

WOMEN AND POWER IN THE HISTORY OF THE ASAN DYNASTY

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In the 13th century the South-East Europe witnessed the rise of two new Slavic independent states, Bulgaria and Serbia. According to Francis Dvornik, this part of Europe was mostly dominated by the Byzantine Empire. The Emperor Basil II, also known as Bulgaroktonos (Bulgarian-slayer), has destroyed the first Bulgarian Empire and thus, since the 11th century, Bulgaria existed only as a Byzantine province. In 1186 a rebellion broke out in Bulgaria, particularly among the Danube region nobles, who rose against the Byzantium. The takeover was highly successful and conveyed the beginning of the Second Bulgarian Empire under the control of the brothers Peter (Kalopeter) and Ivan Asan (Asen, Assen), who subsequently became tsars and established the stronghold at Târnovo (Dvornik 2001, 80, 82). In consequence, the brothers not only became part of the historical records of the restored Bulgaria, but also founded the newly ruling dynasty, the dynasty of the Asan's¹.

The Asan dynasty played a major role in the Bulgarian history. The accession to power of the Asan brothers belong to the historical episode of the rebirth of the Bulgarian statehood. The rebellion of Peter and Ivan Asan had an accurate purpose, the one of restoring Bulgaria within its ethnical and historical boundaries. The political objectives, however, were divergent from the current realities. A statehood pattern for Bulgaria, was the one established during the reign of Tsar Simeon (893-927; since 913 - tsar). The second notion de facto and de jure of concerning the Bulgarian kingdom referred to the revival of the Bulgarian state on the map of the South-East Europe. The political

of the Asan's would have also secured the dynasty's policies of their power accession (Божилев, Гюзелев 2006, 428-429). *The idea of creating a unitary state of Bulgaria led to the compelling the right of succession to the throne.*

Ivan I Asan (1186-1196), *the founder of the Asan dynasty*, was Peter IV's (1185-1197) co-governor, since 1190, officially declaring himself tsar of the Bulgarians (Цанкова-Петкова 1978; Петров 1985; Божилев 1985, 27-40).

The history of the Asan dynasty was not uniform (Божилев 2000, 47-54). After the death Ivan Asan I (1196) succeeded by that of Peter IV (1197), the political power has passed to their younger brother Kaloyan (Kaloioannes – Ivan the Handsome, 1197-1207) (Божилев, Гюзелев 2006, 441-457). The ambitious and “*cunning leader*”, who has also called himself the “*king of Bulgarians and the Vlachs*”, requested the help of Rome. He asked the Pope to send him the imperial crown as well as elevate the residential bishop (the one if the capital Târnovo) to the rank of patriarch. In 1204, Kaloyan has received the crown together with the scepter of Rome and the banner of St. Peter and St. Paul. However the Latin-Bulgarian alliances remained fruitless. The demeanor of the Bulgarian leader was much to impregnate into the Byzantine mentality and therefore he could not adjust himself to the mentality of the modern western order (Dvornik 2001, 85-86).

In 1207, Kaloyan has been murdered, as a result of a court plot. The power has been subsequently arrogated by the nephew of the Asan brothers, Boril (1207-1218), son of Ivan Asan I's sister, whose name has not been retained (Божилев, Гюзелев 2006, 697)². “*След тези (первиту Асеневици),*

¹The Romanian and Bulgarian historical literature is currently subject to a strong controversy as to the origins of the two brothers – some authors claim they are Romanians, while others insist on their Bulgarian origins. The present case study will not target this historiographical issue, as it renders a particular research field. For clear evidence, one needs a peculiar approach, while this does not comply with one's expertise.

²Genealogical table: *Династия на Асеневици и фамилията във Византия (1186-1460).*

прочее, когато прие царство техниятъ царъ Борилъ” (Церковный 1944, 44).

The emperor Boril Asan, emperor Kaloyan’s nephew (“сестреник”) will be using the royal title in reference to his relation with the Asan, on the feminine line, the one of his mother. In order to provide more legitimacy to his supremacy, Boril has resorted to other “political arguments of the time”, namely, by marrying the widow of Kaloyan (“скитка”), his original aunt (Божилков, Гюзелев 2006, 74).

Notably, these circumstances endow convincing evidence as to the certain participation of Boril and Kaloyan’s wife at the accomplishment of the plot regarding King Kaloyan (1197-1207) murder. Without her support and agreement on the “royal assassination” plan, chances of success regarding the overpowering would be most certainly null.

The marriage with Kaloyan’s widow had a substantial importance for the future plans of emperor Boril. On one hand, he would undeniably secure his right to the throne, and thus to absolute power. On the other hand, Boril ensured a both legal and legitimate warrant over the Asan dynasty succession. The precedent has proved to be quite “catchy”, as it has been lately used multiple times in the struggle for the throne birthright, in the medieval Bulgaria (Андреев 1988, 126-130).

Another reasoning with regards to the conquest of the leadership by the latter, namely on the grounds of a plot and not within the birthright legitimacy, is the one referring to the fact that Asan I’s sons, Ivan and Alexander – the legitimate heirs – were bound to flee from Târnovo and the Galicia principality (Божилков 1985, 69).

In order to substantiate alliances with the Latin Empire, Boril decides to marry his step-daughter, Maria (Kaloyan’s daughter) with the Latin Emperor Henry, in 1211 (Цанкова-Петкова 1970, 165-166). Historical sources do not reveal whose was the actual initiative in the matter (*of the matrimonial alliance*). It is nevertheless unquestionable that the union between the Bulgarian family and the imperial Latin court is based on a political intent. The evidence confirming the fact is the one illustrated in the era documents, which depicted the marriage as “arranged” through the “marriage diplomacy”, underlining the fact that the bride’s dowry was huge. The carts with dowry

were drawn by 60 oxes, full of various precious things, such as expensive velvet fabrics, luxurious fur and clothing etc. (Андреев 1988, 128)³.

The 1211 matrimonial contract mounted as a political premise for the marital alliances in the years to come. It was thanks to the “matrimonial policy”, as well as to Henry’s three nieces, that the Latin emperor was able to consolidate alliances, in 1213, with three South-East and Central European leaders: King Andrew II of Hungary, the Bulgarian tsar, Boril and with the emperor of Nicaea, Theodore Laskaris (Божилков 1985, 72).

However the regional political events have changed the course of action of emperor Boril’s matrimonial policies. Shortly after his daughter’s marriage, the Bulgarian empress was forced to give up the imperial throne to a newly appointed empress. Boril remarried Emperor Henry’s niece, the daughter of his sister Iolanta and Pierre de Curtene. She is known as being the first Bulgarian empress with Western European origins. Her name however has not been retained and she was not known for anything major. Her sister, another daughter of Iolanta, was married to Andrew, the Hungarian king. This union’s goal was to merge the relations between Boril and the Hungarian emperor. There was a treaty that has been signed in 1214, which rendered the marriage of the Hungarian throne successor with Bela, Boril’s daughter (Андреев 1988, 126-128; А. Данчева-Васильева 1977, 35-51; Цанкова-Петкова 1970, 165-166).

After several years, the struggle for the Bulgarian throne became very intense. In 1218, Boril has been dismissed by another legitimate contender to the throne, Ivan Asan II. Boril was blinded and imprisoned “for the evil caused to the dynasty and the country” (Данчева-Васильева 1977, 35-51; Божилков 1985, 69-76). Subsequently, one can reach the conclusion that the two politically-cored marriages concluded by Boril, did not secure him neither the happiness nor the legitimate birthright.

³ „Пристигането на Мария в Цариград прдствлявало невиджано зрелище – прията на българската принцеса била натоварена на 60 мулета, а всяко животно било покрито с 8 лакти червено кадифе, половина от което се вдачело по земята. Далеч по-големи от зестрата били политическите активи за латинската дипломация, която си осигурила» союз с Българияй възможность сосредоточить усилия „си по посока на Мала Азия и Енур”.

Ivan Asan II (1218-1241), son of Ivan Asan I and empress Elena (Дуйчев 1941; Данчева-Василева 1977, 52-56; Цанкова-Петкова 1978, 109-137; Василева 1981, 134-143; Божилов 1985, 77-92; Божилов, Гюзелев 2006, 479-500). His birthday is not specifically known, but according to Jordan Andreev's estimates, it would be in the 1195-1196. His childhood was marked by his father's assassination; at the age of 8 or 11, he has then escaped for 10 in Galicia, where he has received political shelter. His first wife, Russian princess Anna, gave birth to two daughters: Maria (future wife of the despot Manuel Angelos) (Божилов 1985, 87, 100-102) and Asanna (? - her name has not been retained) future wife of the Serbian emperor, Steve Vladislav (Андреев 1988, 131; Златарски 1972, 323-418; Божилов 1985, 77).

He acceded to power, while still very young, with the aid of the Russian *druzhina*. He had called himself "*Emperor Ivan Asan, son of Old Asan*" or "*the young emperor Ivan Asan*". Right after the Klokochnitsa victory over Theodore Angelos of Epirus (1224-1230) (Жаворонков 1977, 197), March 2 1230, he started calling himself "*the absolute rightful emperor*", "*the emperor of Bulgarians and the Greeks*" (Кожухаров 1974, 128). This victory has entirely changed the situation in the Balkans and led to a radical change of the political map of the South-East Europe, since the Despotate of Epirus has been erased from it.

According to Ivan Bojilov's confirmation, after ascending the throne, he divorced his first wife, due to state interests and sent her to the monastery (Божилов 1985, 87). In order to ensure his political alliance with King Andrew II of Hungary, Ivan Asan II, offered him the conclusion of a "*dynasty alliance*". Ivan Asan II asked to marry his daughter, Anna-Maria, Ivan Asan II asked him to marry his daughter Anna-Maria, mentioned in "*Синодика*" ("*Sinodica*" - a.n.) and in "*Житието на св. Петка*" ("*Zhitieto na sv. Petka*" - a.n.) with the name of Anna (Попруженко 1928, 88; Божилов 1985, 87).

Andrew II accepted the offer under one condition – the blessing of the Pope. For this reason, the marital contract, has been delayed, but finally, namely in 1221, has reached the respective blessing, the one Pope Honor II. Anna-Maria has been officially declared empress of Bulgaria. As a dowry, Ivan Asan II has received lands in Belgorod and

Branicevo (Златарски 1972, 325-326; История 1954, 142). Ergo, Ivan Asan II has related not only with the Hungarian family, but extensively with the Latin imperial one and with the family of Nicaea Emperor. Of the Latin Emperor's daughters was King Andrew II's wife. Consequently, the affair in question led to an agreement with regards to the marriage of the Hungarian king's son with Maria, daughter of Theodore I Laskaris (1204/1206 - 1222), emperor of Nicaea (Андреев 1988, 132).

Ivan II Asan married the 16 years old Anna-Maria, who gave birth to four children. One of the daughters, Elena, married Theodore II Laskaris, future emperor of Nicaea (1254-1258), this gait being considered as a guarantee for the political alliances between Bulgaria and Nicaea. After the throne accession, Elena has been designated Tsarina Irene. She bore six children and one of her daughters, Irene, was to become the wife of the Bulgarian Tsar Constantine Tikh Asan (1257-1277) (Божилов 1985, 102-103).

In 1237, after the death of Anna-Maria, Ivan Asan II was enchanted by Irene, the daughter of the captive king, Theodore Komnenos. According to the documents of the period, Irene was "*sleek and beautiful*" (Попруженко 1928, 88; Божилов 1985, 87).

Ivan Asan II has then decided to conclude a third marriage, but this gait has been stopped by the determined patriarch of Târnova Vissarion, who has refused to marry them, according to the orthodox canons, which stated the invalidity of the third marriage. Ivan Asan II has solved this problem just like he did with his politico-military ones: by dismissing and assassinating the "*stubborn*" patriarch Vissarion. Responding, the Bulgarian Church clergy did not recognize the third marriage of the leader, or the title of empress given to Irina; moreover, the patriarch Vissarion was later sanctified (Божилов 1985, 77-92).

The marriage with Irene resulted in the birth of three children: Michael Asan and two girls, Maria and Anna-Theodora. Maria was later the wife of the Bulgarian tsar Mitso Asan (1256-1257) and the mother of the Bulgarian emperor Ivan III Asan (1279-1280). Anna-Theodora married the "*sevastokrat*" Peter (who has received the title in question through the status of royal son-in-law) and then became the mother of the future wife of

the tsar Shishman. “*This marriage was the last seed of the Asan dynasty in Bulgaria*” (“[...] от тузи брак води начала си последният клон на Асенавата фамилия в България”) (Божилков 1981, 153-177).

After the death of the famous tsar Ivan Asan II in 1241, who was retained by the Bulgarian history as “a glorious personality, who shed glow on the people and on the throne of Bulgaria, and who was installed during a period of decadence, waste and petty struggles to death, for the throne succession” (Dvornik 2001, 92). The successor of Ivan Asan II was his younger son, Koloman I Asan (1241-1246), bore from the legal marriage with the Hungarian princess Anna-Maria, and therefore grandson of Ivan Asan I. His reign was not long as he was killed, supposedly, by his step-mother Irina, who was securing the birthright to throne succession of her son Michael Asan (Андреев 1988, 140-141; Златарски 1972, 419-428).

The King Michael II Asan (1246-1256), was Ivan’s Asan II and Irene Komnene’s son (whose marriage has not been blessed and thus the child was denominated as a “bastard”- a.n.). He was born not earlier than 1238/1239 and he was only 7 or 8 years old when declared emperor (Божилков, Гюзелев 2006, 503). In the documents of the period he was called “*the emperor Michael Asan, son of the great emperor Asan and the grandson of the old emperor Asan*” (Андреев 1988, 142). His enthronement did not provoke discontent as he was the sole male heir of the Asan regent line, after the death of King Koloman Asan I. His power-hungry mother, Irene has been declared queen.

Era sources have withheld remarks to his royal origins, both for the paternal and on the maternal side. The Kostur inscription since the times of Tsar Michael Asan II (1246-1256) “*Надпись отъ Костуръ отъ времето на царь Михаилъ II Асъня (1246-1256)*”: “† Моление на раба Божий Михаилъ Асънь, синъ на великия царь Асънь, и на неговата майка Ирина, (дщеря) Теодора Комнинъ”, serves as an example (Надпись 1944, 277).

However, Irene Komnene did not manage to coordinate the internal and the foreign political issues. During her reign, Bulgaria lost several territories: “*Thrace, Macedonia, Branicev and the Belgorod County*” (Божилков, Гюзелев 2006, 504).

The contemporary sources illustrated her as very uncultivated tsarina, who lacked the sense of insight. Literally, the country lacked a leader. As a consequence of the multiple discontents, the Bulgarian tsar Michael Asan II, together with his mother, were both victims of the rebellion of the distressed nobles. They have been removed from the government by the great “*sevastokrat*” Peter, husband of Theodora, who was Michael Asan II’s sister. Irene Komnene has titled as a nun, through the name of Xenia and send to a convent. Her imperial title has not been maintained (Цанкова-Петкова 1978, 141-146; Андреев 1988, 143).

The Emperor Michael Asan II married the daughter of the Russian Prince Rastislav Mikhailovich (son in law of the Hungarian King Bela IV), who, received from the Mongols causing his expulsion, the Slovenian „Banat” and the Belgrade from the Hungarians (Андреев 1988, 144). Michael Asan II was in vain waiting for help from his brother in law Rastislav. “*Rastislav has later tried to obtain the Bulgarian throne, together with the territories comprised under the Hungarian suzerainty, which would have led to the configuration of new state of considerable proportions. He had however to give up the idea, as the Bulgarian nobles would never accept a foreign tsar and a foreign prince as a vassal of Hungary*” (Dvornik 2001, 92-93).

Michael Asan II’s fate is not known exactly. He died in 1256 at the age of 18. According to some sources, the cause of death were wounds, to others, it was his brother Kaloman Asan II who killed him (Божилков, Гюзелев 2006, 507).

Koloman (Kaliman) II Asan (1256), Michael Asan II’s successor, was Ivan Asan II’s and the Hungarian princess Anna-Maria’s son. He was righteous to pretend to the throne, but he nevertheless resorted to Boril’s method, acceding to power through the marriage with the widow of Michael Asan II. Marriage with the widow empress gave the direct and legitimate right to the royal throne.

In the defense “*of his daughter’s honor*” the Russian Prince Rastislav Mikhailovich has expressed his ambition to rule Bulgaria. Whilst the attack on Târnovo, Koloman Asan II died. As earlier mentioned, the Russian Prince did not succeed to conquest the Bulgarian throne and therefore never became tsar of Bulgaria; he had then to set-

tle only for an incomplete success, namely that of taking his daughter home (Златарски 1972, 465-474; Margos 1965, 295; Божилов 1985, 113-114; История 1982, 271; Андреев 1988, 148).

Given the custom of obtaining the royal throne in Bulgaria at the time, one may reach the following conclusion: if the claimant to the throne lacked the royal-dynasty origins (which in fact would not allow him obtaining the royal crown), he could then marry a royal representative. This would be sufficient for the accession to the throne. The next contender to the Bulgarian throne did not intervene in the tradition of obtaining it. The main weapon in the struggle for power becomes again, the female representative.

A crucial reason that justified the birthright to leadership of Mitso Asan (1256-1257) was his wife, Anna-Maria, the daughter of Emperor Ivan Asan II and Irene Komnene (Божилов 1985, 110-113; Божилов, Гюзелев 2006, 509).

Since the male royal line in the Asan dynasty has been interrupted in 1256, accordingly to the Bulgarian historic opinion, Ivan Bojilov, the struggle for power passed to the clans from Bulgaria and the ones from the Byzantine Empire, which were somehow related to the Asans (Божилов 1985, 111).

Another Bulgarian historic, Jordan Andreev, supposes that the fight for the throne was held "on the second ascendancy line". An example confirming the assertion is the marriage of Mitso Asan (Андреев 1988, 149). Marrying the daughter of a tsar, Mitso becomes worthy of the royal title of the Asans. The Târnovo aristocracy has never recognized Mitso as an official emperor, at least not one belonging to the Asan dynasty line (*he has been refused to be recognized his right to the Asan dynasty heritage* - a.n.). Furthermore, the Bulgarian aristocracy has longtime insisted on their right of electing a tsar. In fact, due to the fight for the crown, the country saw the beginning of a civil war in 1256 (Божилов 1985, 115).

Against Mitso Asan went another contender to the throne – Constantine Tikh, a relative of Steve Uroš I Nemanja (1243-1276). In good relations with both the Serbian and the Greek dynasties, supported by the diplomatic alliances in Nicaea, Constantine Tikh ends up by defeating Mitso Asan, who is forced to abandon the throne, togeth-

er with his family and to flee in Nicaea (Андреев 1988, 149-150).

Constantine Tikh Asan (1257-1277) came from the Serbian-Bulgarian aristocracy and was a great landowner in the south and the west of Bulgaria. Constantine Tikh Asan has been acknowledged emperor of Bulgaria by the "aristocracy and the people", since 1256, when the struggle for power began. In order to receive the royal title of the Asans, he divorced his first wife (her name and origins have not been withheld), and after sending her to a convent, he remarries Irene Laskaris, the daughter of the Nicaean emperor Theodore II Laskaris (1254-1258) and of Elena Asan (Златарски 1972, 477; Божилов 1985, 116). Irene inherited the „royal blood” of the Hungarian and Bulgarian kings. She was the granddaughter of the tsar Ivan Asan II and the grand-grand-daughter of Andrew II of Hungary.

The marriage of Constantine Tikh Asan with the granddaughter of Ivan Asan II has solved simultaneously two problems. On one hand, Constantine Tikh Asan received the royal title of the Asans and on the other, this was the chance to prevent the interruption of the Asan dynasty.

This marriage however did not last longtime. Worth mentioning nevertheless that Irene has politically manifested herself. After her brother Ivan Laskaris IV (1258-1261) has been blinded and dethroned by Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259-1282), she decided to put her husband against the Greek emperor. These ambitious political plans failed due to several reasons, personal ones including. One year after the marriage, Irene Laskaris has passed away, subsequently Constantine Tikh Asan, widowed, asked to marry one of the ladies from the imperial family Palaiologos. It goes without saying that the third marriage of Constantine Tikh Asan had a political nucleus. Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene, niece of the Byzantine emperor and daughter of Ivan Kantakouzenos and Irene Palaiologina, sister of emperor Michael III Palaiologos, became his wife. Worth mentioning is the fact that the initiative of this marriage conclusion belonged to the byzantine emperor, as he tried to gain an ally in the Bulgarian tsar. Cities such as *Mesembria (Messevr)* and *Anchialus (Anhialo)* were promised as dowry. Even so, Michael III Palaiologos, delayed the conceding of these cities, motivating the hinder by

the fact that these centers could be administered by Byzantine representatives solely. In 1270, the son of Constantine Tikh Asan was born, who was baptized with the name of Michael and who has been therefore considered as a representative of the royal Byzantine family (Андреев 1988, 153).

Despite that, Michael III Palaiologos kept refusing the concession of these two cities to Bulgaria. The dissention has then exceeded the family boundaries and transformed itself in regional and interstate discrepancies, which at the time, was solved in a single way, namely the war. On this particular conduct of the things, insisted the wife of Constantine Tikh Asan.

Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene showed a particular political position engaging herself in state affairs and consequently “declaring war” to her uncle as she wished to gain back her righteous dowry. *De facto*, she was the one leading Bulgaria, transforming its capital in the centre of intrigues and plots against the Byzantine Empire. Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene was sending letters to her mother and the Byzantine emperor where she threatened them with vengeance.

It was mainly her idea of creating a unitary Orthodox vanguard, with the purpose of drawing to her side the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem (“срещу унията, към който трябвало да се присоединят патриарсите на Александрия и Иерусалим”) (Божилов 1985, 116; Андреев 1988, 153). She even used to send her delegates to the Egyptian sultan, in order to persuade him to declare war to the Byzantine Empire.

Another significant issue that Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene was dealing with, was that of the fate of her sons. So that the children of Constantine Tikh Asan resulted from his first marriage were removed from the throne accession, she decided to crown her youngest son. For the first time in Bulgaria, a 2 year old was standing for the throne.

If at that time, the birthright of the first-born was to be acknowledged, then Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene would have declared a new Byzantine tradition. According to Byzantine law, the undeniable right to the throne did not belong to the first-born, but to the one born after the enthronement of his parents. The Bulgarian empress Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene, a

royal Bulgarian representative with royal Byzantine blood, has for the first time applied the Byzantine succession tradition at the Bulgarian court.

Her son, Michael Asan, became a contender to the throne of the kingdom as he would have been born in the ***bagrenitsa*** – a purple room, especially equipped for the childbirth in the royal family. This custom was well-established in the Byzantium. The child bore in this room was considered the legitimate heir of the throne. This way, his mother has secured him the legitimate birthright to the throne of the Bulgarian kingdom (Андреев 1988, 154-156; Златарски 1972, 475-547; Божилов 1985, 115-118).

A contemporary of the events, Manuel Phil, has characterized Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene as “*a tigress who defends her cubs*” (Philae 1900, 251). Because of Empress Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene intrigues, who were solely concerned by the throne successions issues, a rebellion, red by Ivailo, broke out in Bulgaria.

Constantine Tikh Asan, spineless and coward, has actually confided the leadership to his wife and has never taken any sensible measures to repress the rebellion, which in effect led to a true catastrophe. Constantine Tikh Asan could not resist the rebels and was killed by Ivailo himself. The insurgents, allied with the Tatars, approached afterwards Târnovo, the settlement where Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene detained the power, but who remained alone and without any support.

The Byzantine emperor Michael III Palaiologos panicked because of the troubles in Bulgaria. Initially, he tried to intervene in Bulgarian internal affairs, hoping to “*grizzle*” the rebellion. As he understood that he will not succeed through military force, he then decided to solve the issue through matrimonial alliance, the traditional approved method. Michael III Palaiologos was ready to marry his daughter with Ivailo, with this “*rootless*” individual, but later on he changed his mind and decided to enthrone Ivan son of Mitso, as the tsar of Bulgaria. The latter was married in haste with the Byzantine imperial daughter and ergo declared emperor of Bulgaria, with the name if Ivan Asan III. The Byzantine emperor supposed that this politico-matrimonial union would be a sufficient reason for Maria Palaiologina Kantak-

ouzene to voluntarily concedes the throne, which would help Ivan Asan III with the aid of the Byzantium to “*braise*” the rebellion and get the throne. This way he would have been designed as a depot (Pachymeris 1835, 440-441).

The following could have never been foreseen, not even in the most miraculous plans of the Byzantine Court. The decisions and subsequently the course of action of Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene do not fall in any of the limits of any epoch: nor political, nor judicial, nor moral, nor ethical.

In order to withhold the power, which she would then pass to her son, she took exceptional measures. As she acknowledged the fact that she will not receive any support or help, from no one, at the time when Ivailo was attacking the fortress of Târnova, she offered a pact to the insurgents. Namely, she was ready to become Ivailo’s wife under two conditions: after the enthronement, she will be the one leading the country (as always - a.n.) and Ivailo would have to guarantee her son’s birthright and his legitimacy to succeed to the throne of Bulgaria. The thirst for power and the insidious plans of Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene stirred the panic of the Byzantine emperor (Златарски 1972, 544-574; Андреев 1980, 9-17).

Her intentions were, on one side hypocrite and on the other quite rational and well ciphered. The result was also two folded: she gained another victory over the Byzantine emperor and oppressed the peasant rebellion, which got out of control, threatening to become a veritable war of the peasants.

Both for Ivailo and for the rebels, the proposal of Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene was tempting and represented a way of acceding to power. The dream about the social harmony and justice was about to be realized, as the power “*was passed*” to the ordinary people. The idea that the “*emperor was God’s chosen*” reflected the essential grasp of the political doctrine which the Byzantium was based on, as well as the main leadership pattern of the time: the emperor “*of God’s will*”, “*God’s chosen*”, will become emperor the best fitted (Божиллов, Гюзелев 2006, 516).

In the eyes of the rebels, this “*divine sign as a simple peasant became an emperor and he will be a great tsar and will defend both the rich and*

the poor” (Андреев 1988, 158; Златарский 1989, 104-120; Петров 1956, 173-260). A simple swineherd became the national hero of Bulgaria.

Ivailo accepted the offer of Maria Palaiologina Kantakouzene “*for peace sake and to save the country from a civil war and blood shed*” (Андреев 1988, 160). The enthronement of Ivailo (1278-1279) took place in 1278.

Bulgaria has been united by the empowerment of a king of the people, but it has not been saved from the crisis that threatened it due to the domestic and foreign policy issues, arisen against the rootless emperor from the part of the local aristocracy. The Byzantine emperor Michael III Palaiologos was also ready to take exceptional measures in order to dismiss Ivailo and install Ivan Asan III.

The Byzantines conducted a military march against Ivailo, who could not resist in defending his wife (at the time bearing his child) and was murdered. Maria Paleologos Kantakuzene has been taken captive, together with her son Michael and sent to Constantinople. “*The phenomenon of tsar Ivailo*”, according to Jordan Andreev, cannot find any historical equivalents, neither in the history of Bulgaria or in the European one. What brought him to power so easily, the utopian dream about “*political and social*” harmony, proved to be seeming and fruitless. The tragic end of Ivailo was nonetheless oncoming (Андреев 1980, 9-17; Андреев 1988, 163-164).

Ivan Asan III (1279-1280) succeeded on the throne of Bulgaria; he was the grandson, on the maternal line, of Ivan Asan II, the first-born of Emperor Mitso Asan and of the daughter of Ivan Asan II (Божиллов 1985, 249-255). Namely this fact played the crucial role in the choice of the Byzantine emperor in electing the throne contender.

Unlike the “*emperor from the people*”, one had to elect someone with the legitimate birthright to the crown, one with deep royal roots in the leading dynasty. Ivan Asan III proved to be the most appropriate political figure to allege to the throne succession, at the time. The Byzantine emperor has quickly married him with his daughter Irene, ensuring a political, military as well as diplomatic aid in granting the throne (Златарски 1972, 555-571; Божиллов 1985, 251).

Nonetheless Ivan Asan III proved to be worthless of the “*Asan’s blood*” and showed himself in the most inadequate way possible. He became known by the Bulgarian history as the figure most lacking personality, talent who has never outstand in anything, or in the political or in the military field. The political situation of Bulgaria was in need of effective and cursory decisions. In the background of the struggle for power, appeared a new contender to the throne, George Terter. Since Ivan Asan III conceded the throne willingly, he was confined the title of despot, previously promised (Божилев 1985, 251). Loading carts with huge valuable things, he and his wife left Bulgaria. The wife of the Tatar leader, Euphrosyne (Новиков II, 116-19), offered him protection; she was the illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine emperor Michael III Palaiologos (Андреев 1988, 167).

The Asan dynasty played a major in role in the Bulgarian history. The ascension to the throne of the Asan brother corresponds with the rebirth of the Bulgarian statehood. Stating the features and characteristics in the history of the Bulgarian medieval dynasties of emperors, it is worth drawing a particular attention upon the fact that is enormously significant in the European history. “*The feminine factor*” has played a primordial role in

preserving the dynastic right to the throne. On one hand, Bulgaria does not make an exception considering that the inheritance to the throne was also valid on the female line. On the other hand, there are new features emerging, which are less specific for other countries. According to the recent researches, despite the fact that women did not possess the right to the throne accession (or to the power for that matter), it was them who were the primordial “rescue rings” of the leading dynasty, representing the “*lifeline*” in the conquest of power by men.

The relation with the representative of the ruling royal dynasty was the main argument of the political realities and requirements of the era. The only exception was marrying a widow. This method has become widely practiced in Bulgaria. For instance, there are no such cases to be known, nor it was even allowed to practice them, during the Middle Ages. The status and the social position of the widow would radically change; she might have as well been stranded or murdered⁴. There was no possibility at all of ascending to the throne by marrying a widow. In certain cases, mothers would ensure the access to power for their children, but the method of conveying power through a “regent female” was largely practiced and well-known in entire Europe.

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⁴We bring up some examples. Marincea, wife of Ilieș, son Alexandru the Kind, has been exiled after the death of her husband. Elena Rareș was murdered by her brother in law Alexandru Lăpușneanu.

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Femeia și puterea în istoria dinastiei Asăneștilor (sec. XII-XIII)

Rezumat

Articolul este consacrat istoriei dinastiei Asăneștilor prin prisma rolului femeilor în obținerea puterii la domnie. Caracterizând particularitățile și generalitățile din istoria dinastiilor de monarhi ai Bulgariei medievale, am dorit să atragem atenția asupra unui fapt de o importanță majoră în istoria europeană. „*Factorul feminin*” a jucat, practic, un rol decisiv în păstrarea dreptului dinastic la tron. Pe de o parte, Bulgaria nu era o excepție, moștenirea tronului se făcea și pe linie feminină. Pe de altă parte, apar noi forme, mai puțin specifice pentru alte țări. Precum arată cercetările, chiar dacă femeile nu aveau dreptul la tron, dreptul la putere, tocmai ele constituiau „*veriga de salvare*” a dinastiei domnitoare, și erau „*armă de salvare*” în ce privește cucerirea puterii de către bărbați. Înrudirea cu o reprezentantă a dinastiei domnitoare, împărătești era argumentul principal al realităților politice și al cerințelor epocii. Excepție făcea doar căsătoria cu o văduvă. *Aceasta a devenit una din metodele principale și larg practicate în Bulgaria.* De exemplu, în Moldova medievală nu se cunosc asemenea cazuri și chiar nu erau admise asemenea lucruri.

Statutul și situația văduvei se schimba radical, aceasta fiind izgonită sau chiar asasinată⁵. Nu exista nicio posibilitate de urcare la tron prin căsătorie cu o văduvă. În unele cazuri mamele asigurau puterea pentru copii lor, dar forma transmiterii puterii prin intermediul unei femei regente se practica pe larg și se cunoștea, fără excepție, în toate țările europene.

Женщина и власть в истории династии Асень

Резюме

Статья посвящена роли женщин в получении права на престол в истории династии Асень. Характеризуя общее и особенное в истории царских династий средневековой Болгарии, хотелось бы обратить внимание на элемент, имеющий универсальное значение в европейской истории. «Женский фактор» играл практически ключевую роль в сохранении права династии на престол. С одной стороны, Болгария не составляет исключения в этом отношении, так как престолонаследие и в других странах осуществлялось также и по женской линии. С другой стороны, здесь имеются новые формы, не характерные для других стран. Как показывают исследования, даже если женщины не имели права на престол, права на власть, именно они служили «спасительным звеном и орудием» в обретении власти мужчинами. Родство с представительницей господствующей, царской династии было главным аргументом политических реалий и требований эпохи. Исключение составляет лишь женитьба на вдове. Этот способ стал одним из главных и широко практикуемых в Болгарии. К примеру, в средневековой Молдове не было известно таких случаев и даже не допускались подобные варианты⁶. Статус и положение вдовы резко, порой радикально менялся, от изгнания до убийства. Возможности передачи власти посредством брака не было никакой. В некоторых случаях матери обеспечивали власть своим детям, но форма передачи власти через регентство широко практиковалась и была известна, без исключения, во всех европейских странах.

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⁵ Cităm unele exemple. Marinca, soție a lui Ilieș (1432, ianuarie 1 - 1433, septembrie; 1435, august 4 - 1436, martie 8; 1436, martie 8 - 1442, august 1 (asociat cu Ștefan)), fiul lui Alexandru cel Bun, era izgonită după moartea soțului. Elena Rareș era asasinată de către ginerele ei, Alexandru Lăpușeanul.

⁶ Приведем некоторые примеры. Маринка, жена Илиеша (1432, январь 1 - 1433, сентябрь; 1435, август 4 - 1436, март 8; 1436, март 8 - 1442, август 1 (соправитель Штефана II)), сына Александра Доброго, была изгнана из страны после смерти мужа. Елена Рареш, была убита своим зятем, Александром Лэпушняну.