

= Simeon I of Bulgaria =

Simeon ( also Symeon ) I the Great ( Bulgarian : Симеон Велики [ sim??n ?p? ? rvi v??liki ] ) ruled over Bulgaria from 893 to 927 , during the First Bulgarian Empire . Simeon 's successful campaigns against the Byzantines , Magyars and Serbs led Bulgaria to its greatest territorial expansion ever , making it the most powerful state in contemporary Eastern Europe . His reign was also a period of unmatched cultural prosperity and enlightenment later deemed the Golden Age of Bulgarian culture .

During Simeon 's rule , Bulgaria spread over a territory between the Aegean , the Adriatic and the Black Sea , and the new Bulgarian capital Preslav was said to rival Constantinople . The newly independent Bulgarian Orthodox Church became the first new patriarchate besides the Pentarchy , and Bulgarian Glagolitic and Cyrillic translations of Christian texts spread all over the Slavic world of the time . It was at the Preslav Literary School in the 890s that the Cyrillic alphabet was developed . Halfway through his reign , Simeon assumed the title of Emperor ( Tsar ) , having prior to that been styled Prince ( Knyaz ) .

= = Background and early life = =

Simeon was born in 864 or 865 , as the third son of Knyaz Boris I of Krum 's dynasty . As Boris was the ruler who Christianized Bulgaria in 865 , Simeon was a Christian all his life . Because his eldest brother Vladimir was designated heir to the Bulgarian throne , Boris intended Simeon to become a high @-@ ranking cleric , possibly Bulgarian archbishop , and sent him to the leading University of Constantinople to receive theological education when he was thirteen or fourteen . He took the name Simeon as a novice in a monastery in Constantinople . During the decade ( ca . 878 ? 888 ) he spent in the Byzantine capital , he received excellent education and studied the rhetoric of Demosthenes and Aristotle . He also learned fluent Greek , to the extent that he was referred to as " the half @-@ Greek " in Byzantine chronicles . He is speculated to have been tutored by Patriarch Photios I of Constantinople , but this is not supported by any source .

Around 888 , Simeon returned to Bulgaria and settled at the newly established royal monastery of Preslav " at the mouth of the Ti?a " , where , under the guidance of Naum of Preslav , he engaged in active translation of important religious works from Greek to Old Church Slavonic ( Old Bulgarian ) , aided by other students from Constantinople . Meanwhile , Vladimir had succeeded Boris , who had retreated to a monastery , as ruler of Bulgaria . Vladimir attempted to reintroduce paganism in the empire and possibly signed an anti @-@ Byzantine pact with Arnulf of Carinthia , forcing Boris to re @-@ enter political life . Boris had Vladimir imprisoned and blinded , and then appointed Simeon as the new ruler . This was done at an assembly in Preslav which also proclaimed Bulgarian as the only language of state and church and moved the Bulgarian capital from Pliska to Preslav , to better cement the recent conversion . It is not known why Boris did not place his second son , Gavril , on the throne , but instead preferred Simeon .

= = Reign = =

= = = Trade War with Byzantium and Magyar invasions = = =

With Simeon on the throne , the long @-@ lasting peace with the Byzantine Empire established by his father was about to end . A conflict arose when Byzantine Emperor Leo VI the Wise , allegedly acting under pressure from his mistress Zoe Zaoutzaina and her father Stylianos Zaoutzes , moved the marketplace for Bulgarian goods from Constantinople to Thessaloniki , where the Bulgarian merchants were heavily taxed . The Bulgarians sought protection by Simeon , who in turn complained to Leo . However , the Byzantine emperor ignored his embassy .

Forced to take action , in the autumn of 894 Simeon invaded the Byzantine Empire from the north , meeting with little opposition due to the concentration of most Byzantine forces in eastern Anatolia

to counter Arab invasions . Informed of the Bulgarian offensive , the surprised Leo sent an army consisting of guardsmen and other military units from the capital to halt Simeon , but his troops were routed somewhere in the theme of Macedonia . The Bulgarians took most of the Khazar mercenary guardsmen prisoners and killed many archons , including the army 's commander . However , instead of continuing his advance to the Byzantine capital , Simeon quickly withdrew his troops to face a Magyar invasion from the north . These events were later called " the first trade war in medieval Europe " by Bulgarian historians .

Unable to effectively respond to the Bulgarian campaign due to the engagement of their forces against the Arabs , the Byzantines convinced the Magyars to attack Bulgaria , promising to transport them across the Danube using the Byzantine navy . Leo VI may have also concluded an agreement with Arnulf to make sure that the Franks did not support Simeon against the Magyars . In addition , the talented commander Nikephoros Phokas was called back from southern Italy to lead a separate army against Bulgaria in 895 with the mere intention to overawe the Bulgarians . Simeon , unaware of the threat from the north , rushed to meet Phokas ' forces , but the two armies did not engage in a fight . Instead , the Byzantines offered peace , informing him of both the Byzantine foot and maritime campaign , but intentionally did not notify him of the planned Magyar attack . Simeon did not trust the envoy and , after sending him to prison , ordered the Byzantine navy 's route into the Danube closed off with ropes and chains , intending to hold it until he had dealt with Phokas .

Despite the problems they encountered because of the fencing , the Byzantines ultimately managed to ferry the Magyar forces led by Árpád 's son Liüntika across the Danube , possibly near modern Galați , and assisted them in pillaging the nearby Bulgarian lands . Once notified of the surprise invasion , Simeon headed north to stop the Magyars , leaving some of his troops at the southern border to prevent a possible attack by Phokas . Simeon 's two encounters with the enemy in Northern Dobruja resulted in Magyar victories , forcing him to retreat to Drăstăr . After pillaging much of Bulgaria and reaching Preslav , the Magyars returned to their lands , but not before Simeon had concluded an armistice with Byzantium towards the summer of 895 . A complete peace was delayed , as Leo VI required the release of the Byzantine captives from the Trade War .

= = = Anti @-@ Magyar campaign and further wars with Byzantium = = =

Having dealt with the pressure from the Magyars and the Byzantines , Simeon was free to plan a campaign against the Magyars looking for retribution . He negotiated a joint force with the Magyars ' eastern neighbours , the Pechenegs , and imprisoned the Byzantine envoy Leo Choirosphaktes in order to delay the release of the captives until after the campaign against the Magyars . This would allow him to renegotiate the peace conditions in his favour . In an exchange of letters with the envoy , Simeon refused to release the captives and ridiculed Leo VI 's astrological abilities .

Using a Magyar invasion in the lands of the neighbouring Slavs in 896 as a casus belli , Simeon headed against the Magyars together with his Pecheneg allies , defeating them completely in the Battle of Southern Buh and making them leave Etelköz forever and settle in Pannonia . Following the defeat of the Magyars , Simeon finally released the Byzantine prisoners in exchange for Bulgarians captured in 895 .

Claiming that not all prisoners had been released , Simeon once again invaded Byzantium in the summer of 896 , heading directly to Constantinople . He was met in Thrace by a hastily assembled Byzantine army , but annihilated the Byzantine forces in the Battle of Bulgarophyon ( at modern Babaeski , Turkey ) . Arming Arab captives and sending them to fight with the Bulgarians as a desperate measure , Leo VI managed to repel the Bulgarians from Constantinople , which they had besieged . The war ended with a peace treaty which formally lasted until around Leo VI 's death in 912 and under which Byzantium was obliged to pay Bulgaria an annual tribute . Under the treaty , the Byzantines also ceded an area between the Black Sea and Strandža to the Bulgarian Empire . Meanwhile , Simeon had also imposed his authority over Serbia in return for recognizing Petar Gojniković as their ruler .

Simeon often violated the peace treaty with Byzantium , attacking and conquering Byzantine territory on several occasions , such as in 904 , when the Bulgarian raids were used by Arabs led by

the Byzantine renegade Leo of Tripoli to undertake a maritime campaign and seize Thessaloniki . After the Arabs plundered the city , it was an easy target for Bulgaria and the nearby Slavic tribes . In order to dissuade Simeon from capturing the city and populating it with Slavs , Leo VI was forced to make further territorial concessions to the Bulgarians in the modern region of Macedonia . With the treaty of 904 , all Slavic @-@ inhabited lands in modern southern Macedonia and southern Albania were ceded to the Bulgarian Empire , with the border line running some 20 kilometres north of Thessaloniki .

= = = Recognition as Emperor = = =

The death of Leo VI on 11 May 912 and the accession of his infant son Constantine VII under the guidance of Leo 's brother Alexander , who expelled Leo 's wife Zoe from the palace , constituted a great opportunity for Simeon to attempt another campaign against Constantinople , the conquest of which remained the dream of his life . In the spring of 913 , Simeon 's envoys , who had arrived in Constantinople to renew the peace of 896 , were sent away by Alexander , who refused to pay the annual tribute , urging Simeon to prepare for war .

Before Simeon could attack , Alexander died on 6 June 913 , leaving the empire in the hands of a regency council headed by Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos . Many residents of Constantinople did not recognize the young emperor and instead supported the pretender Constantine Doukas , which , exacerbated by revolts in southern Italy and the planned Arab invasion in eastern Anatolia , was all to Simeon 's advantage . Nicholas Mystikos tried to discourage Simeon from invading Byzantium in a long series of pleading letters , but the Bulgarian ruler nevertheless attacked in full force in late July or August 913 , reaching Constantinople without any serious resistance .

The anarchy in Constantinople had ceased after the murder of the pretender Constantine Doukas , however , and a government had promptly been formed with Patriarch Nicholas at the helm . This urged Simeon to raise his siege and enter peace negotiations , to the joy of the Byzantines . The protracted negotiations resulted in the payment of the arrears of Byzantine tribute , the promise that Constantine VII would marry one of Simeon 's daughters , and , most importantly , Simeon 's official recognition as Emperor of the Bulgarians by Patriarch Nicholas in the Blachernae Palace .

Shortly after Simeon visited Constantinople , Constantine 's mother Zoe returned to the palace on the insistence of the young emperor and immediately proceeded to eliminate the regents . Through a plot , she managed to assume power in February 914 , practically removing Patriarch Nicholas from the government , disowning and obscuring his recognition of Simeon 's imperial title , and rejecting the planned marriage of her son to one of Simeon 's daughters . Simeon had to resort to war to achieve his goals . He invaded Thrace in the summer of 914 and captured Adrianople . Zoe was quick to send Simeon numerous presents in order to conciliate him , and she managed to convince him to cede back Adrianople and withdraw his army . In the following years , Simeon 's forces were engaged in the northwestern Byzantine provinces , around Dra? ( Durrës ) and Thessaloniki , but did not make a move against Constantinople .

= = = Victories at Acheloos and Katasyrtai = = =

By 917 , Simeon was preparing for yet another war against Byzantium . He attempted to conclude an anti @-@ Byzantine union with the Pechenegs , but his envoys could not match the financial resources of the Byzantines , who succeeded in outbidding them . The Byzantines hatched a large @-@ scale campaign against Bulgaria and also tried to persuade the Serbian Prince Petar Gojnikovi? to attack the Bulgarians with Magyar support .

In 917 , a particularly strong Byzantine army led by Leo Phokas the Elder , son of Nikephoros Phokas , invaded Bulgaria accompanied by the Byzantine navy under the command of Romanos Lekapenos , which sailed to the Bulgarian Black Sea ports . En route to Mesembria ( Neseb?r ) , where they were supposed to be reinforced by troops transported by the navy , Phokas ' forces stopped to rest near the river of Acheloos , not far from the port of Anchialos ( Pomorie ) . Once informed of the invasion , Simeon rushed to intercept the Byzantines , and attacked them from the

nearby hills while they were resting disorganized . In the Battle of Acheloos of 20 August 917 , one of the largest in medieval history , the Bulgarians completely routed the Byzantines and killed many of their commanders , although Phokas managed to escape to Mesembria . Decades later , Leo the Deacon would write that " piles of bones can still be seen today at the river Acheloos , where the fleeing army of the Byzantines was then infamously slain " .

The planned Pecheneg attack from the north also failed , as the Pechenegs quarrelled with admiral Lekapenos , who refused to transport them across the Danube to aid the main Byzantine army . The Byzantines were not aided by Serbs and Magyars either : the Magyars were engaged in Western Europe as Frankish allies , and the Serbs under Petar Gojnikovi? were reluctant to attack Bulgaria because Michael of Zahumlje , an ally of Bulgaria , had notified Simeon of their plans .

Simeon 's army quickly followed up the victory of Acheloos with another success . The Bulgarians sent to pursuit the remnants of the Byzantine army approached Constantinople and encountered Byzantine forces under Leo Phokas , who had returned to the capital , at the village of Katasyrtai in the immediate proximity of Constantinople . The Bulgarian regiments attacked and again defeated the Byzantines , destroying some of their last units before returning to Bulgaria .

= = = Suppression of Serbian unrest and late campaigns against Byzantium = = =

Immediately after that campaign , Simeon sought to punish the Serbian ruler Petar Gojnikovi? who had attempted to betray him by concluding an alliance with the Byzantines . Simeon sent an army led by two of his commanders , Theodore Sigrica and Marmais , to Serbia . The two managed to persuade Petar to attend a personal meeting , during which he was enchained and carried off to Bulgaria , where he died in a dungeon . Simeon put Pavle Branovi? , prior to that an exile in Bulgaria , on the Serbian throne , thus restoring the Bulgarian influence in Serbia for a while .

Meanwhile , the Byzantine military failures forced another change of government in Constantinople : the admiral Romanos Lekapenos replaced Zoe as regent of the young Constantine VII in 919 , forcing her back into a convent . Romanos betrothed his daughter Helena Lekapene to Constantine and advanced to the rank of co @-@ emperor in December 920 , effectively assuming the government of the empire , which was largely what Simeon had planned to do .

No longer able to climb to the Byzantine throne by diplomatic means , the infuriated Simeon once again had to wage war to impose his will . Between 920 and 922 , Bulgaria increased its pressure on Byzantium , campaigning in the west through Thessaly reaching the Isthmus of Corinth and in the east in Thrace , reaching and crossing the Dardanelles to lay siege on the town of Lampsacus . Simeon 's forces appeared before Constantinople in 921 , when they demanded the deposition of Romanos and captured Adrianople , and 922 , when they were victorious at Pigae , burned much of the Golden Horn and seized Bizye . In the meantime , the Byzantines attempted to ignite Serbia against Simeon , but he substituted Pavle with Zaharije Pribisavljevi? , a former refugee at Constantinople that he had captured .

Desperate to conquer Constantinople , Simeon planned a large campaign in 924 and sent envoys to the Fatimid caliph Ubayd Allah al @-@ Mahdi Billah , who possessed a powerful navy which Simeon needed . The caliph agreed and sent his own representatives back with the Bulgarians to arrange the alliance . However , the envoys were captured by the Byzantines at Calabria . Romanos offered peace to the Arabs , supplementing this offer with generous gifts , and ruined their union with Bulgaria .

In Serbia , Zaharije was persuaded by the Byzantines to revolt against Simeon . Zaharije was supported by many Bulgarians exhausted from Simeon 's endless campaigns against Byzantium . The Bulgarian emperor sent his troops under Sigrica and Marmais , but they were routed and the two commanders beheaded , which forced Simeon to conclude an armistice with Byzantium in order to concentrate on the suppression of the uprising . Simeon sent an army led by ?aslav Klonimirovi? in 924 to depose Zaharije . He was successful , as Zaharije fled to Croatia . After this victory , the Serbian nobility was invited to come to Bulgaria and bow to the new Prince . However , he did not appear at the supposed meeting and all of them were beheaded . Bulgaria annexed Serbia directly .

In the summer of 924 , Simeon nevertheless arrived at Constantinople and demanded to see the patriarch and the emperor . He conversed with Romanos on the Golden Horn on 9 September 924 and arranged a truce , according to which Byzantium would pay Bulgaria an annual tax , but would be ceded back some cities on the Black Sea coast . During the interview of the two monarchs , two eagles are said to have met in the skies above and then to have parted , one of them flying over Constantinople and the other heading to Thrace , as a sign of the irreconcilability of the two rulers . In his description of this meeting , Theophanes Continuatus mentions that " the two emperors ... conversed " , which may indicate renewed Byzantine recognition of Simeon 's imperial claims .

= = = War with Croatia and death = = =

Most likely after ( or possibly at the time of ) Patriarch Nicholas ' death in 925 , Simeon raised the status of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to a patriarchate . This may be linked to Simeon 's diplomatic relations with the Papacy between 924 and 926 , during which he demanded and received Pope John X 's recognition of his title as " Emperor of the Romans " , truly equal to the Byzantine emperor , and possibly the confirmation of a patriarchal dignity for the head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church .

In 926 , Simeon 's troops under Alogobotur invaded Croatia , at the time a Byzantine ally , but were completely defeated by the army of King Tomislav in the Battle of the Bosnian Highlands . Fearing a Bulgarian retribution , Tomislav accepted to abandon his union with Byzantium and make peace on the basis of the status quo , negotiated by the papal legate Madalbert . In the last months of his life , Simeon prepared for another conflict with Constantinople despite Romanos ' desperate pleas for peace .

On 27 May 927 , Simeon died of heart failure in his palace in Preslav . Byzantine chroniclers tie his death to a legend , according to which Romanos decapitated a statue which was Simeon 's inanimate double , and he died at that very hour .

He was succeeded by his son Peter I , with George Sursubul , the new emperor 's maternal uncle , initially acting as a regent . As part of the peace treaty signed in October 927 and reinforced by Peter 's marriage to Maria ( Eirene ) , Romanos ' granddaughter , the existing borders were confirmed , as were the Bulgarian ruler 's imperial dignity and the head of the Bulgarian Church 's patriarchal status .

= = Culture and religion = =

During Simeon 's reign , Bulgaria reached its cultural apogee , becoming the literary and spiritual centre of Slavic Europe . In this respect , Simeon continued his father Boris ' policy of establishing and spreading Slavic culture and attracting noted scholars and writers within Bulgaria 's borders . It was in the Preslav Literary School and Ohrid Literary School , founded under Boris , that the main literary work in Bulgaria was concentrated during the reign of Simeon in the new Cyrillic alphabet which was developed there .

The late 9th and early 10th century constitute the earliest and most productive period of medieval Bulgarian literature . Having spent his early years in Constantinople , Simeon introduced Byzantine culture to the Bulgarian court , but eliminated its assimilative effect by means of military power and religious autonomy . The disciples of Cyril and Methodius , among whom Clement of Ohrid , Naum and Constantine of Preslav , continued their educational work in Bulgaria , actively translating Christian texts , such as the Bible and the works of John Chrysostom , Basil of Caesarea , Cyril of Alexandria , Gregory of Nazianzus , Athanasius of Alexandria , as well as historic chronicles such as these of John Malalas and George Hamartolus , to Bulgarian . The reign of Simeon also witnessed the production of a number of original theological and secular works , such as John Exarch 's Six Days ( ?estodnevi ) , Constantine of Preslav 's Alphabetical Prayer and Proclamation of the Holy Gospels , and ?ernorizec Hrab?r 's An Account of Letters . Simeon 's own contribution to this literary blossoming was praised by his contemporaries , for example in the Praise to Tsar Simeon preserved in the Zlatostruj collection and Simeon 's Collection , to which the tsar personally wrote an

addendum .

Simeon turned the new Bulgarian capital Preslav into a magnificent religious and cultural centre , intended more as a display of his realm 's heyday and as a royal residence than as a military fortress . With its more than twenty cross @-@ domed churches and numerous monasteries , its impressive royal palace and the Golden ( or Round ) Church , Preslav was a true imperial capital . The development of Bulgarian art in the period is demonstrated by a ceramic icon of Theodore Stratelates and the Preslav @-@ style illustrated ceramics .

= = Family = =

Simeon was married twice . By his first wife , whose identity is unknown , Simeon had a son called Michael , possibly because his mother was of inferior birth , he was excluded from the succession and sent to a monastery .

By his second wife , the sister of the influential noble George Sursubul , he had three sons : Peter , who succeeded as Emperor of Bulgaria in 927 and ruled until 969 ; Ivan , who unsuccessfully conspired against Peter in 929 and then fled to Byzantium ; and Benjamin ( Bajan ) , who , according to Lombard historian Liutprand of Cremona , " possessed the power to transform himself suddenly into a wolf or other strange animal " .

Simeon also had several daughters , including one who was arranged to marry Constantine VII in 913 . The marriage was annulled by Constantine 's mother Zoe once she had returned to the court .

= = Legacy and popular culture = =

Tsar Simeon I has remained among the most highly valued Bulgarian historical figures , as indicated by popular vote in the Velikite B?lgari ( a spin @-@ off of 100 Greatest Britons ) television programme , which in February 2007 placed him fourth among the greatest Bulgarians ever . Simeon the Great has been regularly featured in fiction . Bulgarian national writer Ivan Vazov dedicated a children 's patriotic poem to him , " Tsar Simeon " , and it was later arranged as a song , " Kray Bosfora ?um se vdiga " ( " A Clamour Rises by the Bosphorus " ) . An eleven @-@ episode drama series filmed in 1984 , Zlatniyat vek ( The Golden Age ) , retells the story of Simeon 's reign . In the series , the tsar is played by Marius Donkin . A historical drama play called Tsar Simeon Veliki ? Zlatniyat vek produced by Stefan Staychev , director of the Silistra Theatre , premiered in December 2006 . Ivan Samokovliev stars in the part of Simeon .

The painting , " The Bulgarian Tsar Simeon " is part of the 20 @-@ canvas work by Alfons Mucha , The Slav Epic .

The last Bulgarian monarch , Simeon Saxe @-@ Coburg @-@ Gotha , was named after Simeon I. A brand of high @-@ quality grape rakija , Car Simeon Veliki , also bears his name , and an Antarctic peak on Livingston Island of the South Shetland Islands was named Simeon Peak in his honour by the Antarctic Place @-@ names Commission .

= = Timeline = =

= = = In Bulgarian = = =

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