

**Monoxyla, Slavs, Bulgars, and the Coup Organised
by Artemios-Anastasios II (719)***

Not long after the Arabs had abandoned their fruitless siege of Constantinople on 15 August 718, a coup was launched from Thessaloniki with the aim of overthrowing Leo III and restoring Artemios-Anastasios II, who had been dethroned by Theodosios III in 715 and had been living in exile in Thessalonike since then¹.

Owing to the direct threat it posed to the capital and Leo III's preoccupation with addressing it, the time of the Arab siege, as also the period immediately afterwards, was especially favourable to the outbreak of conspiratorial revolts. Just before and during the siege, the troops on Sicily had rebelled and been quelled: convinced that all was lost in the Byzantine capital, they had declared Basil Onomagoulos emperor².

Two sources mention the exiled Artemios's attempt to regain the throne: Theophanes's *Chronographia*³ and Patriarch Nikephoros's *Short History*⁴.

Early in the autumn of 719⁵, as soon as Constantinople had been relieved of the Arab threat, Theophanes tells us that Niketas Xylinites wrote to Artemios in Thessalonike urging him to go to Tervel and seek

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1. See J. Karayannopoulos, *Ιστορία Βυζαντινού Κράτους*, vol. II (565-1081), Thessaloniki 1991³, pp. 122-123.

2. Karayannopoulos, *Ιστορία II*, pp. 121-122.

3. Theophanes, *Χρονολογία* 400.18-401.3, in C. de Boor (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia*, 2 vols., Hildesheim 1963 (= Lipsiae 1883, 1885).

4. Nikephoros, *Ιστορία σύντομος* 57.1-36, in C. Mango (ed.), *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History*, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, XIII, Washington, D.C., 1990.

5. For the date, see F. Winkelmann, *Quellenstudien zur herrschenden Klasse von Byzanz im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1987, p. 38, incl. relevant bibliog. See also Mango, *Nikephoros*, pp. 210-211 (scholia); I. Rochow, *Byzanz im 8. Jahrhundert in der Sicht des Theophanes*, Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten, 57, Berlin 1991, p. 100.

Bulgarian help against Leo III. Artemios hearkened to this advice and went to Tervel, who gave him an army and 50,000 litres of gold. He came to Constantinople with this force, but was not admitted there. The Bulgars handed him over to Leo III, received a reward, and returned to their own country. The Emperor put Artemios and Xylinites to death and confiscated the property of the latter, who was a magister and owned a great deal of property. The Bulgars likewise beheaded the patrician Sisinnios, surnamed Rendakis, because he had collaborated with Artemios, and they handed over to the Emperor the Archbishop of Thessalonike, who was beheaded with Artemios. In the same way, Leo III executed as friends and conspirators the patrician and Count of Opsikion, Isoes, and Niketas Anthrakas, who was lord of the walls. He cut off the noses of the rest, confiscated their property, and sent them into exile⁶.

Now let us see how Patriarch Nikephoros presents the incident. Artemios, he writes, in exile in Thessaloniki, attempted to regain power and proceeded to the following actions: he wrote to the patrician Sisinnios, surnamed Rendakios, who was still in the land of the Bulgars, whither he had been sent to secure their alliance against the Arabs, asking him to collaborate in his plans and persuade the Bulgars to connive with him. Sisinnios promised to do so. Artemios also wrote to the mag-

6. Theophanes 400.18-401.3: Τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει Νικήτας ὁ Ξυλινίτης γράφει πρὸς Ἀρτέμιον ἐν Θεσσαλονίκῃ, ὥστε ἀπελθεῖν αὐτόν πρὸς Τέρβελιν, ὅπως μετὰ συμμαχίας Βουλγαρικῆς ἔλθῃ κατὰ Λέοντος. ὁ δὲ ὑπακούσας ἀπῆλθε καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῷ στρατὸν καὶ ν' κεντηνάρια χρυσοῦ. καὶ ταῦτα λαβὼν ἐπὶ Κωνσταντινούπολιν ἔρχεται. τῆς δὲ πόλεως τοῦτον μὴ δεξαμένης, οἱ Βούλγαροι τοῦτον τῷ Λέοντι παρέδωκαν καὶ φιλοφρονηθέντες ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ὑπέστρεψαν. ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τοῦτον σὺν τῷ Ξυλινίτῃ ἀνείλεν, δημεύσας καὶ τὴν τοῦ Ξυλινίτου οὐσίαν μαγίστρου αὐτοῦ ὑπάρχοντος καὶ πολλὴν κεκτημένου· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Σισίννιον τὸν πατρίκιον, τὸ ἐπὶ κλῆν Ῥενδάκιον οἱ Βούλγαροι ἀπεκεφάλισαν ὡς συνόντα τῷ Ἀρτεμίῳ, καὶ τὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Θεσσαλονίκης προέδωκαν τῷ βασιλεῖ, καὶ ἀπεκεφαλίσθη σὺν τῷ Ἀρτεμίῳ. ὁμοίως καὶ Ἰσόην τὸν πατρίκιον καὶ κόμητα τοῦ Ὀψικίου καὶ Θεόκτιστον πρωτοασκηρήτην, καὶ Νικήταν τὸν Ἀνθρακα καὶ ἄρχοντα τοῦ τειχοῦ ὡς φίλους καὶ συνδρόμους αὐτοῦ, ἀπέκτεινεν· τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς ῥινοτομήσας καὶ δημεύσας ἐξώρισεν.

The first Christian historian, Agapios, Bishop of Hierapolis (Mahbub), who was writing in Arabic in the mid-tenth century, followed Theophanes's narrative (with some additional details): *Kitab al'Unvan: Histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbdij*, edited and translated by A. Vasiliev, *PO* 8, 3 (1912) 397-550, esp. 503. See also Leo Grammaticus 179.11-16 (CB); George Kedrenos 792.14-793.2 (CB); Ioannes Zonaras III 256.7-17 (CB); Theodore Skoutariotes 121.9-12 (= K. N. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 7).

ister Niketas, surnamed Xylinites, who was in Constantinople, as also to the patrician Isoes, overlord of the so-called royal Opsikion, and to Theoktistos, who had been the head of the royal secretaries in his own reign, and to Niketas the lord of the walls, surnamed Anthrakas, asking them to remember their old friendship, to open the gates, and to receive him as king. What he had written, however, immediately became known to the Emperor, who arrested the recipients of the letters, tortured them, and they confessed. Both Niketas, who had the rank of magister, and Theoktistos he beheaded, but he punished the others no less: he confiscated their property and sent them into exile. Artemios with the patrician Sisinnios and the Bulgars arrived at Herakleia and with them the boats they had brought from Thessalonike, which they call *monoxyla*. Then the Emperor wrote to the Bulgars that they should respect peace and hand over the enemies. And they apologised and begged pardon promising to keep the peace. They sent Artemios and the Archbishop of Thessalonike bound to the Emperor together with the head of the patrician Sisinnios, which they had cut off. After this, they departed for their own country⁷.

7. Nikephoros 57.1-31: Ἀρτέμιος δὲ ἐν Θεσσαλονίκῃ ἐξόριστος ὢν πάλιν πειρᾶται τῆς βασιλείας ἐπικρατήσῃν, καὶ ἐπεχειρεῖ τοιαύδε πράττειν. γράφει πρὸς Σισίννιον πατρικίον τὸ ἐπὶ κλην Ῥενδόκιον, πρὸς τῇ τῶν Βουλγάρων διατρίβοντα χώρα παρὰ βασιλέως τηνικαῦτα ἀποσταλέντα ὡς ἂν συμμαχίαν παρ' αὐτῶν κατὰ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν λήψοιτο, ὅπως αὐτῷ τοῖς κατὰ γνώμην συμπτράξειεν, ἀναπείσῃ δὲ καὶ Βουλγάρους συνεργήσῃν αὐτῷ. ὁ δὲ τοῦτο ὑπέσχετο. γράφει δὲ καὶ πρὸς Νικήταν τὸν μάγιστρον τὸ ἐπὶ κλην Ξυλινίτην, ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει ὑπάρχοντα, ἔτι δὲ καὶ πρὸς Ἰσῶν πατρικίον καὶ τοῦ λεγομένου βασιλικοῦ Ὀψικίου ἡγεμόνα, καὶ Θεόκτιστον τὸν πρῶτιστον τῶν βασιλικῶν γραμματέων καθ' οὓς ἐβασίλευε χρόνους γενόμενον, καὶ Νικήταν ἐπὶ κλην Ἀνθρακα ἄρχοντα τειχῶν, παλαιᾶς φιλίας ἀναμνήσκεισθαι, καὶ ἐτοίμους εἶναι συντρέχειν αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἀνοιγνύναι καὶ ὡς βασιλέα ὑποδέχεσθαι. τὰ γραφέντα οὖν εὐθὺς τῷ βασιλεῖ διαγινώσκεται, καὶ τοὺς τὰ γράμματα δεξαμένους χειροῦται καὶ πληγαῖς αἰκίζεται, καὶ αὐτοὶ ὁμολογοῦσι. καὶ Νικήτα μὲν τοῦ τήν ἀξίαν μαγίστρου καὶ Θεοκτίστου τὰς κεφαλὰς ἐξέτεμε, τοὺς δ' ἄλλους οὐ μικρῶς αἰκισάμενος καὶ δημεύσας ἐξορίαις ἀπέπεμψεν. Ἀρτέμιος δὲ ἅμα Σισιννίῳ τῷ πατρικίῳ καὶ τοῖς Βουλγαροῖς μέχρις Ἡρακλείας καταλαμβάνει, σὺν αὐτοῖς δὲ καὶ ἅπερ ἦγον ἐκ Θεσσαλονίκης ἀκάτια· μονόξυλα δὲ αὐτοὶ προσαγορεύουσι. γράφει δὲ Βουλγαροῖς ὁ βασιλεὺς ὡς τὴν εἰρήνην μᾶλλον ἀσπάσσοιντο καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς προδοῖεν. οἱ δὲ εἰς ἀπολογίαν κατέστησαν συγγνώμην αἰτήσαντες καὶ τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην ὑπισχνόμενοι. καὶ τὸν μὲν Ἀρτέμιον σὺν τῷ ἄρχιερεῖ Θεσσαλονίκης καὶ ἄλλους πλείστους δεσμώτας πρὸς βασιλέα πέμπουσι, καὶ Σισιννίῳ τοῦ πατρικίου τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐκτεμόντες ὡσαύτως στέλλουσιν, οὕτω τε πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀπεχώρουν.

Nikephoros ends his account with the pillorying, the penalties, and the punishments which Leo III imposed upon the rest of the conspirators⁸.

The two historians' accounts present significant variations.

Theophanes's account is clearly more concise than Nikephoros's and obviously draws on a different source⁹. He presents Niketas Xylinitis as the instigator of the conspiracy¹⁰ and Sisinnios Rendakis as merely one of the conspirators¹¹, and offers the additional detail of Tervel's gift of

8. Nikephoros 57.31-36: Ἀρτέμιον δὲ σὺν τῷ ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ παραλαβὼν ἐν τῷ λεγόμενῳ Κυνηγίῳ ἀπέτεμεν. Ἰππικὴν δὲ ἁμίλλαν ἐπιτελέσας τῶν ἀποτιμηθέντων τὰς κεφαλὰς διὰ τοῦ ἵπποδρομίου ἐπὶ κοντοῦ ἀνηρτημένας ἐξεπόμπευε. Τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους πάντας αἰκισάμενος καὶ τὰς ρίνας αὐτῶν ἐκτεμὼν καὶ δημεύσας ὑπερορίας κατεδίκασε.

9. See Mango, *Nikephoros*, p. 210 (scholia); Rochow, *Byzanz*, p. 100.

10. Niketas Xylinitis is mentioned only by Theophanes and Nikephoros in this connection. It seems likely that he may be identified with the Niketas, patrician and magister, whose name is on a seal of the eighth century: see G. Zacos and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, I.3, Basel 1972, No. 3157; Winkelmann, *Quellenstudien*, pp. 148-149, 181; Rochow, *Byzanz*, pp. 100-101.

11. A number of scholars have tried to identify Sisinnios Rendakis with other historical figures or to determine his nationality. H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, Paris 1966, pp. 27ff., proposes that Sisinnios Rendakis should be identified as Sisinnios, the Strategos of the Karabesianoι, who is mentioned in the book of the *Miracles* of St Demetrios (P. Lemerle, *Les Plus Anciens Recueils des Miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des Slavs dans les Balkans*, vol. I, Paris 1979, II, 5, 230.30 and 231.6). The identification is rejected by P. Charanis, "Kouver: The Chronology of his Activities and their Ethnic Effects on the Regions around Thessalonica", *Balkan Studies* 11 (1970) 229-248, esp. 243-244; D. Stratos, *Tò Byzántion stón Z' αἰῶνα*, vol. V, Athens 1974, p. 82; Lemerle, *Recueils* II, Paris 1981, pp. 154-155; H. Ditten, "Prominente Slawen und Bulgaren in byzantinischen Diensten (Ende des 7. bis Anfang des 10. Jahrhunderts)", in: H. Köpstein and F. Winkelmann (eds.), *Studien zum 8. und 9. Jahrhundert in Byzanz*, Berlin 1983, p. 106; P. Yannopoulos, "Études de personnalités byzantines: Qui était Sissinnios Rendakis?", *BSL* 52 (1991) 61-69, esp. 64-65. Yannopoulos ("Études", pp. 61ff., and "Σπουδαὶ βυζαντινῶν προσωπικοτήτων: Σισίννιος Ρενδάκις (μέσα Ζ' αἰῶνος - 718)", *ΕΕΒΣ* 39-40 (1972-1973) 579-593) argues that Sisinnios Rendakis should be identified with the Sisinnios, Strategos of the Anatolikoι, who had conscripted the future emperor Leo III into the theme army in 683/684. Ditten (*Prominente*, pp. 105ff.) rejects all the proposed identifications as unconvincing and, on the basis of anthroponymical research, asserts that the surname Rendakis indicates that Sisinnios was a Slav. Cf. P. Malingoudis, *Σλάβοι στη Μεσαιωνική Ελλάδα*, Βιβλιοθήκη Σλαβικῶν Μελετῶν, 1, Thessaloniki 1991, pp. 113-117, who argues that Sisinnios Rendakis was probably descended from Slavs living in Greece. See also Winkelmann, *Quellenstudien*, pp. 148, 181; Rochow, *Byzanz*, pp. 101-102.

For Isoes, patrician and Count of Opsikion, see W. E. Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest*

50,000 litres of gold.

By contrast, Nikephoros's account, which is longer and thus more detailed, presents the deposed emperor Artemios as the prime mover in the conspiracy, Sisinnios Rendakis as a go-between, and Niketas Xylinites as merely one of the conspirators.

The two accounts differ significantly, I think, with regard to the route which Artemios and those participating in his venture followed to Constantinople. According to Theophanes, Artemios went from Thessalonike to Tervel's land, and from there continued with the Bulgarian military and economic aid provided by the Bulgar ruler to Constantinople: δίδωσιν [Τέρβελις] αὐτῷ στρατὸν καὶ ν' κεντηνάρια χρυσοῦ. Καὶ ταῦτα λαβὼν εἰς Κωνσταντινούπολιν ἔρχεται¹².

Nikephoros's account, however, leaves room for two hypotheses: that the two conspirators, Artemios and the patrician Sisinnios, arrived at Herakleia from different starting points, Artemios from Thessalonike and Sisinnios from the land of the Bulgars; or that Sisinnios and the Bulgarian military force came to Thessalonike, whence they accompanied Artemios to Herakleia: Ἀρτέμιος δὲ ἅμα Σισιννίῳ τῷ πατρικίῳ καὶ τοῖς Βουλγάροις μέχρις Ἡρακλείας καταλαμβάνει¹³.

At this point, however, Nikephoros gives a further testimony that Theophanes does not mention: namely that Artemios and Sisinnios brought ἀκάτια to Herakleia from Thessalonike, the so-called μονόξυλα: σὺν αὐτοῖς δὲ καὶ ἄπερ ἦγον ἐκ Θεσσαλονίκης ἀκάτια· μονόξυλα δὲ αὐτοὶ προσαγορεύουσι¹⁴.

In their historical writings or studies most scholars including S. Runciman¹⁵, C. Diehl and G. Marçais¹⁶, K. Amantos¹⁷, L. Bréhier¹⁸, M.

471-843: *An Interpretation*, Amsterdam 1981, p. 212; F. Winkelmann, *Byzantinische Rang- und Ämterstruktur im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1985, p. 72. For the *protoasekretes* Theoktistos and the ἄρχοντα τοῦ τευχίου Niketas Anthrakas, see Rochow, *Byzanz*, p. 102, incl. bibliog.

12. Theophanes 400.21-22.

13. Nikephoros 57.21-22.

14. Nikephoros 57.22-24.

15. S. Runciman, *A History of the First Bulgarian Empire*, London 1930, p. 33.

16. C. Diehl and G. Marçais, *Le Monde oriental de 395 à 1081*, Paris 1936, p. 255.

17. K. Amantos, *Ιστορία τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ κράτους (395-1204)*, vol. 1, Athens 1953², p. 332.

18. L. Bréhier, *Vie et mort de Byzance*, Le Monde byzantin, 1, Paris 1969², p. 77.

V. Anastos¹⁹, J. Karayannopoulos²⁰, A. Christofilopoulou²¹, W. J. Kaegi²², F. Winkelmann²³ and C. Mango²⁴ attach little importance to what Nikephoros says about the *monoxyla* when they discuss Artemios's bid to regain the throne. All the Bulgarian scholars, however, assume that the reference to *monoxyla* implies that Slavs and Bulgars from Thessalonike (Kuber's people) were involved in Artemios's attempted coup.

Let us look more closely at the views of the Bulgarian scholars and those who share them.

i) It has been asserted that Artemios's coup was joined by the Bulgars of Moisia (Tervel's people) and the Slavs of Macedonia with their *monoxyla*.

This is the opinion of V. N. Zlatarski, who, motivated by the fact that *monoxyla* are linked with the Slavs in the sources, asserts that Artemios's venture involved not only Tervel's Bulgars but also the Slavs of Macedonia, with whom Artemios had struck an agreement when he was in Thessalonike²⁵.

ii) Another theory is that Artemios's venture was joined only by the Bulgarians of Thessalonike with their *monoxyla*.

This is the opinion of G. Cankova-Petkova, who rebuts Zlatarski's view with the assertion that it is a question here neither of Slavs nor of the Bulgars of Moisia (whom Theophanes does not mention), but of the "Macedonian Bulgars", who learnt to sail *monoxyla* from the "Mace-

19. M. V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule 717-842", in: CMH IV, part I, Cambridge 1966, p. 64.

20. Karayannopoulos, *Ιστορία* II, pp. 122-123.

21. A. Christofilopoulou, *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία*, vol. II 1 (610-867), Athens 1981, p. 103.

22. Kaegi, *Unrest*, pp. 211-212.

23. Winkelmann, *Rang- und Ämterstruktur*, pp. 72-73; idem, *Quellenstudien*, pp. 38ff, 148, 181. See also Malingoudis, *Σλάβοι*, p. 114 and n. 5; E. Kyriakis, *Βυζάντιο και Βούλγαροι (7ος-10ος αι.): Συμβολή στην εξωτερική πολιτική του Βυζαντίου*, Athens 1993, pp. 78-79.

24. Mango, *Nikephoros*, pp. 210-211 (scholia).

25. V. N. Zlatarski, *Istorija na balgarskata darzava prez srednite vekove*, vol. I.1, Sofia 1918, p. 186: "We know that such *monoxyla* were used by the Macedonian Slavs, particularly the Runchini, who participated more than once in the Avar campaign against Constantinople and continued their plundering in the seventh century. The use of the *monoxyla* therefore suggests that the Macedonian Slavs took part, and that Artemios struck an agreement with them when he was in Thessalonike".

donian Slavs", with whom they had lived in close proximity for over half a century²⁶.

iii) A third theory is that Artemios was accompanied by the Bulgars of Moisia and the Bulgars of Thessalonike (without the Slavs).

It was V. Beševliev who first put forward this opinion. Patriarch Nikephoros, the Bulgarian historian tells us, reports that, when the Bulgars helped the exiled emperor Anastasios II or Artemios in his bid to regain the throne in 718, they brought with them boats from Thessalonike, which they called *monoxyla* ... The reference is probably to the Bulgars of Thessalonike, who were willing in this instance to take part in the campaign together with the Danubian Bulgars²⁷.

26. G. Cankova-Petkova, "Bulgarians and Byzantium during the First Decades after the Foundation of the Bulgarian State", BSL 24 (1963) 41-53, esp. 46: "However, there is no mention of Slav participation in this campaign in any of the sources. Zlatarski's assumption is based solely on Nicephorus' reference to the monoxylon boats, which most scholars link with the Slavs. We know, however, that such boats were used in that period by the Avars and Pre-Bulgarians at the siege of Constantinople in 626. It seems more likely that the Macedonian Bulgarians learnt to sail the monoxylons from the Macedonian Slavs with whom they had lived in close proximity for over half a century"; *ibid.*, p. 47: "We must dismiss the idea that the Danubian Bulgarians were involved. Our view of the matter must be founded primarily on Patriarch Nicephorus' account, which mentions only the Bulgarians in the neighbourhood of Thessalonica and their monoxylon boats".

R. Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria: A Comparative Study across the Early Medieval Frontier*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1975, p. 139, asserts that descendants of the Bulgars who had come to Macedonia with Kuber took part in Artemios's coup, though he thinks that the *monoxyla* which the Bulgars used had been made by the Slavs. Z. Pljakov, "La région de la Struma aux VII-IX siècles", *Palaeobulgarica* 13₂ (1989) 100-115, esp. 105, also shares the view that the Bulgars of Thessalonike were involved: "dans les ouvrages [de Nicéphore] se trouvent mentionnés, en 718, des Bulgares dans la région de Thessalonique. En rapport avec une conjuration éventée, les Bulgares firent remettre à l'empereur un personnage du nom d'Artémios".

27. V. Beševliev, *Die protobulgarischen Inschriften*, Berlin 1963, p. 110: "Der Patriarch Nikephoros berichtet, daß die Bulgaren im Jahre 718, als sie dem gestürzten Kaiser Anastasios II. oder Artemios bei der Wiedergewinnung seines Thrones halfen, von Thessalonike aus auch Boote mitführten, die sie Einbäume nannten ... Und das bezieht sich höchstwahrscheinlich wieder auf die Bulgaren von Thessalonike, die in diesem Fall bereit gewesen waren, zusammen mit den Donaubulgaren an dem Feldzug teilzunehmen". In an earlier study, however ("Les inscriptions du relief de Madara", BSL (1955) 212-254), Beševliev maintains that Artemios was assisted in his venture exclusively by the Bulgars of Thessalonike: "A cette époque, nous dit le patriarche Nicéphore, les Bulgares avaient amené de Thessalonique des barques appelées monoxyles ... Selon toute probabilité, dans ce cas aussi il est question des Bulgares de Thessalonique et non de ceux du Danube" (p. 227).

He notes in another study that “the fact that Artemios brought *monoxyla* as well as Bulgars shows that these Bulgars resided by the sea, and close to Thessalonike moreover”²⁸. Elsewhere, however, Beševliev modifies his original position, accepting both that Slavs from Thessalonike collaborated with Artemios²⁹ and that “either the Slavs or the Bulgars of Thessalonike participated in the attempt”³⁰, though here he avoids stating clearly whom he believes the *monoxyla* belonged to³¹.

The theory that Artemios “called upon the Bulgars ... and certainly the Bulgars who lived near Thessalonike, who can only have been Kuber’s Bulgars mentioned in the *Miracula*”, is also supported by H. Ahrweiler³², who, however, without mentioning the *monoxyla* in the passage from Nikephoros suggests that Artemios’s coup was assisted by the fleet of the Karabesiani mentioned in the *Miracula* of St Demetrios³³.

In short, Bulgarian historians have used Nikephoros’s reference to the *monoxyla* to argue that either the Slavs or the Bulgars of Thessalonike or both the Slavs and the Bulgars of Thessalonike took part in Artemios’s coup.

So here once again we have the theory, so prevalent in Bulgarian historical science, that there were (Proto)Bulgarians in central Macedonia and that they settled in the general area of Thessalonike in the last

28. V. Beševliev, “Die protobulgarische Inschrift von Direkler (Philippoi)”, *JÖB* 42 (1992) 233-240, esp. 239: “Der Umstand dass Artemios zusammen mit den Bulgaren auch Einbäume führte, zeigt, dass diese Bulgaren an der Küste des Meeres und zwar in der Nähe von Thessalonike wohnten”.

29. V. Beševliev, *Die protobulgarische Periode der bulgarischen Geschichte*, Amsterdam 1980, p. 202: “Seine Anhänger in Thessalonike führten von dort Einbäume mit sich, die sie wohl von dortigen Bulgaren und Slawen bekommen hatten”.

30. V. Beševliev, “Moite čičovci v Solunsko” (My uncles in Thessaloniki), *Madara* 3 (1992) 11-27, esp. 22.

31. The view that “Kuber’s (Proto)Bulgarians” and the “Macedonian Slavs” took part in Artemios’s attempt is also supported by V. Gjuselev, “La participation des Bulgares à l’échec du siège arabe de Constantinople en 717-718”, *Études historiques* 10 (1980) 91-113, esp. 107-108. See also Ditten, *Prominente*, p. 105.

32. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 28-29: “[Artemios] fit appel, nous disent les sources de l’époque, et notamment Théophane et Nicéphore, aux Bulgares et sûrement aux Bulgares installés près de Thessalonique, qui ne peuvent être autres que ceux de Kouber que nous connaissons par les *Miracula*”.

33. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, p. 29. See the objections raised by Yannopoulos, “Études” 65, who observes, *inter alia*, that the sources do not mention the fleet of the Karabesianoï, but simply a few “boats” (ἀνάκτις), which were Bulgarian moreover.

quarter of the seventh century³⁴. These are the so-called “Macedonian Bulgars” or “Bulgars of Thessalonike”, i.e. the members of Kuber’s group who are mentioned only in one hagiological source, the *Miracula* of St Demetrios³⁵, and who are believed to have been pure Bulgars, ethnically coherent with the Bulgars of Asparuch, who lived in Moisia. Bulgarian historians believe that it was to these (Kuber’s) Bulgars of Thessalonike that Emperor Constantine IV granted a form of autonomy similar to that which he had accorded the Slavs living around Thessalonike, allowing them to settle in a Byzantine area near Thessalonike, the “Keramesian plain”³⁶; or, according to another theory, he made peace with them and allowed them to settle in the area between Thessalonike and the mouth of the Strymon on the Chalkidike side³⁷. Theophanes and Nikephoros report that it was against these Bulgars of Kuber’s that Justinian II launched a campaign in 688³⁸, because he

34. See M. Grigoriou-Ioannidou, “Τὸ ἐπεισόδιο τοῦ Κούβερ στὰ Θαύματα τοῦ Ἀγίου Δημητρίου”, *Βυζαντιακά* 1 (1981) 69-87.

35. Lemerle, *Recueils* I. 227-234, where the fifth episode is recounted: “Περὶ τοῦ μελετηθέντος κρυπτῶς ἐμφυλίου πολέμου κατὰ τῆς πόλεως παρὰ τοῦ Μαύρου καὶ Κούβερ τῶν Βουλγάρων”.

36. Beševliev, “Moite čičovci”, p. 17 (in trans.): “Constantine IV, father of Justinian II, agreed that the Slavs living around Thessalonike should have autonomy so that peace might prevail within the Empire. He also granted a similar type of autonomy to Kuber’s Bulgars, whom he permitted to settle in a Byzantine area near Thessalonike, the ‘Keramesian plain’”. See also Cankova-Petkova, “Bulgarians”, p. 51, who believes that Nikephoros’s term “land of the Bulgars” refers to the Bulgars living in the area to the west of Thessalonike, which is mentioned in the *Miracula* as the “Keramesian plain”. Cf. Gjuselev, “Participation”, p. 107: “... dans la terre des Bulgares, plus exactement dans la terre des Protobulgares de Kuber qui habitaient au nord de Thessalonique, la plaine de Keramisija”; Pljakov, “Région”, p. 103.

The “Keramesian plain” (Lemerle, *Recueils* I. 228.30) may be identified as the plain of Pelagonia between Stobi and Herakleia Lynkestis: see Lemerle, *Recueils* II. 147; Grigoriou-Ioannidou, “Τὸ ἐπεισόδιο τοῦ Κούβερ”, p. 70 n. 4.

37. This is another view that Beševliev presents in an earlier study, *Periode*, 169, namely, that when Kuber was abandoned by Mauros and a large segment of his people, he “musste seine Absichten aufgeben und sich mit einer friedlichen Niederlassung auf byzantinischem Boden mit der Erlaubnis des Kaisers zufriedenstellen. Der Kaiser schloss einen Frieden mit Kuber und seinen Bulgaren und wies ihnen Wohnsitz an, wahrscheinlich in dem Gebirgsland zwischen Thessalonike und Mündung Strymons auf der Chalkidike zu”.

38. Theophanes 364.11ff.: Τοῦτω τῷ ἔτει ἐπεστράτευσεν Ἰουστινιανὸς κατὰ Σκλαυινίας καὶ Βουλγαρίας; Nikephoros 38.5ff. See M. Grigoriou-Ioannidou, “Ἡ ἐκστρατεία τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ Β΄ κατὰ τῶν Βουλγάρων καὶ Σλάβων (688)”, *Βυζαντιακά* 2 (1982) 113-124.

regarded the autonomy granted them by his father, Constantine IV, as a threat to the unity of the state³⁹. It was they whom he repulsed and they who ambushed him ἐν τῷ στενῷ τῆς κλεισούρας on his way back⁴⁰. An even more extreme view is that it was these Bulgars of Kuber's who settled near Thessalonike and organised themselves into a Protobulgarian community or even a state along the same lines as Asparuch's Protobulgarian state in the north-east Balkans⁴¹.

By and large, the Bulgarian theory is that the Bulgars of Thessalonike were a real force to be reckoned with as far as the Byzantine state was concerned. With their fellow Bulgars of Moisia they played a major role in events in the south-east Balkans, taking part in the Byzantine civil wars and thus assisting the deposed emperor Artemios Anastasios II, exiled in Thessalonike, in his attempt to recover the throne⁴².

The theories that have been propounded regarding the collaboration of Slavs and Bulgars of Thessalonike in Artemios's attempted coup contain a number of weak points, as we shall now see.

Let us look first at the participation of the Bulgars of Thessalonike, a hypothesis which is not supported by the sources.

i) There is not the slightest evidence of what happened to Kuber and his followers after the incident in Thessalonike that is mentioned only in the *Miracula*⁴³. There are therefore no grounds to support any attempt

39. Beševliev, "Moite čičovci", p. 17 (in trans.): "This autonomy struck Justinian as being dangerous to the unity of the Empire. After his operation against the Arabs of Asia Minor, he decided to wipe out the Slavs and also their neighbours the Bulgars, who were living in the vicinity of Thessalonike. Thus, without great difficulty, may be explained the relationship of the Slavs and the Bulgars." Cf. idem, *Inscriptions*, p. 228.

40. Theophanes 364.12ff.: Καὶ τοὺς μὲν Βουλγάρους πρὸς τὸ παρὸν ὑπηντηκότας ὤθησεν, ... Ἐν δὲ τῷ ὑποστρέφειν αὐτὸν ὁδοσταθεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν Βουλγάρων ἐν τῷ στενῷ τῆς κλεισούρας μετὰ σφαγῆς τοῦ οἰκείου λαοῦ καὶ τραυματίας πολλῆς μόλις ἀντιπαρελθεῖν ἠδυνήθη. Concerning Justinian II's return route and the location of the pass in which the Bulgars launched their surprise attack, see Grigoriou-Ioannidou, "Ἡ ἐκστρατεία τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ Β'", pp. 121ff.

41. For a presentation and critique of these theories, see my article "Τὸ ἐπεισόδιο τοῦ Κούβεϋ", pp. 72ff.

42. Cankova-Petkova, "Bulgarians", p. 51.

43. Cf. Lemerle, *Recueils* II. 160: "Nous ne savons rien du sort de Kouber, ni de celui des Sermésianes".

to prove: that Kuber and his people lived either to the west of Thessalonike on the “Keramesian plain” under an autonomous regime or to the east following an agreement with the Byzantine state⁴⁴; that they were a

44. As we have seen (n. 36 above), this is Beševliev’s contention. He bases his assertion that (Kuber’s) (Proto)Bulgarians settled to the east of Thessalonike: i) on the Madara inscription, in which he reads ὁ θῦν μου ἰς Θεσσα[λο]νίκην καὶ ἰς τ]ά[ς] Κισίνας [ἀπὶ λ]θαν (*Protobulg. Inschr. Ic*) as though it concerns Kuber, the uncle of Tervel, i.e. brother of Asparuch, and as though there was a Bulgarian encampment on Mount Kissos (Hortiatis) (*Protobulg. inschr.* 108; “Moite čičovci”, p. 11); ii) on the Vassilika inscription, fragments of the text of which survive in the form of an impression made by Charles Avezou (a member of the French Archaeological School at Athens, who was killed in the First World War) and found among his papers (D. Feissel and M. Sève, “La Chalcidique vue par Charles Avezou”, *BCH* 103 (1979) 287-288; V. Beševliev, “Zur Deutung der protobulgarischen Inschriften von Vassilika, Chalkidike”, *JÖB* 35 (1985) 143-148; idem, “Moite čičovci”, p. 22-23). Beševliev connects the reading of the words τὴν Σαλονί[κην] and ὁ ἀδελφὸς μου, which the editors of the inscription, Feissel and Sève, seem to discern in different lines and with many gaps between them, with the ὁ θῦν μου ἰς Θεσσα[λο]νίκην which he reads in the Madara inscription, in the belief that here again the inscription concerns Kuber’s people living on Kissos, not far from Vassilika (“Zur Deutung”, pp. 147-148); iii) on the reference to “Slav Bulgars” and “Bulgars” in two Athonite documents of the tenth century (a chrysobull of Romanus II of 959/60 = A.Ivir. 32. 10-14, a. 1059 or 1074; and a document of Patriarch Nicolas Chrysoberges of 989 = AL 8. 8ff.), as also two hagiological texts of the eleventh century (Life of St John and St Euthymios of 1041/1042 = *Anal. Boll.* 36-37 (1917/1918) 13-68, and Life of St George the Hagiorite 1045 = *Anal. Boll.* 36-37 (1917/1918) 104-105, c. 36, 26). On the basis of these data, Beševliev concludes that these “Bulgars” or “Slav Bulgars” were descendants of Kuber who remained in the hinterland of Thessalonike until the twelfth century: see V. Beševliev, “Zur Frage der slavischen Einsiedlungen im Hinterland von Thessalonike im 10. Jahrhundert”, *Serta Slavica in memoriam Aloisii Schamus*, München 1971, pp. 37-41; idem, “Moite čičovci”, pp. 23ff.

It must be said, however, that the Madara inscription is very badly damaged and Beševliev’s restoration of the text is based on information taken from the Byzantine chroniclers (Theophanes and Nikephoros) applied, for the most part, to barely discernible traces of letters or syllables. As for the Vassilika inscription, which Beševliev presents as evidence that Protobulgarians settled in Chalkidike, it cannot be regarded as credible historical evidence. As has already been pointed out, the inscription itself does not survive; we know only fragments of it, thanks to Avezou’s impression on hard, poor-quality paper. (For the condition of the inscription, see Feissel and Sève’s comments in “Chalcidique”, pp. 287ff). It is precisely the fragmentary nature of the inscription, with all its lacunae and the uncertain reading of many of the letters, that makes it impossible to reach firm conclusions about either its dating or its meaning: see J. Karayannopoulos, *L’Inscription protobulgare de Direkler*, Comité national grec des études du sud-est Européen: Centre d’études du sud-est Européen, 19, Athens 1986, n. 96.

As regards the “Slav Bulgars” or “Bulgars” mentioned in the two tenth-century Athonite documents and the two eleventh-century lives of saints, as others have already observed, they were leftovers from raids by Simeon’s Bulgars in Thrace, Macedonia and the rest of Greece

force to be reckoned with, against whom Justinian II launched a campaign and by whom he was ambushed in 688; or that it was Kuber's Bulgars (of Thessalonike) who participated, either alone or with their fellow Bulgars of Moisia, in Artemios's attempted coup.

ii) There is no evidence in the *Miracula* that Kuber's people were purely Bulgars. The Bulgars are mentioned simply as one of the indigenous elements with whom the Byzantine subjects ("Romaioi") whom the Avar khan had taken as captives to his state mixed and intermarried: ἐπιμιγνέτες μετὰ Βουλγάρων καὶ Ἀβάρων καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἐθνικῶν⁴⁵. They are not presented as constituting a specific self-contained Bulgarian ethnic group among the population which Kuber led from Pannonia, either when it was leaving the Avars' state or when it was living on the "Keramesian plain". Even after the departure of many "Romaioi"⁴⁶, the demographic composition of this population did not change, but those who stayed with Kuber still remained a "mixed group", a multiethnic body of the συμμίκτως ἐξελθόντας from the Avars' state, as the *Miracula* relate⁴⁷, which is to say some "Romaioi" (for not all of them went), Avars, Bulgars and others. In other words, the Bulgars were only a part of the group with which Kuber was planning to seize Thessalonike and it therefore goes beyond the evidence of any source to talk about "Kuber's

in 913-924, who settled in the area of Hierissos (Dölger); or else they had some connection with Samuel's invasion of the area in 987/989 (Dujčev). One recent view is that these "Slav Bulgars" settled on monasterial land shortly before 959 on the sufferance of the Byzantine authorities for tax reasons (Malingoudis). Lastly, it has been suggested that the "Bulgars" who are mentioned in the lives of John and Euthymios were connected with Samuel's raid in the period 995-999 (Peeters). See F. Dölger, *Ein Fall slavischer Einsiedlung im Hinterland von Thessaloniki im 10. Jahrhundert*, München 1952, p. 19. Dölger's opinion is shared by G. Soulis, "On the Slavic Settlement in Hierissos in the Tenth Century", *Byz.* 23 (1953) 67-72; I. Dujčev, *Proučvanija vărkuh bǎlgarskoto srednovekovie*, in *Sbornik na Bǎlgarskata akademija na naukite* 41 (1945) 1-176, esp. 21-24; Malingoudis, *Σλάβοι*, pp. 134ff.; idem, "Die Bulgaren im byzantinischen Reich": Kritische Bemerkungen", *Balkan Studies* 22 (1981) 247-267, for comments on certain scholars' attempts to "document" the presence of a Bulgarian ethnic element in Chalkidike; P. Peeters, "Histoires monastiques géorgiennes", *Anal. Boll.* 36/37 (1917/1918) 13-68, esp. p. 51 n. 2.

45. Lemerle, *Recueils* I. 228.7.

46. Lemerle, *Recueils* I. 229.12ff.: καὶ ἀκριβωθέντες ὡς ἐκ μήκους μὴ ὑπάρχειν ταύτην [= Θεσσαλονίκη], ἤρξαντο πλείστοι λοιπὸν οἱ ἐκ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὄντες μετὰ γυναικῶν καὶ τέκνων ἐν τῇ θεοσώτῳ ταύτῃ ἡμῶν εἰσένειναι πόλει.

47. Lemerle, *Recueils* I. 229.6.

Bulgars”, or “Bulgars of Thessalonike”, or “Bulgars of Macedonia”⁴⁸.

iii) The participation of the Slavs is also unsubstantiated. Nikephoros does not mention them. As has already been pointed out⁴⁹, the association of Slavs and *monoxyla* seems to be a commonplace or cliché, probably an echo of invasions from the areas of the Dniepr and the Dniestr into the Balkan countries of the Byzantine Empire. And though it is natural to suppose that any people living near a river could have used *monoxyla*, this does not mean that *monoxyla* and Slavs inevitably go together.

iv) The suggestion that the patrician Sisinnios and Tervel’s Bulgars first called at Thessalonike⁵⁰ and thence together with Artemios and the Metropolitan of Thessalonike, who supported him, headed for Herakleia raises questions. How could Sisinnios and the Bulgars have passed unhindered and unharmed among so many Byzantine fortified positions⁵¹? And why would he have taken this long, time-consuming route, when, from the land of the Bulgars, he could have gone straight to Herakleia to meet Artemios from Thessalonike?

It is more reasonable to suppose that Artemios and Sisinnios and the Bulgars set out from different starting points (Sisinnios from the land of Tervel and Artemios from Thessalonike) and met at Herakleia.

Let us come now to the *monoxyla*, and start by looking at the various ways in which they are believed to have been transported to Herakleia.

v) It has been asserted that Artemios’s forces transported their

48. See Grigoriou-Ioannidou, “Τὸ ἐπεισόδιο τοῦ Κούβερ”, pp. 72ff.; cf. A. Christofilopoulou, “Βυζαντινὴ Μακεδονία. Σχεδιάγραμμα γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ ἀπὸ τὰ τέλη τοῦ ΣΤ΄ μέχρι τὰ μέσα τοῦ Θ΄ αἰῶνα”, *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1983) 11-63, esp. p. 32 and n. 20, who notes that “the number of Bulgars in this group would certainly have been limited”. By contrast, Lemerle, *Recueils* II. n. 234, asserts that the group with which Kuber was planning to take Thessaloniki was “mainly” or “exclusively” Bulgarian, and he concludes that “le parti bulgare qui accompagnait Kouber et les siens n’était donc pas quantité négligeable”.

49. P. Speck, *De miraculis Sancti Demetrii, qui Thessalonicam profugus venit oder Ketzerisches zu den Wundergeschichten des Heiligen Demetrios und zu seiner Basilika in Thessalonike* (Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά, 12, Varia IV), Bonn 1993, p. 355 n. 227: “Ich ... habe aber den Verdacht, dass an den meisten Stellen, wo Einbäume im Zusammenhang mit Slaven genannt sind, rhetorisches Klischee und nicht etwa reale Information vorliegt”.

50. This is the view of Yannopoulos, “Σπουδαί”, p. 589; “Études”, p. 62.

51. Yannopoulos, “Σπουδαί”, p. 590 n. 1, considers it likely that the whole of eastern Macedonia and western Thrace revolted in support of Artemios-Anastasios II.

monoxyla by land⁵². But how many *monoxyla* could have been transported in this manner and to what purpose? Obviously only a small number, which certainly could not have been used as a serious operational means of assault on Constantinople, for previous experience had already shown a greater number of *monoxyla* to be ineffectual⁵³.

If we accept the other theory, that the *monoxyla* were taken to Herakleia by sea, then we are faced with a fresh problem. *Monoxyla*, as we know, were made from large hollowed-out tree trunks and could be used only on rivers and on safe, enclosed expanses of sea⁵⁴. How, then, could they have successfully made the rough voyage around the Athos peninsula, where (to recall a classic instance), in 492 BC Mardonios' fleet of obviously larger and more seaworthy vessels had sunk, and Xerxes shortly afterwards (481 BC) had been forced to open a channel for his fleet to avoid a similar disaster?

Even if we suppose that they avoided the dangerous sea voyage by sailing across the Singitic Gulf as far as the so-called Isthmus of Xerxes and then hauling the *monoxyla* across the peninsula to the coast of the Strymonic Gulf, again it seems that it would have been exceedingly difficult for them to cross such a large stretch of open sea, even hugging the coast, even in the month of September.

Furthermore, how could they have taken the *monoxyla* across the Hellespont and the Propontis, both areas that were patrolled by the βασιλικὸν πλώμιον? And what would they have done with the *monoxyla* at Herakleia? Would they have assailed Constantinople from the southwest sea wall? And in either case, how would they have dealt with the Byzantine warships?

All this makes it impossible to accept any of the Bulgarian historians' theories.

52. Yannopoulos, "Σπουδαί" 590 n. 1: "Nikephoros notes that the Bulgars also transported their light boats by land." Elsewhere, however ("Études", pp. 63, 69), Yannopoulos maintains that Artemios organised a "small fleet" in Thessalonike.

53. *Monoxyla* (ἐκ μονοδένδρων γλυπτὰς νῆας) were used by Hadjon the Slav in his assault on Thessalonike in 615 (Lemerle, *Recueils* I. 175.6, 13, II. 169 n. 1) and ten years later, in 626, during the Avaro-Slav assault on Constantinople (Πασχάλιον Χρονικὸν 723.15, 724.8, 13, 20, CB).

54. Cf. Christofilopoulou, "Μακεδονία", pp. 24-25. For the use and interpretation of the term μονόξυλον in the Byzantine sources, see L. Havlikova, "Slavic Ships in 5th-12th Centuries Byzantine Historiography", BSL 52 (1991) 89-104, incl. older bibliog.

Apart from this, however, we also need to ask ourselves which of the people taking part in the venture would have needed to use *monoxyla*, and why. And the answer is, obviously, only those who intended to travel to Herakleia along river routes, who would not have been the men coming from Thessalonike, but Tervel's Bulgars coming from their own country. They would have sailed down the Tudja and then the Hebros to the point where it met the Ergines, and then, sailing upstream, would thus have come fast and safely to Tzouroulon. Herakleia was then very close.

So Nikephoros seems to be confusing things when he writes about *monoxyla* "from Thessalonike". And the same is true of Theophanes when he writes that Artemios went to Bulgaria to meet Tervel and received 50,000 litres of gold and an army to help him carry out his coup⁵⁵.

Given the aforementioned ambiguities and confusion in the sources and the rest of the data available at present, we have to conclude that the theories regarding Slavs and Bulgars of Thessalonike travelling from Thessalonike to Herakleia in or with their *monoxyla* do not stand up to critical scrutiny.

Consequently, theories that link *monoxyla*, Slavs, and Bulgars accompanying Artemios from Thessalonike and helping him in his attempted coup are quite without foundation.

55. Cf. Yannopoulos, "Études", p. 62, for the problems arising out of Theophanes's account.