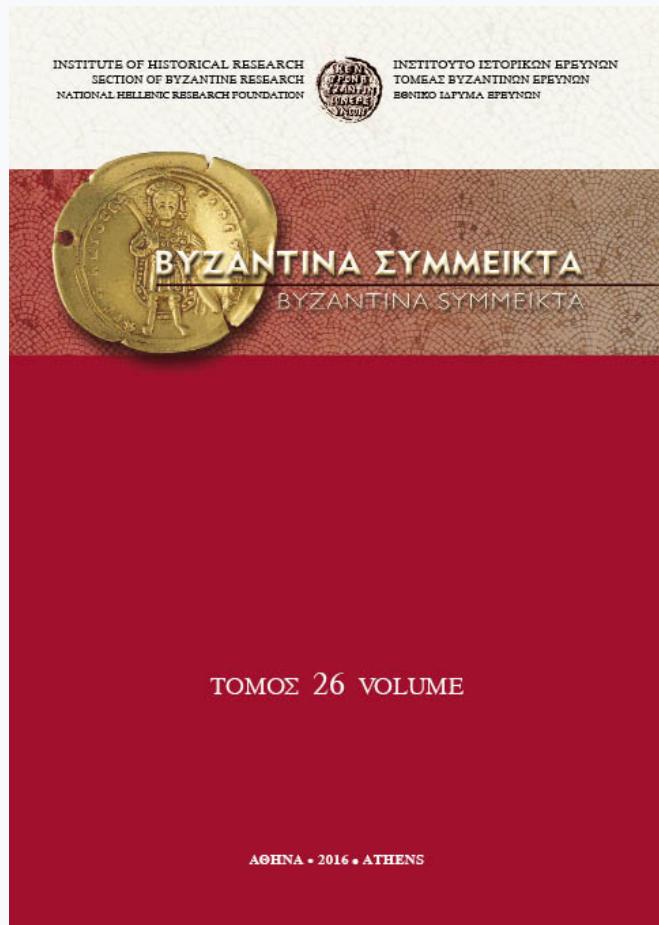


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Book Review: A. Γ. Κ. ΣΑΒΒΙΔΗΣ, Ιστορία της Αυτοκρατορίας των Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας (1204–1461), Thessaloniki 2016

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Α. Γ. Κ. ΣΑΒΒΙΔΗΣ, *Ιστορία της Αυτοκρατορίας των Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας (1204-1461)*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2016. ISBN 978-960-599-032-9

The third edition (with additions) of A. G. K. Savvidis', *History of the Empire of the Great Komnenoi of Trebizond 1204-1461*, consists of three parts (pp. 29-179) and four appendices (pp. 180-219), concluding with a bibliography and an index of names and places. This volume is also supplemented by an auxiliary appendix (pp. 305-365) with a set of reprinted sources on the Pontus: Michael Panaretos' narrative on the reigns of the Great Komnenoi; the Miracles of Saint Eugenios, by Joseph Lazaropoulos; and two chrysobulls of Alexios III (1338-1390)¹. Furthermore, the articulated narrative of the book is complemented by tables of coinage from Trebizond (pp. 367-378); a series of illustrations (manuscripts, iconography, plans and engravings, pp. 379-410); and a folded map of walled cities, towns, villages, churches, monasteries, castles, mines, harbors, mountain passes and roads.

A comprehensive and a fully documented presentation of the foundation, evolution and growth of the state of Trebizond within the framework of the wider international ambient, followed by an assessment of the factors of its decomposition and eventual fall, constitute the book's basic objectives. The state of Trebizond was deemed a successor polity by the regime of Constantinople during the Komnenian period (1081-1185), for the Pontus was the cradle of the ancestors of the Komnenian imperial family. The projection of this hereditary trend is also apparent in the institutional organization of the state of the Pontus, particularly in the titling of *basileus and emperor of the Rhomaioi*, adopted in court protocol; however, this title was subsequently reclaimed by the Palaiologoi after the recovery of Constantinople from the Latins in 1261.

1. The texts are reproduced from J. P. FALLMERAYER's, *Geschichte des Kaisertums Trapezunt*, Munich 1829 (repr. Hildesheim 1964 and New York 1980).

The first chapter (pp. 29-75) presents the formative period of the Empire of Trebizond and its rivalry with the Empire of Nicaea for the territory of Paphlagonia (1204/7-1214), while clarifying diplomatic ventures with the Palaeologoi after their restoration in Constantinople (1204-1297). Part of these arrangements was relevant with the settlement on ecclesiastical hierarchy between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Church of Trebizond. Matrimonial alliances between Trebizond and Georgia securing the stability of control exerted over territories to the east of the state of Trebizond are subsequently analyzed on the basis of information procured by Armenian and Georgian sources and their commentary by modern bibliography, making a very useful and informative contribution of the book.

The first part of the book focuses on the new conditions in the Pontic region that resulted from the invasions and settlement of Seljuks, Turcomans and Mongols. Their resonance and repercussions went as far as Constantinople and Europe to the extent that initiatives to contact the Empire of Trebizond and the Mongols were undertaken by Western rulers and the Pope of Rome. The expansion of Venetian and Genoese trade in the Black Sea, the reciprocal antagonism of these two Italian republics and the privileges granted to them by the state of Trebizond are also discussed to a considerable extent. Excerpts of reports written on different occasions by Western travelers, traders and diplomats illuminate from different angles the conflicting economic and political aspirations in the Pontus.

The second part is entitled *The fourteenth century: the agonizing survival and the interim decline (1297-1390)* (pp. 77-134). As foretold in the title, the unstable political situation at the end of the thirteenth century was about to result in the outbreak of separatist movements aiming either at the throne of Trebizond or the establishment of separate, independent principalities. A detailed presentation of the intense pressure exerted by successive Turcoman raids and their handling by diplomatic alliances based on intermarriages, allows for a comprehensive insight of a type of policy that was going to become crucial and continue in the following period. Two marriages were arranged by Alexios III (1349-1390) with the ruler of the Georgian kingdom (1368) and the Turcoman emir of Djanik (1378); his successor, prince Manuel, the later emperor Manuel III (1390-1416/7), married the Georgian princess Gulkhan-Koulkahad-Eudocia (1377). The pertinent testimonies provided by the Chronicle of Michael Panaretos are complemented by data of Muslim sources and a Turcoman epic. The Turcoman raids of the fourth decade of the fourteenth century, repeated in 1372/3, were followed by a counterattack of Alexios III (1379 or 1380). During this period, certain acts in favor of Pontic

monasteries were promulgated in the Empire of Trebizond, as also the founding act of Dionysiou monastery on Mount Athos, broadening its international prestige.

The third part is entitled *Seven decades of struggle and diplomatic inconsistencies: the fifteenth century. The last period of the State of the Grand Komnenoi and the fall (1390-1461)* (pp. 135-179) and surveys the situation created by the advance of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I (1394-1402) on the northeastern coast of Asia Minor that resulted in the annexation of the Turcoman emirate of Amisos and the invasion of Georgia by Tamerlane (1392). Emperor Manuel III responded to these new challenges with an agreement providing the payment of tribute to Tamerlane. Matrimonial bonds, mentioned in detail, remained the basic means of preserving the crucial stability of the region but were no longer effective vis-à-vis simultaneous military pressures exemplified by the besieging of Constantinople by Bayezid I and Tamerlane's military operations in Asia Minor. Alexios IV (1414-1429) continued the policies of intermarriages followed by his predecessors, marrying his daughters with the rulers of Constantinople and Serbia and the Turcoman emir of the Kara Koyunlu (Black Sheep). One of his sons also married the princess of Georgia; another, a lady of the noble Genoese family of Gattilusi; while the future David I a princess of Gothia (Crimea). Alexios IV was dethroned by his eldest son, John IV (1429-1458/60), who assumed military operations, facing repeated attacks by the Turcoman emirs Erdebil and Khidr beg (1429/30-1431/2). However, the situation became even more serious as an Ottoman fleet of Murad II looted the coastline of Trebizond, while Venetians were constantly applying pressure on the region.

The dense accounts of diplomacy and counterattacks in the context of conflicting interests in the region are supported by a wide range of heterogeneous historical sources from Western Europe (Bavaria, Castile, Rome and Venice) and the Near East, that supplement extensive relevant references from Late Byzantine literature. The range of sources broadens even further, along with the gradual development of rival interests in the region of the Pontus and the Black Sea into areas of intense conflict. The endeavor to prevent the fall of Trebizond is described in the context of the military responses adopted by John IV, who searched for allies among the adjacent Turcoman principalities, as also in Armenia and Georgia. However, attempts for the formation of a coalition proved ineffective, even while David I (1458/60-1461) was seeking assistance from Western Europe, addressing Philip III, the duke of Burgundy, and pope Pius II (during the Council of Mantua 1459) and seeking military support by the emir of Sinope. The outline of the efforts

of the last emperor of Trebizond displays lucidly the limited capacity and the political and military limitations of the state of Trebizond. The diplomatic mission of the Franciscan Ludovico da Bologna in Trebizond proved likewise inefficient. Ottoman land forces regrouped in Bursa and a naval squadron sailed to Sinope, eventually causing the fall Trebizond to Sultan Mehmed II in 1461. Important evidence recorded by Ottoman sources with regards to the process of negotiations and the eventual capture of Trebizond by the Ottomans, is substantially commented in the last part of the book.

Certain subjects are systematically quoted in the appendices (A: A table of the rulers of the Pontus, on pp. 181-182, B: Scholars and scientists in the Empire of Trebizond, on pp. 183-207, C: The Pontic family of Tzanichites, on pp. 208-212, D: The Trapezountine diplomacy of marriage 14th-15th c., on pp. 213-219). The book is addressed not only to specialists but also to the general public, offering an integrated view of various sources, literary or other (Byzantine, Latin, Georgian, Muslim, Ottoman, Persian, Serbian and Syrian), along with notary texts and critical comments on the bibliography.

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