

Georgi DIMOV*

DUKLJA, THE NORMANS OF SICILY AND BYZANTIUM IN THE 11th AND 12th CENTURY

Abstract: The relations between Imperial ally Duklja and Byzantium date back to the mid-1040 s when Michael (Mihailo) son of Vojislav gradually emerged as the sole ruler of this principality over his four brothers (1043–1046).

Michael ruled Duklja from 1046 until 1081, when we find the last mentioning of him in the primary sources. In the early winter of 1072 he sent an army under his son Constantine Bodin to support a Bulgarian rebellion (in the vicinity of Skopje), which was timed to take advantage after the defeat at Matzikert the year before. Another point that complicated the Byzantino-Slavic relations was Michael's wish to create his own church that would have been independent from the Greek-Orthodox archbishops of Dyrrachium and Ohrid.

Later Michael received his crown as papal vassal in an attempt to move further away from the Byzantine sphere of influence (1077). He also entered diplomatic relations with the western powers by marrying his son Bodin, to the daughter of the Norman governor of Bari.

All this political moves make us think that Michael of Duklja would have hoped that the Pope would act in his favor and deter any expansionist attempts by the Normans against his principality, if we bear in mind Amicus II's campaign against Dalmatia only three years before.

The Byzantine victory over the Bulgarians was a critical development in Balkan history. The Byzantines ruled over most of the Balkans — Bulgaria, Serbia, Duklja¹, and Bosnia all fell back under Byzantine rule for the first time since the 6th century.

* Assist. Prof. Georgi Dimov, Institute of Balkan Studies & Center of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia

¹ Montenegro was originally known as "Duklja", and later "Zeta", until 15th century. The name "Duklja" was derived from "Dioclea", a city whose ruins lie just outside present-day Podgorica and which governed the Roman province of the same name, which included the territory of what is today the republic of Montenegro. — see Fine, J. V. A. *The Early Medie-*

Short-lived as it was, Vladimir's influence in Balkan politics shifted the centre of Serbian rule from inland Serbia to the coast. This was a "*renewed Serbian state centered in Duklja*".

The relations between Imperial ally Duklja and Byzantium date back to the mid-1040s when Michael (*Mihailo*), son of Vojislav gradually emerged as the sole ruler of this principality over his four brothers (1043–1046)².

Michael ruled Duklja from 1046 until 1081, when we find the last mentioning of him in the primary sources³. In the early winter of 1072 he sent an army under his son Constantine Bodin to support a Bulgarian rebellion (in the vicinity of Skopje), which was timed to take advantage after the defeat at Matzikert the year before⁴. Skylitzes names "*Bulgariae princeps Michaellem*" and "*suo filio Constantino, cui Bodino cognomen erat*", dated to 1073–1075⁵. The rebellion was crushed by Byzantium, Bodin was defeated south of Skopje, captured and banished to Asia Minor where he remained until ransomed in 1078. The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja records that Bodin declared himself emperor which triggered an invasion from Byzantium, during which Bodin was captured and sent to Antioch in exile⁶.

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Later Michael received his crown as papal vassal (*rex Sclavorum*) in an attempt to move further away from the Byzantine sphere of influence (1077)⁷. He also entered diplomatic relations with the western powers by marrying his son Bodin, to the daughter of the Norman governor of Bari. Du Cange states that "*Jacinthæ... Archyriszi nobilis filiam*" was the wife of Konstantin Bodin

val Balkans, A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991, p. 193.

² Migne, J. P. Cedreni Historiarum Continuatio, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca Tomus CXXII, Paris, 1889, col. 338.

³ Sisic, F. (ed.), Stephenson, P. (trans.) Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, based on Lucius (1666) De regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae, (Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja), 1998, Amsterdam, XXXVII–XXXIX.

⁴ Stephenson, P. Byzantium's Balkan frontier: a political study of the northern Balkans, 900–1204, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 138–144.

⁵ Migne, J. P. Georgius Cedrenus, Ioannes Scylitzes, Michael Psellus, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca Tomus CXXII, Paris, 1889, col. 446.

⁶ Sisic, Stephenson, Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, XL.

⁷ Fine, The Early Medieval Balkans, 215216.

but the primary source which he cites has not yet been traced⁸. She was the daughter of the leader of the pro-Norman party in Bari, Apulia. Later, Jakvinta poisoned Vladimir King of Duklja in 1114, installing her son Djordje as king in his place. Finally, when the latter was deposed in 1118, Jakvinta was arrested and sent to Constantinople where she died⁹.

All this political moves makes us think that Michael of Duklja would have hoped that the Pope would act in his favor and deter any expansionist attempts by the Normans against his principality, if we bear in mind Amicus II's campaign against Dalmatia only three years before¹⁰.

The Normans struck first against northern Dalmatia in 1074 and they briefly made themselves overlords over Split, Trogir, Biograd, Zadar and Nin. Next three years the Venetians sent a fleet to Dalmatia and drove them out. As a result, the doge of Venice again took the title of dux of Dalmatia — the same title given to an earlier doges in 998 by Basil II and expired in 1020 s. Despite its close ties with East Roman emperors and it supported vassal status, Venice was growing stronger and stronger. At the end of the century Venetians were truly an independent and mighty trade and naval power in Adriatic¹¹.

Later, when Normans attacked southern Dalmatia, capturing Ragusa, Bodin was expected to aid the Emperor Alexius at Dyrrhachium. Despite their naval defeat, the Normans of Robert Guiscard in a critical battle of October 1081 defeated the Byzantines near Dyrrhachium.

Alexius also called for his Imperial ally and vassal the Prince (*župan*) Constantine-Bodin of Dioclea. Instead, he remained idle (possibly as part of a pre-conceived plan with the Normans) and watched the Byzantines get utterly defeated; in this battle Dukljans sat on the sidelines¹².

Bodin also had had hostile relation with Byzantines before. On one side, he had actively supported the Bulgarian rebellion in 1070 s, and, on the other side — as a captive in Constantinople after the Byzantines had defeated him in battle.

During his early rule, energy spent consolidating his rule and meddling with Byzantine-Norman matters diverted Bodin's attention from other parts

⁸ Du Fresne du Cange, C. *Historia Byzantina*, Vol. I *Familias ac Stemmata Imperatorum*. Paris, 1680, p. 157

⁹ Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 231–232.

¹⁰ Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan frontier*, 156–160.

¹¹ Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 280–289.

¹² Живковић, Т. Дукља између Рашке и Византије у првој половини XII века. — В: Зборник радова Византолошког института 43, 2006, 451–466.

of his realm. The *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* notes that Bodin sent expedition into Bosnia and Rascia. Since his father, Michael, had already captured Raska earlier, it must have slipped out of Duklja's control. Bodin successfully marched against Raska and placed his cousins Vukan and Marko (the sons of Petrislav) as župans. He also captured Bosnia, and placed one Stipan, to rule in his name. Although Bodin was recognised as *King of Duklja and Dalmatia*, there is no evidence to suggest that Bosnia, Zachlunia, Duklja and Rascia were incorporated into an integrated kingdom. Each region retained its own hereditary nobility, but were under the political and military sway of Duklja.

By 1085 the Byzantines got the upper hand in their wars with the Normans, recapturing Dyrrachium and Ragusa. In 1090, they punished Bodin for his impudence, possibly capturing him for the second time, and not much is known about him subsequently until he dies in c. 1101. Raska, Zahumlje and Bosnia probably broke free from Dukljan vassalage.

First, we saw that Bodin's military actions, as recorded by *Anna Comnena*, show that he was an unreliable ally of Alexius I Comnenus (1081–1118)¹³. On the other side, the next event described by Anna Comnena explains how John Ducas, Emperor Alexius's brother-in-law was sent to Dyrrachium (Durazzo) with strong forces not only to guard the city, but also to wage war against Dalmatiae. Anna Comnena mentions Bodin for the last time in 1091, when Emperor Aexius Comnenus learnt that Bodin intended to move against Byzantium and violate the peace treaties they had made previously.

The *Priest of Dioclea* also writes about Bodin's reign. He says that after the death of Rober Guiscard he defeated the Franks who had been in Dyrrachium and entire territory and took from them the town of Dyrrachium itself. When he later concluded peace with the Emperor, he restored the city to him¹⁴.

But the report that Bodin captured Dyrrachium is not proved by other sources. The only exception is a note of the manuscript of the *Chronicle of the Doge Andrea Dandolo*, which seems to be based on the work of the *Priest of Dioclea*.

Second, unlike the Byzantine sources, the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea* does not specify the year of the beginning of Bodin's rule. The *Priest of Dioclea* is nevertheless familiar with the fact that Bodin put on his head *diadema* and proclaimed himself *imperator*. So, if the *Priest of Dioclea* considered that Bodin's reign started in 1072, when he was proclaimed *Emperor of Bul-*

¹³ Sewter, E. (trans.) *Anna Comnena The Alexiad*, Penguin Books, 1969, I, p. 72.

¹⁴ Живковић, Дукља између Рашке и Византије у првој половини XII века, 451–466.

garians, his twenty-two years in power lasted from 1093 to 1094, and his reign ended in the spring of 1099¹⁵.

Orderic Vitalis records that the “*Serbian prince Bodin*” received the crusading armies of Adhemar Bishop of Le Puy and Raymond de Toulouse after passing “*through Dalmatia*” on their journey eastwards in 1096–1097¹⁶. “*Bodino rege*” also donated the church of St. Martin de Zonchetto to the monastery of St. Benedict by charter dated 1100¹⁷.

Later, Duklja’s long internecine strife was devastating for its status, as it was reduced back to a Principality dependent on Byzantine support, and was increasingly losing territory to Raska.

Only one of the rulers — Radoslav, Prince of Duklja from c. 1146 to c. 1149, was divided by two sides in the political situation in the Balkans (1148) — one being the alliance of the Byzantines and Venice, the other of the Normans and Hungarians¹⁸. Uroš II Grand Župan of Serbia attacked Duklja, occupying about two-thirds of its territory. Radoslav appealed for help to Byzantium which attacked Serbia, forcing Uroš to flee to the mountains and winning a decisive victory against a combined Serbian/Hungarian army on the River Tara in 1150. Under the terms of the resulting peace treaty, Duklja’s territories were restored and Radoslav’s position as *Knez* confirmed¹⁹.

On the other hand, the Normans were sure of the danger that the battlefield would move from the Balkans to their area in Italy. Manuel I Komnenos also allied himself with the Germans after defeating the Cumans in 1148. The Serbs, Hungarians and Normans exchanged envoys, being in the interest of the Normans to stop Manuel’s plans to recover Italy²⁰.

¹⁵ Sisic, Stephenson, *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja*, XL.

¹⁶ Chibnall, M. (ed. and trans.) *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*. Oxford Medieval Texts, 1969–1980, Book IX, p. 35.

¹⁷ Sakcinski, I. K. (ed.) *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalamatiæ et Slavoniæ, Diplomaticki Zbornik kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije (Zagreb)* („Codex Diplomaticus Croatiae”), Vol. I, CCXXIX, 1874, p. 188.

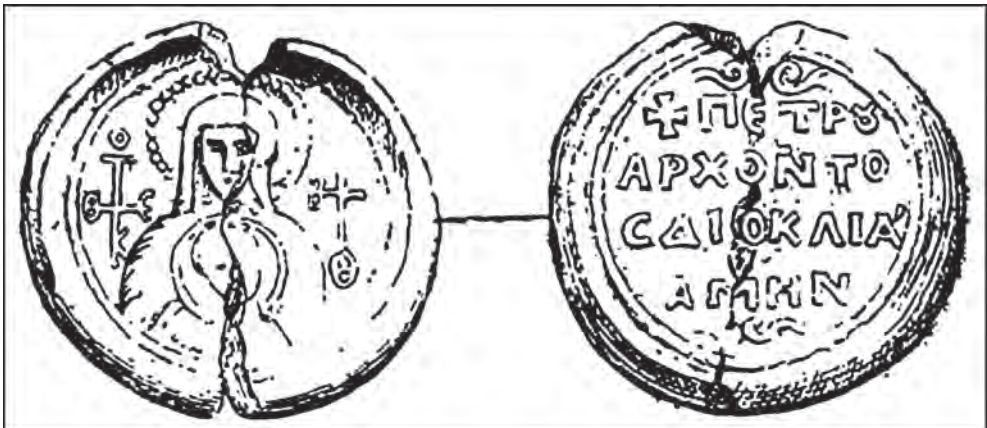
¹⁸ Radoslav succeeded his father in 1146, installed during a visit to Constantinople as *Knez of Duklja*. — Sisic, Stephenson, *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja*, XXXVII.

¹⁹ Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, p. 238.

²⁰ Божилов, И., Билярски, И., Димитров, Х., Илиев, И. *Византийските василевси*. София, 1997, 324–329; Varzos, К. *Η Γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών*. Θεσσαλονίκη, 1984, 422–477; Каждан, А. П. „Загадка Комнинов (Опит историографии)” — *Византийский временник* 25, 1964, 53–98; Magdalino, P. *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180)*, Cambridge, 1993, 59–60.

As we see, the Serbs under brothers Uroš II and Desa revolted against the Byzantines, when Manuel was in Avlona planning an offensive across the Adriatic, and this revolt posed danger to the Emperor if he would attack Italy, as the Serbs could strike at the Adriatic bases. The Serbs next took an offensive against Radoslav, who was a loyal Byzantine vassal (he was installed by Manuel I upon a visit to Constantinople to pay homage to the Emperor). Radoslav was pushed to the southwestern corner of Duklja, to Kotor, and retained only the coastal area, with the brothers holding much of inland Duklja and Trebinje. Radoslav sought help from the Emperor, who sent aid from Durazzo. The fate of Radoslav is unknown.

By the time of Radoslav's reign as prince, he only held a small strip of land on the Dukljan coast. By 1166, much of Duklja was occupied by Rascia, and in 1186, Stefan Nemanja annexed Duklja in its entirety after defeating the last Doclean prince — Mihailo (Radoslav's successor, and Nemanya's nephew). He was faced with growing pressures from Serbia, which completed its conquest of Duklja (by then more commonly known as Zeta) by 1189. Grand Župan Nemanja ruled Duklja (Zeta) directly as part of Serbia until his abdication in 1196 when his older son Vukan succeeded him as Grand Knez of Zeta. According to Fine, Desislava, widow of Mihailo, was in exile at Dubrovnik in 1189, but her fate is unknown²¹.



Lead stamp of archont Petar (or Predimir), 9th C.

²¹ Fine, J. V. A. *The Late Medieval Balkans, A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 7.



Michael I, the first recognized ruler of Duklja on a fresco in the *Church of St. Michael* in Ston.