ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

Συγγραφή : *Κυρίτσης Δημήτρης*
Μετάφραση : *Λουμάκης Σπυρίδων*
Για παραπομπή : *Κυρίτσης Δημήτρης , "Recapture of Constantinople, 1261", Εγκυκλοπαίδεια Μείζονος Ελληνισμού, Κωνσταντινούπολη*
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Περίληψη :

On July 1261, general Alexios Strategopoulos, taking advantage of a favorable coincidence, recaptured Constantinople, occupied by the Latins since 1204, on behalf of Michael VIII Palaiologos, emperor of Nicaea. The recapture marked the beginning of a temporary revival for the city and allowed the consolidation of the Palaiologos dynasty in the power. In the middle run the recapture had negative consequences as well, especially the financial weakening of the Byzantine state, and the collapse of Asia Minor.

Χρονολόγηση

At the night of the 24th of July 1261, towards the dawn of the 25th of July 1261

Γεωγραφικός Εντοπισμός

Constantinople

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1. Introduction

The fall of Constantinople, occupied by the Latins (since 1204), to the army of the so-called "Empire of Nicaea" in 1261 is generally defined in the bibliography as a recapture. This term presupposes accepting that the state of Nicaea represents at a sufficient degree the political continuity, as far as power is concerned, of the before-1204 Byzantine Empire, in contrast to the Latin "Empire of Constantinople".[1]

The entry of the Byzantine army in Constantinople was possible through a certain point on the walls in the area of Pege gate at the night of the 24th of July 1261, towards the dawn of the 25th of July 1261 (Julian calendar).[2]

2. Historical framework

After its Fall in 1204 to the Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade, Constantinople passed into a state of joint-suzerainty of the Latin (French) emperor and the commune of Venice. In the regions that had not been occupied by the Latins, the members of the Byzantine aristocracy and the hierarchy of the Church gathered close together around two royal courts, that were claiming the role of the heir of the Empire: the one of the Doukai Komnenoi in western Greece, and the one of the Laskaridai in Asia Minor. The state of the second ones, also known as the Empire of Nicaea, managed within four decades to assert itself as the predominant power in the dominion of the former Byzantine Empire. Through constant campaigns between 1242 and 1260, the emperors John III Vatatzes (1221-1254), Theodore II Laskaris (1254-1258) and Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259-1282) occupied Macedonia and Thrace, putting aside their principal rival-claimers, namely the Doukai Komnenoi of Epirus and the sovereigns of Bulgaria. The Empire of Constantinople, in which from 1240 to 1261 Baldwin II reigned, remained isolated and without any lands. Due to the lack of any resources, financial and human, its defense was no more depended anywhere else than on the Venetian fleet, and on possible reinforcements from the catholic West. On the other side, the strong land walls and the superiority of the Venetians in the sea made any attempt against Constantinople extremely difficult, and explain the survival of the Latin dominion for such a long period of time.

3. First attempts against Constantinople

The first attempts against Constantinople were made by John III in cooperation with the Bulgarians in 1235 and 1236, but they failed.[3] Next emperor who thought as priority the attempt to recapture the city was Michael VIII Palaiologos. The victory over his allied rivals in Pelagonia in 1259 offered him this opportunity. An additional motivation for the emperor was possibly his will to consolidate his place on the throne, which during 1259 was still not secure, given the fact that typical was co-reigning with the legitimate emperor, the under-aged John IV.

In 1260 Michael attempted, without success, to capture Galata, the fortified quarter on the opposite shore of the golf of the Golden Horn. In addition, it is reported that he proceeded to negotiations with some Latin, a cousin of his according to Akropolites, who

lived in the city, with the purpose of secretly opening some gate, but neither this plan brought any results.[4]

Within the framework of the preparations for an attack at Constantinople is understood as well the treaty of Nympaion (March 1261) between Michael VIII and Genoa, the only power that could compete with the Venetian fleet.[5] At the end, the recapture of Constantinople happened unexpectedly, without demanding some organized campaign or siege.

4. The recapture

The summer of 1261, with the emperor's authorization, caesar Alexios Strategopoulos got ferried across from Asia Minor to Kallipolis in Thrace, in charge of an army unit of around 800 Roman and Cuman soldiers. Mission of this unit was to forestall a possible Bulgarian invasion in Thrace while the bulk of the Byzantine army was occupied with operations in Epirus. From Kallipolis Strategopoulos went to Selymbria, aiming to approach Constantinople and to spy out about the condition inside the city. His informers derived from a team of locals, the thelematarioi, who resided in the agricultural area on the outskirts of Constantinople.[6] They cultivated the land, but it seems that they offered as well their military services to the Latin emperor, since a part of them was organized to a military unit. The thelematarioi informed Strategopoulos that the Venetian fleet had departed in order to attack against Dafnousia, a small island of the Black Sea, and Constantinople was essentially unprotected. They offered to cooperate in order Strategopoulos' army to intrude into the city. The caesar encamped at a short distance from the walls, at the Pege monastery. The agreed operation took place during the night of the 24th towards the dawn of the 25th of July. According to a version, the thelematarioi with ladders stepped into the walls inside, killed the guards and later opened a gate through which the soldiers intruded. According to another version, a small team of soldiers came in from an opening, and later stepped into the walls where they put forth the guards. After the intrusion of Strategopoulos' army into the city, some of the Latin soldiers tried to resist and skirmishes followed, that were unable to hold the Byzantines from capturing the biggest part of the city. Baldwin II, who was on the Blachernai palace, informed about the events fled crossing the city as far as the palace of Boukoleon, on the shores of Propontis, from where he embarked on a ship. He left behind him the regalia of the imperial power, which later on were dispatch to Michael VIII.

Because the fear for the return of the Venetian fleet from Daphnousia never ceased at all, Strategopoulos ordered the burning of the quarters of the Venetians and the other Westerners that were lying all along the Golden Horn. Scenes of chaos soon followed, and when the fleet returned, it was unable to do anything else except than to save the families of the Constantinopolitan Latins, and carried them to other Latin-occupied areas or to the West.[7]

The triumphal entry of Michael VIII Palaiologos to Constantinople took place with great formality on the 15th of August of the same year. The choice of day (the feast of Virgin's Dormition for the Christian church) as well as the intensely religious character of the ceremony (the emperor entered Constantinople on foot through Golden Gate, while a carriage marched before him with the icon of Virgin Hodegetria on it) show Michael's attempt to present the recapture as a divine granting, and himself as bearer of the divine will. In the same direction aimed the issue of golden hyperpyra with a totally new iconographical type: on the one side Virgin Blachernitissa is depicted within the walls of Constantinople, whereas on the other side the emperor kneeling in front of Christ.[8]

The emperor's seat as well as the seat of the patriarchate was transferred, as it was expected, to the recaptured Constantinople. Furthermore the members of the high aristocracy and of the central administration settled in Constantinople. Michael VIII followed a systematic policy of settling in order to reinforce the population of Constantinople, while he proceeded to reparations or renovations of many buildings, religious or not.

5. Consequences of the recapture

The recapture of Constantinople caused an understandable joyfulness to the Byzantines, whereas it stabilized the empire's place as the predominant power within the geographical area of Romania and raised the hope of reconstituting the borders of the 12th century. For the emperor Michael VIII, who added to his title the epithet «New Constantine», was the chance he was looking for in order to complete the dynastic change of 1259: after his entry into Constantinople he was crowned anew, this time along with his son

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Andronikos, while John IV Laskaris was set aside and later blinded.

For Constantinople the settling, its reconnection with its geographical surroundings, the reinforcement of its role as center of international commerce, and the resettlement of the imperial court and the aristocracy in the city marked a short-term revival after the crisis that followed the Fall of 1204, although it does not seem that its population ever reached the 12th century levels.

For the Venetians, the loss of Constantinople was a heavy blow, since for the time being it displaced them from the Black Sea trade for the benefit of their rivals, the Genoese, just right the moment when this particular trade route gained huge importance because of the Pax Mongolica. Although the Venetians were restituted in Constantinople in 1267, the recapture of the city marked the beginning of the Genoese dominion on the trade of Romania.

In the long run, the recapture had negative consequences as well. The enemies of the empire were gathered close together under the perspective of a new Crusade against the Byzantines. Michael VIII was obliged to waste large amounts of resources and diplomatic efforts for the avoidance of these plans, which caused the weakening of the empire.[9] The policy of the Union of the Churches, a part of these diplomatic efforts, caused deep internal disunion, which was added to the already existing dissatisfaction for the usurpation of the throne by the Palaiologoi. The move of the center of gravity towards Constantinople and theWest fell mainly upon the Byzantine Asia Minor, which was met with indifference or even with hostility by Michael VIII with the collapse of its defense as a consequence, and finally its conquest by the Turks at the end of the 13th century.[10]

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1. For the "Empire of Nicaea" see Angold, M., *A Byzantine Government in Exile* (Oxford 1975). On the degree the Latin Empire can be seen as "Byzantine", see Lock, P., “The Latin Emperors as Heirs to Byzantium”, in Magdalino, P. (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries* (Aldershot 1974), pp. 295-304. In any case, it must not be overlooked that at the end the claims of the emperors of Nicaea were legitimized *ex eventu*.

2. Γεώργιος Ακροπολίτης, ed. A. Heisenberg, corr. P. Wirth, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* (Stuttgart 1978), p. 183.

3. Angold, M., *A Byzantine Government in Exile* (Oxford 1975), p. 198.

4. Γεώργιος Ακροπολίτης, ed. A. Heisenberg, cor. P. Wirth, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* (Stuttgart 1978), pp. 174-175. Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymérès, Relations Historiques*, (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), vol. 1, pp. 172-173. For the identification of the events that the two authors are describing see Geanakoplos, D.J., *Ο αυτοκράτωρ Μιχαήλ Παλαιολόγος και η Δύσις, 1258-1282* (trans. Κ. Πολίτη, Athens 1969), pp. 69-71.

5. Geanakoplos, D.J., *Ο αυτοκράτωρ Μιχαήλ Παλαιολόγος και η Δύσις, 1258-1282* (trans. Κ. Πολίτη, Athens 1969), pp. 77-80.

6. Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymérès, Relations Historiques*, (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), vol. 1, p. 157.

7. Γεώργιος Ακροπολίτης, ed. A. Heisenberg, cor. P. Wirth, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* (Stuttgart 1978), pp. 181-183; Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymérès, Relations Historiques*, (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24, Paris 1984), vol. 1, pp. 192-204. Comments and additional notes on sources by Geanakoplos, D.J., *Ο αυτοκράτωρ Μιχαήλ Παλαιολόγος και η Δύσις, 1258-1282* (trans. Κ. Πολίτη, Athens 1969), pp. 82-95.

8. Grierson, Ph., *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* ,vol. 5, part 1 (Washington 1999), p. 106 ff.

9. See Geanakoplos, D.J., *Ο αυτοκράτωρ Μιχαήλ Παλαιολόγος και η Δύσις, 1258-1282* (trans. Κ. Πολίτη, Athens 1969), pp. 82-95.

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10. A brief evaluation of the reign of Michael VIII, in Laiou, A., *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II* (Cambridge MA., 1972), pp. 11-31.

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Γλωσσάριο :

Blachernitissa

Iconographic type of Virgin Mary, whose name is based on a supposedly miraculous prototype located in the monastery of Blachernai. Theotokos is depicted in bust, while in front of her chest a medallion of Christ.

caesar

In the Roman Empire the title of Caesar was given to the Emperor. From the reign of Diocletian (284-305) on this title was conferred on the young co-emperor. This was also the highest title on the hierarchy of the Byzantine court. In the 8th c. the title of Caesar was usually given to the successor of the throne. In the late 11th c. this office was downgraded and from the 14th c. on it was mainly conferred on foreign princes.

Hodegetria

Iconographic type of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin is depicted standing, slightly turning to the right of the viewer, holding in her arms the infant Jesus. The type was named so after an allegedly thaumaturgic icon of the Virgin Mary kept in the monastery of Hodegoi in Constantinople.

hyperpyron

The Byzantine gold coin, 4.3 gr. and 20 ½ carats, introduced by Alexios I Komnenos in 1092. It was preserved until the end of the Byzantine Empire with big changes in his cold content.

Pax Mongolica

A conventional term employed to describe the period of relative stability that prevailed in the greater part of the Euro-Asiatic area after the Mongol conquests (13th-14th c.), causing the efflorescence of trade between the Far East and the Black Sea, via Central Asia.

thelematarios

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The resident of the area outside the walls of Constantinople. The term is employed from the 13th century onwards.

Πηγές

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Παραθέματα

George Akropolites's account of the recapture of Constantinople by the troops of Alexios Strategopoulos

Αἴφνης οὖν ὁ Στρατηγόπουλος Ἀλέξιος ὁ καῖσαρ νυκτὸς ἐπιὼν τῇ Κωνσταντίνου προσήγγισεν. ἐπὶ δὲ μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ εἶχε καὶ ἄνδρας τινὰς ἐξωρμημένους τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἀκριβῶς εἰδότας τὰ κατ'αὐτὴν, καὶ πυνθανόμενος αὐτῶν ἐμεμαθήκει ὁπήν τινα εἶναι περὶ τὸ τείχος τῆς πόλεως, δι'ἧς ἀνὴρ ὁπλίτης δύναιτ' ἄν ἐντὸς εἰσελθῖν, μηδ' ὅλως μελλήσας τοῦ ἔργου εἴχετο. καὶ εἰσῆλθε διὰ ταύτης ἀνήρ, καὶ ἐπηκολούθησεν αὐτῷ ἕτερος, εἶτα ἐκείνῳ ἄλλος, καὶ οὕτῳ μέχρι τῶν πεντεκαίδεκα, τάχα δὲ καὶ πλείους ἄνδρες ἐντὸς εἰσήλθον τῆς πόλεως. ἐπὶ δὲ περὶ τὸ τεῖχος ἕνα εὗρον τῶν ἐμπεπιστευμένων τὴν φυλακὴν, τινὲς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀναβάντες καὶ τῶν ποδῶν λαβόντες ἔρριψαν ἔξω τῆς πόλεως. οἱ δ' ἄλλοι ἀξίνας ἐγχειρισάμενοι καὶ τοὺς μοχλοὺς τῶν πυλῶν διαρρήξαντες ἐλευθέραν πεποίηνται τὴν εἰς τὴν πόλιν εἴσοδον τῷ στρατεύματι. οὕτῳ μὲν οὖν ὁ Στρατηγόπουλος καῖσαρ καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ πάντες Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ Σκύθαι - ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων καὶ γὰρ τὸ ὑπ' αὐτὸν συνεκεκρότητο στράτευμα - ἐντὸς τῆς πόλεως ἐγεγόνεισαν. οἱ δ' ἐντὸς τῷ αιφνιδίῳ κατασεισθέντες τοῦ πράγματος, ὡς εἶχεν ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίαν ἐπραγματεύετο. καὶ οἱ μὲν περὶ τὰ σεμνεῖα ἐβάδιζον καὶ μοναχικὰ ἐνδεδύοντο ἄμφια, ὅπως τὸν φόνον ἐκφύγοιεν, γυναῖκες δὲ εἰς ὀπὰς τειχῶν συνεστέλλοντο καὶ εἰς στοὰς σκοτεινὰς καὶ ἀποκρύφους ἐκρύπτοντο. ὁ δὲ τῆς πόλεως κατάρχων Βαλδουῖνος περὶ τὸ μέγα παλάτιον ὥρμησεν. Οἱ δὲ περὶ τὴν Δαφνουσίαν ἀπιόντες Λατῖνοι καὶ ὁ μετ' αὐτῶν ποτεστάτος, μηδέν τι τῶν γενομένων γνωρίσαντες, ἐπεὶ μὴ κατὰ τῆς νήσου Δαφνουσίας ποιῆσαί τι ἴσχυσαν - ἀντελάβετο γὰρ κἀκείνων θεός - παλίνδρομοι πρὸς τὴν πόλιν ἐπανεζεύγνυον. μέχρι μὲν οὖν τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ ἀρχιστρατήγου τῶν ἄνω δυνάμεων Μιχαὴλ ἐλθόντες, τοῦ περὶ τὸν ἀνάπλουν διακειμένου, οὐδέν τι ὅλως τῶν γενομένων ἐμεμαθήκεισαν· ἐκεῖσε δὲ ἀφιγμένοι καὶ ταῦτα μαθόντες εἰς τὴν πόλιν ὥρμησαν ἐπελθεῖν. ἀλλὰ τὰ Ῥωμαϊκὰ στρατεύματα τοῦτο γνόντες πῦρ ταῖς οἰκίαις τῶν Λατίνων ἐνέβαλον παρὰ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν κειμέναις, καὶ ἐνέπρησαν ταύτας, καὶ πρῶτα μὲν τὰς τῶν Βενετικῶν, εἶτα τῶν ἄλλων γενῶν, ἃς καὶ κάμπους κατωνόμαζον. ἐπεὶ δὲ εἶδον τὴν πόλιν πυρπολουμένην οἱ τῶν Λατίνων, τὰς παρειὰς ταῖς χερσί τύψαντες, καὶ λαβόντες ὅσους ἠδύναντο ἐντὸς τῶν τριήρεων α'τῶν καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν πλοίων, ὑπεχώρησαν, μιᾶς τριήρεως εἰς τὸ μέγα παλάτιον ἀπελθούσης καὶ ἀναδεξαμένης τὸν Βαλδουῖνον ἐν χρῷ τῆς ζωγρείας γενόμενον. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν οὕτω ξυνέβη, καὶ ἡ Κωνσταντίνου προνοίᾳ θεοῦ καὶ αὖθις ὑπὸ χεῖρα τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐγένετο κατὰ λόγον δίκαιόν τε προσήκοντα, Ἰουλίου εἰκοστὴν καὶ πέμπτην ἄγοντος, οὔσης ἐπινεμήσεως τετάρτης καὶ ἀπὸ γενέσεως κόσμου ἔτους ὄντος ,ςψξθ', ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν κρατουμένη χρόνους πεντήκοντα καὶ ὀκτώ.

George Akropolites, *Chronike Syngraphe*, επιμ. A. Heisenberg, διορθ. P. Wirth, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* (Stuttgart 1978), pp. 181-3.