

BARBARIANS, RHOMAIOI AND THOSE IN BETWEEN

Integrating the Christians of the Central Balkans into the Byzantine Empire (late 10th – mid-13th century)

I

BELGRADE 2025



The Institute for
Byzantine Studies, SASA

BARBARIANS, RHOMAIOI AND THOSE IN BETWEEN

I–II

Institute for Byzantine Studies
Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts

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I–II

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VOLUME I

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Bojana Krsmanović

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The Institute for
Byzantine Studies, SASA





Science Fund
of the Republic of Serbia



We dedicate this book to our esteemed professor

Ljubomir Maksimović

with heartfelt thanks for his unwavering support
to successive generations of researchers
at the Institute for Byzantine Studies
of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

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The Project

The project From Barbarians to Christians and *Rhomaioi*. The Process of Byzantinization in the Central Balkans (late 10th–mid-13th Century) [acronym: BarByz_10–13, grant number 7748349] – Program Ideas, was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, which financed our research for three years, starting from January 2022.

The SRO and only participant was the Institute for Byzantine Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) – Belgrade. The Principal Investigator (PI) was *Bojana Krsmanović*, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Byzantine Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA).

The primary task of the project was to identify the factors that allowed the Byzantine Empire's entry into the central Balkans and the indicators of the Byzantine policy's success in the region. The research explored the response of local communities to the growth of Byzantine influence, as well as the endurance of this influence.

Team members and project structure

The PI assembled a team of eleven scholars of various profiles with prior experience in research related to the central topic of the project. Owing to the financial support of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, the team was able to explore new avenues of research.

The project team included twelve members in total:

Bojana Krsmanović, *Predrag Komatina*, *Miloš Cvetković*, *Maja Nikolić, Bojana Pavlović* (engaged in the second and third years of the project cycle, 2023–2025), *Ljubomir Milanović*, *Marka Tomić, Miloš Živković* (engaged in the first year of the project cycle, 2022); *Vladan Zdravković* (2022–2025), *Jovana Šijaković*, *Stanoje Bojanin*, and *Tamara Ilić*.

The PI, Bojana Krsmanović, oversaw and provided guidance in all aspects of research, working with the coordinators and team leaders of separate work packages: Ljubomir Milanović, coordinator of the work package *The Archbishopric of Ohrid (from its founding at the beginning of the 11th to the mid-13th century)* and head of field research; Predrag Komatina, coordinator of the work package *Political, ideological, and*

social aspects of Byzantinization; Miloš Cvetković, coordinator of the work package *Models of Byzantine government in the central Balkans*; Jovana Šijaković, coordinator of research on the role of the church in everyday life in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. In addition to the coordinators, project secretaries Jovana Šijaković and Miloš Cvetković oversaw a range of technical matters during the implementation of the three-year project.

Desk and field research and the STOA digital database

The three-year project cycle included four fieldwork campaigns in three countries – the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Greece. The financial support of the SASA and the Institute for Byzantine Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts allowed us to organize a fifth fieldwork campaign in the Republic of Bulgaria. The organizers and participants of those research campaigns were Ljubomir Milanović, Marka Tomić, Miloš Živković, and Vladan Zdravković. The primary objective was to document the buildings erected in the territory of the Byzantine-era Archbishopric of Ohrid and ascertain their present state of repair.

The field research registered and processed over 240 sacral buildings. The table below shows the number of churches registered in each bishopric of the Byzantine-era Archbishopric of Ohrid:

Bishopric of the Byzantine-era Archbishopric of Ohrid	**Number of registered churches**	**Appendix: inconclusively dated churches**
Ohrid	25	
Debar	1	
Kastoria	16	
Devol	2	
Vlachs (Breanoge)	1	
Glavinitza	16	
Moglena	13	
Bitola (Pelagonia)	19	12
Strumica	8	1
Morovizd	12	4
Velbăžd	7	
Serdica	7	
Niš	14	
Braničevo	7	1
Belgrade	1	
Sirmium	2	
Skopje	10	
Prizren	7	9
Lipljan	3	
Servia	6	

Dristra/Dorostolon	4	
Vidin	2	
Ras	15	
Berat/Horaia	1	
Černik	1	
Chimara	2	
Dryinoupolis	6	
Bela	3	
Bouthroton	7	
Kozel	1	
Petra	1	
Rigi		1
Stagoi	2	
Berroia	1	

Technical files were compiled for each registered building, including floor plan drawings and, in some cases, depending on the type, complexity, and condition of the church, diagrams of the construction phases (ca. 120 churches), interior perspective showing the layout of the frescoes (ca. 50 edifices), and a list of frescoes. The documentation also included site plans for churches in more elaborate architectural compounds, e.g., church complexes, forts, urban centers, archaeological sites with multiple structures, etc. Each registered sacral edifice entry contains photographs of the church (exterior, interior, sculpture, wall paintings).

A smaller part of the material collected during field research has made its way into the two-volume monograph ***Barbarians, Rhomaioi and Those In Between. Integrating the Christians of the Central Balkans into the Byzantine Empire (late 10th – mid-13th century).*** The entire body of documentation compiled during field research has been stored in the STOA digital database (**STOA – Sacral Topography of the Ohrid Archbishopric**).[1] Veljko Goganović, junior research assistant at the Institute for Byzantine Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA), prepared the material for upload and storage in the STOA database. The database and its valuable and extensive contents are expected to become available for perusal in 2027/2028.

Some of the field research material is already available to the international academic community via the international project "*Maps of Power – Karten der Macht*" – *Tabula Imperii Byzantini Balkans*, led by Mihailo St. Popović, Doz. Mag. Dr., Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Medieval Research, Department of Byzantine Research, Vienna.

The field research results will be comprehensively presented in the ***Corpus of Sacral Edifices of the Archbishopric of Ohrid***, authored by Ljubomir Milanović, Marka Tomić and Vladan Zdravković (forthcoming), which is to be the third volume of the monograph *Barbarians, Rhomaioi and Those In Between. Integrating the Christians of the Central Balkans into the Byzantine Empire (late 10th – mid-13th century)*.

1 The database will be available at: https://stoa.visanu.rs/

Research visits and dissemination of project results

During the project cycle, the team members took multiple opportunities to promote the project's objectives and results at home and abroad. Several presentations were held at universities in Serbia (University of Belgrade, University of Novi Sad, University of Niš) and at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Promotional activities included three round tables to discuss different thematic segments of the project.

In 2022–2023, Predrag Komatina, Miloš Cvetković, and Stanoje Bojanin made research visits to the Department of Byzantine Research at the Institute for Medieval Research (IMAFO) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The project research results were presented in the United States on two occasions: at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, in April 2023 (Ljubomir Milanović) and at Dumbarton Oaks – Harvard University, Washington D.C., in July 2024 (Bojana Krsmanović and Ljubomir Milanović). The international conference *Byzanz und das Abendland*, Budapest 2023 and 2024, provided another opportunity to promote the project and some of our research findings (Ljubomir Milanović, Predrag Komatina, Vladan Zdravković, Maja Nikolić, Marka Tomić, and Bojana Pavlović), as did a visit to Athens and the National Hellenic Research Foundation, Section of Byzantine Research, in 2023 (Maja Nikolić and Marka Tomić).

We wish to thank the colleagues who provided us with opportunities to promote our project and research results at international research centers: Doz. Mag. Dr. Phil. *Mihailo St. Popović*, Department of Byzantine Research at the Institute for Medieval Research (IMAFO) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences; *Jelena Bogdanović*, Associate Professor of Architectural History and Theory, Associate Professor of Classical and Mediterranean Studies – Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee; *Nikos D. Kontogiannis*, PhD, Director of Byzantine Studies, Dumbarton Oaks – Harvard University, Washington D.C; Dr. *László Horváth*, Associate Professor at Eötvös-Loránd-Universität Budapest and director of the Eötvös-József-Collegium; Dr. *Erika Juhász*, ELTE Eötvös József Collegium, Budapest; Dr. *Nikos Livanos*, The Institute of Historical Research – The National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens.

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Lomonosov Moscow State University; head of Byzantine Art Deprtment, State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow; *Mihailo St. Popović*, Doz. Mag. Dr., Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Medieval Research, Department of Byzantine Research, Vienna.

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The scope of this research exceeded our initial plans, resulting in a much lengthier volume than expected and, consequently, adding to the workload of our translation team. We thank all of them, especially our long-serving translator *Miljana Protić*, and *Charles Robertson*, who kindly proofread the English text.

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Tijana Dinić worked diligently on graphic design and prepress, as she has done in the past for the needs of the Institute for Byzantine Studies – SASA, and we thank her for her patience and hard work.

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B. K.

Preface

This monograph results from research conducted within the project "From Barbarians to Christians and *Rhomaioi*. The Process of Byzantinization in the Central Balkans (late 10th–mid-13th Century)." The primary focus of this research was to identify the elements underlying the process of integrating the populations of the newly conquered Balkan territories into Byzantine society and its political, ideological, ecclesiastical, and legal frameworks. This process is commonly referred to as *Byzantinization* in academic literature. The initial objective of the project was to explore this process within the interior Balkans, starting from the late 10th century when the end of the Bulgarian-Byzantine conflicts resulted in this region being incorporated into the Byzantine Empire, thereby increasing the visibility of Byzantine influences. Recognizing that Byzantium leveraged the Christianization of an ethnic group to achieve long-term influence across all spheres of social development among the evangelized people, the research also examined the preceding period, when the territory under discussion was within the First Bulgarian Empire. Stretching the timeframe was essential for comprehensively assessing the significance of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, which undoubtedly served as the cornerstone of integration in the new provinces of the Balkans in the post-1018 period.

The project title, "From Barbarians to Christians and *Rhomaioi*," posed the question of whether there was progressive acceptance of Byzantine cultural models that could transform *barbarians* into *Christians* and, ultimately, *Rhomaioi*. Christianization, along with the penetration of Byzantine cultural models, fundamentally changed the way of life of those evangelized. However, this did not necessarily alter or influence the perception of the local population of the Balkans by the Byzantine educated elites, as also indicated by earlier research exploring the Byzantine missionary approach or analyzing ethnic and political identity and the meaning of the term *Rhomaioi*. Therefore, this research did not primarily focus on literary depictions, views, or value judgments by the Byzantine intellectual elite but on the integration process itself, which, with varying degrees of success, led to the incorporation of new provinces and their populations into the Byzantine Empire. Consequently, a different title for the monograph was needed to capture the complexity of the integration process, which cannot be reduced solely to the dissemination of Byzantine influences. The integration process rested on factors that brought the inhabitants of the central Balkans under one

political authority – first the Bulgarian and then the Byzantine. And yet, acceptance of Byzantine influences did not necessarily imply accepting the political authority of the Byzantine Empire. On the contrary, adopting Byzantine ideological, ecclesiastical, cultural, and social models was often motivated by the recipients' need to strengthen their own political entity. By focusing on integrations, the study identified aspects of the Byzantine presence that led to the acceptance of Byzantine political authority, official hierarchy, and social system, organized and guided through the ecclesiastical organization, legislation, and judiciary practice of the Byzantine Empire.

We chose the central Balkans for the territorial framework of our research because this region had been beyond the Empire's direct control from the 7th century until it was gradually incorporated into its borders from the 970s onward. For the purposes of this study, this territory was provisionally described as the central Balkans, a term encompassing all parts of the Balkans annexed by Byzantium in the late 10th and early 11th centuries, including the peripheral zones of the Peninsula that came under direct Byzantine rule in that period. In a strictly geographical sense, some of those areas lie outside the region of the central Balkans. The integration process did not unfold in the same way everywhere across this broader territory; neither do the available sources allow us to retrace that process with the same degree of detail in all the major geographical-historical zones – the northeastern Balkans (between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains), the central areas incorporated into the Archbishopric of Ohrid in the post-1019 period (the Vardar Basin and its environs), the Danube-Morava border zone (Sirmium–Belgrade–Braničevo–Niš), and the northwesternmost part of the central Balkans (the Serbian and Croatian zones). The research did not include the territories in the Balkans that Byzantium had controlled earlier, organizing them into military-administrative districts (the themes of Thrace, Macedonia, Strymon, Thessalonike, Hellas, Peloponnesus, Nikopolis, Kephalonia, Dyrrachion, and Dalmatia).

The chronological framework of the research is roughly delineated by the beginning of John I Tzimiskes' reoccupation of the interior of the Balkans and the middle of the 13th century, which saw a marked tendency towards decentralization in Byzantine governance. This timeframe included several crucial stages that marked the evolution of the integration process in the mentioned geographical-historical zones in the central Balkans – the age of John Tzimiskes and Basil II, the period from 1025 to 1204 with particular focus on the Komnenian era, and the last stage, spanning from 1204 until the restoration of the Empire in 1261. As previously mentioned, some aspects of the integration process could not be adequately depicted without stretching the timeframe. Hence, the monograph also investigates earlier periods of known Byzantine influence, primarily in religious art.

Notably, centuries of *indirect Byzantinization* preceded the direct integration of the central Balkans, a territory that never left the zone of Byzantine interest, into the Empire's borders. As the intensity of Byzantine influence closely reflected the Christianization process, the period of so-called *indirect Byzantinization* has received due

attention. Our starting point was to determine the extent and mechanisms through which Byzantine influence permeated the central Balkans via the Bulgarian Empire. Subsequently, we explored the factors that influenced integration processes during the period of direct Byzantine rule. Given that Christianization typically brought about numerous changes within the evangelized society, the examination of church architecture and art within the First Bulgarian Empire was of paramount importance. The surviving sacred edifices serve as concrete and tangible indicators of the spread of Byzantine influence into the region, which Byzantium would incorporate into its borders post-1018. Consequently, significant attention was given to material evidence of structures built before 1018. The fundamental question we sought to address was what the Byzantines encountered in the interior of the Balkans after integrating this territory into their political borders.

The research further attempted to identify the most significant factors influencing the integration processes. The objective was to assess how the local population responded to the Empire's presence in the region and how profoundly the direct Byzantine governance influenced certain aspects of the local population's daily life. How was the preexisting sacral heritage integrated into the Byzantine archbishopric seated at Ohrid? What role did Byzantine institutions, particularly the Church, play in the integration processes? Did the Byzantine approach to organizing governance in the Balkans differ from those implemented in other border provinces? Did locals participate in the provincial administration and church organization? How did the Byzantine legal tradition affect the daily lives of individuals and their communities in the territory under the Archbishopric of Ohrid? What can we learn about certain aspects of parochial life in Slavic environments? How did the Byzantine elites perceive the central Balkans and the different ethnic groups that inhabited them? These are only some of the questions our research aimed to address.

To answer these questions, we explored the Byzantine approach to military and civilian administration, church organization, religious art, civil and ecclesiastical law, and liturgical life, as well as pertinent accounts of historical and everyday events in Byzantine writings. The monograph includes some of the extensive material collected on the sacral topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid under Byzantine rule. However, the bulk of this material will be presented in the upcoming third volume. Unfortunately, our team did not receive permission from the relevant bishop to conduct comprehensive field research of the cathedral church of Hagia Sofia at Ohrid.

This book hopes to provide fresh insights into various aspects of integration processes in the Balkans from the late 10th to the mid-13th century. It will undoubtedly generate additional questions, paving the way for further research into these integration processes, particularly focusing on the role of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

Belgrade, January 2025 *B. K.*

Part I
DEALING WITH "BARBARIANS"

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The Balkans between Byzantium and Bulgaria

I. Territory

Any discussion of the place of the Balkan Peninsula in the political and cultural traditions of the Byzantine Empire must begin by revisiting the terms that denoted this space in Byzantine sources. Byzantine authors did not use the term "Balkans," which did not emerge until the 16th century.[1] Instead, they called the Balkans by many other names that reflected Constantinople's ideological view of this territory.

Byzantine authors saw the Balkans as part of the Byzantine Empire. Invasions of different "barbarian tribes," such as the Huns, Gepids, Slavs, and Avars, the permanent settlements of the Slavs and Bulgars in the 6th and 7th centuries, and the formation of the first South Slavic states in this region did little to change the view that the Balkans belonged to the Empire's territory regardless of whether they happened to be within Byzantium's borders or beyond its political or military control.[2] The Fourth Crusade and the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, when Nicaea temporarily replaced Constantinople as the capital city, led to a shift in the perception of the Balkans, reframing them as a territory inhabited by powerful political actors and rivals of the Empire of Nicaea in the race for restoring Byzantium and reclaiming the Queen of Cities from the Latin Empire.[3]

II. Terms

Constantinople's political ideology was reflected, among other things, in Byzantine historians' use of archaic terms for the entire territory or specific regions of the Balkan Peninsula, e.g., Illyricum, Dalmatia, and Dacia, names that covered the broader territory of the Peninsula, or Moesia, Dardania, and Triballia, toponyms limited to

1 *Todorova*, Imagining the Balkans, 27.

2 However, Constantine IV (681–685) was forced to recognize the Bulgar state and pay tribute to avoid further incursions into Byzantine territory, Theophanes, 358–359.

3 Thus, in the 13th century, George Akropolites would no longer invoke the historical right of the Romans to reclaim parts of the Balkans from the Bulgarians but would instead employ alternative arguments for this purpose, Acropolitus, 75–77, 107–109. See the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople*, II, 393. See also *Stouraitis*, Lands of the *Rhomaioi*, 45–63; *Van Tricht*, Being Byzantine, 65–119.

certain parts of the Balkans. All of these terms (except for Triballia) had been used in Roman times for the Roman Empire's administrative districts in this territory. Also, the regions in the Balkans that Byzantium had subjugated over time, organizing them into military-administrative units (*themata*), were named after geographical areas: Thrace, Macedonia, Hellas, the Peloponnesus, and so on.

By drawing on classical sources and using archaic geographical terms, Byzantine authors not only showed their erudition but also highlighted the continued existence of one – Roman – Empire, the subjects of which they considered themselves to be. So, in their writings, the term Illyricum covered the territory of the eponymous Roman prefecture or, more specifically, the part of it that lay in the Balkans. Illyricum had been one of the four big prefectures. When the praetorian prefecture of Illyricum was divided into Eastern Illyricum (*Illyricum orientale*) and Western Illyricum (*Illyricum occidentale*) in 379, the Balkan Peninsula was in Eastern Illyricum. Upon the division of the Empire in 395, Eastern Illyricum became part of the Eastern Roman Empire, i.e., Byzantium.[4]

For Byzantine writers, Dalmatia denoted the territory of the Roman province of the same name. Established in 10 AD after the division of the initial province of Illyricum into Pannonia and Dalmatia, this province covered the expansive territory between the Raša (Arsia) River in Istria and Lezhë in modern Albania, parts of present-day Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and north Albania. Its northern frontier was in the Sava Basin, and its capital was Salona (Σαλῶνα). Following Diocletian's administrative reform in 297, the southern part of Dalmatia became a new province – Praevalitana.[5] In Constantine Porphyrogennetos' *De Administrando Imperio*, Dalmatia's northern border was ideologically moved up to the Danube, although that was not where it stood in reality. Thus, Porphyrogennetos introduced the Danube as the symbolic dividing line between the Roman world and barbarians,[6] reestablishing the northern frontier of the Roman Empire where it had been before the barbarian invasions – on the Danube Limes. In the 6th century, Procopius of Caesarea wrote that Emperor Justinian I (527–565) wanted to make the Danube the "strongest possible line of defense" against barbarians because the river separated the territory of the Romans on the right bank from the barbarians who inhabited the left bank.[7] Given that the Prefecture of Illyricum of which Porphyrogennetos spoke reached the Danube, this suggests that the emperor was referencing the conditions of late antiquity, when the prefecture had originally been established. The writings of Constantine Porphyrogennetos (905–959) betray claims to some territories Byzantium had no effective control over in the mid-10th century in their choice of terms denoting Roman (or Rhomaic) lands and areas within and beyond the Empire's borders.[8] During Basil II's war against the

4 *Bury*, History, 32, 127–128; *Treadgold*, History, 69. On Byzantine Illyricum see *Komatina*, Byzantine Illyricum, 429–438.

5 *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 38; *Gračanin*, Južna Panonija, 49–53; *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 166-167.

6 *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 142-143, 270.

7 Procopius, De aedificiis, 222–223, 228–229.

8 *Arrignon – Duneau*, Frontière, 24–29. On the evolution of the terms used by Byzantine writers to define the concept of the border, as well as to delineate Roman territory in relation to the "barbarian" lands see *Chrysos,* Nordgrenze, 27–40.

subjects of Samuel's Bulgaria (976–1018/1019), the symbolic Danube frontier became very much an actual border, acquiring new significance in the 12th century.[9]

In the Komnenian era, both terms, Illyricum and Dalmatia, featured prominently in literary texts, undoubtedly because of the reconquista policy the Byzantines pursued in the Balkans.[10] The age of John II (1118–1143) and Manuel I (1143–1180) saw large-scale campaigns against Hungary, a power whose geographic epicenter was the southern bank of the Danube. So, the erstwhile limes once again became the northern frontier,[11] with all of the Balkans reincorporated, albeit not for long, into the Byzantine Empire. However, in Komnenian-era writings, the term Dalmatia primarily referred to the ethnic space inhabited by Serbs.[12]

Similarly, Komnenian authors used the term Dacia for the Balkans. This name apparently referred to two former Roman provinces, Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediteranea, as well as the erstwhile Diocese of Dacia.[13] Like Dalmatia, the term Dacia covered the geographic space inhabited by the Serbs in the Morava Basin. According to John Kinnamos, the capital city of Dacia was Naissus (today's Niš).[14]

The terms Moesia, Dardania, and Triballia referred to specific parts of the Peninsula. The Roman province of Moesia encompassed, among other territories, the area between the Danube and the Balkan mountain range, where the First Bulgarian Empire emerged. The term Dardania covered a former Roman province whose center was probably Skupi (today's Skopje).[15] John Scylitzes and George Kedrenos, who copied Scylitzes almost word-for-word, used the term Triballia for the Serbian state of Diokleia (Duklja).[16]

In classical geography and historiography, geographical areas were named after the people inhabiting a given territory. Thus, all mentioned appellations were derived from the names of the peoples that inhabited the Balkans: the Illyrians, Dacians, Triballi, and Moesi.[17] Byzantine historians adopted this terminology, but their use of some toponyms reflected Byzantine political aspirations, programs, and ideological

9 *Maksimović*, Organizacija, 31–44; *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 131–132; *Stephenson*, Balkan frontier, 65–66; *Holmes*, Basil II, 415, 425; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 845.

10 For Illyricum see Bryennios, 215, 227; Alexias, 51, 53–54, 129, 225–226, 253, 456. The assertion made by *Živković*, Dukljansko-vizantijski rat, 51, that for Bryennios the concept of Illyricum was limited to the Theme of Dyrrachion and its immediate surroundings is unfounded.

11 Cinnamus, 9–12, 114–115, 124, 126, 131–132, 226, 240; Choniates, Historia, 101–102; VIINJ IV, 47 n. 105; 129 n. 59.

12 Alexias, 183, 252–253, 258, 265–266; Cinnamus, 101–104, 131–132, 199.

13 For basic information on the two provinces see Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity, 449; Alexias, 298; Browning, New Source, 199.

14 Cinnamus, 69–70. The capital of the Diocese of Dacia was at Serdica.

15 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 794. Dardania is mentioned in the historical account of Procopius, De aedficiis, 256, 282–283, as a region or province belonging to Illyricum. Theophylact Simokattes refers to it as τὸ κλίτος τῆς Δαρδανίας (a slope, a region) into which Byzantine general Peter advanced with his army, having heard that the Avar forces had assembled around the so-called cataracts, Theophylactus Simokattes, 292. The Cataracts are the Iron Gates of the Danube, the Djerdap Gorge, which forms part of the boundary between modern Serbia and Romania.

16 *Komatina*, Srbija i Duklja, 159–186.

17 On the use of these terms for peoples who either briefly inhabited or settled in the territory of the central Balkans see *Nikolić – Pavlović*, Bulgarians, Serbs, and the Rus, 750, 753. For ethnonyms see *Pohl*, Ethnonyms, 5–17.

concepts.[18] The resurfacing of the ethnonym Slavs in Komnenian-era writings was part of this tendency.[19] So, all of the mentioned names aimed to show that the Balkan Peninsula had always been part of the Empire and highlight historical continuity.

III. Thematic focus on the Balkans

Geographical descriptions of the Balkans are conspicuously less common in Byzantine historiographical writings from earlier periods than from the middle of the 10th century onward. This can be explained by a renewed interest in the area on the part of Byzantine writers. Before the mid-10th century, Byzantine foreign policy had focused on the East and the Empire's conflicts with the peoples that assailed its eastern frontier (Persians, Arabs), and the choice of the topics most commonly discussed by historians and chroniclers reflected this focus.[20] With the intensification of Byzantine military operations in some parts of the Balkans, reports from the Peninsula grew more frequent. The narrative sources reported the Avar and Slavic invasions and the settlement of Slavic tribes in the interior of the Peninsula, sporadically documenting Byzantine efforts to fend off Slavic incursions and the expeditions the Empire occasionally launched to expand its control in Slav-populated territories. The Byzantine literary tradition also recorded the settlement of the Bulgars and the formation of a Bulgar state between the Danube and the Balkan (Haemus) mountain range in the 680s.[21] From this period onward, the Byzantine frontier in the Balkans was determined relative to the Bulgar state, and the Balkans, or more specifically, a part of the Balkans, became a more or less unavoidable topic in Byzantine writings. How extensively Byzantine chroniclers and historians reported on Byzantine-Bulgar relations depended almost solely on the Empire's endangerment level and the efforts of Byzantine emperors to contain the ambitions of the Bulgar ruling classes. The literary focus on the developments in the Balkans intensified in the late 10th and early 11th centuries when the Byzantine Empire, led by emperors John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and, in particular, Basil II (976–1025) launched large-scale campaigns to establish its northern frontier on the Danube for good.

IV. Knowing the lay of the land

The Byzantine literary tradition includes only a handful of geography textbooks, usually based on classical antecedents.[22] This suggests that the interest of Byzantine

18 *Angelov*, Geography, 45.

19 Bryennius, 209–211, 213–215; Choniates, Historia, 173; VIINJ IV, 149 n. 146. In one instance, Choniates mentions a certain Slav named Varinus (Σθλάβου τινὸς Βαρηνοῦ), who was supposed to assist Peter of Bracieux in capturing the city of Pegae, Choniates, Historia, 641; *Nikolić – Pavlović*, Bulgarians, Serbs, and the Rus, 748–749.

20 The significance of the East for the Empire is evidenced by the transfer of troops from the Balkans to the East during the reign of Emperor Heraclius, *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 75–76. The rationale behind such an imperial strategy lay in the immense economic significance of the eastern possessions, which far surpassed the importance of the depopulated Balkan territories.

21 Theophanes, 356–360; Nicephorus, 86–91.

22 *Angelov*, Geography, 47–48.

writers in geography was primarily fueled by a desire to explain the Empire's political positions, especially when the topic concerned an object of Byzantine imperialist aspirations.

The level of knowledge about the described geographical areas varied and depended on the author's personal and general education and on whether he was a "cabinet" historian or had been an eyewitness of the developments on the ground. The accurate information provided in the writings of "cabinet" historians came from the sources they used. Even though there is no surviving evidence of this, there can be no doubt that court archives and libraries held maps and geographical writings that allowed aspiring writers to learn about the regions they described. Also, they could make use of the data collected by Byzantine military agents, members of diplomatic missions, merchants, and pilgrims who had reported on different places in different periods, providing, among other things, some descriptions of the situation on the ground.[23] Of course, eyewitnesses and those with first-hand experience of some events certainly offered more precise information, but "cabinet" historians were not far behind. Indeed, sometimes it was those who had had an opportunity to see in person the lay of the land they described who made mistakes, while the chroniclers whose sources were limited to the Constantinopolitan archives provided accurate information. For instance, Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene both knew that the name of the Vardar River came from the local population (ὃν ἐγχωρίως καλοῦσι Βαρδάριον / Βαρδάρην οὕτο γὰρ ἐγχωρίως αὐτὸν ὀνομάζουσι). However, while Bryennios conflated the course of the Vardar with that of the Strymon (Struma) River, Anna Komnene correctly reported that the Vardar River rises from the mountains near Moesia and runs between Berroia and Thessalonike before emptying into the South Sea.[24]

Familiarity with the geography of the territories Byzantium aspired to control held practical relevance – it was a necessary prerequisite for successful military campaigns. There are some surviving 10th-century military treatises discussing warfare in inhospitable terrain, although most of those reports concern the wars waged in the East, as do the guidelines to the emperor and the army for setting up camps and outposts during campaigns, revealing how crucial it was to know the lay of the land where battles were fought.[25] Byzantine histories and chronicles also extensively described the terrain and its role in the outcome of a battle or an entire war. A mainstay of such descriptions of the Balkans was its inaccessibility and remoteness. Those almost identically described geographical features of the Balkans grew into a literary trope, resurfacing in Byzantine writings in different versions. Regardless of their sources and ambitions, those descriptions admittedly realistically conveyed the geographical configuration of some parts of the Balkans.[26]

23 There is evidence of imperial agents or spies in Byzantine sources from different historical periods, Theophanes, 447–448; DAI, 49.65–71; Byzantine Military Treatises, 122–125, 152–153, 292.

24 Bryennius, 285; Alexias, 28. Therefore, Gautier's observation that Anna merely repeats Bryennios' description (Bryennius, 285 n. 7) is incorrect, as hers is precise.

25 Byzantine Military Treatises, 22–25, 58–69, 84–91, 154–157, 230–233, 246–256, 272–275, 292–303.

26 Descriptions of inaccessible and rough terrain are also present in accounts of warfare in the East against the Persians, Theophanes, 139, 328–329.

Since writers from various periods recognized the link between relief and warfare, offensive and defensive, their accounts often explained military defeats or victories by the physical layout of the areas where those conflicts had been fought. These descriptions share the widespread and deep-seated view that the geographical configuration of the areas the Byzantines aspired to conquer was more advantageous for the defenders, the Bulgars or the Serbs, than for the imperial army.[27] However, that was not always the case. For example, Theophanes Continuatos reports that Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813–820) fled into the nearby mountains, leaving his army encamped close to Mesembria, only to charge down the steep slopes, killing everyone before him and throwing even Bulgar children against the rocks.[28]

Because the focus of Byzantine writers on the Balkans depended on the military and political situation at the time, not all parts of the Peninsula warranted equally detailed descriptions of their geographical features. For instance, Theophylact Simokattes reported that the areas along the lower Danube were predominantly marshlands and woodlands, making it impossible for the imperial army to clamp down on the local Slavic population.[29] Recounting the Bulgar settlement in the territory between the Balkan mountain range and the Danube, Theophanes and Patriarch Nikephoros note that the terrain was swampy and very difficult to traverse.[30] The numerous gorges allowed the Bulgars to avoid pitched battles and ambush the Empire's troops. Nikephoros I (802–811) ran into one of those ambushes in 811 and perished in an offensive against Krum (803–814), Khan of Bulgaria, together with the members of the Empire's military elite. This defeat was one of the more traumatic events vividly described in the Byzantine literary tradition.[31] According to Leo the Deacon, Bulgaria's territory was densely wooded, dotted with caves and ravines, overgrown with plants, humid, and swampy. The area near the Haemus mountain range and the Rhodopes often saw large-scale flooding and was surrounded by inaccessible mountains on all sides.[32] "The land of the Moesi" abounded in narrow passes known as *kleisourai* (κλεισούραι) because they were enclosed. [33] Powerless in the face of Byzantine might, the Bulgars withdrew into inaccessible areas, which allowed them to take the imperial army by surprise, killing many valiant generals and even Emperor Nikephoros I.[34] Niketas Choniates was another historian who wrote of the inaccessibility of the northeastern Balkans, describing the Byzantine troops' apprehension about waging war in Bulgaria. Having arrived from Philippopolis to the border of Moesia, the army protested, forcing their commander, Kamytzes, to call off the campaign: "Where are you taking us? Whom are we to engage in battle? Have we not traversed these mountain passes many times, and not only did

27 Leo Diaconus, 171–173; Scylitzes, 350–351.

28 Theophanes Continuatus, 41–43.

29 Theophylactus Simokattes, 235–236.

30 Theophanes, 358; Nicephorus, 90.

31 Theophanes, 488–493; *Dujčev*, Chronique byzantine de 811, 210–217.

32 Leo Diaconus, 62–63.

33 Ibid., 130.

34 Ibid., 103–104, 105.

we accomplish nothing worthwhile but we also very nearly perished, one and all. Turn back, therefore, turn back, and lead us back to our own land."[35]

The geographical configuration of the central Balkans was described in more detail. The Byzantine-Bulgarian war (976–1019), which marked the reign of Basil II, was fought for more than four decades in this expansive territory spanning from the Danube in the north to the outskirts of Thessalonike and the Thessalian plains in the south and from the Tmoros mountain range in the west to the Strymon Basin in the east. The accounts of John Scylitzes are consistent with the descriptions of old Bulgaria's territory, repeatedly mentioning the rugged terrain, ravines, mountains, and gorges where the Bulgarian fortresses stood, protected by natural barriers.[36] Komnenian-era writers describe the same geographical features, providing extensive information about Serbia as well as Bulgaria.[37] The reports of John Scylitzes and other historians suggest that this territory also had rivers, lakes, and fertile valleys, which were presumably more densely populated and not inhospitable.[38] The Morava-Vardar Basin was exposed to incursions by various tribes that crossed the Danube and penetrated deep into the interior of the Peninsula. A facilitating factor was that the Danube was not a natural barrier because it froze over in winter and provided safe passage to the barbarians.[39]

Byzantine writers bring reports of many inaccessible fortresses in Bulgarian territory. It was precisely because of those strongholds that the war against Samuel (976–1014) lasted more than four decades.[40] Niketas Choniates reports that most fortresses in Moesia, i.e., the old Bulgarian lands, had stood in inaccessible areas, perched on steep cliffs, identifying Tarnovo and Prosek as the largest and most notable among them.[41]

As in the Bulgarian case, Byzantine historians spoke of the inaccessibility of some parts of the Serb-populated territory, separated from the Empire's territory by gorges and dense woodlands. This mountainous or hilly region, with its rugged cliffs and hidden underground pits, was conducive to guerrilla warfare.[42] The rugged terrain gave an edge to the Serbs, as evidenced by the two defeats the Empire's troops suffered in Diokleia (Duklja) (1040 and 1042).[43]

35 Choniates, Historia, 471, for an English translation cf. *Magoulias*, O city of Byzantium, 258.

36 For more details see the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I.

37 Choniates, Historia, 429–430, n. 40.

38 For instance, the Pelagonian Basin, the Vardar Basin, Scylitzes, 358–359; Alexias 383. In a now-lost letter of Michael Italikos, Archbishop of Philippopolis, to Theodore Prodromos, there was an ekphrasis of the Rhodope region. We learn from Prodromos' response that it contained descriptions of the rivers flowing through the area, the settlements, as well as the city of Philippopolis itself, *Browning*, Unpublished correspondence, 287–288. Unlike the mentioned sources, Theophylact of Ohrid presents us with a poor description of the lake and its fish, Theophylactus, Epistulae, 96.112–116. For further details, see the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I.

39 Although Procopius regards the Danube River as the natural boundary between the Roman Empire and the barbarians, we learn from his narrative that it was easily traversable when not guarded by able generals, Procopius, De bellis, 260–265, 398–399, 464–465. Additionally, Procopius emphasizes that a whole system of fortifications was erected along the Danube in order to prevent barbarian incursions, Procopius, De aedificiis, 264–275. Scylitzes, 399, states that the river was traversable when frozen. See also *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 201.

40 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian fortresses, 843–874; see the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I.

41 Choniates, Historia, 428–429.

42 *Browning*, New Source, 199; Alexias, 130, 183, 253, 258; Choniates, Orationes, 28.

43 Scylitzes, 408–409, 424–425.

Constantine Porphyrogennetos in *De Administrando Imperio* mentions the "inhabited cities (κάστρα) of baptized Serbia." The most important among them was Drstnik, which seems to have been the political center of the Serbian princes, located in Hvosno in present-day Metohija. All of the cities listed by Porphyrogennetos should be sought among the known Early Medieval fortresses built atop late Roman and Early Byzantine ruins.[44] However, there were no fortified cities in the Serbian lands in later periods.[45] Besides the walled city of Ras, restored under the first Komnenian emperors as part of the fortification system to ward off Serbian attacks,[46] the sources mention some minor and often unnamed forts, which seem to have served primarily as refugia manned by a smaller garrison.[47] The sources name a few smaller forts on the Empire's border with Dalmatia in the late 11th century (Zvečan, Galič, Jelač).[48]

V. Struggle for domination in the Balkans

The geographical configuration affected not only warfare methods but also the organization of governance in the Balkans. The military-administrative systems in the periods when the Empire controlled the Balkans and when the Bulgarian Empire incorporated most of the central Balkans shared some characteristics.

A careful consideration of this problem must begin with the reign of Justinian I, who undertook a highly ambitious, complex, and costly project to protect the Empire's interests before it definitively lost the interior of the Peninsula: the fortification of the Balkans, which took around twenty years to complete. Justinian continued the fortress restoration campaign in the Balkans, especially on the Danube frontier, that had begun under Anastasios I Dikoros (491–518). Those rebuilt fortresses, most of which had been damaged in the invasion of Attila's Huns, were smaller than the preexisting strongholds, but this planned rationalization took away little from their military efficacy. Restoring damaged fortresses and building new ones, Justinian reinforced the defenses of the expansive territory from the Danube in the north to Thermopylae in the south with more than 600 fortresses,[49] so the Balkans had eight times more forts than the whole Asian part of the Empire.[50]

The concept of the defense of the Balkans was highly complex. An entire system of fortifications was erected along the Danube, extending from Singidunum to the

44 DAI, 32.149–151; *Ferluga*, Vizantija, 63; *Ćirković*, Naseljeni gradovi, 9–32; *Ivanišević – Bugarski*, Post-Antique Settlement, 7–16; *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 272; *Popović – Bikić*, Vrsenice.

45 In support of this claim, the fact that the centers of the new bishoprics established by Sava Nemanjić within the Serbian Archbishopric were located in monasteries rather than cities would be relevant. I am indebted to Professor Đorđe Bubalo for drawing my attention to this fact.

46 John Kinnamos reports that the Serbs destroyed the fortress of Ras in the year 1123, Cinnamus, 12. For Ras see *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras; 179; *Kalić*, Prokopijeva Arsa, 9–17; *Eadem*, Episkopski gradovi, 433–447.

47 Cinnamus, 102–103; *Manasses*, Dyo anegdota ponēmata, 89–91.

48 Alexias, 266; *Popović*, Forteresses, 177–178; *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 148–150.

49 Procopius, De aedificiis, 250–265.

50 *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 35. This great architectural undertaking was probably the work of Justinian's architect Victorinus, as evidenced by numerous inscriptions from Greece and Albania, *Feissel*, Architect Viktorinos, 136–146; *Sarantis*, Justinian's Balkan Wars, 161–176.

Danube Delta, where the river empties into the Black Sea. In Roman times, fortresses of various sizes and purposes were built along this northern frontier.[51] The biggest among them with the largest garrisons were legionary camps (castra), manned by more than five thousand troops. Justinian reduced the size of those forts and the number of soldiers stationed there.[52] In the interior of the Balkans, numerous fortifications of varying functions were established – ranging from conventional military strongholds to so-called central places and refugia. In the central areas of the Peninsula the rugged terrain served as a shield, primarily the Heamus mountain range (Balkan, Stara Planina) in Thrace, with its many peaks, so fortresses were built on cliffs or in other naturally protected spots. The idea was to enable road control and protect economic resources.[53] Also, an elaborate fortification system was erected – the Anastasian Wall (Longi Muri), stretching from the Black Sea coast across the Thracian Peninsula to the coast of the Sea of Marmara, around sixty kilometers west of Constantinople.[54]

Anastasios' and Justinian's refortification of the Balkans and reorganization of the army in the frontier strip ensured an effective system capable of protecting the local population, even though Justinian's policy focused on reclaiming the western parts of the Empire (Italy, Spain, North Africa). The purpose of fortifying all categories of settlements in the Balkans was to equip the local population to withstand attacks until the imperial army, the *comitatenses*, arrived. Frequent barbarian raids, earthquakes, and a bubonic plague outbreak economically and demographically devastated the Balkans in the second half of the 6th century. Still, the Empire retained control of its border provinces and the limes until the early decades of the 7th century.[55] Many fortresses from Justinian's era did not survive the Slavic settlement in the areas south of the Danube in the 7th century.[56] They were restored in the medieval period and during the expansion of Bulgar control in the 9th century, as attested by the well-researched fortresses of Ras and Romuliana.[57]

The Early Byzantine fortification of the Balkans was not the only legacy of Justinian's age. During his reign, an attempt was made to no longer limit governance to military officials and include the clergy, granting administrative and sometimes even military powers to local bishops.[58] One of the most challenging duties of church dignitaries was to manage large-scale projects of building new cities and fortresses

51 *Roth*, Size and Organization, 346–362. For the organization of the Roman frontier along the Danube and the arrangement of legionary camps see *Jęczmienowski*, Fortifications, 31–57; cf. *Băjenaru*, Minor fortifications.

52 For example, after Justinian's reconstruction, Singidunum was reduced to one-third of its former legionary camp, cf. *Popović*, Beogradska tvrđava, 32–37.

53 Since antiquity, the passes through the gorges and narrow straits of Haemus (Haemus Gate, Trajan Gate), as well as Stenae (medieval Prosek) in Macedonia, were monitored from fortified points. In this way, enemy advances from the north towards the wealthier and more urbanized provinces in Macedonia and Thrace, particularly towards the capital, were slowed down, *Sarantis*, Fortifications, 317–370, 321–322.

54 *Crow*, Anastasian Wall, 1–13.

55 *Barišić*, Car Foka, 73–88; *Haldon*, Byzantium, 43–44.

56 *Ivanišević – Bugarski*, Post-Antique Settlement, 9–10.

57 *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras; *Janković*, Gamzigrad, 201–212.

58 *Maksimović*, Severni Ilirik, 17–57; *Milinković*, Mreža naselja, 299–310.

on the emperor's behalf. This role typically added much to the provincial bishop's reputation and prestige and ensured his promotion to a metropolitan or archbishop. Justinian entrusted the construction of *Iustiniana Prima* to Bishop Catellianus; after its inauguration, the newly built metropolis became the seat of the Archdiocese of Dacia, with Catellianus as its first archbishop.[59] The inscription on a slab from Izbičanj reports that a bishop named Stephen oversaw or managed the construction of multiple public buildings in an unidentified city in Praevalitana during Justinian's reign.[60] These projects of building new fortified cities *ex nihilo*, in a very short timeframe and on behalf of the emperor, reveal the prominent role of church dignitaries in the Eastern Roman Empire, as well as the capacity of their chancelleries to run extensive administrative affairs that the construction of a new urban agglomeration entailed. The most exemplary case in this respect from the region of today's Serbia is precisely the city of Caričin Grad (*Iustiniana Prima*).[61] This job involved coordinating all construction works, paying workers' wages, managing finances, and productively mobilizing the large labor force.[62]

With the permanent settlement of the Slavs, the Balkan Peninsula entered a new chapter in its history. The Byzantines saw the territories inhabited by certain Slavic tribes as distinct areas, dubbed Sclavinias in Byzantine sources.[63] The Slavic space was differentiated from the territory where the Rhomaic population lived.[64] Like all other peoples violating the Roman limes, the Slavs were considered barbarians.[65] Waging war against the Slavs, who joined forces with the Avars to besiege Thessalonike and Constantinople several times,[66] the Empire sought to penetrate deeper into the Peninsula and regain actual control over this territory. However, those attempts achieved little beyond taking some fortresses and the southern areas, where the gradual Byzantine reoccupation resulted in the formation of military-administrative districts (*themata*).[67] One of the most important campaigns against the Slavs in the interior of the Peninsula was led by the eunuch Staurakios, the *logothetes tou dromou* under Empress Irene, in 783. The campaign aimed to ensure Byzantine control over the *Via Egnatia* to connect the capital with the

59 Novella 11; *Sarantis*, Justinian's Novella 11, 494–520.

60 *Mirković*, Justinijanova vremena, 170.

61 *Kondić – Popović*, Caričin Grad; *Ivanišević*, Caričin Grad (*Iustiniana Prima*), 107–126.

62 *Mirković*, Justinijanova vremena, 170.

63 *Chrysos*, Settlements of Slavs, 123–135; *Bugarski – Radišić*, Archaeological Testimonies, 91–99; *Komatina*, Byzantine Illyricum, 429–430.

64 As early as the beginning of the 7th century, the author of the Strategikon distinguished the Slavs from the Avars, viewing them as a group with a different social and political system, Strategikon, 120–123. The majority of scholars maintain that the Slavs originated from the territory of present-day Ukraine, specifically the interfluve between the Bug and Dnieper rivers, and that successive waves of Slavic migrations from that period onward were decisive in shaping the contemporary ethnic landscape of Southeastern Europe, *Koder*, Slavic Immigration, 81–100.

65 Strategikon, 121–126, narrates that the Slavs learnt how to fight only upon contact with the Romans. On general representations of barbarians see *Nikolić – Pavlović*, Bulgarians, Serbs, and the Rus, 741–748.

66 Staurakios, Logos, 345–349, 354–355.

67 See the chapter *Byzantine policy toward "Barbarians"in the Southern Balkans from the 7th to the 10th Century and the Beginning of the* Reconquista, I.

Byzantine-controlled lands on the Adriatic coast and the city of Dyrrachion. One of the results of Staurakios' expedition was the formation of four Byzantine themes.[68]

The Bulgar settlement in the late 7th century and the formation of the Bulgar state in the northeastern Balkans shifted the Empire's operations to this part of the Peninsula. From then until the age of Basil II, Byzantium's return to the Balkans was perceived primarily through the lens of Byzantine-Bulgar relations.[69]

The settlement of the Bulgars moved up the Empire's frontier from the Danube to the foot of the Balkan mountain range. The strategic lynchpin of the Byzantine defensive and offensive policy toward the Bulgars was Thrace, the first *thema* established in the Balkans (after 687).[70] Having established the Theme of Thrace, the Empire set up a military base to subdue the Bulgars in a territory where the Slavs had already settled. However, their military efforts achieved no tangible results, and the Bulgars proved a powerful actor in the internal turmoil that marked the last chapter in the reign of the Heraclian dynasty. Justinian II Rhinotmetos (685–695, 705–711) returned to the throne with Bulgar military assistance, rewarding his ally Tervel (700–721) with the title of caesar, the second highest dignity behind the imperial. While this move could be seen as a whim on Justinian's part, it was nevertheless inappropriate and unprecedented in Byzantine political diplomacy. So, it became apparent already in the early 8th century that the Byzantine policy toward the Bulgars would hinge on military campaigns and concurrent attempts to integrate members of the Bulgar ruling classes into the Byzantine sphere of influence by diplomatic means. That usually involved bestowing honorary titles upon Bulgar rulers, their relatives, and influential members of the Bulgar military class to symbolically make them Byzantine officials, implying that the title-holders had become subjects of the Byzantine emperor.[71] However, the reverse sometimes happened: the inclusion of Byzantine defectors or prisoners-of-war into the military leadership of the Bulgarian Empire. In some cases, captured Byzantine generals led the Bulgar army in a battle against the Empire's troops, undoubtedly adding to the prestige of Bulgar rulers.[72] While the members of the Bulgar elite happily accepted an occasional high title from the Byzantine emperor, the political order in the Balkans remained unchanged: the Bulgars saw the interior of the Balkans as their homelands, and the Byzantine Empire was unable to make its traditional aspirations materialize and establish *de facto* control.

The long history of Byzantine-Bulgar conflicts found a place in the Empire's literary tradition. Even though the Byzantines' focus remained firmly on the East, historians accorded due attention to the emperors who had distinguished themselves in the anti-Bulgar struggle, recording, for instance, that Constantine V (741–775) personally

68 *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 111.

69 *Stanković*, Karakter, 277–297; *Sophoulis*, New remarks, 119–138.

70 *Cvetković*, Reforma, 22–24.

71 For more information on this see the chapter *Indirect Byzantinization: Bulgaria as a Case Study*, I, 54–57.

72 *Browning*, Byzantines in Bulgaria, 34. On prisoners-of-war in conflicts between Byzantium and Bulgaria see *Hristov*, Prisoners of war, 73–105.

led as many as nine successful campaigns against the Bulgars. Those offensives did not crush the Bulgar state, but the subsequent Byzantine defeats in the Bulgar wars brought back the memory of the victorious emperor: on the eve of the Battle of Versinikia (812/813), the supporters of Constantine V opened the door of the late emperor's mausoleum, imploring "not God but him" to rise and lead them against the enemy.[73]

Defeats at the hands of the Bulgars sometimes led to changes on the Byzantine throne. Nikephoros I and many of the Empire's most distinguished nobles lost their lives in a battle against Khan Krum in 811. After the disastrous defeat in the Battle of Versinikia, Michael I Rhangabe (811–813) was forced to abdicate in favor of Leo V the Armenian, a soldier emperor, once a peace treaty was signed with Krum's successor, Omurtag (814–831).

Among the events in which Byzantium lost its edge to the Bulgars, the one that rang out the loudest was the 811 defeat and the death of Emperor Nikephoros I. As noted above, it was one of the most traumatic episodes in Byzantine-Bulgarian relations, which left its mark in Byzantine writings. For instance, Theodore the Studite called on the Rhomaioi to wage a holy war against the Bulgars.[74] However, the disaster of 811 was more commonly recalled in the Church and numerous hagiographical writings[75] than in historiography, even though historical sources tended to insist more on the distinction between the pagan and barbarian Bulgars and the Christian Byzantines.[76] The fallen Byzantines were commemorated in the Church's synaxaria and began to be venerated as martyrs. Stories of the tortures suffered by Byzantine prisoners in Bulgaria and of Bulgars forcing Christians to eat meat during fasts became the stuff of legends.[77] A particularly distressing tale concerned Krum's conquest of Adrianople in 813. Having taken the city, Krum allegedly carried out an old Byzantine custom known as *calcatio colii*, which involved stepping on the defeated party's neck in a display of power and triumph. Having done that to Manuel, the local bishop, Krum let the local population know, in no uncertain terms and with a gesture they were familiar with, who the master was and who his subjects were.[78]

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73 This episode, which describes great fear in Constantinople due to a possible Bulgar attack on the capital, was recorded by Theophanes, 501, who is generally very critical of Constantine V due to his iconoclastic policy. See also *Krsmanović*, Evnusi, 143 n. 292.

74 Theodori Studitae epp., 455. 69–71.

75 *Follieri – Dujčev*, Martiri, 91; for a more detailed explanation see also *Sophoulis*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 25.

76 Theophanes, 501; *Beševliev*, Inschriften, 488–490; *Follieri – Dujčev*, Martiri, 89. Nonetheless, the disastrous defeat of the Byzantine army in 811 was ascribed to the incompetence of Nikephoros I, whose negative characterization we find in our main source for the period in question, Theophanes, 488–493; *Sophoulis*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 18–20. For a more general view of Byzantine neighbors in the time of Theophanes see *Koder*, Frommen Byzantiner.

77 *Wortley*, Legends, 543. Theodore the Studite also composed a short sermon commemorating a group of fourteen Christians put to death by the Bulgars for refusing to eat meat during Lent, Theodorus Studites, Parva Catechesis. The monastery of Stoudion was the place where similar texts on the martyrdom of Christians in Bulgaria were most probably written, *Sophoulis*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 39.

78 Regarding this custom, see *McCormick*, Eternal Victory, 144; *Sophoulis*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 216 n. 245, 256, 305. According to one of the legends about the events of 811, a boy, who went on to become the Byzantine emperor Basil I, was held captive in Bulgaria with his parents. This detail is mentioned in the work of Basil's grandson, Constantine Porphyrogennetos, Vita Basilii, 18–23. From Porphyrogennetos' perspective, this

The holy war against the Bulgars launched after 811 took on peculiar trappings under Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969), John I Tzimiskes, and, in particular, Basil II. Preparing for a campaign to drive out the Rus from Bulgarian territory, Nikephoros II Phokas lobbied for a law declaring all casualties of the 811 war martyrs. However, this law was not enacted until the era of Basil II, when the names of all the fallen martyrs were inscribed in his menologion.[79] During the reign of Basil Boulgaroktonos, Leo the Deacon wrote of the fall of the First Bulgarian Empire, depicting Tzimiskes' campaign of 971 as a crusade that the Byzantines, led by St. Theodore Stratelates, had waged against the enemy.[80] The ambition to completely wipe out the Bulgarian identity, which John Tzimiskes attempted to fulfil, had emerged as early as the era of Nikephoros I, who envisaged the construction of a new city to bear his own name.[81] Basil II would pursue a very different policy.[82]

Of course, the Bulgars eventually converted to Christianity, becoming a member of the Christian family of nations, a development that considerably affected Byzantine-Bulgarian relations.[83] Christianization brought lasting changes in Bulgarian society. Surviving Byzantine sources[84] suggest that the initiative came from the Bulgar side, with indications that their conversion was the result of a policy carefully devised by the Bulgar prince Boris (852–889).[85] After some initial vacillation between Rome and Constantinople, Boris ultimately sided with the Byzantine Church, converting to Christianity according to the Eastern rite and changing his name to Michael in honor of Emperor Michael III (842–867), who symbolically acted as his godfather at the christening, probably in 864.[86] The baptism ceremony took place in Bulgaria, and other prominent members of Bulgar society converted together with the prince. And yet, the Christianization process met with strong resistance, resulting in deep rifts among the Bulgars. Neither Boris' family nor the boyar class escaped this split: the prince's elder son and heir, Vladimir (889–893), tried to restore paganism in Bulgaria and was blinded and dethroned as a result; reportedly, in 866, the prince killed 52 boyars who had refused to give up their pagan beliefs.[87] Accordingly, it is hard to believe that the rift would

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information was important for the emperor's portrayal of the Bulgarians as barbarians at a time when Simeon was knocking at the gates of the Empire. In doing so, the emperor-author sought not only to relativize the policies of Romanos I Lekapenos toward Simeon but also to challenge the very notion that Bulgaria had become an empire.

79 *Wortley*, Legends, 548; Menologium Basilii Porphyrogeniti, 556.

80 Leo Diaconus, 128–129, 154, 157–158.

81 *Dujčev*, Chronique byzantine de 811, 212.

82 See the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I; *Cvetković*, Two approaches, 45–85.

83 See the chapter *Indirect Byzantinization: Bulgaria as a Case Study*, I, 38–43.

84 Life of Ignatius, 58; Genesius, 69; Symeon, 131; Theophanes Continuatus, VI, 665, 824; Theophanes Continuatus, 162–165; *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 197–200.

85 It is well known that Boris maintained very close ties with both Frankish rulers and the prince of Great Moravia. At one point, in an effort to weaken Byzantine pressure, he turned to missionaries from Rome, *Browning*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 144–146; *Sullivan*, Khan Boris, 55–139.

86 This was most likely done to preempt a Byzantine military offensive against Bulgaria, *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 201–202.

87 Annales Bertiniani, 473–474; *Ziemann*, Rebellion of the nobles, 613–624.

not have affected the lower classes of the unlettered population, forced to change their deep-rooted views, beliefs, customs, and, by extension, their way of life.[88]

Concurrently with popularizing the new religion, Boris fought to ensure independence for his church. In the late 9th century, the Council of Constantinople (870) approved the establishment of the Bulgarian Church, initially subjugated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople until it became an autocephalous archbishopric in 879, continuing to develop until Tzimiskes' campaign of 971.[89]

Its growing political and ecclesiastical power brought Bulgaria undisputed domination in the Balkans. Constantinople must have expected the new Christian state to remain under its thumb, but any such hopes proved misplaced. On the contrary, Bulgaria's accession to the Byzantine cultural sphere via Christianization gradually led to the acceptance of other Byzantine traditions. The most drastic reflection of this change in Bulgarian society and the adoption of the dominant ideological mindset was the formation of the Bulgarian Empire under Simeon I (893–927), who had no qualms about calling himself not only the emperor of the Bulgarians but also the emperor of the Romans (Rhomaioi). Thus, Byzantium now faced a rival that contested not only its territorial domination in the Balkans but also its supremacy at the highest ideological level.[90]

The Bulgarians formed their sphere of influence by expanding their territory into the interior of the Balkans and taking parts of the Byzantine territory. One measure of the balance of power between Byzantium and Bulgaria was their respective influence on other peoples in the central Balkans.[91] The Bulgarians came into direct contact with the Serbs in the mid-9th century. Constantine Porphyrogennetos provides several reports on Bulgarian-Serbian relations in the 9th century and the changing military fortunes of both sides.[92] They were a consequence of the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts and a reflection of the efforts of both to establish control over the Serb-populated areas of the Balkans. This is apparent from the fact that during internal power struggles in the Serbian ruling family, its members sought refuge either in Bulgaria (Klonimir, Časlav) or Croatia (Peter, Prvoslav, Bran, Stefan, Bran's son Paul). Those conflicts came to a climax during the reign of Emperor Simeon when the Bulgarians, in their second campaign against the Serbian prince Zachariah (921–925/926) in 925/926, captured first the Serbian *župans* and then "all of the people" and took them into captivity in Bulgaria, except for a handful that had fled to Croatia.[93]

On the other hand, we cannot know whether Byzantium had direct authority over the Serbs in the earliest period of their history except in the neighboring Dalmatian cities (Dubrovnik, Kotor) and on the South Adriatic coastline in the Theme of

88 This is most clearly expressed in Pope Nicholas' responses to Khan Boris, see the chapter *Indirect Byzantinization: Bulgaria as a Case Study*, I, 38–43.

89 *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 326, 345; *Nikolov*, Bulgarian Church, 139–157.

90 See the chapter *Indirect Byzantinization: Bulgaria as a Case Study*, I.

91 For the Slavs in the Central Balkans see *Komatina*, Slavs, 55–82; *Hrissimov*, Slavic Tribes, 465–489.

92 *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 231–271.

93 DAI, 32. 68–99, 123–126; *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 246, 250, 258.

Dyrrachion.[94] Under Basil the Macedonian (867–886), the Byzantine Empire reestablished supreme authority over the Croats,[95] so the flight of some members of the Serbian ruling family to Croatia can be seen as evidence of indirect Byzantine influence on Serbia from the west. The report that the Serbian prince Zachariah went from Croatia to Constantinople and then returned to Serbia in an attempt to return to power supports this, as does the attack of Simeon's army on Croatia after his second successful campaign against Prince Zachariah.

The report that the Serbian prince Peter (892–917/18) acknowledged the suzerainty of Leo VI (886–912) and, at the same time, made peace with Simeon of Bulgaria and even made him his godfather is the earliest evidence of the Serbian prince's vassalage to the Byzantine emperor. Preparing for the Battle of Achelous in 917, the Byzantine emperor sent the *strategos* of Dyrrachion to try to entice the Serbian prince Peter into an alliance by offering gifts. This is the earliest confirmation of the role of the *strategos* of Dyrrachion in implementing the Empire's policy in the Serbian lands. One of the consequences of the Bulgarian victory at Achelous was a change at Serbia's helm. Simeon captured Peter, took him to Bulgaria, and installed his protégé, Paul (917/18–921), in Peter's place. Then, Simeon and Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944) vied for control over the Serbs, supporting one pretender to the Serbian throne or another. This "game of thrones" ended with the arrival of Zachariah, who, having vanquished Simeon's army, sent their arms to Constantinople as a symbol of triumph. Finally, after Simeon's death, Prince Časlav (927/928–?) escaped from Bulgaria, rebuilt his realm with the generous gifts he had received from the Byzantine emperor in return for recognizing his supremacy, and resettled in his land many Serbs who had fled from Bulgaria to Constantinople. The rapprochement between Prince Časlav and Romanos I was certainly one of the results of the peace Byzantium had made with Bulgaria in 927.[96]

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The Balkan Peninsula, which had undergone major demographic changes in the 6th and 7th centuries and was not fully under Constantinople's military and administrative control, was still seen as part of the Empire's territory. The Empire's decision to channel its military and economic resources into the western and, later, eastern provinces made the entire network of Late Antique and Early Byzantine fortifications of more use to the peoples settling in the Balkans than to the Empire and its defense, which had been its original purpose. Besides, the infamous inaccessibility of the Balkans – not a mere literary trope but a realistic description of the geographical configuration – was more advantageous for steppe tribes accustomed to guerilla warfare than for the Empire's troops.

From the Bulgar settlement and the formation of their state until the fall of the First Bulgarian Empire in 971 or 1018 when Basil II established the Empire's northern

94 *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 233; *Prigent*, Évolution, 393–417.

95 *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 269; *Džino*, From Justinian to Branimir, 222.

96 DAI, 32.68–81, 99–145; *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 246, 249–250, 253, 255–256, 259–261, 264. For the conflicts between Bulgaria and Serbia in this period see *Komatina*, O srpsko-bugarskoj granici, 31–42.

frontier on the Danube, the fate of the central Balkans depended on the balance of power between Byzantium and Bulgaria. For much of those three centuries, the Bulgars almost continuously spread their influence, taking control of most of the central Balkans.[97] The age of Krum and Simeon saw particularly intensive territorial expansion, with Bulgaria gradually emerging as a leading political actor in the Balkans. The Byzantine frontier in the Balkans was defined in relation to Bulgaria, which means that the Byzantine presence in the interior of the Balkans depended on the Empire's ability to overpower its only true rival. For all its efforts and some partial success, Byzantium for centuries struggled to achieve such dominance.

The Byzantine response to the Bulgar political and military expansion was multipronged. Incapable of subduing its rival by arms, the Empire had to seek other ways to establish control in the Balkans. Bulgaria's integration into the Byzantine cultural sphere unfolded through a range of channels, from bestowing titles on some Bulgar rulers to incorporate them into the Empire's administrative apparatus to diplomatic marriages between members of Byzantine noble houses and the Bulgarian ruling family to make Bulgaria a client state, to Christianization and establishing an ecclesiastical presence in Bulgaria (which was not a planned mission of Constantinople's but a product of the specific political moment). However, the patterns and practices adopted by the Bulgars were not literal copies of their Constantinopolitan originals but adaptations shaped by proto-Bulgarian culture and customs, as well as by developments on the ground. Serbia was a similar case.[98] By the time Basil I acceded to the throne, Roman missionaries had already Christianized the Serbian population,[99] subjugating them to Rome, which, acting through the Diocese of Pannonia, headed by Methodios, one of the "apostles to the Slavs," sought to restore its influence in the territory of Illyricum in the era of Prince Mutimir (?–891).[100]

Yet Byzantium would not achieve domination in the Balkans until Basil II pacified this territory and the Byzantine Empire realized that its presence in the Balkans would have to involve not only the military-administrative apparatus but also – and perhaps more importantly – the diocesan network of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[101]

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97 For archaeological evidence see *Bugarski – Radišić*, Archaeological Testimonies, 91–99.

98 A golden seal of the Serbian prince Strojimir, dating from the 9th century, has been preserved. The seal features a domed shape with a loop at the top and bears a Greek inscription (K(ύρι)ε βοΐ(θει) Στροήμιρ) surrounding a patriarchal cross, *Živković*, Golden Seal, 23–29. Cf. *Bugarski – Radišić*, Archaeological Testimonies, 96.

99 The extent to which Christianity had truly taken root among the Serbs at that time remains a matter of scholarly debate, given that the earliest Christian names of Serbian rulers do not appear until the latter half of the 9th century.

100 This is confirmed by a letter from Pope John VIII to the Serbian prince Mutimir from 873, which also suggests that there was no established church organization in the territory of Serbia at that time, DAI, 32.27–29; *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 261–285, 334–338; *Idem,* Konstantin Porfirogenit, 243–244.

101 See the chapters *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I and *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II.

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Byzantine Policy toward "Barbarians" in the Southern Balkans from the 7th to the 10th Century and the Beginning of the *Reconquista*

Numerous "barbarian" movements marked the Early Medieval period in Europe, shaping the new ethnic map of the Old Continent. The western part of the Roman Empire did not survive the Migration Period, while rulers in the eastern part of the Empire managed to resist invasions of various "barbarian" tribes up until the early 7th century. The 7th century marks a breaking point in the complicated history of the Byzantine Empire's relationship with the numerous peoples that came into contact with it and were regarded as barbarian by the political and cultural elites in Constantinople. This was particularly true for the Balkans. The collapse of the Danubian Limes opened the door to the great Slavic-Avar invasion in the first years of Heraclius' rule (610–641). One of the consequences of these incursions was the permanent settlement of numerous Slavic tribes within the Empire's (now former) borders. By the end of the century, the complex ethnic landscape in the Balkans saw the addition of the Bulgars. Together with Slavic tribes in the northeast of the Peninsula, they founded the first political entity in territories formerly under Byzantine control.

In the threatened provinces of the Empire, a part of the native population withdrew in response to the settlers' invasion into inaccessible mountainous areas which the Slavic population had no interest in. Their centuries-long isolation in mountain ranges across the Peninsula, with no central authority, contributed to the formation of several autonomous types of government. This caused the central government to conduct efforts aimed not only at the settlers but also at the native population, in order to reintegrate, or return, these people into the state system – a process that could be termed "re-Byzantinization."

Concurrently with the Slavic, and later Bulgar, migration to the Balkans, the eastern borders of the Empire saw the creation of a Muslim state which, in the centuries to come, became the principal focus of Constantinople's foreign policy. The developments in the Balkans were thus of secondary importance for the Empire, except when a peace treaty was in effect or relations with the Arabs were calm. This was just one of the many factors that made renewing provincial government in the Balkan Peninsula, including

determining the limes on the Danube, such a protracted process: it lasted a full four centuries before it was eventually completed under Basil II (976–1025). However, in assessing his endeavor, one must not lose sight of the fact that this result was the culmination of a process that had been unfolding for centuries in varying ways and at different levels of intensity, having begun in the mid-7th century when Emperor Constans II (641–668) embarked on the first large-scale campaign against the Sclavinias.[1]

The court in Constantinople employed various methods during the long-lasting process of integrating the Balkan territory and settled populations. Restoring its governance, Byzantium came into contact with ethnic groups that differed from the *Rhomaioi* in language, religion, law, and custom. Acknowledging their distinctiveness, the Empire incorporated these peoples into its political and social system on special grounds, permitting them a degree of "self-governance." Integration was accomplished through a variety of methods, depending on how each specific ethnos had come into contact with Byzantine territory, building its own relations with the Empire. Based on this criterion, these peoples can be divided into three groups.

One group consisted of recently settled people, such as most of the Slavic tribes and Bulgars, who had, in most cases, conquered former Byzantine territories with arms. Aside from them, sources mention native populations, descendants of the former inhabitants of the Roman Empire, who had lost their immediate territorial and political ties with the center of the Empire because of the arrival of the Slavs and Bulgars. This resulted in their decades-long, sometimes even centuries-long isolation, causing them to develop their own self-governance, shifting their identity away from that of their ancestral lands. This group includes the Latin-speaking Sirmisians and Vlachs, and the Greek-speaking Maniates from the Peloponnesus. The third group includes those who had been settled in the Balkans as part of Constantinople's colonization measures, such as the Mardaites or Khurramites (Persians).

Most of the Slavic tribes and Bulgars who had forcibly, without the Empire's prior permission, occupied Byzantine territories had to be subdued by equally violent measures. The integration of the isolated indigenous groups (Sirmisians, Maniates, Vlachs), as well as ethnic groups whose settlement in the Balkans had been a result of planned colonization (Mardaites, Persians/Khurramites, and others) and had not involved hostilities against Constantinople, was mostly carried out by non-violent means. The only exception was the forced displacement of the Khurramites throughout the Empire following their rebellion.

The first step in integrating Slavs and Bulgars into the Byzantine state and cultural space was the military campaigns undertaken by the central government. However, in the areas it conquered, Byzantium could not constantly keep a sufficiently large standing army, so it was necessary to find a way to continue the integration process of the

1 The term *Sclavinia* referred to territorially defined areas inhabited by Slavs, governed by their own ruler, *Živković*, Sloveni i Romeji, 93–94. Constans' campaign against the Sclavinias is described by Theophanes, 347; as well as eastern writers, Elias, 68.

conquered populations by peaceful means. In this context, the efforts of secular and ecclesiastical administration in the provinces were an important factor or instrument of Byzantinization. In the process of integrating the population settled by the state, as well as restoring control over the indigenous communities, the activities of provincial officials were critical from the onset.

I. Role of central authorities

In 657, Emperor Constans II launched the first campaign that aimed to restore Byzantine control in the southern Balkans after the arrival of the Slavs.[2] Justinian II (685–695, 705–711) led the subsequent campaign in 688, not only against the Sclavinias but also the recently settled Bulgars.[3] Emperor Constantine V (741–775) acquired particular prominence in the struggle against the Bulgars, leading military campaigns as many as nine times.[4] The expedition led by eunuch Staurakios in 783 during the regency of Empress Irene (780–790) is also significant.[5] It allowed the Byzantines to expand and reform their existing provincial organization along the route Constantinople – Thessalonike – the Peloponnesus. The strengthening of Byzantine positions in the Slavic environment in the Balkans, particularly the Peloponnesus, continued in the time of Nikephoros I (802–811).[6] The mentioned military campaigns aimed to retake the southern Balkan Sclavinias and the territories occupied by the Bulgars close to the center of the Byzantine state. In contrast, the Serbian and Croatian lands on the periphery of the Byzantine world was not the focus of the Constantinopolitan court's military and foreign policy efforts until the rule of John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and Basil II (976–1025). However, unlike the Croatian and Serbian lands, Bulgaria was more exposed to Byzantine political, religious, and cultural influence, which allows us to speak of indirect Byzantinization in its territory.

From the 7th century onward, the economic and demographic center of the Empire was located in the East, in Asia Minor. At that time, the Balkans were of secondary importance to the Empire, as they continued to be later. Hence, it is understandable that the majority of Byzantine military forces were based in the East. The eastern military units were relocated to the Balkans only when reinforcements were needed for the Thracian and Macedonian armies, which bore the brunt of the war against the Bulgars. The mobilization of eastern troops for military operations in the European part of the Empire usually caused dissatisfaction among soldiers. The war with the Arabs on the eastern border was much more profitable, allowing soldiers to gain war booty, expand land holdings, and advance in military ranks.[7]

2 Theophanes, 347; Elias, 68.

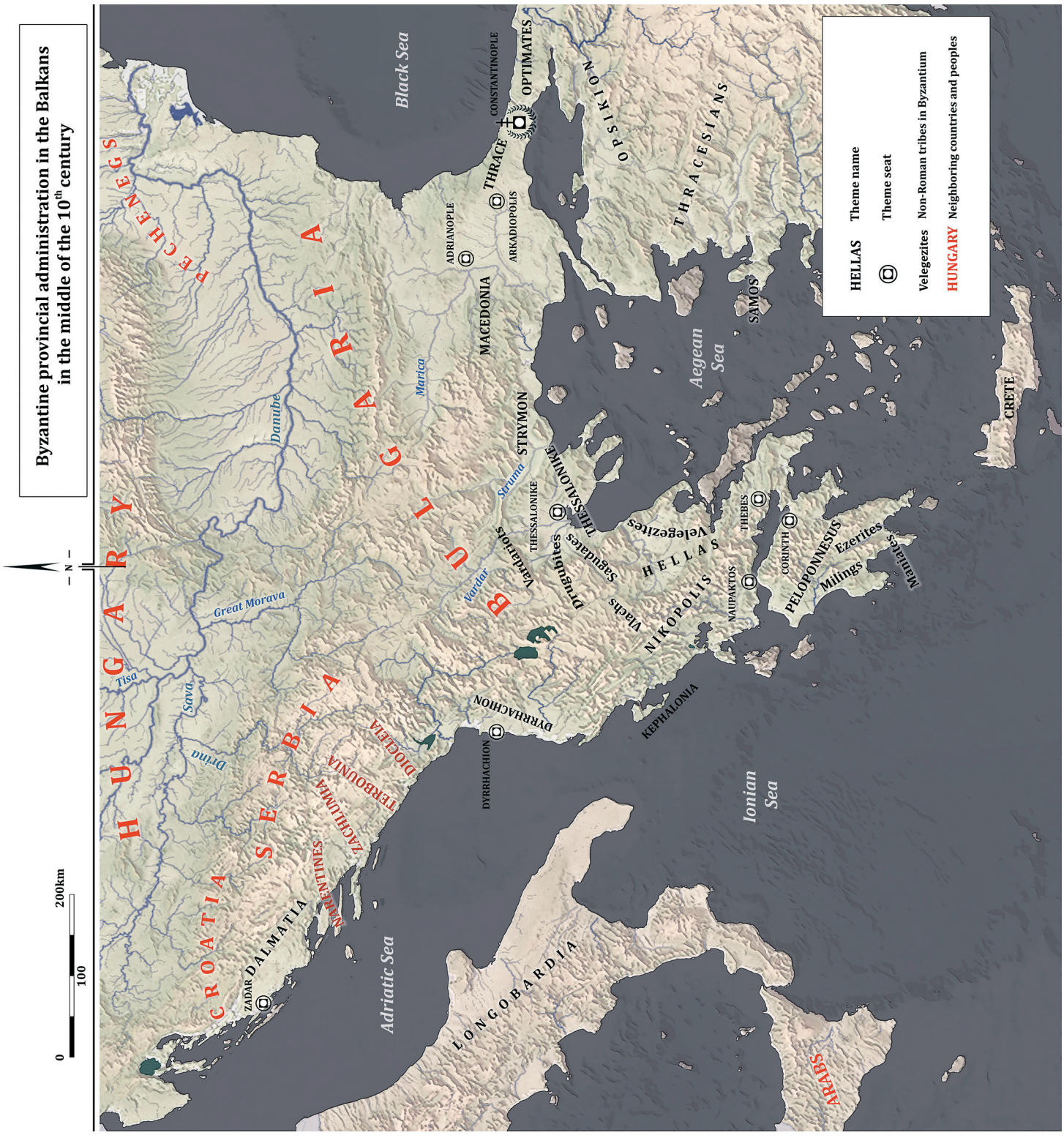
3 Theophanes, 364; Nicephorus, 92; Georgius Monachus, 729.

4 *Ostrogorski*, Istorija, 175–176.

5 Theophanes, 456–457.

6 Cronaca di Monemvasia, 18; Arethas of Caesareia, 192–193.

7 *Krsmanović*, Evnusi, 115.



Map 1.
Byzantine provincial administration in the Balkans
in the middle of the 10th century

The focus of Byzantine foreign policy somewhat shifted from the East to the Balkans during the war with the Bulgarian ruler Simeon (893–927). Regardless, the Balkans was still of secondary military significance compared to the Empire's eastern territories. Until the rule of Romanos II (959–963), there was no designated office whose holder had supreme command over the army in the campaign in western territories; instead, local *strategoi* received extraordinary powers or had their command authority temporarily expanded.[8] A well-known example is the powerful eunuch Aetius, who named his brother Leo the "*monostrategos* of Thrace and Macedonia" at the beginning of the 8th century.[9] The form of military command over "Thrace and Macedonia" or over "Thracesians and Macedonians" long remained a reflection of centralized command in the European part of the Empire, whilst in the East this process was carried out through the *domestikos ton scholon* office. During the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts, holders of the *domestikos ton scholon* office, who represented the central military command, could be deployed in the Balkans. In these cases, they commanded the eastern units incorporated into armies in European themes to meet the needs of the war.[10]

From the 10th century onward, Byzantine offensives relied more heavily on professional (paid) armies. The professionalization of the military was required for the successful, final subjugation of areas that had spent centuries under Arab or Bulgarian control. It was in these circumstances that the *domestikos ton scholon* of the West office was established, which officially centralized the command system in the Byzantine *West*. Introducing the function of supreme commander over the army in the campaign for the western part of the Empire announced more offensive efforts to reoccupy the Balkans.[11]

A more significant shift toward the Balkans may be traced back to the reign of Basil II, a move not well-received in Byzantine literary circles. John Scylitzes, the most significant source for the period of Basil's wars with the Bulgarians, criticized the emperor for neglecting the *East* of the Empire first because of his involvement in civil wars and later the campaigns against Samuel; for "he appeared there [in the East] when the situation needed it, put things in order, then returned, for subjugating the Bulgarians was a constant task and concern."[12] Basil II's preoccupation with the wars in the Balkans made him, in the eyes of contemporary authors such as Leo the Deacon and John Scylitzes, a less relevant emperor than Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969) and John I Tzimiskes, whose foreign policy had focused on the East. This perception of Basil's Balkan policy considerably changed in the late 12th century, during the uprising of Asen and Peter, when the Empire faced a restoration of Bulgarian statehood, reviving the memory of Basil's triumph in Constantinople. The same period saw the addition of the epithet *Boulgaroktonos* (the Bulgar Slayer) to Basil's name.[13]

8 *Krsmanović*, Evnusi, 92, 197.

9 Theophanes, 475.

10 *Krsmanović*, Potencijal, 407–417.

11 *Krsmanović*, Evnusi, 51, 318.

12 Scylitzes, 378.

13 *Stephenson*, Legend, 90–96.

II. Role of provincial authorities

Unable to keep a large standing army in the conquered territories, Byzantium was forced to rely on various administrative mechanisms to integrate the subjugated peoples fully. Consequently, the leading role in the Byzantinization process was assumed by local officials.

Provincial governance, from the 7th century, rested on new principles. In response to Arab conquests, Constantinople started developing the *theme system*. This was a network of military and administrative divisions with special social characteristics, which emerged in the East of the Empire, specifically Asia Minor.[14] At that time, the Byzantine *West*, which in the broadest sense extended to the regions west from the center of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople, encompassing territories in southern Italy, Sicily, and the Balkans, held secondary significance.[15] The thematic system in the West thus developed with a delay of several decades, and the first theme emerged as a response to the arrival of Bulgars and the creation of their state at the end of the 7th century. This was the Theme of Thrace, formed on parts, or remnants, of the former diocese of the same name.[16] Shortly after Thrace, the sources mention the Theme of Hellas[17] and, concurrently with the first themes in the Balkans, another type of militarized frontier territorial unit was established in regions through which important communication routes passed – the *kleisourai*.[18] The first Balkan *kleisoura* was formed in the region of Strymon, or the Strymon Valley, and aimed to protect the road connecting the capital with the Empire's second city, Thessalonike, from Bulgar attacks.[19]

At the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, the theme system in the Balkans was expanded. This was, on the one hand, the result of Staurakios' campaign in the Peloponnesus; on the other, the development and reform of the theme system was a response to the Bulgar expansion during the reign of Krum (803–814). This period saw the formation of several themes: Macedonia, created from a part of the Theme of Thrace, and the themes of the Peloponnesus, Thessalonike, and Nikopolis.[20]

To bolster the Byzantine military presence in the east of the Balkans, Emperor Nikephoros I brought the *stratiotes* from old Byzantine themes in Asia Minor and settled them in this area.[21] During that time, the Mardaites from the Cibyrrhaeotic

14 *Maksimović*, Tematski vojnici, 27.

15 *Krsmanović*, Evnusi, 317; DOSeals I, p. 1.

16 This diocese was part of the late Roman prefecture of the East (Notitia dignitatum, 154), which is why the *strategoi* of the themes in that area (Thrace and later Macedonia) in *taktika* appear among eastern *strategoi*, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 105. In *De thematibus*, however, those themes are considered western (De thematibus, 84, 86). For more on this and other elements of the Late Roman administrative heritage incorporated into the theme system, see *Cvetković*, Elementi, 483–484; On the chronology of the formation of the Theme of Thrace, with an overview of scholarly contributions to the subject, see *Idem,* Reforma, 21–24.

17 *Ostrogorski*, Postanak, 65.

18 *Grēgoriou-Iōannidou*, Byzantines kleisoures, 179–202; *Cvetković*, Osnove, 270–280.

19 *Cvetković*, Osnove, 272; *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 325–327.

20 For more on the founding of these themes: De thematibus, 162–166, 168–170, 172–174, 176–177.

21 Theophanes, 486.

Theme were settled in the Peloponnesus and, by the end of the 9th century, in two more western Balkan themes: Nikopolis and Kephalonia.[22] During the 9th century, or more specifically, after the suppression of the rebellion they had raised around 840, the Khurramites (Persians) were also settled in the Balkans.[23]

The growing Byzantine presence in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas during the 9th century was reflected in the establishment of the themes of Dyrrachion, Dalmatia, and Kephalonia. By the end of the same century, the former *kleisoura* of Strymon also gained the status of a theme.[24]

Aside from the general features typical for the Empire's whole territory, the development of provincial administration in the Balkans from the 7th century involved a number of elements unique to this region, shaped and conditioned by peculiar local circumstances. The conglomerate of different tribes diversified the ethnic landscape of the Peninsula, which was reflected in the organization of government in the reoccupied areas.

Unlike the Croats and Serbs, and the Slavs and Bulgars along the Danube, who had lived on the periphery of the Byzantine world until the 10th century, the Slavs who settled in the southern parts of the Balkans were more exposed to Byzantine military, political, economic, religious, and cultural influence.[25] This enabled Constantinople to subjugate and incorporate them into Byzantine society and the administrative system before the Reconquista of John I Tzimiskes and Basil II. Constantinople's military campaigns against South Balkan Sclavinias resulted in the enslavement of a portion of the Slavic populace, as well as the submission of several Slavic tribes to its supreme authority. Sources mention the colonization of enslaved Slavs in Asia Minor. Theophanes distinguishes the subjugated Slavs from the *τοὺς λοιποὺς* who had recognized Byzantium's imperial supremacy.[26] Acknowledging imperial precedence was the first step toward integration into the Byzantine state system, a process that continued under the supervision of provincial authorities. The inclusion of the Slavs within the Byzantine state framework was accompanied by their Christianization, since, by Byzantine standards, this was a non-Christian and barbarian population.

The Byzantine emperor recognized the authority of Slavic leaders over their tribes, institutionalizing it by granting them, typically, the function of *archon*. The office of an *archon* usually came with a suitable court title. In this way, the Slavic chieftains accepted the primacy of the universal Christian empire and the Byzantine

22 Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos mentions the Mardaites of the Balkan themes in his writings: Vita Basilii, 224, 242; De cerimoniis, Tome III, Livre II, 301, 303, 323, 325; *Haldon*, Theory, 207, 209, 221, 223. On the chronology of their resettlement from the East in the Balkans, see *Cvetković*, Settlement, 70–75.

23 Theophanes Continuatus, 178, 180; Genesius, 40–41. On the forced displacement of the Khurramites, see *Treadgold*, Byzantine Revival, 312–315. *Cvetković*, Niže jedinice, 226–228. Cf. *Cheynet*, Théophile, 49.

24 On the mentioned themes and the time of their emergence: De thematibus, 166–168, 174–176, 177–178; *Cvetković*, Niže jedinice, 141–145.

25 New research findings on the relationship between Balkan Slavs and Bulgars with Byzantium in the first centuries after their settlement in the Balkans are presented in the monograph: *P. Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, Beograd 2021.

26 Theophanes, 430.

emperor as their sovereign. This suited the Slavic leaders because it allowed them to legalize and strengthen their rule over their fellow tribesmen. The next step of the Byzantine court was to push out the local leaders by granting, whenever possible, the title of *archon* to officials of Byzantine origin, paving the way for the Hellenization of the Slavs.[27] This policy is particularly well-illustrated by a passage from *The Taktika* of Leo VI, which recounts how Leo's father, Emperor Basil I, subjugated the Slavs to Byzantine archons, Hellenized and Christianized them, and thus won them over to fight on their side.[28] There is no reason to doubt that the approach that Leo VI ascribed to his father had been a common practice in the Byzantine policy toward the Slavic tribes in the Balkans in the previous centuries as well.

A watershed moment for the firmer integration of Sclavinias into the Byzantine provincial system was the establishment of themes in the Balkans. With the emergence of the first themes, the integration of the Sclavinias began, while the strengthening and expansion of the theme system in the following centuries proportionally contributed to the expansion of Byzantine influence among South Balkan Slavs. Surrounded by the military forces of the Balkan themes, Slavic leaders were forced to comply with the demands of Constantinople and become part of the Byzantine administrative system. Consequently, shortly after establishing the Theme of Hellas, toward the end of the 7th century, the leader of the Velegezites, who inhabited the area around Thebes and Demetrias in Greece, became part of the Byzantine administrative apparatus.[29] Similarly, upon forming the theme with a center in Thessalonike (attested in 824), it became possible to incorporate several Slavic tribes in the area into the thematic apparatus: the Drugubites and Sagudates, who lived west from Thessalonike toward Berroia.[30] The situation in the Peloponnesus could not have been much different. Byzantine control over a major part of that Peninsula was restored at the end of the 8th and beginning of the 9th century, which resulted in the establishment of a separate theme in this area. This was a prerequisite for the remaining unconquered Slavic tribes, settled on Taygetos – namely, the Milings and Ezerites – to legalize their status in the Byzantine administrative system in the first half of the 9th century.[31] The same principle was applied to Epirus. Upon forming the Theme of Nikopolis in the second half of the 9th century, the local Slavs – the Baiunites – were

27 *Cvetković*, Principi, 82–90.

28 Taktika of Leo VI, c. 18.95, p. 470. See *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 71–73.

29 There is evidence of one Tichomiros, the imperial *spatharios* and *archon* of the Velegezites – a seal that dates back to the first half of the 8th century, Seibt, *Siegel*, 28; as well as Akameros, *archon* of Belzetia, whom Theophanes mentions when recounting some late 8th-century events, Theophanes, 473–474. For more details: *Živković*, Južni Sloveni, 231–235.

30 Porphyrogennetos writes that Slavic representatives from the Thessalonian *archontia* were in a delegation that stayed at the court of Emperor Michael III (842–867), De cerimoniis, Tome III, Livre II, 219. On the territories inhabited by the Drugubites and Sagudates, see Caminiates, 8. For more details on these Slavic tribes, see: *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 74–80. In the first half of the 9th century, the leader (imperial *spatharios* and *archon*) of the Drugubites was Peter, whose seal is described in *Wassiliou,* Neue Siegel, 249–251.

31 DAI, c. 50, p. 232, 234. See *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 307–315.

subdued.[32] By extension, we can assume that after the establishment of the Theme of Strymon at the end of the 9th century (first attested in the *Kletorologion of Philotheos* from 899), the local Slavic population was incorporated into the thematic hierarchy.[33]

It is important to note that at first, Byzantine control over the Slavic tribes in the southern Balkans was neither firm nor stable. From the 7th to the 10th centuries, Slavic communities frequently rebelled against the Byzantine government. Constantinople's preoccupations in the East, or its struggles with the Bulgars in the Balkans, created occasional opportunities for them to reassert their independence.

The preserved sources provide data on two basic types of military-administrative units used to integrate non-Rhomaic communities into the theme system in the Balkans from the 7th to the 11th centuries – ethnic *archontiai* and *tourmai*. *Archontiai*, or archontias, were the typical form of government among peoples with developed self-government, which Constantinople merely sanctioned and incorporated into its provincial apparatus. This practice was commonly used for newly settled peoples, like the Slavs, who brought with them their traditional form of governance, but also for native communities (Sirmisians, Maniates, Vlachs), which had established their own autochthonous organs, having for decades and centuries lived surrounded by a sea of settlers.[34] Ethnic *tourmai* enjoyed a lesser degree of self-governance than *archontiai*. This type of military-administrative division was characteristic of tribes and people under Constantinople's firmer control – the communities whose settlement had come about due to Constantinople's colonization measures, like the Khurramites, the Mardaites of the Peloponnesus, Kephalonia, and Nikopolis themes, and a smaller group of Bulgarians in Chalkidike.[35]

Archontes, primarily the Slavic ones, were, to an extent, subjected to the theme *strategoi*. That is suggested by Porphyrogennetos' account of the rebellion of the Milings and Ezerites in *De Administrando Imperio*, where the emperor describes how they rebelled against the *strategos* of the Peloponnesus, refusing the obedience they had pledged.[36] The subjection of Slavic leaders to the *strategoi* is attested by a detail from Kaminiates' account of an Arab siege of Thessalonike from 904. The account mentions that, to obtain help from the Strymon Slavs, the commander of Thessalonike contacted the *strategos* of Strymon, under whose jurisdiction

32 The seal of Hilarion, the imperial *protospatharios* and *archon* of Vagenetia, dates back to the 9th or 10th centuries (PmbZ, #22605); the seal of Theodore, the imperial *spatharios* and *archon* of Vagenetia, is datable – albeit tentatively – to the 7th or 8th century (PmbZ, #7481*). For more details, see *Živković*, Južni Sloveni, 237–238.

33 In 904, Niketas, the emperor's plenipotentiary, in the absence of the wounded Thessalonian *strategos* Leo, following the Arab attack on the city, asked for military aid from the Slavs and their archons, which were under the jurisdiction of the *strategos* of Strymon, as Kaminiates highlights: Caminiates, 19–20. For more details see *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 77–80.

34 *Cvetković*, Principi, 82–90.

35 *Cvetković*, Principi, 90–92.

36 DAI, c. 50, p. 232, 234

they fell.[37] John Kaminiates also writes that the Drugubites and Sagudates were under the jurisdiction of the Thessalonike administration, providing additional evidence of the inferior and subordinated status of the Slavic archons compared to theme authorities.[38] Subordination to the relevant theme *strategoi* also marked the status of the archons of the Maniates. After the restoration of Byzantine control on the Peloponnesus at the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, it became customary for the local *strategos* to send his own official to serve as the *archon* of the Maniates.[39]

The two principal obligations of most ethnic *archontiai* toward Constantinople were providing auxiliary military units and paying taxes.[40] Ethnic *archontiai* that emerged from South Balkan Sclavinias were territorially defined units that probably had a primitive administrative apparatus, with "officials" who served under the *archon* and assisted him in governing the *archontia*. These self-governing units did not develop into independent state forms. On the contrary, in time, Constantinople managed to minimize or eradicate their self-governance. By the beginning of the 13th century, almost all former *archontiai* had become themes but with no indications of autonomy or special status. Only their names preserved the memory of the former autonomous status and ethnic distinctiveness of the local population.

III. Role of the Church

Even though Constantinople displayed considerable political and military domination toward the mentioned Slavic and other non-Rhomaic and pagan communities within the Byzantine Empire, particularly in the southern Balkans, this was not always enough to fully integrate those ethnic groups into Byzantine society. Hence, the state relied on the activities of the Church, whose instruments played an important role in the process of Byzantinization.

In its Byzantinization efforts, the Patriarchate of Constantinople relied on an organized network of bishoprics, autocephalous archbishoprics, and metropolises.[41] In the beginning, the process of Christianization typically unfolded from existing church centers, whose bishops gradually expanded their jurisdiction to neighboring areas settled by barbarians. Over time, new episcopal sees were established with the specific role of Christianizing the settlers, but without formal ethnic features. This category includes the autocephalous archbishopric and later Metropolis of Patras, whose diocesan bishops took a leading role in Christianizing the conquered Peloponnesian Slavs.[42]

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37 Caminiates, 19, 20, 38.

38 Caminiates, 8.

39 DAI, c. 50, p. 236.

40 *Cvetković*, Principi, 87–88.

41 One of the first episcopal sees to play an important role in the Christianization of non-Rhomaic pagan settlers was Gordoservon in Asia Minor at the end of the 7th century. For more details on its status and origin, see *Komatina*, Settlement, 33–42.

42 *Komatina*, Osnivanje Patraske i Atinske mitropolije, 46–47.

In the second half of the 9th century, the state and church leadership in Constantinople introduced an entirely novel practice into the Patriarchate of Constantinople, establishing separate *ethnic bishoprics*. There were several reasons for this. On the one hand, as *The Taktika* of Leo VI reveals, there were tribes whose members had accepted the sacrament of baptism but still held on to their old freedoms.[43] Some of these tribes continued to be hostile towards the Byzantines, which points to the failure of Constantinople's previous Byzantinization policy. Acknowledging the significance that a specific church organization could have in pacifying non-Rhomaic populations, the ruling political and clerical circles in Constantinople started to constitute ethnic bishoprics in the second half of the 9th century. Their primary function was to serve as an institutional framework through which those groups would integrate into the Byzantine ecclesiastical and social system. This novelty was introduced shortly after the end of the century-long Iconoclastic Controversy and the final triumph of Orthodoxy, allowing for the Empire's internal consolidation in both politics and church affairs. As early as the mid-9th century, an extensive missionary campaign was launched targeting various non-Christian groups outside and inside Byzantium's borders.[44] In the last decades of the 9th century, the Bulgarians, too, were granted their own ecclesiastical see. Owing to the Bulgarians' status as a powerful military and political actor balancing between Constantinople and Rome, their ethnic church eventually became autonomous and later autocephalous.[45] While this distinguishes it from the mentioned ethnic bishoprics within the Byzantine Empire and the Church of Constantinople, the Bulgarian case attests to the introduction and spread of the practice of constituting ecclesiastical sees with non-Rhomaic ethnic features at the end of the 9th century.

The newly formed episcopal sees bore names that testify to the distinctive ethnic identity of their flock. The most informative sources about them are the *Notitiae Episcopatuum* and the acts of church councils, in which they appear in the last decades of the 9th century. These ecclesiastical provinces included the Slavic bishoprics Drugubitia,[46] Smolena,[47] Vagenetia[48] as well as Maina,[49] then Vardariots

43 Taktika of Leo VI, c. 18.95, p. 470

44 *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 134–211.

45 *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 236–260, 325–328.

46 Notitiae, 7.299; 9.185; 10.218; 13.228, 824, 827. Peter, Bishop of Drugubitia, is known to have participated in the Photian Council in 879/880, *Mansi*, XVII, 376A.

47 Notitiae, 7.618; 9.492; 10.582; 13.632.

48 This bishopric is not mentioned in the *Notitiae Episcopatuum*. Its existence is attested by the participation of Vagenetia's bishop Stephen at the Photian Council in 879/880, *Mansi*, XVII, 376A. After this region became part of the Bulgarian state, the Byzantine Bishopric of Vagenetia was replaced by the Slavic bishopric of St. Clement, *Komatina*, Oblast Vagenitija, 94–96.

49 As Porphyrogennetos writes in Chapter 50 of *De Administrando Imperio*, the Maniates were descended from Ancient Romans but were called Hellenes because of their paganism, to which they stayed true until the time of Basil (867–886), DAI, c. 50, p. 236. Darrouzes' *Notitiae Episcopatuum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* includes source testimonies about the bishop of Maina, one of the suffragan bishops of the Metropolis of Corinth in the Peloponnesus: Notitiae, 7.495; 9.378; 10.448; 13.444; 21.122 (Notitia 21 lists it as part of the Metropolis of Monemvasia in the Peloponnesus). Sigillographic evidence attests to two of its bishops: Michael (late 9th century) and Theodosios (11th–12th centuries), *Laurent*, Corpus, nos. 583, 584. For more details: *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 290–293.

(Hungarians)[50] and Sagudania,[51] which appeared somewhat later. Most ethnic bishoprics were formed in areas where ethnic *archontiai* also existed (Drugubitia, Smolena, Vagenetia, Maina, and Vardariots).[52]

This category includes a subset of bishoprics whose names also have non-Greek or, more specifically, Slavic etymological roots. Although their names cannot be directly tied to known tribes in Greece and Macedonia, they nonetheless indicate that the population settled in these bishoprics was of Slavic origin.[53] This is the case with the Bishopric of Ezera[54] in the Metropolis of Larissa of the province of Hellas, the bishoprics of Lyoutitza[55], Velikia[56] and Bucuba[57] in the Metropolis of Philippopolis in the province of Thrace, as well as another Velikia in the Metropolis of Philippi in Macedonia.[58]

The coordinated efforts of the state and the church in the further process of integrating non-Rhomaic peoples is also reflected in the evolution of the administrative status of *archontiai* and ethnic bishoprics. From the second half of the 10th century and particularly during the 11th and 12th centuries, *archontiai* were transformed into provinces, or themes, losing the autonomous properties they had as non-typical institutional forms in the theme system. After the 11th century, around the time that saw the gradual abolition of ethnic *archontiai*, sources no longer mention most ethnic bishoprics that had existed in the same areas. Given that *archontiai* served as a transitional institutional form, established to facilitate the gradual inclusion of "barbarians" into the Byzantine administrative system, and that their transformation into provinces marked the end of the main phase in this process, one can assume that the ethnic bishoprics under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople played a similar role. Their establishment marked the final stage in the Christianization and Byzantinization of non-Rhomaic and pagan groups in the Empire, which was largely completed by the 11th century, at least in Greece, Aegean Macedonia, and Thrace, which had ethnic bishoprics, thus mostly eliminating the need for the existence of distinct ecclesiastical sees.

Miloš Cvetković

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50 Vardariots were a group of Hungarians, or Turks, as they are named in contemporary Byzantine writings, who after participating in a campaign of Hungarian magnates south of the Danube in the time of Árpád (895–907) permanently settled in the territory of the Byzantine Empire, in the Vardar Valley, *Cvetković*, Jedna pretpostavka, 20–28. The Bishopric of Vardariots, established at the beginning of the 10th century, played a prominent role in their Christianization. Information about it can be found in Notitiae, 7.308; 10.228; 13.832; 21.103. For more details on the status of Vardariots in the Byzantine state and church organization, see *Cvetković*, Jedna pretpostavka, 19–38.

51 Notitiae, 13.828. On its possible ties with Slavic Sagudates, see *Živković*, Južni Sloveni, 252.

52 *Cvetković*, O „etničkim episkopijama", 291–293.

53 *Živković*, Južni Sloveni, 251–253; *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 288–289.

54 Notitiae, 7.569; 9.440; 10.519; 13.568.

55 Notitiae, 7.586; 9.457; 10.544; 13.594. As a metropolis, it is mentioned in Notitiae, 17.132; 18.153; 19.134.

56 Notitiae, 7.593; 9.464; 10.551; 13.601.

57 Notitiae, 7.594; 9.465; 10.552; 13.602.

58 Notitiae, 7.616; 9.490; 10.580; 13.630.

Part II
ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: INDIRECT BYZANTINIZATION

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Indirect Byzantinization: Bulgaria as a Case Study

With the conquest and integration of new territories into the Byzantine Empire, the peoples that inhabited them became exposed to so-called *direct Byzantinization*. This process involved introducing the Byzantine military, fiscal, and judicial systems in newly integrated regions, accompanied by changes to the ecclesiastical organization, processes that can be traced in the aftermaths of the two reoccupations of the Balkans – the short-lived reconquest of John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and the more lasting reoccupation of Basil II (976–1025). In these cases, the Empire would integrate the territory of another state, its ruler, and its subjects into its sphere of influence. Unlike its direct counterpart, *indirect Byzantinization* involved the dissemination of the Byzantine cultural model in the territory of an independent political entity. *Indirect Byzantinization* encompassed two parallel processes: accepting various Byzantine influences on the social, cultural, religious, and ideological landscape of Slavic states and the local population's response to this process, as the Byzantine model was not blindly replicated but modified to reflect local circumstances. In other words, accepting Byzantine influence in almost all spheres of life unfolded in parallel with adapting the offered – and often imposed – models to the given situation and a community's political needs. Of course, Byzantine influences encountered resistance, as the locals sought to remain as independent from the Empire as possible. Indicators of *indirect Byzantinization* are traceable in all Slavic states, appearing in the same or very similar iterations. This chapter focuses on Bulgaria, the first South Slavic political entity to emerge as a rival to Byzantium's domination in the Balkan Peninsula but nevertheless constantly exposed to various influences from the Empire.[1] In addition, the Byzantine advance into the interior of the Balkans was interpreted through the lens of Bulgaria's conquest.

The polities founded by the Bulgars, Serbs, and Rus were hereditary monarchies, and the Byzantine Empire was not, even though there were periods when the imperial crown was passed down to members of the previous sovereign's family. Despite constant attempts to introduce dynastic succession, this principle was never enshrined in legislation (enacted *de iure*). The Byzantine administrative apparatus was derived from the Roman political system, whereas the Slavic polities were autochthonous creations. Even when these entities adopted elements of the Byzantine system, they did not

1 See the chapter *The Balkans between Byzantium and Bulgaria*, I, 14–22.

fundamentally change their political order. Instead, those borrowed elements – e.g., the ruler assuming the imperial title like the Byzantine sovereign, the nobility bearing court titles or ranks, implementing a Byzantine institution – were adapted to and enmeshed with the existing systems in Slavic states.

Some elements of indirect Byzantinization identifiable in the Bulgar case but also present in later periods, e.g., in Serbia and Kievan Rus, warrant closer examination. These are 1) Christianization, 2) adopting the dominant culture's models via Christianization, 3) modeling the capital city after Constantinople, 4) accepting Byzantine political and ideological doctrines, 5) dynastic marriages with members of the Byzantine imperial family, 6) economic interests.[2]

I. Christianization

A key factor and prerequisite for deeper and more comprehensive penetration of Byzantine influence was the Christianization of the pagan population. Conversion to Christianity had manifold consequences for a society. Some princelings of independent pagan polities recognized Christian monotheism as the most effective way to centralize their authority. The ruler's position was strengthened significantly by the doctrine of the divine right of kings (or emperors, in the Byzantine case). Slavic rulers adopted this long-standing Byzantine doctrine regardless of their relationship with the model they sought to emulate. Christianization also heavily impacted the ruler's relationship with his subjects. Mass acceptance of this monotheistic religion entailed the adoption of certain behavior patterns in the evangelized community.

It was common for Byzantium to guide gradually a community's conversion from paganism to Christianity. In periods of weaker Byzantine influence, the Christianization process tended to be slow, usually failing to go beyond the personal conversion of the ruler and/or his closest family. Unlike the Church of Rome, Constantinople did not pursue an organized evangelizing policy. Furthermore, until the time of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople, missionary work in pagan societies was seen as futile and "casting pearls before swine."[3] Conversion was usually initiated by the rulers of "barbarian" communities, who recognized it could help them consolidate their own authority. Less commonly, Constantinopolitan patriarchs launched isolated attempts to convert certain princelings or entire communities to highlight their influence in the Christian world (particularly during Photios' patriarchate and his clash with Rome).

The sources suggest that the Bulgar khan Kubrat (ca. 635–665) converted to Christianity during the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610–641) and that Telerig (ca. 772–778), having fled to Constantinople, was baptized in the time of Leo IV (775–780) and married a cousin of Empress Irene.[4] A legend in Theophylact of Ohrid's *Martyrdom*

2 For an exploration of these elements in a broader context, see *Obolensky*, Byzantine Commonwealth.

3 *Ivanov*, "Pearls before Swine", 89–90; *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 202, argues that Byzantium pursued organized evangelizing missions toward Bulgaria and the Armenian Monophysites.

4 Bishop of Nikiu, Chronicle, 197; Theophanes, 451.

of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis recounts that the Bulgar khan Enravotas was persuaded to convert by a pious Byzantine captive. Enravotas was an uncle of Boris-Michael (852–889). His nephew later built a small martyrium in Pliska, not far from Omurtag's palace, in his memory.[5] Of course, the Byzantines would have expected baptized rulers and powerholders to launch a mass conversion campaign. These initial steps in the Christianization process were sluggish and disjointed, and Bulgar rulers often proved bitter opponents of Christianity.[6]

Although Christianity was slow to gain traction among the ruling classes of the khanate, the sources indicate the Bulgar rulers' ambiguous position toward the new religion. Several Greek-language inscriptions describe Khan Omurtag (814-831), notorious for his brutal persecution of Christians, as "ὁ ἐκ Θεοῦ ἄρχων" with a cross symbol at the end.[7] However, the phrase "an *archon* by the grace of God" was a Greek version of the proto-Bulgarian title "kan sybigi," attesting to both the endurance of the proto-Bulgarian tradition and growing Byzantine influence in Bulgaria.[8] The Christian community in Bulgaria seems to have grown in Omurtag's day due to intensifying Byzantine-Bulgar relations.[9] Estimates suggest that Christians had become a sizeable minority in Bulgaria by the late 8th and early 9th centuries. Most of them would have presumably been ethnic Greeks, although we cannot rule out the possibility that they included some Slavs and Bulgars, who had yet to be fully slavicized. Hence, it is unsurprising that Omurtag's title was translated into Greek, as this was likely how he addressed all of his subjects. Owing to their skills, Greeks often served in the Bulgar military and administrative apparatus.[10] In addition, some married into the Bulgar ruling family. According to an anonymous chronicle, one Constantine Patzikos married Krum's sister.[11]

Wars provided another opportunity for the intermingling of the two states' subjects and their customs, and the Byzantine Church let its priests proselytize where they could. Theophanes Continuatos provides further evidence of cultural interaction, describing the ceremony of signing the Byzantine-Bulgar peace treaty in 816. Reportedly, Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813–820) pledged to uphold the treaty by performing some pagan customs – pouring water into the ground, tossing a saddle, and killing hounds; for his part, Omurtag probably promised to observe the agreement by swearing an oath on the Bible.[12]

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5 Theophylaktos, Martyrio, 150–155; *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 169. Theophylact's *Martyrdom* provides a brief history of the Bulgarian Church because the Archbishopric of Ohrid was seen as its continuator under Byzantine patronage.

6 *Simeonova*, "Avar Costume", 139, 143.

7 *Beševliev*, Inschriften, 156, 164, 216, 260, 270.

8 *Simeonova*, "Avar Costume", 138–139.

9 *Schreiner*, Christentum in Bulgarien, 51–61; *Rašev*, Vizantijcite v Bůlgarija, 151–162; Stepanov, Bolgary i hristianstvo, 3–10; *Stepanov*, State-formation, 18–20; *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 154.

10 *Sophoulis*, Incorporating the Other, 65–66.

11 Scriptor Incertus, 41.

12 Ignatius, Vita Nicephori, 207; Theophanes Continuatos recounts this episode with revulsion, condemning Leo V the Armenian's partaking in pagan customs, Theophanes Continuatus, 50. For further reading on this event see *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 154.

Organized Christianization of Bulgars did not begin until the age of Khan Boris, who took the Christian name of Michael (Mihail) after the Byzantine emperor Michael III (842–867) upon his conversion.[13] Boris I's attempt to convert his people through the Church of Rome shows that Christianity opened the door to Byzantine political domination. The attempt ultimately failed, but his correspondence with Pope Nicholas I demonstrates how espousing Christianity as the official religion profoundly changed the traditional social order, deeply affecting individual and collective everyday life. Vacillating between Constantinople and Rome reflected the challenges of introducing the Christian way of life. While Patriarch Photios was sterner and more philosophical in his missives, Pope Nicholas I was more specific in his guidelines for a Christian lifestyle, allowing a grace period for the community to get gradually accustomed to the new way of life[14] and advising against violent methods during the conversion process.[15] However, these letters should be seen in the context of the rivalry between the Constantinopolitan patriarch and the pope and the aspirations of each to establish his influence in Bulgaria via the Christianization process.[16]

An illustrative example of the challenges Christianity brought to the Bulgars' everyday life is the ancestor cult, highly venerated in pre-Christian Bulgaria: forbidding prayer for deceased parents who had died as pagans must have been difficult to explain and emotionally unacceptable to commoners in Boris' Bulgaria, who were suddenly expected to embrace the new religion. In addition, Pope Nicholas' reply shows that adaptation to the new lifestyle encompassed a string of daily matters, such as diet, marriage, warfare, bathing, clothing, and so on.[17] The break with tradition and a sharp turn to Christianity led to repression in Bulgaria, creating conflicts between the ruler and other holders of political power. If Boris encountered opposition within his closest family (his eldest son, Vladimir, attempted to revert to paganism) and in boyar circles, having to put down a rebellion and execute 52 boyars and their children,[18] how commoners coped with this painful process, reduced to acceptance of a new lifestyle and a different value system, is an open question. This was precisely what the supporters of the new religion sought to impose, regardless of whether they were locals or Byzantine outsiders.

Bulgaria's new religion required a tangible manifestation. An imposing three-aisled basilica was erected in Pliska, with the construction works probably begun as early as 870, during the reign of Khan Boris. Its design reveals that it drew on Early Byzantine basilicas rather than contemporaneous Constantinopolitan architecture, which favored domed edifices with a cross-in-square floor plan. The basilica was built

13 See the chapter *The Balkans between Byzantium and Bulgaria*, I, 19. Several surviving lead seals mention both of the khan's names, the secular and the baptized, cf. *Vasilev*, Oloven pečat, 3–6.

14 See, for instance, Nicolai I epp. 99, Chapters 104 and 105, p. 599; *Simeonova*, Diplomacy of the Letter, 198–222.

15 Nicolai I epp. 99, chapter 102, p. 599; *Ivanov*, "Pearls before Swine", 98–99.

16 *Dvornik*, Photian Schism, 91–131; *Simeonova*, Diplomacy of the Letter, 223–248; *Ivanov*, "Pearls before Swine", 98–99; *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 213–224.

17 Nicolai I epp. 99, 568–600.

18 For more details on the rebellion see *Ziemann*, Rebellion, 613–624.

atop an Early Christian martyrium. The complex included an episcopal palace with baths, a scriptorium, and other outbuildings. A surviving seal of Archbishop George attests that the Church at Pliska served as a diocesan seat.[19]

The Bulgars made their resistance known, not only when they rejected the new religion but also when they espoused it. Indeed, Boris wanted a new religion and the Christian Church, but one whose status would favor the political needs of his realm. The Bulgarian church organization must initially have depended on Constantinople and Greek clergy. However, two parallel processes emerged in its evolution. The first was the aspiration to make the local church as independent from the Patriarchate of Constantinople as possible; the second was Constantinople's intention to limit this independence. Boris-Michael and, in particular, his younger son Simeon (893–927) made continued efforts to empower the Bulgarian Church, well aware that they could only achieve this objective if the church organization relied on the local clergy, whose theological education, of course, depended on the proselytizing work of Greek clerics.

So, the status of the Bulgarian Church and the degree of its independence essentially came down to two fundamental questions: Did organized Christianization involve using Greek as the official liturgical language, which the Byzantines aspired to impose? What was the response of an independent state that had adopted Christianity as its official religion, relying on the Byzantine Church in this challenging process?[20] The Byzantines ultimately yielded in the domain of literacy, choosing to support the mission of the Thessalonike-born brothers Cyril and Methodios.[21] To facilitate the spread of Christianity in different social classes, both ruling elites – the Byzantine and the Bulgarian – endorsed the introduction of the Slavonic language and script in official communication, supplanting the usage of Greek.

Evangelization focused on the fortified settlements (cities), which became seedbeds of Christianity in local milieus. Many of those centers evolved into bishopric seats, the significance of which grew over time. The earliest organization of the Bulgarian Church rested on a handful of bishoprics that had initially been suffragans of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The decision to place Bulgaria under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was passed at the Fourth Council of Constantinople (869/870). The process of establishing an ecclesiastical network in the newly converted land began. The jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople covered all of Bulgaria, with its territory divided between several metropolises, each of which included multiple bishoprics. The foremost metropolitan bishop held the rank of an *exarchos* and the honorary title of *archbishop*. In the western

19 *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 174; *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 118–119; For more information on the basilica see the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 75–76.

20 *Obolensky*, Commonwealth, 119, argues that after having dethroned Vladimir at the state council in 893, Boris moved to the capital city of Preslav and installed Simeon as Bulgaria's ruler. At the same time, Slavonic replaced Greek as the official language. More recently, this view was reiterated by *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 177. Others believe that no council was convened to dethrone Vladimir and install Simeon and that there was no public declaration that the Slavonic language would replace Greek in Bulgaria, *Nikolov,* Convocato omni regno, 547–560.

21 *Ševčenko*, Byzantium and the Slavs, 8–15.

part of Bulgaria, metropolises were founded at Serdica and Morava, with bishoprics established in Belgrade and Breglanica and possibly also in Skopje, Niš, and Vidin. The Bishopric of Serbia, seated at Ras, was established between 873 and 880 as part of the Bulgarian church organization.[22]

The Bulgarian Church gained autocephaly in 879/880, and its metropolises disappeared and became ordinary bishoprics not superior to any of the others. After Bulgaria's southwestern territorial expansion in the late 9th and early 10th centuries, it annexed the Slavic ethnic bishoprics of the Drugubites and Baiunites, as well as the Byzantine urban bishoprics of Ohrid, Valona, Akrokeraunia (Chimara), and Vodena (Edessa). The network of bishoprics in the western part of the Bulgarian realm continued to evolve in the 10th century. The ethnic bishoprics were eventually replaced by the urban bishoprics of Glavinitza, Bitola, and Devol, and parts of some existing ones emerged as new bishoprics in their own right (Strumica, Prizren, and Velbăžd).[23] In a move that highlighted Bulgaria's ecclesiastical independence from Constantinople, the Archbishopric of Bulgaria became a patriarchate, with Dorostolon as its seat. Regardless, its elevation to a patriarchate did little to lessen Byzantine influence in Bulgaria.[24]

After the fall of the Bulgarian empire in 971, its eastern part returned to the fold of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, with a metropolis founded in Ioannopolis (Preslav). However, the autocephalous Bulgarian Church endured in the western part of the subdued empire. In the post-971 period, its primate fled from Dristra to Serdica and then to Moglena and Vodena before joining Samuel and his rebels in their struggle to restore Bulgarian independence in the southwestern part of the former state. The patriarchs continued to serve as the head of the Church in Samuel's Bulgaria, setting up their seat in the political centers of Prespa and Ohrid.[25]

Byzantium's war against Samuel and his successors did not sever the bonds of the bishoprics in Bulgarian territory with the Greek Church. This is apparent in many aspects, including the fact that some bishoprics continued to be called by their Greek names and that Greek inscriptions appeared in frescoes in Bulgarian churches, e.g., in the Samuelian-era inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa.[26] Byzantine influence was apparent in religious art and other features of sacral buildings erected in both the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's Bulgaria.[27]

Even though the Bulgar conversion to Christianity profoundly affected both Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire, historical narratives show a conspicuous lack of interest in the topic.[28] Describing the Empire's relationship with "barbarian" peoples,

22 *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 348–352.

23 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 789–814.

24 *Nikolov*, Bulgarian Church, 139–158.

25 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 802–813.

26 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I. Greek language remains the dominant language in both state and ecclesiastical administration throughout the 9th and 10th centuries, *Popkonstantinov*, Greek inscriptions, 196–197.

27 For more details cf. the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I.

28 See the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople*, II, 397–399, 406–407.

Byzantine authors rarely mention their conversion, and when they do, it is typically for political reasons. The Christian argument tended to be used when it benefited the Empire's interests.[29] When they fought against other Christian groups, the Byzantines saw these conflicts as civil wars.[30] However, the views of Byzantine authors did not reflect the policy the Empire pursued in reality.[31] The Byzantines were well aware of the significance of Christianization, regardless of Constantinople's reluctance to organize evangelizing missions in other lands and among other peoples as Rome did. Still, as the following chapters demonstrate, the Church was the institution that ensured lasting Byzantine influence over Christianized peoples, as evidenced by the canonization of the first Bulgar ruler to be baptized, Boris-Michael, and his veneration as a saint.[32] Even members of the Byzantine intellectual elite had no qualms about citing Boris' sainthood when it suited their agenda. For instance, in one of his letters, Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos reminded Simeon of his saintly father, who had made peace with Byzantium.[33] In the 11th century, Theophylact of Ohrid emphasized that Boris-Michael had been the most pious of all Christian rulers (ὁ χριστιανικώτατος ἐκεῖνος Βορίσης, ὁ Βουλγάρων βασιλεύς),[34] probably in order to increase the prestige of his throne compared to other archbishoprics.[35]

II. Christian culture and everyday life: Introducing new cultural models

Christianization radically changed everyday life for all social classes of the state that accepted the new faith as the official and only permitted religious affiliation. In this long process, new norms and acceptable behavior patterns inevitably clashed with deep-seated traditional pagan beliefs and customs.[36] Members of the Bulgar ruling family who had spent time at the Constantinopolitan court contributed to popularizing certain patterns of Byzantine Christian culture. The sources describe four such cases in the early period of Byzantine-Bulgar relations. The first was Khan Kubrat, who had been raised and baptized at the court of Emperor Heraclius in Constantinople – at least if Bishop John of Nikiû is to be believed, as no other source corroborates his report.[37] The second was khan Telerig who sought refuge in Constantinople, was

29 *Kaldellis*, Ethnography, 131; *Nikolić – Pavlović*, Bulgarians, Serbs, and the Rus, 752.

30 *Stouraitis*, Byzantine war against Christians, 85–110.

31 Byzantine authors had good reason to avoid discussing certain current political issues, see the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople*, II, 406.

32 For more details on these cults, see the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 264–288. Scholars have yet to ascertain whether a cult of Boris-Michael existed, as the available sources provide contradictory reports see *Cheshmedzhiev*, Kŭm voprosa, 158–176; *Idem*, Vladatelskite kultove, 154–183.

33 Nicholaus I Epistolae, 25.57–66. For an interpretation of this section see *Nikolov*, Making a new Basileus, 103–104.

34 Theophylactus, Epistulae, 22. 35–36.

35 See the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others*, II, 43.

36 For illustrative examples on living by the new rules see the chapter *A Glimpse of Daily Life in the Archbishopric of Ohrid*, II.

37 Bishop of Nikiu, Chronicle, 197.

baptized and married to Empress Irene's cousin.[38] The third was Boris-Michael's sister. Theophanes Continuatos and a much later source, Ephraim of Ainos, recount that she was taken to Constantinople as a captive, where she learned Greek and converted to Christianity, eventually encouraging her brother to do the same.[39] The fourth case, from a time when Bulgaria was already largely Christianized, refers to Boris' younger son Simeon, who spent some time in Constantinople receiving an education and preparing for the priesthood. As time would tell, Simeon took home much more than the Christian culture and the Greek language: he espoused a new ideology, which would materialize during his reign in the imperial title he assumed and his aspiration to become the ruler of a universal empire.[40] Besides selected members of the ruling family, Byzantine merchants, artisans, and engineers who brought their skills and experience to Bulgaria played a prominent role in adopting Byzantine cultural models. Some were prisoners of war, while others lived in the borderlands, usually along the Bulgar northern border, beyond the Danube, where much of Bulgaria's Christian population resided.[41] The Empire's influence continued to spread during the Byzantine-Bulgar wars and in everyday contact between the Bulgars and the Byzantines.

Christianity was adopted through liturgy and theology as a daily ritual. Every member of society was involved in the liturgical practice of the Christian Church. On top of that, thanks to the work of Byzantine missionaries, Cyril and Methodios, and their disciples, most notably Clement and Naum, the Glagolitic and Cyrillic scripts emerged, enabling the translations of Greek liturgical texts into Slavonic.

The history of Slavic liturgical practice within the Byzantine rite commenced around the year 886, following the arrival of a group of Archbishop Methodios' disciples who had been expelled from the Principality of Moravia. Their activity unfolded in the southwestern region of the First Bulgarian Empire – a territory today divided between southwestern North Macedonia, southern Albania, and northwestern Greece – where, with the support of the Bulgar prince Boris-Michael, one of the first centers of literacy was established. Modeled after similar institutions that had existed under Methodios, the center in Ohrid was intended for the education and training of Slavic clergy and ecclesiastical functionaries.[42] At the same time, the Pliska and Preslav literacy centers were established in the eastern part of the Bulgarian state, acting as a hub of Byzantine intellectual and theological influence.[43]

The centers of literacy in Ohrid and Preslav were pivotal institutions in the cultural, religious, and intellectual development of the Bulgarian state during the late 9th

38 Theophanes, 451.

39 Theophanes Continuatus, 232; Ephraem, Historia Chronica, 93.2472–94.2500.

40 *Browning*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 57; *Božilov – Gjuzelev*, Istorija I, 253–254; *Georgiev*, Car, 15–55; *Nikolov*, Making a New Basileus, 102. Bulgarian defectors and hostages continued to live at the Constantinopolitan court even in later periods, e.g., John Asen or Emperor Mitso see the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople*, II, 399.

41 *Browning*, Byzantines in Bulgaria, 32–36; *Hristov*, Prisoners of war, 73–105; *Leszka*, Byzantines, 213–224; *Sophoulis*, Incorporating the Other, 65; see also the chapter *The Balkans between Byzantium and Bulgaria*, I.

42 *Obolensky*, Commonwealth, 96; *Pentkovskij*, Materialy, 246.

43 For the centers of literacy in Bulgaria at the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century cf. Istorija na bŭlgarskata srednovekovna literatura, 78–83.

and 10th centuries. They were both instrumental in the establishment of Old Church Slavonic as the liturgical and literary language among the Slavs in South-Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, there existed some differences between the two schools that affected the further development of culture and literacy not only in Bulgaria, but also in medieval Serbia and Kievan Rus.[44]

The Ohrid center produced and transcribed liturgical texts primarily in the Glagolitic script, whereas in Preslav, the Cyrillic script gradually replaced the Glagolitic.[45] Also, as mentioned, Ohrid acted as a center for the dissemination of Slavic literacy and liturgy. Within the liturgical practice of the bishoprics incorporated into the ecclesiastical structure of the Bulgarian state, a corpus of Slavic liturgical books was in use, commonly referred to as the *Clementine Corpus*. The foundational layer of this corpus, compiled between the years 893 and 916, consisted of two principal textual complexes. The first complex encompassed scriptural texts – namely the Gospels, the Apostolos (Epistles), and the Psalter – tracing their origin to translations made under Methodios. The second complex comprised hymnographic texts for the fixed annual cycle, the movable liturgical calendar, and the weekly liturgical structure, preserved in the Menaia, Triodia, and the Oktoechoi. This second corpus incorporated both original Slavic compositions and translated hymnographic works. The Glagolitic script was employed for the transcription of these liturgical texts. In terms of content, the Slavic liturgical books largely conformed to their Greek counterparts used in the nearby Byzantine bishoprics.[46] After the elevation of the Bulgarian archbishopric to the rank of a patriarchate, the liturgy employed a revised and expanded body of Slavic liturgical books, produced in the mid-10th century. This corpus comprised a complete set of hymnographic texts – translated word-for-word from the Greek – including full cycles of the Menaia, the Triodia, and the Oktoechoi, all carefully collated against the corresponding Greek originals. As in earlier stages, these liturgical books continued to be recorded in the Glagolitic script.[47]

In the early 980s, Samuel established a new capital for his realm in the vicinity of Lake Prespa, relocating the ecclesiastical center of the state. The active usage and increased prestige of the Preslav Cyrillic script in the Ohrid-Prespa region at the end of the 10th century led to the creation of a Cyrillic version of the *Clementine Corpus*. Upon the conquest of the Bulgarian Empire under Basil II, Church Slavonic continued to be used legitimately as the liturgical language within the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Also, the newly established ecclesiastical authorities were confronted with the urgent task of aligning the Slavic liturgical tradition with the contemporary Byzantine liturgical practice.[48]

The Preslav center was more oriented towards the Byzantine Empire and was, therefore, more exposed to its influence. It trained the intellectual and ecclesiastical elite of the Bulgarian state and was engaged in the translation and creation of texts

44 Istorija na bŭlgarskata srednovekovna literatura, 79–82.

45 *Savić*, O problemu formiranja, 175–205; see also *Vlasto*, Entry of the Slavs, 175.

46 *Pentkovskij*, Materialy, 246–247.

47 Ibid., 247.

48 *Pentkovskij*, Materialy, 248.

bearing profound ideological significance.[49] Preslav mostly flourished under the reign of Emperor Simeon. Sometime in the 10th or 11th century, the *Chronicle* of John Malalas was translated from Greek into Slavonic, thus providing Bulgaria with a world chronicle which carried on the history of the Bible into modern times and showed the continuity of God's operation in the world down to and including both the Byzantine and Bulgarian Empires. Apart from the mentioned Malalas translation, *Simeon's Encyclopaedia* (*Izbornik*) was produced at the court of Preslav. It consisted of the *Name List (Nominalia) of the Bulgarian Khans*, as well as the parts of the Bible that clearly legitimized the existence of the Bulgarian state. The purpose of this approach was presumably to define the standing of the Bulgarian state in space and time on a global scale.[50] *Izbornik* was produced around 900 and survives in a Russian copy only, made for Sviatoslav II in 1073.[51] It was prefaced by a eulogy of Simeon in verse: "Simeon, great among the tsars, all-powerful sovereign and ruler."[52]

At the court of Preslav, during the reign of Simeon, there were numerous translators and writers, several of whom are known by name. The first one is John the Exarch, probably of Bulgarian origin, born around 890. His translations include two treatises and many sermons of St. John of Damascus, as well as the *Hexaemeron* of St. Basil the Great, produced around 915.[53] The monk (chernorizets) Hrabr was famous for his *Essay on the Slav alphabet*, an important text for the defense of Old Church Slavonic against the Greek language.[54] Constantine, the Bishop of Preslav, was the compiler and translator of a Gospel commentary based on St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. Isidore, written about 893/4. He is also the author of the *Chronicle* based on the Χρονογραφία σύντομος of Patriarch Nikephoros in the 890s, as well as the translator of St. Athanasios' *Tracts against the Arians* in 906/907, produced at Simeon's orders. The last two known writers are Kosmas the Presbyter, who wrote the *Treatise against the Bogomils* in 969/72,[55] and Gregory the Priest, the alleged translator of parts of the *Old Testament* and John Malalas' *Chronicle*. It is believed that Emperor Simeon made or helped to make the *Zlatostruj*, the Slavonic translation of selected sermons of St. John Chrysostom.[56] Some of the other devotional works translated in the First Bulgarian Empire were St. John Klimax's *Ladder to Paradise*, a treatise on monastic life, the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschos, and the works of St. Ephraim the Syrian. Translations of secular writings included the *Physiologos* and Kosmas Indikopleustes' *Christian Topography*.[57]

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49 Istorija na bŭlgarskata srednovekovna literatura, 81.

50 *Kajmakamova*, Foundation of Bulgarian State, 115–116; cf. *Vlasto*, Entry of the Slavs, 176.

51 For the edition of *Izbornik* see Simeonov sbornik.

52 English translation in *Petkov*, Voices, 92–93.

53 Johannes Exarch. A part of it has been translated into English by *Petkov*, Voices, 90–92.

54 For the edition of the text see *Kuev*, Černorizec Hrabr; cf. *Ivanova*, Inventing Slavonic, 188–215. For the English translation of the text see *Petkov*, Voices, 65–68.

55 Edition of the Treatise in *Begunov*, Kosma Presbyter. For the partial translation into English see *Petkov*, Voices, 68–83.

56 Cf. *Miltenov*, Zlatostruj.

57 *Vlasto*, Entry of the Slavs, 176–178. For more details on the Bulgarian chronography of the period in question see *Podskalsky*, Theologische Literatur, 471–478.

Thus, little by little, the Christianization of Bulgaria changed the everyday life of an ordinary person. The first literary genre to emerge in Bulgaria was homiletics, that is, texts essential for everyday life within the newly adopted religion (Sunday and festal sermons). The prototypes of these homilies were Byzantine, translated into Old Church Slavonic. Several preserved collections were most likely used as handbooks for preaching by the earliest missionaries.[58] These translations were, nonetheless, simple and accessible, neither profound nor contemplative in nature, as testified by Theophylact of Ohrid. They were intended for broader popular audiences rather than for the educated elite.[59]

Encounters with theological writings changed individual and collective perceptions of the system in which the population now lived. Byzantine legislation, an amalgamation of secular and ecclesiastical law, in part made its way into neighboring political entities. Legal texts were translated into Slavonic and some of them were modified to reflect the local situation and the customary law of Bulgaria and Serbia.

The work of Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodios enabled the Slavic population to come into contact with religious writings and legislation in the Slavonic language. This contributed to the establishment and growth of the church organization, as well as to the emergence of other state institutions in Slavic countries.[60] Legal compilations that introduced the local population to Greco-Roman law, the Byzantine imperial ideology, and the dogma of the Christian Church proved particularly impactful for these nascent Christian states. Cyril and Methodios began their mission of translating liturgical books into Slavonic in Great Moravia, and their disciples continued their educational and evangelizing work in the First Bulgarian Empire.

Scholars tend to agree that Methodios translated the *Synagoge of 50 Titles* of John III Scholastikos into Slavonic using the Glagolitic script. This Slavonic translation became known as the *Methodian Nomokanon*.[61] The compilation includes canons arranged by subject into 50 chapters, including canons of the Holy Apostles, decisions of ecumenical and local councils of the Eastern Church, and over 60 excerpts from the second and third letters of St. Basil the Great to Amphilochius of Iconium.[62] Due to its structure, the content of the *Synagoge of 50 Titles* is more limited compared to the *Syntagma of 14 Titles*, a younger Byzantine collection of canons.[63]

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58 *Podsklasky*, Theologische Literatur, 170.

59 Ibid., 179.

60 The Cyrillo-Methodian literary opus as a whole lies beyond the scope of this chapter. For a hypothetical reconstruction of the Cyrillo-Methodian corpus, see the chapter "Methodius in Moravia" in *Dvornik*, Byzantine missions, 160–193.

61 That is usually done with a reference to Vita Methodii, Ch. 15, which claims that Methodios translated an unspecified "Nomocanon" into Slavonic, Vita Metodii, 160.

62 See *Troianos*, Byzantine Canon Law to 1100, 118–120; edition: *Beneševič,* Synagoga v 50 titulov; Scholastikos later revised this canonical compilation, adding imperial legislation from the age of Justinian I to put together a collection with canonical and secular content named after its compiler (*Nomocanon of John III Scholastikos*).

63 Unlike the *Synagoge of 50 Titles*, this collection includes the corpus canonum Ecclesiae Africanae, synodal decisions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and other canons of the Holy Fathers, see *Troianos,* Byzantine Canon Law to 1100, 120.

The *Synagoge of 50 Titles* is thought to have been selected for translation due to its conciseness and the convenient arrangement of the subject matter. Based on a surviving Slavonic text from a much later period, the dominant view among modern scholars is that the *Nomocanon of John III Scholastikos* was not translated in its entirety, with the translation covering slightly under two-thirds of the Greek text.[64] While certain parts of the text may have been left out intentionally, as is commonly held, the Slavonic translation modified the canonical text, omitting some canons or translating them rather liberally. These interventions were usually attributed to Methodios' familiarity with jurisprudence and intention to adapt the selected content to the social landscape of the Slavic lands that were to use the book.[65] The Slavonic translation of the *Synagoge* shares some similarities with the 6th-century Latin collection known as *Codex Canonum ecclesiasticorum Dionysii Exigui*, suggesting that Methodios was familiar with its contents. The manuscript of the *Codex*, dated to 867, which, among other things, includes the beginning of Apostolic Canon 34, contains the same five Slavonic words in the Latin transcription as the Slavonic translation of the *Synagoge*.[66]

Another important code intended for the Slavic state was the *Law for Judging the People (Zakonъ sudnyi ljudьmъ)*, much of which was suitable for implementation in the Principality of Great Moravia of the Methodian age. Drawing on Chapter 17 of the Isaurian *Ecloga*, the *Law for Judging the People* describes criminal offenses against the Christian faith and church, the person and morals, and individual property, softening the secular punishments proposed in the *Ecloga* and listing spiritual penances (epitimia). The legislator wanted to do away with the practice of taking justice into one's own hands, i.e., self-help (Chapter 19), which characterized pre-political and unorganized societies. The *Law for Judging the People* prescribed ("as God's law decrees") trials involving the burden of proof and witnesses (Chapter 2) and introduced mandatory Christian marriages, along with harsh sanctions for breaking Christian marriage vows. It set down the principles of monogamy (Chapter 15) and the indissolubility of marriage except for specific legal reasons (Chapter 33). Finally, the *Law for Judging the People* defined marriage impediments stemming from consanguinity and spiritual kinship (Chapters 8, 9, 14).[67]

The Christian ideology of marriage, codified in the *Law for Judging the People*, and some other characteristic formulations (e.g., invoking "God's law") made their way into the *Anonymous Homily/Homily to the Lord-Judges* in the Glagolitic *Codex Clozianus*. The text, addressed to unnamed lords, seems suitable for the historical context of a young Christian and unfamiliar realm. Several things suggest that Methodios wrote the homily

64 *Vašica*, Metodějův překlad nomokanonu, 15, calculated that the translation left out 37.5% of the Greek text. For the structure of the Slavonic *Syntagma* based on the *Ustiug* and *Iosafovskaja* manuscripts, see Nomokanonъ, MMFH IV, 237–241. Cf. *Žužek*, Determining Structure, 139–169; *Gallagher*, Church law, 237–258.

65 Žužek summarizes different opinions: *Žužek*, Determing Structure, 154, 157; *Idem*, Kormčaja kniga, 16–7. See also *Dvornik*, Byzantine missions, 178; *Gallagher*, Church law, 97, 101.

66 For bibliography on this issue see *Najdenova*, Pravnite pametnici, 138.

67 For the legislation concerning marriage see the chapter *Between Custom and Law: Marriage in the Territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid*, II.

while serving as the Archbishop of Pannonia.[68] Although not a legal text, the homily contains certain important legal principles applied in civil lawsuits and criminal cases, including unbiased judgment, the non-retroactivity of this law, and observing the law.[69]

The two Slavic saints' disciples brought their mission to Bulgaria. In his correspondence with Patriarch Photios and Pope Nicholas I, Khan Boris learned about the Christian dogma and became acquainted with the Christian nature of the most important legal institutions. These letters show that the Bulgars had lived in polygamy before their conversion, having sexual relations even with relatives, and had been unaware of legal grounds for the dissolution of marriage.[70]

Bulgaria's definitive acceptance of Christianity from Constantinople meant broader access to Byzantine law as an instrument of political and social organization. The Christianized Bulgarian cities, Preslav and Ohrid, as mentioned, became translation centers in the ensuing centuries. The language and orthography of some parts of the *Efrem Kormčaja*, an Old Russian nomokanon comprising Slavonic translations of various Byzantine writings, indicate that its protograph originated in Preslav.[71] The translated Greek texts were written no later than 912, suggesting that they were translated during the reign of Emperor Simeon. This is the *Nomokanon of 14 Titles* of the third redaction,[72] known to scholarship as the *Old Slavonic Kormčaja* (the *Drevneslavjanskaja kormčaja*).[73] Its canonical part was divided into fourteen titles with much more content than Scholastikos' syntagma, encompassing the corpus canonum Ecclesiae Africanae, synodal decisions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and various canons of the Holy Fathers.[74] The Slavonic nomokanon included the translation of a codex with some of Justinian's novels, most of which have to do with church organization. Unlike the Greek original which contains the *Collectio tripartita*, the Slavonic book includes *Collectio 93 capitulorum*, with six chapters added to the compilation of Justinian's legislation known as *Collectio 87 capitulorum*.[75]

V. Zlatarski argued that the *Nomokanon of the 14 Titles* of the third redaction, which includes the entire *Ecloga* and the *Farmer's* and *Rhodian Sea Laws*, was compiled specifically for the Bulgarian realm.[76] These legal writings are indeed listed in the contents of the Slavonic *Efrem Kormčaja*, even though the volume does not actually

68 Edition of the homily: *Vaillant*, Homelie, 23; see also *Gallagher*, Church law, 107; *Najdenova,* Anonimnata Homilija, 21–22.

69 *Papastathis,* Procedural principles, 272–273.

70 *Laiou,* Consensus facit nuptias, 197; *Nikolić,* Pravna materija, 469.

71 *Ščapov*, Vizantijskoe i južnoslavjanskoe pravovoe nasledie, 67, 91.

72 The third redaction is datable to 787–861 and known as the redaction of Patriarch Tarasios or the pre-Photian redaction, *Beneševič*, Kanoničeskij sbornik, 260–261, 269–271. The preface with an index of the canonical material grouped into 14 titles, which precedes the *Syntagma* and the *Nomokanon*, are considered the oldest elements of the *Kormčaja*.

73 *Beneševič*, *Drevne–slavjanskaja Kormčaja*.

74 *Troianos*, Byzantine Canon Law to 1100, 120.

75 The Slavonic text of *Collectio 93 capitulorum* has survived in the *Efrem Kormčaja*, accompanied by the Greek text; for a modern edition, see *Beneševič*, Drevne–slavjanskaja Kormčaja, 739–837; see also *Ščapov*, Sobranie novell.

76 *Zlatarski,* Kanoničeski i graždanski zakoni, 115.

include them, probably because they were part of a now-lost Greek protograph of the Slavonic collection.[77] There is some evidence that the Slavonic translation of the *Farmer's Law* could have appeared during the First Bulgarian Empire,[78] with some scholars proposing that certain provisions from the *Procheiron*, e.g., those on marriage and divorce (VII, 1–28 – On Prohibited Marriages)[79] and on bishops, priests, and monks (a portion of Chapter XXIV, the fourth part of Chapter XXVIII, 1, 2–4), were translated around the same time.[80]

The Slavonic translation of the *Ecloga* with the Preamble has not survived in the Bulgarian manuscript tradition but in Old Russian legal collections. The text of the Slavonic *Ecloga* is usually dated to the late 10th century based on the South Slavonic lexemes it contains.[81] In addition, the Slavonic *Ecloga* is not fully consistent with the Greek original, revealing some minor changes. These modifications suggest that the translation was made for use in a much less economically advanced society than the Byzantine.[82]

The place of these laws and their adaptations (e. g. *Law for Judging the People*) in the legal systems of the First Bulgarian Empire remains elusive. Of course, the translated imperial legislation and ecclesiastical law collections must have served as instruments for formulating a political doctrine that would have been conducive to the rise of central secular authority and successful implementation of the church organization.[83] However, Byzantine legal writings in the Slavonic language reveal that some modifications were made to their text and content to reflect the needs of the recipient community. The alterations indicate that the Slavic translators or commissioners of those translations quite reasonably recognized the need to relax, simplify, or adapt the legal provisions of the dominant legal system.

III. Modeling the capital city after Constantinople

Constantinople, the capital city of the Byzantine Empire, was the most impressive and representative symbol of the dominant culture, with its imperial palace complex, magnificent churches (most notably, Hagia Sophia), monasteries, edifices, frescoed and lavishly decorated interiors, artisan shops, and city walls. Visitors from underdeveloped lands were awestruck by its splendor and sought to emulate it, not only in architecture but also in lifestyle. Foreign rulers' visits to the Byzantine imperial court and encounters with courtiers inspired them to build their own palatial complexes to house their courts and personal apartments and surround themselves with luxury,

77 *Najdenova*, Pravnite pametnici, 150–151.

78 Ibid., 155–159.

79 For more see *Ščapov*, Prohiron; *Idem*, Ekloga; and recent research by *Cibranska-Kostova*, Prohiron/Zakon Gradski.

80 These stipulations also made their way into the Ustiug manuscript. For extensive bibliography on this issue see *Najdenova*, Pravnite pametnici, 159.

81 Ibid., 152–153.

82 See *Ščapov – Burgmann,* Die slavische Ecloga.

83 *Najdenova*, Anonimnata Homilija, 29.

making their wealth and power known through the ruler's vestments and the attire of his courtiers. Diplomatic missions and longer stays in Constantinople, when fathers sent their sons to be educated at the Byzantine court (as Simeon's had done) or as honorary hostages and peace guarantors, provided opportunities for foreign rulers and other notables to see for themselves the opulence of the Byzantine capital and court ceremonial. Constantinople became the model Bulgarian rulers aspired to emulate once they adopted other hallmarks of the dominant culture, along with its Christian faith. In their efforts to develop architecture in their realm, they erected palace complexes, churches, and monasteries mimicking those they had seen in the Byzantine capital. Of course, such ambitious projects required hiring architects, artisans, and craftsmen from Constantinople. John the Exarch speaks of this aspect of Byzantinization, describing the splendor of the Bulgarian capital city, Preslav, in Simeon's day and the emperor's luxurious vestments: Simeon sits enthroned in his magnificent palace "in a garment woven with gold, a golden chain round his neck, girt with a purple girdle, his shoulders adorned with pearls, and wearing a golden sword."[84] Displays of wealth became the mark of the progress achieved by a political entity, people, and its ruler. The Byzantine capital was undoubtedly an important element of Byzantinization, instilling in "barbarian" peoples an aspiration to belong to the world that Constantinople symbolized.

Yet, for all its allure, the acceptance of Constantinople as the cultural paradigm to look up to was a gradual process. Early Bulgar architecture shows that rulers such as Krum and Omurtag mimicked the ancestral culture of the steppe tribes to which the Bulgars had belonged. Pliska, the first Bulgar capital,[85] was built atop the ruins of an Early Byzantine fort.[86] Archaeological excavations have revealed that the first palace of the Bulgar rulers was modeled after Attila's – a big yurt with a timber framework.[87] Krum's palace, or αὐλή, was destroyed in a fire in 811 when Nikephoros I (802–811) captured Pliska.[88] The Byzantine influence on architecture in Bulgaria intensified as early as the first half of the 9th century. This was the flipside of Byzantine-Bulgar armed conflicts, which produced many Christian prisoners of war who had served in the Byzantine army. The Bulgar khans hired some of them to make siege engines for assailing cities in the border zone between Bulgaria and the Empire and, no doubt, other structures that must have reflected Byzantine models.

Perhaps the most imposing among those edifices was the Throne Palace, an Early Byzantine structure expanded under Khan Omurtag or, more likely, under Khan Boris after his conversion to Christianity and Bulgaria's increased exposure to Byzantine

84 Johannes Exarch, 195; English translation from *Obolensky*, Byzantine commonwealth, 104. However, Preslav's status as a political center predated Simeon's reign, *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 218, n. 70.

85 Some argue that Pliska was not the first capital city of the Bulgar khans, cf. *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 188; *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 124.

86 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 67–73.

87 *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 148–149; *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 119–120.

88 For more on the term αὐλή see *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 196; *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 131.

cultural trends.[89] The ruins of the edifice were discovered by archaeologists from the Russian Archaeological Institute of Constantinople in 1899/1900. The floor plan suggests that the Throne Palace sought to imitate Byzantine palatial buildings, such as the Magnaura in Constantinople.[90]

Another testament to Byzantine influence on the daily life of Bulgar rulers was the fact that their palace had a bath, with water supplied from a cistern through a system of ceramic pipes.[91] In addition, in the center of Pliska, at the site where Krum's Palace and, later, the Throne Palace are believed to have stood, archaeological excavations uncovered a platform with a podium. While differing views have been proposed about the date and purpose of this structure, one hypothesis is that the podium could have supported a timber building inspired by the architecture of the Chrysotriklinos in Constantinople.[92]

Constantinople and Pliska were both conceived as cities housing the ruler's permanent residence and the main political centers of their respective states. Pliska's spatial and structural characteristics shared some similarities with the Byzantine capital. Namely, the ruler's residence, surrounded by walls in both cities, was the heart of its urban structure. Also, like the Mese (ἡ Μέση), the main thoroughfare of Constantinople, Pliska had a central road that led to the palace. Large aqueducts ensured water supply in both cities, with water stored in cisterns. The defensive systems of Constantinople and Pliska covered a broad territory with lower population density, and the houses where commoners lived were quite primitive in structure. Within the central urban compounds were churches as edifices with rigid construction. Cemeteries were typically within the city's walled enclosure. Like the Harbor of Theodosios in Constantinople, later abandoned and transformed into arable land, much of Pliska's territory was used for agricultural purposes.[93]

Not unlike Pliska, Preslav employed a concentric zone model with the outer and inner town. The inner town stood on a high terrace on the right bank of the Ticha River, functioning as a citadel. The masonry technique of its defensive walls seems to have been imported from Byzantium, even though this remains a subject of debate among scholars.[94] One key difference between Preslav and Pliska was the former's patriarchal palace with a cathedral and numerous monasteries. The influence of Constantinopolitan architecture and art, still in its early stages in Pliska, culminated in Great Preslav.[95] In terms of size, Preslav was comparable to Thessalonike, the Empire's second city.

The Round Church of Preslav is particularly intriguing, as it has no parallel in contemporary Byzantine art. It is, however, reminiscent of the rotundas of Justinian's

89 *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 178; *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 121.

90 *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 178, especially n. 123 for the Great Palace in Constantinople.

91 *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 184; *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 123.

92 *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 185–186.

93 *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 145.

94 For the relevant literature, see the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 73–74.

95 Ibid.

age, such as those in Philippi and Thessalonike.[96] Following his military victories in Macedonia in 904, Simeon arrived at the walls of Thessalonike. It seems safe to assume that he was impressed by what he saw, although the city had recently been sacked in an Arab raid.

Simeon's court in Preslav was inspired by the Great Palace in Constantinople. The Bulgarian ruler presumably hired engineers and builders from Constantinople to impart their skills and knowledge, as well as artistic concepts and ideology, to local masons.[97] Besides the palace, archaeological findings have uncovered a multitude of buildings, including the patriarch's residence, palace chapels, and so on.[98] White marble flooring in the main hall and glass mosaic tesserae also indicate the involvement of Constantinopolitan masons in building Simeon's capital city. Like Pliska, Preslav had baths and other facilities attesting to the existence of water supply and sewage systems – another invention adopted from Byzantium. Also, the ruler's three-aisled basilica, probably begun as early as the reign of Boris-Michael, shows that Byzantine influence was no less pervasive in the second capital of the Bulgarian Empire. The layout of buildings in Preslav's imperial compound closely resembles that around Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.[99] Elements of Byzantine culture are also apparent in Preslav's sculpture and iconography.[100]

Reports on life at the court in Preslav are scant. The hoard of gold and silver discovered in 1975 gives us an idea of the opulence of the Bulgarian palace, adding to the evidence of growing Byzantine influence in the 10th century. This archaeological find includes around fifty pieces of golden and enamel furniture, silverware, jewels, and silver coins minted for Constantine VII and Romanos II (959–963). Other notable items are a medallion necklace and the plates from a diadem made for a female member of the Bulgarian ruling family. The plates feature scenes from the life of Alexander the Great, attesting to the ties between the Bulgarian ruling house and the Macedonian dynasty in Constantinople. The hoard, replete with items made of precious metals, is believed to have belonged to one of the daughters of Maria Lekapene and Peter I of Bulgaria (927–969), who could have procured the furniture in Constantinople during a visit to the city with her mother in 940.[101]

Everyday household items also reflected the Byzantine culture. For instance, Bulgars used jugs whose shape was reminiscent of Byzantine amphorae.[102] Similarly, clothing accessories and jewelry followed Byzantine fashions. After Bulgaria's conversion, there was a noticeable upsurge in the production of women's accessories.[103]

96 *Magdalino*, Byzantine Antecedents, 3–5.

97 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 286.

98 *Bonev – Slavov – Goryanova*, Archaeological exploration, 10–17; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 285. For more details, see the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 73–75.

99 *Konakliev – Doncheva,* Patriarsheska chast, 462–464; *Ćurčić,* Architecture, 287.

100 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 75–85.

101 *Curta*, Southeastern Europe, 229.

102 *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 215.

103 Ibid., 220.

IV. Accepting the Byzantine political and ideological doctrine

Conferring court titles to deserving foreign rulers, thereby integrating them symbolically into the official hierarchy, was one of the avenues for dissemination of Byzantine influence. The Bulgar political elites had encountered Byzantine court ceremonial long before their Christianization under Boris-Michael. When Khan Kubrat made peace with Emperor Heraclius, he received the prestigious dignity of *patrikios*.[104] In an act of gratitude for helping him win back the throne in 705, Justinian II (685–695, 705–711) bestowed on Khan Tervel (700–721) the highest Byzantine title of *kaisar*.[105] As mentioned above, the Bulgar ruler Telerig (ca. 772–778) fled to Byzantium and was baptized there under the name Theophylact before Leo IV (775–780) made him a *patrikios* and offered him the hand of a cousin of Empress Irene in marriage.[106] Despite his notoriety as a fierce persecutor of Christians, several Greek inscriptions described Khan Omurtag as "ὁ ἐκ Θεοῦ ἄρχων" with a cross symbol at the end. Surviving lead seals of the khans Tervel and Telerig, as well as a noble named Baian, who bore the title of *patrikios* and *strategos*, depict these 8th-century magnates as Byzantines. The reverse sides of the seals bear inscriptions invoking the Mother of God and Jesus Christ to help and protect their servants. Depictions of pagan Bulgar rulers with Christian symbols and in Byzantine clothing were imitations of contemporary iconographic representations of Byzantine emperors. Although Bulgar rulers did not typically dress in this fashion, their images on seals were meant to bring them as close to the Byzantine ruling elites as possible. In exchange for formally recognizing the Empire's suzerainty, rulers of neighboring peoples sometimes received Byzantine court titles, usually that of *magistros* and *patrikios*, in a ceremony that required them to wear the appropriate vestments – a himation, silk skaramangion, and chlamys.[107] When the prospective dignitary was unable to travel to Constantinople, an imperial official would be dispatched to his land to deliver the required garments (ἱμάτιον μαγιστράτου).[108]

From the Byzantine point of view, conferring a court title on a Bulgar ruler, with the attendant insignia and suitable clothing, meant their formal accession to Byzantine elite circles. For their part, Bulgar rulers were ambiguous toward this Byzantine practice: in their pagan era, accepting a Byzantine court title and the attendant vestments ensured a degree of prestige in Bulgaria and beyond.[109] Thus, the adoption of elements of the dominant culture, universally accepted in foreign diplomatic circles, marked their recognition by the dominant culture's adherents as well as third-party

104 Nicephorus, 70.

105 Ibid., 102–103.

106 Theophanes, 451.

107 *Simeonova*, "Avar Costume", 138–139, 141–143; *Fiedler*, Bulgars, 192.

108 DAI, 46.49–53, 216.

109 Indicatively, Bulgarian emissaries at the Byzantine court were given precedence over the delegation of Otto I led by Liutprand of Cremona, cf. *Simeonova*, "Avar Costume", 147.

acknowledgment of their belonging to this culture. All this pageantry did little, however, to placate the Bulgar rulers' staunch resistance to Christianity until the second half of the 9th century.[110]

The process of adopting elements of the Byzantine court ceremonial, begun during the reign of Boris-Michael, gained new momentum and different content under his son, Simeon.[111] Simeon of Bulgaria, the first Bulgarian emperor, was one of the gravest threats to Byzantine pretensions of universal domination, second only to Charlemagne. Bulgaria became an empire in 913. Whatever Simeon's motives and ambitions may have been and regardless of the specific circumstances of the event, Nicholas Mystikos, Patriarch of Constantinople, crowned the Bulgarian ruler at the walls of Constantinople. Tellingly, from this time on, Simeon began signing his seals as *basileus*.[112] By the 920s, he had begun to mint coinage depicting himself in the regalia of the Byzantine emperor, with the loros, orb, and scepter.[113] In 924, warriors saluted him at the walls of Constantinople in the "tongue of the *Rhomaioi*" (τῇ τῶν Ῥωμαίων φωνῇ), which was not merely a gesture designed to impress the denizens of the Byzantine capital.[114] Nevertheless, the Bulgarian imperial title was not recognized beyond the territories inhabited by Bulgarians. Near the end of his reign, Simeon signed himself "emperor of the *Rhomaioi*" or "emperor of the Bulgarians and *Rhomaioi*," probably to show his ambition of supplanting the Byzantine with the Bulgarian empire.[115] However, the Byzantine perception of the Bulgarian imperial title depended solely on the given political moment and the Empire's interests.[116]

Surviving seals depict Simeon and his son Peter in Byzantine ceremonial costumes. And yet, even though the Byzantinization of Bulgaria culminated precisely during the reigns of these two emperors, the Bulgarian elites' resistance to Byzantine influence does not seem to have abated, as suggested by Peter's two brothers, John and Benjamin, who are said to have been wearing traditional Bulgar attire.[117] So, two

110 *Simeonova*, "Avar Costume", 139, 143.

111 Ibid., 144–145.

112 However, in a letter written after the Byzantine defeat at Anchialos (917), Nicholas Mystikos had no qualms about reminding Simeon that the Bulgarians were supposedly descended from slaves and had defected from Avar rule, which meant that they could only be subservient to the Byzantines because the territory they inhabited could only belong to the Empire, Nicholaus I Epistolae, 10. 30–39,70. This was a premise he had picked up from Patriarch Nikephoros' *Short History* or *Breviarium,* Nicephorus, 86; Leo the Deacon repeated this claim, describing the Bulgarian emperor Peter as a hide-gnawer (σκυτοτρώκτη) dressed in animal hide (διφθερίᾳ) and thrice a slave by parentage (τρίδουλος ὢν ἐκ προγόνων), Leo Diaconus, 61–63. For more details, see below, 56–57, and the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople*, II, 392.

113 *Beševliev*, Inschriften, 330–331.

114 Theophanes Continuatus, 407; *Beševliev*, Inschriften, 80–81, 247, 261, 277, 330–332.

115 Cf. n. 40.

116 See the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople* II, 393–397. On the ideological foundations of the First Bulgarian Empire see also *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 133–147.

117 Theophanes Continuatus, VI, 412. What is more, John led a rebellion against his brother in 929, but was severely punished and sent to Constantinople as a prisoner, Theophanes Continuatus, VI, 419. Given the paucity of available information, it is not possible to conclusively associate this event with resistance to the increasing Byzantinization of Peter's court. On the rebellion see *Božilov – Gjuzelev*, Istorija, I, 278.

parallel influences were at work: the still-present Bulgar and the Byzantine, which had started rapidly gaining ground from the time of Simeon and Peter. There is no confirmation that Byzantine court titles and suitable attire were ever introduced at the Bulgarian imperial court, although there is unambiguous evidence that Boris, Simeon, and Peter wore Byzantine court vestments for certain ceremonies and formal occasions.[118]

Another aspect that reveals relicts of the proto-Bulgarian tradition was the survival of two proto-Bulgarian titles for high-ranking dignitaries: the *kavkhan* and *ičirgu boila*, outranked only by the Bulgar ruler. The *kavkhan* was essentially the military commander of the Bulgar army and one of the chief diplomats in the realm. A member of the boyar council, he was one of the closest advisors of the Bulgar ruler. The *kavkhan* could also serve as a regent or co-ruler and represented the monarch in his absence from the capital. On top of this, he is believed to have held some judicial powers. The title was hereditary and for life.[119] It probably survived the fall of the First Bulgarian Empire, with the last person who was said to have traced his descent from the *kavkhani* in the sources being George Voyteh (Γεώργιος ὁ Βοϊτάχος, τοῦ τῶν Κοπχάνων γένους καταγόμενος), the leader of the 1072 rebellion.[120] The *ičirgu boilas* were commanders of garrisons manning fortresses, leading heavy infantry and sometimes undertaking important diplomatic missions. In addition to his military-administrative duties, the *ičirgu boila* seems to have wielded judicial powers, although the sources provide few specifics.[121] An *ičirgu boila* by the name of Mostič is known to have served under Simeon and Peter.[122]

The Bulgarians also demonstrated their resistance to Byzantinization and the Byzantine political ideology in the late 9th century by claiming historical rights to the territory they inhabited.[123] The *Nominalia of the Bulgarian Khans*, the text that marked the beginning of Bulgarian historiography, attests to this aspiration. *Nominalia* was a chronicle with heavy ideological undertones[124] and one of the central writings for the Bulgarian elite at the court in Preslav. The source shows that awareness of Bulgarian political traditions in the Balkans was very much alive in the 10th century.[125] This world history follows the Hunic-Bulgar cyclic calendar and draws heavily on oral tradition. It continued to highlight proto-Bulgarian political traditions even after the Christianization and ensuing Slavicization of Bulgaria, emphasizing the continuity of Bulgarian rulers and tracing their roots as far back as Nebuchadnezzar.[126] During Simeon's reign, when Bulgaria espoused a rather bellicose attitude to the Empire, the adoption or use of Byzantine models

118 *Simeonova*, "Avar Costume", 145.

119 *Gjuzelev*, Kavkhanite i ičirgu boilite, 111–121; *Beševliev*, Pûrvobûlgarite, 283–291.

120 Skylitzes Continuatus, 148; *Andreev, Lazarov*, *Pavlov*, Koj koj, 136.

121 *Gjuzelev*, Kavkhanite i ičirgu boilite, 183–188; *Beševliev*, Pûrvobûlgarite, 292–293.

122 *Andreev – Lazarov – Pavlov,* Koj koj, 503–504.

123 The Persian scholar Al-Tabari reports that Emperor Simeon, whom he describes as the emperor of the Slavs, told the envoys of Leo VI after the defeat of Byzantine troops in 896/897: "This land is the kingdom of my ancestors, and I will not step down until one of us vanquishes the other," *Vasiliev*, Byzance et les Arabes II, 11.

124 *Kajmakamova*, Imennik, 1–2, 31.

125 *Nikolov*, Perception of Bulgarian Past, 163–164; *Kajmakamova*, Foundation of Bulgarian State, 115.

126 *Bakalov*, Vizantijskijat kulturen model, 16; *Granberg*, Transferred in Translation, 49–58.

arguably had a different purpose – to be weaponized against the Byzantines. Namely, the Bulgarians believed they had historical claims to the lands their ancestors had taken in the Balkan Peninsula. The Byzantines contested this view, arguing that Byzantine emperors had ruled those territories (κατείχοντο μὲν παρὰ τῶν πρώην βασιλέων, νῦν δὲ παρὰ σοῦ δεσποζόμενα).[127] Like other "barbarians" who had formed their political entities in territories that had once belonged to the Roman Empire, the Bulgarians wanted to highlight their own (non-Roman) political identity and traditions.[128] And yet, those precious proto-Bulgarian traditions were concurrently being reframed in a new milieu dominated by the Slavonic language and Christian culture.[129] In other words, the Bulgarians promoted their pre-Christian traditions by means of what was perhaps the product of Byzantinization with the most far-reaching influence – the Slavic alphabet.

The Byzantinization of the Bulgarian court culminated in the Bulgarian-Byzantine peace treaty of 927. The most impactful results of this peace were the marriage of Peter and Maria Lekapene, granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), the recognition of the Bulgarian ruler's imperial title and, probably, the Bulgarian primate's title of patriarch.[130]

V. Dynastic marriage

Upon her marriage to Peter of Bulgaria, Maria Lekapene, granddaughter of Romanos I Lekapenos, became the first princess from the ruling family to marry a foreigner. Byzantine narrative sources describe the wedding as a spectacular affair. The lavish ceremony reflected Romanos I's propaganda efforts to frame the marriage as a political achievement, highlighting the bridegroom's rank of an emperor and the bride's future status as the mistress (δέσποινα) of the Bulgarians. The wedding festivities were held in Constantinople to allow the crowds to witness them.[131] A speech attributed to Theodore Daphnopates reflects the same objective. While the author mentions neither the marriage nor any other potentially awkward matter, he profusely praises the peace the two sides had reached, insisting on the advantages of the new "alliance" and underscoring the Bulgarians' Christian faith.[132]

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127 Daphnopatès, Correspondance, 65. Furthermore, *Angelov*, Srednovekovnata bŭlgarska diplomacija, 108, argues that Simeon quoted an excerpt from the writings of Byzantine historian Menander Protector to support his argument in a letter to Romanos I Lekapenos. On the ideology underpinning debates about rightful claims to the Balkans, see above, p. 55, n. 112.

128 The Longobards are an illustrative example, *Harrison*, Political rhetoric, 242–243; *Nikolov*, Perception of Bulgarian Past, 165.

129 *Granberg*, Transferred in Translation, 51–52.

130 *Shepard*, Maria Lakapena, 121–122, 130, 138.

131 The pomp surrounding the wedding had another objective: promoting Romanos' elder son and co-ruler, Christopher, as the first in the line of succession before Constantine VII, which, according to Theophanes Continuatos, the Bulgarian attendees had requested during the wedding ceremony, certainly not incidentally, Theophanes Continuatus, VI, 406, 414–415; *Shepard*, Maria Lakapena, 128–133.

132 *Dujčev*, On Treaty of 927, 264, 272, 278; *Shepar*d, Maria Lakapena, 131; *Marinow*, Living in peace, 271–283. The Christian argument was another convenient propaganda tool, see the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople,* II, 397–399, 406–407.

There are no direct reports on what Maria's life in Bulgaria might have been like or what status she had, especially given that she would have been about fifteen years old when she married Peter. Surviving seals depict Peter and Maria as an equal imperial couple (αὔγουστοι βασιλεῖς) in imperial vestments and with the imperial insignia typically worn by Byzantine emperors. On one of them, however, Maria's hand holding a cross appears above Peter's – a gesture Byzantine sphragistics reserved for the senior emperor. As Bulgarian rulers were presumably capable of controlling the designs on their seals, this representation of symbolic seniority was by no means incidental, suggesting that the marriage had fulfilled its political purpose – ensuring peace between Byzantium and Bulgaria for longer than one generation.[133]

The fact that Peter and Maria's marriage produced offspring added to its political significance and potential to ensure continued Byzantine influence in Bulgaria after Maria's death. Maria bore two sons, Boris and Roman, and probably daughters.[134] Arranging dynastic marriages emerged as the most effective tool of Byzantine diplomacy. Byzantine princesses and their descendants paved the way for the Empire's deeper and more lasting influence in the lands with whose rulers the Byzantines had become affiliated through their mixed-marriage policy.[135]

Yet, the perception of Peter and Maria's marriage soon changed, and the next generation of Byzantine authors took a decidedly disapproving view of the union. The Byzantines feared that the marriage of a Byzantine princess to a "barbarian" ruler might create a precedent and become commonplace, regardless of how politically necessary this first foray into dynastic marriage with an outsider had been at the time. Constantine Porphyrogennetos in *De Administrando Imperio* warned his son and heir, Romanos II, that the "Bulgarian marriage" had been a reprehensible anomaly, denouncing it as an "unseemly and improper novelty" (καινοτομήσας) in the noble land of the *Rhomaioi*.[136] Despite Porphyrogennetos' agenda to minimize and relativize some of the political moves made by his father-in-law, Romanos Lekapenos, including the marriage of Maria and Peter, there is no doubt that the Byzantines generally disapproved of marriages between their own and foreigners. Almost two centuries later, the learned princess Anna Komnene described marriage with an outsider and barbarian (ἑτερόφυλού τε καὶ βάρβαρον) as unbefitting (ἀπροσάρμοστον).[137] However, although

133 *Shepard*, Maria Lakapena, 135–136, 141, 142 n. 63, 143–149.

134 See p. 53 above. According to Leo the Deacon, Leo Diaconus, 79–81, 86, during the negotiations between Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969) and the Bulgarians in 969, the Moesi pleaded with the emperor to come to their defense against the Rus. As a pledge of the alliance and their friendship, they offered him maidens of imperial blood (κόρας ἐξ αἵματος βασιλικοῦ) as brides for the heirs to the imperial throne, Basil and Constantine. The identity of these princesses remains obscure. Nevertheless, it appears more plausible that they were daughters of Boris II (969–971), as the daughters of Peter I and Maria Lekapene would have been nearly forty years old at the time of the negotiations. These brides (ἐκ Μυσίας νεωστὶ ἀφηγμένων νυμφῶν) resided in the imperial palace as hostages following the fall of the First Bulgarian Empire in 971.

135 These matrimonial alliances were not confined solely to ruling dynasties, but were also forged between members of the Byzantine and local elites, see the chapter *The Balkans in the Eyes of Constantinople*. II, 400, 405–406.

136 DAI, 13.142–194.

137 Alexias, 34. Interestingly, Anna's maternal grandmother, Maria, was the daughter of John Vladislav, the nephew of Emperor Samuel. Her lineage is, nonetheless, explicitly acknowledged in Bryennius, 219 and Alexias,

the match Peter had made certainly involved a member of the imperial family, Maria was not a purple-born princess (*porphyrogenita*, born after her father had become emperor). Thus, their marriage was arguably a partial concession on Byzantium's part, especially given that Simeon of Bulgaria's demand to have his daughter marry Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos never came to fruition. Simeon's hope was shattered by none other than Romanos Lekapenos, whose daughter Helena married Constantine, the legitimate heir of the Macedonian dynasty, in 919.[138]

VI. Economic interests

The economy and trade also reflected the interplay of Byzantine and Bulgar influence. Economic interests were one of the principal factors that led "barbarian peoples" to turn to the Empire and, conversely, motivated the Empire to establish contact with them. The trade in the natural resources and raw materials available in different parts of the Balkans, the Khazar realm, the vast territory controlled, for a while, by the Avars, the remote Russian expanses, and other territories was of political significance due to the crucial role these goods played in everyday life. The Empire made trade agreements with its neighbors, but most are now fully or partially lost.[139]

Little is known about Byzantine trade agreements with the Bulgars since no official documents have survived. Nonetheless, it is reasonably safe to assume that such agreements were made, as suggested by known Byzantine agreements with other peoples and numerous references in Byzantine sources to the entrepreneurial aspects of the truce between the two parties. We do know that commerce with Bulgaria unfolded in specially designated places, or stations, chosen by the Empire. Numerous seals of a *kommerkiarios*, the Byzantine official in charge of trade, continuously appearing from 690/691 onward, provide evidence of business dealings between Byzantium and Bulgaria. In addition, the chronicle of Theophanes reports that the negotiations between Emperor Michael II (820–829) and Khan Krum (803–814) in 812 included certain provisions of a trade agreement datable to 716.[140]

Trade between Byzantium and Bulgaria unfolded in well-fortified coastal cities as well as in the interior of the Balkans, moving along major roads, most notably the *Via Egnatia*, and navigable rivers. The larger rivers, the Mesta, Strymon, and Axios (Vardar), for example, allowed better communication with the hinterlands.[141] The Byzantines seem to have introduced a new office, the *vardarios*,[142] to control commercial waterways.

69, despite the fact that Anna Komnene herself does not identify Maria as her grandmother. Moreover, elsewhere in her historical narrative, Alexias, 94, Anna refers to her mother merely as a member of the Doukas family, omitting any reference to her Bulgarian ancestry.

138 *Shepard*, Maria Lakapena, 125.

139 For trade agreements with the Russians, see *Franklin*, *Shepard*, Emergence of Rus, 117.

140 Theophanes, 497; *Laiou*, Exchange and Trade, 704.

141 On the significance of waterways in Thessalonian trade, see *Bakirtzis*, Imports, exports, 104.

142 *Oikonomides*, Kommerkion d'Abydos, 246; *Curta*, Edinburgh History, 221, suggests that they had a role in the taxation of local trade.

Fortified coastal cities played a central role in Byzantine-Bulgar trade. Bulgaria's commerce with Byzantium naturally gravitated towards Constantinople and the Black Sea coast through Mesembria and Develtos, big fortified cities that frequently changed hands between the Byzantines and the Bulgars. Owing to trade with Bulgaria, these settlements evolved into major commercial hubs.[143] In addition, the Byzantines developed other harbors that allowed easy access to the interior, such as Thessalonike on the Aegean and Dyrrachion on the Adriatic coast. Constantine Porphyrogennetos wrote as early as the 10th century that the road to the Danube and Bulgaria began in Thessalonike.[144] There are indications that trade routes led to Belgrade already in the early 10th century, although this road did not reach its full potential until the age of Basil II. Developing other urban commercial hubs beyond Constantinople increased Byzantine influence and ensured a continued Byzantine presence in different parts of the world.

Thessalonike's commercial dealings with the Bulgars intensified after 816 when Byzantium and Bulgaria reached a thirty-year peace agreement, as attested by numerous seals of *kommerkiarii* from the latter half of the 9th century discovered in Thessalonike. The city's economy flourished in the 9th century as a result of maritime trade and exchange with Bulgars and other ethnic groups in the Balkans.[145] John Kaminiates reports that "mighty rivers, rising from the land of the Scythians . . . lavish much abundance on the city through . . . being navigable upstream by seagoing vessels, as a result of which a cunningly contrived assortment of profits from commodities flows down those waters."[146] While Kaminiates' claim seems to be something of a rhetorical overstatement, there is little reason to doubt his reports about Thessalonike's fertile agricultural environs that fed the city and the importance of the *Via Egnatia* as a trade route. These commercial dealings allowed its inhabitants to acquire heaps of gold, silver, and silk. The city also produced glassware. After the Arab capture of Thessalonike in 904, the conquerors were amazed by the abundance of the booty.[147]

Regardless, the Bulgarians initially found the relocation of the Bulgarian market from Constantinople to Thessalonike inconvenient, as their merchants were used to staying in Constantinople for entrepreneurial reasons and paid reasonable taxes for this. In addition, Constantinople gave them direct access to commodities from the East, and the move to Thessalonike meant they had to buy these goods from intermediaries, leading to a war in 894.[148] Simeon's further conquests threatened the safety of Thessalonike itself. Taking advantage of the rebellion of Leo of Tripoli and the Arab sack of Thessalonike, Simeon raided Macedonia and made his way to the walls of

143 *Oikonomides*, Trade or Tribute, 31; *Laiou*, Exchange and Trade, 727.

144 DAI, 42.15–18.

145 *Curta*, Edinburgh History, 221.

146 Kaminiates, 12.

147 Kaminiates, 11; *Laiou*, Exchange and Trade, 726–727.

148 Theophanes Continuatus, VI, 357–358. Cf. *Oikonomides*, Kommerkion d'Abydos, 247–248.

Thessalonike. To contain Simeon's expansion, Leo VI (886–912) ceded parts of southern Macedonia and what is now southern Albania to the Bulgarians, with the demarcation line between Bulgaria and the Empire drawn around twenty kilometers north of Thessalonike.[149] Of course, the Bulgarian territorial expansion broadened the scope of their trade. Thessalonike became an important center for Bulgaria, as evidenced by the Bulgarian apocryphal tradition, which spawned various legends about the city.[150] However, after 904, Thessalonike experienced a period of economic stagnation before flourishing again once Basil II reasserted control over the interior of the Balkans.

Bulgaria itself did not have a developed market. The population of the cities that often changed hands between the Byzantines and Bulgars, such as Mesembria, Develtos, Anchialos, and Serdica, and the inhabitants of the Bulgar capital cities, Pliska and Preslav, mostly relied on agricultural production for subsistence, working the farmlands along the city walls. The reasons for Bulgaria's limited economic development seem to have been political and military, as the bulk of the Bulgar army consisted of peasants. For their part, large landowners were more interested in exchanging their goods for Byzantine luxury items than encouraging domestic production.[151] Commercial dealings with Constantinople were intense. The *Book of the Eparch* suggests that Constantinople's imports from Bulgaria included cloth, leather, carpets, and sheepskin, while Bulgars bought luxury items, probably silk garments and red (purple) leather, in Constantinople. These dealings were carried out through barter (unmonetized exchange), which was also how the Byzantines traded with other polities with no monetary system.[152]

The Bulgar economy was not monetized until deep into the Middle Ages. Byzantine coinage has been uncovered in Bulgar territory, primarily in bigger cities, suggesting that trade with Byzantium occasionally involved cash transactions.[153] Regardless, there is no evidence of monetary exchange in Bulgaria's internal trade.[154] The agreement made by Michael II and Krum in 812 stipulated a ransom of two oxen for each Bulgar prisoner. Describing the state of affairs in the 9th century, the Arab geographer Al-Masudi reports the Bulgars used barter exchange rather than cash transactions.[155] Except for central Greece, the Danube downstream, ruler's residences, and major Bulgarian strongholds, the monetization of the Balkan economy unfolded gradually over the 11th century before intensifying in the 12th century once the region's economic and political crisis ended.[156]

149 *Božilov – Gjuzelev,* Istorija, I, 249.

150 *Tăpkova-Zaimova*, Légendes sur Salonique, 133–141; *Dobyčina*, „Divine sanction", 119–120.

151 *Browning*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 112–114.

152 *Laiou*, Exchange and Trade, 704, 733.

153 *Jordanov*, Preslav, 669–671.

154 *Harvey*, Economic Expansion, 113; *Jordanov*, Kharakter na monetnata tsirculatsiia, 229–243; *Idem*, Moneti i monetno obrastenie, 122–124, 200–202.

155 *Browning*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 111.

156 *Morrisson*, Byzantine Money, 959–960.

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When the Byzantines subdued Bulgaria – fleetingly in 971 and definitively in 1018 – they entered a territory that had for centuries been exposed to their influence. Various segments of the Byzantinization process, most notably Christianization, had long provided conduits for Byzantine cultural models to seep into everyday life in Bulgaria. Little by little, this process changed the lifestyle of commoners, informing their customs and altering the culture to which they had previously belonged. Byzantinization brought Bulgaria closer to the Empire in an overarching process that touched all strata of Bulgarian society. For the Byzantines, the territory of Bulgaria had always belonged to the Byzantine Empire, although it had no *de facto* control over the region until 1018. This was the year when Byzantium integrated a part of its *oikumene* that had already joined its cultural commonwealth into its borders and military-administrative system. For the Bulgarians, Byzantium was not an unknown conqueror, as its traditions, e.g., Christian culture and ruler ideology, were already deeply enmeshed into the fabric of the First Bulgarian Empire. In later attempts to break free from Byzantine rule, contenders for the Bulgarian throne in the 11th century, restorers of Bulgarian independence in the late 12th century, and the Bulgarian rulers who came after them typically invoked Emperor Peter I, a Byzantine son-in-law, who had, in time, become the symbol of the Christian and independent Bulgaria.[157] When the Bulgarians eventually reasserted independence and restored their empire in the late 12th century, the process of indirect Byzantinization continued at full capacity.

To what extent was the spread of Byzantine cultural influence spontaneous, and how much of it was a planned strategy? Of course, the Byzantines made use of the elements that had proven to be useful diplomatic levers for controlling their neighbors, most notably conferring Byzantine court titles on foreign rulers and integrating them into the official hierarchy. In time, they developed this velvet-glove mechanism and, in addition to bestowing titles and honorifics, eventually began granting offices that directly included members of local elites into their political system. Finally, dynastic marriages between Byzantine princesses and foreign princes and princelings – much maligned as an anomaly during the First Bulgarian Empire – became an increasingly popular and planned means of ensuring Byzantine influence abroad.

The most enduring and impactful element of indirect Byzantinization was the Christianization of Bulgaria. While scholars disagree on whether the Byzantines purposefully and programmatically evangelized the Bulgars,[158] the establishment of the church organization in Bulgaria was certainly an important political matter that saw Constantinople and Rome vie for domination. The Bulgarian Church was one of the most significant institutions that the Byzantines relied on in the process of Bulgaria's definitive subjugation in 1018,[159] with the resultant Archbishopric of Ohrid providing

157 *Biliarsky*, Tsar of the Bulgarians, 173–188; *Leszka – Marinow*, Bulgarian state; PmbZ II, # 26409.

158 See pp. 38–40 above.

159 See the chapters *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, and *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I.

a conduit for Byzantine influence in subsequent periods. Still, it bears repeating that the conversion initiative came from the Bulgar elites or, more specifically, the Bulgar prince Boris-Michael, who saw the new religion as a tool that could help him centralize his realm, consolidate his family's power, and tighten the bonds between the Slavic and proto-Bulgarian ethnic elements in society. So, the process of indirect Byzantinization was a two-way street – a dialogue between the dominant Byzantine and the local proto-Bulgarian and Slavic culture. With their economic interests and expansionist designs focused on the Empire, the Bulgars looked up to Constantinople, adopting its symbols of sovereignty and power and modifying them to reflect the needs of their state. Following the Byzantine model, they relied on the Christian Church to unify the populations of the territories they controlled. It was this same ecclesiastical institution that the Byzantines would enlist to help them integrate the territories and former subjects of the First Bulgarian Empire.

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Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018

I. Introduction

In this chapter, we aim to take a broad view of Bulgarian architecture and art and to address their relationship with Byzantine traditions. The conversion to Christianity in the second half of the 9th century was pivotal for integrating the Bulgars and the predominantly Slavic population into a unified people and culture – Bulgarian. By embracing Orthodox Christianity and fostering the creation of the Slavic Cyrillic script, the country defined its future cultural orientation. A substantial number of monuments attributed to the First Bulgarian Empire (864–971) and Samuel's Empire (976–1018) have been examined through archaeological excavations, as well as architectural and art-historical analysis. The church architecture and decoration of this period have been addressed in both general overviews and thematic studies. These studies are grounded in established criteria of classification, such as architectural typology and stylistic features.

Building on prior scholarly contributions, this chapter places artistic production within its broader historical and cultural contexts. It seeks to elucidate the conditions under which monuments were conceived and realized, the roles they were intended to fulfill, and the logic underlying their spatial distribution. Several interrelated factors have been identified as central to shaping the dynamics of architectural activity in Bulgaria. These include the expansion of Christianity, the rise of monasticism, the organization of the Bulgarian Church and the adoption of Church Slavonic as the liturgical language, the geopolitical and ideological agendas of Bulgarian rulers, the establishment of political and ecclesiastical centers, the Bulgarian-Byzantine conflicts, and artistic traditions of neighboring regions. However, this interpretative framework also presents certain challenges for researchers. Churches in Bulgaria pose a distinct set of problems. Two major issues can be identified: the difficulty of dating individual monuments and the scholarly approach to the material preserved within the chronological and geographical framework of Bulgaria. Given the loss and poor state of preservation of many monuments, the artistic landscape of medieval Bulgaria is still far from complete. Our knowledge of a significant number of churches is based solely on

archaeological evidence, while another group is preserved in a ruinous condition. Numerous examples represent multilayered monuments, with phases of construction and decoration that either predate or postdate the Bulgarian period. On the other hand, the picture of Bulgarian architecture and art in scholarship is still somewhat fragmented. Monuments once belonging to the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's Bulgaria are now dispersed across the Balkans, falling within the modern borders of several states: Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Albania, Greece, and Serbia. Consequently, national historiographies have tended to focus primarily on monuments located within their respective territories. This narrow focus presents an obstacle to fully understanding artistic production in medieval Bulgaria. Moreover, notable differences in the interpretation of this material across historiographical traditions have also been observed.

To bridge this gap, the present study synthesizes material from all regions that once formed part of the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's state. This integrative approach broadens the picture, providing a necessary framework for evaluating both overall building production and individual monuments within their historical, ecclesiastical, and cultural contexts. This chapter offers an overview of Bulgarian architecture and art, structured in three parts. The first two follow a chronological sequence defined by two political epochs: the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's Bulgaria. The first part discusses the building programs in the capitals (Pliska and Preslav) and the seats of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church (Preslav and Dristra), as well as building activity related to the organization of the Bulgarian Church through the establishment of the so-called Slavic bishoprics, the restoration of former Byzantine bishoprics, and the development of monasticism. The second part introduces the art of Samuel's realm, beginning with the most important building projects in Prespa, the seat of both state and church. It then traces the distribution of monuments according to the bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church, whose activity formed the backbone of building endeavors during this period. The section concludes with a discussion of Bulgarian-Byzantine conflicts and church architecture within the architectural setting of fortifications. The overview is shaped in accordance with the research aims of this book – the process of *Byzantinization* in the Central Balkans. While the entire territory of Bulgaria is taken into account, particular attention is given, for both the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's state, to the southwestern regions of Bulgaria, which in 1019 were incorporated into the Archbishopric of Ohrid. The third part investigates cultural contacts in the border regions of Kastoria and Ras between the 9th and early 11th century, focusing on the parallel presence of Byzantine, Serbian, and Bulgarian entities. These contacts are analyzed through the categories of influence, originality, interchange, and appropriation, in order to elucidate the dynamics and modalities of cross-cultural relations in this context.

II. First Bulgarian Empire

The capitals of the First Bulgarian Empire

Pliska

The first Bulgarian capital was established in Pliska at the beginning of the 9th century. At that time Pliska was a military camp where Khan Omurtag (814–831) resided, as indicated by the inscription on a pillar from 822, found in Khan Krum near Šumen.[1] This is the earliest mention of Pliska in the written sources. The remains of a fortified settlement near the village of Aboba in northeastern Bulgaria were identified in 1898 as the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire.[2] However, the history of research on the site is burdened by a lack of criticism in interpreting the archaeological and architectural evidence.[3] Reconstructing the sequence of construction events at Pliska is coming under increased scrutiny by architectural historians.[4]

The Early Byzantine fortified settlement, built in two phases, most probably predates the establishment of the Bulgarian capital. In the first phase the complex included the vast outer enclosure of 2.300 hectares, surrounded by earthen ramparts, and the inner enclosure which was a *kastron* of 50 hectares. The foundations of the small fort with a gridded structure and the remains of the small cruciform martyrium, located 1 kilometer from the inner enclosure, belong to the first construction phase at the site of Pliska.[5] The former is usually identified as the Palace of Khan Krum (ca. 803–814), and the latter is also considered an example of 9th-century Bulgarian architecture.[6] Both buildings are, in fact, consistent with the typology and building methods of Byzantine fortifications and church architecture of the 5th century. They were part of a military base established on the frontier, probably for two reasons: first, the strategic importance of Pliska, and second, the local saint's cult. During the second phase, probably under the Byzantine emperor Anastasios I (491–518), the fortified complex was reconstructed. At that time, the new palace with a ceremonial basilica, commonly referred to as the Throne Palace, was built, while the Great Basilica was erected on the site of

1 *Beševliev*, Pŭrvobŭlgarski nadpisi, 215–224, No. 57, fig. 142–148; *Prinzing*, Pliska, 245–248, fig. 1.

2 Karel Škorpil and Feodor Ivanovitch Uspenky published their excavation results in: *Uspenskij et al.*, Aboba-Pliska.

3 The bibliography is immense. For the review of various Bulgarian scholarly interpretations, see *Dončeva-Petkova*, 100 godini, 9–18, and *Mal'ceva*, Cerkovnaja arhitektura, 350–365. To this bibliography must be added *Rashev*, Pliska, 255–269; *Hoddinott*, Politics, 787–804; *Georgiev*, Periodisierung, 57–60; and more recent *Rašev*, Bŭlgarskata ezičeska kultura; *Aladzhov*, Byzantine Empire, 113–158; *Idem,* Palaces, 365–381. For the approaches and results of German-Bulgarian investigations conducted at the site of Pliska in 1997–2003, see articles in *Henning (ed.)*, Post-Roman Towns, chapters five and six.

4 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 149–150, 175–178, 230–231, 280–285, and *Ousterhout*, Eastern Medieval Architecture, 532–534. Cf. also *Mijatev*, Die mittelalterliche Baukunst, 30–35.

5 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 149–150, 175–178, fig. 154, 175–179.

6 For the Palace of Khan Krum, see *Mijatev*, Krumovijat dvorec, 71–135; and more recent *Aladžov*, Krumovijat dvorec, 45–56, with bibliography. For the martyrium, see *Georgiev*, Martiriumŭt.

the destroyed martyrium.[7] The impressive remains of the large three-aisled basilica with an atrium have been viewed as one of the earliest Christian buildings in medieval Bulgaria, built by Prince Boris (852–889), after his decision to convert to Christianity in 864.[8] It is now believed that the Great Basilica was most likely an Early Byzantine construction that survived the pagan phase of Pliska.[9]

Following the arrival of the Bulgarians at Pliska, likely around 800, the site was subsequently adapted to serve as the capital. The building program of the Bulgarian khans included masonry architecture, leaving evidence of the site's utilization during the pagan Bulgarian era. Two symmetrical residential court buildings with large central halls flanked by subsidiary rooms, opening to the south through triple-arched doors, and the so-called pagan temple situated to the south, constitute the core of the palatial complex (Fig. 1a).[10] Byzantine palace architecture, such as the Late Antique residential complex of Rhegion in the Thracian hinterland of Constantinople, may have provided a model for the smaller Bulgarian residential court buildings.[11]

The Byzantine emperor Nikephoros I burned the city in 811. Following this, the central part of the site was reconstructed under Khan Omurtag. The construction of fortification walls around the palace complex, measuring 84 by 128 meters, was the most important architectural endeavor. Within the palace enclosure two more buildings were added – another court building to the west and a second pagan temple at the center (Fig. 1b).[12]

The major change in the architectural history of Pliska occurred after the conversion of Prince Boris and his boyars in 864. The first Christian characteristics of Pliska were evident in the pagan cult buildings. The main public temple outside the palace walls was converted into a basilican church with three apses added to the east end of the original rectangular building and side chambers that flank the sanctuary (Fig. 1c). The stratigraphy of this structure suggests that it suffered destruction in the subsequent period. This might have coincided with the events of 865–866, when a rebellion of Bulgarian boyars against Boris and the introduction of Christianity erupted. This building was restored and enlarged probably in the late 9th century under Boris' son Simeon (893–927). In the third phase of construction, it acquired the appearance of a monumental three-aisled basilica measuring 29.5 by 40.5 meters (Fig. 1 d).[13]

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7 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 175–178, fig. 175–179. For a different view and dating of the Throne Palace, see *Miatev*, Der Grosse Palast, 136–144; *Mijatev*, Die mittelalterliche Baukunst, 49–51, fig. 43; *Rašev*, Tronnata palata, 35–43; *Aladzhov*, Palaces, 371–372, fig. 3, 7a–b.

8 The bibliography is extensive. See *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 26–29, 133–134, with bibliography.

9 *Stričević*, La rénovation du type basilical, 180–186; *Mihajlov*, Novi danni, 22–32; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 230–231, 281, fig. 244 a–c.

10 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 281–282, fig. 294–296; *Ousterhout*, Eastern Medieval Architecture, 532, fig. 22.1. Cf. *Aladzhov*, Palaces, 371–380, fig. 8–12, with further bibliography.

11 *Ousterhout,* Eastern Medieval Architecture, 534. For Rhegion, see *Ricci*, Ernest Mamboury, 235–262.

12 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 282–283. Cf. *Aladzhov*, Palaces, 371–380, fig. 8–12, with further bibliography.

13 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 283–284, fig. 297 a–c. Cf. also *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 12, fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Pliska, Bulgarian palace complex, hypothetical evolution phases, plans: a. First Bulgarian buildings: a. residential court buildings and pagan temple; b. Palace complex under Omurtag; c. Palace complex under Boris; d. Palace complex under Simeon

The transformation of Pliska into the capital of Christian Bulgaria also required considerable changes within the palace complex. Archaeology has revealed a small, cross-in-square church, with four freestanding columns. The so-called Palace Church is distinctive for its typology and the system of pilasters along the lateral façades, which reflect contemporary trends in the church architecture of Constantinople. The close connections between Christianized Bulgarian rulers and the court in Constantinople obviously found architectural expression.[14] Byzantine sources testify that Emperor Basil I built several small churches within the Great Palace of Constantinople.

14 *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 98–100, 221, fig. on p. 221; *Ćurčić,* Architecture, 284, fig. 298. Cf. *Mijatev*, Die mittelalterliche Baukunst, 102–103, fig. 109.

About ten other churches, known from their excavated remains within the outer enclosure of Pliska, also date from the late 9th century. They are all relatively small structures, predominantly of basilican character.[15] Among them the so-called Boyar Church deserves attention for its sophisticated design and layout. It is a three-aisled basilica, measuring 8.7 by 12 meters, terminating in a three-part sanctuary with externally three-sided apses. The wall construction is of stone and brick, and the façades are articulated by blind arcades. The design and building construction of the Boyar Church presents a mixture of local and Constantinopolitan features.[16]

Pliska began as a small *kastron*. Standing buildings of the already existing Early Byzantine military camp were refurbished and reused to house the Bulgarian khans. This can be seen within the larger phenomenon of urban revival during the 9th and 10th centuries in the Balkans. The building program and urban development of the first Bulgarian capital occurred in several distinct phases (Fig. 1 a–d). Already at the early stage of architectural production, during the pagan phase, Bulgarian rulers adopted Byzantine models. When it comes to church architecture, two building types were introduced with the earliest churches in Pliska – basilican structures and cross-in-square churches. These designs owe much to Byzantine models, revealing the architectural manifestations of religious and cultural transformation marked by the Christianization of the Bulgarians in 864 and the establishment of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church in 880.[17] The number of churches and their placement within the city and its surrounding area testify to the architectural endeavors of Bulgarian rulers and their aristocracy (boyars), the founding of urban monasteries, and the organization of the Bulgarian Archbishopric until 893, when Prince Simeon moved the capital from Pliska to Preslav.

Preslav

In 893, Simeon I the Great (893–927) chose the fortress of Preslav located on undulating terrain, on the left bank of the river Ticha as his new capital. The city, similar to Pliska, consisted of a much larger outer and smaller inner city. In terms of physical dimensions, both of these entities were significantly smaller than their Pliska equivalents. The area of the outer fortification is slightly more than 300 hectares, while the fortified inner city covered an area of approximately 25 hectares. Parts of the construction of the city may come after those in Pliska with some alterations. The outer rampart was originally built of earth, but was later replaced by a stone wall. The inner rampart of the city was trapezoidal in shape with corner towers and gates.[18] The name of the city appears in written sources as well as in epigraphic and sphragistic monuments.[19]

15 *Mijatev*, Die mittelalterliche Baukunst, 81–84, fig. 76–80; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 142–150; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 284–285, fig. 299a–b.

16 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 284, fig. 299b.

17 For political and ecclesiastical history, see among others: *Komatina*, Crkvena politika; *Tăpkova-Zaimova*, Bulgarians by Birth; *Curta*, Eastern Europe; *Nikolov*, The Bulgarian Church, 139–157.

18 For the list of monuments in both the inner and outer city with an older bibliography see, *Bonev,* Veliki Preslav, 155–332; *Milo et al.*, Into the Tsar's residence, 176–193.

19 *Jordanov,* Imeto na Preslav, 71–81; *Tăpkova-Zaimova*, Bulgarians by Birth, 17–180.

Early archaeological excavation in Preslav was begun by Vassil Zlatarski in 1897 and since then, for over a century, the excavations have continued under many Bulgarian and foreign scholars.[20] Archaeology in Preslav has revealed the presence of structures that predate Simeon's fortress, dating to the first quarter of the 9th century. In the southern part of the inner city the early fortified village of Preslav was discovered.[21] Scholars have established the existence of a powerful garrison fort in Preslav, probably built under Khan Krum and his son Khan Omurtag to control the Varbitsa Pass. This is confirmed by the inscription found on columns in the city, stating that it was the residence of military commanders with the rank of *ičirgu boila* and *setit bogain*.[22] At this period Preslav was already extensively built-up. The walls were made in *opus quadratum* and the fortification had round corner towers and three rectangular gates.[23] The structure is situated on a highly elevated terrace on the left bank of the river.

Just outside the early fortification, but inside the outer walls of the later fortress two pagan temples were discovered. They are of rectangular shape, typical for the period of the late 8th to the early 9th century.[24] Later, after the official adoption of Christianity (864/865), close to the southeastern part of the inner city, a church was built on top of the proto-Bulgarian shrine.[25]

With the move of the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire from Pliska to Preslav, the defense lines of Preslav were enlarged by adding the outer city fortifications between the 9th and the 10th century. These walls followed the terrain of the Ticha riverbed and were made of *opus implectum*. Though the techniques of wall construction in Preslav are typical of the Byzantine architecture of the eastern provinces, debate persists over Preslav's Late Antique and Early Byzantine origin. While some scholars have argued against its Early Byzantine origin, others have recognized it in the development of the fortress architecture.[26]

With the arrival of Simeon on the Bulgarian throne, Byzantine influence grew among the Bulgarian rulers who accepted the concept of a universal empire centered in Constantinople and aspired to be part of it.[27] Simeon was educated in

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20 Vassil Zlatarski did not publish the results of his excavations. The first excavation of Preslav whose results were published was conducted by Karel Škropil and Fedor Uspenski 1905, *Bonev – Slavov – Goryanova*, Archaeological exploration, 10–17; *Stancheva*, Veliki Preslav, 20.

21 *Mihajlov,* Za aoulite, 2–3; *Gerčeva,* Preslavskijat aul, 346–358.

22 *Dimitrov*, Veliki Preslav, 19; *Stancheva*, Veliki Preslav, 28.

23 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 286*; Bonev,* Carskijat dvorec, 24–40; *Bonev,* Veliki Preslav, 176–177; *Bonev,* Južnata stena, 101–108; *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 126.

24 *Totev – Bonev,* Novootkrit prabŭlgarski hram, 222–230.

25 *Kostova*, Churches, 100; *Bonev,* Veliki Preslav, 181–182; *Aladžhov,* Predstoličen Preslav, 53–57.

26 Preslav was mentioned in a source from the end of the 10th century, Patria Constantinople as a city restored by Emperor Constantine the Great, with assistance of the Prepositus Urbicius, during the campaign against the Scythians, i.e., the Goths. The source was dismissed by scholars as a forgery produce in an attempt to emphasize the non-Bulgarian origins of Preslav, Pliska, and Dristra, GIBI V, 323; *Georgiev,* „Tuhlenijat", 22; *Ovčarov,* Za antičnija prinos, 32–37. For the architecture of the fortress*, Ćurčić,* Architecture, 285*; Aladzhov*, The Byzantine Empire, 126, 143*; Ovčarov,* Novi danni, 115; *Milčev – Damjanov,* Arheologičeski razkopki, 275; *Milčev,* Po vŭprosa za kulturata*,* 5, 12. For a different approach to the origin of Bulgarian architecture in general and particularly in Preslav, *Mal'ceva,* Cerkovnaja arhitektura, 350–365.

27 *Obolensky*, Byzantine Commonwealth, 273.

Constantinople where he spent his youth. His aspirations to the Byzantine throne are confirmed on the official seals bearing his title: Emperor of the Bulgars and *Rhomaioi*.[28] It is no surprise that he located his palace in the new capital Preslav and built it to resemble the Great Palace in Constantinople. Simeon strove not only to achieve power equal to that of the Byzantine emperor, but also to create equivalent achievements in art and architecture.[29] He probably brought artisans directly from the Byzantine capital who would later pass on their skills to local artists. These artists and craftsmen transferred the concepts and architectural models of Constantinople to Preslav.[30]

Archaeological excavations have revealed significant remains of buildings within the ramparts of the inner city, including the imperial court, the patriarchal complex with the cathedral church, the court chapel and various other state buildings.[31] By the walls of the inner city were situated the guardhouse and economic premises. The imperial palace complex of the inner city probably resembled the one in Pliska, but also the Great Palace in Constantinople. Unlike Pliska, the complex included a large basilica-cathedral, as well as the patriarchal palace. The main part of the imperial palace situated in the southern part of a terrace on the eastern slope of the hills consisted of two elongated rectangular blocks connected to each other by a passage. The western building, which is also the larger building in the complex, measuring about 25 by 60 meters, was built on the remains of a previous structure with an apse. It was rebuilt in Simeon's time as the Throne Hall. The entrance to the Throne Hall was probably through the Western Palace. An important aspect of these buildings was their interior decoration, which, based on the remains of doorways, decorative cornices and parapets, is most reminiscent of the decoration of the Theotokos *tou Libos* in Constantinople, built in 907.[32] The floor pavement in the central hall was made of white marble. The similarity of motifs and the quality of workmanship point to the possibility that these masons came to Preslav from Constantinople. The discovery of glass mosaic tesserae in the inner city area highlights this possibility. In addition to the main block of buildings, the imperial palace complex also included baths, residential and other facilities, which suggests the existence of a developed water supply and sewage system in Preslav.[33] The complex was completed on the north side with a large Ruler's Basilica. The basilica was of a three-aisled plan. It is suggested that it originated from the time of Prince Boris-Michael (852–889) and was reconstructed during Simeon's reign. In terms of size, with its two narthexes in the west, it was the larger basilica in the complex, measuring

28 *Georgiev,* Car, 15–55; *Nikolov,* Making a New Basileus, 102.

29 *Milanović*, South Slavic Lands, 234–235; *Dall'Aglio*, Shifting Capitals, 587–601.

30 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 286.

31 *Bonev – Slavov – Goryanova,* Archaeological exploration at Veliki Preslav, 10–17; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 285.

32 *Ćurčić,* Architecture, 286; V*aklinova*, The Palaces, 30–37; *Bonev,* Dekorativna skulptura, 79–115; *Bonev,* Vtora, predposledna, poublikacija, 243–259; *Vasileva,* Dvorcovijat kompleks, 37; *Bonev,* Carskijat dvorec; *Bonev,* Ličnijat dvorec, 29–43.

33 *Bonev,* Za mjastato i datata, 267–274.

47.5 by 21 meters. Like the palace, it was richly decorated with *opus sectile* flooring, frescoes, and mosaic walls.[34] On its south side a chapel was later added.[35]

Southeast of the imperial palace was the archbishop's and later patriarchal palace complex with the cathedral church (Fig. 2). The 17 by 32-meter complex in plan was surrounded by its own walls and closely connected to the imperial palace complex. In a concise form, the arrangement is clearly inspired by the arrangement of buildings around the cathedral church in the Byzantine capital. The proximity of the imperial palace to the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia, as well as the patriarchal complex in Constantinople, probably served as a model for the Preslav's imperial complex.[36]

The Preslav Cathedral or Palace Church was relatively large, with a floor plan of approximately 16.5 by 29 meters. It was a three-aisled basilica, with the nave and side aisles ending in separate apses, semicircular both inside and outside. On the western and two lateral façades there were buttresses. Most of them were rectangular, except four that were semicircular.[37] There is reason to suspect an early date of construction, at the time of Prince Boris, sometime after 864.[38] The church was lavishly decorated, as evidenced by the fragmentary remains of various parts of its decoration. The floors were made in the *opus sectile* technique with interlaced geometric patterns executed in multicolored marble. Both technique and motifs find their closest parallels in Constantinople.[39]

South of the archbishopric complex, by the southern defensive walls of the inner city, a cross-in-square church with the large so-called Preslav Phiale was discovered. The Phiale was of a round shape in its exterior, while its interior was a regular octahedron. It had a marble colonnade and a dome.[40] On the south side of the church, a subsidiary chapel was discovered with what is thought to be the tomb of a young member of the royal family.[41]

Numerous remains of monastery complexes were discovered in Preslav, located in both the inner and outer city, and on the right bank of the Ticha River. These undoubtedly formed part of the city's urban area.[42] The largest among Preslav's monasteries

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34 V*aklinova*, The Palaces, 34; *Kostova*, Churches, 100; *Vaklinova – Štereva,* Knjaz Boris I, 185–194; *Vaklinova et al.,* Vladetelskata cŭrkva, 30–40; *Josifova,* Triizmerna obemno-prostranstvena rekonstrukcija, 262–266.

35 During the cleaning of the remains of the Ruler's Church, a rectangular chapel was discovered, leaning against the southern façade of the temple. In the center of this space was a rectangular mortar plate that served as the base for a sarcophagus. It is believed that the sarcophagus, found 80 years earlier, was used to display the mortal remains of Boris-Michael. If it was indeed so, then the description of the miracles associated with the relics of Boris-Michael and mentioned by Theophylact took place at this very site. *Simeonov*, Local Pilgrimage, 157; *Vaklinova et al.,* Arheologičeski razkopki na obekt, 407–409; *Nikolov,* Making a New Basileus, 105.

36 *Konakliev – Dončeva,* Patriaršeska čast, 462–464; *Ćurčić,* Architecture, 287.

37 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 287; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–48; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 33–35; *Josifova,* Triizmerna obemno-prostranstvena rekonstrukcija, 259–262.

38 *Vaklinova*, The Palaces, 34.

39 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 287–288.

40 *Bonev,* The Southern Part of the Royal Palace, 38.

41 *Bonev,* Grob, 204–211.

42 *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 41–187.

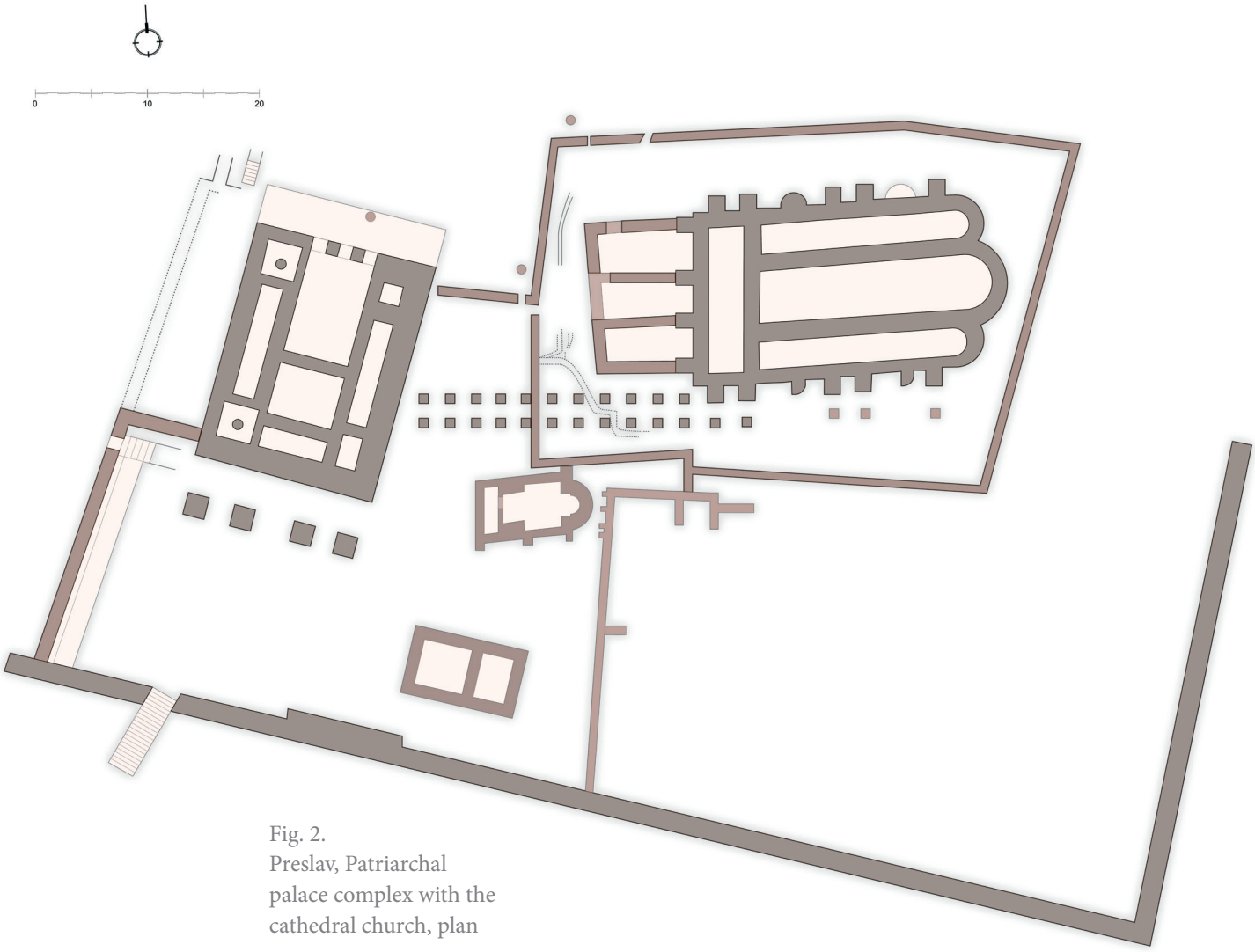


Fig. 2.
Preslav, Patriarchal palace complex with the cathedral church, plan

was probably the so-called Palace Monastery, so named due to its size in relation to other foundations in the city. This monastery was located in the vicinity of the palace in the outer city. The modest size of the church in comparison to the rest of the complex suggests that the initially small foundation probably went through several phases of expansion. The church was of the cross-in-square type with a dome resting on four columns. The interior of the church was richly decorated with ceramic tiles. Next to the church, on its north side, was a corridor along which were vaulted tombs for monks or monastic ossuaries.[43]

Another monastery in the outer city, most famous for its church, is the Monastery of the Round Church. Built by Simeon around 907, the so-called Round or Golden Church was certainly the most important building in the monastery complex (Fig. 3).[44] Wall inscriptions in Cyrillic and Glagolitic name the patron saint of the church, St. John the Baptist, and the person who Simeon entrusted with its construction, the chartophylax Paul.[45] The church nave had a rotunda plan with twelve columns

43 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 290–291; *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 215–217.

44 *Schwartz*, Reconsidering the Round Church, 2–15; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 70–77; *Kostova,* Ošte vednŭž za Krŭglata cŭrkva, 284–303; *Georgiev,* Zlatnata cŭrkva, 7–25.

45 *Popkonstantinov,* Epigraphic Monuments, 123.



Fig. 3.
Preslav, Round or Golden Church, aerial view

surrounding eight niches, and a large apse on the east. In the west, the entrance to the nave was through three doors. The niches were semicircular inside and tree-sided from the outside, and buttresses were placed between them. The entrance to the narthex of the church was flanked by two cylindrical towers with a staircase, in front of which was the atrium.[46] Certainly, the plan of the church indicates reliance on Byzantine prototypes, such as the Chrysotriklinos (Golden Hall, around 565–578) built by Emperor Justin II (565–578) and later Emperor Michael III (842–867), the Church of St. John the Baptist at the Hebdomon or the Church of the Prophet Elijah built by Emperor Basil I (867–886) in the imperial palace.[47] The building had an octagonal plan and a dome, and served as the main throne room in the Great Palace in Constantinople. Imitation of this Constantinopolitan model is also visible in the architectural sculpture, as shown by the pulpit placed in the geometric center of the rotunda, as well as other sculptural decoration.[48]

On the east side of the inner city wall, in a place called Selište, a complex of buildings was discovered, which most likely served secular and residential purposes.[49] What is peculiar about this complex is the church in its center with a large burial structure on its north side. The brick-built burial chamber had an inscription naming a high

46 *Nikolova,* Pravoslavnite cŭrkvi, 88–92.

47 *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 224; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 289.

48 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 202, 289–90; *Magdalino*, Byzantine Antecedents, 3– 5.

49 On the possibility of private estates within churches and their possible function, *Kostova,* Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 199–215; *Kostova,* Imalo li e manastiri-ergasterii, 457–471; *Kostova*, Novootkritite grobni sŭorŭženija, 453–467; *Kostova*, Manastirŭt „na Mostič", 271–287.

military and administrative officer, Mostič the *ičirgu boila*. For many years, Mostič was considered the founder of the monastery until archaeology revealed another burial inscription, placed in a smaller brick tomb, found in the western porch of the church. The inscription testifies to the burial of the mother and relatives of a *synkellos*. Discovery of seven seals of the monk and *synkellos* George confirmed that the monastery's founder was the monk George, personal secretary of the Bulgarian patriarch in the second half of the 10th century.[50] The discovery of seals of Simeon and Peter (927–969) suggest that the monastery was also endowed by these rulers. A Cyrillic inscription was discovered on the site of the monastery with names of the saints Jonas, Kyrios and John, Polycarp, and Eustratius, possibly also Simeon the Stylite, Barbara, and Cyprian of Carthage. These were probably labels for reliquaries containing relics of the named saints. It is known that Simeon venerated relics and translated the relics of various saints to his capital at Preslav. The presence of displayed relics in the church testifies to the importance of Preslav as a religious center.[51]

On the right bank of the river Ticha, opposite Preslav, traces of Early Christian churches have been found. On the northern slope of the hill Deliduška, there was a three-aisled basilica from the 5th century. Later, after the conversion to Christianity, probably in the period close to the second half of the 9th century, basilicas were built at Gebe Klise, Čerešeto, Sakalova Mogila, and Stambol Yolu (Fig. 4).[52] All these basilicas featured three aisles, with a narthex from which the central nave was accessed through three entrances. The central nave was separated from the lateral aisles by massive masonry pillars. The side aisles were covered with barrel vaults and often had galleries above, a design supported by the substantial thickness of the basilica walls. Typically, all basilicas had three apses at the east end – semicircular both inside and out – except for the Stambol Yolu basilica, where the apses were polygonal on the exterior (Fig. 5). The façades of these basilicas were generally simple, with the exception of Sakalova Mogila, where pilasters formed shallow arcade. Notably, both the Gebe Klise and Sakalova Mogila basilicas included a *tribelon* in the western part, supporting the gallery above the western bay. These basilicas were primarily constructed from stone blocks. One basilica that stands apart from the others is Čerešeto, which had a single apse on the east side and a slightly larger narthex. This basilica likely also featured an external narthex, a feature linked to its monastic role. While early scholars believed the basilica used wooden supports to separate the side naves from the central nave, it was later confirmed that these supports were, in fact, masonry piers. Some basilicas were richly decorated with marble and included floors made using the *opus sectile* technique.[53]

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50 *Ćurčić*, Architecture 288; *Popkonstantinov,* Vŭprosi okolo groba, 113–119; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Manastirŭt na Georgi, 44–63.

51 *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 226, note 54; *Nikolov,* Making a New Basileus, 105.

52 *Dimitrov*, Veliki Preslav, 22; *Ovčarov – Dončeva,* Monoumentalnite preslavski baziliki, 91–106; *Kostova*, Churches, 100; *Josifova,* Triizmerna obemno-prostranstvena rekonstrukcija, 259–277*; Totev,* Bazilika v Stambol Jolu, 57–75; *Totev,* Bazilikata pri Sakalova mogila, 38–6; *Georgiev – Dimitrov,* Razkopki, 76–90; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 29–30; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–60.

53 *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 29–31; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–60.

Researchers believe that at one time, the Basilica of Gebe Klise may have served as a cathedral church, given its proximity to the royal palace in Preslav, as well as its size and ornate interior.[54] It is believed that these were buildings under royal patronage.[55]

During and after the reign of Simeon, the location on the right bank of the river Ticha was expanded with numerous monasteries. Monasteries in Tuzlalăka, Patleina, and Avradaka have been excavated, with churches in Avradaka No. 1 and No. 2 from the second half of the 10th century.[56] These were large complexes with many buildings. Such monasteries were mostly founded by nobles, and many prominent statesmen and military commanders spent their last years in such foundations. They were also places of craftsmanship and scriptoria.[57] Besides a lavishly decorated church and the usual residential facilities for monks and the abbot, some monasteries had baths, and most of them possessed a crypt with tombs. A majority of the monastic churches and churches located at architectural complexes identified as civil or private estates followed the Constantinopolitan type of cross-in-square plan with a dome.[58] An extended three-part sanctuary is also a feature they had in common. The three apses were usually polygonal in the exterior. The interior structural system was articulated on the façades. Most of them were small in size, with plans measuring up to 8 by 12 meters. They all shared features characteristic of contemporary churches in Constantinople such as the Theotokos *tou Libos* (907) or Myrelaion (ca. 920).[59]

Monastic churches of the cross-in-square type in Preslav had a variety of supporting systems for the dome with four columns or four piers or a combination of two columns and two piers. In the case of the Church of St. Panteleimon of the Patleina Monastery, the dome rose above piers with concave surface. An unusual design that has been associated with Constantinopolitan influence is seen in the narthex of the Patleina monastery katholikon, where the walls were pierced with niches.[60]

One notable characteristic of the palaces, monasteries, and churches in Preslav is their interior and exterior decoration. The architectural sculpture found in these structures is fully developed and mature, showing no signs of early inexperience or experimental stages. This suggests that the initial craftsmen likely used finished models or even imported ready-made sculptures from Byzantium. Over time, the workshops in Preslav developed their own distinctive ideas and cohesive decorative concepts, with stone sculpture becoming one of the defining art forms of the First Bulgarian Empire.[61]

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54 *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 29.

55 *Kostova,* Churches, 100.

56 *Kostova*, Churches, 102–104; *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 211–214, 231–235.

57 *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries 190–201; *Vitljanov,* Stopanskijat oblik, 92–100.

58 *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 364–365.

59 *Ousterhout*, Eastern Medieval Architecture, 535–536.

60 *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 77–105; *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 231–233.

61 *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 268–291; *Milanova,* Kamennata plastika, 203–227; *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 3–12; *Vaklinova,* Tendencii v razvitieto, 330–351.

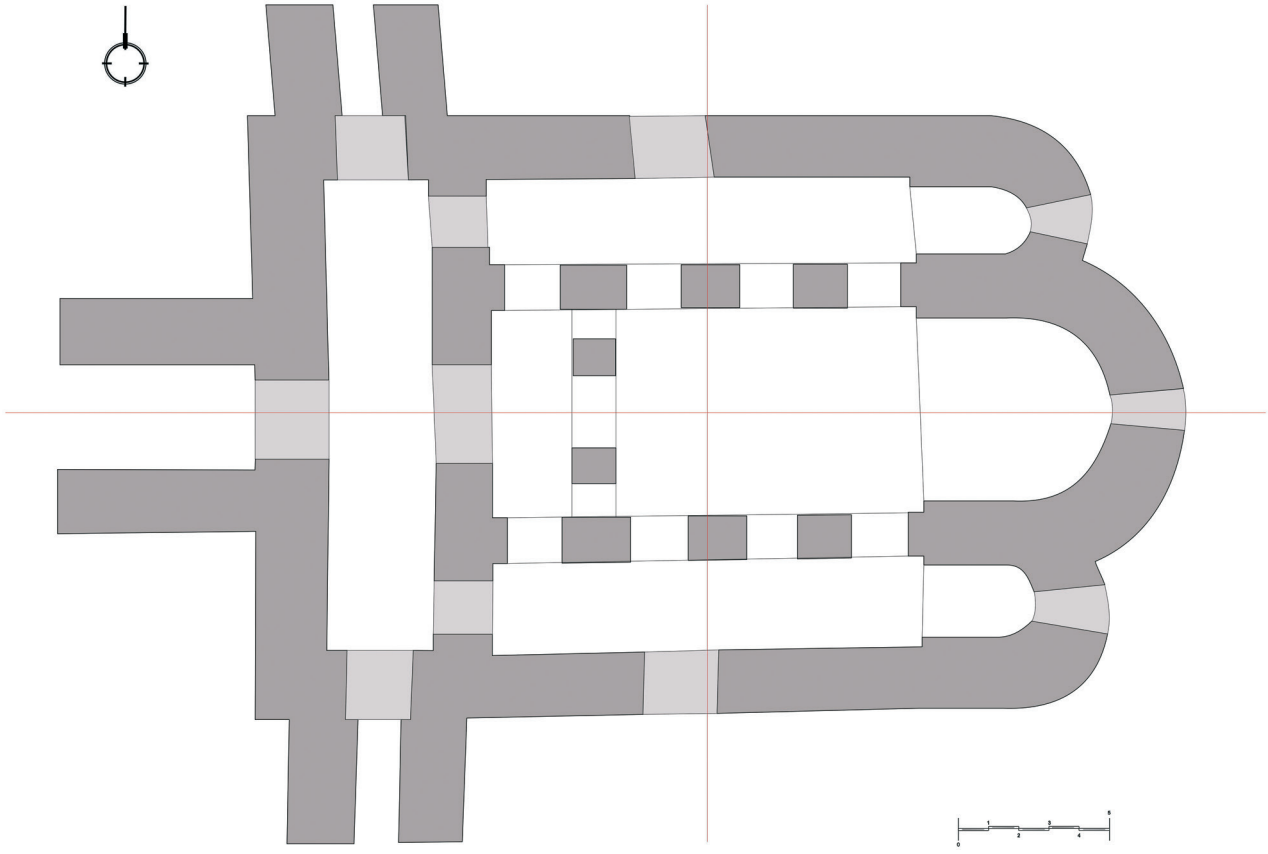


Fig. 4.
Preslav, Basilica at Gebe Klise, plan

The adoption of Christianity in 864/865 created a demand for decorative elements in the construction and furnishing of churches, as well as for other monumental buildings in the new capital, Preslav. The blossoming of decorative sculpture not only served to enhance the aesthetic of the structures but also allowed the Bulgarian Empire to both compete with and emulate the more elaborate art of the Byzantine capital. Sculpture production in Preslav encompassed a variety of styles and employed multiple techniques, including both relief and three-dimensional forms. Artists utilized different types of stone, notably marble and limestone. The sculptural tradition in Preslav was shaped by a range of influences, with Constantinople serving as the primary source. From there, both the preservation and further development of antique motifs were transmitted, alongside artistic currents originating in the East.[62]

The rising elite in Preslav developed a growing demand for decorative elements in palaces and churches, using luxurious materials like marble for facing plinth panels in palaces or cornices with stylized plant motifs for churches.[63] These motifs can be found in buildings such as the basilica in the archiepiscopal/patriarchal complex,

62 *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 3–12. Cf. *Vanderheyde*, La sculpture byzantine, 31–59 passim.

63 *Vasiliev et al.,* Kamena Plastika; *Milanova*, Kamennata plastika, 207–208; *Bonev,* Dekorativna skulptura, 79–115.

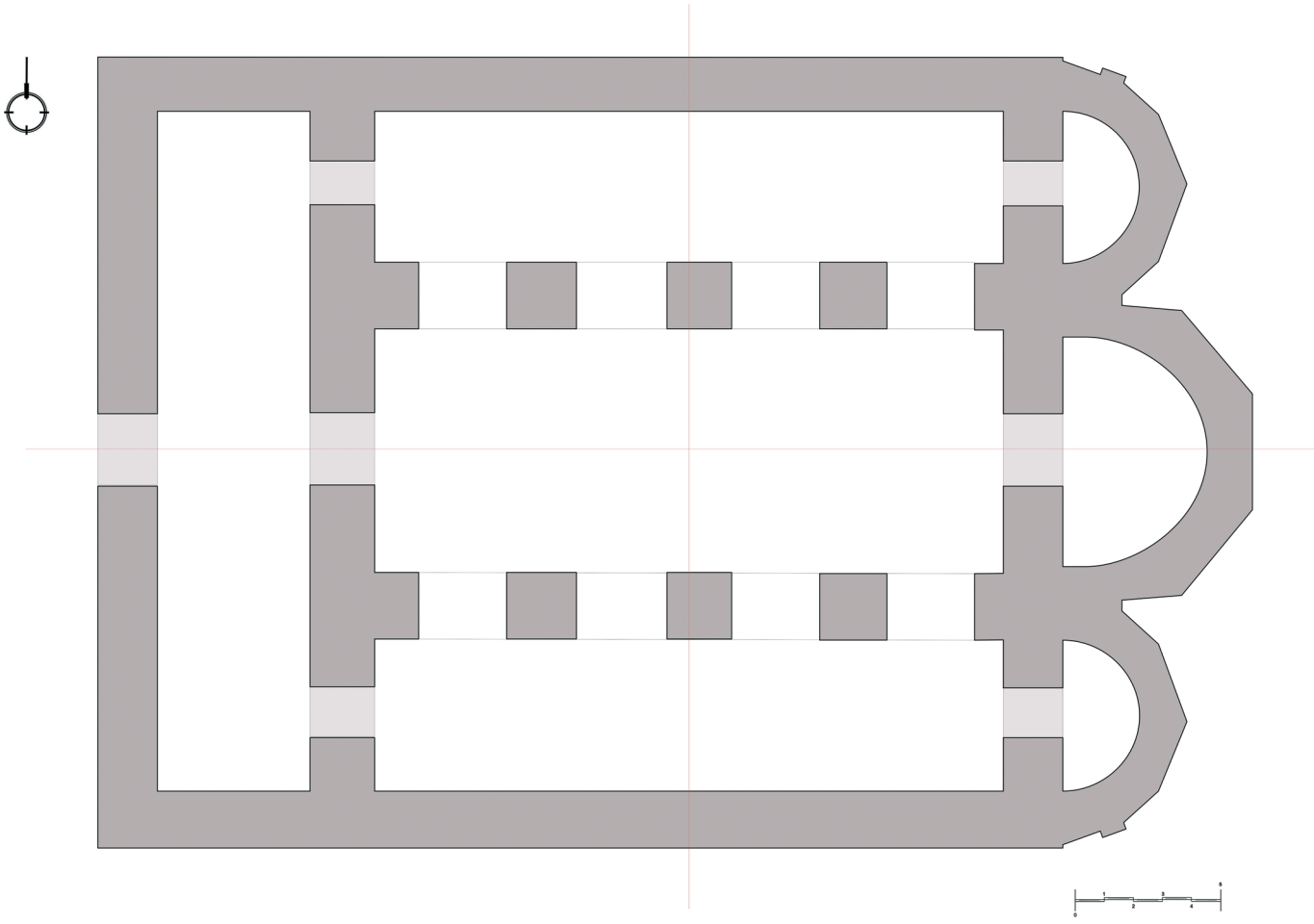


Fig. 5.
Preslav, Basilica at Stambol Yolu, plan

Sakalova Mogila, Gebe Klise, and the Round Church.[64] It has long been noted that the closest analogues to these Preslav sculptures, in terms of style, technical execution, and artistic features, are found in the palace of the Arab caliphs of Córdoba, particularly in 10th century Medina Azahara.[65]

The Round Church, with its decorative cornices, offers many remarkable examples of sculptural craftsmanship.[66] These limestone cornices, of various sizes and purposes, showcase the creativity and artistic skill of the craftsmen. Classical decorative motifs, such as flutes, ovules, and palmettes, are featured – motifs that had been passed down from the ancient architectural and decorative repertoire. However, these elements are presented in striking variety and style. The decoration of the Round Church is a vivid example of the complex blending of reworked antique motifs with the intricate ornamental virtuosity of arabesque design. The attachment to ancient motifs, along with

64 *Georgiev,* „Golemijat carski dvorec," 52–72; *Totev,* Bazilikata pri Sakalova mogila, 38–59; *Ivanova,* Proučvanija na cŭrkvata Gebe klise, 231–232; *Mijatev,* Krŭglata crkva, 76–77; *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 268–278.

65 *Vaklinova,* Veliki Preslav, 40–51; *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 3–12.

66 *Mijatev,* Krŭglata crkva, 76–77; *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 276–278.

their stylized repetition in Preslav-specific combinations, compositions, styles, and forms, is a defining characteristic of the architectural decoration in the capital.[67]

Among the diverse sources of inspiration for Preslav's decorative art is the non-representational ornamentation of the iconoclastic period, which is reflected in the overall concept of plastic decoration in the Bulgarian capital. This includes ornamental motifs as well as an interest in depicting real animals and birds, such as rabbits, dogs, and ducks.[68] A significant number of animal representations on marble capitals from Preslav churches and palaces exhibit a similar style and execution.[69] A distinctive feature of Preslav decoration is a type of a half-capital for a pilaster, which includes both animals and the widely used motif of a palm branch.[70]

What is particularly interesting is that the primary sources of inspiration for these decorations were not contemporary models from the Byzantine capital but rather styles from the most prestigious monuments of the Justinian era. The taste of the Preslav masters and their patrons for Byzantine models of this period is evident in a series of capitals that imitate the Byzantine impost-capital type, which originated around the mid-6th century. An example of this is a marble impost capital with a palmette runner from the palaces of Preslav.[71] Additionally, the revival of luxurious Early Byzantine interiors is suggested by the use of relief frames on wall surfaces in Preslav churches, such as the frame and marble frieze with inlaid ceramics found in the Round Church.[72] This drive to emulate the prestigious Constantinopolitan buildings of the 6th century is further seen in the sculpture from the mid-10th century Church No. 1 in Avradaka, where a stone gutter with a three-dimensional animal head was discovered. This sculpture closely resembles gutters from the Church of St. Polyeuctus, built between 524 and 527 by Juliana Anicia in Constantinople.[73]

Another category of sculpture consists of round animal *protomes*, shaped like lion or monkey heads, which were placed in the block masonry of Church No. 1 in the town of Avradaka.[74] Unlike the gutters, this practice is not typical of traditional ancient sculpture, nor is it found in Byzantine façade decoration.[75]

In summary, the medieval sculpture from Preslav reflects the cultural and artistic fusion between local Bulgarian traditions and broader Byzantine influences. It encompasses a wide range of works, from religious carvings to architectural decorations, and serves as a prime example of the active exchange between the Eastern regions and the Western Mediterranean.

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67 *Mijatev,* Krŭglata crkva, 92; *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 276–282.

68 *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 208–213.

69 *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 6–7.

70 *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 212–213.

71 *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 3–12.

72 *Mijatev,* Krŭglata crkva, 92; *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 276–278.

73 *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 7.

74 *Ivanova-Mavrodinova,* Razkopki na Avradaka, 13–61; *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 8.

75 *Milanova,* Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 8–9.

In many cases, the churches and monasteris were lavishly decorated with ceramic tiles, and ceramic architectural sculpture as well as with pavements. Preslav's painted ceramics emerged alongside the growing construction activity in the new capital. Specialized workshops produced painted ceramic elements for the interior and exterior decoration of palaces and churches.[76] These ceramics often featured elaborate tilework, ceramic architectural sculptures, and floor coverings.[77] This is not surprising, as evidence suggests that around ten workshops were active within the monasteries. Ceramic production in Preslav is generally dated to the late 9th and early 10th centuries. It is thought that the oldest of these ceramics workshops was established in a monastery in the locality of Tuzlalăka in the last years of the 9th century.[78] Workshops have also been discovered at the Panteleimon Monastery on Patleina, within the Round Church complex and the Palace Monastery located on the slopes of the Zabuite Hill. Such workshops produced icons, ceramic miniature columns, and arches for iconostases in addition to tiles for floor decoration.[79]

Large tiles were primarily used for inlay as the main decorative element in paving. In addition to this, there were painted tiles designed for wall panels, cornices, archivolts, and door and window frames. Another category included tiles featuring human or animal images, as well as those bearing Cyrillic inscriptions across their surfaces. Particularly significant to the artistic character of Preslav ceramics are the reliefs created using molds. The painted ceramics of Preslav employed a pre-faience technique, with stylized floral and geometric patterns being the most common motifs for decorative tiles.[80]

A significant number of icons executed in ceramic tile, dating from the 9th and 10th centuries, employ iconography similar to that of contemporary Byzantine icons. They made ceramics bearing images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the apostles, and archangels, as well as relief icons. These ceramic icons were made by extremely skillful master-painters well-versed in Christian doctrine.[81] They formed part of church decoration and were often integrated into larger ceramic iconostases, such as the one discovered at the Palace Monastery, dating to the 10th century. The iconostasis included various ceramic elements, such as semi-columns, cubic bases and capitals, plinths, and arches. Only one icon has been preserved, depicting Christ on a lyre-shaped throne in the intercolumnar space. Above this, there is a row of icons featuring pairs of Church Fathers.[82] The iconostasis could have been made for a small church, chapel, or private altar.[83]

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76 For more on workshops, see *Kostova,* Polychrome ceramics in Preslav, 97–117.

77 *Mijatev,* Preslavskata keramika; *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 307–341.

78 *Žandova,* Dekorativnata keramika, 101–128; *Kostova,* Manastirŭt v Tuzlalŭka, 13–25; *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 233–235.

79 *Manolova-Voykova*, White Ware, 64–66; *Totev*, Nabljudeni vŭrhu risuvanata keramika na manastira, 249–259; *Totev,* Dvorcovijat manastir, 76–77, 96–97.

80 *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 213–219.

81 *Manolova-Voykova*, White Ware, 65; *Totev*, The Ceramic Icon.

82 *Totev,* Keramična ikona s Hristos, 72–79; *Totev,* Preslavskata keramična ikona, 37–44, 45–69, 66–69; *Totev,* Dvorcovijat manastir, 86–89; *Totev*, L'atelier de creamique peinte, 65–80.

83 *Totev,* Keramičnata ikona, 158, *Gerstel*, Ceramic Icons, 53–54.



Fig. 6.
Preslav, Icon of St. Theodore, ceramic, National Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia

Icons were typically painted as single pieces, though there are examples of large composite icons, such as the icon of St. Theodore from the late 9th–10th century (Fig. 6). This icon was created using a mosaic technique, assembling many small tiles. It was discovered in the Patleine Monastery and depicts the monumental figure of St. Theodore. The saint is portrayed with a long, pointed beard and large almond-shaped eyes. A Greek inscription bearing the saint's name accompanies the image. The style of the icon is clearly influenced by 8th–9th century Byzantine iconography.[84] While most ceramic icons follow a more linear style, showing figures frontally in two dimensions, with limited use of dark cinnamon and ochre brown to outline the faces, bodies, and details, there is a group of tiles from the Tuzlalăka site that depict half-figures of the apostles and evangelists. These are rendered in a more graphic manner, resembling the style of miniature illumination.[85]

Two main theories have emerged regarding the origin and dating of Preslav's artistic pottery. The first suggests that it has Eastern roots, drawing influences from regions such as Syria, Mesopotamia, and even Iran. The second theory acknowledges the Middle Eastern influences but emphasizes the dominant role of Byzantium,

84 *Totev,* Keramičnata ikona, 66–67; *Grozdanova*, Icon of St. Theodor, 108–109; *Alchermes*, Icon with Saint Theodore, 329; *Gerstel*, Ceramic Icons, 43–52.

85 *Totev,* Za novootkrite keramični ikoni, 25–28; *Totev,* Preslavskata keramična ikona, 22–34; *Totev,* Keramičnata ikona, 70.

particularly the workshops in Constantinople, in spreading this ceramic style throughout Europe.[86] The ceramic icons from Preslav are the oldest known monumental icons produced by the newly Christianized South Slavs.[87]

Preslav, as the second capital of the First Bulgarian Empire, followed the structure of the old capital, Pliska. It was built with a similar layout – a fortress with an inner city containing the court structures and an outer city. What differs in Preslav is the patriarchal court with a cathedral, and the large number of the monasteries. The architectural and artistic influence from Constantinople that began to blossom in Pliska, came to fruition in Preslav. Besides the basilical plan, the cross-in-square type of churches became a predominant model among the churches of Preslav, especially the monastic ones. In size, Preslav was comparable to the second largest Byzantine city of the Middle Byzantine period, Thessalonike. The development of Preslav was interrupted by the Russian-Byzantine war of 969–971 when it was invaded by the Byzantine Emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and set on fire. Later, Tzimiskes would repair the fortress and give a new name to the city – Ioannopolis.[88]

Seats of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church

Preslav

The Christianization of the Bulgarians in 864/865 facilitated the restoration of church structures in the eastern and central parts of the Balkan Peninsula. In 879–880, the Bulgarian archbishopric was granted autocephaly in accordance with the decrees of the Fourth Council in Constantinople. It played an increasingly central role in promoting the religious and cultural policies of Boris-Michael and his son, Prince (and from 913, Emperor) Simeon, which aimed at introducing Slavonic liturgy and literature. In 927, Byzantium formally recognized the patriarchal dignity of the Archbishop of Bulgaria.[89] With the transfer of the capital of the Bulgarian First Empire from Pliska to Preslav, the seat of the Bulgarian Church also moved.

The southeast section of the imperial palace in Preslav was initially used by the archbishop and later became the patriarchal palace complex, which included a cathedral church. The Archbishop's/Patriarch's seat was surrounded by its own walls. This layout was clearly inspired by the arrangement of buildings around the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia in the Byzantine capital.[90] The Archbishop's/Patriarch's palace is located in the inner part of the Preslav fortress, about 50 meters south of the

86 *Grabar*, Recherches, 7–56; *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 216–217. Cf. The Lost Art Rediscovered (ed. *S. E. J. Gerstel, J. A. Lauffenburger*), 5–172; *Gerstel*, The Nicomedia Workshop, 5–53.

87 *Manolova-Voykova*, White Ware, 64–66; *Totev*, The Ceramic Icon.

88 *Dimitrov,* Veliki Preslav, 23.

89 *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 344–352; *Tăpkova-Zaimova,* Bulgarians by Birth; *Curta*, Eastern Europe; *Nikolov,* The Bulgarian Church, 139–157.

90 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov*,„Golemijat carski dvorec," 9–52; *Konakliev – Dončeva,* Patriaršeska čast na carskija dvorec, 412–414; *Konakliev – Dončeva,* Patriaršeska čast, 462–464; *Ćurčić,* Architecture, 287; *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 233.

Throne Palace and around 20–25 meters west of the Palace Church. The archeological remains of the palace consist of a massive structure with a complex layout, with external dimensions as follows: east – 22.65 meters, west – 17 meters, north – 22.45 meters, and south – 16.5 meters. There are no signs of dismemberment on the external façades, nor is there evidence of buttresses at either base or plinth. It is likely that the façade walls were undivided. The internal layout of the ground floor is quite intricate, with a distinct three-part longitudinal division, suggesting the presence of a basilica hall on the second floor of the building.[91]

The central part of the lower floor of the building is occupied in its northern half by an elongated room, which is accessed through a prominent entrance. The entrance space is divided into three passages by two quartered pillars, which are preserved in the substructure. Above them, arches were most likely placed. The room itself is completely covered with a floor made of large marble slabs, most of which are *spolia* laid on a mortar base. To the south of this vestibule is a smaller, almost square room measuring 4.4 by 4.5 meters. This room also has a floor made of smaller marble slabs. The central row of rooms ends with a narrow room measuring 4.7 by 1 meters, an unusual dimension for a room of this type. Access to the upper floor was provided by two curved circular staircases, located in the two western corners of the building. In the eastern corners, two symmetrically placed rectangular rooms were created.[92]

The artifacts found in the palace mainly consist of building remains, marble, and pieces of hard mortar as well as small amounts of ceramics, dating to period from the 9th to the 10th centuries. Among these finds, the marble pieces are particularly significant, including parts of columns, bases, cornices, tiles from wall cladding, and many pebbles for floor mosaics. These decorative elements appear to belong mostly to the second floor of the building, suggesting that this floor had a more public function.[93]

It is important to note that the architectural plan of the Archbishop's/Patriarch's palace is not unique within the context of the First Bulgarian Empire. Such a plan is found elsewhere in buildings with monumental construction and a public character. The closest analogue is the khan's residence in the Small Palace of Pliska, particularly its eastern building.[94] In his analysis of the palace's architectural origins, Nikola Mavrodinov identified similarities with the palaces in Ctesiphon, built by Chosroes (Khosrow II) in the 6th century (Iraq), and with 8th-century Umayyad Qasr Mshatta palace in present-day Jordan. However, he argued that the true origin of the palace architecture should be sought locally. Mavrodinov suggested that the layout is also seen in wealthy Byzantine houses from Greece, dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries. He referred to the views of Greek scholars who believed that the triple entrance and the arrangement

91 *Ovčarov,* Nabljudenija vŭrhu arhitekturata, 5–6; *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 34–43.

92 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 36–37; *Georgiev*, "Golemijat carski dvorec", 62–64; *Ovčarov,* Nabljudenija vŭrhu arhitekturata, 1–4.

93 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* "Golemijat carski dvorec", 52–68.

94 *Mijatev,* Arhitektura, 57.

of rooms in a linear sequence originated from the Greek megaron.[95] Additionally, the influence of Sasanian palace architecture may have been either direct or mediated through Constantinople.[96]

In front of the Archbishop's/Patriarch's Palace was a large southern square. On the eastern side of the square, a bathhouse was constructed, along with a fenced wall that began at the southwest corner of the bathhouse, extended along its western façade, and reached the fortress wall. Traces of a path made of processed slabs lead from the eastern courtyard with the basilica into the interior of the palace building, suggesting the presence of a small entrance. This was likely an elevated walkway, supported by two rows of paired piers, which connected the palace to the cathedral.[97]

As previously mentioned, the Preslav Cathedral, also known as the Palace Church, was a relatively large structure. Its impressive dimensions rank it among the most monumental ecclesiastical buildings of the early Bulgarian Middle Ages. The cathedral was a three-aisled basilica with a narthex (Fig. 7). This narthex was undivided, relatively narrow, and extended significantly from north to south, measuring approximately 13 by 3.2 meters internally. A single entrance, aligned with the central nave, provided access from the narthex to the nave. There appears to have been no direct passage from the narthex to the side aisles. The nave itself was divided into three aisles by massive stylobates and three piers. The western and two lateral façades featured buttresses. Most of these buttresses were rectangular, except for four that were semicircular. The distance between the buttresses varied but was perfectly symmetrical on both sides of the building.[98] Preslav cathedral basilica likely had a gallery. The windows of the Palace Church were arranged on three levels, positioned between the buttresses of the lower floor, the galleries, and the area above the central nave. The basilica had a gable roof over the central nave, while the side aisles and the narthex were covered by a single-pitched roof. A key development in the church's architecture was the addition of an exonarthex, a rectangular space with entrances on the west and north sides. The construction of the exonarthex was a response to changes in the basilica's function, which can likely be connected to the establishment of Preslav as the capital in 893. These changes are most likely to have occurred during the first decade of Simeon's reign. Other significant alterations were made to the interior decoration of the basilica.[99]

The church's dimensions and plan closely resemble the three-aisled basilica in Pliska, which was likely the cathedral church of the period.[100] Some scholars have speculated that the open system of large buttresses on the church façades represents

95 *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 47–48.

96 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 42–43.

97 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 287.

98 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 287; *Dončeva,* Bazilikite, 44–48*; Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 33–35; *Josifova,* Triizmerna obemno-prostranstvena rekonstrukcija, 259–262; *Ovčarov,* Dvorcovaja cerkov v Preslave, 256–261.

99 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 117–119.

100 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 288.

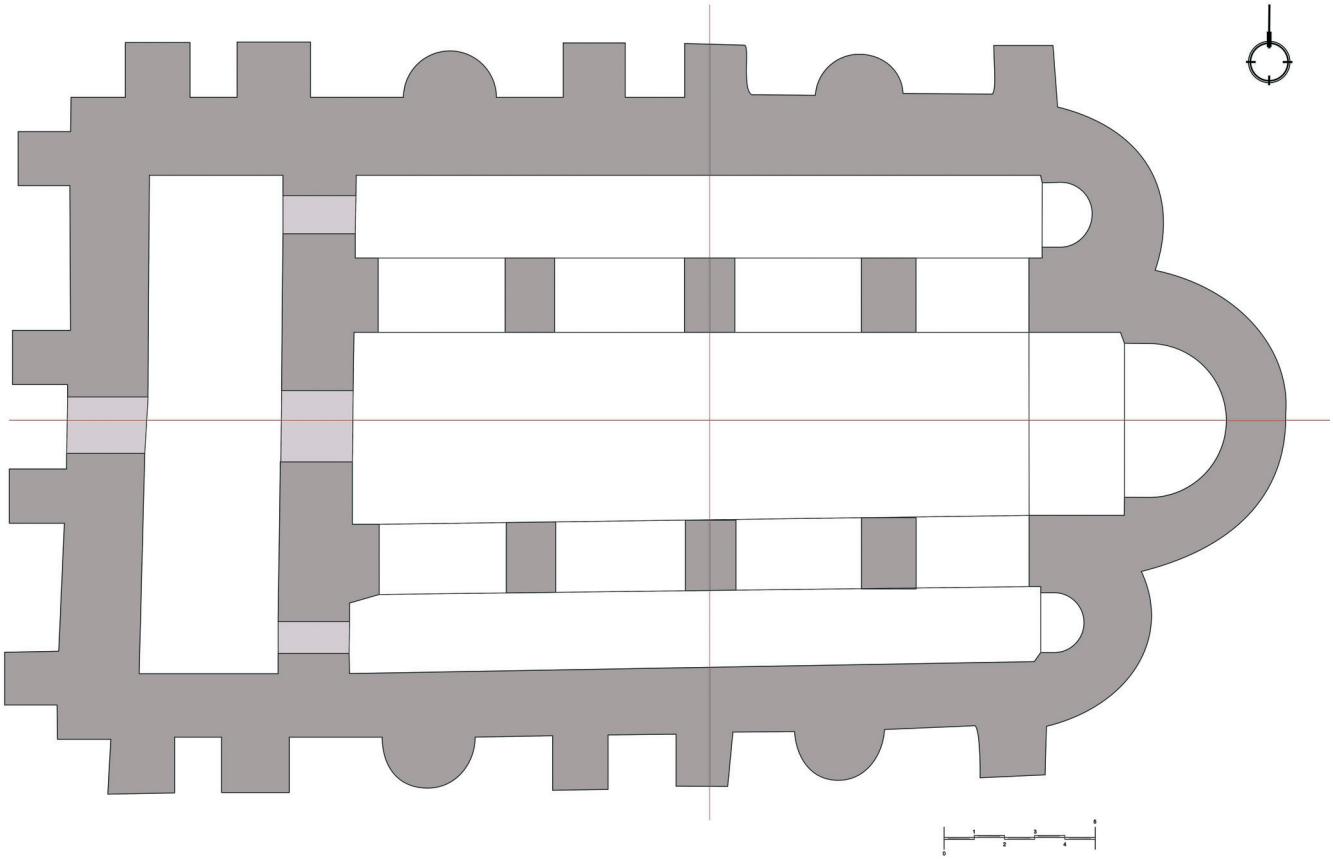


Fig. 7.
Preslav, Cathedral or Palace Church, plan

a western influence, following the traditions of Roman Catholic monuments from the Northern Adriatic region.[101] They base this argument on the presence of the Latin mission in Bulgaria between 867–870, as well as architectural similarities with two earlier basilicas in Preslav, Gebe Klise and Sakalova Mogila. These scholars suggest that the basilica was constructed during this period, or even as early as the time of the Conversion in 864/865.[102] Their claim is that this system of buttresses cannot be found in Byzantine or Bulgarian architecture of the period, with the sole exception of a church from the First Empire being a monastery near the village of Ravna, built at the very end of the 9th century.[103] However, the use of buttresses during this period is also observed in Byzantine churches in Constantinople, such as the Theotokos tou Libos (907). A comparable system of projecting buttresses is evident in the two-story funerary church of Myrelaion, constructed around 920 by Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920–944).[104] The closest analogue to the system of buttresses at the Palace Church, however, is found in the adjacent Round Church in Preslav. On the outer walls of its rotunda, we find the same alternation of projecting rectangular buttresses and exedrae,

101 *Georgiev,* Bazilikata „Gebe klise", 47–48, 53–54; *Marasović*, Prilozi istraživanja starohrvatske arhitekture, 112–113.

102 *Vaklinova*, The Palaces, 34; *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 42–43, 116–119; *Kostova*, Churches, 100; *Dončeva*, Rolja na bazilikanija tip, 271–284; *Georgiev,* Bazilikata „Gebe klise", 47–48, 53–54.

103 *Georgiev,* Manastirska cŭrkva, 71–98; *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 19–20.

104 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 288, *Striker*, The Myrelaion, 16–22; *Marinis*, The Original Form, 267–303.

similar to the larger buttresses at the Palace Church.[105] This suggests that complex systems of prominent buttresses were not only used in the immediate post-Conversion period but also later, during the metropolitan period of Preslav in the 10th century. Their use was not limited to basilicas but also extended to domed churches. The use of buttresses in a domed church in Preslav leads to the hypothesis that the Cathedral of Preslav was originally designed as a cross-domed church.[106] Many cross-domed churches from this period, and even later, feature basilica-like plans in their foundations and lower parts, while their upper structures are cruciform. An illustrative example of this architectural solution is the 11th-century Church of St. John the Baptist in Nessebar. In its foundations and lower parts, it follows the plan of a three-aisled basilica, while its upper structure is already shaped as a cross-domed church.[107] The prototype for this type of church building may have been the five-domed "Nea" Church, built by Emperor Basil I the Macedonian in Constantinople between 876 and 880.[108]

Although the basilica is heavily damaged, its architectural type can still be compared with other monuments in Preslav. In terms of plan, dimensions, and construction, the basilicas at the Gebe Klise and Sakalova Mogila sites are very similar to the Palace Church. However, the most significant difference lies in the appearance of the facades. The basilicas at Gebe Klise and Sakalova Mogila feature undivided, smooth exterior walls.[109]

The church was richly decorated, as evidenced by the fragmentary remains of various decorative elements. The finds include marble frieze fragments, column drums, capitals, and epigraphic monuments. [110] The floors were created using the *opus sectile* technique, with interlaced geometric patterns in multicolored marble. Both the technique and the motifs closely resemble those found in Constantinople.[111] Much of the marble used in the construction and decoration of the church appears to have come from *spolia*, which were then modified with contemporary motifs – a process commonly seen in Constantinople during the 9th and 10th centuries. [112] Around the northeastern part of the nave of the Palace Church, small fragments of frescoes were discovered. The pieces were highly fragmented and did not reveal any substantial figures or detailed designs. Based on the color scheme – saturated reds, blues, and other hues – the decoration is generally associated with the art of the 12th to 13th centuries and likely corresponds to later reconstructions during the Second Bulgarian Empire.[113]

105 *Schwartz,* Reconsidering the Round Church, 2–15; *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 70–77; *Kostova,* Oште vednŭž za Krŭglata cŭrkva, 284–303; *Georgiev,* Zlatnata cŭrkva, 7–25; *Stričević*, L'Église ronde, 212–223.

106 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 288.

107 *Mijatev,* Arhitektura, 106–108.

108 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 273–274.

109 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 18–19; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–48; *Totev,* Bazilikata pri Sakalova mogila, 38–62; *Ovčarov – Dončeva*, Monumentalnite preslavski baziliki, 91–107; *Josifova,* Triizmerna obemno-prostranstvena rekonstrukcija, 259–277; *Dončeva*, Rolja na bazilikanija tip, 271–284.

110 *Ovčarov,* Epigrafski pametnici ot dvorcovata cŭrkva, 259–267.

111 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 288.

112 Ibid., 288.

113 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 68–69.

The described architectural changes to the basilica highlight the special attention that Simeon gave to the church, which supports its designation as the official and representative cathedral of the Bulgarian Church. By this period, the urban character of the entire Archbishopric/Patriarchal complex in Preslav was already taking shape, a development that would continue until the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria in 971.[114]

A cross-in-square church has been discovered next to the southwestern corner of the Palace Church's surrounding wall. It is a small church with external dimensions of 10.6 by 5.4 meters. The apse of the church is located close to the western façade of the bathhouse. Only one row of stones and parts of the wall from the superstructure have been preserved. The church was built from medium-sized limestone blocks, which were very well cut and shaped. The smooth outer walls are enlivened by quartered pilasters, two of which are preserved on the southern side and one on the northern. It is assumed, based on the reconstruction of the missing pilasters, that these were symmetrically placed along the two longitudinal façades of the church. The pilasters project outward, resembling buttresses on the façade of the Palace basilica. The church also had a narthex on the western side. Its plan is cruciform, with a semicircular apse in the lower part, inside and outside. While the exact locations of the entrances have not been determined, it is assumed that the main entrance was located on the west wall. The church had a dome over the central nave, supported by massive corner piers. The described plan of this small church belongs to a group of similar buildings found in Preslav.[115] This type of church closely parallels the Church on Kamenarya and Church No. 8, both of which are located in the Outer City of Preslav.[116] Several other buildings in this group are generally considered burial or family chapels. Despite slight variations in the plans of these churches, researchers agree that they share common design principles, indicating a later period of construction. Most scholars date these churches to the middle of the 10th century.[117]

Before it was destroyed, the church featured marble decoration and wall paintings. Fragments of frescoes were found in several pits, which had served as graves for discarded fresco fragments. From these, a well-preserved image of an angel was restored. The angel is depicted turning to the right, with wings spread – the left wing fully visible and the right half-hidden behind the head. The right hand of the angel is preserved, holding the handle of some object. The figure is modeled relatively flatly, with minimal color transitions or splendor, though the face is rendered with more volume. The color scheme is simple, featuring a reddish background with an ocher-whitish layer applied over it. The angel's eyes are notably enlarged. Stylistically, the depiction of the angel in Preslav dates to the 10th to 11th century. It closely resembles a depiction of

114 Ibid., 117–119.

115 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 43–45.

116 *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 102–105.

117 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 118.

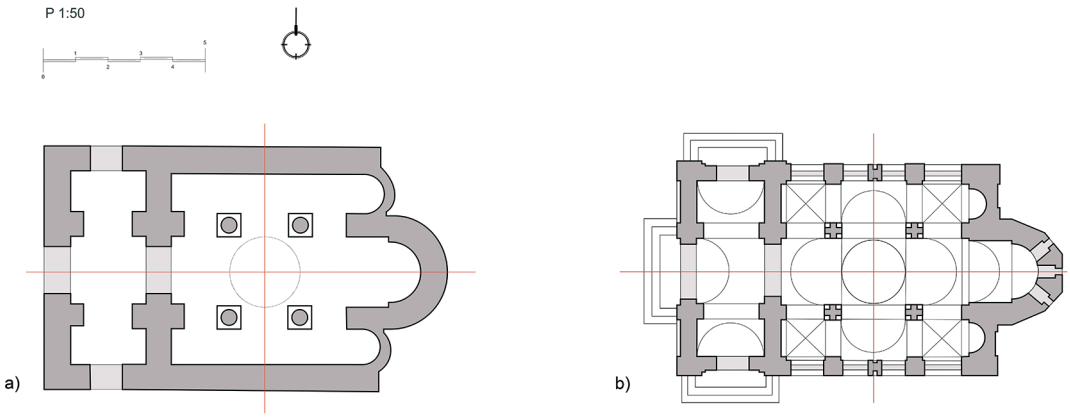


Fig. 8. Preslav, Church next to the Phiale, plan

an unidentified saint from the early church in Vodoča, so-called Eastern Church (St. Leontios), which dates to the late 10th or early 11th century (Fig. 74).[118]

In the 10th century, a series of buildings formed a square to the south of the archbishopric complex, near the southern defensive walls of the inner city. This square played a crucial role in the overall urban layout of the capital. At the center of the square stood a cross-in-square church and a large Phiale (Fig. 8). The church, with an inscribed cross plan, had three apses, a simple narthex, and likely a dome on four free supporters. Its dimensions were 13 by 7.5 meters. The Phiale, located next to the church, was round in shape, but its interior was designed as a regular octahedron. It had a marble colonnade and a dome.[119] On the south side of the church, a sarcophagus was found, likely the tomb of a young member of the royal family.[120]

Overall, the Archbishopric/Patriarchal complex of Preslav was a central institution of the First Bulgarian Empire, serving as the focal point for religious, political, and cultural life during one of the most prosperous periods in Bulgarian history. After the conquest of Bulgaria by the Byzantines, the patriarchate ceased to exist and was downgraded to the status of an archbishopric. Its center was moved to Dristra, modern-day Silistra.

Dristra

After Christianity was established as the official religion of the Roman Empire, Durostorum became an episcopal see, around 380 AD.[121] From that point, Durostorum-Dorostolon-Dristra remained an uninterrupted episcopal center until the end of the 6th century. The last known Early Christian bishop of Durostorum was Dulcissimus. It is believed that Dulcissimus abandoned his see during the great

118 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 69; For the Vodoča, see *Miljkovik-Pepek*, Kompleksot crkvi vo Vodoča, 49–50; *Domozetski,* Vodoča, 779–792.

119 *Bonev,* Cŭrkva pri južnata porta, 44–49; *Pirovska,* Cŭrkva pri vodnoto sŭorŭženie, 37–40; *Bonev,* Preslavska fiala, 52–68; *Bonev,* The Southern Part of the Royal Palace, 38; *Bonev,* Ot "rajona na južnata porta", 48–58; *Bonev,* Carskijat dvorec; *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 218–219.

120 *Bonev,* Grob, 204–211.

121 *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 82–83.

Avar-Slavic invasion of 586, when the city was captured and partially destroyed.[122] The city may have been partially restored before the end of the 7th century, but it was ultimately abandoned and destroyed by the Bulgarians after Khan Asparuh's (681–701) victory over the Byzantine army in the Danube Delta in 680, under the command of Emperor Constantine IV (668–685).[123] However, there are no sources confirming whether the episcopal see was restored at that time. The Early Christian episcopal complex included two basilicas and an episcopal residence located to the east of them, all of which were destroyed by the end of the 6th century.[124] The Fortress of Dristra, originally built during the Early Byzantine period, was later restored and expanded by the Bulgarian Khans Krum and Omurtag in the 9th century as they strengthened their control over the region. Dristra likely served as a residence and military stronghold for the Bulgarian rulers during this period.[125]

In Bulgarian medieval studies, there has long been debate about whether Dristra became one of the dioceses after the establishment of the Bulgarian Archbishopric in 870. It is likely that the Early Christian history of the site contributed to the formation and development of Dristra as a key religious center in the First Bulgarian Empire. Further confirmation of Dristra's early history comes from the epitaph of an archdeacon, the nephew of Bishop Nicholas, who died on 5 October 870.[126] The inscription suggests that Nicholas was the first bishop of Dristra after the conversion to Christianity and was at the head of the see in the spring of 870.[127] In addition to written sources that present Dristra as a leading religious center of the First Bulgarian Empire, the most significant evidence of the diocesan complex's history comes from archaeological discoveries.

Archaeologists still have many unanswered questions regarding the purpose of the entire sacral building complex in Dristra, including the relationships between individual elements and their precise dating. Initially, Church No. 2, along with a residence, was excavated and has since been considered the cathedral church of Dristra (Fig. 9).[128] However, in 2015, the discovery of two churches No. 4 and 5, along with a residence building to the north of them, helped clarify the layout of the entire complex.[129]

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122 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 11–12; *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 88–96; *Atanasov*, Zur topographie des frühchrislichen Durostorum, 28–30.

123 *Atanasov*, Pŭrvostroiteli, 186–190.

124 *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 96–103.

125 *Atanasov,* Drŭstŭr (Silistra) i dunavskata rezidencija, 28–29; *Atanasov – Mihajlov*, Novi danni za dvoreca, 213–245.

126 The monument was stored in the museum in Ruse for an extended period, which led to the initial belief that it had been found in Červenu, see *Zlatarski*, Istorija na bŭlgarskata dŭrzhava, I/2, 213; *Mavrodinov*, Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 91. However, it was later confirmed to be a relic from Dristra. After research by Petar Mutafchiev, Veselin Beshevliev, and Aleksandăr Kuzev, based on which the epigraphic monument was identified and cataloged, it was confirmed that the monument was discovered in Dristra, *Mutafčiev,* Proizhodŭt na Asenevci, 177–176; *Beševliev*, Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften, 35–36; *Kuzev,* Bemerkungen über einige Bistümer, 190.

127 On the status of the Bulgarian Church after the council of 870 and whether it had full autonomy from Constantinople and on the text of the inscription, see *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 19–22.

128 *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 169–175; *Dončeva*, Patriaršeskata bazilika, 125–138.

129 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 35–40.

It is clear that the archiepiscopal complex in Dristra did not emerge suddenly, nor was it the result of a single, unified building program. Previous findings suggest that Church No. 5, a partially excavated three-aisled basilica, was constructed at the approximate center of the Dristra citadel, directly opposite the central southern gate (Fig. 10a). Of particular significance is its close proximity to a pagan temple (or sanctuary) from the first half of the 9th century – a pattern also observed in other major Bulgarian centers such as Pliska and Preslav, where Christian basilicas were often built on the ruins or in the vicinity of earlier pagan sanctuaries.[130]

The remains of Episcopal Church No. 5 are located approximately 0.70 meters below the floor of Church No. 4. Only the southern aisle, about 13 meters in length, has been partially uncovered. Additionally, the western profile and the partition walls between the central and southern aisles, as well as between the central and northern aisles, have been documented. The southern aisle measures 3 meters in width, while the central aisle is 6 meters wide. There are preserved buttresses on the southern wall: the first is situated at the junction of the apse and the southern wall, following a small recess. Subsequent buttresses extend westward from the first one along the southern wall, placed at varying intervals. The foundations of the church were well leveled after the demolition and then filled with two thin layers of mortar. This process effectively sealed the church – a ritual practice often associated with the burial of Early Christian cult monuments in late antiquity.[131]

Based on the remains, it is likely that the church was a three-aisled basilica. Researchers attempted to reconstruct its design using analogies from other known structures of the period. Initially, the church was compared with 9th-century Bulgarian churches featuring prominent buttresses, such as the monastery church (katholikon) near Ravna,[132] which dates to the last quarter of the 9th century (more on this later), and several early basilicas from Pliska.[133] While the plan of the Ravna church, as well as the three basilicas in Pliska, are significantly narrower and shorter, with smaller foundations, the dimensions of Church No. 5 in Dristra suggest a closer comparison with the basilicas at Gebe Klise and Sakalova Mogila, and especially with the Palace Church in Preslav.[134]

The Palace Church in Preslav, like the Church No. 5 in Dristra, occupies a prestigious location, as both served as cathedrals in the 9th century. In addition to this shared status, the two churches exhibit a number of architectural similarities, including deep foundations, square construction, and massive buttresses – features that are absent in the other two major basilicas in Preslav at Gebe Klise and Sakalova Mogila. Almost without exception, analyses of churches in Ravna, Pliska, and Preslav show that the central nave in Dristra is more than twice as wide as the side aisles. The total

130 *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 112, 169, 172.

131 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 35–40

132 *Georgiev,* Manastirska crkva, 71–98; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 90–94.

133 *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 19–28, 41–47; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 26–29, 60–90.

134 *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–59; *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 13–25; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 28–35.



Fig. 9.
Dristra, Church No. 2 with residential complex, second phase, aerial view

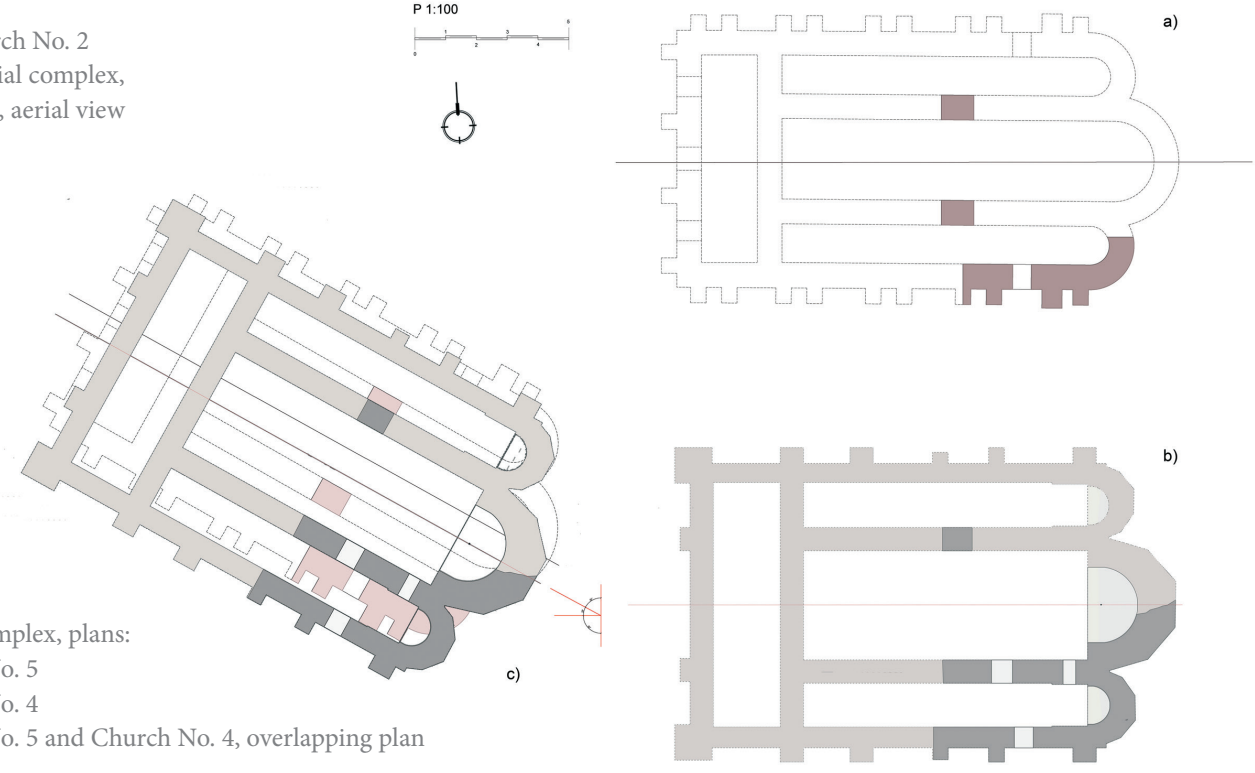


Fig. 10.
Dristra,
Episcopal complex, plans:
a. Church No. 5
b. Church No. 4
c. Church No. 5 and Church No. 4, overlapping plan

external width of Church No. 5 in Dristra is approximately 18.40 meters. Including the buttresses, the width expands to about 20.60 meters. In terms of length, the best analogy for the church in Dristra is the plan of the investigated Palace Church in Preslav. Based on the analogy, the length of Church No. 5 could be, at the least 31 meters, though it is more likely to exceed 33 meters. Similarly, the apse of Church No. 5 might have been either semicircular on both the exterior and interior, as seen in the Palace Church in Preslav, or three-sided on the exterior and semicircular on the interior, as in the church at Ravna. The large buttresses closely positioned at the eastern end of Church No. 5 suggest thick walls at the apse and a vaulted roof, much like those found in Ravna and Preslav.[135]

Regarding the potential existence of an exonarthex, it can only be hypothesized. The western part of the nave, including the narthex and the space in front of it, has not been studied, as they are located in an urban area. However, based on the wide walls and robust foundations, it is likely that the church had galleries above the side aisles.[136]

The similarities in plan, dimensions, and, to some extent, the shaped buttresses between Church No. 5 in Dristra and the Palace Church in Preslav are not surprising. By the mid-9th century, both Dristra and Preslav held the status of royal residences, and their legitimacy was directly tied to the capital, Pliska. It is possible that both temples were built around the same time. A church of such scale, design, and significance in medieval Bulgaria, however, would later be constructed by Samuel at the end of the 10th century, when he built the remarkable three-aisled cathedral basilica at his residence on the island of St. Achilleos in Lake Prespa.[137]

This raises the question of the origin of basilicas with buttresses or pilasters in Bulgarian medieval architecture. Since the system of massive buttresses was not characteristic of medieval Byzantine churches, some Bulgarian scholars suggest that the construction of the Great Basilica in Pliska and the Palace Church in Preslav may have been influenced by Western architectural practices.[138] In fact, arguments have been made that these churches are linked to the Latin mission in Bulgaria shortly after the Baptism, between 867 and 870.[139] Similarly, during the reign of Prince Boris I Michael, around 889, the church at Ravna was built.[140]

It has been suggested that the construction of Cathedral Church No. 5 in Dristra should also be attributed to this same period, around 866–870. This hypothesis aligns with information from Theophylact of Ohrid's *The Long Life of Saint Clement of Ohrid*,

135 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 35–40.

136 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 38–39.

137 *Moutsopoulos*, Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou.

138 *Georgiev,* Bazilikata „Gebe klise", 47–48, 53–54; *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 19–20; *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata-manastir, 23–27.

139 *Ovčarov – Aladžov – Ovčarov,* Golemijat carski dvorec, 42–43, 116–119; *Kostova*, Churches, 100; *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 48–49.

140 *Georgiev,* Manastirska crkva, 71–98.

which mentions that Boris I Michael built seven cathedral (i.e., episcopal) churches. Most researchers agree that one of these churches was located in Dristra.[141] Indeed, the church's plan, dimensions, massive buttresses, and stratigraphy suggest that Church No. 5 was constructed immediately after the baptism of Bulgaria, between 865 and 870, and was likely the cathedral church of the first bishop of Dristra, Nicholas – as documented in the inscription from Silistra. Following the establishment of Bishop Nicholas in Dristra in 870, a second basilica was erected on the banks of the Danube River – Church No. 2, which was associated with the episcopal palace and probably served as palace church.[142]

Church No. 2 in Dristra is one of the most significant and impressive monuments of the early Bulgarian Middle Ages, reflecting the history and development of medieval Bulgarian architecture during that period (Fig. 11). As noted, the church was long believed to be the cathedral church of the Bishopric of Dristra, until a larger church was excavated in the center of the fortress in 2015. The basilica experienced two construction phases during its use in the First Bulgarian Empire. In the first phase, at the end of the 9th century, it was built as a three-aisled vaulted basilica with one narthex and two entrances, located to the west and south. The dimensions of the church are 25.40 meters by 14.70 meters. The aisles are separated from the nave by deep stylobates, on which two pairs of massive rectangular columns rest. These columns likely originally supported a system of arches, which in turn supported the vaulted roof. The church is constructed from well-shaped limestone blocks. The façades of the temple are enlivened by rhythmically arranged pilasters that support an arcade system.[143] The church ends in the east with three apses, which are semicircular on the inside and pentagonal on the outside.[144] The altar area was connected to the *prothesis* and the *diakonikon*'s room through narrow passages. In front of the central apse, there are traces of a low marble altar partition, behind which a reliquary was placed.[145]

The narthex featured three entrances leading into the nave. Both the narthex and the eastern part of the nave contain tombs, which were likely the burial sites of prominent members of the spiritual and secular aristocracy in the 10th century.[146] To the north of the church, near the *prothesis*, there is a baptistery, where a fragment of a fountain and parts of the water supply system have been preserved. Beneath the foundations of the church, fragments of Late Antique, Early Byzantine, and Old Bulgarian

141 *Mullett*, Theophylact of Ochrid, 235–237; *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 48–49.

142 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 49–50; *Dončeva*, Patriaršeskata bazilika, 125–139; *Nikolova,* Pravoslavnite cŭrkvi, 176–177.

143 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 40–41; *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 169–176; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–59.

144 Stefka Angelova suggests that the apses were three-sided on the outside, see *Angelova et al.,* Cŭrkva № 2, 28–40; *Angelova,* Razkopki na cŭrkva № 2, 12–39; *Angelova*, Arheologičeskoto proučvane, 42–45.

145 Some architectural details suggest the presence of an ambo in front of the presbytery, at the center of the church. It is possible that the ambo was erected during the second construction phase, following the beginning of the 10th century, *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 170–171.

146 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 41.

ceramics from the pagan period or possibly earlier, have been found, suggesting that the church was built after the middle of the 9th century.[147] The church in Dristra, during its first construction phase, bears the greatest similarity – both in plan and size – to the Palace Church and the basilicas at Stambol Yolu, Gebe Klise and Sakalova Mogila, in Preslav, with the latter two lacking pilasters on their outer walls.[148]

In the first half of the 10th century, Church No. 2 underwent significant alterations, transforming from a short basilica into a basilica with a dome supported by four cross-shaped pillars (Fig. 12).[149] The comparison of Church No. 2 with Preslav's cross-in-square domed churches is particularly insightful. During the 10th century, the Preslav region was home to some of the most advanced and innovative church designs in the Bulgarian Empire, including several cross-in-square domed structures such as Church No. 1 and Church No. 2 in Avradaka constructed around the first half of the 10th century and the Church of Mostič Monastery. These churches, along with Church No. 2, share significant structural elements, such as the use of pillars or massive supports for the central dome, a feature that became central to the architectural identity of Bulgarian churches during the Golden Age of the First Bulgarian Empire under Simeon.[150] The floor of the Church No. 2 was raised by nearly 0.60 meters and covered with marble slabs, partly in *opus sectile*. During this reconstruction, the baptistery was destroyed. In the northern aisle, near the eastern end, a *mitatorium* was possibly established. However, due to extensive damage in the southeastern part of the church, it is difficult to confirm the presence of this feature with certainty.[151]

The reconstruction can be dated with relative precision to after 927, when Dristra was declared the residence of the Bulgarian patriarch.[152] This dating is supported not only by the changes in the church's architectural volume but also by the rich plastic and decorative system and the only known example of figural painting from the first half of the 10th century.[153] A three-tiered *synthronon* was installed in the altar area, preceded by an ambo. Stela Dončeva argues that this architectural transformation provides strong evidence for a shift in the church's status – from an episcopal cathedral

147 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 40–41

148 *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–48; *Ovčarov – Dončeva*, Monumentalnite preslavski baziliki, 91–106.

149 *Angelova,* Razkopki na cŭrkva № 2, 12–14; *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 169–171.

150 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 79–82; *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 169–176; *Angelova et al.,* Cŭrkva № 2, 28–40; *Angelova,* Razkopki na cŭrkva № 2, 12–39; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 78–83.

151 *Dončeva*, Patriaršeskata bazilika, 131.

152 The transfer of the patriarchal seat from Preslav to Dristra in the early 10th century marks a significant historical event, deserving of careful consideration of both political and religious factors. While the exact reasons for this move remain undocumented, scholars have put forward several plausible explanations, informed by the political, strategic, and religious contexts of the time, see *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 149–168; *Georgiev*, Kŭm vŭprosa za gradoustrojstvoto na aulite, 99–106; *Atanasov,* Pŭrvata bŭlgarska patriaršeska katedra, 179–196. Some scholars argue that until 934/944, the head of the Bulgarian Church held the title of archbishop, as established at the Council of 870. According to these scholars, it was only after 934, and at the latest by 944, that Romanos I Lekapenos granted the bishop of Dristra the title of patriarch, as listed by Du Cange, see, *Podskalsky*, Theologische Literatur, 70–74; *Oikonomidès*, Les listes, 237–244.

153 *Angelova,* Razkopki na cŭrkva № 2, 14.



Fig. 11.
Dristra, Church No. 2,
view from the east

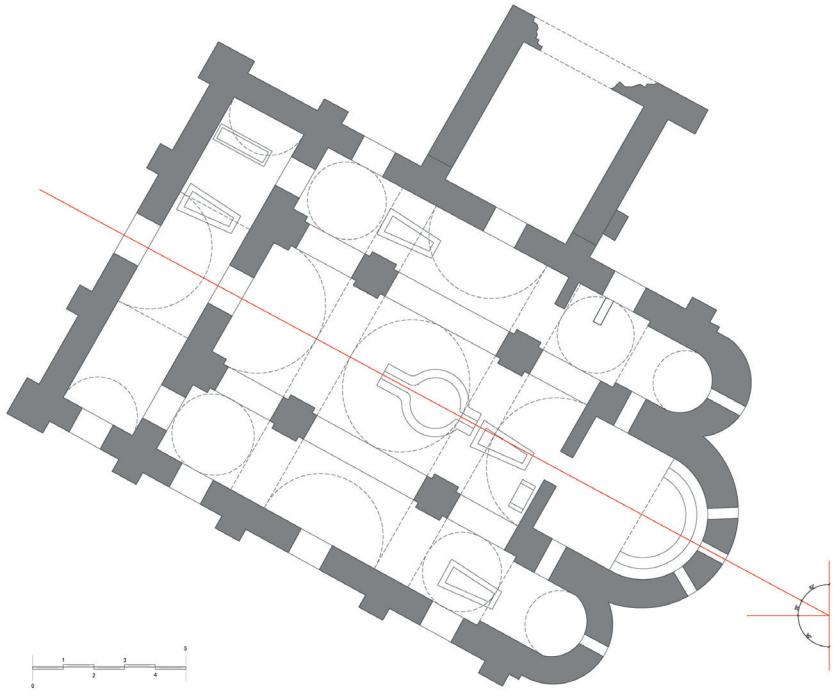


Fig. 12.
Dristra, Church No. 2,
second phase, plan

to a patriarchal cathedral after 927.[154] In the central nave, in front of the royal doors of the altar partition, a brick-built grave was discovered. The grave contained the remains of a man dressed in black, holding a rock crystal cross in his hands. The grave is dated between the 10th and 12th centuries.[155] It has been hypothesized that this could be the burial site of Patriarch Damianos (c. 944–c. 972), but there is no concrete evidence to support this claim.[156]

It was common, especially in episcopal residences, to have two basilicas: one serving as the cathedral and the other dedicated to a martyr.[157] A similar situation is found in Preslav, where two large basilicas existed: one serving as the royal basilica and the other as the cathedral. The position of Church No. 2 on the banks of the Danube, rather than in the center of the medieval city where cathedral churches were typically located, suggests that its primary function was more closely tied to the palatial complex.[158] The importance of the basilica as both an episcopal and patriarchal palace church is further highlighted by its rich plastic decoration. During excavations, numerous decorated stone cornices, columns, bases, and marble details were uncovered, all of which have direct analogues in the plastic decoration of the most prominent 10th-century churches in Preslav.[159] Similar to the 10th-century Church No. 1 in Avradaka, Preslav, Church No. 2 also yielded a three-dimensional stone figure of a fantastic beast – featuring a lion's head, an elongated leopard's neck, and bear's paws – positioned above an arched curve.[160] Besides the sculptural decoration, a fragmented 10th-century white clay icon of the Virgin Mary was discovered to the west of Church No. 2.[161]

It is important to note that Church No. 2 is not an independent monument, but rather a part of the larger episcopal residence complex. The episcopal residence is located just 3.90 meters west of the church's narthex, with its chain of rooms abutting the northern fortress wall. These rooms are arranged in a north-south direction, defining the western edge of the central courtyard. The residence itself has external dimensions of 48.20 by 5.80 meters, and consists of seven rooms on the ground floor, arranged in a continuous sequence. The building is constructed from well-shaped limestone blocks, with larger stones used at the entrances and corners, and smaller blocks used on the facades. The foundation level of the residence coincides with that of the basilica, suggesting that both structures were likely built at the same time, or within a short period of

154 *Dončeva*, Patriaršeskata bazilika, 131–132.

155 *Angelova,* Razkopki na Cŭrkva № 2, 13–16; *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 63–66.

156 *Angelova – Prinzing*, Das mutmabliche Grab des Patriarchen Damian, 728–730; *Atanasov,* Pŭrvata bŭlgarska patriaršeska katedra, 179–196.

157 *Hubert*, Les „Cathédrales doubles"168–176. It is possible that Church No. 2 was founded near the Danube in honor of St. Emilian, who was martyred there in the mid-4th century, *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 50–51.

158 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 50–51.

159 *Angelova,* Razkopki na cŭrkva № 2, 13–14.

160 *Ivanova-Mavrodinova,* Razkopki na Avradaka, 30–35; *Atanasov,* Srednovekovna skulpturna kompozicija, 101–111; *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 92–93.

161 *Angelova*, Arheologičeskoto proučvane, 44.

each other, during the last third of the 9th century. At a later stage, the residence was expanded to the southwest with the addition of a chain of rooms, which enclosed a second courtyard.[162] East of Church No. 2, close to the fortification walls oriented north-south, a three-part bathhouse was constructed. It remains unclear whether the bathhouse was part of the Patriarchal complex or belonged to the Danube palace of the Bulgarian rulers.[163]

In the first half of the 10th century, Dristra became the residence of the first Bulgarian patriarch, prompting the construction of a new, more prominent church at the center of the Dristra citadel.[164] To make way for this, the old episcopal basilica No. 5 was demolished, and a new cathedral, No. 4, was built in its place. Notably, cathedral No. 4 is nearly the same size as basilica No. 5 and partially utilizes its foundations (Fig. 10c). Church No. 4 has been partially explored over a length of about 13 meters in the southeastern part of the southern aisle and the eastern part of the central nave. The inner width of the southern aisle is 2.90 meters. The southern apse is pentagonal on the outside and semicircular on the inside. In the western part of the church, partition walls were found between the central nave and southern and northern aisles. The central nave of Church No. 4 is 7.8 meters wide. The central apse is semicircular on the inside and polygonal on the outside. A massive three-tiered *synthronon* made of stone blocks is placed in the apse, with the joints between the blocks filled with red plaster. The construction of the church is precise, with square well-shaped limestone blocks carefully arranged in rows. Two pilasters have been registered on the southern façade. Notably, the second pilaster, while structurally connected to the wall, lacks a base, unlike the first. Additional pilasters likely existed toward the east, near the apse, and toward the west, near the narthex, but these parts of the church remain unexplored. On the south wall an entrance to the *diakonikon* was recorded. On the foundation of a partition wall, a pedestal measuring 1.5 by 1.5 meters was found. This pedestal likely supported a column, or perhaps a massive square pylon, one of the four supports for the dome. Nearby, a segment of a marble column was discovered. The size and shape of this column exclude the possibility that it supported the dome or the sub-dome space. More likely, it served as part of the middle of a window – a feature typical of the 10th to early 11th centuries. The location, size, and dimensions of these windows or columns are reflected in the preserved churches of the Theotokos *tou Libos* and Myrelaion in Constantinople from the early 10th century. Evidence of a dome covered with lead sheets comes from the many fragments of lead found on the church's floor.[165]

Considering the similar architectonics, altar arrangement, the width of the south aisle, pilasters, and *synthronon* – all of which resemble the fully studied Church No. 2

162 Ibid., 42.

163 Ibid., 170–171.

164 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 82–95. On the possible first Bulgarian patriarch, see, *Nikolov*, The Bulgarian Church, 139–157; *Hannick*, Cheminements, 121–137. Cf. *Prinzing*, La jurisprudence ecclésiastique, 159–177.

165 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 71–78.

in the palace complex – it is likely that the newly discovered Church No. 4 followed a similar cross-in-square with a dome plan (Fig. 10b). The massive structure of this church suggests that it was supported by columns or pillars, similar to Church No. 2. The foundations of the central nave are wider than the outer walls of the church – a rare feature in medieval Bulgarian church construction of the 9th to 11th centuries. This structural anomaly points to the need to bear the enormous loads of a massive dome, a feature without parallel in Bulgarian church architecture of the period.[166] Only a small portion of cathedral Church No. 4 in Dristra has been excavated, limiting our ability to make comprehensive observations or conclusions about its interior and exterior. However, the excavated remains show significant similarities with the second phase of Church No. 2. In terms of plan, design, and to some extent size, it closely resembles several 10th-century cross-domed churches in Preslav, such as the churches in Avradaka and Mostič.[167]

Scholars have speculated that the architectural style of these buildings may have originated in Constantinople, with prototypes found in two existing churches: the Theotokos *tou Libos* (907) and the Church of Myrelaion (ca. 920).[168] If the reconstruction of Church No. 2 and the construction of Church No. 4 in Dristra were indeed prompted by the elevation of the city to patriarchal status in 927 or in 934/944, then their construction dates align closely with the Constantinopolitan churches.[169] Since the Church of Myrelaion was commissioned by Byzantine Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), who also legitimized the first Bulgarian patriarch, it is possible that Constantinopolitan architects played a role in the design and construction of the patriarchal cross-domed churches in Dristra. [170]

The Bishopric of St. Clement and its successors

The ecclesiastical structure of the First Bulgarian Empire rested on the parallel existence of the inherited Byzantine bishoprics and the gradually established Slavic ones.[171] While the former were organized territorially, the latter were defined by their ethnic composition. Scholars have recognized that the ecclesiastical policies pursued by Bulgarian rulers Boris-Michael and Simeon were aimed at consolidating the Slavic population and integrating their territories into the Bulgarian state following the Bulgarian Church's attainment of autocephaly in 880.[172] Ecclesiastical, historical-geographical, and liturgical studies have identified and broadly reconstructed the

166 Ibid., 82–95.

167 *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 78–83.

168 *Macridy et al.,* The Monastery of Lips, 299–315; *Striker*, The Myrelaion, 16–22; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 274–277; *Marinis*, The Original Form, 267–303.

169 *Podskalsky*, Theologische Literatur, 70–74; *Oikonomidès*, Les listes, 237–244.

170 *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 85–89.

171 For the Bulgarian church organization, see *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 348–352; *Idem*, Diocesan Structure, 791–802, map on p. 815 with further bibliography.

172 *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda,125; *Komatina*, Oblast Vagenitija, 94–95; *Petrovski*, Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 20–21.

territorial extent of three bishoprics located in modern-day southern Albania and North Macedonia – Dragvista and Velitsa, Bregalnica, and Devol. Furthermore, there is compelling evidence to support the existence of a fourth bishopric in the region of Pelagonia.[173] This chapter seeks to establish the chronological and geographical boundaries of the sacred landscapes of Slavic bishoprics by analyzing architectural, art-historical, archaeological and written records.

"Dragvista and Velitsa"

The first bishop in Slavonic language was Clement (893–916), a disciple of St. Cyril and Methodios, according to *The Long Life of St. Clement* written by Theophylact, Archbishop of Ohrid.[174] Clement was appointed by the Bulgarian ruler Simeon in 893–894 to serve as bishop of "Dragvista and Velitsa," signifying his jurisdiction over all Slavs under Bulgarian control between the Vardar River and the Adriatic Sea.[175] More recent scholarly work has significantly advanced our understanding of the origin of the Slavic bishopric of St. Clement, shedding light on its geographical, religious, and cultural dimensions. Predrag Komatina pointed out that the Diocese of Vagenetia, belonging to the Slavic tribe of the Baiunites, could possibly have been a Byzantine precursor to the Slavic bishopric of St. Clement.[176] Aleksei Pentkovsky and his Albanian collaborators have identified Velča (Alb. Velçë), located in the valley of the Šušica River, the left tributary of the Vojuša, in southern Albania, as the probable site of the bishop's see. Furthermore, the entire region extending between Glavinitza, Valona, and Chimara has been reliably recognized as the Slavic bishopric of St. Clement (Map 1).[177] It was in this region that the corpus of Byzantine liturgical texts was translated from Greek into Church Slavonic.[178]

The overall archaeological picture of the middle and upper valley of the Vojuša River indicates a notable Slavic presence and building activity. Numerous sites, which preserve Slavic toponyms to this day, contain the remains of medieval churches.[179] Among these, the partially preserved church, excavated in 2015 at the Asomat site

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173 For the Slavic bishoprics, see *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 130–137, 141; *Idem*, Slavjanskoe bogosluženie v arhiepiskopii, 54–100; *Petrovski*, Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 33–38; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 796–801.

174 *Iliev*, The Long Life of Saint Clement, XVII.53–XX.62. For the titles of St. Clement, as noted in the written sources, cf. *Filiposki*, The Titles of St. Clement, 562–570.

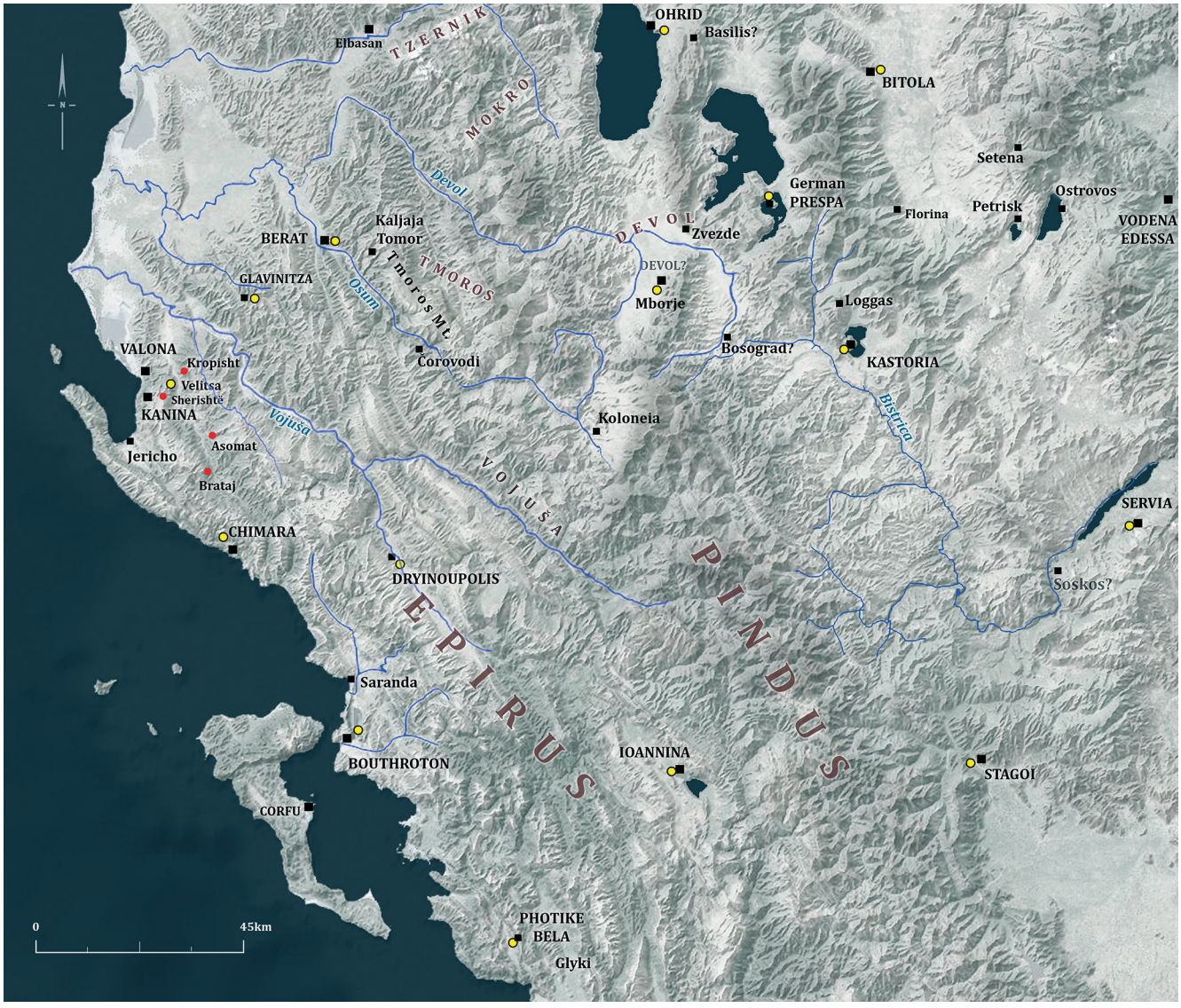
175 These toponyms are associated with the regions inhabited by the Slavic tribes of the Drugubites and Baiunites, who settled across the extensive territory stretching from Thessalonike in the southeast to Pelagonia in the present-day northwest and southern Albania. See *Koco*, Veličkata episkopija, 5–8; *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 288–289; *Cvetković*, O „etničkim episkopijama", 285–299; *Petrovski*, Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 34; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 798–799. Cf. also *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 98–105.

176 *Komatina*, Oblast Vagenitija, 83–100.

177 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 5–42.

178 *Pentkovskij*, Grečeskij original, 651–664; *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija, 422–434; *Mučaj et al.,* Srednevekovye cerkvi, 34.

179 The survey program encompasses numerous sites along the Vlora River and in Mallakastër. However, due to limited archaeological evidence, the majority of the churches remain of uncertain date. See *Xhyheri et al.*, Kërkime arkeologjike, 279–314; *Mučaj et al.,* Srednevekovye cerkvi, 9–10.



Map 1. Slavic bishoprics in the region of Epirus in the 9th and 10th century

near the village of Velçë, is believed to be the earliest.[180] It was a cross-in-square in plan, measuring 10.84 by 7.08 meters, with piers supporting a dome (now lost, Fig. 13a). The naos, approximately of square plan, extended eastward into a semicircular main apse and westward into a narthex. In addition to the main entrance on the west, there were entrances on the north and south sides of the naos. The walls are constructed almost entirely of *spolia* – taken from the ancient site – incorporating large carved stone blocks, brick fragments, and elements of architectural decoration (acroteria, fragments of a cornice). Similarities with churches in the area, dating to the late 9th or 10th century, are worth considering. The same construction technique, utilizing spoliated ancient building materials, can also be observed in the nearby basilica in

180 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 18–23, fig. 2–7; *Xhyheri et al.,* Vlorës, 455–456; *Xhyheri et al.*, Kërkime arkeologjike, 279–288, Tab. I–III, fig. 1.

Glavinitza, modern Ballsh.[181] Additionally, rows of putlog holes documented at Asomat are similarly found in the first construction phase of the Church of St. John the Forerunner in Delvinë (Shen Janit në Delvinë),[182] located within the neighboring Byzantine Bishopric of Dryinoupolis.[183] Critical for the chronology of construction of the church in Asomat is its planning. The spread of the cross-in-square format, characterized by modest dimensions, four square supports and a sanctuary confined to the main apse, is evidenced in the valley of the Šušica River by four ruined churches: St. George, the katholikon of the fortified monastery in Brataj (Fig. 13b, Map 1), Gurzezë, Maja e Lutroit in Kropisht (Fig. 13c, Map 1), and Bregu i Beshos near Sherishtë (Fig. 13d, Map 1). The dimensions and construction technique of St. George[184] and Gurzezë,[185] using rough stonework with limited use of bricks and ceramic tiles, bear similarities with Asomat. Limited excavations confirmed that both Maja e Lutroit and Bregu i Beshos, though of uncertain date, were constructed above the remains of a Late Antique structures.[186] While likely built at a somewhat later date, all these churches may have been modeled after the design employed in Asomat, as proposed by Skender Muçaj.[187] However, accepting the suggested close links between Asomat and the cross-in-square structure appended to Clement's triconch at his foundation in Ohrid (Fig. 44) proves more difficult.[188] Although the noted similarities between them in terms of design are indisputable, the western part of the church complex in Ohrid dates to a later period, as confirmed by more recent research.[189]

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181 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 23.

182 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 23. For the Church of St. John the Forerunner in Delvinë and its construction phases – 9th to 10th century; late 10th to first half of the 11th century; and 13th century – see *Mučaj et al.*, Shën Janit, Delvinë, 93–123, esp. 96–98, 115–116.

183 The Bishopric of Dryinoupolis belonged to the Byzantine Metropolitanate of Naupaktos according to: *Notitia* 7 from the first quarter of the 10th century, *Notitia* 9 from the mid-10th century, and *Notitia* 10 from the period 971–976, Notitiae, 7.582, 9.453, 10.539; *Komatina*, Oblast Vagenitija, 92.

184 Earlier scholars classified the Church of St. George within the corpus of 13th- and 14th-century church architecture. See *Meksi*, Arkitektura e Kishave, 220–221, fig. 180b; *Idem*, L'architecture des églises, 1160, fig. 24. More recent archaeological studies have reassessed its dating, placing this church in the 10th–11th century, certainly before the Norman conquests. See *Xhyheri et al.,* Kërkime arkeologjike, 288–293, Tab. II.11–13, fig. 2–3.

185 The remains of the church at the Gurzezë site exhibit two phases of construction. Based on limited archaeological research, the first phase is dated to the late 9th–early 10th century and has been reconstructed as a cross-in-square structure with an apse. See *Xhyheri,* Korridori Vlorë-Prespë, 286–287, Tab. XLII.1, 3, 5, 7, 8.

186 *Xhyheri et al.,* Vlorës, 441–443, Tab. II. 4, 6 (Bregu i Beshos), 453, fig. 5 (Maja e Lutroit); *Xhyheri et al.*, Kërkime arkeologjike, 293–294, Tab. VII. 10–11, fig. 4–5 (Maja e Lutroit), 295, fig. 7 (Bregu i Beshos).

187 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 22.

188 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 23–24, fig. 8; *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 126.

189 D. Koco, the first excavator at the Plaošnik site, believed that Clement's triconch church was expanded westward during his lifetime: *Koco*, Klimentoviot manastir, 178–179. This was accepted by *Kuzman*, Arheološki svedoštva, 144–149, draw. 1, Pl. 3, 4, fig. 4. A combined analysis of written sources – Theophylact's account of St. Clement's burial in the pronaos of his church – and the architectural evidence demonstrates that only the narthex was part of the initial complex. The cross-in-square structure was a later addition, likely part of renovations carried out in the 12th or 13th century. See *Korunovski – Dimitrova,* Vizantiska Makedonija, 16–19, 42–45; *Kasapova,* Dogradbite, 379–381, fig. 1–5.

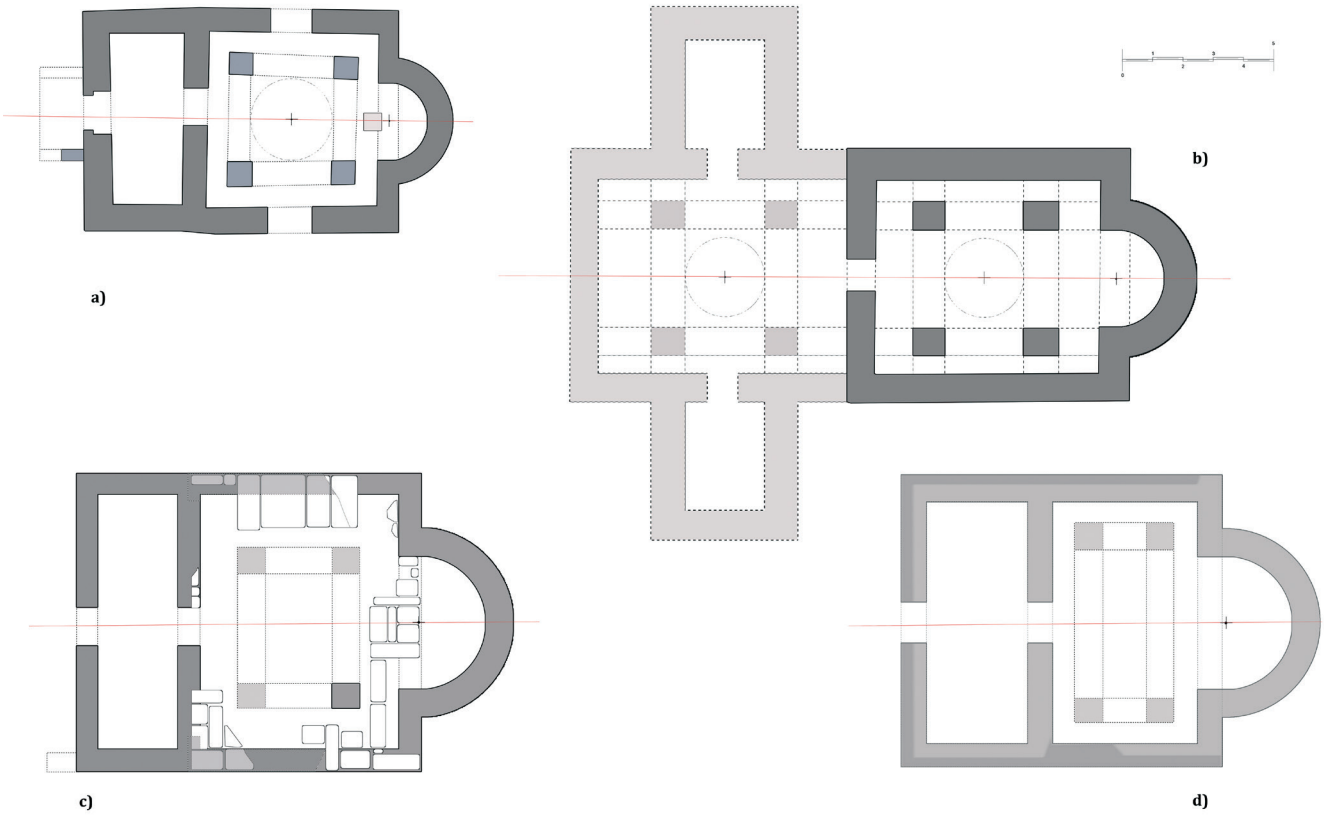


Fig. 13. Šušica River Valley, cross-in-square churches, plans: a. Velçë, Asomat;
b. Brataj, Monastery of St. George; c. Kropisht, Maja e Lutroit; d. Sherishtë, Bregu i Beshos

Nevertheless, the church in Asomat merits consideration within the context of St. Clement's epoch. Firstly, the microtoponym Asomat seems to reflect the church's original dedication to Archangel Michael. Pentkovsky has highlighted numerous parallels[190] to it and demonstrated that the cult of Archangel Michael played a crucial role in shaping Slavic religious culture in the southwestern part of the First Bulgarian Empire. A collection of Slavic hymnographic works dedicated to Archangel Michael, including Clement's Encomium on the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, emerged in the territory of modern southern Albania and southwestern North Macedonia in the late 9th to early 10th century.[191] The monastery established by Saint Naum in 905, with the royal patronage of Prince Boris-Michael, might have continued the tradition of dedication to Holy Archangel Michael initiated in Clement's foundation in Ohrid, rather than being the first known example.[192] Secondly, elements of design and

190 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 24–25; *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 121–122.

191 *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija, 401–442; *Idem*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 117–146.

192 For the discussion on the original dedication of Clement's monastery, see *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija, 401–442; *Idem*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 117–146.

construction – such as the use of piers instead of columns, the lack of architectural articulation of the *pastophoria*, side entrances, and the predominant use of stone – support the early dating of the church in Asomat. From this perspective, it would be instructive to compare the church in Asomat with the Palace Church in Pliska, the earliest example of the cross-in-square type characterized by modest dimensions.[193] Asomat also finds parallels with churches belonging to the so-called provincial variant of the cross-in-square type, as exemplified by the Preslav churches – Bial Briag No. 3, and Tuzlalăka.[194] The various criteria discussed above – localization, dedication, architectural design, construction, historical references – support the general conclusion that the church in Asomat may represent the remaining traces of building activity within Clement's bishopric. According to numismatic finds from the main apse, the church remained active until the 12th century.[195]

The question of Glavinitza

During the most productive period of his life (886–893), devoted to spreading Christianity and promoting Slavic literacy, Clement rather traveled as a *daskalos* throughout the region of Kutmichinitsa[196] than remained restricted to a single center.[197] Glavinitza (Kephalonia, modern Ballsh) features prominently on the map of his missionary activities (Map 1). In his *Long Life of St. Clement*, Theophylact informs us that Boris-Michael granted Clement three lavish houses in Devol, as well as places for rest in Ohrid and Glavinitza.[198] The latter was a stage of the ambitious building activity embodied in the renovation of the large Early Byzantine basilica,[199] which survives today only as archaeological remains.

The medieval church known as "the old Monastery of the Virgin Mary" inherited the plan and dimensions of the earlier structure; it was a three-aisled basilica with a narthex, measuring 22.50 by 17.20 meters. The third, medieval phase of construction included the tripartite sanctuary, which housed the *synthronon*, along with the repair of the walls. The church was expanded with annexed chapels flanking the lateral aisles. Additionally, the former portico was transformed into an outer narthex, and the baptistery into a chapel (Fig. 14). Along with utilizing pre-existing foundations, the church was

193 See above, 69.

194 For these churches, see *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 93, fig. 53–54; *Dončeva*, Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 227–228 (Bial Briag), 233–235 (Tuzlalăka).

195 In the sanctuary, a Norman coin from Sicily, minted during the reign of William II (1166–1189) and bearing Latin and Kufic inscriptions, was discovered. This coin likely dates to the time of the Norman-Byzantine War in 1185, cf. *Mučaj et al.,* Srednevekovye cerkvi, 23.

196 On Kutmichinitsa (Kutmichevitsa) and its localization in the territory of what is now southern Albania, cf. KME II, 487–491 (P. Koledarov); *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 124, 126–127.

197 For this aspect of Clement's life, cf. *Filiposki*, Sveti Kliment, 318, n. 5. For a review of scholarly opinions on the organization of Clement's school, see *Petrovski*, Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 23–24.

198 *Iliev*, The Long Life of Saint Clement, XXIII.67; Theophylactus, Epistulae, 205.

199 The Early Byzantine basilica at Ballsh underwent two phases of construction during the 6th century. Its closest analogies can be found in Basilicas A, C, D, and the baptistery adjacent to the cathedral in Byllis. See *Mučaj*, Kisha e Shën Mërisë, 259–267; *Mučaj – Hobdari*, Manastiri i Shën Mërisë, 191–194, with further bibliography.

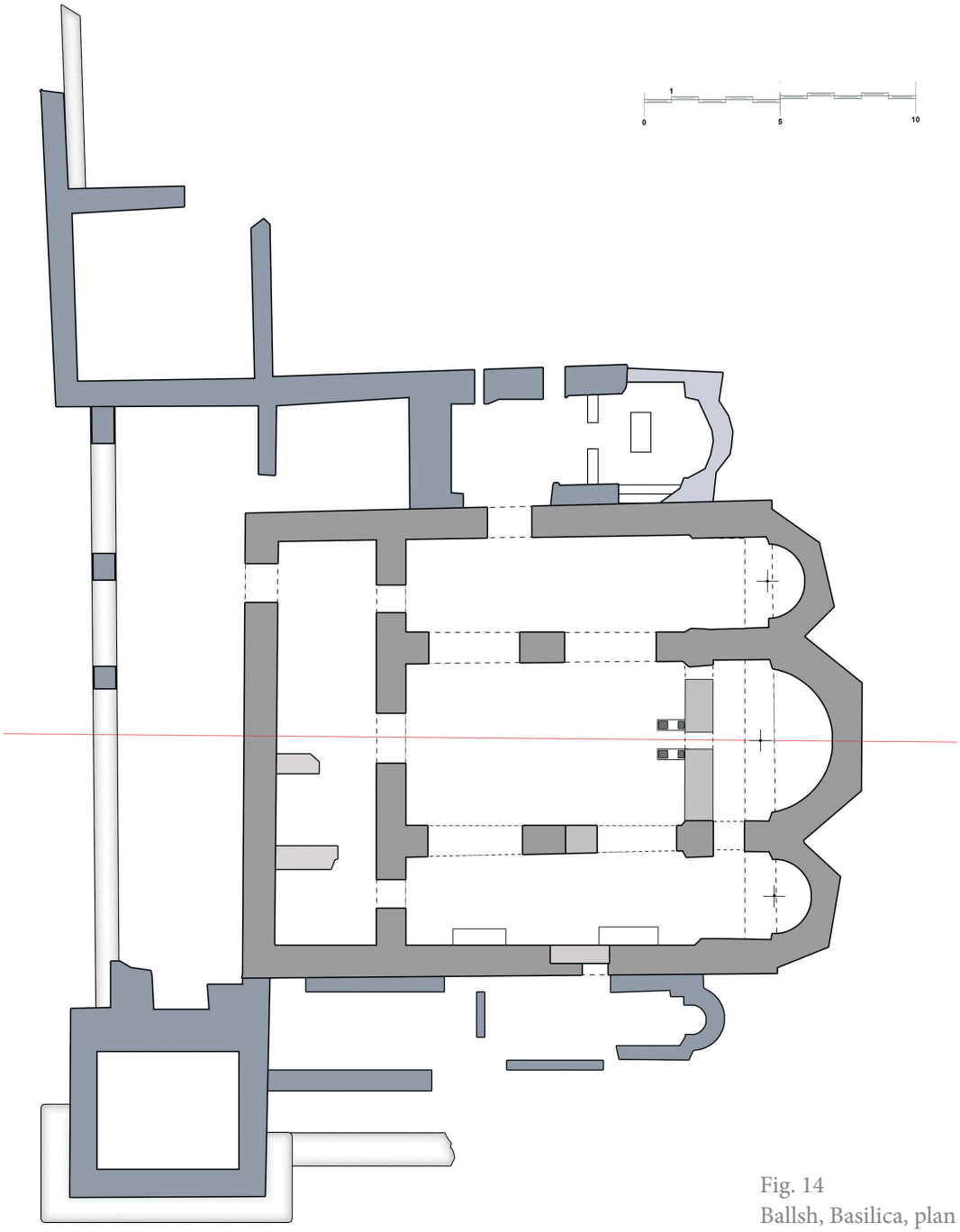


Fig. 14
Ballsh, Basilica, plan

constructed entirely from building materials sourced from the nearby Byllis, an ancient city in southern Illyria and an episcopal see during the Early Byzantine period, which had suffered destruction in the 6th century.[200] Moreover, the majority of the sculptural decoration was assembled from Byllis, as evidenced by spoliated architectural elements found *in situ*.[201] However, a distinct group of older components was newly carved,

200 For Byllis, see *Ceka – Mučaj*, Byllis. For the recent research of the episcopal complex, see *Beaudry et al.*, Byllis, 622–639; *Chevalier et al.*, Trois Basiliques, 155–165; *Beaudry et al.*, Le quartier épiscopal, 1–15, with further bibliography.

201 For the Early Byzantine sculptural decoration of the basilica at Ballsh, see *Anamali*, Bazilika e Ballshit, 301–306; *Idem*, Rreth skulpturës, 237–242. For the fragmentarily preserved ambo from the 6th century in this church, see *Hobdari*, Ambonët, 332–333, Tab. V, 1–3.

providing critical evidence for dating the medieval renovation of the church. More than ten limestone pieces, including colonnettes, shafts, capitals, lintels, and jambs, associated with arches, sanctuary screen, doors, and windows, were published by Skender Muçaj.[202] They are adorned with sculptural decorations of an ornamental character, comprising floral motifs (rinceau with half-palmettes, five-lobed leaves) and geometric elements (six-petal rosettes), interlaces (double braid with oculus, triple braid, torsade), as well as geometric interlace patterns featuring palmettes (Fig. 15–16).[203] All of these are characterized by the same roughly carved low relief and a moderate level of artistic achievement. The majority of the mentioned examples belong to the widespread vocabulary of motifs, reflecting a reminiscence of Late Antique art, found in Byzantium,[204] Southern Italy,[205] and Southern Dalmatia[206] from the 9th to the 11th centuries. This context establishes the broad chronological framework for the creation of the Glavinitza carvings. Muçaj narrows down the dating to between 864 and 919, relying on parallels with the carvings of the Church of the Virgin at Skripou, Orchomenos (873/874),[207] and the Greek inscription on the marble column referencing the Christianization of Bulgarian prince Boris (865/866),[208] found at the site of "the old Monastery of the Virgin Mary" in Glavinitza.[209] Furthermore, Pentkovsky argued that the basilica in Glavinitza was built by Boris-Michael (852–889) as one of the seven cathedral churches following the Christianization of the Bulgarians in 864 and the council in Constantinople (869/870), which assigned Bulgaria to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[210]

While the similarities between the sculpture of Glavinitza and Skripou are undeniable, they remain more general in nature.[211] On the one hand, the sculptural fragments from Glavinitza seem to display closer affinities with the 10th–11th century

202 *Mučaj*, Kisha e Shën Mërisë, 268–277, fig. 5–12; *Idem*, La sculpture décorative, 199–215.

203 An exception is the motif of the spiral snake with the head of a monster, which envelops the cylindrical conduit found in the exonarthex of the church. See *Mučaj*, Kisha e Shën Mërisë, 275–276, fig. 12; *Idem*, La sculpture décorative, 206, fig. 11.

204 For the Middle Byzantine sculpture, see *Vanderheyde,* La sculpture byzantine, 48–59, 109, 133–134, 139–149, 167–177, especially examples: fig. 25, 77, 78, 101–102 (Hosios Loukas Monastery), 79 (Corinth), 80 (Chios), 94, 98 (Skripou), 99–100 (Monastery of Constantine Lips, Constantinople).

205 For the Early Romanesque sculpture in Southern Italy, see *Garton,* Early Romanesque sculpture; Puglia preromanica; *Bertelli – Pani Ermini,* Le diocesi della Puglia.

206 For the Early Romanesque sculpture in Southern Dalmatia, see *Marasović*, Dalmatia Praeromanica IV, passim.

207 For the sculpture of Skripou, see *Megaw*, The Skripou Screen, 1–32; *Papalexandrou*, The Church of the Virgin of Skripou, 156–233.

208 Edition of the inscription: *Praschniker*, Zwei mittelalterliche Inschriften, 73–76, fig. 3; *Ivanov,* Bŭlgarski starini, 12–16.

209 *Mučaj*, Kisha e Shën Mërisë, 277; *Idem*, La sculpture décorative, 207.

210 *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 127–128 who relies on the report of Theophylact of Ohrid in his *Long Life of St. Clement* that the Bulgarian prince Boris-Michael built seven cathedral churches. Cf. *Iliev*, The Long Life of Saint Clement, XXIII.67. For an overview of scholarly efforts to identify the seven cathedral churches built by Boris-Michael, see *Petrovski*, Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 19–20.

211 In this respect, the limited number of decorative schemes, more closely resembling those in Glavinitza, is found in Vrastimiti and the Church of St. Gregory the Theologian in Thebes, both works of the same Theban workshop. For these pieces, see *Megaw,* The Skripou Screen, Pl. 3g–h, Pl. 5b, d.

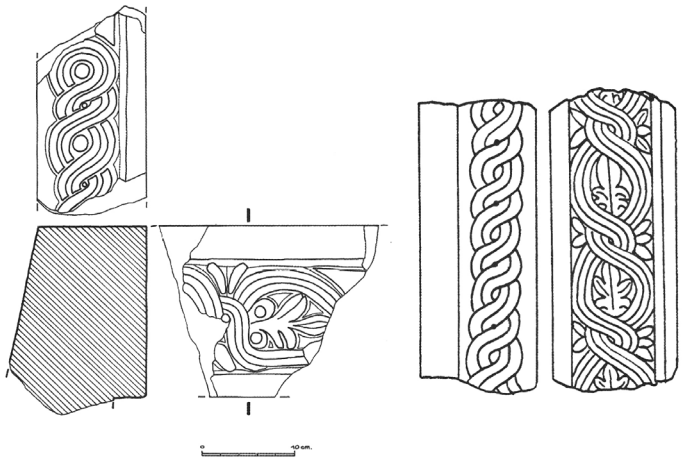


Fig. 15.
Ballsh, fragments of architectural sculpture, National Archaeological Museum, Tirana



Fig. 16.
Ballsh, colonette decorated with a rinceau of half-palmettes, National Archaeological Museum, Tirana

decorative sculpture of churches in neighboring bishoprics under the jurisdiction of the Byzantine Metropolitanate of Naupaktos;[212] on the other hand, potential

212 Cf. the pieces from the Church of the Virgin, Episkopi and the Church of St. John the Forerunner in Delvinë, (Bishopric of Dryinoupolis); St. Gregory, Dramesi; St. Donatos, Glyki (Bishopric of Bela/Photica), St. Demetrios Katsouri (Bishopric of Arta), the Church of the Virgin, Paradeisi (Metropolitanate of Naupaktos) at: *Vanderheyde*, La sculpture architecturale, 13–16, 18–30, 45–48, 68–70, fig. 1–2, 6–12, 16–18, 20–24, 28, 48–50, 89–90; *Hobdari*, Propozim anastiloze, 115–128.

connections with the architectural sculpture of the Bulgarian capital should also be considered.[213] For example, a certain departure from classical norms is notable in the examples from Glavinitza (Fig 16).[214] Despite their less elaborate craftsmanship, they reflect a reinterpretation of models from the Justinianic epoch, akin to those seen in the architectural sculpture of Preslav.[215] The stylized decoration of the latter embodies the antiquarian taste of the Bulgarian court, particularly under Simeon.[216] Although the carvings from Glavinitza require more detailed analysis – particularly in relation to local artistic production in Epirus – they may tentatively be attributed to the broader corpus of Bulgarian sculpture. Preliminary observations suggest a somewhat later origin, dating between 893 and 927, or possibly in the decades that followed. The original dedication of the church might have been to St. Demetrios, as indicated by a 13th-century document authored by Demetrios Chomatenos, Archbishop of Ohrid.[217]

Turning to the question of the establishment of the Bishopric of Glavinitza, the analysis of the sculpture does not support dating it to the period of Boris-Michael's rule. Instead, the church was likely built as the episcopal cathedral at the initiative of Simeon or possibly during the early period of Peter's reign. The proposed conclusion is in accordance with the data provided by the episcopal *notitiae* of the Church of Constantinople. The bishop of Akrokeraunia (Chimara), to whom Glavinitza belonged, appears as a suffragan of the metropolitan of Dyrrachion in *Notitia* 3, dated to approximately 870–880.[218] It is only in *Notitia* 10, written between 971 and 976, that the bishop of Glavinitza or Akrokeraunia is listed among the suffragans of the metropolitan of Dyrrachion.[219] These data suggest that the Bishopric of Akrokeraunia most likely existed continuously throughout the period of Bulgarian rule until 971, while the Bishopric of Glavinitza may have been established as the successor to Clement's Bishopric of Velitsa after his death. It was subsequently merged with the Bishopric of Akrokeraunia (Chimara) between 971 and 976, as argued by Komatina.[220]

213 For the late 9th and 10th-century sculpture of Preslav, see *Vaklinova*, Veliki Preslav, 40–51; *Milanova*, Kamennata plastika, 203–226; *Eadem*, Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 3–11; *Eadem*, Messages culturels, 195–218 with further bibliography.

214 See e.g. the colonette bearing a rinceau with half-palmettes: *Mučaj*, Kisha e Shën Mërisë, 271–272, fig. 7.1–2; *Idem*, La sculpture décorative, 204, fig. 5.

215 See e.g. a marble impost capital from the palace complex of Preslav, adorned with a rinceau featuring half-palmettes: *Milanova*, Ot „antikvarnoto" kŭm „avangardnoto", 7, fig. 14; *Eadem,* Messages culturels, 201, fig. 12.

216 *Milanova,* Messages culturels, 198–202.

217 For a letter of Demetrios Chomatenos addressed to a *hegoumenos* of the Monastery of St. Demetrios in Glavinitza, see Chomatenus, Ponemata, no. 147.1–10. Furthermore, the Monastery of St. Demetrios τῆς Κεφαλωνίας in Thessalonike (now lost) was recorded in the late 13th to early 14th century in manuscript *Cod. Vat. gr. 1891*. The epithet τῆς Κεφαλωνίας most probably points to a connection with Glavinitza / Kephalonia, where a Monastery of St. Demetrios once existed. See *Kissas,* The Monastery of St. Demetrius of Cephalonia, 19–30.

218 Notitiae, 3.308.

219 Notitiae, 10.616–617.

220 *Komatina*, Oblast Vagenitija, 91–93; *Idem*, Diocesan Structure, 801. Cf. *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo.

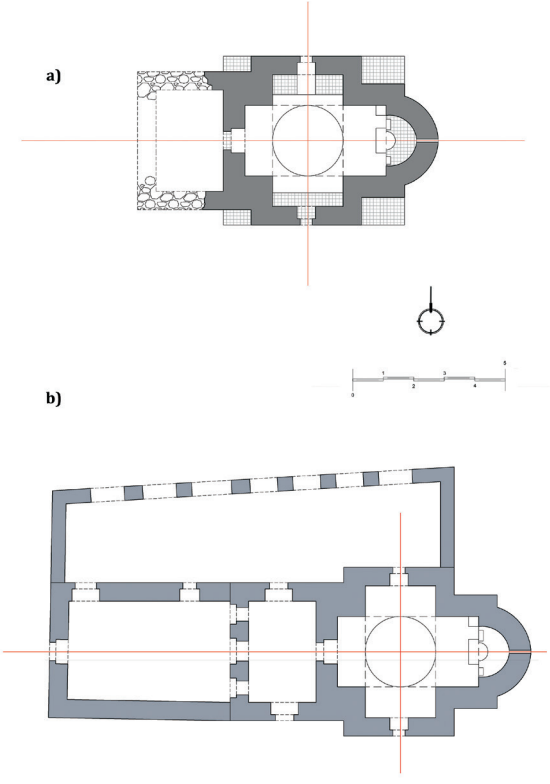


Fig. 17.
Marmiro, Zoodochos Pege, general view

Fig. 18.
Zvërnec Island, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, general view from the east



Fig. 19.
The Bay of Valona,
free-cross churches, plans:
a. Marmiro, Zoodochos Pege;
b. Zvërnec Island, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin



The 10th century witnessed further building activity in the territories of Glavinitza, as evidenced by two churches located in the Bay of Valona on the Adriatic Sea – Zoodochos Pege in Marmiro, near Orikum (Fig. 17)[221] and Dormition of the Virgin on the Island of Zvërnec (Fig. 18).[222] They share in common the free-cross plan, cylindrical drum and small dimensions (Fig. 19a–b). It is noteworthy that the construction ceramics used as *spolia* in Marmiro are identical to those found in the neighboring Asomat and Delvinë. While Marmiro is constructed mostly of irregular stone and brick fragments placed between them, the builders of the church on the island of Zvërnec demonstrated greater masonry skill by employing the cloisonné technique, which is particularly evident in the dome. However, placing these churches more precisely within both the historical timeline and political context of the 10th century remains challenging. In terms of their plan, they appear closely related to a group of small free-cross churches in the Kočani Valley (Teranci, Žiganci, Gradište – Morovizd, Fig. 26).[223] While there is ample reason to attribute these churches to the corpus of Bulgarian architecture, the possibility that they were constructed after Tzimiskes' conquest in 971 cannot be dismissed. In that case, they might be associated either with the establishment of a new Byzantine theme – based in the city of Jericho on the Adriatic coast of the Bay of Valona – or with the period of Samuel's reign.

Bregalnica

The Bishopric of Bregalnica was located in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, along the eponymous river, a left tributary of the Vardar. Its jurisdiction extended over the entire area east of the Vardar, including the basins of the Bregalnica and Strumica rivers.[224] The bishopric took its name from the region, as no city with that name existed.[225] The see itself, however, remains anonymous, with no precise location identified in the historical sources. Established as a Slavic bishopric, Bregalnica continued the tradition of the Late Roman Bishopric of Bargala.[226] Excavations reveal that

221 *Koch*, Einige Bemerkungen, 43–48; *Idem*, Albanien, 282 considers that the church may have originated in the first half of the 10th century; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'architecture, 491, Pl. III. 11. Cf. *Meksi*, Arkitektura e Kishave, 205–206, fig. 164–166, who dates the church in Marmiro to the 12th–13th century based on the comparison with the churches Sapareva Banja and Bobošević.

222 *Vocotopoulos*, Ē ekklēsiastikē architektonikē, 107–108, n.1; *Idem*, Shënime, 144; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'architecture, 491, Pl. III. 12; *Koch*, Albanien, 261. Cf. *Meksi*, Arkitektura e Kishave, 207–209, fig. 167–168, who dates the church on the Island of Zvërnec to the 14th century. It is assumed that the Church of St. Nicholas in Armen, located in the valley of the Šušica River and generally dated to 11th century, may have actually been built in an earlier period, based on archaeological finds dated to the 10th century. See *Xhyheri et al.*, Vlorës, 451–452, Tab. II, 1–3, 7; *Xhyheri*, Nuovi dati sui "bacini" murati, 368, fig. 7.

223 See below 124–127.

224 On the Bishopric of Bregalnica, see *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 1–23; *Koco,* Prilog kon proučavanjeto, 155–162; *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 7–15, 41–104; *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 89–93; *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 129–142; *Stanev*, Bregalnica, 538–563; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 796–798. On the possibility that, at that time, the area under the jurisdiction of the bishop coincided with the region governed by the *comites* Taridēnas and Dristrus, see *Komatina*, op. cit., 798, n. 60.

225 *Koco*, Bregalnica, 75–79; *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 91–93.

226 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 796, n. 52 with further bibliography.

the fortified Late Antique city and episcopal see of Bargala, situated along the upper course of the Bregalnica River, near Štip, suffered destruction during the Avar and Slavic invasions in the late 6th or early 7th century.[227] However, modest Early Medieval structures near the episcopal basilica, including the so-called Small Church, together with discoveries of ceramics, jewelry, and weapons, attest to the Slavic presence in the town from the 7th to the 9th century.[228]

This area was conquered by the Bulgarians in the 9th century. The earliest information about the building activity under the auspices of Prince Boris and his son Simeon in the territory of Bregalnica, comes from later written source. Theophylact, the Archbishop of Ohrid, compiled *The Martyrdom of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis* in the late 11th century, drawing upon Old Bulgarian (Early Slavic) texts.[229] The latter demonstrates that the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs was introduced following the Christianization of the Bulgarians in the 9th century.[230] From the account of Theophylact, we learn that the remains of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis were buried in coffins underneath the ruined church in Tiberiopolis, which the author identifies with Strumica.[231] Furthermore, Theophylact reported that the translation of their relics from Tiberiopolis to the Bishopric of Bregalnica took place in two distinct events. The first occurred during the reign of Prince Boris (852–889). Following his conversion in 864, Boris decided to build a church in their honor in the Bregalnica diocese and move their relics to this edifice. However, only the relics of Timotheus, Comasius, and Eusebius were transferred because of the resistance of the citizens of Tiberiopolis.[232] The chronology of the event can be further refined based on the hagiographical account

227 Long-term survey of Bargala has been ongoing since the 1960s: *Aleksova*, Bargala – Bregalnica, 5–81; *Eadem*, Bargala, 77–84; *Eadem*, Loca sanctorum, 155–165, fig. 40–52; Color Pl. 30–32; *Aleksova – Mango*, A Preliminary Report, 265–281; *Beldedovski*, Episkopskata bazilika, 259–273; *Idem*, Bazilika Extra muros, 193–202; *Nacev*, A Preliminary Report, konzervatorsko-restavratorski raboti, 323–332; *Idem*, Novootkrien termalen objekt, 289–302; *Idem*, Docnoantičkiot grad; *Idem*, Fortifikacijata, 55–63; *Idem*, Sakralna arhitektura, 267–277; *Nacev – Frkov*, Arheološko, arhitektonsko istražuvanje, 157–172; *Atanasova – Nacev*, Novi soznanija, 399–412; *Tutkovski*, Early Christian Mosaics,177–193.

228 *Nacev – Stojanovski*, Gradot Bargala, 272–279.

229 The editions of the text: GIBI XI/2 (Bulgarian translation); *Theophylaktos Achridos*, Martyrio (modern Greek translation). For Theophylact's sources, see *Dragova*, Starobŭlgarskite izvori, 105–131; *Velinova*, Žitie, 188–189; *Kiapidou*, Oi pēges, 13–46. The *Vita* might be attributed to St. Clement, as proposed by *Cheshmedjiev*, Notes, 155. Cf. also *Grozdanov*, Portreti, 127–137. Clement is identified as the author of the earliest service dedicated to the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. See *Velev*, Himnografskite sostavi, 111–142. See also the account of Bregalnica in a Bulgarian apocryphal chronicle, dated to the second half of 11th or 13th century: "King Boris baptized the Bulgarian land and erected churches all around the Bulgarian land and on the Bregalnitsa River": *Tăpkova-Zaimova – Miltenova*, Historical-Apocalyptic Literature, 274–300, esp. 282.26, 292.

230 *Cheshmedjiev*, Notes, 155. We should not exclude the possibility of an earlier emergence of the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. As considered in the scholarship, one of the measures employed by Byzantium in its efforts to reestablish authority in the central Balkans in the 9th century was the resettlement of Christians from various themes of the empire into Slavic regions of the Balkans. These colonists may have contributed to the establishment of the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs. See: *Zlatarski*, Legenda, 190–205; *Koco – Miljkovik-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93–94; *Atanasovski*, Nekoi nedorečenosti, 55. For a different perspective on the origin of the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica, see *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 121–130; *Eadem,* Loca sanctorum, 60–65.

231 GIBI XI/2, 62 (27). For the two toponyms associated with Strumica in historical sources, see *Stefoska*, Dva imena, 77–87, with further bibliography.

232 GIBI XI/2, 67–72 (34–42).



Fig. 20. Strumica, Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis

of Theophylact that the priests "knew how to officiate in the Bulgarian language."[233] It is assumed in scholarship that this could only have taken place after the arrival of St. Cyril and Methodios' disciples from Moravia to Bulgaria, between 886 and 889.[234] The second event occurred during the reign of Boris' son Simeon (893–927). At that time, the relics of two more martyrs from Tiberiopolis, Socrates and Theodore, were translated to Bregalnica.[235] The construction of the church in Bregalnica, conceived to house venerated relics of great significance, was part of the Bulgarian rulers' political agenda. This initiative aimed to establish Bregalnica not only as an administrative hub but also as an ecclesiastical center, as postulated in scholarship.[236]

Scholarly interpretations have approached the chronology of the Bishopric of Bregalnica's establishment from diverse perspectives. Theophylact's testimony regarding Boris-Michael's construction of a church in Bregalnica has been understood as indicating the establishment of the see between 886 and 889. The view of Bregalnica as the first Slavic bishopric was further reinforced by archaeological studies of the monuments in the Bregalnica Valley.[237] More recent studies have identified the introduction of worship in the Slavonic language of the Byzantine rite as a crucial aspect of the so-called

233 GIBI XI/2, 72 (42).

234 *Zlatarski*, Istorija I/2, 238–239; *Atanasovski*, Nekoi nedorečenosti, 56–57; *Stanev*, Bregalnica, 542; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 797.

235 GIBI XI/2, 75 (47).

236 *Stanev*, Bregalnica, 545–546. Cf. *Cheshmedjiev*, Notes, 154 and *Atanasovski*, Nekoi nedorečenosti, 55–57.

237 *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica.

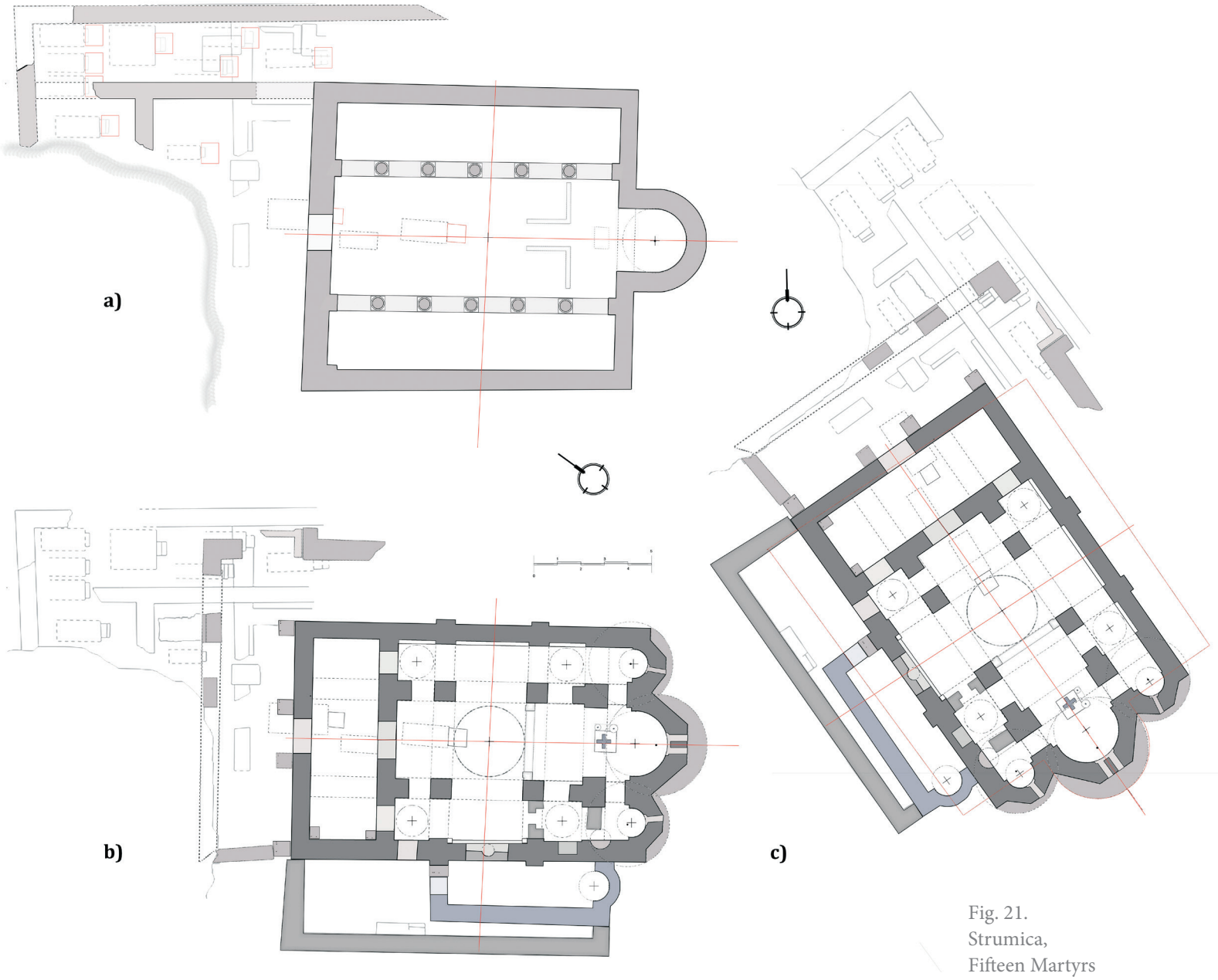


Fig. 21. Strumica, Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis, phases of construction, plans:
a. Late Antique basilica with necropolis;
b. Middle Byzantine cross-in-square church;
c. Composite plan showing all construction phases and building orientation

Slavonic project initiated by Boris-Michael and continued by Simeon. The study of Slavic liturgical sources, alongside historical references, has shown that the formation of Slavic religious culture was a process, the first stage of which was linked to the region of Kutmichinitsa and Clement's bishopric in what is now southern Albania (Map 1).[238] Thus, it is suggested that the Slavic Bishopric of Bregalnica was established only after 904, following the delineation of the new border between Bulgaria and Byzantium.[239]

238 *Pentkovskij*, Grečeskij original, 651–664; *Idem*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija, 422–434; *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 34; *Petrovski*, Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 10–53.

239 For an inscription on a boundary marker from 904 in the village of Nareš, 22 km north of Thessalonike, which testified to a line of demarcation between the Bulgarians and the Byzantines, see *Beševliev,* Pŭrvobŭlgarski nadpisi, No. 46.

This issue also needs to be addressed from the perspective of monuments. In what follows, we shall reconsider the artistic production within the Bishopric of Bregalnica.

Written evidence of church construction in the Bishopric of Bregalnica is partially mirrored in the archaeological record of the two most significant sites from the late 9th and 10th centuries: the city of Strumica and the village of Krupište in N. Macedonia. As noted above, Theophylact's *Vita* associates two churches with the relics of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis: the first located in Strumica and the second in Bregalnica. The relics were discovered beneath the church in Strumica, which had been demolished by the Ombroi (Avars).[240] No additional details about this church are provided. Although the hagiographical source remains silent on the matter, the site of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica provides telling material evidence (Fig. 20).

The construction history at this site spans a lengthy period, from late antiquity until the late Middle Ages.[241] Archaeological excavations have revealed the remains of two churches constructed on the site of an ancient necropolis: an Early Christian basilica and a Middle Byzantine cross-in-square church. In the suburbium of the Late Antique fortified settlement of Strumica, a necropolis was built on some older architectural structure with Late Antique floor mosaics.[242] Twenty-three constructed tombs were uncovered during the archaeological excavation in the early 1970s.[243] An extra muros Early Christian cemetery basilica was constructed above the level of the tombs. It was a three-aisled basilica, of which a part of the main apse, northern outer wall, northern stylobate, and a section of the floor of mortar are still preserved (Fig. 21a).[244] Out of a total of twenty-three tombs, three are located within the walls of the basilica. The best preserved and the largest among them is the central vaulted tomb, with dimensions of 2 by 0.82 by 1.61 meters. Its walls were constructed of rubble stone with mortar, while the vault was built of Late Antique brick. The relationship between the three tombs and their architectural setting is not quite clear. It is assumed that they might have been constructed following the demolition of the Early Christian basilica during the Early Byzantine and transitional period, from the 6th through the 8th century. The assumption is based on the first layer of interior decoration of the central tomb, consisting of large red crosses, painted in fresco on the north and south wall.[245]

240 GIBI XI/2, 62 (27), 69 (37).

241 Archaeological exploration and restoration at the site of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis were conducted during the years 1972/1973, 1982, 1985, 2006/2008: *Koco – Miljković-Pepek – Aleksova*, Prvite rezultati, 43–44; *Koco – Miljković-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93–97; *Aleksova*, Sv. 15 tiveriopolski mačenici, 412–414; *Eadem*, Loca sanctorum, 185–193; *Cvetanov,* Sveti Petnaeset Tiveriopolski mačenici, 178–179; *Rujak – Maninski (ed.)*, Strumica i Strumičko, 49–55.

242 For the Late Antique town under modern Strumica and the question of its possible names, see *Mikulčić,* Antički gradovi, 333–335; *Cvetanov*, Razvoj i kontinuitet, 89–90; *Rujak*, Carevi kuli: Strumica, 69–75.

243 *Rujak – Maninski (ed.)*, Strumica i Strumičko, 51, fig. on p. 50, 53, 54. Cf. *Aleksova*, Sv. 15 tiveriopolski mačenici, 412–413, draw. on p. 413.

244 *Koco – Miljković-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93; *Aleksova*, Sv. 15 tiveriopolski mačenici, 413, draw. on p. 413; *Eadem*, Loca sanctorum, 191–192; *Rujak – Maninski (ed.),* Strumica i Strumičko, fig. on p. 51, 52. For the architectural sculpture of the building, see *Filipova*, Arhitektonska dekorativna skulptura, 38–41, T. L–LIV, LXVII, fig. 5–6, CXIX, fig. 4.

245 *Koco – Miljković-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93–94, fig. 1–2. Cf. *Aleksova*, Sv. 15 tiveriopolski mačenici, 412–413, who proposed dating the central vaulted tomb to the Late Antique period.

Archaeological research ascertained that neither the Early Christian basilica nor the central vaulted tomb were primarily associated with the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis.[246] It was the medieval church, constructed on the ruins of the Early Christian basilica, that testifies to the veneration of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. The center of devotion was the abovementioned vaulted tomb under the naos of the church with a fresco depicting a group image of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis.

The medieval construction history of the site is complicated, especially in regard to the relationship between the crypt and the Church of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. The transformation of the central vaulted tomb into a crypt began with the addition of a fresco of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis, painted on its western wall and directly facing the staircase that leads down into the crypt (Fig. 22). The fragmentary fresco was discovered in 1973 by Dimče Koco and Petar Miljković Pepek.[247] It remains unique as the earliest reflection of this saintly cult in medieval iconography. Additionally, the Strumica fresco is of broader significance, owing to the fact that it is one of the rare surviving examples of fresco painting from the First Bulgarian Empire.[248] As the visual focal point in the small room used for commemoration services to the Fifteen Martyrs, the fresco creates more of an impression as an icon rather than monumental painting. The image of Fifteen Martyrs in Strumica has no parallels in Byzantine art. We learn about their cult and iconography from liturgical and hagiographical sources: the Glagolitic Old Slavonic manuscript – the *Codex Assemanius* (Vat. slav. 3, between 986 and 1051), whose menologion includes the earliest commemoration of only three of the martyrs in the rubric for 29 August[249] and the *Vita* by Theophylact, mentioned above. The half-length portraits of the martyrs were placed in three rows: four in the upper, six in the middle, and five more in the lower. Only five of them have been securely identified: Bishop Timotheus, Comasius (Fig. 23), Eusebius and Bishop Theodore (first row), and the deacon Thomas (lower row).[250] An earlier generation of scholars held that the painter of the Strumica fresco reveals a strong adherence to the Constantinopolitan style seen in late 9th- and early 10th-century miniature and monumental painting,[251] such as the *Homilies*

246 *Koco – Miljkovik-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93. For different opinion on this matter, see *Aleksova*, Sv. 15 tiveriopolski mačenici, 412.

247 *Koco – Miljkovik-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93–96.

248 The faded remains of a fresco or a preliminary sketch, once depicting the figure of a saint, in the southeastern niche of the Church of St. George in Gornji Kozjak, have been associated in scholarship with the period of Boris and Simeon's rule. See: *Rasolkoska-Nikolovska,* Arheološkite istražuvanja, 131–133; *Eadem*, Najstarata freska, 15–22; *Eadem*, Crkvata Sveti Georgi, 306–308. However, its poor state of preservation prevents a reliable determination of its date of creation, see *Aleksova – Mango*, A Preliminary Report, 276. Additionally, the architectural history does not support such an early dating. See also below for a discussion of the Church of St. George in Gornji Kozjak. For the painted decoration in the churches of Kastoria, dated to the second half or the third quarter of the 10th century, see *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 171–188. For the ceramic icons of this period, see above 81–82.

249 Evangeliarium Assemani II, 309–310 (152a–152b); *Vasiljev*, Nov podatak, 13–15. See also *Grozdanov*, Mesecoslovot, 14–17.

250 *Grozdanov*, Portreti, 127–137; *Idem*, Mesecoslovot, 14–17.

251 *Koco – Miljkovik-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 94–95; *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 24–25. Blaga Aleksova's hypothesis (*Eadem*, Loca sanctorum, 189–191), which attributes the fresco to the Late Antique period, has not gained acceptance among scholars and is likewise untenable in the context of this study.



Fig. 22. Strumica, crypt, Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis



Fig. 23.
Strumica,
crypt,
St. Comasius

of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 510) and mosaics in the tympana of the nave in Hagia Sofia in Constantinople.[252] In her recent stylistic analysis, Anna Zakharova revised the dating of the Strumica fresco.[253] By emphasizing the psychological depth of the figures, the artist's notable freedom in shaping forms, and the use of translucent and pure colors applied through a multi-layered technique reminiscent of icon painting, the style achieves a vibrant and harmonious quality. This approach aligns closely with the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, which flourished in Constantinople during the first half of the 10th century.[254] Stylistically, the fresco from Strumica is comparable to the mosaic in the narthex of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (after 906).[255] However, Zakharova showed that it bears a closer resemblance to slightly later works of icon and miniature paintings. Notable examples include several icons from the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, dated to the second quarter – middle of the 10th century, such as The Washing of the Feet and The Mandylion.[256] Additionally, it aligns with miniatures from metropolitan manuscripts like the *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom* (National Library of Athens, Gr. 210, first quarter of the 10th century) and

252 For the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, see *Brubaker*, Vision and Meaning, with further bibliography. For the mosaic in Hagia Sophia, see *Mango – Hawkins*, The Mosaics, 1–41.

253 *Zakharova*, Fresco, 367–378. See also *Eadem*, Freski konca IX–X v., 233–236, fig. 20.

254 *Zakharova,* Fresco, 374–378.

255 *Oikonomides*, Leo VI, 153–172, with further bibliography.

256 *Weitzmann*, The Monastery of St. Catherine, 83–99, Pl. CVIII–CIX, CXI, CXIII–CXV.

the *Trebizond Gospel* (Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, Greek 21, 21a, third quarter of the 10th century).[257]

Based on the analysis of the fresco preserved in the vaulted tomb, the center of devotion to the martyrs in Strumica was created in the first half of the 10th century. This conclusion is consistent with the information provided in Theophylact's *Vita*. By all accounts, it appears that the pictorial program in Strumica was executed only after the construction of the church in Bregalnica, where the relics of three martyrs were initially enshrined, and subsequently joined by those of two others. This sequence may also have unfolded under the patronage of the Bulgarian rulers Simeon or Peter, as suggested by the high quality of the painting and its stylistic alignment with Constantinopolitan models.

In its present form, the church does not appear to be contemporaneous with the earliest phase of the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. Although known only from its foundations, the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis displays all the features of a fully developed Middle Byzantine cross-in-square church. The building measures 10 by 16.5 meters in plan. Its core was made up of cross-in-square naos, extended eastward into a tripartite sanctuary, and westward into a narthex. The dome was supported on four piers instead of columns. The eastern end of the church displays three apses, polygonal externally (Fig. 21b). The church also included an annexed chapel along the south side of the naos. The lowest sections of the walls feature masonry made primarily of roughly finished stone and occasionally brick, including fragments of Early Byzantine marble architectural sculpture used as *spolia*.

Scholars have debated the possible solutions of the original domed design of the Church of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis and its date. Recent architectural analysis by Sašo Korunovski and Slobodan Ćurčić convincingly showed that the church in Strumica adhered to the Constantinopolitan variant of a domed, cross-in-square church.[258] The widespread use of the cross-in-square type in Preslav has often been cited to support a chronological link between the construction of the church and the fresco in the vaulted tomb beneath it.[259] Bulgarian churches of the early decades of the 10th century indeed follow the prevailing design principles of Constantinopolitan architecture, exemplified by the Theotokos *tou Libos* (907) and the Myrelaion (920).[260]

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257 For these miniatures, see respectively *Marava-Chatzinicolau – Toufexi-Paschou*, Catalogue, 57–69, fig. 45–46; *Zakharova*, The Trebizond Lectionary, 59–68.

258 For the opinion that the Church of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis was built on a five-domed scheme, see *Koco – Miljković-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93–94. *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 125–126, 164; *Eadem*, Loca sanctorum, 192–193, argued that it was a five-domed martyrium of the Justinianic era, which was probably rebuilt in the late 9th–early 10th century. *Cvetanov,* Srednovekovni tvrdini, 165 has concurred. For the arguments suggesting that the Church of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis was a domed cross-in-square type, see *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 21, 24, draw. 5; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 412, fig. 452A.

259 *Koco – Miljković-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 93–94; *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 21, 24.

260 Cf. e. g. the churches excavated in the area on the right bank of the river Ticha in Preslav – Church No. 1 and Church No. 2 in Avradaka, and Church No. 1 in Bial Briag, dated to the first half the 10th century. See: *Mavrodinov*, Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 166–167, fig. 167–170 (Bial Briag), 190–197, fig. 204–215 (Avradaka,

However, the Church of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis shares notable architectural features – such as polygonal apses and overall scale – with a group of later churches built in the 11th century, notably on Mount Athos, the Chalkidiki peninsula, and in Thessalonike. These include the katholikon of the Zigos Monastery, the old katholikon of Xenophontos, the Church of St. John the Forerunner at Iviron, the Kelli of Hagios Prokopios affiliated with Vatopedi, the church at Olynthos, and Panagia Chalkeon.[261] The Church of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis likely dates to the period marked by the popularity of the cross-in-square type between the late 10th and the late 11th century. This phenomenon is seen in scholarship as a result of the influences from Constantinople and Thessalonike, following the Byzantine re-conquest of territories of the Balkans in the early 11th century.[262] Situated within the context of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, the construction of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis parallels the revival and strengthening of their cult at the initiative of Archbishop Theophylact in the late 11th century. The dating of construction is also supported by several fresco fragments excavated in 1970s at the site of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. Stylistic analysis dates them to the late 11th or early 12th century.[263]

However, the question remains: what was the original architectural setting of the tomb of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis? While it would be logical to expect that a church housing the relics of the martyrs existed, current archaeological research has not confirmed this. Given the complexity of the site and the possibility of extensive destruction, it may be assumed that an earlier church – possibly with a similar plan – once stood there, although no trace of it has survived.

Turning to Theophylact's *Vita*, the second church that garnered more attention was the newly built edifice in Bregalnica, where the relics of five martyrs were enshrined.[264] The Kale Krupište site near Štip was identified as the see of Bregalnica by Blaga Aleksova, but this identification has since been called into doubt. The Kale site is located on the northeastern outskirts of the village of Krupište, in the western part of the Kočani Valley, at the confluence of the Zletovska River with the Bregalnica River. Within a fortified Late Roman *castrum*, upon which a later civil settlement developed,[265] the foundations of two church buildings were unearthed during excavations

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Churches Nos. 1 and 2); *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 77–93, fig. 38–39, 43–47; *Dončeva*, Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 211–213; *Ćurčić*, Architecture; 291–292, fig. 305; *Ousterhout,* Eastern Medieval Architecture, 536, fig. 22.5.A–C.

261 This group of churches, including the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica, discusses *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 410–412, fig. 450–453.

262 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 410.

263 *Koco – Miljković-Pepek*, Rezultatite od arheološkite iskopuvanja, 95–96, fig. 8.

264 GIBI XI/2, 69–78 (37–54). The narrative focuses on the relics translated to Bregalnica, leading to the conclusion that it is not dedicated to the Tiberiopolis Martyrs as a whole, but specifically to those relocated to Bregalnica. An explanation may lie in the hypothesis that the original text used by Theophylact as a source originated in Bregalnica and was linked to the development of the martyrs' cult at that place. See *Stanev*, Bregalnica, 548–549.

265 Earlier scholars considered the possibility that the Early Byzantine episcopal seat of Zapara might have been located in Krupište. See *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 20, 74–76; *Mikulčić*, Antički gradovi, 325, 346. Cf. *Papazoglu*, Makedonski gradovi, 247. Most recently, it has been proposed that Tranupara should be located

on the site in the 1970s and 1980s. Of the first building, only its elaborate eastern portion, terminating in five apses, has been revealed. Excavations indicated two phases of construction: one in the Early Byzantine period and another in the late 9th to early 10th century. According to Aleksova, a three-aisled basilica with two lateral chapels was later substantially redesigned to accommodate an architectural setting for a martyrium, a cross-shaped elevated structure enveloped by an ambulatory in the southern lateral chamber (*diakonikon*).[266] Among the evidence of liturgical furnishing, the most important includes the remains of the *synthronon* in the central apse and Early Christian elements of the sanctuary barrier used as *spolia*.[267] Such a complicated plan was designed, according to its first excavator, for the cathedral church of Bregalnica where the relics of the martyrs of Tiberiopolis were enshrined.[268] The church also preserved epigraphy, a bronze coin of Emperor Leo VI (886–912), and fragments of pottery, all dating to the 9th and 10th centuries.[269] Such a hypothesis has been criticized with arguments suggesting that this is an Early Byzantine basilica, in which a *synthronon* was not archaeologically confirmed, likely adapted into a small cemetery church in the 9th–10th century.[270] While the evidence of coins, pottery, and epigraphy unequivocally indicates habitation during the 9th–10th century, their small number is insufficient to prove the existence of an ecclesiastical and administrative center. Particularly intriguing are the graffiti – enigmatic symbols, individual runic, Cyrillic, and Glagolitic letters that do not form words – engraved on the building stone blocks – which have posed difficulties in interpretation, raising the question of whether they should be regarded as letters or as "signs with symbolic meaning."[271] The preliminary analysis of the epigraphic material does not support the hypothesis associating the Krupište site with the invention of the Slavic script.[272] Rather, it represents a manifestation of proto-Bulgarian culture.[273]

Information resulting from the most recent excavation has largely resolved the issue of the so-called cathedral church at Kale Krupište site.[274] The complete excavation of the structure revealed its architectural plan, dimensions, and later history. It was a three-aisled basilica, measuring 28 by 29.5 meters, featuring two chapels annexed to

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in Krupište, while Konjuh should be identified with Zapara. See *Sokolovska*, Bregalnica, 161–162; *Eadem*, Harmonija i Zapara, 201–210.

266 *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 89–92, fig. 102–105.

267 *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 89, 98–99; fig. 103, 112–114; *Filipova*, Arhitektonska dekorativna skulptura, 37–38, Pl. XLVIII–XLIX.

268 *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 158–160 discusses the possibility that it was Raven, where the so-called Bregalnica mission took place.

269 *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 98, 111, fig. 106–108, 115, 117, 139–144. The archaeological documentation on the pottery finds from the church area, conducted by Blaga Aleksova in 1994, was published by *Atanasoski*, Okolu problemot, 81–85, T. I–III.

270 *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 347–348, fig. 173; *Trajkovski*, Pogled vrz srednovekovnata arheologija, 275–276; *Idem*, Episkopijata, 89–91, 182–183.

271 On this issue, see *Ilievski*, Grafitite, 41–57; *Ovčarov,* Zagadǔčnite znaci, 186–190.

272 For the association of the Bregalnica River with the Christianization of the Bulgarians and St. Cyril's invention of the Slavic script in the later Bulgarian written sources, see *Tăpkova-Zaimova – Miltenova*, Historical-Apocalyptic Literature, 282; *Stanev*, Bregalnica, 544–545; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 798, n. 62.

273 *Ovčarov,* Zagadǔčnite znaci, 183–197.

274 *Atanasova – Šterjov*, Katedralen hram, 269–286.

the *pastophoria*, a narthex, an exonarthex, and an additional annex on its northwestern side, which included a hypogeum beneath it (Fig. 24). It belongs to the category of basilican churches of the 5th–6th century. The planning arrangement of the developed eastern part of the building finds its closest parallel in the Basilica B in Philippi.[275] The church preserved architectural sculpture and vaulted tombs in the exonarthex, both attributed to the Early Byzantine period.[276] The excavations did not confirm the presence of either the remains of a *synthronon* or the construction of a martyrium in the sanctuary.[277] Along the south and western sides of the basilica, a necropolis was in use, as indicated by grave finds, from the 11th to the 14th century.[278] The basilica itself underwent certain changes and damage over time, which suggests the possibility that its central nave was adapted and used as a small cemetery church during this period. While the evidence of epigraphy, coins, pottery, and architecture attests to Slavic use of the old basilica, there is no reliable evidence of a second phase of construction in the 9th–10th century. Furthermore, as indicated by archaeology and historical sources, Krupište was abandoned after the fall of the First Bulgarian Empire. However, there is much room for further study on this topic, as suggested in scholarship. Several sites in the region of Bregalnica have been proposed, and their investigation might provide an answer to the question of where the cathedral church of Bregalnica was located.[279]

Although the previous exploration did not confirm the hypothesis of Krupište as the see of Bregalnica, the site was undoubtedly of great importance in the wider context of the ecclesiastical architecture of the First Bulgarian Empire, as evidenced by the second church, so-called Crvena Crkva (Red Church). Its foundations have been excavated near the south wall of the fortified area.[280] The conservation work conducted in 1996/1997 revealed that the medieval church was built on the foundations of an earlier structure, likely Early Christian, which had a different plan.[281] The planning design of the Crvena Crkva merges the inscribed-cross and triconch schemes. Its simple rectangular form encloses a cruciform naos and a narthex, with a single projection – the main apse, three-sided externally. The relatively modest overall dimensions of the church measure 8.5 by 14.3 meters. The north and south arms of the cross terminated in apses, which were enclosed within the thickness of the church's exterior walls (Fig. 25).[282] The organization of the corner spaces, created between the arms of the cross,

275 Ibid., 271–277, fig. 2, draw. 1.

276 Ibid., 278–282, fig. 3–5, 7, 7a, 9–11, draw. 2–4.

277 Ibid., 275. See also *Trajkovski*, Episkopijata, 89–91, 182–183.

278 *Atanasova – Šterjov*, Katedralen hram, 282–283. See also *Atanasoski*, Okolu problemot, 87–88, T. IV.

279 *Atanasovski*, Nekoi nedorečenosti, 59. Cf. also *Trajkovski*, Kultot na moštite, 439–445; *Idem*, Episkopijata, 184–187 who discusses the functional context of the first medieval church at the Crkvište site in Morovizd, suggests that the Early Byzantine vaulted tomb, which directly communicated with the church's southern section, may have been reused to house the relics of the Five Martyrs of Tiberiopolis.

280 Until 1959, the structure was preserved up to a height of 2 meters. The building was demolished down to its foundations by the owner of the property on which the church was located. See *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 82. For the position of the church, see the situation plan in *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, fig. 171.

281 *Nacev*, Konzervatorsko-restavratorski raboti, 139.

282 *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 82, fig. 98–99.

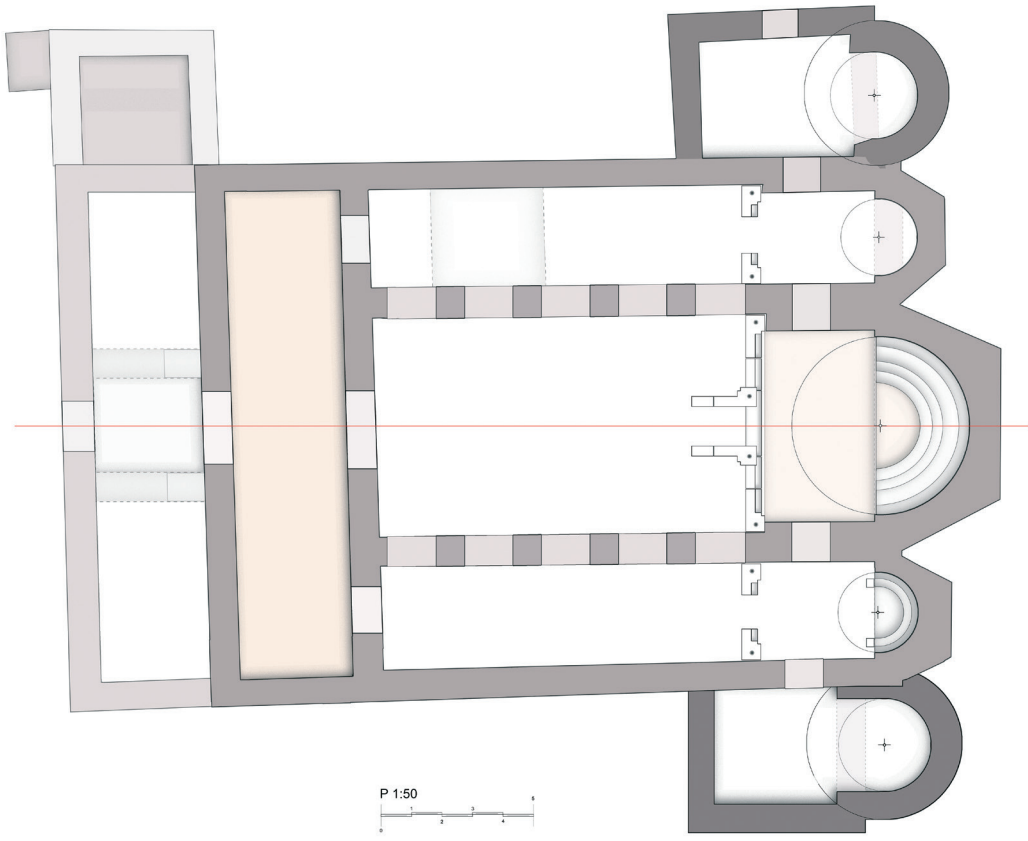


Fig. 24.
Krupište, Kale,
Basilica, plan

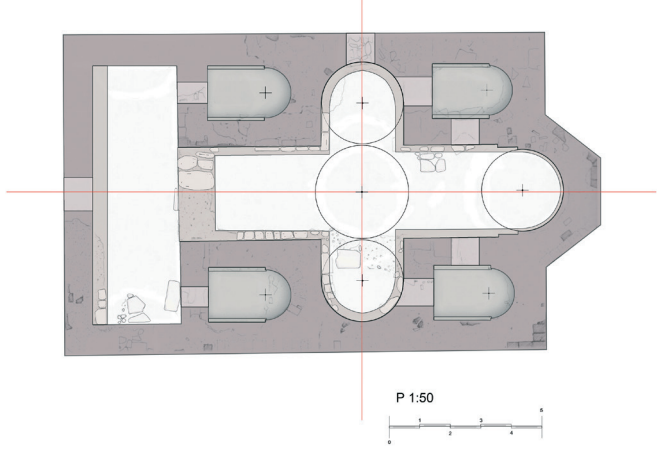


Fig. 25.
Krupište, Kale,
Crvena Crkva, plan

is particularly interesting. All four rooms are of the same size and are terminated on their eastern side with apses, whose semicircular forms are enclosed by the solid walls of the church, both external and internal. The two eastern rooms were connected to the eastern and lateral arms of the cross, while the western rooms were accessed from the narthex. Such a clear articulation of the lateral spaces suggests their functional independence from the naos. It is highly likely that the church was equipped with four lateral chapels.[283] The Crvena Crkva belongs to the category of inscribed-cross churches, a type that was widespread during the 9th and 10th centuries in Byzantine territories

283 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 336, fig. 365.

in the Balkans, as well as in areas under Bulgarian control. [284] However, a variant that combines the two most popular church types – the inscribed-cross and the triconch – was a rarely employed solution. It is important to note, within the context of church architecture of the First Bulgarian Empire, that the closest parallels to the Crvena Crkva at Krupište are likewise found in the central Balkans. These are the ruinous churches near the village Kulata in the Middle Strymon valley (between the 10th and the early 11th centuries, Fig. 36)[285] and in the village Ribare near Svljig (10th or 11th century),[286] along with the now lost St. Nicholas at Aulis in Boeotia (probably first half of the 11th century).[287] Furthermore, in respect of the lateral chapels, it is worth recalling the triconch church at the village of Zlesti (Fig. 39), the representative of the architectural activities in the region of Ohrid, associated with the reign of Simeon. The architectural design of this church, preserved at the level of the foundations, features polygonal rooms integrated into the rectangular wall mass of the narthex.[288]

The architectural characteristics of the Crvena Crkva, combined with well-known historical events, help establish a relative chronological framework for its construction, which may have taken place by 971. Valuable for the question of dating is the evidence of epigraphy matching the aforementioned examples from the cathedral church.[289] Particularly significant evidence of the architectural and craftsman knowledge of the time under discussion is provided by drawings incised on a stone slab, found in the western part of the Crvena Crkva.[290] The schematic plans of triconch churches depicted there, although only sketched, attest to an architectural type that had become an integral part of the architectural activities on the territory of the Bulgarian state.[291] The later history of the Crvena Crkva witnessed a fate similar to that of the so-called Cathedral Church; after the devastation of the church, a necropolis was formed on its site and around its central apse in the 11th century. Judging by the grave finds, it remained in use until the 14th century.[292]

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284 For inscribed-cross type and evidence for dating of the Crvena Crkva, see *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 328–337, fig. 357–367, with examples and further bibliography. *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 81–85, identifies the building as a martyrium and dates it to the 6th century, suggesting that it was renovated in the 9th or 10th century. *Trajkovski*, Pogled vrz srednovekovnata arheologija, 274; *Idem*, Episkopijata, 88–89; and *Beldedovski*, Istražuvanje, 172, 174 concur with that. Such identification and dating cannot be accepted.

285 For this church, see *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 368–373, fig. 7, with further bibliography.

286 For this church, see *Stanković*, An Unusual Triconchal Church, 215–243. The first charter of Basil II to the Archbishopric of Ohrid (1019) lists Svrljig among the toponyms under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Niš. See *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.14–16.

287 For this church, see *Bouras,* Symplērōmatika stoicheia, 227–244. Cf. *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 365–366, fig. 364, who draws attention to the matching layouts and dimensions of the churches in Aulis and Krupište.

288 *Vasiljević,* Trikonhos, 243–253; *Kuzman*, Arheološki svedoštva, 165–171, fig. 10–14; *Maľceva,* Trikonhi, 42. The poorly preserved church in Gorica, located on the eastern shore of Lake Ohrid and likely a compact inscribed triconch, should also be taken into consideration. See *Kuzman*, op. cit., 163–164, fig. 11; *Maľceva,* op. cit., 42.

289 The marble threshold of the northern entrance has engraved Slavic Cyrillic letters and some Glagolitic letters. See *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 110.

290 Ibid., 110, fig. 100.

291 These drawings have been discussed by *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 325, fig. 347 and *Stanković,* An Unusual Triconchal Church, 240–241, fig. 24.

292 *Beldedovski*, Istražuvanje, 172–177.

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A group of monuments in the region of Bregalnica (the Kočani Valley) remains without a secure chronological attribution.[293] These include the Church of St. George in Gornji Kozjak,[294] the remains of churches in the villages of Teranci,[295] Žiganci,[296] and the Gradište site at Morovizd,[297] and the most recently excavated church in the village of Čardaklija.[298] Whereas they have been assigned dates ranging from the late 9th–early 10th century to the 13th century, many of these chronologies are disputed. An obstacle to a reliable conclusion lies in the fact that most monuments are either preserved only at the level of their foundations or destroyed, and have not been archaeologically investigated.[299] To address the question of whether the mentioned group of churches belongs to the corpus of ecclesiastical architecture of the Bregalnica bishopric, we shall approach the issue of chronology from the perspective of architectural typology, the stylistic features of preserved architectural elements, and historical circumstances.

The design of these centrally planned churches is marked by a domed cruciform core.[300] Their architectural form is attested in two closely related types: the free-cross plan and the compact inscribed-cross plan. The first type is represented by the churches in Teranci, Žiganci, and Gradište – Morovizd (26 a–c). All three are small-scale buildings that functioned as cemetery churches, as evidenced by the necropolises around them. Variants of the type are displayed in the following elements. In the case of Morovizd, the elongated narthex encloses the northern, southern, and western arms of the main cross, leaving only the eastern arm completely free.[301] Furthermore, the characteristic features include eastern niches of the lateral arms of the cross in the tiny churches of Teranci and Žiganci.[302] The mural masonry is similar in all examples, featuring stone bonded with mortar and irregular courses of brick. In the case of Žiganci, it also incorporates building material repurposed as *spolia* from

293 For the problem of chronology, see *Trajkovski*, Episkopijata, 168–171; *Atanasova – Šterjov*, Manastirče kaj Čardaklija, 308–310.

294 For this church, see *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 5–19; *Mavrodinov*, Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 178; *Rasolkoska-Nikolovska,* Arheološkite istražuvanja, 125–139; *Eadem*, Crkvata Sveti Georgi, 301–313; *Korać*, O prirodi obnove, 215–216; *Aleksova – Mango*, A Preliminary Report, 273–277, fig. 1, 52–65; *Aleksova*, Krstovidnite crkvi, 277–280; *Eadem*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 145–147; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 105–106, fig. 72; *Miljković-Pepek,* L'architecture, 491, Pl. III. 10; *Dončeva*, Principi, 62–68; *Eadem*, Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 242–244; *Korać*, Sveti Đorđe, 29–34.

295 For this church, see *Okunjev*, Krstoobrazne crkve, 279–306; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'architecture, 491, Pl. III. 7; *Idem*, L'église de la Vierge, 449–457; *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica,150; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 327, fig. 350b.

296 For this church, see *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 20–21; *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 150; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'église de la Vierge, 453–457, fig. d.1; *Idem*, L'architecture, 491, Pl.III.6.

297 For this, now-lost church, see *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 19–20; *Aleksova*, Krstovidnite crkvi, 280; *Eadem*, Krstovidnata crkva, 379–390; *Eadem*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 148–150; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'église de la Vierge, 456; *Trajkovski*, Episkopijata, 170–171, who highlights the possibility that the plan published by Mihailov and Aleksova pertains to another, currently unknown church.

298 *Atanasova – Šterjov*, Manastirče kaj Čardaklija, 299–312.

299 Gornji Kozjak is the only church that has been preserved and subjected to archaeological examination.

300 *Aleksova*, Krstovidnite crkvi, 269–284.

301 *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 19–20, fig. 15; *Aleksova*, Krstovidnata crkva, 382, fig. 1.

302 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 327, fig. 350b.

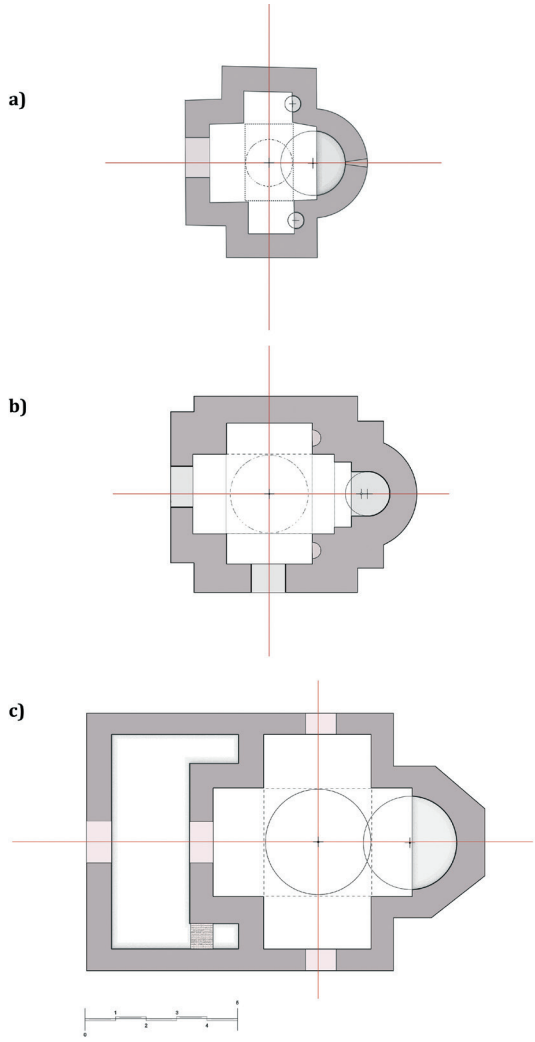


Fig. 26.
The Kočani Valley, free-cross churches, plans:
a. Teranci; b. Žiganci; c. Gradište – Morovizd

an older structure on the site. The upper structure, preserved in a ruinous state until the 1920s, was found only at Teranci, where its layout revealed a cylindrical drum which originally featured four windows.[303]

It is generally accepted in scholarship that a group of free-cross churches in the Bregalnica region were constructed in the late 9th or early 10th century.[304] The key dating argument is based on the unequivocal similarities between the free-cross and the compact triconch types, the latter being widespread in the Ohrid region during the rule of Simeon.[305] An examination of the corpus of monuments from the First Bulgarian Empire indicates that the free-cross type is scarcely attested. Seen as a whole, the free-cross type, displaying four equal arms of a cross, was widespread during the 9th and 10th centuries, although examples can be found up until the 12th century.[306] The group of churches in Bregalnica finds the closest parallels in two 10th-century churches

303 *Okunjev*, Krstoobrazne crkve, fig. 2.

304 *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 1–23; *Aleksova*, Prvite slovenski crkvi, 192–196; *Eadem,* Krstovidnite crkvi, 269–284; *Eadem*, Krstovidnata crkva, 379–390; *Eadem*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 148–150; *Miljković-Pepek,* L'architecture, 491, Pl. III; *Idem*, L'église de la Vierge, 449–457.

305 *Aleksova*, Krstovidnite crkvi, 269–284. Cf. also *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 325 ff.

306 For the free-cross churches, see *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 325–328, 403, 405, fig. 350–352b, 439, 441b.

in what is now south Albania mentioned above – Zoodochos Pege in Marmiro (Fig. 17, 19a) and Dormition of the Virgin on the Island of Zvërnec in present-day southern Albania (Fig. 18, 19b). Parallels may also be drawn with monuments constructed most probably between the early decades of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century in the neighboring area of Velbăžd – St. Nicholas in Sapareva Banja, (Fig. 3–4, vol. II, 81)[307] and St. Theodore in Boboševo (Fig. 1–2, vol. II, 80).[308] The same architectural type was also widespread between the 9th and 12th centuries in southern and central Greece. Relevant examples include St. Andrew in Gortys, Arkadia, St. Peter in Triantafilia-Gklezou and St. Leo in Mpriki (both in Laconian Mani), and St. Photeine in Thebes.[309] The chronological marker is also exemplified by the cylindrical drum of Teranci, a form employed in churches from the late 9th to the 11th century, such as St. Basil Gephyras near Arta, Koubelidiki in Kastoria, Zoodochos Pege in Marmiro, St. Germanos in the eponymous village in Prespa, Dormition of the Virgin in Labovo, and Boboševo (Fig. 17, 64, 94, 99; Fig. 1, 38, vol. II, 80, 122).[310] Our churches are poorly reconstructed from archaeological evidence, except partially for Gradište – Morovizd, identified as a Late Antique settlement restored during the Middle Ages (Fig. 70).[311]

Given the fact that the free-cross type maintained continuity in the Balkans for two centuries, the churches in the Kočani Valley are to be understood within the ecclesiastical and political framework of both the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's Bulgaria. During Samuel's time, the bishopric in the Bregalnica region not only continued but also developed with some changes. Both archaeological and written sources suggest that Morovizd and its surroundings emerged as a significant stronghold.[312] Shortly thereafter, the city was established as an episcopal see, as recorded in Basil II's first Ohrid charter (1019).[313] Equally important is to consider the status of Glavinitza within the autocephalous Bulgarian Church, on whose territory the churches in Marmiro and Zvërnec were built. As clearly stated in the painted inscription in the cathedral church of St. Achilleos in Prespa (dated between 989 and 1002), Glavinitza – the successor to Clement's Bishopric of Velitsa – was an episcopal see of the Bulgarian Church within the realm of Samuel. Its assignment of 40 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi* within the Archbishopric of Ohrid ranks it among the most prominent bishoprics, reflecting its significance and the considerable territorial scope it held in the not-so-distant

307 *Mavrodinov*, Ednokorabnata i krŭstovidnata cŭrkva, 62 and *Mijatev*, Arhitekturata, 189–190, fig. 215, 217 date the church in Sapareva Banja to the 12th–13th century. *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 403–404, fig. 439 places it in the 12th century, while *Miljković-Pepek*, L'architecture, 491, Pl. III. 9 and *Mal'ceva*, Arhitektura, 795–796, fig. 9, 161 propose the most convincing dating, to the period between the first decades of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century, based on the similarities between Sapareva Banja and those in Boboševo, Teranci, Žiganci, and St. Nicholas in Koluša.

308 The church in Boboševo is dated broadly, between the 11th and 14th century, in Bulgarian historiography. See *Mavrodinov*, Vŭnšnata ukrasa, 302–306; *Panajotova*, Cŭrkvata Sv. Todor, 101–141. *Mal'ceva*, Arhitektura, 796–797, fig. 163, evaluates the church in Boboševo as a continuation of the architectural tradition of Sapareva Banja and Koluša in a simplified interpretation by local craftsmen.

309 For these churches see *Drandakēs*, O naos, 146–168; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 325–326, 420, fig. 350A, 463A.

310 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, fig. 342, 345, 351, 360; *Koch*, Einige Bemerkungen, fig. 1–3; *Mal'ceva*, Arhitektura, fig. 163.

311 *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 211–213, fig. 73.

312 Scylitzes, 357; *Krsmanović,* Bulgarian Fortresses, 868.

313 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.3–6.

past.[314] It is also useful to compare the dynamics and character of building activity in these two periods. From the surviving monuments, we see that only the northeastern parts of Bulgaria saw the rise of private foundations by the higher social strata during the First Bulgarian Empire. In contrast, building efforts in the southwestern region were mostly carried out by rulers and Slavic church authorities. The social conditions that allowed for the creation of smaller private foundations and cemetery churches in the southwest only came about during Samuel's time, as his state was centered in that very region. All considered, the evidence does not encourage the early dating of the churches in the Kočani Valley; rather, this state of knowledge necessitates a wider chronological framework encompassing the second half of the 10th and the early 11th century. In this respect, the material under consideration reflects both dynamics and continuity, as this planning type was disseminated across the bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church (880–1018) and later within the Archbishopric of Ohrid (after 1019).

The second type is exemplified by the Church of St. George in Gornji Kozjak (Fig. 27), located just outside the southeast corner of the town Bargala and the remains of the church at the Manastirče site in Čardaklija, near Štip. In plan, both churches are a Greek cross inscribed within a square, with an elongated bema area, a dome and a narthex (Fig. 28 a–b). The shape of the drum in Gornji Kozjak is octagonal, while the dome in Čardaklija is not preserved. In contrast to the seamless geometry in the design of Gornji Kozjak, the cruciform core of Čardaklija shows slight irregularities, likely due to alterations during later restoration of the structure.[315] Both churches housed tombs. In Gornji Kozjak, a rectangular tomb in the southern arm of the cross was constructed simultaneously with the church, while in Čardaklija, four tombs have been uncovered: one situated in the southern part of the naos and three located in the narthex.[316] The lack of archaeological evidence in the latter prevents determining the chronological relationship between the church and the tombs. The building technique in both churches features a combination of carved and broken stone with mortar. Gornji Kozjak is marked by characteristic features. They include eastern niches of the lateral arms of the cross and a *tribelon* (triple arcade) between the narthex and naos. The columns, capitals, and bases of the *tribelon*, along with the window mullions were *spolia* taken from the earlier monuments of nearby Bargala. The later history of the church belongs to the 13th and 14th century, as evidenced by the second and third layers of paintings, along with inscriptions-graffiti, as well as by a domed chapel, attached to the south side of the narthex.[317] However, it is difficult to reconstruct the early history of the church building.[318] Archaeological efforts have sought to shed light on

314 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 795, 801, 804–805, 808, 812.

315 *Aleksova – Mango*, A Preliminary Report, fig. 52–54; *Korać*, Sveti Đorđe, fig. 1–8; *Atanasova – Šterjov*, Manastirče kaj Čardaklija, draw. 1, 3.

316 *Atanasova – Šterjov*, Manastirče kaj Čardaklija, 303–308, fig. 5–14, draw. 5, 6.

317 For these layers of painted decoration, see *Rasolkoska-Nikolovska*, Isus Hristos Antifonitis, 217–229; *Eadem*, Crkvata Sveti Georgi, 301–313; *Đorđević*, Zidno slikarstvo, 107, 138–140. For the graffiti (inscriptions and drawings), see *Tomović*, Ko je bio despot Tornik, 257–269; *Hadžiev – Andreev*, Nadpisi – grafiti, 347–379.

318 The faded remains of a fresco in the southeastern niche, or perhaps just a preliminary sketch, which have been associated in scholarship with the period of Boris and Simeon's rule, cannot be accepted. See note 248.



Fig. 27.
Gornji Kozjak, Church of St. George, view from the northwest

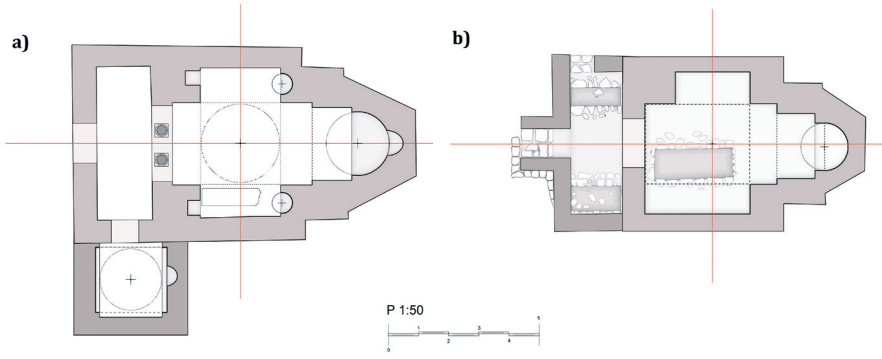


Fig. 28.
The Kočani Valley, compact inscribed-cross churches, plans:
a. Gornji Kozjak, Church of St. George;
b. Čardaklija, Manastirče

this issue. The excavations uncovered the history of the area surrounding the church, revealing a necropolis that was in use from the 9th–10th to the 17th century. Most of the grave finds date to the 10th through 12th centuries, providing evidence of a Slavic settlement nearby the ancient city of Bargala.[319] However, a proposed dating of the Church of St. George to the period of Boris' rule seems unlikely.[320] A more accurate chronology could be established based on the most distinctive

319 *Beldedovski – Nacev*, Bargala, 35–46.

320 *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 5–19; *Miljković-Pepek,* L'architecture, 491, Pl. III. 10; *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 146–147; *Dončeva*, Principi, 62–68; *Beldedovski – Nacev*, Bargala, 35–46.

feature of the church, its cross-domed core. We propose to look firstly at the corpus of monuments from the period of the First Bulgarian Empire. The foundations of several churches excavated in Preslav – at Deliduška, Bial Briag (No. 2), and Selište (No. 2) – have been classified as small funerary buildings featuring a cross inscribed within a square naos and narthex.[321] Despite their overall similarities to Gornji Kozjak, the Preslav churches exhibit notable differences in plan: the eastern arm of the cross served as the bema, while the western arm is significantly shorter. Similarly, in Church No. 8 in Preslav, dated to the late 10th or early 11th century, the eastern arm of the cross constitutes the sanctuary, whereas the four arms of the cross are equal.[322]

While also comparable to the group of free-cross churches discussed above, Gornji Kozjak features a more elaborate sanctuary area and a purer expression of the compact domed-cross design. In this respect, it closely resembles the domed core of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi (1164, Fig. 111, 113, vol. II, 221–222.), probably modeled after the Middle Byzantine Constantinopolitan solutions, such as the central building cores in Atik Mustafa Paça Mosque and Virgin Kyriotissa (Kalenderhane Mosque).[323] Equally important for the issue of chronology is the polygonal shape of the drum (Fig. 27), which replaced the earlier simple cylindrical one and became a standard feature of Middle Byzantine churches in the 11th and 12th centuries. Thus, the Church of St. George might have been constructed following the establishment of Byzantine rule in 1019.[324] Similarly, the chronological frame for the church in Čardaklija could be placed within a similar period.

In sum, it can be concluded that building activity in the Bregalnica region by 971 is evidenced by a small number of monuments, including those known from written sources. These were mostly founded and decorated through the initiative of the Bulgarian state and church. As for the preserved examples, none can be attributed to the reign of Boris-Michael; rather, they belong to either the first half of the 10th century or a later period. The analysis of the preserved architecture and fresco does not allow for considering an early date for the establishment of the Bishopric of Bregalnica. The ecclesiastical landscape of the diocese should, however, be understood within the broader framework of Slavic spiritual life. The Bulgarians inherited the Roman road network, along with the remnants of older churches located along the main routes.[325] The complexity of the revival of Christian culture is reflected in a significant number of explored Slavic necropolises established on ancient cultic sites, often accompanied by the adaptation or modest renovation of pre-existing churches.[326]

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321 For these churches, see *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 101–105, fig. 65–68.

322 *Totev – Georgiev*, Dve cŭrkvi, 25–31, fig. 13–16; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 104–105, fig. 71.

323 *Korać*, O prirodi obnove, 215–216; *Idem*, Sveti Đorđe, 30.

324 The first charter of Basil II to the Archbishopric of Ohrid (1019) lists Kozjak among the toponyms under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Morovizd. See *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43. 3–5.

325 For the roads and communication of Bregalnica, see *Trajkovski*, Episkopijata, 29–34.

326 For the Slavic material culture of Bregalnica, see *Mihajlov*, Kozjak i Bregalniškata episkopija, 21–22; *Aleksova*, Prvite slovenski crkvi, 179–198; *Eadem*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 133–141; *Aleksova – Mango*, A Preliminary Report, 278–281 (Appendix), map A, B; *Trajkovski*, Pogled vrz srednovekovnata arheologija, 276–278; *Idem*, Episkopijata; *Beldedovski,* Slovenski materijalni elementi, 173–183.

Devol

The period after Clement's death witnessed the establishment of new "Slavic bishoprics." The further organization of the diocesan structure developed in parallel with the territorial expansion of the Slavic Enlightenment and the adoption of Church Slavonic as the liturgical language, a process initiated by Boris-Michael and continued by Simeon and Peter. By the mid-10th century at the latest, a bishopric with its seat in Devol had been established. The *Short Life of St. Naum* († 910) reports that it was compiled by an unknown author with the permission of Mark, "the bishop of the bishopric of Devol," who was assigned as "the fourth bishop in the Slavonic language in Devol."[327] According to this testimony, Mark was also a disciple of Clement, which implies that he must have lived and worked in the first half of the 10th century.[328]

The region of Devol is situated in the Korçë Plain (modern-day southern Albania), bordered by the areas of Ohrid, Prespa, Kostur (Kastoria, Greece), and Lerin (Florina, Greece), encompassing the southern shore of Lake Ohrid and Little Prespa Lake (Map 1).[329] The region was named after the now-lost city of Devol, which was the see of the bishopric as well as the center of the *comitatus*[330] and missionary activities of Clement and Naum.[331]

From the letter of Theophylact, Archbishop of Ohrid, addressed to John, *doux* of Dyrrachion and son of *sebastokrator* Isaac in the 1090s, we learn that one of the seven cathedral churches founded by Boris-Michael was located in Devol.[332] This church predates the Slavic phase of the Bishopric of Devol, having been constructed between 870 and 880, during the period when Bulgaria was subordinated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[333] The letter reveals that by the late 11th century, this renowned church had been abandoned as a result of the oppressive imperial fiscal policy in the regions of Prespa and Devol. Consequently, the Archbishop of Ohrid appealed to John for its restoration. Despite considerable scholarly attention, the location of both the town and the church remains unknown. Most scholars associate the location of this medieval town with the vicinity of the modern village of Zvezda (Zvezdë).[334] The fact that Little Prespa Lake was at that time part of the Bishopric of Devol has led some researchers to conclude that Theophylact was referring to the Church of St. Achilleos on Little

327 *Ivanov,* Bŭlgarski starini, 307. For a survey of scholarly interpretations of the hagiographical account concerning Mark as the fourth bishop serving in the Slavonic language in Devol, see at: *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 800; *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 115.

328 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 800 with further bibliography.

329 For the Bishopric of Devol, see *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 114–117; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 800.

330 For the Comitatus of Devol, see *Stanev*, Beležki vŭrhu etničeskata situacija, 209–232.

331 *Filiposki*, Devolskata oblast, 409–416; *Iliev*, Devolskoto središte, 552–567.

332 Theophylactus, Epistulae, 205, 35–36. Cf. *Mullett,* Theophylact of Ochrid, 128, 186, 205, 236–237, 301.

333 Theophylact once again refers to the seven cathedral churches built by Boris-Michael in his *Long Life of St. Clement,* but he does not name them: *Iliev*, The Long Life of Saint Clement, XXIII.67. For an explanation of the meaning of Theophylact's reference to *Βουλγαρίαν ἑπτὰ καθολικοῖς* in the ecclesiastical and political context of Boris-Michael's Bulgaria, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 792.

334 *Zlatarski*, De se namiral gr. Devol, 35–56; *Tomoski*, Po tragata na srednovekovniot grad Devol, 187–200; *Idem*, Zapisi za srednovekovniot Devol, 398–418. See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 336.

Prespa, situated about 15 km from Zvezda.[335] However, this interpretation cannot be accepted for two main reasons. Firstly, during Theophylact's time, Little Prespa Lake belonged to the archiepiscopal bishopric of Ohrid, while Devol had become a separate bishopric.[336] Turning to Theophylact's testimony, it is noteworthy that he first thanks the *doux* for his services in Prespa and Devol, then goes on to request further help for the Bishopric of Devol. Secondly, in his letters regarding the synod of Prespa and the panegyric at Hagios Achilleos, Theophylact makes more explicit references to the Church of St. Achilleos at Prespa.[337]

Two possible locations in the Korçë Plain, with remains of medieval fortifications, have been proposed based on archaeological research and historical references – Zvezda[338] and Mborje (Map 1).[339] While both originate from the Late Antique period, rebuilding and archaeological finds attest to their continuous activity throughout the Middle Ages. Furthermore, Evgeny Golubinsky was the first to highlight the significance of a valuable piece of evidence – the Turkish toponym "Eski Devol" (Old Devol), located south of Korçë and described as the ruins of "Old Devol" by the French diplomat F. Pouqueville in the early 19th century.[340] Aleksei Pentkovsky has since drawn renewed attention to it, noting that "Eski Devol" is recorded on an Austrian map from 1829 and corresponds to the modern village of Mborje.[341] It is noteworthy that, regarding the possible location of Boris-Michael's cathedral church, Bishop Nymphon with a local noble Amirales built the Church of Christ the Life-Giver in the modern village of Mborje in 1389.[342] This church, located on the outskirts of the aforementioned Mborje fortification, may stand on the site or in the vicinity of the old Bulgarian episcopal church, as Pentkovsky suggests.[343] However, accepting this identification without archaeological research would be premature.

The scarcity of preserved monuments diminishes our impression of the sacred landscape of the Bishopric of Devol. Nevertheless, the most significant among them have been spared from oblivion. Alongside the vanished cathedral, the Monastery of Archangel Michael (discussed further below, Fig. 46–47), founded by Naum with financial support from both Prince Boris-Michael and his successor, Simeon, undoubtedly held a prominent place within the region. Situated on its northern border, on a

335 *Grozdanov*, Sveti Naum, 19–20; *Angold*, Church and Society, 170.

336 Cf. Notitiae, 13.834–856 (col. a).

337 See letters no. 78 and 107: Theophylactus, Epistulae, 415.17, 527.7 and comments of *Mullett*, Theophylact of Ochrid, 128.

338 *Karaiskaj – Lera*, Fortifikimet, 91–92; *Damko*, Gërmimet arkeologjike, 268; *Xhyheri et al.*, Kërkime arkeologjike, 311–312, fig. 8, Tab. VII, 3, 4, 5–6; *Kurti – Oberweiler*, Raport mbi vëzhgimin arkeologjik 2021, 17–30.

339 *Xhyheri et al.*, Kërkime arkeologjike, 312, fig. 9, Tab. VII, 1–2; *Kurti – Oberweiler*, Raport mbi vëzhgimin arkeologjik 2018–2019, 67–103, 82, fig. 8.

340 *Golubinskij*, Kratkij očerk, 59. See also *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 49. For the description of Old Devol by F. Pouqueville, see *Pouqueville*, Voyage de la Grece, 388–389.

341 *Pentkovskij*, Slavjanskoe bogosluženie v arhiepiskopii, 79, n. 13. For the Austrian map of 1829, see Carte der europaeischen Türkey, Bl. X.

342 For this church, see *Thomo*, Arkitektura e Kishës, 151–159; *Đurić*, Mali Grad, 31–49; *Lozanova*, The Church of Christ Zoodotes, 151–165; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 601.

343 *Pentkovskij,* Slavjanskoe bogosluženie v arhiepiskopii, 79, n. 13.

high cliff above the southern shore of Lake Ohrid, Naum's foundation testifies to the intensity of his missionary work in the town and region of Devol.[344] The life of Naum, as reflected in hagiography and preserved architecture, also sheds light on the broader organization of the Bulgarian Church in southwestern Bulgaria. His foundation follows the three-conch model of monastery churches introduced by Clement, while his missionary endeavors build upon those of his close associate.

The further uncovering of Devol's architectural past is archaeologically traceable. Recent archaeological surveys have confirmed the presence of scattered remains of medieval fortifications, cemeteries, and churches across the Korçë region.[345] The ruins of a modest church, which stood until recently, were located in a village dating back to the medieval period, below Klasë Rock, near the Zvezda fortification.[346] Meanwhile, in the basin of the former Lake Malik, the toponym St. George (Shën Gjergji) has been recorded, along with the remains of a devastated fortified monastic complex, comparable to St. George in Brataj.[347]

Pelagonia

The last Slavic bishopric examined in this section, which emerged in the first half of the 10th century as a successor to Clement's original bishopric, was located in the territory of Pelagonian Plain.[348] As voiced in the scholarship, this is supported by the following arguments. Firstly, Pelagonia is identified with the lands of the Slavic tribe of the Drugubites.[349] Secondly, Pelagonia served as a natural conduit for the transmission of Slavic religious culture between the Ohrid-Devol region and the Bregalnica area, facilitated by its road network, which connected the most significant Balkan routes of the time – the *Via Egnatia* and the *Via Militaris*.[350] Consequently, the question of the seat of a Slavic bishop in the Pelagonian region was raised. A column with a Slavic inscription from 996, commemorating the death of Bishop Andrew, was discovered at the Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael in Varoš near Prilep.[351] According to Komatina and Pentkovsky, this argument might place the seat of the Bishopric of the "Drugubite" part of the former Slavic bishopric of St. Clement at the monastery or another church in the

344 *Filiposki*, Devolskata oblast, 409–416; *Iliev*, Devolskoto središte, 552–567.

345 *Aliu*, Varreza mesjetare, 215–249; *Xhyheri*, Korridori Vlorë-Prespë.

346 *Xhyheri et al.*, Kërkime arkeologjike, 311–312, fig. 8, Tab. VII, 3–6.

347 *Xhyheri et al.*, Kërkime arkeologjike, 312.

348 For the rather complex relationship between written sources and their interpretation regarding the terms "Pelagonia" and "Pelagonian Plain," see *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 850–852.

349 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 798–799 with further bibliography.

350 *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 135, 137–139; *Petrovski*, Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 37–38. The *Via Militaris* began in Serdica and extended westward through Velbăžd, Štip, Prilep, and Bitola, intersecting with the *Via Egnatia*. Approximately 60 kilometers south of Bitola, following the *Via Egnatia* toward Dyrrachion, lay Ohrid. Traveling from Bitola toward Thessalonike along the *Via Egnatia*, near Florina, a medieval road branched off, leading to Devol, Berat, Sinjë, and Glavinitza, cf. *Škrivanić*, Putevi, 79–80, 91, 101–102; *Mikulčić*, Antički gradovi, 227–229. For the digital reconstructions of the roads between Ohrid and Bitola, and Bitola and Prilep, based on LCP modeling, see *Schmid – Popović – Breier*, From the Via Egnatia to Prilep, Bitola and Ohrid, 289–317, 510–519.

351 *Ivanov,* Bŭlgarski starini, 26–28.

vicinity of Prilep.[352] Bistra Nikolova, however, approaches the issue from a different perspective, drawing on the list of bishoprics in the Church of St. Achilleos on Little Prespa Lake (989–1002). Herakleia, listed among the bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church in the realm of Samuel,[353] was linked to the Early Byzantine episcopal see of Herakleia Lynkestis and was located in the area around present-day Bitola. Based on this, Nikolova suggests that the Bitola region also served as the see of the Pelagonian bishopric during the period of the First Bulgarian Empire.[354]

In an effort to advance the resolution of this question, let us consider the monuments of Prilep and Bitola. It should be acknowledged that the monastery church of the Holy Archangel in Prilep, situated on rocky terrain beneath Markovi Kuli (King Marko's Fortress), was entirely built around 1270–1280, as more recent architectural analysis by Sašo Korunovski has shown.[355] Furthermore, archaeological exploration of the entire area has confirmed that the proto-urban phase of Prilep is characterized by the absence of masonry architecture, which began to appear only from the 12th century onward.[356] A possible earlier structure at this site, if it existed, could have been either a restored ancient church or primarily built of wood, but no evidence of it has been found.

In comparison, the period from the 7th to the 10th centuries is relatively well attested at two sites associated with medieval Bitola. The first is Yeni Mosque (1558–1559), on the right bank of the Dragor River, in the former Pekmez Pazar, the center of modern Bitola. Underneath it, archaeological excavations conducted by Gordana Filipovska Lazarovska and Slobodan Stojkoski uncovered the remains of a church with four distinct construction phases, dating from the 7th to the 15th century.[357] Although the building core has not been preserved, the substantial parts to remain include the main apse and the apse of the *prothesis* (Fig. 29), the eastern part of the southern chapel, as well as the northwest wall of the church with a small portion of the narthex. These allowed the overall dimensions of the church (32.4 by 22.8 meters) to be determined, and the original layout might be reconstructed as a large three-aisled basilica with a narthex and a lateral chapel along its southern side (Fig. 30). The side aisles, as well as the nave,

352 *Pentkovskij*, K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija: Addenda et corrigenda, 136; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 800–801.

353 *Grabar*, Deux témoignages, 163–166. For more information on the inscription in the upper part of the arcade, see the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 305–318.

354 *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 109–110. The bishop of Herakleia is mentioned among the suffragans of the metropolitan of Thessalonike in *Notitia 3* from ca. 870–880, Notitiae, 3.260. However, there are no indications that the city's bishopric survived the Avar-Slavic invasion in the early 7th century. See *Mihajlovski,* Heraclea, Pelagonia and Medieval Bitola, 340–341; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 807. For the use of the toponym "Bitola" by John Skylitzes in reference to the residence of Gabriel Radomir, see *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 850.

355 *Korunovski,* Crkovnata arhitektura, 104–128, 281–284; *Idem*, A contribution to the study of architecture, 111–116, with further bibliography.

356 For the proto-urban phase of Markovi Kuli and its settlement character, see *Babić*, Materijalnata kultura; *Risteski*, Docna antika i srednio vek, 76–80. For the development of the medieval town of Prilep, see *Idem*, Srednovekovniot Prilep, 135–155; *Idem*, Prostorniot raspored, 41–54.

357 For the archaeological research of the Yeni Mosque site, see *Filipovska-Lazarovska*, Jeni džamija, 316–320; *Mihajlovski*, Bitolskata Jeni džamija, 183–188; *Stojkoski*, Srednovekovno kopje, 122–130; *Mihajlovski – Filipovska-Lazarovska – Stojkoski*, Medieval Bitola after 1018, 257–270; *Mihajlovski – Stojkoski – Filipovska-Lazarovska*, Srednovekovna Bitola, 11–33; *Hristovski-Srna,* Arheološkiot lokalitet, 145–161.



Fig. 29.
Bitola, Basilica underneath Yeni Mosque, remains of the sanctuary

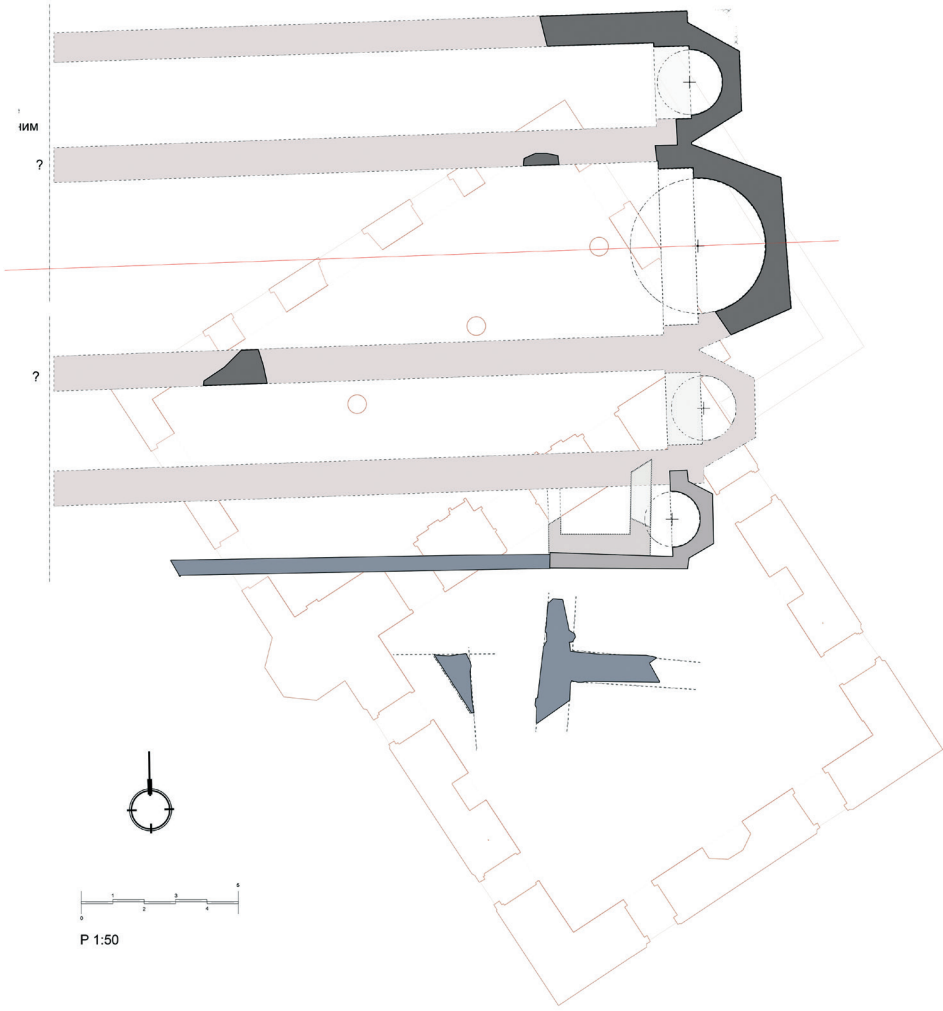


Fig. 30.
Bitola, Basilica underneath Yeni Mosque, plan

terminated in projecting apses semicircular on the inside and three-sided on the exterior.[358] The first phase of construction is placed in the lengthy span of time from the 7th to early 11th centuries, on the ground of the *opus mixtum* masonry technique, a floor of ceramic tiles, fragments of floor mosaics, and pottery.[359] The researchers date the earliest structure to the 7th or 8th centuries based on the ceramic floor and floor mosaic, which are comparable to those in Herakleia Lynkestis from the late 6th or early 7th century.[360] Given that building activity in the Balkans during the 7th and 8th centuries was largely limited to reconstruction and adaptive reuse,[361] we are inclined to believe that the earliest church beneath Yeni Mosque could have belonged to the corpus of 6th-century church architecture and was subsequently rebuilt and adapted. This is evidenced by the most significant religious artifact – a pectoral cross of a late 9th- or 10th -century date, made of metal and adorned with the Crucifixion of Christ and the Virgin *orans*.[362] It finds the closest parallels in a group of small-sized *enkolpia* with the same decoration, which were widespread from the late 9th to the 10th century in the northeastern parts of the First Bulgarian Empire.[363] The early appearance of this type of enkolpion is associated with the process of Christianization, as argued by Ljudmila Dončeva Petkova.[364]

The second site is Kale Bair, located on a hill northwest of Bitola, above the area of Baden Baalari (Fig. 31). Archaeological explorations have unearthed the remains of a fortification and a monumental cross-in-square church within it (dimensions: 23.6 by 20.16 meters), establishing their chronological relationship.[365] The construction of the church, likely in the 11th century or later, was preceded by the building of the fortification walls, enclosing an interior area of approximately 5 hectares. The first defensive line reveals a fortification system consisting of an embankment and a ditch, built using fieldstone, earth, and wood. The second defensive line encloses a circular area with a diameter of 45 meters, where the elevated citadel most likely once stood. It was a typical Slavic fortification, which, according to the assessment of Gordana Filipovska Lazarevska and her collaborators, was built in haste in the late 9th century, probably under Boris-Michael.[366] The fragments of domestic wares discovered *in situ* are datable to a broader chronological frame spanning the 9th to early 11th centuries.[367]

358 *Mihajlovski – Filipovska-Lazarovska – Stojkoski*, Medieval Bitola after 1018, 258–259, fig. 1, 3–5, 8–13; *Mihajlovski – Stojkoski – Filipovska-Lazarovska*, Srednovekovna Bitola, 14, 16–21, fig. 1–14.

359 *Mihajlovski – Filipovska-Lazarovska – Stojkoski*, Medieval Bitola after 1018, fig. 14; *Mihajlovski – Stojkoski – Filipovska-Lazarovska*, Srednovekovna Bitola, fig. 13, 15–20, 22–25, 35.

360 *Mihajlovski – Stojkoski – Filipovska-Lazarovska*, Srednovekovna Bitola, 21–22.

361 For the 7th- and 8th-century architecture in the Balkans, see *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 249–262.

362 *Mihajlovski – Stojkoski – Filipovska-Lazarovska*, Srednovekovna Bitola, 27, fig. 37a–b.

363 Cf. the examples published by *Dončeva-Petkova*, Srednovekovni krŭstove-enkolpioni, 149–151, 396–400 type 1. 1. 1. 4. 14, 1–3 (Catalogue), T. XCV–C.

364 Ibid., 149, 151.

365 For the archaeological research of Kale Bair, see *Filipovska – Srbinovski,* Rezultati od istražuvanjata, 111–121; *Filipovska – Srbinovski*, Pregled na arheološkite istražuvanja, 111–120; *Filipovska-Lazarovska et al*., Izveštaj od arheološkite istražuvanja, 204–209; *Filipovska-Lazarovska – Ġorġievska*, Materijalnata kultura vo Bitola, 11–19.

366 *Filipovska – Srbinovski,* Rezultati od istražuvanjata, fig. 1; *Filipovska-Lazarovska – Ġorġievska*, Materijalnata kultura vo Bitola, 13

367 *Filipovska – Srbinovski*, Rezultati od istražuvanjata, 115–117, Tab. I, III, IV; *Filipovska-Lazarovska – Ġorġievska*, Materijalnata kultura vo Bitola, 15–16.

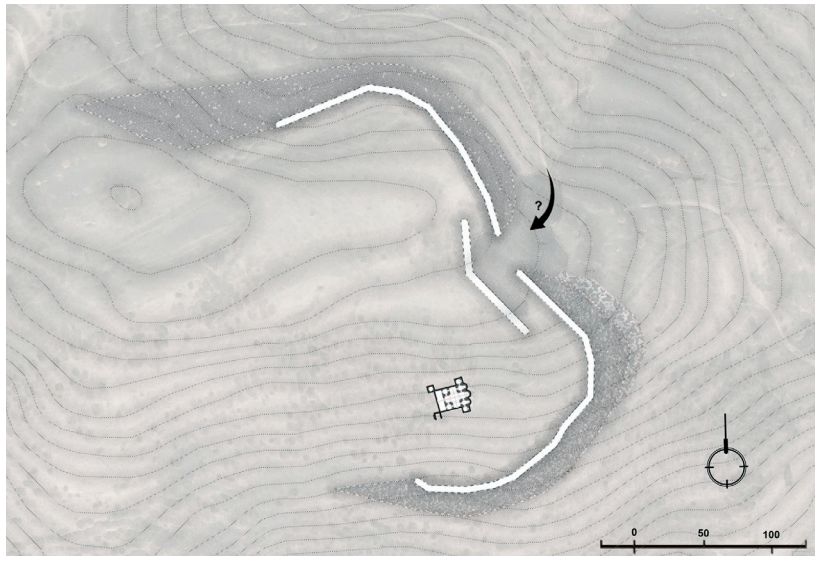


Fig. 31.
Kale Bair,
fortification,
plan



Fig. 32.
Zrze, Cave
complex,
general view

All considered, the archaeological, architectural, and art-historical evidence confirms the Slavic presence in Bitola and its vicinity within the realm of the Bulgarian state in the 10th century, if not already from the late 9th century.[368] This presence was manifested through fortification efforts and the modest reconstruction and adaptation of Early Byzantine churches. Turning again to the question of the bishop's see, a more useful approach seems to be an examination of his jurisdiction in the region of

368 Cf. also the stratigraphic excavations of the limited area beneath the Church of St. Demetrios in Bitola (1830), which revealed layers dating to the 16th and 13th–14th centuries, as well as a layer corresponding to typical Slavic semi-subterranean dwellings: *Filipovska-Lazarevska,* Arheološki naodi, 22.

the Pelagonian Plain. Archaeological exploration of two sites in its northern parts has yielded datable evidence for the period in question.

The cave complex of the Transfiguration is situated near the village of Zrze, 35 km northwest of Prilep, in the northern part of the Pelagonian Plain in North Macedonia.[369] A more recent archaeological examination, undertaken by Branislav Risteski, on the slopes, as well as the upper plateau of the travertine rock, uncovered the remains of a medieval monastic settlement and clarified its chronology (Fig. 32).[370] Archaeological, architectural, and painting evidence suggests that it existed from the late 9th–early 10th century until the second half of the 16th or early 17th century. The first phase of the cave complex at Zrze is datable to the period between the late 9th–early 10th century and the early 12th century. During this time, around thirteen caves in the upper parts of the slopes of the rock were used as cells for living and working. These structures were carved into natural cavities, caves in the travertine rock, plateaus formed after the exploitation of travertine in the 3rd to 4th centuries, as well as leveled surfaces atop the ruins of a Late Antique settlement. The abundance of pottery finds, tools, and handicraft products made from animal bones suggests that the first phase spanned from the late 9th–early 10th century to the first two decades of the 12th century. Based on typological and technological characteristics, the pottery from Zrze represents developed forms of the so-called Byzantine-Slavic ware, closely paralleled by archaeological finds from the Slavic settlements at Markovi Kuli in Prilep and nearby Debrešte.[371]

The archaeological excavations undertaken on the plateau north of the travertine rock are relevant for the early history of the cave monastic community of Zrze.[372] They uncovered an Early Christian church complex, developed in two phases from the late 4th to early 6th century (Fig. 33), with a three-aisled basilica as its central part, housing a vaulted tomb likely belonging to a local martyr. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand the motivation behind constructing a spacious church complex in such an exceptionally unfavorable location. Small-scale building activities were attested within the Early Christian church complex during the first phase of the cave complex of Zrze. Interventions using materials from the site as *spolia* and mud as mortar in the northern aisle of the basilica suggest a partial renovation of the Early Christian church during this period. The results of archaeological research have done a lot to clarify the chronology of the sacral area within the complex. In the 10th and the better part of the 11th century, the partially repaired Early Christian basilica served as a church for anchorites.[373]

The first phase of the monastic settlement also features a small rectangular *parekklesion* (chapel) with an eastern apse. It is located in the southern segment of the

369 The cave complex was named Transfiguration after the monastery founded at the top of the rock in the 14th century. Cf. *Rasolkoska-Nikolovska*, Manastirot Zrze, 407–462.

370 *Risteski*, Deloto na Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 341–352.

371 Ibid., 345–347, 350, fig. 1–4.

372 The archaeological investigation was conducted by *Risteski,* Najranite manifestacii na hristijanstvoto, 203–210, fig. 1, 2, draw. 1.

373 *Risteski*, Deloto na Sveti Kliment Ohridski, 347.

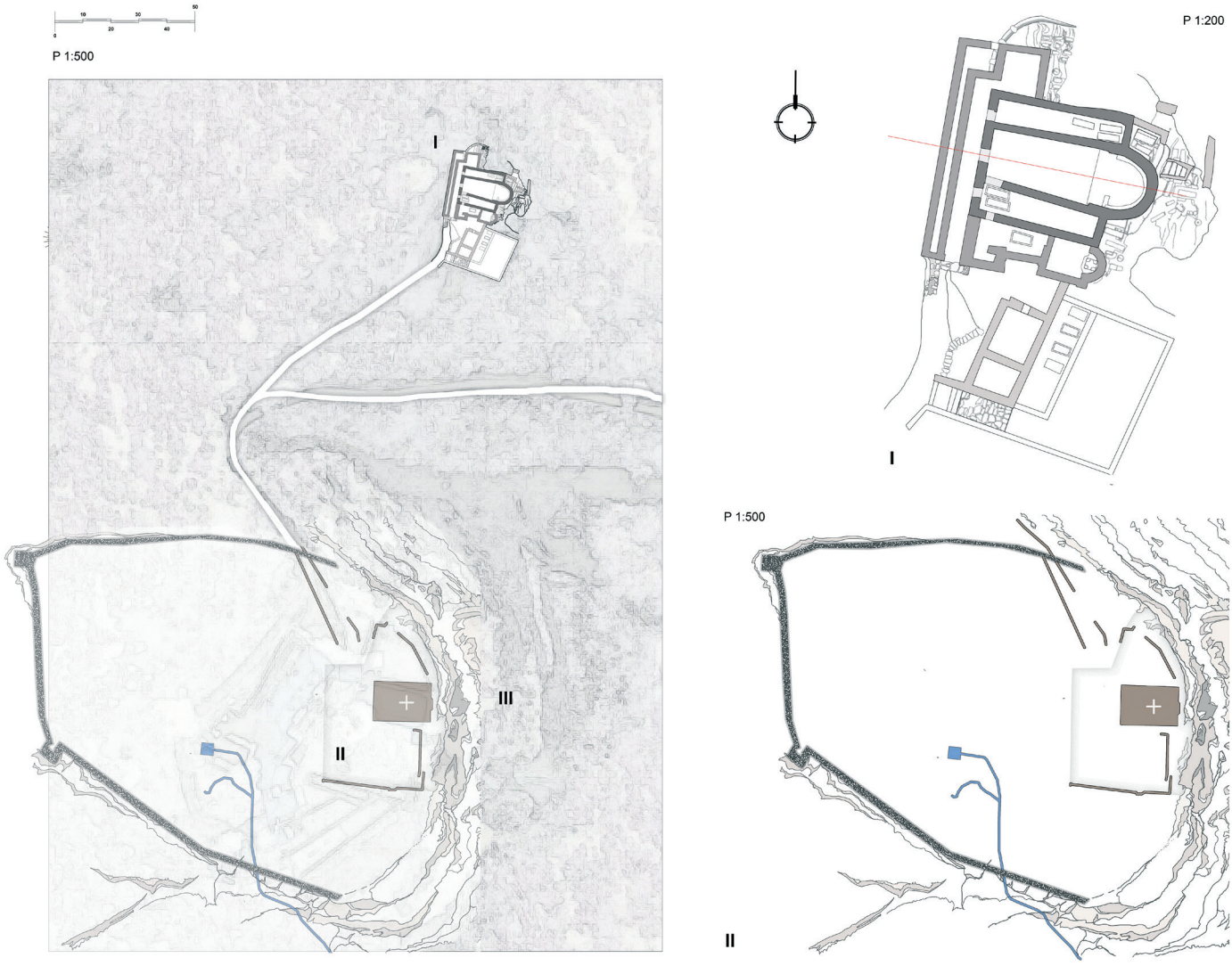


Fig. 33.
Zrze, plan:
I.
Early Christian church complex;
II.
Monastery of the Transfiguration;
III.
Cave complex

rock, formed during the exploitation of travertine in Roman times. The *parekklesion* walls were fashioned out of rough stone bonded with mud, and the floor was made of rammed earth. Given that masonry architecture did not appear in the Prilep area until the 12th century, it is reasonable to assume that the construction of the small chapel took place in the final stage of the first phase.[374]

It is clear from the above that the small anchoretic community was established on the site of the abandoned and devastated Early Christian church complex. This can be taken as evidence of the northern territorial boundary of the missionary activity of St. Clement' disciples and different forms of monastic life at that time. While the architectural remains of the monasteries founded by Clement and Naum in the Ohrid region testify to a coenobitical system, the physical structure at Zrze is more consistent with the cave type of the *lavra*. The organization of the monastic community, profoundly

374 Ibid., 345, fig. 5.

shaped by the site-specific conditions of the rocky terrain at Zrze, brought together communal living and eremitism.

Judging by the preserved monuments, the northern boundary of the Slavic Bishopric of Pelagonia was near Veles. The ruined church, known as St. Constantine, stands at the Panadjurište site, 3 km from the village of Svećani and 25 km south of Veles, on the northeastern slope of Mount Klepa at an elevation of 777 m. From this vantage point, there is an expansive view of Povardarje, encompassing the confluence of the Bregalnica River and the Veles Gorge. The church at Svećani was the subject of archaeological and art-historical study in the 1960s. Petar Miljković Pepek analyzed its construction history and identified its fresco layers.[375] Although rebuilt in the 13th and likely in the 14th century – with the northern wall, narthex, and a chapel added to the south side dating from that period – substantial parts of the original church have been preserved. It was a single-aisled structure with an apse added on its southern side (Fig. 34). Pepek presumed that a lateral apse originally existed on the northern side as well, but it had not been preserved due to later reconstructions (Fig. 35). The relatively low main apse is semicircular on both the exterior and interior, with two niches in front of it serving as *pastophoria*. The masonry, best observed on the main apse and southern wall of the naos, is of rough stone. Although it is a single-aisled church without a dome, the shape and arrangement of its lateral conches are elements that indicate a connection with the triconch architectural type. Pepek draws our attention to the triconch plan established in Clement's foundation and replicated in a group of churches in the Ohrid region, which may have served as a model for the builders in Svećani.[376] Fragments of the earliest frescoes, uncovered beneath the 13th-century layer in the sanctuary, are heavily damaged and scarce, precluding an iconographic and stylistic analysis. The fresco decoration was arranged in two zones, featuring frontal depictions of saintly figures, a typical format in 10th-century Byzantine art.[377] Along with its design, construction and fresco decoration, the epigraphic evidence found *in situ* aids in dating the church. A short inscription – ѧзлъ – was incised on an amorphous stone in both Glagolitic and Cyrillic letters, bearing an apotropaic meaning. According to Vladimir Mošin, the concurrent use of Glagolitic and Cyrillic letters in writing persisted until the early 10th century, providing the *terminus ante quem* for this inscription.[378] The church in Svećani is dated to the period between the early and mid-10th century. Within this chronological framework, it may have played a certain role in the missionary and educational endeavors of the first Slavic bishop, Clement, and his disciples, marking the northernmost extent of their activity. Finally, the material culture, as evidenced by necropolises usually formed alongside ruined Early Christian

375 *Miljković-Pepek,* Crkvata Sv. Konstantin, 149–162; *Idem*, Contribution aux recherches, 191, 193–194, fig. 10; *Idem*, L'architecture, 485, Pl. II, fig. 9, Pl. III, fig. 4.

376 *Miljković-Pepek,* Crkvata Sv. Konstantin, 150–154, fig. 2–5.

377 Ibid., 154–155, fig. 7, 8.

378 Ibid., 151–152, fig. 6.



Fig. 34.
Svećani, Church of St. Constantine, present state of the monument

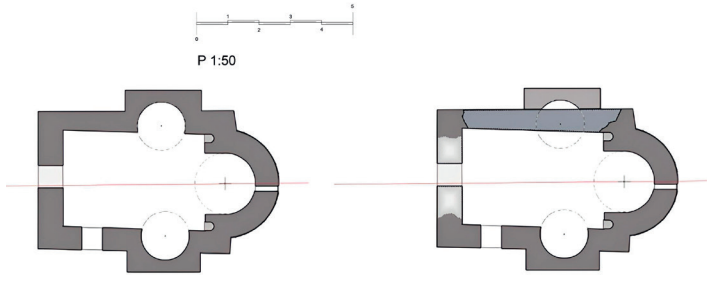


Fig. 35.
Svećani, Church of St. Constantine, plan:
I. Hypothetical reconstruction;
II. Later medieval phases

churches, complements the information provided by monuments regarding the Slavic presence in the Pelagonian Plain during the 9th and 10th centuries.[379]

The information provided by the preserved monuments and written sources allows us to conclude that the jurisdiction of the Slavic bishop of Pelagonia encompassed the area between Bitola and Veles. Finally, the material culture, as evidenced by necropolises usually formed alongside ruined Early Christian churches, further complements the evidence of a Slavic presence in the Pelagonian Plain during the 9th and

379 See e.g. the necropolises in the area of Prilep – Zadna Reka, Grmajte: *Kepeska*, Zadna Reka – Grmajte; Mlaka, Debrešte: Arheološka karta, 296 (B. Kitanoski, L. Kepeska, K. Kepeski); Trpčeva crkva, Dunje: *Kepeska,* Slovenska nekropola, 245–252; *Eadem*, Novi naodi, 213–224; *Eadem*, Trpčeva crkva; Gradište, Debrešte: *Atanasoski*, Archaeological Excavation, 61–70 with further bibliography; Devolgrad, Kavadarci: Arheološka karta, 148 (Ž. Vinčić); *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 200–203, fig. 65–67. Relevant publications on this subject include: *Babić*, Materijalnata kultura; Kulturno bogatstvo Prilepa; *Kepeska,* Nekolku krstovi-privrzoci, 283–290; *Mikulčić*, op. cit.

10th centuries. The seats of the Slavic bishops were not permanent, which suggests that the bishop of the "Drugubite" part of Clement's former bishopric may have resided in both the Bitola and Prilep regions.

Revival of Christian and Byzantine tradition

By the decision of the Photian Council (879/880), the Bulgarian Church gained autocephaly from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[380] The newly established Bulgarian Archbishopric encompassed the metropolitanates and bishoprics within the territory of the Bulgarian state – both those removed from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate between 870 and 880 and those established following the Council of 879/880.[381] This section will focus on the episcopal sees in the western regions of the Bulgarian state, which came under the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ohrid in 1019.[382] These sees were either established on pre-existing Christian traditions (Morava, Vidin, and Belgrade), or restored Early Byzantine bishoprics between 870 and 880 (Serdica, Skopje), or formerly Byzantine bishoprics assimilated in the late 9th to early 10th century (Vodena, Ohrid).[383]

The most significant archaeological record from Morava and Vidin consists of fortifications.[384] Architectural and artistic evidence is preserved at only a few ecclesiastical sites within the territories of the bishoprics of Serdica and Ohrid, which are discussed below. Historical sources further inform the material culture, enhancing our understanding of the early evidence of art and architecture.

The Bishopric of Serdica

The Bishopric of Serdica (modern Sofia) included the surroundings of Sofia, the source area of the Nišava River, as well as Velbăžd with the Strymon region.[385] There is insufficient evidence to consider the possibility that the region of Niš was also under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Serdica.[386] The seat was the city of Serdica, a late Roman metropolitan see that remained an urban center with a Byzantine Christian population until the Bulgarian conquest in 809. It retained its significance as a Christian center even during the reign of the pagan Bulgars, and its status as a bishopric was restored following their conversion.[387]

380 *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 320–328, 344–348.

381 Notitiae 3. 603–610, 642–656, 727–731; 7, p. 269–288; *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.1–43.35,44.7–19, 45.4–13. On the organization and territorial jurisdiction of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church, see *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 348–352 with further bibliography.

382 On this subject, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 789–821.

383 Ibid., 813–814.

384 For the fortifications at Magrum/Morava, Veliki Gradac, and Vidin, see respectively: *Ivanišević – Bugarski*, Primena *LiDAR* tehnologije, 239–255; *Popović*, Veliki Gradac, 265–282; Barakov, Bdin, 623–637.

385 *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 344–352; *Idem*, Diocesan Structure, 801–802, with sources and further bibliography.

386 For the issue of Niš within the organization of autocephalous Bulgarian Church (880–971), see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 793–794, 811, 814.

387 *Sophoulis*, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 188–191, 221–227; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 793.

The preserved monuments within the territory of Serdica are remarkably few, considering the historical significance of the bishopric. [388] The *Lives* of St. John of Rila (ca. 876–946), whose earliest redactions date to the 12th century, provide information about the episcopal church in Serdica, where the saint's body was interred during the reign of the Bulgarian emperor Peter (927–969).[389] This raises the question of whether the episcopal throne was in the Rotunda of St. George or the Basilica of Hagia Sophia, a matter that remains unresolved.[390] Similarly, the accounts of the transfer of the seat of the Bulgarian Church across the western regions of the former empire – from Dristra to Serdica, then from Vodena/Edessa to Moglena, Prespa, and, ultimately, Ohrid, following the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria in 971 – do not address this question (Map 1, vol. I, 299).[391]

It is worth emphasizing here the case of the Church of the Virgin in the village of Yana, 15 km northeast of Sofia, which was published only once in the 1950s by Nikola Mavrodinov.[392] The church was thus included in the corpus of Bulgarian 10th-century architecture based solely on a single photograph. It was believed that this structure, considered to be typologically related to the Church of St. John the Baptist in Mesembria, was destroyed in 1948. Recent significant research revealed that the photograph published by Mavrodinov actually depicts the Byzantine Church of the Virgin in the village of Yana, located in Eastern Thrace, in the Bunarhisar region of the Republic of Turkey, which was renamed in the first half of the 20th century as Kaynardzha.[393] According to archival materials from the 19th and early 20th centuries, the population was predominantly Bulgarian and Greek, which likely explains the unusual misidentification.

The church in the village of Kulata, located in the Blagoevgrad region, may serve as an example of construction endeavors in the Middle Strymon valley.[394] It is assumed that the church may have originally been established as a monastery, based on its architectural plan, the toponyms "Manastir" or "St. Atanas," and the oral traditions of

388 Although only hypothetical, there are indications that the oldest eastern section of the Boyana Church on Mount Vitosha, southwest of Sofia, underwent two construction phases, the earlier possibly dating to the 10th century. See *Velenis*, Srednovekovnite gradežni fazi, 162–177.

389 Ivanov, *Žitija*, 48; *Češmedžiev*, Za vremeto na prenasjaneto, 79–87.

390 The Rotunda of St. George, originally part of a Roman bath complex within Emperor Constantine's residence, was converted into a church around 450, which it remained throughout the Middle Ages without significant alterations to its original structure. See *Filov*, Sv. Georgi; Kirin, *The Rotunda of St. George*, with further bibliography. Hagia Sophia was constructed in the 5th or 6th century, as an extra muros funerary basilica, on the site of three older churches. Despite its monumental appearance and dedication to Divine Wisdom, there is no evidence to suggest that Hagia Sophia in Serdica served as a cathedral after its construction. The later history of the church until the early 14th century remains unknown. It was the cathedral only for a short period of time during the 14th century. See *Filov*, Sv. Sofija; *Bojadžiev*, Rannohristijanski hram; Kirin, *The Rotunda of St. George*, 56–59, 350–359, fig. 88; *Fingarova*, Sophienkirche, 151–154, who dates the Church of Hagia Sophia to the period when the city of Serdica was under Byzantine rule – from the late 7th century until the Bulgarian conquest in 812. For an overview of the research on the Hagia Sophia, see *Valeva*, Saint Sophia Church, 63–92.

391 For a chronology of the transfers of the seat of the Bulgarian Church and its Primate, see *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 154–157, with sources and further bibliography. See also *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 803–804.

392 *Mavrodinov*, Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 201–202.

393 *Zaharieva,* Edna fotografija, 133–144.

394 The church was first archaeologically researched by *Milčev*, Arheologičeski razkopki, 401–449, Tab. XXX–LX. See also *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 153; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 336, fig. 365–366; *Stanković*, An Unusual Triconchal Church, 233–235, fig. 13a–b; *Georgieva*, Trikonhalni cŭrkvi, 251–252; *Eadem*, Church Architecture, 368–374.

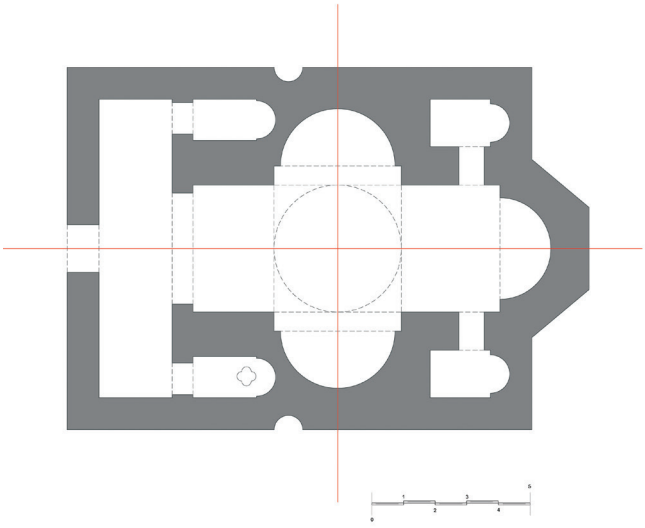


Fig. 36.
Kulata, Church, plan

the local population. Given that the area around the church has not been explored, this hypothesis remains open.[395] The excavated foundations display a combination of inscribed-cross and triconch type (Fig. 36), a plan very close to the Crvena Crkva in Krupište (Fig. 25).[396] Similarly, the north and south arms of the cross ended in apses that were contained within the thickness of the walls, with apsidal corner spaces, formed between the arms of the cross. Furthermore, its simple rectangular form encloses a cruciform naos and a narthex, with the main apse projected on the exterior. The overall dimensions of the church are slightly larger, measuring 16.55 by 11.4 meters. It is worth noting, however, that the design of Kulata places greater emphasis on the central domed space and the lateral apses. It appears that the organization of the lateral chambers also differs, as the eastern ones are accessible only from the sanctuary, suggesting that they functioned primarily as *pastophoria*. The church was constructed with stone courses bound by mortar, while the vaults were built entirely of brick. The inclusion of the pair of deep niches on the exterior evokes Armenian architecture, the influence of which has been observed in Constantinople during the 10th century.[397] Poorly preserved fragments of frescoes in the sanctuary do not allow chronological determination of the church.

However, the stratigraphic context helps us to establish the relative chronology of the site. Firstly, the pottery finds come from three strata – dated to the 6th–9th, 9th–10th and 12th–14th centuries – indicating that the church was founded on the former Early Byzantine and Early Slavic settlements.[398] Secondly, the earth layers, containing burials and associated grave finds outside the church, showed that graves dating from the 8th–9th century predate the construction of the church.[399] Furthermore, the presence

395 *Milčev*, Arheologičeski razkopki, 403–404, 423.

396 The similarities between the two churches are discussed by *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 336, fig. 365–366; *Stanković*, An Unusual Triconchal Church, 233–235, fig. 13a–b; *Georgieva*, Trikonhalni cŭrkvi, 252–253; *Eadem*, Church Architecture, 372.

397 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 336.

398 *Milčev*, Arheologičeski razkopki, 424–440, Tab. XLI–XLIX, L, LV.1.

399 One grave dated from the 12th century has also been archaeologically recorded outside the church, while burials were carried out in larger numbers inside and around the church only after its destruction in the 15th century. See *Milčev*, Arheologičeski razkopki, 440–447, Tab. LVII–LX.

of numerous small hexagonal and triangular marble tiles, alongside large rectangular marble slabs in the main apse, suggests that the church featured *opus sectile* pavements similar to those found in the churches of Preslav.[400] The archaeological evidence strongly supports dating the church to the 10th century. This proposed dating is also the most convincing from an architectural perspective.[401] As previously discussed, the inscribed-cross design, along with variants incorporating the triconch type, emerged as a prominent trend in Byzantine church architecture during the 9th and 10th centuries. Within the realm of the First Bulgarian Empire, this is exemplified by the Crvena Crkva in Krupište, which was probably constructed by 971. There are examples in the central Balkans and Greek lands, however, which might have been built in the late 10th or first half of the 11th century.[402]

The accurate dating of Kulata, considering the ecclesiastical and political epochs of Bulgaria, presents a considerable challenge. The geographical position of the settlement of Kulata is particularly noteworthy, as it was located around 10 kilometers north of the Roupel Pass, a border area between Byzantium and Bulgaria from the 9th to the early 11th century (Map 2).[403] The conclusion that Kulata, along with the surrounding area, was part of Bulgaria until 971 is supported by information from written sources. As a response to the Bulgarian invasions into the territories of the Byzantine Empire through the Roupel Pass after the death of Simeon in 927, this region was further fortified with the establishment of *Kleisoura* Strymon.[404] When Emperor John Tzimiskes conquered the territories north of the Roupel Pass in 971, the new Theme of New (Neos) Strymon was established. It is generally accepted that the geographical location of this theme was in a region north of Serres, in the Upper Strymon valley.[405] These territories were once again incorporated into the Bulgarian domain following the rebellion of the Kometopouloi in 976, leading to the restoration of the Bulgarian state. Kulata is situated very close to the Kleidion Pass, fortified with a defensive network designed to protect central Bulgaria from Byzantine attacks originating from the direction of Serres.[406] It remains unclear whether this region was incorporated into the Theme of Bulgaria and the Bishopric of Velbăžd, under the newly established Archbishopric of Ohrid, following Basil II's conquest of Bulgaria in 1018.[407] Based on archaeological and architectural evidence and historical sources, we propose a timeframe up to 971 for

400 Ibid., 421, Tab. XXXVIII.

401 Ibid., 401–449; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 153; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 336; *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 371–374. For the review of opinions that the church in Kulata should be placed within the broader chronological framework spanning the 9th to 12th centuries, see *Georgieva*, op.cit., 371 with further bibliography.

402 For the examples, see above 123.

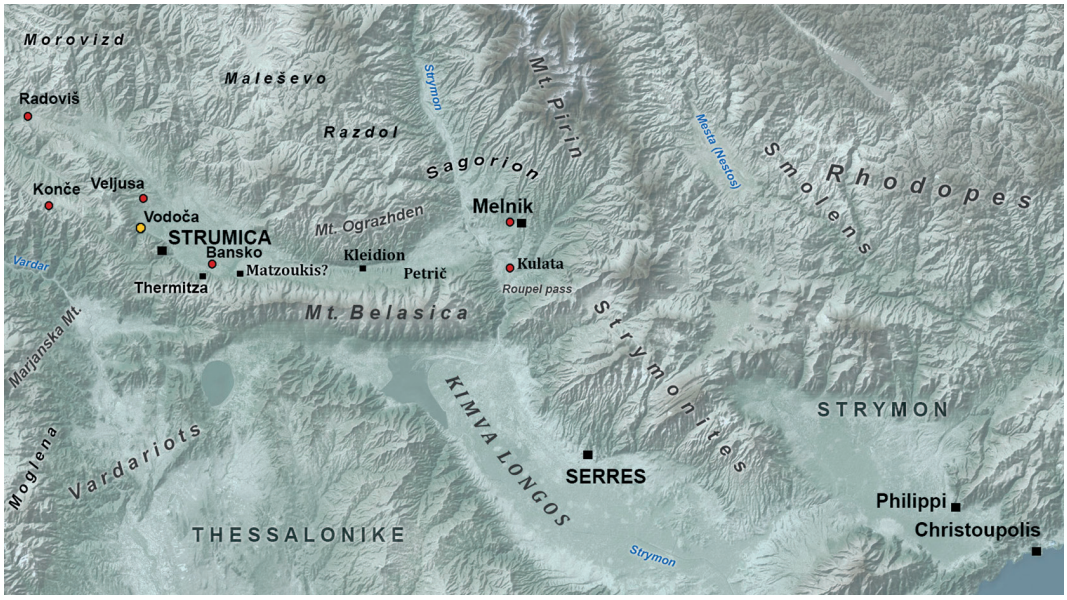
403 *Neševa,* Voennoporni punktove, 452.

404 *Wassiliou-Seibt*, Reconstructing the Byzantine Frontier, 236, n. 36, with sources.

405 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 269.4, 357; *Holmes*, Basil II, 398; *Wassiliou-Seibt,* Reconstructing the Byzantine Frontier, 237.

406 For the system of fortifications in the Kleidion Pass, see *Mitrev*, Za Samuilovata krepost, 155–166; *Idem*, Samuilovata krepost-dema, 432–450. See also *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 862.

407 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 22.7–10. See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 8.



Map 2. The Roupel Pass, a border area between Byzantium and Bulgaria from the 9th to the early 11th century

the construction of the church at Kulata, while acknowledging that a later period (between 976 and 1018) cannot be excluded. Certain archaeological finds indicate that this church was active in the final phase of Samuel's reign. Notably, a bronze pectoral cross adorned with the orans figure of an unidentified saint[408] finds typological parallels with a group of enkolpia from Bulgaria dated to the late 10th and early 11th centuries.[409]

The Bishopric of Ohrid

The Bishop of Ohrid, a suffragan of the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion, was listed among the attendees of the council of 879/880.[410] As a city bishopric in the Slavic milieu of northern Epirus, Ohrid remained within the ecclesiastical and political framework of the Byzantine state for more than a decade after the Bulgarian Church attained autocephaly from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[411] The Bishopric of Ohrid was incorporated into the Bulgarian church organization following the Bulgarian-Byzantine war of 894–896.[412]

The brief historical outline portrays the ecclesiastical milieu that Clement encountered upon his arrival in Ohrid. When it comes to monuments, Theophylact of Ohrid is once again an invaluable source: Ταῦτα δὲ κἀν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ αὐτοῦ

408 *Milčev*, Arheologičeski razkopki, Tab. LV.2.

409 See the comparable examples at: *Dončeva-Petkova,* Srednovekovni krŭstove-enkolpioni, 60–63, fig. 360–361, type 1. 1. 1. 2. 7, no. 126, 127 (Catalogue), Tab. XXIV; 73–76, fig, 13, 368, type 1. 1. 1. 2. 13. 1. 1. 2, no. 168, 169 (Catalogue), Tab. XXXIII.

410 *Mansi*, XVII, 373 E–376 A. The Bishop of Ohrid (ὁ Λυκινίδου, Λυχνίδου) was also listed among the suffragans of the metropolitan of Dyrrachion in *Notitia 3* of the Church of Constantinople from ca. 870–880: Notitiae, 3.303. See *Filiposki*, Ohridskata episkopija, 258–259; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 791–792.

411 *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 105–107; *Filiposki*, Ohridskata episkopija, 257–276; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 796 with further bibliography.

412 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 796.

ἀπέθετο, ὃ ἐν Ἀχρίδι ἐδείματο, ἔτι περιόντος τῷ βίῳ τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Βορίσου, πρὶν ἢ πάντως τὴν τῆς Βελίτζας ἐπισκοπὴν ἀναδέξετε. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ εἶδε τοῦτον τὸν ἄρχοντα πᾶσαν τὴν ὑπ᾽ αὐτὸν Βουλγαρίαν ἑπτὰ καθολικοῖς ναοῖς περιζώσαντα καὶ οἷόν τινα λυχνίαν ἐπτάφωτον τῇ πίστει ἀνάψαντα, ἠθέλησε καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν Ἀχρίδι οἰκεῖον δείμασθαι μοναστήριον· τούτῳ δὲ καὶ ἑτέραν ἐκκλησίαν προσέθηκεν, ἣν ὕστερον ἀρχιεπισκοπῆς θρόνον ἔθεντο καὶ οὕτως ἦσαν ἐν Ἀχρίδι τρεῖς ἐκκλησίαι, μία μὲν ἡ καθολική, δύο δὲ τοῦ ἱεροῦ Κλήμεντος, μεγέθει μὲν πολλῷ τῆς καθολικῆς βραχυτέρα, σχήματι δὲ περιηγμένῳ καὶ κυκλοτερεῖ ταύτης ἐπιτερπεστέρα.[413]

From Theophylact's *Long Life of Saint Clement* we learn the following. There were three churches in Ohrid – the preexisting cathedral, and the two churches founded by Clement. The first of Clement's churches was built as a monastic katholikon between 868 and 893, while the chronology of the second is not clearly expressed. The latter, however, later served as the seat of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Furthermore, Clement's churches were smaller in size than the cathedral, yet with a more refined and rounded form, making them more pleasing in appearance.

Only the first of Clement's foundations, known as the Monastery of St. Panteleimon, has been archaeologically confirmed at the Plaošnik site with rich Early Christian and Early Byzantine heritage. The katholikon followed a triconch plan (further discussed below, Fig. 44), aligning with Theophylact's reference to Clement's churches. It was not an entirely new construction, but rather a renovated and adapted older structure, originally part of a Late Antique church complex (Fig. 37). It seems likely that this architectural type, with its intimate interior, was chosen in accordance with the needs of educational activities and the spiritual life of Clement's time.[414]

It is noteworthy that its architectural setting was situated outside the city center at that time. Researchers have rightly identified this location with the "place of rest" that, according to the hagiographies, was granted to Clement by Michael-Boris. It should be regarded as an uninhabited site in the immediate vicinity of the urban core.[415] As pointed out by Toni Filiposki, the location of Clement's monastery reflected the parallel presence of the Byzantine bishopric and the Slavic missionary and educational endeavors in Ohrid during the second half of the 9th and the early 10th century.[416] The second substantial piece of evidence supporting this assumption is the cathedral mentioned by Theophylact. Therefore, the Byzantine ecclesiastical organization operated within the urban core of Ohrid, while Clement's educational and missionary center functioned on its outskirts.

The second monastic church of Clement has not been archaeologically identified. Furthermore, the interpretation of Theophylact's words "τούτῳ δὲ καὶ ἑτέραν ἐκκλησίαν προσέθηκεν" has raised more questions than it has provided clarification.

413 *Iliev*, The Long Life of Saint Clement, 101, XXIII.67.

414 *Grozdanov*, Sveti Naum, 44.

415 *Filiposki*, Ohrid vo raniot sreden vek, 139–141 with further bibliography.

416 *Filiposki*, Ohrid vo raniot sreden vek, 165–170; *Idem*, Ohridskata episkopija, 257–276.

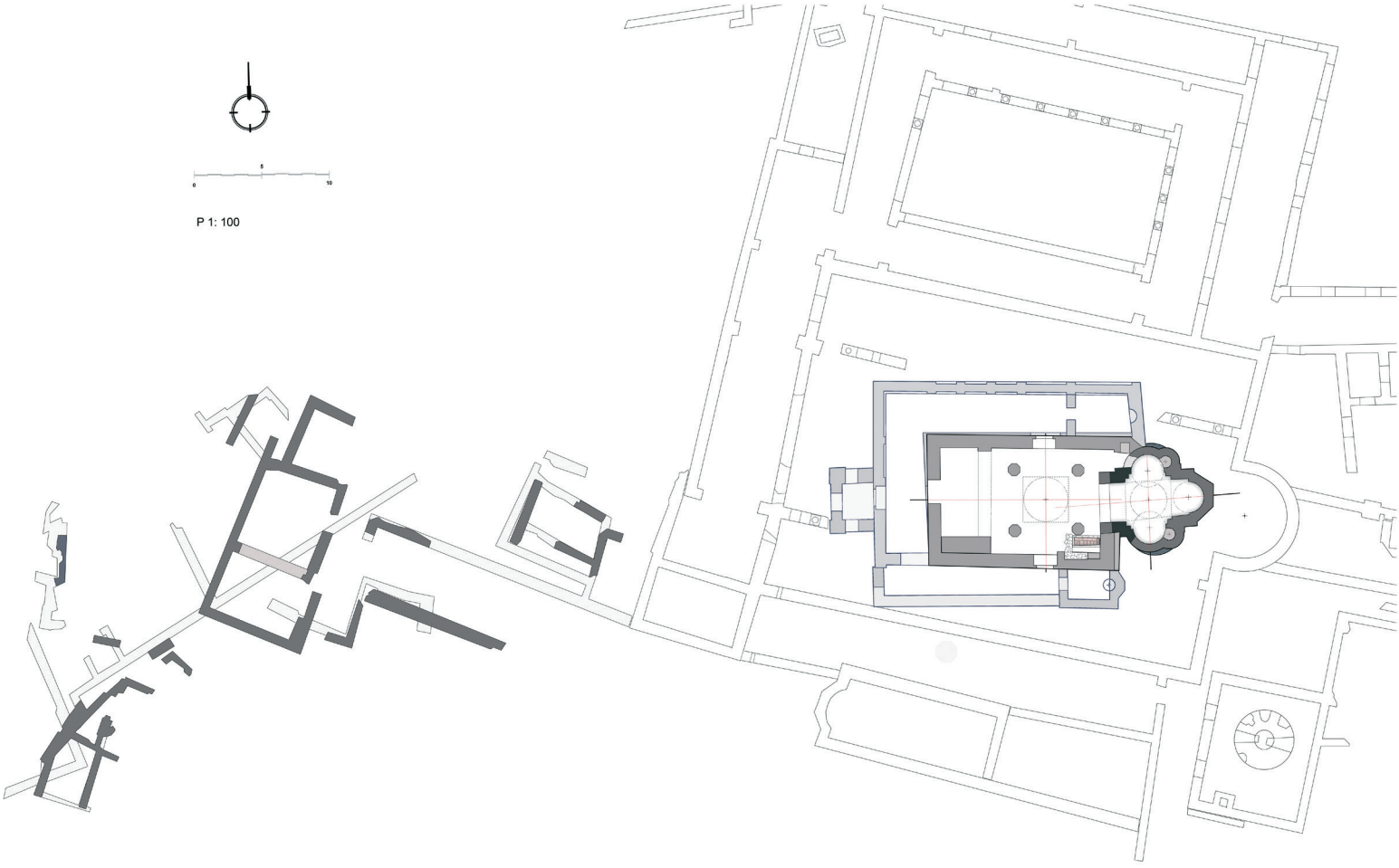


Fig. 37. Ohrid, Plaošnik, general view of the site with Late Antique church complex and medieval monastery of St. Clement, plan

At the very least, one aspect of his account is clear – the second church had a triconch architectural design, just like the first. The key question is: where was Clement's second church located? Three possible explanations have been proposed. The first was offered by Dimče Koco. Based on the translation of προσέθηκεν as "added," he interpreted the remains of Clement's triconch at Plaošnik as the first church, while identifying the western structure in the form of a cross-in-square, which was added to it, as the second church.[417] Filiposki interpreted the term not strictly in a spatial sense but rather in a more abstract manner, considering the chronological gap between the two churches and the cathedral function assigned exclusively to the second one. Relying on Theophylact's account of the later transformation of Clement's second church into the archiepiscopal cathedral, it becomes clear that the second church was not only a distinct structure but also constructed at a different location. Considering the later construction date of Clement's second church, Filiposki suggests that it might have occurred during the reign of Simeon, a period characterized by the weakening or dissolution of the Byzantine episcopacy in Ohrid. In line with this, he allows the possibility

417 *Koco*, Klimentoviot manastir, 179–180.

that Clement built his second church within the urban core of Ohrid.[418] The third explanation is based on the more recent systematic excavations at the Plaošnik site. In the northeastern corner of Sector A, within the present boundaries of the site, a "northern apse of a triconch" was uncovered. According to the excavation report by Vlado Malenko, the southern apse of this structure had been destroyed by Late Medieval constructions in this part of Ohrid, while the eastern apse is expected to emerge with further excavations extending eastward beyond the site's limits.[419] Although highly significant, this evidence remains limited to a single architectural element, with no accompanying archaeological findings. Koco's interpretation largely shaped the historiography of St. Clement. However, the present state of knowledge regarding the western part of Clement's church does not support it. The most recent analysis has shown that the original triconch was preceded by a narthex, while the large western structure was constructed in the 12th or 13th century.[420] While Filiposki's view that the second church was a distinct structure should be accepted, its precise location must remain an open question in the absence of archaeological evidence. Although the remains of another medieval triconch uncovered at the Plaošnik site may appear to be a compelling solution to this issue, the lack of sufficient archaeological and architectural evidence calls for caution in their interpretation and underscores the necessity of further research.

Regardless of these uncertainties, pairing the written sources and material evidence clearly indicates that, following the restoration of the Byzantine episcopate in Ohrid in the 9th century, an episcopal church was first established – likely through the restoration of an older basilica in the urban core. Subsequently, during a period of increasingly intensive Slavic missionary activity, Clement established two private foundations in the vicinity of the Byzantine episcopal seat, with the possibility that the second was situated within its urban fabric, both under the patronage of the Bulgarian rulers.[421]

When was the Bishopric of Ohrid finally integrated into the Bulgarian church organization? The *terminus post quem* of 894–896, established through historical sources, can be further substantiated by archaeological evidence from monuments. The remains of three churches have been recorded in the Ohrid region – on the Gorica Peninsula, on the eastern shore of Lake Ohrid, and in the villages of Zlesti and Izdeglavje (Fig. 38 a–b, 39).[422] All three follow a compact domed triconch plan, established by Clement's church and replicated in Naum's foundation in the neighboring Devol region, which is why they have been associated with the building activity in the Ohrid region under

418 *Filiposki*, Ohrid vo raniot sreden vek, 143–148; *Idem*, Ohridskata episkopija, 265, n. 23.

419 *Kuzman*, Arheološki svedoštva, 148–149.

420 See above 102.

421 Earlier scholars classified the Church of the Virgin Čelnica in Ohrid among the group of 9th-century churches: *Bošković – Tomovski,* Srednovekovnata arhitektura, 84. However, archaeological examination revealed that it was constructed on the ruins of the north tower of a city gate that was walled up in the late 14th century: *Koco*, Bogorodica Čelnica, 171–178.

422 For these churches, see *Vasiljević*, Trikonhos, 243–253; *Kuzman,* Arheološki svedoštva, 163–172, plan 11, 13, fig. 11, 14.

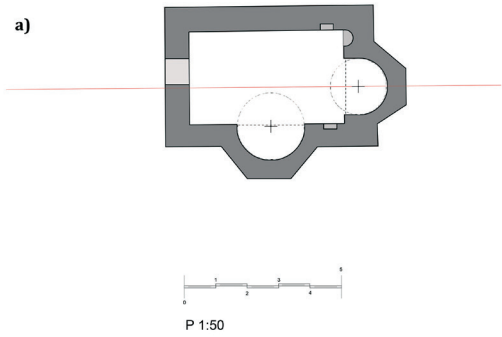


Fig. 38.
Ohrid and its surrounding area, triconch churches, plans:
a. Gorica Peninsula on Ohrid Lake;
b. Izdeglavje

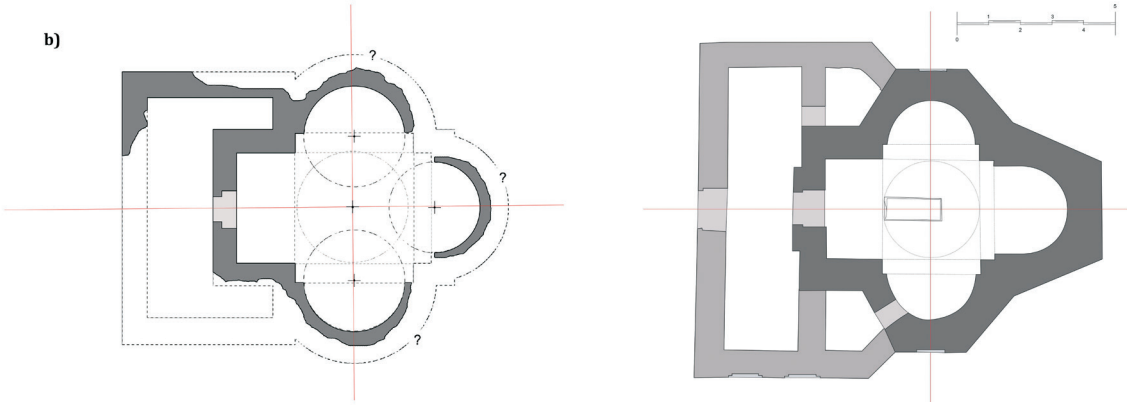


Fig. 39.
Zlesti, a triconch church, plan

Simeon. Their location, design, and size are comparable to their model, suggesting that they played a role in the continued missionary and educational endeavors of Clement's disciples. The increasing number of churches at various locations near Ohrid attests to the expansion of this bishopric within the framework of the Bulgarian state and church.

Monasteries in focus: Founders, functions, architecture, and geographic distribution

The 9th century marked a significant turning point in the history of Christianity across the broader Balkans. The conversion of the Bulgarians to Christianity in 864/865, initiated by the Byzantines during the reign of Prince Boris-Michael, facilitated the introduction of a monastic way of life from Byzantium. After 865, a wave of Byzantine monks arrived in Bulgaria, bringing with them the monastic practices reformed by Theodore the Studite. These practices were established in Bulgaria in their full form.[423]

The densely populated central territories of the First Bulgarian Empire (modern-day northeastern Bulgaria and Dobrudja) had the highest concentration of monasteries. The construction of numerous monastic complexes in the capitals and other major settlements demonstrates the growing demand for and popularity of monasticism in Bulgaria during the early years following the adoption of Christianity. Most of the

423 *Dončeva*, Za njakoi osobenosti na manastirskata praktika, 395–407.

monasteries from the second half of the 9th century were located in provincial areas, while those from the 10th century were primarily urban and suburban. The predominance of provincial monasteries in the early years of the Christianization of the Bulgarians can be attributed to missionary activities, and these monasteries were typically situated in the most densely populated regions and along major roads.[424] In the 10th century, private family monasteries began to emerge. The role of monasteries as centers of learning and literature shifted, and they increasingly became places of spiritual retreat. These monasteries also served as the final resting places for their founders and their families.[425]

Alongside the establishment of monasteries in and near the administrative centers, Pliska and Preslav, another significant monastic region began to emerge. Under the leadership of Clement and Naum, and during the reign of Emperor Simeon (893–927), a second monastic hub developed in the southwestern part of the country, particularly around Ohrid, which became a major religious and cultural center.[426] What is particularly interesting when studying the sacred topography of these cities and their surroundings is the development of early monastic settlements. From the very beginning of official Christianity in Bulgaria, monasteries became key ideological, educational, and cultural centers of the Church. They were socially active and open institutions, evolving into leading spiritual hubs and important centers for the creation and dissemination of culture, literacy, and art in medieval Bulgaria.[427] The significance of monasteries is further highlighted by the fact that their construction was often sponsored and supported by the central state authorities.

However, it is difficult to discuss the founding and maintenance of monasteries in Bulgaria during the second half of the 9th and 10th centuries due to the lack of sufficiently preserved written sources on monasticism from that period. Scholars, however, have hypothesized that some monasteries are directly or indirectly connected to rulers such as Boris-Michael, Simeon, or Peter, either as places of retirement or as final resting places.[428] The arguments for these connections typically rely on the exceptional architecture and decoration of the monasteries, which suggest significant investments – possibly royal patronage. The establishment of scriptoria as centers of education and literacy within these monasteries is also seen as likely only with the support of the ruling dynasty. An important source linking monasteries with the ruling family in Bulgaria is the discovery of royal seals in some monasteries, which testify to their contact with the royal court.[429] Literary sources, such as *The Long Life of Clement of Ohrid* attributed to Theophylact of Ohrid[430] and *The Short Life of Clement of Ohrid* by

424 *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 175–250.

425 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia*, 205–209.*

426 *Dončeva*, Za njakoi osobenosti na manastirskata praktika, 399–400.

427 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 205–209

428 For more on historiographical problem, see *Kostova*, Manastirŭt „na Mostič", 271–287.

429 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 201, n. 10 with extensive bibliography on seals.

430 For the critical edition of the *Vita,* see *Iliev,* The Long Life of Saint Clement, 62–120. For a partial English translation, see *Petkov*, The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 143–160. For a partial Serbian translation, see *Rajković,* Žitije Klimenta Ohridskog, 297–303; For the Bulgarian translation, *Milev,* Grŭckite žitija, 5–165.

Demetrios Chomatenos[431] for the St. Panteleimon Monastery in Ohrid and the *Two Lives of Naum of Ohrid* [432] *written in Slavic* for the Holy Archangel Michael Monastery on the southern shore of Lake Ohrid, also provide valuable insights. However, these two monasteries present specific examples in which Bulgarian rulers appear more as donors than as founders of their own private monasteries, a topic that will be discussed further below. One of the key indicators for recognizing the donors of dynastic monasteries – the presence of tombs belonging to their founders, rulers, or members of the royal family – is still lacking.

Scholars have identified several monasteries as "ruler-monasteries," likely founded with the initiative and support of Prince Boris-Michael and Simeon during the second half of the 9th and 10th centuries. These include the monastery at the Great Basilica in Pliska, the Mother of God Monastery near Ravna, the monastery in the Karaačteke area near Varna, two in the Ohrid area: St. Panteleimon in Ohrid and Holy Archangel Michael on Lake Ohrid, as well as several monasteries in Preslav, such as the complex around the Round Church in Preslav.[433]

Monastery at the Great Basilica, Pliska

One of the largest and most significant structures in Pliska was the monastery surrounding the Great Basilica. Very little information is available about its original appearance. The construction of the residence of the Archbishop of Bulgaria, along with the monastery, began only after 871 and likely concluded around 875.[434] The area surrounding the basilica was enclosed on three sides, covering nearly 1.5 hectares. The complex consisted of five separate buildings, each with its own courtyard, all arranged around the church at its center.

The archbishop's palace was located to the north of the basilica's narthex and was connected to the church's gallery floor by a two-story portico. The palace itself was a two-story structure, with a central hall and uniform apartments on either side. Adjacent to the palace was a building more than 30 meters long, containing seven identical rooms or cells for the archbishop's close associates and key figures in the administration of the Bulgarian Church. The residence of a high-ranking Byzantine cleric in this building is confirmed by the discovery of a lead seal bearing the name George, who held the title Archbishop of Bulgaria.[435] Nearby, the original kitchen and refectory for the archbishop's residence were also constructed.[436]

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431 *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 314–322; *Milev*, Grŭckite žitija, 165–187; *Iliev*, Za Kratkoto žitie, 81–91; *Podskalsky*, Two Archbishops, 139–148.

432 The first Life was published by *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 305–311. For the *Second Life of Saint Naum,* see *Grozdanov*, Sveti Naum, 25–41.

433 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 199–215.

434 *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata manastir, 11–104, with older bibliography; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 13–39; *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 206.

435 *Jordanov*, Pečati i moneti ot Goljamata bazilika, 219–227; *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata manastir, 48–50; *Georgiev – Tihov – Savev – Ilieva*, Goljama bazilika v Pliska, 640–643; *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 206, n. 157.

436 *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata manastir, 92–98.

To the south of the basilica, a building over 35 meters long housed two halls and a vestibule between them, with a second floor. This structure served as a school, complete with a scriptorium and a didascaleion, resembling the large monasteries of Byzantine Constantinople. Here, the literary and educational activities of the archbishopric were concentrated. The area between the didascaleion and the scriptorium provided access to the church from the south for the most important visitors to the archdiocese and the monastery. In some instances, the procession from the palaces, depending on the ceremony, was required to enter the basilica either directly through its narthex or via the southern entrance of the naos. This part of the monastery had a more public character, as the main building in this area was the scriptorium.[437]

To the southwest of the basilica, behind the scriptorium, there was a separate courtyard that contained a necropolis. Archaeologists excavated around 41 graves, some of which contained sarcophagi, suggesting the burial of dignitaries of higher rank. A few of the graves in this area preserved tombstones with inscriptions.[438] A monastery was situated in a separate courtyard to the north of the archbishopric and operated in direct connection with the archbishopric complex. The residents of both complexes used the basilica as a church and shared the same refectory. The monastery buildings were constructed with quarry stones and clay mortar, then coated with lime plaster. The refectory floor was covered with a marble mosaic, similar to the central nave of the basilica, and could accommodate about 70 people for meals. The monastic cells were concentrated in a two-story building at the eastern end of the monastery courtyard. The ground floor featured a large hall, while the upper floor contained the cells, which were connected by a covered corridor and a staircase. A bathhouse was also included in this section of the monastery.[439]

The construction of the large monastery complex around the Great Basilica in Pliska was a politically significant event for the entire country. It promoted communal living within the Christian monastery, situated near the archbishop's residence, at a time when the newly converted population was still adjusting to Christianity. The exceptional architecture, coupled with its connection to the Great Basilica, and the presence of a large scriptorium, suggests substantial financial backing, which could only have come from the ruling house. In this sense, the monastery can rightfully be described as *princely*.[440]

Ravna Monastery

While the Great Basilica Monastery was located in the urban environment of the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire, two other monasteries – likely founded by the

437 Ibid., 57–66.

438 *Stamen*, Kamennite sarkofazi, 44–59; *Vitljanov*, Manastirski nekropol, 62–65; *Georgiev – Smjadovski*, Paraklisat pri Goljamata bazilika, 13–27; *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata manastir, 71–72; *Ilieva*, Hristijanski nadgrobia, 368–380;

439 *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata manastir, 53–57, 78–84.

440 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 201–208; *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 177–178.

royal family – were situated in the countryside: the Ravna Monastery and Karaačteke. Scholars initially agreed that the primary reason for establishing these monasteries was their missionary function during the years following the Conversion.[441]

The Ravna Monastery is located near the village of Ravna on the right bank of the Provadijska River. It was situated near natural water sources and along the Pliska–Varna road, which was surrounded by small fortresses from the 9th and 10th centuries. Additionally, the Provadijski Pass provided a connection between the eastern parts of the Bulgarian heartland, the Thracian region, and Constantinople. [442]

The monastery was established during the final years of Prince Boris-Michael's reign (852–889) as a communal monastery and continued to exist until the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century.[443] An inscription in Greek found within the monastery allows us to identify its patron saint. The inscription informs us that the temple was consecrated in honor of the Mother of God.[444] Another Greek inscription, discovered next to the south wall of the monastery church, provides the exact date of the consecration: 23 April in the 17th year of the Byzantine era, or the year 6097. [445] The year 6097 corresponds to 589 AD according to the Byzantine (Constantinopolitan) calendar. However, scholars have concluded that there was a writing error, with the number T = 300 omitted. Correcting this mistake brings the year to 6397, or 889 AD, which is widely accepted by scholars as the actual date of the monastery's consecration.[446] The timing of the consecration suggests that the monastery may have been built by Prince Boris-Michael as an educational center to support the missionary work of the disciples of Cyril and Methodios. Further evidence of this possibility is found in another Greek inscription bearing the name ΚΛΗΜΕΝΤΟΣ ΠΑΠΑ ΡΟΜΗΣ, referring to Clement of

441 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 118–132; *Kostova*, Topography of Three Early Bulgarian Monasteries, 108–125; *Georgiev*, Manastirskata cŭrkva, 71–98; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova – Pletn'ov*, Manastirite pri Ravna i Karaačteke, 107–121; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Literacy, literature and liturgy, 145–164; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 175–184.

442 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 116–117.

443 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 203–204.

444 For the inscription, *Popkonstantinov*, Ravnenski manastir, 423–428; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 126, n. 28; *Popkonstantinov,* Ravnenskijat hram, 369–381; *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 207; *Petkov*, The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 41. Based on the date of the monastery's consecration, 23 April, Pavel Georgiev suggested that the church may have been dedicated to St. George. He argued that 23 April was commonly celebrated as the feast day of St. George in the Middle Ages, and that monasteries were often consecrated on the feast day of their patron saint, see *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskia manastir, 60–62.

445 *Mihajlov*, Za avtentičnosta na nadpisa, 83–90; *Popkonstantinov,* Ošte vednŭž za nadpisa, 8–19; *Popkonstantinov,* Ravnenskijat hram, 369–381; *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskia manastir, 57–59; *Georgiev*, Hronologicheski prouchavania, 273–280; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 125;

446 According to Veselin Beshevliev and Kazimir Popkonstantinov, the author of the inscription made an error when writing the date. For the further explanation, see *Beševliev*, Grŭcki nadpis, 117–118, *Popkonstantinov,* Ošte vednŭž za nadpisa, 8–19. In contrast, Georgiev argues that the authors of the inscription were well-versed and intentionally used the chronological system of Eusebius of Caesarea, who shortened the biblical calendar by 300 years. According to this system, the year 6097 corresponds to 897 in our modern calendar, *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskia manastir, 57–59; *Georgiev*, Manastirskata cŭrkva, 86–87.

Rome, who was a patron saint of the mission of Cyril and Methodios in Great Moravia.[447] Additional evidence of the monastery's dynastic connections and the personal involvement of the Bulgarian crown comes from lead seals found during excavations. One seal belongs to Simeon himself, and parts of five other seals were issued in the name of his first-born son and heir, Michael bagatour.[448] This implies that, although the monastery was likely planned by Prince Boris-Michael, its construction continued and was completed during the early years of Simeon's reign (893–927 AD).[449]

The monastic complex had a unique layout for the Bulgarian medieval period of the 9th–10th centuries. It was originally enclosed by walls with three rectangular towers and two monumental entrances. According to Rosina Kostova and Kazimir Popkonstantinov, the only other fortified monastery in Bulgaria during that period was the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner, located near present-day Kardzhali[450] The western gate of the monastery was connected to the road leading to the capital, Pliska, while the southeastern gate linked to a road leading to the medieval town of Provat, present-day Provadia.

The central structure of the monastery was the church, which was surrounded by a courtyard and flanked by various monastic buildings (Fig. 40). The overall part of this complex measures 36 by 47 meters. The church itself was built on land with a pronounced slope, descending from west to east and from south to north. The external dimensions of the church are 18.20 by 14.05 meters. It is a three-aisled basilica with a shortened central nave.[451] The central nave was separated from the side aisles by two pairs of marble columns set upon marble bases, which rested above solid stylobates. The colonnades in the nave consisted of three arches, nearly identical in size. The church ends in the east with three apses and a deep bema. The apses are three-sided on the outside and semicircular on the inside.[452] The altar space consists of three rooms, separated by massive walls and isolated from the nave by a heavy altar partition, traces of which remain on the base. The floor of the nave was originally covered in *opus sectile*, though only the mortar base for the cut marble mosaics remains preserved.[453]

To the west of the church is the narthex, measuring 2.95 by 8.75 meters. In addition to the central western entrance, which is no longer preserved, the narthex had two side entrances, of which only the southern one survives. In front of the narthex was an exonartex, consisting of two side rooms and a wide vestibule between them. The rooms were approximately the same size, though the southern one is better

447 *Popkonstantinov – Smjadovski*, Za počitaneto na Kliment papa Pimski, 92–98; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 125.

448 *Popkonstantinov*, Novootrkit pečat, 68–79; G*eorgiev*, Olovni pečati, 103–109.

449 *Kostova*, Silent Communication, 57–78.

450 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 127, n. 13.

451 *Dončeva*, Kŭm manastirskoto ustrojstvo, 444–446; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 90–94, 152; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 295–296; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 184–186.

452 Remains of three older apses beneath the church indicate significant alterations to the original plan, *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 296.

453 *Georgiev*, Manastirskata cŭrkva, 72–74.



Fig. 40.
Ravna,
Ravna Monastery,
plan

preserved. Both rooms had separate entrances from the west. In the southern room, traces of a second entrance can be seen on the southern wall, suggesting that a similar entrance may have existed on the northern side of the other room. The rooms of the exonarthex served as a monastery crypt on the ground floor, as evidenced by the discovered burial chambers.[454] The walls of the church have been preserved to a height of 2.30 meters. They were constructed entirely of small blocks of white stone and very soft limestone with well-polished surfaces. A prominent feature of the church is the six masonry pillars (buttresses) of varying sizes, built into the north and south walls. The massive pillars near the eastern side likely served to absorb lateral forces exerted by the vaults over the pre-apse spaces. These pillars may also have helped stabilize the eastern and northern sides of the church, which was built on a slope.[455]

During the excavations of the church and the surrounding monastic buildings, numerous fragments and complete details of architectural decoration were found. All of these pieces are from the interior of the church, indicating that there was no exterior decoration. In this respect, the monastery is more similar to the early churches of Pliska than to those in Preslav. Interestingly, the interior architectural sculpture is made of white or gray-white polished marble, which suggests the great wealth of the monastery and, without a doubt, points to royal patronage. The sculptural decoration was primarily used for the altar partition and the colonnades. The ornamental motifs are generally uniform, with a predominance of floral and geometric designs. The style

454 *Georgiev*, Manastirskata cŭrkva, 74; *Dončeva*, Kŭm manastirskoto ustrojstvo, 439.

455 *Georgiev*, Manastirskata cŭrkva, 72–75; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 296.

of the iconostasis partition slabs from Ravna closely resembles that of Early Byzantine sculpture. The relief is low and flat, with motifs such as crosses, palmettes, and branches with leaves simply separated from the background, without further surface treatment. This technique is similar to the treatment of ivy leaves on some of the cornices of Church No. 1 in Avradaka, near Preslav.[456]

In terms of architectural type and proportions, the church at Ravna closely resembles the basilicas of Pliska, especially the so-called Boyar Church.[457] Like the Pliska basilicas, the Ravna church features a shortened nave, a simple, undivided vestibule, and side entrances. Researchers consider side entrances to be characteristic of early Bulgarian church architecture. A significant similarity between the Ravna church and the basilicas of Pliska, especially the Great Basilica in Pliska, is the design of the altar apses. In both churches, the apses are three-sided on the outside and semicircular on the inside. However, a major difference from the basilicas in Pliska is the unusual division of the longitudinal façades by six brick pillars (buttresses) of unequal size. In contrast, the Palace Church in Preslav features similarly sized pillars along its façade walls.[458]

Another unique feature of the Ravna Monastery is the large courtyard in front of the main church. Scholars have proposed two functions for this U-shaped courtyard. Drawing on examples from the Great Basilica in Pliska and the Round Church in Preslav, it is suggested that the space served as a gathering point before entering the church. The atrium may also have functioned as a focal point for surrounding buildings.[459] The central courtyard in front of the basilica was surrounded by various structures: on the north side stood a building that housed a scriptorium, library, and school, while on the south side was a two-story building, which included both a refectory and cellars, with the upper floor containing monastic cells.[460] Behind the apse of the church was a freestanding building, likely used by the hegoumenos (abbot) or the founder, as evidenced by its lavish *opus sectile* pavement. The northern part of the monastic enclosure was reserved for the bathhouse and latrines.[461] Rossina Kostova and Kazimir Popkonstantinov have drawn analogies between this layout and Early Byzantine monasteries in Syria, particularly those at Id-Dêr and Dêr Nawa. They also found similarities with the Monastery of Chrysobalanton in Constantinople (ca. 9th century) and the Monastery of Tirilye in Bithynia (ca. 8th century).[462] Given the similarities with urban monasteries in Constantinople, particularly the Monastery of Constantine Lips with the Church of Theotokos *tou Libos*, Slobodan Ćurčić suggests that the planning of the Ravna Monastery may have been directly influenced by the Byzantine capital.[463]

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456 *Georgiev*, Manastirskata cŭrkva, 76–81.

457 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 296.

458 Ibid., 88–92.

459 *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir, 59–60.

460 Scholars have concluded that the scriptorium at Ravna was constructed based on the design of the scriptorium at the Monastery of the Great Basilica in Pliska, see *Georgiev – Vitljanov*, Arhiepiskopijata manastir, 64–65.

461 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 119–120.

462 Ibid., 119.

463 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 296.

The presence of such buildings relatively far from the capital centers raises several questions about the location and purpose of the monastery. It is possible that the monastery was built on a previously established Christian or even pagan cult site. Perhaps future archaeological excavations will provide clearer answers.[464] However, it is evident that the primary function of the monastery, especially in the late 9th and 10th centuries, was as a literary and educational center. It played a key role in the development of Slavic writing, particularly in the training of clergy for the young Bulgarian Church.[465]

This is clearly demonstrated by the discovery of approximately 280 inscriptions and 3,600 drawings or graffiti found on the walls of the monastery buildings. The inscriptions – many in Greek, Slavonic, runic or bilingual, Greek-Slavonic – were tools used for teaching writing. Most of these inscriptions and drawings are concentrated in structures dating to the initial phase of the monastery's foundation. They were found on the walls of the church, the didascalia, the scriptorium, and other buildings in the central courtyard, as well as in the original kitchen and dining room in the southern courtyard. Inscriptions were also found on the enclosure walls, gates, and towers.[466]

The majority of the graffiti takes the form of Christian symbols, indicating a higher level of Christianization, where even illiterate individuals were familiar with these symbols and could express their feelings through them. These graffiti are the only remaining witnesses to the thoughts of the monks. Often influenced by apocryphal ideas, the graffiti frequently depicted a cross in the shape of a tree, sometimes interpreted as the "Tree of Life" in accordance with apocryphal beliefs.[467] In a room that likely belonged to the scriptorium of the Ravna Monastery, a graffiti image of a cross "walking" on feet was found, likely referencing the apocryphal Gospel of Peter.[468] In the same room, a bilingual Greek-Slavonic inscription combined with graffiti provided further insight into monastic life. The inscription referred to a woman named Marina, who was apparently a prostitute, and included a depiction of a vulva on the façade of the church.[469] Additionally, replicas of manuscript illuminations, as well as liturgical texts, were incised into the northern walls of the main church.[470] Scholars have suggested that the female names found among the inscriptions may have been the names of pilgrims' wives or daughters, indicating that Ravna was a popular pilgrimage site.[471] The monastery's peak as a literary and educational center coincided with its early

464 *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir, 64.

465 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Literacy, literature and liturgy in Bulgarian monasteries 9th to 10th c, 145–164; *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir, 65–66. The monastery's scriptorium is considered the earliest known in Eastern Europe, see *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 498.

466 *Popkonstantinov*, Ravnenski manastir, 423–428; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Skriptorijat v Ravnenskija manastir, 719–726; *Kostova,* Boot-Graffiti, 140–166; *Kostova*, Centŭr i periferija, 221–243; *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir, 64; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Literacy, literature and liturgy, 147.

467 By the 10th century, most Byzantine apocrypha had already been translated into Old Church Slavonic and were widely circulated in Bulgaria, *Bereznyak*, Between Baptism and Faith, 177–178.

468 *Kostova*, Lust and Piety, 244–245.

469 *Popkonstantinov – Kronsteiner*, Altbulgarische Inschriften Vol. 2, 221.

470 *Kostova*, "Some aspects," 701–705; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Literacy, literature and liturgy, 148–149.

471 *Kostova – Popkonstantinov*, Ženite v monašestvoto v Bălgariia, 267–275; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 215.

years, overlapping with the reign of Simeon. This suggests that it could have been one of the translation centers initiated by Simeon.[472] That the monastery flourished in the early 10th century is supported by the absence of inscriptions on later constructions, which were probably erected after partial fires and significant damage to the monastery. Based on this, it is clear that the first phase of the monastery's development ended in the third decade of the 10th century.[473]

The connection between the Ravna Monastery and the ruler's court in Preslav is beyond any doubt.[474] The monastery's unique architecture, monumental construction techniques, rich decorative elements, and the specific organization and layout of its spaces – all complemented by numerous inscriptions and drawings – clearly suggest that its construction was an initiative of the state, or more specifically, of princely authority. Of particular interest is the presence of a bathhouse. The inclusion of such a facility, equipped with a hypocaust heating system, is rare in old Bulgarian centers and is typically found only in grander architectural ensembles associated with the ruler or the head of the church.[475] Likely built during the reign of Prince Boris-Michael and further developed under Simeon, the Ravna Monastery became a significant literary, educational, and pilgrimage center. In terms of architectural importance, the monastery church is a key link in the study of church architecture during the First Bulgarian Empire. The fact that it is the first precisely dated building from the second half of the 9th century – and that it was most likely a royal endowment – makes it of exceptional significance in this context.

Karaačteke Monastery

Another significant princely monastery is located in the Karaačteke area, 5 km west of Varna, on the southern slopes of the Frangensko Plateau, overlooking the Black Sea to the west.[476] The monastery complex was one of the largest in the Balkans and was dedicated to the Mother of God.[477] Its scale was particularly grand for the time of the First Bulgarian Empire, covering approximately 4.05 hectares. In addition to its size, the monastery also stands out due to its unusual architectural plan, which does not align with either Bulgarian or Byzantine building traditions.[478]

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472 *Kostova*, Topography of Three Early Bulgarian Monasteries, 121; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Literacy, literature and liturgy, 147–149.

473 *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir, 64–66.

474 *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir, 61–66; *Georgiev*, Manastirskata cŭrkva, 92; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 125–126; *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 199–215.

475 *Georgiev*, Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir, 61–62; *Georgiev,* Manastirska banja, 81–89.

476 *Mirčev*, Razkopkite v Karaač teke, 284–288; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova – Pletn'ov*, Manastirite pri Ravna i Karaačteke, 107–121; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 237–341. The monastery is currently known by the Turkish toponym Karaaçteke, meaning "The Shrine of the Black Elms", see *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 118.

477 The dedication is based on the legend of the miraculous appearance of the icon of the Mother of God at the site in the 16th century, see *Popkonstantinov,* Ravnenskijat hram, 369–381.

478 *Kostova*, The Mother of God Monastery, 217–221.

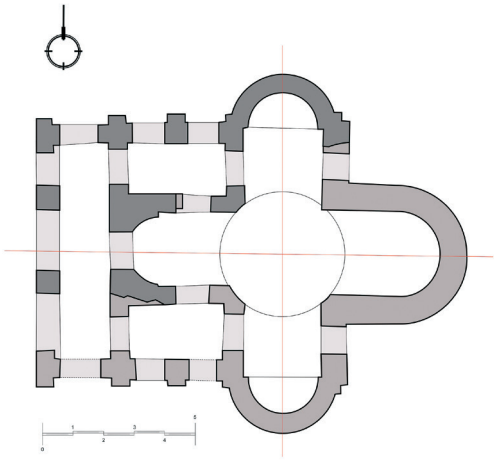


Fig. 41.
Karaačteke near Varna,
Karaačteke Monastery, plan

As with the Ravna Monastery, the location of the Karaačteke Monastery was carefully chosen. In addition to abundant water resources, the area was part of the densely populated region surrounding the ancient city of Odessos, modern Varna. This region was a crucial center of activity in Bulgaria during the 8th to 10th centuries. During the period of Christianization, the monastery became an important missionary station.[479]

Archaeological remains have revealed the structure of the monastery (Fig. 41). At the center of the large courtyard stood the main church, which followed a triconch plan. The church featured four free-standing piers, with the western pair forming an L-shape and curving to create another conch. Scholars have compared the church plan to the Athonite triconch-type churches.[480] There are two main interpretations of the church's design. According to Rosina Kostova, the church had a unique plan combining a pseudo-quatrefoil and a four-column type, with a single apse to the east. Additionally, the church had a U-shaped portico with a gallery to the west.[481] Neli Chaneva-Dechevska reconstructed the church plan by adding a *prothesis* and *diakonikon* to the east, with apses that were semicircular both inside and outside. She observed that the piers beneath the dome featured chamfered inner edges, similar to those found in the church of the Patleina Monastery in Preslav, dating from roughly the same period.[482]

The church was richly decorated with sculptural elements, including marble octagonal colonettes with inlaid decoration, likely part of the chancel barrier, which resemble the colonnettes found in the Round Church in Preslav.[483] A small marble capital was discovered with a flourishing cross design, similar to decorative sculptures

479 *Kostova*, Monasteries in the centers, monasteries in the periphery, 504–510; *Kostova*, Topography of Three Early Bulgarian Monasteries, 108–125; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 116–117; *Dimitrov,* Varna i blizkite j okolnosti prez VII–IX v, 55–79; *Jotov*, Arheologičeski prinosi kŭm istorijata na Varna, 312–342.

480 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 122–123; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 156–160; *Mamaloukos*, A contribution to the study of the "Athonite" church, 39–50.

481 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 122–123.

482 *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Srednovekovnijat manastir,195–211; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 156–160; cf. *Mamaloukos*, A contribution to the study of the "Athonite" church, 39–50.

483 *Pokrovski,* Razkopki na Karaač teke, 249–252, *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 128, n 22; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova – Pletn'ov*, Srednovekoven knjažeski manastir, 743–745.

from both Preslav and Constantinople in the 10th century.[484] In addition to the architectural sculpture, the church was adorned with polychrome ceramic tiles, which can be traced to the Preslav ceramic workshops, as well as frescoes. [485]

The other parts of the monastery complex included a scriptorium, refectory, and residential buildings. These were located on higher terraces to the north of the main church and were connected to it by a large stone staircase.[486] To the northwest, the largest building was situated, with its interior divided into 12 symmetrically arranged rooms, all opening onto a large vaulted corridor. The thickness of the walls suggests the possibility of a second floor, a hypothesis confirmed by the discovery of two collapsed vaults and a staircase at the southwestern entrance. It is assumed that this building was originally constructed as a residential structure and later converted into a scriptorium, which is supported by the discovery of numerous styluses and book cover hasps.[487] To the northeast, there was a residential building with a portico featuring a double arcade facing the courtyard. All the buildings in the monastery, including the church, were constructed using the *opus mixtum* technique, with alternating rows of brick and stone. It is difficult to determine whether any buildings existed on the southern side of the church or if the monastery was enclosed by walls, as there is currently no archaeological evidence to support this. [488]

The size of the monastery, its skillful construction, and elaborate decoration all point to a wealthy founder of high rank. Scholars believe the monastery was commissioned around 870 by Byzantine missionaries, likely sent by Basil I (867–886), with support from the Bulgarian court. This theory is supported by the discovery of a lead seal of Prince Boris-Michael, which also helps establish the date of construction.[489] The significance of the monastery was further confirmed by the recent discovery of a hagiasma beneath a wall that separated the church from the western courtyard. The hagiasma, built in the *opus mixtum* technique, was a single-nave, barrel-vaulted structure with a clay pipe on the southern wall. This is the only known example of a hagiasma in Bulgarian monasteries during the First Bulgarian Empire, and scholars suggest the idea may have originated in Constantinople.[490]

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484 *Totev,* Dvorcovijat manastir, 97, *Macridy et al.,* The Monastery of Lips, 276, 307–308.

485 For ceramics, see *Georgieva*, Preslavski tip keramika, 87–91; *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 225, n. 48; *Yoleva – Djambazov – Djambazov*, Study of medieval ceramics, 387–394. The wall paintings were likely created during one of the final restorations of the church in the 11th century, see *Pokrovski,* Razkopki na Karaač teke, 250; *Popkonstantinov– Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 128, n. 23; *Zorba et al.*, Study of Wall Paintings, 152–165.

486 *Kostova*, The Mother of God Monastery, 218.

487 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Skriptorijat v Ravnenskija manastir, 719–726; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 123–124; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova – Pletn'ov,* Novootkrito ajazmo v knjaževskia manastir, 59–73.

488 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 128, n. 17.

489 *Filov*, Nov pametnik ot Karaačteke, 432–433; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of conversion, 125–126; *Kostova*, The Mother of God Monastery, 219–220.

490 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova – Pletn'ov,* Novootkrito ajazmo v knjaževskia manastir, 59–73; *Kostova*, The Mother of God Monastery, 218–220.

Like the Ravna Monastery, the Karaačteke Monastery served as a large scriptorium and an educational and missionary center, where church books were copied and translated. The later history of the monastery can be inferred from the discovery of a Byzantine anonymous follis (Class A, AD 969–1025), which provides a date for the latest possible reconstruction of the monastery. The monastery was likely abandoned after attacks by the Pechenegs in 1048 or the Uzes in 1064.[491]

Černoglavci Monastery

The monastery is located 2.5 km southwest of Černoglavci, just 25 km northwest of Pliska. It was positioned near a captured spring, between the roads connecting the old Bulgarian capitals, Pliska and Preslav, with the spiritual center of Dristra (present-day Silistra).[492] The monastery complex consists of a basilica, residential buildings, and part of a walled enclosure that forms an inner courtyard in front of the western façade of the basilica. However, only about a quarter of the complex has been excavated.[493] In terms of layout, the monastery's katholikon is a three-aisled basilica with a shortened central nave, a three-part altar section, and a narthex (Fig. 42). The external dimensions of the basilica without the exonarthex are 17 by 12.05 meters. The altar is divided into three separate sections by walls. Three apses in the east are semicircular on the inside and three-sided on the outside. The altar partition is heavy, with richly ornamented marble decoration.[494] In the northern apse, a column of the altar table was discovered, suggesting that the area functioned as an independent chapel.[495] The central nave is separated from the lateral aisles by two colonnades, each with three columns. The narthex is divided into three parts, each connected to the naos by each connected to the naos by a separate opening. Originally, the basilica did not have an exonarthex; this was added later as a U-shaped open portico, which was subsequently walled in to create a closed space.[496] Outside, at the southeast corner of the basilica, a narrow burial chamber with a sarcophagus was discovered. Access to the chamber was from the west side.[497] The entire southern part of the monastery was destroyed in 1956 during the construction of a small dam.[498] The walls of the church are constructed from well-processed stone blocks, bonded with mortar.[499]

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491 *Tŭpkova-Zaimova*, Dolni Dunav, 71–95; *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 80–117.

492 *Balabanov,* Starobŭlgarski manastir, 263–272; *Dončeva*, Kŭm manastirskoto ustrojstvo, 438–449; *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 71–79.

493 The monastery complex was discovered by accident in 1987, *Popkonstantinov – Atanasov*, Za dva nadpisa ot X vek, 105–106.

494 *Balabanov,* Starobŭlgarski manastir, 271–272; *Dončeva*, Kŭm manastirskoto ustrojstvo, 440–441; *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 71–72; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 241–244.

495 *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 71–72.

496 *Balabanov,* Starobŭlgarski manastir, 266; *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 72.

497 *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 72.

498 Ibid., 75.

499 *Dončeva*, Kŭm manastirskoto ustrojstvo, 440.

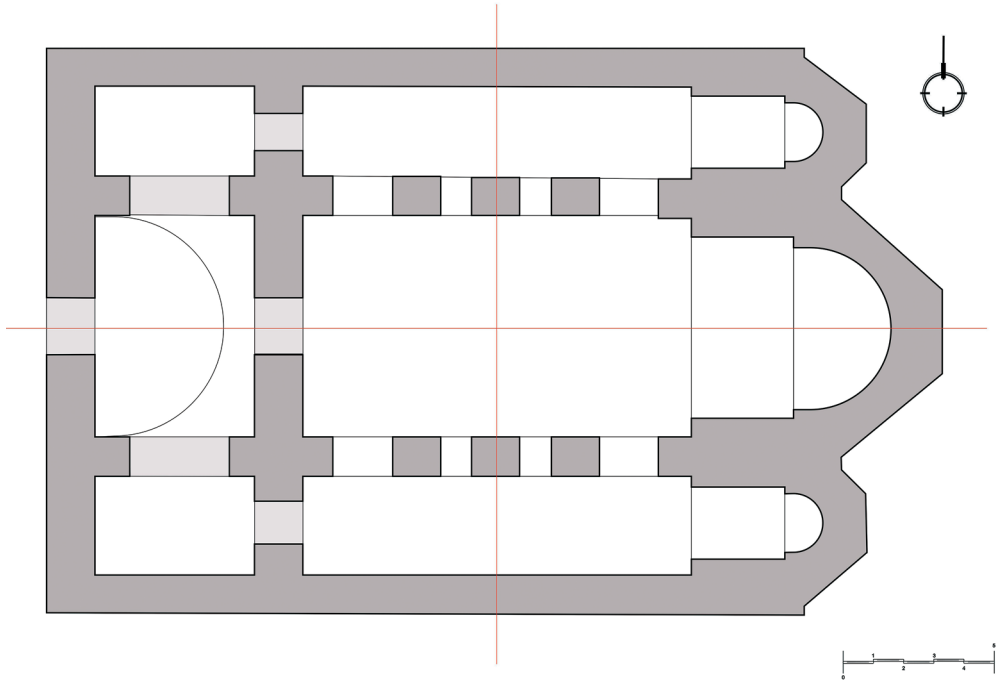


Fig. 42.
Černoglavci,
Černoglavci
Monastery plan

Based on the architectural features of the basilica and its closest parallels with monastery churches in the vicinity of the First Bulgarian Empire capitals Pliska and Preslav, scholars have dated this monastic complex to the end of the 9th century and the first decades of the 10th century.[500] A notable difference, however, is the absence of side doors leading to the narthex, which is a common feature in the basilicas of Pliska and Preslav.[501] The basilica shares several characteristics, particularly with the Monastery of Ravna and its basilica, such as the shortened three-aisled nave and the three-part altar section, which consists of three isolated spaces separated by a heavy marble partition. The basilica can also be compared to Church No. 2 in Dristra.[502]

The other monastery buildings are located within the uncovered enclosure wall in the northeastern sector of the complex. So far, four buildings have been discovered and labeled A, B, C, and D.[503] The construction of the monastery occurred in three phases: first, the basilica and building B were constructed; second, buildings A and D were added; and third, building C and the enclosure wall of the inner courtyard were built. The first phase, in terms of construction technique, was the most elaborate, while the subsequent phases were of lower quality. Buildings A and D share the same plan, with building D featuring a façade facing the church and the courtyard to the south. Building A likely served as a public structure, with a prominent residential floor, similar to the palatial residences of rulers and high clergy. This is suggested not only by its proximity to

500 *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 73.

501 Ibid., 72–73.

502 *Angelova,* Razkopki na cŭrkva № 2, 12–39; *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 40–41; *Atanasov*, Hristijanskijat Durostorum – Drastar, 169–176; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 44–59.

503 Accoring to Stela Doncheva, there were three other buildings beside the basilica, while Kazimir Popkonstantinov encountering four, *Dončeva*, Kŭm manastirskoto ustrojstvo, 440; cf. *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 74–75.

the church but also by the presence of two rows of masonry pillars along the longitudinal walls and buttresses against the slope at the back, which would have supported the possibility of a second floor. Additionally, its dimensions and proportions are similar to those of the two original buildings of the Khan's Palace in Pliska.[504] Although Buildings A to D exhibit more archaic features typical of pre-conversion residential architecture, archaeologists, based on comparisons with the residential complex next to Basilica No. 2 in Dristra, have concluded that these buildings were likely residential structures constructed at the beginning of the 10th century.[505]

It is likely that other communal buildings, such as the monks' cells, kitchen, and refectory, were located on the southern side of the courtyard, although this area has been covered by the dam. Scholars suggest that the far western part of the complex, near the natural spring, may have included a section with baths, similar to other monastic complexes of this type.[506]

A key question concerns the function and significance of the Černoglavci Monastery. Archaeologists have uncovered over 70 primary epigraphic inscriptions within the complex, carved into stone blocks and building ceramics. These inscriptions are written in Cyrillic, Glagolitic, Greek, and runic letters. Notably, a Greek inscription was found that provides the date of the monastery's consecration – 26 May – and its dedication in the name of the "All-Holy (Panagia) Virgin Mary."[507] Fragments of another similar inscription, with letters of comparable size and paleography, mention other saints, including St. Paul and St. Nicholas. Based on these discoveries, scholars believe that the church was dedicated to the Mother of God, St. Paul the Apostle, and St. Nicholas, a conclusion supported by the presence of three separate altars.[508]

The existence of a separate burial chamber in the southeast is not unusual for Bulgarian monasteries of this period, particularly in the capital, Preslav. However, in Preslav, such burial chambers are mostly associated with churches of a private nature. This could be the case at Černoglavci as well. The sculptural decoration on the slab of the sarcophagus discovered in the chamber suggests that the individual buried there held a high social status. More intriguing, however, is the discovery of dozens of graves beneath the flooring of the entire narthex and at the western end of the south aisle. This represents a unique phenomenon for the Bulgarian Middle Ages, as burials were typically located outside the church, either along the northern or southern walls. Scholars have proposed that this mass burial may have resulted from an outbreak of plague or the deaths of prominent members of Bulgarian society, likely around or after the middle of the 10th century. Additionally, there are Cyrillic inscriptions of a commemorative nature on the porch wall in front of the main entrance, dated to 955

504 *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 76.

505 Ibid., 74–75.

506 Ibid., 76.

507 *Popkonstantinov – Atanasov*, Za dva nadpisa ot X vek, 106–109.

508 *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 76–77.

and 958. What is particularly peculiar about this mass burial is that the bodies include both men and women, suggesting a more secular nature to the burial practice.[509]

The representative nature of the monastery and its church is evident in the massive, richly ornamented marble decoration of the altar partition, as well as the marble columns, capitals, and fragments of colored window glass that have been discovered.[510] Additionally, the presence of numerous inscriptions, especially in Slavic, suggests that the monastery at Černoglavci played an important role as a religious and educational center. Given this, the location of the complex seems fitting. In the 8th and 9th centuries, this area was populated by a large proto-Bulgarian population, making it a logical site at which to establish a missionary and educational hub during the Christianization process. Scholars have proposed that, due to its proximity to the church complex in Dristra and the similarities between the two basilicas, the entire complex at Černoglavci may have functioned as a suburban residence for the metropolitan of Dristra, and later for the Bulgarian patriarch himself.[511] Given the numerous burials within the complex of a somewhat ambiguous nature, it is also possible that the site served as a private residential foundation. The question of the true function and purpose of such complexes is not new, as similar questions arose during the period of the First Bulgarian Empire.

Ohrid at the time of Clement and Naum

As mentioned earlier, the only two monasteries in the First Bulgarian Empire whose foundations are documented by sources and show signs of royal patronage are those founded by the disciples of Cyril and Methodios: Clement and Naum of Ohrid.[512] The Monastery of St. Panteleimon is located at Plaošnik, atop the southern ridge of Lake Ohrid. This site lies at the foot of the fortress, at the summit of the ancient city of Lychnida. Clement of Ohrid, who, along with the Apostles to the Slavs Cyril and Methodios, introduced the Cyrillic script to the Slavic peoples in 886, was the founder of the monastery.[513] He laid the foundation for a Christian culture based on the Slavic language.[514] In addition to his missionary and literary work in southwestern Bulgaria, Clement was ordained as the bishop of Velitse and Dragvitsa (Debrica) in 893, becoming the first bishop to serve in the Bulgarian language.[515] Sources detailing the foundation of Clement's monastery are found in two key hagiographies:

509 Ibid., 73.

510 *Dončeva*, Kŭm manastirskoto ustrojstvo, 440.

511 *Georgiev*, Manastirŭt ot X vek, 75.

512 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 199–215.

513 *Dimitrova*, Sveti Kliment, 17–33.

514 *Iliev*, La mission de Clément, 53–72.

515 *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 209–213. Essential reading on Saint Clement's life is *Ivanova – Češmedžiev – Ševčenko,* Kliment Okhridskij, with the older bibliography, 663–676. Cf. *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 264–288.

The Long Life of Saint Clement, attributed to Theophylact of Ohrid (ca. 1084–1107), written at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries,[516] and *The Short Life of Saint Clement* compiled by Demetrios Chomatenos (1216–1236) from the 13th century.[517]

The existence of the monastery is confirmed by archaeological research that started in 1942–1943.[518] However, only the foundation of the main church has been preserved. A modern reconstruction was later carried out, but it was not based on archaeological data (Fig. 43).[519] The two hagiographies dedicated to Clement of Ohrid do not provide an exact date for the construction of the monastery. They state that it was built during the lifetime of Prince Boris-Michael and before Clement was ordained bishop, around 893. It is most likely that the monastery was constructed after Clement's return from Moravia, when he went to teach in Kutmichinitsa (Kutmichevitsa) around 886, and before his ordination as bishop in Preslav in 893.[520] The dedication of the monastery's katholikon to St. Panteleimon is confirmed in *The Short Life* by Chomatenos.[521] There is, however, an alternative theory regarding the monastery's patronage. Some scholars suggest that the church may have originally been dedicated to the Archangel Michael. This theory is based on the widespread veneration of Archangel Michael in the Ohrid-Prespa region and the fact that Clement wrote the Encomium on the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel.[522] Kalina Mincheva noticed that, at some point, the church's dedication was changed to St. Clement. She notes that the earliest record of this change appears in a document from October 1248, which mentions that Archbishop Jacob of Ohrid donated a book to the Monastery of St. Clement.[523] This shift in dedication reflects the growing cult of St. Clement at the monastery during the 13th century.

The church dedicated to St. Panteleimon, which was part of Clement's endowment, has been discovered beneath the foundations of the Imaret or Sultan Mehmed Mosque. It was built on the remains of an older, much larger, south-facing Early Christian three-aisled basilica (Fig. 37).[524] The oldest part of the St. Panteleimon Church is a triconch

516 *The Life of Saint Clement* is probably based on an Old Bulgarian text, which Archbishop Theophylact used while compiling his work, *Obolensky,* Theophylact of Ohrid, 601–618. For the critical edition of the *Vita,* see *Iliev,* The Long Life of Saint Clement, 62–120. For a partial English translation, see *Petkov*, The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 143–160. For a partial Serbian translation, see *Rajković,* Žitije Klimenta Ohridskog, 297–303; For the Bulgarian translation, *Milev,* Grŭckite žitija, 5–165.

517 *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 314–322; *Milev*, Grŭckite žitija, 165–187; *Iliev*, Za Kratkoto žitie, 81–91; *Podskalsky*, Two Archbishops, 139–148.

518 For the history of the archaeological excavations at Plaošnik carried out in 1942–1943, see *Kuzman,* Arheološki svedoštva, 137–144; *Minčeva*, Svedenijata za manastira, 118.

519 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 825–826.

520 *Iliev*, Sv. Kliment Ohridski, 69–70; *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 293.

521 *Milev*, Grŭckite žitija, 177.

522 *Mučaj et al.*, Srednevekovye cerkvi, 24–25. On the Encomium, see *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 333–338; *Kuev*, Pohvalno slovo za Mihail i Gavriil, 238–288; *Pentkovskij,* K istorii slavjanskogo bogosluženija, 401–442.

523 *Minčeva*, Svedenijata za manastira, 124.

524 *Koco,* Ranohristijanski baziliki, 15–33. The basilica was part of an Early Christian complex that included several buildings, such as a tetraconch and an eastern basilica, see *Kuzman,* Arheološki svedoštva, 139–144 with older bibliography.



Fig. 43.
Ohrid, Plaošnik, Church of St. Panteleimon, modern reconstruction



Fig. 44.
Ohrid, Plaošnik, Church of St. Panteleimon, architectural phases, plan

building with slightly elongated apses (Fig. 44).[525] The preserved foundations measure 7.8 by 7.8 meters, excluding the narthex, but the original west wall has not survived. The church's nave features two semicircular apses on the north and south sides, while the eastern apse is semicircular on the inside but three-sided on the outside. The two side apses each contain two niches in the eastern wall, which project outward. It is possible that these niches had some liturgical function. The dome, which originally rose above the nave, rested on the corners of a tetrahedron, reinforced by the joints of the triconch semicircles. The narthex, located to the west of the church, has not been preserved.[526] Later, a large church with a cross-in-square plan and a dome supported by four pillars was added to the western part of the triconch. This new structure, measuring 10 by 15 meters, was initially believed to be the second church mentioned in *The Long Life of Saint Clement* as one of his endowments.[527] However, based on stylistic analysis, the building's typology, and the remains of frescoes, it is now dated to the 12th–13th century, likely before the Palaiologan era.[528] The vaulted double tomb in the southeastern part of the nave also dates to this period. In the sub-domed area, the bases of three pillars that once supported the dome were discovered, while the tomb wall is located in the position of the fourth pillar. It is likely that the original location of St. Clement's tomb was preserved during the reconstruction (Fig. 45). From Theophylact of Ohrid, we learn about the location of the tomb arranged for the saint, which was placed in the southern vestibule or pronaos of the church. Due to the poor preservation of the western parts of the triconch, which were damaged in several later reconstructions, it is not possible to determine the exact structure of the burial. According to *The Long Life*, the saint prepared his own grave, "on the right side of the front area of the temple."[529] The first grave, assumed to be that of the saint, contained silver parts of an icon frame, as well as fragments of three lamps.[530]

Another monastery whose foundation is documented by written sources was built on a high cliff above Lake Ohrid, at its southernmost point, near the present-day state border between North Macedonia and Albania (Fig. 46). The founder of this monastery was a disciple of Cyril and Methodios, presbyter Naum, a Christian missionary among the Slavs and a close associate of Clement who continued his missionary work. The monastery was originally dedicated to the Holy Archangel Michael.

525 There is an opinion that St. Clement restored an older triconch, see *Koco*, Klimentoviot manastir, 129–184, *Miljković-Pepek*, Hristijanskata arhitektura, 225–237; *Malenko*, Lihnidsko-ohridskiot duhoven i kulturen vrutok, 279–297; *Kuzman,* Arheološki svedoštva,144–149; *Filiposki*, Ohrid vo raniot sreden vek, 142.

526 *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 16–19; *Mal'ceva,* Monastyrskaja arkhitektura, 809–828; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 34–58; *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 291–304.

527 *The Long Life* by Theophylact mentions that St. Clement had two churches, which were smaller than the cathedral church but more beautiful due to their "round and spherical shape." *Petkov*, The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 155. Based on this information, scholars have assumed that the first church was a triconch, while the second was a church with an inscribed cross plan in the west, see *Koco*, Klimentoviot manastir, 178–179; *Koco,* Novi podatoci, 245–256; *Miljković-Pepek*, Hristijanskata arhitektura, 225–237.

528 *Kasapova,* Dogradbite, 379–386; *Kostova*, St. Kliment, 593–605. *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 42–45. On the possible location of the second church, see above, 145–149.

529 *Petkov*, The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 158. For more on Clement's tomb and its location, see *Koco*, Klimentoviot manastir 131–134; *Miljković-Pepek,* Novi soznanija, 21–41; *Kasapova,* Dogradbite, 379–380; *Kostova*, St. Kliment, 596–599; *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija,18; *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 291.

530 *Koco*, Klimentoviot manastir, 165.



Fig. 45.
Ohrid, Plaošnik,
Church of St. Panteleimon,
St. Clement's tomb

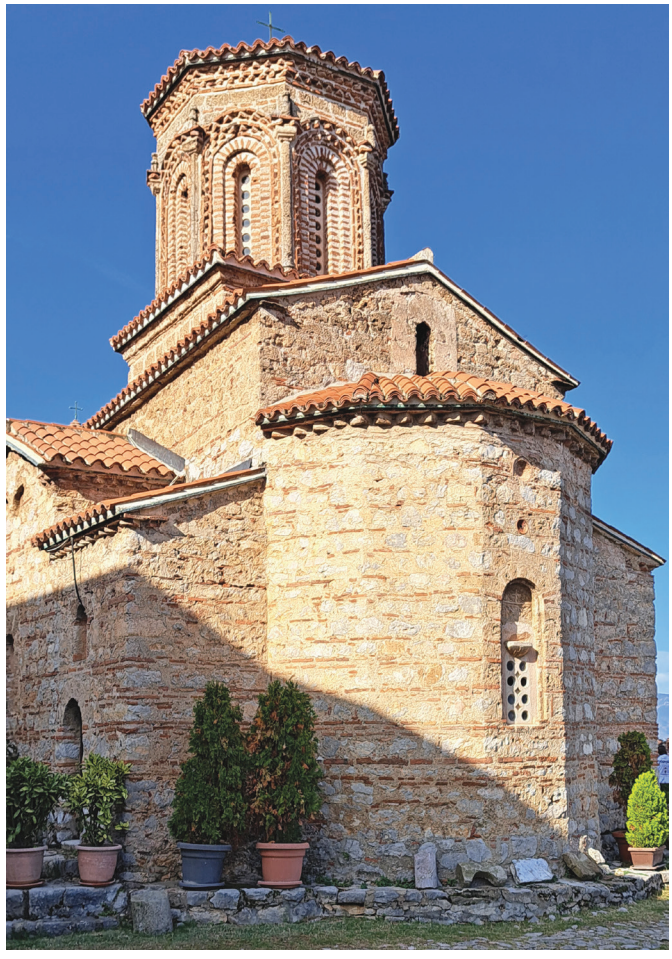


Fig. 46.
Ohrid Lake, Church of
the Holy Archangel Michael,
view from the east

Based on the content of both versions of *The Life of Saint Naum*, written in Slavic, it is possible to establish the approximate time of the monastery's construction.[531] *The Second Life* provides a more explicit date, stating that Naum built his endowment in 905. *The First Life*, however, mentions that Naum began his teaching work in 893 and later constructed a monastery for himself. After spending seven years as a teacher, he retired to the monastery around 900, where he lived for another ten years before receiving monastic ordination and eventually passing away. Some scholars suggest that the construction of the monastery church began around the year 900. [532]

Archaeological research has uncovered the foundations of the original church, on which the existing katholikon was later built. The original church was a domed structure with a triconch base, measuring 7.5 by 9.5 meters, and a rectangular narthex (Fig. 47). Along the southern wall of the narthex was the tomb of the monastery's founder. [533] According to *The Second Life of Saint Naum*, the saint was buried in the tomb on the right, southern, side of the church, within its pronaos or porch.[534] In terms of typology and dimensions, the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael is quite similar to the Church of St. Panteleimon, founded by Clement of Ohrid. The primary difference is that the southern and northern conchae of Naum's church were semicircular on the inside but ended with flat walls on the outside, unlike the curved external walls of Clement's church. This structural difference may have been due to the stone foundation of the church at St. Naum Monastery, as opposed to the earthen foundation of the church at Plaošnik.[535] The Church of the Holy Archangel Michael also contains pieces of architectural sculpture, which have largely gone unnoticed until now. These sculptures are located in the triple-arched opening, or *tribelon*, in the area that separates the naos from the narthex (Fig. 48). The remains date to the earliest phase of the church and were likely repurposed as *spolia* from the original triconch church.[536] The architectural sculpture includes the pedestal of the current *tribelon*, which features two lateral circular openings. This suggests that, in its original use, the pedestal probably functioned as an architrave beam for a porch or portico with a wide entrance and two smaller lateral passages. Next to this pedestal are two marble columns with a modest, shallow lateral profile, supported by inverted capitals carved with crosses. The capitals themselves are topped with another layer of crosses, also impressed. The architectural sculptures bear a broad range of analogies to earlier sculptural art, particularly pre-11th century. [537]

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531 *The First Life* was published by *Ivanov,* Bŭlgarski starini, 305–311. For *the Second Life of St. Naum*, see *Kovačević,* Nekoliko priloga, 1–4. Also, see *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 25–41; *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 216, n. 13.

532 *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 294; *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 43.

533 *Koco*, L'église, 244–247; *Koco,* Rezultati, 152–156; *Koco*, Proučavanja, 56–80; *Grozdanov,* Trikonhalnata crkva na Sveti Naum, 107–115; *Miljković-Pepek,* Nekoi pogledi, 65–83; *Koco,* Trikonhalnite crkvi, 91–100; *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija,18–19.

534 *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 36.

535 *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 293–299; *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 42; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 39–41; *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 365–366; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 809–828; *Koco*, Proučavanja, 78; *Miljković-Pepek,* Nekoi pogledi, 72.

536 Cvetan Grozdanov assumes that the sculpture could be even older, *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 49–50.

537 *Nikolajević-Stojković*, Prilog proučavanju vizantiske skulpture, 157–186; *Radojčić,* Crkva, 148–165; *Petrov*, Dekorativna plastika, 125–182; *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 49–51.

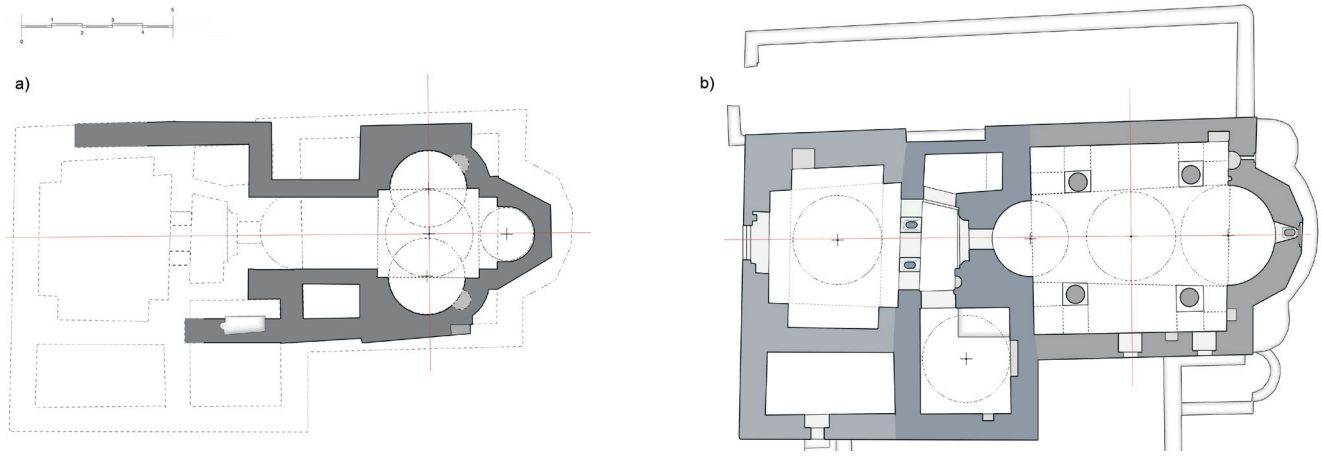


Fig. 47. Ohrid Lake, Church of the Holy Archangel Michael, architectural phases, plan



Fig. 48. Ohrid Lake, Church of the Holy Archangel Michael, *tribelon* between naos and narthex

As we have seen, both the monastic churches of Clement and of Naum were constructed as triconch plans, which are similar in layout but with some differences. Scholars have debated the origin of the triconch plan for these two churches.[538] Within the context of the First Bulgarian Empire, neither Pliska nor Preslav contains monastic churches featuring this type of layout. The only known monastic church from this period constructed with a triconch plan is located at the Karaačteke Monastery (Fig. 41). One possible explanation for the adoption of the triconch design is its connection to Early

538 *Stričević*, Églises triconques, 224–240; *Mijatev*, Arhitekturata, 103; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Po vŭprosa za srednovekovnite trikonhalni cŭrkvi 10–15; *Koco,* Trikonhalnite crkvi, 91–100; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 34–55; *Mal'ceva,* Monastyrskaja arkhitektura, 809–828; *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 44–45.

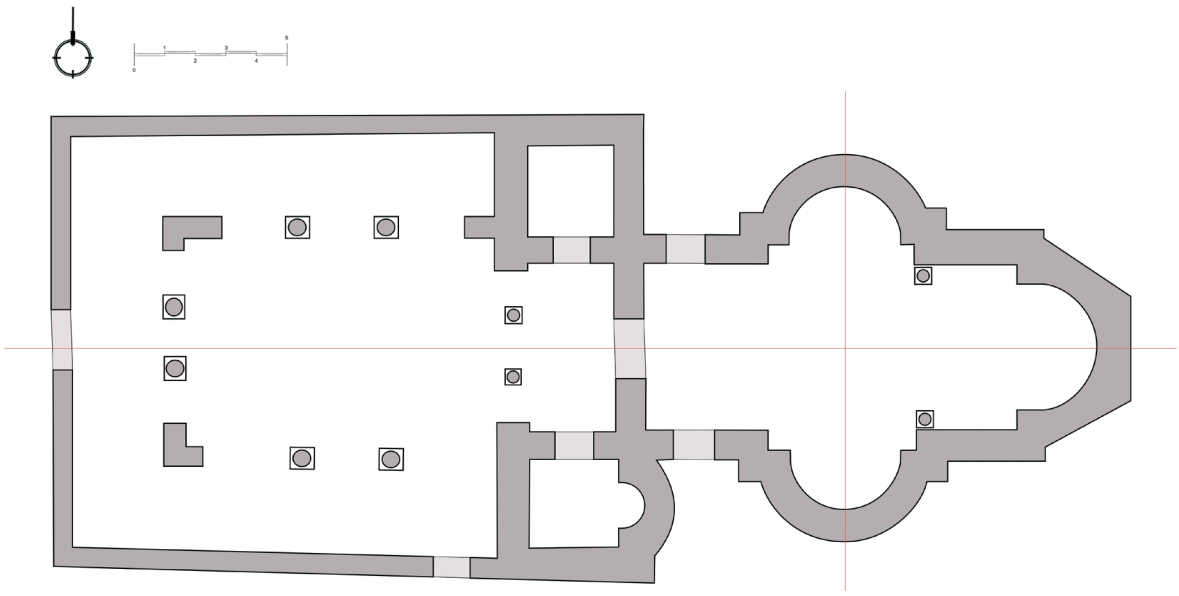


Fig. 49.
Caričin Grad,
Church E, plan

Christian and Early Byzantine traditions, where such layouts were commonly used for martyria or funerary purposes.[539] Early Christian triconch churches tend to be larger in size, whereas those built during the Early Byzantine period, such as Church E at Caričin Grad or the triconch church near Kuršumlija from the 6th century, are more comparable to the triconch churches of Ohrid (Fig. 49).[540] Similar to the Ohrid churches, Church E and the one at Kuršumlija feature semicircular lateral conchs and a three-sided apse.

The Ohrid churches are also compared to contemporary churches from nearby Kastoria, specifically the Churches of the Transfiguration and Koubelidiki (Fig. 94, 98). Although these Kastorian churches are similar in size, they differ in that all three of their conchs are semicircular, and their construction technique is different, as seen in the Koubelidiki church.[541] Svetlana Maltseva, in comparing the architecture of the churches of St. Clement and St. Naum with the Church of St. Andrew in Peristeri near Thessaloniki, identifies several similarities, especially in the design of the semicircular side conchs and the three-sided apse. The Church of St. Andrew was built around 871 by St. Euthymius the New (824–898), who took monastic vows in a monastery in Bithynia, Olympus, the same area where Sts. Cyril and Methodios had once been. Maltseva, drawing attention to this connection and recognizing that Bithynia in Asia Minor was a center of architectural innovation, concludes that St. Clement and St. Naum likely drew inspiration for their monastery churches from this region. This is particularly plausible, as the Church of St. Andrew was also a monastic church. Though Maltseva observes some influences from larger centers like Constantinople in the Peristeri church, she acknowledges that all three of these churches – St. Clement's, St. Naum's, and St. Andrew's – were built by local masons using provincial construction techniques. The reason for this, she suggests, was the difficulty of always acquiring master builders from the capital.[542]

539 *Koco,* Trikonhalnite crkvi, 91–100; *Stričević*, Églises triconques, 224–240; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 36–39; *Grabar,* Martyrium, 102–119; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 147–150, 238–243.

540 *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 297; *Stričević*, Églises triconques, 225; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 238–239.

541 *Moutsopoulos,* Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 3–20, 87–109; *Malceva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 296–297; *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 171–174.

542 *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 298–299.

Numerous monuments attest to the popularity of the triconch plan in religious architecture during the 9th and 10th centuries, particularly in the Mediterranean world. This architectural style was common in regions such as Dalmatia, the Greek provinces of the Byzantine Empire, and even Mount Sinai.[543] Notably, the construction of central-plan buildings was often associated with monasteries, as seen with the Round Church in Preslav (Fig. 3).[544] Given this widespread use of the triconch design, it is difficult at present to definitively determine whether the triconch churches around Lake Ohrid, dating from the 9th and 10th centuries, were directly or indirectly influenced by Early Byzantine buildings of this type in the Balkans, or whether their prototype originated in another region. However, it is clear that the missionaries Clement and Naum, whose activities around Ohrid are believed to have played a significant role in introducing this type of religious architecture to the region, were pivotal in popularizing the triconch plan here. Considering the importance of the monasteries founded by Clement and Naum and their considerable influence in the area, it is reasonable to suggest that other triconch churches built around Ohrid and its vicinity during the same period may have been modeled after these monastic foundations.

There are three churches with a similar triconch plan in the region: the church in the village of Zlesti, now known as the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, the church in Gorica, and the church in Izdeglavje. The church in Zlesti, in its original form, was a compact version of the triconch plan, consisting of a rectangular naos and a narthex built simultaneously on the western side. While Zlesti shares most of its architectural characteristics with the triconch churches of Clement and Naum, it also displays variations in the planning and organization of subsidiary spaces. A distinctive feature of Zlesti's architectural design is the presence of polygonal rooms situated between the narthex and the lateral apses. These rooms were integrated into the rectangular wall mass of the extended narthex, which simultaneously encloses the western sides of the lateral apses (Fig. 39) [545]

The church in Gorica follows a compact domed triconch plan. It consists of a rectangular naos, expanded by a narthex on three sides, of which only the northern portion remains. This suggests the presence of subsidiary spaces at the corners of the narthex. The central domed space was flanked by three apses on the east, north, and south sides. On the interior, the apses are semicircular, though their original exterior walls are missing (Fig. 38). [546]

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543 *Stričević*, Églises triconques, 239; *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 297; *Korać,* Arhitektura, 21–33; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 467–470.

544 *Korać,* Arhitektura, 30; *Maltseva*, Ohrid triconch churches, 300.

545 *Vasiljević,* Trikonhos, 243–253; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 324–325; *Grozdanov,* Trikonhalnata crkva na Sveti Naum, 44–45; *Kuzman,* Arheološki svedoštva, 165–171; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 42; *Stanković,* An unusual triconchal church, 215–243; *Mal'ceva,* Monastyrskaja arkhitektura, 813.

546 *Stričević*, Églises triconques, 237; *Koco,* Trikonhalnite crkvi, 93; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Trikonhalnite cŭrkvi, 9–10; *Bošković*, Arhitektura, 130; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 154–155, *Miljkoviќ-Pepek*, Nekoi pogledi, 67–69; *Miljkoviќ-Pepek*, Hristijanskata arhitektura, 229; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'architecture, 489, *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 324–325; *Grozdanov,* Trikonhalnata crkva na Sveti Naum, 44–45; *Kuzman,* Arheološki svedoštva, 163–164; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 42; *Mal'ceva,* Monastyrskaja arkhitektura, 813.

Of the three churches, the remains of the church in Izdeglavje have been the least explored. Based on limited archaeological investigations and published drawings, it appears to have been a two-conch church. In terms of the number and disposition of apses, Izdeglavje closely resembles the church in Svećani, another early example of Christian architecture among the Slavs. The funerary function of the south lateral apse is also suggested. All three churches have been dated to the late 9th or early 10th century and were likely built after the foundations of the Clement and Naum monasteries.[547]

There are two examples of tetraconch churches in Duklja, Montenegro, that may have been influenced by the monasteries of Clement and Naum during the 10th century under Samuel's rule. These are the churches in Drivast, near Lake Skadar, and in Zaton, Church of St. John near Bijelo Polje. Both churches feature highly pronounced conches with a horseshoe shape. What is particularly interesting is that the church in Zaton has two small niches in the lateral conch, which protrude outward on its eastern wall.[548]

Both monasteries on Lake Ohrid were private foundations of St. Clement and St. Naum, likely following the monastic practices of Byzantium during the 9th–11th centuries.[549] They were primarily established as places for their final rest, as indicated by the tombs of both saints. In *The Life of Saint Clement*, Theophylact of Ohrid reveals another important detail regarding the creation of Clement's monastery. According to him, the church was founded on land that was donated by the Bulgarian prince Boris-Michael to Clement of Ohrid.[550] A similar account is provided in *The Second Life of Saint Naum*, which emphasizes the support given to the saint by both Prince Boris-Michael and his successor, Simeon.[551] It is clear that, while the royal family may have been involved at some point by providing financial assistance or privileges, they can be regarded more as patrons than as the actual founders of the monasteries.

Due to the lack of archaeological evidence for other monastic buildings, it is difficult to determine whether the monasteries of Clement and Naum followed the practices of monasteries in northeastern Bulgaria and became centers for the development of Slavic writing and theology. However, given that both monasteries were founded by missionary saints, it is more likely that they had an educational purpose. According to Theophylact's *The Life of Saint Clement*, the saint divided the books he wrote between his bishopric and the monastery, clearly intending them to be used for further education and missionary work. Further indication of the existence of a developed cultural center in Ohrid could be the earliest Glagolitic manuscript of the Gospels, the so-called Codex Zographensis, which was probably written there, though its date

547 *Stričević*, Églises triconques, 228,; *Koco,* Trikonhalnite crkvi, 91–100; *Miljković-Pepek,* Nekoi pogledi, 67, n. 17; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'architecture, 489, *Miljković-Pepek*, Hristijanskata arhitektura, 229; *Kuzman – Malenko,* Zaglavnica-Staro Selo, 248; *Grozdanov,* Trikonhalnata crkva na Sveti Naum, 44–45; *Kuzman,* Arheološki svedoštva, 171–172; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonkhi, 42; *Mal'ceva,* Monastyrskaja arkhitektura, 813.

548 *Nešković*, Crkva Sv. Jovana, 61–67; *Korać*, L' arhitecture du haut Môyen Age, 151–161; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 467.

549 *Kostova,* St. Kliment, 600.

550 *Petkov*, The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, 154–155.

551 *Grozdanov,* Sveti Naum, 36.

of creation is still a matter of debate.[552] After Clement's death in 916, his monastery would go on to become a major pilgrimage site and a center of healing.[553]

Though both monasteries share similarities in form and function, the disciples of Cyril and Methodios chose different locations for them. Clement built his monastery on the site of a large, old Christian settlement, likely a bishopric whose bishops had participated in major Ecumenical Councils in Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon. By selecting such a location, Clement may have intentionally bridged the gap between the Early Byzantine Church and the newly converted Slavs. In this way, he established a private urban monastery, a model that would become widespread in Preslav at the end of the 9th and beginning of the 10th century. In contrast, Naum chose a location far removed from any urban settlements, instead selecting a site on the shore of Lake Ohrid, surrounded by natural springs. This choice reflects a different vision, emphasizing solitude and natural beauty. Both monasteries, like their founders, proved highly influential in the following centuries – not only as architectural prototypes but also as spiritual centers. However, the available material does not yet allow us to determine the full extent to which this influence was applied.

Monasteries in Preslav

As we have observed, in the early years following the Conversion, large monasteries were constructed, primarily founded by rulers, and they became central hubs for the spread of literacy and Christianity. These monasteries were often built outside urban centers, in densely populated regions and along major roads, locations strategically chosen to support missionary efforts. However, by the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th centuries, significant changes occurred. The growing Christian population created a need for new monasteries, but their role evolved considerably. What sets these new monasteries apart from their predecessors are their size, the design of their main churches, their functions, and the ways they were financed.[554]

Monasteries played a key role as centers of Christian piety, which became an integral part of the official lifestyle of the ruling feudal aristocracy. As a result, most monasteries were established as private foundations by members of the aristocracy.[555] The role they once held as centers for missionary work and education began to fade, and monasteries increasingly became places of retreat from the world, as well as sites of eternal rest for the founder and their family.[556] This practice of building monasteries as private foundations was directly influenced by Byzantine traditions. Consequently, the 10th century saw the emergence of the largest number of private family monasteries.[557] The greatest

552 For the date of the manuscript and its provenance, see *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 216, n. 12.

553 *Simeonov,* Local Pilgrimage, 146–185.

554 The monasteries were dated by archaeological excavation and on the basis of material remains, since none of the monastery buildings have survived. *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries, 190.

555 *Morris*, The byzantine aristocracy, 112–137.

556 *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 199–215.

557 *Magdalino*, The Byzantine Aristocratic *Oikos*', 92–111; *Smyrlis*, Monasteries, 155–167.

concentration of monasteries during this time was undoubtedly in Preslav, the second capital of the First Bulgarian Empire. Due to its large population, the city was an ideal location for the mass construction of churches and monasteries. These monastic structures became a central element in the church organization of the East.[558]

As previously mentioned, the monasteries in Preslav were located both within the inner and outer city, as well as on the right bank of the Ticha (Kamchiya) River.[559] To date, eight monasteries are known in Preslav and its immediate surroundings. These are generally large residential complexes connected to churches. For most of them, their role as monasteries is unquestionable, while for others, their monastic character can only be inferred. Four of these monasteries are situated in the outer city: Čerešeto, the Palace Monastery, the monastery around the Round Church, and the Monastery of Mostič. On the right bank of the Ticha River, outside the fortified city, four more monastic complexes are known: Patleina, Vulkašina, Avradaka, and Tuzlalăka.[560] More or less, all of these monasteries follow the structural model of Middle Byzantine monasticism. The complexes typically include a main church, which is either enclosed or surrounded by a series of buildings within a courtyard. Sometimes, there is an additional adjacent courtyard surrounded by buildings. The positioning of the church in relation to the courtyard can vary: it may be free-standing in the center, as seen in the Palace Monastery and Patleina; slightly off-center, as in Čerešeto, Vulkašina, or Tuzlalăka; or even located outside the courtyard, as in Avradaka. The church could either be free-standing or attached to another building. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is the church architecture of the monasteries in Preslav.[561]

The basilica type of building, characteristic of the earlier period, was used only in the Čerešeto Monastery, the oldest of Preslav's monasteries, which was built around the second half of the 9th century (Fig. 50).[562] The other monasteries, however, were constructed with a katholikon in the cross-in-square plan, of a smaller-scale design that had developed in Byzantium and included some local features. The only exception was the Monastery of the Round Church, where the main structure featured a central system but was constructed as a rotunda.[563] This shift in church design was not incidental; with the establishment of Byzantine liturgical practices in the late 9th century, the cross-domed church became the new architectural standard in the Byzantine capital, particularly suited to the needs of monastic life and smaller congregations of hermits and monks.[564]

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558 *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries, 190–202.

559 *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 44–46; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Manastirite; *Kostova*, Churches, 100–104.

560 *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries, 190.

561 *Čaneva-Dečevksa*, Po njakoi arhitekturno-kompozitsionni osobenosti, 32–44; *Totev – Georgiev*, Novi danni za oblika na njakoi manastiri, 130–136; *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries, 190–202; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 45–56.

562 *Škorpil,* Pametnici, 208–211; *Mavrodinov*, Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 148–150; *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 177–178; *Kostova*, Churches, 102.

563 *Schwartz*, Reconsidering the Round Church, 2–15; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 70–77; *Kostova,* Oshte vednŭzh za Krŭglata cŭrkva, 284–303; *Georgiev*, Zlatnata cŭrkva, 7–25.

564 *Mathews,* "Private" Liturgy, 125–138; *Taft,* The Great Entrance; *Dončeva*, Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 141, 145–149.

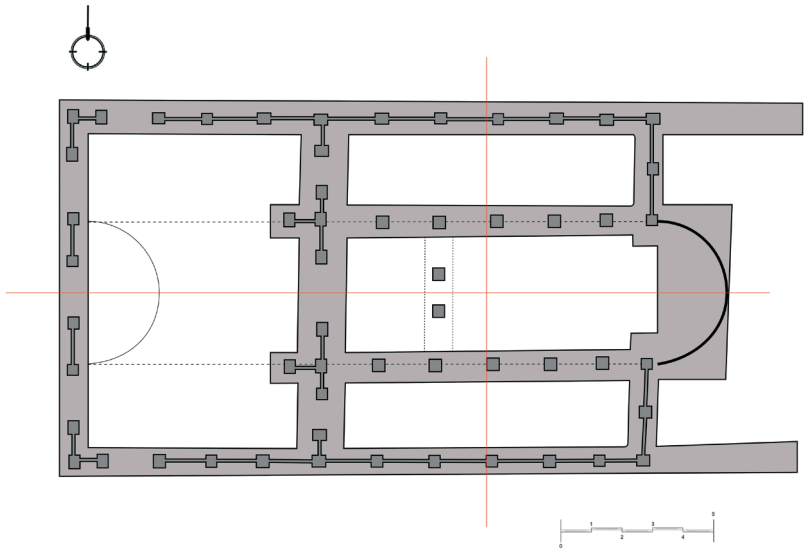


Fig. 50.
Preslav, Čerešeto Monastery, plan

The cross-in-square plan underwent various modifications throughout its development. However, all domed churches, regardless of their variations, were designed with a central guiding principle: the unification of the interior around the vertical axis of the nave. The prominent central dome served as both a unifying compositional element and the vertical axis of the building. In Preslav, the monastic churches of the cross-in-square type, while structurally similar, exhibit noticeable differences in their volumetric and spatial arrangements, particularly in the support system for the dome.[565] These differences can be categorized into two main groups. The first group, the more advanced of the two, follows the so-called Constantinople version.[566] In this design, the dome rests on four free-standing supports. The use of four piers instead of columns, or a combination of two columns and two piers, was seen as a deviation from the Constantinopolitan model, developed by the local builders.[567] This group includes the church of the Palace Monastery, Churches No. 1 and No. 2 from the Avradaka site, and the church of the Mostič Monastery. These churches are more elongated and larger in size compared to other cross-in-square churches in Preslav. All three churches in this group featured a three-part apsidal space with three apses on the east. In Church No. 1 at Avradaka, the apses were semicircular both inside and outside, while in the other two churches, the apses were semicircular on the interior and three-sided on the exterior. However, it is impossible to determine whether churches of this plan had a single dome or multiple domes.[568]

The second major group of cross-in-square churches in Preslav is represented by the so-called "provincial variant," in which the eastern supports of the dome are integrated into the pre-altar walls, while the western supports are free-standing. These churches are typically smaller in size. The monastery churches in Tuzlaläka, Vulkašina, and Patleina belong to this type.[569] In the church at Patleina, the eastern part includes a

565 *Totev*, Ošte za tipologizacijata na krŭsto-kupolnite cŭrkvi, 347–357; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 69–150; *Dončeva*, Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 18–149.

566 *Dončeva,* Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 142–144; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 291–292.

567 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 292.

568 *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 78–93.

569 Ibid., 93–101.

prothesis and a *diakonikon*, with all three apses being semicircular on the interior and three-sided on the exterior. What distinguishes the Patleina monastery church is that the dome is supported by parts of the L-shaped sub-dome supports, which are arched on the inside.[570]

Most of the churches at the Preslav Monastery feature a rectangular narthex to the west, with the eastern and western walls often divided by semicircular niches on the interior. This is also the case at the Patleina Monastery, where semicircular niches are placed along the western wall of the narthex. In addition to the main entrance to the narthex from the west, some churches had side entrances from the north and south. The entrance from the narthex to the nave was generally through a single door, except in the case of Church No. 1 at Avradaka, Patleina, and the church of the Mostič Monastery, where three entrances led from the narthex to the nave.[571]

The churches were primarily constructed of broken stone, with brick used sparingly. Some churches, such as Church No. 1 at Avradaka and the Round Church, featured significant external and internal architectural decoration. The floors of these churches were often covered with marble in the *opus sectile* technique, as well as ceramic tiles embossed in plaster. The floor coverings at sites like Avradaka Church No. 1, Patleina, and the Palace Churches are notable examples. Painted ceramics were also used to decorate the interior walls of the churches, including icons and wall panels.[572]

The monastery complexes in Preslav have often been the subject of debate regarding their actual function and purpose – whether they were private residences or genuine monasteries.[573] One source of this uncertainty stems from the presence of craft workshops in several of the Preslav monasteries.[574] Specifically, the monastery around the Round Church in the outer city, the Palace Monastery, and the monasteries of Patleina and Tuzlalăka; on the right bank of the Ticha River, all contain well-developed workshops for ceramics.[575] Kilns for firing ceramics have been discovered, along with a significant amount of semi-finished products. Additionally, workshops for painting semi-finished items have also been found. What remains unclear, however, is whether the monks themselves were involved in the production of decorative ceramics and icons, or if hired workers played a role in the crafting process.[576] These workshops were typically located in separate sections of the monastery complexes. The monasteries at Patleina and Tuzlalăka, situated near the river, appear to have been strategically placed to facilitate the development of these workshops, with access to raw materials for production.

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570 *Zlatarski*, Kam istorijata na otkritia, 146–162; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 95–97.

571 *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 113–114.

572 *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 208–219; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 133–149.

573 *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries, 193–195; *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 199–215; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 130–135.

574 *Kostova,* Imalo li e manastiri-ergasterii, 457–471.

575 *Totev,* Preslavskite atelieta, 101–109; *Totev*, Preslavskite manastiri, 46–54; *Kostova,* Polychrome ceramics in Preslav, 97–117.

576 *Totev,* Preslavskite atelieta, 101–109; *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries, 193–195; *Kostova,* Imalo li e manastiri-ergasterii, 457–471; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 136–174.

Some researchers suggest that the presence of these workshops indicates that some of the complexes may have initially been established as civil foundations before evolving into monasteries.[577] It was not uncommon for such complexes to begin as private estates, which later transformed into monasteries and became the final resting place for both the founders and their families. This practice of establishing private aristocratic estates that later became monastic centers was a common tradition in Byzantium.[578]

As mentioned in the section on Preslav, the graves of the founders and their families have been discovered in several monasteries. The presence of graves within the monastery complexes is one of the clearest indicators of the monasteries' endowment. Magnificent tombs have been found in the complexes of the Palace Monastery, Patleina, Vulkašina, Tuzlalăka, and Mostič.[579] These tombs were usually placed as separate structures along the northern or southern wall of the church, or sometimes within the church itself, as seen in Tuzlalăka and Mostič.[580] Among these, the Mostič Monastery in the village of Selište, located in the outer city of Preslav, provides the most detailed information.[581] Here, a burial chamber was found next to the northern side of the church, containing a tombstone inscribed with "*ičirgu-boila* Mostič." This led to the assumption that Mostič was the founder of the monastery. However, the discovery of another slab with a Cyrillic inscription in a two-part burial chamber, located in the portico in front of the church's western entrance, added further insight. The inscription revealed that the body of the mother of a *synkellos* – later identified as George, based on a seal found at the site – was transferred to this location.[582] This confirmed that the *synkellos* George had likely converted his private estate into a monastery.[583] The practice of burying the founder and their family members within the monastery was common in Middle Byzantine monasteries. This can also be observed in the Patleina Monastery, where a crypt with six burial chambers was discovered in the northern part of the church, containing the remains of a woman and a child.[584] Similarly, a family grave was found southwest of the narthex of the church at Čerešeto Monastery in the outer city of Preslav.[585] In the Tuzlalăka Monastery, a tomb with a vaulted cylindrical stone roof was discovered to the north of the church. Another tomb, located north of the altar, was built for a person of high rank, with the tomb constructed from large stone slabs.[586]

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577 *Totev*, Manastirat v „Tuzlalaka", 47–50.

578 *Kostova*, Bulgarian monasteries, 195.

579 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Pogrebalni praktiki, 402–422; *Nikolova,* Monašestvo, 120–130.

580 *Georgiev*, Klasifikacija i harakter na grobničnite postrojki, 79–106.

581 On private estates with churches and their possible function, *Kostova*, Patronaž i manastirska geografia, 199–215; *Kostova,* Imalo li e manastiri-ergasterii, 457–471; *Kostova*, Novootkritite grobni suoruženija, 453–467; *Kostova*, Manastirŭt „na Mostič", 271–287; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Manastir na čŭrgubilja Mostič, 629–631.

582 *Gerasimov*, Nov molivdovul na Georgi, 587–588.

583 *Ćurčić*, Architecture 288; *Popkonstantinov*, Vŭprosi okolo groba, 113–119; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Manastirŭt na Georgi, 44–63; *Kostova*, Manastirŭt „na Mostič", 271–287.

584 *Georgiev*, Klasifikacija i harakter na grobničnite postrojki, 79–106.

585 *Škorpil,* Pametnici, 208–211.

586 *Kostova,* Manastirŭt v Tuzlalŭka, 13–25.

Murfatlar Monastery

Most of the monasteries mentioned thus far belong to the coenobitic type. There is no reliable data on hermitages in Bulgaria from this period. The closest example to the anchorite way of life is undoubtedly the unique large monastery complex at Murfatlar, modern-day Basarabi, Northern Dobrudja, Romania. Murfatlar is a rock-cut monastery carved into a chalk massif, created on the site of a medieval quarry by digging churches and cells into the rock. The complex spans an area of approximately 200 meters by 40 meters. Based on archaeological findings, as well as preserved inscriptions and drawings, the monastery is dated to the early 10th century.[587]

The complex consists of four small and two larger churches, along with cells and galleries carved into the northern slope of a solitary crag. All of the churches are single-naved, except for the largest one at the lower level, which is shaped like a three-nave basilica. In this three-aisled church, the narthex is separated from the nave by three arches supported by rock-cut pillars, which are covered with inscriptions and graffiti. The church features a crypt in the western part of the nave, where skeletal remains have been discovered. Above the entrance to the crypt is an image of a saint, identified through a runic inscription as John the Baptist. On the eastern part of the arcade that separates the apse from the nave, there is an image of St. Theodore, accompanied by a Greek inscription. All the churches are longitudinally barrel-vaulted. While the churches share some similarities, they also differ in features; for example, some churches have a narthex, and one has an exonarthex.[588]

Most of the churches display runic, Cyrillic and Greek inscriptions on the walls and columns. The monastery was an important pilgrimage center, as evidenced by a number of inscriptions.[589] Additionally, there are so-called "boot"-graffiti with strong Christian symbolism, including depictions of saints, prophets, ships, ladders, and trees.[590]

Although the entire complex suggests that the monks led predominantly solitary lives, it likely functioned as a larger monastic complex that included a main church. This could be the church marked as B4, which features skilled craftsmanship and a richly decorated interior. A Cyrillic inscription on one of the columns between the narthex and the nave is interpreted as an invocation on behalf of a donor: "Toupai carved out of stone the church of George."[591]

In addition to rock-cut churches, there were also rock-cut rooms used for funerary purposes. These varied in structure, ranging from simple chambers to

587 The monastic complex was discovered in 1957 near the village of Basarabi, formerly known as Murfatlar, Romania. *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 207–208; *Kostova,* Skalnijat manastir pri Basarabi, 131–153; *Popkonstantinov*, Les inscriptions du monastère, 115–145; *Curta*, The cave and the dyke, 129–151; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Literacy, literature and liturgy, 146.

588 *Atanasov,* Influences ethno-culturelles, 112–124; *Kostova,* Skalnijat manastir pri Basarabi, 131–153; *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 234–236.

589 *Popkonstantinov – Kostova,* Literacy, literature and liturgy, 145–164; For number of inscriptions v. *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 236, n. 95.

590 *Kostova,* Boot-Graffiti, 140–166.

591 *Popkonstantinov – Kronsteiner*, Altbulgarische Inschriften, 109.

gallery-catacombs, chapels, and tombs, often located next to the churches. Frequently, a living space was later converted into a burial chamber. Around 20 graves have been uncovered throughout the complex, including two female skeletons. This discovery supports the theory that the site may have been a secular endowment.[592]

The variety of monastic complexes, their layouts, and the church architecture in the First Bulgarian Empire during the 9th and 10th centuries suggest they were influenced by Byzantine monastic practices and art, which were partially altered by local traditions. These complexes served as centers of education, theological learning, and literacy. Whether coenobitic or lavriot, they attracted pilgrims and also functioned as places of final rest. Above all, they were centers of Christianization with a strong missionary purpose.

III. Samuel's State

Prespa as the seat of state and church

Prespa is a high basin in Macedonia, bordered to the east by Mount Baba and to the west by the Petrino and Galicica mountains. The region includes Lake Prespa, which consists of two parts: the Great Lake and the Little Lake. Achilleos Island is located at the northern end of the Little Lake, also known as Little Prespa, and is the largest island in the Prespa region.[593]

Prespa gained significant political importance after 971, when the Bulgarian capital, Preslav, was occupied by the Byzantine emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–976). The region then became a center of resistance, where the brothers David, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel – sons of one of the most powerful Bulgarian komites – led an uprising. These brothers managed to keep the southwestern and western parts of Bulgarian territory free from Byzantine control. At the start of the rebellion, they refrained from declaring the seceded western Bulgarian regions an independent state, as they were uncertain how events would unfold in Eastern Bulgaria, particularly during the Byzantine–Rus' War. After the death of Emperor John Tzimiskes in 976, the brothers launched a full-scale uprising.[594]

There are theories suggesting that Prespa, as a city, was the residence of David, one of the brothers, before he was killed in 976.[595] After the murder of his brother Aaron, between 976 and 986, Samuel became the independent ruler of Bulgaria, with Prespa as his capital.[596] Many historians believe that Prespa served as the capital of the Bulgarian state from 973 to 996, although some argue that Sofia was the capital until 986.[597] There are no written sources that explain the exact reasons why Samuel

592 *Kostova,* Skalnijat manastir pri Basarabi, 131–153; *Curta,* Eastern Europe, 234–236.

593 *Ivanov,* Samuilovata stolica v Prŭespa, 55–80.

594 *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 53–71; *Panov*, The Blinded State, 1–27; *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 238–241; *Moutsopoulos,* Gegoōota tou 9ου–10ου aiōna kai ē epanastasē tōn Komētopoulōn, 36–41.

595 *Angelov – Cholpanov,* Bŭlgarska voenna istorija, 32.

596 *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 73–92; *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 241–249.

597 *Nikolov,* Centralizŭm i regionalizŭm, 167.

chose Prespa as the spiritual and political center of his state. It is possible that the area had a deeper connection to Samuel's family and brothers. For example, on the eastern shore of Lake Prespa, near the village of German, a commemorative plaque was found honoring Samuel's parents – his father, *Komes* Nicholas, his mother, Ripsimia of Armenia – and his elder brother David.[598]

Another reason for choosing Prespa as the capital could have been its strategic location and strong fortifications. Situated on an island in Little Prespa Lake, the city was difficult to access by water and heavily fortified on land. The central part of the island had a fortress (Kale) and a tower, while churches and residences were located along the shore.[599]

After the capture of Larissa in Thessaly around 985/986, Samuel transferred the relics of St. Achilleos (d. 330), the former bishop of Larissa who attended the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea and was the patron saint of Larissa, to Prespa. On the largest island in Little Prespa Lake, he built his residence and a cathedral church, where he placed not only the relics of St. Achilleos but also those of St. Diodoros of Trikke and St. Reginos of Skopelos, which he had acquired during the conquest of Trikala and Skopelos.[600]

Despite the military campaigns and destruction that accompanied the uprising, there was significant artistic activity in Prespa. To this day, three monuments have been partially or fully preserved, showcasing the distinctive features of church architecture in the final decades of the First Bulgarian Empire. These include the Basilica of St. Achilleos on the island of the same name in Little Prespa Lake as well as the Church of the Holy Apostles, and the Church of St. Germanos in the village of German on Lake Prespa.

Samuel's political ambitions are most clearly reflected in the original artistic concept realized through the endowment of the Basilica of St. Achilleos (Fig. 51).[601] The architectural design of the Church of St. Achilleos in Prespa, built toward the end of the 10th century, showcases the innovations of Byzantine builders, while the fresco decoration of the altar apse embodies a complex theological and visual concept.[602] The church was most likely constructed immediately after Samuel's conquest of Larissa,

598 In 1888, a stone slab with an inscription in Church Slavonic was discovered in the necropolis next to the old church. The inscription reveals that in 6501 (or 993), Emperor Samuel had the names of his deceased parents, Nicholas and Ripsimia, and his brother David carved onto the slab as a memorial. The slab also featured three metal crosses with indentations, which were later lost. It remains unclear whether the slab marked the original family tomb or served solely as a memorial, see *Uspenskij*, Nadpis' carja Samuila, 1–4; *Kos,* On the inscription of Tsar Samuil, 203–209; *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 23–25; *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 59–60; *Panov*, The Blinded State, 74–75; *Nikolov*, Iz istorijata na Samuilova Bŭlgarija, 121–122; *Angelidi,* Hagios Germanos, 1153–1155.

599 *Georgiev,* Prespa, 327–331.

600 *Nikolov,* Centralizŭm i regionalizŭm, 171–172; *Gjuzelev*, Hauptstädte, 93–94. Skylitzes tells us about the translation of the relics of St. Achilleos, see, *Scylitzes*, 348–349. For the English translation, see *John Skylitzes*, A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 330–331. The interpolations of Michael of Devol add that Achilleos attended the Council of Nicaea in the time of Constantine with Reginos of Skopelos and Diodoros of Trikke, mentioning that Samuel built a large church to host the relics. On the interpolations, see *Prokić*, Die Zusätze in der Handschrift des Johannes Skylitzes; *Ferluga*, John Skylitzes, 163–170; *Mullett*, Theophylact of Ohrid, 238; *Tăpkova-Zaimova,* Bulgarians by Birth, 107–109.

601 *Dimitrova*, V.I. Personalities, 601–621, 602–605; *Curta*, Eastern Europe, 625.

602 *Dimitrova*, V.I. Personalities, 602–605; *Ruseva,* Bazilikata "Sv. Ahilij", 700–716.

when the relics of St. Achilleos were transferred to Prespa around 985–986.[603] Samuel thus built one of the largest churches of the time in the central Balkans.

Designed as a three-aisled basilica with a narthex measuring 22 by 44 meters, the church was covered with a gable roof supported by wooden beams (Fig. 52). The nave is twice as wide as the side aisles and ends in the east with a horseshoe-shaped apse that houses a three-tiered *synthronon*. The floor of the altar is slightly elevated above that of the nave, and a triangular window is set into the apse. On the western side of the apse, near the pillars framing the window, traces of an episcopal throne have been discovered. In the center of the altar, remnants of the holy table were found, as well as the pillars of ancient origin that once supported it. The exterior of the apse was left unplastered, and traces of scaffolding used during construction can still be seen. The nave is separated from the side aisles by a row of seven symmetrically placed pillars, which support a series of arches repeated at the level of the gallery (Fig. 53). The southern row of pillars is positioned at a higher level than the basilica's floor, and there may have been stairs within the openings of the partition arches in certain areas.[604]

The side aisles of the basilica end in two tall, cruciform chapels with domes, which symmetrically flank the main apse. The chapels on the eastern side are shaped like an inscribed cross. Both the interior and exterior apses of the chapels are semicircular. Until 1929, decorative tiles, characteristic of 9th- and 10th-century architecture, were visible on the drum of the small domes. The domes above the chapels were originally placed on high cylindrical drums, which are now lost (Fig. 54). The external construction of the small domes employs the *cloisonné technique*, with the occasional appearance of a "K" motif executed in brick. This detail is particularly significant as it demonstrates a similarity to the construction practices in neighboring Kastoria, where the same motif can be found on several buildings from approximately the same period such as Koubelidiki, Taxiarches Metropoleos, and Hagios Stephanos. (Fig. 55).[605]

The tomb of St. Achilleos was discovered in the southern part of the *diakonikon* (Fig. 56). It was covered by a stone slab, which appears to have originally been intended as the vertical side of a sarcophagus and was later repositioned here. The relief on the slab depicts a cross with two stylized trees at its base. On the left side of the slab, a bird with an elongated neck and beak is captured by an eagle, while on the right side, another eagle grasps the back of a one-humped camel.[606] Above the relief, at a height of 1.35 meters, there are three layers of frescoes. These paintings extend to the upper edge of the platform, suggesting that a sarcophagus was consistently placed there. Three holes were later made in the slab, one of which was almost certainly used for

603 *Ferluga,* Vreme, 3–7; *Panov*, The Blinded State, 14–95.

604 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē Basilikē, 163–203; *Moutsopoulos,* Anaskaphē tēs basilikēs; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 36–38; *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 261–264; *Doncheva*, Architektur und Liturgie, 367–386; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 311–312; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 29–35, 135; *Moutsopoulos,* Gegoōota tou 9^{ou}–10^{ou} aiōna kai ē epanastasē tōn Komētopoulōn, 30– 62; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 181–183.

605 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 261–280, 288–296; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 181–183.

606 *Milanova,* Skulpturnata ukrasa na bazilikata, 725–726.



Fig. 51. Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, view from the west

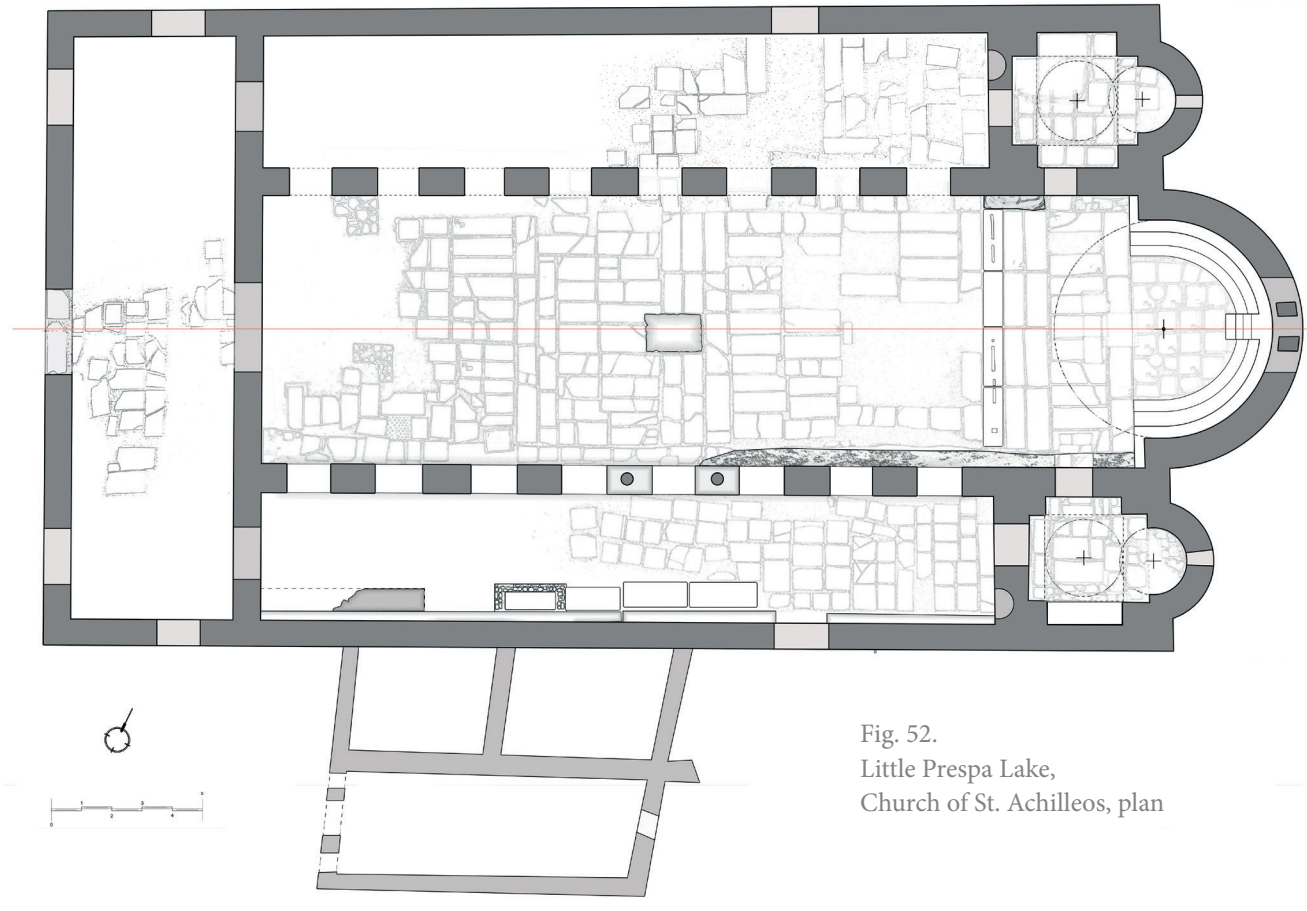


Fig. 52.
Little Prespa Lake,
Church of St. Achilleos, plan



Fig. 53.
Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, arcades of the nave, north side



Fig. 54.
Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, cruciform chapel with a dome



Fig. 55.
Kastoria, Koubelidiki, dome, detail

pouring holy myrrh. Additionally, two lead ampoules were found in the *diakonikon*: one featuring a representation of St. Theodor and the other depicting St. Demetrios. It is clear that the southern chapel, which housed the relics of St. Achilleos, played a significant role in the pilgrimage functions of the cathedral.[607]

607 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 89–136. On cult of St. Achilleos see the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 269–273.



Fig. 56. Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, *diakonikon*, tomb of St. Achilleos

The natural rock on the south side of the nave served as the foundation for both the northern wall of the *diakonikon* and the row of pillars in the south aisle. The level of the south aisle is elevated above that of the altar, owing to the natural topography of the terrain. Four graves were discovered near the southern outer wall, all of which were built with limestone slabs. In the area where the graves were located, the floor slab had been removed, suggesting that the graves were either planned for this location or were dug before the floor was paved (Fig. 57).

Sarcophagus 1, the first from east to west, contains a *spolia* – an antique slab – but no remains were found in the grave. Sarcophagus 2, however, contained a well-preserved skeleton. The surface of the upper slab is carved with a cross, adorned with teardrop-shaped motifs at the ends. At the tops of the vertical arms of the cross are circles, each containing a carved cross, and lead was poured into the circular ends. Grave 3 was sealed with plaster. The skeleton found inside was accompanied by a small folded cloth, which, after analysis, was determined to likely originate from Constantinople (Fig. 58). The main motif on the cloth consists of circles with birds standing on bent branches that form wreaths. This cloth appears to date from the time of the Macedonian dynasty and features oriental motifs. The grave most likely had a vaulted structure, making it a type of arcosolium. Next is grave 4. The entire interior of this grave was plastered, and it was covered with a large marble slab. Like grave 3, this one also had a vaulted structure, with a wooden beam underneath, on which a lamp or lantern may have been hung.[608]

Nicolaos Moutsopoulos suggests that Emperor John Vladislav may have been buried in sarcophagus 1 due to the discovery of decorative gold leaf fragments, while

608 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 137–186; *Moutsopoulos,* Le tombeau, 114–126.



Fig. 57.
Lake Little Prespa, Church of St. Achilleos, south aisle, tombs



Fig. 58.
Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, fragment of textile from the tomb 3, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki

sarcophagus 2 may contain the remains of ruler John Vladimir, who was later transferred to Skadar. Sarcophagus 3 likely contains the remains of Emperor Samuel himself, as the skeleton corresponds to a man around 70 years old, and there are also remnants of imperial cloth. Moutsopoulos believes that grave 4 holds the remains of Gabriel Radomir, along with those of his wife and children, as multiple skeletons were found in this grave.[609]

609 *Moutsopoulos,* Le tombeau, 114–126.

Georgi Nikolov, however, offers a different interpretation. He argues that in graves 1 and 2, the remains of Nicholas, Ripsimia, and David were buried. Nikolov suggests that Samuel, deeply religious, wanted his final resting place to be alongside that of his father, mother, and brother David, and in the church where he had placed the relics of St. Achilleos, his heavenly patron. Nikolov concurs with Moutsopoulos that Samuel is likely buried in grave 3, and next to him Gabriel Radomir and his family in the remaining grave 4.[610]

The entire structure of the basilica is built from stone, with substantial amounts of mortar used in its construction. Brick was used only sporadically, primarily for the construction of arches. The limited use of brick is evident in the apse and small domes of the chapels, which were built using regularly cut stone blocks of smaller dimensions, with a single row of bricks placed between them. This technique deviates from the typical Byzantine practice in the Balkans, suggesting that brick was not readily available at the time. The floor of the central nave was composed of rectangular limestone slabs, likely repurposed from a Late Roman or Early Christian monument as *spolia*. These slabs may have originated from the ancient settlement of Lyka, located on the southwestern side of the island of St. Achilleos. In front of the altar area, there are recesses in the floor, which were designed to secure the panels of the iconostasis.[611]

To the west, the basilica featured a narthex with two side rooms, which may have provided access to the gallery. The narthex was a single-story structure, entered from the west through three doors. It also had openings on the north and south sides, which were later bricked up. The nave and aisles were accessed through three additional openings.[612]

The basilica belongs to the type of church whose builders were clearly educated within the Byzantine tradition. The design of the side chapels with domes, integrated into the architectural framework of a classical basilica, reflects a well-thought-out architectural solution. While it does not significantly deviate from traditional models, it also avoids a direct replication of them.[613] The choice of basilica plan was likely deliberate, aiming to establish a connection with the past – especially with the churches of the earlier capitals, Pliska and Preslav, as well as the episcopal and patriarchal center of Dristra.[614] Furthermore, this cathedral model allowed for the accommodation of a larger congregation, particularly significant in the case of Prespa, where the church was associated with the cult of St. Achilleos.[615] The construction of basilicas was a common practice in the northern Balkans during the 9th to 11th centuries, especially as cathedral churches. In particular, the shortened basilica plan became widespread in both the eastern and western Balkans during

610 *Nikolov*, Iz istorijata na Samuilova Bŭlgarija, 121–134.

611 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 198–204.

612 Ibid., 69–81.

613 *Dimitrova – Korunovski – Grandakovska*, Srednovekovna Makedonija, 1550. For more examples in Byzantine architecture, from the 9th to 11th centuries see, *Kappas*, Experimenting in domed constructions, 95–128.

614 *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 25–90; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 16–66; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 181–182.

615 *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 156–162.

the second half and the end of the 10th century.[616] Notable examples from this period include the churches of Taxiarches Metropoleos, Hagios Stephanos, and Hagioi Anargyroi in Kastoria.[617] This version of the basilical plan also influenced later monuments, such as the first Church of St. Nicholas in Manastir, built in 1095.[618]

Based on an analysis of architectural features, archaeological material, and graffiti, Moutsopoulos concluded that the Church of St. Achilleos was built by Greek craftsmen, both local and newcomers. Some of these craftsmen may have come from Kastoria, while others could have been from the cities in Thessaly that were captured by Samuel.[619] It is likely that the Kastorian craftsmen who participated in the construction of the Church of St. Achilleos also contributed to the building of the Church of St. Germanos on Lake Prespa, with both churches probably commissioned by Samuel.[620]

The Basilica of St. Achilleos in Little Prespa Lake was decorated with frescoes since its inception, and three layers of paintings have been preserved at different levels. Fragments of the first layer, dating between 989 and 1002, can still be found primarily in the main apse and the *diakonikon*, though they are now nearly invisible.[621]

The apse features traditional depictions of the Virgin Mary, archangels, and saints. In the lower part of the apse, directly above the *synthronon*, eighteen arches were painted, each inscribed with the names of the bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church in Greek. This distinctive iconographic choice visually emphasized the unity of the church institution and its administrative independence, underscoring the ideological concept of the ruler.[622]

Above the painted arches in the apse, the bishops are depicted symmetrically as standing figures, dressed in red sticharia and white phelonions, with white omophoria. They are shown blessing with their right hands and holding a book in their left. Above the apse window, based on the preserved drapery from the table painted above the arches of the apsidal window, another distinctive iconographic element can be found in the painting program of the altar area of St. Achilleos. A fragment of the painted

616 *Stričević,* La rénovation du type basilical, 165–211; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 25–90; *Korunovski,* Crkovnata arhitektura, 167–175; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 16–66; *Altripp*, Die Basilika in Byzanz, 12–38; *Mal'ceva – Freze*, Baziliki, 179–203.

617 *Orlandos*, Ta Byzantina Mnēmeia tēs Kastorias, 10 – 19, 61 – 68; *Pelekanidis – Chatzidakis*, Kastoria, 6–14, 22–28, 92–102; *Moutsopoulos,* Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 111–368; *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 231–235; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 174–200, 181–183; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 313–315, 381–382.

618 For St. Nicholas in Manastir, see *Stričević*, La rénovation du type basilical, 204; *Koco – Miljkovič-Pepek*, La basilique de St. Nikolas en village Manastir, 138–140; *Korunovski,* Crkovnata arhitektura, 167–175; *Kostovska*, Sveti Nikola Manastir, 29, 38–40, 40–45, 63–77.

619 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 307–310.

620 *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 181–183.

621 *Pelekanides*, Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 64–78; *Miljukov,* Hristianskie drevnosti, 47–53; *Miljković-Pepek, Freskite i ikonite*, 37–51; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 205–211; *Miljković-Pepek*, Les fresques, 1187–1197; *Miljković-Pepek*, Quatre saints non identifiés de Kurbinovo, 389–402; *Zaharova*, Freski konca IX–X v., 236. Cf. see the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina I, 305.

622 *Grabar,* Deux témoignages, 163–166; *Dimitrova*, V.I. Personalities, 602–605; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 181–183. For more information on the inscriptions in the arches, see the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 304–318.

altar table is accompanied by verses inscribed along the edge of the conch, referring to the rite of Communion celebrated at the altar.[623]

Due to the poor state of preservation, it is difficult to definitively determine whether the painting in the apse depicts the *Hetoimasia*, simply the altar table, or a scene of the Communion of the Apostles. The image clearly represents a transitional solution between the traditional portrayal of the *Hetoimasia* and the altar table upon which Christ the Lamb is placed. This iconography would later become the standard model, as seen in the altar of the Kurbinovo church (1191).[624] While the altar of St. Achilleos lacks a direct representation of Christ's sacrifice, this absence is compensated by the Eucharistic verses, which reflect the concept of Christ's mystical presence as a bodily sacrifice laid upon the altar table.[625]

On the south wall above the tomb in the *diakonikon*, all three layers of painting have been preserved, though they are in poor condition. It appears that the first layer was done using the fresco-secco technique.[626] Some figures are still discernible. The first figure, viewed from east to west, is a saint holding a shield, likely a warrior saint. Next to him is another saint dressed in apostolic clothing, followed by three bishops. All the bishops wear epitrachelions with embroidered crosses, though the last bishop's attire is more richly decorated. On the west wall, next to the tomb, there is a depiction of an archangel with spread wings, probably Archangel Michael. The colors of the preserved frescoes are subdued, mostly light tones against a two-tone background. The figures are static, with close-up facial features and well-executed details in the ornaments. These frescoes are stylistically similar to the earliest frescoes in the churches of Hagios Stephanos, Taxiarches Metropoleos, and Hagioi Anargyroi in Kastoria. Some researchers suggest that the artist who painted the frescoes of the bishops in the apse is the same person responsible for the frescoes in the narthex of the Church of Hagioi Anargyroi in Kastoria.[627]

The same scenes are repeated in the second layer of paintings, dating from the time of Archbishop Leo (1037–1056). This suggests that the paintings were restored due to damage, rather than a change in the iconographic program.[628] Therefore, it is believed that the same figures were painted above the tomb of St. Achilleos. The second layer of paintings covered both the altar apse and the bema, but only a few fragments of this layer have survived. On the north side of the partition wall between the *prothesis* and

623 *Miljković-Pepek,* Les fresques,1190–1195; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 205–211. Similar verses are also inscribed in the apse conch of the church of Panagia Chalkeon from the 11th century, which helped in reconstructing the verses at St. Achilloes, see *Radošević-Maksimović*, Jedan epigram, 9–12.

624 *Grozdanov – Haderman-Misgviš,* Kurbinovo; *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 74–81; *Dimitrova*, The Church of Saint George, 12.

625 *Miljković-Pepek,* Les fresques, 1190–1195; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 205–211; *Dimitrova*, V.I. Personalities, 602–605. For *Hetoimasia,* see *Milanović*, Ever Ready Throne, 1079–1109.

626 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 211.

627 *Miljković-Pepek*, Les fresques,1198; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 242–244. Anna Zakharova disagrees with their opinion, *Zakharova*, The first-layer frescoes, 12, n. 36.

628 *Miljković-Pepek*, Les fresques,1196; *Moutsopoulos*, Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 213.

the altar, near traces of the iconostasis, depictions of two bishops framed by decorative arches are still visible (Fig. 59). One of the saints is accompanied by several letters, which have led some researchers to identify him as St. Achilleos. They assume that either St. Oekumenios or St. Diodoros is painted next to him.[629] Other scholars have suggested that the figure is St. Cyril, with St. Methodios depicted beside him. This suggests that Leo's intention was to highlight the church of the Archbishopric of Ohrid as a key center of apostolic work, aligning it with the ancient and prestigious churches.[630]

On the north side of the first pillar in the northern row, the remains of two standing warrior saints can be seen. Researchers have identified them as St. Nestor and St. Demetrios. St. Nestor is recognizable by the fibula that holds his cloak, as well as the spear in his hand. St. Demetrios is depicted with a smooth face, holding a spear and a sword (Fig. 60). On the east side of the first supporting pillar in the north is a representation of the Archangel Michael. On the south partition wall, between the altar and the south nave, traces of a fresco depicting John the Baptist have been preserved. This was likely part of the Deesis scene.[631]

The third layer, dating from the time of Archbishop Theophylact (1088/89–1120/26), seems to have been a major renovation of the church. As a result, some changes occurred in this layer. In addition to the warrior saint, the apostle, and the three bishops whose relics were stored in the tomb, another saint was added in place of the Archangel Michael.[632]

A question that remains unresolved in the scholarly world is the identification of the bishops and saints depicted above the tomb of St. Achilleos in the *diakonikon*. This issue was first addressed by Petar Miljković-Pepek, who proposed that the bishops whose relics were brought by Samuel are depicted in all three layers of painting: St. Achilleos, St. Diodoros, and St. Oekumenios. Miljković also suggested that, in the third layer, St. Reginos of Skopelos replaced the Archangel Michael.[633] This attribution was later supported by Moutsopoulos, who argued that St. Reginos was depicted in place of St. Diodoros.[634] Although there is no direct evidence in *Skylitzes* that Samuel brought the relics of saints other than St. Achilleos, researchers have referenced later additions to *Skylitzes* by Michael of Devol. These additions mention that St. Diodoros, Bishop of Trikke, and St. Reginos, Bishop of Skopelos, were said to have participated alongside St. Achilleos in the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great.[635]

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629 *Miljković-Pepek*, Les fresques, 1196–1198; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 211–227.

630 *Sisiou*, Oi palaioteres apeikoniseis tōn agiōn Kyrillou kai Methodiou, 65–66; *Zaharova – Maľceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 188–189.

631 *Miljković-Pepek*, Les fresques, 1196–1198; *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 224–230.

632 *Miljković-Pepek*, Les fresques, 1196–1198.

633 Ibid., 1188–1198.

634 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 205–213.

635 *Prokić*, Die Zusätze in der Handschrift des Johannes Skylitzes; *Ferluga*, John Skylitzes, 163–170; *Mullett*, Theophylact of Ohrid, 238; *Tăpkova-Zaimova,* Bulgarians by Birth, 107–109.





Fig. 59. Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, St. Cyril, with St. Methodios?, The Archeological museum in Florina

Fig. 60. Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, St. Nestor and St. Demetrios, The Archeological museum in Florina

In a later study, Pepek revised the identification of the saints above the tomb. He proposed that the figures represent Slavic saints across all three layers, starting with the Slavic apostle Andrew or Urvan, followed by Cyril and Methodios (or possibly Clement in place of Methodios), and finally St. Achilleos. According to Pepek, during the time of Archbishop Theophylact (on the third layer), a change occurred, and four figures of Orthodox prelates were painted, along with a fifth figure in monk's attire. He suggested that on the south wall, Sts. Cyril and Methodios were depicted, with St. Clement and St. Naum next to them. St. Naum was the only one dressed in monastic attire. St. Achilleos was painted in place of the Archangel Michael.[636]

A recent identification of the saints above the tomb has been put forward by Stavros Gouloulis. He suggests that St. Achilleos is depicted in the center, with two other bishops – Oecumenios of Trikke and St. Reginos – shown to the west. To the east of St. Achilleos, Gouloulis identifies St. Tryphon, based on a plant depicted at his feet, and next to him, a warrior saint, whom he believes is most likely St. Nicholas Neos of Vounaina. Additionally, he posits that the Archangels Gabriel and Michael are depicted on the east and west walls, respectively.[637] Undoubtedly, the identification of the saint on the south wall of the *diakonikon* remains an open question and will likely be the subject of further scholarly studies.

636 *Miljkovik-Pepek,* Najstarite svetitelski kultovi vo Makedonija, 23–25, 31; *Miljković-Pepek*, Quatre saints non identifiés de Kurbinovo, 389–402; *Grozdanov,* Ahil Lariski, 271–304.

637 *Gouloulēs*, Oikodomikes kai eikonographikes paratērēseis ston Agio Achillio Prespas, 301–320. The Legend of Saint Tryphon tells the story of Samuel's invasion of Dalmatia, during which he obtained the saint's relics. It was most likely originally written in Latin around the year 1000 and survives in an Italian translation found in a manuscript from 1466. For the source of the Legend, see *Gelsich*, Dalla Legenda de misser San Tryphon, 84–85.

The most significant sculpture found in the Church of St. Achilleos in Prespa is undoubtedly the aforementioned plaque from the saint's grave in the *diakonikon*. The stylistic features of this monument are marked by large, simplified figures with minimal detail, and a planar, linear, and schematic approach to form. This style was particularly relevant around the year 1000, during the period of Samuel's rule.[638] A notable analogy for this sculpture can be found in Stara Zagora, where a group of six plaques and three capitals with highly stylized animal images were discovered. These plaques and capitals feature animal motifs that stand out against an otherwise empty background. Among these unusual depictions are a lioness with a lion cub, a double-headed eagle with heads emerging from a common neck (an archaic and orientalizing motif), and, on the capitals, an elephant attacked by a griffin and a fox stalking a rooster.[639]

The similarities between the plaque from Prespa and those from Stara Zagora suggest that the sculptures date to the 10th and early 11th centuries. This type of decoration appears to have been quite popular in the Greek and Asia Minor provinces, where it was likely reintroduced with the influence of Arab culture. The depiction of camels is rare in Byzantine art of this period, and it is likely that the inspiration for such representations came from earlier monuments of antiquity, particularly from the time of Emperor Justinian I in the 6th century, or possibly from Byzantine manuscripts.[640]

Spolia, in the form of marble slabs and columns, were used in the construction and decoration of the basilica.[641] In addition to these, parapet slabs from the former iconostasis, adorned with relief decorations of free-standing crosses and floral motifs, were also found. The best-preserved altar slab closely resembles one found in the Church of Panagia Perivleptou in Politikon, Euboea from the 11th century. The composition of a Latin cross with strongly widening arms beneath arches and quatrefoils inscribed in squares – both in terms of individual motifs and their overall arrangement – suggests a possible direct connection with Panagia Perivleptou (Fig. 61).[642]

A distinctive motif in the sculpture of St. Achilleos in Prespa is a stylized tree. The shape of these trees is unique in Byzantine art and does not have exact parallels, suggesting the involvement of a local workshop, working in collaboration with traveling craftsmen. Such trees are found on the fragment of the half-column with an octagonal pillar, as well as on the plaque from St. Achilleos' grave.[643] Additionally, plaster fragments were discovered, probably from the window decorations. The use of stucco in

638 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 248–262; *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 235–236.

639 *Milanova,* Skulpturnata ukrasa na bazilikata, 717–741; *Jankov*, Srednovekovnite kamenni relefi, 85–88; *Vaklinov,* Formirane na starobŭlgarskata kultura, 236–237; *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 215–219; *Milanova,* Kamennata plastika, 203–227, 207–208; *Milanova*, Sjužet't lŭvsko semejstvo ot starozagorskite skulptirani ploči, 479–490.

640 *Milanova,* Skulpturnata ukrasa na bazilikata, 725–726.

641 *Moutsopoulos,* Ē basilikē tou Agiou Achilleiou stēn Prespa, 249–250; *Milanova,* Skulpturnata ukrasa na bazilikata, 722–723.

642 *Milanova,* Skulpturnata ukrasa na bazilikata 722–723; *Vanderheyde*, La sculpture architecturale, 142–143.

643 *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 236; *Milanova,* Skulpturnata ukrasa na bazilikata, 723–724.

Byzantine art is rare, and was more commonly found in early Byzantium, where it was likely influenced by Arab art during the Umayyad period. For much of the sculptural decoration, it is unclear whether it dates to the time of Samuel or belongs to the renovation of the first half of the 11th century, contemporaneous with the work done on Hagia Sophia in Ohrid. Unlike the sculpture in Preslav, the decorative sculptures in Prespa lack the plasticity and sculpted cornices. The sculpture from Prespa reflects the spirit and technical trends of the period, fitting within a broader stylistic movement that was not foreign to Byzantine art, particularly in the Greek territories, but found its fullest expression in the peripheral and contact areas, both to the East and the West.[644]

The remains of the Church of the Holy Apostles are located on the southern slope of the hill on the islet of St. Achilleos, south of the modern village. The church survives only at the foundation level. The presence of Late Antique architectural elements, such as fluted columns, column bases, and ancient inscriptions, suggests that the church may have been built on the site of an earlier sanctuary. Unfortunately, insufficient portions of the church's ground plan have survived, making it difficult to reconstruct its original shape. According to Stylianos Pelekanides, who based his reconstruction on the plan of the Taxiarches Metropoleos Church in Kastoria, the Holy Apostles Church was a small three-aisled basilica with three semicircular apses, both externally and internally (Fig. 62).[645] The church consisted of an almost square naos, measuring 5.95 by 5.92 meters, a tripartite sanctuary, and a narthex with dimensions of 1.70 by 5.65 meters. The basilica nave was separated from the side aisles by quadruple arcade, supported by two massive piers and one column positioned between them. The building was entirely vaulted. Similar to the Church of St. Achilleos, the floor was covered with marble slabs that likely originated from the ancient necropolis. In terms of design and structure, the Holy Apostles shares similarities with three small basilicas built during the 10th and 11th centuries in nearby Kastoria: Taxiarches Metropoleos, Hagios Stephanos, and Hagioi Anargyroi. The church may be dated to the late 10th or early 11th century.[646]

The Church of St. Germanos is located on the slopes of Mount Baba, near Lake Prespa in Aegean Macedonia (Greece).[647] The church follows the plan of an inscribed cross with a dome (Fig. 63). On the west side, it is completed by a narthex. The interior measures approximately 5.5 by 9 meters. The dome is supported by a cylindrical drum and rests on four free-standing pillars. On the east side, the church features three apses, semi-cylindrical both inside and out. Externally, the apses extend to the height of the roof cornice, a feature comparable to those found in the churches of St. John the Baptist in Nessebar and Zemen Monastery (Fig. 64).[648] The church does not have

644 *Milanova,* Skulpturnata ukrasa na bazilikata, 728–730.

645 *Pelekanides,* Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 79–84.

646 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tou Nomou Flōrinas, 46–48; *Moutsopoulos*, Ē anaskaphē, 329–398; *Moutsopoulos*, The Churches, 11; *Miljković-Pepek*, L'architecture, 487; *Pelekanides*, Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 79–84.

647 *Miljukov*, Hristianskie drevnosti, 36–40; *Ivanov*, Samuilovata stolica v Prŭespa, 55–80; *Zloković*, Stare crkve, 115–151.

648 *Čilingirov*, Cŭrkvata, 10–11; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 332–334; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 182.



Fig. 61.
Little Prespa Lake,
Church of
St. Achilleos,
altar slab,
The Archeological
museum in
Florina

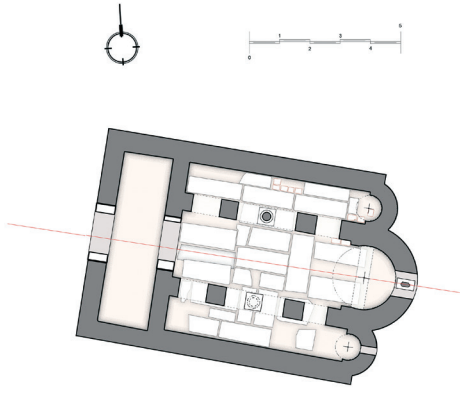


Fig. 62. Little Prespa Lake,
Church of the Holy Apostles, plan

pre-apsidal space thus this building represents a rare architectural type in the First Bulgarian Empire: the so-called "provincial variant" of the inscribed cross with a dome on four pillars. As noted above, this church type was most widespread during the First Bulgarian Empire in Preslav, where it evolved from monastic architecture.[649]

649 *Dončeva*, Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 12–23; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 93–94, *Sōtēriou*, Oi meta troulloy tēs metabatikēs epochēs, 97; *Čilingirov*, Cŭrkvata, 128.

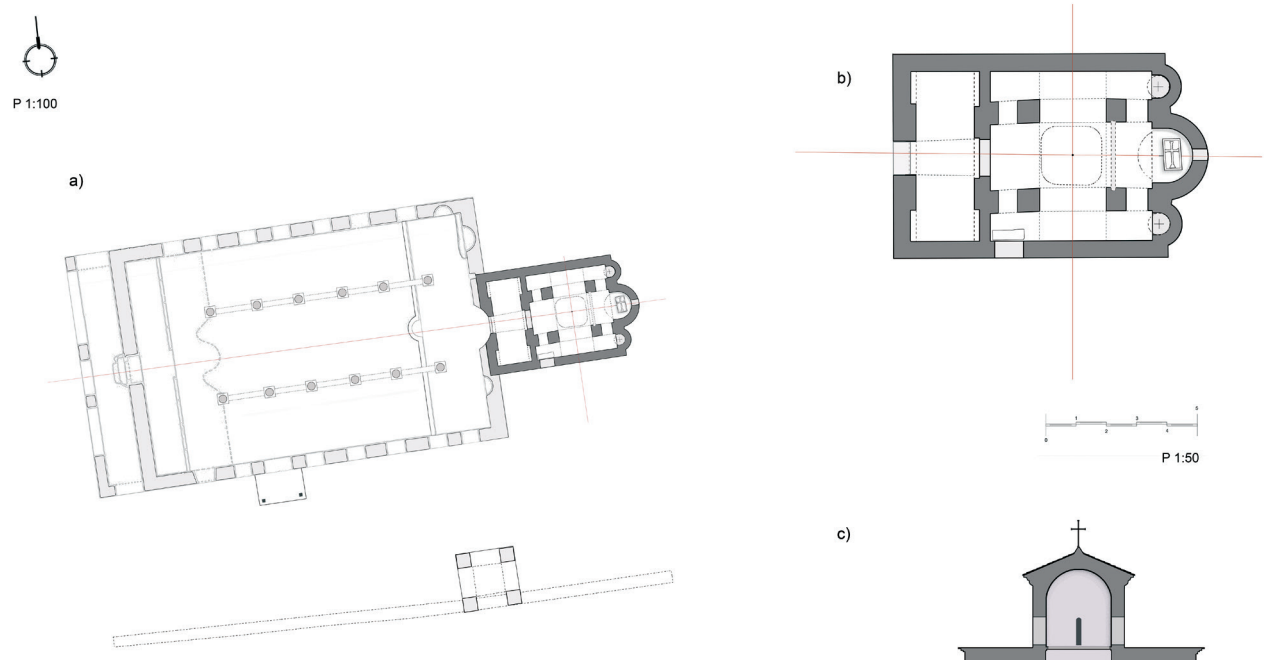


Fig. 63. German, Church of St. Germanos, plan

Fig. 64. German, Church of St. Germanos, view from the east



The main entrance was located on the west side, leading into the narthex of the church. Today, it serves as the connection between the old church and the new one, which was built in 1882. There was another entrance on the south side, which was later walled up. A smaller entrance was likely constructed in its place after the new church was built on the west side. In the apsidal niche, on the altar of the church, a rectangular slab of light gray limestone featuring a depiction of a Latin cross was placed. This slab is from the original altar partition, the grooves of which are still visible on the northeastern pillar. The niche of the *prothesis* is deep, slightly elongated in projection, while the *diakonikon* niche was later sealed off, probably in the second third of the 11th century.[650] The narthex is vaulted with a semicircular arch, where a transverse vault intersects with a longitudinal vault running along the main axis of the church. Notably, the narthex contains four vaulted blind niches on its eastern and western inner walls.[651] These niches are functionally connected to cemetery churches and chapels, with close parallels found in Church No. 4 at Selište near Preslav. Similar niches can also be found in the churches of Patleina and Vinica, located in the Preslav area and dating to the mid-10th century. In these churches, the niches are deeper and take on the shape of shells.[652] Various theories have been proposed regarding the origin and function of these niches, but their purely decorative function should be ruled out.[653]

The church has undergone several renovations over the centuries, with only minor alterations. The structure is built using a combination of brick and stone in the *opus mixtum* technique, while parts of the dome are constructed with alternating rows of stone and brick in the *cloisonnée* technique. The closest parallel to this dome – not only in its external shape and decoration, but also in its internal, almost square form with rounded ends – is found in the Koubelidiki. Similar features can also be seen in the side chapels of the Basilica of St. Achilleos in Prespa. This has led to the belief that the church was likely built by craftsmen from Kastoria in the late 10th or early 11th century.[654]

During the restoration of the church in 1998, decorative elements on the façade, such as dogtooth motifs, double archivolts, and K-shaped brick decorations, were discovered in their entirety. These findings support the view that the church was constructed at the beginning of the 11th century.[655] Additionally, based on typological features and

650 *Stylianos Pelekanides* disputes the existence of the *diakonikon* niche, while Moutsopoulos rightly points to traces in the wall that indicate its original presence, suggesting that it was of the same dimensions as the *prothesis* niche, *Pelekanides*, Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 13; *Mutsopulos,* Byzantinische und nachbyzantinische Baudenkmäler, 34; *Čilingirov*, Cŭrkvata, 126.

651 *Pelekanides*, Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 14.

652 *Bojadžiev,* Cŭrkva № 4, 10–15; *Čaneva-Dečevska,* Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 92–96, 117–122; *Bojadžiev,* Cŭrkvata v Patlejna, 23–33; *Bojadžiev,* Otnovo po vŭprosa za cŭrkvata, 91–101; *Dončeva*, Krŭstokupolnite cŭrkvi, 224–235; *Nikolova,* Pravoslavnite cŭrkvi, 109.

653 *Čilingirov*, Cŭrkvata, 121–122; *Mavrodinova*, Kultura i izkustvo, 82.

654 *Mutsopulos*, Byzantinische und nachbyzantinische Baudenkmäler, 39–40; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 183.

655 *Paissidou,* Askētario Metamorphōseōs stē Megalē Prespa,122–125. However, there are varying opinions regarding the type and dating of the church, with estimates ranging from 993 to 1006. Andrey Protich argues that the church was built in 993 and painted in 1006, which would coincide with the reign of the Bulgarian



Fig. 65.
German,
Church of
St. Germanos,
unidentified saint,
narthex,
east wall niche



Fig. 66.
German,
Church
of St. Germanos,
niche above
the south entrance,
Germanos Patriarch
of Constantinople

the inscription from 1743 located above the narthex door on the inner western wall, as well as the remnants of the first layer of paintings, the church is generally dated to the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century. The Bulgarian Patriarch Germanos I (ca. 972 – ca. 990), who served during the reign of Samuel, is thought to have been a possible donor, as indicated by the dedication of the church. It is believed that he built the church in honor of his patron and namesake, the Patriarch of Constantinople,

Patriarch Germanos, whose seat was in Prespa at the time, *Protič,* Sŭštnost' i razvitie na bŭlgarskata cŭrkovna arhitektura, 186–205. Nikola Mavrodinov accepts his opinion, *Mavrodinov,* Starobŭlgarskoto izkustvo, 268–269.

Germanos (715–730).[656] In the northwestern part of the nave, there is a wooden structure believed to be the tomb of Bulgarian Patriarch Germanos.[657]

Fragments of the first layer of paintings have been preserved in the altar and narthex of the church. In the altar area, there are fragments depicting the *sticharia* of the Church Fathers, while in the narthex, frontal depictions of two unidentified saints are preserved in niches on the eastern and western walls (Fig. 65).[658] Though there are varying opinions on the dating, stylistic characteristics suggest that the paintings are from the early early to mid 11th century.[659] Above the walled southern entrance on the outer wall, there is an image of the church's patron saint, St. Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople (Fig. 66). This painting is generally dated to the early 12th or the early 13th century.[660] There is, however, a possibility that the image of Patriarch Germanos was repainted in the 18th century.

The Church of St. Germanos in Prespa, built around the turn of the 10th to the 11th century with the inscribed cross plan and a dome, marks a significant moment in the spread and development of this architectural typology. This typology would later become a defining feature of the sacral architecture of the Archbishopric of Ohrid in the 11th century and beyond.

The bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church and their monuments

The establishment of the seat of the Bulgarian Church in the Cathedral of St. Achilleos on Lake Prespa around 986 marked the final stage in the relocation of its center, following the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria in 971.[661] Two written sources – Basil II's second Ohrid charter and the so-called "Du Cange Catalogue" of Bulgarian archbishops – inform us that the Bulgarian primates moved from Dristra to Serdica, then from Vodena/Edessa to Moglena, Prespa, and ultimately Ohrid (Map 1, vol. I, 299).[662] These accounts confirm the continuity of the Bulgarian Church of the First Bulgarian Empire, albeit under new circumstances within the restored Bulgarian state under Samuel and his successors.

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656 An inscription in Greek from 1743 indicates that the church was fully painted at that time. The inscription states that the church was built during the time of St. Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople, and that it was painted in 1006. On the inscription and its interpretation, see *Angelidi,* Hagios Germanos, 1147–1165. Krastyo Miyatev suggests that the church was built either by Samuel or by the Bulgarian Patriarch Germanos in 1006, *Mijatev,* Arhitektura, 108–109.

657 *Paissidou,* Askētario Metamorphōseōs stē Megalē Prespa, 124–125; *Moutsopoulos*, Gegonota tou 9ου–10ου aiōna kai ē epanastasē tōn Komētopoulōn, 31–36.

658 *Pelekanides*, Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 48–50.

659 For more on the painting dates, see *Pelekanides*, Byzantina kai Metabyzantina, 48–50; *Čilingirov*, Cŭrkvata, 201–207.

660 On the identification of the saint and dating, *Čilingirov*, Cŭrkvata, 203–204; *Angelidi,* Hagios Germanos, 1147–1165.

661 For a chronology of the transfers of the seat of the Bulgarian Church and its primate, see *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 154–157, with sources and further bibliography. See also *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 803–804.

662 For Basil II's second Ohrid charter, see *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44.33–45.3. For Du Cange Catalogue, see *Ivanov,* Bŭlgarski starini, 566.

The structure and territorial extent of the Bulgarian Church in Samuel's realm are well known, primarily thanks to two key testimonies. The main apse of St. Achilleos on Lake Prespa preserves a monumental list of eighteen suffragan sees under the Bulgarian archbishop, of which only nine or eleven can be identified (Fig. 1–4, vol. I, 307, 309, 315–316).[663] These inscriptions, together with the painted arches above them, represent a unique example within the medieval Christian tradition of cathedral church decoration. As such, they should be seen as reflecting the intention to highlight the territorial extent of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church at the turn of the 10th to the 11th century. The second source, Basil II's first Ohrid charter, further complements the information provided by the fresco inscriptions from Prespa.[664] As established in scholarship, the lists of bishoprics in the first Ohrid charter reflect the state of the episcopal structure in the territory of the Bulgarian Empire between 1014 and 1018 (Map 2, Fig. 5, vol. I, 304, 317). As we shall see below, the Bulgarian Church, compelled by Byzantine conquests, had to restrict its jurisdiction to the bishoprics of the western Bulgarian lands.

When correlated with historical sources, the monuments offer a more nuanced perspective on the dynamics of religious life within the geographical and temporal framework of the Bulgarian church organization. Among the bishoprics discernible in the monumental list in St. Achilleos at Prespa – Skopje (?), Serdica, Vodena (Ἔδεσσα), Kastoria (?), Devol (Σελασφόρος),[665] Velbăžd, Herakleia, Berroia,[666] Glavinitza (Κεφαλονία), Vidin,[667] and Prizdriana (?) – archaeological, architectural, and artistic evidence is preserved for Vodena, Kastoria (?),[668] Velbăžd, Herakleia, Glavinitza,[669] and Prizdriana (?). While corresponding to the list of bishoprics from Prespa, the first Ohrid charter additionally includes the bishoprics of Strumica, Morovizd, Niš, Braničevo, Belgrade, Sirmium, Prizren, Lipljan, and Servia. Except for Niš,[670] and

663 For these inscriptions as historical sources, see the discussion in the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 305–318.

664 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.12–43.35.

665 Nothing is known about the monuments in the Bishopric of Devol during Samuel's reign. This period likely witnessed a shift of the episcopal center toward Kastoria. Cf. *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 814.

666 Berroia was under Bulgarian control from 986 or 989 until 1000/1001. The bishopric was incorporated into the Archbishopric of Ohrid but was later reintegrated into the Metropolitanate of Thessalonike after Basil's death. See *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 856. The Old Metropolis of Berroia is the earliest preserved church in the town. Three phases of construction have been identified, dating from the late 11th to the late 13th century, following the original church which might have originated in the 7th–8th century, as suggested by *Skiadaresēs,* Palia mētropolē, 157–201. See also *Mal'ceva – Freze,* Baziliki, 184–189, fig. 1a.

667 The medieval fortress of Vidin was built atop the remains of ancient Bononia during the First Bulgarian Empire in the 9th–10th century. It remained under Bulgarian control from 976 until 1002, corresponding to the second phase of its construction. Within the fortress, only the remains of a single church of uncertain date have been discovered. For historical references to Vidin, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 805–806; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 866. For archaeological research on the fortress of Vidin and the medieval church within it, see *Mihajlov*, Arheologičeski proučvanija, 1–8; *Vŭlov,* Srednovekovna čerkva, 19–20; *Barakov,* Bdin, 623–637.

668 The monuments of Kastoria are discussed in a separate section of this chapter. See below 259–271.

669 For the 10th-century monuments of Glavinitza, see above 110.

670 There is no information about the Bishopric of Niš until 1018: *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 811. In this context, the Church of St. Prokopios in Prokuplje is noteworthy, though it remains insufficiently studied and insecurely dated. Three phases of construction and many later additions have been identified. Of the original

Belgrade, all these bishoprics preserve remains of monuments that merit consideration within the framework of Samuel's state and church.[671]

Vodena/Moglena

Vodena (Edessa) served as the temporary seat of the Bulgarian primate between 971 and 986 and remained the episcopal center within Samuel's realm until its capture by the Byzantine emperor in 1001/1002.[672] Consequently, the bishop's see was likely relocated to Moglena, another strongly fortified town within the same diocese, which remained an important Bulgarian stronghold until 1015 and continued to function as a bishop's see within the Archbishopric of Ohrid (Map 1, vol. I, 299; Map 1, vol. II, 13).[673] At that time, the bishopric, which originated from the Byzantine urban episcopate of Edessa, encompassed a vast area surrounding the mountain massifs of Nidža and Kožuf and extended to the Vardar River in the northeast.[674]

The Early and Middle Byzantine architectural heritage of Vodena was lost to the devastating earthquake and flood that struck the city in 1395/96.[675] Only the architectural design of the Old Metropolis, a three-aisled basilica with an elevated central nave and narthex dating to the last decade of the 14th century, suggests the possibility that it was built upon the foundations of a Middle Byzantine structure.[676]

The remains of the fortress of Moglena (modern village of Chrysi), including the foundations of two churches – a three-aisled basilica within the fortress and a free-cross church outside it – have been archaeologically studied. All structures have been dated to the Middle Byzantine period, while the possibility of attributing their origin to either Bulgarian or Byzantine rule will be considered below.[677] To these, two

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building, only the perimeter walls, constructed of rubble stone with sparse use of brick, have been preserved. Its second phase involved the construction of a three-aisled, piered basilica with a tripartite sanctuary, dated to the 11th century based on comparable examples from the central Balkans. Consequently, the first phase of construction is assumed to have occurred in the late 10th to early 11th century: *Korać*, O prirodi obnove, 212; *Milošević – Đurić*, Crkva Sv. Prokopija, 95–99, fig. 16–21; *Špehar,* Centralni Balkan, 140–141. Only one fresco fragment, which roughly imitates marble inlay, corresponds to the first phase of construction, while the remaining two fragments are dated to the early decades of the 13th and 17th centuries: *Vojvodić*, Ostaci starijeg slikarstva, 211–225.

671 The churches within the fortresses of Veliki Gradac (Braničevo) and Servia are discussed in a separate section of this chapter. See below 244–245, 251–253.

672 For Vodena as an episcopal see and fortress of Samuel's Bulgaria, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 796, 799, 808–809; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 853–855. See also the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 328–333.

673 For Moglena as an episcopal see and fortress of Samuel's Bulgaria, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 809, 814; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 855. See also the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 328–333.

674 For the territorial jurisdiction of the bishop of Moglena within the Archbishopric of Ohrid, see the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 8.

675 The only testimony to the population and daily life of Vodena in the 10th and 11th centuries is the recently excavated cemetery in the northwestern part of the modern city. See *Paisidou,* Edessa, 165–186. See also *Evangelatou-Notara*, Seismoi sto Byzantio, 93–94.

676 For the architecture and painted decoration of the Old Metropolis, see *Moutsopoulos*, Oi ekklēsies tou nomou Pellēs, 16–17; *Tsigaridas*, Schetika me tēn onomasia tēs Palias Mētropoleōs, 257–261; *Tsigaridas,* Toichographies tēs periodou tōn Palaiologōn, 117–127.

677 See below 234–236.

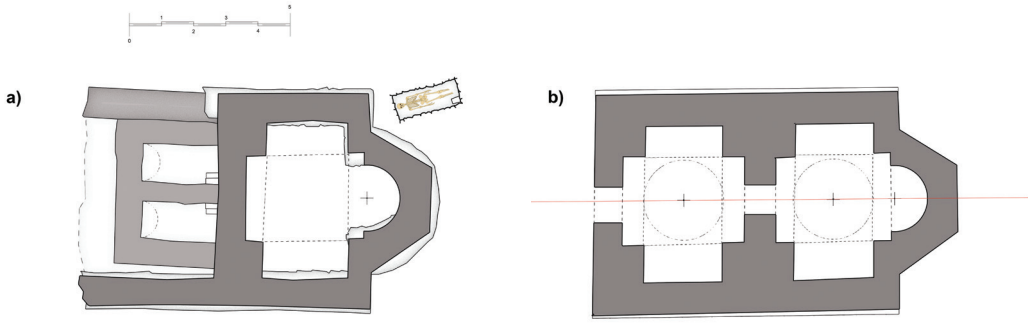


Fig. 67. Meliti, Church of St. George, plan

additional fortresses in the Florina area should be added –Setena and Petrisk – which contain remains of church buildings and are associated in historical sources with Samuel and his successors.[678] One more church within the territory of the Bishopric of Vodena/Moglena deserves brief special mention. The noteworthy discovery of the excavators in 1990s was the Church of St. George at the site Ασπροκκλησιά (Bela Crkva), near the Late Antique settlement in Meliti (Ovčarani), at the foot of Kajmakčalan, 18 km from Florina (Fig. 67).[679] In plan, it featured an atrophied Greek cross inscribed within a square, terminating in a three-sided apse. The cross-domed unit, measuring 2.75 by 2.60 meters, opens into the narthex, which was founded over Christian tombs. The latter has been only hypothetically reconstructed as mirroring the naos. The masonry consists of irregular stone bonded with mortar, interspersed with irregular brick courses, with some sections of the walls featuring vertically laid bricks. It was likely built as a funerary chapel. Several tombs have been excavated around the main apse. Nikolaos Moutsopoulos drew our attention to the similarities between St. George in Meliti and a group of churches excavated in Preslav, classified as small funerary buildings with a cross inscribed within a square naos and a narthex.[680] According to the Greek scholar, the construction of the tiny church in Meliti dates to the early 10th century. In addition to the mentioned examples, a group of centrally planned churches from Bregalnica (the Kočani Valley, discussed above), characterized by a domed cruciform main unit, is noteworthy as comparanda. They represent two closely related types: free-cross churches (Teranci, Žiganci, and Gradište – Morovizd, Fig. 26) and those with a compact inscribed-cross plan (St. George in Gornji Kozjak and Čardaklija, Fig. 28).[681] Like St. George in Meliti, they are small-scale structures that served as cemetery or funerary churches. Drawing on comparisons with the churches of Bregalnica, St. George in Meliti is unlikely to date from the early 10th century; rather, it most likely belongs to the second half of 10th century, or even the early 11th century. As evidenced by examples across the central Balkans, both Bulgarians and Byzantines

678 See below 236–239.

679 *Moutsopoulos*, O Agios Geōrgios Melitēs, 141–162; *Petkos*, Anaskaphē mesobyzantinou naou, 181–189; *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tou Nomou Flōrinas, 215–217, fig. 731–735.

680 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tou Nomou Flōrinas, 216 with comparable examples from later date. For the churches in Preslav, see *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 101–105, fig. 65–68, 71. Cf. *Petkos*, Anaskaphē mesobyzantinou naou, 181–189.

681 See above 124–129.

employed the same architectural types, which sometimes makes it difficult to determine whether specific monuments were the result of construction activity within the First Bulgarian Empire, Samuel's state, or the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Nevertheless, given the importance of the region during the reign of Samuel and his successors, it seems plausible to attribute the construction of St. George in Meliti to that period.

Velbăžd

During Samuel's reign, the organization of the Bulgarian Church underwent certain changes. One such change was the separation of Velbăžd from Serdica as a newly independent bishopric. Its establishment may have been part of Tzimiskes' reforms of state and ecclesiastical administration in the conquered territories of the Bulgarian Empire, or it may have been created under Samuel after 976.[682] Relevant to the territorial scope of the Bishopric of Velbăžd between 976 and 1018 is the information provided in Basil II's first Ohrid charter (1019), which lists the city of Velbăžd along with Suteska, Germania, Terimer, Stob, Lower Suteska, and Razlog (Map 1, vol. II, 13).[683]

There is no evidence of major construction activity within the territory of the Bishopric of Velbăžd.[684] Even the city of Velbăžd itself is never mentioned as an important urban center or military stronghold in accounts of the Bulgarian-Byzantine struggle during the reign of Samuel and his successors.[685]

The seat of the Bishop of Velbăžd remains unidentified, but it may have been located either within the fortress on Hisarlaka Hill or in the lower city.[686] The medieval layers of the settlement at several sites in the area of present-day Kyustendil (Velbăžd) have been dated from the second half of the 9th century through the late 12th-early 13th century, based on residential structures and ceramics.[687] Hisarlaka Fortress is a Late Antique and medieval stronghold situated 2 kilometers southeast of Kyustendil.[688] It preserves the remains of an Early Byzantine three-aisled basilica, measuring 25 meters in length, including the apse. The surviving foundations of partition walls between the columns clearly suggest subsequent reconstruction; however, the lack of a secure

682 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 806.

683 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.7–10. For the territorial scope of the Bishopric of Velbăžd, see *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 86–88; *Mitov*, Kjustendil i Kjustendilsko, 236–237. See also the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 8.

684 Cf. *Georgieva M. – Georgieva D.*, Manastiri ot teritorijata, 37 who briefly mention that the remains of a monastery have been surveyed at St. Dimitar near the village of Ključ, which was part of the fortified defensive network controlling the Kleidion Pass under Samuel.

685 For the historical survey of Velbăžd and its surroundings in the 11th century, see *Mitov*, Kjustendil i Kjustendilsko, 219–259.

686 Medieval Velbăžd inherited Late Antique Pautalia not only in terms of topography but also by adopting its urban layout. The acropolis on Hisarlaka and the fortified area in the plain became, respectively, the citadel and the lower town of the medieval Velbăžd. See *Ruseva-Slokoska*, Pautalija; *Slokoska et al.*, Pautalija (Pautalia), 251–266.

687 *Spasov*, Osnovni rezultati, 137–145; *Stefanova Grozdanova*, Naselenieto na Južna Bŭlgarija, 80–81.

688 *Gočeva*, Krepost, 233–254; *Stajkova-Aleksandrova – Grozdanov*, Arheologičesko nabljudenije, 757–760.

stratigraphic context hinders the establishment of the upper chronological limit for the church's duration.[689] Hisarlaka's role as an episcopal chancery is clearly attested in later sigillographic evidence, with the seals of its bishops known from the late 11th and 12th centuries.[690] In the absence of contemporary evidence, the question remains whether the fortress acquired its ecclesiastical status during the reign of Samuel.

Evidence for churches and monasteries in the Bishopric of Velbăžd is scarce, yet noteworthy for their geographical distribution. The archaeological excavations conducted in the 1990s revealed the long history of construction at the Šipotsko site in the town of Bansko, located in the valley of Upper Mesta River, 5 km from Razlog.[691] On a terrace at an altitude of nearly 1000 meters, an Early Christian church was built by the mid-4th century on the site of a previously occupied Thracian settlement. It was a single-aisled, elongated structure measuring 19 by 4.40 meters, with a chapel added on its northern side.[692] At the end of the 6th century, the church was destroyed by fire. From the late 6th to the 10th century, a medieval village emerged and flourished on the site, with building material from the Early Christian church repurposed for house construction. By the end of the 10th century, the village was abandoned. A small church was then built over the sanctuary area of the Early Christian church, using the same rough stones but now bonded with mortar mixed with crushed brick. The church follows a single-aisled, single-apsed plan, featuring a well-defined western entrance but lacking a narthex. It measures 5.60 by 2.90 meters (Fig. 68). Surrounding the church is an extensive necropolis, from which 150 graves have been excavated, dating from the late 10th to the 13th century. The presence of this large burial ground strongly suggests that the church functioned as a cemetery church, its existence closely linked to the necropolis.[693]

The modest church excavated in Bansko is among the rare pieces of evidence shedding light on the churches used by the local population. It reflects a widespread practice in Bulgaria – rather than constructing *ex nuovo* buildings, older churches were reused and partially renewed.

689 The numismatic material includes coins minted from the late 2nd century to the 6th century, followed by a long gap, after which Byzantine scyphate coins from the 12th–13th centuries appear. See *Grozdanov – Grozdanova,* Rezultati, 498–499.

690 Two seals were found in the Hisarlaka fortress: the first is dated to the end of the 11th century or beginning of the 12th and belonged to unidentified bishop of Velbăžd; the second is dated to the second half of the 12th century and names John, a Bishop of Velbăžd. See *Jordanov*, Corpus, 861, n. 2844; 555. n. 1680.

691 *Melamed*, Proučvanija na ranohristijanskata bazilika, 118; *Idem*, Proučvanija na srednovekovnata cŭrkva, 152; *Idem*, Rannohristijanskata bazilika, srednovekovno selo, cŭrkva i nekropol, 701–704.

692 *Melamed*, Rannohristijanskata bazilika, srednovekovno selo, cŭrkva i nekropol, 701–702, fig. 1; *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 361, fig. 5.

693 *Melamed*, Rannohristijanskata bazilika, srednovekovno selo, cŭrkva i nekropol, 702–704, fig. 1; *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 362–363, fig. 5, 6.

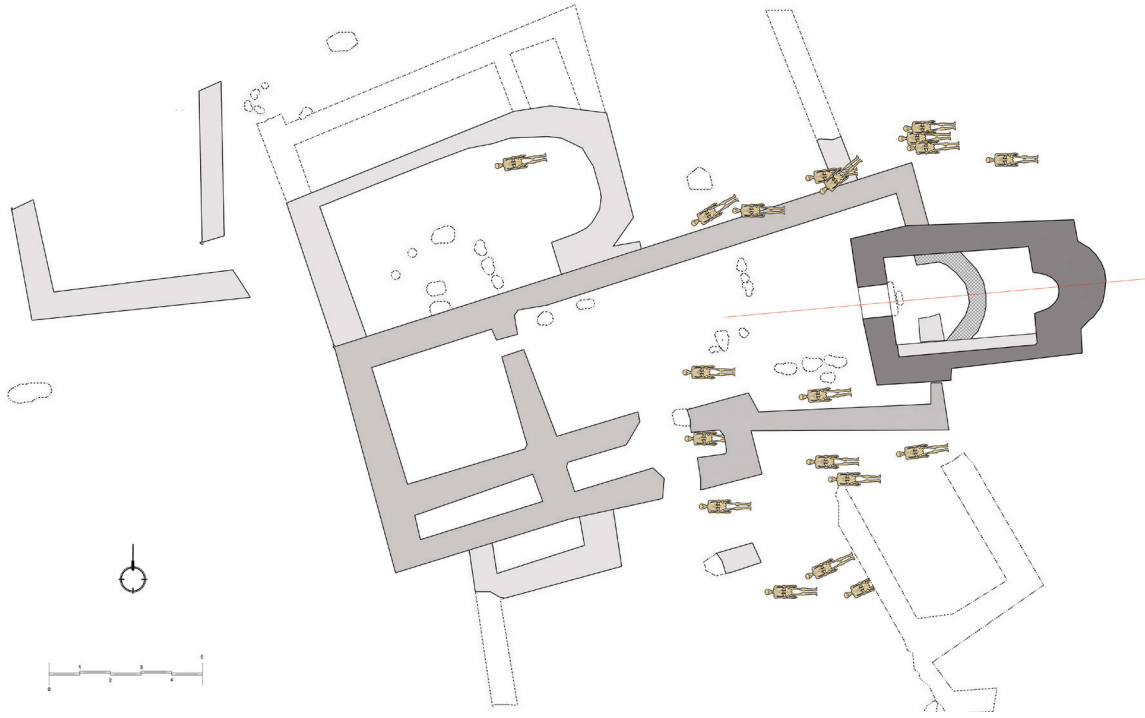


Fig. 68. Bansko, Church at the Šipotsko site, plan showing earlier construction phases

Herakleia

The Bishopric of Herakleia was likely seated near Prilep before its relocation to the vicinity of Bitola, as suggested by epigraphic, historical, and material evidence.[694] A column bearing a Slavic inscription from 996, commemorating the death of Bishop Andrew from the Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael in Varoš near Prilep, warrants consideration of Prilep or its immediate vicinity as the location of the episcopal seat. Conversely, the inscription from Prespa, dated between 989 and 1002, points to a direct connection between this episcopal see and the ancient city of Herakleia Lynkestis. The information provided by these sources allows for two possible interpretations. In the first, while the bishop continued to reside in Prilep until 996, he was at least nominally linked to Herakleia.[695] In the second interpretation, the bishopric had already been transferred to Herakleia or its immediate surroundings by ca. 989, and Bishop Andrew was later buried at the site of his former episcopal seat.

Evidence for building activity within the Bishopric of Herakleia is scarce. The absence of masonry architecture in Prilep prior to the 12th century may partly account for this. As noted above, no remains have been identified of a structure that could be associated with the inscription from 996, which commemorates the death of Bishop Andrew. Another noteworthy, albeit rarely discussed, epigraphic source is an Armenian inscription from 1002, discovered beneath the floor of the south annex of the Church of St. Demetrios in Prilep.[696] The inscription states that the construction or renovation of the Monastery of the Holy Apostles was completed in 1002 and

694 See above 132–133.

695 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 807.

696 *Babić*, Materijalnata kultura, 127, fig. 38.



Fig. 69.
Prilep, Rocky environment of Markovi Kuli

commemorates presbyter Athanasios, "whose memory rests in this desert."[697] Vladimir Mošin allows for the possibility that the mentioned Athanasios may be credited with the renovation of the monastery.[698] The inscription provides significant insight into the spatial setting of the monastery. It was situated at a distance from the settlement, suggesting that it was located in the rocky environment of Markovi Kuli, an area conducive to various forms of cave monasteries (Fig. 69).[699] The Church of the Holy Apostles was clearly constructed using perishable building materials, which is why no traces of this structure have been archaeologically recorded.

Similarly, the fortification of Prilep, described in John Skylitzes' *Synopsis of Histories* as one of the key strongholds of Samuel's Empire during the final stage of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war (1014–1018),[700] has been scarcely archaeologically attested.[701] Therefore, the assumption that the old Late Antique fortress was merely repaired during Samuel's time using dry-stone masonry or wooden constructions seems entirely plausible (Fig. 85).[702]

697 For a copy of an Armenian inscription and Macedonian translation, see *Mošin*, Prilepsko-Varoškiot tainstven natpis, 509–513.

698 Ibid., 511.

699 Cf. *Babić*, Materijalnata kultura, 218–222, who hypothesizes that the rocky environment of the Markovi Kuli site (point 52, Svetac) initially housed the wooden dwelling of an unknown Clement's disciple and later a sacred structure, which might be identified with the Monastery of the Holy Apostles, mentioned in the Armenian inscription. *Vasileski,* Srednovekovnite crkvi vo Prilep, 189 considers this assumption unfounded.

700 Scylitzes, 349, 351, 354–355, 357, 363; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 850–853.

701 The repair of the Late Antique defensive wall near Tower 11 is the only small portion attributed to the period of Samuel, see *Atanasoski*, Ušte ednaš za gradežnite fazi, 127, fig. 13, 14, 19.

702 For the medieval phases of construction of the Markovi Kuli fortification, dating from the mid-12th to the mid-14th century, see *Atanasoski*, Srednovekovnata tvrdina Markovi kuli, 227–309; *Idem*, Ušte ednaš za gradežnite fazi, 107–133.

From an archaeological perspective, the see of Herakleia was likely associated with at least three distinct sites situated within Bitola, Herakleia Lynkestis, and their surrounding vicinity.[703] However, excavations at these locations have so far not yielded church structures that can be confidently dated to the period of Samuel and his successors. Only the existing church beneath the Yeni Mosque (Fig. 29–30) appears to have been in use during that time, as the first phase of its construction concluded chronologically with the fall of Samuel's state.[704]

Morovizd and Strumica

It is generally accepted that the period of Samuel witnessed changes in the organization of the old Diocese of Bregalnica – its episcopal see was likely relocated to Morovizd, while Strumica emerged as an independent bishopric.[705] By the final stage of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war, Morovizd had evidently become a significant stronghold in the Bregalnica Valley within Samuel's state. Its inhabitants surrendered the town to Emperor Basil II in 1018,[706] indicating its status as an urban fortification. The earliest historical reference to the bishop of Morovizd appears soon after, in the first Ohrid charter of 1019 (Map 1, vol. II, 13).[707] However, it remains difficult to determine whether Morovizd became an episcopal see during Samuel's reign or under Basil II.[708]

The two sites – Gradište and Crkvište – can be understood to reflect the prosperity of Morovizd during this period (Fig. 70). Gradište is a Late Antique fortified settlement, later renewed in the Middle Ages, located in the southern part of the village of Morovizd, at the foot of Mount Plačkovica, at an altitude of 580 meters. The fortification has an elongated, south-north orientation. Its highest point on the southern side features an acropolis, built atop a rocky outcrop and reinforced with solid defensive walls. North of the acropolis, on a lower terrace, stands a modern church, erected over the foundations of two earlier churches – an Early Byzantine and a medieval one.[709] Beyond this terrace, the lower town extends further north, enclosed by a defensive wall. The fortified settlement at the Gradište site was actively inhabited from the 11th to the 14th century, as indicated by archaeological evidence.[710] Thus, it has been identified with the fortress of Morovizd mentioned in Skylitzes' account.[711]

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703 See below 232–234.

704 See above 133–135.

705 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 809–810 with further bibliography.

706 Scylitzes, 357; *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 117, 128.

707 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.3–6.

708 For different scholarly opinions on this issue, see *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 93–95; *Stanev,* Bregalnica, 550; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 809.

709 For the medieval church, see above 124–127.

710 *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 211–213, fig. 73; *Trajkovski*, Arheološki osvrt, 281; *Atanasova,* Nekolku utvrdeni naselbi, 361–363, plan 6, fig. 4.

711 *Tomoski,* Makedonija niz vekovite, 169–173; *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 211–215.



Fig. 70.
Morovizd, Late Antique and Medieval fortified settlement at the Gradište site, with the layout of the church complex at the Crkvište site, plan

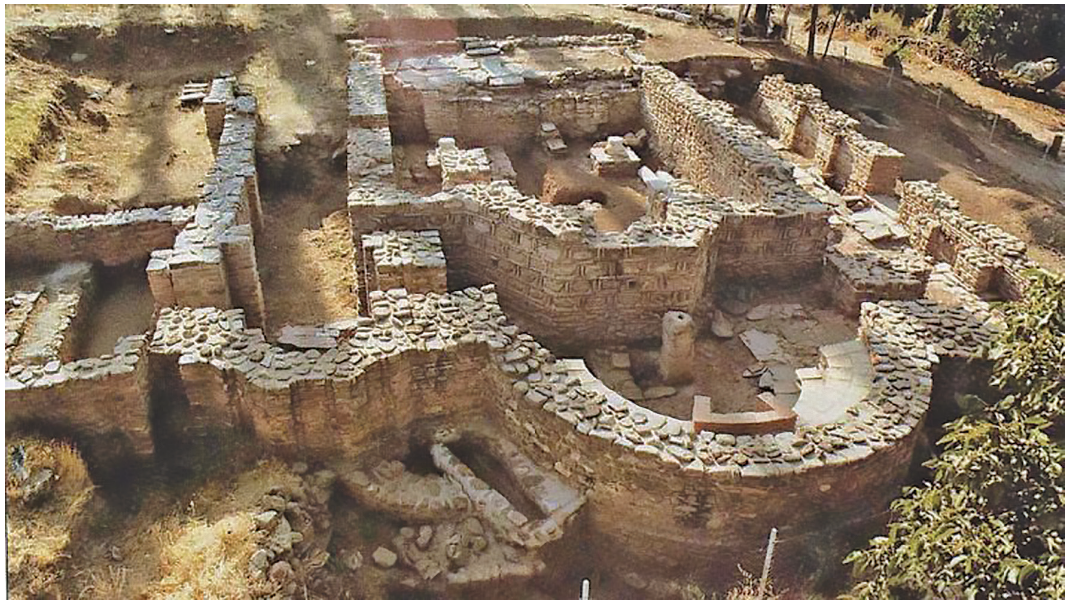


Fig. 71. Morovizd, Crkvište site, complex of four superimposed churches from the Late Antique and Medieval periods

At the foot of Gradište, in the center of the village of Morovizd, lies Crkvište, a complex of four superimposed churches from the Late Antique and medieval periods, extensively researched by archeologist Kiril Trajkovski (Fig. 71).[712] The site preserves an Early Byzantine single-aisled church with a small apsidal annex on its northern side, which housed a piscina and a monumental underground vaulted tomb on its southern side, along with a settlement horizon dating from the 5th to the 7th century (Fig. 72a).[713] The reuse and further development of this Late Antique site illustrate significant aspects of Morovizd's urban and ecclesiastical-administrative continuity into the medieval period. The medieval complex evolved over three centuries through a series of distinct building projects, comprising three superimposed churches. It has been determined that the first medieval church underwent two phases of construction, corresponding chronologically to the 10th and 11th centuries (72b–c). The construction of the third medieval church (Fig. 72d) is linked to changes in the episcopal organization of the Archbishopric of Ohrid and the shifting political landscape in the following centuries. Around 1100, the episcopal see of Morovizd was relocated to Maleševo, while the period after 1204 saw a succession of rulers – Byzantines, Latins, Bulgarians, and ultimately Serbs (Map 2, vol. II, 15).[714] Consequently, the old episcopal see declined, and within the ruinous walls of the former cathedral, a relatively small inscribed-cross church was

712 *Trajkovski,* Istražuvanja vo Morodvis, 133–142; *Idem*, Morodvis, 142; *Idem*, Morobisdon, 176; *Idem*, Ranohristijanska grobnica, 89–94; *Idem*, Grobot 105, 235–246; *Idem*, Arheološki osvrt, 279–287; *Idem*, Pogled vrz srednovekovnata arheologija, 273–280; *Idem*, The medieval necropolis, 207–213; *Idem*, Kultot na moštite, 439–445; *Idem*, Srednovekovnite crkvi, 121–126, 438–442; *Idem*, Episkopijata; *Velova Graorkovska*, Antropološki rezultati, 515–530.

713 *Trajkovski,* Morobisdon, 176; *Idem*, Ranohristijanska grobnica, 89–94; *Idem*, Srednovekovnite crkvi, 121–122; *Idem*, Arheološki osvrt, 281; *Idem*, Episkopijata, 118–140, 184–187, plan 1 on p. 178.

714 See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 16.

erected in the late 13th century.[715] This period also saw the gradual transformation of the site, marked by the emergence of a large necropolis with over 350 graves, the majority of which date from the 12th to the 14th century.[716]

The construction history of the first medieval church at the Crkvište site is of particular importance for understanding the role of Morovizd within Samuel's realm. What survives from the earliest structure is its foundations – a space measuring approximately 17 by 15 meters –along with evidence of an *opus sectile* floor in the sanctuary.[717] Equally important, its design was affected by preexisting site conditions, incorporating the Early Byzantine church with its underground vaulted tomb. It has been archaeologically confirmed that the church was clearly demolished down to its foundation line, and its original layout remains difficult to reconstruct. According to Trajkovski, the overall trapezoidal plan, terminating in the east with three semicircular apses, belonged to an inscribed-cross church. His reconstruction suggests a layout similar to those of Panagia Panaxiotissa at Gavrolimini in Greece and St. John the Baptist at Nessebar (Mesrembria) in Bulgaria, characterized by a central, typically wider nave and lateral spaces, with four massive piers supporting the dome. Trajkovski associates this church with the building endeavors of Boris-Michael and Simeon in the Bregalnica region, dating it to the late 9th–early 10th century.[718] However, a closer examination of both the position and form of the piers – best preserved in the eastern part of the building – along with the greater width of the central aisle compared to the side spaces, suggests that they could not have supported an elongated domed bay.[719] Such an arrangement of the piers, combined with the trapezoidal form of the church's foundations, instead supports its reconstruction as a three-aisled basilica (Fig. 72b). The exact date of the primary construction of the church at the Crkvište site is difficult to determine. As we believe we have demonstrated above, only a very small number of monuments within the territory of the former Diocese of Bregalnica can be attributed with certainty to the First Bulgarian Empire. While it is not impossible that the church at the Crkvište site belongs to this period, what can be stated with certainty is that it was in use during Samuel's reign, alongside the restored fortifications and the small church within them at the Gradište site. Historical sources, in which Morovizd appears only following the restoration of the Bulgarian state in 976, support this. Was the earliest structure at the Crkvište site conceived as a cathedral church? This would be difficult to prove, as no remains of liturgical furniture from the first phase of construction have been recorded. Given the topographical situation of the village of Morovizd, it is worth contemplating the possibility that the church served a monastic function.

715 For this church designed as Church 1, see *Trajkovski*, Episkopijata, 194–209.

716 *Trajkovski*, Grobot 105, 235–246; *Idem,* The medieval necropolis, 207–213; *Velova Graorkovska*, Antropološki rezultati, 515–530.

717 It should be noted that Kiril Trajkovski's bibliography lacks data on the dimensions of the first medieval church. Approximate measurements have been calculated based on the site plan of the complex published in: *Trajkovski*, Arheološki osvrt, 282, fig. 3.

718 *Trajkovski*, Srednovekovnite crkvi, 122–123. Cf. *Idem*, Episkopijata, plan on p. 132.

719 See *Trajkovski*, Episkopijata, 179, plan 2.

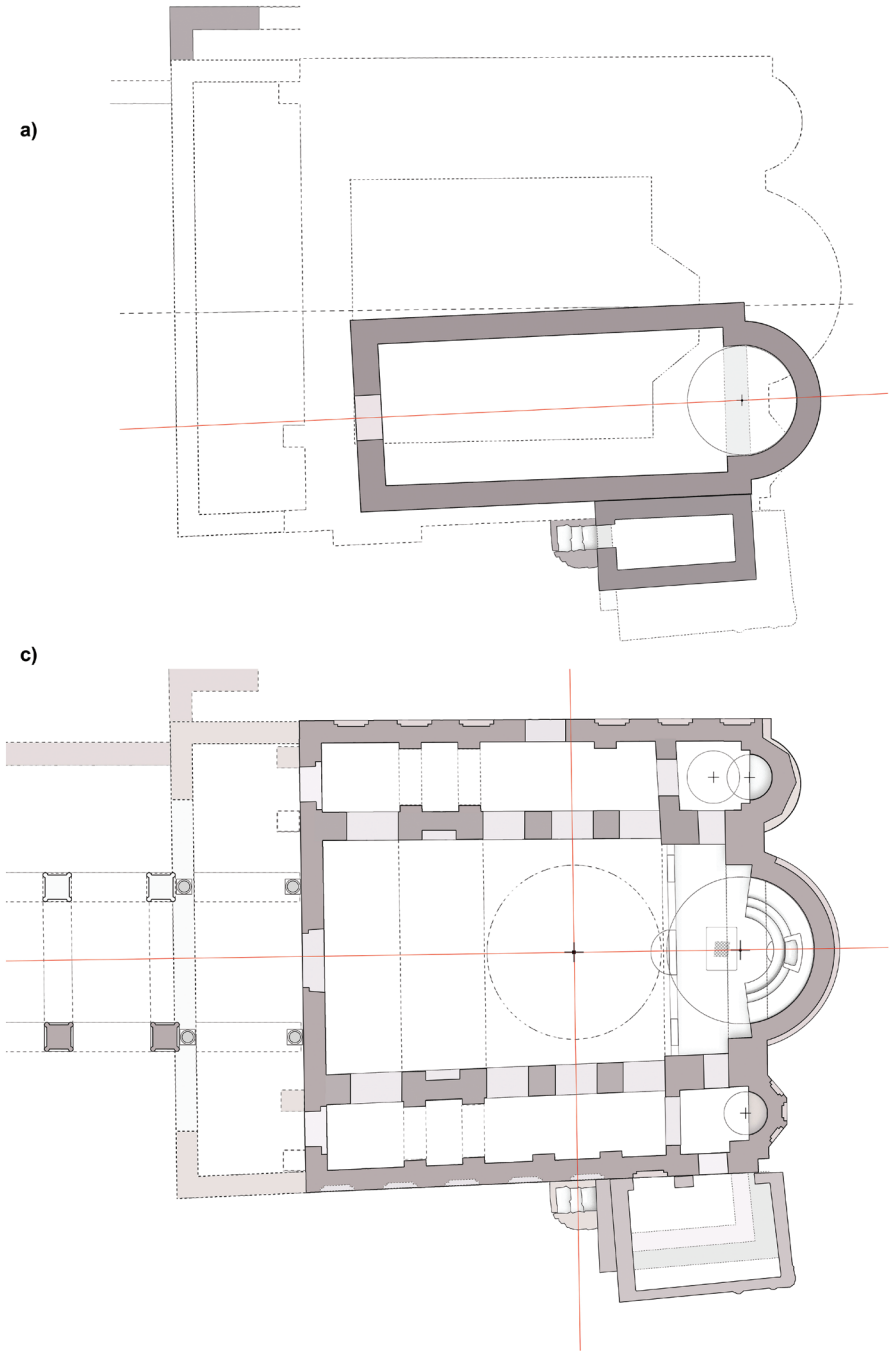
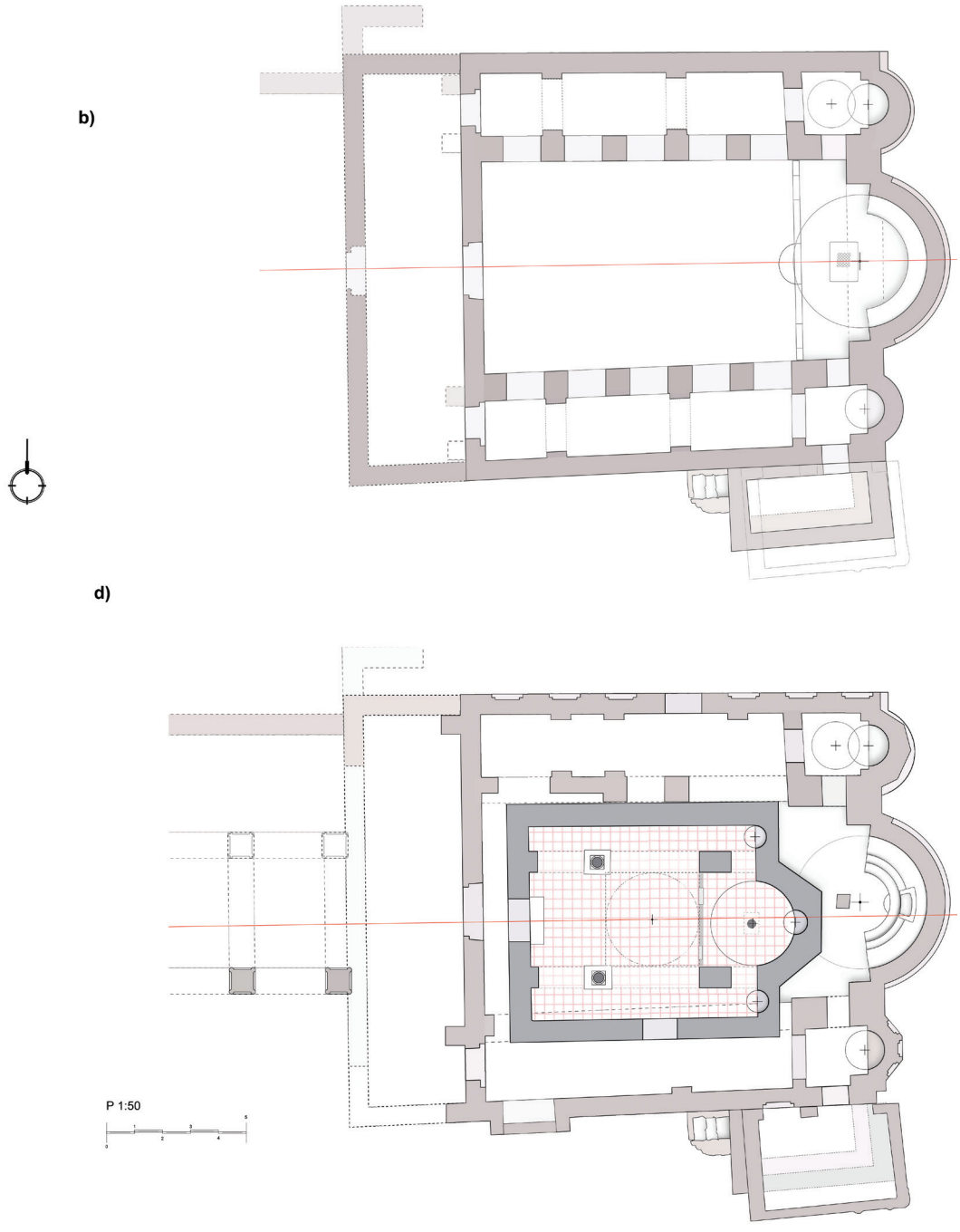


Fig. 72.
Morovizd, Crkvište site, a complex of four superimposed churches, plans:
a. Early Byzantine single-aisled church;
b. Three-aisled basilica, hypothetical reconstruction;
c. Domed basilica, reconstruction;
d. Inscribed-cross church

A new church was built in the 11th century over the foundations of the earlier structure, with only the main apse retained and incorporated (Fig. 72c). According to Trajkovski, in its second phase of construction, the church at the Crkvište site appears to have had a basilican form.[720] The construction elements documented during archaeological research provide further insight into the monument's architecture. The walls,

720 *Trajkovski*, Srednovekovnite crkvi, 123–124; *Idem*, Arheološki osvrt, 283, pl. IV, fig. 6; *Idem*, Episkopijata, 180, Pl. 4.



preserved up to a height of 2 meters, feature stone masonry with the use of brick. The eastern piers were evidently reinforced, while similar supports were added in the western part of the building (Fig. 71), suggesting a cruciform main body of the church, comparable, for example, to Hagia Sophia in Ohrid. While the reconstruction of the church's appearance at the Crkvište site in both construction phases requires further investigation, we shall focus on aspects more relevant to the present discussion. These include the marble *synthronon* with a throne for the bishop in the main apse, as well as the fragmentarily preserved marble sanctuary screen, ambo in the central part of the naos and

frescoes (Fig. 61, vol. II, 145).[721] The stylistic analysis of the fragments of both sculpture and frescoes from Morovizd confirms their dating to the first half of the 11th century.

In conclusion, our analysis of the two early phases of the church at Crkvište, within the context of Bulgarian architecture and ecclesiastical organization, can be summarized through the following points. Based on surviving evidence and current knowledge, a project of rebuilding and lavish decoration of the church at Crkvište took place in the first half of the 11th century and was motivated by its significance within the Archbishopric of Ohrid, with its status as the cathedral of Morovizd. On the other hand, the evidence of the earlier structure at this site does not allow for any conclusions regarding its function during Samuel's reign.

*

The first Ohrid charter provides information about the territorial extent of the Bishopric of Strumica. Besides Strumica itself, the bishopric included Radoviš and Konče, all located in the valley of the Strumica River (Map 1, vol. II, 13).[722] During the late 10th and early 11th centuries, Strumica functioned much as it had in Late Antiquity. The lower town, with its urban core, was protected by the fortress of Carevi Kuli. The growing cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in the following period reinforced Strumica's significance, fostering the further development of this small urban settlement.[723] Stratigraphic excavations of the Late Antique and medieval fortress on the hill overlooking Strumica have revealed a 10th century phase. The Late Antique fortress was likely repaired and renovated to serve a defensive role during the war between Samuel and the Byzantine emperor Basil II from 976 to 1018. This period is evident at the Carevi Kuli site in the remains of a *kastron* in the Južen Rid sector, which served as part of the fortification system and provided defense at the southern approach to the Fortress Carevi Kuli. Repairs to the old ramparts were primarily carried out using dry-stone walling techniques, without mortar, likely reinforced with wooden beams. The late 10th -early 11th century horizon is well-dated based on the discovery of at least three buildings, along with coins, arrowheads, and ceramics found within the defended area and its surroundings.[724] Carevi Kuli in Strumica was one of the fortresses acquired by Basil II following the surrender at the end of the war in 1018. Its commander, Dragomouzos, surrendered the stronghold along with other nearby forts, as documented by John Skylitzes.[725]

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721 For the *synthronon*, see *Trajkovski*, Srednovekovnite crkvi, fig. 9, 10. For the sculpture, see *Filipova,* Arhitektonska dekorativna skulptura, 45–48, Tab. LXXXVIII–XCI. For the fresco fragment, see *Rasolkoska-Nikolovska,* Novootkrienite crkvi vo Morodvis, 29, fig. 1–3; *Eadem*, Slikarskata rabotilnica, 35–39.

722 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.30–43.2; *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 95–98; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 810.

723 See the Codex Assemanius (Vat. slav. 3, between 986 and 1051), whose menologion includes the earliest commemoration of only three of the martyrs in the rubric for 29 August: Evangeliarium Assemani II, 309–310 (152a–152b); *Vasiljev,* Nov podatak, 13–15.

724 For the archaeological research of Carevi Kuli Fortress, see *Rujak,* Sistemot na odbranbeni fortifikacii, 168–178; *Idem*, Carevi kuli: Strumica, 217–223, fig. 212–219. For the defense network (δέματα) on the slopes surrounding Strumica, as described in historical sources, see *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 862–863.

725 Scylitzes, 357.

The only known construction in the Bishopric of Strumitza linked to Bulgarian patronage during Samuel's reign is situated in nearby Vodoča. It seems likely that Vodoča has a history that predates medieval building activities on the site. South of the medieval bathhouse, within the monastic complex, an apse and remnants of a marble mosaic were discovered, likely belonging to an Early Christian basilica.[726] The first medieval construction phase, dating to the late 10th century, was represented by the so-called Eastern Church (St. Leontios, Fig. 73).[727] The surviving elements, including sections of the outer walls and remnants of the massive interior piers, were later integrated into the late 11th-early 12th-century church structure (Fig. 87–88, vol. II, 179–180).[728] The construction technique, preserved only in the lower sections of the eastern wall, displays alternating layers of brick and stone, with pieces of brick embedded in the mortar joints between the stones. Measuring 14 by 18.5 meters in plan, the Eastern Church displayed a blend of architectural types – a domed basilica and cross-in-square church with a tripartite sanctuary. An unusual feature of the edifice is its monumental dome, with a diameter of approximately 7 meters, covering nearly three-quarters of the building's interior. Such a daring design focused the weight on the four massive piers and vaulting structure. Consequently, the main apse was significantly larger than the *pastophoria,* all of which are semicircular both inside and out. The ambitious design and construction project of the Eastern Church demanded a highly skilled master builder with technical expertise, which has led scholars to posit an association with Samuel, or possibly another member of the Bulgarian elite. This short-lived phase of the Eastern Church paralleled the fate of Samuel's entire state. The Bulgarian Church was most likely destroyed during the Battle of Kleidion (Belasica) in July 1014, where Samuel suffered a crushing defeat, dying a few months later.

In the area of the northeastern arch of the Eastern Church, 40 cm below the floor level, a few small fresco fragments were discovered during archaeological excavations in 1973. Only one larger fragment has been published, depicting part of the face of an unidentified saint (Fig. 74).[729] The flesh and hair are modeled with soft transitions, avoiding sharp lines and contours. The saint's face once had noble features, of which only a straight nose and a large, wide-open eye remain. These elements suggest a painter with a keen sense of beauty and elegance in the skillful execution of the figures. The original painted decoration of the Eastern Church has been dated on stylistic

726 *Ananiev*, Arheološki iskopuvanja, 57–64.

727 *Miljković-Pepek*, Kompleksot crkvi vo Vodoča, 20, fig. 4a–b; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 331–332, fig. 357a; *Dimitrova*, Ars Inimitabilis, 343–356.

728 The existing site witnessed building continuity and the restoration of the Bulgarian Church within the Archbishopric of Ohrid, eventually attaining the rank of an episcopal see. See *Miljković-Pepek*, Kompleksot crkvi vo Vodoča; *Idem*, L'architecture, 494, 495, Pl. IV.8, VI. 1–2; *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 45–47, plans 13, 14; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 331–332, fig. 357; *Mal'ceva – Freze*, Stroitel'stvo v Severnoj Makedonii, 426, fig. 2. See also the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century,* II, 110–111, 144–146, 151, 158, 178–180.

729 *Miljković-Pepek*, Kompleksot crkvi vo Vodoča, 49–50, fig. 2, Tab. XX.

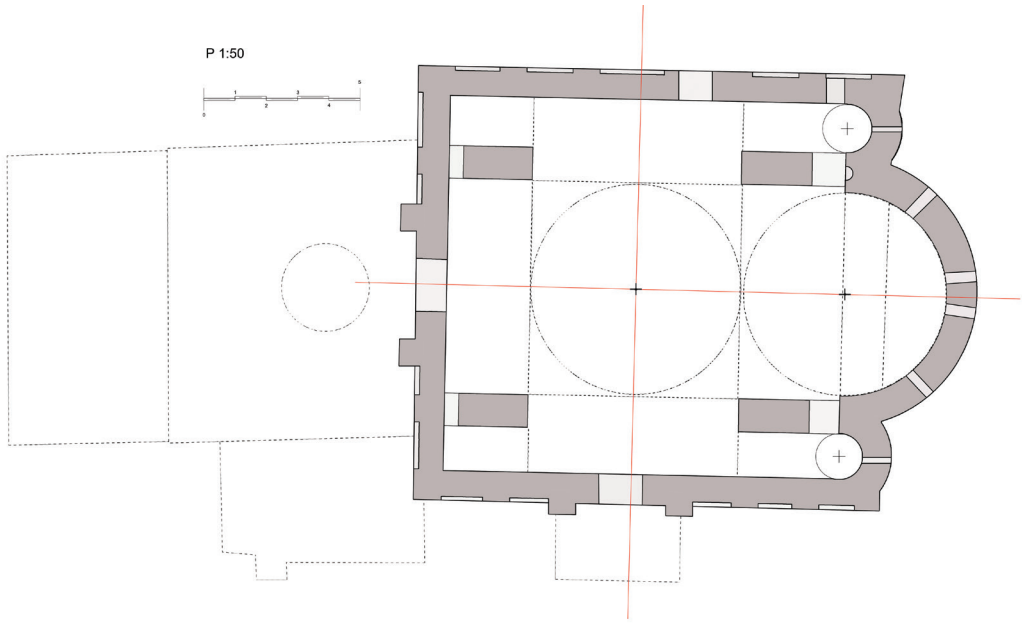


Fig. 73.
Vodoča,
The Church of St. Leontios
(Eastern Church), plan

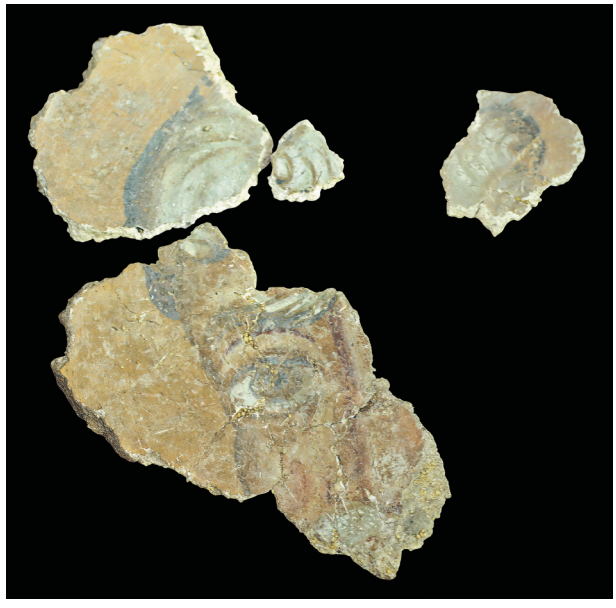


Fig. 74.
Vodoča, fragment of fresco,
NI Museum of Macedonia, Skopje

grounds to the late 10th or early 11th century.[730] The first fresco layer in St. Achilleos, built before 1000 by Samuel, is chronologically very close to the Eastern Church in Strumica. However, the rudimentary state of the frescoes in the cathedral at Prespa limits the possibility of a detailed stylistic analysis.[731] The oldest fresco fragment from the Eastern Church may find comparisons on Mount Athos, which emerged as a center of artistic and architectural activity in Macedonia during the second half of the 10th century. A particularly relevant comparison can be made with the figure of the Virgin Mary, a preserved part of the Deesis in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist and the icon of the Virgin Portaitissa in the Chapel of the Virgin, both created in the late

730 *Miljkoviḱ-Pepek*, Kompleksot crkvi vo Vodoča, 49–50, fig. 2, Tab. XX; *Korunovski – Dimitrova*, Vizantiska Makedonija, 25–26, Tab. 11.

731 For the first fresco layer of St. Achilleos, see above, 188–189.

10th or early 11th century for the Iveron Monastery.[732] The stylistic features observed on the fragment of fresco from Vodoča align with the abstract stylistic trend prevalent from the late 10th through the first half of the 11th century. Consequently, it remains uncertain whether the fragment belonged to the original decoration of the Eastern Church or formed part of the same painting campaign as the frescoes in the Western Church (Fig. 61, vol. II, 145), given their stylistic similarity.[733]

Although our knowledge of St. Leontios in Vodoča remains meager, it is nonetheless invaluable for understanding the artistic patronage standards upheld by the Bulgarian elite. The ambitious architectural design of the short-lived foundation was executed by skilled builders.

Sirmium

While it is well known that Sirmium was part of Samuel's Bulgaria and governed by Commander Sermon until the Byzantine conquest of 1019,[734] the exact date of the establishment of its episcopal center remains uncertain.[735] However, the Bishopric of Sirmium (Srem) existed in 1019, as attested by the first Ohrid charter. It encompassed the area between the Sava and Danube rivers.[736] Archaeological research conducted by Vladislav Popović in the 1960s and 1970s has confirmed that the medieval settlement did not develop on the site of ancient Sirmium (modern Sremska Mitrovica) but in present-day Mačvanska Mitrovica.[737] Historical analysis by Ivana and Predrag Komatina, however, highlights that the two sites were likely closely connected both spatially and functionally during the medieval period.[738]

Remains of a Slavic rural medieval settlement and necropolis, used from the 10th to the 15th century, have been discovered in Mačvanska Mitrovica.[739] Four occupation phases have been identified, the earliest dating to the second half of the 10th century. Along with the settlement and necropolis, Mačvanska Mitrovica preserves three successive medieval churches built on the site of an Early Christian martyrium (Fig. 75). Archaeological excavations at the Zidine (Širingrad) site were limited to the eastern parts of these buildings within an excavation area measuring approximately 16 by 10 meters.[740]

732 For these examples, see *Vapheiades*, A Reassessment, 79–82, fig. 1–2 with further bibliography.

733 For the fresco decoration of the Western Church in Vodoča, see the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 144–146.

734 *Ferjančić,* Sirmijum, 50–51; *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 99, 131–132, 193–194.

735 For this issue, see *Popović*, Sirmijska episkopija, 291–296; *Komatina I. – Komatina P.,* Srem, 142–148; Komatina, Diocesan Structure, 810.

736 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.24–25. See also the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 10.

737 For the results of archaeological excavations, see papers published in: *Popović*, Sirmium.

738 *Komatina I. – Komatina P.*, Srem, 145–146.

739 For the settlement, see *Minić*, Le site d'habitation; *Špehar*, Centralni Balkan, 68–70, fig. 7. For the necropolis, see Ercegović-Pavlović, Les nécropoles.

740 *Popović,* Sirmium, Sremska Mitrovica, 79–80; *Idem,* Sirmium – Mitrovica (Sremska i Mačvanska), 81–86; *Idem*, Sirmijska episkopija, 291–292; *Idem*, Kultni kontinuitet, 303–304.

The earliest layer belongs to a small, single-aisled church constructed with reused Roman bricks. Only its main apse, semicircular on both the exterior and interior, and built against the outer edge of a 4th-century apse, along with the beginning of the southern wall, have been identified (Fig. 75 I). This modest church also features a rustic baptismal font in the naos. It is contemporaneous with the earliest pit houses discovered at the same site, which date to the mid-to-late 10th century. No elements allow for a more precise dating of the church within this timeframe though Vladislav Popović suggests it was built after the fall of the Bulgarian Empire in 971.[741] The first medieval church was destroyed by fire. In its place, a new church, seemingly of basilican form, was built, featuring three apses on the eastern side, slightly horseshoe shaped both inside and outside (Fig. 75 II). Its central apse was erected on the site of the apse of the earlier church, indicating direct continuity and a brief interval between the destruction of the first and the construction of the second medieval sanctuary. Built with reused Roman bricks, the second church has poorly preserved walls, making a precise assessment of the construction technique difficult. The older brick floor has survived only in fragments, while a later floor, consisting of compacted earth with a very thin lime coating, was laid above it.[742] A typological approach does not allow for precise dating of the second church, as the partially preserved ground plan at the Zidine site was widespread both during the time of Samuel's state and after its collapse. Small find and numismatic evidence provide a critical chronological framework. A silver-gilt pectoral cross was found on the chest of an individual buried in a Roman or Early Byzantine tomb with a gabled roof in the *diakonikon*, reused in medieval times. The cross bears a Greek inscription "Lord, save the one who wears this," and an image of the Crucifixion. It is dated to the 11th century and corresponds to similar examples from the Balkans of the same period.[743] A *follis* coin of a variant type dated to 1001–1010/1015 was discovered embedded in the foundation of the central apse.[744] This exceptionally important numismatic find provides a reliable *terminus post quem* for the dating of the second church. Additionally, a coin hoard consisting of over 20 Byzantine folles, all from class A2 and minted between 976 and c. 1030–1035, was found 50 meters southwest of the church complex.[745] Therefore, the second church could have been built under Samuel and Sermon around the year 1000, but also after the Byzantine conquest of Sirmium in 1019.[746] It functioned throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, as evidenced by numerous graves from the corresponding burial horizon found in the necropolis next to the church. On its ruins, a Catholic church dedicated to St.

741 *Popović,* Sirmium, Sremska Mitrovica, 82; *Idem*, Sirmijska episkopija, 291–292, 294–296; *Idem*, Kultni kontinuitet, 303 who argues that the formation of the first medieval church may be linked to Western missions arriving via neighboring Hungary.

742 *Popović*, „Metodijev" grob, 297–302; *Idem*, Kultni kontinuitet, 303–306.

743 *Popović*, „Metodijev" grob, 301, fig. 7–8.

744 *Popović*, „Metodijev" grob, 301, fig. 5–6; *Radić*, The Circulation, 206–207; *Ivanišević*, Interpretation, 41.

745 *Popović*, Katalog vizantijskog novca, 331–333, fig. on p. 342; *Idem*, Ostava anonimnih vizantijskih folisa, 343–344. For the chronological classification of the folles of Basil II and Constantine VIII – Class A2, see *Ivanišević*, Interpretation, 19–42.

746 *Popović*, „Metodijev" grob, 301–302; *Idem*, Kultni kontinuitet, 304, n. 5.

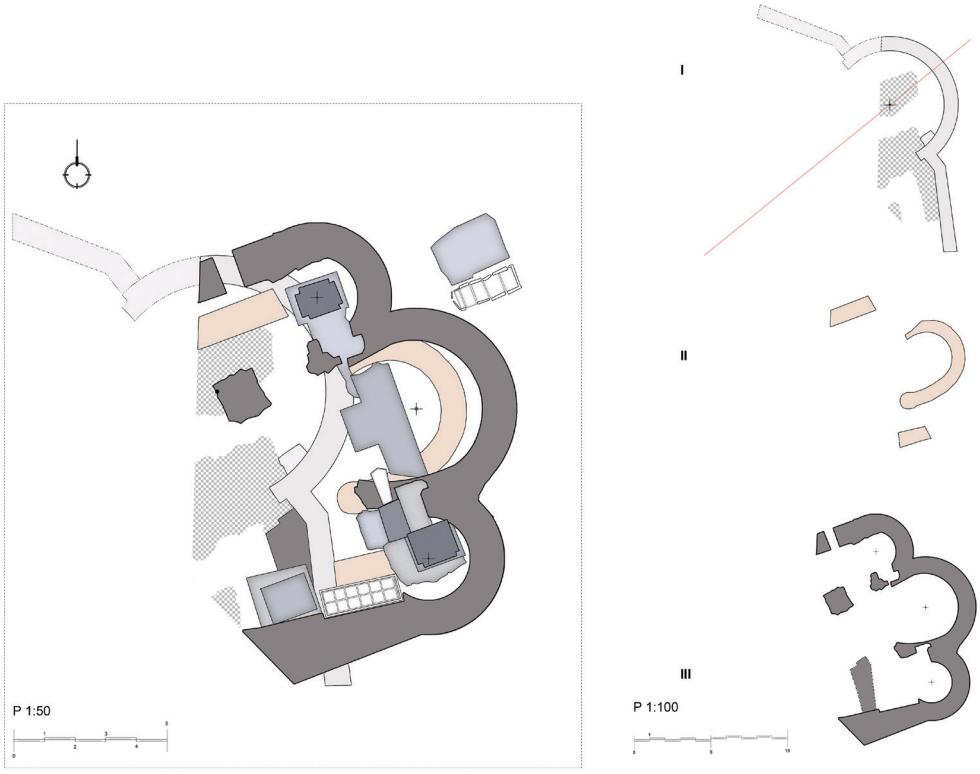


Fig. 75.
Mačvanska Mitrovica, Zidine site, three successive medieval churches, plans:
I. First medieval church;
II. Second medieval church;
III. Third medieval church

Irenaeus, was built in 1229–1230. In the second half of the 13th century, it became the seat of the Benedictine Sirmian bishopric (Fig. 75 III).[747]

The remains of the second church at the Zidine site in Mačvanska Mitrovica appear to be the only surviving testimony to architectural endeavors in the region of Sirmium (Syrmia, Srem) at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. Based on its archaeological, historical, political, and social context, this church can be identified with certainty as the cathedral of Sirmium only as late as its association with the Archbishopric of Ohrid. It was indeed described as "a great church, which the people of that land (i.e., 'Further Syrmia') refer to as episcopal" (maiori ecclesia, quam terre illius homines episcopalem appellant) in a later source – a letter from Pope Gregory IX dated 1229.[748]

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the complex stratigraphy at the Zidine site is that the three superimposed churches attest to the exceptional importance of the cultic place on which they were built. It might have been the result of the medieval revival of the cult of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Sirmium and martyr executed in 304. Given that the martyrium of St. Irenaeus has been identified in Sremska Mitrovica, it has been suggested that Greek, Latin or Bulgarian monks of the 10th–11th centuries, upon encountering the remains of an unfamiliar martyrium in Mačvanska Mitrovica, may have attributed it to the most renowned Sirmian martyr, the blessed Irenaeus. Consequently, the Benedictines simply adopted an already existing tradition.

747 For this church, see *Popović*, Sirmium – Mitrovica (Sremska i Mačvanska), 81; *Idem*, Sirmijska episkopija, 292–293; *Andrić,* Bazilijanski i benediktinski samostan, 118–119.

748 *Theiner*, Monumenta Hungariae I, 88–89.

Although historical sources confirm the dedication to St. Irenaeus only for the third church, the prominence of his cult and the belief in the healing power of the sacred site had spread much earlier within the Archbishopric of Ohrid, as recorded by Archbishop Theophylact.[749]

The archaeological evidence still needs to be examined from a historical perspective.[750] The establishment of the settlement and ecclesiastical center in Mačvanska Mitrovica does not represent a continuation of the preceding era on the territory of Sirmium (Srem) in either a political or ecclesiastical sense. Throughout the 9th century, the region between the Sava and Danube rivers was under Frankish control, while the see of St. Methodios, Bishop of Frankish Pannonia, was at least formally and symbolically linked to Sirmium. Around the year 900, the Hungarians took control of Sirmium, and their presence was attested half a century later by Constantine Porphyrogennetos. It seems likely that, despite Bulgarian-Hungarian rivalries in the territory between the Sava and the Danube, there is no basis to conclude that the Bishopric of Sirmium was established within the First Bulgarian Empire by 971.[751] This is further supported by the archaeological record, which lapses after the Early Byzantine period in the old ecclesiastical center of Sremska Mitrovica. Who controlled Sirmium in 971, when Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskes brought an end to the First Bulgarian Empire, remains unknown. Sources are silent on this matter. Scholarship has proposed three possibilities: the first suggests that Sirmium was under Hungarian influence;[752] the second argues that direct Byzantine rule was not established in the town[753]; while the third posits its reoccupation by the Byzantines between 971 and 976.[754] Distant from the regions where the Bulgarian-Byzantine war took place between 976 and 1018, Sirmium only fell at last into the hands of Basil II in 1019.[755]

Our assessment of the second church in Mačvanska Mitrovica within its historical context can be summarized as follows. According to Skylitzes, no attack on Sirmium occurred in 1019; rather, the Byzantine general Constantine Diogenes lured Sermon into a meeting and killed him. Following Sermon's death, his widow surrendered the city, and the inhabitants peacefully accepted the suzerainty of the Byzantine emperor.[756] As previously noted, the same year saw the issuance of the first Ohrid charter, which established the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Sirmium. Two considerations arise in this context: first, the brief interval between these events left little time for the construction of a new church; second, there is no evidence of destruction in the city. Taken together, these factors suggest that the suffragan of the Archbishop of

749 *Popović*, Blaženi Irinej, 259–263.

750 For the historical survey of Sirmium/Srem, see *Bubalo – Mitrović – Radić*, Jurisdikcija, 25–59 (Bubalo); *Komatina I. – Komatina P.*, Srem, 141–164 with further bibliography.

751 *Komatina I. – Komatina P.*, Srem, 142–146.

752 *Popović*, Sirmijska episkopija, 295–296.

753 *Bubalo – Mitrović – Radić*, Jurisdikcija, 28 (Bubalo).

754 *Komatina I. – Komatina P.*, Srem, 146–147.

755 *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 99, 131–132, 193–194; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 847, 866–867.

756 Scylitzes, 365–366.

Ohrid was appointed to an already existing church in Mačvanska Mitrovica. The coin evidence, dated to 1001–1010/1015, might indicate that the first medieval church was still in use in 1019, while the second may have been built only following the establishment of Byzantine rule.

Prizren and Lipljan

The earliest reference to both Prizren and Lipljan as episcopal sees appears only in the first Ohrid charter (1019), which indirectly confirms their episcopal status within the Bulgarian Church of Samuel's realm.[757] Due to the absence of historical sources, it is not possible to determine when they were established. The state of knowledge is more solid regarding Prizren and Lipljan in the historical and political context of the 10th century. Based on this, it is assumed that the dioceses of Prizren and Lipljan, located in the borderland between Serbian and Bulgarian territories, were established in the 10th century – Prizren in the first half, and Lipljan only after Tzimiskes' reoccupation of the Balkan interior in 971–976.[758]

Prizren is attested as an episcopal see by the earliest medieval church in the town, the foundations and remaining walls of which were incorporated into the later Serbian cathedral of the Virgin Eleousa (Bogorodica Ljeviška) built by King Milutin (1282–1321) between 1306–1309 (Fig. 76).[759] According to Slobodan Nenadović, who conducted archaeological excavation in the 1950s, the original church was a three-aisled basilica with a triple-apsed sanctuary, narthex, and an opened exonarthex, both of which had annexes on the north and south sides, with overall dimensions of 26 by 21 meters (Fig. 77). The basilica's interior was divided into three aisles by arcades supported by rectangular piers. The nave, more than twice as wide as the side aisles, terminates in a three-sided apse, while the side naves end in semicircular apses. The naos opened toward the narthex through a triple-arcade opening, with the central passage likely wider than the two side ones. The nave rises significantly higher than the side aisles, reaching a maximum height of up to 8 meters. Its upper walls were pierced by ten windows, with an additional four in the narthex. The walls of the basilica were built primarily of hewn blocks of stone with mortar and small brick fragments embedded in the joints of the façade surfaces. The arches between the piers on both longitudinal walls, as well as those above the window openings, were constructed entirely of brick. The basilica in Prizren was a timber-roofed structure, covered with ceramic tiles.[760] The

757 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.29–33.

758 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 811 with further bibliography.

759 The basilica was restored and repainted in the third decade of the 13th century, when the episcopal seat of Prizren was attached to the Serbian autocephalous Church. It was completely rebuilt in the early 14th century. For the 13th-century restoration of the basilica and the Church of Bogorodica Ljeviška, see: *Nenadović*, Šta je kralj Milutin obnovio, 221–222, fig. 18–19; *Idem*, Bogorodica Ljeviška, 52–53, 67–102; *Ćurčić*, 'Renewed from the Very Foundations', 23–36; *Idem*, Architecture, 644–646, fig. 753–756; *Čanak-Medić – Todić*, Bogorodica Ljeviška; *Davidov Temerinski*, Crkva Bogorodice Ljeviške; *Jevtić,* Reuse and Remodeling, 132–155.

760 *Nenadović*, Šta je kralj Milutin obnovio, 209–221, fig. 7–16; *Idem*, Bogorodica Ljeviška, 44–48, 55–66, Tab. I, III, V–IX.

spoliated fragments of Early Byzantine sculpture embedded in the walls of the Church of Bogorodica Ljeviška, along with the proportional relationship between the width of the central nave and the side aisles, suggest that an Early Byzantine building could have preceded the Middle Byzantine basilica.[761] However, archaeological investigations have not reached sufficient depth to confirm the existence of the earlier church.

A coin minted by Romanos I Lekapenos and his son and co-emperor Christopher, dated 927–931, was discovered in the foundations of the chapel on the southern side of the narthex.[762] This numismatic evidence provides a useful *terminus post quem* for the church's construction, while the first Ohrid charter establishes the *terminus ante quem* in 1019.[763] Some scholars have placed the basilica in Prizren within a narrower chronological framework, suggesting a later date, and associating it with the Byzantine restoration program undertaken by Basil II following his victory over the Bulgarians.[764]

The precise dating of the basilica in Prizren is challenging for two main reasons. First, basilicas were continuously built in the central Balkans throughout the 10th and 11th centuries by both the Bulgarians and the Byzantines, particularly as cathedrals.[765] Secondly, the cathedral of Prizren lacks documentary evidence. With its simple design, the basilica in Prizren exhibits typological features – piered arcades, a *tribelon*, and a nave significantly wider than the side aisles –comparable to those of St. Achilleos in Prespa and Vranište, as well as churches in Crkvište – Morovizd, Moglena, St. Prokopios in Prokuplje (second construction phase), Servia, St. Nicholas in Manastir, and others (Fig. 52, 72b, 83, 86; fig. 110, vol. II, 219). The cathedral of Prizren finds parallels among churches built over a span of time from the 10th to the late 11th century. Consequently, dating based on architectural analysis alone remains inconclusive. A more comprehensive approach should consider the monument within the broader cultural and historical context of the period.

Although it is entirely reasonable to assume that the restoration of Byzantine rule would have been accompanied by intensified building activity, the earliest preserved monuments – such as the second church in Vodoča – do not support this assumption. Instead, they indicate that substantial ecclesiastical engagement in church construction became more pronounced only with the arrival of Archbishop Leo.[766] Basil II's

761 For these fragments, datable to the 5th or 6th century, and Early Byzantine parallels for the basilica in Prizren, see *Nenadović*, Šta je kralj Milutin obnovio, 218–220; *Idem*, Bogorodica Ljeviška, 59–64, 228–230, fig. 125.

762 *Nenadović*, Šta je kralj Milutin obnovio, 212–213, fig. 10.

763 *Nenadović*, Bogorodica Ljeviška, 64–65; *Korać*, O prirodi obnove, 212; *Idem*, O srednjovekovnim bazilikama, 70–71, fig. 1.2; *Stričević*, La rénovation du type basilical, 202–203; *Davidov Temerinski*, Crkva Bogorodice Ljeviške, 18–20; *Radičević*, The Earliest Period, 212–213, fig. 179a, 180; *Maľceva – Freze,* Baziliki, 188.

764 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 397–398, fig. 430E.

765 For the typology and functions of basilicas in the Middle Byzantine period, see *Altripp*, Die Basilika in Byzanz. For the cathedral churches and their architectural design in Middle Byzantine Macedonia, see *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi.

766 It should be noted that the fragments of four stone reliefs, most likely originating from a sanctuary barrier, have been embedded in the walls and architectural elements of the Church of Bogorodica Ljeviška. They bear a strong resemblance to the sculptural decoration of the 11th-century Church of Hagia Sophia in Ohrid and the Middle Byzantine reliefs in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid. Reused as building material, their original sanctuary screen remains unidentified. For these fragments, see *Nenadović*, Šta je kralj Milutin obnovio, 230–231, fig. 28, 29, 126; *Idem*, Bogorodica Ljeviška, 219, fig. 21, 22.



Fig. 76.
Prizren, Church of the Virgin Eleousa (Bogorodica Ljeviška), general view

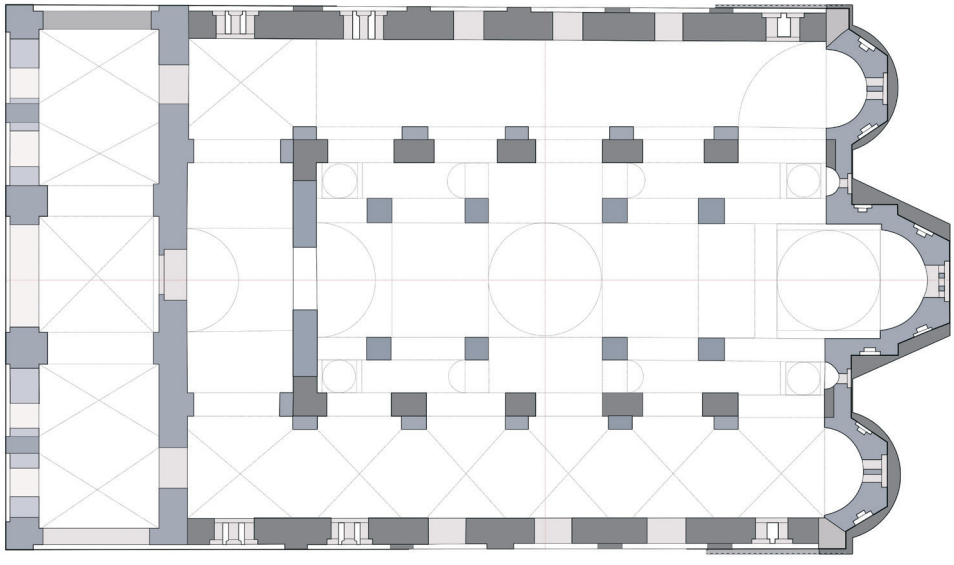


Fig. 77.
Prizren, Church of the Virgin Eleousa (Bogorodica Ljeviška), composite plan showing the original basilica and its 13th- and 14th-century renovations

restoration program around 1018 appears to have been primarily focused on fortifications[767] and, in certain cases, possibly on churches situated within fortified sites that were central to his military campaigns.[768] Prizren, however, was not located in the zone of active military operations and thus would not have been a focus of these efforts. Given that the first Ohrid charter confirms the episcopal sees of the Bulgarian Church as they existed between 1014 and 1018, this would imply that the church in question was already in existence by that time.

*

Lipljan had developed as an urban center by 1018, as evidenced by Skylitzes' account of its inhabitants surrendering to Basil II, along with the residents of Pelagonia and Morovizd.[769] The town was situated in the sparsely populated area of Kosovo Polje, as indicated by the first Ohrid charter, which lists no other toponyms within the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Lipljan.[770]

Two sites within the bishopric – Gračanica Monastery and the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple in the village of Lipljan – witnessed a long history of construction predating the 14th-century Serbian foundations. Both are most relevant for the discussion on the episcopal seat of Lipljan within the Bulgarian Church organization and the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

The monastic church of Gračanica, built by King Milutin as the cathedral of the Lipljan bishopric of the Serbian autocephalous Church (Fig. 78), is situated less than 1 km east of Ulpiana, a Roman municipium restored by Emperor Justinian I (527–565), who established the episcopal seat there, naming it *Iustiniana Secunda*.[771] Archaeological excavations have identified two distinct, albeit poorly preserved, construction phases beneath the 14th-century edifice.[772] The older of the two was a three-aisled basilica, approximately 19 meters long and 10 meters wide, with a narthex flanked by

767 For some examples recorded in historical sources and archaeologically confirmed, see *Moutsopoulos*, *Ekklēsies tou Nomou Flōrinas*, 61–62, fig. 59–60; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 850.

768 See e.g. discussion about Servia in the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 172–174.

769 Scylitzes, 357; *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 117, 128.

770 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.32–33. See also the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 10.

771 For a survey of Serbian historiography on Ulpiana/*Iustiniana Secunda* until the early 2000s, see *Jeremić*, Rimski i ranovizantijski grad, 138–139. The Roman-Germanic Commission of the German Archaeological Institute conducted geophysical surveys in cooperation with the Archaeological Institute of Kosovo and the Museum of Kosovo in Priština (2008–2012). It is estimated, using geophysical non-invasive methods, that the city covered an area of at least 55 hectares, of which only 1–2% of the territory has been identified through research so far. Furthermore, metal mines were discovered in the vicinity: *Berisha et al.*, Archäologisch-geophysikalische Prospektion, 82–88; *Teichner*, On the Ancient Twin-City, 271–275; *Idem,* Ulpiana – *Iustiniana secunda*, 81–93. The Turkish archaeological expedition (2012–2015) discovered an Early Christian baptistery and a three-aisled basilica with an apse in the central part of the city, exhibiting two construction phases – dating to the 4th and 5th centuries. Based on its spatial position, dimensions, and rich mosaic decoration, it is presumed to have been the main city church, possibly dedicated to Sts. Florus and Laurus. The coin findings are predominantly from the 4th century, with the most recent examples dating to the reign of Emperor Justin I (518–527): *Četinkaja,* To Excavate or not?, 111–118, 868; *Idem*, Early Christian Architecture, 30–46.

772 *Mijović*, Gračanica, 128–133; *Idem,* O genezi Gračanice, 127–159.

two adjoining side rooms. Its eastern end terminated in three semicircular apses (Fig. 79). Due to the poor state of preservation, limited investigation, and the reuse of materials from earlier structures in the construction of the 14th-century church, the precise form of certain architectural elements remains undetermined. A central question remains as to whether the basilica's interior was divided by solid walls, or by columnar or piered arcades. Additionally, the extent of the westernmost part of the monument, as well as the function of the side annexes, remains uncertain. As a result, the basilica has been dated to either the reign of Emperor Justinian I or the 9th or 10th century. Certain features, such as the presence of a narthex with adjoining side rooms and the use of bricks in the eastern section, suggest a 6th-century construction date. However, the three shallow apses – semicircular both internally and externally, with the central one only slightly projecting beyond the lateral ones, similar to those in the original basilica in Prizren – point to a possible date between the 9th and 11th centuries.[773] The specific function of the original basilica is unknown. However, the numerous Roman tombstones reused in the construction of the 14th-century church, as well as the Late Antique sarcophagus discovered in its foundations, suggest that a necropolis of Ulpiana *extra muros* extended across this site.[774] The second phase of construction includes a small, single-aisled domed church, discovered in the eastern part and within the central apse of the basilica (Fig. 79). Its function is confirmed by the Serbian recension of Old Church Slavonic inscriptions on fresco fragments, as well as historical references in the founder's charter of Gračanica Monastery – it was built to serve as the cathedral of Lipljan following the establishment of the Serbian Archbishopric in 1220.[775]

The present-day village of Lipljan, located about 10 kilometers from ancient Ulpiana, has been identified with the town of Λιπένιον, attested in the historical sources. Lipljan preserves the ancient name of Ulpiana in its Slavic form. Beyond the name itself, the most compelling evidence for the medieval history of this settlement lies in the discovery of two earlier churches that preceded the present 14th-century Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (Fig. 80).[776] From the first phase of construction on the site, the foundations and walls of a three-aisled Early Byzantine basilica partially survive. The building consisted of a central nave, 8 m wide, and two narrower side aisles, each 5 m wide, terminating on the east with three semicircular apses, both externally and internally. Information about its western part and the interior spatial division is lacking due to limited excavation carried out in the 1950s. This original building was destroyed, and subsequently, a second three-aisled structure was constructed on its ruins. While the latter's central nave retained approximately

773 *Mijović*, O genezi Gračanice, 130–134, plan 1–4, fig. 1–7; *Ćurčić*, Gračanica, 19–20, 43–44; *Jovanović*, Arheološka istraživanja, 48, fig. 82; *Radičević*, The Earliest Period, 214–215; fig. 170d.

774 *Vulović,* Manastir Gračanica, 166–167, fig. 1, 2.

775 *Mijović*, O genezi Gračanice, 134–141, plan 1–4, fig. 8–9, 17–24. The chrysobull of the Church of Gračanica, transcribed in the fresco technique onto the west wall of the *diakonikon* (1321), locates the episcopal seat of Lipljan in Gračanica during the 1220s. For the charter, see Zbornik ćiriličnih povelja i pisama, 499–504, no 137; *Marković*, Chrysobull, 214–215.

776 Archaeological excavations of the Lipljan church, conducted on a limited scale, were carried out in the 1950s: *Ljubinković et al.,* Istraživački i konzervatorski radovi, 69–134.



Fig. 78.
Gračanica Monastery,
katholikon, general view

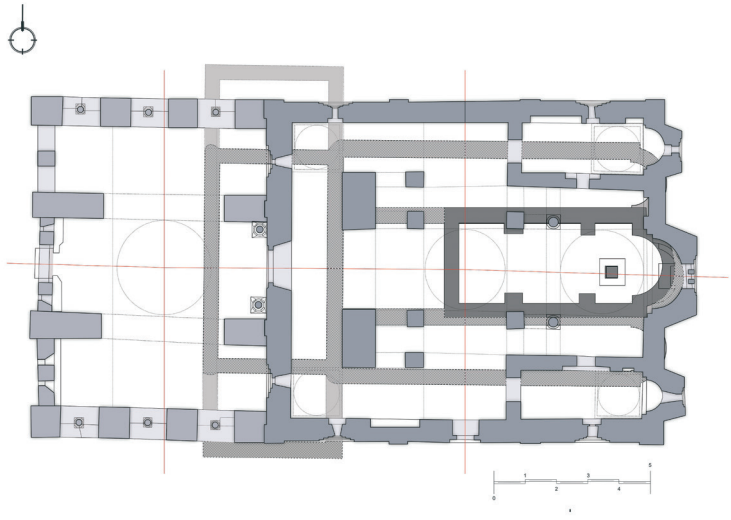


Fig. 79.
Gračanica Monastery,
katholikon and archaeologically documented
remains of church structures beneath, plan:
I. Basilica; II. Single-aisled church



Fig. 80.
Lipljan, Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, general view

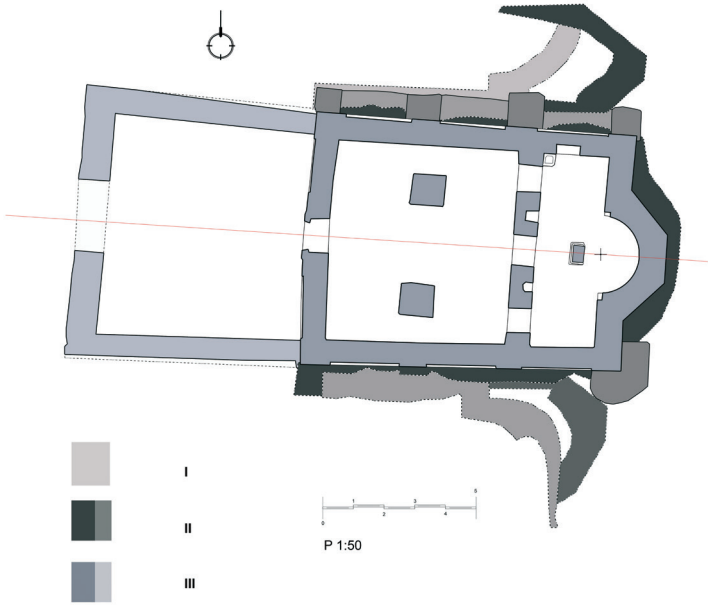


Fig. 81.
Lipljan, Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (III) and archaeologically documented remains of church structures beneath, plan: I. Early Byzantine basilica II. Middle Byzantine basilica

the same position and span, the side aisles were somewhat narrower (Fig. 81). The discovered remains of the basilicas do not provide sufficient evidence to reconstruct their form, or determine their date of construction. They allow only for the establishment of their relative chronology, with the first dated to the 5th–6th century and the second to the 10th–11th century.[777] It seems likely that the churches were part of a larger complex, as suggested by the remains of the wall surveyed at the site.[778]

The examples of Gračanica and Lipljan raise the question of where the episcopal seat of Lipljan was located before 1220. In this regard, three viewpoints have been presented in the scholarship. The first identifies the first church beneath Gračanica as the cathedral of Lipljan, proposing that the renewal of the Early Byzantine episcopal tradition rooted in the devastated Ulpiana/*Iustiniana Secunda* likely occurred in its immediate vicinity. The construction of the second church at the site is considered indicative of the continued episcopal function within the Serbian milieu.[779] The second viewpoint is more willing to associate the Bishop of Lipljan, listed in the first Ohrid charter, with the eponymous urban settlement and its second church. This interpretation necessitates an explanation for the subsequent transfer of the episcopal seat to Gračanica within the Serbian autocephalous Church. The destruction of the second church in Lipljan and its location – situated too close to the Serbian-Byzantine border – are considered possible reasons for the first Serbian archbishop, Sava, to relocate the seat to a safer place, making use of the existing but ruinous church in Gračanica.[780] Finally, some scholars consider the insufficient exploration of all three sites – Ulpiana/*Iustiniana Secunda*, Gračanica, and Lipljan – as a significant obstacle to determining whether any of these churches served as the episcopal seat, and if so, which one.[781]

The above discussion calls for a balanced perspective, mindful of both the existing evidence and the current state of knowledge. The example of Prizren is instructive, demonstrating that the Serbian Church maintained the continuity of ancient episcopal seats, inherited from the Archbishopric of Ohrid and the Bulgarian Church of Samuel's time, through the rebuilding of cathedrals. A similar course of events can be expected for Lipljan. However, due to the lack of sufficient evidence regarding the original basilica beneath Gračanica, our understanding of its history during the late 10th and early 11th centuries remains incomplete. Nevertheless, based on Skylitzes' account, it is reasonable to assume that the second church discovered in Lipljan functioned within the urban setting of the town during Samuel's reign.

777 *Ljubinković et al.,* Istraživački i konzervatorski radovi, 94–95, fig. 12–14 (S. Vučenović). See also: *Jovanović*, Arheološka istraživanja, 45–46; *Davidov Temerinski*, Crkva Vavedenja Bogorodice, 11; *Radičević*, The Earliest Period, 213, fig. 179c.

778 *Ljubinković et al.,* Istraživački i konzervatorski radovi, 95 (S. Vučenović). Cf. *Ivanović*, Srednjovekovni spomenici, 449–450, who argues that the wall remains likely belonged to the city fortifications.

779 *Mijović*, O genezi Gračanice, 138–141; *Janković*, Lipljanska episkopija, 31–32; *Jovanović*, Arheološka istraživanja, 45, 48; *Čanak-Medić – Todić*, Manastir Gračanica, 10–11.

780 *Davidov Temerinski*, Crkva Vavedenja Bogorodice, 11.

781 *Ljubinković et al.,* Istraživački i konzervatorski radovi, 70, n. 50; *Ćurčić*, Gračanica, 19–20; *Radičević*, The Earliest Period, 213–215.

Ohrid

It is not known when the ecclesiastical seat of Samuel's Bulgaria was relocated from Prespa to Ohrid. According to undated testimony from the "Du Cange Catalogue," Philip was the first ecclesiastical head of Samuel's state to reside in Ohrid.[782] The generally accepted chronological framework places this event between 992–993 and 1015.[783] However, the final phase of Samuel's most significant building project – the painted decoration of the Cathedral of St. Achilleos in Prespa, completed between 989 and 1002 – argues against an earlier date, suggesting the relocation occurred sometime after the completion of the frescoes, if not later.

Was the relocation of the ecclesiastical seat to the new political center of the state in Ohrid accompanied by construction endeavors? Within the urban core, there are no monuments, either preserved or archaeologically recorded, that can be attributed to the period of Samuel and his successors. However, recent archaeological excavations conducted at the site south of Hagia Sophia uncovered two significant stratigraphic levels,[784] which gave rise to different interpretations. The first stratigraphic level includes a floor made of large bricks, marble, stone slabs, and a fragment of a mosaic, found in the northeastern part of the excavated area at a depth of 3.60 meters. These finds are likely associated with the floor and substructure of a building entrance, probably dating from the Antique or Early Christian period.[785] A wall approximately 0.70 meters wide, running west-east (Wall 1), along with several other walls with a north-south orientation, belong to the second stratigraphic level. They were uncovered below the present-day pavement level, in the area between the western parts of Hagia Sophia and modern residential buildings to the southeast. Wall 1, especially two of its piers, was decorated with wall paintings, of which many fragments have survived. Among them, the most significant is a partially preserved representation of a bishop in a *polystavrion* with an *omophorion* in three-quarter stance with his hands held in gestures of supplication, depicted on the so-called western pier. The latter is situated at 11.70 meters from the western parts of Hagia Sophia, at a depth of 1.20 meters.[786] Goce Angeličin Žura interpreted the masonry and decorative elements of the second stratigraphic level as belonging to the cathedral church built by Samuel on the foundations of an Early Christian basilica.[787] However, this interpretation cannot be accepted. While the fresco fragments found *in situ* warrant further examination, certain preliminary observations, such as the three-quarter pose of a bishop's figure, clearly indicate a later date. Additionally, the ceramics found in this layer date from the 9th to 13th century, while coins date from the 13th and 14th centuries.[788] The site is poorly documented,

782 *Ivanov,* Bŭlgarski starini, 566.

783 *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 155–156; *Filiposki*, Ohrid vo raniot sreden vek, 183–192; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 804–808.

784 *Kuzman*, Archaeological Discovery, 141–162.

785 Ibid., 150–152, fig. 1, 2, 13, 16, 17. 1–8.

786 Ibid, 141–150, fig. 1–12, 18–19.

787 *Angeličin Žura*, Nov arheološki nalaz, 9–19.

788 *Kuzman*, Archaeological Discovery, 152, 154, fig. 17. 9–21, 20.



Fig. 82. Vranište, Basilica, eastern view, present state of the monument

further complicating any attempts to determine the spatial relationship between the discovered architectural elements and their decoration. Nonetheless, we should consider Pasko Kuzman's preliminary remarks, suggesting that the excavated medieval walls likely belong to a larger architectural complex, possibly one of the reception rooms in the archbishop's palace of Ohrid.[789]

Based on the preserved evidence and the current state of knowledge, it appears likely that the ecclesiastical leader relocated his residence to Ohrid, while St. Achilleos in Prespa continued to function as the cathedral. Firstly, Prespa and Ohrid were ecclesiastical centers within the same diocese. Secondly, although Prespa was a short-lived seat of the Bulgarian Church, the significance of St. Achilleos as the newly established cathedral remained undiminished after Samuel's death and continued within the framework of the Ohrid Archbishopric. During his stay in Ohrid, the Bulgarian ecclesiastical leader had several existing churches at his disposal. The possibility that the old Byzantine episcopal church was still active at that time should not be ruled out either.

However, architectural evidence in Vranište indicates building activity in the region of Ohrid during the time of Samuel and his successors, or shortly thereafter. The remains of the church are located 5 km north of Struga (Fig. 82). It was a three-aisled basilica, of which only the eastern part of the central nave has been preserved.[790] Following the archaeological investigations of 1951 and 1980, much of the basilica's original appearance can be reconstructed (Fig. 83).[791] Its plan measures 20.90 by 15.90

789 *Kuzman*, Archaeological Discovery, 157–161, fig. 21. For the hypothetical reconstruction of the archbishop's palace, see *Čipan*, Sveta Sofija, 107–116.

790 That space today serves as a small cemetery chapel dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, known as Bogorodica Prečista.

791 *Koco,* Spomenici, 17–26, fig. 3–8; *Idem*, Sveta Sofija, 54–56, fig. 2.

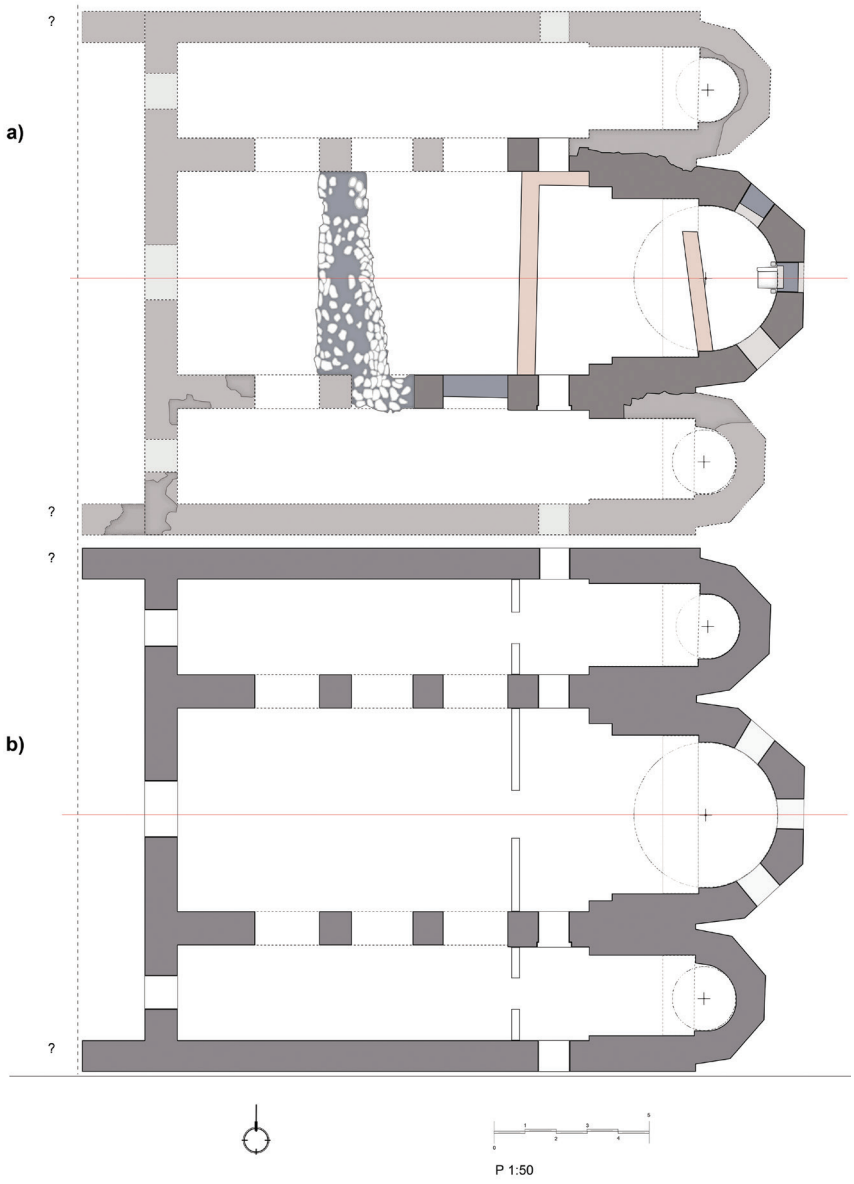


Fig. 83.
Vranište,
Basilica, plan:
a. Archaeologically documented remains of the original basilica and its later alterations;
b. Rectified reconstruction of the original plan of the basilica

meters. The building had three aisles which terminate in apses, semicircular on the interior and polygonal on the exterior. The spacious central nave (width: 6.20 meters) is divided from the side isles by piers supporting brick arches, with a distance of 2 meters between them. Three pairs of square columns have been preserved. The bema and the lateral chambers are extended by extra bays. The main apse has three windows, which are now walled up. Lateral chambers do not communicate with the main apse, indicating that they probably did not serve as *pastophoria*. More likely, they were separate chapels. Investigations indicate that the central and side isles were vaulted and covered by a timber roof. The church was illuminated by clerestory windows in the southern and northern walls, as well as in the main apse, and possibly on the apses of the lateral chambers. The masonry, with the exception of the vaults, is made of large blocks of quarried limestone. There is no clear archaeological and architectural evidence for the western part of the church, specifically its narthex and facade. A dating to the late

10th–early 11th century is suggested, based on the similarities with two basilicas, the nearby St. Achilleos (Fig. 51–52) and the original church of Ljeviška (Fig. 77). The colonnaded arcades that divide aisles in Vranište are arranged in the same manner as in St. Achilleos. Similarities between Vranište and Ljeviška have been observed based on the typology of basilican architecture.[792]

The notion of the northern shore of Lake Ohrid near Struga, an area where the Black Drin flows out of the lake, appears in historical sources and is particularly relevant for Vranište. Anna Komnene reports a complex network of channels and efforts to control the water flow in this area during the time of Samuel.[793] The position of the village of Vranište in the Drin Gorge, where the river's course becomes more confined, provided an ideal setting for the development of a settlement. As Dimče Koco argued, such large-scale construction must have been part of a more developed settlement, situated within a broader geographical and historical context connected to the *Via Egnatia* and regional trade.[794] Neither do the historical sources regarding the chronology of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 976–1018/1019 contradict the assumption that the church in Vranište was built during the time of Samuel. As one of the residences of Bulgarian rulers, and later the main political and ecclesiastical center, Ohrid, probably including the neighboring Struga, ultimately came under Byzantine control following the surrender of its inhabitants in 1018.[795]

Fortifications

A significant number of fortified places played a role in the period between 976 and 1018/1019 as we learn from both historical sources and archaeological studies. The repair and construction of fortifications across Bulgaria constituted a practical response to the military challenges posed by the protracted war that lasted over four decades. This network of defensive structures ranged from *phrouria* to fortified settlements and substantial fortresses, all serving as primary targets for Byzantine invasions and focal points of Bulgarian military resistance.[796] Among these, urban fortifications referred to as *kastron* and *polis* in the historical sources, functioned not only as military but also as administrative structures of the state, and in certain cases, as ecclesiastical centers. This chapter focuses on strongholds that, along with defensive architecture, preserve architectural and archaeological evidence of urban environments and church architecture. The material is presented according to territorial zones corresponding to the Bulgarian military organization and the diocesan network of both the Bulgarian Church from 1014–1018/1019 and the Archbishopric of Ohrid, as recorded

792 *Bošković – Tomovski*, Srednovekovnata arhitektura, 84–85, fig. 14; *Korać*, O prirodi obnove, 212; *Idem,* O srednjovekovnim bazilikama, 68–76; *Miljković-Pepek,* L'architecture, 489, pl. I. 10; *Stričević,* La rénovation du type basilical, 201–202.

793 Alexias, 383 (XII, 9.6).

794 *Koco,* Spomenici, 7–16.

795 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 848.

796 The relevant bibliography includes *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi; *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti; *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 337–352; *Cvetanov*, Srednovekovni tvrdini.

in the Ohrid charters (1019–1025, Map 1, vol. II, 13).[797] This section seeks to refine the chronology of the church buildings, deepen the understanding of the social and architectural context in which they emerged and functioned, and ultimately identify the distinctive features that differentiate Bulgarian defensive and ecclesiastical architecture from their Byzantine counterparts.

Zone I: The central region of Samuel's Bulgaria: Ohrid, Bitola, Moglena, Skopje, and Kastoria

As the central area of Samuel's Bulgaria, Zone I encompasses Prespa/Ohrid, Herakleia/Bitola, Vodena/Moglena, Skopje, Devol, and Kastoria (Map 3, vol. I, 319).[798] As discussed above, the state and church seats in Prespa and Ohrid, with their churches and the residences of the Bulgarian rulers and church primates, were defended by 1018.[799]

We should also briefly mention Herakleia/Bitola. The Bishopric of Herakleia was probably based near Prilep before its relocation to the vicinity of Bitola around 996, as suggested by epigraphic, historical, and material evidence. John Skylitzes describes Prilep as a military stronghold where Samuel fled following his defeat at Kleidion (Belasica) in 1014 and ultimately died.[800] However, Skylitzes' account has found limited archaeological confirmation due to the extensive multiphase construction of the Markovi Kuli fortress in later periods (Fig. 84). The only element attributed to Samuel's time is the repair of a Late Antique defensive wall near Tower 11, indicating that Bulgarian *phrourion* was located in the acropolis (Čardak, Fig. 85).[801] Although epigraphic sources – such as a column with a Slavic inscription from 996 commemorating the death of Bishop Andrew and an Armenian inscription from 1002 referring to the Monastery of the Holy Apostles – clearly indicate the presence of churches within or near the fortress of Prilep, none have survived.[802]

The exact topographical situation in the area around Bitola remains uncertain, complicated by the varying toponyms used in historical sources.[803] First, the bishopric's seat is referred to as Herakleia in the inscription in the Church of St.

797 In this regard, the present section is intended as complementary to the subsequent contribution in the volume *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I.

798 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 319–337.

799 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 847–850. The rulers of Samuel's state had four capitals: Prespa, Ohrid, Bitola, and Setena. During Samuel's reign, Prespa and Ohrid were the most significant. However, during the brief rule of Gabriel Radomir, Bitola rose in importance. Ultimately, for Emperor John Vladislav, Ohrid held the primary significance in comparison to all the other capitals. See *Filiposki*, Prestolninite, 139–148.

800 Scylitzes, 349.

801 *Atanasoski*, Ušte ednaš za gradežnite fazi, 127, fig. 13–14, 19. For the construction phases of the Prilep fortress (Markovi Kuli), see *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 249–254; *Risteski*, Docna antika i srednio vek, 76–80; *Idem*, Srednovekovniot Prilep, 135–155; *Idem*, Prostorniot raspored, 41–54.

802 Further discussed above 204–205.

803 Relevant bibliography about medieval topography of Bitola/Pelagonia and toponyms implied by the written sources include: *Tomoski*, Butella civitas, 289–293; *Idem*, Toponimot Manastir, 463–473; *Maneva*, Prilog, 267–274; *Eadem*, Herakleja, 75–90; *Janakievski*, Ubikacija na srednovekovna Bitola; *Mihajlovski*, Circulation of Byzantine seals, 574–587; *Idem*, Heraclea, Pelagonia and Medieval Bitola, 339–359; *Idem*, Novi podatoci, 199–208; *Idem,* Prilozi za ubikacijata, 130–137.



Fig. 84.
Prilep, Markovi Kuli fortress

Achilleos,[804] while the first Ohrid charter names it as Bitola.[805] Second, John Skylitzes uses the toponym Pelagonia as a synonym for both the *polis* and the region of the Pelagonian Plain.[806] Third, Skylitzes introduces a new element to the local topography: the palace in Bitola of Gabriel Radomir Samuel's son and heir, which was reportedly burned by Basil II in 1015.[807] However, this textual evidence remains unconfirmed by archaeological excavations.

From an archaeological perspective, the see of Herakleia was likely associated with at least three distinct sites situated within Bitola, Herakleia Lynkestis, and their surrounding vicinity, though none can be identified with the fortress of Bitola with certainty. Constructions at two of these sites in Bitola and its vicinity, attributed to the period of the First Bulgarian Empire – the church beneath the Yeni Mosque (Fig. 29–30) and the fortifications at the Kale Bair site (Fig. 31) – were likely in use during the reign of Samuel and his successors.[808] Furthermore, medieval remains have been discovered at numerous surveyed sites surrounding major public buildings

804 This version of the name is inherited from the Early Byzantine episcopal see of Herakleia Lynkestis. See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 318, fig. 5.

805 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.27–29.

806 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 850–851. Pelagonia is listed among toponyms under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Bitola in the first Ohrid charter: *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.27–29.

807 Scylitzes, 351.

808 The continuity of use at the Kale Bair site is evidenced by domestic wares discovered in situ, datable to a chronological frame spanning the 9th to early 11th centuries (*Filipovska – Srbinovski*, Rezultati od

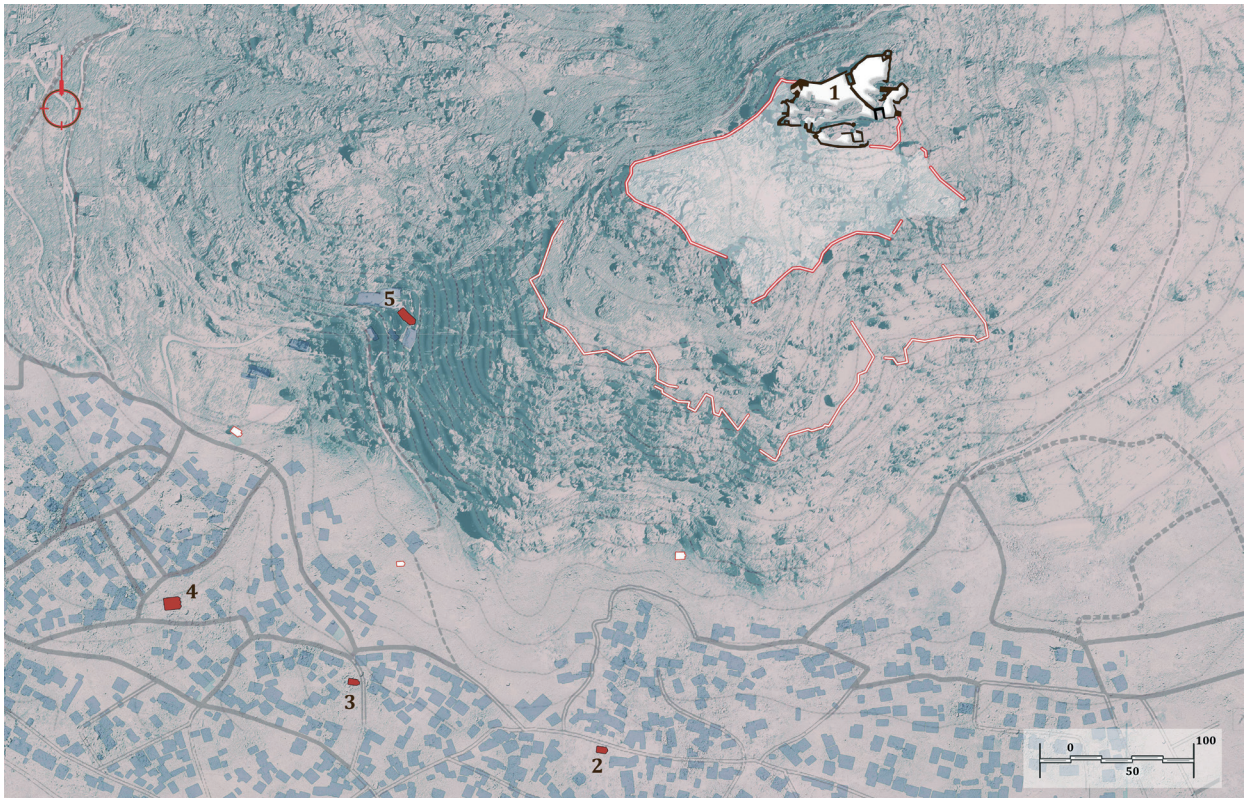


Fig. 85. Prilep, Markovi Kuli fortress, acropolis (1) and the lower town, plan

in present-day Bitola.[809] A further line of evidence comes from scholarly suggestions that the palace of Gabriel Radomir was fortified, with its presumed location likewise associated with the vicinity of ancient Herakleia Lynkestis.[810] Without delving into the complex issue of the so-called Bitola inscription, discovered during the demolition of the Sungur Çavuş Mosque (built in 1434/1435), it is worth noting that building material from Herakleia was reused in the construction of Turkish mosques in Bitola.[811] Finally, the fortifications of ancient Herakleia Lynkestis – including the acropolis, the upper and lower town, with existing infrastructure and a highly favorable strategic position along the *Via Egnatia* – may have been renewed and reused during Samuel's time.[812] Excavations to date, near the southeastern city wall, have revealed the so-called Basilica D from the 6th century, and above it, a small cemetery chapel accompanied by a necropolis dated to the late 10th to early 11th century.[813] Evidence of continuous occupation – from the 10th through the 14th century

istražuvanjata, 115–117, Tab. I, III, IV; *Filipovska-Lazarovska – Ġorġievska*, Materijalnata kultura vo Bitola, 1019. See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 196–199.

809 *Janakievski*, Ubikacija na srednovekovna Bitola.

810 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 326.

811 *Maneva*, Prilog, 273.

812 *Maneva*, Prilog, 267–274; *Eadem*, Herakleja, 75–90. See also *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 139–140, fig. 20.

813 *Maneva*, Grobovite, 35–43; *Eadem*, Srednovekovna nekropola, 169–199. See also *Džidrova*, Običajot na pogrebuvanje, 255–272.

– is provided by finds of pottery, jewelry, and coins, although the settlement layers remain archaeologically unexplored.[814] While these results lend strong support to the hypothesis that the medieval fortress of Bitola was located on the site of Herakleia Lynkestis, conclusive answers await future archaeological investigation of its acropolis.

Moglena served as a stronghold for supporters of an independent Bulgaria, a status traceable to the years following 971, when it temporarily functioned as the seat of the Bulgarian Church's head. This prominence persisted until 1015, when Basil II captured the fortress. According to the sources, the Byzantine emperor ordered its foundations undermined and the structure set on fire. As previously mentioned, Moglena likely became the seat of the Bishopric of Vodena/Edessa following the Byzantine conquest of the town in 1001/1002. It may be said that Moglena retained its status as an ecclesiastical center after passing into Byzantine hands. Textual sources leave no doubt that Basil II demilitarized Moglena as early as 1015. In 1019, it became the seat of a bishopric within the Archbishopric of Ohrid, which encompassed not only the Moglena region itself but also Prosek, Mariovo, Setena, Ostrovos, and Zaodria.[815]

The fortress of Moglena is situated on a low hill, approximately 800 meters northwest of the village of Chrysi, overlooking the Moglena Valley. This hill rises on the left, eastern bank of the Moglenitsa River, and is encircled by the river and one of its tributaries to the west.[816] The remains of the perimeter fortification walls, documented during the 1985–1987 survey, enclose an area of approximately 40,000 square meters, following the hill's elliptical contours.[817] The best-preserved section is the southeastern part of the acropolis walls, featuring a gate and three towers: two round and one rectangular. The walls are constructed of roughly hewn river stone bonded with lime mortar, while the towers incorporate fragmented brick within the mortar joints. Presumably built in the 10th century, if not earlier, to defend the farmers and herders who lived in the fertile plain with a water source, the fortifications of Moglena were demolished and rebuilt twice, in 1015 and in 1082. Moglena is categorized as a small fortified town, with its settlement extending southwest beyond the city walls.[818] The continuous occupation of the area is evidenced by graves dating to the 8th and 9th centuries, as well as a hoard of coins from the periods 945–959 and 963–969 discovered in Chrysi.[819]

The most imposing medieval structure was likely the church within the acropolis, of which only the foundations remain (Fig. 86).[820] Excavations uncovered the northern

814 *Maneva*, Herakleja, 81 with further bibliography.

815 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 855.

816 *Kravari*, Villes, 82–83; TIB XI/2, 743–745.

817 *Evgenidou*, Anaskaphes, 63–64, fig. 1; *Eadem*, To kastro tēs Chrysēs 325–342; *Eadem*, Servia and Moglena, 15–16, fig. 1; *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 338, 341.

818 Cf. Scylitzes, 352 who describes Moglena as as both *πόλις* and *φρούριον*.

819 *Touratsoglou*, Apo ta nomismatika pragmata, 531; TIB XI/2, 745, n. 43.

820 *Evgenidou*, Anaskaphes, 64–65, draw. 2; *Eadem*, Servia and Moglena, 16–18, fig. 2; *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 272–273, draw. 54–56, fig. 31. It should be noted that excavations unearthed the remains of another church of uncertain date outside the city walls. It was a free-cross church with dimensions of 9.59 by 8.40 meters, serving a funerary purpose, as indicated by the 50 graves found both inside and outside the

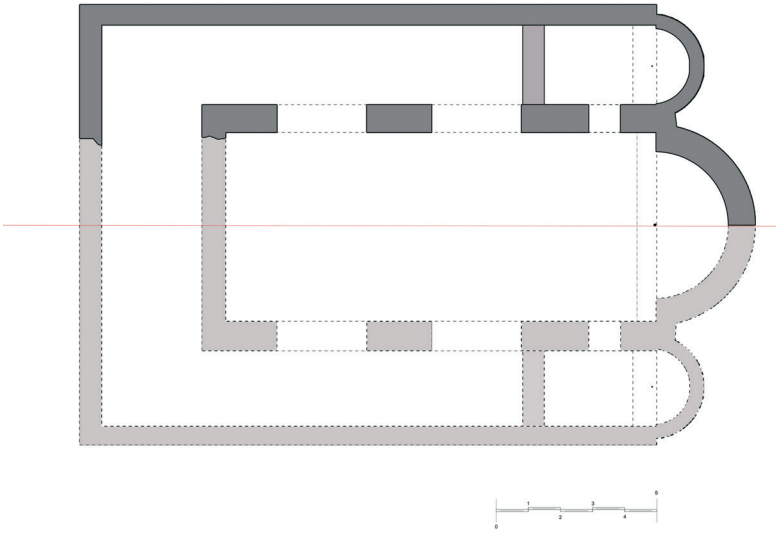


Fig. 86.
Chrysi, Fortress of Moglena, basilica within the acropolis, plan

half of a three-aisled basilica with a narthex, measuring 21 by 13.5 meters. The preserved northern apse and part of the main apse suggest that the church featured a tripartite sanctuary with apses that were semicircular both internally and externally. Its naos was subdivided from the side aisles by walls functioning as huge piers, perforated by passageways. Additional walls divided the *pastophoria* from the side aisles, indicating their distinct liturgical purpose. The church was furnished with liturgical installations and adorned with elegant decorative elements. The main apse retains the base of the *synthronon*, while the *prothesis* preserves an *opus sectile* floor. Traces of a marble-incrusted floor are evident in the central nave. The masonry of the walls consisted of roughly hewn river stone bonded with lime mortar and fragmented brick within the vertical mortar joints. While its scale, typology, and the presence of a *synthronon* clearly indicate that the church within the fortress of Moglena functioned as a cathedral, its dating remains within a broader chronological framework spanning the 10th to 12th centuries.[821]

A comparative study of Middle Byzantine episcopal basilicas, paired with historical references, can provide valuable insights for proposing a relative chronology. In this context, the church in the acropolis of Moglena shares common features with St. Achilleos in Prespa and the basilicas of Servia (Fig. 81, vol. II, 174) and Crkvište – Morovizd. Along with semicircular apses, a *synthronon*, and a construction technique that primarily employs field stone with mortar and sparingly used bricks, both St. Achilleos (Fig. 52) and Crkvište – Morovizd (in its first and second construction phase, Fig. 72b–c) also feature side aisles terminated by chapels. The similarities between the basilicas of Moglena and Servia are most evident in the masonry walls that separate the nave from the aisles.[822] While the sufficiently preserved basilica in Servia displays walls perforated by simple arcades, no evidence has been preserved in Moglena to reconstruct the shape

church. Except for one reliquary cross datable to the 8th–9th century, the archaeological findings have not been published. See: *Evgenidou*, Anaskaphes, 65–66, draw. 3; *Eadem*, Servia and Moglena, 18, fig. 3.

821 *Evgenidou*, Anaskaphes, 65; *Eadem*, Servia and Moglena, 18; *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 273.

822 For the comparative analysis of these churches, see *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 157–158, 164, 166, 170.

of the passageways. St. Achilleos, Crkvište – Morovizd (the first phase of construction), and Servia were all built in the late 10th or early 11th century, if not earlier. The basilica in Moglena, displaying comparable features in ground plan, spatial organization, masonry, size, and function, can be reasonably placed within the same chronological framework as these monuments.[823] The effort to situate the basilica of Moglena within its original ecclesiastical and political context presents a challenge for scholars. Was it constructed within Samuel's realm, or did it emerge following the Byzantine conquest of Moglena in 1015? Elevating Moglena to the status of the seat of the bishopric would have necessitated the construction of a church to serve as its cathedral. The building campaign may have occurred between 1002 and 1015. However, how should we understand Skylitzes' account of the devastation of Moglena's fortifications by Basil II?[824] Two points should be considered in this regard. First, Basil's conquest of Moglena was primarily aimed at demilitarizing the town. Second, the church was situated within the highly defended acropolis enclosure.[825] However, there is little doubt that the destruction of the fortress entailed the complete destruction of the church. It is plausible that the church was damaged in 1015 but subsequently restored under Byzantine authority.

In sum, the last phases of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war went hand in hand with certain building activities by both Byzantines and Bulgarians. A comparison between Servia and Moglena is particularly instructive in this regard. The former was constructed following the Byzantine conquest of the fortress in 1001, or during the first quarter of the 11th century, as generally accepted in scholarship, while the latter suggests Bulgarian patronage. Despite their possible distinctions in state and ecclesiastical affiliation, their architectural forms belong to the same cultural and artistic milieu, produced by masons trained within the Byzantine Empire.

Two additional fortresses within the Bishopric of Vodena/Moglena are associated with Samuel and his successors. The first is Setena, located approximately 4 km northeast of the village of Skopos, strategically positioned on a hill to control access to Mount Kajmakčalan and the Nidža massif, in the Florina region.[826] According to Skylitzes, Setena housed a palace of Samuel and a granary. Despite its strong fortifications, it ultimately fell after a siege in 1017. Although the fortified settlement was destroyed, it was subsequently restored and remained part of the Bishopric of Moglena, as evidenced by the first Ohrid charter.[827]

The excavations of Setena (Kale) conducted by Nikolaos Moutsopoulos in the 1990s documented an acropolis roughly square in shape, measuring 40 by 50 meters, as well as a fortified lower town, which extends over 2.4 hectares. It is classified as a *phrourion*,

823 Cf. also *Mal'ceva – Freze*, Baziliki, 184 which includes a brief note suggesting that the church of Moglena belongs to the 11th–12th-century basilicas in Macedonia, though it may have been of an earlier date and subsequently restored.

824 Scylitzes, 352.

825 The position of the basilica within the fortress of Moglena is discussed at: *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 217; *Eadem*, Ē thesi tou episkopikou naou, 161.

826 *Kravari,* Villes, 329; TIB XI/2, 978–979.

827 *Krsmanović,* Bulgarian Fortresses, 852.

a smaller type of fortified enclosure that controls strategic positions and passes.[828] The Late Roman, Early Christian, and Early Byzantine phases are evidenced by a cistern within the acropolis, a necropolis in the lower town, and numismatic finds.[829] The Middle Byzantine phase is attested by the remains of a modest church located on the eastern slope within the lower town (micro toponym Crkvište), the remains of the medieval cemetery to the east of the church, and an abundance of dark-colored pottery similar to that discovered at the Rentina fortress.[830] The single-aisled church featured an irregular polygonal apse and a narthex, with a wooden roof and overall dimensions of 10.75 by 4 meters. It was constructed upon the ruins of an Early Christian structure, as indicated by the preserved mosaic floor. Its masonry consisted of stone and mud, with the exterior plastered with white mortar. Fragments of frescoes with Greek letters have been discovered; however, they cannot be relied upon for dating. The use of mud masonry, the irregular polygonal apse, and the pottery suggest a construction date in the early 10th century. Based on this, Moutsopoulos concludes that the church predates the Bulgarian occupation of the site and was certainly active during the reign of Samuel.[831] It formed part of the fortifications likely established during the Justinianic period, which survived the Dark Ages and continued to function during the Kometopouloi rebellion.[832]

The second fortress within the Bishopric of Vodena/Moglena is Kale Amyntaio. The fortified site located north of Lake Petron in the region of Florina, can be identified as the fortress of Petrisk based on historical sources and survey data.[833] According to Skylitzes, Gabriel Radomir, the son of Samuel, was killed ‚ἐν τῷ Πετερισκῷ' in 1015.[834] Its continuous role in the defensive policy of the Byzantine Empire is confirmed by *Strategikon of Kekaumenos* of the 1070s.[835]

The remains of the fortress, in the shape of an irregular triangle, are situated on the hill known as Kale, strategically overlooking the main passage of the *Via Egnatia* and Lake Petron.[836] The fortified enclosure is divided into two parts – an acropolis and a lower town – by a transverse wall, covering an area of 8.1 hectares. The fortification walls are constructed exclusively of stone bonded with strong lime mortar, with most sections not exceeding 1 meter in height. No traces of towers have been identified, while the gates appear to be located on the eastern side and at the midpoint of the transverse wall. The similarities in the presence of a transverse wall and the use of

828 For the excavations at Setena, see *Moutsopoulos*, Anaskaphes, 11–18, draw. 9–13; *Idem*, To kastro tēs Setenas, 171–182; *Idem,* O monochōros dromikos naos, 217–229; *Idem*, Ekklēsies tou Nomou Flōrinas, 213–314; *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 340.

829 *Moutsopoulos*, Anaskaphes, 17–18, draw. 10–13; *Idem*, To kastro tēs Setenas, 177, 181, draw. 2.

830 *Moutsopoulos*, Anaskaphes, 15, draw. 10; *Idem,* O monochōros dromikos naos, fig. 6–7.

831 *Moutsopoulos*, O monochōros dromikos naos, 217–229, fig. 1–5; *Idem*, Ekklēsies tou Nomou Flōrinas, 213–314.

832 *Moutsopoulos*, To kastro tēs Setenas, 182.

833 TIB XI/2, 844. Cf. *Kravari*, Villes, 314–315 who suggests that *Petrisk* is likely identical to *Petra*.

834 Scylitzes, 353. Cf. PmbZ (867–1025), 22032.

835 Kekavmen, 280–281, comment. 513, 515.

836 For the most recent survey of the fortress, see *Paisidou et al.,* «Kale» Amyndaiou 2015, 73–82 with further bibliography.

local building materials between Petrisk and the fortifications of Loggas, Servia, and Rentina indicate a network of strongholds in the mountainous regions of Macedonia, most of which played a role during the war of 976–1018/1019. Surface pottery finds, along with traces of small houses, indicate the existence of a rural settlement during the Middle Byzantine period, extending earlier to the period between the 7th and 9th centuries and continuing into the 13th century.[837]

Similarly to the fortress of Moglena, the church is situated within the acropolis. Only its substantial perimeter walls remain standing, with the western wall being the best preserved, reaching a height of up to 4.75 meters. The church was a three-aisled basilica without a narthex, featuring a semicircular apse at the eastern end. Its dimensions, 13.50 by 16 meters, result in a nearly square plan (Fig. 87). Visible pilasters on the eastern and western walls mark the divisions between the three aisles, which were likely separated either by piers or solid walls. Each aisle terminates at the western end with a broad arched opening, forming a robustly constructed entrance. The masonry, composed exclusively of stone without brick, displays a vertical structural pattern resembling a mixed system of zones. This pattern alternates broad zones of semi-carved stones with narrow zones of flat stones arranged in a single row, resembling bricks. Such an arrangement appears to be an attempt to imitate the mixed construction technique using available local materials. Additionally, two or three irregular window openings are found in the southern wall, while a small, arched, single-lobed window remains preserved in the eastern wall of the *diakonikon*. It is likely that the basilica was covered with a wooden roof, as indicated by the relatively thin walls.[838]

The square layout of the church, with its emphasis on width, the wide and unique semicircular apse of the sanctuary, and the prominently projecting pilasters on the eastern and western walls towards the interior, are characteristic features of the small basilicas built from the late 9th century through the 10th century and into the 11th century. Notable examples include the churches in Kastoria, such as the Taxiarches Metropoleos (Fig. 95), Hagios Stephanos (Fig. 96), the Hagioi Anargyroi (Fig. 117, 119, vol. II, 227), the Chapel of St. Euthymios in Thessalonike, and Church No. 4 in Bial Briag, Preslav.[839] On the basis of the archaic characteristics of the church's architecture, Mellina Paisidou and her collaborators suggest that its initial phase of construction may be placed in the 9th century, if not earlier,[840] but Nikolaos Moutsopoulos says only that the church predates the 11th century.[841] Considering the proposed chronological framework, it is more likely that the fortress of Petrisk, along with the

837 Ibid., 72–77, figs. 1–7.

838 Ibid., 77–80, figs. 8–13.

839 For these churches, see *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 279, fig. 291 (Chapel of St. Euthymios), 313–314, fig. 331 (the Taxiarches Metropoleos), 314, fig. 332, 333 (Hagios Stephanos), 381–382, fig. 409; *Dončeva*, Bazilikite, 151 (Bial Briag No. 4).

840 Furthermore, the fortifications of Petrisk should not be attributed to the fortification campaign of Emperor Justinian I but rather to a later period. See *Paisidou et al.,* «Kale» Amyndaiou 2015, 80.

841 *Moutsopoulos,* Ekklēsies tou Nomou Flōrinas, 175, figs. 540–542.



Fig. 87.
Lake Petron, Fortress of Petrisk, basilica within the acropolis

church in the acropolis, predates Samuel's time. However, the possibility of strengthening, restoration, or additions to both the fortification walls and the church during the period of Bulgarian control over the fortress should not be discounted.

*

The central regions of Samuel's Bulgaria also included fortified settlements on the fringes of the Bulgarian territory: Skopje, Devol, and Kastoria. Despite its strategic and ecclesiastical importance in Samuel's Bulgaria,[842] Skopje has left no architectural remains from that period. The three most important sites – the fortress of Skopje, known as Skopsko Kale, Skupi, and Taor – show continuity from Antiquity. Among the stratigraphic levels of the fortress of Skoplje, K VI is attributed to the Middle Byzantine period, including Samuel's period. The Bulgarians likely inherited the Late Antique fortifications to a great extent, with additions to the defensive system involving wooden palisades, as indicated by the deep ditches found at the site (Fig. 88).[843] The numismatic evidence from this layer indicates continuity of coins from the reigns of Constantine VII (913–957) and Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), followed by a

842 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 859–860.

843 *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 298–308, fig. 138; *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 53, 121, 200, cat.no. 145, fig. 121, 122; *Maneva*, Skopje i Skopsko, 371, 373–374, fig. 67 with further bibliography.



Fig. 88. Skopje, Fortress, acropolis and the lower town, plan

greater quantity of coins from the reigns of John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and Basil II (976–1025).[844] In the meantime, the area of the Roman theater at the Skupi site, situated 5km from Skoplje, was organized as a settlement and cemetery. The activity at the site during the 9th to 11th centuries is dated by pottery and jewelry found in grave

844 *Maneva*, Skopje i Skopsko, 373, fig. 77.

contexts.[845] A similar repertoire of jewelry is found at the site of Gradište, village of Taor, located 20 km southeast of Skopje. However, another group of small finds is primarily associated with the military function of this fortress, spanning from the time of Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944) to Alexios III Angelos (1195–1203).[846]

Even less information is available about Devol, an old Slavic bishopric that continued to function as an episcopal seat of the Bulgarian Church in Samuel's state, although it appears under its Greek name, Selasphoros, in the inscription of St. Achilleos (Fig. 4, vol. I, 316). Skylitzes mentions Devol only once, in the context of its possession by the Byzantines in 1018.[847] While it would be more significant to establish when Basil II captured it, the sources remain silent on this matter. Nonetheless, the plausible locations of the lost town of Devol in the Korçë plain – at the sites of Zvezda and Mborje – suggest that it was fortified (Map 1).[848] It is generally assumed that the episcopal seat was transferred from Devol to Kastoria in the early 11th century, with Devol being incorporated into the Bishopric of Kastoria, while Basil II may have retained the town as a military base.[849]

Kastoria served as a military and ecclesiastical center of Samuel's Bulgaria and remained a *protothronos* of the Archbishopric of Ohrid from its establishment onward. This fortified urban settlement, referred to as a *polis* in the sources, remained under Bulgarian control until the conclusion of the war of 976–1018.[850] Its strategic position near the *Via Egnatia*, situated on a peninsula extending from Mount H. Athanasios into Lake Kastoria at an elevation of approximately 75 meters above the lake, provided natural defenses.[851] Medieval Kastoria developed at the site of its Early Byzantine predecessor, the fortified settlement established by Justinian I.[852] The fortifications of Kastoria developed gradually throughout the Byzantine period, building upon the surviving Justinianic walls. The preserved sections of the walls and the earliest churches in the town contribute to the reconstruction of the city walls during the Middle Byzantine period. The urban core was defended by a wall enclosing the narrow isthmus on the northwestern side, while the lake and mountains provided natural defenses on the other sides, as mentioned above. The inner-city walls and four main streets, still traceable within modern Kastoria, defined an enclosed area. Starting from the west, where the main entrance of the city stood, they led eastward, reaching the acropolis, which occupied the summit of the city's hill (Fig. 89).[853] Scholars have identified both Justinianic and Byzantine

845 The settlement contained 21 residential structures, while the necropolis comprised 73 graves with 86 burials. See *Kuzmanovski,* Srednovekovna nekropola, 367–419; *Jovanova*, Skupi, 285–322; *Maneva*, Skopje i Skopsko, 364–368, figs. 43–53, 56–62.

846 *Maneva*, Skopje i Skopsko, 363–368, figs. 42, 54, 64.

847 Scylitzes, 360.

848 See above 131.

849 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 808. See also the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 336–337.

850 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 858–859; *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 338.

851 For Kastoria, see TIB XI/2, 549–555.

852 *Pelekanides*, Kastoria, 1190–1193; *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 339, 341.

853 The urban fabric extended 900 m east to west and 1,000 m north to south: *Pelekanides*, Kastoria, 1191, fig. 1; *Drakopoulou*, Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 17–19, fig. 2, 3; *Eadem,* Kastoria, 114.



Fig. 89. Kastoria, Oikonomou district, acropolis walls and Taxiarches Gymnasiou

phases of the fortifications.[854] However, evidence suggests that the walls were also reinforced during the 9th–10th centuries. The construction method, characterized by a large number of wooden scaffolds made of tree trunks about 10 cm in diameter – especially attested in the western sector, where the Turkish Mendrese now stands – appears to belong to this period.[855] Furthermore, the first medieval construction phase of the acropolis is generally attributed to the late 9th and 10th centuries.[856] As Eugenia Drakopoulou noted, further study is needed to determine whether these reinforcements took place during the period of Bulgarian rule.[857]

The early churches of Kastoria provide a second key indicator for assessing this issue. While their construction dates vary between the 10th and 11th centuries, their distribution within the town's topography attests to a dense concentration of buildings in its oldest districts (*synoikiai*). Koubelidiki, Hagios Demetrios, and the Taxiarches

854 *Moutsopoulos*, Esquisse de l'histoire des remparts, 71–83.

855 *Moutsopoulos,* Kastoria, 429.

856 The excavations were carried out on a plateau of the Church of Koubelidiki. See *Kakabas – Drosou*, Anaskaphikes ergasies, 1–16. Cf. *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 343–345.

857 *Drakopoulou*, Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 19.

Gymnasiou are all located in the Oikonomou district within the acropolis (Fig. 89, 94), while Hagios Stephanos stands in the Eleousas district in the inner city city (Fig. 96). The relatively distant position of the Taxiarches Metropoleos (Fig. 95) in the eponymous district, outside the city walls in the southern part of the peninsula, should be understood in relation to its function as a cemetery church, as evidenced by depictions of the deceased citizens of Kastoria. Finally, the Hagioi Anargyroi (Fig. 117, vol. II, 227), situated in the southern district of Saint Panteleimon overlooking the lake, was a private foundation, possibly monastic in nature.[858] As seen from above, Kastoria is distinguished by its large number of churches. While the dating of their architecture and earliest frescoes remains a subject of ongoing debate, their social and cultural context has been thoroughly studied. None of these churches can be linked to the military function of the fortress. Instead, they reflect the city's urban development and economic prosperity. More importantly, all of them contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural interactions between Greeks and Bulgarians, as further discussed in the section below.

Turning to the chronology of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war, both historical records and material evidence attest to the existence of another two fortified centers of Bulgarian resistance in the region. During his 1017 campaign, Basil II razed Loggas (Λογγᾶς), the nearest stronghold to Kastoria, along with Bosograd, a fortress in the broader Kastoria region.[859] Only Loggas preserved the remains of a church within its fortified enclosure.[860] This small fortress (*phrourion*) is located 0.7 km southeast of the village of Sidirochori and about 8 km north of Kastoria. It was built on an extremely inaccessible mountain slope, with its highest point reaching an elevation of approximately 920 meters. From there, it commanded a complete view of the Kastoria plain.[861] The fortification follows an irregular plan. Its best-preserved section, reaching up to 1.7 meter, features a dry-stone construction technique, also recorded in other fortifications under Bulgarian control between 976 and 1018. In the southeastern part of the enclosed area, archaeological excavations revealed the foundations of a modest one-aisled church, likely with a wooden roof. The church was preceded by a narthex and terminated in the east with a large semicircular apse. Beyond it, a rectangular open courtyard served as a cemetery. The dark-colored pottery found in this layer suggests the church was constructed in the late 10th to early 11th century.[862] Stratigraphic analysis further revealed that the Bulgarians constructed fortification walls atop the ruins of a Roman and Early Byzantine fortified settlement.[863]

858 *Drakopoulou*, Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 23–24.

859 Scylitzes, 355–356. See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 335–336 with references in bibliography for Bosograd.

860 For Loggas, see TIB XI/2, 682.

861 For the archaeological excavations of Loggas, see *Moutsopoulos*, Loggas, 305–336; *Idem*, Anaskaphes, 1–11.

862 *Moutsopoulos*, Anaskaphes, 6, fig. 1–3. Cf. *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 340, 341 who consider the fortress of Loggas solely within the Byzantine context.

863 *Moutsopoulos*, Anaskaphes, 7–10, fig. 4–8.

Zones II and III: The regions of Thessalonike, Larissa, Epirus, and Naupaktos

With the expansion of Samuel's state, the Bulgarians took control of Byzantine territory, categorized here as zones II and III. The second territorial zone comprised the fortified towns of Berroia, Servia, Petra, and Stagoi, all of which were episcopal seats under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishops of Thessalonike and Larissa (Map 5, vol. I, 338.). The third territorial zone lay in Epirus and included the fortresses within the bishoprics of Glavinitza, Tzernik, and Berat/Horaia (Polychairepolis/Poulcheriopolis), under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Dyrrachion. Additionally, it encompassed Ioannina, Bela (Photike), Dryinoupolis, Bouthroton, Chimara, and Kozel, over which the metropolitan bishop of Naupaktos laid claim (Map 6, vol. I, 344).[864]

While undoubtedly significant for the political history of Samuel's Bulgaria, the fortified cities mentioned above are part of Byzantine cultural heritage, reflecting the urban, fortification, and architectural planning of the Middle Byzantine period. Furthermore, their incorporation into the ecclesiastical framework of the Archbishopric of Ohrid by Basil II's decision was short-lived; except for Glavinitza and Berat/Horaia, all the bishoprics were restored to the mentioned Byzantine metropolitanates under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople following the emperor's death. For the most part, churches within these fortified towns either predate or postdate the period of Samuel's control over them. Only two of these churches are attributed to the early 11th century – the basilica in Servia and the earlier structure beneath the Church of Sts. Sergios and Bakhos in Chimara. Therefore, they will be briefly mentioned here.

The fortress of Servia served as a stronghold of Bulgarian resistance from 986 or 989 until 1001, when it was retaken by Basil II. Samuel and Nikoulitzas, the former commander of Servia, made attempts to reclaim it in the years that followed. However, the historical sources provide insufficiently precise details regarding this military campaign, leading to varying interpretations in scholarship. According to one view, Servia remained under Bulgarian control until 1018, when it was finally conquered by Basil II.[865] Another interpretation suggests that Byzantine control of the fortress remained uninterrupted, continuing until 1018.[866]

Servia is situated above the valley of the Bistrica (Haliakmon) River, at the pass known as Stena Sarantaporu, which connects Macedonia with Thessaly, 22 km southeast of Kozani.[867] The fortress of Servia has an irregular shape, conforming to the steep rock on which it was built. It comprises three distinct sections: the acropolis at the highest point (2.5 hectares), the upper town (20 hectares), and the lower town at the foot of the hill (75 hectares).[868] At the northwestern edge of the lower town, within

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864 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 337–346.

865 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 809–810.

866 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 340.

867 For Servia, see TIB XI/2, 964–967.

868 For the fortifications of Servia with phases of construction, see *Xyngopoulos,* Ta mnēmeia, 17–26; *Evgenidou*, Anaskaphes, 67–68, draw. 4; *Eadem,* Servia and Moglena, 19–22, fig.4; *Tsilipakou*, Serbia; *Tanou*, Typologia byzantinōn pyrgōn, 338, 341, 342, 345, 346, 347.

the fortified enclosure, stand the monumental ruins of the cathedral church of Servia, measuring approximately 22.50 by 13.30 meters (Fig. 84, vol. II, 176). This three-aisled basilica, featuring a clerestory-lit central nave, a large semicylindrical apse at the east end (now collapsed), and a narthex, exemplifies Middle Byzantine basilican architecture (Fig. 81, vol. II, 174).[869]

The cathedral of Servia is linked to Byzantine sponsorship, either around 1001[870] or shortly after Basil's third *sigillion* confirmed Servia's status as a bishopric within the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[871] Archaeological research conducted in the 1990s revealed a more complex history at the site.[872] The pottery, mosaic floor, and coins of Theodosios I and Justinian found in the basilica, along with the recently uncovered early construction phase of the fortifications in the acropolis, indicate that the site was occupied during the Early Christian and Early Byzantine periods, possibly with a church dating from the same time.[873] Particularly noteworthy is the discovery of a Byzantine coin from the 10th century (N17), likely of Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), in the foundation of the southern wall of the basilica.[874] This numismatic find provides a *terminus post quem* for the basilica's construction, raising the question of whether it might have functioned as the cathedral of Servia earlier, while the city was under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Thessalonike and later the Bulgarian Church until around 1000. Leaving aside this issue, which requires further archaeological investigation, attention should be drawn to several architectural features of the basilica in Servia and its parallels. The single wide eastern apse, the construction technique utilizing fieldstone with mortar and sparingly used bricks, the perforated masonry walls separating the nave from the aisles, and the *tribelon* marking the division between the naos and narthex exhibit parallels with churches in Epirus and Macedonia. Notable examples include St. Donatos in Glyky, the Chapel of St. Euthymios in Thessalonike, St. Achilleos in Prespa (Fig. 52), Crkvište – Morovizd (Fig. 71, 72b-c), Rendina, Moglena (Fig. 86), Serres, and Melnik (Fig. 90), dating from the 9th–10th to the 11th–12th centuries. Given their prolonged presence in basilican churches across the central Balkans, these architectural elements cannot serve as precise chronological markers for the monuments. However, they provide an essential interpretative framework for understanding the relationship between Bulgarian and Byzantine church architecture, as the distinction between them cannot be determined by architectural features alone.

869 For the basilica of Servia with its later construction phases (ca. 1200, 14th centiry), see *Xyngopoulos,* Ta mnēmeia, 29–75. The cathedral of Servia is discussed in surveys and studies of Middle Byzantine basilicas: *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 310–311, fig. 327A; *Altripp*, Die Basilika in Byzanz, cat. no. 12, 12, 19, 20, 178, Tab. 18, fig. 12.1–3; *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 52, 157, 164, 166, 167, 169, 175, 215–216, 265–268, cat. no. 7, draw. 40–43, fig. 19–20; *Mal'ceva – Freze*, Baziliki, 184, 188–189, 190–193, fig. 1.v.

870 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 310.

871 *Xyngopoulos,* Ta mnēmeia, 46–49.

872 *Theologidou*, Basilikē, 592–593; *Tsilipakou*, Basilikē, 609–611; *Eadem*, Basilikē tōn Katehoumenōn, 814–820; *Eadem*, Topografia kai technē, 285–286.

873 *Tsilipakou*, Basilikē, 610–611; *Eadem*, Topografia kai technē, 286.

874 The coin is damaged and has not been published, see *Tsilipakou*, Basilikē tōn Katehoumenōn, 814; *Eadem*, Topografia kai technē, 286.

The territorial expansion of Samuel's state toward the Adriatic Sea included an old Byzantine urban Bishopric of Chimara (Akrokeraunia), at that time merged with the Bishopric of Glavinitza.[875] Within the fortress of Chimara stands a single-aisled church that underwent two construction phases. The first phase, characterized by masonry with medium and small-sized limestone blocks in the lower sections of the walls, is believed to date to the late 10th–early 11th century and is thought to have been the cathedral church.[876] Future archaeological investigations of the monument may confirm or refute this assessment based on architectural analysis.

Zones IV and V: The regions of Bregalnica, Triaditza and the Strymon River

The eastern part of Samuel's Bulgaria encompassed the territory of the Bregalnica Valley, as well as the area of Serdica and the Strymon River, categorized here as zones IV and V (Map 7–8, vol. I, 348, 354).[877] As discussed above, the old Slavic Bishopric of Bregalnica was succeeded by the Bishoprics of Strumica and Morovizd. The area of Strumica was protected by a network of fortifications, including the *kastron* of Carevi Kuli and the *phrouria* of Matzoukis, Thermitza, and Kleidion Pass, none of which contained church buildings. All of them played a role in the Battle of Kleidion (Belasica) in 1014, when Samuel suffered a heavy defeat, as described in historical sources.[878] The fortress of Gradište, along with the now-lost small church within it, is the only fortified settlement of Morovizd attested in historical sources and the archaeological record (Fig. 70).[879] Other fortifications in the region do not seem to have survived, if they ever existed.

The area of Serdica and the Strymon River overlapped with the Bishoprics of Serdica and Velbăžd and included the fortifications of Serdica, Pernik, Boyon, Moreia, and Velbăžd. These fortifications can be classified based on their date of construction and relevance in the war of 976–1018/19. Among them, only Pernik is an entirely new medieval construction built from the foundations, while Serdica and Velbăžd were Late Antique fortresses that were repaired and reused in the 9th and 10th centuries.[880] The latter is barely attested in the historical and archaeological record. In contrast, the defensive network of Serdica played a prominent role during the war. Serdica retained its urban topography and the well-preserved Early Byzantine defensive system, which was repaired by Bulgarian rulers throughout the 9th and 10th

875 For the history of the Bishopric of Chimara, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 795, 799, 801, 804, 812.

876 *Meksi*, Disa kapela Bizantine, 79–80, Tab. VI, IX. 3; *Idem*, Arkitektura e Kishave, 143–144, fig. 72b.

877 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 348–355.

878 For the archaeological study of the fortifications in N. Macedonia, see *Rujak*, Sistemot na odbranbeni fortifikacii, 161–180; *Idem*, Carevi kuli: Strumica, 217–223, figs. 212–219; *Cvetanov*, Voeno – strategiskoto značenje, 200–216; *Idem*, Srednovekovni tvrdini. For the archaeological study of the fortifications in Bulgaria, see *Mitrev*, Za Samuilovata krepost, 155–166; *Idem*, Samuilovata krepost-dema, 432–450. For the references in historical sources, see *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 862–863.

879 See above 206–208.

880 For the Roman and Late Antique Pautalia and medieval Velbăžd, see *Ruseva-Slokoska*, Pautalija; *Slokoska et al.*, Pautalija (Pautalia). See also *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 53–54, 198, cat.no. 137, fig. 110–111.

centuries.[881] The two most important and well-preserved early churches of Serdica – the Rotunda of St. George and Hagia Sophia – likely continued to function during this period. The approach to this military and ecclesiastical center was controlled by the fortresses of Moreia, Pernik, and Boyon. While the localization of Moreia remains a subject of debate,[882] the fortress of Pernik is well studied archaeologically. It occupies a rocky plateau on the right bank of the Strymon River, southwest of the present-day administrative center of Pernik. The fortifications enclose an area of approximately 5 hectares, with curtain walls constructed of rubble stone bonded with mortar and reinforced by four rectangular towers.[883] Numismatic and archaeological evidence indicate that the settlement was fortified as early as the second half of the 9th century,[884] but its role as a military stronghold (*phrourion*) became prominent during Bulgaria's resistance against Basil II, as reported by John Skylitzes.[885] The fortress retained its significance as an urban center under Byzantine rule. If earlier churches existed, they did not survive the earthquake of 1063, which led to extensive reconstruction of the defensive structures and residential buildings, as well as the construction of new churches. The remains of churches unearthed within the fortress – nos. 2, 4, 5, and 6 – exhibit various layouts, but most are identified as private funerary foundations, all dating to the second half of the 11th and 12th centuries.[886]

Although described by Skylitzes as a Bulgarian fortress captured by the Byzantine general Nikephoros Xiphias in 1017, Boyon is too poorly preserved to be archaeologically studied. However, it has been tentatively identified on a hilltop above the well-known Boyana Church, at the Momina Skala peak on Vitosha Mountain, southwest of Sofia.[887] Boyana Church has two medieval building phases. Its eastern part, a compact inscribed-cross church, belongs to the first construction phase (Fig. 46–47, vol. II, 130). A cylindrical drum rests on four massive piers attached to the walls of the naos, which is nearly square in shape, measuring 5.80 by 5.70 meters, including the semicircular apse. The church is constructed entirely of brick with wide mortar joints. Its exterior is articulated by triple blind arcades on shallow pilasters. Although tentatively dated to the late 10th–early 11th century, the church's harmoniously organized space and high-quality construction suggest a somewhat later date. Its present form indicates that it was likely built as a private foundation following the Byzantine reconquest

881 *Stančeva,* Usvojavaneto na antičnoto nasledstvo, 209–222; *Eadem*, Arheologičeskoto nasledstvo, 6–36; *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 53, 54, 56, 65, 72, 79, 96, 103, 104, 110, 121, 122, 128, 133, 137, 200, cat. no. 144, fig. 120.

882 The source provides only one geographical reference, placing it between Philippopolis and Triaditza/Serdica. It has been identified with the fortress near present-day Vetren in the Pazardzhik region and with the so-called Sersem Kale near Ihtiman. See *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 59 with further bibliography.

883 *Čangova*, Uvod, 5–11; *Eadem*, Gradoustrojstvo, 12–88; *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 196–197, cat. no. 134, fig. 105–107.

884 Coins of Basil I (867–886), eight coins of Leo VI (886–912), and a silver seal of the Bulgarian emperor Peter (927–969) have been found: *Jurukova*, Numizmatični i sfragistični pametnici, 102–109.

885 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 864.

886 For these churches, see *Čangova*, Gradoustrojstvo, 64–79.

887 *Stančeva*, Bojanskata krepost, 36–41; *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 57, 58, 72, 201, cat. no. 149.

of these territories in 1019.[888] It should be noted that the design of the oldest church in Boyana shows similarities with the two compact inscribed-cross churches in the region of Bregalnica, Gornji Kozjak (Fig. 28a), and Čardaklija (Fig. 28b), which, as we believe we have shown above, were built after 1019.

Finally, east of the left bank of the Strymon River stands the fortress of Melnik.[889] Skylitzes' chronology of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war links Melnik to the Byzantine offensive that culminated in the Battle of Kleidion (Belasica) in July 1014. However, the fortress was not taken by force but surrendered to the eunuch Sergios that same year.[890] While the early 11th-century military context of Melnik is clear, there is no direct information about its place within the organization of the Bulgarian Church. Its position in the Middle Strymon valley forms a geographical whole with the Upper Strymon valley, which belonged to the Bishopric of Velbăžd. However, Melnik is not listed among the toponyms under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Velbăžd in the first Ohrid charter (Map 1, vol. II, 13).[891] Furthermore, *Notitia* 17 of the Church of Constantinople, a later source, attests that this fortified town belonged to the Metropolitanate of Serres.[892]

Nevertheless, the fortifications of Melnik, particularly the Church of St. Nicholas, merit consideration within the chronological framework of the late 10th and 11th century. Its location and form align closely with the brief description provided by Skylitzes: the *phrourion* was built on a rock and protected by precipices and ravines. The plateau, with its nearly vertical sides rising up to 200 meters, covers an area of approximately 12 hectares. The acropolis formed at the St. Nicholas plateau is the best preserved and has played a central role in the settlement's development.[893] Archaeologists have partially reconstructed the Early Byzantine past of the settlement.[894] However, it seems unlikely that Melnik can be definitively categorized as a rebuilt Early Byzantine fortress. While earlier scholars identified 6th-century walls at the so-called Small Fortress, located at the southwestern edge of the plateau,[895] more recent investigations indicate that its masonry dates to the Komnenian period.[896] Yet, the wall of roughly hewn stones, east of the Church of St. Nicholas, may represent the first phase of defensive architecture, dated to the late 10th–early 11th century.[897]

888 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 483. *Velenis*, Srednovekovnite gradežni fazi, 162–177 proposed the possibility that the oldest part of the Boyana Church underwent two construction phases, the earlier of which may date to the 10th century. See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 128–131.

889 *Dujčev*, Melnik, 28–41.

890 Scylitzes, 351; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 862.

891 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.7–10. See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 8.

892 Notitiae, 17.56 (comm.), 20.44.

893 *Neševa*, Voennoporni punktove, 462–463, fig. 2, 3, 9, 10, 11; *Eadem*, Melnik pri car Samuil, 605–622; *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 199, cat. no. 142, fig. 116–118.

894 *Neševa*, Melnik, 235–263.

895 Ibid., 236–237, 248–258.

896 *Cvetkov,* Selištnata mreža, 38–40; *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 55–56.

897 *Neševa*, Etapi v istoričeskoto razvitie, 311–312.



Fig. 90. Melnik, acropolis, Church of St. Nicholas, aerial view

The Church of St. Nicholas stands at the highest point of the eponymous plateau (Fig. 90). Throughout its long history, it has witnessed transformations and destruction, yet significant portions of its original structure remain preserved and have been carefully restored.[898] Built over an Early Byzantine church, it is a three-aisled basilica with three semicircular apses at the eastern end, the central one being larger. Measuring 15.80 by 15.50 meters, the church has a naos that is almost square in shape. The nave is twice the width of the aisles, with arcades resting on two piers on each side. A pair of massive T-shaped piers separates the sanctuary from the nave. The walls are constructed from an irregular mixture of fieldstone with periodical courses of fragmented or whole bricks.[899]

There is still no clear consensus on the dating of the original medieval basilica within the fortress of Melnik, with proposed dates ranging from the late 9th to the 13th century. The earlier dating is primarily based on pottery evidence from the late 9th and 10th centuries,[900] while the later dating links the construction of the church to its early 13th-century frescoes.[901] However, the best dating evidence is to be gleaned from the church's planning design, internal structural arrangement, and masonry, all of which

898 For six different building phases in the course of centuries, see *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 351–353, with bibliographical references.

899 *Mijatev*, Arhitekturata, 146, fig. 156–157; *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 353–354, fig. 1–4.

900 *Neševa,* Melnik. Bogozidanijat grad, 188; *Eadem*, Melnik pri car Samuil, 613–614 argues that the church was rebuilt at the end of the 9th century, possibly as one of the seven cathedral churches of Prince Boris, a claim that cannot be accepted.

901 *Mijatev*, Arhitekturata, 146; *Georgieva*, Arheologičeski proučvanija, 29; *Mavrodinova*, Cŭrkvata Sveti Nikola; *Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, 245–246, draw. 3–8; fig. 2–5; *Todić*, The Symbolical Investiture, 59.



Fig. 91. Melnik, Church of St. Nicholas, eastern view



Fig. 92. Little Prespa Lake, Church of St. Achilleos, eastern view

are characteristic of late 10th, 11th and 12th-century basilicas in the central Balkans.[902] Specifically, the dominant presence of the central apse with three equal round headed windows at Melnik (Fig. 91) finds its closest parallels at St. Achilleos in Prespa (Fig. 92), while the spatial arrangement of the sanctuary including T-shaped piers are the

902 For the comparative study of these churches, see *Mal'ceva – Freze*, Baziliki, 179–203; *Prepis*, Kŭm problema na datirovkata, 176–193.

same as in the cathedral of Serres. Furthermore, the almost square plan of the basilica at Melnik is similar to the small basilicas in Kastoria – Hagios Stephanos, the Taxiarches Metropoleos and the Hagioi Anargyroi. Finally, the apse of the *prothesis* displays remains of a decorative band executed in bricks, a characteristic element of the decorative vocabulary found in the façades of churches in Kastoria.[903] That said, the basilica in Melnik may be dated to a period between the late 10th and late 11th centuries, though this issue requires further investigation.

Zone VI: The Danube and Sava borderlands

The borderlands of Samuel's Bulgaria, designated here as Zone VI, lay along the Danube and Sava rivers (Map 9, vol. I, 358). The cities of importance as episcopal seats – most of them inherited from the First Bulgarian State – were Dristra (Dorostolon), Vidin, Belgrade, Braničevo, Sirmium, and Niš. As part of the northern and eastern borderlands, they largely remained on the sidelines of Bulgaria's conflicts with Byzantium. The efforts to restore the Bulgarian Empire were concentrated in the western and southwestern parts of its realm. Consequently, historical sources provide no information about them, with the sole exceptions of Vidin and Sirmium. As a major center of independent Bulgaria, Vidin was a well-fortified *polis* that remained under Bulgarian control from 976 to 1002.[904] The medieval fortress of Vidin underwent several phases of construction: fortifications were first built atop the remains of ancient Bononia in the 9th–10th century and were later reinforced twice – once during Samuel's reign and again after 1002, when the city became a key Byzantine stronghold on the Danube. Within the fortress, only the remains of a single church of uncertain date have been discovered.[905] Being the northernmost and rather isolated Bulgarian center on the Sava River, Sirmium was the last stronghold to fall under Byzantine control at the very end of the war in 1019.[906] As discussed above, excavations have not confirmed the existence of fortifications surrounding the medieval settlement and the three successive churches at Mačvanska Mitrovica, though this does not necessarily mean they did not exist.

Archaeology, as yet, has little to add to our understanding of the material culture, urban and spiritual life of the other centers mentioned above. Only Braničevo stands out.[907] The archaeological record created in the Veliki Gradac fortress from the 9th to the 11th centuries is valuable for tracing the continuity of habitation in the area over

903 *Prepis*, Kŭm problema na datirovkata, 176–193.

904 *Scylitzes*, 346. For the siege of Vidin, see *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 866.

905 For archaeological research on the fortress of Vidin and the medieval church within it, see *Mihajlov*, Arheologičeski proučvanija, 1–8; *Vŭlov*, Srednovekovna čerkva, 19–20; *Kuzev*, Bdin, 98–115; *Barakov*, Bdin, 623–637. See also *Rabovjanov*, Izvŭnstoličnite kamenni kreposti, 185–186, cat. no. 95.

906 Scylitzes, 365–366. For the last days of Bulgarian Sirmium, see *Krsmanović,* Bulgarian Fortresses, 866–867.

907 For Braničevo as a religious, administrative, and military stronghold, see *Komatina*, Morava i Braničevo, 103–107; *Idem*, Diocesan Structure, 792–793, 809. The available archaeological finds testify to the development of the medieval town of Braničevo following the victory of Emperor Basil II, *Popović – Ivanišević*, Braničevo, 125–179.

two centuries, under both Bulgarian and Byzantine rule.[908] Veliki Gradac is situated 200 meters from the right bank of the Danube, near Donji Milanovac. Stratigraphic excavations have identified at least three occupational layers at the site. The well-preserved Late Antique fortification, with a rectangular plan covering approximately 1.7 hectares, was reinforced in the late 9th and 10th centuries. At the same time, a small settlement emerged within the fortification walls. Initially, in the 10th century, the area was occupied by pit dwellings. In the 11th century, these were replaced by surface dwellings with stone walls, accompanied by the construction of a new circular tower in the southern corner of the fortification (Fig. 93).[909]

This phase of urban development was also marked by the construction of churches. The so-called Old Church was discovered in 1961 near the northern gate of the structure (Fig. 93). This single-nave church, measuring 12.5 by 6.5 meters, has a semicircular apse to the east. The southeast corner of the church is destroyed, and it is aligned parallel to the fortification's ramparts. The western wall is narrower than the eastern one, and the thickness of the walls is 60–70 cm, though they are preserved only up to 30 cm. The church floor, made of antique bricks, was well-preserved in the apse. Notably, the church was built partly over the cobblestones of the main Roman-Early Byzantine road, indicating that it was not constructed in the 6th century. Based on the discovery of two coins inside the church, it is dated to the late 10th or early 11th century. One coin found in the apse dates from the reign of Basil II (976–1025), confirming the church's use during his rule. The second coin, discovered at the crown of the nave wall, dates to the reign of Manuel Komnenos (last quarter of the 11th century to mid-12th century). Since this coin was found in the wall's crown, its exact relevance is uncertain, but it is likely to suggest that the church ceased to function during this period.[910]

The so-called Younger Church at Veliki Gradac was renovated during the Middle Ages on the foundations of the Early Byzantine structure (Fig. 93). This single-nave building, with overall dimensions of 19 by 8 meters, had a semicircular apse to the east and a narthex to the west. A square annex (5 by 5 m) was added to the south. While this annex displays Early Byzantine construction techniques, it was not built concurrently with the church but somewhat later. The church was rebuilt in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by sections of the walls, which are made entirely of stone and plaster. The renovation is dated to the 11th century. Ceramic finds suggest that the church belongs to a later phase in the settlement's history when the population increased, necessitating the construction of another Christian temple. Additionally, a coin of the Hungarian king Ladislaus I (1077–1095) found above the floor of the nave further corroborates the church's use during this period.[911]

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908 For the archaeological excavations at Veliki Gradac, see *Janković*, Srednjovekovno naselje; *Popović*, Veliki Gradac, 265–282. Another important aspect of life in the Danubian frontier from Mačvanska Mitrovica to Veliki Gradac in the late 10th-early 11th century is the circulation of Byzantine coinage. See *Radić*, The Circulation, 201–214.

909 *Janković*, Srednjovekovno naselje; *Špehar*, Centralni Balkan, 74–77, fig. 9.

910 *Janković*, Srednjovekovno naselje, 41–46, fig. 18–19; *Špehar*, Centralni Balkan, 138, fig. 24A.

911 *Janković*, Srednjovekovno naselje, 41–46, fig. 18–19; *Špehar*, Centralni Balkan, 138–140, fig. 24A.

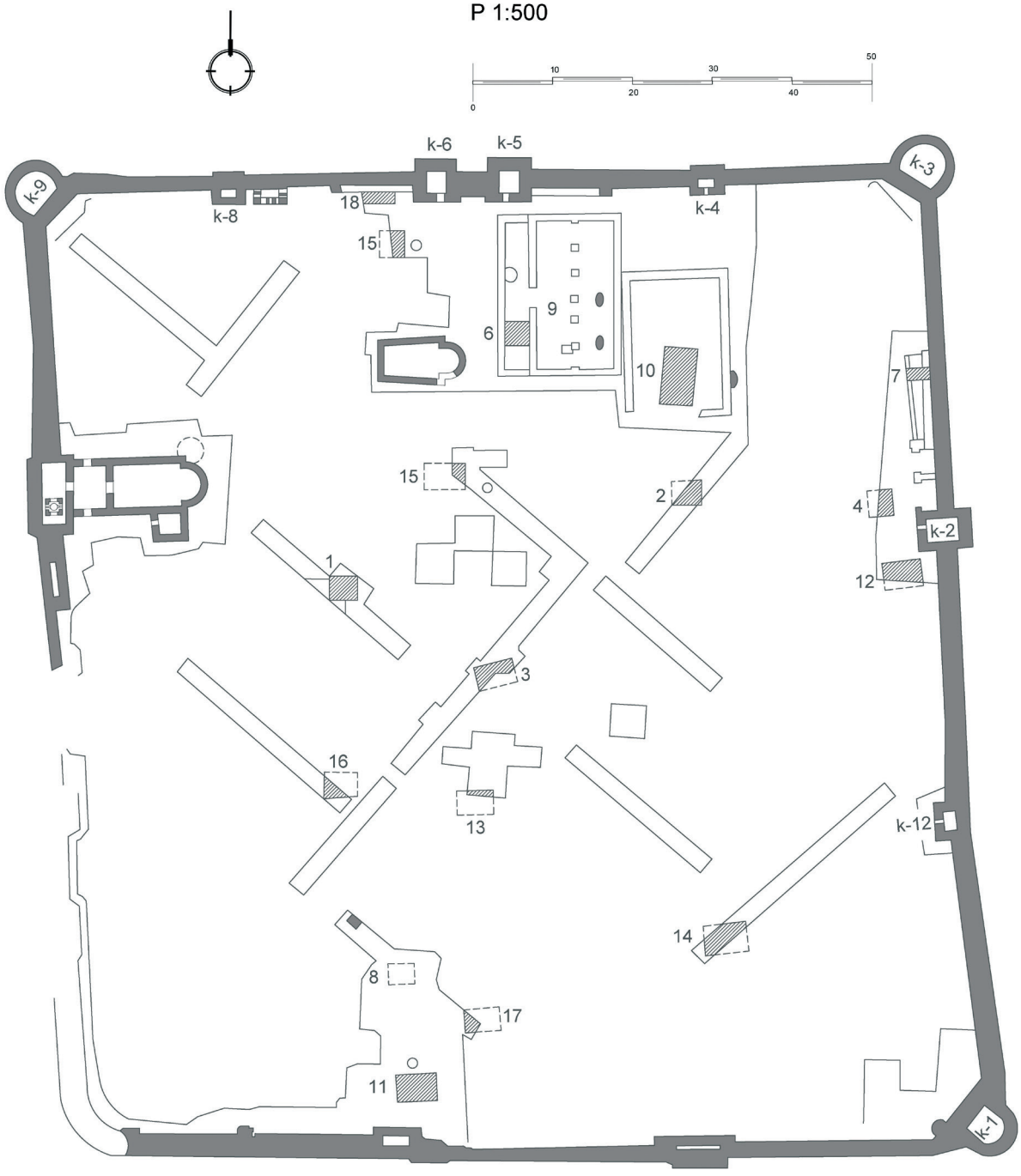


Fig. 93. Veliki Gradac, fortified settlement, plan with the layout of Old Church and Younger Church

It is difficult to distinguish, based on the churches presented above, whether they belong to Samuel's or Basil's epoch. Rather, along with the settlement, they attest to the continuity of life during the Bulgarian-Byzantine wars, even amid Basil II's campaign against Vidin in 1002. Habitation persisted until the 1070s or later, when the site was eventually abandoned.

Zone VII: The western borderlands

The final area under Bulgarian control to be addressed here comprises the western borderlands, including Prizren, Lipljan, and Ras (Zone VII, Map 10, vol. I, 363).[912] Much like most fortresses along the Danube and Sava frontiers, these strongholds appear to have remained uninvolved in the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts between 976 and 1018. The only exception noted by Skylitzes is Lipljan, whose inhabitants surrendered the town to Emperor Basil II in 1018.[913]

The information provided by both monuments and the *sigillia* of Basil II confirms the episcopal status of Prizren, Lipljan, and Ras within Samuel's Bulgaria.What was the defensive aspect of these settlements? It is not possible to trace the beginnings of Prizren's urban development beneath the modern town. Only its sacral focal point has been preserved, located beneath the Church of the Virgin Ljeviška (Fig. 76–77). The lower town was protected by a fortress situated on a hill east of modern Prizren, on the left bank of the Bistrica River. The fortification was constructed in multiple phases, the earliest of which dates to the 11th century and is associated with Byzantine rule. Today, only faint traces of these defensive structures remain.[914] The mention of Lipljan in Skylitzes' account suggests that the settlement possessed a certain degree of defensive organization. This is further supported by the testimony of Anna Komnene, who describes Lipljan as a small town and one of the main battlegrounds in the conflict between the Župan of Raška, Vukan, and the army of the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos in 1093–1094.[915]

Within the area of Ras, the fortresses of Postenje (Fig. 107) and Ras (Fig. 108) were located – originally Late Antique and Early Byzantine fortifications, both of which were renewed in the 9th century.[916] Their earliest medieval horizon spans from the 9th to the late 10th century. Based on its proximity to the cathedral church of St. Peter (Sts. Peter and Paul, Fig. 102), it is assumed that Postenje was a more prominent fortress and possibly the seat of the *katepano* during the time of Tzimiskes.[917] Furthermore, the latter comprised two churches: a so-called larger church and a chapel attached to the so-called palace. The exact date when Samuel took Ras is not known, but it might be linked to his military campaign in Diokleia (Duklja) and Dalmatia at the end of the 10th century.[918]

* * *

War was an everyday reality in the short-lived state of Samuel. The military, state, ecclesiastical, and representational aspects of defensive architecture are essential for understanding the four decades marked by conflicts with Byzantium in an effort to restore the Bulgarian Empire. Most fortified cities, settlements, and military outposts

912 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 362–364.

913 Scylitzes, 357.

914 For the fortress and settlement of Prizren, see *Nikolić*, Prizren, 42–62.

915 Alexias, 265 (IX, 4.2–3).

916 For Ras – Postenje, see *Mrkobrad*, Ras – Postenje, 203–219. For Gradina (Ras), see *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras.

917 *Kalić*, Prokopijeva ARSA, 14; *Vojvodić*, Prostorne studije i privredni obrasci, 29.

918 *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 113.

were situated on hilltops, hillsides, or along lake shores. In this respect, Bulgarian fortresses did not differ significantly from their Byzantine counterparts, as the Middle Byzantine period was marked by an increased need for protection and territorial control. However, the landscape of the central Balkans – with its mountainous terrain, narrow river valleys, gorges, and ravines – proved more favorable to organized Bulgarian resistance than to sustained Byzantine offensives.

Bulgarian fortifications may be classified into three main categories: those inherited from the period of independent Bulgaria, reoccupied and reconstructed Late Antique fortified sites, and newly established fortifications. Differences between the fortifications in the eastern and south-western parts of late 10th-early 11th century Bulgaria have been noted in terms of planning and building technique. The presence of preexisting Late Antique structures, combined with the influence of Byzantine architectural and military traditions in the southwestern territories of Bulgaria, provides a plausible explanation for the more advanced planning and construction techniques observed in the fortresses of that region.[919] Furthermore, certain architectural features allow scholars to distinguish the layers dating to Samuel's period from earlier or later Byzantine phases of the fortifications. These include the dry stone construction techniques with trenches and wooden palisades.

What remains to be considered is church architecture within fortifications. What make these churches specifically Bulgarian in terms of architecture and artistic expression? It is noteworthy that in a considerable number of examples, the Bulgarians built modest churches over Late Antique or Early Byzantine structures, or made reinforcements and repairs to the standing Byzantine churches during their occupation of the fortified sites. More important are the examples of churches within fortified ecclesiastical centers that served as cathedrals of the Bulgarian Church between 976 and 1018. It has proved difficult to explain the Bulgarian artistic context for the following reason: the most significant Bulgarian state and church foundations, such as St. Achilleos in Prespa, demonstrate that substantial financial resources were allocated to engage skilled architects, builders, and possibly painters. Given the prominence of Bulgarian ecclesiastical dignitaries within the Bulgarian military elite, it is indisputable that they were in a position to construct or repair cathedral churches.[920] The territorial overlap of bishoprics with regions known to have had Bulgarian military strongholds further supports this. However, a comparison between Bulgarian and Byzantine churches reveals no architectural distinction between them. Both Bulgarians and Byzantines employed masons trained within the Byzantine Empire. The examples of Bulgarian church architecture discussed here did not develop a distinct artistic identity of their own but rather adopted the Byzantine one. Consequently, while historical circumstances allow us to attribute certain churches to Samuel's period, their Byzantine-like appearance presents a challenge to reaching definitive conclusions.

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919 *Rabovjanov*, Tradicii i vlijanija, 423–431.

920 For the Bulgarian ecclesiastical dignitaries within Samuel's realm known from historical sources, see *Zajkovski*, Eparhijata na crkovnata organizacija, 157–164.

IV. Contact zones

Kastoria

Byzantine town in the Slavic milieu

A major gap in our knowledge of the period between the late 9th and early 11th century concerns Kastoria – an important Byzantine town strategically located on the western shore of Lake Kastoria, in the Haliakmon River Valley of western Macedonia. It sat at the crossroads between the central Balkans and the western regions, making it a key hub for trade and military movements between the West and Constantinople. Its fortifications, along with its natural surroundings, also made it a defensible location.[921] Kastoria's impressive city walls were built over its Early Byzantine predecessor – a fortified city founded by Justinian (527–565) as a renewal of Diocletianoupolis, relocated to the more secure island at the center of Lake Kastoria.[922] These walls were first mentioned by the historian Prokopios in his work *De Aedificiis*.[923] It remains unclear from Prokopios' account whether the town was renamed Justinianoupolis or preserved its earlier name.[924] A later ecclesiastical source, however, confirms that the Early Byzantine ecclesiastical center continued to be known as Diocletianoupolis under the Metropolitanate of Thessalonike.

The Notitia Episcopatuum of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, no. 3 (ca. 870–880), lists the Bishopric of Diocletianoupolis twice: as a suffragan under the Metropolitanate of Thessalonike in the province of Macedonia, and under the Metropolitanate of Larissa in Second Thessaly.[925] These inconsistencies in the source likely reflect antiquarian information about the administrative system: under Diocletian, Thessaly was established as a separate province, incorporating Orestis – the district of Macedonia to which Diocletianoupolis had originally belonged.[926] However, none of the 10th-century notitiae – 7, 9, and 10 – include Kastoria among the suffragan sees of the Metropolitanate of Thessalonike.[927] Does the absence of Kastoria from episcopal lists suggest that the bishopric had already been incorporated into the Bulgarian Church by the early 10th century?[928] Answer to this question may be illuminated by turning to Bulgaria's military and political circumstances during that period.

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921 *Drakopoulou*, Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 114–126.

922 For Diocletianoupolis, see *Papazoglu*, Makedonski gradovi, 182–184; *Kuzmanovska*, Poznoatnička toponimija, 58–62. Cf. *Drakopoulou*, Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 116 who urges caution in attributing the city's fortification to Justinian's imperial program, noting instead that Kastoria developed on the same site as the Roman city of Celetron.

923 Procopius, De aedificiis, 112.

924 For the survey of scholarly opinions on this issue, see *Kuzmanovska*, Poznoatnička toponimija, 59–60, n. 205.

925 Notitiae, 3. 258, 682.

926 For provinces of Macedonia and Thessaly in Antiquity, see *Papazoglu*, Makedonski gradovi, 88–89. In the 10th-century notitiae 7, 9, and 10, the Metropolitanate of Thessalonike is assigned to Thessaly. See Notitiae, 7. 296; 9. 182; 10. 215.

927 Notitiae, 7. 296; 9. 182; 10. 215.

928 Cf. the bishop of Vodena (Edessa), who, according to Notitia 3, was a suffragan of the metropolitan of Thessalonike, but does not appear among his suffragans in the 10th-century Notitiae 7, 9, and 10. It has been

During the medieval period, the Bulgarians had a significant presence in the region, especially after 904, when the First Bulgarian Empire expanded under the leadership of Simeon the Great and his successors.[929] Nevertheless, historical sources concerning the Bulgarian–Byzantine conflicts of 894–896 and 913–927 offer little to no information on Kastoria. Simeon the Great's territorial acquisitions in Macedonia and modern-day Albania during the campaign of 894–896 defined the border between Bulgaria and Byzantium by treaty in 904.[930] The southwestern border of Bulgaria ran from the Vardar River east of Vodena/Edessa, across the Paikon and Vermion mountains, passed south of Kastoria, followed the Vjosa River, and reached the Adriatic coast at Chimara. Beyond that point, the border left Berroia, Servia, and Stagoi in Byzantine hands. Bulgaria controlled nearly all the Slavic communities inhabiting regions in Macedonia and present-day Albania situated south and west of Ohrid.[931] As seen from above, the Byzantine territories in the southern part of the Macedonian region, including Kastoria, came under Bulgarian control. This region remained peripheral during the more intense Bulgarian-Byzantine conflict between 913 and 927, which focused primarily on the Thracian and Macedonian themes and the area close to Constantinople.[932] Similarly, the military priorities of post-927 Bulgaria under Peter did not encompass the area of Kastoria,[933] leading to the general conclusion that the situation there remained largely unchanged. Such a historical interpretation may rest on a single key argument: the Bulgarian-Byzantine treaty of 927 reestablished the common borders defined by the treaties of 896/897 and 904, whereby Bulgaria relinquished all Byzantine territories conquered by Simeon after 913.[934]

In sum, the absence of Kastoria from the episcopal lists of the Church of Constantinople, combined with indirect evidence from the political history of Bulgaria, suggests that the city was likely incorporated into the Bulgarian state and church

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suggested that the bishopric fell under Bulgarian rule and became part of the Bulgarian Church in the early 10th century. See *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 130–131; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 799.

929 *Hupchick*, The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 149– 220, esp. 166–167, 228, 253, 298.

930 In 904, the southern Macedonian border was established at the village of Naresh, situated approximately 22 kilometers from Thessalonike, where commemorative stone boundary markers were erected. See *Beševliev,* Pŭrvobŭlgarski nadpisi, no. 46.

931 *Zlatarski*, Istorija I/2, 340–341; *Koledarov,* Političeska geografija, 46–47, map no. 7, 8; *Hupchick*, The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 167.

932 For the war of 913–927, see *Ostrogorski*, Istorija, 252–258, map. no. 3; *Hupchick*, The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 167–219 with further bibliography. Little is known about Simeon's campaign of 918 in the Theme of Hellas. The *Strategikon* of Kekaumenos likely refers to these events, though the documentary basis is insufficient (Kekavmen, 198.11–13). A lacuna in the text (Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς λυπηθεὶς ἀνεχώρησε, καὶ ἔμειναν οἱ τοῦ κάστρου ἀχείρωτοι καὶ ἀήττητοι ... * ἦν τις πόλης ἐν Ἑλλάδι πολυάνθρωπος) led the first editors of the manuscript to surmise that the missing portion may have contained the name of a city – either Kastoria or Kastrion. Lemerle expressed doubt regarding this possibility, noting that neither of these cities belonged to the Theme of Hellas. He suggested that Kekaumenos may have deliberately left the name blank, given the remoteness of the events in time and his uncertainty about the city's actual name (*Lemerle*, Prolégomènes, 57, n. 3). Litavrin, for his part, points to the numerous textual inaccuracies found in the manuscript and proposes that this may be yet another such instance (Kekavmen, 433, comment. 374). Cf. *Pelekanides,* Kastoria, 1191.

933 For the reign of Peter (927–969), see *Hupchick*, The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 221–246, with further bibliography.

934 For the Byzantine–Bulgarian Peace Treaty of 927, see *Pirivatrić*, Some Notes, 40–48; *Hupchick*, The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 223 with sources and bibliography.



Fig. 94. Kastoria, Oikonomou district, Koubelidiki, view from the southeast

during the reigns of Simeon and Peter.[935] As an ancient Byzantine bishopric located on the border between Bulgaria and Byzantium and within a predominantly Slavic milieu,[936] Kastoria does not appear to have been a primary concern for the Bulgarian rulers.[937] Their attention was focused instead on consolidating control over the Slavo-Bulgarian population in the territories recently taken from Byzantium.

The ecclesiastical and military status of Kastoria within Samuel's state is well documented through Skylitzes' *Synopsis,* the first Ohrid charter (1019) and likely inscriptions from St. Achilleos in Prespa.[938] The city was seized by Samuel probably around 990 and remained under Bulgarian control until 1018, when it was conquered by Basil II.[939] The first Ohrid charter allows the conclusion that Kastoria, as a successor of the Early Byzantine Diocletianoupolis, had gained significant prominence within the Bulgarian Church during Samuel's reign. This is reflected in its prominent position on the

935 *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 128–129 expresses a similar view.

936 To the west, Kastoria bordered the Slavic Bishopric of Devol. For the Bishopric of Devol and its territorial extent, see *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 114–117; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 800. In the post-1018 period the Bishopric of Devol was subsumed under that of Kastoria, which became the seat of the unified bishopric, as evidenced by the first Ohrid charter. See *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.16–20.

937 Exceptions in this regard were the old Byzantine Bishopric of Serdica, permanently conquered by the Bulgarians as early as 812, and Ohrid, the center of the Slavic-language Christianization of the Bulgarian population.

938 For the possibility that the partially preserved inscription, located fourth to the left of the throne in the apse of St. Achilleos in Prespa, refers to Kastoria, see the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I, 308, 314, fig. 4–7.

939 *Pelekanides*, Kastoria, 1190–1194; *Hupchick*, The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars, 298, 306; TIB XI/1, 549–550; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 858–859.

list, immediately following Ohrid, as well as the notable number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* assigned to it (40 and 30, respectively).

During the obscure period in Kastoria's history, spanning from the late 9th to the early 11th century, a series of monuments were constructed, all sharing common architectural features. These include partially or well-preserved churches located both within and beyond the city walls. The Virgin Mary of Kastriotissa, known as Koubelidiki (Fig. 94), Hagios Demetrios, and the Taxiarches Gymnasiou (Holy Archangel of the Gymnasium) are situated in the Oikonomou district within the acropolis, while Hagios Stephanos (St. Stephen) stands in the Eleousas district of the inner city (Fig. 96). The Taxiarches Metropoleos (Holy Archangel of the Metropole) lies in the eponymous parish, outside the city walls in the southern section of the peninsula (Fig. 95). Finally, the Church of the Hagioi Anargyroi (The Holy Unmercenaries Kosmas and Damian) is located in the southern parish of Saint Panteleimon, overlooking the lake (Fig. 117, vol. II, 227.).[940]

This section presents the material classified by architectural type, outlining the dating criteria based on construction techniques and preserved monumental painting. It further addresses the question of the role of Kastoria's local building tradition within the broader framework of Bulgarian ecclesiastical architecture.

The churches of Kastoria: Typological diversity

Basilicas occupied a dominant role in the architectural landscape of Kastoria, as exemplified by the Taxiarches Metropoleos, Hagios Stephanos, and the Hagioi Anargyroi.[941] They all follow the type of basilica with a shortened nave. Among them, the Taxiarches Metropoleos is generally considered the earliest. With overall dimensions of 6 by 10 meters, it was a miniature three-aisled basilica with a narthex. Its nave is separated from the aisles by two rows of a columnar arcade. Of the three semicircular apses, only the central one is visible from the outside; the lateral ones are embedded within the mass of the eastern wall. The church was originally fully vaulted: the central nave with a longitudinal barrel vault, and the side aisles with quadrant vaults. The central nave features a markedly elevated clerestory zone. On the western side, a shallow narthex was built, featuring the same spatial structure as the naos and divided into three bays. The Taxiarches Metropoleos might have been built on the site of an Early Byzantine church, as suggested by the reuse of Late Antique architectural elements – columns, column bases, capitals, and imposts of twin colonettes – incorporated as *spolia* into the structure.[942]

940 For the disposition of the churches, see *Pelekanides*, Kastoria, fig. 1; *Drakopoulou*, Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 23–24; *Eadem*, Kastoria, fig. 96.

941 The architecture of these churches is most thoroughly explored by *Orlandos*, Ta Byzantina Mnēmeia tēs Kastorias, 2–199 and *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 111–144, 203–229, 307–330. See also the overviews: *Pelekanides*, Kastoria, 1198–1211, fig. 2–12; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 313–314, 381–382, fig. 331–333, 409; *Ousterhout*, Eastern Medieval Architecture, 408 and several case studies of monuments in Kastoria: *Wharton Epstein*, Middle Byzantine Churches, 190–207; *Eadem*, Art of Empire, 98–100; *Mal'ceva – Freze*, Baziliki, 190–192; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 178–181; *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 174–178, fig. 4–6.

942 *Pelekanides*, Kastoria, fig. 12; *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 117–119; fig. 107–112.



Fig. 95.
Kastoria, district of Taxiarches Metropoleos, Taxiarches Metropoleos

Hagios Stephanos is unusually small in both width and length 7.7 by 11.7 meters, but it is of considerable height, about 9.2 meters and has very elongated proportions (Fig. 97). It consists of three aisles, with the two side aisles noticeably lower than the central one. The central nave is separated from the lateral aisles by a wall pierced with large arches. The narrow rectangular narthex is located on the west side. The central apse is semicircular on the inside and three-sided on the outside, while the lateral ones are embedded within the mass of the eastern wall in the same way as those in the Taxiarches Metropoleos. Underneath the present apses, remains of three niches were discovered, with the middle one being polygonal. These were clearly the remnants of an older church, on the ruins of which Hagios Stephanos was built.[943] Inside the apse, there is a built *synthronon* with the bishop's throne. The side aisles and narrow narthex form a kind of procession space around the central part of the nave, reinforcing its central role. This is further emphasized by the constructed parapets that separate the altar area from the rest of the nave, as well as by the height of this part of the nave, which is especially pronounced. The narthex contains a room on the upper floor, connected to the nave of the church by a large two-light window. The gallery, most commonly designated as *katechoumena,* is covered by a quadrant vault and includes a chapel in its southern part, separated from the rest of the room by a structure resembling a flying buttress.[944] The room on the first floor is accessed

943 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 210–211, fig. 185. Cf. *Siomkos*, L'église Saint-Etienne, 35–45.

944 For the functions of church galleries, see *Marinis*, Architecture and Ritual, 91–93. For the view that the gallery in Hagios Stephanos functioned as a *katechoumena*, from which distinguished members of the monastic



Fig. 96.
Kastoria, Eleousas district, Hagios Stephanos

via stairs in the northern corner of the narthex. Additionally, the floor of the narthex projects from the outside of the building, giving the impression of a tower above the main entrance to the church.[945] The presence of the *synthronon* and the parapets of the templon are typically considered features of an episcopal center. As noted in scholarship, the presence of a *synthronon* does not necessarily indicate a cathedral church,[946] and the modest dimensions of Hagios Stephanos certainly do not support its identification as the cathedral of Kastoria.[947] However, both features of its internal topography – the *synthronon* and the *katechoumena* – warrant further investigation within both episcopal and monastic contexts.[948]

The third member of this group is the Hagioi Anargyroi. Like the Taxiarches Metropoleos and Hagios Stephanos, it is a three-aisled, fully vaulted basilica with a nearly square plan (10 by 12.5 meters), featuring a projecting semicircular apse at the east end and a prominently elevated central nave. The heightening of the central nave was likely not intended solely for additional lighting but may have served a symbolic or aesthetic function. A comparable architectural solution appears in the Church of

community attended the service, see *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 313–315. Cf. *Wharton Epstein*, Middle Byzantine Churches, 192 who suggests that the gallery may have been added for structural rather than liturgical purposes.

945 *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 177.

946 As many as nine small basilicas in Pliska feature a *synthronon*. In such cases, it was not a mark of an episcopal church, but rather a designated place for the bishop when he officiated at the liturgy there on special occasions. See *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 41, 61–62.

947 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 214–215.

948 For the cathedral context of bishop's throne and *katechoumena*, see *Radujko*, Episkopski presto.



Fig. 97. Kastoria, Hagios Stephanos, interior, view from the gallery toward east

St. Nicholas (Shën Kollit) in Perondi, near Berat, which scholars date to the second half of the 11th century (Fig. 21–22, vol. II, 100).[949] As in Hagios Stephanos, the central nave is separated from the lateral aisles by solid walls pierced with two arched openings on the north side and a single one on the south.

The Church of the Transfiguration and Koubelidiki both exhibit a triconch plan, though they do not belong to the same building tradition.[950] The former is situated outside the urban settlement of Kastoria, while the latter stands within the acropolis of the fortress. The ruined Church of the Transfiguration stands atop the eponymous hill on the northern shore of Lake Kastoria, near the villages of Metamorfosi and Fotini (Fig. 98). Its plan, measuring 7.5 by 7.5 meters, consists of a rectangular naos surrounded by three low semicircular apses on the eastern, southern, and northern sides. The dome is elevated on a cylindrical drum resting on four massive central piers. Its architectural design is marked by simplicity and a certain lack of refinement, most evident in the construction technique, which combines rough fieldstone with abundant mortar. Brick is employed selectively, primarily for the vaults, pendentives, and the dome. Though grouped with the early churches of Kastoria, the Church of the Transfiguration most likely predates them.[951] In terms of architectural design and masonry technique, it shares greater affinities with the late 9th–early 10th century churches – St. Andrew in Peristeri near Thessalonike and a group of Ohrid triconchs.[952]

Although typologically related to the Church of the Transfiguration, the Koubelidiki – by its composition, construction technique, and style – shows no direct connection with it, but rather aligns with the group of church buildings within the city walls of Kastoria (Fig. 94). Smaller in scale, with overall dimensions of 6.2 by 7.5 meters, the Koubelidiki is marked by refined geometric simplicity. A cubic core is enclosed by relatively low semicircular apses on the east, north, and south sides, above which triangular tympana rise. Compared to the squat proportions of the Transfiguration Church, the Koubelidiki is more vertically oriented. Its striking external appearance is further emphasized by an unusually elongated cylindrical drum.

The domed triconch type of church was known in the Balkan provinces during this period, though the origin of this architectural plan is debated. Similar churches, such as those in Ohrid (Fig. 38–39, 44, 47) and at the Karaačteke Monastery (Fig. 41), share an analogous plan, yet differences in composition and elevation make direct comparisons difficult.[953] While churches from the turn of the 9th–10th centuries

949 *Meksi*, Arkitektura, 19–43; *Idem*, Arhitektura e kishave, 152–154; *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 217.

950 For the architecture of these churches, see *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 2–109, fig. 1–18, Tab. III–VI; 87– 109, fig. 81–99. See also *Pelekanides*, Kastoria, 1196–1197, fig 15; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 323, fig. 345, 346 a, b.

951 *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 172–174.

952 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 40–58; *Maltseva*, Ohrid Triconch Churches, 291–298, fig. 1, 2, 5, 8; *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 171–174, fig. 1, 2, 3.

953 *Koco,* Trikonhalnite crkvi, 91–100; *Stričević*, Églises triconques, 224–240; *Mal'ceva,* Trikonhi, 36–39; *Grabar*, Martyrium, 102–119; *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 147–150, 238–243; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Po vŭprosa za srednovekovnite trikonhalni cŭrkvi, 10–15; *Mal'ceva*, Monastyrskaja arkhitektura, 809–828; Grozdanov, Sveti Naum, 44–45; *Popkonstantinov – Kostova*, Architecture of Conversion, 122–123; *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 156–160; *Mamaloukos*, A contribution to the study of the "Athonite" church, 39–50.



Fig. 98.
Lake Kastoria,
Church of the
Transfiguration

in Ohrid have often been compared to the Koubelidiki, no clear information about the triconch elevation of the Ohrid churches exists, preventing a full comparison.[954] It is possible that the builders in Ohrid and the surrounding region, influenced by the monastery churches of Saints Clement and Naum, adopted the modified triconch as a model for their churches. Given the geographical proximity and the similar architectural features, it should not be discounted that this influence may have spread to Kastoria as well. Based on the triconch plan, which in Ohrid and Karaachteke was associated with the monastic function of the church, it can be assumed that the same function applied to the Koubelidiki.[955] Another characteristic of this period is the use of cylindrical drums, which were considered typical of the 10th century. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this architectural feature appears in several churches, including the church in Teranci, Zoodochos Pege in Marmiro (Fig. 17), the Church of St. Germanos in the eponymous village in Prespa (Fig. 64), the Dormition of the Virgin in Labovo (Fig. 38, vol. II, 122) and Boboševo (Fig. 1, vol. II, 80), Hagios Basileios para tin Gephyran in Arta, and St. John the Baptist in Nessebar. All these churches have uncertain datings, ranging from the late 9th century to the middle of the 11th century. [956]

The last group of Kastorian churches includes small single-aisled structures covered by a gable roof. This simplest church design is exemplified by Hagios Demetrios Oikonomou, and the Taxiarches Gymnasiou/Oikonomou (Fig. 89).[957] Both feature a semicircular central apse topped with a characteristic triangular gable adorned with a dog-tooth band and a single window, while the small *pastophoria* niches are enclosed within the thickness of the eastern wall. Better preserved, the Taxiarches Gymnasiou displays relatively steep proportions, while the overall appearance of St. Demetrios is difficult to assess as it lies partially buried below the current street level.

954 *Mal'ceva*, Monastyrskaja arkhitektura, 809–828; *Eadem*, Ohrid triconch churches, 291–304.

955 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 323.

956 *Wharton Epstein*, Middle Byzantine Churches, 195, n. 23.

957 For the architecture of these churches, see *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 395–399, fig. 357–359.

The building tradition of Kastoria: From local ground to the Bulgarian frame

The churches of Kastoria display a notable consistency in their external appearance, despite the diversity of their architectural typology. A heightened concern for the exterior of church buildings is manifested in two principal aspects: the measured manipulation of spatial proportions and the richly articulated façades. These converge in steep silhouettes imbued with picturesque vitality – a signature of the local building craft.

The distinctive construction method represents a variant of the cloisonné technique, in which two rows of bricks alternate with courses of large, irregularly shaped stone blocks. In the mortar joints between the stones, bricks are inserted vertically, diagonally, or in combinations that resemble Greek letters – most commonly the letter kappa, which appears both in its standard and reversed forms. Through the use of such cloisonné patterns, combined with dog-tooth bands tracing the arched windows, running along the façades, and encircling the drum of the dome, the architecture achieves a sense of surface flatness and a marked separation between the building's volumetric elements. The integration of various building materials – including stone, brick, and ceramic tiles – was intended to produce polychromatic surfaces in which ornaments played a prominent role. These façades display a rich repertory of decorative motifs, including solar rosettes, *opus spicatum*, and stylized forms of Greek letters (Fig. 99).[958]

The shared architectural features observed in the churches of Kastoria were the product of local workshops.[959] As established in scholarship, their activity can be traced from the 10th century through the first half of the 11th, spanning several generations of builders. Although distinctive, the architectural character of Kastoria evolved in parallel with broader Middle Byzantine trends across the Byzantine territories in the Balkans, including regions under Bulgarian control at the time. For instance, the construction of high clerestory zones in churches such as the Taxiarches Metropoleos, Hagios Stephanos, and the Hagioi Anargyroi – comparable in height to that of the Koubelidiki – represents an architectural phenomenon attested both in Kastoria and in the neighboring capital, Thessalonike. The most representative examples of this style are the chapel of St. Euthymios attached to the basilica of St. Demetrios and the Panagia ton Chalkeon.[960] Furthermore, the decorative treatment of construction materials, though restrained, can be observed on the exteriors of certain churches in Epirus and Western Sterea Hellada, such as Panagia Panaxiotissa at Gavrolimni and Hagios Basileios para tin Gephyran in Arta.[961]

More significantly, the well-preserved churches of Kastoria reveal connections with Bulgarian architecture, both from the era of the First Bulgarian Empire and the time of Samuel's state. The churches of the Taxiarches Metropoleos, Hagios Stephanos and

958 For more on the construction technique and façade decoration in the monuments of Kastoria, see *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias.

959 *Wharton Epstein*, Middle Byzantine Churches, 190–207; *Eadem,* Art of Empire, 98–102; *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 171–188.

960 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 219.

961 For the architecture of these churches, see *Vokotopoulos*, Ē ekklēsiastikē architektonikē, 45–50, 80–86, Tab. 32–34a, 48–49; Ćurčić, Architecture, 327, 331, fig. 351, 355–356.



Fig. 99.
Kastoria,
Koubelidiki, drum,
cloisonné patterns,
building materials
and ornaments

the Hagioi Anargyroi follow the form of a truncated basilica, a type of church that was common in the Bulgarian lands, especially in the capitals of Pliska and Preslav. As many as nineteen small basilicas have been uncovered within the larger enclosure of Pliska, protected by earth ramparts. They may have served as private foundations, belonged to small monastic communities, or functioned as parish churches meeting the liturgical needs of the local population.[962] Hagios Stephanos in Kastoria has often been compared to Basilica No. 36 in Pliska.[963] Basilica no. 4 from Bial Briag in Veliki Preslav and the well-preserved Church of St. Stephen in Nessebar should also be included in the list. In the latter, the central nave rises significantly above the side aisles – a feature comparable to that found in the monuments of Kastoria.[964] However, finding direct analogies is difficult, as the churches in the Bulgarian capitals are only preserved in their foundations.

Closer connections with Bulgarian architecture were established during the period of Samuel's realm, whose capital lay in the geographical vicinity of Kastoria. The influence of Kastoria's art workshops on the cultural scene is most evident in their likely involvement in the construction of two churches of great importance to the Bulgarian ruler. These are the Basilica of St. Achilleos (Fig. 54), which served as the cathedral and

962 *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 41–47, fig. 17–22.

963 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 211.

964 *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 48–55, fig. 23–24.

the ruler's own endowment, and the Church of St. Germanos in the eponymous village in Prespa (Fig. 64).[965] It should also be noted that the architectural features identified at the Church of St. Nicholas within the fortress of Melnik – such as its square basilican plan and the remnants of decorative brickwork – show certain similarities to the churches of Kastoria.[966]

Dating criteria: Construction methods and monumental painting

Based on both their architectural structures and the stylistic features of the preserved frescoes, scholars have variously dated the churches of Kastoria from the mid-9th century to the last quarter of the 11th century. Understandably, analyses have most often focused on the most representative buildings (Koubelidiki) and best-preserved painted decoration (Hagios Stephanos, the Hagioi Anargyroi).[967] However, incorporating the nearby Church of the Transfiguration into the discussion may contribute to a more precise establishment of the chronological framework of these monuments. What distinguishes this church most from the rest of the Kastorian churches are the crude construction of fieldstone in large quantities of mortar and the absence of elongated proportions. Based on this, it is placed in the late 9th century and compared, among others, with the group of Ohrid triconch churches.[968] It is noteworthy that the architectural settings of both Clement's foundation, known as the Monastery of St. Panteleimon, and the Church of the Transfiguration were situated outside the urban centers of Ohrid and Kastoria. Similar to the old Byzantine urban episcopal seat of Ohrid, Kastoria was likely incorporated into the Bulgarian ecclesiastical structure only after the Bulgarian-Byzantine war of 894–896.[969] This raises an important question: could the Church of the Transfiguration be regarded as evidence for the territorial spread of Slavic missionary endeavors across the regions of Macedonia and present-day Albania? Might the church's location, then, have reflected the overlapping presence of the Byzantine bishopric and Slavic missionary activities around Kastoria in the late 9th and early 10th century? Given that Clement served as bishop of the Slavs, his ecclesiastical jurisdiction may have extended into the territory around Kastoria, insofar as a Slavic population was present there. Kastoria lay on the border of the Slavic Bishopric of Devol, an area known for the missionary activities of Clement and Naum. Particularly relevant in this context is Naum's monastery, with its triconch church, situated on a high cliff above the southern shore of Lake Ohrid – territory that fell within the Bishopric of Devol. Historical circumstances, geographical proximity, and the popularity of small triconch churches support this hypothesis. Nonetheless, the absence of documentary evidence precludes a definitive conclusion.

965 Ćurčić, Architecture, 312; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 181, fig. 8, 9.

966 *Čaneva-Dečevska*, Cŭrkovnata arhitektura, 55–58, fig. 28. See above 248–251.

967 A comprehensive overview of scholarly opinions regarding the dating of the monuments in Kastoria is offered by *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 178–181; *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 174–176.

968 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 2–20; *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 171–174.

969 For the episcopal see of Ohrid in the late 9th and early 10th centuries, see above 145–149.

The arguments for dating the Church of the Transfiguration, as presented above, do not support an early dating of the Kastorian churches. Rather, they appear to fall within the chronological framework of the 10th century. However, precise dating cannot be established on the basis of architectural comparison alone.

Only two churches – Hagios Stephanos and the Taxiarches Metropoleos – preserve, at least in part, the first layer of painted decoration.[970] Nevertheless, these frescoes provide compelling evidence for dating the monuments. In Hagios Stephanos, the oldest layer of frescoes is preserved in the nave, gallery, and narthex.[971] In particular, the Last Judgment composition in the narthex, which covers the vault and part of the walls, deserves special mention (Fig. 101). The painting is flat and linear, with a schematic treatment of draperies. Most of the figures have oval faces, thick eyebrows, wide eyes, prominent noses, and small mouths. Due to the poor state of preservation, it is difficult to fully assess the composition. However, it is clear that the painters had an excellent sense of scale and a keen understanding of how to integrate scenes, figures, and ornamental motifs with the architectural space of the church.[972]

In the Taxiarches Metropoleos, the first-phase frescoes are preserved only in the sanctuary and the narthex.[973] The standing figure of Christ is depicted in the conch of the northern apse, while the standing figure of the Apostle Matthew appears in the conch of the southern apse. The placement of Christ in the *prothesis* and the Apostle Matthew in the *diakonikon* indicates that the *pastophoria* also functioned as chapels with their own distinct decorative programs. The wall above the entrance from the narthex into the naos features a monumental depiction of Christ enthroned, with a Deesis composed of busts in the lunette beneath. Three more standing figures are partially discernible on the western wall of the narthex, above the entrance. They may have represented Old Testament figures – Abraham with Lazarus, Isaac, and Jacob – from the composition known as the Tribunal of the Apostles.[974] Each of these proposed identifications formed part of the Last Judgment iconography during that period. As shown in this brief outline, the eschatological program is present in the western part of both monuments.

Stylistically, scholars have linked these paintings to the archaic style of Cappadocia from the 9th and early 10th centuries, particularly to works in the Old Tokali Kilise Group or St. John the Baptist in Güllü Dere (913–920). Comparisons have also been

970 The first-layer frescoes have been identified in the churches of Hagios Demetrios Oikonomou and the Taxiarches Gymnasiou, although they are poorly preserved: *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 395–399, fig. 357–359.

971 For the first-layer painted decoration of Hagios Stephanos, see *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 229–305, fig. 200–257; Pelekanidis – Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, 6–10, 14–18, fig. 1–6.

972 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 229–305; *Wharton Epstein*, Middle Byzantine Churches, 190–192; *Pelekanidis – Chatzidakis*, Kastoria, 6–13; *Zaharova*, Freski konca IX–X v., 228–232; *Siomkos*, L'église Saint-Etienne, 45–135; *Panayotidi*, La peinture monumentale, 79–82.

973 For the first-layer painted decoration of the Taxiarches Metropoleos, see *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 155–200, fig. 146–170, Tab. 9–11; Pelekanidis – Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, 92–93, fig. 1–3.

974 *Panayotidi,* La peinture monumentale, 82, fig. 8–9.

made with the mosaics in the narthex of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, as well as manuscripts such as Codex Graecus 923 from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The frescoes are also compared with the mosaics of the dome of Hagia Sophia and the frescoes in the apse of the Rotunda of St. George in Thessalonike, both dating from the late 9th century.[975] Based on these analogies, there have been various opinions regarding the dating of the frescoes of the Hagios Stephanos and the Taxiarches Metropoleos, ranging from the mid-9th to the first half of the 11th century.[976] Recently, Anna Zakharova, following the opinion of Maria Panayotidi, revised the dating of the first layer of paintings in these churches, pushing it to the third quarter or the second half of the 10th century.[977] She outlined the stylistic tendencies in Byzantine art of the 9th and 10th centuries, discussing the divergent approaches to pictorial decoration in Cappadocia and Thessalonike. It was convincingly argued that the frescoes of Kastoria belong to the subsequent phase in the provincial reception and further development of the abstract stylization style, introduced in Macedonia through the activity of painters working in Thessalonike at the end of the 9th century. Zakharova further based her argument on the analysis of a specific ornament known as the "jigsaw" ornament, which is commonly found in Byzantine monumental painting from the second half of the 10th to the first half of the 11th century. She noted that the "jigsaw" ornament in Hagios Stephanos (Fig. 100) is particularly distinctive, combined with medallions of symmetrically curved shoots that form heart-shaped motifs with a three-petal palmette inside. Analogies for this ornament are found in illuminated manuscripts from Constantinople, such as the *Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus* (943), Cod. Gr. 1675 and 1157 from the Vatican Library, and Cod. 43 and 44 from the Monastery of St. John the Evangelist on Patmos – all dating from the mid-10th century and later. This type of motif was also present in monumental painting, especially in Cappadocia, where more sophisticated paintings influenced by Constantinople are found. Examples include the frescoes of the New Church of Tokali in Cappadocia (c. 950s) and simpler examples, such as the Church of Sümbüllu in the Ihlara Valley (second half of the 10th century), the Direkli Kilise in Belisirme (976–1025), and others.[978]

The earliest preserved painted programs in Kastoria were created in the third quarter or the second half of the 10th century, as convincingly demonstrated by Zakharova. These paintings have proven essential for establishing the relative chronology within the group of Kastorian monuments. A similar dating has been proposed for the Koubeleidiki, based on its façade decoration and elongated proportions, which closely resemble those of Hagios Stephanos. While the Church of the Hagioi

975 *Wharton Epstein*, Middle Byzantine Churches, 190–192; *Eadem*, Art of Empire, 100–101; *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 290–296; *Siomkos*, L'église Saint-Etienne, 125–129; *Pelekanidis – Chatzidakis*, Kastoria 6–18; *Panayotidi*, La peinture monumentale, 79–82.

976 Comprehensive overviews of scholarly opinions regarding the dating of the monuments in Kastoria are offered by *Siomkos*, L'église Saint-Etienne, 125–132; *Zaharova*, Freski konca IX–X v., 230–232; *Eadem*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 178, n. 16.

977 *Zaharova*, Freski konca IX–X v., 231–232; *Panayotidi*, La peinture monumentale, 79–82, fig. 5–10.

978 *Zaharova*, Freski konca IX–X v., 231.



Fig. 100.
Kastoria, Hagios Stephanos, gallery, St. Stephen, "jigsaw" ornament



Fig. 101.
Kastoria, Hagios Stephanos, narthex, Last Judgement, detail with Apostles

Anargyroi shares certain features with Hagios Stephanos, particularly in terms of plan and decorative articulation, notable differences suggest a slightly later date. The height of the basilica is less pronounced than in Hagios Stephanos or Koubeleidiki, and its façades are distinguished by blind niches and paired windows. These elements suggest that the church was constructed by the same Kastorian workshop, though likely by a

subsequent generation.[979] The first layer of frescoes in the Hagioi Anargyroi points to a date after the reconquest of Kastoria by Basil II and its incorporation as an episcopal seat within the Archbishopric of Ohrid. As for the final two churches in the group – Hagios Demetrios Oikonomou and the Taxiarches Gymnasiou – they too should be situated within a timeframe extending from the second half of the 10th century to the early 11th, primarily based on shared structural and decorative characteristics.[980]

* * *

The churches of Kastoria were constructed during the reign of Peter (927–969) or during the rule of Samuel and his successors (976–1018). While they are of great artistic value, these monuments should also be understood as important historical sources. They offer insights into the status of the city and the social conditions in which it functioned during the period of Bulgarian control. Architectural and artistic evidence points to a period of prosperity, marked by the proliferation of private foundations. Within the urban fabric, these churches served as focal points of social life – places where people gathered and around which residential neighborhoods were organized.[981] Unfortunately, no information has been preserved about the founders of these churches.[982] They may have been representatives of the Bulgarian Church, members of the local elite, or wealthy Greek or Slavic merchants.[983] Although the demographic composition of the city remains unclear, Kastoria evidently functioned as a contact zone between Greeks and Bulgarians, bearing witness to their coexistence.

The complete absence of Slavic inscriptions, combined with the presence of Greek inscriptions on bricks and in the original frescoes of the churches – Hagios Stephanos, the Taxiarches Metropoleos, and the Hagioi Anargyroi – leaves little doubt that the builders and painters were Greek.[984] However, the example of the Church of St. Achilleos in Prespa demonstrates that the presence of Greek inscriptions does not necessarily imply that the founder was of Greek origin. Kastoria thus stands as a prime example of the influence of Byzantine art on the artistic production within the Bulgarian Empire. It reflects the emergence of a distinctive synthesis between local traditions and Byzantine stylistic models in both architecture and painting – a development that would continue to evolve after the establishment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

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979 Ćurčić, Architecture, 381–382; *Zaharova – Mal'ceva*, Hudožestvennye tradicii, 179–180.

980 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 398–399, points out that the Church of Hagios Demetrios Oikonomou ranks among the oldest churches in Kastoria.

981 *Drakopoulou,* Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 117.

982 The earliest known donor is Constantine, whose portrait is preserved in the Church of the Hagioi Anargyroi. For the reproduction of the fresco, see Pelekanidis – Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, fig. 29. Earlier scholars dated the fresco to around the year 1000, but more recent research has revised this, placing it in the around the second quarter or the middle of the 11th century. See: *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 184, n. 34.

983 *Ćurčić,* Architecture, 315; *Wharton Epstein*, Middle Byzantine Churches, 200–202.

984 *Moutsopoulos*, Ekklēsies tēs Kastorias, 144–155, 197–201; *Zakharova*, On the 10th–11th Century Churches, 181–182.

Ras

Where Serbia "approaches" Bulgaria

In Chapter 30 of the *De Administrando Imperio*, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (913–959) writes that the land of Serbia "approaches" Bulgaria to the south.[985] The emperor then describes two Serbo-Bulgarian wars from the mid-9th century, noting that the second ended with the Serbs defeating the army of the Bulgarian prince Boris. As a result, Boris made peace with the Serbs and requested that two sons of the then Serbian *archon*, Mutimir, accompany him. They "escorted him unharmed to the border, to Ras".[986] These descriptions are invaluable for understanding the geographic demarcation between the two territories and the position of Ras during the 9th and 10th centuries. A clear border line between Serbia and Bulgaria most likely did not exist; rather, during this period it was more of a sparsely settled zone of demarcation.[987] Therefore, this zone should not be sought in the settled Raška River Valley but somewhat to the east, stretching from the Ibar Basin toward the Kopaonik massif, which closes off the approach to Ras from the east and serves as a natural boundary toward the sparsely populated Morava Valley, a territory under Bulgarian control.[988]

The territorial integrity of the Early Medieval Serbian state was disrupted twice during the period of the First Bulgarian Empire.[989] The first occupation occurred in 924, when Serbia was conquered by the Bulgarian emperor Simeon. This Bulgarian domination was short-lived: shortly after Simeon's death in 927, the Serbian prince Časlav (927/28–?), under the powerful influence and patronage of Byzantium, succeeded in restoring the dispersed population and reestablishing his rule. Also worth noting is that the Bulgarians did not integrate the former Serbian territory, including Ras, into their territorial system at that time, but rather devastated the area and relocated the Serbian population into Bulgarian lands.[990] Ras was conquered by the Bulgarians for a second time during the reign of Emperor Peter (927–968), in the later part of his rule and after the death of Prince Časlav, likely between 950 and 960. During this period, Ras was part of the Bulgarian state and church. Following the collapse of the Bulgarian Empire in 971, a large part of the Balkan Peninsula was restored to Byzantine rule during the victorious campaign of John Tzimiskes. At that time, an administrative unit – the katepanate with its center in Ras – was probably established, although it lasted only briefly, most likely until the uprising of the Kometopouloi in 976. Eventually, the territories of the Serbian lands, including the region of Ras, once again became part of the Bulgarian Empire during the reign of Samuel, following his campaign against Diokleia (Duklja) and Dalmatia, which took place between 997 and 999.

985 DAI, 30.117–119.

986 DAI, 32.38–42, 44–49, 50–53.

987 *Komatina*, O srpsko-bugarskoj granici, 36–37.

988 *Vojvodić*, Pogled na rezultate, 258.

989 For the Serbian lands and Serbian princely family in the 9th and 10th centuries, see *Maksimović*, Pokrštavanje, 155–174; *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 246–271.

990 DAI, 32.117–126; *Komatina*, O srpsko-bugarskoj granici, 35–36; *Idem*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 257–264.

The Bishopric of Ras was located in Serbian territory, with its seat at the Church of St. Peter in Ras. It appears for the first time only in the second Ohrid charter of 1020, where it is listed among the bishoprics that had belonged to the Bulgarian Church "under Emperor Peter (927–969) and Samuel (976–1014)."[991] Two key questions have drawn scholarly attention: when was the Church of Serbia established and what was its subsequent status? Based primarily on historical sources, scholars have offered three main viewpoints. One group argues that the Church in Serbia was linked to the Bulgarian Church from its inception, proposing foundation dates that range from as early as 870–880 through the reign of Peter (927–969).[992] A second perspective holds that the Serbian Church remained under Roman jurisdiction throughout the 9th and 10th centuries, following its initial affiliation with the Moravian Archbishopric under Methodios.[993] Finally, some scholars contend that the bishopric in Ras was only established during the brief Byzantine administration between 971 and 976, when Ras served as the seat of the *katepano*.[994]

More recent research by Miodrag Marković has shed new light on this issue by combining historical sources with the art-historical evidence provided by the cathedral of St. Peter – the oldest preserved Serbian church (Fig. 102) He clarified one of the most challenging research questions – namely, the construction history of St. Peter's Church – which proved crucial for determining the date of the establishment of the "bishopric of Serbia" with its seat in Ras.[995] Although only additional archaeological research on the monument can confirm these conclusions, they appear highly plausible based on the available material evidence. Two early phases in its architectural development have been identified, further discussed below. It was built around 820 owing to the efforts of Serbian prince Radoslav and restored by Prince Mutimir around 880 who made it an episcopal see.[996] Although Mutimir pursued a twofold ecclesiastical policy – one oriented towards Rome and the other towards Constantinople or Bulgaria – the bishopric of Ras initially formed part of the short-lived Moravian Archbishopric, headed by the Slavic teacher Methodios. After Methodios' death in 885, and following the Hungarian conquest of the Pannonian state, the Bishopric of Ras appears to have come under the direct jurisdiction of the Roman pope.[997] Art-historical evidence further supports the hypothesis of ecclesiastical ties between the Serbs and the Pannonian and Moravian Slavs during Mutimir's reign. The architectural plans of two Pre-Romanesque churches

991 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44. 7–33.

992 *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 813, n. 177; *Komatina*, Crkva, 73–77; *Ćirković,* „Naseljeni gradovi", 29; *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras, 38.

993 *Pentkovskij*, Slavjanskoe bogosluženie i cerkovnye organizacii, 36–39, 43–46; *Savić*, Srpska književna reč, 36–50.

994 *Vojvodić*, Pogled na rezultate, 260–262.

995 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 13–46.

996 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 85–121. Cf. *Vojvodić*, Pogled na rezultate, 237–264 for different opinion.

997 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 38–44.



Fig. 102. Ras, Church of St. Peter, aerial view

in major Moravian centers – Mikulčice (Church No. 9)[998] and Trenčín[999] – both featuring a tetraconch inscribed in a circle, closely resemble the ground plan of St. Peter's in Ras, suggesting mutual influences.[1000] Moreover, the original dedication of the bishopric's seat to the "princeps of the apostles" underscores its early association with Rome. Between 925 and 928, Ras was subordinated to the newly founded Archbishopric of Split. In the mid-10th century, during the reign of Bulgarian emperor Peter (927–968), the bishopric became part of the Bulgarian Church, likely between 950 and 960. Following the collapse of the Bulgarian Empire, it is believed that the Bishopric of Ras was incorporated into the Metropolitanate of Dyrrachion. This hypothesis is supported by the content of the second Ohrid charter of Emperor Basil II. Ras likely remained under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Dyrrachion during the period of Samuel's restoration of the Bulgarian state, though its authority was probably nominal.[1001]

The Church of St. Peter: A monument that speaks for itself

While Bulgaria played a significant role in the political life of the Serbian lands throughout the 9th and 10th centuries, its architectural developments had no discernible impact on early Serbian monuments – the finest representative of which is the Church of St. Peter in Ras. Both Bulgaria and Serbia developed artistically under strong Byzantine influence. However, unlike Bulgaria, which maintained direct links with Constantinople, the so-called Baptized Serbia and the Serbian principalities – Arenta, Zachlumia, Terbounia, and Diocletia – were influenced by Byzantium only indirectly. This influence, accompanied by the prevailing pre-Romanesque stylistic currents, reached the hinterland primarily through Byzantine coastal strongholds on the Adriatic Sea, such as Kotor, Dubrovnik, Split, and Zara.[1002]

As mentioned above, the construction of the Church of St. Peter, located at the mouth of the Deževska River in Ras, was initiated by Serbian prince Radoslav around 820, making him the first known founder, based on available later sources.[1003] The church was built a few kilometers from the ramparts of the Postenje fortress, situated on a hill northeast of Novi Pazar. The oldest part of the church featured a tetraconch plan inscribed within a circle (Fig. 103). Of the four conches, only the apsidal conch on the eastern side had a distinct, almost horseshoe-shaped form. The rotunda, with an exterior diameter of 10 meters, was surrounded on all sides, except the east, by an ambulatory.

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998 Church No. 9 in Mikulčice was built in the second half of the 9th century and functioned as a baptistery. See *Illaš,* Kostol č. IX v Mikulčiciach, 10–45.

999 The church in Trenčín was remodeled during its second construction phase, following the Mikulčice model, also in the second half of the 9th century. It served as the court chapel of an unidentified nobleman. See *Illaš*, Štyri predromanske rotundy, 656–660.

1000 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 120, fig. 93–94.

1001 *Komatina*, Crkva, 73–91; *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 334–344; *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 44–46.

1002 *Marković*, Beginnings of Artistic Activity, 147.

1003 On historical sources about the church and its founder, see *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 13–36.

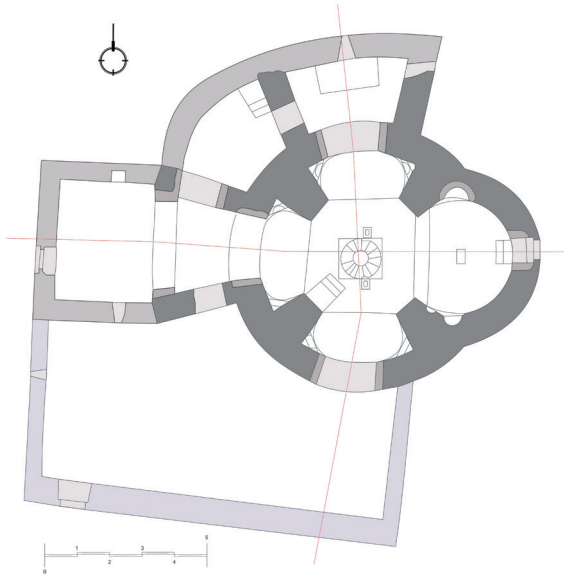


Fig. 103.
Ras, Church of St. Peter, plan

The outer diameter of this ambulatory arrangement was 16.5 meters. Above the vaults of the southern, western, and northern conches, a narrow gallery was constructed, serving as a *katechoumena* or *matroneum.* This gallery was accessed by a staircase located in the northwestern bay of the outer nave. The Church of St. Peter had a dome, most likely similar to the present one, built over the squinches. In front of the southeastern column of the rotunda, there was a circular pool used for the baptism of adults.[1004]

Recent research distinguishes two principal criteria for dating the first construction phase of the Church of St. Peter, namely its architectural design and stone sculpture. The overall design of St. Peter's Church, with its distinctive features – a centralized domed structure with galleries and an ambulatory – recalls the Justinianic models of court churches, such as Sts. Sergios and Bakhos in Constantinople and San Vitale in Ravenna. The former was integrated into the imperial palace complex, while the latter stood adjacent to the palace of the Byzantine *exarchos*. This aligns well with the architectural production of palace-type churches in Central and Southeastern Europe during the early 9th century. A similar correlation between architectural concept and function is evident, for instance, in the Palatine Chapel in Aachen and the Church of the Holy Trinity in Zadar, which served as Bishop Donat's residential chapel within the episcopal palace. That is to say, the Church of St. Peter may have originally served as a palace church as well.[1005] The well-established comparable architectural features of the two circular churches – in Zadar and Ras – are significant within the broader context of cultural transformations in the Early Middle Ages. They demonstrate that Early Middle Byzantine and Pre-Romanesque architecture were still deeply rooted in Early Byzantine models, with the differences between them not yet clearly articulated.[1006]

1004 *Nešković*, Petrova crkva kod Novog Pazara 1–33; *Korać*, O arhitekturi, 176–177; *Popović*, Preispitivanje crkve Svetog Petra, 109–232; *Marković*, Beginnings of Artistic Activity, 147–149; *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 85–114.

1005 *Marković*, Beginnings of Artistic Activity, 149; *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 109–110. Cf. also the Round Church in Preslav, attributed to Simeon and dated to 907, likewise built after Byzantine prototypes: *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 289, fig. 302.

1006 *Ćurčić,* Architecture, 340–343, fig. 372–375.

The crude building technique of St. Peter's Church reflects similarities with contemporary church architecture in the Byzantine world. The walls were constructed using large broken and hewn stones, while brick was primarily used for the semi-domes of the conches, the arches between the large pilasters of the tetraconch, and the wall of the *tribelon*, which separated the central bay from the altar apse. The exterior of the church was simply decorated, with arcades of six blind arches on the southern façade and most likely the northern façade of the rotunda. Every other arch was pierced to allow light into the gallery.

The stone sculpture of the building is an oddity, representing a mixture of two stylistically distinct elements. The first group features an uniconic decorative vocabulary, executed in stucco (Fig. 104). The dominant motif of the cross is found in blind niches and squinches, while a series of geometric and plant-based ornaments are shallowly carved into the fresh plaster of the apsidal cornice and substructures of the gallery. They find parallels in Iconoclast decoration, made in fresco technique and carved, in the churches of Constantinople, Thessalonike, and Cappadocia. It is proposed, based on comparative study, that the aniconic decoration of St. Peter's Church was created at the beginning of the Second Iconoclasm (815–843).[1007] How did the Iconoclast decoration spread beyond the Byzantine Empire? Such influences may have come from the Byzantine strongholds in Dalmatia, particularly Dubrovnik, where the masons likely originated. This connection is further supported by the close ties between Prince Radoslav and the Byzantine emperor Michael II (820–829), known for his iconoclast stance, during the renovation of Dubrovnik, as later written sources suggest.[1008]

Concurrently with the uniconic elements, the church building in Ras displays Pre-Romanesque sculptural decoration. Twisted ropes and the so-called three-strand braid with eyes originally embellished the cornices of the apse and the pilasters (Fig. 105). Most of the stone sculpture was subsequently cut off, displaced, and reused as *spolia* during later restorations of the church. The sculpted stone elements used in the decoration of the original church building in Ras are attributed to the Pre-Romanesque period. A comparable repertoire and carving style are found along the Adriatic coast, particularly in southern Dalmatia during the late 8th and early 9th centuries.[1009] Among the closest related examples are the fragmentarily preserved: sarcophagus from the Church of St. Stephen in Dubrovnik, ciborium from the Cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor, the window lunettes housed in the lapidarium of the Monastery of the Holy Archangels on Prevlaka, and the baptismal font associated with the time of the Serbian prince Višeslav.[1010]

1007 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 95–97, 103–106, fig. 66–74, 80–82.

1008 Ibid., 23–26, 34 with sources.

1009 Ibid., 99–103, 106–109, fig. 73–79, 83.

1010 For these examples, see *Marasović*, Dalmatia praeromanica IV, 104–107, fig. 110; 391–395, fig. 413; 407–412, fig. 435–438.



Fig. 104.
Ras, Church of St. Peter, eastern squinch in the southern conch, *stucco* decoration



Fig. 105.
Ras, Church of St. Peter, cornice above the northeastern pilaster, Pre-Romanesque sculptural decoration, twisted ropes and the three-strand braid with oculi

The cause of the church's destruction remains unknown, but it is plausible that it occurred during one of the two campaigns by the Bulgarians – at that time still pagans – against Serbia in the 9th century, as mentioned above. The second construction phase occurred around 880, during the reign of Prince Mutimir, when it was converted into the cathedral of the Ras bishopric. The church was probably completed and frescoed at the beginning of the 10th century under the supervision of Prince Peter Gojniković (892–918), Mutimir's nephew.[1011] Although the original church featured the so-called High Place, a *synthronon* was added in the apse as a characteristic feature of episcopal churches.[1012] At this time, the galleries were also completed, and the church's dome took on its current form. The drum of the dome, both inside and outside, was shaped like an

1011 *Marković*, Beginnings of Artistic Activity, 147.

1012 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 38, 113, fig. 85.

octagon with unequal sides. Four windows were placed in the drum, and the dome itself was decorated with blind niches above these windows.[1013] The method of decoration and the placement of the niches suggest that the masters may have originated from the West. During the renovation, the rotunda received two smaller openings on the inside, at the height of the gallery, on the southern, western, and northern sides. Each opening had a semicircular end and was framed by ashlar blocks, with a blind niche between them. When considering the architectural features of the renovated Church of St. Peter as an episcopal church in Ras, scholars have noted its possible influence on two pre-Romanesque churches from the second half of the 9th century, the remains of which are preserved in Mikulčice and Trenčín, key centers of Great Moravia.[1014]

Another key aspect in the study of the Church of St. Peter in Ras is the partial preservation of its earliest wall paintings. These were only recently published, systematically studied, and dated to the late 9th or early 10th century by Dragan Vojvodić.[1015] The paintings in the upper zones are the best-preserved, with scenes such as the Annunciation to the Virgin, Visitation, the Nativity of Christ, the Adoration of the Magi (Fig. 106), and Presentation of Christ in the Temple depicted in the dome. The series of evangelical episodes continued in the trompe l'oeil beneath the dome, where modest fragments reveal scenes of the Baptism, the Betrayal of Judas, and the Transfiguration.[1016] The frescoes of the first layer in the semi-calotte of the altar apse are in even worse condition. However, based on several discernible traces, it is believed that the scene of the Ascension of Christ was depicted there as part of the church's original program.

Despite the poor preservation of the paintings, especially in the upper layers where the final paint has not survived, it is still possible to conduct a stylistic analysis. The frescoes in Ras exhibit a refined approach characteristic for the classicist trend of the early Macedonian dynasty period. They are comparable to the late 9th-century wall paintings of Thessalonike, particularly those in the churches of Hagia Sophia and the Rotunda of St. George. In terms of proportions, elongated figures, and less emphasis on schematic drawing, the painting in Ras is akin to a 9th–10th century fresco depicting an unidentified bishop in the Basilica of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike. Through this stylistic feature and some iconographic details, the frescoes in Ras can be linked to Byzantine masters.[1017]

Both phases of construction and painted decoration of the Church of St. Peter in Ras reflect the cultural orientation of the highest stratum of early Serbian society. The galleries and baptismal font in St. Peter's Church indicate two primary functions of the original church: it was constructed as a court chapel and served for adult baptisms in the Early Medieval period. The latter carries broader cultural significance, acting as an argument *ex silentio* for a phase in the Christianization of the Serbs – and, at least,

1013 Ibid., 114–121.

1014 Ibid., 120.

1015 Ibid., 127–151, fig. 97–114.

1016 *Đurić*, Vizantijske freske, 25–26; *Mihajlović*, Crkva svetog Petra, 71–81; *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 127–151; *Vojvodić*, Medieval wall paintings, 16–39.

1017 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 146–151; *Vojvodić*, Medieval wall paintings, 16–39.



Fig. 106. Ras, Church of St. Peter, drum of the dome, Adoration of the Magi

confirms that Prince Radoslav underwent a personal conversion. Such an early appearance of Christian architecture among the Serbs, while neighboring Bulgaria, at that time ethnically composed of Bulgars and Slavs and still adhering to pagan religious beliefs, warrants further comment. This can be attributed to the political organization of the Serbs in the territories they inhabited. The earliest influences of Christian culture reached the Serbs in the hinterland from the Adriatic Sea. These connections are perhaps best illustrated by a particular piece of liturgical furniture – the above-mentioned baptismal font from the time of Serbian prince Višeslav, the pre-Romanesque stone sculptural decoration of which shares similarities with that of St. Peter's Church in Ras.[1018] The baptismal font can be attributed to a Kotor stonecarvers' workshop active during the episcopate of Bishop John, based on its epigraphic features. This attribution suggests that part of the Bay of Kotor was, at that time, under the political authority of Serbian princes, which in turn facilitated a more direct transmission of artistic influences from Kotor to the hinterland territories inhabited by Serbs.[1019]

1018 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 99–103, 107, fig. 75, 77, 78.

1019 *Komatina*, O natpisu na krstionici, 7–25. For the stonecarvers' workshop of Kotor, see *Zornija*, Klesarska radionica, 87–118.

The restoration of the church in Ras, on the initiative of Prince Mutimir – transforming it into an episcopal seat while preserving its centrally planned structure with galleries modeled after Constantinopolitan Sts. Sergios and Bakhos – can likewise be interpreted within a broader cultural and political context. Byzantium's political authority, which affirmed the legitimacy of Serbian archons, was reflected in the adoption of specific architectural models. As noted in scholarship, Emperor Basil I (867–886) restored Justinian's foundation of Sts. Sergios and Bakhos and commissioned the Church of St. Elijah in Constantinople, reportedly constructed on an octoconch plan – known only through textual sources.[1020] This Constantinopolitan prototype may have inspired developments in the Serbian lands. Centrally planned churches, characterized by multiple conches arranged around a core space typically surmounted by a dome, appear across the Serbian principalities along the eastern Adriatic littoral and Baptized Serbia.[1021] This architectural phenomenon is widely regarded as marking the emergence of Christian architecture among Serbs. A notable example is the Early Medieval church in Ošlje – an octoconch structure built in one of the "inhabited cities" of the principality of Zachloumoi – intended for mass baptisms.[1022] This aligns with the generally accepted view that the broader Christianization of the Serbs occurred during the reign of Prince Mutimir (?–891), with Basil I playing a pivotal role in the process.

Ras and its fortified settlements: A landscape of borderland society?

Ras is not listed among the "inhabited cities" of Serbia in Chapter 32 of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos' *De Administrando Imperio*.[1023] It was likely incorporated into the Bulgarian state between 950 and 960, which may explain its omission from this historiographical work, composed between 948 and 952. However, the Bulgarian conquest of Ras did not necessarily imply a demographic shift. Archaeological investigations indicate that the area between Golija and Rogozna was, in all likelihood, predominantly inhabited by Serbs both before and after the Bulgarian takeover.[1024] On the other hand, historical analysis suggests that the list of "inhabited cities" in Serbia may not accurately reflect the full extent of Serbian settlement across the central Balkans in the 9th and 10th centuries. Since the basic territorial unit was the *župa*, the area covered by Serbian *župas* likely extended well beyond the urban centers mentioned in the sources.[1025] This may be particularly true for the *župa* of Ras – a region traversed by key communication routes linking the coastal areas with the central parts of the Balkan Peninsula since earlier periods.

1020 *Marković*, Beginnings of Artistic Activity, 149.

1021 *Ćurčić*, Architecture, 467–469, fig. 529–532.

1022 For the church in Ošlje see *Korać*, O arhitekturi, 182–185; *Marković*, Beginnings of Artistic Activity, 149.

1023 DAI, 32.149–151; *Komatina*, O srpsko-bugarskoj granici, 33.

1024 *Vojvodić,* Prostorne studije i privredni obrasci, 28.

1025 *Komatina*, O srpsko-bugarskoj granici, 38.

Two fortifications – Postenje and Ras – controlled the northeastern and western approaches to the central plain of the Raška Valley (Novi Pazar Basin).[1026] They formed part of a network of regional strongholds across the Raška region, lining the Pešter Plateau and the valleys of the Raška and Ibar rivers. Their concentration in the Raška Valley reflects the broader 9th- and 10th-century pattern of reoccupation and refortification of Late Roman and Early Byzantine sites in the central Balkans and indicates a relatively high population level in this area. This strategic importance also helps explain why Ras was chosen as the seat of a bishopric in the 9th century.[1027]

Postenje occupies a hill rising above the bank of the Raška River, not far from the Church of St. Peter (Fig. 107). Archaeological excavations have identified nine cultural horizons, the richest of which dates to the reign of Justinian I, while two belong to the medieval period.[1028] Postenje has been identified with ancient Arsa, recorded by Prokopios in the mid-6th century, and with medieval "Rasa" (ἡ Ῥάση), mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogennetos.[1029] During the Early Medieval renewal – dated to the late 9th and 10th centuries – the existing Late Antique fortifications were comprehensively repaired, including their defensive towers and internal buildings. The site comprised an upper town covering over 1.6 ha and a lower town. Within this same phase, two churches, a residential complex, and the so-called palace were restored and reused, and several new structures were erected inside the enclosure. Based on pottery, jewelry, and everyday equipment, Dušan Mrkobrad assigns this phase to the Early Medieval period. No destruction layer has been identified between this renewal and the subsequent medieval occupation, which continued into the 11th and 12th centuries.

The fortress of Ras is located on the sites of Podgrađe and Gradina, above Pazarište, on a hill southwest of the confluence of the Sebečevo River with the Raška (Fig. 108). Archaeological excavations carried out by Marko Popović have revealed four medieval horizons, the earliest of which dates from the mid-9th to the late 10th century.[1030] The first medieval reoccupation of the Late Antique site has been dated, at the latest, to the second half of the 9th century. At that time, the well-preserved older ramparts were further secured on the eastern side with dry-stone walls built of roughly hewn stone and reinforced with palisades. In addition, a second rampart – composed of a stone wall and wooden palisade – also dating to the 9th–10th centuries, enclosed the southern suburban plateau at the Podgrađe site. The Early Medieval fortification of Ras covered an area of approximately 6 hectares.

1026 *Vojvodić,* Prostorne studije i privredni obrasci, 53–59.

1027 *Ivanišević – Bugarski,* Post-antique settlement patterns, 7–17.

1028 *Mrkobrad*, Ras-Postenje, 203–217.

1029 *Kalić,* Prokopijeva ARSA, 9–17; *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 241–242 expresses doubt that the "Rasa" mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogennetos refers to the Serbian Ras, since the feminine form of the toponym does not appear in Serbian sources.

1030 *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras, 139–161.



Fig. 107.
Ras,
Postenje fortress



Fig. 108.
Ras,
Ras fortress

This horizon has been associated with the remains of several wooden dwellings, within which a substantial quantity of ceramic material was uncovered.[1031] The largest group of vessels comprises two classes of locally made ceramics: one fashioned without a potter's wheel (shallow bowls and lids), and the other formed on a slow wheel (kitchenware). A distinct category is represented by ceramics of Bulgarian provenance – amphora-like jugs with burnished outer surfaces, sometimes marked with incised symbols (IYI), commonly found in the central regions of the First Bulgarian Empire.[1032] The pottery assemblage bears witness to life in the settlement of Ras from the second half of the 9th century until its destruction by fire at the end of the 10th century.

It seems likely that in the 9th and 10th centuries – as well as during the brief establishment of the katepanate at Ras – the Postenje fortification held particular importance for two main reasons. First, its position guarded the approach to Ras from the east, defending against incursions from Bulgaria, the period's principal adversary.[1033] Second, its proximity to the episcopal seat at the Church of St. Peter underscores Postenje's significance. This reinforces the hypothesis that the site once housed the seat of the Byzantine *katepano*.

What still needs to be addressed is the cultural attribution of the archaeological finds. Unfortunately, we lack the published results of the Postenje excavations, as they were never properly released. However, the analysis of ceramic material from the Early Medieval fortified settlement of Ras has made it possible to determine its historical and social context.[1034] Discovered objects of Bulgarian provenance testify to Bulgarian presence in the territory of Ras. They may be interpreted as a consequence of periodic Bulgarian occupations of these fortified sites during the 10th century – first under Simeon and later under Peter.[1035] The majority of the ceramic finds comprise tablewares and cooking wares produced in local workshops. The handmade products follow the Slavic ware tradition in both technology and style, reflecting patterns of Slavic settlement. The introduction of wheel-made wares is seen as an influence from the Byzantine cultural sphere and part of the process of *Byzantinization*, primarily in terms of technology, before 971. The ceramic assemblage from Ras aligns with Serbian material culture, as shown by parallels with finds from the fortress of Vrsenice.[1036] Yet the same tradition also shaped communities along the border where Baptized Serbia and Bulgaria converged during the 9th–10th centuries, offering a broader perspective. This suggests sustained interaction among societies that shared cultural traits despite ethnic boundaries.[1037]

1031 *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras, 142–161, 323–329 (Catalogue).

1032 *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras, 155–159, 297–298.

1033 *Vojvodić*, Prostorne studije i privredni obrasci, 56–58.

1034 *Bikić*, Keramičke celine, 287–307.

1035 *Popović*, Tvrđava Ras, 298; *Radišić*, Archaeological testimonies, 139; *Bikić*, Keramičke celine, 303; *Vojvodić*, Prostorne studije i privredni obrasci, 27–28.

1036 Archaeological finds from the Bulgarian production centers have not been recorded at Vrsenice. Accordingly, it has been assumed that this fortification was located within the borders of "Baptized Serbia." See *Popović – Bikić*, Vrsenice, 132–133.

1037 *Bikić*, Keramičke celine, 301–305.

V. Conclusion

The materials presented in this chapter offer insight into a significant portion of the Bulgarian monumental corpus. They help identify the features that define it as distinctly Bulgarian, while also tracing the presence of Byzantine ideas within these architectural and visual expressions. Based on the surviving evidence, Bulgarian architecture and art – from their origins up to 1019 – are most meaningfully understood in relation to Byzantium, not only through artistic models, but also through devotional and liturgical practices. The nature of these relations was multilayered, shaped over time by social, religious, and political transformations. The Byzantine influence on Bulgarian ecclesiastical art can be categorized in terms of its phases, forms, intensity, and regional variation. It spread from both the Empire's capital and its provinces, with varying prominence in different periods. We begin the concluding discussion by first considering the role of the Byzantine legacy in the Balkans, and second, its contemporary artistic manifestations in the formation and development of Bulgarian art.

Early Christian and Early Byzantine sites – including abandoned fortifications, fortified settlements, episcopal centers, and church complexes – had a significant impact on the settlement patterns and ecclesiastical structures of the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's Empire. This influence is evident in Bulgarian centers (e. g., Pliska, Vidin, Serdica), different types of settlements (e.g., Krupište, Velbăžd, Gradište – Morovizd, Strumica), episcopal complexes (Dristra), cave monastic communities (e.g., Zrze near Prilep), places of cultic veneration (the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica), and fortifications (Prilep, Moglena, Setena, Petrisk, Loggas, Servia, Veliki Gradac). Furthermore, entire former Late Antique and Byzantine episcopal centers, along with their urban structures, were incorporated into the Bulgarian state and church (e.g., Herakleia Lynkestis, Serdica, Ohrid, Kastoria), which strongly shaped their subsequent development. Early Christian and Early Byzantine layers are evident on individual monuments as well. Some of the earliest Bulgarian monasteries (the Great Basilica Monastery in Pliska and Clement's monastery in Ohrid) were built atop the ruins of earlier structures, on sites with Early Byzantine heritage. Important churches were also created by restoring and remodeling preexisting basilicas, such as those beneath the Yeni Mosque in Bitola and in Glavinitza. In many cases, Bulgarian churches incorporated older structures (Crkvište – Morovizd; Bansko) or used building materials and architectural sculpture from nearby, well-known Early Byzantine episcopal complexes (e.g., the basilica in Glavinitza and Byllis; St. George in Gornji Kozjak and Bargala), or from unidentified ancient structures (e.g., the church in Asomat, Velçë; the Holy Apostles at Little Prespa). Additionally, entirely new churches were sometimes constructed on the sites of Early Byzantine settlements (e.g., the church in Kulata, Petrič).

The establishment and development of Bulgarian towns, urban settlements, political and ecclesiastical centers, as well as civil and military fortifications – all of which had Late Antique and Early Byzantine origins – can also be viewed within a broader

context. They formed part of the wider phenomenon of urban revival during the 9th and 10th centuries in Byzantium, including the Balkan territories under Byzantine control.

The role of the basilica in Bulgarian architecture should also be understood within this broader context. The continued construction and enduring presence of this traditional architectural type in the Byzantine territories of the Balkans and the Aegean islands have been partially explained in scholarship by both pragmatic considerations and functional needs. Many Early Byzantine basilicas remained in use or were repaired during the 9th and 10th centuries, while their spaciousness and structural simplicity contributed to their enduring popularity. The same factors can be cited in relation to the adoption of the basilica in Bulgaria. The three-aisled basilica, with numerous variations, was the building of choice for cathedrals (e.g., Preslav, Dristra, Glavinitza, Prizren, Prespa), monastic churches, particularly in the provinces of the First Bulgarian Empire (e.g., the Monastery of the Great Basilica in Pliska, Čerešeto, Ravna, Černoglavci, Murfatlar), and the churches in urban settlements (Crkvište – Morovizd, Lipljan, Vranište). Small basilicas were constructed as private foundations serving either small monastic communities or as parish churches, as seen within the larger enclosure of Pliska and in Kastoria. Many Byzantine basilicas were inherited and repaired, while new ones were built under Bulgarian patronage within fortifications that came under Bulgarian control, especially during the reign of Samuel (e.g., Petrisk, Moglena).

While the Early Byzantine heritage played a significant role, the Bulgarians also embraced key aspects of contemporaneous Byzantine urbanism, church design, artistic styles, and techniques. In particular, Byzantine church architecture evolved in response to the monastic and liturgical reforms of the 9th century, as well as to a shift in worship practices – from large-scale assemblies to more intimate congregations. The cross-in-square domed church, markedly different from the earlier, more expansive basilica, emerged as the new architectural standard in Constantinople. Its introduction in Bulgaria can be traced to the time of Pliska, as evidenced by the Palace Church uncovered through archaeological investigation. The same type, with abundant variations, was also widely used in large monastic complexes (e.g., the so-called Palace Monastery) and in private estates or monastic foundations in the outer city of Preslav (e.g., Patleina, Avradaka, and Tuzlalăka), as well as in churches located within the territories of the Slavic bishoprics (e.g., Asomat near Velçë) and bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church within Samuel's realm (Vodoča). The spread of the cross-in-square form in Bulgaria did not displace the basilica; both types were used in parallel, reflecting different contexts of patronage and function.

The most ambitious building projects reveal direct connections with Constantinople, particularly in the architecture and urban planning of Preslav, the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire. As discussed above, Simeon aspired not only to wield power equal to that of the Byzantine emperor, but also to attain comparable achievements in the realms of art and architecture. He had his palace constructed in accordance with models known from the Great Palace in Constantinople. The southeastern section of

the complex initially served as the archbishop's residence and was later transformed into a patriarchal palace complex that included a cathedral church. This layout clearly reflects the influence of the spatial arrangement of the imperial and patriarchal complexes surrounding Hagia Sophia in the Byzantine capital.

The second phase of building activities in Dristra offers further evidence of the close ties between the Bulgarian rulers Simeon and Peter and Constantinople. The construction of Church No. 4 and reconstruction of Church No. 2, both following the domed cross-in-square plan, are associated with the elevation of the city into patriarchal status in 927. The architectural style of these buildings may have originated in Constantinople, with prototypes found in two existing churches: the Teotokos *tou Libos* (907) and the Church of Myrelaion (ca. 920). Given that Romanos I Lekapenos, the founder of the palace church of Myrelaion, legitimized the first Bulgarian patriarch, as part of the Bulgarian-Byzantine treaty of 927, it is possible that Constantinopolitan architects played a role in the design and construction of the patriarchal cross-domed churches. The fact that the churches in Dristra survive only as archaeological remains limits the extent to which this question can be further explored.

The architectural sculpture found in Preslav is fully developed and mature, showing no signs of early inexperience or experimental stages. This suggests that Simeon likely brought artisans directly from the Byzantine capital, who later transmitted their skills to local craftsmen. A substantial portion of the relief sculpture that once adorned monuments in Preslav reflects a design inspired by Constantinople. This influence is evident both in the evocation of Justinianic impost capitals and in the use of the contemporaneous iconoclastic decorative repertoire, employed to create the effect of a stylized arabesque. As in Constantinople during the 9th and 10th centuries, a similar approach to the use of *spolia* is evident in Bulgaria. Much of the marble used in the construction and decoration of churches appears to have been taken from earlier buildings and then reworked with contemporary motifs, as seen in the cathedrals of Preslav and Glavinitza.

The preserved examples show that churches in Preslav and Drista from the late 9th and 10th centuries were adorned with ceramic icons, often integrated into larger ceramic altar screens, such as in the Palace Monastery in Preslav. Their style and iconography are thoroughly Byzantine, closely resembling 9th-century miniature illumination. Furthermore, where inscriptions have been preserved, they are written in Greek. At the opposite end of the country, in Strumica, lies the tomb of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis, which preserves one of the rare surviving examples of fresco painting from the First Bulgarian Empire. Nevertheless, the work is of high quality and stylistically aligned with the so-called Macedonian Renaissance that flourished in Constantinople during the first half of the 10th century. Given the well-documented involvement of the Bulgarian rulers in establishing and consolidating the Slavic Diocese of Bregalnica, it is plausible that painters trained in Constantinople were commissioned to decorate this prominent place of veneration. Byzantine influence is even

more pronounced in the architecture and art of Samuel's realm. Indeed, it is often difficult to distinguish between contemporaneous "Bulgarian" and "Byzantine" churches in terms of architectural forms, construction techniques, and painted decoration. The use of the same artistic language, combined with the poor state of preservation, lack of documentary evidence, and the long-term persistence of the same church types, poses a challenge in attributing some monuments either to construction activities within Samuel's state or to those of the Archbishopric of Ohrid (Moglena, Servia, Melenik, Sirmium/Srem). Unlike the previous period, the Byzantine building practices and monumental painting adopted by the Bulgarians took on a regional character. The most significant local impact was made by the building workshop of Kastoria, whose stylistic influence extended well beyond the city itself. The clearest examples of this are the churches of St. Achilleos and St. Germanos in Prespa – well-preserved and securely dated – constructed by craftsmen from nearby Kastoria. Builders from cities in Thessaly, which had fallen to Samuel, may also have taken part in these architectural endeavors. Characterized by a lack of plasticity, the sculpture from Prespa shows affinities with artistic production in the peripheral and frontier regions of Byzantium, both in the East and the West. The second half of the 10th century saw the provincial reception of the painting style introduced in Macedonia through the work of painters active in Thessalonike at the end of the 9th century, as exemplified by the best-preserved pictorial ensembles in Kastoria (Hagios Stephanos, the Taxiarches Mitropoleos). Similar provincial traits are discernible in the poorly preserved first-layer frescoes of St. Achilleos.

The character of Byzantine influence clearly reflected the political circumstances and ideological aspirations of Bulgarian rulers, which differed significantly between the period of the First Bulgarian Empire and that of Samuel's state. During the construction of Preslav, Bulgaria was at peace with Byzantium, and its rulers maintained close ties with Constantinople. In contrast, Samuel was in constant conflict with Basil II, which hindered cultural exchange with the Byzantine capital; instead, he turned to neighboring Byzantine centers that had come under Bulgarian rule. In his effort to emulate his predecessors and the Byzantine emperors, Samuel turned to the traditional basilica form – grandly reimagining it and enriching it with distinctive, original features.

What, then, defines Bulgarian art beyond its ties to Byzantium? How did it shape its own identity amid strong Byzantine influence? In approaching this question, it is useful to distinguish three interrelated components of Bulgarian identity: political, cultural, and artistic. Scholarship has largely addressed the question of Bulgarian identity from the perspective of historical sources and the medieval worldview. In this context, the ethnonym "Bulgarians" did not serve as an ethnic designation of the state, but rather carried a primarily political meaning. Both the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's state were multiethnic, with a predominantly Slavic population, while Bulgarian identity functioned as an integrative framework – political, religious, and cultural – for all subjects of these states.

Artistic identity, as a visible and tangible expression of this integrative framework, emerged within the shared cultural space of the Byzantine *oikoumene*, yet evolved in response to specific local conditions. It reflected not only the political aspirations of the Bulgarian rulers but also the ideological needs of the Bulgarian Church. While adopting the artistic language, building traditions, and technical practices of Byzantium, Bulgarian art gradually acquired distinctive features that emerged through local agency, cultural priorities, and conditions.

The major architectural achievements of the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's state were conceived to impress. Monumental in scale, some also reveal a striking originality of design. Two early cathedrals – the Palace Church in Preslav and Church No. 5 in Dristra – were three-aisled basilicas, with widths expanding to 16.5 and 20 meters, respectively, and an overall length of approximately 30 meters. Unique among early churches in Bulgaria is the Round Church, located outside the inner city walls of Preslav as part of a monastic complex. It was a rotunda, featuring twelve columns encircling eight niches and a large apse on the eastern side. The circular plan of the naos had an internal diameter of 10 meters. Samuel upheld the tradition of his predecessors, recognizing architecture and visual splendor as potent emblems of both state and ecclesiastical authority. Erected as the seat of the Bulgarian primate on an island in Lake Little Prespa, the Church of St. Achilleos stood among the largest churches of its time in the Balkans. This three-aisled basilica with a narthex measured 22 by 44 meters.

While the monuments built throughout the period under consideration served the representational purposes of the Bulgarian state and church, they also offer a different perspective on their history. Epigraphic evidence – preserved in graffiti inscriptions and tombstones – attests to the presence of founders, monks, clergy, and, notably, visitors. These inscriptions illuminate certain aspects of the lives of those who were once buried in or active within these sacred spaces. The Slavonic and Greek inscriptions, along with Christian symbols on tombstones (Mostič; Monastery of the Great Basilica in Pliska; Samuel's inscription on the tombstone or memorial of his parents and brother in the village of German in Prespa), affirm the Christian identity of the deceased and the languages they used. The walls and columns of churches, scriptoria, and other buildings within monastic courtyards bear runic, Slavonic, Greek, or bilingual Greek–Slavonic graffiti-inscriptions (Ravna, Černoglavci, Murfatlar, Krupište site in Bregalnica). These served not only as exercises in writing but also as commemorative texts, recording names and prayers left by literate individuals of varying social backgrounds. Generally regarded as unofficial historical sources, graffiti-inscriptions reveal aspects of how people in Bulgaria understood their own piety, devotional habits, and linguistic identity.

The intensive building activity during the First Bulgarian Empire shaped the architectural identity of Bulgarian churches. This identity is marked by numerous variations of two principal types – the basilica and the cross-in-square church

– as well as by distinct structural elements, construction techniques, and systems of façade articulation (Pliska, Preslav, Dristra). The large basilicas employed exterior buttresses for structural support, while their central naves were typically twice the width of the side aisles. In cross-in-square churches, the dome was supported either by four massive piers or by a combination of two piers and two columns. Churches were primarily constructed of broken stone or limestone blocks, with brick used more sparingly. In the southwestern regions of the state, distant from the direct influence of Constantinople, new architectural forms emerged to serve the Christian missionary efforts among the Slavs, endorsed by Boris and Simeon. The compact triconch churches in the region of Ohrid and Pelagonia, while drawing on Early Byzantine tradition, also introduced distinct and original design elements (Clement's monastery; Naum's monastery; Zlesti, Gorica, Izdeglavje, Svećani). A rare but original variant that combines the two popular church types – the inscribed-cross and the triconch – goes along with this architectural development, as seen in the Crvena Crkva at Krupište in the Bregalnica region and the church in Kulata near Petrič.

One of the hallmarks of Bulgarian artisan production was the polychrome ceramic manufactured in workshops located in Preslav. Introduced from Constantinople in the late 9th century, ceramic production in Preslav flourished as part of Simeon's ambitious building program for the Bulgarian capital. Manufacturing complexes and find-spots of polychrome ceramics provide rich evidence for phases of process, equipment, and type of products (Palace Monastery, Round Church, Patleina, Tuzlalăka, Avradaka, Vălkašina). Among the finished artifacts used in the decoration of monuments were small icons of various shapes, multi-tile icons, convex, flat and arched tiles painted with animal motifs, geometric and vegetal ornaments, as well as tiles intended for floor revetment. Elite in character, the production of painted ceramics was never intended for large-scale or market-oriented distribution; instead, the elaborate tile works catered exclusively to high-ranking patrons affiliated with the court and major ecclesiastical institutions.

Stone sculpture emerged as a complementary medium to painted ceramics in the architectural decoration of Preslav's churches. Workshops in Preslav employed various types of stone, including marble and limestone, to create both relief and three-dimensional forms. Early Bulgarian sculptural ensembles were predominantly developed within a Byzantine framework, drawing on Constantinopolitan models that combined antique motifs with ornamental traditions from the East. The presence of pre-Romanesque features in the three-dimensional sculpture still invites further study.

Finally, painted monuments are invaluable not only as works of art, but also for what they reveal about cult practices in Bulgaria. The fresco depicting the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica is significant as being the evidence of the local saintly cult, introduced with Christianization and establishment of the Bishopric of Bregalnica, and continuously venerated in later times, as confirmed by Archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid.

Although the destruction and poor preservation of monuments hinder a comprehensive assessment of architectural and artistic production within Samuel's realm, certain defining tendencies can nonetheless be identified. Characteristic of this period are the rulers' building initiatives in the capitals – Prespa, Setena, and Bitola – as well as a shared commitment by the ruling and ecclesiastical elites to fortify strategic urban, military, and religious centers. These undertakings fostered artistic expressions which occasionally revealed remarkable originality. Two examples illustrate this. In the Church of St. Achilleos in Prespa, the domed eastern side chapels and their integration into the architectural framework of a classical basilica significantly elaborated the basic basilican design. The main apse features a unique painted program within the medieval Christian tradition of cathedral church decoration: eighteen painted arches above the *synthronon*, each bearing the name of a bishopric of the Bulgarian Church written in Greek. This painted record served to emphasize the legitimacy and territorial extent of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church at the turn of the 10th to the 11th century. The Church of St. Leontios (Eastern Church) in Vodoča offers a second example, blending elements of a domed basilica with those of a cross-in-square church. Its monumental dome, approximately 7 meters in diameter, once spanned nearly three-quarters of the interior, creating a striking spatial experience now lost. Finally, in the second half of the 10th century, the southwestern regions of Bulgaria witnessed a rise in the construction of small cross-domed churches – likely private foundations or cemetery churches – as evidenced by examples from the Kočani Valley (Teranci, Žiganci), Florina (St. George in Meliti), and the Bay of Valona (Zoodochos Pege in Marmiro).

Prolonged exposure to Byzantine cultural models facilitated the indirect *Byzantinization* of the territories under Bulgarian control – a process traceable from the final decades of the 9th century until 1018. While this epoch encompassed two successive states – the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's state – the Bulgarian Church endured without interruption, despite Tzimiskes' reoccupation of the Balkan interior (971–976) and the resulting political realignment. Retaining its autocephalous status, the Bulgarian Church conferred legitimacy upon the Kometopouloi. Through its continuity and recognized authority, it emerged as the most important integrative force, providing the institutional framework for both political cohesion and the production of art. Finally, Bulgarian Patriarch John and the senior clergy played a decisive role in the peace negotiations with Basil II, which led to the conclusion of the Byzantine–Bulgarian peace agreement of 1018/1019. From the standpoint of cultural and artistic history, the establishment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid did not represent a rupture but rather affirmed the continuity of earlier processes. The subsequent coexistence of the *Rhomaioi* and the Slavic population within the framework of the Greek ecclesiastical organization continued to draw upon well-established artistic principles, while simultaneously acknowledging the Slavic cultural identity.

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Part III
WARFARE, GOVERNANCE AND INTEGRATION POLICY

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From *Pax Basiliana* to *Pax Byzantina*

In the last decades of the 10th and first decades of the 11th century, the Byzantine Empire waged war against the Bulgarians for control of the Balkan interior. An all-out war began in 976 with a rebellion of the so-called *Kometopouloi* brothers – David, Aaron, Moses, and Samuel.[1] Their uprising evolved into a full-blown war to re-establish the Bulgarian Empire, as John I Tzimiskes (969–976) had crushed the Empire as a byproduct of a military campaign launched against the Russians in 971. The Bulgarians lost a chunk of their territories, primarily in the northeastern part of the Balkans, with their capitals, Pliska and Preslav. Tzimiskes stripped the Bulgarian emperor Boris II (969–971) of his imperial insignia but, at the same time, made him a Byzantine dignitary. Boris received the title of *magistros*.[2]

However, this overwhelming military and political success was short-lived. Soon, Tzimiskes was dead and succeeded by Basil II (976–1025), and Samuel, the most able and the youngest of the *Kometopouloi* brothers, emerged as the rebel leader. The center of the rebellion was in the western and southwestern regions of the once-mighty Bulgarian Empire. In those territories, the idea of an independent Bulgarian state continued to be fiercely defended until 1019. The Bulgarian political elites and clergy persistently put up resistance against the Byzantine army for more than four decades (976–1019). The war was waged at varying degrees of intensity for over forty years, with the hostilities occasionally interrupted by short-lived truces.[3]

The protracted nature of the Byzantine war against the Bulgarians was also influenced by the geography, which did not lend itself to grand-scale hostilities.[4] Hence, the war revolved around fortified settlements, which served as focal points of resistance for the supporters of independent Bulgaria. The sources inform us that those fortresses usually stood in inaccessible positions, rendering them virtually impregnable. Also, the sources confirm that the interior of the Balkans was covered by an elaborate network of fortresses, some of which had prominent roles in the military organization of Samuel's Bulgaria.

1 The rebellion may have broken out shortly after the Bulgarian emperor Peter died, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 57–71.

2 Leo Diaconus, 128–159; Scylitzes, 294–310; Povest' vremennykh let, 51–52.

3 For a detailed warfare analysis see *Strässle*, Krieg.

4 See the chapter *The Balkans between Byzantium and Bulgaria*, I. A few pitched battles between the Byzantine and Bulgarian armies influenced the course of the war but not directly its end, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 194; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 846 et n. 9.

The Byzantine sources attest that those fortified positions were also isolated centers of resistance. They offer no evidence that Bulgarian troops from other areas ever came to assist the defenders of a fortress during attacks by the Byzantine army. The isolation of these fortresses led to the concentration of decision-making powers in the hands of the local elites, i.e., the fortress commanders. They were in charge of maintaining and defending their fortress but were also responsible for the continuation of the daily life of the local population during the conflicts.

The local population lived within the fortress walls and beyond them. Most were subsistence farmers and pastoralists. When needed, the defensive walls of the fortresses provided safe havens to the locals, where they could temporarily bring their cattle and agricultural products to safety.[5] This also allowed the fortresses to withstand longer-lasting sieges, as Kekaumenos explained in his accounts.[6] Archaeological evidence confirms that the local population inhabited broader areas around the fortified places. Most suggestive of this are the remains of parish churches, cemeteries, and the like.

Basil II put sustained pressure on Samuel and his successors at least from 986. However, despite all of Byzantium's efforts, most Bulgarian fortresses eventually fell after their commanders surrendered to Basil II. Bulgarian commanders focused mainly on their own territories and fortresses, which made them quite independent from the central government, i.e., the members of Samuel's dynasty. That allowed them to independently decide whether to yield or persevere in fighting the Byzantines. A mass surrender took place in 1018 after the death of John Vladislav, the last ruler of Samuel's Bulgaria (1015–1018). Basil II awarded the local elites for surrendering, granting them honorary titles (usually the dignity of *patrikios*) and other privileges. Gradually, after 1018, parts of the Bulgarian elite were incorporated into the Byzantine ruling classes, which meant that they had renounced the idea of an independent Bulgarian state. Once Byzantium captured the Bulgarian strongholds and took military control of the central areas of the Balkans, its northern frontier was established on the Danube for the long term.[7]

However, the territory that had once belonged to Samuel and his successors was ecclesiastically unified after 1018. Basil II formed the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid and granted it extraordinary privileges. That was confirmed by three founding charters successively issued after the war. The first was issued presumably in 1019, the second in 1020, and the third sometime after 1020 but before 1025.[8]

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5 According to *Moutsopoulos*, Anaskaphes, 4, cattle herding was the main livelihood of the population living near highland fortresses, e.g., Loggas, Setena, and Bosograd.

6 Kekavmen, 264–266. *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 846.

7 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite (with a bibliography).

8 Ed. *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42–46; *Dölger–Müller*, Regesten, nos. 806, 807, 808. Cf. *Prinzing*, Kirchenprovinz, 407–410, Tabelle I. There are still lingering questions about the text of the *sigillia*. A new text edition, currently being prepared by *C. Gastgeber – M. St. Popović*, along with a diplomatic study and an analysis of toponyms, will conclusively address textual issues and any possible later modifications of certain passages in the charters. On the nature and importance of Basil's Ohrid charters, see *Prinzing,* Byzantine ecclesiastical province, 355–373.

Later historical sources suggest that the long-term pacification of the Balkans after 1018 did not depend as much on Byzantine military might as on its ecclesiastical policy. That brings us to the fundamental question of who should be credited with establishing long-lasting peace in the Balkans. Two groups of historical sources may offer some possible answers.

The first group includes Byzantine narratives. This group of sources suggests that the war ended after the mass surrender of the commanders of Bulgarian fortresses. The most important among them is the *Synopsis of Histories* by John Scylitzes, which provides the most detailed account of the events of 976–1019. The characteristic feature of this group is that they barely mention the role that church dignitaries played in the war. For example, Scylitzes mentions the Bulgarian patriarch David (i.e., John) only twice.[9] And yet, even these terse reports suggest that the patriarch wielded immense political influence among the Bulgarian ruling classes.

In the second group are three charters issued by Basil II in the process of forming the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid. The charters add to our understanding of the war against the Bulgarians. The diverse information contained in these *sigillia* suggests that the Bulgarian senior clergy played a decisive role in peace negotiations. This allowed the Bulgarian church dignitaries to assume a twofold role in the post-1018 period: they *became* the guarantors of more lasting peace in the Balkans, and they *remained* the keepers of the Bulgarian identity within the Byzantine Empire. In other words, Basil II dissolved the Bulgarian state but retained its church.

I. The founding charters of the Archbishopric of Ohrid

The establishment of the Ohrid Archbishopric was a major concession on Basil's part, to the former subjects of the Bulgarian emperors, i.e., to the Bulgarian clergy and the local population. As mentioned above, the founding of the Archbishopric was regulated by Basil II in three charters. The information furnished in the charters is valuable for several reasons.

I. The Archbishopric of Ohrid was founded as an autocephalous church, meaning that the Byzantine emperor, rather than the patriarch of Constantinople, appointed its head.[10] We know that John, the dethroned Bulgarian patriarch, was the first to serve as the archbishop of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[11] Even though Byzantine chronicles provide scarce information on John's activities during the war, it is obvious that he played a prominent role in establishing the peace of 1018/1019. Evidently, Basil II showed great respect for him as John commanded authority over the local populace and had been helpful in getting them to accept the new

9 Scylitzes, 353–354, 357. *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 111.

10 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

11 This person is widely believed to be John, the Bulgarian patriarch in Samuel's Bulgaria, who was appointed the first archbishop of Ohrid under Basil II. However, some scholars argue otherwise, see the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others,* II, 55.

church constitution and the new military administration. Sadly, we know nothing of John's suffragan bishops. We can but assume that Basil retained all Bulgarian bishops who had occupied those positions when the war ended, particularly because bishops have life tenure.

II. The charters report which bishoprics made up the initial territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. We know there were at least 32 bishoprics. The charters name the seat of each individual bishopric, and the first *sigillion* alone describes the borders of 17 bishoprics. In addition, for each bishopric, the charters specified the number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* (dependent peasants) assigned to each bishop.

III. The charters include information on the relocation of the head of the Bulgarian Church in the post-971 period. Following Tzimiskes' occupation of northeastern Bulgaria, the seat of the Bulgarian patriarch moved from Dorostolon to Serdica and then on to Vodena and Moglena (after 976). Another source reports that for some time, the seat of the Bulgarian Church was at Prespa (ca. 986). After 992/993, Ohrid eventually became the seat of the Bulgarian Church.[12]

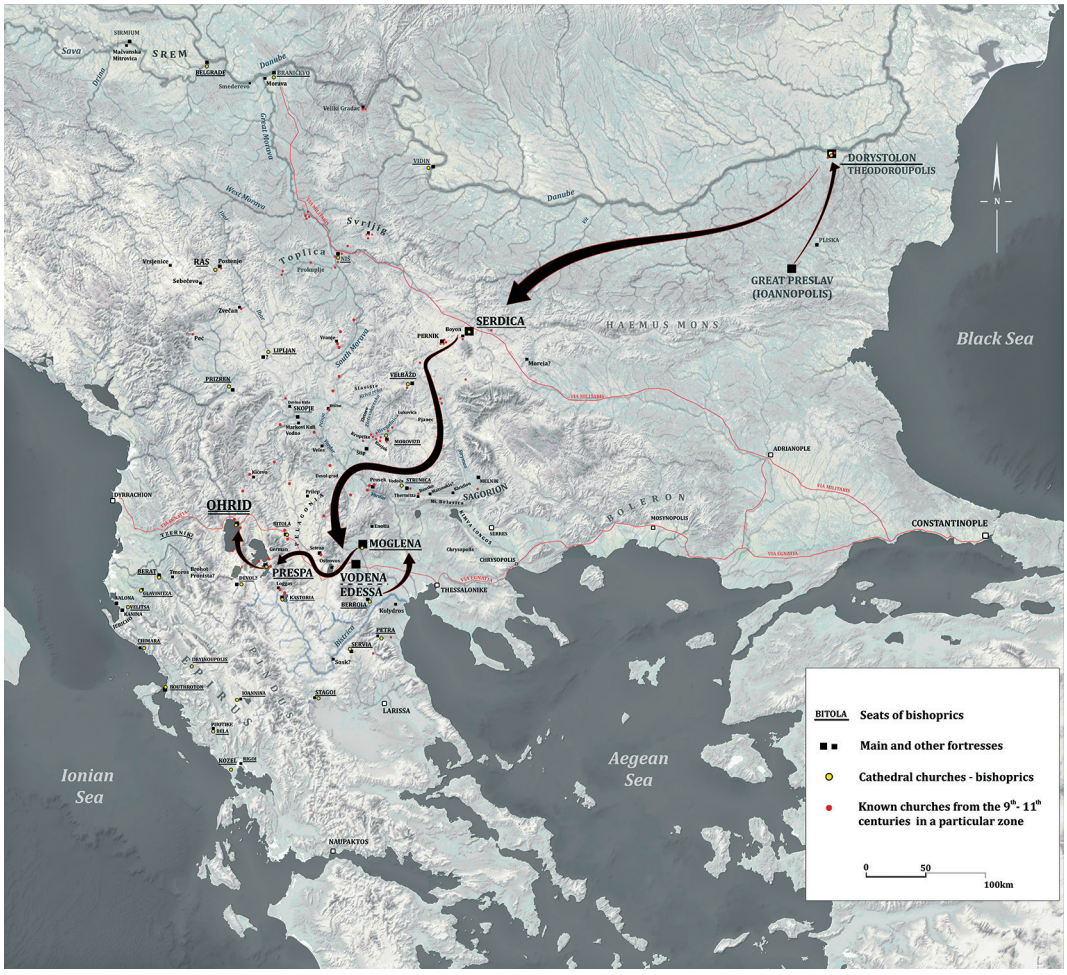
The relocation of the ecclesiastical seat to an area where there had been no Byzantine jurisdiction suggests that the Bulgarian clergy did not accept Tzimiskes' rule and did not approve of the symbolic dissolution of the Bulgarian Empire in 971.

The relocation of the ecclesiastical seat suggests that the Bulgarian patriarch retreated from settlements that were bound to be attacked by the Byzantines because they were situated on major roads – Serdica on the *Via Militaris* and Vodena and Moglena on the *Via Egnatia*. That may have been one of the reasons why, in ca. 986, the patriarch moved to the safer city of Prespa and, later, to Ohrid. The choice of the temporary and permanent seats of the head of the church also indicates large concentrations of Slavic population in those areas.

IV. The charters give us a glimpse into the role of church dignitaries in the war. Specifically, the second *sigillion* of Basil II pays special attention to the Bishopric of Vidin (Βοδίνη).[13] The emperor decided to elevate it above the other bishoprics by allowing it to have more *klerikoi* and *paroikoi*, explaining that this bishopric had earned its privilege because it had "opened the doors leading to this land [sc. Bulgaria]." As others have noted, the decision to grant this bishopric more *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* suggests that it may have been a reward for the contribution of Vidin

12 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44–45; *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 566. It follows from the available data that Patriarch Germanos stayed in Vodena and Moglena from 976 to 986. We have no way of knowing how long he stayed in each of those settlements during that decade. The patriarch may have resided in Vodena while a residence and a cathedral were being built at the Moglena fortress for the Patriarchate's needs. In that case, Vodena was perhaps never in the running to become the permanent seat of the church, as it was exposed to Byzantine attacks. No traces of a prestigious cathedral have been discovered at Vodena so far. However, we should bear in mind that the inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos places the seat of one of 18 bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church at Edessa, see below, 305–317.

13 *Oikonomides*, Tax exemptions, 319–320, believes that this was Vodena (τὰ Βοδηνά) i.e. Edessa. We would argue that this was, in fact, Vidin (ἡ Βιδίνη) on the Danube because during Byzantine rule, Vodena's importance was primarily military, see below. The same dilemma (Vodena/Vidin) concerns the flight of the eunuch Romanos, son of the Bulgarian emperor Peter, *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 113–114.



Map 1. Route of the relocation of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical seat

ecclesiastical dignitaries to the Byzantine conquest of this strongly fortified city.[14] It is well known that Vidin fell only after an eight-month siege (ca. 1002). Following the conquest, Basil II imposed no punishment on the local inhabitants and added new fortifications to the city.[15] Although there are no similar reports on other diocesan centers, based on the privileges given to the Ohrid Archbishopric, it is reasonable to assume that the local clergy had played an important role in the surrender of other Bulgarian strongholds, too.

V. The charters provide insight into Basil's geopolitical and ideological view of Samuel's Bulgaria. Whereas Byzantine chronicles and histories describe Samuel and his successors as rebels,[16] in Basil's charters, Samuel's name is not accompanied by the terms ἀποστάτης, τύραννος or the title βασιλεύς or any other title that might explain Samuel's position as a ruler. Basil mentioned Samuel only twice: in the

14 *Zlatarski*, Istorija I/2, 722, n. 1.

15 Scylitzes, 346. See below, 357–358.

16 For Byzantium, the rebellion of Samuel and his successors was ἀποστασία, τυραννίς, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 133–148. The way Byzantine writers referred to Samuel and his family members depended on the subject they were dealing with and the time they were writing, *Krsmanović – Loma*, Georgije Manijakis, 255–258.

first charter, stating that he would exempt the Ohrid clerics from the οἰκομόδιον tax and other fiscal duties, as they had been exempt in "Samuel's time" (ἐπὶ τοῦ Σαμουήλ);[17] and in the second charter, where he emphasized that the archbishop of Ohrid was to have under his jurisdiction all Bulgarian bishoprics and cities that "had been governed and ruled by Emperor Peter, Samuel (ὑπὸ Πέτρου τοτοῦ βασιλέως καὶ τοῦ Σαμουὴλ), and the erstwhile bishops."[18]

In his first charter, Basil II assigned seventeen bishoprics to the Archbishopric and conspicuously chose not to mention Peter but only Samuel. However, in the second charter, he established the Archbishopric's continuity primarily with the time of Emperor Peter, mentioning Samuel just once. The Byzantine emperor highlighted that the Empire had conquered Bulgaria "not without blood, toil and hardship, but by long years of persistence and with God's help." Owing to divine assistance, "what was separate" became "one." Also, Basil II emphasized that the laws of the conquered country had remained intact, as confirmed in his *sigillia*. Accordingly, he ruled that the "Bulgarian archbishop" should have as large a jurisdiction as he had had under Emperor Peter. This led him to issue the second charter, in which he added more bishoprics, including Dristra/Dorostolon, to the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Respecting its territorial continuity with the formerly independent Bulgarian Church, Basil II annexed Dristra/Dorostolon to the Archbishopric of Ohrid as it had served as the seat of the Bulgarian primate "when Emperor Peter ruled Bulgaria."[19]

This suggests that Basil II recognized three chronological stages in the history of Bulgaria: first, the age of Emperor Peter, whose imperial title Byzantium recognized, leading Basil II to describe him as a βασιλεύς; next, he goes straight to Samuel's era, omitting the reign of Peter's son Boris II, although he gives Samuel no title befitting a ruler; finally, he refers to the wartime period, mentioning only Samuel but not his successors Gabriel Radomir and John Vladislav. Therefore, Basil II connects Samuel's era with Emperor Peter's. Although the main concern of his charters was the church constitution, the way Basil II incorporated Samuel into the Bulgarian tradition suggests that he did not challenge the continued existence of an independent Bulgarian state up to 1018/1019. Despite the outcomes of John Tzimiskes' campaign in 971, "what was separate" did not become "one" until the age of Basil II.

VI. Besides recognizing the continuity between Samuel's and Peter's Bulgaria, the charters suggest that the formation of the Archbishopric of Ohrid was intended to ensure the continuity of the Bulgarian legacy within the borders of the Byzantine Empire. This hypothesis rests on the list of bishoprics in the damaged inscription in the apse at the Church of St. Achilleos in Little Prespa. Space was left to list

17 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44.2 For the οἰκομόδιον tax (listed as οἰκοδομίον in Gelzer 44.1).

18 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse 44.16. Cf. *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država,138.

19 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse 44.

eighteen bishoprics, and efforts to decipher them have relatively reliably revealed nine, or at most, eleven bishopric names. A comparison of their names with Basil's Ohrid charters shows that the diocesan structure inscribed at St. Achilleos is mostly consistent with the information on the bishoprics provided in the charters. The discrepancies concern cases when an ecclesiastical seat moved or the name of a bishopric changed (but not the territory it covered). As the damaged inscription raises some doubts, it warrants closer examination in a separate section.[20]

VII. Basil II retained the existing tax system in the territory initially covered by the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid. The first charter exempted the *klerikoi* from the οἰκομόδιον and other taxes, as they had been exempted under Samuel.[21] The οἰκομόδιον tax appears in Basil's charter for the first time. It was probably a basic land tax that had existed in Bulgaria before the Byzantine conquest (кwмwдь), which the Byzantines simply continued to collect under Basil II. That is supported by Scylitzes' report that in the time of Samuel, each Bulgarian household (*oikos*) possessing a pair of oxen had to deliver one *modios* of wheat and one of barley annually to the Bulgarian state.[22]

The second *sigillion* specified the archbishop's right to collect the *kanonikon*[23] from all churches in the territory under his jurisdiction. Next, the emperor forbade government officials (military commanders, tax collectors, and other bearers of secular authority) to encroach on the possessions of the archbishop and his suffragan bishops.[24]

The privileges granted to the Archbishopric of Ohrid show that, in his fiscal policy, Basil II again insisted on continuity with the preexisting state of affairs. This concession stemmed from the fact that Byzantium now controlled economically underdeveloped and war-ravaged territories. The mass surrender of Bulgarian commanders and the participation of the Bulgarian clergy in the negotiations with the Byzantine emperor showed that neither of the warring sides had been capable of continuing those long-term hostilities. Basil wanted a fast and firm pacification of the local population and seems to have relied primarily on the members of the Bulgarian clergy to achieve this objective.

As previously noted, the tax privileges granted to the archbishop were of limited importance. The exemption of the Archbishopric's *klerikoi* from certain taxes, most notably the land tax (*oikomodion*), was not a serious loss for the Empire – the tax was modest and not vital to Byzantium's prosperity. In addition, Basil assigned each bishopric of the Ohrid Church a precise number of *klerikoi* and

20 See below, 305–317.

21 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse 44.

22 Scylitzes, 412. *Cankova-Petkova*, Za agrarnite otnošenija, 90–95; *Oikonomides*, Fiscalitè, 82–83; *Idem*, Tax exemptions, 320–321.

23 ODB II, 1102–1103.

24 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 46.

paroikoi who were exempted from taxation by the state. So, Basil's privileges to the Ohrid Church meant that the imperial treasury lost some of the revenue in the Archbishopric's territory, but not all of it.[25]

VIII. Finally, Basil II put under Archbishop John's jurisdiction the bishoprics that had, before Samuel's era, belonged to the Byzantine Church, i.e., the local Greek metropolises, as the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid had an important role in the peace process. Samuel's conquests and the subsequent foundation of the Ohrid Archbishopric jeopardized the metropolitan interests of Dyrrachion, Thessalonike, Larissa, and Naupaktos.[26] In the second *sigillion*, the emperor forbade Greek metropolitan bishops to infringe on the possessions or interests of the Ohrid archbishop in the bishoprics he had acquired both before and after 976.

With the death of Basil II in December 1025, the Ohrid archbishop lost the Byzantine emperor's protection. In the following years, the Archbishopric of Ohrid lost some of its territories because neighboring Greek metropolitan bishops managed to restore their jurisdiction in the bishoprics they had previously held. Also, new theories on the origin of the Ohrid Archbishopric emerged, claiming it as a part of the Byzantine rather than the Bulgarian heritage and linking its origins to *Iustiniana Prima*.[27]

II. On the bishopric ranking

The bishoprics of the Ohrid Church had different ranks according to the number of their *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* exempted from taxation. In the first charter, Basil II says that Archbishop John had asked him for a list of the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* who would serve at the church of the Ohrid bishopric and in the bishopric churches under Ohrid's jurisdiction. The number of the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* assigned to a bishopric ranged from 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi* to 12 *klerikoi* and 12 *paroikoi*. At the end of the first *sigillion*, the emperor stated that the *klerikoi* would be exempt from the οἰκομόδιον tax and other obligations (τῶν λοιπῶν ἐπηρειῶν) just as they had been during Samuel's reign. In the second charter, the emperor allowed the archbishop to collect the *kanonikon* from all bishoprics and "κάστρα," even those not named in his charters, and from the Vlachs and the Vardariots within the Bulgarian borders. The archbishop and his bishops were free from hindrance in "any church affairs" and allowed to enjoy their privileges without interference from military commanders, tax collectors, and other state officials.

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25 Cf. *Oikonomides*, Tax exemptions, 321–325.

26 The jurisdiction of the mentioned Greek metropolitan bishops was expanded under John Tzimiskes, Notitia 10. However, it is doubtful whether the information in Notitia 10 realistically reflected the state of affairs, i.e., whether the authority of the Greek metropolitans had ever truly taken root in the bishoprics placed under their jurisdiction under Tzimiskes. For the dating of Notitia 10 to Tzimiskes' era, see *Živković*, Crkvena organizacija, 156.

27 See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II.

Basil's charters show that the bishoprics of the Ohrid Church can be grouped into five categories:

The first group includes the bishoprics that received tax exemption for 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi*. There were nine of these. In the first *sigillion*, Basil assigned 40 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi* to the Bishopric of Ohrid; in the second *sigillion*, he increased the total number of its *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* from 70 to 80, explaining the increase by the need to place the archbishop's see on an equal footing with the Bishopric of Vidin, which he had wanted to elevate "above the best" in recognition of its services and to which he had assigned 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi*.

Besides Ohrid and Vidin, the first category includes the bishoprics of Serdica, Niš, Belgrade, and Skopje, as well as Dristra and Petra. In addition, we know that the Bishopric of Rigoi near Arta, not included in Gelzer's edition of Basil's charters, also had 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi*.[28]

The second category comprises bishoprics that had 40 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi* – a total of 70 persons subordinated to the bishops. There were two such bishoprics, Kastoria and Glavinitza.

The third category includes the bishoprics whose bishops had 30 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi*. As the first and third charters attest, there were three of these: Lipljan, Servia, and Berroia.

The fourth category is the largest, with a total of 13 bishoprics. Their bishops had 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi*. These were the bishoprics with seats in Moglena, Bitola/Pelagonia, Morovizd, Velbăžd, Braničevo, Sirmium, Prizren, Ras, and Tzernik. This group also included the bishoprics of Dryinoupolis, Bela/ Photike,[29] Ioannina, and Kozel.

The fifth and last category included five bishoprics with 12 *klerikoi* and 12 *paroikoi*: Strumica, Bouthroton, Horaia, Chimara, and Stagoi.

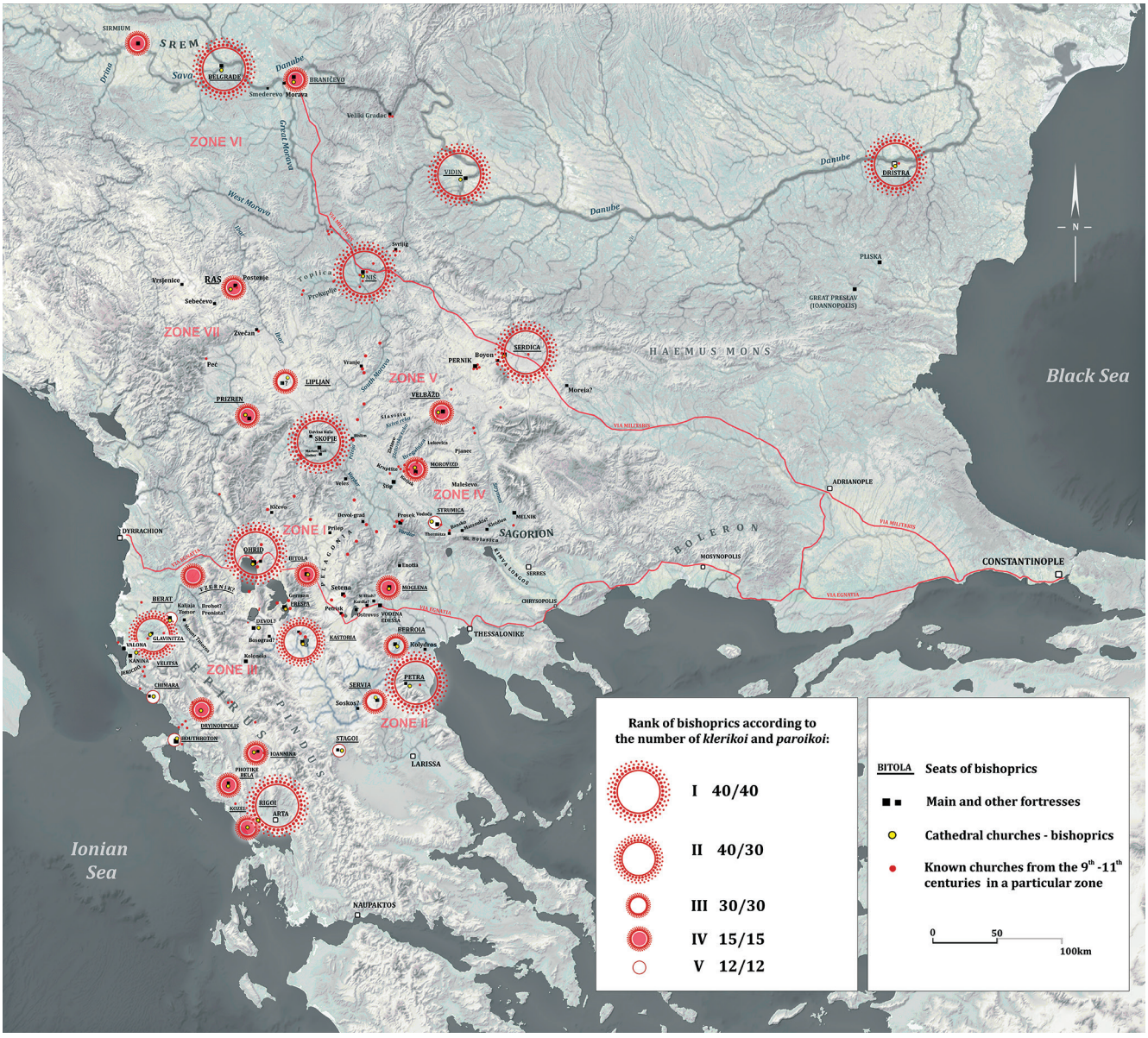
The number of the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* assigned to each bishopric warrants a few remarks.

There is no doubt that the more *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* a bishopric had, the more important it was considered, as seen from the elevation of the Bishopric of Vidin. The number of the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* was equal, except for two bishoprics (Kastoria and Glavinitza). As explained above, by exempting from taxation a specific number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* tied to episcopal possessions, the imperial treasury renounced some of its revenue in favor of the bishoprics, i.e., the Archbishopric.[30] The difference in the total number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* in a particular bishopric of the Ohrid Church might be explained by several factors: the antiquity of a bishopric, population density, economic activity, and the number and state of sacral edifices in the defined

28 *Dölger – Müller*, Regesten, no. 807. Cf. *Prinzing*, Byzantine ecclesiastical province, 377, Table I.

29 Cf. TIB III, 123–124.

30 On the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* see *Papagianni*, Ta oikonomika, 186–216; *Oikonomides*, Tax exemptions, 317–326; *Angold*, Church and Society, 234–239.



Map 2. Rank of bishoprics according to the number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* exempted from taxation in the charters of Basil II

circumscribed territory. Many churches had been war-damaged or devastated from 976 to 1019 or even earlier as a consequence of the Russian incursion into the Bulgarian territory and Tzimiskes' counterattack.[31]

The tax exemption for a specific number of diocesan *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* was evidently politically motivated, too. On the one hand, it is reasonable to assume that Basil was more generous to the bishoprics in strategically important regions where Bulgarian resistance had concentrated during the war. Also, he may have yielded to the ambitions of some bishops, counting on their support in pacifying the local population and getting them to accept Byzantine rule in some areas.

31 *Magistros* John Kourkouas is known to have raided many Bulgarian churches "in Moesia" during the Russo-Byzantine war, Leo Diaconus, 148; Scylitzes, 304. Cf. *Krsmanović*, Evnusi, 368.

On the other hand, Basil's charters mention some settlements as bishopric seats, whereas Byzantine histories and chronicles offer no information about them during the long war. The first-category of bishoprics, whose bishops had more *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* than others (40 of each), such as Belgrade and Niš, are particularly notable. The question is whether the preferential treatment of such bishoprics was aimed at strengthening the demographic and economic power of the Empire in areas where Byzantium had been present in earlier centuries only through church organization but in which Basil now held all levers of power. During this long period, some Byzantine bishoprics in the interior of the Balkans had died away, and some had been incorporated into the independent Bulgarian Church after 880. Reclaiming this territory, Basil II formed the Archbishopric of Ohrid, restoring the foundations on which, several centuries earlier, Byzantium had tried to build a system that would effectively integrate the Slavs and Byzantines in this territory.

There are, however, examples of a reverse process. For instance, Bouthroton is known to have been a strong economic urban hub,[32] but in this bishopric, Basil II exempted from taxation the minimum number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* (12 of each). This case suggests that the Empire was reluctant to renounce its revenue in economically developed regions, limiting tax exemptions where it could and where it was unfettered by political concerns.

The above examples show that the numbers of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* listed in Basil's charters say little about the demographic landscape in the bishoprics of the Ohrid Church. At first glance, we might be led to assume that the number of a bishop's subordinates was proportionate to the size of his bishopric's flock. That, however, proves an inadequate indicator, as Basil's church organization in the retaken territories depended on multiple factors.

III. The inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos as a source for the church organization of Samuel's age

John Scylitzes reports that Samuel, having taken Larissa, the principal Byzantine fortress in Thessaly, in 985/986, transferred the relics of St. Achilleos to Prespa, where his palace was located. According to a later interpolation by Michael of Devol, he built a magnificent church dedicated to this saint at Prespa.[33] Earlier research has shed some light on the frescoing of this church, and the apse at St. Achilleos at Prespa is thought to have been painted twice: first between 989 and 1002 and again later, probably under Archbishop Leo, the Greek who succeeded John on the Ohrid throne (ca. 1037–1055/1056).[34] The apse bore traces of an inscription in the upper part of the arcade, with 18 fields evenly distributed on the left and right of the throne in the *synthronon*. The remains of the inscription were photographed and partially deciphered. The

32 See below, 346–347.

33 Scylitzes, 330.

34 Since the inscription lists Berroia and Vidin, the church is believed to have been frescoed between the years when Samuel took Berroia (989, possibly even 986) and lost Vidin (ca. 1002).

inscription is now lost, so what information we have comes from old photographs and previous attempts to reconstruct its contents. According to Milyukov's reading, the inscription listed the bishoprics of Vidin, Kephalonia, Berroia, Herakleia, Selasphoros, Skopje, Serdica, and Edessa (?). Moutsopoulos added a few bishopric names to his reading (Prizren, Velbăžd, and Prespa) and confirmed the reading of Edessa.[35]

As the traces of the inscription were discovered in the first layer of plaster with the earliest frescoes, the inscription seems datable to the first frescoing of the St. Achilleos apse and, hence, testifies to the structure of the Bulgarian Church in the earliest phase of Samuel's reign. The altar barrier hid the frescoed representation of the Bulgarian church organization from the eyes of the visitors who came to the Church of St. Achilleos at Prespa, which housed the relics of Thessaly's most renowned saint. It was an unusual and singularly important representation in religious art, which monumentally enshrined the territorial legitimacy of the Bulgarian church organization at the turn of the 10th to the 11th century.[36]

The names of 18 bishoprics were inscribed in the upper zones of the arcade, below the arches, in Greek, using the following formula: "+ Θρόνος πο/που *bishopric name*." Some earlier scholarship argued that the abbreviated form πο/που, written in Greek letters, was derived from the Slavic proposition "в, на, над, за, върху, кьм, по, от(х)" etc.[37] However, the entire inscription is in Greek, with some bishopric names archaized and rendered in their Greek versions, even if they had a preexisting Slavic name. In other words, the painter used a Greek rather than a Slavic template, or someone dictated to the artist the inscription's content in Greek. The "-πο/που" was more likely derived from the suffix of the word ἐπίσκοπος in the genitive singular ἐπισκό**που**. If so, the final formula would have read: "+ Ὁ θρόνος (τοῦ) ἐπισκόπου *bishopric name*," which found its way into the inscription in an abbreviated and possibly distorted Greek-language version. The emphasis on the genitive case would have had to do with the fact that the inscription specified the seating arrangement for each of the 18 bishops in the *synthronon*. That suggests that most of those 18 bishops actively governed their bishoprics. The group may have included some titular bishops who did not have access to their bishoprics at the time of the frescoing of the St. Achilleos apse, but were nonetheless claimed by the Bulgarian Church.

All bishopric names in the inscription begin with a small cross symbol (either above the inscription or in the same row, preceding the inscription); in two cases, below the inscribed Greek name of the bishopric (Selasphoros and Vidin), there was another cross marking the end of the inscription. The Greek text with the bishopric names was packed together, suggesting that the intention might have been to save space in the upper zone to allow for a possible frescoing of the lower zone.

35 *Milyukov*, Hristijanskaja drevnosti, 30–31; *Moutsopoulos*, Basilikē, A', 153–157.

36 Cf. the sanctuary imagery in the territorially close but later examples of the archdiocesan seats at Hagia Sophia in Ohrid and Žiča, *Todić*, Arhiepiskop Lav, 119–136; *Vojvodić* et *al*., Žiča, 241–242, 246–249.

37 *Mucopulos*, Bazilikata Sveti Ahilij, 67.



Fig. 1.
Little Prespa,
St. Achilleos,
altar apse,
present condition

The use of Greek in frescoes is consistent with the established practices of the Bulgarian Church. However, the Slavic language and script were used in everyday life, as attested by tombstone inscriptions from Samuel's era, for instance, the tombstone Samuel erected for his deceased parents and brother (992/993) in the village of German or the so-called Varoš inscription from Prilep,[38] with John Vladislav's Bitola inscription being another notable example.[39]

The content of the heavily damaged, Greek-language inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos, with most of the bishopric names unreliably deciphered, opens several important questions that today defy definitive answers. Further research employing state-of-the-art methods could perhaps shed more light on some of the numerous problems associated with the Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa. Suffice it to mention a few.

The inscription in the church at Little Prespa shows that the inscribing of the bishopric names was a slapdash job, with the words heavily abbreviated due to the severely cramped space in the arcade parts below the arches. As noted above, two attempts have been made to propose readings for 11 bishopric names, some of which are inconclusive. Left of the throne, in a line of nine bishoprics, four possible names have been proposed: Skopje, Serdica, Edessa, and Prespa (?); right of the throne, seven bishopric names have supposedly been deciphered: Selasphoros, Velbăžd (?), Herakleia, Berroia, Kephalonia, Vidin, and Prizdriana (?)/Prizren.

38 *Kos*, O natpisu cara Samuila, 203–209; *Adontz*, Samuel l'Arménien, 384–385; *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 24–26, 27–29.

39 *Tomović*, Morfologija ćirilskih natpisa, 31–33.

Tentative readings were suggested for the fourth inscription left of the throne, with Moutsopoulos arguing that it contained the first two letters of a bishopric name, *Πρ-*, which he believed to stand for Prespa, as well as for the third inscription on the right side of the throne, Velbăžd (*B...υλ...*), and the eighth right of the throne, Prizdriana (Milyukov: *πεδ* / Moutsopoulos: *πρδρυ*).[40]

Despite the problems with its reading, it is nonetheless apparent that the inscription did not list Prespa because the surviving part of the inscription in that field seems to contain the letters *KPI*, indicating Kastoria as a more likely solution. In any case, the reading "Prespa" is not feasible. The reading of the name Prizdriana is similarly dubious, although this bishopric does appear in the first *sigillion* of Basil II. Only the letters in the middle of this name have survived, making it nearly impossible to identify the bishopric. However, given that Basil II founded the Archbishopric of Ohrid on the traditions of the Bulgarian church organization from Samuel's and Peter's eras, the hypothesis about the Bishopric of Prizdriana should not be categorically dismissed. This hypothesis is supported by evidence that the Church of the Virgin Ljeviška in Prizren stands atop the foundations of an older church believed to have belonged to Samuel's era.[41]

The extensive damage to the inscription and the elusive names of most bishoprics make it impossible to gauge if or to what extent the inscription preserved the memory of bygone times and the ecclesiastical system from the ages of Peter and Boris. It seems more likely that the monumental representation highlighting the episcopal thrones conveyed the true landscape of the Bulgarian Church in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. That is supported by the inclusion of the Bishopric of Berroia, an old and prominent Byzantine possession that spent 12 to 15 years under Samuel's control (ca. 989/986– 1001), and whose bishop was seated in the fifth place right of the throne, suggesting that after the Bulgarian conquest, Berroia had joined the existing bishoprics but without affecting the positions of the most prominent bishops of the Bulgarian Church.

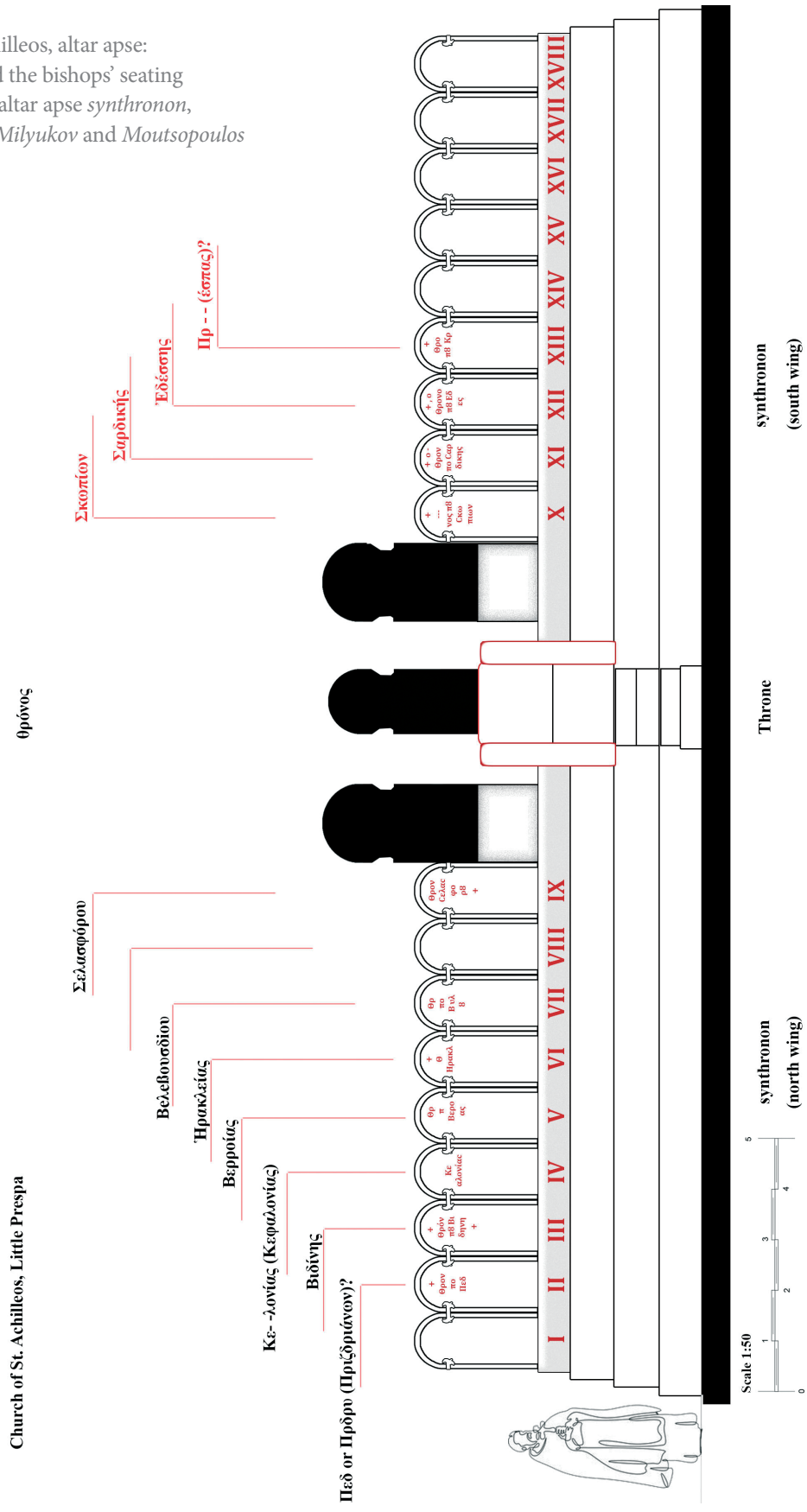
The proposed readings of the damaged inscription offer no indication that the 18 listed bishoprics included any in the homelands of the First Bulgarian Empire, although this does not necessarily mean that there were none. Tzimiskes had taken Preslav and Pliska, but Byzantium lost control in this region at some point, only to reclaim the old Bulgarian capitals in the campaign of 999/1000. Regardless, there is no evidence to confirm that Preslav and Pliska were part of Samuel's realm before 999/1000. The inhabitants of the old Bulgarian capitals may have temporarily defected, taking advantage of the political upheavals in the Balkans. Be that as it may, the homelands of the First Bulgarian Empire played a marginal role in Samuel's Bulgaria.

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40 A graphical representation of what remained of the inscription, read by Moutsopoulos as Prespa, is shown under XIII, Prizdriana under II, and Velbăžd under VII: *Milyukov*, Hristijanskaja drevnosti, 30–31; *Moutsopoulos*, Ē basilikē tou Agio Achilleiou, A', 402, 404, and the table on 405. For the definitive reading, see *Idem*, Bazilikata Sveti Ahilij, 67. The remains of the inscription interpreted as Velbăžd were shown only in Milyukov (Hristijanskaja drevnosti, 30), and his reading is given in the list of the suggested bishopric names, *Mucopulos*, Bazilikata Sveti Ahilij, 67.

41 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 219–221.

Fig. 2.
Little Prespa, St. Achilleos, altar apse: Bishopric names and the bishops' seating arrangement on the altar apse *synthronon*, as reconstructed by *Milyukov* and *Moutsopoulos*



The names of the bishoprics, especially those also known under their Slavic names, similarly raise some doubts. For example, the bishopric listed in the inscription as Selasphoros is called Devol in other sources. The available sources suggest that the name Selasphoros appeared for the first time in the inscription from Samuel's church and re-entered into use in the late 11th or early 12th centuries, as attested by *Notitia 13*.[42] However, the name Selasphoros failed to take root, and its Slavic name, Devol, remained in broader usage. The bishop of Devol is mentioned in the *Short Life of St. Naum*,[43] suggesting that this bishopric was known in the Slavic milieu and the Bulgarian Church under the same name attested in Byzantine-era sources. For instance, John Scylitzes' account of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war, one of Basil II's charters, the correspondence of Archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid (1088/1089 – 1120/1126),[44] and some later sources all mention the term "Devol."[45]

The meaning of the Greek word Selasphoros, an erudite variant of the adjective or noun Φωσφώρος ("Light-bearer"), is clear enough;[46] what is surprising is the use of this name for a Bulgarian bishopric during the period of struggles for restoring Bulgarian independence, particularly in the church believed to have been the spiritual center of Samuel's Bulgaria. The use of the Greek term Selasphoros for this bishopric, better known as Devol, may have come from an earlier source unknown to us. However, it is more likely that the Bishopric of Devol had earned its new, poetized name for some other reason – perhaps because of the toponym Zvezde ("Stars"), usually associated with Devol,[47] or for some other reason that had to do with the prestige of this old Slavic bishopric under Bulgarian rule.

The inscription at St. Achilleos also lists Edessa under its Greek name. When the *Kometopouloi* rebellion broke out, the Byzantine fortress of Edessa became a secure Bulgarian stronghold known under its Slavic name of Vodena. The Slavic toponym appears in Basil's charter, and Vodena consistently features in accounts of the armed conflicts in John Scylitzes' chronicle. Scylitzes drew on an earlier source to describe the wars of 976–1019, meaning that the fortress was unambiguously known under its

42 Notitiae, 13.851.

43 *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 307.

44 For the dating of Theophylact's mandate in Ohrid see *Prinzing*, Byzantine ecclesiastical province, 380, Table II.

45 *A. Loma*: Ptolemy's *Geography* contains the earliest and only reference to Διβόλια, a toponym of dubious origin, in classical antiquity. *Schramm*, Eroberer, 228–229 (26.2), with bibliography, proposed that the Slavs adopted the toponym via the local Roman population, in whose pronunciation *Dibolia* had become **Devolia*, like in the Latin word *Tiber*, acc. *Tiberim* > Italian: *Tevere*. Due to the folk etymology that associated the toponym with διάβολος (devil), the bishopric was renamed Σελάσφορος in the 13th century, but this erudite name never made it into the vernacular. However, the earliest instance of using Σελάσφορος for Devol does not come from the 13th century but, as shown, from the inscription at St. Achilleos – in other words, from Samuel's era.

46 *Todorović*, Filološki prilog, in: *Vojvodić*,Ἡ Σελασφόρος, 1205–1207.

47 William Martin Leake was the first to propose a ubication, having identified Selásforo with Devól in 1835. This hypothesis (Diabolis-Zvezde?) was included in the 2000 edition of the Barrington Atlas. A recent and more exhaustive archaeological survey of the Kalaja e Zvezdës site (2013–2015) has identified a medieval phase of the fortress, reviving the hypothesis that Devol was in the Zvezde village, long believed to be a Late Antique fortress atop a pre-Roman fort, *Leake*, Travels in Northern Greece, 339–340; *Talbert et al*., Barrington Atlas, 752; *Xhyheri et al*., Kërkime arkeologjike, 311. In contrast, *Pentkovskij,* Slavjanskoe bogosluženie v arhiepiskopii, №2, n. 13, holds that the fortress of Devol stood at the site of the stronghold at the summit of Mborje overlooking modern Korçë.

Slavic name during the war and not as Edessa, as it is listed in the *Escorial Taktikon* and even earlier as a suffragan bishopric of the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike.[48] The name Edessa in the inscription in the apse at St. Achilleos shows that the Bishopric of Edessa retained its old name in the post-976 period, in the framework of Samuel's church organization. Even though Edessa had become part of the independent Bulgarian Church in the late 9th century, there is nothing to suggest that the name of this bishopric ever changed, and its Greek name seems to have remained in long-term use. It should be noted that a bishopric called Vodena did not exist in Basil's church organization and that this Slavic toponym does not appear in any of Basil's charters as part of a bishopric assigned to the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[49] Its Slavic name is mentioned only in reference to the fortress that served as one of the temporary seats of the displaced Bulgarian patriarch after 971. However, the name Edessa did not become obsolete –*Notitia 13* lists a bishopric called ὁ Ἐδεσσα ἤτοι Μογλένων,[50] meaning that Vodena/Edessa belonged to the same bishopric as Moglena at the turn of the 11th to the 12th century. In other words, it seems safe to assume that both names, Edessa (Greek) and Vodena (Slavic), remained in use later on, but the ecclesiastical nomenclature employed the name Edessa.

Another bishopric in the inscription at St. Achilleos also raises some questions: the bishopric listed as Kephalonia (Κεφαλονία), the Greek translation of the Slavic name of the Bishopric of Glavinitza. *Notitia 10* from John Tzimiskes' era mentions this bishopric by its Slavic name (Γλαβινίτζα ἤτοι Ἀκροκεραύνια), as does the first charter of Basil II.[51] Why was the Greek translation of its name used in the inscription at Samuel's church, while the Byzantine *Notitia* and the charter issued by the Byzantine emperor Basil II employed the Slavic version (Γλαβινίτζα)? *Notitia 13* included both names, listing it as ὁ Κεφαληνίας ἤτοι Γλαβινίτζης,[52] showing that the Slavic name and its Greek equivalent (calque) were used in church organization, with the Greek translation of the Slavic name preferred to the earlier Greek name of Ἀκροκεραύνια.

The use of the classical name of Herakleia for the bishopric[53] whose territory would be covered in Basil's charter by a bishopric listed under the Slavic name of Βουτέλη/Bitola is no less baffling. The inscription lists another name inherited from classical antiquity – the Bishopric of Serdica.[54] If we take the inscription at St. Achilleos

48 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.29; 360. Notitiae, 3.262.

49 For more details on the status of Edessa/Vodena in the military and church organization, see below.

50 Notitiae, 13.839.

51 Notitiae, 10.616; *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

52 Notitiae, 13.844.

53 Notitiae, 3.260, datable to 870–880, mentions Herakleia as a suffragan bishopric of the Metropolis of Thessalonike. Herakleia was integrated into the Bulgarian Church after it became independent, but the bishopric retained its name, as attested by the inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos in Little Prespa.

54 *A. Loma*: **Sredetz** < Срѣдьць is the Slavic name for the ancient city known as *Serdica/Sardica* in Latin and Σερδική/Σαρδική in Greek, named after the Thracian tribe of the Σερδοί, Σαρδοί. The Slavs adopted this name from the local population early on, as attested by the liquid metathesis *er* > *rě*, which was no longer productive after the early 9th century. Schramm proposes that the Vulgar Latin locative case *Serdice* may have been adopted as (въ) Срѣдьци (11th c.). The Slavic form *Стрıадьць with a *t* inserted into the initial cluster *sr* and

to be datable to Samuel's era, it seems that the senior clergy of the Bulgarian Church under Samuel had been more attached to Byzantine traditions than Basil II would be.

Velbăžd, the tentative reading of one of the 18 bishopric at the Church of St. Achilleos (B..υλ..),[55] is a different case. The first *sigillion* of Basil II confirms the existence of this bishopric. The name is undoubtedly Slavic (Bulgarian), meaning that its classical name – Pautalia – was not used at Prespa. The inscription also listed the Bishopric of Vidin under its Slavic name.[56]

A separate set of questions concerns the arrangement of the bishoprics and their bishops in the inscription in the altar apse at Samuel's church. As mentioned, a nine-field arcade was frescoed on the left and right of the throne at the center of the *synthronon*, with each field reserved for the name of one of the 18 bishoprics and the throne for the head of the Bulgarian Church. So, the first question to ask is where the Bulgarian primate held court when St. Achilleos was frescoed for the first time – at Prespa or Ohrid.

The hypothetical chronology of the Bulgarian primate's relocation from Dorostolon to the central areas of Samuel's realm after 971 suggests that his seat moved to Prespa ca. 986 and from Prespa to Ohrid sometime after 992/993. The question is whether the move from Prespa to Ohrid meant that one of the existing churches in the new center served as the cathedral church or if a new church was built for this purpose. There are no reports that could be tied to the era of Samuel and his successors about the construction of a new or the repurposing of an existing church, and there is also no evidence to confirm that Samuel personally used Ohrid as his capital. The reports that Ohrid served as the "*metropolis* of all Bulgaria" come from the last stage of the war and hence do not necessarily imply that this city had become the political center of Samuel's empire any earlier. We know that it housed the "palace of the kings

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the Bulgarian pronunciation of the yat [ja] may have produced the Byzantine Τριάδιτζα, which lost its *s* due to the decomposition of the proposition εἰς and/or, as Schramm hypothesizes, by association with Τριάδα '(Holy) Trinity'. Cf. *Schramm*, Eroberer, 364–365 (38.16), with bibliography.

55 *A. Loma*: Milyukov deciphered three letters, and *Moutsopoulos*, Ē basilikē tou Agio Achilleiou, A', 405, proposed this reading. **Velbăžd** was the medieval name of the town known in antiquity as Pautalia, modern-day Kyustendil. The toponym is a possessive adjective ending in *jь*: Common Slavic **Velьbudjь* or **Velьbǫdjь*, with the word *grad* 'fortress, town' implied, derived from the Slavic personal name **Velьbudъ* or **Velьbǫdъ*. In the latter case, supported by a later Middle Bulgarian record Вельбжжи (Loc.) from 1277 and a comparison with the Polabian toponym *Villebanse*, the form Βελεβούσδιος as recorded in the charter issued in 1019 by the Emperor Basil II presumably shows both the Bulgarian development *dj* > *žd* and the Serbian-type denasalization of *ǫ* > *u*. However, a reliable conclusion is compounded by the fact that the underlying Slavic was later (in Bulgarian and Serbian attestations) reinterpreted by the word denoting a camel, Old Slavonic: вельблждъ with the adjective вельблжждь, *Loma*, Etnička prošlost, 114, 121. The modern name Bulgarian Кюстендил, Serbian Ћустендил is from Turkish *Köstendil* 'Constantine's province'; the city was thus named by the Turks after the Serbian magnate Konstantin Dragaš († 1395) who ruled this region at the time of the Ottoman conquest.

56 *A. Loma*: **Vidin** as derived from the Turkish *Vidin*, which, in turn, came from the Middle Greek Βιδίνη, Βιδήνη, derived from the Slavonic **Bъdynь*, Middle Bulgarian Бъдынь (attested in Asen's charter to Dubrovnik), Serbo-Slavonic въ Бъдини in Archbishop Danilo's writings. The Old Slavonic name reflects the town's name in antiquity, which was of Celtic origin: Latin: *Bonōnia*, Greek: Βονωνία, with the dissimilation *n* – *n* > *d* – *n*, cf. Italian: *Bologna*, reflecting the same Celtic protoform with a different dissimilation. *Schramm*, Eroberer, 401–402 (41.12); Etimološki rečnik srpskog jezika, II, 288 s.v. Бдињ, with bibliography. In the charter of Basil II, the genitive form Βοδίνης seems to be based on Slavic Бъдинъ, with its omicron regularly transcribing the hard semivowel ъ and an iota for и delabialised from ы, cf. the Middle Greek spelling Βιδύνη.

of Bulgaria," known to have existed in other settlements, and that it was "where their treasure was stored."[57] However, does this mean that St. Achilleos at Little Prespa lost its status as the cathedral at some point? The available information suggests otherwise.

Firstly, the grandeur and distinctiveness of the sanctuary, designed to highlight the territorial legitimacy of the independent Bulgarian Church, suggest that St. Achilleos was the preeminent church of Samuel's empire. It was where the head of this church and his suffragan bishops assembled for councils and religious feasts. John Vladimir, Prince of Diokleia (Duklja), was murdered in front of this church in a plot by John Vladislav, who had previously received him at his palace in Prespa (ad imperatoris curiam in loco, qui Prespa dicitur).[58] So, St. Achilleos was also a meeting place for the ruling dynasty's members. There is no such evidence for Ohrid, although it housed the relics of St. Clement, which would have surely added to the city's prestige as an ecclesiastical hub. Still, the elevation of Prespa to be the realm's religious center was undoubtedly Samuel's decision, as he had facilitated the translation of the saint's relics – and, by extension, his cult – from Larissa. This move was significant not only for the Bulgarian Church but also for the ruling dynasty, which had closer ties to the Church of St. Achilleos than to the ecclesiastical heritage of Ohrid.

Basil's first *sigillion* to the Archbishopric of Ohrid mentions Ohrid and Prespa as towns in the same bishopric.[59] This territorial link between Prespa and Ohrid seems to have been inherited from the Bulgarian era, which is why St. Achilleos could retain its status as the cathedral and most important church in the state even when the head of the church resided at Ohrid, using one of the local churches when needed.

It should be noted that the imposing size of the Church of St. Achilleos was unrivaled by other similarly ranked cathedrals.[60] Of course, churches in cities and towns could not be grander due to the spatial constraints of urban settings, with the exception of the Old Metropolis in Berroia, which was unusually large for an urban church within city walls. Similarly, the monastery churches selected to serve as bishops' cathedrals tended to be more modestly sized. Still, the surviving material evidence allows us to gauge the area of the church naoses where the congregation convened. At St. Achilleos, the total area of the church ground floor with the narthex and the sanctuary was nearly 663m^2. The space available to the believers inside the church and west of the templon was reduced to 507.1m^2. This figure would have been significantly higher, coming up to over 796 m^2, if the hypothetical galleries existed, at least during the first phase of the church. At the Church of Hagia Sophia in Ohrid, the faithful had roughly 339.17 m^2 at their disposal. That means the Church of St. Achilleos could accommodate twice as big a congregation as Hagia Sophia, possibly even more. Similarly, St. Achilleos emerges as by far the largest among the researched cathedrals in the Archbishopric's territory. For instance,

57 See below, 320–325.

58 Gesta Regum Sclavorum I, 134–136.

59 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

60 See below, 372–373, Fig. 10a–b.

the Dristra cathedral's naos measured about 236.43 m^2, and the cathedral at Vodoča near Strumica, in its final version, had about 161.62 m^2 to accommodate the congregation, the one at Morovizd about 208.27 m^2, and the one in Prizren about 235.34 m^2. Only the spacious naos of the Old Metropolis in Berroia approaches the size of the ground plan of St. Achilleos in Little Prespa, with its 430.61 m^2, including the transept wings. The extraordinary volume of St. Achilleos certainly had to do with the fact that it was built to serve as a pilgrimage center. So, the monumental church was designed from the outset to accommodate many visitors. This was also a significant difference between the new church dedicated to the Thessalian saint at Little Prespa and the Church of St. Achilleos on the acropolis in Larissa, which could receive a much smaller congregation in its naos (253.03 m^2) due to the spatial constraints of its urban environment.

All of this suggests that St. Achilleos did not lose its status as the preeminent cathedral while Samuel's Bulgaria existed and that the idea to move the archbishop's throne permanently stemmed from the Byzantine view of Ohrid's role as the most important ecclesiastical institution in the Balkans. This program gained traction as early as the primacy of Archbishop Leo, who succeeded John, the first head of the autocephalous Archbishopric. St. Achilleos did not lose its importance in the Byzantine period, ranking second behind Hagia Sophia in Ohrid.

Finally, the criterion that guided the order of the bishoprics in the inscription remains unclear.

This criterion was clearly not geographical. If it were, the bishoprics close to the ecclesiastical center (Prespa or Ohrid?) would have been named in fields nearer to the episcopal throne in the apse. The first bishopric left of the throne is Skopje, and the first right of the throne is Selasphoros (Devol). Skopje is followed by Serdica, which has no counterpart in the right column (the inscription is too damaged to be legible). On the left, Serdica is followed by Edessa (Vodena), whose counterpart on the right is Velbăžd. Next, a tentative reading suggests that Edessa (on the left) is followed by *KPI-* (Kastoria?), with its counterpart on the right being Herakleia (Bitola in Basil's *sigillion*). From the fourth spot on the left, there are no surviving segments of the inscription (and, hence, no decipherable bishopric names). On the right, four more bishopric names have been proposed: Berroia, Kephalonia (Glavinitza), Vidin, and Prizren (?).

A graphic representation of the order and distance of the bishoprics from the throne might look something like this:[61]

61 Milyukov gave the bishoprics a linear numbering from I to XVIII, starting from the first (farthest) seat north of the *synthronon*, which Moutsopulos accepted. We think that numeration should begin from the episcopal sees closest to the throne at the center of the *synthronon*.

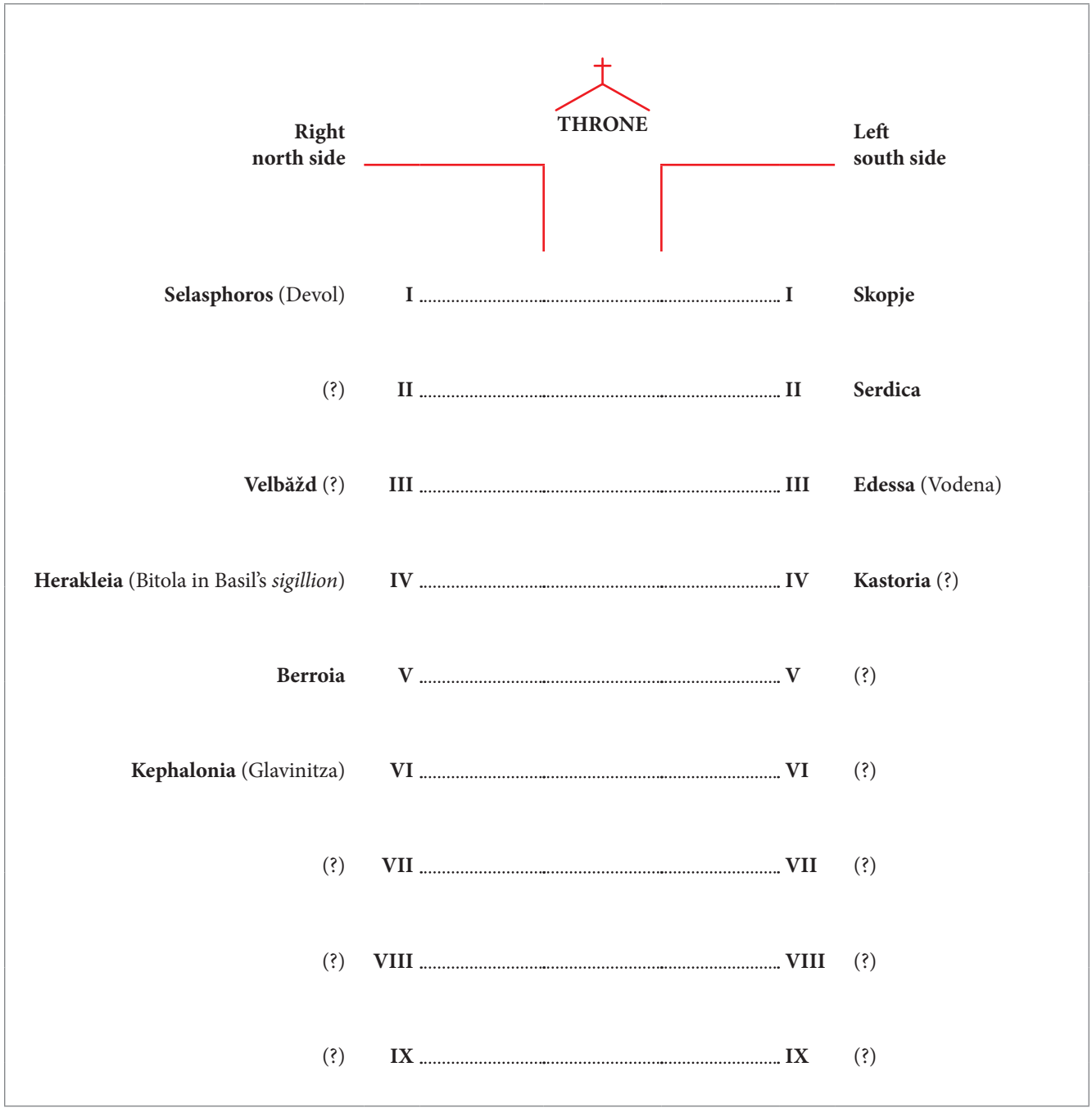


Fig. 3. Little Prespa, St. Achilleos, altar apse: Diagram of hypothetical bishopric names left and right of the throne according to *Krsmanović – Zdravković*

So, as the geographical criterion did not dictate the order of the bishoprics, the arrangement may have reflected their rank in the Bulgarian Church. The ranks of the bishoprics were probably inherited from Bulgaria's earlier church organization. Notably, the deciphered bishopric names from the Church of St. Achilleos seem to match the bishoprics listed in Basil's first *sigillion*.

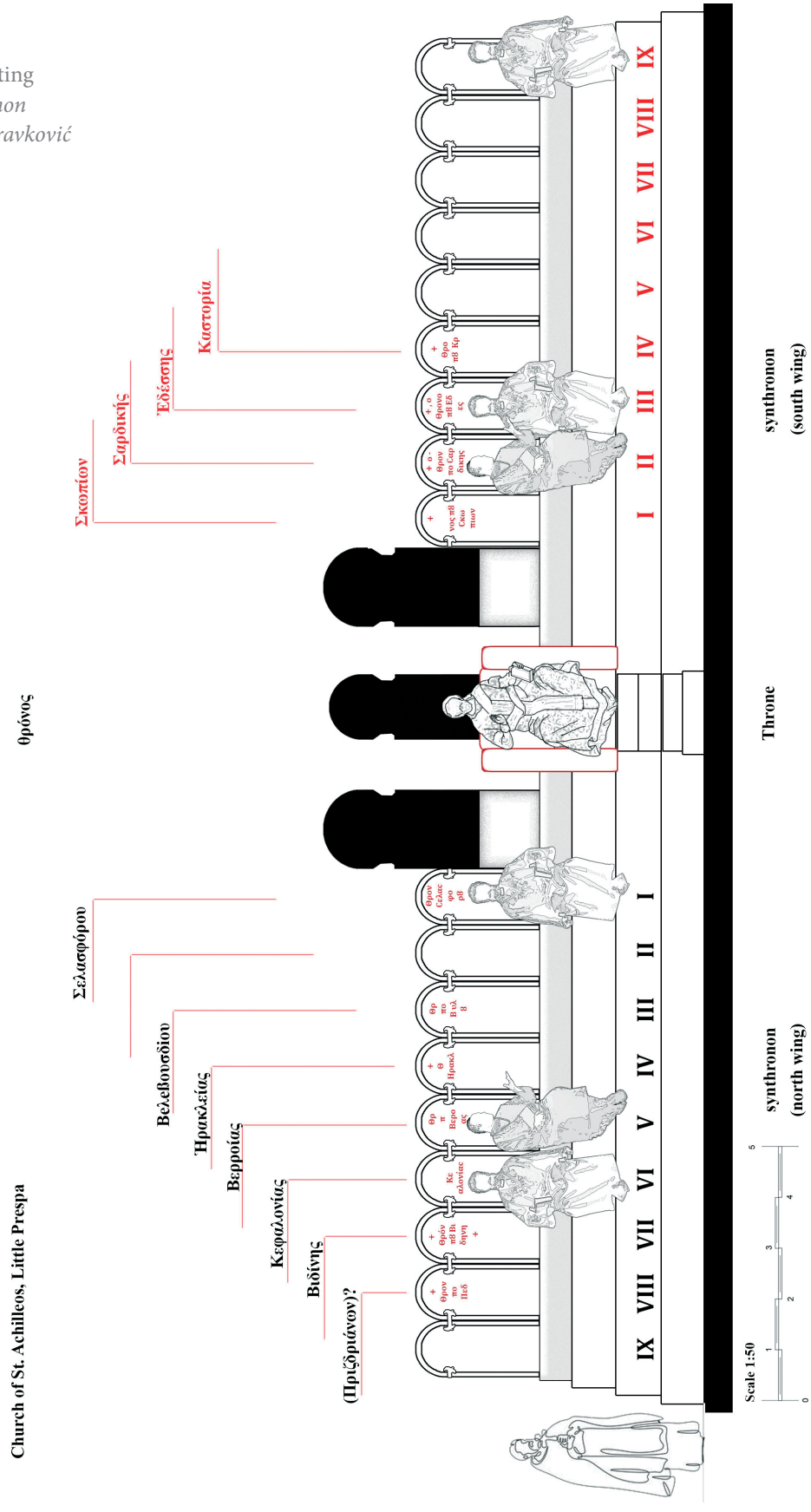


Fig. 4.
Little Prespa, St. Achilleos, altar apse: Bishopric names and the bishops' seating arrangement on the altar apse *syntronon* as reconstructed by *Krsmanović – Zdravković*

	Inscription in the apse at St. Achilleos (left of the throne)	Charters of Basil II
I	**Bishopric of Skopje (?)**	= **Bishopric of Skopje / τῶν Σκοπίων,**[62] ***I sigillion***
II	**Bishopric of Serdica**	= **Bishopric of Triaditzes / τῆς Τριαδίτζης, *I sigillion***; in this case, only the name of the see is different; it was known as both Serdica and Triaditza, with Scylitzes using the term Triaditza for the geographical area, as well.
III	**Bishopric of Edessa**	**Vodena / τῶν Βοδινῶν** (τὰ Βοδηνά). Basil's ***sigillia*** do not mention either the Bishopric of Edessa or Vodena; neither does this toponym appear as a settlement in any of the bishoprics.
IV	**Bishopric of *Kri-* (Kastoria?)**	= **Bishopric of Kastoria, I *sigillion*.**
	Inscription in the apse at St. Achilleos (right of the throne)	**Charters of Basil II**
I	**Bishopric of Selasphoros**	**Devol is mentioned as a settlement in the Bishopric of Kastoria, *I sigillion*.** It later became a separate bishopric, meaning that Devol's independence from Kastoria was restored, with both becoming bishoprics in their own right, as they had been in the Bulgarian Church.
III	**Bishopric of Βελεβουσδίου**	= **Bishopric of Velbăžd, I *sigillion***
IV	**Bishopric of Herakleia**	**Bishopric of Bitola / Βουτέλη, *I sigillion*:** The bishopric name Herakleia comes from the ancient Greek city of Herakleia Lynkestis near Bitola. There is no doubt that this was the territory of the bishopric listed in Basil's charters under its Slavic name, Bitola, which is not a translation of the older name.
V	**Bishopric of Berroia**	= **Bishopric of Berroia, III *sigillion***
VI	**Bishopric of Kephalonia**	= **Bishopric of Glavinitza, I *sigillion*:** the bishopric was listed under its Slavic name.
VII	**Bishopric of Vidin**	= **Bishopric of Vidin, II *sigillion***
VIII	**Bishopric of Πρδρυ (?)/Prizdriana (?)**	= **Bishopric of Prizdriana, I *sigillion***

Fig. 5. Little Prespa, St. Achilleos, altar apse: Overlapping of the bishoprics in the St. Achilleos inscription with the bishoprics listed in Basil II's charters

62 *A. Loma*: **Skopje** is not a Slavic but a substrate toponym, reflecting the ancient name of the city Lat. *Scŭpi* m. pl. Its short *u*, preserved in Albanian *Shkup*, in Slavic mouth was regularly substituted with the reduced vowel *ъ*, cf. Old Serbian (1216) Скьпьль градь 'the (fortified) city of Skopje', where **Skъpl'ъ* is a Slavic *j*possessive derived from the substrate stem *Skъp*; the neuter form of the same adjective, to **město* 'place' or **pol'e* 'field', or a derivative in *ьje*, spelled Скопиѥ, showing the development *ъ* > *o*, which is characteristic of Macedonian, and possibly also the Eastern SouthSlavic loss of the epenthetic *l*, was used in both Middle Bulgarian and Old Serbian sources (Modern Serbian being *Skoplje*). Presumably on this Slavicized form is based also the Medieval Greek τὰ Σκόπια, which replaced Σκοῦποι = Lat. *Scupi* of the Roman era. In the Basyl's II charter from 1019, τὸν ἐπίσκοπον τῶν Σκοπίων εἰς αὐτὰ τὰ Σκόπια is parallelled by the derivatives from Slavic names in the same source, such τὰ Μόγλαινα, Βελάγραδα, Πριζδριάνα, with the Gen. pl. τῶν Μογλαίνων / Βελεγράδων / Πριζδριάνων, translating the Slavic adjectives in *ьskъ*; consequently, at St. Achilleos (ἐπισκόπου) τῶν Σκωπίων would correspond to **(столъ) епископа скопьскаго*, only the omega in the first syllable is puzzling: if read correctly, it hardly can be explained by a Vulgar Latin form **Scōpi*, which is assumed by Schramm for some attestations from Late Antiquity. See *Schramm*, Eroberer, 359–362; *Loma*, Toponimija, 201–202; *Idem*, Jezička i etnička prošlost, 265–266.

IV. On the overlapping of Bulgarian military organization with the diocesan structure of the Archbishopric of Ohrid (Zone I–VII)

When he founded the Archbishopric of Ohrid, Basil II presumably started from the preexisting state of affairs – the diocesan structure of conquered Bulgaria. As the analysis of the inscription from the Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa shows, the available information about the church organization of Samuel's Bulgaria is incomplete and unreliable. Regardless, the deciphered bishopric names in the inscription suggest that these matched the list of the bishoprics Basil II assigned to the Archbishopric of Ohrid in his *sigillia* of 1019, 1020, and 1020–1025, especially those listed in the first *sigillion*. Conspicuously, those episcopal sees match the known centers of Bulgarian resistance: Vidin, Berroia, Selasphoros/Devol, Skopje, Serdica, Edessa/Vodena, and Kastoria. The sources do not mention the territories of the bishoprics of Herakleia (named after the ancient Herakleia Lynkestis near Bitola), Glavinitza, and Velbăžd (separated from the Bishopric of Serdica to become a bishopric in its own right) under these names as sites of Byzantine-Bulgarian hostilities. However, these bishoprics covered the areas where Bulgarian strongholds are known to have existed.

As Basil started from the preexisting state of affairs, i.e., the diocesan structure of conquered Bulgaria, when he set out to define the borders of the Archbishopric of Ohrid and its bishoprics, it seems sensible to try to determine to what extent and why the diocesan seats of the Archbishopric of Ohrid corresponded to the fortresses involved in the conflicts of 976–1019. It was an extensive territory that had undergone uneven historical development. Basil II unified this space in his charters to the Ohrid Church, marking it as "Bulgarian." His ultimate objective in forming such a church organization was to integrate the local population and the members of the local elites into the Empire's military-administrative, legislative, and cultural framework. The first step in this process was disarming the Bulgarian troops and, if needed, removing their commanders from areas where they had been active as leaders and organizers of anti-Byzantine resistance. Fortresses had been the epicenters of resistance in 976–1019, so one way to distance them from their identity as military centers was to promote their role in the Church. The military potential of certain strategically important Bulgarian centers was wiped out when Basil leveled their fortresses, but some of them retained their status as ecclesiastical centers in the post-1019 period (e.g., Moglena and Ohrid).[63]

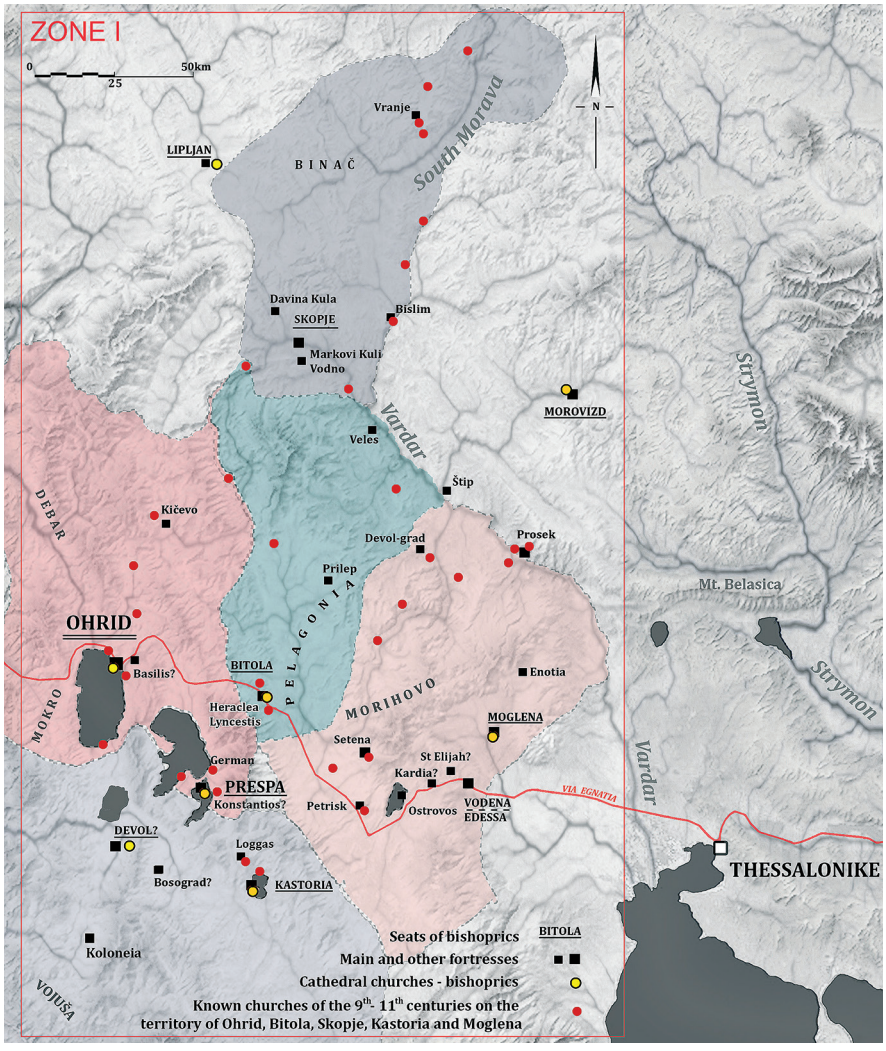
The available information in the sources allows us to trace the overlapping of the Bulgarian military organization in the Balkans and the diocesan network of the Archbishopric of Ohrid by territorial zones. For clarification purposes, we have identified seven territorial zones.

63 See below 328–333.

ZONE I: The Central area of Samuel's Bulgaria

Zone I encompasses the central area of Samuel's Bulgaria. First of all, it includes the residences (τὰ βασίλεια) of the Bulgarian rulers – Ohrid, Prespa, Bitola/Pelagonia, and Setena. Unlike some other fortresses and regions, the sources did not report the names of the military commanders of those settlements. The members of Samuel's family might have personally led the defense of the areas where they resided. Besides the strongholds in the very heart of Samuel's Bulgaria, Vodena/Edessa and Moglena, the fortresses that had served as the seats of the Bulgarian primate in the post-971 period, also belong to this group.[64] The central part of Samuel's Bulgaria also included some fortified settlements on the fringes of the Bulgarian heartlands: Skopje, Devol, and Kastoria.

The residential area of the Bulgarian rulers and heads of the church was divided into three bishoprics: **Ohrid, Bitola, and Moglena**. Due to its status as the archbishop's see and the number of the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* at its disposal, the Bishopric of



Map 3. ZONE I – Central area of Samuel's Bulgaria

64 This was an area traversed by a route of vital importance to Samuel – the *Via Egnatia*, *Shepard*, Communications, 217–235.

Ohrid was among the most powerful, with 80 subordinates serving under the bishop.[65] The bishoprics of Bitola and Moglena belonged to Category IV and had 30 subordinates (each had 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi*). This means that with the formation of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, the subordinates that served under the three bishops in the homelands of Samuel's territory amounted to 70 *klerikoi* and 70 *paroikoi*, which Basil exempted from taxation.

Bishopric of Ohrid

As the political, ecclesiastical, and cultural heart of Samuel's Bulgaria (πόλις, μητρόπολις πάσης τῆς Βουλγαρίας),[66] Ohrid became the center of the newly formed Archbishopric of Ohrid after the end of the war. Additionally, Basil II gave the Bishopric of Ohrid the settlements of Prespa, Mokro, and Kičevo. Prespa was the most important of the three because it had served as the seat of the Bulgarian Patriarchate under Samuel.[67]

Samuel's family is believed to have originated from the village of German near Prespa, which could explain why he chose Prespa to serve as the spiritual heart of his realm. Prespa seems to have been the political center of the state during his reign, and also housed his palace (τὰ βασίλεια) and probably those of other family members.[68] In addition, the village of German near Prespa had a church dedicated to St. Germanos, which is datable to the late 10th or early 11th century. A tombstone commemorating Samuel's parents and one of his brothers, David, was discovered near the church.[69]

As explained above, Samuel built a magnificent and sizable basilica on an island in the Little Prespa Lake and, after he had conquered Larissa, the most important Byzantine city in Thessaly, in 985 or 986, brought the relics of St. Achilleos from Larissa to this new foundation.[70] The construction of the church at Little Prespa may have begun earlier, before the conquest of Larissa, in which case the taking of Larissa would have accelerated its completion. The translation of the relics of Larissa's patron influenced the choice of the titular saint for the church at Little Prespa and its evolution into a pilgrimage site in the heart of Samuel's Bulgaria.[71] The erection of the church and the

65 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse 42, 45.

66 Scylitzes, 358.

67 See above, 305–317.

68 Scylitzes, 330; Gesta Regum Sclavorum I, 134. The choice of the Prespa and Ohrid areas for the center of the state may have also had economic reasons, as it allowed control over trade routes, primarily the *Via Egnatia*, which gave Samuel access to the Adriatic Sea and a connection to the West, *Shepard*, Communications, 217–235.

69 At the Church of St. Germanos in the village of German in the Great Prespa area, a tombstone was discovered whose inscription reports that Samuel erected the tombstone in memory of his father, Nicholas, mother, Ripsimia, whose name is known from an interpolation by Michael of Devol (Scylitzes, 328.62), and one of his brothers, David, *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 24–26; *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 59–60. For the Church of St. Germanos see the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 193–198.

70 Scylitzes, 330. See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 181–182.

71 Two sources, from the 11th and 13th centuries, respectively, have preserved the tradition that some of St. Achilleos' relics were left in Larissa, i.e., that Samuel did not translate the saint's relics in their entirety to the newly built Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa. The first source is the canon dedicated to St. Achilleos, composed in the 11th century by Arsenious, the abbot of Cryptoferrata near Rome, which several times highlights the shrine and the sacred sarcophagus of St. Achilleos as the blessing of the city of Larissa. The



Map 4. Main road routes in the Balkans – *Via Egnatia* and *Via Militaris*

translation of the saint's relics led to the transfer of the Bulgarian patriarch's seat from Moglena to Prespa under the Bulgarian patriarch Germanos Gabriel (ca. 986). The war booty from the conquest of Larissa may have facilitated the completion of St. Achilleos and added to its decoration.

The reasons behind Samuel's attachment to the cult of St. Achilleos remain unclear. Was this simply the most valuable relic he managed to get his hands on in his conquests of Byzantine cities? Whatever the reason, it was thanks to Samuel that the cult of St. Achilleos was so highly revered in the territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[72]

second is the vita of St. Achilleos commissioned by Thomas Gorianitis, metropolitan bishop of Larissa, who headed the Diocese of Larissa in 1264–1273. *Foukou*, Agios Achillios, 31–36, 40.

72 *Subotin-Golubović*, Kult svetog Ahilija, 21–23. See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 269–273, 291.

The Church of St. Achilleos served as the cathedral. There is no doubt that it had this role between 989 and 1002, when its apse was frescoed for the first time and, we would argue, even later.[73] While Prespa was the most important center at the beginning of the war in 976, to which Samuel and his brothers had ancestral ties, Samuel remained attached to the Prespa area even after he became the sole ruler and leader of the revolt. There is nothing to confirm that he personally used Ohrid as his capital.[74] Still, thus far, no evidence of more powerful strongholds has been discovered in the Little Prespa Basin to add to the picture of this place as a firmly fortified political center of Samuel's realm.[75] Byzantine sources offer no indication that the second generation of Samuel's family favored Prespa over Ohrid or even other places where they resided more often. Gabriel Radomir gravitated towards Bitola and the region of Soskos, and John Vladislav to the Pelagonian Plain and its fortresses.[76] However, *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* reports that John Vladislav's palace was in Prespa in 1016, confirming that Prespa served as one of the ruling family's residential areas at that time.[77] The Church of St. Achilleos continued to be held in high regard even in the post-Samuelian era,[78] and remained highly significant to Samuel's family members and the Bulgarian clergy.

The transfer of the ecclesiastical center of Samuel's Bulgaria from Prespa to Ohrid is impossible to securely date. It may have happened after 992/993 or possibly much later, after Samuel died in 1014. Regardless of the date, favoring Ohrid as the center of the Bulgarian state would have been justified. It was an old Byzantine urban hub, enclosed in defensive walls, from where it would have been easier to manage the realm's political affairs. That was why Ohrid housed the residences of the Bulgarian emperors and their treasury. Hence, it was to be expected that the primate's seat would move to this political center. The fact that Ohrid was an old bishopric whose bishop was one of the attendees of the ecclesiastical council held in Constantinople in 879/880 must have contributed to this move. As a Byzantine urban bishopric, Ohrid had played a prominent role in spreading Christianity and, by extension, the Byzantine cultural influence among the local Slavic population.

The bishop of Ohrid was a suffragan of the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion, as *Notitia 3* (ca. 870–880) reports. Under Prince Boris I, when the Bulgarian Church became autocephalous, many bishoprics were removed from the borders of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and placed under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Patriarchate. Ohrid's fate in this reshuffling is uncertain. The city seems to have fallen under growing Bulgarian political control but retained a prominent role as an ecclesiastical center in the independent Bulgarian Church. Tzimiskes' campaign brought a

73 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 126, 180–198, 133.

74 *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 156.

75 For Kale, the ruins of a hilltop fort in the south of the island, see below n. 89.

76 Scylitzes, 351, 353, 354, 355.

77 Gesta Regum Sclavorum I, 134.

78 Theophylact of Ohrid mentions in his letters that the Church of St. Achilleos hosted ecclesiastical councils. Theophylact is known to have attended feasts in honor of St. Achilleos (15 May), Theophylactus, Epistulae, nos. 31, 78, 108; cf. *Subotin-Golubović*, Kult svetog Ahilija, 22.

short-lived change in Ohrid's status because the bishopric was restored to the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion after 971,[79] only to return to the Bulgarian Church soon after.

Regardless of Ohrid's political and ecclesiastical significance, the question is how we should interpret the report about the transfer of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical seat. As we have seen, there is no evidence of a cathedral in Ohrid from the age of Samuel and his successors to confirm that the city served as the seat of the Bulgarian Church. Ohrid assumed this role only after the cathedral dedicated to Hagia Sophia was built in the Byzantine era.[80] In other words, as an ecclesiastical center, Ohrid should not be viewed separately from Prespa and the Church of St. Achilleos. In Ohrid, the head of the church had at his disposal several churches that had contributed to the Christianization of this region, any of which he could use while staying in the city.[81] However, none of them could rival the monumental Church of St. Achilleos, whose significance went beyond the sacral domain and closely intertwined with the ruling ideology of the new dynasty, adding to its prestige and legitimacy.[82] Besides, all the available evidence on wartime Ohrid pertains to the city's role in the secular rather than the sacral sphere of power. As a strong regional urban hub, Ohrid would have been superior to the rural Prespa Basin, which had neither an urban center nor a stronger fortress. The strength of the Prespa region most likely stemmed only from the higher concentration of Slavs among its inhabitants.

The development of Ohrid as a Christian center under strong Byzantine influence could have been another reason that Samuel chose Prespa, his native region, to be the spiritual heart of his realm. The spread of the revolt and Samuel's control to other parts of the Balkans must have caused some changes in Ohrid, and the city gradually acquired a new role in the struggle for an independent Bulgaria. The Byzantine influence in the region of Ohrid was suppressed during Samuel's reign. When the war ended, Basil II found Byzantine prisoners in Ohrid, Prespa, and Pelagonia, whom Samuel had settled there; the emperor allowed "many of those *Rhomaioi* and Armenians" to stay if they so wished.[83] We have no information about how these Byzantines and Armenians

79 Notitiae, 3 236.303; 10.330.619, cf. *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 791–792, 795–796, 801, 804.

80 See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 159–169.

81 Field research findings suggest that very few churches from the 9th and 10th centuries have survived at Ohrid. In the broader area, however, there are a few churches datable to this period. This evidence confirms that Ohrid was an active spiritual center in the First Bulgarian Empire. The fact that the Christian missionaries St. Clement and his disciple Naum built their foundations in Ohrid shows how important the future "metropolis of all Bulgaria" was to the local Slavic population. The most notable among those foundations is the Church of St. Panteleimon at Plaošnik, which Clement built ca. 893 and where he was laid to rest. See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018,* I, 146–151.

82 The matter of the cathedral and seat of the head of the Bulgarian Church under Samuel is closely tied to the problem of his coronation. There is no reliable information on whether such a ceremony ever took place and, if it did, when and where. For more details, see *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 161–168; *Idem*, Between the East and the West, 499–508.

83 Scylitzes, 363. According to Michael of Devol, among those prisoners, the most distinguished were the sons of Basil Apokapes, one of whom was named Gregoras.

lived in the regions where the idea of independent Bulgaria had taken hold, but the report that "many of them" chose to remain in the heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria after 1018 suggests that the integration process of various peoples had continued in this region during the war. Basil II needed every means of successful integration to ensure a more lasting pacification, especially in the capital of the subdued state, because the concern that the "Bulgarian court" in Ohrid could become a "major center of rebellion" had not waned by 1018.[84] Every district where Samuel and his successors resided was a potential hotbed of resistance, which is why Basil II destroyed the "palaces" of the Bulgarian rulers not only in Ohrid but also in Bitola and Setena.

Even though Byzantine authors speak of Ohrid as the "metropolis of all Bulgaria," they have little to say about the military government of the city during the reign of Samuel and his successors. We do not know whether a specially appointed commander led Ohrid's defense. Basil II conquered the city "by siege" in 1015,[85] but effectively took control of it as late as 1018. Then, in the "metropolis of all Bulgaria," Basil found the "treasure" stored there. In 1018, the emperor finally appointed a Byzantine governor of Ohrid (the *archon* Eustathios Daphnomeles).[86] On the same occasion, its defensive walls were razed, and not re-built, since the city is known to have been unfortified in 1072, despite reports that it was the seat of a *strategos*.[87] Thus, although Ohrid lost its military power in 1018, the city's broader area retained its strategic importance for Byzantium, and the emperor had the fortress of Basilis built "up the mountainside" east of Ohrid, on the *Via Egnatia*,[88] thereby ensuring Byzantine control in the area. In addition, he ordered the construction of another fortress, Konstantios, in the region of Little Prespa, perhaps on the islet of St. Achilleos.[89] The islet was accessible and had no particular defensive advantages beyond the surrounding waters. These two fortresses controlled the freshly pacified nucleus of Samuel's realm. Their names – Basilis and Konstantios – symbolically reminded the local population that they were now the subjects of new overlords, Basil II and his brother and co-emperor, Constantine VIII.

After the war, Ohrid retained its ecclesiastical rank as the center of the autocephalous Archbishopric, which only seemingly preserved its political significance. However, it remains unknown which church, if not St. Achilleos, served as the cathedral before Hagia Sophia was built. We know that Hagia Sophia served as the bishop's seat from 1037, i.e., when it was the cathedra of Archbishop Leo. It is unclear whether its construction took place during the Bulgarian or Byzantine period in Ohrid's history,

84 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 848–849.

85 Zonaras, III, 565.

86 Scylitzes, 358–359.

87 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164: the *strategos* of Ohrid Marianos.

88 For two tentative ubications of Basilis (on the east side of Mount Petrinsko, on the mountainside called Istok, at the site Petrinsko Kale or in the area of the village of Evla, site Kale in Evla), see *Koco*, Arheološka karta, „Resensko"; *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 273; cf. *Lilčić Adams*, Fortresses around Lake Ohrid, 105, 109, 115–116.

89 Scylitzes, 359. The only fort on the islet of St. Achilleos is the Kale ruins on a hilltop on the south side of the islet, usually identified as the fortress of Konstantios, *Moutsopoulos*, Basileios stē Deabolē, 43–61. It is possible, however, that there was a fort in that place even before Basil II pacified the Prespa Basin.

so at this point, we cannot say which church was the cathedral in the early years of Byzantine rule.[90] The sources of revenue that would have allowed Samuel to build not one but two representative churches – one in Prespa and one in Ohrid – in such a short time are equally baffling. Some of the funding came from the war booty because waging war against Byzantium was certainly lucrative, as we can see from the description of the Bulgarian imperial treasury discovered in Ohrid in 1018. According to Scylitzes, Basil found "a great deal of money, crowns with pearls, vestments embroidered in gold and one hundred *kentenaria* of gold coin which he had distributed to his army as a bonus."[91] The sum of one hundred *kentenaria* of gold coin that Basil II found in Ohrid was undoubtedly not all of the money in the Bulgarian treasury because there would have been more in regular circumstances. The Bulgarian coffers were evidently in good shape before 1018, capable of funding not only warfare but also the construction and furnishing of churches.[92] And yet, the available information suggests that significant investments were limited to St. Achilleos.

Basil's *sigillia* confirm that the Pelagonian Plain was divided between the bishoprics of Bitola and Moglena.

Bishopric of Bitola

Basil confirmed that the Bishopric of Bitola, which encompassed Pelagonia (the Pelagonian Plain), Debrešte, Veles, and Prilep, would continue to exist and assigned it 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi*. This bishopric succeeded the Bishopric of Herakleia, listed in the inscription in the apse at St. Achilleos. The seat of the Bishopric of Herakleia is believed to have been in the Prilep area (ca. 996)[93] before it moved to the vicinity of Bitola. The sources describe Prilep as a military stronghold but not as a residence of Samuel or any of his family. Samuel fled to Prilep after his defeat at Belasica in 1014 and, according to Scylitzes, died there on 24 October 1014.[94]

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90 See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 159–169.

91 Scylitzes, 359. The sums stored in state treasuries eloquently speak of the disparity in Bulgaria's and Byzantium's economic power. For instance, the imperial coffers contained 200,000 talents (μυριάδας εἴκοσι ταλάντων) or 2,000 *kentenaria* of gold coin during Basil II's reign, Pselli Chonographia I, 19. Cf. *Morrisson*, Byzantine Money, 920.

92 Although the 6th century was quite a long time before the age of the *Kometopouloi*, some examples can illustrate the sums allotted for the restoration or construction of certain edifices. For instance, Justinian I gave 30 *kentenaria* for rebuilding Antioch after an earthquake and an additional ten *kentenaria* for restoring the city's destroyed churches. Given this one and other examples of known imperial donations in earlier periods, we can infer that the Bulgarian treasury in Ohrid in the early 11th century held quite enough money to finance church-building projects, even more so because religious buildings had been much more expensive to build in the 6th century because they required architectural sculptures, precious materials for wall cladding, and floor mosaics, *Zdravković*, Justinijana Prima (Caričin Grad?), 182–183, 161. Cf. *Morrisson*, Byzantine Money, 931.

93 Its seat may have been at the Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael in the settlement of Varoš, at the foot of the Prilep fortress, where a tombstone was discovered with a Slavic inscription commemorating the passing of Bishop Andrew in 996. This may have been the seat of the "Drugubite" part of the former Slavic bishopric of St. Clement, *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 806–807.

94 Scylitzes, 349. According to Michaelis Attaliatae Historia 177, Samuel died at Prespa. For archaeological evidence unearthed at the Prilep fortress (the Markovi Kuli site), see *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 250, Fig. 103; *Koco*, Arheološka karta, „Prilep", 283–287; *Risteski*, Markovi Kuli 18–24.

The broader area of Prilep retained a prominent role in the Bulgarian military organization throughout the war. It seems that Bogdan, the "*toparches* of the interior fortresses" (ὁ τῶν ἐνδοτέρω κάστρων or ὁ τῶν ἐνδοτέρω τόπων τοπάρχης), with his father-in-law, Matthaïtzes, governed the region stretching from Prilep to Ohrid.[95] This group of fortresses belonged to the heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria. The later sources also place the "interior fortresses" (τὰ ἐνδότερα) of the Byzantine district of Bulgaria in the region of Prilep. [96] The zone governed by the *toparches* of the fortresses in the Prilep area must have also included the strongholds scattered in a wide circle around Bitola. Northeast of Prilep, the fortress of Devol-grad near Raec Gorge defended the basin of the Raec River; northwest and west of Prilep, several strongholds stood on hilltops on the outer edges of the Pelagonian Plain, preventing easy access from Pelagonia into the valleys of the Treska and Crna Reka rivers.

It is unclear when the seat moved from Prilep to Bitola, but this must have occurred after 996. Scylitzes' information on Bitola calls for caution, as do his reports concerning the toponym of Pelagonia. For instance, Scylitzes says that Basil burned the palace of Gabriel Radomir, Samuel's son and heir, at Bitola in 1015 (τὰ ἐν Βουτέλῃ βασίλεια τοῦ Γαβριήλ), suggesting that there was a settlement of that name that cannot be identified with "Pelagonia." According to one hypothesis, the toponym Bitola refers to the estate of a monastery (derived from the Slavonic word "обитѣль") near the residence of Samuel's son. However, the safety of Samuel's heir must have been ensured by a fortified structure with a garrison, so we would perhaps do better to seek the place Scylitzes calls Bitola closer to Herakleia Lynkestis,[97] the site that gave its name to the Bishopric of Herakleia. Around 870–880, it was under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike.[98]

The excavations conducted so far show that churches once stood in the downtown of modern-day Bitola, at the sites of the Yeni Mosque and the fortress of Kale Bair, northwest of Bitola. Both of these churches have impressively sized floor plans, but the central position of the first suggests that it may have been the cathedral. John Vladislav's surviving inscription, datable to 1015/1016, also indicates the location of the city fortress of Bitola. The inscription on a marble slab is believed to have stood at the entrance to the fortress, close to the Sungur Cavus Bey Mosque, which was near the Wood and Sheep Markets. The inscription speaks of restoring the "city walls" to provide a safe haven and ensure the salvation of the Bulgarians. John Vladislav was allegedly assisted in restoring the fortress by the Mother of God and the Twelve

95 Scylitzes, 357–358.

96 Scylitzes, 414. Samuel deported the imprisoned inhabitants of Larissa to the interior of Bulgaria (εἰς τὰ τῆς Βουλγαρίας ἐνδοτέρα) 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 τὰ τῆς Βουλγαρίας ἐνδοτέρα could refer to those regions. In that case, the phrase ὁ τῶν ἐνδοτέρω κάστρων τοπάρχης would be geographically more specific than the "interior of Bulgaria." Cf. VIINJ III, 82 n. 27 (*J. Ferluga*); *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 852–853.

97 *Moutsopoulos*, Ē basilikē tou Agio Achilleiou, A', 403, n. VI, 405. On Herakleia Lynkestis, cf. *Papazoglou*, Makedonski gradovi, 188–194.

98 Notitiae, 3.260.



Fig. 6.
Prilep, inside
of the citadel

Apostles, indicating the Christian patrons of Bitola.[99] Future excavations are expected to narrow down the location of Gabriel Radomir's Bitola.

The term Pelagonia may have had two meanings in Scylitzes' writings: a *polis* and a synonym for the Pelagonian Plain.[100] The Pelagonian Plain was one of Bulgaria's most economically advanced regions. Reports from the wartime period suggest that it was also well-defended. A mobile Bulgarian army was stationed there. Most of the reports on its operations concern the period after Samuel's reign, when several Bulgarian-Byzantine pitched battles are known to have taken place. In addition to burning Gabriel Radomir's palace in 1014, the Byzantines intensified their offensive in 1015 and 1017, taking numerous prisoners (capturing as many as 200 well-armed soldiers in 1017), horses, and cattle.[101] During the 1017 siege of Setena, which housed a palace of Samuel's, the Byzantine forces raided and burned the local granary.[102] Pelagonia's belligerent population refused to surrender to Basil II until 1018. Scylitzes reports that residents "from Pelagonia, Morovizd and Lipljan" came to the emperor at Mosynopolis, "surrendering those towns to him" (παραδιδόντων τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰς πόλεις).[103] This phrasing suggests that Pelagonia was a *polis*. However, Scylitzes interchangeably uses the terms Pelagonia and the Pelagonian Plain (τὰ πεδία Πελαγονίας): in 1015, two Byzantine commanders were ordered to

99 For doubts about the authenticity of the inscription or its upper parts, see *Veljković*, Bitoljska ploča, 359–378; *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 807 n. 131.

100 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 850–851.

101 Scylitzes, 354–356.

102 Scylitzes, 356.

103 Scylitzes, 357.

"overrun the Pelagonian plain" and were killed in a Bulgarian ambush led by Ibatzes, so Basil II personally "returned to Pelagonia" (ὁ βασιλεύς ἐπανέστρεψεν εἰς Πελαγονίαν), from whence he drove out Ibatzes.[104] That allows for the hypothesis that the inhabitants of the *region* of Pelagonia surrendered their *cities* (τὰς πόλεις) in 1018. In other words, the plural form παραδιδόντων τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰς πόλεις is quite ambiguous and possibly misleading because it obscures whether the plural refers to the inhabitants of the three cities (Pelagonia, Morovizd, Lipljan) or the inhabitants of the settlements/cities in the Pelagonian Plain, as well as Morovizd and Lipljan. It is still unclear whether Scylitzes' report on Pelagonia represents the first written reference to a city of that name.

The topography of medieval Bitola has yet to be comprehensively archaeologically researched. So far, there are three notable sites: the ancient Greek Herakleia Lynkestis, the center of the city by the Dragor River (Yeni Mosque), and the mystifying site at the Kale Bair hill, where the foundations of an imposing church were discovered. None of these three sites can be securely identified as the medieval fortress of Bitola.[105]

Bishopric of Moglena

The fortresses of Vodena and Moglena were centers of exceptionally staunch Bulgarian resistance. That was probably why the members of the Bulgarian Church took refuge there when they fled the northeastern regions after 971. During Tzimiskes' reign, Vodena was briefly under Byzantine military control. The *Escorial Taktikon* mentions the *strategos* of Edessa (i.e., Vodena), who was in charge of defending the fortress and its broader area.[106] There is no confirmation that the establishment of military control led to the restoration of the Byzantine church organization in the region of Edessa. *Notitia 10*, datable to Tzimiskes' era, says nothing of Edessa, a former suffragan bishopric of the metropolis of Thessalonike.[107] In the late 9th or early 10th century, this bishopric was integrated into the Bulgarian Church, where it remained in Samuel's time, as attested by the inscription from the Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa.[108] So, the Bishopric of Edessa survived Tzimiskes' campaign as part of the Bulgarian Church, probably owing to the high concentration of Slavs living in its territory.

The formation of the *Strategis* of Edessa in Tzimiskes' era did not automatically result in stable Byzantine control. Byzantium's authority seems to have gone no further than appointing a *strategos* (fortress commander) and stationing a garrison, failing to secure the local population's acceptance. The Slavic name of Vodena replaced the

104 Scylitzes, 354.

105 The acropolis of Herakleia has yet to be researched. The available information suggests that the remaining territory of ancient Herakleia was uninhabited in the medieval period, although there is evidence of a cemetery from the late 10th and early 11th centuries in its castle town, *Maneva*, Bazilika De, 51–57, T. I–VI.

106 The *Strategis* of Edessa is usually thought to have been located in the European rather than the Asian part of the Empire, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.29; 360 et n. 400.

107 Notitiae, 3.262.

108 As a suffragan of Thessalonike, Edessa is listed only in Notitia 3, while Notitia 13 lists it as a suffragan bishopric of the archbishop of *Iustiniana Prima*, i.e., of all Bulgaria, i.e., the Archbishopric of Ohrid, Notitiae, no.13.839. Notitiae, 7, 9 and 10, say nothing about Edessa.

Greek toponym for this settlement, which emerged as a hotbed of Bulgarian resistance in the post-971 period. Nevertheless, its Greek name, Edessa, remained in official use in the Bulgarian Church even under Samuel, as the St. Achilleos inscription shows.

During the reign of Basil II, control over Vodena was remarkably important for both the Bulgarians and the Byzantines. Vodena stood in a strategically vital position on the *Via Egnatia* section that connected Thessalonike and the Pelagonian Plain in one direction; in the other direction, from Kastoria, it led to an important road toward the coastal city of Avlona (modern-day Valona). Without control of Vodena and the gorge monitored from the fortress, no incursion toward Kastoria and Bitola was possible.

The Bulgarian commander (κατάρχων) of Vodena was Draxanos. Basil II twice assailed this stronghold. In his first attempt in 1001, he took Vodena and punished its inhabitants by deporting them to the Boleron area.[109] Draxanos asked and was granted permission to settle in Thessalonike, where he married the daughter of the first priest of the Church of St. Demetrios. However, Basil's generosity failed to bring this magnate to heel. Although his wife had borne him four children, Draxanos ran away three times and was eventually executed.[110] Neither the deportation of its inhabitants nor the Byzantine garrison installed at the fortress managed to pacify Vodena. Basil was forced to assail the fortress again in 1015, taking it by siege. Scylitzes reports that the locals were "again" deported to Boleron. It is unclear whether this second expulsion involved the part of the population that had remained at the fortress in 1001 or the inhabitants who had returned home in the meantime. In any case, the *kontaratoi*,[111] described as "wild and murderous" soldiers, were installed at Vodena, presumably to instill fear into the inhabitants of Vodena and discourage any future attempt at revolt.[112]

The circumstances of the Byzantine conquest of Vodena suggest that its broader area was densely populated by ethnic Slavs, meaning that banishing the inhabitants who lived within the fortress's defensive walls would have been insufficient to ensure lasting Byzantine control. This is why, in 1015, Basil II built two new fortresses, Kardia and St. Elijah, in a pass controlling access to Vodena. The locations of those fortresses are still unknown, but they evidently allowed the Byzantines total military control of all access points to Vodena and the pass through which the *Via Egnatia* led. The two fortresses blocked the Slavic population's access from the direction of Moglena, Ostrovos, and the mountainous area of modern-day Nidže to Vodena. This reveals the weakness of the Byzantines' control over Vodena after the first conquest of the fortress (1001). No major changes were made after 1001, and in time, the Slavs reasserted their control of Vodena and its broader area. Thus, the leveling of Moglena and the raiding of Ostrovos, Petrisk, and eastern Pelagonia proved necessary in order to establish permanent control over Vodena.

109 Scylitzes, 345. The region of Boleron lay between the Rhodopes in the east and the Mesta River in the west, with the city of Mosynopolis in the middle, *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 158–159.

110 Scylitzes, 345. *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite 120.

111 The *kontaratoi* were infantry who carried long spears and were tasked with protecting fortresses.

112 Scylitzes, 352.

The sources also mention Moglena as a temporary seat of the head of the Bulgarian Church after 971, when the primate resided in southwestern Macedonia.[113] This confirms that up to 1015, Moglena had been a strong center of the supporters of independent Bulgaria. Scylitzes mentions Elitzes, who was the *archon* of Moglena before 1015. When Basil set out to take Moglena in 1015, Domitianos Kaukanos, a close associate of Gabriel Radomir, was there, as were many other unnamed magnates. Basil II personally participated in the siege of Moglena and took it after he had its foundations undermined and set on fire. The emperor ruthlessly clamped down on Moglena's defenders: those capable of bearing arms were sent to Asprakania on the eastern border and integrated into the Byzantine army, the local commoners were driven away, and the fortress was burned. This meant that the region of Moglena, which controlled the fertile Moglena plain, was demilitarized as early as 1015. In the same 1015 campaign against Vodena and Moglena, Basil II took control of a minor fortress called Enotia (modern-day Notia) in the northern part of the Moglena plain.[114]

Strategically, Vodena and Moglena were not equally important to the two warring sides, with Byzantium prioritizing Vodena over Moglena. The report that Vodena was spared and manned by a Byzantine garrison and even reinforced by two new fortresses, Kardia and St. Elijah, attests to its significance. From 1015 onward, Vodena became an important strategic base from which Byzantium established partial control over the very heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria. Unlike Vodena, the fortress of Moglena was leveled, and its residents were dispersed in the area. However, while in Bulgarian hands, the Moglena fortress provided staunch support to the defenders of Bulgarian Vodena while enabling communication with the mountainous hinterlands in the Morihovo region and the Crna Reka Valley. Simply put, Moglena's direct link to Vodena made the former formidable and dangerous, and hence it was imperative for Basil II to destroy it.

Nevertheless, Moglena had a prominent role in the church organization of Basil's era: it became the seat of a bishopric with 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi* exempted from taxation (as many as the Bishopric of Bitola). As the first *sigillion* shows, the Bishopric of Moglena encompassed some residences of Samuel's family members and some prominent rebel centers. Setena is known to have belonged to the Bishopric of Moglena.[115] According to Scylitzes, Setena contained a palace of Samuel's and a granary, which probably stored grain grown in the Pelagonian Plain. It was well-defended and fell only after a siege in 1017.[116] Besides Setena, the Bishopric of Moglena included Ostrovos (today's Arnissa).[117]

113 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse 44–45.

114 Scylitzes, 352. The remains of a modestly sized fort have been found on a hilltop overlooking the settlement of Notia at the southern foot of the Voras (Kajmakčalan) Mountain. The fortress was too small to accommodate a settlement within its defensive walls, suggesting that its role was purely military, *Kravari*, Villes, 84. According to *Paisidou*, Pella, 68, the distance between the fortresses of Ostrovos–Vodena–Moglena–Enotia was 33 kilometers by air, meaning that they may have communicated by signals.

115 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

116 Scylitzes, 356.

117 The fortress of Ostrovos on the eponymous lake is believed to have stood on a craggy islet now seasonally accessible by land via an isthmus due to the present-day fluctuation of the lake's water level, *Popović*, Medieval Macedonia, 168.

The information on this settlement is scant, but we know that Basil II attacked and raided the area of the Ostrovos fortress several times (ca. 1015, ca. 1017). Ostrovos was a staunch Bulgarian stronghold that did not fall under Byzantine control until the mass surrender at the end of the war.[118] The fortress of Petrisk on the eponymous lake stood west of Ostrovos. According to Scylitzes, this was where Gabriel Radomir was killed while out hunting in September 1015. Archaeological evidence shows that a fortress from the era of Samuel and his successors existed at Petrisk. Also, a three-nave basilica datable to the 11th century was discovered at the fortress. The church of the fortified Petrisk was, like Ostrovos, presumably a suffragan of the Bishopric of Moglena.[119]

The Prosek fortress was also in the Bishopric of Moglena. It stood above Demir Kapi, through which the Vardar River flows, allowing the fortress to control the road from Bulgarian Skopje to Byzantine Thessalonike. Archaeological findings show that the fortress had an access point only on one side, which would have made it impregnable. Scylitzes' *Synopsis* mentions Prosek in the context of some events in 1018, when the fortress had already fallen into Byzantine hands.[120]

The excavations at Moglena have unearthed significant traces of the fortress near the village of Chryssi (formerly Slatina), with the remains of a three-aisled basilica, which may have served as the cathedral. The dating of the basilica to the 11th century suggests that the bishopric was restored; however, the city walls were razed, confirming that postwar Moglena became the seat of a large bishopric but lost its military relevance.[121] Also, there are remains of a smaller cruciform church (of the free-cross type) beyond the walls of the Moglena fortress, which are datable to the 10th–12th centuries, possibly even earlier.[122] The preserved remnants of churches near Demir Kapi also attest to sacral activities in the territory of the Bishopric of Moglena.[123]

Later sources inform us that Vodena and Moglena lay in the same bishopric (ὁ Ἐδέσσης ἤτοι Μογλένων),[124] but it remains unclear why the toponym Vodena (Edessa) never appears in Basil's *sigillia*. The charters mention Vodena neither as a diocesan seat nor as a town in one of the bishoprics under the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Basil II's second *sigillion* mentions Vodena just once, as one of the settlements where the Bulgarian primate resided in the post-971 period.[125] Besides, Vodena, under its Greek name of Edessa, had been an old Byzantine see under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike in the late 9th century, before it was integrated into the Bulgarian

118 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse 42; Scylitzes, 353, 356.

119 *Paisidou* et al., «Kale» Amyndaiou 2015, 74–78.

120 Scylitzes, 358.

121 The ruins still visible near the town of Chryssi, in the basin of the Moglenitsa River, include the remains of a smaller fort built by the Normans in 1082 and soon, possibly the same year, demolished by the imperial army.

122 *Evgenidou*, Servia and Moglena, 18.

123 These are humble churches built in the Early Medieval period in the naves of Late Antique churches in necropolises, *Petrov*, Barrel-Vaulted Tomb, 405–425; *Idem*, "Crkvište", 71–78; *Idem*, Kale – Strezov Grad, 135–141.

124 Notitiae, 13.839a. Cf. *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 808.

125 See above, 331–333.

Church. As already noted, there is no evidence that Tzimiskes' campaign led to the restoration of the diocesan see at Edessa. Shortly after Tzimiskes died in 976, Byzantium lost control of the Edessa region. The Bulgarian independence movement must have been firmly entrenched in this region, given that Vodena served as a temporary seat of the Bulgarian primate. The inscription from the Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa lists this fortress – under its Greek rather than Slavic name – as the center of one of 18 bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church during Samuel's reign.[126]

So, Vodena/Edessa played a prominent role in the military organization of both Bulgaria and Byzantium. The available information suggests a link between Vodena and Moglena. As explained above, they belonged to the same bishopric in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, suggesting the two may have been connected in earlier periods, too. Under Tzimiskes, both settlements were probably in the *Strategis* of Edessa. Moglena was probably in the Bishopric of Edessa in Samuel's era, which could have been a legacy of the First Bulgarian Empire's church organization. Presumably, the link between the two settlements would have been acknowledged during the formation of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

Accordingly, there are two ways to explain the absence of the toponym Vodena/Edessa in Basil's *sigillia*. A less likely scenario is that it was simply a mistake that resulted from the territorial proximity of the two settlements, with the bishopric seat moving back and forth between Moglena and Vodena. If that were indeed a mistake, it would mean that Vodena had been part of the Bishopric of Moglena from the founding of the Archbishopric of Ohrid and remained within its borders, as later sources confirm. However, the accuracy of listing the bishoprics, their seats, and the settlements in them makes it almost impossible to believe that Basil II would have made such an oversight.

It seems more likely that upon the formation of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, Vodena was removed from the church organization because it was a fortress that Byzantium had set up as a strategic military base. The sources report that Basil II insisted on the militarization of Vodena from 1015. His decision to deport the local population, bring in the *kontaratoi*, and build two additional fortresses to safeguard access to Vodena supports the hypothesis that this fortress had a special status in Byzantium's military organization. In 1015–1018 and probably the first post-1018 years, this fortress controlled a part of the territory once in the very heart of Samuel's Bulgaria. The consolidation of Byzantine rule did not gradually diminish the relevance of Vodena as a military base, but the settlement seems to have been subsequently integrated into the Archbishopric's structure as part of the Bishopric of Moglena. An obvious delay in the development of Vodena's sacral architecture perhaps supports the view that Vodena's relevance in the early period of Byzantine rule was primarily military. Namely, there is a marked lack of material evidence of churches from the 11th and 12th centuries, a period that saw vigorous church-building in other parts of the Empire.[127]

126 See above, 305–317.

127 For more details, see *Paisidou*, Pella, 69.

The absence of a bishopric seated in Edessa in *Notitia 10* suggests that Edessa had had a purely strategic role in Tzimiskes' era, serving as a stronghold on the *Via Egnatia* in the border zone toward the interior of the Balkans in which Byzantium had no control whatsoever. Entrenching his forces at Edessa would have allowed Basil to control access to the heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria, and he treated this fortress much like Tzimiskes had done. That suggests that Edessa/Vodena had a purely military purpose in the Byzantine penetration into the Balkans and that the fortress did not feature in the church organization during the reigns of those two emperors and was not the seat of a bishopric, unlike in the Bulgarian period.

The central areas of Samuel's Bulgaria also included Skopje, Devol, and Kastoria.

Bishopric of Skopje

Skopje does not feature prominently in the accounts of the conflicts of 976–1018. The city must have held strategic importance for Samuel because he entrusted its governance to the eunuch Romanos, the brother of the deposed Bulgarian emperor Boris II. However, Romanos surrendered the city to Basil II, probably around 1004, maybe even earlier, in 1003 or 991. He was rewarded with the title of *patrikios praipositos* and the office of the *strategos* of Abydos. We know little about how the Byzantines organized their governance in the city. It is unclear whether it permanently remained in Byzantine hands after Romanos surrendered or whether Basil II retook it at the very end of the war.[128] However, there is no doubt that Skopje became a leading Byzantine military center in 1018. The same year, Basil II appointed his general David Areianites the *strategos autokrator* in Skopje, i.e., the *katepano* of Bulgaria.[129] That means that Skopje was made the foremost military center of the region that became the Byzantine military-administrative district called Bulgaria. With the promotion of Skopje to the command center of the tagmatic army, Basil II continued the reform of the military administration in the Balkans begun under his predecessor, John Tzimiskes. The accounts of the conflicts in 976–1019 confirm that only two command centers of this rank survived Tzimiskes' era – Thessalonike and Adrianople.[130]

Basil II strove to separate the ecclesiastical center from the political and military hub in the territories he had conquered in the Balkans. While Ohrid remained the spiritual heart of the region, Basil's military organization was guided by Constantinople's interests. Skopje's geographical position allowed the Byzantines to control an expansive territory with the fortified cities that had played a role in the persistent struggle for independent Bulgaria for four decades.

Archaeological findings partially compensate for the lack of written testimonies of Skopje's military relevance during the war, confirming continuous inhabitation

128 Scylitzes, 346. The conquest of Skopje is variously dated (to 991 or 1003), but it was probably temporary; for more details, see *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 117; *Gyuzelev*, Notes, 51–68.

129 Scylitzes, 358.

130 *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 148–163. The sources no longer speak of the *katepano* of Mesopotamia of the West, the *katepano* of Theodoroupolis, and the *katepano* of Ras.

throughout the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries.[131] In addition, Skopje's castle town (the Skopsko Kale site) must have been fortified as early as Basil II's era, in 1018, and the fortress continued to be expanded later. Similarly, archaeological evidence confirms the existence of other strongholds in the immediate vicinity of Skopje, e.g., at the site Markovi Kuli and Mount Vodno, where the local fortress may have been in use in the 10th century. It survived under Byzantine rule and was restored multiple times (12th–13th century). At the same site, besides the imposing ramparts, a 12th-century palace was discovered, as well as two large Late Antique cisterns that had been restored and furnished with piping, possibly as early as the 11th century. No church has been found thus far at Markovi Kuli.[132]

Skopje was the dominant fortress in the area. The topography of the Skopje Basin reveals a network of larger and smaller fortresses that controlled access to the basin and the city of Skopje, running from the canyon and pass of the Matka River in the west to the valleys of the Vardar and Pčinja in the northeast. Some modest churches in Grdelica Gorge perhaps mark the northernmost reaches of the expansive Bishopric of Skopje.[133] In the territory under its jurisdiction, the strongholds primarily controlled the strategically important routes in the Morava and Vardar valleys and the road to Kosovo through Kačanik Gorge. Hence, the city's advantageous geo-strategic position was probably why the Byzantines chose Skopje as their principal base in the newly conquered territories. The fortified city was the hub from which the Empire controlled movements in the territories it had taken in the central Balkans.

The city of Skopje was another old ecclesiastical center. In the second half of the 9th century, Skopje was incorporated into Bulgaria, retaining its status of a diocesan see, which is why it appears with this rank in the inscription from the Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa. The bishop of Skopje was seated in the first spot by the throne on the left, which perhaps suggests that the bishopric had a more prominent rank in the Bulgarian Church. It is known to have retained this rank when the city fell under Byzantine control.[134] Basil's first *sigillion* granted four settlements and tax exemptions for 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi* to the bishopric. In the central zone of Samuel's Bulgaria, this rank was accorded only to Ohrid, the seat of the archbishopric,[135] and Skopje, the center of the Byzantine military administration. However, we have yet to discover where the cathedral of the Bishopric of Skopje stood at the turn of the 10th to the 11th century.[136]

131 Archaeological research was conducted in 1975 at the Kale site in Skopje and in 2007 in the enclosed space by the southern rampart, *Maneva*, Skopje i Skopsko, 349.

132 *Mikulčić*, Srednovekovni gradovi, 286–289.

133 These are the small monasteries dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God in Mrtvica village and to St. Elijah in Kacapun village, *Pešić*, Crkva Bogorodičinog Uspenja, 93–107; *Pajkić*, Crkva Sv. Ilije, 373–384.

134 See above, 305–317.

135 Basil granted to Ohrid 40 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi* in his first *sigillion* and an additional 10 *paroikoi* in the second, meaning that the bishop of Skopje had the most *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* in the central zone of what was formerly Samuel's Bulgaria.

136 Archaeological findings confirm the existence of sacral buildings in Skopje and its vicinity, but they date from the 11th century (Prohor Pčinjski and Staro Nagoričino) or an even later period (Nerezi), see the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 206–210, 220–225.

Bishopric of Kastoria

Kastoria is another example of overlapping military and church organizations. The city is described as an impregnable fortress in the war of 976–1018. Archaeological findings indicate that fortifications had stood at the site since the age of Justinian I, when a fortress was built atop the ruins of an old fort, Celetrum.[137] Besides the findings from Justinian's era, research has uncovered several medieval sections of the ramparts encircling the fortress. The city's urban core stood on a dominant elevation on an islet, or isthmus, and probably had defensive walls as early as Samuel's time.[138] Even though we have no information about Kastoria's defenders, we know that Basil II unsuccessfully besieged it in 1017, when, as Scylitzes reports, it proved impregnable. It would seem that the city was not taken by force but surrendered to the emperor at the very end of the war.[139]

Kastoria was the dominant fortress in the area. The territory it controlled can be gauged from the distribution of several strongholds in its immediate and broader surroundings. Those fortresses were built to secure and control the road network, which would have been very important for a lively commercial center of Kastoria's stature. Kastoria's geographical position was very convenient: it was close to the *Via Egnatia* and adjacent to the trade route that led westward to the coastal town of Avlona.

Loggas (Λογγᾶς), one of the few fortresses Basil II took by siege and burned in 1017, was near Kastoria. Scylitzes reports that the emperor captured numerous prisoners (inhabitants or/and soldiers?) there. The spoils of war were so plentiful that he divided them into three parts, keeping one for himself and giving the remaining two to the "Romans" and his "Russian allies," which suggests that this was a powerful center of Bulgarian resistance.[140]

The course of Basil II's military operations reveals the true objectives of his 1017 campaign against Kastoria. Loggas was destroyed because it was the stronghold nearest to Kastoria and could thwart a siege of the city. The emperor's 1017 offensive probably aimed not to take Kastoria at any cost but to cut it off from the Bulgarian fortresses in the interior (Bitola, Prespa, and Devol).

Another fortress in the broader region of Kastoria was Bosograd, which Basil II took and burned.[141] After that, he continued onward to Berroia and reinforced its ramparts, which led some scholars to infer that the fortress of Bosograd stood on the route from Kastoria to Berroia.[142] Another hypothesis argues that this stronghold is

137 *Moutsopoulos*, Oppidum Celetrum, 1–30.

138 *Drakopoulou*, Ē polē tēs Kastorias, 19–20; *Moutsopoulos*, Kastoria, 257– 474.

139 Scylitzes, 355. *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 858–859.

140 Scylitzes, 355. Archaeological evidence reveals that another fortress, restored under Justinian I and later destroyed, stood north of Kastoria, above the Loggas Valley. This fortress was probably rebuilt when Samuel added new fortifications at Kastoria. The fortress and the church at its center were demolished in the early 11th century, a move usually associated with the razing of Loggas in 1017, *Moutsopoulos*, Anaskaphes, 10–11; *Idem*, Loggas, 305–336.

141 Scylitzes, 356.

142 VIINJ III, 122 n. 146 (*J. Ferluga*).

to be identified with the fortress ruins near the town of Božigrad (today's Miras in Albania), on the road that led westward from Kastoria to Avlona.[143] This would mean that Basil II personally led the bulk of his army to Berroia and dispatched a battalion to take Bosograd.[144]

The first *sigillion* issued to the Archbishopric of Ohrid mentions Kastoria as the seat of a bishopric that received tax exemptions for 40 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi*. This bishopric covered several settlements, including Devol, an important center in the war of 976–1018, whose exact location remains unknown.[145] The two strongest fortresses in the Korçë Plain, Zvezde and Mborje, are possible candidates for the site of medieval Devol.[146] We know little about how Byzantium took Devol, but it kept it until 1018. By then, Devol must have become a secure Byzantine possession because Basil II was in Devol when he exchanged letters for 55 days with the Bulgarian magnate Ibatzes and accepted the surrender of Prousianos, John Vladislav's eldest son.[147] Devol seems to have peacefully surrendered to Basil II, probably with all strongholds on the outer edge of the Korçë Plain and around the now drained Lake Malik.

In the past, Devol had served as the seat of one of the four Slavic bishoprics that had played leading roles in the Christianization of the local population. The inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos listed Devol under its Greek name, Selasphoros (Σελασφόρος), as the seat of an important bishopric whose bishop sat next to the throne on the right. Also, the inscription most likely lists the throne of the bishopric at Kastoria (fourth spot on the left). The arrangement of the bishoprics in the St. Achilleos inscription suggests that Selasphoros (Devol) outranked Kastoria in Samuel's era.[148] The fact that Devol was an old and well-developed Slavic bishopric that had existed since St. Clement's time and had played a prominent role in the development of early Bulgarian church organization could explain its rank.

The first *sigillion* of Basil II informs us that the Bishopric of Devol was dissolved and merged with the Bishopric of Kastoria, to whose bishop the emperor assigned a considerable number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi*. What could have led Basil II to favor Kastoria over Devol, the more reputable Christian center of the two and one that had contributed so much to the Christianization of the Slavs? A possible explanation could be that Devol had been ravaged in the war, especially during the offensives of 1017

143 The location of Bosograd in a strategically important hub, with a road passing through it and leading to Koloneia toward the Vojuša River and onward along the river to the coast, supports its identification with Božigrad, *Karaiskaj – Lera*, Fortifikimet, 108–110, pv. I–IV; *Moutsopoulos*, Bozigrad, 243–246.

144 The regions of Moliskos and Ostrovos were raided on the way to Berroia, Scylitzes, 356. The exact location of the Moliskos region is unknown, but it presumably lay south of Petrisk and Ostrovos, *Moutsopoulos*, Moliskos, 166–171.

145 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

146 Preliminary research suggests that the Devol fortress could have indeed been above the modern-day village of Zvezde in the *Kometopouloi* era – on the north side of the Korçë Plain, beside Tzangon Pass. The hypothetical location of Devol rests on archaeological evidence from the site at Korçë Plain and the area of the drained Lake Malik, spanning from prehistory to the medieval period and largely reflecting the usual pattern of habitation in this region. *Zdravković*, Upper Devol, forthcoming.

147 Scylitzes, 360.

148 See above, 305–317.

(the attacks on Loggas, Kastoria, and Bosograd), potentially resulting in economic devastation and depopulation. Alternately, it may have been more important to Basil II to keep Devol a military base because it controlled the strategic route through Tzangon Pass and the midstream of the Devol River, and such a pronounced military role would have inevitably detracted from its ecclesiastical relevance.

Even though the location of Kastoria's cathedral remains unknown, sacral buildings survived in this unassailable and well-fortified city, allowing the bishop of Kastoria to run his expansive bishopric smoothly in the post-war period. Judging by the numerous 9th- and 10th-century sacral edifices in the city, we can infer that Kastoria was one of the more developed and wealthier Bulgarian bishoprics.[149]

And yet, the merging of Devol and Kastoria into one bishopric proved short-lived. The ecclesiastical tradition prevailed over the new organization, and Devol resurfaced in the 11th century as an independent bishopric. From a letter Theophylact of Ohrid wrote ca. 1092/1093 to the *doux* and *praitor* of Dyrrachion, John Komnenos, we learn that the former Bishopric of Devol was in a sad state in the late 11th century. Theophylact reports that the cathedral of Devol, one of the seven churches built by the Bulgarian emperor Boris, had been abandoned in the absence of a bishop. Another contributing factor had been the harsh fiscal policy, so the Devol church was abandoned because those whom Alexios I Komnenos had assigned to the bishop's service in a *sigillion* had fled into the woods.[150] The date of the reestablishment of the Bishopric of Devol is unknown; it may have taken place during the process of reducing the Archbishopric's territory and the attendant partition of the bishoprics established by Basil's founding charters.[151]

ZONE II – The area of Thessalonike and Larissa

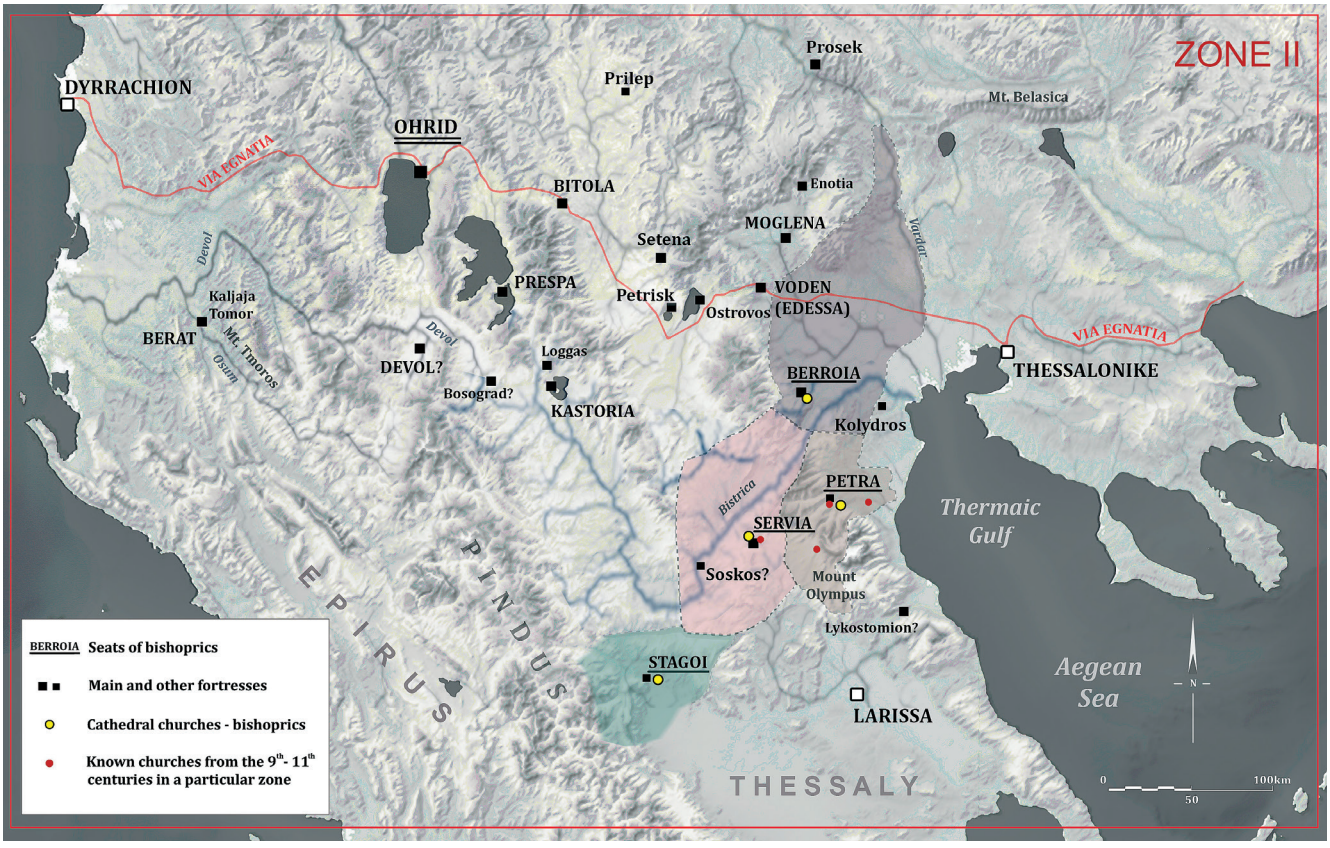
The second zone of the territory of Samuel's Bulgaria includes the fortresses that had been Byzantine but fell under Bulgarian control after Samuel's uprising. They are known to have served as diocesan seats under the jurisdictions of the neighboring metropolitan bishops – of Thessalonike and Larissa. These bishoprics were Berroia, Servia, Petra, and Stagoi.

Two military strongholds known to have been old ecclesiastical centers stood south of the heart of Samuel's Bulgaria: Berroia and Servia, fortresses of high strategic importance to Byzantium, which controlled access to Thessalonike from the southwest. Both were on the strategic route that led from Thessalonike along the Thermaic Gulf to the confluence of the Bistrica (Haliakmon) River. From there, the road continued via the Kolydros fortress to Kastoria and westward to Avlona. The Berroia and Servia fortresses controlled the routes in the midstream of the Bistrica (Haliakmon) River.

149 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 241–243, 256–271.

150 Theophylactus, Epistulae, no. 22. Cf. *Mullett*, Theophylact of Ochrid, 202. See the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others*, II, 60.

151 See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th century – Territorial and Ideological Framework,* II.



Map 5.
ZONE II –
Area of Thessalonike
and Larissa

Bishopric of Berroia

Berroia was an old Byzantine possession. Under John Tzimiskes, it became a *strategis* whose *strategos* held a prominent position in the official hierarchy.[152] The city was the seat of a bishop who was a suffragan of the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike. Samuel took Berroia around 989, possibly as early as 986. From then until it surrendered to Basil II in 1001, Berroia was one of the staunchest Bulgarian centers. Samuel entrusted its defense to Dobromir, his niece's husband. Berroia did not lose its relevance once it returned to Byzantine control. Basil II reinforced the city walls and rewarded Dobromir's surrender by elevating him to the rank of an *anthypatos* (and *patrikios*), probably also giving him a military office.[153]

Kolydros (modern-day Kolindros),[154] southeast of Berroia, was another fortress that surrendered to Basil II in 1001. After Dobromir's surrender of Berroia, the commander of Kolydros, Demetrios Teichonas, realized that his fortress would be unable to withstand the Byzantines' attacks, so he ceded it to the emperor and asked to be allowed to join Samuel with his army, which the emperor permitted him to do.[155]

152 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.32; 356.

153 Scylitzes, 344.

154 Archaeological research has uncovered the remains of ramparts and towers in the Kolindros downtown, near the Church of St. Theodore, *Papazotou*, Topographia, 247.

155 Scylitzes, 344.

Kolydros was not leveled; its ramparts seem to have been reinforced after the takeover, and the fortress continued to be active in later periods.[156] In the early 10th century, Kolydros was the center of a suffragan bishopric of the Metropolis of Larissa and was likely integrated into the Bulgarian Church under Samuel. After the fortress surrendered to Basil II, the bishopric may have survived for a while as Larissa's suffragan before it eventually merged with Kythros.[157]

The Bishopric of Berroia is listed as part of the Bulgarian Church during Samuel's reign. Its bishop occupied the fifth place on the right side of the throne, which does not suggest that it was a top-ranking bishopric.[158] It seems that the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike tried to restore jurisdiction over his old suffragan bishopric after Berroia came back under Byzantine military control after 1001. He was but one of the Greek metropolitan bishops who refused to accept the curtailing of their authority that the formation of the Archbishopric of Ohrid entailed. Hence, Archbishop John of Ohrid petitioned Basil II to issue a new charter specifying the borders of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. In the second *sigillion*, the emperor expressly forbade the neighboring bishops to encroach on the "Bulgarian bishoprics and appropriate them," ruling that the Ohrid Church must include all Bulgarian bishoprics that the Bulgarians had controlled under Peter and Samuel. The second and third *sigillia* expanded the territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Berroia appears in the third charter, giving rise to the question of when it became a "Bulgarian bishopric." A 10th-century *notitiae* describe it as a suffragan of Thessalonike,[159] and the St. Achilleos inscription as one of the Bulgarian bishoprics, indicating that the city of Berroia was only under temporary Bulgarian control – for about ten years, between 989 (or 986) and Dobromir's surrender in 1001. This suggests that Basil II made a generous concession when he let the Archbishopric of Ohrid have Berroia. We do not know what might have motivated him to agree to this favor. Was the emperor trying to back the ambitions of the Archbishop of Ohrid, or was he swayed by the mood of the local population, which might have preferred to stay within the newly formed Archbishopric? Whatever the case, the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike assumed jurisdiction over the Bishopric of Berroia soon after Basil died in 1025.

The sacral architecture of the 11th century confirms that Berroia was remarkably important to Byzantium. The Old Metropolis Church in Berroia was dedicated to the Mother of God, and is one of the largest diocesan churches in the region of Macedonia. An inscription from ca. 1070–1080 above the west entrance informs us that the church was built by Niketas, known to have served as Berroia's bishop in 1078. Niketas may have restored the cathedral, which would make it datable to the early 11th century.[160]

156 *Gouloulis*, Proskunētes stē buzantinē Pieria, 382–383.

157 Notitiae, 7.573; 9.444; 10.523,789. *Papazotou*, Topographia, 35; TIB I, 82–83, 190.

158 See above, 305–317.

159 Notitiae, 7.298; 9.184; 10.217.

160 The inscription, carved into a marble spolia, is very short and reads: "Καί τοῦτο ἔργον [μεσολαβεί διακόσμηση] Νικήτα Θυηπόλου". Based on a description of the Old Metropolis, Thanasis Papazotou attributed the construction of this cathedral to Niketas, Bishop of Berroia, mentioned in just one source from 1078, thereby dating the building of the church to 1071–1081, *Papazotou*, Ktētorikē epigraphē (α), 200; *Skiadaresēs*, Palia mētropolē, 52–56.

Bishopric of Servia

The fortress of Servia was in the region of Thessalonike. It was probably another old Byzantine possession that had belonged to the Thessalonian district. The fortress fell under Samuel's control around the same time as Berroia, most likely in 989 or 986. Kekaumenos reports that the Servia fortress was inaccessible, with the surrounding gorges and ravines adding to its defenses. He brings a detailed account of the Bulgarian conquest of the fortress, attributing the exploit to the cunning of his grandfather, Demetrios Polemarchios. We learn that a *strategos* with two *taxiarchai*, commanders of 1000-strong detachments, had manned the fortress before it fell to the Bulgarians.[161]

After the conquest, Servia became a hotbed of Bulgarian resistance, suggesting that a Slavic population lived in the fortress and its environs. Samuel entrusted Servia to Nikoulitzas, a bellicose general who would continue to defy Basil's authority until late 1018. Shortly after Dobromir surrendered Berroia, Basil II besieged Servia and took it in 1001. However, that did little to quell the local population's anti-Byzantine resistance. Measures such as deporting Servia's defenders and inhabitants, reinforcing its walls, and installing a large garrison failed to ensure stable Byzantine control of this fortress. Samuel and Nikoulitzas, Servia's former commander, tried to win it back, but Basil II broke their siege. We cannot know when the siege occurred, but there is no doubt that Servia remained in Byzantine hands from 1001 onward. Since a Byzantine garrison guarded it and the Bulgarians resorted to a siege to win it back, Servia must have remained in use after the 1001 conquest.[162]

Scylitzes reports that Basil II dispatched Nikephoros Xiphias to tear down "all the strongholds at Servia and at Soskos" (τὰ ἐν Σερβίοις καὶ τῷ Σωσκῷ φρούρια) in 1018, after most of the Bulgarian magnates had surrendered. His account suggests that Servia was the dominant fortress in an area with minor strongholds that the Byzantine army continued to assail even in the last stage of the war in 1018. According to a view based on archaeological excavations, the fortress walls were leveled. That could have happened no earlier than 1018, when the Balkans were pacified and Basil's operations focused on preventing a number of centers from becoming zones of full-blown conflict. However, archaeological research indicates that Servia's acropolis and upper ward may have remained fortified even after Xiphias' offensive.[163] Servia held extraordinary strategic importance for Byzantium, which would have presumably spared its ramparts from planned and total leveling. The robust and well-fortified Servia controlled the strategic gorge known as *Portes Servion* at its foot, in the valley of the Platanoulia River. Another strategic point was the *Stenon Portes* Gorge southwest of Servia, near the village of Rahovo. A road led southward from Servia to Larissa, and the area south of the Bistrica (Haliakmon) River was controlled by both Servia and Soskos.[164]

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161 Kekavmen, 190.

162 Scylitzes, 344.

163 *Kontogiannis*, Byzantine Fortifications, 190; *Stalidis – Koutsianou*, Castle of Servia, 124.

164 *Keramopoullou*, Volustana, 314–318; *Katsikis*, Phrourio, 601. For the fortress of Sosokos, see *Strässle*, Krieg, 180–181.

The hostile Servia and its area could only be pacified through the Church. Servia was assigned to the Archbishopric of Ohrid in the first *sigillion*: it was officially removed from the jurisdiction of the Thessalonian metropolitan bishop, under which it had been in the 10th century.[165] Servia's bishop was allowed to have 30 *klerikoi* and as many *paroikoi*, equalizing Servia's diocesan rank with Berroia's. To contain the ambitions of Thessalonike's metropolitan bishop or perhaps for some other reason, Basil's third *sigillion* confirmed Servia's status and rank in the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[166]

Significant remains of a cathedral built or restored after Byzantium had taken control of Servia have survived in the fortress's lower ward. Some argue that the church is datable to ca. 1001, shortly after Basil II took the fortress; others place its construction in the first quarter of the 11th century – the very end of Basil's reign or a few years after his death.[167] In any case, it would have been in Byzantium's interest to maintain Servia as an ecclesiastical center.

During the war, this area was covered by a network of fortresses. One of them was Soskos. There is no mention of Soskos in Basil's *sigillia*, but we know that the fortress stood in an inaccessible location and had provided refuge to Samuel's son and heir, Gabriel Radomir. According to the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, it was a settlement (ὁ χῶρος) that Gabriel Radomir was fond of frequenting for hunting.[168] As it was the second most important fortress in the area of the Bistrica (Haliakmon) River's midstream (behind Servia), it seems reasonable to assume that it lay on the river's south bank, west of Servia.

Bishopric of Petra

The loss of Petra, one of the strongest bishoprics of the Ohrid Church, which received tax exemptions for 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi*, was another blow to the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike.[169] This bishopric lay south of the right bank of the Bistrica (Haliakmon) River, on Mount Olympus.[170] The two most important routes connecting the basin of Thessalonike with Thessaly ran through its seat. This territory, delineated by the middle and lower courses of the Bistrica (Haliakmon) River, the coast of the Thermaic Gulf, and Mount Ossa south of Olympus, encompassed Pieria and the Olympus mountain range. Four fortresses relevant to the Byzantine-Bulgarian wars of 976–1018 stood in this area: Kolydros and Petra in the mountains, and Kythros and Platamon (called Herakleia until the 12th century) in the coastlands. All four were preexisting

165 Servia is listed as Thessalonike's suffragan in Notitiae 7.300; 9.186; 10.219, as well as in Notitiae, 13.229, 825. So, this center was only temporarily part of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

166 *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 69 et n. 105.

167 See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 202–204.

168 Gabriel often went hunting in this region and allegedly forced the locals to accompany him in this leisurely pursuit until he was – as legend has it – killed by St. Demetrios, Staurakios, Logos, 360–361.

169 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 46. Notitiae, 10.222.

170 The Bishopric of Petra covered the mountainous area in the middle of the Pierian region. It bordered the Bishopric of Kitros (previously Kolydros) in the north, and the southern part of Pieria belonged to the Bishopric of Lykostomion, *Gouloulis*, Proskunētes stē buzantinē Pieria, 375.

Byzantine fortresses from which the Empire controlled movements in the gorges near Petra and Tempe on the Pinios River. Tempe Gorge, an old strategic route, was guarded by a stronghold now known as Orias and believed to have been called Lykostomion in the Byzantine era. Besides Platamon, this fortress was the central Byzantine base for the reconquest of Larissa. The region of Petra was strategically vital because the so-called "Pythian road" led through Petra Gorge westward to the Olympus mountain range.[171]

Preliminary archaeological surveys of the fortifications and settlements underneath the acropolis at Petra suggest that the enclosure contained, in addition to the cathedral, at least one other church near a small cemetery. However, traces of a cathedral have yet to be discovered.[172] The available archaeological findings indicate that the settlement inside Petra's ramparts was small, with a land area of up to thirty ares. Traces of an aqueduct reveal well-organized living conditions. Based on the preliminary archaeological results and the topography of the craggy summit of Palaiochori, where the fortress of Petra and its castle town stood, we can infer that Petra had a secure acropolis that would have been difficult to assail and that its settlement developed inside the enclosure, on a plateau below the citadel. There is evidence of a piping system, defensive walls, and the remains of a church. A monastery church of similar antiquity must have existed before the extant church at the nearby Monastery of the Blessed Virgin at Petra of Olympus.[173]

Bishopric of Stagoi

Basil's third *sigillion* mentions the Bishopric of Stagoi, with a modest 12 *klerikoi* and 12 *paroikoi*. Before Samuel's conquests, this bishopric had been under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Larissa.[174] Accounts of the war offer scant information about Stagoi. John Scylitzes speaks of it at a time when it was already under Byzantine control. He also reports that Elemagos Phrantzes, the commander of the strong fortress of Belgrade/Berat, and his *synarchontes* surrendered to Basil II in 1018 at Stagoi.[175] That is all we know of Stagoi. The Bulgarians' control of this old Byzantine stronghold may have been short-lived. Later, Stagoi was incorporated into the Theme of Servia, and the bishopric became a suffragan of the metropolitan bishop of Larissa as early as the mid-12th century.[176] There is archaeological evidence of a rather imposing cathedral dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God.[177]

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171 *Keramopoullou*, Volustana, 314; *Avramea*, Thessalia, 84–86. Cf. *Strässle*, Krieg, 114–116.

172 *Mamaloukos*, Paratērēseis stēn topographia, fig. 4–9, 156–160.

173 *Katsoni*, Merikes paratērēseis, 32.

174 Notitiae, 7.574; 9.445; 10.524, like in Notitiae, 13.572, meaning that its incorporation into the Archbishopric of Ohrid was short-lived. Cf. *Androudis – Anagnostopoulos*, Ē byzantinē kathedra tōn Stagōn, 46–47.

175 Scylitzes, 364.

176 *Avramea*, Thessalia, 53–54. A document from 1163 defining the borders of the Bishopric of Stagoi contains information on the possessions in the bishopric's villages, many of which had Slavic names, *Astruc*, Un document inédit de 1163, 213, 216–217; *Vranousi*, Episkopē Stagōn, 19–32.

177 Many scholars have dated the cathedral of Stagoi rather broadly, from the 9th to the 12th centuries; currently, the medieval church dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God is thought to have been built atop the foundations of a Late Antique basilica in the second half of the 11th century, *Androudis – Anagnostopoulos*, Ē byzantinē kathedra tōn Stagōn, 110–112.

ZONE III: The area of Epirus and Naupaktos

The third territorial zone of Samuel's Bulgaria lay west and southwest of the Tmoros mountain range, encompassing the bishoprics to which the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion laid claim. These were Glavinitza, Tzernik, and Berat/Horaia (Polychairepolis/Poulcheriopolis).[178] In addition to these, this zone included the bishoprics in the Epirus area: Ioannina, Bela (Photike), Dryinoupolis, Bouthroton, Chimara, and Kozel, which the metropolitan bishop of Naupaktos aspired to incorporate into his metropolis.[179]

The Tmoros mountain range was one of the areas of concentrated Bulgarian resistance, with inaccessible Bulgarian fortresses that the Byzantines would take only after the mass surrender of 1018. Mount Brohot was probably part of the Tmoros mountain range. Brohot held the "very lovely palace" of Pronista (or Koprinista, in the interpolations in Scylitzes' text),[180] which belonged to Samuel's magnate Ibatzes. The area was inaccessible and heavily defended by armed guards (τοῖς φυλάττουσιν) at various access points. Ibatzes persevered until the end of the war but was eventually caught by a ruse and blinded by Eustathios Daphnomeles, a Byzantine general serving as the governor of Ohrid. Tmoros also provided refuge to the sons of the late John Vladislav, Prousianos and his two brothers. Amidst the mass surrender of Bulgarian magnates after John Vladislav's death at Dyrrachion in February 1018, Tmoros remained the last impregnable refuge of the heir to the Bulgarian throne. The Byzantine army could not take control of the mountain and instead forced Prousianos and his brothers to surrender by besieging it and blocking the access points at its foot.[181]

Another strong and inaccessible fortress in the Tmoros region was Berat (Horaia), which surrendered to Basil II in 1018. Scylitzes reports that Elemagos, the governor of Belgrade/Berat, surrendered with his *synarchontes* (μετὰ τῶν συναρχόντων αὐτοῦ). They were probably the commanders of some minor fortresses dependent on Berat. In the context of the surrender of the inaccessible Berat, he mentions only the commander (κρατῶν) of Rhakova but does not report his name, so we have no way of knowing whether he governed a fortress or a broader area.[182]

Berat was the seat of the Bishopric of Horaia, which Basil's second *sigillion* assigned to the archbishop of Ohrid. Information about it is scant. We know only that Basil II mollified its bishop by exempting from taxation a modest number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* (12 of each). During Tzimiskes' reign, this bishopric had been under Dyrrachion's jurisdiction.[183] However, we do not know whether the bishopric was

178 Notitiae, 10.616, 621, 622.

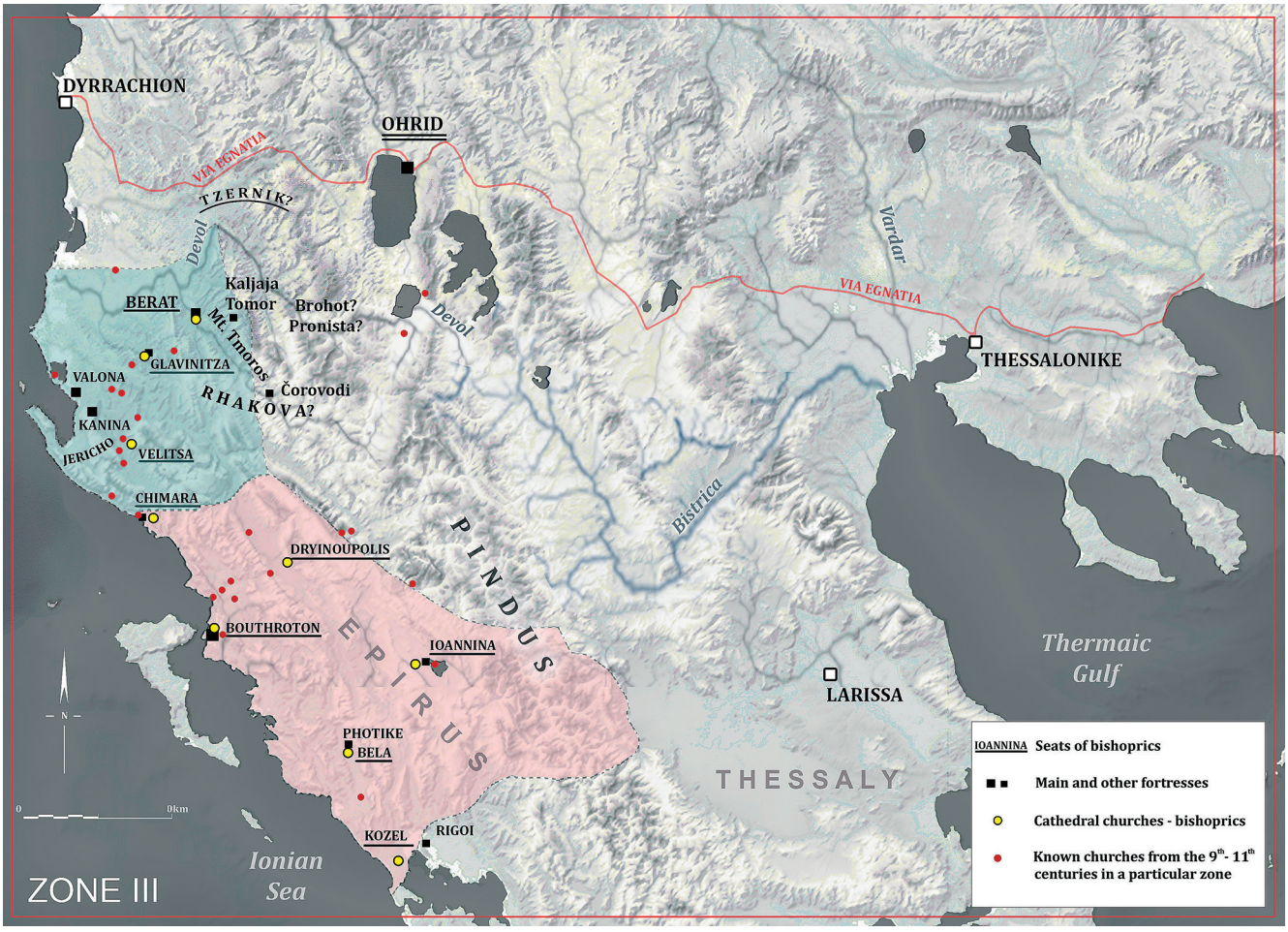
179 Notitiae, 10.536, 537–538, 539, 540, 541.

180 In one of his letters, Theophylact of Ohrid reports that the bishop of Glavinitza passed through Kopronista on his way to Ohrid, Theophylactus, Epistulae, no. 40. Cf. *Mullett*, Theophylact of Ochrid, 308.

181 Scylitzes, 359–360.

182 Scylitzes, 364. Scylitzes also uses the term κρατῶν for the commander of Sirmium, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 131 n. 195. *A. Loma*: the toponym Rhakova (Ῥάκοβα) is derived from the zoonym *rak*, *Ylli*, Das slavische Lehngut im Albanischen, II, 161–162.

183 Notitiae, 10. 622 (Poulcheriopolis).



Map 6.
ZONE III –
Area of Epirus
and Naupaktos



Fig. 7.
Kaljaja Tomor site

formed before 971 or after Tzimiskes' Bulgarian campaign. One of the outcomes of this campaign was the establishment of the *Strategis* of Jericho, which connected the themes of Dyrrachion and Nikopolis.[184]

Berat was not the only fortress in the area of the Tmoros mountain range. Near Berat, a fortress called Kaljaja Tomor stood on the western slopes of Mount Tmoros. Archaeological surveys of the site have revealed multiple layers of fortification, from prehistory to classical and late antiquity, to the Early Medieval period, when the fortress was restored. After the surrender of Berat, the Bulgarians seem to have continued their resistance at the fortress in the town of Čorovodi on the southern slopes of Mount Tmoros and at the Kaljaja Tomor fortress.[185] During Samuel's reign, a well-defended refugium which the Bulgarians had adapted to their needs may have stood at the site of the medieval fortress of Kaljaja Tomor. The refugium may have been equipped for long-term habitation in the Early Byzantine period, but this must remain in the realm of conjecture until further archaeological research.[186] The stronghold of Kaljaja Tomor was associated with the city of Berat throughout all periods and remained a military center under Byzantine rule.[187]

Unlike Horaia, whose time of establishment eludes us, there is no doubt that the bishoprics of Glavinitza and Tzernik had been in the independent Bulgarian Church before they fell under Dyrrachion's jurisdiction during the reign of John Tzimiskes.[188] Samuel restored them to the Bulgarian Church, and Basil II incorporated them into the Archbishopric of Ohrid in his second *sigillion*, assigning them a modest number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* (Tzernik had 15 *klerikoi* and as many *paroikoi*, and Glavinitza 12 *klerikoi* and 12 *paroikoi*). The territories where those bishoprics were located do not appear in the sources as conflict zones in the war of 976–1018. An exception could be the reports in Scylitzes' *Synopsis* about Samuel's rule over Dyrrachion and Dyrrachion's return to Byzantine control in 1005. These reports confirm that the population in the broader area of Dyrrachion had an ambivalent attitude toward Samuel. An illustrative example is the Chryselios family, whose members first agreed to accept Bulgarian rule and then changed allegiance after Basil II promised them honorary titles and high social standing.[189]

Samuel expanded his territory west of the Tmoros mountain range toward the Adriatic coast. That is attested by the inclusion of Glavinitza (modern Ballshi) in the St. Achilleos inscription. We have seen that the Greek translation (calque), Kephalonia, replaced the bishopric's Slavic name in the St. Achilleos inscription and that its

184 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.7. *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 805.

185 *Spahiu*, Beratit dhe të Skraparit, 349.

186 The fortress on Mount Tmoros (Tomorr) has never been archaeologically researched, but a survey was conducted, revealing the remains of walls of a trapezoid fortress with four towers and a 100-ton cistern, *Mane*, Rrethi i Beratit, 405–406.

187 *Schramm*, Eroberer, 98, 382.

188 Notitia, 10.616, 621.

189 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 119–120.

bishop occupied the sixth seat on the right of the throne.[190] Glavinitza was probably another old Byzantine bishopric in the Slavic milieu and had become part of Bulgaria in the late 9th century. It must have ranked among the more prominent bishoprics in the Archbishopric of Ohrid as it was assigned 40 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi*, as well as two settlements, one of which was Kanina.[191] Its seat was most likely Glavinitza.

Archaeological research has discovered representative remains of a three-aisled basilica at Glavinitza. It is believed to have been one of the seven cathedrals erected by the Bulgarian ruler Boris I. The church probably continued to serve as the bishop's cathedral in the later period. There is archaeological evidence of other 9th- and 10th-century churches in the territory of the Bishopric of Glavinitza, which would have befitted the rank of this important diocesan see. Other notable sacral edifices include the Church of St. Sergios and Bakhos in Chimara.[192]

Whatever ranks these bishoprics might have had in the Archbishopric of Ohrid, the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion was determined to reassert his authority over them. An attempt to that end may have come as early as 1005 when Byzantium restored political and military control over Dyrrachion and the neighboring areas. The war may have provided a convenient opportunity for the ambitions of Dyrrachion's metropolitan bishop to reclaim the bishoprics placed under his jurisdiction in Tzimiskes' era. It seems the metropolitan bishop refused to renounce his claims even after peace was finally established in 1018/1019, vying with the archbishop of Ohrid for control over these contested bishoprics. Therefore, Basil II issued a second *sigillion* in favor of the Ohrid Church as early as 1020, expressly ordering the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion to "keep to his throne and be content with his assets and revenues and not to infringe upon the Bulgarian bishoprics."[193]

The Archbishopric of Ohrid's western bishoprics also included those in the Epirus area, encroaching on the claims of the metropolitan bishop in Naupaktos.[194]

In Tzimiskes' time, Naupaktos had jurisdiction over the Epirian bishoprics of Ioannina, Bela (Photike), Dryinoupolis, Bouthroton, Chimara (previously part of Glavinitza),[195] and Kozel.[196] Basil II gave these bishoprics to Ohrid in the second *sigillion*, approving tax exemptions for a modest number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* (the bishops of Dryinoupolis, Bela, Ioannina, and Kozel had 15 of each and Bouthroton and Chimara 12 of each).[197]

Bouthroton, the most important seaport of Late Antique Epirus, underwent a transformation that saw its urban heart ruralized in the Early Medieval period. The

190 See above, 305–317.

191 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42.

192 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 244–246.

193 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 45.

194 See above, 302.

195 *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 100–110.

196 Notitiae, 10.531–541. *Prinzing*, Byzantine ecclesiastical province, 374–377, Table I.

197 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 45–46.

urban settlement began to be restored in the mid-10th century and had become a vital commercial hub and port by Basil II's time. Archaeological research suggests that when the Archbishopric of Ohrid was established, Bouthroton was a dominantly Byzantine enclave in a Slavic environment, separated by defensive walls and the Vivari Channel from the rural hinterlands.[198] Throughout its existence, the imperial port's economic power stemmed from fishing, harvesting seashells, and maritime trade, especially with southern Italy, Otranto, and Bari, as evidenced by findings of imported ceramics,[199] as well as Basil II's rare gold *tetarteron* and John I Tzimiskes' silver *miliaresion*.[200]

Letting the Archbishopric of Ohrid have the Bishopric of Bouthroton was a generous concession on Basil's part. The reason for this magnanimity may have been his intention for the powerful Greek bishoprics to influence the region's large Slavic population. Basil II may have envisaged a similar role for other Epirian bishoprics inhabited by numerous ethnic Slavs. For instance, the bishopric names of Bela and Kozel suggest that the local population was predominantly Slavic.[201]

Evidence of sacral edifices in the Epirian bishoprics shows that the number of prestigious churches in them varied. Bouthroton and its area have yielded the most extensive evidence of sacral buildings from the 10th or early 11th centuries, confirming that the city of Bouthroton was a developed spiritual center. Archaeological research has unearthed remains of a cathedral built in the 6th and restored in the 10th century, as well as traces of basilicas on an acropolis, whose first stage is datable to the 6th and restoration to the 10th century. Beyond the walls of Bouthroton, there are remnants of significant sacral edifices, such as the basilica in the Vrini plain.[202]

In Bela, there is evidence of a three-aisled basilica dedicated to St. Donatus, datable to the 9th or 10th century, although the purpose of this church remains unclear. In Dryinoupolis, in the village of Peshkëpi, a church dedicated to the Nativity of the Mother of God has survived; it is datable to the 11th or possibly the 10th century and may have served as the bishop's cathedral. Information on the Bishopric of Kozel around the time it became part of the Archbishopric of Ohrid is scant. In 1050, it returned to the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Naupaktos. The center of this bishopric may have been in Kozel, where an aisleless domed church dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God, built at an unknown date, has survived. Unlike these Epirian bishoprics, Ioannina offers no archaeological evidence of sacral buildings from Samuel's time or the post-Samuelian era. The known structures were built later, suggesting that the Bishopric of Ioannina did not have a prominent role at the turn of the 11th to the 12th century.[203]

198 *Hodges*, Butrint's northern frontier, 323–327; *Idem*, A 'god-guarded' city?, 191–218; *Hernandez–Hodges*, Beyond Butrint, 292–309;

199 *Vroom*, Dishing up history, 299

200 *Hodges*, A 'god-guarded' city?, 198.

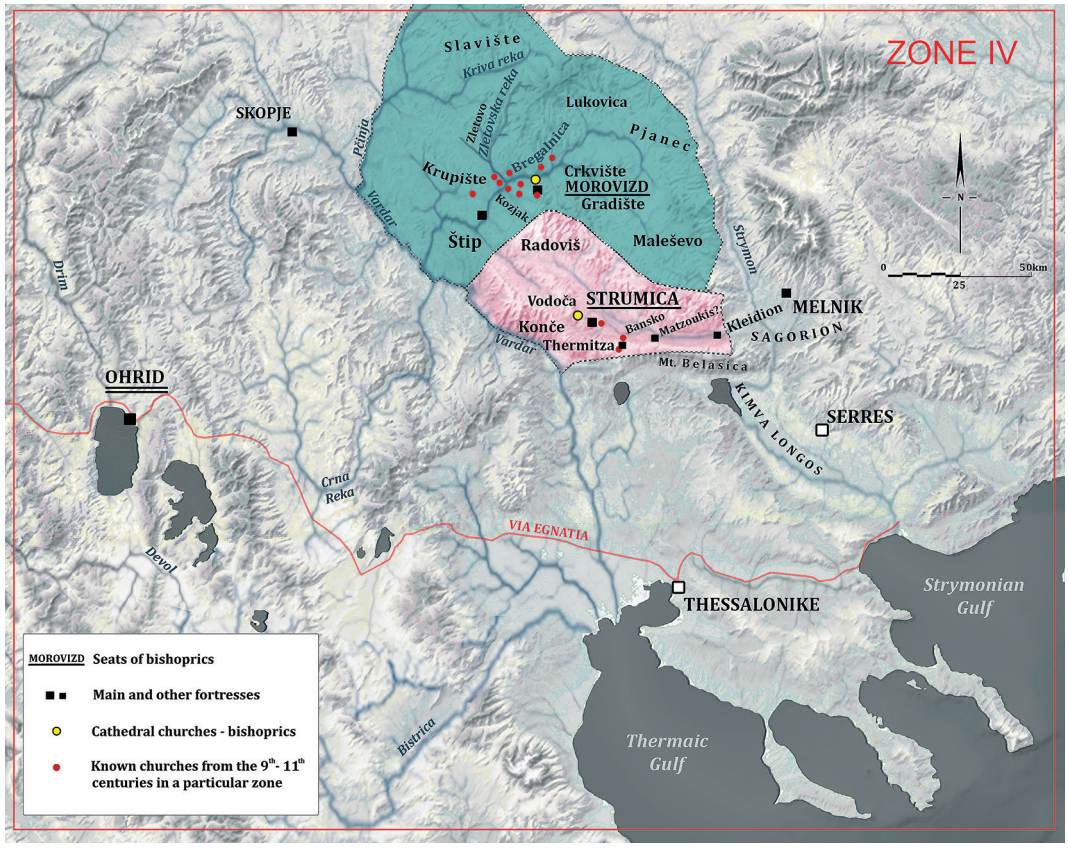
201 The new names of the bishoprics in Epirus reveal a changed demographic landscape, with different groups of settlers populating some parts of Epirus, e.g., the Bishopric of Rigoi, whose name is of Greek-Sicilian origin, or the Bishopric of Vonditza, whose name is of Slavic origin, *Veikou*, Byzantine Epirus, 310–311.

202 *Hodges*, A 'god-guarded' city?, 205–208; *Sebastiani*, Butrinto; *Greenslade*, Byzantine central-place.

203 *Pallas*, Epiros, 295.

ZONE IV: The area of Bregalnica

To the east of the heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria, in the territory of what was once the Bishopric of Bregalnica, the sources mention two successors: the Bishopric of Strumica and the Bishopric of Morovizd.



Map 7.
ZONE IV –
Area of Bregalnica

Bishopric of Strumica

One of the more important regions of Samuel's Bulgaria was east of the Vardar River. A network of fortresses covered the Strumica area. The center of this region was Strumica, but other fortresses stood nearby, e.g., Matzoukis and Thermitza. These minor strongholds fell in 1014 and 1015. The Strumica region protected the heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria from Byzantine attacks from the direction of Serres. The Byzantine army launched offensives in the Strumica area from Serres, marching through the valley known as Kimva Longos, at the northern end of which lies the entrance into the Kleidion Pass. The Kleidion Pass gave the imperial army access to two offensive routes: the northern, through the valley of the Strymon River, past Melnik and on to Pernik, and the western, which led along the Strumica River to the eponymous fortress.

The Byzantines and the Bulgarians clashed in this area several times, most famously in the Battle of Kleidion (Belasica) in July 1014, which ended in Samuel's

defeat; he died later that year (October 1014). Basil II took Strumica in 1018 after its commander, Dragomouzos, surrendered; the emperor rewarded his submission with the title of *patrikios*. Scylitzes reports that Dragomouzos surrendered his fortress with other nearby forts (τὰ ἐν τῇ Στρουμβίτζῃ παρεσχηκώς), suggesting that Strumica was the political and military center of its broader area.[204]

In the late 9th century, ca. 886–889, during the reign of Prince Boris I, the city of Strumica had belonged to the large Bishopric of Bregalnica. This bishopric is thought to have encompassed the entire territory east of the Vardar, including the valleys of the Bregalnica and Strumica rivers. Its seat was probably in Krupište (the archaeological site of Kale Krupište), near the confluence of the Zletovska and Bregalnica rivers.[205] The *Martyrdom of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis*, penned by Archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid in the late 11th century by drawing on local traditions, offers some information on the spread of Christianity in the Strumica region. Theophylact says that Tiberiopolis (i.e., Strumica) cherished local cults, including the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. The inhabitants of Tiberiopolis venerated this group of saints at the time of the Avar invasion and the Bulgarian conquest of Strumica. After the Bulgarians' official conversion to Christianity in 864, Prince Boris wanted to translate the martyrs' relics from Tiberiopolis to Bregalnica. However, he was only partially successful because the inhabitants of Tiberiopolis vehemently protested against such a move.[206] Allegedly, the relics of three martyrs were moved in Boris' time and of two more under his son Simeon (893–927). We do not know when Strumica became the seat of a separate bishopric. As a prominent spiritual center with a long Christian tradition among the local Slavic population, it eventually became a major military center, as the war of 976–1018 showed.[207]

The first *sigillion* of Basil II lists Strumica as the seat of a bishopric.[208] The emperor granted this bishopric tax exemption for a modest 12 *klerikoi* and 12 *paroikoi*. Archaeological research has uncovered several prestigious sacral edifices near Strumica, meaning that the broader area of the fortress was well-populated. The number and architecture of those churches suggest that the region was quite prosperous. That, in turn, indicates that the Strumica area had not been heavily affected by the war, allowing for its quicker economic development in the post-1019 period. The economic potential of the Strumica region may have been the reason Basil II assigned the minimum number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* to its bishop.

Several 10th-century sacral buildings of note have survived in the Strumica area. In the village of Vodoča, four kilometers from Strumica, there are ruins of three

204 Scylitzes, 357. Cf. *Strässle*, Krieg, 117–119.

205 Archaeological evidence suggests that the Bishopric of Bregalnica was highly developed, *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 30–35, 160–165; *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 89–93; *Atanasoski*, Okolu problemot, 74–90; *Stanev*, Bregalnica, 542–554. See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 110–114, 119–129.

206 GIBI XI/2, c. 34–42. See the *chapter Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 115–119. Cf. *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 797.

207 Scylitzes, 357.

208 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42–43.



Fig. 8.
Strumica,
fortress, entrance,
present condition

churches forming the sacral complex of the Vodoča Monastery (the Church of St. Leontius, i.e., the so-called Eastern Church; the so-called Western Church; and finally, the new Eastern Church atop the remains of the old Eastern Church). While the dating of these monuments remains unclear, some propose that St. Leontius was built during Samuel's era and the other two in the Byzantine period. [209]

The entire complex was integrated into the new church, which became the seat of Strumica's bishop, probably around 1100. Another noteworthy site is Bansko, with the ruins of a church dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, which had a *synthronon* in the apse.[210] Its construction is datable to the Komnenian era. The church is located near a Roman thermae, so Strumica's bishop may have had a residence there in the late 11th or early 12th century. The sources mention Thermitza in the Strumica region in Basil's time, a fortress that probably overlooked the village of Bansko.[211] All of this suggests that the Strumica region was continuously populated. In addition, evidence of construction works indicates that Strumica and its broader area retained their religious significance even after Basil's era.

209 See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 178–188, 192–193.

210 See the chapter The *Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 96–99, 103, 138, 188.

211 *Zlatarski*, Istorija I/2, 758 n. 2; *Cvetanov*, Thermal Springs, 515–518.

Bishopric of Morovizd

The region of Strumica included Morovizd, once also part of the old Bishopric of Bregalnica. Scylitzes mentions it just once, reporting that the inhabitants of Morovizd, along with the residents of Pelagonia (ἐκ Πελαγονίας) and Lipljan, surrendered those towns to the emperor (παραδιδόντων τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰς πόλεις).[212] In the first *sigillion*, Basil II rewarded the bishop of Morovizd by exempting 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi* from taxation and assigning his bishopric to the Archbishopric of Ohrid. This ecclesiastical province covered the settlements in the basins of the Bregalnica and Pčinja rivers east of the Vardar (Kozjak, Slavište, Zletovo, Lukovica, Pjanec).[213] It also included Krupište, the former center of Bregalnica, an old Bulgarian bishopric. The bishop's seat moved from Krupište to Morovizd under Basil II, possibly even earlier. The promotion of Morovizd to a diocesan see may have been one of the results of Tzimiskes' campaign in the Balkans. However, little is known for certain beyond that Morovizd was a political and military center in the Bregalnica Valley in Samuel's Bulgaria and that it eventually surrendered to the Byzantines. That may move up the time of Morovizd's promotion to an ecclesiastical center to Basil II's era, as its new status may have plausibly been a reward for the city's surrender in 1018. The expansion of Morovizd's church and its possible conversion into a domed basilica (at the Crkvište/Manastirište site), with its sanctuary furnished with a high-quality masonry *synthronon* and a bishop's throne, perhaps supports this possibility. The expansion of the church building suggests that this edifice became the cathedral even though it stood beyond the Morovizd fortress (the Gradište site).[214]

Archaeological evidence has revealed a number of smaller churches from various periods in the Bregalnica Valley, on the route from Krupište to Morovizd,[215] which could mean that the local population participated in building sacral edifices.

The old Bishopric of Bregalnitsa, with its center at Kale Krupište, had been a Slavic bishopric and played a major role in the Christianization of the local population. Extensive evidence of sacral buildings from the period when the bishoprics of Strumica and Morovizd had replaced the old bishopric shows that this region continued to develop under Byzantine governance.

The secure and unassailable fortress of Melnik, which surrendered to Basil II in 1014, stood east of the Strymon. The emperor left it standing and installed a Byzantine garrison. Melnik's strategically advantageous position at the junction of the Strumica and Strymon river valleys gave this fortress a purely military role in Basil's pacification plans.[216]

212 Scylitzes, 357.

213 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

214 See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 196, 288.

215 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 206–212.

216 *Dujčev*, Melnik, 30–41; *Popović – Jubanski*, Melnik-Zlatolist, 55–56; *Neševa*, Voenooporni punktove, 461.



Fig. 9.
Morovizd,
Crkvište site

ZONE V: The area of Triaditza and the Strymon River

Bishopric of Serdica

Serdica was another vital region of Samuel's Bulgaria. It is known from earlier periods as a strategically important fortress involved in Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts. Byzantium lost the fortress in 812 and did not retake it until 1018. In the war of 976–1018, Serdica was one of the most robust centers of the Bulgarian army, even though we know nothing about its commander or defenders. Serdica was the dominant city in its broader area, which was covered by a network of minor fortresses. Scylitzes calls this region Triaditza, reporting that the Byzantine army assailed the "fortresses in Triaditza" multiple times (999, 1016) (πολλὰ τῶν ἐν Τριαδίτζῃ φρουρίων; κατὰ τῶν ἐν Τριαδίτζῃ φρουρίων; ἄπεισιν εἰς Τριάδιτζαν).[217] Besides Serdica, another notable fortress (ἔρυμα / φρούριον) in this area was Pernik, and Byzantine writers also mention some minor strongholds, such as Boio/Boyon (Βοιώ, Βοϊάνος) and Moreia.

The Byzantine general Nikephoros Xiphias took Boyon during an offensive against the "strongholds of Triaditza." The fortress has been identified on a hilltop above the well-known Bojana Chruch on the Momina Skala peak on Vitosha Mountain, southwest of Sofia. Boyon had double ramparts and controlled the gorges and passes on Vitosha's northern slopes.[218]

217 Scylitzes, 343, cf. Zonaras III, 559: τῶν ἐν Σαρδικῇ φρουρίων; Scylitzes, 355.

218 Scylitzes, 354. *Rabovyanov*, Kreposti, 201.

Moreia, Serdica, and Pernik all held out against Basil's attacks. The emperor besieged Moreia in 986 but eventually withdrew.[219] As Basil's assault on Moreia came as part of the offensive against Serdica and defeat in the Battle of the Gates of Trajan (Ihtiman), it is reasonable to assume that the fortress stood near the *Via Militaris*. This was the route the Byzantine army had taken when it set out against Serdica, and retreated after its defeat in 986. Basil probably planned to raze the Bulgarian border strongholds and those along the *Via Militaris*.[220]

Basil II twice laid siege to Pernik. The first attempt was in 1004 when he "lost quite a number of men" before "realizing that the defense-works were too good to be taken by siege." The second siege, in 1016, lasted 88 days and ultimately proved futile, with the emperor losing many troops at the walls of Pernik.[221] The names of the fortress commanders in the Triaditza area are unknown. The only exception is Pernik, which was defended by Krakras and his brother and son. The fortress surrendered at the end of the war in 1018. Notably, 35 other fortress *archontes*, presumably recognizing Krakras' seniority, surrendered with him when he ceded Pernik to Basil.[222]

As an old church center with a long Christian tradition, Serdica retained a prominent place among the bishoprics of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. This bishopric included, among others, the fortress of Pernik, suggesting a link between ecclesiastical administration and military governance.

Serdica had been an old Byzantine metropolis[223] and later bishopric before its integration into the autocephalous Bulgarian Church, a factor that must have contributed to its importance as an ecclesiastical center. In the post-971 period, when the Bulgarian patriarch moved from one place to another trying to escape the Byzantine army and control, he temporarily found refuge at Serdica: after the fall of Dorostolon in 971, the patriarch relocated to Serdica before retreating to southwestern Macedonia (Vodena, Moglena, Prespa and, finally, Ohrid). Serdica is listed in the St. Achilleos inscription as a diocesan see, in the second place on the left, behind the Bishopric of Skopje.[224] It retained this lofty rank in the Archbishopric of Ohrid, with Basil II exempting from taxation 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi* of the bishop of Serdica.[225] This suggests that the emperor indulged the ambitions of the head of this reputable and powerful old bishopric.

In the region of Serdica, there is archaeological evidence of sacral edifices and various fortresses. That is to be expected, given that Serdica was an ecclesiastical and military center in different periods. The church that served as its cathedral in the 9th

219 Kekavmen, 196–198.

220 The identification of Moreia at Semser Kale, on the Mativir River, is questionable, TIB VI, 368.

221 Scylitzes, 347, 355.

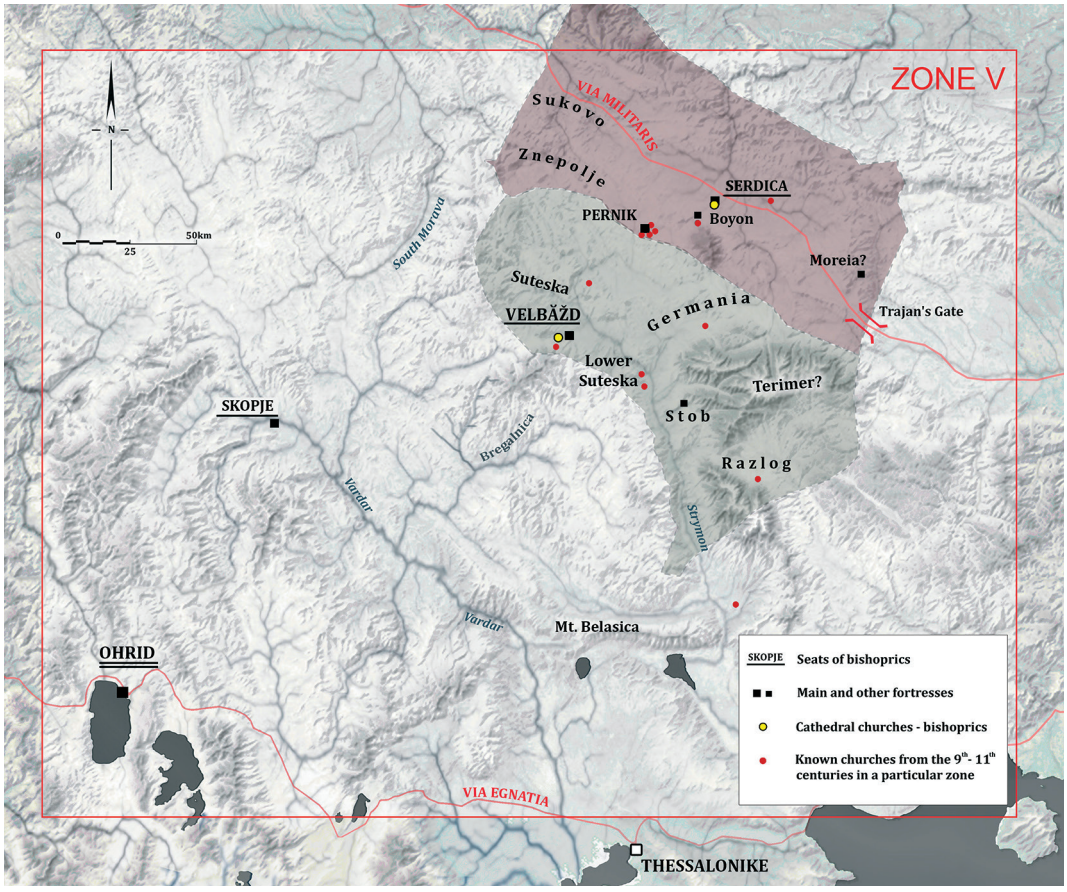
222 Scylitzes, 357; Zonaras III, 565–566.

223 In late antiquity, the suffragans of the metropolitan bishop of Serdica were the bishops of Pautalia (later Velbăžd), Naissus, and Remesiana, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 16, 654.2–7. In the list of metropolises Serdica is listed in Notitiae, 3.49.

224 See above, 305–317.

225 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

Map 8.
ZONE V –
Area of Triaditza and
the Strymon River



and 10th centuries has yet to be identified, although some speculate that it may have been the Rotunda of St. George. Archaeological findings from the Pernik area confirm that the settlement survived into the Byzantine era.[226] This evidence confirms the continuous inhabitation of this region and shows that the armed conflicts did not hamper its development. The population that lived in the areas of Serdica, Pernik, and other fortresses does not seem to have been displaced, although Basil II dispatched his army to demolish the Bulgarian strongholds "in Triaditza" during the war.

Bishopric of Velbăžd

We know little of the role that the inhabitants of Velbăžd (old Pautalia, modern Kyustendil) played in the war of 976–1018. The earliest reference to the bishopric whose seat was Velbăžd may be the hypothetical one in the damaged inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos. If we take this tentative reading to be correct, Velbăžd was listed in the quite prominent third spot on the right, in the group of bishoprics headed by Selasphoros.[227] That would mean that the Bishopric of Velbăžd was formed as early

226 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 246–248.

227 See above, 305–317.

as Samuel's era, perhaps even before. However, it is unknown whether it was founded during the First Bulgarian Empire, or Tzimiskes' campaign in Bulgaria. In any case, Basil's first *sigillion* reliably confirms the existence of the Bishopric of Velbăžd, listing it as one of the suffragan bishoprics of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. The emperor allowed the bishop of Velbăžd a modest number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* (15 of each).[228] Tellingly, most toponyms listed in the Bishopric of Velbăžd are Slavic (e.g., Razlog, Suteska, Stob), as is the name of the bishopric itself, indicating a high concentration of Slavic (Bulgarian) population in the Velbăžd area.

Although the location of Velbăžd's cathedral eludes us, the development of this bishopric involved the construction of several notable sacral edifices, most from the 11th and 12th centuries, i.e., the Byzantine era.[229]

ZONE VI: The Danube and Sava borderlands

Bishopric of Dristra/Dorostolon

Even though the borderlands along the Danube and Sava lay on the fringes of Samuel's Bulgaria, this region saw some armed conflicts. Byzantine chroniclers inform us that Basil's offensives targeted Vidin and the Sirmium area. The reports concerning Dristra/Dorostolon reveal the city's strategic importance. And yet, the status of Dorostolon during the war of 976–1017 is puzzling. Scylitzes describes Dorostolon as a Byzantine city where the *strategos* Tzotzikios, son of the *patrikios* Theudatos the Iberian, resided. In 1017, the historian reports, Tzotzikios warned Basil II that John Vladislav and Krakras, the commander of Pernik, were negotiating an alliance against Byzantium with the Pechenegs.[230] The deal ultimately fell through, so we cannot say whether Dorostolon's *strategos* undertook any other initiatives during the war.

The Byzantine army had taken Dristra/Dorostolon during John Tzimiskes' campaign in Bulgaria. This development forced the Bulgarian primate to move his seat from Dorostolon to Serdica and onward to the Bulgarian strongholds in southwestern Macedonia. The *Taktikon Escorial* and the seals from the so-called *Preslav Collection* attest to the introduction of the office of the *strategos* of Dristra.[231] The seal of a *katepano* of Theodoroupolis, a toponym identified with Dorostolon, suggests that the city had military relevance. The seal is datable to Tzimiskes' era, but the office is unattested in the *Taktikon Escorial*.[232] We cannot say whether Dorostolon remained under continuous Byzantine control from 971 to 1017. Other Bulgarian centers taken

228 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

229 See the chapter *The Sacral Topography of the Archbishopric of Ohrid: Architecture, Art, Patronage, and the Cult of Saints in the 11th–13th Century*, II, 112–117, 149.

230 Scylitzes, 356.

231 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 269.9. The seals belonged to Leo Sarakinopoulos and Arkadios, *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 215–217, 259–277, 271a.

232 For a discussion of the seal of a certain Sisinios, *katepano* of Theodoroupolis (*Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 228–231; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, 33.1), a toponym identified with Dorostolon, see *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 138–139.

during Tzimiskes' campaign in 971 are known to have defected and lent their support to Samuel's restoration of independent Bulgaria. That was presumably the case with Preslav and Pliska. Regardless, we do not know if the old Bulgarian capitals were indeed integrated into Samuel's Bulgaria. We only know that Byzantium retook Preslav and Pliska in a campaign "against the Bulgar strongholds beyond the Haemos range" in 999/1000. Nikephoros Xiphias led the campaign, from which the Byzantine army returned "triumphant and intact."[233] This suggests that anti-Byzantine resistance was not particularly deep-rooted in northeast Bulgaria. After 971, the bellicose supporters of restoring the Bulgarian Empire retreated to the western and southwestern parts of their realm, following in the footsteps of their senior clergy. The inhabitants of Pliska and Preslav must have rebelled and defected from Byzantium, although no particulars about this are known.[234] Similarly, we cannot say how the situation in Dorostolon unfolded. Regardless, Tzimiskes' fortifications at Dorostolon and its area, as well as the strategic significance of the fortress, suggest that after 971, Byzantium did not lose control of Dristra, which remained on the sidelines of the decisive developments in the war of 976–1018.[235]

Basil's second *sigillion* gave Dristra to the Archbishopric of Ohrid, mentioning that this bishopric had "shone with the dignity of an archbishopric" during Peter's reign, before the Bulgarian archbishops started moving from one place to another.[236] Basil makes no reference to Samuel's era here, which suggests that Dorostolon permanently lost its status as a residence of the Bulgarian primate after Peter's reign, in the time of Boris II and John I Tzimiskes. Even if Samuel retook Dorostolon for a few years, the city would have had a marginal role in the ecclesiastical organization of his time. Basil recalled Dorostolon's traditional significance when he allowed its bishop the maximum number of *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* (40 of each), making Dristra one of the strongest bishoprics. Yet, Dristra's diocesan rank in the Ohrid Church did not rest solely on its ancient glory as the former seat of the Bulgarian Church. Dorostolon was also a fortress at a convenient strategic location, which is why it became the local *katepano*'s residence, presumably in the first half of the 11th century. In the second half of the 11th century, the Bishopric of Dristra was removed from the Archbishopric's borders, and the city became the seat of a metropolitan bishop under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople. This change in the military and ecclesiastical rank of Dorostolon/Dristra's officials shows that the Byzantines had solidified their control of this frontier town and the surrounding area.[237]

233 Scylitzes, 343–344.

234 Samuel may have taken control of the old Bulgarian capitals after Basil's defeat at the Iron Gates in 986, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 95, 115–116

235 The seals of the *strategos* of Dristra show that Byzantium never lost control of the city during the war of 976–1018, *Krsmanović*, Byzantine province 195 n. 90.

236 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44.

237 See the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I, 421.

Bishopric of Vidin

The case of Vidin aptly illustrates the link between the military and church organization. This city on the Danube is known to have been a particularly strong center of the Bulgarian army. At the beginning of the war, probably ca. 978, the eunuch Romanos, the second son of Peter of Bulgaria and brother of the dethroned Bulgarian emperor Boris, whom Samuel later made the governor of Skopje, took refuge in Vidin. Scylitzes recounts how the late Peter's sons fled from Constantinople to "Bulgaria"; Boris died shortly afterward, and Romanos, as Michael of Devol reports, managed to escape and reach Vidin.[238] At that time, Vidin was a well-fortified city and one of the centers of what was left of independent Bulgaria. Although we know nothing of Vidin's commander, it was manned by battle-hardened troops.[239] Around 1002, Basil II launched an offensive against Vidin and took it after an eight-month siege involving both land and naval forces, which was the usual Byzantine tactic for assailing Danubian cities.[240] The Bulgarians' military prowess made it difficult for Basil to take the city. Vidin's defenders were familiar with 'Greek fire' and put to use their experience (acquired, no doubt, in earlier conflicts with the Byzantines) during Basil's siege of the city. Nevertheless, the city eventually fell, but the fate of its defenders remains unknown. Basil reinforced the city walls, making Vidin a strategic Byzantine stronghold on the Danube.

As mentioned earlier, Basil's second *sigillion* provides a few details about the Byzantine conquest of Vidin. The emperor included Vidin in the Archbishopric of Ohrid, rewarding its bishop with 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi*. This generosity to the Bishopric of Vidin may have had to do with the willingness of Vidin's clergy to urge the besieged city to surrender to Basil ca. 1002.[241] In that case, Vidin would have been another powerful Bulgarian base Basil II took by surrender.

The Bishopric of Vidin was one of the 18 bishoprics of the Bulgarian Chruch under Samuel listed in the St. Achilleos inscription at Little Prespa.[242] The bishop of Vidin sat in the seventh place on the right. Besides Velbăžd, Vidin is the only bishopric listed in the damaged and partially deciphered inscription under its Slavic name. The position of its bishop in the seating arrangement suggests that Vidin had a lower rank in the diocesan hierarchy of the Bulgarian Church in Samuel's era. On the right side of the throne, its bishop was preceded by the primates of Selasphoros, Velbăžd (?), Herakleia, Berroia, and Kephalonia (Glavinitza).

If we take the number of the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* to reflect a bishopric's importance, it follows that the Bishopric of Vidin's rank under Byzantine ecclesiastical administration (in the Archbishopric of Ohrid) was much higher than it had been in the

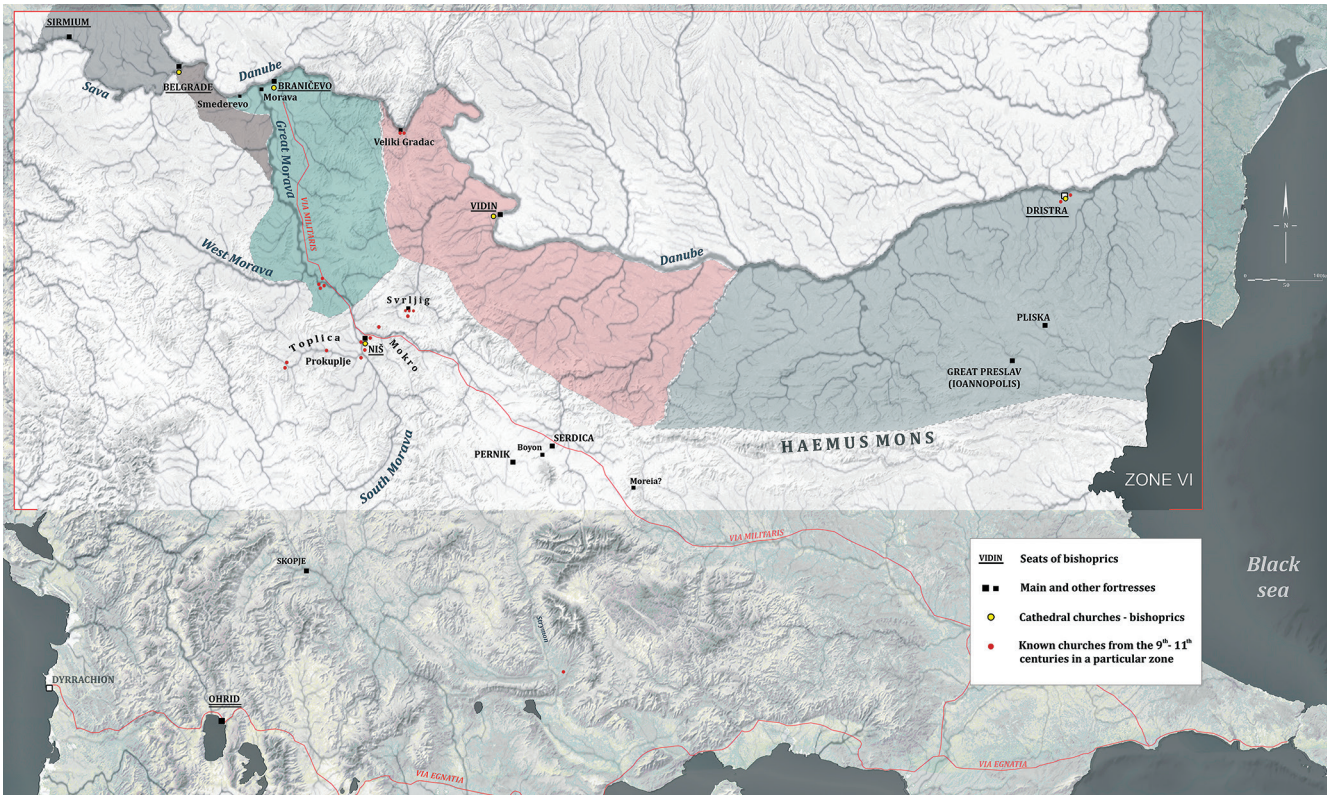
238 There are doubts as to whether he fled to Vidin or Vodena. We would argue that Vidin seems more probable, *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 113.

239 Scylitzes, 346.

240 For instance, Tzimikes' offensive against Dorostolon, v. *Haldon*, Byzantine Wars, 149–157.

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

242 See above, 305–317.



Map 9.
Zone VI –
Danube and Sava
borderlands

Bulgarian Church. That would suggest that Vidin had a prominent role in Basil's plans to revitalize the borderlands through the church organization, as attested by the examples of Dristra, Belgrade, and Niš.

Vidin is known to have been continuously inhabited through several successive periods, so there is no doubt that it was a fortified settlement in the First Bulgarian Empire. It would seem that Tzimiskes' campaign in 971 never reached Vidin, allowing Bulgaria's clergy and military personnel to find refuge there in the post-971 period, after Byzantium had taken the Bulgarian capitals of Preslav and Pliska. Vidin's importance during the reigns of Peter, Boris I, and Samuel and in the Byzantine era allows us to place the establishment of this bishopric in the pre-Samuelian period.[243]

Bishoprics of Belgrade and Braničevo

Besides Dristra and Vidin, the Archbishopric of Ohrid received two more bishoprics in the Danubian borderlands: Belgrade and Braničevo. Neither of those cities features in the accounts of the war of 976–1018, but there is some information about them from a later time. Both were fortified settlements on the Danube,[244] but we know

243 *Barakov*, Srednovekovnijat Bdin, 258–260; *Idem*, Medieval Bdin, 625–628; *Kajmakamova*, Predstavata za grad Vidin, 396–403; *Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 113.

244 The earliest archaeological evidence of Early Medieval Belgrade comes from the second half of the 9th and 10th centuries. Medieval Braničevo, a Slavic settlement at the confluence of the Mlava and the Danube, may have been founded around the time of the establishment of the Bishopric of Morava/Moroviskos, so no later than

nothing of the military organization of this area either under Samuel or under Basil II. Basil's first *sigillion* reveals the importance of those cities, assigning 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi* to the Bishopric of Belgrade, making it one of the highest-ranking bishoprics in the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[245] Besides Belgrade, four more settlements belonged to the eponymous bishopric.

Belgrade (Singidunum), the starting point of the *Via Militaris*, had military and economic importance in Roman times. The city declined in the age of barbarian invasions and, in particular, in the aftermath of the settlement of Slavic tribes in the Balkans. Belgrade lay on the fringes of the First Bulgarian Empire, a factor that surely impeded the settlement's revival. It regained its strategic importance in the Byzantine era, becoming a fortified city that protected the Empire's northern frontier in the 11th century.

A letter Pope John VIII sent to Prince Boris I in 878 recounts an interesting anecdote illustrating the process of Christianization in the Belgrade area in the last decades of the 9th century. At that time, the Bishopric of Belgrade belonged to the Metropolis of Morava, a territory within the borders of the Bulgarian state inhabited by a Slavic population whose conversion to Christianity had only just begun. All of Bulgaria's territory, including its northwestern regions, was then under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as per the decisions of the ecumenical council of 869/870. That, however, did little to discourage Rome from attempting to strengthen its influence in Bulgaria, leading to friction between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople. The Pope's letter of 878 recounts that someone called George (the Bulgarian primate?), described as a bogus bishop, had unlawfully consecrated Sergios as bishop of Belgrade.[246] Sergios was a Slav and a eunuch, suggesting he was lowborn and had probably been imprisoned and castrated in captivity. We know nothing about Sergios' early sacerdotal career, but he certainly lacked the spiritual qualities and abilities necessary for the job. The Pope's letter reports that Sergios had previously lost his status as a clergyman because of his "many transgressions." He somehow managed to reassert himself and, with the help of George, the bogus bishop, became the bishop of Belgrade. Sergios' advancement in the Church suggests that the Byzantine clergy may not have had a better candidate to appoint. Christianizing remote territories inhabited by a predominantly pagan population, they had no choice but to seek support among the locals who had, at least formally, accepted the new religion.

How much did the local situation change when the Bulgarian Church gained independence in 880? After 880, the Metropolis of Morava, with its Bishopric of Belgrade, became part of the independent Bulgarian Church but lost its status as a metropolis and was demoted to the rank of a bishopric whose seat was Braničevo. Samuel and his successors inherited the existing bishoprics, and Basil II accepted them, too. In

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the mid-9th century, at the site of Early Byzantine Viminacium. However, archaeological research at Mali Grad in Braničevo has revealed no findings predating the 11th century, *Popović*, Beogradska tvrdjava, 49–54; *Popović – Ivanišević*, Braničevo, 130, 166.

245 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

246 See *Komatina*, Moravski episkop, 359–368.

Basil's first *sigillion*, Morava/Moroviskos appears only as a settlement in the Bishopric of Braničevo, which had several settlements, including Smederevo (τὸν Σφεντέρομον), with 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi*.[247]

Evidence of sacral buildings in the territory of the Bishopric of Belgrade is scarce. Surviving fragments of an iconostasis suggest that the cathedral was in the enclosure of the Belgrade fortress. The findings are datable to the 11th century, when Belgrade became a strategically important Byzantine city. Sacral edifices from the territory of the Bishopric of Braničevo, more specifically, the archaeological site of Veliki Gradac on the right bank of the Danube, belong to the 10th and 11th centuries, but their remains show that none of them were monumental churches. Since there is no information on either Belgrade or Braničevo in the war of 976–1018 and immediately after Byzantium retook the area, this archaeological evidence is significant because it attests to their continuous habitation.[248]

Bishopric of Sirmium

The sources mention Sirmium and its broader area as the last city to fall to the Byzantines at the end of the Bulgarian-Byzantine war. Under Samuel and his successors, Sirmium was an isolated Bulgarian center governed by a single family. The ruler of Sirmium, Sermon (ὁ τοῦ Σιρμίου κρατῶν ... Σέρμων), has been the subject of several scholarly debates. He had a brother called Nestongos and a wife. Sirmium was eventually taken by Constantine Diogenes, a Byzantine general who had made his name in Basil's war for Bulgaria. Sirmium surrendered in 1019, and we know nothing of its previous military organization. Having deceived and killed Sermon, Diogenes persuaded Sermon's widow to cede the city. Sirmium was an important military center for Byzantium and was integrated into the Empire's military-administrative system after 1019. The rank of the commander of Sirmium and its broader area remains unknown.[249]

Basil's first *sigillion* lists the Bishopric of Sirmium (ἡ Θράμος), covering the territory between the Danube and Sava rivers, as a suffragan of the archbishop of Ohrid. Conditions for a more lasting pacification in Sirmium, Mačva, and the Sava Basin (Posavina) did not become ripe until the age of Basil II.[250] This period probably saw the restoration of the old settlement north of the Sava.[251] After the introduction of Byzantine rule, on the south bank of the Sava, in Mačvanska Mitrovica (Zidine site),[252] a large settlement with a necropolis emerged, situated next to a triple-apse church, probably built at the turn of the 10th to the 11th century (Church no. 3 at the Zidine site). Anonymous bronze *folles* (Class A2) were discovered in the area of Mačvanska

247 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

248 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 251–253

249 The Nestongoi, a family whose patronymic would have been Nestongos, were active in Byzantium later on, especially in the 13th century, *Dujčev*, Proučvanija, 33–37. On the problem of the district of Sirmium, see the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I, 400–401, 417–418.

250 *Strässle*, Krieg, 460.

251 *Stephenson*, Balkan Borderlands, 668.

252 *Popović*, „Metodijev" grob, 266–268.

Mitrovica.[253] One *follis* coin, found beneath the foundations of the church, dates from Basil II's era, with the emission of this *follis* variant datable to 1001–1010/1015.[254] This allows us to assume that the triple-apse church was built after this time, most likely following the Byzantine takeover of Sirmium in 1019.[255]

Basil II integrated the Bishopric of Sirmium into the Archbishopric of Ohrid, assigning it a modest 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi*.[256]

Bishopric of Niš

Given the scarcity of information about the course of the war of 976–1019 in the northern reaches of the central Balkans, the reports concerning the Bishopric of Niš are particularly noteworthy. In his first *sigillion*, Basil II gave this bishopric four settlements and 40 *klerikoi* and as many *klerikoi*, making Niš one of the strongest bishoprics in the Archbishopric of Ohrid by the number of the bishop's subordinates.[257] However, since we have no information on Niš's role in the war, the ranking of its fortress and commander in the military organization of Samuel's Bulgaria remain unknown.

Niš is one of the examples showing that a settlement's importance could vary depending on who controlled it. While part of the Bulgarian state, Niš was a wayside stop on the road to the more important Vidin. The Belgrade and Braničevo regions were similar cases because neither of those Danubian borderlands featured prominently in Samuel's war plans. The Bulgarians focused on their borderlands toward Byzantium – the territories southeast of Serdica and Pernik – and the area between Strumica and Thessaly, the theater of the fateful struggle against the Empire. In this political configuration, Niš remained on the sidelines.[258]

In contrast, for the Byzantines, Niš was a long-standing military base and an important commercial and military center on the *Via Militaris*. It controlled the Morava plain (Margum Planum) up to the Danube, where the Byzantines intercepted barbarian incursions from the north. After Skopje became the seat of the Theme of Bulgaria, Niš regained its role as an important military base in the Morava Valley and occasionally served as the seat of the *doux* or *katepano* of Bulgaria in the late 11th century, as did Belgrade.[259]

As the birthplace of the Byzantine Empire's founder and the seat of a bishopric founded in the 4th century, Niš retained a prominent role in the Bulgarian Church. Despite the lack of reports about this settlement during the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's era, it is clear that Basil II had good reason to make it the seat of a strong

253 *Popović*, Catalogue, 186, 193–195.

254 *Popović*, „Metodijev" grob, 267.

255 *Ivanišević*, Interpretation, 41.

256 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

257 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

258 *Nikolova*, Ustrojstvo, 72–74.

259 See the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I, 428–429.

bishopric in the Archbishopric of Ohrid. The Bishopric of Niš seems to have covered the expansive territory from Toplica in the west to Mokro and Svrljig in the east and from the confluence of the West and South Morava in the north to Grdelica Gorge in the south, where it bordered the Bishopric of Skopje. The Byzantines apparently recognized the city's strategic potential and accordingly gave it a prominent role in the new church organization of the Balkans. Judging by its suffragans listed in the first *sigillion* of Basil II, the Bishopric of Niš seems to have encompassed the territories of the Late Antique bishoprics of Naissus and Remesiana.

The expansion of the Bishopric of Niš in the early 11th century to the territory of the former Bishopric of Remesiana (Mokro and Svrljig) may have been one of the reasons why Basil II assigned 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi* to its bishop. Was he swayed by the early history of the ecclesiastical organization in the region, or did he want to strengthen this center and make it a more attractive place to live? The demographic landscape of the Niš area, like that of the Danubian frontier, was hardly favorable. The central Balkans were mostly inhospitable, with dense forests and inaccessible terrain, making them unsuitable for settling a larger population, which was also the case with the areas closer to old Byzantine centers. Furthermore, frequent incursions of various tribes across the Danube plagued the Morava corridor. These challenging circumstances affected life in the fortresses and cities along the Danube and the settlements in the Morava Valley, including Niš and its broader area. Given the strategic importance Niš acquired from Basil's era onward, it seems reasonable to assume that the emperor had wanted to encourage the development of the Niš area through the ecclesiastical organization.

The archaeological evidence of sacral edifices in the broader area of Niš mostly comes from the 11th century or later. Although the church that served as the cathedral escapes us, we know that Byzantium accorded due attention to this region in the post-war period. The only known monumental church in the area is the Church of St. Prokopios in Prokuplje (Toplica), datable to the 10th century. However, Prokuplje's role in Samuel's Bulgaria and the period when Byzantium took the northern reaches of the central Balkans remains unknown.[260]

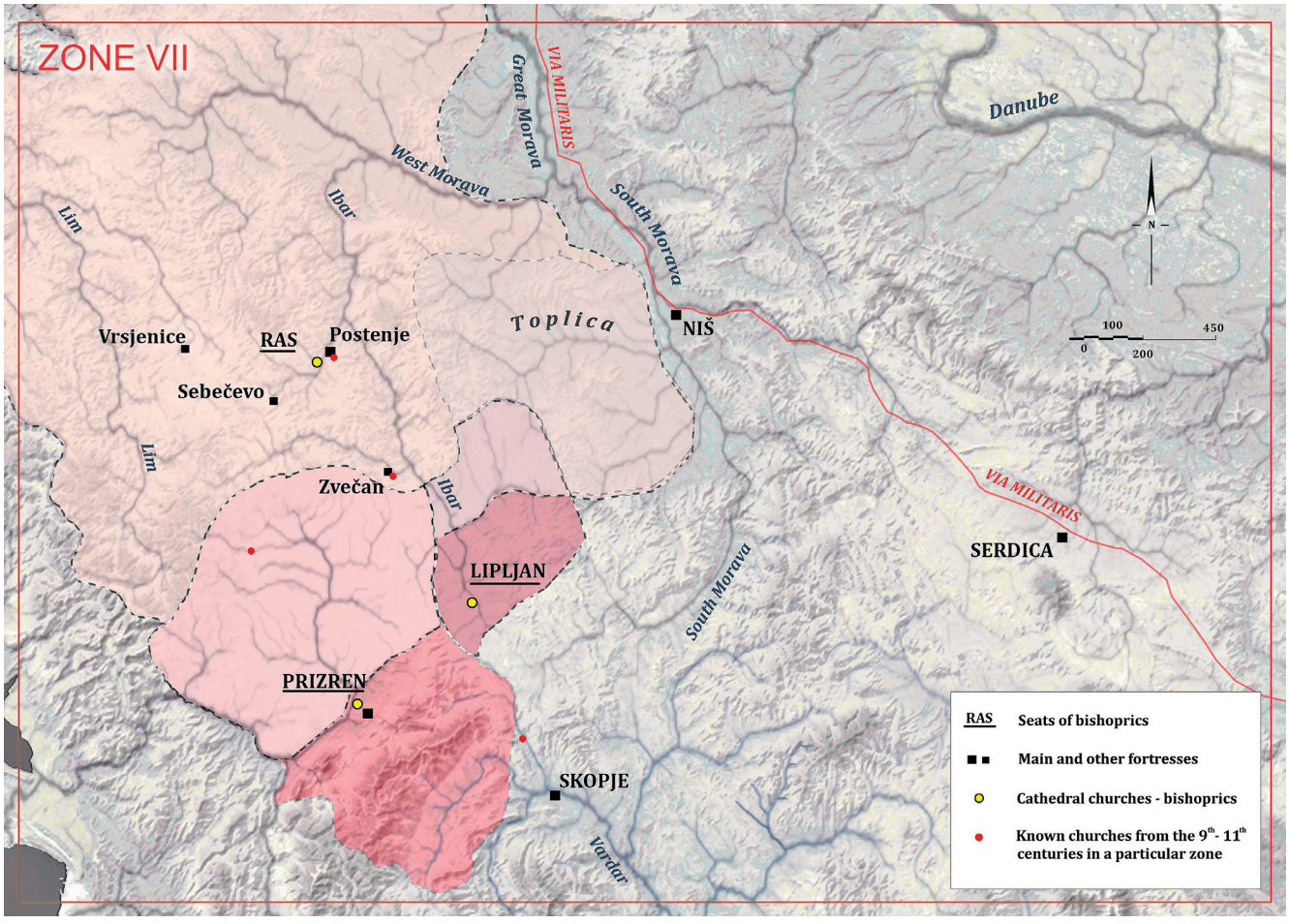
ZONE VII: The western borderlands

Bishoprics of Prizren, Lipljan, and Ras

Basil's *sigillia* list Prizren, Lipljan, and Ras as diocesan sees but not as fortresses involved in the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts of 976–1018. Scylitzes mentions Lipljan only once – in his account of the mass surrender of Bulgarian magnates and fortresses. His terse report informs us that the inhabitants of "Pelagonia (ἐκ Πελαγονίας), Morovizd and Lipljan surrendered those towns" to the emperor (παραδιδόντων τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰς πόλεις),[261] suggesting that the fortress of Lipljan was either impregnable or stood beyond the main routes of Byzantine campaigns.

260 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 220.

261 Scylitzes, 357.



Map 10. ZONE VII – Western borderlands

The sources mention neither Lipljan nor Prizren when describing Tzimiskes' campaign in Bulgaria. The earliest reference to both as diocesan seats is in Basil's first *sigillion*. Their founding was probably the result of the expansion of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical organization. These two bishoprics are believed to have been created by removing their respective territories from the jurisdiction of the Bishopric of Skopje in the first half of the 10th century. They remained independent bishoprics under Samuel and later in the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

Basil's *sigillia* suggest that Lipljan, described by Scylitzes as a *polis*, was a developed settlement. Basil gave Lipljan 30 *klerikoi* and 30 *paroikoi*, possibly as a reward for the city's peaceful surrender, whereas Prizren received a modest 15 of each.[262]

Ras is mentioned as a Bulgarian stronghold on the border between Bulgaria and Serbia as early as the 9th century. In Tzimiskes' time, Ras had a governor with the rank of a *katepano*, as evidenced by a seal dating from the period of the Byzantine campaigns in Bulgarian territory.[263] The *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* confirms the presence of

262 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 43.

263 DOSeals I, 33.1. W. Seibt, BZ 84/85 (1991/2), p. 549 (33.1); BZ 92/2 (1999), p. 765, challenged the reading of the toponym Ras on the seal.

a Byzantine army in the Ras area ("totam Rassam provinciam") when Tzimiskes withdrew from Bulgaria to launch military offensives in the east.[264] However, the *katepano* of Ras is unattested in the *Taktikon Escorial*, a source that reflects the state of affairs established in 971–975. So, the seal may date from a slightly later period, which could explain the absence of the commander of Ras in the official hierarchy of Tzimiskes' era. However, it is more likely that the Byzantine army's stay in the Ras area was brief and did not involve a stable military government. Unless Ras was an isolated Byzantine enclave, any link between this fortress and the Byzantine regions in the south would have gone via Lipljan and Prizren. Another mystery is when Samuel took Ras. Still, Samuel's conquest of the fortress and bishopric later provided grounds for Basil to assign it to the archbishop of Ohrid, considering it an old Bulgarian possession. After Bulgaria's definitive fall in 1018, Ras became a Byzantine border fortress conveniently protected by natural barriers.

The Bishopric of Ras was probably established in the 9th century as a Serbian spiritual center under the influence of the Roman Church.[265] Very unusually, this bishopric lay beyond the political borders of Bulgaria for a while but was nevertheless part of its ecclesiastical system. With its 15 *klerikoi* and 15 *paroikoi*, the Bishopric of Ras would have been of middling importance.[266] Basil II gave it to the Archbishopric of Ohrid in 1020. He did so in the second *sigillion*, which mostly assigns the bishoprics taken from nearby Greek metropolitan bishops to Archbishop John of Ohrid, but the status of Ras remains unclear because it is listed after Dristra and Vidin and before other bishoprics that had been under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dyrrachion in Tzimiskes' time. However, there is nothing to confirm that the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion had extended his jurisdiction to the Bishopric of Ras under Tzimiskes.[267]

Preserved sacral buildings attest to the process of Christianization in all three bishoprics. The location of Lipljan's cathedral is unknown because the surviving remains are underneath sacral edifices from later periods. The cathedral may have been at Gračanica or Lipljan itself. Archaeological evidence from Prizren paints a clearer picture. We know that its cathedral stood at the site of the Church of the Mother of God Ljeviška, probably built in Samuel's time. The inscription at the Church of St. Achilleos at Little Prespa potentially lists the episcopal see at Prizren as the eighth on the right of the centrally positioned throne. As noted above, this is a tentative reading, although at least three letters of the name are legible.[268] The cathedral of Ras predated Samuel's era. The Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul was probably erected by the Serbian prince Radoslav as early as 820 and served as the seat of the Ras bishop in different periods.[269]

264 Gesta Regum Sclavorum I, 116.9–10.

265 *Marković – Vojvodić*, Crkva, 30–55, holds that the Bishopric of Ras was part of Methodios' Bishopric of Pannonia, a suffragan of Rome, before its integration into the Bulgarian Church, probably in the 10th century.

266 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 45.

267 *Komatina*, Crkva, 88–91.

268 See above, 305–317.

269 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 254–255, 272–284.

V. The demographic landscape of the central Balkans in the late 10th and warly 11th centuries

The evident territorial overlapping of Bulgarian military strongholds with the centers and territories assigned to the Archbishopric of Ohrid brings us to the demographic landscape of this part of the Balkans at the turn of the 10th to the 11th century. As only the first *sigillion* lists the settlements in the territories of 17 bishoprics, the approximate borders of the other bishoprics remain unknown, with our knowledge limited to the bishop's seat.

The lack of sources precludes far-reaching and well-grounded conclusions about the demographic landscape. Whatever we can glean about the demographic situation will inevitably be indirect knowledge pieced together from various written and material sources. Still, the following can be said with confidence. Firstly, this territory was inhabited by a predominantly Slavic population, to which Byzantine authors usually referred by the ethnonym Bulgarians because of their strong attachment to the political and legal traditions of the First Bulgarian Empire and Samuel's state. Of course, the sources also report other ethnic groups, informing us that the Armenians had inhabited the Balkans before 976 and fought in the war of 976–1018 in the Byzantine army. Armenian influence is apparent in the given names of the four *Kometopouloi* brothers (David, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel), all of whom were named after Old Testament personages and were presumably of Armenian ancestry.[270] Besides the Slavs, Bulgarians, and Armenians, the Vlachs and the Vardariot Turks[271] lived in the central Balkans. Secondly, the sources unambiguously show which areas were densely populated. Wherever there is evidence that a Bulgarian military stronghold also served as the seat of a bishop of the Archbishopric of Ohrid – and, in most cases, also as the former seat of a suffragan bishop of the Bulgarian primate – it seems reasonable to assume that this was a densely populated area. If there is evidence of a cathedral and other sacral edifices in such an area, we can get an idea of not only its population density but also its economic potential.

Some reports in the sources give us a glimpse into the relative population density and the (dis)continuous inhabitation of particular areas. The question of the demographic landscape is inextricably tied to any attempt to understand how Byzantium took control of the Balkan interior. Population density dictated the strategic importance of a particular region and, by extension, the necessary adjustments of the Empire's military and administrative system to the preexisting state of affairs. Basil II's post-1018 focus on transforming the Bulgarian Church into a Byzantine ecclesiastical institution suggests that he saw the Church as his most reliable ally in the lasting pacification of the Balkans. If his aim was to pacify the local population through the Church, was the Archbishopric's diocesan structure determined, among other things, by the demographic landscape, and could the formation or elevation of some bishoprics contribute to the demographic revitalization of those areas?

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270 *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 57–71; *Nikolov*, Observations, 251–266.

271 For more details *Cvetković*, Jedna pretpostavka, 19–38.

Starting from the territorial zones where the Bulgarian military organization is known to have mirrored the ecclesiastical system – both the Bulgarian from Samuel's era and the Byzantine from Basil II's time – we can safely assume that the Slavic population was concentrated around the dominant fortresses from which the Bulgarian army controlled the broader area and vital roads. Unfortunately, we have no numerical data to help us gauge the population density in the central Balkans. The scarce data on the number of Bulgarian prisoners or the contingent of troops stationed at a particular fortress are neither sufficient nor trustworthy. For instance, Scylitzes relays a report from an unknown source that Basil II imprisoned about 15,000 (or 14,000) Bulgarians after the Battle of Kleidion (Belasica) in 1014 and blinded them, ordering that "one man for each hundred be left one eye so he could be their guide, then sent them back to Samuel" in Prilep. So, there would have been about 150 of those half-blinded soldiers. Leaving aside the veracity of the report of mass blinding, the number of prisoners is strikingly high and, no doubt, exaggerated.[272] Similarly, we know that Constantine Diogenes captured some horses and 200 heavily armed troops in an attack on John Vladislav's army in the Pelagonian Plain (1017),[273] a figure that seems realistic for a regiment accompanying the Bulgarian emperor. In addition, describing the Byzantine army at the Servia fortress, Kekaumenos reports that a *strategos* and two *taxiarchai* were stationed there on the eve of the Bulgarian conquest in 989 (or 986).[274] The *taxiarchai* were officers who commanded 1000-strong battalions, so this would suggest that no fewer than 2000 troops manned Servia – another blatantly inflated figure.

Describing the size of the Byzantine and Bulgarian armies, Byzantine historians shied away from hard numbers, preferring vague descriptive phrases such as "large army," "multitude," "large garrison," "many magnates," "many troops," "adequate garrison," "battle-worthy garrison," and the like. However, Samuel's capacity to stand up to Basil's army in head-on confrontations suggests that he could recruit the locals into his troops. Many combatants in the struggle for independent Bulgaria were stationed at fortresses, where they served as defensive troops and would have been unable to join the mobile army if their primary task was guarding their stronghold. So, the Bulgarians did have a mobile army that accompanied the ruler in his campaigns, but there is no information on the number of troops it averaged. In addition, the Bulgarian offensives involved raiding and pillaging, so the number of combatants would have fluctuated because the local population often joined such campaigns.

Given the developed Bulgarian military organization in 976–1018, one must wonder what happened to the Bulgarian army after the Russian incursion into Bulgaria and during Tzimiskes' campaign, as well as later, after the dethroning of Emperor Boris II. The sources report no significant movements of the troops of Peter's and Boris's empires during the wars in the Balkans – the Russo-Bulgarian of 968 and the

272 Scylitzes, 349; Kekavmen, 168; The veracity of the mass blinding report is dubious, especially the number of allegedly blinded Bulgarians, VIINJ III, 107 n. 97 (*J. Ferluga*); *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 122 et n. 157; *Schreiner*, Blendung, 170–187.

273 Scylitzes, 356.

274 Kekavmen, 190.

Russo-Byzantine of 969–971. The accounts of the conflicts that resulted in the dissolution of the Bulgarian state depict the once bellicose subjects of the First Bulgarian Empire as suddenly passivized. However, this is contradicted by the reports of an elaborate network of well-defended fortresses in the Balkan interior in 976–1019, suggesting that the Bulgarian troops retreated to the periphery of their realm after the devastation of the northeastern and central parts of Bulgaria. In those areas, which remained beyond Byzantine control after 971, the Bulgarians mounted a determined defense, as attested by various accounts of wartime events, particularly those on the fortress defenders' combat experience. In his account of Vidin's conquest, Scylitzes describes the "ingenuity" of its defenders, who were familiar with "Greek fire" and thus managed to extinguish it. Other descriptions of impregnable Bulgarian strongholds (Moreia, Serdica, Pernik, and others) also suggest that this was a battle-hardened population.

The armed conflicts in Bulgaria's territory inevitably led to migrations of various groups, changing the demographic landscape of the central Balkans. The relocations of Bulgarian church dignitaries from Dorostolon and Serdica to the southwest suggest that the southwestern areas lay beyond Byzantine control and were well-populated. The local population supported the Bulgarian clergy, ensuring its survival and continued activity in the territories under the Bulgarians' political authority. Several reports attest that the heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria were well-populated. Basil's frequent attacks on those areas support this, as does the Bulgarian patriarch's retreat to Vodena, Moglena, Prespa, and Ohrid. Unable to take control of the fortresses, Basil's campaigns targeted the local population around them, which relied on farming and cattle herding as their main livelihoods. In this context, the handful of reports on the fate of the local population after the conquest of a fortress is quite informative. For instance, Basil II sent away the inhabitants of Servia and installed a Byzantine garrison at the fortress (1001). Vodena survived two displacement campaigns (1001 and 1015). Scylitzes reports that its residents were resettled both times in Boleron, a region in the hinterlands of the Byzantine military base of Mosynopolis. After the displacement of Vodena's inhabitants in 1015, Basil brought in a special military unit, the aggressive *kontaratoi*, whose presence in Vodena was meant to intimidate the locals who had remained near the fortress or entertained plans to return. After the conquest of Moglena, whose walls he had demolished and burned, the emperor forcibly dispersed the local peasantry over the area and sent the Bulgarian magnates and those capable of bearing arms eastward to Asprakania, where they were integrated into the Byzantine army. The fortress of Loggas near Kastoria is an example of a local population brutally punished for its defiance. Having taken Loggas in 1017, Basil seized a great deal of booty and captured many defenders and locals, whose number must have been considerable because he divided them into three groups, keeping one part for himself and assigning the other two to the Russian mercenaries and the Byzantine army. The Ostrovos, Moliskos, and Soskos areas and the Pelagonian Plain also saw devastation and plundering. We know that Pelagonia was inhabited and had a granary at the Setena fortress, which stored grain from the broader area where peasants and pastoralists lived. It was obviously a fertile land that significantly

contributed to supplying the Bulgarian army.[275] This was the reason behind the punitive raids, which hit the local population the hardest, and the displacement measure was intended to undermine the hostile Slavic population.

Although such reports are not available for all fortresses, there is no doubt that people lived in their enclosures and broader areas. In other words, those strongholds had both military and economic importance to the local population. Lakeside and riverside fortresses were economic hubs where the inhabitants of the broader region gathered (e.g., Ohrid, Prespa, Kastoria, Petrisk, Ostrovos, Soskos, and others).

The reports on the Tmoros mountain range are particularly suggestive. Even though this was an inhospitable mountainous region, it is striking that even those highlands were important for the locals' daily life. At Brohot, Ibatzes not only kept his troops (guards) but also had the "very lovely palace" of Pronista, where he held "a public celebration of the feast of the *koimesis* [Dormition] of the all-holy Mother of God," hosting "his close neighbors and those of adjacent lands." Public celebrations of this feast were a long-standing custom. The described feast took place at the very end of the war (1018), when Byzantium had already taken the "metropolis of all Bulgaria." The mass surrender of Bulgarian magnates does not seem to have dramatically interfered with the daily life of the local population, which had until recently resisted Byzantine rule. In other words, the followers of the defiant Ibatzes felt safe and beyond the Byzantine army's reach at his highland abode as late as 1018, apparently using accessible routes familiar to them to come from the "adjacent lands." That tells us that the area around Devol and Tmoros was well-populated and in good economic shape. Ibatzes owned enough movable property to satisfy the ambitious Eustathios Daphnomeles, the "archon" of Byzantine Ohrid and later the *strategos* of the important and old Theme of Dyrrachion.[276]

Scylitzes' reports show that the demographic landscape in some regions changed during the war and in its aftermath. For instance, one of the consequences of Samuel's conquest of Larissa was the resettlement of its inhabitants "into further Bulgaria," probably in the region of Pelagonia, Prespa, and Ohrid. In those same areas, Basil II found in 1018 "many *Rhomaioi* and Armenians" whom Samuel had settled there. The emperor allowed them to stay if they so wished, which some did and others did not.[277] Basil II also found Byzantine prisoners the Bulgarians had captured during the war in Dyrrachion, Koloneia, and Dryinoupolis and again allowed them to remain where they were if they wanted to. Those who wished to leave accompanied the imperial army to Kastoria, but there is nothing to show whether they settled there permanently or not.[278] If they did, the demographic landscape of Kastoria would have shifted in favor of the Byzantine population.

275 Given the fertility and size of the Pelagonian Plain, it is unlikely that Setena was the only granary in the area.

276 Scylitzes, 360.

277 Scylitzes, 330, 363.

278 Scylitzes, 363.

It seems that Basil II contemplated a planned resettlement of Boleron. Besides the inhabitants of Vodena, who were twice sent to this region, the emperor also settled there the Bulgarians from the Thessalian fortresses he had taken at some point after 1001.[279]

These reports show that the population of Samuel's Bulgaria mostly remained in the Balkans both during and after the war. The only known exception is the defenders of Moglena, who were sent to the easternmost border. This resettlement measure usually targeted the members of the higher military classes and rarely the rural population. The sources report that some Bulgarian commanders received honorary titles (rarely offices) as rewards for surrendering and were resettled in the East or Constantinople.[280] Notably, Thessalonike seems to have been a covetable destination for the commanders of Bulgarian fortresses, with some asking to be allowed to move to the Empire's second city (Draxanos of Vodena and Elinagos of Berat, as well as a magnate called Gabras, whose region of command eludes us).[281] Thessalonike was a major and highly developed urban center not far from their homelands, where they could return at a propitious time. Still, it seems that many Bulgarian magnates remained in their homelands, as suggested by the reports on the rebellion of Peter Delyan.[282]

The Byzantine military organization also contributed to changes in the local demographic landscape, although we cannot know to what extent. Regardless of whether Basil II had taken a fortress by arms or by surrender, he routinely installed a Byzantine garrison and commander to contain the local Slavic population and prevent it from influencing the course of the war. If his primary aim was to forestall the reconquest of the fortresses by their inhabitants and the local army, he needed to ensure the long-term presence of Byzantine troops, which, in time, altered the local demographic landscape. Still, we cannot say how heavily the Slavic population was suppressed or how lasting those changes were. It seems reasonable to assume that strong garrisons installed at strategically important fortresses allowed for a higher influx of Byzantine population into fortified settlements than in the surrounding rural areas.

Besides written sources, archaeological evidence of sacral edifices, cemeteries, fortresses, and settlements also adds to our knowledge of the demographic landscape of the central Balkans. However, very few sites in the Balkans have been covered in archaeological excavations, and in many cases, there are no detailed reports of fieldwork campaigns, with many sites yet to be chronologically systematized and exhaustively researched. Regardless, some archaeological findings offer a glimpse into the inhabitation of particular areas. Evidence of cathedrals is particularly noteworthy because it helps us locate diocesan seats, suggesting that population density was higher in the broader area of the ecclesiastical centers. As building cathedrals required significant funding, it is clear that such projects could not be completed without the support of the bearers of political and economic power either in Samuel's Bulgaria or during the

279 Scylitzes, 345.

280 Prousianos, Alousianos, Bogdan, Gudelis, and others.

281 Scylitzes, 345, 364.

282 See the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I, 406–414.

Byzantine era. Of course, we should bear in mind that the motivation for building a cathedral may have stemmed from something other than population density. For instance, this was the case with the Church of St. Achilleos, the most prominent Christian place of worship in Samuel's Bulgaria, which was erected in a topographically secluded and well-protected location – an islet in Little Prespa – for a variety of reasons. The reverse is true of the Church of Hagia Sophia at Ohrid and the Moglena cathedral within the fortress enclosure, as well as of the cathedrals in Berroia and Servia.

The size of cathedrals can also help us gauge the population density of particular areas because their purpose was to bring together many believers from the bishopric's territory. Therefore, let us revisit the naos areas of some cathedrals, which indicate the relevance of an episcopal see and, indirectly, the size of the local population. The locals' religious life was closely tied to the central sacral edifice, where their bishop held court and where they assembled for religious feasts and rituals of importance to their daily lives. Imposing churches tended to be located in well-populated areas. A notable Byzantine example is the five-aisled Church of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike. At this church, the area of the naos and the galleries available to the flock was over 1428 m^2. Its monumental dimensions were not only due to Thessalonike's status as the Empire's second most developed urban center in the Balkans (after Constantinople). The patron saint of the Thessalonian church was St. Demetrios, so it was designed to receive pilgrims visiting from afar and not only the population of the city's broader area. The Church of St. Achilleos in Little Prespa could receive a congregation half the size of the one that could be accommodated at St. Demetrios. Still, Samuel's church was also intended to be a pilgrimage site and designed to have a naos capable of receiving a large crowd from closer and more remote regions. It bears repeating that its naos was much more spacious than that of the Larissa church, from where Samuel had translated the relics of St. Achilleos to Little Prespa. Although the spatial constraints of Larissa's urban setting were certainly one of the reasons that the naos of its church was markedly smaller, the construction of such an imposing church at Little Prespa was primarily intended for the local population, which must have been sizeable and on whose support Samuel relied in his struggle for an independent Bulgaria. Of course, that by no means suggests that the Byzantines never visited the Church of St. Achilleos, although pilgrimages from Byzantine-controlled areas must have been less frequent during the war.

The imposing size of St. Achilleos sets it apart from other churches in the territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Although data is lacking for some cathedrals, the available information shows that they could receive a much smaller congregation than Samuel's foundation. Of course, any comparison of the area available to the flock has to be interpreted with caution because the size of the church also depended on its location, with cathedrals in urban settings inevitably being smaller. Still, the naos areas of known cathedrals in the Archbishopric of Ohrid typically ranged from 200 to 380 m^2, with some having a much smaller space available to the congregation (see Fig. 10a–b). This confirms that St. Achilleos was the largest church in the territory of the future Archbishopric, and this church must have served the religious needs of one of the most densely populated regions in Samuel's Bulgaria (see Map 3: Zone I). The more or less

similar naos areas at other cathedrals suggest that those bishoprics also had a roughly comparable population size. The population distribution in the bishoprics was uneven, with a higher concentration of inhabitants in fortified settlements, administrative and religious centers, and the fertile regions predominantly inhabited by a rural population.

Necropolises, cemetery churches or chapels, and the number of rural sacral edifices also shed some light on the demographic landscape. The construction of religious buildings was closely tied to founding settlements and the daily needs of the local population. Let us consider a few interesting examples that can help us estimate the population density of particular regions.

At the Prosek fortress, four necropolises have been researched to various degrees, allowing us to distinguish the phases datable to the 9th–11th centuries (among others). Cemetery churches stood atop the remains of Early Byzantine churches at three sites: near the Prosek fortress, west of the fortress (in the village of Korešnica on the Vardar's left bank), and by a settlement in a valley right of the Vardar (Crkvište at Demir Kapija). A fourth, westernmost necropolis lay on the Vardar's left bank (the site "Krstevi" – Korešnica), where no church has been discovered so far.[283] However, judging by the multitude of graves and the opulence of the grave goods, this necropolis seems comparable to the one near the Vodena fortress, thought to be datable to the 11th and 12th centuries.[284] At the Vodena necropolis, 133 graves were discovered, with a significant number (33) of burials being inhumations of children. Those modest graves, with no masonry tombs but with various and abundant grave goods, seem comparable to the necropolises in the broader central Balkans. This suggests that some of the more prosperous hubs had local workshops that produced jewelry (necklaces, bracelets, rings) and everyday items to be sold in populated areas.

Several Slavic cemeteries have been found in the Bregalnica plain, most notably the necropolis in the former seat of the Bishopric of Bregalnica at the Kale Krupište site and the cemetery by the Church of St. George in nearby Kozjak. The cemeteries near Orizari, Adži Begovo, Karaorman, Kočani, and Bargala are also datable to the 9th and 10th centuries.[285] This attests to the continuous inhabitation of the territory that would become the Bishopric of Morovizd in the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

In the territory of Strumica, once part of the Bishopric of Bregalnica, there are two notable necropolises, one in the immediate vicinity of the Strumica settlement on the site of an ancient necropolis and another in the nearby village of Bansko.[286] Both graveyards stood next to important sacral buildings – the medieval church dedicated to the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica and the church dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in Bansko. Archaeological research has yielded plenty of evidence of the continuous sacral use of the principal necropolis near Strumica's

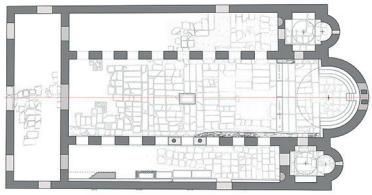
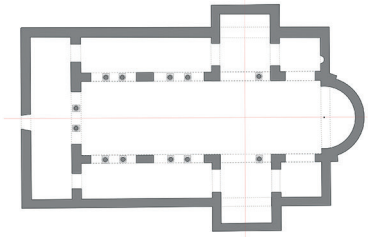
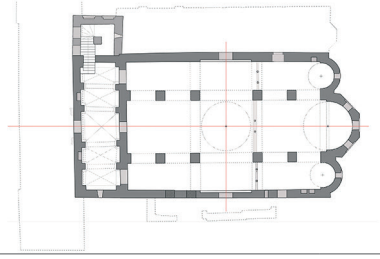
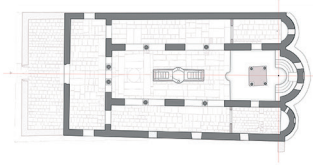
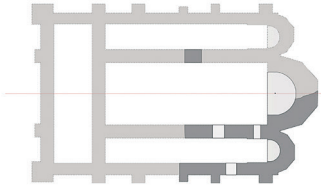
283 *Aleksova*, Prosek-Demir Kapija, 90–91; *Maneva*, Srednovekovnata nekropola, 187, 199–200; *Petrov*, Arheološki lokaliteti od 10 i 11 vek, 228, 231, 234.

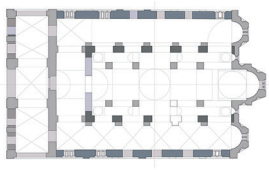
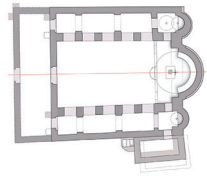
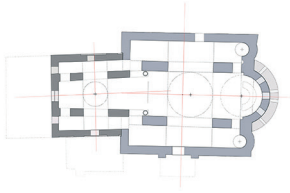
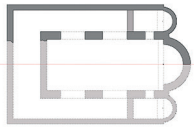
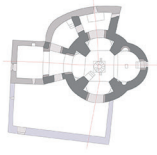
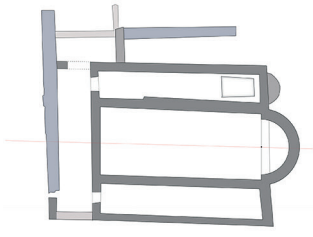
284 *Paisidou*, Edessa, 173.

285 *Aleksova*, Episkopijata na Bregalnica, 6–69, 85–87.

286 *Nacev*, Sv. 40 Sevastiski mačenici, 1–31; *Cvetanov*, Thermal Springs, 522, 524–525.

Fig. 10a–b. Naos areas of selected cathedrals and spaces available to the congregations in the territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid and St. Achilleos in Larissa

Bishopric	Cathedral	Total area of the church ground floor / Area of the naos available to the congregation	Remarks
1. Bishopric of Ohrid	Basilica of St. Achilleos, Little Prespa 	662.876m² / Approx. 507.1 m²–796.245m²	The lower approximate figure represents the area of the ground floor of the naos in front of the templon and with the narthex added. The maximum assumed area includes the entire naos with the hypothetical galleries in the first phase of the church. (*Moutsopoulos*, Ē basilikē tou Agio Achilleiou, Γ′, 5. ΠΙΝΑΞ Α′)
2. Bishopric of Berroia	Old Metropolis 	621.36m² / Approx. 430.61m²	The area available to the congregation includes the three-nave naos, narthex, and transept in front of the templon. (*Skiadaresēs*, Palia mētropolē, 273)
3. Bishopric of Ohrid	Hagia Sophia 	401.4m² / Approx. 339.17m²	The urban environment of the church dictated its smaller dimensions. The proposed area for the flock refers only to the ground floor of the church, which includes the naos and the narthex. (*Schellewald*, Sophienkirche in Ohrid, Pl. II, Ill)
4. Bishopric of Stagoi	Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God 	314.39m² / Approx. 221.3m²–275.64m²	The lower approximate figure does not include the exonarthex. (*Moutsopoulos*, Ē basilikē tou Agio Achilleiou, Γ′, 6. ΠΙΝΑΞ Α′; *Andrudēs – Anagnōstopoulos*, Ē byzantinē kathedra tōn Stagōn, 215)
5. Bishopric of Dristra	Patriarchal Cathedral Church 	370.45 m² / Approx. 236.43 m²	The reconstruction of the church plan is based on archaeologically confirmed remains of its foundations, without showing the church walls, which were thinner in the above-ground zone. (*Atanasov*, Ot episkopija kŭm samostojnata patriaršija, 72–73)
6. Bishopric of Servia	St. Demetrios 	246.93m² / Approx. 188.33m²	The church is in a very confined space – on a ravine within a fortress. (*Karagiannē*, Episkopikoi naoi, P1. 41, 42)

Bishopric	Cathedral	Total area of the church ground floor / Area of the naos available to the congregation	Remarks
7. Bishopric of Prizren	Virgin Ljeviška 	370.94m² / Approx. 235.34m²	The calculated area available to the congregation includes the entire naos west of the templon and the narthex prior to its renovation in the 14th century. (*Čanak-Medić – Todić*, Bogorodica Ljeviška, 38, Fig. 31)
8. Bishopric of Morovizd	Crkvište – Manastirište site in Morovizd 	320.17m² / Approx. 208.27m²	The proposed figure refers to the area of the entire three-nave naos in front of the templon and narthex. (*Trajkovski*, Morodviškata episkopija, 282)
9. Bishopric of Strumica	St. Leontius at Vodoča 	224.7m² / Approx. 161.62m²	The area refers to the final stage, when the monastery church encompassed two churches, i.e. when the western smaller church became the narthex of the larger eastern church. (*Miljković-Pepek*, Vodoča, 23, Fig.3)
10. Bishopric of Moglena	Basilica *intra muros* 	220.1 m² / Approx. 140.84m²	The reconstruction of the church plan is based on the archaeologically researched northern half of the basilica within the fortress enclosure of Moglena. (*Evgenidou*, Anaskaphes, 65)
11. Bishopric of Ras	Sts. Peter and Paul 	83.29m² / Approx. 61.235 m²	The small area intended for the faithful in the rotunda of St. Peter includes a trefoil nave without an altar apse and a narthex with two northern chambers on the ground floor. (*Marković – Vojvodić*, Church of the Holy Apostles, 7, Fig. 3)
12. Metropolis of Larissa	Basilica of St. Achilleos 	385.9m² / Approx. 253.03m²	The depth of the naos, which was intended for the gathering of believers in the basilica on the acropolis hill in Larissa, had to be limited by the templon and the length of the masonry-built tomb in the north aisle (proskomidia). (*Sythiakakē-Kritsimallē,* Leipsana gliptou, 461, P1.1)

ramparts, at the site of the ruins of the church dedicated to the Martyrs of Tiberiopolis, starting from an unidentified classical structure with sumptuous mosaic floors. Atop the ruins of this structure, a Late Antique funerary basilica was built in a cluster of 23 recorded masonry vaulted tombs. In the Early Medieval period, a shrine dedicated to the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis emerged on the ruins of this sacral complex, with a frescoed crypt from the first half of the 10th century.[287] The long-term use of the necropolis next to the Church of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis and expansions of the cemetery in later periods show that the city of Strumica and its broader area were continuously inhabited. Although its population may have fluctuated, this evidence attests to the region's demographic and economic vitality: existing churches were restored and maintained, with new prestigious sacral edifices built under Byzantine rule (Veljusa, the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in Bansko, and others).

Another good example of the existence of modest churches and necropolises near villages is the region of Razlog in the Bishopric of Velbăžd (the Šipotsko site near modern Bansko). This village cemetery with a small chapel was actively used from the 10th to the 13th century.[288]

Unlike this modest sacral complex, the medieval cemetery near the Moglena fortress ramparts has been archaeologically researched. In the enclosure, which measures over 4 hectares, a cathedral basilica with a *synthronon* in its apse has been partially examined.[289] The necropolis lay beyond the fortress walls next to a cemetery church of the prestigious free-cross type. North of the church, 18 graves have been researched, including five belonging to children. In the church itself, a representative masonry tomb, once covered with a stone slab, was researched, while an imposing vaulted tomb was unearthed west of the entrance to the nave, which held the remains of three deceased persons interred on top of each other in different periods. So far, 53 graves have been researched, including 13 used for children's burials, with the reuse of graves noted in 11 cases. The diverse and sumptuous grave goods collected during research include a cruciform reliquary with a relief of the Crucifixion on one side and the Mother of God on the other, datable to the 8th or 9th century. This valuable item seems more likely to be a local family heirloom than a reliable indicator of the necropolis' antiquity. Both the cathedral and the cruciform church at Moglena are currently thought to have been erected sometime from the 10th to the 12th century and probably underwent multiple stages. The use of Late Antique spolia in the cemetery church (segments of a pillar and the sanctuary barrier), the cathedral basilica in the fortress, and the cross-shaped reliquary are taken as evidence of the continuous inhabitation of Moglena and its surroundings.[290] That tells us that the choice of Moglena as an episcopal seat facilitated the demographic and economic development of the Moglena region in the Byzantine era, gradually overcoming the effects of the fortress's wartime devastation.

287 *Rujak et al*., Strumica, 49–55. See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I, 110sq.

288 *Georgieva*, Church Architecture, 361–364.

289 *Evgenidou*, Servia and Moglena, 18.

290 *Evgenidou*, Anaskaphes, 63–68.

In addition to the necropolises near medieval churches, archaeological research has unearthed cemeteries near Early Byzantine ruins, whose formation may have been planned or spontaneous. A Slavic cemetery in Bitola (10th–11th centuries), in the territory of former Herakleia, next to Basilica D, has been archaeologically researched. This necropolis formed around the ruins of an Early Byzantine basilica.[291] In Prosek, an Early Medieval Slavic burial site with the remains of a Late Antique fortress was found at Markovi Kuli (9th–10th centuries).[292]

Besides the important churches in the fortresses and episcopal seats, there must have been numerous parish and village churches in the rural surroundings of the fortresses, as well as a number of monasteries. Parts of the rural regions of Pelagonia, Moliskos, and Soskos, as well as Moglena, Vodena, and Ostrovos, were ravaged in the war of 976–1018. If the punitive raids of the imperial forces aimed to undermine the economic power of the enemy and the local population, we can assume that the rural churches and monasteries did not escape plundering, which they had rarely done during Tzimiskes' campaign in Bulgaria.[293]

Future archaeological research will, no doubt, complete the picture of the settlements and population of the areas in the central Balkans that became the bishoprics of the Ohrid Church after 1018. For now, suffice it to say that some regions had a more favorable demographic landscape, especially if they were conducive to farming, cattle herding, and manufacture. Generally, the territories where the Bulgarian military organization and the diocesan structure of the Archbishopric of Ohrid are known to have overlapped seem to have been more densely populated. The demographic landscape of the northern regions in the Danubian Plain raises some doubts. Even though the sources attest to some fortified settlements, there is nothing to give us a glimpse into the inhabitation of their hinterlands. As noted above, Basil II may have wanted his ecclesiastical policy and tax exemptions to the local bishops to boost the economic development of those regions, gradually improving the demographic landscape of the borderlands exposed to frequent incursions of various tribes from the north.

The demographic landscape of the central Balkans changed over time, and the population density of some regions fluctuated depending on their exposure to large-scale devastation in the wartime period, leading to either spontaneous or planned depopulation, e.g., in the broader areas of Moglena, Vodena, Servia, Kastoria, and others. Although we cannot say how the adverse effects of this depopulation were dealt with, there is information to suggest that the population of some regions managed to recover. Besides Moglena, an illustrative case is Vodena, whose inhabitants were uprooted and replaced by a garrison, transforming the fortress into a military base, which is why it was probably excluded from the Archbishopric's initial diocesan structure under Basil II. The researched necropolis, with children inhumed in one-fourth of 133 graves, suggests that Vodena partially rebounded demographically, and that the Vodena

291 *Maneva*, Srednovekovna nekropola, 196–197.

292 *Pašić*, Iskopavanja, 157–158.

293 Leo Diaconus, 148; Scylitzes, 304.

region regained its demographic vitality during the Byzantine era. The same applies to Moglena, although its necropolis has yet to be comprehensively excavated and examined. Grave reuse and the age of the persons interred in the necropolis (with 13 out of 75 graves belonging to children) indicate the vitality of the population that lived in this fertile agrarian region.[294]

In some regions, the demographic situation did not improve because the Slavic population displaced from their homelands during the war returned, but because members of other ethnic groups settled there. For instance, we know of the planned settlement of the Cumans and Pechenegs in the Moglena region – the very heart of Samuel's Bulgaria – in the late 11th century.[295] These nomadic tribes, which were in the habit of crossing the Danube and raiding the interior of the Byzantine Balkans, contributed to restoring the demographic situation in the broad territory from Serdica to Niš to Ovče Pole to Bregalnica, where the Pechenegs settled en masse.[296] In other words, by the late 11th century, the territories of the bishoprics of Serdica, Niš, Velbăžd, Morovizd, and Moglena had a different demographic structure than they had had upon the establishment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Those changes were equally challenging for the Empire's military administration and ecclesiastical organization, which had no qualms about integrating various ethnic groups into its diocesan structure. The Vlachs and the Vardariot Turks (*Vardariotai*) are specifically listed in Basil's second *sigillion* as the suffragans of the archbishop of Ohrid. This status was not granted to other ethnic groups in the Archbishopric's framework, but the Church nevertheless strove to integrate them into the local population of the existing bishoprics.

VI. From *Pax Basiliana* to *Pax Byzantina*

A comparison of Basil II's Balkan policy with that of John I Tzimiskes reveals the full magnitude and weight of Basil's concessions to the subdued Bulgarians in the post-1018 period. Tzimiskes' conquest of Bulgaria was an unexpected byproduct of the Russo-Byzantine war for domination in the Balkans. Tzimiskes identified the Bulgarian state with its capital city and the bearer of the imperial title. For the Byzantines, the conquest of the Bulgarian political center, Preslav, and the dethronement of Emperor Boris II, who traded his imperial title for the Byzantine honorary dignity of *magistros*, meant the end of the Bulgarian Empire. This success was celebrated with a spectacular triumphal procession in Constantinople in 971, and the Bulgarian crown was laid on the altar at Hagia Sophia, marking the real and symbolic fall of the First Bulgarian Empire.[297]

But Tzimiskes did not stop at the pomp and pageantry for the crowds of Constantinople. He proceeded to obliterate all traces of the Bulgarian ethnic and political identity, doing away with the term "Bulgaria" in the military-administrative system

294 *Evgenidou*, Servia and Moglena, 18.

295 For the Cumans in 12th-century Moglena, see two documents for the Lavra Monastery, *Praktikon* of Andronikos Vatatzes (1181) and *Prostaxis* of Andronikos I Komnenos (1184), *Bartusis*, Land and Privilege, 50–58.

296 Scylitzes, 459. See the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I, 424–425.

297 See *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 47–61.

the Byzantines established in the territories that had formerly belonged to the Bulgarian Empire. Instead, the emperor renamed cities as another way of glorifying his unexpected victory. The Bulgarian capital was renamed Ioannopolis in the conqueror's honor, and Dorostolon, the seat of the Bulgarian patriarch, was renamed Theodoropoulis after St. Theodore Stratelates.[298] Although these new names proved short-lived, they still reveal Tzimiskes' intention to restructure the territory of former Bulgaria according to a pattern that solely reflected the view from Constantinople. The *Escorial Taktikon* records a string of new *strategides*, created as a result of the conquest of Bulgarian territories or the reorganization of the old Byzantine frontier strip in the Balkans. None of those new *strategides* bore a name that evoked the Bulgarian Empire or its Slavic population. The only preserved Slavic name was Drugubitia, but this region had been integrated under this name into the Byzantine administrative system even before Tzimiskes.[299] Tzimiskes' ecclesiastical organization followed the same pattern. There could be no patriarch without an emperor, so the Bulgarian Patriarchate was replaced by a metropolis, with Ioannopolis as its seat, under the Church of Constantinople. Also, due to tighter Byzantine control in the borderlands, some formerly Bulgarian bishoprics fell under the jurisdiction of the neighboring Greek metropolitan bishops and, by extension, under the Church of Constantinople.[300] It seemed that Tzimiskes' victory over Sviatoslav and his unexpected subjugation of Bulgaria marked the Empire's organized return to the Balkans. That, however, was but an illusion.

The local population and the secular and clerical elites of the First Bulgarian Empire vehemently rejected this imposed state of affairs, a byproduct of the Russo-Byzantine conflict in Bulgaria's territory. The relocation of the Bulgarian patriarch to areas beyond Byzantine control (first from Dristra to Serdica and on to southwestern Macedonia after 976) showed that the state and church could not be reduced to their capital cities or identified with them.

The full scope of the Bulgarians' defiance and rejection of Byzantine authority became apparent as soon as Tzimiskes died. The rebellion of the *Kometopouloi* broke out in southwestern Macedonia and spread to nearby Byzantine border fortresses; in the next few years, the rebels' raids reached the Peloponnesus, as well as the western, northern, and eastern parts of the Balkans.

Basil II faced organized and fierce resistance from the local population in the tenth year of his reign. Hoping to prove himself a competent general in the eyes of his military elite, Basil launched his first Balkan campaign, changing little in Tzimiskes' strategy. This large-scale and costly expedition (986) targeted the strong border

298 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.9. For a discussion of Theodoroupolis, see *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 132 et n. 274, 139 et n. 304.

299 The *strategides* of Berroia, Edessa, and Drugubitia were established before 976, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.32, 267.6.29, 356–357, 360. It is possible that their founding had to do with the so-called first uprising of the *Kometopouloi*, which may have broken out as early as 969, and that Byzantium established those *strategides* on the very frontier toward Bulgaria in the aftermath of this rebellion, having quashed it, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 44–48; *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 51 n. 19.

300 On Tzimiskes' ecclesiastical policy in the Balkans, see *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 58–59.

fortress of Serdica and ended in the crushing defeat of the imperial army in the Battle of the Gates of Trajan (Ihtiman). Not only did Serdica prove untouchable, but, to the emperor's humiliation, even the minor stronghold of Moreia proved strong enough to resist. Kekaumenos reports that the "embittered" Basil retreated, and the fortress defenders remained "free and undefeated".[301] At that point, Basil II must have realized that a minor fortress with a well-organized defense could withstand an attack just as well as a big one. That forced him to change his war strategy. His new approach against the recalcitrant Bulgarians meant that every fortress mattered, especially those controlling local roads and access points to certain areas and fortresses. He would persistently pursue this strategy for the following thirty years or so.

And yet, neither Basil's determination nor the decades-long exposure of this territory to the ravages of war broke the tenacious resistance of the Slavic population loyal to the traditions of independent Bulgaria. Byzantium proved incapable of taking control of the expansive central Balkans by arms. Basil's frequent, almost incessant expeditions, usually targeting Bulgarian strongholds, disrupted the local population's daily life but could not ensure a firm and continued Byzantine presence, not even in the broader areas of the fortresses the emperor had managed to take. Byzantine victories in the handful of pitched battles against the Bulgarian army were insufficient to guarantee the Empire's lasting domination in the regions where Bulgarian resistance had lost some of its intensity. The human resources of Samuel's Bulgaria proved adequate for replenishing its manpower, concentrated in inaccessible fortified areas.

The topography of the central Balkans, with its mountainous terrain and long and narrow river valleys, gullies, and gorges, was better suited to Bulgarian resistance than Byzantine offensives. This terrain did not assume a defensive role for the Empire until the post-1018 period.[302] Byzantine historians have left descriptions of Bulgarian fortresses, most of which stood at inaccessible locations, surrounded by gorges, steep ravines, and river beds, e.g., Vodena, Moglena, Servia, Melnik, Strumica, Berat, Tmoros.[303] Archaeological research continues to add to our knowledge of the number of those fortresses, supplementing the picture of a shrewdly used strategic synergy between the terrain and fortifications. The territory Basil II fought to conquer had another notable geographical feature: it was dotted with lakes, on whose shores stood Ohrid, Prespa, Kastoria, and the lakeside fortresses on the *Via Egnatia*, such as Petrisk, Ostrovos, and others. The defense of nearby Bulgarian strongholds made clever use of those lakes and their waters. In a word, a territory with such a topography was difficult to take and even more difficult – if not impossible – to keep under lasting and stable control unless its population was pacified.

Besides the terrain, another factor that made the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria so challenging was the way wars were fought at the time. Warfare logistics involved

301 Kekavmen, 198.

302 Cf. *Strässle*, Krieg, 103–147; *Marinow*, Mountain warfare, 95–108.

303 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 111. For geographical descriptions in the works of Byzantine authors, see the chapter *The Balkans between Byzantium and Bulgaria*, I, 10–14.

securing provisions for the beginning of a campaign; once those were gone, food and other supplies had to be pillaged from the assailed territory and the local population. This population, predominantly Slavic, was loyal to the idea of independent Bulgaria. In some regions, the Byzantines faced a high concentration of hostile locals, forcing Basil II to resort to uprooting and resettling them elsewhere in several cases (Servia, Moglena, Loggas, Vodena, and the Bulgarian fortresses in Thessaly). This measure was partially effective only when followed by bringing in other ethnic groups to populate the area. Byzantium did not have the capacity to launch a planned colonization campaign amidst the war.

Even though Byzantium's economic and human resources were superior to those of the restorers of the Bulgarian Empire, the war weighed heavily on the imperial treasury. Hiring mercenaries, either domestic or foreign, bringing in the machinery needed for siege warfare, overcoming terrain obstacles, producing siege engines, undermining the walls of Bulgarian fortresses, and the planned leveling of the taken strongholds to wipe out their potential to become hotbeds of resistance involved enormous expenses Byzantium could not keep covering from its own coffers for four decades. On top of that, building new minor forts at strategic points, reinforcing the taken fortresses, and hiring garrisons to man the conquered strongholds, which now assumed a defensive role in the war, all required significant funding.[304] This strain on Byzantium's resources forced it to recoup some of those costs by constantly pressuring the local population. That meant the locals were exposed to twofold pressure, bearing the burden of the resistance to Byzantine rule and being the target of the imperial army's plundering and punitive raids.

Basil II's imperative in the inaccessible central Balkans was to clear and secure the principal roads and routes, such as the *Via Egnatia*, preventing a too-high concentration of Slavic population. It seems that Byzantium managed to take control of only the main roads during the war but not those in the deeper interior of the Balkans. That was why the emperor resorted to razing some fortresses and resettling the local population. Conspicuously, this drastic measure was applied in no more than a handful of cases, typically for the fortresses that stood on important roads (Moglena, Loggas, Bosograd, Setena). Otherwise, Basil II preferred to keep and reinforce a taken fortress, reusing it as a Byzantine base for further conquests.

Taking a fortress allowed the conquerors to establish control in its broader area. That, however, did not automatically subdue the local population, which tended to regroup and join other centers of resistance, even if it had been forcibly displaced, as attested by the example of Vodena, whose inhabitants were twice punished by being sent to Boleron.

Despite the local population's staunch resistance, the Balkans were finally pacified in 1019. Several converging factors enabled Basil's penetration into the Balkans. The defended Bulgarian territory was largely decentralized and the weakening of

304 During the war in the Balkans, Basil II also faced civil wars and led some campaigns in the East, *Holmes*, Basil II.

centralized governance gradually chipped away at Bulgarian resistance. Samuel was the only figure authoritative enough to keep the elite together. The unity of politically influential figures in Bulgaria began to crumble after he died in 1014, particularly during the strife between the members of two dynastic branches: Gabriel Radomir, Samuel's son and heir, and John Vladislav, Aaron's son. All of these challenges and the clash with John Vladimir, Prince of Diokleia, in 1016 make it clear that the Bulgarian leadership had differing views on continuing the war against Byzantium and how it should be waged. These conflicts affected not only the ruling classes of Samuel's Bulgaria (whose members supported one faction or another)[305] but also the Slavic population. For example, the assassination of John Vladimir, Prince of Diokleia, at Prespa could only have alienated much of the Serbian population, pushing it away from the cause of a joint restoration of independent Bulgaria.[306]

The fact that the members of the Bulgarian military elite were so firmly entrenched at their fortresses made them quite autonomous from central authority, allowing them to independently decide whether they would surrender or continue to fight against the Byzantines. Their fortresses were isolated centers of resistance, and no mobile army came to assist the fortress defenders and help ward off Byzantine attacks or sieges, as the accounts by Byzantine authors show. Since they were left to fend for themselves, the Bulgarian commanders' resistance depended on the available resources and their personal assessment of how sensible it was to continue the anti-Byzantine struggle.[307] This left room for Basil II to complement his military pressure with political deals offered to fortress commanders.

The case of Berroia revealed the pattern that the surrender of the members of the military elite followed. Fortress commanders agreed to renounce the restoration of their independent state in exchange for Byzantine honorary titles and sometimes offices, as well as other financial privileges, taking this opportunity to become members of the conqueror's ruling classes. Byzantine historians report that the surrender of fortresses had begun under Samuel (Berroia, Kolydros, Skopje, Dyrrachion)[308] only to intensify as the war dragged on. However, the mass surrender of more Bulgarian strongholds than ever, dotted over the broad territory of what was once Samuel's Bulgaria, did not come until John Vladislav died at Dyrrachion in February 1018. Although his eldest son, Prousianos, aspired to succeed him, the surrender of other members of the imperial family and powerful fortress commanders showed that the idea of continuing to fight for an independent Bulgaria had run its course.

As noted above, Byzantine historians are silent on the role of Bulgarian ecclesiastical dignitaries in the surrender of military commanders. We know that the Bulgarian patriarch negotiated with Basil II about the surrender of Maria, John

305 Scylitzes, 353.

306 Gesta Regum Sclavorum, 134–136.

307 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Fortresses, 846.

308 The case of Dyrrachion, an old Byzantine possession temporarily integrated into Samuel's Bulgaria, is peculiar for multiple reasons, *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 119–120, 121.

Vladislav's widow, and other members of the ruling family.[309] This suggests that the surrender of the members of the Bulgarian military elite could not have come about without the involvement of the senior clergy. The territorial overlapping of bishoprics with the regions where Bulgarian military strongholds are known to have existed seems to support this. That would, in turn, mean that the clergy had shared the fate of the military commanders and the local population during the war. Besides, reports of the Bulgarian patriarch's post-971 relocations indicate that the Bulgarian Church was the most organized actor that emphatically rejected Tzimiskes' dissolution of the Bulgarian state and church. Having preserved its organization, the Bulgarian Church could legitimize a new ruler and his dynasty. We could go as far as to say that the Bulgarian Church was the keeper of the idea of Bulgarian independence after 971 and during the war of 976–1018.

What factors may have influenced the Bulgarian clergy to give up on the idea of Bulgarian political and ecclesiastical independence after having steadfastly defended it for decades? The war destruction and the dwindling of Bulgarian military strength made it difficult to keep the church organization running. The devastation of church possessions and constant pressure on the flock threatened to permanently undermine the authority of the bishops and diocesan clergy, especially in areas where the Byzantines had taken fortified military bases. Although no information on this has reached us, one might wonder what happened, for instance, with the bishop of Vodena (Edessa) in 1001 or, even more intriguingly, in 1015 when Basil brought in the *kontaratoi*, sent away the local population, and leveled and burned the fortress of Moglena, which had strategically propped up Vodena? Did the bishop of Vodena, a bishopric listed in the St. Achilleos inscription under its Greek name, flee to another Bulgarian stronghold, or did he side with the new master? While these questions are impossible to answer, there is no doubt that similar scenarios unfolded in other Bulgarian military and diocesan centers, weakening the Bulgarian Church during the war.

The death of John Vladislav was a heavy blow to the independent Bulgarian Empire. He seems to have invested considerable effort into homogenizing the Bulgarian elite and had no qualms about physically eliminating his rivals, killing Gabriel Radomir in 1015 and John Vladimir a year later. These assassinations reveal that Bulgarian society was deeply divided and that those rifts must have had roots in the period when the four *Kometopouloi* brothers took the helm of the uprising.[310] Although Prousianos wanted to continue the anti-Byzantine struggle, he lacked support among the Bulgarian generals and, probably, in ecclesiastical circles. Thus, when John Vladislav died, the state was left leaderless, and the Church lost its principal ally in the struggle for independence.

The war had shown that the Byzantines could not take all of the Bulgarian strongholds, especially the strong fortresses with natural defenses; similarly, the Bulgarians had realized by 1018 that they could not win back the territories Samuel had temporarily

309 Scylitzes, 357.

310 Samuel killed his brother Aaron, John Vladislav's father, *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 79–88.

conquered in his lifetime. By 1018, Basil had managed to surround the regions in the interior of the Balkans where the Bulgarians had entrenched themselves in the last years of the war. Regardless, the course of the conflict was uncertain for the Byzantines in terms of both duration and outcome. Both sides were ready for a compromise in 1018.

Personally negotiating with Basil II, the Bulgarian military commanders ensured they and their families had a high social status in the new order. This allowed the emperor to remove them from the territories they had previously commanded if he needed to. Some were sent to the East or to Constantinople; others were probably permitted to remain, although we cannot know if they continued to reside at their fortresses or resettled in another region or town in the Balkans. As we have seen, we only know that Thessalonike was an appealing choice for some commanders.[311] Nearly all Bulgarian military commanders became members of the patrician class, but very few seem to have been given active service to accompany their new social standing and financial privileges.[312] Basil thus dismantled the Bulgarian military class, paving the way for its integration.

Basil II held parallel talks with the Bulgarian patriarch, John. The purpose of those negotiations was to decide not only the future status of Patriarch John in Byzantium but also the entire Bulgarian ecclesiastical organization. John got Basil to make him the head of the future archbishopric – an autocephalous one, no less, which meant that he enjoyed the highest level of independence he could possibly have in the Empire. That highlighted the direct link between the former head of the Bulgarian Church, now an autocephalous bishop, and the Byzantine emperor, the founder of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. In addition, the negotiations specified the number and borders of the suffragan bishoprics, as well as the exact number of the *klerikoi* and *paroikoi* to be exempted from taxation.

Another notable aspect of Basil's negotiations with the Bulgarian clergy was that the initial territory John got Basil to grant to the Archbishopric exceeded the areas the Bulgarians controlled in 1018. The first *sigillion*, probably issued in 1019, gave the former patriarch jurisdiction over 17 bishoprics with seats at Ohrid, Kastoria, Glavinitza, Moglena, Bitola, Strumica, Morozvid, Velbăžd, Serdica, Niš, Braničevo, Belgrade, Sirmium, Skopje, Prizren, Lipljan, and Servia. At least three of those bishoprics are known to have been in Byzantine hands until 1019 (Servia from 1001, Moglena from 1015, and Sirmium from 1019), and others had surrendered to Basil in 1018 (only the surrenders of Morovizd, Bitola, Lipljan, and Strumica are attested in the sources, but the list was presumably longer). That shows that John's negotiating position was not that of a defeated party and that Basil II was not in a situation to impose the 1018 state of affairs on the ground as the negotiating framework.

The first round of talks failed to satisfy the ambitions of John and his bishops, so Basil II increased the Archbishopric of Ohrid's territory by issuing two more charters,

311 Scylitzes, 345, 364. *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 120.

312 *Dudek*, Elity, 43–71; *Kanev*, Awarding, 455–473; *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 109–128. See the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I, 411–413, 446–447.

curbing the interests of the Greek metropolitan bishops of Thessalonike, Larissa, Dyrrachion, and Naupaktos. The second *sigillion* (1020) expanded the Archbishopric's jurisdiction to another 13 bishoprics (Dristra, Vidin, Ras, Horaia, Tzernik, Chimara, Dryinoupolis, Bela, Bouthroton, Ioannina, Kozel, Petra, and Rigoi), some of which had been part of the Bulgarian Church in earlier periods – under Samuel and Emperor Peter, as Basil II noted in the charter. Tellingly, the second *sigillion* followed barely a year after the first, suggesting that Archbishop John had intended from the outset to restore the borders of the Bulgarian Church in their full scope. Insisting on the expansion of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, John seems to have been guided not only by the diocesan structure of the First Bulgarian Empire but also by the distribution of the Slavic population. The Byzantine enclaves surrounded by ethnic Slavs, e.g., Bouthroton or Stagoi, were no less important to him. These generous territorial concessions were enshrined in the third *sigillion*, giving John jurisdiction over the bishoprics of Berroia and Stagoi and confirming Servia as a suffragan of the Ohrid Church.

The known territories of the bishoprics show that the Archbishopric *de facto* encompassed almost all major military centers of Samuel's Bulgaria. Thus, most of the territory of Samuel's Empire was replicated in the diocesan structure of the Ohrid Church. In a situation when the members of the Bulgarian military class had lost their political influence and power after agreeing terms with Basil II, the traditions of independent Bulgaria were preserved in two ways: in the ecclesiastical organization, i.e., the Archbishopric of Ohrid, and in the military-administrative district named "Bulgaria," established by Basil II with Skopje as its center.[313] The former preserved the identity of the Slavic population, the former subjects of the Bulgarian rulers, and the latter reflected the Byzantine perspective of including the local population in the Empire's administrative system.

Despite the district's evocative name, Basil II's military-administrative policy was guided solely by his Empire's interests. What leniency he showed to the local population, e.g., retaining the fiscal policy of independent Bulgaria,[314] was only meant to pacify the taken territories more effectively. The marginalization of politically influential figures of Bulgarian society, who had been disarmed and resettled, must have been a facilitating factor. The only actor who kept his influence was Archbishop John with his clergy. In the post-1018 period, they renounced their roles as supporters of independent Bulgaria, preserving their institutional distinctiveness rooted in the Slavic ethnic and cultural identity. The privileges Basil II granted to the Archbishopric of Ohrid suggest that John's authority stemmed from his palpable influence on the local population. Relying on his negotiation skills – the same diplomatic acumen that had served him so well in his talks with the Byzantine emperor, he seems to have been capable of persuading the subjects of Samuel's Bulgaria to accept en masse the new regime and the new ecclesiastical organization. Preserving the ecclesiastical structure intact in a

313 See the chapter *Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification*, I, 395–404.

314 Scylitzes, 412.

territory with a predominantly Slavic population must have been an acceptable way out for the inhabitants of the central Balkans, worn out by the decades-long war.

Of course, we must not forget that the Bulgarian Church had evolved from the Byzantine and developed under its influence, regardless of the peculiarities that inevitably emerged during this evolution.[315] Basil's intense and unwavering focus on the ecclesiastical organization in the Balkans, including placing the Bulgarian Church under his patronage, tells us that he thought of it as an authentic Byzantine legacy.[316]

The established Byzantine-Bulgarian peace realistically reflected the balance of power, which would not have drastically shifted to the advantage of either party even if the war had continued. The privileges won in direct negotiations between the Byzantine emperor and the Bulgarians, who included all classes of Bulgarian society – commoners, political figures, military elites, and, in particular, the clergy – blurred the line between the victorious and the defeated. Regardless of the long-term merit of Tzimiskes' policy in the Balkans, his 971 campaign and its aftermath unambiguously showed who had emerged victorious and who had been defeated. That was not the case with Basil II's war.[317] He left a personal mark on the peace process, laying the ground for the co-existence of the *Rhomaioi* with the Slavic population, starting from the one thing they had in common – Christianity. The establishment of *pax Basiliana* paved the way for *pax Byzantina*, ushering in a new chapter in the development of the central Balkans in the post-1025 period, characterized by growing Byzantine influence in all spheres of power and the suppression of Bulgarian traditions.

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315 See the chapter *Bulgarian Church Architecture and Art: From Origins to 1018*, I.

316 The importance Basil II assigned to ecclesiastical policy in integrating other peoples into the Empire is also apparent from the fact that his era saw the emergence of the earliest monastic communities διαφόρων γλωσσῶν on Mount Athos, *Krsmanović*, Značaj Atona i Ohridske arhiepiskopije, 87–112; cf. *Eadem*, Mount Athos.

317 Byzantine authors seemed much more impressed by Tzimiskes' triumph, *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 75–78.

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Provincial Administration in the Service of Pacification

During the war against Samuel's state, a mobile army led personally by the emperor or one of his generals ensured a Byzantine presence in the central Balkans. After 1018, the professional mobile troops withdrew from this territory, and representatives of the new provincial administration assumed responsibility for defending the newly acquired possessions and integrating the local population. Constantinople's primary objective in the conquered parts of the central Balkans was to pacify the locals and include them in the Byzantine military-administrative system, while economically exploiting the territories they inhabited. The structure and nature of the newly established governance and the instruments of power it wielded were different from the provincial administration introduced in other parts of the Balkans in the previous centuries – in the old Byzantine themes in the southern areas of the Balkans (the themes of Thrace, Macedonia, Strymon, Thessalonike, Hellas, Peloponnesus, Kephalonia, and Nikopolis) or the western coastlands (the themes of Dyrrachion and Dalmatia), which had a developed system of governance. In contrast to these, new, highly militarized districts emerged from the Empire's annexations after Bulgaria's surrender and the conquests of Serbia, Sirmium, and Croatia, where our sources describe atypical provincial governance adapted to local conditions. The main differences between these models were:

- the level of the presence of military and civilian administrative organs,
- the process of appointing provincial officials – recruiting them from the ranks of local magnate families or appointing functionaries dispatched by the central government,
- different fiscal and economic systems involving privileges or heavier taxation,
- ecclesiastical organization – a local church either enjoyed autocephaly or was a suffragan of the Church of Constantinople.

On top of this, the boundary between individual branches of power in the new and old themes was quite porous, with military organization being the most flexible. In some cases, a joint military command was installed, straddling the territories of old and new districts, such as in the *strategides* of Thrace and Ioannopolis,[1] Thrace and

1 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 239–250, 290.

Dorostolon,[2] and, later, the doukate of Thrace and Mesopotamia (of the West),[3] the doukate of Thessalonike and Bulgaria,[4] and the doukate of Thessalonike, Bulgaria, and Serbia[5]. An intriguing example is Philippopolis, a city that had been part of the First Bulgarian Empire but remained under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople. The Byzantines captured the city in the late 10th century. Although an old Bulgarian possession, Philippopolis was not part of the Theme of Bulgaria, which does not seem to have included the old Bulgarian capital cities in the northeastern Balkans either.

Notably, the borders of the districts fluctuated over time, expanding or shrinking. An illustrative case is the commander of the old Byzantine theme of Dyrrachion, whose jurisdiction in the late 11th century stretched as far as the Vardar – deep into the territory once covered by Basil's Theme of Bulgaria.[6] Districts were merged (e.g., Niš, Braničevo, and Belgrade)[7] or partitioned as needed (the Theme of Bulgaria was divided into several new military-administrative divisions: Skopje, Niš, and so on)[8]. It is important to note that significant differences in the character of Byzantine administration emerged within both groups – old as well as new themes.

In establishing provincial organization within the newly acquired territories in the late 10th and early 11th centuries, as well as during subsequent reforms, Constantinople adhered to various guiding principles influenced by multiple factors. The internal political climate of the Empire significantly shaped the level of Byzantine presence in the Balkans. Additionally, international considerations affected the Byzantines' strategic approach in the region. Finally, the choice of methods employed by Constantinople depended on specific circumstances in the Byzantine-controlled areas of the Balkans, which included factors such as:

- *The method of incorporation: Whether an entity had been integrated into the Empire by force or by non-violent means (negotiations)*. A military victory enabled integration without conferring significant privileges, whereas peacefully persuading the enemy to recognize Byzantine supremacy typically required considerable concessions, as evidenced by the Balkan policies of Tzimiskes and Basil.
- *Atypical historical development and a distinct political identity.* These factors necessitated the implementation of specific principles when incorporating certain entities. This typically involved the formation of distinct thematic units with ethnic characteristics and the granting of privileges, a strategy most evident in the integration of Samuel's Bulgaria in 1018. During the Komnenian era, the peripheral regions of the Balkans supplanted the interior as the privileged part of the Peninsula.

2 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 259–277.

3 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 237–238.

4 *Zacos*, Seals II, no. 969.

5 *Swiencickyj*, Byzantinische Bleisiegel, no. 11, p. 439.

6 Theophylactus, Epistulae, no. 12, pp. 167, 169; no. 19, p. 195. See *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 151–152.

7 Cinnamus, 124 (Niš and Braničevo); Choniates, Historia, 101 (Braničevo and Belgrade).

8 DOSeals I, no. 30.1 (Skopje); Cinnamus, 124 (Niš and Braničevo); Choniates, Historia, 101 (Braničevo and Belgrade).

- *Mood of the local population*. If the locals put up continued and insurmountable resistance, the Empire resorted to violent methods, including forced displacement.
- *Demographic peculiarities*. Population density, along with the ethnic and religious composition, influenced the selection of the government model to be adopted. These considerations guided the arrangement of *strategides* and command centers, as well as the establishment of the ecclesiastical network.
- *Geostrategic position*. The proximity of the frontier affected the administrative structure of specific regions. Defending the frontier strip necessitated a larger military presence. Access to key routes and trade centers and geography (accessibility and defensibility) also influenced the choice of the local military-administrative government model.

Constantinople aimed to establish uniform governance throughout the Empire's territory and implement existing models where possible. However, in practice, new methods were frequently required. By analyzing these models and identifying their common features, the two centuries of Byzantine rule in the central Balkans (971/1018–1204) can be tentatively divided into five chronological stages:

- *Tzimiskes' age* – the period after the formal dissolution of the Bulgarian Empire in 971 and the establishment of control in the acquired territories. During this time, efforts were made to implement the administrative models used in the Empire's East without consideration for the local conditions, aiming to eliminate any remaining elements of Bulgarian political and ecclesiastical distinctiveness. The provincial administration system established by Tzimiskes remained in place until the mid-980s when the Kometopouloi rebellion wiped out its main components.
- *Basil's era* – the period dominated by the policy of making concessions and granting privileges that allowed Basil II to achieve lasting pacification. In the Bulgarian lands, this policy reached its climax with the establishment of an autocephalous church and the Theme of Bulgaria. Basil again resorted to constituting ethnic themes in the territory of subdued states in Serbia, Croatia, and Sirmium.
- *Post-Basilian age* – In the 1030s, Constantinople began gradually rescinding the so-called "Bulgarian privileges." This period saw drastic changes in economic policy, rebellions of the local population in the Balkans, and the revival of old Bulgarian and other aspirations to statehood.
- *Komnenian era* – From the late 11th century until the 1180s, Bulgaria was fully pacified. Amidst a radically changed international situation, the era of the Komnenoi shifted the focus of Byzantium's Balkan policy from Bulgaria to the borderlands (Anchialos, Dyrrachion, Dalmatia, the middle Danube), and the former Bulgarian political heart in Macedonia lost its strategic importance.
- *Post-Komnenian age* – From the 1180s to 1204, Byzantium gradually withdrew from its Balkan possessions. Hungary and Serbia both took chunks of the Byzantine territory in the 1180s, and Bulgaria restored its statehood in the northeastern Balkans at roughly the same time. Concurrently, Venice, the Normans, and

Germany all harbored growing designs on Byzantine possessions, culminating in the fall of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade and the nearly total collapse of Byzantine rule in the Balkans. The end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th centuries saw the rise of so-called local lords – Byzantine provincial governors who defected from the central authorities and became independent rulers of Byzantine possessions in the central Balkans.

These chronological stages in the evolution of the Byzantine administration in the central Balkans should be examined in relation to its role in the pacification and integration of the local population. It is important to trace how Constantinople implemented its objectives and how local communities responded to the Empire's policies. Additionally, an assessment of the effectiveness of the Byzantinization process in the central Balkans is warranted.

I. Tzimiskes' advance into the Balkans

Tzimiskes' victorious campaign against the Russian prince Sviatoslav in 971 ended with the unexpected annexation of Bulgaria and the installation of Byzantine garrisons in Preslav, Bulgaria's capital city, renamed Ioannopolis in the emperor's honor, and in other cities in the heart of the former Bulgarian empire. The main outcome of this campaign was the re-establishment of the Byzantine frontier on the lower Danube after three centuries of Bulgarian domination in this part of the Balkans. Bulgaria was seemingly defeated, but the process of its integration into the Byzantine administrative system had only begun.

In the centuries that preceded Tzimiskes' *reconquista*, Byzantium had sought gradually to reassert control in the Balkan Peninsula. As early as the mid-7th century, Constantinople launched large-scale campaigns against the Sclavinias, and the end of the same century saw the first anti-Bulgarian offensive. Emperors usually led these campaigns personally. When the offensive ended, in the absence of a large mobile army, the leading role in pacifying and integrating the locals passed onto the organs of thematic government, which began spreading gradually from the fringes to the interior of the Peninsula in the late 7th century. The process of integrating local communities typically began by including their chieftains in the Byzantine hierarchy headed by the emperor, followed by Christianization and the deployment of Byzantine officials in those communities.[9]

Tzimiskes was likely aware of how his predecessors had integrated the southern Balkan Sclavinias into the Byzantine military-administrative system. The cornerstone of this integration process was ethnic *archontiai* and ethnic themes – a model successfully applied to the Armenian principality of Taron a few years before Tzimiskes ascended to the throne.[10] Besides military campaigns, these expansionist projects relied heavily on

9 See the chapters *Byzantine Policy Toward "Barbarians" in the Southern Balkans from the 7th to the 10th Century and the Beginning of the Reconquista*, I and *Indirect Byzantinization: Bulgaria as a Case Study*, I.

10 On the status of Taron in the Byzantine thematic organization see *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.20; 355–356; ODB III, p. 2012 (*N. G. Garsoïan)*.

the diplomatic acumen of the Byzantine court. Nonetheless, John I Tzimiskes chose a different approach when introducing Byzantine governance in Bulgaria after 971.

Having taken Bulgaria with little resistance, the emperor set out to organize Byzantine rule with no regard for local specificities and the needs of the local population. He dethroned the Bulgarian ruler, dissolved the empire in a symbolic ceremony at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and placed governance of the newly taken territory firmly in the hands of Byzantine military officials, bypassing the local political elite. The Bulgarian autocephalous Church and its clergy fared no better.[11]

When Tzimiskes' campaign in the Balkans ended, his generals continued military operations in the central Balkans, capturing the Serbian state, Ras, and the fortress of Morava on the confluence of the Morava River and the Danube.[12] These overwhelming Byzantine victories and the subsequent subjugation of Bulgaria and Serbia must have had a ripple effect, encouraging the Croatian ruler Držislav to recognize Constantinople's suzerainty.[13]

The sources indicate that the Constantinopolitan administration aimed to replicate Eastern governance models in the Balkans. This involved a military organization based on a network of so-called minor *strategoi* (garrison commanders at fortresses), who were subordinate to the highest-ranking provincial tagmatic commanders (*doux*, *katepano*).[14]

During Tzimiskes' reign, four major military command centers of the highest rank were established in the Balkans, each led by a *doux* or *katepano*. In the old Byzantine territories, such centers were formed in Thessalonike[15] and Adrianople[16]. The other two centers were established in newly conquered regions: one in the heart of the former Bulgarian empire (Theodoroupolis/Dristra,[17] later known as Mesopotamia of the West[18]), and one in Ras[19], intended to control the Serbian ethnic and political areas.

Shortly after the Byzantine military triumph, the *katepano* of Theodoroupolis (Dristra's new yet short-lived name)[20] assumed supreme military command in the old Bulgarian lands. Then, mirroring the organization of governance on the Eastern frontier, the district of Mesopotamia of the West was formed, whose governor is attested

11 *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 47–61.

12 Gesta Regum Sclavorum, 116; DOSeals I, nos. 33.1, pp. 100–101; 36a.1, pp. 195–196.

13 Thomas Archidiaconus, 60. For more details, see *Komatina*, Byzantine Rule in Croatia, 12–17.

14 *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 173–180.

15 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 263.33.

16 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 263.34.

17 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 228–231.

18 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 263.31.

19 DOSeals I, no. 33.1, pp. 100–101.

20 Leo the Deacon reports that Tzimiskes, in a symbolic act of gratitude to St. Theodore Stratelates for his assistance in the war, renamed Dristra after the saint (Theodoroupolis), Leo Diaconus, 158. A century after Leo, Skylitzes claims that Tzimiskes gave the saint's name to the city of Euchaita in Asia Minor, where his relics were held, Scylitzes, 309. For arguments supporting the hypothesis that the renamed city was indeed Dristra, see *Oikonomidès*, Première occupation, 586–587.

in the *Escorial Taktikon*.[21] Most scholars place Mesopotamia of the West in the lower Danube,[22] with its seat at Little Preslav[23]. This command merged at some point with that of Thrace, since surviving seals attest to the office of the *doux* of Thrace and Mesopotamia.[24] The primary task of the *katepano*/*doux* of Mesopotamia of the West was to control the lower Danube, which was strategically important because of political and economic ties with the steppe tribes and states on the other side of the river.[25]

The *katepano* of Ras probably monitored the Serb-inhabited territories and the routes connecting the central Balkans to the west of the Peninsula and the middle course of the Danube. The newly established *Strategis* of Morava was the northernmost Byzantine military base in the Balkans and was probably reliant on the Byzantine command center in Ras.[26]

Besides these four top-ranking commands, garrisons headed by *strategoi* were installed at strategically important centers, primarily the districts in the old Bulgarian lands (Dristra,[27] Preslav[28] and Beroe[29]) targeted by Tzimiskes' offensive. These *strategides* were to fortify a frontier strip in the northeastern Balkans and bolster Byzantine presence in the heart of the former Bulgarian state.

The new *strategides* also controlled other strategic points: the *strategos* of New Strymon[30] controlled the Strymon Valley or, more specifically, its upper course, keeping an eye on Velbăžd and Serdica; the commands at Berroia,[31] Edessa,[32] and Drugubitia[33] protected the Thessalonian hinterlands from the hostile Slavic population of Macedonia, while the *Strategis* in Jericho[34] secured a land route between the themes of Dyrrachion and Nikopolis, which the Bulgarians had severed in the late 9th or early 10th century; the *strategos* of Morava[35] guarded the frontier with the Hungarians and controlled the road connecting the Danube Basin with the central Balkans.

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21 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 263.31.

22 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 363; *Oikonomidès*, Première occupation, 584–585; *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 41.

23 For different views about the location of this stronghold, see *Jordanov*, Corpus I, 145–148; *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 90–94.

24 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 237–238.

25 Seals of the *kommerkiarios* of Dristra and the *kommerkiarios* of Little Preslav attest to the economic significance of the lower Danube, DOSeals I, nos. 65.2, 78.1 – 3; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, 23.6–8. Suggestively, a Russian chronicle reports that Sviatoslav wanted to make Little Preslav his capital city "because it was where all luxuries converged: from the Greeks – gold, silk, wine, and various fruit; from Bohemia and Hungary – silver and horses, and fur, wax, honey, and slaves from Russia," Povest' vremennykh let, 48.

26 DOSeals I, no. 36a.1, pp. 195–196.

27 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 269.9; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, nos. 23.1–5.

28 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.9; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, nos. 35B.15–19; 38.1–2; 38A.3.

29 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.34; DOSeals I, no. 64.1; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, no. 18.1.

30 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 269.4; *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 283–288.

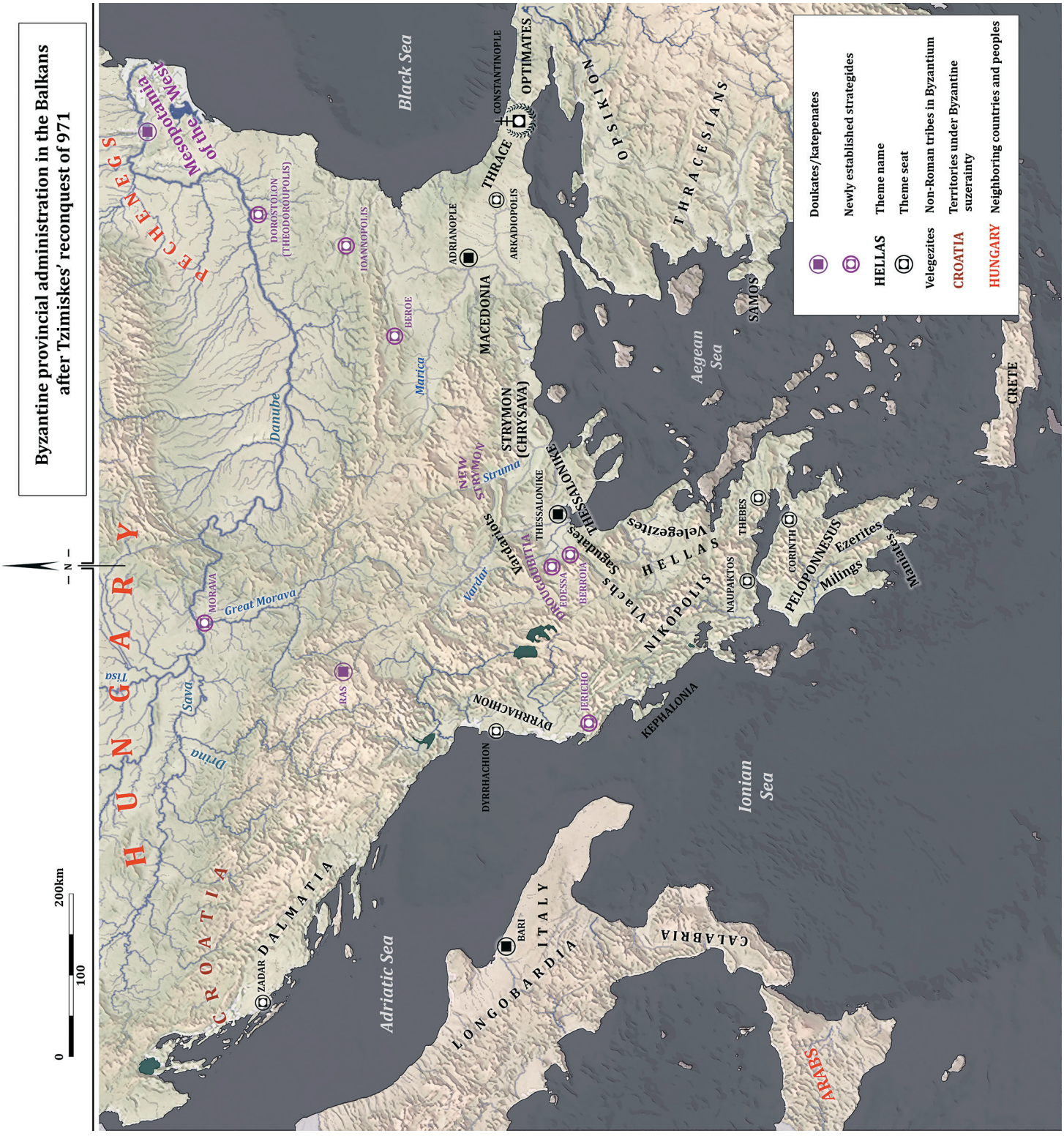
31 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.32.

32 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.29.

33 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.6; *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 220–221.

34 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.7; DOSeals I, no. 13.1.

35 DOSeals I, no. 36a.1, pp. 195–196.



Map 1.
Byzantine provincial administration in the Balkans
after Tzimiskes' reconquest of 971

Command centers were installed at no more than a handful of strategic points, with the bulk of the Balkan interior remaining beyond Byzantine military control. The reason for this may have been limited military resources, as Constantinople's focus was still firmly on the East.

Tzimiskes sought to mitigate the inability to deploy garrisons and establish command centers across a wider territory by expanding the ecclesiastical network, presumably with the intention of integrating local populations in regions devoid of a military presence. Consequently, episcopal seats in Epirus, Ohrid, Diokleia, and the vicinity of Skadar were either restored or established under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople.[36]

The establishment of military and ecclesiastical authority depended on the local situation. In the former Bulgarian territories, the new Byzantine military and church administration was built on the remnants of prior Bulgarian governance. Ioannopolis and Dorostolon, which had previously been Bulgaria's political and religious hubs, became command centers, with Ioannopolis also serving as an ecclesiastical center.[37] In Macedonia, Tzimiskes relied on the existing military and church structure, which was originally Byzantine rather than Bulgarian. In the bishoprics of Drugubitia, Berroia, and the former Bishopric of Edessa, the emperor established eponymous *strategides*.[38] Berroia, Drugubitia, and the old Bulgarian territories demonstrate an alignment between the military and ecclesiastical branches of power.

The situation in Epirus differed slightly. Only one *strategis*, Jericho,[39] was established in Epirus, while multiple episcopal seats were active in the area, including Valona, Glavinitza, Poulcheriopolis, and Tzernik.[40] These bishoprics, as well as Ohrid, fell under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dyrrachion.[41] New episcopal centers in the territory of Diokleia and around Lake Skadar (Diokleia, Skadar, Drivastum, Antivari, Polatum, and Graditzion),[42] formed by Tzimiskes due to the absence of military governance, were also assigned to the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion.

The arrangement of military and church centers in the interior of the Balkans was an inverted version of that in Epirus and the Diokleia-Skadar region. Berroia and New Strymon were command bases rather than ecclesiastical centers. Similarly, Ras and Morava had only command centers and no ecclesiastical sees. The sources do not report that any other Bulgarian bishoprics in the Balkan interior (Belgrade, Serdica, and Bregalnica) became suffragans of the Church of Constantinople.[43] Therefore, it seems safe

36 *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 59.

37 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.9, 269.9; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, nos. 23.1–5, 35B.15–19, 38.1–2, 38A.3; *Jordanov*, Pečatite, no. 389.

38 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.32, 267.6, 267.29; Notitiae, 10.217, 218.

39 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.7.

40 Notitiae, 10.616, 617, 621, 622.

41 Notitiae, 10.619.

42 Notitiae, 10.612–615, 620, 623.

43 On the old bishoprics of the Bulgarian Church, see *Komatina*, Diocesan Structure, 789–815.

to assume that Tzimiskes did not intend, at least not initially, to subjugate all Bulgarian bishoprics to the Church of Constantinople, only those that the Bulgarians had annexed under Simeon. Tzimiskes' triumphant campaign thus annulled the expansion of the Bulgarian Church in the late 9th and early 10th centuries. The bishoprics of Ohrid, Glavinitza, and Valona once again came under the Metropolis of Dyrrachion, to which they had belonged before. Dyrrachion also received the newly established bishoprics of Poulcheriopolis and Tzernik and the ecclesiastical seats in Diokleia and around Skadar.[44]

The network of command centers established by Tzimiskes shortly after the end of the war in Bulgaria (971) underwent changes in the following years. Command centers were merged or split, particularly in the old Bulgarian lands and Thrace.[45]

Constantinople's primary objective was to establish control over the principal routes and strategic points, with the attendant economic exploitation of the conquered territory. However, little was done to integrate the local population. Tzimiskes granted the locals no fiscal or economic privileges – an approach that later proved crucial in their pacification and integration under Basil II. The new government was purely military, with no civilian official attested in the sources. On top of this, Tzimiskes' administration made no room for the members of the Bulgarian political elite, and Byzantine officials were brought in from other parts of the Empire to take leading positions instead. An illustrative example is Leo Sarakinopoulos, a Byzantine officer who spent years serving in various military capacities in the conquered Byzantine lands.[46] Leo's patronymic suggests that he was of Arab ancestry and probably came from the Empire's East.

The principles that guided the establishment of provincial administration in the conquered territories were part of a broader strategy designed to obliterate all traces of Bulgarian statehood. The Bulgarian ruling family was interned in Constantinople in 971 after being divested of their imperial insignia. Bulgaria's political and ecclesiastical centers were renamed. Preslav became Ioannopolis, and Dristra, the seat of the Bulgarian Church, was renamed Theodoroupolis – in honor of Emperor John (Tzimiskes) and St. Theodore Stratelates, respectively.[47] Tzimiskes' provincial nomenclature – military, civilian, and ecclesiastical – left no room for the term Bulgaria.

When he incorporated the Bulgarian and Serbian states, Tzimiskes did not establish thematic districts named after these entities, even though, he must have been familiar with this model, as it had been applied in the East, in Taron, only a few years before the conquest of Bulgaria. There was a notable difference between Taron and Bulgaria however: the Armenian principality had become part of the Empire through negotiations and concessions, whereas Bulgaria had been overpowered by arms and annexed outright. Taron's rulers renounced their claims in their principality and, in

44 *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 59.

45 *Cvetković*, Two Approaches, 56.

46 PmbZ, #24520.

47 Scylitzes, 298 (Ioannopolis); Leo Diaconus, 158 (Theodoroupolis). The toponym Presthlavitza/Preslavets (Little Preslav) seems to have been dropped around the same time, with the military district seated in the city renamed Mesopotamia of the West.

return, received possessions in other parts of Byzantium. Tzimiskes evidently believed that the Bulgarian territories could be successfully integrated without tolerating an administrative nomenclature evocative of the Bulgarian ethnic identity. Half a century later, organizing governance in the conquered territories after 1018, Basil II formed themes with ethnic names (Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia), revitalizing the principle applied in the establishment of the Theme of Taron in the 960s.

Bulgarian ecclesiastical autocephaly was abolished by removing the head of their church from the list of imperial dignitaries (*taktika*).[48] The incumbent Bulgarian patriarch, Damian, had no choice but to leave his seat in Dristra and seek refuge in Triaditza (Serdica). His successors subsequently relocated the ecclesiastical throne, initially to Vodena and Moglena (Germanos Gabriel) and thereafter to Ohrid (Philip and, later, David/John). In addition to these cities, Prespa also served as the seat of the Bulgarian Church at one point.[49]

A metropolitan bishop named Stefan took the helm of the see of Preslav, assuming jurisdiction over the old Bulgarian lands.[50] The former archbishopric/patriarchate was thereby demoted to the rank of a metropolis. This move was part of the tried-and-tested Byzantine ecclesiastical policy in the latter half of the 10th century, which involved integrating various communities into the Patriarchate of Constantinople as ethnic metropolises. Notable precedents were the formation of the Metropolis of Taron in the territory of the eponymous Armenian principality, which was integrated as a theme into the Byzantine provincial administration in the 960s,[51] and the establishment of the Metropolis of Rus in the independent and freshly Christianized Russian principality seated at Kiev[52]. However, unlike in Taron or Rus, the metropolitan see was not named Bulgaria but Ioannopolis after the recently renamed capital city. So, the Bulgarian metropolis bore the name of Emperor John Tzimiskes instead of one that would have evoked the ethnic identity of its flock. At the same time, the bishoprics that the Bulgarian Church had appropriated in the wake of Simeon's conquests returned to the relevant Byzantine metropolises.

It seems safe to assume that Tzimiskes employed a similar approach in organizing governance in the Serbian lands. The emperor no longer personally led campaigns in the Balkans after 971, when he captured Preslav and Dristra, delegating further operations to his generals. These offensives were undoubtedly part of a systematically devised strategy aimed at subduing the leading political actors in the Balkans. The Byzantines

48 Unlike the *Kletorologion of Philotheos* (899, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 137.17) and the *Beneshevich Taktikon* (934–944, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 245.17), the *Escorial Taktikon* (971–975) does not list the head of the Bulgarian Church.

49 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44–45; *Ivanov*, Bŭlgarski starini, 566.

50 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, no. 389.

51 The process of converting the Armenians in the borderlands to Eastern Orthodoxy, which Byzantium had begun in the 850s, was completed with the establishment of the Theme of Taron and an eponymous metropolis, as attested in the *Escorial Taktikon* and *Notitia 10*, *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 265.20; Notitiae, 10.702. For more on the beginnings of this conversion project, see *Komatina*, Crkvena politika, 173–174.

52 Notitiae, 11.62. On the establishment of church organization in Rus, see *Poppe*, Organisation diocésaine, 165–217.

took the Serbian state by force of arms, obliging the ruling family to flee.[53] A new Byzantine administration was introduced; again, the new administrative division (Ras) did not bear the Serbian ethnic name, unlike Basil's Theme of Serbia. Around the same time, a new church organization emerged in the part of the Serbian territory where no command centers were formed – the episcopal see with Diokleia as its center.[54]

The fatal flaw of Tzimiskes' administration was its overreliance on a network of military bases, which left much of the interior beyond Byzantium's reach. Regardless, Tzimiskes' personal authority kept the Balkans in check during his lifetime. A sizeable part of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical and secular elites rejected the new overlords, seeking refuge in Macedonia and establishing contacts with external political actors.[55] Nonetheless, the Balkans remained pacified and put up no rebellions until the emperor died in 976.

Tzimiskes essentially adhered to the traditional Byzantine foreign policy of prioritizing the East while treating the Balkans as a secondary concern. However, it soon became apparent that the Byzantine territories in the Balkans required much closer attention. Upon the emperor's death, the authority that had contained the Balkans, particularly the volatile situation in Bulgaria, abruptly vanished. The year of John Tzimiskes' death witnessed an uprising against the new emperor, Basil II, first in Asia Minor and subsequently in Macedonia. The deficiencies of Tzimiskes' provincial administration quickly became evident. The governance system he had introduced in the Balkans after 971 persisted for just over a decade. Following Basil's defeat at the Gates of Trajan (986), the *Kometopouloi* state expanded significantly, wiping out almost the entirety of Tzimiskes' administrative legacy in the reclaimed parts of the Balkans. Croatia and Serbia broke away from the Byzantine sphere of influence, and Samuel seized substantial portions of Byzantine territory in Macedonia and Epirus over the following ten years, expanding his influence in Dyrrachion's hinterlands and Diokleia, as well as northward, up to the Danube. The stability of Byzantine rule in the old Bulgarian lands was no longer safe either.

II. Basil's approach to organizing governance in the Balkans

The decades-long Byzantine-Bulgarian war led Basil II to adapt his Balkan strategy and tactics to the altered political landscape of the Peninsula. This new situation, which had significantly changed since the age of his predecessor, prompted Basil II to adopt a very different approach compared to Tzimiskes' methods of organizing governance in the newly acquired Balkan territories.

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53 Gesta Regum Sclavorum, 116.

54 Notitiae, 10.612. For more details on the church organization in the Serbian lands, see *Živković*, Crkvena organizacija; *Komatina*, Crkva.

55 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 109–128. Certain annals mention that Bulgarian envoys visited the court of Otto I, King of East Francia and Holy Roman Emperor, at Quedlinburg in 973, Annales Hildesheimenses, 62; Lamberti Annales, 63; Annales Altahenses maiores, 787; Thietmari Chronicon, 753. Nothing else is known about this diplomatic mission. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that these envoys were representatives of the "remnants of the Bulgarian state," whose elite and primate retreated westward to the central Balkans: first to Serdica and then on to Macedonia, the heart of the rebel territory. For various opinions on this matter, see *Pirivatrić*, Samuilova država, 69–70.

Both the Byzantine territories and the unconquered parts of the Balkans experienced political turmoil. The three-year-long civil war triggered by the usurpation of Bardas Skleros (976–979), along with frequent clashes between political factions at court, delayed Constantinople's response to the *Kometopouloi* rebellion in Macedonia. After he officially ascended the throne, Basil spent nearly a decade consolidating his position as head of state, working to eliminate the usurper Bardas Skleros and distance himself from the influence of his great-uncle, the *parakoimomenos* Basil Lekapenos.[56]

The situation in the "Balkan theater" in the early years and even decades of Basil's reign hardly favored Byzantine interests. During this period of internal strife, the *Kometopouloi* rebellion outgrew its local context, evolving into a broader effort to restore Bulgaria's recently lost independence. Samuel's empire differed significantly from Bulgaria in Boris II's era (969–971). Boris' Bulgaria had fallen first to Sviatoslav and then to Tzimiskes within a few months. The nucleus of the new Bulgaria was no longer in the northern Balkan flatlands but in hilly Macedonia, whose geography lent itself well to sustained resistance. The region's rugged terrain, with numerous impregnable fortresses, and the new and enhanced demographic base bolstered the rebels' efforts. The *Kometopouloi* rebellion and the Byzantine response escalated into a war that lasted for decades.[57]

Basil initially tried – and failed – to end the conflict in a blitzkrieg of sorts, as his predecessor, Tzimiskes, had done in his whirlwind campaign of 971. Basil's first major offensive against the rebels (986) ended in a crushing defeat.[58] The ensuing usurpations of Bardas Phokas and Bardas Skleros led to a new delay in the Byzantine response to the *Kometopouloi* rebellion.[59]

It had taken Tzimiskes no more than a few months to assail, besiege, and take control of the Bulgarians' two largest cities – the political and ecclesiastical centers of Preslav and Dristra, crushing Bulgarian resistance. In contrast, Basil waged war in Macedonia for decades, fighting for every stronghold and facing fierce resistance from the local population, which steadfastly held to the idea of an independent Bulgaria.

Another unexpected aspect of Basil's war in the Balkans was the appearance of pro-Bulgarian factions even in old Byzantine cities that had never been under Bulgarian control before that point. The most striking example is Dyrrachion, whose local commander, Chryselios, agreed to recognize Bulgarian suzerainty, sealing the deal by having his daughter marry Samuel.[60] Similarly, the sources report growing pro-Bulgarian sentiments in the Byzantines' principal command centers in the Balkans, Adrianople, and Thessalonike.[61]

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56 For more details on the specific internal-political circumstances within the Empire, with particular emphasis on the role of the influential eunuch Lakapenos, see *Krsmanović*, Evnusi, 379–402.

57 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I.

58 Leo Diaconus, 171–173; Scylitzes, 330–331; Yahya, 21–22; Stephanos von Taron, 186–187.

59 *Holmes*, Basil II, 240–298.

60 Scylitzes, 349. See VIINJ III, 108 n. 99 (*J. Ferluga*).

61 Scylitzes, 343.

The Empire had turned its sights to the Balkans, finally shifting its foreign policy focus westward. However, this shift did not find universal acceptance and approval in the high circles of Constantinople. In addition to prioritizing the Empire's interests in the Balkans over Eastern concerns, Basil relied on diplomacy much more than Tzimiskes. His strategy of granting privileges to certain members of the Bulgarian secular and ecclesiastical elites proved one of the most decisive factors in the Byzantine-Bulgarian war.

Unlike his predecessor, Basil understood the central role of the Church in protecting Bulgarian political and legal traditions. Tzimiskes' uncompromising treatment of the highest echelons of the Bulgarian clergy had forced them to flee the old Bulgarian lands and join forces with Samuel to restore Bulgarian statehood. In contrast, Basil's introduction of Byzantine rule rested primarily on the pact he made with the senior Bulgarian hierarchs.

Basil's integration policy relied on a system of privileges granted not only to the political and ecclesiastical elites but also to the local population. These privileges were exercised through the autocephalous Bulgarian Church and the newly established themes with ethnic names. This chapter focuses on the domain of secular authority.

The territories Basil occupied after Bulgaria's surrender in 1018 became part of an eponymous theme.[62] The same approach – integrating entire states as distinct ethnic themes – was used after the conquest of Serbia[63] and, likely, Croatia[64]. Sirmium experienced a similar fate.[65]

The ethnic themes Basil established in the Balkans shared some common characteristics. They were formed by integrating entire political entities and retaining their original names. Basil typically sent the former bearers of political power and members of local ruling families to Constantinople to ensure Byzantine control and preempt future resistance. They received suitable honors in the capital to help smooth their integration into the Byzantine ruling classes. After the final surrender of 1018, the emperor took Prousianos, his brothers, and their mother with him to Constantinople. The members of the Kometopoulos family were paraded in Basil's triumphal procession in Constantinople, just as Tzimiskes had brought Boris and Romanos to the capital to witness the celebration of his victory in 971.[66] The widow of the last lord of Sirmium,

62 Scylitzes, 358.

63 The campaign seems to have been led by Constantine Diogenes, who was appointed the first *strategos* of Serbia, as indicated in Skylitzes' account, Scylitzes, 365–366. In addition to Skylitzes' reports on Diogenes' service, surviving seals attest to his role in the Theme of Serbia: the seal of Constantine Diogenes, *strategos* of Serbia (*Laurent*, Thème byzantin de Serbie, 190; DOSeals I, no. 34.1, pp. 101–102) and the seal of Constantine, *anthypatos*, *patrikios*, and *doux* of Thessalonike, Bulgaria, and Serbia (*Swiencickyj*, Byzantinische Bleisiegel, no. 11, p. 439) probably belonged to the same person. For more details on Constantine Diogenes, see *Cheynet*, Diogénai, 123–127.

64 Lupi Protospatarii annales, 57; Chronicon ignoti civis Barensis, 149; DOSeals I, p. 49. See below 401. See also *Komatina*, Byzantine Rule in Croatia, 20–26.

65 Scylitzes, 365–366. See below 400–401.

66 Leo Diaconus, 158–159; Scylitzes, 364–365.

Sermon, was also sent to Constantinople and married off to a Constantinopolitan dignitary.[67] After the conquest of Croatia in 1024, the Croatian ruler's widow and their son were taken to Constantinople.[68] It seems reasonable to assume that the Serbian ruling family was also removed from its homelands, as suggested by the appearance of the patronymic *Servilias* on Byzantine officials' seals from the 11th century onward.[69]

Basil relied on his faithful generals in the early stage of introducing Byzantine governance, appointing them as governors of the new districts. The general who had been responsible for the conquest of a given territory usually became its governor. David Arianites became the *strategos autokrator* in Skopje, i.e., the *katepano* of the district of Bulgaria;[70] Constantine Diogenes was appointed the *strategos* of Serbia before becoming the governor (*archon*/*strategos*) of Sirmium.[71] There is no evidence to confirm that this was also the case with Croatia's conqueror, Basil Boioannes, but it is a possibility that should not be rejected out of hand.[72] So, the newly introduced government was markedly militarized. Besides appointing generals as governors, the sources' silence on the involvement of civilian officials in the new administrative divisions shortly after their formation also suggests that a military regime was installed in the new themes.[73]

Reconstructing the territorial boundaries of these districts is challenging because no lists of Byzantine officials (*taktika*) or similar writings on provincial administration have survived from Basil's era, which makes the reports in narrative sources and sigillographic evidence, along with Basil's founding charters to the Archbishopric of Ohrid, so indispensable.[74]

The first of those charters contains a list of the bishoprics and their parishes annexed to the Archbishopric of Ohrid shortly after 1018.[75] With a few exceptions (Servia, Moglena), these were fortified settlements where Bulgarian control endured until almost the end of the war, and which the Byzantines seem to have taken by their

67 Scylitzes, 365–366.

68 See below 401.

69 Some hypotheses associate the Servilias lineage with the old Serbian ruling dynasty, which may have been integrated into the Byzantine nobility after the conquest of Serbia in 1018. According to some theories, their patronymic was derived from the term *servus* or the name of the city of Servia. Given that the members of this lineage appear on seals from the 11th century onward – conspicuously coinciding with the subjugation of Serbia – it seems more likely that they were indeed descended from the old Serbian ruling dynasty. Various members of this family continued to appear with high titles (*protospatharios*, *magistros*, and so on) and offices (usually civilian ones – judicial and fiscal) in different parts of the Empire – from Tarsus, Seleucia, and Iberia in the East to Constantinople and other parts of the Balkans (Thrace and Macedonia, Strymon, Thessalonike, and Boleron), all the way to Longobardia, *Jordanov*, Corpus II, 368–371.

70 Scylitzes, 345, 350, 354, 355, 358.

71 Scylitzes, 365–366. See above n. 63.

72 See below 401.

73 A seal of the *anagrapheus* of Bulgaria likely dates from this period, *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 49.

74 For more details on the organization of governance in the conquered territories after 1018, see *Krsmanović*, O odnosu, 17–39; *Maksimović*, Organizacija, 31–43; *Petrovski*, Central-southern Europe, 266–276.

75 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42–44.

commanders' surrender.[76] Hence, it is reasonable to assume that those centers were placed under the Byzantine commander of the Theme of Bulgaria, as both the district and the Archbishopric of Bulgaria were formed shortly after the surrender of 1018. It was an extensive territory that stretched to Servia and Kastoria in the south, Belgrade and Braničevo in the north, and Serdica in the east, bordering the themes of Dyrrachion and Serbia in the west.

The part of the Bulgarian ethnic and political space Constantinople had taken earlier, before the final surrender of 1018, remained outside the theme's borders: the Theme of Philippopolis and the old Bulgarian lands between the Danube and the Balkan mountain range (the Theme of Dorostolon). The sources mention the formerly Bulgarian city of Philippopolis as a Byzantine military base as early as Basil's first campaign against Samuel (986), confirming that it remained a stronghold of the Empire throughout the war.[77] The theme seated at Dorostolon, formed under Tzimiskes, probably remained under Byzantine rule during the war against Samuel and his successors.[78] Byzantium restored or consolidated its control in the northeastern Balkans ca. 1000, forming *strategides* in Preslav, Little Preslav, and Pliska. The sigillographic evidence confirming their existence is generally datable to the 11th century. However, this does not imply that there was no military organization in the region shortly after 1000.[79] At a certain point, the area came under the joint command of Thrace and Mesopotamia, with *doux* Damian Dobromir serving as its head for a while.[80] Most likely before the 1030s, the Thracian-Mesopotamian joint command system was dissolved and replaced by a (reestablished) high-ranking command in Dristra, led by a *katepano*.[81] This command assumed the primary responsibility for defending the northeastern Balkans from Pecheneg raids until it evolved into the Theme of Paradounavon by the mid-11th century.[82]

Besides the district of Bulgaria, Basil established the Theme of Serbia, again retaining the ethnic identifier of the local population in the name. This theme probably covered the nucleus of the former Serbian ethnic and political space, which Constantine Porphyrogennetos had described a few decades earlier in *De Administrando Imperio*.[83] However, we cannot know whether the Theme of Serbia included Diokleia,

76 These were the bishoprics of Kastoria, Glavinitza, Moglena, Bitola, Strumica, Morovizd, Velbăžd, Triaditza (Serdica), Niš, Braničevo, Belgrade, Sirmium, Skopje, Prizren, Lipljan, and Servia, *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 42–43.

77 Scylitzes, 331, 343, 345, 347–348.

78 Dorostolon does not appear on the list of old Bulgarian cities in the northeastern Balkans where the Byzantines reasserted control in 999/1000 (Great and Little Preslav, Pliska, Scylitzes, 344), suggesting continued Byzantine administration of Dorostolon during the war. Skylitzes mentions Tzotzikios, son of Theudatos the Iberian, who served as the *strategos* of Dorostolon in 1017, Scylitzes, 356.

79 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, nos. 62.1 (Pliska), 63.1–9 (Preslav and Presthlavitza).

80 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 237–238.

81 DOSeals I, no. 65.1; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 62.

82 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 134ff.

83 DAI, c. 32, p. 160. On Serbia's borders in the age of Constantine Porphyrogennetos, see *Komatina*, Konstantin Porfirogenit, 271–275. For more details on Byzantine Serbia, see *Maksimović*, Organizacija, 38–41; *Komatina*, Srbija i Duklja, 159–186.

which emerged in the late 10th century as the leading power in the polycentric Serbian political space. Ethnic themes were typically established in territories an ethnic community had controlled until its integration into the Byzantine Empire. To determine the geographical position of the Theme of Serbia, we must look at the political events in the Serbian ethnic space that preceded Tzimiskes' and Basil's reoccupation.

Following the death of Prince Časlav in the mid-10th century, the Serbian state persisted in some capacity, either as a unified entity or divided into smaller principalities, until its eventual conquest by the Byzantines under Tzimiskes. In addition to establishing a military command in Ras,[84] Constantinople formed a bishopric in Diokleia,[85] suggesting that the territory of Diokleia was under some sort of Byzantine control. Regardless, Serbia and Diokleia had distinct positions in the Byzantine administrative and ecclesiastical framework. Ras became the seat of a top-ranking military command, as attested by a surviving seal of the *katepano* of Ras. For its part, Diokleia fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion and probably under the military authority of the *strategos* of Dyrrachion. After Tzimiskes, Diokleia's development continued to be tied to the Theme of Dyrrachion. Samuel entrusted the governance of Dyrrachion's hinterlands to his vassal, the Diokleian prince John Vladimir.[86] In the post-1018 period, the Theme of Serbia covered the heart of what was formerly Porphyrogennetos' Serbia, whereas Diokleia was subjugated to the *strategos* of Dyrrachion (possibly with a degree of self-government).[87] When Stefan Vojislav became the ruler of Diokleia several decades later and rebelled against Byzantium (ca. 1039), Constantinople dispatched an army led by the *strategos* of the Theme of Dyrrachion.[88] Other parts of the Serbian ethnic space probably remained beyond the Theme of Serbia, e.g., Zachlumia (Zahumlje), as suggested by its recognition as an entity distinct from Serbia in Byzantine administration. A report on Ljutovid, *strategos* of Serbia and Zachlumia,[89] supports this hypothesis. Ljutovid was evidently a member of the local elite, unlike any other known *strategoi* of Serbia.

Sirmium, the region between the Sava and Danube rivers, was integrated into the Byzantine provincial administration as a unified political entity. The last ruler of Sirmium before the Byzantine conquest was a local magnate called Sermon, brother of one Nestongos.[90] The political status of Sirmium and the surrounding areas is still shrouded

84 Gesta Regum Sclavorum, 116; DOSeals I, no. 33.1, pp. 100–101.

85 Notitiae, 10.612.

86 Gesta Regum Sclavorum, 130.

87 *Komatina*, Srbija i Duklja, 159–180, proposes his well-argued hypothesis that Skylitzes' *Serbia* refers to the eponymous theme covering the territory of future Raška. In line with this interpretation, the terms *Triballia* and *Triballi*, which also feature in Skylitzes' account of Vojislav's rebellion, would denote Diokleia and its inhabitants. For a different view, arguing that *Serbia* and *Triballia* were synonymous, see VIINJ III, 117, n. 132 (*J. Ferluga*).

88 Scylitzes, 424.

89 Letopis popa Dukljanina, 188–190.

90 Scylitzes, 365–366.

in mystery. The compiler of *Gesta Regum Sclavorum* indicates that in the 10th century, Sirmium's inhabitants represented a distinct ethnic and political group in a kind of alliance with the Hungarians.[91] So, this entity seems to have retained a degree of political independence under both Hungarian and Bulgarian suzerainty (9th and 10th centuries), as well as in Samuel's Bulgaria. Sermon was probably a local lord whose ties to Samuel's empire remain unclear. Following Sirmium's surrender in 1019, the Byzantines formed a distinct theme in this region, independent from the districts of Bulgaria and Serbia.[92]

The last of the Balkan political actors to fall under direct Byzantine control was Croatia, which succumbed in the closing years of Basil's reign (1024) after an intervention by Basil Boioannes, the *katepano* of Longobardia. Before this, Basil II made Croatia's rulers Byzantine dignitaries in 1018, not unlike Tzimiskes' treatment of Držislav half a century earlier.[93] Skylitzes reports that the Byzantine emperor, having ended the campaign in Bulgaria, conferred honorary titles on the two brothers who ruled Croatia, indicating they had agreed to recognize the Empire's suzerainty.[94] For his part, Thomas the Archdeacon writes that the Croatian ruler Krešimir, a contemporary of Emperors Basil and Constantine, bore the title of *patrikios*,[95] suggesting that the two unnamed brothers from Skylitzes' account should be identified as Krešimir and his brother Gojslav.[96] The sources do not specify what led to the intervention of the *katepano* of Longobardia six years later, but we know that he captured the *patrikia*, probably Krešimir's wife, and sent her to Constantinople with her son.[97] This event is taken as the beginning of the process of establishing direct Byzantine rule in Croatia.[98]

Among these four ethnic themes, the Theme of Bulgaria stands out for its size, character, and internal structure. It encompassed a much larger territory than any of the others and was granted exceptionally generous fiscal privileges. An important aspect of its identity was the eponymous autocephalous church. Additionally, Bulgaria had a more diverse ethnic composition than the others, and its military-administrative and ecclesiastical organizations reflected this heterogeneity. Namely, the Vlachs[99] and

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91 Gesta Regum Sclavorum, 112: „Quodam itaque tempore dum esset rex in partibus Sremi, Sremani congregantes se cum Hungaris commiserunt proelium cum rege, in quo loco ceciderunt Sremani cum Hungaris et facta est eis contritio magna."

92 For more details on Byzantine Sirmium, see *Komatina I. – Komatina P.*, Srem, 141–164.

93 Thomas Archidiaconus, 60. For more details, see *Komatina*, Byzantine Rule in Croatia, 12–17.

94 Scylitzes, 365.

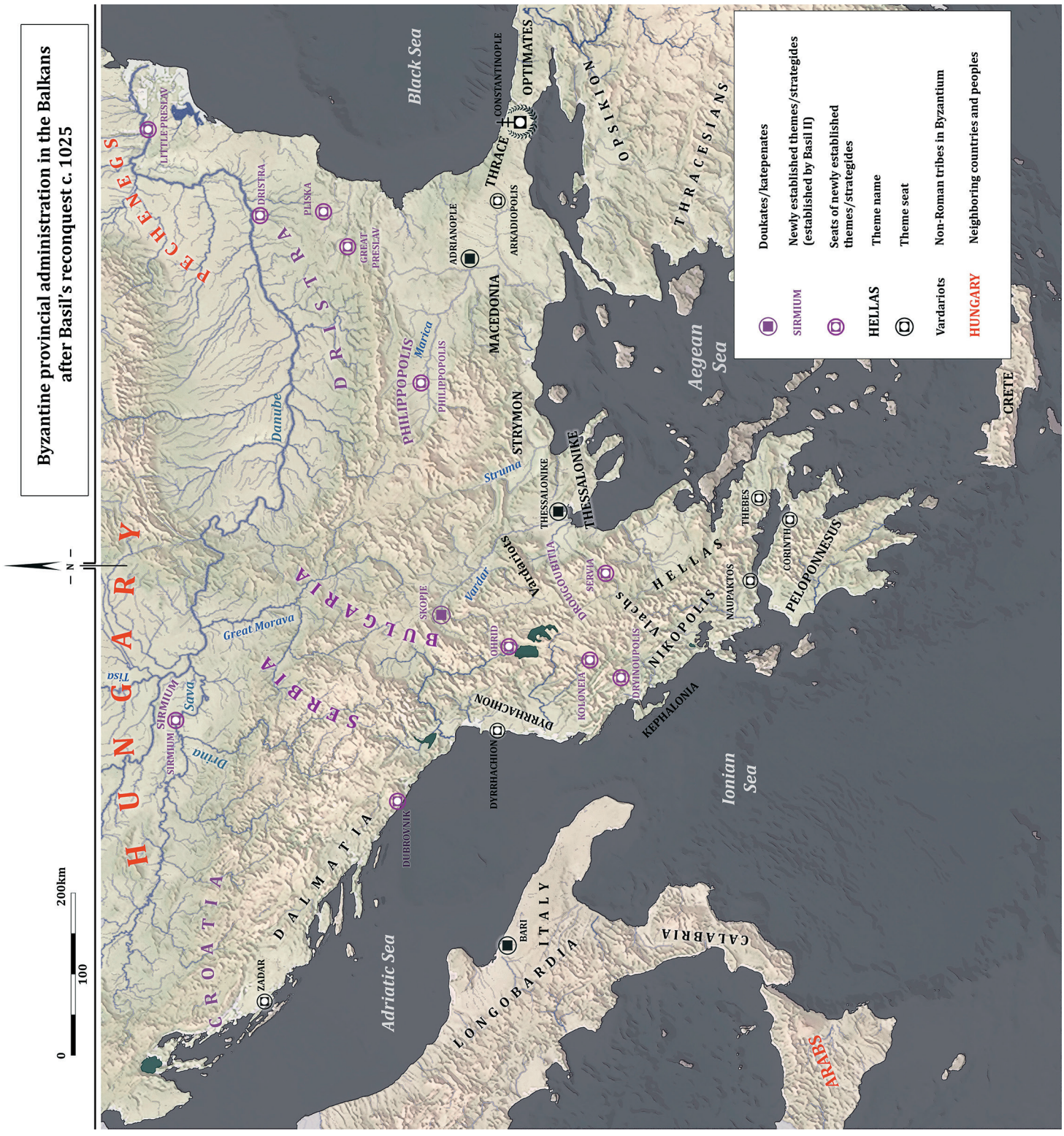
95 Thomas Archidiaconus, 62.

96 *Šišić*, Povijest, 482; *Klaić*, Povijest, 329–330; *Goldstein*, Hrvatski rani srednji vijek, 343, 346–347; *Komatina*, Byzantine Rule in Croatia, 20.

97 Lupi Protospatarii annales, 57. Chronicon ignoti civis Barensis, 149. On the captive's identity see *Komatina*, Byzantine Rule in Croatia, 21 and n. 47.

98 *Komatina*, Byzantine Rule in Croatia, 20–26.

99 Basil's second charter informs us that the archbishop of Ohrid was entitled to collect the *kanonikon* tax καὶ τῶν ἀνὰ πᾶσαν Βουλγαρίαν Βλάχων, *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 46. The bishop of the Vlachs appears as a suffragan of the archbishop of Ohrid in the time of Theophylact of Ohrid. The bishopric is referred to as Βρεανόγης ἤτοι Βλάχων, Notitiae, 13.856. On the Vlachs' position in the Byzantine administrative system, see *Cvetković*, O statusu Vlaha Helade, 45–60.



Map 2.
Byzantine provincial administration in the Balkans
after Basil's reconquest c. 1025

the Vardariots[100] enjoyed special status in the Church of Ohrid, with the Vardariots also having a peculiar position in the military-administrative system.

The governors of the Theme of Bulgaria were officers with the ranks of *strategos autokrator*, *strategos*, *doux*, and *katepano*. Skylitzes mentions a *strategos autokrator* – the first governor of the Theme of Bulgaria, David Arianites. Michael of Devol, however, ascribes the rank of *katepano* to Arianites.[101] Sigillographic evidence attests that the theme had a *strategos*; from the mid-11th century, the administrator of the Bulgarian theme was usually a *doux* or a *katepano.*[102] The theme's military-administrative center was Skopje, with garrisons installed in other fortresses, whose commanders bore the title of *strategos* (also referred to by Byzantine authors as *hypostrategoi* and *archontes*). They were subordinate to the thematic governor in Skopje. Reports on them are scant (a notable exception is Eustathios Daphnomeles, "archon" of Ohrid),[103] but we can safely assume that Basil repurposed many of the captured Bulgarian fortresses as lower-ranking command centers headed by *strategoi* (*strategides*). These fortified centers also typically served as episcopal seats. So, military-administrative and ecclesiastical authorities in the Theme of Bulgaria worked from the same centers, although the Bulgarian autocephalous Church covered a larger territory than the eponymous theme. Basil's second *sigillion* had expanded the jurisdiction of the Church of Ohrid to the northeastern Balkans (the bishoprics of Vidin and Dristra), Serbian lands (Bishopric of Ras), and a handful of bishoprics that had previously belonged to the metropolitan bishops of Dyrrachion and Naupaktos.[104] The governor of the Theme of Bulgaria was not in charge in these areas.

Bishoprics were established in regions and cities where no command centers are known to have existed during the times of Samuel and Basil, such as in the Morava Valley and the Danube Basin (bishoprics of Niš, Braničevo, Belgrade, and others). A likely reason for their formation was that Constantinople lacked the military resources to establish command centers (*strategides*) and deploy sufficient garrisons in all conquered territories. Following his predecessor's example, Basil presumably sought to make up for

100 The *notitiae* from the 10th and second half of the 11th centuries list the bishop of the Vardariots as a suffragan of the metropolitan bishop of Thessalonike (Βαρδαριωτῶν ἤτοι Τούρκων, Notitiae, 7.308, 10.228, 13.832). The Vardariots enjoyed a similar status to that of the Vlachs in the territory of the Ohrid Church. Basil's second *sigillion* ordered the Vardariots to pay the *kanonikon* tax to the archbishop of Ohrid. The writings of Theophylact of Ohrid mention the Vardariots and their district, Theophylactus, Epistulae, no. 88 p. 461 (περὶ τὸν Βαρδάριον ἀρχὴ), no. 118 p. 549 (τῷ Βαρδαρίῳ χωρίον), no. 127, p. 571 (τοῖς Βαρδαριώταις), p. 575 (τοὺς Βαρδαριώτας). See *Mullett*, Theophylact of Ohrid, 94, 129–130, 187, 204, 210. The Vardariots were a group of Hungarians – or Turks, as contemporary Byzantine writings called them – which, after a campaign waged by Hungarian magnates south of the Danube during Árpád's reign (895–907), permanently settled in the Empire's territory. For more details, see *Cvetković*, Jedna pretpostavka, 19–32.

101 Scylitzes, 358.

102 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 49.

103 Scylitzes, 359.

104 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44–46. In his second *sigillion*, the emperor expanded the archbishop's jurisdiction to the old Bulgarian lands between the Danube and the Balkan Mountain (the bishoprics of Dristra and Vidin), adding the Bishopric of Ras and bishoprics in Epirus – Horaia/Horaea, Tzernik, and Chimara, and warning the metropolitan bishop of Dyrrachion to "keep to his throne and be content with his assets and revenues and not to infringe upon the Bulgarian bishoprics"; finally, he listed the ecclesiastical sees of Dryinoupolis, Bela/Photike, Bouthroton, Ioannina, Kozel, and Petra.

the fragility and insufficiency of his military organization by expanding its ecclesiastical counterpart, building upon the Bulgarian clergy's role in the pacification of Bulgaria.

In the early years following the Byzantine reoccupation of the Balkans, Constantinople's *de facto* control was heavily reliant on the presence of the mobile army, which had its bases in Dyrrachion, Thessalonike, in the region of Macedonia, and Thrace (Adrianople, Philippopolis). This was probably why military commands in the newly acquired territories occasionally merged with command centers in the old Byzantine themes. Such merging of commands was particularly common during periods of invasion, e.g., the Pecheneg attacks in the 1020s, when Constantinople appointed Constantine Diogenes as commander of Sirmium and Bulgaria, as reported by Skylitzes; surviving seals describe him as the *doux* of Thessalonike, Bulgaria, and Serbia.[105]

III. Response

The full extent to which *Pax Basiliana* had influenced the central Balkans became apparent only in the decades following Basil's death, just as the true merit of Tzimiskes' Balkan policy did not show itself until after 976. The sources suggest that some segments of the Constantinopolitan ecclesiastical and secular elites did not approve of Basil's methods in pacifying and integrating the former subjects of Samuel's Bulgaria. Consequently, the period after 1025 saw a notable shift towards adapting the Empire's Balkan policy to exclusively serve Constantinople's interests. This change led to resistance among the local communities, who had long considered the interior of the Balkans as rightfully theirs, before Basil's advance into the Peninsula.

Constantinople's attitude to Basil's privileges to Ohrid – The most significant outcomes of Basil's policy of making concessions were the formation of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church, the creation of the eponymous district, and the fiscal privileges granted to its inhabitants. However, this policy did not align with the vested interests of the highest ecclesiastical and political circles in Constantinople. Skylitzes informs us that the emperor's relationship with Patriarch Sergios of Constantinople left much to be desired, with the two at loggerheads about abolishing the *allelengyon* tax.[106] Another contributing factor to their disagreements must have been the establishment of Bulgarian autocephaly, particularly because the archbishop of Ohrid assumed jurisdiction over some bishoprics that had previously been suffragans of the Church of Constantinople (most notably, the bishoprics in the northeastern Balkans and the former suffragan bishoprics of the metropolises of Thessalonike, Larissa, Dyrrachion, and Naupaktos). Basil's second *sigillion* reveals the disgruntlement of the high clergy in Constantinople and local Byzantine bishops at the emperor's preferential treatment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.[107] Shortly after Basil's death, the bishop of Naupaktos

105 *Swiencickyj*, Byzantinische Bleisiegel, no. 11, p. 439; Scylitzes, 373, 376.

106 Scylitzes, 365.

107 *Gelzer*, Bistümerverzeichnisse, 44–46.

joined an uprising against the local representatives of the central government, an act of dissent probably driven by the same concerns. The inhabitants of the Theme of Nikopolis rebelled against the local *strategos*, "mad" George, due to his unfairness and extra taxes. The *strategos* was murdered, and Basil's brother and successor, Constantine VIII (1025–1028), responded by ruthlessly cracking down on the rebels, including the metropolitan bishop of Naupaktos, whom he had blinded.[108]

The appointment of Leo, a cleric of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as the archbishop of Ohrid in 1037 marked the beginning of changes in the Ohrid Church – the suppression of its Bulgarian/Slavic character in all spheres. This process culminated in the 12th century with the adoption of the theory of *Iustiniana Prima* as the precursor to the Ohrid Church, relativizing its Bulgarian roots and identity. A concrete result of this tendency was a gradual erosion of the Archbishopric of Ohrid's territory, with emperors increasingly inclined to meet the demands of nearby metropolises under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople.[109]

The letters of Theophylact of Ohrid, a learned archbishop of the Ohrid Church during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, provide evidence of discontent among the Patriarchate of Constantinople's high clergy. They suggest that the privileges granted to the Ohrid Church encroached not only on the economic interests of the imperial court but also on the authority of the Church of Constantinople. Also, Theophylact's correspondence shows that the primates of the Ohrid Church defended their privileges and economic interests. This indicates the readiness of church officials to challenge the aspirations of the Church of Constantinople as soon as they were appointed to new positions in the Church and sent away from Constantinople to the provinces. Theophylact's erudition and distinguished career undoubtedly positioned him as a member of the capital's ecclesiastical elite. Still, for all the disdain for his flock conveyed in those letters, in which he often contrasts his underdeveloped and uncultured bishopric with the capital's intellectual vibrancy, Theophylact persistently defends the privileges and interests of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, aligning his personal agenda with the concerns of the bishopric he headed.[110]

Change in fiscal policy – The so-called Bulgarian privileges limited the tax revenue to the patriarchal and imperial coffers. The political circles in Constantinople began revising the "Bulgarian privileges" shortly after Basil died – as early as the 1030s. The first moves concerned fiscal privileges or, more specifically, the practice of paying taxes in kind. John the Orphanotrophos, an influential eunuch and the dominant figure at Michael IV's court (1034–1041), was responsible for the departure from this Bulgarian tradition, which Basil II had upheld in his day. The right to pay taxes in kind was undoubtedly one of the most generous concessions Basil had made to the local population

108 Scylitzes, 372.

109 See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from 11th to the 13th Century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II.

110 See the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others*, II, 58–64.

when he pacified Bulgaria in 1018. Taxation in money put a considerable strain on the inhabitants of the economically underdeveloped parts of the central Balkans.

The shift in Byzantium's Balkan policy could not but induce a response. Revoking the "Bulgarian privileges" in the time of John the Orphanotrophos, particularly those involving fiscal and economic benefits, and the brutal fiscal policy introduced under Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos continued in the early 1070s, when the *logothetes tou dromou* Nikephoritzes managed the imperial coffers. The Empire's fiscal policy sparked a string of rebellions in the ethnic themes Basil had formed and in other parts of the Byzantine Balkans. Besides Constantinople's harsh taxation, different internal and external factors contributed to these uprisings.

The death of Basil II ushered in a decades-long period of instability in the Empire, marked by frequent changes on the throne because the Macedonian dynasty produced no male heirs after Constantine VIII. This absence of a direct male lineage allowed numerous usurpers and rebels to challenge the representatives of central authority.[111] These succession wars reflected the power struggle between the Constantinopolitan and provincial elites. Furthermore, various political actors in the Balkans (Serbian, Bulgarian, and so on) sought to take advantage of the situation to regain their statehood, which Basil II had extinguished.

Besides internal strife, the Empire faced upheavals on its frontiers. Frequent incursions of nomadic tribes, particularly the Pechenegs, followed by the Uzes and Cumans, interfered seriously with the functioning of Byzantine administration in the Balkans. Hungary became a serious political actor and stakeholder in the Balkans. The westernmost reaches of the Empire, including the Adriatic coastlines, faced Norman invasions in the 11th century. At the same time, a new power that would end the Empire's centuries-long domination in Asia Minor emerged – the Seljuk Turks. Even though their army failed to reach the Balkans, the very real Seljuk threat in the East after the Battle of Manzikert (1071) heavily impacted the perception of the Balkans in Constantinople's political mindset.[112]

Rebellions as a response – The sources say little of how the Empire integrated local populations into the Byzantine administrative structure in the post-1018 period. Information on the locals' everyday life in the early period of Byzantine rule is scarce, and we cannot know how and to what extent they interacted with the Empire's officials. What the sources do report is the local population's resistance to the central government and Byzantine policy. Still, this resistance was not continuous, suggesting that some sort of symbiosis between the representatives of the new government and local communities must have been achieved after 1018.

Rebellions of the local population typically broke out for specific reasons. The sources report that they were almost always driven by changes in fiscal policy that

111 See *Cheynet*, Pouvoir et contestations; *Krsmanović*, Uspon.

112 *Angold*, Byzantine Empire, 34–55, 129–131.

directly affected the locals' daily lives. Discontent would eventually evolve into political dissent and ideas of restoring independence. In Bulgaria's case, we would do well to ascertain how strong the traditions of Bulgarian statehood in the Balkans truly were in the post-1018 period. At first glance, the sources indicate that the political and ideological aspects of 11th-century rebellions in the Theme of Bulgaria were secondary, while the primary cause of disgruntlement appears to have been the local population's economic status. In essence, the sources seem to suggest that the movements for restoring the Bulgarian empire would not have emerged if Constantinople had not pursued such a harsh taxation policy. Regardless of the outcome of these short-lived rebellions, the idea of Bulgarian statehood was still alive, although it had lost much of its former edge in the protracted conflicts with Byzantium.

Unlike the revolts in Bulgaria, the sources do not attribute the uprisings in Serbia and Croatia to changes in fiscal policy. However, their emergence coincides with the revised Byzantine policy in the central Balkans. The aspirations of the Serbs and Croats appear to have differed from those of the Bulgarians, as they had previously lived on the periphery of the Byzantine sphere of influence and were directly subjected to Constantinople for only a short period during the first half of the 11th century (Serbia had also been briefly subdued under Tzimiskes). Notably, the earliest rebellions emerged in these peripheral regions. Two revolts were mounted in the Theme of Serbia (after 1034 and in 1039/1040). The leader of the first rebellion was presumably Stefan Vojislav, probably a relative of John Vladimir, Prince of Diokleia. The sources report that the Byzantine Empire failed to establish firm control over the Serb-inhabited areas in the early decades of the 11th century, although Byzantine *strategoi* are known to have served in the Theme of Serbia (Constantine Diogenes, Nicholas, and, probably, Theophilos Erotikos). The first uprising does not seem to have been successful and is believed to have ended with Stefan Vojislav's imprisonment in Constantinople. Theophilos Erotikos was dispatched to pacify Serbia. Stefan Vojislav escaped from Constantinople and had Erotikos expelled, and the Byzantines tried to put down the second rebellion in 1039, relying on the military resources of the Theme of Dyrrachion. The Byzantines fought against the Serbs for several years but failed to prevent their independence even by targeted military expeditions. The independent Serbian state, with its nucleus in the territory of Diokleia, received recognition during the reign of Vojislav's son Michael, on whom Constantine Monomachos bestowed the title of *protospatharios*.[113]

The sources do not describe how Croatia got its independence, but it is known to have restored its statehood no later than the 1050s, under Stephen I, son of the former Croatian ruler and *patrikios* Krešimir and father of the future King Peter Krešimir.[114]

The emergence of independent states in the periphery of the Balkans was not seen as a major loss in Constantinople. However, the Empire would face the consequences of their independence, primarily that of the Serbian state in Diokleia, in the

113 *Komatina*, Srbija i Duklja, 159–180.

114 *Komatina*, Byzantine Rule in Croatia, 26–27.

last decades of the 11th century, during the rebellion of George Voyteh (1072) and the Norman intrusion into the Balkans during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos. These events demonstrated that Serbia's independence had irreparably eroded Byzantine control over the central Balkans.

Reports about the rebellions in the Theme of Bulgaria, the establishment of which was one of the most significant legacies of Basil's war, are more illustrative of Byzantine policy in the Balkans. Two large-scale revolts temporarily interrupted Byzantine rule in this region. The first movement emerged 21 years after Bulgaria's subjugation. It was led by Delyan, who was allegedly a grandson of Samuel's and added the Bulgarian imperial name of Peter to his own.[115] At the invitation of the rebels, the Diokleian prince Constantine Bodin, son of *protospatharios* Michael and grandson of the Serbian prince Stefan Vojislav, took the helm of the second uprising (1072). Evoking Bulgarian imperial traditions, Bodin also took the name Peter, like Delyan before him.[116] The surviving accounts of these revolts point to three problems: the situation in the Byzantine government in the Balkans, the integration of the local population and its attitude to the traditions of Bulgarian statehood, and the stance of the Archbishopric of Ohrid's clergy on the rebels' struggle.

So, the first question to ask concerns the shape of the Empire's administrative system in the Balkans when the first and largest rebellion in the Theme of Bulgaria broke out. The course and scale of Peter Delyan's uprising (1040–1041) undoubtedly laid bare the limited Byzantine military presence in the Balkan interior in the first half of the 11th century. The sources do not specify who defended the former Bulgarian fortresses, e.g., Belgrade, Morava, Niš, Skopje, Prilep, and others, during Delyan's advance into the Morava-Vardar strip in 1040. Conspicuously, there is no mention of the Byzantine command in Skopje, which served as the center of the Bulgarian district and the seat of the highest-ranking military commander (*strategos autokrator*/*katepano*/*doux*). Basil II is thought to have introduced the office of the *katepano* of Skopje, i.e., Bulgaria, but this position does not seem to have been regularly filled. Its vacancy would not have constituted a departure from the usual practices of Byzantine military governance, as attested by the lack of reports on any involvement of the *doux* of Adrianople in the war of 976–1018.

The first response of the Byzantine authorities came from the Theme of Dyrrachion, as it had done during the Serbian rebellion, suggesting that this city was the nearest active command center from which the Byzantines could launch a counter-offensive against the rebels. The expedition of Basil Synadenos, *strategos* of Dyrrachion, ended at Debar due to his clash with a subordinate officer named Michael Dermokaites. Relieving the governor of the Theme of Dyrrachion (Synadenos) of his command and appointing a replacement (Dermokaites) revealed the weaknesses of the Byzantine military hierarchy in the Dyrrachion district. Skylitzes' report that Dermokaites

115 Bŭlgarska nacionalna istorija IV, 58–65, 83–85 (*P. Pavlov*).

116 Bŭlgarska nacionalna istorija IV, 67–71, 83–85 (*P. Pavlov*).

mismanaged the theme, seizing carts, horses, and other valuables from his subordinates,[117] illustrates the hardships of ordinary soldiers, whose personal property was apparently at stake. Their discontent led to an uprising in the Theme of Dyrrachion, with a soldier called Tichomiros proclaimed "emperor of Bulgaria."[118]

Leaving aside the relationship between the two rebel centers, Delyan's and Tichomiros', it is evident that the traditions of Bulgarian statehood were very much alive in the former territory of Samuel's Bulgaria, including the Theme of Dyrrachion, inhabited, among other ethnic groups, by a Slavic population. Skylitzes describes both Tichomiros' and Delyan's supporters as Bulgarians.[119] In both cases, their followers came from the predominantly Slavic local population, which identified with the ethnonym Bulgarians for various reasons. Tichomiros' uprising did not spread to the city of Dyrrachion, which remained a Byzantine stronghold until Delyan captured it once he took the helm of the whole rebel movement. Skylitzes tells us that the conquest of Dyrrachion was led by Delyan's general Kaukanos,[120] suggesting that the Byzantines failed to ensure an effective defense of both Skopje and Dyrrachion in 1040.

The second and, as it turned out, most important Byzantine military center during Peter Delyan's rebellion was Thessalonike, the seat of a *doux*/*katepano*. The rebels never captured it, although the sources report they exerted considerable pressure on the city. We know that an attack of Delyan's army forced Emperor Michael the Paphlagonian to flee Thessalonike for Constantinople and that Manuel Ibatzes, "a close associate of the emperor," defected to the rebels, seizing "all the regalia, the tent, and whatever there was of gold, silver and vestments" and giving it all to Delyan.[121] Manuel Ibatzes was probably a descendant of Samuel's notoriously recalcitrant magnate Ibatzes.[122] Kekaumenos confirms that the *doux* of Thessalonike took an active role in quashing the uprising and was responsible for the Byzantine reconquest of the Demetrias fortress. To help the inhabitants of the fortress, who had rebelled against Delyan's commander (governor or *strategos*) Ljutovoj, the *doux* dispatched the *pantheotes* Zepe with an army and ships, which blocked the fortress port and allowed the Byzantines to reassert their control.[123]

The role of Thessalonike as the most important active tagmatic military center was inherited from the war against the Kometopouloi. The report that the emperor's nephew, *patrikios* Constantine, served as the *doux* of Thessalonike[124] confirms the city's leading role during Delyan's rebellion. Even though the Empire established new command centers of various ranks in the post-1018 period, the lynchpin of its defense in the Balkans during the first half of the 11th century remained Thessalonike and its

117 Scylitzes, 410.

118 Scylitzes, 410; Zonaras 599.

119 Scylitzes, 410; Zonaras, 599.

120 Scylitzes, 411; Zonaras, 599, reports only that Delyan captured Dyrrachion.

121 Scylitzes, 411.

122 VIINJ III, 149 n. 223 (*J. Ferluga*).

123 Kekavmen, 188, 190.

124 Scylitzes, 413.

environs. This suggests that Basil's successors did not develop a military organization in this part of the Balkans, relying on Thessalonike as their base and the mobile army, which could be deployed in this part of the Empire when needed. The merging of the commands of Sirmium–Bulgaria or Thessalonike–Bulgaria–Serbia and concentrating command powers in the hands of Constantine Diogenes[125] to fend off the Pecheneg invasion in 1026/1027 supports the hypothesis that the defense of the entire central Balkans relied on the military base at Thessalonike. The city similarly remained the pillar of Byzantine defense during Delyan's rebellion.

Kekaumenos reports that the rebels were well organized, battle-hardened, and bellicose, as suggested by their capture of the Demetrias fortress in Hellas and the strong "Bulgarian fortress" of Boyon near Serdica, led by one Botkos.[126] The Byzantines had taken the fortress in 1016 after a successful operation led by Nikephoros Xiphias in the region of Triaditza.[127] Reports on their belligerent defenders show that Byzantium once again failed in 1040/1041 to consolidate its control in some parts of what was formerly Samuel's Bulgaria. We know that the rebels controlled the broader area of Serdica because the sources report that Emperor Michael the Paphlagonian personally put down the rebellion in 1041 with an army assembled from various parts of the Empire, including Varangian mercenaries. From the Serdica area, this army advanced deeper into the district of Bulgaria, retaking Boyon and slaughtering its defenders.[128] The report on Manuel Ibatzes, who continued to resist the Byzantines in the region of Prilep even after Delyan's capture, is the last piece of information we have on the 1040–1041 revolt in the central Balkans.[129] The rebellion effectively ended after the collapse of the resistance movement in Prilep.

Peter Delyan's movement spread to the Theme of Nikopolis, while its center, Naupaktos, remained under Byzantine control. There is no information on its commanders, but we know that John Koutzomytes, a *praktor* (public tax collector) whose greed had incited the local population to rebel, served in this theme. Skylitzes opines that the Nikopolitans joined Delyan's rebellion due to the unpopular fiscal policy rather than out of loyalty to the traditions of independent Bulgaria.[130] As explained above, the inhabitants of this theme had risen against the central authorities shortly after Basil II's death for similar reasons, and the metropolitan bishop of Naupaktos had made the ill-advised decision to support the rebellion.[131] A part of the Theme of Nikopolis had been in Samuel's Bulgaria, and the developments from the time of Constantine VIII and Michael IV the Paphlagonian confirm the unabated resentment of its inhabitants, whom the Byzantines could not mollify by non-violent means.

125 *Swiencickyj*, Byzantinische Bleisiegel, no. 11, p. 439; Scylitzes, 373, 376.

126 Kekavmen, 196.

127 Scylitzes, 354.

128 Kekavmen, 196.

129 Scylitzes, 414.

130 Scylitzes, 411–412.

131 Scylitzes, 372. See above 404–405.

Even though Byzantine authors provide no detailed accounts of the rebellion, their sporadic reports show that the attempt to restore Bulgaria's independence involved most major strongholds of Samuel's state – Belgrade, Morava, Niš, Skopje, Ostrovos, probably Devol, Prilep (the region known as the "inner areas"), Dyrrachion, Triaditza (Serdica), and Boyon.[132] The rebels tried to advance southward to Thessalonike and Hellas (the conquest of Demetrias, the Battle of Thebes).[133] Parts of the Theme of Nikopolis also joined the uprising.[134] The territorial scope of Peter Delyan's rebellion reveals that the Byzantines had felt very sure of themselves in the Balkans shortly before the revolt broke out in 1040. Notably, Stefan Vojislav had mounted a rebellion in the Theme of Serbia only a year earlier, and yet the Empire chose not to heed this warning to bolster its military presence in the central Balkans.[135]

The second pertinent question is how loyal local communities in the central Balkans were to the traditions of independent Bulgaria. One of the indicators is the gradation among the leaders of the 1040–1041 rebellion. Kinship with Samuel's dynasty, feigned or authentic, obviously played a decisive role in the locals' allegiances in the former territory of Samuel's state, most of which had become the Byzantine district of Bulgaria in the post-1018 period. Reports suggest that Tichomiros, an officer from the Theme of Dyrrachion, enjoyed the lowest level of support, regardless of his alleged wisdom and courage.[136] The instigator of the rebellion, Peter Delyan, seems to have been more popular. His descent from Samuel was emphasized from the very beginning of the revolt, with Delyan claiming to be a son of Gabriel Radomir.[137] Finally, Alousianos, the secondborn son of the Bulgarian emperor John Vladislav, had the broadest support base. Alousianos had been taken to Constantinople with his brothers after 1018 and given the title of *patrikios* before becoming the *strategos* of Theodosioupolis. Following a personal clash with John the Orphanotrophos, he joined Delyan, who had no choice but to share his leading position with Alousianos, a legitimate member of the Bulgarian dynasty. The alliance proved short-lived: after a failed attack on Thessalonike, Alousianos blinded Delyan and defected to the emperor, receiving the title of *magistros* as a reward.[138] Alousianos' prestige among Bulgarians and Byzantines alike rested on his status as the eldest heir of Samuel's lineage. His elder brother, *magistros* Prousianos, had taken the monastic vow after a failed plot during the reign of Romanos III Argyros, and there is no evidence that he was alive during Delyan's rebellion.[139]

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132 Scylitzes, 409–414; Kekavmen, 196.

133 Scylitzes, 411; Kekavmen, 188.

134 Scylitzes, 411.

135 Scylitzes, 424; Kekavmen, 184, 186; Zonaras, 617–618.

136 Scylitzes, 410.

137 Scylitzes, 409. Psellos and Zonaras associate him with Samuel's brother Aaron, Psellus, Chonographia, 71; Zonaras, 598. On Delyan and his parentage, see VIINJ III, 141–142 n. 205 (*J. Ferluga*), 221–222 n. 3 (*B. Radojčić*).

138 Scylitzes, 359; Kekavmen, 176, 178; Psellus, Chonographia, 74, 76; Zonaras 601–603. On Alousianos and his parentage, see VIINJ III, 153–155 n. 234–240 (*J. Ferluga*).

139 Scylitzes, 376. *Cheynet*, Pouvoir et contestations, no. 31; *Krsmanović*, Uspon, 54–63.

Reports on the leaders and prominent participants in the rebellion suggest that Basil's policy of integrating the Bulgarian elites, especially the members of Samuel's house, had been partially successful. The sources mention several distinguished figures in the rebellion of 1040–1041, although, of course, there may have been more. Delyan's social status proves elusive, but the breadth of his support base suggests that he had ties with the higher classes of the Bulgarian (Slavic) population in the Balkans. There is no doubt that the three rebel leaders whose alleged ancestors had been members of the ruling elites in Samuel's era belonged to the higher classes: Alousianos, son of Emperor John Vladislav, Manuel Ibatzes,[140] who took his defiant ancestor's name as his patronymic and continued to fiercely resist the Byzantines even after the rebellion collapsed in 1041, and Delyan's general who took Dyrrachion, dubbed Kaukanos[141] by Skylitzes, who was probably descended from holders of this proto-Bulgarian title under Samuel, Gabriel Radomir, and John Vladislav, with the title presumably becoming a patronymic by the time of Delyan's rebellion. Kekaumenos also mentions the "old and battle-hardened" Ljutovoj of Devol, to whom Delyan entrusted the conquest and command of the Demetrias fortress in Hellas.[142] Ljutovoj was probably a general who had served in Samuel's Bulgaria and had ties to Devol either as his hometown or place of military service. The same source mentions Botkos, who defended the strong fortress of Boyon near Serdica, where the bellicose Bulgarians had assembled.[143] Besides these figures, we also know of Anthimos, who led a portion of the rebel army toward Hellas and defeated the Byzantine general Alakasseus in the Battle of Thebes.[144] Anthimos was probably an officer who had defected from some Byzantine military district, like Tichomiros, who is known to have been a member of the military class in the Theme of Dyrrachion.

Basil's policy of rewarding the commanders of Bulgarian fortresses by conferring on them Byzantine honorary titles had integrated members of the Bulgarian elite into the Empire's ruling class, giving them new career opportunities. The Byzantines resettled some Bulgarian magnates in the East, removing them from their homelands after 1018,[145] but many remained in the Balkans. Reports on the members of Samuel's house show that they had close ties to the Byzantine elites, suggesting that their participation in uprisings against imperial authority was not initially driven by aspirations to restore Bulgarian independence. The case of Alousianos confirms the successful integration of the higher classes: he joined Delyan's movement for personal reasons and eventually left it driven by no less self-serving interests. Resettling the members of Samuel's military and political elites from the Balkans in Constantinople and the eastern parts

140 Scylitzes, 411. See VIINJ III, 149 n. 223 (*J. Ferluga*).

141 Scylitzes, 411. See VIINJ III, 149 n. 225 (*J. Ferluga*).

142 Kekavmen, 188, 190. See VIINJ III, 206–207 n. 39–40 (*J. Ferluga*).

143 Kekavmen, 196.

144 Scylitzes, 411. It is unclear whether this was the Thebes near Demetrias or the one in Boeotia, see VIINJ III, 149 n. 227 (*J. Ferluga*).

145 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 117, 121 n. 74.

of the Empire smoothed the symbiosis of the Bulgarians and Byzantines, unlike the integration process in the Balkans. Reports on the participants of Delyan's uprising describe the Bulgarian magnates' eagerness, defiance, and tight-knit organization in their attempts to restore Bulgarian statehood in the Balkans. A contributing factor may have been the Empire's failure to include the political elites of subdued Bulgaria in the Byzantine administrative system in the Balkans after 1018.

Even though it had not ensured adequate backing for its military organization, the Byzantine Empire set out to change its policy in the central Balkans in the domain of not only taxation but also ecclesiastical governance. The appointment of Leo, a cleric of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and a native of Paphlagonia, as the archbishop of Ohrid in 1037 marked the beginning of the Byzantinization of the Ohrid Church.[146] This brings us to the third question: the attitude of the Archbishopric of Ohrid's clergy toward the rebellion that had roused the local population, reviving the memory of an independent Bulgarian empire over a broad territory.

The sources are conspicuously silent on the involvement of Ohrid's archbishop and senior clergy, which is not the case in their reports on later unrest in the Balkans.[147] Their silence suggests that, unlike the Bulgarian Church of Samuel's era, the Archbishopric of Ohrid was neither a bearer of the idea of Bulgarian statehood nor an ally of those who championed it. Still, given Delyan's alleged descent from Samuel's lineage and his ideological ties to Emperor Peter, whose name he assumed, a concretized ideological program obviously underpinned the rebellion of 1040–1041. Who could have been the architect of this program? Choosing the name of the Bulgarian ruler Peter, a symbol of the Bulgarian Empire, may have stemmed from the knowledge that the Byzantines had recognized his imperial title, unlike that of his predecessors and successors. In addition, by emphasizing Samuel as an ancestor of the rebel leader, the age of Samuel's Bulgaria was ideologically included as a continuation of the traditions of Peter's empire. The awareness of this continuity, apparent even in Basil's founding charters to the Archbishopric of Ohrid, must have come from more erudite circles. Regardless, it is impossible to say whether the architects of this program came from the ranks of the Church, i.e., the clergy of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

Even though some settlements that joined the rebellion were episcopal seats (Belgrade, Niš, Skopje, Serdica, possibly Devol, and Morava),[148] the relationship of their bishops with the rebels remains unclear. There is nothing to suggest that local bishops supported the uprising or any of the three rebel leaders. Even if some members of the local senior clergy sided with the rebels, the preeminent Byzantine church organization in the central Balkans offered no open or organized support to the revolt of 1040–1041. Archbishop Leo's appointment in 1037 shows that the process of replacing the clergy

146 Scylitzes, 400.

147 Skylitzes Continuatus, 182. See below 417.

148 For more details on the network of bishoprics of the Ohrid Archbishopric, see the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th Century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II.

of the Ohrid Church inherited from Samuel's era was already underway. This process included the bishoprics whose thrones had been vacated when their primates died. One of the consequences of these personnel changes was to distance the Archbishopric of Ohrid from its Bulgarian roots and bring it closer to the Church of Constantinople.[149]

Did the sour experience of Peter Delyan's rebellion change how Byzantium governed its Balkan territories? The second rebellion in the district of Bulgaria (1072) showed that some modifications were made to the military organization, most notably the activation of the command center in Skopje. The Byzantine counter-offensive against the rebels in 1072 relied on the military base at Skopje, with no involvement of Dyrrachion and Thessalonike reported in these developments. This means the lynchpin of the Theme of Bulgaria's defense had shifted to its center, Skopje. Still, there is no evidence that this shift was purely down to the lesson the Empire had learned in putting down Delyan's uprising. The Pecheneg and Uzes southward invasions in the previous decades and the large-scale Hungarian offensive against Niš (1071) may have just as easily led to the activation of the military base in Skopje.

Prosopographic evidence attests to the almost continuous activity of several high Byzantine officials in the Theme of Bulgaria in the post-1040 period, including some that served during the rebellion of 1072. In addition to the functions of *doux* and *katepano* (Andronikos Philokales,[150] Leo Drimys,[151] Nikephoros Karantenos,[152] Damian Dalassenos[153]), the sources mention an *anagrapheus* and *pronoites*, who wielded some military powers (Basil Monachos).[154] Seals also confirm that a *logariastes*, *anagrapheus* and *pronoites* served in the Theme of Bulgaria (Constantine).[155] In addition, the district was headed at one point by Nikephoros Proteuon.[156] Notably, some of these officials held fiscal powers, suggesting that the Byzantines had, in the meantime, intensified their economic exploitation of the central Balkans.

Similarly, the sources mention lower-ranking provincial military officials in the Theme of Bulgaria: the *strategoi* of the fortresses the Byzantines had taken under Basil II. In the post-1018 period, some of these strongholds were no longer used as military bases, while others became seats of the local *strategos*, i.e., the leader of the garrison installed at the fortress. Niš,[157] Prizren,[158] Kastoria, Devol, and Ohrid, which had a

149 See the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others*, II.

150 Kekavmen, 280; *Jordanov*, Prečatite, no. 323; https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1977.34.24/view (accessed 9. 9. 2024)

151 *Laurent*, Bulletin, 611–613.

152 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163.

153 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163.

154 Scylitzes, 458, 459, 471 (*archon*, *hegemonas*, *synkellos*); Kekavmen, 180 (*pronoites*); Attaliatus, 31–32 (*satrapes*, *archegos*); *Zacos*, Seals II, no. 959 (*synkellos and anagrapheus*); *Jordanov*, Corpus I, no. 19.1 (*synkellos and anagrapheus*).

155 *Schlumberger*, Sigillographie, p. 240, nos. 1–2; *Zacos*, Seals II, nos. 422, 423.

156 Scylitzes, 478.

157 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164, 165; Bryennius, 211.

158 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163.

strategos but not a fortress, Skopje, Sirmium, and the Danubian cities up to Vidin, appear as fortified military bases in the rebellion of 1072.[159] The Byzantines sought to control the surrounding areas and local populations from these military bases, relying on *strategoi* from their own ranks. The policy of excluding the locals from the administrative system must have created a rift between Byzantine officials and the local population, contributing to the spread of rebellions at opportune moments.

Reports on the course and end of the 1072 rebellion indicate that the Byzantine military administration had become more effective since Delyan's uprising. Even though the Byzantines brought in mobile troops from other parts of the Empire in 1072, the defense of the central Balkans relied more on local garrisons, as attested by the rebel army's failed attempt to take Kastoria.[160]

The sources explain the beginnings of the 1072 rebellion by the locals' disgruntlement with Constantinople's fiscal policy, which then evolved into a political revolt rooted in the traditions of Bulgarian statehood. The outbreak of the uprising seems to have been limited to the center of the Theme of Bulgaria, Skopje, where "Bulgaria's prominent men" had gathered – most likely distinguished Bulgarians who lived in this district. Very unusually, they sought a leader beyond their ethnic circle, inviting Michael, Prince of Diokleia, and his son, Constantine Bodin, to take the helm of their uprising.[161] While some scions of Samuel's family were still active in the 1070s, they had no role whatsoever in the events of 1072, possibly because they had successfully assimilated into the Byzantine high society.[162]

The appeal of "Bulgaria's prominent men" to Diokleia and its rulers shows that, in addition to Hungary, the Serbian principality had become an important political actor by the early 1070s, capable of challenging Byzantine domination in the central Balkans. Bodin's willingness to take the reins of the rebellion as "emperor of Bulgaria/Bulgarians," taking the imperial name of Peter,[163] demonstrates that the traditions of the Bulgarian empire held universal significance for the Slavic population of the Balkans. Bulgaria had been Byzantium's long-standing rival, which had, for centuries and remarkably successfully, blocked a Byzantine advance into the Balkan interior, demarcating the Empire's frontier in this region.

Reports suggest that the territory covered by the 1072 rebellion was smaller than the one that had participated in Delyan's revolt. Besides Skopje, another hub of the rebellion in its initial phase was Prizren, where the Bulgarian leaders made an alliance with the Serbs of Diokleia. The rebels had the support of the local population in the very heart of Samuel's realm. Bodin's supporters from the ranks of the Bulgarian political elite took temporary control of Skopje. We know that Bodin's army numbered 300

159 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164.

160 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164.

161 Skylitzes Continuatus, 162–163.

162 Skylitzes Continuatus, 134 (*vestarches* Samuel Alousianos).

163 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163, 164.

troops, occasionally joined by locals. Bodin put his general Petrilo in charge of a part of this army, which then managed to take Ohrid and Devol. The sources report that the locals greeted Petrilo "amicably" and readily recognized Bodin as their new lord.[164] The other part of the rebel army, led by Bodin, took Niš, Sirmium, and other Danubian cities up to Vidin.[165] As the rebellion was drawing to a close, Byzantine soldiers, mercenaries (Alemanni and Franks), and troops from the district of Macedonia raided Prespa, plundering the Church of St. Achilleos and demolishing the Bulgarian palace, which had apparently stood there since Samuel's day.[166]

The sources mention George Voyteh as a prominent participant in the rebellion, describing him as a member of the "kavkhan lineage."[167] His position in the Byzantine administrative system is unknown, but he must have been a politically influential figure held in high regard in Skopje and among the local population. Voyteh was one of the unofficial leaders of the rebellion, although he was reluctant to assume formal leadership. In addition, the sources reveal his ambiguous position on continuing the revolt, reporting that Voyteh eventually backed down and made peace with (Michael) Saronites, the *doux* of Skopje, a decision he later came to regret.[168] The sources name no other notable rebels, leaving us in the dark regarding the participants' social status. However, they do provide some information that paints a polarized picture of the local population. For instance, we know that a notable named Boris David opposed the rebellion and sought refuge at fortified Kastoria, which remained beyond the reach of Bodin's army.[169] In the post-1018 Byzantine military organization, Kastoria retained the prominent role it had had in Bulgaria's military governance. The inhabitants of the district of Bulgaria seem to have been divided, with some supporting and others opposing the rebellion, a factor that must have contributed to its failure.

The assignment of local Byzantine officials (Nikephoros Karantenos, Damian Dalassenos, and Saronites) to suppress the 1072 rebellion without direct intervention from the emperor indicates that this uprising was of a lower intensity compared to Delyan's.[170]

The selection of the rebel leader, the limited territorial scope of the uprising, and the polarization of the local population suggest that the Byzantines had sufficiently consolidated their rule in the central Balkans in the three decades separating Delyan's movement from Bodin and Voyteh's rebellion.

Like in the case of the Delyan revolt, the position of ecclesiastical circles on the events of 1072 remains unknown. Although the sources mention the episcopal seats of Skopje, Prizren, Niš, Ohrid, and Devol as settlements involved in the rebellion, there is nothing to show how the ecclesiastical organization functioned in these turbulent

164 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163–165.

165 Bryennius, 211.

166 Skylitzes Continuatus, 166.

167 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163. See VIINJ III, 180 n. 22 (*B. Radojčić*).

168 Skylitzes Continuatus, 165. See VIINJ III, 184 n. 35 (*B. Radojčić*)

169 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164. See VIINJ III, 182 n. 32 (*B. Radojčić*).

170 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163, 165.

conditions. However, some settlements appear conspicuously more often than others in accounts of these rebellions, providing some insight into the locals' mood. A telling example is Devol, a former episcopal seat included in the Bishopric of Kastoria after 1019.[171] The exact date when Devol regained its status as an episcopal seat remains unknown; however, it must have occurred before 1092/1093, when Theophylact of Ohrid lamented the deplorable state of Devol's cathedral in a letter.[172] Devol had been an important Bulgarian military center during Basil's war in the Balkans. There is no doubt that the Byzantines sought to tighten their grip on the fortress and its environs in the post-1018 period, and the temporary dissolution of the Bishopric of Devol was presumably part of this strategy.[173] Contributing factors may have been the devastation of the area during the hostilities and the fact that the Devol region was home to a rather unruly population, often disloyal to Constantinople. The residents of Devol rose against the Byzantines multiple times, joining the Bulgarian/Slavic rebellions of 1040–1041 and 1072.[174] As we will see, the inhabitants of Devol and Ohrid also supported a Byzantine movement against the imperial government – the rebellion of the Byzantine general Nikephoros Basilakes, who tried to overthrow the emperor in 1078.[175] This rebellion demonstrated that the clergy did not share the sentiments of the local population, as the incumbent archbishop of Ohrid made clear in no uncertain terms.

As in Serbia, Croatia, and Bulgaria, Byzantine control was also undermined in Sirmium, the fourth entity Basil had integrated in the closing years of his reign. With the surrender of the widow of Sermon, Sirmium's last lord, Byzantine troops led by Constantine Diogenes took control of the region in 1019. The widow was sent to Constantinople and married off to a dignitary in the capital. Diogenes, who had previously served as the *strategos* of Serbia, became Sirmium's governor[176] before taking the helm of the Theme of Bulgaria a few years later. The reason for this last appointment was the Pecheneg invasion in the mid-1020s.[177]

Reports on the administrative organization of Sirmium in the post-1019 period are quite terse. Given that the Byzantines lost control of the Theme of Serbia around 1040 and, temporarily, in the wake of Delyan's rebellion, also of the Theme of Bulgaria, it seems unlikely that Byzantine rule in Sirmium fared any better. Delyan's uprising began near Sirmium – in the fortresses of Morava and Belgrade.[178] The Themes of Serbia and Bulgaria territorially separated Sirmium from the heart of the Empire, so we can assume that the Byzantines could not have retained control of Sirmium during

171 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I – *Zone I.*

172 Theophylactus, Epistulae, no. 22. See *Mullet*, Theophylact of Ohrid, 202. See also the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others*, II, 60.

173 See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I – *Zone I.*

174 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164.

175 Skylitzes Continuatus, 182.

176 Scylitzes, 365–366.

177 Scylitzes, 373.

178 Scylitzes, 409.

Delyan's rebellion, although they recovered it once the revolt ended. The local administration endured for three more decades before its final collapse when Bodin's rebels and, finally, the Hungarians captured the city.[179] So, by the 1080s, the Byzantines had lost control of Serbia, Croatia, and Sirmium. The Byzantine base in the central Balkans remained the district of Bulgaria, regardless of the short-lived rebellions occasionally launched by the local population.

Besides the revolts that broke out in Basil's ethnic themes, the sources describe other uprisings in the Balkans. While they were driven by similar, primarily economic reasons (additional taxation, greedy local officials, rescinding the privileges of the local elites), their focus was not on restoring or achieving independence, although Bulgarians participated in all those rebellions, which tended to break out in areas with atypical social, ethnic, and religious landscapes.

A notable example of such rebellions was the uprising of Larissa's inhabitants – Vlachs, Bulgarians, and Greeks, who were disgruntled by the fiscal measures introduced by Constantine IX Monomachos in 1066. If Kekaumenos is to be believed, a Byzantine official named Nikoulitzas Delphinas reluctantly took the helm of the rebellion but soon clashed with other rebel leaders, resulting in the uprising's collapse.[180]

Similarly, the rebellion in the Theme of Paradounavon in the early 1070s broke out because of the brutal fiscal policy pursued by the *logothetes tou dromou* Nikephoritzes. Again, a Byzantine officer of Bulgarian descent became the leader of the uprising at one point – Nestor, who was initially sent as the *doux* of Paradounavon (or, according to Attaleiates, *katepano* of Dristra) to pacify the unrest. The rebels' demographic base consisted of local Bulgarian and Pecheneg elites. The rebels set out for the Empire's capital, but the movement collapsed before they could reach it.[181] Nevertheless, the rebellion temporarily destabilized Byzantine rule in Paradounavon. It was not until two decades later that Alexios I Komnenos finally consolidated the Byzantine presence on the lower Danube after he defeated the Pechenegs in 1091.[182] Constantinople's intellectual circles used the term *mixobarbaroi* for Paradounavon's diverse population,[183] suggesting that the Byzantines did not have full control in the lower Danube area in the last decades of the 11th century.

The Paulicians, a religious group whose members served in the Byzantine military, rebelled in Philippopolis in 1084–1086.[184] The followers of Paulicianism or Manichaeism were descended from settlers from Asia Minor whom the Empire had

179 Cinnamus, 227; Bryennius, 211.

180 Kekavmen, 268ff. See Bŭlgarska nacionalna istorija IV, 65–67, 83–85 (*P. Pavlov*).

181 Skylitzes Continuatus, 164; Attaliatus, 158. On Nestor's movement, see *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 98; *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 50–82; Bŭlgarska nacionalna istorija IV, 71–76, 83–85 (*P. Pavlov*).

182 On Alexios' war against the Pechenegs, see *Meško*, Alexios I Komnenos, 221–306.

183 Attaliatus, 158; Alexias, 228, 287, 295, 327, 328, 350, 435, 464, 475, 476. See *Stephenson*, Balkan frontier, 109–110.

184 Alexias, 174, 199.

resettled in strategically important parts of the Balkans to help defend its frontiers. The idea was to get the Paulicians to convert to Orthodox Christianity, but the conversion proved difficult to implement fully. Despite their co-existence with the local Bulgarian-Slavic and Orthodox population, the Paulicians preserved their religious identity, and this distinct identity underpinned the resistance movement they launched in 1084–1086. The rebellion came as a response to the reprisals of Alexios I Komnenos, who had brutally cracked down on Paulician mercenaries, blaming them for the Byzantine defeat in a Byzantine-Norman conflict near Dyrrachion. The Paulicians, led by Travlos, canceled their allegiance to the emperor in 1084, allying with Pecheneg tribal leaders. Alexios' army, supported by mercenary battalions, forced the rebels to withdraw to the north.[185] The events preceding the rebellion reveal family ties between the Paulician and Pecheneg chieftains. The Paulician leader Leka from Philippopolis is known to have become a kinsman of some Pecheneg tribal leaders during the reign of Nikephoros Botaneiates (1078–1081). Leka was responsible for the death of Bishop Michael of Serdica.[186] Around the same time, unrest broke out in Mesembria. Little is known about these riots except that they were incited by one Dobromir,[187] possibly a scion of a prominent Bulgarian family from Samuel and Basil II's era.[188]

Even though the Bulgarian ethnic element was an important factor in the rebellions in Larissa and Paradounavon and the Paulician revolt in the Philippopolis area, these uprisings did not aspire to restore Bulgaria's independence or the former Bulgarian empire. Even when the idea of Bulgarian statehood resurfaced in the rebellion of Voyteh and Bodin in 1072, the developments in the district of Bulgaria had nothing to do with the uprising that Nestor, a Byzantine official of Bulgarian descent, led around the same time in the Theme of Paradounavon. This absence of a unifying factor indicates that the old traditions of Bulgarian statehood had faded on the periphery of the Bulgarian world, i.e., in the territories beyond the district of Bulgaria. Regardless of the Bulgarian ethnic presence, the borderlands were inhabited by a diverse population that did not have a history of aspiring to a universal Orthodox empire. The idea of restoring Bulgarian statehood was alien to this heterogeneous population, no less so than loyalty to the state where it lived.

Byzantium's response to the "barbarization" of the Balkans – The term *mixobarbaroi* suggests the ethnic diversity of certain parts of the Balkans. As mentioned, in the 11th century, the lower course of the Danube was an area of weaker Byzantine control, primarily due to the higher concentration of barbarians who crossed over the Danube and raided the territories along the northern frontier. These disturbances did not allow the Empire to tighten its grip, and the Byzantines could do little beyond installing

185 On the uprising of the Paulicians, see *Meško*, Alexios I Komnenos, 229–233; Bŭlgarska nacionalna istorija IV, 78–85 (*P. Pavlov*). For more details on Bogomilism, see *Bádenas*, Resistance bulgare, 104–108 (*P. Pavlov*).

186 Skylitzes Continuatus, 184; Attaliatus, 232.

187 Skylitzes Continuatus, 184; Attaliatus, 232.

188 Scylitzes, 344, 359; *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 237–238. See below 446.

garrisons in the fortresses on the Danube frontier. The chief cause of the barbarization of the Danube frontier was the Pecheneg threat, with the sources reporting their frequent incursions into the Empire's territory from the 1020s onward.[189]

The Pecheneg raids led the Empire to reassess its view of the northern frontier in the Balkans.[190] Basil II had established the frontier on the Danube, the traditional demarcation line between the *world of the Rhomaioi* and the *barbarian world*. In the 11th century, this natural barrier proved surmountable for nomadic tribes who invaded the Balkan interior across the Danube – primarily the Pechenegs, followed by the Uzes and Cumans.[191] Consequently, the term *borderland* evolved, expanding from the Danubian limes to the interior. So, the vast territory of the central Balkans from Thessalonike in the south became a border zone.

Byzantium was plagued by nomadic raids throughout the 11th century. The most intense were the incursions of the Pechenegs, who regularly raided Byzantine territories in every decade from the 1020s onward.[192] The Pechenegs ravaged not only the territories the Empire had annexed in the Balkans after 1018 but also old Byzantine themes, e.g., Thrace and Macedonia.[193] The barbarians sometimes set their sights on Thessalonike but never managed to take the Empire's "second city."[194] The Uzes crossed the Danube in 1064, plundering the Danubian borderlands. Some of the invaders continued their advance southward, laying waste to everything before them up to Thessalonike and Hellas, probably including Macedonia.[195] Nevertheless, this large-scale incursion had no lasting consequences, and the Uzes soon retreated across the Danube. Similarly, Byzantine sources report a Cuman raid in the 11th century, during the reign of Alexios Komnenos, which affected Byzantine Thrace with Adrianople and Anchialos on the Black Sea.[196]

How did the Byzantine military organization function in these precarious conditions? The sources attest that the command in Thessalonike was operational and focused on defending the territories that had once made up the nucleus of Samuel's Bulgaria and the southern areas covered by the Byzantine district of Hellas. The territorial jurisdiction of the *doux* of Thessalonike was expanded when needed, but it generally corresponded to the region commanded by the same official during Basil II's war in the Balkans.[197]

As we have seen, the activity of the command center in Thessalonike during Peter Delyan's rebellion points to the same conclusion. During the invasions of nomadic

189 Scylitzes, 373.

190 For more details on Pecheneges on the Lower Danube, see *Diaconu*, Petchénègues.

191 On the incursions of nomadic tribes and the character of the northern frontier in the 11th century, see *Stephenson*, Balkan frontier, 80–116.

192 *Antonović*, Etnička kretanja, 73–76.

193 Scylitzes, 399.

194 Scylitzes, 397.

195 Skylitzes Continuatus, 114; Psellus, Chonographia, 260; Attaliatus, 66; Zonaras 678.

196 Alexias, 287.

197 *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 148–156.

tribes such as the Pechenegs and Uzes, Thessalonike defended its immediate environs, with the *doux* of Thessalonike usually not involved in expeditions that aimed to protect and fortify the frontier on the Danube.

The lynchpin of the defense of the Balkan interior shifted from Thessalonike to the district of Bulgaria. This seems to have been one of the consequences of Peter Delyan's rebellion, the suppression of which was entrusted to the command in Thessalonike rather than the command center in Skopje, as might be expected. The scale of this rebellion and the Pecheneg devastation of Byzantine territories showed that it was necessary to activate the military potential of the district of Bulgaria. Notably, the *doux*/*katepano* of Bulgaria took a more active role in anti-Pecheneg expeditions from the 1040s onward.[198]

Given that nomadic tribes invaded Byzantine territories from the north, crossing the Danube, the Byzantines also restructured their military administration in the territories on the Danube. In the post-1018 period, the defense of the Danube frontier likely relied on military commanders installed at fortresses along the river. Except for Dristra, which was headed by a *katepano*,[199] the ranking officers at all other fortresses were *strategoi* (Pliska, Preslav, Little Preslav, Varna)[200]. While the exact date when the Byzantines formed the Theme of Paradounavon eludes us,[201] we do know that there was a continuous need to merge commands on the Danube limes, as attested by reports on the "archons of Danubian cities" in Byzantine accounts of the events in the 1040s.[202] So, we can reasonably assume that Dristra had been the main military center on the lower Danube before this period and that the *katepano* of Dristra had coordinated the defense of this frontier segment.

When the raids of nomadic tribes moved up the Empire's northern frontier from the fortified Danube limes to the interior of the Balkans, the central areas of which now became a border zone, the Empire adapted its military organization to the new situation, launching coordinated operations by troops assembled from multiple districts to ensure a more effective defense. As noted above, the district of Bulgaria assumed a more prominent role in defending the territories north of Thessalonike from the 1040s onward. For instance, a large-scale counter-offensive against the Pechenegs was launched ca. 1046/1047 under the leadership of Basil Monachos, the commander (*hegemonas*, *archon*, *pronoites*, and *anagrapheus*) of Bulgaria, and Michael, "*archon* of the Danubian cities." Constantine Arianites, *doux* of Adrianople, joined the campaign, presumably because the Pecheneg raids affected the Byzantine districts of Thrace and Macedonia.[203]

198 Scylitzes, 458, 459.

199 DOSeals I, no. 65.1; *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 62.

200 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, nos. 15.1 (Vrana); 62.1 (Pliska); 63.1–9 (Preslav and Presthlavitza).

201 Various dates have been proposed for the formation of the district of Paradounavon, see *Jordanov*, Corpus I, pp. 135–136; *Stephenson*, Balkan frontier, 94; *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 194–198; *Bozilov*, Administration, 95–97; *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 59–88.

202 Scylitzes, 433, 457.

203 Scylitzes, 457, 458.

This overview brings us to a few conclusions. Firstly, even though Basil II was probably responsible for establishing the position of the *doux*/*katepano* of Bulgaria with its seat at Skopje,[204] until the 1040s, the Byzantine military organization in the Balkans had relied on two tagmatic centers formed under Tzimiskes – Thessalonike and Adrianople,[205] with Thessalonike attested as an active military center, unlike Adrianople, which had no strategic significance during the war of 976–1018 and does not appear in the sources as a military base (instead, Philippopolis and Mosynopolis assumed Adrianople's military and strategic role in this period).[206] Basil probably introduced the position of the *doux*/*katepano* of Skopje into the official hierarchy. However, we cannot know if officials were regularly appointed to this position and, if so, how much recruiting potential the district had. During Basil's reign and shortly after his death, the Byzantines concentrated the bulk of their military resources in this part of the Balkans in the region of Thessalonike. Secondly, the Serbian and Bulgarian rebellions and the Pecheneg raids led to changes in the military organization of the Balkans – reforming and reactivating existing military centers. Thus, Dyrrachion was made a command center headed by a *katepano* in the early 1040s, becoming more actively involved in defending the Adriatic coast and its hinterlands.[207] Skopje, or more accurately, the district of Bulgaria, assumed a more prominent role in protecting the Balkan interior, a change reflected in growing prosopographical information on the holders of the title of *doux*/*katepano* of Bulgaria.[208] The Pecheneg invasions into the districts of Thrace and Macedonia led to the activation of the *doux* of Adrianople, who was responsible for protecting the Constantinopolitan hinterland.[209] Reforms were also implemented on the vulnerable Danube frontier, where a command center headed by a *doux*/*katepano* was established to oversee the defense of the Danubian cities.[210]

These changes to the military system allowed the Byzantines to maintain their presence in the Balkans in the 11th century. Despite the scarcity of information on the Empire's efforts to keep various command centers operational, such an undertaking must have been quite challenging for Constantinople. Perhaps the reports on the situation in the doukate of Adrianople on the eve of Leo Tornikios' rebellion in 1047 may shed some light.[211] We know that the revolt was supported by demobilized troops, some of whom lived in the district of Thrace-Macedonia. Most of them were presumably local soldiers, as the sources report they had estates in this region. We also know that their demobilization had been a temporary measure that Byzantium had resorted to because it could not keep paying an army unengaged either in the Eastern theater or in the Balkans. The sources report that those demobilized troops aimlessly roamed Thrace and

204 Scylitzes, 358. See *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 192–194.

205 *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 263.33.34.

206 *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 157–163.

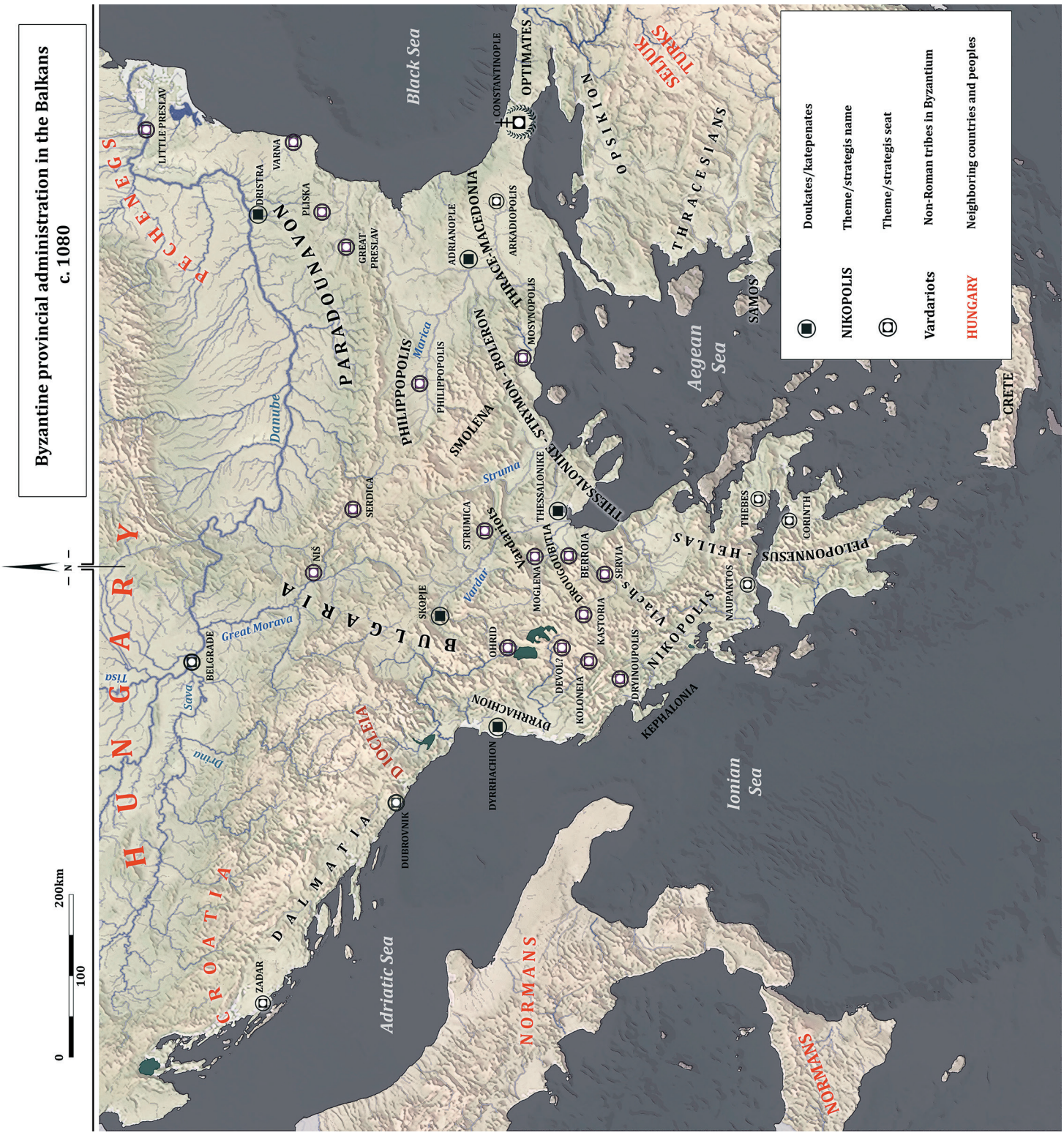
207 Kekavmen, 184 (*katepano*); Scylitzes, 424 (*archon*).

208 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 49.

209 Scylitzes, 458.

210 The earliest seals of the *katepano* of Paradounavon are datable to the 1050s, *Jordanov*, Corpus I, pp. 135–137.

211 *Cheynet*, Pouvoir et contestations, no. 65; *Krsmanović*, Uspon 111–139.



Map 3.
Byzantine provincial administration in the Balkans c. 1080

Macedonia, reaching as far as the capital and disturbing the local population and the central authorities.[212] Also, it seems that the position of the *doux* of Adrianople was not vacant at the time. The most likely candidate to have filled it was the *magistros* Constantine Arianites, mentioned shortly before the demobilization of the Macedonian armies as a participant in the campaign against the Pecheneg chieftain Tyrach.[213] There are no surviving records of his activities during Tornikios' rebellion. Admittedly, this is of little consequence, as Arianites may have served as the *doux* of Adrianople without actually commanding the troops of the Thrace-Macedonia district that had been demobilized before they rebelled. Reports on the military organization in the territory controlled by Adrianople show that the Byzantines could not always cover the costs of running a network of command centers and keeping them operational at full capacity. Instead, armies from other centers that happened to be active at the time would be engaged to compensate for this disadvantage. For instance, the Empire dispatched an army from the district of Bulgaria to deal with Tornikios' rebels.[214] However, this army was defeated, and additional troops had to be sent from the East to suppress the rebellion.[215]

Besides reorganizing military governance, another way the Empire responded to the barbarization of the Balkans was trying to revive the demographic landscape.

The settlement of barbarians in Byzantine territories was both spontaneous and planned. Having crossed the Danube, members of nomadic tribes sometimes lingered in territories south of the river. They must have been quite numerous and visible to the Byzantine government because Byzantine authors eventually coined the term *mixobarbaroi* for the diverse population of the lower Danube region. The Byzantines had no choice but to accept the newcomers and try to integrate them into their administrative system. Reports on this process are scant, but we know of a Pecheneg community led by one Kegen, which was apparently a compact population. A surviving seal refers to their chieftain as John Kegen, *magistros* and *archon* of the Πατζινακίας,[216] suggesting that he governed an area (*archontia*?) populated by Pechenegs.[217] Kegen's people must have consisted of soldiers and their families, as Kegen and his Pechenegs fought as Byzantine allies in military campaigns, supporting the armies of the districts of Bulgaria, Paradounavon, and Thrace-Macedonia (Adrianople). This joint army clashed ca. 1046/1047 with another Pecheneg group led by Tyrach.[218]

The frequent Pecheneg raids and their self-initiated settlement forced the Byzantines to contain this process by undertaking a planned Pecheneg colonization. Having defeated Tyrach's tribesmen, they decided to resettle this group of Pechenegs in the underpopulated flatlands of the district of Bulgaria, i.e., near Serdica, Niš, and Ovče Pole.

212 Psellus, Chonographia, 151.

213 Scylitzes, 458.

214 Attaliatus, 24.

215 *Krsmanović*, Uspon 129–130.

216 Cf. *Jordanov*, Corpus I, no. 59.1.

217 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, pp. 138–142.

218 Scylitzes, 458.

Reports that the Pechenegs were disarmed and "scattered here and there" instead of being resettled as a compact group reveal the gravity of the Pecheneg threat.[219] The objective was to compel them to pay taxes and, when needed, conscript them into armies led by Byzantine commanders. This policy proved effective in the long term, and the Pechenegs began to assimilate in the 11th and, in particular, in the 12th century.[220]

Byzantium ultimately resolved the Pecheneg problem by force when Alexios Komnenos defeated them in the famed Battle of Levounion in Thrace (1091). Until then, the Pechenegs had actively participated in the developments in the Balkans as raiders, allies of other ethnic groups in anti-Byzantine revolts, and Byzantine subjects. John II Komnenos (1118–1143), Alexios' son and successor, crushed the last remnants of Pecheneg rebel tribes in 1122.[221]

The expansion of the network of top-ranking command centers led by a *doux* or a *katepano* to ensure a more effective defense of the Balkan frontier and the vast borderlands relied on mobile armies (*tagmata*) and the fortress system, whose garrisons protected the immediate surroundings of a given fortress and controlled access to important roads. Such a system was already in place in the East before John Tzimiskes tried to establish it in the Balkans after 971.[222] A striking characteristic of the Bulgarian military organization was its elaborate network of fortresses, over which Basil II assumed control after having vanquished the Bulgarians in 1018.[223] However, it is unclear whether the Byzantines managed to replace Bulgarian garrisons with their own in all captured fortresses. The surviving evidence on the *strategoi* of cities/fortresses suggests that a number of once-strategic strongholds fell into disuse under Byzantine rule.

The process of limiting the powers of *strategoi*, effectively reducing them to leadership over the garrison stationed at a fortress, led to the disappearance of the term *strategos* from the military-administrative nomenclature after the 11th century.[224] Instead of the word *strategos*, 12th-century sources employ the term *kastrophylax* (fortress warden), a self-explanatory term that leaves little doubt about the powers wielded by the holders of this office.[225] Similarly, reports from the 12th century sometimes use the term *boulgarika themata*, a counterpart to the term *armeniaka themata*, a phrase long used in the easternmost parts of the Empire to denote borderlands dotted with strategic fortresses.[226] However, the term *boulgarika themata* was not widely used for the fortress network in the Balkans or necessarily associated with the borderlands, with the sources limiting it to the region of Strumica and Serres.[227]

219 Scylitzes, 459.

220 *Antonović*, Etnička kretanja, 78–81.

221 *Ostrogorski*, Istorija 339, 355.

222 *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 132–136.

223 *Krsmanović,* Bulgarian Fortresses. See the chapter *From* Pax Basiliana *to* Pax Byzantina, I.

224 Novellae et aurae bullae, p. 364.

225 ODB II, p. 1112–1113 (*A. Kazhdan*).

226 *Ahrweiler-Glykatzi*, Recherches, 80; *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 84–87.

227 Actes d'Iviron III, no. 56, p. 79 (Strumica); Choniates, Historia, 465 (Serres).

Finally, it bears mentioning that the changes in military organization recorded in the sources from the 1040s onward were partially accompanied by modifications to the civilian administration, most notably in the Empire's fiscal policy. These changes included switching from taxation in kind to taxation in money – a move that led to the 11th-century rebellions of the local population – but also changing the titles of civilian tax officials. From the mid-11th century, the titles of some officials, e.g., the *pronoites* and *anagrapheus*, were accompanied by the phrase "all of Bulgaria," whereas the sources had previously used only the term Bulgaria, recording a *praitor*, *pronoites*, *anagrapheus*, *asekretes*, *notarios*, and other officials of "Bulgaria."[228] This emphasis on jurisdiction over the entire Bulgarian territory in civilian officials' titles suggests that their powers stretched beyond the military district of Bulgaria from the mid-11th century onward. Presumably, these officials were also in charge of the territory of Paradounavon and, according to John Skylitzes, even the Theme of Nikopolis.[229] In other words, the Byzantines probably merged the territories in the central Balkans that had enjoyed a preferential tax regime under Bulgarian rule, which the Empire chose to maintain in the post-1018 period. Expanding the territorial jurisdiction of some officials from "Bulgaria" to "all of Bulgaria" indicates a distinction between military and civilian organizations. The sources show that the Byzantines had managed to adequately develop their military and civilian administration in the district of Bulgaria in the post-1018 period but not in Paradounavon, where they established only a military district. The situation on the Danube frontier seems to have been so unstable that it did not allow the development of civilian governance. The Byzantine presence was reduced to troop deployment and tax collection, implemented by the bureaucratic apparatus of the district of Bulgaria. In the mid-11th century, the phrase "all of Bulgaria" also began to appear in the full title of the archbishops of Ohrid.[230]

IV. The Komnenian iron fist in the central Balkans

The accession of Alexios I Komnenos in 1081 put an end to frequent changes on the Byzantine throne after many decades. The rise of the Komnenian dynasty ushered in a period of stability, introducing a system of family rule. This meant that the members of the ruling family and the clan around the House of Komnenos occupied high official positions in Constantinople and other parts of the Empire.[231]

This stabilization allowed the court to launch a reform of provincial administration to strengthen Byzantine positions in the Peninsula. In the pre-Komnenian era, Constantinople had pursued a defensive policy in the Balkans, struggling to contain various

228 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, pp. 48–49.

229 In this area, the same fiscal laws as in Bulgaria seem to have been in place, drawing on the tax policy of Samuel's era, Scylitzes, 411–412.

230 *Seibt – Zarnitz*, Bleisiegel, no. 5.2. 10.

231 For the general characteristics of the reign of the Komnenoi, see *Stanković*, Komnini.

ethnic rebellions, some of which resulted in the emergence of independent states in the northwestern Balkans (Serbia, Croatia). The Hungarians took control of Sirmium in the 1070s, forcing Byzantium to retreat from its possessions in Dalmatia in the early 12th century. Similarly, the Empire withdrew from Italy in 1071, and the same year saw the collapse of Byzantine rule in Asia Minor after the defeat in the Battle of Manzikert.[232]

The defeat at Manzikert affected the perception of the Byzantine presence in the Balkans among Constantinople's ruling and well-educated circles. Faced with the loss of their state's former nucleus in the East, where they sought to reassert their control, the Byzantines increasingly turned to their Balkan territories, hoping to find a new economic, demographic, military, and political foothold in this part of the Empire. Consequently, defending the Balkan provinces became the priority of their military policy during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos.

This new approach was partially a product of the political landscape in the Balkans. In the Komnenian era, the Hungarians and Normans emerged as Byzantium's principal rivals. In addition, the Crusaders entered the fray, repeatedly traversing the Balkans on their way to the Holy Land. Nonetheless, the Komnenian emperors – Alexios, John, and Manuel – managed, for the most part, to maintain the Byzantine positions in the Balkans.[233] Manuel even reasserted control over Sirmium, Bosnia, and parts of Croatia and Dalmatia.[234]

Revoking the "Bulgarian privileges" – Tighter imperial control in the Balkans allowed Constantinople to start restructuring the local administration. The most impactful aspect of the Komnenian strategy in the Balkans was concentrating all military and civilian powers in the hands of local military commanders – the *doukes*,[235] resulting in the disappearance of *praitores* and judges, provincial officials of the civilian bureaucracy of the 11th century.[236]

Before the Komnenian era, there had been no strict separation between military and civilian powers. It was not uncommon for the same person to successively, or even concurrently, perform duties in different branches of power (military and administrative).[237] Also, the competencies of military and civilian officials sometimes overlapped, with military commanders occasionally assuming judicial or fiscal and financial powers[238] and some civilian officials temporarily tasked with duties that would typically

232 *Angold*, Byzantine Empire, 44–55; *Stephenson*, Balkan frontier, 189, 197–202.

233 *Ostrogorski*, Istorija, 335–370. For more details on the Balkans in the Komnenian era, see *Dimov*, Balkan World.

234 *Stephenson*, Balkan frontier, 253–256.

235 On the office of the *doux* in the provincial organization of the period, see *Oikonomides*, Évolution, 148–150; *Cheynet*, Du stratège de thème au duc, 181–94.

236 On the praitores, see *Ahrweiler-Glykatzi*, Recherches, 67–78; *Ilić*, Prilog funkciji pretora, 695–720.

237 Various sources attest to the merging of military and civilian powers in the hands of one official, see, for example, *Schlumberger*, Sigillographie, p. 240, nos. 1–2; DOSeals IV, no. 55.7; Actes de Docheiariou, no. 3, p. 68.

238 Tagmatic commanders, the *doukes*, began assuming civilian powers already in the late 10th century, *Dölger*, Schatzkammern, no. 56, p. 155. See *Ahrweiler-Glykatzi*, Recherches, 61; *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 210; *Eadem*, Taktikon Escorialense, 623–631.

fall within the purview of the police.[239] The *praitor* was the top-ranking civilian official of a district. However, these officials eventually disappear from the sources, with the last *krites/praitor* reported to have served as the civilian administrator of a district in 1124.[240] The only known exception was the district of Hellas-Peloponnesus. This composite theme, like other coastal districts, was formally governed by the *megas doux*, the commander-in-chief of the Byzantine navy. The holders of this position could not regularly do the job of the provincial warden in the district of Hellas-Peloponnesus, so local *praitores* continued to do so.[241] Besides the *praitor*, another office the sources ceased mentioning in the Komnenian era was the *strategoi* – the governors of the old Byzantine *themata*,[242] who were replaced by *doukes*, resulting in more uniform supreme governance in the provinces.

The domination of military offices over civilian ones reflected the militarization of society that intensified with the ascent of Alexios I. In this regard, a notable novelty was the pronoia system, intended to strengthen the Empire's military might.[243] The same period saw the aristocratization of governance, a process that predated the Komnenoi. Under their rule, kinship with the ruling dynasty became one of the important factors in assigning government positions.[244]

A set of changes was implemented in the provincial administration of the Balkans as early as the reign of Alexios Komnenos. The sources no longer mention the Theme of Bulgaria from the late 11th or early 12th century.[245] There are no surviving seals of the *doux/katepano* of Bulgaria after the closing years of the 11th century, and the last reference in narrative sources to this official (dux Nicheta, princeps Bulgarorum) concerns the Crusaders' march through the Morava Valley in 1096.[246] While some reports suggest that in the 1060s or 1070s, the unitary district of Bulgaria was split into several smaller divisions headed by *doukes* – in Skopje (Nikephoros Karantenos and Damian Dalassenos, 1071/1072),[247] Belgrade (1072),[248] and Serdica (Romanos Diogenes in the 1060s),[249] this process should not be seen as the creation of military-administrative districts in their own right (doukates) but rather as the relocation of central command

239 Psellus, Epistulae, no. 193, pp. 505–506. For a description of the jurisdiction of the *praitor*, including policing duties, see Sceaux byzantins, 987.

240 Novellae et aurae bullae, p. 364. See *Oikonomides*, Évolution, 149.

241 For more details, see *Herrin*, Hellas and Peloponnesos, 267.

242 Novellae et aurae bullae, p. 364. See *Oikonomides*, Évolution, 148.

243 *Ostrogorski*, Pronija, 16ff. For more research on the pronoia system, see *Ostrogorsky*, Pronoia unter den Komnenen, 41–54; *Maksimović*, Geneza, 103–154; *Bartusis*, Land and Privilege.

244 *Angold*, Byzantine Empire, 152–153.

245 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, 49. *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 98–99, argues that the Theme of Bulgaria was divided into two districts with centers at Skopje and Belgrade in the late 11th century and that the district of Belgrade inherited the name Bulgaria.

246 Albertus Aquensis, 274–279.

247 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163.

248 Scriptores rerum hungaricarum, 373–374.

249 Skylitzes Continuatus, 121.

within the still intact district of Bulgaria. The district's military commander resided in Petrisk during the 1066 rebellion of Larissa (Andronikos Philokales, 1066/1067)[250] and in Belgrade during the First Crusade before withdrawing to Niš (Niketas, 1096)[251].

So, it was not until the Komnenian era that several doukates with smaller territories and known military centers replaced the unitary district of Bulgaria established after 1018. Skopje was the center of one of those distinct territorial divisions;[252] another covered Niš, Braničevo, and Belgrade.[253] Serdica likely served as the center of another military province, as the sources describe the city as one of the most important military bases in the district of Bulgaria as early as the 1060s;[254] also, the charter Alexios III Angelos issued to the Venetians in 1198 confirms that Triaditza/Serdica (together with Velbăžd) was a separate *provintia*.[255]

The reasons for breaking up the formerly undivided district of Bulgaria were twofold. Firstly, no movements seeking to restore Bulgarian independence emerged after 1072. The turmoil brought about by the Pecheneg, Norman, and Cuman incursions into Byzantine-controlled territories in no way affected the obedience of the inhabitants of the former Bulgarian district. Similarly, neither the Serbo-Byzantine conflicts in the Komnenian era nor the upheavals caused by Hungarian-Byzantine frictions threatened the stability of Byzantine rule in the territory that once made up the nucleus of Samuel's state and the district of Bulgaria. This stability remained intact even in the face of the Crusaders' progress through Byzantine possessions in the Balkans on their way to the East. So, we can reasonably argue that the district of Bulgaria and its inhabitants were well-integrated into the Byzantine administration during the reigns of the early Komnenoi, obviating the need to centralize military governance over a broader area such as the undivided district of Bulgaria.

Secondly, the objective of the military administration reform was to increase efficacy, which could not be achieved by having just one command center protect the vast territory from the Danube to Thessaly. Separating other centers in the middle course of the Danube, the Morava Basin with its tributaries, and the Vardar upstream involved installing troops and command centers at bases that made it easier to defend the different sectors of the former district of Bulgaria.

Notably, the new Komnenian administrative nomenclature had no room for the term *Bulgaria*. Accordingly, Byzantine and other authors in the 12th century no longer used the term *Bulgarians* for the population that lived in the former district's territory.

250 Kekavmen, 280.

251 Albertus Aquensis, 274–279.

252 DOSeals I, p. 98, no. 30.1.

253 Andronikos Komnenos, *doux* of Niš and Braničevo (Cinnamus, 124), i.e., *doux* of Braničevo and Belgrade (Choniates, Historia, 101).

254 Skylitzes Continuatus, 121.

255 *Tafel – Thomas*, Urkunden, 260.

Recounting 11th-century developments in the central Balkans, Byzantine chroniclers distinguished between the *Bulgarians* and the *Rhomaioi*, assigning two meanings to the term *Bulgarians* – individual or collective ethnicity and the troops and inhabitants of the district of Bulgaria (not necessarily of Bulgarian ethnicity). Albert of Aix, who accompanied the Crusaders on their journey through the central Balkans in the late 11th century, refers to the inhabitants of the Morava Valley as Bulgarians.[256] He was also the last author to mention a governor (princeps) of the district of Bulgaria (Niketas).[257] Merely half a century later, during the Second Crusade, Crusader travel writers called the population of the middle Danube Greeks, mentioning the Pechenegs and other ethnic groups but not the Bulgarians.[258]

The Bulgarians are also absent from Byzantine accounts of the Byzantine-Hungarian war in the mid-12th century. Describing the hostilities between the *Rhomaioi* and the *Huns* (Hungarians) near Belgrade and Braničevo, John Kinnamos calls the residents of those cities Βελεγραδῖται and Βρανιτζοβῖται.[259] Erasing the term Bulgaria from the administrative nomenclature evidently made the term *Bulgarians* obsolete as an identifier of the district of Bulgaria's inhabitants regardless of their ethnicity. The restructuring of the military district of Bulgaria and the disappearance of the term *Bulgaria* from official usage should be seen as some of the ways in which the early Komnenoi sought to deconstruct the Bulgarian identity in the central Balkans.

Another tool that could help dismantle the Bulgarian identity in the central Balkans was popularizing the theory of *Iustiniana Prima* as the precursor to the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid, underlining its Greek rather than Bulgarian beginnings.[260] The Komnenian emperors endorsed the theory of the Ohrid Church's Greek roots. Furthermore, a member of the House of Komnenos was responsible for changing the full title of the archbishop of Ohrid – John (Adrian) Komnenos was the first head of the Church of Ohrid to sign documents as the archbishop of *Iustiniana Prima* and all of Bulgaria.[261] The tendency to maintain the Archbishopric's relevance is apparent from the persons chosen to serve as its primates. Alexios Komnenos sent to Ohrid the learned Theophylact, a close associate of the Doukai and Komnenoi, an appointment that showed how much the emperor valued the most prominent ecclesiastical institution in the Balkans. For his part, Manuel Komnenos entrusted the prestigious position of Ohrid's primate to his relative Adrian. Clearly, the practice of appointing members of the Komnenian dynasty and their clan to influential positions extended to the Church of Ohrid.[262]

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256 Albertus Aquensis, 280.

257 Albertus Aquensis, 274–279.

258 Odo de Deogilo, 63. See *Komatina*, Srbi na putu krstaša, 70. On the use of the term Bulgaria, see *Komatina*, Pojam Bugarske, 41–56.

259 Cinnamus, 131, 133.

260 On the changing character and identity of the Ohrid Church, see *Prinzing*, Entstehung, 268–287. See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th Century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II.

261 Acta synodica, 197.

262 See the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others*, II, 65–66.

The fiscal and other privileges Basil II had granted to the inhabitants of the central Balkans and the clergy of the Ohrid Church were gradually revoked from 1030s onward, leading to multiple rebellions in the 11th century. The Komnenoi continued this process. Theophylact of Ohrid's letters reveal that imperial officials and members of the Patriarchate of Constantinople rescinded or threatened to take away various types of fiscal and other privileges at the turn of the 11th to the 12th century.[263] The Komnenian emperors shifted the preferential treatment of certain institutions, provinces, and social or ethnic groups (Vlachs) from the central Balkans to the periphery of the Empire – the borderlands covered by the doukates of Dyrrachion, Anchialos, and Dalmatia.

New pillars of borderland defenses – In the pre-Komnenian period, the bulwark protecting the Byzantine Balkans consisted of the command centers of Thessalonike and Adrianople and later Dyrrachion, Skopje (district of Bulgaria), and Paradounavon. In the Komnenian era, the most dangerous threats to Byzantine control of the Balkans were Norman invasions across the Adriatic coastlands, Hungarian incursions from the north, the Serbian expansion from the western to the central Balkans, and the Crusaders, whose eastbound expeditions took them through the central Balkans. Even though they had lost much of their 11th-century intensity, occasional Pecheneg and Cuman raids prevented the Byzantines from tightening their grip on the lower Danube.

The changing international landscape forced the Byzantines to move their defense line in the Balkans from the former heart of the districts of Bulgaria (Skopje) and Paradounavon to the command centers that could more effectively fend off their new enemies. These were the three districts formed in old Byzantine territories – the doukates of Anchialos, Dyrrachion, and Dalmatia – and the doukate of Niš–Braničevo–Belgrade, a territory the Empire had annexed in 1018.

Anchialos, Dyrrachion, and Dalmatia were prosperous coastal regions with well-developed commerce, where local elites took a more prominent role in provincial administration. Various forms of local self-government traditionally existed in these districts.[264] That, however, was not the case in the Danube–Morava region. A theater of long-standing conflicts between the Byzantines, Bulgarians, and Hungarians, this area had been demographically and economically devastated and struggled to develop a local political elite. Hence, the doukate of Niš–Braničevo–Belgrade was governed by outsiders from other parts of the Empire rather than local officials.

Anchialos. In the Komnenian age, this district assumed a leading role in the Byzantine defensive system in the northeastern Balkans. The doukate of Anchialos replaced the district of Paradounavon after the latter's dissolution, around the same time that the sources stopped reporting on the district of Bulgaria. The last known governor of Paradounavon served in the 1090s.[265]

263 See the chapter *The Good Shepherds and the Others*, II, 40, 54, 61–62.

264 *Cvetković*, Peculiarities, 832–836.

265 Alexias, 257.

Even though they disappeared at roughly the same time, Paradounavon's fate in the Byzantine provincial organization should be examined separately from that of the district of Bulgaria. The Byzantines still needed a military district on the lower Danube during the Komnenian period, but the defense line of what was once Paradounavon had to be moved for strategic reasons. As noted above, frequent raids of steppe tribes from the Danube forced Constantinople to launch administrative reforms in this region, dissolving the district of Paradounavon and thereby moving up the defense line from the lower Danube to the area between the Black Sea and the Balkan Mountains. This territory, whose center was Anchialos, lent itself to more effective defense than the Danubian flatlands.[266]

The strategic importance of Anchialos became fully apparent during the conflicts with the Pechenegs and Cumans in the 1080s and 1090s. Alexios Komnenos is known to have stayed in Anchialos multiple times with his army, using the city as his base.[267] By that time, the region of Anchialos must have already assumed the defensive role previously held by Paradounavon. The new military-territorial division would have presumably inherited some of the privileges, primarily economic ones, formerly enjoyed by Paradounavon's border command. The sources are silent about the preferential treatment of Anchialos, the nearby cities, and the (Vlach) combatants who lived in the Balkan Mountains, until Constantinople threatened to revoke their privileges. Niketas Choniates reports that Isaac II Angelos encountered resistance when he decided to levy taxes on Anchialos, the nearby cities, and the Vlachs to raise funds for his lavish wedding to Princess Margaret of Hungary in 1185. This resistance evolved into the rebellion led by Peter and Asen, which ultimately resulted in the restoration of Bulgarian statehood.[268] The disruption to the locals' way of life undoubtedly stood at the root of the uprising. These unwelcome changes included additional taxation, which was unacceptable to some social (and ethnic) groups that lived in Anchialos and nearby border cities and had a prominent role in protecting the frontier in the 12th century. The Dalmatian cities and Dyrrachion enjoyed similar privileges in the same period.

Dyrrachion. While Anchialos and its environs bore the burden of protecting the frontier from the Pechenegs and Cumans, the district of Dyrrachion fended off Norman invasions from southern Italy.[269] The loyalty of the city and its broader area depended on the financial privileges Constantinople conferred on local archons. Eusthatios of Thessalonike described how Dyrrachion's inhabitants rose against the Byzantines in 1185 precisely because of additional taxation. The rapacity of Romanos, Emperor Andronikos' brother-in-law and *doux* of Dyrrachion, had brought the locals from "wealth to destitution."[270] Abuses and mismanagement by the central authorities' representatives

266 *Madgearu*, Military Organization, 85–86.

267 According to *Meško*, Alexios I Komnenos, 240–241, 332–333, the district of Anchialos was formed as one of the main points in the Byzantine line of defense during the war against the Pechenegs in 1086/1087.

268 Choniates, Historia, 368–369.

269 For more details on Byzantine Dyrrachion, see *Ferluga*, Drač, 65–130.

270 Eustazio di Tessalonica, 64.

led Dyrrachion's residents to defect from Constantinople and side with Venice in 1185.[271] Dyrrachion again readily accepted Venetian rule in 1205 when the Venetians and Crusaders divided up the Byzantine Empire among themselves.[272]

Dalmatia. Dalmatia is reliably attested as one of the border districts that enjoyed economic privileges. Constantinople opted for an exceptionally lenient approach to reintegrating Roman cities on the Dalmatian coast into the Empire. Along with a tolerant policy toward the Roman Catholic clergy,[273] Manuel I Komnenos conferred economic privileges on the higher social classes in Dalmatian cities and their hinterlands to ensure their loyalty and support. Thomas the Archdeacon reports that Manuel Komnenos did not demand a tribute after he restored Byzantine control in Dalmatia and instead opened the imperial coffers, to lavish gifts on his Dalmatian subjects. The emperor was careful not to burden the locals with additional expenses, so he financed the *doukes* of Dalmatia and their armies from the imperial treasury.[274] Although these reports come from a later source, they nonetheless suggest that the economic position of Dalmatia's population was more favorable than in other parts of the Empire.

Manuel Komnenos continued the practice of Dalmatia's previous masters of affirming municipal rights and freedoms during takeovers, a tradition commonly followed in this region in the 12th century. Having taken Dalmatia in the early 12th century, King Coloman of Hungary (1095–1106) guaranteed that city privileges would continue to be respected. While the Hungarian authorities sought to revoke them gradually, the described practice of upholding communal privileges was certainly in place.[275] Dalmatian cities had a prominent role in maritime trade, as did Anchialos and Dyrrachion. In this period, the Byzantine, Venetian, and Hungarian interests clashed in the area, with each of these powers trying to win over the Dalmatian cities by granting privileges to their elites. These cities had once belonged to the Byzantine Empire, but their distance from the Byzantine capital, the presence of influential local families, and the conflicting interests of outside factors contributed to their atypical development, characterized by self-government. Organizing governance in Dalmatia, the Byzantines adapted their approach to the preexisting state of affairs.[276]

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271 *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 184; *Heher*, Dyrrhachion, 181

272 *Ducellier*, Durazzo et Valona, 69f.

273 Manuel acknowledged the rights of the See of Rome in Dalmatia, not meddling in the appointment of the archbishops of Split and respecting the usual principles underpinning the operations of the Catholic Church in this territory. For his part, the Roman pontiff elevated Split, the seat of the Byzantine doukate, above other Dalmatian sees in the Catholic hierarchy (Zadar, Dubrovnik, Bar). The decision drew on the heritage of classical Salona, whose traditions the archbishop's throne in Split had inherited. On Manuel's relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in Dalmatia, see *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 263–264.

274 Thomas Archidiaconus, 122, 124.

275 *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 127.

276 *Cvetković*, Peculiarities, 834. Local magnates played prominent roles in the government of Byzantine Dalmatia, with some appointed thematic governors (*strategoi*), an office typically reserved for representatives of the central authorities. This practice is traceable in the period after Manuel's reoccupation of the Dalmatian possessions, when Rogerius, a local magnate probably of Croatian ancestry, became the provincial governor (*doux*) of Dalmatia and Croatia after a string of ethnic Greeks, Codex diplomaticus, ed. *Smičiklas*, pp. 165–167, nos. 163, 165. See *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 141.

The policy of according preferential treatment to certain provinces in the Komnenian era was primarily motivated by the fact that protecting and keeping those territories in the Byzantine Empire largely hinged on the loyalty of the local aristocracy. Also, these regions and populations were, to a smaller or larger extent, ethnically and ecclesiastically distinct from the dominant Greek Orthodox population. Latin-speaking Catholics lived in Dalmatia, Dyrrachion was under strong Latin influence, and the northeastern Balkans were ethnically diverse, with a combination of Bulgarians, Vlachs, the mysterious *mixobarbaroi*, Pechenegs, and other steppe tribes. Hence, Constantinople could not take their allegiance for granted and had to tread carefully to ensure their continuing loyalty. Finally, elements of centuries-old municipal self-government, especially in Dalmatia and Dyrrachion, must have contributed to the local nobility's expectations of preferential treatment in the process of establishing and organizing Byzantine rule.

Niš–Braničevo–Belgrade. The Morava–Danube zone gained particular significance under the Komnenoi. With the beginning of the Crusades, the Morava Basin became one of the territories on the way to the Holy Land. Hungary's growing designs on Byzantine possessions south of the Danube and the rise of the Serbian polity, with Ras as its center, required a stronger Byzantine military presence in the Morava region.[277] So, the Byzantines formed a doukate that spanned from Niš to Braničevo and the Morava to Belgrade. This territory had formerly been part of the district of Bulgaria. However, in the post-1018 period, the Byzantines failed to ensure a more formidable and lasting military presence in the district's economically and demographically underdeveloped northern parts. Reports from the 11th century confirm that the Byzantine line of defense was repeatedly violated in this region by Peter Delyan's and George Voyteh's rebels and the Hungarian advance. Settling the Pechenegs[278] and establishing a *strategis* in Niš,[279] probably in the latter half of the 11th century (after 1072),[280] were the first important steps toward tightening Byzantine control in the Morava region. Regardless, it was not until Alexios I Komnenos established a doukate or "theme from Niš to the Danubian Braničevo" that the Byzantines consolidated their domination.[281] The main command centers of this border district were Niš, Braničevo, and Belgrade. The fortress of Morava, once the seat of a *strategis* established by Tzimiskes, lost its military relevance in the Komnenian era.[282]

The military centers of Niš, Braničevo, and Belgrade also served as episcopal seats. They had had this status in the newly established Archbishopric of Ohrid, possibly even earlier, under Bulgarian rule, with the difference being that Braničevo

277 *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 156–238.

278 Scylitzes, 459.

279 DOSeals I, no. 32.1, p. 100.

280 *Jordanov*, Nish, 177; *Cvetković*, Mesto Niša, 312.

281 Alexias, 454.

282 *Komatina*, Morava i Braničevo, 105–106. For more details on Byzantine Belgrade, see *Kalić*, Beograd, 35–58.

replaced Morava as the episcopal center under Byzantium.[283] Belgrade and Braničevo were the pillars of the Byzantine defense system against Hungary in the first half of the 12th century, facing the Hungarian strongholds at Zemun and Hram.[284] Niš was the second line of defense, a city where military commanders could retreat from Belgrade, as the *doux* Niketas did during the First Crusade.[285] Also, Niš was the starting point of Byzantine offensives against the Serbs and Hungarians.[286] John Kinnamos describes Niš as a strategic junction of roads that led into the Serbian and Hungarian lands.[287]

The Morava–Danube zone saw temporary changes, with the significance of border fortresses in the defense system depending on the circumstances. For instance, in the 1160s, Manuel I Komnenos set up a temporary frontier strip against Hungary after he took the important Hungarian fortress of Zemun, and Sirmium, a former Byzantine possession. So, the Empire expanded its control to territories north of the Sava, albeit fleetingly. As a result, Belgrade temporarily lost its significance as a center on the frontier, with Zemun and Sirmum becoming the first line of defense against Hungary. This state of affairs proved short-lived: when Manuel Komnenos died in 1180, Hungary reclaimed Zemun and Sirmium, briefly taking even Belgrade and Braničevo.[288]

Reports are scarce on the nature of Byzantine rule in the doukate of Niš–Braničevo–Belgrade. It seems reasonable to assume that, unlike other border districts, e.g., Dyrrachion or Dalmatia, this region had no influential local magnates to shape political life. Its exposure to raids of various ethnic groups across the Danube would have prevented continued economic development, consequently inhibiting its demographic potential. Crusader writers left testimonies of the unfavorable situation in the region, describing the strip from Belgrade to Serdica as desolate and impoverished; it was not until a traveler reached the plains of Thrace that wealthy regions and opulent cities appeared.[289] In a particularly intriguing report, Odo of Deuil describes the city of Braničevo and its environs as destitute, explaining this by the region's underpopulation, with too few inhabitants to make optimal use of the nearby fertile land.[290]

The Komnenoi sought to bring life to the Morava Basin, which 11th-century sources depict as underpopulated and impoverished. For instance, John Kinnamos describes Dendra near Niš as wealthy and well-populated during the reign of Manuel Komnenos.[291] The Komnenoi continued the colonizing policy of their 11th-century predecessors to revive the potential of border regions, resettling a group of Serbs near

283 See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th Century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 9.

284 *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 191.

285 Albertus Aquensis, 274–279.

286 Cinnamus, 103–104.

287 Cinnamus, 212.

288 *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 253–255, 281–284.

289 Odo de Deogilo, 63. See *Komatina*, Srbi na putu krstaša, 69.

290 Odo de Deogilo, 62.

291 Cinnamus, 204. See VIINJ IV, 58–59 n. 140 (*J. Kalić*); *Blagojević*, Dendra, 197–212.

Serdica.[292] The expansion of the Serbian ethnic space from Raška (Rascia) to the east in the Komnenian era is quite apparent. Notably, the Serbian ethnic expansion unfolded at a faster pace than that of their political space. In the 1180s, the Serbs in the Morava Basin (from Braničevo to Ravno) lived under Byzantine rule, while their kinsfolk south of Ravno lived in Stefan Nemanja's realm.[293]

As the disadvantageous economic and demographic situation held back the development of local elites, Constantinople had no reason to ensure the locals' loyalty by granting them economic privileges, unlike in Dalmatia, Dyrrachion, and Anchialos. The military relevance of the doukate of Niš–Braničevo–Belgrade depended on the central authorities and their ability to maintain and boost the military potential of this border zone. The Komnenoi by no means left this part of the frontier to its own devices, as attested by the reports that Andronikos, a member of the closest Komnenian circle and himself a future emperor, became the governor of this doukate in 1153. John Kinnamos refers to Andronikos as the *doux* of Niš and Braničevo and Niketas Choniates as the *doux* of Niš and Belgrade, identifying these cities as the command centers in this frontier zone.[294]

V. The age of local lords

The stability of the central government and the military organization reform implemented by the Komnenian emperors in the Balkan provinces had tightened Byzantium's grip on the region for an entire century. The death of Manuel Komnenos (1180) ushered in a new period of instability, which culminated during the Fourth Crusade, resulting in the Empire's fall and, of course, the collapse of its rule in the Balkans.

The period of 1180–1204 was marked by the emergence of local lords and the formation of their polities in different parts of the Balkans. Essentially, the Byzantines began losing control of some parts of their territory even before the fall of Constantinople in 1204. Several factors contributed to the emergence of local lords.

Frequent usurpations and changes on the throne undermined central governance, preventing a more resolute Byzantine response to outside threats. In addition to losing their positions in the East, the Byzantines faced old and new political rivals in the Balkan theater. In the 1180s, the Hungarian king Béla III (1172–1196) reclaimed his "patrimony" (Dalmatia, Croatia, and Sirmium), and his army took some other possessions south of the Danube, including the cities of Belgrade and Braničevo. Stefan Nemanja, Grand Župan (Prince) of Raška, considerably expanded his territory, especially in the Morava Basin, capturing the city of Niš. The rebellion of the brothers Peter and Asen broke out in the northeastern Balkans only five years after Manuel's death, ultimately leading to the restoration of Bulgarian independence. The Normans

292 Cinnamus, 103.

293 Arnoldus Lubecensis, 118–119. Stefan Prvovenčani, 20. See *Uzelac*, "Čuvaj se Belijalovih sinova", 104.

294 Cinnamus, 124; Choniates, Historia, 101.

launched a large-scale offensive in the Balkans from southern Italy in 1185, taking Dyrrachion and then Thessalonike, the Empire's "second city." Finally, the Crusader march through the Balkans in 1189 adversely affected the situation in the region.[295]

While the Byzantines managed, temporarily and occasionally, to ward off these threats, Constantinople was on the defensive during the last two decades of the 12th century and had to rely much more on its tried-and-tested diplomatic tactics such as arranging dynastic marriages and offering financial incentives to foreign rulers. This policy had borne some fruit under Isaac II Angelos (1185–1195), and the Byzantines recovered Belgrade, Braničevo, and Niš, temporarily retaining control in the basins of the Morava, Vardar, Strymon, Mesta and Marica rivers, where some of the most important roads in the Peninsula passed.[296]

Regardless, the bonds between the capital and the provinces were unraveling. A contributing factor was the extreme privatization of the official hierarchy during the reigns of the Komnenoi and Angeloi. Taking their cues from the ruling dynasty, officials in the provinces created their own family and client clans, becoming increasingly powerful in their local milieus. Unchecked by the central authorities, these magnates harbored growing aspirations for independence. Thus, local separatism eventually led to the emergence of semi-independent parastates. The sources report this phenomenon in various corners of the Empire – in the Rhodopes and Macedonia, mainland Greece, and parts of Asia Minor.[297]

While the roots of local separatism are traceable to previous periods, it reached its apex in the late 12th and early 13th centuries amidst a general decline of the central government's authority. The infamous inhospitality of some parts of the Balkans was conducive to this phenomenon, allowing local magnates to defend their territories for longer. That was why local lords emerged in the Rhodopes and Macedonia, but not in the flatlands, e.g., the Morava Basin. Also, in some regions in the frontier strip, it was easy for local magnates to organize political trade with their neighbors, smoothing their road to independence, as the Bulgarian-Byzantine conflicts at the turn of the 12th to the 13th century showed.

Recurring internal strife and wars with neighbors that had cost the Byzantines many provinces decimated the imperial treasury, forcing the central authorities to introduce new taxes. Local populations, disgruntled by the changed fiscal policy, rose up against greedy imperial officials, siding with local magnates (e.g., Anchialos and Dyrrachion). The ethnic distinctiveness of the inhabitants of the Balkan provinces contributed to their alienation from the center. The Slavic, Bulgarian, and Vlach populations challenged the Greeks, reflecting the overall trend of growing antagonism in the multiethnic Empire between different ethnic groups in the 12th century.

295 For more details, see *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 275–315.

296 *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 308.

297 The phenomenon of local lords was extensively discussed by *Radić*, Oblasni gospodari, 151–289. See also *Stephenson*, Balkan Frontier, 279–281.

The first local lords to break away in Byzantine territories, the boyars Dobromir Chrysos and Ivanko, belonged to the ruling class of the restored Bulgarian empire. Another local magnate was Strez, who formed his realm in the years after 1204. They were all seasoned warriors driven by personal ambition who had taken advantage of Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The restoration of the Bulgarian empire in the Bulgarian homelands (the territory between the lower Danube and the Balkan mountain range, with Great Tarnovo as its center) was the most striking indicator of the blatant failure of the Byzantine policy in the Balkans. This time, however, the fate of the central Balkans did not hinge only on the relationship between these two empires, as it had done in the pre-1018 period.

Failing to ensure loyalty in the territories inhabited by a predominantly Bulgarian-Slavic and Vlach population, the Byzantines began recruiting members of the ruling classes of another state (in this case, the Bulgarian Empire) to serve as governors of Byzantine provinces. A notable example is Dobromir Chrysos, an ethnic Vlach, Bulgarian, or Slav, who was sent to guard Strumica around in 1197.[298] The sources do not report his office or title, but there is no doubt that Chrysos and others like him wielded military and administrative powers. Chrysos defected and expanded his realm from Strumica to the abandoned fortress of Prosek, making it his seat. Prosek had been a naturally protected military base in the Vardar Valley, which the Byzantines had probably taken by surrender in 1018. The Byzantines likely abandoned Prosek when they moved the defense line in the central Balkans from the district of Bulgaria to the Danube Basin. Admiring Prosek's natural defenses and impregnability, Niketas Choniates says that the Byzantines had "long neglected the fortress," leaving it unmanned. Joining forces with his father-in-law Manuel Kamytzes, a Byzantine general and a relative of Emperor Alexios III Angelos, Chrysos temporarily took control of Pelagonia and Prilep, the territory that had once made up the heart of Samuel's state. The fact that he held the fortresses of Strumica and Prosek for several years without encountering resistance reveals the mood of the local population, which readily accepted a renegade from Byzantium. Manuel Kamytzes and Chrysos tried to expand their territory into Thessaly, with their raids disrupting everyday life even in parts of Hellas and the Peloponnesus. While Chrysos governed a part of Macedonia, Kamytzes ruled independently in Thessaly. The Byzantines used a combination of diplomacy and brute force to break up the alliance of Chrysos and Kamytzes. They first reclaimed Thessaly and then Strumica, obliterating Chrysos' political project around 1202.[299]

Ivanko, a failed contender for the Bulgarian throne who assassinated Emperor John Asen I in 1196 and fled to the Byzantines, was sent to Philippopolis to govern the city on behalf of the Byzantine emperor. Taking advantage of the rugged terrain, Ivanko defected two years later and set up camp at the Kritzimos fortress in the Rhodopes. Byzantine campaigns against him proved futile, and Ivanko expanded his control to

298 Choniates, Historia, 487.

299 Choniates, Historia, 502, 533–535.

the territory between the Marica and Strymon and the Rhodopes and the Aegean, including the Theme of Smolena. Regardless, Ivanko was eventually captured by a ruse and probably executed, so the Empire recovered these territories after some time.[300]

Macedonia continued to be a region where local lords tended to emerge. Another magnate, Strez, broke away in the post-1204 period and set up his realm, which included the territories formerly held by Dobromir Chrysos. Strez was also a member of the Bulgarian boyar class and a nephew of the Bulgarian rulers Peter, Asen, and Kaloyan. Just as Chrysos and Ivanko had used the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts to further their political ambitions, Strez took advantage of the Serbo-Bulgarian strife. Strez's base was the inaccessible fortress of Prosek, which had previously served as Chrysos' stronghold.[301]

Besides members of the Bulgarian ruling class who had served the Empire before going rogue in their territories, e.g., Dobromir Chrysos and Ivanko, Byzantines too became usurpers on occasion. Manuel Kamytzes, the emperor's cousin who joined forces with his son-in-law Chrysos, briefly ruled independently in Thessaly, albeit without having previously served as an imperial official. However, as his realm consisted mostly of flatlands, he could not mount sustained resistance against the imperial army and was promptly defeated (ca. 1202).[302]

After Ivanko died, John Spiridonakis was appointed the governor of the Smolena region in the Rhodopes. Capitalizing on the turmoil caused by the alliance of Dobromir Chrysos and Manuel Kamytzes, Spiridonakis set up a short-lived independent realm around 1201 in the region entrusted to him, but it was not long before a Byzantine military intervention dealt with the deserter.[303]

As in Thessaly, the terrain configuration, explains why no local lords emerged in the Morava Basin, another politically volatile Byzantine territory. After the Byzantine-Hungarian treaty (1185) and the Serbian defeat in the Battle of Morava (1190), the Byzantines reasserted control over the region. It was governed by a *doux*, whose command center during the Third Crusade (1189) was Braničevo.[304] None of the local Byzantine commanders set himself up as an independent ruler like Chrysos, Ivanko, Spiridonakis, and Kamytzes had done. There were several reasons for this seeming lack of ambition. The Morava flatlands did not lend themselves to a would-be defector's effective defense. Unlike Chrysos' fortress at Prosek or Kamytzes' Kritzimos, this region had no inaccessible strongholds where local lords could find refuge and safety during Byzantine offensives. In addition, the Morava plains were plagued by almost incessant expansionist and pillaging campaigns from three directions (the Hungarians, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Crusaders), so it would have been impossible to set up an independent political realm there, unlike in the Rhodopes and Macedonia. Finally, the

300 Choniates, Historia, 469–473, 509–513, 518–519.

301 *Radić*, Oblasni gospodari, 226.

302 Choniates, Historia, 533–535.

303 Choniates, Historia, 534–535.

304 Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris, 27–28.

region's ethnic diversity was hardly conducive to such political projects. Its multiethnic tapestry, consisting of Serbs, Vlachs, Bulgarians and Greeks,[305] could not sustain local patriotism as a unifying factor, while the Bulgarian-Slavic population of the Rhodopes and the Vardar Valley could. The Serbs in the Morava Basin, still beyond the reach of the grand princes of Raška, seem to have had their local chieftains,[306] and other communities likely had them, too. The reports on the plots of Andronikos Komnenos several decades earlier, who, as the *doux* of Niš and Braničevo (and Belgrade), had colluded with the Hungarians and attempted a rebellion against his cousin, Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, demonstrate that this was not a region that lent itself to local revolts.[307]

Unlike the flatlands, the Rhodopes and Macedonia saw multiple local lords emerge over the decades (Dobromir Chrysos, Ivanko, Strez, Alexios Slav) but in different political circumstances.[308]

After the fall of Constantinople in 1204, the sources confirm that Albanian local lords emerged in the broader area of Croae. Albanians appear for the first time as participants in the political developments in the Peninsula in reports on the rebellion of Nikephoros Basilakes in 1078.[309] To integrate the Albanians into their military-administrative organization, the Byzantines had formed the administrative division of Arbanon, whose governor bore the title of prior.[310] In the closing years of Manuel I Komnenos' reign (1179), Arbanon appeared in the title of *sebastos* Constantine Doukas, who governed all of Diokleia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Arbanon, and Split as a *doux* and *archegos*.[311] The Progoni family ruled Arbanon in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. One of the political figures from the Progoni family was the *panhypersebastos* and grand *archon* Demetrios, who married the daughter of the Rascian (Serbian) ruler Stefan Nemanjić.[312] In the post-1204 period, the development of the political entity governed by the Progoni family unfolded in a changed political landscape, marked by the struggle for domination between Venice, Epirus, and Bulgaria.[313]

Few reports have reached us on how Byzantine defectors organized rule in the regions they controlled. The sources describe Ivanko's extreme brutality against captured Byzantines,[314] so it seems safe to assume that his fellow Bulgarians/Slavs held leading

305 Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris, 28.

306 Arnoldus Lubecensis, 119.

307 Choniates, Historia, 101.

308 *Radić*, Oblasni gospodari, 176–245.

309 Skylitzes Continuatus, 182; Attaliatus, 228–229.

310 Codex diplomaticus II, ed. *Smičiklas*, 102

311 *Schreiner*, Dux von Dalmatien, 286–287: τοῦτον δοῦκ(α) καὶ ἀρχηγὸν καταστής(ας) ἐπὶ πάση Διοκλήᾳ, Δαλματ(ίᾳ), Χορβατ(ίᾳ), Ἀρβαν(ίᾳ) καὶ Σπαλάθ(ρῳ).

312 *Solovjev*, Nepoznat ugovor, 292–293; Innocentii III papae Regesta sive epistolae, t. II, ep. VII, 1343–1344; t. III, ep. XCVII, 107; Chomatenus, Ponemata, 64*–66*, 19, no. 1.

313 *Ferjančić*, Albanci, 289–293.

314 Choniates, Historia, 513.

roles in local administration. Power was likely concentrated in the hands of ruling families and their client clans, as suggested by the situation in Strez's realm. Having established a new "state" roughly in the same region as Chrysos a decade after the latter's defeat, with its seat also at Prosek, Strez gathered members of the boyar class to help him govern,[315] suggesting that Chrysos may have done the same in his realm.

Given that those independent polities ceased to exist as soon as their local rulers were overthrown, with the Empire promptly recovering most of these regions, it is clear that they had no developed administrative apparatus or military organization to sustain long-term resistance. All of them relied solely on the authority of the ruler who had defected, and his defeat or death removed the one prerequisite for independence. It bears repeating that the inhospitable terrain and the local population's disgruntlement allowed similar polities to emerge as soon as the situation permitted it and the conditions were met – an opportune political moment and a political figure authoritative enough to start a rebellion.

We cannot know how those local polities integrated the church and local clergy. Ivanko's realm had a centuries-old tradition of Paulicianism (Manichaeism).[316] And yet, Ivanko was undoubtedly an Orthodox Christian, as indicated by one of his primary political objectives – securing the Bulgarian imperial crown.[317] Latin sources from the late 12th century to the 1270s associate the Bogomils (Paulicians, Manichaeans) in the central Balkans with the "Church of Drugubitia."[318] In the same period, Greek intellectuals used the designation "Drugubites/Drugubitia" not in relation to the heresy but in relation to the rebellion of a local ruler, i.e., *tyranny* in Macedonia, as the case files of Demetrios Chomatenos show. His reports concern the environs of Berroia, once populated by the Slavic Drugubites.[319] The Byzantines had integrated the Drugubites into their administrative and ecclesiastical system as early as the 9th century by forming first an *archontia* and then the theme/*strategis* of Drugubitia (971) and an eponymous bishopric in the second half of the 9th century.[320] Besides Berroia, Chomatenos connects Drugubites with the Polog region.[321] Scholars have proposed different interpretations for his phrases "rule of the Drugubites" and "tyranny of the Drugubites." In one of the more compelling theories, Franjo Barišić and Božidar Ferjančić argued that those terms referred to Strez's state and rule.[322]

315 Chomatenus, Ponemata, p. 407, no. 134.

316 On the Paulicians and Bogomils, see Bŭlgarska nacionalna istorija IV, 104–108 (*P. Pavlov*).

317 Choniates, Historia, 469–473, 509.

318 *Barišić – Ferjančić*, Vesti, 42.

319 Chomatenus, Ponemata, p. 276, no. 81.

320 The Drugubites and the Sagudates lived west of Thessalonike, toward Berroia, Caminiates, 8. Several sources attest to their integration into the military-administrative and ecclesiastical systems: *Wassiliou*, Neue Siegel, no. 4 (Peter, *spatharios* and *archon* of Drugubitia, first half of the 9th century); *Mansi*, XVII, 376A (Peter, Bishop of Drugubitia, a participant in the council of 879/880); *Oikonomidès*, Listes, 267.6 (*strategos* of Drugubitia, 971–975).

321 Chomatenus, Ponemata, p. 316, no. 94.

322 *Barišić – Ferjančić*, Vesti, 41–58.



Map 4.
Byzantine provincial administration in the central Balkans in the late 12th century

Local magnates of Bulgarian, Slavic, or Vlach ancestry in the Rhodopes and Macedonia and the Paulicians of Philippopolis all sought to break away from Constantinople's influence. This could explain the baffling use of the reference "Drugubites/Drugubitia," which 13th-century authors may have understood as a term for those who are rebelling or defecting.

Demography was another factor that determined the success or failure of separatist movements. Higher population density contributed to economic prosperity, as the financial means of the ruling classes show. For instance, Dobromir Chrysos, the lord of Strumica and Prosek (and, briefly, Prilep and Pelagonia), was wealthy enough to pay the ransom for Manuel Kamytzes and to finance his independence project for several years (1197–1202).[323]

The layout of Byzantine provinces in the Balkans in the late 12th and early 13th centuries indicates that Macedonia was much more densely populated than the Morava Basin, as it had been in the age of Basil II. The charter Alexios III Angelos issued to the Venetians in 1198 records the following provinces in Macedonia: Ohrid, Prespa, Kastoria, Servia, Skopje, Sagorion, Maleševo–Morovizd, Strumica, Prilep–Pelagonia, Moliskos–Moglena, Berroia, Jericho–Kanina, Ioannina, Dryinoupolis, Devol and Koloneia.[324] There were just two divisions north of this region: Triaditza– Velbăžd and Niš–Braničevo.[325] *Partitio Romaniae* (1204) describes a similar provincial organization in Macedonia, although the Byzantines had lost control of Strumica, Maleševo–Morovizd, Triaditza– Velbăžd, Niš–Braničevo, and Skopje in 1198–1204.[326] The Hungarians took Belgrade and Braničevo ca. 1202–1204, and the Serbs briefly captured Niš before the city fell to the Bulgarians. Kaloyan's Bulgarians recovered the remaining provinces, having taken Ohrid and other cities in the Vardar Valley after the fall of Constantinople in 1204.[327] These events indicate that Macedonia had a much higher population density than the Morava Basin, which would have provided the economic preconditions for local separatism.

VI. Concluding remarks

Officials of provincial administration – The development and characteristics of Byzantine administration in the Balkans can be traced through the holders of more relevant civilian and military offices. The key question is whether the local population participated in the Empire's administrative system in the central Balkans. Even a cursory look at the sources reveals that they offer little evidence of the organized integration of local community members in administration, with only a handful of known

323 Chrysos paid a ransom of two *kentenaria* of gold for Manuel Kamytzes, Choniates, Historia, 533.

324 *Tafel – Thomas*, Urkunden, 258/260–264.

325 *Tafel – Thomas*, Urkunden, 260–261.

326 *Tafel – Thomas*, Urkunden, 485–487; *Carile*, Partitio, 221.

327 See the chapter *The Archbishopric of Ohrid from the 11th to the 13th Century – Territorial and Ideological Framework*, II, 20.

cases. The lack of such reports suggests that the process of integrating the locals did not entail power-sharing between the Byzantines and the local community. What little information we have refers to Byzantine officials and dignitaries appointed to administrative and military offices in the territories Byzantium annexed under John Tzimiskes and, even more so, under Basil II.

In his campaign against Sviatoslav, Tzimiskes was accompanied by his generals, most of whom had fought with him when the future emperor waged wars in the East as a high officer of the Byzantine army. One of Tzimiskes' most active officers in the Balkans was Leo Sarakinopoulos, whose name appears on numerous seals from the so-called Preslavian collection with the titles of *strategos* of Dorostolon, *strategos* of Dorostolon and Ioannopolis (Preslav), and *strategos* of Thrace and Ioannopolis, demonstrating that the emperor gave Leo military control over the most important cities captured in the campaign of 971.[328] Leo Sarakinopoulos was undoubtedly John Tzimiskes' closest associate and brother-in-arms. He is also known to have served as the *domestikos ton Hikanaton* of the West and the *komes tou staulou*,[329] probably during the campaign in the Balkans before becoming the head of the military administration in Preslav and Dristra, the most important Bulgarian cities, following the dethronement of Boris II. The patronymic, Sarakinopoulos, suggests that he was of Arab parentage and probably temporarily served in the Balkans.

Given John Tzimiskes' overarching ambition to suppress Bulgarian traditions in all segments of governance in the captured territories in the northeastern Balkans, it is hardly surprising that he entrusted local administration to his faithful generals rather than local community members. Basil II's treatment of the population of subdued Bulgaria was markedly different, so his administration could be reasonably expected to have reflected this policy. Nevertheless, the sources provide no evidence that this was indeed so.

The narrative sources record numerous names of the people who fought in Basil's long war against Samuel and his successors. In the first decade of the war (976–986), the Byzantine offensive relied on local Byzantine commanders, of whom we know very little (for instance, an unnamed officer active in the area of Serres and subordinated to the *doux* Melissenos).[330] Reports on Byzantine commanders became more common once the emperor personally joined the campaign (986), with the *doukes* of Thessalonike, who bore the brunt of the war effort, mentioned as Basil's generals (N. Melissenos?,[331] Gregory Taronites,[332] John Chaldos,[333] Nikephoros Ouranos,[334] who served

328 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 215–216, 239–244, 259–277.

329 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 168–174, 191.

330 Scylitzes, 329.

331 Scylitzes, 329.

332 Scylitzes, 339, 341.

333 Scylitzes, 357.

334 Scylitzes, 341, 364.

as both the *doux* of Thessalonike and the *domestikos ton Scholon*,[335] David Arianites,[336] Theophylaktos/Nikephoros Botaneiates,[337] Constantine Diogenes[338]). Some of them performed other duties in the Balkan war before or after their service in Thessalonike, leading targeted campaigns or commanding garrisons at one of the captured Bulgarian fortresses. Notable military officers also included those stationed at other important Byzantine military bases, such as the *strategoi* of Philippopolis, Theodorokanos[339] and Nikephoros Xiphias,[340] or Tzotzikios,[341] *strategos* of Dorostolon and son of Theudatos the Iberian. Eustathios Daphnomeles[342] was another distinguished officer, as were some others, for instance, the eunuch Sergios,[343] who contributed to the surrender of the strong Bulgarian fortress of Melnik.

The majority of prominent generals came from the eastern parts of the Empire. Some were presumably natives of Byzantine districts in the Balkans, but the sources provide no specifics about them. With a literary flourish, Skylitzes cited an alleged speech by Eustathios Daphnomeles reflecting the distinction between those two groups of Byzantine generals. Addressing the supporters of Samuel's magnate Ibatzes, Daphnomeles reportedly said: "I [am] Roman; not a Roman living in Thrace or Macedonia, but a Roman of Asia Minor; some of you know how far distant that is."[344]

During the war and in the early post-1018 period, while he sought to assert full control over the fallen Bulgarian fortresses, Basil naturally relied on the generals who had fought alongside him in the Balkan war. For instance, we know that Eustathios Daphnomeles was appointed the "*archon* of Ohrid" after the capture of the "metropolis of all Bulgaria" before becoming the *strategos* of Dyrrachion.[345] David Arianites was named the "*strategos autokrator* in Skopje," i.e., the *katepano* of the district of Bulgaria, with its seat at Skopje.[346] Constantine Diogenes became the *strategos* of Serbia or, more accurately, the "archon" of the lands around Sirmium, identified as Serbia. Consequently, Diogenes was appointed the governor of this city and its broader area.[347] Skylitzes' phrase "archon" presumably refers to the holder of the *strategos* office, although the city's vulnerable position in the border zone allows for the possibility that the "*archon* of Sirmium" may have held the title of *doux*.

335 *Krsmanović*, Byzantine Province, 153–154, 156.
336 Scylitzes, 345, 350, 354, 355, 358.
337 Scylitzes, 350; Attaliatus, 177.
338 Scylitzes, 352, 355, 356.
339 Scylitzes, 343.
340 Scylitzes, 343, 345, 348, 352, 364, 366.
341 Scylitzes, 356.
342 Scylitzes, 343, 359, 361, 362, 363.
343 Scylitzes, 351.
344 Scylitzes, 362.
345 Scylitzes, 343, 359.
346 Scylitzes, 358.
347 Scylitzes, 365 –366. See above n. 63.

Although no other prosopographical information securely datable to Basil's age has reached us on military governors in the Balkan provinces, the fragility of the recent pacification would have made Basil's brothers-in-arms, who were familiar with the terrain, local populations, and the general situation in this part of the Empire, the preferred candidates for government positions. Basil II aimed to quickly integrate the subjects of Samuel's realm, a process that would have called for seasoned and loyal military commanders capable of tightly controlling the network of fortresses that had, until recently, been strong and impregnable centers of Bulgarian resistance.

While many distinguished Bulgarian generals had switched sides in 1018 or earlier,[348] the sources provide no evidence that any of them were included in Byzantine military governance in the territories that had been the theater of the decades-long war. Reports on Dobromir, who was rewarded with the high dignity of *anthypatos* (and *patrikios*) for his surrender of the important city of Berroia in 1001, suggest that he may have also been appointed to a post, although we cannot know in which part of the Empire.[349] A seal of Damianos Dobromir, *doux* of Thrace and Mesopotamia, confirms that the title holder was either the same person or a family member who had taken the name Dobromir as his patronymic.[350] This seal, which cannot be securely dated, is the only indicator that prominent Bulgarians may have served in Byzantine districts in the Balkans.

The rebellion of Peter Delyan showed that many members of the Bulgarian ruling classes remained in the Balkans after the surrender of their strongholds. Regardless, neither they nor their descendants appear in the sources as holders of military or administrative offices in the 11th-century Balkans. However, there is no doubt that figures of considerable authority among the locals participated in Delyan's uprising, although it is unclear what their influence may have rested on. The reports on Bulgarian magnates and members of Samuel's family show that Basil II bestowed honorary titles on the Bulgarian elites, primarily to persuade them to cease hostilities and recognize Byzantine rule. However, only the Bulgarian magnates removed from the Balkans after 1018 and resettled in the East are known to have been assigned to specific positions in the Empire.[351] It seems safe to assume that the Bulgarian magnates who had not been transferred from their homelands after 1018 similarly received honorary titles that would have made them members of the Empire's higher social classes. Given that the rebellion of Peter Delyan came as the earliest public display of the local population's disgruntlement, we can assume that the first two decades under Byzantine rule saw at least a partial integration of the Bulgarian elite into Byzantine society in the Balkans. Bulgarian magnates might have been assigned to lower positions in the local administration, serving as intermediaries between local communities and the representatives of central government – the holders of the highest offices in the province. However, it

348 *Krsmanović*, Bulgarian Elite, 109–128.

349 Scylitzes, 344.

350 *Jordanov*, Pečatite, nos. 237–238.

351 *Dudek*, Elity, 43–71*; Kanev*, Awarding, 455– 473.

is evident that the Byzantines did not appoint members of the local higher classes to high offices in the military-administrative organization of the Balkans.

Subduing Samuel's state, Basil II humored the Bulgarian Church by forming the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid with extensive territorial jurisdiction. In addition, he placated the local population by keeping the fiscal system from the era of Samuel and the First Bulgarian Empire. The formation of a district named Bulgaria only seemingly preserved the memory of the traditions of the subdued state. Namely, governance of the district was not ceded to Slavs and Bulgarians but was retained firmly in the hands of the *Rhomaioi*. In Basil's era, this government was personified by the highest military positions (*doux*, *katepano*, *strategos*) and later civilian offices (*praitor*, *anagrapheus*, *pronoites*), accompanied by the district name ("Bulgaria") and, from the mid-11th century, in the names of certain offices (*pronoites* and *anagrapheus*), "all of Bulgaria."[352] So, there was no meaningful difference in Tzimiskes' and Basil's approach to selecting the holders of military and civilian offices. Constantinople sought to retain control over its new possessions by centralizing governance through its officials.

The Byzantines' lack of military resources and reluctance to include local community members into the highest provincial administration did not allow them to assert lasting and effective control over the whole central Balkans, resulting in the collapse of the Byzantine military organization in the region in the face of Serbian uprisings and Peter Delyan's rebellion in the 1030s and early 1040s. In Delyan's case, the collapse did not last long; with the revolt of Stefan Vojislav, however, the Empire lost a part of the Serb-populated territory for good. It was not until these drastic upheavals that Constantinople decided to change its approach and begin integrating local rulers into its official hierarchy. A source reports that one Ljutovid served as the "*strategos* of Serbia and Zachlumia."[353] His title and the circumstances in which he governed suggest that this was Byzantium's attempt to maintain the illusion of suzerainty in the district of Serbia rather than a genuine official of a Byzantine administrative division. This solution, however, was only temporary and yielded no result.

The reform of provincial administration in the central Balkans launched in the 1040s bolstered the Byzantine presence, a change reflected in more frequent appointments of the highest administrative officials in the district of Bulgaria and the newly established district of Paradounavon. Nevertheless, this reform did little to shift the attitude toward the local population. The Empire still insisted on centralizing and controlling provincial administration through ethnic *Rhomaioi* sent from the capital city or other parts of the Empire to the central Balkans, as evidenced by the patronymics of the officials who served in the top-ranking military and civilian positions in the districts of Bulgaria and Paradounavon (Philokales, Karantenos, Dalassenos, Saronites, Bryennios, Vatatzes, Kabasilas, Taronites, Drimys, Pegonites, Diogenes, Apokapes, Nikerites, and so on).[354]

352 *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 49.

353 Letopis popa Dukljanina, 188–190.

354 On Byzantine noble houses, see *Cheynet*, Pouvoir et contestations.

Did the increased military presence of Byzantium and its personnel boost political inclusivity and result in a more comprehensive integration of the local population into the provincial system compared to the earlier period? While the question defies a conclusive answer, there is some indirect yet suggestive evidence: the reports on the 1072 rebellion in the Balkans reveal a polarization of the local population, with some "Bulgarians" supporting the rebels and others remaining loyal to the Empire. As noted above, one Boris David fled before the insurgents to safety in Kastoria, where "Byzantine men" were encamped – the *strategos* of Ohrid Marianos, the *strategos* of Devol, *patrikios*, and *antypathos* Theognostos Bourtzes, and the *strategos* of Kastoria. The rebel leaders proved less than steadfast in their intentions, and George Voyteh made a deal with Michael Saronites, *doux* of Skopje. The report that a disgruntled group of "Bulgaria's prominent men" appealed to a foreign ruler, whose son took the helm of the uprising, also indicates a polarization in the local population and its prominent classes.[355] One of the reasons for their appeal was that Diokleia could, at that point, make its military potential available to the rebelling magnates, but recruiting Bodin also suggests that the rebellion was not as popular among the Bulgarians as its leaders would have liked, which had not been the case with Peter Delyan's revolt.

The rebellion that broke out in the district of Paradounavon in 1072 showed how risky it was for the Byzantines to place their trust in members of local communities. Constantine X Doukas (1071–1078) dispatched the *vestarches* Nestor as the *katepano* of Dristra / *doux* of Paradounavon of Dristra to put down the rebellion. Attaleiates says that Nestor was "ἀπὸ Ἰλλυρικῶν δὲ τὸ γένος ἕλκοντα".[356] Constantinople's decision to make him the highest-ranking military officer in the district of Paradounavon indicates that the central government expected his familiarity with the terrain and local population to help quash the rebellion more effectively. It was not to be: Nestor defected and joined forces with the Pechenegs against the Empire.

The importance of military positions in the Balkans grew over the second half of the 11th century, paving the way for the rise of Byzantine generals in the official hierarchy. Some provincial governors in the Balkans became candidates for the throne (Nikephoros Proteuon, *katepano* of Bulgaria)[357] or usurpers (Nikephoros Basilakes, *doux* of Dyrrachion),[358] with one crowned the Byzantine emperor (Romanos Diogenes, former *doux* of Serdica/Bulgaria and *doux* of Paradounavon/*archon* of the Danubian cities)[359].

In the Komnenian era, the Byzantines had an iron grip on governance in the central Balkans. The borderlands saw conflicts with neighboring polities, with Constantinople relying heavily on its own officer personnel. Prominent military positions in the Balkans were entrusted to the emperor's relatives, e.g., John Komnenos[360] in Skopje

355 Skylitzes Continuatus, 163–165.

356 Attaliatus, 158.

357 Scylitzes, 478, 479.

358 Skylitzes Continuatus, 182.

359 Skylitzes Continuatus, 121; Attaliatus, 77; Kekavmen 282.

360 DOSeals I, no. 30.1, p. 98.

and Andronikos Komnenos[361] in Niš (Niš–Braničevo–Belgrade). Also, the Komnenian emperors' personal involvement in military expeditions in this part of the Empire reflected the increased significance of the Balkans.[362]

The period of instability in central government after the reign of the Komnenoi affected the Empire's presence in the Balkans. It was not until this period – when the Byzantines suffered sizable territorial losses – that Constantinople tried to find a way out by recruiting members of local communities for government positions. The collapse of the Empire's military domination in the Balkans meant that the Byzantines could no longer appoint provincial governors from their own milieu and began recruiting members of Slavic, Bulgarian, or Vlach local communities. That, however, did not achieve the desired outcome: instead of making governance more effective, the Empire now faced defections of regional governors, who formed independent political entities in the territories they controlled. While all of those independent polities proved short-lived, the usurpations in Macedonia and the Rhodopes laid bare Byzantium's weakness and inability to cope with new challenges in the Balkans.

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361 Cinnamus, 124; Choniates, Historia, 101.

362 On the military campaigns of the three major Komnenian emperors (Alexios I, John II, and Manuel I), see *Birkenmeier*, Komnenian Army, 56–138.

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Integrating the Christians of the Central Balkans into the Byzantine Empire (late 10th – mid-13th century)

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