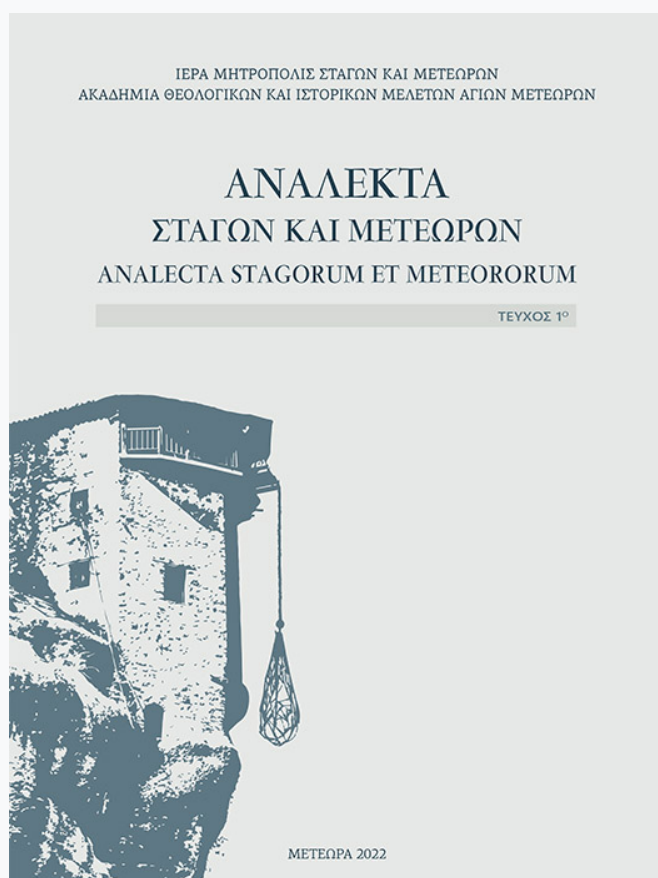


Analecta Stagorum et Meteororum

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THESSALY UNDER THE SERBS (1348 - c. 1373)

Maja Nikolić

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ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΤΑΓΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΕΩΡΩΝ
ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΜΕΛΕΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ ΜΕΤΕΩΡΩΝ

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ΣΤΑΓΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΕΩΡΩΝ
ANALECTA STAGORUM ET METEORORUM

ΤΕΥΧΟΣ 1^ο



ΜΕΤΕΩΡΑ 2022

ΑΝΑΛΕΚΤΑ
ΣΤΑΓΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΕΩΡΩΝ



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Το παρόν έργο πνευματικής ιδιοκτησίας προστατεύεται από τις διατάξεις της ελληνικής νομοθεσίας (Ν 2121/1993 όπως έχει τροποποιηθεί και ισχύει σήμερα) και από τις διεθνείς συμβάσεις περί πνευματικής ιδιοκτησίας. Απαγορεύεται απολύτως η χωρίς γραπτή άδεια του εκδότη κατά οποιονδήποτε τρόπο ή οποιoδήποτε μέσο (ηλεκτρονικό, μηχανικό ή άλλο) αντιγραφή, φωτοανατύπωση και εν γένει αναπαραγωγή, εκμίσθωση ή δανεισμός, μετάφραση, διασκευή, αναμετάδοση στο κοινό σε οποιαδήποτε μορφή και η εν γένει εκμετάλλευση του συνόλου ή μέρους του έργου.

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΤΑΓΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΕΩΡΩΝ
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ΜΕΤΕΩΡΑ 2022

Εἰς μνήμην Χαραλάμπους Β. Στεργιούλη (†1.9.2021),

Διευθυντὴ συντάξεως τοῦ Περιοδικοῦ

ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΣΕΒΑΣΜΙΩΤΑΤΟΥ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΟΥ ΣΤΑΓΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΕΩΡΩΝ Κ. ΘΕΟΚΛΗΤΟΥ

Πᾶσα σοφία παρὰ Κυρίου καὶ μετ' Αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (Σειράχ, Α΄, 1)

Πλήρεις χαρᾶς καὶ εὐφροσύνης, ὑποδεχόμεθα καὶ προλογίζομεν τὴν ἔκδοσιν τοῦ ἐπιστημονικοῦ Περιοδικοῦ τῆς Μητροπολιτικῆς Ἀκαδημίας Θεολογικῶν καὶ Ἱστορικῶν Μελετῶν Ἁγίων Μετεώρων, τοῦ ὑπὸ τὸν τίτλο «Ἀνάλεκτα Σταγῶν καὶ Μετεώρων – Analecta Stagorum et Meteororum». Τὸ ἐν λόγῳ Περιοδικὸν σκοπεῖ εἰς τὴν μελέτην τῆς Ἱστορίας καὶ τῆς πνευματικῆς παρακαταθήκης τῆς ἀγιοτόκου πολιτείας τῶν Ἁγίων Μετεώρων καὶ τῆς παλαιφάτου ἐπισκοπῆς τῶν Σταγῶν, νῦν δὲ ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Σταγῶν καὶ Μετεώρων. Εἰς τὸ ἐν λόγῳ συλλογικὸν πόνημα ἀναδεικνύεται μετὰ πολλῶν γραπτῶν πηγῶν καὶ ἀρχαιολογικῶν μαρτυριῶν, ἡ πολύχρονος ἱστορία τῆς τοπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὁ πολιτισμικὸς θησαυρὸς τῆς μετεωρικῆς Θηβαΐδος, καὶ ἡ δρᾶσις τῶν μεγάλων ἐκκλησιαστικῶν προσωπικοτήτων τῆς Δ. Θεσσαλίας.

Διὰ τοῦτο εἴμεθα ἐκ τῶν προτέρων πεπεισμένοι ὅτι ἡ ἔκδοσις καὶ ἡ διάδοσις τοῦ Περιοδικοῦ Ἀνάλεκτα Σταγῶν καὶ Μετεώρων θὰ συντελέσῃ οὐχὶ μόνον εἰς τὴν γνῶσιν τῆς ἱστορίας τῆς περιοχῆς τῶν Σταγῶν ἢ τῶν μετεωρικῶν Μοναστηρίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τὴν περαιτέρω ἀναγνώρισιν τῆς συμβολῆς τῆς τοπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἰς τὴν πνευματικὴν ἀνάπτυξιν τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου Ἑλληνισμοῦ ἀπὸ τὰ βυζαντινὰ ἕως τὰ νεότερα χρόνια.

Ἐκφράζομεν τὴν εὐαρέσκειαν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν ἡμῶν πρὸς τὰ κοπιάσαντα μέλη τῆς τριμελοῦς συντακτικῆς Ἐπιτροπῆς τοῦ Περιοδικοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἐλλόγιμα μέλη τῶν ἐπιμέρους ἐπιστημονικῶν Ἐπιτροπῶν, διὰ τὴν ἀξίειπαινον αὐτῶν σπουδὴν καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν. Ὡσαύτως, θερμὰς εὐχαριστίας καὶ εὐγνώμονας προσρήσεις ἐκφράζομεν πρὸς τοὺς συγγραφεῖς τῶν μελετῶν τοῦ πρώτου τεύχους, οἵτινες διὰ τῆς ἐνδελεχοῦς ἐντρυφήσεως αὐτῶν εἰς τὰς πηγὰς, ἀπέδωσαν μὲ ἀντικειμενικότητα καὶ ἐπιστημονικὴν ἀκρίβειαν πάντα ὅσα οὗτοι πραγματεύονται.

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, διὰ πρεσβειῶν τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου τῆς Μετεωριτίσσης καὶ πάντων τῶν Ὁσίων τῶν ἐν τοῖς λίθοις τῶν Μετεώρων λαμπάντων, εἴη μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ πάντων ἡμῶν, Ἀμήν.

Ἐγγραφον ἐν τῷ ἐπισκοπείῳ τῶν Σταγῶν, τῇ 25ῃ μηνὸς Ὀκτωβρίου, ἔτους σωτηρίου 2021

τῷ Σταγῶν καὶ Μετεώρων Θεοκλήτῳ

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Στεργιούλης Χαράλαμπος († 1.9.2021)

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ΣΥΝΤΟΜΟΓΡΑΦΙΕΣ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΩΝ

ΑΑΑ	Ἀρχαιολογικὰ Ἀνάλεκτα ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν
ΑΒΜΕ	Ἀρχεῖον Βυζαντινῶν Μνημείων Ἑλλάδος
ΑΕΘΣΕ	Ἀρχαιολογικὸ Ἔργο Θεσσαλίας καὶ Στερεῆς Ἑλλάδας, Πρακτικὰ Ἐπιστημονικῆς Συνάντησης
ΑΔ	Ἀρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον
ΑΕ	Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς
ΔΧΑΕ	Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας
ΕΕΒΣ	Ἐπετηρὶς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν
ΕΕΘΣΠΘ	Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης
ΕΜΑ	Ἐπετηρὶς Μεσαιωνικοῦ Ἀρχείου Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν
ΕΕΦΣΠΑ	Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς τῆς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν
ἩπειρΧρον:	Ἡπειρωτικὰ Χρονικὰ
ΘεσσΗμ	Θεσσαλικὸ Ἡμερολόγιο
ΘεσσΜελ	Θεσσαλικά Μελετήματα
ΘεσσΧρον	Θεσσαλικά Χρονικά. Δελτίον τῆς ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Λαογραφικῆς Ἐταιρείας τῶν Θεσσαλῶν
ΘΗΕ	Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἠθικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία
ΙΑΙΣΕΕ	Ἱστορικὸν Ἀρχεῖον Ἱερᾶς Συνόδου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος
ΙΕΕ	Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους
ΚαρδΧρον	Καρδιτσιώτικα Χρονικά
ΚρητΧρον	Κρητικὰ Χρονικά
ΝΕ	Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων
Νεολόγου Ἐπιθεώρησις	Νεολόγου Ἑβδομαδιαῖα Ἐπιθεώρησις, Πολιτικὴ, Φιλολογικὴ, Ἐπιστημονικὴ.
ΠΑΑ	Πρακτικὰ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν
ΠΑΕ	Πρακτικὰ τῆς ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας
ΑnBoll	Analecta Bollandiana
ArtB	The Art Bulletin
AS	Acta Sanctorum

BalkSt	Balkan Studies
BHC	Bulletin de correspondance hellénique
BHG	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca, F. Halkin (ed.), vols. I, II, III, Bruxelles 1957
BHG	Nov. Auct. F. Halkin, Novum Auctarium Bibliothecae hagiographicae graecae, [Subsidia Hagiographica 65], Bruxelles 1984.
BMGS	Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
BNJb	Byzantinische-neugriechische Jahrbücher
ByzForsch	Byzantinische Forschungen
ByzSl	Byzantinoslavica
ByzVindo	Byzantina Vindobonensia
BSGRT	Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CahArch	Cahiers Archéologiques
CahBalk	Cahiers Balkaniques
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
ChHist	Church History
CIÉB	Congrès International d'Études Byzantines
Corsi	Corsi di cultura sull' arte ravennate e bizantina
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSHB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, B. G. Niebuhr et al. (eds.), Bonn 1828-1897.
DACL	Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, H. Leclercq, F. Gabrol (eds.), vols I-XV, Paris 1907-1923.
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
DOS	Dumbarton Oaks Studies
EChR	The Eastern Churches Review
ÉO	Échos d'Orient
EOE	Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire (2009)
EtBalk	Études balkaniques
GSND	Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva
IIRAIK	Izvestija Russkogo Arkheologičeskogo Instituta v Konstantinopole
JEastCS	The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies

JAch	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JÖB	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
JÖByzG	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft
JSav	Journal des Savants
JThS	The Journal of Theological Studies
JWarb	Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes
LA	Liber Annus. Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
LBG	Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität (E. Trapp et alii), Wien 1994 k.e.
LOC	Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio, E. Renaudot (ed.), vols I, II Parisiis 1716.
MSU	Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens
OKS	Ostkirchliche Studien
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
OrChr	Oriens Christianus
OrChrAn	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
PBW	Prosopography of the Byzantine World
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca, J.-P. Migne (ed.), vols. 161, Paris 1857-1866.
RÉB	Revue des Études Byzantines
RÉG	Revue des Études Grecques
RESEE	Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes
RSBN	Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici
SEG	Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum
SemKond	Seminarium Kondakovianum
StP	Studia Patristica
SüdostF	Südost-Forschungen
Synaxarium EC:	H. Delehaye, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae, e codice sirmondiano nunc berolinensi abiectis synaxariis selectis, Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris, Bruxellis 1902
TM	Travaux et Mémoires
Turcica	Turcica, Reuve d'études turques
VizVrem	Vizantinijskij Vremmenik
WJKg	Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte
ZLU	Zbornik za likovne umetnosti Matice srpske

Zograf	Zograf, Revue d'art médiévale
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik
ZRNM	Zbornik Radova Narodnog Muzeja
ZRVI	Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta
ZSU	Zbornik Srednovekovna umetnost



THESSALY UNDER THE SERBS (1348 - c. 1373)

Maja Nikolić

ABSTRACT: *The rule of the Serbs in Thessaly began in 1348, when the military units of the Serbian Emperor Stefan Dušan, led by his prominent general Preljub, took over and incorporated it into the Serbian Empire. Preljub governed Thessaly until his death, in early 1356. After the short reign of Despot Nikephoros II Orsini (1356–1359), Thessaly was conquered by Dušan's half-brother Symeon Uroš Palaiologos (1359–c. 1371), who proclaimed himself emperor. He was succeeded by his elder son, John Doukas Uroš Palaiologos, who ruled for a very short time (c. 1371/2–c. 1373), before retiring to Meteora as monk Joasaph, where he lived until his death in 1423, essentially becoming the second ktetor of Meteora. The rule of John Uroš was followed by that of Kaisar (Caesar) Alexios Angelos Philanthropenos, which marked the end of Thessaly's Serbian period, lasting less than three decades.*

KEYWORDS: *Thessaly, Serbian Empire, Stefan Dušan, Preljub, Symeon Uroš, John Uroš*

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: *Θεσσαλία, Σερβική Αυτοκρατορία, Στέφανος Δουσάν, Πρελούμπος, Συμεών Ούρεσης Παλαιολόγος, Ιωάννης Ούρεσης*

I. THE RULE OF STEFAN DUŠAN (1348–1355)

Due to the political fragmentation prevailing in Byzantium during the second civil war (1341–1347), the troops of the Serbian King Stefan Dušan conquered between 1343 and 1345 much of Byzantium's Balkan territories: namely the whole of Macedonia and Albania, with the exceptions of Thessaloniki, Dyrrhachion and Buthrotum¹. As a result, the Serbian King started to style himself 'честник Грком' (the one that partakes in ruling the Greeks, i.e., the Byzantines). By the end of 1345 he had also proclaimed himself emperor, with

¹ On Stefan Dušan's conquests cf. *Историја српског народа*, I, 511–523, 541–544; Ferjančić, Ćirković, *Стефан Душан*, 49–190.

an imperial coronation taking place on 16 April 1346². As early as 1347 Serbian troops conquered Epirus; and then in 1348, taking advantage of the effects of the Black Death pandemic, they seized Thessaly as well³. This venture was facilitated by the death of its previous governor, Sebastokrator John Angelos (Kantakouzenos's nephew), from the plague (*τοῦ ἐμοῦ τετελευτηκόντος ἀνεψιοῦ*). Unable to oppose the invaders, or acting under the calculation that it could benefit from an agreement with Thessaly's new ruler, the local aristocracy did not resist⁴.

The prime sources on Thessaly's conquest by the Serbs are the memoirs of John Kantakouzenos and the Chronicle of Ioannina. First Kantakouzenos, when mentioning the events of 1349 and his intention to leave young John V in Thessaloniki, made the following claim: that with the help of God and a great army he will not only save Thessaloniki from the Serbian danger, but will also liberate the rest of Macedonia, Thessaly and Akarnania, which were conquered by the Triballoi⁵. On the other hand, the Chronicle of Ioannina begins with the information that the King of Serbia Stefan (*ὁ καὶ κράλης Σερβίας ἀπάσης*) crossed the Byzantine border, was crowned emperor and then conquered Wallachia in Greece (*καὶ τὴν ἐν Ἑλλάδι Βλαχίαν*), where he appointed Preljub, his noble as ruler (*ἄρχοντα*), granting him the dignity of kaisar/caesar⁶. The *terminus ante quem* for this event is provided by two chrysobolls of Stefan Dušan, issued to the monasteries of the Most Holy Mother of God in Lykousada and St. George in Zablantia in November 1348. About a year earlier, and certainly before December 1347⁷, Dušan became the lord of Epirus⁸. There he appointed his half-brother Symeon-Siniša as governor, having previously bestowed to him the title of despot⁹.

2 On Stefan Dušan's imperial title and its development in the course of time cf. Pirivatrić, "Улазак Стефана Душана у Царство".

3 John Kantakouzenos clearly mentions that the Serbs conquered Thessaly after the subjugation of Epirus and the death of Sebastokrator John Angelos, which is believed to have occurred in 1348 (Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *Ιστορία* III, 147).

4 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 147. On Sebastokrator John Angelos see n. 14. On the other hand, the forceful conquest of Epirus means that the Serbs encountered resistance there, probably organized by John Angelos. See Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros*, 130.

5 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 113 sq.

6 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 74.

7 We know this on the basis of Dušan's chrysobull issued to the Athonite Monastery of Great Lavra in December 1347, in which the he signs, inter alia, as the Lord of the Despotate of Epirus. See Solovjev, Mošin, *Грчке повеље српских владара*, 116–123, no. XVI. The conquest of Epirus, therefore, must have happened before the date the chrysobull was issued.

8 Solovjev, Mošin, *op. cit.*, 152–161, no. XX; 162–167, no. XXI. Cf. Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 228.

9 The Chronicle of Ioannina suggests that Dušan first bestowed the title of despot to Symeon, subsequently sending him to Epirus 'Τὸν δὲ ἴδιον ἀδελφόν, καλούμενον Συμεών, ὃς ἐξανεψιὸς ἐτύγγχανε

Symeon then married Thomais¹⁰, the daughter of the late Despot John II Orsini, who, along with her brother Nikephoros, could claim hereditary rights to the Despotate of Epirus¹¹.

Božidar Ferjančić believed that the Thessalian aristocracy was not satisfied with Byzantine rule represented in Sebastokrator John Angelos, which facilitated the effortless Serbian conquest of such a vast area¹². However, by recognizing Kantakouzenos as emperor in 1342 Thessaly was in effect accepting the rule of Constantinople from 1347, when he, as the winner of the civil war, began to reign. Perhaps, the dissatisfaction of the Thessalian nobles can be better observed in their continuous anti-Constantinopolitan disposition. For example, they recognized Kantakouzenos as emperor while he was in clash with Constantinople. The very moment Kantakouzenos succeeded in installing himself as the emperor in Constantinople, he no longer suited them. In this regard it is particularly important that Kantakouzenos appointed his cousin John Angelos as lifelong governor of Thessaly (*περιπόθητον ἀντάδελφον τῆς βασιλείας μου κύριον Ἰωάννην τὸν Ἄγγελον εἰς κεφαλὴν τῶν κάστρων καὶ χωρῶν Βλαχίας ἐφ' ὄρω τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ*)¹³. This probably betrays his increased awareness of the anti-Constantinopolitan feelings prevailing among the local aristocrats. Apart from being a relative and faithful supporter of Kantakouzenos, John Angelos, as his patronym

τοῦ βασιλέως Παλαιολόγου, τοῦτον δεσπότην τιμήσας εἰς Αἰτωλίαν ἐξέπεμψεν, ἀρχηγὸν καὶ ἡγεμόνα καταστήσας τοῦτον.' See *Χρονικό των Ἰωαννίνων*, 74. Cf. Ferjančić, *Деспоту у Византији*, 167). However, the sources do not indicate exactly when this happened: possibly sometime soon after Dušan's coronation, or at the latest, immediately after Epirus was conquered. However, there is no evidence that Symeon's title was a direct consequence of the conquest of Epirus and that he, as Dušan's closest relative, received it in order to govern the area. On the contrary, it seems logical to assume that he was granted the title at an earlier stage, when Dušan was creating his court (see Maksimović, "Српска царска титула", 174–175). The most prominent courtiers were always closely related to the imperial family. Despite certain exceptions, they usually held the three highest titles: despot, sebastokrator and kaisar (see Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 9–11. Ferjančić, Ђirković, *Стефан Душан*, 176. Macrides, Munitiz, Angelov, *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 252, 291–301). This is all the more so if we bear in mind that Dušan recognized Symeon as the heir to the Serbian throne. He remained second in line even after the birth of Uroš (Miklosich, *Monumenta Serbica*, 116, no. 99. Mihaljević, *Крај српског царства*, 15–16). This is also supported by a donor fresco, representing Dušan as the ktetor, together with his wife Helena, their son Uroš and, presumably, Symeon in the southwest corner of the nave of Visoki Decani Monastery (Vojvodić, "Портрети владара", 268–272).

10 '...ὁς καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ γενομένος, τὴν τοῦ μακαρίτου δεσπότη Ἰωάννου θυγατέρα μνηστεύεται, Θωμαΐδα οὕτω καλουμένην, ὄρφανὴν ἐκ πατρὸς οὖσαν, ἐπὶ μητρὶ καὶ μόνῃ τὰς ἐλπίδας σαλεύουσαν, καὶ ἐπ' ἀδελφῶν νέω, ὃν καὶ ὡς ὄμηρον ὁ βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων εἰληφώς εἰς Κωνσταντινούπολιν ἀπήγαγε, καὶ τὴν τοῦ Καντακουζηνοῦ θυγατέρα ἐπιγαμβρεύσας αὐτῷ, ἐκέισε εἶναι πεποιήκεν...' (*Χρονικό των Ἰωαννίνων*, 74–75).

11 Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros*.

12 Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 229.

13 Ἰωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *Ιστορία* II, 320.

points out, was undoubtedly related to the Angeloi, a family that had reigned over Epirus and Thessaly after 1204 and whose rule in these areas stood a symbol of the decentralization of power vis-à-vis Constantinople¹⁴. An interpretation, first brought forward by Alexander Solovjev, and subsequently adopted by George Soulis, is that the Thessalian nobles made an agreement with Dušan, similar to the one made with Kantakouzenos in the end of 1342, and that this was largely the reason Thessaly passed to Serbian rule without actual combat¹⁵.

To continue, Michael Buća, a noble from Kotor, is mentioned in a Venetian report, written in April 1350, as ‘ambaxatorem serenissimi domini imperatoris di Raxie et Romanie, dispoti Larte et Blachie comiti’¹⁶. On the basis of Buća’s prominent position in the Serbian court it has been proposed that Stefan Dušan included the title of Count of Wallachia into his full style¹⁷. This thesis, however, does not find support in the sources¹⁸. The only documented example in which he added the title of ‘Despotate of the western land’ (i.e., Epirus) into his style is his December 1347 chrysobull to the Athonite Monastery of the Great Lavra¹⁹. In this official document he signed as ‘Stefan in Christ God, the faithful Emperor of the Serbs and the Greeks and the Despotate of the western land’²⁰.

The special status of Epirus and Thessaly within the Serbian empire is visible in the fact that, being conquered from the Byzantine Empire, they were assigned their own governors²¹. Geographically they were situated far from the

14 On John Angelos cf. *Prosopographisches Lexikon des Palaiologenzeits* (Hereafter *PLP*), no. 204→ 91038. His kinship with John Kantakouzenos is not clear, since Kantakouzenos mentions him as both a nephew and a brother (see supra nos. 4 and 13). The same applies to his relationship with the Angeloi family. R. Buonocore de Widmann presented the opinion that John Angelos was the son of Andronikos Tarchaneiotes, Megas Konostablos of Michael VIII Palaiologos, who was married to the daughter of John I Doukas, Sebastokrator of Thessaly (“I Nemagni-Paleologo-Ducas-Angelo-Comneno”, 254 no. 5). On the other hand, S. Binon categorically rejected this possibility on the basis of cognate terms found in the sources (“A propos d’un prostagma”, 146–151). Finally, D. Nicol suggested that his mother was the aunt of John Kantakouzenos, his father’s sister, who was married to the Angeloi family (*The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, 147–148, no. 37). More research is required in order to illuminate John’s relation to the Angelos and the Epiro-Thessalian branch of this family, although it should be considered highly probable. After all, he is mentioned in the sources only by the patronymic Angelos; not to mention of Kantakouzenos’s consistent use of the holders of the right to local governments for his political goals, as also evidenced by the case of Despot Nikephoros II (see infra).

15 Solovjev, “Θεσαλίϊσκιε αρχονты в XIV вѣкѣ”, 166. Soulis, “Σερβοκρατία”, 59–60.

16 Ljubić, *Listine o jednošajih između južnoga slavenstva i Mletačke Republike*, 174, no. 250.

17 Jireček, *Историја Срба*, 226. Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros*, 130.

18 Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 229, no. 8.

19 The variants of his style were based on two basic, one Serbian and another Greek-Roman, components. See Maksimović, “Српска царска титула”, 173–189. Pirivatrić, “Улазак Стефана Душана у Царство”, 391–394.

20 Solovjev, Mošin, *Грчке повеље*, 117–123, no. XVI.

21 We know that Stefan Dušan also gave some parts of Albania around Valona, Kanina and Berat to his

core of the Serbian lands. Then, from the beginning of the Thirteenth century they gradually grew into independent states, ultimately developing their own political and ideological traditions²². Bearing all this in mind, Stefan Dušan's coming to terms with the Thessalian aristocracy in 1348 illustrates how pragmatic his policy was towards Thessaly and Epirus. Thus, it seemed clear to him that it was impossible to bind the local nobility more firmly to his state, at least in the short term²³. As a result, he assigned their governance to the people he trusted the most. On the other hand, this suggests that he intended to permanently link other areas he conquered, primarily Macedonia, to the Serbian state. The focus on Macedonia meant, as the events showed, Dušan's clear determination to seize Thessaloniki, the second city of the Byzantine Empire, but perhaps also the ambition to capture Constantinople itself²⁴. Macedonia was certainly much closer to the Byzantine capital than Epirus and Thessaly. Therefore, it is no wonder that these areas were the first to separate from the Serbian Empire almost immediately after Dušan's death in 1355.

Unfortunately, there is no direct textual evidence testifying to the existence of an agreement between Dušan and Thessaly's nobility, at least in the form of a confirmation of privileges or the granting of new ones. This is not the case with the generous privileges presented by Dušan to the Church in Thessaly. We get a glimpse of these privileges in the two aforementioned chrysobulls issued in November 1348 to the monasteries of the Most Holy Mother of God in Lykousada and St. George in Zablantia²⁵. The monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God in Lykousada was one of the richest and most influential monastic communities in Thessaly²⁶, a royal foundation established by the wife of Sebastokrator John I Angelos (1268–1289). Dušan granted the monastery an exemption from duties and levies, recognising all the estates previously given to it with official charters. He also granted the right to receive 300 modius from the Lykostomi-

brother-in-law, Despot John Komnenos Asanes (*PLP*, no. 12076). We do not know, however, when exactly this happened, nor the extent of the territory that John Asanes ruled over. It was assumed that he succeeded Sebastokrator Nikephoros Isaac, who occupied Berat and some other cities in Albania in 1342/3 (*PLP*, no. 8277. Ferjančić, Ćirković, *Стефан Душан*, 173, 195–197). In the sources, however, his name is most often associated with Valona and Kanina. Cf. Ferjančić, *Деспоти у Византији*, 166–167. Mihaljčić, *Крај српског царства*, 23, 32, 149. Soloviev, "Un beau-frère du tzar Dušan", 180–187.

22 On the subject see Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 11–189. Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros*. Σταυρίδου-Ζαφράκα, *Νίκαια και Ήπειρος*.

23 See also Maksimović, "Српска царска титула", 175–176.

24 Pirivatrić, "Улазак Стефана Душана у Царство", 381–409, esp. 405.

25 Soloviev, Мошин, *Грчке повеље*, 152–161, no. XX, 162–167, no. XXI.

26 On this monastery, which is believed to have been located in today's Loxada near Karditsa, cf. Sophianos, "Τα υπέρ της Μονής της Παναγίας της Λυκουσάδος", 479–528. Unfortunately, no material remains of its structures have been uncovered yet.

on saltworks, from which it previously received 250 modius of salt per year²⁷. A peculiarity of this document is the fact that it was the first imperial charter to include an oath formula²⁸. Moreover, at the request of its monks, Dušan returned the village of Zablantia to the Monastery of St. George. The village was previously taken by Sebastokrator John Angelos, who had turned the peasants into stratiotes (soldiers). At the same time, Zablantia gained an exemption of all duties, while the monastery's abbot, Makarios, was appointed to the mentioned position for life²⁹.

Thessaly was conquered, in the name of the first Serbian emperor, by his prominent general and noble Preljub³⁰. Kantakouzenos praises him greatly in his writings. In his description of the Serbian cavalry's defeat in the battle against the Seljuks near Stephaniana, in May 1344, he informs us that Stefan Dušan had selected the best units of his army, appointing Preljub (Πρεάλιμπος) as their general, who surpassed the other nobles in courage, spirit and experience³¹. In a similar manner, Kantakouzenos mentions him once more as the man who managed to hold the city of Servia in the fall of 1350. He mentions that Servia was a strong fortress on the border between Bottiaia and Thessaly and, like the rest of Thessaly, was commanded by Preljub, one of the king's nobles (Πρεάλιμπος τῶν παρὰ Κράλη δυνατῶν), who stood out before others with his wisdom and bravery³².

To continue, we know that Preljub held the high court dignity of kaiser. It is believed that he received it immediately after the conquest of Thessaly, as the Chronicle of Ioannina suggests³³. We also know that he was married to Eirene, who is also mentioned in the sources as Πρελούμπισσα³⁴. After her husband's death, Eirene continued to live with their son Thomas in Trikala, until Despot Nikephoros, after conquering Thessaly, deprived her of her husband's land (καὶ τὴν εἰρημένην Πρελούμπισσαν τῆς ἀνδρώας ἀρχῆς ἐκβαλῶν), sending her and her son to Serbia (πρὸς τὴν τῶν Σέρβων ἐκπέμπει γαῖαν). There, Dušan's son Uroš mar-

27 Solovjev, Mošin, *Грчке повеље*, 158–159, no. XX.

28 Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 233 no. 29.

29 Solovjev, Mošin, *op. cit.*, 162–167, no. XX. On abbot Makarios cf. *PLP*, no. 16188. On the monastery, which certainly existed during the time of Sebastokrator John cf. Koder, Hild, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, 282.

30 *PLP*, no. 23720. No source mentions that his name was Gregory (Grgur), although it is referred by some researchers (Soulis, "Σερβοκρατία", 62. Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros*, 130).

31 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *Ιστορία* II, 423.

32 *Ibid.* III, 130–131. Ferjančić, Ćirković, "Јован Кантакузин", 513.

33 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 74. Ferjančić, "Севастократори и кесари у Српском царству", 263–264.

34 *PLP*, no. 23718.

ried her to Radoslav Hlapen³⁵. At the State Synod held in Skopje, Emperor Uroš issued a charter on 15 April 1357, confirming her the patrimony (баштина/*baština*) of her late husband. Preljub's *baština* was located in the areas southeast of Prilep and included the middle course of the Crna Reka River, Morihovo and the eastern slopes of the Selečka Planina Mountain³⁶.

The fact that Emperor Uroš calls Eirene 'the beloved and wholehearted sister of my Empire' in the aforementioned chrysobull has captured the attention of researchers. Some thought that she was in fact Uroš's sister and Dušan's daughter³⁷. There were also those who categorically rejected this thesis³⁸. Finally, it has also been supported that she was Dušan's illegitimate daughter³⁹. It has been recently suggested that Preljub's wife Eirene was the sister of Empress Helena-Elisabeth, Dušan's wife, and, thus, the aunt of Emperor Uroš⁴⁰. It is also certain that Preljub and Eirene had a son, Thomas, the latter being the most hat-

35 Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων, 77–78.

36 Novaković, *Законски споменици*, 313. Mihaljčić, *Крај српског царства*, 14. *Actes de Lavra*, IV, 179 locate the villages of Liparo and Sirmurinovo, part of Preljub's *baština*, to the east and south of Vodena (Edessa).

37 Among others Soulis, *op. cit.*, 62. Nicol, *Meteora*, 59. On the other hand Nicol (*Despotate of Epiros*, no. 31 on page 131) claims that Dušan did not have a daughter, but he nevertheless mentions her in his genealogical table on p. 254.

38 Purković, "Byzantinoserbica", 47–49. Ferjančić (*Tecanuja*, 230, no. 9) first expressed some reservations, but later changed his mind (see no. 40). *Actes de Lavra*, IV, 177–178 (S. Ćirković). Soulis, *The Serbs and Byzantium*, 229, no. 3.

39 Loenertz, "Notes sur le règne de Manuel II", 393, no. 12.

40 Osswald, "À propos du César Preljub". Although not impossible, this assumption is based on our scarce prosopographical knowledge of the most prominent figures of the period under study. Things are further complicated by our incomplete comprehension of the ways in which the various terms denoting kinship were used in the sources. This sometimes leads to uncertain identifications, e.g., rejecting the term 'sister' as proof that Preljub's widow was Stefan Uroš's sister, while at the same time interpreting that it actually meant Uroš's aunt, (Osswald, *op. cit.*, 149, 156). However, even if we accept this interpretation, it does not rule out the possibility that Dušan and Helena also had a daughter. After all, Nikephoros Gregoras mentions in his history that in 1351 Dušan sent a message to the Ottoman Bey Orhan (r. 1323/4–1362), offering his daughter as wife to one of his sons ('...πρεσβείαν ὁ τῶν Τριβαλλῶν πρὸ βραχέος ἡγεμῶν ἐπεπόμφει, πρὸς γάμου ζητῶν κοινωσίαν συνάψαι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ θυγατέρα τῶν τοῦ Ὑρκανοῦ τούτου παίδων ἐνί, ἵνα συγγενικῆς σχέσεως τὰς μεταξὺ σπονδὰς ἐρειδούσης μονιμώτερον τῆ τῶν Τριβαλλῶν ἐντεῦθεν εἴη χῆρα τὸ ἄφοβον...'. See Νικηφόρος Γρηγοράς, *Ρωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία* III, 100). According to the same historian, although the barbarian (meaning Orhan) was very happy with the proposal of an arranged marriage the plan was never materialized. The deputies, who were sent back to Serbia by Orhan to finalize the contract, were stopped (some captured and others killed) by people sent by Despot Nikephoros (*ibid.*, 100). The assertion made by Osswald (*op. cit.*, 149, no. 64), that B. Ferjančić and S. Ćirković believed it was not Dušan's daughter, is based on an incorrect reading of their text. In their translation and comments of Gregoras's narrative they state the following: '...There should be no doubt about the credibility of the data given by Nikephoros Gregoras. The information from the charter, which attracted the attention of M. Purković, does not rule out the possibility that Stefan Dušan also had a legitimate daughter, which he offered to Orhan. So, despite the existence of two children, the Serbian emperor

ed ruler of Ioannina⁴¹. The opinion that Helena, Thomas's sister, mentioned in the sources as the wife of Despot John Spata (Gjin Bua Shpata) around 1375⁴², was also the daughter of Preljub and Eirene has been recently questioned⁴³. It has been suggested that she was the daughter of Kaisarissa Eirene and her second husband Radoslav Hlapen instead⁴⁴.

The northern border of Preljub's Thessaly stretched slightly beyond the city of Servia. Kantakouzenos gives a detailed description of the attempt to take over the city, which, as already mentioned, was located on the border between Bottiaia and Thessaly (*ἐν μεθορίοις Βοττιαίας κειμένη καὶ Θεσσαλίας*)⁴⁵. The southern border is believed to have stretched up to the Venetian port of Pteleon⁴⁶. Its western border was on Mount Pindos, while its eastern was the Aegean Sea⁴⁷. It should be emphasized that Preljub never ruled Epirus, as noted by Laonikos Chalcocondyles⁴⁸. It is believed that his capital was Trikala, which will remain the capital of Thessaly until its fall to the Ottomans⁴⁹. It was one of the best fortified cities in Thessaly, and Dušan's half-brother Emperor Symeon Uroš will later also dwell there⁵⁰.

John Kantakouzenos's description of the attempt to take Servia provides us with some details about Preljub's rule. Apart from Preljub's reluctance to stay in Servia, if we are to believe Kantakouzenos, we also learn that tensions rose between the local population and the Serbian authorities. Namely, Preljub kept the women and children inside the citadel (*ἄκραν*), together with a Serbian military unit of 500 men, while local men capable of combat were sent to the first line

could complain that he did not leave a large number of children, and he could call Uroš his only son...' ("Нићифор Григора", 280, no. 149. Moreover, this thesis is repeated in the aforementioned authors' monograph dedicated to Emperor Stefan Dušan) (cf. Ferjančić, Ćirković, *Стефан Душан*, 279).

41 *PLP*, no. 23721.

42 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 85, 92. Λαόνικος Χαλκοκονδύλης, *Αποδείξεις Ιστοριών* I, 198.

43 *PLP*, no. 23719.

44 Osswald ("À propos du César Preljub", 147 no. 39) argues that Dušan's chrysobull, issued to Preljub and referred to in that of Emperor Uroš from April 1357, mentions still unborn children (Novaković, *Законски споменици*, 313) of Preljub and his wife. See *infra*.

45 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *Ιστορία* III, 130.

46 Soulis ("Σερβοκρατία", 61, no. 1), based on a decision of the Venetian senate made in 14 March 1350, was of the opinion that the Serbs briefly captured Pteleon. Ferjančić however thought that there was not enough data in the sources to support such a claim (*Τεσαλιја*, 231).

47 Soulis, *op. cit.*, 63.

48 Λαόνικος Χαλκοκονδύλης, *op. cit.*, 25–26, 198–199. Σούλης, *op. cit.*, 63–64.

49 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 77. Ferjančić, *Τεσαλιја*, 230. Koder, Hild, Soustal, *Hellas und Thessalia* (Hereafter *TIB*), 278.

50 Soulis, *op. cit.*, 66–67.

of defence. What is more, those living outside the city walls were not allowed to enter the city. Preljub ordered them to fight in front of their houses instead⁵¹.

The aforementioned March 1350 decision of the Venetian Senate has fuelled hypotheses that the most important units of Preljub's army consisted of Albanians⁵², and that the Albanian ethnic element in Thessaly was reinforced during the reign of Stefan Dušan⁵³. Nonetheless, sources testify of the Albanian presence in Thessaly since the thirteenth century, becoming a very important military and political element after the re-establishment of Byzantine rule after 1332⁵⁴. Besides the above mentioned, nothing else is known about Preljub's rule in Thessaly, which lasted until his death (beginning of 1356)⁵⁵. In the Life of St. Athanasios of Meteora, it is noted that, some time before his death, Kaisar Preljub boasted to the saint that the Albanians had sworn his allegiance. The saint warned him not to brag too much, because he would pay it in blood. Soon after, wounded in the abdomen, he bled to death (*πληγείς κατὰ γαστρὸς καὶ αἱμορροήσας μετ' οὐ πολὺν χρόνον*)⁵⁶. This led to the assumption that Preljub may have been killed in a conflict with the Albanians⁵⁷.

II. THE REIGN OF NIKEPHOROS II ORSINI (1356–1359)

Despot of Epirus, John II Orsini (1323–1336/7) was poisoned by his wife Anna Palaiologina⁵⁸, daughter of Andronikos Palaiologos⁵⁹ and granddaughter of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos. He left behind a minor son Nikephoros and a daughter Thomais, the last heirs who could claim hereditary rights to the Despotate of Epirus, as already stressed⁶⁰.

51 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 130–131.

52 Ljubić, *Listine*, III, 169, no. 248. See no. 46.

53 Soulis, *op. cit.*, 59.

54 Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 177, 181, 186, 192, 198–205, 211, 213, 217, 220, 239–243, 262, 263.

55 Osswald, *op. cit.*, 146.

56 Bees, "Συμβολή", 258–259. Sophianos, *Ο ὀσιος Αθανάσιος ο Μετεωρίτης*.

57 Nicol, *Despotate of Epirus*, 134. Soulis, *op. cit.*, 72.

58 After poisoning her husband, Vasilissa Anna (*PLP*, no. 21345) ruled on behalf of her son independently, but only for a short time. After the 1338 Byzantine conquest of Epirus, she was taken by Emperor Andronikos III to Thessaloniki, where she spent some time. She was then allowed to return to Arta; only to be detained again in 1342 by the governor of Thessaly, John Angelos. Upon the arrival of the Serbs, she was released, with Stefan Dušan marrying her to his brother-in-law, Despot John Asanes. When he died in 1363, Anna, twice a widow, joined her son-in-law, Symeon Uroš, in Trikala (Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros*, 132–133).

59 *PLP*, no. 21435.

60 Nicol, *op. cit.*, 105.

Nikephoros was married to Kantakouzenos's daughter, Maria⁶¹, by the summer of 1342 at the latest⁶². Being a legitimate heir to the throne of Epirus, Nikephoros was granted the title of despot by Emperor Kantakouzenos, as his son-in-law and in accordance with the state and legal traditions of the Despotate. At the same time, Kantakouzenos's younger son, Manuel, was also granted the title of despot. As Kantakouzenos himself narrates, after his re-coronation and the coronation of John V in Constantinople in May 1347, he first sent a message to Dušan, demanding to retreat from all the Roman territories which he had conquered. Since, of course, Dušan did not accept that, Kantakouzenos sent his son Matthaios with ten thousand Ottoman Turks to the region of Mygdonia. The Turks seemed more interested in plundering the area and returned to Asia Minor after amassing their booty, with the campaign ending unsuccessful. Judging by the conditional chronology brought by the emperor-writer himself, the campaign must have taken place sometime in the end of spring of 1347⁶³. Only after these events did Kantakouzenos send a ship to Thessaly to bring his younger son Manuel. After Manuel arrived in Constantinople, he was granted the title of despot together with Nikephoros Orsini. According to his memoirs, Kantakouzenos granted on the same occasion the title of sebastocrator to two of his brothers-in-law, John and Manuel⁶⁴. Noting that it is rather strange that Manuel and Nikephoros had not received the title of despot earlier, Ferjančić concluded that Kantakouzenos hesitated to grant the highest court titles before he himself was crowned in Constantinople. His hesitation has been attributed to the fact that the granting of titles was considered an exclusive imperial right; although he had already been crowned emperor in Adrianople on May 21, 1346⁶⁵. However, perhaps some other motives can be discerned in this peculiar "game of thrones". It seems possible that Nikephoros had received the title of

61 Ferjančić (*op. cit.*, 238, no. 44), probably by mistake, calls her Anna.

62 Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, 130–133, no. 27.

63 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 29–32. These events have been ascribed different dates by researchers. The embassy of John Kantakouzenos sent to Dušan has taken place after 21 May 1347, according to F. Dölger (*Regesten der Kaiserurkunden*, no. 2920) and A. Constantinides Hero (*Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, 429). On the other hand, S. Novaković has concluded that the campaign of Matthaios Kantakouzenos, which followed the embassy, took place in the spring or summer of 1347 (*Струмска област у XIV веку*, 39. Cf. *Историја српског народа*, I, 543 (S. Ćirković, R. Mihaljčić); while Dölger (*Regesten*, V, no. 2921), Nicol (*Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, 66) and Soulis (*Serbs and Byzantium*, 34 sq.) propose March 1348.

64 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 33. Although Ferjančić first dates the bestowal of the title of despot to Nikephoros and Manuel in 1347 (*Децному*, 76), i.e., after the aforementioned coronations, he will later place the campaign of Matthaios Kantakouzenos in spring of 1348 (Ferjančić, Ćirković, *Стефан Душан*, 182).

65 Ferjančić, *Децному*, 77.

despot in order to claim his hereditary rights to Epirus⁶⁶, which was conquered by the Serbs before December 1347⁶⁷. It seems relevant that Dušan had sent his half-brother Symeon, who was related to the Palaiologos imperial dynasty⁶⁸, as governor, previously granting him the same title. Like Thessaly, the rule of Epirus was to become the imperial appanage that was to be ruled by the emperor's, i.e. Kantakouzenos' cousin⁶⁹. Undoubtedly, this was part of Kantakouzenos's plan not only to consolidate the political influence of Constantinople in Epirus and Thessaly, but also to establish the rule of his own family, a potential imperial dynasty, over the vastest Byzantine territory possible.

After Kantakouzenos's abdication in 1354, Dušan's death in 1355 and Preljub's death in 1356, Nikephoros II set out for Thessaly with the fleet, leaving his wife Maria to manage their estates centered on Enos⁷⁰. Kantakouzenos notes that Despot Nikephoros conquered Thessaly, but Epirus as well, in a very short time⁷¹. In Thessaly, he first deposed Preljub's widow, sending her and her son Thomas to the Serbs⁷². However, a certain Limpidarios rebelled against Nikephoros in Enos. The despot's wife Maria managed to escape to Constantinople, but soon after left for Thessaly with the blessing of John V. There she joined her husband, who in the meantime quelled the rebellion. For a time, they lived happily together. But then Nikephoros decided to divorce her and marry the sister of Dušan's widow, Empress Helena-Elisabeth, in order to rule Thessaly and Akarnania so firmly, since the Triballoi would not attack because of the marriage, and to thwart the Albanians who are rebellious and very dangerous⁷³. So, Nikephoros undoubtedly tried to make an agreement with Emperor Uroš, which would inevitably distance him from Kantakouzenos and the Byzantine influence. Although almost everything was arranged, the Albanians asked from Despot Nikephoros to cancel the "Serbian" marriage, which he eventually did.

66 The Chronicle of Ioannina asserts that Nikephoros went to Thessaly after Dušan's and Preljub's death, claiming his hereditary rights to the despotate (*Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 75).

67 See *supra*.

68 Symeon Uroš was the son of the Serbian King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (1321–1331) from his second marriage to Maria Palaiologina (*PLP*, no. 21391), the daughter of Panhyperebastos and Kaiser John Palaiologos, grandson of Emperor Michael VIII, and Eirene, daughter of Theodore Metochites.

69 Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros*, 127.

70 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 315. Although the Chronicle of Ioannina (*Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 75) erroneously claims that Nikephoros left from Constantinople, his expedition to Thessaly and Epirus could have been the result of instructions from Constantinople.

71 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 315, 317. *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 75–76.

72 *Ibid.*, 78. Nicol, *op. cit.*, 134–135. See also *supra*.

73 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 315–317.

However, before Maria returned from the Peloponnese, where she had taken refuge at her brother's, Despot Manuel, Nikephoros died⁷⁴.

Beyond the above-mentioned sources, the only other mention on Nikephoros's three-year rule over Thessaly appears in the first chrysobull of Emperor Symeon Uroš, issued in August 1359⁷⁵. This also represents a credible *terminus ante quem* of the despot's death in a conflict with the Albanians by the river Achelous. The exact date of this event has been debated for a long time. Rade Mihaljčić persuasively suggested the summer of 1359⁷⁶. Immediately after the death of Despot Nikephoros, his brother-in-law Symeon Uroš Palaiologos Nemanjić seized the opportunity to conquer Thessaly.

III. THE REIGN OF SYMEON UROŠ PALAIOLOGOS (1359 –c. 1372)

As the Chronicle of Ioannina recounts, Despot Nikephoros II Orsini conquered Thessaly soon after Preljub's death in the beginning of 1356. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Epirus, from where he expelled his brother-in-law, Despot Symeon Uroš, and his sister Vasilissa Thomais, depriving them of their power over this area. Symeon and Thomais had to relocate in Kastoria, where Symeon Uroš established a court, conquering at the same time some neighboring fortifications. There, some four or five thousand of his soldiers – Romans, Serbs and Albanians – proclaimed him emperor (*ἀναγορεύεται*), after which he set off for Serbia (*πρὸς δὲ τὰ τῆς Σερβίας*), aiming at the imperial throne from his nephew Stefan Uroš⁷⁷. John Kantakouzenos, on the other hand, mentions that Despot Nikephoros hoped to return to his patrimony (*τὴν πατρίαν ἐλπίσας ἀνασώσασθαι ἀρχὴν*), seizing the opportunity of the turmoil in the Serbian Empire, but also because Preljub, the governor of Thessaly, had died. According to Kantakouzenos, Nikephoros set out from Enos with an armed fleet and the inhabitants of Thessaly, like a great wave (*ὥσπερ ἐκ κλύδωνος μεγάλου*) which voluntarily switched from the government of the Triballoi to the serene state of the Romans⁷⁸. Finally, Nikephoros Gregoras claims that Despot Nikephoros first took over the areas of

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 318–319. Maria stayed in Morea for a while, and then returned to Constantinople, where she lived as a nun in the Monastery of Kyra Martha together with her mother Eirene until the end of her life. Her only son, Antonios Kantakouzenos, if he really was her son, became a monk in Meteora. See Nicol, *op. cit.*, 135–136. *Idem*, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, 133, no. 28.

⁷⁵ Solovjev, Мошин, *Грчке повеље*, 216–229, no. XXXI.

⁷⁶ Mihaljčić, "Битка код Ахелоја", 272–275.

⁷⁷ *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 75–76.

⁷⁸ Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 314–315.

Akarnania and Aetolia. Then, with the help of his brother-in-law Symeon Uroš, 'the then ruler of the regions and cities there', Nikephoros attacked the cities of Thessaly, subdued to the King of Serbia, which had been calling for a long time and now approached him voluntarily⁷⁹.

John Kantakouzenos is rather vague in his account of Symeon Uroš's conquest of Thessaly. He wrote that Symeon 'won many of the eminent among the Triballoi as supporters in his endeavor', and that 'the most powerful of the nobles among them (the Triballoi) removed the weaker ones from power, subjugating the nearby cities and not participating themselves, nor submitting to him as a master, but sending an auxiliary army as allies and friends, and others (helped) uncle Symeon; and some of them did not approach anyone, but, holding to their army, (they) waited to join the one who would prevail'⁸⁰. According to this description, at least two thirds of the nobles supported Uroš. Also, one is led to believe that they used Symeon's attempt to usurp the throne in order to increase their own power. Some scholars bring forward the opinion that Kantakouzenos's narrative does not reflect the political reality in the beginning of Uroš's rule, probably referring to the events which took place a decade later. It is believed that Kantakouzenos wrote his history after 1354, with the year 1369 considered a reliable *terminus ante quem* of its completion⁸¹. Thus, it seems pertinent to assume that the news of the unrest in the Serbian Empire corresponds to a time closer to the later date⁸². Mavro Orbini informs us that the nobles of Zeta and Raška did not support Symeon, which was one of the reasons of his unsuccessful campaign against Skadar in 1358⁸³. It is also certain that the Lord of Berroia Radoslav Hlapen, who was married to Preljub's widow, as well as Empress Helena-Elisabeth, did not support him. On the other hand, Symeon Uroš obviously enjoyed the support of Despot John Komnenos Asanes, who was married to Vasilissa Anna, the widow of Despot John II Orsini, mother of Symeon's wife Thomais⁸⁴. Asanes's courtier Basil Zenofi negotiated with the Republic of Ragusa in September 1357 on behalf of Symeon Uroš⁸⁵. In addition, the proba-

79 Νικηφόρος Γρηγοράς, *Ρωμαϊκή Ιστορία* III, 556–557.

80 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 314–315. Ferjanči, Ćirković, "Јован Кантакузин", 560.

81 Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, 468.

82 Mihaljčić, *Крај Српског царства*, 12.

83 Mavro Orbin, *Краљевство Словена*, 45.

84 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 74–75.

85 'Vasilio Ćenosī, nuncio domini Symce'. See Thalloczy, Jireček, Sufflay, *Acta et diplomata res Albaniae*, II, 33–34, no. 129. Mihaljčić (*Крај Српског царства*, 18–19) correctly emphasized that it is not clear from this decision what the exact motive of the negotiations was, claiming that this did not mean that John Komnenos Asanes recognized the supreme authority of Symeon Uroš.

bility that a large number of the Serbian nobles rose up against the legitimate successor of Stefan Dušan, a descendant of the holy family of Nemanjić, seems low. The slim chances Symeon's venture had is further revealed by the fact that Emperor Uroš received the support of the largest number of the Serbian nobles at the State Synod in Skopje in April 1357. Finally, Symeon Uroš in the following year again attacked lands which were under the direct rule of Emperor Uroš, which suggests that the nobles' support was not Symeon's driving force in his claim of the imperial crown.

It cannot be verified if Symeon Uroš tried to seize the Serbian imperial crown before Despot Nikephoros II set out to take over his patrimony, so the news of the fall of Epirus into the hands of his brother-in-law found him in Kastoria, as Kantakouzenos wrote; or he first lost Epirus, and then reached for the throne of Stefan Uroš V, as the Chronicle of Ioannina narrates. On the other hand, Nikephoros Gregoras's assertion that Despot Nikephoros first took Epirus from Symeon Uroš, who then helped him capture Thessaly, without mentioning at all Symeon's attempt to seize the Serbian imperial title, seems questionable. It is hard to believe that Symeon simply renounced the area that belonged to the empire he desired to rule and he personally governed for at least nine years, especially considering the fact that the campaign he undertook to seize the throne from Uroš at that time was a highly unpredictable undertaking. This would mean that Symeon embarked on an extremely uncertain war against the Serbian Empire, at that time undoubtedly the most powerful state on the Balkans, with only four or five thousand soldiers; while at the same time he gave up his former territory and only source of military and economic security.

It is also interesting how Symeon got to Kastoria, a city in Western Macedonia, which had been in Serbian hands since 1343, and therefore under the direct rule of Emperor Uroš. There seem to be two explanations. One is that Symeon attacked the Serbian Empire, before or after he lost Epirus, conquering Kastoria and the surrounding cities, which, according to the Chronicle of Ioannina, were located on the border to Serbia (*τὰ τῆς Σερβίας καταλείπει ὄρια*)⁸⁶. The second is that Symeon Uroš arrived in the city after he was expelled from Epirus, with the permission of Emperor Uroš, and only after that he decided to fight for the Serbian imperial crown. The chronological framework of Symeon Uroš's first attack on the Serbian Empire is also unclear, as is the course of his actions. If we accept that Despot Nikephoros conquered Epirus and Thessaly by the spring of 1356⁸⁷,

⁸⁶ *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 77.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 76–77. Mihaljčić, "Битка код Ахелоја", 273.

and that Symeon's failure to seize the Serbian imperial throne was sealed by the Serbian State Synod in April 1357, the question arising is where and what was he doing all this time. As later events will show, it seems that Symeon Uroš, after losing Epirus, and before conquering Thessaly, ruled only Kastoria and the surrounding areas⁸⁸.

Regardless of all the doubts about why and how, it is certain that Symeon Uroš did try to take the Serbian throne from his nephew, but without success. As early as April 1357, Emperor Stefan Uroš V Nemanjić sovereignly governed the territory he inherited from his father, except for Epirus and Thessaly, but, as it appears, parts of Western Macedonia as well⁸⁹. This is confirmed by six charters he issued during or immediately after the State Synod, in which the Serbian nobles gave him full support⁹⁰. Only one more piece of information regarding Symeon's attack on the Serbian Empire is preserved. As already mentioned, during the summer of 1358, he tried to capture Skadar, but without success⁹¹.

Learning that Nikephoros II had died, Symeon left the Serbian borders (*τὰ τῆς Σερβίας καταλείπει ὄρια*) and headed for Thessaly, which he seems to have easily conquered by the end of the summer of 1359. He first established his court in Trikala, with Augusta Thomais joining him later⁹². After leaving the empress in the palace with their two children, he set out for Aetolia, which he also subjugated to his rule. He was welcomed with joy (*ἀσμένως*), recognized as emperor and given Arta, Ioannina and other fortifications. The Christ-loving Emperor

88 *Ibid.*, 275.

89 Symeon Uroš's hold over Kastoria and its surroundings recalls the negotiations between John Kantakouzenos and Stefan Dušan near Thessaloniki in 1350, and of John's request that Stefan returned to Byzantium the areas he had conquered. Seeing that Dušan ascribed great importance to these territories, and at the same time being protective of Byzantine interests, Kantakouzenos proposed a compromise. He suggested that Akarnania, Thessaly, Serbia and some smaller towns, as well as Berroia, Vodena (Edessa), Gynaikokastron, Mygdonia with inhabited towns and villages around Struma and the hills of Tantesana should belong to the Romans; while Zichna, Serres, Melnik, Strumica, Kastoria and other villages and towns of Macedonia, which are outside these cities, should remain in Serbian hands. Dušan first accepted this, so agreements were made in the presence of young Emperor John V. However, some Romans convinced Dušan to give up on his claims, which he did (Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 155–157). Although the sources are silent about this, it is not impossible that Symeon Uroš ruled Kastoria and the surrounding fortifications in 1356 with the support of Constantinople. Kastoria, as evidenced by a preserved inscription from the city's cathedral dated in 1359/60, was under the rule of Emperor Symeon Uroš. See. Drakopoulou, *Η πόλη της Καστοριάς*, 93–95.

90 Radojčić, *Српски државни сабори у средњем веку*, 146–170. Mihaljičić, *Крај Српског царства*, 18, 34.

91 Mavro Orbin, *Краљевство Словена*, 45.

92 As befitted, the Metropolitan of Larissa Antonios dedicated one *ekphrasis* to Trikala as the capital. See Parageorgiou-Eraldis, *Μητροπολίτου Λαρίσης-Τρίκκης Αντωνίου, εγκώμιον εις τον άγιον Οικουμένιον. Sophianos, "Τα αγιολογικά και υμνογραφικά κείμενα"*, 7–78. Psephtogas, *Αντωνίου Αρχιεπισκόπου Λαρίσης Λόγοι*, no. 17. Rigo, "La politica religiosa degli ultimi Nemanja", 211–212.

Symeon won them over with gifts, and then returned to Thessaly due to the attack of Radoslav Hlapen⁹³.

Radoslav Hlapen was a Serbian lord from the time of Emperor Stefan Dušan⁹⁴. Kantakouzenos mentions him as a man of aristocratic origin and close to the Serbian ruler, whose army was not insignificant, his wealth great, and who in 1350 even decided to side with him⁹⁵. The Chronicle of Ioannina confirms that Hlapen, one of the Serbian satraps (εἷς ὧν τῶν Σερβικῶν σατραπῶν), held some Roman cities on the border and that he conquered the famous city of Berroia probably in the summer of 1351⁹⁶. At the time of Despot Nikephoros' death, Hlapen was already married to Eirene, Preljub's widow, since the Chronicle of Ioannina asserts that he left for Thessaly sometime after that⁹⁷. He was accompanied by his stepson, the much hated Thomas Preljubović of the Chronicle of Ioannina (τὸ κάκιστον τοῦ Πρελούμπου γέννημα), a young man at that time⁹⁸. His attack, therefore, certainly followed either during the second half of 1359 or during the first half of 1360. On that occasion, Hlapen captured the fortress of Damasi, north of Larissa, in the north of Thessaly⁹⁹. The sources do not mention other war operations, and the conflict soon ended and was sealed with a marriage between Symeon's daughter Maria Angelina and Hlapen's stepson Thomas Preljubović, celebrated in Trikala by the Metropolitan of Larissa. Hlapen returned the town of Damasi to Symeon Uroš¹⁰⁰.

As already mentioned, Preljub's patrimony, which was under Hlapen's rule from 1359 at the latest, included the middle course of the Crna Reka River, Morihovo and the eastern side of the Selečka Planina Mountain¹⁰¹. It is not clear, however, which lands Hlapen's patrimony entailed¹⁰². The Chronicle of Ioannina suggests that, apart from Berroia, he also kept Vodena (Edessa) under his rule: his stepson Thomas Preljubović, who returned to his stepfather's seat

93 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 77.

94 *PLP*, no. 30848.

95 Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός, *op. cit.*, 135.

96 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 77. Matanov, "Radoslav Hlapen", 72–74.

97 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 78.

98 *Ibid.*, 8.

99 Cf. *TIB*, I, 141.

100 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 78–79. It is not clear why Ferjančić (*Тесалџа*, 242) claims that Hlapen kept the town.

101 See *supra* and no. 36.

102 Mihaljčić without citing the source, claimed that he ruled in Berroia (*Κραј српског царства*, 198), and that he governed Northern and Central Greece as well (*ibid.*, 99, 130, 278). On the other hand, citing John V. A. Fine (*The Late Medieval Balkans*, 349–350) and Hristo Matanov ("Radoslav Hlapen", 78–79), Bendan Osswald ("À propos du César Preljub", 147, 148 no. 52) argues that his rule included the area between Vardar River in the East, Crna Reka River in the West and Haliakmon in the South,

after marrying Symeon's daughter, is mentioned to have dwelled there around 1366/7¹⁰³. It seems that Hlapen's lands in reality represented a kind of buffer zone between the Serbian Empire and the state of Symeon Uroš¹⁰⁴. Still, Kastoria remains an open question, as judging from the mentioned inscription in the city's cathedral, the city belonged to Symeon Uroš in 1359/60¹⁰⁵. Much later, Mavro Orbini, however, notes that it belonged to Hlapen¹⁰⁶.

As previously mentioned, it has been recently suggested that Helena, the sister of Thomas Preljubović, who is mentioned as wife of Despot John Spata around 1375¹⁰⁷, was in fact the daughter of Kaisarissa Eirene and of her second husband Radoslav Hlapen¹⁰⁸. This view is based on the fact that the sources explicitly mention only the later tyrant of Ioannina as the child of Preljub and Kaisarissa Eirene. Yet, there is a record, datable between 1371 and 1394, which mentions one of Hlapen's daughters, named Helena, married to King Marko Mrnjavčević. That is to say, Marko took her back as his first married wife, since he had previously handed over Todora, wife of a certain Gregory with whom he had lived for a while, to Hlapen¹⁰⁹. Thus, it appears that King Marko took back his first wife who was living with her father, Hlapen. On the other hand, Mavro Orbini later notices that Marko's wife Helena betrayed him by handing Kastoria over to Balša Balšić, to whom she later remarried¹¹⁰. However, there seems to be no basis in the hypothesis that Hlapen's daughter Helena was first married to King Marko, then to Spata between 1371 and 1375, and then again to King Marko, as recently proposed¹¹¹. It seems even less plausible that Hlapen, who had several daughters¹¹², had two with the same name, one from his marriage to Kaisarissa Eirene, and the other from one of his previous marriages, not mentioned in the sources at all. All this perhaps provides with credibility the hypothesis that Helena, the sister of Thomas Preljubović, was actually the daughter of Kaisar Preljub.

including Kitros, which is located north of Katerini (*Actes de Lavra*, IV, 179).

103 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 79–80.

104 Osswald, *op. cit.*, 148.

105 Drakoroulou, *Η Πόλη της Καστοριάς*, 93–95.

106 Mavro Orbin, *Краљевство Словена*, 45. This information is accepted by Matanov (*op. cit.*, 79, 148) and Osswald (*op. cit.*, 148 no. 51).

107 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 85.

108 See *supra* and no. 44.

109 Stojanović, *Стари српски записи и натписи*, I, 58–59, no. 189. Mihaljčić, *Крај српског царства*, 198.

110 Mavro Orbin, *op. cit.*, 68, 320. Mihaljčić, *op. cit.*, 198.

111 Osswald, *op. cit.*, 148.

112 Matanov, *op. cit.*, 85–86.

Symeon Uroš showed greater interest in Thessaly. He handed the governance of Epirus to the Albanian feudal lords John Spata and Peter Losha, to whom he also bestowed the titles of despot¹¹³. The former held the areas around Achelous River and Angelokastron, and the latter the area around Arta¹¹⁴. Only Ioannina stayed under the direct control of Symeon Uroš who will send there his son-in-law, Thomas Preljubović, in 1366/7¹¹⁵.

The ideology of Symeon Uroš's state is often characterized as an amalgam of Byzantine-Serbian state-legal traditions, a direct reflection of his dual origin – Serbian and Greek. However, in the chrysobull issued in August 1359 to the Monastery of St. George in Zablantia, Symeon Uroš emphasized first that he took over Trikala on the ground of his inheritance (*εις τὸ [γενέσθαι] τὴν φυσικὴν μου κληρονομίαν, τὰ Τρίκαλα, εἰς τὴν δουλοσύνην καὶ ὑποταγὴν τῆς βασιλείας μου*)¹¹⁶. What is more, in the second chrysobull issued in May 1366 to the same monastery, he claims that he took over the whole of Thessaly on the grounds of his inheritance (*Τοίνυν ἡ βασιλεία μου καταλαβὼν περὶ τὴν κληρονομίαν μου τὴν Βλαχίαν*)¹¹⁷. Undoubtedly, Symeon's claim to rule Thessaly is based on his close association with the previous rulers, that is his brother-in-law Despot Nikephoros II Orsini (*ὁ ἀοιδίμος ἀδελφὸς τῆς βασιλείας μου, δεσπότης κῦρις Νικηφόρος ὁ Δούκας*), as well as his father-in-law, Despot John II Orsini (*τοῦ ἀοιδίμου δεσπότης καὶ πενθεροῦ τῆς βασιλείας μου, κυροῦ Ἰωάννου ἐκείνου*), which was supposed to give legitimacy to his authority¹¹⁸. This fact is further emphasized by his reference to 'Uncle Angelos' (*τοῦ θείου μου τοῦ Ἀγγέλου, τὸν θεῖον τῆς βασιλείας μου τὸν Ἄγγελον ἐκεῖνον*), Kantakouzenos's appointed governor of Thessaly¹¹⁹. He thus appears as the last heir of the overlords of this region. Moreover, when it comes to Symeon's dual imperial background, Greek-Serbian, it should be stressed that, judging by the documents he issued, but also by other sources that mention his name and full style, he primarily emphasized his kinship with the ruling Byzantine imperial dynasty by using the patronym of Palaiologos¹²⁰. In only two sources, the chrysobull issued in May 1366 to the Monastery of St. Nicholas and St. George in Zablantia and the 1366/7 inscription found in the Monastery of the

113 Ferjančić, *Деспоти*, 168.

114 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 79.

115 *PLP*, no. 23721.

116 Solovjev, Mošin, *Грчке повеље*, 217–229, no. XXXI.

117 *Ibid.*, 250–257, no. XXXIV.

118 *Ibid.*, 220³⁷⁻³⁸, 222⁸⁰⁻⁸¹, no. XXXI. Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 244.

119 *Ibid.*, 222⁸¹⁻⁸², 224¹²⁴⁻¹²⁵, no. XXXI.

120 Maksimović, "Српска царска титула", 187.

Hypapante on Meteora, did he sign as Uroš, unreservedly associating himself with the Serbian royal-imperial dynasty of Nemanjić¹²¹. It is, therefore, safe to say that Symeon Uroš based his ruling legitimacy on the local traditions and his kinship with the Palaiologoi.

To continue, we know almost nothing about Symeon's imperial crown. The only source informing us on his ascension is the Chronicle of Ioannina. Be it as it may, it is mentioned that Symeon Uroš was proclaimed (ἀναγορεύεται), not crowned emperor in Kastoria¹²². The sources remain silent on the time and ceremony of his ascension. In addition to the Chronicle of Ioannina, there is more evidence of his imperial claims: first, the title he used when signing charters, second, the title's mention in several surviving inscriptions, and third, his bestowal of titles to the local nobility, a prerogative held only by emperors. Without doubt, Symeon Uroš granted twice the title of despot¹²³, and perhaps once of Sebastokrator to a certain Blaž Matarango¹²⁴.

Furthermore, it has been noted that Symeon Uroš's signatures on his three known chrysobulls (issued in 1359 to St. George in Zablanti, in 1361 to John Tsaphas Orsini¹²⁵, and in 1366 to St. Nicholas and St. George in Zablantia) resemble in many respects to the Palaiologan imperial signatures of the same period, with the addition of elements which originate in the traditions of the Serbian Empire. This has been interpreted as proof of his political skill aimed at gaining the favor of both those who desired Byzantine rule and those who sought to preserve the Serbian traditions in Thessaly¹²⁶. Howbeit, Symeon Uroš went a step further than Stefan Dušan when it comes to his imperial title. In the signatures of Dušan's Greek chrysobulls there is always a geographical term, e. g., the Emperor of Romania (Ρωμανία), but not the title of Emperor of the Rhomaioi, i.e., Romans (Ρωμαῖοι), which was standard in Byzantine imperial charters¹²⁷. This is the point in which the charters of Symeon Uroš differ significantly. In the chrysobull issued to the Monastery of St. George in Zablantia in Au-

121 Solovjev, Mošin, *op. cit.*, 250–257, no. XXXIV. Lascaris, "Deux chartes de Jean Uroš", 279 sq.

122 Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων, 76.

123 E.g., to John Spata and Peter Losha, while Symeon's son-in-law Thomas Preljubović received the same title from Byzantium (Ferjančić, *Десноту*, 80–81, 168).

124 Ferjančić, "Севастократори", 262, n. 53). Also, in the 1361 chrysobull issued to John Tsaphas Orsini, the latter is mentioned as *megas konostaulos* (Solovjev, Mošin, *op. cit.*, 232–233, no. XXXII). But the hypothesis that he received his title from Symeon Uroš cannot be substantiated.

125 Era Vranousis (Χρονικά της μεσαιωνικής και τουρκοκρατούμενης Ηπείρου, 69–80) doubted the authenticity of the data of the chrysobull in question.

126 Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 245.

127 See Maksimović, "Грци и Романија".

gust 1359, he signed as ‘Symeon in Christ God faithful Emperor and Autocrator of the Rhomaioi (τῶν Ῥωμαίων) and Serbia Palaiologos’.¹²⁸ By the same token, he signs the chrysobull issued in January 1361 to John Tsaphas Orsini, archon of Epirus, as ‘Symeon in Christ God faithful Emperor and Autocrator of the Rhomaioi (τῶν Ῥωμαίων) and the Serbs Palaiologos’¹²⁹. In the chrysobull issued to the Monastery of St. Nicholas and St. George in Zablantia in May 1366 he also writes: ‘Symeon in Christ God faithful Emperor and Autocrator of the Rhomaioi (τῶν Ῥωμαίων) and Serbia and all Albania (παντός Ἀλβάνου) Uroš Palaiologos’¹³⁰. Thus, in his chrysobulls, Symeon Uroš is always the Emperor of the Rhomaioi and the Emperor of Serbia or the Serbs.

The mention of the Rhomaioi and the Serbs/Serbia, as part of Symeon’s imperial title, can, therefore, be seen as an appropriation of both traditions with deeper roots in Thessaly. After Dušan’s death, he may have had the ambition to rule the Serbian Empire. But after 1357 he was forced to abandon it. On the other hand, there is no evidence suggesting a plan to claim the imperial crown of Constantinople.

However, we know more of Symeon Uroš’s religious policy¹³¹. It has been previously mentioned that the Cathedral of Kastoria was restored during the reign of Emperor Symeon Palaiologos and his son John Doukas¹³². Another important inscription from the Church of St. Stephen, presumably erected in Trikala, affirms that it was built during the time of Emperor Symeon Uroš, Despoina Anna and Metropolitan of Larissa Neilos¹³³. This is datable between 1363 and 1372¹³⁴. Furthermore, the Cathedral of the Holy Archangel Michael in Trikala was also restored in 1362, during the reign of Symeon Uroš¹³⁵. Finally, the 1366/7 inscription in the Monastery of Hypapante in Meteora at-

128 Solovjev, Mošin, *Грчке повеље*, 228, no. XXXI. The chrysobull issued to the Monastery of St. George in Zablantia in August 1359 contains elements that deviate from the Byzantine traditions of imperial chancellery. The word χρυσόβουλλος λόγος is mentioned three times only in the end, and in the nominative, while the text is clumsily composed and contains a certain number of repetitions. Nevertheless, the chrysobull is considered authentic, and the irregularities are attributed to the provincial scribe’s inexperience. These mistakes do not appear in the chrysobull issued in May 1366, a text which is justifiably considered to be exemplary of Byzantine customs. See Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 247–248.

129 Solovjev, Mošin, *op. cit.*, 230–239, no. XXXII.

130 *Ibid.*, 250–257, no. XXXIV.

131 See Rigo, “Politica religiosa degli ultimi Nemanja”.

132 Drakopoulou, *Η Πόλη της Καστοριάς*, 93–95. Lascaris, “Deux chartes de Jean Uroš”, 283 sq.

133 *PLP*, no. 20043.

134 Papachrysanthou, “À propos d’une inscription de Syméon Uroš”, 484. Ferjančić, *Τεσαλιја*, 44.

135 Αντώνιος Λαρίσης, *Εγκώμιο εις τον άγιο Κυπριανό*, 75. Rigo, “Politica religiosa degli ultimi Nemanja”, 216.

tests that the church was built and painted during the time of ‘the most pious Emperor Symeon Palaiologos, Autocrator of *the Rhomaioi, Serbia and Romania Uroš*’¹³⁶.

A prostagma of Symeon Uroš issued in May 1362, although its content does not correspond to this type of document, represents the first official attempt to protect the monks of the Stagoi hermitage, the first epicentre of the monastic community of Meteora. It is for this reason that Symeon Uroš, being evidently fond of the Stagoi hermitage, can be considered as one of the founders of Meteora¹³⁷. The prostagma is also interesting because it mentions the Metropolitan of Larissa Antonios as the general ‘judge’ of the Rhomaioi (*καθολικὸς κριτὴς τῶν Ῥωμαίων*)¹³⁸. The charter issued by his son John Uroš in November 1372, where his father’s bestowal of the Monastery of Mother of God of Doupiane to his spiritual father, the Protos of Stagoi Neilos, is mentioned, further reveals Symeon’s consideration for the hermitage¹³⁹.

Symeon’s rule also led to the normalization of ecclesiastical affairs in Thessaly and Epirus. This was signalled above all by the restoration of relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as evidenced by the appointment of metropolitans. Despite the sporadic mentions in the sources that the Serbs were appointing bishops after the proclamation of the Serbian Patriarchate and Empire in 1346, it is uncertain that this practice had become standard in the conquered Byzantine lands¹⁴⁰. Also, despite the scarcity of direct evidence, it is believed that Symeon Uroš followed his brother’s policy in religious matters as well until Dušan’s death. Symeon’s “reconciliatory” policy towards the Patriarchate of Constantinople started when he conquered Thessaly. The ecclesiastical influence of Constantinople in Thessaly during the reign of Symeon Uroš is also visible in the fact that the cult of St. Gregory Palamas started to spread between 1360 and 1368. There was even a church dedicated to him in Kastoria¹⁴¹.

By far the most prominent figure in the context of the rejuvenated relation between Constantinople and Thessaly was the Metropolitan of Larissa Antonios. An intellectual figure, he left a significant theological-rhetorical literary

136 Lascaris, *op. cit.*, 279 sq.

137 Subotić, “Почети монашког живота и црква манастира Сретења у Метеорима”, 125–181. Agoritsas, “Από τη Σκήτων των Σταγών στον οργανωμένο κοινοβιακό βίο”, 33–66. Varpeiades, *Η μονή του Αγίου και Μεγάλου Μετεώρου*, 42–44, 268–270.

138 Solovjev, Mošin, *Грчке повеље*, 240–249, no. XXXIII. Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 249–251.

139 Bees, “Σερβικά και Βυζαντιακά γράμματα Μετεώρου”, 9–13. Sophianos, “Δύο προστάγματα”, 22.

140 Maksimović, “Српска царска титула”, 175–176. Rigo, “La missione di Teofane di Nicea a Serre”, 114–115.

141 Rigo, “Politica religiosa degli ultimi Nemanja”, 207–208, 221–222.

legacy, which remains mostly unpublished¹⁴². During Preljub's rule Antonios stayed in Thessaloniki¹⁴³. When Kantakouzenos briefly brought some of Thessaly under Byzantine rule Antonios returned to Larissa. Kantakouzenos's short-lived regains forced his return to Thessaloniki, only three months later¹⁴⁴. He returned to Thessaly for good with the arrival of Nikephoros II Orsini. In all likelihood, it was he who appointed Antonios as the general 'judge of the Rhomaioi' just before his death¹⁴⁵. Antonios remained in Trikala until the end of Symeon's reign and served as metropolitan until his death, a few years later. He is mentioned for the last time in 1363, while his successor Neilos first appears in the sources in 1372/3¹⁴⁶.

Thus, it seems that the appointment of metropolitans in Thessaly was in the hands of the Patriarch of Constantinople during the reign of Symeon Uroš, and perhaps during the short reign of his son John Doukas as well. This is also attested by the existence of patriarchal monasteries in Pteleon¹⁴⁷. Even in the second chrysobull issued to Zablantia in 1366, it is mentioned that the tower built by the monks of St. Nicholas on land that belonged to Zablantia remains in the ownership of both monasteries and is to be 'considered imperial and patriarchal' (*καὶ εὐρίσκεται βασιλικὸν καὶ πατριαρχικόν*)¹⁴⁸. Also, an act of the Patriarchate of Constantinople issued in September 1371 informs us that the Synod of Constantinople was deciding on the appeal of the Metropolitan of Larissa regarding the problem of jurisdiction in Thessaly¹⁴⁹. Finally, Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos appointed on the same day the Metropolitan of Larissa Neilos as the Patriarchal Exarch in Thessaly¹⁵⁰.

Considering the above a natural question arises: what kind of an empire was this without its own Church? This brings us back to the question of Symeon's

142 *PLP*, no. 1098. J. Preiser-Kapeller, *Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz. Ein Verzeichnis der Mitropoliten und Bischöfe des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel in der Zeit von 1204 bis 1453*, Saarbrücken 2008, 231. Rigo, *op. cit.*, 212 no. 46 for the most significant bibliography. From 1318, however, Trikala became the seat of the Metropolitan of Larissa (*loc. cit.*)

143 Αντώνιος Λαρίσης, *Εγκώμιο εις τον άγιο Κυπριανό*, 73.

144 This is how Antonio Rigo (*op. cit.*, 214) interprets the particular passage of the Encomium to St. Kyprianos (Αντώνιος Λαρίσης, *Εγκώμιο εις τον άγιο Κυπριανό*, 73.541–74.570), although other sources do not mention that Kantakouzenos conquered Larissa and Trikala in his short-lived regain of Byzantine territories in 1350.

145 '...καταλαβείν ήμίν πάσαν την αύτών τών κοσμικών πραγμάτων ήρχεν, ήπερ ήμίν, προς θελήσεως την διοίκησιν έμπιστεύεται...' See Αντώνιος Λαρίσης, *Εγκώμιο εις τον άγιο Κυπριανό*, 74. Rigo, *op. cit.*, 214.

146 Rigo, *op. cit.*, 214 no. 57.

147 Miklosich, Müller, *Acta et diplomata* (Hereafter *MM*) I, 474.

148 Solovjev, Мошин, *Грчке повеље*, 254, no. XXXIV.

149 *MM* I, 514–515.

150 *MM* I, 587–589. Rigo, *op. cit.*, 215.

imperial title. From the standpoint of the Serbian imperial crown, Symeon's proclamation as emperor was an act of usurpation¹⁵¹. *Ekthesis Nea*, a manual of titles created during the time of Patriarch Neilos (1379–1388) and used by the Patriarchate, mentions that the rulers of Wallachia were to be addressed as despots¹⁵². At first glance, this suggests that Constantinople did not recognize Symeon Uroš as emperor either. Notwithstanding, the prescription on how a metropolitan should address a certain 'despoina of Serbia' (δέσποιναν Σερβίας) complicates things¹⁵³. Ivan Djurić identified her as Thomais, wife of Symeon Uroš, claiming that Constantinople did recognize her husband's imperial title¹⁵⁴. As she is mentioned only in relation to her son, Djurić considered her to be a widow: normally her husband, as the emperor, would be mentioned first¹⁵⁵. Nevertheless, we do not know exactly when Despoina Thomais died. It is certain that by the beginning of 1385 she had passed away¹⁵⁶. Besides, the inscription in the Church of St. Stephen in Trikala puts a certain Despoina Anna next to Emperor Symeon Uroš. Also, the inscription's mention of the Metropolitan of Larissa Neilos, who took office sometime between 1363 and 1371¹⁵⁷, leads to the reasonable assumption that Despoina Thomais had already expired by then¹⁵⁸. Djurić also notes that the spot in the manual reserved for the mysterious despoina in *Ekthesis Nea* does not allude any particular veneration, since she is mentioned only in the end of the chapter on archons, and not in the one on emperors. Au contraire, he directs our attention to the use of the phrase 'βασιλεία σου' (your imperial reign), also reminding us that the other epithets assigned to her (ἐνσεβεσιάτη καὶ φιλόχριστε, ὑψηλοτάτη καὶ λαμπροτάτη) were 'common among the Thessalians'. After all, the inscription from Trikala mentions Symeon Uroš and

151 *Историја српског народа*, I, 569–570.

152 Darrouzès, "Ekthesis Néa", 56³⁴.

153 *Ibid.*, 60.

154 Djurić, "Ектесис неа", 421–427.

155 *Ibid.*, 423.

156 In its description of the second wedding of her daughter, Maria Angelina Doukaina, to Esau Buondelmoti in January 1385, the Chronicle of Ioannina informs us that Kaisarissa Maria, wife of Alexios Angelos Philanthropenos and daughter of Radoslav Hlapen, and her brother (= Stephen, see infra), came from Thessaly in order to take part in the celebration (*Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 95). The fact that Thomais did not attend her daughter's wedding implies that she had passed away by then.

157 *MM I*, 589. See nos. 147 and 151.

158 This inscription has not been preserved, except in written form, and has been edited several times. Lascaris, ("Deux chartes de Jean Uroš", 280–283) asserted that the previous publishers had misread, and thus erroneously published, the name Anna, since Symeon's wife's name was Thomais. Then, Papachryssanthou ("À propos d'une inscription de Syméon Uroš", 483–488) republished the inscription and claimed that it was produced in Trikala sometime between May 1363 and November 1372, and that the mentioned Despoina Anna was in fact the mother-in-law of Symeon Uroš, who, on the basis of his kinship with the emperor, claimed the right to the imperial title. She was mentioned in

Despoina Anna as εὐσεβεστάτοι¹⁵⁹. Moreover, certain inaccuracies also appear in the patriarchal manual. For example, although the rulers of Thessaly were supposed to be addressed as despots, Alexios Angelos Philanthropenos bore the title of Kaisar and his wife of Kaisarissa¹⁶⁰. Similarly, although it is widely accepted that Lord Constantine Dragaš never bore the title of despot, *Ekthesis Nea* instructs that he should be addressed as one¹⁶¹. All this creates the impression that the ‘despoina of Serbia’ could have been another noble woman, unknown to us, who held this title as either a daughter or sister of an emperor¹⁶².

Symeon’s actual imperial status is not only curbed by the fact that there is no information on his coronation, which was considered the highest degree of sanction of imperial title. In Byzantium, any political adventurer with enough power could be proclaimed emperor, but only an imperial coronation by the Constantinopolitan Patriarch, preferably in the Church of Saint Sophia, could provide the desired legitimacy¹⁶³. What distinguishes the case of Thessaly from both the Byzantine and the Serbian model was the fact that Symeon Uroš did not form an autocephalous Church attached to his state¹⁶⁴. The absence of such an institution may also be the answer to the question of his coronation: there simply was no high church authority that could perform that act. Symeon Uroš was certainly not crowned emperor by the Patriarch of Constantinople or the Patriarch of Peć, and obviously not by the archbishop of his state, who, as we have seen, did not exist.

the inscription because her daughter was already deceased at the time. All the previous interpretations, however, do not exclude the possibility that Symeon Uroš, after the death of his first wife, was remarried to a certain Anna. But this is a topic for further research.

¹⁵⁹ “εἰ[ς] τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ εὐσεβεστά[του] βασιλέος ἡμῶν Σημεὸν τ[οῦ] Παλαιολόγου κ[αί] τῆς εὐσεβεστά[της] δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Ἀν(νης)”. See Papachryssanthou, “À propos d’une inscription de Syméon Uroš”, 484. Djurić, “Ектесис неа”, 425.

¹⁶⁰ See no. 156 and *infra*.

¹⁶¹ Darrouzès, “Ekthesis Néa”, 61. Ostrogorski (“Господин Константин Драгаш”, 288–289, 291–292) showed that Constantine Dragaš never held the title of despot.

¹⁶² This, for instance, was the case with Despoina (δέσποινα) Eudokia, daughter of the Emperor of Trebizond Alexios III Komnenos, although neither of her two husbands, an Anatolian dynast named Tadjedin and Lord Constantine Dragaš, bore the title of emperor (Djurić, “Евдокија Комнина и њен муж Константин Драгаш”, 263–265), as well as ‘Empress’ Eudokia, presumably Dusan’s sister, mother of Despot John and Lord Constantine Dragaš (Nikolić, *Јелена Драгаш Палеологина*, 49–83).

¹⁶³ Maksimović, “Српска царска титула”, 180. As is well known, the only example of an emperor who was not crowned is Constantine XI Dragaš Palaiologos. But this was a consequence of the extraordinary circumstances prevailing in the Byzantine Empire in the eve of its fall. It is also important to note that Kantakouzenos was crowned emperor twice, in order to give his usurpation a legitimate simulacrum. On the issue of the coronation in general see A. Christophoroulou, *Εκλογή, αναγόρευσις και στέψις*.

¹⁶⁴ See Maksimović, “Српска царска титула”, 177–178.

Therefore, Symeon's state, as already noticed, can really be considered a "quasi-empire"¹⁶⁵. With the exception perhaps of the period before April 1357, Symeon Uroš did not intend to create a new universal empire, nor to replace the Byzantine and/or the Serbian. His rule was based exclusively on the historical, political and social traditions, as well as the reality of Thessaly, with his imperial title and family ties with the Palaiologoi and the Nemanjić being a matter of prestige that added some weight to his legitimacy as ruler.

Symeon Uroš fathered at least three children. The eldest son, John Uroš, succeeded him to the throne. We also know of his other son, Stefan, from the Koporin Chronicle¹⁶⁶. As stated in Mavro Orbini's history, he ruled a part of Thessaly and was married to the daughter of the Lord of Mesara and other cities in Romania¹⁶⁷. In addition to his two sons, Symeon Uroš also had a daughter, Maria Angelina Doukaina Palaiologina¹⁶⁸, who was first married to Thomas Preljubović, and, after his murder, to Esau Buondelmonti¹⁶⁹.

It is not known when, how and where Symeon Uroš died. A certain *terminus ante quem* is November 1372, when his son and heir, Emperor John Uroš, issued two prostagmata to Neilos, the Protos of Stagoi¹⁷⁰.

IV. THE REIGN OF JOHN DOUKAS UROŠ PALAIOLOGOS (1372–1373)

Very little is known about the early life and reign of John Uroš¹⁷¹. The 1359/60 inscription in the Church of St. Archangel Michael in Kastoria suggests that John Uroš¹⁷² became his father's co-ruler after the latter's proclamation as emperor in Kastoria in 1356¹⁷³. Nothing else is known of him until he becomes the sole Emperor of Thessaly, after the death of his father. Interestingly, the Chronicle of Ioannina refers to him as Emperor Joasaph (*βασιλεὺς*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁶⁶ Stojanović, *Стари српски родослови и летописи*, 80, 82. *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 95. Solovjev, Mošin, *Грчке повеље*, 294–295, no. XXXIX. Lascaris, "Deux chartes de Jean Uroš", 312–314. Loenertz, "Une page de Jerome Zurita", 158–159, 163–165.

¹⁶⁷ Mavro Orbin (*Краљевство Словена*, 45 sq.) and Loenertz (*op. cit.*, 164) mention that Stephen ruled in the area of Farsala, and was married to the daughter of Francesco Giorgio, Markgraf of Bodonica, a principality near Thermopylae.

¹⁶⁸ *PLP*, no. 21393.

¹⁶⁹ Jireček, "Die Witwe und die Söhne des Despoten Esau von Epirus", 1–16. Agoritsas, "Maria Angelina Doukaina Palaiologina", 171–185. Ferjančić, *Тесалија*, 263–264.

¹⁷⁰ Lascaris, *op. cit.*, 277–284.

¹⁷¹ It was suggested that he was born either in 1349 (Nicol, *Meteora*, 64 sq.) or 1352 (Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen*, 26 sq., no. 42).

¹⁷² *PLP*, no. 21179.

¹⁷³ Lascaris, *op. cit.*, 283 sq. Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 259.

Ἰωάσαφ)¹⁷⁴. This is a clear indication that his later life as monk, and second founder of Meteora, prevailed in the collective memory. Modern researchers on the other hand take Mavro Orbini's recounting of John's blinding by his father-in-law Radoslav Hlapen with a pinch of salt¹⁷⁵.

Furthermore, the fact that his younger brother Stefan governed the area around Farsala has led some researchers to conclude that John Uroš ruled over only one part of Thessaly¹⁷⁶. This does not necessarily mean that Thessaly was formally divided, especially if Stefan recognized his brother's supreme authority.

Only two documents, prostagmas, both issued in November 1372, have been preserved from the reign of John Uroš. The first of them was issued to Neilos, the Protos of Stagoi, and it confirms the possession of Cyril's cave in Mykane¹⁷⁷. Of special interest to this prostagma is the emperor's order that the property should not be infringed by any Romans, Albanians or anyone else. This order led B. Ferjančić to the conclusion that the number of the Serbs living in Thessaly was not particularly significant, at least during the reign of John Uroš. However, a 1388 act of Neilos, Patriarch of Constantinople, which confirms the stavropegic rights to the monastery in Lykousada, commands that no one, be it a Roman, a Serb or an Albanian, has the right to disturb it¹⁷⁸. With the second prostagma bearing the same date, Emperor John Uroš confirms to Neilos the possessions of the Monastery of Mother of God of Doupiane, which were granted, 'from the blessed ancestors of my Empire, and also from the blessed father of my Empire'¹⁷⁹.

John Uroš's rule of Thessaly was short-lived, as he resigned from power sometime before June 1373. This finds proof in an endowment document signed by the then Protos Neilos, concerning nun Theodoule Koteantzaina's donation to Meteora¹⁸⁰. In that document Kaisar Alexios Angelos Philanthropenos is mentioned for the first time as the Lord of Thessaly¹⁸¹. In the charter issued to

174 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 94–95.

175 Mavro Orbini, *op. cit.*, 45. This information was categorically rejected by S. Ćirković (Mavro Orbini, *op. cit.*, 311), while Nicol, (*Meteora*, 103) seemed inclined to accept it.

176 Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 261.

177 Bees ("Σερβικά και Βυζαντιακά γράμματα Μετεώρου", 9–11) erroneously attributes them to Symeon Uroš (Sophianos, "Δύο προστάγματα του Ιωάννη Ούρεση", 21). Lascaris has clarified that it was the prostagma of John Uroš, and not his father's ("Deux chartes de Jean Uroš").

178 Lampros, "Νείλου Κων/πόλεως σιγίλλιον περί τής μονής Λευκουσιάδος", 178; Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 262–263.

179 Bees, *op. cit.*, 11–13. Sophianos, *op. cit.*, 22. Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 263.

180 *PLP*, no. 13324.

181 Bees (*op. cit.*, 98–100) erroneously dates the documents to 1388. Ferjančić (*op. cit.*, 266–267) shows

the Monastery of Mother of God of the Great Gate in November 1381, John Uroš is mentioned as ‘† ἰωάνν(η)ς οὐρέσης ὁ παλαιολόγος ὁ διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀγγελικοῦ σχήματος μετόνομασθῆς ἰωᾶσαφ (μον)αχ(ός)’¹⁸². Despite this dramatic switch, the former Emperor John Uroš continued to play an important political role in both Epirus and Thessaly. The Chronicle of Ioannina reports that following the death of Thomas Preljubović on 23 December 1384 the inhabitants of Ioannina called upon ‘Emperor Joasaph’, who ruled the city until 31 January 1385. Then, Esau Buondelmonti arrived in Ioannina and married Thomas’s widow and Joasaph’s sister, Maria Angelina¹⁸³. It is believed that monk Joasaph stayed in Ioannina for some time, probably until May 1386¹⁸⁴. At that time, his sister Maria Angelina gifted to her brother and Meteora many ecclesiastical vessels, which she had previously given him to keep safe after the death of her first husband¹⁸⁵.

After these events, monk Joasaph withdrew to Meteora. However, he left them again after the Ottoman conquest of Thessaly and went to Mount Athos where, it is believed, that he stayed for two years¹⁸⁶. After that, he returned to Meteora for the last time, where he reached the end his earthly life, sometime before 24 February 1423¹⁸⁷. His devotion to the monastic community, first as a ruler, and then as a spiritual figure, is evident not only in his justifiable recognition as its second founder, but in his elevation to sainthood as well¹⁸⁸. Thus, this is how, first and foremost, he will be remembered in history.

With John Uroš’s retreat from the political scene ends the rule of the Serbs in Thessaly. John Uroš was succeeded by Kaisar Alexios Angelos Philanthropenos, who nominally recognized the power of John V and Manuel II Palaiologos. He was then succeeded by Manuel Philanthropenos Angelos, sometime before June 1373. As early as 1393, Thessaly was conquered by the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I Thunderbolt (1389–1402), a fate all Balkans were to share by the end of the fifteenth century¹⁸⁹.

1373 is the more plausible date. On Alexios Angelos Philanthropenos see *PLP*, no. 29750.

182 Lascaris, *op. cit.*, 294 no. 1. Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 263.

183 *Χρονικό των Ιωαννίνων*, 94–95.

184 Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 263.

185 Solovjev, Мошин, *Грчке повеље*, 290–295, no. XXXIX. Vapheïades, *Ἡ Μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου καὶ Μεγάλου Μετεώρου*, 69–70.

186 Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 281.

187 Bees, “Geschichtliche Forschungsergebnisse und Mönchs”. Polemis, *The Doukai*, 100. Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 264. Vapheïades, *op. cit.*, 62–63.

188 He is celebrated on April 20.

189 *PLP*, no. 29750. Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 265–281.

Η ΘΕΣΣΑΛΙΑ ΥΠΟ ΣΕΡΒΙΚΗ ΚΥΡΙΑΡΧΙΑ (1348 – περ. 1373)

Maja Nikolić

Μετά την κατάκτηση μεγάλου τμήματος της Βυζαντινής Αυτοκρατορίας (1343–1345), δηλαδή ολόκληρης σχεδόν της Μακεδονίας και Αλβανίας, ο Σέρβος κράλης Στέφανος Ντούσαν ανακήρυξε τον εαυτό του *Αυτοκράτορα* (τέλη του 1345) και εν συνεχεία, στις 16 Απριλίου του έτους 1346, έλαβε το στέμμα. Μετά ταύτα, τα στρατεύματά του κατέλαβαν την Ήπειρο (1347) και λίγο αργότερα τη Θεσσαλία (1348).

Οι πηγές υποδεικνύουν ότι η Θεσσαλία ετέθη υπό τη σερβική κυριαρχία χωρίς μάχην. Για το λόγο αυτό ορισμένοι ισχυρίζονται ότι η Σερβική κατάκτηση ήταν στην πραγματικότητα αποτέλεσμα συμφωνίας μεταξύ των Θεσσαλών αριστοκρατών και του Στεφάνου Ντούσαν, ανάλογης με τη συμφωνία που οι Θεσσαλοί είχαν συνάψει λίγα χρόνια πριν με τον Ιωάννη Καντακουζηνό (τέλη του 1342). Επομένως, η Σερβική κατάκτηση της Θεσσαλίας θα πρέπει να κατανοηθεί όχι μόνο ως αποτέλεσμα της δυσαρέσκειας της τοπικής αριστοκρατίας έναντι του θρόνου της Κωνσταντινούπολης, αλλά και ως έκφραση της σταθερής αντίδρασης των Θεσσαλών έναντι της κεντρικής εξουσίας.

Η ιδιαίτερη θέση και σημασία των περιοχών της Θεσσαλίας και της Ηπείρου, στο πλαίσιο της αυτοκρατορίας του Στεφάνου Ντούσαν, αποδεικνύεται από το γεγονός ότι οι εν λόγω περιοχές έξουσιάζονταν από δικούς τους κυβερνήτες. Γεωγραφικά, βρίσκονταν πολύ μακριά από τον πυρήνα των σερβικών εδαφών. Ταυτόχρονα, οι περιοχές της Θεσσαλίας και της Ηπείρου, ήδη από τις αρχές του 13^{ου} αιώνα, εξελίχθηκαν σταδιακά σε ανεξάρτητα κράτη, και δημιούργησαν τις δικές τους πολιτικές και ιδεολογικές παραδόσεις. Φαίνεται λοιπόν ότι ο Σέρβος αυτοκράτορας αντιλήφθηκε σύντομα ότι δεν ήταν δυνατόν να τις δεσμεύσει και να τις εντάξει οργανικά και μόνιμα με το σερβικό κράτος. Ως εκ τούτου, τις ανέθεσε στη διακυβέρνηση των ανθρώπων εκείνων που εμπιστευόταν περισσότερο.

Συγκεκριμένα, ο Στέφανος Ντούσαν διόρισε τον αδερφό του, Συμεών-Σίνισα ως κυβερνήτη της Ηπείρου, δίδοντάς του τον τίτλο του *Δεσπότη*. Στη συνέχεια ο Συμεών παντρεύτηκε τη Θωμαΐδα, αδερφή του Δεσπότη Νικηφόρου Β΄ Ορσίνη και κόρη του Δεσπότη Ιωάννη Β΄ Ορσίνη. Όσον αφορά στη Θεσσαλία, αυτή κατακτήθηκε και κυβερνήθηκε στο όνομα του Στεφάνου Ντούσαν από τον εξέχοντα στρατηγό και ευγενή καίσαρα Πρέλουμπο, τον οποίο ο Ιωάννης Καντακουζηνός επαινεί για τη σοφία, το θάρρος και την εμπειρία του. Πρωτεύουσα του κράτους του Πρέλουμπου ήταν τα Τρίκαλα, πόλη η οποία θα παραμείνει ως πρωτεύουσα της Θεσσαλίας μέχρι την κατάληψή της από τους Οθωμανούς. Ο εν λόγω ηγεμό-

νας ήταν παντρεμένος με την Ειρήνη. Γιός τους ήταν ο μισπός τύραννος των Ιωαννίνων, Θωμάς Πρελούμποβιτς. Φαίνεται πως είχαν επίσης μια κόρη, ονόματι Ελένη. Ο Πρέλουμπος πέθανε στις αρχές του έτους 1356. Μετά τη σύντομη επί της Θεσσαλίας κυριαρχία του Νικηφόρου Β΄ Ορσίνη (1356–1359), η περιοχή κατακτήθηκε από τον Συμεών Ουρέση Παλαιολόγο, τον Δεσπότη της Ηπείρου.

Ειδικότερα, το έτος 1356, ο δεσπότης Συμεών εκδιωγμένος από την Ήπειρο ή αναχωρώντας πριν από την κατάκτησή της από τον Νικηφόρο Β΄, και προκειμένου να καταλάβει τον Σερβικό αυτοκρατορικό θρόνο, κατέφθασε στην Καστοριά, όπου ανακηρύχθηκε *Αυτοκράτορας*. Μετά δε την αποτυχία του να λάβει τον θρόνο της Σερβίας (1357–1358), και κυρίως μετά το θάνατο του δεσπότη Νικηφόρου Β΄, ο Συμεών επέτυχε να κατακτήσει τη Θεσσαλία στα τέλη του 1359. Αμέσως μετά προσάρτησε και την Ήπειρο, αλλά αναγκάστηκε να φύγει σύντομα, παραδίδοντας τη διακυβέρνηση της χώρας σε δύο φεουδάρχες Αλβανούς, τον Ιωάννη Σπάτας και τον Πέτρο Λιώσα, στους οποίους απέδωσε επίσης τους τίτλους του *Δεσπότη*. Τούτο δε διότι η κυριαρχία του επί της Θεσσαλίας αμφισβητήθηκε από τον Ραδοσλάβο Χλάπενο. Παρόλο που αυτός ο Σέρβος ευγενής, παντρεμένος με τη χήρα του πρώην κυβερνήτη της Θεσσαλίας, του Πρέλουμπου, κατέκτησε την πόλη Δαμάσι, η διένεξη τελείωσε σύντομα και σφραγίστηκε με έναν γάμο μεταξύ της κόρης του Συμεών, Μαρίας Αγγελίνας, και του παραγιού του Χλαπένου, Θωμά Πρελούμποβιτς.

Η βασιλεία του Συμεών Ουρέση Παλαιολόγου στη Θεσσαλία χαρακτηρίζεται ενίοτε ως αμάλγαμα βυζαντινών και σερβικών πολιτικο-νομικών παραδόσεων, απόρροια της διπλής καταγωγής του, Σερβικής και Ελληνικής. Υπενθυμίζεται ότι ο Συμεών ήταν γιος του Σέρβου κράλη Στεφάνου Ουρέση Γ΄ Ντετσάνσκι (1321–1331) από τον δεύτερο του γάμο με τη Μαρία Παλαιολογίνα. Αυτή ήταν κόρη του πανυπερσεβάστου και καίσαρα Ιωάννη Παλαιολόγου, κυβερνήτη της Θεσσαλονίκης, εγγονού του αυτοκράτορα Μιχαήλ Η΄ και ανιψιού του Ανδρονίκου Β΄, και της Ειρήνης, θυγατέρας του Θεόδωρου Μετοχίτη. Ωστόσο, κρίνοντας από τα χρυσόβουλά του αλλά και από άλλες πηγές που αναφέρονται σε αυτόν, ο Συμεών σταθεροποίησε την εξουσία του στη Θεσσαλία, θεμελιώνοντάς την όχι μόνο πάνω στις τοπικές παραδόσεις, αλλά και στη στενή συγγένειά του τόσο με τους προηγούμενους ηγεμόνες: τον γαμπρό του, δεσπότη Νικηφόρο Β΄ Ορσίνη, και τον πεθερό του, δεσπότη Ιωάννη Β΄ Ορσίνη όσο και με τους Παλαιολόγους.

Ο Συμεών Ουρέσης θεωρούσε τον εαυτό του αυτοκράτορα «των Ρωμαίων και των Σέρβων [=Σερβίας]». Τούτο μαρτυρείται στα έγγραφά του, σε επιγραφές, αλλά και στο γεγονός ότι παραχωρούσε υψηλά αυλικά αξιώματα, αποκλειστικό προνόμιο των αυτοκρατόρων. Ωστόσο, δεν γνωρίζουμε σχεδόν τίποτα για τη στέψη του. Οι πηγές πληροφορούν ότι ο Συμεών *ανακηρύχθηκε*, όχι ότι *στέφτηκε* αυτοκράτορας στην Καστοριά.

Η δράση του Συμεών Ουρέση αποτυπώθηκε στις πηγές, κυρίως όμως όσον αφορά στη θρησκευτική του πολιτική. Ως προστάτης και ευεργέτης του μοναχισμού στην περιοχή των Στάγων, ο Συμεών Ουρέσης θεωρείται συνήθως ως ένας από τους ιδρυτές των Μετεώρων. Η κυριαρχία του σήμαινε επίσης την ομαλοποίηση της εκκλησιαστικής ζωής στη Θεσσαλία, αλλά και στην Ήπειρο. Η ομαλοποίηση αυτή εκφράστηκε με την αποκατάσταση των κανονικών σχέσεων με το Πατριαρχείο της Κωνσταντινούπολης, γεγονός ορατό κυρίως στον διορισμό μητροπολιτών, οι οποίοι στάλθηκαν από τη Βασιλεύουσα. Επομένως, κατά τη διάρκεια της βασιλείας του Συμεών Ουρέση - και θα μπορούσε να ειπωθεί κατά τη σύντομη βασιλεία του γιου του, Ιωάννη Ουρέση - η θεσσαλική Εκκλησία ήταν υπό τη δικαιοδοσία του Πατριαρχείου Κωνσταντινούπολης.

Αλλά τί είδους αυτοκρατορία ήταν εκείνη που δεν είχε τη δική της Εκκλησία; Η ανυπαρξία αυτοκέφαλης Εκκλησίας στην επικράτεια του Συμεών Ουρέση μπορεί να αποτελέσει απάντηση στο ερώτημα, αν αυτός στέφθηκε ποτέ ως *αυτοκράτορας*. Φαίνεται ότι η απάντηση είναι αρνητική, όχι μόνο επειδή δεν υπάρχουν στοιχεία για κάτι τέτοιο, αλλά και για τον απλό λόγο ότι δεν υπήρχε ανώτατη εκκλησιαστική αρχή που θα εκτελούσε αυτήν την πράξη. Είναι αφετέρου βέβαιο ότι ο Συμεών δεν στέφθηκε αυτοκράτορας από τον Πατριάρχη της Κωνσταντινούπολης ή τον Πατριάρχη του Ρεέ, και προφανώς όχι από τον αρχιεπίσκοπο της επικράτειάς του, ο οποίος δεν υπήρχε. Ως εκ τούτου, το κράτος του Συμεών Ουρέση, όπως έχει ήδη παρατηρηθεί, μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ως μια «ψευδο-αυτοκρατορία». Αυτή διαμορφώθηκε ως αποτέλεσμα των τοπικών παραδόσεων, ιστορικών, πολιτικών και κοινωνικών, με τον αυτοκρατορικό τίτλο και τους οικογενειακούς δεσμούς με τους Παλαιολόγους και τους Νεμάνιτς να προσθέτουν κύρος στην αμφισβητούμενη από τα πράγματα νομιμότητα του Συμεών.

Δεν είναι γνωστό πότε, πώς και πού πέθανε ο Συμεών Ουρέσης. Ένα πιθανό χρονικό όριο είναι ο Νοέμβριος του έτους 1372, όταν ο γιος και ο κληρονόμος του, ο αυτοκράτορας Ιωάννης Ουρέσης, εξέδωσε δύο προτάγματα εν αναφορά με τον Νείλο, Πρώτο της σκήτης των Σταγών.

Πολύ λίγα, ωστόσο, είναι γνωστά για τη ζωή και τη βασιλεία του αυτοκράτορα Ιωάννη Δούκα Ουρέση Παλαιολόγο. Εξάλλου, δεν κυβέρνησε τη Θεσσαλία για πολύ, αφού παραιτήθηκε από την εξουσία πριν τον Ιούνιο του 1373. Αν και έγινε μοναχός με το όνομα Ιωάσαφ, ο τέως αυτοκράτορας Ιωάννης Ουρέσης έμελλε να έχει σημαντικό πολιτικό ρόλο τόσο στην Ήπειρο όσο και στη Θεσσαλία. Ειδικότερα, μετά τη δολοφονία του Θωμά Πρελούμποβιτς τον Δεκέμβριο του 1384, κυβέρνησε την πόλη των Ιωαννίνων μέχρι τον Ιανουάριο του 1385, όταν ο Ιζαού Μπουοντελμόντι παντρεύτηκε τη χήρα του Θωμά και αδελφή του Ιωάσαφ, Μαρία Αγγελίνα. Έχοντας ζήσει στο Άγιον Όρος για δύο χρόνια, μετά την οθωμανική κατάκτηση της Θεσσαλίας το έτος 1393, ο Ιωάσαφ επέστρεψε στα Μετέωρα, όπου

τελείωσε τη ζωή του πριν από τις 24 Φεβρουαρίου 1423. Η ιστορική και αγιολογική παράδοση θα τιμήσει δεόντως τον Ιωάννη-Ιωάσαφ, πρώτα απ' όλα, κυρίως ως τον δεύτερο κτίτορα της μονής του Μεγάλου Μετεώρου.

Το τέλος της ζωής του Ιωάννη-Ιωάσαφ και η κυριαρχία του καίσαρα Μανουήλ Φιλανθρωπινού Αγγέλου σηματοδοτεί το τέλος της κυριαρχίας των Σέρβων στη Θεσσαλία, η οποία επέπρωτο να διαρκέσει λίγο περισσότερο από δύο δεκαετίες.

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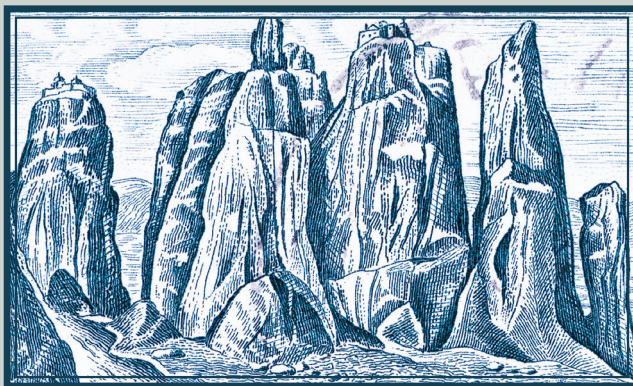
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