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Mirosław J. Leszka

The Portrayal of Peter in Mediaeval Sources



I. Byzantine Sources

Remarks about tsar Peter can be found across various sources of Byzantine provenance, from historiographic to hagiographic works¹. From the perspective of creating his image, the most important are the historiographic works. Peter is mentioned in texts that are associated with Symeon Logothetes, in the book VI of *Continuation of Theophanes*, in the *Historia* of Leo the Deacon, as well as in the works of later authors – John Skylitzes (eleventh century) and John Zonaras (twelfth century).

I.I. Peter's Titulature in the Byzantine Sources

Firstly, it is worth noting how Peter was titled in the Byzantine sources, which may to some degree attest to the attitudes the Byzantines had toward him. According to the Byzantine-Bulgarian treaty of 927, it

¹ The Reader can find a discussion of these in the chapter untitled 'Sources and Modern Scholarship' of the present volume. Cf. also M.J. Leszka, *Wizerunek władców pierwszego państwa bułgarskiego w bizantyńskich źródłach pisanych (VIII – pierwsza połowa XII wieku)*, Łódź 2004, pp. 130–131.

would appear that Peter was given the right to the title of the ‘basileus of the Bulgarians’². This change in the titulature of the Bulgarian ruler, although without naming Peter specifically, is mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenetos in *The Book of Ceremonies*:

To the archon, by the grace of God, of Bulgaria: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and Holy Spirit, our one and only true God, Constantine and Romanos, having faith in God alone, emperors of the Romans, to our beloved spiritual son and archon, by the grace of God, of the most Christian nation of the Bulgarians.* It is more fittingly expressed: *Constantine and Romanos, pious sovereigns in Christ our God and emperors of the Romans, to our beloved spiritual son, the lord so-and-so, emperor of Bulgaria* (βασιλέα Βουλγαρίας).³

Constantine, who after all was unsympathetic towards the Bulgarians, including Peter himself⁴, did not omit this fact; one could therefore expect that titling the ruler of the northern neighbour of Byzantium ‘basileus of the Bulgarians’ should have been common in the Byzantine sources. This, however, is not the case – the title appears only sporadically. We find it in a letter from Theophylaktos, the patriarch of Constantinople, addressed to Peter⁵. The patriarch, being the son of Romanos Lekapenos, was related by marriage to Peter, and the letter itself was drafted in the patriarch’s chancery. The use of the official title of the Bulgarian rulers is completely understandable. The *II Sigillion* of emperor Basil II from May 1020, issued for the Archbishop of Ohrid, also refers to Peter as basileus⁶. This document was issued by the imperial chancery, and was to be the legal basis for the functioning of the Bulgarian Archbishopric. The authors

² Cf. Part One, Chapter III, Point 2 of the present book.

³ Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, II, 48, p. 690 (transl. p. 690).

⁴ Г. Г. Литаврин, *Константин Багрянородный о Болгарии и Болгарах*, [in:] *Сборник в чест на акад. Димитър Ангелов*, ed. В. Велков, София 1994, pp. 30–37.

⁵ *Letter of the Patriarch Theophylaktos to Tsar Peter*, p. 311.

⁶ Basil II, *Sigillion II*, p. 556: Πέτρον τοῦ βασιλέως. Cf. M. J. Leszka, *Wizerunek...*, p. 131; Д. Чешмеджиев, *Цар Петър във византийските извори*, [in:] *Кръгла маса. “Златният век на цар Симеон: политика, религия и култура”*, ed. В. Станев, София 2014, p. 108.

of this text, working on the basis of the imperial archives, certainly must have known the proper title of the Bulgarian ruler, and the *Sigillion* itself, being a legal act, required precise wording.

In historiographic sources, Peter was outright called a basileus by John Skylitzes⁷, while Symeon Logothetes, Continuator of George the Monk and book VI of Continuator of Theophanes called him a basileus as the husband of Maria (ὡς βασιλεῖ προσηρμόσθη ἀνδρὶ)⁸. The title of an Archon was used frequently⁹. In Leo the Deacon we find the title ἡγήτορ¹⁰ and ἀρχηγός¹¹. Constantine Porphyrogenetos called Peter by the title κύριος¹². Very frequently, the Byzantine authors have not used any title at all, and referred to the Bulgarian ruler as Peter the Bulgarian, or simply used his name alone¹³. All of the titles listed above that were used to refer to Peter were firmly embedded in Byzantine literature¹⁴. What may come as a surprise is the fact that in the historiographic works only John Skylitzes

⁷ John Skylitzes, p. 255. It should be noted that the title *basileus* does not appear in all of the copies of John Skylitzes' work. It was replaced with the term *archegos* [Viennese manuscript no. 35 (A), Coinslin manuscript no. 136 (C)], or *krator* [Milanese manuscript, Ambros. 912, (B)]. This question was noted by J. Bonarek, *Romajowie i obcy w kronice Jana Skylitzesa. Identyfikacja etniczna Bizantyńczyków i ich stosunek do obcych w świetle kroniki Jana Skylitzesa*, Toruń 2003, p. 147, fn. 266.

⁸ Symeon Logothetes, p. 329; Continuator of George the Monk, p. 907; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 23, p. 415. Cf. Z.A. Brzozowska, *Car i caryca czy cesarz i cesarzowa Bułgarów? Tytulatura Piotra i Marii-Ireny Lekapeny w średniowiecznych tekstach słowiańskich (Jak powinniśmy nazywać władców bułgarskich z X stulecia)*, WS 62, 2017, pp. 17–26.

⁹ Continuator of George the Monk, p. 904; Symeon Logothetes, 136, 45, p. 326; John Skylitzes, pp. 223, 225 (as was mentioned above, this author also used the title *basileus*); the title *archon* was used both before and after the conclusion of peace); Pseudo-Symeon, p. 740; Leo the Deacon, IV, 5, p. 62.

¹⁰ Leo the Deacon, V, 2, p. 78.

¹¹ Leo the Deacon, IV, 5, p. 61.

¹² Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 13.148.

¹³ Np. Symeon Logothetes, 136, 45, p. 326; 47, p. 327; 51, p. 328; Continuator of Theophanes, VI, 28, p. 419; VI, 35, p. 422; Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 905, 906, 910; Pseudo-Symeon, p. 744; cf. M.J. Leszka, *Wizerunek...*, p. 132; Д. Чешмеджиев, *Цар Петър...*, p. 108.

¹⁴ On this subject see: Г. Бакалов, *Средновековният български владетел. Титулатура и инсигнии*, София 1995, pp. 98–195.

directly called Peter a basileus. What is the reason for this? Avoiding the use of the title of 'basileus' in relation to Peter was, it seems, an intentional move, aimed at lowering his position in relation to the Byzantine emperor. It is obvious that the Bulgarian ruler bearing the title of the basileus of the Bulgarians was not equal to the Byzantine emperor, however it needs to be remembered that in Byzantium there was a strongly embedded conviction that the only one who should be entitled to be called a basileus was the emperor ruling from Constantinople. It is worth reminding how vigorously the Byzantines protested against the adoption of an imperial title by Charlemagne¹⁵, or how hostile Nikephoros II Phokas was towards Otto I, the restorer of the imperial institution in the West¹⁶. The Byzantines' concessions to Peter in this matter were made easier by the fact that Symeon, his predecessor, has already managed, in a way, to make them used to the idea by using the title both with and without their approval, and even by claiming the title of the basileus of the *Rhomaioi*¹⁷. Peter likely did not have such great ambitions, and was satisfied with a title of an 'ethnic' emperor. With time, when the Byzantines' memory of Symeon's aspirations and of his victories over them partly faded, a concession regarding the imperial title for his son may have appeared to be an excessive one. It is for this reason, one might think, that they tried to forget about it. This tendency is particularly notable in the works written by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos and the authors associated with him. The emperor's dislike towards the Bulgarians is highlighted by many of the scholars; its

¹⁵ C.N. Tsirpanlis, *Byzantine Reactions to the Coronation of Charlemagne*, Буџ 6, 1974, pp. 347–360.

¹⁶ С.А. Иванов, *Византийско-болгарские отношения в 966–969 гг.*, ВВ 42, 1981 pp. 95–96.

¹⁷ On Symeon's efforts to obtain an imperial title – И. Божиков, *Цар Симеон Велики (893–927). Златният век на Средновековна България*, София 1983, p. 98sqq; Г. Бакалов, *Средновековният...*, pp. 150–168; M.J. Leszka, *Symeon I Wielki a Bizancjum. Z dziejów stosunków bułgarsko-bizantyńskich w latach 893–927*, Łódź 2013, pp. 138–158; 236–247; А. Николов, "Великият между царете". *Изграждане и утвърждаване на българската царска институция през управлението на Симеон I*, [in:] *Българският златен век. Сборник в чест на цар Симеон Велики (893–927)*, ed. В. Гюзелев, И.Г. Илиев, К. Ненов, Пловдив 2015, pp. 149–188; К. Маринов, *Византийската имперска идея и претенциите на цар Симеон според словото "За мира с българите"*, КМС 25, 2016, pp. 342–352.

origins were in part of personal nature¹⁸, and in part were a consequence of continued envisaging of Bulgarians as a potential, and dangerous, enemy¹⁹. A similar proclivity can also be seen in Leo the Deacon, which can be explained by the fact that this author's work was created at the time of war between Byzantium and tsar Samuel, and the author himself had a strong, negative attitude towards the Bulgarians, resulting from his experiences from the campaign of 986, which the Byzantines lost. The use of nomenclature normally employed towards Bulgarian rulers of the pagan period, which did not reflect Peter's actual title that was accepted by Byzantium, was likely done for three reasons. Firstly, it was intended to reduce his position in the eyes of Byzantine readers; secondly, it was an expression of a tendency present in Byzantine literature to use archaic language; and thirdly, it was a symptom of a visible dislike towards the Bulgarians, present among some of the authors.

John Skylitzes, who did use the title of 'basileus' in regard to Peter, was writing his work at the time when Bulgaria no longer existed. Certainly, the fact that Byzantium destroyed the state that has previously been governed by a ruler bearing the title of a basileus may have filled Byzantines with pride. A confirmation of this view can be seen in, firstly, the fact that Boris II, the last Bulgarian ruler of the first state was frequently referred to, more than any of his predecessors, as βασιλεὺς τῶν βουλγάρων²⁰. Similarly, also the rulers of the so-called state of Cometopouloi, with whom Basil II

¹⁸ Г. Бакалов, *Царската промугация на Петър и неговите приемници в светлината на българо-византийските дипломатически отношения след договора от 927 г.*, ИП 39.6, 1983, pp. 36–37; Г. Г. Литаврин, *Константин Багрянородный...*, pp. 32–36; J. Shepherd, *A marriage too far? Maria Lekapena and Peter of Bulgaria*, [in:] *The Empress Theophano. Byzantium and the West at the turn of the first millennium*, ed. A. Davids, Cambridge 1995, pp. 130–134.

¹⁹ Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 5. The emperor points to the Pechenegs as the force that was a counterweight to the Bulgarians. Cf. J. Shepherd, *Constantine VII's Doctrine of "Containment" of the Rus*, [in:] *Геннадиев. К 70-летию академика Г. Г. Литаврина*, ed. Б. Н. Флоря, Москва 1999, pp. 272–274.

²⁰ John Skylitzes, p. 297, cf. p. 255, 310; John Zonaras, p. 529, cf. p. 535–536 (Zonaras, in his description of the times of Boris II, relies on the account of Skylitzes, and therefore it is not surprising that he referred to the Bulgarian ruler as a basileus); Leo the Deacon, VIII, 6, p. 136; IX, 12, p. 158 (here, instead of 'Bulgarians', we find

fought and eventually won, were considered by John Skylitzes to have been emperors²¹. Secondly, we can see this in the description of the triumph of John I Tzimiskes, where it was very clearly stressed that the Byzantines have captured the imperial clothing and imperial insignia of power of the Bulgarian rulers²². It cannot be ruled out that John Skylitzes may have been also influenced by the fact that following the conquest of Bulgaria in 1018, part of the Bulgarian nobility, including representatives of Samuel's family, were incorporated into the Byzantine ruling elite. A symbolic expression of this phenomenon was the marriage of Isaac I Komnenos, the emperor in the years 1057–1059, with Catherine, a daughter of John Vladislav.

1.2. Portrayal of Peter in the Context of the Conclusion of Peace in 927 and at the Beginning of his Reign

Peter most commonly appears in the Byzantine sources in relation to the conclusion of peace in 927. In the Byzantine chronicles we find an exceedingly unified sequence of events that led to the aforementioned treaty, which makes an impression that there was some kind of an official version on which they all based their work. The sequence of events was as follows: the death of Symeon – the military expedition of Peter against the Macedonia theme – the secret mission to Constantinople

'Mysians'). Perhaps the attitude of Skylitzes and Zonaras was also a result of the Bulgarian influence at the imperial court at the time when they were writing their histories.

²¹ John Skylitzes, pp. 358–359 (Ohrid as the capital of the Bulgarian basileioi).

²² John Skylitzes, p. 310; John Zonaras, pp. 535–536; Leo the Deacon, IX, 12, pp. 158–159. On the subject of the celebrations associated with the triumph over the Bulgarians, see: В.Н. Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I/2, *Първо българско Царство. От славянизацията на държавата до падането на Първото царство (852–1018)*, София 1927, pp. 627–629; М. М с о г м и с к, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 171–175; see also: S. R e k, *Geneza tytułu carskiego w państwie zachodniobułgarskim*, ВР 2, 1985, pp. 52–53; Г. А т а н а с о в, *Инсигниите на средновековните български владетели. Корони, скиптри, сфери, орбжия, костюми, накити*, Плевен 1999, pp. 102–105; M.J. L e s z k a, *Wizerunek...*, pp. 141–142; Т. Р а р а м а с т о р а к и s, *The Bamberg Hanging Reconsidered*, ДХАЕ 24, 2003, pp. 375–392.

of the envoy Kalokir, with a peace offer extended out of fear of Romanos Lekapenos' counteraction – the acceptance of the peace offer by Romanos – negotiations in Mesembria – the arrival of the Bulgarian delegation led by George Sursuvul to the Byzantine capital – reaching an accord regarding conditions of the peace – the meeting of Maria, the daughter of Christopher, by the Bulgarians – the arrival of Peter – the signing of the peace treaty – the marriage of Peter and Maria – the wedding reception – the newlyweds' departure from Constantinople. This is the framework of events associated with the treaty of 927, as presented by the historiographic sources²³. It is clear from this account that the one who initiated the peace negotiations was Peter, and that he was motivated by the fear of the Romans, who were preparing an expedition against him. Moreover, he began the peace negotiations in secret, which could mean that he lacked the authority to impose his will on his own subjects. Byzantine historiographers present Peter, at the beginning of his reign, as a weak ruler, forced to ask for peace, and still lacking the authority in his own state. The most spectacular event during Peter's stay in Constantinople was his marriage with Maria Lekapene. This marriage was to guarantee the permanence of the peace treaty. The marriage of a woman from the imperial family to a foreigner was an unprecedented event in the history of Byzantium. What is notable, however, in the official account of the events is the lack of a mention, or even a hint, of the exceptional nature of this fact. The wedding celebrations in Constantinople were arranged in such a way as to show the Constantinopolitans that the marriage of Maria and Peter the Bulgarian was not dictated by the events, and that it was the beginning of a lasting peace²⁴. Aretas of Caesarea, in his letter to Romanos Lekapenos, expressed hope that this relationship will bear good fruit²⁵, and the author of the speech *On the Treaty with the Bulgarians* claimed

²³ Pseudo-Symeon, pp. 740–741; Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 904–907; Leo Grammatikos, pp. 315–317; Continuator of Theophanes, pp. 412–415; John Skylitzes, pp. 222–224; John Zonaras, pp. 474–475.

²⁴ On the role of the marriage ceremony of Peter and Maria in Romanos Lekapenos' policy, cf. Part One, Chapter IV, point 2 of the present monograph.

²⁵ Aretas, p. 99.

that God removed Symeon and gave the ruler's place to Peter so that the latter could conclude the peace. In this manner, Peter at the same time became a tool in the hands of God²⁶.

The Byzantine historians saw the positive sides of the marriage of Maria and Peter, pointing to the conclusion of peace that the union has sealed, and highlighted the fact that it was not some great calamity for Maria herself who, while sad about losing regular contact with her family, on the other hand was happy to become a Bulgarian ruler, which certainly has to be seen as a sign of approval of Peter²⁷.

The words of criticism that came from under the pen of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos in the *On the Governance of the Empire* are an exception to the positive reception of the marriage between Maria and Peter. He claimed that marrying Maria to a foreign ruler was in a breach of an existing law. The fact that it did happen was a consequence of the lack of education of Romanos Lekapenos, who was a simple man, and not born in purple. Constantine VII also disparaged the significance of the union itself, by writing that Maria was not a daughter of a legitimate emperor, and that it was not such a great detriment since the Bulgarians were, after all, Christians. However, even Constantine noted the fact that the conclusion of peace, of which Maria's marriage was a guarantee, brought freedom to many Byzantine captives²⁸.

²⁶ *On the Treaty with the Bulgarians*, 16, p. 278.371–378; R. J. Jenkins, *The Peace with Bulgaria (927) Celebrated by Theodore Daphnopates*, [in:] *Polychronion. Festschrift F. Dölger*, Heidelberg 1966, pp. 293, 297; Т. Годоров, “Слово за мира с българите” и българо-византийските политическо отношения през последни години от управлението на цар Симеон, [in:] *България, българите и техните съседни през вековете. Изследвания и материали от научната конференция в памет на доц. д-р Христо Коларов, 30–31 октомври 1998 г., Велико Търново*, ed. Й. Андреев, Велико Търново 2001, pp. 141–150; K. Marinow, *Peace in the House of Jacob. A Few Remarks on the Ideology of Two Biblical Themes in the Oration, On the Treaty with the Bulgarians*, *BMd* 3, 2012, p. 91; idem, *Not David but Salomon: Tsar Peter I (927–969) according to the Oration ‘On the Treaty with the Bulgarians’* (in press). Peter as Solomon, the son of Symeon-David, bringing to conclusion his father's plan.

²⁷ Continuator of Theophanes, p. 415; Continuator of George the Monk, pp. 906–907.

²⁸ Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 13.146–163. Constantine VII derived the prohibition of marriages between

The beginnings of Peter's reign have been mentioned in particularly interesting passages found in two hagiographic sources, specifically: *Life of St. Mary the Younger*²⁹ and *Life of Luke the Younger*³⁰. In the first of the texts we read: *his [Symeon's – M.J.L.] son Peter succeeded him. Behaving in an even more barbaric fashion, he destroyed to the ground the Thracian cities captured by his father*³¹.

This passage relates to the events which occurred after Symeon's death, and which preceded the conclusion of the Byzantine-Bulgarian peace. The author of *Life of Luke the Younger*, in turn, has this to say about the beginning of Peter's reign:

After a short time the sinner Symeon, who was responsible for spilling so much Christian blood, departed from men and was succeeded by his son Peter. He was clearly the heir to his father's dignity and wealth, but not to his savage and hatred; on the contrary, insofar as possible he repudiated his father's lineage and kinship. Thus he said farewell to blood and war and welcomed peace with us, transforming the scimitar and the spear and all iron armour into pruning hooks and mattocks, as the prophet would say.³²

the imperial women and foreigners from the legislation of Constantine the Great, who never promulgated such a law. Cf. G. P r i n z i n g, *Bizantyńczycy wobec obcych*, ed. K. I l s k i, Poznań 1998, pp. 27–28; see also Part One, Chapter IV, point 2, of the present book.

²⁹ *Life of St. Mary the Younger*. On the subject of this source, see: W. S w o b o d a, *Żywot św. Marii*, [in:] *SSS*, vol. VII, p. 313; S. K i s s a s, *O βίος της Αγίας Μαρίας της Νέας ως πηγή για την αρχαιολογία και ιστορία της τέχνης*, BF 14, 1989, pp. 253–264. Cf. C. M a n g o, *The Byzantine Church at Vize (Bizye) in Thrace and St. Mary the Younger*, ZPBVI 11, 1968, pp. 9–13; *PMZ II*, vol. IV, pp. 334–337, s.v. *Maria die Jüngere (von Bizye) (#24910)*; S. C o n s t a n t i n o u, *A Byzantine hagiographical parody: Life of Mary the Younger I*, BMGS 34, 2010, pp. 160–181.

³⁰ *Life of St. Luke the Younger*, 40, pp. 58, 60. On the subject of the *Life* – G. M o r a v c s i k, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. I, *Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkvölker*, Berlin 1958, pp. 568–569; *Life of St. Luke the Younger*, pp. IX–XVIII; on the subject of St. Luke, see: N. O i k o n o m i d e s, *The First Century of the Monastery of Hosios Loukas*, DOP 46, 1992, pp. 245–255.

³¹ *Life of St. Mary the Younger*, 26 (transl. p. 280).

³² *Life of Luke the Younger*, 40, pp. 58, 60 (transl. pp. 59, 61).

How to explain this difference of opinion? It would seem that it is a result of the personal experiences of the authors. The former judged Peter through the lens of the events which occurred in Thrace, and which he may have witnessed personally. Meanwhile Greece, where the events of *Life of Luke the Younger* have taken place, had not been touched by the military activity occurring at the beginning of Peter I's reign. The reign itself certainly differed, in a positive manner, from Symeon's rule, when even these lands were raided. Peter's characterisation was built through comparison with his father. Peter was therefore lusting for neither fame nor riches. He had no tendency for cruelty, and loved people. He ceased the bloodshed, and most importantly made peace, which allowed discarding of weapons and resumption of normal life.

The beginnings of Peter's reign are also associated with the matter of the rebellion of his two brothers. The Byzantine historians do not present their own opinion here about Peter. However the way in which these events have been presented makes it possible to make some conclusions as to their intentions and opinions of the tsar. At first glance it might seem that according to the Byzantine historiographers the insurgence of John and Michael exposed Peter's weak position and lack of authority³³. A closer examination of the accounts precludes such position. The fate of these rebellions unequivocally attests to this, as in both cases Peter emerged victorious without even having to fight with his brothers. In John's case, his plot was uncovered and its members, on Peter's unflinching orders, were harshly and exemplarily punished. The brother himself was treated with restraint, with imperial leniency, even gentleness, which Peter would likely have not been able to afford if he thought that John could constitute a serious threat.

As for Michael's rebellion, it ended, similarly to John's, even before it properly began, and without any intervention on Peter's part. This was caused by Michael's sudden death. Michael's supporters, fearing punishment from Peter, as John Skylitzes stressed, fled from Bulgaria. The way in which events happened during the rebellion clearly showed that Peter enjoyed both the protection of divine providence, had authority, and that

³³ Thus, e.g., J. B o n a r e k, *Romajowie...*, p. 146.

he was seen as a stern and resolute ruler, which in part must have been a result of the way in which he dealt with the plotters who supported John. The rebels moved against Peter only because they were led by Michael who, like Peter himself, was a son of Symeon and a member of the ruling family. Only he could have given them a hope of success. Once he was gone, the rebels knew they had no chance in a confrontation with the ruler.

The way in which the Byzantines presented Peter in the situations discussed above attests to, in my opinion, their view of him as a strong, determined ruler, who could deal with internal threats, and who enjoyed Divine protection. It might appear that this is contrary to what they wrote about him in the context of the events that preceded the conclusion of peace. One needs to remember, however, that their criteria for evaluating Peter were based on the Byzantine interests, and a desire to present the Byzantines in a better light.

What casts a certain shadow on the image of Peter as a ruler is a description we find in the passages devoted to his brothers' rebellions: the ruler was tricked by the Byzantine envoy, John, who, without Peter's permission, had taken his namesake from Preslav to Constantinople. Regardless of whether this information is true, it is worth noting that the Byzantine authors have not presented it in a manner that would be accusatory towards Peter. This should not be surprising, given that the 'abduction' of John showed the Byzantines in a favourable light.

1.3. Peter's Religious Attitude. Portrayal of the Ruler in the Final Years of his Reign

The second theme that is clearly apparent in relation to Peter are his dealings in religious matters. It was during Peter's reign that the Bogomil heresy began³⁴. It was likely in this matter that he turned to the patriarch of Constantinople, who in turn penned something of a laudatory hymn

³⁴ On the subject of Bogomilism, cf. Part Two, Chapter VII, point 3 of the present book. There also the reference to the literature of the subject.

in Peter's honour; for it is in this manner that one might describe the beginning of a letter to the Bulgarian ruler:

How great a treasure is a faithful and God-loving soul, our spiritual son and the best and finest of our relatives, especially when at the same time it is the soul of a ruler and a leader – such as Yourself – that knows how to love and worship that which is good and appropriate! For in leading a prudent life and acting well, it ensures well-being not only for itself, but also, by extending a most protective care over all those who are subject to its power, it cares on his behalf for what is the most important and concerning salvation. For what is more important or salutary than unblemished and true faith, and a salubrious concept of divinity, thanks to which with pure awareness we worship the One God, the Purest and the Most Holy? For that is the chief ingredient of our salvation.³⁵

Undoubtedly, one can see here a certain rhetorical exaggeration, characteristic of the epistolary convention, a desire to flatter the addressee, or traces of the Byzantine theory of power, but perhaps, one would like to think, a respect for the man whose deep religiosity was widely known. A sentence penned by Leo the Deacon, in which he described Peter as *a pious and respected man*³⁶, resonates with Theophylaktos' letter. One might therefore think that the Byzantines highly valued the religious attitude of the Bulgarian ruler. This made even clearer by a reference to Peter made by Leo the Deacon in the aforementioned passage, where he called him ἡγήτορ τῶν Μυσῶν³⁷, not considering it appropriate to call him a basileus of the Bulgarians. For Leo the Deacon, Peter was certainly a worthy of respect, pious man, however only a leader of the Mysians, of

³⁵ *Letter of the Patriarch Theophylaktos to Tsar Peter*, p. 311.

³⁶ Leo the Deacon, V, 2, p. 78 (transl. p. 129). Cf. И. Дуйчев, *Стара българска книжнина*, vol. I, София 1943, p. 220; Л. Симонова, *Образът на българския владетел във византийската книжнина (средата на IX – началото на XI в.)*. Няколко примера, [in:] *Представата за "другия" на Балканите*, ed. Н. Данова, В. Димова, М. Калицин, София 1995, p. 27.

³⁷ Leo the Deacon, V, 2, p. 78.

barbarians. This remark excellently corresponds with a description of the Bulgarian embassy to Nikephoros II Phokas, penned by the emperor, which arrived in Constantinople to remind the Byzantines about the tribute that they were due to pay to the Bulgarians. The emperor was then supposed to have called the Bulgarians *the particularly wretched and abominable Scythian people*³⁸, and referred to Peter as a *leather-gnawing ruler clad in a leather jerkin*, which definitely must have been an insult³⁹. It is not certain whether this scene has actually taken place⁴⁰, however the fact that Leo the Deacon, writing at the end of the tenth century, could have considered it plausible speaks volumes about the condescension with which the contemporary Byzantines treated their Bulgarian neighbours.

Peter's reign began in an atmosphere of conflict with the Byzantium, and ended in a similar fashion. The deterioration of the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations during the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas became a pretext for renewed interest in Peter. John Skylitzes mentioned that Nikephoros II Phokas demanded from Peter to stop the Hungarians who, through the Bulgarian territory, were making their way to Byzantium⁴¹. John Zonaras has written down the proud reply of the Bulgarian ruler, in which Peter refused to accede to the Byzantine emperor's demands and pointed out that he previously requested Byzantine assistance against the Hungarians, which he was denied. In the present situation, having formed peaceful relations with them, he saw no reason to start a war⁴². Peter

³⁸ Leo the Deacon, IV, 5, p. 61 (transl. p. 110).

³⁹ Leo the Deacon, IV, 5, p. 62 (transl. p. 110; see also fn. 37 on that page). This conclusion is confirmed by the fragments of the letters of Theophylaktos of Ohrid, in which the bishop writes with disgust about the Bulgarians, as of the people who 'stink of a goat's hide' – Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Letters*, 4, 5; see also J. Shepard, *A marriage...*, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Cf. C.A. Иванов, *Византийско-болгарские...*, pp. 92–94; J. Bonarek, *Przyczyny i cele bułgarskich wypraw Światosława a polityka Bizancjum w latach sześćdziesiątych X w.*, SH 39, 1996, pp. 288–291; K. Marinow, *Dzicy, wyniosli i groźni górale. Wizerunek Bułgarów jako mieszkańców gór w wybranych źródłach greckich VIII–XII w.*, [in:] *Stereotypy bałkańskie. Księga jubileuszowa Profesor Ilony Czamańskiej*, ed. J. Paśkiewicz, Z. Pentek, Poznań 2011, pp. 41–42.

⁴¹ John Skylitzes, pp. 275–276.

⁴² John Zonaras, pp. 512–513.

was chastened for adopting this stance. Nikephoros Phokas arranged for the Rus' under Svyatoslav to attack the Bulgarians, who suffered a series of defeats. In the light of the Byzantine sources, Peter appears as a proud ruler, independent from the Byzantines, who near the end of his life was not able to lead an effective defence against the Rus incursion. Given the circumstances, the triumphant Leo the Deacon could afford to be compassionate to Peter when he was describing the circumstances of his death. The Bulgarian ruler, having heard of the defeats suffered by his troops in fighting the Rus', was to have become so sorrowful *in his extreme distress at the unexpected rout, suffered an attack of epilepsy, and departed this world*⁴³.

From the above deliberations, it becomes clear that the Byzantine authors associated Peter primarily with the establishing of lasting peace with the Empire in 927. In the sources that present the events from before the reign of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas (963–969), when the relations between the two countries have taken a turn for the worse, Peter is most often presented as a co-founder of peace, a deeply religious man, accepting the Byzantine understanding of a ruler's role in the religious matters. The Byzantine authors incidentally also indicate that Peter was able to effectively defend his position and sternly deal with his opponents. In the sources relating the events from the final years of his life, he is presented as a haughty man, daring to move against the Byzantine basileus, for which he was justly and severely punished.

It is worth highlighting that most often the Byzantine authors did not present their attitude towards, and appraisal of, Peter directly, which means that the reader of their works has to create an image of the Bulgarian ruler for himself, constructing it on the basis of the way in which particular events have been presented. The sole direct characterisation of Peter was included in the *Life of Luke the Younger*.

⁴³ Leo the Deacon, V, 2, p. 78 (transl. p. 129).

2. Bulgarian Sources

Mentions of Peter can be found in, i.a., the following mediaeval Bulgarian sources: *Sermon against the Heretics* of Cosmas the Priest, created in the period between the years immediately following Peter's death (969–972) and the 1040s⁴⁴; *Service of St. Tsar Peter*, which was most likely written at the end of the tenth century⁴⁵; *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*/the so-called *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* – the work, most generally speaking, created during the Byzantine rule in Bulgaria (1018–1186)⁴⁶; the Lives of John of Rila: *Folk Life of St John of Rila*, created most likely in the eleventh century⁴⁷; *Prologue life of St. John of Rila (I)*, written in the thirteenth century⁴⁸; *Prologue life of St. John of Rila (II)*, existing in the framework of *Dragan's Menaion* from the thirteenth century⁴⁹;

⁴⁴ C O S M A S T H E P R I E S T. On the subject of this source: G. M i n c z e w, *Stowiańskie teksty antyheretyckie jako źródło do poznania herezji dualistycznych na Balkanach*, [in:] *Średniowieczne herezje dualistyczne na Balkanach. Źródła stowiańskie*, ed., transl., comment. G. M i n c z e w, M. S k o w r o n e k, J. M. W o ł s k i, Łódź 2015, pp. 13–57 (see the work for further publications on the subject).

⁴⁵ *Service of St. Tsar Peter*. The text is known from two fragmentary copies from the thirteenth century. Cf. *Ziemscy aniołowie, niebiańscy ludzie. Anachoreci w bułgarskiej literaturze i kulturze*, ed. G. M i n c z e w, Białystok 2002, pp. 65–66.

⁴⁶ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*. O this source – K. M a r i n o w, *Kilka uwag na temat ideologiczno-eschatologicznej wymowy "Bułgarskiej kroniki apokryficznej"*, FE 4. 6/7, 2007, pp. 61–75; I. B i l i a r s k y, *The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah. The Destiny and Meanings of an Apocryphal Text*, Leiden–Boston 2013, *passim*.

⁴⁷ *Folk Life of St John of Rila*; on this source, see Й. И в а н о в, *Жития на св. Ивана Рилски с уводни бележки*, ГСУИФФ 32.13, 1936, pp. 4–8; К. И в а н о в а, *Най-старото житие за св. Иван и някои негови литературни паралели*, [in:] *Медиевистика и културна антропология. Сборник в чест на 40-годишната творческа дейност на проф. Д. Петканова*, ed. А. А н г у ш е в а, А. М и л т е н о в а, София 1998, pp. 37–47; М. С п а с о в а, *Народно ли е народното (безименното) житие на св. Йоан Рилски*, Рбг 22.4, 1998, pp. 50–74; В. П а н а й о т о в, *За "народното житие" на св. Йоан Рилски*, ПКШ 4, 1999, pp. 92–98; *Ziemscy aniołowie...*, pp. 19–21.

⁴⁸ *Prologue life of St. John of Rila (I)*; on this source: Й. И в а н о в, *Жития на св. Ивана Рилски...*, pp. 11–13; Н. М. Д ы л е в с к и й, *Жития Иоанна Рильского русских древлехранилищ и их болгарские источники (Краткие заметки к материалам и задаче дальнейшего исследования)*, ТОДРЛ 23, 1968, p. 280.

⁴⁹ *Prologue life of St. John of Rila (II)*; on its subject: Й. И в а н о в, *Жития на св. Ивана Рилски...*, pp. 13–15; Н. М. Д ы л е в с к и й, *Жития Иоанна Рильского...*, p. 280;

the *Life of St. John of Rila* of Euthymios of Tarnovo, written down in the fourteenth century⁵⁰; *Synodikon of Tsar Boril* – created in 1211⁵¹. The listed sources give, in my opinion, a good idea of how Peter was being presented in the mediaeval Bulgarian sources⁵².

2.1. Titulature

Regarding the way in which Peter was referred to in the Bulgarian sources, he was consistently titled there as ‘emperor/tsar’ (цѣрь бѣлгаромѣ / цѣрь бѣлгарскыи). This tendency can also be seen in works translated from Greek (Continuator of George the Monk, John Zonaras) in which, notably, Peter is called an emperor even when the Greek original did not use this title⁵³.

This tendency is not surprising. Bulgarian authors and translators simply reflected the actual state of the day, which was for them both rewarding and a cause for pride. It cannot be also ruled out that this pride was further reinforced by the fact that a considerable number of these works and manuscripts of earlier texts (from the tenth or eleventh centuries) came from the times when the Bulgarian rulers customarily used an imperial title.

I. Biliarsky, *St. Peter (927–969), Tsar of the Bulgarians*, [in:] *State and Church. Studies in Medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium*, ed. V. Gjuzelev, K. Petkov, Sofia 2011, p. 180.

⁵⁰ Euthymios of Tarnovo; for more on this text see: Й. Иванов, *Български старини...*, p. 369; idem, *Жития на св. Ивана Рилски...*, pp. 15–21; Н.М. Дылевский, *Жития Иоанна Рвьльского...*, p. 280.

⁵¹ *Synodikon of Tsar Boril*. For more on this source, see: *Борилев синодик. Издание и превод*, ed. И. Божилов, А. Тотоманова, И. Билярски, София 2010.

⁵² The list of other mediaeval Bulgarian sources in which Peter appears (or rather, is only mentioned in passing), can be found in the following works: I. Biliarsky, *St. Peter...*, pp. 175–178; Д.И. Польшвинный, *Царь Петр в исторической памяти болгарского средневековья*, [in:] *Средневековният българин и “другите”. Сборник в чест на 60-годишнината на проф. дин Петър Ангелов*, ed. А. Николов, Г.Н. Николов, София 2013, pp. 137–145; Z.A. Brzozowska, *Car i sarusa...*, pp. 20–22. The translations of the Byzantine chronicles into the Old Church Slavonic, which differ from the Greek originals only in minor details, fell outside the scope of my interest.

⁵³ Z.A. Brzozowska, *Car i sarusa...*, pp. 17–26.

2.2. *The Sermon against the Heretics*

The Sermon against the Heretics of Cosmas the Priest is, perhaps, the earliest text of Bulgarian provenance in which we find a mention of Peter. It needs to be clearly stated, however, that it is only a passing remark⁵⁴. It refers to Peter as an orthodox tsar, who is mentioned only to indicate that it was during his reign that the Bogomil heresy was born⁵⁵. The stressing of the tsar's orthodoxy is perhaps not so much, or maybe not only, a reflection of the commonly held opinion of him, but a result of wanting to lay another accusation at the heretics' door, namely, that they have moved against such a pious ruler. Aside from this sole remark, the author of the speech does not mention Peter again.

2.3. Peter in the *Lives* of St. John of Rila

John – the most well known Bulgarian saint and anchorite, founder of a monastic community which grew into the famed Rila Monastery – was born ca. 876. We have no certain information about his origins or the reasons for which he decided to lead a hermit's life in the Rila Mountains which, ultimately, brought him renown and recognition, something he did not, after all, seek. As a result, he founded the aforementioned community, and became its first hegumenos. He passed away however, most likely in 946, once again a hermit⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ *Sermon against the Heretics*, 3, [in:] *Średniowieczne herezje dualistyczne*, p. 72: в лѣта правобѣрнаго царя Петра (*in the years of the orthodox Tsar Peter*, transl. p. 68).

⁵⁵ Peter was 'used' in a similar manner in the *Synodikon of Tsar Boril* (13b, p. 121), although in the remark discussing Bogomil's appearance he was not described as 'orthodox' (*Upon the priest Bogomil, who adopted the Manichaen heresy under Bulgarian King Peter* – transl. p. 344). In a separate passage of this text he is called *the holy king* (201b, p. 149, transl. p. 352). In the *Service of St. Tsar Peter* we find a fragment describing how tsar Peter has driven out the 'prince of darkness'. It would be tempting to conclude that the passage tells of fighting the heresy, however such interpretation might be going too far.

⁵⁶ On the subject of John of Rila, see i.a.: И. Д у й ч е в, *Рилският светец и неговата обител*, София 1947; I. Д о б г е в, *Sv. Ivan Rilski*, vol. I, Linz 2007; Б. Н и к о л о в а, *Монашество, манастири и манастирски живот в средновековна България*, vol. II, София 2010, pp. 790–815; Й. А н д р е в, *Иван Рилски*, [in:] Й. А н д р е в,

The *Lives* of John of Rila associate him with tsar Peter. The latter was to have been greatly impressed by John's saintliness⁵⁷. Authors of the *Lives* focus the topic of relations between the ruler and the saint on two matters: the efforts of the former to meet John, and the care he took to ensure the mortal remains of the holy man were given appropriately dignified treatment. To show the way in which Peter was presented in the *Lives* of John of Rila, I will use the oldest example known to us, the *Folk life of St. John of Rila*. According to the anonymous author tsar Peter, who happened *to be in Sredets*⁵⁸, after hearing of the holy man sent nine men into the Rila Mountains to find the place in which John dwelt so that the tsar could meet him and bow down to him⁵⁹. After a lengthy search, the tsar's messengers met with John. This only came to pass because the latter,

И. Л а з а р о в, П. П а в л о в, *Кой кой е в средновековна България*, София 2012, pp. 270–275.

⁵⁷ It would appear that the monastic environment was very close to tsar Peter not only because of his deep piety, but also because of family tradition. His grandfather Boris-Michael became a monk in 889, giving up the throne, and remained a monk until his death in 907. Boris-Michael's brother, Dox, also devoted himself to monastic life. Symeon, Peter's father, accepted a monk's schema in Constantinople, and became a monk for more than ten years. He rescinded his vows in 893 to take the reins of power. It is possible that Symeon's sisters, Anna and Praxia, were nuns (Т. Т о т е в, *Родов манастир на владетелите в Преслав*, СЛ 20, 1987, pp. 120–128; G.N. N i k o l o v, *Die Christianisierung der Bulgaren und das Mönchtum in der Familie des Khans Boris I. Michail*, [in:] *Rome, Constantinople and Newly-Converted Europe. Archeological and Historical Evidence*, vol. I, ed. M. S a l a m o n et al., Kraków–Leipzig–Rzeszów–Warszawa 2012, pp. 91–97). Peter's brothers, John and Michael, also ended up in a monastery, although not necessarily of their own volition (on the circumstances in which Michael and John adopted monk's habit, cf. Part One, Chapter I, point 1, of the present work). The fact that Peter himself became a monk, albeit only shortly before his death, is a symbolic expression of Peter's ties to monasticism. Cf. И. Д у й ч е в, *Рилският светец...*, p. 123sq; *Ziemscy aniołowie...*, p. 19; cf. В. Н и к о л о в а, *Монашество...*, pp. 274–285; 626–628, 790–815).

⁵⁸ *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 33 (transl. p. 168).

⁵⁹ The hagiographers' relations should, of course, be treated with caution, in particular when it comes to details, however it would not have been at all strange that the tsar, a pious man, would have liked to meet with a holy hermit. Such occurrences were common in the world of Byzantine Christianity. It would be worth bringing up the examples, if only for the argument's sake, of the contacts of the emperors and empresses with holy stylites throughout the fifth century. On this subject see, i.a.: R. К о с и ŋ с к и, *Holiness and Power. Constantinopolitan Holy Men and Authority in the 5th Century*, Berlin–Boston 2016, pp. 42–46, 129–167.

who did not want any publicity, took pity on the men, knowing that they could not return to the tsar until they fulfilled their order⁶⁰. After the meeting, the messengers returned to the tsar and related their meeting with John, and: *tsar Peter listened to them and praised God*⁶¹. Thus the author of the *Life* presented the ruler's reaction to the information he received. The tsar decided to personally – accompanied by a numerous retinue – set out to meet the holy man. However, a personal, direct conversation between Peter and John did not happen. The latter, through messengers, proposed the tsar only this:

If you wish that you see me and I see you, pitch your tent on the peak, and I will make smoke. You will see the smoke, and I will see the tent, because it has been commanded that in this way we see each other. The holy father made smoke [that went up] like a column in the sky. Tsar Peter saw the sign of the holy father, and the holy father looked up to the tent. Both praised God and bowed to each other⁶².

Moved by what has happened, and grateful to John, the tsar sent the latter a cup filled with gold. The saint accepted the cup, and asked for the gold to be returned to the ruler. Afterwards, the tsar and his men departed⁶³. Some time later John of Rila died, and his body remained in an unknown location. Not knowing that John passed away, the tsar once more sent his men to find him. Their mission ended in failure. The tsar was to have then said: *Verily, I was not worthy of seeing the saint*⁶⁴. After some time, Peter once again sent his men to search for John. This time, they succeeded, although the outcome was likely not what the tsar expected, for the messengers found only the saint's body. Through an angel, as the *Life* relates, Peter received a message from God to bury the remains

⁶⁰ *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 34.

⁶¹ *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 34 (transl., p. 169).

⁶² *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 35 (transl. p. 169).

⁶³ On the of biblical inspiration that led to presenting by the hagiographer the subject of the meeting between John of Rila and Peter – I. B i l i a r s k y, *The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah...*, pp. 180–185.

⁶⁴ *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 36 (transl. p. 170).

in Sredets. Tsar fulfilled God's will; John's remains were moved to the indicated location and buried. A church was raised to honour the saint⁶⁵.

The above account inclines one to reflect on several matters. It would be a truism to say that Peter was not its main protagonist, and his presence was mainly intended to highlight John's exceptional character. It was the tsar who sought the saint's favour, not the other way round! The portrayal of Peter in the *Life* is rather one-sided. The hagiographer indicated that the ruler was a pious man, even calling him a holy tsar, one who had great respect for John⁶⁶. The latter is the tsar's spiritual mentor, a holy man. The hagiographer pointed out that the tsar was a man absorbed in prayer, living a life devoted to religious matters, and having a special connection to God (the vision regarding John's burial). In the background, however, one may also see Peter the ruler. He was stern, and his subjects heeded his commands. The latter is attested by the behaviour of the first group of messengers sent to find John, who preferred to starve rather than stop searching for the holy man. They were afraid to stand before the tsar without having fulfilled his order, knowing that they would be severely punished. The hagiographer indicated that the tsar was a famous and

⁶⁵ *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, pp. 36–37. Later *Lives* show the topic of relations between Peter and John in a roughly similar fashion, and the differences that appear between them, stemming primarily from the development of the worship of John of Rila, as well as the propagandist aims which they served, do not affect Peter's image in a major way Cf. Д.И. П о л ы в я н н ы й, *Царь Петр...*, p. 144.

⁶⁶ *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 34. It is noteworthy that in the later texts Peter is not always called a saint. Thus, for example, in the *Life* penned by the patriarch Euthymios of Tarnovo (pp. 59–73). In the liturgical calendar Peter is commemorated on the 30th of January (the day widely considered the date of his death), along with St. Clement of Rome. This subject was recently addressed by: И. Б и л я р с к и, М. Й о в ч е в а, *За датата на успението на цар Петер и за кута към него*, [in:] *Tangra. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на акад. Васил Гюзелев*, ed. М. К а й м а к а в о в а et al., София 2006, pp. 543–557; Д. Ч е ш м е д ж и е в, *Култът към български цар Петер I (927–969): монашески или държавен?*, [in:] *Любав према образовању и вера у Бога у православним манастирима*, 5. Меѓународна Хилендарска конференција. *Зборник изабраних радова I*, ed. Р. М а т е ј и ć et al., Beograd–Columbus 2006, pp. 245–257; Б. Н и к о л о в а, *Цар Петър и характерът на неговия култ*, Pbg 33.2, 2009, pp. 63–77; I. B i l i a g s k y *St. Peter...*, pp. 175–178; Д. Ч е ш м е д ж и е в, *Култовете на българските светци през IX–XII век. Автореферат*, ПЛОВДИВ 2016, pp. 13–15; see also Part One, Chapter VII, point 3, of this monograph.

mighty ruler, with an army and many men at his disposal⁶⁷. He was also wealthy, since he could afford to give John a cup filled with gold, and to construct a temple in his honour in Sredets⁶⁸. Notably, in the account the saint is not only Peter's spiritual guide, but also gives him advice on what kind of ruler he should be⁶⁹. Returning the gold to the tsar is, in my opinion, meant not only to attest to the saint's frugality, but also to a certain lack of understanding on Peter's part regarding John's way of life; however, it is also a hint for the tsar that he should wisely spend the assets he has to fulfil the needs of his state and subjects⁷⁰.

2.4. Peter in the *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*

Tale of the Prophet Isaiah is classed among the historical-apocalyptic literature⁷¹. It was written at the time when the Bulgarian lands were already a part of the Byzantine Empire. In it, we find an extraordinarily interesting passage regarding Peter, and for this reason I will quote it in full:

⁶⁷ *Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 34: *He took along many people and his soldiers...* (transl. p. 169). Reminiscences of viewing Peter as a great ruler can be seen in, I think, the *Prologue life of St. John of Rila (II)* (p. 58), in which the anonymous author wrote that John Assen envied tsar Peter's and emperor Constantine's achievements.

⁶⁸ Regarding whether it was Peter who was responsible for moving John's remains to Sredets, there are some doubts about that. This issue is analysed by i.a. Ivan Duychev (И. Д у ч е в, *Рилският светец...*, pp. 184–197); Todor R. Todorov (Т. Т о д о р о в, *Кога били пренесени мощите на св. Иван Рилски в Средец*, ГСУНЦСВПИД 91 (10), 2001, pp. 169–179), and Dimo Cheshmedzhiev (Д. Ч е ш м е д ж и е в, *За времето на пренасяне на мощите на св. Йоанн Рилски от Рила в Средец*, ВМд 6, 2015, pp. 79–89).

⁶⁹ This topic was further explored in the *Life of St. John of Rila* by Euthymios of Tarnovo (p. 69), the author of which tells Peter to prostrate himself at the feet of the Church, his mother. I. B i l i a r s k y, *St. Peter...*, pp. 186–187. It is interesting that in comparison with Euthymios' text, the much earlier the *Service of St. Tsar Peter* (p. 393) highlights his role as the protector of the men of the Church: *чрѣноризьцѣж люба. и словужителѣа цркви вѣкиж мѣтвь ихъ ради* (*You loved monks and servants of the church of God because of their prayers* – transl., p. 109).

⁷⁰ Presumably this is how one can understand the words attributed by the hagiographer to John: *I, brother, have no troops to arm, and no goods to buy* (*Folk life of St. John of Rila*, p. 35; transl. p. 170).

⁷¹ On the subject of this genre of Bulgarian literature, see the classic work of: V. T a p k o v a - Z a i m o v a, A. M i l t e n o v a, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria*, Sofia 2011.

After his death [tsar Symeon – M.J.L.], his son tsar Peter took over the Bulgarian kingdom, and he was tsar of the Bulgarians and of the Greeks as well. He ruled the Bulgarian land for twelve years, without sin and without a wife, and his rule was blessed. In the days and years of St Peter, the tsar of the Bulgarians, there was plenty of everything, that is to say, of wheat and butter, honey, milk and wine, the land was overflowing with every gift of God, there was no dearth of anything but by the will of God everything was in abundance and to satiety. And then, in the years of St Peter, tsar of the Bulgarians, there was a widow in the Bulgarian land, young, wise, and very pious, by the name of Elena. She gave birth to Constantine, a saintly and very pious man. He was the son of Constantine the Green and Elena, and this Constantine was called Porphyrogennetos and he was tsar of the Romans. Because of envy, his mother Elena fled from the Roman Hellenes to the city of Vize, found herself with a child, and gave birth to tsar Constantine. To this tsar an angel of God revealed the good word about the Honest Cross from the East. Tsar Constantine and tsar Peter loved one another.⁷²

This passage was discussed in the literature of the subject multiple times and from different angles. A particular emphasis was placed on the theme of associating Peter with Constantine the Great / Constantine Porphyrogennetos, and seeing in him the restorer of the Bulgarian state. Scholars wondered why he was ‘cast’ in this role – rather than Boris-Michael, who was responsible for introducing Bulgaria into the Christian oikumene, or Symeon I the Great, during whose reign Bulgaria became a great power. Various answers were offered, however the one pointing to the fact that there was a visible tendency of linking the fate of Bulgarians and Byzantines in the milieu in which the *Tale* originated appears to be the most likely⁷³. Peter, sharing familial ties with the Lekapenos family, as well as with the Macedonian dynasty, through his marriage with

⁷² *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, 401d (transl. pp. 17–18; with minor changes – M.J.L.).

⁷³ E.g. K. Marín ow, *Kilka uwag...*, pp. 70–72; cf. J. D u d e k, *Cesarz Bazyli II w opiniach średniowiecznych Bułgarów*, [in:] *Stereotypy...*, p. 76.

Maria, was far more suited to the role of a keystone joining Bulgarian and Byzantine history⁷⁴.

From the perspective of analysing our subject, particularly significant are the arguments for the saintliness of Peter, absent from the other texts. The anonymous author emphasises the fact that his was a sinless life, spent in purity. Peter led a people chosen by God, similarly to a Byzantine emperor⁷⁵. Associating him with Constantine the Great or Constantine Porphyrogenetos makes him equal to a Byzantine ruler. This is also expressed through the statement that he was a *tsar of the Bulgarians and of the Greeks*⁷⁶. A notable feature of this portrayal of Peter in the *Tale* is the indication that during this ruler's reign Bulgaria was going through a period of a particular beatitude, and abounded in all the necessary goods⁷⁷. Peter therefore comes across as a good, just⁷⁸ and strong ruler.

In the *Tale* we also find information related to the final part of Peter's life: *The Bulgarian tsar Peter, a righteous man, gave up his kingdom, fled to the West, to Rome, and there ended his life*⁷⁹. This passage causes a no small problem for the scholars who, knowing it has no basis in reality, are puzzled about the source for this relation. A commonly held belief is that it resulted from associating Peter with the emperor Constantine the Great, the restorer of the Roman Empire⁸⁰, although it cannot be ruled out that this is a later addition, creation of which was influenced by the

⁷⁴ D. Češmedžiev, *Bułgarska tradycja państwowa w apokryfach: car Piotr w Bułgarskiej kronice apokryficznej*, transl. Ł. Mysielski, [in:] *Biblia Slavorum Apocryphorum. Novum Testamentum, Materiały z Międzynarodowej Konferencji Naukowej, Biblia Slavorum Apocryphorum. II. Novum Testamentum, Łódź, 15–17 maja 2009 roku*, eds. G. Minczew, M. Skowronek, I. Petrov, Łódź 2009, pp. 139–147.

⁷⁵ K. Marinow, *Kilka uwag...*, pp. 66–70; I. Bilarsky, *The Tale...*, pp. 65–127.

⁷⁶ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, 401d (transl. p. 17). This fragment can perhaps be also understood as stating that Bulgarians and Greeks (Byzantines) are governed by the same rulers – K. Marinow, *Kilka uwag...*, p. 71; I. Bilarsky, *St. Peter...*, pp. 180–186.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Service of St. Tsar Peter*, p. 388. The same source ascribes to Peter generosity towards the poor.

⁷⁸ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, 401d, p. 17. This characterisation of Peter's reign harmonises with a statement from the *Service of St. Tsar Peter* (p. 388), where it is said that the tsar loved peace (вЪЗЛЮБИ МИРОВАИ ПРЪВЪИВАТИ ВЪ ЖИТИ СВОЕИЧЪ).

⁷⁹ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, 402a (transl. p. 18); cf. I. Bilarsky, *St. Peter...*, p. 181.

⁸⁰ E.g., Д.И. П О Л Ы В Я Н Н Ы Й, *Царь Петр...*, pp. 143–144.

published in 1572 in Venice *Book for Various Occasions* by Yakov (Jacob) Kraykov, in which there is a mention of tsar Peter who fled from Preslav and died in Rome⁸¹.

The portrayal of Peter we find in Bulgarian sources is clearly one-sided, predominantly limited to the religious sphere. It is a result of, on the one hand, the nature of the texts we have at our disposal, which are not, after all, strictly historical works devoted to Bulgarian history, but rather – generally speaking – religious or historical-religious literature. On the other hand, also a result of a particular ideological climate and the environment in which the texts were created, which is particularly noticeable in the *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*. The indigenous, Bulgarian works cannot be used for the purpose of developing our knowledge of Peter's reign, unlike the Byzantine sources; instead, they are the basis for studying the memory of Peter and the history of his cult.

In the native sources, Peter is not charged with the responsibility for Bulgaria's collapse, on the contrary, he is seen as a strong ruler, which can be attested to by the fact that it was his name that was invoked by those who fought for independence during the period of Byzantine bondage. It was adopted by: Delyan, the leader of the uprising of 1040, by Constantine Bodin, proclaimed basileus of Bulgarians during the uprising of George Voyteh in 1072, and Theodore-Assen, the initiator of the uprising which led to the restoration of the Bulgarian statehood in the 1180s⁸².

⁸¹ I. B i l i a r s k y, *St. Peter...*, p. 181; i d e m, *The Tale...*, pp. 201–202. Cf. also Part II, Chapter VIII, point 1. Yakov Kraykov was supposed to have simply made up this episode. This information was included in the seventeenth-century manuscripts of *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*. It cannot also be completely ruled out that the idea of 'sending' Peter to Rome was a reference to the fact that the tsar was St. Peter's namesake who, after all, met his death in the Eternal City, and was buried there. Associating tsar Peter with the Apostle is an indication making this hypothesis somewhat probable – *Service of St. Tsar Peter*, p. 388: **ВЪРХОВНОМУ ТЫ СЪИМЕННИКЪ СЪИ ЦРКВЕ СВОЖ СЪЗДА. НА КАМЕНИ ОУТВЕРДИВ. ВЪРОЖ СЪПРОТИВНЫИМЪ РЪКАМЪ ВЪЗБРАНЪЖ** (*To the supreme among your namesakes [i.e., Apostle Peter] you dedicated this church and founded it on the rock, preserving it from the storms of the enemy* – transl., p. 108).

⁸² This was noticed by, i.a., И. Б и л я р с к и, *Покровители на Царство...*, pp. 34–36; Д.И. П о л ы в я н н ы й, *Царь Петр...*, p. 141; П. П а в л о в, *Векът...*, p. 34.

Concluding these considerations, it would also be worth quoting a passage from the *Service of St. Tsar Peter*, which clearly attests to the fact that Peter entered the Bulgarian historical memory as a tsar-monk, a guide and caretaker of his subjects.

Преподобных чинъ празноуж. раужит сѧ дне с тобож Петре црю прѣл-
женых ѿче. присно въ шбитѣлех. тамо и зде бѣди намъ оулоучити.

Якоже сын прѣжде с нами ѿче. и яко и чѧда своя приеѧла любезно.
тако и нѣк прими млтвы сѧж. и защити ны ѿ всекож напасти. [...]

Придѣте вси вѣрни. Петра мниха да въсхвалимъ. бывша ѿ Бѧ црѣ
вльгарьска. [...] Источникъ ты вы. и скровище нескѧдно. подаж
излѣваж на вбогьмъ присно. и млтина свож всеждѣжущж. и чръно-
ризьцѣж любѧ. и слоужителя црѣве бѣжж млтвь ихъ ради. и мьзѧ
ѿ Бѧ надѣжсѧ. ежже не погрѣши. добръ плоѧ показавъ.

Tsar Peter, the estate of the blessed ones is celebrating today and rejoicing with you forever in the [heavenly] foundations. Be our [intercessor] here and there so that we succeed.

Earlier you were with us, father, and welcomed us kindly like children of yours: now accept these prayers of ours and protect us from any kind of trouble. (...)

Step forward, oh you faithful, to praise the monk Peter, the former tsar of Bulgaria from Christ.(...) You were the spring and the generous treasury from which [alms] to the poor always poured out; your alms never ended. You loved monks and servants of the church of God because of their prayers and hoped for reward from the God.⁸³

⁸³ *Service of St. Tsar Peter*, pp. 389, 392, 393 (transl., p. 109).

3. Other Sources⁸⁴

In the conclusion to my considerations regarding portrayal of Peter in mediaeval sources I would like to draw attention to the accounts of two authors, contemporary to the tsar, who were neither Byzantine nor Bulgarian.

3.1. Peter in the Works of Liudprand of Cremona

Peter was mentioned in two of Liudprand's works⁸⁵ – *Antapodosis* (*Retribution*) and *Legatio* (*Embassy*). In the former, written after Liudprand's stay in Constantinople in 949, Peter is mentioned as one of Symeon's sons. The Latin author emphasised that Peter was ruling Bulgaria at the time, moreover, he was doing so with a strong hand (*is still alive [and] powerfully leads the Bulgarians*)⁸⁶. In another passage of *Antapodosis* Liudprand mentioned that the tsar married a daughter of Christopher and a grand-daughter of Romanos Lekapenos, and that *a very solid peace was established between Bulgarians and Greeks*⁸⁷. Peter's wife changed her original name, which is not mentioned, to Irene, to highlight the fact that thanks to her a peace was established.

⁸⁴ On this subject, also see: Z. B r z o z o w s k a, *The Image of Maria Lekapene, Peter and Byzantine-Bulgarian Relations between 927 and 969 in the Light of Old Russian Sources*, Pbg 41.1, 2017, pp. 40–55.

⁸⁵ On the life and work of Liudprand, cf. i.a.: M. L i n z e l, *Studien über Liudprand von Cremona*, Berlin 1933; J.N. S u t h e r l a n d, *Liudprand of Cremona, Bishop, Diplomat, Historian. Studies of the the Man and his Age*, Spoleto 1988; on the missions to Constantinople and the reminiscences thereof in Liudprand's works – J. K o d e r, T. W e b e r, *Liudprand von Cremona in Konstantinopel*, Vienna 1980; T. W o l i ń s k a, *Konstantynopolitańska misja Liudpranda z Kremony (968)*, [in:] *Cesarstwo bizantyńskie. Dzieje. Religia. Kultura. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi przez uczniów na 70-lecie Jego urodzin*, ed. P. K r u p c z y ń s k i, M.J. L e s z k a, Łask–Łódź 2006, pp. 201–223; e a d e m, *Konstantynopol i jego mieszkańcy widziani oczyma Liudpranda z Kremony*, VP 28, 2008, pp. 1231–1243.

⁸⁶ Liudprand of Cremona, *Retribution*, III, 29: *Qui nunc usque superest potenterque Bulgariis principatur* (transl. p. 124).

⁸⁷ Liudprand of Cremona, *Retribution*, III, 38: *inter Bulgarios et Grecos pax sit firmissima constituta* (transl. p. 129).

The image of Peter (or rather that of his father, Symeon) may have been somewhat darkened by the fact that his brother Bayan was supposedly practising magic, and had the ability to transform himself into a wolf, and into other animals. Liudprand did not draw any conclusions from this information, perhaps because he was doubtful of its veracity⁸⁸.

This – generally positive – portrayal of Peter is different in *Legatio*, the second of Liudprand's aforementioned works, which relates its author's stay in Constantinople in 968, during his diplomatic mission for Otto I. In it, Peter appears in the context of negotiations, conducted by Liudprand, to arrange a marriage between a Byzantine emperor's daughter and the son of Otto I, and to determine the seat which he, an envoy of emperor Otto I, should occupy by the Byzantine ruler's table. In writing about the former matter, Liudprand concluded that Peter was not a particularly powerful Slavic ruler. The Latin author made this remark to state that his master, Otto I, has subordinated many Slavic rulers who were more powerful than Peter⁸⁹. In the second case, Liudprand was not speaking of Peter directly, but indicated that he – Otto's envoy – was given a less prominent seat at the imperial table than the Bulgarian ruler's envoy; the latter was described thusly: *shorn in the Hungarian style, girt with a bronze chain, and – as mind suggested to me – not yet baptized*⁹⁰. Liudprand cited the Byzantines' explanation who, while considered his remark about the Bulgarian envoy's appearance correct, at the same time pointed out that according to the peace treaty concluded by Peter along his wedding with Christopher's daughter, the Bulgarian envoy should nonetheless be seated at a more honourable place than envoys of other rulers⁹¹.

⁸⁸ Liudprand of Cremona, *Retribution*, III, 29: *Baianum autem adeo ferunt magicam didicisse...* On the topic practicing magic by Bayan – X. Тр е н д а ф и л о в, *Цар и век. Времето на Симеон, Четири инсталации*, Шумен 2017, pp. 286–294 (there, further literature of the subject).

⁸⁹ Liudprand of Cremona, *Embassy*, 16.

⁹⁰ Liudprand of Cremona, *Embassy*, 19: *Ungarico more tonsum, aenea catena cinctum et – ut mens mihi suggerit – catechumenum* (transl. p. 250).

⁹¹ Liudprand of Cremona, *Embassy*, 19. It is worth noting that in this remark Liudprand, quoting Byzantines, titled Peter 'basileus': *Petrus Bulgarorum vasileus*. This clearly shows that Liudprand, who after all knew Greek, must have been aware that the Bulgarian ruler was entitled be addressed as an emperor.

If one were to take *Legatio* at its face value, then in Liudprand's opinion Peter would have been a weak ruler who surrounded himself with uncultured people (moreover, ones who were only beginning to emerge from paganism); this would have indeed been a poor testimony of the ruler's own Christianity, and of his culture.

Was this really Liudprand's view of Peter? One may doubt that, for the character of Peter was for Liudprand merely a tool for conducting his diplomatic mission, and demands for status appropriate for an envoy of emperor Otto. This also explains the change that occurred in portraying Peter between *Antapodosis* and *Legatio*. For Liudprand writing the former of these works Peter was a figure of whom he heard either from his father⁹², or already during his stay in Constantinople in 949, and the remarks of the ruler were included only by the way of weaving his tale if the Byzantine history. In *Legatio*, Peter gained greater significance, as an example of a ruler who received in marriage the hand of a Byzantine imperial daughter – something Liudprand himself was attempting to negotiate with Nikephoros Phokas. Disparaging Peter was intended to raise in comparison the status of Otto I. It is also worth noting that Liudprand's stay in Constantinople in 968 happened at the time when the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations were in a far worse state than in 949. The Byzantine attitude towards Peter in 968 was, to some extent, compatible with the way in which the ruler's figure was used by Liudprand in his negotiations with Nikephoros Phokas.

⁹² Liudprand's father visited Constantinople in 927 at the head of an embassy to Romanos Lekapenos sent by Hugo of Provence (Liudprand of Cremona, *Retribution*, III, 24; А. Т о у н б е е, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World*, London 1973, p. 93; cf. X. Т р е н д а ф и л о в, *Младостта на цар Симеон*, София 2010, pp. 19–20). Liudprand's father died soon after returning from that embassy, therefore it is more likely that the relation came to Liudprand in the form of his father's notes rather than a story he heard.

3.2. Ibrahim ibn Yakub's Relation

Ibrahim ibn Yakub, a traveller and merchant of Jewish origins⁹³, had encountered Bulgarian envoys sent to Otto I in the 960s (961 or 965/966)⁹⁴ in Merseburg, and heard from them of their ruler. His relation from this meeting is preserved in the eleventh-century work *Book of Highways and Kingdoms* by Al-Bakri. Ibrahim described the dress of the Bulgarian envoys, and added the following remark regarding the Bulgarian ruler:

their king enjoys great authority, wears a diadem on his head, has secretaries, heads [of offices] and senior functionaries, and issues orders and prohibitions in a well-advised and regular manner, as is the custom with the greatest monarchs.⁹⁵

While the text does not mention Peter by name, the dating of the meeting indicates that he was the one the Bulgarian envoys were describing to Ibrahim, presenting him as a strong ruler aided by an efficient

⁹³ On this author and his work, see e.g.: D. M i s h i n, *Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub At-Turtubi's Account of the Slavs from the Middle of the Tenth Century*, AMSCEUB 1994/1995, pp. 184–199; *Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub at-Turtushi. Christianity, Islam and Judaism meet in East-Central Europe, c. 800–1300 A.D. Proceedings of the International Colloquy 25–29. April 1994*, eds. P. C h a r v á t, J. P r o s e c k ý, Praha 1996; *Ibrahim Ibn Jakub i Tadeusz Kowalski w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę edycji. Materiały z konferencji naukowej*, ed. A. Z a b o r s k i, Kraków 2008.

⁹⁴ On the dating of Ibrahim ibn Yakub's journey – J. W i d a j e w i c z, *Studia nad relacją Ibrahima ibn Jakuba*, Kraków 1946, p. 11; I b r a h i m i b n J a k u b, s. XLI. Cf. P. E n g e l s, *Der Reisebericht des Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub (961/966)*, [in:] *Kaiserin Theophanu. Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends. Gedenkschrift des Kölner Schnütgen-Museums zum 1000 Todesjahr der Kaiserin*, ed. A. v o n E u w, P. S c h r e i n e r, vol. I, Köln 1991, p. 417.

⁹⁵ I b r a h i m i b n J a k u b, p. 148 (transl. – J. S h e p a r d, *A marriage...*, p. 148). On this description V. G j u z e l e v, *Bulgaria a państwa i narody Europy Środkowej w X w.*, transl. K. M a r i n o w, [in:] *Byzantina Europaea. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, ed. M. K o k o s z k o, M. J. L e s z k a, Łódź 2007, pp. 135–136; M. K a j m a k a m o v a, *Култът към цар Петър (927–969) и движещите идеи на българските освободителни въстания срещу византийската власт през XI–XII в.*, BMD 4/5, 2013/2014, p. 421.

administration⁹⁶. It is worth stressing that his is not an opinion of Ibrahim himself, who noted he has never been to the ruler's country. One could say therefore that the passage does not even relate an opinion of some average Bulgarians, but rather Bulgarian envoys' propaganda, who presented their ruler as one of the most important ones in the world. Ibrahim ibn Yakub may have shared this view at least to some extent, based on the fact that he emphasised the dress of the Bulgarian envoys: they wore robes decorated with gold and silver, which indicated that they represented a wealthy ruler. Ibrahim also mentioned that Bulgarians were Christians, and that they translated the Gospel into their native tongue. The Bulgarian ruler, therefore, was a leader of a Christian and civilised state.

* * *

The portrayal of Peter in mediaeval sources, leaving aside the topic of his religiosity and information being entirely at odds with historical reality, presents a strong and proud ruler, effectively governing the Bulgarian state.



⁹⁶ One nonetheless needs to be aware that this is such a general description, devoid of details, that it could be simply treated as a characterisation of rulers of Christian Bulgaria in general rather than of Peter himself. It is also worth emphasising that Ibrahim ibn Yakub likely picked from the tale of the Bulgarian envoys only that which he considered important and interesting.