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## SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SLAVIC TRIBES THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE ANTI-BULGARIAN UPRISINGS ALONG THE MID-DANUBE IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Abstract.** The article tries to answer three questions related to the tribes that came into conflict with the Bulgarian state during its expansion to the west in the first third of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. And the questions addressed in it are: 1. How many and which tribes were in conflict with the Bulgarian state?; 2. When were the lands of the Timociani annexed by the Bulgarian state?; 3. Where were the lands of the Abodriti-Praedenecenti and what caused the Bulgarian aggression towards them? After a thorough review and criticism of the sources and research on the issues under consideration, the following conclusions have been reached. From the beginning of the study of the problem how many tribes participated in the unrest against the Bulgarian state, P. Šafárik has the idea that among the tribes in the narrative sources, can be found other tribes as well. Thus appear the tribes of Bodriči (sounding, perhaps, like Krivichi), Kučani (Guduskani), Braničevci and others. After an assessment of the information in the *Annales Regni Francorum*, it turns out that the only tribes recorded in the source that had a clash with the Bulgarian state in the period were the Timociani and Abodriti-Praedenecenti. Since it is not directly related to the events that took place in 818, the question of when the Timociani lands were annexed to the Bulgarian state is hardly touched by the researchers. After research and exclusion of other possibilities, the thesis is defended that this could have happened recently after the Bulgarian conquest of Serdica in 809. With the inclusion of Serdica within the Bulgarian borders, Bulgaria controlled south of the Danube River not only the Danube plain but also the territories lying along the Thessaloniki-Danube axis. From this point on, the territories lying along this axis could be gradually taken over. Being further away from Byzantium, the lands located north of Sredets are more easily assimilated. It is in these territories that the Timociani fall. Given all the above, it can be assumed that it was after the capture and absorption of Sredets that the Bulgarian State looked northwest, but still south of the Danube river, where the Timociani lived. It seems that at this time an alliance was made with them, which turned out to be not particularly lasting. About the habitation of the Abodriti-Praedenecenti tribe in the information of 824, it is recorded that they lived in Danubian Dacia and were neighbours of the Bulgars. On the question of where this Dacia is located, which in its description does not correspond to any of the previously known Dacias, many hypotheses have been expressed, and in modern times most researchers are of the opinion that the lands of the Abodriti-Praedenecenti were located along the Left Bank of the river Danube, on the territory of modern Banat, i.e. east of the river Tisza. New evidence has been added to the localization of these habitations. In this case, the following question logically arises: provided that the Timociani lived on the Southern, Right Bank of the Danube, what caused the unfriendly relations of the Bulgarian state to the Abodriti-Praedenecenti living on the

other side of the Big River? Given the size of the Danube River, it is quite difficult to cross and to transfer the fighting to the other bank of the Danube clearly should have had serious reasons. One of the possible explanations for this could be the transfer of the Timociani to their territory, on their way to the West, thus creating a *casus belli* for the Bulgars.

**Keywords:** *Annales Regni Francorum*, Frankish Empire, Bulgarian Empire, Timociani, Abodriti-Praedenecenti, historical geography, struggle

The beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century is a time of great importance for the two emerging empires on the European continent. These are the Frankish and the Bulgarian empires. Both at this moment are ruled by some of their strongest rulers, who, among other things, founded new dynasties – Charlemagne (768–814) and Krum (ca. 796–814) and, respectively, the Carolingian and Krum dynasties. Despite their proximity (for common borders, at this point, we have no data), they know about each other<sup>1</sup>, but there is no evidence of any tensions with each other. Rather, it can be argued that there is a mutually beneficial symbiosis between the two in relation to the divided territory of the Avar Khaganate. Only a vague report of a clash between the two states is given by the later *Monachi Sangallensis*<sup>2</sup>. Despite the lack of evidence, it would be reasonable to suppose that the emergence of occasional border disputes would have been inevitable, especially during the period following the death of the two great rulers.

The bone of contention between the two empires would be the several Slavic tribes living along the middle course of the Danube. The troubles for the Bulgarian state with these tribes would begin in 818. This would lead to a local conflict with the Frankish Empire, which would culminate in 827–829. It is some previously overlooked or poorly understood aspects surrounding these tribes that this article deals with. But first, for the sake of clarity, the known facts about these particular tribes will be presented.

The most detailed account of these events is presented in the *Annales Regni Francorum* (hereafter *ARF*)<sup>3</sup>. Its chronology of the events is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> For the Franks' knowing of the Bulgars, see: *Annales Laurissenses Minores*, [in:] *MGH*, vol. I, Hannoverae 1926, p. 122; *Annales Regni Francorum inde ab A. 741. usque AD A. 829*, [in:] *MGH.SRG* (Separatim editi), Hannoverae 1895 (cetera: *Annales Regni Francorum*), p. 186. On the recognizing of the Franks and their eastern policy by the Bulgars, see Н. ХРИСИМОВ, *Какво цели кан Крум с подновяването на договора от 716 година?*, *Епо* 25.2, 2017, p. 420–431.

<sup>2</sup> *Monachi Sangallensis*, [in:] *MGH.SS*, vol. II, Hannoverae 1828, p. 744, 748.

<sup>3</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 148–159, AD 818–822; *Carolingian Chronicles. Royal Frankish Annals. Nithard's Histories*, trans. B.B. WALTER, W. SCHOLZ, B. ROGERS, Ann Arbor 1972, p. 104–112.

**AD 818:** In autumn<sup>4</sup>, in addition to all other envoys, those of [...] *other peoples were also there, that is, of Abodrites<sup>5</sup>, of Borna, duke of the Gudusciani, and of the Timociani, who had recently revolted against (separated from the alliance with) the Bulgars and come over (moved) to our side [...]*<sup>6</sup>.

**AD 819:** A second assembly convened in the month of July in the palace of Ingelheim with the main issue discussed being the Ljudevit's rebellion. He tried to push the neighbouring tribes to war with the Franks by sending his envoys to them. *The Timociani had broken with the Bulgars and wished to come to the emperor's side, submitting to his authority. But Ljudevit blocked the move and with specious reasoning led them on to drop their plan and join his perfidious revolt<sup>7</sup>.*

**AD 822:** General assembly gathered in Frankfurt. There the emperor received embassies and gifts. *At this assembly he received embassies and presents from all the East Slavs, that is, Abodrites, Sorbs, Wilzi, Bohemians, Moravians, and Praedenecenti, and from the Avars living in Pannonia<sup>8</sup>.*

**AD 824:** After arriving in Aachen and celebrating Christmas, the emperor is informed that envoys from the ruler of Bulgaria are in Bavaria. He dispatched men to meet them and told them to wait there until the right moment for the meeting came. *The emperor also received the envoys of the Abodriti who are commonly called Praedenecenti and live in Dacia on the Danube as neighbors of the Bulgars, of whose arrival he had been informed. When they complained about vicious (unfair) aggression by the Bulgars and asked for help against them, he told them to go home and to return when the envoys of the Bulgars were to be received<sup>9</sup>.*

In the following year 825, in the month of May, the Council of Aachen took place. The emperor received the Bulgarian envoys, but the envoys of the Abodriti, called Praedenecenti, never came<sup>10</sup>.

This concludes the information about the tribes, a point of contention between the two early medieval empires. Although the events of these years are also found in other Frankish sources, those under consideration are not present in any other source and must be reconstructed on the basis of the *ARF* alone. Given the official nature of the *ARF*, it is safe to conclude that the account of events they describe is reliable.

Considering the situation presented in the *ARF* and the events that had occurred prior to the recording, several questions arise and will be answered here. They are as follows:

<sup>4</sup> For the time when the envoys were received in the imperial court, see P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831*, Leiden–Boston 2012 [= ECEEMA, 16], p. 294.

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of *Annales Regni Francorum*, cited herein, uses the form Obodrites.

<sup>6</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 149; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 104. All citations of the *Annales Regni Francorum* in English are according to the: *Carolingian Chronicles...* When the translation is not exact, the text has been supplemented by the author (in parentheses).

<sup>7</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 150–151; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 105.

<sup>8</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 159; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 111–112.

<sup>9</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 165–166; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 167; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 116.

1. How many and which tribes were in conflict with the Bulgarian state?
2. When were the lands of the Timociani annexed by the Bulgarian state?
3. Where were the lands of the Abodriti-Praedenecenti and what caused the Bulgarian aggression towards them?

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From the beginning of the in-depth study of the problem in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the pioneering research on the Slavic past by Pavel Šafárik (1795–1861), the hypothesis was put forward that as early as the beginning of the rupture with the Bulgarian state (in 816, according to him) at least three Slavic tribes (in his words – peoples) acted in favour of this collision. These are the Bodriči, Kučani and Timočani<sup>11</sup>. Leaving aside the wrong year in which the events actually took place, it is striking that the Slavic tribes are very different from those attested in the sources. All of them are considered to have broken away from the union with the Bulgars. In this case, this can be seen in the light of the author's acceptance of the explanation *qui nuper a Bulgarorum societate disciverant et at nostros fines se contulerant* as referring to and explaining the actions of the three tribes mentioned in the sentence<sup>12</sup>. Given the lack of punctuation in medieval texts, this error, considering the very early stage in which it was made, can be accepted as “normal”. Along with this, however, we also observe something very characteristic of the authors from the romantic movement of historical science, namely the introduction into scholarly circulation of historical entities that do not exist in the sources or at least not as they should be, according to the researchers of the time. This is how the Slavic “peoples” of the Bodriči, Kučani and Timočani appeared to the world. This way all three tribal names become sufficiently similar to familiar Slavic ones, i.e. it was considered normal that a Latin text does not convey the Slavic words accurately and they need to be “adapted” back. Thus, the tribal names Abodriti, Guduskani and Timočani found in the text were “adapted” to Bodriči (sounding, perhaps, like Krivichi), Kučani and the unchanged, but, perhaps, the main reason for the “adaptation” of the other two – Timočani. Given that Shafarik is one of the leading pan-Slavists, and, after all, it is the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such a “loose” interpretation of the names is easily understandable.

This trend of coining new tribes in the context of the events under consideration continues, and then, through Shafarik's writings, enters the historiographies of the Slavic states. Thus, in the works of Spyridon Palauzov (1818–1872) they are present in an identical form, just as Shafarik “identified” them earlier<sup>13</sup>. Konstantin Jireček (1854–1918) writes that the tribes that broke away were the Timočani,

<sup>11</sup> П. ШАФАРИК, *Славянские древности*, vol. II, pars 2, Москва 1847, p. 285–286.

<sup>12</sup> *Annales Regni Francogit*, p. 149; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> С. ПАЛУЗОВ, *Век болгарского царя Симеона*, Санкт-Петербург 1852, p. 14.

living in the territory of “modern Serbia”, and the Bodriči, living along the Tisza River<sup>14</sup>. Franjo Rački (1828–1894), in his comments on the sources related to early Croatian history, connects the Timociani and the Bodriči (Abodriti, Braničevci) with the conflict with the Bulgars<sup>15</sup>. Konstantin Grot (1853–1934) also assumes that among these tribes are the Bodriči and Praedenecenti, with most of their population inhabiting the left bank of the Danube River, and a smaller part, under the name Praedenecenti from Brandic (Prandic, Predenec), i.e. Slavic Braničevo, inhabiting the right bank<sup>16</sup>.

Marin Drinov (1838–1906) is the only one of the historians of that time who delves into analysis and criticism of Shafarik’s already established conclusions. After presenting the arguments of the classicist-Slavophile, these are labelled “etymological guesswork” in relation to the tribe of Guduskani-Kučani – after the name of the Serbian town of Kučevo and the Praedenecenti-Braničevci (respectively from the name of the medieval town of Braničevo), and together with this it is stated that such claims are refuted by direct historical evidence. That’s why Drinov refers again to the primary sources of information about the tribes under consideration – the ARF, where it is stated that the Praedenecenti lived *в прилегавицей к Дунаю Дакий*, i.e. *in Dacia adjacent to the Danube (Et contermini Bulgaris Daciam Danubio adiacentem incolunt)*<sup>17</sup>. According to him, here by Dacia is meant “northern Dacia”, a point which is confirmed by another reference in the text of the ARF, where the Praedenecenti are presented as being as immediate neighbours of the northern Moravians (*Orientalium Sclavorum, id est, Abofridorum, Soraborum, Wiltzorom, Boheimorum, Marvanorum, Praedenecentorum et in Pannonia residentium Avarum legationes*)<sup>18</sup>. And as for the connection of the Guduskani with the mountain Kučai and respectively the city of Kučevo near the river Mlava, it is enough to say that their leader was Borna, duke of Dalmatian Croatia<sup>19</sup>.

Regardless of the aforementioned criticism, Shafarik’s ideas continued to be popular during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this trend continued and even made its way into some chrestomathic works. For example, the “father of Slavic archaeology” Lubor Niederle (1865–1944) writes that the tribes in question are the Moravians, Timociani, Abodriti and Braničevci, who, in turn, are part of the seven Slavic tribes known from the events surrounding the creation of the Bulgarian state<sup>20</sup>. In the work of Vasil Zlatarski (1866–1935), the tribes participating in the events were

<sup>14</sup> К. Иречек, *История болгар*, Одесса 1876, р. 179–180.

<sup>15</sup> *Documenta Historiae Chroaticae Periodum Antiquam*, ed. F. Rački, Zagrabiae 1877 [= MSHSM], р. 321, 330; ИДЕМ, *Hrvatska prije XII vieka*, Zagreb 1881, р. 51–52.

<sup>16</sup> К. Грот, *Моравия и мадьяры с половины IX до начала X века*, Санкт-Петербург 1881, р. 91, н. 1.

<sup>17</sup> М. ДРИНОВ, *Заселение Балканского полуострова славянами*, Москва 1873, р. 156, н. 83.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, р. 156, н. 84.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, р. 156.

<sup>20</sup> L. NIEDERLE, *Slovanské starožitnosti*, vol. II, pars 1, Praha 1906, р. 415–421.

the Timocani, and together with them were the Abodriti, who inhabited the left bank of the river Danube up to the Tisza, and from the mouth of the Sava to that of the Timok, while another group of them was known as Praedenecenti or Braničevci, living on the right bank of the Danube River, in the area of the Mlava River<sup>21</sup>.

This line of thought would persist until the 1960s, when two consecutive studies by Vasil Gyuzelev clarified things regarding the tribes involved in these<sup>22</sup>.

In order to fully clarify the situation regarding how many and which tribes the Bulgarian state is in conflict with, we need to return to the *ARF*. To make it clear, it is necessary to trace in which year which tribes are mentioned as having a conflict with the Bulgarian state. Here's what the situation looks like:

In 818, the Abodriti, Borna, duke of the Gudusciani, and the Timociani, who had recently broken away from their alliance with the Bulgars and were heading towards to Frankish borders, were admitted to the court of Louis the Pious (814–840).

Given the mention of Abodriti and Timociani here together, in one phrase (context), and the fact that a few years later the Abodriti-Praedenecenti would be threatened by the Bulgarian state, it is logical to assume that from the beginning the conflict was with these two tribes. When reasoning in this direction, it is completely normal to assume that the tribes listed in sequence broke away from the union with the Bulgars and came to the Frankish borders, as was already accepted in the studies of Shafarik and the subsequent researchers. But in order to determine whether this is actually so, an examination of several issues of philological and ethnohistorical nature would be necessary.

First of all, as V. Gyuzelev points out, there is the problem of who is meant by the final, inserted part of the sentence – all three of the afore mentioned tribes or only the Timociani. For this, he rationally explains with philological arguments that even the formal grammatical analysis of the sentence does not allow the

<sup>21</sup> В.Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I, pars 1, *Епоха на хуно-българското надмоцие*, София 1918, p. 312.

<sup>22</sup> See: В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Баварският географ и някои въпроси на българската история от първата половина на IX век*, ГСУ.ФИФ 58.3, 1964/1965, p. 286–287; ИДЕМ, *Bulgarisch-frankische Beziehungen in den ersten Hälfte des IX. Jahrhunderts*, BbG 2, 1966, p. 25–31. Nevertheless, in some modern works, the Braničevci and similar tribes can still be encountered, as is the idea of a connection between Borna and both the Guduskani and the Timociani. Another present “scenario” is that the Timociani, Abodriti-Praedenecenti and Guduskani all broke away from the union with the Bulgars. See e.g. Д. АНГЕЛОВ, *Образуване на българската народност*, София 1971, p. 246, 326; I. GOLDSTEIN, *Hrvatski rani srednji vijek*, Zagreb 1995, p. 194, 295; Т. ЖИВКОВИЋ, *Јужни Словени под византијском влашћу (600–1025)*, Београд 2007, p. 192, n. 851. For the idea of connecting the Guduskani and Timociani, see: Н. ГРАЋАНИН, *Guduskani/Gudušćani – Gačani: promišljanja o etnoinimiu Gačani i horonimiu Gacka u svjetlu ranosrednjovjekovnih narativa i suvremenih historiografskih tumačenja*, [in:] *Gacka u srednjem vijeku. Zbornik radova*, ed. ИДЕМ, Ž. HOLJEVAČ, Zagreb–Otočac 2012, p. 55–56sq.



attribution of the phrase *qui nuper a societate Bulgarorum desciverant et ad nostros fines se contulerant* to all three tribes. Also, if the said phrase refers to all three, then the word “Timocianorum” in the main sentence would not be connected with the conjunction “et”, but rather “Timocianorumque”<sup>23</sup>.

Moreover, the Guduskani are well-known as part of the Dalmatian Croats and never belonged to the Bulgarian group of Slavs, let alone derived from it at that time<sup>24</sup>. The same applies to Borna<sup>25</sup>. This is also evident from the ARF records for the following years. In connection with this tribe and the older interpretations by Shafarik and his followers, there are also examples in which his “etymological” localization connected with the Kučai mountain and the city of Kučevo in modern Eastern Serbia. It leads some researchers to the conclusion that Borna was a local prince and to the creation of new legendary stories around him, with the ancient city of Guduscum, located by the author at the fortress near Kučevo<sup>26</sup>, declared to be the centre of his possessions. Such historical “interpretations” were challenged almost immediately after their appearance by Stepan Antoljak<sup>27</sup>. In addition to their incorrectness, in recent years, archaeological excavations have been carried out at the site of the supposed ancient fortress of Guduscum, which unequivocally show that there is no layer from the early Middle Ages or any finds from this period at all<sup>28</sup>. In summary, everything said so far about the Guduskani leads to the conclusion that from the point of view of historical data, as well as on account of the archaeological evidence, there is no possibility that they could be connected with the Danube, in the area of Iron Gates (Djerdap).

Speaking of this year and the then-mentioned Abodriti, it is hardly possible to claim that they are the same as those who came into conflict with Bulgaria in the following years. Rather, these are the well-known northern Abodriti mentioned

<sup>23</sup> V. GJUZELEV, *Bulgarisch-frankische...*, p. 25. However, in later studies it was noticed that the Guduskani and Timociani, in general, were placed under the command of Borna. See e.g. C.R. BOWLUS, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars. The Struggle for the Middle Danube, 788–907*, Philadelphia 1995, p. 61; W. POHL, *The Avars. A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567–822*, Ithaca–London 2018, p. 318. In this case, such a hypothesis is somewhat justified, since this problem is far from the main task of the authors.

<sup>24</sup> V. GJUZELEV, *Bulgarisch-frankische...*, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> See M. ANČIĆ, *From Carolingian Official to Croatian Ruler – The Croats and the Carolingian Empire in the First Half of the Ninth Century*, HAM 3, 1997, p. 7–13; G. BILOGRIVIĆ, *Borna, Dux Guduscanorum – Local Groups and Imperial Authority on the Carolingian Southeastern Frontier*, HAM 25.1, 2019, p. 170–176; I. GOLDSTEIN, *Hrvatski...*, p. 159sq.

<sup>26</sup> See S. PRVANOVIĆ, *Ko je bio hrvatski knez Borna (Da li je poreklom iz Istočne Srbije)*, RJAŽU 311.6, 1957, p. 301–310. Similar statements are also presented in P. KOMATINA, *The Slavs of the Mid-Danube Basin and the Bulgarian Expansion in the First Half of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century*, ЗРВИ 47, 2010, p. 57, n. 6.

<sup>27</sup> S. ANTOLJAK, *Da li bi se još nešto moglo reći o hrvatskim knezovima Borni i Ljudevitu Posavskom*, ГЗФФ.С 19, 1967, p. 130–132.

<sup>28</sup> П. ШПЕХАР, *Касноантичка остава алата са локалитета Босиљковац код Кучева*, Vim 16, 2011, p. 25–58.

in the *ARF* text, from 796 to 826, 32 times in total<sup>29</sup>. To this conclusion leads their mention first in the series of the three tribes listed therein, and that there is no specification similar to what was used for them when they were mentioned in 824, or when they appeared only with the additional part *Praedenecenti*, as in 822. Their reference in the phrase in question separated from the *Timociani* (between them, after all, were the *Guduskani* headed by *Borna*) additionally shows that their namesakes, involved in a conflict with the Bulgarian state a few years later, are not described, but specified as *Praedenecenti*. Of course, the possibility cannot be excluded that at some earlier moment the *Abodriti* living along the Middle Danube parted with the northern ones and moved to where we find them, but such a study is far from the goals of the present work.

Continuing the reflections on the problems of the mentioned tribes and more specifically a possible primary connection/closeness between the *Guduskani* and the *Timociani*, special attention should be paid to their mention in the year 819. In this year, describing the battle of *Kulpa* between *Borna* and *Ljudevit*, it is said that the main reason for the defeat suffered by the former was that the *Guduskani* deserted him on the battlefield<sup>30</sup>. At the same time, as already described, the *Timociani* tribe, *which, after breaking away from the alliance with the Bulgars, wanted to go over to the side of the emperor and place itself under his authority, was misled by Ludevit and lured with false persuasions not to do so, that it abandoned its previous intentions and became his ally and helper*. If the *Timociani* and the *Guduskani* had something in common, they would not be mentioned in the same context, the later betraying their leader, and the former breaking away from their union with the *Bulgars* (they alone) and during their movement to the west towards the lands of the *Franks*, joined their enemy *Ljudevit*.

The presented facts and their interpretation show that it was only the *Timociani* that took part in the initial stage of the conflict between the Middle Danube Slavs and the Bulgarian state. Along with this, from a historiographical point of view, it should be mentioned that the tradition of connecting *Guduskani* and *Timociani* is still alive in the scholarly circles of researchers from Yugoslavia and the countries that inherited it after its breakup<sup>31</sup>.

Further, in the year 822, during the Council of Frankfurt, the emperor received embassies and gifts *from all the Eastern Slavs*, as here, in that year and in this context, an embassy of the *Praedenecenti* is mentioned. In this specific case, it is clearly visible that *Abodriti* and *Praedenecenti* are mentioned as separate tribes, i.e. separate political entities located within the perimeter of influence/interests of the Frankish Empire. And what is even more remarkable is that the two tribes cannot be mixed/confused with each other because the *Abodriti* are at the beginning

<sup>29</sup> I. BOBA, "Abodriti qui vulgo Praedenecenti vocantur" or "Marvani Praedenecenti"? Pbg 8.2, 1984, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 151; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. K. FILIPEČ, *Donja Panonija od 9. do 11. Stoljeća*, Sarajevo 2015, p. 102, n. 253.



of the list and the Praedenecenti are at its end, i.e. there is no way to say that there is a confusion on the part of the person who recorded the embassies.

Two years later, at the very end of 824, a Bulgarian delegation arrived in Bavaria and was deliberately left waiting because at the same time envoys of the *Abodriti qui vulgo Praedenecenti vocantur* arrived in Aachen. In this case, unlike two years earlier, this tribe is now represented by its primary and qualifying name. This is probably done intentionally, to make the point clear to the readers, who should not confuse these Abodriti with the northern ones. In 822, this is unnecessary because both tribes are mentioned. In this case, what we are interested in does not need to be further clarified, because, apparently, it was sufficiently known even with its complementary name.

The waiting of the Bulgarian delegation is obviously necessitated by the very complicated situation that has arisen around the south-eastern borders of the Frankish Empire. In this area, the Bulgarian state had begun “unjust, hostile” actions against the Abodriti-Praedenecenti Slavic tribe that recently appeared in the range of interests of Louis the Pious. It was for this reason that they asked for help against their attackers.

The data from 822 introduced the Abodriti-Praedenecenti into the *ARF* and the political circle of the Frankish Empire, and two years later this same tribe complained in Aachen about its aggressive Bulgarian neighbours. In the years 822–824, only this tribe is mentioned as having a conflict with the Bulgarian state.

Summarizing the information available in the *ARF*, cleared of the layers of overinterpretations, it is obvious that there were not many small tribes that were in conflict with the Bulgarian state during the short period under consideration. Two tribes stood in the way of the expansion of the Bulgarian state to the west, or at least this is what the Frankish sources mention, and, unfortunately, no Bulgar accounts of these events survive. The Timociani seceded from their alliance with the Bulgarian state in 818, and in 824 the Abodriti-Praedenecenti stood in the way of the Bulgars to the west, i.e. there is reliable information about the conflict of the Bulgarian state in those years with only two Slavic tribes.

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Since it is not directly related to the events that took place in 818, the question regarding the date in which the lands of the Timociani were annexed by the Bulgarian state is hardly discussed by the researchers. In cases where this is done, it is in passing. This is how it happens with V. Zlatarski, who writes that this tribe had already become part of the Bulgarian state during the reign of khan Tervel<sup>32</sup>. As mentioned above, according to L. Niederle, the Timociani are part of the seven

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<sup>32</sup> В.Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История...*, p. 312.

Slavic tribes, i.e. they have been part of the state since its foundation<sup>33</sup>. In more recent times, Petar Koledarov perceives the people of Timociani as guardians of the Bulgarian western border outside its central territory since its creation<sup>34</sup>. Panos Sophoulis thinks that it was one of the breakaway Avar Slavic tribes, fitting into the description of “the surrounding Slavina”, which was allied with khan Krum against Byzantium, and khan Omurtag tried to incorporate it into the state’s territories<sup>35</sup>.

In 2010, Predrag Komatina published a special article dealing with the problems surrounding these tribes. In it, he also addresses this issue in the context of multiple issues important from the author’s point of view. In this case, he returns to the old idea of L. Niederle, that the Timociani are part of the seven Slavic tribes that formed the basis of the state created by Khan Asparuh<sup>36</sup>. New, greatly expanded, arguments for this “classical” thesis have been adduced and deserve to be presented. The probable territory inhabited by the seven tribes is represented as covering the entire territory north of the Balkan Mountains, as far as the Iron Gates. This is justified above all by the famous expression from one of the most difficult-to-understand sentences in Theophanes the Confessor: κυριευσάντων δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν παρακειμένων Σκλαυινῶν ἔθνῶν τὰς λεγομένας ἑπτὰ γενεάς, τοὺς μὲν Σέβερεις κατῴκισαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἔμπροσθεν κλεισουρας, εἰς δὲ τὰ πρὸς Μεσημβρίαν καὶ δύσιν πάκις Ἀβαρίας τὰς ὑπολοίπους ἑπτὰ γενεάς ὑπὸ πάκτων ὄντας<sup>37</sup>, repeated in an abbreviated form by patriarch Nicephorus<sup>38</sup>. Based on this information, supplemented with the above-commented and presented data from the *ARF*, the Serbian researcher tries to specify the possible territories inhabited by the Timociani. He thus accepts that these were the territories of the seven Slavic tribes – to the south reaching the Balkan Mountains, and in the west – bordering the Avars<sup>39</sup>. In this case, he defines the territories of the seven Slavic tribes as located north of the Danube River, west of those of the Bulgars and north of the Balkan Mountains. To the west, they border the Avars. On this occasion, the author assumes that the territories of these tribes hardly extended to the west of the Homolje Mountains in the valley of the Morava River, ending at the Iron Gates<sup>40</sup>. The question of where the *territories under direct Bulgarian control* were located, was left aside from the main topic of discussion, but it was presumptively accepted that these

<sup>33</sup> L. NIEDERLE, *Slovanské...*, p. 415–421.

<sup>34</sup> П. КОЛЕДАРОВ, *Политическа география на средновековната българска държава*, vol. I, *От 681 до 1018 г.*, София 1979, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 294.

<sup>36</sup> P. KOMATINA, *The Slavs...*, p. 55–82.

<sup>37</sup> *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883 (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 359.

<sup>38</sup> *Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Breviarium Historicum*, trans. et comm. C. MANGO, Washington 1990 [= *CFHB*, 13; *DOT*] (cetera: NICEPHORUS), p. 90–91.

<sup>39</sup> P. KOMATINA, *The Slavs...*, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

were the lands west of the Iskar River<sup>41</sup>. The lands of the seven Slavic tribes marked in this way also include the river Timok, i.e. it is accepted that the Timociani are part of the seven Slavic tribes already mentioned by Theophanes the Confessor and Patriarch Nicephorus. The author then draws attention to the term *societas* or *Bulgarorum societas* mentioned twice in the *ARF*. For its part, it is compared with the well-known and differently interpreted, word combination at the end of the above-mentioned expression from the chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor – ὑπὸ πᾶκτων ὄντας, referring to the seven tribes<sup>42</sup>. This word combination is deemed equal to the much more common expression συμμαχία in Theophanes, which in turn is equated in meaning to the Latin *societas*, meaning an alliance<sup>43</sup>. The author concludes that when the *ARF*'s geographical and political definitions of the Timociani are compared with the same definitions given by the Byzantine sources for the seven Slavic tribes, they largely overlap, leading to the conclusion that the Timociani are one of these seven tribes<sup>44</sup>.

In recent years, this thesis has been adopted by researchers from the Western Balkans<sup>45</sup>.

Regardless of this perception in scholarly circles, several things are striking about the presented thesis. First of all – those two types of sources are “synchronized”, completely different both in origin and time they describe – Byzantine, talking about events from the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and, accordingly, Latin (Frankish) from the first quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, with only the latter being contemporary to the events discussed here. Moreover, presented in this way, the solution to the problem seems over-simplistic. Given the above, the stated reasons of Pr. Komatina on the identification of the Timociani as part of the seven Slavic tribes and, accordingly, establishing their relations with the Bulgars as early as the beginning of the Bulgarian state on the Lower Danube seems to need further elaboration.

First of all, attention should be paid to the fact that neither in the older archaeological studies on the core territory of the early medieval Bulgarian state (Dobrudja, North-Eastern Bulgaria, the Wallachian Plain) nor the modern ones, is there a tendency to determine separate territories for the Slavs and the Bulgars. Everywhere in the mentioned regions, the discovered early medieval necropolises are biritual, with burials associated with the (Proto) Bulgarians, and some of the cremations with the Slavs<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, the material unequivocally shows the absence of

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61 and note 22 with reference to V. Zlatarski and the presence of ramparts in this region. See В.Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История...*, p. 152.

<sup>42</sup> Р. КОМАТИНА, *The Slavs...*, p. 62.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 62–63.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. П. ШПЕХАР, *Централни Балкан од 7. до 11. века. Археолошка сведочанства*, Београд 2017, p. 233.

<sup>46</sup> For the older studies, see Ж. ВЪЖАРОВА, *Славяни и прабългари по данни от некрополите от V–XI в. на територията на България*, София 1976; Д.И. ДИМИТРОВ, *Прабългарите по Северното*

“separate” Slavic and properly Bulgarian parts within the state. Nothing speaks of its possible federative nature, and hence separate territories of the seven Slavic tribes, and that, in their context, also the territories of the Timociani should be sought.

Archaeological research is also important for clarifying several other questions related to specifying the territory of the early medieval Bulgarian state and, accordingly, the relationship of the Timociani tribe with it. First of all, the archaeological researches on the territory of the Danubian plain show the presence of a population westwards approximately to the river Iskar. More precisely, this refers to the territories in the area of the three successive ramparts with a front to the west, separated from each other by about 30–40 km and located west of the river – Ostrovsky, Hayredinsky and Lomsky<sup>47</sup>. According to some researchers, their appearance varies between the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and they are associated, in the first case, with the beginning of the Bulgarian state, and in the second – with the Bulgarian expansion to the west by the khans Krum and Omurtag<sup>48</sup>. Evidence from recent archaeological surveys and C<sub>14</sub> samples indicate likely dates for the construction of the Ostrovsky rampart between 767 and 900, and within this broad time range, three narrower phases emerge, such as the stratigraphic correlation with the pottery found at the bottom of the moat, gives priority to the dates 802–845 or 853–885<sup>49</sup>. Archaeological data from the surrounding early medieval necropolises also show that the population here appeared no earlier than the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>50</sup>. This indirectly allows the dating of the ramparts to the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. P. Koledarov suggests that these ramparts mark the inner territory of the early medieval Bulgarian state<sup>51</sup> and that such a central core of the state was formed after the beginning of the Bulgarian expansion in the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>52</sup>. To the west of these territories, there is almost no data for the time before the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The largest early medieval centre

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*и Западното Черноморие*, Варна 1987, p. 183–260. For an up-to-date, summarizing study, covering and commenting on the necropolises on both banks of the Lower Danube, see: U. FIEDLER, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6. bis 9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau*, vol. I–II, Bonn 1992. Recently, there has been a tendency to link some of the cremations with the Bulgars, but this still cannot be accepted without reservations. See Л. ДОНЧЕВА-ПЕТКОВА, К. АПОСТОЛОВ, В. РУСЕВА, *Прабългарският некропол при Балчик*, София 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Р. РАШЕВ, *Старобългарски укрепления на Долния Дунав (VII–XI в.)*, Варна 1982, p. 65–68.

<sup>48</sup> See В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История...*, p. 152–154; П. КОЛЕДАРОВ, *Политическа...*, p. 25; Р. РАШЕВ, *Старобългарски...*, p. 68; В. ГРИГОРОВ, *Археологическо проучване на Островския вал до Кнежа*, *Архе* 52.2, 2011, p. 134.

<sup>49</sup> V. GRIGOROV, *The Ostrovski Rampart. Problems of Research and Chronology*, [in:] ПБА, vol. X, ed. Е. ТОДОРОВА, София 2020, p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> В. ГРИГОРОВ, *Археологическо...*, p. 131 and the literature cited therein; ИДЕМ, *The Ostrovski...*, p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> П. КОЛЕДАРОВ, *Политическа...*, p. 25.

<sup>52</sup> N. HRISSIMOV, *On the Origins of Komitats in the First Bulgarian Empire*, *SCer* 9, 2019, p. 429–453.

located west of the ramparts, but on the territory of modern Bulgaria – medieval Vidin, was archaeologically attested again only in the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>53</sup>. The situation is the same with the appearance of population in the territories located west of the modern Bulgarian-Serbian border to the modern Serbian capital of Belgrade<sup>54</sup>. P. Špehar connects the early medieval settlements of this period, located in the area of the Timok River – Gamzigrad (*Felix Romuliana*) and Acvae, precisely with those of the Timociani<sup>55</sup>.

Regarding what was written by Theophanes the Confessor, that to the west the Bulgarian state, respectively the seven Slavic tribes, bordered with the territory of the Avar Khaganate, clarifying the problem against data from archaeology could be of use. In this case, it is clearly seen that there are no contact points between the culture of the Avar Khaganate in its late period (after 680) and that of the First Bulgarian Empire. The closest Late Avar necropolises and single graves to the Bulgarian lands are more than 100 km from the modern Bulgarian territories<sup>56</sup>. Furthermore, the mapping of necropolises and settlements from the Late Avar period shows minimal presence along the right (southern) bank of the Danube. On the right bank, west and north of the Wallachian plain are the Carpathians, which serve as a wide, natural barrier between the two countries. Beyond the Carpathians, a greater Avar concentration is found on the territory of Transylvania, while on that of Banat, the Avar presence is minimal. All this shows that there are no direct points of contact between the territories of the Avar Khaganate and the Bulgarian state, but rather an unpopulated buffer territory, as the Bulgarian lands of this period are described by Arab travellers.

If we return to the text of Theophanes the Confessor and look for specific geographic details in it, i.e. to assume that its geographical markers are accurate, it must be borne in mind that even at a later time this kind of knowledge may be called abstract rather than concrete. It is enough just to pay attention to the

<sup>53</sup> В. ВЪЛОВ, “Баба Вида“ – замък на владетелите на средновековния Бдин, [in:] *Средновековният замък в българските земи (XII–XIV в.)*, ed. И. ДЖАМБОВ, Сопот 1987, p. 47–57.

<sup>54</sup> I. BUGARSKI, M. RADIŠIĆ, *The Central Balkans in the Early Middle Ages: Archaeological Testimonies to Change*, [in:] *Byzantine Heritage and Serbian Art*, vol. I, *Process of Byzantinisation and Serbian Archaeology*, ed. V. ВІКІЋ, Belgrade 2016, p. 91–99 and specially fig. 49.

<sup>55</sup> П. ШПЕХАР, *Централни...*, p. 233. About the early medieval settlement on the ruins of Felix Romuliana, see Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Гамзиград у средњем веку*, [in:] *Felix Romuliana – Гамзиград*, ed. И. ПОПОВИЋ, Београд 2010, p. 201–212.

<sup>56</sup> See *Archäologische Denkmäler der Awarenzeit in Mitteleuropa*, vol. I–II, ed. J. SZENTPÉTERI, Budapest 2002 [= VАН, 13.1–2], karte 4. An exception is a find of a bridle of Avar type from the Late Avar period, found near Mihajlovac, Negotin municipality, Serbia, but in this case, it is a portable item that cannot be a sure starting point for a permanent Avar presence or settlement. See *Archäologische Denkmäler der Awarenzeit in Mitteleuropa*, vol. I..., p. 241. Specifically about the late Avar finds on the territory of modern Serbia, see И. БУГАРСКИ, Н. ЦЕРОВИЋ, *Касноаварски налази са подручја Срема и српског Подунавља из археолошке збирке раног средњег века Народног музеја у Београду*, ЗНМБ.А 25.1, 2021, p. 321–342 and specially fig. 12.

“geographical” excurses in the works of Emperor Constantine VII the Porphyrogenitus<sup>57</sup>. Another geographical note should be made here, namely that from the point of view of modern researchers and the delineation of the western borders of the early medieval Bulgarian state, no one has gone so far as to place the borders so far to the west – all the way to the Iron Gates, as this was done by Pr. Komatina, with the idea that the Timociani are part of the seven Slavic tribes, and even that the Abodriti-Praedenedenti are also part of them?!<sup>58</sup>

To all these factors showing the impossibility of identifying the Timochiani as one of the seven Slavic tribes, one may add that the expression *seven (Slavic) tribes* is only one of the possible translations from the passage of Theophanes the Confessor. Even more than 60 years ago, attention was paid to the possibility that the expression could also be translated as the seven genera<sup>59</sup> – a name that is completely appropriate for a tribe. In that case, would it be possible to look for such a large territorial extent of the areas inhabited by such a tribe?

We must turn our attention to the other “detail” found in the sources by Pr. Komatina that gave him the grounds to “synchronize” the text of Theophanes the Confessor and that of the *ARF*. This is the identification of *societas* in the *ARF* with ὑπὸ πάκτων ὄντας in Theophanes the Confessor, which in turn is identified with συμμαχία, which he elucidates well on etymological basis. However, if we go outside the context of the words and see what happened in the early years of the existence of the Bulgarian state and especially during the period of crisis in it, one can judge best the relations between Bulgars and Slavs. The very fact of the absence of further mention of the seven (Slavic) tribes in the sources can only lead us to think in the direction that they were an indisputable part of the state and the search for them could only be biased. To a large extent, this also applies to the other Slavic tribe mentioned by Theophanes in connection with the creation of the Bulgarian state – the Severi. They are mentioned only once in Theophanes after the events of 680. This happened in 764 when Emperor Constantine V Kopronimos sent people to Bulgaria in secrecy and captured the prince of the Severi, Slavun, who, as Theophanes informs us, *had done many evils in Thrace*<sup>60</sup>. For the second time, we see the Severi acting together with the Bulgars, and also living in Bulgaria. Even in these difficult moments for the Bulgarian state, the Prince of the Severi acts in defence of the state.

Regarding the Slavs themselves, without being identified tribally, they are mentioned several times from the creation of the Bulgarian state until the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, during emperor Justinian II’s campaign to reclaim the

<sup>57</sup> H. WOLFRAM, *The Image of Central Europe in Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus*, [in:] *Constantine VII. Porphyrogenitus and his Age*, ed. A. ΜΑΡΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, Athens 1989, p. 5–14.

<sup>58</sup> P. KOMATINA, *The Slavs...*, p. 68–74.

<sup>59</sup> Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *Бележки към началния период от историята на българската държава*, ИИБИ 5, 1954, p. 319–328.

<sup>60</sup> THEOPHANES, p. 436.



throne, headed by the Bulgarian ruler Tervel, in addition to Bulgarians, Slavs are also mentioned as taking part in it<sup>61</sup>. The situation is more complicated in the period of the crisis itself when it is said that Slavs fled to the Byzantines, but at the same time, they acted as allies of khan Telets<sup>62</sup>. In these years of internal instability, Slavs could be seen fleeing the state as well as fighting for it. However, when describing the battle that took place, in the context of the defeated troops of Telets, only Bulgars are mentioned everywhere<sup>63</sup>.

With all the presented historical and archaeological facts, it is evident that the relations between Slavs and Bulgars have been stable enough since the time of the establishment of the Bulgarian state, and during the crisis in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century they were strengthened even further, as the Slavs, in some cases, were the main supporters of statehood. Given what has been said, it can be assumed that the Timociani and their lands were recently annexed to the Bulgarian state. Their actions, compared to those of the Slavic tribes that took part in the creation of the state, show the immaturity of relations – they show a “immature” union. This points to the idea that this union was born out in times not so distant from these events, and thus comes close to P. Sophoulis’ proposition presented above. It should not be forgotten that similar actions of annexing other Slavic tribes were carried out before, even immediately after the state emerged from its period of internal political instability. Such, for example, was the case of 774, when a 12,000 strong Bulgarian army went to capture the inhabitants of Verztia and resettle them in Bulgaria<sup>64</sup>. This shows the interest of the Bulgarian state in the Thessaloniki – Middle Danube axis even before the victorious actions of the Khans Krum and Omurtag, i.e. the idea of incorporating the Slavic tribes living on the Balkan Peninsula is earlier than the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when we see it in the process of realization. It was on this axis – along the Timok River – that the Timociani tribe lived. This is also the reason for the Bulgarian state’s interest in their territories. To control and rule the lands along this axis you need to hold Serdica. This city, because of its central location, is the key for controlling the Balkans. The possession of the city ensures possession of a large part of the peninsula.

It was because of Serdica that the war between Byzantium and Bulgaria, which would eventually lead to the death of Emperor Nicephorus I Genicus (802–811), began. During the reign of this emperor, Peter Charanis notes that Byzantium became active in recapturing its territories in the province of Hellas from the Slavs<sup>65</sup>. In recent years, Panos Sophoulis has shown that these actions of the ambitious emperor on the territory of the Balkans were not something isolated, but was part of a program to reconquer the Byzantine territories in this region. It has

<sup>61</sup> THEOPHANES, p. 373.

<sup>62</sup> THEOPHANES, p. 432.

<sup>63</sup> THEOPHANES, p. 433; NICEPHORUS, p. 148–149.

<sup>64</sup> THEOPHANES, p. 446–447.

<sup>65</sup> P. CHARANIS, *Nicephorus I, The Savior of Greece from the Slavs (810 A.D.)*, *BMbyz* 1.1, 1946, p. 75–92.

been described in detail how the military actions and campaigns of the Byzantines on the territory of Thrace and Macedonia began as early as 808. This is indirectly attested in two letters from Theodore the Studite. In these letters, he had previously written to the emperor asking for an audience and stated that Nicephorus had gone on a campaign with his son Staurakius. It is almost certain that this campaign was in the Balkans, as the emperor is not known to have personally led an army eastward after 806<sup>66</sup>. The gradual Byzantine expansion into western Thrace continued after that. At the end of 808<sup>67</sup>, a Byzantine expeditionary force operated in the area of the Struma River. And in this case, Theophanes omits information that would be essential for understanding the strategic goals and movements of the Byzantines. He only reports that while the army was receiving its pay, the Bulgars suddenly attacked it, killing many soldiers and officers, including the *strategoï*, and confiscating the pay (about 1,100 pounds of gold) along with the army's supply train<sup>68</sup>. P. Sorphoulis suggests that the main purpose of this army was to keep the pressure on the local Slavs, as well as to build or repair fortifications located strategically along the river<sup>69</sup>. In this case, the author concludes that, given the information provided by Theophanes, it seems that this Bulgarian attack was surprising but it cannot be known whether further military actions between the two sides continued. Taking into consideration one of the Early Bulgarian triumphal inscriptions, describing a battle at Serres and the city's proximity to the Struma River, it has long been assumed that the battle in question was meant there<sup>70</sup>. Along with this, it was pointed out that, shortly before the battle, in addition to dealing with the Slavs, the emperor may have been looking for opportunities to retrieve Serdica<sup>71</sup>. Krum captured the city from the Byzantines before the Easter holidays of the following year 809<sup>72</sup>, and although Theophanes does not explain when it was captured by the troops of Nicephorus, it probably happened before March<sup>73</sup>. An intense Byzantine year with all these events, which took place in quick succession, indirectly indicates military activity on the Bulgarian and Byzantine sides along the Struma River. In this case, it is quite possible that the capture of Serdica is connected with these events, and that the defeat of the Byzantine army along the Struma is part of these actions<sup>74</sup>. As further proof in this direction serves the fact that the upper

<sup>66</sup> P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 186–187.

<sup>67</sup> Year 6301 according to the chronology of Theophanes.

<sup>68</sup> THEOPHANES, p. 484–485; P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 187.

<sup>69</sup> P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 187.

<sup>70</sup> See В. БЕШЕВЛИЕВ, *Първобългарски надписи*, София 1992, p. 153; P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 188.

<sup>71</sup> P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 186.

<sup>72</sup> The same year 6301 according to Theophanes.

<sup>73</sup> P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 187 and note 90.

<sup>74</sup> For the period after the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, there are no archaeological traces of habitation on the territory of Serdica. For a good review and critique of the narrative and archaeological evidence on this, see: К. СТАНЕВ, *Защо през 809 г. кана сьуби-*

course of the Struma River is about 30 km from Serdica, and Serres is almost at the same distance from the river. Due to the presence of more than 6,000 Byzantine troops in Serdica, it can be assumed that it was the result of some military actions in the area on the part of Byzantium, and in no case can this large number be taken for a city garrison, as is often done<sup>75</sup>. This army is hardly staying in Serdica by chance. First of all, the city was strategically important – whoever controlled it, controlled the main communication and military routes into the Balkans, and hence the peninsula itself. Control over this city predetermined many things in the future relations between Bulgaria and Byzantium. From the position of Byzantium, the possession of Serdica opened the way to the Central and Western Balkans and, above all allowed it to intervene in the partition of the collapsing Avar state. Along with that, the possession of these territories would allow Byzantium to act on the rear of the Bulgarian state. From the Bulgarian point of view, the possession of Serdica would secure the western border of the state and open the way for expansion along the Thessaloniki-Danube axis, and from there to the north and northwest – to Central Europe. Its importance is well recognized on both sides. From the Bulgarian side, this can be seen from the actions along the Struma and the capture of Serdica. On the Byzantine side, the Bulgarian actions, perhaps surprising for Byzantium, received their response with an immediate march of the emperor to Serdica, but as Theophanes says in this case – *Nikephoros pretended to be going on campaign against him on Tuesday of the Saviour's Passion week, but did not achieve anything worthy of mention*<sup>76</sup>. Obviously, this is not quite the case, because Theophanes' text unequivocally speaks of the fact that the emperor went on a campaign against the Bulgars. On his way, he met the military commanders who escaped the massacre at Serdica, to whom he did not offer immunity, and as a result, they fled to Krum. Apparently, Nicephorus at that time had already gone against the Bulgars or in the direction of Serdica, because, as Theophanes writes, *Nikephoros tried to convince the Imperial City by means of sworn sacrae that he had celebrated the feast of Easter in the court of Kroummos*<sup>77</sup>. I.e. at the same time when the events described in Serdica took place, a Byzantine army led by the emperor himself has

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зи Крум превзема Сердика?, Ист 16.2/3, 2008, p. 38–39. P. Sophoulis suggests that Serdica was captured by the Byzantines soon after the battle by the Struma. See P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 189.

<sup>75</sup> See Б. ПРИМОВ, *Укрепване и териториално разширение на българската държава през първата половина на IX в.*, [in:] *История на България в четиринадесет тома*, vol. II, *Първа българска държава*, ed. Д. АНГЕЛОВ, София 1981, p. 134; И. БОЖИЛОВ, В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *История на средновековна България VII–XIV век*, София 1999, p. 127. For the fact that it is a 6,000-strong army, not a garrison, see К. СТАНЕВ, *Защо...*, p. 41; П. ПАВЛОВ, *Сердика-Средец-София в историята на Първото българско царство*, [in:] *ИДЕМ, Забравени и неразбрани. Събития и личности от Българското средновековие*, София 2012, p. 274–275.

<sup>76</sup> *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813*, trans. et ed. С. MANGO, R. SCOTT, G. GREATREX, Oxford 1997, p. 665; THEOPHANES, p. 485.

<sup>77</sup> *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor...*, p. 666; THEOPHANES, p. 485.

already set off in the same direction but came late – on the way he meets only the few officers (and soldiers) who survived the massacre. Because of his failure to help Serdica, the emperor proclaimed that he had celebrated Easter in Krum's aule. It seems that this march of Nicephorus was the reason why Krum only took Serdica and destroyed its walls, but immediately afterwards withdrew. Some time ago Pl. Pavlov proposed that the events that took place in Bulgaria in 811 should be called the *war for Serdica*<sup>78</sup>, but given the analysed information presented by the author, it can be argued that this war began as early as 809, and its finale would be placed two years later with the defeat of the Byzantine army and the death of the emperor, as well as the final incorporation of Serdica in the territories of the Bulgarian state.

With the inclusion of Serdica in the Bulgarian territory, Bulgaria now controlled not only the Danubian Plain but also the territories lying along the Thessaloniki-Danube axis south of the Danube River. From the Danube, descending along the course of the Morava River, the Avar raids traditionally went in the direction of Thessaloniki<sup>79</sup>. Serdica from that moment on would become Sredets, because of the central position it held in the Bulgarian territories. Subsequently, the territories lying along this axis can be gradually claimed. Being more distant from Byzantium, the lands north of Sredets were more easily occupied. It is in these territories that the lands of the Timociani also fall. Given all that has been stated, it can be assumed that it was after the capture and incorporation of Sredets that the Bulgarian state turned its gaze to the northwest, but south of the Danube River, where the Timociani inhabited. Apparently, it was at that moment that the alliance with them was concluded – an alliance which turned out to be short-lived.

In this case, a bad chance for this young, immature union turns out to be the situation in the central Danube basin, where at this very moment a “stir” among the Slavic tribes living there began as a result of the attacks on the Avar Khaganate by the Franks and Bulgarians, which led to the disintegration of the Khaganate and the centrifugal forces caused by it.

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The *ARF* introduces the Timociani and Abodriti-Praedenecenti at different times and in different contexts, which suggests different reasons for their inclusion. Given the mention of both tribes in connection with their confrontation with the Bulgarian state, there can be no doubt about the context in which they appear, although other reasons for this can also be sought. Along with this, the chronology of events leaves no doubt that these are two separate, successive conflicts, and on this basis, it can be argued that they have different roots. In view of what has been said, it is

<sup>78</sup> П. ПАВЛОВ, *Сердика-Средец-София...*, p. 273–281.

<sup>79</sup> P. KOMATINA, *The Slavs...*, p. 61.

of great importance to determine where the lands of the Abodriti-Praedenecenti were situated and what caused the Bulgarian aggression toward them.

Regarding the settlements of the Abodriti-Praedenecenti, in the report of the year 824 in the *ARF* it is recorded that they lived in Danubian Dacia (*Daciam Danubio adjacentem incolunt*). On the question of where this Dacia is located (the description provided by the text does not correspond to any of the previously known Dacias), many hypotheses have been put forward. In the early years of research into the problem, it was assumed that this tribe lived mainly on the left bank of the Danube, and a small part under the name Braničevtsi (*praedenecenti*) lived on the other right or southern bank<sup>80</sup>. In modern times, the majority of researchers believe that the lands of the Abodriti-Praedenecenti were located on the left bank of the Danube River, on the territory of modern Banat, i.e. east of the Tisza river<sup>81</sup>. Along with this, some authors believe that the tribe controlled the territories in their old locations – around the mouth of the Morava River<sup>82</sup>. With such unanimity of opinions, it might be hard to refute the thesis that the Abodriti-Praedenecenti lived in a place different from the generally accepted one, i.e. on the territory of the modern geographical area of Banat.

This location is confirmed by the sequence of enumeration of the legations in 822, where they are represented from north to south and the Praedenecenti are placed south of the Moravians (Great Moravians), adjacent to the Avars<sup>83</sup>. If the Osterabtrezi tribe can be connected with the Abodriti-Praedenecenti, then, regardless of the fact that it is not subject to exact localization, it certainly lived north of the Danube river, as the official name of the Bavarian geographer suggests (*Descriptio Civitatum et Regionum ad Septetriionalem Plagam Dunabii*)<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> See the first part of the article.

<sup>81</sup> В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Баварският...*, p. 287; ИДЕМ, *Bulgarisch-frankische...*, p. 29; П. КОЛЕДАРОВ, *Политическа...*, p. 35; S. BREZEANU, “La Bulgarie d’au – delà de l’Ister” à la lumière des sources écrites, *EB* 20.4, 1984, p. 123; J. HERRMANN, *Bulgaren, Obodriten, Franken und der Bayrische Geograph*, [in:] *Сборник в чест на акад. Димитър Ангелов*, ed. V. VELKOV, София 1994, p. 44; И. БОЖИЛОВ, В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *История...*, p. 151; I. BÓNA, *From Dacia to Erdöelve: Transylvania in the Period of the Great Migrations (271–896)*, [in:] *History of Transylvania*, vol. I, *From the Beginnings to 1606*, ed. L. МАККАЙ, А. MÓCSY, New York 2001, p. 264–265; А. MADGEARU, *Transylvania and the Bulgarian Expansion in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, *AMN* 39/40.2, 2002/2003, p. 43; P. GEORGIEV, *The Abodriti-Praedenecenti between the Tisza and the Danube in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century*, [in:] *Avars, Bulgars and Magyars on the Middle and Lower Danube*, ed. L. DONCHEVA-РЕТКОВА, С. BALOGH, А. ТҮРК, Sofia–Piliscsaba 2014, p. 109. The same in Bulgarian language: П. ГЕОРГИЕВ, *Абодритите-преденеценти от междуречието на Тиса и Дунав през IX век*, *ГСУНЦСВПИД* 97 (16), 2011, p. 48–49; P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria...*, p. 295. Best justification of the thesis in P. КОМАТИНА, *The Slavs...*, p. 69–74, but again with the assumption that the Abodriti-Praedenecenti were one of the seven (Slavic) tribes.

<sup>82</sup> К. ФИЛИПЕС, *Donja Panonija...*, p. 114.

<sup>83</sup> P. КОМАТИНА, *The Slavs...*, p. 68.

<sup>84</sup> В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Баварският...*, p. 286.

If this is so, the following question naturally arises: on the condition that the Timochiani live on the southern, right bank of the Danube, what caused the unfriendly relations of the Bulgarian state towards the Abodriti-Praedenecenti inhabiting the other bank of the great river?

Given the size of the Danube River, it is quite difficult to cross it, and there must have been serious reasons for transferring the hostilities to its other bank. What could these reasons be? To understand what happened, we have to return again to the events that took place in this region in the first decades of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, which are described in the *ARF*. In the most dramatic year for the Abodriti-Praedenecenti – 824, during which we also get the most detailed information about them, we learn that the Bulgarian state started unfair aggression, from the point of view of the tribe in question, and also that they are neighbours of the Bulgars, i.e. inhabit territories bordering theirs.

Before the capture of the eastern territories of the Avar Khaganate by the Bulgars, the Abodriti-Praedenecenti could not have had a common border with the Bulgarian state. The Bulgarian territories are beyond the Carpathians, in the Walachian plain, and remain far from the lands of this Slavic tribe. The situation changed after the capture of the Avar territories during Krum's wars beyond the Carpathians, when the Avar territories in Transylvania and to the left bank of the Tisza were captured<sup>85</sup>. In the territories of Banat, Late Avar findings are relatively rare, and it can be assumed that these lands during this period were not dominated by the Khaganate<sup>86</sup> but were inhabited primarily by Slavic tribes.

Nevertheless, being neighbour with someone hardly gives you a proper *casus belli*. The reason for these “unfair aggression” may be related to the events arising from the struggle for the Avar succession and the events that took place a little earlier on the other side of the Danube.

Returning to the earlier events on the Bulgarian western border – the secession of the Timociani from the union and their withdrawal to the west towards the Franks in 818 – it is noticeable that they did not move much further west. In the following year, they joined one of the two warring Croatian armies and participated in the military actions under the command of Ljudevit. Determining the location of the settlements of the Timociani after the retreat from their original lands can be made possible on the basis of what we know about the lands controlled by Ljudevit and the spread of his rebellion in 819<sup>87</sup>. After this adventure

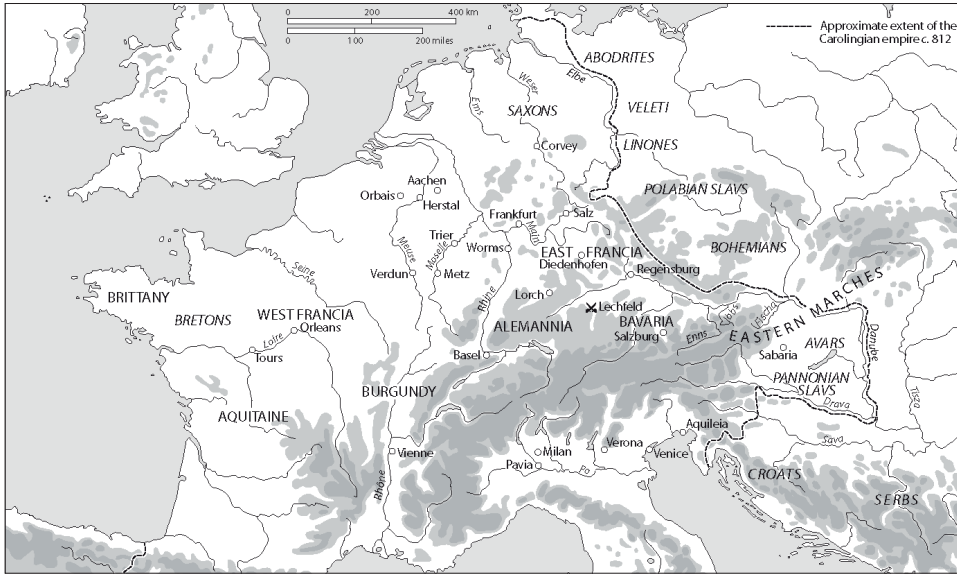
<sup>85</sup> For this, see lastly Н. ХРИСИМОВ, *Земите на Първото българско царство през IX век на север и запад от Карпатите – безспорно и спорно*, [in:] *Империи и имперско наследство на Балканите. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на проф. Людмил Спасов*, vol. I, *Античност и средновековие*, ed. Д. В. ДИМИТРОВ et al., Пловдив 2019, p. 51–91.

<sup>86</sup> *Archäologische Denkmäler der Awarenzeit in Mitteleuropa*, vol. II..., karte 4.

<sup>87</sup> Perhaps in this connection, I. Bona places the Timociani in the gap between the Sava and the Danube – I. БОНА, *A Kárpát-medence a IX. Században: a bolgárok*, [in:] *Magyarország története. Előzmények és magyar történet 1242-ig*, ed. G. SZÉKELY, A. G. SZERK, A. BARTHA, Budapest 1984, p. 26.



of theirs, they are no longer mentioned. In order to reach their new territories in the Frankish Empire, the Timociani had two possible paths. One was through the then-troubled lands of the Croats, and the other, to the north across the Danube and through the lands of the Abodriti-Praedeneenti (map 1).



**Map 1.** The Frankish lands and their Eastern borders (according: *Imperial Spheres and the Adriatic. Byzantium, the Carolingians and the Treaty of Aachen (812)*, ed. M. ANČIĆ, J. SHEPARD, T. VEDRIŠ, London–New York 2018).

In the meantime, as a result of the retreat of the Timochiani to the west, the Bulgarian offensive penetrated deep along the middle course of the Danube, thereby annexing this territory to the Bulgarian state. The appearance of early medieval Belgrade dates back to this time<sup>88</sup>, and it is entirely possible that it was also the base of the Bulgarian fleet, which would later intervene in the course of the campaigns of the Bulgarian army<sup>89</sup>. Along with this, the lands of modern Banat, i.e. the lands of the Abodriti-Praedeneenti, are pressed from the north, east and south by Bulgarian territories, while to the west, they are bordered by the territories of the Frankish Empire. In this context, it seems quite reasonable for the

After I. Bona, a whole series of publications follow this tradition – See: J. SZENTPÉTERI, *Térképlapok a 9. századi Kárpát-medencéről*, [in:] *Az Alföld a 9. században*, vol. II, ed. M. TAKÁCS, Szeged 2017, p. 12–16.

<sup>88</sup> М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Београд и његова околина од IX до XI века*, ГГБ 52, 2005, p. 95–103.

<sup>89</sup> *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 173; *Carolingian Chronicles...*, p. 122.

Abodriti-Praedenecenti to accept the Bulgarian actions as “unfair aggression”. It is entirely possible that the Timocieni also chose the route west through their lands, thus creating a *casus belli* for the Bulgarians to get militarily involved against them, but this remains only in the realm of conjecture.

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For a long time historians have been speculating regarding the tribes with which the Bulgarian state was in conflict in their western borders during the first decades of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This is largely due to the authority exerted by some researchers – founders of local schools –, whose influence, in some cases, continues to impact scholarship up to this day. The tribes of the Timocieni and the Abodriti-Praedenecenti appear separately and in different contexts in the only source that speaks about them, the *ARF*. Based on this, it can be argued that their conflict with the Bulgarian state began at different times and, subsequently, had different roots. For a short time, following the capture of Serdica by Krum (before the Easter holidays of 809), the Timocieni were allies of the Bulgarian state, but then opted to side with the Franks. This marks the beginning of the Bulgarian expansion to the west, south of the Danube. During the course of the conquest, the Bulgars would also encounter the Abodriti-Praedenecenti, whose lands were surrounded on three sides by the Bulgarian state. As a result of this conflict, the Bulgars and the Franks entered into direct diplomatic relations with each other for the very first time.

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