Byzantine Thessalonike: a unique city?

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Thessalonike has often, both in the Middle Ages and more recently, been called the second city of the Byzantine empire.[1] Such indeed it was in population and economic importance from the middle of the seventh century, when Alexandria and Antioch were captured by the Arabs and became subject to the Muslim Caliphate. It was not, however, except incidentally, the seat of the imperial government since the days in the early fourth century of Galerius, whose triumphal arch and his probable mausoleum, now the church of St George or Rotonda, are familiar to all who visit the city. What I shall concentrate on here is what kind of city Thessalonike was and how it differed from Constantinople, and indeed from most of the other cities of the Byzantine empire.

First of all, it was, unlike Constantinople, a Hellenistic foundation, established about 316 B.C. by Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's generals and a successful contender for the kingship of Macedonia after Alexander's death. He named it after his wife, Alexander's half-sister. It lay, as did Alexandria and Antioch, both major Hellenistic foundations, at the point where one of the major trade routes of the Old World reached the Mediterranean, at the end of a road which led from the Danube and Central Europe, via the valleys of the Morava and of the Vardar to the sea – the route of the present-day railway line from Belgrade to Thessalonike. It was a populous and prosperous city for six and a half centuries before Constantine founded his capital on the Bosporus. Like other Hellenistic cities, it enjoyed a considerable measure of self-rule – more indeed than Alexandria or Antioch, which were royal capitals. It preserved not insignificant traces of its ancient autonomy up to, and even beyond its final capture by the Ottoman Turks in 1430, and from time to time the city authorities acted in complete independence of the imperial government, and sometimes even in open defiance of it.[2] In Constantinople, on the other hand, such local municipal organizations as existed lay under the heavy hand of the central government and its powerful officer, the City Prefect.

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Thessalonike was essentially a trading and manufacturing city. It no doubt profited from the great expansion of long-distance trade resulting from Alexander's conquests. The increasing wealth of the eastern Mediterranean world must have sucked into Thessalonike goods from the Balkans and Central and Northern Europe. What were these goods? We have little direct information. Slaves probably bulked large among them, though as usual there is little hard evidence for this. A rather unsatisfactory fourth century A.D. treatise on geography speaks of iron, textiles, lard and cheese being exported through Thessalonike.[3] To these must probably be added gold. Yet these are hardly enough to account for the prosperity of the city in Roman times, or for the enlargement of its harbour by Constantine, though this may have depended partly on military considerations. Traffic in the opposite direction will have included such Mediterranean products as olive oil and wine and luxury goods of all kinds. Another product was probably salted or smoked fish. Fishing is mentioned throughout the history of the city, and in 1185 we hear by chance of an inspector of fish prices.[4] And a point which has not been given as much consideration as it deserves is the importance of salt in the economy of the city. There is evidence for the production of salt from the sea in the city territory throughout the Middle Ages. In 688 Justinian II granted the revenues from a salt pan near Thessalonike to the church of St Demetrios.[5] A document of 1089 mentions the gift by the emperor Basil II to a monastery of a salt pan in the neighbourhood of the city.[6] In 1415 there were two guilds of salt workers in Thessalonike. (There were no sources of this essential commodity in Central Europe until the development of the mining of rock salt in modern times.)

So much for the north-south flow of trade, some of which may go back to prehistoric times. The construction by the Romans towards the end of the second century B.C. of an east-west military road from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, the Via Egnatia, which passes through Thessalonike, increased the importance of the city as a centre of trade and manufacture. In particular it provided a land route linking Thessalonike both with Italy and Constantinople.

From its position on two major trade routes the city became prosperous under Roman rule. Its size and importance are mentioned by Strabo and by Lucian. It was also for three centuries the administrative centre of a vast area of the Balkans. It became a cosmopolitan city, visited by and settled in by people of many races and languages. Many Romans visited it, including among others Cicero during his period of exile. Tombstones from the Roman period show many Roman names. The city became a Roman colony. St Paul found there a substantial and influential

Jewish community. A cosmopolitan city it remained. In A.D. 904, a native writer observes, many foreigners visited the city, and its streets were always filled with a motley throng of citizens and strangers, as numerous as the sands of the seashore. The citizens, he tells us, grew wealthy from this active commerce, and wore silk garments rather than woollen. Its craftsmen worked in gold, silver and precious stones, bronze, iron, tin, lead and glass.[7] In the twelfth century the annual fair of St Demetrios attracted merchants from all over Greece, Bulgarians, Scythians, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Celts from beyond the Alps, Phoenicians, Egyptians, and men from the shores of the Black Sea.[8] The sermons of archbishop Eustathios in the late twelfth century depict a society in which monks no less than laymen were involved in manufacture, trade and usury. Venetian documents in the twelfth century often show Thessalonike as the ultimate destination of trading voyages. From the eleventh century there were both Venetian and Genoese communities in the city. These foreign visitors and residents seem to have been subject to less strict control in Thessalonike than in Constantinople, where their permission to reside in the city and their movements were subject to surveillance by the City Prefect. In the twelfth century Benjamin of Tudela, indeed, reports that there were about 500 Jews – i.e. 500 households – in Thessalonike, that they were oppressed and lived by silk-weaving, and that their head was appointed by the emperor.[9] It is also worth noting that in the eleventh century and later Thessalonike was on a regular pilgrim route from the west to the Holy Land.

The citizens of Thessalonike were not only in contact with merchants and others from distant lands. They also had close neighbours who differed from them in language and culture. From the middle of the sixth century Slavonic-speaking peoples began to move in the southern Balkans.[10] Their original home had probably been north of the Carpathians, in the region of the upper Vistula, and they had kinsmen further east, in the area of the lower Dniester and Dnieper. By the middle of the fifth century some of them were already settled in the middle Danube region in present-day Hungary. Whether their further advance southwards was due to pressure from other peoples to the north, to the vacuum created in Central Europe by the movement of Lombards, Gepids and other Germanic peoples, or to some other cause, we do not know. In any case, it is of no matter for our present discussion. The Slavs' tribal structure had disintegrated during their long journey from their homeland. As they moved into the southern Balkans they came neither as warrior bands nor as a state in embryo, like some of the Germanic peoples in the fourth century, but as small groups, sometimes fragments of former tribes,

sometimes as extended families or as artificial clans, in search of land to settle on, and booty to picked up on the way. By the later sixth century they were settled, probably at first in small pockets, to the west, north and east of Thessalonike. Yet the scarcity of Slavonic toponyms in the immediate vicinity of the city suggests that the city landowners retained control of their estates in the Axios valley and around the lakes to the north and east of the city.

By the seventh century, Thessalonike and the neighbouring Chalkidike peninsula had become a Greek enclave surrounded on all sides but the sea by a predominantly Slavic population, and such indeed it remained till the early years of the present century.[11] In this respect, it resembled such centres of Hellenic culture as Alexandria and Antioch, which since their foundation had been Greek cities surrounded by non-Greek peoples, upon whom they exercised a very strong cultural influence. By the middle of the seventh century the impetus of the Slavonic migration southwards had petered out and the processes of adaptation, acculturation and in many regions complete assimilation had begun.

Let us look at what we know of the relations between the citizens of Thessalonike and their Slav neighbours in the course of seven centuries. When the Slavs first appeared on the scene they were the occasion of great alarm. Distinguished from the citizens by their language, by their religion, by their blond hair, by their clothing, perhaps by their height, by their material culture, and by the absence among them of any identifiable political authority, they represented the Unknown, the Other. But those who settled near the city and those who passed by on their journey to peninsular Greece must have entered into economic relations with the city, beginning by exchanging the products of agriculture, animal husbandry and hunting for metal goods, textiles and, no doubt, salt. They offered no serious threat to the city, which was well protected by its formidable walls. Their simple and fragmented political and military organization made siege operations impossible. Only when they were taken over and used as auxiliaries by a well organized state could they become dangerous. This happened in 586, when the Avars, a formerly pastoral people from central Asia, launched an attack on the city with the willing or unwilling support of Slav auxiliaries. However the strength of the walls, the courage of the citizens and the intercession of the city's patron St Demetrios saved the situation. Soon the Avars went off to settle in present-day Hungary and the relations between the city and its neighbours resumed their normal course.

Time permits only a few snapshots of how things worked out in the next seven centuries or so. The anonymous cleric who composed a collection of the miracles

of St Demetrios describes the Slav peasants swelling around the city as idolatrous and lawless people who did not observe the rules of marriage – εἰδωλόπηκτον καὶ ἀθεμιτόγαμον καὶ παράνομον ἔθνος.[12] As a learned clergyman he was shocked by their lifestyle. In the same collection, however, we find the story of a Slav chief (*phylarchos*) named Perboundos, who lived in the city, wore Greek clothes, and spoke 'our language'. Perboundos was arrested by the imperial authorities, charged with plotting a revolt, and taken off to Constantinople. Thereupon a delegation of leading citizens and Slav leaders was sent to the capital to intercede for him. Unfortunately, before they arrived, Perboundos, who feared for his life, had escaped, made his way to Slav territory, and persuaded some of his compatriots to rise in arms against Byzantine rule. This small-scale revolt was easily suppressed and Perboundos was captured and executed. There ensued a blockade of the city by angry Slavs, which caused a shortage of grain. The richer citizens exploited the situation by hoarding supplies. In due course the emperor sent ships with food from Constantinople. As soon as they were unloaded the city authorities commandeered them and sent them to buy corn from another Slav community to the south of the city. Another group of Slavs meanwhile, led by their 'kings', attempted to take the city by storm, but were defeated, so the inhabitants believed, with the help of St Demetrios.[13] These events took place between summer 676 and summer 677. I have told this story at some length because it illustrates many things - the growing social differentiation within the Slav communities, the attraction of Greek city life for some of the emerging Slav leaders, the developing links between citizens and Slavs and the normally peaceful relations between them, the way in which these relations could be destroyed by heavy-handed government interference, the inability or unwillingness of the Slavs to combine against the domination of the city, and the readiness of the city authorities to take initiatives independently of Constantinople. Peaceful intercourse was the normal state of affairs, but there were ambiguities and uncertainties on both sides, and local conflict could easily flare up.

In 904, the year when Thessalonike was captured and plundered by an Arab fleet, a somewhat different picture emerges from the detailed account of events by John Kameniates, a cleric and member of the archbishop's staff.[14] (Alexander Kazhdan's rejection of Kameniates' work as a later forgery has not won general acceptance.) Two Slav tribes, already mentioned in the seventh century, the Drougobitai and the Sagoudatoi, still lived in the vicinity of the city, partly in city territory and partly under Bulgarian rule. For at this time the Bulgarians under Tsar

Symeon, profiting by a weak regency in Constantinople, had pushed forward their frontier. Greek inscriptions set up by the Bulgarian authorities to mark the frontier have been found 25 and 35 kilometres from the city walls. Relations with local Slavs and with Bulgarians were friendly, and lively and profitable trade went on with Bulgaria. Relations had greatly improved, observes the writer, since the conversion of Bulgaria a generation earlier. Both the Slavs in the city territory and those in the neighbouring province to the east provided a militia which came to the defence of the city when the Arab attack began. They were particularly valued because of their skill as archers, though they did not distinguish themselves on this occasion. There were also Slavs living in the city. Though not expressly stated, it is clear that all these Slavs were now Christians. Their conversion was not, as was that of the Bulgarian Slavs, the result of an act of state, but was due to the slow and unrecorded missionary activity of the local clergy, and to the attraction of Byzantine life. So they had been integrated into Thessalonian and Byzantine society since the days of Perboundos.

The greatest testimony to the close relations between Greeks and Slavs in Thessalonike in the mid-ninth century is surely the work of Cyril and Methodius, the Apostles of the Slavs.[15] Sons of a Byzantine officer in Thessalonike, bilingual in Greek and Slavonic, and educated in Constantinople, they devised an alphabet which faithfully reflected the phonology of early Slavonic, translated into Slavonic the basic texts of Christian liturgy, trained Slav priests, ad so created a third trans-national language of literature and cultural discourse in Europe side by side with Greek and Latin. The initiative for their work came from emperor and patriarch in Constantinople and reflected short-term political considerations; but the ability to carry it out successfully they had acquired in Thessalonike. Citizens of Thessalonike by birth, by their achievements they became citizens of the world. They changed permanently the cultural map of Europe. Every child who can write his or her own name, from Montenegro to Kamchatka, is a pupil of a pupil of a pupil . . . of these two brothers, who were in every sense men of the word, not men of the sword.

The local Slavs are mentioned incidentally here and there in later accounts, from which it is evident that, though integrated into the life of the region, they often retained their ancestral language and many of their ancestral customs. Men of Slav background come to Thessalonike, are educated there, and go on to play a role in Byzantine society. Examples from the early fourteenth century are Gregory Akindynos, the leading anti-Hesychast theologian and Neophytos Prodromenos,

who compiled a botanical lexicon and other works in one of the great monasteries of Constantinople. The constant contact with people of different language, and the constant interaction between the two communities made Thessalonike a very different kind of city from the capital. It was a frontier city. But a frontier is not necessarily a barrier. As American historians have often remarked in connection with their own country, frontiers are better understood as zones of interaction between two different cultures, as places where they contend with one another and with their physical environment to produce a dynamic that is unique to time and place.

It is interesting to note that the Slavs, both those close to the city and those more remote from it, developed a deep sense of reverence for St Demetrios.[16] During the Norman occupation of the city in 1185 a miracle-working icon was rescued from the church of the saint, probably by Bulgarian monks, and taken to Turnovo in northern Bulgaria. There a church was dedicated to St Demetrios by the brothers Peter and Asen, who a year or two later headed a revolt against Byzantine rule, which culminated in the establishment of the Second Bulgarian Empire. They proclaimed that the saint had abandoned the Byzantines and come over to the Bulgarian side, and that his support guaranteed them victory. Indeed the support of St Demetrios helped to legitimate their rule in the eyes of their subjects. The coins and seals of Bulgarian rulers continued to bear the portrait of the saint until the final conquest of the country by the Turks in 1393.

For several periods in its history, and particularly in the late sixth and seventh centuries and in the fourteenth and early fifteenth, land communication between Thessalonike and Constantinople was cut off. This situation encouraged a certain distancing from the government in the capital and the maintenance and development of institutions of self-government. The prestige and strength of the local magistrates and magnates – who were often the same – was a potential source of conflict between them and the imperial governor of the city, be he a civil servant or a member of the imperial family. When the central government was weak, indecisive or divided, or when communications were difficult, Thessalonike tended to act as an independent city-state. The *politarchai* with whom St Paul had to deal[17] had successors in a council of lay notables and high ecclesiastics which is mentioned from time to time in the history of the city. In the final decades of the empire this council seems to have consisted of seven clergymen and five laymen. Such a council, sometimes called a *dodekada*, continued to deal with the affairs of the Christian population of the city in the early period of Ottoman rule.[18] When

Byzantine rule broke down, as after the Fourth Crusade in 1204, or was divided by civil war between claimants to the throne as in the middle of the fourteenth century, or again in the fifteenth, local self-government became virtual independence. The most striking instance of this was during the civil war of 1342-1349, when the so-called Zealot revolt took place. To deal with the causes and course of events during these years would require a separate study. Suffice it to say that the paralysis of central authority combined with acute social conflict between rich and poor within the city – a conflict made all the more acute by the occupation of the surrounding territory either by rebel forces or by Serbia – led to the establishment of a local regime, which paid lip-service to a weak government in Constantinople, resisted all interference by the usurper John Cantacuzenus, and negotiated independently with the king of Serbia, who was eager to profit by Byzantine weakness to extend his rule. There are some tantalizing similarities between events in Thessalonike and those in contemporary Italian cities, and in particular Genoa, with which Thessalonike had close commercial ties. I am thinking of the role played by the guilds and the active part played by an assembly of the whole citizen body, as well as the massacre of some members of the aristocracy, while others put themselves at the head of a movement demanding some kind of social transformation. But it would be unwise to postulate any direct connection in the total absence of evidence. What is important is that whereas other cities in the remnant that was left of the Byzantine empire were riven by social conflicts and divided in their loyalties, and some, like Adrianople, did make some claim to self-rule by reviving and empowering assemblies of their citizens, Thessalonike alone succeeded in conducting its affairs independently of both claimants to imperial power for five years. Again, in the last centuries of the empire the citizens, through council or assembly, claimed, often successfully, to have rights which did not depend on the will of the central government. This they had done against Boniface of Montferrat after the capture of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade, and against both Venetians and Turks in the fifteenth century. These rights, as formulated in 1423 in the negotiations with Venice, included the right to preserve their ancestral customs and to be ruled by their own magistrates, the right of the archbishop and clergy to carry out their duties without external interference, and the right of the citizens to sell their possessions to whom they wished and to leave the city without hindrance. Other cities in Greece occasionally asserted ancient rights, particularly during the period of Latin rule – Corfu is an example. But none did so so consistently or so successfully as Thessalonike. Whether these rights were survivals from antiquity,

or part of a developing civic ideology which accompanied the decline and eventual collapse of imperial power is a question difficult to answer. Be that as it may, the tendency of Thessalonike to run its own affairs and on occasion to loosen or break its ties with Constantinople is something which distinguished it from other cities of the Byzantine empire, especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

It is probably no accident that it is in Thessalonike that we first find writers dealing overtly with contemporary political themes. Thomas Magister, scholar, teacher, and eventually monk (c. 1275 – c. 1350) in his treatise *On the State* (*Peri politeias*) criticises the shortcomings of his own society, in particularly the economic inequality and the social tension which it engendered. Other Thessalonian writers, such as Nicholas Cabasilas, Gregory Palamas, and Demetrios Kydones also dwell on the injustice and mistreatment of the disadvantaged which they saw around them. They tend to treat social and economic problems from a moral and religious stand-point, but they recognise them as problems for which a solution must and could be found. These men are in a sense forerunners of George Gemistos Plethon, who in the fifteenth century challenged the basic concepts upon which the legitimacy of the Byzantine empire rested.

This new political thinking was one aspect of the lively intellectual culture of Thessalonike in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, a topic which Sir Steven Runciman has discussed and illuminated in his book The *Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge 1970). A key figure in this Renaissance was Thomas Magister, of whom I have just spoken. Known to classical scholars as an editor of and commentator on the Attic tragedians and Pindar, to theologians as the composer of many hymns and panegyrics, and to students of rhetoric as the author of speeches which were long attributed to Aelius Aristides, who lived a thousand years before him, he was a man of wide-ranging culture and a gifted teacher, who numbered among his pupils many men of letters of the two following generations.[19]

Let us glance back to the circumstances which favoured this cultural revival. In 1204 Thessalonike was not captured and pillaged, nor was its social order disrupted, as happened in Constantinople. The city welcomed Boniface of Montferrat, appointed by the Latin emperor Baldwin as King of Thessalonike. Montferrat rule lay lightly on the city, and Boniface derived a certain legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens from his marriage to Margaret of Hungary, widow of emperor Isaac II Angelos. The city's rights and privileges were respected by the new ruler. There was no panic exodus of citizens, as there was from Constantinople, though some magnates had to hand over their luxurious town houses to knights in

Boniface's service. There was certainly no pillaging of works of art or of books, and little change in the pattern of social life. The great scholar-bishop Eustathios was not yet ten years dead, and his library, with its many rare classical and patristic texts, was probably still intact. Nikephoros Blemmydes was sent to Thessalonike by the Nicean emperor John Vatatzes in 1240 to search for books. John Pediasimos Pothos, born in Thessalonike c. 1250, taught there from 1284 to c. 1310 and wrote on mythology, logic, mathematics, music, astronomy, canon law and medicine; he clearly had a rich library at his disposal.[20] All these factors provided ideal conditions for the 'take-off' of literature and scholarship in the late thirteenth century, and enabled Thessalonike to break the almost total monopoly of higher education and culture by Constantinople, which had prevailed before 1204.

Space does not permit here even the most cursory account of cultural life in Thessalonike in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The names of a few men of letters born and mainly active in Thessalonike will provide an impressionistic picture. Theodore Triklinios, editor of classical Greek poetry and student of ancient Greek metre, has been described as the first modern textual critic. Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos composed a history of the church from the earliest times, making use of sources now lost. Nikephoros Choumnos, statesman, diplomat, essayist and scholar was the father of Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina-Palaiologina, who played an important part in the theological and monastic movement of the early fourteenth century. Neilos Kabasilas was a theologian and polemicist. His kinsman Nicholas Chamaetos Kabasilas wrote on rhetoric, astronomy, law, theology and political theory. Gregory Palamas, the theologian of the Hesychast movement, became archbishop of Thessalonike: his adversary Gregory Akindynos was of Slavic origin, and studied in Thessalonike. Among jurists are to be numbered Constantine Harmenopoulos, whose handbook of Byzantine law was translated into Slavonic and adopted in Russia, and in the early nineteenth century became the legal code of the new Greek state, and Matthew Blastares, canonist and hymnographer, whose *Syntagma* of civil and ecclesiastical law was translated into Serbian at the instance of King Stefan Dushan, and later used in Russia. Isidore Glavas, archbishop of Thessalonike and friend of the emperor Manuel II, in his sermons and letters provided fascinating information on conditions during the first Turkish occupation of the city. Demetrios and Prochoros Kydones became champions of a religious rapprochement with the West and translated into Greek most of the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. Finally, Thessalonike provided two ecumenical patriarchs, Isidore Boucheiras (1347-50)

and Philotheos Kokkinos (1352-55, 1364-76), who in his youth had been Thomas Magister's cook and pupil and who wrote inter alia the Lives of several contemporary Thessalonian saints.

The arts flourished alongside letters in Thessalonike. New churches were built and decorated, such as the Holy Apostles and Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos, both in the fourteenth century. It is clear too that painters from Thessalonike were in demand in Serbia and by their work contributed to the development of Serbian art. Those who decorated the monastery church at Sopochani in the 1260s have been thought by art historians to have been under the direct influence of a workshop in Thessalonike. As the Serbian kingdom expanded into Macedonia and King Milutin maintained close contact with the city, Thessalonian influence became more evident. We know the names of a team of travelling painters, Michael Astrapas and Eutychios, who contributed to the decoration of the church of St Clement in Ohrid, of St George in Staro Nagorichino, and of the royal chapel at Studenica in the early fourteenth century.[21] On the north wall of the royal chapel at Grachanica decorated about 1321 there appears a portrait of archbishop Eustathios of Thessalonike, probably the only classical scholar to attain sainthood. The family name Astrapas is extremely rare, and it is interesting that Theodore Triklinios mentions a certain John Astrapas, whom he calls a *grapheus*, and who drew the diagrams for his short treatise on the nature of the moon, which he wrote in Thessalonike. This evidence links the travelling team with the city.[22] There was much lavish decoration of churches in northern Serbia in the later fourteenth century which reflects the influence of Thessalonike. So the city provided an alternative centre to Constantinople in art as well as in literature and scholarship, theology and law.

In conclusion I will try to summarize the history of Thessalonike in the last generation before its final conquest by the Ottoman Turks. It is a complicated and revealing story. The fate of the city was part of the disintegration of the last remnants of the Byzantine empire. Turkish pressure, though intermittent, was inexorable. The imperial dynasty of the Palaiologoi made things worse as sons quarrelled with fathers and brothers with brothers over an ever-shrinking heritage. At one moment there were four rival emperors each supported by his own faction, seeking to outwit or outmanoeuvre one another for control of what was now a phantom empire – *carstvo koga nema*, in the words of a Yugoslav historian.[23] Sometimes one or other, from choice or necessity, established himself in Thessalonike, or was sent there as governor or as exile. The worthy but hapless

Manuel II was for some time governor of the city and later, excluded from the succession by his father John V, established himself there as an independent emperor from 1382 to 1387. He tried hard to organise an effective resistance to the Turks, but in the end had to leave the city in 1387 because the citizens preferred to surrender rather than face the risk of capture and pillage. They were probably right in their assessment of the situation. The Turks then treated Thessalonike with relative clemency, permitting churches to function without hindrance and the local magistrates to exercise limited authority. For Sultan Murad I Thessalonike was important as a centre of trade and as a stepping stone to Constantinople. So the city enjoyed a quasi-automonous position under Turkish sovereignty, and was not integrated into the structure of the Ottoman empire. Many of its citizens emigrated to Byzantine or Latin territory. Others embraced Islam.

The defeat and capture of Sultan Bayezid by the Mongol Tamerlane at the Battle of Ankara in 1402 granted a short respite to the empire. On 9 May 1403 Thessalonike was returned to Byzantine rule by a treaty with Suleyman, Bayezid's eldest son - who, incidentally was a poet. But its situation remained uncertain, and the haemorrhage of its citizens continued, while relations between the local magistrates and the governors sent from Constantinople were often tense. So long as Suleyman controlled the Balkans there was no direct threat to Thessalonike. But the citizens and magistrates, more realistic in their evaluation of the situation than the government in Constantinople, appear to have realised that the Byzantine empire had no future, and that they were faced with the stark choice between getting the best terms they could from the Turks or getting serious help from the West, probably at the price of church union and loss of their independence. After all, the city had existed and flourished for centuries before Constantine the Great. If all went well it could continue to flourish after the last of his successors had vanished. The tradition of independence, reinforced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was strong. There developed among citizens and magistrates two factions, pro-Turk and pro-western. The latter group was probably involved in trade with Italy. Intermittent blockade or siege of the city began again in 1411, causing increasing poverty, hunger and despair. Archbishop Symeon mentions a strong movement among the citizens for surrender during the intensified Turkish siege in 1422-3. (They justified their attitude by referring to Romans 13.1-2.) Another group was in contact with Venice, the most powerful western state with a presence in the eastern Mediterranean. In 1423 a message arrived from Constantinople urging the rich to fund the defence of the city themselves, as the

emperor, who was then paying tribute to the Sultan, could do nothing to help. This brought matters to a head. The pro-Venetian policy carried the day, and a formal request was addressed by the Council to the Venetian Senate to take over the city. The governor, Andronikos, the third son of Manuel II, seems to have played no direct part in the negotiations. The Venetians agreed, and on 7 July 1423 a treaty was signed. The city was to become a Venetian dependency, and Venice agreed to respect its traditional rights. According to a contemporary historian it undertook to make Thessalonike a second Venice.[24] The Senate no doubt expected to be able to make peace with Sultan Murad II, but its approaches were repeatedly rejected. The Ottoman blockade continued. Conditions in the city reached famine level. Citizens began lowering themselves from the walls by ropes to surrender to the Turks. Venice, its hopes of peace disappointed, did not keep its part of the bargain. The Council was suppressed and a committee of Venetians set up with authoritarian powers. Appeals to Venice were met by empty promises. In 1430 Murad moved a large army up to the walls and called on the Venetians to surrender. Many citizens urged acceptance of this offer, but they were held in tight control by a mercenary force introduced by the Venetians. Finally the Sultan lost his patience, and on 29 March took the city by storm. There followed the three days of plunder permitted by Islamic law, and then the Sultan restored order with a firm hand.

So ended the history of Byzantine Thessalonike. It did not, of course, mark the end of the city. In the early years of Turkish rule the population of the city was small. Many citizens had fled. From 1478 on regular census reports survive. In that year the population was a little over 10,000, of whom the majority were Christians. By 1500 there were 20,000 inhabitants, still with a Christian majority, and there were already 4,000 Jews. By 1519 the population had risen to almost 30,000, of whom more than half were Jews, refugees from Spain and Portugal, who brought with them a variety of skills and a spirit of enterprise.[25] This marks the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the city, which demonstrates once again its unique character.

There is room for much further research on the history of Thessalonike, on its retention of some of the features of a late antique city, on its long and successful symbiosis with the surrounding Slavs, on the influence which it exerted on the whole Balkan region, and in particular Bulgaria and Serbia, in the later Middle Ages, on its ambiguous relationship with Constantinople, on its history under Ottoman rule, on its long-lasting role as a major Jewish city, which was so tragically terminated in our own time, and on many other aspects of its civic existence.[26]

NOTES

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1 E.g. Michael Choniates, Ep.36.2, οἵα πόλις ἑάλω. πρώτη μετὰ τὴν πρώτην καὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ἁπασῶν βασιλεύουσαν (of the capture of Thessalonike by the Normans in 1185).

2 For an early instance cf. Malchus, frg. 20 (R.C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary classicising historians of the later Roman Empire* II [Liverpool 1983] 436. 12-19). In 479 when the imminence of an Ostrogoth attack became known, the citizens of Thessalonike declared no confidence in the Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum, took the keys of the gates from him and entrusted them to the bishop.

3 *Exposition totius mundi et gentium* (ed. J. Rougé) 51.

4 Eustathios, *The Capture of Thessaloniki* (ed. J.R. Melville Jones, Canberra 1988) 73.

5 A.A. Vasiliev, 'An Edict of the Emperor Justinian II', *Speculum* 18 (1943) 1-13.

6 Actes de Xénophon, no, 1.146.

7 John Kameniates, *De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, ch.9.

8 Timarion (ed. Romano) 114-123.

9 *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (ed. M.N. Adler) p.18.

10 On the penetration of the Slavs into Macedonia and peninsular Greece cf. A.P. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom* (Cambridge 1970) 3-12, 320-2; R.J.H. Jenkins (ed.) *Constantine Porphyrogenitus De Administrando Imperio. Commentary* (London 1962) 182-95; G. G. Litavrin and A.P. Novosel'cev (edd.), *Konstantin Bagrjanorodnyj, Ob Upravlenii Imperii* (Moscow 1989) 427-45; D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe 500-1453* (London 1971) 42-68; Ph. Malingoudis, Σλάβοι στὴ μεσαιωνικὴ Ἑλλάδα (Thessalonike 1988); id. Ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη καὶ ὁ κόσμος τῶν Σλάβων (Thessalonike 1991); H. Ditten, *Zur Bedeutung der Einwanderung der Slawen*, F. Winkelmann and others (edd.), *Byzanz im siebten Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1978) 73-160; G.G. Litavrin, *Razvitie etničeskogo samosoznanija slavjanskix narodov v epoxu rannego srednevekov'ja* (Moscow 1982) 33-49.

11 A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World* (London 1977) 103.

12 P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius et la pénétration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, I (1979) 187.17.

13 Ibid, 208-21.

14 John Kameniates, *De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, ch.20.

15 The literature on Cyril and Methodius and their influence is immense. Cf. A.P. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs* 26-66; F. Dvornik, *Les légendes de Constantine et de Méthode vue de Byzance* (Prague, 1933, rpt. Hattiesburg, Minnesota 1969); I. Dujčev and others (eds.), *Kirilometodievska bibliografija 1940-1980* (Sofia 1983).

16 D. Obolensky, 'The Cult of St. Demetrius of Thessalonike in the History of Byzantine-Slav Relations', *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe* (London 1982) IV.

17 Acts, 17.6,8.

18 A.E. Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek nation 1204-1451* (New Brunswick, NJ 1970) 146; id., *The Greek Nation 1453-1669* (New Brunswick, NJ 1976) 191.

19 On Thomas Magister cf. most recently S.K. Skalistes, *Θωμᾶς Μάγιστρος. Ὁ βίος καὶ τὸ ἔργο του* (Thessalonike 1984).

20 CF. C.N. Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries (1204-ca. 1310)* (London 1982), 117-125.

21 P. Miljković-Pepek, *Deloto na zografite Mihailo i Evtihij* (Skopje 1967).

22 S. Kissas, *Solunska umetnička porodica Astrapa*, (Zograf 1974) 335-7.

23 I. Djurić, *Sumrak Vizantije* (1984) 13.

24 Ducas, P. 197.18 (Bonn edn.)

25 H. Lowry, 'Portrait of a city: the population and topography of Ottoman Selanik (Thessalonike) in the year 1478', *Diptycha* 2 (1980-1) 254-93.

26 See now, on the more recent past, M. Mazower, 'Salonica between East and West, 1860-1912', *Dialogos* 1 (1994) 104-27.