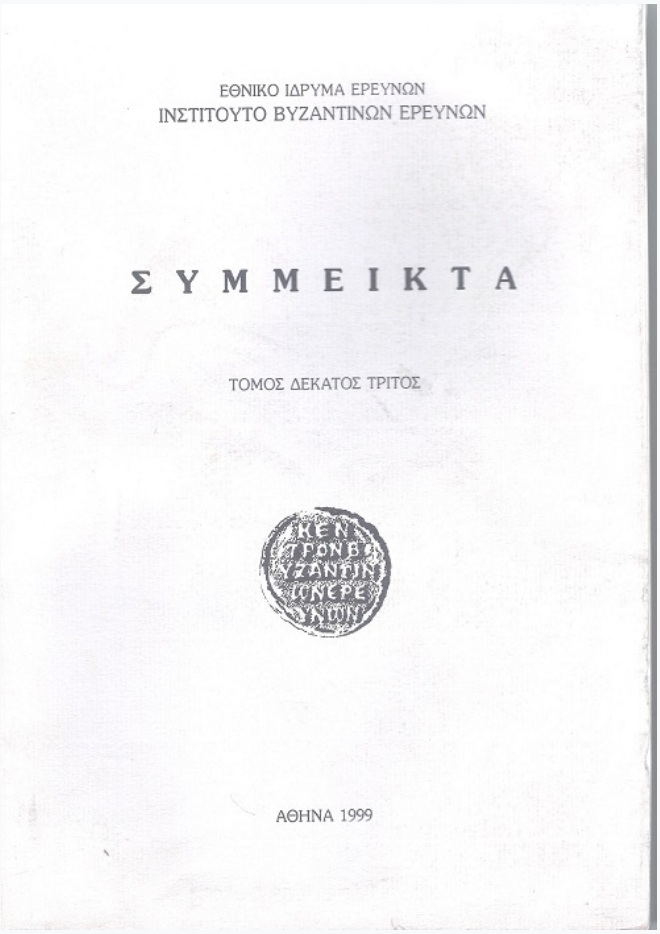
ePublishing

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
EKT
NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 13 (1999)

SYMMEIKTA 13



The Date of the Creation of the Theme of Peloponnese

Tibor ŽIVKOVIĆ

doi: 10.12681/byzsym.863

Copyright © 2014, Tibor ŽIVKOVIĆ

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0.

To cite this article:

ŽIVKOVIĆ, T. (1999). The Date of the Creation of the Theme of Peloponnese. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, *13*, 141–155. https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.863

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 02/05/2026 11:27:59

TIBOR ŽIVKOVIĆ

THE DATE OF THE CREATION OF THE THEME OF PELOPONNESE

Before we try to set up a hypothesis about the date of the creation of the theme of Peloponnese, let us emphasise one crucial point. We have to bear in mind that the earliest themes were created as the result of a particular policy towards external enemies of the Empire. In the case of the themes in Asia Minor, this policy was caused by the Persian threat. In the case of Thrace, it was the Bulgarian danger. However, later on, especially in the Balkans, the creation of themes crowned the efforts of the Byzantine government to hold more firmly territories obtained or regained through the wars with the Bulgarians or the Slavic tribes.

The object of this paper will not be the question of Byzantine rule in the Peloponnese, during the seventh and eighth centuries, since we would be forced to speak about the time, nature and character of the Slavic settlement, rather than about the question of thematic rule. However, some events which took place during the eighth century, and concern Byzantine rule in the Peloponnese, will be mentioned and explained.

There is a well established opinion among scholars that the theme of Peloponnese has been created between 783 and 812, and although we have no new evidence, derived either from written or archaeological sources, it is possible, to regroup and reconsider the existing evidence, and place this event in a much shorter span of time[1].

1. G. OSTROGORSKY, Postanak tema Helada i Peloponez, *ZRVI* 1, 1952, 73 (Zusammenfassung: *Die Entstehung der Themen Hellas und Peloponnes*) put the creation of the theme of the Peloponnese between 783 and 805; similarly, M. W. WEITHMANN, *Politische und ethnische Veränderungen in Griechenland am Übergang von der Antike zum Frühmittelalter. Die Kultur Griechenlands in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, Bericht über das Kolloquium der Südosteuropa - Kommission 23.-31. Oktober 1992,

It is a well-known fact that thematic organisation in the European parts of the Empire was not in place before the very end of the seventh century. The statement of Constantine Porphyrogenitus about the time of the creation of theme of Thrace because of the Bulgarian danger, around 680, is contained in *De Thematibus*[2]. The second theme, Hellas, was created a few years later, between 687-695, as we know from Theophanes that Leontius was appointed strategos of Hellas before dethroning Justinian II[3]. That should be a *terminus post quem non*. On the other hand, in 687 Justinian sent a synodic letter to Pope Konon II, in which he mentioned the military commanders gathered at that time in the imperial palace[4]. Since we do not read the name of the strategos of Hellas, 687 should be the terminus *ante quem non*. However, there is some doubt about this letter to Pope Konon. We cannot be completely sure that Justinian's intention was to mention all the strategoi or just those who were present at that time in Constantinople.

Observing the policy of Justinian II toward the Sclavinias in Macedonia[5], and his large-scale resettlement of the Slavs in Asia Minor[6] and probably from the west

Göttingen 1996, 18 (after 784); IDEM, *Die Slavische Bevölkerung auf der Griechischen Halbinsel*, München 1978, 122 (between 784 and 804/805); P. A. YANNOPOULOS, *La pénétration slave en Argolide*, *BCH*, Supplément VI, Études Argiennes, 1980, 371 (before 806); A. BON, Le problème slave dans le Péloponnèse à la lumière de l'archéologie, *Byzantion* 20, 1950, 14, thinks that the theme of Peloponnese was created before 812; IDEM, *Le Péloponnèse byzantin jusqu'en 1204*, Paris 1951, 46 (between 802 and 812). Also, D. ZAKYTHINOS, Le thème de Céphalonie et la défense de l'occident, *L'Hellénisme Contemporain* 3-4, Athens 1954, 310 (802-812); W. TREADGOLD, *The Byzantine Revival 780-842*, Stanford 1988, 136 (809/810). J. NESBITT - N. OIKONOMIDES, *Byzantine Seals*, vol. II, Washington 1994 (further: *DO Seals*), 2.22.62 (last decade of the eighth century). Same opinion: D. OBOLENSKY, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, London 1971, 77. The original point of view on the date of the creation of the theme of Peloponnese expressed by A. STAVRIDOU-ZAFRAKA, Slav Invasions and the Theme Organization in the Balkan Peninsula, *Βυζαντιακά* 12, 1992, 172, that the Peloponnese was a theme before the military campaign of Staurakios in 783, and consisted of the eastern part of the Peloponnese with Corinth as the capital, is not sufficiently supported by the sources.

2. COSTANTINO PORFIROGENITO, *De Thematibus*, ed. A. PERTUSI, Vatican 1952, 84$_{5-11}$.

3. THEOPHANES *Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883, I, 368$_{15}$-369$_{26}$.

4. In this letter the Emperor mentioned his *collegiis popularibus*, commanders of armies of Opsikion, Anatolicon, Thrace, Armeniacon, Italy, Cabarisiani (Carabisiani?), Sardinia (*sic!*), Africa, being at that time gathered in the imperial palace - i.e. *ad hoc*; cf: MANSI, XI, col. 737. PERTUSI, *De Them.*, 110, proposed that it should be written Carabisiani instead of 'Cabarisiani'; N. OIKONOMIDÈS, Une liste arabe des stratèges byzantins du VIIe siècle et les origines du thème de Sicile, *Documents et études sur les institutions de Byzance (VIIe-XVe s.)*, London 1976, VII, 121-130. This opinion is mostly accepted: cf. *DO Seals II*, 150-151.

5. THEOPH. I, 364$_{11-14}$. This offensive was directed against the Slavs of Strymon.

6. THEOPH. I, 364$_{14-15}$.

of Thessaloniki (Drogubitai) to the lower reaches of the Strymon[7], we have the strong impression that Justinian II planned to reorganise large portions of the territory of what is today Greece. His plans were interrupted by a military disaster on his way home, when the Bulgarians utterly destroyed his army while he himself narrowly escaped death[8]. All these events took place in 688/89. Then, in the years which followed, Justinian planned the war against the Arabs, placing his hopes, unfortunately for him, in the hands of 30.000 Slav soldiers[9]. After a heavy defeat at Sebastopolis, Justinian ruled three more years, and then his first reign was ended by the usurpation of Leontius.

As mentioned above the Emperor was beaten by the Arabs in 692; thus, he could turn again his attention towards the Slavs or, better, towards Europe. In spite of these plans, having learnt his lesson from the previous campaign, he would probably have decided to create a theme in Hellas, with the remains of the Byzantine possessions in central Greece under one military governor, i.e. the strategos. In this way, he would have naval and ground troops at his disposal for the renewed offensive against the Slavs. In that case we can assume that the Emperor planned to reach Thessaloniki and then Hellas by the sea route with the clear intention of avoiding a possible Bulgarian surprise. Having in mind the additional taxation in 693/94 raised by Theodotus, minister of finance, we would conclude that it could be connected with some large-scale military preparation[10], besides the building activities in Constantinople[11]. In accordance with this theory, we could place the creation of the theme of Hellas between 693 and 695.

However, we know that Leontius was *persona non grata* at the court. Naming him as the strategos of Hellas for the purpose of a renewed offensive against the Slavs of Greece does not seem likely. Having this in mind, we would propose that if Justinian II created the theme of Hellas, it could have happened during his stay in Thessaloniki in 688/89 and be connected with the Emperor's policy toward the Slavs and his intention of subjugating their tribes settled between Thessaloniki and Thermopylae.

7. *De Them.* 89. This conclusion follows from the story about the creation of the kleisoura of Strymon.

8. THEOPH. I, 364$_{15-18}$.

9. THEOPH. I, 365$_{30}$-366$_{20}$.

10. THEOPH. I, 367$_{23-27}$.

11. THEOPH. I, 367$_{12-14}$; 368$_{9-11}$.

Since we know with certainty that the theme of Hellas already existed in 695, we have to ask ourselves which parts of Greece this theme covered. Its northern border can be traced more or less with certainty. The Slavic tribe of the Velegezitai, living around Demetriada and Thebes (Phthiotis) around the Gulf of Volos[12] probably blocked Byzantine rule to the north of this line. To the west the border did not reach distant Nikopolis, probably ending somewhere in or immediately behind Boeotia. Attica and Euboea are the two most certain parts of this theme; but the problem is its southern border.

There are two general points of view on how the theme of Peloponnese has been created. According to the first, it was created independently of the theme of Hellas[13]. According to the second, the theme of Peloponnese emerged from the theme of Hellas[14]. If we want to give an answer about the date of the creation of the theme of Peloponnese, we should first accept one of these theories. There is, of course, a third opinion, according to which, both the theme of Hellas and the theme of Peloponnese emerged as a result of the division of the large naval-military district of Karabisianoi[15].

The great English scholar J. B. Bury, supposed long ago that the theme of Peloponnese was initially a turma of the theme of Hellas, and was later separated from it and upgraded into a theme[16]. For a long time this opinion prevailed, until prof. Ostrogorsky, another great name in modern Byzantinology, proposed that the Peloponnese was never part of the theme of Hellas[17]. Another supporter of the third theory was also a great scholar, P. Charanis. His theory is neutral, allowing for

12. *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius*, ed. P. LEMERLE, Paris 1979, *Miracula*, II, 4, 214.11-12.

13. OSTROGORSKY, *op.cit.*, 67.

14. J. B. BURY, *A History of the Later Roman Empire (395 A.D. to 800 A.D.)*, London 1889, II, 350-351. Bury believed that the theme of Hellas had at least two tourmas, Hellas and Peloponnesus, and, maybe, a third which could be Epirus or Nikopolis.

15. P. CHARANIS, Observations on the History of Greece during the Early Middle Ages, *Balkan Studies* 11, 1970, 10-11, thought that the theme of Karabisianoi embraced the southern and southeast shores of Asia Minor, the Aegean islands, the shores of Greece, Crete and the eastern shore of the Peloponnese.

16. CH. DIEHL, L'origine du régime des thèmes dans l'Empire byzantin, *Études byzantines*, Paris 1905, 284, believed that the theme of Hellas also comprised Thessaly and lands on the shores of the Ionian Sea. F. DVORNIK, *Les légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance*, Prague 1933, 12, adopted Diehl's point of view adding to the theme of Hellas, the Ionian islands – Kephalonia and Zakynthos.

17. According to OSTROGORSKY, *op.cit.*, 68, the theme of Hellas consisted only of Attica and Euboea.

the independent creation of both themes out of one large district, which had presumably a naval character. Later, in 949, we meet a toumarches of the shore (of Peloponnese?), who could be a relic of the maritime background of the theme[18].

Prof. Ostrogorsky believed that the Byzantine Empire had a very strict order in the ranking of thematic officials. According to him, when a theme was divided, the new unit would be placed below the 'mother' theme in official lists[19]. In this way, for instance, the themes of Thrakesion and Cappadocia emerged by division of Anatolikon, and come in all preserved Taktika below it. In addition, the themes of Bukelarion and Optimaton emerged from Opsikion, and also come below it[20]. However, here Prof. Ostrogorsky did not offer a final answer. Why then, if we accept this point of view, does the theme of Peloponnese come in all preserved Taktika (Uspenskij, Beneševič, Philotheos, and Escorial) before Hellas? If Hellas is older than the Peloponnese, how could it be possible that the strategos of Peloponnese ranks before his colleague of Hellas[21]? Obviously, we have to re-examine the theory about the 'mother theme' and the 'new-born theme' at least for its validity for the themes in the European part of the Empire.

It is indisputable that this theory works well in many other examples, especially in the eastern part of the Empire. In the western part, however, there are some exceptions. For instance, the theme of Dalmatia, created in the middle of the ninth century, is seven places below Longobardia (899) but in the Taktikon Benešević (934-944) it is two places above the theme of Longobardia[22]. A plausible explanation is that the theme of Dalmatia played a minor role in 899 in comparison with Longobardia, but in 934-944, because of Byzantine losses in Italy, became much more important. Another example is the theme of Nikopolis, which appears in all Taktika before Hellas[23]. Furthermore, the theme of Nikopolis was created in the

18. *De Cerem.*, 665$_{18-19}$. Namely, during the preparation for the expedition against the Arabs of Crete, in 949, we find mention of ὁ τουμάρχης τῆς παραλίου; cf. NESBITT - OIKONOMIDES, *Seals* II, 62.

19. OSTROGORSKY, *op.cit.*, 69.

20. N. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, Paris 1972 (further, OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*), 49, 137-139, 245-247, 263-267.

21. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 491$_{1}$, 491$_{3}$, 1051$_{2}$, 1051$_{5}$, 2652$_{3}$, 2658. OSTROGORSKY, *op.cit.*, 70, thought that an important fact in support of his hypothesis that the Peloponnese and Nikopolis had never been tourmas of the theme of Hellas, is the order of their appereance in the Taktika – always before the theme of Hellas. On the other hand, he did not answer the question of what the Peloponnese was in an administrative sense before the creation of the theme.

22. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 247$_{29-30}$.

23. In the Taktikon Uspenskij (842-843) there is no *theme* of Nikopolis (OIKONOMIDÈS, *Listes*, 49) but in Philotheos Nikopolis comes immediately after the Peloponnese and two places before the theme

middle of the ninth century and was never part either of Peloponnese or of Hellas[24]. However, strategically, as it faced Italy to the west and also faced potential Arab threats, it had a more prominent military and naval position than Hellas. Exactly the same principle could be applied to the Peloponnese and its military importance towards the west.

So, which principle of ranking of themes was followed in Byzantium during the eighth and ninth centuries? Our impression is, that the order of appearance of the themes in the Taktika actually shows how the Byzantines judged the military and strategic importance of the themes and not only their date of creation. Probably the best example would be *De Thematibus*, written by the man who wrote *De Ceremoniis*. Since he allowed himself to enumerate the themes in geographical order, counting from east to west, Thrace, Macedonia, Strymon, Thessaloniki, Hellas, the Peloponnese, Cephalonia, Nikopolis, Dyrrachion[25], it is obvious that we cannot stick so firmly to the theory of 'mother' and 'new-born' themes.

We would now turn out attention towards the second opinion - the Peloponnese been part of Hellas? Since we know of representatives of the Byzantine administration in Argos, Troizen, Corinth and Monemvasia, during the seventh and eighth centuries[26], we have to accept that the Peloponnese was part of the theme of Hellas[27]. Now, the question is when the Peloponnese was separated[28]?

of Hellas; cf. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 139$_{8-10}$. The Taktikon Beneševič keeps the same order of appereance of these themes; cf. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 247$_{19-21}$. In the Escorial Taktikon, Nikopolis also comes before Hellas, but here they are separated not only by the usual theme of Kibyrreotai but also by Cyprus and Crete; cf. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Les listes*, 265$_{24-28}$.

24. *De Them.* 176; OSTROGORSKY, *op.cit.*, 70.

25. *De Them.* 86-94.

26. Anthony, bishop of Troizen was among those who attended the VIIth Ecumenical Council in 787; cf: MANSI, XII, col. 1099. Also well known is the seal of an ekprosopou of Troizen; cf. *DO Seals*, 2.35.1, dated to the eighth-ninth century. Among the participants of the VIth Ecumenical Council, 680/681, was John, bishop of Argos; cf. MANSI, XI, col. 646. But probably the most important proof of the existence of imperial rule and, in some way, developed economic life, is the seal of Theophylactus, kommerkiarios of the Peloponnese; cf. *DO Seals*, 2.22.14, dated to the eighth-ninth century. Also, note the seals of Niketas, hypatos and epoptes of the Peloponnese, dated to the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth century; cf. *DO Seals*, 2.22.8.

27. THEOPH. I, 405$_{17-18}$, mentions in 726 Agalianos, tourmarches of the Helladikoi. Since we know that the theme of Hellas existed at least from 695, it follows that it had at least two tourmarchai - one in Hellas proper (Attica, Euboea), and the other in the Peloponnese.

28. *Miracula*, II, 5, 230$_{27}$-233$_{26}$.

The most commonly proposed date for the creation of the theme of Peloponnese is between 784 and 805, rarely in 806-812. These opinions are based on four sources –the Chronicle of Monemvasia, the *De administrando imperio*, Chapter 49, the Scholion of Arethas, and Theophanes.

Now we will summarise their contents. The Chronicle of Monemvasia (CM) or, better, Chronicle of the metropolis of Patras, speaks about ecclesiastical reorganization, in the largest portion of the Peloponnese, including the building of churches[29]. It reflects an oral tradition, which had roots in the ecclesiastical circles of Patras. However, the striking fact in this narration is that the strategos was regularly sent to the Peloponnese by the Emperor. Then, one of these strategoi, of the family of Skleros, defeated some Slavs and subjugated them, sending the good news to the Emperor Nicephorus I. On hearing this, the Emperor started reorganising the Church and rebuilding the towns –Patras and Sparta– and repopulating them. All these events, according to CM, took place during the patriarchate of Tarasios, who died, as is well established, in February 806[30].

In our opinion, here we find only the information that a strategos already existed during the third year of the reign of Nicephorus I[31], i.e. in 804. On the other hand, Arethas also mentions a strategos of Peloponnese, his victory over the Slavs, and the rebuilding of Patras in the fourth year of Nicephorus' rule - [i.e. in 805]. Both narrations speak only about Achaia, not at all about the whole of the Peloponnese. When we add a third source, the DAI, which speaks about the uprising of the Slavs of Achaia, we can see that a strategos also existed in the Peloponnese during the rule of Nicephorus.

Since Nicephorus I spent the first half of his rule fighting the Arabs in the East, not even making an effort to respond to a Frankish proposal for peace in 803, it does not seem likely that he undertook administrative and military action in the Peloponnese. For us, all three of these sources speak about two events: First, Arethas and the Chronicle of Monemvasia speak about a military campaign of the strategos of the Peloponnese towards Achaia; the second, *De administrando imperio*, speaks about the uprising of the Peloponnesian Slavs in Achaia[32]. Furthermore, the next time we hear about the Melingoi and the Ezeritai, around

29. P. LEMERLE, La chronique improprement dite de Monemvasie: Le contexte historique et légendaire, *REB* 21, 1963 (further, LEMERLE, *La chronique*), 9-11. According to this source, ecclesiastical reorganisation took place in Achaia and Laconia.

30. THEOPH. I, 481$_{15-16}$.

31. Already pointed out by OSTROGORSKY, *op.cit.*, 72.

32. OSTROGORSKY, *op.cit.*, 72, believed that DAI, CM and Arethas speak about the same event.

839-842, we can see that they were already subjugated to the Empire[33]. Therefore, the campaign of Skleros was also conducted against Laconia and probably Arcadia. This interpretation goes along with the report of CM about the rebuilding of Sparta. To conclude, it is unlikely that Nicephorus I created the theme of the Peloponnese. On the contrary, CM, DAI and Arethas say that a strategos of the Peloponnese already existed during the rule of Nicephorus I. How effective this rule was until the victory of 804/5 and which territories he governed, is another question.

Since we have eliminated the possibility that the theme of Peloponnese was created during the rule of Nicephorus, let us examine the period between 783 and 802. Theophanes speaks, in his very short account, about the military campaign of the logothete Staurakios in 783, probably during the spring, summer and autumn. The logothete proceeded toward Hellas, subjugating Slavic tribes, and then attacked the Slavs of the Peloponnese taking many prisoners and large booty[34]. The importance of his victories is underlined because he held a triumph in the hippodrome of the capital (February 784)[35].

Since Theophanes is usually not interested in administrative changes, he does not speak more about this expedition. However, later, writing about the Velegizitai and their chieftain Akamir, he shows that one result of Staurakios' campaign was the subjugation of these Slavs and their administrative incorporation within the theme of Hellas[36]. This means that after 783 the theme of Hellas extended its borders to the north, towards Thessaly[37]. After a long time, the jurisdiction of the strategos of Hellas passed the natural border of Thermopylae. When? Immediately after the campaign of 783 or later on?

Some eastern sources also speak of the campaign of Staurakios. Michael the Syrian says that Staurakios attacked the Arabs in the Peloponnese, defeated them, took booty (sheep and camels), and established garrisons there. Michael's information is also preserved in Barhebreus[38] with the same distortion. Instead of the Slavs,

33. *DAI* I, 50$_{6-7}$.

34. THEOPH. I, 456$_{25}$-457$_{2}$

35. THEOPH. I, 457$_{4-6}$.

36. THEOPH. I, 473$_{32}$-474$_{4}$.

37. On the contrary, TREADGOLD, *op.cit.*, 73, thinks that the boundaries of the theme of Hellas remained "essentially the same".

38. BAR-HEBRAEUS, ed. W. BUDGE, London 1932, 120: "*Stauracius dux Romanorum Peloponnesum adortus est, quae dudum Arabum fuerat, eaque potitus est. Praesidio illuc collocato abiit, postquam ingentem captivorum copiam, oves, gregesque equorum et camelorum inde deduxerat*". Bar-Hebraeus

both sources speak of the Arabs. The information about the garrison which Staurakios left there is important. If we check his route from Constantinople to the Peloponnese, it seems quite possible and necessary that he had to leave some forces behind him before going back home. If this is correct, why not in the Peloponnese too? However, establishing a garrison does not prove that a theme was created. It could be just the beginning of such a process.

A very important question is why this campaign was conducted. How does it fit in the foreign policy of Irene? Should we see it in the context of the eastern or the western policy? Since the Peloponnese did not play any part in eastern policy before the fall of Crete to the hands of the Arabs in 824/827[39], we would prefer the western policy[40]. However, the creation of a particular theme must be observed in the context of the state's general policy.

When Irene began her rule in 780, the first thing she did, was to send the strategos Elpidios to Sicily (February 781)[41]. Then, since she heard that Elpidios was involved in a plot, she sent Theophilos to remove Elpidios and arrest him[42]. During the same year, she had some success against the Arabs[43]. The success in the East was overshadowed by the, now open, rebellion of Elpidios.

The importance of Sicily grew after 774, when the Franks crushed the Longobard kingdom and entered Italy with the support of the papacy[44]. Close to Sicily,

was born in Melitene in 1225 and died in Maraga, Azerbaidjan, 30. VII 1286; MICHEL LE SYRIEN, *Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, ed. J. B. CHABOT, Paris 1905, v. III, 13.

39. According to V. CHRISTIDES, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824). A Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam*, Athens 1984, map 11, Arab attacks on Cephalonia or Patras and Methoni should be placed between 867-886. Christides also assumes that the Arabic attack on Patras occured in 805 or 807.

40. N. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète et les thèmes de Céphalonie et Longobardie*, *REB* 23, 1965, 118-123, asked himself the same question concerning the problem of the creation of the theme of Cephalonia. He concluded that this theme was created firstly because of the Frankish danger and secondly owing to the Arab threat. An Arab incursion in the Adriatic, described in *Annales ragusini anonymi*, ed. SP. NODILO, Zagreb 1883, 8-11, had already occured in 740; then they would have destroyed Epidaurus(?). According to the same source, the citizens of Dubrovnik constructed their first fortress to defend themselves against Mauros' and Saracens in 754.

41. THEOPH. I, 454$_{25-27}$.

42. THEOPH. I, 454$_{29-31}$.

43. THEOPH. I, 455$_{2-5}$.

44. For the relations between Byzantium and Charlemagne see: J. GAY, *L'Italie méridionale et l'empire byzantin depuis l'avènement de Basile Ier jusqu'à la prise de Bari par les Normands (867-1071)*, Paris 1904, 34-39; C. N. TSIRPANLIS, Byzantine Reactions to the Coronation of Charlemagne 780-813, *Βυζαντινά* 6, 1974, 347-383; V. VON FALKENHAUSEN, *La dominazione bizantina nell' Italia meridionale dal*

were the remnants of Byzantine rule in Calabria; the Duchy of Benevento, ruled by Arches, son-in-law of the last Lombard king, Desiderius, was a tiny buffer state between Byzantium and Charlemagne. In spite of the Frankish threat, it is clear why Irene's first steps as a ruler were made towards Italy.

The next step of Charlemagne was to proclaim his son Pipin as king of Italy in 781. Then Irene tried some diplomacy. Before May 782 she sent an embassy with proposals to the Franks[45]. She asked for the hand of Rothrud, the daughter of the Frankish ruler, for her son Constantine VI[46]. After the betrothal had been arranged, both sides got more time for further plans. However, Sicily was still rebellious, and during the same year, Irene sent a strong fleet under the command of Theodore to remove Elpidios. Finally, Sicily has been secured and Elpidios escaped to the Arabs in Africa.

In the East, however, the Arabs defeated Staurakios and peace was concluded[47]. This peace lasted until 786. Free from the Arab danger, and temporarily removing the threat of the Franks by the betrothal, Irene was capable of giving much more attention to the European parts of the Empire. We do not believe that her policy towards the Slavs was just a picnic, as Treadgold understood it, but rather a well-planned action[48]. How serious this action was, becomes clear if we see how long the land route followed by Staurakios was. The campaign lasted at least over half a year, during which Staurakios subdued the Slavs in Macedonia and Hellas[49]. His attack on the Peloponnese was not accidental, but part of the plan made in Constantinople before his departure. As we learn from Theophanes, later in 799, and the action against Akamir and the Velegizitai, it is clear that Slavic tribes had been incorporated into the theme of Hellas.

Between the 784 and 787 Irene made preparations for re-introducing the veneration of icons[50]. This was a very important question. The papacy gave support to the Franks and her only way to regain some ground in Rome was to finish with

IX all' XI secolo, Bari 1978, 13-16; T. C. LOUNGHIS, *Les ambassades byzantines en Occident depuis la fondation des états barbares jusqu'aux Croisades (407-1096)*, Athens 1980, 153-156.

45. *Annales Mosellani a. 704-797*, ed. I. M. LAPPENBERG, MGH SS XVI, ed. G. H. PERTZ, Hannover 1859, 497$_{15-16}$, mentions this embassy under the year 781; cf: LOUNGHIS, *op.cit.*, 153.

46. THEOPH. I, 455$_{19-25}$.

47. THEOPH. I, 456$_{15-22}$.

48. TREADGOLD, *op.cit.*, 71-72.

49. TREADGOLD, *op.cit.*, 72, thinks that the campaign lasted at least five months.

50. As of 784 Irene started preparations for the Council, and sent a letter to the Pope inviting his representatives; cf. MANSI, XII, 984E-986C.

iconoclasm. Irene took too great a risk. She confronted almost the entire eastern army and other powerful elements of the capital. In her first attempt, she failed (786), but one year later the Council of Nicaea was held and the restoration of the icons took place. The policy toward the papacy seemed to have been fruitful. Then, Charlemagne reacted.

But, before the Council, Irene had sent an embassy asking again about the planned marriage between Rothrud and Constantine VI, with the clear intention of discovering what was actually in the mind of the Frankish king[51]. The answer was neutral and both sides knew very well that a conflict was in the air.

The Frankish king was not literate, but had definitely a great gift for politics. Recognising that the policy of Irene toward the papacy and Benevento would damage his interests, he attacked Benevento in 786/787 and forced Arches to recognise him as his sovereign[52]. The Duke of Benevento sent an embassy to Irene in 787, but when this embassy reached Constantinople, the old Duke had already died on 26 August 787. However, some agreement was reached. If Byzantium wanted to remove the Franks from Italy, Benevento would be a useful ally. Learning of this from Pope Hadrian, Charlemagne did not want to establish the son of Arches immediately as Duke[53]. Finally, in the spring of 788 he established as the Duke of Benevento the second son of Arches, Grimoald, since the older one, Romuald, also died almost at the same time as his father. This was under the following conditions: all documents issued by the Duke had to be countersigned by Charlemagne, coins had to have Charlemagne's image and, most important for us, the Duke had to forbid his citizens to have a beard. Here it is clear that Charlemagne was afraid of Byzantine influence[54].

51. *Annales Einhardi* a. 741-829, MGH SS I, ed. G. H. PERTZ, Hannover 1829, 169.39-42, says, under the year 786: "*Ipse post haec cum legatis Constantini imperatoris, qui propter petendam filiam suam ad se missi fuerant, locutus est, atque illis dimissis Romam reversus sanctum paschale festum magna cum hilaritate celebravit*". It seems that the embassy from Byzantium reached Italy at the very end of the year 786.

52. From the ENHARDI *Fuldensis Annales a. 680-838,* MGH SS I, 350.17-19, we learn that in October 787 Charlemagne was marching against Benevento. Also, according to the same source, when the Frankish king arrived in Capua: "*Grimaltum filium Aragisi* (Arches) *ducis Beneventanorum in obsidatum accepit. Hruodtrudis* (Rotrhud) *filia regis a Constantino imperatore desponsatur*". R. MCKITTERICK, *The Frankish Kingdoms Under the Carolingians*, London-New York 1993, 69, places this campaign of the Franks against Arches in 787/788. It seems that a better solution would be in 786/787. Also, *Annales Laurissenses a. 741-801,* MGH SS I, 168,170, put Charlemagne's campaign against Benevento and the submission of Arches in 787.

53. *Codex Carolinus*, MGH Epistolae III, ed. W. GUNDLICH, 83, 617-618.

54. GAY, *op.cit.*, 38. LOUNGHIS, *op.cit.*, 154-155.

Therefore, when Charlemagne established Grimoald, second son of Arches, in spring 788, as his vassal, it became obvious that diplomacy could not stop the Franks. Therefore, from the moment when Benevento became a vassal state of the Franks, Irene could start her military preparations. In the autumn she broke off the betrothal and in November Constantine was married to Maria of Armenia[55]. Then, the Empress sent to Italy the eunuch John at the head of an army, the same eunuch who had been successful against the Arabs in 781. Along with John, Irene sent Theodat, son of the last Lombard king, Desiderius, and natural claimant to the throne of Lombardy[56]. However, this expedition failed and John was killed. Benevento stayed under the Frankish influence[57]. In that year, all western policy, conducted between 781 and 789, although carefully planned, including the reorganization of the European possessions of the Empire, the reinstatement of the icons and diplomatic buying of time, fell into ruins.

In 790, Staurakios, the real architect of the Empire, was removed from office and Constantine seized power[58]. After the removal of Staurakios, we do not see anyone, who could take serious measures in the sense of administrative and military changes. All that was done during the reign of Irene was done during the time when he was logothete, as Theophanes remarked, referring to the year 789/90 - *everything was in his* (Staurakios') *hands* (τὰ πάντα κατέχοντα)[59]. The sole rule of Constantine is just a list of failures against the Arabs as well as against the Bulgarians, with some sporadic small-scale victories. After Irene took power again in 797, all energy was spent between the rival factions at the court, those of Staurakios, Aetius and Nicetas[60].

55. THEOPH. I, 463.21-28. MCKITTERICK, *op.cit.*, 70, thinks that the breaking off of the betrothal had already occured in 787.

56. GAY, *op.cit.*, 14-15, thought that this expedition was conducted in 788; FALKENHAUSEN, *op.cit.*, 16 is of the same opinion. It is better if we put this expedition between December 788 and spring 789, since the definitive break in Frankish-Byzantine relations happened in October 788 and was sealed by the marriage of Constantine VI in November of the same year.

57. THEOPH. I, 464.2-8. ENHARDI *Fuldensis Annales*, 350.21-22, *sub a.* 788; *Annales Laurissenses*, 174.1-5, *sub a.* 788. According to Ann. Laurissenses, Benevento sided with the Franks. Furthermore, it is narrated as if the conflict occured between *Graecos et Langobardos, id est duce Spolitino nomine Hildebrando, seu duce Grimoaldo... et fuit missus Wineghisos una cum paucis Francis.* From there follows that the Franks had a very small detachment in the allied army.

58. THEOPH. I, 466$_{26-28}$.

59. THEOPH. I, 464$_{19-20}$.

60. THEOPH. I, 474$_{13-20}$. It should be emphasised that a follis of Constantine the VIth and Irene (780-790) was discovered at Hagios Phloros near Messini on the road connecting Messini and Vulkano in Arcadia. See B. ATHANASOPOULOU-PENNA, Η ζωή στις βυζαντινές πόλεις της Πελοποννήσου· Η

Certainly, one could ask what the creation of the theme of Peloponnese meant in practical terms? Did Irene expect to get soldiers, a fleet or logistic support for the war in Italy? If we observe the sources of the ninth century, we can see that the Peloponnese is mentioned only in the context of Italian military affairs. In 880 an army of the protovestiarios Procopius, sent to Calabria, also had troops from the theme of Peloponnese[61]. On the other hand, the Byzantine admiral Nasar sailed to Methone during the naval operations against the Arabs around 873/74 (?)[62]. In the tenth century, according to the DAI, cavalry units of the theme of Peloponnese had the obligation to participate in the military campaign in Italy[63]. It is very significant that the troops of the Peloponnese, seem never to have been used in the East. Therefore, Irene could expect that the Peloponnese would yield troops, a fleet, and give logistic support for the war in Italy. It seems that this logistic support was the main point during the first years of the existence of the theme of Peloponnese[64].

To conclude. There is a much more greater probability that the theme of Peloponnese was created between 784 and 788. In 784 Irene made a famous trip to Thrace and Macedonia, rebuilding Berrhoe (Stara Zagora), Anchialos and Philippopolis (Plovdiv). It was the logical exploitation of Staurakios' successes. Later on, especially when it became clear that the war with the Franks was on its way (i.e., after the spring of 788, when Grimoald became the vassal of the Franks or more probably already in the late autumn of 786 or spring of 787, when Charles attacked Benevento), the re-organisation of the western part of the Empire occurred. Therefore, it is more likely that the theme of Peloponnese was created between the spring of 786 and winter 788. It was a process which began in 784 and finished before the expedition of the eunuch John in late 788. Then, the definite subjugation of the still independent Slavic tribes was carried out by 805 and with the forces of

νομισματική μαρτυρία (8ος-12ος αι. μ.Χ.), *Μνήμη Martin Jessop Price* 1997, 201, 261; also, Η. ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΑΚΗς - Ναταλία ΠΟΥΛΟΥ-ΠΑΠΑΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΥ, Η Πρωτοβυζαντινή Μεσσήνη (5ος-7ος αιώνες) και προβλήματα της χειροποίητης κεραμικής στην Πελοπόννησο, *Σύμμεικτα* 11, 1997, 316, note 221.

61. GEORG. MONACHUS CONT. 845-11 mentions the strategos of the Peloponnese in the context of a military expedition against the Arabs in Italy.

62. THEOPH. CONT. 304-12-14.

63. *DAI* I, 51-199-204; 52-1-15.

64. Further military strengthening of the theme of Peloponnese occurred in 805, when Patras had been rebuilt to become a naval base because of the ongoing war in Dalmatia against the Franks, and Sparta was garrisoned with the clear intention to keep the Milingoi and Ezeritai in check.

the theme of Peloponnese. The Chronicle of Monemvasia and Arethas actually speak of this last stage of subjugation, while Porphyrogenetus speaks about the Slavic uprising which occured later on, probably in 811[65].

65. The uprising of the Slavs of Achaia could be connected with the "fifth vexation" of Emperor Nicephorus. Accordingly, we believe that the Slavs, who were paroikoi of the metropolis of Patras, revolted soon after the implementation of this law (after spring 810). In accordance with this date, the Arabs mentioned in CM are *kaphiroi* (Καφήρους) settled in the Peloponnese, and they were actually converted; about the *kaphiroi*, see LEMERLE, *La chronique*, 20, note 28. For the "fifth vexation" of the Emperor Nicephorus, see: THEOPH. I, 486$_{29}$-487$_{2}$.

Tibor ŽIVKOVIĆ, Η χρονολογία της δημιουργίας του θέματος Πελοποννήσου

Στην ιστορική επιστήμη υπάρχει, για τη δημιουργία του θέματος Πελοποννήσου, η κυρίαρχη άποψη ότι προέκυψε μεταξύ των ετών 783 και 812, είτε ως διαίρεση του θέματος Ελλάδος είτε ανεξάρτητα από αυτό. Στην παρούσα μελέτη, προσπαθήσαμε να λύσουμε και τα δύο αυτά ζητήματα, της χρονολόγησης και του τρόπου δημιουργίας του θέματος Πελοποννήσου. Το συμπέρασμά μας είναι ότι το θέμα Πελοποννήσου προέκυψε από την διαίρεση του θέματος Ελλάδος. Από την άλλη πλευρά, θεωρήσαμε την χρονολόγησή του στο πλαίσιο των διπλωματικών σχέσεων του Βυζαντίου προς τη Δύση (τους Φράγκους) κατά τη βασιλεία της αυτοκράτειρας Ειρήνης. Εξετάζοντας τις πηγές (Χρονικόν της Μονεμβασίας, Σχόλια του Αρέθα και De Administrando Imperio), συμπεράναμε ότι το θέμα Πελοποννήσου υπήρχε ήδη όταν ανέβηκε στο θρόνο ο Νικηφόρος Α΄ (802). Στα πλαίσια της πολιτικής της Ειρήνης προς τους Φράγκους στην Ιταλία, συμπεράναμε ότι η εκστρατεία του λογοθέτη Σταυρακίου το 783 ήταν η αρχή της πραγματοποίησης ενός ευρύτερου σχεδίου. Περαιτέρω όξυνση των βυζαντινο-φραγκικών σχέσεων, που κορυφώθηκε με την επίθεση του Καρόλου του Μεγάλου εναντίον του Benevento το 786, οδήγησε στην εκστρατεία του ευνούχου Ιωάννη το 788/89 στην Ιταλία. Ως εκ τούτου, συμπεραίνουμε ότι το θέμα Πελοποννήσου δημιουργήθηκε μεταξύ των ετών 784 και 788, στα πλαίσια των προετοιμασιών για τον πόλεμο με τους Φράγκους, πιο συγκεκριμένα μεταξύ του χειμώνα 786 και του καλοκαιριού 788.