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## THE IMPACT OF THE FOURTH CRUSADE AND THE LATIN EMPIRE OF CONSTANTINOPLE ON THE SECOND BULGARIAN TSARDOM

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**Abstract:** *The article dwells on the impact of the Fourth Crusade and on the newly created Latin Empire (1204–1261) on the restored Bulgarian statehood. The author examines the influence of the Latin Empire on the Second Bulgarian Tsardom in several aspects: the re-establishment of the Second Bulgarian Tsardom in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe as a political and military factor; the role of the Bulgarian rulers in the division of part of the Byzantine heritage in the Balkans, and the role of the Second Bulgarian Tsardom in the political influence of the papacy in Southeastern Europe in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.*

**Keywords:** *Fourth Crusade; Latin Empire of Constantinople; Second Bulgarian Tsardom; Cumans.*

The relations between the restored Bulgarian Tsardom and the Latin Empire in the period 1204–1261 have been the subject of consistent and detailed research, but the topic is still open to contributions in Bulgarian and foreign historiography.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is to offer a review of the political, military, and religious dimensions of Bulgarian–Latin relations during this period from the point of view of their impact on the restored Bulgarian state in 1185–1186. To what extent did the new Latin Empire change the political and military situation for the Bulgarians? Did it facilitate or complicate the process of restoring the Bulgarian Tsardom? Last but not least, did it significantly change the political development and historical perspectives of the Bulgarians on the Balkan Peninsula?

### Political Impact. Legitimacy of the New Dynasty. Legitimacy of Statesmanship

The Fourth Crusade and its reorientation from Egypt towards Constantinople accelerated the diplomatic negotiations and the endorsement of the legitimacy of the new dynasty of Assenids, represented by Tsar Kaloyan (1197–1207), following a tentative start back in 1199. Papal–Bulgarian contacts became more intensified after the appearance of the Crusaders under the walls of Constantinople in 1203. As a result, the negotiations ended with a church union and political recognition of Kaloyan’s royal title by Pope Innocent III in the fall of 1204.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the many studies on the subject, the following can be pointed out: [Van Tricht, Ph. 2011; Queller, D. Madden, Th. 1997; Златарски, В. 1972; Данчева-Василева, А. 1985; Данчева-Василева, А. 1994, с. 65–72; Madgearu, А. 2017; Pentek, Z. 2004; Dall’Agljo, F. 2008–2009, pp. 29–54; Dall’Agljo, F. 2013, pp. 299–315; Dall’Agljo, F. 2013, pp. 109–117; Dall’Agljo, F. 2019, pp. 65–84; Петров, П. 1955, с. 35–57; Primov, В. 1971, pp. 183–213].

Another aspect of the influence of the Latin Empire on the Second Bulgarian Tsardom manifests itself in the dynastic marriages under the rule of Tsar Boril in 1213–1214 and under the rule of Tsar John II Assen in 1228 [Цанкова-Петкова, Г. 1978, с. 97–100; 112–114]. With these dynastic and political agreements, the Bulgarian rulers not only concluded military and political treaties with consequences in the Balkans, but also established their power and authority in pan-European dimensions. A third aspect of the political influence of the new Latin Empire in Constantinople is evidenced by the fact that the destruction of the Byzantine Empire created suitable conditions for claims for a “new Constantinople” (the establishment of a “new Constantinople”) in Nicaea, Trebizond, and Tarnovo [Карпов, С. 2005, pp. 283–292].<sup>2</sup>

Yet another issue of interest is the influence of the Fourth Crusade and the Latin Empire on the political stability of the restored Bulgarian Tsardom. On the one hand, the military and political threat from the Crusaders led to relative internal stability in Bulgaria, as the Latin aggression and the looming conflict consolidated the Bulgarians, the Vlachs, and the Cumans in the first Bulgarian–Latin War of 1205–1213 [Wilksman, J. 2021; Иванов, И. 2016, с. 178–187].<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the Latin Empire also became a destabilizing factor, as it supported the separatism of local rulers such as Alexius Slav (1208–1228).<sup>4</sup> The first contact between the Crusader leaders and the Bulgarian ruler Kaloyan in the summer of 1204 can shed light on an intriguing ideological and political aspect of the Latin ambitions to gain a political and military foothold in the Balkans at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. During a military expedition of the Latin army in Thrace in the summer of 1204, Tsar Kaloyan sent an embassy with a proposal for an agreement, but the result was unsatisfactory because, when asked about the reasons for coming to these lands, Pierre de Brachaux replied that ancient Troy belonged to them by inheritance, and that they were here to conquer the lands that once belonged to their ancestors [Дьо Клари, Р. 2007, с. 153–155; Ангелов, П. 2011, с. 164]. This episode vividly presents the role of the legend of Troy and the Trojan War in Latin political ideology. This ideology, combined with the idea of continuity between the Latin and Byzantine empires, turned out to be in direct conflict with the political ideology and territorial claims of the restored Bulgarian Tsardom.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> According to the author, the events of 1204 brought about conceptual changes in an imperial ideology founded on the ecumenical character of the Empire of the Romans protected by Almighty God and embodying taxis in a world ruled by Constantinople, the Blessed capital of Orthodoxy, by a unique, sacred, and autocratic emperor. Only he who possessed the imperial city confessed the Orthodox faith, and followed Roman laws could be fully legitimate. In their bid for legitimacy, the Grand Komnenoi of Trebizond – as well as the Laskarids of Nicaea, the Angeloi Doukai of Epiros, and other sovereigns – attempted to harness themselves to this Byzantine heritage by initially adopting conventional values and ideological traditions. They put a great deal of thought into formulating their conceptual position as emperors who did not rule from the imperial city, which was in the hands of a non-Orthodox and not entirely Roman ruler, and each chose the same model: the creation of a “new Constantinople” in Nicaea, Trebizond, or even Tarnovo, given that the king of Bulgaria laid claim to the same legacy.

<sup>3</sup> According to J. Wilksman, *the Latins showed more battle-willingness in their warfare than the other belligerents in the conflicts of the region. There were cultural reasons behind this. It should nevertheless be noted that there was variation in the battle-willingness of the Byzantines depending on commanders, circumstance, period, and adversary.*

<sup>4</sup> About political separatism at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, see [Николов, Г. 2011] and [Кънев, Н. 2016, с. 84–99, с. 93]. The author states an innovative and well-argued thesis that, in 1208, Alexius Slav was not awarded the honorary title of despot by Henri de Hainaut. In fact, during his negotiations with Alexius and his marriage to his daughter, the Latin emperor recognized the legality of the claims of the lord of the Tsepina Fortress to the Bulgarian throne and, accordingly, to a title equivalent to that of despot in its primary meaning of basileus (βασιλεύς), i.e. tsar. This is also confirmed by the information of Henri de Valenciennes that the emperor promised Slav power over all of Bulgaria.

<sup>5</sup> About the political ideology of the Latin Empire, see [Kanev, N. 2018, pp. 53–67, p. 55]. According to the author, the formation of the imperial ideology of the Latin Empire of Constantinople started as early as the establishment of the Empire itself in 1204. This is to justify the fundamental basis of the authority of the Latin emperors and their special place as rulers of the East in the Christian world. The ideology reflected directly

Some researchers allow the possibility of an aspiration of the first rulers of the Assen dynasty for a real political inheritance of the Byzantine imperial idea [Dall'Aglio, F. 2019, p. 178].<sup>6</sup> In my opinion, it is difficult to confirm this idea as an actual political doctrine under the rulers Peter (1185–1197), Assen (1187–1196), and Kaloyan (1197–1207). The Bulgarian–Latin conflict was mainly caused by specific territorial disputes, and not by the idea of Bulgarian hegemony in the Balkans. Rather, the hostile Bulgarian–Latin relations were a projection and consequence of the hostile Bulgarian–Byzantine relations at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the very beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Although the events of 1205–1207 provide a general outline of the Bulgarian–Latin conflict, the Greek participation in these events should also be mentioned because the Bulgarian rulers usually fought against the Latin Empire in alliance with the Greek aristocracy in Thrace in 1205–1206, and in alliance with Nicaea in 1206–1207 and 1235–1237. This testifies to the clear awareness of a strong opponent in the face of the Latins and to the need to comply with the general political and military situation along the other Bulgarian borders (especially those with Hungary in the northwest) [Dall'Aglio, F. 2019, p. 179].<sup>7</sup>

Another fact to keep in mind is that the Latin Empire, like the Byzantine Empire until 1204, was a factor that significantly influenced the raging political instability of the restored Bulgarian state. A prime example of this is the Latin support for an alliance with the local ruler Alexius Slav in the period 1208–1216 [Дьо Валансиен, А. 2009, с. 39–40, 42–43]. However, in the later periods of Bulgarian–Latin relations, this intervention stopped and the barons in Constantinople did not play a significant role in the internal politics of Bulgaria. On the contrary, after 1228–1229, the Bulgarian ruler John II Assen made attempts to interfere in the internal affairs and management of the Latin Empire.

Reference should also be made to the observation of some researchers that, as a result of the Battle of Adrianople on 14 April 1205, the Latin Empire concentrated its military forces on the Balkan Peninsula against Tsar Kaloyan, which enabled the emergence of the Nicaean Empire in Asia Minor, i.e. the Bulgarian–Latin war strengthened Nicaea as a potential successor to Byzantium [Fine, J. 1994, p. 83.; Gjuzeleв, V. 2009, p. 186]. This idea is further supported by the argument that the Bulgarian–Latin ecclesiastical union of 1204 had quite a superficial character, because if the Latin Empire and Kaloyan had not been embroiled in a war in 1205–1207, the strengthening of the Nicaean Empire would not have been possible.

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on the images and the legend on the emperor's seals, including on those of the last Latin Emperor Baldwin (Baudouin) II of Courtenay (1228–1261) (p. 65). According to the author, *Baldwin (Baudouin) II's seals contain new ideologically loaded elements which are unique to them... The traditional concepts of imperial ideology... were enriched by some new suggestions and reasons for the legitimacy of the Emperor such as the status of porphyrogenitus and the undeniable hereditary rights over the Empire... Unlike the iconography and the legend on the obverse of the seals of Baldwin II, which had a kind of 'outer' or 'pro-Western' intentions, those of the reverse had rather 'internal' and 'pro-Byzantine' purposefulness.*

<sup>6</sup> According to the author, *On the other hand, possible that Peter and Kalojan did demand recognition as βασιλεὺς, signalling the desire to take over the Byzantine empire with the assistance of Western powers, in a moment in which the imperial authority in Constantinople was weakened and under attack? After all, according to the well-known words of Niketas Choniates, in the initial stages of the revolt Asen and Peter had rallied the Bulgarians and Vlachs, proclaiming that the martyr of Christ, Demetrius, had left the town of the Thessalonians and his temple and his residence among the Romans, and came to them to help and assist in the endeavor.*

<sup>7</sup> As Dall'Aglio notes: *But the question cannot be reduced to the military abilities of Kalojan's army. The degree of ideological hostility towards the Byzantine empire, reciprocated in full by the Byzantines who disdained both the Bulgarians and their leaders, was far too great to allow for the establishment of a Bulgaro-Byzantine empire, with a Bulgarian at its head. The same elevation of Tarnovo as the capital of the state, and its constant embellishment and sanctification with a large array of relics taken from the newly conquered lands, is proof enough of the fact that the Asenids wanted to present themselves as counterparts of the Byzantine empire, establishing a state that mirrored its political and spiritual characteristics. The situation, as it is well known, quickly evolved between 1203 and 1204, and while the hostility between Bulgaria and Hungary remained, the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade changed everything in the region.*

Notwithstanding political and ideological disagreements, the conflict between the restored Bulgarian state and the newly established Latin Empire was the result of sharp territorial disputes.

### Territorial Disputes

By all accounts, in 1204, the Bulgarian tsar Kaloyan and the Latin barons attempted to conduct negotiations, where the contested territories were undoubtedly one of the central issues. In addition to Robert de Clary, information about the desire of the Bulgarian tsar to establish peaceful contacts with the Latin Empire is given by the history of Nikitas Choniates. The latter notes that the Latins responded with disdain to Kaloyan's offer of peace: *John suspected the arrogance of the Latins and feared their spear as a fiery sword, for when he had also sent ambassadors of friendship, he was answered to in his letters he treats them not as a tsar with friends, but as a servant with masters. Otherwise, they would take up arms against him and easily devastate Mysia, which he ruled not by right, but as a breakaway from the Romans, and restore him to his former position* [Nicetae Choniatae. 1983, p. 73]. It is also clear from the *Deeds of Pope Innocent III* that the Bulgarian ruler sent messengers and letters to the Latins with proposals for peace, which were also rejected. Even when the ruling dignity (legitimacy) of Tsar Kaloyan was officially recognized by the head of the Roman Church in November 1204, the Latins rejected peace proposals, declaring that *there will be no peace with him unless he returns the land belonging to The Empire of Constantinople, which he had invaded with violence*. To this, the Bulgarian ruler replied that *he owned this land more justly than they did Constantinople* [Innocentius III, 1965, p. 378]. Geoffroy de Villardouin also testifies that Boniface de Montferrat proposed Emperor Baldwin's general military action against Kaloyan, who *holds an unjustly large "part of the land."* Admittedly, Kaloyan failed in his attempts to establish peaceful relations with the Latin Empire. This can be attributed not only to the arrogance of the Latin barons but also to the claims of the Bulgarian ruler to territories in Thrace and Macedonia [Fine, J. 1994, p. 81].

In light of the above, it is easy to see why the union conclusion did not play a decisive role, and the strained relations between Bulgaria and the Western knights, namely the territorial disputes, were the basis of the sharp military conflict that broke out in the spring of the following year 1205. In a letter to Pope Innocent III from November 1204, the Bulgarian ruler called on the Pope to arbitrate, warning the conquerors of Constantinople *to stay away from my tsardom, and so my tsardom will do them no harm* [Innocentius III, 1965, p. 360]. In fact, this was a warning of war.

It is logical to assume that the main issue in these territorial disputes was related to Kaloyan's proposal to confirm the status quo and the reluctance of the Latins to accept this status quo, i.e. Bulgarian rule over lands in Thrace and Macedonia [Данчева-Василева, А. 1985, с. 54–55, 176]<sup>8</sup>. It was in Thrace that the political and military foundations of the main Bulgarian–Latin conflict emerged. A reasonable assumption can be made that Kaloyan's offer of alliance and help was related to a proposal to divide the lands in Thrace (probably also Macedonia). This proposal appears to have been in sharp conflict with the interests of the barons and with the division of the Byzantine Empire (*Partitio Romaniae*) carried out in May 1204.

An even earlier time frame to consider is the period 1189–1190 when there were attempts at negotiations between the Assenids and Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa.<sup>9</sup> This clash of interests for control over fertile territories and strategic cities predetermined Latin–Bulgarian relations to a significant

<sup>8</sup> As noted by A. Dancheva-Vasileva, in 1204, the Bulgarian ruler Kaloyan tried at least twice to establish good relations and negotiate with the Latins on the condition that the knights would not have any claims to Thrace and Macedonia. In conclusion, A. Dancheva-Vasileva observes that Bulgaria contributed both directly and indirectly to the weakening of the Latin Empire, and in some cases even went against its interests.

<sup>9</sup> It is logical to assume that one of the main issues in the attempted negotiations of Peter and Assen with Emperor Frederick I in 1189 and 1189 and of Kaloyan with the Crusader leaders in 1204 was that of territorial recognition and the boundaries of the Bulgarian Tsardom. The facts show that both in 1189–1190 and 1204 the negotiations were ineffective. One of the most likely reasons for this was the reluctance to recognize Bulgarian claims for territories south and southwest of the Balkan Mountains, in Thrace and Macedonia, regardless of the military aid promised by the Bulgarians with troops against Byzantium.

extent as early as 1204, and the union between the papacy and Bulgaria did not significantly change the dimensions of the clash. In the end, the existence of the Latin Empire, the crisis it soon fell into, and the rivalry for the Byzantine inheritance, in which Nicaea and Epirus were actively involved, proved favourable to the Bulgarian territorial expansion to the south. The territorial expansion of Bulgaria after the Battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230 is a true testimony to the ramifications due to the weakness of the Latin Empire and the fragmentation of power in the southern parts of the Balkans.

Bulgarian–Latin relations were extremely complicated due to the influence of some external factors, among which the role of the Cumans deserves special attention. This role can be examined from two points of view: the Cumans' participation as Bulgarian allies in the Bulgarian–Latin conflicts, and the reflection of the end of this active alliance on the relations between Bulgaria and the Latin Empire.

### **The Cumans and Bulgarian–Latin Relations**

On the one hand, the Cumans played an important role in the Bulgarian victories against the young Latin Empire in the period 1207–1213 [Николов, А. 2018, с. 568–581; Павлов, П. 1989, с. 9–59; Расовский, Д. 1939, с. 203–211; Vasary, I. 2005]<sup>10</sup>. This role was more significant in the first years of the war, diminishing after 1211. On the other hand, we must recognize the role of the Latin factor at the end of substantial Cuman military aid to Bulgaria and its consequences for the reorientation of Bulgarian politics after 1213.

In my understanding, it was the Latin Empire that was one of the factors, along with Hungary and the Teutonic Order in Burzenland (Transylvania), which precipitated the interruption of the close Bulgarian–Cuman relations and union after 1211–1213 [Hautala, P. 2015a, pp. 13–31; Hautala, P. 2015b, pp. 80–90]. The Bulgarian–Latin–Hungarian Union of 1213 was a heavy blow to the extremely close political and dynastic Bulgarian–Cuman relations. The Latin influence also shows through the dynamics of the Teutonic–Cuman conflict from 1211–1225, which significantly limited the opportunities of the Cuman chiefs to participate in the Bulgarian–Latin wars in the south. This change was one of the factors that led to the reorientation of the Bulgarian tsar Boril towards an alliance with the Latin Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom in 1213–1214. The analysis of events indicates that in the period between 1210 (or 1211) and 1213, there was a drastic change in the Cuman military aid, characteristic of the period 1186–1210. It is a known fact that Boril divorced the Cuman queen and married a niece of Emperor Henry, and that a marriage was also arranged between the Hungarian crown prince Bela and Boril's daughter. This marked a dramatic turn in relations with the Cumans.

The following are some of the possible causes behind this shift. Some of the events in the period 1211–1213 indicate that the Cuman allies (or at least some of them) went beyond the control of the Bulgarian rulers. Notably, religious differences were also an obstacle to stable, lasting Bulgarian–Cuman relations. The fact that the Cumans were not present in the struggle of the claimant John Assen for the throne in 1217–1218 is indicative. This can likely be explained by both the broken Bulgarian–Cuman relations under Boril and the involvement of the Danube Cumans in the north and northeast in the struggle with the Teutonic Order and in the internecine struggles between the Russian principalities [Glassl, H. 1971, pp. 22–49; Hunyadi, Z. 2018, pp. 151–162; Diaconu, P. 1978; Ivanov, I. 2022, pp. 491–505]. The issue of Bulgarian–Cuman relations and their role in the stage of the initial military conflict between Bulgaria and the Latin Empire poses another problem – that of the duration of hostile and peaceful relations between Bulgaria and the Latin Empire in the period 1204–1261.

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<sup>10</sup> The above also raises doubts about the effectiveness of the Cumans in the campaigns under consideration. Abstracting from the descriptions of their fierce raids and widespread destruction, we can conclude that their role was really important, but not the only factor for the outcome of the war. We should not underestimate the fact that the Cumans' direct involvement in the siege warfare was insignificant, because, for most of the military campaigns in question, sieges were much more common and decisive than open battles. Choniates himself explains this with the inability of the Scythians (Cumans) to besiege fields and city fortifications.

### Peace and War in Bulgarian–Latin Relations in the Period 1204–1261

The first issue to be considered here is the number of Bulgarian–Latin wars during the period of existence of the Latin Empire (1204–1261). A thorough analysis of the sources shows several military conflicts of varying intensity, and the exact chronology of the last one – namely the one during the reign of the Bulgarian ruler Michael II Assen (1246–1254), is quite obscure. The next most important question is about the ratio between alternating periods of peace and war in Bulgarian–Latin relations [Ivanov, I. 2016, pp. 178–187].

Regarding the number of Bulgarian–Latin military conflicts, the following can be mentioned. Undoubtedly, the first war can be dated back to the period 1205–1213, beginning with the entry of Tsar Kaloyan into the Greco–Latin conflict in the early spring of 1205, and ending with the Bulgarian–Latin treaty under the reign of Tsar Boril and Emperor Henry in 1213. The next Bulgarian–Latin war was fought in the period 1235–1237. It started with the active military actions of Tsar John II Assen in alliance with the Nicaeans against the Latins in Eastern Thrace and Constantinople, and ended with the renewal of peaceful relations between both sides in 1237. Another military conflict between the Bulgarians and the Latins broke out in 1247, when, as a result of the Bulgarian–Nicaean Treaty of the previous year 1246, Michael II Assen broke the peace with the Latin Empire and took part in the campaign of John III Duka Vatatzes against the Latins in Eastern Thrace [Georgius Acropolita, 1978, p. 85; Theodorus Scutariota, 1894, pp. 498–499; Гюзелев, В. 1978, с. 21; Polemis, D. 1966, pp. 270–271; Cankova-Petkova, G. 1969, pp. 65–75]. The date of the end of this Bulgarian–Latin conflict remains unknown, but it can be assumed that on the eve of the Bulgarian–Nicaean War of 1254, peace with the Latins in Constantinople had already been restored. There is a lack of historical reports about military actions between Bulgaria and the Latin Empire after 1247, so it can be concluded with reasonable certainty that a total of three wars were fought between the two powers. The most intense one was the first Bulgarian–Latin war of 1205–1213. The quantitative analysis shows that in the period 1204–1261, the hostilities lasted for about 17 years, while the two sides were in peaceful relations for about 39 years. This testifies to a predominantly peaceful rather than hostile relationship. Thus, peace dominated the war in the relations between Bulgarians and Latins<sup>11</sup>.

### Bulgaria, the Latin Empire, and Constantinople

Another aspect of the role and influence of the Latin Empire in terms of the changed status quo after 1204 was the control over Constantinople and the Straits. There are divergent opinions regarding the Bulgarian ambitions to control the city of Emperor Constantine in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to some researchers, Tsar Kaloyan's victories over the Latins can be attributed to such ambitions, while others deny such an aspiration.<sup>12</sup> Since there is no written record of plans for an attack by Tsar Kaloyan against Constantinople, these analyses rather concern the political ideology of the medieval Bulgarian state, but not real military plans and actions in the early period of Bulgarian–Latin relations. Therefore, despite the remarkable political and military activity of Tsar Kaloyan, he cannot be directly linked to a quest for control over Constantinople<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> See: [Dall'Aglio, F. 2019, p. 84]. The same opinion is also held by F. Dall'Aglio, according to whom *the hostility between Bulgaria and the Latins was not necessary nor was it the general rule of their relationship, but only one of the many ways in which they were interconnected*.

<sup>12</sup> Prof. V. Zlatarski argues that, like Krum and Simeon, Kaloyan also directed his efforts to the Byzantine capital. See: [Златарски, В. 1972, с. 264]. Analyzing the Bulgarian–Latin relations under Kaloyan, A. Dancheva-Vasileva maintains that, following the imperial idea of his predecessors, the Bulgarian ruler had Constantinople as his goal, but exercised political foresight that excluded war to the extreme and at any cost. See: [Данчева-Василева, А. 1985, с. 67]. According to I. Božilov, Kaloyan sought to conquer Constantinople. See: [Божилов, И. 1994, с. 57]. According to F. Dall'Aglio, Kaloyan had no ambitions to conquer Constantinople. According to the author, *he considered himself as he had every right to do, the βασιλεύς of Bulgaria: but most certainly, not the βασιλεύς of Constantinople*. See: [Dall'Aglio, F. 2019, p. 182].

<sup>13</sup> Georgi N. Nikolov notes briefly, but precisely: *Instead of against Constantinople, Tsar Kaloyan focused on the conquest of Thessaloniki*. See: [Николов, Г. 2014, с. 99]. The same opinion is supported by I. Ivanov,

Unlike Tsar Kaloyan, his nephew John II Assen took direct action against Constantinople after his victory at Klokotnitsa on 9 (22) March 1230. The change in the status quo threatened the Latin barons in Constantinople and led to an exacerbation of Bulgarian–Latin relations after 1231. As a result, there was a Bulgarian–Nicaean rapprochement, secured by a contract and a marriage between Elena (daughter of Ivan II Assen) and Theodor (son of the Nicaean emperor John III Vatatzes). The alliance had a strong anti-Latin motivation and the allies started a war against the Latin Empire in Eastern Thrace. After a successful campaign and division of the conquered territories, the Bulgarians and the Nicaeans, supported by the Thessaloniki ruler Manuel and by Cuman troops, besieged Constantinople by land and sea. That is why some medievalists associate the participation of Bulgarian troops in the joint Bulgarian–Nicaean siege of Constantinople in 1235 with the ambitions of Tsar John Assen for permanent control over the city. But in truth, this position is not very popular among Bulgarian medievalists [Иречек, К. 1978, с. 303; Златарски, В. 1972, с. 396; Матанов, Х. 2014, с. 297; Николов, Г. 2014, с. 99–100].<sup>14</sup>

On the one hand, the siege of 1235 was the first in the medieval actions of the Bulgarians against the city, in which a fleet also participated, i.e. in this case, we can talk with full certainty about a classic siege, and not about land attacks and short blockades like those carried out under Krum and Simeon. But as if in a kind of historical irony, despite these seemingly favourable conditions for taking the city, John II Assen withdrew before achieving real results. The analysis of political and military actions strongly suggests that the capture of Constantinople was not a strategic goal for Tsar John II Assen [Златарски, В. 1972, с. 396; Николов, Г. 1995, с. 118–127]<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, we can conclude that the fall of Constantinople under Latin rule in the period 1204–1261 did not significantly change the strategic plans of the Bulgarians who carried out many actions to expand their power in Thrace and Macedonia, but not towards Constantinople.

### The Religious Impact

Finally, but importantly, I will present an overview of the religious dimensions of Bulgarian–Latin relations in the period 1204–1261. The beginning of this period was marked by active relationships and negotiations between the Bulgarian ruler Kaloyan and the Roman Pope Innocent III. The policy towards the Bulgarian ruler was part of large-scale actions on the part of the papacy. In 1198, the Pope sent a letter to the Byzantine emperor, trying to persuade him to enter into a union with Rome [Петров, П. 1955, с. 37]. In the following year 1199, the Roman Catholic high priest again turned to Byzantium, asking for the unification of the two churches and the inclusion of the Byzantines in a crusade against the infidels. Later, to put pressure on Byzantium, the Pope turned to its northern

based on an analysis of Kaloyan's military actions which indicates that his strategy was not aimed at capturing Constantinople, but at controlling Thessaloniki as the second most important strategic centre in the Balkans. See: [Иванов, И. 2020, с. 220–234; Иванов, И. 2010, с. 45–46].

<sup>14</sup> K. Jireček accepts that the Bulgarian ruler had real intentions to capture Constantinople. Dwelling on the reign of Tsar John II Assen and in particular on the Bulgarian–Nicaean siege of Constantinople, V. Zlatarski notes the following: *Finally, the unsuccessful actions during the siege of Constantinople and mainly the destruction of the Nicaean fleet, without which it was too clear for Ivan Assen II that the Bosphorus capital could not be conquered, they showed the Bulgarian tsar that further military actions against the Latin capital would be not only useless but also harmful to his state.* H. Matanov believes that, after the unsuccessful attempt to besiege Constantinople, *Ivan Assen realized his mistake made through the alliance with Vataci and asked to correct it.* G. Nikolov emphasizes that this was the longest Bulgarian participation in a real siege of the city, but also that *the Bulgarian ruler was aware that the possible conquest of Constantinople by the Bulgarians would put the Bulgarian Tsardom in a state of “alone against all.”*

<sup>15</sup> G. Nikolov believes that, at that time, the Bulgarian Tsardom was fully integrated into the Byzantine world and such an idea and action were illogical and unpragmatic. He points out that even rulers like Kaloyan and Ivan Assen could not and did not organize independent military actions against the Byzantine capital. The scholar emphasizes that *the joint Bulgarian–Nicaean siege of the city of Constantine in 1235 and its blockade by land and sea two years later had the goal of liberating the Byzantine capital and handing it over to Emperor John Duka Vatatzes (1222–1254).*

neighbours – Bulgaria and Serbia, in an attempt to make them join the Western Church [Петров, П. 1955, с. 38–39]. The union concluded between Pope Innocent III and Tsar Kaloyan in 1204 had a certain positive impact on Bulgaria's relations with the newly established Latin Empire. The Pope failed to prevent the hostile actions of the Crusaders against Tarnovo, but he did not prevent Kaloyan from defeating their armed forces.

Certainly, the relationship between Pope Innocent III and the Bulgarian ruler Kaloyan was completely informed by the conflict between Bulgaria and the new Latin Empire. In 1205, the Pope sent letters not only to Kaloyan, but also to Archbishop Basil of Tarnovo, to advise the ruler to conclude a truce with the Latins [Innocentius III, 1965, pp. 364, 378], but events clearly show that political realism prevailed over religious considerations [Ангелов, П. 2011, с. 148; Гюзелев, В. 2009, с. 142]. The Pope was torn between the desire to attract Bulgaria to the Roman Church and the plans to strengthen the Latin Empire. The essential question remains whether the union played an important role in the Bulgarian–Latin relations in the period 1204–1261. The answer is rather negative since the religious union failed to overcome the political and military contradictions during the reign of not only Kaloyan but also of Boril and even John II Assen. The end of these, although formally close religious relations, was complicated by the return of the Bulgarian Church to Orthodoxy and by the granting of autocephaly or special rights to Tarnovo in 1235 [Karpov, S. 2005, pp. 293–294].

In conclusion, I would highlight the fact that the establishment of the Latin Empire in 1204 and the Bulgarian–Latin relations in the period 1204–1261 played an essential, and at times even decisive role in the history of the Second Bulgarian Tsardom. First of all, the temporary destruction of Byzantium significantly disrupted the political and military situation in the Balkans. On the one hand, this complicated the realization of the political ambitions of the Bulgarian rulers of the Assen dynasty, but on the other hand, it created favourable conditions for the strengthening and even temporary periods of supremacy of the Bulgarians. Next, the Bulgarian–Latin–Hungarian relations, combined with the union concluded in 1204 between Rome and Tarnovo, put Bulgaria in a relatively balanced position as a mediator between Orthodox and Catholic Europe. All this, in combination with the fact of the predominantly peaceful and conflict-free relations between Bulgarians and Latins in the period 1204–1261, allowed the consolidation and stabilization of the restored Bulgarian Tsardom in the first decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

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