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THE TAGMATA AND THE  
BYZANTINE BALKAN RE-  
CONQUISTA  
(Middle of Eight middle of Ninth  
Century)

For the Byzantine Empire the seventh century represented a period of transition. The struggle for survival which in the beginning was waged against Sassanid Persia and later the Arabs, forced the Byzantine government in an effort to oppose this external aggression more successfully to start a comprehensive state reform, including in this process also its military forces. The establishment of the *themata* led to disappearance of the role that the *praesental* army possessed, which was at the same time an elite striking force and a personal army of the Byzantine emperor. After the structural changes made in the seventh century the *Opsikion* army emerged as the only military force in the Balkans. Until the first half of eight century its assignment was the protection of the imperial territories in southern Thrace and the city of Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> But this type of structural setting of the Byzantine military system didn't give the desired reliability and stability. Between the end of the seventh and the first half of the eight century Byzantine Empire was subjected to strong attacks from the Arabs, and in 680 Byzantium finally lost the territories in Northern Thrace to the new aggressive adversary in the Balkans, the Bulgars.<sup>2</sup> Along with this external threat, there was some

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<sup>1</sup> The *Opsikion* army probably was a successor of the *praesental* army, reorganized in 622 during the reign of Heraclius (610-641). For more details on its role during the seventh and early eight century in: John F. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians: An Administrative, Institutional and Social survey of the Opsikion and Tagmata c.580-900*, (Bonn: Poikila Byzantina 3, 1984), 172-173, 175-176, 196-197.

<sup>2</sup> More on the Arab sieges of Constantinople and Byzantine defeat by the Bulgars see: *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor, Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813*, Cyril Mango and Roger Scott trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997),

internal insecurity in the Byzantine state.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that the role which was entrusted to the *Opsikion* army to be a guardian of the imperial power was betrayed. The rebellion of Artavazdos that began in 741 against the Emperor Constantine V (741-775) was the last of several revolts that occurred during the first half of the eight century where the *Opsikion* army and its commander had the central role.<sup>4</sup>

After this last rebellion the Emperor Constantine V began a partial reform of its armed forces. He made two significant changes. First was the partition of *thema Opsikion*,<sup>5</sup> which reduced the military and political influence of its military commander. The second change, highly significant for the Byzantine foreign and domestic policy, was the establishment of new imperial elite forces known as *tagmata*. These were the *scholai* and *exkoubitoi*, descendants of the old guardian units from the sixth century, *scholae* and *excubitores*.<sup>6</sup> At the same time the Emperor formed an elite palace guard consisting of two separate units - the first in charge for the security of the Great Palace, the second for the manning of its walls.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of *tagmata* resolved the problems that the central government faced. The first was the necessity of creating a military force that would defend the imperial against the provincial interests, while the second problem was the need for a more effective army than it existed at the moment. By the end of the eight and

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354, 395-398, 415-421. Also: Warren Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state and Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 325-326, 328-329, 347-349.; Георгије Острогорски, *Историја Византије*, (Београд: Просвета, 1969), 138-140, 165.

<sup>3</sup> Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 337-345.; Острогорски, *Историја*, 153-154, 162-165.

<sup>4</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 415-421. About the role of the *Opsikion* in these rebellions: Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 205-210.; Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army 284-1081*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Constantino Porphyrogenito, *De Thematibus, Book I*, 5-6., Andrea Pertusi trans., (Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticano, 1952), 130-135. See also: Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 209, 216.; Walter E. Kaegi Jr., *Byzantine Military Unrest (471-843)*, (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert Publisher, 1981), 237.; Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 228-229, 341.

<sup>7</sup> More on the *noumera* in: John Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 256-266.; Warren Treadgold, "Notes on the Numbers and Organization of the Ninth-Century Byzantine Army", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1980), 277. Also: John B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century With a Revised Text of the Kleitorologion of Philotheos*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 65.

early ninth century the empress Irene (797-802) and her successor Nicephorus I (802-811) formed additional *tagma*, which further increased the political and military security of the Byzantine rulers.<sup>8</sup>

There are several theories concerning the size of these elite units. The reason for this is the confusion found in the works of Ibn Khurradadhbīh, Ibn al-Fakīh and Khudāma, Arab geographers who are the only ones that provide detailed information about the strength of the *tagmata*.<sup>9</sup> J. B. Bury, A. Toynbee and lately J. Haldon, do not agree that the size totaled about 4,000 or 6,000 soldiers for each unit, and assume that they did not possess so many soldiers in their ranks. They base their view on the information found in the work of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959), *De Ceremoniis*. Constantine informs about the preparations made during the forthcoming military campaign of 949 on Crete, where the number of elite units who were enlisted was much lower than the ones attested by Ibn Khurradadhbīh and Khudāma. The document reports that for the Cretan expedition a total of 647 soldiers from the *scholai* were levied, *exkoubitoi* around 700, while *hikanatoi* 456 soldiers.<sup>10</sup> J. B. Bury and J. Haldon initially assumed that this was

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<sup>8</sup> For *vigla/arithmos* and the term *vigilia* see: Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 293.; Bury, *Imperial Administrative System*, 60-61.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 359. For the *hikanatoi*: *Sacrorum Consiliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio XI, XVI*, ed. Gian D. Mansi, (Florentiae, 1765), 213.; Bury, *Imperial Administrative System*, 63.; Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival 780-842*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 162. For the *optimatoi*: Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 224-226.

<sup>9</sup> For the works of Ibn Khurradadhbīh and Khudāma in: ed. and trans. M. J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum VI*, (Bruxelles: E. J. Brill, 1889), 81-82, 196-199. According to J. Haldon, when Khudāma compiled his work he probably used an older source, possibly Al-Jarmi, who would seem had access to Byzantine official documents that originated from the period between 786 and 809. See: John F. Haldon, "Kudāma ibn Dja'far and the Garrison of Constantinople", *Byzantion* 48, (Bruxelles, 1978), 78-90. W. Treadgold comes to the same conclusion. See: Warren Treadgold, "Remarks on the Work of Al-Jarmi on Byzantium", *Byzantinoslavica XLIV*, (Prague, 1983), 205-212.

<sup>10</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, ed. I. I. Reiskii, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, (Bonnae, 1829), 666. See also: Bury, *Imperial Administrative System*, 54.; Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 276-282. and John F. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565-1204*, (London: UCL Press, 1999), 102.; Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 286-287.

actually the total strength of these military forces. Later, J. Haldon left this question open but suggests that they were nevertheless small units.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike them, W. Treadgold puts forth another theory. He accepts the information given by Khudāma as accurate and indicates the confused description of the *tagmata* by Ibn Khurradadhbīh.<sup>12</sup> According to him, this question would still remain open if the information presented by Khudāma could not be confirmed with another source, the *Kletorologion* of Philotheus. W. Treadgold points out the fact that the number of senior officers from the elite units of *scholai*, *exkoubitoi*, *vigla*, *hikanatoi* and *noumera* who together with the junior officers attended the imperial banquets held in the Great Palace on the twelfth day after Christmas totaled 204 for each *tagma*. According to his opinion, this was the exact number of officers required for the normal functioning of an elite squad of 4,000 soldiers, which indicates that Khudāma was accurate and the strength of these military units haven't changed between 839/842 and 899.<sup>13</sup>

An additional argument in favor of W. Treadgold's theory is also the Byzantine military strategy according to which, the central government during the formation of the expeditionary army recruited detachments from different *themata*, while at the same time paying attention not to completely undermine their defensive power. A typical example for this is the preparation for the already mentioned Cretan campaign of 949 in which the detachments of the *scholai* and *exkoubitoi* stationed in Bithynia were not enlisted.<sup>14</sup> The principle of selecting

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<sup>11</sup> John F. Haldon, "Strategies of Defence, Problems of Security: the Garrisons of Constantinople in the Middle Byzantine Period", *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron, (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1995), 149.

<sup>12</sup> Treadgold, "Notes on the Numbers, 273.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolas Oikonomides, *Les Listes De Préséance Byzantines des IX et XI Siècles*, (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1972), 170-175, 182. About W. Treadgold's theory see: Treadgold, "Notes on the Numbers", 273-275. and Warren Treadgold, "Standardized numbers in the Byzantine Army", *War in History* Vol. 12, (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2005), 5-6. For the relevance of Khudāma's view: Treadgold, "Remarks on the Work of Al-Jarmi", 209.

<sup>14</sup> The detachment of the *scholai* and *exkoubitoi* recruited for the Cretan campaign was from soldiers billeted in the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia. See in: *De Cerimoniis*, 666.4-8. However, it should be noted that the transfer of troops from the *themata* for the purposes of major expeditions was completed only when Byzantium had signed a peace treaty with one of its neighbors. The Balkan expedition of Staurakios in 783 was carried out after a peace treaty was made with the Arabs: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 456. More about the Byzantine principle of levying soldiers from several

military units for the upcoming campaign probably depended upon the military tasks that were assigned to each of the thematic armies during their establishment,<sup>15</sup> a strategic concept that was also valid for the *tagmata*. All previously mentioned arguments suggest that the elite squads witnessed in *De Cerimoniis* who were enrolled as part of the forthcoming expedition to Crete in 949 actually didn't present the entire unit, but rather only a small detachment of the total manpower that the *tagmata* had at their disposal, which according to Khudāma numbered to 4,000 troops each.

Another relevant fact can be noticed in the sources regarding the issue about the size of the *tagmata*. Theophanes in his *Chronicle* indicates that early in his reign the emperor Leo IV had "...increased the *tagmata*."<sup>16</sup> If we reject the assumption that he established a new elite squad (sources testify that these types of military units were created only after his reign), then it can be concluded that Theophanes actually

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different themes for the requirements of the military campaigns see in: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 358, 366, 376, 447, 490.; For the Cretan campaign: *De Cerimoniis*, 664.4.-667.11. The Byzantine army that Theoktistos led against the Sklavinias on Peloponnesus was made up of soldiers from the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia, as well as from other western (Balkan) *themata*. See: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik and trans. Romilly J. H. Jenkins, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, Vol. I, (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 50.9-16. For the campaign of Michael I (811-813) against the Bulgarian khan Krum (803-814) in: Leonis Grammatici, *Chronographia*, 336.16-22., ed. Immanuelis Bekkeri, (*Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, (Bonnae, 1842). More about the size of the imperial army between the end of the sixth and the beginning of the tenth century in: *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, ed. George T. Dennis, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae Vol. XVII*, (Wien, 1981), III.8-10.; *The Taktika of Leo VI*, ed. and transl. George T. Dennis, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae Vol. XLIX*, (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), IV.47, IV.71, XVIII.147. See also in: John F. Haldon, *Byzantium at War AD 600-1453*, (Osprey Publishing LTD, 2003), 56-57.; Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 288-289.

<sup>15</sup> Theophanes Continuatus in his work reports about the military tasks that were assigned to the two *strategoï* of Thrace and Macedonia. He testifies that during the first half of the ninth century a law existed under which "...the commanders of Thrace and Macedonia, when there was peace with the Bulgarians, they [had a duty] to share the danger and to fight alongside the eastern armies..." This indicates that their primary military assignment was the security of the imperial possessions in the Balkans. See in: *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, ed. Immanuelis Bekkeri, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, (Bonnae, 1838), 181.16-18. За бугарски превод во: *Гръцки извори за Българската История*, Том V, (София: БАН, 1964), 118.

<sup>16</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 449.

reports an increase in the number of troops in the already existing *tagmata*. This brings us to another essential problem. If the emperor Leo IV had increased these units, then what was the strength of each of the elite units prior to completion of this process, i.e. at the time of their establishment? If we assume that according to Khudāma the size of these units at the beginning of their formation amounted to 4,000 troops, and if the Byzantine emperor Leo IV had increased the *tagmata*, then during the first half of the ninth century they should have more troops than the number given by this Arab geographer. Furthermore, if this is the case, then for these elite units to have about 4,000 soldiers in its ranks in the period between 839/842 and 899, the central government should previously reduce their size. But not a single source informs of decreasing the number of troops in the already existing *tagmata*. They only testify about the formation of additional units of this rank (*vigla*, *hikanatoi* and the temporary elite unit of *phoideratoi*).<sup>17</sup> This brings us to the assumption of J. B. Bury, accepted by A. Toynbee and J. Haldon according to whom, when Constantine V created the units *scholai* and *exkoubitores* they had fewer troops than the number presented by Khudāma, or 4,000 soldiers for each *tagma*. But this doesn't suggest that the theory of W. Treadgold is not correct and that the *tagmata* didn't have that much soldiers. In fact, Khudāma's testimony of the elite units strength, the theory that he probably used an older source whose author seems to have access to various Byzantine official documents that originated from the period between the 80's of the eight and the first decade of the ninth century,<sup>18</sup> as well as the information in the *Chronicle* of Theophanes, are all facts which indicates that during the time of Leo IV the already existing *tagmata* were "increased" with additional troops, so after the completion of this procedure they had in their ranks 4,000 soldiers each.

However, it remains unknown how many soldiers the elite units had before their "increase". The sources do not provide any information that would directly give an answer to this question. Yet even from those that are available, a certain hypothesis with some rough estimates can be provided. What can be noticed from them is that for a better organization of the imperial army, as for an increased financial efficiency of the state, until the end of the ninth century the Byzantine government used round

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<sup>17</sup> For the *phoideratoi*: Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 246-250.

<sup>18</sup> Haldon, "Kudāma ibn Dja'far and the Garrison of Constantinople", 84.; Treadgold, "Remarks on the Work of Al-Jarmi", 205-212.

numbers for the billeting of military forces throughout the *themata*.<sup>19</sup> The sources suggest that for this purpose the administration probably used the army detachment *droungos*, which in the official documents numbered 1,000 soldiers. When some reorganization was done, whether it was a partition of *thema* or increase of troops in a *thema*, W. Treadgold assumes that this was implemented according to the size of this military unit.<sup>20</sup> He estimates that during the second half of the eighth century for the Byzantine state army of about two *droungoi*, or 2,000 soldiers, was a bare minimum that satisfied the security needs of the western *themata*. This army size was probably sufficient for some of the thematic armies to maintain the imperial power in the region, but also to execute specific defensive assignments if necessary.<sup>21</sup> Because of some similarity with the thematic armies in its command structure, as well as in the internal structural organization of its basic unit, the *bandon*, probably the same principle could also be applied to the *tagmata*.<sup>22</sup> In that context it may be assumed that even among the elite units the strength of two *droungoi*, or 2,000 soldiers, probably was the minimal military power with which they could form the core of the future imperial expeditionary forces, or be able to carry out independently some smaller military missions.<sup>23</sup> This unit size would in fact allow the central government some flexibility in the implementation of its foreign and domestic policy. To be more precise, it would allow the Byzantine emperor in case of catastrophic defeat and a greater loss of life in the ranks of the *tagmata* during some expeditions, to have in reserve enough members from these elite units who could then respond to future tasks (ensuring the political

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<sup>19</sup> For more details about the strength of the thematic armies and the use of round numbers for their stationing see: Groeje, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum VI*, 84, 196-199.

<sup>20</sup> By the end of tenth century the distribution of military forces across the themes, the partition of the major themes in to smaller, as well as its reinforcement with new soldiers, was carried out according to the size of the unit *droungos*. See in: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 64-70, 105-106, 111. For the use of round numbers in the byzantine administration: Treadgold, "Standardized numbers", 1-14.

<sup>21</sup> According to the assumption of W. Treadgold in 773 the smallest armies numbered around 2,000 soldiers and were situated in the *themata* of Hellas, Cibyrhaeot and Sicily. See: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 359.; Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium 600-1025*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 168.; Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 229, 234.; Haldon, "Strategies of Defence, Problems of Security", 149.

security of its imperial authority, as well as performing new offensive campaigns<sup>24</sup>), until a conscription or a transfer of troops from the thematic armies was carried out which would replenish the empty posts in the *tagmata*.

The formation of these new elite units towards the middle of the eight century led to some logistical problems. Because the *scholai* and *exkoubitoi* no longer presented a palatine guard, but elite units with estimated 2,000 soldiers each, the question about their billeting emerged. During the reign of Constantine V its highly plausible that they were based inside the capitol, because the written sources reports that in this period some of the churches and monasteries in Constantinople were used as barracks for "...the soldiers who shared his [iconoclastic] opinions."<sup>25</sup> That these were the *tagmata* testifies Theophanes Confessor in his *Chronicle* according to whom, the elite units at the time of empress Irene publicly stood behind the iconoclasm and prevented her attempt to organize a church council in 786 that should condemned this teaching and restore the veneration of icons.<sup>26</sup> Because of their opposition, which was directed against her political and religious agenda, the empress Irene afterwards transferred the elite units *scholai* and *exkoubitoi* outside Constantinople and billeted them through the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia, as well as in Bithynia in Asia Minor, where they remained stationed.<sup>27</sup>

Initially created only to limit the power of the commander of *Opsikion*, and to provide adequate protection for the Emperor against possible future rebellions from the provincial potentates, these elite troops exceeded its basic function. Made up of professional soldiers (unlike the seasonal thematic soldiers) under the direct control of the

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<sup>24</sup> In the ascent of Michael I as new Byzantine emperor, and in the battles that Byzantium fought against the Bulgarians after 811, "...the remaining contingents..." of the *tagmata* were also participating. See: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 493, 501.

<sup>25</sup> Theophanes in his *Chronicle* testifies that the monasteries of Dalmatos, Kallistratos, Dios and Maximinius were given to the army. See in: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 443. He also informs about the existence of the city *tagmata* during the reign of Leo IV. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 449. According to J. Haldon probably part of these elite units were stationed in the city or in the uninhabited area between the Theodosian walls and the old wall of Constantine. For more details: Haldon, "Strategies of Defence, Problems of Security", 153-154.

<sup>26</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 461.

<sup>27</sup> *De Cerimoniis*, 655. See also: Haldon, "Strategies of Defence, Problems of Security", 153.; Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 308.; Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 286.



ruler, well trained and probably paid on a monthly basis, equipped with the best weapons and armor, the *tagmata* have given the Byzantine emperors much greater security.<sup>28</sup> Capable of recruiting a strong army without significantly cutting the defense capabilities of the thematic armies stationed throughout the Balkans and in Asia Minor, the Byzantines managed in the following period not only to strengthen, but gradually extend the boundaries of their Empire.

The Byzantine military strategy in the Balkans from the middle of the seventh until the middle of the eighth century was determined by several factors: the constant warfare on the eastern frontier against the Arabs which led to two major sieges of Constantinople, and the Bulgarian threat that appeared on the Balkan Peninsula after the establishment of their state in Northern Thrace in 680. Also, the frequent outbreak of plague until her last appearance in 747-748 had a considerable impact on the available human resources, important for the financial and military power of the Empire.<sup>29</sup> Since there was a great possibility of being attacked from several sides at once, while possessing limited resources, the military and strategic concept of the Byzantine state was actually a tactic of retaining the military threat through attrition of the enemy and defense of the remaining imperial possessions. The Byzantine expeditions in the Balkans which were directed towards the Bulgars and the *Sklaviniai* were not annually. In fact the sources testify that between these campaigns a period of several years or even decades of Byzantine military passivity can be seen.<sup>30</sup> The *themata* of Thrace and

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<sup>28</sup> About the method of payment of the elite units see: Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 308-309, 313-314.; Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy", *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou, (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 1013-1014.; Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 284. For the military equipment: Haldon, *Byzantine Pretorians*, 318-323.; Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 125.

<sup>29</sup> About the plague of 749 see: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 423.; Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani, *Breviarium Historicum*, Cyril Mango trans., *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, Vol. XIII, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 67-68. More on the influence of the epidemics in: Lester K. Little, ed., *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541-750*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104.

<sup>30</sup> For the campaign of emperor Constans II (641-668) see: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 347.; Andrew Louth, "The Byzantine Empire in the seventh century", in *The New Cambridge Medieval History Vol. I c.500-700*, ed. Paul Fouracre, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 299.; Бранко Панов ред, *Историја на Македонскиот Народ*, Том I, (Скопје, 2000), 298.; For the campaign of emperor Constantine IV (668-685) see: Acti S. Demetrii II, *Грџки извори за Българската Историја*, Том III, (София: БАН, 1960), 157.; See also: Митко Б. Панов,

Hellas, established in the Balkans by the end of the seventh century, did not possess enough military strength that would allow them to undertake large-scale operations directed towards the reintegration of the Balkan regions inhabited by Slavs and Bulgars. They were created for one purpose only, to defend the remaining Byzantine possessions in the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>31</sup> The sources testify that these two newly established thematic armies had no capacity to act independently against the enemy on the battlefield. In case of an enemy attack these thematic forces only had an obligation to shelter the population and to secure the cities, fortresses and important crossing points at their territory. Afterwards, according to the established Byzantine warfare tactics they should constantly hinder and harass the opposing army, rendering impossible their free movement to pillage and gather food and fodder, important for supporting the soldiers and their horses, giving thus sufficient time for the central government to raise an army that would successfully defeat the enemy.<sup>32</sup>

The Byzantine military activity on the Balkan Peninsula from the middle of the eight century significantly differs from the previous period and corresponds with the establishment of the *tagmata*. Instead of just

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„Македонија и Словените од средината на VI до средината на IX век“, *Историја на македонскиот народ*, Тодор Чепреганов уред., (Скопје, 2008), 86.; For the expedition of Justinian II (685-695/705-711) in 687 see: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 364.; Mango, *Nicephori Patriarchae*, 38.; Georgius Monachus, *Грџки извори за Българската Историја*, Том IV, (София: БАН, 1961), 47.; Тибор Живковић, *Јужни Словени под византиском влашћу 600-1025*, (Београд, 2007), 158.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 332-333.; For the Bulgarian campaign of Justinian II in 707 see: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 376.; Mango, *Nicephori Patriarchae*, 43.; Georgius Monachus, *ИБИГИБИ*, Том IV, 48-49.

<sup>31</sup> About the establishment of *thema* Thrace see: Ralph-Johannes Lilie, “Trakien” und “Thrakesion”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, herausgegeben von H. Hunger, 26. Band, (Wien: Der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 28-34.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 329-330.; For the formation of *thema* Hellas: Георгије Острогорски, „Постанак тема Хелада и Пелопонез“, *Из византиске историје и просопографије*, (Београд: Просвета, 1968), 142-143.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 332.; Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 265-266.

<sup>32</sup> The Byzantines repeatedly used guerrilla warfare tactics, which consisted of sheltering the local population and the destruction of crops, as well as constant skirmishes and harassment of the enemy. Dennis, *Taktika*, XVII.76-80, XVIII.126-127, XVIII.134.; See also *On Skirmishing in: Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. and trans. George T. Dennis, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, Vol. XXV, (Washington D.C., 1985). A short overview of these defensive tactics in: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 177-180.

occasional display of military power, Byzantium began long and aggressive war against the Bulgarian state that lasted nearly two decades, in which a total of nine expeditions were executed. However, the Byzantine military activities were not confined only to the Bulgars. The imperial army intervened in Macedonia where managed to subdue the local *Sklaviniai*, who recognized the Byzantine supremacy nominally,<sup>33</sup> as well as on the eastern frontier against the Arabs.<sup>34</sup> It can be noted from the sources that immediately after the establishment of *tagmata* the Byzantine Empire demonstrated intensified offensive activity in the Balkans with a high degree of efficiency of its military forces, and that's only a few years after the last major outbreak of plague which according to the words of Patriarch Nicephorus "... fell upon the Imperial City and the surrounding lands."<sup>35</sup> They also testify that despite the occasional high losses in human power during this long Byzantine-Bulgar War, whether in the course of battles or because of certain bad weather conditions, the imperial army could quickly regroup and start another offensive expedition.<sup>36</sup>

In comparison with the previous period, the improvement in efficiency that can be seen in the imperial army during the second half of the eight century cannot be justified with any fundamental changes in the Byzantine military strategy, tactical activity, or the size of the expeditionary army and its formation deployment before the battle. In fact, the Byzantine military commanders at the time of Constantine V used in their battles against the enemy identical military formations and battlefield tactics as their predecessors from the seventh century. The surviving military manuals like the *Strategikon* of Maurice (584-602) and *Taktika* of Leo the Wise (886-912), composed before and after the eight century do not display between themselves some radical deviations and substantial change in the Byzantine military-strategic concept.

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<sup>33</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 430. For this campaign see: Живковић, *Јужни Словени*, 161-2.; Бранко Панов ред., *Историја на Македонскиот Народ*, 306.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 363.

<sup>34</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, p.445.; Острогорски, *Историја Византије*, 175. For a brief survey on the Byzantine-Arab warfare in: *The Cambridge History of The Byzantine Empire c.500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 255-256.

<sup>35</sup> Mango, *Nicephori Patriarchae*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> For more details about the byzantine military activities during the reign of Constantine V: Mango, *Nicephori Patriarchae*, 73-82.; Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 431-438.

Actually, from their content it can be concluded that the *Taktika* is in a way a repetition, reformulation and adaptation of the *Strategikon* according to the conditions that existed at the end of the ninth century. The same is noticed in the other Byzantine military treatises like *De re Militari*, *De Velitatione* or the manuals from the time of Nicephorus II Phocas (963-969).<sup>37</sup> These manuals inform that the Byzantine strategy was not about waging a pitch battle against the enemy. They suggest that the Byzantines should always try to avoid it, or to reduce it to a bare minimum. The author of the *Strategikon* actually advises the military commanders to use various military skills and tactics, and suggests to defeat the enemy "...by deceit, by raids, or by hunger." He further recommends that they should constantly use their "...tactical and strategically skills..." and to avoid as much as possible a direct confrontation,<sup>38</sup> or in another word to wage against their enemies a typical defensive war of attrition.

If there wasn't any significant change in the military strategy and tactics during the second half of the eighth century, then the reasons for the increased Byzantine presence in the Balkans should be looked somewhere else, that is in the reform of Constantine V and the establishment of the new elite units. Consisting of professional soldiers or mercenaries, with better military skills than the seasonal thematic forces, stationed first at Constantinople and then across the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia, the *tagmata* probably elevated the preparedness of the Byzantine army on a much higher level, thus allowing not only for

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<sup>37</sup> For *De Re Militari* and *De Velitatione* in: Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises.*; For the military manuals of Nicephorus II Phocas in: *Sowing The Dragons Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, Eric McGeer trans., (Dumbarton Oaks, 2008). However it should be noted that although they used the theoretical strategies listed in the military manuals, the Byzantine commanders were flexible and practical, and very often used *ad-hoc* tactics that were not mentioned as a possible solution in some of these treatises. Such advice is given not only by Nicephorus II, but by Kekaumenos: *Советы и рассказы Кекамена*, Генадиј Г. Литаврин ед., (Москва, 1972), 142.

<sup>38</sup> Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*, prooemium, VIII.2.4.; Walter E. Kaegi jr., *Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy*, (Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1983), 8. This byzantine strategy of avoiding a pitch battle with the enemy is also testified by Theophanes. See in: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 432. But despite this established strategy the sources inform us that the Byzantine armies still fought regular battles on the battlefield. See: George T. Dennis, "The Byzantines in Battle", ed. Kostas Tsinakakis, *Byzantium at War (9th-12th c.)*, (Athens: The National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1997), 165-178.

its rapid and effective deployment on the field, but also for an increased military engagement throughout the Balkans. Until their formation in the middle of the eighth century the military power of Byzantium in the Balkan Peninsula was almost symbolic. The Thracian army who had been separated from the *Opsikion* army in 680 probably numbered about 6,000 soldiers; its goal was to provide greater security for the Thracian region and the city of Constantinople. Together with *thema* of Hellas, established several years later in the region of Attica and Boeotia with an army that numbered about 2,000 soldiers, it can be noticed that by the end of the seventh century the Byzantine Empire had deployed in the Balkans a total of 8,000 troops. Unfortunately, this did not present more than 10% of the overall army potential of the Empire in that given period.<sup>39</sup>

These two thematic armies stationed in the Balkans were not large and powerful enough to resist the enemy on their own. They were also stationed too far away from each other to operate together. The creation of the elite units of *scholai* and *exkoubitoi*, around 2,000 troops each, had changed this situation.<sup>40</sup> Not only they have increased the overall number of Byzantine forces in the Balkans, so that by the middle of the eighth century together with the thematic forces most likely numbered about 12,000 soldiers, but stationed it the capitol and militarily experienced by the long years of constant warfare against the Bulgars, the *tagmata* have become a crucial factor for the Byzantine military power in the Balkan Peninsula. Also, unlike the thematic armies these units were directly subordinated to the Byzantine emperor and immediately available for the implementation of his political agenda. The increase of the *scholai* and *exkoubitoi* with 2,000 soldiers each at the time of Emperor Leo IV, so that the number of Byzantine forces in the Balkans reached about 16,000 troops, further strengthened the military presence on its territory, and also subsequently increased the awareness among the Byzantine rulers that there was an opportunity to start with the reintegration of the previously lost imperial territories.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> According to W. Treadgold and J. Haldon the imperial army during this period numbered around 80,000 soldiers: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 64, 66-67. and John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 239.

<sup>40</sup> We're not enlisting here the elite guard unit *noumera* made of two tagmas of 2,000 soldiers, because their duty was the safety of the Great Palace and its walls.

<sup>41</sup> Whether this was a carefully planned policy of the Byzantine government or an immediate *ad-hoc* decision is difficult to say, mostly because of absence of any

The first significant step can be seen in the military expedition of Staurakios in 783, as well as in the campaign of the empress Irene and her son Constantine VI during the next year which in fact presented some sort of display of the Byzantine military power throughout the Thracian region.<sup>42</sup>

Several years after this expedition the empress Irene established a new elite unit named *vigla* that was responsible for her security. Since the sources reports that it was billeted in Constantinople and took part in the military campaigns as a detachment responsible for the safety of the army commander and the military camp,<sup>43</sup> it can be concluded that with its formation the military forces in the Balkans increased by an additional 4,000 soldiers. But at the same time a part of the *scholai* and *exkoubittoi*, possibly half of them, were dislocated to Bithynia in Asia Minor, so that the number of troops located on the territory of the Balkan Peninsula remained unchanged, or about 16,000 members of the Byzantine military forces. The increased military presence, as well as the human resources that would seem didn't lacked in the Empire during this period,<sup>44</sup> allowed the Byzantine rulers to establish between the end of the eight and the beginning of the ninth century several new *themata* in the

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evidence in the sources that would indicate existence of a long-term Byzantine strategy. More details about this question in: Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> For the campaign of Staurakios see: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 456-457. For W. Treadgold this was an easy campaign. See: Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 71-72. According to T. Živkovič, this was a well-planned expedition. See: Tibor Živkovič, "The Date of the Creation of the Theme of Peloponnese", (*Byzantina Symmeikta* 13, 1999), 150. For the campaign of Irene and Constantine VI and its different interpretations by the scholars see: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 457. And: Живковић, *Јужни Словени*, 162.; *Историја на Македонскиот Народ*, 307.; Lilie, "Trakien" und "Thrakesion", 41.; Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Byzanz unter Eirene und Konstantin VI (780-802)*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 172-174.

<sup>43</sup> See in: *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, John F. Haldon ed. and trans., *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* Vol. XXVIII, (Wien, 1990), C.420-435. Theophanes informs that the commander of the *vigla* died in the campaign of 811 which suggest that this *tagma* was frequently an active participant of the military expeditions. See: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 491.

<sup>44</sup> The reason why the Byzantine Empire probably hasn't felt a shortage of human resources was the disappearance of the plague and the systematical plan of colonization that Emperor Constantine V and his heir Leo IV have implemented in Thrace. More about the influence of the epidemics in the Byzantine Empire see: Little, *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, 99-118. About the theory that the epidemics didn't have tremendous negative influence in the Byzantine state see: Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 66-68.

Balkans. They were *thema* Macedonia which encompassed the western regions of Thrace, *thema* Peloponnese located on the eponymous peninsula, *themata* Cephallenia and Thessalonika, and probably *thema* Strymon.<sup>45</sup>

In accordance with the policy of its predecessors, emperor Nicephorus I continued to increase the Byzantine military presence in the Balkans. For that purpose he established a new elite unit in Constantinople, the *hikanatoi*, which numbered 4,000 soldiers, bringing the number of the *tagmata* billeted in the Balkans at about 12,000 troops. The creation of several new *themata* with 2,000 soldiers each, except the *thema* of Macedonia, which possessed an army of 3,000 soldiers (probably 9000 during 809),<sup>46</sup> as well as the formation of a new elite

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<sup>45</sup> *Thema* Macedonia was probably established during 790. See: Dragan Gjalevski, "Some Observations about the Establishment of *thema* Macedonia", *ГИИИ*, 54, бр.1-2, (Скопје, 2010), 45-56. According to P. Koledarov it was created somewhere between 797 and 802: Петар С. Коледаров, „Образување на тема „Македонија“ в Тракија“, *Известија на Института за Историја*, Том 21, (Софија: Българска Академија на Науките, 1970), 221-223. W. Treadgold assumes that that it was formed in 789: Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 92-93, 100, n.114. *Thema* Peloponnese was probably established during the period between 784 and 809. For more details see: Георгије Острогорски, „Постанак тема Хелада и Пелопонез“, *Из византиске историје и просопографије*, (Београд: Просвета, 1968), 149-153.; Romilly J. H. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD 610-1071*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987), 122.; Živković, "The Date of the Creation of the Theme of Peloponnese", 153-154.; Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 160. *Thema* Cephallenia was formed in 809 at the latest. See: Острогорски, „Постанак тема Хелада и Пелопонез“, 153-154, n. 50.; Tibor Živković, "Uspenskij's Taktikon and the Theme of Dalmatia", (*Byzantina Symmeikta* 17, 2005), 58, 76-77.; Димитрије Оболенски, *Византијски Комонвелт*, (Београд: Просвета, 1996), 95.; Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 161, 166. There are several opinions about the creation of *thema* Thessalonika according to which it was established during the first half of the IX century, i.e. somewhere between 809 and 836. Острогорски, „Постанак тема Хелада и Пелопонез“, 154, n.55.; Тоунбее, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 269.; Оболенски, *Византијски Комонвелт*, 95.; Živković, "Uspenskij's Taktikon and the Theme of Dalmatia", 62, 85.; Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 161. The letter of Michael II (820-829) send to Louis the Pious (814-840) presents a proof that this *thema* existed before 824 and that it was created by 809 at the latest. See in: *Византиски извори за историју народа Југославије*, Том I, (Београд, 1955), 251, n.5. For *thema* Strymon see: Živković, "Uspenskij's Taktikon and the Theme of Dalmatia", 62-64.; Острогорски, „Постанак тема Хелада и Пелопонез“, 155.; Оболенски, *Византијски Комонвелт*, 96.

<sup>46</sup> Theophanes informs that in 809 Krum conquered Serdica and executed the whole army contingent in the city, who numbered about 6,000 soldiers. It is highly possible that this military garrison was under the command of the strategos of *thema* Mace-

unit, allowed the number of Byzantine forces in charge of the security of the imperial territories in the Balkans to increase to around 28,000, or 34,000 soldiers in the year 809.<sup>47</sup> However, the defeat of the imperial army in the region of Strymon, as well as the conquest and destruction of Serdica in 809 by the Bulgarian khan Krum, slightly diminished the Byzantine military presence in the Balkans and warned Nicephorus I that before starting any kind of extensive strategy of expansion, first the previously conquered territories should be consolidated.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, the catastrophic defeat of the Byzantines in 811 by the Bulgars where the bulk of the imperial army was killed (among the fallen victims was the emperor Nicephorus I),<sup>49</sup> lead to an abrupt halt in the Byzantine policy of reintegration. This event not only inflicted a significant blow to the imperial military prestige, but the sources suggest that together with the change of the imperial government that was carried out during the same year, allowed the military and political initiative in the Balkans to pass from the Byzantines to the Bulgars. However, the sources also suggest that despite the ravaging and free movement of Krum's army throughout the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia,<sup>50</sup> the division of the military system on *tagmata* and *themata*, together with the transfer of additional troops from Asia Minor, allowed the Byzantines in the early years after the defeat of Nicephorus I to hold some balance against the Bulgars and even to win several battles. Among them was the victory of 816, highly important for the

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donia. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 485.; See: Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 149.; Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine state*, 426-427.

<sup>47</sup> W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 66-68.

<sup>48</sup> For that purpose Nicephorus I made a transfer of population from Asia Minor settling them through the already conquered *Sklaviniai*. About this population transfers see: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 486. Also: Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 136-137, 149-150, 160-164. Parts of them were settled in the region of Strymon and in the city of Philippi. Панов, *Историја на Македонскиот Народ*, 309. For the colonization of Peloponnesus: Moravcsik and Jenkins, *DAI*, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 490-491.; Georgius Monachus, *ИБИГИБИ*, Том IV, 54.; Иван Божилев и Васил Гюзелев уред., *История на средновековна България VII-XIV век*, Том I, (Софија: Анубис, 1999), 128-130.; Острогорски, *Историја Византије*, 200.; According to W. Treadgold Nicephorus I levied around 70,000 soldiers. For the battle: Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 170-174.

<sup>50</sup> The Life of Nicethas Medicium most vividly describes the situation in Thrace after 811 when the Bulgars have gained great freedom of movement throughout its territory. According to the author of this work, the Curator of the imperial estates Mangana Zacharias was captured in Thrace by the Bulgars during the collection of the state taxes. Божилев и Гюзелев, *История на средновековна България VII-XIV век*, 144.



signing of the Byzantine-Bulgarian peace treaty between Leo V (813-820) and Omurtag (814-831). With this agreement Byzantium returned under its rule most of the territories from the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia.<sup>51</sup>

The signed peace treaty allowed the Byzantine Empire to consolidate its ranks and to rebuild the military forces in the Balkans lost not only during the long years of fighting with the Bulgars, but also during the rebellion of Thomas the Slav. After the small setback in the second and third decade of the ninth century, the Byzantine position strengthened during the reign of Michael II and his son Theophilus (829-842). This was a period when despite the several military defeats from the Arabs in Sicily and Crete, Byzantium once again has taken the initiative in the Balkans and succeeded to impose its authority on the Macedonian *Sklaviniai* (although only temporary to some of them) who may have been acting independently.<sup>52</sup> During their rule *thema* Dyrrhachium<sup>53</sup> was established, situated on the western coast of the

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<sup>51</sup> Although the Byzantines were badly defeated by the Bulgarian army several times, it can be noted that the indecision, poor coordination and the high level of anxiety among the military commanders significantly reduced the combat effectiveness of the imperial army. See in: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 500-503. For the increased endurance of the Byzantine military system at the beginning of the ninth century witness also the victory on the eastern frontier against the Arabs: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 497. For the assumption of W. Treadgold about the prompt recruitment of soldiers in the vacant ranks in the *tagmata* and the thematic armies see: Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 180-181. For the Bulgar defeat in 816 see: John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 15-16. About this peace treaty in: Васил Златарски, *История на Българската държава през средните векове, Том I, Част I*, (София, 2002), 299-304.

<sup>52</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in *De Cerimoniis* testifies about several revolts in the region of Thessalonica against the byzantine rule, indicating that these *Sklaviniai* probably recognized the power of the Byzantine emperor. *De Cerimoniis*, 634.11-14., 635.3. The Life of St. Gregory Decapolitus reports that during 836-837 in the region of Thessalonica a rebellion was started by an Exarch of one of the surrounding *Sklaviniai*, but was defeated afterwards. For more details see: Vita Gregorii Decapolitani, *ИБИГИБИ*, Том IV, 38-39.; the hagiographical works of life of St. Methodius also informs that the *Sklaviniai* have come under the supreme authority of the byzantine emperor. According to them he was appointed as *archon* in a certain Slavic region for about 10 years. See in: *Сведоштва за Кирил и Методиј*, прев. Радмила Угриновска-Скаловска и Љубинка Басотова, (Скопје, 1989), 58.; Бранко Панов, *Македонија низ историјата*, (Скопје, 1999), 40.

<sup>53</sup> About the establishment of this byzantine *thema* see: Острогорски, „Постанак тема Хелада и Пелопонез“, 154.; Оболенски, *Византијски Комонвелт*, 95.; Živković, "Uspenskij's Taktikon and the Theme of Dalmatia", 62, 81, 84, n.76.; W. Treadgold as-

Adriatic Sea, so that the number of Byzantine forces increased by an additional 2,000 soldiers.<sup>54</sup> Another military reinforcement of the Byzantine forces stationed in the Balkan Peninsula occurred during 840. Theophilus to each of the *themata* of Macedonia and Thrace assigned additional 2,000 soldiers, part of the Khurramite contingents, so that by the middle of the ninth century the Byzantine military presence in the Balkans increased to 4,000 new troops.<sup>55</sup> By the end of his reign the Byzantine Empire deployed across the Balkan *themata* about 20,000 troops, while in and around Constantinople, as well as through the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia, were billeted some 12,000 out of 16,000 members of the *tagmata* ready to assist these thematic armies. That was a total of 32,000 soldiers stationed in the Balkans in charge for the security of the imperial domains, an increase of approximately four times compared to the middle of the eight century before the establishment of the *tagmata*. These forces probably constituted more than 25% of the overall military power that the Byzantine emperor had at his disposal in the moment.

Towards the middle of the ninth century the first stage of the Byzantine reoccupation of the previously lost imperial territory in the Balkans ended. All the territories south of Debelus, Adrianopolis, Philippopolis, Thessalonica and Mount Pindus, and the coastal areas south of the city Dyrrhachium, found themselves under the authority of the Byzantine emperor. The exceptional role that the *tagmata* had during this process of reintegration was by the middle of the ninth century fully recognized by the Byzantines. The higher military prowess of the *tagmata* in relation to the seasonal thematic units has resulted in their acceptance by the central government as the main striking force of the imperial army. For this purpose a new centralized command was established, led by the *domestikos* of the *scholai*, which by the middle of the tenth century was divided in two, Eastern and Western. Although in this period the thematic units still held great importance for the Byzantine Empire, the *tagmata* however were the ones who took the central role in the offensive campaigns carried out by the Byzantine emperors from the middle of the tenth until the middle of the eleventh

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sumes that *thema* Dyrrhachium was formed by the emperor Theophilus: Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 317.

<sup>54</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 66.

<sup>55</sup> For the enlargement of the thematic armies with the Khurramite units and their billeting see: Treadgold,

*Byzantium and its Army*, 67-69.; Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 314-317.

century, which in fact presents the apogee of the Byzantine military power.

Драган ЃАЛЕВСКИ

ТАГМАТА И ВИЗАНТИСКАТА РЕКОНКВИСТА  
НА БАЛКАНОТ  
(средина на VII – средина на IX век)

- р е з и м е -

Византиската воена активност на Балканот од средината на VIII век значително се разликува од претходниот период и соодветствува со воспоставувањето на *тагматите*. Создадени да обезбедат адекватна заштита за императорот против можни идни побуни од провинциските моќници, тие ја надминале својата основна функција. Стационирани во Константинопол, но и низ темите Тракија и Македонија, овие елитни единици станале клучен фактор за остварување на византиските интереси на Балканот. Улогата што ја имале *тагматите* во текот на реинтеграцијата на балканските територии била целосно препознаена од Византијците кон средината на IX век, што резултирало со тоа тие да бидат прифатени како главна ударна сила на империјалната армија.