

The Revolt of the Zealots in Thessaloniki (1342-1350): Monasticism and Monarchy at the End of the Byzantine Empire

Matthew Raphael Johnson
Johnstown, PA

Introduction: The Materialist Assault

One of the greatest social theorists living today, Vladimir Katasonov, only writing in Russian, lists ten specific marks of the “capitalists” or monetary civilization. This need not be modern or based on any sort of a market. It is a mentality rather than an ideology. He is looking at the USA and, to that extent, he is correct. He is also looking at times of decay in societies, including the one dealt with in this paper, 14th century Byzantium.

Paraphrasing Katasonov's analysis, these ten marks are first, the transformation of the pursuit of wealth from a necessary evil to a legitimate goal in itself. Terms such as “one's worth” or “welfare” are known only in quantitative terms. Second, the accumulation of wealth has no end or purpose. It exists for its own sake. Third, that because this is socially accepted (rather than seen as vulgar such as in Aristotle's time), it alters the society, inverting the natural order, making the spirit serve the material. This, fourth, leads to what he calls “mutations” in society where “. . . relationships and mutually cooperative societies are replaced by competition and greed.” This leads, fifth, to a radically stratified class society. This is because the success in gaining money and capital, since it is the most valued pursuit imaginable, puts one in the perfect position to gain more. It is irrational. It leads to the rule of an oligarchy who never openly identifies itself. As if acknowledging their lack of legitimacy, they rule though “universal” slogans and constitutions.

Sixth, Katasonov writes, “In order to strengthen their position in society, the oligarchs manipulates the desire of the lower classes to justify their own enrichment.” This is to say that the universal drive to self interest, rational or not, once it becomes the norm, removes any sense of justice against oligarchy. One's self interest is just as good as another's and hence, that one is more successful than another is no one's concern. group of "elite" skillfully uses the desire “plebs” to enrichment.

Seventh, class relations harden to a semi-feudal state. This, in turn, leads to the lack of incentive for this increasingly dissatisfied class to work. Ninth, usury and asset stripping become the main means of making money once long term investments are seen as too unstable. Society is dying under the rule of an oligarchy and, once that becomes known, only the short term matters. Finally, all revolves around money: it is the universal Mercury, the universal solvent.

Capitalism, ancient or modern, is a perversion. It exists when natural and normal forms of life have broken down. It is almost universally understood as a precursor to total collapse. In traditional societies, economic life was concentrated in the rural commune or extended family. The revolution of materialism usually meant the rule of concentrated urban populations over a scattered, malleable countryside. In addition, the world trade in goods and local demand create a universal web of dependence that destroys any hope of personal autonomy,

Without a strong monarchy, oligarchy takes over. This is an iron law of civilized history. A monarchy is that which restrains Antichrist – to use the ancient Byzantine and Russian idea – and this, at its most practical level, is the lust for money. It is no accident or coincidence that the essential message of the prophets is that the rejection of Yahweh and the acceptance of “monetary civilization” are one and the same thing. An oligarchy is man reduced to a primal,

wild instinct; an animal. So through ideological manipulation and alchemical ritual was Orthodoxy slowly turned into heresy: all heresy is social, it is the separation of man from God either in man's absorption into "divinity" or God's eternal separation from the nature he created to be link him. Heresy justified the rule of money and capital since it reduced the created order to insignificance either because God was absent or man was.

Byzantine Decline and Populist Revolt: The Background

The Byzantine Empire – New Jerusalem as it termed itself – never recovered from the papal assault of 1204. Most of the gold, jewels and valuables of the empire were taken and used to build the modern west. In the period of the populist revolt of the zealots, Byzantium was in the state of decline matched only by the USA in 2016: the domination of money and the transformation of constitutional and canonical rule into feudal slavery. The concentration of land into fewer and fewer hands was the norm.

The class war was made worse by the racial one: Italian merchants monopolized the wholesale foreign and domestic trade of the empire. For the assistance of the west that never came, the Greek empire sold its soul. Its sovereignty was removed when the Florentines and Venetians were given tax-free status in the empire. The empire's Jews were intimidate allies of the Italians as they were, far more enthusiastically, with the Muslims.

Jews, a handful of secular lords and merchants from the west were given privileges while the peasantry fought their wars. No moral purpose was manifest in the state. One would think that an oligarchy would maintain the army at high level of readiness in case of civil unrest. However as always, people are not rational and economic theory never predicts the workings of the human mind. Like the Poles in the late 18th century and the Novgorod slave-drivers soon to arise in the north, the oligarchy reduced the army to nothing. A victorious emperor with a loyal army means the doom to the decadent, mindless oligarchical soul. Since all is short term asset stripping and almost nothing is production, the army was left to rot. As with each and ever other aspect of economic history, elites showed themselves to be irrational, self-destructive and completely ignorant of their "self-interest."

After the death of Emperor Andronicus III in 1341, the young John V Palaiologos was crowned to take his place. However, real power remained in the hands of one of the most distinguished and wealthy landowners in Thrace, John Cantacuzenus, and he became regent for the young emperor. He relied on a large provincial aristocracy and armed force. His center of power was Didimotika, the most powerful fortress in Thrace.

His opposition was not long in forming. Its major leaders were the young emperor's mother, Anne of Savoy, Alexis Apokaukos the minister of finance and Patriarch John Apiriysky, or "The Cripple." Alexis was the most dangerous for his naval experience. As a commoner, he outfitted the powerful Greek fleet. His victories against the Turks made him a popular force. As a non-noble, he was rightfully angry at nobles of lesser ability taking power over himself.

In general, it was the local urban workers, craftsmen and lower clergy that formed the early opposition. It hurt that the empire was suffering attacks and a loss of territory from Serbs and Bulgarians. The latter had recently plundered the lands of western Thrace under Ivan Alexander (1371). The regent's plan was to make peace with Bulgaria, make war on the Turks and unify the empire once more.

There was substantial opposition against John the regent and after a coup in the capital that same year, the regent was stripped of all lands and rank. However, the regent had retreated to his fortress in Thrace where in October of 1341 his backers proclaimed him emperor against the

young John.

John the regent then made war on the imperial family from Thrace. The war developed as one between Thessaloniki and Constantinople. The geographic division is far less important than the question of usury, the real issue at hand. The rich, those supporting the regent, used usury to maintain their power and slowly take the wealth of others to themselves. The resulting war destroyed the prosperity of the empire.

Contrary to common myth, St. Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts rejected the oligarchs and, like all great church fathers, wrote against usury and condemned it as an insidious means of theft. As the enemies of the state pressed on her borders, land was sold in a panic. The church never accepted a legitimate title to land in this way. The law is about the good, not about procedures. Hence, this was also a war on the conception of law and contract.

St. Nicholas Cabasilas wrote his “Oration against Usury” at about the same time St. Gregory did. Nicholas argued that usury is taking from something that provides no value. It is taking from money itself, not investment. If it was investment that produced the means to replay usurers, then the failure of the investment would end the claim of the creditor. It never does, proving that it is the money, not the investment, that earns usury.

Both Palamas and Cabasilas argue that surplus funds beyond necessities are not owned. This is to be given to the poor. There is no absolute right to property and income if it is more than necessary. It is a compound sin when hoarding money leads to the manipulation of the poor. The greater the crisis, the greater the desperation. Profits from this period of time are not legitimate. It is a contract without value because it is not freely signed.

Thessaloniki was a market oriented city and a naval bastion. War, as always, destroyed all stability and contracts became void. The wealth gap increased when the war broke out. The commoners of both the city and countryside saw the civil war as unnecessary and the result of two factions of the elite fighting to see which one can milk the peasantry. Cantacuzenus was the symbol for the oligarchy and his rule was marked by the increasing concentration of landownership. In Thessaloniki, the populist and socialist Zealot party removed oligarchs from the city (Laiou 1972: 284-300).

Thessaloniki sought independence and a vague form of republican government. John V was installed largely through Venetian cash and even sought a Unia with Rome for easier access to Italian money. In 1371 he became Catholic.

Andronicus IV was the son of John and used the Turks to gain the throne while Italy had much to gain from promoting division. The main causes for division were usury versus Christian economics, urban versus rural and of course, the landed elite versus the untitled.

Palamas was not on the side of the elite, as most writers in English, anxious to discredit the church, assume. Zealotry was close to the hesychasts and vice versa. This is underscored by the fact that the hesychasts were always poor. Zealots were led by local monastics. Zealot fighters were either monastics or based on monastic lands. Thessaloniki had close ties with Athos through the Zealots.

Andronicus IV was willing to use Turks to capture power. The Italian states were used as balance. John V went to Venice while Andronicus went to Genoa, helping to fan the flames of war between the two oligarchies. John for his part, went to the papacy to make his deal for power. Emir Murad allied with Andronicus against John. His early victories led to Gallipoli granted to the Ottomans as payment. Murad then shifted to John and back again. The brief but disastrous reign of Andronicus IV led to the precedent of a Byzantine tributary state. Both

factions went to hostile foreigners for assistance.

The Zealot Commune

For eight years the commune ruled the city. The structure of urban government permitted the non-titled to rule even at the expense of the aristocracy. Western historians argue that St. Gregory Palamas was on the side of the noble elite in this war due to the fact that the patriarch of the usurper, John the Cripple, was an opponent of the movement. The real motive is to discredit the church. The hesychast idea was represented in both camps, but the monks under Palamas were essential to the development of the commune. Yet, Greek writers such as Kostas Lampou continue to spread slanderous ideas such as, “Zealots came into open confrontation with the dogmatism of the hesychasts and Gregory Palamas, who praised monasticism, the strict rule and allegiance to the power of the landlords and the emperor.” Needless to say, no citation is given. The article was printed in “Television without Borders,” a creation of George Soros and the European Union. Thus, in diverting attention from the truth of the Greek idea, Soros and his allies continue to behave as oligarchs have always done: passions rule reason.

This sort of intellectual laziness leads to comments such as

[Zealots] took measures towards intellectual freedom, freedom of speech and religious tolerance. They abolished all privileges, the right of private property and confiscated the wealth of the nobility. Direct election was established for all government offices, courts and religious offices. The wealth of the church was taken and separation of church and state established. They established status of equality before the law, released their serfs and gave equal rights to foreigners (Lampou, 2013)

This organ of the modern-day oligarchy merely projected their own ideological demands onto 14th century Byzantium. Not a word of the above is true, and nothing the Zealot movement ever legislated or imposed came remotely close to that. As “migrants” and “refugees” from Syria invade Europe, the Zealots are now said to have concerned themselves with the rights of “foreigners.” Yet, the issue did not arise at the time. There were no “nobles” in the Byzantine empire since no system of ranked titles existed outside government service.

The argument of the paper here is shown by the behavior of oligarchy today. When passion rules reason, all communication is manipulation and all acts are defense mechanisms. Reality becomes a projection of elite desires.

The zealots had an ideological approach seeking the elimination of nobility and the separation of the city from the empire. The war of the poor against the oligarchs was long in coming. In Russia, the destruction of the oligarchy under Ivan III, Basil III and Ivan IV made this sort of populism redundant until Razin reacted against the rationalization and centralization of political power on the western, capitalist model. The commune spread to Edirne, Ferres, Iraklia and elsewhere in Macedonia.

Primarily, the Zealots fought the concentration of wealth in the hands of landed oligarchs and more generally, that landed wealth was synonymous with power. They rejected the new, westernized state that this corruption required and hence, demanded decentralized, medieval-style rule. Theirs was a “reactionary” movement, as all peasant movements are. However, beyond these general principles, the actual daily grind of the Republic of Thessaloniki is almost entirely unknown to historians.

Concerning the church, Martzleos writes, “They confiscated a large part of the church property, namely the property of the rich [monasteries] is not a proof for the existence of hostility on their part to the Church and monasticism.” The hesychasts, unknown to secular historians, did not own property. There was also no expropriation of church lands recorded anywhere, though their enemies might have said this to harm their reputation. The hesychast favored the small skete and hermitage. The hesychast was out of place in the cenobite. This is an example of ignorance and prejudice among scholars in this field – they say a vague “church” owned property.” the “Palamites” were monks therefore, they owned the property that the large monasteries did. With no one to say otherwise in the hothouse atmosphere of academia, they get away with this ignorance.

One clear truth is that hesychasm is political. This is saying very little if by “political” one means that which is social or legal. The critical distinction between essence and energy is not something that should be approached lightly or by amateurs. Most certainly, it cannot be approached by anyone not well schooled in Plato.

The first consequence of this distinction is that the mind is no longer a separate faculty but is integrated into the far more comprehensive heart. This does not mean that the practical, utilitarian logic of life is somehow made into a theological notion. It is however, demoted into the realm of the strictly formal. “reason” becomes far more like “logic” while terms such as nous become more separated from utilitarian concerns.

The position of the supporters of John V Palaiologos sharply deteriorated due to a failed alliance with the emir Sarukhan. In the summer of 1346, Anna of Savoy hired his 6000th detachment to fight the Cantacuzenus. But, finding a completely devastated Thrace, the Turks under Sarukhan did not want to fight with the usurper and went to plunder South Bulgaria. On the way back the Turks came to Constantinople and demanded from Anna awards for their “service.” Having been refused, the Turks razed the suburbs of the capital, have entered into an agreement with Cantacuzenus beforehand. Thus ended yet another irrational enterprise of endless bloodshed by the apostles of “self-interest” and “Enlightenment.”

Refusing all conception of reason or self-interest, the capitalists of the day saw a sharp political and economic deterioration of the empire. Serbia and Bulgaria had much of the empire, Venice and Genoa controlled the money and Thessaloniki was still under the zealots. So in the height of irrationality, the entire war was for nothing. The throne had no power.

The fleet was virtually nonexistent while the treasury was empty. The Venetians “pledged” 30 thousand ducats for the jewels of the imperial crown. The war for non-existent power led to a situation so absurd that the crown itself needed to be sold for quick cash. As always, irony is lost on the man whose appetite controls him.

The civil wars between factions of the elite were manifestly irrational. They did not even serve the interests of the leaders who believed themselves to be served by taking the throne by violence (and with foreign assistance). From 1321 to 1341 and beyond, these wars became more violent. The clear result – known at the time – was the mortgaging of the state to either the Turkish regime or the oligarchs in northern Italy. It is in this context that the commune was founded.

The commune and the rise of the hesychast model are connected. A major part of the problem is the presumption of secular, liberal, alienated, urban academics trying to write intelligently about a conception of monastic life and prayer as specific and as ontological-based as hesychasm. It is akin to someone writing a lengthy history of Tibet having never heard of Buddhism. This is no flippant exaggeration.

The disintegration of the state – a decomposition as the result of deliberate elite choice – led, as it always does, to the rise of oligarchy. Without a central power, the elite factions seek to gain as much as possible before the entire system is gone. It is extremely rare to find exceptions to this. The central state had lost all legitimacy and was soon to be a servant of overtly hostile powers. The landed elite then took this as an excuse to gain as much short-term privilege as possible.

Fr. George Metallinos concludes the following:

It is indeed clear that - in spite of the confusion in the sources - the Zealots of Thessaloniki constituted a social group, as discerned by the People. It had ties to the "maritimers" - a well-known guild with Palaeologos family members at its head. The collaboration between Zealots and maritimers was obviously a coinciding of mutual interests. . . The Zealots identified with the people and they expressed the demands of the lower social strata, which partially coincided with those of the army as well (Metallinos, 1995)

Fr. George strongly suggest that monastic participation in this movement was substantial. In his view, it was a coalition of monastics, military factions, the merchant marine, certain elements of the merchant classes and the lower classes in general. It was led by the Palaeologoi and was vague in its ideology.

Hesychasm was a communal and anarchist ideal in terms of its own organization. It largely rejected formalized hierarchies and instead sought the freedom that grace offered rather than the letter of a rule. It is not opposed to the coenobia (as some in the mythic possessors vs. non-possessors issue will claim), but emphasizes a less rigid approach to worship, but is usually stricter in its asceticism. Its most clear social idea is a rejection of possessions. Hesychasm is essentially connected with the extreme rejection of property, serfdom and the consequent attachment to the power systems that ownership implies. In no conceivable way can "Palamites" defend property or privilege. The very structure of their monasteries – many still existing today – rejected this totally and completely.

It is an obvious corollary that the hesychastic ideal would heap scorn on usury, the additional consequence of the rise of local strongmen and the disintegration of any unifying ideal above that of violent appetite. Usury is anathematized by canon law and thus, Byzantine civil law over and over again without difference. It is not merely unjust, but a heresy and a radical departure from Christianity. In Byzantium, this would mean the total rejection of all social standing since the excommunicate could never be a citizen of the commonwealth.

On the other hand, landed elites saw the church as an economic inconvenience. This is another near-universal constant since appetites, once whetted, rarely calm down of their own will. The commune and the hesychast communal structure are very similar in their mission and purpose, and are at war with its polar opposition, secular oligarchy quite willing to convert to Catholicism or Islam to maintain their property. That these elementary ideas remain mysterious to American history professors shows what a stagnant cesspool that crowd really has become.

In addition, the canons governing hesychasm strongly reject any involvement in "political" affairs. Generally, following social issues is harshly treated in the monastic enclosure. The tenured historian now has to explain how the Palamite monastics has committed open heresy, schism, flouted its own canons and constitution, totally rejected its most fundamental

ethical principles, sided adroitly with a political faction and, at the same time, have no one notice. The American history professor is adroit at ladder climbing, conformity, bureaucratic protocol and self-interest, and it is common that their vices are projected onto historical figures they purport to understand. Mass firings in classics department should be the natural and rational reaction to this rank ignorance and incompetence, but logic and knowledge is not the ground for hiring or promotion.

The landed interest the world over, once freed from the “father” figure of central and idealistic control, quickly becomes a mechanized, secular and alienated collector of neuroses. They are aware of their legal illegitimacy as well as their assistance in the very society that has given them the positions they so deviously exploit. The point is that the factions for political pore were subjectively aware of the absurdity and contradiction of their life's work, and the same can be said of the short-term thinking of the local elite.

The zealots had to have modeled themselves on the monastic idea, since experience with these egalitarian communes rejecting ownership of anything was a daily event. Yet again, simple logical operations are erased when tenure is granted. Worse, that a bourgeois, “progressive” revolution is seen in the commune by tenured academics in America is now acceptable historical analysis.

Donald M. Nichol is less obnoxious than his younger understudies, but his confused analysis of the situation in his *Last Centuries of Byzantium* (cf esp 215-232) show a total lack of knowledge of Byzantine theology and even worse, an inability to keep focused on one level of analysis at a time. He provides no reason why the vague, always unnamed zealots would loathe Palamas. His essential teachings equated private property with theft and murder (a notion Nicol seems to have missed).

As if often the case, he uses political categories borrowed from modern republicanism to explain the pro-Palamite synods. Emperors of questionable legitimacy with few resources with few means of enforcement had no means at their disposal to force doctrine on anyone, let alone those who owned nothing. John had himself already converted to papism in Rome, and yet this did not cause the disintegration of the Greek faith in Constantinople. The decisions of emperors, especially at this period of confusion, had no bearing whatsoever on theology. At a more fundamental level, one without think that a monastic form of organization that was militant in its anarchist collective conceptions of itself would merely be eliminated centuries earlier to justify the growth of landed estates. Either these were not seen as threats or they were not capable of destroying them. All monastic rules without exception reject the ownership of property. The collective possession of lands is not an individual matter at all. The pope does not own the Vatican.

In an otherwise excellent article by John Barker, he makes this comment:

After John VI's assumption of power in Constantinople, the Zealot regime remained defiant, refusing to accept as their new metropolitan Kantakouzenos' designate, the eminent Gregory Palamas. This denial was apparently made not only on political grounds but because the Zealots opposed the triumphant theological doctrines of hesychasm with which Palamas and his Kantakouzenian supporters were identified (Barker, 18).

This writer needs substantial proof to accept the assertion that the longshoremen were

“opposed” to the metaphysical doctrines and theology of Palamas and the monastics. Further, that they would oppose “theological doctrines” exclusively because they are associated with a faction they dislike also requires substantial evidence.

Academic fantasizing about the Commune reached a point where Greek academic Christos Malatras needed to write about the “Mythology” of the Zealots. First, he states that there was no anti-religious element to this movement at all. It can only be attributed to the neurosis of the liberal professors who write on it. They merely projected their own desires onto the “history” they were writing. Secondly, there is no connection to a “middle class” at all. Yet again, it is a projection. They see their own world everywhere, so they merely project the French Revolution onto this 14th century movement. Third, there were no “popular assemblies.” This again is a fantasy of the liberal academic. There was no redistribution of wealth. Finally, its leaders were “Michael and Andreas Paleologos, George Kokalos, Alexios Metochites” all high aristocratic leaders.

His view is that it was little more than a separatist movement connected to a disgruntled faction of the aristocracy. Malatras' might be an exaggeration, but his purpose is to end the neurotic projection of academic ideologies onto this mysterious movement. This writer sees the movement as akin to Razin or Pugachev in Russia: a return to the old empire. There were solid economic, ethnic and political reasons to seek revolution or separation. Trade was in Italian hands, civil war was destroying the already weakened empire, and the ruling class was decadent. While the ideology here is not as clear as in the Russian cases, the context of this revolt is suggestive.

The State, the Commune and the End of Byzantium

The Byzantine idea was based on a free peasantry, strong monasteries that checked both bishops and the state, and a noble class dedicated to national service. Without these three pillars, the state fell and society quickly disintegrated. By the death of Basil II in 1025, a firmly professional civil service existed in both military and civilian areas. Noble estates, as always, were the main issue. Feudalism, defined here as the ability to charge high rents based on their social position, destroyed the peasantry and the state. It corrupted all offices and eliminated the legitimacy of local rulers.

A resurgent Islam pressed on Byzantium from the south while the west saw the Normans and the north, the Magyars descending on the New Israel. Basil II defined Byzantine political theory as based around a strong crown dedicated almost solely to military life and the constant surveillance of noble arrogance. Moving to the Balkans and Kiev rather than the south, Basil redefined the Byzantine mission geographically. He redefined property as moral stewardship and not the oligarchical conception of sacrosanct property ties (except if those ties benefit heir enemies).

Fiscal reform was also about removing a means by which the elite can charge rents. It took any excess liquidity out of the system and removed more cash from the “discretion” of local strongmen. Conquered people were not really “conquered” but liberated, and needed to be treated better than their former overlords. Taxes needed to be low, since high taxes did not benefit the state, but were often diverted to noble hands. The law of contract, unsurprisingly, was reformed and all offices were centralized.

The Zealot commune was based around several issues that gave it its character. First, the autonomy of urban society against the irrational behaviors of the late emperors. This also

included using the city as a counterweight to the landed interest which was synonymous with the oligarchy at the time. The land was contrasted to the mercantile. The ethnic component was the attack on Italian privileges coming from its banking establishment and its skillful use of the appetites of these emperors to lure them into a debt relationship more comprehensive than conquest. Oddly, the hackneyed “rich versus poor” dyad did not exist. When Christ made reference to the “poor in spirit,” he was not referring to those unable to pay their credit card bill. He was referring to those who refused to use one in the first place. Importantly, the communion-anarchist ideal of the hesychastic skete is essential. Modern historians hardly have the vocabulary needed to grasp the nature of this approach to grace and authority. There is no parallel in modern life. Needless to say, the job of the historian is to provide this vocabulary. As they have refused, those excluded from the hallowed halls – yet again – have to do their job for them.

The second civil war in this era of Roman history gave the cities the opportunity to create coalitions against the ruling class. Once the navy and merchant marine fell apart given the collapse of central state structures, these classes joined with the zealots. In any civil war over time, insecurity reigns. Land and money are concentrated as smaller landowners merge with larger ones. Only the major landowners can survive such onslaughts. This was not a protest against the Byzantine state or monarchy. In fact, it was a protest of its absence and debasement. It became indistinguishable from noble elites as state offices became prizes for loyalty. That Cantacuzenus used Turkish forces to destroy the Thessalonian population is ironic.

It should come as no surprise that the decay of the empire was accompanied by the rise of usury and money-lenders. As always, they are at the root of all urban revolt and most certainly, given the events of the period, Thessaloniki was not exception. From the end of the 13th century to the of the empire, it was fragmenting both politically and economically. Imperial coinage was driven out by local or regional. By the 1350s, the Venetian gold ducat was the currency of the city.

As civil wars destroyed the empire, resources for reconstruction were dissipated. As collapse was imminent, frustration with the ruling class' irrationality bubbled over into violence in more cities than Thessaloniki

W. Barker writes:

Under new leaders—one of them called Andreas Palaiologos, known as leader of the longshoremen (paraqalavssioi)—a riot was organized and the populace joined in what became a bloodbath. Apokaukos and about a hundred of the counterrevolutionary magnates were rounded up and, after brief imprisonment, were delivered to the mob to be torn to pieces in savage retaliation. Heedless of their leaders' admonitions, the blood-crazed mob then went on a rampage through the city, murdering any other Kantakouzenian sympathizers, real or merely accused, and pillaging their homes. When the dust settled, Thessalonike was more firmly than ever under the control of the Zealots and their ruthless commune. Dissent of any kind was prosecuted as “Kantakouzenism.” (Barker, 17).

The second civil war saw the rise of Alexis Apokaukos, a bureaucrat associated with the opposition to Cantacuzenus. He initially was backed by the zealots. Looking to the merchants rather than landowners, this initial “social war” was a false one. Laiou states that there was some

talk about Apokaukos creating a new, merchant-centered state on the coast to imitate the Italians. Once the war was lost, Apokaukos was murdered in 1345. She also noted that, once the social system broke down, many of the older landed interests turned to usury and loan sharking (Laiou, 290).

In the (2003) doctoral dissertation of DI Marakov, Byzantine society and the people in the Homilies of St. Gregory Palamas, the Russian writer makes a few salient points. First, that given the lack of a clear agenda from the Zealots, to be “opposed” to them is impossible. Palamas was a strong egalitarian and communalist, but the methods of the Zealot party were not constructive. Palamas condemns usury over and over again, reaffirms the injustice of inequality, but rejects the violence and mob-mentality of the Zealot movement. It is common for westerners to take Palamas' work on this topic and simply say that “Palamas condemns the zealots” so as to imply that he was a partisan of the wealthy. To say something so stupid should be met with a termination of academic employment.

There was no “crisis of feudalism” and “capitalism” was identical with the Italian oligarchy and the foreign moneylender. Hence, there was no desire for a “new system.” The crown was not the problem, only that it was corrupted by these same foreign influences. Syuzyumov writes in Byzantine Annals:

On the one hand, in the Byzantine Empire in central Greece is still dominated by Latin feudal lords who had no ties with the Byzantine central government as it was independent of Trebizond. On the other hand, the secular lords and monasteries of Byzantine Thrace and Macedonia had enormous power over the population and, due to imperial immunities, had little to do with the administrative system of the State. Even when they were formally loyal to the central government, they did not render it actual assistance. The central government was powerless (Syuzyumov, 26).

The monasteries were quite popular, the source of poor relief, hospital care, education and most culture. They had substantial power certainly, but it came at the expense of the nobility. Syuzyumov also argues that the Italian states rendered Byzantium into a dependent position:

Italian dominance, caused the policies of the Comneni and Angelos and the Latin conquest of Byzantium, transformed the country. Byzantium became a raw-materials exporter to the Italians. Even the most lively trade of this kind generates income first of all, to the large estates and strengthens the spirit feudal fragmentation. Not every development of trade relations is a phenomenon that facilitates the transition of the country to capitalism (Syuzyumov, 15)

The Serbian offensive began in 1343. Cantacuzenus' incompetence in military matters led to a break with Dusan. The Byzantine feudal lords saw the Turks as the only significant force that could support them in their struggle to maintain their power and lands. Cantacuzenus also hoped to help the Turks create a naval power and some to control the Aegean Sea so as to resist the expansion of the Italian republics. No rational person at the time could have seen this as sane policy. They were knowingly arming their enemies.

The fate of the Byzantine Empire and the outcome of the struggle between two factions of the Byzantine noble factions finally fell into the hands of foreigners. Greeks naturally rebelled

against the feudal population of villages and many towns were terrorized by foreign troops, mainly Turkish, and could not continue to fight. The war had become a national one and the eventual fall of the city to the Turks was long decreed by the Greek elite themselves.

It is reasonable to assume that the emperors outside the empire were likely unaware of the ideological ideals of the factions in the civil war. Their concerns lie elsewhere. Stepan Dusan was the strongest monarch in Europe at the time. He was popular with the Greek speaking regions of southern Europe who sought him out to rescue them from their own ruling class. It did not take long for the zealots themselves to seek Serbian protection.

Sprgiannes, governor of Thrace under Andronicus II, was in secret talks with the Serbs. Dusan would increase his empire, end the civil war, bring order and resurrect the empire. Byzantium was near total collapse while Serbia was in its youth. Factions in the Greek world were bringing in mercenaries, hostile to the empire, from all over the world. When Cantacuzenus heard of the talks with Dusan, he mobilized the remnants of an army but relied mostly on Frankish mercenaries. Knowing this policy's irrationality, he created another civil war and guaranteed more suffering for himself and the empire. John V fled to Serbia once Andronicus III took over.

The expansion of the Serbian empire to the south was the work of local military nobles, not Dusan personally. John V, on orders from Venice, revolted against Dusan given his overwhelming power. He took Albania and Florina under his empire. John's revolt amounted to nothing, leading to his apostasy in Rome a short time later. By 12348 Dusan was the most powerful player on the continent.

Commercial oligarchies do not like land empires gaining power so, as Dusan grew, Venice went to the empire. Genoa has itself grown, leading to a full scale war between these two commercial states. Andronicus went to Genoa.

A few months later Dusan took all of Macedonia except Thessaloniki. Cantacuzenus brought in army after army of Turks, apparently thinking that taking Greek-speaking areas will not occur to them. When Cantacuzenus took Constantinople in 1347. Known from the beginning, whoever took power would be far more miserable than those that did not. The motivation for the civil war then is cannot be a desire for power or control. No "state" existed: there was no money, no civic life and no army.

The Turks and Greek elites ruled, so the "victor" in the civil war gained nothing. The war between the merchant and landed factions was equally meaningless. Any merchant would become the serf of the Italians while landed estates were increasingly empty and power concentrated into a few hands. Only in 1348 the Black Death saved Byzantium from more war. The Turks plundered Greek areas in the west (as was naturally predicted), so there was a desire (at some level) to hand the empire over to them.

Conclusion

The civil war and the revolt of the Zealots (1341-1355) occurred after the death of Andronicus III in 1341. The power of the empire went to the regent of his infant son John V who was the noble and wealthy landowner John Cantacuzenus of Thrace. The opposition forces were shifting and almost bereft of an ideology, but the consensus seems to be certain merchant factions, the navy and the urban poor united briefly to fight against Cantacuzenus.

This movement was not anti-royalist and was not "liberal" in any definition of that sense, despite the wishful thinking of academia. Magnates and the emperor were opposites and were

normally at war. There was no “ruling class” in this respect.

Alliances were created within cities against the decay of imperial power, that is, against the rule of oligarchy. In 1342, after Cantacuzenus failed to capture Thessaloniki, the nobility were expelled. Power in the “second city of the empire” passed to the zealots. It was initially led by a middling merchant class with a military force of Apokaukos and, in theory, Stepan Dusan.

There was some change in the form of redistributed property, the confiscated lands of the nobility and, most importantly, limitations on usury. This was a rebellion protesting a power vacuum, the domination of foreigners and the impending sense of dread knowing that the empire was near the end.

The real puzzle is the actors in the civil war. Byzantium was no prize. To become “emperor” was to have little power in a state that barely functioned and had no money. The chances of being tortured to death by one's elements while in power were high. Seeking power makes no sense. In fact, there seems to be no immediately plausible reason to desire power there at all.

The zealots failed because the coalition against the landed oligarchy just meant that the poor were cooperating with the merchant class that sought to take their place. Their movement weakened and soon split into factions. Early in the summer of 1345 the oligarchy, under Apokaukos, lured the zealot leader Michael Palaiologos into a trap, where he was killed. The rebellion against Apokaukos was vicious, as was the reprisal. The mob killed Apokaukos and no nobles remained in the city.

The truth is that Byzantium never recovered from 1204, neither did Christendom. Fighting on several fronts at once almost all the time, the Byzantine system required precision intelligence, martial ability, moral leadership and unwavering faith in God, the touchstone of the entire civilization. The revolt of the Zealots was done at one of the lowest times of Byzantine history. A civil war with no prize was the proximate cause, but the overall cause is what happens when central authority weakens: landed oligarchy and the increasing concentration of wealth that it implies. World history is either a strong royalism or oligarchical despotism. However these express themselves is unimportant, but it is the key.

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