

## **The Byzantine historian Scylitzes describes the wars between Bulgaria and Byzantium at the time of Tsar Samuel**

*John/Ioannes Skylitzes/Scylitzes (Greek Ιωάννης Σκυλίτζης, fl. 1081) was a Byzantine historian of the late 11th century. His major work was the **Synopsis of Histories** (Σύνοψις Ἱστοριῶν), which covers the reigns of the Byzantine emperors from the death of Nicephorus I in 811 to the deposition of Michael VI in 1057. An illustrated version of the Synopsis was produced in Sicily in the 12th century, and is now at the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid, so is known as the *Madrid Skylitzes*, *Codex Græcus Matritensis Ioannis Skylitzes*, or *Skyllitzes Matritensis*. It is the only surviving illustrated manuscript of a Greek chronicle, and includes 574 images. It is unclear whether the images are copies of Byzantine images or new to the copy.*

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***Information of the Byzantine historian Scylitzes (11th-12th c.) about rebellions against Tsar Peter pointing that they were not aimed at forming a new state with different ethnic composition.***

"Mihail, the other brother of Peter, the Tsar of the Bulgarians, dreamed of seizing the power in Bulgaria. He captured a strong fortress and spread unrest throughout the Bulgarian state and many Bulgarians joined him. He died soon, however, and the adherents, because they were afraid of Peter's wrath, entered the Byzantine lands by way of Macedonia, Strymon and Hellas...

"Peter, Tsar of the Bulgarians, renewed the peace immediately after his wife's death and concluded a treaty with the Emperor and gave as hostage his own sons, Boris and Roman. Not long afterwards he died. After this his sons were sent to Bulgaria so as to occupy their father's Kingdom and to stop the advance of the Comitopuli. Because David, Moses, Aaron and Samuel, sons of one of the powerful comites of Bulgaria, intended an uprising and spread unrest throughout the Bulgarian State."

*Georgii Cedreni Compendium historianum, ed. Bonn, p.p. 312, 313, 346, 257. The original is in Greek.*

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***Scylitzes reports that the Bulgarians after a revolt entrusted the government of Bulgaria to the sons of one of the all-powerful comites in Bulgaria. Samuel became absolute ruler of Bulgaria.***

"Immediately after the death of Emperor Ioannes, the Bulgarians rose in revolt and four brothers were entrusted to govern them: David, Moses (Moysey), Aaron and Samuel (Samuil), sons of one of the all-powerful comites of the Bulgarians and for this reason named Cometopuli...

Of these four brothers, David was killed forthwith by some Wallachian vagabonds between Castoria, Prespa and the so-called "Fair Oak Wood"<sup>1</sup>. When besieging Serres Moysey was hit by a stone, cast from the wall, and died. Aaron was killed by his brother Samuel on July 14 in the locality Razmetanitsa together with all his kin because he was adherent, as they say, of the Byzantines or because he was trying to seize the power for himself. Only his son, Ivan Vladislav, was saved by Samuel's son Radomir Roman. So Samuil became the absolute ruler of all Bulgaria."

*Ibidem, p.p. 434-435, p. 275. The original is in Greek.*

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***Accounts of the same historian, Scylitzes, on the wars between Bulgarians and Byzantines - Samuel's soldiers are Bulgarians, the population which the Byzantines are expelling from the Macedonian towns is also Bulgarian.***

"Samuel set out against Thessalonica and distributed the main part of his army in ambushes and traps and he sent only a small part on an incursion to Thessalonica...

Samuel camped on the opposite bank. Because of the torrential rains, the river rose and caused floods, so that no battle whatever was expected at that moment. The magister, however, by inspecting the upper and lower reaches of the river, found a place through which he thought he could cross. In the night, having roused his troops, he crossed the river and attacked Samuel's soldiers in their carefree sleep. A very large number of them were massacred, nobody ever thinking of defense. Samuil himself and his son, Radomir were wounded, receiving grave wounds and would have been taken prisoner, had they not mixed with the dead, lying as dead. When night fell, they secretly fled towards the Aetolian mountains and from there across the peaks of these mountains crossed the Pindus and saved themselves in Bulgaria. And the magister, after freeing the Byzantines that had been taken prisoner and stripping the Bulgarians who had fallen, robbed the enemy camp and with a very rich loot returned to Thessalonica with his troops...

In 6508, 13 indiction (=999 AD) the Emperor sent a strong army against the Bulgarian fortress beyond the mountain Hemus...The Byzantine troops captured Great and Little Preslav, as well as Pliska and returned unharmed and victorious.

The following year the Emperor again set out against the Bulgarians via Thessalonica. He was joined by the governor of Berrhoea<sup>2</sup> Dobromir, who surrendered the town to the Emperor and was honored with the dignity of anthypatus. The defender of Serbia<sup>3</sup> Nikola, who, because of his small stature was called by the diminutive name of Nikolitsa, put up a valiant resistance and staunchly endured the siege imposed on him. The Emperor, however, set himself the task to capture the fortress and succeeded, taking Nikolitsa in person as prisoner. He drove the Bulgarians from there and left a garrison of Byzantines. After all this he returned to the capital, taking Nikolitsa with him, whom he distinguished with the title of a patrician. The inconstant Nikolitsa escaped from there and making his way secretly to Samuel, together with him began to besiege Serbia. The Emperor, however, moved swiftly and freed the town from the siege, and Nikolitsa fled with Samuel...

The Emperor went to Thessaly and rebuilt the castles destroyed by Samuel while those which were in the hands of Bulgarians he captured by siege and resettled the Bulgarians in the so-called Voleron<sup>4</sup>. After setting up a strong guard in all the fortresses, he returned to the so-called Vodena. Vodena is a small fortress situated on a steep rock where the waters of the Ostrovo lake fall, which run underground and at this place come to the surface again. As the inhabitants of this town did not surrender of their own free will, the Emperor took it by siege. He deported them also in Voleron, then installed a strong guard in the town and returned to Thessalonica.

Next year, 15th indiction (=1003 AD), the Emperor set out on a march against Vidin and captured it by force after full eight months of siege. While he was busy with the siege, Samuel with a swift movement suddenly fell on Adrianople on the very day of the Assumption of the Virgin. By sudden assault he also seized the fair annually held and attended by a great crowd and after collecting a big booty, returned to his country. And the Emperor, after fortifying Vidin very well, returned to the capital without losses, having devastated and destructed all Bulgarian fortresses on his way. When he approached the town of Skopie, he found Samuel camping carefree across the Axios river, which

is now called Vardar. Relying on the river being in flood, this giving no possibilities for crossing, he set up his camp in a negligent manner. But a soldier found a ford and led the Emperor through it. Shocked by his sudden appearance, Samuel hastily fled in confusion, and his tent and the entire camp were captured. And the town of Skopie was surrendered to the Emperor by Roman, the son of Peter, Tsar of the Bulgarians and brother of Boris, called also Simeon after the name of his grandfather and placed there as governor by Samuel. The Emperor received him and after distinguishing him for his decision with the title of patrician and prepositor, sent him as a strategus to Abydos.

Passing from there, the Emperor set out for Pernik whose defender was Krakra, a man excellent in military matters. He spent there quite a long time and lost a considerable number of soldiers in the siege. Finding the fortress impregnable and Krakra impervious to flattery or to other promises or proposals, he moved back to Philippopolis. Whence he returned to Constantinople."

*Ibidem*, p.p. 449-456, p.p. 278, 280, 282-285. The original is in Greek.

#### Editor's Notes:

1. "*Fair Oak Wood*" refers to the area of "Krassivite Dybravi" (Красивите дъбрави (дъбове)" (Greek: *καλή δρυς* — *kale dris*) close to Prespa in Macedonia, now Republic of Greece
2. *Berrhoea* is the medieval Greek name of the town of *Stara Zagora* in the Thracian valley of Bulgaria (Slav name *Berroe*)
3. *Serbia* refers to the town of *Servia* (in Greek Σέρβια) in Western Macedonia, Republic of Greece located on the right bank of the river Aliakmonas (Slav *Bistritza*).
4. *Voleron* is a geographic area located in Northern Greece between the rivers *Nestos* and *Evros* (Slav *Mesta* and *Maritza*).

#### Links:

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