





Yanko Hristov (Blagoevgrad)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7882-9749>

Dafina Kostadinova (Blagoevgrad)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2466-7980>

BYZANTINE BATTLESHIPS AND MILITARY TRANSPORT VESSELS ALONG THE HOSTILE SHORES

Abstract. The establishment of the Bulgarian Khanate along the Lower Danube River and the Northern Black Sea coast changed the geo-political situation in the early medieval Southeastern Europe. It is beyond doubt that the Bulgarians did not develop navy or commercial fleets at that time. However, one cannot reveal substantial reserves about the statement that Khan Asparukh' descendants were not completely disadvantaged by their Black Sea coastline that they managed to keep under control due to political and military reasons. This becomes clear if the prolonged series of clashes between Byzantium and Bulgaria in 750s–770s are taken into consideration. Despite an obvious usefulness of the cooperation between land armies and navy squadrons in those endeavors, as well as the non-challenged Byzantine maritime supremacy along the Black Sea shores, the Imperial navy met substantial difficulties or did not completely accomplish its tasks on many occasions.

Keywords: Byzantine navy, western Black Sea, debarkment, dikes, ditches and ramparts, battle of Anchialos (763 AD)

Introduction

It is an undeniable truth, given the geographical location, that from the early Byzantine era to its end under the Ottoman Turks, Byzantium was a state whose rulers relied on both land and sea forces. In times of stability and military power, and in times of hardship, the vast coastline of the Empire's continental and island possessions, together with the seafaring traditions of their population and some geopolitical challenges, were the reason for the Byzantines to remain involved in the maritime activities¹. Although some dangerous rivals for

¹ Cf. H. AHRWEILER, *Byzance et la mer. La marine de guerre, la politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzance aux VI^e–XV^e siècles*, Paris 1966; D. OBOLENSKY, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, London–New York 1971, p. 9–18; M. WHITTOW, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1996, p. 15–37; J.H. PRYOR, *Byzantium and the Sea: Byzantine*

the fleets of the emperors of Constantinople appeared in the 5th century in the Mediterranean, (with some exceptions concerning the Rus' endeavors) the domination of the Imperial fleet hardly had any alternatives in the Black Sea until the end of the 12th century. This, in turn, explains to a great extent the perception of the Black Sea and the surrounding shores as a secondary operational theater for the Imperial Navy². Of course, the lack of a truly competitive maritime power on the Black Sea coast does not mean that the rulers of Constantinople ignored threats in the Caucasus, the Eastern European steppes or the Balkans, or that they were negligent and did not try to take advantage of their favorable geopolitical situation. On the contrary, even a cursory glance at the Byzantino-Bulgarian conflicts – from the victory of Khan Asparukh (c. 670s–700) in the Battle of Onglos in 680, to the Byzantine reconquest of the Lower Danube lands by Emperor Basil II (976–1025), is sufficient to convince one in the opposite³. Undoubtedly, concerning such particular topic as the history of maritime warfare against the Empire's Balkan rivals, it must be emphasized that the future underwater archeological research, excavations and shipwrecks' map in the western Black Sea can change significantly⁴. However, given the current situation, the information in the narratives from

Fleets and the History of the Empire in the Age of the Macedonian Emperors, c. 900–1025 CE, [in:] *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. J.B. HATTENDORF, R.W. UNGER, Woodbridge 2003, p. 83–104; T.C. LOUNGHIS, *Byzantium in the Eastern Mediterranean. Safeguarding East Roman Identity (407–1204)*, Nicosia 2010, p. 24–76; A. GINALIS, *The Impact of Byzantium's Political and Economic History on Mediterranean Seafaring*, [in:] *Schiffe und ihr Kontext. Darstellungen, Modelle, Bestandteile – von der Bronzezeit bis zum Ende des Byzantinischen Reiches*, ed. H. FRIELINGHAUS, T. SCHMIDTS, V. TSAMAKDA, Mainz 2017, p. 199–208.

² S. COSENTINO, *Naval Warfare: Military, Institutional and Economic Aspects*, [in:] *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204*, ed. Y. STOURAITIS, Leiden–Boston 2018 [= BCBW, 3], p. 310–311.

³ With an emphasis on the goals and objectives (related to transport, debarking and descents, supplies, blockades and sieges, etc.), the Polish scholar Kiril Marinow proposed a solid argumentation of the classification of the Byzantine naval forces activity against the Early Medieval Bulgaria. Cf. K. MARINOW, *Zadania floty cesarskiej w wojnach bizantyńsko-bułgarskich (VII–XI w.)*, [in:] *Byzanti-na Europaea. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, ed. M. KOKOSZKO, M.J. LESZKA, Łódź 2007 [= BL, 11], p. 381–392.

⁴ As early as 1976, Mikhail Lazarov drew attention to the special organization, training and equipment necessary for discovering traces of shipwrecks of the Byzantine military and military-transport vessels of the 8th century. He further emphasized that in view of their cargo, it would be naive to believe that there is an abundance of preserved relics. Cf. M. ЛАЗАРОВ, *Потъналата флотилия*, Варна 1976, p. 141–145. In recent years, the research of the team of Center for Underwater Archaeology (Sozopol) has been marked by significant consistency. The results are extremely encouraging. In 2017, a total of 23 shipwrecks were studied in the waters of the Burgas Bay and in the nearby waters in the interior of the Black Sea on an area of 142 km²; 9 of these 23 shipwrecks were completely unknown, hence, an additional study (including diving) was conducted until in 2016 a Byzantine vessel from the tenth century was discovered. Cf.: Л. ВАГАЛИНСКИ, Д. АДАМС, К. ДИМИТРОВ, К. БЪЧВАРОВ, Р. ПАЧЕКО-РУИЗ, В. ДРАГАНОВ, Д. ГЪРБОВ, *Морски археологически проект Черно море*:

that era still remains a crucial source. For that objective reason, the focus in the following pages is on some descriptions of the Byzantino-Bulgarian wars of the 750s–770s. There is a number of records concerning the participation of the navy. A quick glimpse clearly illustrates the fact that the success of the fleet is influenced by the overall course of the campaign, but at the same time, it is not necessarily linked to the ultimate victory or defeat in the conflict. It is worth paying attention not only to the outcomes, but also to the conditions and peculiarities in the naval endeavors during the wars of Emperor Constantine V (741–775) against the Bulgarian Khanate.

Hundred horse-carrying ships, loaded with a force of cavalry and sent to the Istros

After the end of the great Arab siege of Constantinople in 717–718, the Byzantines, despite their inability to ensure peace on the coasts of Sicily, Sardinia and the Southern parts of the Italian peninsula, or to put an end to the pirate raids in the Aegean, kept their dominance in the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean stable for about a century ahead. The success near the Bosphorus almost immediately escalated into a counter-offensive by the Imperial Navy. Due to it, some of the previously lost positions were restored and raids were made on the shores of Egypt. The attacks were repeated in the 720s and the 730s. The Byzantine expedition in 747 was even more decisive and devastating, when the united Syrian and Egyptian Arab squadrons were severely defeated and the naval power of the Umayyad Caliphate collapsed. A circumstance that allowed the ambitious and undoubtedly capable Emperor Constantine V to concentrate significant forces at sea during his campaigns against the Bulgarian Khanate for two decades⁵.

Археологически изследвания по българския континентален шелф, АОР 2018, р. 714–716. Some anticipated difficulties come from the fact that in many places the seabed in the waters of today's ports on the Bulgarian part of the Black Sea is clogged with layers of mud and sediments, as well as waste such as ropes, chains, nets, etc. Cf. for example: Д. ГЪРБОВ, З. ГЕОРГИЕВА, Х. АНГЕЛОВА, П. ПЕТРОВ, *Спасително археологическо проучване във връзка с предстоящо изпълнение на проект "Реконструкция и модернизация на рибарско пристанище Северна буна – Несебър" в прилежащата акватория (вътрешни морски води) на гр. Несебър*. Научен отчет, Созопол 2016; Н. ПРАХОВ, З. ГЕОРГИЕВА, К. ДИМИТРОВ, К. ВЕЛКОВСКИ, *Археологическо издирване в акваторията на пристанище "Несебър – Юг"*, АОР 2018, р. 723–725; Н. ПРАХОВ, К. ДИМИТРОВ, П. ГЕОРГИЕВ, *Комплексно археологическо проучване на акваторията на „Старинен град Несебър“*, АОР 2019, р. 738–740.

⁵ Cf. А.В. БАННИКОВ, М.А. МОРОЗОВ, *История военного флота Рима и Византии (от Юлия Цезаря до завоевания крестоносцами Константинополя)*, Санкт-Петербург 2014, р. 398–399; В. СЕСОТА, *Arab Expansion on Byzantine Territory, 632–718 AD*, [in:] *Byzantium and the Arabs. The Encounter of Civilizations from Sixth to Mid-Eighth Century*, ed. T. WOLIŃSKA, P. FILIPczAK, Łódź 2015 [= BL, 23], р. 223–269 (р. 250–269 in particular). Cf. also the recently published article: R.J. OLSEN, *The Last Arab Siege of Constantinople (717–718): a Neglected Source*, GRBS 60.3, 2020, р. 425–443.

For their comments on the events of the military clashes between Byzantium and Bulgaria in the 750s–770s historians have to rely mainly on what was written in Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronography* and Patriarch Nikephoros' *Breviarium* [*Short history*]. Both works are “problematic”, especially concerning the records for the Iconoclast period, insofar as it is difficult to say to what extent Iconophilic authors, such as Theophanes and Nikephoros, retold, abridged or changed the specifics of the information from the sources they employed for the 8th century⁶. Thus, as pointed out by Jakov Ljubarskij, modern day scholars ...*who are concerned with the problem* Wie es eigentlich gewesen war *must be very cautious dealing with the texts of such sort*⁷. In fact, some of the chroniclers' sources were probably favourable towards the policy of the Iconoclastic Emperors, at least partially. Despite Theophanes' extremely negative attitude towards Emperor Constantine V the author ...*had difficulty with his characterization of Constantine's policy. For example, the “tyrant” was successful in his wars and ...becomes particularly eloquent when describing Constantine's victories in Bulgaria...* – as is rightly specified in a key study of Byzantine literature during the period of the 650s – c. 800⁸. With a narrower focus only on the specifics of the historical work of Patriarch Nikephoros a similar emphasis makes Dragoljub Marjanović referring that

...Emperors, who are capable of restoring peace in their state, either by waging successful warfare with the enemies, or by concluding peace treaties with them, are positively regarded in the *Short history*, including the Iconoclast Constantine V as well...⁹

The well-known and often discussed descriptions in *Chronography* and in *Breviarium* regarding the outbreak of the conflict between Bulgaria and Byzantium, which took place and lasted for the third quarter of the 8th century, are quite similar.

⁶ L. BRUBAKER, J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680–850). The Sources. An Annotated Survey*, Aldershot 2001 [= BBOS, 7], p. 165–172; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, New York 2013, p. 26–31, 38–77.

⁷ J.N. LJUBARSKIJ, *Concerning the Literary Technique of Theophanes the Confessor*, Bsl 56, 1995, p. 317–322. Cf. also: P.J. ALEXANDER, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople. Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire*, Oxford 1958, p. 157–162; H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. I, München 1978 [= HA.BH, 5], p. 331–339, 344–347; C. MANGO, *Introduction*, [in:] NIKEPHOROS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, *Short History*, ed. C. MANGO, Washington D.C. 1990 [= CFHB, 13], p. 5–16; C. MANGO, R. SCOTT, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813*, trans. et ed. EIDEM, Oxford 1997, p. LII–LXIII, LXXIV–XCVII; J.N. LJUBARSKIJ, *Quellenforschung and/or Literary Criticism: Narrative Structures in Byzantine Historical Writings*, SO 73.1, 1998, p. 5–22.

⁸ A. KAZHDAN, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)*, contr. L.F. SHERRY, C. ANGELIDI, Athens 1999, p. 229.

⁹ D. MARJANOVIĆ, *Modes of Narrativity in the Short History of Nikephoros of Constantinople*, ЗРБИ 52, 2015, p. 13.

As it is well known, they tell about the settlement of Syrians and Armenians in Thrace, the construction and restoration of fortresses in the area, the Bulgarian claims due to the changed *status quo* near the southern border of the Khanate. Also a coincidence is found in that the refusal of Emperor Constantine V to satisfy the demands of the Bulgarian ruling elite was followed by hostile actions. Beyond the similarities, there are noticeable differences. Regarding the actions of the Bulgarians Theophanes wrote: ...*they made military expedition and came as far as the Long Walls in an advance on the Imperial City. After causing much destruction and taking many prisoners, they returned home unharmed*¹⁰. Patriarch Nikephoros also mentioned that the enemy squadrons were reaching the approaches to Constantinople, but he focused on the Byzantine actions to repel the invasion. The text of *Breviarium* also reads:

...On meeting his refusal, they took up arms and overran the Thracian region nearly as far as the Long Wall. (The Emperor) marched out against them and, having joined battle with them, put them to flight. He pursued them mightily and killed many Bulgarians. A short time thereafter he made an expedition against them by sea and land. Those who were embarked on the ships (which numbered five hundred) set sail by the way of the Euxine and, upon reaching river Istros, burned the Bulgarian lands and made many captives; while (the Emperor) himself joined battle with them at so-called Markellai (this is a fort lying very near to the Bulgarians), put them to flight, and killed many of them. Being thus worsted, they petitioned for peace and delivered hostages among their children...¹¹

The result of the transfer of Byzantine cavalry deep into the Bulgarian rear and the advantages they created were an additional incentive for Emperor Constantine V to include the navy in his subsequent campaigns against the Bulgarian Khanate. The benefits of bypassing the main defensive line in Haemus Mountain leave little doubt as to why such impressive persistence was shown in renewing naval initiatives on the western shores of the Black Sea and in the direction of the Danube Delta¹². Theophanes the Confessor and Patriarch Nikephoros were remarkably unanimous in providing information about the number of the vessels used. This very specificity makes one particular terminological dissonance in their narratives even more noticeable. For example, when it comes to the clash of 763, the

¹⁰ *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine...*, p. 593–594. All quotations in the text are according to the enclosed English edition.

¹¹ *Nicephori patriarchae Constantinopolitani Breviarium historicum*, ed. C. MANGO, Washington D.C. 1990 [= *CFHB*, 13] (cetera: ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΣ), p. 145.

¹² К. МАРИНОВ, *Zadania floty cesarskiej...*, p. 382–383, 384–386; IDEM, *В дебрите на Хемус (за някои страни в ролята на планината през периода VII–IX в.)*, Pbg 37.4, 2013, p. 60–73. Also: А. АВРАМЕА, *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 [= *DOS*, 39], p. 57–90; D.V. ДИМИТРОВ, *Морето в политиката на средновековните балкански държави*, SB 32, 2017, p. 165–183.

first of the mentioned chroniclers pointed out that the type of ships that made up the fleet was the chelandion (χελάνδιον). In the relevant passages in the work of the second one, the designation of horse transport ships (νῆες ἵππάγωγοι) is found. The description of the next expedition in 766 in *Chronography* the chelandions were mentioned again, in *Breviarium* σκάφη/σκάφος was used as a more general name for a vessel¹³. Patriarch Nikephoros did not mention the chelandions in none of the described events related to the actions of the fleet of the mid-8th century. On the contrary, the term was used repeatedly by Theophanes both in connection with the naval expeditions in question against Bulgaria in the 760s and later in the 770s, and in the description of completely different events as well. In some cases, the word is used alone in the text, while in others it is immediately surrounded by more names of ships of the era. In fact, the difference can be observed in the descriptions of events that have nothing to do with the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts of the 750s–770s. Among the most outstanding examples is the record about the expedition against Chersonesos in 711, Theophanes noted that the fleet consisted of various kinds of vessels – dromos, triers, transport ships, fishing boats and chelandions¹⁴.

Again, according to the reports in *Chronography*, in 774, 2,000 such chelandions set out for the Bulgarian shores led by the Emperor Constantine V. A year later, the ailing ruler passed away on a chelandion on his return to the capital¹⁵. Beyond the outlined differences, the question of whether and to what extent the chelandion underwent any evolution since the mid-8th century, and what type of vessel (with one or two rows of oarsmen) the authors from later 9th and 10th centuries using this term meant¹⁶. Concerning the *Chronography*, the

¹³ *Theophanis Chronographia*, vol. I, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883 [= CSHB] (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 432–433; NIKEPHOROS, p. 148–150, 156. Cf. E.A. SOPHOCLES, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Period (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, New York 1900, p. 992; *Древногреческо-русский словарь*, vol. II, ed. И.Х. ДВОРЕЦКИЙ, Москва 1958, p. 1478; *LSJ*, p. 1605.

¹⁴ Regarding the events of 711, Patriarch Nikephoros also mentioned the diversity of the ships, but did not specify what they were. When describing the repressions in Chersonesos, both chroniclers noted that twenty of the local leaders were drowned – in a deliberately sunken ἀκάτιον according to the text of *Breviarium*, and in χελάνδιον according to that of *Chronography*. Cf.: THEOPHANES, p. 377–378; NIKEPHOROS, p. 106–109. In addition, despite the different terms the chronicles show an outstanding coincidence. Both authors pointed out that on the way back to Constantinople, the ships were caught in a storm and about 73,000 people drowned. Cf. also S. FORREST, *Theophanes' Byzantine Source for the Late Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries c. AD 668–716*, *TM* 19, 2015, p. 417–444. For the requisition of various commercial vessels for military-transports in the fifth and sixth century: C. ZUCKERMAN, *On the Byzantine Dromon (with a Special Regard to De Cerim. II, 44–45)*, *REB* 73, 2015, p. 59–67.

¹⁵ THEOPHANES, p. 448.

¹⁶ Cf. the comments, viewpoints, and the enclosed bibliography: G.J. BLACKBURN, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Ships, Boats, Vessels, and Other Water-borne Craft*, Woodstock 1978, p. 130, 309; R.W. UNGER, *The Ship in the Medieval Economy, 600–1600*, London 1980, p. 95–98; IDEM, *Warships and Cargo Ships in Medieval Europe*, *TC* 22.2, 1981, p. 236–240; V. CHRISTIDES, *Naval History and*

question in which of the records the chronicler used *chelandon* as a designation of a specific kind of vessel with oars – used for military and military-transport needs arises; and in which, in a more general sense, for a rowing ship¹⁷. In view of the participation of the Byzantine fleet in the conflicts with the Bulgarian Khanate, especially taking into consideration the specified scale and capabilities of the Byzantine shipbuilding, it must be pointed out that in the account of the events from the third quarter of the 8th century, *chelandon* was probably used as a general designation of ships involved in the naval endeavors, not only in its narrow sense of a particular type of vessel. Nevertheless, it is much more essential that the discrepancies in the names of the vessels with those found in the text of *Breviarium* do not hide the fact that both chronicles refer to the transport of cavalry units (equestrians and horses as well as their equipment).

At the background of the relatively large clarifications made, it should be explicitly noted that the military and military-transport capabilities of the Imperial fleet during the second half of the 8th century were significant. This, however, was a precondition for their exaggeration by modern scholars. In this regard, for example, one can come across a statement of the Romanian scholar Alexandru Madgearu who states that

...during the wars of 760, 763 and 765, Durostorum [Drastar, present day Silistra (Bulgaria)] was occupied again for a while. Only in this way can be explained the discovery of some lead seals issued by Byzantine officers dated in the 8th century...¹⁸

However, he did not provide any further details about the way of sustaining the Byzantine troops occupation in the key center of the Early Medieval Bulgaria. After this statement, however, there are a number of unanswered questions. Except for the ambiguous “a while”, there is no comment on how long Constantine V’s troops stayed in Drastar. In addition, it is not considered necessary to ask what

Naval Technology in Medieval Times. The Need for Interdisciplinary Studies, B 58.2, 1988, p. 309–332; W. TREADGOLD, *The Army in the Works of Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, RSBN N.S 29, 1992, p. 87, 100–102, 110–121, 123–125, 134–141; V. CHRISTIDES, *Byzantine Dromon and Arab Shīnī*, [in:] *Tropis III. 3rd International Symposium on Ship Construction in Antiquity*, ed. H. TZALAS, Athens 1995, p. 111–122; C. MAKRYPOULIAS, *The Navy in the Works of Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, GA 6, 1995, p. 152–171; J.H. PRYOR, E.M. JEFFREYS, *The Age of the Δρομων: the Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204*, Leiden–Boston 2006 [= MMe, 62], p. 164–173; J. DELGADO, *Ships on Land*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Maritime Archaeology*, ed. A. CATSAMBIS, B. FORD, D.L. HAMILTON, Oxford–New York 2011, p. 187–191; C. ZUCKERMAN, *On the Byzantine Dromon...*, p. 57–98; I. ΔΗΜΗΤΡΟΥΚΑΣ, *Τα Βυζαντινά πολεμικά πλοία και τα πληρωμάτά τους (9^{ος} και 10^{ος} αί.)*, GA 12, 2017, p. 293–307; S. COSENTINO, *Naval Warfare...*, p. 333–334.

¹⁷ H. AHRWEILER, *Byzance et la mer...*, p. 410–413; D. MOUTSOS, *Greek χελάνδιον and Latin chelundria*, B 62, 1992, p. 402–413; E. MACGEER, A. KAZHDAN, *Chelandon*, [in:] *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, ed. A. KAZHDAN, Oxford–New York 1991, p. 417–418.

¹⁸ A. MADGEARU, *The Byzantine Expansion in the Black Sea Area*, RMH 2008, p. 23.

the Bulgarian countermeasures against them were. Suspiciously, the cited study did not specify how that Drastar's imaginary occupation ended – with defeat or retreat. If it was the second option, again there is no word about the way in which the supposed Byzantine detachment was withdrawn (by ships or by a forced march on the land). In this regard, it is important to mention a circumstance that should also be given due attention – rowing against the current of the river and avoiding the shallows seriously increases the time to overcome even seemingly short distances. There are reliable indications that in the Middle Ages those who navigated against the river current were completely aware of these peculiarities¹⁹.

For the sake of objectivity, it should be emphasized that there is much more than one way to explain the appearance of one seal of the Strategos Phokas and another one of the Turmarhos Aetolius in the Bulgarian lands (on both sides of the Lower Danube at that time), without avoiding essential details²⁰. Especially those

¹⁹ It must be admitted that this information does not refer to the 8th-century endeavors, but concerns the later Byzantine campaigns. However, one should not ignore its validity in the times. This peculiarity stands out in full force during the campaign of Emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–976) against the Rus of Prince Svetoslav of Kiev in 971. According to reports, after the capture of Preslav and the surrounding settlements, the Imperial ground forces managed to outrun the fleet's appearance under the walls of Drastar, that was later included in the siege. Cf.: *The History of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, trans. et ed. A.-M. TALBOT, D.F. SULLIVAN, Washington D.C. 2005 [= DOS, 41] (cetera: LEO DIACONUS), p. 179–188. It should not be forgotten that the quick move due to the need of rapid involvement of the Imperial navy was not an easy task, too. For example, according to Genesisios during the progressive Arab invasion in Sicily in 877–878 the Imperial navy did almost nothing and remained blocked for fifty days at Peloponnesse by the bad weather, without chance to prevent the fall of Syracuse. Actually, Symeon the Logothete who blamed mainly Emperor Basil I reported the events in a rather different way. It is hardly a coincidence that in Book 5 (*Vita Basilii*) of Theophanes Continuatus' *Chronography* under supervision of Emperor Constantine VII (913–959) has been added additional information in order to present his grandfather in the best possible light, shifting the blame for the delay to the navy commander Adrian. Cf. GENESIOS, *On the Reigns of the Emperors*, trans. et ed. A. KALDELLIS, Canberra 1998 [= BAUS, 11], p. 103; *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, rec. S. WAHLGREN, Berlin–New York 2006 [= CFHB, 44.1] (cetera: SYMEON LOGOTHETE), p. 264.74–81. Cf. the recent English translation *The Chronicle of the Logothete*, trans. et ed. S. WAHLGREN, Liverpool 2019 [= TTB, 7], p. 198; *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber, quo vita Basilii imperatoris amplectitur*, ed. I. ŠEVČENKO, Berlin–Boston 2011 [= CFHB, 42], p. 236–243; Cf. also the comments of P. MAGDALINO, *Knowledge in Authority and Authorised History: the Imperial Intellectual Programme of Leo VII and Constantine VII*, [in:] *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. P. ARMSTRONG, Farnham 2013, p. 203–206. In another well-known case, the squadrons of the Norman field army moving from Dyrrachium toward Thessaloniki also outrun the Norman fleet in the siege and the conquest of the city in 1185. Cf.: EUSTATHIOS OF THESSALONIKI, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, trans. et ed. J.R. MELVILLE-JONES, Canberra 1988 [= Baus, 8], p. 66. Cf. also: R. KOSTOVA, “Bypassing Anchialos”: the West Black Sea Coast in Naval Campaigns 11th to 12th c. (I), [in:] *Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на акад. Васил Гюзелев*, ed. M. КАЙМАКОВА et al., София 2006, p. 585–586; ЕАДЕМ, *The Lower Danube in the Byzantine Naval Campaigns in the 12th C.*, CCDJ 24, 2008, p. 271–272.

²⁰ G. ATANASOV, *Durostorum – Dorostol(os) – Drastar/Dristra – Silistra. The Danubian Fortress from the Beginning of the 4th to the Beginning of the 19th c.*, [in:] *Thracian, Greek, Roman and Medieval*

concerning the vague and rather suspicious conditions of their finding and that the efforts should be linked to the events of the third quarter of the 8th century and to the dubious “capture of Drastar” by the Emperor Constantine V’s troops which cannot be supported in the reasons for the dating of the mentined seals outside the chronological framework of 750s–770s²¹.

It is an indubitable fact that on the shores of the Northern Black Sea coast the Imperial fleet was able to capture strategic areas and make a *place d’armes* for the transferred landing units. At the same time, it is far more difficult to accept that during the campaigns against the Bulgarian Khanate of the 760s, the Byzantines permanently conquered territories around the Danube Delta. Such a clarification does not detract from the success of the Byzantine fleet at that time at all. Emperor Constantine V managed to surprise Khan Vineh by transporting cavalry troops by sea who ravaged the Bulgarian lands around the Danube Delta and abducted many captives²².

Cities, Residences and Fortresses in Bulgaria, vol. I, ed. R. IVANOV, Sofia 2015, p. 530. Cf. also: A. КУЗЕВ, *Дръстър*, [in:] *Български средновековни градове и крепости*, vol. I, *Градове и крепости по Дунав и Черно море*, ed. A. КУЗЕВ, В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, Варна 1981, p. 177–195; Г. АТАНАСОВ, *Християнският Дуросторум–Дръстър. Доростолската епархия през Късната античност и Средновековието IV–XIV в.*, Варна 2007, p. 133–135.

²¹ I. MITITELU, I. BARNEA, *Sigilii de plumb bizantine din regiunea Dunării de Jos*, SCIV 17.1, 1966, p. 43–45; I. JORDANOV, *Srednovekovnijat Drastar. Spored danni ot sfragistikata (VII–XII v.)*, АДСВ 40, 2011, p. 102–103. One can say that it is against the historical objectivity and accuracy if modern political borders have motivated the invention of tendentious justifications. Such as the over-use of the doubtful hypothesis about a Byzantine naval base at Lykostomion in the Early Middle Ages (H. AHRWEILER, *Byzance et la mer...*, p. 87–90. Cf. also: V. ТАРКОВА-ЗАЙМОВА, *Quelques observations sur la domination byzantine aux bouches du Danube. – Le sort de Lykostomion et de quelques autres villes côtières*, SB 1, 1970, p. 79–86; I. BOZHILOV, V. GJUZELEV, I. Barnea, *Șt. Ștefănescu. Din Istoria Dobrogei. Vol. III. Bizantinim Români și Bulgari la Dunărea de Jus*. București, 1971, III 28.3, 1972, p. 115–125; A. MADGEARU, *The Lykostomion Theme on the Lower Danube (9th Century)*, [in:] *Studia Antiqua et Mediaevalia. Miscellanea in honorem annos LXXV peragentis Professoris Dan Gh. Teodor*, ed. D. APARASCHIVEI, Iași 2009, p. 297–304; A. MADGEARU, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube, 10th–12th Centuries*, Leiden–Boston 2013 [= ECEEMA, 22], p. 7–57. *There is no strong reason to believe that any Byzantine fortress along the northern part of the western coast remained active between the end of the 7th century and the late 10th.* – One can read in a still relatively recent publication. Cf.: R. KOSTOVA, *The Western Black Sea Coast in the 8th–10th Centuries: How and How Much Was It Defended?*, [in:] *Fortified Settlements in Early Medieval Europe. Defended Communities of the 8th–10th Centuries*, ed. H. HEROLD, N.J. CHRISTIE, Oxford 2016, p. 223. Cf. also: R. KOSTOVA, *Byzantine Fortifications and Defensive System in the Black Sea Area: the West Coast of the Black Sea*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Black Sea*, <http://blacksea.ehw.gr/Forms/fLemmaBodyExtended.aspx?lemmaID=10650> [27 III 2021]; A. GINALIS, D. HEHER, A. KÜLZER, J. PREISER-KAPPELLER, G. SIMEONOV, *Harbours and Landing Places on the Balkan Coasts of the Byzantine Empire (4th to 12th Centuries)*, ID 1–667, [in:] *European Harbour Data Repository*, vol. IV, ed. L. WERTHER, H. MÜLLER, M. FOUCHER, Jena 2019, p. 58 [ID 569]).

²² НИКЕФОРΟΣ, p. 145.

The naval forces of the Empire were sent in this direction several more times in the 760s and 770s. The information provided by Patriarch Nikephoros and Theophanes the Confessor lacks abundance of details about the preparation and stages of the expeditions. However, it can be assumed that some of the ambiguities can be overcome due to the knowledge of seafaring in the early Middle Ages. Despite all the advantages it had compared to marching by land, sailing was not an easy endeavor at all. Even when it was not about transporting horses, the problems arising from the use of rowing boats for military operations at long and relatively long distances from the starting bases were diverse and often quite significant. These included the training of crews and the provision of paddles, masts and sails, materials for repairing holes and leaks, supplying the required quantities of provisions and water, weapons, etc. Difficulties were further multiplied if the final destination was too far away or there were no suitable intermediate bases for refilling with water and provisions, for rest, for replacement of sick and injured crew members²³. Another debatable issue is the speed they had and the distance at which the Byzantine naval squadrons were able to move in one day, as well as the duration of their stay on the high seas without mooring. They depended on many conditions, among which it is necessary to mention the favorable opportunities to stretch the sails or taking advantage of the sea currents. As it has been specified, at least in theory (in cases of necessity and in favorable conditions), ships were able to move not only during the day but also at night. On the other hand, strong waves, headwinds and winds seriously affected the distances they travelled, and unfavorable climatic conditions often led even to the cessation of navigation and hold-ups until the situation changed²⁴. It must be taken into consideration that for the large early medieval expeditions of rowing vessels the type of ships or the possibility of optimal water supplies were not always crucial. The final destination and the mooring place were often far more decisive. The numerous squadrons were particularly vulnerable while mooring or anchoring out of the suitable long beach or large sheltered harbours. In addition, as it has been pointed out, anchoring or mooring Byzantine dromons and chelandions in the mentioned circumstances was difficult, laborious and time-consuming. In fact, any delay without a safe landing on the enemy shore was a serious threat due to the negative effect of the summer heat, wind changes, sea currents, physical exhaustion of the rowers, etc.²⁵

²³ J.H. PRYOR, *Geography, Technology, and War. Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649–1571*, Cambridge 1992 [= P.P.P.], p. 87–101; J.E. DOTSON, *Economics and Logistics of Galley Warfare*, [in:] *The Age of the Galley. Mediterranean Oared Vessels since Pre-Classical Times*, ed. R. GARDINER, London 1995, p. 217–223; J.H. PRYOR, E.M. JEFFREYS, *The Age of the Δρομῶν...*, p. 264, 339–354.

²⁴ S. COSENTINO, *Naval Warfare...*, p. 340–346.

²⁵ J.H. PRYOR, E.M. JEFFREYS, *The Age of the Δρομῶν...*, p. 354–378.

In view of the above, it is of great importance that in the 8th century in all the cases of involvement of the Byzantine fleet against the Bulgarians the starting point was Constantinople and its nearby ports²⁶. The direct distance across the Black Sea from the Bosphorus to the Istros River is relatively short (about 450 km). However, given to the typical cabotage sailing of the era – near to the coastal line without going too deep into the sea nearly doubled the distance from Constantinople to the Danube Delta (about 700–750 km along the sea shores). For fast vessels with a well-trained crew familiar with the currents and moorings on the western shores of the Black Sea such a distance was not a significant challenge. Additionally, it should be explicitly noted that this was not a specific “marathon” voyage in which a single ship and its crew were in optimal condition. On the contrary, it meant the movement of large squadrons whose ships were loaded with people, horses, equipment and supplies. The difference was significant because larger squadrons often consisted of heterogeneous vessels, whose sailors had different experience and skills²⁷. Even with the season’s preconditions, the meteorological conditions, the use of winds and sea currents, etc., the speed of movement was usually in accordance with the slowest ships (to maintain contact with them), and the distance was beyond the capabilities of two- or three-day sailing. This, together with the fact that in the third quarter of the 8th century the Byzantines did not have operating ports on the shores of the Northwestern Black Sea coast to fully perform the function of naval bases, necessitated stopping in the Burgas Bay for rest, regrouping, water and food resupply, etc.²⁸

Although not being able to compete with Byzantium at sea, the Early Medieval Bulgarian ruling elite made the necessary efforts to repel the threats coming from the Imperial navy. To a large extent they were related to preventing the possibilities for Byzantine landings on the Dobrudzha coast and in the delta of the Danube. Just skim-reading the text of Theophanes’ *Chronography* one can see in the description

²⁶ N. GÜNSENIN, *Harbours and Shipbuilding in Byzantine Constantinople*, [in:] *The Sea in History. The Medieval World / La Mer dans l’Histoire. Le Moyen Âge*, ed. M. BALARD, Woodbridge 2017, p. 412–424.

²⁷ G. МАКРИС, *Ships*, [in:] *The Economic History of Byzantium...*, p. 93.

²⁸ Р. РАШЕВ, *Първото българско царство и морето*, [in:] *Средновековна България и Черноморието (сборник с доклади от научната конференция, Варна – 1980)*, ed. А. КУЗЕВ et al., Варна 1982, p. 47–56; Л. БОБЧЕВА, *Ранносредновековни български селища и некрополи по южнодобруджанския черноморски бряг*, [in:] *Средновековна България и Черноморието...*, p. 99–109; Р. РАШЕВ, *Северозападният черноморски бряг през ранното средновековие*, [in:] *Българите в Северното Причерноморие. Изследвания и материали*, vol. VI, ed. П. ГОДОРОВ et al., Велико Търново 1997, p. 33–44; И. БОЖИЛОВ, В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *История на Добруджа*, vol. II, Велико Търново 2004, p. 29–40; G. SIMEONOV, *Harbours on the Western Black Sea Coast and the Byzantine Campaigns against the Avars and Bulgarians from the 6th until the 8th Century*, [in:] *Medieval Ports in North Aegean and the Black Sea. Links to the Maritime Routes of the East, International Symposium Thessalonike 4–6 December. Proceedings*, ed. F. KARAGIANNI, Thessalonike 2013, p. 49–56; R. KOSTOVA, *Byzantine Fortifications and Defensive System...*

of campaign of Emperor Constantine V in 763 a notice of a large Byzantine fleet that was sent to the Black Sea. However, it was not clearly specified where it was going to. In *Breviarium*, Patriarch Nikephoros testified that the intention was to transfer the cavalry on the ships across the Black Sea to the Danube River. Searching for discrepancies is unnecessary and counterproductive, moreover, both chroniclers provided no additional information about the actions of the naval forces of the Empire in the anti-Bulgarian campaign in question. In this case, the lack of additional details probably is due mainly to the failures of the fleet²⁹. Theophanes the Confessor wrote that in response to the combined campaign of Emperor Constantine V on land and sea in the summer of 763, just before directing his main forces south of the Haemus, Khan Telets ...recruited 20 000 men among the neighboring nations to fight on his side and, after stationing them at the fortifications, made himself secure³⁰. The mentioned auxiliary force was described as a *great multitude of Slavonian allies* by Patriarch Nikephoros in his *Breviarium*³¹. As it has been specified, the interest in this question was generally overshadowed by the focus on other notices in this part of the chronicler's text³². It is reasonably assumed that the mentioned fortifications were embankments, ditches and palisades, located in the easternmost parts of the Haemus massif. Without doubting the rationality of such a localization, it must be emphasized that when it comes to repelling combined Byzantine strikes on land and sea, one must not forget the anti-landing shafts, which also played a key role in the defense strategy of the Bulgarian Khanate. From today's perspective, coastal dikes are not an overwhelming obstacle. However, given the peculiarities of rowing seafare, in the third quarter of the 8th century any detention of the large Byzantine naval squadrons in front of them for more than a day or two was of great importance. Perhaps in the summer of 763 not only the gathered reinforcements and the protection of the gorges, but also the successful security against the Imperial fleet by blocking the possibility of the transported cavalry detachments to set foot on the Bulgarian coast led Khan Telets to the decision to give a general battle³³.

Regarding the subsequent initiatives of Emperor Constantine V against Bulgaria in 764–765, Theophanes the Confessor stated:

²⁹ THEOPHANES, p. 432–433; NIKEPHOROS, p. 149.

³⁰ *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine...*, p. 599.

³¹ NIKEPHOROS, p. 148.

³² К. МАРИНОВ, *В дѣбрите на Хемус...*, p. 60–73.

³³ Cf. P. РАШЕВ, *Старобългарски укрепления на Долния Дунав (VII–XI в.)*, Варна 1982, p. 32–50; A. GINALIS, D. НЕНЕР, A. KÜLZER, J. PREISER-KAPPELLER, G. SIMEONOV, *Harbours and Landing Places...* Cf. also: P. SQUATRITI, *Digging Ditches in Early Medieval Europe*, pp 176, 2002, p. 11–65; IDEM, *Moving Earth and Making Difference: Dikes and Frontiers in Early Medieval Bulgaria*, [in:] *Borders, Barriers and Ethnogenesis. Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. F. CURTA, Turnhout 2005, p. 59–90; R. KOSTOVA, *The Western Black Sea Coast...*, p. 221–234.

In the same year Paganos, the lord of Bulgaria, sent an emissary to the Emperor requesting a personal meeting. Having received a pledge, he came down with his boyars. The Emperor, having taken his seat and having Sabinos seated next to him, received them and reproved them for their disorderly conduct and their hatred for Sabinos. And so they made a semblance of peace. The Emperor, however, sent a secret mission to Bulgaria and apprehended Sklavounos, chief of the Severi, who had caused much damage in Thrace. Also Christianos was arrested, a renegade from the Christian faith and leader of the Skamaroi... All of a sudden, the Emperor left the City and, finding the passes unguarded because of the nominal peace, invaded Bulgaria as far as the Τζικαα. He set fire to the fortified camps that he came across and returned in fear without having accomplished any brave deed...³⁴

A look at the text of Patriarch Nikephoros makes it easy to see that the Bulgarian attempts to achieve peace after the flight of Khan Sabinos to Byzantium were taken into consideration only after Emperor Constantine V undertaking a campaign found fortified passages in Haemus³⁵. The *Breviarium* also shows that the Byzantines did not remain faithful to the agreements. The ongoing internal crisis and the political instability were the reason for a new campaign against the Bulgarian Khanate. Patriarch Nikephoros wrote:

In the 3rd indiction Constantine entered Bulgaria in order to remove from office their leader who had been appointed by Sabinos, a man called Oumaros, and proclaim in his stead the Bulgarian Toktos, brother of Baianos. The Bulgarians fled to the forests of the river Istros and many of them were slain, including Toktos together with his brother as well as others. Another one of their commanders, whom they call Kampaganos, was killed by his own slaves while he was attempting to escape to Varna and join (the Emperor). At that time a great many Bulgarian villages were burned and destroyed by the Romans...³⁶

The last testimony from the text of *Breviarium* can be considered a description of the success of the Byzantine fleet, but with the explicit stipulation that the Imperial troops did reach the Danube. The conditionality in this case is significant, as in the respective sections in *Chronography*, a feeling of fast movement is created quite unambiguously, but only on land.

When describing the unsuccessful participation of the Byzantine naval forces in the campaign in 766, it is stated that the impressive (probably exaggerated) number of 2,600 vessels went to the Burgas Bay.

But as the fleet was anchored by the coast of the sea that is there (for that place is lacking in harbors and difficult for sailors), – one can read in Nikephoros' text – a violent and harsh blast blew against it (it was a north wind), overturned and broke the ships against the shore, and sank in the surf a great number of crews. The Emperor was greatly distressed by this and

³⁴ *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine...*, p. 603.

³⁵ NIKEPHOROS, p. 151.

³⁶ NIKEPHOROS, p. 151–153.

commanded the officers to cast nets in the sea in order to collect the drowned bodies and bury them; and thus he returned to the palace...³⁷

Theophanes the Confessor also noted the reason for the termination of the campaign and the fact that the bodies of the victims were pulled out with nets and buried³⁸. The Byzantine Navy was involved in the war against Bulgaria again a decade later in the mid-770s. In May 774, Emperor Constantine V personally led a large fleet with the intention of entering the Danube, while the task of his cavalry troops were to overcome the defenses in the gorges of Haemus and to penetrate north of the mountain while the main Bulgarian forces were busy to oppose the planned landing. The idea failed without even reaching the Danube Delta.

...Constantine dispatched a fleet of 2,000 **chelandia** against Bulgaria. He himself embarked in the red **chelandon** and set out with the intention of entering the river Danube, leaving the **strategoï** of the cavalry **themata** outside the mountain passes in the hope that they might penetrate into Bulgaria while the Bulgarians were occupied with him. – one can read in *Chronography* – When, however, he had gone as far as Varna, he took fright and was considering a retreat. The Bulgarians, too, were frightened when they saw these things and sent a boyar and a Tzigos to ask for peace. They swore to one another that neither would the Bulgarians go forth against the Roman country, nor would the Emperor contrive to penetrate into Bulgaria, and they mutually drew up written instruments to that effect...³⁹

A little later, in the autumn of the same year, the Byzantine Navy was again involved in a campaign against the Bulgarian Khanate. The reports reveal that 12,000 cavalymen on board were unable to take part in hostilities on the North-western shores of the Black Sea, as the ships were caught in a storm near Mesembria. In connection with this campaign, Theophanes the Confessor spoke again about the fears of Constantine V, who preferred to stay with the army ground forces⁴⁰. The worries of the experienced ruler were completely understandable (and in view of the events – they were justified) given the unsuitable season for sailing. However, such motives were not valid in the previous expedition in late spring and early summer of 774. It is reasonably accepted that then the fear came from the inability to overcome the anti-landing dikes, ditches and embankments, which made the prolonged stay in the sea unnecessary and even dangerous.

It is significant that in the presentation of the Byzantine campaigns against Bulgaria in the 760s and 770s in *Breviarium* and in *Chronography* there is no mention of permanent control of a bridgehead on the Bulgarian coast in the North-western Black Sea coast, or of really deep penetration of the Danube Delta and

³⁷ NIKEPHOROS, p. 157.

³⁸ *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine...*, p. 605.

³⁹ *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine...*, p. 616–617.

⁴⁰ THEOPHANES, p. 447–448.

movement against the river current. In fact, concerning the statement of Drastar's occupation by the Byzantines in the early 760s it should be emphasized that it is particularly surprising why such a major Byzantine success remains undescribed in the narratives of the era.

...The bones of those killed at Achelos...⁴¹: A little more about the echo of a momentous event

The strategic decision to take a combined strike at sea and land in the presence of an Imperial enemy in the Northeastern part of the Balkans was not an innovation of Emperor Constantine V in the 750s–770s. However, given the geo-political situation in which the core of the Bulgarian Khanate is in the lands of present-day Dobrudzha (former Roman province of Scythia Minor), the parallel movement of the fleet and land forces along the Western shore of the Black Sea brought significant positives. It is worth taking into account the proximity and connection between the Imperial outposts in the Burgas Bay (serving as intermediate bases for rest, supply and reorganization) and the so-called Anchialos' field in their immediate hinterland, where the routes leading to the lowest and convenient to overcome passes in the eastern parts of Hemus are found. In view of this, it is not surprising that the area in question near Messembria, Anchialos and Debeltos often became a place of clash between the armies of the Bulgarian rulers and the Byzantine armies, not only in the period from the third quarter of the 8th century⁴².

Given the mentioned above, it is worth reminding that while in *Breviarium* Patriarch Nikephoros shared the same idea with Theophanes the Confessor about the outcome of the difficult battle of Anchialos in 763 and the massacre of the captives, in his *Antirrheticus* III the author offered a different viewpoint. Here Paul J. Alexander's statement that the last part of *Antirrheticus* III (chs. 62–84) is perhaps, of all of Nikephoros's texts, the most interesting for the scholars whose attention is attracted by Byzantine history and historiography should not be omitted⁴³. In ch. 72 of the mentioned work there is a special emphasis that the Byzantine success in 763 (as far as it can be accepted as such) was at high price. The text reads:

...Because he [Constantine V] was preparing to take revenge on the Scythian people who lived to the west of us, he gathered his whole army and entered into battle with the enemies.

⁴¹ СΥΜΕΟΝ ΛΟΓΟΤΗΤΕ, p. 192.138–139.

⁴² В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Край града, наречен Анхиало. (Бележки върху историята му през IV–X в.)*, ИИМБ 28/43, 1992, p. 144–157.

⁴³ For the *Antirrheticus* III's cf. *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Antirrhetici tres adversus Constantinum Copronymum*, ed. A. ΜΑΙ, [in:] *PG*, vol. C, col. 375–534 (cetera: *Antirrheticus* III); P.J. ALEXANDER, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople...*, p. 170–171; A. BRYER, J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era...*, p. 256–257.

The results show how successful the outcome of the war was for him. Because to this day they are exposed by the ravines and the plain near the city called Anchialos, that housed the bones of the massacred. Since almost the entire army of the Romans fell victim to the Scythian sword...⁴⁴

It is unquestionable that the quoted fragment definitely was paid attention to by researchers. In regard to some of the terrible effects of the wars between the Empire and its hostile neighbors, John Haldon remarks that *Patriarch Nikephoros referred in one of his polemical writings to the bones of the soldiers slain at the battle of Anchialos in 763 which could still be seen there at the beginning of the 9th century*⁴⁵. Vasil Gyuzelev assumes that...*the contradictory testimonies show that this battle was absolute bloodshed and with great number of lost human lives for both sides. However, they were more significant for the limited resources and capabilities of the Bulgarian Khanate...*⁴⁶.

Of particular note are the key efforts of the German Byzantinist Paul Speck, and also of the French scholar Marie-Jose Monzain-Baudinet, who translated the text and added the commentaries and notes on Nicephorus' *Antirrethici*⁴⁷. In view of the achievements in terms of style, narration, some interpolations and traceable primary sources, and taking into account the characteristic archaic tendencies of the Byzantine authors and the sum of their geographical, historical and political ideas, the use of the ethnonym "Scythians" referring to the Bulgarians in chapter 72 of *Antirrethicus* III is no surprise. On the other hand, the clearly recognizable and very symbolic weapon μάχαира in the ancient texts is much more closely associated with the Thracians, which was certainly known by an erudite author such as Patriarch Nikephoros⁴⁸. Given the interest in the Bulgarian-Byzantine conflict

⁴⁴ *Antirrethicus* III, PG, vol. C, col. 508B.

⁴⁵ J. HALDON, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204*, London 1999, p. 241.

⁴⁶ В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Вътрешнополитическата криза в Българското ханство и опитите за нейното преодоляване през втората половина на VIII век*, [in:] *История на България в 3 тома*, vol. I, *История на ранносредновековна България VII–XIV век*, ed. И. БОЖИЛОВ, В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, София 1999, p. 116.

⁴⁷ Cf. NICEPHORE, *Discours contre les iconoclasts. Discussion et réfutation des bavardages ignares, athées et tout à fait creux de l'irreligieux Mamon contre l'incarnation de Dieu le verbe notre sauveur*, ed. et trans. M.-J. MONZAIN-BAUDINET, Paris 1989 (cetera: NICEPHORE, *Discours*); P. SPECK, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen. Die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus*, Bonn 1990 [= PB, 10], p. 263–275, 535–556.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, the mention of unburied victims of hostilities further strengthens the connection with Thrace (in a geographical sense), while Procopius' *History of Wars* when describing the Slavic attacks on the Balkans mentions that...*the whole land inhabited by the Illyrians and Thracians came to be everywhere filled with unburied corpses...* Cf. PROCOPIUS, *The History of Wars*, vol. V, trans. et ed. H.B. DEWING, London–Cambridge, Mass. 1962, p. 26. In fact, W. Treadgold points out that number of additional allusions to ancient and early Byzantine texts exist in other chapters of the final part of Nicephorus' *Antirrethicus* III. Cf. W. TREADGOLD, *Opposition to Iconoclasm as Grounds for Civil War*, [in:] *Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion*.

of the third quarter of the 8th century, the most important question seems to be related to whether there can be sufficient trust in the information in the fragment under consideration of the polemical work of the high clergyman. The answer cannot be unequivocal, as M.-J. Monzain-Baudinet emphasized more than three decades ago. In fact, Patriarch Nikephorus did not lie when he wrote about many victims. Although there can be no question of undoubted direct compliance, one should not underestimate the perceptible resemblance with some verses of *Jeremiah* 8: 1–2 as well as *Ezekiel* 6: 3–5, 37: 1–3. At the same time, without fabricating an incorrect version of the final victory of Emperor Constantine at the Battle of Anchialos in 763, he managed to belittle it by masterfully misleading the readers with the facts he knew about the campaigns of the mid-760s and the Byzantine failure of 766, which had a disastrous end. In *Antirrethicus* III Patriarch Nikephoros was suspiciously silent for the key moments of Emperor Constantine V's active involvement in the internal crisis in Bulgaria. The outline of the struggles for the khan's throne is quite vague. Indeed, the flight of Khan Sabinos to Byzantium is given a cursory glance, but respectful Byzantine successes in 764–765 remain without mention. The passages that refer to the Eastern policy of Emperor Constantine V are also marked by underestimation or omission of the successes. The neglect of the chronological sequence of events concerning the resettlement of Syrians and Armenians in Thrace seems to have further contributed to the overall confusing effect⁴⁹.

The reflection of the events in the mid-760s and the stories of the battles between Bulgarians and Byzantines in the fields near Anchialos found a place in the works of later Byzantine chroniclers of the 9th and 10th centuries. Along with the outstanding influence of the work of Theophanes the Confessor, it is worth mentioning that as for the description of the actions of the Byzantine Navy in the conflicts with Bulgaria in the third quarter of the 8th century, their texts also reveal a connection with what was written in the polemical *Antirrethicus* III of Patriarch Nikephorus. In this regard, a look at George the Monk's *Concise Chronicle* is

Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19–21 Mai 2011), ed. J. KODER, I. STOURAITIS, Vienna 2012, p. 36; IDEM, *The Middle Byzantine Historians...*, p. 19, 21.

⁴⁹ NICEPHORE, *Discours*, p. 280–281 (cf.: *Antirrethicus* III, PG, vol. C, col. 508C–509A). It must be acknowledged that the final part of *Antirrethicus* III draws the attention not only with the battle bloodsheds or with Emperor Constantine V's active involvement in foreign policy but also with the various information about the plague of 747, earthquakes, economy, famine, construction projects, etc. Nevertheless, the chapters from 62 to 84 of the text also have tendentious allusions and presenting the Emperor in a negative way. Cf. P.J. ALEXANDER, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople...*, p. 159–161, 170–172, 188; V. BEŠEVĽIEV, *Die Berichte des Theophanes und Nikephoros über die Thronwirren in Bulgarien 763–765*, JÖB 20, 1971, p. 81–82; P. SPECK, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen...*, p. 535–556; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians...*, p. 18–21. Cf. also: L. BRUBAKER, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, London 2012, p. 32–55; D. AFINGENOV, *Style, Structure, and Authorship of the Hypothetical Source of Theophanes for the Reigns of Leo III and Constantine V*, TM 19, 2015, p. 467–472.

inevitable. Relatively little is known about the author. He is believed to have been born around 830 and joined a monastery in Constantinople or near the capital shortly after the collapse of Iconoclasm and the restoration of Iconodulia in 843. His work points to the fact that he had only basic education. Despite this, George the Monk obviously had extensive knowledge of scriptural, patristic and hagiographical texts. The method of extracting passages from the works of various earlier authors and assembling them into a single text was typical of his *Concise Chronicle*⁵⁰. Something more:

George the Monk compiled his own history, which is, to a considerable extent, a collection of excerpts mainly taken from patristic texts and put together to form a homogeneous text. The reworking of the excerpts before their insertion into the chronicle is not consistent throughout the whole. The chronicle was intended to provide knowledge for Orthodox readers. This purpose outweighs the chronological goals of George the Monk's historical narrative. His extracting method is the same as the one applied by *florilegia*, *catenae*, question-and-answer works, and collections of speeches. Thus, in George's chronicle nothing was written by George himself

– one can read in a very recent publication⁵¹.

The highly illustrative part of George the Monk's *Concise Chronicle* concerning the reign of Emperor Constantine V, reads:

Moreover, since many of the commanders and soldiers were accused of worshipping icons, this three times miserable and an enemy of the truth sentenced them to various tortures and violent torment, then he went on a campaign against the Bulgarians. Having armed two thousand and six hundred chelandions, he sent them to Achelos. Heading for the shore, because a strong north wind was blowing, almost all [vessels] were destroyed and countless troops drowned...⁵²

In fact, the discrepancy between Anchialos and Achelos (Achelus) can be seen in Nikephoros and Theophanes (or in their original source). While the Patriarch

⁵⁰ Cf. Д. АФИНОГЕНОВ, *Композиция хроники Георгия Амартола*, ВВ 52, 1991, p. 102–112; ИДЕМ, *Some Observations on Genres of Byzantine Historiography*, В 62, 1992, p. 13–33; J. LJUBARSKIJ, *George the Monk as a Short-Story Writer*, ЈОБ 44, 1994, p. 255–264; Д. АФИНОГЕНОВ, *Константинопольский патриархат и иконоборческий кризис в Византии (784–847)*, Москва 1997, p. 132–148; ИДЕМ, *The Date of Georgios Monachos Reconsidered*, BZ 92.2, 1999, p. 437–447; А. KAZHDAN, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)*, ed. C. ANGELIDI, Athens 2006, p. 43–52; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians...*, p. 114–120; L. NEVILLE, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, contr. D. HARRISVILLE, I. TAMARKINA, C. WHATLEY, Cambridge 2018, p. 87–92; M. DETORAKI, *Chronicon animae utile. La Chronique de Georges le Moine et les récits édifiants*, [in:] *Myriobiblos. Essays on Byzantine Literature and Culture*, ed. T. ANTONOPOULOU, S. KOTZABASSI, M. LOUKAKI, Boston–Berlin–Munich 2015 [= BArchiv, 29], p. 103–130.

⁵¹ P. MANAFIS, *(Re)writing History in Byzantium. A Critical Study of Collections of Historical Excerpts*, London–New York 2020, p. 18.

⁵² *Georgii Monachi Chronicon*, vol. II, ed. C. DE BOOR, corr. P. WIRTH, Stuttgart 1978 [= BSGR], p. 758.

points to Anchialos (and Mesembria), Theophanes the Confessor notes Achelos. Depending on whose text they follow, the discrepancy also appears in the works of later authors. Yet, such a peculiarity is probably not only due to the proximity of the names, but also because the river Achelos flows into the Black Sea nearby the city of Anchialos⁵³.

It is worth noting that, according to the above, the end of the campaign in 766 was not due solely to the catastrophe that befell the Byzantine fleet. ... *The Bulgarians, hearing of this* – the author pointed out – *started a battle with him, his troops were killed fiercely and he returned with great shame and defeat...*⁵⁴. The heavy losses suffered by the troops of Emperor Constantine V during his campaigns against the Early Medieval Bulgaria are mentioned once again. The original source of the information is indisputable. *About him and the divine [Patriarch] of Constantinople Nikephoros said the following...* – George the Monk's *Concise Chronicle* reads, several lines below a passage very identical to the above-mentioned fragment of ch. 72 from the patriarch's polemical work follows:

...Of those victories invented by his insane and raging like-minded people, let us recall one of the most notable, [because] all are such. After preparing to take revenge on the Scythian people living in the west, he gathered all his subordinate army, entered into hand-to-hand combat with the enemies and what end of the war he achieved – the obvious things testify. This is clearly shown by the valleys and plains around the city called Achelos, which housed the bones of the slain. Because almost the entire Roman army fell victim to the Scythian sword...⁵⁵

The combined Byzantine campaigns by land and sea against Bulgaria in the third quarter of the 8th century were given a place in the so-called “anti-Macedonian chronography”⁵⁶. While George the Monk's text emphasizes on the casualties among the army, Symeon the Logothete mentions the successes of Emperor Constantine V in 763 and his triumphant entry into Constantinople with the tied captives of the army of Khan Telets⁵⁷. The story of the next expedition in 766 with the participation of the naval forces of the Empire repeats the well-known information about the strong north wind that smashed the ships, after which the Bulgarians held victory over the Byzantine land army. In this particular case, the additional touches regarding the outcome of the battle and especially what remains as evidence are of greater importance.

⁵³ NIKEPHOROS, p. 156; THEOPHANES, p. 437. Cf. A. KAZHDAN, *Achelous*, [in:] *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium...*, p. 13; A. GINALIS, D. HEHER, A. KÜLZER, J. PREISER-KAPPELLER, G. SIMEONOV, *Harbours and Landing Places...*, p. 51 [ID 56].

⁵⁴ *Georgii Monachi Chronicon*, p. 758.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 760–761, 762–763.

⁵⁶ А. КАЖДАН, *История византийской литературы (850–1000 гг.). Эпоха византийского энциклопедизма*, Санкт-Петербург 2012, p. 177–188; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians...*, p. 203–217.

⁵⁷ SYMEON LOGOTHETE, p. 191.113–115.

... The Emperor went to war against the Bulgarians with the navy as well as the army, and he sent forces to Achelos. However, a violent wind started to blow, and the ships were destroyed, – one can read in the chronicle of Symeon the Logothete. – On learning this, the Bulgarians joined battle with them, and the Emperor was terribly defeated and returned humiliated. For even until today the bones of those killed at Achelos bear evident witness to the defeat...⁵⁸

When the topic is a battle with many casualties and the scattered remains of slaughtered Imperial fighters, which can be seen even decades later, it is traditionally associated with the clash near Achelos River on August 20, 917 between the victorious Bulgarians led by Tsar Symeon (893–927) and the routed Byzantine troops commanded by Magistros Leo Phokas. Speaking about this pivotal moment in the conflict between the Bulgarian ruler and the Regency led by Empress Zoe Carbonopsina – the mother of underage Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, after describing the course of the battle itself, Leo the Deacon added: ... *Today one can still see heaps of bones next to Anchialos, where the retreating Roman troops were ingloriously cut down at that time...*⁵⁹. Without belittling the real possibility of similarity in events distant in the time, such a creative approach is reminiscent of the Byzantine historians and chroniclers' tendency to use *topoi* and re-use expressions and motifs that authors from later periods without modification or with minor additions borrowed from earlier works and included in their own texts. As it is highlighted, the peculiarity in question in the construction of the text should not be considered a shortcoming, nor is it a definite proof of the unreliability of the descriptions. Moreover, the borrowings were not usually accidental, but due to a variety of reasons. Demonstrating education, fitting into the tradition, searching for a specific focus, compliance with the established or the formation and strengthening of specific attitudes of the audience were only a few of them⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ *The Chronicle of the Logothete...*, p. 145–146. Cf. SYMEON LOGOTHETE, p. 192.134–139.

⁵⁹ LEO DIACONUS, p. 171–172.

⁶⁰ Cf. I. NILSSON, *To Narrate the Events of the Past: on Byzantine Historians, and Historians on Byzantium*, [in:] *Byzantine Narrative. Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, ed. J. BURKE et al., Melbourne 2006 [= BAus, 16], p. 47–58; EADEM, *The Same Story, but Another. A Reappraisal of Literary Imitation in Byzantium*, [in:] *Imitatio – Aemulatio – Variatio. Akten des internationalen wissenschaftlichen Symposionszur byzantinischen Sprache und Literatur (Wien, 22.–25. Oktober 2008)*, ed. A. RHOBY, E. SCHIFFER, Vienna 2010, p. 195–208; K.J. SINCLAIR, *War Writing in Middle Byzantine Historiography. Sources, Influences and Trends*, Birmingham 2012 (unpublished PhD dissertation), p. 12–23; P. MAGDALINO, *Byzantine Historical Writing, 900–1400*, [in:] *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. II, 400–1400, ed. S. FOOT, C.F. ROBINSON, Oxford 2012, p. 218–237; R.-J. LILIE, *Reality and Invention. Reflections on Byzantine Historiography*, DOP 68, 2014, p. 157–210; J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Historical Writing in Byzantium*, Heidelberg 2014, p. 11–62; R. MACRIDES, *How the Byzantines Wrote History*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Belgrade 22–27 August 2016. Plenary Papers*, ed. S. MARJANOVIĆ-DUŠANIĆ, Belgrade 2016, p. 257–263; W. TREADGOLD, *The Unwritten Rules for Writing Byzantine History*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress...*, p. 277–292.

On the other hand, one cannot be omitted that Leo the Deacon was not the only author who talked about the Bulgarian success. Shortly after the battle, Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos (901–907, 912–925), in his correspondence with Tsar Symeon, spoke of the great losses among the Imperial troops. The defeat, emphasizing its unprecedented scale, was also widely dealt with in the works of the 10th–12th centuries. For a contemporary of the events, as the aforementioned Patriarch of Constantinople was, it is clear why he did not write about the bones of unburied victims that could be seen for a long period of time on the surface. In Book 6 of Theophanes Continuatus, in the texts related to the work of Symeon the Logothete, and especially for the later chronicles of John Scylitzes and John Zonaras, such an aspect would seem perfectly understandable. However, such an aspect is not found⁶¹. This peculiarity of the description of the hostilities in 917 presented by Leo the Deacon is an exception. Nearly a century ago, Nicola Blagoev attributed it to the fact that

...he lived a short time after the event and had the opportunity to check it with eyewitnesses and accomplices, some of whom must have been still alive in his time. The continuator of Theophanes, for various personal reasons and considerations, would not have fully conveyed the historical truth⁶².

Fifteen years prior to N. Blagoev's published opinion, Mikhail Sjuzumov drew the attention to another aspect, which may also be among the reasons for the existence of the passage for the scattered human remains as evidence of the Byzantine defeat in the text of Leo the Deacon. The Russian scholar, when considering the sources and creative techniques of the chronicler, emphasized his tendency to imitate with very small corrections and to borrow ready-made passages from earlier authors and to incorporate them to his own story⁶³. Without belittling Sjuzumov's opinion, it should be pointed out that up to present-day some important additional touches have been added to Leo the Deacon's sources and narrative models as well as details concerning creative techniques and peculiarities of narration in his *History*⁶⁴. This does not mean that Leo the Deacon used

⁶¹ Cf. *Nicolai I Constantinopolitani patriarchae Epistolae*, ed. R.J.H. JENKINS, L.G. WESTERINK, Washington D.C. 1973 [= *CFHB*, 6], p. 54.1–68.278, 70.20–28, 84.55–88.137; *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister [Pseudo-Symeon], Georgius Monachus*, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonn 1838 [= *CSHB*, 33], p. 388.13–390.21; SYMEON LOGOTHETE, p. 304.129–306.179; *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum*, rec. H. THURN, Berlin–New York 1973 [= *CFHB*, 5] (cetera: SKYLITZES), p. 202.71–205.67; *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome historiarum libri XVIII*, vol. III, rec. T. BÜTTNER-WOBST, Bonn 1897 [= *CSHB*], p. 463.3–464.9.

⁶² Н.П. БЛАГОЕВ, *Критичен поглед върху известията на Лъв Дякон за българите*, МП 6.1, 1930, p. 48.

⁶³ М. СЮЗУМОВ, *Об источниках Льва Диакона и Скилицы*, ВОБ 2, 1916, p. 106–166.

⁶⁴ Cf. LEO DIACONUS, p. 9–52; A. KAZHDAN, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)*..., p. 273–294; K.J. SINCLAIR, *War Writing in...*, p. 47–60; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine*

randomly such a recognizable (at least for his well-read audience) motif. On the contrary. The author mentioned unburied remains of killed soldiers, which could be seen decades later, in another place in his work. The example has nothing to do with the Byzantino-Bulgarian wars and is related to the clashes between the Empire and the Arabs in East Asia Minor⁶⁵. Apart from Leo the Deacon's *History*, a later use of the motif is found in John Scylitzes's *Synopsis historiarum* – this time as a testimony to the Bulgarian victims in the battle along the Spercheios River in 997, and also in Anna Comnina's *Alexiad* – to the Crusaders slaughtered by the Seljuk Turks in the late 11th – early 12th century⁶⁶.

Along with the clarification that the events of the first quarter of the 10th century (or even later) are beyond the scope of this article, dedicated to the participation of the Byzantine fleet in the wars of Emperor Constantine V against Bulgaria, it must be clearly stated that there is no doubt about the dimensions of Tsar Symeon's victory in the summer of 917. The brief notes presented are due to that the fact that phrase about the piles of bones of the Byzantine warriors slaughtered near the Achelos appeared in a polemical work with an extremely negative pathos towards Emperor Constantine V and then "migrates" further into the later texts⁶⁷. One should not ignore the general attitudes in Byzantium at the beginning of the Second Iconoclast period when the *Antirrhetici* were written by Patriarch Nikephorus. In several places in the text, it stands out that the Patriarch addressed it to his contemporaries and argued or struggled with popular moods among his audience at the specific historical moment of composing the text. In this regard, *Antirrethicus* III is interesting mainly for what it reveals about Nikephorus use of history

Historians..., p. 236–246; L. NEVILLE, *Guide to Byzantine Historical...*, p. 124–127. Cf. also: A. КАЖДАН, *Источники Льва Диакона и Скилицы для истории третьей четверти X столетия*, ВВ 20, 1961, p. 106–128; A. ΜΑΡΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *From Narrative Historiography to Historical Biography. New Trends in Byzantine Historical Writing in the 10th–11th Centuries*, BZ 102.2, 2009, p. 697–715; M. HINTERBERGER, *Envy and Nemesis in the Vita Basilii and Leo the Deacon: Literary Mimesis or Something More?*, [in:] *History as Literature in Byzantium. Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007*, ed. R. MACRIDES, Farnham 2010 [= SPBSP, 15], p. 187–203; A. KALDELLIS, *The Manufacture of History in the Later Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Rhetorical Templates and Narrative Ontologies*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress...*, p. 293–306; J. SIGNES CODOÑER, *Dates or Narrative? Looking for Structures in Middle Byzantine Historiography (9th to 11th Century)*, [in:] *Byzanz und das Abendland IV. Studia Byzantina-Occidentalia*, ed. E. JUHÁSZ, Budapest 2016 [= ABR.BB, 4], p. 227–255.

⁶⁵ LEO DIACONUS, p. 75.

⁶⁶ SKYLITZES, p. 364; *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, vol. I, rec. D.R. REINSCH, A. KAMBYLIS, Berlin 2001 [= CFHB, 40.1], p. 300–301.

⁶⁷ In fact, in addition to the idea that George the Monk obtained the information from Patriarch Nikephorus, it is believed that both he and Theophanes the Confessor used the same earlier source (as the senior Byzantine clergyman did), and all mentioned authors disseminated its information with the corresponding corrections. Cf. D. AFINOGENOV, *Style, Structure, and Authorship...*, p. 467–472.

for ideological and polemical purpose. Of course, we must remain doubtful that he seriously strived for re-writing completely the entire narrative about Emperor Constantine V's rule. However, he did enough in this direction by using very recognizable moments of the Byzantine past, particularly arranged in order to undermine the "malicious topical" pro-iconoclastic claims in the early 9th century Byzantium. Also, it should be borne in mind that after the series of Imperial failures in the conflicts with Bulgaria during the ruling of Khan Kardam (777 – c. 800) and Khan Krum (c. 800–814) – especially the defeat of the Byzantines in the Battle of Markellai (792), the defeats in the valley of the river Strimon (808), the fall of Serdica (809), the fatal end of Emperor Nikephoros I Genikos (802–811) and his army in the gorges of Haemus (June 26, 811) and the subsequent Bulgarian counteroffensive in 812–813, the population of Constantinople remembered the time of the triumphant Iconoclast Emperor Constantine V with grief⁶⁸. As for what happened in the mid-760s in particular, it is essential that despite Patriarch Nicephorus's biased attempt to create confusion about Emperor Constantine V's actions in the "fields near Anchialos", the later authors apparently not only oriented in the sequence of events, but also had no doubts about the Byzantine successes and failures.

Conclusion

Finally, with the stipulation that future underwater research in the Bulgarian and Romanian parts of the Western coast of the Black Sea may give a different direction of the commentaries, still, it can be noted that in the wars against the Bulgarian Khanate, the fleets sent by Constantinople in the third quarter of the 8th century were impressively numerous. Even with some reasonable doubts concerning the numbers mentioned by the chroniclers in the well-known passages from *Breviarium* and *Chronography*, it is easy to notice that this tendency not only did not facilitate the landing effort, but in cases of failure it made the Byzantine fiasco even greater and the number of the casualties even significantly bigger. To some extent, this was due to the technical characteristics of the Imperial rowing warships and military transport vessels from the Middle Byzantine era that did not allow a stay outside the port for long periods. The need for replenishing water supplies narrowed the span to a few days, limited their range and the ships had to make refueling stops even if they did not carry additional horses and soldiers. The dromons and chelandions did not sustain during storms, strong winds and

⁶⁸ It is by no means by accident that Theophanes the Confessor wrote that some of the inhabitants of the capital during a procession in the Church of "The Holy Apostles" rushed to the tomb of Emperor Constantine V on the eve of the Battle of Versinikia (June 22, 813). Cf.: THEOPHANES, p. 501. Cf. also P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831*, Leiden–Boston 2012 [= ECEEMA, 16], p. 184–254.

high waves, especially outside the shipping season. Among the factors that also influenced the inclusion of the Byzantine naval squadrons in military campaigns at sea against Early Medieval Bulgaria was the fact that most of the crews in the fleet had experience mostly in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. Such a feature is not to be underestimated. Although closed, the Black Sea has its own specifics in terms of air and sea currents, navigation conditions and berths.

Bearing in mind the cases in which meteorological conditions were the main reason for the failures of the Imperial fleet, the role of the built-in shafts along the Northwestern coast of the Black Sea must be recognized. Undoubtedly, their embankment, as well as the maintenance and protection of the shafts in question, blocking the areas accessible from the sea, caused tension in the resources of the Early Medieval Bulgarian state. Moreover, it is a fact that it coincided with the height of the internal political crisis and the intensity of dynastic conflicts. At the same time, however, the great benefit of them was evidenced by the fact that despite the involvement of significant forces in the 760s and 770s, Emperor Constantine V never managed to repeat the scenario of his first campaign by sea and land against Bulgaria.

In other words, along with the general technical limitations of all rowing ships of the era, the mentioned combination of natural-geographical, climatic and military-engineering factors sufficiently influenced the participation of the Byzantine fleet in the wars against pagan Bulgaria during the reign of Emperor Constantine V. It can be claimed that during the outlined chronological frames the naval forces of Byzantium encountered serious difficulties or did not fully fulfill their assignments on the Western and Northwestern shores of the Pontus.

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Yanko Hristov

South-West University “Neofit Rilski”
Faculty of Law and History
Department of History
66 Ivan Mihaylov Str.
2700 Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
hristiqnko@gmail.com

Dafina Kostadinova

South-West University “Neofit Rilski”
Faculty of Philology
Department of Germanic and Romance Studies
66 Ivan Mihaylov Str.
2700 Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
dafinakostadinova@yahoo.com

