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SERGIUS, THE PAULICIAN LEADER, IN THE ACCOUNT BY PETER OF SICILY*

At the beginning of the second half of the ninth century, at the pinnacle of the Paulician power, Peter of Sicily resided on the territory of the Paulician state with the center in Tephrike (Tibrica, now Divrigi in Turkey)¹, then under the protectorate of the Caliphate². He was an official at the court of the Byzantine Emperor Basil I (867–886), who entrusted him with the negotiations on peace conditions and the exchange of prisoners³. During his mission Peter became interested in the beliefs of the Paulicians⁴. As he writes himself, he conducted a thorough investigation into the case⁵. He spent nine months among the Paulicians (at the turn of 869–870)⁶, which allowed him to collect a wealth

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¹ Πέτρου Σικελιώτου *Ιστορία περί τῆς κενῆς καὶ ματαίας αἰρέσεως τῶν Μανιχαίων τῶν καὶ Παυλικιανῶν λεγομένων, προσωποποιηθεῖσα ὡς πρὸς τὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Βουλγαρίας*, 187, TM 4, 1970 (cetera: PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*), p. 67. In HAMILTON's translation: *This happened in the second year of Basil, Constantine and Leo, our great pious and just emperor (Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c. 650 – c. 1450, trans. et ed. J. HAMILTON, B. HAMILTON, Y. STOYANOV, Manchester 1998, p. 92)*.

² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 4 and 187–188, p. 9 and 67.

³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 4 and 187–188, p. 9 and 67. He wrote: *I was among them on an imperial commission at the beginning of the reign of the autocrator Basil [...] My task concerned an exchange of prisoner* (4, trans. HAMILTON, p. 67) and: *At that time I was in Tefrice, having been sent there in the imperial service to exchange some archons who were prisoners* (187, trans. HAMILTON, p. 92). Tephrike is known as Abriq, Tafriq or sometimes Al-Abriq in Arabic sources (*Hudūd al-‘ālam, The Regions of the World*, trans. V. MINORSKY, Oxford 1937, p. 218).

⁴ M. TSIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA (*Paulicians Between the Dogme and the Legend*, SCer 7, 2017) defines the terms ‘Paulicianism’ and ‘Paulicians’ as *medieval heretics, followers of the dualistic teaching, which came to birth in Western Armenia in the 7th century, and consequently, during the 8th–10th centuries, spread in Asia Minor, Syria, Byzantium, and Bulgaria*.

⁵ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 5, p. 9.

⁶ *I spent a period of about nine months there, while Basileius and Zosimus, their polluted so-called synkedmoi, were still alive* (PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 188, p. 67, trans. HAMILTON, p. 92).

of first-hand information⁷. He emphasized that he had the opportunity to talk to many of the heretics, but he also talked to Orthodox Christians to learn as much as possible about the heresy. On this occasion, he learned that the Paulicians intended to send their missionaries to Bulgaria and decided to warn the head of the Bulgarian Church against the heretics by sending him a written account of their views, methods of action and leaders⁸. The addressee of this text, the Archbishop of Bulgaria, whom Peter named *proedros*⁹, was not mentioned by name. We can only suppose that we are talking about the first Orthodox archbishop of that country, appointed after Boris Mikhail, prince appointed by God had accepted Christianity¹⁰.

After recognizing the views of the Paulicians as Manichaean¹¹, Peter used not only oral testimonies, but also the works of his predecessors, who fought the heresy of Mani. These included works by Cyril of Alexandria¹², Socrates Scholasticus¹³ and Epiphanius of Cyprus¹⁴. He quoted the first of the above most extensively, however, supplementing the information with his own¹⁵. He also drew on the formula of renunciation of Manicheanism, which he quoted faithfully. He published the collected data in a work entitled *Ἱστορία περὶ τῆς κενῆς καὶ ματαίας αἰρέσεως τῶν Μανιχαίων τῶν καὶ Παυλικιανῶν λεγομένων, προσωποποιηθεῖσα ὡς πρὸς τὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Βουλγαρίας* (*History of the senseless and worthless heresy of the Manichaeans, also called the Paulicians, addressed to the Archbishop of Bulgaria*). This text is considered to be the most competent source of information on both the history and doctrine of the Paulicians. Additional information can also be found in Peter's *Speeches against the Manichaeans*¹⁶. He discussed, among other things, the question of the existence of two Gods – the good and the bad – in the teaching of heretics, their attitude towards the Mother

⁷ Peter boasted about his inquisitiveness: *I made careful and precise enquiry about the matters afore-said* (PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 188, p. 67, trans. HAMILTON, p. 92), *I also made careful enquiries about them from the orthodox who lived there* (PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 5, p. 9, trans. HAMILTON, p. 67).

⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 5 and 6, p. 9.

⁹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, p. 11 (*Prologue*).

¹⁰ The first Orthodox archbishop was appointed after the baptism of Khan Boris in 864 (*Chronographiae Quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Liber Quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris Amplectitur*, V, 96, ed. et trans. I. SEVCENKO, Boston–Berlin 2011 (cetera: THEOPH. CONT., *Vita Basilii*), p. 310–312). The first archbishop was in post by 870; see P. LEMERLE (*L'histoire des Pauliciens d'Asie Mineure d'après les sources grecques*, TM 5, 1973, p. 21) for the dated epitaph of a member of his suite.

¹¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 89, p. 39; 86, p. 37.

¹² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 46, p. 23.

¹³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 78, p. 35.

¹⁴ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 82–83, p. 37.

¹⁵ 32 fragments of his text (47–77) contain quotes from Cyril's *Catechesis* directed against Manicheans.

¹⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Adversus Manichaeos sermones tres*, [in:] PG, vol. CIV, col. 1305–1349.

of God, and the question of their rejection of the sacrament of communion. In unpreserved speeches, he considered their attitude towards the cross, the Old Testament, the prophets, Apostle Peter and the Orthodox Church. The above mentioned works are also known under the Latin titles: *Historia Manichaeorum* and *Sermones contra manichaeos*.

The texts of Peter of Sicily have survived in only one manuscript from the eleventh century (MS, Vat. gr. 511, ff. 80v–111v)¹⁷, with its first and final parts destroyed. Of the six speeches against the Manichaeans, two have survived in their entirety, while the third is incomplete¹⁸. *The History of the Manichaeian Heresy* was found by Jacques Sirmond in the Vatican Library and published in 1604 by the Jesuit Matthew Rader¹⁹. In 1847 Cardinal Angelo Mai, as the only publisher with access to MS Vat. gr. 511, published a slightly different version of this work²⁰. We also owe him the publication of three speeches against the Manichaeans. Cardinal Mai's edition is the basis for a publication in Migne's *Greek Patrology*²¹. In 1849 Johann Karl Ludwig Gieseler published an abbreviated version of the work, attributed to Peter the Hegumenus²², believing that it was written by Peter of Sicily. We now have a new edition of the *History of Manichaeian Heresy*, and its abbreviation²³ thanks to the work of a group of researchers from the Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation Byzantines in Paris.

A lot of information from Peter's works can be found in the treatise against the Manichaeans, written by Peter's contemporary Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople (858–867 and 877–886)²⁴. The patriarch dedicated the first four books to the Paulicians. Although the relationships between the two authors are still under discussion, it seems that Peter was the first. R.M. Bartikian doubts that Peter and Photius wrote independently of each other, using another common source.

¹⁷ M. TSIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA, *Paulicians...*, p. 234. The manuscript is discussed by R. DEVRESSE (*Codices Vaticani graeci*, vol. II, Citta del Vaticano 1937, p. 364–367).

¹⁸ J. HAMILTON, B. HAMILTON in *Christian Dualist...*, p. 66.

¹⁹ *Petri Siculi Historia ex ms. codice bibliothecae Vaticanae graece cum latina versione*, ed. M. RADERUM, Ingolstadii 1604.

²⁰ A. MAI, *Nova Bibliotheca Patrum*, vol. IV.3, Roma 1837.

²¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Historia utilis et refutatio atque eversio haeresos Manichaeorum qui et Pauliciani dicuntur*, [in:] PG, vol. CIV, col. 1240–1349.

²² Earlier J.K.L. Gieseler translated Peter's work and published it along with the text set by M. RADER: *Petri Siculi Historia Manichaeorum sive Paulicianorum*, textum Gr. M. RADERI, rec. L. GIESELER, Gottingae 1846.

²³ *Les sources grecques pour l'histoire des pauliciens...*, p. 1–226. Text and translation of the *Istoria* on pages 7–67.

²⁴ Φωτίου αρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Διήγησις τῆς νεοφανοῦς τῶν Μανιχαίων ἀναβλαστήσεως, (*Diegesis*), [in:] *Les sources grecques pour l'histoire des pauliciens...* (cetera: PHOTIUS, *Diegesis*), p. 99–184. Older edition: PHOTIUS, *Contra Manichaeos libri quattuor*, [in:] PG, vol. CII, col. 15–264. On the date of composition see W. TREADGOLD, *Photius Before His Patriarchate*, JEH 53, 1, 2002, p. 8–9.

Therefore, it should be assumed that the patriarch took information about the heresy of the Paulicians from Peter's *History of the Manichaeian Heresy*²⁵. Also later authors used works by Peter of Sicily. One of them was Euthymios Zygabenos, who knew and quoted them. The abbreviation of Peter's work made by Peter the Hegumenus was even more popular.

Peter of Sicily decided to present the views of the Paulicians briefly so that, as he wrote, it would be easy to remember them²⁶. He then challenged them, trying to provide arguments to those who would combat them. We have neither time nor particular need to elaborate on the subject of Paulician theology²⁷. I am going to disregard Peter's argument about the alleged continuity of heresy from Manicheism to Paulicism, and the evolution as a result of which its followers were called Paulicians instead of Manicheans²⁸. Suffice it to say that Peter explicitly stated that Paulicianism and Manichaeism were one and the same heresy²⁹. He wrote: Ἄλλὰ μηδεὶς οἰέσθω ἑτέραν αἵρεσιν εἶναι, ἣν ἐδίδαξε Σέργιος, καὶ ἑτέραν τοῦ Μάνεντος ἡμία γάρ ἐστι ἡ αὐτή³⁰ and that although they themselves distanced themselves from Manicheism, in reality οὐ γάρ ἄλλοι οὗτοι καὶ ἄλλοι ἐκεῖνοι, ἀλλ' οἱ οὗτοί Παυλικιάνοι καὶ Μανιχαῖοι ὑπάρχουσιν, ταῖς τῶν προηγησαμένων αἰρέσεσι τὰς ἐξευρεθείσας αὐτοῖς μυστὰς αἰρέσεις ἐπισυνάψαντες καὶ ἐν ἀπωλείας βάραθρον ἐπορῶξαντες³¹. Today we know that Emperor Basil's representative was wrong in identifying the Paulicians with the Manichaeans³².

²⁵ H. GRÉGOIRE, *Les sources de l'histoire des Pauliciens. Pierre de Sicile est authentique et «Photius» un faux*, BCLSM 22, 1936, p. 95–114; K. TER-MKRTTTSCHIAN, *Die Paulikianer im byzantinischen Kaiserreiche und verwandte ketzerische Erscheinungen in Armenien*, Leipzig 1893, p. 3–4, 9–14, 127.

²⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 35, p. 19.

²⁷ On Paulician religious beliefs see P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 126–132; M. LOOS, *Le mouvement paulicien de Byzance*, II, Bsl 25, 1964, p. 55–63; P. CZARNECKI, *Ewolucja doktryny radykalnego dualizmu w średniowieczu (VII–XIII wiek)*, PJAC 5, 2, 2013, p. 61–85; N.S. GARSOĪAN, *Byzantine Heresy. A Reinterpretation*, DOP 25, 1971, p. 94–113.

²⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 86, p. 37; 89, p. 39. Similarly in the title of the work.

²⁹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 170, p. 63.

³⁰ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 170, p. 63. *Let no one think that there are two different heresies, one taught by Sergius, the other by Mani; they are one and the same* (trans. HAMILTON, p. 89). At the same time Peter of Sicily states that the Paulicians called themselves “Christians” and their opponent Orthodox persecutors “Romans”.

³¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 3, p. 9, trans. HAMILTON, p. 66.

³² There is no direct connection between the early teaching of Paul of Samosata and the later Paulician doctrine. See N.S. GARSOĪAN, *The Paulician Heresy. A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire*, The Hague–Paris 1967, p. 205; EADEM, *Byzantine Heresy...*, p. 95–96; M. LOOS, *Le mouvement...*, II, p. 55–63; A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians (Al-Bayāliqa) in Muslim Sources and Their Role in Wars between Arabs and Byzantines*, SAI 9, 2001, p. 48; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство в българските земи (архетип и повторения VII–XVII век)*, София 2015, p. 58–65. Byzantine authors (Peter of Sicily, Euthymios Zygabenos, Anna Komnena) seemed to use the term of the Manichaeans in order to accuse Paulicians of being a dangerous and heterodox cult (H. KUSABU, *Seminaries, Cults, and Militia in Byzantine Heresiologies. A Genealogy of the Labeling of “Paulicians”*, [in:] *Radical Traditionalism. The Influence*

However, his opinions affected the perception of Paulicianism in Byzantium and Western Europe in the Middle Ages³³.

Peter of Sicily pointed to the determination of the Paulicians – they were willing to accept many dangers and endure many blows in order to share their faith with those they met on their way. He had to see them as very convincing, since he considered it the best defense not to engage in debates with the Paulicians and avoid meetings with them. This was to apply in particular to simple people with no knowledge³⁴. In his opinion, an ordinary man, out of concern for his safety, should avoid heretics like fire, because only people who know Scripture well are able to realize that they are dealing with heretics³⁵. This is because the Paulicians, using allegory in a dishonest way, seem to accept all orthodox dogmas³⁶. They loudly denounce Mani, Paul of Samosata and other heretics³⁷, but they listen to even worse teachers and leaders³⁸. They say one thing and mean another in their hearts, he says. They are like octopuses and chameleons – they change their shape to capture the victim. Only when somebody shows an interest in their teachings they gradually reveal their secrets³⁹. They say that they listen to the words of the Gospel and the apostles, but they convey them cunningly and contrary to the truth⁴⁰. Reading these opinions it is impossible to resist the suspicion that Peter himself experienced serious difficulties during the disputes with leaders of the heresy in question.

In his account he devoted much space to the leaders of the Paulicians, starting with Constantine, also known as Saloanous, through Simeon, the emperor's envoy, who was tasked with fighting heretics but was eventually swayed by them.

of Walter Kaegi in *Late Antique, Byzantine, and Medieval Studies*, ed. C. RAFFENSPERGER, D. OLSTER, Lanham 2019 [= B.EEL], p. 187). It is worth mentioning that the idea of connecting Paulicians to Manichaeism is not reflected in Muslim sources (A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 45). The only exception is al-Mašūdi who writes about their connection with dualism. Contrary to the Manichaeans the Paulicians were accepted and considered by the Muslims as their Christians subjects. See also A.R. TAYYARA, *Muslim–Paulician Encounters and Early Islamic Anti-Christian Polemical Writings*, ICMR 27, 4, 2016, p. 471–489, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/09596410.2016.1218650> [19 IX 2019].

³³ This thesis was repeated by other Byzantine authors, for example by Euthymios Zigabenos. According to Д. РАДЕВА (*Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 58) *Първият и основният източник за това изрично свързване на манихеите с павликяните е Петър Сицилийски*. In Byzantium civil laws and procedures against the heresy of Manichaeans had been applied to Paulician heresy (M. TSIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA, *Paulicians...*, p. 241; *Ius Graecoromanum*, vol. II, *Leges imperatorum Isaurorum et Macedonum*, ed. I. ZEPOS, P. ZEPOS, Athenis 1931, p. 219).

³⁴ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 10 and 12, p. 11.

³⁵ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 12, p. 11.

³⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 13, p. 11.

³⁷ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 15, p. 13.

³⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 16, p. 13.

³⁹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 16, p. 13.

⁴⁰ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 23, p. 15.

Then Justus, Paul the Armenian and his two sons (Gegnesius, also called Timothy and Theodor), Zachariah, son of Gegnesius and his bastard Joseph, and finally Baanes, son of a pupil of Joseph⁴¹. Trying to discredit them, he emphasized that some of the worst heresy teachers came from the Saracens, some from slaves, others were born to prostitutes, and others took their mistakes from women⁴².

Sergius, known as the son of Druinus⁴³ and as Tychicos⁴⁴, had an important place among these figures. He was Greek⁴⁵. He was brought up as an Orthodox Christian in a village Annia near Tabia (Tavium) in Galatia⁴⁶ and received some education. We know that he wrote pastoral letters to the Paulician communities. Some of them are mentioned and even quoted by Peter of Sicily⁴⁷. Later, Sergius was also credited with writing a commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew⁴⁸.

He began his activity during the reign of Empress Irene (797–802) and was the head of the community for 34 years (801–835)⁴⁹. According to Peter, while still a young man, he had a relationship with a woman who was a Manichaeon⁵⁰ and led by her, became *the forerunner of Antichrist* (πρόδρομος τοῦ Αντίχριστου)⁵¹. The woman read the Gospels, distorting the meaning of each sentence. Teaching Sergius, she slowly turned him into ἐργαλεῖον τοῦ διαβόλου⁵². Painting the image of the heresiarch with dark colors, Peter depicts him as a puppet in the hands of that woman. In the subsequent part of his account Peter calls Sergius ὑπέρμαχος τοῦ διαβόλου who had been taught heresy παρά τῆς ὀλεθρίου γυναικὸς⁵³. According to the interpretation of the Byzantine author, the devil himself used her in order to win over Sergius for heresy, suggesting him various questions and misinterpretation of texts⁵⁴. It is worth noting that another tradition was known

⁴¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 130, p. 51; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 69–70.

⁴² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 136, p. 53.

⁴³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 132, p. 51; Πετροῦ Ἠγουμένου Περί Παυλικιανῶν τῶν καὶ Μανιχαίων (*Précis sur les pauliciens*), 5–6, [in:] *Les sources grecques pour l'histoire des pauliciens...* (cetera: PETRUS IGUMENUS), p. 82–83.

⁴⁴ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 152, p. 57; PHOTIUS, *Diegesis*, 8–9, p. 123; 113, p. 159.

⁴⁵ J. HAMILTON, В. HAMILTON in *Christian Dualist...*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 81; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 70.

⁴⁷ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 43, p. 21–23 and 158, p. 59. Their fragments were also found in Armenian text known as *The Key of Truth* (F.C. CONYBEARE, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Key of Truth. A Manual of the Paulician Church in Armenia*, ed. et trans. IDEM, Oxford 1898, p. XL–XLI). K. TER-MKRTTCHIAN, *Die Paulikianer...*, p. 22–24; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 117–122.

⁴⁸ *Le Synodikon de l'orthodoxie*, ed. R. GOUILLARD, TM 2, 1967, p. 65.309–314 (trans. HAMILTON, p. 137); J. HAMILTON, В. HAMILTON, *Historical Introduction*, [in:] *Christian Dualist...*, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 83.

⁵⁰ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 138, p. 53; PHOTIUS, *Diegesis*, 101, p. 155; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 116–117.

⁵¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 135, p. 53, trans. HAMILTON, p. 83.

⁵² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 147, p. 57.

⁵³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 152, p. 57. In HAMILTON's translation: *the devil's champion, who had been taught her heresy by the destructive woman* (p. 86).

⁵⁴ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 138–146, p. 53–55.

to later Byzantine writers, who claimed that the teacher of Sergius was a magician named Lycopetrus, or Peter the Wolf⁵⁵. Sergius is mentioned also by Matthew of Edessa under the Armenian name, Sarkis and nickname Tychus (instead of Tichicus)⁵⁶.

The above characteristics contradicts the description of Sergius' achievements. As it was said he remained the leader of the Paulicians for thirty-four years, from the reign of Augusta Irene (797–802) until Emperor Theophilus (829–842). During that time he brought many people to apostasy, which Peter saw as the fulfillment of Apostle Paul's prophecy from the letter to the Thessalonians⁵⁷. This was the result of the intense missionary activity of the Paulician leader. Sergius wandered tirelessly, visiting the cities and districts where Apostle Paul had taught eight hundred years earlier and, claiming to be his disciple, swayed many away from the Orthodox faith. Peter, who had access to his correspondence, claims that the heresiarch boasted of his successes in one of his letters⁵⁸. The emperor's envoy was particularly hurt that there were many priests and Levites among the apostates, which proved the effectiveness of the Paulician propaganda. What is important, the apostasy turned out to be permanent, because during Peter's stay in Tephrike, the descendants of those converted by Sergius still followed heresy. The Byzantine had to admit that Sergius had caused significant damage to a large part of the Church of Christ⁵⁹. He also could not ignore the fact that he enjoyed great esteem among the Paulicians and was even adored by his disciples as Paraclete and a Holy Spirit: Σέργιον τὸν ἑαυτὸν παράκλητον λέγοντα [...] καὶ ὑπο τῶν ἰδίων μαθητῶν ὡς πνεῦμα ἅγιον προσκυνούμενον⁶⁰. Peter sought to explain this popularity by the deceit committed by Sergius, who took the name of Tychikos (Τυχικόν τε ἑαυτὸν καλέσαντα)⁶¹, mentioned in Apostle Paul's epistles, and allegedly claimed to be the Apostle's disciple, sent by him to teach. In Peter's opinion the devil's disciples often adopted new Christian names. The Sicilian also claims that the Paulician leader misrepresented the testimonies of Scripture, called himself Paraclete, and cunningly referred to the virtues and appearances of piety, hiding like a wolf in sheep's clothing. He did it so skilfully that many considered him a perfect

⁵⁵ *Euthymii monachii Peribleptae Liber invectivus contra heresim execrabilium et impiorum haereticorum qui Phundagiatae dicuntur*, [in:] PG, vol. CXXXI, col. 47–58; trans. HAMILTON, p. 157 and 163–164 (the heretic Sergius and his dog).

⁵⁶ Eutyches in A.E. Dostourian's translation (*The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, part II, 35, trans. et ed. A.E. DOSTOURIAN, Lanham–New York–London 1984, p. 113). F.C. CONYBEARE (*Introduction...*, p. LXVIII) gives the corrected version. See also S. RUNCIMAN, *The Medieval Manichee. A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*, Cambridge 1947, p. 36.

⁵⁷ 2Thess 2, 3.

⁵⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 153, p. 57.

⁵⁹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 154, p. 57.

⁶⁰ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 134, p. 53; K. TER-MKRTTSCHEAN, *Die Paulikianer...*, p. 22; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 51, 136.

⁶¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 134, p. 53.

guide to salvation⁶², although he actually rejected piety. Peter considers people who succumbed to the teachings of Sergius to be ignorant, without giving any further thought to the reasons why the heresiarch was so successful. Judging the consequences of his actions, he observes that he did not teach the word of God, but a mortal error⁶³, and that those who followed him were deprived eternal life and led to perdition.

Our author maintains that the heresiarch sought to destroy all men who professed pure faith, who were true Christians. The accusations made against Sergius are reminiscent of those made against the leaders of religious sects today. The heresiarch is said to have deterred the disciples of his faith from worldly life, alienated them from their families and led to their premature death⁶⁴.

Among the evil deeds of the Paulician leader, selling Christian children was particularly horrible. Peter says that the heresiarch, with the help of his disciples, took children away from their parents and sold them in captivity to the Saracen barbarians⁶⁵. The same fate befell handsome young men and women. The Sicilian paints a vivid image of infants torn away from the breasts of their mothers, brothers and sisters separated from their loved ones, driven out of their own country and sent to distant, alien places. According to the information available to him, many people died in bonds and in prison because of Sergius' actions, and others, who were rich, became destitute because of him⁶⁶.

Other allegations concern violations of Christian morality. The heresiarch and his disciples allegedly broke up marriages and defiled marriage beds. Victims of their activity were monks taken from the monastic life and nuns who offered their virginity to Christ⁶⁷.

Peter also learned that Sergius had a rival, a certain Baanes ('Vahan' in Armenian)⁶⁸. In fact, Baanes was the predecessor of Sergius⁶⁹. He was born in Armenia and according to Photius he had a Jewish father. He later joined Epaphroditus in Antioch in Pisidia and eventually replaced him as a *didaskalos*⁷⁰. Sergius, whose followers had always referred to Baanes as the "Reeking One", spoke against him⁷¹. According to Peter, there was an open confrontation between them, two or three times. Sergius, pretending to be godly, attacked Baanes in the

⁶² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 149, p. 57.

⁶³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 152, p. 57.

⁶⁴ Е.Э. Липшиц, *Павликианское движение в Византии в VIII и первой половине IX вв.*, ВВ 5, 1952, p. 55–56.

⁶⁵ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 154, p. 57.

⁶⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 155, p. 59.

⁶⁷ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 154, p. 57–59; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 141.

⁶⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 170, p. 63.

⁶⁹ Baanes was at the head of the Paulicians from 777 or 783 to 801. A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 48; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 83, 140.

⁷⁰ J. HAMILTON, B. HAMILTON, *Historical Introduction...*, p. 18. Baanes died in 801.

⁷¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 170–172, p. 63–65.

presence of all, accusing him not of matters of faith, but of unspecified acts of wickedness⁷². This led to an open conflict between the two men and to a schism in heresy⁷³. Sergius was accepted as a *didaskalos* by some Paulicians, and it was then that he took the name Tychikos, whom St. Paul described as *a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord*⁷⁴. It is not known what happened to Baanes, except that some of the Paulicians remained faithful to him. Even after Sergius' death, his disciples killed Baanes' followers⁷⁵ until they were stopped by Theodot, Sergius' *synekdemos*, urging them to remain united⁷⁶.

The role played by Sergius in the development of Paulician heresy and the esteem he enjoyed among them are evidenced by the epithets bestowed on him by Peter. Here are some of them – τὸν τοῦ διαβόλου ὑπέρμαχον [...], προβατόσχημον λύκον, [...] τὸν ἐχθρὸν τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [...], τὸ τῆς ἀθεότητος στόμα, τὸν τῆς θεομήτορος καὶ πάντων τῶν ἀγίων ὑβριστήν [...] τὸν ἀντίμαχον τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποστόλων⁷⁷, ὃ ἐχθρὸς τῆς ἀληθείας, υἱὲ διαβόλου⁷⁸ συκοφάντα, τῆς ἀληθείας κατήγορε⁷⁹, τῆς ἀσεβείας προστάτα⁸⁰, μείζον πάντων τῶν θηρίων τοῦ τῆδε βίου⁸¹, Σέργιον τὸν τοῦ σκότους προσφιλή τὸν ἑαυτὸν λυχνοφανῆ ἀστέρα λέγοντα⁸². After Apostle John, Peter asked the heresiarch how he dared making himself equal to God⁸³.

The terms used by Peter to describe Sergius correspond to the invectives directed against all Paulicians – οἱ ἀνόσιοι⁸⁴, ἀπιστήσοι δαίμονας [...] συκοφάνται καὶ πχμμίαροι⁸⁵. According to him, they are fools who *craftily and untruthfully conceal the wolf under the sheepskin*⁸⁶.

The successes of Sergius drew the Emperor's attention to the Paulicians. While in the early days of his activity the Paulicians enjoyed relative tolerance, later the Patriarch Nicephoros (806–815) persuaded the ruler to recognize them as

⁷² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 170, p. 63.

⁷³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 172, p. 65; PHOTIUS, *Diegesis*, 125, p. 163; 128–129, p. 165; S. RUNCIMAN, *The Medieval Manichee...*, p. 36; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликияни и павликянство...*, p. 141–144; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 80.

⁷⁴ Eph 6, 21.

⁷⁵ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 173, p. 65; PHOTIUS, *Diegesis*, 130, p. 165, 167; M. LOOS, *Le mouvement paulicien de Byzance*, I, Bsl 24, 1963, p. 279.

⁷⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 174, p. 65; M. LOOS, *Le mouvement...*, I, p. 279.

⁷⁷ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 133, p. 51.

⁷⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 162, p. 61.

⁷⁹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 165, p. 61.

⁸⁰ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 168, p. 63.

⁸¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 181, p. 65.

⁸² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 134, p. 53. *The lover of darkness who called himself the star of daybreak* (trans. HAMILTON, p. 83).

⁸³ Io 5, 18; PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 162, p. 61.

⁸⁴ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 5, p. 9.

⁸⁵ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 34, p. 19.

⁸⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 23, p. 15, trans. HAMILTON, p. 69.

heretics and to take action against them. Michael I (811–813) and his successor, Leo V (813–820), seeing that heresy had attracted many Christians, ordered the death penalty for those who were involved in it⁸⁷. The orders of the emperor were executed, among others, by Bishop of Neocaesarea and exarch Paracondacus⁸⁸. On this basis we can conclude that Sergius resided in the Neocaesarea area, probably in Kynochorion⁸⁹.

The repressions were met with strong resistance from the Paulicians. Sergius' disciples, called *astatoi*, cunningly and treacherously murdered the exarch, while the inhabitants of Cynochoritae killed metropolitan Thomas⁹⁰. *Astatoi*, who became the military arm of the Paulicians, fled to Melitene⁹¹, to Muslim-controlled areas. The local emir, Monocherares – 'One-Handed', that is 'Umar Ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Aqṭa' (about 830–863), gave the *astatoi* the fortress Argavon (today Arguvan)⁹². Various Muslim authors (eg. Al-Mas'ūdī, Aṭ-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Atīr) indicate that an alliance might have existed between Paulicians and the Arabs⁹³.

⁸⁷ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 175, p. 65; THEOPHANES AM 6304, p. 495; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 81. The author of *Vita Macarii* writes about punishing the Paulicians with death during the times of Emperor Theophilus (*S. Macarii monasterii Peleceetes hegumeni acta graeca*, 14, ed. H. DELEHAYE, AB 16, 1897, p. 159). George the Monk accused the emperor Constantin V of favoring the Paulicians (GEORGIUS MONACHUS, *Chronicon*, vol. II, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1904, p. 752). According to some scholars, the Paulicans previously collaborated with the iconoclast emperors (N.S. GARSOĪAN, *The Paulician Heresy...*, p. 122–123; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликянството между легендите и историята VII–XVII век*, ПИФ 1, 2, 2017, p. 42–43, online: <https://logos.uni-plovdiv.net/en/elektronno-spisanie-plovdivski-istoriceski-forum> [19 IX 2019]; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 80–81; M. LOOS doubts such cooperation (*Le mouvement...*, I, p. 267–268). Also Emperor Nicephorus I (802–811) was designated by Theophanes as an ardent friend of the Manicheans, i.e. Paulicians (*Theophanis Chronographia*, AM 6303, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883 (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 488).

⁸⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 176, p. 65.

⁸⁹ P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 71.

⁹⁰ Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 84; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 72.

⁹¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 177, p. 65; A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 48, 54; Е.Э. ЛИПШИЦ, *Павликианское...*, p. 57; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликянството...*, p. 44; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 72–73, 82. On 'Umar Ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Aqṭa' see M. CANARD, *Un personnage de roman arabo-byzantin*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Byzance et les musulmans de Proche Orient*, praef. C. САНЕН, London 1973, p. 1–14. On Melitena – E. HONIGMAN, *Malatya*, [in:] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. VI, Leiden 1991, p. 230–231.

⁹² They also settled around Tephrike and Amara (*Theophanis Continuati libri I–IV*, IV, 16, ed. et trans. M. FEATHERSTONE, J. SIGNES CODONER, Boston–Berlin 2015 [= *CFHB*, 53] (cetera: THEOPH. CONT.), p. 236).

⁹³ The war with the Byzantine Empire was also recorded in Arabic poetry, in folk epics like the story of Dāt al-Himma and in Byzantine epic Digenis Akritas. For the details see S.B. DADOYAN, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World. Paradigms of Interaction Seventh to Fourteenth Centuries*, vol. I, *The Arab Period in Arminjah: Seventh to Eleventh Centuries*, New Brunswick–London 2013, p. 96–107; A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 54–58; G. HUXLEY, *Antecedents and Context of Digenes Akrites*, GRBS 15, 1974, p. 317–338.

Muslim caliphs had generally offered Paulicians hospitable shelter because they were the main enemy of the Byzantines and knew the region well, and thus could serve as guides during the Muslim marches against Byzantines, actively participating in wars against the Byzantium⁹⁴. That was the reason why the Paulicians enjoyed a kind of autonomy under the ‘Abbasids⁹⁵. Having settled there and gathered supporters from all sides, the Paulicians started attacking the empire arm in arm with the Arabs⁹⁶. The chronology of these events is uncertain. It is possible that it took place during the rebellion of Thomas the Slav – in the 820s⁹⁷. Then Sergius and many of his followers joined the *astatoi* in Argauon. Sergius, who made a living as a carpenter, lived there for some time with his disciples, without giving up his missionary activity.

The Paulician leader founded new communities, naming them after the first Christian communities founded by Apostle Paul⁹⁸. This is how the Paulician “Colossan” Church came into being (which brought together the inhabitants of Cynochoritae)⁹⁹ and the Church of the “Laodiceans”. The latter was founded when Sergius moved his headquarters to Kynochorion near Neocaesarea (Niksar). His activity was not confined to the regions mentioned above. During his mission to Cilicia he founded, probably with the consent of Emir of Tarsus, the Church of the “Ephesians” based in Mimistra¹⁰⁰.

Sergius died a violent death, slaughtered with an axe in the mountains above Argauon by a man named Tzanion, who came from a *kastellon* in the Nicopolis region¹⁰¹. It happened in the year 6343 since the foundation of the world

⁹⁴ A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 50–51; Д.О. ЛОЕВСКИЙ, Д.А. НИКУЛЬШИН, *К вопросу об ереси павликиан в Византии*, ИУГУ 33, 2004, p. 208; S.B. DADOYAN, *The Armenians...*, vol. I, *The Arab Period...*, p. 45–46, 95–101; vol. II, *Armenian Realpolitik in the Islamic World and Diverging Paradigms Case of Cilicia: Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries*, New Brunswick–London 2013, p. 10–11, 40.

⁹⁵ A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 54.

⁹⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 178, p. 65; PHOTIUS, *Diegesis*, 138, p. 169; H. KENNEDY, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates. The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, London 1986, p. 152–154; P. SOPHOULIS, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831*, Leiden–Boston 2012, p. 249; N.S. GARSOÏAN, *The Paulician Heresy...*, p. 120, 135; F. ALPI, *Messaggi attraverso il confine: l’Armenia e il confine orientale di Bisanzio nelle Lettere di Grigor Pahlawowni Magistros (ca. 990–1058)* (Diss., Università di Pisa 2014, available online: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/79619043.pdf>, 19 IX 2019), p. 223, 243 (*i pauliciani avevano fatto fronte comune con gli Arabi*).

⁹⁷ J. HAMILTON, B. HAMILTON, *Historical Introduction...*, p. 20; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 81.

⁹⁸ PETRUS IGUMENUS, 7, p. 84; M. TSIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA, *Paulicians...*, p. 239; P. LEMERLE, *L’histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 118–120.

⁹⁹ PETRUS IGUMENUS, 7, p. 84; N.S. GARSOÏAN, *The Paulician Heresy...*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁰ PETRUS IGUMENUS, 7, p. 84; PHOTIUS, *Diegesis*, 139–140, p. 169; S. RUNCIMAN, *The Medieval Manichee...*, p. 39; J. HAMILTON, B. HAMILTON, *Historical Introduction...*, p. 20; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 83–84.

¹⁰¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 180, p. 65; P. LEMERLE, *L’histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 74.

(= AD 834/835)¹⁰². The reasons for this crime are unknown. It should not come as a surprise that, according to Peter, it was God's punishment for dividing the Church¹⁰³.

The protagonist of this paper prepared the community well for further fights with Byzantium and dealing with their Saracen neighbors. He also introduced changes to Paulician theology¹⁰⁴. In the opinion of contemporary researchers, Sergius was *dernier grand docteur paulicien*¹⁰⁵, the great Paulician apostle¹⁰⁶, greater heresiarch¹⁰⁷ and a person of great charisma. He demonstrated more pleasing morals, good manners and tenderness than his predecessor, Baanes¹⁰⁸. He is not, however, *un grand théologien* but rather *un homme d'action*¹⁰⁹.

His work was continued by a large group of disciples, among whom Peter mentions Michael, Canacharis, John Aoratus (who he calls false priests), Theodot, Basileius, Zosimus and others¹¹⁰. While Peter was in Tephrike, Basileius and Zosimus were still alive¹¹¹ and were religious leaders. Their names, along with the name of Sergius, were among those condemned in anathemas¹¹².

Those disciples whom the Paulicians called companions of the road (*synekdemoi*, συνέκδημοι), after the death of their teacher, disseminated his teachings and those of his predecessors among the residents of Argaoun. According to the information provided to Peter, at first they did not choose one leader, but they all had the same rank, they were all equal. They had subordinates, whom they called notaries (νοτάριοι)¹¹³, who, according to Peter, were false priests. It seems that the *synekdemoi* maintained their position also when the Paulicians were joined by Karbeas (Καρβέας), an important staff official of the commander of the Anatolic Theme, who rebelled after the execution of his father, fled to Argaoun with a group of Paulicians (they were said to have been five thousand) and offered his services

¹⁰² PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 181, p. 65; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 84; Е.Э. ЛИПШИЦ (*Павликианское...*, p. 58) wrote that *Смерть Сергия отнесена Петром Сицилийцем к 6303 г. от сотворения мира, что соответствует у Фотия 6343 г., т. е. если следовать общепринятой константинопольской эре, но Петру событие это относится к 795 г., по Фотию же — к 835 г.*

¹⁰³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 179, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴ N.S. GARSOÏAN, *The Paulician Heresy...*, p. 182–185; ЕАДЕМ, *Byzantine Heresy...*, p. 96; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 101, 117–118, 141, 157.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Synodikon de l'orthodoxie...*, p. 133.

¹⁰⁶ F.C. CONYBEARE, *Introduction...*, p. XXXII.

¹⁰⁷ S. RUNCIMAN, *The Medieval Manichee...*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁸ Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликянство...*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁹ P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 122.

¹¹⁰ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 182, p. 67.

¹¹¹ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 187, p. 67.

¹¹² *Les formules d'abjuration*, I, 15; II, 14; III, 2; IV, 9, [in:] *Les sources grecques pour l'histoire des pauliciens...*, p. 193, 195, 197, 199, 205, 207; J. GOUILLARD, *Commentaire...*, p. 233–234.

¹¹³ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 183, p. 67; K. TER-MKRITSCHIAN, *Die Paulikianer...*, p. 26–27.

to the Emir of Melitena¹¹⁴. During his time, the numbers and power of the Paulicians grew. They left Argauon, founded Tephrike and settled there before 856¹¹⁵.

As a result, they became partially independent from the Muslims of Melitena, and living in the vicinity of Armenia and Byzantium they were able to attack them¹¹⁶. They subjugated the local population, using those who obeyed them as helpers in guarding the prisoners. The disobedient were sold to Saracens. Karbeas made Tephrike a shelter for those who were sentenced to death for Paulician heresy in the empire¹¹⁷. Also supporters of heresy from the vicinity of Tephrike gathered here. According to Peter, they were the most greedy, the most promiscuous and insane people, tempted by the promise of freedom to fulfill their most shameful desires¹¹⁸.

The mission of Peter of Sicily in Tephrike ended in failure, so in the following years Basil I undertook campaigns against the Paulicians and despite initial setbacks he managed to defeat them and destroyed Tephrike (871/872)¹¹⁹. However, the ruler decided not to persecute the defeated, but to use their military potential, eagerly conscripting them into the ranks of the Byzantine army. Almost one hundred years earlier in 757, the Paulician colony was founded in Thrace by Emperor Constantine V¹²⁰. John Tzimiskes (969–976) resettled them in the vicinity of Philippopolis, a fortress that he had recently taken away from the Bulgarians¹²¹. Thus, although in a different way than envisaged by Peter of Sicily, the Paulicians found themselves in the Bulgarian territory. The Bulgarian clergy already had the right materials to meet that challenge.

¹¹⁴ Karbeas is called Qarbiyās in Arabic sources (A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 53–55). On Karbeas see P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 856–896.

¹¹⁵ Е.Э. Липшиц, *Павликианское...*, p. 59; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликианството...*, p. 45.

¹¹⁶ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 184, p. 67; S. RUNCIMAN, *The Medieval Manichee...*, p. 39–44; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликианство...*, p. 85.

¹¹⁷ THEOPH. CONT., IV, 16, p. 237–139; IV, 23, p. 250–252; THEOPH. CONT., *Vita Basilii*, 37–43, p. 136–159 (= ed. I. BEKKER, p. 165–166; 176–177, V, 37–43, 266–276); *Iosephi Genesis Regum libri quattuor*, I, 31; I, 34–37, rec. A. LESMUELLER-WERNER, Berolini 1978 [= CFHB, 14], p. 81–82, 85–88 (= ed. C. LACHMANN, Bonn 1834 [= CSFB], p. 120–126); *Georgii Cedreni Historiarum Compendium*, vol. II, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonn 1839 [= CSHB], p. 206–212; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликяни и павликианство...*, p. 85; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 92–96.

¹¹⁸ PETRUS SICULUS, *Istoria*, 185, p. 67.

¹¹⁹ A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 59; Д.О. ЛОЕВСКИЙ, Д.А. НИКУЛЬШИН, *К вопросу...*, p. 208; W.M. RAMSAY, *The Campaign of Basil I. against the Paulicians in 872 AD*, CR 10, 1896, p. 136–140; Д. РАДЕВА, *Павликианството...*, p. 45–46; P. LEMERLE, *L'histoire des Pauliciens...*, p. 104–110.

¹²⁰ THEOPHANES, AM 6247, p. 429; A. NAZMI, *The Paulicians...*, p. 59; Y. STOYANOV, *The Other God. Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, New Haven 2000, p. 150; P. CHARANIS, *The Transfer of Population as a Policy in the Byzantine Empire*, CSSH 3, 2, 1961, p. 140–154; S. RUNCIMAN, *The Medieval Manichee...*, p. 39.

¹²¹ *Crisi, rotture e cambiamenti*, ed. U. BIANCHI et al., Milano 1995, p. 197; *Christian Dualist...*, p. 23; M. TSVIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA, *Paulicians...*, p. 232; P.M. БАРТИКЯН, *Византийская, армянская и болгарская легенды о происхождении павликиан и их историческая основа*, ВВг 6, 1980, p. 61; H. KUSABU, *Seminaries...*, p. 183; Д.О. ЛОЕВСКИЙ, Д.А. НИКУЛЬШИН, *К вопросу...*, p. 209.

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Abstract. Peter of Sicily, a Byzantine high official from the times of Basil I, intended to warn the Archbishop of Bulgaria against certain heretics, known as the Paulicians, as he learned during his mission to Tefrike about their plans of sending their missionaries there. His writings are regarded as the most competent source of information on the history and doctrine of the Paulicians. He also described some of their leaders, including Sergius himself.

According to Peter, it was a woman with whom Sergius had had an affair who made him the devil's tool. He accepted the name of Tychicos and passed himself off as a disciple of Paul the Apostle. For 34 years he was the leader of the Paulicians. Peter admits that Sergius was successful in winning followers and at the same time, besides making false statements, accuses him of selling Christians

into slavery to barbarians and of collaboration with the Muslims. In the end, however, he was supposed to have an argument with another heresiarch, Baanes, which would lead to a break among the Paulicians.

Sergius is colourfully described as an enemy of the Cross, a voice of impiety, a lover of darkness and a wolf in sheep's clothing, who skilfully pretends to be a man of virtue but has deceived many. Although he himself was murdered in 834/835, his work was continued by disciples of his.

Keywords: the Paulicians, Peter of Sicily, Sergius, heresy, Byzantine history.

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