of the policy of assimilation of the elites of the conquered state implemented by Basil II<sup>30</sup>. We also owe Michael the knowledge about the circumstances of the tragic deaths of some members of the Komitopules family. It complements the text of Skylitzes reporting the murder of emperor Gabriel Radomir by his cousin John Vladislav. It provides precise data on the deaths of all four sons of *komes* Nicholas<sup>31</sup> or the circumstances of the death of emperor John Vladislav in a skirmish at the walls of Dyrrachion in February 1018<sup>32</sup>.

Is it possible to determine the origin of the data from bishop Michael's additions based on such information? Some of them, referring to the details of local toponomastics, topography, economic values, location of Byzantine forts, are probably the result of his good visual knowledge of the geography of the western Balkans<sup>33</sup>. On the other hand, knowledge about the contexts of past events, some from the end of the tenth century,

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<sup>30</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 14; IS, p. 34244. Beginning with the daughter of Samuel Miroslava, who before 1005 married the captured Ashot (see IS, pp. 342-54) and ending with the marriage of the daughter of John Vladislav to the future emperor Isaac Komnenos (B. Prokić No. 66, 67; IS, p. 492-51). The flight of Miroslava with Ashot to Byzantium ruined the chance of Samuel's plan to win over the Byzantine aristocracy against the continuation of the war with Bulgaria. See S. Pirivatrić, *Personal names in the ruling families of the First Bulgarian Empire in the second half of 10th and early 11th centuries. Some observations on their political implication*, in: *Evropejskiat Jugoiztok prez vtorata polovina na X – načaloto na XI vek. Istorija i kultura*, ed. V. Gjuzelev – G.N. Nikolov, Sofija 2015, p. 585-596; *PmZ*: sv. "Miroslava", No. 25408.

<sup>31</sup> Sequentially, David ("killed between Kastoria and Prespa, at a place called Kalasdrys [beautiful oaks], by some vagabond Vlachs"), Moses fell in a clash with the Byzantines at Serres ("Others write that it was not by a stone thrown that Moses died but his horse fell, bringing him down, and he was slain by one of duke Melissenos' men"), Aaron, on Samuel's orders, was killed with almost his entire family ("on 14 June at a place called Rametanitza"). See B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 8, 9; IS, p. 329<sup>79-80, 81-85, 89</sup>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 312; Samuel died a few months after the defeat at Belasica after seeing a procession of blinded Bulgarian captives ("two days later he died on 6 October"). See B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 21; IS, p. 349<sup>45</sup>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 331. See *PmZ*: sv. "David Kometopulos", No 21433; sv. "Moses Kometopulos"; sv. "Aaron Kometopulos", No 20003; sv. "Samuel Kometopulos", No 26983.

<sup>32</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 36; IS, p. 357<sup>57-59</sup>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 338: "a mounted engagement took place with the commander and patrician Niketas Pegonites and he fell, mortally wounded in the entrails by two foot soldiers running through the melee".

<sup>33</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 18, 43, 47; IS, pp. 346<sup>56-58, 358 4-8</sup> 359<sup>42</sup>.

must have been due to unspecified written sources. Schreiner expressed his belief that there could have been some local chronicle at Michael's disposal<sup>34</sup>. Medieval Devol was a center with old Church Slavonic cultural traditions, which is confirmed by testimonies from the times of Byzantine rule. According to the message contained in the *Life of St. Clement (Legenda Bulgarica)* at the beginning of the tenth century there was to be a famous school here, the activities of which certainly contributed to the rapid cultural flourishing of the region. The piece used by Michael could have been created in such an environment<sup>35</sup>.

However, in the circumstances that occurred in the first century after the conquest, it is difficult to treat Devol as a thriving center of church culture. Theophylact in his letter to John Komnenos (ca 1092-1093) complained about the spiritual and material decline of the local bishopric in contrast to the times of its glory<sup>36</sup>. The strenuous efforts of the archbishop probably contributed to the restoration of the rank of the eparchy, but Michael did not look for materials used in the appendices in his eparchy. He could, however, find them elsewhere, namely in nearby Prespa, more precisely on the present island of St. Achilles, surrounded by the waters of the Small Prespa Lake. This former seat of the Komitopules family had its ups and downs in Byzantine times, but it was never as neglected as Devol. This is emphasized by the Theophylact, in one of his letters the archbishop thanks the archon of Prespa for its preparation for the synod, which probably began on the day of St. Achilles (?-330, May 15) of Larissa in 1103<sup>37</sup>. Prespa's religious status is the result of the efforts of Samuel and his successors. The Komitopules, like their predecessors in Pliska and Preslav, showed concern for preserving their achievements in the historical memory of their subjects. A real confirmation of this are their inscriptions, including one

<sup>34</sup> Schreiner, p. 251.

<sup>35</sup> A. Milev, *Grăckite žytja na Kliment Ohridski*, cap. 57, 59, Sofija 1966, p. 126<sup>9-12,30-31</sup>. The authorship of the first life (*Legenda Bulgarica*) is attributed to archbishop Theophylact, Milev, *Grăckite žytja na Kliment Ohridski*, p. 31-71. See I.G. Iliev, *Devolskoto knižovno i literaturno središče ot kraja na IX do načaloto na XII vek – ot sveti Kliment do Michail Devolski*, in: *Evropejskiat Jugoiztok prez vtorata polovina na X – načaloto na XI vek. Istorija i kultura*, ed. V. Gjuzelov – G.N. Nikolov, Sofija 2015, p. 552-567.

<sup>36</sup> *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, No 22, pp. 202-205. The archbishop reports in his letter that the local stately church, built in the time of Boris Michael, is in a state of ruin. Particularly acute was the lack of a bishop and priests, which, according to Theophylact, contributes to the deepening of the material decline of the eparchy.

<sup>37</sup> *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, No 108, p. 526-527.

from the vicinity of Prespa, which with their message authenticate Michael's additions<sup>38</sup>. According to the bishop, the rank of this center in Samuel's country was emphasized at the beginning of his actual reign, when in 985/986, when after conquering the nearby Byzantine Larissa, he translated the relics of St. Achilles into Prespa "constructing a most beautiful and large church in his name"<sup>39</sup>. Probably the aim of these initiatives was to create a sacred center on the Prespan island in order to commemorate the merits of the new ruling family. The importance of Prespa was to reflect the program of "renovatio imperii" implemented by the victorious emperor Samuel, as a restorer of the former power of Bulgaria's glory<sup>40</sup>. Archaeological excavations conducted in 1965-1975 by Nikolaos Moutzopoulos show that the Basilica of St. Achilles

<sup>38</sup> Found in 1883 in the village of German on the Great Prespa Lake, it was created in 993 as a tombstone of Samuel's parents. Another inscription found in Bitola in 1956 also commemorates the ancestors and deeds of emperor John Vladislav. Both texts confirm the message of bishop Devol that Samuel's mother and grandmother of John Vladislav was indeed Hripsime, the wife of *komes* Nicholas. See *Car Samuilov nadpis v' Prespa ot' 993 g.* in: Ivanov, p. 23-25; J. Zaimov – V. Zaimova, *Bitolski nadpis na Ivan Vladislav samod'ržec bālgarski. Starobālgarski pametnik ot 1015-1016 godina. Ivan Vladislav i negovjat nadpis*, Sofija 1970, p. 24, 33, 110-111, 117-119; W. Seibt, *Untersuchungen zur vor- und Frühgeschichte der "bulgarischen" Komitopulen*, "Handes Amsorya" 89 (1975) p. 66-100 (where the problem of family ties between the Komitopules and the Armenians is raised); S. Rek, *Powstanie zachodniobūlgarskiego państwa Komitopulów*, PH 74 (1983) p. 247-250. On the rank of Prespa in the Komitopules state, see T. Tomoski, *Prespa vo Sredniom vek*, "Journal of History" 15/2 (1979) p. 49-80; G.N. Nikolov, *Centraliz'm i regionalizm v rannosrednovekovna Bālgarija*, Sofija 2005, p. 171-172.

<sup>39</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 12; IS, p. 330<sup>7,9</sup>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 313. At the same time, the relics of the other two Thessalian bishops from ancient times were transferred to Prespa: "with Reginos of Skopelos and Diodoros of Trikka".

<sup>40</sup> It is possible that in Prespa there were also relics of St. Tryphon of Kotor, captured by Samuel around 1000 year. See S. Pirivatrić, *Samuilova država. Obim i karakter*, Beograd 1997, p. 159-160. A similar initiative to collect relics in their capital city, but on a much larger scale and in a longer chronological dimension, was taken by the Asenids, transforming it into the new capital of the Bulgarian state reborn after 1185. See K. Marinow, *Inny Konstantynopol. Tyrnowo jako stołeczny ośrodek późnośredniowiecznej Būlgarii*, AUL Folia Historica 87 (2011) p. 343-371; A.S. Dobyčyna, *Tyrnowo i politika peresenija svjaščennych relikvij v period stanovlenija Vtorogo Bolgarskogo Carstva (1185-1204)*, in: *Velikite Asenevci. Sbornik s dokladi ot konferencija, posvetena na 830 godina ot vāstannieto na bratjata Petr i Asen, načaloto na vtoroto bālgarsko carstvo i objavjaneto na Tārnowo za stolica za Bālgarija i 780 godin ot legitimnoto vāzobiovjane na Bālgarskata Patrjaršija*, ed. P. Pavlov – N. Kānev – N. Hrissimov, Veliko Tārnowo 2016, p. 52-59.

was built as a future necropolis of the Komitopules. Among the graves discovered in the ruins of the temple, four burials of representatives of the political elite can be distinguished, due to the location and preserved endowment. One of them was identified by Moutzopoulos as the tomb of emperor Samuel, in the others Gabriel Radomir, John Vladislav or St. John Vladimeros of Dioclea were supposed to rest. Although the imperial residence was plundered and burned in 1073, numerous temples and monasteries located on the island and shores of the lake not only survived, but also others, and Prespa retained its sacred significance until the end of the Middle Ages<sup>41</sup>. Under these circumstances, the cult of St. Achilles of Larissa was established in the archbishopric of Bulgaria and neighboring regions. This process was accompanied by the creation of native works related to his cult. Samuel's name often appears in liturgical and apocryphal texts and chronicles written in the Balkans, later copied in the *Slavia Orthodoxa* area<sup>42</sup>. It can be assumed that on such a basis an not retained work commemorating the merits of the Komitopules could have been born. Such a text could take the form of a *synodikon*, a text commemorating the names of the members of the ruling family, their spouses and offspring, as well as the exact dates of their death and burial places. It is possible that Michael had access to such a work and used it to correct the message of the Skylitzes. However, this was not the only source used for this purpose by bishop of Devol.

A number of Michael's additions concerning the history of the Empire and the Great Church, the fate of the imperial commanders fighting against the Bulgarians, or the careers of the descendants of the Komitopules after the conquest testify to the knowledge of Byzantine sources. Some of them do not portray Bulgarians very positively, hence the native

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<sup>41</sup> N. Moutzopoulos, *Bazilikata "Sveti Achilij" v Prespa. Edin istoričeskij pametnik – svetinja*, Plovdiv 2007, p. 137-192; R. Ruseva, *Bazilikata "sv. Achilij", monašestvoto i iskustvoto v Prespa. Predvaritelni beležki*, in: *Evropejskiat Jugoiztok prez vtorata polovina na X – načaloto na XI vek. Istorija i kultura*, ed. V. Gjuzelev – G.N. Nikolov, Sofija 2015, p. 700-716; C. Grozdanov, *Portreti na svetilite od Makedonija od IX-XVIII vek*, Skopje 1983, p. 145-159; I. Velez, *Pregled na srednovekovni crkvi i manastiri vo Makedonija*, Skopje 1990, No 237, 281, 395, 551, 552, 740, 791.

<sup>42</sup> T. Subotin-Golubović, *Kult svetog Achilija Lariskog*, ZRVI 26 (1987) p. 21-34; T. Subotin-Golubović, *Nova služba sv Achiliju Lariskom*, ZRVI 27-28 (1988) p. 149-175; A. Miltenova, *Vremeto na car Samuil v srednovekovnata bālgarska literatura*, in: *Evropejskiat Jugoiztok prez vtorata polovina na X – načaloto na XI vek. Istorija i kultura*, ed. V. Gjuzelev – G.N. Nikolov, Sofija 2015, p. 639-664.

origin should rather be excluded<sup>43</sup>. Whether these were works from the eleventh century, which were also used by Skylitzes or other texts, unfortunately it is not known. We have a laconic clue that appears in the context of Michael's addition to the circumstances of the death of Moses Komitopulos at Serres: "Others write (ἄλλοι δὲ οὐ λίθῳ βληθῆναι γράφουσι...) that it was not by a stone thrown that Moses died but his horse fell, bringing him down, and he was slain by one of duke Melissenos' men"<sup>44</sup>. It suggests that the reader (and commentator) of the chronicle derived his knowledge from more than one author<sup>45</sup>. It is possible that the genesis of the other parts of his text was similar, unfortunately the current state of knowledge does not allow for their closer clarification. We must be content with the observation that in the case of Michael we are dealing with a combination of an insightful reader of the Skylitzes as his proofreader and commentator.

### 3. Michael's message: sending and receiving

According to Schreiner, the aim of the author of the additions included in the Vienna manuscript was to familiarize potential readers with the circumstances of the fall of Bulgaria. The reign of Samuel and his successors, despite their successes in the confrontation with Byzantium, is in Michael's view a testimony to the end of the history of a powerful state that for centuries directly threatened the emperors of Constantinople<sup>46</sup>. However, the above observation does not exhaust other interpretative possibilities. The information present in Michael's appendices about the fate of successive generations of Komitopules who tried to realize

<sup>43</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 19, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 55, 65, 66; IS, pp. 347<sup>81-82</sup>, 359<sup>33</sup>, 359<sup>42</sup>, 360<sup>51</sup>, 363<sup>54-56</sup>, 364<sup>66</sup>, 364<sup>84-88</sup>, 448<sup>52</sup>, 492<sup>51</sup>. E.g. When Samuel's daughters found out they have been given the Byzantine title (*patrikia zoste*) by the empress widow Maria they had: "When they saw Maria the wife of John standing beside the emperor, these women set about her as though they would kill her" take on a tragicomic dimension. See B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 52; IS, p. 363<sup>59-60</sup>; PmB: sv. "Maria", No 24944.

<sup>44</sup> IS, p. 329<sup>83</sup>; Tr. J. Wortley, p. 331.

<sup>45</sup> It is possible that Michael also had access to works written in the eleventh century, which Skylitzes used to create the last parts of his chronicle. See K. Biały, *The Authorship of the lost source of John Scylitzes' "Synopsis Historion" in the charter about the reign of Michael IV*, "Eos" 101 (2014) p. 275-284.

<sup>46</sup> Schreiner, p. 252.

their aspirations under Byzantine rule suggests that we are dealing with a more specific purpose of the author's message.

Completing the work of Skylitzes, Michael considered it important to highlight the signs of the decline of Samuel's line. This applies not only to the fate of emperor Gabriel Radomir, who less than a year after the death of his father fell victim to a family murder. One of the appendices was dedicated to Peter II Delyan, perpetrator of Bulgaria's apostasy (after "the twenty-first year of its enslavement and subjection"). As the leader of the rebellion, Delyan was in his eyes an apostate deserving of political and moral condemnation, so his defeat was an important element of the political success of emperor Michael IV<sup>47</sup>. The bishop did not question, as some Byzantine authors did in the XI-XII centuries, the origin of the leader of the uprising. Several decades after this uprising, Delyan's belonging to the ruling family did not raise doubts among Bulgarians<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, Michael, writing about the circumstances of his birth, recognizes Delyan as the son of Gabriel Radomir. He points out, however, that he was excluded from the succession when Samuel's son despised his mother:

Radomir had to wife the daughter of the Kral of Hungary. For reasons unknown to me he took to hating her and sent her away when she was already pregnant to him. Then he took the fair Irene who had been taken prisoner at Larissa (...). Born to him by the daughter of the kral of Hungary whom he hated while Samuel was still alive, drove her out and married the very beautiful Eirene of Larissa<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> B. Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 59; IS, p. 409<sup>88</sup>; Tr. J. Wortley, p. 384. On the role of combating "apostasy" in the imperial propaganda of medieval Byzantium, see A. Savvides, *Internal strife and unrest in later Byzantium, XIth-XIIIth centuries (A.D. 1025-1261). The Case of urban and provincial insurrections (causes and effects)*, "Symmeikta" 7 (1987) p. 237-273. Regarding the outbreak of the uprising and its causes, among others see J. Dudek, *Elity bułgarskie po podboju bizantyńskim. 1018-1041*, „Balcanica Posnaniensia” 26 (2019) p. 43-71.

<sup>48</sup> Written in the XI-XII centuries in the Western Balkans, the so-called "Apocryphal Latopis" mentions Delian as one of the Bulgarian rulers. See V. Täpkova-Zaimova – A. Miltenova, *Istoriko-apokaliptičnata knižnina vāv Vizantija i v srednovkovna Bālgarija*, Sofija 1996, p. 68. According to Skylitzes (IS, p. 410-411), Delyan eliminated his rival Tichomir for leadership, quickly convincing the Bulgarians that he was the rightful emperor.

<sup>49</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 24, 60, 62, 64; IS, pp. 350<sup>56-59</sup>, 409<sup>89, 95-96</sup>, 411<sup>37</sup>; tr. J. Wortley (with a small correction J.D.), p. 332, 385. Michael Psellos writes extensively about Delyan's origin (IV 40, v. 1, p. 76), describing him as a servant and pretender who escaped from Constantinople. The form of the usurper's name (Δολιάνος – "liar")

From the group of Komitopules, the bishop clearly prefers a group of descendants of John Vladislav. Thanks to Michael's information, one can see their fate until the second half of the eleventh century and see that the successors of Aaron Komitopulos, or more precisely "Vladislav's family (*genos*)" best adapted to new circumstances under Byzantine rule<sup>50</sup>. The fate of subsequent generations of this Komitopules line was meticulously analyzed by Iwan Božilov<sup>51</sup>. The results of his research show that despite the different finale of their careers, they formed a group of aristocrats whose influence and importance went beyond the western Balkans. Admittedly, some made the wrong political choice, which cost them dearly<sup>52</sup>. Others managed to weather the storms of history and established their own lineages, enriched with Byzantine titles and offices<sup>53</sup>. One was governor of a key province on the Asian border of Byzantium, then became the commander-in-chief of the imperial army in the war against the usurper, he was defeated in it, but his family fortune did not

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forms a "speaking name" used for propaganda purposes, repeated by others. Meanwhile, Michael of Devol, presumably the only Greek-language author, cites the form of the name/term "Odeljan/Oðeleǎvoç" found in the western Balkans. Data on the various forms and meanings of this name were collected by S. Antoljak, *Petar Delian ili Doljan ili Odeljan*, in: *Srednovjekovna Makedonija*, v. 1, Skopje 1985, p. 711-725) and D. Madjarov (*L'histoire de Petâr/Pierre Deljan – souverain legitime et du prince Arpad – düla. Relations entre le rituel et la titulature*, BHR 1-2 (2011) p. 3-40). The prevailing belief in the literature on the subject is that Delian's mother could have been the unnamed daughter of King Stephen I the Great (997-1038) or his predecessor Gejza (970-997). See *PmZ*: No, 22032A; É. Révész, *Die Ehe Gavril Radomirs und der Tochten des ungarischen Königs*, „Inicijal” 2 (2014) p. 47-60. This was questioned by J. Lešny (*Państwo Samuela a jego zachodni sąsiedzi*, BP 2 (1985) p. 88-92), presenting a number of arguments in favor of the fact that the father of the Hungarian princess was probably one of the lesser rulers eliminated by Stephen I, in these circumstances the marriage lost its political *raison d'être* for the Komitopules. See. *PmB*: sv. Gabriel-Radomir-Romanos, No. 22032.

<sup>50</sup> The term "Vladislav's family" does not appear in Byzantine sources, but from the family of Aaron Komitopulos only one of his sons survived the massacre in Rametanica – John Vladislav. The term "Vladislav's family" in relation to all his descendants was introduced into the literature of the subject by Alexander Každan. See *Socjalnyj sostav gospodstvujuščego klasa Vizantii XI-XII vv.*, Moskva 1972, p. 90.

<sup>51</sup> I. Božilov, *Bălgarite vāv vizantijskata imperia*, Sofija 1995, p. 236-254. Cf. B. Skoulatos, *The Byzantine characters of "Alexiades"*. *Prosopographic analysis and synthesis*, Leuven 1980, No 1, 179, p. 3-4, 274-275.

<sup>52</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 46, 49; IS, p. 359<sup>33</sup>, 360<sup>51</sup>; Božilov, No 163, 164, 169.

<sup>53</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 46, 49; IS, p. 359<sup>33</sup>, 360<sup>51</sup>; Božilov, No 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157.



suffer in anything<sup>54</sup>. The wife of the victor was the sister of the defeated leader, the only known by name daughter of John Vladislav, who went down in history as empress Catherine of Bulgaria<sup>55</sup>. However, in principle, there is no information that the descendants of Samuel and Gabriel Radomir received titles and apanages or were related to the Byzantine aristocracy after 1018<sup>56</sup>. The conqueror of the Komitopules, who survived after family disputes, considered only the “Vladislav family” worthy of this kind of signs of kindness. It is possible that Basil’s conduct resulted from a real assessment of the state of the then elites of the conquered state. It is possible that the earlier negotiations conducted by the emperor with John Vladislav on the terms of the honorable surrender of the Bulgarians played a role here<sup>57</sup>. In any case, the advent of Byzantine rule paved the way for this distinguished branch of the Komitopules to enter the elite circle of the Empire, at the same time setting in motion the process of their assimilation. Gradually, as this process progresses, one can speak of the formation of separate families of Aaronid’s and Allusian’s in the second half of the eleventh century<sup>58</sup>. At the beginning of the next century, descendants of John Vladislav still maintained their high social status. Presumably, one of them, named Aaron, remained in the circle of Theophylact’s friends, so close that the archbishop, also valued as a poet, dedicated one of his poems to him<sup>59</sup>. Such descendants of the rulers of

<sup>54</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 46, 49, 65; IS, p. 359<sup>33</sup>, 360<sup>51</sup>, 448<sup>51-53</sup>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 421: “The governor of the region was vestes Aaron, son of [John] Vladisthlav and brother of Prousianos”; Božilov, No 158.

<sup>55</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 66; IS, s. 492<sup>51</sup>; tr. J. Wortley, p. 458: “Aikaterina, daughter of Vladisthlav, king of Bulgaria”; Božilov, No 165.

<sup>56</sup> It is known that only Samuel’s daughter, Miroslava, after fleeing with her husband from Bulgaria in 1005, was endowed by Basil II with the title of “patrikia zoste”. See IS, pp. 343<sup>65-67</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> IS, p. 353. See A. Kotłowska, *Cesarstwo Bizantyńskie wobec kryzysu dynastycznego w Bułgarii w 1015 r.* RH 76 (2010) p. 255-262.

<sup>58</sup> ODB sv. “Aaronios”, “Alousianos”, v. 1, p. 1-2, 70.

<sup>59</sup> *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, ed. P. Gautier (CFHB. STh 16/2) Thessalonique 1980, p. 366<sup>1-8</sup>. See I. Durić, *Teofilakt Ochridski pod šatorom Arona* ZRVI 27-28 (1989) p. 69-90. Božilov (No. 159, 160, 160a, 161, 162, 164, 164) identifies several probable grandchildren of John Vladislav using the name “Aaron/Aaronios”. Probably to one of them Theophylact dedicated his piece. In later times, the “Aaronid’s”, like the “Allusian’s”, are much less visible in the sources. Rather, this cannot be explained by the biological extinction of this line of Komitopules or the possible degradation in the hierarchy of the Byzantine aristocracy. It is possible that we are dealing here

Bulgaria were as clear to Michael as other local notables who remained loyal to Byzantium in difficult times. It is no accident that he emphasizes that when the rebels under the banner of Konstantin Bodin occupied cities deprived of walls by Basil II, apart from them, there was also a group of “supporters of the Romans”, preparing to put up vigorous resistance<sup>60</sup>. In addition to those Komitopules who decided to unite their fate with Byzantium, these Bulgarian notables are also spotted by Michael in his appendices to *Synopsis Historion*, when he completes Skylitzes’ account of the surrender of the Bulgarians in 1018<sup>61</sup>.

In these circumstances, one can speak of a certain message conveyed by the Viennese manuscript of the chronicle. Indeed, it does not take the form of an independent narration, but due to the significant enrichment of the initial version of Skylitzes’ text, one can put forward a thesis that Michael formulated a specific message to the recipients. They were certainly medieval Romans (*Rhōmaïoi*) who accepted the accession of loyal Bulgarian nobles to the Byzantine elite. They held offices or important functions in the western Balkans, annexed in 1018. Nor can we exclude from their ranks the descendants of notables from the times of the Komitopules, who at the beginning of the twelfth century began to integrate with the Romani elites. The emergence and permanent presence of such environments in the area coinciding with geographical Macedonia can be treated as a feature that distinguishes this region from the other parts of the first Bulgarian state<sup>62</sup>.

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with a gradual abandonment of giving characteristic names related to the family tradition, which meant full assimilation of the descendants of John Vladislav.

<sup>60</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No 69; S.C., p. 164<sup>2-12</sup>; *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles. The Continuation of the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (1057-1079)*, tr. E. McGeer, Leiden 2020, p. 150, 151: “Petrilos took the city by storm – for it was not fortified at all but had been lying in ruins ever since the emperor Basil razed it to the ground, since he suspected that the royal seat of the Bulgarians would be a powerful incentive to rebellion – and after being welcomed with open arms there Petrilos prepared the inhabitants to acclaim his lord. He did the same thing in Diabolis and set off in all haste for Kastoria. The supporters of the Romans were gathered there, as stated above”.

<sup>61</sup> Prokić, *Die Zusätze*, No. 40, 54; IS, p. 358<sup>83-84</sup>, 364<sup>71</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> G.G. Litavrin (*Prošloe i nastojašče Makedonii v svete sovremennykh problem*, in: *Makedonija. Problemy istorii i kultury*, ed. R.P. Grišin, Moskva 1999, p. 25-31) drew attention to the unique feature of Macedonia (in the geographical sense), which in the Middle Ages was subjected to Byzantine cultural influences. This was to distinguish it from other regions of the first Bulgarian state or other parts of *Slavia Orthodoxa*. Following the reflections of this researcher, it can be stated that the attitude of local aristocratic fam-

From the state of preservation of the well-known manuscripts of *Synopsis Historion* (10) and the works of later authors using the text of Skylitzes, it appears that Michael's additions were hardly known to the literary elite of Byzantium. There are many indications that we are dealing with an isolated testimony, the impact on the audience of which did not seem to exceed the western Balkans. This is confirmed by the image of the Komitopules visible in the flourishing Byzantine history after 1118. We have the right to interpret this date as a certain caesura. Not only because the bishop of Devol points out that he completed of Skylitzes at that time or because Alexios I Komnenos died in the same year (15 August 1118). Nikephoros Bryennios presenting the genealogy of the empress dowager, writing about her mother, Maria granddaughter of John Vladislav, he commits a clear manipulation<sup>63</sup>. The continuator of his historical work, the porphyrogenita Anna Komnene, does not directly confirm the message of her spouse. However, he describes Samuel as the last Bulgarian emperor (“βασιλεὺς (...) Σαμουήλ ὁ τελευταῖος τῆς βουλγαρικῆς δυναστείας”)<sup>64</sup>. Both Anna and Nikephoros did not take into account in their historical works the fact that their contemporaries descended exclusively from the line of John Vladislav. It was certainly not a sign of their ignorance. When Anna Komnene finishes the work “Alexias”, the process of shaping the image of emperor Alexios I came to an end. He, not his uncle Isaak, was the founder of the glory of the new dynasty. Irena's pedigree is necessary for such an image, but it consists

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ilies acquired for Constantinople before the crisis of the Empire at the end of the twelfth century must have played an important role in these cultural changes. This probably explains the specific durability of political relations of this part of the western Balkans with the Byzantine state in the years 1180-1340. Neither the crusaders nor the rulers of the re-born Bulgarian state were able to take control of the former core of the Komitopules state. Only the king of Serbia managed to do so, who decided to proclaim “emperor of the Serbs and *Rhōmaïoi*” in Skopje in 1346. The title primarily reflected the ambitious plans of Stephan Dušan. It could also be treated as a gesture addressed to elites of mixed Byzantine-Bulgarian origin in geographical Macedonia.

<sup>63</sup> *Nicephori Bryennii Historiarum libri quattuor* III 6, p. 219<sup>15-20</sup>. “(...) on her father's side, she descended from Samuel, Emperor of Bulgaria (τὸν βασιλέα Βουλγάρων τὸν Σαμουήλ ἀνῆκε τὸ γένος), as she was the daughter of his son Trojannes (...). The beauty of the soul emphasized its extraordinary beauty, as the shining virtues and customs added ornaments to the splendor of the family”. Her marriage to Andronikos Dukas was contracted before 1066. D.I. Polemis, *The Doukai. A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography*, London 1968, No. 21, p. 58; Božilov, No. 168, 172.

<sup>64</sup> *Alexias*, VII 3, pp. 21021-21022.

of those elements of tradition that are not controversial. Trajan (Trojan), the ancestor of Alexios' wife, in addition to his marriage to a Byzantine aristocrat, did not deserve anything special compared to his relatives. Unlike Aaron and Allusian, he did not establish a separate lineage. When Nikephoros comes to enumerate his achievements, he limits himself only to the information that in addition to the marriage of his daughter to one of the Doukas, it was also a marriage with an aristocrat related to the well-known Byzantine families of Phocas, Kontostephanos and Avalants<sup>65</sup>. In the historical work of Anna Komnene, her relatives were included, but with some reservations. Not everyone is associated positively in her time. Some of the descendants of John Vladislav were discredited by participating in the conspiracy against emperor Alexios in 1107<sup>66</sup>. Probably, however, this was not the only main reason for treating Samuel as the progenitor of Empress Irene. In the middle of the twelfth century, the process of absorption of this branch of the Komitopules came to an end, they no longer differ from other aristocratic families co-creating the "clan" of Komnenos – Doukas, Bryennios, Palaiologos, Diogenids, Angelos. Bishop Michael's efforts are no longer relevant to the creation of their future. Samuel, known for his bravery, even as a long-time opponent of Basil II, was better suited to play the role of ancestor of those heirs of the Komitopules who co-created the new imperial elites.

Translated: Piotr Dudek

### Abbreviations

- AUL Folia Historica – Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica  
 BHR – Bulgarian Historical Review  
 BBg – Byzantinobulgarica  
 BMGS – Byzantine Modern and Greeks Studies  
 Bsl – Byzantinoslavica. Revue international des études byzantines  
 CFHB.SBe – *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae. Series Berolinensis*  
 CFHB.SV – *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae. Series Vindobonensis*  
 CFHB.STh. – *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae. Series Thessalonicensis*

<sup>65</sup> Nicephori Bryennii *Historiarum libri quattuor* III 6, p. 21919-21920.

<sup>66</sup> *Alexias* XIII 1, p. 385<sup>35-59</sup>, 386<sup>60-95</sup>, 387<sup>1-14</sup>. See. Božilov No 163, 164; Cheynet, p. 102.

- CSHB – *Corpus scriptores historiae byzantinae*  
 Glas SKA – Glas Srpske Kraljevske Akademije/Глас Српске Краљевске Академије  
 ODB – *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. Kazhdan et al., New York – Oxford 1991  
 Pbg – *Paleobulgarica/Старобългаристика*  
 PmZ – *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Zweite Abteilung (867–1025)*, red. F. Winkelmann, Berlin 2013  
 ZRVI/ЗРВИ – *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta/Зборник Радова Византолошког Института*

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