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Grand *Župan* Uroš II of Rascia

Abstract: Historical data on the person and policies of the “veliki [grand] *župan*” Uroš II – *archžupan* in Byzantine sources, *magnus comes* in Latin texts – can be found in twelfth-century Serbian, Greek, Hungarian, German and Russian sources. The paper is divided into three sections dealing specifically with Uroš II’s family relations (ancestors and descendants); chronological issues of his reign in Serbia; and his domestic and foreign policies. Uroš II’s father, the Serbian *župan* Uroš I, had three sons and a daughter: Uroš II, Desa, Beloš and Helen (Jelena). Uroš II succeeded his father as the ruler of Serbia. Helen married king Béla II of Hungary (1131–41) and became a very influential figure at the Hungarian court. Their brother Beloš, who was known in Hungary as *ban* Béla and subsequently held the office of the palatine of Hungary, considerably contributed to the firming up of Serbian-Hungarian political ties. Based on a detailed analysis of the surviving sources, the author suggests the conclusion that Uroš II was a true predecessor of Stefan Nemanja in all his policies. He was a vassal of the Byzantine emperor but he allied with Hungary in the aspiration to achieve independence. At the time of Uroš II and his successors the region of Rascia (Raška, Rassa), known for the city of Ras (modern Novi Pazar) and the Bishopric of Raška with the bishop’s seat at the church of Sts Peter and Paul, was the core of the Serbian state.

Keywords: *archžupan/magnus comes*, Serbia, Rascia, city of Ras (Novi Pazar), Uroš II, Byzantium, Hungary

Rascia (Raška) underwent major changes in the twelfth century.¹ The road travelled from a small vassal polity of Byzantium to the state of Stefan Nemanja was a long one. It is still inadequately known. This becomes particularly clear with regard to Rascia’s internal development. Historians have had much trouble clarifying it primarily because of the nature of the surviving sources which seldom contain information about areas such as the economy, administration or way of life of the Balkan peoples. These areas tended to become a focus of interest in contemporary writings only when they came to upset the established system of relations in a given region. That is exactly how the twelfth-century *župans* of Rascia entered history. Of all of them, the remarkable figure of Stefan Nemanja has always attracted the greatest attention. His reign and especially his achievements overshadowed everything that had gone before. The unprec-

¹ The name “Raška” (Rascia) for the core area of the medieval Serbian state became established in the twelfth century. It is much older, though, and associated with the history of the city of Ras (modern Novi Pazar) and the Bishopric of Raška, cf. J. Kalić, “Naziv ‘Raška’ u starijoj srpskoj istoriji (IX–XII vek)”, *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta XIV-1* (1979), 79–91. The title of the ruler of Serbia before she was constituted as a kingdom in 1217 was “veliki [grand] *župan*”, referred to as “*archžupan*” in Byzantine sources and as “*magnus comes*” in Latin texts.

edented extent of the Serbian realm centred on Rascia was such a compelling proof of the magnitude of Nemanja's achievement that both Serbian and foreign scholars mostly focused on him. Foreign historians were usually led to Rascia via the work of the Byzantine writers John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates. They sought to unravel at least the basic issues of twelfth-century Serbian history, and in doing so rightly insisted on Serbian-Byzantine relations. But they tended to lose their way in the really convoluted tangle of family and political relations of the *župans* of Rascia.² Serbian historiography, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the personage of Stefan Nemanja and, in search for data that could shed light on his activity, either completely ignored his predecessors or tended to link them to him by making all sorts of constructions. This was particularly obvious in the attempts to identify Nemanja's father. Struggling to solve the mystery, historians tended to link to Uroš I, Uroš II and Desa pieces of information that in fact have nothing to do with them.³ In this way a grave injustice was done to those who had paved the way for Nemanja.

This paper is devoted to the grand *župan* Uroš II of Rascia in an effort to provide answers to a few basic questions concerning Uroš II himself, the times in which he reigned and the policies he pursued.

Family background

Župan Uroš I of Rascia had three sons and a daughter. One son's name was Desa, according to the *Letopis popa Dukljanina* (Chronicle of a priest of Dioclea).⁴ In

² K. I. A. Grot, *Iz istorii Ugrii i slavianstva v XII veke (1141–1173)* (Warsaw 1889); E. Golubinskii, *Kratkii ocherk istorii pravoslavnykh tserkvei* (Moscow 1871); A. Huber, *Geschichte Österreichs*, vol. I (Gotha 1885); V. N. Zlatarski, *Istoriia na bŭlgarskata drzhava II* (Sofia 1934).

³ I. Ruvarac, "Prilošci k poznavanju izvora srpske istorije", *Godišnjica N. Čupića* 14 (1984); Lj. Kovačević, "Nekolika pitanja o Stefanu Nemanji", *Glas SKA* 58 (1900), 1–106; D. Anastasijević, *Otac Nemanjin* (Belgrade 1914); St. Novaković, "Zemljište radnje Nemanjine", *Godišnjica N. Čupića* 1 (1877), 163–244; St. Stanojević, "O Nemanjinom ocu", *Starinar V* (1928–30), 3–6; V. Ćorović, "Pitanje o hronologiji u delima sv. Save", *Godišnjica N. Čupića* 49 (1940), 1–69; *Letopis popa Dukljanina*, ed. F. Šišić (Belgrade – Zagreb 1928); R. Novaković, "Kad se rodio i kad je počeo da vlada Stevan Nemanja", *Istoriski glasnik* 3–4 (1958), 165–192; M. Dinić, "Srpske zemlje u ranofeudalno doba (do XII veka)", in *Istorija naroda Jugoslavije I* (Belgrade 1953), 249–250; K. Jireček, *Istorija Srba I* (Belgrade 1952), 141ff.

⁴ *Letopis popa Dukljanina*, ed. F. Šišić, 375; cf. N. Radojčić, "Društveno i državno uređenje kod Srba u ranom srednjem veku", *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva XV* (1935), 15; in reconstructing the relations of kinship by birth and marriage in the family of the *župans* of Rascia we depend on various sources. In addition to the abovementioned *Letopis*, they include the Byzantine writers Kinnamos and Choniates, Otto of Freising and the *Vienna Illuminated Chronicle*. The sources originated in different environments and vary in trustworthiness. Some of the writers were contemporaries of or chronologically close to the events they wrote about (Otto of Freising, Kinnamos, Choniates), but some accounts are of a later date and

his account of the events in Serbia in the mid-twelfth century, Kinnamos claims that Uroš (II) and Desa were brothers.⁵ Information about yet another family member survives in Hungarian sources: Helena, daughter of Uroš I and sister of Uroš II and Desa. Namely, towards the end of his life king Stephen II of Hungary decided to marry his heir, Bela the Blind, son of Almos, to the daughter of the Serbian grand *župan* Uroš (I). Thus Uroš's daughter became a Hungarian queen, wife of Bela II (1131–1141).⁶ Since a child was born out of this union, Géza, future king Géza II (1141–1162), and since it is reliably known that Stephen II lived to see his birth, the date of the marriage of Helena and Bela can be established quite accurately. Stephen II died on 1 March 1131 and, therefore, the marriage is assumed to have taken place in 1129 or in 1130 at the latest. So it was then that close family ties were established between the *župan* of Rascia and the Hungarian royal house. This fact explains some important subsequent events.

Besides Uroš (II), Desa and Helena, Uroš I had a third son, Beloš. Beloš was a very interesting figure and left a deep imprint in Hungary where he lived most of his life. He enjoyed the reputation of an accomplished warrior. According to complex evidence from several sources, in the war between the minor king Géza II's forces and the Austro-German invading armies in 1146, the decisive role was played by the king's uncle, the *ban* Beloš.⁷ The invaders were defeated and Beloš became quite influential at the Hungarian court. He took part in the upbringing and education of king Géza II.⁸ Sources usually refer to him as "ban".⁹

therefore rely on earlier writings (*Vienna Illuminated Chronicle*). For the *Letopis* cf. the view of S. Mijušković, transl. and ed., *Ljetopis popa Dukljanina* (Titograd 1967), 7–120.

⁵ *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, ed. A. Meineke (Bonn 1836), 113.

⁶ *Chronicon pictum Vindobonense*, ed. I. Szentpétery, *Scriptores rerum Hungaricum* I (Budapest 1937), 443: "Statimque misit [sc. king] nuncios in Servian et filiam Uroš comitis magni in legitimam uxorem Bele traduxerunt." Queen Helena convenes an assembly at Arad (*ibid.* 444). There is an ample scholarly literature on the *Vienna Illuminated Chronicle*, to mention but: H. Marczali, *Ungarns Geschichtsquellen im Zeitalter der Arpaden* (Berlin 1882), 68–83; S. Domanovszky, preface to *Scriptores rerum Hungaricum* I, ed. Szentpétery (Budapest 1937); C. A. Macartney, *The Medieval Hungarian Historians* (Cambridge University Press, 1953), 133–142; T. Kardos, preface to the edition of this Chronicle *Die ungarische Bilderchronik* (Budapest 1961), 5–30; and more recently, e.g.: G. Kristó, "Anjou-kori krónikáin", *Századok* 3–4 (1967), 457–508.

⁷ Otto Frisingensis, *Gesta Friderici imperatoris*, MGH SS XX, 369–370, including a fine description of Beloš and his abilities; *Chronicon*, ed. Szentpétery, 456: "avunculus domini regis Bele ban nominatus"; *Lavrent'evskaia letopis'*, vol. I of *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (PSRL I) (Leningrad 1928), under the year 1144 mentions the Hungarians and the "ban, the king's uncle".

⁸ Cinn. 104.

⁹ He figures in Hungarian charters from 1142 onward, and with the title of *dux* or *ban*: G. Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*, vol. II (Buda 1829), 88; the charter

From 1145 he served as palatine of Hungary.¹⁰ In the Hungarian-Byzantine war of 1151 he fought against the Byzantine emperor Manuel's army which invaded Sylvania. The *ban* Beloš launched a counteroffensive towards Braničevo and drove the Byzantines out of Hungary.¹¹ He disappears from the sources towards the end of Géza II's reign. This inspired the assumption that he had fallen from his charge's grace and was removed from his high offices. Some historians believed him to have been the grand *župan* of Rascia mentioned as the ruler holding the Serbian throne in the 1160s.¹² It is a fact that the *ban* Beloš supported Géza's brothers, Stephen in particular, in the struggle for power.¹³ The struggle reached its peak after Géza II's death in 1162, and the circumstances for Beloš to support Stephen's pretensions became even more favourable. Stephen ascended to the Hungarian throne in 1163, backed more by Byzantine money and arms than by

of 1142 is also included in I. Kukuljević-Sakcinski, *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. II (Zagreb 1876), 30, but under the year 1141. Probably based on that, V. Klaić, "Hrvatski bani za Arpadovića", *Vjestnik kr. hrvatsko-slavonsko-dalmatinskog Zemaljskog arkiva* 1 (1899), 129, believed that the *dux* Beloš was mentioned in the sources for the first time in 1141. I. Kukuljević-Sakcinski, "Prvovjenčani vladaoici Bugara, Hrvata i Srba", *Rad JAZU* 59 (1881), 116, argued that Beloš occurred in a charter of 1137. This view was adopted by Kovačević, "Nekolika pitanja", and rectified by Šišić, *Letopis*, 99, n. 78. Cf. also M. Gyóni, *A magyar nyelv görög feljegyzéses szórványemlékei* (Budapest 1943), 29–30.

¹⁰ The year 1145 – "Belus Palatinus Comes": Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus* II, 124; 1146 – "Belus Comes Palatinus et Banus": G. Wenzel, *Codex diplomaticus Arpadianus continuatus*, vol. I (Pest 1860), 57; 1148 – Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus* II, 129; 1150 – again as "Beluš Banus": Wenzel, *Codex diplomaticus* I, 60. Under the same year, the Russian *Ipat'ivskaia letopis'* (PSRL II) (St. Petersburg 1908), 407–408, brings the information that the daughter of the Hungarian *ban* is to be married to Prince Vladimir, brother of Izaislav Mstislavich. Cf. V. G. Vasil'evskii, "Soiuz dvukh imperii", *Trudy V. G. Vasil'evskago* IV (Leningrad 1930), 104. The year 1152 is also mentioned: Wenzel, *Codex diplomaticus* I, 60; T. Smičiklas, *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. II (Zagreb 1904), 67.

¹¹ Cinn. 117. Beloš continues to be mentioned in Hungarian sources until 1158: Wenzel, *Codex diplomaticus* I, 62; Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus* II, 140–143, 144, 146, 148. This brief list of references to Beloš does not take into account many testimonies to his activity. Cf. B. Homan, *Geschichte des ungarischen Mittelalters*, vol. I (Berlin 1940), 384–385; J. Radonić, "Srbija i Ugarska u srednjem veku", in *Vojvodina* I (Novi Sad 1939), 130–131.

¹² It has long been observed that the name of the *ban* Beloš does not occur in the Hungarian sources between 1158 and 1163. This has been the reason for some to assume that sometime "around 1158" he went to Serbia where the emperor Manuel appointed him as grand *župan*: Grot, *Iz istorii Ugrii*, 230–234; F. Chalandon, *Les Comnène* II (Paris 1912), 391–392; Klaić, "Hrvatski bani", 135–137; Šišić, *Letopis*, 96–98, believed he had been the grand *župan* of Rascia in 1161–1162. Cf. n. 49 below.

¹³ Rahewin, *Gesta Friderici*, MGH SS XX, 423–424. Cf. J. v. Pauler, "Wie und wann kam Bosnien an Ungarn", *Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen aus Bosnien und Herzegowina* II (1894), 161; Jireček, *Istorija* I, 145; B. Nedeljković, "Postojbina prvog bosanskog bana Boriča", *Istoriski časopis* IX–X (1959), 55–56.

supporters in the country. In a charter issued in Esztergom, Beloš figures among his closest associates.¹⁴ Beloš died before 1198.¹⁵ In his lifetime he had a Benedictine monastery built on his estate in Syrmia, in the present-day village of Banoštor, Serbia. Evidence of this lavishly endowed monastery and its founder survives in the name of this settlement that has grown in the vicinity.¹⁶

Uroš II ruled Rascia at exactly the same time when Beloš was at the helm of Hungarian politics. Even though Beloš's policy of supporting the Serbian anti-Byzantine agenda was neither new in Hungary nor was it his invention, it was expanded and set on a firmer basis in his time. Serbian-Hungarian cooperation was at work during the wars against Byzantium in 1149–50.

When did Uroš II become the grand župan of Rascia?

The Serbian-Byzantine wars waged in the mid-twelfth century are known well enough. Their course is outlined by the data provided by Kinnamos and Choniates, and their nature identified by modern scholarship.¹⁷ We shall, therefore, only dwell on the data that are helpful in clarifying the question posed above.

Emperor Manuel I Komnenos undertook two successive campaigns against Rascia. The first was launched in response to the news of an anti-Byzantine alliance of the Alemanni, Serbs and Hungarians.¹⁸ Namely, the Serbs joined

¹⁴ In this document king Stephen IV confirms the *ban* Beloš's ruling that the forest of Dubrava is in the ownership of the Bishopric of Zagreb. Among the king's witnesses, Borič, the *ban* of Bosnia, figures immediately after Beloš and before the other *župans*. The charter is published by Smičiklas, *Codex diplomaticus* II, 303, but the line where the *ban* Borič is mentioned is left out. Cf. Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus* II, 166.

¹⁵ He is referred to as "deceased" in a letter of the pope Innocent III to the bishop of Kalocsa. Cf. Smičiklas, *Codex diplomaticus* II, 303.

¹⁶ In his abovementioned letter Innocent III says: "in proprio fundo suo, qui appellatur Keu, monasterium in protomartiris Stephani honorem construxit..." It may not be irrelevant that in 1164 the emperor Manuel, while on his Hungarian campaign, made a stop in Syrmia in a place called Petrik (χωρον Πετρικον) which seems to have been the Hungarian *Keu* or *Ku* that occurs in the sources. Hungarian *kő* means "stone", which is equivalent to Greek "πέτρα". That the later settlement of Banoštor should be brought into connection with Beloš's estate *Keu* seems to be suggested by a later document of 1309 which mentions "Civitas de Ku que alio modo Monasterium Bani nominatur": *Monumenta Vaticana*, ser. I, vol. II (Budapest 1885), 322. Cf. D. Csánki, *Magyarország történelmi földrajza a Hunyadiak korában*, vol. II (Budapest 1894), 234.

¹⁷ Vasil'evskii, "Soiuz dvukh imperii", 94; Jireček, *Istorija* I, 142; Dinić, "Srpske zemlje", 249–250; J. Kalić, "Srpski veliki župani u borbi s Vizantijom", in *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. I, ed. S. Ćirković (Belgrade 1981), 197–211; F. Makk, *The Arpáds and the Comneni* (Budapest 1989), 42–62.

¹⁸ Cinn. 101–102.

a broad anti-Byzantine coalition formed by the South-Italian Normans, Hungary and a powerful German duke of the house of Welf. Somewhat later, the idea of a war against the emperor Manuel attracted the French king, Louis VII, and Hungarian-Byzantine clashes were also sparked in the fiercely rivalling Rus' principalities. Opposed to the thus allied forces was the firm German-Byzantine alliance concluded during the stay of Conrad III Hohenstaufen in Constantinople at the time of the Second Crusade. Most of the battles between these hostile blocs were fought between the Normans and Byzantium over the Ionian Islands, between the Welf and Hohenstaufen families, and between the Serbs and Byzantines in Rascia.¹⁹ In 1149 Manuel ravaged Ras and captured Nikava and Galič, and then returned to Constantinople only to resume his campaign the following year, and on a much larger scale.²⁰

Neither Kinnamos nor Choniates mention the *župan* of Rascia who rebelled against Byzantium in 1149 by name. Kinnamos does not name him even in his extensive account of the emperor's campaign of 1150.²¹ Yet, after the account of the Serbian defeat at the Battle of the river Tara in the late autumn of 1150, he adds that "a long while later" the Serbs deposed Uroš without the emperor's knowledge and handed power over to his brother Desa. But they were fearful of the emperor's anger and so they brought the dispute before Manuel to arbitrate. Manuel restored Uroš (II) to power.²² It has been rightly inferred from this passage that Manuel backed Uroš in this internal conflict given that he, apparently after the Battle of the Tara in 1150, had accepted him as the ruler of Rascia and his vassal.

Thus, it may be indirectly inferred from Kinnamos that Uroš II was the grand *župan* of Rascia in 1150. That this was so becomes clear from Choniates' account of the same events. It explicitly names Manuel's adversary in Serbia in 1150: Uroš, the ruler of the Serbs.²³ And that is not all. This important passage in Choniates contains yet another piece of information. The emperor learned,

¹⁹ H. v. Kap-Herr, *Die abendländische Politik Kaiser Manuels* (Strasbourg 1881), 31–37; P. Lamma, *Comneni e Stauffer*, vol. I (Rome 1955), 85–115; J. Kalić, "Evropa i Srbi u XII veku", *Glas SANU* 384 (1998), 95–106.

²⁰ Cinn. 102–103; *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1835), 119–120.

²¹ Cinn. 103–113.

²² Cinn. 113.9–16.

²³ Chon. 121.18–19. It is curious that this piece of information has largely gone unnoticed even though attention to it was drawn quite early on by Ruvarac, "Prilošci", 214–215. Uroš's name occurs only in the Greek text. The translator into Latin left the name out. It should be noted that Uroš's name occurs in both manuscripts of Choniates' text used for the Bonn edition. Manuscript B says: τὸν ῥήγα σερβίας τὸν οὐρεσην; Chon. 121; Th. Skutariotes, *Σύνοψις χρονική*, in K. N. Sathas, ed., *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. VII (Venice and Paris 1894), 238.3–4, says: τὸν Σερβίας ἄρχοντα Οὐρεσιν.

Choniates says, that the ruler of the Serbs misconducted himself and *acted even worse than before*,²⁴ which is obviously an allusion to the previous year, 1149, because it was the only year prior to 1150 in which the Serbs rebelled against Manuel.

It follows from Choniates, then, that Uroš II was the Serbian ruler in 1149, that he rebelled against Byzantine rule then, and that he continued his rebellion in 1150 “worse than before”. This disproves all assumptions, so current in the earlier literature, concerning Vakhin, the Serbian *župan*.²⁵

This conclusion is confirmed, in their own way, by Byzantine twelfth-century rhetoricians. Their writings do not contain any precise chronological information; such information simply emerges from their content. The poet Theodore Prodromos, for example, glorifying the emperor’s deeds, describes Manuel’s campaign against the Serbs. In his words, Serbs dispersed before the advancing imperial army and their ruler, Uroš, did not appear before the emperor but withdrew to a remote part of his land.²⁶ This apparently refers to the emperor’s campaign of 1149. The same event seems to be referred to in an oration of Michael of Thessalonike, also known as Michael (the) Rhetor, which mentions, in the florid rhetorical manner, ties between Serbs and Hungarians. The emperor, Michael says, attacked the heart of the Serbian land, which he calls “the land of the Slavs”, and routed the adversary.²⁷

Apart from these more or less known data about Uroš II, Kinnamos’ text contains other details about the situation in Rascia. They reveal some facts about Uroš II himself: in the passage describing the Serbian defeat at the Battle of the Tara in 1150. The envoys of the Serbian grand *župan* were the first to appear before the emperor, and then came the *župan*. On that occasion the terms of their relationship were settled. Uroš II paid homage to the emperor and promised to provide military assistance in two cases. Namely, he agreed to

²⁴ Chon. 121.18–19: βασιλεὺς δὲ αὐτὸς αὐθις μαθὼν κακουργεῖν τὸν Σερβίας δυναστεύοντα οὖρεσι καὶ χεῖρονα δρᾶν τῶν προτέρων...

²⁵ On Vakhin, see a more detailed analysis of the sources and literature by J. Kalić in *Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije IV* (Belgrade 1971).

²⁶ Theodorus Prodromus in *Recueil des historiens des croisades, Hist. grecs*, vol. II, ed. E. Miller (Paris 1881), 761–763. The poem says that Manuel moved against the Serbs after his victory in Corfu, i.e. in 1149.

²⁷ W. Regel, *Fontes rerum byzantinorum*, vol. I (St. Petersburg 1892), Speech no. X, pp. 174–175. The speech seems to have been composed in 1150 because the rhetorician, describing the emperor’s campaign against the Serbs which may be identified as the 1149 campaign based on its content, says in one place (174.15): τί μὴ λέγω τὰ πέιρουσι. Cf. K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* (Munich 1897), 473; G. Moravcsik, *A magyar történet bizánci forrásai* (Budapest 1934), 206; Jireček, *Istorija I*, 142; only R. Browning, “The patriarchal school at Constantinople in the twelfth century” (II), *Byzantion* 33 (1963), 12, dates the speech to 1155 without offering any supporting argument.

send two thousand men in the event of a war in the west, and “when a war is waged in Asia, whereto he usually sends three hundred, he will send another two hundred” men.²⁸

It follows clearly from this text that Uroš had provided three hundred men for the Byzantine emperor’s Asian campaigns prior to 1150, and at least once (τὸ πρότερον εἰώθει). The question is: when did the emperor Manuel wage a war in the east before 1150? because it apparently was then that Uroš sent his soldiers. If we go back in time, it is known that in 1146 Manuel launched a large-scale expedition against the sultan Masud of Iconium.²⁹ The emperor had mustered a large army which headed towards the heart of the enemy’s land. Regrettably, Kinnamos and Choniates say nothing about how and from which regions the army was mustered; consequently, there is no mention of Serbs as participants in the expedition either. However, since it is known that Manuel waged no war in the east between 1146 and 1150, it appears unquestionable that the Serbian military assistance to the emperor mentioned by Kinnamos should be dated to 1146. Manuel suspended his expedition against the sultan upon learning about preparations being made in the west for another large-scale crusade, which meant a new threat from that direction.³⁰ Whether Uroš had sent a contingent to Manuel prior to 1146 and, if so, for which war, cannot be inferred from these sources.

What follows as a necessary conclusion is that: in 1146, Uroš already was the grand *župan* of Rascia, he already was a vassal of Manuel I Komnenos and he was honouring his duties as a vassal to the emperor. It is very likely that he had been in power even before 1146. Whether he had ruled Rascia before 1143, the year Manuel ascended to the Byzantine throne, or whether this change on the throne had an effect on his position remains an open question. Be that as it may, he was the grand *župan* of Rascia from 1146 on.³¹

²⁸ Cinn. 113.306: *κἄν μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν ἐσπέραν στρατεύοιε, σὺν δισχιλίοις ἐπεσθαὶ ὠμολόγει, πολεμοῦσί γε μὴν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀσίας πρὸς οἷς τὸ πρότερον εἰώθει τριακοσίοις καὶ διακοσίοις ἤδη προσεπιπέμπειν*. It is Uroš who pledges to send the promised military assistance to Manuel; ergo, not some other *župan* of Rascia.

²⁹ Cinn. 46ff; Chon. 71–72.

³⁰ B. Kugler, *Studien zur Geschichte des zweiten Kreuzzuges* (Stuttgart 1866), 114; Chalandon, *Les Commènes* II, 247–257.

³¹ Anastasijević, *Otac Nemanjin*, 23, believed that Uroš II had not become the grand *župan* of Rascia until “about 15 or 16 years” after 1129–1130. In support of his claim he pointed to the information that in the war between Géza II and the Germans in Hungary about 1146, in addition to the *ban* Beloš, a certain “comes Uroš” had also excelled (*Chronicon* I, 457). Anastasijević assumed that this Uroš might have been Uroš II who had been in, or sent aid to, Hungary at the time. Although interesting, this assumption can hardly be accepted. Firstly, there are several persons by the name Uroš in the same source (*Chronicon* I, 430; 437f). Secondly, this was the year when the grand *župan* of Rascia sent a contingent for Manuel’s

Historians still cannot say with certainty whether the grand *župan* Uroš II of Rascia was related to Stefan Nemanja.³² What is certain, however, is that all views based on the assumption that either Uroš II or Desa was Nemanja's father should be discarded. Based on that assumption, data and events that are completely unrelated to Uroš II have been related to him nonetheless.³³ When the available data are properly delineated from one another, what remains as a reliable basis for further research are the following facts: Uroš II was the grand *župan* of Rascia in 1146, he held the position in 1149 and 1150 as well, and it was him who led the well-known rebellion against Byzantium in those years.

Until when did Uroš II rule Rascia?

The end of Uroš II's reign is still quite obscure. There is no explicit information in the sources, and the answer cannot be given unless two other questions are answered first. First, when did the conflict between Uroš and his brother Desa take place? And, second, are Uroš II and Primislav one and the same person?

According to Kinnamos, a long time intervened between the Battle of the Tara and the moment the Serbs deposed Uroš and handed power over to his brother Desa without the emperor's knowledge. However, Kinnamos claims, fearful of Manuel's anger, they appeared before the emperor with Uroš and Desa and stated that they would recognise the authority of the one the emperor should choose. Manuel chose Uroš again.³⁴

This obviously was a struggle for power in Rascia, outlined briefly and in the writer's typical disguised manner. Even though many details of these events can be surmised rather than proved, the central issue to be clarified is the issue of their chronology. When was Uroš II ousted? Two other contemporary writers

campaign in the east. It does not seem very likely that Uroš II would have left the country, even for a short while, in order to appear on a distant Hungarian battlefield in person.

³² Novaković, "Kad se rodio i kad je počeo da vlada Stevan Nemanja", 184, assumed that a relative of Nemanja's, close or distant, had ruled Rascia between 1142 and 1144.

³³ Anastasijević, *Otac Nemanjin*, 24, believed that Nemanja's father, be it Desa or Uroš II, had been exiled from Rascia in 1131 and that he then went to Zeta, where his son Nemanja was born around 1132. While Anastasijević hesitated between Desa and Uroš II as Nemanja's father, Šišić, ed., *Letopis*, 96–98, opted for Uroš II. Relying on the data about Uroš in Stefan the First Crowned's account of "great mayhem" in Rascia and the banishment of Nemanja's father, Šišić concluded that Uroš II had ruled in 1131–32 and again in 1133–61. He reiterated this view in his *Poviest Hrvata za kraljeva iz doma Arpadovića 1102–1301* (Zagreb 1944), 60–61, but now stretched Uroš II's reign to 1166 without offering any argument to support it. On the subject of Nemanja's ancestors see S. Ćirković, "Preci Nemanjini i njihova postojbina", in *Stefan Nemanja – Sveti Simeon Mirotočivi, istorija i predanje*, ed. J. Kalić (Belgrade 2000), 21–29.

³⁴ Cinn. 113.

speak about it: the rhetorician Michael of Thessalonike and the poet Theodor Prodromos. The former requires particular attention.

Michael of Thessalonike wrote four orations between 1149 and 1156. He dedicated them to Manuel Komnenos, using all his skills and eloquence to depict his military successes against the enemies of the empire as flamboyantly as possible. In one of the speeches, he mentions the conflict between two Serbian *župans*, whom he calls satraps.³⁵ There the Serbs are called Dacians, the Dacian people, and the Hungarians, Gepids. The Dacian people, long subjected to the emperor, the rhetorician says, sided with the Gepidic ruler, i.e. the Hungarians, ousted the satrap (*župan*) appointed by the emperor and acclaimed the one appointed by the Gepids.³⁶ Manuel decided to restore the overthrown one to power and moved against the Serbs. As he adjudicated in favour of the previous satrap, the Serbs calmed down, gave hostages and “fought in alliance”, i.e. they committed themselves to providing military assistance to Byzantium.³⁷

This account essentially matches the one by Kinnamos. Even though Michael of Thessalonike names neither the overthrown *župan* nor the one who aspired to take his place, it does not seem difficult to grasp who is who, because he claims that the Serbs deposed the ruler appointed by Manuel, which tallies with Kinnamos’ account of Uroš II. The usurper in this case must have been Desa, only that Michael also states that he enjoyed Hungarian support.

In order to be able to use these data, we need to establish when the speech was written and to which events it referred.

In one place in this oration Michael of Thessalonike says that four years have elapsed since the emperor brought thousands of prisoners from Hungary, since the Byzantine army ransacked Hungary, which he calls Pannonia, leaving it empty and desolate.³⁸ During the wars against Hungary, which is the period when the rhetorician composed his speeches, the emperor Manuel captured a large number of prisoners *only once*, and, according to Kinnamos’ and Choniates’ matching accounts, in 1151.³⁹ If we add four years to this year which brought

³⁵ Speech no. X in Regel, *Fontes rerum byzantinorum* I, 152–165.

³⁶ The Dacian people [Serbs] ... σατράπην μὲν, ὃν αὐτὸς ἐγκαταστηάμενος εἶχε, ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ ἐποίησατο, τὸν δ’ ἐκ τοῦ Γήπαιδος δεδομένον τούτῳ ἠσπάσατο (ibid. 163.25–27).

³⁷ Ibid. 163–164.

³⁸ Michael of Thessalonike to the emperor: Ἐμνησικάκει μὲν σοι ὁ Γήπαις λείας ἐκείνης, ἀφ’ ἧς ἐρήμη καὶ κέανδρος ἡ Παννονία γέγονε μονονού, καὶ δηλοῦσιν αἱ μυριάδες τῶν αἰχμαλώτων οὐς ὁ στρεπτός περιηχένισε αἰδηρος, τὸν ἀπ’ ἐκείνου γούν χρόνον καὶ ἐς τέταρτον ἔτος ὄλον, τοῦτον εἰς συσκευὴν ὡς ἀμννοῦμενος ἀπηνάλωσε (ibid. 158.1–5).

³⁹ Manuel’s first clash with the Hungarians in Rascia took place in 1150, but on that occasion only an auxiliary unit from Hungary led by Vakhin took part in the battles (Cinn. 107–112; Chon. 121–122). Hence, there could not have been a large number of prisoners, let alone thousands. In 1151 Manuel raided into Hungary, leaving a trail of plunder and destruction in

Manuel big successes and a rich booty, we obtain the year 1155 as the date of the described strife in Rascia.⁴⁰

Having described the conflict in Rascia and the emperor's intervention there, Michael of Thessalonike mentions the conclusion of a Hungarian-Byzantine peace. Some historians contended that the oration should be dated to 1156 and not to 1155.⁴¹ But the writer's own biography appears to provide evidence to the contrary. Namely, at the council held in Constantinople on 26 January 1156, the patriarch of Antioch, Soterichos Pantevgenos, was condemned for his teachings along with his followers. Michael of Thessalonike was one of them and he was removed from his position.⁴² Considering that the council was held in early 1156, his oration obviously could not have been composed then and certainly

his wake. Kinnamos and Choniates both claim that he captured a large number of prisoners and that the returning Byzantine army took them with it (Cinn. 113–118; Chon. 122–123). In 1152 Manuel reappeared on the Danube, but there was no fighting (Cinn. 119–120). The following year, 1153, saw no war on the Hungarian-Byzantine border either (Cinn. 121; Chon. 132). Clashes in Danube areas took place in 1154, but this time Byzantium was on the defensive: it defended Braničevo and Belgrade (Cinn. 130–133; Chon. 133–134). There could not have been many Hungarian captives. On the contrary, the Byzantines suffered an overwhelming defeat and heavy losses at Belgrade. Finally, in 1155 Manuel's army was on the Danube again, but on this occasion a Hungarian-Byzantine peace treaty was concluded without battle (Cinn. 133–134).

⁴⁰ The oration was dated in this way even by Regel, *Fontes* I, xix, but he created confusion by mentioning prisoners from Serbia although there were none then. The same dating can be found in Krumbacher, *Geschichte*, 473; and in Anastasijević, *Otac Nemanjin*, 24, n. 1, though with no supporting argument. Browning, "The patriarchal school", 12, thinks of 1153 as the date of the oration, but does not offer arguments to support his view. It should be noted that there is another oration of Michael of Thessalonike (no. VIII in Regel, *Fontes* I, pp. 131–152) that may be related to 1153 because therein the author mentions ten years of Manuel's reign. It is impossible that both orations (nos. VIII and IX in Regel, *Fontes* I) date from 1153 because the analysis of their content shows two different situations in Serbia. In Oration VIII there is no mention of any conflict between the *župans* of Rascia or their supporters.

⁴¹ Moravcsik, *A magyar történet bizánci forrásai*, 206; I. Rác, *Bizánci költemények Mánuel császár magyar hadjáratairól* (Budapest 1941), 11.

⁴² Cinn. 176; Chon. 275–276; cf. Chalandon, *Les Commène* II, 640–641; Lamma, *Comneni e Stauffer* I, 255–256; R. Browning, "A new source on Byzantine-Hungarian relations in the twelfth century", *Balkan Studies* 2 (1961), 182–183; P. Wirth, "Michael von Thessalonike", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 55.2 (1962), 267. Michael of Thessalonike was archbishop until 1156. It is known that he was replaced by Basil of Ochrid in 1156; cf. V. G. Vasil'evskii, in his critical review in *Vizantiiskii vremennik* VI (1899), 529, of K. Krumbacher, "Michael Glykas", *Sitzungsberichte d. phil.-philos. und hist. Klasse der K. b. Akademie der Wissenschaften* III (1894), 410.

could not have glorified the emperor's successes achieved later that year. Therefore, the events the rhetorician speaks about can only be dated to the year 1155.⁴³

Another contemporary, the poet Theodore Prodromos, offers a somewhat different picture of the situation in Rascia. According to him, Desa was an unlawful ruler of the Serbs (Dalmatae) who, upon the news of Manuel approaching, went out to meet the emperor and pledged submission to him, though not quite of his own volition. He appeared before the emperor together with his rival, whom the poet does not name. In this version too, the emperor acts as an arbiter and settles the situation in Serbia by restoring to power the one "who fell from power". The text mentions the *župans* who had abandoned allegiance to the arch*župan*. The emperor forced them to submit to his authority.⁴⁴

Prodromos offers some new information but there is also many a vague place. His style being entirely subjugated to the desire to evoke imperial superiority as vividly as possible, he resorts to excessive contrasts. This goes especially for his portrayal of Manuel's opponents. Upon hearing that the great autocrat is approaching, they as a rule are overwhelmed with fear, prostrate before him and plead for mercy, which is what the *župan* of Rascia, Desa, does too. Some conclusions can be drawn nonetheless. Firstly, the struggle for power in Rascia must have begun at the time of the Hungarian-Byzantine war because Prodromos describes the emperor's doings in Rascia, and then proceeds to depict how Manuel moved his army towards the Danube, against the Hungarians, on which

⁴³ Since in this oration Michael mentions the conclusion of the Hungarian-Byzantine peace, the years prior to 1153 should also be ruled out because it is known from Kinnamos and Choniates that hostilities lasted until 1155. The question is why Moravcsik, *A magyar történet bizánci forrásai*, 206, and Rácz, *Bizánci költemények*, 11, date this oration to 1156. Moravcsik – *Byzác és a magyarság* (Budapest 1953), 80, and "Hungary and Byzantium", in *The Cambridge Medieval History IV* (Cambridge 1966), 581–582 – was of the opinion that the Hungarian-Byzantine war had ended with a peace treaty in 1156 and not in 1155. Since Michael of Thessalonike mentions the conclusion of this treaty in his speech, however, the speech needs to be dated accordingly. On the reasons why some historians date the end of the war to 1156 see J. Kalić-Mijušković, *Beograd u srednjem veku* (Belgrade 1967), 353, n. 82. It appears, however, that Michael of Thessalonike himself provides data that contradict Moravcsik's dating. Namely, if our interpretation of his speech is correct, i.e. if four years elapsed from 1151 when Manuel had returned with a large number of prisoners from Hungary, then the conclusion of the peace treaty has to be dated to 1155. And that is not all. We have already noted that Michael of Thessalonike was removed from office in 1156, which means that he could not have composed a praise of Manuel's successes in 1156. Consequently, the successes he describes can only be dated to the previous year, 1155.

⁴⁴ Prodromos' poem is published in *Recueil des historiens des croisades, Hist. grecs II*, 748–752, but the version is incomplete. The missing passages are precisely those that concern the situation in Serbia. Jireček, *Istorija I*, 144, used this incomplete version and therefore, as he himself noted, he was unaware of some parts of Prodromos' text. The complete version of the poem is included in Rácz, *Bizánci költemények*, with the part on the Serbs on pp. 29–35.

occasion he concluded peace with the Hungarian king.⁴⁵ In this, Prodromos' sequence of events tallies with that of Michael of Thessalonike. Secondly, Desa was one of the participants in the struggle for power in Rascia. According to Prodromos, the emperor backed the overthrown ruler. Desa came before the emperor together with the other pretender to the throne. Thirdly, besides the two feuding *župans*, Prodromos mentions other *župans* who abandoned allegiance to their ruler and whom the emperor forced to submit to him. If Prodromos' poetic and exaggeration-laden narrative is to be trusted, the situation in Rascia was tumultuous, ridden with internal strife.

Those are the available sources of information about the internal strife that was shaking Rascia in the mid-twelfth century. Although they do not tally on the sequence of events and although they include texts by two Byzantine rhetoricians composed in a deliberately bookish and vague style, it seems that an important chronological datum may be gleaned from them nonetheless. The conflict in Rascia took place at the time of the Hungarian-Byzantine war, and shortly before the conclusion of peace, which is to say in 1155. Choniates makes no mention of these events.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Prodromos, Poem 2, in Rác, *Bizánci költemények*, 35, v. 357ff.

⁴⁶ In his account of the Hungarian-Byzantine war of 1150–51, Choniates mentions the Serbs only one more time after his description of the Serbian defeat on the river Tara. He says that the emperor declared war on the Hungarians again and that he arrived in Serdica, where his army had been gathered. Envoys of the Hungarian king also arrived there with an offer of peace. After the negotiations that ensued, the emperor gave up his Hungarian campaign and moved against the "satrap of the Serbs". Instilling the latter with fear along the way, he persuaded him into recognising only him (the emperor) and into revoking the agreement with the Hungarians. Having achieved all that, the emperor disbanded the troops and withdrew (Chon. 132).

In view of the course of Choniates' narrative, this episode in Serbian-Byzantine relations may be dated to between 1151 – since Choniates previously describes the emperor's successes against the Hungarians in 1151 (Chon. 122–123) – and November 1153, when Manuel was in the Bitola area (Chon. 133); in 1153, on 22 November, Manuel wrote to the bishop Wibaldus "a Castro Pelagoniae": cf. Ph. Jaffé, *Bibliotheca rerum germanicarum*, vol. I (Berlin 1864), 561. The year 1152 as the year of Manuel's campaign should be ruled out based on comparative analysis of Kinnamos' and Choniates' texts. Namely, writing about the events of 1152, Kinnamos says that the emperor *arrived* to the Danube and was about to engage the Hungarians in battle, but peace was concluded soon afterwards (Cinn. 119–120). Choniates is explicit that the emperor only went as far as Serdica and then turned the army against the Serbs without going to the Danube (Chon. 132). Choniates' account, therefore, does not tally with Kinnamos' account of the events of 1152, but it does tally with his account of the events of 1153. Namely, describing the year 1153 Kinnamos says that the emperor set out towards the Ister to engage the Hungarians, but does not say whether he reached the river or not (Cinn. 121).

As it appears from all this, Manuel's operation against the *župan* of Rascia mentioned in Choniates (Chon. 132) should be dated to 1153, as proposed early on by Vasil'evskii, "Soiuz

Uroš II does not figure in the sources after 1155. All trace of him ends there. In the 1160s there occur references to Primislav as the grand *župan* of Rascia. The only who knows of him is Kinnamos. In the Serbian annals and genealogies, which are of a much later date, the name Prvoslav occurs, but that was Nemanja's brother.⁴⁷

According to Kinnamos, Primislav ruled Serbia until 1162. Namely, that year Manuel set off for Serbia in order to "straighten out" the situation there, i.e. to install a loyal vassal in power.⁴⁸ "As I have already related," Kinnamos says, the

dvukh imperii", 66 (although later, on p. 78, he says it was 1152), and Chalandon, *Les Comnène* II, 408, with no explanation.

What has to be clarified at this point is whether Choniates' account of the events of 1153 can be taken as corresponding to Kinnamos' account of the strife in Rascia, the conflict between Desa and Uroš (Cinn. 113), as believed by Vasil'evskii, "Soiuz dvukh imperii", 66–67, and Kovačević, "Nekolika pitanja", 65–66. They based their view on the fact that after the Battle of the Tara until the end of the Hungarian-Byzantine war in 1155, Choniates mentions the Serbs only once, and in this particular section (Chon. 132). They were led to such a conclusion by the desire to find in Choniates the information that would match Kinnamos, to confirm it. In this particular case, such a desire faces great difficulties because the two texts considerably differ in content. Firstly, Kinnamos (Cinn. 113) says that the Serbs deposed Uroš and handed power to Desa. Fearful of the emperor's discontent, they appeared before him and Manuel adjudicated in Uroš's favour and restored him to power. Choniates (Chon. 132) claims that the emperor set out against the satrap of the Serbs (he speaks of only one satrap, not two, or of any dispute between *župans*), made him revoke his alliance with the Hungarians and recognise him as his sole overlord. Who was the "satrap" that Manuel set out against in 1153? If it was Uroš II, then there was no dispute with Desa. Moreover, it would mean that Uroš II was in alliance with the Hungarians at the time, whereas the oration of Michael of Thessalonike suggests that it was Uroš II who enjoyed Hungarian support in his dispute with Desa (Regel, *Fontes* I, 163–164). If, on the other hand, we assume that in 1153 Manuel set out against Desa, who had replaced Uroš, such an assumption cannot be made to agree with Choniates' claim that Manuel forced this one and only satrap to revoke his alliance with the Hungarians and recognise him (the emperor) as his sole overlord, which would mean that it was under those terms that he remained in power, which then again contradicts Kinnamos' claim that Manuel gave support and power to Uroš in the dispute between Uroš and Desa (Cinn. 113). Secondly, Kinnamos claims that the ruler of Rascia was overthrown without the emperor's assent and πολλοῖς ὕστερον the Battle of the Tara in 1150 (Cinn. 113), which agrees much better with the year 1155 than 1153. It seems from all the above that Choniates' account of the events of 1153 and Manuel's intervention against the *župan* of Rascia (Chon. 132) should not be taken as corresponding to Kinnamos' account of the internal dissension in Rascia (Cinn. 113).

⁴⁷ Lj. Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi* (Belgrade 1927), 14–17, 181, 186, 191, 193, 197, 202, 279. It has been widely accepted that Primislav and Prvoslav are one and the same person. It should be borne in mind that Kinnamos (Cinn. 235) mentions yet another Primislav, but that one was a Russian prince.

⁴⁸ The chronology of Manuel's arrival in Philippopolis follows from the course of Kinnamos' narrative. He first says (Cinn. 203) that after the death of the Hungarian king Géza II, his

then-incumbent ruler Primislav “rebelled and acted wilfully” even before.⁴⁹ On those earlier occasions, the emperor had not removed him from power, but now, in 1163, he did, and he replaced him with his brother Beluš. The latter ruled for a short time and then withdrew to Hungary, where he died quite a while afterwards.⁵⁰

It has long been observed that Kinnamos, speaking of Primislav, adds the phrase “as I have already related”. But nowhere before the section of the text

brother Ladislaus (II) had already seized power from Géza’s son Stephen (III), and we know that this took place in the summer of 1162: Homan, *Geschichte* I, 393–394; Šišić, *Poviest Hrvata*.

⁴⁹ The emperor set off for Philippopolis τὰ πρὸς τῇ Σερβικῇ καταστησόμενος πράγματα. Ὁ γὰρ τοι Πριμισθλαβος, ὃς τῆς χώρας τότε ἦρχε, καὶ ἄλλοτε μὴν ὥοπερ μοι δεδιήγηται πρότερον, ἀποστασίαν ὠδίνησε καὶ αὐτονόμω ἐχρήτη τῇ γνώμῃ (Cinn. 204.1–4). Many scholars believed that the name of this *župan* of Rascia was Prvoslav (Jireček, *Istorija* I, 144, n. 122; Ruvarac, “Prilošci”, 215; Ćorović, “Pitanje o hronologiji”, 47–48). It should be noted that in the earliest surviving copy of Kinnamos’ manuscript (Vat. gr. 163, fol. 254^r) clearly stands Πριμισθλαβος.

⁵⁰ Cinn. 204. The question to be posed here is whether this Beluš, Primislav’s brother, is the same person as the Hungarian *ban* Beloš who occurs in Hungarian and other sources in 1142–58 and 1163 (cf. n. 8–11 above). As we have already seen, the course of Kinnamos’ narrative allows the events in the section where Primislav and Beluš are mentioned to be dated to 1162. According to Kinnamos, it was in that year that Manuel removed Primislav from power and replaced him with Beluš (Cinn. 204). Therefore, *only in that year*, and not before, could Beluš be the grand *župan* of Rascia. The fact that the Hungarian sources make no mention of the *ban* Beloš, under the assumption that Beloš and Primislav are one and the same person, is irrelevant to the question as to who was in power in Rascia prior to 1162. The view should be discarded, then, that the *ban* Beloš withdrew to Serbia in 1158 or in any other year prior to 1162 and, if Kinnamos is to be believed, took power there. Yet another reason seems to go against identifying the *ban* Beloš as Beluš, the grand *župan* of Rascia. Considering that the alliance between Serbs and Hungarians was seen in Constantinople as dangerous and hostile, it is only natural to ask whether the emperor Manuel would have entrusted rule in Rascia to a man who had been his open enemy in Hungary in 1151 (Cinn. 117), who had many connections and substantial estates in Hungary. In connection with the emperor’s expedition against the Serbs, twelfth-century sources mention several times their ties with the Hungarians as something the emperor sought to put an end to. There is no doubt that further enquiries into the personage of the *ban* Beloš in Hungary are needed in order to unravel this question with more certainty. Yet, it seems little likely that Manuel would have entrusted rule over the Serbs to a man who embodied the Hungarian-Serbian ties even if he could have been in disgrace with the Hungarian court at the time. Such a conclusion would hardly be changed by the fact that the *ban* Beloš supported Géza II’s brothers at the expense of Géza’s son in the struggle for power which raged in Hungary and in which Manuel interfered by supporting the very same pretenders. Arguing against identifying the *ban* Beloš as Beluš, Primislav and Desá’s brother, were Vasil’evskii, “Soiuz dvukh imperii”, 94; Kovačević, “Nekolika pitanja”, 70; Dinić, “Srpske zemlje”, 250. The fact may not be irrelevant that Kinnamos refers to the *ban* Beloš as Βέλοσις (Cinn. 104, 117) and to Primislav’s brother as Βελούσης (Cinn. 204).

that describes the events of 1162 does Kinnamos speak of Primislav; he only speaks of Uroš (II) and Desa. Since it is known that Uroš made attempts to emancipate himself from imperial control, many historians were led to conclude that Primislav and Uroš II are one and the same person.⁵¹ There still are no new data that could help resolve this old problem. Kinnamos' text is enigmatic, vague. And yet, it seems that his passing reference to his own non-existent previous account does not allow a conclusion as bold as the one proposing that he used two different names to refer to one person. Even a critical edition of Kinnamos' work would hardly make it any more plausible.⁵²

Consequently, the question posed above – until when did Uroš II rule? – can presently be answered only incompletely. He was the grand *župan* of Rascia in 1155 and certainly for some time after that. It is not known when and under what circumstances he left the position of power. The change of ruler took place between 1155 and 1162. It is a fact that in 1160 the emperor Manuel expected the *župan* of Rascia to provide military assistance for his upcoming campaign in the east.⁵³ This fact implies that there was no conflict between the emperor and the grand *župan* at that moment. Whether this *župan* was Uroš II or a successor of his still remains a matter of conjecture.

The politics of Uroš II

We have before us some ten years of Uroš's reign (1146–1156). Apart from a short break when he was ousted by Desa, he managed to remain in power in the face of very turbulent times and the volatile situation in the country. It is a long enough period to permit some conclusions about his politics and, possibly, his goals.

⁵¹ Vasil'evskii, "Soiuz dvukh imperii", 94–95; Kovačević, "Nekolika pitanja", 69–70; Anastasi-jević, *Otac Nemanjin*, 11–12; V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena do svršetka XIX. stoljeća*, vol. I (Zagreb 1899), 161. Ćorović, "Pitanje o hronologiji", 47–48, aware of the impossibility of Kinnamos' claim (Cinn. 204.2–3), suggests that it does not refer to Primislav, whom he calls Prvoslav, but to the situation in Serbia that Kinnamos mentions in the previous sentence. Although quite interesting, his interpretation is grammatically untenable. Those are clearly two separate sentences. What remains a possibility, of course, is that Kinnamos' text should not be understood literally. In his analysis, C. Neumann, *Geschichtsquellen im zwölften Jahrhundert* (Leipzig 1880), 80, finds that there are many lacunae in Kinnamos' text, such as the one concerning Primislav, which he ascribes to the copyist who left out or shortened some passages.

⁵² Against identifying Prvoslav (Primislav) as Uroš II were also Ruvarac, "Prilošci", 215; Jireček, *Istorija I*, 144; Ćorović, "Nekolika pitanja", 48–49; Dinić, "Srpske zemlje", 250.

⁵³ Cinn. 199.

Uroš II fought for the independence of Rascia. In this policy, he, as well as Desa, was Nemanja's true predecessor.⁵⁴ In 1146 he already was a vassal to the emperor Manuel. Perhaps he had come to power with the emperor's support. This is suggested by the claim of Michael of Thessalonike that the emperor decided in 1155 to restore to the throne of Rascia the *župan* whom he had installed and the Serbs deposed.⁵⁵ Uroš fulfilled his vassal duties and supplied the emperor with auxiliary troops when required.⁵⁶

A few years later he joined an anti-Byzantine coalition, which, as far as is known, was his first attempt to achieve independence for Rascia. As long as the emperor was firmly in power, Choniates claims, the Serbs seemed to be well-intentioned and sweet-tongued, while harbouring quite the opposite feelings.⁵⁷ At the earliest opportunity, however, and it was the year 1149, when the Norman-Byzantine war was in full swing, they took to arms against Byzantium. The Serbs attacked "neighbouring lands" which were under Byzantine rule.⁵⁸ They fought fiercely but were defeated the same year, the heart of their land was ravaged and Ras itself destroyed. The emperor's triumph was not complete though. The conflict was resumed next year, and on an even larger scale. Uroš II secured Hungarian military assistance. It is obvious, even though it is not explicitly mentioned anywhere, that his strong family ties with the Hungarian ruling house and common interests were strongly conducive to their military cooperation.

In the dramatic confrontation of 1150, which ended in the barely accessible and by then already snow-covered areas around the river Tara, the Byzantine army confirmed its superiority.⁵⁹ The Serbs were overpowered again and Uroš II was forced to negotiate. His vassal duties were reconfirmed and enlarged. He had to agree to increase the number of soldiers (from 300 to 500) he would place at the emperor's disposal in case of a war in the east, while the figure for a war in the west remained unchanged (2,000). It appears that Uroš also gave hostages and "accepted twice as large a burden of submission as before", as Michael of Thessalonike recorded gloatingly.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ That Desa had been Nemanja's political forerunner was established by Jireček, *Istorija* I, 144.

⁵⁵ See n. 35 above.

⁵⁶ Cinn. 113.

⁵⁷ Chon. 119.11–14.

⁵⁸ Chon. 119. There Choniates (Chon. 119.23–24) says that the *župan* of Rascia, when he realised that he could not resist the Byzantine army, ἀφίσταται μὲν τῶν πεδινῶ.

⁵⁹ Cinn. 103–113; Chon. 121–123. Cf. the accurate description of the events in Jireček, *Istorija* I, 142–143.

⁶⁰ Cinn. 113; Regél, *Fontes* I, 143. The submission of the Serbs (Dalmatae) is also mentioned in the work of an anonymous twelfth-century poet preserved in a Venetian manuscript of the thirteenth century: S. Lampros, "Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς κῶδιξ 524", *Neos Hellenomnemon* 8 (1911), 148–150.

The *župan* of Rascia did not stay still for long. An opportunity to resume his rebellion arose in 1153. Namely, a new Hungarian-Byzantine conflict was on the horizon. In order to prevent the enemy's incursion from the north, Manuel took his army along the usual route towards the Danube, but Hungarian envoys met him halfway in Sofia, where peace was soon arranged. Manuel then redirected his army against the Serbian *župan*. The emperor was particularly displeased with his arrangements with the Hungarians. As it seems, however, the two sides did not engage in any battle. Faced with the immediate threat of military intervention, Uroš pledged submission to Manuel, recognised his overlordship and promised to "break the agreement" with the Huns (Hungarians).⁶¹ One more attempt to achieve Rascia's independence failed.

This was not the only trouble the emperor Manuel faced in the Balkans the same year, 1153. He had appointed his cousin Andronikos Komnenos as governor of an important province bordering Hungary. It encompassed present-day Braničevo, according to Kinnamos, Niš, and, according to Choniates, Belgrade as well.⁶² Those were three most important Byzantine fortresses that defended the Morava river valley, affording obstacles to the enemy's advance from the north. Andronikos seized the unexpected opportunity. He promptly entered into negotiations with the Hungarian king, seeking assistance against the emperor. He offered king Géza II the province he administered in the event of the favourable outcome of the planned action. He also despatched envoys to the German king, Frederick I Barbarossa. He pursued his design in secrecy. None of the sources says that Andronikos sought assistance from the Serbs or negotiated with them about anything. However, in view of Andronikos' activity in the neighbourhood of Rascia and the fact that he sought assistance from the Hungarian royal court which maintained close contacts with Uroš II (it was the time when the power of the *ban* Beloš in Hungary was at its peak), it is quite unlikely that his plans would have remained unknown to the *župan* of Rascia. And that is not all. By undermining the emperor Manuel's reputation, he no doubt facilitated the ambitions of other enemies of the empire. Even though there is no documentary evidence of any link between Andronikos' activity and Uroš's policy, it seems very likely that Uroš played it to his advantage.

Little is known about the situation in Rascia. Contemporary writers were not interested. Only Theodor Prodromos mentions feuding *župans* in Serbia who do not obey the grand *župan*.⁶³ There was feuding within the family of Uroš II himself. Details of his conflict with his brother Desa are not known; only its outcome was recorded: Uroš II was ousted by his brother Desa, i.e. by his

⁶¹ Chon. 132. The same in Th. Skutariotes, *Σύνοψις χρονική*, 242.

⁶² Cinn. 124; Chon. 133.

⁶³ Rácz, *Bizánci költemények* 32–33, verses 301–356.

brother's supporters, and apparently with Hungarian backing.⁶⁴ Since the rebels, according to Kinnamos, feared the emperor's anger, it is obvious that *at that time* Uroš II enjoyed Manuel's support.

Yet, despite the information that Desa's struggle for power was supported by Hungary, it would be erroneous to describe him as a Hungarian man and Uroš II as a Byzantine protégé. Both Uroš and Desa were both at one time or another in their lives. Manuel took Uroš to task over his allying with the Hungarians more than once (1150; 1153), but he accepted him as his vassal (1146; 1153; 1155). The next *župan* of Rascia, Desa, pursued the same policy in the 1160s: he was brought to power by Manuel but before long the emperor accused him of colluding with the Hungarians and had him imprisoned.⁶⁵

In brief, in their struggle for independence, the *župans* of Rascia (Uroš II, and then Desa) were well aware of the existing circumstances and based their decisions on them, acting against Byzantium whenever possible, because it was Byzantium, not yet Hungary, that stifled their autonomous rule. Stefan Nemanja pursued the same policy as they had, only that he managed to achieve its goal. However, the circumstances in which Uroš had rebelled against Byzantium were very different from those in Nemanja's time; they had been much less favourable. Byzantium under the Komnenoi, from the end of the eleventh century until 1180, was on the rise. It had full control over the situation in the Balkan Peninsula. In the reign of Manuel Komnenos it largely dictated Hungarian politics too. Under such circumstances, Rascia was unable to achieve independence. It was not until Byzantium's abrupt decline after 1180 that it became a viable prospect. Nemanja seized the opportunity. It is only that the road travelled to it can be seen more clearly now. On that road, Uroš II had made his full contribution.

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⁶⁴ Regel, *Fontes* I, 163–164; Cinn. 113.

⁶⁵ Cinn. 204; 212–214.

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