

**EMPEROR SYMEON'S BULGARIA
IN THE HISTORY OF EUROPE'S SOUTH-EAST:
1100 YEARS FROM THE BATTLE OF ACHELOUS**

I

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СИМЕОНОВА БЪЛГАРИЯ
В ИСТОРИЯТА НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ ЮГОИЗТОК:
1100 ГОДИНИ ОТ БИТКАТА ПРИ АХЕЛОЙ

I

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Prince Michael of Zahumlje – a Serbian ally of Tsar Simeon

Aleksandar Uzelac

Michael of Zahumlje (reign usually dated c. 910–935) is one of the most neglected and marginalized persons in the early medieval Serbian history. Researchers frequently regarded him as a mere local potentate, experienced in political intrigues, but without significant military power or influence. Such notion is far from the truth.¹ Besides being mentioned by the most important Byzantine source for the history of the South Slavs – ‘De administrando imperio’ (*DAI*), composed in the mid-tenth century and attributed to Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Michael left traces in a number of Latin chronicles from the Apennines, while his activities attracted attention not only in Constantinople, but also in Venice, Apulia and Rome.

In *DAI*, Michael is mentioned as the ‘archon of Zachlumi’, latin sources call him ‘dux Chulmorum’, ‘dux Sclavorum’ or ‘rex Sclavorum’, while his Slavic title must have been ‘knez’. His patrimonial land, the province of Zahumlje, partly corresponding to the modern region of Herzegovina, was situated between the land of Narenta or Paganja to the west, Travunia to the southeast, and Serbia proper to the north. It included a tract of the sea coast, stretching from Dubrovnik to the mouth of the Neretva River, but also some lands west of the middle course of Neretva, thus dividing Narenta and Serbia, and extending to the northwest as far as Croatia.² It is usually assumed that Michael’s capital was in Stagnon or Ston, the coastal seat of the bishopric of Zahumlje, attested as early as 925–928, but probably in existence since the late ninth century.³ Archeological evidence points out to a different place as the original ‘capital’ of the rulers of Zahumlje – in the present-day Mogorjelo, near Čapljina on Middle Neretva, where a settlement from Roman times was still used in the 9–10th century, and several intriguing objects of Frankish import and the local imitations were found.⁴ Possibly, the princes of Zahumlje used

¹ Recently, prominent Serbian historian Tibor Živković attempted to make a re-evaluation of Michael’s role in the turbulent history of the eastern Adriatic at the beginning of the tenth century. He portrayed him as a capable ruler who ‘embarked on a complex and dangerous political course’, T. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Portreti srpskih vladara (IX–XII vek)*, Beograd 2006, 74.

² CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, Greek text edited by GY. MORAVCSIK, English trans. by R. J. H. JENKINS, Washington DC 1967, 144–145.

³ S. MIŠIĆ, *Humaska zemlja u srednjem veku*, Beograd 1996, 122–123; T. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Crkvena organizacija u srpskim zemljama (rani srednji vek)*, Beograd 2004, 146–147, 159–160.

⁴ J. WERNER, Frühkarolingische Gürtelgarnitur aus Mogorjelo bei Čapljina (Herzegovina), *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu* 15–16 (1960–1961) 235–247; *Istorija Crne Gore I*, Titograd 1967, 360–361 (J. KOVAČEVIĆ); Z. VINSKI, O nalazima karolinških mačeva u Jugoslaviji,

both of these places as residences, as they suited their aims to secure their power on the Adriatic shores and to keep the interior of his lands safe from the pressure of the princes of Serbia from the north.

Similarly to their neighbors in Travunia and Narenta, ‘the Zachlumi were Serbs from the time of that prince who claimed the protection of the emperor Heraclius’.⁵ Nonetheless, Michael himself was not a member of the ruling Serbian dynasty, and not even of Serbian origin. According to *DAI*, ‘The family of the anthypatos and patrikios Michael, son of Bouseboutzis, prince of the Zachlumi, came from the unbaptized who dwell on the river Visla and are called Litziki’.⁶ The name of Michael’s father, who besides this information remains a completely unknown person in history, was rendered as Polish patronym Wyszewycz or Serbian Višević, while the enigmatic Litziki were associated with the archaic names of Poles (Lendizi, Liakhy),⁷ or with the Slavic tribe of Lingones mentioned by chronicler Adam of Bremen.⁸ Be that as it may, it is certain that, although his subjects were perceived as Serbs, the family of Prince Michael of Zahumlje did not descend from Serbs or Croats, and was not related to their dynasties.

The earliest occurrence of Michael in the sources is from 912. Venetian chronicler John the Deacon recorded that at that time Pietro, son of Venetian doge Orso II (912-932), was treacherously captured on his return from Constantinople by Michael, ‘dux Sclavorum’, when he wanted to pass through the lands of the Croats. The prisoner was stripped from the gifts he received in Constantinople, and sent to Bulgarian ruler Simeon. He stayed in Bulgaria for some time, before he was ransomed and returned home.⁹

Starohrvatska prosvjeta 11 (1981) 20, 27; T. BURIĆ, Istočnojadranske Sklavinije i Franci u svjetlu arheoloških nalaza, in *Starohrvatska spomenička baština – radanje prvog hrvatskog kulturnog pejzaža: zbornik radova znanstvenog skupa održanog 6-8. listopada 1992*, ed. M. JURKOVIĆ et al., Zagreb 1996, 141–142; M. PETRINEC, Zapažanja o poslijekarolinškom oružju i konjaničkoj opremi s područja Hrvatske i Bosne i Hercegovine u kontekstu povijesnih zbivanja u 10. i 11. stoljeću, *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* 39 (2012) 80, 88.

⁵ CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, 160–161.

⁶ CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, 160–163.

⁷ T. LEWICKI, Litzike Konstantina Porfirogenety i Biali Serbowie w po‘Inoczej Polace, *Roczniki historyczne* 22 (1956) 9–34; R. NOVAKOVIĆ, Da li su svi Zahumljani poreklom Srbi?. Povodom roda Mihaila Viševića, *Istorijski časopis* 22 (1975) 18–43.

⁸ MAGISTRI ADAM BREMENSIS *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. B. SCHMEIDLER, *MGH SS rer. Germ.* 2, Hannoverae et Lipsiae 1917, 77, 162. The Dalmatian chronicler Thomas, archdeacon of Split (c. 1200–1268) recorded fragments of a legend dealing with the arrival of ‘seven or eight tribes of nobles called Lingones from the region of Poland’, together with the Gothic king Totila (Venerant de partibus Polonie, qui Lingones appellantur, cum Totila septem vel octo tribus nobilium), THOMAE ARCHIDIACONI SPALATENSIS *Historia Salonitanorum atque Spalatinorum pontificum*, ed. and transl. by D. KARBIĆ et al., Budapest 2006, 36–37.

⁹ DIACONO GIOVANNI, La Cronaca Veneziana, in *Cronache Veneziane antichissime* I, ed. G. Monticolo, Roma 1890, 131–132: ‘qui dum Chroatorum fines rediens transire vellet, a

The next episode from Michael's life is recorded five years later. According to *DAI*, protospatharius and strategos of Dyrrachium Leo Rhabduchus 'arrived in Paganía, which was at that time under the control of Peter, prince of Serbia, in order to advise and confer with this prince upon some service and affair. Michael, prince of the Zachlumi, his jealousy aroused by this, sent information to Simeon, prince of Bulgaria, that the emperor of the Romans was bribing prince Peter to take the Turks (that is Magyars) with him and go upon Bulgaria. It was at that time when the battle of Achelous had taken place between the Romans and the Bulgarians'.¹⁰ Evidently, as these two instances reveal, during the second decade of the tenth century, Michael established close contacts with Simeon, and was counted among his allies.

The reasons that motivated Michael to turn to the mighty Bulgarian ruler are not hard to guess. Since the mid-ninth century, Serbian ruler Vlastimir (c. 835–850) and his descendants made attempts to spread their power from the interior to the neighboring Slavic principalities in the maritime regions. Vlastimir established his influence in Travunia, via dynastic marriage, by giving his daughter to the son of a local ruler, 'and, desiring to ennoble his son-in-law, he gave him the title of prince and made him independent'.¹¹ At the beginning of the tenth century, Vlastimir's youngest grandson Peter of Serbia (892/3–917/8) laid claims to the province of Narenta or Paganía. In 917, as evidenced from the report in *DAI*, this land was already under his control and the expansion of his power must have been at the expense of the Prince of Zahumlje, whose western lands separated Narenta from Serbia.¹² The enmity between Michael and Peter, caused by the territorial dispute, becomes even more discernible if one takes into account the information provided by John the Deacon, according to which Michael captured the doge's son when he wanted to pass through the lands of the Croats. As Narenta stretched along the coast between Zahumlje and the lands of the Croats, it seems that it was Michael who controlled it in 912. Thus, even the fragmented information we have at our disposal indicates that between 912 and 917, Peter managed to seize considerable part of Michael's possessions lying west from the Neretva River. So, when the Serbian ruler, who at least at the beginning of his reign nurtured amicable relations with Simeon and may have even been godfather of his namesake son,¹³ began the secret

Michahele Sclavorum duce fraude deceptus, omnibusque bonis privatus, atque Vulgarico regi, Simeoni nomine, exilii pena transmissus est'. The event was mentioned in a number of later Venetian chronicles and codices, see: Ș. MARIN, Un fiu de doge la curtea țarului Simeon al Bulgariei. Cazul lui Pietro Badoaro, *Revista Istorică, serie nouă* 18/3-4 (2007) 375–391.

¹⁰ CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, 156–157; G. OSTROGORSKI, Lav Ravduh i Lav Hirosfakt, *3PBII* 3 (1955) 29–36.

¹¹ CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, 162–163.

¹² *Istoriya Srpskog naroda*, I, ed. S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, Beograd 1982, 157–158. (S. ĆIRKOVIĆ)

¹³ ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Portreti srpskih vladara*, 50–51.

negotiations with the Byzantine representative, it was the opportunity Michael used not only to inflict damage to his rival, but also to additionally gain Simeon's favors.

There is no information how the contacts were established and conducted between Michael and Simeon. If Peter controlled both Narenta and Travunia at that time, as it is sometimes supposed, it would have meant that Michael's lands were completely surrounded by his rival. In this case, the only way he could have been able to maintain the contacts with Bulgarians was via the sea route. Since the late ninth century, the First Bulgarian state had an access to the Ionian sea, through coastal province of Vagenitia (the land of the Slavic tribe Vaiunites) in southern Albania.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it seems improbable that Michael used this way to send the Venetian captive in 912, or the crucial information about the secret talks between Leo Rhabduchus and Peter of Serbia in 917, to Simeon. This route was not only long, but its course lied along the Byzantine themes of Dalmatia and Dyrrachium. Therefore, another possibility, namely that Michael managed to extend his power, or at least his influence over the lands of Travunia and Dioclea lying to the southeast, and that he was able to establish contact with Bulgarians at the borders of Dioclea cannot be excluded. It is circumstantially confirmed by the fact that Leo Rhabduchus, in order to meet with the Serbian ruler, had to travel as far as Narenta, instead to the closer and more suitable Travunia or Dioclea. There are other evidences of Michael's control of the Adriatic coast to the south as far as Kotor, but they will be discussed later in the text.

As *DAI* states, Simeon received information about the secret talks between Peter of Serbia and Leo Rhabduchus not long after his victory at Achelous. If we are to believe the source, the Bulgarian ruler was mad with rage, and in late 917 or 918, he decided to send an army against the Serbs. In the course of the campaign, Peter was treacherously captured and taken to Bulgaria where he died in prison, while Simeon installed on Serbian throne another member of the Serbian dynasty, Paul, the son of Branos. The political conditions in Serbia remained precarious in the following years, as pro-Bulgarian and pro-Byzantine faction continued to fight for supremacy. Paul was attacked by his cousin Zacharias sent from Constantinople, but the pretender was defeated and extradited to Simeon. Soon, when Paul aligned himself with Byzantium, the Bulgarian ruler sent Zacharias as his candidate, who expelled the rival and took his place (either in 920/921 or in 923/924 the chronology of this event provided by *DAI* is somewhat confusing).¹⁵ Nonetheless, swayed by

¹⁴ P. KOMATINA, Oblast Vagenitija i episkopija sv. Klimenta, *3PBH* 53 (2016) 94–96; cf. P. KOLEDAROV, *Politicheskata geografija na srednovekovnata b'lgarska d'zhava I*, Sofia 1979, 42, 51.

¹⁵ G. OSTROGORSKI, Porfirogenitova hronika srpskih vladara i njeni hronološki podaci, *Istorijski časopis* 1 (1948) 26–27; T. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Južni Sloveni pod vizantijskom vlašću, 600–1025*, Beograd 2002, 416–417.

the Byzantine diplomacy, Zacharias did not remain loyal to Simeon either. Another campaign was organized by Simeon, but this time Bulgarian commanders were defeated and slain by the Serbs; their heads being sent to Constantinople as a trophy. Fed up with Serbian politics, disloyalty, squabbles as well as their ability to put up strong resistance against the punitive campaigns, Simeon then decided to change his strategy and approach. In 924, or possibly in 926, he sent another army, together with Chaslav, another Serbian pretender who resided in Bulgaria, but with another objective in mind. In front of the new Bulgarian intervention Zacharias took flight to Croats, while Bulgarians convened Serbian 'župans' to 'receive Chaslav for their prince; and, having tricked them by an oath and brought them out as far as the first village, they instantly bound them, and entered Serbia and took away with them the entire folk, both old and young, and carried them into Bulgaria, though a few escaped away and entered Croatia; and the country was left deserted'.¹⁶

Eventually, it turned out that the conquest and thorough pacification of Serbia became a source of new troubles. The Croats accepted Serbian refugees and feared their new neighbor just enough to be induced by the Byzantine diplomacy to abandon the neutral stance in the conflict. Croatian entry into the anti-Bulgarian coalition prompted Simeon to organize another campaign in late 926 or more probably in early 927.¹⁷ According to DAI, when 'these same Bulgarians under Alogobotour (that is Alp-Bagatur, rather a military title than a personal name) entered Croatia to make war, they were all slain there by the Croats'.¹⁸ The Continuator of Theophanes dates the beginning of the disastrous Bulgarian campaign on May 27th, 927, which is in fact the day of Simeon's death, as confirmed in another Byzantine source.¹⁹

Michael of Zahumlje is not mentioned in the relatively short, but informative report of *DAI*, covering the events in Serbia between 917 and 927. Naturally, that does not mean that he stayed out of the conflict and that he did not use the opportunities, provided by the Bulgarian expansion, to pursue his own interests. It is possible, and indeed probable that after Peter's capture and imprisonment Michael (re)established his control in the lands to the west of Neretva.²⁰ There is also a hypothesis that he played a minor role in Simeon's embassy to Fatimids in

¹⁶ CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, 156–159.

¹⁷ F. ŠIŠIĆ, *Povijest Hrvata u vrijeme narodnih vladara*, Zagreb 1925, 422; OSTROGORSKI, Porfirogenitova hronika srpskih vladara, 28–29; I. BOŽILOV – V. GYUZELEV, *Istoriya na B'lgariya 1 (VII–XIV v.)*, Sofia 1999, 260; ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Južni Sloveni pod vizantijskom vlašću*, 377, n. 1267; N. BUDAČ, *Hrvatska i Bizant u X stoljeću, Tabula: časopis Filozofskog fakulteta u Puli* 12 (2014) 53.

¹⁸ CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, 158–159.

¹⁹ THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, *Chronographia*, in *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, ed. I. BEKKER (*CSHB* 45), Bonn 1838, 411; BOŽILOV – GYUZELEV, *Istoriya na B'lgariya*, 260.

²⁰ MIŠIĆ, *Humska zemlja u srednjem veku*, 42.

North Africa in 922 or 923, more precisely that Bulgarian emissaries embarked from a port in the Eastern Adriatic controlled by the Prince of Zahumlje.²¹

Michael's relations with Bulgarians during the last years of Simeon's rule were variously interpreted by historians. Some researchers expressed opinion that, either after the expulsion of Peter, or after Simeon's conquest of Serbia, Michael switched sides and offered his allegiance to Constantinople, feeling threatened by the growing power of his former ally.²² Others thought that he remained a Bulgarian ally until the death of their ruler in 927.²³ There is no doubt that Michael came to terms with Constantinople; the titles (or rather a single title, with two elements) of *anthypatos* and *patrikios*, bestowed to him and attested in DAI, show that he became part of the complex Byzantine political hierarchy, but it is unknown whether that happened before or after 927.²⁴ Fortunately, some useful indications about Michael's attitude during these obscure years are preserved in Latin sources, to which we now have to turn our attention.

In 923, the emperor Roman I Lakapenos (920–944) and the government in Constantinople agreed to return Dalmatia under the patronage of the Roman Church. Consequently, the pope John X (914–928) convened two councils in order to deal with the issues of the church jurisdiction, and allegedly widespread presence of Slavic language and glagolitic script in the liturgy. The Acts of the two councils in Split, held in 925 and 928, are preserved only in a sixteenth century source, *Historia Salonitana Maior*.²⁵ They are regarded as authentic by the majority of historians, although a dispute to what extent they were revised from its original form continues up to this day.²⁶ According to the documents,

²¹ J. W. A. FINE, *The Early Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, Ann Arbor MI 1991, 151–152; cf. K. KR'STEV, B'lgariya, Vizantiya i Arabskiyat svyat pri caruvaneto na Simeon I Veliki, in *B'lgarskiyat zlaten vek. Sbornik v chest na car Simeon Veliki (893–927)*, Plovdiv 2015, 373–374.

²² ŠIŠIĆ, *Povijest Hrvata u vrijeme narodnih vladara*, 411–412;

²³ *Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije II*, Beograd 1959, 60, n. 209 (B. FERJANČIĆ); *Istorija Srpskog naroda*, I, 159. (S. ČIRKOVIĆ); MIŠIĆ, *Humska zemlja u srednjem veku*, 42.

²⁴ For different opinions see: J. FERLUGA, *Vizantijsko carstvo i jugoslovenske države od sredine IX do sredine X veka*, *3PBH* 13 (1971) 103: 'after 927'; ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Portreti srpskih vladara*, 80: 'around 926'; N. K'NEV, *Otrazhenieto na b'lgaro-vizantiyskite otnosheniya po vreme na P'rvoto b'lgarsko carstvo v' rhu sluchajte na udostoyavane na vladeteli ot Zapadnite Balkani s vizantiyski pochetni titli*, in *B'lgariya v svetovnoto kulturno nasledstvo. Sbornik s materialni ot Tretata nacionalna konferenciya po istoriya, arheologiya i kulturen turiz'm. „P'tuvane k'm B'lgariya“*, Shumen 2014, 296, 298: 'between 921 and 924'.

²⁵ *Historia Salonitana maior*, ed. N. KLAČIĆ, Beograd 1967.

²⁶ Critical overview of the problem is presented by N. BUDAČ, *Historia salonitana and Historia salonitana maior*, in *Summer School in the Study of Historical Manuscripts*, eds. M WILLER, M. TOMIĆ, Zadar 2013, 101–131.

the first council was attended by Croatian ruler Tomislav, Michael of Zahumlje (Tempore Joannis pape sanctissimo consulatu peragente in provincia Croatorum et Dalmatiarum finibus Tamisclao rege et Michael in suis finibus presidente duce), papal legates, local bishops, representatives of Dalmatian cities, and a number of Croatian and Serbian nobles (Croatorum atque Serborum proceribus).²⁷ Michael's engagement is also attested in a papal letter, preserved in the same compilation and sent to 'dilecto filio Tamisclao, regi Crouatorum, et Michaeli, excellentissimo duci Chulmorum'.²⁸ The two rulers were not explicitly mentioned in the acts of the second council from 928, when the jurisdiction of archbishoprics of Split over bishoprics in Croatian lands, as well as those outside them, in Ston, Dubrovnik and Kotor, was finally confirmed.²⁹

Although the question of the authenticity and veracity of the acts of the councils is outside the scope of this text, it is important to note that many researchers used them as an evidence of Michael's good relations with Tomislav, but also with Constantinople. Therefore, some remarks need to be inserted here. First, as some historians argued, the council was convened for the matters of the church and, considering that the territories of both rulers were under papal jurisdiction, Michael's engagement reveals that he was willing to acknowledge papal authority and obviously to protect his own interests, but nothing beyond that.³⁰ Second, the representatives of Byzantine theme of Dalmatia are not mentioned in the acts of the council.³¹ Their absence and presence of Michael may serve not only as another indication that he controlled the hinterland of Dubrovnik and Kotor, but even that he established his supremacy in both of these cities at the expense of Byzantium before 925. Finally, at the time when Tomislav and Michael attended the council, the Croats were still not part of the anti-Bulgarian alliance, nor there was open enmity between them and Simeon. Consequently, the acts in their preserved form indicate a certain degree of cooperation between Tomislav and Michael, even their cordial mutual relations, but they could not be interpreted as an evidence that Michael switched sides in the Bulgarian-Byzantine conflict and abandoned his alliance with Simeon before 925.

Another event in which Michael participated is even more intriguing. In 926, he took possession of the port of Siponto in historical Apulia (and the modern region of Capitanata), controlled by Byzantium. It is recorded in three different, albeit mutually dependent Italian texts, composed in the eleventh century: 1) in

²⁷ T. SMIČIKLAS (ed.), *Codex diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, I, Zagreb 1967, 32–33 (= *Historia Salonitana maior*, 98.)

²⁸ SMIČIKLAS, *Codex diplomaticus*, I, 34. (= *Historia Salonitana maior*, 99.)

²⁹ SMIČIKLAS, *Codex diplomaticus*, I, 38. (= *Historia Salonitana maior*, 104.)

³⁰ FINE, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 160.

³¹ Cf. BUDAČ, *Hrvatska i Bizant u X stoljeću*, 53–54.

the Annals of Benevento, sub anno 926: ‘Michael, rex Sclavorum, comprehendit Sipontum’;³² 2) in the Annals of Lupus Protospatharius of Bari, where the date is more precisely fixed as July 926: ‘comprehendit Michael Sclabus Sipontum mense Julii’;³³ 3) and in the Annals of Bari, where the date is recorded as Monday, July 10, 928: ‘die sanctae Felicitatis, secunda feria, indictione 15’.³⁴ The year of 928 is undoubtedly wrong. July 10, 926 was on Monday, and therefore, this date is almost universally accepted as the day of Michael’s takeover or capture of Siponto.

Unlike the date, and similarly to his relations with Simeon, the background and the character of Michael’s overseas expedition is disputed. Historians disagree whether it was an inimical act against Byzantine Apulia, or an expedition on behalf of the emperor,³⁵ possibly in order to relieve the city of Siponto from the pressure of Arabs or Lombards.³⁶ The latter opinion gained more prominence, partly because the sources only mention Michael’s takeover of Siponto, without emphasizing the fight or bloodshed. These elements are, nonetheless, present in another text in which this event was recorded, unfortunately omitted by the generations of the Serbian and Croatian medievalists. It is the Chronicle of bishop Romoald II of Salerno, composed in the late 12th century, where the following entry stands: ‘Anno Dominice incarnationis 926, venerunt Sclavi in Apuliam et civitatem Sipontum hostili direptione et gladio vastaverunt’.³⁷ This information, independent of those preserved in the Annals of Benevento and by the chroniclers from Bari, reveals the true, violent character of Michael’s expedition.

One more remark about the time and date of the event is in order. In the summer of 926, Simeon already occupied Serbia and the war with Croats was

³² *Annales Beneventani*, ed. G. H. PERTZ, *MGH Scriptores* III, Hannoverae 1839, 175.

³³ *Lupi Protospatarii Annales*, ed. G. H. PERTZ, *MGH Scriptores* V, Hannoverae 1839, 54

³⁴ *Annales Barenses*, G. H. PERTZ, *MGH Scriptores* V, Hannoverae 1839, 52

³⁵ ŠIŠIĆ, *Povijest Hrvata*, 424; F. GESTRIN, *Slovani v Italiji v zgodnjem srednjem veku*, *Zgodovinski časopis* 51/2 (1997) 160–161; ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Portreti srpskih vladara*, 80–81; BUDAK, *Hrvatska i Bizant u X stoljeću*, 56.

³⁶ The Byzantine possessions in Apulia were indeed attacked numerous times by the Arabs and the Lombards during the first decades of the tenth century. When duke Landolfo I of Benevento and Capua attacked Apulia in 921 and defeated Byzantine forces near Ascoli, it seems that in the same year his brother Atenolfo temporarily took control of Siponto; in the Annals of Benevento sub a. 921 is recorded: ‘intravit domnus Athenolphus in Sipontum’ (*Annales Beneventani*, 175), but the information does not appear in the other above-mentioned sources. The Byzantines rejected Landolfo’s plea to be installed as a governor in Apulia, and were successful in restoring their positions before 926. Another Lombard invasion on Apulia was in 929, B. KREUTZ, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, Philadelphia 1996, 97–99; G. A. LOUD, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Northern Conquest*, New York 2013, 20–21.

³⁷ ROMUALDI SALERNITANI *Chronicon*, ed. C. A. GARUFI, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* VII/1, Città di Castello 1935, 165.

about to come. If Michael found himself of the opposing side of the Bulgarians, he would be hardly in position to undertake any kind of military campaign on the other side of the Adriatic. However, if he remained Bulgarian ally, his action seems logical, especially if one considers it not just as a marauding venture, but rather a strategic attempt to establish a stronghold in Byzantine Apulia, weakened due to the external Lombard and Arab pressure, and possibly to cut off communications between Byzantium and its new allies – the Croats. Therefore, it seems certain that in July 926 Michael did not act as an imperial ally in Apulia, nor his fleet descended upon the shores of the Apenine peninsula as a rescue force against Arabs, Lombards or any other enemy. The only enemy that threatened Siponto in 926 was Michael, ‘rex Sclavorum’.

In this way, the event provides a strong and convincing evidence that Michael was still an enemy of Byzantium, and consequently a Bulgarian ally in 926, and that he remained as such – either until their defeat at the hands of Croats, or until the death of Simeon next year. It was only after the demise of the Bulgarian ruler that Michael had to come to terms with Constantinople. Nonetheless, it seems that even under the new circumstances that followed the restoration of Byzantine influence in the Adriatic he managed to keep a larger part of his possessions and his prestige. The titles he received from Constantinople are a testimony of his significance and influence in the Byzantine hierarchy; in the same way his appearance in the acts of the first council of Split on par with Croatian ‘rex’ or ‘dux’ Tomislav,³⁸ and a memory of ‘rex Sclavorum’ in the Apulian tradition represent a testimony of his power. There might be another: an inscription from Ston found in 1953, dated in the tenth century and with a high degree of certainty attributed to Michael. Despite the difficulties in reading and understanding of its text, the inscription provides another indication of his naval power and control of the cities along the Dalmatian coast.³⁹

The source material discussed here is fragmentary. It does not reveal much detail of the power struggles in the eastern Adriatic, where Byzantine-Bulgarian

³⁸ In the acts of the council of 925, Tomislav is titled ‘rex’, but for the thirteenth century chronicler Thomas of Split he was only ‘dux’, THOMAE ARCHIDIACONI SPALATENSIS *Historia*, 60.

³⁹ The most appropriate seems the reading proposed by J. KOVAČEVIĆ, *Marginalije uz probleme arheologije i umetnosti ranog srednjeg veka* (II), *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu* 8/1 (1964) 113–123: MI(C)HAELUS FORTITER (ET) SUPER REGO PACIFICO C(I) V(ITATES) OM(NE)S ROMANO(S) (‘Michael strongly pacifies and rules over all Roman cities’); a different reading was proposed by I. OSTOJIC, *O Mihajlovu natpisu u Stonu*, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 14/1 (1963) 34–39: MIHAELUS FORTITER SUPER(AVIT) G(R)ECO PACIFICO CU(M) OM(INE)S ROMANO(S) (‘Prince Michael bravely defeated Pacificos the Greek, and the Romans’); according to some other researchers, the name on the inscription should be attributed to Archangel Michael, and not to the ruler of Zahumlje, cf. M. JURKOVIĆ, *Ranosrednjovjekovni latinski natpisi s Pelješca*, *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 10 (1986) 83–89.

conflict was reflected on the relations between various Slavic states and their internal conditions. However, one thing is certain: at least from 912, and possibly earlier, Simeon of Bulgaria had a staunch and trustworthy ally in the person of Prince Michael of Zahumlje in this strategically vital region. It was an alliance out of the interest, but it benefited both interested parties. Via his ally, Simeon was in position to disrupt and to hamper Byzantine attempts to form a wider anti-Bulgarian coalition, while Michael, relying on Bulgarian power, was able to secure his independence and to expand his power over neighboring Serbian lands along the coast. Probably Michael at some point acknowledged the powerful Bulgarian ruler as his overlord, but the sources do not provide even the slightest indication whether and when that happened.

Съкращения Abbreviations

<i>ВВр</i>	Византийский временник
<i>ГДА</i>	Годишник на Духовната академия
<i>ГИБИ</i>	Гръцки извори за българската история
<i>ГСУ ИФФ</i>	Годишник на Софийския университет. Историко-философски факултет
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<i>ГСУ ЮФ</i>	Годишник на Софийския университет. Юридически факултет
<i>ЖМНПр</i>	Журнал Министерства народного просвещения
<i>ЗРВИ</i>	Зборник радова Византолошког института
<i>ИНМВ</i>	Известия на Народния музей – Варна
<i>ИПр</i>	Исторически преглед
<i>ЛИБИ</i>	Латински извори за българската история
<i>МПр</i>	Македонски преглед
<i>ТОДРЛ</i>	Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы
<i>AASS</i>	Acta Sanctorum
<i>BM</i>	Bulgaria Mediaevalis
<i>Byz</i>	Byzantion
<i>CFHB</i>	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
<i>CSHB</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
<i>DAI</i>	De administrando imperio
<i>DOP</i>	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
<i>DOT</i>	Dumbarton Oaks Texts
<i>JÖB</i>	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
<i>MGH</i>	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
<i>MGH Epistolae</i>	Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae
<i>MGH SS</i>	Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores
<i>MGH SS rer. Germ.</i>	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae historicis separatim editi
<i>ODB</i>	The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia Graeca
<i>REB</i>	Revue des études byzantines
<i>SCer</i>	Studia Ceranea
<i>Sett</i>	Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano sull'alto medioevo
<i>Sla</i>	Slavia Antiqua

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