

Byzantine Thessaloniki

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Thessaloniki, the city founded by the Macedonian king Cassander through the synoecism of 26 settlements in 316/5 B.C., and to which he gave the name of his wife, who was both the daughter of Philip II and sister of Alexander the Great, enjoyed an exceptional geographic setting. Built at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, it was the most important way-station along the Via Egnatia, which started from Dyrhachium and reached as far as Byzantium, at a point where intersecting roads, descending through the valleys of Morava and the Axios, co-mingled with the Aegean, linking the cities of the Danube with the harbors of the East. Its privileged and strategic location was a decisive factor in the city's evolution, and sealed its fate. Thessaloniki rose to become the most important political, military, and commercial center in the Balkan region of the Roman Empire.

The city reached its zenith and enjoyed great prosperity from the mid-2nd c. A.D. The rebuilding of large public building complexes, including the agora, where the political and administrative center of the city was located, the library, the odeion, and others dates to the Antonine (138-193) and Severan (193-235) eras. From the mid-3rd c. A.D., the Roman emperors accorded it the honorary title of *colonia*, and granted it the privileges of the *metropolis of Macedonia* and *neokoros* (*the temple warden*), which was connected to the worship of the emperor. Thus from that time on, Thessaloniki was called the "Metropolis of Macedonia", the "eminent metropolis of the Macedonians" (*η περιφανής των Μακεδόνων μητρόπολις*), as well as the "city-colony of Thessaly" (*πόλις Θεσσαλίας κολωνία*).

In 298/9 the caesar Galerius Maximianus, who administered the eastern part of the Roman Empire together with Diocletian Augustus, transferred his seat from Sirmium in Pannonia to Thessaloniki, and adorned the city with an imposing palace complex, a triumphal arch and the Rotunda, in the eastern part of the city. Thessaloniki was elevated to an imperial city, a living expression of the new political orientation of the Roman state towards the East, and the new political ideology of the Tetrarchy. A few years later, Constantine the Great strengthened the city with an artificial harbor, the "dug-out harbor" (*σκαπτόν λιμένα*), to the southwest and leeward portion of its coastline.

The political and economic role of Thessaloniki followed political developments. The reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, which aimed at the political and military reorganization of the empire, resulted in the founding of a large administrative district, the *Prefecture of Eastern Illyricum* with two *dioceses*, those of Macedonia and Dacia. The absolute monarchy of Constantine the Great in 324, accompanied by the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to the East, at the site of ancient Byzantium, and the growing development and evolution of the New Rome, Constantinople, into the center of the empire, the center of the *Oikoumene*, would inevitably relegate Thessaloniki to a secondary position. It would remain a provincial city in the shadow of the capital, and despite its frequently leading role in political and military affairs, and its importance, it would always be considered by the Byzantines as the "first city after the first city" (*viz.*, "second city") and "the first city of the Romans (Greeks) after the great one" (*μετά την μεγάλην παρά Ῥωμαίοις, πρώτη πόλις*).

The city's transition from the pagan to the Christian world took place gradually, though it began early. The Thessalonians had the good fortune to hear the preaching of the Apostle Paul himself, and to receive support in their new faith through his letters. They knew and honored martyrs both male and female, though they identified themselves with the city's par excellence martyr, its patron saint Demetrius, the Christian officer martyred during the age of Galerius in 305. The church of St. Demetrius became a place of pilgrimage for both natives and foreigners, and the fame of the Myroblytes (lit. "myrrh-gushing") Saint and his veneration lent an ecumenical air to the city. Pilgrims departed, taking with them small bottles containing the miraculous myrrh, the so-called *koutrouvia* (κουτρούβια), with depictions of the Myroblytes. The city's very existence and its salvation are connected to worship of this Saint. From as early as the 5th century, houses of prayer and monasteries, dependencies and huts (*skites*) both within and outside the city made up the religious face of the city. Outside the eastern and western walls, in a verdant region of trees, gardens, and vineyards, there were cells and monasteries, with monks living in caves, while in the city's churches, which remained open day and night, hymns and melodious chants arose.

By virtue of its location and importance, Thessaloniki witnessed the repercussions of political events and uprisings that disturbed the Balkans from time to time. Incursions by the Goths in the 4th century south of the Danube forced the Emperor Theodosius (379-395) to make Thessaloniki a staging area for his operations against the marauders. During his sojourn in the city in 380, the Emperor was baptized a Christian by the Bishop of Thessaloniki, Acholius (or Ascholius). It is probable that the city walls were built at that time, but we do not know whether Hormisdas, whose name is mentioned in an inscription on the tower bearing his name in the eastern wall, was Theodosius' general or a later official. From the late 4th until the 6th centuries, various barbarian tribes – Goths, Visigoths, Huns – crossed the natural northern border of the empire, the Danube, and tore through the Balkans, destroying cities and the surrounding countryside. The empire, which had become involved in war with the Persians along its eastern boundaries, was unable to assist the state's western provinces, Thrace and the large province of Illyricum. The situation became even more dangerous when, the sovereign state of the Avars, an Asian people of Hunnic (Turkish) origin, was established north of the Danube. In 582, they conquered Sirmium on the river Save, an important fort and transportation hub near Belgrade. After subjugating various Slavic tribes in the Danube region, they engaged in repeated incursions on Byzantine soil.

Thessaloniki, the capital of Illyricum, came to know brutality and fatal dangers from these Avaroslav and Slavic attacks. Unique details are narrated in the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* (*Θάματα του Αγίου Δημητρίου*), a collection of texts of the life and Acts of the Saint belonging to the 7th century, containing speeches delivered by the city's bishops at celebrations in memory of St. Demetrius. These emphasize both the extent of the danger as well as the miraculous intervention of the Saint. The first major attack, with 100,000 Avaro-slavs (the number is surely exaggerated) occurred on the evening of Sunday, September 22, 597. When day broke, the enemy rushed towards the walls and set up ladders in order to take the city by siege. And then, the bishop John states, the miracle took place: the Saint, assuming the form of an armed foot-soldier, appeared on the ramparts, struck with his spear the enemy who had first set foot on the walls, and threw him off the wall, dead. And as the dead man tumbled down the ladder, he dragged along those who were coming after him. The army and civil guard thus repulsed the first major siege laid to the city.

After the overthrow of the Emperor Maurice in 602, the northern border of the empire along the Danube collapsed. The transfer of troops from Thrace to Asia Minor to fight the Persians had left the northern provinces vulnerable. The Slavs crossed the Danube and began to settle in territory belonging to the empire. In 604, 5,000 Slavs besieged Thessaloniki without success. In 615, the city was attacked by a combined force of Slavic tribes that cut off the city from the sea with dug-out vessels, while their families camped in the plain in order to settle in the city after it was taken. This attack was one of the more organized ones. At that moment, the defenders of the city saw St. Demetrius, dressed in a white cloak, walking on the walls and on the sea. Enemy ships began to fall one against the other, and the enemies fell into the sea, which was dyed red from barbarian blood. A sudden powerful wind from the south caused even greater confusion among the fleet. A verse inscription on a mosaic in the Church of St. Demetrius probably refers to this destruction of the barbarian fleet; the inscription affords an example of the writing of literary epigrams that developed in Thessaloniki along with rhetoric and a rich hymnography connected to the worship of St. Demetrius:

*Κτίστας θεωρείς του πανενδόξου δόμου / εκείθεν ένθεν μάρτυρος Δημητρίου/
του βάρβαρον κλύδωνα βαρβάρων στόλω(ν)/ μετατρέποντος κ(αι) πόλιν
λυτρωμένου.*

"You are looking upon the builders of this illustrious church, on either side of the Martyr Demetrius, who put to flight the barbarous storm of barbarian fleets and saved the city."

In 618, a new Avaro-Slavonic attack met the same fate as that of 620, when the Slavs wished to take advantage of the chaos caused by the earthquakes that had struck Thessaloniki and other cities in Macedonia.

The final attempt by the Slavs to conquer Thessaloniki occurred during the same period when the Arab fleet was besieging Constantinople, during the reign of the Emperor Constantine IV "Pogonatus". The occasion for this was the imprisonment and later, the execution of Perbundus, the chief of the Rynhini – a Slavic tribe near Rendina – who had been accused of conspiracy by the authorities of Thessaloniki. For two years, 676-677, Slavic tribes including the Strymonites, the Rynhini, and the Sagoudatoi, pillaged the environs of Thessaloniki and occupied themselves with piracy. During the period the city was cut off from the sea, it was threatened by famine. However, the Thessalonians sent ships to the Slavic Velegezites of Demetrias (near modern-day Volos), who supplied them with grain and legumes. Thus, at the same moment when some Slavic tribes were given over to hostile attacks, other tribes were maintaining commercial relations with Thessaloniki. Its harbor continued to operate during the entire period of Slavic invasions.

The *Miracles* of St. Demetrius provide indications concerning the first Slavic settlements in Illyricum and Thrace, which are referred to in the sources as the *sklaviniai* (σκλαβηνίαι). This term signifies the dense settlement of Slavs in the region between the Danube and the mountain-range Haimos, as well as scattered Slavic settlements, with each tribe separately settled in inaccessible areas near river valleys. The Byzantine government allowed such settlements, as long as the Slavs paid taxes, the so-called *pakta*, and did not give the State any trouble. Uprisings by the Slavs frequently called forth the intervention of the imperial army. In 688, the Emperor Justinian II campaigned against the Bulgarians, who had settled in northeast Thrace in

681, as well as against the Sklavini of Haimos, who had collaborated with the Bulgarians against Byzantium. Following operations in northern Thrace, the Emperor crossed the Strymon straits and descended to Thessaloniki. Along his way he subjugated other Slavs, while still others acknowledged his sovereignty. In a gesture of gratitude to St. Demetrius for defeating the enemies of both himself and the city, he bequeathed to the Saint's church the income from a salt mine, as a marble inscription (now lost) testifies. Furthermore, he resettled 30,000 Slavs in Bithynia, in Asia Minor, in order to use them against the Arabs. The *sklaviniai* were slowly included in the Byzantine military-administrative theme system, and Byzantine officials assumed their administration. The inclusion of the Slavs in the army, where they served primarily as archers, and their association and commercial relations with the native Greek population gradually led to their Hellenization, to their conversion to Christianity, and finally to their assimilation. Thus, appropriate conditions for peace were created, which favored economic, trade, and intellectual activities. At the beginning of the 9th century, the *Theme of Thessaloniki* (Prefecture of Thessaloniki), the great military-administrative district that included the entire region west of the Strymon as far as the Pindus, was established. Many of the seals of 8th and 9th century military, political, and financial officials have been preserved; these show the unimpeded operation of the state mechanism and economic activities in the city's extensive harbor. Here is how the Thessalonian cleric John Kaminiates describes the harbor in the early 10th century:

Είναι λοιπόν η πολιτεία...απλόχωρη και πλατιά και καλοτειχισμένη με κάστρο και πύργους πυκνούς που παρέχουν ασφάλεια στους κατοίκους της...ενώ από το νότο απλώνεται θαλασσινός κόλπος που τη ζώνει και βοηθάει από τα πλάγια τα καράβια που έρχονται από παντού να πιάνουν εύκολα. Γιατί προς τα εκεί μπαίνει μέσα στη ξηρά θαυμαστό λιμάνι, που απλώνει με σιγουριά την είσοδό του στους ναυτικούς, χωρίς να το πειράζουν καθόλου οι φουρτούνες και κάνει το αγκυροβόλι ακύμαντο.

“And so, there is the city ... spacious, wide, and well-walled, with a fortress and close-set towers that provide security to its residents ... while from the South the gulf that encircles it stretches out, on either side assisting the boats arriving from all destinations to anchor easily. For in that area this marvelous harbor extends inwards, expanding its entrance to sailors with security, not in the slightest disturbed by storms, and creating an unruffled anchorage”.

The fertile plain, the rivers, and two lakes supplied the city's marketplace with an abundance of agricultural products and fish, while boats brought into the port products from the markets of the Balkans and the East. The “public highway”, i.e. the Via Egnatia, carried foreign traders and travelers from East to West, flooding the marketplace with countless numbers of natives and foreigners. One would find a great number of products manufactured from copper, iron, lead, and glass, miniature works of gold and silver, and fabrics made of silk, wool, and linen in the city's agora. The city's buildings and monuments and its wide roads testify to its wealth. Many of its Byzantine encomiasts call it “broad-streeted” and a “megalopolis”. Speaking with pride of his birthplace, JohnI Kaminiates writes: “*Ημείς, ω φίλος, πατρίδος εσμέν Θεσσαλονίκης ... πόλεως μεγάλης και πρώτης των Μακεδόνων*” (My friend, our native city is Thessaloniki ... a great city, first of those of Macedon). But it would be just

this reputation for being a wealthy city that would become the cause of its sudden misfortunes.

From the time that Crete fell into the hands of the Arabs around 824, Saracen corsairs, using the large island as a staging-ground, ravaged the islands and coasts of the Aegean. In the early 10th century, during the rule of Leo VI, they destroyed Demetrias and headed for Propontis, but they were repulsed by the imperial fleet and turned against Thessaloniki. Upon hearing the dreadful news, the Thessalonians began to prepare at a feverish rate to defend the city. They reinforced the more vulnerable part of the city that was on the sea, throwing sarcophagi and other blocks of marble into the sea to prevent the pirate ships from drawing near. However, the city's new general, Leon Chatzilakios, ordered the people to stop these works, and to raise the sea wall, an event that is confirmed by an inscription now lost. On Sunday, July 29 904, the corsair ships appeared, led by the apostate Leon Tripolitis. John Kaminiates, who lived through these tragic days, describes the dramatic moments of the siege of the city and its defense, scenes of madness, slaughter and the enslavements that followed its capture. The pirates remained in the city ten days, slaughtering its inhabitants and pillaging. Thousands of prisoners – around 22,000 in all – were crowded onto boats and taken to the slave markets of Crete and Tarsus, John Kaminiates among them. But the city recovered quickly from this great disaster, remaining the most important political and military center in the region.

But apart from being a major political, military, and economic center, the bastion of the Byzantine Empire in the western Balkans, Thessaloniki also exerted particular cultural influence. It is justly praised as the birthplace of two brothers, Constantine, who shortly before dying in Rome assumed the name of the monk Cyril, and Methodius, the sons of a military official in the prefecture of Thessaloniki. After general studies in Thessaloniki, Constantine went, as was customary, to Constantinople for higher studies, and became the student of the famous Leon the Mathematician, who had also served as Bishop of Thessaloniki from 840-843, as well as of the Patriarch Photios. He became a professor of rhetoric and was known by the nickname “the philosopher”. His older brother Methodius may have served as administrator in some Slavic area (possible near the Strymon River, or in Bithynia). The two Greek brothers knew Arabic, Slavic, and Hebrew, and undertook diplomatic missions to the Arabs and apostolic/missionary work among the Khazars on the Black Sea. In 863, they moved to Moravia following the request of its king Rastislav (Rastic) to the Emperor Michael III to send priests to preach his people Christianity, wishing to remove the influence of the German clergy from his country. The Patriarch Photios, the 9th century's most influential man of letters, was the inspiration for Byzantium's apostolic/missionary program. In contrast to the Western Church, which employed Latin for the Divine Liturgy, the Byzantine missionaries/apostles used not Greek, but the language of the converts themselves. For this purpose, Constantine invented the Slavic alphabet, the so-called *Glagolitic* alphabet, on the basis of the Greek one, and translated the Bible and other liturgical volumes from Greek into Old Slavonic – common among all the Slavs at the time – while Methodius was considered the translator of Byzantine works of law and canon law, and the compiler of a discourse on the apportioning of justice that refers to primitive state structures like that of the Slavs. Thus were created the first works of Slavonic literature. It is thus justifiably that the two Greek brothers from Thessaloniki have been called, and honored as, “the apostles of the Slavs”.

The Byzantine Empire reached its greatest extent and zenith during the reign of the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty. Thessaloniki was the seat of the

emperors' operations against the Bulgarian tsars Simeon and later, Samuel, who revolted against Byzantium following the death of the emperor John Tzimiscēs in 976, founding the Bulgarian kingdom with its capital at Prespa and Ohrid. In 1018, following lengthy wars, Basil II the Bulgar-slayer dissolved Samuel's kingdom and his regions returned to the Byzantine Empire; the Danube became once more the northern border of the empire. Basil organized the reacquired territories administratively and ecclesiastically, and allowed the residents of these poor regions to pay their taxes in kind, as they had under Samuel. With the death of Basil II in 1025, his policy was overturned. A short time later, John the Orphanotrophos, brother of the Emperor Michael IV, required these regions to pay their taxes in cash for reasons of the State budget. In 1040 there was a revolution by the Bulgars in Belgrade that spread southward, and the following year the general Alousianos, nephew of Samuel, besieged Thessaloniki with an army of 40,000 and a host of siege machines. Thanks to the heroic exit of its inhabitants and in the belief that their patron Saint would guide them, the city was saved from fatal danger.

From the mid-11th century, the Empire was in crisis. Ambitious generals rebelled, and new enemies threatened the empire's territorial integrity: the Seljuk Turks in the East, the Normans in the West, the Oguz and the Cumans in the Balkans. The continuous breaking-up of the themes led to the destruction of the theme institution. The state entrusted its defense to foreign mercenaries, wealthy provinces in Asia Minor were lost, income from taxes declined, the economy withered, and the currency was debased.

Despite the generally declining economic situation throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, Thessaloniki preserved its robust and prosperous economy. At the beginning of the 12th century, the author of the dialogue of the dead *Timarion*, written according to the model of Lucian's dialogues of the dead, described the great commercial fair during the days of the feast of St. Demetrius. "And it was the celebration of the Demetria, just as there was the Panathenaia in Athens and the Panionia among the Milesians. This is the greatest of the celebrations among the Macedonians." And he continues, "For there come to this (celebration) not only Thessalonians and others of the native population; people from everywhere, and of every sort, come to it: Greeks from all parts of Greece; Slavs from every tribe those near the Istros (Danube) to as far as Bulgaria; Campanians, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, and Gauls, from those living beyond the Alps. In short, the Ocean's waves send pilgrims and celebrants to the Martyr. This is how famous it is in Europe ... Outside the city's western walls were pitched tents in two long rows, facing each other and displaying every sort of goods for sale. There were fabrics and thread from Boeotia, the Morea (Peloponnesus), from Italy, Phoenicia, Egypt, Spain and Gadeira (mod. Cádiz), where they weave the most beautiful fabrics. The merchants bring these to Macedonia and Thessaloniki straight from the countries where they weave them. And the Black Sea sends its products to Byzantium and from there, a great many horses and mules carry all those that can be carried."

At the end of the 11th century and during the 12th, the Normans, who had founded their kingdom in Sicily, occupied Byzantine territories in South Italy and undertook attacks on the western provinces of the empire. In 1185, they took Dyrrhachium, the most important port in the Adriatic, and on August 24 they occupied Thessaloniki. The Norman occupation lasted three months. Slaughter, rape, looting, and vandalism followed the taking of the city, as described by the Archbishop Eustathius, who was humiliated and abused by the conquerors.

The anomalous political situation at the end of the 12th century, with its violent overthrowing of emperors and its splinter movements, shook the empire to its foundations. In 1204, the Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade captured Constantinople and shortly later they conquered Thessaloniki, the empire's second city; the Byzantine Empire was collapsing. Its place was taken by the Latin Empire of Constantinople and by other Frankish and Greek states (the empires of Trebizond and Nicaea, the Despotate of Epirus with Arta as its capital). Thessaloniki became the capital of the Lombard kingdom of Monferrat. The Latin occupation lasted twenty years. At the end of 1224, following a siege that lasted many months, the ruler of Epirus Theodore Doukas entered the city in victory. He was proclaimed and crowned "King and Emperor of the Romans (Greeks)". Thessaloniki rose to the rank of "royal" city, with an organized royal court, senate, central administration, and religious hierarchy. Theodore Doukas issued coinage from the Thessaloniki mint; on it he was portrayed with imperial symbols, usually with St. Demetrius. The goal of the Emperor of Thessaloniki was the re-conquest of Constantinople and the restoration of the Byzantine Empire. He conquered Bulgars and Franks and arrived at the walls of Constantinople. The Empire of Thessaloniki reached its greatest extent, stretching from the Ionian and Adriatic seas as far as Didymoteichon and Adrianople. In the spring of 1230, Theodore Doukas set forth on his campaign against Constantinople. However, arriving at the Evros and before launching his attack against the Latins, he turned northward against the Bulgars, in order to secure his rear. He was unexpectedly and utterly defeated by the Bulgar Tsar Ivan Assen II and taken prisoner. The Empire of Thessaloniki shrank, and in 1246 came into the possession of the rival Greek Empire of Nicaea.

In 1261, Nicaean forces captured Constantinople and put an end to Frankish rule. The new Emperor, Michael VIII Palaiologos, endeavored to reorganize the state. But the loss of wealthy provinces in Asia Minor, the trading privileges of the Italian naval republics of Genoa and Venice, and internal differences between unionists and anti-unionists undermined the economy and internal unity.

The situation in the empire worsened continually. The decision by Andronikos II Palaiologos to dismantle the fleet deprived the empire of a valuable means of defense and heightened its dependence upon foreign powers. The advance of the Ottoman Turks in Asia Minor in the early 14th century forced the Emperor to resort to the services of Catalan mercenaries. But when he was unable to pay the salaries he had promised them, the latter collaborated with the Turks in plundering Thrace and Macedonia. They established themselves in the Cassandra peninsula, whence they pillaged and destroyed many of the Mt. Athos monasteries. Following their failure to take Thessaloniki in 1308, they turned to southern Greece and settled in Attica.

In the 14th century, Thessaloniki was frequently the domicile of members of the imperial family. In 1303, Andronikos II's second wife, Yolanda-Irene of Montferrat, settled in the city, where she sought to divide the empire among her children in accordance with western feudal beliefs. Such a thing, however, was in complete opposition to the dogma of a single, unified empire, which was a fundamental principle of Byzantine political ideology. The Empress came into conflict with the Emperor and remained in Thessaloniki until her death in 1317. Her seals are preserved – there is one in the Museum of Byzantine Culture – with her name: Irene Doukaina Komnena Palaiologina.

A short time later, civil strife broke out, with Thessaloniki playing a leading role. In 1320, the Emperor Andronikos II cut off his grandson Andronikos from co-rule and succession, because he considered him responsible for the fatal wounding of

his brother. Civil war erupted. The young Andronikos became ruler of Thessaloniki and other Macedonian cities, and in 1328 entered the royal city of Constantinople in triumph, forcing Andronikos II to abdicate and withdraw to a monastery. Stephen Dusan, the ruler of Serbia, benefited from the political turmoil and seized a number of cities in Macedonia; in 1334, he arrived just outside Thessaloniki. The city was saved thanks to the concluding of a peace by the Byzantines, while Dusan abandoned the cities he had captured.

After the sudden death of Andronikos III in 1341, another lengthy civil war broke out; both Serbs and Turks became embroiled in it, and ecclesiastical and social conflicts manifested themselves with disastrous consequences. The powerful faction of the regency that held the guardianship of the underage Emperor John V Palaiologos proclaimed the most powerful man of the age, John Kantakouzenos, and one of his delegates, enemies; they confiscated Kantakouzenos' fortune and expelled his relations and followers. John was pronounced emperor at Didymoteichon. Civil war spread to the cities of Thrace and Macedonia. Kantakouzenos repeatedly tried to win over Thessaloniki, but its inhabitants remained loyal to the Palaiologan family and the lawful emperor.

It was then that dramatic events began to unfold in Thessaloniki. The dynastic dispute evolved into a social uprising when the Zealots, who came primarily from the lower classes, revolted in 1342 and ransacked the homes of the rich. In terror, the latter abandoned the city together with the governor. It is probable that the Byzantine palace of Thessaloniki was destroyed at that time. Kantakouzenos allied himself with Dusan and the Emir of Aidin, who sent ships to blockade the city. The Zealots became masters of the situation, while the government in Constantinople sent a fleet to Thessaloniki and recognized the Zealots. In 1345, the final resistance by the nobles was drowned in blood. The Zealots threw the commander of the city and a hundred nobles from the Acropolis walls down, while the mob below was slaughtering them. The *Monody on the Dead Fallen in Thessaloniki*, attributed to the great Thessalonian man of letters Demetrius Kydones, provides images of horror and vengeful madness on the part of the mob: "They dragged the rich by their necks with rope as if they were slaves. Servant shoved master; slave, his buyer; villager, general, and farmer, soldier."

The reconciliation of John Kantakouzenos and John V Palaiologos, and the counter-revolution organized in Thessaloniki by the representative of the Byzantine government, brought about the fall of the Zealots in 1349. During the same period, with all its political and social turmoil, the Hesychast controversy erupted with chief representatives Gregory Palamas, opposed by the Calabrian monk Barlaam. In 1350, Gregory Palamas, the greatest theologian of the 14th century, became Bishop of Thessaloniki. In 1354, a new outbreak of conflict between John Palaiologos and John Kantakouzenos ended in the latter's resignation and his withdrawal to a monastery. In the same year, the Turks took possession of Gallipoli following an earthquake and settled permanently in Europe.

During these troubled years, and within the political turmoil and uncertainty, Thessaloniki displayed an admirable cultural activity. The 14th century is considered the city's golden age of arts and letters. Many scholars were born there or made the city their home, so that it was called "the blessed mother of orators and the source of philology", and the "Muses' Second Helicon". Philologists of repute such as Thomas Magistros and Demetrius Triklinios laid the basis for the science of philology and textual criticism. The high political officials and men of learning, Nikephoros Choumnos and Theodore Metochites, lived there and sang the praises of the city. In

1345 Constantine Harmenopoulos, a higher court judge (“the universal judge of the Greeks”, *καθολικός κριτής των Ρωμαίων*), published the *Hexabiblos*, a systematic codification of Byzantine civil and criminal law, and Matthaios Blastares, a monk in the Monastery of Isaac, compiled a collection of canon law and polemical discourses. Here were born the scholarly brothers Demetrius and Prochoros Kydones, the theologians and mystics Neilos and Nicholas Kabasilas, and the Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos.

But civil wars were undermining the foundations of the empire and paving the way for its imminent fall. In 1345, Stephen Dusan conquered Serres and was crowned King of Serbia and Romania. His short-lived kingdom came to an end with his death in 1355. But the Ottomans were advancing and occupying territories in Thrace and Macedonia. In 1371, following the defeat of the Serbs by the Turks at Tschernomen in the Evros, Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks became tributaries of the Sultan. Using Thessaloniki as his base, Manuel, John Palaiologos’ son, attempted to organize the defence of the city and opposition to the Turks. He retook cities and forts in Macedonia, appropriating ecclesiastical and monastic lands to equip his army. In 1383, Turkish forces besieged Thessaloniki, and continued for four years. Many thought of abandoning the city in order to avoid disaster, and it was in vain that Manuel endeavored to encourage them. He was forced to abandon the city, which following an agreement became a tributary of the Sultan. John V Palaiologos died in 1391, and Manuel stole away from Prusa (mod. Bursa), where he had been held hostage by the Sultan, and was declared Emperor in Constantinople. Enraged, Sultan Bayazid I marched against the city, looting its environs, destroying Christoupolis (Kavala), and taking Thessaloniki. In 1395, he imposed the child tribute (*paidomazoma*) on the city.

Byzantium was given a breath of life by the Mongols’ defeat of the Turks at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Thessaloniki once more reverted to the Byzantines. It was ruled by offspring of the imperial family until 1423, when it surrendered to the Venetians on condition that they ensure its defense, provision it, and respect the rights of its residents and the privileges of its bishop. But the Venetians did away with the city’s autonomy, and many inhabitants began to abandon it. On March 29, 1430, as an inscription on a column of the church Acheiropoietos states, the city fell into the hands of the Turks. A priest, Ioannis Anagnostes, sorrowfully described the final sack and destruction of the second city of the waning Byzantine Empire. The city was looted, and its Christian population decimated. Nonetheless, during the long period of Ottoman rule (1430-1912), Thessaloniki managed to recover and develop into a flourishing economic and commercial urban center of the Ottoman Empire.

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For Byzantine Thessaloniki and its history, one may have reference to:

A) collective and annual volumes, and publication volumes from conferences and symposia dealing with Thessaloniki and Macedonia;

B) monographs and studies, wherein will be found references to sources and bibliographies.

A)

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- *Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Number Fifty-Seven 2003. Symposium on Late Byzantine Thessalonike*. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C. 2004.
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- *Η ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΗΝ ΕΠΟΧΗ ΤΩΝ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΩΝ*. Β' Διεθνές Συνέδριο, Αριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης 14-20 Δεκεμβρίου 1992, Thessaloniki 2002.
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