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THE LAST DECADES OF THE STATE OF DUKLJA (DIOCLIA)

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ABSTRACT

The last two rulers of the State of Duklja were knez (Prince) Radoslav and his son, veliki knez (Grand Prince) Mihailo, both belonging to the Vojislavljević dynasty. The reign of Prince Radoslav began around 1142, while the reign of Grand Prince Mihailo concluded no later than 1186. During this period, the state of Duklja struggled for its survival. Its primary adversary was Raška, while Byzantium served as its principal ally. Little is known about these relations, as well as the personalities and events from this period, owing to the scarcity of sources and historians' limited interest in this topic. This paper examines the most significant events of the final period of the State of Duklja based on the available sources and literature.

Keywords: Duklja, Prince Radoslav, Grand Prince Mihailo, Raška, Byzantium

GLI ULTIMI DECENNI DELLO STATO DI DOCLEA

SINTESI

Gli ultimi due sovrani dello Stato di Doclea furono il principe Radoslav e suo figlio il granduca Mihailo, entrambi della dinastia dei Vojislavljević. Il regno del principe Radoslav ebbe inizio intorno al 1142, mentre quello del granduca Mihailo si concluse entro il 1186. Durante questo periodo, lo Stato di Doclea lottò strenuamente per la sopravvivenza, trovandosi ad affrontare il Regno di Rascia come principale avversario, ma potendo contare sull'appoggio dell'Impero Bizantino. A causa della limitata disponibilità di fonti e dell'interesse limitato degli storici per questo argomento, le informazioni sui rapporti, sulle personalità e sugli eventi di questo periodo sono scarse. Questo articolo si basa sulle fonti disponibili e sulla letteratura esistente per analizzare gli eventi più significativi degli ultimi anni dello Stato di Doclea.

Parole chiave: Doclea, principe Radoslav, granduca Mihailo, Rascia, Bisanzio

INTRODUCTION

The history of the State of Duklja (Dioclia) during the reign of the last Vojislavljevićs, *knez* (lat. *knesius*, Prince) Radoslav and *veliki knez* (Grand Prince) Mihailo, remains poorly understood due to the scarcity of sources. This refers to the period from 1151, when Prince Radoslav was last mentioned, to 1189, when *kneginja* (Princess) Desislava, the wife of Grand Prince Mihailo, was last mentioned.

The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, as the primary, but controversial, domestic source for the history of the state, concludes with a concise description of events during the reign of “Prince Radoslav and his brothers, Jovan and Vladimir” (*Radaslavi knesii et fratribus, Ioannis et Bladimiri*) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163). Most compilers of this work believe that the Chronicle was created between 1149 and 1215 and that it was written or compiled from several texts from different epochs in Bar by an anonymous Benedictine, a member of the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese (Radoman, 2016, 165–166). The original Chronicle was most likely written in the Slavic script (Glagolitic or Cyrillic) and translated into Latin in the third quarter of the twelfth century (Radoman, 2008, 104). The first reliable data on the use of the Chronicle dates from the middle of the fourteenth century (Kowalski, 2021, 30). Historian Tibor Živković proposed an unusual thesis that the Chronicle was commissioned by the Croatian Ban Pavle Šubić in order to historically legitimize his plan to conquer Bosnia, Travunia, Zahumlje, Zeta, and Raška. Thus, at Šubić’s order, the Chronicle was written by the Abbot of Split and then by the alleged Archbishop of Bar, Rudger, originally Czech, between 1295 and 1298 in Split, and supplemented in Bar between 1299 and 1301 (Živković, 2009, 363). Although he acknowledged this work of Živković, historian Wawrzyniec Kowalski believes that there are dubious assumptions and unproven theses in Živković’s theory (Kowalski, 2021, 21, 39). Literary historian Aleksandar Radoman completely rejected Živković’s thesis. He stated that Živković expressed unsubstantiated views and succumbed to national romanticism (Radoman, 2013, 106–107, 112–113). Radoman pointed out that Živković incorrectly stated that Rudger was the Archbishop of Bar between 1298 and 1301 because at that time the Archbishop of Bar was Martin (Radoman, 2013, 118). On the other hand, Radoman considers that the Chronicle was created precisely at the order of Prince Radoslav, whose reign is discussed in the last chapter of the Chronicle (Radoman, 2016, 174–175). The author of the Chronicle clearly favors Prince Radoslav and his ancestors, yet there is no reliable evidence to suggest that Prince Radoslav commissioned this work.

However, there is no doubt that the last chapters of the Chronicle pertain to the history of Duklja, and, as noted by historian Franjo Rački, they serve as a valuable supplement to the limited Latin and Byzantine sources on Duklja (Kowalski, 2021, 34, 42). That last part of the Chronicle was written as the Duklja Chronicle or the Zeta Chronicle (Živković, 2009, 26). This part contains many details that

were presumably copied from the lost chronicle or history that dealt with Duklja from Prince Stefan Vojislav to Prince Radoslav (Živković, 2009, 271). Although the entire Chronicle was based on earlier texts that did not survive, surely the last chapter of the Chronicle is the closest in time to the anonymous priest of Duklja (Kowalski, 2021, 16). The credibility of the last chapter of the Chronicle is significantly higher than that of other parts of the Chronicle. The historian Jovan Kovačević noted that from Chapter 36, where the Chronicle of Duklja starts, the “historical value of the account” changes and that from this chapter, the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja “gains credibility as a source” (Bešić et al., 1967, 382). Historians have also pointed to other undeniable values of the Chronicle. Franjo Rački stated that the Chronicle “can be well used for the geography of Upper Dalmatia,” Stojan Novaković that its “geographical account is always consistent and faithful,” Ferdo Šišić that “the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja is, first and foremost, a very important and reliable source for the geography of the eleventh and twelfth centuries,” and Nikola Radojčić that Dukljanin’s geographical information is “more reliable, with some extraordinarily precise details” (Mijušković, 1988, 89–90). Nikola Radojčić also emphasized the “high scientific value of Dukljanin’s geographical information” and that the Priest of Duklja had “excellent geographical knowledge and a highly developed sense for differentiating among different territories” (Radojčić, 1927, 22; 1933, 362). This allows events from the reign of Prince Radoslav to be discussed with a greater degree of reliability, although one must keep in mind the obvious ideological ambition of the priest of Duklja (Kowalski, 2021, 42).

According to the Priest of Duklja, Prince Radoslav, after the death of his father King Gradinja (*Gradihna*), went to the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–80) who “gave him to rule and govern the entire land, just as his father had done” (*deditque ei totam terram dominandam eamque regendam, sicut tenuit pater eius*) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 220). This formulation suggests that Duklja was already in a vassal relationship with Byzantium, a notion supported by the fact that King Gradinja ascended to the throne around 1131 after a conflict with King George (*Đorđe*), aided significantly by Byzantium. The Byzantine strategos from Durrës captured the deposed King George and took him to Constantinople, where he eventually died (Andrijašević, 2022, 69). It appears that King Gradinja received support from Byzantium in exchange for entering into vassalage (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 96). In addition, due to internal conflicts, Duklja weakened toward the end of King Gradinja’s reign. The priest of Duklja mentions that Gradinja, during his rule, had to “bear many ambushes and unjust persecutions from wicked people, but God delivered him from all evil” (*diebus regni sui multas insidias et persecutiones iniuste a malignis hominibus, sed ex onjnibus eripuit eum deus*) (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 102, 374).

The precise period of Prince Radoslav and his brothers’ reign is unknown, but it is certain that he ruled after 1142 and before 1151 (Borozan, 2015, 102). The timing and place of Radoslav’s visit to Emperor Manuel I is also uncertain.

According to one account, he was in Constantinople immediately following Manuel I's ascension to the throne (Bešić et al., 1967, 402). In Constantinople, he purportedly declared his intention to be a faithful vassal to Byzantium, and the emperor confirmed his rule in Zeta and Travunia, territories previously governed by his father, King Gradinja (Babić & Grafenauer, 1953, 261). He personally received power from the Emperor, and upon returning from Constantinople, he ruled alongside his brothers Jovan and Vladimir. This variant is based on the assertion from the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja: "After this, Prince Radoslav went to Emperor Manuel and was kindly received by him ... Later, Prince Radoslav, upon returning from the emperor, began to rule and dominate the land with his brothers" (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 220).¹ However, in the Chronicle, it is not stated where Emperor Manuel received Radoslav. According to the second variant, as conveyed by historian Vladimir Ćorović, Radoslav was in the military camp of Emperor Manuel when he led the campaign against Raška in 1149 and subsequently became his vassal (Ćorović, 1940, 159). However, Ćorović did not specify the source of this information, so it is not possible to reliably determine where the meeting between Prince Radoslav and Emperor Manuel took place. Due to the vassal relationship and restricted authority, Radoslav was granted only the title of Prince.

THE STRUGGLE OF PRINCE RADOSLAV FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DUKLJA

Prince Radoslav, aside from entering into Byzantine vassalage, inherited internal adversaries from his father, as the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja mentions that "some villains, who were old enemies" (*quidam maligni, qui antiqui inimici fuerunt*), rose up against Radoslav (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 221). They brought Desa, the youngest son of Raška *župan* (Prefect) Uroš I, and entrusted him with Zeta and Trebinje—Travunia (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 102). It appears that they were direct administrators in Travunia and Zeta, indicating that Desa did not acquire these regions through a war campaign. Instead, the nobility of Travunia and Zeta, opposing Radoslav, handed over these territories to Desa (Živković, 2006a, 142).

According to one account, Desa seized Zahumlje in 1130–1 during King Gradinja's reign (Mišić, 1996, 47). There is a possibility that Duklja lost Zahumlje even before the reign of King Gradinja (Džino, 2023, 174–175). Zahumlje nobles were nominal vassals of the rulers of Duklja during that period, but this relationship was variable and significantly fluctuated after Duklja began to weaken from the beginning of the twelfth century (Džino, 2023, 177).

1 *Post haec Radaslavus knesius perrexit ad imperatorem Hemanuelem et benigne ab eo susceptus est ... Postea knesius Radaslavus, veniens ab imperatore, caepit tenere et dominare terram cum fratribus suis* (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 220).

Desa subsequently took control of Travunia and Zeta around 1144–5 (Živković, 2006b, 458). According to the second account, Desa initially gained control of Zahumlje, which had previously been ruled by Radoslav's brother, Vladimir (Živković, 2006a, 146). At the invitation of a dissatisfied rebellious nobleman, who opposed Radoslav's acceptance of vassalage towards Emperor Manuel I in 1149, Desa assumed control of Travunia and Zeta in 1150 (Ćorović, 1940, 162). After Desa gained control of Zahumlje, Travunia, and Zeta, Prince Radoslav and his brothers remained in the coastal region from Kotor to Shköder (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 102). Thus, Desa controlled the northern and western parts of the state of Duklja, while Radoslav managed to retain its eastern and southern regions, encompassing areas around the Morača River, Lake Skadar, and the coastal stretch from Kotor to Shköder. According to the Priest of Duklja, Prince Radoslav and his brothers in this war fought “against Uroš's son [Desa] and other enemies, aiming to reclaim the rebellious territory and staunchly defend the one under their rule” (*contra filium Urossi [Desa] et contra caeteros inimicos, quatenus terram, quae eis rebellaverat, valerent acquirere et eam quam dominabant viriliter defendere*) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 163, 221). After these statements, The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja concludes with the simple Latin phrase “Etc.” (and so on) indicating the continuation of this war.

Historian Mavro Orbini, who published the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja in Italian in 1601 as part of his book “Il Regno de gli Slavi”, provided more information on this. Orbini had at least three copies of this Chronicle at his disposal (Živković, 2009, 42). Orbini stated that during the war against Desa, Prince Radoslav sought assistance from Dubrovnik to acquire weapons from Italy (Orbini, 1999, 309). However, this endeavour did not aid him, and Desa went on to rule from Hum to Kotor and Upper Zeta for the remainder of his life, declaring himself a *ban* or a duke. Orbini incorrectly asserts that Hum extended to Kotor and that, at that time, there was an Upper Zeta. Also, Desa was neither a *ban* nor a duke. The likelihood of Radoslav seeking help from Dubrovnik is supported by the fact that Dubrovnik was then under Byzantine rule, and Radoslav himself was a Byzantine vassal.

Information about the subsequent course of the war between Radoslav and Desa is scarce. In a charter from 1151, which historian Ferdo Šišić, but also contemporary authors, claims to be authentic, Desa titled himself as “the Prince of Duklja, Travunia and Zahumlje” (*Dioclie, Stobolie, Tacholmie dux*) (Pop Dukljanin, 1928, 201, 242–243; Džino 2023, 177). This would imply that Desa successfully defeated Radoslav and took control of the entire Duklja. However, Desa is not mentioned in Duklja after 1151. Historian Ivan Marković asserts that Byzantium became involved in the war that same year, expelled Desa from Duklja, and Radoslav “once again ruled over his country”, continuing his rule as “a friend and vassal of Byzantium” (Marković, 2014, 89). Marković stated that “from that moment Duklja (had) peace until Stjepan Nemanja” (Marković, 2014, 89). Marković did not specify the basis for this conclusion, but Tibor

Živković also emphasizes that Desa did not rule Duklja after 1153 at the latest (Živković, 2009, 307). Subsequent events confirm this.

The war between Raška and Duklja held broader significance as Duklja was a vassal and ward of Byzantium, while Raška formed an anti-Byzantine coalition with Hungary and the Normans. The successor of Raška Prefect Uroš I was his son Uroš II, who, upon ascending to the throne in 1145, pursued an anti-Byzantine policy with support for Hungary. This stance led to Emperor Manuel I launching a campaign against Raška in 1149, during which he took control over the capital Ras, the fortress Galič, and took many prisoners, but he failed to capture the Prefect (Stephenson, 2008, 683). The Byzantine offensive persisted in 1150, resulting in Uroš II's defeat in the crucial battle on the Tara River near Valjevo. Subsequently, he had to become a Byzantine vassal (Srevojević et al., 1981, 203–204). The triumph of Byzantium weakened Uroš II's influence in Raška, a situation exploited by his brother Desa to overthrow him and assume control as the Prefect of Raška around 1153 or 1154 (Džino, 2023, 178). Ban Borić of Bosnia capitalized on Desa's departure to Raška and seized Travunia in 1153 (Živković, 2008, 57). In the same or the subsequent year, Ban Borić took control of Zahumlje (Živković, 2006a, 147; Džino, 2023, 200–201). Ban Borić was a Hungarian vassal, as Bosnia had come under Hungarian control before 1138 (Ćirković, 1964, 42). As a result, Zahumlje and Travunia, once part of the State of Duklja, came under the control of Bosnia, and thereby fell under the supreme authority of Hungary.

DUKLJA AND GRAND PRINCE MIHAILO WITHIN THE BYZANTINE ORDER IN THE BALKANS

After 1151, Prince Radoslav is not mentioned in the sources. The end of his reign, as well as the circumstances surrounding it, remains unknown. Historian Dane Gruber, citing Mavro Orbini, asserts that Radoslav ruled until 1170, but this claim is considered unproven (Gruber, 2014, 363, n. 2). One present-day author asserts that Radoslav's reign extended until 1162, yet fails to provide a source or evidence to support this claim (Banjević, 2016, 661). Following the death of Prince Radoslav, his son Mihailo assumed power (Borožan, 2015, 105; Andrijašević, 2022, 70). The time and circumstances of Mihailo's ascension to the throne are unknown. Little is known about the history of Duklja during that time, and its position can only be inferred indirectly through the lens of the Byzantine-Hungarian war of 1165–7.

In 1165, during the war against Hungary, Emperor Manuel I gained control of parts of Croatia, Srem, and Bosnia. Later that same year, his commander John Ducas took control of parts of Dalmatia (Ferluga, 1957, 131; Goldstein, 1999, 69; Curta, 2019, 338). According to the account of the Byzantine chronicler John Cinnamus, who referred to Dalmatia in terms of the old Roman province, Byzantium occupied the following cities: Trogir, Šibenik, Split, the people of

Kačić, Klis, Skardin, Ostrovica, Solin, and “others that are in the Dalmatian land—altogether fifty-seven” (Cinnamus, 1652, 270–271; Ostrogorski & Barišić, 1971, 88; Kinnamos, 1976, 187). According to one version of the translation of Cinnamus’s work, the “famous city of Dioclea” was also seized, although historiography holds different opinions on this matter (Cinnamus, 1652, 270; Ostrogorski & Barišić, 1971, 88, n. 244; Kinnamos, 1976, 187). However, at this time, Duklja itself had long been an abandoned city, and the name was mentioned only in reference to the state (Ferluga, 1957, 132). Considering that Duklja was a vassal state, it is likely that the Byzantine army entered Duklja at the end of this campaign to assert dominance and reaffirm its vassal status.

This campaign was part of Emperor Manuel I’s plan to restore the former Roman Empire (Ostrogorski, 1969, 361–362). This was the last Byzantine military campaign on the eastern Adriatic coast (Goldstein, 1999, 61). Venice, an ally of Manuel in the war against Hungary, provided crucial assistance to Byzantium by deploying a fleet of about 100 ships, contributing to the acquisition of Dalmatia (Stephenson, 2008, 685). Thanks to the help of the Venetians, Byzantium occupied Dalmatia up to Šibenik, while the Venetians controlled Zadar and the northern islands (Komac, 2003, 288). The triumph in the war against Hungary secured Byzantium’s dominance in the Balkans. In 1165, Byzantium established a province, known as a ducat, from the areas it had conquered in Dalmatia and Croatia (Živković, 2006b, 460–461). The ducat encompassed the territory from Šibenik to Kotor. Some opinions suggest that Byzantium established two ducats. One was the ducat of Dalmatia and Croatia based in Split, while the other was the ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja (Gruber, 2014, 365). According to this opinion, this constituted the restoration of two Byzantine themes: Lower (Inferior) and Upper (Superior) Dalmatia, which had been established no later than during the reign of Emperor Romanos III Argyros (1028–34) (Ferluga & Ostrogorski, 1966, 169, n. 303). The existence of the Upper Dalmatia theme is evidenced by the fact that around 1040, Duke Stefan Vojislav of Duklja managed to capture the strategos of the Upper Dalmatia theme from Dubrovnik, Katakalon of Klazomenai, and imprisoned him in Ston (Lučić, 1980, 16). Additionally, there are records indicating that Byzantine authority during this period relied on local rulers in Hum, Bosnia, Serbia, and Duklja, who were under the supervision of Byzantine toparchs and strategoi, seated in Zadar, Dubrovnik, and Durrës (Džino, 2023, 171–172). The two Dalmatian ducats have functioned as administrative regions within the distinct theme of Dalmatia since the late ninth century (Barada, 1949, 95). In the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, they are identified as White Croatia (Lower Dalmatia) and Red Croatia (Upper Dalmatia) (Pop Dukljanin, 2016, 177). The ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja (Upper Dalmatia) was governed by a *dux* based in Kotor, Bar or Shkodra (Babić & Grafenauer, 1953, 261). The governor of the first ducat was Nicephorus Haluphaus, and of the second Duke Ignatius. However, the Byzantine chronicler John Cinnamus explicitly stated that John Ducas had entrusted the administration of Dalmatia to *dux* Nicephorus Haluphaus (Ostrogorski & Barišić, 1971, 87–88).

Hungary retaliated in 1166. It reclaimed central Dalmatia and southern Croatia, capturing the *dux* Haluphaus. As a result, the center of Byzantine administration shifted to southern Dalmatia, encompassing a portion of Duklja. Thus, the Byzantine ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja, with its center in Dubrovnik, was formed. At that time, Byzantium likely controlled several coastal towns of Duklja (Ferluga, 1957, 137). It must have taken Kotor, because in the charter on the consecration of the Cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor in 1166 it is stated that the ceremony was attended by *kir* (Lord) Izanak (Isaac), *dux* (Byzantine governor) of Dalmatia and Duklja (Preradović, 2014, 32). Given that the name of Emperor Manuel I (Emmanuel) was mentioned in this document, it suggests that Kotor was under the supremacy of Byzantium. It is assumed that Byzantine garrisons were present in Bar and Ulcinj at that time (Ferluga, 1957, 138). In July 1167, the Byzantines successfully launched a counteroffensive, defeating Hungary and gaining control of Srem, Bosnia, and parts of Croatia and Dalmatia (Ostrogorski, 1969, 364; Curta, 2019, 339). The ducat of Dalmatia and Croatia, centered in Split, was renewed, and the name Duklja was omitted. This was considered a temporary measure, as Byzantium directly controlled only a small part of Duklja (Ferluga, 1957, 137). Therefore, the ducat of Dalmatia and Duklja was not mentioned after 1167. From 1170 to 1180, there was no mention of the ducats of Dalmatia and Duklja (Ferluga, 1957, 136). An indicator of Byzantine power in Dalmatia was the journey of Archbishop Rainer (1175–80) of Split and the nobles of Split to Constantinople to swear allegiance to Emperor Manuel, who received them warmly and rewarded them (Curta, 2019, 339).

Byzantium established direct rule in Kotor, while Byzantine garrisons were stationed in the coastal towns of Duklja. Duklja was in a firm Byzantine vassalage but retained its state and dynastic uniqueness while expanding territorially. After Emperor Manuel I took over Bosnia, he also claimed Travunia and, probably, Zahumlje, subsequently returning these territories to Duklja. The proof of this is found in the inscription on the tombstone of Trebinje (Travunian), *жупан Грд* (*župan, Prefect Grd*), which states that Grd lived “during the time of Grand Prince Mihailo” (*Въ дни кнеза велиега Михоила*) (Stojanović, 1923, 1; Borozan, 2015, 105). Grd died around 1180 during the rule of “the last Prince of Duklja and Hum, Mihajlo” (Bešić et al., 1967, 406). The question of rulership in Zahumlje during this period is debatable. In the group of charters known as the “Lokrum forgeries”, nobles in Zahumlje are mentioned, including Prince Hranko, Ban Slavogost, and Ban Rastimir. Their names are likely accurately recorded in these disputed charters and probably date from a broad period between the 1040s and 1170s (Džino, 2023, 177). However, there is no reliable evidence to suggest that any of them were rulers in Zahumlje during the 1160s and 1170s. According to historian Siniša Mišić, Zahumlje was purportedly under the control of *veliki župan* (Grand Prefect) Stefan Nemanja’s brother *knez* (Prince) Miroslav circa 1166, during the division of Raška into constituent segments by Stefan Nemanja and his brothers—Tihomir, Miroslav, and Stracimir (Mišić,

1996, 48). However, Mišić did not state the source or evidence for this claim, but only that it was “logical”. Historian Danijel Džino assumed that Emperor Manuel entrusted Zahumlje to the brother of Stefan Nemanja, Miroslav, or one of the landlords from the “Lokrum forgeries” around 1161–2 (Džino, 2023, 178). However, this thesis is debatable for several reasons. This could not have occurred before 1167 when the Byzantine-Hungarian war ended, after which Byzantium established supreme power in the central and western Balkans and separated Zahumlje from Bosnia and Hungary. As proof that Miroslav was the Prince of Hum-Zahumlje from the beginning of the 1160s, Džino pointed to the record from the Church of St. Peter in Bijelo Polje, where Miroslav is titled Prince of Hum. Džino referred to the claim of another researcher that the last Cyrillic letters “o” and “x” on the church record denote the year 1161 (Marković, 2012, 25). However, the author of this claim also notes that it is merely an unreliable assumption. This is because the church record omits letters indicating thousands and hundreds, lacks the typical date expression, and the author assumes that this was due to space constraints. Additionally, the author suggests that the reverse order of letters and numbers in the record was used (Marković, 2012, 27–30). According to reliable data, this church was built around 1190, and it was probably completed only around 1195 (Ljubinković, 1959, 97; Janković, 1985, 39). Miroslav was certainly Prince of Hum after 1180, but the record from the church of St. Peter in Bijelo Polje is not proof that he ruled Hum-Zaumlja before that year. In the end, it is unusual for the Byzantine emperor to directly grant a region to a secondary member of the ruling family. It seems unlikely that Emperor Manuel I would have bypassed Stefan Nemanja, the supreme ruler of Raška, in order to entrust Zahumlje to his brother Miroslav. Additionally, it should be noted that the rulers of Raška were unreliable Byzantine vassals, and the emperor had no interest in bolstering their power.

Although there is no solid evidence, the most probable conclusion is that Emperor Manuel ceded Zahumlje, as well as Travunia, to Prince Mihailo of Duklja at the end of the 1160s as his trusted vassal. Academician Miloš Blagojević concluded that Mihailo “governed Duklja and Trebinje, undoubtedly with the consent of Emperor Manuel I” (Blagojević, 2011, 11). Historian Jovan Kovačević points out that Mihailo was, probably, also the ruler of Zahumlje (Bešić et al., 1967, 409). Historian Živko Andrijašević also stated that Mihailo’s rule in Zahumlje had a basis, considering that Duklja consisted then of a loose alliance of several separate geographical and administrative areas (Andrijašević, 2022, 70). In that alliance, Zahumlje was the most remote and probably the least controlled area by the ruler of Duklja. The title of Mihailo, the last Grand Prince of Duklja, as the ruler in Travunia and Zahumlje serves as evidence that Byzantium took control of those territories from conquered Bosnia after 1167 and, probably, returned them to Duklja. This can also be interpreted as a strategic move by Byzantium to reinforce its most loyal vassal in the western Balkans. The territorial enlargement of Duklja was the reason for

declaring the ruler of Duklja a Grand Prince. If the notion that Prince Radoslav ruled until around 1170 is accepted, then it is possible that he declared himself a Grand Prince, and Mihailo inherited that title. In addition to Grd's tombstone, this title is evidenced by the charter of Princess Desislava from 1189, in which she states that her husband Mihailo is *magnus comes*—a Grand Prince (Vučetić, 1907, 54). This title literally translates to Great Count, but given that Mihailo held the rank of Prince, the accurate translation would be Grand Prince. Despite this, historian Konstantin Jireček referred to Mihailo as “the last minor ruler of Duklja” (Jireček, 1952, 153). This is an unjustified assessment, given the title of Grand Prince and the territorial extent of the state of Duklja. However, this territorial extent was not accompanied by internal unity, making Duklja highly vulnerable to external adversaries.

During this period, Kotor distinguished itself among the towns of Duklja. Although under Byzantine supremacy in 1166, it maintained a high degree of autonomy. This is evidenced by the 1167 contract between Kotor and Omiš, in which neither the emperor nor the provincial governor is mentioned (Ferluga, 1957, 144). It appears that Byzantium ceded Kotor to Grand Prince Mihailo, making it his stronghold. He supposedly resided in Kotor before departing Duklja (Živković, 2006b, 465).

The vassalage towards Byzantium had an impact on the status of the state church, namely the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese. Given that Duklja did not have full independence and depended on Byzantine authorities, Pope Alexander III made a decision at the end of or no later than 1167 to subordinate the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese to the Dubrovnik Archdiocese (Gruber, 2014, 367; Živković, 2009, 58). At that time, Dubrovnik was under the supremacy of Byzantium, and it is conceivable that this occurred with the consent of the Byzantine Emperor and the pope. Manuel I was actively working on the creation of a church union with Rome to restore the “Justinian's and Constantine's world empire” (Ostrogorski, 1969, 362). Dubrovnik served as an example of the symbiosis between the Roman church and Byzantine rule. At that time, the dioceses in Duklja, Travunia, and Zahumlje were subordinated to the Archdiocese of Dubrovnik, establishing Dubrovnik as a “metropolis for all Upper Dalmatia” (Marković, 2014, 106–107). Nevertheless, the Duklja-Bar Church never reconciled with this change. As a result, the bishops of Bar retained the title of Duklja-Bar bishops until 1199 when they successfully reconstructed the Archdiocese of Bar (Ćirković et al., 1970, 15; Živković, 2009, 60). Another viewpoint suggests that the papal bull issued by Pope Clement III in 1089, which recognized the status of the Archdiocese of Duklja-Bar, was obtained based on inaccurate information. Additionally, it is argued that the papal bulls issued by Pope Alexander II in 1067 and Callistus II in 1124 concerning this status are also considered to be forgeries. This interpretation implies that the Archdiocese of Duklja-Bar was not established until 1199 (Zadro, 2011). On the other hand, historian Katarina Mitrović emphasizes that it is incorrect to refer to these papal documents as

bulls, as this term was only used from the mid-thirteenth century, and that the document from January 8, 1089, is, in fact, a solemn papal privilege (*privilegium solemne*) (Mitrović, 2017, 66). Mitrović adds that this privilege from 1089 is fundamentally an authentic document, but the circumstances of its creation are disputed, as it was issued by (anti)pope Clement III (Wibert) (1084–1100), although the Roman Church today recognizes all documents issued by antipopes (Mitrović, 2017, 71, 73).

THE DEFEAT OF BYZANTIUM AND THE FALL OF DUKLJA UNDER RAŠKA

Due to the Byzantine predominance in the Balkans, Duklja benefited from Byzantine protection from 1167 to 1180, marking a relatively peaceful period. At that time, Duklja possessed the same territory as during the reign of the last King of Duklja, Gradinja, but lacked its former power. Duklja operated as a Byzantine vassal, relying on the benevolence and power of Emperor Manuel I, particularly on the support of Byzantine troops in coastal cities. For Duklja's security, it was crucial that Raška also served as a (reluctant) Byzantine vassal. Its ruler, Grand Prefect Stefan Nemanja, became a vassal of Emperor Manuel I in 1168, with a brief interruption in 1172 (Blagojević & Petković, 1989, 36). The threat posed by Raška to Duklja's survival became evident in 1172 when, during the Venetian-Byzantine war, Stefan Nemanja turned against Byzantium, leading a faction of his army to attack Kotor (Srevojević et al., 1981, 210). In response, Emperor Manuel I launched an attack on Serbia that same year, compelling Nemanja to submit. This safeguarded Duklja from an offensive by the ruler of Raška. Bosnia occupied a similar vassal position with respect to Byzantium, while Srem was under the direct administration of the Emperor's relatives (Ćorović, 1940, 163). In this way, Manuel I solidified his influence in the western Balkans, exercising direct Byzantine control over Srem, Croatia, and Dalmatia, while maintaining vassal relationships with Duklja, Raška, and Bosnia. Bosnia and, notably, Raška were compelled into Byzantine vassalage due to their adherence to anti-Byzantine and pro-Hungarian politics. On the other hand, for Duklja, Byzantine vassalage was a deliberate strategic choice.

In Emperor Manuel I's strategic plans, Dalmatia served as a crucial stepping stone for the prospective conquest of northern Italy. The responsibility for implementing this policy fell upon Nicephorus Haluphaus and his successor as the *dux* in Split, Constantine Ducas (Stephenson, 2008, 685–686). Manuel's primary objective in his Balkan conquests was to establish a strategic foothold, creating a network of influence that extended towards Hungary and Italy. The aim was to surpass his main European competitor, the Holy Roman Empire led by Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (Stephenson, 2008, 685–686). Nevertheless, Manuel's expansionist policies exhausted the resources of the empire, and his successors struggled to uphold the enduring legacy of Manuel's reign.

The death of Emperor Manuel I in 1180 triggered the unraveling of the order he had instituted in the western Balkans, and the ensuing power struggle for the imperial throne ultimately led to the collapse of the Byzantine state on the Balkans (Ostrogorski, 1969, 370). The Hungarian army invaded Dalmatia and took control over Zadar (Curta, 2019, 339). Hungary returned parts of Croatia, Srem, and Dalmatia, as well as Bosnia, where Ban Kulin became its vassal (Ćorović, 1940, 165). Duklja could no longer rely on the protection of Byzantium, which, by the end of Manuel's rule, was economically and militarily exhausted (Ostrogorski, 1969, 367). Stefan Nemanja seized this opportunity to attack Duklja, particularly its coastal cities, in late 1180 and early 1181. The Archbishop of Bar, Grgur, stated that "significant disagreements" erupted between Bar and the Grand Prefect Stefan Nemanja leading to a "major commotion" (Borozan, 2015, 107). Archbishop Grgur also mentioned that (Grand) Prince Mihailo, while concerned about the Duklja Church, might not have been expected to provide assistance. Kotor attempted to safeguard itself by entering into a peace treaty with Dubrovnik in 1181, aimed at countering Stefan Nemanja (Bešić et al., 1967, 410). It is certain that after this Nemanja's attack on Duklja, Zahumlje was under the control of Raška, specifically Nemanja's brother Prince Miroslav (Mišić, 1996, 48).

Mavro Orbini placed these events between 1170 and 1172, asserting that Prince Radoslav and his brother *Ivanish* (John) were still ruling Duklja at that time (Orbini, 1999, 310–311). Orbini states that, faced with Nemanja's attack, Prince Radoslav went by boat from Ulcinj to Dubrovnik. Then Nemanja took all of Zeta with its cities except Kotor, which remained loyal to Radoslav. Radoslav and John took refuge in Durres from Dubrovnik and sought help from Byzantium, but "no province was given to them at the emperor's behest." After that, Duklja remained under Nemanja's rule. During that period, Radoslav's other brother, Vladimir, was in Raška, attempting to overthrow Nemanja through an uprising. However, he was defeated and subsequently fled to Bulgaria. According to Orbini, this marked the end of Duklja and the Vojislavljević dynasty, as Orbini was not aware of Grand Prince Mihailo and his wife, Princess Desislava. Furthermore, Orbini made an error in Radoslav's genealogy by stating that his father was Draginja (*Dragihna*) instead of King Gradinja. The sources from which Orbini derived the description of these events are not known. Historians Stojan Novaković and Dane Gruber believed Orbini (Novaković, 2003, 27–28; Gruber, 2014, 368–369). In contrast, historian Sima Ćirković criticized Orbini's work, pointing out inaccuracies in chronology, events, and personalities. According to Ćirković, Stefan Nemanja took control of Duklja between 1183 and 1186, with the last ruler being Grand Prince Mihailo (Orbini, 1968, 16, 1–19). From Orbini's work, the only reliable information is that the last rulers of Duklja sought assistance from Dubrovnik and Byzantine Durres during their conflicts with Raška.

Stefan Nemanja persisted in his attacks on Duklja between 1183 and 1186 (Ćirković, 1976, 132). The Raška Grand Prefect seized the opportunity during a significant and triumphant offensive by Hungary against Byzantium around

Belgrade and in the Morava River valley in 1183 (Srevojević et al., 1981, 252). The Raška army also initiated a front in Duklja. Fortified coastal cities have long resisted Nemanja's siege. They faced severe punishment for this. After the conquest, the army of Raška proceeded to destroy the cities of Duklja, including Danj, Sard, Shköder, Svač, Ulcinj, and Bar (Ćirković et al., 1970, 3). Nemanja's son, Stefan the First-Crowned, wrote between 1208 and 1216: "And he [Nemanja] left Kotor, fortified it, and moved his court there, where it remains to this day. He razed the other towns, demolished them, and turned their glory into desolation" (Prvovenčani, 1988, 73). Until early 1186, Kotor was occupied, spared from destruction for Nemanja to establish a court there. Nemanja's supporters in Duklja aided in the conquest (Srevojević et al., 1981, 252–253).

The conclusion of Grand Prince Mihailo's reign remains uncertain. Historian Sima Ćirković claims that Mihailo left the country and went to Dubrovnik (Ćirković, 1976, 132; Orbini, 1968, 16). Bar, preserving its autonomy, resisted Nemanja's attacks for the longest period and housed Princess Desislava, the wife of Grand Prince Mihailo (Blagojević & Petković, 1989, 37–38). She departed from Bar no later than mid-1189 and arrived in Dubrovnik, where she issued a charter to the citizens in August of the same year. The witnesses to the charter were Archbishop Grgur of Bar and the *župani* (Prefects) Černeha and Vitalis (Borožan, 2015, 107). This marked the end of the state of Duklja and the Vojislavljević dynasty.

As part of this conquest, Stefan Nemanja specifically targeted the civil and military authorities of the Byzantine Empire in Duklja and Dalmatia. His son, Stefan the First-Crowned (*Prvovenčani*), stated that Nemanja "exterminated the Greek name", implying that he expelled Greeks from the cities of Duklja and Dalmatia, thereby preventing the resurgence of the Byzantine influence (Ćirković et al., 1970, 3; Prvovenčani, 1988, 73). Stefan Nemanja partitioned the land of Duklja by assigning Zeta and Travunia to his eldest son, Vukan. Vukan was titled "King of Dioclea, Dalmatia, Trebinje, Hvosno and Toplica" (Ćirković et al., 1970, 4). The Serbian biographer Domentijan recorded that in Raška in the mid-thirteenth century, "Duklja" (*Диоклитиа*) was called a "great kingdom from the beginning" (*велико кралевство от прва*) (Kovačević, 1955, 293; Domentijan, 1988, 157). Vukan adopted this title to preserve the tradition of the independent Dukljan kingdom, which was also his argument in the struggle for the throne against his brother Stefan the First-Crowned (Andrijašević, 2019, 39). Vukan lost this battle but retained the royal title and ruled Duklja almost as an independent ruler. He had his nobility, army, separate revenues, administrative apparatus, and maintained diplomatic relations with the pope and the Hungarian king (Blagojević, 2011, 16). He was succeeded by his son Đorđe around 1208, who also titled himself as King of Duklja until 1217 when Stefan the First-Crowned became the first crowned King of Serbia (Andrijašević, 2019, 40). After that, Đorđe held the title of prince, marking the decline of the tradition of the Dukljan kingdom within the Nemanjić dynasty. However, a Venetian list of

rulers from 1301 mentions that Stefan Dečanski (Stefan of Dečani), the son of the Serbian king Milutin, titled himself as “king of Duklja, Albania, Zahumlje, and coastal regions” (*rex Dioclie, Albanie, Chelmie et maritime regionis*) (Ćirković et al., 1970, 60). As pointed out earlier, Stefan Nemanja’s brother, Prince Miroslav, held control over Zahumlje (Ćirković, 1995, 51). Nemanja, entrusted Zahumlje (the land of Hum) to his youngest son Sava around 1190, probably in 1194–5 (Ćirković et al., 1970, 4; Džino, 2023, 179). Consequently, the territory of Duklja was partitioned among the sons of Nemanja, according to the principle of dividing the land into “appanage principalities” (Blagojević, 2011, 15).

CONCLUSION

The reign of Prince Radoslav and his son Grand Prince Mihailo largely coincides with the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I who pursued an aggressive strategy in the Balkans as part of a broader plan to restore the Roman Empire. His primary adversaries were Hungary and Raška. Following the conquest of Croatia in 1102, extending control over much of Dalmatia until 1133 and Bosnia until 1138, Hungary established a formidable presence in the Balkans, strengthened by dynastic connections to Raška—Jelena, the daughter of Raška Prefect Uroš I, became the wife of the Hungarian King Béla II. As the ally to Hungary, Raška sought to conquer Duklja (Zeta, Zahumlje, Travunia) and a portion of Dalmatia. Nevertheless, Byzantium proved more successful in the decades-long conflicts with Raška and Hungary. Consequently, Emperor Manuel I established a Byzantine order in the Balkans. Hungary withdrew, and Raška was compelled to become a vassal of the Byzantine Empire.

Confronted by the belligerent and pro-Hungarian stance of Raška, Duklja had no alternative but to turn to Byzantium for support. Consequently, what began as vassalage during the reign of King Gradinja evolved into the strategic policy pursued by Prince Radoslav and Grand Prince Mihailo. This policy found justification in the conflicts involving the Prince of Raška and the Prefect Desa, as well as the Prince of Duklja, Radoslav, and later, the Grand Prefect Stefan Nemanja and Grand Prince Mihailo. In these struggles, Byzantine assistance played a crucial role in preserving the Vojislavljević dynasty and the State of Duklja. Devoid of this assistance and considering the backing that the rulers of Raška enjoyed among the leaders of Duklja, particularly in Travunia and Zahumlje, the survival of Duklja would have been significantly challenging. Conversely, Duklja held strategic importance for Byzantium by acting as a deterrent against Raška and Hungarian incursions into Byzantine territories in Dalmatia and the Adriatic. Due to this policy, Duklja gained control over Zahumlje, Travunia, and the most crucial coastal cities of Zeta. The ruler of Duklja assumed the title of Grand Prince, thereby consolidating power comparable to that of the former Dukljan kings. Byzantine dominance ensured peace and security for Duklja during the period of 1167–80. However, this came at the cost of relinquishing some sovereignty, as

Byzantine garrisons were stationed in coastal cities, and the autonomous status of the Duklja-Bar Archdiocese was forfeited. These were the most important events in the final decades of the Duklja state.

Following the death of Emperor Manuel I, and the swift deterioration of Byzantium, Duklja found itself bereft of its crucial political and military backing. Stefan Nemanja capitalized on this situation to achieve his strategic objective—the conquest of Duklja. Nevertheless, this accomplishment was neither swift nor effortless. Between 1180 and 1186, Duklja fiercely fought for its survival. Despite the fierce resistance, the superior resources of Raška enabled Stefan Nemanja, aided by pro-Raška forces within Duklja, to conquer and destroy its cities. The last ruler of Duklja, Grand Prince Mihailo, along with his wife Princess Desislava, the Archbishop of Bar, and the lords of Duklja sought refuge in Dubrovnik. The state of Duklja was subsequently partitioned by the princes of Raška.

ZADNJA DESETLETJA DRŽAVE DUKLJE (DIOCLIA)

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POVZETEK

Članek na podlagi primarnih virov, zlasti Letopisa popa Dukljana, ter relevantne literature, izpostavlja najpomembnejše dogajanje v državi Duklja med letoma 1142 in 1186. V tistem času sta regiji vladala knez Radoslav in njegov sin, veliki knez Mihajlo, oba iz dinastije Vojisavljević. Primarni zunanji nasprotnik Duklje je bila Raška, navznoter pa sta glavni izziv predstavljala šibka osrednja oblast in neučinkovit nadzor nad oddaljenimi regijami, kot sta bila Travunija in Zahumlje. Okoli leta 1150 je Desa, župan Raške, prevzel oblast nad velikim delom Duklje, vendar se je knez Radoslav uspel ubraniti s pomočjo bizantinskega cesarja Manuela I. Komnena, ki si je Raško nato podredil. Ta konflikt je bil del širšega spopada med Bizancem in Madžarsko, v katerem se je Raška povezala predvsem s slednjo, Duklja pa z Bizancem. Knez Radoslav je služil kot Manuelov vazal, Duklja pa je imela ključno vlogo kot temelj bizantinske balkanske politike, zato je bilo med Bizancem in Dukljo vzpostavljeno strateško zavezništvo. Zahvaljujoč temu Duklja ni le preživela, temveč je celo okrepila svoj teritorialni položaj. Po uspešni vojni cesarja Manuela I. proti Madžarski v letih 1165–1167, si je Duklja povrnila vpliv nad Zahumljem. Ta dogodek je privedel do tega, da je Mihajlo, zadnji vladar iz dinastije Vojisavljević, prejel naziv velikega kneza. Po smrti cesarja Manuela I. leta 1180 je bizantinska oblast v regiji propadla in Duklja je izgubila svojega zaščitnika. V letih 1180–1186 je to priložnost izkoristil vladar Raške, veliki župan Štefan Nemanja, in osvojil Dukljo. Zadnji člani dinastije Vojisavljević, skupaj s plemstvom in nadškofom Duklje in Bara, so leta 1189 emigrirali v Dubrovnik.

Ključne besede: Duklja, knez Radoslav, veliki knez Mihailo, Raška, Bizanc

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