

Liliana SIMEONOVA\*

## A MURDER RECONSIDERED: JOHN VLADIMIR, JOHN VLADISLAV AND THE BYZANTINE-BULGARIAN CONFLICT

**Abstract:** Largely discounted by historians as a work that is mostly based on factual inaccuracies and fiction, the so-called Chronicle of Dioclea contains at least one chapter of semi-authentic historical information — the Life of St. John Vladimir, a prince of Dioclea and possibly an heir to the Bulgarian throne. The Life is believed to be a novelization of an earlier hagiographic work, which may have been written in Slavonic but is now lost. While both John Vladimir and his royal executioner, John Vladislav of Bulgaria, were historical figures, the Life of St. John Vladimir contains non-historical material (e. g., visions, episodes of divine intervention and retribution and, above all, the romantic tale of John Vladimir's marriage to Kossara, Tsar Samuel's daughter).

When analyzed in the context of the bitter Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict of the later tenth and early eleventh century, John Vladimir's life and deeds look differently. In his westward expansion, Samuel (976–1014) managed to place Dyrhachium under his authority and conquered Dioclea. While Dyrhachium was of key importance to both Byzantium and Bulgaria because of its control over the main east-west route linking the Balkans with Italy, the neighboring principality of Dioclea was expected to serve as an Adriatic power base for whichever empire managed to place it under its supreme authority. Samuel captured Prince John Vladimir of Dioclea and had him married to one of his daughters, Kossara: this was a political marriage by means of which Samuel aimed at securing Dioclea for himself. As for the love story of John Vladimir and Kossara that is incorporated into the saint's vita, it appears to be an hagiographer's invention, based on Skylitzes' account of the marriage of another daughter of Samuel's, Miroslava, to the noble Byzantine captive Aso-

---

\* Prof. Liliana Simeonova, Institute of Balkan Studies & Center of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia

tios/Ashot Taronites, whom Samuel later appointed governor of the province of Dyrrhachium.

With his back safeguarded by Dyrrhachium and the principality of Dioclea, Samuel could now turn on the Serbs, the Dalmatian Croats and the Hungarians. But Dyrrhachium was soon to be turned over to the Byzantines by the two men Samuel trusted most — the newly appointed provincial governor and son-in-law of Samuel's, Ashot Taronites, and Samuel's own father-in-law, John Chryselios, who was a proteuon of the city. For the time being, John Vladimir seems to have remained loyal to Samuel who appears to have designated him as a potential heir to his throne, second-in-line to his only son, Gabriel Radomir. Two later sources — the so-called Synodikon of Boril (1211) and the Slavo-Bulgarian History by Paisii of Hilandar (1762) — provide evidence that this was the then established order of succession.

Upon the death of Samuel (1014), Gabriel Radomir ascended the throne but only ten months later he was killed by his cousin, John Vladislav (1015–1018), who seized the throne and took steps to ensure his position against his potential rival, John Vladimir. Byzantine diplomacy seems to have been very active in their efforts to pit the two men against one another. While Vladislav was continuing the resistance, Vladimir may have begun to vacillate on his decision which side to take. Before long, John Vladislav had him murdered. A little later, while camping at Dyrrhachium John Vladislav himself was murdered by an unknown soldier, in whom he recognized the murdered John Vladimir — most probably the assassin was a Byzantine agent. John Vladislav's death (1018) marked the effective end of the Bulgarian Empire. In the same year, John Vladimir's uncle, Dragimir, was killed by some local citizens in Kotor. The Byzantines seemed to have finally secured most of the Balkans for themselves.

In the Balkans, St. John Vladimir is a popular figure among hagiographers, hymnographers, icon painters, and National Revival historians and writers. As early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, he was mentioned by the Ragusan chronicler Mauro Orbini in his work titled *Il regno degli Slavi* ('The Realm of the Slavs'), published in 1601. At the end of the seventeenth century, in 1690 a Greek *akolouthia*, containing a life of the saint, prayers to him and hymns to be chanted on his feast day, was published in Venice. In 1756, Andrija Kačić Miošić composed *Pisma od kralja Vladimira* ('Poem of King Vladimir'), as part of his *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskog* ('Pleasant Conversation of the Slavic People'). A few years later, in 1762 the father of modern Bulgarian historiography, Paisii of Hilandar, mentioned John Vladimir in his *Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya* ('Slavo-Bulgarian History'). All of those works, however, draw information about St. Vladimir's life from the same source —

Chapter 36 of the so-called *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea*,<sup>1</sup> known as the *Life of St. John Vladimir*.

The *Life* is not an original source: it is believed to be a novelization of an earlier hagiographical work, which may have been written in Slavonic but is now lost.<sup>2</sup> While the *Life of St. John Vladimir* includes facts, which seem to have been historically genuine, it also contains non-historical material, such as miracles, visions, episodes of divine intervention and retribution. The main personages in the vita — Prince Vladimir as well as the Bulgarian kings Samuel, Radomir and Vladislav — are historical figures, whereas the tale of the love of Vladimir and Kosara, Samuel's daughter, appears to be an embellishment of the historical truth, a romantic addition to Vladimir's life story, which aims to dramatize the plot.

As I have already noted, the *Life of St. John Vladimir* is almost hagiographical in its one-sided portrayal of its subject. One may be tempted to dismiss its historicity by suggesting that its anonymous author may have been in pursuit of a personal or political agenda. Yet, the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea* is the only source that provides a detailed account of Basil II's activities in Bulgaria from a non-Byzantine perspective; it is for this reason, as P. Stephenson points out, that it demands our careful attention.<sup>3</sup>

The only Byzantine source to mention John Vladimir, albeit in a passing remark, is John Skylitzes. It has been argued that Skylitzes, as a former career bureaucrat,<sup>4</sup> was producing a subtle form of propaganda for Alexios Komnenos, by depicting the military aristocracy under Basil II in ways that would encourage loyal service in their contemporary descendants.<sup>5</sup> In his *Synopsis Historiarum* ('Historical Summary'),<sup>6</sup> Skylitzes provides information about Basil II's relations with Bulgaria; however, his accounts are mostly focused on specific raids and battles, with his chronology often being unreliable.

<sup>1</sup> The *Chronicle* has undergone through a number of editions: e. g., F. Šišić (ed.), *Letopis Popa Dukljanina* (Beograd — Zagreb, 1928); V. Mošin (ed.), *Ljetopis Popa Dukljanina* (Zagreb, 1950); S. Mijušković (ed.), *Ljetopis Popa Dukljanina* (Titograd, 1967). The dating and the authorship of the *Chronicle* are not subject to discussion in the present article.

<sup>2</sup> N. W. Ingham, "The Martyrdom of St. John of Dioclea" — *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 35–36 (1987), 199–216.

<sup>3</sup> P. Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> W. Seibt, "Johannes Skylitzes: Zur Person des Chronisten" — *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 25 (1976), 81–85.

<sup>5</sup> C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)*, (Oxford, 2005), ch. 4.

<sup>6</sup> H. Thurn (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae. Synopsis Historiarum* [CFHB 5], (Berlin, 1973).

While we may not have explicit knowledge of the series of events that surrounded the commission of that crime, that is, Vladimir's murder by order of Vladislav, we could try to reconstruct the actions and circumstances that led to it, based on the information provided by 'the Priest of Dioclea' and John Skylitzes.

At some point in time toward the end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh, Tsar Samuel of Bulgaria (976–1014) managed to place Dyrrachion under his authority and conquered Dioclea. The strong fortress of Dyrrachion was of key importance to both powers, Byzantium and Bulgaria, because it controlled the access to the *Via Egnatia*, the main east-west route linking Constantinople with the Adriatic and Italy.<sup>7</sup> As for Dioclea, which was situated to the north of Dyrrachion, by the end of the tenth century it seems to have been a Byzantine vassal principality: most probably, at that time the Byzantines ruled over some coastal cities such as Bar and Kotor and certain isles off the coast<sup>8</sup>, whereas the interior of this region may have been governed, in the name of the Byzantine emperor, by local officials.<sup>9</sup> Tsar Samuel may have been planning to use Dioclea as his powerbase, in his effort to spread his authority over the cities of Dalmatia that lay further north.

In the words of the 'Priest of Dioclea', "*while Vladimir was still a youth ruling in his father's stead, the aforementioned Samuel, tsar of the Bulgars, mustered a mighty army which he led into the Dalmatian lands, which lay beyond the territory of King Vladimir.*"<sup>10</sup> Initially, Vladimir tried to put up some resistance but later on he decided to give himself up in order to deliver his people "*from famine and the sword.*" Samuel then took John Vladimir in captivity and proceeded with his efforts to conquer the Dalmatian coast, reaching "*as far as Zadar, before returning to his own land through Bosnia and Rassa. Meanwhile, Vladimir was held in chains and offered supplication day and night, fasting and praying. An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a vision and comforted him with reve-*

<sup>7</sup> L. Simeonova, *The Via Egnatia — the Most Actively Used Overland Route in the Balkans* — In: E. de Sena (ed.), *Papers of the American Research Center in Sofia*, Vol. I (Sofia, 2014), 69–73.

<sup>8</sup> E. g., see the seal of Niketas, an imperial *spatharokandidatos* and *archon* of the isles of Dioclea: E. McGeer, J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides (eds.), *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art, 5: The East (continued): Constantinople and Environs, Unknown Locations, Addenda, Uncertain Readings* (Harvard University Press, 2005), No. 121.1, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155: a personal seal belonging to an *archon* called 'Peter of Dioclea' of the late tenth or early eleventh century.

<sup>10</sup> *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* (Ljetopis' Popa Dukljanina), Ch. 36 (trans. by P. Stephenson): [http://www.paulstephenson.info/trans/lpd 2.html](http://www.paulstephenson.info/trans/lpd%202.html) > 12. 8. 2016.

*lations of what would come to pass, how he would be liberated from his prison, and how, through his martyrdom, he would ascend to the heavenly kingdom.”*<sup>11</sup>

Vladimir’s biographer then tells us how one of Samuel’s daughters, Kosara, fell in love with the young prisoner and begged her father to allow her to marry this man, or else she would kill herself. The tsar granted his daughter’s request because he “*knew that Vladimir was of royal lineage. Immediately he sent for Vladimir, and ordered that he be brought before him bathed and clothed in the manner of a king. Then, gazing fondly upon him, and kissing him in front of the nobles of his kingdom, he gave his daughter to him for his wife. Having celebrated his daughter’s marriage in a regal manner, the tsar made Vladimir a king, and gave him both the land of his patrimonial kingdom, and the whole territory of Dyrrachium.*”<sup>12</sup>

In reality, there could be little doubt that the marriage of Vladimir and Kosara was a political marriage by means of which Samuel aimed at realizing his plan to subdue Dioclea and place it under his suzerainty.<sup>13</sup> As for the love story of John Vladimir and Kosara that is incorporated into the saint’s *vita*, it appears to be literary invention, based on Skylitzes’ account of the marriage of another daughter of Samuel’s, Miroslava, to the noble Byzantine captive Asotios/Ashot Taronites, whom Samuel later appointed governor of the province of Dyrrachion.

This is how John Skylitzes narrates the story of Miroslava’s marrying Ashot Taronites, the son of Gregory Taronites. Gregory was a Byzantine nobleman of Armenian descent whom Basil II appointed *doux* of Thessalonike in 991.<sup>14</sup> A few years later, probably in the mid-990 s Gregory and Ashot were ambushed by the Bulgarians; the father was killed and the son was captured and imprisoned. “*When Samuel returned safely to his homeland — Skylitzes writes — he took Asotios, son of Taronites, out of prison and made him his son-in-law by marrying him to his daughter, Miroslava. For she, Miroslava, had fallen in love with him and was threatening to kill herself unless she could be legally married to him. Once the marriage was a fait accompli, he [i. e., Samuel] sent him with her to Dyrrachion to ensure the security of the district.*”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> On the political nature of this marriage, see В. Н. Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, I/2 (София, 1971), 674–676.

<sup>14</sup> On Skylitzes’ interest in the deeds and family trees of the Byzantine aristocracy, see C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)*, (Oxford, 2005), 194–195.

<sup>15</sup> Skyl., *Synopsis historiarum*, 16.24: J. Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, 324–325. According to V. Zlatarski, the marriage of Ashot and Miroslava could have taken place no earlier than 999, after the marriage of Vladimir and Kosara: Златарски, *История*, I/2, с. 676.

In other words, Samuel secured his control over the province of Dyrrachion by making his son-in-law, Asotios/Ashot, governor. But as soon as Ashot got there he persuaded his wife to join him in boarding a Byzantine ship that was coasting nearby. Ashot came bearing a letter from one of the powerful men of Dyrrachion, the *proteuon* Chryselios. Chryselios offered to deliver the city of Dyrrachion to the Byzantine emperor in return for him and his two sons being raised to the dignity of *patrikios*. Soon after, a Byzantine squadron appeared off Dyrrachion under the command of Eustathios Daphnomeles, and the city returned to Byzantine rule. If we have to believe Skylitzes, the story had a happy ending for all those involved in it: Asotios was honored, by the emperor, with the title of *magistros*, Asotios's wife became a *patrikia zoste* (i. e., a lady-in-waiting), and the two sons of Chryselios were designated *patrikioi*, their father having died in the meantime.<sup>16</sup>

The dating of this episode is unclear; it is usually dated shortly after 997/8, according to the narrative of Skylitzes. The Italian chronicler Lupus Protospatharius gives a different date for the Byzantines' recovery of Dyrrhachium: according to Lupus, this happened in 1004/5 with the fortress being delivered to the emperor by a certain Theodore; Ashot is not mentioned at all.<sup>17</sup> In all probability, this Theodore was one of the sons of the late *proteon* of Dyrrachion, Chryselios.

Skylitzes' narrative continues with Samuel's tragic death and the dealings, which Samuel's son and successor to the throne, Gabriel Radomir, had with the Byzantines;<sup>18</sup> the murder of Radomir by his cousin, Vladislav, who promised to become a subject and servant of the emperor; the realization, by the emperor, that Vladislav intended to do the exact opposite of what he had written to him; and the campaign, which Basil II led against the Bulgarians, eventually taking the city of Ochrid, "*where stood the palace of the kings of Bulgaria*".<sup>19</sup>

After securing his position in Ochrid, the emperor took the road to Dyrrachion "*where the situation demanded his presence*". But he could not make it to Dyrrachion and, in the meantime, Vladimir was murdered by order of Vladislav. According to Skylitzes, as long as Vladimir, the husband of Samuel's daughter,

<sup>16</sup> Skyl., *Synopsis historiarum*, 16.24: Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, p. 325.

<sup>17</sup> W. P. Churchill, *Annales Baresnes and the Annales Lupi Protospatarii. Critical Edition and Commentary*. PhD Diss. (Center of Medieval Studies — University of Toronto, 1979), p. 133. According to Zlatarski and Pirivatrić, Dyrrachion must have been delivered to the Byzantines in 1005: cf. Златарски, *История*, I/2, с. 689; С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава* (Београд, 1998), с. 193.

<sup>18</sup> Skyl., *Synopsis historiarum*, 16.35–37: Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, 331–334.

<sup>19</sup> Skyl., *Synopsis historiarum*, 16.38: Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, 334–335.

was ruling Tribalia and the lands in the very vicinity of Servia,<sup>20</sup> things were calm at Dyrrachion, “for he was a man of integrity, peace and virtue. But when Gabriel was slain by John [Vladislav], Vladimir also was betrayed. He had put his trust in the oaths, which John had sworn by the agency of David, archbishop of Bulgaria, and surrendered to him, only to be slain by him a little later. The situation around Dyrrachion then became very disturbed and distressed because John [Vladislav] repeatedly attempted to take the city... This is why the emperor [Basil II] wished to go there to render aid, but ... he was prevented from doing so.”<sup>21</sup> After campaigning against Bulgaria, Basil II returned to Constantinople on 6 January 1018. Vladislav took advantage of the emperor’s absence and “went off to besiege Dyrrachion with barbaric insolence and arrogance. When the siege was laid, an engagement took place in which he fell; with no man known to have been the cause of his death. He [i. e., Vladislav] had ruled Bulgaria for two years and five months.”<sup>22</sup> Skylitzes does not say when and where the prince of Dioclea was assassinated. He seems to imply that the murder of Vladimir took place at the time when Vladislav was attempting to storm Dyrrachion.

The ‘Priest of Dioclea’ offers a more detailed account of the events that led to Vladislav’s decision to murder his cousin, Radomir, and later on Radomir’s brother-in-law, Vladimir:

“...fearing the loss of his empire, the emperor Basil secretly sent ambassadors to Vladislav, Radomir’s cousin, who asked: ‘Why do you not avenge the blood of your father? Take our gold and silver, as much as you desire to be at peace with us, and take Samuel’s kingdom because he killed your father, his own brother. If you get the upper hand, kill his son Radomir, who now rules the kingdom’. Vladislav consented to these words, and on an appointed day while Radomir was out hunting, he rode out with him and struck him dead. In this way Radomir died, and Vladislav, his murderer, ruled in his stead.”<sup>23</sup>

Vladislav then sent envoys to Vladimir, demanding his attendance at the court in Prespa. Vladimir’s wife, Kosara, begged him not to go, being afraid that the new Bulgarian tsar might murder him, as he had murdered her brother, Radomir: “Send me instead, so that I may see and hear what the tsar has in

<sup>20</sup> Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, p. 335 erroneously translates ‘Servia’ as ‘Serbia’. Servia (in present-day Western Macedonia, Greece) was a fortress, which Samuel took in 999. In 1002, the Byzantines recaptured the fortress, despite the severe resistance of its Bulgarian castellan, Nikoulitzes.

<sup>21</sup> Skyl., *Synopsis historiarum*, 16.38: Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, p. 335.

<sup>22</sup> Skyl., *Synopsis historiarum*, 16.41: Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, p. 338.

<sup>23</sup> *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* (Ljetopis’ Popa Dukljanina), Ch. 36 (trans. by P. Stephenson): <http://www.paulstephenson.info/trans/lpd2.html> >12. 9. 2016.

*mind. If he wants to murder me, let him murder me, so long as you do not perish*". Off she went. Vladislav received her with honor, but under false pretenses. The tsar then extended a second invitation to Vladimir, this time sending him a gold cross and a pledge of faith. The prince of Dioclea turned down the gold cross, pointing out that Our Lord, Jesus Christ, was suspended not on a gold cross, but on a wooden one. This episode clearly is a hagiographer's invention, aiming to underscore the religiosity of the martyred man. Only after Vladislav sent to Vladimir two bishops and a hermit to renew the pledge of faith and give him a wooden cross did the prince of Dioclea set off to the tsar.<sup>24</sup>

Vladislav had ordered that ambushes be set alongside the road, so that Vladimir would be leaped upon and murdered while traveling *en route* to Prespa. But God sent His angels to guard Vladimir and his companions. Upon finding out that the prince of Dioclea had not been murdered but, upon arriving safely in Prespa, had gone into a church to pray, Vladislav became furious and sent swordsmen to decapitate the prince: "*While the king [i. e., Vladimir] prayed the soldiers surrounded him. When the king noticed this he called to the bishops and hermit who were there and said: 'My lords, what is this? What have you done? Why did you deceive me thus? Why should I die blameless for having believed your words and oaths?' They were so ashamed that they did not dare look him in the face. Next the king prayed and made his confession, received the body and blood of Christ, and taking in his hands the cross which he had obtained from the tsar, he said: 'Pray for me, my lords, and let this cross as well as you be my witness on the Day of Judgment that I died blameless'. Then he kissed the cross, made peace with the bishops, and left the church as all around him wept. Immediately before the doors of the church he was struck down by the soldiers; he was beheaded on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May. The bishops carried his body into the church and buried him amid hymns and paeans.*"<sup>25</sup>

The year, in which the assassination of Vladimir took place, is not mentioned in the *Chronicle*.<sup>26</sup> We are told that, not long after he was buried in the church, miracles began to happen at his tomb. "*When the tsar saw what miracles the Lord performed there, he repented and so filled with terror that he allowed his cousin [Kosara] to take his [i. e., Vladimir's] body and bury it wherever she wished. So she took his body and transported it to a place known as*

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The year of Vladimir's murder is uncertain; according to Zlatarski, he was assassinated in either 1015 or 1016: cf. Златарски, *История*, I/2, с. 721–722.

*Krajina, where his [i. e., Vladimir's] court was, and interred him in the church of St. Mary.*"<sup>27</sup>

In the *Chronicle*, the nearly-hagiographical description of the events that surrounded Vladimir's assassination ends with an account of his executioner's death: "One day, while he [i. e., Vladislav] was encamped before Dyrrachion, he was tucking into a feast when a vision of St. Vladimir as an armed soldier appeared before him. He was shaken with fear, and began to cry at the top of his voice: 'Guards, come at once, run and defend me from Vladimir, he wants to kill me'. Saying this, he leapt to his feet to flee. Immediately he was struck by the angel. He fell to the ground and both his body and soul expired. His nobles, soldiers and all of his people were struck with terror and foreboding. Setting fire to their camp, they all fled that very night and made for their homes. So it came to pass that this most worthless killer, who had ordered that Vladimir be beheaded and thus made a martyr while he was sitting down to dine, was himself struck dead and joined Satan's angels at suppertime."<sup>28</sup>

According to the 'Priest of Dioclea', Vladislav was feasting when Vladimir was assassinated and later on he, too, was assassinated while feasting: this repetitive 'feasting-murder' motif seems to be a hagiographer's invention rather than a historical fact. Skylitzes seems to give a more realistic explanation of how and where Vladislav died. A later, revised version of Skylitzes' history provides yet another description of the circumstances of Vladislav's death before the walls of Dyrrachion: "a mounted engagement took place with the commander and patrician Niketas Pegonites and he [i. e., Vladislav] fell, mortally wounded in the entrails by two foot soldiers running through the melee."<sup>29</sup>

With the death of the last of the Bulgarian rulers, John Vladislav, the bitter Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict came to an end. It had lasted thirty-eight years. But why was Prince Vladimir murdered during the final stage of that bloody conflict? Was he a threat to Vladislav's position?

There could be little doubt that Vladislav ordered Vladimir's murder for political reasons. The old tsar, Samuel, may have designated his son-in-law, Vladimir, as his successor to Bulgaria's throne, second in line only to his son, Radomir. This hypothesis is corroborated by two later Bulgarian sources, the so-called *Synodikon of Boril* (1211) and Paisii's *Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya*

<sup>27</sup> *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* (Ljetopis' Popa Dukljanina), Ch. 36 (trans. by P. Stephenson): <http://www.paulstephenson.info/trans/lpd2.html> >12. 9. 2016.

<sup>28</sup> *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* (Ljetopis' Popa Dukljanina), Ch. 36 (trans. by P. Stephenson): <http://www.paulstephenson.info/trans/lpd2.html> >12. 9. 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Skyl., *Synopsis historiarum*, 16.41: Wotley (trans.), *John Skylitzes*, p. 338.

(1762), both of which mention Prince Vladimir as Radomir's successor to the throne. Thus, the official *Record Book of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church* (i. e., the *Synodikon of Boril*), which is to be read every year on the *Sunday of Orthodoxy*, gives the names of four Bulgarian rulers in the following order of succession: "Samuel, Gabriel Radomir, John Vladimir, and John Vladislav."<sup>30</sup> Paisii, in his *Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya*, says that "after Samuel, his son Radomir ascended the throne but his reign only lasted a year and a half, and he was killed while hunting, at the instigation of the Greek tsar... After Radomir, Vladimir became tsar."<sup>31</sup>

The exact reason for Vladislav's decision to have Vladimir murdered remains unclear: was it because Vladislav was so greedy for power that he ruthlessly eliminated both men, Radomir and Vladimir, in order to seize the throne for himself? Or was it that Vladislav decided to have Vladimir murdered because he had found out that Vladimir was engaged in secret negotiations with the emperor to make Dioclea Byzantium's vassal again? Whatever the case may have been, later Bulgarian sources refer to John Vladimir as Bulgaria's tsar who must have ruled the country after Radomir, and before Vladislav.

---

<sup>30</sup> И. Божилов, А. Тотоманова, И. Билярски (ред., прев., комент.), *Борилов синодик. Издание и превод* (София, 2012), с. 310.

<sup>31</sup> П. Динеков (ред.), *Славянобългарска история* (София, 1972), с. 94.