

From Mačva to Tarnovo: On the Roads of the Balkan Politics of Prince Rostislav Mikhailovich

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In the mid-thirteenth century, due to complex political circumstances, a member of the Russian ruling Rurik dynasty, Prince Rostislav Mikhailovich, the son of Chernigovian and Kievan Prince Mikhail Vsevolodovich, became the lord of Mačva or, referred to by its older name, *Sirmia Ulterior*. This was a border area of the Kingdom of Hungary, located south of the rivers Sava and Danube. Rostislav did not become the master of Mačva by his own will. As the son-in-law of the Hungarian King Béla IV and the husband to Béla's beloved daughter Anna, his intention was to take possession of the Russian principality of Galicia. For the throne of Galicia, Rostislav and his father fought for a full decade against a close cousin, Rostislav's uncle, Daniil Romanovich, the prince of neighbouring Volhynia. However, on 17 August 1245, Rostislav's army, made up of his Russian supporters and detachments given to him by the Hungarian king and Polish ally and cousin, Prince of Krakow, Boleslaw the Chaste, suffered a severe defeat in the battle of Yaroslav. Probably in 1246, Rostislav's father-in-law and political patron Béla IV made peace with Daniil Romanovich in the town of Zwolen, marrying his other daughter Constance to his son Leo. This way, the Hungarian court (at the expense of Rostislav Mikhailovich and Anna) ceded the right to Galicia to the Romanovs. The Hungarian king did so because of the Mongolian threat from the East, but primarily because of his plans to acquire Austria and Styria after the recent death of the last male representative of the Babenberg dynasty, Frederick II the Quarrelsome. After this turn of events, as compensation for Galicia, Rostislav acquired

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from the hands of his father-in-law, Mačva, sometime between 1248 and 28 June 1254.²

Mačva, clearly, could not make up for the loss of Galicia for Rostislav, because how could we otherwise explain the fact that for the rest of his life he emphasized Galicia in his ruling title, while minimizing his lordship over Mačva. It appears that the power over Mačva was even less satisfactory when it came to the ruling ambitions of this Russian prince in the role of a son-in-law of the Hungarian king. The imposed arrival to the southern Hungarian border provided Rostislav with the opportunity to turn his gaze to the neighbouring southern Slavic countries and start pursuing an independent policy towards them, with the support, we believe, or at least a favourable sentiment, of his father-in-law. In any case, symbolically speaking, Rostislav's routes and ambitions led further south from Mačva. Due to the silence of the historical sources, we do not know anything about the lord of Mačva's policy towards Serbia. We seemingly know a little more about his presence in Bosnia, but again not enough to discuss the time and place of his stay on the other side of the Drina River.

However, while searching for a reliable itinerary of Rostislav Mikhailovich, available sources lead us towards Bulgaria. We take this direction in light of the unusually important role Rostislav Mikhailovich had in the Hungarian-Bulgarian relations in the thirteenth century, which is today a well-known topic in historiography.³ The information on

² For more details see: T. Senga, "IV Béla külpolitikája és IV Incepápához intézett „tatár-levele” [The Foreign policy of Béla IV and *Tartar-letter* sent to Pope Innocent IV], *Századok* 1–2 (1987): 584–612; Dj. Hardi, *Itinerarij Rostislava Mibailoviča* [The Itinerary of Rostislav Mikhailovich] (Sremska Mitrovica; Novi Sad: Istorijski arhiv Srem – Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu, 2019), 24–85, 91–95.

³ P. Nikov, "Blgaro-ungarski otnošenija ot 1257 do 1277 godina. Istoriko-kritično izsledvane" [Bulgarian-Hungarian relations from 1257–1277], *Sbornik na Blgarskata akademija na naukite, Klon istoriko-filologičen i filozofsko-obščestven* [Review of the Bulgarian academy of sciences. Historical-philological and philosophical-social class]11 (1920): 57–110; V. Zlatarski, *Istorija na Blgarskata država prez srednite vekove III. Vtoro blgarsko carstvo, Blgarija pri Asenevci (1187–1280)* [History of the medieval Bulgarian state III. The second Bulgarian Empire, Bulgaria under the Assen dynasty] (Sofija: BAN, 1940), 456–490; I. Petkova, "Nordwestbulgarien in der Ungarischenpolitik der Balkanhalbinsel im 13. Jahrhundert." *Bulgarian Historical Review* 1, (1983): 58–62; H. Dimitrov, *Blgarsko-ungarski otnošenija prez srednovekovieto* [Bulgarian-Hungarian relations in the Middle Ages](Sofija: Akademično izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov", 1998), 153–166; I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevci (1186–1460): genealogija i prosopografija* [The Assen Family. Genealogy and

Rostislav's presence in the politics of the Second Bulgarian Empire is, nonetheless, limited. It constitutes only a few, although prominent, immediate sources, among which the historical work of the Byzantine dignitary and writer George Acropolites, who had the opportunity to meet Rostislav in person and deal with him, is of paramount importance.

As far as contemporary historiography is concerned, there is no doubt that in Acropolites' writing a certain "ὁ Ρῶσος Οὐῖρος" – or elsewhere simply "Οὐῖρος" – presented as the "father-in-law of the Bulgarian emperor (Michael II Asen) and the son-in-law of the Hungarian king" refers to our Rostislav Mikhailovich.⁴ As a close and undoubtedly influential cousin of the Bulgarian emperor, he was assigned the role of chief Bulgarian mediator in the peace talks conducted in the summer of 1256 on the River Regina with the Emperor Theodore II Laskaris of Nicaea and George Acropolites himself, who was at that time the imperial grand logothete in charge of concluding agreements with other rulers and states.⁵ If for a time there was a dilemma as to who owned the title "ὁ Ρῶσος Οὐῖρος" (*Rōsas Uros*), it was definitely resolved by Vencel Gustav. This biographer of the "Galician hercog, the son-in-law of Hungarian King Béla IV" logically concluded that Rostislav's title of Dominus connected with Mačva (*Dominus de Machou*), recorded in Béla IV's charter issued on 28 June 1254,⁶ corresponded to the old Hungarian

prosopography] (Sofija: BAN, 1994), 106–110, 113–114; V. Achim, *Politica sud-estică a regatului ungar sub ultimii Arpădieni* [The southeastern policy of the Hungarian Kingdom under the last Árpáds] (Bucharest, 2008), 141–150.

⁴ *Georgii Acropolitae*, Opera I. ed. Augustus Heisenberg, corectiorem curavit Peter Wirth (Stuttgart: in aedibus B. G. Teubner, 1978) (= Acropolites), 127; for an overview of references to Rostislav Kikhailovich by Acropolites, or later by Theodore Skoutariotes and other Byzantine sources see: Gy. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica. Sprachreste Der Türkvölker in den Byzantinischen Quellen* II (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 237–238; M. Bibikov, *Byzantinorossica. Svod vizantijskib svidetelstv o Rusi I* [Byzantinorussica. Data of Byzantine writers on Rus'] (Moskva: Jaziki slavjanskoj kulturi, 2004), 614; "Uroš," in *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*. CD ROM Version, erstellt von Erich Trapp, unter Mitarbeit von Rainer Walther, Hans-Veit Beyer und anderen (Wien: VÖAW, 2001), no. 21194.

⁵ Owing to the fact that he was a grand logothete, the imperial dignitary in charge of conducting diplomatic affairs, Acropolites had the opportunity to meet Rostislav Mikhailovich directly. For more on the dignity of the grand logothete in the given negotiations see: M. Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile. Government and Society under the Laskarids of Nicaea (1204–1261)* (Oxford University Press, 1975), 164–165.

⁶ *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis* I-XI. Georgius Fejér ed. (Budae: Typis typogr. Regiae Universitatis, 1829-1844) (= F), IV/2, 218; *Az Árpád-házi királyok okleveleinek kritikai jegyzéke-Regesta regum stirpis Arpadianae critico diplomatica* I-II/1, ed.

title of *úr*. The latter title found its direct reflection with Acropolites, when he identified Rostislav in accordance with his title and origin as *Rōsos Uros* or “Russian lord.”⁷ Finally, the only son-in-law of the Hungarian king who resided in Hungary in the 1250s and who could have physically been in the Balkans was precisely Rostislav. And let us remember the aforementioned piece of information provided by Acropolites, which is invaluable in understanding the entries in Rostislav’s Bulgarian itinerary. In his work, the well-informed Byzantine writer on two occasions provides the unique news that Rostislav, i.e. *Rōsos Uros*, was the father-in-law of the Bulgarian Emperor Michael II Asen.⁸ Owing to the work of Gojko Subotić, today it is certain that the eldest daughter of Anna of the house of *Árpád* and Rostislav Mikhailovic was called Anna. That is the name inscribed on a portrait on the façade fresco of the Temple of Brigadier Michael in Kostur (Kastoria).⁹ The earliest possible year of Anna Rostislavich’s birth was 1243. When she became a Bulgarian Empress and consort of Michael Asen and how old she was at the time, is left entirely to speculation.¹⁰ In the broader

Szentpétery Imre (Budapest: MTA, 1923–1943); II/2-3, ed. Szentpétery Imre, Borsa Iván (Budapest: MTA 1961); II/4, ed. Borsa Iván (Budapest: MTA 1987). (= RA), no. 1011.

⁷ G. Wenzel, *Rosztizslav galicizai herceg, IV. Béla királynak veje* [Rostislav, Prince of Galicia and son-in-law of King Béla IV] (Budapest: MTA, 1887), 14–15; An overview of older historiographic sources is given by: P. Nikov, “Blgaro-ungarski otnošenija,” 60–61; For a more detailed interpretation of the titular meaning within the Byzantine and Hungarian context see: K. Jireček, *Istorija Srba, prva knjiga do 1537. godine*, drugo, ispravljeno i dopunjeno izdanje, preveo J. Radonić [The history of the Serbs. Second, revised edition] (Beograd: Slovo ljubve 1978), 180, ref. 99; Gy. Moravcsik, *Bizánc és a Magyarság [Byzantium and the Magyars]* (Budapest: MTA, 1953), 87–89; G. Ostrogorski, “Urum-despot, Počeci despotskog dostojanstva u Vizantiji” [Urums-despot. Beginnings of the despot dignity in Byzantium], in *Iz vizantijske istorije, istoriografije i prosopografije* [From Byzantine history, to historiography and prosopography], ed. G. Ostrogorski (Beograd: Prosveta, 1970), 211–214; F. Makk, *The Árpáds and the Comneni. Political relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the 12th century* (Budapest: MTA, 1989), 87–88.

⁸ Acropolites, I, 127, 152.

⁹ G. Subotić, “Portret nepoznate bugarske carice” [The portrait of an unknown Bulgarian empress], *Zograf* 27 (1998/1999), 93–102.

¹⁰ It was Spiridon Palauzov, considering the example of the marriage of Rostislav’s daughter, in a comparative analysis of Helen, the daughter of John II Asen married to Theodore II Laskaris (1235), who noted that in this part of Europe, princesses entered into royal marriages even at the age of ten. That is, age was not a key precondition for marriage. We also add that Hungarian king Béla III married his daughter Margaret to the Byzantine emperor Isaac II Angelos before she turned ten. Palauzov, “Rostislav Mihajlovič, knjaz Mačvi,” [Rostislav Mikhailovich, prince of Mačva], *Žurnal Ministerstva*

political context, this marriage, in our view, was probably made between 1253 and 1255. In any case, it probably took place at a time when Rostislav had already established his rule in Mačva on the one hand, and in the circumstances of straining Bulgarian-Nicaean relations (1254) on the other – leading to Bulgaria’s rapprochement with Hungary, which was based on the marriage alliance.¹¹

Rostislav’s son-in-law, Michael II Asen (1246-1257), was the son of the powerful Bulgarian Emperor Ivan Asen II and the princess of Epirus Irene Komnene. He was born between 1238 and 1241.¹² He ascended to the throne as a boy, following the “sudden” death of his half-brother Kaliman, at a moment of general decline of the Bulgarian Empire, which found itself in the position of a Mongol tributary. The fact that the Bulgarian ruler was not yet of age and that the regency, headed by his mother, was overall passive, was exploited by the Nicaean Emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes. Without much resistance, the Nicaean troops

Narodnogo Prosvetščenja 8 (1851): 31–32; See: M. Wertner, *Az Árpádok családí története* [The History of the Árpád family] (Nagy Becskerek: Pleitz Ferenz Pál könyvnyomdája, 1892). Idem, “Margit császárné fiai” [Sons of Empress Margareth], *Századok* (1903): 593–611; L. Tautu, “Margerhita di Ungheria imperatrice di Bisanzio,” *Antemurale* 3 (1956): 51–79.

¹¹ In the sources, this marriage is usually dated to 1255. This chronology is not impossible. Already, it was Mór Wertner who dated the event “around” 1255. On the basis of an analysis of Hungarian diplomatic materials, Petar Nikov dated the marriage in the last quarter of 1255 or at the beginning of 1256 at the latest. His position is consistently taken by other authors. However, on this occasion, we only note that Nikov’s analysis of the diplomatic material has several shortcomings. M. Wertner, *Az Árpádok családí története*, 473; P. Nikov, “Blgaro-ungarski otnošeniya,” 57–58; V. Zlatarski, *Istorija na Blgarskata država*, 456; V. Zlatarski, *Istorija na Blgarskata država*, 456; S. Todorova, “Dšcerjata na Rostislav Mihajlovič i sbitijata v Blgarija ot sredata na XIII v.,” [Daughter of Rostislav Mihailovich and her destiny in Bulgaria in the mid-13th century] *Istoričeski pregled* 2 (1989), 52–53; H. Dimitrov, *Blgarsko-ungarski otnošeniya*, 157; J. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans – A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth century to the Ottoman Conquest* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1997), 159; I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevi*, 108; V. Mandzjak, “Rostislav Mihailovič –,Dux Galiciae et imperator Bulgarorum,” *Knjažva doba: istorija i kultura* 5 (2013): 141; M. Font, “Prince Rostislav in the Court of Béla IV,” *Russian History* 4:44 (2017): 502; the work that is possibly related to this topic was unavailable at the time this paper was written: L. Havlíková, “Cherchez la femme, Czech-Bulgarian Relations in the 13th Century,” in *Bălgarsko srednovekovie: obšestvo, vlast’, istorija. Sbornik v čest’ na prof. d-r. Milijana Kajmakamova*. Studia historica, sást. Georgi N. Nikolov – Angel Nikolov (Sofia: Universitetsko izd. “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2013), 331–343.

¹² For more on the personality and the reign of Michael Asen see: I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevi*, 106–110; G. Cankova-Petkova, *Blgarija pri Asenevi* [Bulgaria under the Asens] (Sofija: Narodna prosveta, 1978), 138–148.

placed the former vast conquests of Michael's father under the authority of the Greeks. It was not until the death of John III Vatatzes, on 4 November 1254,¹³ that young Michael, who had just come of age, or rather, his ruling environment, finally acted with arms against the Nicaean Empire. At first, the Bulgarians were successful, as they took over a number of fortified cities in the Rhodopes region and attempted to further conquer the regions of Thrace and Eastern Macedonia. However, the new Byzantine emperor, the energetic Theodore II Laskaris, wasted no time. Already during the coming winter, Laskaris headed the available army through Hellespont and, in a relatively short time, managed to recapture almost all of the recently lost fortresses and lands except for the invincible Tsepina in the Rhodopes. The reluctance of Michael II Asen and his warlords, who had withdrawn from their camp on the Maritsa River, avoiding battle with the Nicaean emperor, played a considerable role in this unexpected success of the Byzantines. In this way, at the end of 1255, the long battle year ended favourably for the Greeks. However, a crucial battle did not occur, with both sides preparing for another war spring. It was initiated by the Bulgarian side, sending an army to Thrace consisting of 4000 Cumans newly allied with the Bulgarians. The cavalry detachments of the steppe warriors inflicted defeat on the Nicaean forces, devastated the area around the town of Didymoteicho (Demotika), and then withdrew quickly with the spoils, in accordance with their mode of waging war. At that time, Theodore II Laskaris arrived in Thrace at the head of a relatively large army, which he had collected from all sides during the previous months in the Minor Asian provinces of his country, adding to it the detachments of unavoidable mercenaries.¹⁴

¹³ D. Polemis, *The Doukai, A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London: Athlone P., 1968), 108.

¹⁴ For more on the events of the Bulgarian-Nicaean war of 1254-1256 and its outcome, ending in the so-called Peace of Regina: A. Gardner, *The Lascaris of Nicaea, the Story of an Empire in Exile* (London: Methuen 1912), 211-220; V. Zlatarski, *Istorija na Blgarskata drzava*, 447-464; I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevi*, 106-110; G. Cankova-Petkova, *Blgarija pri Asenevi*, 138-148; I. G. Iliev, "Reginskijat miren dogovor i srednovekovnijat grad Cepina," [The peace treaty of Regina and medieval town of Cepina] *Epohi V* (1997), 82-90; N. Kanellopoulos, and J. K. Lekeai Joanne. "The struggle between the Nicaean Empire and the Bulgarian state (1254-1256): towards a revival of Byzantine war tactics under Theodore II Laskaris," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 5 (2007): 56-69; A. Madgearu, *The Asanids The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185-1280)* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 240-243.

Reaching the area of Vize, or Bizya, from where the Cumans allegedly escaped before the Nicaean swords, Theodore Laskaris set up his military camp on the Regina River. At this point, George Acropolites introduces us to the character and role of Rostislav Mikhailovich. Namely, we learn that after the arrival of a large Byzantine army near the borders of the Bulgarian state, Michael Asen hesitated and decided to make peace, which as a mediator, “ὁ Πῶσος Οὐῖρος”, his father-in-law, but also the son-in-law of the Hungarian king, was to arrange. Michael Asen had previously organized a safe arrival of Rostislav Mikhailovich, in accordance with his high status and the familial relationship with the emperor, and a meeting with Theodore II Laskaris. Indeed, at the head of an escort made up of Bulgarian dignitaries, Rostislav arrived at the Byzantine camp and was received with great honours. He made a peace treaty and affirmed it with an oath in his own name and in the name of his son-in-law. According to the agreement, the Bulgarians agreed to abandon the extremely strategically important fortress, the invincible Tsepina, which was the only one still in their possession,¹⁵ further agreeing that the borders between the two countries be restored to their original location before the war broke out. Rostislav’s acceptance was ensured with rich gifts from the Byzantines – horses and fabrics among other gifts – which, according to Acropolites, amounted to 20,000 [hyperpyrons?]. After the agreement was reached, the emperor with his army remained in the area of the Regina River, awaiting the surrender of Tsepina and certain other areas in Macedonia.¹⁶

Based on the account of the Acropolites’ report, the ubication of Rostislav’s 1256 itinerary is quite certain.¹⁷ Starting, no doubt, from the Bulgarian capital of Tarnovo with the powers authorized by his son-in-law, he met with Emperor Theodore II Laskaris and chief Nicaean negotiator George Acropolites on the Regina River in the Byzantine military camp. The Regina (Rēgina; Ergene in Turkey) still flows today through the plain of eastern Thrace and, as Maritsa’s left tributary, flows

¹⁵ For more on the strategic significance of Tsepina in the Rhodopes within the framework of these events see: D. Cončev, “La Forteresse TZEPIAINA – Cepina,” *Byzantinoslavica* 20 (1959): 285–305.; I. G. Iliev, “Reginskijat miren dogovor,” 82–90.

¹⁶ Acropolites, I, 126–127.

¹⁷ Acropolites, I, 126.

into it near Cypsela.¹⁸ Closer determination of the meeting place, i.e. the Nicaean military camp, possibly reveals the same source from which we learn that the Byzantine forces pursuing Cumans reached the area of the Eastern Thracian strategic city of Bizya (Byzē, today Vize), located northeast of Arcadiopolis, from which military campaigns had often been initiated.¹⁹ Following this, Theodore II arrived at the Regina, where he erected a camp that was apparently located on the upper or middle course of this river. According to Ivan Božilov and Vasil Gjuzev, although Acropolites did not specify the exact location of the Byzantine camp, it had to be located on the aforementioned river southeast of Demotika.²⁰ Again, let us suppose that after the Regina, Rostislav returned to Tarnovo.²¹

When was the so-called Peace of the Regina signed and when did the Russian prince visit the eastern Thracian regions near Constantinople? There are at least three approaches to answering this question in historiography.²² Crucial to the chronology of events is the news brought to us by both the aforementioned Acropolites and his contemporary Theodore Scoutariotes. The chronicle of the imperial diplomat and ecclesiastical dignitary Theodore Scoutariotes in accounting these events is based on the excerpts from Acropolites' work, with valuable additions that fortunately relate to the topic that is also of interest to us.²³ Let us start first with our main source, the work of the grand logothete George Acropolites. In his account of the events that immediately followed at the imperial army camp on the Regina after the peace was made, Acropolites pauses to describe the event that took place on the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus – 6 August 1256. How could he not, when

¹⁸ P. Soustal, *Thrakien (Thrace, Rhodope und Haimimontos). Tabula Imperii Byzantini Band 6.* (Wien: VÖAW, 1991), 425–426; P. Koledarov, *Politička geografija na srednovekovnata blgarska država I* (Sofija: BAN 1989), 65.

¹⁹ T. E. Gregory. "Bizye," in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Aleksandr P. Kazhdan, (New York : Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 292–293.

²⁰ I. Božilov and V. Gjuzev, *Istorija na Srednovekovna Blgarija VII–XIV vek* [History of medieval Bulgaria] (Sofija: Anubis 1999), 507.

²¹ This opinion is also put forth, logically, by: Palauzov, "Rostislav Mihajlovič," 46.

²² An overview of the historiographic sources and views is given by: I. G. Iliev, "Reginskijat miren dogovor," 87, ref. 2; c.f.: *George Acropolites, The History.* translated with an introduction and commentary by Ruth Macrides (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2007), 304–305

²³ Alexander Kazhdan, "Scoutariotes Theodore," in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Aleksandr P. Kazhdan (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 1912–1913.

this day likely remained with him as a traumatic memory. On the basis of a report that Rostislav had actually made a false oath and that the Bulgarians did not intend to comply with the agreed peace provisions, the timid emperor became furious and accused the alleged failure of negotiations on his teacher and grand logothete, who had earlier specified the agreement in writing and had probably been the first to advocate for the highly valuable gifts. The emperor ordered George Acropolites to be punished – to be flogged with 24 lashes and publicly humiliated. However, the allegations were unfounded.²⁴ From this, it is clear that the peace was certainly made before 6 August 1256 (*datum ante quem*), and certainly all historians who, guided by Acropolites' narrative, dated it this way were right – it took place before 6 August: at the end of July or the first days of August, i.e. in the summer of 1256.²⁵

Acropolites' work is, in chronological terms, complemented by Theodore Scoutariotes, who provides a precise report stating that Emperor Theodore II Laskaris waited for the surrender of Tsepina from the day of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul – 29 June – until the end of August.²⁶ Although historiography has long had access to Scoutariotes' report,²⁷ we will point out the comments made by Ruth Macrides, who concludes that the peace was made during June, probably on the 29th day of that month.²⁸ Ivan Božilov, that is, Božilov together with Vasil Gjuzev, conclude that the treaty was made at the end of June, beginning

²⁴ Acropolites, I, 127–133; comment: J. B. Pappadopoulos, *Théodore II Laskaris, Empereur de Nicée* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et fils, 1908), 93–97.

²⁵ *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches* 3 Teil, F. Dölger – P. Wirth eds; zweite erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage bearbeitet von Peter Wirth (München: Beck 1977), no. 1839; *Grički izvori za blgarskata istorija – Fontes Graeci Historiae Bulgaricae*, VIII, ed. Mihail Vojnov, *Izvori za Blgarskata istorija – Fontes Historiae Bulgaricae*, XV (Sofija: BAN 1971), 194, ref. 5; G. Cankova-Petkova, *Blgarija pri Asenevci*, 143; *Georgios Akropolites (1217–1282), Die Chronik*, übersetzt und erläutert von Wilhelm Blum (Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1989), 233, ref. 149; P. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 425.

²⁶ *Theodoros Skoutariotes, Anonimous Synopsis Chronikei*, ed. Konstantinos N. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη VII* (Venice–Paris: Phoinix and Maisonneuve, 1894), 525. 1–5.

²⁷ J. Pappadopoulos, *Théodore II Laskaris*, 92, ref. 1 – he believes that by this date the Byzantines had already taken over Tsepina.

²⁸ R. Macrides, *George Acropolite*, 304; Her work influenced: D. G. Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris, Elena Asenina and Bulgaria,” in *Srednovekovniat blgarin i drugite*. Sbornik v čest na 60-godišninata na prof. din Petr Angelov (Sofija: Universitetsko izdatelstvo „Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, 2013), 292, ref. 94; A. Madgearu, *The Asanids*, 243.

of July 1256.²⁹ Some sources, however, also put forth that the peace treaty was concluded as early as May 1256. If we are right, this is a mistake the origin of which leads to Franz Dölger and the third volume of his *Regesta of Imperial Documents of the Byzantine Empire* (“kurz vor 25. mai 1256”). It was already in the second edition of Dölger’s book, written by Peter Wirth, that, alongside the unchanged accompanying text, this date was revised to August (“kurz vor 6. august”).³⁰ By trusting the report of Theodore Scoutariotes, we can conclude that, at the end of June 1256, Rostislav was staying in the Byzantine imperial army camp on the Regina River, and that by 29 June, or possibly earlier, he had confirmed a peace treaty by swearing an oath, and perhaps by providing his signature.

Rostislav’s presence and role in the conclusion of the Bulgarian-Nicaean peace is confirmed by the proclamation of Theodore II Laskaris sent to his subjects in the east about the recent successes of the war and the triumph of their emperor.³¹ From its contents we also learn that the mediator in the peace talks was the Russian prince (ὁ τῶν Ρώσων ἄρχων), who had sworn an oath to the Emperor of Nicaea on behalf of the Bulgarians. The appeals of this “worthy man” allegedly softened the emperor in his intentions to pursue the strictest demands he had intended to impose on the “defeated side.”³² Finally, himself an eloquent writer, Theodore Laskaris, bringing the missive to its end, presented the entire course of the war to his subjects with a compelling allegory. In his words, driven by hunger and beastly intentions, a dog, a lion cub and a

²⁹ I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevci*, 108, 110; I. Božilov and V. Gjuzev, *Istorija na Srednovekovna Blgarija*, 507; c.f.: I. G. Iliev, “Reginskijat miren dogovor,” 87; the work of Božilov and Gjuzev influenced: Georgij Akropolit, *Istorija*, perevod, vstupideljnaja statja i priloženija Petra I. Žavoronkova (St. Peterburg: Alteja, 2005), 266, ref. 814.

³⁰ c.f. *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453* Teil. 3. F. Dölger ed. (München; Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1932), no. 1833, 1834; *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden* 3. P. Wirth ed. no. 1839, 1839d; also see: M. Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile*, 165; V. Gjuzev, “Bulgarien und das Kaiserreich von Nikaia (1204–1261),” *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 26 (1977): 143–154.

³¹ As the emperor waited for the surrender of Tsepina until the end of September 1256, the missive was created after the end of this month.

³² *Theodori Ducae Laskaris Epistulae CCXVII*. ed. Nicolaus Festa (Firenze: Carnesecchi, 1898), 280. 34–42; the translation of the missive into Bulgarian: G. Balasčev, “Pismo ot imperatora Teodora II Laskar po sključvanieto mira s car Mihaila Asena (1256 g.)” [Letter of Emperor Theodor II Laskaris after concluding peace treaty with Emperor Michael Asen], *Minalo* 5–6, II (1911): 60–66; c.f.: V. Zlatarski. *Istorija na Blgarskata država*, 459–463.

bear teamed up and attacked the Empire. But these beasts were defeated by God, having sustained a blow to the head by the rod of the Byzantine Imperial army. The dog was beheaded, the lion cub escaped, while the bear (ἡ ἄρκτος) unexpectedly, on behalf of the former two, emerged as a mediator seeking peace with the emperor.³³ Without a dilemma, historiography unanimously concluded, beginning with Alyssa Gardner, that the bear in this imperial story symbolized Rostislav Mikhailovich, while in all likelihood the dog represented the Cumans, and the lion cub Michael II of Asen and Bulgaria.³⁴ The content shown is also the only source for our next assumption, which further illuminates the Bulgarian itinerary and the politics of the Russian prince. If by now, by logic of things, we could have guessed that Rostislav, in addition to his role as chief negotiator of the Bulgarian emperor, was at the same time his aide and participant in the Bulgarian-Nicaean war of 1254-1256, the announcement of a bear teamed with two other allies, a dog and a lion cub, who attacked the Byzantine Empire, confirms this assumption. Unfortunately, not counting Acropolites' description of the Cuman military movement in the spring of 1256, sources fall short of more detailed news related to the operation of the Bulgarian imperial army and possibly Rostislav's presence with military forces before the conclusion of the Regina Peace.

The outcome of the war may have sealed the fate of young Michael II Asen. The tumultuous events that would soon follow in Bulgaria would initiate the campaign of Rostislav Mihailovich, the destination of which would be the Bulgarian capital of Tarnovo. Since we have previously made the assumption that Mikhailovich may have already been to the throne city of the Bulgarian Empire, as it was the starting and ending point of his diplomatic mission from 1256, it hypothetically follows that he was familiar with the route to Tarnovo. In contrast, it remains unknown from which direction and location the Russian lord headed towards the centre of the Bulgarian state. Was it from the

³³ *Theodori Ducae Laskaris Epistulae*, 282. 83–94.

³⁴ A. Gardner, *The Lascaris of Nicaea*, 218–219 (ref 1 p. 219); see the discussion of Andreeva and Zlatarski: M. Andreeva, “Statji V. N. Zlatarskago po istorii Bolgarii,” [The works of V. N. Zlatarski on the history of Bulgaria], *Byzantinoslavica IV* (1932): 446–447; V. Zlatarski, *Istorija na Blgarskata država*, 462–463; Idem, “Južna Blgarija sled smrtta na Ivan Asenja II i reginskijat mir” [Southern Bulgaria after the death of Ivan Asen II and the peace of Regino], in *Sbornik B. Djakovič* (Sofija: Narodna biblioteka Plovdiv, 1927), 336.

direction of Severin and south-eastern Hungary, having crossed the Danube somewhere in the Wallachian Plain – as was customary for the Hungarian royal armies, or possibly from the direction of Mačva, along the well-known Balkan routes south of the Danube? Of course, we do not rule out the possibility that he had a river flotilla with him as a support for his advancement. The only immediate source with respect to Rostislav's new journey is, once again, George Acropolites. Although the Byzantine statesman and writer set aside his interests in Bulgarian affairs for a while, he returned to them, describing in chapter 73 a number of bloody upheavals concerning the last male representatives of the Asen dynasty. Informed by certain residents of Tarnovo, Acropolites tells us that the well-known enemy of Byzantium, Bulgarian ruler Michael II Asen was fatally wounded by his paternal cousin, Kaliman.³⁵ Upon killing him, Kaliman took Michael's widow as wife, intending to seize power over the Bulgarians. This did not come to be, because, as Acropolites reports, “ἀλλ' ὁ Ῥῶσος Οὐρος μετὰ στρατευμάτων ἐπελθὼν τῷ Τρινόβῳ τὴν θυγατέρα τοῦτον...”³⁶

Among the translators of Acropolites' works, there are mainly two approaches to transcribing this passage that are of particular interest to us. According to the first approach, the translation is as follows: “but Rōsos Uros entered Tarnovo with his army and took his daughter, Michael's wife.”³⁷ According to the second approach: “but Rōsos Uros attacked Tarnovo with his army and took his daughter, Michael's wife.”³⁸ At first glance, these are minute details that do not change the meaning of the translation. All the more so, as the Acropolites goes on to explain that Kaliman – who had in the meantime apparently fled Tarnovo – was killed as he wandered from one place to another.³⁹ However, the whole course of events, reduced to the question of whether Mikhailovich entered Tarnovo, is of particular weight to a number of historians. The problem is only indirectly related to the issue of Rostislav's itinerary, and essentially concerns the epilogue of the event, that is, the legitimacy of Rostislav's title of Imperator Bulgarorum.

³⁵ Kaliman Ase, the son of sebastokrator Aleksandar. I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevi*, 113-14.

³⁶ Acropolites, I, 152.

³⁷ P. Žavoronkov, *Georgij Akropolit*, 122; R. Macrides, *George Acropolite*, 334.

³⁸ M. Vojnov, *Grčki izvori za blgarskata istorija*, 204–205; W. Blum, *Georgios Acropolites*, 170;

P. Nikov, “Blgaro-ungarski otnošenija,” 73–77; V. Zlatarski. *Istorija na Blgarskata država*, 470.

³⁹ Acropolites, I, 152.

At one time, Petr Nikov made considerable efforts to prove that Rostislav in fact attacked Tarnovo, but did not conquer it, because the city was heavily fortified and was allegedly held by an anti-Hungarian boyar party, which advocated for the coming of the subsequent Bulgarian emperor Constantine I. Admittedly, according to Nikov, Rostislav took with him his daughter, who became a widow again and was free. His title of Emperor Bulgarorum, preserved in one of his charters, did not, therefore, refer to the conquest of Tarnovo or to the throne in Tarnovo, but rather as an ephemeral manifestation of the claim of the Russian prince or the result of the conquest of a part of the Bulgarian northwest territories, possibly Vidin, which, after Rostislav's time, in the 1260s, was ruled by another Hungarian vassal (and royal relative) with the title of Emperor Bulgarorum, despot Yakov Sviatoslav.⁴⁰ This thesis was especially advocated by Vasil Zlatarski and it has become widely accepted in Bulgarian historiography today.⁴¹

If we are to return to the aforementioned Acropolites' report, Rostislav clearly took his daughter from Tarnovo, from where Kaliman had fled before him; with respect to everything else, historians had to create a series of assumptions that were based on other assumptions. We must also not overlook the fact that Anna Rostislavich was a legitimate Bulgarian empress and that through her, by taking her as his wife, quite possibly under duress, the usurper Kaliman tried not only to gain legitimacy with the Bulgarians, but also to position himself closer to Rostislav and indirectly Hungary, despite the fact that he had initially acted against their interests. The assumption of a number of historians that Rostislav allegedly rushed to Bulgaria to support his son-in-law's killer, in our view, contradicts Acropolites' account.⁴² Why, then, did Kaliman not take his bride with him and went to her father during his escape from Tarnovo? With all the political twists and turns, it is unlikely that such an action could have been expected from the executioner of Emperor Michael II Asen who had been under Rostislav's tutelage.

⁴⁰ P. Nikov, "Blgaro-ungarski otnošenija," 66–77.

⁴¹ V. Zlatarski, *Istorija na Blgarskata država*, 469–470; I. Petkova, "Nordwestbulgarien in der Ungarischenpolitik," 61–62; S. Todorova, "Dščerjata na Rostislav Mihajlovič," 54–56; H. Dimitrov, *Blgarsko-ungarski otnošenija*, 166.

⁴² Following Nikov's work: I. Petkova, "Nordwestbulgarien in der Ungarischenpolitik," 61; S. Todorova, "Dščerjata na Rostislav Mihajlovič," 56; H. Dimitrov, *Blgarsko-ungarski otnošenija*, 159; V. Achim, *Politica sud-estica*, 146.

Rostislav also certainly had a real impact on the Bulgarian imperial court until the death of his son-in-law. He recalled that it was Rostislav who, in front of the Bulgarian lords, had led the peace mission on the Regina River. We do not know what the internal situation in Bulgaria was on the eve of the conclusion of the so-called Regina Peace, and we do not rule out the possibility that Rostislav only represented the interests of the young Michael and the ruling circles of the court in Tarnovo, who, by all accounts, did not have the strength to continue the war against the Nicaean Empire, which rested, with a huge force, on the Bulgarian borders. Petr Nikov sought to resolve this contradiction by anticipating further Acropolites' account. For, the Byzantine writer states that after the death of both Michael Asen and Kaliman (with whom the Asen male lineage became extinct), the Bulgarian state lost its rightful ruler and the boyar champions decided the new emperor to be Constantine, the son of Tych, who was not a member of the ruling dynasty. According to Nikov, it was these Bulgarian boyars who held firmly the power in Tarnovo and kept Rostislav away. Unless, one might also notice, these gentlemen from Tarnovo had previously not expelled Kaliman, preventing him from taking Bulgarian Empress Anna with him, and opened the gates of the capital of Tarnovo to the Russian prince.⁴³ Acropolites, it is true, was not informed that Rostislav possibly declared himself Emperor in Tarnovo. The election of Constantine Tych certainly followed Rostislav's departure. The new ruler Constantine Tych was much more interesting to the learned Acropolites, and his previous laconic presentation was intended to explain to his reader how this Bulgarian lord ascended to the Bulgarian throne. Namely, in the conditions of the general collapse of the Bulgarian state, Constantine Tych soon turned for help to Theodore II Laskaris. He became his son-in-law, thus forming familial ties with both the Laskaris and the Asen dynasties, and as a Nicaean protégé, began to pursue anti-Hungarian policies.⁴⁴

⁴³ For more on the fortifications of Tarnovo see: I. Dujčev, "Tъrnovo kato političeski i duhoven centr prez ksnoto srednovekovie" [Tarnovo as political and spiritual center in the late medieval times], in *Blgarsko srednovekovie. Proučvanija vrhu političeskata i kulturnata istorija na srednovekovna Blgarija* [Medieval Bulgaria. Studies on political and cultural history of medieval Bulgaria], ed. Ivan Dujčev (Sofija: Izdatelstvo Nauka i izkustvo, 1972), 416–417.

⁴⁴ I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevci*, 115–117.

Let us, therefore, turn to the source of all the aforesaid questions. We agree with Petr Nikov and those who are like-minded that, by emphasizing the title of Bulgarian emperor, Rostislav only expressed his claims to this country and that he had no real dynastic or other rights to the Bulgarian throne, or lasting influence in Tarnovo. It is further not impossible that he, from that time, or some time before, maintained control over the north-eastern Bulgarian area by controlling Vidin, although this assumption is not supported by immediate sources.⁴⁵ However, all these circumstances do not in the slightest dispute the possibility that Mikhailovich indeed entered Tarnovo, from where he, with dignity, took along his daughter Anna, at that moment the legally crowned Bulgarian Empress and widow of Michael II Asen. For us, this interpretation is unambiguous.⁴⁶ Of course, we agree that Rostislav apparently did not have the strength for a longer stay in Tarnovo, but had to withdraw from there.

In addition to being a matter of aspirations, medieval titles also had to have a foothold either in law, or ruling ideology, or in a ceremonial act. The very emphasis in Rostislav's intitulation of the grandiose title of Emperor Bulgarorum, in what is today his only preserved and unfortunately undated charter (1257?), which, in light of these circumstances, only adds value to it,⁴⁷ indirectly points to the confirmation of his entry into Tarnovo. Under these circumstances, the enterprising Rurikovich could, in such events, seize the opportunity and, after the extinction of the male lineage of the Asen dynasty, proclaim and crown himself, in the place allotted for this act, the Bulgarian emperor. He met at least one requirement for such an act and claim. During his Hungarian period of life, we know with certainty that Rostislav still remained loyal to the Orthodox Church, a fact long ago emphasized by František Palacký.⁴⁸ Rostislav's march and, we believe, entry into

⁴⁵ P. Nikov, "Blgaro-ungarski otnošenija," 76.

⁴⁶ It is also supported by, for example: S. Palauzov, "Rostislav Mihajlovič, knjaz Mačvi," 46; K. Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, 180.

⁴⁷ *A zŕibi és vásonkeői gróf Zichy-család idős ágának okmánytára. Codex diplomaticus domus senioris comitum Zichy de Zich et Vasonkeo I-XII*, ed. Nagy Imre, Nagy Iván, Vég hely Dezső (Budapest: Kiadja a Magyar Tört. Társulat, 1871-1931), (= Z), I, 5.

⁴⁸ F. Palacký, "O Ruském knížeti Rostislawovi" [On the Russian prince Rostislav], *Časopis Českého Museum XVI/1* (1842): 34–35; c.f.: Dj. Hardi, "Religioznaja prinadležnost knjazja Rostislava Mihajloviča vo vremena ego žizni v Vengrii," [Religious belonging of Pince Rostislav Mikhailovich in the time of his life in Hungary] in *Rus' and Countries of the latin*

Tarnovo, took place after the murder of Michael II Asen. In historiography, these events, with respect to the considerable gap in Acropolites' report of Bulgarian affairs, are usually dated to the end of 1256, beginning of 1257.⁴⁹ In our opinion, it is also possible that Rostislav went to the Bulgarian capital in the spring of 1257.

Finally, Rostislav's Bulgarian successes and the appropriation of the Bulgarian imperial title appear to have been reflected in the Czech countries, above all with the continuator of the Chronicle of the Cosmas of Prague. This chronicler was, in 1261, well informed that the future Czech Queen Kunigunda, as the bride of the Czech King Ottokar II, was "the filiam of Rostislai [Hostislai] Ducis Bulgarorum."⁵⁰ This tradition

Culture (10th–16th c.), ed. Vitaliy Nagirnyy (Krakow: Jagiellonian University, 2016), 154–162; Dj. Hardi, "Rutheni sunt schismatici: konfesijna naležnístj ruskich knjaziv Rostislava Mihajloviča ta Leva Daniloviča u svitli vibranih ugarskih i českich diplomatičnìh džerel – porivnjalnij analiz" [The confessional belonging of Russian princes Rostislav Mikhailovich and Lev Danilovich in the light of selected Hungarian and Czech diplomatic sources-comparative study], in *Religions and beliefs of Rus' (9th–16th centuries)*, ed. Vitaliy Nagirnyy (Krakow: Jagiellonian University, 2018), 259–268.

⁴⁹ P. Nikov, "Blgaro-ungarski otnošenija," 80–81; V. Zlatarski. *Istorija na Blgarskata država*, 469; H. Dimitrov, *Blgarsko-ungarski otnošenija*, 159; I. Božilov, *Familijata na Asenevci*, 113–114.

⁵⁰ *Letopisy české od roku 1196 do roku 1278*, *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum* (=FRB), II, *Cosmae chronicon Boemorum cum continuatoribus*, ed. Josef Emler (Praha: Nákladem Musea Království Českého 1874), 291; *Cosmae chronic Boemorum*. edente D. Rudolfo Köpke (*Annalium Pragensium pars I. a. 1196-1278*). *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum* (=MGH, SS) IX, ed. Georgius Heinricus Pertz (Hannover: Societas Aperiendis Fontibus Rerum Germanicarum Medii Aevi 1851), 178.

⁵⁰ "... Kunegundem, filiam Rostislav ducis Bulgarie..." *Neplacha, opata opatovského, Krátká kronika římská a česká* [Short Roman and Czech chronicle], ed. Josef Emler, FRB III (Praha: Nákladem Musea Království Českého 1882), 474–475; "... Cunegundym, filiam ducis Bulgarorum..." *Kronika Jana z Marignoly* [The Chronicle of Jan of Marignoly], ed. Josef Emler, FRB, III, Praha (Praha: Nákladem Musea Království Českého 1882), 571; "... Gunegundem, filiam Rostislav ducis Bulgarorum neptem Bele regis Ungarie," *Kronika Pulkavova*, [Chronicle of Pulkav] ed. Josef Emler, FRB, V (Praha: Nákladem Musea Království Českého, 1893), 152–153; *Joannis Długosii seu Longini canonici cracoviensis, Historiae Polonicae libri XII*. ed. Alexander Przewydzicki, II, libri 6–8, *Opera Omnia*, XI (Cracoviae: Kirchmayer, 1873), 383, 505; an analysis of historiography: G. Wenzel, *Rosztisław galiczyński herceg*, 16–17; M. Wertner, "Boris und Rostislav, II Rostislav von Halics und seine Familie," *Vierteljahrsschrift für Heraldik, Sphragistik und Genealogie* XVII, Heft 2 (1889): 185–186; Idem, *Az Árpádok család története*, 467–468; *W. Swoboda*, "Księżna kaliska Bułgarka? przyczynek do rozbioru krytycznego *Annalium Długosza*," [Princess of Kalisz Bulgarian? Contribution to the critical understanding of *Annals of Długosz*], *Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza* 26. 13–2 (1980): 71–77; V. Adamovič, "Belo IV. a Uhorsko

was later adopted by the Czech chroniclers of the fourteenth century and is reflected with Jan Neplach, John of Marignolli and Pribik Pulkava. A century later, Polish historian Jan Długosz took over the news from Pulkava, taking it one step further and concluding that Kunigunda's younger sister Gryfina, the widow of the Krakow prince Leszek II the Black, was a "matronam Bulgariae ortam."⁵¹

Why, however, did the Czech chronicler and Rostislav's contemporary not mention his imperial title? We would not dare to put the testimony of a narrative source and Rostislav's formal intitulation in his original charter on the same scale. The intitulation certainly has an undeniable original weight. However, the answer may lie in the short-lived nature of Rostislav's Bulgarian imperial ambitions. In any case, the issue deserves special discussion. We are at least certain of one thing: after 1257, in relation to the Hungarian-Bulgarian war, for some reason, we no longer find Rostislav Mikhailovich in the sources, nor any mention of his name. However, in one of his 1260 grants to a certain Torda, the son of Győr, in the name of the Cheusy estate that belonged to the Zala fort, the Hungarian Crown Prince, young King Stephen, among other things, cited the merits of this warrior during the campaign "in Bulgariam." Stephen was personally informed of this by the initiator of the grant, his baron and the mayor of Zala, magister Csak, who also led the march.⁵² Gyula Pauler was the first to conclude, given the course of the renewed Hungarian-Czech conflict over Austria and Styria, as well as

v českých kronikách (do 14. století)" [Béla IV and Hungary in Czech chronicles up to the 14th century], *Historické štúdie, Acta historica Posoniensia* XXIV (2014): 44–62.

⁵¹ "... Kunegundem, filiam Rostyslay ducis Bulgarie..." *Neplacha, opata opatovského, Krátká kronika římská a česká*, ed. Josef Emler, FRB III (Praha: Nákladem Musea Království Českého 1882), 474–475; "... Cunegundym, filiam ducis Bulgarorum..." *Kronika Jana z Marignoly*, ed. Josef Emler, FRB, III, Praha, (Praha: Nákladem Musea Království Českého 1882), 571; "... Gunegundem, filiam Rostilsai ducis Bulgarorum neptem Bele regis Ungarie," *Kronika Pulkavova*, ed. Josef Emler, FRB, V (Praha: Nákladem Musea Království Českého, 1893), 152–153; *Joannis Dlugossii seu Longini canonici cracoviensis, Historiae Polonicae libri XII*. ed. Alexander Przewycki, II, libri 6–8, Opera Omnia, XI (Cracoviae: Kirchmayer, 1873), 383, 505; an analysis of historiography: G. Wenzel, *Rostizslaw galicziái herczeg*, 16–17; M. Wertner, "Boris und Rostislav, II Rostislav von Halics und seine Familie," *Vierteljahrsschrift für Heraldik, Sphragistik und Genealogie* XVII, Heft 2 (1889): 185–186; Idem, *Az Árpádok családi története*, 467–468; *W. Swoboda*, "Księżna kaliska Bulgarka?", 71–77; V. Adamovič, "Belo IV. a Uhorsko" *Historické štúdie*, 44–62.

⁵² *Hazai okmánytár. Codex diplomaticus patrius I-VIII*. Nagy Imre ed. et. al. (Győr; Budapest: Säuervein Géza betüivel, etc. 1865–1891) (= H), 105–107; RA, no. 1768.

the rule of Stephen's cousin in Zala County, that magister Csak (mayor of Zala from 1256 to 1259 and 1260)⁵³ undertook the Bulgarian march probably in 1259. Yet, it was of little use to Rostislav. Constantine Tych remained on the throne and Rostislav was left to continue to carry his Bulgarian imperial title and, perhaps realistically, to rule over certain Bulgarian regions (Vidin). Pauler's view became generally accepted in historiography.⁵⁴ As is well known, during the second half of 1260 the Bulgarians took advantage of Hungary's preoccupation in the war against the Czech king and seized the Banat of Severin. The initiator and main actor of the Hungarian campaign against Bulgaria in 1261 was the son of Béla IV, Hungarian Crown Prince Stephen. To reiterate, there is no mention of Rostislav in the Hungarian charters created in connection with the coming wars.⁵⁵

Bringing to a close the discussion of Rostislav's travels throughout the Balkan region, we are obliged to look at another piece of information. The author of the *Chronicle of Morea* reports that, in the Battle of Pelagonia, which took place in the autumn of 1259, among many allies who fought on the side of Michael Palaeologus and the Nicaeans, there were also the Hungarians and the Serbs, whose troops were personally led by their respective kings.⁵⁶ If the King of the Hungarians could hypothetically have been the young Prince Stephen, son of Béla IV, since the Serbian ruler Stefan Uroš was at that time a proven enemy of the Nicaean Empire, Eugen Darkó identified none other than Rostislav Mikhailovich as the King of Serbs who, according to the aforementioned source, commanded a detachment of 600 men. This issue remained

⁵³ A. Zsoldos, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1000–1301* [Hungarian lay archonotology 1000-1301] (Budapest: MTA 2011), 231–232.

⁵⁴ The logical question that arises is if this Zala army, led by Csak, directed by Stephen, could have been a support to Rostislav during his march to Trnovo, 1257?

⁵⁵ For more on subsequent Hungarian-Bulgarian relations in which the young King Stephen played a significant role: Gy. Pauler, "V. István bolgár hadjárata" [Bulgarian campaign of Stephen V], in *Hunfaly-album, Hunfaly Pál felszázados akadémiai tagsága emlékére* [Hunfaly-album. In the memory of the Pál Hunfaly 50 years in as a member of the Academy] (Budapest: Kiadják tisztelői, 1891): 164–174; Gy. Kristó, *Az Árpád-kor háborúi* [The wars of the Árpád era] (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Könyvkiadó, 1986), 137–138; H. Dimitrov, *Blgarsko-ungarski otnošénija*, 170–175.

⁵⁶ *The Chronicle of Morea, TO XPONIKON TOY MOPEΩΣ.*, ed. John Schmitt (London: Methuen & Co. 1904), 238; *Chronicle of Morea*. translated from the Greek with notes and introduction by E. Harold (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1964), 178.

unanswered in historiography.⁵⁷ If, in the summer of 1259, we would turn our gaze to Styria and Carantania, more than a thousand kilometres away from Pelagonia, there we would find Hungarian Crown Prince Stephen of the House of *Árpád* at the head of his Cuman and Hungarian troops. It was the beginning of a new great Hungarian-Czech war, which would end the following year, at the Battle of Kressenbrunn. There, gathered together, were almost all of the Hungarian able-bodied men and king's allies, probably including Rostislav Mikhailovich's units. These events have already been discussed in more detail in our book. In this context, the information put forth in the *Chronicle of Morea* should be taken with great caution.

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