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## BYZANTINE POLITICS OF “SWORD AND LETTER<sup>1</sup>” – THE CASE OF SAMUEL

The view that is generally accepted in today's historiography about the Byzantine attitude towards war is that the Byzantines, or at least their elite, disliked waging war. The Byzantine emperors preferred to use various diplomatic means and methods like bribery, ideology, deception and intelligence, rather than to prepare for war or to wage one.<sup>2</sup> This position remained unchanged throughout the Byzantine history. It's noted in *The Anonymous Byzantine Treatise on Strategy*, military manual written during the sixth century and complemented in the next centuries, as well as in *the Strategikon* of Maurice and Leo's *Taktika*. Anna Comnena gives the same attitude in the beginning of the twelfth century.<sup>3</sup> But some deviation from this Byzantine view can be

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<sup>1</sup> About the importance of the letter in the Byzantine diplomacy see: M. E. Mullet, “The language of diplomacy”, *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), 203-216.

<sup>2</sup> More details about the Byzantine imperial ideology and attitude towards war and warfare see: John Haldon, “‘Blood and Ink’: some observations on Byzantine attitudes towards warfare and diplomacy”, *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), 281-294. Also: John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565-1204* (UCL Press, 1999), 13-33.

<sup>3</sup> For the end of the sixth century see: *The Anonymous Byzantine Treatise on Strategy*, ed. and tr. George T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington D.C., 1985), 23. Also: *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, ed. George T. Dennis and tr. Ernst Gamillscheg (Viena, 1983), VII.prooem. For English: *Maurice's Strategikon. Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, tr. George T. Dennis (Pennsylvania, 1984), 64. For the end of the ninth century: *The Taktika of Leo VI*, ed. and trans. G. T. Dennis, (Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), XX.12. For Anna Comnena's view on warfare see: Anna Comnena, *The Alexiade*, ed. and tr. E. A. Dawes (London, 1928), XII.5.

seen during the second half of tenth and the first two decades of the eleventh century which is considered as “belle époque” of Byzantium. The Empire was on the offensive and led by capable “soldier” emperors<sup>4</sup> who through conquest pushed the state boundaries in East, the Mediterranean and West.<sup>5</sup> With their military backgrounds and education, but also the experience gained on the battlefield, these rulers tried to change the rhetoric of central government towards war and warfare, which in certain moments resembled like real “crusade” élan. One of them, emperor Nicephorus II Phocas (963-969), even attempted to establish a formal military doctrine based on the existing view on defense of Orthodoxy and waging war on behalf of the Christian faith which was successfully defeated by the Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>6</sup>

The apogee of Byzantine political and military power, its “Golden Age”, was achieved during the last of these “soldier” rulers, the emperor Basil II (976-1025).<sup>7</sup> It was assumed in the Twentieth Century Byzantine historiography that after the initial period filled with political intrigue and civil wars, the rest of his reign was a protracted and continuous military campaign. Through constant warfare, numerous battles and much bloodshed he managed to extend imperial territories, not only in the East and but also in the West. This image of emperor Basil II as restless and brutal warrior, eager to start a battle and subdue the enemies of the Empire through warfare, is a result of overemphasizing of his military skill and courage on behalf of the other

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that there were other Byzantine rulers before and after these late tenth century “soldier” emperors who were warlike and personally led military campaigns. Constantine V (741-775) is one such example.

<sup>5</sup> More details about this period in: Георгије Острогорски, *Историја Византије* (Београд, 1966), 272-298.; Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997), 446-583.

<sup>6</sup> About the military rhetoric of Nicephorus II Phocas and John I Tzimiskes (969-976) in: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 29. For the letter sent by Emperor John I to the Armenian ruler Ashot in: Ara E. Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades, 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (Lanham, 1993), 28-33. More details about the crusading élan of John I Tzimiskes in: Paul E. Walker, “The “Crusade” of John Tzimiskes in the Light of new Arabic evidence”, *Byzantion*, 47, (Bruxelles, 1977), 301-327. For the attempt of Nicephorus II to establish military doctrine see: Ioannis Scylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn (Berlin, 1973), XIV.18. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, tr. J. Wortley (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 263.

<sup>7</sup> The latest bibliography that researches the reign of Basil II is from Catherine Holmes. See: Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

traits as a ruler in the sources.<sup>8</sup> It was believed that his greatest military success, the conquest of Samuel's "Bulgarian" Empire<sup>9</sup> and subjugation of the Balkan Peninsula, for which he was later given the nickname "Boulgaroktonos",<sup>10</sup> was achieved after a fierce and bloody three decades of continuous fighting against the Kometopoulos and his successors.<sup>11</sup> According to Skylitzes words, he was "...eager to restrain [Samuel] from his [conquering] activities..." and for that purpose "...continued to invade Bulgaria every year without interruption."<sup>12</sup>

However, this image of Basil established during the twentieth century as warlike and austere Emperor who in order to achieve its objectives in the Balkans used only military means is disputed in the recent years.<sup>13</sup> Even his predecessors on the throne who were perceived as "soldier" emperors, John and Nikephoros, used against their external adversaries other non-military measures.<sup>14</sup> All military manuals from the

<sup>8</sup> About Basil's image as a harsh military ruler see: Острогорски, *Историја Византије*, 294.; Romilly H. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The imperial Centuries AD 610-1071*, (University of Toronto Press, 1966), 300-301, 311-327. The same image is also portrayed by Dimitry Obolenski. See in: *Византијски Комонвелт*, (Београд, 1996), 161-162.

<sup>9</sup> There are different views about the character of Samuel's state. For the latest view: Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: a political study of the northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61-62.; Срђан Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, (Београд, 1997). For a Macedonian view about the character of Samuel's state see: Стјепан Антолјак, *Самуиловата држава*, (Скопје, 1969); Бранко Панов ред., *Историја на македонскиот народ Том I*, (Скопје, 2000). That Samuel's state was a continuation of the first Bulgarian empire see: Иван Божилов и Васил Гюзелев, *Историја на средновековна Българија VII-XIV век*, (София, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> The latest and fullest research about the origin of Basil II nickname is from Paul Stephenson. See: Paul Stephenson, *The legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Jenkins, *Byzantium: The imperial Centuries*, 312.

<sup>12</sup> Ioannis Scylitzae, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn (Berlin, 1973), XVI.35, XVI.20. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, tr. J. Wortley (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 321, 330.

<sup>13</sup> For more details: Stephenson, *The legend of Basil*, 32-35. There is a great discrepancy between Basil's conquests and the manner how he administrated them afterwards. See: Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 76-77. The same situation can also be noted on the Eastern frontier. See: Catherine Holmes, "How the East was won in the reign of Basil II", *Eastern approaches to Byzantium: papers from the Thirty-third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Anthony Eastmond, (University of Warwick, March 1999), 41-56.

<sup>14</sup> Instead to fight the Bulgarians Nicephorus II sent Kalokir on a diplomatic mission to the Russians who had to convince Svyatoslav to make war against his enemy in the Balkans. For more details: Leo Diaconus, 63.7-12. For English: *The History of Leo the*

sixth until the tenth century, directly or indirectly advise avoidance of direct confrontation with the enemy and use of other more sophisticated “intelligent” means of warfare. The *Strategikon* of Maurice recommends implementation of various military skills on the field, because: “...it is not, as like some laymen might imagine, by the number of bodies, by unquestioning boldness, or by plain assault that battles are decided but, under God, by strategy and skill. Strategy makes use of times and places, surprises and various tricks to outwit the enemy with the idea of achieving its objectives even without actual fighting.” Furthermore, the author advises the generals to constantly use their tactical and strategic skills, and as much as possible avoid direct confrontation.<sup>15</sup> In case this strategy didn’t achieve the desired results, according to the anonymous author of *on Strategy* they should “...stir up neighboring peoples against them.”<sup>16</sup> Actually, for the Byzantines war was like hunting. Not even in a moment should one think “...simply to overpower the enemy in the open, hand to hand and face to face, even though you might appear to win, is an enterprise which is very risky and can result in serious harm.”<sup>17</sup> Leo VI suggests the same. According to him, “...it is safer and more advantageous to overcome the enemy by planning and generalship than by physical force and power and the hazards of a face-to-face battle.”<sup>18</sup> It is highly unlikely that against its greatest Balkan adversary, Samuel the Kometopoulos, Basil used only weapons and arms, because this would be a complete deviation from the already established Byzantine attitude towards war and warfare.

The sources are explicit that Emperor Basil II used “sophisticated” methods during his reign. Michael Psellos in his *Chronicle* notes how despite of his exceptional military knowledge, he

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*Deacon*, IV.6. According to Liutprand, he also raised the possibility of a ‘marriage treaty’ with Otto of Saxony between his son and heir and a Porphyrogenita. See: Liutprandi Cremonensis Episcopi, *Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*, cap. 53., Opera Omnia, ed. E Dümmler, (Hannoverae, 1877), 203. The chrysobull given to Liutprand for delivery to Otto suggest some intentions for further diplomatic negotiations. See: *Legatione*, cap. 56, 206. John I Tzimiskes used scouts and other informants before his campaign against Svyatoslav. See in: Leo Diaconus, 130.14-18. For English: *The History of Leo the Deacon*, VIII.2. Also: Оболенски, *Византијски Комонвелт*, 157.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state and Society*, 502.

<sup>15</sup> For more details see: *Strategikon*, II.1, VII.A. For English: *Maurice's Strategikon*, 23, 64.

<sup>16</sup> “On Strategy”, VI.26-29.

<sup>17</sup> *Strategikon*, VII.A. For English: *Maurice's Strategikon*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> *Taktika*, XX.11.

“...didn’t desired too much the battle itself, fearing that it may be compelled to flee from the opponent ... [but rather] showed more cunning in the warfare.”<sup>19</sup> Probably the cunning that Psellos writes about implies not only deployment of various strategic and tactical skills on the battlefield, something that the Byzantine military treatises after the sixth century advise, but also implementation of other non-military means. The use of these other “sophisticated” methods during Basil’s Balkan campaigns is noted in John Skylitzes, as well as in other sources. The visit Basil had in his military camp by unnamed Serb diplomatic officials during his campaign in the vicinity of Thessaloniki is one such example.<sup>20</sup> Another is the return of Dyrrachion under imperial control which was achieved through negotiations and offer of high court titles to the members of the leading family in the city, Chryselios.<sup>21</sup> From these and other such information it can be concluded that in his struggle against Samuel Basil II used a wide range of common diplomatic means: from alliances with neighboring nations, negotiations with the leading figures in the enemy camp, bribes, up to generous offers of high Byzantine titles that came together with significant remuneration and prestige to the governors of enemy cities and fortresses.

From these few examples it is unquestionable that Basil’s Balkan policy didn’t deviate from the principles presented in the source materials and applied so many times in the past by the Byzantine authorities. But what was the level of implementation of these non-military means? Why did Basil used them and when? Where they at the expense of military operations? From the sources, both Byzantine and Eastern, several different periods of Byzantine politics towards Samuel can be differentiated. The first is from the beginning of Basil’s reign until the Battle of Sardica. The second is between 986 and 997 when the fighting was along the border regions and in the provinces of the

<sup>19</sup> Михаил Псел, *Хроника*, I.33-34.

<sup>20</sup> For the Serbian embassy sent to the emperor Basil II see: Г. Острогорски, „Српско посланство цару Василију II“, *Византија и Словени*, (Просвета, Београд, 1970), 147-158. Probably the Serbian ambassadors were sent by the ruler of Dioclea, the leading Serbian principality at that moment. See also: Тибор Живковић, *Јужни Словени под византиском влашћу 600-1025*, (Београд, 2007), 284.; Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 101.; Florin Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500-1200*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 213.; Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 60.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state and Society*, 520.

<sup>21</sup> *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.24. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 325. See also: Holmes, *Basil II*, 496.; Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 114.; Острогорски, *Историја Византије*, 234.

Byzantine Empire; while the last period is after the Byzantine victory at Spercheios until the death of the Kometopoulos when the war was transferred deep into the enemy territory. If one looks at the source material, the only thing that differentiates them is the uneven use of these non-military means.

Despite some inconsistencies and ambiguities, as well as lack of precise chronological dating, certain events in the source material clearly indicates that between 976 and 986 there was some Byzantine diplomatic activity in the Balkans whose purpose was to prevent the military advancement of the Kometopouloi. Kekaumenos informs that his grandfather, who carried the same name as him and was *strategos* of Hellas, was able to defend Larissa against the attacks from Samuel so that "...sometimes [he] fought against him, and sometimes eased him and those around him with gifts." But since he was replaced, and the new *strategos* of Hellas could not think of a new stratagem, after a three year siege the city was conquered.<sup>22</sup> Even John Skylitzes, according to whom "...[Aaron Kometopoulos] was sympathetic to Romans..."<sup>23</sup> in a way indirectly informs that probably some diplomatic contacts existed between the Kometopouloi and the Byzantine authorities. The same was witnessed by the eastern sources. Matthew of Edessa informs that before the Battle of Sardica in 986 Basil sent an envoy who asked from Samuel and the other *archontes* in his country "... to come and fall on his knees before his imperial majesty."<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the first, there is a lack of evidence in the second period about any non-military measures used by Emperor Basil II. The sources informs only of military campaigns and battles on the battlefield. From them it can be concluded that Basil probably hasn't used diplomatic measures against Samuel, or he used them, but they didn't give any results. The reason for this should be sought in the successes of Samuel,

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<sup>22</sup> The emperor was aware of Kekaumenos stratagems and approved their implementation. Details about Samuel siege of Larissa in: *Византиски извори за историју народа Југославије Том III*, обр. Јадран Ферлуга, Божидар Ферјанчић и др., (Београд, 1966), 196-198. See also in: Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 88-90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.11. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 312.

<sup>24</sup> More about this Byzantine mission to Samuel and the kometopouloi in: *Matthew of Edessa*, 40. Other Armenian sources also inform the use of non-military means by the Byzantine Empire during this period. See: *Всеопция истори Стени Таронскаго*, перев. съ армянскаго и объяснена Н. Еминьимъ, (Москва, 1864), 175. Also: Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 84-85.

the political stability of his country and the integrity he had among his subjects and beyond as a ruler. Several byzantine authors speak about the image Samuel had among his contemporaries. Skylitzes testifies that the Kometopoulos "...was much given to waging war and not at all to possessing his soul in peace."<sup>25</sup> The Vita of St. Nikon which was written within the living memory of Samuel's campaigns indicates that he "...was invincible in strength and unsurpassed in courage."<sup>26</sup> Kekaumenos in his *Strategicon* names him as an "excellent" warrior.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the subsequent successes of Samuel after the victory at Serdica in 986, as well as his constant aggressive warfare, not only in the border regions but also deep in the Byzantine territory, didn't left enough free space for Basil to undertake any other measures besides the military. If there was some sort of diplomatic activity it is not unlikely that it was immediately stopped by the Kometopoulos. But this Byzantine disadvantage completely changed after Samuel's defeat at river Spercheios.

The third period that lasted from 997 until the death of Samuel, despite many battles that emperor Basil II waged is full of evidence of increased Byzantine diplomatic activity.<sup>28</sup> The first evidence gives Yahya of Antioch, according to whom Samuel tried to minimize the heavy defeat by concluding an agreement with the *basileus*, pledging that he would subdue to his power. His report further suggests that the imperial government was also interested in negotiations.<sup>29</sup> If one follows

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<sup>25</sup> *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.11. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 313.

<sup>26</sup> *Niconis Vita*, *Гръцки извори за Българската История Том VII*, (София, 1968), 148.

<sup>27</sup> *Cecaumeni Strategicon*, *ГИБИ Том VII*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> About the byzantine perception of Samuel's military threat and their awe of the victory at Spercheios in: *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.23. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 324. About the byzantine perception of Samuel in the Vita of St. Nikon see: *ВИИИЖ III*, 36-39. The same perception about Samuel had George the Monk Continuator. See in: Georgius Monachus Continuatus, *ИБИГИБИ*, Том VI, 155. See also: Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 103-104.; Божилов и Гюзелев, *История на средновековна България VII-XIV век*, 321.; Острогоски, *Историја Византије*, 293.; Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 409-410.; Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> Except that he possessed strong arguments - military advantage on the field and fear from the opponent for further reprisals, additional factor why Basil agreed to negotiate and sign a peace treaty with the enemy was not only the submission offered by Samuel, but also the bad situation in which the imperial provinces were in the Balkans after the protracted war that was led solely on Byzantine territory. For more details see: B. P.

Skylitzes abbreviated narration of the Byzantine offensive from the beginning of the new millennium, it is evident that a substantial part of Basil's success against Samuel achieved in these couple of years was not only through battles and sieges<sup>30</sup> but also with the help of non-military means. Dobromir, "...governor of Berrœa [who was married to a niece of Samuel] joined the emperor's ranks and surrendered his town to him, for which he was honored with the title of *anthypatos/proconsul*."<sup>31</sup> In the same way Basil captured Skopje where "...[the city] was handed over to the emperor by Romanos [the son of the Bulgarian emperor Peter and brother of Boris] whom Samuel had appointed as its governor...The Emperor rewarded his submission with the titles of *patrician* and *prefect* [*praepositos*], awarding him a command of Abydos."<sup>32</sup> These Byzantine military and diplomatic achievements seems to had a great impact on some of Samuel's elite, because Dyrrachion was soon returned under Byzantine control through a bestowal of imperial titles of *patrikios* to the two sons of Chryselios, the leading man [*proteuon*] of the city.

But not all attempts were successful. During the Byzantine siege of Pernik which was under the command of Krakras, "...a most excellent man in warfare..." and with exceptional knowledge of martial

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Розен, *Император Василій Болгаробойца, Извлечения изъ Лѣтописи Яхъй Антиохійскаго*, (Санктпетербургъ, 1883), 34.16-18. Also: Милан Бошкоски, *Великаните на македонскиот среден век*, (Македонска реч, Скопје, 2007), 82-83.; Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 103-104.; Златарски, *История на Българската држава, Том I/2*, 699-700.

<sup>30</sup> Servia and Vodena were conquered by the Byzantines after a long siege, which in case of Vidin lasted for eight months. Kolidros was taken by the *basileus* after successfully completed negotiations with the defenders and the given permission to retreat from it unharmed. According to Skylitzes, Basil II defeated Samuel in battle near Skopje. See: *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.27, 30. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 326-328. About these byzantine campaign see also: Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 64-65.; Бошкоски, *Великаните*, 106-110.; Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 116-117.; Божилов и Гюзелев уред., *История на средновековна България VII-XIV век*, 323-325.; Златарски, *История на Българската држава, Том I/2*, 717-724.

<sup>31</sup> *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.27. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 326. Zonaras also testifies that Romanos, the governor of Skopje, was the son of Bulgarian emperor Peter. See in: Ioannes Zonaras, *ИБИГИБИ*, Том VII, 188. Unlike them Yahya of Antioch indicates that Roman, son of Peter, was captured by the Byzantines in 991 and put in captivity, where he died in 997. See: *Извлечения изъ Лѣтописи Яхъй Антиохійскаго*, 34.15-20.

<sup>32</sup> For more details on the events after the battle near Skopje see: *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.30. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 328-329.; Ioannes Zonaras, *ИБИГИБИ*, Том VII, 187-188.



arts, "... [Basil] spent considerable time laying siege to that place and lost quite a number of men." But "...realizing that the defense-works were too good to be taken by siege..." the Byzantine emperor attempted to divert Krakras attention "...by flattery, promises or other suggestions."<sup>33</sup> But Krakras, the governor of Pernik, rejected the Emperor's proposal.

Several factors were crucial for the use of non-military means. The first was the theater of war, the second configuration of its terrain. Unlike the vast eastern plains of Syria, the Balkan Peninsula is intersected with high mountains and small valleys, with deep narrow passes in between. This type of terrain is particularly suitable for waging a guerilla war. Any long term dwelling of the imperial army in the Balkan regions that was under Samuel's rule presented a danger for its safety. That especially could refer for the period after Spercheios when Basil advanced deeper and deeper into enemy territory, where he could easily be surrounded and ambushed, or his supply lines to be cut, so that the army he led would be deprived of food and other resources needed for the successful continuation of the campaign. Another reason why this "sophisticated" methods were so often implemented by the Byzantine government can be seen in the siege of Pernikos: avoiding large number of unnecessary casualties during battles or sieges of cities.<sup>34</sup> Additional factor was the administrative structure of the medieval states and the transfer of power from the central level to its most distant regions. Because the control over a certain area or a city, as well as the loyalty of the local population from the same region were usually acquired, but also maintained, through providing allegiance from the governor of the fortress or district, this control could be easily lost in the same way. The end result from these diplomatic activities was conquest of territory from the enemy. Or more accurately, they were handed over to the *basileus* to govern them.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, this policy of bribery and defection of the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.31. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 329.

<sup>34</sup> About the serious problems that the Byzantines faced during their military campaigns in the Balkans in: "Campaign Organization and Tactics", *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. and trans. G. T. Dennis, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* Vol. XXV, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1985), 15.3-9, 17.4-5, 20.3-19, 20.46-53, 21.30.

<sup>35</sup> From ideological and political point of view, with the acceptance of the Byzantine title the individual also acknowledged the Byzantine order, and thus the supreme power of the *basileus*. Actually they became his subjects who were obliged to submit to his will. That is why after handing over the fortress in to the hands of Basil II its governor

most influential people could weaken the position of the opposing leader and disrupt the authority he had over his associates. This internal weakening of the enemy would then seriously affect its activity on the battlefield. But these "sophisticated" tools were used not only for practical, but also for ideological and political reasons. The Byzantine society, or rather its elite, greatly praised the victory over the enemy, or the reintegration of lost territories, when it was done without shedding Roman blood. This "noble" victory, as they named it, actually presented a very strong propaganda tool for the central government.<sup>36</sup>

In his efforts to subdue Samuel, Basil also began negotiating a military alliance with several neighboring countries. For this purpose the Byzantine emperor first came into contact with Dioclea, the leading Serbian principality in that period, and then with Venice. The sources indicate that certain success was achieved because the Venetian Doge on his title *dux Veneticorum* added *et Dalmatianorum*, and his fleet by the end of the tenth and early eleventh century operated through the Adriatic

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Dobromir was transferred to Thessaloniki and Roman-Simeon at Abydos in Asia Minor. For the transfers of Samuel's former associates see: *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.27, XVI.30. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 326, 328-329.

<sup>36</sup> According to the Byzantine belief the offensive war could easily lead to a loss of many Christian lives and collapse of the economic well-being of Byzantine subjects, something that was ideologically in stark contrast to the Christian norms and the established role of the *basileus* as protector of "the Chosen people". See in: *Maurice's Strategikon*, VII.A, VIII.1.7. By leading a reckless and aggressive military policy the *basileus* would completely undermine his position, because in the eyes of his own subjects the human losses would be interpreted as a kind of divine punishment for the deflection of the Emperor from the path of righteousness. When a defeat was suffered from the enemies, this was accepted by the Byzantines as punishment for the sins they have committed in the past. Only when the Byzantine Empire would return to the path of righteousness it will be again victorious. This belief was widely accepted, even by those who war and warfare was an everyday profession. If the Byzantine emperor achieved "noble" victory on the battlefield he could then be presented before his subjects as a ruler who acted as protector of the Christians and cared for their welfare. Also, through the use of these non-military diplomatic measures he was probably trying to portrayed himself as humane and compassionate ruler, who has forgiven the "hostile" actions and accepted them back (seen according to the Byzantine perception), the subjects who illegally "rebelled" against him. For an overview of the so-called "noble" wars waged by the Byzantine emperors see: *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.26. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 326.; Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 447.; *Taktika*, XVIII.40. Also see in: Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 136.; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 23, 25.

Sea.<sup>37</sup> Besides Dioclea and Venice, Byzantium extended its diplomatic contacts north of the Danube. During the eight-month siege of Vidin the *basileus* came into contact with the Hungarian leader Ajtony (Achtum) whose territory was situated around Körön River, north of this city. Later on, the Byzantine emperor managed to gain as an ally the Hungarian King Stephen, who militarily helped him in his conquest of the territories ruled by Samuel and his successors.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from these diplomatic means, Skylitzes informs that Basil used against his enemy another “sophisticated” non-military method that was extremely brutal: blinding of prisoners of war. Even though it seems like a construction of the author, the event which occurred in Prilapon after the Battle of Kleidion indicates enough the effect that this non-military tool probably had.<sup>39</sup> But however brutal and barbaric method this was, and how much fear inflicted on the enemy, it must be noted that the reason for its use is of political and ideological nature.

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<sup>37</sup> Because at this time the Venetian fleet already sailed through the Adriatic, probably the imperial vessels that were witnessed by Skylitzes and patrolled around the city were one and the same, i.e. Venetian ships under the flag of the *basileus*. It seems that the marriage of the future Doge of Venice Giovanni Orseolo with the daughter of Argyros (sister of the future emperor Romanus III Argyros (1028-1034)), the economic benefits of Venetian merchants in Constantinople, as well as the title given to the Doge Pietro II, actually were diplomatic means that the Byzantines used to win over, but also to reward the loyalty of Venice. The reason for the intensification of the Byzantine-Venetian contacts were not only of economic nature, or the Saracen and German threat in southern Italy that existed in this period (their interconnection and consistence do not allow them to be characterized only as a coincidence), but it seems that they were also established because of the political situation in the Balkans and the increasing influence that Samuel had on the Adriatic coast through his control of the city of Dyrrachion. See in: *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.25. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 325.

<sup>38</sup> More about the alliance of Basil II with the Hungarians, and later with their king Stephen see: *Fundatio Ecclesiae S. Albani Namucensis*, ИБИЛИБИ, Том II, 373.; *Vita Stephani regis*, ИБИЛИБИ, Том II, 382-383. There are various dates regarding the military involvement of King Stefan in the Byzantine fight against Samuel. See in: Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars*, 62.; Ристо Илјовски, „Византиско-Унгарски сојуз во почетокот на XI век против Самуил и неговите наследници“, *Зборник Радова Византолошког Института*, XXIX-XXX, (Београд, 1991), 95-97.; Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil*, 34.; Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*, 118-119, п.145-146.; Бошкоски, *Великаните*, 111-112.; С. Антолјак, *Средновековна Македонија*, Том I, (Скопје, 1985), 456-457.

<sup>39</sup> John Skylitzes informs that the death of Samuel was a result of the sight he saw in Prilapon of the soldiers blinded after the battle of Kleidion. See: *Ioannis Scylitzae*, XVI.35. For English: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 331.

According to the Byzantine ideological belief this act actually represented a legal and humane punishment, an act of Christian charity from the *basileus*, used only against those who were believed to be his subjects (the population within the Empire and its dependencies) and tried to defy his will, or usurp his legitimate rule.<sup>40</sup> But this extremely brutal act did not achieve its goal. It didn't force the enemy to surrender. The war in the Balkans continued with the same ferociousness.

It is indisputable that against Samuel Basil used military force. But it is also undeniable that at the same time the imperial government under his reign used other "sophisticated" methods. These diplomatic means were implemented according to the military-political situation and the current needs on the battlefield. When Samuel's power was on the rise they were either ineffective, or there was no opportunity for their implementation. But when the situation has changed in favor of Byzantium we can see frequent use of these non-military means that not only complemented, but sometimes completely replaced the military activities of the imperial forces on the battlefield. Despite the militant rhetoric that exists in the sources, Basil was probably not as warlike and brutal as they want to show him, but certainly he was also not that peaceful. He was not an Emperor who achieved his political agenda only through use of weapons and spilling of blood. In fact, he was a ruler who used in his foreign policy every possible means that could bring glory to the Empire. In that aspect Basil was no different from other capable Byzantine emperors who personally led military campaigns, but also often used other "sophisticated" non-military means to achieve their political goals. His long-term campaigning and the occasional outbursts of brutality witnessed in sources were most likely an outcome of several different factors: the current need of the Byzantine state, his own personality and the experience he gained during the first decade of his reign. The Byzantine politics towards Samuel was actually a continuation of Centuries long imperial foreign policy, and not a period of deviation from its established attitudes and principles; no more warlike or peace-loving than before, a typical Byzantine policy of "sword and letter". But as in many previous occasions, these diplomatic

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<sup>40</sup> This act of blinding in the Byzantine Empire was used against usurpers and those who had thrown off the supreme authority of the *basileus*. See for: Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 132, 303, 304, 313.; Иван Божилов, *Византийският Свят*, (София, 2008), 395.; Божилов и Гюзелев уред., *История на средновековна България VII-XIV век*, 325. About the use of this brutal means by Basil II: Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 529.; Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil*, 85.

methods did not give immediately the desired result. It took another four years after the death of Kometopoulos and additional military and diplomatic efforts from Basil to finally conquer Samuel's "Bulgarian" empire and establish Byzantine hegemony throughout the Balkans.

Драган ЃАЛЕВСКИ

## ВИЗАНТИСКАТА ПОЛИТИКА НА „МЕЧ И ПИСМО“ – СЛУЧАЈОТ НА САМУИЛ

*- р е з и м е -*

Погледот кој е општоприфатен во денешната историографија за византискиот однос кон војувањето е дека Византијците, или барем нивната елита, имале одвратност кон водењето војни. Византиските императори повеќе сакале да употребуваат разни дипломатски средства и методи како поткуп, идеолошка уцена, лукавства и разузнување отколку да се подготвуваат и да водат војни. Овој нивен став останал непроменет во текот на византиската историја. Врвот на византиската политичка и воена моќ, „златното доба“ на Византија, бил во времето на последниот од овие „воени“ владетели, императорот Василиј II. Сликата за Василиј оформена во текот на XX век како император кој за да ги постигне своите цели на Балканот, употребува единствено воени средства, се оспорува во последните неколку години. Очигледно е од изворниот материјал дека против Самуил тој користел не само воена сила, туку и други „софистицирани“ невоени методи употребувани во зависност од моменталната воено-политичка ситуација и потребите на теренот. Кога Самуиловата моќ била во подем, тие или биле неефективни или не постоела можност да бидат имплементирани. Но кога состојбата се променила во корист на Византија, овие средства не само што го надополнувале туку понекогаш и целосно го заменувае дејствувањето на империјалните сили на бојното поле. И покрај воинствената реторика што постои во изворите, Василиј најверојатно не бил воинствен толку колку што сакаат да го прикажат, но сигурно не бил и многу мирољубив. Тој бил византиски император кој, како и другите способни владетели од минатото, ги употребувал сите можни средства што би можеле да ѝ донесат слава на Империјата. Всушност, политиката на Василиј II кон Самуил била продолжување на неколкувековната империјална надворешна политика, а не период на отстапување од нејзините ставови и воспоставени принципи, не повеќе воинствена или мирољубива отколку порано, типична византиска политика на „меч и писмо“.