

# CENTRIFUGAL MOVEMENTS IN THE BALKANS IN THE 11th CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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All over the Byzantine Empire, the 11th century was a time of social and political transformation and turmoil, on the background of the increasing influence in the imperial palace of the members of the *politikos genous*. Representatives of provincial aristocratic families, they became *oikeioi* or *basilikoi anthropoi*. In the provinces, the landowners began to exert a real mastership over the cities and their surroundings, sometimes with the aid of small private military forces<sup>2</sup>. The emergence of such local power centers had as a final and logical result the uprisings against the central power.

We can classify the 11th century Balkan rebellions in:

- 1– mutinies of the generals who wished to usurp the imperial power (for instance, Georgios Maniakes in 1042–1043, and Leon Tornikios in 1047);
- 2– rebellions that wished to usurp the imperial power under the form of the restoration of the Bulgarian state (Peter Delian, Tihomir, George Vojtech, Constantine Bodin);
- 3– separatist rebellions in small and medium-sized territories (Stephen Voislav, Niculitzas, Tatos and Nestor).

The first type will not be discussed here, because those mutinies were not centrifugal movements (sometimes, they expressed only a rivalry between western and eastern armies<sup>3</sup>). The separatist rebellions were not specific for the Balkans. In the same period, the Byzantine Empire was confronted with similar movements in Apulia (1040), Armenia (1051–1052), or Antiohia (the independent principality of Philaret Brachamios, after 1073)<sup>4</sup>. The Balkan region was not itself a problem for the empire. The real problem was the crisis in the relations between center and periphery, whatever this periphery was, caused by the increasing taxes that

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<sup>2</sup> Ostrogorsky 1971, 13–14; Ahrweiler 1976, 105–120. However, as Inoue 1989, 551–559 and Cheynet 2000, 310–316 have shown, these private forces were weak.

<sup>3</sup> Kaegi 1972, 403–405.

<sup>4</sup> Ferluga 1985, 151, 153; Cheynet 1990, 48, 63, 82, 397–399.

burdened these poor and marginal regions. If elsewhere the autonomist movements expressed only the ambition of the local rulers, in the Balkans the ultimate reason of the mutinies was poverty. The conversion from the stratiotic army to a paid army after the 1030s required higher incomes<sup>5</sup>, but the peasants and the shepherds from the underdeveloped regions were not able to pay more and more for the state, when the emperors increased the taxes or converted in money the levies in kind to obtain extra resources for the wars against the Pechenegs or other enemies<sup>6</sup>. The centrifugal movements were without any doubt an answer to this fiscal pressure of the center and to the corruption and the bad administration<sup>7</sup>. Religious reasons had only the Paulicians who joined the Paristran movement in 1078<sup>8</sup>, but this can be explained by their usual propensity for unrest and by the proximity to the rebelled territory. The involvement of Bogomilism is not attested in other movements, although this heresy expressed a kind of opposition and mistrust against the established authority<sup>9</sup>.

However, not the common people started the revolts, but the local rulers, of Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian, Pecheneg, or Vlach origin. They planned the movements having in mind the autonomy, the independence or the imperial power. The aristocrats were the real rulers or beneficiaries of all the “people’s” uprisings<sup>10</sup>. The leaders found support among the common people eager to escape the fiscal pressure of the center. Paul Stephenson has remarked that the self-interest of the local aristocrats was the main factor of the centrifugal uprisings, and in some cases, “the principal mean to galvanize popular support for a secessionist movement was to appeal to the common memory of an independent ruler of the northern Balkans, whose authority resided in the title ‘emperor of the Bulgarians’”<sup>11</sup>.

Some of the leaders were aristocrats who acquired the status of *douloi* or *anthropoi* of the emperors. Such chiefs from the peripheral areas bore the title *toparches* in the Byzantine sources. A *doulos* was a *toparches* who had renounced his territory. The *toparches* was a ruler who preserved a position between autonomy and subjection to the imperial power. Basil II was so wise as to accept a partial freedom for these local chiefs. Their unrest meant the tentative of recovery of the former territory or of its independency, and the breaking of the *douleia*<sup>12</sup>. To

<sup>5</sup> Lemerle 1977, 268–271; Cheynet 1991, 66; Haldon 1999, 92–93.

<sup>6</sup> Stephenson 2000, 82–89, 135–136 has shown that the payments for the Pechenegs caused a supplementary burden for the people of the theme of Bulgaria who revolted against it in 1040.

<sup>7</sup> For this relation between corruption and unrest see Savvides, 263; Cheynet 1993, 11–13.

<sup>8</sup> Sacerdoțeanu 1939–1940, 89, 98–99; Cheynet 1990, 85, 94, 392; Malamut 1995, 134–135; Stephenson 2000, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Fine 1977 has demonstrated that the heresy was not a support for social and political movements. See also Bâdenas de la Peña 2002, 147–150, who emphasizes that, unlike Paulicianism, Bogomilism was a nonviolent movement.

<sup>10</sup> Cheynet 1990, 14. Savvides 1987, 239, 259 remarked too that all the separatist movements and military mutinies were initiated by aristocrats or landowners.

<sup>11</sup> Stephenson 2000, 143–144.

<sup>12</sup> Lemerle 1960, 80–81; Ostrogorsky 1971, 12–14; Ferluga 1976, 242; Cheynet 1984, 215–222; Cheynet 1990, 287–288; Stephenson 2000, 123–129.

this category belong Stephen Voislav and Peter Delian, both entitled *toparches* by Kekaumenos<sup>13</sup>, but also Nestor, a ruler of Serbian or Vlach origin who received the title of *anthropos* or *doulos* of the emperor Constantine X in exchange for his land<sup>14</sup>. Other leaders were civilian or military dignitaries (Tihomir, Nestor again, and Niculitzas). The movement from the theme of Bulgaria led by George Vojtech from Skopje was initiated by a group of local landowners affected by the financial policy of Nikephoritzes<sup>15</sup>. Finally, other rulers involved in rebellions were barbarian chiefs like those who took the power in Paradunavon in 1072 (Tatos, Sesthlav, Satza); they were masters of some regions, granted to their people<sup>16</sup>.

The territorial target of the centrifugal movements varied from the independency of a small or medium sized territory (Thessaly, Paristrion) to the restoration of Bulgaria as an independent state ruled by a tzar (Peter Delian and Constantine Bodin). In the case of Delian, the legitimacy of the title of tzar was given by the claimed descent from Gavril Radomir. According to Michael of Devol (the copyist of the chronicle of Scylitzes), Peter Delian was the son of the Hungarian princess (sister of King Stephen I), the first wife of Gavril Radomir<sup>17</sup>. Real or not, what matters is that the rebels believed so. He was acclaimed as a tzar at the beginning of the revolt, at Belgrade<sup>18</sup>. It seems that he took also the old Bulgarian title of *qagan*<sup>19</sup>. Constantine Bodin was invited by the Bulgarian aristocrats to take for himself the same title of tzar of the Bulgarians in the revolt led by George Vojtech<sup>20</sup>.

Some rebellions had an urban origin, while other had a rural origin. The first type is represented by the movement of the citizens of Larissa in 1066 and partially by the Paristrion rebellion. The former was a plot of some rich people and officers. Attracted in this plot, Niculitzas was acclaimed with the words *polychronos* and with the title *authentēs*, both reserved to the emperor<sup>21</sup>. The movement itself reflected the interests of the city community (the opposition against the tax increases made by Constantine X); Michael Angold has emphasized that this was one of the first revolts based on a city, not on a province, when the urban *archontes* defended the interests of their cities against the abuses of the imperial

<sup>13</sup> Kekaumenos, 170, 172.

<sup>14</sup> Scylitzes Continuatus, 166; Oikonomides 1986, 93–94, no. 95; Jordanov 1992 a, 238–239, no. 14–15; Madgearu 2003, 50. According to Attaliates, Nestor was an *Illyrian*. This archaism could refer to a native from the western or central parts of the Balkan Peninsula (Serbian or Vlach) and seems less probable to be equal to “Bulgarian”, as some historians believed (for instance, Tăpkova-Zaimova 1974, 672–673). Diaconu 1970, 104 and Angold 1984 a, 98 consider that Nestor was perhaps a Vlach.

<sup>15</sup> Ferluga 1976, 393; Ferluga 1985, 157–158; Fine 1991, 213.

<sup>16</sup> Gyóni 1943–1944, 83–188; Bănescu 1946, 90–93; Tăpkova-Zaimova 1974, 671–673; Malamut 1995, 129–135; Madgearu 2003, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Zlatarski 1932, 354–363; Ferluga 1976, 341; Iljovski 1991, 98–99; Makk 1994, 27; Dimitrov 1995, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Ferluga 1976, 385; Fine 1991, 204.

<sup>19</sup> Dimitrov 1993, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Sacerdoțeanu 1939–1940, 89–91; Ferluga 1976, 393–395; Fine 1991, 213–214.

<sup>21</sup> Kekaumenos, 259, 261; Lemerle 1960, 47, footnote 7; Cheynet 1990, 288.

power. It was the time when the Byzantine towns began to acquire some autonomist features<sup>22</sup>. For the position held by Niculitzas in Larissa, the words of Kekaumenos are very suggestive: “he has his men, and the troop (*laon*), the city (*kastron*) and the region (*chora*) obey to him”<sup>23</sup>. He was the real master of the city, and in this position he acted in the revolt. Niculitzas was most probable the *strategos* of Larissa, the residence of the theme of Hellas<sup>24</sup>; if not, he was however a rich landowner<sup>25</sup>. The Paristriian movement began too as an urban mutiny, when the payments sent to the Danubian cities to support the defence against the Pechenegs were canceled by Nikephoritzes<sup>26</sup>. The power was taken by Tatos, a Pecheneg chief who was most probably the *archon* of the autonomous *Patzinakia* established in southern Dobruja after 1053<sup>27</sup>. The Pecheneg warriors were the main force and the autonomous *Patzinakia* became a free territory that resisted until 1091. Meanwhile, Nestor found in these events an opportunity to become again an independent ruler, breaking the vow of *douleia* and concluding an alliance with Tatos<sup>28</sup>.

All the movements began near the frontiers, except the revolt from Larissa. From the periphery, the movements spread inside, sometimes over a great territory. The rebels of Peter Delian ravaged a large area from the Danube to northern Greece and Dyrrachion, especially after the alliance with the forces gathered by Tihomir, a Byzantine officer of Bulgarian origin from the theme of Dyrrachion who rebelled against his commander and who pretended for himself the title of *tzar*<sup>29</sup>. In other instances, the peripheral movements were a stimulus for unrest in the neighbouring regions (for instance, the Paulicians from Philippopolis led by Lekas and Traulos joined the Paristriian rebels after 1078, giving them the possibility to invade Thrace<sup>30</sup>).

In the rebellions were involved people of other origin than Greek (Bulgarians, Serbs, Pechenegs, Vlachs, Romanians from Paradunavon), but this would not mean they had a real national character. It is nevertheless true that the movement of Peter Delian was stimulated by a decision that disturbed the “national” pride of the Bulgarians, the replacement of the Bulgarian archbishop of

<sup>22</sup> Angold 1984 b, 242; Angold 1985, 20–21; Matschke 1995, 46–48; Ferluga 1998, 372–373.

<sup>23</sup> Lemerle 1960, 83 has observed that *laos* means here the private forces of an aristocrat.

<sup>24</sup> Sacerdoțeanu 1939–1940, 97; Murnu 1984, 84; Lazarou 1979, 307; Inoue 1989, 557, footnote 43.

<sup>25</sup> Lemerle 1960, 50; Ferluga 1976, 390; Ferluga 1985, 155; Fine 1991, 216.

<sup>26</sup> As has shown Stephenson 2000, 98–100.

<sup>27</sup> The seals of Kegen with his Christian name Ioannes recorded the title *archon Patzinakias*. *Patzinakia* was an autonomous territory inside the province of Paradunavon, located most probable in north-eastern Bulgaria, around Preslav. See Jordanov 1992 b, 79–82; Madgearu 2003, 51–52.

<sup>28</sup> Stănescu 1966, 56–58; Madgearu 2003, 51.

<sup>29</sup> For the extension of the revolt, see: Ferluga 1976, 384; Cheynet 1990, 49. For Tihomir: Ferluga 1976, 385–386; Cheynet 1990, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Stănescu 1966, 61; Cheynet 1990, 85, 94, 392; Malamut 1995, 134–135; Stephenson 2000, 101. Lekas was married with a Pecheneg woman.

Ohrid with a Greek one<sup>31</sup>. This means that the economic causes were combined with a clear anti-Byzantine feeling of the conquered population. The restoration of Samuel's empire was a project followed by Peter Delian and next by Constantine Bodin, but this Bulgaria was not a "national" state. It was the rival empire, emerged from the Byzantine model. This was a common project of the central Balkan population, regardless their ethnic origin. It is very significant that the Macedonian rebels invited a Serbian from Duklja to be the tzar of the Bulgarians in the uprising of 1072. Like Macedonia, Duklja belonged to the Bulgarian empires of Simeon and Samuel. *Bulgaroi* was a political, not an ethnic name, in the same way as *Romaioi*.

The inter-ethnic cooperation is attested in several cases. The participation of the Vlachs in the rebellion of Peter Delian can be admitted<sup>32</sup>. The Byzantines from Nicopolis joined the Bulgarian rebels, because they too were affected by the financial policy of the center<sup>33</sup>. In the mutiny of Larissa, Greeks, Vlachs and perhaps Bulgarians rose together against the tax increases<sup>34</sup>. The same cooperation is attested in the Paristran rebellion, between Greeks, Romanians and Pechenegs, and in the war led by Constantine Bodin, between Bulgarians and Serbs. The Paristran Pechenegs supported in 1078 an usurper like Nikephor Basilakes<sup>35</sup>, who certainly did not rebel for "national" reasons. The same hate against the central power put together separatist local chiefs, military rebels and traitors. The best illustration is the movement of Paradunavon, where the separatist ruler Tatos was allied with a traitor, Nestor, and where the usurper Nikephor Basilakes found help.

The fight against the Byzantine power was facilitated by the geographical conditions in the case of the rebellion of Stephen Voislav. The war of 1042 was successful because it was a guerilla fulfilled in the mountains of Duklja<sup>36</sup>. In other cases, the centrifugal movements were helped by external forces (Pechenegs, Hungary, and the Sicilian kingdom). It seems that Hungary was involved in the rebellion of Peter Delian (the presumed nephew of Stephen I), which began near its border, at Belgrade<sup>37</sup>. The events occurred in Paradunavon between 1072 and 1091 were caused not only by the turmoil of the Pechenegs already settled in the province, but also by the assistance given by the external barbarians<sup>38</sup>. The Thessalian revolt started in its turn on the background of the Udae and Norman

<sup>31</sup> Ferluga 1985, 142; Fine 1991, 203-204.

<sup>32</sup> Cankova-Petkova 1973, 74.

<sup>33</sup> Scylitzes, 411-412; Ferluga 1976, 387; Ferluga 1985, 144-145; Cheynet 1990, 50.

<sup>34</sup> Gyóni 1945, 143-145; Lemerle 1960, 75; Lazarou 1979, 308-309.

<sup>35</sup> Cheynet 1990, 86; Stephenson 2000, 101. A seal of Nikephor Basilakes from 1078 found at Nușăru (Barnea 1993, 61-65, nr. 9) confirms the information given by Zonaras, XVIII. 19. 17, that the usurper has sent messages to the Pechenegs.

<sup>36</sup> Wasilewski 1971, 113-114; Ferluga 1985, 148-149; Malamut 1998, 441-442.

<sup>37</sup> Dimitrov 1995, 7, 12; Makk 1999, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Gyóni 1943-1944, 147-158; Tanașoca 1973, 81; Madgearu 2003, 49-55.

attacks and a coordination could be supposed with the offensive of Robert Guiscard<sup>39</sup>.

The movements were defeated because the Byzantine army was still powerful, and because the rebels were not able to establish a firm control over strategic areas and points like Macedonia, the Haemus passes, or Thessalonike. They tried to do this, but they were not successful, even if the rebels of Larissa conquered the important strategic point of Servia, the gate to Macedonia. As like as Peter Delian and Constantine Bodin, they intended to control *Via Egnatia*<sup>40</sup>. However, Thessalonike was never reached. Alusian, the ally of Delian, led a siege there, but he failed, because he was in fact a traitor<sup>41</sup>. The fight for supremacy between Peter Delian and Alusianos was another major reason of the defeat of their movement. The local Bulgarian or Byzantine aristocracy had weak military forces, and the peasants were not a trained army. Without professional warriors, the rebels were easily defeated by the Byzantine soldiers (in 1040–1041 and 1072–1073).

The rebels achieved better results only with the cooperation of the Pecheneg professional warriors, who transformed the eastern part of Paradunavon into an independent region that resisted for almost two decades and that was recognized by Alexios I by the treaty concluded in autumn 1087. The final result of the mutiny was the creation of a Pecheneg realm, led by Tzelgu, who made an alliance with the former Hungarian king Solomon. This anti-Byzantine coalition represented a major threat to the power balance in the northern Balkan Peninsula<sup>42</sup>. A special case was the war led by Stephen Voislav in 1042. Because he ruled a semi-independent state, the conflict was more serious than other revolts, and the Byzantine army was defeated. Duklja survived as a Slavic power center which was to become independent under Mihailo Voislav (1046–1082), a state that was able to support the Bulgarian uprising of 1072<sup>43</sup>.

The events analyzed in this paper were preliminaries of the anti-Byzantine fight that led to the foundation of the Vlacho-Bulgarian state in the late 12th century, which was a reaction to similar economic causes, developed in more favorable internal and external conditions than the 11th century movements. In both periods, the high level of the taxes and the bad administration inflamed the separatism in the remote areas of the Byzantine Empire, where the rebels found often support from the external enemies.

<sup>39</sup> Chalandon 1900, vol. I, 60, 85–86 (the idea was accepted by Murnu 1984, 114–115 and Gyóni 1945, 136).

<sup>40</sup> Ferluga 1976, 387; Ferluga 1985, 144.

<sup>41</sup> Ferluga 1976, 388–389; Fine 1991, 205–206; Stephenson 2000, 132.

<sup>42</sup> Stănescu 1966, 62–63; Diaconu 1970, 112–118; Tanașoca 1973, 81–82; Malamut 1995, 136; Stephenson 2000, 102; Madgearu 2003, 53–54.

<sup>43</sup> Fine 1991, 207, 212–214; Stephenson 2000, 138–147.

### ABBREVIATIONS

BF:	Byzantinische Forschungen, Amsterdam
BHR:	Bulgarian Historical Review, Sofia
BZ:	Byzantinische Zeitschrift, München
DOP:	Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Washington D.C.
EB:	Études Balkaniques, Sofia
INMV:	Izvestija na Narodnija Muzej, Varna
REB:	Revue des Études Byzantines, Paris
RRH:	Revue Roumaine d'Histoire, Bucarest
SBS:	Studies in Byzantine Sigillography, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C.
TM:	Travaux et Mémoires, Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation Byzantines, Paris
ZRVI:	Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta, Belgrade

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