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Writing at the Emperor’s Behest: A Remark on Theodore Daphnopates’ Correspondence to Bulgarian Tsar Symeon I the Great (893–927)

STRESZCZENIE

Pisząc na rozkaz cesarza. Uwagi na temat korespondencji Teodora Dafnopata do bułgarskiego cara Symeona I Wielkiego (893–927)

Listy wysokiego dygnitarza bizantyńskiego Teodora Dafnopata, wysłane do bułgarskiego cara Symeona (893–927; zm. 27 V 927) w imieniu cesarza bizantyńskiego Romana I Lekapena (920–944; zm. 29 VI 948), są dobrze znane. Zostały napisane w końcowej fazie długiej wojny bizantyńsko-bułgarskiej w latach 913–927. Korespondencja Daphnopatesa wywołała i prawdopodobnie nadal będzie inspirować poważną działalność badawczą. Trudno się temu dziwić biorąc pod uwagę fakt, że listy dotyczyły niektórych aspektów bizantyńskiej ideologii i koncepcji politycznych, a także roszczeń bułgarskich z początku X w. Niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na informacjach dotyczących bizantyńskiej ludności cywilnej i jej losów pod presją nacierających wojsk wroga. Zwrócono uwagę na ich schwywanie i porwanie. Główny nacisk kładziony jest na często pomijane lub jawnie zaniedbywane informacje, które Daphnopates przekazuje w kwestii zniewolenia, handlu niewolnikami oraz wysiłków władz bizantyńskich, by sprowadzić przynajmniej część poddanych z powrotem do Cesarstwa poprzez znaną praktykę wymiany jeńców wojennych.

Słowa kluczowe: Europa Południowo-Wschodnia, dyplomacja, niewola, jeńcy wojenni, wymiana jeńców



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ABSTRACT

The letters written by Theodore Daphnopates, a high Byzantine dignitary, and sent to Bulgarian Tsar Symeon (r. 893–927; d. May 27, 927) on behalf of the Byzantine Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920–944; d. June 29, 948) in the final phase of the prolonged Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 913–927, are well known. Daphnopates' correspondence has encouraged, and will probably continue to encourage, research activity due to its focus on both the aspects of Byzantine political ideology and concepts, and on the Bulgarian claims in the early 10th century. This text focuses on information concerning Byzantine civilians and their fate under the pressure of advancing enemy troops. Attention is paid to their capture and abduction. The main focus of this article is on the often overlooked or overtly neglected statements that Daphnopates offers on enslavement, slave trafficking, and the efforts of the Byzantine authorities to bring at least some of their subjects back to the Empire through the familiar practice of exchanging prisoners of war.

Keywords: Southeastern Europe, peace treaty, diplomacy, captivity, prisoners of war, exchange of captives

Introduction

IN the opening lines of an article on prisoners of war in the Baltic area between the 12th–13th centuries, Kurt Villads Jensen, a Danish scholar, points out that, given the scale, frequency and cruelty of conflicts in the region during the period, there is a high probability of casualties in the course of hostilities for a significant part of the population along the south coast in the Baltic Sea. It is not only about material damage, but especially about abduction, enslavement or massacre¹. The danger to the inhabitants of the Balkan provinces of Byzantium during the large-scale Byzantine-Bulgarian war between 913–927 is of such magnitude. This short text is not intended to go into detail on the variety of aspects of this protracted and devastating war with many victims between the two greatest Orthodox powers in the 10th century. The article's aim is much narrower. It focuses on the three letters composed by the high Byzantine dignitary, Theodore Daphnopates (letter numbers 5–7, according to the arrangement of his epistolary collection), and sent to Tsar Symeon (r. 893–927; d. May 27, 927) on behalf of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920–944; d. June 29, 948) during a short period of time (from late 924 – early 925 to late 926 – early 927) and during the final stage

¹ K.V. Jensen, *Prosiners of War in the Baltic in the XII–XIII Centuries*, “E-Strategica” 2017, no. 1, pp. 285–295.

in the mentioned Byzantine-Bulgarian². Undoubtedly, the letters in question are well known among scholars³. However, it is worth noting that despite the critical edition and translation of Theodore Daphnopates' epistolography, there are statements that it remained "poorly studied and underestimated" in many details⁴. In fact, when it comes to aspects related to the war between 913–927, this statement is only partially⁵. On the other hand, concerning the

² *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance*, eds et transl. J. Darrouzès, L.G. Westerink, Paris 1978, pp. 57–85; *Theodoros Daphnopates*, [in:] *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit Online*, eds R.-J. Lilie et al., Berlin 2013, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ29849/html> (accessed: 12 II 2021).

³ For the Byzantine epistolography in general see: K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, München 1897, pp. 452–454; J. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du X^e siècle* [= Archives de l'Orient chrétien, vol. VI], Paris 1960; H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, Bd. I, München 1978, pp. 199–239; M. Mullett, *The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter*, [in:] *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, eds eadem, R. Scott, Birmingham 1981, pp. 75–93; M. Mullett, *The Language of Diplomacy*, [in:] *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, eds J. Shepard, S. Franklin, Aldershot 1992, pp. 203–216; P. Hatlie, *Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography*, "Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies" 1996, vol. XX, pp. 213–248; M. Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* [= Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, vol. II], Aldershot 1997, pp. 11–43; eadem, *Epistolography*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, eds E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon, R. Cormack, Oxford 2008, pp. 882–893; D.A. Chernoglazov, *Laus epistulae acceptae: ob evolyutsii vizantiyskogo epistolyarnogo komplimenta*, "Vizantiyskiy vremennik" 2010, vol. LXIX(XCIV), pp. 174–186; Al. Riehle, *Introduction: Byzantine Epistolography: A Historical and Historiographical Sketch*, [in:] *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography*, ed. Al. Riehle, Leiden 2020, pp. 1–30; S. Kotzabassi, *Epistolography and Rhetoric*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 177–199; Fl. Bernard, *Epistolary Communication: Rituals and Codes*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 307–332.

⁴ D.A. Chernoglazov, *Beobachtungen zu den Briefen des Theodoros Daphnopates. Neue Tendenzen in der byzantinischen Literatur des zehnten Jahrhunderts*, "Byzantische Zeitschrift" 2013, vol. CVI, no. 2, pp. 623–644; idem, *Opisaniya okhoty v pis'ma Feodora Dapnopata*, "Antichnaya drevnost' i sredniye veka" 2015, vol. XLIII, pp. 208–228; J. Duffy, *Authorship and the Letters of Theodore Daphnopates*, [in:] *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, eds T. Shawcross, I. Toth, Cambridge 2018, pp. 547–557.

⁵ V.N. Zlatarski, *Pismata na vizantiyskiya imperator Roman Lakapena do balgarskiya tsar Simeona*, "Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniya, nauka i knizhnina" 1896, vol. XIII, pp. 282–322; E. Aleksandrov, *Diplomaticheskaya perepiska tsarya Simeona s imperatorom Romanom Lakapinom*, "Palaeobulgarica" 1990, vol. XIV, no. 2, pp. 16–22; S.N. Malakhov, *Kontseptsiya mira v politicheskoy ideologii Vizantii pervoy poloviny X v.: Nikolay Mistik i Feodor Dapnopat*, "Antichnaya drevnost' i sredniye veka" 1995, vol. XXVII, no. 3, pp. 19–31; A.S. Mokhov,

captivity and prisoners of war during the conflicts in question, a statement about the need for new studies and scholars' additional activities seems particularly correct. The statement seems surprising, not only because the strokes in the correspondence are confirmed in other sources of the era, but also because the high dignitary's letters are an expression of the will of the Emperor. Respectively, everything he wrote to the Bulgarian ruler are details of the official position of the authorities in Constantinople.

Wartime writing in search of peace

Given that Theodore Daphnopates took on the responsible task of contacting the Bulgarian ruler after the death of the influential Patriarch of Constantinople in the spring of 925, the similarities with a number of passages from previous correspondences led by Nicholas I Mystikos (901–907, 912–925, d. May 11, 925), similar phrases and motives are unlikely to surprise⁶. Although they are not comparable in number with the voluminous correspondences between Tsar Symeon and the Patriarch, they are considered a kind of continuation of the diplomatic correspondences of the high Byzantine clergyman to the Bulgarian ruler⁷. The connection between the hierarch's letters and those of the Byzantine dignitary, and the general purpose for which they were written, is already stated in the opening lines of Daphnopates' letter 5. The passage

K.R. Kapsalykova, *Obrazy vojny v vizantiyskoy istoricheskoy literature X v.: Feodor Dafnopat*, "Nauchnyye vedomosti Belgorodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta" 2015, ser. Istoriya. Politologiya 36, pp. 44–49; M.J. Leszka, *Bizantyńscy intelektualisci o wojnie i pokoju (Mikolaj Mistyk i Teodor Dafnopates)*, "Vox Patrum" 2021, vol. LXXVII, pp. 35–50.

⁶ *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance...*, pp. 15–16.

⁷ For the life and works of Nicholas I Mystikos see: *Nikolaos I. Mystikos*, [in:] *Propographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit Online*, eds R.-J. Lilie et al., Berlin 2013, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/database/PMBZ/entry/PMBZ28039/html> (accessed: 14 II 2021); R.J.H. Jenkins, *A Note on the Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus*, [in:] idem, *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and the 10th Centuries*, London 1970, pp. 145–147; L.G. Westerink, *Introduction: I. Life of Nicholas*, [in:] *Nicolai Constantinopolitani patriarchae Epistolae*, eds et transl. R.J.H. Jenkins, L.G. Westerink [= *Corpus Fontium Histotiae Byzantinae*, vol. VI], Washington DC 1973, pp. xv–xxvii; Y.N. Lyubarskiy, *Zamechaniya o Nikolaye Mistike v svyazi s izdaniyem yego sochineniy*, "Vizantiyskiy vremennik" 1986, vol. XLVII, pp. 101–108; Al. Kazhdan, *Nicholas I Mystikos*, [in:] *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I–III, eds idem et al., Oxford 1991, pp. 1466–1467; Vl. Stanković, *Carigradski patrijarsi i carevi Makedonske dinastije*, Belgrade 2003, pp. 88–106.

reads as follows: "By many signs, our God-appointed imperial authority is convinced that you, my spiritual brothers, are always indulging in obscene and empty thoughts, deliberately interfering with the wonderful work of peace, and never sincerely and without cunning has anything been written or thought. [...] Having carefully considered this and refuted in every way the unjust objections and arguments presented by you, brother, we took advantage of the previous letters and persuaded you through them, on the one hand, to stop striving for murders and wars, and on the other to adhere to the blissful peace, so that perhaps by sending frequent letters we may be able to alleviate the cruelty of your heart"⁸.

One can mention that the phrases inherent in the correspondence of Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos, referring to bloodshed and murder, with some variations, are present several times in all three letters addressed to the Bulgarian ruler on behalf of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos. Again, the emblematic motif of a defiled land and the fratricidal nature of the conflict between co-religionists is used, along with the corresponding references to *Genesis* 4. The motif is further enhanced by the presence of passages marking the looting and destruction of settlements in the European provinces of Byzantium⁹. The similarity in the phrases referring to the damage and violence suffered by Byzantine subjects, such as the breakup of families through orphanhood, widowhood, or bereavement, is visible. Daphnopates also did not omit to include in his texts the well-known accusations of the particularly unacceptable murder of local clerics, which was repeated multiple times by Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos in his own correspondence to Tsar Symeon¹⁰. A vivid and imaginative passage from Daphnopates' letter 5 reads: "You yourself first upset us and first violated the agreements and oaths by marching against us, ravaging the land and capturing cities, slaughtering the entire population with a sword and destroying divine altars to the ground, and sacrificing priests and monks to the sword [...]"¹¹.

⁸ *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance...*, Ep. 5, 57.2–11.

⁹ *Ibidem*, Ep. 5, 59.21–27, 37–42; Ep. 6, 77.125–128; Ep. 7, 81.16–21; Ep. 7, 83.38–43; Ep. 7, 83.61–85.66.

¹⁰ Cf. *Nicolai Constantinopolitani patriarchae...*, Ep. 11, 74.39–40; Ep. 14, 96.74; Ep. 21, 144.55–57; Ep. 23, 160.63; Ep. 26, 182.32; Ep. 28, 192.11.

¹¹ *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance...*, Ep. 5, 61.69–72.

No less eloquent is another fragment from letter 7: “What will I wail for and what will I complain about? The misfortunes of the enslaved or the innumerability of the dead? The groans of the orphans or the tears of the poor widows? Is it the desolation of the earth or the destruction of war? How many altars of God have been destroyed! How many priests and monks have perished – some in the performance of the divine sacraments, and others with sacred praise of the mouth! [...]”¹².

Given the Patriarch’s suggestions that compensation in the form of money and valuables, as well as territorial acquisitions in Bulgaria’s favor were among the desirable and possible solutions that the ruling circles in Constantinople were willing to accept in exchange for a peace treaty with Tsar Symeon, the Emperor’s refusal to cede parts of Byzantine Balkan possessions stands out impressively¹³. According to Daphnopates’ letters, Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos is reluctant to accept any surrender of imperial possessions in the Balkans and insists that, among the prerequisites for peace, the two countries return to the outlined border, according to the agreements between the Bulgarian ruler and Emperor Leo VI in the late 9th – early 10th century. The relatively extensive text of Daphnopates’ letter 5 deserves special attention in this section: “We addressed your mind with peaceful messages, zealously gave gifts, and even more zealously promised to give if you, brother, are willing to live in peace; we sent holy fathers to beg you, we sent messengers with proposals for peace; and at last we met one another, which no one has ever seen happen; we talked about God-pleasing things, even if we did not really find any of them in you. And if you also want another concession, then what other concession should we talk about? About what you want? In our opinion, this is not a concession, but a fall; not devastation, but desolation; not

¹² *Ibidem*, Ep. 7, 83.38–43.

¹³ *Nicolai Constantinopolitani patriarchae...*, Ep. 18, 122.46–54; Ep. 19, 128.25–27; Ep. 25, 176.84–92. See also: J. Chrysostomides, *Byzantine Concepts of War and Peace*, [in:] *War, Peace and World Orders in European History*, eds A.V. Hartmann, B. Heuser, London–New York 2001, pp. 91–101; J. Howard-Johnston, *A Short Piece of Narrative History: War and Diplomacy in the Balkans, Winter 921/2 – Spring 924*, [in:] *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization. In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*, ed. E. Jeffreys, Cambridge 2006, pp. 340–360; I. Stouraitis, *Byzantine War against Christians – an Emphylios Polemos?*, “Byzantina Symmeikta” 2010, vol. XX, pp. 85–110. Cf. also the most recent M.J. Leszka, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–50.

unification, but rupture, because he who passes on to him the trust of God from foreign and bloodthirsty nations is condemned as one who has committed not a concession but a crime¹⁴.

An excerpt from the final passages of the letter in question is even more illustrative: “Reject stubbornness against peace agreements, and if you wish, we will agree to what we have often informed you, as we have been informing you of our unchanging decisions, namely: we will never give you a single inch of land, a fortress, or any another space, but only that to the conditions concluded by the emperor kyrios Leo, we will add the hundred items of scaramangium you know, because he, when you both took the great oaths of peace, did not accept anything that would cause death and a disgrace to the Roman state”¹⁵.

The referenced examples can easily be supplemented with other passages from Daphnopates' letters to the Bulgarian ruler, although the persistence of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos comes against the backdrop of Bulgarian military domination in the conflict and the inability of Byzantine troops to counteract effectively enough. One can be reminded of the several Bulgarian successes in Constantinople's immediate vicinity as well as in Mainland Greece in the 920s. It is noteworthy that the information in the first letters sent on behalf of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos to Tsar Symeon also made clear that many of the fortifications in the interior were in Bulgarian hands or abandoned as unfit for protection¹⁶.

Judging by Daphnopates' correspondence, along with the unacceptable territorial demands, two other aspects were also sufficiently disturbing for Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos – Symeon's claims for the Imperial title of Bulgarians and Romans (*Basileus ton Bulgaron kai ton Rhomaion*) as well as the loss of a taxable population, either in enemy control in Byzantine territories under Bulgarian occupation or those who were doomed to further deportation and enslavement. In letter 5 we read: “Do not think, my spiritual brother, that by destroying the whole West and capturing its inhabitants, you can therefore call yourself the Emperor of the

¹⁴ Théodore Daphnopatès *Correspondance...*, Ep. 5, 63.85–96.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, Ep. 5, 67.135–143.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, Ep. 5, 59.21–27; Ep. 6, 75.90–95; Cf. also Y. Stouraitis, *Migrating in the Medieval East Roman World, ca. 600–1204*, [in:] *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone*, eds J. Preiser-Kapeller, L. Reinfandt, Y. Stouraitis, Leiden 2020, pp. 141–165 (esp. pp. 144–153).

Romans. Because they did not resort to you voluntarily, but they were captured by you by force and by war... Which Romans called you “the Emperor”? Those who are caught by you, or those who are handed over to unfaithful tribes and doomed to slavery¹⁷.

It should be emphasized that, more than a century ago, Vasil N. Zlatarski (1866–1935) drew attention to the quoted passage in his comments on the published translation of the letters. The remarks of the prominent Bulgarian medievalist are mostly in the direction of inter-Balkan political relations and the involvement of Serbs and Croats in the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict¹⁸. However, given the interest in the fate of Byzantine civilians in Bulgarian captivity from the mid-920s onward, it seems reasonable to take a close look at all fragments in Daphnopates’ letters concerning Imperial subjects caught and abducted by Symeon’s detachments during wartime activities. In fact, the imperial concerns about the negative effect of the army’s bloodshed and the loss of a taxable population in the 920s can hardly be described as surprising. Raising the question of captives cannot be isolated from the efforts of the rulers of Constantinople to bring as many of them back to Byzantium as possible. Unfortunately, neither in his first letter to Tsar Symeon nor in the next two, when it comes to imperial subjects in Bulgarian hands, Theodore Daphnopates does not actually specify exactly when their capture took place, which does not allow to specify the exact length of the captives’ detention. In general, in view of our knowledge of the age, one can point out that a stay in enemy hands can vary in chronological frameworks – from a markedly short one to one that lasts for years or decades, or until the end of the captives’ lives. As it is well-known, even taking into account regional, ethnic and religious characteristics, early medieval Europe, as well as the Islamic world in the Middle East and North Africa, can be marked by apostasy, escape, ransom, exchange, release by force or being set free (regardless of whether before or after the conflict). However, it is not in all of the mentioned options that the end of captivity is connected with the former prisoner’s return to the homeland.

In fact, regarding the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict between 913–927, some of the abovementioned options are not quite re-

¹⁷ *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance...*, Ep. 5, 59.37–41; Ep. 5, 59.47–61.49.

¹⁸ V.N. Zlatarski, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

levant. For example, apostasy (in the sense of apostasy from one's own religion) must be ruled out insofar as the conflict is between the Christian co-religionists in the Orthodox world. Bulgarian military superiority in open clashes with the Byzantine armies in the decade after 917 limits the possibilities for the release of Byzantine captives by force. According to records in the chronicles of the era, efforts to intercept the invading Bulgarian units clearly do not bring many benefits in limiting the devastation and liberating captives. It is noteworthy that, as in the case of the humiliating defeat for the Byzantines at Pegae, in front of Constantinople itself, these actions are not only accompanied by new casualties among the regular soldiers and command staff but also increase the number of Imperial soldiers in Bulgarian captivity¹⁹.

In view of the development of hostilities in the 920s, single or small-scale group escapes, with all the attendant danger, seem to be a far-fetched way of ending captivity in comparison to liberation through force. There is an explicit emphasis on such an option in Daphnopates' letter 5. The high Byzantine dignitary not only pointed out that some Byzantine captives "run away from your country and seek refuge with us as to fellow countrymen" but Daphnopates goes even further in the following lines: "Hence, think about it. Last year, about twenty thousand Bulgarians fled to our peaceful and amicable country, and it seems that they hated your warlike zeal and irreconcilable plans [...]"²⁰.

Undoubtedly, the subjective disregard of the mentioned fragment of the correspondence to the Bulgarian ruler is unacceptable. However, it can also be said that any unreserved acceptance of the unconditionally surprising (and perhaps quite exaggerated) number seems superfluous. It is very likely that the key to the true meaning of the information presented is related to the dichotomy "peace – hostility" and the accompanying lines, for the free choice of those wishing to live in a "peaceful and amicable country", as opposed to abducted and forcibly detained in enemy hands.

Given the legislative activities of the Byzantine emperors as well as the reception of some of the Imperial legal codes in newly

¹⁹ *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister* [Pseudo-Symeon], *Georgius Monachus*, rec. I. Bekker, Bonn 1838, pp. 401.3–402.4; *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, rec. S. Wahlgren [= *Corpus Fontium Histotiae Byzantinae*, vol. XLIV/1], Berlin–New York 2006, pp. 316.126–317.148.

²⁰ *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance...*, Ep. 5, 59.42–45.

converted Bulgaria, the unfortunate fate of the captured Byzantines could be alleviated in cases of ransom by their families or fellow co-religionists (at least in theory). Unfortunately, neither Daphnopates nor other contemporary Byzantine authors present unequivocal evidence to the extent which the legally mandated obligations *de facto* contribute to the return of captured soldiers and civilians from Bulgaria back to Byzantium. The far less numerous, Old-Bulgarian primary sources also do not contribute to overcoming the deficits in question. However, it must be acknowledged that the lack of information about the redemption and release of the Byzantines from Bulgarian captivity, through the efforts of their relatives (or concern about their fate from representatives of the clergy or other laymen co-religionists), can not be accepted as proof that such efforts (successful or fruitless) were not undertaken by the imperial subjects in the 920s²¹. On the other hand, for Constantinople's ruling circles during that time, ransoming captives was far from just a personal or family commitment. State intervention, either with or without the mediation of the church and its hierarchs, has had its traditions since the early Byzantine era²². As it is well-known, exchanging captives during a temporary lull in hostilities or in reaching peace between warring parties is often just an addition to their mutual exchange agreements. The practice was consolidated in the wars with the Arabs and was significant for the efforts of the Byzantine authorities to bring back their subjects (warriors and civilians) that are in enemy captivity²³.

²¹ Commentaries about such efforts as well as the respectful obstacles in Y. Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, transl. J.M. Todd, Cambridge 2009, pp. 50–53. For a more general perspective, see H. Fancy, *Captivity, Ransom and Manumission, 500–1420*, [in:] *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. II (AD 500–1420), eds C. Perry et al., Cambridge 2021, pp. 53–75.

²² N. Lenski, *Captivity, Slavery and Cultural Exchange between Rome and Germans from the First to the Seventh Century CE*, [in:] *Invisible Citizens: Captives and Their Consequences*, ed. C.M. Cameron, Salt Lake City 2008, pp. 80–109; idem, *Captivity and Romano-Barbarian Interchange*, [in:] *Romans, Barbarians and the Transformation of the Roman World*, eds R.W. Mathisen, D. Shanzer, Farnham 2011, pp. 185–198.

²³ Cf. A.J. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World*, Oxford 1973, pp. 377–393; A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, *Some Remarks on the Fate of Prisoners of War in Byzantium (9th–10th Centuries)*, [in:] *Atti del Congresso Interdisciplinare di Studi Storici, La liberazione dei 'captivi' tra christianità e islam*, ed. G. Cipollone, Vatican City 2000, pp. 583–620; Y. Rotman, *Byzance face à l'Islam arabe, VII^e–X^e siècle. D'un droit territorial à l'identité par la foi*, "Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales" 2005, vol. LX, no. 4, pp. 767–788; idem, *Byzantine Slavery and the*

It is interesting to note that, in the 920s, an offer to exchange prisoners came from the Bulgarians and not from the Byzantines. At least, such an impression is created by the final passages from letter 20 of Patriarch Nikolas I Mystikos to Tsar Symeon²⁴. It is no less significant that, despite the stated readiness, no further action in this direction has been taken. The reasons vary within a significantly wide range, as I have already had the opportunity to emphasize. Among the factors that may have had a counterproductive influence is the significant imbalance in the number of Imperial subjects held in Bulgarian captivity, compared to Bulgarians who experienced the hardships of captivity in Byzantium. It cannot be excluded that the suggestion made by Tsar Symeon was simply a diplomatic game and did not overlap with his real intentions. Comments on the excerpted passage from letter 20 should not be isolated from the circumstance that the obstacles were not due solely to the large discrepancy in the number of captives on one side or the other²⁵.

The reports concerning Byzantine captives in the letters in question present substantial additional points. The accusation that Tsar Symeon doomed Byzantine captives (his Christian co-religionists) to slavery among pagans, an action inconsistent with his claims of being Emperor to Bulgarians and Romans (i.e. Byzantines), is present not only in letter 5²⁶. The same information also appears in letter 7. The lines read as follows: “Why, then, of the people of the two of us, some are oppressed in captivity and prison, and others are betrayed by you into the bondage of unfaithful peoples?”²⁷.

The information about the different policies pursued by the Byzantine and Bulgarian rulers towards the captives in the conflict is distinctive. Here it is worth asking not only why, in the 920s, the imperial authorities preferred to keep the captured Bulgarians

Mediterranean World..., pp. 27–44, 47–81; A. Ramadān, *The Treatment of Arab Prisoners of War in Byzantium, 9th–10th Centuries*, “Annales islamologiques” 2009, vol. XLIII, pp. 155–194; K. Durak, *Performance and Ideology in the Exchange of Prisoners between the Byzantines and the Islamic Near Easterners in the Early Middle Ages*, [in:] *Medieval and Early Modern Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean*, eds A. Ozturkmen, E. Birge Vitz, Turnhout 2014, pp. 167–180.

²⁴ *Nicolai Constantinopolitani patriarchae...*, Ep. 20, 140.169–191.

²⁵ For additional details see: Y. Hristov, *Written Not with Ink, but with Tears: Byzantine Civilians in Bulgarian Captivity according to the Letters of Patriarch Nikolas I Mystikos (901–907, 912–925)*, “Mediaevalia” 2022, vol. XLIII, pp. 137–169.

²⁶ *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance...*, Ep. 5, 59.40–42, 59.47–61.49.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, Ep. 7, 83.36–38.

imprisoned (at least at first), instead of selling them into slavery, but also why the same outrages of captivity and enslavement of imperial subjects in Symeon's Bulgaria were not expressed. In this regard, it is not pointless to recall the expected long-term benefits of the captives' retention in early medieval Bulgaria. For example, some Byzantine hagiographical accounts refer that prisoners of war were distributed as booty and inserted into provincial households²⁸. Moreover, the captured soldiers, as well as kidnapped non-combatants, did not necessarily flow into the hands of the higher social strata. The forced labor of the enslaved is applicable to the activities within households of conventional warriors – cattle-breeders, peasants and artisans in their peaceful life. The Old Bulgarian collection of miracle stories, named *A Tale of the Iron Cross*, also provides essential details about such a possibility in records concerning estates that could hardly be defined as lordly mansions²⁹. At the risk of some over-interpretation, it can be assumed that the latter option, despite all hardships and mistreatment, is preferred over the inclusion of captured Byzantines in slave exports outside Bulgarian possessions. After all, based on the historical experience of conflicts with their northern neighbor, the imperial ruling circles had reason to hope that when the hostilities ceased, the captives would return to Byzantium, either in exchange (or ransom) or released as an expression of mutual concessions and goodwill³⁰. In fact, although not as direct as the refusal to make territorial concessions, or the stated tendency to pay tribute in Bulgaria's favor in withdrawing from the occupied lands, Theodore Daphnopates' letters consist of a recognizable hint that the exchange of prisoners and the release of imperial subjects in Bulgarian hands are among the desired and expected conditions for negotiating peace between the two countries. If the emphasis in Letter 6 that the Arabs, notwithstanding their hostility to the Empire, "by making peace for two or three years, observe it inviolably, by gaining theirs and returning ours"³¹, may be lost in the face of all the verbosity, then in letter 7 the emphasis is definitely perceived more clearly.

²⁸ *Miracula S. Georgii*, ed. J.B. Aufhauser, Leipzig 1913, p. 24.4–19.

²⁹ B. Angelov, *Skazanie za zhelezniya krast*, "Starobalgaska literatura" 1971, vol. I, pp. 144–145, 148–150.

³⁰ Y. Hristov, *Dusha za Dusha: Otnosno razmqnata na plennici mezhdu Bulgariya i Vizantiya prez Rannoto Srednoviekovie*, "Studia Iuridico-Historica" 2016, vol. V, pp. 76–99.

³¹ *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance...*, Ep. 6, 71.28–30.

The text reads: "I know nothing more disgusting and difficult than the war between brothers. Know, my dear brother, that after others have started the war and have been justly exterminated by God, it is unjust that all the people who have done nothing wrong should be killed. Let us not be worse off than the barbarians, who, even if they live in peace with us and exchange prisoners, still do not love perfect peace because they are not of perfect faith. And you, my spiritual brother, as a supporter of the perfect and correctly transmitted faith, why do you not agree to peaceful and indestructible treaties³²."

The enclosed lines give sufficient grounds to assume that for the Byzantine authorities the positive solution to the issue of prisoners of war was seen as an important prerequisite for a mutually satisfactory and peaceful end of the conflict. However, despite the appeals, the situation with the imperial subjects in Bulgarian captivity changed only at the beginning of the reign of Symeon's successor Tsar Peter I (r. 927–969). The captives' release started almost immediately after the conclusion of the peace treaty and the marriage between the newly enthroned Bulgarian Tsar and Maria, the granddaughter of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos, in October 927, and lasted for the next following years after that³³.

Conclusion

Given the interest in the three letters written by Theodore Daphnopates and sent to the Bulgarian ruler Symeon on behalf of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos, several key aspects deserve to be summarized. Primarily, it is essential that the diplomatic correspondence under review point to the fact that in the 920s the Balkan provinces of Byzantium continued to be an active slaving zone for the recently Christianized Bulgarians³⁴. The reports in Daphnopates'

³² *Ibidem*, Ep. 7, 83.62–85.70.

³³ *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio* [= Corpus Fontium Histotiae Byzantinae, vol. I], vol. I, eds et transl. G. Moravcsik, R.J.H. Jenkins, Washington DC 1967, p. 74.158–161; *Theophanes Continuatus*, p. 419.10–24; *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, p. 332.473–487; *Ioannis Scylitzae. Synopsis Historiarum* [= Corpus Fontium Histotiae Byzantinae, vol. V], rec. I. Thurn, Berlin–New York 2006, pp. 225.1–226.11. See also: M.J. Leszka, K. Marinow, *Peace*, [in:] *The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I*, eds eorundem, Łódź–Kraków 2018, pp. 47–53.

³⁴ For the slaving zones see: J. Fynn-Paul, *Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era*,

letters quite unequivocally emphasized whose subjects were captured, deported and enslaved in the final stages of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 913–927. In addition, no less noteworthy are references that some Byzantine civilians were not only forcibly detained in Bulgaria but were sold into slavery abroad. Because of the efforts to achieve peace between the two warring parties, the exchange of prisoners, which was a desired and sought-after solution, is also particularly indicative. All of this is a proper reason to consider the mentioned fragments of the epistolography of the high Byzantine dignitary in question as a crucial primary source for any study concerning the fate of prisoners of war in the inter-Balkan conflicts of the Empire in the early Middle Ages.

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