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The Environment and Geopolitics of the State



From the seventh to the eleventh centuries, Bulgaria encompassed the areas in the central and north-eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. Of course, the territories that made up the Bulgarian state during this period underwent significant changes, and expanded in every direction¹. The tenth century in this respect marked an important turn. At that time, tsar Symeon I managed to move the country's borders southwards and westwards, but lost a significant part of the Bulgarian lands north of the Danube Valley. The most important geopolitical transformation of the Bulgarian state came in the last quarter of the century. Its centre, along with its main cities, shifted from the north-eastern Danube territories to the south-western areas of Macedonia. The purpose of this text, however, is not to offer a detailed discussion of the territorial changes to which the Bulgarian state was subjected in the early Middle Ages. Nor is it to offer an insight into territorial policies carried out by successive Bulgarian rulers.

¹ For the analysis of the border changes of the Bulgarian Tsardom during Peter's reign see e.g. the following works: П. К о л е д а р о в, *Политическа география на средновековната българска държава*, vol. I, *От 681 до 1018 г.*, София 1979; К. Г а г о в а, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Border in Thrace from the 7th to the 10th Century (Bulgaria to the South of Haemus)*, BHR 14.1, 1986, pp. 66–77; P. S o u s t a l, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, vol. VI, *Thracien (Thrakē, Rodopē und Haimimontos)*, Wien 1991, pp. 91–93.

Instead, it aims to provide a general description of the territories that remained under Bulgarian rule in the period under consideration, and to highlight their importance to the Bulgarian state from its rise in the second half of the seventh century to its collapse in the early eleventh century, with special regard to tsar Peter's reign.

A significant feature of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast between Cape Emine in the east, that is, the eastern branch of the Balkan Mountain range (ancient and mediaeval Haimos, which predominantly consist of today's ranges of Predbalkan, Stara Planina and Sredna Gora), and the Danube delta in the south is the cliffs. Consequently, this part of the coast is not particularly open towards the sea, which can clearly be seen in the Emine – Varna – Cape Kaliakra line². The mountain slopes of the eastern Balkan and the Mominsko Plateau, which lie between Emine and Varna, drop sharply into the sea, thus making the coast inaccessible, and the cliffs that rise up to 65 metres in height on the Kaliakra peninsula, near today's Kavarna, account for this inaccessibility between Varna and Cape Kaliakra. In this area there are only three points at which the Black Sea coast can be accessed: at the mouth of the River Kamchiya, which flows through the mountains, at the mouth of the River Provadiyska near Varna and at the mouth of the River Batova, near Kranevo, slightly north of the last locality³. This was borne out by emperor Constantine VII, who in his description of the route which took the Varangian merchants along the western coast of the Black Sea to Constantinople, mentions the following stopping points that they made during their travels through the Balkans: the Danube delta, Konopas and Constantia, the estuary

² For more on these capes and mediaeval settlements and fortifications see: Б. Петрунова, *Нови археологически данни за крепостта Калиакра*, [in:] *Каварна. Средище на българския Североизток. Сборник доклади от научна конференция Каварна – 2007 г.*, ed. е а д е т, Х. Куз о в, Д. Мир ч е в а, Каварна 2007, pp. 126–139; К. М а г и н о в, *Twierdza Emiona. Na nadmorskich stokach średniowiecznego Hetusiu*, *VP* 28, 2008, pp. 617–633; Г. Д ж и н г о в, *Тиризис. Акре. Калиакра*, ²Каварна 2010, pp. 5–9, 28–62; Б. Петрунова, *Реликвите на Калиакра*, Добрич 2014.

³ See: Z. C z e р р е, J. F l i s, R. M o c h n a c k i, *Geografia fizyczna świata*, Warszawa 1969, pp. 243, 244; Ц. М и х а й л о в, Х. Т и ш к о в, Л. З я п к о в, Д. Г о р у н о в а, *Дунавска равнинно-хълмиста област*, [in:] *География на България в три тома*, vol. II, *Физико-географско и социално-икономическо*, ed. К. М и ш е в, София 1989, pp. 60–65.

of the River Provadiyska, the same of River Kamchiya and the Mesembria harbour located south of the Balkan Mountains⁴. For this reason too, the Bulgarians fortified this part of the coast with earthen ramparts in order to prevent the imperial fleet from disembarking troops to attack the Khanate's interior. Given the above, it is understandable – although geography was not the only factor here, nor was it the most important one – that the sea, leaving aside the threat of invasion from these points, did not play a significant part in the history of the Bulgarian state in the early Middle Ages, nor economically – for primary sources say nothing of the existence of a Bulgarian merchant fleet at that time⁵. Moreover, there was no harbour in this part of the coastline in the period from the mid-ninth century to the beginning of the 970s. It was not until the establishment of the lasting Byzantine rule over this area, which took place in the eleventh century, that Varna (ancient Odessos) saw its revival as a stronghold and an important harbour city⁶. In addition, ethnographic studies show that traditionally Bulgarian cuisine had mainly freshwater fish on its menu⁷. However, this fact does not mean that sea fishing was completely unimportant, especially, which is quite understandable, for those who lived on the coast (the Greek population from such cities as Mesembria, Anchialos and Sozopolis must have engaged in this activity). In addition,

⁴ Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *On the Governance of the Empire*, 9, p. 62.96–104. For identifications see: П. С. Коледаров, *Историческата география на Северозападното Черноморие по данните на Константин Багренородни*, ИП 33.3, 1977, pp. 50–64.

⁵ Р. Рашев, *Първото българско царство и морето*, [in:] *Средновековна България и Черноморието (Сборник доклади от националната конференция Варна – 1980)*, ed. А. Кузев, Т. Йорданов, Варна 1982, pp. 47–56. Views to the contrary, which are based on a specific interpretation of one passage from the *Hexameron* by John the Exarch or on the discovery of pictures representing ships in the old Bulgarian capitals, are in my opinion unconvincing – see: Ц. Чолова, *Данни за българския външнотърговски обмен и мореплаване в Шестоднева на Йоан Егзарх*, Век 8.4, 1979, pp. 62–65; Д. Овчаров, *Български средновековни рисунки-графити*, София 1982, pp. 53–56.

⁶ В. Плестньов, *Варна през Средновековието (VII–XIV в.)*, [in:] *idem*, И. Русев, *История на Варна*, vol. II, *Средновековие и Възраждане (VII в. – 1878 г.)*, Варна 2012, pp. 162, 183–192; *idem*, *Крепостта Варна според писмените извори от IX–XII в.*, ДобСб 30, 2015, pp. 193–219.

⁷ Х. Вакарелски, *Етнография на България*, София 1974, pp. 193–210, 218.

in archaeological findings, clay weights used for fishing nets, the bones and vertebrae of fish species from the sturgeon family, iron hooks and clam shells, provide evidence of a preponderance of inland fishing⁸.

In Northern Thrace, south of the Balkan Mountains, between Cape Emine in the north and the Strandzha massif in the south, the topography of the Black Sea coast is slightly different. Opening out onto the sea, the land is more accessible here than in the north. It is also more indented and, as such, provides good mooring. This can be said especially of the deep Burgas bay that wedges its way inland, making it possible to sail down the River Sredetska to Develtos. In the ninth and tenth centuries Develtos played an important economical role as the customs post situated on the border between Bulgaria and Byzantium⁹. North of the bay, there lay the two most important harbours of Northern Thrace – Anchialos and Mesembria¹⁰. The former was located on the sea promontory, near the salt pans¹¹, as is indicated by the etymology of the word. The latter lay

⁸ Z. Kurnatowska, *Ślowiańszczyzna Południowa*, Wrocław 1977, p. 104; В. Гюзелев, *Икономическо развитие, социална структура и форми на социална и политическа организация на прабългарите до образуването на българската държава (IV–VII в.)*, *Архе* 21.4, 1979, p. 14; Й. Чангова, *Перник*, vol. III, *Крепостта Перник VIII–XIV в.*, София 1992, p. 18; Л. Дончева-Петкова, *Одърци. Селище от Първото българско царство*, vol. I, София 1999, p. 59; Х. Матанов, *В търсене на средновековното време. Неравният път на българите (VII–XV в.)*, София 2014, pp. 112–113.

⁹ И. Йорданов, *Печатите на комерсиарията Девелт*, ПП 2, 1992, pp. 17–85; idem, *Печатите на комерсиарията Девелт. Addenda et corrigenda*, [in:] *Нумизматични и сфрагистични приноси към историята на Западното Черноморие. Международна конференция Варна, 12–15 септември 2001*, ed. И. Лазаренко, В. Йотов, В. Иванов, В. Славчев, Варна 2004, pp. 230–245. On the center itself see: М. Балболова-Иванова, *Средновековный Девелт в VIII–X вв.*, [in:] *Bulgaria Pontica Medii Aevi*, vol. IV–V/1, ed. В. Гюзелев, София 2003, pp. 79–84.

¹⁰ On these centres see: V. Gjuzev, *Die mittelalterliche Stadt Mesembria (Nesebär) im 6.–15. Jh.*, *BHR* 6.1, 1978, pp. 50–59; idem, *Anchialos zwischen der Spätantike und dem frühen Mittelalter*, [in:] *Die Schwarzmeerküste in der Spätantike und frühen Mittelalter*, ed. R. Pillinger, A. Pülz, H. Vetteers, Wien 1992, pp. 23–33.

¹¹ Б. Розов, *Солниците при гр. Поморие*, ГП 4.4/5, 1950, pp. 20–23; С. Кираджиев, *Енциклопедичен географски речник на България*, София 2013, p. 426. There are actually salt lakes near this town. In etymological terms, the name can also be linked to the coastal location of the town – М. Лазаров, В. Гюзелев,

on a small peninsula connected to the mainland by a narrow dike. Sources of thermal waters known for easing the ailments (such as, gout) of Bulgarian nobles and Byzantine emperors (Constantine IV, for example)¹² were found in the neighbourhood of Mesembria. South of the Burgas bay, there were two harbours – Sozopolis and Agathopolis¹³. Of particular note here is the fact that these centres survived the so-called migration period and Bulgaria's territorial expansion, including the wars waged against Byzantium in the first half of the ninth century. This guaranteed their sustainable development. Both harbours – Anchialos and Mesembria – managed to establish strong relations with Byzantine Constantinople; the strength of these relations could be seen in the unswerving support the cities received from the imperial fleet and in the ethnically dominant position of the Greek and Anatolian population that lived there. While close relations were also established with other cities located at the seaside, those whose hinterland was uninhabited up until the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries, were neglected. In the ninth and tenth centuries Sozopolis and Agathopolis probably served as important trading centres between Byzantium and Bulgaria, having been operated by the Byzantines from the sea. However, it must be stressed that the role of official trade centre between the two countries was assumed by Develtos, after its reconstruction¹⁴.

Увод, [in:] *История на Поморие*, vol. I, *Древност и съвремие*, ed. А. Орачев, В. Василчина, Бургас 2011, pp. 13–14.

¹² Nikephoros, 36, p. 90.11–13; Theophanes, AM 6171, p. 358.27–28.

¹³ On Sozopolis – Б. Димитров, *Созопол*, [in:] *Български средновековни градове и крепости*, vol. I, *Градове и крепости по Дунав и Черно Море*, ed. А. Кузев, В. Гюзелев, Варна 1981, pp. 388–407; И. Йорданов, *Средновековният Созопол според данните на сфрагистиката*, AMV 7.2, 2008, pp. 114–162; В. Димитров, *Sozopol*, Sofia 2012, pp. 199–220. On Agathopolis – idem, *Агатопол*, [in:] *Български средновековни градове...*, pp. 412–426; Ц. Дражева, *Най-южната българска черноморска крепост Ахтопол*, [in:] *Каварна...*, pp. 211–221.

¹⁴ For more on the significance of the Black Sea in the history of mediaeval Bulgaria see: Б. Димитров, *Средновековна България и морето. Исторически очерк*, Мор 3.2, 1981, pp. 219–231; V. Gjuzelev, *Il Mar Nero ed il suo litorale nella storia del Medioevo Bulgaro*, BVg 7, 1981, pp. 11–24; idem, *Черноморската област в политическата история на Средновековна България*, [in:] *Чиракман – Карвуна – Каварна. Сборник*, ed. В. Василев, М. Велев, София 1982, pp. 76–82; С. Георгиева, *Черно море като географски фактор в историята на Първото българско царство*,

A long strip of grassland could be seen stretching along the north and west coast of the Black Sea. It extended to Dobrudzha (referred to in the Middle Ages as the Karvuna land, according to the *Tale of the prophet Isaiah*¹⁵), behind the so-called Madara Plateau. The strip played an important part in the history of the Bulgarian state. On the one hand it enabled the establishment of regular contacts – political, economic, cultural and migrational (i.e. it guaranteed the influx of people into the Bulgarian territory) – with nomads from the Black Sea steppes and, possibly, from areas in central Asia. On the other hand it put Bulgaria in constant danger of being attacked by these nomads from the north-east. The Bulgarians themselves arrived in this territory from the Black Sea coast in the latter half of the seventh century. An undulating area in the west of forests and grassy plains, Dobrudzha (the steppes extends mainly over its eastern part) provided a perfect framework for the development of a nomadic economy – one which gave priority to animal husbandry. The role played by this area, in the initial period of the Bulgarian settlement south of the Danube delta, can be in no doubt. However, one can safely assume that animal breeding still played a significant role in the ninth and tenth centuries, along with land cultivation that was already in progress¹⁶. Scholars maintain that the name Karvuna is derived from the Greek word *κάρβων*, that is, coal, which concludes that the region's inhabitants must have been involved in the production of charcoal. This observation adds a significant element to our knowledge of the economic development of this area¹⁷.

[in:] *Средновековните Балкани; политика, религия, култура*, ed. Л. Симеонова, София 1999, pp. 28–32; К. Станев, *Морето – неусвоеното пространство на Първото българско царство*, *Ист* 15.2/3, 2007, pp. 25–34.

¹⁵ *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, f. 401a–b, pp. 14.33–34, 15.7.30–31.

¹⁶ Cf. V. Gjuzelev, *Naturrumliche Bedingungen, Grenzen und Namen von Dobruda im Mittelalter (14.–17. Jh.)*, [in:] *idem, Mittelalterliches Bulgarien. Quellen, Geschichte, Hauptstädte und Kultur*, Istanbul 2001, pp. 345–366.

¹⁷ В. Бешевлиев, *Из късноантичната и средновековната география на Североизточна България*, *ИАИ* 25, 1962, pp. 1–18; However, the view has recently been called into doubt. It is indicated that the Karvuna land is referred to in the *Tale* as inhabited by the Bulgarians, also known as the Cumans and it is known that the Danube residence of Cuman leaders was called Karabuna (near today's Tatarbunary). The area

The natural migration corridor, extending to Madara, offered an easy access to the Danubian Plain. Lying west of this corridor, the plain was comprised of territories between the lower Danube Valley in the north and the Balkan Mountains, including their foothills, in the south. This area formed the nucleus of the Bulgarian state from the seventh century, when the state seized control of it, to the fall of the eastern Bulgaria in 971. The Bulgarians ruled over this area also between 986 and 1000, and the western part of it remained in their control even longer, up to the fall of the fortress Bdin (today's Vidin) in 1003 (the fortress seems to have been Bulgaria's most important centre in the north-western part of the plain)¹⁸, by which time the state's political centre had already shifted to Macedonia. According to Bulgarian sources, the territory under discussion formed the so-called interior of the Bulgarian state¹⁹ which was home to most settlements and to the country's political centres, including of course its

was thus etymologically linked to the name of the town rather than the kind of economic activity for which the area was known – Г. А т а н а с о в, *Добруджанското деспотство. Към политическата, църковната, стопанската и културната история на Добруджа през XIV век*, Велико Търново 2009, p. 21. However, the opinion is not widely held.

¹⁸ On the fortress see: С. М и х а й л о в, *Археологически проучвания на крепостта Баба Вида във Видин*, Архе 3,3, 1961, pp. 1–8; W. S w o b o d a, *Widin*, [in:] SSS, vol. VI, pp. 421–422; Б. К у з у п о в, “Замъкът Баба Вида”, МПК 20.4, 1980, pp. 7–12; А. К у з е в, *Бдин*, [in:] *Български средновековни градове...*, pp. 98–115; В. В ъ л о в, *Седалището и териториалният обхват на Бдинската област от средата на IX до началото на XI век*, ИМСБ 13, 1987, pp. 21–45; V. В е š e v l i e v, *Die Herkunft des Stadtnamens Бѣдинъ*, ЛВа 31.1/2, 1988, pp. 43–44; М. Н и к о л о в а, *Към въпроса за името на град Видин*, ИМСБ 14, 1988, pp. 75–97; П. Б а л а б а н о в, С. Б о я д ж и е в, Н. Т у л е ш к о в, *Крепостно строителство по българските земи*, София 2000, p. 60; Г. Н. Н и к о л о в, *Централизъм и регионализъм в ранносредновековна България (края на VII – началото на XI в.)*, София 2005, pp. 192–193; Л. С и м е о н о в а, *Крепостта Видинис/Бдин и “завръщането на Византия на Дунава”: реализация и крах на една имперска мечта*, СВ 32, 2017, pp. 61–93.

¹⁹ Г. В л а д и м и р о в, *Дунавска България и Волжска България. Формиране и промяна на културните модели (VII–XI в.)*, София 2005, pp. 65–66; М. К а й м а к а м о в а, *Образуването на българската държава в българската средновековна историопис*, [in:] *Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на акад. Васил Гюзелев*, ed. e a d e m et al., София 2006, pp. 71–72, 76, 86, 87; P. S o p h o u l i s, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831*, Leiden–Boston 2012, pp. 75–76. The analogical structure of territorial division was preserved during the reign of Cometopouloi dynasty – С. П и р и в а т р и њ, *Самуилова държава. Обим и характер*, Београд 1997, pp. 90, 129, 171–172, 192.

capitals – Pliska (towards the end of the ninth century) and Great Preslav (from the end of the ninth century to 971)²⁰. In the tenth century, the Byzantines wrote of the Haimos Mountains range (later called Balkan by the Ottoman Turks) and the river Danube as being the most distinctive features of the region's topography, and also considered this territory to be the core of the Bulgarian state²¹. They also began to use the term

²⁰ On these centres see: P. П а н о в а, *Столичният град в културата на средновековна България*, София 1995, pp. 90–140; e a d e m, *The Capital City in the Medieval Bulgarian State*, JÖB 46, 1996, pp. 437–440; П. Г е о р г и е в, *Столиците на княз Борис-Михаил – хронология и типологическа характеристика*, [in:] *Християнската култура в средновековна България. Материали от национална научна конференция, Шумен 2–4 май 2007 година по случай 1100 години от смъртта на св. Княз Борис-Михаил (ок. 835–907 г.)*, ed. i d e m, Велико Търново 2008, pp. 154–163; D. Z i e m a n n, *Pliska and Preslav: Bulgarian Capitals between Relocation and Invention*, [in:] *Българско Средновековие: общество, власт, история. Сборник в чест на проф. д-р Милияна Каймакамова*, ed. Г.Н. Н и к о л о в, А. Н и к о л о в, София 2013, pp. 170–185. On Pliska – Д. О в ч а р о в, *Плиска*, [in:] i d e m, Т. Т о т е в, А. П о п о в, *Стари български столици. Плиска. Велики Преслав. Търновград*, София 1980, pp. 9–69; ППр 4, 1985, pp. 5–131; *Материали за картата на Средновековната българска държава (територията на днешна Североизточна България)*, ed. P. P a ш e в, ППр 7, 1995, pp. 247–263; С. Б о я д ж и е в, *Архитектурата на българите от VII до XIV век в три тома*, vol. I, *Дохристиянска архитектура*, София 2008, pp. 30–143; P. P a ш e в, *Българската езическа култура VII–IX в.*, София 2009, pp. 45–104; *Археологическа карта на Плиска*, ed. А. А л а д ж о в, София 2013; Н. М а в р о д и н о в, *Старобългарското изкуство. Изкуството на Първото българско царство*, София 2013, pp. 51–74; on Preslav – W. S w o b o d a, *Preslav Wielki*, [in:] *SSS*, vol. IV, pp. 335–343; D. O v č a g o v, *Emergence et développement de la ville de Preslav. IX^e–X^e siècles (Quelques problèmes et aspects)*, BHR 7.2, 1979, pp. 51–61; Т. Т о т е в, *Преслав*, [in:] Д. О в ч а р о в, Т. Т о т е в, А. П о п о в, *Стари български столици...*, pp. 71–133; ППр 4, 1985, pp. 132–222; *Материали за картата на Средновековната българска държава...*, pp. 175–190; Т. Т о т е в, *Археологические данные о Преславе*, ШУЕКП.ТКИБ 2, 1998, pp. 61–68; П. Б а л а б а н о в, С. Б о я д ж и е в, Н. Т у л е ш к о в, *Крепостно строителство...*, pp. 157–170; Т. Т о т е в, *Преславската култура и изкуство през IX–X век. Студии и статии*, София 2000; i d e m, *Great Preslav*, Sofia 2001; I. J o r d a n o v, *Preslav*, [in:] *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. II, ed. A. E. L a i o u, Washington 2002, pp. 667–671; С. Б о я д ж и е в, *Архитектурата на българите...*, pp. 149–172; P. P a ш e в, *Българската езическа култура...*, pp. 105–115; Н. М а в р о д и н о в, *Старобългарското изкуство...*, pp. 182–231.

²¹ *On the treaty with the Bulgarians*, 12, p. 274.307–310; K. M a r i n o w, *In the Shackles of the Evil One: The Portrayal of Tsar Symeon I the Great (893–927) in the Oration 'On the Treaty with the Bulgarians'*, SCer 1, 2011, pp. 166–167.

Mysoi/Mysians – a reference to a Thracian tribe that had once inhabited this territory – which was synonymous with ‘Bulgarians’. Along with the Karvuna land, this area became one of the most important in the Bulgarian state. In addition to playing a significant economic role, it constituted the country’s agricultural centre, known for the cultivation of various crops. Unsurprisingly, Byzantine troops resorted to a scorched earth policy while withdrawing from Pliska in 811. By destroying the harvests and killing farm animals, the Byzantines hoped to strike a serious blow to the Khanate’s economy. In fact, the Bulgarians spent eleven months trying to eliminate the negative effects of the devastation inflicted by the enemy²². The significance of this food supply base became clear in the mid-ninth century, when poor harvests caused a great famine in the Khanate and led the Bulgarians to turn to their southern neighbours for help. This step resulted in the conclusion of an official peace between the feuding parties and in the acceptance of Christianity by khan Boris I, the Bulgarian ruler²³. The eastern part of this plain, the so-called Ludogorie, also played an important economic role. Covered with forest between the Danube Valley and the foothills of the Balkan Mountain (the above mentioned Predbalkan), it served as a reservoir of wood and venison²⁴. As can be seen from epigraphic sources and osteological findings, it constituted one of the main sources of food for Bulgaria’s population. The Danubian Plain – the part located south of the river Danube – which was most important to the Bulgarians was irrigated by a number of rivers, all of which were the Danube’s right-bank tributaries: Archar, Lom, Tsibritsa and Ogosta starting from the western part of the Balkan Mountain; the Vit, Osam and Yantra that flow down from the central massif; the Rusenski Lom, originating in the eastern part of the mountains, and the largest of them all – the Iskar that runs through the Sofia Valley and crosses the mountain range. In the east there were two rivers flowing into the Black Sea – the

²² Cf. Theophanes, AM 6301, pp. 495,22 – 496,6.

²³ T. Wasilewski, *Bizancjum i Słowianie w IX wieku. Studia z dziejów stosunków politycznych i kulturalnych*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 126–127.

²⁴ Ц. Михайлов, Х. Тишков, Л. Зяпков, Д. Горунова, *Дунавска...*, pp. 50–59; Б. Илиев, *Родно Лудогорие. Алманах*, София 2008, pp. 28, 36–40; С. Кираджиев, *Енциклопедичен...*, pp. 327–328.

River Provadiyska and the River Kamchiya. All these rivers would have had a positive effect on the development of husbandry in the area under discussion. The inhabitants relied on them for fish and drinking water²⁵.

Stretching between the so-called Iron Gates in the west and the river's delta in the east, the Lower Danube covers a distance of over 500 kilometres. It cuts through the Danubian Plain, forming a natural northern border of the nucleus of the Bulgarian state. The Byzantines described the Danube as a river that, though very deep, is easy to cross because of its weak current²⁶. Although the river often marked the state's border, it posed no serious obstacle. It iced over and was thus easy to cross in the winter²⁷, and the river's islands made its crossing even easier. Some scholars claim that the Danube did not form an important demarcation line, and the people on both of its banks did not much differ from each other in cultural terms. In this part of Europe, the role of such a barrier fell to the Carpathian Mountains and their natural southern extension – the Balkan Mountain range²⁸. This may account for Bulgaria's territorial expansion in this direction, especially after the fall of the Avar Khaganate. Regardless of whether this opinion is justified, the river played a very important role in Bulgaria's history. First of all it was navigable down the whole length of the part dealt with here, and – as is not the case of a sea fleet – we have evidence that the Bulgarians had a river fleet as early as the 820s. Although the evidence is incidental and concerns a military expedition to Pannonia, it seems obvious that the river was used for

²⁵ On the role of the plain see: Ц. Михайлов, Х. Тишков, Л. Зяпков, Д. Горунова, *Дунавска...*, pp. 29–65; Д. Митова-Джонова, *Общонародното и регионалното в културно-историческото развитие на Дунавската равнина*, София 1989; С. Кираджиев, *Енциклопедичен...*, pp. 194–196.

²⁶ *On Strategy*, p. 62.4–7; В.В. Кучма, “Византийский Аноним VI в.”: основные проблемы источников и содержания, [in:] *идеи, Военная организация Византийской Империи*, С.-Петербург 2001, p. 214. Ivan Venedikov (И. Венедиков, *Правългарите и християнството*, Стара Загора 1998, p. 14), who concedes the difficulty one encountered in trying to cross the river and seize control of the Danubian fortresses that guarded its crossing, adds that barbarians ran over the limes in the south without destroying it.

²⁷ Cf. Анна Комnene, III, 8, 6, pp. 106.18 – 107.30 (the Pechenegs' example).

²⁸ *The Natural Regions of the Balkan Peninsula (after Cvijić)*, GRev 9.3, 1920, pp. 200–201; Z. Czeprе, J. Flis, R. Mochnacki, *Geografia...*, p. 240.

both economic and commercial purposes, especially in the latter half of the ninth and in the tenth centuries. This is attested to by the existence of harbours in the Danube Dristra and in Pereyaslavets (Little Pereslav) situated in the Danube delta²⁹. However, it is difficult to say whether the last city, referred to in *Russian Primary Chronicle* as the main centre of the Bulgarian lands and the hub of commercial exchange between the south and the north³⁰, actually played such a role as early as the 960s. Scholars raise some serious doubts about it. Strategically important was the role of the delta of the great river. During the formation of the Danube Khanate, it served as home to Onglos – the khan’s main seat (probably until the mid-eighth century, when the role of the capital was assumed

²⁹ В.Б. Перхавко, *Переяславец “Повести временных лет”*, Век 17.4, 1988, pp. 20–24; N. Oikonomides, *Presthlavitzza, the Little Preslav*, [in:] idem, *Byzantium from the Ninth Century to the Fourth Crusade. Studies, Texts, Monuments*, Hampshire 1992 (no XIV), pp. 1–10; O. Damian, C. Andonie, M. Vasile, *Cetatea byzantină de la Nufăru. Despre problemele unui sit suprapus de oasezare contemporană*, Реуи (14), 2003, pp. 237–266. On Dorostolon see: П. Мутафчиев, *Съдбините на средновековния Дръстър*, [in:] idem, *Избрани произведения в два тома*, vol. II, ed. Д. Ангелов, София 1973, pp. 19–103; А. Кузев, *Дръстър*, [in:] *Българските средновековни градове...*, pp. 177–185; *Дуросторум–Дръстър–Силистра: сборник с изследвания*, ed. С. Христов, Р. Липчев, Г. Атанасов, Силистра 1988; И. Йорданов, *Дуросторум – Доростол – Дръстър според данните на сфрагистиката (VI–XIV в.)*, ДобСб 30, 2015, pp. 49–103. Different views have been put forward regarding the location of Pereyaslavets. The vicinity of the Romanian Nufăru has recently been indicated – И. Конавалова, В. Перхавко, *Древняя Русь и Нижнее Подунавие*, Москва 2000, pp. 55–56; P. Stephenson, *Byzantium’s Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 56–57 (after Nicolas Oikonomides). On the doubts concerning the role this centre played in the period under consideration see: М. Раев, *Переяславец на Дунав – мит и действителност в речта на княз Святослав в “Повесть временных лет”*, ГСУ.НЦСВПИД 95 (14), 2006, pp. 193–203. Although Bulgarian scholars accept the existence of such a harbour on Păcuiul lui Soare (The Island of the Sun) – see for example D. Oвчаров, *La forteresse protobulgare sur l’île danubienne Păcuiul lui Soare*, [in:] *Dobrudža. Études ethno-culturelles*, ed. idem, Sofia 1987, pp. 57–68 – when the Island remained under the rule of Bulgarian rulers, archaeological findings suggest that it was built under Byzantine rule, during the reign of John Tzymiskes at the earliest – P. Диасону, D. Вилсману, *Păcuiul lui Soare*, vol. I, Bucurşti 1972. Thus, the harbour may have fallen into Bulgarian hands for a while no sooner than towards the end of the tenth century.

³⁰ *Russian Primary Chronicle*, AM 6477, p. 68.

by Pliska) and where the Bulgarians originally settled³¹. In the latter half of the eighth century the delta made it possible for the Byzantine fleet to sail into the rear of the Bulgarians' main territory and forced them to fight on both fronts (in other words, the Bulgarians found themselves in the Byzantines' clutches), thus weakening the defence of the southern demarcation line that blocked access to the Danubian Plain, that is, the Balkan Mountain massif. It also needs to be added that the river Danube was one of Bulgaria's largest reservoirs of drinking water and home to various species of fish to be found on the mediaeval menu³².

It remained in dispute for as long as Bulgaria maintained control of such areas as the Wallachian Plain, situated north of the lower Danube, the Transylvanian Plateau, the Moldavian Plateau stretching over the central, southern and eastern territory of today's Romania, and Bessarabia that is part of today's Moldavia. It seems that the Bulgarians quickly managed to extend their influence over the Wallachian Plain and the Bessarabian territories that formed part of the migration corridor stretching along the Black Sea coastline. In the west, the grassy steppe extended as far as today's Bucharest. The Transylvanian Plateau, bounded to the east and south by the Carpathian mountain range and guarded by the Avars, formed a natural enclave to which the Bulgarians, in that stage of building their state, could not obtain access. This area is also bounded to the west by the Apuseni Mountains, which along with the Carpathian bend are easier to access along the east-west line, but steeper are in the south. Transylvania was probably ruled by the Bulgarian khans from the fall of the Avar Khaganate to the arrival of Hungarian tribes, that is, for almost the entire ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries. The region encompasses

³¹ On Onglos see e.g.: Р. Рашев, *Българската езическа култура...*, pp. 29–33; D. Ziemann, *Onglos – once again*, VMd 3, 2012, pp. 31–43.

³² Ц. Михайлов, Х. Тишков, Л. Зяпков, Д. Горунова, *Дунавска...*, pp. 31–36; Л. Симонова, *Пътуване по Дунава (IX–XI в.)*, [in:] *Пътуванията в средновековна България. Материали от първата национална конференция "Пътуване към България. Пътуванията в средновековна България и съвременният туризъм"*, Шумен, 8–11.05.2008 г., ed. И. Йорданов, Велико Търново 2009, pp. 104–109; С. Кираджиев, *Енциклопедичен...*, p. 194. Cf. В. Тъпкова-Займова, *Долни Дунав – limes и limes между Византия и славянския свят*, [in:] *Руско-български връзки през вековете*, ed. Д. Ангелов, София 1986, pp. 39–45.

the upland and mountain areas. It is dominated by plateaus, intersected by numerous valleys³³. Because of its iron, non-ferrous metals (including silver), rich salt deposits, and the abundance of timber and animals, it played a significant role in the economic life of Bulgaria, but probably not in Peter's times. The mountainous and grassland areas were favourable to animal husbandry. The Wallachian Plain, irrigated by a number of rivers from the Danube's left-bank tributaries (e.g. Jiu, Olt, Argeş, Dâmboviţa), was perfectly fit for cultivation, and so was the river's right-bank area. It can be said that the Wallachian Plain played a role similar to that of the Danubian Plain south of the Danube River. Some scholars are of the opinion that low-lying and grassland areas on both banks of the river shared similar cultural characteristics and enjoyed strong mutual relationships. From a strategic viewpoint, the area of the so-called 'Bulgaria north of the river Danube' formed the Bulgarian state's northern border and acted as a buffer zone that blocked access to the country's political centre, which was situated in the southern part of the valley of the great river. This area also brought the Bulgarians into contact with Great Moravia, the Frankish kingdom (in the north-west), Slavic tribes (in the north) and steppe nomads (in the north-east).

Although Bulgaria's topography was quite diverse, there was one feature which distinguished it and which dominated the landscape of both the Balkan Peninsula and the rest of southern Europe. This was the preponderance of mountains, intersected by fertile valleys and lowlands. The mountain ranges kept human enclaves isolated from each other and

³³ M. Comşa, *Die bulgarische Herrschaft nördlich der Donau während des 9. und 10. Jh. Im Lichte der archäologischen Forschungen*, D 4, 1960, pp. 395–422; S. Brezianu, *La Bulgarie d'au-delà de l'Ister a la lumière des sources écrites médiévales*, EB 20.4, 1984, pp. 121–135; N.-Ş. Tanaocsa, T. Teotsei, *L'extension de la domination bulgare au nord du Danube aux VIII^e–IX^e siècles*, EB 20. 4, 1984, pp. 110–120; J. Nouzille, *Transylvania. Obszar kontaktów i konfliktów*, transl. J. Praksa, Bydgoszcz 1997, pp. 21–23; A. Madgearu, *Transylvania and the Bulgarian Expansion in the 9th and 10th Centuries*, AMN 39/40.2, 2002/2003, pp. 41–65. See Ian Mladjov (*Trans-Danubian Bulgaria: Reality and Fiction*, ByzS 3, 1998, pp. 85–128), who argues for Bulgaria's presence north of the Danube river also in the tenth century, although the view is not widely held. For more on Transylvania in this period see: I.M. Tipliç, *Transylvania in the Early Middle Ages (7th–13th c.)*, Alba Iulia 2006.

separated the peninsula's interior from the coastline areas – those that opened out onto the outside world³⁴.

The southern parts of the Danubian Plain gradually transition into the foothills of the Balkan Mountains, and are made up of a number of acclivities, which stretch over the length of 460 kilometres and encircle the Balkan Mountain range proper from the north. The massif itself runs in a long curve of 550 kilometres, from the Iron Gates in the west to Cape Emine in the east³⁵. The width of the mountain range in question varies between 20 and 50 kilometres and that of its foothills between 20 and 45 kilometres. The total area of both is 24 000 square kilometres. Although the mountains are not high – their western range rises to an average height of 849 m (the highest peak reaches a height of 2168 m), most mountain passes in the central part of the range rise to a height of over 1000 m above sea level with peaks of over 2000 m above sea level (the highest of them being 2376 m). In the mountains' eastern ranges, the average altitude does not exceed 385 m above sea level. Together, they form the region's distinct geographical barrier that naturally separates the Danubian Plain in the north from Sub-Balkan valleys in the south and south-west (along with the Sofia Valley, also called Sofia Field) as well from the Northern Thrace in the south-east. The mountains formed the Danube area into a distinct territory in which the centre of the Bulgarian state was situated. They also provided a climatic barrier between the territories characterised by the continental climate to the north, and those lying to the south, which remain within the orbit of both transitional and Mediterranean climates. This mountain range also marks a boundary between different species of fauna and flora: Siberian-European in the north and Mediterranean in the south. Finally it is also the main watershed that divides the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea.

³⁴ For more on the issue see: F. B r a u d e l, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949 (I am using the Polish edition of the book, see: F. B r a u d e l, *Morze Śródziemne i świat śródziemnomorski w epoce Filipa II*, vol. I, transl. T. M r ó w c z y ń s k i, M. O c h a b, wstęp B. G e r e m e k, W. K u l a, Warszawa 2004, pp. 29–58); X. M a t a n o v, *Балкански хоризонти. История, общества, личности*, vol. I, София 2004, pp. 8–9, 26, 38, 48, 68, 83, 98–99, 103, 107, 123, 136, 161, 183, 189–190, 197, 199, 203, 267, 297.

³⁵ In terms of the way the terrain lies and not based on the geological structure of the massif. In line with the latter the proper mountain range starts at the Biogradchik Pass.

The massif's characteristic feature is its steady descent in the eastward direction, which made the coastal parts of the mountains open to all sorts of influences from the south. It was not accidental that the local mountain passes were crossed mainly by people travelling along the north-south line, especially when the centres of early mediaeval Bulgaria were located north of the eastern part of the Balkan Mountains. The central and eastern part of the mountains was easier to access from the north – here the mountains slowly morph into something of a mountain foreland that joins gently with the Danubian Plain. Unlike its northern counterpart, the southern slopes of the massif drop sharply down into Thracian territories. The only exception here is the western side of the Balkan Mountains³⁶. Because of the way the land lay it was the Bulgarians, and not the Byzantines, who maintained control of the interior of the massif for most of the early Middle Ages. Archaeological research shows that the colonisation of the Balkan Mountains did not get fully under way until the final years of the First Bulgarian Empire. In the previous period, especially from the late seventh to the early ninth centuries, the mountains served as a buffer zone which the Bulgarian state deliberately left devoid of any significant settlement, but nevertheless deployed its troops in order to patrol and control it. The Bulgarian settlements were concentrated mainly in the area of the Danubian Plain³⁷.

From an economic point of view, these mountains, the most densely forested part of the Balkans³⁸, would have served as a timber repository

³⁶ On the topography of the mountains see: В. Маринов, *Стара-Планина (Природна физиономия и културно-стопанска структура)*, Род 2.1, 1939, pp. 121–143; Л. Динев, Л. Мелнишки, *Стара планина*, София 1962; Н. Maguszcak, *Bulgaria*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 294–304; П. Пенчев, Х. Тишков, М. Данева, Д. Горунова, *Старопланинска област*, [in:] *География на България...*, pp. 85–113; Х. Тишков, Ц. Михайлов, Л. Зяпков, Д. Горунова, *Предбалканска област*, [in:] *География на България...*, pp. 65–85; В. Николов, М. Йорданова, *Планините в България*, София 2002, pp. 9–44; С. Кираджиев, *Енциклопедичен...*, pp. 431–432, 519–521.

³⁷ Cf. Л. Динев, Л. Мелнишки, *Стара...*, pp. 53–54.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 37–39; Z. Czerpe, J. Flis, R. Mochnacki, *Geografia...*, p. 242; Н. Maguszcak, *Bulgaria...*, p. 160; Х. Тишков, Ц. Михайлов, Л. Зяпков, Д. Горунова, *Предбалканска област...*, pp. 67, 69, 72, 74, 75, 77, 79, 80–81, 82, 84, 85; П. Пенчев, Х. Тишков, М. Данева,

from antiquity to the modern era. Mountain pastures were well suited for livestock farming and, along with a gradual increase in the number of settlers, played an increasingly important role in the development of this aspect of the Bulgarian economy. The Bulgarians, such as the Thracians and Romans before, may also have been involved in exploiting ores that existed in the area³⁹.

On the southern slopes of the Central Balkan Mountains are the Sub-Balkan valleys (Pirdop, Karlovo, Kazanlak), which form something of a furrow that separates the Balkan Mountains from other range, that is, Sredna Gora – sometimes called the Anti-Balkan⁴⁰. Both massifs connect four mountain thresholds. These connections run high in the mountains and this may have been the reason why both massifs, from antiquity to the modern era, were not treated as two distinct mountain ranges – that is, Stara Planina and Sredna Gora – but were instead given a single name of Haimos. Sredna Gora is 250 kilometres long and 50 kilometres wide. It extends from the Iskar river valley in the west to the Tundzha river valley in the east, covering an area of about 5950 square kilometres (with the highest acclivity of 1604 m above sea level). With the assistance of two mountain thresholds the western part of these mountains links up with the Rhodope massif, wedging its way between the Northern Thracian Plain and the Sofia Valley and forming a barrier that, running in the east-west direction, separates the mountainous regions of the Western Balkans from the low-lying terrains of Northern Thrace⁴¹. It is the western part of Sredna Gora that is intersected by the famous ancient Succ

Д. Горунова, *Старопланинска област...*, pp. 89–90, 93–94, 95, 96, 98–99, 101, 103, 105, 107, 109, 110–111, 113; В. Николов, М. Йорданова, *Планините...*, pp. 10, 19–24, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44.

³⁹ Д. Ангелов, *Стопански живот*, [in:] *История на България в четиринадесет тома*, vol. II, *Първа българска държава*, ed. idem, София 1981, p. 341.

⁴⁰ Z. Czerpe, J. Flis, R. Mochnacki, *Geografia...*, pp. 239, 240; Г.Д. Данов, *Средна гора. пътеводител*, София 1971, p. 9; H. Maruszczak, *Bulgaria...*, pp. 124, 316–317; С. Кираджиев, *Енциклопедичен...*, p. 421.

⁴¹ Г.Д. Данов, *Средна гора...*, pp. 9, 11; H. Maruszczak, *Bulgaria...*, p. 317; К. Мишев, *Южнобългарска провинция*, [in:] *География на България...*, p. 134; В. Николов, М. Йорданова, *Планините...*, p. 45; С. Кираджиев, *Енциклопедичен...*, pp. 515–516.

Pass (the Ihtiman Pass), known in the Middle Ages as Imperial Kleisoura and towards the end of the tenth century also referred to by some Byzantine authors as Bulgarian Kleisoura⁴². This mountain pass marked a borderline between Thrace and Illyria. The ancient military road (*via militaris*), i.e. the Balkans main artery, ran through the pass. From a strategic point of view, it was the most important mountain pass in this part of the Balkan Peninsula. To control it was to control the flow of goods and people.

South-west of the Balkan Mountains and west of Sredna Gora there is the Sofia Field, a long valley, with Sredets as its most important city (the ancient Serdica, referred to in mediaeval times as Triaditsa, today's Sofia)⁴³. This area constituted an important communication hub intersected by the routes running from the north-west to south-east (the so-called military road) and from the north-east to south-west (from the Danubian Plain through the Western Balkan Mountains to Macedonia by the Struma river valley)⁴⁴. The Sofia Field, along with the lands lying north-west of it, opened onto the Central Danube and Pannonia. For this reason, in the tenth century, the route was often taken by Hungarians who either invaded Bulgaria or advanced further afield into Byzantine territories. In the north it enabled the Bulgarians to penetrate into Macedonian areas. It should be added that west of the bend of the Balkan Mountains there

⁴² И. Велков, *Траяновите врата*, Век 1.3, 1931, pp. 33–35; П. Мутафчиев, *Старият друм през "Траянови врата"*, СБАН.КИФФО 55.27, 1937, pp. 19–148; Д. Митова-Джонова, *Confinium Succi et Mutatio Soneium през античността и ранновизантийската епоха*, Ана 1.2/3, 1994, pp. 77–99; В. Гълъбова, *История на Ихтиман*, vol. I, София 2007, pp. 25–34. Cf. В. Василев, *Ихтиманският край в древността*, Век 18.6, 1989, pp. 47–58.

⁴³ For more on the issue see: *Сердика*, vol. I, *Археологически материали и проучвания*, ed. Т. Герасимов, София 1964; *Сердика*, vol. II, *Археологически материали и проучвания*, ed. В. Велков, София 1989; Г. Цанкова-Петкова, *Сердика – Средец през ранното средновековие (IX–XII в.)*, [in:] *София през вековете*, vol. I: *Древност, Средновековие, Възраждане*, ed. П. Динев, София 1989, pp. 42–54; П. Павлов, *Средец (София) в историята на Първото българско царство*, [in:] *1200 години Сердика – Средец – София в България*, ed. Б. Петрунова, М. Ваклинова, София 2009, pp. 4–38; А. Данчева-Василева, *История на средновековна София от IV–XIV век*, София 2017.

⁴⁴ А. Данчева-Василева, *Град Сердика (Средец) в политическата история на България (809–1018 г.)*, ИП 60.3/4, 2004, p. 17.

was another natural migration corridor. It ran southwards, through the Morava Valley, in the direction of Macedonia. In the early Middle Ages it was used by the *Sclavenoi*, the western branch of the Slavs, who advanced into Byzantine territories⁴⁵.

Lying south and east of the Ihtiman Pass were fertile terrains of Northern Thrace that constituted the fertile hinterland of the western coast of the Black Sea. This area is characteristically bounded by the massif Haimos in the north and north-west, by the Rhodope Mountains in the south and south-west and by the Strandzha Massif (along with the mountains Sakar and Hasekiyata) in the south and south-east. From the east, Northern Thrace opens out onto the sea. This was another area that played an important economic role, notably in terms of the development of commerce, agriculture and fishing. The low-lying areas of this part of Thrace offered good conditions for farming, and two large rivers, Hebros (today's Maritsa) and its left tributary, the river Tundzha, added fresh fish to the people's diet. The mild climate acted as an additional incentive for people to settle there. Philippoupolis (today's Plovdiv)⁴⁶ was its most important centre, but there were also other important cities such as Beroe (today's Stara Zagora)⁴⁷, Stilvnos (today's Sliven)⁴⁸ and those I have already mentioned – Sozopolis, Develtos, Anchialos and Mesembria – along the coast.

In the era of an independent Bulgarian state (i.e. between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, with a break between 971–976/986, and

⁴⁵ Т. Живковић, *Јужни словени под византијском влашћу (600–1025)*, Београд 2002, pp. 264, 274, 300. Cf. С.А. Иванов, *Оборона Византии и география “варварских” вторжений через Дунай в первой половине VI в.*, ВВ 44, 1983, pp. 27–47; i d e m, *Оборона балканских провинции Византии и проникновение “варваров” на Балкану в первой половине VI в.*, ВВ 45, 1985, pp. 35–53.

⁴⁶ On this centre see: А. Данчева-Василева, *Пловдив през Средновековието IV–XIV в.*, София 2009, pp. 31–54, 214–223, 244–246, 272–274, 289–291, 314–323, 326, 355–356.

⁴⁷ For more on the fortress see: Г.Н. Николов, *Военно-политическа история на средновековния град Боруй*, ВС 50.3, 1981, pp. 34–44; П. Балабанов, С. Бояджиев, Н. Тулешков, *Крепостно строителство...*, pp. 105–110, 125–128.

⁴⁸ С. Табаков, *Опит за история на град Сливен*, vol. I, *Сливен и Сливенско до началото на XIX в.*, ed. И. Тодоров, com. П. Ангелов, В. Дечев, София 1986; И. Щерева, К. Вачева, Д. Владимирова-Аладжова, *Туида–Сливен*, София 2001.

between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries; in 1018/1019–1185 the lands of the dissolved Bulgarian state were, at least formally, an integral part of the Empire), Northern Thrace, because of its geopolitical location, became an arena of military rivalry between Bulgaria and Byzantium. For this reason it can be considered to have formed something of a border area between the two states, a natural buffer zone (especially between 681 and 816) providing a direct link between their capitals – Pliska and Preslav on one hand and Constantinople on the other. In addition, it gave the Byzantines a certain amount of freedom in organising military expeditions against Bulgaria and provided them with strong fortresses in which to find shelter in case of failure. From the Bulgarian perspective, the Northern Thrace formed a perfect bulwark that prevented the Byzantines from invading the heart of Bulgaria and that provided the Bulgarians with the possibility of planning attacks against Byzantine capital and Aegean Thrace. What was of crucial importance during the military campaigns conducted in Thrace was to seize control of the Adrianople fortress. On one hand, it served as an outpost for the imperial troops setting out on their expeditions to the north, on the other it formed something of a gate providing access to the road leading to the Byzantine capital. For this reason the Bulgarian armies usually marched in a southerly direction, along the rivers Maritsa and Tundzha and thence to Constantinople. In cultural terms Asia Minor exercised a greater influence on Thrace than did the areas located behind the Stara Planina range. It was due to the accessibility of this area from the Black Sea and the smaller height of the Strandzha mountains that along with the territories lying south of them usually remained part of the Byzantine Empire⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ On Thrace's economic and political significance see: Д. Ангелов, *Тракия и българо-византийските отношения до падането ѝ под османска власт*, ИТНИ 1, 1965, pp. 61–91; W. Swoboda, *Трасја*, [in:] *SSS*, vol. VI, pp. 120, 122–123; Д.В. Момчилов, *Североизточна Тракия VII–X век*, Епо 3.2, 1995, pp. 62, 64; К. Гагова, *Тракия през българското Средновековие. Историческа география*, София 2002, pp. 29–30; Д. Момчилов, *Култура и политика на Първото българско царство в Североизточна Тракия (по археологически данни)*, Варна 2007, pp. 13, 204, 211, 217, 223. Cf. also H. Magyszczak, *Bulgaria...*, p. 107; К. Мишев, С. Велев, И. Вапцаров, М. Йорданова, Д. Горунова, *Тракийско-Странджанска област*, [in:] *География на България...*, pp. 135–166. On Byzantine cultural exchange

The Rhodope mountains occupy most of the southern section of the north-eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. The mountains are about 220–240 kilometres long and 100 kilometres wide, occupying about 18 000 square kilometres. The range's average altitude is 785 above sea level (the highest peak rises to over 2190 metres), but their western part is much higher than the eastern one. In the west the mountains border on the Pirin and Rila alpine ranges, forming part of the Rilo-Rhodope massif⁵⁰. In addition to containing mineral deposits, the Strandzha and Rhodope mountains played an important role in the development of pastoral farming economy⁵¹. It was not until the ninth century that this territory became part of the Bulgarian state. The Bulgarians seemed quite satisfied with the life they lived in the mountains. The Rhodopes not only offered them shelter but also the possibility of mounting a surprising attack on the Aegean coast.

Further to the west, there lay the historical Macedonia, a colourful country of mountains and valleys. Difficult to access, the valleys were filled with settlements developing in isolation from each other. Although there was the second most important Byzantine metropolis in Macedonia, Thessalonike, situated at the Aegean Sea coast, the country, especially in its mountainous parts, remained beyond the reach of Constantinopolitan authorities. In the mid-ninth century, Macedonia, in spite of its remoteness, became an integral part of the Bulgarian state, and so did the territories of Northern Thrace lying significantly closer to Bulgaria's main centres. It was partly due to the fact that the areas west of the Ihtiman Pass lay at that time within the Bulgarian state. The incorporation of Macedonian territories into the Danube Bulgaria appears to have been something

zones see, more generally, D. O b o l e n s k y, *Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges*, [in:] *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Études Byzantines*, Bucarest, 6–12 Septembre 1971, vol. V, ed. M. B e r z a, E. S t ä n e s c u, Bucureşti 1974, pp. 303–313; R. T h e o d o r e s c u, *Au sujet des "corridors culturels" de l'Europe sud-orientale, I*, RESEE 21.1, 1983, pp. 7–22; i d e m, *Au sujet des "corridors culturels" de l'Europe sud-orientale, II*, RESEE 21.3, 1983, pp. 229–240.

⁵⁰ И. В а п ц а р о в, С. В е л е в, М. Й о р д а н о в а, Д. Г о р у н о в а, *Рило-Родопска област*, [in:] *География на България...*, pp. 166–219; С. К и р а д ж и е в, *Енциклопедичен...*, pp. 458–460.

⁵¹ Д. А н г е л о в, *Стопански...*, p. 341.

of a logical consequence of Bulgaria's rule over the Sofia Field. The actions carried out under the protection of mountain ranges and earlier contacts with their compatriots (or the tradition of such contacts) of the so-called khan Kouber's group enabled the Bulgarians to penetrate these areas and annex them to their state in mid-ninth century⁵². It was more difficult for the Byzantine armed forces to get to the mountainous Macedonia. During the rule of the Cometopouloi dynasty the nucleus of the Bulgarian state shifted to the geographical Macedonia with Ohrid and Prespa as its centres, and its mountainous topography was one of the factors that enabled Bulgaria to resist the Byzantine aggression. The Vardar and Struma rivers were among the rivers along which there ran communication corridors. In the western part of the mountains there were the silver deposits. The Macedonian mountains were of course home to animal husbandry⁵³. Grapevine and fruit were also grown here. In the tenth and eleventh

⁵² On these contacts see: G. C a n k o v a-P e t k o v a, *Bulgarians and Byzantium during the first Decades after the Foundation of the Bulgarian State*, Bsl 24.1, 1963, pp. 51–52; M. B o й н o в, *Някои въпроси във връзка с образуването на българската държава и покръстването на българите*, ИИИ 10, 1962, pp. 282–283, ргзур. 14; B. Г ю з e л e в, *Езическа България*, [in:] И. Б o ж и л o в, B. Г ю з e л e в, *История на средновековна България VII–XIV век*, София 1999, pp. 96, 121, 127, 161; Г. A т a н a c o в, *Тервел. Хан на България и кесар на Византия*, Силистра 2004, pp. 22–23; Г.Н. Николов, *Централизъм...*, pp. 67, 94. I would like to emphasise that it was the memory and tradition rather than the actual relations with Bulgarian settlement, although it is difficult to determine that in 9th century there was no such settlement at all – cf. W. S w o b o d a, *Kuber...*, [in:] SSS, vol. II, pp. 554–555; V. B e š e v l i e v, *Die Protobulgarische Periode der bulgarischen Geschichte*, Amsterdam 1981, pp. 170–172; J.V.A., F i n e, *The Early Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Sixth Century to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor 1983, p. 191; B. П o п o в и њ, *Куврат, Кубар и Аспарух*, Стр 37, 1986, pp. 125–126 (the author locates those Bulgarians in 9th–10th c. in the area of Albania); З. П л я к o в, *Населението в областта на Средна Струма през VII–IX век*, [in:] *Четвърти международен Конгрес по славянска археология, София – 1980 (Доклади и съобщения)*, vol. I, ed. Д. A н г e л o в, София 1992, pp. 386–391; П. П a в л o в, *Истини и заблуди за светия цар Петър*, [in:] i d e m, *Забравени и неразбрани. Събития и личности от българското средновековие*, София 2010, pp. 33, 34; i d e m, *Векът на цар Самуил*, София 2014, pp. 21–22 (according to the last author the mentioned in the sources macedonian *Scythians*, who supported Michael's rebellion against tsar Peter, were descendants of the Kouber's Bulgarians).

⁵³ A.E. L a i o u, C. M o r r i s s o n, *The Byzantine Economy*, Cambridge–New York 2007, pp. 63, 93, 171–172.

centuries, during the reign of tsars Symeon and Samuel, the Bulgarian state found itself in control of mountainous territories in Albania and the indigenous Serbian areas of Rashka and Zeta. The control of these territories enabled Bulgaria to engage in the Croatian affairs and to undertake action along the Adriatic coast.

All the territories characterised above were held together by a network of routes. In the ninth and tenth centuries the famous *via militaris*, cutting across the north-east part of the Balkan mountains and linking Belgrad with Constantinople, was the most important of them. In earlier periods the Bulgarians tried to seize control of it as it was often used by their opponents. Crucial for keeping it under control were political centres that lay along it and that played a very important role in the long-distance trade linking Byzantine megalopolis with Central and Western Europe. The centres were: Belgrade, Naissos, Sredets, Philippoupolis – the cities that lay within Bulgaria's borders, and Adrianople which was part of the Empire. It should be stressed that in the period under consideration, that is, in the latter half of the ninth century, the road regained its importance after two hundred years of insignificance⁵⁴. It owed its renaissance to three factors: firstly, the beginning of this century saw the fall of the Avar Khaganate, a political organism that stood in the way of freely using the road; secondly, the official acceptance of Christianity by the Bulgarians, which resulted in a few decades of peaceful relations with Byzantium; thirdly, Byzantine-Frankish and Byzantine-Moravian relations were given a new lease on life following the consolidation of the Carolingian state and the restoration of the imperial power in the west. All of this was followed by the revival of trade exchange. True, the situation along the *via militaris* deteriorated following the final settlement of Magyars in Pannonia, which took place towards the end of this century, and the Byzantine-Bulgarian

⁵⁴ Л. Симеонова, *Пътуване към Константинопол. Търговия и комуникации в Средиземноморския свят (края на IX – 70-те години на XI в.)*, София 2006, pp. 102–103; М. М с О r m i c k, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900*, Cambridge 2001 (I am using the Polish edition of the book, see: М. М с С o r m i c k, *Narodziny Europy. Korzenie gospodarki europejskiej, 300–900*, transl. А. В u g a j, Z. D a l e w s k i, J. L a n g, I. S k r z y p c z a k, Warszawa 2009, pp. 76–80, 527–531).

wars during the reign of Symeon the Great posed a hindrance to the free transfer of goods between Byzantium and the western world (one needs to add that these difficulties were only temporary because the intensity of these wars varied and, especially in the first decade of the tenth century, there were long periods of relative peace). Following the conclusion of the peace in 927, the relations again returned to normality, although the Hungarian menace cast its shadow on them. The remark appears to be quite important given the fact that the Bulgarians controlled several hundred kilometres of the route between Belgrade and Plovdiv. Thus the state ruled by Borys-Michael, Vladimir-Rasate, Symeon and Peter can be assumed to have derived profits from an important trade route running through its territory (leaving aside its purely military aspects and taking into consideration only trading relations)⁵⁵.

However, when one looks at the map of Bulgaria, one is inclined, after taking into account the location of its capitals (above all the Great Preslav), to conclude that their connection with Constantinople, Bulgaria's most important politico-economic partner, was even more important than the military route mentioned above⁵⁶. A more westerly route ran from Constantinople to Adrianople, along the valley of the river Tundzha and further north through Probaton (today's Sinnaköy) and Diampolis (today's Yambol) and the mountain massif – through Varbitsa Pass – to Preslav. By taking the extension of the route, one could get to Pliska, passing through the fortifications in the village of khan Krum. The eastern branch of the road forked off in Constantinople and ran through the mountains Strandzha to the fortress Potamoukasteľ⁵⁷ (in the north it ran almost parallel to the *via militaris*) and along the western coastline of the Black Sea, joining together again in Develtos, that is, at the

⁵⁵ The following monographs are still the best works on the route: K.J. Jirěček, *Die Heerstrasse von Belgrad nach Constantinopel und die Balkanpässe. Eine Historisch-Geographische Studie*, Prag 1877; П. Мут а ф ч и е в, *Старият друм...* Cf. also M. Madzharov, *Roman Roads in Bulgaria. Contribution to the Development of Roman Road System in the Provinces of Moesia and Thrace*, Veliko Tarnovo 2009, pp. 70–131.

⁵⁶ Similarly – Л. С и м е о н о в а, *Пътюване...*, p. 105.

⁵⁷ On this fortification see: Ж. А л а д ж о в, *Къде се е намирал Потамукастел от средновековните извори*, ПС 2, 2000, pp. 289–291; К. Г а г о в а, *Тракия...*, p. 281.

official customs point of both states⁵⁸. From Develtos it ran to the fortress Markellai, situated at the southern foot of the Eastern Balkan Mountains and through the Rish Pass (the so-called Verigava in Byzantine sources)⁵⁹ in a straight line to Pliska⁶⁰. Further north from Pliska to the Danubian Dristra and, perhaps, Pereyaslavets. Then, after crossing the big river, it ran through Transylvania and the valleys of the river Mureş and the river Someş to the Moravian lands (probably to the so-called Solnograd, today's Szolnok in Hungary), serving as the route used to export the Transilvanian (Bulgarian) salt, but surely in the ninth century, and not during tsar Peter's reign⁶¹. The communication line I have just briefly described, played the

⁵⁸ Г. А я н о в, *Стари пътища и селища край тях през Странджа и Сакар*, ИАИ 15, 1946, pp. 94–113.

⁵⁹ On this identification see: В. Б е ш е в л и е в, *Географията на България у византийските автори*, ИИМВ 23 (38), 1987, pp. 43–44; Д. М о м ч и л о в, *Южните части на Ришкия и Върбишкия проходи и "Еркесията" през Първото българско царство*, [in:] ППР 8, 2000, p. 241. A different view has recently been expressed by Pavel Georgiev (П. Г е о р г и е в, *Главният път през Веригава през ранното средновековие*, [in:] *История на пътя. Черно море между Изтока и Запада. XII-ти Понтийски четения във ВСУ "Черноризец Храбър"*, ed. С. Т а б а к о в а - С т о е в а, Варна 2007, pp. 7–25), who identifies Verigava with either Dyulino or Emine (or Seaside) Passes.

⁶⁰ Ж. Д о б р е в а, *Пътната мрежа между Плиска и Ришкия проход VII–IX век*, [in:] *Пътуванията...*, pp. 151–158; П. Г е о р г и е в, *Хинтерландът на Абоба-Плиска: пътни комуникации, селищни и военни средища*, [in:] *Eurika. In honorem Ludmilae Donchevae-Petkovaе*, ed. В. Г р и г о р о в, М. Д а с к а л о в, Е. К о м а т а р о в а - Б а л и н о в а, София 2009, pp. 333–353. More generally, see: С. Т. Н е д е в, *Пътища в Източна Стара Планина от създаването на българската държава до Освобождението и от Османското владичество*, ИВНД 15.1, 1973, pp. 213–226; Д. М о м ч и л о в, *Пътна и селищна система между Източна Стара Планина и "Еркесията" IV–XIV в. (Върбишки, Ришки и Айтоски проход)*, Варна 1999.

⁶¹ V. C h a l o u p e c k ý, *Dvě studie k dějinám Podkarpatska*, I: *Síl z Bulharska (892)*, II: *Kdy bylo horní Potisí připojeno k Ubrám*, SFFUKB 3,30 (4), 1925, pp. 1–11; P. R a t k o š, *K otazce hranice Velkej Moravy a Bulharska*, HČSAV 3, 1955, pp. 212–215; В. Р r i m o v, *Certain Aspects of the International Importance of the First Bulgarian Empire*, ЕН 5, 1970, p. 201; G. K o v a c h, *Date cu privire la transportul sări pe Mureş (sec. X–XIII)*, Zr 12, 1980, pp. 193–200; Д. А н г е л о в, *Вътрешна и външна търговия през VIII–X в.*, [in:] *Стопанска история на България 681–1981*, ed. Л. Б е р о в et al., София 1981, p. 47; i d e m, *Стопански...*, p. 347; K. P o l e k, *Podstawy gospodarcze Państwa Wielkomorawskiego*, Kraków 1994, p. 82; A. M a d g e a r u, *Salt Trade and Warfare in Early Medieval Transylvania*, EN 11, 2001, pp. 271–283; i d e m, *Transylvania and the Bulgarian Expansion in the 9th and 10th Centuries*, AMN 39/40.2, 2002/2003,

most important role in the relations between Bulgaria and Byzantium. Its northern part, crossing the eastern areas of the Danubian Plain, offered Bulgaria's capitals access to the Danube Valley and the lands on the left bank of the river. East of the connection was the route following the coastline (it is sometimes referred to as the *via pontica*)⁶², linking the most important harbours of the Black Sea coast. It ran through the Dyulino or Emine Pass in the eastern part of the Balkan Mountains and the area of Lake Varna, reaching the Danube Delta.

The ancient road linking Belgrade in the west and the delta of the Danube in the east ran along the right bank of the Danube Valley, passing through Bdin, Nikopolis and Dristra. The route was opened for trade following the fall of the Avar Khaganate, although scholars suggest there were some impediments in its use because of the Byzantine-Bulgarian wars during the reign of Symeon⁶³. Parallel to it was the route running along the northern foothills of the Predbalkan and linking Preslav and Vratitsa (today's Vratsa) in the west, a place through which led the shortest route to Serdica, south of the mountain range⁶⁴. It had its counterpart at the southern slopes of Haimos, linking the coastline Anchialos and Sredets⁶⁵. A branch of the road extended to Beroe at the foot of the east-

pp. 50–51; В. Йотков, *Българският контрол на "Пътя на солта" в Трансилвания през IX в. (по археологически данни)*, [in:] *Великотърновският Университет "Св. св. Кирил и Методий" и българската археология*, vol. I, ed. Б. Борисов, Велико Търново 2010, pp. 487–495; П. Павлов, *Стопанско развитие на Първото българско царство*, [in:] И. Тютюнджиев, М. Палангурски, А. Костов, И. Лазаров, П. Павлов, И. Русев, *Стопанска история на България*, Велико Търново 2011, p. 21.

⁶² Л. Симеонова, *Пътуване...*, p. 105; П. Георгиев, *Главният път Византия – България до края на VIII век*, [in:] *Пътуванията...*, pp. 84–103.

⁶³ Л. Симеонова, *Пътуване...*, pp. 136–138.

⁶⁴ П.Х. Петров, *Средновековна Вратица*, [in:] *История на град Враца. От Древността до Освобождението*, ed. Е. Бужашки et al., София 1976, p. 74; К. Дочев, *Стари римски пътища в Централна Долна Мизия (II–IV в. сл. Хр.)*, ИРИМВТ 7.4, 1994, pp. 61–76; V. Tărkova-Zaimova, *Frontières médiévales et réseau routier au sud du Danube*, *VMd* 1, 2010, pp. 1–15. See also: Д. Димитрова, *Археологически паметници във Врачански окръг*, София 1985; Б. Николов, *От Искър до Огоста. История на 151 села и градове от бившия Врачански окръг*, София 1996.

⁶⁵ P. Soustal, *Tabula...*, pp. 135–136; К. Гагова, *Тракия...*, p. 104.

ern part of the Anti-Balkan, linked Beroe with Philippoupolis⁶⁶. There was also a route that branched off from the *via militaris* at the latitude of Adrianople, linking the latter with Develtos⁶⁷. Some minor tracks, which also branched off from the military road, cut across the Rhodope mountain range and enabled one to get to one of the most important tracks of the Peninsula, known as *via Egnatia*, linking Dyrrachion with Constantinople⁶⁸. *Via Egnatia* also ran through Thessalonike, but only its western part lay within the Bulgarian State and until the last quarter of the tenth century it didn't play a significant role in the history of the state in question. However, its role increased along with the shift of what is known as the inner area of the Bulgarian state towards Macedonia⁶⁹. The route leading from the Danube Valley, along the river Morava and through Naissos and Vranje to Skopje has already been mentioned.

This incomplete description of the mediaeval Bulgaria's communication routes, deliberately focusing on the most important ones of them, clearly indicates that the way the land lay in this part of the Balkans tended to favour the latitudinal arrangement of the main routes⁷⁰. Of course, in the north-eastern and central parts of the Balkans the longitudi-

⁶⁶ P. Soustal, *Tabula...*, p. 135; К. Гагова, *Тракия...*, pp. 103–104.

⁶⁷ P. Soustal, *Tabula...*, pp. 143–145; cf. К. Гагова, *Тракия...*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ P. Soustal, *Tabula...*, pp. 139–140, 141, 142–143; К. Гагова, *Тракия...*, p. 105. On *via Egnatia* see e.g.: G.L.F. Tafel, *De via Romanorum militari Egnatia qua Illyricum Macedonia et Thracia iungebantur*, Tübingae 1837; J. Voťpka-Pečha, L. Vidman, *Via Egnatia mezi Elbasanem a Ochridským jezerem*, FPH 82.2, 1959, pp. 187–196; G.S. Xidakis, E.G. Varagouli, *Design and Construction of Roman Roads: The Case of Via Egnatia in the Aegean Thrace, Northern Greece*, EEG 3.1, 1997, pp. 123–132; M. Fasolo, *La via Egnatia I. Da Apollonia e Dyrrachium ad Herakleia Lynkestidos*, ²Roma 2005; A. Gutschke, *Auf den Spuren der antiken Via Egnatia – vom Weströmischen ins Oströmische Reich: Ein historischer Reiseführer durch den südlichen Balkan: Albanien – Mazedonien – Griechenland – Türkei*, Schweinfurt 2010.

⁶⁹ Cf. Т. Филипоски, *Прашанјето за проодноста на западниот дел од патот Via Egnatia (Драч–Солун) во втората половина на IX век*, [in:] *Патуванјата...*, pp. 110–119; J. Shepherd, *Communications across the Bulgarian lands – Samuel's poisoned chalice for Basil II and his successors?*, [in:] *Европейският Югоизток през втората половина на X – началото на XI век. Историја и култура*, ed. В. Гюзелев, Г.Н. Николов, София 2015, pp. 217–235; С. Георгиева, *Цар Самуил в соперничество с Византија за контрол над Виа Егнација и Драч*, Епо 25.1, 2017, pp. 188–195.

⁷⁰ *The Natural Regions...*, pp. 199–200; H. Maruszczak, *Bulgaria...*, pp. 15, 196.

nal road network was formed too, crossing the Haimos, Strandzha, Rhodope and Dinaric mountain ranges. However, the mountains constituted a natural communication barrier separating particular areas, and the main routes ran either along the rivers or through mountain valleys⁷¹. One should also keep in mind water routes which also played an important economic role. Sources attest to the fact that the Lower Danube and the river Hebros (Maritsa) were both navigable, the latter up to the city of Adrianople in Thrace⁷². Of course the sea route, along the coast of the Black Sea, Aegean Sea and Adriatic Sea was the most convenient⁷³. However, it has already been mentioned that the last route was out of Bulgarian merchants' reach. Among the inland areas of water mentioned above only the Danube Valley lay within Bulgaria's borders while the navigable part of the river Hebros was outside these borders.

The above remarks regarding the geopolitical significance of the territories that made up the Bulgarian state from the second half of the

⁷¹ For more details on Bulgaria's communication system see: В. Тъпкова-Займова, *Към въпроса за военните пътища през Първото българско царство*, ИП 14.1, 1958, pp. 58–73; J.-Ch. Poutiers, *A propos des forteresses antiques et médiévales de la plaine Danubienne (Essai de reconstruction du réseau routier entre Iskär et Ogosta)*, EB 11.2, 1975, pp. 60–73; P. Soustal, *Tabula...*, pp. 132–146; K. Belke, *Roads and travel in Macedonia and Thrace in the middle and late Byzantine period*, [in:] *Travel in the Byzantine World. Papers from the Thirtieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, April 2000*, ed. R. Macrides, Aldershot 2001, pp. 73–90; A. Avramea, *Land and Sea Communications, Fourth–Fifteenth Centuries*, [in:] *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. I, ed. A.E. Laiou, Washington D.C. 2002, pp. 64–74; К. Гагова, *Тракия...*, pp. 99–110; V. Tăpkova-Zajmova, *Frontières médiévales et réseau routier au sud du Danube*, BMd 1, 2010, pp. 1–15.

⁷² E. Todorova, *River Trade in the Balkans during the Middle Ages*, EB 20, 1984, p. 47; P. Soustal, *Tabula...*, p. 135; К. Гагова, *Тракия...*, pp. 103–104.

⁷³ Cf. K. Marinow, *Zadania floty cesarskiej w wojnach bizantyńsko-bułgarskich (VII–XI w.)*, [in:] *Byzantina Europea. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, ed. M. Kokożko, M.J. Leszka, Łódź 2007, pp. 381–392; R. Kostova, *“Bypassing Anchialos”: The West Black Sea coast in naval campaigns 11th to 12th c.*, [in:] *Тангра...*, pp. 579–597; eadem, *The Lower Danube in the Byzantine Naval Campaigns in the 12th c.*, [in:] *Cultură și civilizație la Dunărea de Jos*, vol. XXIV, Călărași 2008, pp. 269–281.

seventh century to the beginning of the eleventh century in general, and during the tsar Peter I reign in particular, can be regarded as an introduction to the issue, providing a general framework within which to discuss it and showing that Bulgarians' arrival in the Lower Danube and their settlement in the territories between the valley of the river and the Balkan Mountain range resulted in making these areas become the heart of the Bulgarian statehood in the early Middle Ages. Favourable to such a development was certainly the existence of natural barriers, both water and mountainous ones, separating the heart of the state from the regions that surrounded it. With such a location of Bulgaria's centre, including the location of its capitals, the country's territorial development was determined for centuries to come, and so were its economic and political partners, as well as cultural influences it fell under.

It seemed quite natural for Bulgaria to extend its rule northwards, especially as its main opponent, Avar Khaganate, ceased to exist. However, after reaching the height of its territorial expansion in the ninth century, the Bulgarians focused on preserving the status quo. The areas south of the Carpathian Mountains were for the longest time part of Bulgaria. Because of the *via militaris* the Bulgarians became open to influences from Central and Western Europe, just as did Transylvania. They were also exposed to constant danger of being invaded by nomadic tribes from the north, the more so as the steppe made it possible to get very near Bulgaria's capitals. From the end of the ninth century the danger faced by Bulgaria was made use of by Byzantium. Because of its proximity, Byzantium rose to the position of Bulgaria's main political Balkan partner. The constant danger, coupled with the nearness of Byzantine harbours, led the Bulgarians to resort to a policy of expansion. The way in which they attempted to remove the danger from their borders was by moving the latter southwards.

No less important was the expansion into the territories of Bulgaria's southern neighbour – more fertile than those in the north. And the same can be said of the territories inhabited by Slavs. Taking control of Sofia's Field enabled the expansion into Macedonian territories. The latter turned out to be no less enduring than that directed toward Thrace territories, which were located much closer to Bulgaria's political core. The control

of territories in northern Greece, Albania or Serbia turned out to be more ephemeral.

The fall of the north-eastern Bulgaria, followed by the shift of its political centres to south-western territories, entailed a change in the country's geopolitical situation. The change opened up a new possibility of territorial expansion, especially in Illyria and continental Greece. However, this expansion had to be accompanied by the abandonment of an active policy in Thrace. And soon it was stopped by Basil II's reconquista⁷⁴.



⁷⁴ On the topic see: P.M. Strässle, *Krieg und Kriegführung in Byzanz. Die Kriege Kaiser Basileios' II. gegen die Bulgaren (976–1019)*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2006.