

Abstract

The political and military history of the state ruled by the Asan dynasty

Chapter I.

The sources

The internal sources are scarce. They include letters exchanged between the tsars and the popes, few inscriptions, religious texts which remembered some political and military facts, the seals issued by the rulers of the state, the coins, and the results of the archaeological excavations in fortresses and other sites.

The first category of the external sources is represented by the Byzantine writings: the histories of Niketas Choniates, Georgios Akropolites, Georgios Pachymeres, Pseudo-Kodinos, Theodor Skutariotes, the orations of Eustathios of Thessaloniki, Ioannes Syropulos, Euthymios Tornikes, Georgios Tornikes II, Constantine Stilbes, Sergios Kolyvas, Niketas Choniates, and Michael Choniates. Other data come from a description of the miracles made by Saint Demetrios (written by Ioannes Staurakios) and from a poem by Manuel Philes.

The next category includes the western relations about the third and fourth crusades. For the period of the third crusade, data concerning the Vlacho-Bulgarian state are provided by Ansbertus, *Historia peregrinorum*, Tageno, Sicardus, and Albertus Miliol. The land of the Vlachs mentioned in *Nibelungenlied* was this state (the knowledge about it arrived at Passau from the relation of Tageno, who was a clergyman at that bishopric). For the fourth crusade and the following years, a large amount of information comes from the writings of Jeffrey of Villehardouin, Henry of Valenciennes, Bernard le Trésorier, and Robert of Clari. Another important source is *Historia Regum Francorum* by Philippe Mouskés, written by the middle of the 13th century at Tournai. Various pieces of information are found in chronicles like those of Sicardus, Ogerio Pane, Baudoin d'Avesnes, Albericus Trium Fontium, Robert de Auxerre, and in the so-called Chronicle of Morea, whose Greek prototype was composed around 1320-1330. Later sources like the histories of Flavio Biondo and Paulo Ramusio are not really useful, but older Venetian chronicles (Marino Sanudo Torsello, 1321, and Andrea Dandolo, 1350) preserved some data not found elsewhere. Very important are the letters of popes Innocentius III and Gregory IX, as well as those of the Latin emperor of Constantinople Henry I.

Some data were transmitted by Serbian, Hungarian and oriental sources (the biographies of the saints Stephen Nemanja and Sabbas, the relation of Rogerius, the Hungarian Chronicle, the histories of Fazlallah Rashid ad-Din, Ibn Taghrībirdī, and Vardan Arewelc'i), and in the report of William of Rubruck.

Chapter II.

The historiography

The first author who wrote something about the second Bulgarian state was Mauro Orbini (1601), but in a biased way, according to his panslavist ideas, which became the inspiration for the fanciful work of the Bulgarian monk Paisie of Hilandar (1762). True accounts based on the Byzantine sources were instead elaborated by the Romanian prince and historian Demetrius Cantemir (1722), and later on by Charles Lebeau (1757-1786), Edward Gibbon (1776), Johann Thunmann (1774), Dionisie Fotino (1818), and George Finlay (1854). All of them recognized the role of the Romanians in the genesis of the state. The Transylvanian Romanian historians Gheorghe Șincai (1811) and Petru Maior (1812) have too written about the Asan dynasty in their history, the first of them introducing the papal letters as a source. A special study dedicated to the state created by the Asan brothers was published in 1879 by Constantin von Höfler. The place of the Romanians in the genesis of the second Bulgarian kingdom was emphasized by Robert Roesler (1871), but in order to support his theory of their late immigration from the south to the north of the Danube. The answer was given by Alexandru D. Xenopol (1884, 1888 and 1891), who, rejecting the immigration theory, denied any extension of the Romanian-Bulgarian state north of the Danube. This extreme opinion was contradicted by Dimitre Onciul in several of his studies. Other contributions were brought by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (the origin of the name Asan, the domination north of the Danube), and later by George Murnu and Nicolae Iorga. The first large history of Bulgaria written by Constantin Jireček in 1876 was also the first modern work displaying the biased conception of excluding Romanians from the history of the tsardom. His ideas were developed by Bulgarian scholars like Vasili Zlatarski and Petăr Mutafčiev.

In the interwar period, the origins and the history of the Romanian-Bulgarian state were dealt in the works of N. Iorga, N. Bănescu, P.P. Panaitescu, C. C. Giurescu, Aurel Decei, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, and Gheorghe Brătianu. The subject was ignored in the first years of the Communist regime, being resumed only when began the recovery of the national values, after 1962 (the treaty of history edited by the Academy). The interest for the state of the Asan dynasty increased after 1971, with the works of several young historians, among whom some are continuing their activity until now. In Bulgaria it was continuity between the nationalist views of the „burgeoise” and Communist historiography during the entire period after 1945. The role of the Romanians was almost always denied. It is nevertheless true that the Bulgarian historians brought important contributions to the political, military, social and cultural history of the state, while the Romanian historiography was almost limited to the problem of the ethnic origin of the founders. The history of the second Bulgarian tsardom was dealt with no *parti pris* by several western authors, who sometimes noticed that both Romanian and Bulgarian historians are wrong to project in the Middle Ages the contemporary nationalism. After 1989, the young generation of Romanian and Bulgarian historians is no more focused on this nationalist conception, but the older Bulgarian historians who continued their work preserved the same ideas of denying the role of the Romanians.

Chapter III.

The situation of the Byzantine Empire in the years before the rebellion of the Romanians and Bulgarians

The *pronoia* type of property introduced by Alexios I Comnenos led to an army which cost less, a part of the expenses being transferred to the owners of these estates, but also caused a reduction of the income, during the period when Manuel I Comnenos was fighting long wars, in east and against Hungary. The cutting of the resources for the paid military was the reason of the rebellions started after 1180. The rise of Hungary was stopped by Manuel, but the wars were resumed when Andronic Comnenos usurped the power. In 1182-1183, Bela III has conquered a region between Belgrade and Braničevo, advancing even to Sofia, with the help of the Serbian ruler Stephen Nemanja. The same usurpation was the pretext for the war started by William II of Sicily. His army was able to conquer Thessaloniki (24th August 1185), because the defence of the city was weakened. Eventually, the Byzantine army commanded by Alexios Vranas was victorious at Dimitritsi (7th November 1185). Meanwhile, Andronicos was replaced with Isaac II Angelos, who very soon proposed peace to the Hungarian king. Bela III decided to give him his daughter Margret, with the conquered region as dowry. The emperor increased the taxes for the wedding expenses. This action and the dethronement of the emperor who fought against corruption were the preconditions of a rebellion among the peasants and small owners.

Chapter IV.

The beginning of the rebellion and the genesis of the Romanian-Bulgarian state (1185-1188)

Two Vlach brothers, Peter and Asan, asked the emperor Isaac II Angelos to be enrolled in the army and to receive an estate in the Haemus Mountains. They met him at Kypsella short time before the battle of Dimitritsi. Being refused and offended, they returned home and started a plot. The people rallied because the tax increase which affected the cattle owners and the peasants from the imperial estates. According to Robert de Clari, Asan was managing an imperial stud.

The real name of Peter (the elder brother) was Theodore, but he took the new one in the memory of the Bulgarian tsar Peter I or more probable in the memory of the rebel Peter Delian, who fought in 1040 against the Byzantine domination (the Romanians took part at that movement besides the Bulgarians). The name Asan is of Cuman origin, but this was the family name. He was in fact called Ioan (John), as results from the *Synodikon* and from one of the writings about Saint Ivan of Rila. It is not true that he was also called Roman (as believed Gr. Jitaru and S. Iosipescu).

It seems that the two brothers did not asked for a *pronoia*, as it is commonly sustained, but for the autonomy of the region north of Haemus, the ancient Moesia, as it is called by Niketas Choniates. For a later moment, the same author specified that the rebels occupied the toparchy of Moesia, which belonged to the Vlachs. The toparchies were peripheral regions ruled by foreigners. One of such toparchs was Stephen Nemanja. This means that Peter and Asan asked the autonomy of a territory, and the refusal led them to the rebellion.

The Bulgarian and Romanian population was oppressed, but fearful. To stir the people to fight, Peter and Asan pretended that Saint Demetrios has abandoned the support for the

Greeks, becoming their ally in the fight for freedom. They did this in an improvised chapel at Tărnovo, where some people in ecstasy induced by hallucinogens spoke about this miracle (an icon took from Thessaloniki was also there). This action of propaganda was decisive for starting the rebellion. The saint became in the mind of the common people the supreme commander of their movement, and remained the protector of the state which developed later.

The symbols of the imperial power (golden crown or diadem and red shoes) were usurped by Peter. It was nothing strange in this action since in the same years other rebels pretended the imperial power, and even Isaac was too a usurper. The imperial title (tsar) was bestowed to him by the end of 1185 by the priest Vasile (Basil), who took the title of archbishop of Tărnovo.

The wedding of Isaac II with Margret is dated to February 1186, and the preparations began after the meeting at Kypsella, when Peter and Asan were already home. They started the rebellion before the tax increase occasioned by the wedding, because the autonomy was denied. They represented the local owners, especially from the highlands. Like the previous movements of the Bulgarians, Serbs and Vlachs, this rebellion was started by the cattle owners and by the petty aristocracy (the Bulgarian *bolgars*). The restoration of the Bulgarian state was the common project of all these populations, and the opposition against the central power did not express a "national" ideology. The purpose was the independence of a territory, a smaller one like Thessaly, or a larger one, like the entire former Bulgarian state. These rebellions against the Byzantine administration involved people of different ethnic origins. The name *Boulgaroi* acquired in this case a political significance, like *Romaioi*, while the name *Vlachoi* remained only an ethnonym. The Bulgarians were not persecuted as a people during the Byzantine domination, because there were no ethnic discriminations. Therefore, the rebellion of 1185 was the achievement of the small aristocracy and of the cattle owners, who stirred the upheaval of the peasants and of the poor people from the towns.

The movement began at Tărnovo, the residence of a Byzantine *strategos* during the 11th-12th centuries. Well defended by nature, the city covered the area of three hills (Tsarevets, Trapezitsa, Momina Krepost), and it was a quite developed economic center. It is high probable that the Asan brothers were citizens of Tărnovo. The chronology of the events was established after several wrong interpretations by G. Prinzing. The revelation of Saint Demetrios "transfer" to the rebels' side occurred on his day, 26th October 1185, at Tărnovo, before the victory of Dimitritsi. It is excluded a date after this victory, because in this case it would have been difficult to prove that the Greeks lost the support of the military saint. At Tărnovo, the icon of Saint Demetrios was put in a wooden chapel or maybe in a tent, and on that place was soon built a stone church.

The movement involved a mountain population which already had a military training, acquired as a result of the reforms operated by the Comnenian emperors. Units of Vlachs recruited from Haemus and Rhodopi were organized in the Byzantine army. These Vlachs belonged to a group of Romanian population from which survive the so-called Megleno-Romanians, north of Thessaloniki. As shepherds, the Vlachs were wandering in the entire space of former Bulgarian tsarate, especially in the mountains, but without having their own country. At the beginning, the Romanians (Vlachs) were the promoters of the movement, because as any pastoral population they were opposed to central authority. The Bulgarians

aimed instead the revival of their state. The decisive participation of the Romanians is evidenced by the Byzantine and western sources (Niketas Choniates, Ansbertus, Jeffrey of Villehardouin, Henry of Valenciennes, Robert de Clari, and other sources). Very important are the statements of pope Innocentius III about the Roman origin of the Vlachs. Based on these sources, the most part of the historians, not only Romanians, agreed that the Romanians led by Peter and Asan started the rebellion, or that they have the main role in the events. It is likewise true that the result was a state that restored the old Bulgarian one, because the Romanians did not have such a state from which to take tradition.

The Romanian origin of the founders is proven by the name of the youngest brother, Ioniță (Kaloian), a Romanian, not a Bulgarian name. It is attested as Joannitius in Latin or Joannice in French. A mixed Romanian-Cuman origin of this family could not be excluded, because Cumans were living since the end of the 11th century in the area peopled by Vlachs. Paisie of Hilandar imagined the descent of Asan from the tsar Gabriel Radomir. This idea of a lineage from the old dynasty was supposed by some historians who took into consideration a partial Romanian origin of Samuels' family.

After the start of the rebellion, the Romanians and Bulgarians ravaged the Haemus mountain area, at the end of 1185. The mountain range called Zygos by the Byzantines is Stara Planina. An attack was directed to Preslav, but the siege was not possible and the rebels renounced for a while to recover the former capital. The inroads continued in Thrace, through the mountain passes. The defence of some of these *kleisourai* was the charge of the Vlachs recruited in the Byzantine army. So, the mountains became the base of the attacks against the Byzantine army. Isaac II retorted after the invasion of Thrace with a campaign started in April 1186. After the victory of the Byzantine army which led to the conquest of Târnovo, some rebels led by Peter took refuge north of the Danube, where they asked the Cumans to help them. The Cumans, professional mounted warriors, became for the future an outstanding force allied with the Romanians and Bulgarians. Peter determined the Cumans to plunder the region south of Haemus. The new attack in the autumn of 1186 was successful because the Byzantines were not careful to watch what they had recovered in the spring. The Romanians and Bulgarians supported by the Cumans advanced by the Riš pass toward Thrace. The region north of the Haemus became independent (this region called Mysia by Niketas Choniates was considered by him the motherland of the Vlachs). This was *Vlachia* or *Blakia*, the country mentioned by Robert of Clari and Jeffrey of Villehardouin. The precise location was disputed, and it is most probable that *Vlachia* was the name given to the region between Stara Planina and Danube.

The offensive of the rebels was enabled by the wrong decisions of Isaac II in the leadership of the war (three campaigns between autumn 1186 and March 1187). One of his generals, Alexios Vranas, used the army prepared for fight against them to start his own rebellion in April 1187. It is even possible that Asan proposed an alliance with this would-be emperor, as it is suggested by his lead seal found at Dobri Dol, in the area controlled by Alexios Vranas. The seal has the legend *Ioannou basileou ton Boulgaron*, which means that Asan took the title of tsar of the Bulgarians (attested by two other seals), while Peter dreamed to be Byzantine emperor. From a passage from the work of Georgios Akropolites results that the rule of Asan began in 1187. The war was resumed in October 1187 against the invaders that continued to plunder Thrace up to Agathopolis. The Byzantine army marched toward Beroe (Stara Zagora)

when it was ambushed. Next, on 11th October, the elite detachment won a victory at Lardeas (Lozenets) against the Cumans. The emperor did not continue the advance to the Vărbitsa in the direction of Preslav. A new campaign was organized after short time. From Philippopolis, the army advanced to Sofia, but the winter interrupted the march. In the spring of 1188 Isaac II attempted to conquer Lovitzos, but the siege failed. In unknown circumstances were captured Helen (the wife of Asan) and Ioniță, still a youngster. The minor brother was kept for some time as hostage at Constantinople. After this war, the Byzantines recognized the appearance of the new state by a peace treaty. The boundary was Beroe – Philipopolis – Agathopolis. Niketas Choniates used the name Zagora for the area north of Stara Planina, contrary to older sources which applied the word the region south of this range. Other sources dated in the 13th-14th centuries are too speaking about Zagora as the region between Stara Planina and Danube.

Chapter V.

Peter and Asan, 1189-1197

The development of the new independent Romanian-Bulgarian state was favored by the weakening of the Byzantine Empire and by the troubles caused by the third crusade. The crusaders that entered in June 1189 by Belgrade were perceived as a danger for the security of the empire, and Isaac II feared even that Frederic I intended to overthrow him. The Byzantine commander of Braničevo received orders to stir ambushes against the marching crusaders, made by the local population (Vlachs, Bulgarians, Serbs and Greeks). Some Vlachs were still fighting on the Byzantine side, like those who fought with the crusaders near Adrianople in February 1190. Military units composed by Vlachs were attested since the 10th century. The Byzantine administration was surviving in a part of that theme which was too called Bulgaria (its last duke was mentioned in the relation about the crusaders' journey).

At Niš, Frederic I met Stephen Nemanja and Peter, both willing to fight in common against Isaac II, as vassals of the German emperor. Frederic I rejected the proposal and continued the march. The crusaders were constantly attacked by Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians and Pechenegs on the way to Sofia and next to Philippopolis, where they arrived on 24th August 1189. The city was intentionally dismantled by the Byzantines, but the crusaders managed to occupy Thrace, and Frederic was now inclined to attack Constantinople. Peter proposed again an alliance in December 1189, when the headquarters of the crusaders where at Adrianople. The ruler of the Romanians and Bulgarians offered 40.000 Vlachs and Cuman archers as a support force, asking for him to be recognized emperor of Greece. For a while, Frederic I planned to siege Constantinople with these Vlachs and also with the Serbs, but he decided to continue the march to the Holy Land. He was also against the pretention of Peter to be recognized as emperor like him. For the crusaders, Peter was only the *dominus of terra Blacorum*.

After the departure of Frederic's army to Asia Minor in February 1190, Isaac II was able to resume the wars against the Vlachs and Bulgars, who were again plundering Thrace. In the same time, the Serbs did the same in Macedonia. In July 1190, the emperor launched a new campaign. The first plan was to advance with the fleet on the Danube. Two lead seals of the emperor found at Isaccea came from messages related to this operation which was directed to the territory near the Danube mouths (a letter of Frederic I specified that the rebels were

already masters of Bulgaria up to the mouth of the river). The first plan was replaced with a landing at Mesembria. The army marched toward Preslav and Tărnovo. The capital was not conquered, and the army retreat in September. On the way to Beroe, in the Tryavna pass, it was ambushed, and this battle was a great victory for the Vlachs and the Bulgars. They even took pieces from the imperial treasure. After this, they continued the attacks south of Stara Planina, reaching Sofia and Niš, a city which was for short time recovered by the Byzantines. Later on, in 1191, the Serbs accepted to make peace with Isaac II, who received back the region between Niš and Belgrade. Bulgaria was thus separated from Serbia by a Byzantine territory.

After this victory in the west, the emperor thought it was possible to win also the Vlacho-Bulgarian state. In April 1191 was repelled a Cuman attack over Philippopolis, and in this city was next appointed commander a brave general, Constantine Dukas Angelos. He was able to defend Thrace, but he tried to rebel and he was removed. During his short leadership the Byzantine army took the dominant position. In the early 1192, Peter accepted to stop the invasions, but Asan continued to be an enemy. Peter moved his residence to Preslav, the region around becoming a kind of appanage. The attacks were resumed in the same year 1192 after the dismissal of Constantine Dukas Angelos. The Byzantine army was defeated at Arkadiopolis in 1194. After this, Bulgaria reached the line of Rhodopi.

The last solution of Isaac II was a campaign in cooperation with Bela III, but the dethronement of the emperor cancelled this plan. The new emperor Alexios III tried to close peace, but Peter and Asan continued the attacks in 1195, in southern Thrace and Macedonia. The counteroffensive of the sebastocrator Isaac Comnenos failed with the defeat at Serrai. He was captured. From Beroe was took a mint which was used for the first Bulgarian imitative coins.

A new rebellion was started in Macedonia by the Vlach Dobromir. After his first attempt to become an independent ruler, a toparch, he was captured, freed and put commander of the Strumitza fortress, in 1196. He rebelled again next year. His second name Chryos renders perhaps the Vlach name Hârsu.

Sometime in the first part of 1196, Asan was murdered by Ivanko, a Bulgarian boliar who after the plot asked help from Alexios III, but the army sent to Bulgaria refused to fight. The second army departed too late, when Ivanko was already banished by Peter from Tărnovo. He sought refuge to Constantinople. It is not known when Ioniță came back from Constantinople, but he became associated ruler with Peter after the death of Asan (Peter continued to stay at Preslav). In 1197, Peter was too killed, Ioniță remaining the single tsar, because the son of Asan, Ioan (John), was a child.

In this first period of the state, the territory between the Danube, Black Sea, Rhodopi and Timok was liberated by the joint forces of the Romanians, Bulgarians and Cumans, based on the advantages given by the field (the mountains). The Byzantine army was in decline, and this enabled the victories of the rebels. The new state built its capital at Tărnovo, and the bringing of the relics of Saint John of Rila symbolized the continuity with the first Bulgarian tsarate.

Chapter VI.***Ioniță (1197-1207)***

Ivanko was appointed commander at Philippopolis, but he betrayed Alexios III in 1198, closing a peace treaty with Ioniță. He remained for a while the ruler of a independent region in eastern Macedonia and southern Thrace, but in 1200 was again defeated by the army of the emperor, and his land was recovered by the empire.

The Cumans attacked Thrace and Macedonia for three times in 1199 and 1201. At these invasions took part Romanians from north of the Danube, who were their subjects. These attacks were not initiated by Ioniță, and it is possible that Bulgaria was too affected.

Ioniță started his own war against Alexios III in March 1201. The main achievement was the conquest of Varna, done with the help of a siege tower. Mesembria was too liberated. These victories determined Dobromir to rebel again. He was now the master of a strong fortress, Prosakos. After the failed attempt to conquer this residence, Alexios III proposed to Dobromir to establish peaceful relations. The next action of the emperor was to close peace with Ioniță, in the spring of 1202. The boundary was established on Stara Planina.

In the west, the region Belgrad-Braničevo was still Byzantine in November 1198, but in the summer of 1199 it was conquered by Bulgaria, becoming a territory disputed with Hungary. This region belonged to the first Bulgarian state until 1018 when it was occupied by the Byzantine Empire. In 1202, Bulgaria took the region of Niš from the Serbian ruler Vukan, and this determined the attack of Hungary, whose target was the recovery of the region which was the dowry of Margret.

This conflict emerged during the negotiations between Ioniță and Pope Innocentius III, started in 1198. They concerned the coronation and the title of emperor (tsar), seen as the inheritance of the former tsars Peter I and Samuel. Ioniță was eager to unite his church with Rome, because he and his people, the Vlachs, were of Roman origin (a truth acknowledged by the pope). The pope agreed that Ioniță has the right to be master of the region disputed with Hungary, but asked him to give back what he conquered north of the Danube. The so-called Blachia mastered by Ioniță was the territory between Vidin and Braničevo, and by this reason king Emerich did not recognize the title of Ioniță as ruler of Bulgaria and Blachia. Furthermore, Ioniță asked the pope to confer him the imperial title, but this was not possible. He was recognized only as a king. The cardinal Leon Brancaloni was sent to Târnovo in February 1204 to offer the royal crown to Ioniță. The archbishop Vasile was too recognized as the head of the Bulgarian church, but not with the title of patriarch. The church of the Bulgarians and Romanians was united with Rome, and Ioniță received the royal insignia on 8 November 1204.

Meanwhile, the Byzantine Empire was confronted with the fourth crusade. Announced in 1198, it was supposed to reach Egypt, but the intrigues of Venice determined the participants to support the pretender to the Byzantine throne, Alexios, the son of Isaac II. Under the pressure of the crusaders, emperor Alexios III was replaced by Isaac II, who reigned together with his son after 1 August 1203. Alexios III sought help from Ioniță during his refuge in Thrace. Ioniță tried to reach an agreement with the crusaders and to become a vassal, but they considered him a usurper, not a possible partner for the conquest of Constantinople. Alexios IV was not able to satisfy the huge pretensions of the crusaders and it was too replaced by Alexios V. The conquest of the city by the crusaders (13 April 1204) was followed

by the election of the Latin emperor Baldwin I. The main leader of the crusaders, Boniface of Monferrat, who received a kingdom centered at Thessaloniki, married Margret, the former empress of Isaac II, becoming the brother in law of the Hungarian kings Emerich and Andrew II, and by consequence, enemy of Ioniță. The tsar tried first to keep peace, but after short time he decided to occupy a part of Thrace, in cooperation with the local Greeks, former subjects of Alexios III. In the spring of 1205 were freed Adrianople, Didymoteichon and Arkadiopolis. A new fortress was built at Kritsuva.

After these victories, the inhabitants of Adrianople asked Ioniță to free them from the Venetians. Baldwin organized a campaign to take back this city, and set the camp there. Meanwhile, the army of Ioniță arrived at Adrianople. The victory in the battle of 13-14 April 1205 was decided by the Cuman allies who organized an ambush where the heavy cavalry of the Latins was destroyed. Baldwin was captured. The citizens of Adrianople did not respect their promise to give the city to Ioniță, who tried without success to conquer it by a siege. Ioniță did not accept to free Baldwin even when the pope requested this, and the former Latin emperor died at Tărnovo in the next year. Rumors circulated that he was murdered, but there is no certain data about this. The grave defeat suffered by the Latins at Adrianople was echoed in many western sources, sometimes in a distorted manner. The victory was followed by a campaign in Thrace and Macedonia. The most important achievement was the conquest of Serrai and Verroia, fortresses which belonged to the kingdom of Thessaloniki. Meanwhile, the people of Thessaloniki rebelled against the Latins. The power was taken for a short time by a Vlach chief, Şişman, the commander of the fortress Prosakos. In June 1205, the new emperor Henry I tried to take the strategic initiative with a new offensive toward Adrianople, but he failed. Ioniță was instead successful in conquering Philippopolis (the city was destroyed).

In the next offensive (February 1206), an army composed of Romanians and Cumans ravage an area close to Constantinople, between Rousion and Athyra. Another attack was directed to eastern Macedonia. Many fortifications were destroyed, and the prisoners were deported to the Danubian region. The large scale pillage turned the local population to the Latins' side, and then to Theodore I Laskaris, the ruler of the new Greek empire of Nicaea. Other Greeks, from Adrianople and Didymoteichon, were under the protection of Theodore Vranas, a valiant general. Didymoteichon was besieged in June 1206 and again in August, by the army of Ioniță. Adrianople was too attacked, but the army commanded by Henry I was able to chase off the army of Ioniță. The Latin army advanced to Beroe, with the intention to reach Tărnovo. In the spring of 1207, after the establishment of an alliance with the Empire of Nicaea, Ioniță launched an attack against Adrianople, with a large army of Romanians, Bulgarians and Cumans. In the siege were used 33 trebuchets, but the walls resisted because they were repaired immediately. In July 1207, Henry I made a truce with Theodore I, and thus he was able to resume the war against Bulgaria, but there were many casualties, and the Latin army went back to Adrianople.

After the death of Boniface (killed on 4th September 1207), Ioniță tried to conquer Thessaloniki. Besides his army, at the siege took part a distinct force, the Cuman allies commanded by Manastras. The total manpower was around 10.000, while the garrison of Thessaloniki was much small. Almost all it was prepared for the climbing on the precinct wall in front of all the towers, when the siege ceased because Ioniță died. The legend recorded by

Greek, Serbian and western sources says that the tsar was killed by Saint Demetrios, who defended his city. The legend was represented in several mural paintings and icons (the most important at Dečani). Georgios Akropolites sustained that Ioniță died by pleurisy, but it is most probable that he was killed by Manastras, at the suggestion of a group of conspirators conducted by his nephew Borilă, the future tsar, who was considered a usurper by his contemporaries. The army left in peace Thessaloniki after the death of Ioniță.

The discovery of a ring with the name Kaloian in a grave near the 40 Martyrs church from Tărnovo led to the supposition that the skeleton belonged to the tsar, but later researches have demonstrated that the ring is dated in the 14th century.

During the reign of Ioniță, Tărnovo became a true capital. The tsar was reigning over several local rulers, commanders in the fortifications or chiefs of some regions, like Bellota. The centrifugal trends that emerged in the Byzantine Empire and that allowed the appearance of Bulgaria survived in this new state.

Chapter VII.

Borilă (1207-1218)

Borilă was the son of a sister of Ioniță, who took the power and the widow of the former tsar (a woman of Cuman origin). The minor sons of Asan, John and Alexander, took refuge in Russia. The power was taken by a group oriented to the Cumans. Borilă was entitled tsar of Bulgarians on his lead seals. The real name is *Borilă*, not *Boril*, because this is the form rendered by seals, with the letter *Yer*. The Greek, Latin and French language sources attested the name in forms that could be transcriptions of *Borilă*, a name with analogies in regions peopled by Vlachs. The name *Boril(ă)* or *Borilo* is derivated from the Slavonic word *boriti* (to fight). Another Borilos, a military commander during the reign of Nikephor Botaneiates, was perhaps a Pecheneg from Paradunavon, because he was called “Scythian” or “Mysian”.

In the spring of 1208, Henry I started a war against Borilă, to support the pretender Esclas (Slav), the son of another sister of Ioniță. His residence was Tzepaina (he moved later at Melnik). He considered himself the authentic heir of the former tsar, and Henry I tried to help him to take the power. The offensive was stopped at Beroe, but on the way back, at Philippopolis, the Latin army was able to defeat in open field the large army of Borilă (1st August 1208). In the aftermath, Henry I strengthened the positions of the empire in western Thrace by the alliance with Slav, who became despot, being also married with a bastard daughter of the emperor. On that occasion he received the second name Alexios. The despot ruled at Melnik until 1229. A brother of Borilă called Strez took refuge in Serbia, because he feared to be killed. He received from Stephen II the fortress Prosakos and a region between Ohrid and Struma. In 1209 he made submission to Henry I and peace with Borilă, receiving from the tsar the title of *sevastokrator*. It seems that Dobrudja was another region that was separated in the period after the death of Ioniță.

In 1211, Borilă has organized a council against the Bogomilic heresy. He remained faithful to the union with the Roman church, but this council prepared the establishment of the alliance with the Orthodox Empire of Nicaea (March 1211). The coalition which included Theodore I Laskaris, Borilă, Strez and the ruler of Epirus, Michael I Comnenos Dukas aimed the conquest of Constantinople. Pope Honorius III moved in Transylvania the Teutonic Order, to fight against the Cumans, the allies of Bulgaria, who continued to invade the Latin

Empire. The attacks were repelled, and Borilă was compelled to make peace with Henry I, who needed an ally against Michael I of Epirus. The alliance was sealed with the marriage of the Latin emperor with a daughter of Ioniță, at the beginning of 1214. It is not sure that Borilă married too with a daughter of Yolanda, the sister of Henry, but it is certain that he became the vassal of the Latin emperor. The alliance helped the reunification of Bulgaria, because Strez made submission, and Alexios Slav was already allied with Henry I. The supposition that the emperor gave to Borilă a coat of arms, recorded in the Wijnbergen armorial, is impossible. The peace of 1214 made Henry I the hegemon in the Balkan Peninsula. Together with Borilă and Strez, he attacked Serbia, but the campaigns of 1214 and 1215 were not successful. After the killing of Strez, his territory was divided between Borilă and Henry I.

Borilă closed another alliance with Hungary in the same year 1214. King Andrew II helped the Bulgarian tsar against the rebels of Vidin, who were supported by the Cumans who were against the peace made between Borilă and Henry I. The Hungarian prince Bela betrothed another daughter of Borilă, but the marriage will not be achieved. The gift of Borilă was the region between Belgrade and Braničevo.

The reign of Borilă ended when Ioan, the son of Asan, came back from Russia with an army, and fought for his right. First, he rallied some of the boyars and took the power in a region that could be Dobrudja. Next, he besieged Tărnovo for seven months. Borilă was blinded, and Ioan Asan II started his reign, at the beginning of 1218.

Chapter VIII.

Ioan Asan II (1218-1241)

The new tsar preserved the alliances with Hungary and the Latin Empire (ruled between 1221 and 1228 by Robert of Courtenay). The Cumans who attacked the Latin Empire in 1222 or 1223 were not the allies of Ioan Asan II. The alliance with Hungary was strengthened in 1221 by the marriage of the tsar with Anna Maria, the daughter of king Andrew II. Her dowry was the region between Belgrade and Braničevo. The relations with Hungary turned bad in 1228, when an attack was launched against Vidin. Andrew II was fearful about the rise of Bulgaria to a hegemonic position after the death of Robert of Courtenay. Another reason was the competition for Cumania, the region where a Latin bishopric was established in 1227. The conversion of the Cumans opened this competition, because Bulgaria was too in expansion in that area.

At Constantinople, the new emperor Baldwin II was a child. Ioan Asan II proposed his regency, but he was refused. The plan was the unification of the empires, in the same way as intended tsar Symeon in 913. This ambition of ruling at Constantinople caused the confrontation with the prince of Epirus, Theodore Angelos Comnenos Dukas, who was crowned emperor at Thessaloniki in 1227, after the conquest of a large part of Macedonia. He closed an alliance with Alexios Slav, followed by another one with Ioan Asan II, but the rivalry for Constantinople determined him to attack Bulgaria. His army suffered a big defeat at Klokoznitsa (9 March 1230). Theodore was captured, and the most part of his state was occupied by Bulgaria in the aftermath of the conflict. Thessaly, Albania and were too included, and Serbia was attacked because Stephen Radoslav helped his father-in-law Theodore. The victory was commemorated by the erection of a church at Tărnovo. The inscription put there describes the extension of the state. Ioan Asan II was entitled tsar of the

Bulgarians and the Greeks in the inscription of Stenimachos and in deeds issued after the victory of Klokotnitsa.

The small state of Alexios Slav was occupied, and the state of Thessaloniki became a satellite of Bulgaria (ruled by Manuel, the son-in-law of Ioan Asan II). In this hegemonic position, the tsar was able to take Constantinople, and with this purpose he tried to obtain the trust of the Greeks. This was possible only if he turned to Orthodoxy. When Pope Gregory IX found out about this, he urged Andrew II to attack Bulgaria. In the autumn of 1231, the region Belgrade–Braničevo was again occupied, but after short time was recovered by Bulgaria. On the northern side of the Danube up to the Olt River, in a region taken from Bulgaria, the Banate of Severin was established in 1232. After this war, in 1234, Ioan Asan II closed an alliance with the emperor of Nicaea John III Vatatzes. He renounced to the pretention to become emperor at Constantinople, being recognized as emperor of Bulgaria. The Maritsa River was the boundary between the empires. The daughter of Ioan Asan II, Helen, married with the future emperor Theodore II Laskaris. Another daughter, Beloslava, married with the Serbian king Stephen Vladislav.

The hegemonic position of Bulgaria was completed by the establishment of the autocephalous patriarchy in 1235, recognized by all the Orthodox patriarchs. It is not sure that this action led to the persecution of those who remained Catholics, but one effect was the imitation of the Byzantine Empire. The symphony of the religious and political powers was expressed by the building of the patriarchy on the top of Tsarevets, in a place higher than the palace. The tsar was entitled *autokrator*. The issue of original Bulgarian coins was another feature of the imperial power.

Ioan Asan II, in cooperation with John III Vatatzes, launched a war against the Latin Empire in the summer of 1235, but the sieges that lasted until the spring of 1236 were not successful, although the garrison of Constantinople was small. The events were described by Philippe Mouskés and in a letter sent by Pope to the new Hungarian king Bela IV, who was invited to attack Bulgaria (he did not that). Realizing that the emperor of Nicaea has chances to take the power at Constantinople, Ioan Asan II broke the alliance in 1237, hoping that he will be accepted emperor as tutor of the young Baldwin II. He announced Gregory IX that he could rejoin the Roman church. This change of policy was short, because Ioan Asan II felt himself guilty of treason when his wife, his son and the patriarch suddenly died. Thinking that this was a divine punishment, he resumed the alliance with the Empire of Nicaea at the end of 1237. After the death of Anna Maria, he married Irene, the daughter of Theodore Comnenos Dukas.

The new alliance determined the Pope to ask Hungary to start a crusade against Bulgaria, but Bela IV avoided such a conflict, being aware of the new common danger, the Mongols. Ioan Asan II was too inclined to adopt a neutral position, allowing in 1239 the march of the army of Baldwin II through his country. The advance of the Mongols determined the refuge of 40.000 Cumans in Hungary, in 1238. Another group received land in Bulgaria in 1239, but it was slaughtered at the orders of Ioan Asan II, who was afraid of troubles similar with those made by their brothers in Hungary.

Ioan Asan II died in 1241, short time before 24 June, when Hungary was already defeated by the Mongol Horde. The great offensive of Batu reached Hungary by two directions. The

battle of Muhi (11 April 1241) was a disaster for the Hungarian army. The Mongol invasion and the death of Ioan Asan II opened the period of decline of Bulgaria.

Chapter IX.

The decline of the state of the Asan dynasty (1241-1280)

The tutor of the minor son of the former tsar and of Anna Maria, Căliman (Koloman), was most likely Alexander, the brother of Ioan Asan II (it seems that the widow Irene went to Thessaloniki). The rule of Koloman was seen by Hungary as an opportunity to exert influence in Bulgaria. Bulgaria was invaded by the Mongols in the spring of 1242. Fazlallah Rashid ad-Din recorded two conquered cities, Tirnin (Tárnovo) and Kila, which is not Chilia in the Danube Delta as many historians supposed, but Anchialos. From Bulgaria, the horde advanced in the Latin Empire. When they returned, they ravaged the entire Bulgaria, but they were defeated by the „king of the Vlachs” in a mountain pass, as it was recorded by Philippe Mouskés. After 1242, Bulgaria, called *Blakia* by William of Rubruck, became a tributary state of the Golden Horde. In the same year, the Empire of Nicaea acquired the hegemonic position in the eastern Balkan Peninsula, by the occupation of the state of Thessaloniki.

Căliman died in 1246 at 12 years. It is possible that he was murdered at the decision of Irene, whose eight years son Michael became the new tsar. This meant the victory of a pro-Orthodox group, hostile to Hungary. The power was exerted perhaps by the sevastokrator Peter, the brother-in-law of Michael Asan. Soon after the beginning of the new reign, John III Vatatzes attacked Bulgaria, occupying some parts of Thrace and Macedonia (Serrai, Melnik, Tzepaina, Stenimachos, Skopion, Prilep and other forts and towns). Other parts of Macedonia were conquered by Michael II Dukas, the prince of Epirus. All what gained Ioan Asan II in 1230 was lost. The changes were recognized by a peace treaty in the spring of 1247. According to this treaty, Bulgaria and the Empire of Nicaea started soon a common war against the Latin Empire. Meanwhile, Hungary began a hostile policy toward Bulgaria. One of the missions of the Hospitallers who received land in the Banate of Severin (2 June 1247) was to fight against the tsarate.

The first own military decision of Michael Asan, at the age of 15 years, was a war against Serbia, in cooperation with Ragusa (1253). The Bulgarian army did not achieved too much, and returned when Hungary intervened. In these circumstances, in 1254, Hungary occupied again the disputed region Belgrade-Braničevo. Its administration was bestowed to the duke of Mačva, Rostislav Mihailovič. After the death of John III Vatatzes in 1254, Michael took revenge, freeing most of the regions occupied in 1246. He established peaceful relations with Hungary, and married Anna, the daughter of Rostislav Mihailovič (they are represented in the picture in the church of Kastoria). The new Nicaean emperor Theodore II Laskaris launched the counteroffensive in January 1255. The winter interrupted the advance to Tárnovo. In 1256 were occupied several fortresses in the Rhodopi region. The emperor crushed the rebellion of Dragotas of Melnik, a Bulgarian chief who was previously made commander of that city. The last target was Tzepaina, but this inexpugnable fortress was obtained only when Michael Asan asked peace, his forces being defeated near Vyzie. The peace agreement closed in June 1256 established the new boundary in Macedonia.

The defeat stirred a plot against Michael. The power was given to Căliman II, who was perhaps the son of Alexander. He was killed even before the army of Rostislav Mihailovič reached Tărnovo to avenge the death of his son-in-law. Thus ended the male lineage of the Asan family, but the dynasty continued by Irene, daughter of Theodore II Laskaris and Mary (the daughter of Ioan Asan II). She married in 1258 the boyar elected as Tsar, Constantine, son of Tich, of Serbian origin. Constantine was thus the representative of the filo-Byzantine group. The death of Michael was followed by some separatist actions. An autonomous territory ruled by Peter already existed, as it could be inferred from the treaty with Ragusa. Another such appanage belonged to sevastokrator Kaloian, the founder of the Boiana church. Another boyar, Jacob Svetoslav (of Russian origin) married in 1262 with another daughter of Theodore II Laskaris. It seems that he ruled over a territory in the western Bulgaria. A pretender to the throne was Mičo, a boyar married with Mary, the daughter of Ioan Asan II and Irene. His appanage was around Preslav, and he tried to become tsar at Tărnovo, fighting with Constantine until 1263, when he found refuge at Mesembria. Constantine was in conflict since his first year of reign with the Latin Empire. A Venetian fleet under the orders of Baldwin II attacked Mesembria. The source speaking about this event mentioned that the enemies were the Vlachs. The Latin emperor acted in coordination with Hungary. Rostislav Mihailovič has too occupied a part of Bulgaria around Vidin, in 1257. In 1259, he invaded again Bulgaria commanding a Hungarian army, but in 1260 his territory and the Banate of Severin were attacked by Constantine Asan and Jakob Svetoslav. The counteroffensive of Bela IV followed in 1261. The campaign was directed to Tărnovo.

Constantine Asan kept peace with the Empire of Nicaea for a while, when Theodore II Laskaris was in alliance with Hungary, but the Bulgarian-Byzantine relations went badly because the hostility between Irene and Michael VIII Palaeologos. In the second half of 1261, Constantine Asan was thus encircled by enemies, except Serbia. Yet, he was able to launch a campaign in Thrace in 1262-1263 (followed by the counteroffensive of Michael VIII in 1263). Mičo offered Mesembria to the emperor in exchange for asylum. The region of the Danube Delta was also subjected to the Byzantine Empire, and an army commanded by Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotos advanced in the western regions of Bulgaria ruled by Jakob Svetoslav. Confronted with this aggression, Svetoslav made an alliance with the Hungarian king Stephen V. As his vassal, he attacked Constantine Asan in 1263, becoming the new master of Vidin. Constantin attacked again the empire in cooperation with a Tatar army in the winter of 1264/1265, but he did not recover the territory lost in 1263. The Tatars acted at the request of the Seljuk ruler Izz al-Din Kaykaus, whose people were, as it seems, colonized in Dobrudja with the agreement of the Byzantine emperor. In 1265, Jakob Svetoslav turned again to the side of Constantine, but next year Stephen V was able to march with his army up to Tărnovo, and in these circumstances Svetoslav changed again his allegiance until 1273, when he became again a subject of Constantine. He remained all this time master of Vidin.

The next action of Constantine was the participation at the anti-Byzantine coalition initiated by Charles of Anjou, in 1269. Embassies were exchanged until 1273. These contacts with a western king might be the source of the two coats of arms ascribe to the king of Vlachia in the Wijnbergen armorial composed between 1265 and 1288. One of them could belong to Constantine Asan, while the second could be ascribed either to Jakob Svetoslav, either to Litovoi, a Romanian ruler from Oltenia. The alliance with Charles of Anjou

determined Constantine to launch an attack in Thrace in 1272, but he changed his policy when Michael VIII closed the alliance with the Tatar ruler Nogai, whose center of power was Isaccea, between 1273 and 1285.

After 1273, Constantine was in a state of illness, and the power was exerted by Mary. She ordered the killing of Svetoslav in 1277. A fervent Orthodox and enemy of Michael VIII, she opposed to the reunification of the Bulgarian church with Rome, proposed at the Council of Lyons in 1274. Hungary was too in turmoil after the death of Stephen V in 1272. The new established banates of Kučevo and Braničevo were soon occupied by two Bulgarian chiefs of Cuman origin, Dorman and Kudelin, who kept them until 1291.

In the summer of 1277, the continuous Tatar invasions caused a popular upheaval in Bulgaria, led by Ivailo, a swineherd. Many people went to his side, and he defeated and killed Constantine, becoming the new tsar (Mary accepted him as husband). Michael VIII tried to take profit from this situation. The son of Mičo called Ioan was married with his daughter Irene and proclaimed tsar of the Bulgarians. Ivailo was confronted with the opposition of some boyars, and in these circumstances was organized the campaign of Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotes in Bulgaria, started in the autumn of 1278. The fights lasted until the summer of 1279, when Ivailo escaped from Tărnovo to Dristra. After the siege of Dristra, Ivailo turned back to Tărnovo with some Tatar allies (meanwhile, the power was taken by Ioan, who became Ioan Asan III). Ivailo obtained two victories against the Byzantine army, at Devina (a hill in Tărnovo) and in the Strandža mountains. Ioan Asan III was dethroned by a boyar of Cuman origin, George Terter, who kept the power at Tărnovo. Ivailo tried to obtain again the tsarate with the help of Nogai, but the Tatar ruler killed him. George Terter remained tsar, with the support of the Tatars. Thus began a new period in the history of the Bulgarian tsarate.

Chapter X.

The fortifications

Some fortifications were inherited from the Byzantine Empire, the most important being certainly Tărnovo. The Tsarevets hill (12 hectares) was a Late Roman settlement, fortified again by the middle of the 12th century. During the Asan dynasty it was encircled with a wall with perimeter of about 2000 m. The main entrance is composed of three gates. There are also three small gates. The second fortification of Tărnovo, Trapezitsa (8,5 hectares), is too of Byzantine origin, but expanded in the 13th century. The main gate located to the north is defended by a large tower. Other inherited Byzantine fortifications were those along the Danube, from Belgrade to the Danube mouths. Belgrade and Braničevo were conquered in 1199 and became an object of dispute with Hungary until 1254. In 1199 was also established a bridge-head at Severin, until 1232. Vidin was a very important stronghold, built in the 9th century on the place of a Roman city. This fortress was used during the Asan dynasty. Other Danubian forts used by Bulgaria were those from Lom, Oryahovo, Svištov, Dristra. In Dobrudja it is attested the use of the fortifications from Turcoaia, Isaccea and Nufăru.

In the region between Danube and Stara Planina, the most important fortification except Tărnovo was Preslav. The old capital with the area of 3,5 km preserved its two precincts, external and internal. Another fortified town was Šumen (2,8 hectares). A former Byzantine

fortification was restored in the 13th century at Červen (20 hectares), and another fortified city was Loveč (10 hectares).

Between Stara Planina and Rhodopi, the most important walled city was Philippopolis, disputed for several times with the Byzantine and the Latin Empires. In the neighborhood are located the small but strongholds of Stenimachos, Kritzimos and Tzepaina, residences of local chiefs.

In the western Macedonia, Melnik was the main fortified city of Bulgaria, conquered in 1195 and taken in 1246 by the Byzantine army. The stronghold of Prosakos defended the Demir Kapija pass on the Vardar.

On the Black Sea shore, the most important fortifications were Mesembria and Varna. The first one is now partially under water. The precinct used in the 12th -13th centuries was that built after 1063. Mesembria belonged to Bulgaria between 1201 and 1263. The fortification of Varna, now disappeared, was estimated to cover an area of 220 x 170 m. It was conquered in 1190, lost in 1193 and recovered in 1201.

Conclusions

There were four stages in the history of the state ruled by the Asan dynasty: secession, restoration of the Bulgarian tsarate and claiming of the imperial title, consolidation by territorial sovereignty, and finally the legitimation from the first Bulgarian state, with the exclusion of the Romanian element. The state inherited not only the Byzantine imperial model, but also those centrifugal trends manifested in that empire, which allowed its birth. The boyars followed different external orientations, to the west or to the east, and sometimes they changed the rulers with foreign support. Local chiefs influenced by the western feudalism took possession of some castles, while others received appanages. The final result was the secession of Vidin.

The adoption of Catholicism was required to obtain the legitimation of the imperial title. The alliance with the Empire of Nicaea after 1233 involved the return to Orthodoxy.

The state created by the Asan dynasty had a certain influence on the emergence of the political organization of the north-Danubian Romanians, by the domination exerted in Oltenia and by the church. The dependence on the Patriarchy of Târnovo enabled the use of the Slavonic language in the Romanian church, in the competition with the expansion of the Latin Christianity represented by Hungary. Romanian rulers like those who owned a fort and a small church at Cetățeni, erected by the beginning of the 13th century, were under the protection of the Bulgarian tsarate, until the domination of the Golden Horde. Later on, the Wallachian princes borrowed the title IO (Ioan) from the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Alexander, but this would not mean a direct relation with the name of Ioniță, the source of that title in the late Bulgarian political ideology.

The Asan dynasty embodied an imperial idea, reflecting a substitution of the Byzantine Empire. This imperial idea was not followed by the Romanian princes in the 14th century. The single inheritance of the Romanian-Bulgarian state founded in 1185 for the north-Danubian Romanians was the preservation of the Slavonic language in the church and in the state administration. Their history would have been different if the tsarate did not turn back to the eastern Christianity in 1235.