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И ПИЩАМИ. И СТРЕЧУ ИЩЕНИ  
ОБЛАГОУЩЕНАШЕ ПО ВѢГДОУ



## III



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## SAVA NEMANJIĆ AND NICAEA

**Abstract:** *In this article we focus on the travels that Sava Nemanjić made to the empire of Nicaea, in 1219 and 1229 respectively. His meetings with the emperors and the patriarchs are discussed, in an attempt to point out their important political, ecclesiastical, ideological and symbolical dimensions. The events of 1219, which emerge as crucial in the relevant issues, are put in their political and ecclesiastical background, while their consequences are also examined. The relations constructed between Sava and the holders of power in Nicaea are seen as a part of the fragmented world after 1204.*

**Key words:** *Saint Sava, Nicaea, Serbian Church, Stefan the First Crowned, Ohrid.*

### Prelude: After 1204, Before 1219

The first steps of the establishment of the autocephalous archbishopric of Serbia are closely connected with the important figure of Sava Nemanjić (saint Sava), and the city of Nicaea. That city had become iconic from an ecclesiastical point of view since the first half of the fourth century, when (A.D. 325) the First Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church had been held there; in 787 the Seventh Ecumenical Council (the last one, according to the Orthodox Church) was also held there. As a result, Nicaea had for centuries been a prestigious ecclesiastical centre. At the second decade of the 13th century, when Sava visited the city, Nicaea was the capital of the so-called “empire of Nicaea”, a state which had been gradually established and consolidated in exile<sup>1</sup> after the collapse of 1204 and the chaos which prevailed in the former lands of the Byzantine Empire after the Latin conquest; it was also the temporary residence in exile of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>2</sup>

Which was the political and ecclesiastical background of the important events of 1219? What brought Sava at Nicaea, and which plans or aspirations led the emperor of Nicaea and the Patriarch of Constantinople who acted there to make such steps? Under which circumstances Sava returned to the empire of Nicaea ten years later? In the present study we will try to examine some important aspects of these matters, which could shed some light both to the interrelation between Church and Politics in the thirteenth century and to the relations between Serbia and Nicaea in the framework of a fragmented Byzantine World.

The political circumstances were highly convenient for Serbia at the second decade of the 13th century. Thanks to the effective policy of its ruler Stefan Nemanjić (1196-1228),

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1 On these procedures see Giarenis 2008a, *passim*. On the ideological pattern of exile appropriated see Angold 1989, *passim*.

2 On the events of 1203-1204 and the aftermath of the Latin conquest see Dujčev 1975; Queller – Madden 1997; Angold 2003; Phillips 2004; Laiou (ed.) 2005; Giarenis 2008b; Moschonas (ed.) 2008; Piatti (ed.) 2008; Van Tricht 2011; Radić 2016; Stavridou-Zafraha 2016b; Giarenis 2017.

Serbia had become a powerful, united and expanding state.<sup>3</sup> In 1217 Stefan became “the first-crowned” ruler of his state [*Prvovenčani*], as he was granted a highly important official recognition of his rulership by the Pope of Rome Honorius III (1216-1227). Stefan received a crown of the *kral* (corona regni) from the legate of the Pope; that diplomatic action further enhanced the status of Serbia in the political framework of the era.<sup>4</sup> Serbia was undoubtedly an enviable partner for both the West and the East.

In the ecclesiastical sphere, the parts which contested for assuring their influence into Serbia were mostly the Papacy, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the archbishopric of Ochrid.<sup>5</sup> As far as politics was concerned, the competing powers included western states, Bulgaria, as well as the “successor-states” of the Byzantine legacy, most importantly the empire of Nicaea and the state of Epiros. The latter newly-founded states with byzantine origins fiercely competed for the inheritance of the ecumenical Byzantine legacy.<sup>6</sup> The political and ecclesiastical controversy between Nicaea and Epiros gave Serbia an opportunity to take advantage of the unprecedented fragmentation of the Byzantine world and thus further enhance its position and status in both Church and Politics.

Let us now examine the political and ecclesiastical condition of the era more closely. 1216 saw the death of two important figures, who had been immediately connected with the Fourth Crusade, the Latin conquest, and its political and ecclesiastical aftermath: Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) and the ruler of the Latin Empire of Constantinople Henry of Flanders/Hainaut (1206-1216).<sup>7</sup> The Athonite monks felt at the following period free to show their respect towards the Orthodox rulers in Nicaea and Epiros, and mostly towards the reestablished –since 1208– Patriarchate of Constantinople (in the exile of Nicaea). Quite naturally, they also seemed to be eager to acknowledge their suzerainty to the emperor of Nicaea, who significantly operated as a protector of the Patriarchate and guardian of the Orthodoxy. That very choice made the new Patriarch Honorius III write, in 1223, full of rage that the monks on Holy Mountain were disobedient and rebellious towards the Papacy: “monachos Monti Sancti inobedientes Sedi Apostolicae ac rebelles”.<sup>8</sup> Those evolutions concerning Athonite Monasticism and its attitude towards the states of the era must have also played an important role in shaping Sava’s orientation towards Nicaea and his cautiousness towards the Papacy. That choice definitely contributed in the elaboration of the plan for the establishment and orientation of the Serbian Church, since Sava was a leading monastic figure who acted on Mount Athos and formulated important elements of his thought there.

Serbia at the time stood somehow ambiguously and undecidedly between eastern and western Christianity. As already mentioned, its ruler had received the *corona regni* from the Papacy. In order to understand the balance, it is also important to note that whereas its littoral areas fell under the Latin archbishopric of Antiochia, its mainland was subject to the archbishopric of Ochrid.<sup>9</sup> The latter was an important ecclesiastical see,<sup>10</sup> led at the time by the

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3 See Durham 1989, 7-12; Ćirković 1992, 53-63; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1992, 201-204; Papadrianos 1998, 104-108.

4 See Durham 1989, 12; Ćirković 1992, 56; Gonis 2001, 186; Shepard 2006, 16; Giarenis 2008a, 262; Kralić 2017, 7-18.

5 On the papal policy towards the East, see Claverie 2013, *passim*.

6 See Stavridou-Zafra 1990; Giarenis 2001; Giarenis 2008b; Stavridou-Zafra 2016a.

7 On Innocent III and his actions see Sayers 1994; Bolton 1995; Moore 2003; Hanne 2012. On Henry of Flanders see Van Tricht 2000; Giarenis 2008a, 90-109.

8 See Hofmann 1926, 8; Pertusi 1963, 230; Obolensky 1988, 134-135; Plested 2011, 106. On the background see also Claverie (2013), esp. 193-233.

9 See Kloszowski 1993, 658.

10 On the archbishopric of Ochrid see Delikari 2014, *passim*.

important figure of Demetrios Chomatenos (1216-1236) and highly connected at the time with the state of Epiros, which had been founded some years ago by Michael Angelos Komnenos. Theodoros Angelos Doukas Komnenos, Michael's successor, competed Theodoros I Laskaris's power and found in Demetrios Chomatenos one of the most important and influential churchmen of his state and supporters of his power and rulership against the emperor of Nicaea and his aspirations.<sup>11</sup> The ecclesiastical competition between Nicaea and Epiros took the shape of an open and rigorous controversy between the patriarchate of Constantinople and the archbishopric of Ochrid. Such a situation also operated as a background both for Sava's request and for the response he received from the emperor and the patriarch at Nicaea; the Empire of Nicaea and the Patriarchate of Constantinople could not ignore neither Serbia's increasing political power nor an appeal for the creation of an ecclesiastical seat which was to decrease the range and influence of the archbishopric of Ochrid.

St. Sava was the person who undertook the ambitious but realistic project of the ecclesiastical emancipation of the Serbs. Sava (Rastko Nemanjić) combined important capacities and qualities for such a purpose. He was a leading and influential monastic personality, and held high reputation on Mount Athos and beyond.<sup>12</sup> He was also the brother of the Serbian ruler Stefan, whose power and legitimacy had been recently increased. Sava's visits to the empire of Nicaea certainly need to be seen in that wide context, in order to be sufficiently interpreted.<sup>13</sup>

Naturally that travel of 1219 was not the product of a sudden impulse; Sava must have carefully prepared his visit. We know that during his stay on Mount Athos he had kept in contact with his brother Stefan on various matters.<sup>14</sup> Stefan was naturally eager to see that the Serbian monastic and ecclesiastical legacy which his father and brother established in Serbia and on Mount Athos was officially recognized and institutionalized. Sava's visit at Nicaea, the actual shelter in exile of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, should be seen within its ecclesiastical and diplomatic framework. As is well known, those domains were not separated in the medieval world; under the Nemanjids that general remark seems to be even more valid. Stefan and Sava did not necessarily possess an identical view of the exact relation of Serbia to the East and the West, and the Orthodoxy and Papacy; but they seem to have shared a plan of balance of Serbian presence between the two ecclesiastical spheres and the political entities of the era. They most certainly coordinated on the matter and must have reached an agreement; as a result, Sava's initiative had certainly obtained Stefan's approval and support. This certainly does not reduce Sava's personal role in the events, which was of crucial importance.

Was there any kinship between the ruler of Serbia and the emperor at Nicaea, which could facilitate things? Stefan had ca. 1190, when still a prince, married Eudokia Angelina, daughter of Alexios III Angelos.<sup>15</sup> Through that marriage the ruling families in Byzantium and Serbia had certainly become related. But had Theodoros Komnenos Laskaris, who was to be

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11 On Chomatenos's personality, works, and influence see especially Prinzing (ed.) 2002. See also Katerelos 1992; Demou 1995; Prinzing 2004; Delikari 2014, 179-210; Prinzing 2016. On his involvement in the ecclesiastical controversy between Epiros and Nicaea, see Karpozelos 1973, esp. 40-45, 61-79; Katerelos 1995, *passim*; Giarenis 2001, 110-121; Stanković 2012.

12 On his monastic steps on Mount Athos, initially at Karyai (ca. 1995) and then at Chilandar Monastery (ca. 1198), see Obolensky 1988, 124-134; Beck – Patlagean 1993, 338-339; Gonis 2001, 183-186; Tarnanides 2004, 80, 396; Loes 2017, 363-365; Curta 2017, *passim*.

13 Kadlec 1933, 101-104; Kloczowski 1993, 658-659.

14 Ćirković 1992, 58; Gonis 2001, 186.

15 On Eudokia see especially Laskaris 1926, 7-37. On that diplomatic marriage between Byzantium and Serbia see also Panagopoulou 2006, 390-392 [num. 44]; Radić 2016, 33; Loes 2017, 364.

the emperor of Nicaea when Sava visited the city in 1219, in that way become a relative-in-law with Stefan and Sava? The answer is an affirmative one, but that kinship was not to last for long. Theodoros married Anna Angelina, Eudokia's daughter, most probably in February 1199,<sup>16</sup> and he thus became a brother-in-law of the Serbian ruler (and consequently also related to his brother Sava). But Eudokia was roughly banished by Stefan shortly afterwards, in 1200 or 1201.<sup>17</sup> Since the story of Eudokia's Serbian marriage had that sad outcome, the kinship between the two leaders, Stefan and Theodoros (and between Sava and Theodoros) was not valid anymore at the period of the events of 1219. As a result, that kinship from the past could not have played any role in the choices under examination. Quite interestingly, though, an allusion to that kinship seems to have been ideologically useful; as a result, it was emphatically pointed out in the narratives regarding St. Sava's visit at Nicaea.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Teodosije makes a confusion between Theodoros Laskaris and Theodoros Angelos, and he further "enhances" the alleged kinship, when he erroneously reports that "the daughter of Theodoros Laskaris was married to Radoslav, the son of Stefan, who was St. Sava's nephew".<sup>19</sup>

What about the date of that visit? Older research had opted for 1220;<sup>20</sup> but a revision of the date to August or early autumn of 1219 has been widely accepted.<sup>21</sup> A recent suggestion for a revised date in 1218 seems quite appealing,<sup>22</sup> but its documentation does not really suffice.

### Nicaea, 1219

The most important evidence on the visit which led to the election of Sava as archbishop of Serbia comes from the two *Lives* of the saint, which were composed by Domentijan and Theodosije respectively.<sup>23</sup> The first *Life* was written in the middle of the 13th century (ca. 1240), i.e. only some years after the saint's death, whereas the second one was penned during the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. The evidence provided by those ideologically determined writings regarding the critical travel and stay of the described saint is quite interesting; the image is not uniform, but many confluences occur. The *Lives* of Saint Sava constitute valuable sources on the event and more widely on Church and Politics in the thirteenth century.

In both *Lives*, Sava's visit to the city where the election of Sava took place finds its justification as a means for the settlement of a matter concerning the Chilandar Monastery. Sava was accompanied by other monks from that athonite monastery, which was closely connected with him and the Serbian ruling family. That monastery actually constituted a fundamental stone of all the steps towards the independent status of the Serbian Church, and its

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16 On that marriage, see Giarenis 2008a, esp. 49-52.

17 Van Dieten (ed.) 1975, 531-532. See also Brand 1968, 120; Gonis 2001, 186; Stephenson 2002, 308-309; Panagopoulou 2006, 392; Shepard 2006, 16.

18 That "Byzantine connection" which had made Stefan Nemanja a 'svat' of the Byzantine Emperor was also pointed out by Sava as an author in his hagiobiography of Stefan Nemanja, and its ideological meaning was steadily propagated, in both literary and artistic ways. See Obolensky 1988, 139; Maksimović 1988, 44-46; Ferjančić – Maksimović 2014, 48-49; Maksimović 2017, 127.

19 Daničić (ed.) 1860, 126. See also Tarnanides 2007, 39; Maksimović 2017, 126.

20 See e.g. Dölger 1932, 7; Laurent 1971, 31-32; Beck 1980, 187.

21 See e.g. Dölger – Wirth 1977, 13 [num. 1703a]; Tarnanides 1991, 239; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1992, 202-203; Podskalsky 2000, 87; Gonis 2001, 186; Giarenis 2008a, 264-265.

22 Ćirković 2008, *passim*.

23 On the authors and the texts see Tarnanides 1991, 235-236; Bojović 1995, 164-180, 417-459; Tarnanides 2006, 103-104. See also Podskalsky 2000, 365-386.

bestowal to the Serbs in 1198 had been a clear manifestation of good relations between the Byzantine emperor Alexios III Angelos and the Serbian ruler.<sup>24</sup>

It is really interesting that none of the *Lives* of the saint actually mentions Nicaea as the place of Sava's travel and stay. Domentijan interestingly provides the evidence that Sava travelled "to the East, to his friend the emperor of Constantinople[Carigrad] kyr Theodoros called Laskaris".<sup>25</sup> On that issue, Teodosije notes that Sava travelled to "the imperial city of Constantine, in which emperor Theodoros Laskaris ruled at the time".<sup>26</sup> The question is: how could Constantinople have been confused with Nicaea? Could it have been just a matter of poor information, or ideological purposes need to be traced in that "inaccuracy"?

When Domentijan composed the first *Vita*, Nicaea still stood as the capital of the Byzantine Empire in exile (which continued until the Byzantine reconquest of Constantinople, in 1261). Interestingly, during Theodoros Laskaris's reign we possess some interesting references to his empire and his imperial power as that "of the East".<sup>27</sup> Domentijan's reference is accompanied by an important explanation, which fully complies with the ideological purposes of the text: Sava travels to the East, where he is to meet the "emperor of the Reigning City". The Life's author here seems to repeat a fundamental line of the Nicaean ideology of the time. And he does so, because that very conceptual line serves his purpose of propagating the highest ideological value of Sava's election process. According to that line, the Byzantine emperor (*car*, *basileus*) had temporarily moved to Nicaea, which had now become a capital (*Carigrad*, *Basileuoussa*) in exile. Domentijan seems to hide a certain aspect of the peculiar circumstances of the era, which were a product of the catastrophe of 1204. Thus, he notes that Sava travelled to the east, to visit the "emperor of Constantinople" (i.e. the Byzantine emperor), no matter where he temporarily resided. His evidence is rhetorically and ideologically determined.

Teodosije's reference to the place of the events names "Carigrad" as the place of Sava's visit. The reference was made after 1261, at a time when Constantinople had been reestablished as the natural and undisputed centre of the Byzantine State and of the Orthodox Church. This is perhaps why the hagiographer "erases" any reference to the "East" and focuses on "Carigrad" as the natural and steady source of lay and church power. That choice seemed to further enhance the legitimization of the important events of 1219.

Another issue is who was Sava's main host during that visit. In other words: who was the leading figure that determined the choices regarding Sava and Serbia in 1219? Domentijan notes that Sava's travel was "to his friend [...] kyr Theodoros called Laskaris". Personal acquaintance, a friendly relation, as well as the alleged kinship, to which we have already referred, between Sava and Theodoros I are clearly alluded here. Such a relation between the two persons could imply a preparation of the visit, a ground for coordination, and a shared plan about the Serbian Church between Sava, Stefan, and Theodoros.

According to Domentijan's *Vita*, Sava had during his visit at Nicaea been well received by the patriarch Germanus II (1223-1240).<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, we do know that Sava's first visit was during the patriarchate of Manuel I Sarantenos-Charitopoulos (1217-1222);

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24 See the edition of the chrysobull issued by Alexios III Angelos in 1198: Živojinović et al. (ed.) 1998, [num. 4] 104-107 (text: 107-110). On its background and results see Beck 1959, 130; Obolensky 1988, 129-130; See also Nichorites 2004, 29; Stanković 2013, 89.

25 Daničić (ed.) 1865, 217. See also Spinka 1968, 85; Stanković 2016, 94; Maksimović 2017, 125.

26 Daničić (ed.) 1860, 126. See also Maksimović 2017, 126.

27 See e.g. Kolovou (ed.) 2001, [num. 179] 284.1 ("Τῷ βασιλεῖ τῷ Λάσκαρι τῆς Ἀνατολῆς"). Ibid. [num. 94] 122, and [num. 136] 222. See also Marković 2009, 79, and n. 365.

28 Daničić (ed.) 1865, 217. See also Spinka 1968, 85; Giarenis 2008a, 266. On that patriarch see Lagopatis 1913, *passim*.



Manuel should thus be considered as the patriarch who actually received Sava.<sup>29</sup> The inaccuracy which occurs here could be seen in the framework of the political and ideological prospects of the Serbian State and Church and their attempts to keep some balance between the Patriarchate of Constantinople (at Nicaea) and the archbishopric of Ochrid, but also between the respective states of Nicaea and Epiros<sup>30</sup>, but it could also be seen as an author's confusion, who noted down the name of the Patriarch of Nicaea at the time of the composition of the *Vita* as the name of the Patriarch who acted in 1219.

According to allusions made in the accounts of the saint's biographers, Sava at Nicaea had meetings and talks, initially on matters regarding Chilandar Monastery, and afterwards on the necessity of a Serbian archbishopric. The inclusion of matters regarding Chilandar during those meetings confirmed the importance of the monastery and the previous coordination between Byzantium and Serbia on the matter, and acted as an appropriate prelude to the main agenda of the visit. According to the *Lives* of the saint, the emperor Theodoros I clearly indicated his positive attitude towards Sava; he reportedly expressed his full consent to Sava's request for the establishment of an archbishopric, and he subsequently asked the patriarch [Manuel Sarantenos] to fulfill it. That leading role of the emperor indicated in those accounts<sup>31</sup> could be seen as a fitting consequence of their generic character; the saint's virtue is praised by the Byzantine emperor, whereas all the other persons' involvement in the event is highly decreased. However, the endangered situation of the Patriarchate of the time and its close connection to the imperial power and will can also give an important supplementary explanation.

From the Nicaean part, the choices which were made at the time regarding the Serbian Church seem to have been mostly the product of imperial decisions. The Byzantine emperor appears in the *Lives* as the person who first received Sava's request, without any precedented diplomatic communication. Nevertheless, their close relation stated in the accounts could certainly have allowed a kind of communication and preparation on the important issues which were to be discussed in Nicaea. According to the version of the story depicted in Domentijan's *Vita*, the saint during his stay at Nicaea suddenly realised that a solution on the status and the future of the Serbian Church had to be found. Therefore, he expressed his concern and interest to the emperor of Nicaea so that the Serbs were given the right to have their own Church, and consequently their own archbishop, who would be able to teach the Christian Word and ordain in his diocese. Sava also made the request to the emperor so that he mediated to the Patriarch for the ordination of the first archbishop of the Serbian Church. Sava's suggestion was that it could be one of the Chilandarite monks of his entourage.<sup>32</sup>

The emperor looked at those monks one by one, and subsequently expressed his decision; according to that, the only person deserving that high ecclesiastical office was Sava himself. The text of the *Vita* mentions that Theodoros turned to Sava and told him: "Do not deny the apostolical choice, because we do have information in us about you from the Holy Spirit".<sup>33</sup> That latter wordage could be seen as an expression of the important capacity of the

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29 On the person and his policy see Karpozelos 1973, 52-54, 68-71; Giarenis 2008a, 260-261. On his literary activity see Wirth 1968, 248-250; Criscuolo 1975/76, 213-221.

30 On that issue see especially Ćirković 2008, *passim*. See also Miljković 2008, 141-143; Maksimović 2017, 125.

31 See Gonis 2001, 187; Giarenis 2008a, 266.

32 See Tarnanides 1991, 239; Gonis 2001, 188-189; Tarnanides 2007, 32-34.

33 See the reference in Daničić (ed.) 1860, 124. See also Gonis 2001, 187; Giarenis 2008a, 266-267; Loes 2017, 367.

Byzantine emperor as *epistemonarches*,<sup>34</sup> but it could also be seen as a blurred allusion to a coordination between Stefan Nemanjić and Theodoros I Laskaris on the issue.

Following a hagiographical *locus communis* which had flourished since Late Antiquity<sup>35</sup>, Sava is presented to initially reject the imperial request and pressure to receive the high office; nevertheless, he finally had to give in, and reluctantly accept.<sup>36</sup> Sava was ordained in Nicaea by the patriarch Manuel I Sarantenos as archbishop of Serbia. Unfortunately we do not possess any information of the very place of the ceremony. The first choice would most probably be the prestigious church of Hagia Sophia.<sup>37</sup> But if the ceremony was chosen to coincide with the glorious feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God (15th of August), as has been suggested,<sup>38</sup> it must have been held in the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God (Hyakinthos Monastery),<sup>39</sup> where the patriarchal synods were also usually convened.

The ceremony which was held in the capital of the empire of Nicaea was majestic and imposing. The emperor, imperial dignitaries and officers, bishops, members of the patriarchal clergy, monks and priests were all present.<sup>40</sup> As Domentijan informs us, the patriarch accepted the imperial advice, and on the fixed day, “he put on the costume of the Great Ecumenical Church, and in the presence of many bishops, priests and deacons, the blessed Sava was guided there for the ordainment; he was ordained archbishop by the hand of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch and by the command of the emperor of Constantinople kyr Theodoros Laskaris”.<sup>41</sup> Domentijan reports that the patriarch, whom he erroneously names as Germanus, also issued an official document, which he gave to Sava. The biographer inserted the text of the document –or, to put it more accurately, his version on it– to the respective narrative.<sup>42</sup>

After the ordination, Sava also asked for the concession of an autocephalous status to the Serbian archbishopric. His arguments included concerns on the serious dangers which the representatives of the Serbian archbishopric would in the future have to face in order to reach the seat of the Patriarchate, when there would be a need for the election of a new archbishop; most importantly, there could also be dangers for the archbishopric itself, that would have to stay headless for a considerable time.<sup>43</sup> As Teodosije reports, Sava shared those thoughts with emperor Theodoros. The latter is presented to have initially been hesitant on that matter; but he finally conceded to Sava’s request, and made a suggestion to the Patriarch to give his blessing, so that “the future archbishop will not have to come from the Serbian lands to Constantinople, but a local synod will elect and ordain him instead”.<sup>44</sup>

At the formation and expression of that request, Sava must have taken into account the peculiar political and ecclesiastical situation of a fragmented world in the aftermath of 1204. The political controversy between Nicaea and Epiros had already produced an important

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34 On that capacity and its political and ecclesiastical consequences see Dagron 1991; Dagron 1996, 257-263.

35 On that common place in Late Antiquity and beyond see Sterk 2004, *passim*; see also Pratsch 2005, 117-134.

36 Giarenis 2008a, 267; Loes 2017, 367.

37 On the church see Möllers 1994; Foss 1996, 101-104; Altripp 1999. On the Byzantine churches at Nicaea see Preschlow 2017, esp. 209-215.

38 Živojinović 1980, 450-451.

39 On the church see Schmit 1927; Preschlow 1972; Foss 1996, 97-101.

40 See Pospischil 1966, 23-25; Kidd 1973, 336; Giarenis 2008a, 267.

41 Daničić (ed.) 1865, 114-115. See also Ferjančić – Maksimović 2014, 42.

42 See Daničić (ed.) 1865, 217-218. For a modern Greek translation of the excerpt see Gonis 2001, 188. See also Ćirković 1992, 59; Spinka 1968, 86; Giarenis 2008a, 267-268.

43 See Tarnanides 2007, 32.

44 Daničić (ed.) 1860, 131. See also Tarnanides 2007, 32.

ecclesiastical aspect, which gave Serbia an opportunity to claim and obtain an independent Church. Until 1219, the Serbian bishopric has been a suffragan of the archbishopric of Ohrid; the latter's head, Demetrios Chomatenos, acted as a leading ecclesiastical figure in the state of Epiros and expressed the main arguments of its clergy, challenging the ecumenical character and the status of the patriarchate of Constantinople, that had to reside in Nicaea.<sup>45</sup>

By his request Sava fully recognized the patriarch in Nicaea as the ecumenical patriarch; he thus walked on the main ideological line of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the exile of Nicaea, which constituted a valuable ideological weapon of the empire of Nicaea in its multifaceted controversy against Epirus. In exchange, the Patriarchate had to grant an autocephalous status to the Serbian archbishopric. The Patriarch at Nicaea could not hesitate to do so; such a process resulted in the reduction of the size of the Chomatenos's territory by almost half;<sup>46</sup> the Patriarchate's opponent was expected to lose much of his power and prestige. It was also an opportunity for the holders of power in Nicaea to expand their influence in the Balkans at a critical period, that they could not miss. Following the imperial will, the Patriarch convened a Synod at Nicaea, which granted the autocephalous status to the new archbishopric.<sup>47</sup>

That step practically meant an independent status of the Serbian Church henceforth.<sup>48</sup> Apart from the political and ecclesiastical preconditions mentioned before, the pious and venerable spiritual personality of Sava undoubtedly played an important role in the respective choices, decisions and actions of the emperor and the patriarch at Nicaea. The importance of the events of 1219 is self-evident, but can also be confirmed by its aftermath.

### After 1219

Only some months after the events of 1219 at Nicaea, the Serbian ruler seems to have looked for a political counterbalance towards Epiros. As the conclusion of a diplomatic approach between the two parts, at the end of 1219 or at the beginning of 1220 Stefan's son Stefan Radoslav was married to Anna Komnene Doukaina, daughter of the ruler of Epiros Theodoros Komnenos Angelos Doukas.<sup>49</sup>

A reaction from Chomatenos to the events which had taken place in Nicaea was to come soon afterwards. In May 1220 he sent an extensive letter to Sava<sup>50</sup>, delivered by Ioannes, bishop of Skopje. In his letter Chomatenos expressed his deep discontent for the establishment of the Serbian Church and for the excessive losses it meant to his archbishopric's territory. He insisted on attributing to Sava only the identities of a monk and of a member of the imperial

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45 See above, and note 11.

46 See Fine 1994, 116; Stavridou-Zafraka 2016a, 256.

47 See Prinzing 1972, 169-171; Karpozelos 1973, 67; Obolensky 1988, 149-152; Ferjančić 1989, 146-147; Van Tricht 2011, 404-405.

48 Tarnanides 2007, 32.

49 On the marriage see Kisas 1978; Stavridou-Zafraka 1990, 65; Bredenkamp 1996, 81; Tarnanides 2007, 39; Lappas 2007, 110-111; Osswald 2011, 58; Loes 2017, 78. On the role that probably Sava himself played see Ferjančić – Maksimović 2014, 41-42. On Anna see Laskaris 1926, 38-52. On the engagement, the ring and its inscription see Krumbacher 1906; see also Paul 2007, 255.

50 See the text of the letter, Prinzing (ed.) 2002, [num. 86] 296-302. See also Tachiaos 1997, 75-80. On the letter and its importance see Ostrogorsky 1938; Prinzing (ed.) 2002, 179\*-182\*. On some of its aspects see also Zafraka 1990, 203-204; Tarnanides 1991; Prinzing 2004, 173-174; Tarnanides 2006, 104, 199-207; Tarnanides 2007, 42-44; Giarenis 2008a, 270-272; Loes 2017, 369-371.

family of Serbia.<sup>51</sup> Chomatenos denied to recognize Sava's election and ordainment, which he portrayed as against the canon law.

As a documentation for his arguments, Chomatenos cited canons from local and ecumenical ecclesiastical councils,<sup>52</sup> to argue that no bishop apart from the archbishop of Ochrid, the Patriarch of Constantinople included, had the right to ordain regarding the territory of the autocephalous archbishopric of Ochrid.<sup>53</sup> He also asserted that canons 12 and 17 from the Fourth Ecumenical Synod and canon 38 from the Quinisext, which gave the right to the Byzantine emperor to promote a bishopric to metropolitan church or archbishopric did not provide any validation in that very case, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, because Sava was not a bishop before his ordainment in Nicaea<sup>54</sup>, and secondly, because at that politically fragmented condition of the Byzantine World, there was not a political leader who could be seen as the indisputable heir of the traditional Byzantine emperor, as far as the range and significance of his authority and prestige were concerned.

Through those arguments the archbishop of Ochrid, who claimed at the time in many ways his right to operate as "quasi-patriarch", unfolded a political theory, according to which the emperor at Nicaea could not be seen as the sole legitimate emperor of the Byzantine world.<sup>55</sup> In his own words: Ποῦ δὲ καὶ βασιλεία νῦν, ἧς τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον προνοούμενον σέμνωμα, πολλῶν ἄρτι κατὰ τόπους ἐξουσιαζόντων καὶ μηδενὸς ἀποσώζοντος ἀκέραιον τὸ τῆς βασιλείας ἀξίωμα; Καὶ εἰ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθινὴ βασιλεία, οἴχεται σοι πάντα καὶ πάντως τὸ εὐλογον.<sup>56</sup>

Chomatenos thus makes an argumentation through a quite idiosyncratic elaboration of canon law to indicate that he would have been the only clergyman that could have made such an ordainment, if he had received such a request and had found that appropriate. He argued that such an action by the Patriarch of Constantinople clearly contradicted the canon law.<sup>57</sup> But in fact he also openly challenged the traditional right of the ecumenical Patriarch to concede the status of autocephality. He used some of the main elements of his political theory, which not surprisingly coincided with the Epirot leader's arguments and aspirations to relativise the importance and range of the empire of Nicaea, and its invaluable pillar, i.e. the Patriarchate of Constantinople. That argumentation appeared as an integral part of the controversy between Nicaea and Epirus, at a time when Epirus was in a process of expansion and won important victories.

What Chomatenos had chosen not to mention is that as far as foundations and ideology were concerned, the Empire of Nicaea possessed a legitimate emperor, who had been officially crowned and unctioned by the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Patriarchate of Constantinople constituted an invaluable asset for the Empire of Nicaea, and it immensely helped the state in its recognition and esteem among the Orthodox Christians. As a result,

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51 «τῷ τιμωτάτῳ ἐν μοναχοῖς καὶ νιῷ τοῦ μεγάλου ζουπάνου Σερβίας κυρῷ Σάββα»: Prinzing (ed.) 2002, 296, vv. 3-4. See also Stanković 2012.

52 Prinzing (ed.) 2002, 299-301, vv. 108-185.

53 Prinzing (ed.) 2002, 299, vv. 101-107.

54 Prinzing (ed.) 2002, 298, vv. 60-63: ἀλλ' ἐχρῆν ἐπίσκοπον τυγχάνειν σεπρότερον, εἴτα ἐκτοῦ ὑπὸ δέους προελθεῖν εἰς τὸ τιμώτερόν τε καὶ ὑψηλότερον. Σὺ δὲ οὔτε ἐπίσκοπος ὑπῆρξας καὶ τὴν βασιλικὴν δικαιοδοσίαν οὐδ' ὅλως ἔχεις, τὴν σὴν συγκροτοῦσαν προχειρίσιν.

55 See Demou 1995, 81-84; Loes 2017, 370-371.

56 Prinzing (ed.) 2002, 298, vv. 63-67. A small correction of mine appears here in comparison to the edited text of v. 64. On Chomatenos' argument see Tarnanides 1991, 242-243; Katerelos 1995, 264.

57 Prinzing (ed.) 2002, 299, vv. 105-107: τὸ δὲ λαβεῖν σε παρ' ἐτέρου χειροτονίαν εἰς τόπον αὐτοκεφάλου ἀρχιερέως, ὅσον τὸ ἅπονον, οἶδασιν οἱ τὰς τῶν νόμων καὶ κανόνων δέλτους ἀκριβοσάμενοι.

according to the imperial ideology elaborated at the court of Nicaea, the only legitimate *basileus Rhomaion* resided in Nicaea; the first emperor at the exile of Nicaea was crowned there by the recently elected Patriarch Michael IV Autoreianos at Easter 1208 was Theodoros I Komnenos Laskaris.<sup>58</sup> The Patriarch of Constantinople at Nicaea also saw that the Serbian Church obtained the status of an autocephalous archbishopric, led by Sava. Only in 1227 an Epirot leader, Theodoros I Komnenos Doukas (1215-1230), was crowned as *basileus Rhomaion*; the coronation and unction ceremony was held in Thessalonica by Demetrios Chomatenos.<sup>59</sup>

In the following year (1228), the new Serbian ruler Radoslav initiated a policy which mostly tended to the rapprochement with the expanding power of Epiros. As we have already seen, Radoslav had in 1219/20 been married to Anna Komnene Doukaina, daughter of the ruler of Epiros. The policy which the new Serbian ruler followed certainly took into account the expansion of the Epirot power and the establishment of the Empire of Thessaloniki.

We do not know whether Sava shared that orientation or not. But we do know that at the same year he departed for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, at the end of which he chose to visit the empire of Nicaea again. After that he stayed for some time on Mount Athos, and then returned to Serbia through Thessaloniki, where he met Theodoros Angelos Doukas Komnenos and tried to keep diplomatic balance.<sup>60</sup>

### **Ten years afterwards: Smyrna and Nymphaion, 1229**

Sava visited the territory of the empire of Nicaea again during the summer of 1229, at his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.<sup>61</sup> During his visit, which should most probably be dated in July or August<sup>62</sup>, he met the pious emperor Ioannes III Doukas Vatatzes (1222-1254)<sup>63</sup>, whom Domentijan calls “Kalojan”, his wife Eirene Doukaina Komnene<sup>64</sup>, and their son Theodoros [II Doukas Laskaris]. Sava had already been familiar with the empress Eirene, “the daughter of Theodoros Laskaris” as Domentijan calls her; he had already met her during his first visit in the empire and its capital, ten years earlier, when he had been ordained archbishop and had obtained the autocephalous status.

Where did the meeting between Vatatzes and Sava take place? It must have been near Smyrna, which constituted an important economic and military pillar of the empire, and the main port of the empire of Nicaea, which connected it with the Aegean sea islands and beyond.<sup>65</sup> Domentijan reports that the emperor received Sava “in a quiet place”<sup>66</sup>, which makes it probable that the meeting took place at the imperial palace which Ioannes had built at Nymphaeum, not far from Smyrna.<sup>67</sup> That palace constituted the main residence of the emperor

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58 See Giarenis 2008a, 296-330.

59 See Karpozelos 1973, 72-76; Katerelos 1995, 194-216; Giarenis 2001, 108-113; Stavridou-Zafraka 2014, 170-172.

60 On that visit see Simić 2016, 229-231, with further sources and bibliography.

61 On that second visit at the empire of Nicaea, see the accounts by Domentijan and Teodosie: Daničić (ed.) 1865, 276-277, and Daničić (ed.) 1860, 171. See especially Marković 2009, 78-84. See also Ferjancić 1989, 137-139; Tamanides 2007, 45; Ferjancić – Maksimović 2014, 50.

62 On the exact date see Marković 2009, 82, 91.

63 On his reign and policy see especially Langdon 1978; Langdon 1992; Mitsiou 2006. On his accession to the throne see Langdon 1993, and Giarenis 2003, esp. 222-224.

64 On the person and her activity see Mitsiou 2011.

65 On Smyrna's importance at that time see Ahrweiler (1965), *passim*.

66 See Daničić (ed.) 1865, 276-277. See also Marković 2009, 80.

67 On that palace see Buchwald 1979, 263-268; on the village see Kararas 1968.

during summer. It seems that Sava mainly intended to meet the emperor of Nicaea, and show his loyalty to his rulership as *basileia Rhomaion*.

His decision to visit the empire of Nicaea again certainly needs to be seen as a result of the political and ecclesiastical facts of the period. Theodoros Doukas Komnenos's imperial coronation in Thessalonica, which had taken place most probably in 1227 by Demetrios Chomatenos, was an important event which held major political, ecclesiastical and ideological value.<sup>68</sup> Through his visit Sava clearly reaffirmed his recognition to the emperor of Nicaea as *imperator Romanorum* and showed the compliance of the Serbian Church with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in opposition to the actions of Chomatenos.

When the visit had to end, Ioannes Vatatzes provided Sava with a ship to return to his land, and a sliver of the True Cross as a gift.<sup>69</sup> Vatatzes' generous gifts to the pious archbishop of Nicaea constitute a good example of the philanthropy that the emperor showed throughout his reign. But they also indicated the pleasure of the pious emperor to the pious clergyman, and the imperial will to put Sava's further travel afloat under imperial auspices. The choice for the donation of a ship naturally responded to practical needs of the travel that Sava was to make; but perhaps it was also meant to indicate a recent achievement of that emperor. Interestingly, Ioannes Vatatzes had made systematic and strenuous efforts to create a navy in his empire; it was not an easy task, but it brought considerable result and it contributed to the expansion of the empire's territory, control and influence.<sup>70</sup> Vatatzes' donation of a ship to Sava was a clear indication of his accomplishment, which had started bringing fruits after 1224 in the Aegean Sea.<sup>71</sup> Apart from its practical value and use, the gift also carried an important symbolical and ideological capital, which was to be transported to Athos by the pious archbishop, while it was simultaneously the means for his transport.

Vatatzes' decision for his second gift to Sava reflects the enhanced importance of the True Cross in the period after 1204 and constitutes a part of a much wider practice, which had interesting ideological purposes and connotations. It naturally seemed a quite appropriate gift to the clergyman's piety and to his widely known eagerness to make a collection of holy objects and relics; but it was also used to underline the legitimacy of the emperor of Nicaea and his capacity as the heir of a pious *basileia*. Vatatzes seems to have used his holdings of fragments of the True Cross to portray himself as the natural successor of the emperors of Constantinople before 1204.<sup>72</sup>

As a *New Constantine* he chose to be ideologically connected to the Cross; when he hosted Sava at his return from the Holy Land, he chose to donate him a valuable object which portrayed his capital city as a *New Jerusalem*, and his territory as a Holy Land par excellence, where the *New Israel* lived. It is also important to note that the emperor who offered that highly valuable gift to saint Sava, was soon also to be canonized as "saint Ioannes emperor the Merciful (ὁ Ἐλεήμων)".<sup>73</sup>

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68 On aspects of the controversy between Nicaea and Epirus regarding that issue see Giarenis 2001, esp. 108-120, with references to relevant sources and studies.

69 On that gift from the emperor to the saint, see especially Miljković 1999-2000, *passim*. See also Popović 2014, 59; Fundić – Kappas 2013, 144-145.

70 See Ahrweiler (1966), 313-323.

71 See Schopen (ed.) 1829, 28.20-29.5. See also Ahrweiler (1966), 316-321.

72 On the enhanced importance of the True Cross after 1204 see especially Eastmond 2003. See also Erdeljan 2017, 118-132.

73 On Ioannes as a saint, see the edition of his *Vita*: Heisenberg (ed.) 1905; on the identification of its author as Georgios of Pelagonia, see Moravčik 1927. See also Constantelos 1972; Macrides 2001, 69-71; Papayianni 2004-2005; Spanos – Zarras 2010, 73-74; Demetrakopoulos 2016, *passim*.

## Conclusion

Sava Nemanjić's visits at the empire of Nicaea were an integral part of Serbian pragmatic diplomacy of the era. His actions were carefully prepared, and his requests were appropriately addressed to the holders of power in Nicaea, who took the opportunity to expand their influence in the fragmented world after 1204, and to indicate their leading role *urbi et orbi*. It was mostly a decision with political preconditions and criteria, to which the Patriarchate of Constantinople in exile abided by the reason of the state. The latter was clearly expressed by the founder of the empire of Nicaea Theodoros I Laskaris, who had cared for the survival of the Orthodox Patriarchate after the cataclysm of 1204.

The events of 1219 in Nicaea were of historical importance for Serbia –the Serbian Church was granted the status of autocephalous archbishopric, and Sava was ordained as its first archbishop. The enhanced status and power of Serbia allowed its leaders pursue pragmatic relations towards Nicaea and Epiros, trying to promote its interests. Sava can certainly be seen as a leading figure in that process; he wisely used the rivalry between Nicaea and Epiros, in the benefit of Serbian Church and State. He seems to have had quite harmonious relationship with his relatives who occupied the Serbian throne –his brother Stefan Nemanjić and his nephew Stefan Radoslav. He acted as an influential adviser and as an instrumental partner in the construction of a realistic strategy towards Nicaea. Interestingly, both his visits at the empire of Nicaea (1219 and 1229) were succeeded by a visit at Thessaloniki, as a counterbalance. Theodoros I Laskaris (through the Patriarch Manuel Sarantenos) granted Sava Nemanjić the status of autocephalous archbishop, while Ioannes III Vatatzes provided him with important and iconic gifts.

Sava must have been content to the hospitality of the Nicaean emperors, the honour and the status he received, and the gifts of ecclesiastical, political and ideological value he brought back to Athos and Serbia. On the other hand, Nicaea was also happy to be recognized as the continuation of the Byzantine imperial power of Constantinople, and as a source of power and prestigious gifts throughout the Balkans after 1204.

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**САВА НЕМАЊИЋ И НИКЕЈА**

У овом чланку се бавимо путовањима Саве Немањића у Никејско Царство, 1219. и 1229. године. Обрађују се његови сусрети са царем и патријархом да би се нагласила њихова значајна политичка, црквена, идеолошка и симболичка димензија. Догађаји из 1219. године, кључни за нашу тему, се истражују у њиховом политичком и црквеном контексту, док се истовремено истражују и њихове последице. Сложени односи између светог Саве и властодржаца у Никеји се испитују у контексту света подељеног догађајима из 1204. године.