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RECONSTRUCTING 7th  
CENTURY MACEDONIA:  
SOME NEGLECTED  
ASPECTS OF THE  
*MIRACLES OF  
ST. DEMETRIUS*

The two Books of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* are considered as one of the most important sources for the reconstruction of the Dark Age Balkans. They are the only surviving testimony of the attacks of the Slavenes and Avars on Thessalonica. What is more, the Book II of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* contains rare contemporary accounts for the period after Heraclius' reign. The *Miracles of St. Demetrius* are generally associated with the issue of the Slavic settlement in Macedonia and the Balkans, which was a matter of long debate among the scholars.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The dominant opinion among the scholars was that the settlement of the Slavs in Macedonia and the Balkans occurred by the 580s. See, Фрањо Баришић, *Чуда Димитрија Солунског као историски извори* (Београд, 1953); Стјепан Антолјак, *Средновековна Македонија I* (Скопје, 1985); Бранко Панов, *Средновековна Македонија I* (Скопје, 1985), and more recently, Paul M. Bardford, *The Early Slavs: Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe* (Cornell University Press, New York, 2001, 60-63; Ирена Стефоска, *Словените на почвата на Македонија* (Скопје, 2002); Zbigniew Kobylinski, "The Slavs", *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 1, c. 500-c.700*, ed. P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 2005), 524-546; Милан Бошкоски, *Скопје и скопската област од VI до крајот на XIV век* (Скопје, 2009), 57-72; Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500-700* (Oxford, 2011), 181-182. The present author of this article, formerly automatically accepted this interpretation, proceeded from the traditional historiography and uncritical use of the historical sources that involved the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* (Mitko B. Panov, "On the Slav Colonization and the Ethnic Changes in Macedonia by the End of the 6th and the First Half of the 7th Century", *Balkanica Posnaniensia*, 11-12 (2001), 23-33).

However, starting with the seminal work of Florin Curta, recent studies have challenged the traditional interpretation of the Slavic settlement in the Balkans, based upon the critical analysis of the sources that comprise the Miracles of St. Demetrius as well. It seems that lately scholars are more inclined towards the opinion that the first indication of the Slavic settlement in the Balkans can be found only in the period of Heraclius' early years of accession to power.<sup>2</sup> It is the critical analysis of the Miracles of St. Demetrius that provide a basis for this interpretation.

Nevertheless, the main question arises - if there was no settlement of Sclavenes before 610, how did a multitude of Sclavene tribes establish themselves in the surrounding area of Thessalonica in only a few years period? Furthermore, if the anonymous author of the Book II of the Miracles of St. Demetrius is to be believed, they were not only differentiated by their name controlling a certain territory in the hinterland of Thessalonica, but they were also well organised and even managed to acquire unification and achieve an alliance under a sole leader (ἑξάρχος) Chatzon. In addition, modern scholars without reservation accept the impression of the anonymous author that at that time the separate Sclavene tribes were a familiar presence and that the citizens could distinguish them. Furthermore, the prominent citizens of Thessalonica even established close connections with the Sclavene leader Hatzon. All this took place in few years' time and in an extremely hostile environment, as the second homily of the Book II of the *Miracles* is presenting. This article is an attempt to shed certain light on these and other questions that are neglected and derive from the re-reading of the two Books of the Miracles of St. Demetrius.

F. Curta has rightly put forward the question of when did the multitude of Sclavene tribes, mentioned in the Book II of the Miracles of

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<sup>2</sup> For the first indication of the settlement in the Balkans in the reign of Heraclius, see more recently Тибор Живковић, *Јужни Словени под византиском влашћу, 600-1025*, друго издање (Београд, 2007), 125-135; Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs, History and Archeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500-700* (Cambridge, New York, 2001), 113-114; idem, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500-1250* (Cambridge, 2006), 58-59. Michael Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian* (Oxford, 1988), 113, 184-185, argued that there is no proof in the sources of the infiltration of Slavs into Macedonia in the 580s. Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 401-402, argued that the initial Slavic settlement in the 580s certainly occurred but they "were swallowed up by Maurices counterattacks" and that after 614 the decisive moment of the settlement of the Slavs occurred in the Balkans.

St. Demetrius, settle in the vicinity of Thessalonica, since they were not there in 610. He noticed that it was impossible to tell with precision when did those tribes settle in this region, but argued that “it cannot have been earlier than the reign of Heraclius”. Since the main aim of the Slavene tribes besieging Thessalonica in 615/6 was to “settle with their families” after the conquest of the city, Curta argued that “they were not coming from afar”, i.e. were coming from the hinterland of Thessalonica. That would explain how the prisoners taken after the siege could return to Thessalonica carrying the booty taken by the Slavenes from the inhabitants of the city. However, Curta did not give a definite answer to the question on how no less than five Slavene tribes managed to establish themselves in the hinterland of Thessalonica in such a short period of time, even though he critically addressed the Book II of the *Miracles* challenging the notion of the capability of those tribes to perpetrate the large-scale devastation of the most of the Balkans and even parts of Asia.<sup>3</sup>

To address this complex issue, we should look back into the textual context of the Book I of the *Miracles*, written by Archbishop John precisely at the time when the siege of Thessalonica in 615/6 occurred, that is in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. John registered the first attack of the ‘Sklavini’ (Σκλαβίνων) on the city of Thessalonica in 584, informing of a “not so great a barbarian army” which “we counted to be about 5,000”.<sup>4</sup> The attack on Thessalonica in 584, though having a character of a military organisation undertaken by a certain group of warriors ‘Sklavini’ on their own, was most probably in some kind of coordination with the Avar incursions that were being carried out at the same time in Hellas. That is also confirmed by the accounts by *Evagrius* and *Michael the Syrian* who point to the Avar incursions in Hellas in the early 580s, which implies a coordinated military action.<sup>5</sup> It is credible that in this period some military groups were directly

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<sup>3</sup> *Miracula* II. 1. 179. Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 107-108; Idem, “Still waiting for the barbarians? The making of the Slavs in ‘Dark-Age’ Greece.” In *Neglected Barbarians*. Edited by Florin Curta (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 462-464.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des Miracles de saint Démétrius*, Vol. 1: Le texte (Paris, 1979), I. 12.112.

<sup>5</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, trans. M. Whitby (Liverpool, 2000), VI.10; *Chronique de Michel le Syrien Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche*, ed. J-B Chabot, T. I-III (Paris, 1899), X. 21. On the Avars as participants in the attacks in Hellas, M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian* (Oxford, 1988), 110; Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 94-95

subordinated to the Avars, while certain groups named by John as the ‘Sklavini’ acted in coordination but independently, as was the case with the attack on Thessalonica in 584.

In any case, the one-day-attack on Thessalonica in 584 did not have the capacity to threaten the city more seriously, due to the limited number of enemy warriors, as well as the quick mobilisation of the citizens.<sup>6</sup> What remains unnoticed by the modern scholars is the fact that John, while stating that the enemy warriors which attacked Thessalonica in 584 was the “chosen flower” of the “nation of Sklavini” (τῶν Σκλαβίνων ἔθνους), felt it necessary to clarify that in fact that is what “is said” (ὡς εἴρηται).<sup>7</sup> Such dissociation is an illustrative indication that John, as well as the citizens themselves, was unable to specifically identify the attacking warriors who directly threatened the city for the first time. John’s distancing from his own identification of the attackers as being the ‘Sklavini’ by pointing out that “it is said”, even though he was referring to the event that he personally witnessed is a clear indication that there were no groups of enemy warriors that were settled in the vicinity of Thessalonica in that period, nor was the city previously directly threatened by any ‘Sklavini’. Otherwise, John as an eyewitness would have been certain in the identification of the attackers and would have shared the same perception with the citizens who were his main audience. In that respect, what is indicative is that John himself mentions that the people of Thessalonica could distinguish “certain sounds of the barbarian cry” from afar.<sup>8</sup> Hence, it is understandable why John, except at one instance in the beginning where he refers to what “is said” to name the attackers as being ‘Sklavini’, used the term ‘barbarians’ to refer to the enemy warriors consistently throughout the following text where he elaborates on the attack. That John could not distinguish the enemy warriors, additionally attest his explanation that the relatively small number of the enemy warriors, was due to the fact that “they would not have attack so suddenly so large city, if they did not overtook

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<sup>6</sup> Баришић, *Чуда*, 49-55. For the different dating of this campaign, see the commentary by О. В. Иванова, “Чудеса св. Димитрия Солунского”, in *Свод древнейших письменных известий о славянах*, т. II (Москва, 1995), 182; Живковић, *Јужни Словени*, 361, п. 479. F. Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 92–93, п. 67, who decidedly rejects the suggested dating by Lemerle for the year 604 AD. (Paul Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des Miracles de Saint Démétrius*, Vol. 2: Commentaire (Paris, 1981), 40. 69, 72).

<sup>7</sup> *Miracula* I. 12.108.

<sup>8</sup> *Miracula* I. 12.112.

in power and audacity those who sometime in the past battled against the city”.<sup>9</sup> This explanation is hardly of a person who was able to assess that the attackers were a professional soldiers, the “chosen flower”, but rather reflect his consistent tendency to give the attack a greater dimension.

In light of the fact that John, as well as the citizens, was unable to specifically identify the attackers, he evidently resorted to the use of the specific term ‘Sklavini’ (Σκλαβίνων) that was probably created in Constantinople in the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in addition to the usual terms ‘Σκλαβηνων’ or shortened version ‘Σκλάβοι’ to refer to the military groups of barbarians coming from the northern side of the Danube river. If one takes into account that in describing the attack on Thessalonica, which followed two years later in 586, John used the term “Sklaviniai” (Σκλαβινιῶν) for the first time for the attacking warriors, it appears that by using the term “Sklavini” (Σκλαβίνων) he was in fact pointing to the unknown group of warriors coming from the barbarian land - ‘Sklaviniai’ located on the other side of the Danube.<sup>10</sup> In general, the available contemporary sources do not report of any settling of Sclavenes in Macedonia as a consequence of this campaign. The account of *John of Ephesus* on the campaign of the “accursed people of the Sklavenoi” (Σκλαβηνῶν) who, starting from 581 for four years in a row, had “overran the whole of Hellas, and the regions surrounding Thessalonica, and all Thrace, and captured the cities, and took numerous forts, and devastated and burnt, and reduced the people to slavery, and

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<sup>9</sup> *Miracula* I. 12.107-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Miracula* I. 13.117-118. Paul Lemerle in his critical edition of *Miracles*, amended the word “Sklabiniin” with “Sklabhnin”, arguing that “Sklabiniin” contained in the oldest manuscript Vaticanus graecus 797 from the 10<sup>th</sup> century is a corrupted form of “Sklabhnin”. His amendment is based upon the later 12<sup>th</sup> century Greek manuscript 1517 in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale. See, Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils*, I, 134.14. Геннадий Литаврин, *Византия и Славяне* (Санкт Петербург, 1999), 520-522, criticises the interpretation by Lemerle, advocating the position that the *Miracles of St. Demetrios* actually contains the first and oldest mention of the term “Sklaviniai”. See also, Анголјак, *Средновековна Македонија*, I (Скопје, 1985), 127-128. Recently, Evangelos Chrysos, “Settlements of Slavs and Byzantine sovereignty in the Balkans”, *Byzantina Mediterranea. Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65. Geburtstag*. Belke, Klaus, Ewald Kislinger, Andreas Kulzer, and Maria Stassinopoulou (Vienna: Bohlau, 2007), 123-135 accepted the interpretation of Lemerle, arguing that the term ‘Sklaviniai’ appears “in no greek source of the sixth or the seventh century”. See also, Florin Curta, “Sklaviniai and ethnic adjectives: a clarification.” *Byzantion Nea Hellás* 30 (2011): 87-88, who argued that the first mention of the term “Sklaviniai” is contained in the work of Theophylact Simocatta.

made themselves masters of the whole country, and settled in it by main force, and dwelt in it as though it had been their own without fear”, does not imply settling of groups of Slavs. This account rather points to the existence of constant military threat at the time, that also influenced a perception of a continuing presence of enemies which included the Avars, accompanied with Byzantium’s incapability to respond efficiently to such a challenge.<sup>11</sup> It created an impression for John of Ephesus that in fact the Sclavenes remained in the land as if it was theirs, notwithstanding the fact that at that time the Avars were carrying out their invasions on Hellas.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the accounts in the Book I of the Miracles of St. Demetrius and of John of Ephesus can not be taken as an indication of a settlement, since the Sclavene warriors engaged in the campaigns returned in 584, as they had done before, to their homes on the other side of the Danube, taking with them the spoils they had triumphantly obtained.

Shortly after, in 586, Macedonia was again directly threatened by incursions of the Avars and their subordinate military groups from the ‘Sklaviniai’ (τῶν Σκλαβινιῶν) coming from across the Danube. According to the Book I of the Miracles of St. Demetrius, as this large army crossed the Danube, it directly set out towards the city of Thessalonica with the intent to conquer it. The Archbishop of Thessalonica, John, writes about “the greatest war of all” that the city had ever faced and “the greatest Miracle” undertaken by St. Demetrius. What is indicative is that in describing this attack too, John uses the same formulation for identifying the attackers, starting his explanation with the words “it is said” (λέγεται) that the leader of the Avars at the time, saw that of all the cities in the entire Illyricum, Thessalonica was in the “heart of the Emperor” and that if it were to “suddenly suffer destruction”, that would hurt him the most. Furthermore, the Archbishop reports that led by the motive to take his revenge on the Emperor, the Avar Khagan had “called unto him the entire faithless and beastly tribe of the Sklaviniai” (τῶν Σκλαβινιῶν θηριώδη φυλήν), the people that was completely subordinated to him” and after including other Avars as well, “ordered them all to set out against the God-protected

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<sup>11</sup> *Iohannis Ephesini historiae ecclesiasticae pars tertia*, ed. E. W. Brooks, CSCO (Louvain, 1936), VI 25; *Свод древнейших письменных известий о славянах*, т. II (Москва, 1995), 279-280.

<sup>12</sup> Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 48–50 credibly shows that in Constantinople, the desolations in Hellas were in fact attributed to the Avars and not to the Slavs.

Thessalonica”.<sup>13</sup> In the week-long siege from both land and sea, which started on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 586, various siege devices were used which further points to a previously planned action, and a tried and tested military strategy of the Avars, who were already acquainted with the techniques of laying siege.<sup>14</sup> Having in mind the reported absence of the Prefect of Illyricum at the time of the siege, it becomes clear that this campaign had a surprising character and was a part of a comprehensive military strategy of the Avars in realising their offensive attacks on the Balkans.<sup>15</sup> The absence of the Thessalonica elite from the city is also registered, which suggests that the defence was exclusively in the hands of the self-organised citizens, under the leadership of the Archbishop at the time, Eusebius. This situation illustrates the preparedness of the citizens for emergency mobilisation, but also that there were no indications that would suggest a direct threat to the city. If there had been a continued threat to the city, the political and civil elite certainly would not have left Thessalonica.

After week-long unsuccessful attempts to penetrate the defence of the city, the joint army of the Avars and the warriors from the ‘Sklaviniai’ gave up the siege and withdrew. The reason for the victory over the ‘barbarians’ who withdrew in panic, according to John, was the “bravery of the Macedonians” (τοῖς Μακεδόσιν) – the “protectors” of the city, encouraged by St Demetrius and God himself.<sup>16</sup>

In analysing the character of the attack itself, it is indicative that the Archbishop of Thessalonica cites the estimates of the “observers” (καταληφθείσης) in concluding that the number of the enemy who laid siege to Thessalonica was 100.000, or “somewhat less or a lot more”. John’s dissociation as regards the number of attackers, as opposed to the attack from 584, for which he personally noted the concrete number, as well as the present disparity in estimates, points to the evident exaggeration of the threat.<sup>17</sup> This conclusion comes from placing the

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<sup>13</sup> *Miracula* I. 13.117-118. For the date of the siege, see Баришић, *Чуда*, 49-55; Иванова, “Чудеса”, 182; Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 92-94.

<sup>14</sup> On the Avars being familiar with the techniques of laying siege, M. Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 118-119.

<sup>15</sup> Theophylact Simocatta (I. 8. 10-11) also registers the military engagement of the Avars in Thrace in 586, the time of which coincided with the attack on Thessalonica. See, M. Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 147; Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 97-98; Живковић, *Јужни Словени*, 130-133.

<sup>16</sup> *Miracula* I. 14. 148; I. 13.116.

<sup>17</sup> *Miracula* I. 13. 117-118.

attack in the context of Byzantine imperial policy, i.e. from presenting Thessalonica as a kind of “heart of the Emperor”. In other words, John tendentiously tried to raise the moral of the citizens of Thessalonica by creating an image that the destiny of the Empire itself depended on the survival of their city.

Notwithstanding John’s tendency to evidently exaggerate the threat from the siege, the military potential of the gathered enemy army, both in the sense of numbers and organisation, had a much more serious character than the separate attack of the warriors of the ‘Sklavini’ in 584. It is indicative that, as opposed to the previous attack, the military potential in the siege of 586 was due to the immediate organisation on the part of the Avar Khagan, which covered both the presence of the Avars in the army and the command over them. In that respect, John’s suggestion that the citizens saw for the first time a barbarian army “so close as to besiege the city” undoubtedly points to the different character of the siege in comparison to the siege that happened two years before. Perhaps with this fact John referred to the novelty concerning the greater numbers of the army and the talks about the Avar warriors who, together with the subordinated warriors from the ‘Sklaviniai’ and the other barbarians, had besieged the city, as opposed to the attack of 584.<sup>18</sup> In any case, this fact further testifies as to John’s and the citizen’s insecurity regarding the specific identification of the enemy warriors that besieged the city.

Analysis of the *Miracles* reveals another aspect that has been neglected by the scholars. Namely, besides John reporting that the enemy had never before been seen from so up close as to besiege the city, he also concludes that “most of the citizens, except those that were listed in the military registers, did not even recognise their appearance”.<sup>19</sup> This fact further implies that John, as well as the citizens themselves, was unable to specifically identify the attackers. Even in the noticeably invented story of the “large number of the enemy” that allegedly deserted after the unsuccessful siege and entering the town communicated with the citizens, John did not identify them, but labeled

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<sup>18</sup> Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 54, who points to the dominance of the Avar presence in the besieging army. M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice*, 147, postulates that the Avar campaign in Thrace coincided with the attack on Thessalonica, which was most likely the reason why the citizens of Thessalonica were convinced that the siege was carried out on the orders of the Avar Khagan.

<sup>19</sup> *Miracula* I. 13. 121.



them as “enemies”.<sup>20</sup> It is probable that the naming of the new enemies was also based on the information from those citizens that were engaged in the Byzantine military service, who used the specific terms created in Constantinople for designating the main enemies at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century – the Avars and the ‘Sklavini’ who were coming from the ‘Sklaviniai’ on the other side of the Danube. In that respect, it is understandable why in the two cases when he uses the terms ‘Sklavini’ and ‘Sklaviniai’ in describing the warriors that attacked Thessalonica in 584 and 586, John felt it necessary to dissociate himself and call upon the fact that “it is said”. That entails that the archbishop linked this attack with the general perception of the circumstances in Byzantium at the time and therefore used the specific terminology applied for the enemy warriors. Further in the text, as was the case with the first siege, John consistently used the terms ‘barbarians’, ‘tribe’ or ‘enemies’ thus avoiding the specific identification of the warriors in the siege. It is indicative that John, in the part of the *Miracles* that precedes the description of the siege, elaborates his intent to write about “how the barbarian people, in large numbers, attacked the God-protected city of the people of Thessalonica”. The same tendency is also present in the use of the terms “barbarian cry” or “barbarian voice”, which are not accompanied with a concrete identification.

The specific term ‘Sklaviniai’ (Σκλαβινιῶν), used for the first time by John for the identification of the barbarians on the left side of the Danube region that were in subordination to the Avars, opens up yet another perspective. This term in its singular form ‘Sklavinia’ (Σκλαβινία), was used by *Theophylact Simocatta* writing in the second quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century for denoting the particular barbarian lands north of the river Danube the Byzantine troops were engaged against in 602.<sup>21</sup> Thus John actually used the specific terms ‘Sklavini’ and ‘Sklaviniai’ that circulated among the soldiers and the administration that were present in Thessalonica at the time of the writing of the *Miracula*. With the terminology ‘Sklavini’ and

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<sup>20</sup> *Miracula* I. 12. 159-160.

<sup>21</sup> Curta, “Sklaviniai and ethnic adjectives”, 89-94, argued that the specific use of the term ‘Sklavinia’ by Theophylact “is nothing more than a narrative device, the role of which is to focus his audience’s attention upon a particular part of the barbarian lands north of the river Danube”, contra Chrysos, “Settlements of Slavs”, 125-126, who claimed that the term should be interpreted as an adjective “Slavic”, not of ‘Sklavinia’, in accordance with his thesis that the term ‘Sklavinia’ is not attested in any Greek source of the sixth or the seventh century.

‘Sklaviniai’, John was obviously referring to what was being “said” at the time, i.e. that the barbarians – the ‘Sklavini’ – were coming from a certain territory ‘Sklaviniai’ on the northern side of the Danube river. The fact that John used the terms ‘Sklavini’ and ‘Sklaviniai’ only once in the text substantiates that he was unable to identify the attackers. With it he pointed to what it was being said at the time about the enemy warriors being ‘Sklavini’, namely, those who were coming from ‘Sklaviniai’, which was a specific term for the territory that was controlled by the barbarians on the northern side of the Danube at the time when he was writing.

John’s reservation as to identifying the enemy warriors attacking Thessalonica in 584 and 586, gets another dimension if one takes into consideration the fact that he compiled the first book of the *Miracles* in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and personally witnessed the third siege by the ‘Sklavini’ and the fourth jointly with the Avars. Whether it means that John was unable to specifically identify the enemies that also attacked Thessalonica in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century remains an open issue. John’s reticence in describing the two sieges does not preclude the possibility of the same perception at the time he was compiling the work. What also remains an open issue is the question why John did not describe the sieges of the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century as well, though he personally witnessed these events. In any case, John had no reservations whatsoever in sharing his personal and general perception, at the time, for the group identification of the citizens of Thessalonica as being Macedonians, depicting them as protectors of the city together with St Demetrius.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, it is characteristic that John also uses the formulations “whole of Macedonia” (ὅλη τῆ Μακεδονία) and “all Macedonians” (τοὺς Μακεδόνας ἅπαντας) in suggesting the entire population in Macedonia.<sup>23</sup> This further corroborates that one cannot speak of any Slavs settling at the time when the first two sieges on Thessalonica occurred. This conclusion is also supported by the writings of the Archbishop John who stresses the fact that after removing the siege of Thessalonica in 586, the cavalry units of the citizens that had been sent in reconnaissance concluded that there were no barbarian troops in the vicinity of the city, which had apparently passed a “large distance”

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<sup>22</sup> *Miracula* I. 14.148; I. 13.116.

<sup>23</sup> *Miracula*, I.13.116.

during a single night.<sup>24</sup> The rapid stabilisation of the conditions in 590's illustrated in the Papal correspondence further points to the absence of enemy troops after their retreat to the other side of the Danube.<sup>25</sup> That there were no new settlers within Macedonia in this period is also confirmed, in addition to the Papal correspondence and the immediate accounts contained in the *Miracles*, with the focus of the military campaigns of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice which, after 592, was turned towards the north of the Danube.<sup>26</sup> Maurice's military manoeuvre proved to be quite effective and resulted in the absence of registered incursions and attacks of the Sclavenes on the Balkans and in Macedonia. These factors had an influence on the preservation of a stable situation in Macedonia in the first decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which is also confirmed by Heraclius's passing through the city of Thessalonica in 610 during the civil war with Phocas.<sup>27</sup>

The forcible deposition of the Emperor Maurice in 602 by Phocas (602–610) was an introduction into an anarchic period for Byzantium, which resulted in a gradual collapse of the defence at the Danube limes.<sup>28</sup> However, at the time of the reign of Phocas there were no registered incursions of the Sclavenes or the Avars on the Balkans.<sup>29</sup> The attacks of the Sclavenes on the Balkans were renewed in the first years of the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610–641). Using the full engagement of Heraclius at the renewed eastern front against Persia, which had the effect of neglecting the defence of the Balkan region, in 610 AD certain military groups, identified in the Byzantine sources as 'Sclavenes' (Sklavenoi, Sklavini, Sklaboi), started gradually to establish themselves in the region of the Balkans and in Macedonia. What is characteristic regarding the territory of Macedonia, that is the territory in

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<sup>24</sup> *Miracula* I.13.164-165.

<sup>25</sup> Gregorii I papae *registrum epistolarum*, ed. P. Ewald and LM Hartmann, 2 vol. *MGH Epp.* i, ii, Berlin 1887-99), Ep. I. 43; III. 6-7; IX. 68. M. Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 112-116

<sup>26</sup> *Theopylact Simocatta*, Trans. Mary and Michael Whitby (Oxford, 1986), VII 15. 12-14; VIII 6.1. F. Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 99-107.

<sup>27</sup> W. E. Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003), 45-46.

<sup>28</sup> An account of the Armenian chronicler Sebeos implies that the Byzantine defence positions on the Danube were maintained in the first years of Phocas's reign, Sebeos. *Historia*, trans. R. Bedrosian (New York, 1985), 80. See: Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 106-108; Живковић, *Лужни Словени*, 126-129. J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the seventh century* (Cambridge, 1997), 37, is of the opposite opinion and believes that after the rebellion of Phocas there was a collapse of the defence on the Danube.

<sup>29</sup> Баришић, *Чуда*, 66-73; Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 336-337.

the hinterland of Thessalonica, is that the barbarian groups and the territories controlled by the “others” in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century were generally identified in the direct authentic accounts by the specific terms ‘Sklavini’ (*Miracles of St. Demetrius*) or in the later accounts with ‘Sklavinia/i’ (*Theophanes*).<sup>30</sup>

The anonymous author of the second book of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* registered the attack on Thessalonica from the “nation of Sklavini” (τῶν Σκλαβίνων ἔθνους) carried out in 615/6.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to Archbishop John, the anonymous author did not express any reservations when identifying the attackers as being the ‘Sklavini’ (Σκλαβίνων). At the same time, it is indicative that besides the group identification of the enemy troops with the specific term ‘Sklavini’ (Σκλαβίνων), the anonymous author differentiated, for the first time regarding this siege, specific groups of tribes, listing them by name as Drugubites, Sagudates, Belegezites, Baiunetes and Berzetes.<sup>32</sup> However, the fact that he wrote from a chronological distance of about 70 years, advances several unobserved aspects.

The authentic reconstruction of the siege of Thessalonica in 615/6 shows that the troops of the ‘Sklavini’ were led by Chatzon. The identification of Chatzon as a leader, i.e. the “exarch of the Sklavini” (Σκλαβίνων ἑξάρχος) and as the main initiator and executor of the siege of Thessalonica itself, suggests some higher degree of military organisation aimed at conquering the city. What followed in 616 was a

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<sup>30</sup> It is indicative that anonymous author of the *Miracles* rarely used the term ‘Σκλάβων’, in contrast to the usual term ‘Sklavini’ (Σκλαβίνων). He used the term ‘Σκλάβοι’ only in general and unspecific form, when writing about some warriors who attacked the city in boats (*Miracula*, II. 1. 189), for those living in the huts (*Miracula* II. 5. 289); for those living by the river Strymon (*Miracula* II. 4. 243), for those speaking the language of the Slavs (*Miracula* II. 5. 291), or those endangering the “Keramisians” in boats (*Miracula* II. 5.302). The only adjective “Slavic” if we are to accept the critical edition of Lemerle is used to describe the “Slavic boats.” (*Miracula*, II. 1. 185). This tendency shows that the term ‘Σκλάβοι’ was actually applied stereotypically by the anonymous author. Archbishop John never used the term ‘Σκλάβοι’.

<sup>31</sup> The majority of scholars agree that the siege occurred in the first years of Heraclius reign. Баришић, *Чуда*, 86-95, dated this siege in 616, while Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils*, II, 91-94, dated the siege to 615.

<sup>32</sup> *Miracula* II. 1. 179-180. For more details on the location of these Slavic tribes, see: Олга В. Иванова, Г. Г. Литаврин, „Славяне и Византия“, in *Раннефеодальные государства на Балканах, VI-XII вв.* (Москва, 1985), 57 ff; Панов, *Средновековна Македонија*, III, 1 ff.

direct attack on Thessalonica from both land and sea, which was still mostly concentrated on the side of the sea. And again Thessalonica remained unconquered, and the citizens even managed to capture the leader Chatzon himself. The anonymous author of the *Miracles* also reveals the episode that prominent people in the city had been hiding Chatzon from the citizens “for some kind of benefit and with ill intentions”, which gives an impression of the complex character of the attack that was also based on a formerly established communication with the Thessalonica elite. Still, Chatzon was found and stoned to death by the enraged women of Thessalonica.<sup>33</sup>

*Isidore of Seville* concludes that in this period the ‘Sclavi’ had taken Hellas from Byzantium, which points to a serious threat to the Byzantine positions on the Balkans that echoed in Spain.<sup>34</sup> However, it is difficult to imagine that the desolations on the territory of “whole Thessaly and the surrounding islands, as well as the Aegean islands, and apart them the Cyclades islands, and whole Achaea, Epirus, the larger part of Illyricum and parts of Asia” had been caused by separate groups of the ‘Sklavini’ – the Drugubites, Sagudates, Belegezites, Baiunetes and Berzetes, as the anonymous author of the *Miracles* tried to present it.<sup>35</sup> It is much more plausible that the author tried to portray the siege of Thessalonica, which seems to have had a local character, in a broader context with the rest of the campaigns on the Balkans that were taking place at the same time, and for which he probably gained insight from the administrative documents.<sup>36</sup> That was undoubtedly necessary in terms of ascribing a greater dimension to the attack so as to create a perception regarding the greatness of the victory of the citizens under the protection of St Demetrius. The anonymous author followed, no doubt, the tendency that John had, since this attack took place during the time he was the Archbishop, to exaggerate the threat and with it to enlarge the victory and increase the moral of the citizens.

What is indicative is the fact that John, even though witnessing this attack in 615/6 as well as the next one in 618, nevertheless stated that the siege of 586 had been “the greatest war” that Thessalonica “had ever faced”. If that was the case, then it follows that the siege in 615/16,

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<sup>33</sup> *Miracula* II. 1.181-194.

<sup>34</sup> Isidore Seville. *Historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum*. Ed. Theodor Mommsen. *MGH AA* 11. *Chronica Minora* (Berlin, 1894), 120.

<sup>35</sup> *Miracula* II. 1. 179.

<sup>36</sup> Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, 107-108.

as well the following one in 618, were of a significantly lesser extent than the siege that took place 30 years before. This conclusion would mean that the anonymous author, writing from a chronological distance of about 70 years later, inserted certain elements in the text in order to give the attack a greater dimension, even though it had had a local character. In fact, this assumption is suggested by the rapid failure of the siege. If the said differentiated groups of tribes had had such a capacity as to threaten the broader territory of the Balkans and parts of Asia, as the anonymous author tried to present it, they certainly would not have given up the siege after just seven days, and then ask the Avars for help after the failure of the attack on Thessalonica.

As regards this siege, the intention of the warriors who brought with them their families “to establish them in the city after its conquest” is mentioned in the *Miracles* for the first time.<sup>37</sup> This remark by the anonymous author is generally explained by the modern scholars with the possibility that several Slavene tribes had set up in some parts of the territory of Macedonia, concentrating their settlements around Thessalonica. However, it is hard to believe that the settling of the multitude groups of the Slavene tribes in the vicinity of Thessalonica occurred in such a short period of time after the year 610 which, if the anonymous author of the *Miracles* is to be believed, was followed by their differentiation and concrete naming (known to the citizens), which reached a certain degree of military–political organisation led by the exarch Chatzon. It is more plausible that a longer period of time than a few years was undoubtedly needed for this kind of social and political differentiation among the separate groups of the ‘Sklavini’.<sup>38</sup> Hence, it is more likely that the anonymous author, writing from a chronological distance of more than six decades later and with the intent to introduce more clarity for his auditorium, inserted certain elements from the time when he was compiling the Book II of the *Miracles*, as it is much more credible that separate groups of the ‘Sklavini’, led by their leaders, were formed, differentiated and familiar to the citizens of Thessalonica by that time. That would mean that the anonymous author had, in fact, inserted in the text the later names of the groups of ‘Sklavini’ known as

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<sup>37</sup> *Miracula* II 1.179.

<sup>38</sup> P. Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 403, 423, argued that from one of the episodes of the *Miracles* of St. Demetrius “it emerges that several Slavic groups were settled in the vicinity of the city by about 670, a point confirmed by later events”.

Drugubites, Sagudates, Belegezites, Baiunetes, and Berzetes, and presented them as participants in the siege on Thessalonica in 615/6. In that respect, it is indicative that the anonymous author, in listing the separate names of different groups of the ‘Sklavini’, had brought them in historical and geographical context with the extensive attacks on the Balkans that occurred in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The purpose of inserting the names of later formed groups of the ‘Sklavini’ and framing it in the specific historical events on the Balkans in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century was to give the siege of Thessalonica a greater dimension, but which in reality was of a local character.<sup>39</sup> The fact that Chatzon was not identified as the leader of one of the separately listed groups of tribes but was presented only as the exarch of the undefined ‘Sklavini’, speaks in support of this supposition as well. In fact, the anonymous author of the *Miracles* thought necessary to clarify that it was an ‘attack by the Sklavini, or more correctly by Chatzon’ that occurred at the time of Archbishop John.<sup>40</sup> Another indicator which confirms this supposition is the fact that in describing the following attack that took place in 618, as well as the events that occurred before the seventh decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the anonymous author no longer lists by name any one group previously mentioned, but uses the general term ‘Sklavini’.

For the purpose of clarifying the situation in Macedonia at that time, one should also take into consideration the character of the writings by the anonymous author who, like the Archbishop John, did not intend to create some kind of a historical work for a wider audience. The two Books of the *Miracles* were designed solely for the citizens of Thessalonica, and entire parts of them were in the form of homilies that were read in religious services. Hence, the present tendency for exaggerating the character and seriousness of the attacks in order to glorify the success of the citizens also becomes clear. In that respect, the reason why the anonymous author inserted the later names of the separate groups of tribes from the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which were most probably not yet formed and not corresponded with the time that the siege had occurred, namely in 615/16, can be explained as well.

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<sup>39</sup> That there was a tendency to exaggerate this attack, which was in fact of a local character, by placing it into a wider context of the attacks at that time see: Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 53–54 who also points out to the fact that if there had been a more serious dimension to the attack, it certainly would have been registered in other Byzantine authors as well.

<sup>40</sup> *Miracula* II. 2.195.

It was done with the aim to make the historical events more understandable for the citizens of Thessalonica themselves, as they were his immediate audience, since they occurred more than 60 years before the time when the anonymous writer was compiling his work.

If the supposition for the insertion of later names in historical framing and geographical defining of the groups of 'Sklavini' in the vicinity of Thessalonica by the anonymous author of the *Miracles* is accepted, it would bring both the process of gradual forming and differentiation of separate groups registered in the sources as the 'Sklavini/ai' in Macedonia and the attainment of a higher degree of political organisation to a more realistic time frame, as was the case with the 670s when the title of the "King of the Rynchines" (Ρυγχίνων ἄρχος) and kings of the Drugubites was registered. It would have taken a longer period of time than a few years for this process. In any case, what is certain is that in 615/6 Chatzon distinguished himself as a popular leader among the warriors of the 'Sklavini' who were attacking the city, which of course was due to the promise that after conquering it, they could settle in the city together with their families.<sup>41</sup> Whether the plan for settling in the city can be taken as a certain indicator for the existence of any group of Slavene, already settled in the vicinity of Thessalonica, is another issue. Even more so the anonymous author was writing about events that occurred seventy or so years before. As opposed to this dilemma, what is certain is that the existence of a plan to settle together with their families suggests that in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century the warriors identified with the term 'Sklavini' did not necessarily come from afar, as was the case with the earlier attacks when they were coming from across the Danube with the sole purpose of taking spoils. It is probable that Chatzon was indeed a popular leader of certain Slavene group of warriors, which brought with them their families with the aim of conquering Thessalonica, and consequently settled in the vicinity of the city.<sup>42</sup> But it is hard to believe that the siege was a result of the tribal union of the already settled multitude of Slavene tribes differentiated by their name, as the anonymous author

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<sup>41</sup> On the rise of the leaders of the Slavs as representatives of the collective interest and responsibility, see : Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, 325-336.

<sup>42</sup> Живковић, *Јужни Словени под византиском влашћу*, 134-135, argued that it was a Slavic group, which after crossing the Danube river, decided to settle themselves. However, he accepted without reservation the notion of the anonymous author of the existence of the several Slavene tribes already in that period.



presented. At any rate, the anonymous author of the *Miracles*, following the same terminology as John, was usually using the specific formulation ‘Sklavini’ (Σκλαβίνων) to generally identify the barbarian enemies threatening Thessalonica that were different from the Avars.

The fact that the siege failed immediately after the elimination of Chatzon further points to the absence of a more serious level of organisation of the ‘Sklavini’. The failure in the siege of Thessalonica, due to the evident lack of military capacity, quantity and proper organisation for taking the city, as it is stated in the *Miracles*, led the ‘Sklavini’ to ask the Avar Khagan for help offering him alliance. The outcome of the negotiations was the military and logistical assistance provided by the Avars, whose army also included the warriors of the ‘Sklavini’ from across the Danube that were subordinated to the Avar Khagan.<sup>43</sup> The extensive land and sea siege of Thessalonica that took place in 618 and was carried out by the Avars and troops of the ‘Sklavini’, unfolded over the course of 33 days. However, the strong resistance by the citizens, the supplies of wheat and different kinds of food, as well as the open flow from sea, were the factors that determined the failure of that siege too. The crucial thing for the failure of the attack was nevertheless the withdrawal of the Avars after reaching an agreement with the citizens of Thessalonica that probably included certain compensation. What is indicative in this case is that, in contrast to the previous siege from 615/6, the anonymous author of the *Miracles* did not name the separate groups of the ‘Sklavini’, nor did he mention that they had any leader. On the contrary, the text gives the impression that the Avar leaders were the ones who organised the attack, commanded the army and negotiated with the citizens of Thessalonica.

It is indisputable that for organising the siege, which included entering into alliance with the Avars, what was necessary was an appropriate level of organisation of the warriors identified as the ‘Sklavini’. It certainly required a leader as a representative of their interests, as was the case with the leader Chatzon. Nevertheless, one cannot say that in this period there was a higher degree of military and political organising among the ‘Sklavini’ nor a tendency for their political mobilisation, as was the case with the subsequent siege of Thessalonica in the 670s by different ‘Sklavini’ groups, for which a direct military intervention from Byzantium was necessary.

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<sup>43</sup> *Miracula* II. 2.197–8.

Generally speaking, the character and the outcome of the sieges in 615/6 and 618 AD corroborate that the 'Sklavini' did not have the capacity to take over Thessalonica on their own. At the same time, after this attack on Thessalonica, it became clear that the Avars and the Sclavenes had different strategic conceptions in realising their plans on the Balkans. The failure in conquering Constantinople in 626 marked the beginning of a gradual weakening of the Avar Khaganate's power. This resulted in a new essential change in the constellations on the Balkans, considering that the Avars were the main driving force behind the military campaigns in this region.

The analysis of the written accounts shows that the Avar Khaganate was the mobilising factor for the military campaigns of the warrior groups of the 'Sklavini' providing the necessary military potential and organisation in the attacks on Thessalonica in 586 and 618. That the Avars and their subjugated warriors from the 'Sklaviniai' beyond the Danube and other groups of barbarians provided the numbers for the attacks is shown by the comparison with the lesser military capacity of the independent attacks of the 'Sklavini' in 584 and 615/6. On the other hand, it is indicative that the circumstances in Macedonia towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century were, in a way, in direct correlation with the military planning of the Avar Khaganate. Namely, the rise in power of the Avar Khaganate corresponds with the military mobilisation of the 'Sklavini' which resulted in four sieges on the city of Thessalonica in the period of 584–618, the most serious of which were evidently carried out in a joint effort, i.e. with the direct participation of, organised by and under the command of the Avars, and the participation of warriors from the "Sklaviniai". Conversely, the gradual decline of the Avar Khaganate after 626 coincides with the peaceful period established in Macedonia after 618 that lasted several decades, when the absence of military actions or clashes of any kind on Macedonian territory is noticeable in the sources. How much the anonymous author of the Book II of the *Miracles* was capable to make the distinction between the enemies 'Sklavini' and Avars, remains an open question. So much so because even Archbishop John himself, who witnessed the events at the time, expressed serious reservations in the concrete identification of the enemy warriors. In any case, both authors resorted to the use of the terms 'Sklavini' and Avars in identifying the main enemies of Byzantium at the time. At the same time it is noticeable that the anonymous author continued to use the specific term 'Sklavini' but, in contrast to John, did not use the term 'Sklaviniai'. Does this mean that the anonymous author did not make a

difference between the ‘Sklavini’ and the ‘Sklaviniai’? Or, perhaps, it was his way of indicating the different geographical defining of the immediate threat by the enemies at the time when he was compiling his work, in the sense of the first meaning of the term ‘Sklaviniai’ used for denoting the barbarian lands beyond the Danube. It can not be excluded that in the perception of the anonymous author, ‘Sklavini’ and ‘Sklavinia/i’ were synonyms denoting the “others” who, led by their leaders, had gradually secured control over certain territories in the hinterland of Thessalonica by 670s and directly opposed their own interests to the interests of the citizens of Thessalonica and Byzantium.

After 618 there is a lack of authentic accounts on attacks by the ‘Sklavini’ or the Avars in Macedonia, which corresponds to the time when Byzantium withdrew its troops from the Balkans. Numismatic finds confirm that at around 620 AD there was a general withdrawal of the Byzantine troops from the Balkans. However, recent research additionally shows that the numismatic hoards in this period should not be linked to the “Slavic” tide and mass colonization, but rather treated as an indicator for the presence of the Byzantine troops, that disappeared after their general retreat from the Balkans.<sup>44</sup> That suggests that the gradual process of the formation of new military-political groups identified by the Byzantine sources as the “Sklavini/ai” in Macedonia did not take place in conditions of a continued conflict and general destruction by the new groups of immigrants, but in an immediate peaceful coexistence and interaction with the indigenous population in Macedonia and the Byzantine authorities. This conclusion is also supported by the latest studies which point to the need to revise the idea so far of some kind of mass “Slavic” flood or planned colonisation of the Balkans, in favour of chaotic movements of smaller groups.<sup>45</sup>

It was only in the 630s that the *Miracles* registered the incidental intention of the ‘Sklavini’ to penetrate the city after the earthquake which caused damage to a part of the inner walls. According to the anonymous author, this intention remained unrealised after the ‘Sklavini’, while approaching the city, realised that its defence was not

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<sup>44</sup> Curta, *Southeastern Europe*, 74-75, who suggests that the numismatic hoards should not be interpreted as being the consequence of Slav invasions but as an indicator of the presence of Byzantine troops and the accumulated wealth. With the general retreat of the army in ca 620, the numismatic hoards disappeared as well.

<sup>45</sup> Curta, *Making of the Slavs*; Daniel Dzino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat: Identity transformation in Post-Roman and Early Medieval Dalmatia* (Brill, 2010), 211-212; Timothy Gregory, *A History of Byzantium* (Blackwell, 2005), 168-170.

affected and “returned in fear, accomplishing nothing”.<sup>46</sup> It is indicative that in describing this concrete miracle, the anonymous author did not mention any tribe by name, nor did he classify the ‘Sklavini’ as “our neighbours”, explaining only that they were “near us”. This episode additionally shows that one cannot speak of some multitude of tribes settling in the vicinity of the city. The names of the Slavene tribes appeared again only in the 670s when the anonymous author was writing as an eyewitness, describing the Thessalonica siege that occurred as a result of the liquidation of the king of the Rhynchines, Prebondos. Presenting the siege undertaken by Rhynchines, Drugubites, Sagudates and Strymonians, the anonymous author explicitly noted that “in short, those were the things which no one from our generation did not hear, nor saw, and for the majority of them even until now we could not say their names”.<sup>47</sup> What is more indicative is that in the introduction to the episode of the incursion of the *Sermesianoï*, the anonymous author recalls the previous chapters, referring to the “Sklavini, or more correctly the so called Hatzon”.<sup>48</sup> It is apparent that even in this passage he did not mention any tribes by name, but used the general term ‘Sklavini’ and the leader Hatzon to refer to the attacks on Thessalonica that occurred during the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

The reasonable interpretation of the neglected aspects of the *Miracles* would be that the establishment of the certain groups termed in the *Miracles* as ‘Sklavini’ in the vicinity of Thessalonica was a gradual process, which took place after 610, in parallel with the general withdrawal of the Byzantine troops from the Balkans. It is hard to assume that already in 615/16 in the vicinity of Thessalonica a multitude of Slavene tribes existed, differentiated by their name and controlling specific territory, or even more, obtaining tribal unity in attacking Thessalonica. It is more probable that certain immigrant warrior group led by the ‘Big-men’ Hatzon attacked the city, bringing with them their families. The process of the social and political differentiation that led to the establishment of the several Slavene tribes mentioned in the Book II of the *Miracles* of St. Demetrius, that was accompanied with their concrete naming and association with the specific territory, most probably occurred during a longer period, not of a several years as one could understand from the uncritical reading of *Miracles*. The fact that

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<sup>46</sup> *Miracula* II. 3. 216-229.

<sup>47</sup> *Miracula* II. 5. 288.

<sup>48</sup> *Miracula* II. 2. 196; II. 5.284.

Archbishop John was not able to recognize the enemy warriors even though he was writing in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century is an additional argument in favor of this conclusion. The anonymous author twice referred to the leader Hatzon and ‘Sklavini’, while presenting the sieges from the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century to his generation. He explicitly remarked their status as “neighbors” only when describing the events that occurred in 670s, thus making the difference with the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It is more probable that the anonymous writer referring to the siege of 615/6 made insertion in the text of the Book II of Miracles, placing the later names of the Slavene tribes that were established by the 670s and were of familiar presence, i.e. “neighbors”, with the aim of making the events more understandable and receptive to the citizens. Since he was describing more extensive geographical area that included Thessaly, Cyclades, Achaia, Epirus and large part of Illyricum with the aim of demonstrating the larger scale of the local event, the author of the Book II of the Miracles thought convenient to mention the later names of the tribes as taking part of the siege, that included Baiunites or Belegezites, who were inhabiting the areas further away of Thessalonica in the time of his writing. Those tribes were most probably formed during a longer process, certainly by the 670s, as were the other tribes mentioned in the Miracles – Drugubites, Sagudates, Berzetes. This supposition could give an explanation to the dilemma among scholars of whether Belegezites and Baiunites, moved from their previous settlement from the vicinity of Thessalonica in Thessaly or Epirus. They did not move given that they were established there later, not in the second decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The available evidence on the first presence of Sklavini in the mid-600s and the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century around Thessalonica and Constantinople corresponds to this general picture.<sup>49</sup> What is more, the analysis of the Book II of the

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<sup>49</sup> The opinion that the “Sklaviniai” in the vicinity of Thessalonica were already established by the 6<sup>th</sup> century maintained by Ф. Баришић, *Чуда*, 52 and Lemerle, *Les Plus Anciens Recueils*, II, 71-72, does not have confirmation in the sources. Recently, Б. Ристовски, “Првобитното име на Самуиловото царство било Склавинија“, *Македонскиот идентитет низ историјата*, ed. Т. Чепреганов et al. (Скопје, 2010), 67-68, even claims that it is “undisputed fact that Sklavini as statehood subjects are formed only in the borders of Byzantium and precisely on the territory of Macedonia”. What we can be certain is that by the mid-600 and the 670s the ‘Sklaviniai’ were registered by Theophanes in the environs of Constantinople and Thessalonica. The recent studies provide a altered picture from the traditional notion about the settlement of the Slavs in the Balkans proceeded from the critical analysis of the written sources and the

Miracles of St. Demetrius reveals that the process of the establishment of groups of Slavene tribes in southern Macedonia by the 670s did not take place in conditions of a continued conflict and general destruction, but in an immediate peaceful coexistence and interaction with the indigenous population in Macedonia and the Byzantine authorities. From the reading of *Miracles* one gets the impression that the leaders such as Hatzon and Prebondos, obtained their authority, among other because of their ability to contact with the prominent citizens and Byzantine authorities in Thessalonica.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the re-reading of the *Miracles* reveals a different picture in the reconstruction of seventh century Macedonia, namely the surrounding area of Thessalonica and the Strymon valley. What happened in the other parts of Macedonia, i.e the territory of present-day Republic of Macedonia, we cannot tell with certainty since there are no direct accounts contained in the *Miracles* and *Theophanes*. This question is getting more complex with the claim of the anonymous author of the Book II of the *Miracle of St. Demetrius* noting that the army of the group “Sermisianoï” led by Kouber in 680/81, after crossing the Danube “came into our lands and conquered the Keramisian plain” that is the plain around the present day Bitola.<sup>51</sup> Whether the term “our lands” means that Byzantium maintained authority in this part of Macedonia, is impossible to tell. What is more, there are no direct archaeological findings that will confirm Slavic presence.<sup>52</sup> However that is another issue that can be only clarified by future archeological findings, which also concerns other neglected aspects raised from the re-reading of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*.

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available archaeological data. For Dalmatia and Croatia, see: See, Dzino, *Becoming Slav*, 92-117; For northern and eastern Adriatic region, see Florin Curta, "The early Slavs in the northern and eastern Adriatic region: a critical approach." *Archeologia Medievale* 37 (2010), 303-325; For Greece, see Curta, "Still waiting for the barbarians", 403-478.

<sup>50</sup> One can only speculate that Prebondos was “a mere commander of a Slavic military unit employed by the imperial army”, as is recently argued by Adam Izdebski, “The Slavs political institutions and the Byzantine policies (c.a. 530-650), *Byzantinoslavica* 1-2 (2011), 61-64.

<sup>51</sup> *Miracula* II. 5.288.

<sup>52</sup> И. Микулчиќ, *Средновековни градови и тврдини во Македонија* (Скопје, 1996), 26-28; Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 423-424.

Митко Панов

РЕКОНСТРУИРАЌИ ЈА МАКЕДОНИЈА ВО VII ВЕК:  
НЕКОИ ЗАНЕМАРЕНИ АСПЕКТИ ВО *ЧУДАТА НА СВ.*  
*ДИМИТРИЈ СОЛУНСКИ*

- р е з и м е -

Анализата на одредени занемарени аспекти од двете збирки на *Чудата на Св. Димитрија* открива дека појавата и формирањето на групите словенски племиња околу Солун бил постапен процес, кој се одвивал во периодот по 610 г., паралелно со генералното повлекување на византиските војски од Балканот. Традиционалното гледиште на истражувачите се заснова на претпоставката дека во 615 г. во околината на Солун веќе егзистирале повеќе словенски племиња, кои биле диференцирани според нивното име и контролирале одредена територија, или уште повеќе, постигнале ниво на заемно племенско обединување во нападот на градот. Меѓутоа, критичката анализа на *Чудата* укажува дека процесот на социјална и на политичка диференцијација, што довело до формирање на повеќе словенски племиња споменати во *Втората збирка на Чудата*, најверојатно се случил во подолг временски период, сигурно до 70-тите години, а не во втората деценија на VII век. Во тој контекст, анонимниот автор веројатно ги вметнал подоцнежните имиња на племињата Драгувити, Сагудати, Велегезити, Вајунити, Берзити со цел да ги направи поприемливи за граѓаните историските настани и географскиот опсег опишани во врска со опсадата во 615/6 г. Врмувањето во поширок историски и географски простор било во функција на давањето поголема димензија на опсадата, која, реално, имала локален карактер. Анализата на *Втората книга на Чудата* открива и друг аспект, имено дека процесот на формирање на групите „Склавини“ во јужна Македонија до 70-тите години од VII век не се одвивал во услови на континуиран конфликт и генерална деструкција, туку во непосредна интеракција со домородното население во Македонија и византиските власти.