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

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The notion of δῆμος/δήμοι (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 city\(^2\). The δήμοι, 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 δήμοι\(^3\). The leaders of the δήμοι could come from the senatorial aristocracy, from wealthy representatives of the middle

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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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⁷ See THEOPHYLACTE D’ACHRIDA LETTRES, ed. P. GAUTIER, [CFHB 16/2], Thessalonica, 1986, n. 127) «Εἰ τοίνυν μέλει σοι καὶ ἁρματηλάτην τοῦτον ἴδειν δοξιμώτατον καὶ τοῖς τῶν χρωμάτων ἐπονύμιοι δήμοις περιμάχητος θέαμα καὶ πᾶσι φιλίπποις εὔφημον λάλημα, μηκέτι τοιαύτην ἄγχε φύσιν ἐν τῇ τῆς ἑχούσης ἡμᾶς Μακεδονίας στενοχωρίᾳ, ἀλλὰ λύσον ἐπί τήν Λάρισαν.» Cf. CHRISTOFILOPOULOU, *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 δήμος denotes all the citizens without any clear social distinction. 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 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


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 δῆμος in the chronicle of his contemporary Theodore Skoutariotes is found principally in the parts of his work copied from earlier sources; consequently, the term δῆμος in Skoutariotes’ work should not be taken as a currently used term. See Ἀνωνύμου σύνοψις χρονική (Theodore Skoutariotes), ed. K. SATHAS, in: Μεσαιωνικὴ 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 τοῦ τότε, στρατηγῶν, ἥγεμονον, στραταπέδου παντός, τῶν ἐν τέλει, τῶν εἰς δήμον τελούντων, ἱεραρχίας αὐτῆς, οὐδενὸς ἀντειπόντος». 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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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, ΙΙΙ, 221-223; Nicephorus Gregoras I, 531; John Cantacuzenus II, 297; Doukas, 83.

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

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


18. John Cantacuzenus I, 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 Gregoras I, 68 «καὶ πάντας ὁδίως ἐφεύλεκτο, ταξιάρχους, λοχαγούς, στρατόν, στρατηγοὺς, τοὺς ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου, καὶ ὅσοι τῆς συγκλήτου», 191, 397; Idem II, 634 «ὑποπτεύθησαν δ’ οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν ἅπαντες στρατιῶται, καὶ ὅσον τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης τὸ ἔκκριτον, καὶ κινεῖτα κατ’ αὐτῶν ὁ δήμος ἄγχαιως», 846 (Sometimes the δήμος denotes one part of the soldiers, see Nicephorus Gregoras I, 65 «ὅσοι τῶν ἐν ἀξιώματι καὶ ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου τοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ»); John Cantacuzenus II, 297 «καθάπαξ γὰρ εἰς δύο διακαθέτεσθαι, στρατιὰ μὲν καὶ οἱ άλλοι ἄριστοι τῶν πολιτῶν τὰς Καντακουζήνην τοῦ βασιλέως ἡρωντό, ἔχειν οἴμενοι δυνήσεσθαι τὰς κατασχούσας στήσειν συμφοράς...
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)\textsuperscript{25}, «ὅσοι τοῦ δήμου τῶν Βυζαντίων ἑτύγχανον ἔκκριτοι» (those from the people of Constantinople who were prominent)\textsuperscript{26}, «ὅσοι τοῦ Βυζαντίων δήμου συνειδητοί εἶναι ἐδόξουν» (those from the people of Constantinople who were the wisest)\textsuperscript{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 δήμος 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\textsuperscript{28}, to the «τῆς πολιτείας ὅσον ἦν περιφανές», «ὅσον δὲ τῶν στασιαστῶν ἐναγόντων ... »; Doukas, 83. See also Georgios Sphrantzes. Memoriae 1401-1477, ed. V. GRECU, Bucharest 1966, 536, where the δήμος is discriminated from the nobles.

\textsuperscript{25} Nicephorus Gregoras I, 397 «καὶ αὐταὶ προσφέρεται πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα καὶ πάππον δυοῖν χρημάτων ὑπώσπον συνχωρήσαι οἶ, ἢ τὴν πρὸς τὸ Βυζάντιον ὑπόστροφον εἰσένθε, ἢ τῶν ἐν Βυζαντίῳ τινῶν εἰς ἐκείνου ἀφιέρων ἐκ τῶν τῆς συγκλήτου ἐκ τῶν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀρχόντων, καὶ εἰ τίνες ἐκ τῶν δήμου παιδείας εὐ ἔχοντες εἶν, οἵτινες ἱκανοὶ ἔσονται τὰ ὑπὲρ ἐκείνου λεξηθεισάμενα ἀπαγγέλαι τῷ τε βασιλεί ταῖς εἷς τῷ ὑπὸ τῷ Βυζαντίῳ». These are mentioned below (p. 398) as «τέτταρας τῶν τοῦ δήμου προκρίτων».

\textsuperscript{26} Nicephorus Gregoras I, 531 «μετὰ δὲ τάτα συνήθροικώς πάοντα τι τῆς σύγκλητου καὶ τοὺς ἐν Βυζαντίῳ τημικαύτα ἐπιδημοῦντας ἐπισκόπους σὺν γε τῷ πατριάρχῳ, καὶ ὡσοὶ τοῦ δήμου τῶν Βυζαντίων ἑτύγχανον ἔκκριτοι, εἰς μέσον ἤγεγκε τοὺς τοῦ στασιαστάς τοὺς τοῦ στασιώτας, καὶ ὡσοὶ ἑτύγχανον μάρτυρες». These are mentioned below (p. 398) as «τέτταρας τῶν τοῦ δήμου προκρίτων».

\textsuperscript{27} Nicephorus Gregoras II, 846.

\textsuperscript{28} Georgii Acropolitae Opera, ed. A. HEISENBERG, Leipzig 1903 (Stuttgart 1978), 77 «καὶ οἳ μετ’ οὐ πολὺ ωμοθηματικῶς πάρισιν συνειδημένοι, ὡσοὶ τοῦ πατριάρχη καὶ τῶν Βυζαντίων ἑτύγχανον ἔκκριτοι, εἰς μέσον ἤγεγκα τοὺς τοῦ στασιαστάς τοὺς τοῦ στασιώτας».

\textsuperscript{29} George Pachymeres II, 341; Idem III, 211.
ἡν τῆς πολιτείας καθαρόν τε καὶ ἔκκριτον» (the most prominent of the citizens) of George Pachymeres\textsuperscript{30} and to the «ἐν λόγῳ τῶν πολιτῶν» (the prominent among the citizens) of John Cantacuzenus\textsuperscript{31}. Similar might be the expression «τῆς πολιτείας ἄρχοντες» or «πολιτικοὶ ἄρχοντες», which is found mainly in documentary sources of the 14th and 15th centuries\textsuperscript{32}. These citizens and archontes were also distinguished from the senate and the nobles and represented the people in various collective bodies (provincial...

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\textsuperscript{31} John Cantacuzenus II, 573 «καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκκλησίαν φανερῶς συναγαγὼν ἐκ τῶν ἀρίστων καὶ τῆς στρατιᾶς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν τῶν μάλιστα ἐν λόγῳ».

\textsuperscript{32} For Constantinople see mainly Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel, vol. 2, ed. Herbert Hunger – Otto Kresten – Ewald Kislinger, Carolina Cupane, [CFHB 19/2], Wien 1995, no. 111 (1337-1338); Acta et Diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana, eds. Franciscus Miklosich – Iosephus Müller, vols. 1-6, Bonn 1860-1890, here v.2, 472, 493, 495; Critobuli Imbriotae historiae, ed. D. R. Reinsch, [CFHB 22], Berlin 1983, 41 «τιμᾶται παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ τῶν τῆς πολιτείας». For Thessalonica see Actes de Vatopédi I. Des origines à 1329, ed. J. Bompaire – J. Lefort – V. Kravari, C. Giros, Paris 2001, no. 48 (1313) «τῶν ἐκκρίτων τῆς αὐτοῦ θεοσώστου πόλεως, τῶν τῆς δηλονότι ἐκκλησιαστικῶν καὶ τῶν τῆς πολιτείας», no. 49 (1317), where they are referred as «τῆς πολιτείας ἄρχοντων», among whom is found the προκαθήμενος and the καστροφύλακας of Thessalonica and also other ἄρχοντες without offices and titles, who obviously belong to the social category, about which we are talking; Actes de Vatopédi II, no. 144 (1375). For Serres see Lisa Benou, Le codex B du monastère Saint-Jean-Prodrome (Serrès), t. 1 (XIII-XV siècles), Paris 1998, no. 23, no. 127. Cf. A. Kontogiannopoulou, Αστικά συμβούλια στο Βυζάντιο. Συμβολή στη μελέτη της συλλογικότητας κατά τους τέλευταίους βυζαντινούς αιώνες (13ος-15ος αι.), Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ελληνικά 10 (in press, 16-18). For the notion of politeia, which is traditionally related to the participation of the δῆμος in the public life (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 of the citizens; in the 11th century see Michael Attaliates, 244), in the 15th century see mainly Kiousopoulou, Emperor or Manager, 91-95; see also H.-G. Beck, Konstantinopel. Zur Socialgeschichte einer früh-mittelalterlichen Hauptstadt, BZ 58 (1965) 11-45.
councils, synods, assemblies, trials) as well as in the entrance of the emperor in the capital. 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.

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. 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. 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 1994, 38; Matschke – Tinnerfeld, Gesellschaft, 100.
36. Matschke, Konstantinopel, 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 ship-owners.

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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, *Konstantinopol*, 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...


46. Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως του Κοκκίνου Αγιολογικά Έργα vol. 1, ed. D. Tsames, Thessalonica 1979, 164 «οὐδὲ τῆς βουλῆς ταῦτα καὶ τῶν ἀρίστων, οὐδὲ γε τῆς δευτέρας καὶ μέσης, ὡς ἄν εἴποι τις, μοίρας, ἀλλὰ τοῦ πολλοῦ καὶ συρφετώδους ἀνθρώπων».

47. Matschke-Tinnefeld, Gesellschaft, 99.


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 «ἐκχωριτοὶ 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.

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 γῆν ἐργαζομένους, τοὺς τὰς οἰκίας, τοὺς τὰς ὀλκάδας, τοὺς χειρεπιστήμονας, δι᾽ ὧν αἱ πόλεις πᾶσαι συνίστανται»

Also, John Cantacuzenus in his work denotes with the term “demos” the lower stratum of the urban populations, which is distinguished from the nobles and the middle stratum of citizens (μέσους) and elsewhere from the merchants, the soldiers, the artisans and the clergymen. 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 τις τοὔνομα τοῦ δήμου εἷς, σκαπάνῃ προσέχων καὶ χερσὶ καὶ γλίσχρως ἐκ τούτων ποριζόμενος τὸν βίον»

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,
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 δῆμος 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 δῆμος, for whom he usually employs negative characterizations\textsuperscript{58}. Also, John Cantacuzenus uses negative expressions for the δῆμος, 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 «ἐπιπολύ τῶν ἀπορωτάτων καὶ λωποδυτῶν καὶ τοιχωρύχων ὄντες, αὐτοί τε ὑπὸ τῆς πενίας ἀναγκαζόμενοι οὐδὲν εἴασαν ἀτόλμητον, καὶ τοὺς δήμους ἐνῆγον πρὸς τὰ ἴσα, τὴν πρὸς βασιλέα τὸν Παλαιολόγον εὔνοιαν ὑποχρινώμενοι, δι καὶ πιστοτάτους ἑαυτούς προσηγορεύσασιν»\textsuperscript{61}.

\textsuperscript{55} John Cantacuzenus II, 544-545 «κες τὴν ὑστεραίαν γὰρ Τζεφραίτις ἐκ τῶν οἰκετῶν μεγάλων δουκάς ... ὑπὲρ τοῦ δεσπότου ἀμυνόμενος, τὸν δήμον ἐκίνει ... καὶ μάλιστα τὸ ναυτικόν, εὕρων πρὸς ἐκείνων κεκτημένοιν οὐ μικρὰν, οἷα δὴ περὶ αὐτοίς ἀει ἠσχολημένον». 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, ἀπάρας ώς ἐἰχε τῆς κατοικίας ἵππου ταχυκεῖ, ἐρχον ἐξομοίωσε τὸ σπουδαιότατον πειρὴ τὸν ἄνθρωπον σπουδαιοτιμηθέντα ... καὶ ξυγκαλεί τοὺς ξυγκάλεσας καὶ οἷς συνήθης ὁ θόρυβος ... ὁ ξυγκαλεῖ δ’ ὀχλος εἰς ταῦταν γεγονότες ... ἐγνώσαν τοῖς ἑντὸς τῆς πόλεως Κατελάνους ἐπιχειρεῖν».


\textsuperscript{59} John Cantacuzenus III, 290 «ὁ δήμος αὐθεσι ἀλάμψας ἐφερόμενος ὁμήρ», 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\textsuperscript{62}, while he also refers to the rabble\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{65} and the entrance of the emperor in the city\textsuperscript{66} and in many cases, especially during the turbulent period of civil wars, it undertakes political action\textsuperscript{67}. In those cases, when the δῆμος is not distinguished from other social groups,

\textsuperscript{62} Doukas, 83 «... ὁρῶν τὸν δῆμον ἐν διχοστασίαις ... ὁρῶν τὸν χυδαῖον λαόν».
\textsuperscript{63} Doukas, 43 «καὶ γὰρ τὸ πλεῖστον τῆς πόλεως μέρος, ὅσον τῆς γερουσίας ὅσον τὸ συρφετόν, ἐσέβετο Καντακουζηνόν».
\textsuperscript{64} Hünгер, Byzantinische Logoteknie, 321.
\textsuperscript{65} Doukas, 111. See also George Pachymeres III, 221 (the promotion of Andronicus II son, John to despote).
\textsuperscript{66} George Pachymeres IV, 321 «καὶ ὁ δῆμος ἅπας διημερεύσας ἐπὶ πολι, ὅσος τε Ῥωμαϊκὸς καὶ ὅσος ἄλλος ἄλλος ἐξ ἄλλων, ὅσον τε καὶ γλωσσῆς, καὶ μᾶλλον Ἰταλικός, σὺν τῷ περιφανεν μέρει τῆς πόλεως καὶ κλήρῳ παντί καὶ ἀρχιερεύσι, μετέφωρος ἐστι ὑπὲρ ὑποτελῶν τοὺς βασιλείς φιλοτήμος ὕποδεξόμενον»; John Cantacuzenus II, 297, 491; Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά, ed. S. Lambros, vol. 1, Athens 1912, 250. Cf. Kioussopoulos, Emperor or Manager, 112.
\textsuperscript{67} Nicephorus Gregoras I, 169 «καὶ ἔσται κατὰ τῶν δοκοῦντων ἄδικειν ἐκ τοῦ δήμου λοιδορία μαχρά, νῦν μὲν ὑπ’ ὄδοντα ψυθυριζόμενη, μετά δὲ κύκλους ἔστιν υἱὸς ἑναυτῶν ἀνακεκαλυμμένη καὶ ὑπαθρός», 319 «ἡμας ἐπὶ τὴν βασιλεύουσαν, ως αὐτέκα αἰρήσοντες στασιάξουσαν τε καὶ ἐκπεπολεμομένην πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ταῖς ἀδίκοις χερσὶν ἐκπορίζουσιν αἱ τοιαῦται τῶν πραγμάτων καινοτομίαι», 501 «ἀπεσταλμένοι παρὰ τοῦ Πάππα (1334-5), διαλεξόμενοι περὶ τε εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ ἦν εὐθὺς ἰδεῖν πολλοὺς τῶν τοῦ δήμου ζήλων μὲν λαμβάνοντας, οὐ κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν δὲ, καὶ πρόχειρων τινα καὶ ἀταμίευτον προτείνωντος γλώσσαν καὶ πρὸς γε ἑπ’ συνυθόντας καὶ αὐτῶν γε τοῦ πατριάρχην ἐξ διαλέξεις»; Idem II, 682 «ἐπειδὴ τὴν σφῶν αὐθαίρεταν ὅ,τε δῆμος ἐμίσει καὶ τὸ σφίντον αὐτοί νοοῦν τῶν ἀπολωλότων μέρος εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἤδη προὐχώρει, τὴν τοῦ δήμου πρὸς ἑκείνους ἀπέτρεψαν ἔχον»; Laonikos Chalkokondyles I, 57; Doukas, 83 «δημηγορήσας κατενώπιον πάντων τῶν ἀρίστων καὶ τῶν τοῦ δήμου».
it is possible that it indicates the entire urban population\textsuperscript{68}, 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»\textsuperscript{69}, «οἰκήτορες»\textsuperscript{70}, «πολίται»\textsuperscript{71},

\textsuperscript{68} See for example, John Cantacuzenus III, 278 «Καλλιούπολις … πέπτωκε μὲν καὶ αὐτὴ τῶν ἄλλων μᾶλλον, ὁ δῆμος δὲ ἄπας διεσώθη ἐν τοῖς πλοίοις, ἢ ἣν πέπτωκε πολλῶν».

\textsuperscript{69} George Akropolites, 6; George Pachymeres ΙΙΙ, 97 «λαὸς ἅπας τῆς πολιτείας»; Idem IV, 321; Nicephorus Gregoras Ι, 252, 319; Doukas, 83 «τὸν χυδαῖον λαὸν» and 317 «ὁ χυδαῖος οὖν καὶ ἀγοραῖος λαός»; 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).


\textsuperscript{71} George Sphrantzes, 196. See also George Akropolites, 7; Nicephorus Gregoras Ι, 101 «ἐκόντων τῶν πολιτῶν»; Idem II, 673 «οἱ τ’ ἐφεστηκότες ταῖς πόλεσιν ἡγεμόνες, ὑπὸ τε τῶν ἰδίων ἑκάστος πολιτῶν ἐκβιαζόμενοι»; John Cantacuzenus I, 104 «οἱ τ’ εφεστηκότες ταῖς πόλεις ἤγεμόνες, ὑπὸ τε τῶν ἱδίων ἑκάστος πολιτῶν ἐκβιαζόμενοι»; Idem II, 477 «πέμψας τε ὁ βασιλεὺς προσηγόρευε τοὺς πολίτας καὶ παρῆνε τοὺς πολίτας», 573 «καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκκλησίαν ἐκήρυξεν τοῖς πολίταις τῶν ἁγίων πολιτῶν». The same term is also employed for the inhabitants of Constantinople, see «Πολίταις», Theodore Skoutariotes, 216 «καὶ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως Μανουήλ παρὰ τοῖς Πολίταις ἀναγορεύσεως»; Doukas, 57; 73; Idem 83; Idem
«πολιτεία»72, «ἔποικοι»73. It is significant that in the 13th century George Akropolites, who does not use the term δήμος as already mentioned, refers «τοῖς τῆς Αδριανοῦ οἰκήτοράς» (the inhabitants of Adrianople), while John Cantacuzenas in the next century mentions «τὸν Αδριανουπολίτων δήμον» (Adrianoples’ demos)74. Sometimes these terms are used alternatively with δήμος. For example, George Pachymeres in a passage of his history writes that «δήμος ἄπα... ὅσος τε Ῥωμαῖος καὶ ὁσός ἄλλος ἐξ ἄλλων γενόν τε καὶ γλώσσαι, 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 «ἀμα δὲ καὶ λαός, ὅσοι τῶν Πρωμαῖκων καὶ ὁσοι τῶν Ίταλῶν» were participating in a church ceremony75. Moreover, George Akropolites mentions that the οἰκήτορες of Philippopolis 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 δήμος of Sparta to welcome the despote Theodore I78.

According to the above it is evident that the δήμος 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 δήμος. It is known that there was a kind of organization in the districts of Constantinople under

91. A similar meaning seem to have the expression «οἳ δὲ τῆς πόλεως», Doukas, 51 and «οἳ τῆς Κωνσταντινών», idem, 139.
73. George Akropolites, 75 «ἐπέλε δὲ φίλάσις ἐς Μελένικον, πάντα προούπα τοῖς ἐποίκοις συνείπται καὶ σφάς αὐτοῖς διεγείρει προδοοῦν τὸ ἄστυ τῷ βασιλέω». 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.
74. George Akropolites, 21-22; John Cantacuzenus III, 243-244.
75. George Pachymeres IV, 321 and III, 31 respectively.
76. George Akropolites, 8.
77. George Pachymeres II, 443.
78. George Sphrantzes, 204 «οὐκ ἤθελον δεχθῆναι αὐτὸν ὁ δήμος ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον καὶ ὑβρεῖν ενέπλυνον».
the supervision of the «δήμαρχοι»79. This organization was formed after the recapture of Constantinople in 1261 and was based on the form that existed before the conquest of the city by the crusaders in 1204. As for the leader of the δήμος in each district it seems that he used the old name of the circus-factions’ leader. As we have already mentioned the δήμαρχοι were responsible for the security and maintenance of order in the city80.

According to Pseudo-Kodinos, in court ceremonies the flag of the δήμαρχοι followed that of the despotes and the archontes81. Doukas, also, mentions the «δημοκρατούντας» as leaders of the δήμος. Specifically, when the Ottoman sultan Bayezid (1389-1402) asked from the emperor John V (1341-1391) to pay taxes and send one hundred soldiers under the leadership of John’s son, the emperor «μὴ ἔχων βοήθειαν ἐκ τινος τῶν ῥηγάδων ή τῶν ἀριστοκρατούντων, εἰς τοῦτο κατένευσεν»82. It is possible that there was a similar organization in the «γειτονίαι» (districts) of provincial cities83.

In the sources of the 14th and 15th century the «τῆς πολιτείας ἄρχοντες» or «πολιτικοί ἄρχοντες» are found, as we have already mentioned, in Constantinople, Thessalonica and Serres. They were mainly members of the middle social grouping who participated in the public affairs as representatives of the people so in Constantinople as in Thessalonica and Serres and were usually distinguished by the senate or the «συγκλητικοὺς ἄρχοντες»84. It is possible that these archontes, along with 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 «συνεκκλησιασμού» 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 Leomis 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 (βασιλεῖς παρὰ παντὸς ἀναγορεύεται τοῦ λαοῦ).

89. George Pachymeres III, 103 (trial of Bekkos, «τῶν λαϊκῶν οἱ ἐλλόγιμοι»), 211 (trial of Stratopoulous in 1294 «τῶν τῆς πολιτείας δοσον περιφανες τε καὶ ἐκχριστον»); Idem IV, 449 (trial of despote Michael Angelos in 1304 «τῶν τῆς πολιτείας»), 595-597 (harangue);
occasions\textsuperscript{90} by taking part in uprisings\textsuperscript{91} thus affecting in many cases political developments, especially during the civil wars of the 14th century\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{93}. The «πολιτεία»\textsuperscript{94}, that is the representatives of the δήμος, appears in this political context as a third pole of power next to...

Nicephorus Gregoras I, 70, 169-170 (trial of Bekkos, «όσοι τῶν ἐλλογίμων»), 395-398 (embassy), 531 (trial of conspirators in 1336), 557 (trial of Barlam in 1341 «Ὅθεν ἐκισωροῦσαν τολμήθηνα διακαστήρια εἰς τὸ μεγίστον νεώ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ Σοφίας, παράνοιας καὶ βασιλείου αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν τῆς συγκλήτου λογίων», καὶ οὕς τῶν σοφωτέρων ἀνδρῶν»); Idem III, 538 «καὶ ἔσται κατὰ τῶν δοκούντων ἀδικεῖν ἐκ τοῦ δήμου λοιδορία μακρὰ, νῦν μὲν ὑπ' οδόντα ψιθυριζομένη, μετὰ δὲ κύκλους ἐστίν οὕς ἐνιαυτῶν ἀνακεκαλυμμένη καὶ ὑπαίθρος».

90. Nicephorus Gregoras I, 169 «καὶ ἔσται κατὰ τῶν δοκούντων ἀδικεῖν ἐκ τοῦ δήμου λοιδορία μακρὰ, νῦν μὲν ὑπ' οδόντα ψιθυριζομένη, μετὰ δὲ κύκλους ἐστίν οὕς ἐνιαυτῶν ἀνακεκαλυμμένη καὶ ὑπαίθρος».


92. Nicephorus Gregoras I, 501 (where many of the people prompted the patriarch to negotiations for the union with the Latin Church); John Cantacuzenus I, 104 «... οἱ τ’ ἐφεστηκότες ταῖς πόλεσιν ἤγειμόνες, ὕπο τ' τῶν ἱδίων ἐκάστας πολιτῶν ἐκβιαζόμενοι καὶ τὴν ἁδηλίαν δεδουκότης τῆς τυχῆς, οὐκ εἰδότες πρὸς ὀπότερον τῶν βασιλέων τὸ κράτος χωρῆσαι, τὸ δυνατωτέρω γὰρ τὸ νῦν ἔχον φανομένω καὶ αὐτοῖς ἐπιπειμένω παραδώσουσι 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. OIKONOMIDÉS, 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 city\(^ {97}\) as well as to support one or another potential ruler\(^ {98}\). We only mention the case of despote Theodore I of Peloponnese\(^ {99}\), 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 φανερῶς ἧξαντο, καὶ ψήφισμα γέγονε κοινόν, ὃρκοις τὸ βέβαιον ἐσχηκός, ἢ τοὺς Φρειώνες ἐξελάσαι τῆς αὐτῶν ἢ τεθνάναι»\(^ {100}\). With the bishop of the city at their head, they rose in revolt\(^ {101}\). The despote Theodore I regained his territory, and in 1404 the treaty of Vassilopotamos forced the Knights withdrawn from the towns they had seized\(^ {102}\).

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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. 21460.


101. George Sphrantzes, 204.

102. D. Zakynthinos, 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\(^{103}\). 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\(^{104}\). In addition, Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonica in the early 15th century, reproached the archontes of the city because they perpetrated injustices\(^{105}\).

We also mention the protests of both the patriarch Athanasius and Nicolaus Cabasilas against the speculators\(^ {106}\) and the social contradictions highlighted by Alexios Makrembolites\(^ {107}\). 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\(^ {108}\).

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

\(^{103}\) Nicephorus Gregoras I, 392, 397, 399.
\(^{104}\) John Cantacuzenus III, 34-42. Cf. OIKOMIMIDÈS, Hommes d’affaires, 64.
\(^{105}\) Balfoeur, Symeon, 47 «Καὶ ἄρχοντες μὲν κατασπαταλῶσι, θησαυρίζουσι τὰ καὶ ὑπεραίρονται κατὰ τῶν ὑπὸ χείρα, πῶν ἄδικιάς ἔχον ἀνέδην διαπραττόμενοι, οὐ μόνον ὑδάεν ἀποδίδοντες Θεῷ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀφαρπάζοντες καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι ἀρχήν ἡγούμενοι ἑαυτῶν καὶ τὸ τοὺς πενομένους καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτοὺς μηδὲ φύσεως ἀνθρωπίνης σχεδὸν εἶναι νομίζειν».
\(^{107}\) Alexios Makrembolites, 203-215.
\(^{109}\) Doukas, 317 «Ὁ χυδαῖον καὶ ἀγοραῖον λαὸς ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ μοναστηρίου, ἐν καπηλείοις κρατώντες ἐν χεριν 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.\footnote{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\footnote{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\footnote{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 «δόσοι τοῦ Βυζαντίων δήμου συνετώτεροι εἶναι ἔδόξουν» attended this assembly and the Empress inquired «τὴν ἑκάστου γνώμην»\footnote{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\footnote{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

\footnote{110. Nicephorus Gregoras Ι, 501 «ἀπεσταλμένοι παρὰ τοῦ Πάππα (1334-5), διαλεξόμενοι περὶ τε εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας τῶν ἐκκλησιών. καὶ ἦν εὐθὺς ἰδεῖν πολλοὺς τῶν τοῦ δήμου ζῆλον μὲν λαμβάνοντας, οὐ κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν δὲ, καὶ πρόχειρόν τινα καὶ ἀταμίευτον προτείνοντας γλῶσσαν καὶ πρὸς ἐτι συνωθοῦντας καὶ αὐτὸν γε τὸν πατριάρχην ἔς διαλέξεις».

111. George Pachymeres ΙV, 569, 595; Nicephorus Gregoras Ι, 532.


114. See Kontogiannopoulou, Ανδρόνικος, 125-127; Patlagean, L’immunité, 591-601; D. Kyríteses, 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 λαὸς, οἰκήτορες, πολίται, πολιτεία, ἕποικοι 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 *demos*/*δῆμος* (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 *δῆμος* 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 *δῆμος*, 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 *δῆμος* 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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