

# THE CHURCH ORGANIZATION AT THE LOWER DANUBE BETWEEN 971 AND 1020

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Several studies on the Byzantine Church organization at the Lower Danube were published in the last 25 years. New seals were found and older sources were reinterpreted. The discussion was open by the Austrian Byzantinist Werner Seibt in his short paper on the interpretation and chronology of the lead seals that belonged to the archbishop George of Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>. He expressed the idea that George was the head of the archbishopric created by Tzimiskes at Dristra with the purpose to replace the former Bulgarian patriarchate. A similar point of view was independently proposed by the Bulgarian historian Pavel Georgiev in his special paper from 1980 and next in the study dedicated to the Church organization of the Bulgarian lands in the Byzantine period<sup>2</sup>. The Romanian theologian Adrian Gabor also studied the ecclesiastical policy of Basil II<sup>3</sup>. A turning point in the research was represented by the large study of Petre Diaconu, first published in Romanian and next in French<sup>4</sup>. In his polemic with P. Georgiev, P. Diaconu put forward new conclusions as concerns the changes occurred in the Church organization of the Lower Danubian region after 971. Two seals from the Dumbarton Oaks collection were published in 1991<sup>5</sup>. They are proving the existence of a metropolitan seat at Constanța sometime during the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the past was known only the unchanging repetition of the name Tomis in the bishopric lists written down along the centuries. Ion

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<sup>1</sup> W. Seibt, *Georgios Archiepiskopos Boulgarias. Zur Identifizierung des bulgarischen Erzbischofs während der Herrschaft des Johannes Tzimiskes mit Hilfe zweier Siegeltypen*, JÖB, 24, 1975, p. 55-59.

<sup>2</sup> P. Georgiev, *Au sujet de l'interprétation des sceaux de plomb de l'archevêque Georges de Bulgarie*, EB, 16, 1980, 3, p. 120-129; Idem, *L'organisation religieuse dans les terres bulgares du Nord-Est après l'an 971*, in *Dobrudža. Études ethno-culturelles*, Sofia, 1987, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gabor, *Organizarea administrativă și religioasă a Imperiului Bizantin dată de Vasile II Macedoneanul și importanța ei pentru istoria poporului român*, ST, 41, 1989, 5-6, p. 98-117. The paper of N. V. Dură, *Relațiile canonice ale bisericii românești nord-dunărene cu scaunele episcopale din sudul Dunării*, MB, 36, 1986, 2, p. 39-48 contains several confusions and can not be taken into consideration.

<sup>4</sup> P. Diaconu, *Despre organizarea ecleziastică a regiunii Dunării de Jos (ultima treime a secolului X - secolul XII)*, ST, 42, 1990, 1, p. 103-120; Idem, *Sur l'organisation ecclésiastique dans la région du Bas-Danube (dernier tiers du X<sup>e</sup> siècle-XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, in EBP, II, 1991, p. 73-89.

<sup>5</sup> J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *Catalogue of byzantine seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. I. *Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, 1991, p. 181.

Barnea pointed out immediately this discovery into a short paper dedicated to the survival of the city Tomis and to its metropolitan seat during the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>6</sup>. Finally, the last opinion belongs to P. Diaconu<sup>7</sup>, who made some remarks on Barnea's paper. With this occasion he resumed the previous discussion about the Church organization established by John Tzimiskes.

However, there is still much to do as concerns the knowledge of the Church organization in Paradunavon. The present study tries to give a comprehensive view of the first period of the Church organization established by the Byzantines in the regions conquered from Bulgaria. The new sources and the new interpretations are making possible another approach of the period between 971 and the moment when Basil II has created the autocephalous archdiocese of Ochrida.

The old Church organization ceased to exist between the Lower Danube and the Balkan range in the same time with the town life, in the first decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Avar and Slavic invasions led to the gradual withdraw of the Byzantine power from this area. Some cities survived during the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, but these are exceptions (Odessos/Varna, Durostorum/Silistra, and perhaps Bononia/Vidin). A true survival of the town life could be accepted only south of the Balkans, in Thrace and Macedonia<sup>8</sup>. The Christian population continued to exist between the Danube and the Balkans, but without any superior Church organization and with no relations with the Constantinopolitan church. The conversion of Bulgaria in the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century was the first step toward a new Church organization at the Lower Danube. The Bulgarian church became autocephalie in 870 when an archbishopric was set at Preslav. The tzar Simeon transformed it into a patriarchate in 918, but Constantinople recognized this Bulgarian patriarchate only in 927, when the coming of Tzar Peter put an end to the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict.

According to the last discovered lead seals, seems to be clear that the first moment of the new Byzantine Church organization was the creation of a metropolitan seat at Preslav in 971. John Tzimiskes gave his name (Ioannoupolis) to the former Bulgarian capital. He kept here the center of the church. The single known metropolitan bishop was a certain Stephanos. Two seals found at Preslav

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<sup>6</sup> I. Barnea, *Noi date despre Mitropolia Tomisului*, "Pontica", 24, 1991, p. 277-282.

<sup>7</sup> P. Diaconu, *Points de vue sur l'organisation ecclésiastique au Bas-Danube (X<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, "Dacia", NS, 38-39, 1994-1995, p. 449-452.

<sup>8</sup> A. Madgearu, *Continuitate și discontinuitate culturală la Dunărea de Jos în secolele VII-VIII*, București, 1997, p. 112-114.

and Pliska attest him<sup>9</sup>. Stephanos ruled before 976, because it is known that Basil II changed from the very beginning the name *Ioannoupolis* in *Preslav*. He systematically acted against all that his enemy Tzimiskes did<sup>10</sup>. The status of the Bulgarian eparchy was lessened from an autocephalous patriarchate to a metropolitan seat subordinated to Constantinople. The political significance of this act is obvious. The Byzantine reconquista implied the integration of the local church into the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Petre Diaconu has shown that the four seals which belonged to a certain *Georgios archiepiskopos Boulgarias* could not be dated after 971, as sustained W. Seibt and P. Georgiev (who located the seat at *la Dristra*)<sup>11</sup>. The archaeological context of the seals found at Pliska proves that they were dated before the end of monastery of Pliska (the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century). P. Diaconu also remarked that the iconography of the seals is typical for the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and for the first half of the next one<sup>12</sup>. It follows that George was archbishop of Bulgaria sometime between 870 and 918, in the period when the ruler of the Bulgarian church had this rank<sup>13</sup>. His absence in the written sources does not disprove this. Therefore, we do not agree the point of view that John Tzimiskes established an archbishopric at Dristra.

The same P. Diaconu sustained that the Church organization established by Tzimiskes was cancelled by Basil II after a short time. He supposed that the metropolitan seat was moved from Preslav to Dristra after 976<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, he expressed the idea that Dristra was the place of a bishopric subjected since 971 to the metropolitan seat of Ioannoupolis<sup>15</sup>.

The existence of a bishopric at Dristra since 971 seems to be very likely. It is known that a church from this town was rebuilt sometime between 976 and 981 (the chronology results from the interpretation of an inscription found at Silistra)<sup>16</sup>. However, Dristra was recorded as episcopal seat in the last years of Basil II, in his

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<sup>9</sup> I. Jordanov, *Pečatite ot strategijata v Preslav (971-1088)*, Sofia, 1993, p. 183, nr. 389; P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 74-77; Idem, *Points...*, p. 450.

<sup>10</sup> P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> W. Seibt, *op. cit.*, p. 58-59; P. Georgiev, *Au sujet...*, p. 126-129; Idem, *L'organisation...*, p. 151, 154. See also R. Vassilev, *Novootkrit oloven pecat na arhiepiskop Georgi i Pliska*, "Numismatika i sfragistika", Sofia, 1992, 1-2, p. 26-29 (another seal, found at Pliska).

<sup>12</sup> P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 77-82.

<sup>13</sup> P. Georgiev, *L'organisation...*, p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 82-83 and footnote 54.

<sup>15</sup> P. Diaconu, *Points...*, p. 450, 452.

<sup>16</sup> M. Salamon, *Some Notes on an Inscription from Medieval Silistra (c. 976)*, RESEE, 9, 1971, 3, p. 492-496.

second edict (*sigillion*) from May 1020 granted to the archbishopric of Ochrida<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, the Byzantine bishopric of Dristra inherited the former Bulgarian eparchy.

Dristra was also the residence of a theme commander. John Tzimiskes established two provinces at the Lower Danube in 971: Western Mesopotamia (in the northern Dobrudja) and Dristra (in the southern region). The theme of Dristra was later unified with the province of Thrace. Few years after the Byzantine offensive of 1000-1001, the theme of Dristra was detached from Thrace and formed a greater province together with the former Western Mesopotamia. The name *Paradunavon* was not yet established. The province kept the name of the residence city<sup>18</sup>. The seals of Theodore, *primikerios* and *strategos* of Dristra are dated in the first two decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup>. Another *strategos* of Dristra was recorded by Skylitzes in 1017 (Tzitzikios)<sup>20</sup>. It seems that the province of Dristra was ruled in the same period by a certain Constantine (...) *polites*, *patrikios* and *katepano* de Dristra, whose seal was recently published<sup>21</sup>.

The metropolitan seat of Ioannoupolis-Preslav survived until the Bulgarian conquest of this city, dated most probable in 986. The tzar Samuel created since 980 another organization for the Bulgarian church in the recovered territory. He established at Sofia a new Bulgarian patriarchate led by Germanos. The seat was next moved southwards and finally it was established at Ochrida around 990, where survived until 1018<sup>22</sup>.

We suppose that the seat of Preslav was moved at Tomis (Constanța) after 976 or after 986 when the city was lost. Two recently published seals attest the names of two metropolitan bishops of Tomis, Aniketos and Basil. They could be

<sup>17</sup> H. Gelzer, *Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistümerverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche* (II), BZ, 2, 1893, p. 44-45; P. Georgiev, *L'organisation...*, p. 150; P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> For details on the Byzantine administrative and military organization between 971-1018, see A. Madgearu, *Revenirea dominației bizantine la Dunăre*, in "Anuar. Studii de securitate, apărare națională și istorie militară", București, 1998, p. 153-154 and Idem, *The Military Organization of Paradunavon*, ByzSl, 60, 1999, 2, p. 421-423.

<sup>19</sup> I. Barnea, Șt. Ștefănescu, *Din istoria Dobrogei*, III, București, 1971, p. 89, 93. The third seal (from Silistra) is recorded by I. Jordanov, *Neizdadeni vizantijski olovni pecati ot Silistra* (I), "Izvestija na Narodnija Muzej", Varna, 19 (34), 1983, p. 109, nr. 16. A finger-ring with seal of the same person was recently found at Slaveevo, Varna department (R. Markov, *Novootkrit prăsten-pecat na vizantijski sanovnik*, "Arheologija", Sofia, 39, 1998, 3-4, p. 63-66).

<sup>20</sup> I. Barnea, Șt. Ștefănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *op. cit.*, p. 150, nr. 65.1. From the name of the province only the letters...ιστ... were preserved. We do not agree the restitution "Paristrion", because the official seals are giving only the form "Paradunavon".

<sup>22</sup> M. de Vos, *Un demi-siècle de l'histoire de la Macédoine (975-1025)*, Thèse de doctorat du III<sup>e</sup> cycle, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris, 1977, p. 115-116.

dated in the last decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the next<sup>23</sup>. The restoration of the metropolitan seat of Tomis (which existed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century) could be taken into consideration only since John Tzimiskes. A later date in full 11<sup>th</sup> century, after the reign of Basil II, is less probable, because the seals typology. The archaeological researches made at Constanța did not displayed relics able to confirm a great development of this center. However, it is clear that this settlement has revived around the mid 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>24</sup>. Ion Barnea believed that Tomis survived as a town during the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>25</sup>, but his point of view is not founded. The usual argument of the presence of the name *Tomis* in the chronicle of Nikephor in relation with events occurred at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century is mistaken<sup>26</sup>.

P. Diaconu supposed that John Tzimiskes has created the metropolitan seat of Tomis in the same time with that of Ioannoupolis-Preslav<sup>27</sup>. It is still possible that the seat of Tomis was founded by a transfer from Preslav, decided by Basil II. Constantia (Tomis) remained under Byzantine power after the conquest of Preslav by the Bulgarians. This place was defended by the earthen walls between Cernavoda and Constanța. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss their chronology. It is however sure they exist then. The period of Basil II is the single one when Constantia (Tomis, Constanța) reached a certain development, but not for a long time. It seems that this settlement was hardly struck by the Pecheneg invasions around 1036<sup>28</sup>.

The survival of the metropolitan seat of Tomis until the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century is not possible. P. Diaconu believed this, and I. Barnea thought even that the seat existed until the rebellion of the Asan brothers<sup>29</sup>. We do not agree this, because Constantia declined after Basil II. It seems that a new revival of this settlement occurred at least at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as could be inferred from a recent published portolano<sup>30</sup>. It is clear that the main place in Paradunavon was taken over by Dristra after 1018. By this reason we consider that the religious center was moved into the same town Dristra.

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<sup>23</sup> J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *op. cit.*, p. 180-181, nr. 80.1, 80.2; I. Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 279-281; P. Diaconu, *Points...*, p. 450, 452.

<sup>24</sup> Gh. Mănușu-Adameșteanu, *Tomis-Constantia-Constanța*, "Pontica", 24, 1991, p. 303-308.

<sup>25</sup> I. Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 278-281.

<sup>26</sup> A. Madgearu, *op. cit.*, p. 113, with previous bibliography.

<sup>27</sup> P. Diaconu, *Points...*, p. 451, 452.

<sup>28</sup> Gh. Mănușu-Adameșteanu, *op. cit.*, p. 318-323.

<sup>29</sup> P. Diaconu, *Points...*, p. 452; I. Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>30</sup> O. Cristea, *Informații despre Marea Neagră într-un portolan pisan de la sfârșitul secolului al XII-lea (cca. 1200)*, "Sud-estul și contextul european", 9, 1998, p. 77-81.

The bishopric of Dristra was subordinated to this metropolitan seat and remained in this structure until 1020, when the metropolitan bishopric of Tomis was abolished. Dristra next became the main urban and religious center in the province of Paradunavon, while Tomis/Constantia declined soon.

Therefore, John Tzimiskes organized a metropolitan seat at Preslav (Ioannoupolis) in the territory conquered by him from Bulgaria. We suppose that this seat was moved at Constanta in 986 or even in 976, as an eparchy of the province Western Mesopotamia, which remained Byzantine after 976. This metropolitan seat survived after 1000, but not also after 1020, because the edict of Basil II dated May 1020 does not record it. (This edict mentions for Dobrudja only the bishopric of Dristra).

We consider that the metropolitan seat of Tomis was abolished in 1020, after the establishment of the province Paradunavon and in relation with the changes occurred in the organization of the archbishopric of Ochrida (see below). The Paradunavon theme replaced the previous themes of Dristra and Western Mesopotamia, most probable in the same time with the creation of the provinces Bulgaria and Serbia. This was decided when the conquest of Bulgaria was finished (1018).

Basil II accomplished the second stage of the Byzantine Church organization in the Lower Danubian area. The first step was the replacement of the Bulgarian autocephalous patriarchy with an archbishopric located too at Ochrida. The territory former subjected to Samuel was included in this archbishopric in 1019. The emperor granted an autocephalic status to this eparchy. In the future, the new archbishopric of Ochrida will be considered as a revival of the former Justiniana Prima (created in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by the same will of an emperor and in near the same territory). The archbishopric of Ochrida was removed from the jurisdiction of the Constantinopolitan patriarchy. This decision taken by Basil II was certainly influenced by his bad relations with the patriarch Sergios II (1001-1019). The emperor tried to obtain the support of the conquered people. He granted several privileges to this archbishopric, including tax exemptions for priests and *paroikoi*. He also appointed as archbishop a Bulgarian, John of Debar<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> B. Granic, *Kirchengeschichtliche Glossen zu den vom Kaiser Basileios II dem Autokephalen Erzbistum von Ahrida verliehenen Privilegien*, "Byzantion", 12, 1937, 2, p. 396-401; M. Gyóni, *L'évêché vlaque de l'archevêché bulgare d'Achris aux XI<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles (I)*, "Études slaves et roumaines", 1, 1948, 3, p. 150; J. Ferluga, *Byzantium on the Balkans. Studies on the Byzantine Administration and the Southern Slavs from the VII<sup>th</sup> to the XII<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Amsterdam, 1976, p. 381; M. de Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 115-118; P. Georgiev, *L'organisation....*, p. 149-150; A. Gabor, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

The actions decided by Basil II are known from the three edicts issued in 1019-1020<sup>32</sup>. Unfortunately, none of them was preserved in original. It is known only the confirmation given by Michael VIII Palaeologus in August 1272, preserved in its turn in three copies written in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>33</sup>. By this reason one could suppose that some names were erroneously transmitted. The edicts were issued at the supplication of the archbishop John. He requested the exact delimitation of his diocese and the approval for exemption from *oikomodion* for certain numbers of priests (*klerikoi*) and peasants (*paroikoi*) in each bishopric<sup>34</sup>. In this way were recorded the names of the bishoprics and of the main parishes (*enoriai*) from the archbishopric of Ohrida. The first edict (issued in 1019, perhaps in 1018) approved the requests. The result was the establishment of an archbishopric composed from seventeen bishoprics in the area of the former Bulgarian patriarchate during the reign of Samuel<sup>35</sup>.

The province Paradunavon entered under the jurisdiction of Ochrida, by virtue of the second edict of Basil II, dated May 1020. The emperor had in view to be merciful with the Bulgarians after he defeated them. He thus accepted the new requests of the archbishop John. John claimed that the neighbor metropolitan seats (Dyrrachion, Naupacta, Larissa and Thessalonica) have been annexed former Bulgarian territories. Basil II accepted the integration in the archbishopric of Ochrida of all the regions that belonged to the former state of Tzar Peter (927-969), including the south ones. By the second edict, 13 bishoprics were added. The third edict (issued too in 1020) the archbishopric of Ochrida received other two dioceses<sup>36</sup>. In this way the archbishopric of Ochrida reached the extension of Bulgaria during the reign of Peter - according to the wish of John. The integration of the church of the new province Paradunavon in the archbishopric of Bulgaria was a part of the wise Bulgarian policy of Basil II. It was indeed a wise policy. When Michael IV has

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<sup>32</sup> Edited by H. Gelzer, *op. cit.*, p. 40-57.

<sup>33</sup> B. Granic, *op. cit.*, p. 396; M. Gyóni, *op. cit.*, p. 148-149.

<sup>34</sup> Land tax inherited from the former Bulgarian state, payed by all the families who owned a pair of oxes. The exemptions granted by Basil II confirmed the older ones, given by Samuel. See A. Gabor, *op. cit.*, p. 115. According to D. Angelov, these exemptions represented a kind of *exkusseia* (*Die bulgarische Länder und das bulgarische Volk in den Grenzen des byzantinischen Reiches im XI-XII. Jahrhundert (1018-1185) (Sozial-ökonomische Verhältnisse)*, in *Proceedings of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, London-Oxford, 1967, p. 156).

<sup>35</sup> M. Gyóni, *op. cit.*, p. 150; P. Georgiev, *Au sujet...*, p. 125; A. Gabor, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>36</sup> See H. Gelzer, *op. cit.*, p. 44-45, 55; M. Gyóni, *op. cit.*, p. 151-152; M. de Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 118; P. Georgiev, *Au sujet...*, p. 126; A. Gabor, *op. cit.*, p. 115-116.

decided to abrogate the privileges granted by Basil II and to replace the Bulgarian archbishop John with the Greek Leon, the Bulgarians revolted against him in 1040<sup>37</sup>.

According to the edict of May 1020, Dristra was the single bishopric in the eastern part of the Paradunavon theme, while the western area was subjected to the bishopric of Vidin.

The bishop of Dristra had had the right to have in his service 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi* exempted from the land tax. No names of parishes are given in his case, but it is specified that this diocese has several *kastra*. There are no proofs for the existence of other bishoprics in Dobrudja, other than Dristra, in the first two decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The bishopric of Axiopolis (attested to the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>38</sup>) was most probable created later, when the town life developed in Paradunavon. No clear proofs exist for a bishop at Garvăn, not even later (as supposed some researchers)<sup>39</sup>.

The western part of Paradunavon was put under the jurisdiction of the bishopric of Vidin, inherited too also from the former Bulgarian patriarchy. The bishop of Vidin had in his service 40 *klerikoi* and 40 *paroikoi* exempted from the land tax, as like as his colleague from Dristra. The subordination of Vidin between 1004-1020 it is not certainly known. We do not agree the hypothesis<sup>40</sup> that the bishopric of Vidin belonged to the metropolitan seat of Dristra, because Dristra will became a metropolitan seat much more lately. It is more probable that both seats of Vidin and Dristra were suffragans of the metropolitan seat of Tomis, until its abolition in 1018. It seems likely that all the territory conquered in 1000-1004 was organized as a single administrative and religious unit. However, Vidin was attested in 1020 as a bishopric dependent of Ohrida (Bođínŋŋ). Like Dristra, Vidin was added by the second edict of May 1020. It is a heavy reason to consider that both dioceses belonged before to the same structure (the former metropolitan seat of Tomis).

The bishopric of Vidin was involved in the christening of Achtum, a duke who ruled in the Banat. According to *Legenda St. Gerhardi*, this prince was baptized *secundum ritum Graecorum in civitate Budin* (Vidin). Some time ago we expressed our opinion about the chronology of the war between Achtum and King Stephen I of Hungary<sup>41</sup>. We continue to sustain it, as follows.

<sup>37</sup> J. Ferluga, *op. cit.*, p. 383-389.

<sup>38</sup> E. Popescu, *Notes on the History of Dobroudja in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century: the Bishopric of Axiopolis*, in Idem, *Christianitas Daco-Romana. Florilegium studiorum*, București, 1994, p. 421-438; P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> See P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 86-87.

<sup>40</sup> A. Gabor, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> A. Madgearu, *Contribuții privind datarea conflictului dintre ducele bănățean Achtum și regele Ștefan I al Ungariei*, "Banatica", 12, 1993, 2, p. 5-12.



Two points of view were expressed on the date of the war: 1003-1004 or 1028-1034. Some researchers<sup>42</sup> are supporting the later chronology because this accords with the information that Achtum was allied with the "Greeks". As a consequence, they consider that the war against Achtum was possible only in the period of decline of the Byzantine power, after 1025. The big problem is just this: was indeed Achtum allied with the Byzantine Empire? Things are not simple, because the relation recorded in the tenth chapter of *Legenda Major Sancti Gerardi* has several confusions and anachronisms, which are distorting the chronology and the context of the events. For instance, a doubtful information says that Achtum owned the fortresses Severin and Vidin. This is an anachronism created by transposing realities from the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, when both fortresses belonged to Hungary. (As a matter of fact, no fortress existed at Severin during the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries). However, the Byzantine army conquered Vidin in 1002. This means that it is not possible the mastership of Achtum over Vidin after 1002. The most important objection concerns the international relations. What reasons would have the Byzantines to support an enemy of their ally Stephen, an ally who fought against Bulgaria together with Basil II<sup>43</sup>? The virtual enemy of the Byzantine Empire at the Danube after 1018 were the Pechenegs, not the Hungarians. One year before 1028 (when some researchers are dating the defeat of Achtum), therefore in 1027, a striking Pecheneg invasion reached not only the Byzantine territories in front of the Banat and Oltenia, but also Hungary<sup>44</sup>. On the other hand, the Pechenegs were the traditional enemies of the Hungarians.

By these reasons we consider that the Byzantine Empire had no interest to support an enemy of Hungary, in the period after 1025. The same alliance remains also unlikely for 1002, when Stephen I at Vidin helped Basil II. No war existed between Hungary and the Byzantine Empire in 1002-1038 (the maximal interval when the conflict with Achtum could be dated). We suppose instead that Achtum was an ally of the Bulgarian tzar Samuel, before 1002.

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<sup>42</sup> C. A. Macartney, *Studies on the Earliest Hungarian Historical Sources*, "Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis", Budapest, 4, 1938, 4, p. 456-507; E. Glück, *Cu privire la istoricul părților arădene în epoca ducatului lui Achtum*, în *Studii privind istoria Aradului*, București, 1980, p. 128-130; R. Constantinescu, *Gerard din Cenad - un scriitor al anului 1000*, în *Gerard din Cenad, Armonia lumii*, București, 1984, p. 39-47; C. Bálint, *Südungarn im 10. Jahrhundert*, Budapest, 1991, p. 116-117; I. A. Pop, *Românii și maghiarii în secolele IX-XIV. Geneza statului medieval în Transilvania*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, p. 128.

<sup>43</sup> See G. Györfy, *Zur Geschichte der Eroberung Ochrids durch Basileios II*, in *Actes du XII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'Études Byzantines*, 2, Belgrad, 1964, p. 149-154.

<sup>44</sup> P. Diaconu, *Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube*, București, 1970, p. 40-41; V. Spinei, *Realități etnice și politice în Moldova meridională în secolele X-XIII. Români și turanici*, Iași, 1985, p. 68.

Some historians<sup>45</sup> sustain indeed that the relation from chapter 10 of *Legenda Major* contains a grave anachronism. In their opinion, the "Greeks" are in fact the Bulgarians, whose name was replaced because the former Bulgarian state was for a long time a Byzantine territory when the text was written (the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century). The name "Greeks" was in this case a generic designation for the eastern monks, without ethnic traits. It follows that the date of the war between Achtum and Stephen I should be placed around 1002. The attack against Glad (934) was the first part of a south-Danubian offensive directed toward the Morava valley. In the same way, the attack against Achtum was just an episode of a greater campaign led by Stephen I against Bulgaria in 1002.

Two coalitions were formed in the Danubian area in 1000-1002. The aggressors were the Byzantine Empire and Hungary (a young state whose expansional ambitions have just began). Both intended to take over the control over this area. On the other side was Bulgaria, most probably helped by the Pechenegs. In this conflict, the place of the duchy led by Achtum in the Banat was on the Bulgarian side<sup>46</sup>.

We support the earlier date around 1002 for the war between Achtum and Stephen. Achtum was baptized at Vidin before the Byzantine conquest of this Bulgarian town, when he was allied with Samuel and when Vidin belonged to the Bulgarian patriarchy of Ochrida. Although possible, the jurisdiction of the seat of Vidin over the Banat is not proved, neither before 1002, nor after.

The extension of the archbishopric of Ochrida in the Banat was also sustained on the basis of another information from the first edict of Basil II. The territory of the new theme Serbia/Sirmium<sup>47</sup> was divided in 1019 between the bishoprics of Braničevo, Belgrade and Sirmium, all of them being dependent of Ochrida. The bishopric of Braničevo inherited Morava, a bishopric founded before 879, when the region belonged to Bulgaria<sup>48</sup>. The fortress Braničevo was located in the former Roman town Viminacium (today, Kostolac) and it had a great importance in the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>49</sup>. Set on the right bank of the Danube, in front of the Banat, the bishopric of Braničevo had six parishes attested in the edict. From these, four were

<sup>45</sup> D. Onciul, *Scrieri istorice*, I, București, 1968, p. 584-585; G. Fehér, *Bulgarisch-ungarische Beziehungen in dem V-XI Jahrhunderten*, Budapest, 1921, p. 152-155; G. Györffy, *op. cit.*, p. 149; B. Hóman, *Geschichte des ungarischen Mittelalters*, I, Berlin, 1940, p. 168-169.

<sup>46</sup> We intend to write a particular study about the Byzantine-Bulgarian-Hungarian relations in 969-1018.

<sup>47</sup> See for this T. Wasilewski, *Le thème byzantin de Sirmium-Serbie au XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ZRVI, 8, 1964, 2, p. 465-482.

<sup>48</sup> V. Popovic, *Episkopiska sednata u Srbiji od IX do XI veka*, "Godišnjak Grada Beograda", 25, 1978, p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> See M. Popovic, V. Ivanisevic, *Grad Braničevo u srednjem veku*, "Starinar", NS, 39, 1988, p. 125-179; M. Popovic, *Les forteresses du système défensif byzantin en Serbie au XI<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, *ibidem*, 42, 1991, p. 172.

identified in the neighbourhood of Braničevo: Μορόβισκος (Morava/Moravište)<sup>50</sup>, ΣΦεντέρομος (Smederevo/Semendria), Γρότα (Grocka) and Βροδάρισκος (Brodskopolje). The place Ισραάλαγγα was not identified. The sixth parish is Βίσισκος or Διβίσκος<sup>51</sup>. M. Gyóni, who made a careful study of the edict, supposed that *Dibiskos* has a name inherited from the ancient *Tibiscus*<sup>52</sup>.

*Dibiskos* was searched somewhere near the river *Timiș* (*Tibiscus*). M. Gyóni proposed its location at Cuvin, based on arguments that will be presented below.

The location at Jupa-Tibiscum was sustained by many Hungarian and Romanian historians<sup>53</sup>. Others believed that *Dibiskos* should be placed at Timișoara<sup>54</sup>, because this was an important town, since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. One could observe that this town was recorded in the sources, since 1212, with the names *Themes*, *Temes*, or *Tymes*<sup>55</sup>. Constantine Porphyrogenitus transmitted the same form of the river's name at the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Τιμήσης)<sup>56</sup>. This means that the name of the river was already transformed from *Tibiscus* in *Timiș*. The name *Dibiskos* should be linked with another place, whose name evolved in other way.

<sup>50</sup> It is the city of Morava, located at the mouth of the homonymous river, on the place of the Roman town Margum (today, Dubravica). It is not known when the bishopric of Morava was moved to Braničevo. A Byzantine fortification with an area of 10 ha existed at Morava during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. See J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *op. cit.*, p. 195-196; L. Maksimovic, M. Popovic, *Les sceaux byzantins de la région danubienne en Serbie. II. La collection du Musée National de Belgrade*, "Studies in Byzantine Sigillography", ed. N. Oikonomides, 3, Dumbarton Oaks, 1993, p. 127-129.

<sup>51</sup> H. Gelzer, *op. cit.*, p. 43; M. Gyóni, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>52</sup> M. Gyóni, *L'Eglise orientale dans la Hongrie du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, "Revue d'Histoire Comparée", 25, n. s., 1947, vol. 5, 3, p. 45-46.

<sup>53</sup> Al. Elian, *Les rapports byzantino-roumains*, *ByzSl*, 19, 1958, 2, p. 215; G. Székely, *La Hongrie et Byzance aux X<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, *AH*, 13, 1967, 3-4, p. 302; G. Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars*, Budapest, 1970, p. 110; R. Theodorescu, *Bizant, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (secolele X-XIV)*, București, 1974, p. 77; V. Muntean, *Banatul și Bizanțul (secolele XI-XII)*, *MB*, 26, 1976, 1-4, p. 234; E. Glück, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>54</sup> I. D. Suciu, *Contribuții la problema continuității: castrul Timiș*, *RdI*, 29, 1976, 7, p. 1056; Idem, *Monografia Mitropoliei Banatului*, Timișoara, 1977, p. 39-41; C. Răileanu, *Tabula Peutingeriana și "Tivisco"-Timișoara*, *RdI*, 30, 1977, 12, p. 2225-2250; I. D. Suciu, R. Constantinescu, *Documente privitoare la istoria Mitropoliei Banatului*, I, Timișoara, 1980, p. 21 (the translation of the source, with some mistakes: *paroikoi* is translated "parohi" = vicars!); P. Iambor, *Contribuții documentare privind unele așezări românești din vestul țării la începutul feudalismului*, *AMN*, 17, 1980, p. 167-168; L. Munteanu, *Cercetări arheologice la obiectivul "La Chilizii"*, com. Vărădia, jud. Caraș-Severin, "Cercetări arheologice MNI", 6, 1983, p. 236; N. Dănilă, *Elemente bizantine în viața populației autohtone din Banat și Transilvania în sec. VII-XIII*, *MB*, 34, 1984, 11-12, p. 720.

<sup>55</sup> C. Suciu, *Dicționar istoric al localităților din Transilvania*, II, București, 1968, p. 193.

<sup>56</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 40. 38. For the evolution of the name, see D. Slușanschi, *Tisa-Timiș-Prahova*, in *Studia indoeuropea ad Dacoromanos pertinentia. I. Studii de tracologie*, București, 1976, p. 151-165.

More suitable seems to be the location at Jupa-Tibiscum. This supposition was not argued, although some facts can support it. Jupa is located near Caransebeș, the most important Romanian centre in the mediaeval Banat (a flourishing town during the 14<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>57</sup>. Placed at the crossing of two roads that reached the south-Danubian area (by Cerna valley and by the basin Caraș-Ezeriș), Caransebeș is not very far from Braničevo. However, it is more near than Timișoara. (We should remark that a communication Braničevo – Timișoara would be hindered by the marshy zone that existed before the Modern Ages southwards of Timișoara. Timișoara was oriented toward the Mureș valley, not toward the Danube). The location of Dibiskos at Jupa seems more likely than at Timișoara. However, the archaeological researches brought any proofs for the location of this church centre at Jupa<sup>58</sup>.

We previously admitted<sup>59</sup> the location of Dibiskos at Jupa as it was sustained in those studies mentioned above. In fact, a careful inquiry shows that the most probable solution was that first given by M. Gyóni. A Greek chronicle from 1519 has recorded a place named *Timbisko*, in the relations of the Hungarian-Ottoman wars of 1439 and 1443. From the context results that *Timbisko* was located somewhere on the left bank of the Danube, vis-à-vis of Semendria (Smederovo). Based on this information, M. Gyóni has located Dibiskos at Cuvin. He observed that the name *Temes* survives until now at Cuvin. This is the name of the island between Cuvin and Palanka<sup>60</sup>. We can add here that this idea is supported by comparison with other relations of the campaign of 1443. They are clearly showing that the troops of the Hungarian king Vladislav were called up at Cuvin before the crossing of the Danube<sup>61</sup>.

It seems that *Timbisko* was another name for Cuvin, a name replaced by the Hungarian official name *Cuvin* (*Kewe*, from *kö* "stone"). The name *Timbisko* disappeared after the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Dibiskos-Cuvin was therefore a parish from the bishopric of Braničevo. One could observe that all the parishes of this bishopric are located into a small area. Cuvin is located within this area.

<sup>57</sup> R. Popa, *Caransebeș și districtul său românesc în secolele X-XIV*, SCIVA, 40, 1989, 4, p. 353-370; P. Bona, *Caransebeș (Contribuții istorice)*, Caransebeș, 1989 (who supposes that Dibiskos was just at Caransebeș - p. 25). See also P. Bona, N. Gumă, L. Groza, *Caransebeș. 700 de ani de atestare documentară (contribuții monografice)*, Caransebeș, 1990, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> See now A. Ardeț, *Cercetări arheologice la biserica medievală de la Cărbunari-Tigănești (sec. XIII-XIV)*, AMN, 33, 1996, I, p. 416-417.

<sup>59</sup> A. Madgearu, *Contribuții...*, p. 10. See also Idem, *Despre situația geopolitică a Banatului în secolele IV-XII*, "Anuar. Studii de politică de apărare și istorie militară", ISPAIM, București, 1997, p. 158 (where I accepted the location at Cuvin).

<sup>60</sup> M. Gyóni, *L'Eglise...*, p. 46-49.

<sup>61</sup> Vezi C. Mureșan, in *Istoria militară a poporului român*, II, București, 1986, p. 231.

We would like to remind that the edict of Basil II confirmed a previous situation, which is said to be contemporary to the reign of Samuel. In this case, the parish of Dibiskos belonged to the Bulgarian diocese of Braničevo, at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and in the first years of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Because Cuvin is only a bridgehead in front of Smederevo and Morava, the existence of this parish is not able to prove the extension of this diocese inside the Banat.

On the other hand, it is more probable that the Banat (or at least its northern part, where several orthodox churches from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries are known at Cenad, Pâncota, Săvârșin, Miniș, Mocrea, Pecica, Szöreg)<sup>62</sup> was under the care of the metropolitan bishopric of Tourkia, of Greek rite (a suffragane of the Constantinopolitan patriarchy and not of the archbishopric of Ochrida). This metropolitan seat inherited the older bishopric founded by Hierotheos, in the mid 10<sup>th</sup> century. We have been already shown into another study that the territory of the Hungarian chieftain baptized at Constantinople in 953 was located in this area between Tisa, the Criș rivers and Mureș<sup>63</sup>. The diocese of *Tourkia* founded by Hierotheos in this area survived for a certain period and later acquired the metropolitan rank. John, a metropolitan bishop of Tourkia, was a participant at the patriarchal concilium of 1028. It is also known the lead seal of another metropolitan bishop of Tourkia, Antonios (11<sup>th</sup> century). He was *synkellos* and *proedros* of Tourkia. In the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century, the seat of this metropolitan diocese was set at Bács, one of the most important mediaeval cities in southern Hungary<sup>64</sup>. It is much more probable that the eastern Christians who lived in the Banat in 1020 were the flock of the metropolitan bishop of Tourkia.

The historians who admitted the extension of the archbishopric of Ochrida in the Banat did not analyzed all the consequences of this idea. If one suppose that Achtum reigned in the Banat after 1020 (a fact which we deny), this would mean that his duchy was religiously integrated in the Byzantine Empire and that the dependent peasants from Dibiskos paid taxes for the archbishop of Ochrida. Even the existence of a kind of Byzantine paroikoi in the 11<sup>th</sup> century Banat is

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<sup>62</sup> E. Glück, *op. cit.*, p. 124-125; R. Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 43-44; S. Heitel, *Începuturile artei medievale în bazinul inferior al Mureșului* (teză de doctorat), București, 1998.

<sup>63</sup> A. Madgearu, *Misiunea episcopului Hierotheos. Contribuții la istoria Transilvaniei și Ungariei în secolul al X-lea*, RI, SN, 5, 1994, 1-2, p. 147-154; Idem, *Geneza și evoluția voievodatului bănățean din secolul al X-lea*, SMIM, 16, 1998, p. 203-204.

<sup>64</sup> N. Oikonomides, *À propos des relations ecclésiastiques entre Byzance et la Hongrie au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle: Le métropolitain de Turquie*, RESEE, 9, 1971, 3, p. 527-530; J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *op. cit.*, p. 103, nr. 36.1; P. Stephenson, *Manuel I Comnenus, the Hungarian Crown and the "feudal subjection" of Hungary, 1162-1167*, Byz Sl, 57, 1996, 1, p. 35.

unthinkable. All the social and ecclesiastic data that we can find out from the edicts issued by Basil II are typical only for the Byzantine milieu.

Therefore, anything proves that the archbishopric of Ohrida was extended in the Banat. This large Church organization structure was established inside the boundaries of the former Bulgarian state and only there.

By this reasons we consider that Dibiskos (Cuvin) was under Byzantine domination in 1020. Nothing surprising, because Hungary was still weak in this zone. The Byzantine authorities had instead the interest to ensure the defence of the fortresses Morava and Braničevo, especially their connection to the north. The Romans acted into a similar way; they established a bridgehead at Cuvin<sup>65</sup>. It is interesting to observe that also the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima had in the 6<sup>th</sup> century some parishes on the left bank of the Danube, in the Banat, at Recidiva and Litterata (both were located east of Cuvin).

We can conclude that the new Church organization achieved by Basil II led to the integration of all the territories conquered at the Lower Danube into a single great archbishopric which had approximately the maximal boundaries of the first Bulgarian tzardom. This organization was not practical. Around the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the bishopric of Dristra was raised at the metropolitan rank in view to a better ecclesiastic administration of the province Paradunavon<sup>66</sup>. In this way, the Paradunavon theme was removed from the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Ochrida.

A last remark concerns the disparity in the number of bishoprics between the central and southern parts of the archbishopric of Ochrida, and its northern area. The small number of bishoprics in the themes Paradunavon and Serbia was due to a less urbanization, in comparison with the southern regions of the Balkan Peninsula. From this point of view, the raising of the diocese of Dristra at the metropolitan rank suggests a progress of the urbanization in Dobrudja in the northern Bulgaria.

#### ABBREVIATIONS:

AH: "Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae", Budapest.

AMN: "Acta Musei Napocensis", Cluj-Napoca

ByzSl: "Byzantinoslavica", Praga

<sup>65</sup> M. Džordžević, *Contributions to the Study of the Roman Limes in South Banat*, in *Roman Limes on the Middle and Lower Danube* (Cahiers des Portes de Fer, Monographies 2), ed. by P. Petrovic, Belgrade, 1996, p. 128-130.

<sup>66</sup> P. Diaconu, *Sur l'organisation...*, p. 83; Idem, *Points...*, p. 452. P. Georgiev, *L'organisation...*, p. 157 shows that other reorganizations of the bishoprics were made in the same period.

- BZ: "Byzantinische Zeitschrift", München  
EB: "Études Balkaniques", Sofia  
EBP: *Études byzantines et post-byzantines*, București  
JÖB: "Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik", Wien  
MB: "Mitropolia Banatului", Timișoara  
RdI: "Revista de istorie", București  
RESEE: "Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes", București  
RI: "Revista istorică", București  
SCIVA: "Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie", București  
SMIM: "Studii și materiale de istorie medie", București  
ST: "Studii teologice", București  
ZRVI: "Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta", Belgrad