

# **Links Between Anglo-Saxon and Byzantines Until the End of the Eleventh Century**

## **Part two: Scandinavian Activities in the Byzantine Empire**

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### **Abstract:**

The study makes an insight into the history of the invasions and military confrontations that took place during the beginning of the 8th and the end of the 11th century, between the Vikings or the Varegs of the Scandinavian Peninsula, on the one hand, and the Christian Kingdoms and populations, from Kievan Russia, the Khazar empire, Azerbaijan, the Byzantine Empire, on the other, pursuing both the evolution of the Christianization of these kingdoms and populations. It is evoked the military and political-religious activity of some outstanding personalities who participated in the events of this era, such as King Harald Hardrada of Norway, Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969) Ioan Tzimiskes (969-976), Vasile II The Bulgarokton (976-1025), Alexios I Comnenus (1081-1118), John Comnenus (1118-1143) and Manuel I Comnenus (1143-1180). At the same time, the connections between Scandinavia, Kievan Russia and the Byzantine Empire are presented.

### **Keywords:**

history, vikings, Varangians, sweds, Christianisation, Harald Hardrada, Basil II

### **Introduction**

While the Norwegian and Danish Vikings raided, conquered and colonized territories in the West, Swedish and Baltic Vikings had an impressive activity in Eastern Europe. Although it was not brought to the attention of the researchers in

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the same way that Western history of Vikings was studied and it has not enjoyed the same popularity, the history of the northern incursions in the East and their impact was also important.

Swedish Vikings were called Varangians by the Byzantine and Slavic peoples from the steppes of Russia and they were highly active in the Eastern Europe. Their activity was mainly commercial which led to the development of trading centers such as Birka and Hedeby, but they were also a warlike people, subjecting Slavic populations and attacking Arab Emirates on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Swedes activity followed two paths, the first to the Black Sea and the second to the Caspian Sea. Their point of departure and one of the first conquered areas was Novgorod. According to the Primary Chronicle or The Tale of Past Years as it is also known, Slavs from Novgorod drove away the Vikings but soon began to fight each other and brought the country to the brink of chaos. Then they sent emissaries to the Vikings and invited them to come back to lead them, stating that their country is vast and rich, but there is no proper rule in it. Three Varangian brothers came to the Slavs, one of them was Rurik, the largest and most significant who stayed to rule over the Novgorod<sup>1</sup>. The other brothers of Rurik, Askold and Dir went south and settled in Kiev.

The second route pursued the trade from the Volga River and from the shores of the Caspian Sea. Jewish Khazars Empire of the Caspian dominated the landscape of the wild steppes. During the attack in 910, on the Iranian shore, Varangians obtained the permission to transit Khazars territory in the exchange for half of the booty that the vikings would capture from the arabs. Scandinavians ravaged Azerbaijan and destroyed the suburbs around their capital, Baku. Thirty years later, another Scandinavian expeditionary force entered the Caspian seeking a new incursion in Azerbaijan, but under the pressure of Muslims, Jews did allowed the transit of their territory, which led to hard reprisals from the Varangians who devastated the major cities. This aspect brought the end of the Jewish kingdom of the Khazars.

But the real target of the Sweden Vikings was the Byzantine Empire, and the enclaves they have created in the territory of Eastern Slaves had the primary purpose of uniting the Swedish ports with Constantinople, the most important commercial center in the world and the holder of numerous treasures that drew the obvious interest of the Scandinavians. Although the main motivation was the trade with Byzantium, Varangians tested the empire's military reaction force several times.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Hazzard Cross, Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Texts*, Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge, 1953, p. 59-69.

The first serious attack on Constantinople took place around the year 860 under the leadership of Askold and Dir, the brothers of Rurik, when almost 200 Varangian-Russian ships reached in front of the city. Michael III (842-867) was emperor in Byzantium but he was missing from the city because of his involvement in the fight against the Arabs. The empire was in full ecclesiastical conflict and Patriarch Photios and Patriarch Ignatius were the protagonists. Vikings devastated the suburbs and destroyed the monastery from the island of Marmara, where Patriarch Ignatius was in exile. Twenty-two of the servants of the former patriarch were cut to pieces with an axe<sup>2</sup>. Patriarch Photios, who described the surprising attack, put the Vikings withdrawal on account of the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary.

The attack from 860 brought the Varangians in Romans' attention, although they appear in the Byzantine annals earlier. For the first time, Varangians are mentioned in the Life of St George of Amastris in connection with an attack that spent in the province of Paphlagonia. Western contemporary sources from the Abbey of St. Bertin mention the presence of Varangians within the Byzantine delegation at the Frankish king, Louis the Pious. In the Roman delegation were also two Swedes Varangians that Ludovic imprisoned throughout their stay at the imperial court, because he was afraid of the idea that they might be Viking spies, as Franks were suffering devastating attacks from the Scandinavians, as we have seen previously.

Another Varangian large-scale expedition which was held against Constantinople took place in 907. During Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886-912), a large Russian fleet appeared again under the walls of Constantinople, under the command of the Russian Prince, Oleg, Rurik's successor and also the one who moved the Slavs' capital from Novgorod to Kiev. Similarly with the attack from 860, in 907 Varangians devastated city's surroundings and killed a large number of people. The Vikings lifted the siege in the exchange of large sums of money and of granting significant trade privileges. In fact, getting the trade agreements was the main reason for the Russian-Scandinavian attacks because a real conquest of the Constantinople which was surrounded by impenetrable walls and defended by a defensive system unique in the world, was practically impossible. Scandinavians' policy has always been based on the trade policy with more powerful nations that could not be conquered. The devastation of the suburbs of Constantinople was the only military achievement that Scandinavians could hope at in the Byzantine Empire which proved to be a far superior opponent to the Western Christian kingdoms. Although these attacks had a strong impact in the Empire, they were

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Vasiliev, *The Russian Attack on Constantinople in 860*, Cambridge Mass, Cambridge, 1925, p. 188-189.

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meant to make the Russians to be noticed by the imperial court in Constantinople and also to bring closer the two nations. This led to the inclusion of Russia in the political, religious and cultural sphere of the Byzantine Empire.

Despite the friendly relations between the two states, there were other Varangians attacks against Constantinople, as those from 941 and 944 which were caused by Prince Igor. But this time the Byzantines were not taken by surprise, they completely defeated the Russians using Greek fire. Another invasion, took place during Prince Sviatoslav's reign, but we will analyze it later.

**Byzantine Empire**

Between 730-843, with a break between 780-815, the iconoclasm grinds the unity and the strength of the Empire. Religiously, the Iconoclasm fails, but politically, the imperial power is consolidated, opening the path to the Macedonian dynasty apogee<sup>3</sup>. During the iconoclasm, Byzantine relations with the papacy were noticeably alienated, the Empire also lost the exarchate of Ravenna which facilitated the inmoving of the Carolingians in Italy. The relations with the West tended to be worse, especially during the photiane schism and also during the Bulgarians', Hungarians' and Moravias' conversion to Christianity.

Charlemagne's coronation in Rome, in 800, introduces a clear challenge to the Byzantine universality. Certainly the Arab Caliphate's threaten was most starkly, but Carol's ascension in Europe raises serious problems for the Christian political unity principle<sup>4</sup>. It refers to the existence of a single emperor in the Christendom. Just as there is one God, the Christian leader wanted to be His deputy on Earth. But the Byzantines were threatened by the Arabs and the Bulgarians and they could only ideologically respond by asserting their roman character.

On 23 September 867, Basil I arranges the murder of his benefactor, Emperor Michael III, who had associated him to the throne. In this way, Basil the Macedonian is considered the dynasty founder, which lasted until 1057. The Macedonian dynasty period will be the peak of the Empire and the Byzantine civilization throughout its millenary history.

Two of the most capable emperors of this dynasty were Nikephoros II Phokas and John Tzimiskes and they were followed by the brilliant emperor, Basil II. All these rulers were generals, remarking themselves in the fight against the Arabs, and the later will be highlighted in the long war against the Bulgarians.

Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969) was the most brilliant general in the service of Emperor Romanos II (959-963) and a worthy descendant of John Curcuas,

<sup>3</sup> Michael Kaplan, *Bizant*, trad. de Ion Doru Brana, Editura Nemira, București, 2010, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

the Byzantine general who initiated the Roman counteroffensive against the Arab power in Asia Minor, in Caucasus and in the Middle East. Phokas's first mission was to lead a large sea expedition against the Arabs pirates who had their nest on the island of Crete<sup>5</sup>. A year after Roman's enthronement, Nikephoros left in front of a fleet totaling 77 000 soldiers and rowers. He has driven away the Arabs and has encircled their stronghold, Candia. The siege lasted the whole winter, but at the arrival of the spring, the Muslim resistance ceded and the fortress was finally breached. After more than a century when the island of Crete served as a base of the Arabs pirates, it returned to the Byzantine Empire.

Nikephoros returned to Constantinople as a triumphant, while his brother, Leo Phokas, defeated Saif al-Dulah's army at the eastern border. In the attempt to exploit the victory of his brother Nikephoros and John Tzimiskes formed an army of 70 000 people, which has swept the emirate of Tarsus and arrived in front of the walls of Aleppo, the great stronghold of Syria, which they have conquered, burned and devastated, forcing Saif to run away. After that, they draw back on the Byzantine territory. In the Byzantine camp there were some news about the untimely death of the young Roman emperor who was apparently exhausted because of the hunting activities<sup>6</sup>. The young empress, Theophano became thus widow and the two brothers, Basil II and Constantine VIII orphans.

Theophano invited the glorious general to return to the capital to celebrate the recent victories. The empress revealed her plan to marry Nikephoros who was a widower himself. He was reticent at first, but he reluctantly accepted and as soon as he left the capital, the schemings against him began. He was very loved by the army and thus he was proclaimed emperor by his troops. Nikephoros returned to Constantinople and took hold of the city with the help of the enthusiastic crowd and then, he married Theophano. He did not have any children and by the age of 51 he adopted Theophano's sons who were the rightful heirs to the imperial throne. Pious and gentle Nikephoros II did not seem the ideal man for the mischievous Theophano. Rather she looked like his whimsical daughter, but his interest was not to reign peacefully in Constantinople, but to return as soon as possible on the Eastern battlefield. Nikephoros proves to be an emperor who is not content to send his generals on the battlefield. He wants to actively participate on the battlefield, being a soldier.

The emperor was highly devoted to the Orthodoxy and his greatest desire before he came to rule was to withdraw to Athos. But now, he supported the establishment of new monasteries in the conquered territories, in order to strengthen

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<sup>5</sup> Warren Treadgold, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, trad. de Mirella Acsente, Editura Artemis, București, 2003, p. 164.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

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the faith of Christ and the real and lasting presence of the Empire in those places. Nikephoros tried to persuade the patriarch Polyeuct to honor the Byzantine martyr soldiers who had died in the war with the Arabs, highlighting the inviolable character of the war for the Byzantine Empire and the sanctity of war for Christianity in the Byzantine Empire. The patriarch dismissed this idea, arguing that killing is a sin and the soldiers must do penance. Disappointed by the outcome of the dispute, Nikephoros issued a law that limited the land donations to the Church, in order to prevent the tend to accumulate vast properties for which the taxes were very low<sup>7</sup>.

In 964, the Emperor started the annual expedition against the Arabs, while sending two fleets, one to recover Sicily and another to conquer Cyprus. The first fleet failed but the second mission was crowned with success, occupying Cyprus, a vital strategic point for the Empire. Meanwhile, Nikephoros submitted the Emirate of Tarsus within one year. Yaqut, an Arab geographer from the XIII century tells an interesting story related to the conquest of Tarsus. Under the walls of Tarsus, the emperor ordered that two banners to be raised as emblems, one for “land of Romans” and one for the “land of Islam” and also ordered to be announced that around the first banner to gather all those who want justice, objectivity, security of assets, family life, children, good roads, laws and gentle treatment, and around the second, to gather all those who wish adultery, oppressive laws, tyranny, violence, land requisition and confiscation of the property<sup>8</sup>.

The emperor banished from his new theme all the Muslims who did not want to convert to Orthodoxy and encouraged the Christians from Armenia and Syria to settle in the newly conquered territory which was fertile, but sparsely populated.<sup>9</sup>

The greatest dream of Nikephoros was to conquer Antioch, the ancient city that he also besieged for a short time in 966. Arab resistance collapsed, particularly after the death of Saif al-Dulah. A part of Armenia was annexed by the Byzantine Empire in this campaign, when it was voluntarily ceded by the minor princes in exchange for the relatively large properties in Anatolia.

Nikephoros re-added a missing element in the establishment of the imperial army - Katapraktoi famous brotherhood. The corpus formed the Byzantine heavy cavalry, but their origin was not Byzantine, the famous fighters have been known since Antiquity by the peoples of Central Asia, particularly by the Sassanids. Both the horse and the rider were dressed in an scale armor made of metal breastplates, joined together, making this oriental knight a deadly rider. Their main weapons were the spear, the sword, the bow and the mace. Their charge was so strong that it

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> A.A. Vasiliev, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, trad. de Ionuț-Alexandru Tudorie, Vasile-Adrian Carabă, Sebastian-Laurențiu Nazăru, Editura Polirom, București, 2010, p. 316-317.

<sup>9</sup> Warren Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

literally made the earth to tremble and the enemies' spirit to decrease. Disciplined and frightening, the feared catafractars were responsible for the repeated victories of the Byzantine Emperor, Nikephoros II Phokas.

If in the East, where the emperor was present on the battlefield, the situation was favorable for the expansionist policy of the empire, in the West, Byzantium was losing territories in the favor of the Arabs or Germans. The fleet which was sent to conquer Sicily failed, while the entire island fell into the hands of the Muslims. Bulgarian problem became increasingly necessary for Constantinople. After a conflict with Tsar Peter, because the emperor did not want to deflect his attention from the eastern campaign, he called the heathen Russian Prince, Sviatoslav to aid him. Sviatoslav crossed the Danube in 967 and crushed the Bulgarians, incorporating the east of the country in a enlarged russian realm<sup>10</sup>.

Next year, the German emperor Otto I was upset because the Emperor of Constantinople did not want to send him a Byzantine princess to marry his son and invaded the Byzantine territories in the southern Italy. Meanwhile, in the rest of the Empire broke a great famine that caused the unpopularity of the king

Refusing to turn his attention to something else, Nikephoros gloriously continued his campaign, when he conquered the eastern suburbs of Edessa, but later he departed again on Antioch. Realizing that the city assault would last too long, the emperor left the army and headed to Constantinople<sup>11</sup>. In the spring of 969, the Roman army retook the great Christian city, then it subjected Aleppo, while the Byzantine commander from Italy defeated the army of Otto. The Byzantine commander from Armenia invaded what had remained of the Arabic province and devastated its capital<sup>12</sup>.

Despite his victories at the border, the emperor did not enjoy anymore the sympathy of the residents and dignitaries from Constantinople where he rarely reached. Feeling neglected by the emperor, the empress Theophano and the domestic of the East, John Tzimiskes, devised a plot to assassinate Nikephoros and after his death, they would have married<sup>13</sup>. In a despicable and a disgraceful way for the Byzantine court, John Tzimiskes, Emperor's nephew after his mother, assassinated Nikephoros while he was sleeping on the floor, as he was used to, exhausted from many hours of prayer spent in front of the icons. The brave Emperor, „the pale death of the saracens”, both holy and ugly, magnificent and unbearable deserved a far better ending<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> A. A. Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

<sup>12</sup> Warren Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 167.

<sup>14</sup> John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Apogee*, Knopf, New York, 1992, p. 210.

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Concerned with the famine that haunted the city, the population has not objected to what had happened<sup>15</sup>. The patriarch Polyeuct crowned John Tzimiskes on condition that his properties be donated to the Church, to punish his accomplices and to exile Theophano in a monastery. John accepted these conditions and was crowned emperor.

Nikephoros II Phokas's assassination was perhaps the most detestable and basest dethronement in the history of the Byzantine Empire. The emperor survived so many battles only to be assassinated while resting on the floor, exhausted from many hours of prayer. Plots, assassinations and betrayals are habits too common in the Byzantine society, that will eventually lead to the slow and painful death of the Empire.

About Phokas, an Arab historian from the eleventh century wrote: „Nikephoros's incursions had become a pleasure for his soldiers, because nobody attacked or stopped him; he was marching where he wanted and destroying what he liked, without encountering any Muslim or anyone else to deviate from the road or to prevent him from doing what he wanted. Nobody could stop him.”

Greek historian of the time, Leon The Deacon felt that Nikephoros would have been able to establish the boundaries of Empire in the East to India and in the West until the end of the world, in other words, to the Atlantic Ocean<sup>16</sup>.

John Tzimiskes (969-976). Although John was a usurper and an assassin, he proved to be an outstanding ruler as his predecessor. Handsome, charismatic and with many relationships, being the grandson of his victim Nikephoros Phokas<sup>17</sup>, John reigned as a regent for minor and legitimate emperors Basil and Constantine. In order to give more legitimacy to his reign, John Tzimiskes married their aunt. Being an active emperor who spent the most of his time on the battlefield in the East, he left the great multitude of administrative tasks in the hands of Great Chamberlain Basil Lecapenos, the illegitimate son of the late emperor, Roman I (920-944).

At the beginning of his reign, the three years of famine that ravaged the empire ceased and the emirate of Aleppo sat at the feet of the Byzantines. In order to be free to fight with the Arabs, John Tzimiskes solved the German problem by sending his niece, Theophano to marry the son of Otto I. But there still remained a pressing problem in Europe that the emperor could not neglect: Russian Sviatoslav, who was called for help by Nikephoros Phokas I, was deeply implanted in eastern Bulgaria, seeming to threaten even Constantinople. He believed that his people need a little practice before the great, oriental campaign. John initiated a

<sup>15</sup> Warren Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p 167.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> Warren Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p. 167.



total offensive against the Russians. But before the fight, a new problem has arisen. Bardas Phokas, a grandson of Nikephoros Phokas, sought to avenge his uncle, but he was soon caught and exiled. Solving this problem in 971, Emperor John and 40 000 soldiers defeated the Russians twice. Fleeing in disorder, they took refuge in the city of Silistra. City siege lasted three months, and the Russians gave up and agreed to leave Bulgaria in the exchange for food for their hungry army. On this occasion, the Byzantine Emperor annexed the eastern Bulgaria. The other Bulgarians took refuge in the mountains, but John did not bother to take them out from there thinking that it was too much effort for too little benefit<sup>18</sup>.

Free of any problem to keep him stuck in Europe, in the next year, the emperor started a war with the Arabs and he was even dreaming to conquer Jerusalem. Before arriving in the East, his armies invaded the emirate of Mosul, the next Arab power that stood in his way. In the absence of the emperor, the army's fight was poor and it was defeated<sup>19</sup>. The Byzantine general was captured and imprisoned. Soon he died in an Arabian prison.

Next year, John personally took the command of the Byzantine armies, invading and devastating the emirate and forcing the emir to pay an annual tribute. A year later, the emperor has proposed a much stronger target by attacking the Fatimid state in Egypt whose caliphate ruled the southern Syria and Palestine. John Tzimiskes nominated the domestic Bardas Skleros, a skillful warrior and strategist, and came together in Palestine where they occupied the holy places in Galilee, then they headed to the coast, conquering Beirut and devastating Sidon and Byblos.

During his last campaign, there has been kept a letter to the king's ally, the king of Armenia, Ashot III. This letter suggests the king's intentions to release the Jerusalem from Muslims, by organizing a crusade. The letter shows that John's itinerary started with his army from Antioch which went to Damascus and to Palestine. The towns of Nazareth and Caesarea voluntarily surrendered to the king and even Jerusalem begged for mercy. "If the African heathens who were living there," wrote the King for his friend and his ally, "they would not have fled because of us in the fortresses on the coast, we would have entered, with the help of God, in the holy city of Jerusalem and we would have prayed to God at the Holy Places." Before arriving in front of Jerusalem, the king directed his forces in the north along the coast where he conquered many cities<sup>20</sup>. In the same letter, the king boasted and exaggerated the success of his campaign. "Phoenicia, Syria and Palestine are released from the yoke of the Muslim and recognize the authority of the

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 167-168.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.

<sup>20</sup> A. A. Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

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Byzantine Greeks”<sup>21</sup>. Certainly, the letter contains many exaggerations because in reality the king did not advance beyond the northern Palestine. To make credible the conquest of Jerusalem, John Tzimiskes first had to defeat the Fatimid and to occupy the center of Palestine<sup>22</sup>. They were in a situation far more difficult than the Byzantines.

After this glorious campaign, the king took the road to Constantinople, but he was ill and died shortly after his entry into the capital. A lot of people affirmed that John Tzimiskes had been poisoned by the great chamberlain Basil Lecapenos to prevent the emperor to investigate the allegations of corruption against him<sup>23</sup>. The murderer was finally assassinated but like his predecessor, killing and overthrowing the current emperor was lamented by the Byzantines. John Tzimiskes proved to be a formidable general, just like his uncle. Certainly, if he had been given more time, the king would have returned to Palestine and would have conquered Jerusalem.

About John Tzimiskes, a Byzantine chronicler wrote: “All nations were terrified because of his attacks; he extended the Roman land; Saracens and Armenians fled, and Persians were afraid of him; people from all over the place offered him gifts, begging him to make peace with them; He submitted far-reaching Edessa and the Euphrates River, and the earth was filled with Byzantine armies; Syria and Phoenicia were trampled by Roman horses and he achieved great victories; Christian’s sword cut like an axe”<sup>24</sup>.

British historian Warren Treadgold praised the steps taken by the two emperors during their reign, unlike the English historian Edward Gibbon who saw in Byzantium a constant decay of the Roman Empire “in seven years, Byzantium lost two great emperors who had used their growing power to make big gains. Together, Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes had amplified Byzantine territory by a quarter, enclosing most of Bulgaria, the emirate Tarsus and much of Armenia. The flux was based on the Byzantium’s possibility to continue to expand under the leadership of some governors less remarkable”<sup>25</sup>.

Basil II (976-1025). The reign of Emperor Basil II is quite interesting and is marked in the first part of the struggle of various factions for the throne of Constantinople, having as main actors the emperor, the great chamberlain Basil Lecapenos, Bardas Skleros, domestic of the East and Bardas Phokas, the grandson of Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas. They all had important roles to play during the

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Warren Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> A. A. Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>25</sup> Warren Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

reign of the two great emperors-warriors. Emperor Basil II was the son of Roman II and the Empress Theophano and the adopted son of regents Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes. He shared the imperial throne with his younger brother, Constantine VIII, who refused to be involved throughout the reign in administrative, political or military matters, preferring to let his brother to handle the actual leadership of the empire. He kept for himself the ceremonial roles of the court and palace library, dedicating his whole life to history, study and research.

Basil II was about 18 when he ascended the throne and no longer needed any tutelage, but seemed more interested in women rather than the governance of the Empire. It seems that his brother was even frivolous<sup>26</sup>.

Basil Lecapenos, the grand chamberlain, was one of the main conspirators in the assassination of Nikephoros and was considered by the public opinion the responsible for the death of John Tzimiskes. He was detested by Basil II and his younger brother, Emperor Constantine VIII. He was shrewd, cunning and intelligent and knew to play in the palace intrigues

Bardas Skleros was the domestic of the East and he was a good tactician and warrior.

Bardas Phokas was the grandson of the Emperor Nikephoros and he was seeking to avenge the death of his uncle. He was an able overall and he was exiled. He knew his soldiers very well and he had to humble opponents with his skill in the art of war.

The first spark was lit when Basil Lecapenos tried to remove Bardas Skleros from the post of domestic of the East. As a consequence, Skleros started a rebellion against the throne, crowning himself as emperor in Melitene. Apparently Skleros would not have wanted to unseat the emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII, but to reign for them, as Phokas and Tzimiskes did<sup>27</sup>. Soon, the former supporters of Tzimiskes joined Bardas Phokas, strengthening the ranks of the rebel army.

Imperial troops sent against Skleros were crushed by Bardas in eastern Anatolia. After this, he conquered the entire province. When he wanted cross into Europe, supported by the fleet of theme Kibyraioton, the imperial fleet rejected him and sent him back to the shores of Asia Minor.

Civil war has had serious consequences for the empire. Taking the advantage of the occasion, the brother of the Bulgarian deceased king, Boris II, escaped from the Byzantine prison and was proclaimed king by the leaders of the Bulgarian resistance in the mountains. Opposite the Empire, the emir of Aleppo ceased paying the tribute and left the Byzantine vassalage, proclaiming his independence, while

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 170.

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the leaders of Bagdad conquered the emirate of Mosul and the disputed Byzantine city, Edessa.

In this desperate situation, the Prime Minister Basil called Bardas Phokas from his exile and nominated him the theme of the East. Phokas gladly accepted to fight against Skleros, who was a supporter of the cause of Tzimiskes, his uncle's murderer. When he arrived in Anatolia he received the support of Phokas' family members and friends, and formed a formidable army. Bardas came to make war with him, but he was defeated in two bloody battles and he had to retreat to the east. Meanwhile, the army of Phokas received contingents coming from Georgia. In the final battle, the army of Skleros was defeated and the most soldiers surrendered while Skleros fled to Baghdad. Basil remained in the control of the government and Bardas Phokas was the leader of the army. Phokas launched a brief campaign against the emir of Aleppo who refused to pay the tribute and convinced him come forward with the money. In 985, when the Emir was late with the tribute, Phokas invaded his emirate with the thought of conquering it<sup>28</sup>.

Suddenly and surprisingly, Emperor Basil II who has been absent so far in the political life of the Empire, vigorously intervened by arresting Basil and sent him to exile. He also asked Bardas Phokas to interrupt the campaign against Aleppo and reduced him to the rank of duke.

When he reached 27 years, the young emperor decided that it was time to rule alone, but he was lazy and this bad reputation made the Byzantines to have few expectations from him.

While searching military glory, Basil planned the invasion of Bulgaria. The emperor took the command of his armies and began the siege of Serdica fortress. The siege proved to be more difficult than the Byzantines expected as they run out of supplies. The emperor preferred the withdrawal, returning to Constantinople, but on the road, in a mountain gorge, he was surprised by the Bulgarian army. In the battle at the Gates of Trajan, in Gora mountains, he suffered a humiliating defeat the hands of Samuel, the Bulgarian general who has set the emperor on the run with heavy losses.

At the news of the disastrous defeat, Bardas Skleros came back from Baghdad and started a new rebellion. He was supported by the Arabs and Armenians. Skleros gained control of the Byzantine Syria and a large part of Armenia. Frightened, the emperor reinstated the former domestic Bardas Phokas, but he was disappointed and disgusted by the emperor's behaviour towards him and as soon as he arrived in the East, he proclaimed himself emperor. In the exchange of his aid, he promised Skleros the provinces from the Eastern border of the empire. Real-

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem.*

ising that the things could be done without Skleros Bardas, Phokas imprisoned him and took from him the armed forces. In just one year Bardas Phokas owned Anatolia and Crimea<sup>29</sup>.

Being in desperate need for help, Basil II appealed to the great pagan ruler of the Russians from Kiev, Prince Vladimir. The emperor has promised that he would give his sister, Ana in order to become his wife, if the Russian prince converts to Orthodoxy and send troops to fight the usurper. Vladimir accepted the marriage with Ana and was baptized to Christianity. Then he imposed it to the Russians. In 988 Russian people will embrace Christianity and this date will become a national symbol for the entire nation. In the help of the emperor there was sent a detachment of 6000 Scandinavian soldiers. They have been disgruntled and unpaid for a long time for their services and they were causing disturbances in the new Slavic state. These soldiers were enrolled in a permanent body that will become the famous Varagian Guard and they will ensure the personal protection of the Byzantine emperors. After several hesitations and attempts of harassment at the emperor, the final fight took place at Abydos, in northwestern Anatolia. In front of the new Varagian Guard the emperor attacked Bardas Phokas. During the fierce battle, Phokas died because of a seizure and this caused the end of the rebellion. Basil II was again the only emperor who reigned over the entire Byzantine territory.

The first part of the reign of Basil, (ground the two civil wars) ended, but the events that occurred have left a strong imprint on the young ruler. Faced with the possibility of losing the throne and his life, the emperor changed his attitude and mood. Basil II has become cruel and vindictive; he decided to destroy all his enemies. Therefore he decided not to take any wife who could betray him, to plot against him or to kill him, or whose relatives could cause intrigues to ruin him. Instead, the emperor preferred a warrior's life, being almost permanently on the battlefield and in military camps.

In retaliation for helping Bardas Phokas, Basil II firstly attacked the Georgians. He defeated Phokas's main ally, the king of Georgia, which has tamed the emperor only when he was appointed the heir of his kingdom. Then Basil has riveted his attention to the Bulgarians. The defeat from the Gates of Trajan affected him and permanently kept alive the memory of this disaster. Basil attacked them and drove them away from the northern Greece, capturing their king, Roman. Samuel hardly escaped from the hands of the Byzantines. Basil's campaign was interrupted by some problems at the eastern border, where his vassal, the Emir of Aleppo needed help. The emirate of Marwanid in southern Armenia at the foot of Ararat was brought under his reign.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 171.

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Meanwhile, Samuel resumed his attacks on northern Greece, but the Byzantines rejected it. Initially, Samuel was willing to accept the Empire protectorate and to become a vassal but the news about the death of the Bulgarian Emperor, made him to take the opportunity and to crown himself as the Emperor of the Bulgarians<sup>30</sup>. Therefore the war continued, and in 999 Basil took hold of Serdica (Sofia), which was unsuccessfully besieged in his first campaign against Bulgarians. Again, he had to interrupt Bulgarian campaign because Fatimid Arabs were causing problems on the other side of the Empire. Basil managed to end a 10-year truce with the Fatimids in order to be free to fight with the Bulgarians. Without him, the Byzantine army conquered East Bulgaria, but lost the important port of Dyrrhachium on the Dalmatian coast of Epirus. With the death of the leader of Georgia, the situation became more favorable in the East Empire, which annexed this kingdom. The stability from the east made the emperor to return quietly in front of his armies in Bulgaria which missed him. When he took the lead of the armies, the garrison of the Dyrrhachium handed over the city, and the rest of the Bulgarians were expelled from Greece. Bulgarians only had the west of their former country. Now, the byzantine emperor stopped the campaign against them, being contented with what had been achieved. The Empire has enjoyed peace and tranquility for a while and Basil's concern was to fill the coffers of Byzantium. On the outside, the emperor managed to obtain a truce with the Fatimids for another 10 years and tried to reach an agreement with Samuel of Bulgaria, but he was not willing to accept the Byzantine protectorate. This was a decision that the Bulgarian king will definitely regret. In 1014, Emperor Basil invaded Bulgaria and managed to encircle the bulk of the enemy army in a pass in the mountains, capturing 15,000 soldiers<sup>31</sup>. The emperor would have accepted favorable conditions to release them if Bulgarians had not caught a Byzantine force in the ambush a few days later. Furious at this audacity, Basil blinded all the prisoners except one in a hundred. He took out of him only one eye in order to lead the others and then he sent him to Samuel. Their appearance terrified the Bulgarian king so hard that he died of a heart attack. After that, the emperor conquered several forts and he withdrew in Thrace during the winter.

The son of Samuel, Gabriel Radomir was quick to become a vassal of the Empire, but Basil did not believe him and submitted the conquest. Soon, Gabriel died and was succeeded by John, who repeated the gesture to become the client of the Byzantium. Basil accepted this time, but soon he discovered that he was mocked because Bulgarians were planning a siege on the Dyrrhachium. Being

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<sup>30</sup> Warren Treadgold, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174.

angry, the emperor has devastated the capital, Ochrid and took on the road some prisoners whose eyes were taken out. The king did not want to divert his attention from the campaign even when free Georgians invaded the Byzantine Georgia and the Fatimids conquered emirate of Aleppo. John of Bulgaria occupied the Ochrid and kept other strongholds in western Bulgaria, but he continued to lose ground. In early 1018 he tried to conquer Dyrhachium but this attempt brought his death. All the generals, with the widow of John surrendered to the Byzantine emperor.

Basil II restored the borders of the Byzantine Empire in the Balkans as they were in the time of the Emperor Justinian the Great. Even more than that, seeing the Byzantine glory, Serbs and Croats has willingly accepted to become the vassals of Constantinople. The campaign of mutilation and extermination of the Bulgarians brought to Basil II the nickname which translates to “the Bulgarians’ killer”.

Bulgaria was subjected and the king turned his attention to the problems he neglected in the East. Aleppo was brought back as a decisive factor in the influence of the Empire and the Georgians were punished (they had their eyes taken out). King of Armenia willingly accepted the Byzantine protectorate and he bequeathed his kingdom to Constantinople. The other kings of the divided kingdom did not accept the Byzantine protectorate but simply have voluntarily given up in the exchange for some modest possessions in Anatolia. A short revolt of Bardas Phokas’ son, Nicephorus Phokas troubled the East, but it was soon stopped by the rebel assassination.

It should be noted that during the reign of the Emperor Basil II and his followers, the situation of the Christians from the Holy Land has suffered significant changes<sup>32</sup> Certainly, Basil who was a committed Christian, suffered when he found out the news that al-Hakim, the Fatimid Caliph, who was known in the West as the Mad Caliph, began a violent persecution of the Christians in Palestine. The caliph ordered the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher and the Calvary Church in Jerusalem and the confiscation of all the goods and relics of the churches. He failed to destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but he caused serious damages. The persecution was so violent that because of the fear, many Hebrew and Christians denied their faith and embraced the Islam faith. But after the death of al-Hakim which occurred in 1021, the situation of the Christians has improved considerably. Patriarch of Jerusalem, Nichifor, was sent to Constantinople to announce the return of all properties to Christians and rebuilding Holy Sepulcher. He also announced the rebuilding of the churches in Syria and Egypt, and all Christians were safe in all provinces of the caliphate<sup>33</sup>. Certainly, these achievements will be

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<sup>32</sup> A. A. Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

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exaggerated, but they demonstrate the fear and respect that Fatimids had for the Byzantine Empire.

Emperor Roman III (1028-1034), after the occupation of Edessa, has proposed to Muslims an armistice which stipulated that they allow Christians to rebuild the Holy Sepulcher and the emperor had to reserve the right to nominate the patriarch of Jerusalem. The Caliph apparently did not oppose the emperor's two requests and he has been given the right to restore the Holy Sepulcher on his expense<sup>34</sup>. In 1046, the Persian traveler Nasir-i Khusraw, who visited the rebuilt church, described it as the most spacious building with a capacity of 8000 people; this was built with the highest craftsmanship with colored marble, with ornaments and sculptures; inside, everything was adorned with Byzantine icons and worked in gold brocades. The recorded legend by the traveler mentions an alleged visit of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II in Jerusalem which was done in secret to avoid being taken captive. The Persian traveler reports: "In the days that al-Hakim reigned in Egypt, the Greek Caesar came to Jerusalem. When al-Hakim received the news about the arrival, he sent one of his cupbearers and said: <<there is a man with such a face, with such a condition, who you'll find sitting in the mosque of the Holy City ; go there, come up to him and tell him that al-Hakim sent you, because he may not believe that me, al-Hakim did not know about his coming; but tell him to be happy, because I do not have any evil intent toward him >> "<sup>35</sup>.

In general, Arabs were tolerant towards the Christians in the Holy Land, Syria or Egypt, but it could not be asserted the same about the Seljuk Turks, the future masters of Jerusalem Caliphate in Baghdad.

Emperor Basil II, "the Bulgarians' killer", died in 1025 at the age of 67, while he was preparing a campaign to retake Sicily from the Arabs. Basil reigned longer than any Roman or Byzantine emperor and bequeathed to his successors the most powerful empire of the time. Moreover, the Byzantine Empire of Basil II was the strongest in its millenary history. Indeed, borders are more limited than in the time of Justinian the Great, but the kingdom is more solid, homogenized and richer. Unlike Justinian the Great which left the empire almost bankrupt, Basil II left the coffers full and he also took care of the military campaigns, of the economy and administration.

Throughout his reign, Bulgarians were subjected, Armenians and Georgians voluntarily offered their kingdoms to the Byzantium and the Fatimids were watching from the border with fear and respect. Basil II did not have spectacular wars against the Arabs as his predecessors but he has retained and strengthened these territories which became an integral part of his empire.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 320.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.



Petruț-Ciprian Terciu

The reign of these three warriors emperors, Nikephoros II Phokas, John I Tzimiskes and Basil II, the “Bulgarians’ killer” is the peak period of the Byzantine Empire which has lasted for two centuries. The situation in the East was favorable for the Christians. Even those who did not live within the borders of the empire were treated with respect by the Muslims because of the fear of the Byzantine repercussions. The surrounding nations rushed to tail alliances with the Romans, some of them left their legacy to Constantinople, while others simply voluntarily ceded their kingdoms to Byzantium.

### **The life and activity of Harald Hardrada**

Regarding the Scandinavian policy, we will analyze the life, the activity and the rule of a key character that united the Northern world, the Byzantine and the English.

Together with the Norwegian King Olaf II who was also his maternal half-brother Harald Hardrada, participated in the Battle from Stiklestad. He managed to save himself from the disastrous battle, although he was seriously wounded<sup>36</sup>. After the battle, Harald managed to escape with the help of the count of Orkney Islands and took a refuge in a farm in the eastern Norway. Harald crossed the mountains in Sweden then he went at the court of the Russian Prince, Yaroslav the Wise, where his brother, Olaf, had taken refuge during his exile. Yaroslav needed warlords, so he received him. The Norwegian warrior participated in the battles of Iaroslav against the Poles, Estonians, Pecenegs and Byzantines<sup>37</sup>.

After a few years in the service of Prince Yaroslav, Harald headed to Constantinople (Miklagard after the name given to the city by the Scandinavians) together with his companions and they joined the Varangian Guard.

Due to his courage and skills in war, Harald was named the captain of the elite guards. Although the main function of the emperor’s guard was protection, we can see Harald leading battles both in the East and the West. He participated in missions against the Arabs pirates in the Mediterranean.

It should be noted that the Byzantine Empire, during the reign of Harald, was trying to keep intact the political, military and territorial legacy that it received from the illustrious emperor Basil II (976-1025), but from the death of the victorious emperor and until the reign of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) Byzantium was deprived of the genius of such leaders and Constantinople had the

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<sup>36</sup> Sigfus Blondal, Benedikt S. *The Varangians of Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> Kelly DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2012, p. 27.

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most incapable rulers from its millenary history. In such conditions Harald activated in Byzantium, although his period of residence in the Mediterranean empire was still keeping the international prestige of Byzantium. However, Harald had the honor to fight with George Maniakes, one of the most famous general from the Byzantine history.

His early campaigns were held in Asia Minor in the fight against the Arab raids. Until 1035, the Byzantine forces were able to repel the Muslims attacks in the Asian part of the empire, and the Roman troops (whereby Harald was an important part) reached the springs of the Euphrates, in Mesopotamia. After the completion of the incursions, Harald fought in the wars of the Emperor Michael IV (1034-1041) against the Pecenegs. According to the Icelandic sources, Morkin-skinna and Heimskringla, Harald came to Jerusalem where he held battles in the area. The possibility that Harald visited Jerusalem is quite high if we look from the perspective of the agreements between Emperor Michael IV and the Fatimid Caliph. It may be that Harald's mission in Jerusalem could be based on the escort of the Christian pilgrims who were visiting the Holy Land, and possibly including members of the imperial family. The struggles that are mentioned by the Icelandic saga could have been carried out against the Arab bandits who robbed the Christian caravans<sup>38</sup>.

In 1038 Harald joined George Maniakes (Icelandic saga Heimskringla calls him Gyrgje) in his campaigns in Sicily, which were directed against the Emirate from the island. Snorri Sturlson attributes to Harald the conquest of four cities from this place. After the cessation of the campaign in the island, Harald joined the battle in Italy which was against the Lombardy-Norman coalition which started a rebellion against Byzantium, but the imperial troops were finally defeated and the Varangian Guard was recalled to Constantinople. The success of the Byzantines in the West was short and the Arabs managed the reconquest of the Byzantine possessions in Sicily. However the success of Maniakes in Sicily has inspired the Norman mercenaries in the Byzantine army to organize the conquest of the island on their own which led to the formation of the Norman kingdom of Sicily.

After the recall to Constantinople in 1041, Harald fought for the Emperor Michael IV against the Peter Delyan's Bulgarians. After this battle, he was called the „Bulgarian burner”<sup>39</sup>.

Meanwhile, Maniakes started his rebellion against Michael IV, which continued even against the new emperor, Constantine IX Monomachos. Maniakes was proclaimed emperor by his troops, including the Varangian Guard, and in 1043

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30-31.

<sup>39</sup> Mikhail Bibikov, *Byzantine Sources for the History of Balticum and Scandinavia* in Volt, Ivo; Janika Päll, *Byzanto-Nordica 2004*, Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University, 2004, p. 21.

he was directed against Constantinople. Although, initially he was successful in the battle against the imperial troops near Thessaloniki, Maniakes was killed on the battlefield. English historian, Warren Treadgold, believes that the failure of George Maniakes to take the power in Constantinople contributed as much as the indifference of Basil II to leave the empire in the hands of a capable king.

Harald was not affected by Maniakes's uprising and he was favorably regarded by Emperor Michael IV. Moreover, he was given specific ranks and dignities. But his relations have been affected by the conflict with the Empress Zoe and with the new emperor, Michael V who reigned for only four months between the years 1041-1042.

Sources are different regarding Harald's relations with the imperial family of Constantinople, but the fact is that Harald was imprisoned. The political situation in the imperial palace had become extremely unstable, leading to the blindness of the new emperor, Michael V and the dictatorship of the Empress Zoe.<sup>40</sup>

In the middle of this disturbance, Harald managed to escape and flee to the court of the Prince Yaroslav, where he had already shipped his huge fortune accumulated during his stay in Byzantium, especially after the right to plunder the royal treasury after the death of each emperor. Taking into account that Harald participated in three such actions, at the death of emperors Roman III, Michael IV and Michael V, he has accumulated a huge fortune. So huge was his fortune, that it allowed him to start the war in order to conquer the Norwegian throne. Although he had to flee from Constantinople, Harald has kept throughout his life very high feelings for the Byzantine Empire and he was deeply influenced in his reign by the Roman government policy.

During his stay at the court of Yaroslav, Harald married his daughter and revealed information related to the defense of the Constantinople and the situation of the Byzantine Empire. Yaroslav attacked the Byzantine Empire in 1043, but the fleet which was led by his son, Vladimir of Novgorod, was destroyed by the Byzantine navy using Greek fire. Several thousand of Russian soldiers were taken captive in Constantinople and were blinded. Despite this defeat, Yaroslav managed to obtain a favorable peace agreement. The son of Yaroslav, Vsevolod I, married the daughter of Emperor Constantine Monomachus and Vsevolod's son, Vladimir, was so proud of his origins that he reigned in Kiev under the name of Vladimir II Monomachus. Although according to Michael Psellos, the conflict between the Byzantine Empire and Yaroslav seemed to end, in reality it continued in the following years, culminating with the victory of the Russians who conquered the Kherson and the Byzantine Emporium in Crimea.

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<sup>40</sup> Kelly DeVries, *op. cit.*, p. 33-34.

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Keeping alive his desire to conquer the throne which was taken from his brother, St. Olaf II Haraldson, Harald left Kiev around 1045 and sailed in Novgorod, then he went home. In the absence of Harald, the Norwegian throne was occupied at the death of King Cnut the Great by Magnus the Good, an illegitimate son of Olaf II. After the death of the Danish King Harthacnut in 1042, Magnus was elected king in Denmark and managed to defeat Svein Estridsson, the main pretender to the throne. Harald was currently allied with Svein Estridsson and the Swedish king Anund Jacob and together they started a rebellion against Magnus, pillaging and plundering the Danish coasts. Their goal was to demonstrate to the Danish people that Magnus was unable to provide any protection. That strategy worked, and Magnus was advised not to start a war against his uncle. He agreed to share the power with Harold in Norway, although Magnus prevailed as the Danish monarch. Meanwhile, Harold had to share with Magnus his enormous wealth that he accumulated in the Byzantine Empire. During the short division of the Norwegian throne, they held two separate sovereign courts and their few meetings culminated with physical violence<sup>41</sup>.

Magnus did not have any heirs so on his death; his successors were Svein Estridsson, his old rival to the Danish throne and Harald to the Norwegian throne. Since then, the reign of Harald is characterized by the efforts focused on conquering Denmark. Although he had several major battles, he did not fully succeed in subjecting the Danes. In 1065, he concluded a peace treaty with Svein. This supposed that each of them will keep their borders untouched.

Harald's domestic policy is characterized by drastic measures which were imposed to his political opponents and to all those who evaded his authority. Harald was closely pursuing an intense national unification program, repressing violently any undermining of his authority. For this reason he received the nickname *Hardrada* which means the "hard ruler". Despite his aggressiveness and his violence Harald *Hardrada*'s reign of 20 years represented a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity for the Norwegians. On one hand, this time of glory is due to the important inheritance that was received from the Norwegian kings such as Haakon the Good, Olaf I Trygvason and Olaf II Haraldson, his brother; and on the other hand is due to his good leadership and governance. Unlike his predecessors, Harald acted like a Byzantine despot, concentrating all the power into his hands.

Like a Byzantine despot, he also acted in the ecclesiastical matters. Harald was identified as a Christian, despite his exaggerated violence, like his brother, St. Olaf II, a Christian with deep spiritual feelings, but characterized by violence and

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40-45.

aggression. Archaeological discoveries have unearthed the ruins of many churches which were built during his reign which led to the advancement of Christianity in Norway's mountainous interior provinces, where paganism still had its strong roots. Harald invited many priests and hierarchs from Kievan Russia or from Byzantium to strengthen Christianity in his country, thus introducing in Norway a different form of Christianity than the one which was practiced by the Church of Rome in northern Europe<sup>42</sup>. This condition actually created confusion among the papal legates who arrived at the Norwegian court and their vehement protest forced Harald to chase them away from the country<sup>43</sup>. Clearly, in this context, it is demonstrated that the influence Byzantine politics had on Harald made him to act like a Byzantine emperor whose royalty is based on divine volition.

During his reign in Norway, he aligned to the political influence of the Roman-Greek Empire and the Church of Constantinople, being a part of the Byzantine Commonwealth alongside Russia, Georgia and the territories which were inhabited by the Vlachs. Although Norwegian sources do not indicate this, it is very likely that Harald III has maintained a living connection with the Byzantine Empire, sending Constantinople new recruits to the Varangian Guard, while the Church of Norway was aligning to the spirituality of the Orthodox Church even if during his reign, between West and East, the Great schism of 1054 occurred; however, it did not happen in Norway too and many of the Europeans did not know of its existence at the time.

Being an explorer was another spectacular feature of his character. Like Eric the Red and his son, Leif Ericsson, Harald inherited the love for explorations, for new discoveries and adventures. Historian Kelly DeVries believes that Harald had visited the Norwegian colonies in Greenland and America. This fact is based on the testimonies of the Archbishop Adam of Bremen who transmitted the Western world news about the discovery of new territories. *Icelandicsaga Morkinskinna* tells about the navigations voyages which were undertaken by Harald at the edges of his kingdom and beyond the ocean in the north, which makes the historian H.H Lamb to believe that Harald sailed to the islands of Novaya Zemleca, in the northern Asia, close to the polar circle<sup>44</sup>.

In 1066, the English king died without any heirs. There was known his disposition for a spiritual life which is the reason why he and his queen maintained a pure life in virginity. But this decision, although it was remarkable, was also disas-

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<sup>42</sup> According to Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Schism That Never Was: Old Norse Views on Byzantium and Russia", *Byzantinoslavica*, LXVI (2008), p. 173-188.

<sup>43</sup> Kelly DeVries, *op. cit.*, p. 47-48.

<sup>44</sup> H. H. Lamb, *Climate, History and the Modern World*, in the Taylor & Francis Library, Routledge, London, 1982, p. 165.

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trous for the English kingdom because a dynastic crisis established after his death. Three candidates expressed their intentions to be crowned at Westminster and all three claimed that they were appointed by Edward. Harold Godwinson, the first of them, was the son of the powerful Earl Godwin, and became king after Edward's death. The second of them was Duke William of Normandy, and the third was Harald Hardrada, the King of Norway.

Dreaming to restore the Empire of the North Sea of the Danish king, Cnut the Great, although he failed in his initiative to take the throne from King Svein Estridsson, Harald Hardrada took the advantage of the dynastic crisis from England and sailed with an army of about 10 000 - 15 000 people<sup>45</sup>. He arrived in northern England almost simultaneously with the invasion of William of Normandy at Hastings, on the south coast of Britain. Allying himself with Tostig, the brother of King Harold Godwinson, he conquered York, but unusual for Harald, he left the army in drunkenness, allowing Harold Godwinson to take them by surprise. Although Viking army fought heroically, the Norwegians were almost exterminated, among the victims being also King Harald Hardrada. So great was the disaster Norwegians suffered that Scandinavian sources claim that the survivors have filled only 25-30 boats.

Unfortunately for the English King Harold Godwinson, he was defeated and killed on the battlefield of Hastings on October 14, 1066 what made this date to become the most famous in English history. William, duke of Normandy, became William I, King of England. After the Battle of Hastings, Normans took the realm of England and installed a repressive regime against the Saxons, harrying the north and the city of York. Norman's conquest of England is the final stage in the forming of the English people, who combined elements of Celtic British English with Latin Roman, Saxon and Germanic and Norman French.

Harald Hardrada's death on the battlefield at Stamford Bridge marked the final moment of the Viking era. The death of Harald III had a special significance in the history of England and even the Byzantine history. If Harald had not invaded England, then perhaps Harold Godwinson would not be defeated by William at Hastings and would no longer have been forced to fight two opponents at once. As neither the legendary Hercules in Greek mythology could not fight two opponents at the same time, neither Harold Godwinson managed to reject two simultaneous invasions. As we previously stated, the death of Harald Hardrada influenced the Byzantine history. His service in the imperial guard of Constantinople represented the culmination of Scandinavian element in the Varangian Guard. But as Harald indirectly helped to the Norman conquest of England in 1066, many Anglo-Saxons nobles and com-

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<sup>45</sup> Kelly DeVries, *op. cit.*, p. 264-265.

moners have sought refuge in the way of William the Conqueror and his regime, in Byzantium. Since 1070, thousands of Englishmen have arrived in Constantinople seeking new opportunities, but the situation of the Empire at that time was more than disastrous because of the incapable emperors. Starting with the brilliant Emperor, Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) who was helped by the British troops, the Empire was saved and there started a flourishing period that lasted one hundred years. The exodus of many Englishmen in the Byzantine Empire led to changes in the composition of the Varangian Guard from Scandinavian element to Anglo-Saxon one, although many different people continued to serve this elite unit. We can say that the dominant Scandinavian element from the Varangian Guard coincided with the golden era of the Byzantine Empire under Emperor Basil II (976-1025), the true exponent of the Macedonian dynasty, while the English dominant element coincided with the Comnenian Restoration of emperors Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), John II Komnenos (1118-1143) and Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180).

Even though between British and the Byzantines did not continued any close relations during the Middle Ages, the existence of their contacts is amazing and is primarily due to the international prestige of Byzantium and the enterprising of the Vikings. British Scandinavian peoples homogenized their relations with the Romans through their outstanding and unique activities. Through them there has been created an axis that united Britain and Ireland to Scandinavia and the Byzantine Empire through the Kievan Rus.

Although these territories covered great distances, they could be connected on water by the fearless Vikings navigators. Both in Antiquity and during the Middle Ages it was much easier to travel by the sea than on the land. Therefore Ireland, Britain and Scandinavia were not isolated from the rest of Europe as it could be thought, but they were better connected than many other landlocked countries within the continent. Vikings vessels, with a unique construction were perfect for shipping. Byzantium prestige attracted many adventurers and the best warriors who transmitted this opportunity to the British people. As we have seen, Constantinople deeply influenced the whole Kievan Rus and the Russian people that today are considered to be the rightful successors of Byzantium, calling the capital Moscow, as the Third Rome. But the spirit of the Byzantine Roman past Russian steppes and ended up in Scandinavia and Britain. Harold Hardrada chased away the papal legations from Norway, being loyal to the Byzantine and Russian tradition. The English king Edward the Confessor continued to maintain diplomatic relations with the empire of Constantinople. In fact, in England there could not be imposed the domination of Rome until the Norman Conquest by William the Conqueror in 1066, and in Ireland a century later by the Norman conquest of King Henry II of England.

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In conclusion, we can state without any danger of error that Great Schism of the West and East in 1054 was the Great Schism between Rome and the East. Real schism was materialized in 1204 when the destruction of Constantinople by the Crusaders occurred, which just had to protect it against the Muslims. Constantinople was also the protector of Christians centuries against Muslim invasions. Although the imperial city will be recaptured, the Byzantine Empire will be only a pale shadow of what it once was and will survive until 1453 when it sacrificed itself together with its emperor, Constantine XI, in a heroic lost battle.