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GEORGIOS SPHRANTZES OR HOW TO BECOME AN ARCHON IN BYZANTIUM IN THE XV CENTURY*

The historical work by Georgios Sphrantzes, his *Memoirs*, illustrates, through information on his life and career, the way in which a person could enter the higher social circles in XV century Byzantium. Usually, these persons were referred to in sources as ‘archons’ and some of them as the emperor’s ‘oikeioi’, which involved a specific kind of personal and close relationship with the ruler and, in this case, a dynasty. Furthermore, Sphrantzes’ work provides data on some late Byzantine phenomena, for instance, not only the imperial ‘oikos’, but those of the emperor’s brothers as well, and indicates the existence of the same hierarchy in the ‘ospitia’ of the despots.

Key words: Sphrantzes, archon, oikeios, oikos, ospition, aristocrat, ambassador, kephale

Историјско дело Георгија Сфранциса, његови *Мемоари*, илуструје, кроз информације о његовом животу и каријери, као модел, начин на који је нека личност могла да постане део највиших друштвених кругова у Византији XV века. Ове личности извори најчешће помињу као ‘архонте’, а неке од њих као цареve ‘oikeioi’, што је термин који је означавао специфичну врсту личне и блиске везе са владаром и, у овом случају, династијом. Штавише, Сфранцисов спис пружа податке о неким позновизантијским феноменима, као што су не само ‘oikos’ цара, већ и цареve браће такође, што сведочи о постојању исте хијерархије и у ‘кућама’ тадашњих деспота, у то време искључиво чланова династије Палеолога.

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Кључне речи: Сфранцис, архонт, oikeios, oikos, ospition, аристократа, амбасадор, кефалија

As it is well-known, Georgios Sphrantzes wrote the ‘Memoirs’,¹ a literary family history of the last Palaiologoi emperors. Therefore, we are very well informed about Sphrantzes’ own life through his historical work. He himself and his family were in the service of the last three Byzantine emperors. The essential information on Sphrantzes’ life, his historical work, the editions and principal literature have been given by H. Hunger.² Nevertheless, some new observations can be made based on the many details of his life and career. In a way, his connections with the members of the Palaiologoi dynasty could be viewed as an example of ‘how to become an archon’ in Byzantium, in the first half of the XV century.

First of all, Sphrantzes called himself an ‘archon’ (ἀρχων).³ In the XV century, the term was usually considered to refer to an aristocrat or, at least, a person of very high status in Byzantine society.⁴ During the XIII and XIV centuries, for instance, in the sources, the terms ‘κύριος’, ‘δοῦλος’, ‘οἰκεῖος’ denoted an aristocrat.⁵

Not only did Sphrantzes originate from a distinguished family in Lemnos,⁶ but they were intellectuals, as well. Namely, Sphrantzes stated that his uncle had been the tutor to the despotes Constantine. Accordingly, his uncle’s sons and Sphrantzes himself were despotes’ companions, friends and attendants.⁷

Furthermore, later, Sphrantzes also became the ‘οἰκεῖωσι’ of the emperor Manuel II.⁸ The nature of a ‘τοῦ οἰκεῖου’ meant that a person had some kind of political connection with the emperor. But the sources refer to some of the ‘τοῦ οἰκεῖου’ of the emperor, who did not have any political competence.⁹ In the early days of his life this was also the case with Sphrantzes. That was how his career advanced, later on. As it was emphasized by D. Kyritses, for middle-class people during the previous two centuries, the court hierarchy was the key to entering the

¹ Generally on autobiographical tradition in Byzantium cf. *M. Hinterberger*, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz*, Wien 1999.

² *H. Hunger*, *Die Hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, I, München 1978, 494–498 (hereafter: *Hunger*, *Literatur*).

³ Giorgio Sfranze, *Cronaca*, a cura di *R. Maisano*, Roma 1990, 58, 66 (hereafter: *Sfranze*, *Cronaca*).

⁴ For instance, *T. Kiousopoulou*, *Βασιλεύς ή οικονομός. Πολιτική εξουσία και ιδεολογία πριν την Άλωση*, Athena 2007, 84, states that 80 people were mentioned as archons in the sources, who were entrusted with a particular political office or assignment (hereafter: *Kiousopoulou*, *Βασιλεύς ή οικονομός*).

⁵ *D. Kyritses*, *The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, Harvard University 1997, 12 (unpublished doctoral thesis; hereafter: *Kyritses*, *Aristocracy*).

⁶ *Hunger*, *Literatur*, 494.

⁷ *Sfranze*, *Cronaca*, 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹ *Kiousopoulou*, *Βασιλεύς ή οικονομός*, 120.

higher aristocracy.¹⁰ Since he was not a member of the high aristocracy by birth, he could have chosen to enter public administration. These people were generally well-educated and most of their careers began with a good education either in Constantinople or in the towns of their origin. Some of them who managed to acquire office would later pursue notable careers as high ranking court dignitaries, probably in the various *logothesia*. The highest ranked of these officials would become the emperor's closest associates and even form certain marriage connections to the dynasty.¹¹

Thus, Sphrantzes first entered the service of the emperor Manuel II, then the emperor John VIII and later the despotes Constantine.¹² Very early, even during the lifetime of Manuel II, he took part in some very important diplomatic missions, and in the service of the empress Helena Dragases Palaiologos. In fact, Sphrantzes participated, along with Loucas Notaras¹³ and Manuel Melachrenos, as an emissary, in the signing of the peace-treaty with Murat II, in February 1424, when Byzantium again became an Ottoman vassal.¹⁴ Actually, he is known, later on, to have become one of the imperial family's most trusted and most important diplomats. Anyway, it has already been emphasized by scholars that the Byzantine ambassadors of the XIV and XV centuries originated from the rank of the archons.¹⁵

Then, in January 1432, the emperor John VIII appointed him to the dignity of protovestiarites.¹⁶ The nature of this office is unclear from the sources, and the origins of its holders are mixed. This position probably existed from the XIII century and its recipient is believed to have been the chief of the *vestiariitai*, i.e. imperial bodyguard.¹⁷ Another dilemma about this office is genuine. Actually, this office was bestowed on Sphrantzes by the emperor John VIII, in Constantinople, but at that time he was already in the service of the despotes Constantine, who

¹⁰ *Kyritses*, *Aristocracy*, 51.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

¹² Sfranze, *Cronaca*, 32–36.

¹³ On Loucas Notaras, one of the most distinguished figures of the Late Empire cf. *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, Wien 1976 sq, no. 20730 (hereafter: PLP), as well as *K.-P. Matschke*, *The Notaras Family and Its Italian Connections*, DOP 49 (1995) 59–62; *idem*, *Personengeschichte, Familiengeschichte, Sozialgeschichte: Die Notaras im späten Byzanz, Oriente e Occidente tra Medioevo ed età moderna: Studi in onore di Geo Pistarino*, ed. L. Balletto, tome 2, Genova 1997, 787–812; *Th. Ganchou*, *Le rachat des Notaras après la chute de Constantinople ou les relations étrangères de l'élite byzantine au XVe siècle, Migrations et Diasporas Méditerranéennes (Xe–XVIe siècles)*, ed. *M. Balard, A. Ducellier*, Paris 2002, 149–229; *T. Kioussopoulou*, *Λουκάς Νοταράς: Ψήγματα μιας βιογραφίας, Κλητόριον εις μνήμην Νίκου Οικονομίδη*, ed. *F. Euan-gelatos-Notara, T. Maniati-Kokkini*, Athena — Thessaloniki 2005, 161–176.

¹⁴ "...ἀποκρισιάρων ἀπελθόντων... ἐγὼ δὲ ὡς ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγίαν δέσποιναν συγγενίδα αὐτοῦ δὴ τοῦ ἀμηνᾶ ... καὶ ὅτι, ἂν δεῖσθῃ, νὰ γράψω καὶ δι' ὑφειλτῶν εἰς τε τὸν ἄγιον βασιλέα καὶ εἰς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν βασιλέα εἰς τὴν Οὐγγαρίας εὐρισκόμενον, Sfranze, *Cronaca*, 26.

¹⁵ *Kioussopoulou*, *Βασιλεύς ἢ οἰκονόμος*, 129; *S. Mergiali-Sathas*, *A Byzantine Ambassador to the West and his Office during the XIV and XV centuries: a Profile*, BZ 94 (2001) 598–604.

¹⁶ Sfranze, *Cronaca*, 72.

¹⁷ *Kyritses*, *Aristocracy*, 43; *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, New York, London 1991, 1750 (*A. Kazhdan*) (hereafter: ODB).

was in Morea. So, he could not have been in the service of the emperor, particularly not as the chief of his bodyguard. Could it be that this particular office was only a titular one at that point in time? Or that the despotai, the emperor's brothers, each one of them ruling over a particular part of Morea at that time,¹⁸ had their own protovestiarites', as they had their own courts and ministers?¹⁹

Even before he was granted the dignity of protovestiarites, Sphrantzes was appointed a kephale of Patras in 1429.²⁰ He would also hold this office several times later, as kephale of Selymbria in 1443 and of Mistra in 1446. The office of kephale was detected in the sources from the mid-XIII century and by the XIV century, the persons who bore the title combined the functions of civil and military administrators.²¹ Anyway, it emerges that in the XV century, as well as in the previous period, the kephales of certain areas were in charge of collecting taxes.²² It appears as though Sphrantzes partly confirms this, by showing the competences of a kephale in the narration of an episode after he became the kephale of Selymbria, in March 1443. He was supposed to guard the city in the name of Despot Constantine, against the Sultan, the despotes Demetrios and the emperor John VIII himself.²³ However, in June of the same year, it was decided that despotes Constantine should turn back to Morea and despotes Theodore should come to Constantinople and take Selymbria. Sphrantzes himself, as kephale, handed over the town to despotes Theodore in March 1444, declining his proposal to stay there “ἵνα καὶ τὴν Σηλυμβρίαν ἔχω καὶ τῶν πρώτων αὐτοῦ ὑποχειρίων εὐρίσκωμαι”.²⁴ Sphrantzes also refers to the area of jurisdiction of the kephale as a κεφαλατίκιον.²⁵

¹⁸ From 1428 until 1443, the despotes Theodore II, despotes Constantine and despotes Thomas shared rule over the Peloponnese, *D. A. Zakythinou*, *Le Despotat grec de Moreé*, I, edition revue et augmentée par *Ch. Maltéizou*, London Variorum 1975, 119.

¹⁹ Sphrantzes narrates that the despotes Constantine had his own mesazons even before he was assigned to govern one part of the Peloponnese (Sfranze, Cronaca, 36; cf. below p. 7). Then he mentions the protostrator Frangopoulos in a manner as the mesazon of despotes Theodore II (PLP no. 30100), Sfranze, Cronaca, 40, 41, n. 1, 92. Later, during the clashes between despotes Demetrios and despotes Thomas, in 1459, he mentions the protostrator Sebastopoulos Nicolaos, firstly as the mesazon of despotes Demetrios, who was helping despotes Thomas (PLP no. 25084), and then he mentions a cousin, Palaiologos Georgios (PLP no. 21447), who was, in contrast, firstly the mesazon of despotes Thomas, who was helping despotes Demetrios, Sfranze, Cronaca, 154. Finally, he mentions Raoul Michael Ises as the first archon of the court of despotes Thomas, Sfranze, Cronaca, 76 (cf. n. 63 below). On the other hand, Sphrantzes mentions even an archon of a lower level (ἄρχων ἀπὸ τοῦ δευτέρου), who was sent by the king of Georgia, in order to arrange the details concerning the marriage between Constantine XI and the Georgian princess (Sfranze, Cronaca, 118).

²⁰ Sfranze, Cronaca, 62.

²¹ ODB, 1122 (*M. C. Bartusis*).

²² *Lj. Maksimović*, *The Byzantine Provincial Administration under the Palaiologoi*, Amsterdam 1988, 117 sq. Cf. *K.-P. Matschke*, *Notes on the Economic Establishment and Social Order of the Late Byzantine Kephalaí*, *BF* 19 (1993) 139–143.

²³ „ἵνα καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν ἀμυρῶν καὶ τὸν δεσπότην κῶρ Δημήτριον καὶ αὐτὸν δὴ τὸν δεδωκότα βασιλέα προστάξας φυλάττω”, Sfranze, Cronaca, 92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 92

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20, 42, 70, 96, 152, 154.

Finally, Sphrantzes received the dignity of *mezas logothetes* in 1451.²⁶ Although there was great opposition to this act of the emperor Constantine XI, I shall put aside discussion on this particular subject,²⁷ and only observe, concerning Sphrantzes himself, that he was the bearer of one of the Empire's highest dignities for a period.

Sphrantzes' eventual relations of kinship to the Palaiologoi have not been clearly documented. We know that Sphrantzes' sister was married to Mamonas Gregorios Palaiologos, the kephale of a fortress on the Black Sea in 1416/17.²⁸ He was the son of Paulos Mamonas, the lord of Monembasia, who was in a dispute with the despotes Theodore I and later presented his accusations before Bayazit I in 1394. Subsequently, they reached a settlement and I assume, although without any further evidence to give at this point, that he may have been married to a woman from the Palaiologoi family, since his son bore that name, obviously inherited from his mother's side.²⁹ Later on, in 1438, Sphrantzes himself married Helena, the daughter of ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου Alexios Palaiologos Tzamlakon.³⁰ The level of his father-in-law's connection to the Palaiologoi is not known either, but it is believed that the Tzamlakones in general originated from the family branch deriving from the marriage of Anna, the daughter of the emperor Michael VIII, and Demetrios/ Michael Angelos.³¹ The office of ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου, nevertheless, in the XIV century corresponded to a bureaucrat and generally designated a person who was one of the emperor's private secretaries. Sphrantzes' father-in-law, so far, is considered to be the last known ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου.³²

The status of a person in Byzantium could have been measured in terms of birth, wealth, rank, profession, education and accomplishments.³³ Yet, as stressed by Paul Magdalino, what made an aristocrat was also his ability to identify with a group which he could call his own.³⁴ As we can see, Sphrantzes called himself an 'archon' (ἄρχων).³⁵ He also referred to himself as an imperial 'οἰκεῖος', narrating that he became one of the 'οἰκείωσι' of the emperor Manuel II.³⁶ As J. Verpeaux emphasized, in order to highlight the substance of this term, an 'οἰκεῖος' was a person who held a privileged position as a close, familiar and trustworthy servant, who more or less used to take part in many diplomatic missions, assigned to him

²⁶ Ibid., 124.

²⁷ *Kiuouspoulou*, Βασιλεύς ἡ οἰκονόμος, 121–122 expressed an opinion which actually depreciates the title of *mezas logothetes* bestowed on Sphrantzes.

²⁸ Sfranze, Cronaca, 12.

²⁹ Cf. PLP no. 16578, no. 16580.

³⁰ Sfranze, Cronaca, 86.

³¹ *Kyritses*, Aristocracy, 226–27.

³² Ibid., 42; ODB, 1101 (*A. Kazhdan*).

³³ *P. Magdalino*, Byzantine snobbery, *The Byzantine Aristocracy XI to XIII Centuries*, ed. *M. Angold*, Oxford 1984, 58 (hereafter: *Magdalino*, Snobbery).

³⁴ *P. Magdalino*, *The Byzantine aristocratic oikos*, *The Byzantine Aristocracy XI to XIII Centuries*, ed. *M. Angold*, Oxford 1984, 92 (hereafter: *Magdalino*, Byzantine aristocratic oikos).

³⁵ Sfranze, Cronaca, 58, 66.

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

by the emperor,³⁷ as testified by documents from the XIII, XIV and XV centuries. The ‘οἰκεῖτος’ appeared as an individual in the imperial escort, in the imperial service and he was connected with the emperor by a relationship based on loyalty and this relationship was much deeper than those between the emperor and the other common officials.³⁸

It has already been pointed out, particularly by P. Magdalino, that the ‘οἶκος’, ‘a social model in Byzantine society’, incorporating the household with all its dependants and dependencies, was the basic building block of all Byzantine urban and bureaucratic structures.³⁹ Although the Byzantines always maintained a distinction between the public and the private aspects of imperial power, ‘the formal division between the palace and the civil administration became less and less clear-cut with time’.⁴⁰

This connection existed in the XV century as well, since it has been suggested by many points in Sphrantzes’ work.⁴¹ The historian uses a particular term to denote the phenomenon of an aristocratic ‘οἶκος’. The term in question is τὸ ὀσπίτιον (domus, house; conclave; familia, stirps) and it is mentioned many times in his work.⁴²

As an ‘οἰκεῖτος’ of Manuel II, Sphrantzes narrates about his close relations with the emperor. Apart from the obvious goal to show how important his role in the affairs of the Empire and service of its last emperors was, he also describes the way how the Byzantine aristocratic ‘οἶκος’ was organized and how it functioned, at least in some details. For example, on several occasions in his work he mentioned the gifts which the emperors Manuel II, Constantine XI and the empresses Helena Dragases and Sofia of Monferrato had presented to him. As a token of gratitude for bringing them the good news that the emperor John VIII would, on his return from Hungary, safely arrive in Constantinople, soon, the empress Helena gave him some fine green χαμουχᾶν and the young empress sent him a message that she hoped the cloth she was sending would become the property of his wife, when he eventually married. On the same occasion, the emperor Manuel II gave him a chest (σεντούκιον) that Sphrantzes had requested some time before, but had been refused with the explanation that it had belonged to John V and would therefore be passed on as a legacy to his son, John VIII.⁴³ During the fighting for

³⁷ This component of Sphrantzes services is noted in *Kiousopoulou*, Βασιλεὺς ἡ οἰκονόμος, 267–268.

³⁸ *J. Verpeaux*, Les oিকেιοι. Notes d’histoire institutionnelle et sociale, REB 23 (1965) 92.

³⁹ *Magdalino*, Byzantine aristocratic oikos, 105, 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 93.

⁴¹ Sfranze, Cronaca, 26, 28, 32, 34, 36, 96 and many other.

⁴² *Ibid.*, (domus) 34, 38, 20; 56, 9; 58, 13; 62, 14, 16, 20; 74, 17, 19; 112, 23; 116, 2; 132, 20; 158, 4; 176, 15; (conclave) 34, 8, 16; 46, 15, 20; 126, 25; (familia, stirps) 42, 6; 76, 25; 82, 24; 106, 6; 108, 4, 6; 112, 2; 140, 21; 168, 22, 24. Nevertheless, the term τὸ ὀσπίτιον is also confirmed in the actes of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, cf. *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, ed. *F. Miklosich, J. Müller*, II, Vienna 1862, 380, 381, 382, 493, 494 sq.

⁴³ Sfranze, Cronaca, 28.

Patras, in 1429, Sphrantzes was wounded and captured.⁴⁴ After being released, he returned to his headquarters. He found a precious gift from his master, a beautiful suit, as a sign of gratitude for all the trouble he had experienced while in Constantine's service.⁴⁵

Furthermore, it was common practice, at least in the XV century and in the imperial *ὀσπίτιον* for the servants of the late emperor to be handed on to his successor. Hence, Sphrantzes narrates that the emperor Manuel II assigned him in his will, to his son John VIII.⁴⁶ Prior to their leaving for Mistra, in November 1427, Constantine Dragases asked his brother, the emperor, to give Sphrantzes to him as a servant. But the emperor objected because it was the will of their late father. Only later, after the request of their mother, the empress Helena, and after the 'lobbying' of Constantine's mesazons (καὶ ἔτι μετὰ τῶν μεσαζόντων αὐτοῦ), the emperor John VIII agreed, but only if Constantine was going to stay in Mistra. Otherwise, if he returned to Constantinople, Sphrantzes was to remain in the service of John VIII.⁴⁷ Finally, when Constantine Dragases appointed Sphrantzes to the position of kephale of Mistra (εἰς κεφαλατίκιον), he explained his act by the fact that the historian had served him well and because of his personal affinity for him, but also because he wanted him, as a person of trust, to be in charge of one of the most important cities of the Empire at that time, as was the case with Corinth and Patras (ὅτι θέλω νὰ ἔνι καὶ τοῦτου ἔν ὡς ἡ Κόρινθος καὶ ἡ Πάτρα, ὧν τὴν μὲν ἔχει ὁ Καντακουζηνὸς Ἰωάννης, τὴν δὲ Ἀλέξιος ὁ Λάσκαρις).⁴⁸ In many other instances, the last Byzantine emperor expressed his confidence in Sphrantzes, but the following one was perhaps the most illustrative, particularly in expressing how important it was for an emperor, at least during the last period of the Empire's existence, to have someone he could rely on. In the narration referring to the possibility of marrying Constantine Palaiologos to Mara Branković, the daughter of the Serbian despotes, apparently some very turbulent events occurred. The emperor Constantine explained to Sphrantzes why the marriage had not taken place. While this subject was under discussion, Constantine had no one to consult with. His mother Helena had died. So had Kantakouzenos.⁴⁹ Loucas Notaras was mindful only of his own interests, he was vindictive, and never failed to take his revenge when he thought he had been wronged, a fact which Sphrantzes knew best. The emperor's *megas domestikos*, Kantakouzenos,⁵⁰ was the enemy of Serbia (ἐχθρωδῶς εἰς τὰ τῆς Σερβίας) and he united with John Kantakouzenos,⁵¹ urging the emperor to marry the princess of Trebizond. The emperor could not rely on the monks either, since they were impractical in the matter of marriages, and, as far as

44 Ibid., 46.

45 Ibid., 56.

46 Ibid., 32.

47 Ibid., 36.

48 Ibid., 96.

49 It is Manuel Kantakouzenos, the protostrator, cf. PLP no. 10979.

50 It is Andronikos Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, cf. PLP no. 10957.

51 Cf. PLP no. 10974.

the archons were concerned, who could he have found so impartial that he could trust him (εἰς ἄρχοντας; καὶ τίνα νὰ εὔρισκον ἀπροσπαθῆ καὶ νὰ μηδὲν πρόσκειται εἰς τι ἢ νὰ μηδὲν τὸ ἐξείπη πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους).⁵²

As the close and trustworthy ‘οἰκεῖος’ of the entire imperial family, Sphrantzes was somehow, evidently by the will of the members of the Palaiologoi family, even authorized to make his own decisions. Constantine, the emperor, testifies to this with the words that Sphrantzes was the one who took action, made decisions, knew the emperor personally and was as thoroughly informed as possible (σὺ γὰρ, ὁποῦ καὶ ἔπραξας καὶ ἔστησας καὶ εἶδες τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ συνέτυχες καὶ ἐπληροφορήθης).⁵³

The close relations within the imperial ὀσπίτιον of the period were reflected in Sphrantzes’ description of his relations with the despotes Constantine. The historian reports that he cultivated a great friendship (ἀγάπην καὶ πληροφορίαν) with the despotes, since Sphrantzes’ uncle had been his tutor (τατᾶς) and his uncle’s sons were his companions, friends and attendants (συνανάτροφοι καὶ φίλοι καὶ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ), as Sphrantzes himself was. When the time came and he became one of the emperor Manuel’s οἰκείωσιν, despotes Constantine would gain from his father many things he wanted through Sphrantzes’ care and insistence.⁵⁴ The familiarity of the emperors with their servants was also illustrated by Sphrantzes’ description of the events after the death of the emperor Manuel II. He says that, according to the customs and the order in the chambers of the emperors (καὶ συνηθείας καὶ τάξεως οὔσης εἰς τὰ τῶν βασιλέων ὀσπίτια), the servants of the father had free access to the chambers of the sons, but not the other way round, as long as the father was alive. Since the emperor Manuel II had died, his servants (οἱ κελλιῶται) returned to the palace after the first memorial service (τὸ πρῶτον μνημόσυνον), because it was the tradition for them to remain by his grave until the first memorial service.⁵⁵ Although this account indicates that relations between the masters and their servants were close and that the servants were a significant part of their ‘οἶκος’, there were some rules which they had to obey. In the same episode, Sphrantzes tells us how despotes Constantine praised him for not violating the rule by not entering the chamber in which he was.⁵⁶

There were, obviously, some other services which, at least, the imperial servants could carry out. In an account describing the death of his great friend, Makarios Makris, a philosopher, intellectual, spiritual man and abbot of the Pantocrator monastery,⁵⁷ Sphrantzes eulogizes him and defends him from the accusations that he was a heretic. He stresses that Makarios had come to Constantinople from the Holy Mount and assumed responsibility for the imperial monastery of

⁵² Sfranze, Cronaca, 116.

⁵³ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁷ On Makarios Makris cf. PLP no. 16379.

the Pantocrator with Sphrantzes' personal assistance (παρακινήσει καὶ συνεργείᾳ ἰδικῆ μου), something which everyone knew. With God's help, and with the zeal and care of Makris and Sphrantzes, everything in the monastery that was good, concerning its organization and propriety, flourished.⁵⁸ It is rather interesting and significant that Sphrantzes took on the task of improving and decorating (εὐκοσμίαν) the sepulchre of the Byzantine emperors and their family members.⁵⁹

Along with the familiarity that he, as part of their 'οἶκος', enjoyed with the last three Byzantine emperors, Manuel II, John VIII and Constantine XI, Sphrantzes' work also testifies to the familiarity which he, as a master, maintained with the members of his own ὀσπίτιον. While the burdensome events connected with his appointment to the position of megas logothetes were taking place, Sphrantzes discussed this rather sensitive and important matter with his relatives and friends, as well as with his τῶν οἰκεῖων, and all of them suggested that he should agree to do any of the duties that were offered to him.⁶⁰ It is known, at least from some previous times in the Empire's history, that the Byzantine aristocratic 'οἶκος' was a very simple organism, consisting of the master of the house, his wife and children, and the servants who provided their household needs.⁶¹ According to Sphrantzes' testimony, in addition to the existence of the hierarchy and order in the imperial ὀσπίτιον,⁶² a hierarchy existed in other 'courts' or ὀσπίτια. Thus, he mentions Raoul Michael Ises (Ραοὺλ Μιχαήλ ὁ Ἰσηῖς) who was the first archon of the court of the despotes Thomas (ὁ πρῶτος ἄρχων τοῦ ὀσπιτίου ἐκείνου).⁶³ In the events that occurred prior to the siege of Patras in March 1429, in describing how Andronikos Laskaris Padiates was sent to the archons of Patras on some business and after that seized the town of Andrusa εἰς κεφαλὴν, Sphrantzes mentions Laskaris Alexios as ὁ πρῶτος τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ ὀσπιτίου αὐτοῦ, namely, the house of Laskaris, who took εἰς κεφαλατίκιον Bostitza.⁶⁴

Although the adoption of many significant surnames and patronymics became the fashion in Byzantium after the IX century, which drastically increased with the impending fall of the Empire, especially among those who were uncertain even of their *de facto* position in society,⁶⁵ that was not the case with Sphrantzes.

⁵⁸ Sfranze, Cronaca, 70.

⁵⁹ Cf. R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire Byzantin*, I, tome III: Les églises et les monastères, Paris 1953, 532.

⁶⁰ Sfranze, Cronaca, 126.

⁶¹ *Magdalino*, Byzantine aristocratic oikos, 96.

⁶² Cf. up p. 8–9.

⁶³ Sfranze, Cronaca, 76. On Raoul Michael Ises cf. PLP no. 24136.

⁶⁴ Sfranze, Cronaca, 40–42. According to PLP, it is possible that Laskaris (no. 14520) is identical with Filanthropenos Alexios Laskaris (no. 29753) or with Padiates Andronikos Laskaris (no. 21290). Following Sphrantzes' narration, the only possible identification is between Laskaris (no. 14520) and Padiates Andronikos Laskaris (no. 21290). Nevertheless, this question deserves further investigation.

⁶⁵ Cf. D. Nicol, *The prosopography of the Byzantine aristocracy, The Byzantine Aristocracy XI to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold, Oxford 1984, 79–91 (hereafter: Nicol, *The prosopography*).

However, who knows, he might have changed his attitude after establishing the closer family connection with the Palaiologoi, which had been planned to take place after Sphrantzes' return from Cyprus, in 1452. Before he was required to leave for Cyprus, the emperor Constantine told Sphrantzes to sign the documents for the queen of Cyprus, daughter of despotes Theodore II and the emperor's niece, with his new title of *megas logothetes*, as he was soon to be listed as a relative.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, due to well-known circumstances, this was never to come about. The chapter of his work that refers to his acquiring the title of *megas logothetes*, clearly shows how important it was for him to obtain a higher dignity. The whole discussion started with the emperor addressing him as *protovestiarites*. Since Sphrantzes, who had just returned from his journey to Trebizond and Georgia, was supposed to go on another diplomatic mission, to Cyprus, he replied to the emperor that his wife would either marry another man or take monastic vows if he continued to go on missions. First, the emperor promised that the missions on his behalf (τὰ διὰ σοῦ ἀποκρισιαρικὰ) would cease after this one,⁶⁷ and then suggested granting him a higher title. Sphrantzes agreed to go to the mission because with a higher title, even his wife would be persuaded, as she would enjoy the privileges of a higher position, honor and glory than that of the other *archontisses* (ὅτι διὰ τοῦτο θέλει ἔχειν καὶ ἄπερ μᾶς ἔταξαν, καὶ τόπον καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀναδοχὴν πλείω τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχοντισσῶν).⁶⁸

As P. Magdalino has also already emphasised, if discussion about the Byzantine aristocracy is to be meaningful, it should be justified to talk about Byzantine snobbery.⁶⁹ This is also illustrated by the episode when Sphrantzes was sent by Dragases as an ambassador to the Sultan. When he arrived in Constantinople, Markos Palaiologos Iagaris, at that time *protovestiarites*, and later *protostrator*, was assigned to him as a co-ambassador (συναποκρισιάριος). He was more inclined to oppose Sphrantzes' engagement in this matter than to favour it. Sphrantzes saw no other reason for Iagaris' attitude but what one could describe by the proverb 'spite knows not how to assess its advantage' (φθόνος οὐκ οἶδε προτιμᾶν τὸ συμφέρον). In negotiations with Ibrahim Pasha they were required to deliver Patras to its previous lords. Sphrantzes then asked the Pasha not to say this to his lord, Dragases, because he had sent him to the Turks as an ambassador, an archon (ἐκεῖνος ὅπως ἴπποτε ἄρχοντα αὐτοῦ ἀπέστειλε). Instead, the Emir should send one of his own archons to inform Dragases about this demand. The Pasha told him that he had spoken wisely, but Iagaris laughed at him. Sphrantzes stres-

⁶⁶ Sfranze, Cronaca, 130. R. Maisano (131, n. 1) regards this news as though the emperor actually was going to list Sphrantzes officially as one of his courtiers i.e. probably, as his 'οἰκέτος'. On the other hand, the father of Sphrantzes' proposed future daughter-in-law, Nicolaos Goudelis, was married to Theodora Palaiologina (Goudelina), definitely of Palaiologoi family and perhaps the daughter of despotes Demetrios Palaiologos (cf. PLP no. 4341). This also could have been the mentioned συγγενῆ.

⁶⁷ Sfranze, Cronaca, 118–120.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 122.

⁶⁹ Magdalino, Snobbery, 58.

ses his triumph, saying that, finally, a Turkish ambassador was sent to Dragases (ἀπῆρα ἀρχοντόσκληρον), which was the first step in the negotiations concerning Patras.⁷⁰ Although all the details about him and his life are not certain, one could say that Iagaris, in terms of his background, functions and position at court, was one of the most significant representatives of the higher Byzantine aristocracy at that time.⁷¹ His ‘snobbery’ was all the more evident because of the fact that Sphrantzes, at that particular moment, was kephale of Patras, one of the most important Byzantine cities in the Peloponnesus.

It seems that during his life-time, Sphrantzes accumulated or even inherited considerable wealth. He had earned some of it from his diplomatic missions. During the mission to arrange the marriage between Dragases and a princess of Georgia, the bride’s parents promised the amount of 36,000 florins and an additional 3,000 florins each year, as a dowry. Sphrantzes himself gained a great deal, on this occasion — 1,600 florins (γομάρια μετάξεως τέσσαρα, ὡς ἠκούσαμεν, ἔχει τὸ γομάριον φλωρία φ).⁷² Some time before the beginning of the siege of Constantinople, Sphrantzes undertook a trip with his eldest son John, the greatest of his movable assets (καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ κινητοῦ μου βίου τὸ πλεόν μεριδικόν) in order to show him all the places that would be significant in his future life. At the same time, they carefully followed the movements of the Sultan so that, in the event of war, Sphrantzes could leave his son and his wealth with his relatives in Morea (μὲ τὸν βίον μου).⁷³ After despotes Thomas and his family and archons had departed for Corfu in July 1460, Sphrantzes intended to take a ship and leave either for Crete or the monastery of St. Nicolas near Berroia, which had been built by his grandfather on his mother’s side.⁷⁴

Finally, to conclude the whole observation of Sphrantzes as ἄρχων of the Empire of the Romaioi, it is plausible to refer to a letter that Mehmed II addressed to the most noteworthy noblemen of the Peloponnesus on December 26, 1454. The letter, requesting them to accept the protection of the Turks, promising safety for them, their children and properties, mentions not only Manuel Raoul, Demetrios Lascaris, the families of the Dyplovatatzes, Kavakas, Pepegomenas, Frangopoulos, Zgouromalas, Mauvropapas, Philantropenos, Petro-Bua, but Georgios Sphrantzes, too, at the beginning.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Sfranze, Cronaca, 66.

⁷¹ On Iagaris cf. PLP. no. 7811.

⁷² Sfranze, Cronaca, 114.

⁷³ Ibid., 126.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁵ “ἐν μπρώτοις ἄρχων κὺρ Σφραντζῆς μὲ ἄλλους τοὺς ἐδικούς“, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, III, ed. *F. Miklosich, I. Müller*, Vienna 1865, 290; *D. A. Zakythinos*, *Le Despotat grec de Moreé II*, edition revue et augmentée par *Chryssa Maltéizou*, London Variorum 1975, 224.

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Маја Николић

ГЕОРГИЈЕ СФРАНЦИС ИЛИ КАКО ПОСТАТИ АРХОНТ У ВИЗАНТИЈИ XV ВЕКА

Већ нам је одавно познато да је Георгије Сфранцис, писац драгоценог мемоарског списка који нам, из пишевог угла, приповеда историју Византијског царства последњих деценија његовог постојања, а поглавито породичну историју Палеолога, био близак слуга, дипломата и пријатељ читаве царске породице. Његово дело је, међутим, и врело података за друштвену историју овог доба, а сам Сфранцис може бити пример како се улазило у групу истакнутих дворских угледника, од којих многи у ово доба немају ни племенито порекло, ни достојанство, нити, пак, службу на двору са конкретним надлежностима. Припадници овог слоја се начелно, у изворима од XIII до XV века, називају архонтима (ἀρχοντες). Они су често и цареви ὀικεῖτοι, тј. блиске цареве слуге и особе од поверења, које учествују у дипломатским мисијама, јављају се у царској пратњи и везане су за владара, везама заснованим на оданости, чвршће него што је то био случај са другим царевим чиновницима. Сфранцис није био пореклом из високе аристократије својим рођењем. Потписао је из угледне породице интелектуалаца са Лемноса. Као и за многе припаднике његовог друштвеног слоја, током претходна два века, и за њега је дворска хијерархија била кључ да уђе у више друштвене слојеве. Он је најпре, пошто му је стриц био тутор синова Манојла II Палеолога, очигледно одгојен на двору, поставши тако ὀικεῖωσι' цара. Убрзо започиње своју вишедеценијску дипломатску службу, те 1429. постаје кефалија Патре, 1443. Селимврије, а 1446. године и Мистре. Цар Јован VIII му је 1429. године доделио достојанство протовестијарита, а цар Константин XI Драгаш 1451. и престижно достојанство великог логотета. Сфранцис је био ожењен ћерком последњег, у изворима поменутог, ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου, Алексија Палеолога Цамплакона, очигледно, иако није извесно на који начин, у родбинским везама са царском династијом. Сфранцисов син Јован требало је да се ожени ћерком Николе Гуделиса, мужа Теодоре Палеологине Гуделине, за коју се претпоставља да је била ћерка царског брата, деспота Димитрија Палеолога, који је, као и Сфранцис, био противник Фирентинске уније. Као део царског икоса (οἶκος), иначе основног социјалног модела византијског друштва у свим градским и бирократским структурама, саопштава нам, користећи и оригинални термин (ὄσπιτιον), како је он био уређен и сведочи, такође, да је у његовим оквирима постојала одређена хијерархија. На исти начин били су уређени и икоси деспота Пелопонеза, других архоната, али и самог Сфранциса. Чини се да је током свог живота Сфранцис сакупио, или наследио, и значајно богатство, а део тога је свакако био стечен учешћем у многобројним дипломатским мисијама у којима је био на челу. Стога није чудо што се Мехмед II Освајач, у свом писму од 26. децембра 1454. године, упућеном угледним архонтима на Пелопонезу, на првом месту обратио Георгију Сфранцису.