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ЗБОРНИК РАДОВА

ВИЗАНТОЛОШКОГ ИНСТИТУТА
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ON THE ROLE OF BULGARIAN FORTRESSES IN THE WAR OF 976–1018*

After 1018/1019, the organization of Byzantine rule in the interior regions of the Balkans rested on the administration that John I Tzimiskes established in the areas taken from Bulgaria after 971 and the experience Basil II acquired during the war of 976–1018/1019 against Samuel and his successors. The sources attest that the struggle for Bulgarian independence relied on a dense network of fortresses in the interior of the Balkans. Accounts of the war of 976–1018/1019 by Byzantine authors show that, based on certain criteria, we can identify the dominant fortresses that served as the centers of Bulgarian resistance. Basil took control of most of those fortresses by their surrender. The way in which the Balkan interior was subdued led to Byzantium's reliance on church organization to establish its rule in the post-1018/1019 period. During the reign of Basil II and shortly after his death, the Archbishopric of Ohrid had a twofold role. This institution, on the one hand, ensured lasting peace in the Balkans and, on the other, remained the only guardian of the subjugated people's identity. However, in the mid-11th century, Byzantium already began to openly pursue a policy that almost exclusively favored Constantinople's interests in the Balkans.

Keywords: Basil II, Balkans, Bulgarian fortresses, Archbishopric of Ohrid

The sources offer only sporadic information on the Byzantine territorial-administrative organization in the Balkans during the reign of Basil II (976–1025) and in the first decades of the post-Basilian era. Our knowledge is limited by the fact that not a single official list of Byzantine offices and titles has reached us from the time of Basil II and his successors. Hence, we cannot know exactly how many districts were

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formed during the reign of this emperor or what their internal organization was. Nevertheless, the administrative-military organization that Basil II built in the interior of the Balkan Peninsula was influenced by two factors.

Firstly, there was an obvious tendency to retain the course in military administration set by Basil's predecessor, John I Tzimiskes (969–976). This was a system that rested on territorial districts headed by *doukes* and *katepano*, who co-existed with the *strategoï*.¹ An important resource from his time is the *Taktikon Escorial*, a list of Byzantine officials, which informs us about the territorial-administrative organization of the areas taken in the Byzantine-Russian war for Bulgaria (970–971).² These reports are supplemented by seals, primarily those in the so-called *Preslavian collection*. Some of them bear combinations of offices not listed in the *Taktikon Escorial*, leading to the conclusion that the seals shed light on the early years of the Byzantine presence in the territory of the northeastern Bulgarian Empire.³

Secondly, there is no doubt that the experience acquired in the war against Samuel and his successors (976–1018) influenced Basil's organization of administration in the Balkans. The war focused on fortresses, the main centers of resistance to the Byzantine penetration into the Balkan interior.⁴ This factor shaped the character of the war and, after 1018/1019, the organization of Byzantine rule in the conquered territories.

On this occasion, I would like to examine the reports on the Bulgarian fortresses in Byzantine narrative sources, above all, John Skylitzes, the most detailed account of the period 976–1018/1019.⁵ The aim is to clarify how Basil II took control of the regions in the interior of the Peninsula.

Let us start with the observation that the war lasted more than four decades and involved two or even three generations of the same family. If we look at the Bulgarian ruling family, we will see that its members fit for military service belonged

¹ Following the model of the Empire's eastern parts, the presence of *doukes* / *katepano* and *strategoï* was recorded during John Tzimiskes' reign in the Balkans. The presence of *strategoï* in a region that had a tagmatic center headed by a *doux* or *katepano* made the internal structure of those districts more complex. Before the era of Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes, autonomous military-administrative districts were defined according to the thematic *strategoï*, but the emergence of *doukes* and *katepano* in certain areas led to a change in the criteria used to define autonomous districts, *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 84 sq.

² The *Taktikon Escorial* is usually dated to 971–975, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 255–277. It remains unclear whether this was the final list or a draft because some offices are known to have been omitted in it but confirmed in other sources, *Krsmanović*, Beobachtungen, 631–636.

³ The seals of the so-called Preslavian collection record combinations of offices not listed in the *Taktikon Escorial*, e.g., the *strategos* of Ioannoupolis (former Preslav) and Dorostolon, *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 259–277, 271a. The *Taktikon Escorial* mentions only the *strategos* of Thrace and Ioannoupolis, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.9. On the characteristics of Tzimiskes' penetration into the interior of the Balkans, see *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 136–142.

⁴ *Privatnić*, Samuilova država, 192, 194.

⁵ This is part of a broader research conducted under the project "From Barbarians to Christians and Rhomaioi".

to three generations: Samuel and his brothers David, Moses, and Aaron; their sons (e.g., Gabriel Radomir, Samuel's son or John Vladislav, Aaron's son); the sons of John Vladislav, Prousianos and his brothers.⁶

The involvement of members of two or three generations from the same family in this war testifies to the persistent resistance of the local population to the establishment of Byzantine rule. The bearers of this lasting and tenacious resistance were the members of the Bulgarian elite. In some cases, they were members of the Bulgarian nobility who, after Tzimiskes' occupation, had fled from old Bulgarian lands (between the Danube and the Balkan mountain range, where the old Bulgarian centers had been, such as Dorostolon and the former capitals of Pliska and Preslav) to the western and southwestern reaches of the First Bulgarian Empire. The migration of the members of the Bulgarian elite is confirmed by reports on the transfer of the seat of the Bulgarian Church – from Dristra / Dorostolon to Triaditza / Serdica, Vodena / Edessa to Moglena, Prespa, and, finally, Ohrid.⁷ Church dignitaries were, no doubt, accompanied by the members of the secular elite. They joined the Bulgarian magnates who lived in the parts of the First Bulgarian Empire that remained beyond the reach of Tzimiskes' campaign of 971.

The conflicts, which lasted more than forty years, were low-intensity. In this period, the inhabitants of the central Balkans, regardless of whether they lived in Bulgarian or Byzantine strongholds and their vicinity, faced the trials and tribulations of war but also a need to ensure their livelihood by pursuing peacetime activities. For instance, in his account of the Bulgarian conquest of Larissa in 985, Kekaumenos reports that, during the several years of Samuel's periodic attacks, the inhabitants of Larissa sowed and harvested crops outside the city walls, thereby securing their livelihood.⁸

Despite the fluctuating intensity of the conflict, the sources unambiguously attest that Basil II worked hard to *re-establish* the Empire's northern frontier on the Danube. The offensives of the Byzantine army targeted different regions of the Balkans, and, additionally, Byzantium was forced to defend its old possessions and repair the damage incurred in Bulgarian raids. It also had to constantly provide manpower for the war in the Balkans and mobilize additional troops that occasionally joined the Balkan campaigns.

⁶ Examples from other Bulgarian families show the involvement of two generations: Krakras and his son; Dobromeros and Dobromeros the Younger; Nikoulitzas and Nikoulitzas the Younger, *Krsmanović*, *Bulgarian Elite*.

⁷ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverszeichnisse*, 44–45; *Ivanov*, *Starini*, 566. Basil's *sigillion* (1020) omitted Prespa, which served as the see of the Bulgarian primate before he moved to Ohrid. Samuel had the relics of St. Achilleos translated to Prespa and laid to rest in a magnificent church he had built there, *Skylitzes*, *Synopsis*, 330. For a chronology of the transfers of the seat of the Bulgarian church and its primate, see *Pirivatrić*, *Samuilova država*, 154–157.

⁸ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 266–268.

Another contributing factor to the long duration of the war was the configuration of the terrain, which offered few opportunities for open combat.⁹ Samuel's comrades-in-arms had a choice: retreat to a fortress and put up resistance or accept the sovereignty of the Byzantine emperor. Fortresses were usually in inaccessible places, which rendered many of them impregnable. The tactic for defending Bulgarian independence could be succinctly described by paraphrasing Kekaumenos: if you happen to be in a fortified city, gather your men and wage war against the enemy, and fill your fortress with food supplies, as this will allow you to withstand all attacks.¹⁰

Accounts of Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts in Byzantine sources show that fortresses were isolated centers of resistance. For instance, there is no indication that Bulgarian troops from other areas came to the aid of the defenders of strongholds during attacks of the Byzantine army. The isolated position of fortresses meant that the resistance to the Byzantine invasion was in the hands of the members of the Bulgarian elite. They were in charge of maintaining the fortresses, defending them, and organizing the daily life of the local population. Some areas are known to have been controlled by multiple members of the same family. In some cases, local magnates had been tied to their respective regions and fortresses even before Samuel's uprising. Refusing to accept the situation established by Tzimiskes in 971, those magnates and their families organized the defense of their fortresses and lands, relying on the local population (e.g., Krakras and his son and brother; Sermon, Nestongos' brother; Ibatzes at Mount Brochotos).

The attachment of Bulgarian magnates to their own regions and fortresses made them quite independent from the representatives of the central government, i.e., the members of Samuel's dynasty. They could independently decide whether to surrender or continue to fight against Byzantium. Whether that made it easier or more difficult for Byzantium to conquer the Balkans is open to debate. On the one hand, Basil II acquired control over the majority of important fortresses after their Bulgarian commanders surrendered, which could arguably be said to have been a favorable development for Byzantium. On the other hand, a mass surrender of Bulgarian magnates did not take place until 1018/1019, suggesting that they persistently clung to the idea of independent Bulgaria and pulled the Empire into a protracted war.

The defense system of the Bulgarian Empire rested on a network of fortresses of varying importance. The available information suggests that fortified centers were surrounded by smaller forts tasked with controlling and defending access to the more significant strongholds. The sources do not expressly report the existence of central or principal fortresses from whence the surrounding area would have been controlled,

⁹ A few open battles between the Byzantine and Bulgarian armies are known: Battle of the Gates of Trajan in 986, the Battle of Spercheios in 997, on the Vardar River before the Byzantine conquest of Skopje (ca. 1003 or 1004, or, according to other opinions, 991), the battles in the Stroumitza region in 1014, in the Pelagonia valley in 1015, 1017, cf. *Pirivatrić, Samuilova država*, 194. Regardless of their importance for the course of the war, these standoffs did not directly mark its end.

¹⁰ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 264–266.

and fortified structures are variously referred to as πόλις, φρούριον, ἔρυμα, κάστρον, δέμα. Some of those terms are used as synonyms (e.g., πόλις and φρούριον; κάστρον and φρούριον; ἔρυμα and φρούριον). However, the reports in the sources suggest that there was a difference in the hierarchical rank of fortresses in the Balkans.

The ranking of fortresses, according to their strategic importance and role in the Bulgarian military organization, can be reconstructed based on indirect information. The following factors should be taken into account:¹¹

- the term used in the sources to describe the stronghold;
- reports that indicate that the fortress existed before 976;
- the geographic position of the fortress;
- information on how Byzantium acquired control of the fortress (by capture or surrender);
- information on the treatment of the local population (whether they were displaced from the fortress, scattered in the surrounding area or resettled in other Byzantine-controlled territories, included in the Byzantine military service, etc.);
- information on the Bulgarian commanders of the fortress and how they were incorporated into the official Byzantine hierarchy;
- information showing the status of a fortified settlement in the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

The context in which the sources – above all, John Skylitzes – portray the war of 976–1018/1019 allows us to distinguish the major or dominant fortresses, which were the pillars of Bulgarian defense from Byzantine conquest in some areas. They included the very heartlands of Samuel's state, which housed the residences of Bulgarian rulers; the region of Stroumitza; the southern part of present-day Albania; the old Bulgarian territories between the Danube River and the Balkan mountain range; the fortresses in the north, along the Danube, including the broader area of Sirmium.

There is scant information on the military organization in the very heartlands of Samuel's state, which housed the residences of Bulgarian rulers – Ohrid, Prespa, Bitola, and Setena. We only know for certain that those were fortified settlements. The sources expressly mention the fortress at Ohrid,¹² the siege of Setena (meaning the settlement had fortifications),¹³ and archaeological findings confirm the existence of defensive walls in the vicinity of Bitola.¹⁴ However, the names of the military

¹¹ The results of more detailed research will be presented in the publication "From Barbarians to Christians and Rhomaioi. The Process of Byzantinization in the Central Balkans (late 10th–mid-13th century)", vol. I (forthcoming).

¹² Skylitzes Continuatus, 164.

¹³ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 356.

¹⁴ Mihajlovski, Novi podatoci, 199–208.

commanders who were directly in charge of defending the settlements that housed the palaces of Bulgarian rulers are unknown. The Byzantine army several times assailed this territory, which was well-defended and whose population supported the idea of independent Bulgaria until the last years of the war.

Among the listed settlements, the most important was Ohrid, described in the sources as πόλις, μητρόπολις πάσης τῆς Βουλγαρίας. The “metropolis of all Bulgaria” was where “the palaces of the kings of Bulgaria” stood (μητρόπολις οὐσα πάσης τῆς Βουλγαρίας, ἐν ἧ καὶ τὰ βασιλεία τῶν βασιλέων ἴδρυντο Βουλγαρίας) and “where their treasure was stored” (τὰ χρήματα ἀποτεθησαύριστο), on which Basil II laid his hands as late as 1018, including elaborate crowns, vestments embroidered in gold, and 100 *kentenaria* of gold coin.¹⁵ Skylitzes’ description and use of the plural (τὰ βασιλεία τῶν βασιλέων) suggests that all emperors from Samuel’s line had ties to Ohrid as the main political and, later, ecclesiastical center of their realm, although they had residences in other settlements, too.¹⁶

Skylitzes recounts that Basil captured the “city” (τὴν πόλιν) of Ohrid and, on this occasion, “set everything in order” (πάντα καλῶς διαθείς).¹⁷ John Zonaras reports that Basil II took Ohrid by laying siege to the city (πολιορκία λαβῶν).¹⁸ However, Skylitzes goes on to claim that Basil II appointed a Byzantine governor in Ohrid as late as 1018 (and not in 1015), “providing him with an adequate guard.” In 1018, Basil II set up camp in Ohrid, where “the people came out to meet him with paeans of praise, clapping of hands and acclamations”.¹⁹ Thus, the sources describe Basil’s capture of Ohrid in different contexts, leaving it unclear whether Ohrid was partially, or perhaps temporarily, taken in 1015. That would mean that Byzantium ultimately came to control Ohrid by the surrender of its inhabitants in 1018.

Besides the two mentioned above, no other sources contain reports that might shed some light on the military importance of Ohrid in the war of 976–1018. We have no information on the commander of Ohrid or the army that must have been stationed there to defend the “palace of the kings of Bulgaria” and their treasures. We do know, however, that the walls of Ohrid were razed. In the *Chronographia*, Skylitzes Continuatus reports that, in 1072, Petrilos charged into Ohrid because the city “was not yet fortified and had lain in ruins since Emperor Basil had leveled it, fearing that the Bulgarian palace in it might become a nucleus of rebellion.”²⁰ The “Bulgarian palace” (τὰ ...τῶν Βουλγάρων βασιλεία) mentioned by Skylitzes Continuatus could

¹⁵ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 358–359. On Ohrid see *Filiposki*, Ohrid.

¹⁶ *Pirivatrić*, *Samuilova država*, 156, notes that the sources do not confirm that Ohrid was Samuel’s capital and allows that he might have been most closely tied to Prespa, his native region.

¹⁷ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 353.

¹⁸ Zonaras III, 565. Zonaras based his description of the war of 976–1018 on Skylitzes, drastically summarizing the latter’s account.

¹⁹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 358–359.

²⁰ Skylitzes Continuatus, 164.

become a nucleus of rebellion as long as the main bearers of resistance – in this case, the members of the Bulgarian family – did not surrender and were removed from the area in which they enjoyed the local population's support. The inhabitants, it seems, remained quite fickle in their resolve to surrender to Byzantium.²¹

The office of the first Byzantine governor of Ohrid, Eustathios Daphnomeles, is not specified in the sources. Skylitzes refers to him twice as the "archon" of Ohrid.²² We know, however, that in the 11th century, Ohrid had an official with the rank of a *strategos*.²³ If archon Daphnomeles received the title of *strategos* in 1018 in Ohrid, he would have been the *strategos* of a fortress whose principal task was to defend the city and its area with his garrison.²⁴ After Daphnomeles captured and blinded the Bulgarian commander Ibatzes (in a personal mission of the Byzantine commander of Ohrid rather than as part of a military operation), the emperor rewarded him by making him the *strategos* of Dyrrachion.²⁵ This old Byzantine military-administrative district was superior in rank and importance to the former "metropolis of all Bulgaria."

However, the former metropolis of all Bulgaria retained this status after 1018, now in the Byzantine church organization. Basil II made Ohrid the seat of the newly established autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid.²⁶ In this way, the traditions of the First Bulgarian Empire and the continuation of this polity under Samuel and his successors were recognized through the church organization in the Balkans.

Besides Ohrid, the sources report that the Bulgarian rulers had residences in Prespa, Bitola, and Setena.

Prespa was one of the centers of the rebellion but had no particular military importance. We know that Samuel's palace was in Prespa and that the magnificent church dedicated to St. Achilleos was built there. Samuel brought the saint's relics from Larissa after he took the city in 985 and laid them to rest in the church.²⁷ The Komitopouloi are believed to have originated in the Prespa area, as attested by a monument Samuel erected in 992/993 in memory of his parents and brother.²⁸

²¹ In 1018, Basil was joyfully greeted by "all the people" in Ohrid (Skylitzes, Synopsis, 358), and in 1072, the inhabitants of Ohrid gave Petrilos a "friendly" reception and recognized Bodin as their ruler, which is also what happened in Devol (Skylitzes Continuatus, 164).

²² Skylitzes, Synopsis, 359, 361.

²³ A later source informs us that, in 1072, Marianos served as the *strategos* of Ohrid, Skylitzes Continuatus, 164.

²⁴ This was a new type of *strategis*, whose commanders bore the rank of *strategos*. The co-called *small strategoi* or *strategoi of cities* had limited military powers, which were of a different nature than that of the *strategoi* who were governors of *themata*. In time, the commander of a fortress and city came to be referred to as a *kastrophylax*, Ahrweiler, Administration, 50, 52.

²⁵ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 363.

²⁶ Gelzer, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

²⁷ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 330. *Mutsopulos*, „Sveti Ahilij“.

²⁸ On the ancestry of the Komitopouloi, see Pirivatrić, Samuilova država, 57–71.

Prespa probably served for a while as the see of the head of the Bulgarian Church after he fled from Dorostolon and Serdica to the southwest.²⁹

The sources did not describe Basil's conquest of Prespa, so we can assume that Byzantium took control of the entire territory from Ohrid to Prespa after the mass surrender of the local population in 1018. Basil's entry into Ohrid was a decisive event that allowed him to subdue the very core of Samuel's Bulgaria. To ensure his control, the emperor built two fortresses (φρούριον) that controlled the route Ohrid–Prespa: Basilis, atop a mountain between Lake Ohrid and Lake Prespa, and a smaller one called Konstantios at Lake Prespa.³⁰ Those fortresses housed the garrisons that ensured the peace established with the surrender of the Bulgarian elite and the local population. After 1018, Prespa became part of the diocese of Ohrid.³¹

There is also no information on the military status of Bitola (Βουτέλη). Bitola is mentioned only as the place where the palace of Gabriel Radomir stood, which Basil II burned down, probably in late 1014, after he learned of Samuel's death (24 October 1014).³² Skylitzes' "Bitola" could be understood as a toponym that described the area of a monastery (Slavonic: "обитѣль"), in whose vicinity Samuel's son and heir had his residence. We can assume that Gabriel Radomir's residence was in a settlement protected from any invasions of the Byzantine army. The safety of Samuel's son must have involved a fortified structure and a garrison stationed in the fort or its vicinity. Although we have no direct information on the settlement of Bitola or an eponymous fortress, Skylitzes' "Bitola" seems to have been associated with Heraclea Lyncestis, a bishop's see known to have existed in the last decades of the 9th century.³³

Skylitzes distinguishes between Bitola, the Pelagonian plain, and Pelagonia. The "Pelagonian plain" (τὰ πεδία Πελαγονίας) was multiple times (1015, 1017) a theater of Bulgarian–Byzantine conflicts, when Basil's army robbed the local population.³⁴ Skylitzes mentions Pelagonia in a context suggesting that it was a city (πόλις).

²⁹ A source from the mid-12th century, the so-called *List of Bulgarian Archbishops*, reports that Germanos Gabriel, the head of the Bulgarian Church, temporarily resided in Vodena and Prespa. This was the time after Boris II had been dethroned in 971 when, according to the same source, the seat of the Bulgarian primate moved from Dorostolon / Dristra to Vodena and Prespa and then to Ohrid, *Ivanov, Starini*, 566. The second *sigillion* of Basil II (1020) omits Prespa (see n. 7), but reports that the seat of the Bulgarian Church moved from Vodena to Moglena, *Gelzer, Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 44–45. The sources do not contradict each other because Vodena and Moglena belonged to the same diocese, as did Ohrid and Prespa; for more details, see *Komatina, Diocesan Structure*, 803–804.

³⁰ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 359. The location of Konstantios is unknown, and Basilis could be the fortress overlooking the present-day village of Ceredvor, for more details, see VIINJ III, 130 n. 177 (*J. Ferluga*). In 1040, Basilis was taken by the rebel Peter Deljan, Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 411.

³¹ *Gelzer, Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 42.

³² Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 351.

³³ *Komatina, Diocesan Structure*, 806–807.

³⁴ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 353, 354, 355. We know that, in 1017, the army led by David Areianites and Constantine Diogenes "took possession of many beasts and numerous prisoners" in the plains of Pelagonia.

We know that, in 1018, the inhabitants of “Pelagonia (ἐκ Πελαγονίας), Morozvzd and Lipljan” surrendered those towns to the emperor (παραδιδόντων τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰς πόλεις).³⁵ Elsewhere, Pelagonia appears in the context of settlements such as Ohrid (πόλις) and Prespa: Michael of Devol reports that Samuel settled many Byzantines and Armenians (prisoners of war) in “Pelagonia, Prespa and Ohrid.”³⁶

However, the usage of the term “Pelagonia” is unclear because, in one instance, Skylitzes’ text used the term “Pelagonian plain” and “Pelagonia” as synonyms. In 1015, the Byzantine commanders George Gonitziates and Orestes were ordered to “overrun the Pelagonian plain (τὰ πεδία Πελαγονίας),” where they were slain in a Bulgarian ambush led by Ibatzes, and Basil II was forced to personally “return to Pelagonia” (ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπανεστρεψεν εἰς Πελαγονίαν) to drive out Ibatzes.³⁷ The context seems to suggest that, in this instance, Skylitzes’ use of “Pelagonia” (Πελαγονία) as a stand-alone term is identical to the phrase τὰ πεδία Πελαγονίας.

Regardless of the lack of unambiguous information on the settlements and fortifications in the Pelagonian plain, this was no doubt a populated area that the Bulgarian army steadfastly defended. We know that, in the Pelagonian plain, the Byzantine army took many prisoners, who could have belonged to the local population or the mobile Bulgarian army.³⁸ The Byzantines also took possession of “many beasts,” suggesting that the locals were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. This is supported by the report that Setena, in the south of the Pelagonian plain, had a granary for storing grain harvested in the nearby areas.³⁹

Despite frequent incursions, Byzantium took control of Pelagonia only in 1018, when its population surrendered. As noted above, Skylitzes recounts that the “ambassadors from Pelagonia, Morozvzd and Lipljan” (mentioned only in this context, with no other information) came to see the emperor in Mosynoupolis and surrendered their towns.⁴⁰ The surrender came at a time when all prominent Bulgarian generals gave up on mounting any further resistance. Basil II affirmed the importance of the region of Pelagonia by founding the diocese of Bitola.⁴¹ Besides this

³⁵ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 357.

³⁶ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 363.

³⁷ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 354.

³⁸ There are reports that the Bulgarian mobile army fought in this territory. We know of the detachment led by Ibatzes ca. 1015, which defeated and killed George Gonitziates and Orestes. In the spring of 1017, the Bulgarian tsar John Vladislav was in the Pelagonian plain with his army. Having captured Setena, Basil II sent Constantine Diogenes against John Vladislav, who was in the vicinity, and the Byzantine army drove out the Bulgarians, killed many of their soldiers and “took prisoner two hundred soldiers with all their arms and horses” (διακοσίους πανοπλίτας καὶ τοὺς ἵππους). In the same clash, “all the equipment of John” was taken, and his nephew was captured and blinded, Skylitzes, Synopsis, 354, 356.

³⁹ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 356.

⁴⁰ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 357.

⁴¹ Gelzer, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

diocese, Basil's first *sigillion* regulating the borders of the Archbishopric of Ohrid lists the dioceses of Morozvzd and Lipljan. The diocese of Lipljan was assigned thirty clerics and thirty *paroikoi*, which made it one of the more important dioceses in the Church of Ohrid.⁴²

One of Samuel's residences was in Setena, which was also described as a fortress (φρούριον). We know nothing of its military commanders. Nevertheless, it must have been well defended because Basil II captured it ca. 1017 by siege. The emperor found much grain there and ordered the army to pillage it, burning the rest.⁴³ Setena would later be incorporated into the diocese of Moglena.⁴⁴

The heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria also included Prilep. This fortress is mentioned as the place where Samuel died on 24 October 1014.⁴⁵ It was a safe haven for Samuel (and possibly his residence), where he took refuge after the Battle of Belasitsa.⁴⁶ Although the narrative sources on the war of 976–1018 offer no other information, there can be no doubt that Prilep was the most important fortress in the northern part of the Pelagonian plain, controlling the approach to Bitola from the north.⁴⁷ The link between Prilep and Bitola is also apparent from the fact that Prilep later became part of the diocese of Bitola.⁴⁸

After Samuel died in 1014, Basil II sent out an army against Prilep and Styreion (Στυρειον, Štip or the area of Stobi?),⁴⁹ having previously burned down Gabriel Radomir's palace in Bitola.⁵⁰ We cannot know whether it was then that the Bulgarians permanently lost the Prilep fortress or not. The dilemma springs from the reports on the region of "interior fortresses / places," which, according to Skylitzes, remained in Bulgarian hands until 1018.

The region of "interior fortresses / places" is believed to have covered the territory west of Prilep toward Ohrid. It was governed by "toparches" Bogdan (ὁ τῶν ἐνδοτέρω κάστρων / τόπων τοπάρχης). This group of fortresses (κάστρα) belonged to the very core of Samuel's Bulgaria.⁵¹ The fortress that dominated this area is unknown, but it could have easily been Prilep. Describing the later developments of Peter Deljan's rebellion in 1041, Skylitzes mentions the "interior" (τὰ ἐνδοτέρα) of

⁴² *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 43. For more details on the development and history of the mentioned dioceses, see *Komatina*, *Diocesan Structure*, 809–811.

⁴³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 356.

⁴⁴ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 42.

⁴⁵ According to Michaelis *Attaliatae Historia*, 177, Samuel died in Prespa.

⁴⁶ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 349.

⁴⁷ The continually inhabited region of Prilep is also known to have served as a bishop's seat in the early Byzantine period, *Komatina*, *Diocesan Structure*, 800–801, 806–807.

⁴⁸ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 42.

⁴⁹ *Adžievski*, *Stipion (Stupion) ne e Štip*, 81–91.

⁵⁰ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 351.

⁵¹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 357–358.

Bulgaria, placing it in the Prilep area.⁵² He recounts that Manuel Ibatzes⁵³ built a wooden barricade (δέμα ξύλινον) at Prilep in a bid to stop the advance of Michael IV the Paphlagonian (1034–1041) deeper into Bulgaria.⁵⁴

Bogdan, the *toparches* of the “interior fortresses,” surrendered to Basil II in 1018 and received the title of *patrikios* as a reward. We also know that Bogdan colluded with Basil II even before he surrendered and that he killed his father-in-law, Matthaïzes. These reports suggest that Matthaïzes belonged to the belligerent faction of Bulgarian magnates loyal to the idea of independent Bulgaria. His murder was a prerequisite for ceding the “interior fortresses,” an area that had belonged to the heartlands of Samuel’s Bulgaria.⁵⁵

Besides the residential places of Bulgarian rulers, the heartlands of Samuel’s Bulgaria included Vodena / Edessa and Moglena, two strong fortresses that probably protected the broader area.

We do not know when Byzantium lost Edessa, also known by its Slavonic name of Vodena (Βοδινά, οἱ Βοδηνοί). The *Taktikon Escorial* lists the *strategos of Edessa*,⁵⁶ suggesting that the city was incorporated into Byzantium during Tzimiskēs’ campaign in Bulgaria. However, Byzantine control proved neither lasting nor firm. Vodena was one of the strongest Bulgarian fortresses (φρούριον) in the heartlands of Samuel’s realm and also served for a while as the seat of the Bulgarian patriarch.⁵⁷ The population of Vodena showed continued defiance toward Byzantium. The fortress was naturally protected by its position: it was located on a precipitous crag around which the waters of lake Ostrovo flowed.⁵⁸

The conquest of Vodena was tied to Basil’s attempt to exert more pressure on the center of Samuel’s realm. After Berroia surrendered, Basil II turned to Edessa / Vodena and captured it by siege in 1001 because neither the commander of the

⁵² Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 414. We know that Samuel deported the imprisoned inhabitants of Larissa to the interior of Bulgaria (εἰς τὰ τῆς Βουλγαρίας ἐνδοτέρω) after he took the city in 985, *ibid.*, 330. Since, at the end of the war, Basil found imprisoned Byzantine soldiers (Rhomaioi and Armenians) in Ohrid, Prespa, and Pelagonia, whom Samuel had settled there (*ibid.*, 363), the phrase “interior of Bulgaria” could refer to those regions. In that case, the phrase ὁ τῶν ἐνδοτέρω κάστρον τοπάρχης would be geographically more specific than “interior of Bulgaria.” Cf. VIINJ III, 82 n. 27 (*J. Ferluga*).

⁵³ Manuel Ibatzes was a close associate of the Byzantine emperor Michael IV but then defected to the rebels. Ibatzes was probably descended from a magnate who had participated in the war of 976–1018, perhaps even the renowned Bulgarian commander Ibatzes, who was tricked and blinded by Eustathios Daphnomeles, the “archon” of Ohrid, cf. VIINJ III, 149 n. 223 (*J. Ferluga*).

⁵⁴ At this time, the term Bulgaria referred to the Byzantine district formed by Basil II after 1018, *Mullett*, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, 53–69; *Komatina*, *Pojam Bugarske u XI i XII veku*, 41–56.

⁵⁵ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 358. The episode with Bogdan and Matthaïzes confirms that the matter of war or peace with Byzantium could cause deep rifts within Bulgarian noble houses, *Krsmanović*, *Bulgarian Elite*.

⁵⁶ *Oikonomidès*, *Listes*, 267.29.

⁵⁷ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 44–45; *Ivanov*, *Starini*, 566.

⁵⁸ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 345.

fortress, Draxanos, nor the inhabitants wanted to lay down their arms. Once he took the fortress and secured it with a guard, Basil resettled its population in Boleron.⁵⁹ The events of 1015 confirmed that this was a strong Bulgarian center indeed. Skylitzes recounts that Vodena rebelled, and it took “a long-drawn-out siege” to get its people to surrender a second time. Then, “he deported them again to Boleron”⁶⁰ and brought the bloodthirsty and savage “κονταράτοι” to the fortress, obviously in a bid to discourage any future disobedience of the local population. Nevertheless, it seems that the situation in Vodena remained precarious because Skylitzes reports that, in 1017, having taken Setena and fought against the army of John Vladislav in the Pelagonian plain, Basil II went to Vodena and “set everything in order there.”⁶¹

Vodena was very strategically important to Byzantium, not only because it had been a *strategis* in Tzimiskes’ era but also because of Basil’s intent to retake the fortress and solidify his control over it. Although it was one of the focal points of Bulgarian resistance, its walls were not demolished, and in 1015, Basil built two fortresses (φρούρια), Kardia and St. Elijah, in the pass leading to Vodena. The sources are silent on the post-1018 fate of Vodena / Edessa as a Byzantine military center. We know only that Basil II incorporated this old episcopal see, which had fallen under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian patriarch in the early 10th century, into the newly established Archbishopric of Ohrid. Although Vodena does not feature in Basil’s *sigillia* to the Church of Ohrid, a later list of the bishops of the Archbishopric of Ohrid (late 11th–early 12th century) lists Edessa / Vodena as part of the diocese of Moglena (ὁ Ἐδέσσης ἦτοι Μογλένων).⁶²

The case of Draxanos, the commander of Vodena, also shows how important it was to Basil II to pacify this fortress. Having lost his stronghold, Draxanos managed to avoid deportation to Boleron. He asked and was permitted to reside in Thessalonike, where he married the daughter of the “first priest” of the Church of St. Demetrios and had four children with her. Basil’s attempt to induce Draxanos into submission by making concessions to him indicates that this Bulgarian magnate, whom Skylitzes described as ἀνὴρ πολεμιστής, was a person of great political authority.⁶³ However, Draxanos’ clout proved of little use to the Byzantine emperor and

⁵⁹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 345. The region of Boleron lay between the Rhodopes in the east and the Nestos River in the west. Its center was the city of Mosynoupolis, an important Byzantine military base in the war of 976–1018, *Krsmanović*, *Byzantine Province*, 158–159

⁶⁰ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 352. This report of Skylitzes’ is open to conjecture as it is unclear who these inhabitants were: was only a part of the population deported in 1001 while others stayed behind in the fortress and rebelled in 1015, leading to a second wave of deportations to Boleron, or did the inhabitants displaced in 1001 return from Boleron to Vodena in the meantime and mount a rebellion against Byzantium in 1015?

⁶¹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 356.

⁶² Notitia 13A. For more details, see *Komatina*, *Diocesan Structure*, 803–804, 808–809.

⁶³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 345.

Basil II had to contend several times with the defiance of the former commander of Vodena and its inhabitants.⁶⁴ The continued disobedience of Vodena, attested in the sources, brings into question the success of Tzimiskes' penetration into the Balkans. The appearance of the *strategos* of Edessa in the *Taktikon Escorial* cannot be taken as evidence that Byzantium established stable control in the area of Vodena after 971.

The Bulgarians had another stronghold to the northeast of Vodena: Moglena, from whence the plain of Moglena was controlled. Skylitzes describes Moglena as both πόλις and φρούριον.⁶⁵ We know that it was headed by the "archon" Elitzes and that Domitianos Kaukanos (reportedly a close associate of Gabriel Radomir) and many other unnamed magnates took refuge in the fortress in 1015. Moglena also housed a large Bulgarian garrison. From the beginning of Samuel's rebellion, it was an important and safe center in southwestern Bulgaria and temporarily served as the seat of the Bulgarian primate, who had fled there after he was forced to leave Dorostolon, Serdica, and Vodena.⁶⁶

Byzantium took control of Moglena by siege in 1015, in an operation led personally by Basil II. The foundations of the fortress were excavated and set on fire, forcing the defenders and the inhabitants to surrender. The fortress was burned after it was captured; the "commoners" were dispersed, and the able-bodied defenders of Moglena were dispatched to the East, to Asprakania, and incorporated into the Byzantine army.⁶⁷ The demilitarized region of Moglena became a diocese in the Church of Ohrid. It included Ostrovo (modern Arnisa), an important Bulgarian stronghold whose area Basil II raided at least twice (ca. 1015 and ca. 1017) but seems not to have taken the fortress itself.⁶⁸ Basil II could have captured the Ostrovo region only at the end of the war, when the mass surrender of Bulgarian magnates gave him control over the bulk of Samuel's Bulgaria.⁶⁹

After Moglena, a smaller fortress (φρούριον) called Enotia (modern Notia), in the north of the Moglena plain.⁷⁰ We have no other information on Enotia. Presumably, it was a modestly sized fortress that controlled access to Moglena from the north. Thus, Enotia seems to have belonged to the group of fortresses dependent on major strongholds, in this case, Moglena.

⁶⁴ Draxanos' settlement in Thessalonike did not involve freedom of movement. He is known to have fled from Thessalonike three times and was ultimately executed for his treachery, *Heher*, Tod, 145 n. 137; 146 n. 143; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite.

⁶⁵ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 352.

⁶⁶ *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44–45.

⁶⁷ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 352.

⁶⁸ *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

⁶⁹ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 353, 356. Not far from Ostrovo, there was a settlement called Moliskos, which Skylitzes (356) mentioned just once – in his account of the devastation of the countryside surrounding Ostrovo and Moliskos by the Byzantine army in 1017, before the conquest of Setena.

⁷⁰ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 352. *Kravari*, Macédoine occidentale, 84–85.

To the southeast of the very nucleus of Samuel's Bulgaria, two strongholds that controlled access to Thessalonike stood – Berroia and Servia. The πόλις of Berroia, a former Byzantine possession,⁷¹ was headed by a *strategos* in the time of John Tzimiskes. The *Taktikon Escorial* assigns a very high rank to the *strategos* of Berroia, listing him as the 29th among the thematic *strategoï*.⁷² The strategic importance of Berroia stemmed from its position: the city / fortress controlled and defended the approach to Thessalonike from the west. The Bulgarians are believed to have taken Berroia in 989 when Samuel unsuccessfully tried to capture Thessalonike, or possibly before that, in 986. We do not know whether the city surrendered or was taken by force. Skylitzes reports that, in 1000/1001, Berroia was headed by “katarchon” Dobromeros (Dobromir), who must have been close to Samuel's family as he was married to his niece. In talks with Dobromeros, Basil II convinced him to surrender Berroia and rewarded him with the high dignity of *anthypatos* (which usually went hand in hand with the title of *patrikios*) and, very likely, a military office.⁷³ As the war went on, Basil II maintained the fortress, restoring its walls in 1017 (τὴν Βέρροϊαν ἐπικτήσας).⁷⁴

In the post-1018 period, Berroia became an important part of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, which attests to its significance. As the third *sigillion* of Basil II regulating the borders of the Archbishopric of Ohrid shows, the diocese of Berroia was taken out of the Metropolitanate of Thessalonike and assigned to Ohrid.⁷⁵ Its exemption from the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Thessalonike, short-lived as it might have been, leads us to the question of the local population's mood.⁷⁶ Did Basil II meet the wishes of Berroia's inhabitants when he merged them with the Archbishopric of Ohrid or did he use this move to ensure the good graces of the Bulgarian elite after 1018?

After Dobromeros surrendered the city, Basil turned to the nearby fortress (πόλις) of Kolydros (probably modern-day Kolindros, southeast of Berroia, near the Thermaic Gulf). Its commander (φυλάττων) was Demetrios Teichonas. After the surrender of Berroia, Teichonas could not resist the Byzantine offensive for long and yielded his fortress, after which he was allowed to withdraw with his army and “rejoin

⁷¹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 344.

⁷² *Oikonomidès*, *Listes*, 265.32; 356.

⁷³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 344. A seal belonging to a certain Damian Dobromir, *anthypathos* and *patrikios*, *doux* of Thrace and Mesopotamia (*Jordanov*, *Corpus I*, no. 35A.14, p. 98–100), could confirm his advancement in the Byzantine official hierarchy. The dating of the seal is debatable, as is the identity of its owner. However, the report that Dobromir received the title of *anthypathos* supports the conclusion that he actively participated in the Byzantine official hierarchy. There are also doubts concerning Mesopotamia because this could have easily been Mesopotamia in the Balkans. For more details, see *Krsmanović*, *Bulgarian Elite*. See p. 203 et n. 130.

⁷⁴ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 356.

⁷⁵ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 46.

⁷⁶ Berroia was probably reincorporated into the Metropolitanate of Thessalonike after Basil's death, *Krsmanović*, *O odnosu*, 37 et n. 80.

Samuel.⁷⁷ His case shows that already ca. 1001, Bulgarian commanders had different views on continuing the war against Byzantium. At this time, surrenders of Bulgarian magnates were uncommon, but when they did happen, they followed the same pattern as in the later years of the war. As the conflict progressed, Bulgarian commanders proved increasingly willing to lay down their arms in return for keeping their privileged social status under the new sovereign. The example of Kolydros points to another conclusion: once the dominant fortress in a given region was lost, the commanders of nearby minor forts found it difficult to resist the attacks of the Byzantine army.

Servia was another major Bulgarian fortress (φρούριον / πόλις / κάστρον).⁷⁸ The *Taktikon Escorial* does not list the *strategos* of Servia, but a *strategis* of that name seems to have existed. We do not know whether it was Tzimiskes who conquered it during his Bulgarian campaign or if it was taken shortly after he died. Servia is believed to have been controlled by Byzantium until 989 and taken by Samuel.⁷⁹ Kekaumenos reports that Servia was impregnable because it was surrounded by crags and precipices as natural barriers. Kekaumenos' maternal grandfather, Demetrios Polemarchos, was a high-ranking Bulgarian general (καφαλή) in a borderland near Servia.⁸⁰ For more than a year, he unsuccessfully tried to take the fortress defended by the Byzantine *strategos* Mageirinos with two *taxiarchai*, commanders of detachments with 1,000 troops. Servia was ultimately taken by a ruse, allowing Demetrios Polemarchos to capture the *strategos* and the *taxiarchai* and take the fortress "without bloodshed."⁸¹

After Samuel's conquest ca. 989, Servia became a strong center of Bulgarian resistance. Around 1000/1001, it was headed by the bellicose commander (φυλάττων) Nicholas (nicknamed Nikoulitzas on account of his modest height). After Berroia and Kolydros surrendered, Servia was taken by siege, but it was not razed. We know that Basil II "transported the Bulgars out of there." The population probably scattered in the surrounding area because, although a strong guard was left in the fortress, Servia did not become a secure Byzantine possession after 1001. His promotion into a *patrikios* seems to have done little to mollify the former commanding officer. Nicholas fled from Constantinople and tried to retake the fortress with Samuel, but to no avail. Basil II personally had to bring his army to Servia and break the siege.⁸²

⁷⁷ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 344.

⁷⁸ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 344; Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 190.

⁷⁹ *Strässle*, *Krieg*, 409.

⁸⁰ The term καφαλή denotes the head of a region, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 169–170.

⁸¹ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon* 190. Kekaumenos' report suggests that at least 2,000 troops defended Servia. Demetrios Polemarchos was one of the Bulgarian magnates who surrendered to Basil II at the end of the war, for which he was rewarded with the titles of *patrikios* and *mystikos*.

⁸² Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 344. The chronology is unreliable because Skylitzes describes it as an event that happened after the conquest of Servia and the first capture of Vodena, both of which took place in 1001. Nicholas was caught later and imprisoned in Constantinople. He fled again and hid in the mountains and was caught again as late as 1018. He surrendered of his own volition, but the emperor nevertheless had him jailed in Thessalonike, *ibid.*, 363.

In 1018, after the mass surrender of Bulgarian magnates, the emperor dispatched Nikephoros Xiphias to tear down all the strongholds at Servia and at Soskos.⁸³ This report suggests that a network of fortresses covered the area of Servia and Soskos, in which Servia and, possibly, Soskos were the dominant strongholds. The available information on Soskos also indicates that it was a strong Bulgarian center. According to *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, it was a settlement (ὁ χώρος) where Gabriel Radomir liked to stay.⁸⁴ Skylitzes mentions Soskos as one of the places that Basil II plundered ca. 1015 in a campaign that covered the Ostrovo area and the Pelagonian plain.⁸⁵ Soskos was evidently a safe haven for the members of the Bulgarian ruling family, and the population of Soskos and its surroundings continued to defy Byzantine control until the end of the war in 1018.

On the outer edges of the heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria, to the west, stood another important city (πόλις) – Kastoria. Skylitzes mentions this toponym in his account of the death of Samuel's brother David, who was killed in 976 by Vlachs between Kastoria and Prespa.⁸⁶ The sources suggest that Kastoria lay outside of the main routes of Basil's offensives, so the first attempt to take the city seems to have happened in 1017. Before the attack on Kastoria, the fortress (φρούριον) of Longos, northeast of Kastoria, was taken by siege in the early spring of 1017 and promptly burned. Longos seems to have been a strong Bulgarian center as the fall of the fortress brought Basil many prisoners-of-war, although we have no way of knowing how many and whether they were soldiers or inhabitants of the fortress. In any case, the spoils of war were so plentiful that they were divided into three parts, of which Basil II gave one to his Russian allies, another one to the Byzantines, and kept the third for himself.⁸⁷

The capture of Longos opened the path to Kastoria. However, Basil soon established that the city was impregnable. We know nothing of the defenders of Kastoria and its Bulgarian commander or when exactly Byzantium took control of it. We can but speculate that, as a strong military center, it long provided a haven for Bulgarian combatants and civilians. We do know that Kastoria was in Byzantine hands in 1018, at the very end of the war, because it was where Maria, John Vladislav's widow, and two unnamed daughters of Samuel were brought to Basil II.⁸⁸ Given its epithet of an

⁸³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 364.

⁸⁴ Gabriel often went hunting in this area and reportedly made the locals accompany him in this leisurely pursuit until he was killed by St. Demetrios, Ioannes Staurakios, *Logos*, 360–361.

⁸⁵ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 353.

⁸⁶ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 329. David was killed at Kalas Drys, for a ubication see VIINJ III, 75 n. 20 (*J. Ferluga*).

⁸⁷ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 355.

⁸⁸ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 363. As a reward, Maria was given the title of *zoste patrikia*, and Samuel's daughters were promised great honors and riches. Maria was sent to Constantinople with her children, and Michael of Devol reports that she was accompanied by other relatives, including an illegitimate son of Samuel.

unassailable city, Kastoria probably surrendered to Basil II. The context of that event was presumably the mass surrender of Bulgarian magnates, which began after John Vladislav died at Dyrrachion in February 1018. In the first charter to the Archbishopric of Ohrid, Kastoria was made a diocese, and its bishop was given forty clerics and thirty *paroikoi*. Although he “might have had more before,” the emperor said, his intention was not to have it surpass the number of clerics and *paroikoi* assigned to the archbishop of Ohrid.⁸⁹ The fact that in the early 11th century, the seat of the old Slavic diocese at Devol moved to Kastoria, with Devol becoming part of the diocese of Kastoria, shows just how much Basil II tried to acknowledge the local history of this region in his conquest of the Balkan interior.⁹⁰

There are no reports on the military status of Devol (Diabolis) in the time of Samuel and his successors. John Skylitzes mentions it only in the events of 1018 when it was already under Byzantine control. It remains unclear whether the city surrendered or was taken by force, but we know it was a safe zone for Byzantium in 1018. It was in Devol that Basil II accepted the submission of Prousianos and his brothers and negotiated the surrender of Ibatzes for fifty-five days, exchanging letters with this spirited Bulgarian magnate, who was, at the time, at his estate on Brochotos (part of Mount Tmoros). From Devol Basil II set out to pacify the northern regions, consolidating his control of the old districts and forming new ones (Dyrrachion, Koloneia, and Dryinoupolis).⁹¹ Recent research has shown that the upper stream of the Devol river, the Korçë Plain, including the area of Koloneia, was continually inhabited and fortified.⁹²

On the road from Kastoria to Berroia, there was a fortress (φρούριον) called Bosograd. Basil II took it in 1017 and burned it before he proceeded to restore Berroia, devastate Ostrovo and Moliskos, and take Setena by siege.⁹³ We have no information on the defenders of Bosograd, but the fortress belonged to the defensive network in the heartlands of Samuel’s Bulgaria. Its conquest and burning suggest that it was less secure than Kastoria and Berroia.

The city of Skopje lay at the extreme north of heartlands of Samuel’s Bulgaria.⁹⁴ It was a dominant fortress in the Skopje plain and the middle course of the Vardar River. The strategic importance of Skopje is apparent from the report that Samuel gave governance (ἄρχειν) of the city to Romanos, the eunuch brother of Boris II, the only surviving member of the Bulgarian imperial dynasty dethroned by Tzimiskes

⁸⁹ Gelzer, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 42.

⁹⁰ For more details, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 800, 805, 808.

⁹¹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 360, 363.

⁹² See the research of Vladan Zdravković conducted as part of the project “From Barbarians to Christians and Rhomaioi. The Process of Byzantinization in the Central Balkans (late 10th–mid-13th century).”

⁹³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 356.

⁹⁴ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 346, 358; Zonaras III, 560.

in 971. Skopje controlled the route through the Morava-Vardar corridor toward Thessalonike. It was an old provincial and ecclesiastical center, which had probably served as the seat of the former metropolitan of Dardania.⁹⁵

Basil set his sights on Skopje after he took Vidin on the Danube. When he left Vidin for Constantinople ca. 1002, “ravaging and destroying every Bulgar stronghold (φρούρια) he came across on the way home,” he came to Skopje. Basil II took the city after he surprised Samuel, who was encamped on the other side of the Vardar. Skopje surrendered to Byzantium, most likely in 1003 or 1004.⁹⁶ In exchange for the title of *patrikios praepositus* and the office of the *strategos* of the theme of Abydos, Romanos broke his allegiance to Samuel.⁹⁷ Although Skylitzes does not report Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts during the war in Skopje, the city would have vast importance after its end. In 1018, Basil II made Skopje the military and political center of the Byzantine district of Bulgaria. It became a Byzantine military base of the highest rank, headed by a *doux* / *katepano*. David Areianites was appointed the *strategos autokrator* in Skopje in 1018, i.e., the *katepano* of Bulgaria.⁹⁸ Slightly later, the city became the seat of one of the strongest dioceses in the Archbishopric of Ohrid.⁹⁹

The heartlands of Samuel’s Bulgaria ended in the west with the Tmoros mountain range, which protected the inaccessible Bulgarian strongholds that the Byzantine army would take only after the surrender of 1018. One of the sites at Tmoros is believed to have belonged to the Bulgarian magnate Ibatzes. John Skylitzes mentions that this Bulgarian archon had “a very lovely palace” called Pronista (Προνίστα) or Koprinistra (Κοπρινίστρα) (according to an addition to Skylitzes’ text) on Mount Brochotos (Βροχωτός), part of the Tmoros mountain range.¹⁰⁰ The terrain was inaccessible and protected by guards (τοῖς φυλάττουσιν) stationed at certain checkpoints. Ibatzes stayed a while at his lovely palace. Skylitzes recounts that he celebrated the feast of the Koimesis (15 August) and, “as was his custom” (εἰώθει), invited his close neighbors but also “those of adjacent lands” (οὐ τοὺς ἀγρογείτονας μόνον καὶ ἀγχιτέρμονας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ὡς πορρωτάτω πολλούς).¹⁰¹ Skylitzes’ description shows that this area remained under Bulgarian control throughout the war, under adequate military protection, and that the inhabitants of the broader surroundings felt safe enough to attend a feast “as was custom.” This population accepted Basil’s rule only after Eustathios Daphnomeles resorted to a ruse to capture and blind their bellicose and defiant leader, Ibatzes. That happened as late as 1018, after the

⁹⁵ *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 794–795.

⁹⁶ The year of Skopje’s surrender is still contentious; for more details, see *Privatrici*, Samuilova država, 117.

⁹⁷ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 346.

⁹⁸ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 358. *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 192 sq.

⁹⁹ Gelzer, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

¹⁰⁰ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 360. These are believed to have been summer pastures, VIINJ III, 130 n. 180 (*J. Ferluga*).

¹⁰¹ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 360–361.

surrender of almost all relevant actors in the war of 976–1018, including Prousianos, the heir to the Bulgarian crown. The surrender of the nearby fortresses, such as Berat, also failed to discourage Ibatzes. The emperor's attempts to pressure him from Devol proved equally futile: Basil spent fifty-five days in Devol trying to persuade Ibatzes into submission or defeat him by arms.¹⁰²

The reports concerning Prousianos confirm that Mount Tmoros was one of the safer havens for the Bulgarians, beyond Byzantine reach. After their father's death and the surrender of the more prominent commanders, Prousianos and two of his brothers, Alousianos and Aaron, and other supporters fled to Mount Tmoros, refusing to yield to the Byzantine emperor. The Bulgarian strongholds were impregnable, so Basil had no choice but to block the foot of the mountain with his army. The insubordinate Bulgarians were thus cut off, isolated and besieged, and ultimately surrendered after they were given assurances.¹⁰³

A Bulgarian stronghold (φρούριον) called Berat (Belgrade, Beligrad) stood at the foot of Mount Tmoros. Owing to its geographical position and the surrounding landscape, it was inaccessible and virtually impregnable: in the south, it was encircled by precipices, with the Ason River flowing through them, and had just one entrance. The only report that suggests Berat was the dominant fortress in its broader area comes from the final stage of the war. Its commander (archon) Elemagos (Elinagos) Phrantzes surrendered to Basil II at Stagoi in 1018 together with his co-archons (συναρχόντων αὐτοῦ). The significance of this surrender is attested by the report that Elemagos was rewarded with the title of *patrikios* and allowed to take up residence in Thessalonike.¹⁰⁴

The surrender of the commander (κρατῶν) of Rhakova is also mentioned in the context of yielding the inaccessible Berat. His name was not recorded, so we cannot know if he was the commander of a fortress or a region.¹⁰⁵

The report that Basil II received Elemagos at Stagoi shows that Byzantium had taken control of Stagoi before this event. The fate of this fortress in the war of 976–1018 is unknown because Skylitzes mentions this toponym just once, in the context of Elemagos' surrender. However, the report that the diocese of Stagoi was taken out of the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Larissa and incorporated into the Archbishopric of Ohrid (the third *sigillion* of Basil II)¹⁰⁶ supports the inference that this fortress was for a while in Samuel's Bulgaria, probably from the Bulgarian conquest

¹⁰² Skylitzes, Synopsis, 364.

¹⁰³ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 360.

¹⁰⁴ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 364. On the conspiracy of Elinagos and Gabras in Thessalonike, see *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite.

¹⁰⁵ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 364. This could have been the area around the Rhakova rivulet in western Macedonia, Jean Skylitzès, 302 n. 242 (*Jean-Claude Cheynet*). Skylitzes also used the term κρατῶν for the commander of Sirmium, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 131 n. 195.

¹⁰⁶ *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 46. *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 812.

of Larissa (985) until the Byzantine army retook the Thessalian fortresses. This most likely happened after Basil II captured Berroia and Servia and before the conquest of Vodena (1001). At that time, the emperor went to Thessaly and rebuilt the fortresses (φρούρια) that Samuel had demolished, laying siege to those that still had Bulgarian garrisons and deporting the imprisoned Bulgarians to Boleron.¹⁰⁷

In the east, the heartlands of the Bulgarian Empire ended with the area of Stroumitza. This region was covered with a network of fortresses, with the fortified settlement of Stroumitza being the dominant one among them.¹⁰⁸ This belt was supposed to protect central Bulgaria from Byzantine attacks from the direction of Serres via the plain of Kiava Longos, with the Kleidion pass at its narrowest point in the south.¹⁰⁹

The region of Stroumitza was well-protected by its natural barriers, Mount Belasitsa and the pass of Kleidion. John Skylitzes mentions that defense-works (δέματα) on the slopes surrounding Stroumitza impeded the Byzantine approach to Stroumitza.¹¹⁰ Important fortresses (φρούριον) mentioned by name in the Stroumitza area include Matzoukion, Thermitza, and Melnikos. The first two were in the immediate vicinity of Stroumitza, and Melnikos lay to the east of the left bank of the Strymon River.

In the Byzantine offensive that led to the Battle of Belasitsa in July 1014, Samuel suffered a heavy defeat and died a few months later (October 1014).¹¹¹ The fortresses (φρούριον) Matzoukion and Melnikos were taken in this offensive. The emperor personally took Matzoukion, close to Stroumitza, but its later fate is unknown. The attack on Melnikos, a little further away, came after the death of Nikephoros Botaneiates, the *doux* of Thessalonike. According to Skylitzes, the Bulgarians had felt so safe at Melnikos that they were not concerned about a Byzantine attack because the fortress was inaccessible – it was built on a rock and protected by precipices and ravines. Melnikos was not taken by force but surrendered to the eunuch Sergios after he convinced the defenders of Melnikos to yield. We have no information on the commander of Melnikos, but Skylitzes reports that the emperor “received and rewarded” the defenders of the fortress. The surrender meant that the fortress survived intact, and Basil II installed a garrison to guard it.¹¹² A smaller fortress called Thermitza fell the following year. We know that in 1015, Basil sent David Areianates to the region of Stroumitza and that he took Thermitza, which then disappeared from the sources.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 344. Basil II would soon send the Bulgarians of Vodena to join them.

¹⁰⁸ Although little archaeological research has been done in modern-day Stroumitza, the remains of two fortresses have been found: Markovi Kuli in the southwest of today's Stroumitza and Carevi Kuli in its northern part, where the late antique and medieval stronghold of Tiveriopolis once stood, *Mikulčič, Srednovjekovni gradovi*, 318–322. Cf. *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 796–798, 810.

¹⁰⁹ VIINJ III, 105 n. 91 (*J. Ferluga*).

¹¹⁰ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 351.

¹¹¹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 349

¹¹² Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 351.

¹¹³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 354. For a ubication see VIINJ III, 119 n. 138 (*J. Ferluga*).

Stroumitza is another of the fortresses that Basil II acquired after the surrender at the end of the war in 1018. Its commander Dragomouzos surrendered his stronghold with other nearby forts (τὰ ἐν τῇ Στρουμβίτζῃ παρεσχηκώς). Like in many other cases, the surrender of such a distinguished commander was rewarded with the title of *patrikios*.¹¹⁴ The settlement became the seat of the bishop of the diocese of Stroumitza, as reported in Basil's first *sigillion* to the Church of Ohrid.¹¹⁵

To the northeast of the nucleus of Samuel's realm, there was a defensive network in which the fortresses of Serdica and Pernikos had dominant roles. Serdica was an old Byzantine center but had been part of Bulgaria from 812 to 1018. After the defeat of Boris' Bulgaria in 971, the city temporarily served as the seat of the Bulgarian patriarch.¹¹⁶ The sources show that Serdica remained a strong and impregnable center of resistance until the war ended in 1018. The strategic importance of the fortress forced Basil II to direct his first independent campaign against Samuel to Serdica. Through Philippoupolis, an important Byzantine military base, he invaded Bulgaria in 986 and besieged Serdica for twenty days. However, the indolence and inexperience of the Byzantine soldiers left him no choice but to withdraw. On their return to the capital, his army was attacked at the Gates of Trajan and suffered a heavy defeat.¹¹⁷

Although the sources attest that Serdica was well-defended and fortified, they are silent on its commander. In the war of 976–1018, Serdica seems to have been the center of the region Triaditza / Serdica. Skylitzes reports that the Byzantine army assailed forts in Triaditza several times: in 999, Basil invaded Bulgaria and “overthrew many fortresses in Triaditza” (πολλὰ τῶν ἐν Τριαδίτζῃ φρουρίων);¹¹⁸ in 1016, Nikephoros Xiphias was sent against the fortress of Triaditza (κατὰ τῶν ἐν Τριαδίτζῃ φρουρίων) and, having overrun the entire area, he took the stronghold (ἔρυμα) known as Boianos (Βοιώ, Βοϊάνος), near Serdica, by siege; the same year, the emperor went to Triaditza (ἄπεισιν εἰς Τριάδιτζαν) and besieged the fortress of Pernikos.¹¹⁹

Besides the stronghold (ἔρυμα / κάστρον)¹²⁰ Boianos, two more fortresses in the region of Triaditza are known by name: Moreia and Pernikos, both of which controlled the approach to Serdica. Kekaumenos is the only source that mentions the stronghold (κάστρον) of Moreia. It was besieged in 986 when Basil II launched his first campaign against Samuel. The siege was unsuccessful, and the defenders of the fortress remained

¹¹⁴ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 357.

¹¹⁵ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 42–43.

¹¹⁶ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 44; *Ivanov*, *Starini*, 566.

¹¹⁷ Leonis *Diaconi Historiae*, 171–173; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 331.

¹¹⁸ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 343. Zonaras III, 559: τῶν ἐν Σαρδικῇ φρουρίων.

¹¹⁹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 355.

¹²⁰ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 196, describes the conquest of the stronghold of Boianos (κάστρον) in 1041, which had rebelled and become one of the centers of the insurgents led by Peter Deljan. The account of how the fort was taken reflects Kekaumenos' guidelines for defending fortresses from enemy attacks.

“free and undefeated.”¹²¹ Unlike Moreia, of which we know little else, the importance of Pernikos in the war of 976–1018 is well documented in the sources.

Skylitzes describes Pernikos as ἔργυρα and φρούριον.¹²² It was a remarkably strong fortress whose defense was led by the Bulgarian magnate Krakras (φύλαξ) with his brother and son.¹²³ The sources describe him as an excellent military commander insusceptible to bribery. Krakras was influential among the local population, which stubbornly resisted Byzantine attacks. The sources mention two attempts by Basil II to take this stronghold. The first siege of Pernikos probably happened in 1004 and lasted “a considerable time.” Skylitzes reports that Basil “lost quite a number of men” because “the defense-works were too good to be taken by siege,” and Krakras “could not be deflected by flattery, promises or other suggestions.”¹²⁴ The second siege of Pernikos took place in the late fall of 1016. It was preceded by a successful campaign in the region of Triaditza led by Nikephoros Xiphias. In 1016, Basil II apparently wanted to exert pressure on Serdica by taking Pernikos. However, that plan failed, although the siege lasted eighty-eight days. The inhabitants of Pernikos, led by Krakras and his family, repelled the attack, and the emperor returned to Mosynoupolis, having lost many men at Pernikos.¹²⁵

Krakras proved his political and military authority once again in 1017, when he and John Vladislav negotiated with the Pechenegs. The commander of Pernikos assembled an army and planned to attack “Roman lands” in an alliance with the Pechenegs. And yet, Krakras laid down his arms in 1018, after John Vladislav was killed. Krakras’ brother and son negotiated the conditions of his surrender with the emperor at Adrianople. The surrender included Krakras and the “celebrated fortress of Pernikos” and thirty-five other forts (φρούριον, κάστρον) and their “archons.” We do not know the names of these fortresses, but they must have been minor forts dependent on Pernikos whose commanders recognized Krakras’ authority. Krakras and the thirty-five archons were granted an official audience with the emperor at Serres. However, it seems that only Krakras received the title of *patrikios*, whereas the others, including his son and brother, were “well-received.”¹²⁶ The fate of Krakras and his family under Byzantine sovereignty is unknown.

The ties between Pernikos and Serdica were maintained in the Archbishopric of Ohrid, with the diocese of Triaditza becoming one of the strongest bishoprics of the Ohrid Church in terms of the number of clerics and *paroikoi* it had.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 198.

¹²² Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 347, 355.

¹²³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 357.

¹²⁴ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 347.

¹²⁵ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 355.

¹²⁶ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 357; Zonaras III, 565–566.

¹²⁷ Basil II gave the bishop of Triaditza forty *paroikoi* and forty clerics, *Gelzer, Bistümerverzeichnisse*, 43.

The northeastern part of the realm of Boris II, which included the old Bulgarian capitals of Preslav and Pliska, does not feature in the sources as a theater of intense Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts in 976–1018. The Byzantine control established under John I Tzimiskes was shaken off, but we do not know when or how. As the *Taktikon Escorial* and the seals from the so-called Preslavian collection show, after 971, Byzantium secured a significant military presence in this region: from (western) Mesopotamia (headed by a *katepano* and *strategos*) to Dorostolon (*strategos*) to Beroe (*strategos*) and Preslav / Ioannoupolis, which was incorporated into the Byzantine theme of Thrace (the *strategos* of Thrace and Ioannoupolis / Preslav).¹²⁸ The arrival of Tzimiskes' army to the northeast of the First Bulgarian Empire and the establishment of military administration forced the members of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical and secular elite to move to the parts of Bulgaria that remained beyond Byzantium's reach or where there were not enough Byzantine troops to ensure stable control. The sources offer no information on any organizers of resistance against Byzantium in the old Bulgarian centers in Samuel's time. Skylitzes mentions a Byzantine campaign against the "Bulgar strongholds (Βουλγαρικῶν κάστρων) beyond the Haemos range" led by Theodorokanos and Nikephoros Xiphias in 999/1000. In that offensive, they took Great and Little Preslav and Pliska. According to Skylitzes, the Byzantine army returned from this campaign "triumphant and intact,"¹²⁹ which could suggest that the idea of independent Bulgaria might not have enjoyed the broader support of the local population. Given that it was this region that symbolized the Bulgarian Empire in Tzimiskes' eyes, Byzantium's post-971 efforts to maintain its control must have focused on the old Bulgarian capitals and their areas. These efforts were apparently not fruitless, as the region seems to have been of peripheral importance for the supporters of the idea of independent Bulgaria during the war of 976–1018.

The sources offer no reliable reports on the fate of the region known as (western) Mesopotamia. If this district marked the entry of Tzimiskes' army into the Danube delta, Byzantium probably retreated from it after 976.¹³⁰ Only Dorostolon / Dristra on the Danube seems to have remained in its possession, as there are no indications that the Bulgarians retook this city, which was organized as a *strategis* in Tzimiskes' time.¹³¹ In his account of the war of 976–1018, Skylitzes mentions the *strategos* of Dorostolon Tzotzikios, son of the *patrikios* Theudatos the Iberian, who informed Basil II in 1017 that John Vladislav and Krakras, the commander of Pernikos, were negotiating with the Pechenegs and trying to convince them to invade the Byzantine territory from the north.¹³² The talks failed, but we know nothing else

¹²⁸ *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 263.31 (*katepano* of Mesopotamia); 269.16 (*strategos* of western Mesopotamia); 269.9 (*strategos* of Dristra / Dorostolon); 267.34 (*strategos* of Beroe); 265.9 (*strategos* of Thrace and Ioannoupolis).

¹²⁹ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 343–344.

¹³⁰ On western Mesopotamia see *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 40–43, 51, 86.

¹³¹ *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 269.9. On the theme of Dristra see *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 59 sq.

¹³² Skylitzes, Synopsis, 356.

of Dorostolon and the events in the Danubian basin. As Skylitzes' report comes from the last stage of the war, when Dorostolon was certainly under Byzantine control, we cannot rule out the possibility that the city changed hands from 976 to 1017 and might have belonged to the Bulgarians at some point. However, given that Byzantium had accorded a lot of attention to Dorostolon in Tzimiskes' time,¹³³ it seems more likely that the fortress remained under its control, even more so because the Danubian regions held less importance for Samuel and his successors. A contributing factor to that was the Byzantine conquest of Vidin around 1002.

Vidin, described as a πόλις, was another major Bulgarian center.¹³⁴ The sources confirm that this was the fortress that Basil II besieged longest. According to Skylitzes' report, the siege lasted eight months and involved the Byzantine fleet and ground forces. The Bulgarian archons proved their experience in military affairs: they knew how to extinguish 'Greek Fire' and prevent the Byzantines from burning the defensive walls. The city was taken in 1002, but it is unclear whether this was a military or diplomatic success of Basil II.¹³⁵ In the second *sigillion* of Basil II, which defines the borders of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, the emperor credits the clergy of Vidin with having "opened the doors leading to this land [sc. Bulgaria]." When the war ended, the diocese of Vidin was rewarded for this favor: the second *sigillion* granted the bishop of Vidin (Βοδίνης) forty clerics and forty *paroikoi*. Thus, the diocese of Vidin was "elevated above the best" in the Archbishopric of Ohrid.¹³⁶

Besides these reports on church dignitaries, we have no other information on Vidin. The fate of its defenders remains unknown. We know only that the emperor maintained the Vidin fortress and reinforced it in 1002, meaning that he repaired the defensive walls and installed a strong garrison to guard the city.¹³⁷

Sirmium was an isolated Bulgarian military center in the far northwest of the Peninsula. The earliest reports on the defense of the city date from the end of the war. We know that Sirmium continued to resist even after the most prominent members of Samuel's and John Vladislav's families had laid down their arms. The

¹³³ According to Leonis Diaconi Historiae 158, after he took Dorostolon, Tzimiskes renamed it Theodoroupolis, in honour of Saint Theodoros Stratelates, who had come to the aid of the Byzantine army. Skylitzes, Synopsis, 309, associates the name of Theodoroupolis with Euchanea in Asia Minor. A surviving seal of Sisinius, described as the *katepano* of Theodoroupolis (*Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 228–231; Corpus I, 33.1), has opened the question of the identification of Theodoroupolis (Dristra or Presthlavitzza or Euchanea) and the military rank of this center. The *Taktikon Escorial* mentions neither Theodoroupolis nor the *katepano* of Theodoroupolis, leaving room for various interpretations, *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 132 et n. 274; 139–140 (with literature); *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 38–39, 62.

¹³⁴ The eunuch Romanos, brother of the deposed Bulgarian emperor Boris II, probably took refuge in Vidin after he escaped from Constantinople (εις Βιδίνην, Skylitzes, Synopsis, 329.75), and not in Vodena (τὰ Βοδινά, οἱ Βοδηνοί) / Edessa, for more details, see *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite.

¹³⁵ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 346.

¹³⁶ *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 45. Cf. *Zlatarski*, Istorija I/2, 722 n.1.

¹³⁷ Skylitzes, Synopsis, 346.

commander of Sirmium, described as a κρατῶν, was Sermon, brother of Nestongos of Sirmium. Skylitzes' emphasis on this kinship suggests that the brothers belonged to a distinguished Bulgarian family.¹³⁸ As we know nothing else of the brothers from Sirmium, it remains unclear whether Samuel had appointed Sermon governor of the city or if their family had been tied to Vidin since the times of Peter and his son Boris II. We cannot reliably establish whether Tzimiskes' campaign of 971 reached Sirmium.¹³⁹ Sirmium did participate in the struggle for Bulgarian independence, and it was a well-defended and impregnable Bulgarian stronghold. The Byzantine general Constantine Diogenes marched on Sirmium with "a considerable army." However, no attack on Sirmium ensued because Diogenes convinced Sermon to meet him and then killed the Bulgarian commander. Sermon's widow surrendered the city and was married to a prominent Constantinopolitan dignitary. Diogenes, previously the "archon" of the neighboring lands, was appointed governor of the city and its area.¹⁴⁰

These reports suggest that a Bulgarian noble family ruled Sirmium during the war of 976–1018 and that its members started to consider surrender only when it was already evident that Byzantium had control of almost the entire interior of the Peninsula because most members of the Bulgarian military and social elite had laid down their arms. In such a situation, the defiant stance of Nestongos' brother and his supporters might have been challenged, leading Sermon to accept negotiations with Diogenes. Sermon's widow was apparently influential enough to decide the city's fate on behalf of its inhabitants and defenders, who peacefully accepted the Byzantine emperor's suzerainty. Once the hostilities ended, Sirmium became the seat of the diocese of Sirmium / Srem.¹⁴¹

John Skylitzes' account of the war of 976–1018 did not include some centers that we know Basil II incorporated into the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Among others, Niš, Braničevo, and Belgrade became seats of dioceses under Ohrid's jurisdiction.¹⁴² Some of those fortified settlements feature in reports concerning the uprising of Peter Deljan in 1014/1041. We know of the forts (φρούρια) of Morava and Belgrade, whose inhabitants supported the restoration of the Bulgarian Empire. The uprising was well received in the territory that was formerly part of Samuel's Bulgaria and the

¹³⁸ According to *Dujčev*, *Proučvanija*, 32–33, his name was a metathesis of the toponym Sirmium. For the Nestongoi, see *ibid.*, 33–37.

¹³⁹ Coinage of John I Tzimiskes was discovered at the archaeological site of Mačvanska Mitrovica, see *Popović*, *Sirmium – Mitrovica*, 82.

¹⁴⁰ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 365–366. The region that Constantine Diogenes governed before Sirmium was discussed several times in scholarship. His career was associated with testimonies about the *strategis* of Serbia and the status that Sirmium was granted after 1019, i.e., whether it was the seat of a *doux* or a *strategos*; see e.g., *Krsmanović*, *Byzantine Province*, 198–200 (with earlier literature); *Komatina*, *Srbija i Duklja*, 159–186; *Madgearu*, *Military Organization*, 95–100.

¹⁴¹ *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverszeichnisse*, 43. For more details, see *Komatina*, *Diocesan Structure*, 810.

¹⁴² *Gelzer*, *Bistümerverszeichnisse*, 43.

residents of Niš and Skopje (then a metropolis of Byzantine Bulgaria) gave Deljan an enthusiastic welcome, “proclaiming and acclaiming him.”¹⁴³ The rebels found refuge in Ostrovo, an important Bulgarian fortress during the war of 976–1018.¹⁴⁴

* * *

The reports in narrative sources confirm that a dense network of fortresses, some of which had dominant strategic roles, covered the interior of the Balkans. Their Bulgarian commanders, the sources attest, were political leaders of great authority among the local population. Besides Ohrid, a political and religious metropolis under Samuel and his successors, the group of dominant fortresses certainly included Setena, Prilep, Vodena (Edessa), Moglena, Skopje, Berroia, Servia, Kastoria, Longos, Berat (Belgrade), Stroumitza, Melnikos, Serdica, Pernikos, Vidin, and Sirmium. Although we have little specific information on Lipljan and Morozvzd, the status they were accorded in the Archbishopric of Ohrid implies that they were stronger fortified centers. Important centers such as Devol and Ostrovo should not be excluded from this group.

It is indicative that most dominant fortresses proved impregnable, as attested by the reports on Berroia, the region of so-called “interior fortresses,” Kastoria, Skopje, Berat / Belgrade, Stroumitza, Melnikos, Serdica, Pernikos, Sirmium, Lipljan, Morozvzd, and others. Byzantium established control over them by the surrender of their commanders, whom Basil II included in the official hierarchy by granting them honorific dignities (usually the title of *patrikios*) and, in some cases, offices.

The establishment of Byzantine rule involved the demilitarization of the conquered territories. The first step after taking a fortress was to disarm its defenders and install a Byzantine garrison as the guarantor of newly established control over the fort and its surroundings. In some cases, the Byzantines resorted to razing and burning fortresses, thereby eliminating their potential to again become a center of support for independent Bulgaria. Byzantine accounts of the war of 976–1018 include very few instances of brutal treatment of the inhabitants and defenders of fortresses. We know that Moglena, Longos, and Bosograd, a minor fort on the road from Kastoria to Berroia, suffered this harsh fate. A later source informs us that Basil II had the walls of Ohrid demolished to prevent the city from becoming a center of rebellion against Byzantium in the future. This example implicitly suggests that the number of razed Bulgarian strongholds must have been much higher.

However, Basil II preserved and reinforced many fortresses – those he judged to have long-term strategic significance for Byzantium. They were entrusted to Byzantine *strategoï*.¹⁴⁵ A decisive factor for the fate of a fortress was whether it had been

¹⁴³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 409.

¹⁴⁴ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 413.

¹⁴⁵ For instance, we know that the *strategoï* of Ohrid, Kastoria, and probably Devol were active in 1072 (Theognostos Bourtzes appears as an *anthypatos* and *patrikios*, but could have also served as the *strategos* of Devol because this was the combination of honorific titles that usually accompanied the rank of a *strategos*), Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 164.

taken by force (after a siege) or surrendered. Examples include Berroia and Servia, which controlled the approach to Thessalonike, and Vodena (Edessa), Kastoria, and Vidin, which controlled a section of the Danubian frontier. Another important center was Skopje, which was chosen to serve as the main Byzantine stronghold in the territory of the former Bulgarian Empire. In addition, Melnikos is known to have survived, as did Serdica, a previously important strategic fort for Byzantium and its frontier toward the First Bulgarian Empire.

The reports that Basil II built some new fortresses that controlled access to other forts and routes confirm that Constantinople's interests shaped the organization of Byzantine rule in the conquered territories in the Balkans. Although he razed the walls of Ohrid, he tightened the Byzantine control of the Ohrid–Prespa route by building two fortresses: Basilis, on a mountain between the two lakes and Konstantios at Lake Prespa.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, despite the stout resistance of Vodena, which was besieged twice, he reinforced its walls and deported its inhabitants. Finally, he settled the savage *kondaratoi* at Vodena to instill fear in the local population and dissuade them from rebelling. To ensure complete Byzantine control, he built two fortresses, Kardja and St. Elijah, which controlled the pass that led to Vodena.¹⁴⁷

The success of the integration of subdued Bulgaria could not be ensured just by bringing the Byzantine army and stationing it at strategic checkpoints, whose only task was to keep the peace in the conquered territory. An additional measure was removing the bearers of political and military authority from the fortresses and regions they had governed and incorporating them into Byzantium's privileged social class. However, lasting peace could only be ensured by including the broader population of the Balkans in the political, cultural, and spiritual life of the Byzantine Empire. Therefore, Basil II turned to the Church, which had, for centuries, exerted its influence either through the Byzantine dioceses that the Bulgarians had taken over at some point or through those founded by the Bulgarian Church.

The members of the Bulgarian Church had supported the struggle for the Bulgarian Empire until, in 1018, they took on a mediator role in the peace process. The Bulgarian magnates compensated their surrender and giving up on the traditions of independent Bulgaria with prestigious new titles and privileges, blending into the social elite that had subdued them. Unlike them, in the post-1018 period, the head of the Bulgarian Church rose to prominence as the only guardian of the Bulgarian identity. As such, he also became the guarantor of lasting peace. This twofold role of the Bulgarian primate was reflected in the fact that John the Slav remained at the head of the newly established autocephalous church based in Ohrid, as the first among the archbishops.

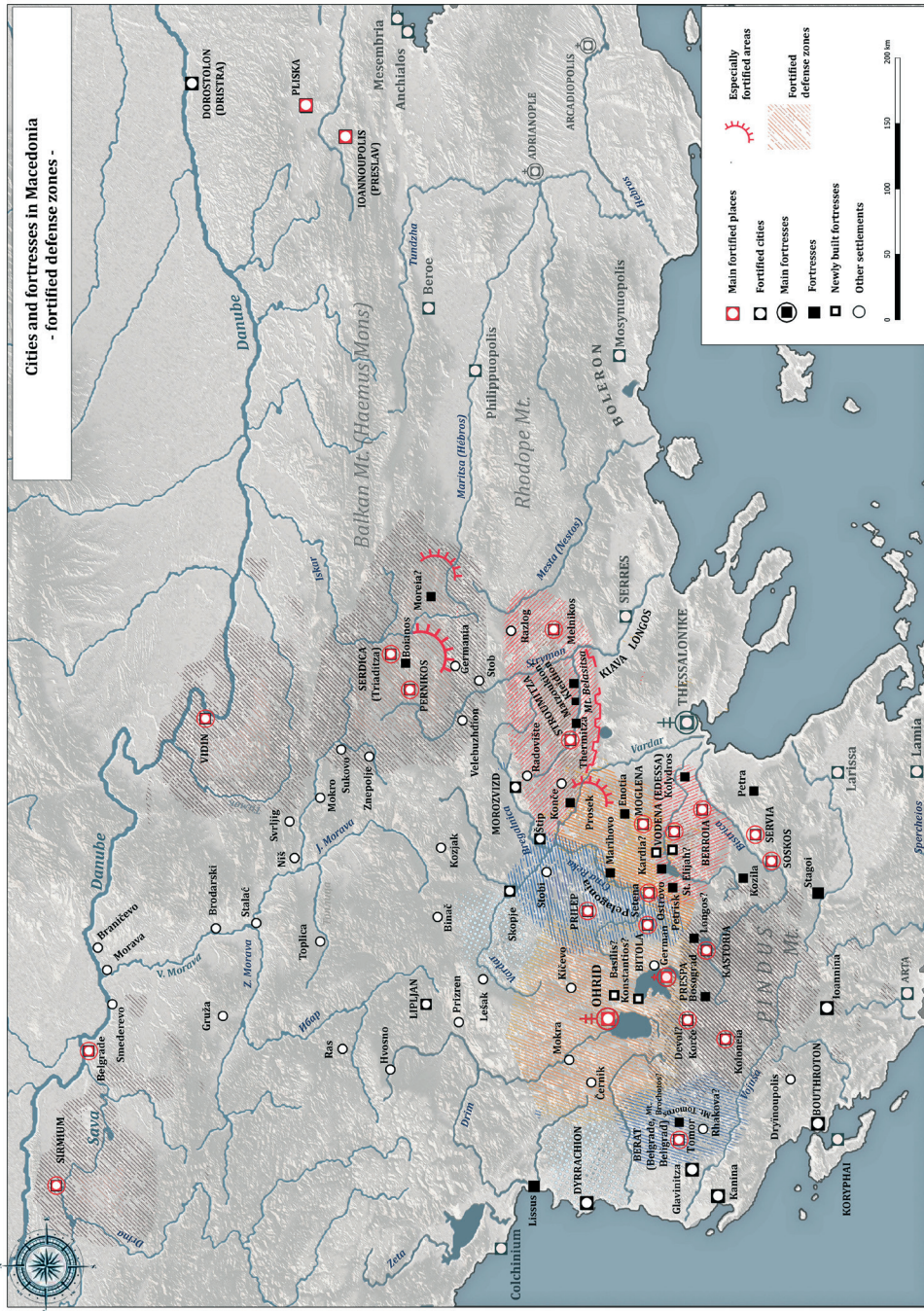
Many formerly Bulgarian military centers acquired new roles after the conquest of Bulgaria, becoming the centers of dioceses in the new Church. Regardless

¹⁴⁶ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 359.

¹⁴⁷ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 352.

of the insistence on the Bulgarian origin of the Church of Ohrid under Basil II, in the post-1025 period, the Byzantinization of the Balkan interior gained momentum. Thus, the Archbishopric of Ohrid, the most important Byzantine institution in the territory of Samuel's Bulgaria, began to lose its Bulgarian identity already by the mid-11th century. From that point onward, its origin was increasingly associated with the bishopric of Justiniana Prima, founded in 535, during the reign of Justinian I.¹⁴⁸ The development of Byzantine administration in that territory unfolded concurrently with this process. If, in the time of Basil II, the administrative organization in the Balkans rested on principles of governance promoted during the reign of his predecessor, John I Tzimiskes, and the experience acquired in the war of 976–1018, under his successors, the military-administrative system was almost exclusively adapted to the interests of Constantinople in the Balkans.

¹⁴⁸ *Prinzing*, *Theorie*, 269–287; *idem*, *Kirchenprovinz*, 396–397. Cf. *Krsmanović*, *O odnosu*, 27–37. On the penetration of Byzantine influence into the territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, see *Todić*, *Arhiepiskop Lav*, 119–136.



Cities and fortresses in Macedonia. Map design by Vladan Zdravković.

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О УЛОЗИ БУГАРСКИХ ТВРЂАВА У РАТУ 976–1018

Сазнања о управном систему који је Византија изградила на Балкану после 1018/1019. ограничава чињеница да ни из времена Василија II нити из времена његових наследника није сачувана ниједна службена ранг-листа византијских чинова и почасних звања. Ипак, подаци из извора потврђују да је војно-управна организација, изграђена током епохе Василија II у унутрашњим областима Балкана, почивала, с једне стране, на новим принципима управе, која је изграђивана у византијским пограничним провинцијама током епоха Василијевих претходника Нићифора Фоке (963–969) и Јована Цимискија (969–976); с друге стране, на Василијеву организацију власти у балканским областима утицало је искуство стечено током рата са Самуилом и његовим наследницима (976–1018).

Анализа података византијских писаца који говоре о рату 976–1018/1019. показала је да се систем одбране Самуилове Бугарске заснивао на мрежи утврђења изграђеној у унутрашњим областима Полуострва. Извори сугеришу да су постојала утврђена средишта, окружена мањим тврђавама чији је задатак био да контролишу и бране прилазе важнијим утврђеним центрима. Постојање главних или централних тврђава није експлицитно посведочено у изворима, па се утврђена места означавају терминима πόλις, φρούριον, έρμα, κάστρον, δέμα, од којих се неки користе у синонимном значењу. Међутим, и поред терминолошке непрецизности, јасно је да тврђаве нису биле једнаког ранга. Уколико се у обзир узму одређени критеријуми (старост тврђаве, њен географски положај, ранг заповедника, статус који су ти заповедници добили у византијској службеној хијерархији, улога утврђених насеља у Охридској архиепископији и др.), може се закључити да су неке тврђаве имале већи стратешки значај и доминантну улогу у рату 976–1018/1019.

Чињеница да је већина доминантних тврђава у византијски посед дошла предајом њених (бугарских) заповедника а не освајањем, на другачији начин осветљава дуготрајни процес византијског запоседања балканских области. Успостављање власти на Балкану Византија није могла да темељи на војној моћи, па је посегла за црквеном организацијом. По оснивању, Охридска архиепископија је преузела двоструку улогу: та институција је постала гарант трајнијег мира на Балкану, али и једини чувар идентитета покороног народа.

Од средине 11. века, међутим, византијски војно-управни систем и црквена организација прилагођавани су готово искључиво интересима које је Цариград имао на Балкану.

Зборник радова Византолошког института 60 (2023)

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