The Notion of δῆμος and its Role in Byzantium during the Last Centuries (13th-15th c.)

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The notion of δῆμος/δῆμοι (people/circus factions) has been a favorite subject in modern research and various opinions have been formulated regarding its organization and the role it played in political developments, especially during the early Byzantine period (4th-6th c.)1. It is generally accepted in modern bibliography that the demos of Constantinople, successor of the populus romanus, the people of Rome, was organized at the space of Hippodrome, which was at the centre of the political and administrative life of the city2. The δῆμοι, that is, the factions formed in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, the most important of which were the Greens and the Blues, had organically integrated members and many supporters. The δήμαρχοι were at the head of δῆμοι3. The leaders of the δῆμοι could come from the senatorial aristocracy, from wealthy representatives of the middle


2. Dагрон, Naissance, 317.

social stratum and state officials, while their members could belong to the palace personnel or be small merchants, artisans and laborers. The δήμοι were primarily in charge of the conduct of horse racing or other games in the capital or other provincial cities. On extraordinary occasions they took on other duties, such as the guarding of the walls. Also, they participated in imperial ceremonial, particularly in the proclamation of the new emperor and gradually emerged into a major political force⁴.

After the suppression of the Nika revolt in 532, when the factions received a serious blow, their involvement in political life was gradually reduced. In the years that followed the δήμοι seem mainly to participate in court ceremonies, expressing in general terms the official political ideology⁵.

The perception of δήμος in the early centuries as described above was disputed by a new interpretation of the sources material, according to which the δήμος and the δημόται were not connected exclusively to the Hippodrome and they comprised a distinct social stratum, probably the middle social stratum. This citizen body was defined by the entitlement to free daily rations of bread and eventually of other products and probably undertook various municipal responsibilities⁶. From the 11th century the δήμοι are rarely found in the sources⁷, while

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6. Gascou, Institutions, 200-212; Zuckerman, Cirque, 78-94.

7. See Théophylacte d’Achrida Lettres, ed. P. Gautier, [CFHB 16/2], Thessalonica, 1986, n. 127) «Εἰ τοῖνυν μέλει σου καὶ ἄριστην ἐν τῆς ἐχούσης Μακεδονίας στενοχωρία, ἀλλὰ λύσον ἐπὶ τὴν Λάρισσαν», Cf. Christofilopoulos, Πολίτευμα, 360-361. According to S. Vryonis, “the guilds of eleventh-century Constantinople exercised some of the political functions of the old demes and circus factions” as they were at the heart of the rebellions which broke out in the capital particularly in the second half of the century. See S. Vryonis, Byzantine δημοκρατία and the Guilds in the Eleventh Century, DOP 17 (1963) 287-314 (=
it has been argued that the δῆμος denotes all the citizens without any clear social distinction\(^8\).

In modern bibliography referred to the period with which we are concerned (13th-15th c.) the term δῆμος denotes generally the lower strata of the urban population, that is, small merchants, artisans and various laborers\(^8\). However, through the systematic study of that period’s sources certain nuances can be detected in the meaning of the term δῆμος, which, apart from the lower social stratum, also seems to include the middle social class and moreover to denote a larger group that contains both the lower and the middle social stratum. This paper intends to examine the concept of demos and similar expressions, the social composition of this body and its role in the political life of the era, based on the sources of the late Byzantine period (13th-15th c.).

The sources’ material for the definition of the urban population and its action is fragmentary and comes mainly from Byzantine historians and chroniclers of that period, who are not very consistent when they refer to social stratification. Moreover, the differences in the socio-political views and the style of the authors of the 13th, 14th and 15th century, as

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well as the interval between their works should be taken into account for a more accurate elaboration of the data, which come from these sources. The fragmentary material of the narrative sources is complemented by the monastery archives, the lives of saints, the correspondence and other literary works of the era.

Closely connected to the organization and the life of the imperial capital the term δῆμος is not found in the sources of the so-called “Empire of Nicaea” (1204-1261). The term δῆμος is not found in the work of George Akropolites, the main narrative source for the years that followed the conquest of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204. It appears, however, as a currently used term in the narrative sources after the recapture of Constantinople by Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259-1282) in 1261. George Pachymeres uses the term δῆμος only sporadically. The historians of the 14th century, however, such as Nicephorus Gregoras and John Cantacuzenus refer quite often to the

10. The reference to the δήμος in the chronicle of his contemporary Theodore Skoutariotes is found principally in the parts of his work copied from earlier sources; consequently, the term δήμος in Skoutariotes’ work should not be taken as a currently used term. See Ἀνωνύμου σύνοψις χρονική (Theodore Skoutariotes), ed. K. Sathas, in: Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη, vol. 7, Venice – Paris 1894, 1-556, here 22, 237, 312), where the transfer of quotations from the historical work of Nicetas Choniates is obvious. See mainly Scutariotes 508 and Choniates 235 respectively. Also, in a later Life of the saint King John the Merciful is referred that the emperor had been chosen for the throne by everybody «βασιλέως τὸν τότε, στρατηγῶν, ἡγεμόνων, στρατοπεδίου παντός, τῶν ἐν τέλει, τῶν εἰς δήμον τελούντων, ἑφαρμάξεις αὐτής, οὖν δέντες ἀντετίστοντο». The Life was written between 1365 and 1370 and there is obviously used the current terminology of the time. See A. Heisenberg, Kaiser Johannes Batatzes der Barmherzige. Eine mittelgriechische Legende, BZ 14 (1905) 160-233, here 162, 197.


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δήμος and its action. Finally, references to the δήμος are also found in the 15th century authors, although they are quite rare. The references to the δήμος concern primarily the imperial capital and some provincial cities, such as Thessalonica, Adrianople, Didymoteichon, Gallipoli, Heracleia Pontica, Bizye, Berroia and Edessa in Macedonia, and Arta.

Let us first see what the social composition of the δήμος was. Generally, the δήμος is distinguished from the senate and the nobility, the clergy and the army. According to our literary sources the term denotes above all the


14. See mainly George Pachymeres, III, 221-223; Nicephorus Gregoras I, 531; John Cantacuzenus II, 297; Doukas, 83.

See mainly Nicephorus Gregoras I, 500; John Cantacuzenus I, 271.

16. See mainly John Cantacuzenus II, 176, 179.


18. John Cantacuzenus III, 278.


23. John Cantacuzenus I, 518. According to the evidence of the sources similar references also concern other provincial cities such as Serres, Melnik, Philippopolis, Patra, the island of Tenedos (see below notes 68-73).

24. Nicephorus Gregorians I, 68 «καὶ πάντας ῥαδίως ἐφείλκετο, ταξιάρχους, λοχαγοὺς, στρατόν, στρατηγοὺς, τοῖς ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου, καὶ ὅσοι τῆς συγκλήτου», 191, 397; Idem II, 634 «ἐποπευθήσαν δ’ οἱ περὶ αὐτῶν ἄπαντες στρατιώται, καὶ ὅσοι τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης τῷ ἐκκριτῷ, καὶ κινεῖται κατ’ αὐτῶν ὁ δήμος ὑγιάδαιος», 846 (Sometimes the δήμος denotes one part of the soldiers, see Nicephorus Gregorians I, 65 «ὅσοι τοῦ ἐν ἀξιώματι καὶ ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου τοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ»); John Cantacuzenus II, 297 «καθάπαξ γάρ εἰς δῶν διαμεθεῖσαι, στρατιὰ μὲν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ἄριστοι τῶν πολιτῶν τῷ Κατακουζηνίῳ τοῦ βασιλέως ἡρωντό, ἐκείνων οἰόμενοι δυνήσαντας τὰς κατασχούσας στῆσειν σιμφοράς.
citizens of the middle social stratum, who were distinguished socially and economically.

In the 14th century Nicephorus Gregoras distinguishes a category of citizens as «τινὲς ἐκ τοῦ δήμου παιδείας εὖ ἔχοντες» (those from the people who were well educated)\(^\text{25}\), «ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου τῶν Βυζαντίων ἐτύγχανον ἔκκριτοι» (those from the people of Constantinople who were prominent)\(^\text{26}\), «ὅσοι τοῦ Βυζαντίων δήμου συνετώτεροι εἶναι ἐδόκουν» (those from the people of Constantinople who were the wisest)\(^\text{27}\). These were representatives of the people, who thanks to their education and their socio-economic position participated in political affairs. In the first case they were delegates of the people who participated in an embassy sent by Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282-1328) to his grandson Andronicus during the first civil conflict of the 14th century. In the second case these were representatives of the δῆμος of Constantinople who took part in a trial in 1339, while in the third case they were the representatives of the people of the capital who participated in an assembly called in 1348 by the Empress Irene.

This category of citizens must be identical to the «κρείττους ἄλλως τῶν οἰκητόρων» (those who were in a better position than the others) of George Akropolites\(^\text{28}\), to the «τῆς πολιτείας ὅσον ἦν περιψανὲς»\(^\text{29}\), ὅσον oἱ δῆμοι ἃ, τῶν στασιαστῶν ἐνσώγαντων ... »; Doukas, 83. See also Georgios Sphrantzes. Memori 1401-1477, ed. V. GreCU, Bucharest 1966, 536, where the δῆμος is discriminated from the nobles.

\(^{25}\) Nicephorus Gregoras I, 397 «κἀκεῖθεν πρεσβεύεται πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα καὶ πάππον δυοῖν ζητημάτων ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐκ τῶν τῆς συγκλήτου τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀρχόντων, καὶ εἰ τινὲς ἐκ τοῦ δήμου παιδείας εὖ ἔχοντες εἶεν, οἵτινες ἱκανοὶ ὑπ' ἐκείνου λεχθησόμενα ἀπαγγεῖλαι τῷ τε βασιλεῖ καὶ ὅλῳ τῷ Βυζάντιῳ».

\(^{26}\) Nicephorus Gregoras I, 531 «μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα συνηθροικὼς πάσαν τὴν σύγκλητον καὶ τοὺς ἐν Βυζαντίῳ τηνικαῦτα ἐπισκόπους σύν γε τῷ πατριάρχῃ, καὶ ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου τῶν Βυζαντίων ἐτύγχανον ἔκκριτοι, εἰς μέδον ἤγειρε τοὺς τα στασιαστὰς τοὺς στασιώτας, καὶ ὅσοι ἐτύγχανον μάρτυρες».

\(^{27}\) Nicephorus Gregoras II, 846.

\(^{28}\) Georgii Acropolitae Opera, ed. A. Heisenberg, Leipzig 1903 (Stuttgart 1978), 77 «καὶ οἳ μετ' οὐ πολὺ ὁμοθυμαδὸν συνειλεγμένοι καὶ τοὺς ἐν στρατείᾳ κατειλεγμένους, ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου τῶν Βυζαντίων ἐτύγχανον ἔκκριτοι, εἰς μέδον ἤγειρε τοὺς τα στασιαστὰς τοὺς στασιώτας, καὶ ὅσοι ἐτύγχανον μάρτυρες».

\(^{29}\) George Pachymeres II, 341; Idem III, 211.
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ἔν τῆς πολιτείας καθαρόν τε καὶ ἔκκριτον» (the most prominent of the citizens) of George Pachymeres and to the «ἐν λόγῳ τῶν πολιτῶν» (the prominent among the citizens) of John Cantacuzenus. Similar might be the expression «τῆς πολιτείας ἄρχοντες» or «πολιτικοὶ ἄρχοντες», which is found mainly in documentary sources of the 14th and 15th centuries. These citizens and archontes were also distinguished from the senate and the nobles and represented the people in various collective bodies (provincial...
councils, synods, assemblies, trials) as well as in the entrance of the emperor in the capital\textsuperscript{33}.

But who belonged to this category of citizens? According to the aforementioned sources they were educated people of a prominent social and economic status. Apparently they did not belong to the high aristocracy of the state, they did not hold an honorific title or office, but most probably came from the upper class of the middle social stratum\textsuperscript{34}. G. Weiss has suggested that the representatives of the δήμος, who participated in a synod against Palamas in the 14th century, were the δήμαρχοι of Constantinople\textsuperscript{35}. The δήμαρχοι, who along with the δήμος had gradually lost their power during the middle Byzantine period, appear to have specific duties in the Palaeologan period\textsuperscript{36}. According to their appointments’ letter, the δήμαρχοι were responsible for the security and maintenance of the urban fortification in their region and also for the keeping of order\textsuperscript{37}. In the early 14th century

33. See the notes above and also Kontogiannopoulou, Αστικά συμβούλια, 17-18, 25-26.

34. The middle social stratum was a broad social category, which included heterogeneous elements, i.e. both wealthy merchants and professionals, also owners of large urban and rural property and of medium-size holdings. See mainly G. Litavrin, Sovety I rasskazy Kekavmena, Moskau 1972, 332; H. Beck, Das byzantinische Jahrtausend, München 1978, 253; E. de Vries - van der Velden, L’élite byzantine devant l’avance turque à l’époque de la guerre civile de 1341 à 1354, Amsterdam 1987, 58; P. Schreiner, Byzanz [Oldenbourg Grundriss der Geschichte 22], München\textsuperscript{2} 1994, 38; Matschke – Tinnefeld, Gesellschaft, 100.


36. Matschke, Konstantinopol, 157-158, where all the former bibliography about the δήμαρχοι is listed.

two of them had been chosen to assist with the control of Constantinople’s provision in cereals. It is possible that the most prominent of the δήμαρχοι could participate in public affairs, although our knowledge about their social position does not allow us to place them with certainty in the middle social stratum.

Other prominent members of the organizations who were active in the city’s districts under the leadership of the δήμαρχοι could probably participate in the public affairs. Demetrius Cydones in his correspondence mentions the social rise of a man who was a servant and gradually acquired wealth and rose to the middle social stratum. Furthermore, the δήμαρχος of his district praised him for his participation in the public affairs.

This category may also have included wealthy merchants and bankers, educated officials, who were participated in the civic councils and also representatives of the professional societies and associations and shipowners.


39. For example we know nothing about the social position of the two δήμαρχοι (Antiocheites and Ploumes) of the early 14th c. mentioned above (n. 37). See also Matschke, Konstantinopel, 158ff.


In the sources of the period with which we are concerned the middle social grouping is also denoted by other expressions, which identify more precisely this social category. John Cantacuzenus in the 14th century mentions the μέσοι of citizens, who are distinguished from the ἄριστοι (aristocracy) and the δήμος, which denotes here the lower strata of the urban population. Other sources mention the μεσότης, the second and μέση μοῖρα, terms which also denote the middle social class. It is possible that the use of these terms is connected with the growth of commercial and banking activities in Byzantium, especially in the 14th century, which made the middle social stratum more distinct in certain authors of that period.

The fact that the term μέσοι is not found in the sources in the 15th century has led to the theory that the middle social stratum disappears from the sources because it coincides with the aristocracy. The present analysis, τῶν τοιούτων; George Sphrantzes, 536-538, where among the δήμος of Monembasia are mentioned persons «ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ μὲν ἱκανόπλοιοι τε καὶ θαλαττουργοί, καὶ νίκαι ἐμπορικά πλείστας ἔχοντες». Cf. Charanis, People, 70, 76-78. About the economic activities of the middle social class see N. Oikonomides, Hommes d'affaires grecs et Latins à Constantinople (XIII-XV siècle), Paris 1979, 53 ff. For those who were occupied with maritime professions see also below n. 54. For the late Byzantine professional societies see G. Maniatis, The Domain of Private Guilds in the Byzantine Economy, Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries, DOP 55 (2001) 339-369.


46. Φιλοθέου Κονσταντινοπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου Αγιολογικά Έργα vol. 1, ed. D. Tsames, Thessalonica 1979, 164 «οὔτε τῆς βουλῆς ταύτα καὶ τῶν ἀρίστων, οὔτε γε τῆς δευτέρας καὶ μέσης, ὡς ἂν εἶποι τις, μοίρας, ἀλλὰ τοῦ πολλοῦ καὶ συρφετώδους ἀνθρώπων».


49. Oikonomides, Hommes d'affaires, 115-123.
however, makes it clear that the middle social stratum does not disappear in the 15th century, but as in the 13th, the 14th and the 15th century one part of it is determined with expressions such as «ἐκκριτοὶ τοῦ δήμου» and «τῆς πολιτείας» mentioned above. These representatives of the popular classes could participate in the provincial council of the archontes, in assemblies, in trials and embassies and claim, through their involvement in public affairs, a share in power.\(^{50}\)

Another notion of the δήμος in the period under study is that of the lower social stratum of the urban populations. Alexios Makrembolites in his “Dialogue between the rich and the poor” includes in the category of the poor (πένητες), «τοὺς τὴν γήν ἐργαζομένους, τοὺς τὰς οἰκίας, τοὺς τὰς ὀλκάδας, τοὺς χειρεπιστήμονας, δι’ ὅν αἱ πόλεις πᾶσαι συνίστανται»\(^{51}\). Also, John Cantacuzenus in his term “demos” the lower stratum of the urban populations, which is distinguished from the nobles and the middle stratum of citizens (μέσους)\(^{52}\) and elsewhere from the merchants, the soldiers, the artisans and the clergymen\(^{53}\). John Cantacuzenus mentions that at the beginning of the great civil conflict in 1347 one of the instigators of the revolt against him in Adrianople was «Βράνος τοὔνομα τοῦ δήμου εἷς, σκαπάνῃ προσέχων καὶ χερὶ καὶ γλίσχρως ἐκ τούτων ποριζόμενος τὸν βίον»\(^{54}\). It is obvious that according to Cantacuzenus the δήμος had included the economically and socially lower members of the merchants and the artisans, who did not belong to the middle class. The same historian, however, mentions the «ναυτικόν» as part of the δήμος.

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52. John Cantacuzenus II, 177-179, 352, 490.
53. John Cantacuzenus III, 34, 227. Also the «δημώδης ὄχλος» (III, 120) is distinguished from the soldiers and the senators.
54. John Cantacuzenus II, 176. However, as Michael Angold has pointed out, Cantacuzenus wanted to underestimate his opponents and Branos probably belonged to a higher social grouping than the emperor was willing to describe. He possessed a house and was still prominent in the city’s affairs even after it had returned to the Cantacuzenus allegiance. See John Cantacuzenus II, 485, 557. Cf. M. Angold, Archons and dynasts: Local aristocracies and the cities of the later byzantine empire, in: The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries, ed. M. Angold, Oxford 1984, 236-253, here p. 248.
that is seamen in general, who could come from both the middle and the lower social stratum\textsuperscript{55}.

The historians of the period, representatives of the upper social class\textsuperscript{56}, often use negative characterizations for the common people. In the historical work of George Pachymeres the δήμος is equated to the vulgar mob which, according to the author, demanded the creation of a fleet and for that reason in 1305 erupted in bloody riots against the Catalans and the Genoese in Constantinople, despite the intervention of the patriarch\textsuperscript{57}. In addition, Nicephorus Gregoras quite often identifies the mob with the δήμος, for whom he usually employs negative characterizations\textsuperscript{58}. Also, John Cantacuzenus uses negative expressions for the δήμος, which is motivated by irrational impulse\textsuperscript{59}, is at archontes’ and demagogues’ beck and call\textsuperscript{60}, while for the rebels of the great civil conflict of the 14th century he mentions that «ἐπιπολὺ τῶν ἀπορωτάτων καὶ λωποδυτῶν καὶ τοιχωρύχων ὄντες, αὐτοὶ τε ὑπὸ τῆς πενίας ἀναγκαζόμενοι οὐδὲν εἴασαν ἀτόλμητον, καὶ τοὺς δήμους ἐνήγον πρὸς τὰ ἱσα, τὴν πρὸς βασιλέα τὸν Παλαιολόγον εὔνοιαν ὑποχρινόμενοι, διὸ καὶ πιστοτάτους ἑαυτοὺς προσηγορεύκασιν»\textsuperscript{61}.

\textsuperscript{55} John Cantacuzenus II, 544-545 «ἐς τὴν ὑστεραίαν γὰρ Τζεφραίτις ἐκ τῶν οἰκετῶν μεγάλου δουκάς ... ὑπὲρ τοῦ δεσποτῶν ἀμνόμενος, τὸν δήμον ἐκίνει καὶ μάλιστα τὸ ναυτικόν, εὐνοιαν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἐκτιμήμενον ὦ μικράν, οἷα δὴ περὶ αὐτοὺς ἐκ τῶν ἀπορωτάτων μαθητῶν.» According to him the «ναυτικόν» in Thessalonica had its own organization, which was different from that of «τῆς ἄλλης πόλεως», see John Cantacuzenus II, 575. Cf. Maniatis, Guilds, 355, where the author remarks that it was about an association of seamen independently of their social and economic status, like ship-owners, skippers, common seamen and longshoremen.

\textsuperscript{56} For the social position of the late Byzantine historians see H. Hunger, Βυζαντινή Λογοτεχνία, vol. 2, Athens 1992, p. 282ff.

\textsuperscript{57} George Pachymeres IV, 581 «τοῦτο γνοὺς ὁ πατριάρχης, ὁ πατωμάχος ἀπάρας ὡς εἴη τῆς κατοικίας ἢ που κατώκει, ἔργον ἔχων τὸ αὐτοῦ, καὶ τῶν ἀνανομής καὶ τῶν ἀνομίων τοὺς, ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀναδεις πολιτειῶν καὶ τῶν ξυγκλητίων καὶ τῶν κατοικίας τῆς πόλεως Κατελάνοις εὐχερεμένω.»


\textsuperscript{59} John Cantacuzenus III, 290 «ὁ δήμος αὐθῆς ἀλόγον φερόμενος ὀρμή», 304.

\textsuperscript{60} John Cantacuzenus I, 274; Idem II, 177; Idem III, 304.

\textsuperscript{61} John Cantacuzenus II, 177-178, 298.
Moreover, Doukas identifies the demos with the vulgar people\(^{62}\), while he also refers to the rabble\(^{63}\). The fact that references to δῆμος appear with greater frequency in the work of John Cantacuzenus than in the work of George Pachymeres and Nicephorus Gregoras is explained by the emphasis given by the emperor-author on the description of the social conflicts of his time\(^{64}\).

In the period with which we are concerned the δῆμος also denotes a wide social group, usually distinguished by the aristocracy, the army and the clergy, which obviously included the middle and lower strata of the urban population without clear social distinction. The δῆμος in this wider sense participates in various court ceremonies, such as imperial investiture\(^{65}\) and the entrance of the emperor in the city\(^{66}\), and in many cases, especially during the turbulent period of civil wars, it undertakes political action\(^{67}\). In those cases, when the δῆμος is not distinguished from other social groups,
it is possible that it indicates the entire urban population, although, in our opinion, the term in its wide sense addresses mainly the middle and lower strata of the urban population.

The notion of δῆμος as defined in the afore-mentioned categories is also expressed by other terms used in this period, such as «λαός», «οἰκήτορες», «πολίται», «καλλιούπολις...πέπτωκε μὲν καὶ αὐτὴ τῶν ἄλλων μᾶλλον, ὁ δῆμος δὲ ἅπας διεσώθη ἐν τοῖς πλοίοις, ἃ ἦσαν ἐκεί πολλά».

68. See for example, John Cantacuzenus III, 278 «Καλλιούπολις...πέπτωκε μὲν καὶ αὐτὴ τῶν ἄλλων μᾶλλον, ὁ δῆμος δὲ ἅπας διεσώθη ἐν τοῖς πλοίοις, ἃ ἦσαν ἐκεί πολλά».

69. George Akropolites, 6; George Pachymeres ΙΙΙ, 97 «λαὸς ἅπας τῆς πολιτείας»; Idem IV, 321; Nicephorus Gregoras I, 252, 319; Doukas, 83 «τὸν χυδαῖον λαὸν» and 317 «ὁ χυδαῖος οὖν καὶ ἀγοραῖος λαὸς»; George Sphrantzes, 204, 292, where are mentioned the «ἐγκριτοί» of the fortress of Patra who along with the people yielded the city to Thomas Palaeologus (around 1429).

70. George Akropolites, 6-8, 10, 12 «ἢ καὶ παρὰ τῶν οἰκητόρων μετακληθέντες εἰς τὴν τῆς χώρας δεφένδευσιν», 22, 40 «ἐπαιτηλοῖς δὲ λόγοις τοὺς οἰκήτορας ὑπελθών, ὡς πλουτίσειε τούτους ἄκρως καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Ῥωμαίων ὑπερυψώσειεν», 77 «ὁ χυδαῖος οὖν καὶ ἀγοραῖος λαὸς»; Nicephorus Gregoras Ι, 457 «ὁ βασιλεὺς ἱκανὸν ἐπέθετο τοῖς περὶ τὸν Αἷμον πολιχνίοις καὶ εἵλε μικροῦ πάντα ἀπονητί, τῶν οἰκητόρων προσεῤῥυηκότων ἑκόνων»; John Cantacuzenus Ι, 104 «αὐτὴ τὰς πόλεις δεικνύοντας ἐπεί συνετωτέροις τε καὶ στρατηγωτέροις».

71. George Sphrantzes, 196. See also George Akropolites, 7; Nicephorus Gregoras Ι, 101 «ἐκόντων τῶν πολιτῶν»; Idem II, 673 «σταγωνάζει λαμπρῶς τοὺς πολίτας»; John Cantacuzenus III, 104 «οἱ τ’ ἐπεστηκότες καὶ τὰς πόλεις δεικνύοντας, ἵπ τ’ ἔφεστηκότες ταῖς πόλεις δεικνύοντας, ὡς τ’ ἐπεστηκότες ταῖς πόλεις δεικνύοντας».


73; Idem 83; Idem
«πολιτεία»72, «ἔποικοι»73. It is significant that in the 13th century George Akropolites, who does not use the term δῆμος as already mentioned, refers «τοὺς τῆς Αδριανοῦ οἰκήτορας» (the inhabitants of Adrianople), while John Cantacuzenus in the next century mentions «τὸν Άδριανουπολιτῶν δήμον» (Adrianoples’ demos)74. Sometimes these terms are used alternatively with δῆμος. For example, George Pachymeres in a passage of his history writes that «δῆμος ἄπας ... ὅσος τε Ρωμαϊκὸς καὶ ὅσος ἄλλος ἐξ ἄλλων γενόν τε καὶ γλωσσῶν, καὶ μᾶλλον Ἰταλικός» along with members of the upper social class and the clergy were about to welcome the kings, while elsewhere he mentions that «ἄμα δὲ καὶ λαὸς, ὅσοι τῶν Γραικῶν καὶ ὅσοι τῶν Ἰταλῶν» were participating in a church ceremony75. Moreover, George Akropolites mentions that the οἰκήτορες of Philippiopolis refused to welcome Alexius III (1195-1203) in 120376, George Pachymeres in 1268 mentions that the ἔποικοι of Mesembria and Anchialos did not accept that these cities were to be yielded to the king of Bulgaria Constantine Tich (1257-1277)77, while George Sphrantzes in the early 15th century mentions the denial of the δῆμος of Sparta to welcome the despote Theodore I78.

According to the above it is evident that the δῆμος in that period denotes a broad social body, which includes both members of the middle and lower strata of the population. Contemporary sources do not provide much information about the organization of the δῆμος. It is known that there was a kind of organization in the districts of Constantinople under

93. George Akropolites, 75 «ἐπεί δὲ φθάσοι ἐς Μελένικον, πάντα προῦπτα τοῖς ἔποικοις ποιεῖται καὶ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς διεγείρει προδοῦν τὸ ἄστυ τῷ βασιλεῖ». These terms, however, could also denote all the urban population, as is shown in the footnotes referred to them. Especially the ἔποικοι and οἰκήτορες, who are usually found in the sources next to the archontes and the clergy, seems that they were denoting the organized people and they were receiving privileges from the byzantine emperors. See Patlagean, L’immunité, 596-597.
94. George Akropolites, 21-22; John Cantacuzenus III, 243-244.
95. George Pachymeres IV, 321 and III, 31 respectively.
96. George Akropolites, 8.
97. George Pachymeres II, 443.
98. George Sphrantzes, 204 «οὐκ ἤθελον δεχθῆναι αὐτὸν ὁ δῆμος ἀλλὰ μάλιστα καὶ ὠρευόμετον ἐνέπλυνον».

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the supervision of the «δήμαρχοι»

79. Nicephorus Gregoras II, 608; George Sphrantzes, 386.

80. See above n. 36.


82. Doukas, 75.


participated in the demos’ organization as its representatives in the council of archontes in the provincial cities, like Thessalonica and Serres, or in assemblies, synods, trials and other public events so in the capital as in other cities. The process of selecting the representatives of the people and the function of its organization it is not known. The evidence of the sources permit us to suggest that the δῆμος or its representatives did not act as an independent political authority, except perhaps from the period of civil conflicts, but participated in the exercise of power mainly through the institutional collective bodies, such as the council of archontes in the provincial cities and assemblies.

The members of the δῆμος acted collectively and participated in various public events, such as the entrance of the emperor in the capital or other cities and in court ceremonies. The demos, usually through its representatives, participated also in church synods, assemblies, trials and embassies. In addition, it could display its discontent on several occasions.

85. See above n. 31, 32.

86. It seems that the distinction between the «συγκλητικοί» and «τῆς πολιτείας ἄρχοντες» was primarily social and denoted the members of the high aristocracy that participated along with the members of the middle social stratum in the council of archontes in the provincial cities or in various public affairs in the capital.

The people’s organization in the Byzantine cities was never ceased to exist and the people undertook political action (see for example in the 10th century Leonis Diaconi Historiae, ed. C. B. Hase [CSHB 11], Bonn 1828, 100, where the senate is distinguished by the prominent citizens; in the 11th century see Michael Attaliates, 244). But its participation in decision-making passed normally through the official institutions of the state, as mentioned above. Only in the 15th century is the politeia treated in the sources as an independent political power, when asked its opinion in crucial matters, like the choice of an emperor (see below n. 93-95). But even then it does not seem to influence substantially political developments.

87. See John Cantacuzenus I, 426; Idem II, 491; Doukas, 139. See also George Pachymeres III, 97, 261; Idem IV, 321, 401, 413, 445.

88. George Pachymeres III, 221; Doukas, 111. See also George Akropolites, 6 (βασιλεὺς παρὰ παντὸς ἀνεγορεύεται τοῦ λαοῦ).

89. George Pachymeres III, 103 (trial of Bekkos, «τῶν λαϊκῶν οἱ ἐλλόγιμοι»), 211 (trial of Strategopoulos in 1294 «τῶν τῆς πολιτείας δοῦν περιφανεῖς τε καὶ ἔκκριτον»); Idem IV, 449 (trial of despote Michael Angelos in 1304 «τῶν τῆς πολιτείας»), 595-597 (harangue);
occasions\(^{90}\) by taking part in uprisings\(^{91}\) thus affecting in many cases political developments, especially during the civil wars of the 14th century\(^{92}\). Moreover, from the second half of the 14th century, when the Byzantine State became gradually tributary of the Ottoman sultan, it seems that the citizens were taken into account, at least formally, in decision making. Both Laonikos Chalkokondyles and George Sphrantzes mention the question addressed by Bayezid to the citizens of Constantinople (Βυζάντιοι), during the conflict between Manuel II (1391-1425) and Andronicus IV (1376-1379) for the occupation of the throne, about their preference for the succession of the byzantine throne\(^{93}\). The «πολιτεία»\(^{94}\), that is the representatives of the δῆμος, appears in this political context as a third pole of power next

Nicephorus Gregoras I, 70, 169-170 (trial of Bekkos, «δοσιν των ἐλλογίμων»), 395-398 (embassy), 531 (trial of conspirators in 1336), 557 (trial of Barlaam in 1341 «Οθεν ἔκπροπο τον ἐν υἱοτητικήν δικαιώμαν ἐν το μεγάς ὑπάλληλο συγκλήτων», καὶ δόσιν των συγκλήτων ἀνδρῶν); Idem III, 538 «καὶ ἀμα θυσίαν γεννημένον, καὶ οὐκ οὗτος τοῦ ἐμποτισθηναι τοὺς του μεγίστου νεωτέρους, καὶ ἀνδρόν καὶ δοῦν τοῦ ἄνθρωπος πληροφοροῦσιν το χρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου»;

John Cantacuzenus I, 385-388 (assembly in Chios), 522 (assembly in Arta); Idem II, 217 (assembly), 351 (assembly), 420 (assembly), 490 (assembly); Laonikos Chalkokondyles I, 57; George Sphrantzes, 196.

90. Nicephorus Gregoras I, 169 «καὶ ἔσται κατὰ τῶν δοκοῦντων ἂν ἰκεῖν ἐκ τοῦ δήμου λοιπονία μακρά, νῦν μὲν ὑπὸ διδάσκοντος πολιτείας προερχόμενον μετὰ δὲ ἐκάκιος ἐστιν ὁ δήμος ἀνακεκαλυμμένη καὶ ἐπαύθρο».


92. Nicephorus Gregoras I, 501 (where many of the people the patriotic to negotiations for the union with the Latin Church); John Cantacuzenus I, 104 «... οἱ τ’ ἐφετεροτέτες ταῖς πόλεσιν ἕγερμον, ὑπὸ τοῦ τῶν ἐκακοῦσο τοι στασιωτῶν ἀνακιδοτῶ», τον ἑδράνδας δεδομένας τῆς τύχης, οὐκ εἰδότες πρὸς ὑπόστερον τῶν βασιλεῶν τὸ κράτος χωρίσει, τὸ δυνατοτέρῳ τὸν ἐν ἐνοπηγένη καὶ αὐτοῖς ἐπικεφαλεῖν παραδούσιν τὰς πόλεις». Also in 1347 the money-changers were strong enough to prevent the imposition of economic measures by John Cantacuzenus (III, 34-42). Cf. Oikonomides, Hommes d’affaires, 64.

93. Laonikos Chalkokondyles I, 57. See also George Sphrantzes, 196.

94. Critoboulos, 41.
to the senate and the emperor, although they do not seem to substantially influence political developments.95

Through its collective action, δῆμος was trying to make its own demands, which were first of all the protection of the empire’s territory and the reinforcement of its defense. When the ruler was indifferent or detrimental to the state’s territorial integrity, the people of the cities took its fate in their own hands exercising in this way pressure on the governor for a more rational foreign policy. The sources give us many examples. George Pachymeres, for example, mentions the discontent of the people, because of the reduction of maritime forces by Andronicus II and the popular outburst against the Catalans and the Genoese of the capital in 1305 after the attack led by the first against the Byzantines.96

Also, in many cases the citizens of provincial cities decided whether to permit the entrance of a specific individual in their city97 as well as to support one or another potential ruler.98 We only mention the case of despote Theodore I of Peloponnese, who between 1397 and 1404 had decided, before the Ottoman threat, to yield most of his territory to the Knights of St John of Rhodes. The inhabitants of Sparta, however, refused to welcome the Knights and «πολεμεῖν Ῥοδίοις φανερός ἦρξατο, καὶ ψήφισμα γέγονε κοινόν, ὅρκοις τὸ βέβαιον ἐσχήκατο, ἡ τούς Φρειρίους ἐξελάσαι τῆς αὐτῶν ἢ τεθνάναις»100. With the bishop of the city at their head, they rose in revolt101. The despote Theodore I regained his territory, and in 1404 the treaty of Vassilopotamos forced the Knights withdrawn from the towns they had seized102.

95. See also Kiousopoulos, Emperor or Manager, 169-170.
97. George Akropolites, 8, 10 (the citizens of Nicaea); Doukas, 89.
98. George Akropolites, 21 (the citizens of Adrianople), 75, 149, 172; George Pachymeres II, 443; Nicephorus Gregoras I, 16, 457; Doukas, 81-83; D. Balfour, Politico-historical Works of Symeon archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429) [WBS 13], Wien 1979, 57.
99. PLP, no. 21640.
101. George Sphrantzes, 204.
102. D. Zakythinos, Le Despotat grec de Morée. Vie et institutions, London 1975, 95. See also George Sphrantzes, 204, where the δῆμος of Sparta refused to welcome the despote Theodore I in the city.
Moreover, the people demanded that economic pressures and social injustices affecting mainly the middle and lower strata be reduced. According to Nicephorus Gregoras, Andronicus III gained the sympathy of the people of the Thrace and the capital in his fight against his grandfather Andronicus II, with promises for reduction of taxes and deliverance from the political inaction of the old emperor, which had enabled the state enemies to prey upon its lands and occupy its cities\textsuperscript{103}. Also, in 1347 the money-changers of Constantinople put political pressure on John Cantacuzenus and thus prevented the imposition of economic measures by the emperor\textsuperscript{104}. In addition, Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonica in the early 15th century, reproached, the archontes of the city because they perpetrated injustices\textsuperscript{105}.

We also mention the protests of both the patriarch Athanasius and Nicolaus Cabasilas against the speculators\textsuperscript{106} and the social contradictions highlighted by Alexios Makrembolites\textsuperscript{107}. Especially during the second civil war of the 14th century the social rivalries, which were smoldering mainly in the urban centers, manifested in violence. The regime of Zealots in Thessalonica that prevailed for almost a decade was the culmination of those rivalries\textsuperscript{108}.

The people also defended the preservation of the Orthodox doctrine and expressed their opposition to the Union with the Latin Church\textsuperscript{109}, although

\textsuperscript{103} Nicephorus Gregoras I, 392, 397, 399.
\textsuperscript{104} John Cantacuzenus III, 34-42. Cf. Oikonomides, Hommes d’affaires, 64.
\textsuperscript{105} Balfour, Symeon, 47 «Καὶ ἄρχοντες μὲν κατασπαταλοῦσιν, θηραμφίζοντι τε καὶ ἐπεφαίνουσιν κατὰ τὸν ὑπὸ χείρα, πάν ἀδικίας ἔρχεται διαφανεῖς, οὐ μόνον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄρχοντα ἀδικίας θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ κατασπατάλησιν καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι ἄρχοντες ἐργασίαν λείποντα καὶ τὸ τοῖς πενομένοις καὶ υπ’ αὐτοῦς μηδὲ φύσεως ἀνθρωπίνης σχεδὸν εἶναι νομίζειν».
\textsuperscript{106} George Pachymeres IV, 509; Maffry Talbot, Correspondence, no. 106; R. Guilland, Le traité inédit ‘Sur l’usure’ de Nicolas Cabasilas, in: Εἰς μνήμην Σπ. Λάμπρου, Athens 1935, 269-277.
\textsuperscript{107} Alexios Makrembolites, 203-215.
\textsuperscript{109} Doukas, 317 «Ὁ χυδαῖος οὖν καὶ ἄγοραῖος λαὸς ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ μοναστηρίου, ἐν καπηλείοις κρατῶντες ἐν χερσὶ τὰς φιάλας πλήρεις ἀκράτου ἀναθεμάτιζον τοὺς ἑνωτικοὺς, πίνοντες εἰς πρεσβείαν τῆς εἰκόνος τῆς Θεομήτορος».
in some cases representatives of the people proposed the reconciliation of the two Churches\(^{110}\).

The expression of popular discontent in combination with the general weakening of the Byzantine State led the emperors to come into frequent contact with the δῆμος or its representatives, through the convocation of assemblies or harangues\(^{111}\) that they addressed to it in various circumstances so as to justify or impose their policy. We mention indicatively two cases where the emperors appealed to popular approval for economic or defence issues. First, the assembly called in 1347 by John Cantacuzenus for the ratification of tax measures\(^{112}\). Second, the assembly called in 1348 by the Empress Irene in order to respond appropriately to the embassy of the Genoese, who demanded the disarmament of the Byzantine fleet. The senators and «δοσις του Βυζαντιων δημου συνεπτωτεροι ειναι έδοχουν» attended this assembly and the Empress inquired «την έκαστου γνώμην»\(^{113}\).

Moreover, the concession of privileges to the cities especially from the early 13th century onwards, as also the judicial reforms by the first Palaeologoi are illustrative examples of the emperors’ efforts to fulfill the demands of the δῆμος, in its wide sense\(^{114}\).

To summarize, the presence of the δῆμος in the sources of the period under study is not simply a re-use of the classical term derived from ancient literature but is related to the reorganization of the capital after its recapture in 1261, and more precisely to the organization of the city’s districts under the leadership of δήμαρχοι. The people in the provincial cities were also expressed in the sources after the reconquest of Constantinople with the term δῆμος. The δῆμος is also connected to the rise of the middle social class, which is subsumed in its notion. During these years the δῆμος was a

\(^{110}\) Nicephorus Gregoras I, 501 «ἀπεσταλμένοι παρὰ τοῦ Πάππα (1334-5), διαλέξομενοι περὶ τε εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν. καὶ ἦν εὔθυς ἰδέαν πολλοῖς τῶν τοῦ δήμου ζῆλον μὲν λαμβάνοντας, οὐ κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν δὲ, καὶ πρόχειρον τινα καὶ ἀταμίευτον προτείνοντας γλῶσσαν καὶ πρὸς γε ἐπι συνωθοῦντας καὶ αὐτόν γε τὸν πατριάρχην ἐς διαλέξεις».

\(^{111}\) George Pachymeres IV, 569, 595; Nicephorus Gregoras I, 532.

\(^{112}\) John Cantacuzenus III, 34-39.

\(^{113}\) Nicephorus Gregoras II, 846.

\(^{114}\) See Kontogiannopoulou, Ανδρόνικος, 125-127; Patlagean, L’immunité, 591-601; D. Kyritses, The 'Common Chrysobulls’ of Cities and the Notion of Property in Late Byzantium, Σύμμεικτα 13 (1999) 229-245.
not homogeneous broad social body, which included members of both the middle and the lower social stratum. It is obvious that, while representing the δῆμος in collective bodies, the members of the middle social stratum were making their own demands. General terms such as λαός, οἰκήτορες, πολίται, πολιτεία, ἔποικοι seem to have in many cases a similar meaning to that of δῆμος. Until the fall of the empire the δῆμος did not seem to act as an independent political authority which was regularly taken into account in decision making. Nevertheless, the organization and political action of the δῆμος especially through assemblies and uprisings, related to the general political developments of the era, indicate that its role in decision-making policies was in certain cases decisive.
The notion of δημοσ/δήμοι (people/circus factions) has been a favorite subject in modern research and various opinions have been formulated regarding to its organization and the role it played in political developments. In modern bibliography referred to the period with which we are concerned (13th-15th c.) the term δήμος denotes generally the lower strata of the urban population, that is, small merchants, artisans and various laborers. However, through the systematic study of that period’s sources certain nuances can be detected in the meaning of the term δήμος, which, apart from the lower social stratum, also seems to include the middle social class and moreover denotes a larger group that contains both the lower and the middle social stratum. This paper examines the concept of δήμος and similar expressions, the social composition of this body and its role in the political life of the era, based on the sources of the late Byzantine period (13th-15th c.).

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