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### Byzantium, its Slavic Elements and their Culture (sixth to ninth centuries)

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BYZANTIUM, ITS SLAVIC ELEMENTS AND THEIR CULTURE  
(SIXTH TO NINTH CENTURIES)

καὶ δῆτα ὁ Βουσᾶς τοὺς Ἀβάρους ἐδίδασκε  
συμπήγνυσθαι πολιορκητικὸν τι μηχανήμα  
ἔτι τῶν τοιούτων ὀργάνων ἀμαθεσιτάτους ὑπάρχοντας,  
Theophylactus Simocatta, *Historiae*, II. 16.9-20

πλείστην γὰρ οἱ Σκλάβοι πεῖραν τοῦ κατατολμᾶν  
τῆς θαλάσσης εἰλῆφασιν, ἐξότε τοῖς Ῥωμαίων  
καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐπέθεντο πράγμασι  
Theodore Syncellus, *De obsidione Constantinopolis*

By the sixth-seventh centuries the political horizons of the Byzantine Empire had altered and constricted in the east, north, west and south. The Danube, Nile and much of the Tigris Euphrates river systems had been occupied and crossed by the Arab caliphs and the numerous Slavic tribes as Byzantium was absorbed by the struggle of political and military survival. The Slavs, who occupied the north and central Balkans, had reached the Adriatic and Black Seas, and had begun to overrun much that is present day modern Greece. The Arabs, in a few decades, had removed Byzantine power in Armenia, Byzantine Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypte and north Africa. The Arab conquests were rapid, non-destructive, and preserved much of the ethnic, social, economic and cultural stuctures that Byzantium had left behind.

It is significant that by the ninth century Arabic texts of Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates, and some of Plato had begun to enter the culture of the Arabs. In the Balkans the conquests settlements were not carried out by a strong centralized state, but by numerous Slavic tribal groups which had no higher concept of the state but only that of the tribal chieftains whose loyalties shifted between one or another of the Asiatic peoples such as Avars and Bulgars. The changes which they wrought were abrupt and often destructive. It is interesting to note that the classical Greek heritage, into which

the Muslim Arabs entered as a result of the Byzantine inheritance of the eastern lands, was to come to the Slavs much later and it was to come not from Byzantium but from the West.

Inasmuch as monotheism, alphabet and literature, and an ultimate political theory were to come to many of the South and Eastern Slavs from Byzantine influence and models, modern historians have paid a great deal of attention to the Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius and to the consequences of their missions on the political and cultural foundations of the South and East Slavs as the result of the fact that in the ninth and tenth centuries these began to emerge as societies with a written literature and the nuclei of state foundations<sup>1</sup>. But scholarship as to the nature and history of pre-literate Slavic societies proceeded more laboriously and they remain mysterious because of the limited sources. There arose after World War I a Slavistic scholarship, which was based on linguistics and archaeology, that has begun to draw the contours of these pre-literate societies, among Czech, Polish, Russian and German scholars<sup>2</sup>. The most recent additions and contributions for this knowledge as concerns the South Slavs are the efforts of the late Bulgarian scholar Živka Vyžarova and her «school» of archeology<sup>3</sup>.

The hasty uncovering of an early Slavic cemetery on the grounds of the new museum at Olympia in the early 1960's was the occasion of my early interest in the question of the material remains, and therefore in the material culture of pre-literate Slavic settlements in Greece<sup>4</sup>. That the Slavs had, early (before the liquid metathesis

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1. V. BEŠEVILIEV, *Die Protobulgarische Periode der bulgarischen Geschichte*, Amsterdam 1981; F. DVORNIK, *Les légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance*, Hattiesburg 1981.

2. I. BORKOVSKY, *Die Prager Burg zur Zeit der Premyslidenfürsten*, Prague 1972; W. HENSEL, *Die Slawen im frühen Mittelalter*, Berlin 1965; I. P. RUSSANOVA, *Slavjanskije Drevnosti*, Moscow 1976; Florin CURTA, *The Making of the Slavs. History and Archeology of the Lower Danube Region c. 500-700*, Cambridge 2001; Sp. VRYONIS, 'Η καθ' ἑμᾶς Ἀνατολή, Thessaloniki 1995, 11-82.

3. Živka VUŽAROVA, *Slavjani i Prabŭlgari po dani nekropolite ot VI-XI v na teritorijata na Bŭgarija*, Sofia 1976; *Srednovekovnoto selište S. Garvan. Silistrenski okrug, VI-XI v.*, Sofia 1986; Ljiljana. DONČEVA-PETKOVA, *Bŭlgarski bitova keramika prez rannoto srednovekovie (vtorata polovina na VI-kraja na X v.)*, Sofia 1977. For Greece consult, Ph. MALINGOUDIS, *Σλάβοι στὴ μεσαιωνικὴ Ἑλλάδα*, Thessaloniki 1988; Id., *Studien zu den slavischen Ortsnamen Griechenlands*, Mainz-Wiesbaden 1981; Id., *Ἡ Θεσσαλονικὴ καὶ ὁ κόσμος τῶν Σλάβων*, Thessaloniki 1997.

4. Sp. VRYONIS, The Slavic Pottery (Jars) from Olympia, Greece, in Sp. VRYONIS (ed.), *Byzantine Studies. Essays on the Slavic World and the Eleventh Century*, New Rochelle 1992, 15-42. For a detailed, descriptive analysis of the Slavic finds at Olympia, T. VIDA - Th. VÖLLING, *Das slawische Brandgräberfeld von Olympia*, [Archäologie in Eurasien 9], Rahden 2000. For broader questions of cultural encounter of the Slavs, Al. AVENARIUS, *Die byzantinischen Kultur und die Slawen*, Munich 2000.

had taken place in South Slavic dialects), settled in Greece was established by German Slavist Max Vasmer who had carried out, in situ, a detailed study of Slavic toponyms in Greece, in the earlier part of the twentieth century (though the book was not published until 1941). My interest in the small Slavic cemetery of Olympia coincided with the ninth century Epitomator Strabonis who in commenting on Strabo's description of Elis (region of Olympia) stated: «Salmoneus, Oinomaos, Pelops and the Pelopidai lived in Pisa, which is now called Visa. But today there is not any name of the Pisatai and Kaukones and Pylioi. For all these (lands) are inhabited by Skythians» (a frequent archaism for «Slavs»)<sup>5</sup>.

The question which will concern us here has to do with the nature of pre-literate Slavic society as it is reflected in specific Byzantine texts and in what manner did Slavs acculturate within the Byzantine milieu. On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary celebration of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens (1980) I discussed an important aspect of the acculturation of South Slavs as a result of their political and military contacts with Byzantine authority in the late sixth century. Specifically this limited analysis concerned itself with an investigation of the earliest Byzantine texts which deal with the original military technology at the disposition of the South Slavs and of their early political masters (the Asiatic Avars). The basic texts for this analysis were those of Procopius, Theophylactus Simocatta and the so-called *Strategikon* of Maurice, all of which give us important information of the military technology of the early Slavs<sup>6</sup>.

These earliest descriptions of Avaro-Slavic military campaigns and tactics make no mention whatever of an advanced poliorcetic technology. Aside from the ordinary spears, bows and poisoned arrows they possessed only ladders with the aid of which they hoped to take fortified places or towns. Very often they resorted to faked retreats and withdrawals from fortified places as a result of which the garrisons would be drawn out of the town walls, hoping thus to ensnare the enemy and destroy him in the open field of battle. The walls, henceforth denuded of defenders, were a prey to the besieging Slavs who would ascend the siege ladders under the cover of their numerous archers. In short the Slavs at this stage were not yet in possession of the technology of siege machinery.

In this earlier study the next evidence that was brought to bear were the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios the patron saint of Thessaloniki, the first part of which was composed

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5. M. VASMER, *Die Slaven in Griechenland*, Berlin 1941, 17.

6. Sp. VRYONIS, The Evolution of Slavic Society and the Slavic Invasions in Greece. The First Major Slavic Attack on Thessaloniki A.D. 597, *Hesperia* 50, 1981, 378-390.

by John the archbishop of the city, whose tenure of the archiepiscopal throne spanned the late sixth and earlier part of the seventh century. Herein he describes the dangerous Slavic siege of Thessaloniki that commenced on Sunday of September 22, probably in the year 597. His eyewitness description depicts a fully developed and very effective technology among the Slavic soldiery and one which almost succeeded in taking the great city. He writes: «On the following day, they prepared siege machines, iron battering rams, catapults for throwing stones of enormous size, and the so-called tortoises, onto which, along with the catapults, they placed dry skins ... so that they might not be harmed by fire or boiling pitch. From the third day ... they hurled stones, or rather mountains as they were in size, and the archers shot further, imitating the winter snowfalls, with the result that no one on the wall was able to emerge without danger and thus to see something outside. The tortoises were joined to the wall outside and without restraint were digging up the foundations with levers and axeheads. I think that these numbered more than one thousand»<sup>7</sup>.

Eventually the defenders, by well organized sallies, were able to remove all the many battering rams from the walls' foundations and henceforth had to deal with the formidable ballistae or catapults: «There were tetragonal and rested on broader bases, tapering to narrower extremities. Attached to them were thick cylinders well clad in iron at the ends, and there were nailed to them timbers like beams from a large house. These timbers had the slings hung from the back side and from the front strong ropes, by which, pulling down and releasing the sling, they propel the stones up high and with a loud noise. And on being fired they sent up many great stones so that neither earth nor human constructions could bear the impacts. They also covered those tetragonal ballistae with boards on three sides only, so that those inside, firing them might be wounded with arrows by those on the walls»<sup>8</sup>.

The combination of catapults and battering rams so expertly crafted by the Slavic armies came close to penetrating the walls of Thessaloniki. How was it that the Avaro-Slavs acquired the poliorcetic technology which assisted them in taking walled cities in the Balkans, since originally their siege devices had provided them only with ladders? The answer to this question I found in the accounts of Theophylactus Simocatta who records that they had been able eventually to level the walls of Singidunum, and had captured the walled town of Bongos and were able to take some forty walled fortresses with siege machines. The same historian informs us that about 587 the

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7. P. LEMERLE, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius*, Paris 1979, vols. I-II, especially vol. I, 148-149.

8. LEMERLE, *Miracula* I, 154.

Avaro-Slavs set out to besiege the walled town of Appiarea in Moesia Inferior. They happened to capture, in the course of the siege, the city's military engineer, a soldier by the name Bousas. The latter appealed to the citizens to ransom him lest he be put to death by the Slavs. The citizens refused and subjected him to insults. The military engineer, in order to save his own life and having been insulted, revealed his terrible secret to his captors: «As a price for this stay (of execution) he would turn the fortress over to the barbarians ... Indeed Bousas taught the Avars to construct siege machines, for they happened to be the most ignorant of such machines, and he built the siege machine to hurl missiles. Soon after, the fortress was levelled, and Bousas collected judgement for the latter's inhumanity, having taught the barbarians something frightful, the technology of besieging. Thence the enemy captured effortlessly a great many of the Roman cities by making use of this original device»<sup>9</sup>.

In this communication of 1980, later published, I addressed the matter, discussed in Theophylactus, and the skill which Slavic soldiery demonstrated in the accounts of the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios, as an important element of the cultural adaptation of the South Slavic tribes in their new Byzantine environment.

By way of continuing the theme of Slavic acculturation in the Byzantine environment in the late sixth and seventh century I turn once more to the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios, at least to the first two sections composed respectively by Archbishop John and by an anonymous continuator, both of whom recorded fascinating details in the military, political and economic encounters of local Slavic groups, in the vicinity of Thessaloniki, with the Byzantine environment. The developed Slavic poliorcetic technology which the Archbishop John witnessed and so accurately described in Part One of the *Miracula*, becomes a constant theme and it is evident that the influence of Byzantine military technology had had a profound effect on the South Slavs rendering them even more dangerous to the city of Thessaloniki. There is no point in continuing a descriptive analysis of this aspect of Slavic adaptation to the Byzantine science of poliorcetics. Rather I wish to turn to the realm of maritime navigation and the Slavic adaptation to the Aegean Sea.

One is well aware that the Narentine Slavs readily adapted to local piracy sometime after they overran part of Dalmatia. The same adaptation among certain of the South Slavic groups in the vicinity of Thessaloniki seems to have taken place. These new settlers encountered the Aegean for the first time and thus reacted to the challenge, as had the ancient Greeks some two and one-half thousand years earlier. Procopius has

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9. THEOPHYLACTUS SIMOCATTA, *Historiae*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Stuttgart 1972, II, 16.9-17.

nothing to say of the Slavs and the waters save, «they revere both rivers and nymphs and some other daemons and they sacrifice to all of them»<sup>10</sup>.

The *Strategikon* of Maurice has a little more to say about their relation to the waters: «They are experienced beyond all men in the crossing of rivers and bravely endure the waters. Often some of them, while in their own land, are surprised by trouble and, diving into the depth of the water, hold canes in their mouth made long especially for this and hollowed throughout, reaching up to the surface of the water, lying on their backs in the deep, they breath through them and it is sufficient for many hours, so that no suspicion of them arises. But even if it should transpire that the canes are seen from outside it is supposed by the inexperienced that they are one with the water. Wherefor those who are experienced in this, recognizing the cut and position of the cane, either stab their mouth with them or taking them away, bring them up from the water as they are no longer able to remain in it»<sup>11</sup>.

In this case Theophylactus confirms the great riverine familiarity of the South Slavs in some detail. Specifically the Avar khan of the Avaro-Slavs relied heavily on Slavic boat builders to supply his armies with the river boats in order to cross the Danube and to attack the towns of the empire. When he decided to proceed to the attack of Singidunum the inhabitants of the city organized raids so as to burn the boats being shaped by the Slavs for the attack. Thus when he wished to cross the river Save he once more ordered the Slavs to furnish the river boats for the campaign. Mousocius, a Slavic chieftain, disposed of some 150 such river boats called monoxyles (boats carved out of the single trunk of a tree). But it seems that most of these river boats, the monoxyles, were of modest dimensions and not suitable for sailing in the open sea, though it is not clear whether the term monoxyle is used to designate something a little more ambitious. Ships designed for maritime purposes had to have a deep keel so that they would not be easily overturned by the rough seas. Generally, Byzantine authors do not use the term monoxyle to denote maritime vessels. One must assume that the original South Slavic monoxyles were unable to sail the open and rough waters of the Aegean Sea.

It is to the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios that one must turn, once more, in order to catch a glimpse of this early encounter of certain South Slavic groups with the Aegean Sea and with its environment. In particular the relevant documents come from Part Two of the *Miracula* written by an anonymous author sometimes after the middle of the seventh century. The first miracle of which he speaks is said to have transpired in

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10. PROCOPIUS, *De bello gothico*, ed. J. HAURY - G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1962, III, 14.22-30.

11. *Strategikon* of Maurice, ed. MICHAESCÛ, *Arta Militara*, Bucharest 1970, 278, 280.

the olden days of Archbishop John, therefore considerably before the author's time, whereas the second section we shall consider transpired between 676 and 678, more than three-quarters of a century after the Slavic attack on Thessaloniki in 597. Both the events and the relevant *termini technici* are relevant for the purposes of this discussion, and we must keep in mind that the anonymous author of this Second Part of the *Miracula* has introduced some misleading anachronisms in the account of the event he dates to the time of Archbishop John.

Let us turn to the first miracle he attributes to the patron saint of Thessaloniki. Here the author describes a very extensive attack that took place about 614 A.D.<sup>12</sup>, when the ruler of the Slavs Chatzon brought massive land forces and also 'naval' forces to the siege. The section that describes the siege is subtitled: «Περὶ τῆς κατασκευῆς τῶν πλοίων τῶν Δρογουβιτῶν, Σαγουδατῶν, Βελεγεσιτῶν καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν»

The text proceeds to inform the audience on the shipbuilding activities of the new South Slavic settlers at the edge of the Aegean Sea and at the mouths of the rivers which empty into it: «There occurred, as it is said at the time that John, of Holy memory, held the episcopal throne that there arose the nation of the Sklavinoi and a vast multitude of Drougovitai, Sagoudatai, Velegezitai, Vaiounitai, Verzitai and other nations was assembled, that is all those who discovered how to make carved boats out of single trees. Having outfitted themselves for the sea and having sacked all Thessaly and the islands surrounding it and Hellas, and in addition to the Cycladic Islands all Achaia and Epirus, most of Illyricum and a part of Asia, and having rendered uninhabited very many towns and eparchies, they all decided to array themselves against our aforementioned and Christ-loving city and to sack it like all the rest. And having thus come to an agreement on this they built very numerous boats each carved out of a single tree» (κατασκεύασαν ἐκ μονοδένδρων γλυπτὰς νῆας)<sup>13</sup>.

In short the anonymous author describes how the numerous small Slavic entities now settled within easy reach of the Aegean first devised the craft of hewing and carving a boat out of a single tree trunk. Having thus prepared themselves for the sea, they proceeded to plunder the coasts of much of central and southern Greece, the Greek islands, and parts of western Asia Minor in their «ships carved from one tree each», the well known monoxyle. The anonymous would have us believe that the South Slavs spread out over all the Aegean Sea in these small monoxyles. Many scholars have followed this text in a rather unguarded fashion, and we shall return to it.

12. LEMERLE, *Miracula* II, 92-93 on all the above.

13. LEMERLE, *Miracula* I, 175.



Chatzon had co-ordinated an attack which sought to isolate the city both on the land and on the sea, and it is to the latter that we shall momentarily turn our attention. The Slavic sailors took time to prepare their boats for the all-out attack on the walled city and so withdrew to a little port on the bay of Thessaloniki. Here they put their boats in shape for the synchronised attack on the city's walls both by land and sea. In this preparation for the sea attack: «The Slavic sailors carried out plans of placing planks and animal skins atop their boats so as to protect the oarsmen from the stones (thrown) from the walls they were going to approach, or to free them from the weapons that would be firing at them»<sup>14</sup>.

Simultaneously they sent out boats to survey the sea walls of Thessaloniki in an effort to find their weakest areas. On the fourth day of the siege their leader gave the signal for the all-out attack which on the land side was marked by the violent attack of the various and numerous siege machines. On the sea the Slavic boats set out to attack the city at two points: (a) At the tower to the west of the ecclesiastical port where there was a side gate, and (b) at the unwalled section of the shore where the defenders had prepared a camouflaged ditch with a machine with spikes. The fleet of small Slavic ships proceeded, with their attached, protective roofs, to the attack. Unfortunately for them the attacking ships were not able to maintain their lines and order and soon fell into a state of chaotic disorder: «So it came about that they fell on one another and some of the boats were overturned and thus the Slavs in these boats were thrown out into the sea. Some, swimming about, sought to save themselves in some of the other boats and grabbing hold of it (*sic*) he overturned that boat and also threw into the sea the Slavs who were in it. The captains of the remaining (Slavic) boats cut off, with their swords, the hands of those stretching out to the still floating boats, other captains cut off the heads, and still other (captains) pierced such (sailors) with their spears. And so it was each one who sought after his own salvation became the enemy of the others»<sup>15</sup>.

Those sailors who made it to the unwalled shore fell into the camouflaged ditch and onto the machine with the spikes, whereas the remainder who had survived the catastrophe of the fleet made it to the tower and side gate only to be slain there by an attack of the defenders. The remainder of the surviving boats had beached themselves on the sands and could not be drawn back out to sea. The *Miracula* related that the entire sea view had turn red from the blood of the barbarians and as the wind began to blow they could not row any of the boats out to sea, but the remaining boats

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14. LEMERLE, *Miracula* I, 167.

15. LEMERLE, *Miracula* I, 176-178.

managed to make their way by hugging the shore to the west and the east. «And many of the bodies of the barbarians were thrown up on the sand and against the walls».

The internal contradiction of this part of the anonymous narrator is striking. In the beginning he speaks of a Slavic naval prowess which, by the use of the monoxyles, had navigated the rough Aegean Sea and had proceeded to the ravaging and destruction of much of the Greek speaking world that lived around the Aegean basin. Yet the detailed description of the naval sector of the siege of Thessaloniki in about 614, shows complete disaster due to the lack of any maritime skills on the part of the Slavic sailors and boat builders. Their ineptness emerges in every one of the details of the naval fiasco of this expedition. First, they did not know how to manoeuvre their ships ... they fell onto one another, sinking many of their own boats. Second, the monoxyle was so unseaworthy that one drowning sailor could overturn the monoxyle simply by grabbing it and pulling down on it. This speaks to the smallness of the monoxyle as well as to its lack of a deep keel. The lack of experience in manoeuvring ships, and in building seacraft that could navigate the rough seas was not yet in the possession of the Slavic settlers. How then could they sail off and sack the entire maritime world of Greek speakers who, living on the Aegean now from some two and one-half millenia, had complete knowledge and the technology for dealing with their maritime environment? The bay of Thessaloniki was well protected and should not have presented the Slavs with such difficulties if they had had appropriate ships and knowledge. The Slavic experience with waters had to do with rivers and lakes and their small boats were appropriate for these milder waters. The South Slavs had encountered the sea, now, but they had not mastered the body of maritime knowledge and technology necessary for an accomodation with this new aspect of the forces of nature. And it is obvious that in this particular miracle the anonymous author has committed a gross anachronism for the Slavs were to learn about the sea from their neighbouring Byzantine populations, as they had learned the technology of siege warfare from a local urban, Byzantine engineer. In this early military encounter with the sea these groups of Slavs had experienced a total and bloody disaster in an engagement where the Byzantine military fleet was not even present.

The South Slavs of the region of Thessaloniki seem to have made the transition from their small riverine monoxyles to seaworthy vessels by the third quarter of the seventh century as we learn, again from the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios. In the Fourth Miracle related by our anonymous author we have to do with one of the many South Slav reges or kings as the Byzantine sources tell us. Though he is connected with the Slavs of the Strymon, the Rhynchinos, and the Sagoudatai, he prefers to live in the great metropolis of Thessaloniki, he speaks Greek and seems to have dressed in the

Byzantine manner. He was accused of plotting a rebellion against the emperor, and was sent off to Constantinople where the emperor, busily preparing for his wars with the Arabs, kept him under close watch. The name of this small king was Perbundos and he had close ties not only with the local Slavs, many of whom recognised him as their leader, but also with many of the citizens of Thessaloniki. The local Byzantine eparch had accused, to the emperor, this king of the local Slavs of Rhynchinos, as having conspired against Thessaloniki. Upon his arrival there the local Slavs of both Rhynchinos and the Strymon, along with representatives of Thessaloniki, sent a mission to Constantinople to plead for the life of Perbundos. Eventually Perbundos fled the capital and continued his conspiracy. Eventually he was recaptured and executed. The result was the rising of the Slavs of Strymon, Rhynchinos and the Sagoudatai and their decision to set a long siege to Thessaloniki.

The local Slavs, in apportioning the labors of war and attack, ordained that the Slavs of the Strymon should raid and plunder the regions to the east and north of the city, and the Sagoudatai and Slavs of the Rhynchinos should attack those regions to the west of the city and that they should raid, with their «yoked» vessels (*=διὰ τῶν ἐσευγγμένων νηῶν*) the adjacent seas on a daily basis. These military and naval raids and attacks were maintained for the next two years during which there were three to four attacks or raids every day. The inhabitants of the city were the daily witnesses and mourners to and for the citizens slain both on land and sea for this long period. Eventually the city, thus locked up from both within and without began to suffer the pains of hunger and began to eat the domestic animals and even the nettles. The Slavs had seized the nearby rural churches and used them as outposts to slay all those who dared come out of the walls to scavenge for food, and the Slavic monoxyles, hidden under the overhanging cliffs and secret places would rush out to attack solitary boats and kill those attempting to derive some small source of food (fish) and they would slay them all.

Then the city council and the citizens decided to send out, secretly, ten sea ships, the remaining boats and the monoxyles to the Slavic tribe of the Velegezites in the districts of Thebes (of Phthiotas) and Demetrias in order to purchase grain. For, it is related, the Slav Velegezites of Thessaly had an agreement for peace. Seeing that the Thessalonians were sorely pressed by hunger, the Slavs of the region of Thessaloniki decided to organize a full, developed siege of the city hoping thus to take it in its weakened state. It is of interest that the boats in the local Slavic fleet were no longer the monoxyles of old but a new, for the Slavs, type of ship called *ζευκρός* (yoked, or, made by carpenters), which was adapted to the needs of true maritime movement and warfare. The anonymous author relates that finally the Slavic attacks were thwarted

and the appearance of the imperial army and imperial grain ships so strengthened the citizens that the Slavs fled in disorder abandoning their booty and siege machines. But the fleet of the Slavs of Strymon and Rhynchinos, after having abandoned the siege, began to seek Byzantine shipping on the open seas with, as the text says, their «yoked (or carpenter made) ships». «They plundered very many of the ships that were used to collect supplies and to bring them to Constantinople, all the way from the islands, the narrow sea (the Dardanelles), the regions about Parion and Prokonessos and of the ships in the customs itself. Having enslaved these they return home with very many ships, to their lairs». It was precisely this military/piratical activity on the high seas which caused the emperor to send the imperial army and fleet to disperse the Slavs (the emperor was most probably Constantine IV who had just concluded a peace with the Arabs).

The text shows, clearly, that the Slavs had fashioned a new type of ship, unlike the older and crude monoxyles which were suitable only for rivers and for shallow coastal movement, the *ζευκτὰς ναῦς*. And as we see it was quite capable of carrying out raids and attacks on the high Aegean seas, particularly along the shipping lanes that lead from the Aegean toward Constantinople. The Slavs were finally at their ease in the Aegean Sea, and had learned the ropes from the local maritime technology.

It is interesting to note, first, that the text of the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios differentiates between the term *μονόξυλα* on the one hand, and the terms *ἐζεργμῆναι νῆες*, *ζευκταὶ νῆες*, *ζευκτὰ πλοῖα*. Paul Lemerle, in his translation, rendered these two forms of the verb *ζεύγνυμι*, by the French «navires charpentés», that is to say ships put together with different pieces of wood<sup>16</sup>. His implication is that these later Slavic ships were different from the monoxyles and thus in some line of evolution in terms of maritime technology. It would be relevant to inspect other texts to see what specific or technical meaning the basic verb *ζεύγνυμι* and its derivatives might have in a Byzantine maritime context and in the history of this complex of lexical derivatives of the verb.

Generally this verb means: to yoke, bridge, pair. It also, by extension, could mean to fit or to bind. The unabridged Liddell-Scott Greek lexicon gives two similar meanings that have very specific reference to furnishing or strengthening ships. One of these references is a locus classicus. In the famed episode between Corcyra and Corinth, which set off the Peloponnesian War, the former had repaired their aged

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16. LEMERLE, *Miracula* I, 169-170, 200.

battle-ships: καὶ τὰς ναῦς ἅμα ἐπλήρουν, ζεύξαντές τε τὰς παλαιὰς ὥστε πλωίμους εἶναι καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἐπισκευάσαντες<sup>17</sup>.

One notes first the balance between ζεύξαντες and ἐπισκευάσαντες. The latter word is to be translated «having repaired» but the former word is much more loaded for if they had not ζεύξαντες the older ships would have been unable to navigate on the sea. Liddell-Scott has translated this passage in its relevant section, as follows: «having strengthened with thwarts (seats)». The translator of this passage in the Loeb ext, C. M. Smith translates more specifically: «having previously strengthened the old vessels with cross beams so as to make them seaworthy».

In the Avaro-Slav siege of Constantinople in late August-early September 626, the texts of Theodore Syncellus, George of Pisidia and the *Paschal Chronicle* relate that the Avar ruler brought a considerable number of Slavic monoxyles from Danubian region, overland, and put them into the sea at Halai on the European shore of the Bosphorus and in the western shallows and rocks of the Golden Horn (where they would be safe from attack by the larger Byzantine triremes and biremes which could not venture into the shallow waters)<sup>18</sup>. Both groups of monoxyles were utterly destroyed, and their crews with them, by the Byzantine ships. This is indicative, once more, that the Slavic sailors were hindered by their continued reliance on such boats outfitted to operate primarily in riverine environments and shallows. George of Pisidia, in his poetic rendition of the land and sea battles makes an interesting observation as to the arrangement of the monoxyles just prior to their fatal clash with the Byzantine fleet in the westernmost Golden Horn: ἐκεῖ γὰρ ὥσπερ ἐν θαλάττῃ δίκτυον τὰ γλυπτὰ συζεύξαντες ἥπλωσαν σκάφη (and there (in view of the church of the Panagia Vlacherna) did they spread out, like some net in the sea, their carved ships, and they linked (tied) them the one to the other)<sup>19</sup>.

17. THUCYDIDES, I, 29.

18. The texts are conveniently collected in *Grčki Izvori za bugarskata istorija*, ed. J. DUJČEV, Genoveva CANKOVA-PETKOVA, Vasilka T. PKOVA-ZAIMOVA, L. JONČEV, Petar TIVČEV, Sofia 1960, vol. VI-3: THEODORE SYNCELLUS, 41-55, GEORGE OF PISIDIA, 57-67, *Paschal Chronicle*, 77-84. For the broader subject see, Fr. BARIŠIĆ, Le siège de Constantinople par les Avars et les Slaves en 616, *Byzantion* 24, 1954, 371-395; V. GRUMEL, La défense maritime de Constantinople du côté de la Corne d'Or et le siège des Avars, *BSI* 25, 1964, 217-233; J. D. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, The Siege of Constantinople in 626, in C. MANGO - G. DAGRON (eds.), *Constantinople and Its Hinterland*, Aldershot 1995, 131-142; the detailed account of A. STRATOS, *Tò Buzávntion stòn Z' aiōna*, B', 626-634, Athens 1966, 491-542, and especially 524-529, is noteworthy. His analysis of the sources on the events in the Golden Horn is careful and convincing.

19. Giorgio di Pisidia, *Poemi. I. Panegirici epici*, a cura di A. PERTUSI, Ettal 1959, 196.446-447. See also his notes on p. 196, and his careful commentary on the text on pp. 223-224.

There can be no doubt that this form of the verb *συζεύξαντες* means to tie or to bind, and further the use of the simile of the net thrown into the sea means an instrument which is «tied together» at regular, small intervals. It was a tactic applied in order to keep the small monoxyles from losing their order and falling upon one another. But the use of the verb in its compound form indicates that the use of the simple word would not have conveyed the meaning of «being tied or bound together».

Important, also, is the text of Psellos' *Chronographia* which describes the naval battle between the Russian fleet of monoxyles (whatever the word may have come to mean by this late time) and the imperial fleet sent out by the emperor Constantine IX in 1043<sup>20</sup>. Finding that the warships immediately at hand were insufficient, the emperor had to gather, quickly whatever ships he had: *Ὅθεν ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ λείψανά τινα τοῦ παλαιοῦ στόλου συνηθροικῶς, καὶ ταῦτα δὴ ζεύξας* (whence the emperor gathered some remnants of the old fleet, and having refitted them ...) <sup>21</sup>.

In this case we have a derivative of the simple verb *ζεύγνυμι* and its use is precisely that of Thucydides in describing the refitting or strengthening of the older battleships by the Corcyreans. In both cases there is a technical procedure of strengthening older ships so that they can undertake a type of naval warfare which involved, among other things, violent ramming, and which involved grappling and boarding enemy warships.

These usages in Psellos and Thucydides are very specific and would seem somehow to differ from the epithets of *ζευκταὶ* and *ἐζευγμέναι* in the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios as to the Slavic ships of the latter seventh century.

The derivatives of the verb utilized in the *Miracula* are all in the plural and do not appear, at least in the texts available today, in connection with Byzantine ships. Two possible explanations, but they remained unconfirmed, emerge from the examination of the lexical matter itself. The first is the possibility that the new Slavic boats were two or more which were bound together and which would serve first to enlarge their capacity, and second to give a kind of maritime stability to two or more bound monoxyles in the open sea. Or, they were no longer ships simply carved out of one tree trunk, but were either compound ships with the structures similar to other seagoing craft, or they could have had an adjusted body carved out of one tree-trunk but with a number of added features which would give it a somewhat better maritime ability. Still, the *Miracula* text applies these type epithets to describe only Slavic boats

20. On the latter see the insightful commentary of Dimitri Obolensky in R. J. H. JENKINS (ed.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio*, II. *Commentary*, London 1962, 23-25, where he brings to bear the additional information in Russian sources on the monoxyles and their variety.

21. M. PSELLOS, *Chronographie*, ed É. RENAULT, Paris 1928, vol. II, 10.

(with exception of the coastal monoxyles used by Byzantines for coastal trade). Such was the case of the Russian monoxyles that descended the rapids of the Russian rivers (where they could be disassembled) and carried overland, and then reassembled when in the presence of the seas. But the Byzantine texts do not refer to these as *ἐξευγμέναι νῆες*<sup>22</sup>.

One must await further lexical and archeological research on this matter. But it would seem that the Slavic maritime technology of the latter seventh century succeeded in making a considerable adaptation in terms of technological details in their meeting with the Aegean Sea. However their performance in the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus during the Avaro-Slavic siege of Constantinople was a complete disaster<sup>23</sup>. Half a century later their *ἐξευγμέναι νῆες* were regularly raiding Byzantine shipping, both governmental and private in the Aegean and in open view of the customs house of Abydos.

In these two cases, military poliorcetic and in maritime technology, the newly settled Slavs had begun to be influenced by Byzantine military and maritime technology.

But there are other details, especially in the narrative concerning Perboundos, that indicate that acculturation was taking other forms as well. As we saw Perboundos had become bicultural to a certain extent: he lived in Thessaloniki, he spoke Greek, and dressed Byzantine, but he also had close relations with the citizens and members of the city council of Thessaloniki. His rural Slavic subjects cooperated with the Thessalonians in sending an embassy to Constantinople to plead for the life of Perboundos. When the Slavic king was executed, the local Slavs indicated that their acculturation was limited politically and so they besieged the city for two years. The local authorities had no assistance from the emperor as the latter was involved in military operations against the Arabs who constituted an immediate danger to the entire empire. But the city of Thessaloniki seems to have had a peace agreement with yet another Slavic tribe, which was located in the Thessalian plain and so sent to them for grain. Here one sees an important economic accommodation and acculturation of beligerant Slavic tribes. As the principal urban and economic center Thessaloniki was an important center of consumption and so was also a principal customer and market for Slavic produce. Yet the Thessalonians who went with the ships to acquire grain feared that if the Velegezitai got wind of the siege which had just broken out the local Slavs might murder them.

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22. *Ibid.*

23. STRATOS, *op. cit.*

By the latter seventh century these Slavic groups, which had entered the Greek peninsula, had established themselves on the land with their animals and were engaged in agricultural production, and so found economic demand in such markets as that of Thessaloniki to their advantage. Also they were settled within a society and land which was far more developed in most aspects, and this too was attractive. From the few Slavic graves that have been excavated in Greece, but much more from those Slavic cemeteries excavated in Bulgaria, we see that the material culture of the early Slavs did not even have the potter's wheel in the late sixth century, something that had been around for some two thousand years.

By the ninth, tenth and eleventh century we see that there has developed a full cultural adaptation of many such Slavic settlements, and that in some cases this was well on the way to socio-cultural absorption into the local society. But before this came to prevail there was an intermediate period when the strong cultural and semi-political identity of these newly settled Slavic communities is clearly evident.

The invasions and settlements of Slavs in Byzantine lands in various parts of the Byzantine empire resulted in the appearance of several smaller «Sklaviniai». The use of this term both in the singular and plural by the sources implied the existence of separate and compact Slavic communities in the Balkans each of which had its own social organization and chiefs, as well as its own military bodies. Usually these Sklaviniai were interspersed among the older Byzantine populations with whom they had relations of sorts as well as with Constantinople and its provincial representatives. The sudden settlement of compact Slavic groups within the matrix of an older population produced hostile, and often violent relations much as the new settlers were still in a heroic or epic, pre-literate stage in which warfare, raids, booty, banditry and piracy were preeminent. We have seen, above, how this tribal mode and technology of warfare began to undergo transformation in military and maritime matters. We have already seen the manner in which these relations also took on a very important economic aspect as in the example of the Thessalonian successful effort to buy agricultural provisions from the Sklavinia of the Velegezitai in Thessaly, with which Sklavinia the inhabitants of Thessaloniki had made peace agreements while they were at war with the local Sklavinias west of Thessaloniki. Finally we have already caught a glimpse of the efforts of the centralized state to impose its political will on some of these Sklavinias when the emperor Constantine IV sent out a major expedition to reduce them to peace and order.

If the state were to survive during the great crisis of the seventh century it had to take military measures not only against the great Arab threat and later that of the newly founded Bulgarian kingdom, but it had to find time to restrain and to subject,



often repeatedly, these small Sklavinias lest the state begin to dissolve from the internal decomposition of the state. This involved a military reduction of the disobedients and some kind of formal incorporation of their separate societies into the state structure. Thus the individual Sklavinias were faced, before the pressure of the Byzantine state, to choose from three possibilities: a) A struggle to remain completely independent of the Byzantine state; b) Essentially to accept incorporation of the newly founded Bulgarian kingdom –a realistic possibility only for those Sklavinias near the Bulgarian borders; c) Acculturation to the local Byzantine society and incorporation of an official nature into the local administrative system, but with the rights of maintaining their local chiefs or archontes.

Unlike the vast bureaucratic state of Byzantium with its political theory of one God, one state, one law, most groups of Sklaviniai within the territories of the now reduced Byzantine borders had no overall institution or ruler so as to be able to coordinate the total demographic strength of the Sklavenoi in the Peloponnese, in central Greece, in Macedonia and Thrace. Accordingly their military efforts against the Byzantine state were of a circumscribed local nature, and as a result this most serious failure (they had failed to take Thessaloniki) was that they had no reliable, contiguous demographic base on which to amass larger and more effective military forces. The Bulgarian state appeared only in the latter part of the seventh century and in the beginning had to concentrate on absorption of its own Slavic groups and on the incessant wars with Byzantium which, in the critical reign of Constantine V were disastrous for Bulgaria. The presence of Sklavinias on the Byzantino-Bulgarian boundaries rendered those regions particularly susceptible to Bulgarian bids on these Sklavinias, but as one goes further south the realities for the Bulgarian state were quite otherwise. By the tenth and eleventh centuries the Bulgarian state first weakened and then disappeared.

Though the troubled conditions of the Byzantine state in the face of the tremendous Arab offensives of the seventh century allowed the local Sklavinias considerable freedom to indulge their activities of banditry on land and piracy on the sea, as well as occasional sieges of Thessaloniki, they were never sufficient to lead to the foundation of an independent state.

In 688/9 the emperor Justinian II carried out a successful military expedition against the Bulgarians but also against the Sklaviniai, going as far as Thessaloniki and took away captives a very large number of the Sklavenoi. These he settled in the theme of Opsikion in northwestern Asia Minor and from which he raised a special army of some 30,000. Unfortunately for the emperor this substantial army of 30,000 deserted to the caliphal armies in their first military encounter and on his return to Bithynia Justinian

is said to have slain their families. Much later, in 762, 208,000 Sklavenoi are said to have settled<sup>24</sup>.

Some twenty years later (782-3) in the reign of Constantine VI and his mother Irene the government sent out a major military force the purpose of which was, once more, to subdue the local Sklaviniai, under the direction of the Logothete Stavrakios. It proved to be succesful, at least for the immediate future, as he forced the Sklavenoi of the region of Thessaloniki and central Greece to pay their taxes to the government, and in Peloponnese he succeeded in taking away extensive numbers of the local Slavs and taking great booty at their expense. In the following year he was allowed to celebrate his victories in the Constantinopolitan hippodrome during the course of the horse races. This and other such encounters of the imperial armies and of the local administrative officials indicate that the impetus of such measures arose from the insistance of the government that the local Slavs fulfill their obligations to the state, and the resistance on the part of these Slavs was due to the that fact they wished to be free of all such obligations. But that they were already well advanced in some formal integration into the local political situation emerges from the incidents attendant on the Byzantine civil strife between the empress Irene and her son Constantine VI. For in 798/9 Akamir, archon of the Sklavenoi of Velzetia (in Thessaly), conspired with the Byzantines of the Helladikon (district of central Greece) to free (in Athens) the imprisoned sons of Constantine VI and to replace Irene with one of them. Irene, herself an Athenian sent her nephew Theophylact Sarantopochis (also a noble Athenian familly) who succeeded to blind all the conspirators<sup>25</sup>. This close political connection of the archon of the Thessalian Slavic tribe with members of the leading citizens of Athens in a plot to replace the empress in Constantinople indicates the degree to which the Sklaviniai had been incorporated into the political life of both the provincial administration and of the imperial office itself.

At the same time certain of the Sklaviniai rebelled against the payment of taxes, or tribute, to Constantinople, against performance of obligations to the state and persisted in acts of banditry on the land and of piracy on the sea. Here the testimony of Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the *De Administrando Imperio*, makes the case quite clear where he speaks of three substantial state interventions in the ninth and in the tenth century. These interventions consisted of military expeditions of the state as well as of military actions on the part of the local Greek inhabitants to put an end to the

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24. THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Hildesheim 1963, vol. I, 364-366; *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople*, Short History, text, translation and commentary by C. MANGO, Washington 1960, 140, 220.

25. THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, I, 473-474.

violation of local security as well as insubordination against the authority of the state. The first of these rebellions broke out and ended between 802-811 and was carried out by the Slavs of the northern Peloponnese in alliance with Arab corsairs. The Slavs of Achaëa first attacked the dwellings of their Greek neighbors in the rural areas and then proceeded to attack the area around the city of Patras before settling down to the siege of the city. As the siege was protracted and the citizens were beginning to suffer from lack of provisions they sent word to the Byzantine strategos, whose center was at Corinth, to send supplies and his army. But before these reached Patras the local forces had succeeded in routing the Slavs and so they managed, by themselves not only to defend the city but also to defeat their attackers. Upon receipt of the news the strategos notified the emperor in Constantinople, that is Nicephorus I, who replied that inasmuch as the victory was due to the intervention of Patras' patron Saint Andrew the entirety of the attacking Slavs and their families were dedicated to the perpetual service of the ecclesiastical metropolis there to serve the metropolitan and all foreign embassies as well as state missions, from the estates and wealth of the local Slavs themselves. And so the political integration was intensified through the arm of the church and through the local administration of Patras itself<sup>26</sup>.

The problem of the disobedience of the Slavs in the Peloponnese appears once more in the reigns of Theophilus and his son Michael III (841/2): «Rebelling they became autonomous and busied themselves with robbery, enslaving, the taking of booty, arson and theft. And so in the reign of Michael the son of Theophilus, the protospatharius Theoktistus Vryennius was sent out as strategos in the theme of the Peloponnese with a substantial force of Thracians, Macedonians and of the western themes in order to make war on and to subdue them. And he subdued all the Slavs of the Peloponnese there and others who had been insubordinant ... And the protospatharius and general of the Peloponnese Theoktistus, having been able to subdue also the Milingoi and the Ezeritai, he imposed on the former a tax of 60 nomismata and on the latter a tax of 300 nomismata»<sup>27</sup>.

By 921, in the time of Romanus I, the particular Slavic tribes of the Milingoi and Ezeritai, safely ensconced on the heights of mount Taygetos, were again the source of local disturbances and «refused to obey the strategos and they refused to heed the imperial order. They conduct themselves as though they were autonomous and self-governing. They refused to any archon appointed by the strategos nor do they deign

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26. CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. G. MORAVCSIK-R. J. H. JENKINS [CFHB 1], Washington 1967 (hereafter *DAI*), 228-233.

27. *DAI*, 232.

to perform military service with him, nor do they undertake to perform any duty to the imperial treasury...»<sup>28</sup>.

Constantine VII relates that the new strategos of the Peloponnese Krinites Arotas crushed their rebellion in a military campaign that lasted from March until November during the course of which the two Slavic tribes suffered the burning of all their crops and the pillaging of all their lands: «Seeing thence their complete destruction they negotiated for peace by submitting to them (the government's troops) and asking for the pardon of their previous crimes. But the aforementioned ... general Krinites placed on them a tribute (tax?) larger than that they had previously paid ... so that the tribute of the Milingoï was 600 nomismata and that which he placed on the Ezeritai ... was 600...»<sup>29</sup>.

These two tribes seem to have survived as socio-ethnic groups longer than the other Slavs of Peloponnese, and this undoubtedly due to the fact that they were very difficult to access. But it was not so much a matter of political independence as a matter of avoiding responsibilities to the local and state authorities. Eventually they were fully assimilated into a larger political society that by the fourteenth through the fifteenth centuries became ever more fragmented.

And what of the Sklavinoi of the regions of Thessaloniki, whom we followed in the *Miracula* of St. Demetrios well into the latter half of the seventh century?

When in 904 the Arab fleet, under the leadership of the Byzantine renegade Leo of Tripoli, was sighted en route to sack Thessaloniki, the strategos of Thessaloniki immediately notified the Byzantine strategos of Strymon to send an extensive body of Slavic archers to help man the walls of the city against the pending Saracen siege of the city. The reaction of the Strymonian Slavs was sluggish and very few responded to the order despite the fact that the authorities of Thessaloniki repeatedly and urgently sent out the demand. The response was so weak as to be disheartening. Cameniatas paints a picture of Thessaloniki and its hinterland on the eve of the siege which reflects conditions quite different from those which had prevailed in the late sixth and throughout much of the seventh century when the Slavic tribes were indulging in disruptive raids and attacks, sieges, banditry and piracy: «We shall, to the degree possible, depict the condition of the plain to the west of the city. This other plain, which begins from the wall of the Ekbole and which leads up to the mountain on the right, and on the left is bounded by the sea, is a veritable sight by virtue of its beauty. There the plain is moistened by the waters and it boasts to having as neighbor both

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28. *DAI*, 232.

29. *DAI*, 234.

the city and the sea, and is crowned by vineyards, trees ... and gardens, as well as by dwellings and by very many reverent sanctuaries most of which are shared by flocks of monks which are exercised in every type of virtue and who live only in God...At that point the plain leads to dry land which though it is treeless is nevertheless covered by vegetation and which is felicitous for agricultural activity. The land reaches out to the west up to some great and high mountains where a certain city, Berroia by name, was settled, and it also is very famous as to its inhabitants and in all other things of which a city can boast. In the midst of this plain (to the west of Thessaloniki) there is located a number of villages of which one group pays its taxes to Thessaloniki (and its inhabitants are called Drougouvitai and Sagoudatai), and the other group pays its taxes to the nations of the Scythians (Bulgars), especially when they are all at peace and when they do not resort to those weapons which arouse battles ... And in a lively community they exchange the necessities, thus preserving a wondrous and deep peace among themselves. Certain very large rivers which arise in the land of the Scythians (Bulgars) and which share the plain, they also produce an abundance to the city with their multitude of fish and by the ability of merchant vessels to ascend them (the rivers) so that there flows from these waters a varied income of the necessities»<sup>30</sup>.

By 804 the *modus vivendi* between the local Slavic and older Byzantine populations had been regulated internally, the various Slavic groups had been tightly integrated into Byzantine society and their acculturation had proceeded apace. They were incorporated in the realms of the local economy, of political, administrative and military relations as well as by integration through religious conversion. Their relations to the neighboring Bulgarian state were regulated by the treaties between the two states as well as by local commercial and economic practices. They participated in the local political relations through the dealings of their archontes with the local Byzantine strategos or with his representative. Their religious hierarchs and priests were integrated in the bureaucratic structure of the church. They still retained their language which, in contrast to the case of the Slavs in central Greece and the Peloponnese, bordered on a massive linguistic Slavic reservoir just on the other side of the borders between Byzantium and the Bulgarian kingdom. As for their tribal identity Constantine Porphyrogenitus remarks in the *De Thematibus*, on the theme of Strymon: «The theme of Strymon was organized within that of Macedonia and there is no (early) mention concerning a theme for it was then reckoned to be a *kleisoura*. Scythians

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30. IOANNIS CAMENIATAE, *De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, ed. G. BÖHLIG, Berlin 1973, 7-8; on Cameniatas' description of the Slavs, see R. A. NASLEDOVA, *Makedonski Slavjane kontsa IX-nachala X v. po dannym Ioanna Kameniaty*, *Viz. Vrem.* 11, 1956, 82-97.

(Slavs) instead of Macedonians now dwell in it as Justinian (II) Rhinotmetos settled them in the mountains of Strymon and in...the kleisourai”<sup>31</sup>.

We see that the governmental institutionalization of the administrative obligations of the Sklaveniai is manifested in the systems of enforced military service, payment of taxes or tribute, and in the performance of public obligations, all of which are noted in the writings of Constantine Porphyrogenitus. The rebellion of older Byzantine populations against many of these obligations is also to be seen, as witnessed in the novellae of Justinian I concerning the Anatolia provinces. Thus there were entire village complexes, often in mountainous regions, which refused to pay their taxes and resisted tax collector attempts by taking up arms against the agents and troops of central government<sup>32</sup>. In this respect the general obedience of the inhabitants was always a problem for the central government.

One last glance of the military absorption of Slavic settlers in Anatolia will serve to show how the system functioned. In the large amada which was organised in an effort to retake Crete from the Arabs in 949, Constantine Porphyrogenitus records the fact that Slavic soldiery were still been recruited as a separate ethnic entity in that year. He relates their number, officers and payment: «(Pay) for the Sthlavenians who reside in Opsikion: 125 men. The chiefs (kephalai) receive, each, 5 (gold) nomismata, and the other 124 soldiers each receive 3 nomismata, or a total roga of 5 pounds and 27 nomismata»<sup>33</sup>.

Constantine took these figures from the official accounts of the expenses of the failed expedition, accounts which were undoubtedly kept in the central archives of the palace. The figure of Slavic troops was rather small when compared with the massive figures reported for Slavic troops and settlements in western Asia Minor. The same contingent was also sent to fight under the strategos of Langobardia in southern Italy at the same rate and with the same numbers of archontes and troops.

In finishing this brief analysis of the social accomodation and acculturation of the Slavic groups settled within the Byzantine empire we can see, in rough outline, how this worked out in one specific case in the Peloponnese where as late as the second

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31. *Constantino Porphyrogenito, De Thematribus*, ed. A. PERTUSI, Vatican 1952 (hereafter *De Them*), 89.

32. Sp VRYONIS, St. Ioannicius the Great (754-848) and the Slavs of Bithynia, *Byzantion* 31, 1961, 245-248.

33. CONSTANTINI PORPHYROGENITI, *De Cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. I. I. REISKE [CSHB], Bonn 1829, I, 662-663, 666, 669.

half of the ninth century Pisatis of the region of Olympia has been settled by Scythians (Slavs) and where the ancient name of Pisatis has been replaced by the Slavic name Vis, a word which in today's South Slavic tongues designates a hill or height<sup>34</sup>.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Slavist Max Vasmer had pointed to the text in the *De Thematibus* in which Constantine Porphyrogenitus had referred to the existence of a significant Slavic population in the Peloponnese: Ἐσλαβώθη δὲ πᾶσα ἡ χώρα καὶ γέγονε βάβαρος, ὅτε ὁ λοιμικὸς θάνατος πᾶσαν ἐβόσκετο τὴν οἰκουμένην, ὁππότε Κωνσταντῖνος, ὁ τῆς κοπριᾶς ἐπώνυμος, τὰ σκῆπτρα τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων διεῖπεν ἀρχῆς (and the entire land [Peloponnese ?] was Slavonised and became barbaric when pestilential death grazed on the oikoumene at the time that Constantine, who had the last name of «manure», held the sceptre of Roman rule)<sup>35</sup>.

This sentence has been variously translated but it conveys the belief of Constantine that the Slavic population of the Peloponnese had become demographically more important as a result of the great plague of 747. More significant for our purpose here is the tail end of this small section of the *De Thematibus* on the theme of Peloponnese, which contains a tantalizing and gossipy aside: «As a certain Peloponnesian was boasting greatly about his noble (so that I may avoid the word ignoble) descent, that notorius scribe Euphemius jeered at him with this must quoted iambic verse: Γαρασδοειδῆς ὄψις ἐσθλαβωμένη. This man was Niketas who married his daughter Sophia to Christopher the son of the grand and noble emperor Romanus»<sup>36</sup>. The gossipy phrase concerning this Niketas is to be translated as «a cunning, Slavonized face»<sup>37</sup>.

The personal hostility of both the notorius scribe and of the emperor have to do with the emergence of Niketas as an important participant in the politics of the court in Constantinople and of the crudeness of a nouveau arrivé. Of further interest is the fact that the scribe Euphemius must have known some Slavic, as well as ancient Greek, for he picked an appropriate Slavic epithet to describe the man's facial feature – garazhdu=sly, cunning– and was able to add a Greek adjectival ending to the Slavic word and to make it fit into the iambic meter. How was it that he was so familiar with the Slavic word?

34. *Geographi graeci minores*, ed C. MÜLLER, Paris 1889, II 583, §21. On page 574 he speaks of Skythai Slavoi in all Epirus and Hellas, as well as in Peloponnese and Macedonia. See also the terse documents of Vasmer, 17.

35. *De Them.*, 91.32–35.

36. *De Them.*, 91.36–42.

37. *De Them.*, 173–174 for further comments. Also VASMER, *Die Slaven in Griechenland*, 15.

More important is Niketas' family name, Rendakios, which is clearly non Greek though its ending and form have been somewhat Hellenized. The name is clearly derived from a Slavic word<sup>38</sup>. The Greek Slavist Phaedon Malingoudis has traced the history and careers of 18 individuals who bore this family name from 718 into the tenth century where our Niketas appears, and most of the bearers of the last name held official positions either in the court or in the provinces. The name appears both in the Peloponnese and central Greece and some may have been related. The first names in all cases where they are given indicate adoption of names current among Byzantine Christians. Undoubtedly they had at some time become familiar with the various degrees or styles of the Greek language, as we have already seen in the case of Perboundos in the latter part of the seventh century. Undoubtedly most of these individuals must have used their positions within their smaller Slavic societies as a stepping stone for entry into the formal governmental structures of Byzantine society, and obviously used marriage alliances (as we see in the case of Niketas) as further bridges to social mobility. A second case of social mobility and Byzantinization is the case of the famous Byzantine monk Ioannikios, of the Boilas family, obviously of Slavic origin and settled in western Asia Minor, who was first a soldier and then became a saint in the church<sup>39</sup>.

We have reached the end of this short excursus on the Sklaviniai and Sklavenoi and the varied nature of their social acculturation and/or accommodation with the Byzantine inhabitants of the Greek peninsula. It was a long term process and due to geographical, political and linguistic factors attained or failed to attain various degrees of absorption or isolation in Byzantine society.

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38 On this family, MALINGOUEDES, *Σλάβοι στην μεσαιωνική Ελλάδα*, 78-99.

39 VRYONIS, as in note 32 above.