

## **Khan Krum and the Change of Bulgarian Grand Strategy at the Turn of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century.**

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The Bulgarian Empire was a regional power in Eastern Europe throughout the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Its cultural and political influence was integral in the formation and development of later Slavic states, such as the Serbian Empire and Kievan Rus. However, the reasons for its success lack a comprehensive analysis from a grand-strategic point of view. A major problem in discussing the grand strategy of the Bulgarian Khanate and later First Bulgarian Empire is the fragmented nature of domestic sources for the history of the country before the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Another is the overreliance on Byzantine historiography, which is not always a reliable and unbiased source of information, for the reconstruction of Bulgarian history. This is not to say that there has been no work done at all in the field. There are many analyses of the general strategic considerations of the Bulgarian khans and the tactical and strategic implications of their specific actions, but these are mostly fragmentary, based on the 10<sup>th</sup> century, or not in English. This is why this paper will attempt to create a comprehensive analysis of the change of Bulgarian grand strategy in the early 9<sup>th</sup> c. AD. During the relatively short rule of Khan Krum (803-814), Bulgaria was transformed from a small confederation of Bulgar nomads and Slavic tribes into the third European power after the Frankish and Byzantine Empires. The reason for this success was a shift in grand strategy, begun by Krum and finished by his son Omurtag (814-831), from the preclusive defense of the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the creation and preservation of a regional balance of power with the Byzantine Empire through the combination of deliberate outward expansion, internal centralization, and, of course, a little luck. This ensured the survival, continuing security, and prosperity of the Bulgar state in the Balkans up until the changes of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the rule of Tsar Simeon the Great.

## 1. The Bulgarian Grand Strategy in the 8<sup>th</sup> century

To understand the paradigm shift that the rule of Khan Krum represented, it is first necessary to examine the grand strategy of the Bulgar state before his ascension to the throne. The Bulgars settled in the lands between the Haemus Mountain and the Danube River in 681, seizing these lands from the Byzantine Empire. This conquest was achieved in conjunction with the local Slavic confederation. Byzantium never renounced its claim to these lands, given that the Danube River was the frontier of the empire since the days of Augustus. The goal of the khans was simple – to assure the survival and continuing security of the new state.<sup>1</sup> However, the means to achieve this goal were limited. The new political formation was a confederation of a Bulgar ruling elite and several Slavic tribes. The Bulgars and Slavs had a common foreign policy, but the large autonomy of the Slavs did not provide the khans with many mechanisms to extract revenue other than the exploitation of the agricultural activities of conquered populations and plunder. Since the financial and military resources of Bulgaria were far inferior to those of the cosmopolitan Byzantine Empire, the Bulgar khans could only practice a preclusive defense,<sup>2</sup> which consisted of Slavic tribes manning the key mountain passes and defeating any low-intensity threat from the Byzantines before it could pass the Haemus mountain, while any large-scale operations would be met south of the mountain by a combined army of Bulgar cavalry and Slavic infantry, led by the khan. Such situations led, for example, to the battles of Anchialus (708) and Marcellae (792). This defense was

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<sup>1</sup> While Bulgaria in no way can be considered a “nation-state” in this period, the Bulgarian term държава, which is used by Bulgarian historians to denote the political entity, ruled by the Bulgar khans and later Bulgarian tsars, is best translated in English as “state” or “country”. The terms Bulgar and Bulgars usually refer to the semi-nomadic ruling elite of the political formation, while the term Bulgarian and Bulgarians is used more to describe the political union of Slavs and Bulgars that later formed the Bulgarian ethnic identity. The terms Bulgar state, Bulgaria, and Bulgarian Khanate can be used interchangeably, despite the subtle differences described above, since it is presumed that the Bulgar ruling elite would dictate policy. Similarly, although this essay recognizes that the name “Byzantine Empire” was at no point in history the official name of the Eastern Roman Empire, it will nonetheless use the terms “Byzantine” and “Byzantium over “Eastern Roman” due their conciseness and established use in historiography.

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth discussion of preclusive defense and border defense in the Antonine Era of Roman history, see Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 74-75

complemented by limited opportunistic expansion in moments of Byzantine weakness. Such opportunities presented themselves in 688, when Khan Asparukh (681-701) intervened on behalf of the Macedonian Slavs and Bulgars against Byzantine subjugation attempts, 705, when the new khan Tervel (701-718) backed the overthrown Justinian II and helped him seize the throne in exchange for territorial concessions in Northern Thrace, and 711-716, when Justinian II lost his throne after his defeat at the Battle of Anchialus, precipitating a dynastic crisis in Byzantium.

The conflict was halted with a peace treaty in 716 between the Byzantine emperor Theodosius III and the Bulgarian Khan Tervel, found in the *Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor*.<sup>3</sup> The treaty confirmed the acquisition of Northern Thrace, which “was an excellent shield that guarded the entry to the core of their state against Byzantine invasion, and opened the way to attacks on Aegean Thrace and the Byzantine capital.”<sup>4</sup> Also, it included yearly tribute in the form of scarlet skins, the mutual repatriation of political fugitives, and trade regulations. The display of military might and the new territorial acquisitions were thought to have guaranteed Bulgarian survival and so seemingly satisfied the ends of the Bulgar state. This might also explain why the Bulgarians allied with the Byzantines against the Umayyad Caliphate in the 716-717 Siege of Constantinople. Tervel probably believed that a weakened Byzantium was preferable to eventual Arab conquest, which would threaten to engulf Bulgaria next. It can be said that the Caliphate was also seen as essential in weakening the Byzantines, so that Bulgaria would be able to consolidate in the Balkans, while the two empires fought in Anatolia. However, this strategy was entirely dependent on the preservation of the status quo and did not take into account potential changes in the distribution of power, such as the weakening of Bulgaria and the Umayyad Caliphate, or the strengthening of the

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<sup>3</sup> Theophanes the Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, trans. Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1982), 175.

<sup>4</sup> Kirił Marinow, “The Haemus Mountain and the Geopolitics of the First Bulgarian Empire: An Overview,” *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 51 (2014): 22.

Byzantine Empire. Indeed, the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century saw a major political crisis within the Bulgar state and Byzantine invasions by Emperor Constantine V (741-775), who oversaw a renaissance of Byzantine power on both the Anatolian and Balkan front. This showed that the survival of Bulgaria had not been assured and that Constantinople had not forsaken its long-term goal of recapturing its lost territories. Moreover, the political instability and tensions between Slavs and Bulgars prevented any kind of expansion, which had been so successful during the rules of Asparukh and Tervel. The state survived the crisis through a defense-in-depth strategy,<sup>5</sup> weathering the storm of Byzantine invasions, harassing supply lines, and winning occasional tactical battlefield victories, such as at the battle of the Rishki Pass in 759. Bulgaria was finally stabilized under the rule of Khan Kardam (777-803). However, the lack of optimization of resource extraction and the false assumption that the ends of Bulgarian policy had been fulfilled by the peace treaty of 716 ensured that any future instability would be exploited by the Byzantines and that preclusive defense was not enough to guarantee the survival of Bulgaria.<sup>6</sup> This necessitated the creation of a new grand strategy – one of a continuing balance of power between the Byzantines and Bulgarians.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Strategic-historical Reconstruction of Khan Krum's Rule

The origins of Khan Krum and many aspects of his rule have been the subject of intense scholarly debate in the past 50 years, but no full consensus has yet been reached. This is why it is necessary, before moving on to describe and analyze his new grand strategy, to offer a reconstruction of his rule that takes into account the strategic and tactical considerations that Krum would have had to deal with and the implications of his decisions for Bulgarian policy and grand

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<sup>5</sup> For a thorough definition of defense-in-depth, see Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, 136

<sup>6</sup> Александър Николов, Митко Делев, Александър Иванчев и Веселин Янчев, *История и цивилизация за 11 клас. Профилирана подготовка* (София: Просвета, 2002), 42.

<sup>7</sup> In this essay, the meaning of the term *balance of power* denotes the policy of the achievement and preservation of a power equilibrium between Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire through balancing activities. For a thorough discussion of the term, please see Inis Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), 17-18

strategy. In doing this, the works of many scholars, such as Veselin Ignatov, Ivo Androvski, Vasil Zlatarski, and especially the excellent historical reconstruction of Dennis Hupchick, will be used.<sup>8</sup>

The first problem that a historian, who wants to analyze the background and strategic genius of Khan Krum, encounters is that we are not sure of his origin – whether he was of Avar,<sup>9</sup> Macedonian/Pannonian Bulgar,<sup>10</sup> or Danubian Bulgar<sup>11</sup> origin, whether he was part of the Bulgar ruling house – Dulo, or a founder of a new dynasty. Even the year of his ascension to the throne is uncertain – the last mention of the previous khan, Kardam, was in 796.<sup>12</sup> Nikolay Kolev bases himself on Sigebert's account and places the ascension of Krum in 807.<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, Bulgarian scholars have chosen 803 as the year Kardam died and Krum came to power.<sup>14</sup> The peaceful transition of power would indicate that Krum was a relative of the previous khan.

However, the relative ease of Krum's conquest of the Eastern part of the Avar Khaganate,<sup>15</sup> completed by 805, would indicate that the new ruler either was descended from the Bulgars within the Avar Khaganate, or that his mother was Avar.<sup>16</sup> Ignatov's belief that the conquest of the Avar Khaganate started in 796 under khan Kardam<sup>17</sup> can be reconciled with other theories. Krum had partitioned the Avar Khaganate with Charlemagne, whose conquest began in 788 and ended around 796.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the end of Charlemagne's conquest in the Western parts would correspond to the start

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<sup>8</sup> Dennis Hupchick, *The Bulgarian-Byzantine wars for early medieval Balkan hegemony: silver-lined skulls and blinded armies* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 67-122.

<sup>9</sup> Ivo Androvski, *Kana siubigi Krum* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Avitokhol--Ivo Androvski", 2010), 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> Йордан Андреев и Андрей Пантев, *Българските ханове и царе от хан Кубрат до цар Борис III* (Велико Търново: Абагар, 2004), 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> Veselin Ignatov, *Khan Krum: pobedonosetsiut: istorichesko razsledvane* (Sofia: Millenium 2017), 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> Николай Иванова Колев (Гутев), *Българска история до XII век през погледа на старите автори* (Herzogenaurach: Kolev, 2015), 419-420.

<sup>13</sup> Колев, *Българска история*, 421.

<sup>14</sup> Николов et al., *История и цивилизация*, 42.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed map of Krum's military campaigns, please see p.14

<sup>16</sup> Androvski, *Kana siubugi*, 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> Ignatov, *Khan Krum*, 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe, Their History, Arts, and Architecture: A Cultural History of Central Europe, 750-900* (Brill; Boston: Brill, 2004.), 61.

of the Bulgarian conquest of the Eastern regions. If we accept that the future khan was either an Avar Bulgar supporter of Kardam or a relative of Kardam with dynastic links within the Avar Khaganate, we can explain the peaceful transition of power between the two khans, the relatively short time needed to subdue the vast territory of the Eastern Avar Khaganate (796-805), and the lack of any rebellion against the conquerors. If Krum had rights of inheritance over that part of the Khaganate, or political connections, this would explain the lack of rebellion against Bulgar authority, while such a revolt occurred against Charlemagne in 799.<sup>19</sup> Whether Kardam or Krum initiated the partition of the Khaganate with the Frankish Empire, is not of crucial importance. It was Krum who completed it and benefited from the increased territory, control over the trade with the Franks, support of the local Bulgar group and Avar mercenaries, as well as from the agricultural resources of the Danubian plain. The doubling of Bulgarian territory and the rapid rise of the khan's power and resources caused a reaction from the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine emperor Nikephoros I (802-811) oversaw an effort at reasserting Byzantine authority in the Balkans and Anatolia. While the Bulgars were occupied with the subjugation of the Avar Khaganate, Nikephoros was conducting military interventions in Western Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece against the so-called Σκλαβηνίεις (Slavic districts). As Hupchick remarks, “[s]uccess would strengthen the empire militarily and financially and prevent the Bulgar state from doing the same. Thus, the Bulgars would be confined to Dobrudzha and the Danubian Plain and rendered more susceptible to future military efforts to eliminate their state, and imperial authority over all previously lost Balkan lands would be restored.”<sup>20</sup> His focus on the Balkans was eased by the contemporary civil war (809-819) in the Arab Caliphate. The idea that Nikephoros was clearing

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<sup>19</sup> Androvski, *Kana siubigi*, 30-31.

<sup>20</sup> Hupchick, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 67.

his rear in anticipation of a campaign against Bulgaria is clear from the failed military campaign against Bulgaria in 807, which ended before it even began at Adrianople due to an attempted coup.<sup>21</sup> A culmination of long-term preparation for the destruction of Bulgaria or simply a reaction to the strengthening of Bulgar power,<sup>22</sup> the campaign alerted the Bulgars to Byzantine intentions and gave them the pretext to attack. The assertion that the direction of this campaign – towards the Struma river valley and Macedonia – was due to Krum's origin from the Macedonian Bulgars<sup>23</sup> or that it was a joint operation between the Macedonian and Danubian Bulgars - is conjectural at best, as evidenced by Ignatov: "The main operative goal of the Byzantine command probably was the dislocation of the available military contingent towards Serdica and the strengthening of this point, key for the Balkans... From there on an advance in the borders of Bulgaria can be expected. That is why the Bulgarian side understood the collocation of imperial regiments in the Struma valley as a prologue to an aggressive campaign and undertook a preemptive blow."<sup>24</sup> This led to the defeat of the Byzantine army in the Struma valley and the subsequent siege of Serdica in 809. The capture of this city can be considered an important strategic success for Bulgaria, because it opened the road towards expansion in Macedonia that would become key in maintaining the Bulgaro-Byzantine balance of power, as will be elaborated later in this paper.

In response, the Byzantine emperor launched a new campaign in 811, which was successful in passing the Haemus Mountain, destroying 2 Bulgarian armies, and capturing the Bulgarian capital at Pliska. Despite attempts at achieving a peace treaty before the campaign and after the sack of Pliska, Krum was unable to prevent the Byzantine advance. The subsequent tactical recklessness of Nikephoros allowed Krum to mobilize his Bulgars, as well as his Slavic and Avar

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<sup>21</sup> Николов et al., *История и цивилизация*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Николов et al., *История и цивилизация*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> Андреев и Пантев, *Българските ханове*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Ignatov, *Khan Krum*, 41. Author's translation.

allies and mercenaries, and inflict a decimating defeat on the imperial army at the Varbitsa pass, killing the emperor, cutting his head off, and turning it into a drinking cup for use in celebrations. Nikephoros's heir, Staurakios, was able to escape, but his wounds soon forced him to abdicate and retire to a monastery. His uncle, Michael I, became emperor. While Krum could not capitalize immediately on this victory, because he had to both rebuild the capital and mobilize a sufficient army, in 812 he marched on Debeltos. The city was taken and its population was forcibly moved beyond the Danube to weaken these lands and establish Bulgarian control easier. Following several raids in Thrace, he proposed reestablishing the treaty of 716 to the emperor. According to Nikolay Hrisimov, the last two clauses, concerning the exchange of political fugitives and trade regulations, were absent in the initial treaty and were added in by Krum.<sup>25</sup> After all, the Byzantines still harbored Bulgar fugitives from the times of the civil wars to eventually use as pretenders to internally destabilize Bulgaria. This clause, according to Theophanes,<sup>26</sup> became the reason for the failure of the negotiations. In 813, the Bulgarian khan successfully routed the Byzantine army of Michael I at Versinikia, leading to a dynastic change in the empire. Michael I was replaced by Leo V the Armenian (813-820). Leaving his brother to besiege Adrianople, Krum arrived at the gates of Constantinople and, after conducting pagan rituals to frighten the population, sued for peace. A meeting was arranged between the emperor and khan, where Leo V attempted to ambush and kill Krum. This breach of diplomatic protocol angered Krum, who ransacked all of Thrace, captured Adrianople, moving its population beyond the Danube, and preparing siege engines for a siege of Constantinople. However, amidst this preparation, the Bulgar ruler died from a cardiac arrest on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 814. Krum's son, Omurtag, took power and, in 815, achieved the signing of a peace

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<sup>25</sup> Nikolay Hrisimov, "Какво цели кан Крум с подновяването на договора от 716 година?," *Епохи XXV*, no. 2 (2017): 420-431.

<sup>26</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 175-177.

treaty between Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire.<sup>27</sup> The treaty recognized some of the Bulgarian conquests in the Serdica region and Thrace and it formalized the exchange of prisoners-of-war and the return of Slavic populations to their original habitations. This treaty can be considered as the definitive point when the Bulgarian grand strategy officially moved away from the idea of preclusive defense and towards a lasting balance of power, a process begun by Krum's conquests.

### 3. Khan Krum and the New Bulgarian Grand Strategy

Krum's victories against the Byzantines achieved the Bulgarian goal of enhanced security. This end was accomplished through a change of grand strategy from a preclusive defense to the creation and preservation of a balance of power through external and internal balancing. The new Bulgarian grand strategy, based on the military and territorial parity with the Byzantine Empire in the Balkans, created an equilibrium that guaranteed peace between the two states, with some small interruptions and territorial changes.

The shift from preclusive defense to a lasting balance of power as a grand strategy is evident from the internal and external balancing activities,<sup>28</sup> undertaken by Krum and continued by his son Omurtag. The military conflicts were simply the most overt of these activities. The Second Hambarli inscription shows an attempt at creating a Bulgarian administrative structure in the conquered lands south of the Haemus that was later completed by Omurtag through the creation of the so-called "komitat" system.<sup>29</sup> Krum divided the conquered lands into 3 parts, one ruled directly, while the other 2 were administered by the Bulgar ichirgu-boil (commander of the capital garrison) and boila kavhan (regent and commander of the army). They were assisted by Greek individuals,

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<sup>27</sup> Колев, *Българска история*, 458-460.

<sup>28</sup> For a thorough discussion of external and internal balancing, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), 168

<sup>29</sup> Kiril Petkov, *The voices of medieval Bulgaria, seventh-fifteenth century: the records of a bygone culture* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 7.

who would have eased the communication between the new rulers and the Greek-speaking population. Krum's administrative reforms increased his ability to mobilize resources for warfare and gather taxes from these conquered lands, as well as limit the autonomy of Greeks and Slavs in the conquered regions. Later, Omurtag was able to complete his reforms by taking away the autonomy of the Slavs and incorporating them in the administrative apparatus of the country.<sup>30</sup>

The second important element of Krum's internal balancing was the introduction of a law code, based on a conversation between Krum and the conquered Avars.<sup>31</sup> While this law code, preserved in the Souda lexicon, has been described as more fictional than literal,<sup>32</sup> it is unlikely that the Byzantine author would ascribe such a law code to just any ruler of Bulgaria. Therefore, while the specific provisions of the document cannot be taken at face value, we can conceive of Krum trying to supplant the former common law and establishing a common law code for both Slavs and Bulgars. Finally, during Krum's rule, the Bulgarian army was reorganized and rearmed, which significantly increased its military capability, culminating in the victorious campaigns between 805 and 814.<sup>33</sup> The strengthening of the power of the Bulgarian ruler is manifest in the new title *καὶ ἄρσις ὑβίγι*, seen in inscriptions from the rule of Omurtag and his son Malamir (831-836) and read by Bakalov as "great khan".<sup>34</sup> While the completion of this internal centralization is doubtless the achievement of Omurtag, it began with the laws and administrative reorganization of Krum. These attempts at reform curbed the separatism and power of the noble boil houses that had caused the crisis of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and increased the khan's authority.<sup>35</sup> This ultimately allowed Krum to

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<sup>30</sup> Николов et al., *История и цивилизация*, 51-52.

<sup>31</sup> Petkov, *The voices of medieval Bulgaria*, 23-24.

<sup>32</sup> Desislava Naydenova. "Историческата достоверност на Лексикона „Суда“ като източник за законодателството на хан Крум," *Старобългарска литература* 35-36 (2006): 167-180.

<sup>33</sup> Androvski, *Kana siubugi*, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Георги Бакалов, *Средновековният български владетел* (София: Анупис, 1997), 119-121.

<sup>35</sup> Бакалов, *Средновековният български владетел*, 120.

reestablish the principle of dynastic primogeniture that had collapsed in the wake of the crisis of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> His descendants would rule Bulgaria until the death of Tsar Roman I in 997.

This internal balancing allowed for Krum's military success in the campaigns of 805-814 and the subsequent internal stability of Bulgaria. Moreover, the direction of these military conquests was not chosen at random. While this essay has tried to explain in-depth the tactical considerations behind particular military decisions in his rule, it is now necessary to turn to the broader strategic meaning of these conquests. To reiterate, the goal of Bulgarian grand strategy was to guarantee the survival and security of Bulgaria against the revanchist Byzantine Empire. To achieve this goal, a stable balance of power had to be achieved. The only way to achieve this aim was to expand into Byzantine lands, diminishing Byzantine resources and flexibility of Byzantine military operations, while in the meantime strengthening the relative power of the Bulgar state through expansion. These political claims to expansion can be seen in several columns with the names of military victories of Khan Krum that would once have adorned the main street of Pliska.<sup>37</sup> The destruction of the Avar Khaganate was an important strategic decision that allowed Bulgaria to expand and strengthen its position and thereby increase its ability to deal with future Byzantine operations in the Balkans. However, this rapid expansion led to a Byzantine reaction that culminated in the failed campaign of Nikephoros I in 811. The most vital acquisition in this period was undoubtedly the city of Serdica. It was important for lines of communication and troop movement to the imperial possessions in the Adriatic. The fall of Serdica forced these same troop movements to pass through Thessaloniki and left a vacuum in the Struma valley and modern Northern Macedonia. These lands, settled by Slavic and Bulgar populations, were later incorporated into Bulgaria during the reign of

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<sup>36</sup> Бакалов, *Средновековният български владетел*, 112.

<sup>37</sup> Mirela Ivanova, "The Madara Horseman and Triumphal Inscriptions in Krum's Early Medieval Bulgaria," in *Trends and turning point: constructing the late antiquity and Byzantine world*, ed. Matthew Kinloch and Alex MacFarlane (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 184.

Khan Presian (836-852) as a reaction to Byzantine covert operations in 836-837.<sup>38</sup> It is clear that this expansion only aimed at maintaining the balance of power between the Bulgarians and Byzantines, while also forcing the Byzantine Empire to abandon its ambition to conquer Bulgaria.<sup>39</sup> Krum's expansion enabled this external balancing through strategically motivated territorial acquisition. The rule of Krum, the peace treaty of 815, and the campaigns in 836-837 strengthened the gravitation of Slavic tribes to Bulgaria and turned it into a center of Slavic political unification.<sup>40</sup> This process led to the gradual amalgamation of Slavs and Bulgars, leading to the emergence of the Bulgarian identity in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Also, this balance of power was strengthened through the presence of two powers, the Abbasid Caliphate and the Holy Roman Empire, which were strong enough to threaten the rear of the two belligerents, prevent any expansion, and so contribute to the stability of the balance of power in the Balkans.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Appraisal and Conclusion

The rule of Khan Krum and the changes in Bulgarian behavior in the 9<sup>th</sup> century have been, understandably, praised universally by Bulgarian historians.<sup>42</sup> After all, he bequeathed to his son a stronger state than he had inherited from Kardam. The success of his military campaigns and their positive effect on the internal stability of Bulgaria is also noted by Hupchick: "The Bulgar state was left in a position to consolidate its internal affairs free of Byzantine interference and to commence its systematic territorial expansion into the central, western, and northwestern

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<sup>38</sup> Hupchick, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 67.

<sup>39</sup> Николов et al., *История и цивилизация*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Бакалов, *Средновековният български владетел*, 112.

<sup>41</sup> Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 20. While the Abbasid Caliphate never allied Bulgaria against Byzantium and the Frankish Empire/Eastern Frankish Kingdom never allied Byzantium against Bulgaria, the threat of such an alliance forming was enough to help deter a large-scale conflict between the two states for 80 years.

<sup>42</sup> Андреев и Пантев, *Българските ханове*, 56 has the most positive view of khan Krum's rule, but all other mentioned Bulgarian sources generally share a positive outlook on Krum's rule.

Balkans.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the success of his internal balancing efforts is manifest in the strengthening of the authority of the khan, the completion of the internal administrative reforms under the rule of Omurtag, and the limitations on the power of the Bulgar aristocracy that have already been discussed. The inclusion of Slavs in the administrative apparatus began the gradual amalgamation process between Bulgars and Slavs that led to the formation of the Bulgarian identity and increased the internal cohesion of the state.

The external balancing efforts of Khan Krum, as has already been mentioned, created a stable balance of power in the Balkans that ensured both the survival and security of Bulgaria and a lasting peace between Byzantium and Bulgaria, with some small skirmishes in 836/837 and 863 that aimed to preserve the balance of power that had been achieved in the Balkans: "The failure of Nikephoros I to break Bulgar power, the sustained counter-offensive of Krum's armies, and the conclusion of the thirty year-peace between Leo V and Omurtag ... provided an unaccustomed amount of security for the Bulgars on their south-eastern frontier.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the balance of power that khan Krum achieved and that his descendants preserved through both internal and external balancing activities provided Bulgaria with internal stability and external security for the next 80 years. This grand strategy changed only with the rise of the Simeon I, who would use the strengthened position that Bulgaria had developed in the past 80 years to attempt to achieve Bulgarian hegemony in the Balkans.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hupchick, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 114.

<sup>44</sup> Panos Sophoulis, "New Remarks on the History of Byzantine-Bulgar Relations in the Late Eighth and Early Ninth Centuries," *Byzantinoslavica - Revue internationale des Etudes Byzantines* 1-2 (2009): 119

<sup>45</sup> For a thorough discussion of Tsar Simeon I's rule, see the relevant chapter in Hupchick, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*.



“Bulgaria under Khan Krum including the most important campaigns and battles,” Battle of Versinikia, Wikipedia, accessed May 4, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Versinikia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Versinikia)

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