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“THE EMPEROR OF SERBS AND GREEKS“ STEFAN DUSHAN AND IVIRON MONASTERY OF ATHOS (THE 30S AND 40 OF THE XIV CENTURY)

The middle of the XIV century was an extremely interesting epoch in the history of the Byzantine Empire. The acute internal political, social-economic and religious crisis during the reign of the Paleologos rulers, aggravated by external threat, led to the irreversible process of decrease and degradation of the Empire. In this period, Serbia reached the peak of its power. This kingdom had been increasing its territories in the Balkans since the XIII century. Serbia forced the Byzantine Emperor to recognize all the outcomes of wars launched by Serbians.

In 1331, the Serbian throne was occupied by a representative of the Nemanjic dynasty – Stefan IV Dushan, whose aim was to take control of the entire Balkan peninsula. He wanted to be crowned as the Emperor of Byzantium in Constantinople. Gradually, Stefan Dushan occupied the territories that formed part of Byzantium (Macedonia, Epirus, Thessalia and part of Thracia). In 1346, Dushan was crowned at Uskuba Cathedral as “The Emperor and Autokrator of Serbs and Greeks “.

Stefan Dushan considered that one of the most important factors for the legitimization of his power was the support of the Greek clergy. However, he could not receive this support from Constantinople Patriarchate. Therefore, he focused on Mount Athos and its monasteries.

The given paper analyzes Stefan Dushan’s church policy and his attitude to Athos Mountain and the Georgian Monastery of Iviron. The paper focuses on the “Hrisobules” granted by the Emperor to the Georgian clergy in 1346, in confirmation of the property and privileges granted to the Monastery. The paper also summarizes the role of Athos Iviron Monastery in Dushan’s imperial policy and the history of the Byzantine church in the given period.

KEYWORDS: Serbia, Byzantium, Stefan Dushan, Mount Athos, Iviron.

The medieval Serbian-Georgian political and religious relationships have not been studied in Georgian historiography so far. Neither have they been analyzed in Serbian historiography. This is due to historical processes, political orientation and the fragmentary nature of these relationships. Taking into account the events in the Serbian and Georgian political and cultural fields in the XIII-XIV centuries, I argue that the analysis of the issue is of great significance for the research of Serbian-Georgian relationships as well as for the study of Georgia's foreign policy and church history.

Methodologically, the given paper is based on historical, cognitive, content-analysis, historical-typological, comparative, biographic, retrospective, historical-genetic and systematic methods of research. This implies a complex study of historical sources on the given issue. Based on the implemented research, I will attempt to reconstruct the historical events of the given period.

Based on the available historical sources, we can say that Georgian-Serbian religious relationships started much earlier than the 14th century, namely, in the first half of the 13th century (we cannot exclude even earlier contacts in case other historical sources are discovered). However, I will focus on the above-mentioned contacts in another paper. Thus, the given research embraces the analysis within the chronological framework of the given period.

The middle of the XIV century is an extremely interesting epoch for Georgia, Serbia, the Byzantine Empire and the entire region in general. During the reign of the Palaiologos (Paleologos) dynasty, there was an acute internal political, social-economic and religious crisis, aggravated by external threat. This caused the degradation and diminishing of the Empire and led to the new distribution of power in the region. The political events of this period influenced the Byzantine religious circles and, what is especially important for us, the Georgian monastery of Athos. In order to understand the issue more deeply, I will offer the reader a brief description of the historical background.

It is well known that by the beginning of the 30s of the XIV century, as a result of successful raids of Ottomans, Byzantium had already lost a major portion of Asia Minor (including Bursa and Nikea). The capital of the Ottoman Empire was located in Bursa. The Byzantine rulers, oppressed by the Ottomans, tried to solve the problem by establishing close links with the European political circles and the Pope of Rome. Naturally, the alliance was aimed at the satisfaction of mutual interests. However, the alliance agreements between Byzantium and the West frequently implied unequal conditions. I mean that the Byzantine side often had to make a compromise in order to receive the promised assistance.

In the second half of the 13th century, during the reign of Michael

VIII Paleologos, the Byzantine court faced a serious dilemma: on the one hand, the country was under the threat of physical destruction due to the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, there was a threat of civil war, due to the Western orientation and religious compromise of the rulers. In particular, based on the agreement with the Pope of Rome Gregory X, Byzantine authorities agreed to establish a church union between the Catholic and Orthodox communities. The agreement was implemented in 1274 at Lyon Council, and is known as the “Union of Lyon”. Apart from the representatives of the Byzantine Emperor, Latin Patriarchs of Antioch and Constantinople and the Pope of Rome, the Council was attended by the ambassadors of France and England, a delegation of the Mongol Khan etc. (Macharashvili, 2007, pp. 3-4). It was obvious that the representatives of the Greek clergy would have to make significant compromise in return for political agreement and support. Indeed, at the Council, the ambassadors of Paleologos presented a synodical document signed by bishops regarding the Union. At the sixth session, the Greeks recognized the Filioque. Thus, after the “Great Schism”, the Church Union between the Catholic and Orthodox Christians was signed for the first time at Lyon Council. However, it should be noted that the Agreement was not implemented. The Orthodox population of the Empire was categorically against its implementation. Therefore, Michael VIII started severe repressions of opponents of the Union throughout the country (arrest, torture, banishment, confiscation of property etc.) (Macharashvili, pp. 4-5). This shattered the authority and position of the Paleologos rulers.

The most radical opponents of the Union were the monks of the Athos mountain. In 1278, they held a church council and anathematized the Pope of Rome, the Patriarch of Constantinople Joannis XI Vecci, who supported the Union, all other supporters of the Union and even the Emperor Michael Paleologos (Macharashvili, 2007, p. 7). We cannot say for certain whether the representatives of Iviron Monastery of Athos took part in the 1278 Church Council. Yet, there are data regarding their opposition to the Union. For instance, the Greek “Life” of Ioane, Euthimius and Giorgi Athonite says: “When the Catholics came here to the Holy Mountain with the consent of King Michael and the Patriarch (Joannis XI Vecci - G. M.), they drowned the saint fathers of the Iviron Monastery in the sea, because the fathers did not accept the Pope’s messengers and refused to sign the Agreement of the Latins. The sacred coffin of reverend Euthimius, same as the coffins of Ioane and Giorgi, were seized together with the church treasure and the monastery was left empty” (Macharashvili, 2007, p. 8). This source describes the raid of Pope’s supporters upon the monasteries on Mt. Athos in 1280 (or, according to some scholars, in 1285) which also affected the brethren of the Iviron Monastery. The above-mentioned source, as well as other historical sources quoted by Giorgi Macharashvili

in his work “Lyon Union and Georgia”, prove that the Georgian monastery opposed the Union, thus causing the aggression of the Emperor and the supporters of the Pope. The opposition of the Iviron Monastery to the Paleologos rulers, caused by the latter’s aspiration to form an alliance with Rome, continued in the following period, especially in the middle of the XIV century, during the Serbian intervention on the Byzantine territory.

As we have mentioned above, the reign of the Paleologos led the Empire to a severe political and religious crisis. In parallel, the Ottoman threat became more and more obvious. Despite the civil confrontation and the acceleration of the process of destruction of the Empire, the royal court still expected salvation from the West.

In 1341, after the death of Emperor Andronikos III, the royal court was divided into two fractions. One fraction was represented by the mother of underaged Emperor – Anna of Savoy, the Patriarch of Constantinople -John XIV Kalekas, and the Chief of the Navy, Great Duka Alexios Apokaukos. The other fraction was represented by a powerful military leader and advisor of the royal court – John Kantakouzenos. The main reasons for their confrontation were different political and religious orientations. The Queen’s “camp” supported the union with Rome, viewing this union as the means for military strengthening of Byzantium. The supporters of Kantakouzenos, mostly the Greek aristocrats irritated by the increasing commercial influence of the Italians, were strongly against the alliance with Rome. The confrontation between the members of the royal court was aggravated by the religious factor: the pro-Roman orientation of the Paleologos caused dissatisfaction among the Orthodox clergy and the population of the Empire; hence, the majority supported Kantakouzenos. In this regard, special mention should be made of the clergy of Mount Athos and Hesychast monks led by Gregory Palamas.

The pro-Western orientation also reached Mount Athos and found its expression in the works of the representatives of the so-called religious humanism (Barlaam, Gregory Akindynos). There were religious debates between the humanists and Hesychast monks. The latter preserved the Orthodox self-consciousness in their life and interests. The Hesychast movement was led by the Archbishop of Thessaloniki Gregory Palamas (1296/97-1359), who did his best to preserve the oriental Orthodox theological traditions and pro-Greek orientation (Barnovi, 2016).

In the autumn of 1341, during the absence of Kantakouzenos in Thracia, the Queen and her supporters organized a coup. Kantakouzenos was deprived of his rights; his allies, including Gregory Palamas, were arrested. However, Kantakouzenos did not surrender. He declared himself Co-Emperor of the underaged John V and started to struggle. Yet, soon after the Queen’s favourite Zealots occupied Thessalonika, Kantakouzenos was forced to leave the city and find shelter in Pristina (Douglas A. Howard,

2017, p. 15). The confrontation between Anna of Savoy and Kantakouzenos turned into a civil war which also involved external forces. The Serbian intervention in Byzantium is related to the above-mentioned events. This intervention affected the territorial borders of the Empire and also influenced the religious circles.

It should be noted that the Serbian State gained supremacy in the Balkans in the second half of the XIII century. The dynasty of the Nemanjić took advantage of the internal problems of Byzantium and enhanced their territories in the Balkan region. At the same time, it forced the Emperor of Byzantium to recognize every result of the wars of Serbians. In 1331, the most prominent representative of the Nemanjić dynasty, Stefan IV Dushan occupied the throne and led Serbia to the peak of its power. Stefan Dushan, who had spent 7 years of his childhood at the royal court of Byzantium, was well aware of the internal problems of the Empire, including the public movements and confrontations at the court (The History of Yugoslavia, 1963. p. 94). This awareness helped him to work out correct policy and make the right steps. At the beginning of Dushan's reign, Serbian borders spread from the rivers Sava and Danube to Strumica and Prilep, and from Bosnia to Rilodag and Struma. Yet, the King was not satisfied with this territory and aimed to unite the entire Balkan peninsula under his power and become the Emperor of Byzantium crowned in Constantinople. The King made subsequent steps towards his goal. In 1334, he occupied Western Macedonia, then – Albania up to Durrës and Valona. In 1340, he occupied Epirus up to Yannena. Gradually, he occupied Thessalia and part of Thracia. Parallel to Dushan's conquests, the civil war started in Byzantium. This enabled Dushan to succeed in his further expansion. In 1342, John Kantakouzenos, who was exiled from Byzantium, addressed Stefan Dushan for help. The Serbian King supported Kantakouzenos, gave him shelter and did not agree to extradict him to the Byzantine Royal Court even in exchange for lands (Cirkovic, 1996, p. 135-155).

In his work "The History of the Roman Empire in the 14th Century", a Greek scholar Ioannis Psellos mentions the agreement between Stefan Dushan and John Kantakouzenos. According to this Agreement, in return for the interference in the Byzantine civil war, Kantakouzenos agreed to do the following favors to Stefan Dushan:

Dushan could preserve the lands occupied during the wars with the Paleologos kings in Epirus and Albania and the territories occupied during his personal wars with local rulers.

The occupied towns of Macedonia and Thessalia were free to choose between Kantakouzenos and Dushan.

In case of murder of John V, Kantakouzenos would declare Dushan as Co-Emperor (Psellos, 1953).

Thus, the agreement was made, but, taking into account Dushan's goals, it was clear that this agreement was temporary. Parallel to the agreement with Kantakouzenos, the King of Serbia united the occupied lands and tried to find allies (for instance, Venetians) in order to support the idea of restoration of the powerful Roman (Byzantine) Empire ruled by Serbians. Soon Kantakouzenos and Dushan argued about the division of Byzantine lands; hence, the alliance was destroyed in 1343. From this time, the King of Serbia changed his political orientation and got related to the Byzantine royal court by means of marriage (Dushan's son married the sister of Emperor John V Paleologos). Thus, Dushan became a relative and protector of the underaged Emperor. From this year on, he called himself „Cesnik Grkom“ (чесник греков). This title underlined his direct involvement in the ruling of the Greek Empire (Cirkovic, 2004, p. 64).

Closeness to the Byzantine royal court did not prevent Dushan from conquests. During the following two years, he continued the conquest of Macedonia, occupied Veria, Drama and Halkidiki peninsula with Athos. In the autumn of 1345, he occupied the town of Serres. At the end of the same year, Dushan declared himself Emperor of Serbians and Greeks and started preparation for turning the autocephalous archbishopric of Serbia into an institution of higher rank - Patriarchate (Cirkovic, 1996, pp. 135-155; The Cambridge History... , 2008, p. 824)

It should be underlined that one of the most important factors for the legitimization of Dushan's power was the support of the Greek clergy. However, it was impossible to receive this support from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Therefore, he focused on the Athos mountain and its monasteries. Certainly, this was not accidental. Above all, we should take into account the religious and political significance of mount Athos in the Christian world, due to which all the powerful rulers tried to obtain influence on this Holy Mountain. Besides, as mentioned above, Athos was the centre of Hesychasm, and, according to a Serbian scholar Sima Cirkovic, during the reign of Paleologos kings, this sacred place declared disobedience, opposing the Emperor's pro-Roman orientation and his aspiration to establish the Union of Church. Thus, during the civil war, the Athonite clergy supported Kantakouzenos due to his Greek orientation. Later on, the Athonite clergy supported the Serbian king and considered him as the unifier of Orthodox forces. That is why the monasteries of Athos supported Stefan Dushan.

According to a Serbian scholar Sima Cirkovic, in 1345, after the occupation of the town of Serres, Stefan Dushan entered into an agreement with the representatives of Mount Athos, who recognized his authority and accepted him as their ruler. On April 16, 1346, at Easter holiday, Dushan was crowned at Uskuba cathedral as "The Emperor and Autokrator of Serbs and Greeks". Alongside with the Serbian clergy, the coronation was attended

by the Patriarch of Bulgaria, Archbishop of Ohrid and representatives of the Athos mountain (Cirkovic, 2004, pp. 64-65).

Of special importance for the given research is the position of the Athos Iviron monastery and the relations between the Serbian Emperor and the Georgian monks.

We can find information regarding the relations between the Serbian Emperor and the Georgian monastery of Athos in two documents preserved at Iviron archive. These are the gold stamp charters (Hrisobule) presented to the monastery by Dushan in January and April of 1346. The first one is presented several months prior to the coronation and provides interesting information regarding the relations between the Serbian ruler and the Georgian monks. The text of the Hrisobule says that Athonite monks visited Dushan and declared their loyalty to him. There is a Hrisobule granted to the monasteries of Athos, which says that Dushan sent his logothete to Athos, asking the monks to pray for him. The monks agreed on condition that Dushan would be mentioned in their prayers after the Emperor of Byzantium. The monks asked for guarantees regarding the freedom of the Holy Mountain and preservation of their lands. Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, the information of the Hrisobule regarding the visit of Athonite monks to Dushan and declaration of their loyalty makes us think that the Serbian ruler was more acceptable candidate for the Athonite monks than for the Greek clergy. This position of the Georgian monks was probably due to the oppression of the Georgian community by the Greeks in the given period.

Another interesting fact is that by the year 1340, the total amount of tax paid by Iviron to the State for certain villages owned by the monastery exceeded to total amount of tax paid by the peasants of these villages (Iviron Acts, 2008, p. 22). In 1341, during the civil war, Iviron was obliged to pay even higher taxes. In such conditions, the Serbian Emperor rendered significant assistance to Iviron monastery (Iviron Acts, 2008, p. 24).

According to the Hrisobule, Iviron asked Stefan Dushan to free the monastery from the above-mentioned tax (in the amount of 400 hyperpyrons). The monastery paid this tax for Radolibos and other domains. The tax was first paid to the Emperor's Treasury and later to the soldiers. The King accepted the monks' request and sacrificed the above-mentioned amount to the Holy Virgin Monastery of Iviron. He freed the monastery from all fiscal taxes and, using the gold stamp charter, guaranteed their property rights on the lands of the monastery (Radolibos, Dobrobykeia, Obelos, Kotzake, Grizoba with Zichna mill, Minor church of Saint Nicholas in Prebezaina, the Monastery of Saint John Theologian at Serres, Saint Unmercenaries in Kyrannitza, Melitzianis, houses in Serres, the church of Eleusa Icon of the Holy Virgin with its lands). Attention should be paid to the fact that the first gold charter of Dushan does not

mention Iviron's property in Thessaloniki or Chalcedonia or any lands in the North. According to the researchers of Iviron Acts, these lands owned by the monastery were at that time under the Serbian rule.

The second gold charter was granted to Iviron Monastery by Stefan Dushan after his coronation. In this document, the list of lands of Iviron is enhanced. Besides, the Emperor frees all domains and church lands from fiscal tax and confirms the monastery's ownership rights (Iviron Acts, 2008, pp. 126-139). The charter presents a complete list of monastic lands on the Serbian and Byzantine territory and mentions 7 lands that were unknown until the issuance of the charter:

- 1) The houses in Rentina
- 2) The land of Saint George in Kouboukleia
- 3) Houses in Vrestian Zeugaralikion
- 4) Houses in Zichna
- 5) Kormista Zeugaralikion
- 6-7) Two lands of eleusa in Stroummitza: of St. Kale and St. Theodore (Iviron Acts, 2008, p. 17)

In addition, Dushan deprived Iviron of certain lands and granted them to the Russian monastery of St. Pantaleon and Serbian monastery of Hilandar. These lands were: St. Cyricus, a land plot in Kotzake, a mill in Antzista and Maluka.

St. Cyricus church with vineyards and cornfields, a mill in Antzista and Kotzake were granted to St. Pantaleon Russian Monastery, and Maluka was granted to the Serbian monastery of Hilandar (Iviron Acts, 2008, pp. 15-16). Naturally, these actions of the Serbian Emperor were aimed at the enhancement of Slavonic (Serbian, Russian) monasteries on the Athos, because the Greek monasteries were still dominant on this Holy Mountain.

Thus, based on the analyzed documents, we can find out information regarding the general economic situation of the Iviron Monastery and its relation with the Serbian Emperor. The above-mentioned charters prove that, alongside with the attempts to strengthen Slavonic monasteries, the Emperor tried to support the Athonite brethren. The Emperor's interest and support of Iviron was due to several factors:

For centuries, the Iviron monastery had played an important role in the life of the Athos mountain. It was often mentioned as "The Emperor's Monastery" or "The Large Imperial Monastery". The documents issued by the Athos Council were signed by the superior of Iviron whose signature stood below that of Athos Archimandrite or representative of the Laura (since 1366 - below the signature of the representative of Vatopedi) (Iviron acts, 2008, p. 9). Besides, the monastery had many subordinate objects on the Athos mountain. Apart from solid economic state, this increased its influence and authority.

The monastery was famous for its anti-Union position. It did not obey the decrees and orders of the Paleologos authorities. This formed favourable grounds for the monastery's pro-Serbian orientation. Iviron was one of the most important and competitive powers among the non-Greek monasteries of Athos. This monastery played an important role in the implementation of the Serbian Emperor's religious and political affairs.

In its turn, the monastery was interested in alliance with the Serbian Emperor, because:

Due to the disobedience declared after the Lyon Council, mount Athos and the Georgian monastery became the objects of aggression on the part of Pope's supporters and State authorities.

The Georgian brethren was oppressed by the Greek clergy.

In these conditions, the Serbian Emperor, who had oriental Orthodox religious orientation, was the most acceptable candidate for the throne (especially because the majority of pretenders were Greek). He was really capable of replacing the Paleologos dynasty by the Nemanjic dynasty. He was capable of creating favourable conditions for non-Greek Orthodox monasteries on Athos mountain.

Thus, the wish for cooperation between the Serbian and Georgian sides was mutual. Hence, both sides made corresponding steps. The Georgian brethren supported the Serbian Emperor. In his turn, the Emperor freed the monastery from the financial obligations imposed by the Paleologos authorities (and strongly hampering the monastery's progress) and granted the monastery with property rights on their lands. The above-mentioned enabled the monastery to escape financial problems caused by increased State tax. Besides, the Emperor's support freed the Georgian monastery from the Greek discrimination and State pressure caused by the monastery's anti-Union position. Now the monastery had a real chance of freedom. Of course, we cannot exclude probable risks on the part of Serbian authorities, but the key factors affecting the monastery no longer existed.

With regard to the issue under analysis, it is both interesting and important to find out who was the supervisor of the monastery in the given period.

It is well known that until the middle of the XIV century the supervisors of Iviron were Georgians. Iviron's property increased in the period of supervision of Georgians (mostly due to donations rather than acquisition) (Iviron Acts, 2008, p. 16). There is scarce information regarding the life of the Iviron monastery after the middle of the XIV century. There is no precise, detailed information in Georgian historiography regarding the supervisor of the Monastery. Therefore, we have addressed scholarly literature and Iviron archive in order to find out the person who supervised

the Iviron Monastery during its agreement with the Serbian Emperor.

In their work "The History of the Georgian Culture", G. Lortkipanidze and N. Chikovani note: At the time when Stefan Dushan granted the monastery with property rights on lands, "the monastery had a Georgian supervisor who was also engaged in the activities of other monasteries" (Lortkipanidze, Chikovani, 1997, p. 275). This information is extremely important because it underlines the Georgian origin of the supervisor and his contribution to Iviron and other monasteries. However, the above-mentioned authors do not mention the name of the supervisor. In this regard, we have studied a collection of acts preserved at Iviron archive (published in Georgian language) and containing a list of supervisors of the Georgian monastery. According to this list, from September, 1344 until March, 1347, the monastery was supervised by Andria (Iviron Acts, 2008, p. 45). As we have mentioned, the Serbian Emperor granted charters to Iviron monastery in January 1346 (first charter) and in April of the same year (second charter). The date of issuance of these documents coincides with the supervision of the Iviron Monastery by Andria. Hence, we assume that the agreement with the Serbian Emperor was signed in the period of supervision of the Georgian monastery by Andria. Thus, the monastery was granted the Emperor's charters at the time of Andria's supervision.

Interestingly enough, the support of the new ruler of Byzantium and the awards received from the new Emperor had a significant impact on further development of the Iviron Monastery. During the lifetime of Stefan Dushan, the Georgian brethren continued to supervise the monastery and owned numerous domains and lands. In its turn, Iviron was the only stronghold of the Serbian Emperor among the entire clergy of the Empire. We might even assume that due to the pro-Serbian orientation of the Athonite Georgians, after Dushan's death, in 1355/1356, based on the Decree issued by the Patriarch of Constantinople Calistus I, Georgians were deprived of high-rank positions as well as the right to supervise Iviron. Since then, the role of Georgians became restricted in the life of the Iviron Monastery.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that the middle of the XIV century was an extremely interesting period in the monastic life of Mount Athos, as well as the history of the entire Byzantium and Serbian-Georgian relations. Analysis of the Serbian intervention on the Byzantine territory, its causes and results, the approach of the Orthodox clergy and, in particular, the attitude of the Iviron Monastery enables us reconstruct the history of Iviron in the obscure epoch, yet unstudied in the Georgian scholarly literature. Apart from Greek and Georgian sources, significant data are obtained from the Serbian sources. In my opinion, the issues under analysis require further research, which, most hopefully, will be carried out in the near future.

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