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ЗБОРНИК РАДОВА

ВИЗАНТОЛОШКОГ ИНСТИТУТА
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THE PECULIARITIES OF THE BYZANTINE PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE BALKANS UNDER THE KOMNENOI*

The text presents the results of the research on the Byzantine provincial organization in the parts of the Balkans that the Empire directly controlled during the Komnenian era. The non-uniform historical and political evolution of some regions of the Balkan Peninsula called for different methods to be employed by the Constantinopolitan court when organizing the local provincial administration, leading to a differentiation among the Balkan *themes*. Another factor that contributed to the differentiation process was that not all provinces were of equal importance to the Empire, which is why strategically important districts and their local elites received certain privileges, mostly of a fiscal and financial nature. The role and significance of some *themes* grew over time, while others gradually lost their strategic relevance. That was reflected in Constantinople's changing approach to organizing the provincial administration in the Balkans. This contribution focuses on when, how, and why some Balkan districts received privileges or had them rescinded in the Komnenian era.

Keywords: Byzantium, Balkans, Komnenoi, provincial administration

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The beginning of the Komnenian era in Constantinople coincided with a shift in the Byzantine Empire's Balkan policy. The ascent of Alexios I, marked the beginning of the Komnenian century on the Byzantine throne, happened ten years after the famous Battle of Manzikert in 1071. The Byzantine army's defeat in this battle was not only fateful for the future of Asia Minor, but had far-reaching consequences on the perception of the Balkans among the ruling circles in Constantinople. Faced with the loss of the Empire's political heart in the East, Byzantine leaders, seeking a new economic-demographic and military-political foothold, increasingly relied on their possessions in the Balkan Peninsula. Although Constantinople's state ideology still focused on the East – with Alexios I launching and his successors continuing the re-conquest of these territories, not only the lost *themes* in the interior of Asia Minor, Antioch, and Syria but also going further to Jerusalem and the Holy Land – the political reality in the Empire had profoundly changed. From the 11th century, the real political and economic power of the Byzantine Empire rested on its Balkan possessions. Consequently, during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, safeguarding the Balkan provinces became the priority at the expense of protecting the Eastern possessions. While the Seljuks were gradually capturing Byzantine cities in Asia Minor, Alexios redirected the bulk of the available military resources to the defense of Byzantine territories in the West. The centuries-old role of the principal Byzantine rival in the struggle for domination in the Balkans – the Bulgarians – passed on to new actors: the Normans of Southern Italy, the Pecheneg and Kuman tribes arriving from the Eastern steppes, and the new lords of the Pannonian Basin – the Hungarians. Therefore, the well-oiled diplomatic, military, and political strategy that Constantinople had for centuries pursued in the Balkans had to change.¹

As it was not sustainable in the long term to deploy significant military resources (professional mobile troops) to safeguard the Balkan frontiers, their defense primarily relied on the organs of provincial administration. Besides military governance, civilian and, in particular, church organs of administration played prominent roles in the integration of the local population into the Byzantine state and society and in ensuring their loyalty. Basil II realized the primary importance of organs of local governance in the pacification and defense of Balkan possessions and, when organizing the administration of the Balkans with its three pillars (military, civilian, and ecclesiastical), inaugurated several novel principles that rested on acknowledging and respecting local peculiarities necessary for the integration of the captured territories.² That had not been the case with his predecessor, John Tzimiskes, who, during the “sudden” reoccupation of the Balkans known as the First Reconquista, tried (and

¹ Marek Meško recently published a monograph on Alexios I Komnenos' policy in the Balkans in the last two decades of the 11th century. Minutely tracing the wars against the Normans, Pechenegs, and Kumans, Meško showed how the focus of the Byzantine foreign policy and strategy shifted from the East to the Balkans, see *Meško*, Alexios I Komnenos.

² The reconstruction of Byzantine administration in the Balkans after the end of Basil's conflict with Samuel and his successors has been discussed by, among others: *Maksimović*, Organizacija vizantijske vlasti, 31–43; *Krsmanović*, O odnosu upravne i crkvene organizacije, 17–39.

failed) to wipe out the entire legacy of the centuries-long Bulgarian political presence. In addition to dismantling the Bulgarian state, Tzimiskes attempted to dissolve the church, while also renaming Bulgarian cities. Establishing Byzantine authority in the reoccupied areas, he implemented models of governance that had previously worked only in the East of the Empire.³ Unlike him, Basil transplanted some Eastern models but also introduced novelties, such as conferring privileges on the subjugated population. On the one hand, he allowed the formation of an autocephalous church that inherited the traditions of the old Bulgarian Archbishopric/Patriarchate and, on the other, concurrently founded a large thematic unit that covered most of what was once Samuel's empire, bringing together the population that had for centuries lived under the same administrative-legal system. The newly formed *theme* was named after the erstwhile state, on whose remains it was established, and had a privileged fiscal policy that allowed it to pay taxes in kind instead of money. Those steps were necessary for the process of establishing control in the reoccupied territory and pacifying the population whose collective historical consciousness vividly remembered old political and legal traditions. The uprisings of Petar Delyan and Georgi Voyteh, with Bodin's support, whose leaders sought to legitimize their claims by citing ties with the old Bulgarian state and dynasty, bear witness to that.⁴

Just half a century after Basil's death, the political landscape of the Balkans had profoundly changed. The Bulgarian traditions had faded, and after the rebellion of Georgi Voyteh was put down in 1072, for more than a century, the sources report no uprising aimed at restoring Bulgarian statehood. Consequently, the heartlands of Samuel's state were no longer a politically vulnerable area, and instability shifted to the fringes of the Byzantine territory exposed to Norman, Pecheneg, Kuman, and Hungarian invasions. That called for a reform or reformulation of some premises on which Byzantine control rested and their adaptation to the new political circumstances.

Researching the Byzantine provincial administration in the Balkans after the Reconquista in the time of Basil II, when the entire Peninsula, after more than four centuries, found itself under the Empire's control, becomes a more complex endeavor, once we take into account that the non-uniform historical and political development of its parts demanded that the Constantinopolitan court applies different approaches in organizing their provincial administration. Shortly after Basil's reconquest, a notable difference emerged between the provinces that had been part of the Empire before Basil's and Tzimiskes' time and the areas integrated into the Byzantine state after 1018. Unlike the Southern provinces, which had a developed administrative apparatus, especially in the fields of the judiciary, finance and taxation, the former territory of Samuel's state was under a sort of special "military" regime. Without

³ This topic is the subject of research to be published in a forthcoming article by Miloš Cvetković, "Differences in the Principles Applied during the Restoration of Byzantine Administration in the Balkans under John I Tzimiskes and Basil II?"

⁴ On the rebellions and uprisings in medieval Bulgaria, including those led by Petar Delyan and Georgi Voyteh, see *Pavlov*, Buntari i avantjuristi.

a developed bureaucratic apparatus, in those provinces the autocephalous Church of Ohrid took charge of some civilian duties. In time, the differentiation between the territories, where the Byzantine Empire exercised its power directly, and the areas in the extreme West, where the authority of the Byzantine court became merely nominal, grew more and more pronounced. In the Komnenian era, another distinction emerged because the border provinces on which the Empire's defense depended received a more privileged status than the ones in the interior. These differences and peculiarities are the subject of research that the present article aims to present.⁵

* * *

Among the general features of Byzantine provincial administration in the Balkans in the Komnenian era, the most notable one is the concentration of all military and civilian authority in the hands of local military commanders – the *doukes*.⁶ As is well known, even before the Komnenian era, there had been no rigid delimitation between the military and civilian administrative structure, headed by the *praitores*. It was quite common for the same person to successively or even concurrently discharge duties that belonged to different branches of authority.⁷ The competences of military and civilian governors often overlapped: some military commanders

⁵ A stand-alone study on Byzantine provincial organization in the Balkans under the Komnenoi has yet to be written, but various aspects of this topic were discussed in many publications, including syntheses on Byzantine history, biographies of Komnenian emperors, monographs and studies on Byzantine administration, society, aristocracy, and army. Finally, studies in historical geography are also relevant for reconstructing the Byzantine administration in the Balkans; a particularly notable example is the series *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* with volumes devoted to the Balkan provinces. This decades-long project of the Austrian Academy of Sciences is now led by Doz. Mag. Dr. Mihailo St. Popović. Selected scholarly production on these topics includes: *Angold*, Byzantine Empire; *Treadgold*, History of the Byzantine State and Society; *Haldon*, Warfare, State and Society; *Varzos*, Genealogia tōn Komnēnōn; *Meško*, Alexios I Komnenos; *Papageorgiou*, John II Komnenos and his era; *Magdalino*, Empire of Manuel I Komnenos; *Cheyne*, Pouvoirs et contestations; *Birkenmeier*, Development of the Komnenian Army; *Stephenson*, Byzantium's Balkan Frontier; *Madgearu*, Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube; *Dimov*, Balkan World in the Age of the Komnenian Dynasty.

⁶ On the role and office of *doux* see *Oikonomidēs*, Évolution de l'organisation administrative, 125–152; *Cheyne*, Du stratège de thème au duc, 181–194.

⁷ An illustrative example of alternating between civilian and military offices was Constantine, a governor of the *theme* of Bulgaria in the mid-11th century. This official consecutively served as the *anagrapheos*, *doux*, and *pronoites* of (all) Bulgaria, as attested by sigillographic evidence, *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 49. On the other hand, Andronikos, the leader of Thessalonike and Serres from the House of Doukas, concurrently bore the titles of *praitor* and *doux*. An act from 1112 from the archive of the Athonite monastery of Dochiariou reports the case of a woman called Eudokia, daughter of *patrikios* Gregory Bourinos, who sent a petition to Andronikos: finding themselves in a difficult financial situation, Eudokia and her husband asked the *praitor* and *doux* of Thessalonike and Serres to allow the sale of assets that she had received as her dowry, *Actes de Docheiariou*, no. 3, p. 68. In this instance, Andronikos acted as the commanding official at the top of the bureaucratic structure in the *theme* and, consequently, forwarded the case to subordinate officials in charge of this type of legal procedure. Sphragistic evidence also confirms the practice of concurrently discharging military and civilian duties. *Dumbarton Oaks* has published an 11th-century seal that belonged to Constantine, *patrikios*, *hypatos*, judge, and *katepano* of Mesopotamia, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks IV*, no. 55.7.

occasionally veered into the domain of judicial or fiscal and financial authority,⁸ and some civil administrators took on policing duties.⁹ However, the bearers of supreme civil authority in the *themes*, the *praitores*, disappeared from the sources after the first quarter of the 12th century.¹⁰ The sources from the time of Alexios I suggest that, in some *themes*, the military and civilian administrative apparatus still operated side-by-side, i.e., separately, but this was about to change. The last reference to a *praitor* who served as the civilian governor of a *theme* dates from 1124, and the only exceptions were the *praitores* of the *theme* of Hellas and the Peloponnese. The reason for this is that, in the time of Alexios I, this composite theme, with other important coastal districts, was formally under the *megas doux*, the commander-in-chief of the Byzantine navy. As these officers were unable to regularly carry out the duties of the provincial governor in the *theme* of Hellas and the Peloponnese, the local *praitores* survived as the *de facto* administrators of the province.¹¹ The *strategoï*, the officials that had for centuries governed the *themes*, also disappeared in the Komnenian era. This shows that the bureaucratic nomenclature was harmonized and resulted in the *doukes* becoming the main and only heads of provinces.

Prioritizing military functions over civilian offices reflected the overarching militarization of the state and society that had begun with the rise and final return of the military aristocracy, when Alexios I ascended the throne after the decades-long domination of the bureaucratic nobility at the Constantinopolitan court.¹² In his seminal study on the *pronoia*, George Ostrogorsky highlighted the statements of two

⁸ Appropriating civilian duties became noticeable by the late 10th century, at the time when the *doukes* were primarily the leaders of tagmatic units and stewards of large composite military districts. Hélène Ahrweiler notes that this process can be traced already in an act issued by *doux* John Chaldos to the Kolvos monastery in 995, *Ahrweiler-Glykatzi*, *Recherches*, 61. Cf. *Dölger*, *Schatzkammern*, no. 56, p. 155. In the 11th century, it became a widespread practice, *Krsmanović*, *Byzantine Province in Change*, 210.

⁹ Psellos' correspondence offers some information that suggests that the *praitores* discharged policing duties. Psellos reports that Basil Xyros, *proedros*, judge, and *praitor* of the *Theme* of the Thracians, did as a righteous judge should and arrested a notary who had abused his position, eliciting the author's condemnation, Psellus, *Epistulae* I, no. 193, pp. 505–506. For a description of the praetor's jurisdiction which includes police duties, *Sceaux byzantins*, 987.

¹⁰ The most recent study on the history of the *praitor* office and the evolution of the duties of this official in the Byzantine Empire, focusing on the 11th and 12th centuries, was published in this issue of the journal ZRVI, *Ilić*, *Pravnoistorijski prilog istraživanju funkcije pretora*, 695–720.

¹¹ For more details see *Herrin*, *Realities of Byzantine provincial government: Hellas and Peloponnesos*, 253–284.

¹² Subordinating civil structures to military ones was not novel in itself. Justinian the Great inaugurated this principle in some provinces of the Roman Empire in the 530s, and it was also implemented in the Exarchate of Ravenna and the Exarchate of Carthage in the late 6th century. However, its full affirmation came with the development of the *theme* system. For more details see *Cvetković*, *Elementi poznorimskog vojnog i upravnog uređenja*, 473–486. Yet, this principle was largely abandoned in the 11th century, during the domination of the so-called bureaucratic aristocracy, only to be revived with the Komnenoi and the final triumph of the military elite. On the relationship between the representatives of the civil and military nobility in the 11th century, see *Krsmanović*, *Uspon vojnog plemstva*.

Byzantine authors, Skylitzes Continuatus and Niketas Choniates, which illustrate the attitude of the state and society toward the army and military affairs before and after the Komnenoi ascended the Byzantine throne.¹³ Skylitzes Continuatus described the situation in the 11th century (under the Doukai), remarking that “the soldiers put aside their arms and became lawyers or jurists.”¹⁴ A century later, Choniates reported that “everyone wanted to enlist in the army.”¹⁵ As is well known, the *pronoia* system, which involved granting privileges for performing military service, became widespread under the Komnenoi, especially during the reign of Manuel I.¹⁶ The aristocratization of governance, a process that had gained momentum even before the rise of the Komnenoi, unfolded concurrently, but in the Komnenian era, kinship with the ruling family became one of the most important factors for conferring offices.¹⁷ The militarization and aristocratization of the Byzantine society and bureaucratic apparatus were long-term historical processes whose roots are to be sought in the centuries before the first Komnenoi came to power.

* * *

In contrast to the general features of the Komnenian provincial organization that, as a result of a comprehensive militarization and aristocratization of society, marked almost all Byzantine *themes* in the Balkans, the sources suggest that some peculiarities in the functioning of the local authorities appeared only in certain provinces, with some thematic divisions becoming privileged. Whereas some districts received privileges, others lost them or were simply dissolved. Let us look at the individual territories that reveal Constantinople’s policy of granting privileges to strategically important provinces.

The Bulgarian lands – the districts of Bulgaria, Paradounavon, and Anchialos. By the beginning of the Komnenian era, in the time of Alexios I, the sources no longer mention two Balkan *themes* – Bulgaria and Paradounavon. Both were military-administrative divisions formed in the former territory of Samuel’s state, with recognizing some rights of the subjugated local population. Historical scholarship has determined a long time ago that the integration of the local population into the Byzantine state apparatus was facilitated by granting economic privileges, primarily allowing the inhabitants to pay taxes in kind rather than money. The documents that

¹³ Ostrogorski, Pronija, 17.

¹⁴ Skylitzes Continuatus, 112.

¹⁵ Choniates, 209.

¹⁶ For more details on the *pronoia* system and other forms of privileges, see Ostrogorsky, *Pronoia unter den Komnenen*, 41–54; Maksimović, *Geneza i karakter apanaža u Vizantiji*, 103–154; Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*.

¹⁷ In the first years of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, the members of his wider family already received governance of important military divisions all over the Empire, Angold, *Byzantine Empire*, 152–153. On the family rule of the Komnenoi, see Stanković, *Komnini u Carigradu*, 50ff.

guaranteed those privileges have not reached us, so we learn of them, like of some other events in Byzantine history, when they were rescinded or at least challenged. Namely, revoking those privileges led to the uprising of Peter Delyan in the *theme* of Bulgaria in the early 1040s, as reported by John Skylitzes.¹⁸ Michael Attaleiates writes that the reason for the revolt in the *theme* of Paradounavon in 1072 was the financial reforms implemented by Nikephoritzes, which threatened the economic interests of the local population.¹⁹ Paul Stephenson assumes that the reason the rebellion broke out was the new policy of the government in Constantinople and its leading minister Nikephoritzes, which involved collecting resources for defending the borderlands locally rather than centrally.²⁰ Skylitzes Continuatus reports that the *stratiotes* were excluded from the governance of Paradounavon,²¹ which also supports the premise about the implementation of reforms that disrupted the way the administration had functioned until that point.²²

To understand the nature and character of the “Bulgarian rebellions” in the 11th century, we should bear in mind that they usually sprang up when the Empire was facing internal or external troubles. In Delyan’s time, it was the threat of George Maniakes and the war against Stefan Vojislav in Duklja (Diokleia). A similar scenario reoccurred three decades later. At the time of the uprising of Georgi Voyteh, the Empire had to contend with Seljuk pressure in Asia Minor, the Normans in Southern Italy, and the Hungarian onslaught from the Danube and Sava. But the most important factor that gave the leaders of those rebellions an upper hand and allowed their movements to gain momentum was the discontent of the population of the erstwhile Bulgarian state, which largely sided with the rebels in both uprisings. The reason for their disaffection was, no doubt, the revoking of their fiscal and, to an extent, ecclesiastical privileges. By the mid-11th century, the Church of Ohrid had begun to lose its Bulgarian character, becoming increasingly “Greek” because one of the principal tasks of its leadership was to “Grecize” the local Slavic population.²³ In

¹⁸ Skylitzes, 412. For the historical scholarship on this matter, see VIINJ III, 143–144, n. 208, 151–152, n. 231 (*Ferluga*); *Treadgold*, *History of the Byzantine State and Society*, 588.

¹⁹ Attaleiates (ed. *Bekker*), 204–205; Ataliates (ed. *Pérez Martín*), 150.

²⁰ *Stephenson*, *Byzantium’s Balkan Frontier*, 99.

²¹ Skylitzes Continuatus, 166.

²² The local population’s discontent caused by the fiscal and financial reforms and the concurrent refusal of Constantinople to pay tribute to the Pechenegs contributed to the spread of the rebellion of which the *vestarches* Nestor eventually took the helm. Besides its economic background, the rebellion was also of an ethnic nature due to the peculiar ethnic identity of the local population, described in Byzantine narratives by the term *mixobarbaroi*. Cf. *Stephenson*, *Byzantium’s Balkan Frontier*, 98–100, 109–110; *Madgearu*, *Periphery Against the Centre: the Case of Paradunavon*, 49–56; *Madgearu*, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube*, 79f; *Dimov*, *Balkan World in the Age of the Komnenian Dynasty*, 146–147.

²³ The first archbishop of Ohrid, who was also the last head of the independent Bulgarian Church, John, was succeeded in 1037 by Leo, a Greek. The theory that the church of Justiniana Prima was the precursor to the autocephalous Church of Ohrid was formally adopted in the following century, cf. *Prinzinger*, *Entstehung und Rezeption*, 269–287.

the mid-11th century, the cathedra at Dristra, which had jurisdiction over the *theme* of Paradounavon, was officially taken out of the Archbishopric of Ohrid and restored to the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople.²⁴

The *theme* of Bulgaria disappeared from the sources at the turn of the 11th to the 12th century. From the end of the 11th century, there are no surviving seals of the *doukes* of Bulgaria, and the narrative sources mention him for the last time in the context of the Crusaders who, during the First Crusade, passed through the Morava valley in 1096.²⁵ The dissolution of this *theme* marked the end of the process of reshaping the provincial organization in the Central Balkans implemented by Basil II after 1018. The *theme* of Bulgaria was formed to bring together the population of the territory that was once Samuel's state, which was to enjoy some privileges, primarily fiscal, in this territorial-administrative framework. The *theme* and autocephalous church that bore the name of Bulgaria, with the privileged fiscal policy they had, were the result of Basil's policy of compromise. Shortly after Basil's death, Constantinople began gradually revoking those privileges. The change in collecting taxes and the Grecizing of the church came just a dozen years after Basil's passing. The population rebelled against the new measures, but their resistance was finally broken by the end of the 11th century. After Voyteh's rebellion, for more than a century, there were no uprisings aimed at restoring Bulgarian statehood. Although the political situation during the invasions of the Normans, Pechenegs, and Kumans in the late 11th and early 12th centuries would have worked to the advantage of a would-be restorer of Bulgarian political and legal traditions, perhaps even more so than in the time of Delyan and Voyteh, the sources betray no trace of such a rebellion. The lack of revolts in this period suggests a long-term abatement of tensions in the former heartlands of Samuel's Bulgaria, which seems to have paved the way for revoking the last vestiges of its former privileged status. Another factor that must have contributed to the reform of the military-administrative system was that it would have been difficult to control the expansive territory from Thessaly to the Danube from Skopje, the command center of the *theme* of Bulgaria. Therefore, the *theme* was partitioned. Its Northern part (from the Danube, along the Great and South Morava) was transformed into a new military-administrative district that included Belgrade, Braničevo, and Niš;²⁶ the Eastern part also became a separate district, with Serdica as

²⁴ Basil II's second Ohrid charter assigned the cathedra in Dristra to the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Ohrid, *Gelzer*, Ugedruckte, 44. In the mid-11th century, this see was on the list of metropolitanates under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople. For more details, see *Komatina*, *Pojam Bugarske*, 53 n. 76.

²⁵ *Jordanov*, *Corpus I*, p. 49. Alexander Madgearu argues that, in the late 11th century, the *theme* of Bulgaria was split into two military-administrative divisions headquartered in Skopje and Belgrade, with the district seated in Belgrade inheriting the name of the *theme* of Bulgaria. He bases his claim on the report of Albert of Aachen, who, describing the First Crusade, calls *doux* Niketas both the governor of Bulgaria and the commander of Belgrade, *Madgearu*, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube*, 98–99.

²⁶ *Komatina*, *Morava i Braničevo*, 103–107.

its center;²⁷ and the central area remained under the command center in Skopje, but no longer had Bulgaria as part of its name.²⁸ It is particularly important to note that the Bulgarian name permanently disappeared from the military-administrative nomenclature, which can, to an extent at least, be associated with the tendencies of the Ohrid cathedra to gradually develop the premise that *Justiniana Prima* was the precursor, ideological bedrock, and foundation of the autocephalous church in Ohrid.²⁹ Hence, this was not merely a spatial reshuffling and partition of the large *theme* of Bulgaria, but a reform aimed at obliterating any remaining traces of the Bulgarian tradition in the provincial administration.

The old Bulgarian lands in the *theme* of Paradounavon³⁰ did not share the fate of the former core of Samuel's empire due to its peculiar historical-political development. For centuries, in the time of Simeon, Boris-Michael, and their predecessors, from the time of the Bulgarian settlement, the heartlands of the Bulgarian state lay between the Danube and the Balkan mountain range, and it was this area that Tzimiskes' reconquest focused on. At this time, the region of Macedonia was on the fringes of the Bulgarian world. The situation dramatically changed during Samuel's rebellion, when the remains of the unsubjected Bulgarian secular and church aristocracy found refuge in this territory, making it the nucleus of the new empire.³¹ Dristra (Dorostolon), Preslav, Pliska, and other cities and fortresses in the North-Eastern Balkans did not have a prominent role in Samuel's empire, unlike Ohrid, Prespa, Prilep, Bitola, and Macedonia in general. They seem to have received less attention in Samuel's state than the new heart of his realm, allowing Basil to capture them long

²⁷ *Madgearu*, Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube, 69ff, rejects the earlier theory that Serdica was taken out of the *theme* of Paradounavon, becoming West Paradounavon.

²⁸ Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks I, no. 30.

²⁹ Cf. *Prinzing*, Entstehung und Rezeption, 269–287.

³⁰ The earliest reference to the *katepano* of Paradounavon in the sources dates from the 1050s. However, we cannot reliably say whether Paradounavon was formed by separating it from the *theme* of Bulgaria or by transforming the military command in Dristra. For more details, see *Jordanov*, Corpus I, pp. 135–136. The surviving sigillographic evidence shows that there was no developed civilian bureaucratic apparatus in Paradounavon (no local civilian officials are known), suggesting that the fiscal and financial affairs of the district were handled by the officials of the *theme* of Bulgaria. This is supported by the seals of Constantine, *anagrapheos* and *pronoites* of all Bulgaria, who performed these duties in the 1050s – around the same time when a separate command emerged in Paradounavon. In this case, the phrase “all of Bulgaria” undoubtedly describes a broader territory than the *theme* of Bulgaria, including Paradounavon, Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks I, p. 93; *Krsmanović*, Problem der sogenannten zusammengesetzten Bezirke, 78. Paradounavon was, thus, formed as a military district independent from the *theme* of Bulgaria, but for fiscal and financial purposes, its territory was still under the jurisdiction of the bureaucratic apparatus of the *theme* of Bulgaria. Consequently, it follows that the lower Danube, i.e., North-Eastern Bulgaria, was, from 1018 onward, part of the fiscal system of the Bulgarian theme, which had a privileged taxation policy. Similarly, after 1018, the lower Danube area fell under the autocephalous Bulgarian/Ohrid Church. The organization of military administration in the lower Danube should be seen separately because the *katepano* of Dristra appeared in the sources as early as the 1030s, *Jordanov*, Corpus I, p. 62.

³¹ *Krsmanović*, The Bulgarian Elite between War and Peace in the Balkans, 109–128.

before the final fall of Bulgaria. This attests to an unambiguous distinction between the old Bulgarian lands and the central parts of Samuel's state, which can be traced even in the 11th century, when the Byzantine Empire controlled all of Bulgaria. Unlike the valleys of the rivers Morava and Vardar, the lower Danube was not affected by Delyan's and Voyteh's rebellions, but these areas were exposed to the Pecheneg and Kuman raids. In view of that, the position and status of Paradounavon in the Byzantine provincial apparatus should be assessed separately from the history of the *theme* of Bulgaria. If the dissolution of the Bulgarian *theme* was a result of the pacification of the former heartland of Samuel's state, which removed any need to maintain its special military-administrative and fiscal status and ultimately led to the dissolution of a separate *theme* called Bulgaria, this was certainly not the case with Paradounavon. And yet, the *theme* of Paradounavon was disbanded around the same time, and its last known governor is known to have worked in the 1090s.³² The local political circumstances, however, were different, and so the reason for the dissolution of this *theme* is to be sought elsewhere. A. Madgearu rightly argues that the frequent raids of the steppe tribes from the Danube led Constantinople to reform its governance in this area: dissolving the *theme* of Paradounavon, the defense line moved from the lower Danube to the territory between the Black Sea and the Balkan mountain range, which was easier to defend than the Danubian plain. The role of the new command center in this region fell to Anchialos.³³

The strategic importance of Anchialos came to the fore during the wars against the Pechenegs and Kumans in the 1080s and 1090s, when Emperor Alexios and his army stayed in the city several times and used it as his base.³⁴ At that time, Anchialos took on the defensive role that Paradounavon had previously had, so we can assume that the new military-territorial division also took over some of the privileges, primarily economic ones, intended for borderland command. The sources, however, report the special privileged status of Anchialos, the neighboring cities, and the (Vlach) warrior population that inhabited the Balkan mountain range only when this position came to be threatened.³⁵ More specifically, Niketas Choniates writes that, in 1185, Isaac II Angelos, preparing for his wedding with Princess Margaret of Hungary and needing funds for these celebrations, decided to levy taxes on Anchialos, the neighboring cities, and the Vlachs, which was met with resistance. This wave of resistance and the failure to reach an agreement with the emperor resulted in the rebellion headed by Peter and Asen, ultimately leading to

³² Madgearu, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube*, 87.

³³ *Ibid.*, 85–86.

³⁴ M. Meško argues that the military district of Anchialos was formed as one of the main strongholds in the Byzantine defense line during the war against the Pechenegs in 1086/1087, Meško, Alexios I Komnenos, 240f, 332f. Michael Angold emphasizes that the local elite of Anchialos participated in a council with Alexios I during the war with the Kumans in 1094, Angold, *Byzantine Empire*, 152.

³⁵ Similarly, the revocation of fiscal privileges had contributed to the breaking out of Delyan's rebellion, see p. 829 and n. 18.

the restoration of Bulgarian statehood.³⁶ This resistance certainly stemmed from the emperor's interference in the normal functioning of this region, primarily through taxation, which was neither customary nor acceptable for the local population (not unlike the financial reforms that led to the rebellion of 1072 in Paradounavon).³⁷ This suggests that Anchialos, the nearby cities along the border, and some social (and ethnic) groups that lived in this area³⁸ had enjoyed some privileges associated with their role in defending the frontier in the 12th century. That seems even more likely once we take into account the contemporaneous examples of the Dalmatian cities and specifically the case of Dyrrachion.

Dalmatia. In 1167, during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos, Byzantium managed to establish direct control over (a part of) Dalmatia after an almost century-long hiatus.³⁹ The process of reintegrating the Roman cities on the Dalmatian coast into the Empire was marked by an unusual approach of the Constantinopolitan court. Thomas the Archdeacon reports that the emperor not only refrained from asking for a tribute to be paid once he had reestablished control in this area, but also used funds from the imperial treasury to endow his local subjects.⁴⁰ Additionally, the emperor covered the expenses of his representatives (*doukes*) and the accompanying army from the central treasury, thereby sparing the local population any additional expenses.⁴¹ Although these reports come from an author who lived a century after these events and obviously tried to portray the Byzantine administration in as flattering a light as possible, we can assume that Dalmatia indeed had a more favorable fiscal and financial status than other parts of the Empire.⁴² To secure the sympathies of the local nobility, Manuel had to meet their demands, at least to an extent. It should be noted that the affirmation of the "city rights and freedoms" during the takeover in Dalmatia was not uncommon in the 12th century. For instance, after the Hungarian conquest of Dalmatia under Coloman (1095–1106), the king gave guarantees that city privileges would be respected.⁴³ The Hungarian authorities did try to phase them out, but the practice of affirming communal privileges certainly existed. This was a time, when the interests of Byzantium, Venice, and Hungary clashed in this region, with each of these powers trying to win the Dalmatian cities,

³⁶ Choniates, 368–369.

³⁷ See p. 829 and n. 19–22.

³⁸ On the role of Vlach soldiers in the Byzantine army, see *Madgearu*, Vlach Military Units, 47–55.

³⁹ On the restoration of Byzantine rule and the forming of the *doukate* of Dalmatia (and Croatia), see *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 120ff. Under Manuel Komnenos, Byzantium restored its control over Dalmatia in a ground operation rather than in a naval expedition, as had been usual until then, *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴⁰ Thomas Archidiaconus, 122, 124.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 122, 124.

⁴² Scholars tend to agree that Thomas' reports can be taken as truthful and that they indicate that the Empire indeed had a special policy for the *theme* (*doukate*) of Dalmatia, *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 145–146, *Magdalino*, Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 90, 134, *Stephenson*, Byzantium's Balkan Frontier, 263.

⁴³ *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 127.

or, more specifically, their social and political elite, to side with it. These cities had been part of the Byzantine Empire in the past, but their distance from its center and the presence of strong local autonomous elements, with the overlapping interests of external factors, gave rise to a feeling of distinctiveness and the emergence of a level of self-government in those communities.

A notable feature of self-government in Dalmatia, i.e., the participation of the local nobility in city governance, was the office of *proconsul*. In the Late Roman period, this office belonged to the bearers of the highest authority in the province – the provincial governors.⁴⁴ The *proconsuls* are believed to have had a role in the governance of Byzantine Dalmatia in the late 8th and early 9th centuries,⁴⁵ before the *theme* was established, which allows us to speak – albeit tentatively – of the multicentennial continuity of this office in Dalmatian territory. It was not uncommon for late Roman administrative functions to endure for centuries in the Empire's Western provinces, as attested by the example of Istria, governed from the 6th century to 788 by an official called *magister militum*. Similarly, in Sardinia, local authority was in the hands of a *doux* from the 6th to the 9th century.⁴⁶ The office of the Dalmatian *proconsul* survived the establishment of the theme. In 986, its holder was Madius, known as the *prior* of Zadar and *proconsul Dalmatiarum*.⁴⁷ It is particularly noteworthy that Madius' descendants, a grandson of the same name and great-grandson Gregory (Grgur), appear in the first half of the 11th century with the title of *prior*, and Gregory also bore the title of *proconsul* and even the *strategos* of Dalmatia.⁴⁸ If the proposed identification of this Gregory with the Dobronja mentioned by Kekaumenos is correct, he was also known as an *archon* and *toparches*.⁴⁹ If multiple generations of the same family served as *priors* and *proconsuls*, it seems plausible to assume that they were from distinguished houses of the local nobility. It allowed local magnates to have a significant share in the governance of Byzantine Dalmatia, with some even becoming administrators of the *theme* and receiving the title of *strategos*, usually reserved for representatives of the central government. This practice continued after Manuel's reoccupation of Dalmatian possessions and, after a few Greeks had served as the *doux* of Dalmatia (and Croatia), a local noble called Rogerius, apparently of Croatian descent, became the governor of the province.⁵⁰

The fiscal and financial privileges granted to Dalmatian cities and their elites during Manuel's reign can thus be seen as Constantinople's way of adapting to the

⁴⁴ *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 25ff.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁷ *Documenta historiae Chroaticae*, no. 17, p. 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, nos 32–35, pp. 41–44, nos. 53–54, pp. 69–71. *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 96.

⁴⁹ *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 96–97. Kekavmen, 316, 318.

⁵⁰ *Smičiklas*, *Codex diplomaticus*, nos. 163, 165, pp. 165–167. See *Ferluga*, Dalmacija, 141.

centuries-old local self-government of Dalmatia.⁵¹ On the other hand, there is little doubt that such a move was also part of the overarching policy of granting privileges to border regions and populations on which the defense of the Empire depended. A similar strategy was applied in the *themes* of Bulgaria and Paradounavon in the 11th century and probably in Anchialos, too, in the Komnenian era. Another similarity in the integration of Dalmatia and the “Bulgarian lands” into the Byzantine state and society was Constantinople’s tolerant church policy in these regions. Basil established the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid, which continued to play the role of the Bulgarian Church, rejecting its annexation (restoration) to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Thus, the emperor largely retained the existing ecclesiastical-judicial system and tradition. Similarly, Manuel respected the rights of the See of Rome in Dalmatia, choosing not to interfere in the appointment of the archbishops of Split and accepting the established principles that guided the functioning of the local Catholic Church. For his part, the Roman pontiff made the seat of the Byzantine *doukate* – Split – hierarchically superior to other Dalmatian *cathedrae* (Zadar, Dubrovnik, and Bar), basing his decision on the heritage of classical Salona, whose traditions had passed on to the archbishop’s throne in Split.⁵²

Dyrrachion. A similar situation to the one in Anchialos, described by Choniates,⁵³ arose around the same time in another corner of the Balkans. Namely, Eusthathios of Tessalonike reports that the greed of the local governor of Dyrrachion, *doux* Romanos, the emperor’s son-in-law, had brought the local population from wealth to destitution. Abuses and unconscientious behavior of the central government’s representatives in Dyrrachion had sparked disaffection among the locals. As a result, they called off their allegiance to the Byzantine court and sided with the Normans in 1185,⁵⁴ and a similar scenario reoccurred in 1205, in the years when the Venetians and Crusaders divided up the remnants of the Byzantine Empire.⁵⁵ Historical scholarship has usually interpreted Eusthathios’ reports as evidence that the population of Dyrrachion, or, more specifically, the local elite (*archontes*), had enjoyed some privileges, which were then revoked due to the greedy policy of the local governor (*doux* Romanos).⁵⁶

The representatives of Dyrrachion’s local elite, not unlike the magnates of Dalmatia, played a prominent role in governing the theme. Whereas Dalmatia had *proconsuls*, the local magnates of Dyrrachion held the title of *proteuon*. We learn of

⁵¹ On the Dalmatian *archontia* and *theme* in the middle Byzantine period, with an overview of the literature on the subject, see Cvetković, Niže jedinice tematskog uređenja, 138ff.

⁵² On Manuel’s relationship with the Roman Church in Dalmatia, see Stephenson, Byzantium’s Balkan Frontier, 263–264.

⁵³ See pp. 832–833.

⁵⁴ Eustazio di Tessalonica, 64. Cf. Choniates, 297, 317.

⁵⁵ Ducellier, Durazzo et Valona, 69f.

⁵⁶ Stephenson, Byzantium’s Balkan Frontier, 184. Heher, Dyrrhachion, 181.

the distinguished role of the bearers of this office from Skylitzes' account. Namely, Skylitzes writes of the *proteuon* Chrysilios and the negotiations on the surrender of the city to the Byzantines that this noble had with Basil during Byzantium's war against Samuel in the early 11th century. Chrysilios offered to surrender the city and, in return, asked to be made a *patrikios*, along with his sons. He was promised these dignities and surrendered the city. However, Chrysilios did not live long enough to receive the dignity he had been promised.⁵⁷ A later interpolation in Skylitzes' text reports that (John) Chrysilios previously had his daughter Agatha wed Samuel and that Samuel's successor Gavriilo Radomir was born in this marriage.⁵⁸ Chrysilios was undoubtedly a representative of the local nobility, whose power rested on economic ties and kinship with influential political actors in the Balkans. Another similarity between the territorial-administrative divisions of Dalmatia and Dyrrachion was that, in these regions, offices passed from one generation to another within distinguished noble houses, like in the abovementioned case of the Zadar *prior* and Dalmatian *proconsul* Madius and his descendants who performed the same duties.⁵⁹ In Dyrrachion, a few decades after *proteuon* John Chrysilios died, one of the most powerful people in the district became *toparches* Cursilius, as reported in the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja*. The *toparches* commanded the district of Dyrrachion during Byzantium's conflict with the rebels of Stefan Vojislav in the 1030s and 1040s.⁶⁰ Cursilius' name and role in the city suggest that he was probably a member of the Chrysilios noble family from Dyrrachion.⁶¹ The title of *toparches*, in this case, belonged to the highest representative of the local nobility in the *theme* of Dyrrachion, which *proteuon* John Chrysilios had certainly been, too. There is a striking similarity with the abovementioned *archon* and *toparches* (*prior*, *proconsul*, and *strategos*) Gregory (Grgur) Dobronja, who was the most prominent powerholder in Dalmatia at the same time as *toparches* Cursilius in Dyrrachion (in the 1030s).⁶² The case of the Chrysilios family of Dyrrachion reveals the significance of the local magnates whose loyalty the Constantinopolitan court had to buy with various privileges.

The privileges that the Dyrrachion elite lost in 1185 were economic in nature and can be associated with Dyrrachion's role in the defense of the Empire, which rapidly grew from the last decades of the 11th century and the Norman invasion. The more prominent role of the military district of Dyrrachion in the Byzantine military-provincial system in the Balkans is attested by the fact that, at the end of the 11th century, the territorial powers of the command center in Dyrrachion were expanded

⁵⁷ Skylitzes, 342–343. See VIINJ III, 93–94 n. 63 (*Ferluga*).

⁵⁸ Skylitzes, 349; See VIINJ III, 108 n. 99 (*Ferluga*).

⁵⁹ See p. 834.

⁶⁰ *Gesta Regum Sclavorum*, 146.

⁶¹ Bearers of the same surname appear in other positions in the Empire. Nicholas Chrysilios was a *strategos* in the East, and Theodore Chrysilios was a Byzantine official in Constantinople, see *Ferluga*, Drač i njegova oblast, 92–93.

⁶² See p. 834 and n. 49.

deep into the interior of the Balkan Peninsula, up to Polog and the Vardar River.⁶³ In this way, Alexios I Komnenos, roughly at the same time, underlined the importance of two command centers on two sides of the Balkan Peninsula – Anchialos and Dyrrachion – that were given the leading role in preventing raids of the steppe tribes from the Danube and the Normans from Southern Italy. Parallels for the privileged status of the local elite in these districts, whose loyalty was needed to ensure the protection of the frontier, should be sought in that context.

* * *

Conclusion. Buying peace by paying tribute was a commonly used strategy of Byzantine diplomacy, when the Empire was unable to overpower its enemies. Reintegrating the Balkans into the Byzantine political and judicial system, Basil II applied the same policy in the domain of provincial administration. During his decades-long conflict with Samuel and his successors, he had previously promoted some members of the Bulgarian military elite with honors to ensure their sympathy, which proved to be one of the factors that decided the outcome of the war. Basil continued to pursue his policy of buying peace and loyalty even after the war, granting fiscal privileges and other economic benefits to the population of the erstwhile Bulgarian state in the *themes* of Bulgaria and Paradounavon. Another aspect of Basil's approach of compromise was his tolerant church policy, reflected in the formation of an autocephalous church on the foundations of the Bulgarian Archbishopric/Patriarchate.

From Basil's time to the Komnenian era, the political situation in the Balkans dramatically changed, and the Normans, Pechenegs, Kumans, and Hungarians replaced the Bulgarians as the Byzantines' chief opponents. Consequently, Constantinople redirected its policy of granting privileges to some provinces from the former heartland of Samuel's state to the fringes of the Peninsula – the districts that now had a decisive role in defending the Empire from its new enemies. During the reign of Alexios I, the Central Balkans were no longer a threat to Constantinople's interests, leading to the dissolution of the *theme* of Bulgaria and the revocation of all privileges built into its bureaucratic system. Around the same time, Alexios dissolved the other district formed in the territory of the former Bulgarian lands, Paradounavon, but this time, the reasons were tactical by nature. With this decision, the line of defense moved to the area between the Black Sea and the Balkan mountain range. The role of Paradounavon passed to Anchialos, whose inhabitants, like their neighbors, the Vlachs of the Balkan mountain range, received some economic concessions for their loyalty and protection of the frontier. Not unlike Anchialos in the defense of the frontier from the Pechenegs and Kumans, Dyrrachion was tasked with safeguarding the border from the Normans of Southern Italy, and Constantinople offered financial privileges to the local *archontes* on whose loyalty the defense of the city and its area depended. Those concessions were indirectly tied to the described events of 1185. The

⁶³ This is attested in the reports of Theophylact of Ohrid: Theophylactus, *Epistulae*, no. 12, pp. 167, 169; no. 19, p. 195. Cf. *Stephenson, Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 151–152.

last great ruler from the Komnenian dynasty, Manuel I, granted privileges to another border province – Dalmatia. Once again, the privileges were economic and financial and seem to have been extended to the social elite in a move meant to, together with his tolerant policy toward the Roman Catholic clergy, ensure the sympathy and support of the Dalmatian cities and their hinterlands. Like Anchialos and Dyrrachion, those were coastal cities important for maritime trade. Dyrrachion, Anchialos, and Dalmatia were the main defense points that prevented invasions of the Normans, the steppe tribes across the Danube, and the influence of Venice and the Hungarians in the Adriatic. Dalmatia and Dyrrachion were probably expected to have a prominent role in Manuel's planned offensive in Italy.

The Komnenian-era policy of granting privileges to some provinces was primarily shaped by the fact that the defense and preservation of those areas under Byzantine control largely depended on the loyalty of the local nobility. One should bear in mind that the ethnicity and religion of these regions and their populations were, to a smaller or greater extent, different from the dominant Byzantine identity. The inhabitants of Dalmatia were Latin-speaking Catholics. Dyrrachion was also under pronounced Latin influence, and the North-Eastern Balkans were home to different peoples, from the Bulgarians and Vlachs to the enigmatic *mixobarbaroi* to the Pechenegs and other steppe tribes. Therefore, their allegiance to Constantinople was not guaranteed and had to be ensured. Finally, elements of centuries-old municipal self-government, especially in Dalmatia, contributed to the local nobility's expectations of preferential treatment in the establishment and organization of the Byzantine provincial administration.

The policy of buying the loyalty of the local elites of Anchialos, Dyrrachion, and Dalmatia was meant to ensure the security of the main defense points on the Empire's frontier – which was certainly one of the main tasks of the Komnenian emperors, especially Manuel I. The only borderland in the Balkans excluded from this policy was the Morava valley. There might have been several reasons for this. On the one hand, this region did not have an influential elite or local *archontes* on whose allegiance its defense depended. Instead, it was protected by local garrisons whose members were recruited from different parts of the Empire. Belgrade, Braničevo, and Niš, the most important cities in the area, did not have a tradition of local self-government like Dalmatia and, to an extent, Dyrrachion.

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СПЕЦИФИЧНОСТИ ВИЗАНТИЈСКЕ ПРОВИНЦИЈСКЕ УПРАВЕ НА БАЛКАНУ У ДОБА КОМНИНА

Текст садржи резултате истраживања византијске провинцијске организације на деловима Балкана које је Царство, за време владавине династије Комнина, непосредно контролисало. Неуједначен историјско-политички развитак појединих регија Балканског полуострва условио је примену различитих метода цариградског двора приликом организације тамошње провинцијске управе, што је довело до извесне диференцијације међу балканским темама. Диференцијацији је допринео и неједнак стратешки значај различитих провинција за Царство, услед чега су стратешки важним окрузима и локалним елитама додељиване одређене привилегије, углавном пореско-финансијске природе. Улога и значај појединих тема су притом расли, док на другој страни поједине области временом губе стратешку позицију. У складу с тим се могу пратити и промене у приступу Цариграда организацији провинцијске управе на Балкану. У средишту истраживања била су питања: када, на који начин и због чега су одређеним балканским окрузима у доба Комнина додељиване или укидане повластице.

Куповина мира плаћањем данка била је једно од уобичајених средстава византијске дипломатије, у временима када Царство није било у могућности да војним путем надјача своје непријатеље. Реинтергацијом Балкана у ромејски државно-правни оквир Василије II је ту политику пренео и у раван провинцијске управе. Поменути цар је претходно, током вишедеценијског сукоба са Самуилом и његовим наследницима, обасипао почастима поједине припаднике бугарске војничке елите купујући њихову наклоност, што је, показало се, био један од пресудних чинилаца који су одлучили исход рата. Са политиком куповине мира и лојалности цар је, на изванредан начин, наставио и по завршетку војног сукоба додељивањем пореских привилегија и других економских повластица становништву на подручју некадашње бугарске државе – у бугарској и подунавској теми. Василијев компромисни приступ се огледао и у толерантној црквеној политици чији је одраз било конституисање аутокефалне цркве на темељима бугарске архиепископије/патријаршије.

Од Василијевог времена до епохе Комнина политичке прилике на Балкану су се умногоме измениле, те уместо Бугара главни такмаци Византинцима постају Нормани, Печенези, Кумани и Угри. Цариград је у складу с тим преусмерио политику привилеговања одређених провинција са некадашњег језгра Самуилове државе на обод Полуострва, односно на округе који су имали кључну улогу у одбрани од нових непријатеља. Централни део Балкана није више у доба Алексија I представљао претњу интересима Цариграда, услед чега су укинута тема Бугарска и све привилегије које су у оквиру њеног бирократског система постојале. Приближно у исто време Алексије укида и други округ који је постојао на тлу бугарских земља – Парадунавон – али због другачијих, тактичких разлога. Тим чином премештена је линија одбране од упада Печенег и Кумана на потез између Старе планине и Црног мора. Улогу Парадунавона преузима командни центар у Анхијалу, чије становништво, као и суседни Власи на Старој Планини, у неком тренутку добијају одређене економске уступке за лојалност и чување границе. Информације о њима на посредан начин пружа Никита Хонијат описујући узроке побуне Петра и Асена из 1185. године. Слично улози анхијалске области у одбрани границе од Печенег и Кумана, драчки округ је понео терет одбране од јужноиталијанских Нормана. Због тога је Цариград финансијским повластицама настојао да придобије локалне архонте, од чије је верности зависила одбрана града и околине. Реч је о уступцима који су на посредан начин посведочени у вези са догађајима из 1185. године (норманско запоседање града). Последњи велики владар комниновске династије Манојло I доделио је повластице још једној пограничној провинцији – Далмацији. Повластице су, такође, биле економско-финансијске природе и, по свему судећи, намењене друштвеној елити, чиме је, уз толерантну политику према римокатоличком клеру, требало обезбедити наклоност и подршку далматинских градова и њиховог залеђа. Драч, Анхијал и Далмација биле су главне одбрамбене тачке које су спречавале продор Нормана, степских прекодунавских народа, као и утицај Венеције и Угра у Јадрану, при чему се од Далмације и Драча могло очекивати да имају важну улогу и у Манојловој планираној офанзивној политици у Италији.

Политика привилеговања одређених провинција у доба Комнина била је условљена првенствено тиме што је одбрана, односно очување тих крајева унутар оквира византијске власти, у великој мери зависила од верности локалне аристократије. Треба притом имати у виду да је реч о крајевима и становништву које се у етничком (и верском) смислу у мањој или већој мери разликовало од доминантног ромејског идентитета. У Далмацији је живело лагинофоно католичко становништво, у Драчу су латински утицаји, такође, били изражени, док су североисток Балкана насељавали различити народи, од Бугара и Влаха, загонетних *миксоварвара*, до припадника степских печенешких и других племена. Њихова верност Цариграду се стога није подразумевала, већ ју је требало обезбедити. Коначно, елементи вековима старе муниципалне самоуправе, посебно у Далмацији, свакако су утицали на то да локална властела очекује посебан третман приликом успоставе и организације византијске провинцијске власти.

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