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BULGARIAN-SERBIAN MARITAL DIPLOMACY FROM THE END OF 13th TO THE BEGINNING OF 14th CENTURY

Abstract: The article deals with marital agreements that had a bearing on Bulgarian-Serbian foreign policy relations between the 1280s and the beginning of the 1320s. There are five such agreements. Three are connected with the Bulgarian capital of Turnovo: the marriage of Milutin and Anna, the daughter of Tsar Georgi I Terter; the marriage of Theodora, the daughter of King Smilets (1292–1298) and Stefan, future King Stefan Dečanski, the son of Milutin; and the marriage project between the widow of Smilets and Milutin himself. The other two are the result of Serbia's relations with the north-western Bulgarian city of Vidin: the marriage of Shishman with the daughter of Dragoš, the grand župan of Milutin and the marriage of Mihail Shishman with Anna/Neda, Milutin's daughter.

Keywords: Milutin, Georgi I Terter, Stefan Dečanski, Mihail Shishman, Anna/Neda, diplomatic marriages.

The Bulgarian-Serbian marriages concluded in the period from the 1280s to the early 1320s are related to the diplomatic activity of several Bulgarian rulers and the name of a single ruler on the Serbian side – Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282–1321). During his relatively long rule and even before his ascension to the throne, Milutin participated in the design and realization of many marriages – his own, his children's, even his boyars'. Some of these marriages are an integral part of the history of medieval Bulgaria and will be the subject of attention in the present study. Unfortunately, the sources containing information about marital alliances concluded or designed by

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Milutin are too fragmentary and contradictory. This is the reason why a number of researchers engage with them in their quest to solve the questions or to offer their hypotheses about unclear events.[1] Bulgarian-Serbian marriage diplomacy is an important part of the marriage policy of medieval Bulgarian rulers. The geographical and ethnic closeness of the two nations determined the great activity in their relationships, a part of which were the frequent political marriages used in the medieval tradition to consolidate the agreements reached. King Stefan Uroš II Milutin pursued particularly active marital diplomacy with the Bulgarians during the period of his long reign, during which several rulers came successively to power in Bulgaria: Georgi I Terter (1280–1292), Smilets (1292–1298), the widow of Smilets (1298–1300), Theodore Svetoslav (1300–1321). Meanwhile, the Vidin rulers, Shishman and Mihail Shishman, recorded their names in the history of Bulgarian-Serbian political marriages as well, as their lands bordered Serbia. There are five marriage agreements relating to the Bulgarian-Serbian foreign policy relations. Three of them are connected with the Bulgarian capital of Turnovo: the marriage of Milutin and Anna, the daughter of Tsar Georgi I Terter; the marriage of Theodora, the daughter of King Smilets (1292–1298) and Stefan, the future King Stefan Dečanski, son of Milutin, and the marriage project between the widow of Smilets and Milutin himself. The other two are the result of Serbia's relations with the north-western Bulgarian city of Vidin: the marriage of Shishman with the daughter of Dragoš, the grand župan of Milutin and the marriage of Mihail Shishman with Anna/Neda, Milutin's daughter.

There are many obscurities about the mentioned marital alliances, but fortunately, two Dubrovnik documents contain undisputed information about the date of the first of them, announcing that on August 11, 1284, the Republic

[1] Studies on the topic are too numerous to be inserted in a note. I will therefore mention only some of them: В. Мошин, *Балканската дипломатија и династическите бракови на кралот Милутин*, Споменици за средновековната и поновата историја на Македония, т. II, Скопје 1977, 89–213; L. Mavromatis, *La fondation de l'empire serbe: le kralj Milutin*, Thessaloniki 1978, 36; К. Кръстев, *Съдбата на българската царкиня Анна Тертер*, Тангра. Сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на акад. Васил Гюзелев, София 2006, 649–657; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство при династията на Тертеревци*, Пловдив 2011, 133–172; E. Malamut, *Les reines de Milutin*, Byzantinische Zeitschrift 93/2 (2000) 496–507; V. Gjuzelev, *Imperatrix Bulgariae Anna-Neda (1277 – c. 1346)*, Зборник радова Византолошког института L (2013) 617–627; А. Узелац, *О српској принцези и бугарској царици Ани (прилог познавању бракова краља Милутина)*, Историјски часопис 63 (2014) 29–46; С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Свети краљ: култ Стефана Дечанског*, Београд 2007, 208–212; В. Станковић, *Краљ Милутин (1282–1321)*, Београд 2012.

earmarked a certain sum to purchase a gift for the wedding of Milutin and the daughter of the Tsar of Bulgaria (at that time Georgi I Terter).[2] Two Byzantine authors, George Pachymeres and Nicephorus Gregoras – the former was the contemporary of the events, while the latter lived and wrote later – although differing in their opinion of the number and order of Milutin's wives, agree that his Bulgarian wife was the third in line. Pachymeres also adds that the Bulgarian princess was a child born of Georgi Terter's marriage to "Asen's sister", i.e. Maria Asenina, his second wife.[3] Their marriage dates from 1279 and a simple calculation shows that on the day of her wedding the princess was no more than four or five years old.[4] In none of the sources cited above, however, the name of the bride child is not mentioned. We find it in a copy of the Serbian Synodicon of Orthodoxy from the end of the 14th century in a text containing wishes of longevity for King Stefan, his wife Anna and their children.[5] This text dates back to the period 1286–1292 as it mentions Archbishop Jacob, who officiated in this religious order from the beginning of 1286 until the beginning of 1292.[6]

These are all the testimonies directly related to the marriage of Serbian King Milutin with minor Bulgarian princess Anna Terter. Other sources help to identify the reasons for the marriage. These reasons must have been quite

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[2] *Kancelarski i notarski spisi (Acta cancellariae et notariae annorum 1278–1301)*, ed. G. Čremošnik, Archiv Ragusini, Beograd 1932, 122; К. Јиречек, *Историја Срба*, Београд 1911, 319; В. Мошин, *Балканската дипломатија и династическите бракови на кралот Милутин*, 210–211, 181–182; П. Ангелов, *Болгаро-сербские политические отношения в годы правления царя Феодора Святослава и короля Стефана Милутина (1300–1321)*, Etudes balkaniques 4 (1979) 108–109; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на България*, т. I , София 1999, 538; К. Кръстев, *Съдбата на българската царкиня Анна Тертер*, 651–652.

[3] Despite the categorical statement of Pachymeres, some researchers believe that Anna was the daughter of Georgi I Terter from his first marriage. See П. Павлов, *Търновските царици*, Велико Търново 2006, 57.

[4] И. Божилов, *Фамилията на Асеневци (1186–1460). Генеалогия и просопография*, София 1985, 258.

[5] С. Косановић, *Српске старине у Босни. Неколике биљешке*, Гласник Српског ученог друштва 29 (1871) 174.

[6] К. Јиречек, *Историја Срба*, 319, нап. 1; В. Мошин, *Балканската дипломатија и династическите бракови на кралот Милутин*, 184; К. Кръстев, *Съдбата на българската царкиня Анна Тертер*, 653; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 136. It is clear that even if it was written in the latest possible year – 1292, twelve-year-old Anna Terter could not have had several "children", so those were probably Milutin's children from his previous marriages.

important since they led to the overcoming of at least two serious obstacles to the realization of the inter-dynastic affiliation. The first is the age of the princess, who was far from her twelfth year – the minimum legal age at which girls in the Middle Ages could marry. The second obstacle is that the bridegroom had a wife whom he had to divorce. Another complication came from the fact that before that he had another marriage to a woman whom he had divorced illegally and who was still alive while Milutin was planning his third wedding. Her presence among the living made illegal any subsequent marital relationship of the Serbian ruler, or so claimed Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282–1328) when in 1299 he defended the legality of the marriage he had designed between his young daughter Simonis and the Serbian King. However, Milutin's marriages show, as many other cases, that there was no law or canon that could prevent rulers from concluding marriages if they considered them politically beneficial. It seems that, due to the complicated circumstances, the marriage of Milutin and Anna Terter was carried out after "sure oaths", as Pachymeres emphasizes in one place,[7] and in another remarks that there were "terrible oaths" from which "it seemed the marriage was contracted lawfully".[8]

However, in order to find out the reasons for this marriage, we need to look at the political situation in the Balkans around the date of the wedding and several years before. In the middle of 1281, Bulgaria actively joined the anti-Byzantine coalition led by Neapolitan King Charles I of Anjou (1266–1285). The King sought to restore the Latin Empire of Constantinople and to this end he tried to ally with Venice and Hungary and all enemies of Byzantium in the Balkans, including Serbia, Bulgaria and Thessaly.[9] In order to link the members of the coalition even more closely, two military alliances were concluded, both of them fastened with marriages. One was between Tsar Georgi I Terter and Thessalian ruler Sebastocrator John Angel (1268–1289). It is usually dated to 1281. In addition to being allies, the two rulers became kinsmen too, negotiating a marriage between prince Theodore Svetoslav and

[7] Georgius Pachymeres, *Relationes Historicas*, CFHB, XXIV/3, Paris 1999, 300–301 (ГИБИ, 10, 191).

[8] Georgius Pachymeres, *Relationes Historicas*, ed. A. Failler, CFHB, XXIV/4, Paris 1999, 307 (ГИБИ, 10, 193).

[9] C. Del Guidice, *Codice diplomatico di Carlo d'Angio*, I, Napoli 1863, 222; C. Minieri-Riccio, *Il regno di Carlo I d'Angio dal 2 gennaio 1281 al 31 dicembre 1283*, Archivio storico italiano IV (1870) 12; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на България*, 537.

the daughter of John Angel, who was still a child.[10] The other union linked Thessaly to Serbia. There is no unanimous opinion of the time when it was concluded. Some researchers believe that the Serbian-Thessalian rapprochement dates before March 1282, because the Sicilian Vespers broke out at the time and marked the beginning of the disintegration of the anti-Byzantine coalition. It would therefore not be logical for the Serbian ruler to commit to an alliance with Thessaly, which was connected with an already doomed anti-Byzantine coalition.[11] Other scholars think that the end of 1282 and even the beginning of next year is a more likely date.[12] However, it is necessary to bear in mind the active anti-Byzantine policy of Milutin, who carried out several campaigns against lands in Macedonia ruled by the Empire – the first one in the autumn of 1282,[13] the second one – at the very end of 1283 and the third one – in the second half of 1284.[14] It is therefore appropriate to ask whether the Sicilian Vespers and the engagement of Charles d'Anjou in another conflict had so much influence on the withdrawal of the Balkan states included in Charles' coalition. The answer is rather negative, at least as far as Serbia is concerned. The Bulgarian Tsar did not carry out such active anti-Byzantine military actions as his western neighbour. In fact, there are laconic and not very clear reports of battles between Bulgarians and Byzantines, dated by most researchers during the summer of 1281 – summer of 1282 at the latest.[15] And yet neither the Bulgarian nor the Serbian ruler hastened to dissolve their alliance with Thessaly shortly

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[10] Georgius Pachymeres, *Relationes Historicas*, CFHB, XXIV/3, 85; Б. Цветкова, *Българо-тесалийските отношения по времето на Георги I Тертер*, Известия на българското историческо дружество 22–24 (1948) 415–417; Й. Андреев, *Отношенията между България и Неаполитанското кралство през втората половина на 13 век*, ИПр 4 (1978) 59–74; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на България*, 537.

[11] E. Malamut, *Reines de Milutin*, 495–496.

[12] *Византиски извори за историју народа Југославије* (*ВИИНЈ*), VI, Београд 1986, 588–589; В. Мошин, *Балканската дипломатија и династическите бракови на кралот Милутин*, 145 сл; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, Београд 2015, 190.

[13] А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 187.

[14] *Ibidem*, 188.

[15] Nicephori Gregorae, *Byzantina Historia*, ed. L. Schopen, Bonn 1829, I, 140 (=ГИБИ, XI, 138); *Imperatoris Michaelis Palaeologi de Vita Sua*, ed. H. Grégoire, Byzantion 29–30 (1959/1960) 461–462; Й. Андреев, *Отношенията между България и Неаполитанското кралство*, 72–73; К. Петков, *България и византийско-неаполитанският конфликт през 1281 година*, Военноисторически сборник 60/3 (1991) 3–14; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 45–46; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 189.

after the Sicilian Vespers. The marriages that sealed the unions were preserved. It is clear that the rebellion against Charles d'Anjou in Sicily cannot serve as an argument for more accurate dating of the marriage between Milutin and the daughter of Sebastocrator John Angel, but for the purposes of the present study, the difference of a few months between the two dates is irrelevant and it is enough to say that the marriage was concluded in 1282.

Both of the Thessalian princesses were sent to their husbands' homes immediately after the conclusion of the agreements between George I Terter and John Angel in 1281, and between Serbia and Thessaly in 1282. Milutin even parted with his first wife to marry the Thessalian princess. And the fiancée of prince Theodore Svetoslav went to live in Turnovo, although her fiancé was still in Byzantium as a hostage of the 1279 agreement.[16] The princess was sent to the Bulgarian capital to ensure good relations between Bulgaria and Thessaly, although her future husband was a hostage in Byzantium and the Byzantine Emperor would hardly agree to release him while his father was in a coalition hostile to the Empire. This shows to what extent medieval rulers valued kinship as a means of guaranteeing political relations. The Serbian King ignored the divorce canons, and the rulers of Bulgaria and Thessaly became kinsmen in spite of the bride's minority and the absence of the groom, who had almost no chances to return home while the anti-Byzantine union of the fathers-in-law lasted. The coalition lost its strongest trump card when in March 1282, most probably not without the involvement of Byzantine diplomacy, the so-called Sicilian Vespers broke out – the bloody rebellion against the power of Charles d'Anjou. The war which followed between Charles I d'Anjou and Peter III of Aragon (1276–1285) shattered the dreams of the King of Naples to restore the Latin Empire of Constantinople.[17] The rulers in the Balkans continued to maintain their allies, based on their common enmity towards Byzantium. In a letter from Patriarch Gregory II of Cyprus (1283–1289) dated 1283–1284, Thessalian Sebastocrator John Angel was still reproached for his alliance with the "archon of Serbia", who was an enemy of the Empire.[18] But

[16] Georgius Pachymeres, *Relationes Historicas*, CFHB, XXIV/3, 84–85. With this agreement, Georgi Terter became Ivan III Asen's son-in-law and in return promised loyalty to the new Tsar imposed on the Turnovo throne by Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259–1282). See details about this marriage in S. Georgieva, *Bulgarian-Byzantine Marital Diplomacy from 1185 to 1280*, Bulgaria Mediaevalis 3 (2012) 448–449.

[17] S. Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers: A History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge 1958, 214–227.

[18] *ВИИНЈ*, VI, 588–589.

Bulgarians and Serbs were subjected to heavy oppression by the Tatars of Nogai (born about 1240, died 1299), whose Ulus was in the immediate vicinity of the Bulgarian Tsardom.[19] At the same time, the Thessalian ruler was hard-pressed by Byzantium and it seems that by the beginning of 1284[20] both the Serbian and Bulgarian rulers decided that they could no longer rely on him and simultaneously gave up on their alliance with Thessaly. Milutin returned the Thessalian princess to her father, and Georgi I Terter used her sister as an exchange coin to arrange his relationship with Byzantium.

Judging by the development of events, it is clear that the Tsar offered Andronicus II good neighbourly relations promising to break his alliance with Thessaly provided that the Emperor allowed his first wife to return to Turnovo in order for Terter to re-establish his marriage with her, and also released his son Theodore Svetoslav from hostage.[21] All this was fulfilled, but only a few months later, Georgi Terter made an alliance with a devout enemy of the Empire, Serbian King Milutin, and he even got into kinship with him by giving his young daughter to Milutin as wife. Thus he practically backed out of his alliance with Byzantium. What were the motives for these visibly contradictory diplomatic moves made by the Bulgarian ruler? In 1281, the hostage of his first wife and son did not stop him from engaging actively in the anti-Byzantine coalition that seriously threatened the Empire. He also participated in active military actions, though without success.[22] He, it is true, gave up on them quite quickly, but not on his alliance with the Thessalian ruler, who was a long-time enemy of Byzantium. Then suddenly Terter radically changed his policy and took steps to reconcile with Constantinople.

Objectively, the signed treaty with Byzantium meant that the Empire recognized Georgi Terter as a legitimate Turnovo ruler and officially refused to assert any claims of Ivan III Asen to the Bulgarian throne. On the other hand,

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[19] On the establishment of Nogai in the western Black Sea steppes and in the immediate vicinity of the Bulgarian lands and his relations with the countries of the European Southeast see А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 129 sq., and about Milutin's problems with the Tatars see the same book, 186–187.

[20] For a summary of the various opinions on the dating, see И. Божилов, *Фамилията*, 254, бел. 35. Most researchers believe that the alliance with Thessaly was terminated in 1284: П. Ников, *Татаробългарски отношения през средните векове с оглед към царуването на Смилеца*, ГСУ, ИФФ XV–XVI (1919–1920) 14, 17; Б. Цветкова, *Българо-тесалийските отношения*, с, 416; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История*, 538; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 49; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 191.

[21] S. Georgieva, *Marital unions as a tool of diplomacy between Bulgaria and Byzantium from 1280 to 1396*, Bulgaria Mediaevalis 4/5 (2014) 456–457.

[22] К. Петков, *България и византийско-неаполитанският конфликт*, 9–14.

however, recognized by Byzantium or not, Georgi Terter was a perfectly legitimate ruler because he already had several contracts with other rulers. In other words, his recognition by Byzantium was hardly the cause of the reversal in the political relations between the two countries. Bearing in mind that as soon as his first wife and son returned to Turnovo, Georgi Terter turned his back on the Empire again, one has the impression that the only purpose of his alliance with Andronicus II was to reunite with his family. However, it is difficult to believe this motive since only two or three years before that Georgi Terter acted on the international front as if he was not interested in the destiny of these hostages. Still, there is logic in the explanation that since he did not get a son from his second wife for four years, Georgi Terter took care to return to Turnovo his only son and legal heir.[23] And that logic can be substantiated with an argument from the sources. Pachymeres says that Terter started the negotiations with Andronicus by asking him to allow him to restore his first marriage because the church refused to recognize his second one. The Emperor agreed to the exchange of the two wives, which was carried out. However, Andronicus kept Theodore Svetoslav as a hostage in Byzantium. Then Georgi Terter made every effort to have his son back in Turnovo although he had solved the problem which primarily was brought to the fore as the reason for the negotiations. Therefore, the real reason for the abrupt turn of the Bulgarian-Byzantine relationship was the Tsar's desire to have his heir back. And it is a fact that soon after the return of Theodore Svetoslav in Bulgaria he was declared his father's co-ruler.[24] However, it is also a fact that in less than a year, the heir and co-ruler would again be sent as a hostage in a foreign country, not in a Christian one such as Byzantium, but in Nogai's Ulus where they professed Islam. Nevertheless, it is most likely that the exchange of the two wives was only a pretext to seek peace with Byzantium, while the return of Theodore Svetoslav in Turnovo was the main reason for this. On the other hand, neither the Western world in the face of Charles d'Anjou nor Thessaly could give any kind of support to Terter, so he found himself almost surrounded by enemies. It is hardly surprising that under these circumstances he decided to seek peace with Byzantium. Moreover, the Empire was an ally with Nogai's Tatars, and therefore there was hope that the alliance would relieve the pressure of the Tatar raids.

[23] К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 51.

[24] Т. Герасимов, *Медни монети на Георги Тертерий I и сина му Тодор Светослав*, ИБИД 14–15 (1937) 109–115; К. Дочев, *Монети и парично обръщение в Търново (XII–XIV в.)*, Велико Търново 1992, 83; idem, *Български средновековни монети XIII–XV в.*, Велико Търново 2003, 55–56; Б. Цветкова, *Съдбата на Теодор Светослава преди възцаряването му*, ИБИД 22–24 (1948) 45–46; И. Божилов. В. Гюзелев, *История*, 538–539; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 52.

However, the question is why after this seemingly successful diplomatic move, Georgi I Terter gave up what he had achieved by making an alliance with Serbia. The Bulgarian-Serbian agreement was essentially anti-Byzantine. Moreover, it was against the interests of the Tsardom as a unifier of the lands inhabited by Bulgarians, for Milutin, albeit in a war with Byzantium, actually expanded his kingdom at the expense of such lands in the region of Macedonia.[25] It seems the Tsar did not have much of a choice. His situation was quite complicated. Separatists had cut off large areas of his Tsardom. He could hardly have had enough military contingents to allow him to think about the Bulgarian-populated lands in the western territories of the Empire. The union with Byzantium would not help him to annex Macedonia in Bulgaria because the Empire would not give it to him voluntarily and he did not have enough power to forcefully do it. On the other hand, Andronicus II did not represent an imminent threat to the boundaries of the Tsardom because of the problems he had in Asia Minor, nor could he alleviate the pressure of the Tatars on the Bulgarian lands, because the cooperation of the Tatars with Byzantium was due to the personal friendly relations between Nogai and the deceased Michael VIII Palaeologos,[26] although Georgi I Terter could hardly have known that. If he had considered all these arguments depriving his union with the Empire of a particular sense, he would hardly have signed the contract with Andronicus II at the beginning of the year. No one can deny that when George Terter made his alliance with Byzantium he was convinced of the benefit of this union. Then why did he dissolve it so soon without a visible change in the political situation? One must infer that the Tsar was rather forced or convinced to reconsider his relations with the Empire. By whom?

In the "Life of Stefan Uroš II Milutin", it is said that the Serbian ruler visited Turnovo and achieved for his kingdom everything that was fair to receive.[27] There is no exact date of the visit in the source. Most researchers date this meeting to 1310 and associate it with the reign of Tsar Theodore Svetoslav (1300–1321).[28] The reasons are that the hagiographer first mentions

[25] К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 133 concisely explains this treaty by Terter's desire "to secure his western borders".

[26] А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 191.

[27] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, ed. Ђ. Даничић, Загреб 1866, 141–142.

[28] К. Јиречек, *Историја Срба*, Београд 1911, 328; П. Ангелов, *Българската средновековна дипломация*, София 1988, 156, where the visit is dated to 1310; П. Ангелов, *Болгаро-сербские политические отношения в годы правления царя Феодора Святослава и короля Стефана Милутина (1300–1321)*, 109; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История*, 551; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 166–167.

Milutin's meeting with the Byzantine Emperor in Thessaloniki, and then the visit of Milutin to Turnovo. The meeting in Thessaloniki took place on the occasion of the King's wedding with Simonis in 1299. Therefore, Milutin visited Turnovo afterwards, as Danilo generally follows the chronological sequence of the events he recounts. It is true that in that part of the Vita in which Danilo writes about the political history of Milutin's rule, he generally arranges the events in chronological order. This part ends with the suppression of Stefan (Dečanski)'s rebellion, which took place in 1314. There follows a long story about the godly deeds of Milutin, such as the construction of churches and monasteries, gifts and graces for the sick and the poor – all of them done in the praise of God. And God, in turn, gave him such power that *all kings and barbarians were afraid only to mention his name*. This is followed by a comparison with Alexander of Macedon and an astonishment with the majesty by which the King granted his state the help of God, and furthermore: *It is amazing how the Tsar meets with other tsars and still manages to force his will*.[29] Immediately after these comparisons there follows a single long sentence, which begins with the assertion that Milutin, resting on his faith in Christ, *was not afraid of anyone and not once, but twice he wished to meet the universal Emperor of the New Rome, of Constantinople, Andronicus, in order to receive what he desired and without hearing a bad word about himself, he achieved the desires of his heart, not only in his own country and in the Greek land, but in his own (Andronicus') throne city of Thessaloniki, achieving his every will. And also with the Bulgarian Tsar in Turnovo he met and received every righteousness for his kingdom.*"[30] Obviously, the main task of this passage is to magnify the achievements of the Serbian King. When giving examples of confirmation of a praise, it is natural to first set a stronger example, namely the repeated meetings with the ruler of the God-anointed Constantinople, and then to give another example – in this case with the Turnovo Tsar, in order to show that Milutin just like Alexander of Macedon imposed his will on other rulers. In other words, the order in which the meetings with the two emperors are listed is not chronological, but rather hierarchical, and does not refer to events after 1314 when the chronological narrative of political events was interrupted. This paragraph represents a kind of transition from the story of Milutin's godly affairs to the story of his worldly exploits, this time on the battlefield where he fights victoriously with "the ungodly Persians and Agarians".

[29] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, 141. This is probably again a comparison with "Alexander, the Macedonian Tsar" because Milutin is a king, not a tsar.
[30] *Ibidem*, 141–142.

The analysis of this part of the Vita where Milutin's visit to Turnovo is mentioned shows that the information is not chronologically bound to other events and therefore the source does not allow even approximate dating. In this case, we are forced to look for the most plausible moment for Milutin's visit in Turnovo. The development of the Bulgarian-Serbian political relations in the first half of the 1280s allows the visit to be dated to the middle of 1284[31] and to be interpreted as a reaction of the Serbian ruler after the conclusion of the Bulgarian-Byzantine agreement. The King was planning campaigns against the Empire and he cannot have wanted to leave in his rear an ally of Byzantium such as Terter, who became an ally after the signing of the peace treaty with Andronicus II. That is why he visited his royal neighbour in Turnovo and apparently made him an offer that Georgi Terter could not refuse. There is no doubt that he promised peace, and most likely they also agreed to mutual assistance in case their countries were attacked by Tatars or Byzantines. The fact that Terter accepted the Serbian ruler's proposal of alliance can be interpreted as a wordless acknowledgment of political weakness and fear of Serbia's military power. An alliance with Serbia would be a guarantee that Terter's aggressive Western neighbour, who gradually began to impose himself as a dominant figure in the Balkans, would not attempt to expand his kingdom at the expense of the lands of the Turnovo realm. In the autumn of the same year, when Terter made an alliance with Milutin, the Serbian King undertook yet another raid in the Byzantine possessions in Macedonia, where a compact Bulgarian population lived. This, however, did not aggravate the relations between the two neighbours which remained good until the end of Terter's reign.[32] This indicates that the Tsar had no claim to these lands or was unable to lay any claims. It is assumed that the treaty of 1284 legalized the Serbian dominion over Velbuzhd, Mraka, Žegligovo and Slavište, which were ceded as a dowry to the Bulgarian princess.[33] However, I doubt that these lands could be the subject of Bulgarian-Serbian negotiations, as they were the possession of Byzantium before being captured by the Serbs.

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[31] This date is assumed by: С. Мишић, *Српско-бугарски односи на крају 13. века*, ЗРВИ 46 (2009) 334–335; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 192.

[32] A. Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, I, Roma, 1859, 375–377, no. 608–609; I. Dujčev, *Medioevo Bizantino-slavo*, I, Roma 1965, 403–404; И. Билярски, И. Илиев, *Папа Николай IV и българите*, ИПр 5–6 (1997) 168–170; В. Гюзелев, *Папството и българите през средновековието,* Пловдив 2009, 156; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 194–195.

[33] С. Мишић, *Српско-бугарски односи на крају 13. века*, 334; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 194.

Thus, as a result of the agreements between the two rulers in the summer of 1284, Anna Terter, then still under five, was sent to her husband's home where she would spend the next decade and a half of her life. Most researchers assume that she was a Serbian queen throughout this time, but there are scholars who question this claim. If we read only Pachymeres' narrative, such doubts would be instantly crossed out. The prevailing opinion in historiography is due to the authority of Pachymeres. This Byzantine historian was in personal contact with the people who were direct participants in the events of 1299, as a result of which Anna Terter had to leave Serbia and move to Constantinople. That year Milutin made an alliance with Andronicus II and insisted that the alliance be cemented with a marriage to a Byzantine princess. Pressed by the lack of marriageable damsels from the dynasty, broken-hearted, the Emperor offered the King his own five-year-old daughter, Simonis – yet another minor wife the Serbian ruler would take home to care for her until she reached the age for actual marriage. But let us go back to the question of Anna Terter's status before she was sent to Constantinople.

Pachymeres claims that in 1299 one of the main obstacles for the Serbian King to get into kinship with the Emperor (apart from Simonis' age, of course) was Milutin's marriage to the Bulgarian princess, concluded under "terrible oaths". Andronicus II eliminated this obstacle by referring to a law according to which when a man had no legal divorce with his first wife, any subsequent marriage was illegal if concluded while his first wife was alive. And that was exactly the case with Milutin and his wives before Simonis, while the little Byzantine princess was to marry him legally because his first wife had died shortly before. Pachymeres states that he personally attended the conversation between the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople John XII Cosma (1294–1303), who was against the marriage. In his narrative he spoke cursorily of another obstacle, and it was a woman – the Hungarian princess Elizabeth, whom Milutin had "seduced" (το φθάσαι), and she was a "sister-in-law of his brother Stefan and of the Emperor himself"[34] and on top of all she was a nun. Pachymeres does not say that Milutin was married to this woman; he only implies a scandalous affair between them. Nicephorus Gregoras (born in 1295, died circa 1360), who wrote his *Roman History* several decades after the events we are interested in, mentions the said sister-in-law as Milutin's second wife, and explains that because the Serbian church "had long opposed this

[34] Georgius Pachymeres, *Relationes Historicas*, CFHB, XXIV/4, Paris 1999, 307. Bulgarian translation – Гръцки извори за българската история (ГИБИ), т. 10, София 1980, 193.

lawlessness after some time he also released this wife of his and took a third one, who was the sister of Bulgarian ruler Svetoslav".[35]

If we only relied on these two sources, we would probably prefer the information left by Pachymeres, the contemporary and eyewitness of the events, and assume that Milutin did not have a legal marriage with the Hungarian princess. Several Western sources, however, undermine our confidence in Pachymeres. One of them is a completely objective source and is a union treaty between the Serbian King and the new claimant to the throne of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, Charles de Vallois. The treaty mentions the daughter of Milutin, born by his lawful wife Elizabeth, named Zariza/Carica, proposed in 1308 as a bride for the son of Charles de Vallois.[36] This information, confirmed by other sources, shows that Milutin had a legal marriage with Elizabeth. Scholars usually date it to 1283/1284, following Gregoras.[37] However, again according to information from Western sources, Elizabeth was unable to marry the Serbian King before 1290 because as a child she was devoted to God and spent thirty-two years in a monastery,[38] from where

[35] Nicephorus Gregoras, *Byzantina historia*, Vol. I, Ed. Ludovici Schopeni, Bonnae 1829, 203.

[36] L. Mavromatis, *La fondation de l'empire serbe: le kralj Milutin*, Thessalonique 1978, 130: "unicam filiam suam nomine Zarizam, quam ex Elizabet, uxore sua legitima procreavit, daturum in uxorem legitimam Carolo, filio nostro"; *Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis*, Т. Живковић, В. Петровић, А. Узелац, Критичко издање текста на латинском језику, превод и филолошка анализа Драгана Кунчер, Београд 2013, 126. The source confirms this marriage project without mentioning the princess's name and explaining that her mother was the daughter of the Hungarian king. This information is also confirmed by a fresco in the monastery Assumption of the Holy Virgin in Gračanica, depicting the family tree of Nemanjićs, where princess Carica is included and mentioned in an inscription. Б. Тодић, *Грачаница: сликарство*, Београд–Приштина 1988, 107, 170.

[37] В. Мошин, *Балканската дипломатија и династическите бракови на кралот Милутин*, 160, 171; В. Станковић, *Краљ Милутин (1282–1321)*, Београд 2012, 46, 65.

[38] This number seems a little doubtful because, by 1292, Elizabeth must have been quite old for medieval standards if she had been in a monastery for 32 years. She had hardly been given there as an infant, she must have been at least five or six. So, 5 + 32 years in the monastery + 3 years marriage to the Bohemian ruler, which means she came to Serbia when she was already at the age of 40 or 35 if we assume that she was raised in the monastery since her birth. This casts some doubt on the number 32, even more so that elsewhere in the "Description of Eastern Europe" there is another number – 34, but there it is with Roman numerals (*Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis*, 126) and it is easy to make a mistake with them. Even if she had spent less time in the monastery, the important thing is that she was first a nun and then went out at the request of her brother, King Ladislaw, and began her secular life, part of which was her relationship with Milutin.

she went out in 1287 by order of her brother Ladislav IV (1272–1290) to marry a nobleman from Bohemia who died in 1290. Only after that Elizabeth was married to the King of Raška.[39]

But when was Anna Terter deprived of her crown? Given that Milutin was extremely pragmatic with his marriages (with the exception of the first one, for which we have no information, the other three – with the Thessalian, Bulgarian and Byzantine princesses – were definitely a result of political agreements), we can try to find in the period between 1290 and 1299 some events which, on the one hand, deprived his marriage with Anna Terter of political significance, and on the other hand, called for an alliance with Hungary, cemented with a marriage to Elizabeth. This definitely could not have happened until 1292 because the sources testify to good relations between Serbia and Georgi Terter almost to the very end of his rule.[40] However, by the overthrowing of Georgi I Terter from power under Nogai's pressure in 1292 and his replacement with Tsar Smilets, the marriage of Milutin with the Bulgarian princess lost all political weight.[41] It was in the same year that a reason for rapprochement between Raška and Hungary appeared in connection with the successes of the Braničevo rulers, Dorman and Kudelin, against the two Nemanjić brothers, which also affected the interests of Hungary. With regard to this, the hypothesis emerges that in 1292 Milutin divorced Anna Terter and married Elizabeth.[42]

However, can we fully trust the cited western sources? They claim that Milutin had only two legal marriages – with Elizabeth and Simonis. And the Serbian sources clearly show that Milutin was legally married to his first wife, Elena (or Ana).[43] For years, his marriage to Anna Terter was also considered

[39] *Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis*, 144; *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*, V/3, ed. G. Fejer, Budae 1830, 204, 300; E. Malamut, *Les reines de Milutin*, 493–494; А. Узелац, *О српској принцези и бугарској царици Ани*, 35–37.

[40] A. Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, I, Roma 1859, 375–377, no. 608–609; Г. Николов, *Сепаратизмът в Българския северозапад и Сръбското кралство в края на 13в.*, България и Сърбия в контекста на византийската цивилизация, София 2005, 104–105.

[41] E. Malamut, *Les reines de Milutin*, 498; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 209; А. Узелац, *О српској принцези и бугарској царици Ани*, 37.

[42] E. Malamut, *op. cit.*, 498; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 209–210.

[43] The opinion that Milutin's first marriage with a Serbian noble woman was legal is maintained in Serbian historiography, though not all authors accept as indisputable the reading of the name Elena in the inscription accompanying her portrait in the church Đurđevi Stupovi: Н. Радојчић, *Српски државни сабори у средњем веку*, Београд 1940, 27–29; *ВИИНЈ*, 6, 41–42; Б. Тодић, *Српско сликарство у доба краља Милутина*,

to be completely legitimate by both Serbs and Bulgarians. But western sources do not know these two wives of Milutin, nor do they mention his Thessalian wife. It is possible that Milutin's marriage to Elizabeth was presented as legitimate to the Western rulers, so that the daughter from that marriage had a higher value as a bride, while in fact her mother may have had the status of a concubine due to the refusal of the Serbian church to recognize her marriage with the King.[44] A strong argument in favour of the claim that Anna Terter lost her status as a queen is her absence from the donors' portrait in the church of St. Achillius in Arilje, depicted in 1296, where the King of Raška is portrayed with his brother Dragutin and Dragutin's wife Catalina. Neither Anna nor Elizabeth is portrayed beside Milutin. However, according to a Serbian art historian, it was not obligatory in Serbian medieval painting to depict the ruler with his wife.[45] In other words, the absence of Anna's image from the donors' portrait in Arilje does not necessarily mean that her marriage to Milutin was dissolved at the time of the church's painting. Once this argument dropped out of the picture it is much easier to explain why the Byzantines insisted so much on having Anna Terter given to them before they sent Simonis to marry Stefan Uroš II Milutin. And it is easier to explain Anna Terter's presence in the Serbian royal court after 1292 or after 1296 until her official divorce in 1299. And the explanation is that until then she was not divorced from Milutin despite his relationship with Elizabeth.[46] There cannot be a categorical opinion on this issue due to the state of the sources, but whether Anna was honoured as a Queen of Serbia after 1292 or not, that is the year when the political content of her marriage was completely exhausted, and her presence in the court of Milutin became a formality. Moreover, she does not seem to have had children with Milutin, which would have given her the extra weight she would have had as Queen Mother.[47] However, as the Greek sources undoubtedly testify,

Београд 1998, 36; С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Свети краљ: култ Стефана Дечанског*, Београд 2007, 208.

[44] It is possible that the statement of the anonymous author of "Description of Eastern Europe" that Milutin "had many wives simultaneously" (multitudinem uxorum simul actu habens) is not only due to the author's negative attitude towards the Serbian King – *Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis*, 126.

[45] Д. Војводић, *Зидно сликарство цркве Светог Ахилија у Ариљу*, Београд 2005, 169–170.

[46] Cf. С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Свети краљ: култ Стефана Дечанског*, Београд 2007, 210, нап. 37.

[47] There is also a hypothesis that the younger son of Milutin, Konstantin, was born by Anna Terter – З. Йончева, *Династически бракове и въпросът за престолонаследието в Сърбия, XII – началото на 14 век*, Studia Balkanika 25 (Sofia 2006) 227; The same

Anna remained in the Serbian royal court until 1299 when she was finally separated from Stefan Uroš II Milutin and was sent to Constantinople.[48]

The marriage of Milutin and Anna Terter was the first but not the only one in the history of the marital diplomacy of this ruler with the Bulgarians. And it could hardly surprise anyone in view of the active relationship between the two neighbouring nations, especially since the Serbian King had to settle foreign policy relations with two Bulgarian royal courts – not only with the Turnovo Tsardom but also with the independent Vidin region.[49] If we follow the chronological order of the political Bulgarian-Serbian marriages we should continue the study with the marriage of the Vidin ruler Shishman and a daughter of Serbian grand župan Dragoš. It has a complex history reflecting the interests of several rulers: the two Serbian rulers Dragutin and Milutin, the rulers of the Braničevo Principality, Dorman and Kudelin, the Vidin Despot Shishman, and last but not least the Tatar leader Nogai.[50] In 1290, Stefan Dragutin (King of Serbia 1274–1282, ruler of Srem 1282–1316), an immediate neighbour of the Principality of Braničevo, made an unsuccessful attempt to conquer the lands of Dorman and Kudelin. This provoked a counterattack of the Braničevo princes who, helped by hired Cuman and Tatar troops, invaded the land of Dragutin. To deal with them, the Serb called upon his brother King Stefan Uroš II Milutin and their united forces put an end to Dorman and Kudelin's independent dominion. The defeated Bulgarian princes managed to escape and went to Nogai for help. The sources, however, report that not the Tatars, but the Vidin Despot Shishman attempted to oppose the Serbian invasion of the Bulgarian-populated Braničevo region. It is logical to assume that this march was organized under the influence of Nogai.[51] In 1292, Shishman's troops, composed mainly of Tatars, penetrated deep into the lands

hypothesis is maintained by С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Свети краљ: култ Стефана Дечанског*, 206, 211, 255 without arguments.

[48] About Anna Terter's life later on see И. Божилов, *Фамилията*, 258; И. Божилов, *Българите във Византийската империя*, София 1995, 354; К. Кръстев, *Съдбата на българската царкиня Анна Тертер*, 655–656.

[49] Once he had to come into contact with the Principality of Braničevo, but there was no question of inter-marriage there.

[50] П. Ников, *История на Видинското Княжество до 1323 година*, ГСУ–ИФФ (XVIII) 1922, 68–83; Х. Коларов, *Българо-сръбските отношения при Тертеровци (по сведения от „Животи краљева и архиепископа српских)*, България в света от древността до наши дни, София 1979, 218–220; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История*, 533–535; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 139–148 ; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 205–210, 214–219.

[51] П. Ников, *История на Видинското Княжество*, 68–78.

of Milutin. Despite the initial success of the Bulgarian despot, Milutin organized a successful counter-attack and conquered the whole area together with Vidin. Shishman was forced to flee to save his life. According to Archbishop Danilo II, who describes these events in "Milutin's Life", Shishman submissively asked the winner to accept him as *one of his beloved*, and in return he would swear that *until his last breath he will not act against the will* of the Serbian King.[52] Milutin demanded that Shishman prove his words by agreeing to marry a daughter of one of Milutin's nobles. Shishman agreed and *when this happened it assured the godly King that everything was at his will and desire, he returned his state to him, and the city called Bdin. ... and with great fame he returned to his throne. And then he gave him the daughter of his grand župan Dragoš to become his wife and honoured him with great honour and many gifts*."[53] Milutin's decision to abandon his conquest does not seem logical in view of his ambition proven over the years to extend his kingdom's territory at the expense of foreign lands. It can only be explained if it was taken under coercion. Indeed, researchers have long established that Milutin returned Shishman's despotate to the will of Nogai, who threatened the King with a punitive march for having encroached on the lands of his vassal.[54] There were no military actions because the Serbian King accepted all Nogai's demands and virtually recognized himself as a Tatar vassal and guaranteed his loyalty by sending his firstborn son, Stefan (Dečanski), and several prominent Serbian boyars to the court of the Tartar leader. Shishman's marriage, however, is entirely the result of Milutin's diplomatic thinking because Nogai hardly told him how to arrange his relations with Shishman. For the Tartar leader, it was important that the Bulgarian despot regained his authority over the Vidin region and continued to be his loyal vassal, as Shishman's possessions were a buffer zone between the lands of the Golden Horde and those of Hungary and Serbia.

What was the purpose of the marriage? It did not bind the two rulers with the strength of the kinship relations which all medieval rulers relied upon, settling their political relations with marriages. If the grand župan was of royal blood as suggested by the Serbian scholar A. Uzelac,[55] Danilo would have mentioned that it was an inter-marriage between Shishman and the Nemanjić dynasty. The medieval author certainly knew well the widespread custom of consolidating agreements with dynastic marriages, and would have found more

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[52] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, 118.
[53] *Ibidem*, 119; Х. Коларов, *Българо-сръбските отношения*, 218.
[54] П. Ников, *История на Видинското Княжество*, 78; Х. Коларов, *op. cit.*, 219–220.
[55] А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 217.

appropriate words to state that Shishman was married into the King's family had this been the case. And he says that Milutin decided to force Shishman to marry a daughter of one of his boyars to test the extent to which the despot was willing to obey his will. The marriage seemed to help Milutin overcome the bitterness of the fruitless victory, the humiliation he had experienced in his collision with Nogai. Of course, the dialogue invented by the hagiographer to present what happened is not to be accepted verbatim, at least because Shishman could not have proposed to become a vassal of Milutin as he was a vassal of Nogai, as was Milutin himself. However, it is a fact that Shishman married the daughter of a Serbian boyar. So this part of the dialogue corresponds essentially to reality. Judging by the source, some time passed between the agreement and the wedding, since after the agreement the King returned to the capital and prepared for the realization of the plan, which took place not later than 1293. But when he was considering whose boyar's family to intermarry with Shishman, his idea seemed to have evolved, for Milutin decided to marry the Vidin ruler to the daughter of none else but grand župan Dragoš, who was one of the most prominent representatives of the Serbian aristocracy. Judging by this choice we could assume that Milutin was not far from the idea of imposing his influence in the Vidin region, laying the foundations for a close relationship with Shishman, in which the Serbian King would be more a patron than an overlord. This idea came to its fullest development when Milutin decided to intermarry his own family with the Shishmans by giving his own daughter Anna/Neda[56] as wife to Shishman's son Mihail.

"Milutin's Life" mentions the two marriages one after another in a short text, but short as it is, it clearly shows that between the weddings of the father and the son, some time passed – the time when the Serbian King was convinced "in his [Shishman's] great affection and all true obedience and faithful service".[57] When exactly was the marriage between Mihail Shishman and Anna/Neda concluded? It had to consolidate some new agreement between the Serbian King and Despot Shishman. It is clear from the source that Mihail Shishman married the Serbian princess while his father was still alive. Hence, it happened before 1313, when Mihail was mentioned in a Venetian document

[56] About Anna/Neda's names see V. Gjuzelev, *Imperatrix Bulgariae Anna-Neda*, 618, note 8: Most sources – Serbian, Dubrovnik and Neapolitan – call this daughter of Milutin and wife of Mihail Shishman Ana or Anna. The name Neda is mentioned in one document of 1497 – S. Ristić*, Dečanski spomenici*, Beograd 1864, 20. „Neda or Dominica" are the names used by Mauro Orbini in *Il Regno degli Slavi, hoggi corrottamente detti Schiavoni*. Historia di Don Mauro Orbini rauseo abbate Melitense, In Pesaro 1601, 465.

[57] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, 119.

as the sole ruler of Vidin.[58] We can further specify the latest date for the marriage of Mihail and Anna/Neda by referring it to the information on Milutin's negotiations with Charles de Valois, which were mentioned above. They were held in 1308[59] and in connection with the agreement the rulers discussed a marriage of the *only* (according to the source) daughter of the Serbian King named Carica with Charles's son. For Carica to be "the only" daughter, the other daughter of Milutin and Elizabeth must have been married and away from her father's home.[60] This means that the marriage of Mihail and Anna/Neda could have been concluded in 1308 at the latest. The earliest possible date for this wedding is 1299 – the year in which Nogai died, thus putting an end to the vassal dependence of the Serbian King and despot Shishman of the Tatars.[61] This change probably required clarification of the relations between Milutin and the Vidin potentate. So the marriage of Mihail Shishman and Anna/Neda must have been concluded between 1299 and 1308, but rather at the beginning of this period,[62] soon after Milutin intermarried into the Palaeologus dynasty, followed by a rift in the relations between the Serbian King and his brother Dragutin. It was then that there was a serious reason to settle relations with the Principality of Vidin through such a politically arranged marriage. Assuming the marriage was concluded between 1299 and 1300, Anna/Neda must have been six or seven years old at most on her wedding day if her parents' marriage dates from 1292 and Anna/Neda as their first daughter was born in 1293 at the earliest.[63] The story of Milutin's marriages shows that the princesses' fragile age was not particularly disturbing for medieval rulers. Therefore, we cannot believe that Anna/Neda's youth could be an obstacle. If she was seven years old at the time of her marriage, the Serbian woman was

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[58] *Венециански документи за историята на България и българите от XII до XV век*, изд. В. Гюзелев, София 2001, 59; П. Ников, *История на Видинското Княжество*, 90.

[59] L. Mavromatis, *La fondation de l'empire serbe*, 130.

[60] А. Узелац, *О српској принцези и бугарској царици Ани*, 41 нап. 44.

[61] Cf. Н. Илиев, *Малолетен ли е бил Иван Стефан през 1330 г.*, Исторически преглед 6 (1989) 52 who dates the marriage to 1300–1302.

[62] А. Узелац (*О српској принцези и бугарској царици Ани*, 41) dates the marriage to the first decade of the 14th century.

[63] Cf. V. Gjuzelev, *Imperatrix Bulgariae Anna-Neda*, 618, the author states that Anna/Neda was Milutin and Elizabeth's daughter, Elizabeth being the King's first wife and accordingly the princess' date of birth is referred to 1277. Unfortunately, there are no arguments to justify the dating. Cf .also С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Свети краљ: култ Стефана Дечанског*, 206, 211, where the scholar insists that Anna was born by Milutin's first wife – the Serbian woman called Elena or Ana.

able to give birth to Ivan Stefan[64], the first (it is supposed) of her four sons by Mihail Shishman, at the age of twelve or thirteen at the earliest, that is, about 1305–1306.[65]

It is not known whose initiative for this diplomatic marriage was. It has been suggested that Shishman was the one who wanted to become a vassal of Milutin after he could no longer rely on Nogai's support, and in Turnovo after the death of Tsar Smilets at the end of 1298 there was a struggle for the throne between the late Tsar's widow and his brothers Radoslav and Voysil, which eventually ended with the ascension of Theodore Svetoslav to the throne.[66] Archbishop Danilo says that it was Shishman who *begged* Milutin to become one of his *beloved*, but this relates to the negotiations that led to the agreement which was cemented with Shishman's marriage with the daughter of Serbian župan Dragoš. In regard to the marriage which allied the Serbian King with Shishman's son Mihail, there are no sources by which to judge whose initiative it was. Milutin, facing a strong opposition in the face of his brother Stefan Uroš Dragutin and his mother Elena,[67] also benefited from the rapprochement with the Vidin Despotate and therefore it is equally possible that he proposed the kinship. On the other hand, Shishman, without the support of the Tatars, was hardly a serious threat to Serbia, while Milutin's troops instilled fear even with the Byzantine Emperor. Moreover, at the same time, Theodore Svetoslav ascended to the throne in Turnovo, after having won the favour of the new Tartar ruler, Toktu. Shishman could hardly have known what to expect from the new Tsar in Turnovo, and uncertainty over the unknown future could have made him look for rapprochement with Milutin. Obviously, both sides benefited from the kinship, although it is unclear on whose initiative it had been implemented.

It is also unclear who gained greater benefits from this marriage. Scholars, especially in older days, insist that Vidin was dependent on Milutin. This statement, however, is not based on concrete evidence which shows that the Serbs benefited in any way from this dependence, but only on the fact that Milutin became a relative by marriage to Shishman and Mihail, at a time when the Serbian King was undoubtedly the dominant political power in the Balkans.

[64] И. Божилов, *Фамилията*, 139–142.

[65] Cf. П. Мутафчиев, *История на българския народ*, т. 2, София 1943, 242; А. Бурмов, *История на България през време на Шишмановци (1323–1396)*, Свезка 2, ГСУ-ИФФ 43 (1947) 269; И. Божилов, *Фамилията*, 139, who suggests that Ivan Stefan was born at the very beginning of the century.

[66] Н. Илиев, *Малолетен ли е бил Иван Стефан през 1330 г.*, 51.

[67] А. Узелац, *О српској принцези*, 41.

From the "Life of Stefan Dečanski", written by Danilo's Continuator, it is clear that Milutin and Mihail Shishman had very close relations until the death of the Serbian King in 1321.[68] There is no evidence to suggest that these relations were unequal, i.e. that Mihail was politically dependent on Milutin. Moreover, over the years the Vidin ruler established himself as an authoritative international figure, which is evident from a 1313 list of the rulers who maintained friendly relationships with Venice, where Mihail was titled the *despot of Bulgaria and lord of Vidin* and was ranked higher than the doge of Venice. There is even a direct, albeit later, piece of evidence that points to the existence of an equal alliance. It is found in Peyatovicski's 16th century genealogical text, which mentions that shortly before his death, Milutin named his son Constantine as his successor, and then sent him to the Bulgarians and the Greeks to hire an army for an impending war.[69] In all likelihood, *Bulgarians* refer here to the Vidin Despotate.[70] Moreover, the negotiations must have been led directly with Mihail, because if we judge by Mihail Shishman's title of a despot, given to him most probably by Theodore Svetoslav,[71] he had arranged his relations with Turnovo, and the Vidin region was once again a part of the Tsardom.[72] If Constantine had to hire an army, then Mihail Shishman was not obliged because of some political dependence on Raška to provide a military contingent to Milutin. This is confirmed by the fact that Bulgarians and Greeks are placed under a common denominator. In other words, the marriage of Mihail Shishman and Anna/Neda sealed a political agreement signed by equal partners. Only a decade later, when Mihail Shishman died, already as Tsar Mihail III Asen, in the battle of Velbuzhd in 1330, Serbia led by Stefan Dečanski (1322–1331) attempted to take advantage of the marriage concluded thirty years earlier and dissolved in 1324,[73] by imposing on the suddenly

[68] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, 180; П. Ников, *История на Видинското Княжество*, 103–104.

[69] Л. Стојановић, *Стари српски родослови и летописи*, Ср. Карловци 1927, 49; П. Ангелов, *Болгарская история в сербских родословных текстах и летописях (IX–XIV вв.)*, Paleobulgarica 2 (1981) 27.

[70] П. Ангелов, *op. cit.*, 27.

[71] И. Божилов, *Фамилията*, 120.

[72] According to И. Божилов, *op. cit*., 119–120 Vidin was an apanage given to Shishman on the occasion of his marriage to Asen's descendant, and Mihail received the despot title and the Vidin apanage from his cousin Theodore Svetoslav.

[73] For the second marriage of Michael III Shishman Asen with the widow of Theodore Svetoslav – Byzantine Teodora see S. Georgieva, *Marital unions as a tool of diplomacy between Bulgaria and Byzantium from 1280 to 1396*, Bulgaria Mediaevalis 4–5 (2013–2014) 467–468.

vacated Turnovo throne Anna/Neda and her son Ivan Stefan. However, they managed to remain in power for only a few months, which could not be considered a significant success of Serbian diplomacy. In other words, we can conclude that the marriage of Mihail Shishman and Anna/Neda was a successful move for the marital diplomacy of both countries at the time of its conclusion and the political alliance cemented with it lasted until the community of interests that generated it existed. Mihail strengthened his self-esteem and built authority under the patronage of his father-in-law, and the Serbian King could focus his attention on fighting his brother Dragutin without worrying that the Principality of Vidin, adjacent to the possessions of both Serbian rulers, could pass on the side of Dragutin.

Two more episodes from the history of Bulgarian-Serbian marital diplomacy are related to the time around the very end of the 13th century – a proposal for personal union between the two countries based on the marriage between Serbian King Milutin and the widow of Tsar Smilets[74] and the marriage of Stefan, the son of Milutin and the future Serbian King, with Theodora, the daughter of Smilets. The first of these episodes took place during the winter and early spring of 1299, when Stefan Uroš II Milutin and Andronicus II led the alliance negotiations, cemented with the marriage between the Serbian King and Simonis, the five-year-old daughter of the Byzantine Emperor. At that time the rule over the Tsardom of Turnovo was in the hands of the widow of Tsar Smilets, who died in November 1298. We learn about these events from a detailed letter-report by Theodore Metochites, who headed Andronicus II's envoy and was in charge of conducting negotiations for the final arrangement of the conditions for the marriage between Milutin and the Byzantine princess. A complicated diplomatic battle began, involving two other embassies – one from Thessaly and the other from Bulgaria. Each of the three embassies tried to attract Milutin as an ally and offered him an inter-dynastic marriage. The main purpose of both the Thessalian and the Bulgarian envoys according to Metochites was to thwart the alliance between Serbia and Byzantium. In this intense competition, in which Byzantium emerged as the main rival with the suggestion to marry the Serbian King into the Emperor's family by marriage to a porphyrogene princess, the Bulgarian tsaritsa could only hope for success if she offered Milutin something equal or even better. And she proposed herself together with the Tsardom. This is the only way to interpret the words of Theodore Metochites, who wrote in his letter the following: *She* [the widow of Smilets] *is trying to win the marriage for herself*

[74] П. Ангелов, *Проекти за българо-сръбска държава през Средновековието*, Минало 2 (2004) 14–17.

by destroying our vows and settlements. She keeps giving promises and then praises the Bulgarian Tsardom to which she is the ruler and which he [Milutin] *will have through her*.[75]

The anti-Byzantine direction of this proposal cannot be denied, but the quest to thwart the Serbian-Byzantine rapprochement was hardly the only reason why the tsaritsa offered her hand to the Serbian King. It should not be forgotten that the negotiations took place only a few months after the death of King Smilets, and the fact that they were led on behalf of his widow shows that, for one reason or another, she had taken the control over the Tsardom. It is clear from the sources that she relied on the help and support of her son-in-law Eltimir, the brother of Tsar Georgi I Terter, about whom Metochites wrote in his letter of March 1299 saying that he had recently returned from abroad and married the *beloved daughter* of the tsaritsa.[76] Whether this marriage was concluded at the end of the reign of Smilets[77] or after his death, the important thing is that the Tsar's widow managed to secure the loyalty and support of her son-in-law in a very complex situation. On the one hand, judging by the fact that, a little later, Smilets' brothers – Radoslav and Voysil laid claims to the Turnovo throne, the widowed tsaritsa was pressed by a strong internal opposition.[78] On the other hand, the internecine war among the Tatars gave hope that the Tsardom would be able to free itself from its vassal dependence on Nogai,[79] at the same time, however, this could not happen if Bulgaria was in a political isolation and could not rely on allies among its neighbours. And the position of the Bulgarian diplomats during the negotiations with Milutin shows that the tsaritsa, although a Byzantine and even a close relative of

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[75] K. Sathas, *Biblioteca graeca medii aevi*, I, Venetiae 1872, 148–153; L. Mavromatis, *La fondation de l'empire serbe*, 116; Bulgarian translation in *Извори за средновековната история на България (VII–XIV в.) в австрийските ръкописни сбирки и архиви*, т. 1, ed. В. Гюзелев, София 1994, 118.

[76] K. Sathas, *Biblioteca graeca medii aevi*, I, 148–153; L. Mavromatis, *La fondation de l'empire serbe*, 116; П. Ников, *Татаробългарски отношения през средните векове с оглед към царуването на Смилеца*, 90–91 and a later publication of the same translation in *Извори за средновековната история на България (VII–XIV в.) в австрийските ръкописни сбирки и архиви*, 118.

[77] Metochites' letter leaves the impression that the marriage was designed by the widowed tsaritsa, but Pachymeres defines Eltimir as "Smilets's son-in-law" and not as "Smilets wife's son-in-law" – Georgius Pachymeres, *op. cit.*, XXIV/4, 611–610 (ГИБИ, 10, 200).

[78] И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на България*, 542; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 161–162.

[79] А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 228.

Andronicus II (she was his cousin) perceived Byzantium as an adversary rather than an ally. These circumstances are the likely explanation for the impressive move of the ruling widow on the front of marital diplomacy with Serbia. However, it did not prove to be impressive enough for Milutin.

The King was listening carefully to the Byzantine and Bulgarian envoys, even forcing them to appear before him at the same time, apparently to fuel competition between them in order to maximize his benefits. Finally, however, he chose to get into kinship with the Byzantine Emperor instead of marrying the Turnovo tsaritsa. Why? The marriage to the tsaritsa would have given him a royal title; the territory of Turnovo Tsardom was much larger than the lands in Macedonia which the marriage to Simonis would bring him. Yet he preferred the hand of the five-year-old Byzantine princess. Did he judge that he had no potential to hold and protect such a large territory in a confrontation with Byzantium and the Tatars, and he seemed to have expected a confrontation with his brother Dragutin, who had previously given him power over Serbia under the conditions that Milutin had no intention of fulfilling? Was he blinded by the glamour that his kinship with the Byzantine Emperor promised? By creating an Orthodox commonwealth, Byzantium succeeded in imposing on the minds of a number of nations in Eastern Europe the thought of the superiority of the Byzantines, the unattainability and holiness of the Byzantine Emperor standing at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. Below him were all other members of the imaginary family of rulers, to whom the Byzantine Emperor was *pater familias*.[80] In this situation, the kinship with the Basileus for each Orthodox ruler meant approaching the unattainable peak. The marriage to a Byzantine princess raised her husband's authority and provided him with the political support of the Empire.[81] Pachymeres' account shows Milutin becoming more cooperative when he realized that the Emperor had decided to give him as wife not the Emperor's sister Eudokia as the original plan was, but his own daughter.[82] No matter how hard the envoys of the Bulgarian tsaritsa tried to persuade the Serbian King that Byzantium was already an unreliable and hopeless ally, since its lands in Thrace were devastated by Tatars and its

[80] F. Dölger, *Die Familie der Könige*, Historisches Jahrbuch (1940) 397–420; Ф. Дьолгер, *Средновековното "семейство на владетелите и народите" и българския владетел*, Списание на БАН 32 (1943) 181–222; G. Ostrogorski, *The Byzantine Emperor and the Hierarchial World Order*, The Slavonic and East European Review 84 (1956) 1–14.

[81] М. Ласкарис, *Византијске принцезе у средњовековној Србији*, Београд 1926, 124.

[82] Georgius Pachymeres, *op. cit*., CFHB, XXIV/3, $303_{26\text{-}28}$; ГИБИ, 10, 192.

provinces in the East,[83] i.e. in Asia Minor – by Turks, Milutin apparently remained determined to become the son-in-law of the Emperor.

Another circumstance may have contributed to this decision, but its existence is not an undisputed fact in historical science. This is the hypothetical son of Tsar Smilets. None of the sources devoted to the political history of the Middle Ages in the Balkans contain information about the existence of a direct heir to Smilets. Theodore Metochites, who spent months in obligatory communion with the Bulgarian envoys, does not mention a word from which it can be seen that the tsaritsa acted in the negotiations as the regent of the young son of the deceased Tsar. George Pachymeres, the author of the main source of the epoch, also does not talk anywhere about Smilets' son, though he knows very well Smilets' wife and her role in the events between the 13th and the 14th century. The evidence that caused the appearance of the controversial figure of the so-called Tsar Ivan IV Smilets in Bulgarian history is found in the typicon of the Constantinople monastery St. Virgin Mary of Good Hope, whose donor was Theodora, nun Theodoulla – a sister of the Bulgarian tsaritsa, wife of Smilets. Two passages from this document mention a person, defined once as *my beloved nephew, kurios* [lord] *John Comnen Duka Angel Vrana Palaeologus, son of the high despina of the Bulgarians, called before God and the Schema monk Joasaph*, and the second time as *my beloved nephew, son of the high despina of the Bulgarians, kurios John Palaeologus Angel Vrana, called before God and the Schema, monk Joasaf*.[84] There is no doubt that the John mentioned in the typicon is a son of the Byzantine princess, married to Smilets. But was he a son of Smilets?[85] Both times John is mentioned by his mother's names, as the son of the despina of the Bulgarians, but not as a son of the Tsar of the Bulgarians, nor is he titled a tsar – a title he should have had if he had inherited his father on the throne and ruled the Tsardom from the end of 1298 until the ascension of Theodore Svetoslav in 1300. The arguments adduced above inevitably cast doubt on the royal origin of John.

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[83] K. Sathas, *Biblioteca graeca medii aevi*, I, Venetiae 1872, 148–153; П. Ников, *Татаробългарски отношения*, 92–93.

[84] H. Delehaye, *Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Palèologues*, Bruxelles 1921, 141–142; И. Божилов, *Бележки върху българската история през 13 век*, Българско средновековие. Българо-съветски сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на проф. Иван Дуйчев, София 1980, 78–79.

[85] A categorical positive answer to this question is given by И. Божилов, *op. cit*., 78–80. A categorical negative answer to the same question is given by К. Кръстев*, Имало ли е български цар Йоан IV „Смилец"?*, Paleobulgarica XXXIV, 1 (2010) 55–60.

This suspicion is further fuelled by the information on the tsaritsa's activity after she was overthrown. Having lost the opportunity to create, together with Milutin, a realm to rival Byzantium, Smilets' widow rebuilt the relations with the empire that fitted her origin. She used her family ties with Emperor Andronicus II to unite the interests of Eltimir and Constantinople. Andronicus II relied on her to win her son-in-law against Tsar Theodore Svetoslav.[86] Thus Smilets' widow is represented by Pachymeres as an intermediary in the relationship between Eltimir and Byzantium. If she had a son from Smilets, it seems strange that this ambitious woman, as she is depicted by Theodore Metochites, after being deprived of the throne, did not assert her son's legitimate rights to the Turnovo throne but put her energy in defence of the interests of Eltimir, who was only her son-in-law, and should be far behind her son. John's behaviour also raises doubts over the existence of a legitimate successor to Smilets: this John bears his mother's names, does not claim the Bulgarian throne, and the empire makes no attempt to use him as a claimant to the power in Turnovo.[87]

The earliest possible date of birth of the Byzantine princess, who became despina of the Bulgarians in 1292, was 1263, as she was the fourth child of her parents who married in 1259. If she was born so early, she could have been twelve or thirteen years old when she married and had a son before her marriage to Smilets, which dates from 1278/79 at the earliest. She could have been widowed or divorced recently after her first wedding, and her marriage to Smilets could have been second to her. If she was born later, then it would have been possible to re-marry after 1305 when her traces in the sources were lost, and she may have given birth to John some time after returning to Byzantium. It is a fact that there is no evidence of a marriage of hers after Smilets' death,[88] but absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.[89] However, there are sufficient arguments to hypothesize that John was not the son of Smilets. Then, in 1299, his widow must have negotiated with Milutin on her own as a sole ruler. In that case, we could admire the breadth of her political thought that outlined the boundaries of a powerful unified realm of two ethnically close nations which could compete with Byzantium and become a

[86] Georgius Pachymeres, *op. cit*., CFHB, XXIV/4, 608–611.

[87] И. Божилов, *Бележки*, 80.

[88] See the opposite opinion in К. Кръстев, *Имало ли е цар Йоан IV*, 57–58. See my arguments against this opinion in S. Georgieva, *Marital unions as a tool of diplomacy*, 461–462.

[89] Such *argumentum ex silentio* is given by И. Божилов, *Бележки*, 79 and by S. Georgieva, *The Byzantine Princesses in Bulgaria*, Byzantinobulgarica 9 (1994) 189.

dominant factor in the European Southeast. This is the view of a person free from the responsibility to keep the identity of the Bulgarians or to take into account their history of a nation with an independent state. The aim is for the tsaritsa to have as much power and secure support that the widow evidently saw in the face of Stefan Uroš II Milutin. The Serbian King, however, refused to marry the Turnovo tsaritsa, apparently seeing in her plan more flaws than advantages compared to what Byzantium offered him.

On the other hand, in the present state of the sources, we cannot categorically reject the possibility that John Duka Angel Vrana Palaeologus was the son of Smilets, but for some reason completely distanced himself from his past and returned to the roots of his mother, merging with the high Byzantine aristocracy, remaining far from political life. If that is true, we must assume that in 1299 his mother led the negotiations with the Serbian King from the position of the regent of Smilets' minor heir. In this case, there are two possibilities. The first possibility is that the queen had betrayed her son's interests and completely selfishly sought a glamorous future for herself, offering Milutin the Bulgarian crown without conditions.[90] The other one, which sounds more natural to me, is that the mother protected the interests of her son and offered her hand and the Tsar's crown to Milutin, provided that after his death the Tsardom of Turnovo would be inherited by her son. Such a condition meant that the proposed unity would have brought the Serbian King more problems than benefits, for in practice he had to take upon himself the regency of John[91] and to endeavour to defend a realm that was not in a flourishing state and would not even remain for his offspring. Until a source appears to prove conclusively the credibility of one of the hypotheses, they both have the right to exist. In both cases, however, this marriage initiative of the Bulgarian royal court ended in failure due to the strong competition of the marriage with the Byzantine princess born in purple, offered to Stefan Uroš II Milutin by Byzantium.

In order to complete the list of marital agreements that are part of the Bulgarian-Serbian marital diplomacy in the period of the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century, we must examine one more marriage – the one between Milutin's son Stefan, future King Stefan Dečanski and Theodora, the daughter of King Smilets. There are several hypotheses for this marriage, too. This time they are related to the date of its conclusion. The earliest assumption

[90] This is what happened according to K. Krastev; see К. Кръстев, *Имало ли е цар Йоан IV*, 57.

[91] А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 229.

dates the marriage to 1298, before Smilets' death.[92] The main argument of this hypothesis is the claim that Danilo speaks of Smilets as the then Bulgarian ruler. Hence, it is concluded that the marriage was contracted in order to confirm the peaceful relations between the two states under the "new" ruler.[93] In "Stefan Uroš II's Life", however, Danilo only says that Milutin married his son to *the daughter of the Bulgarian Tsar, called Smilets*. By this definition, the author may simply have indicated the origin of the King's daughter-in-law, and the expression used does not necessarily mean that the ruler in question reigned at the time. Moreover, if the marriage could be dated to 1292, or soon after, it would be possible to explain Milutin's wish to get into kinship with Tsar Smilets, who then replaced Georgi I Terter on the throne, and it would be quite normal for Milutin to seek to confirm the peaceful and allied relations from the time of Terter with the new ruler. In 1292, however, to avoid an invasion of Nogai's troops, Milutin was compelled to recognize himself as his vassal, and to send his son Stefan and several prominent boyars as hostages to the Tatar ruler. Stefan managed to return shortly before the start of the internecine wars among the Tatars, which led to Nogai's death.[94] Therefore, the marriage can be dated to 1297–1298 at the earliest, but then Smilets was no longer the "new" ruler of the Tsardom.

The other hypothesis dates the marriage to 1299–1300, based on the argument that Stefan Dečanski was able to escape from the Tatars only after 1299 when Nogai died and the internecine wars began, creating favourable conditions for the Prince to escape.[95] In fact, the internecine wars began earlier – as early as 1297, and Danilo's Continuator testified that Stefan had managed to return to his homeland before the wars broke out, noting that shortly after his return, the devil decided to have fun and put the Tartars to ruin,[96] i.e. Stefan must have run away in 1298.

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[92] В. Мошин, *Балканската дипломатија и династическите бракови на кралот Милутин*, 179–181; Х. Коларов, *Българо-сръбските отношения при Тертеровци*, 220; П. Ангелов, *Болгаро-сербские политические отношения в годы правления царя Феодора Святослава*, 109; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на България*, 541; П. Ангелов, *Проекти за българо-сръбска държава през Средновековието*, 17; К. Кръстев, *Българското царство*, 154.

[93] П. Ангелов, *Болгаро-сербские политические отношения в годы правления царя Феодора Святослава*, 109.

[94] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, 122.

[95] К. Јиречек, *История*, 330.

[96] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, 122.

The third hypothesis dates the marriage in question to 1305–1306.[97] According to this assumption, the marriage of Stefan (Dečanski) and Theodora was one of the first measures to introduce Stefan into the possession of Zeta, which until 1306 was under the control of Queen Mother Elena. The marriage helped to legitimize Stefan's status because Theodora was the descendant of the Byzantine Palaeologus dynasty on the maternal line, and this would help him to establish himself as a legitimate heir to the throne. I have reservations about this hypothesis because Danilo presents the Bulgarian woman as the daughter of Tsar Smilets and not as a descendant of the Palaeologi, and the Archbishop was well acquainted with the politics and problems of Milutin. In addition, the author of the vita explicitly declares that he aims to describe everything worthy of praise in the life of this Serbian King. He would not have missed to note that Milutin had married his son to a descendant of the Palaeologi, which would give him the opportunity to emphasize that the King was not only a loving father but also a far-sighted and influential politician. Furthermore, Danilo writes that the marriage was concluded when the whole of the Kingdom of Serbia lived "quietly and uneventfully", but after 1300 a long and lasting war with Dragutin began.

The latest date suggested for the marriage of Stefan (Dečanski) and Theodora is 1309–1310. The argument is that since Stefan and Theodora's first son was born in 1311, his parents' marriage must have been concluded a year or two before that.[98] This argument, however, is not particularly convincing because the appearance of children in the family does not follow a well-established program. Besides, we do not know at what age Stefan and Theodora were married. For Theodora, we can only assume that she was Smilets' younger daughter, because (again supposedly) first her sister was married to Eltimir, and the order of marriage usually followed the order of seniority. The year in which her parents were married – 1282[99] is hypothetical, too. Even if these hypotheses correspond to the truth, we can only conclude that Theodora was

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[97] Х. Матанов, *Нови седения за родственици на деспот Алдимир (Елтимир)*, Годишник на Софийския университет „Св. Кл. Охридски 1 (1987) 107–113; А. Узелац, Б. Радовановић, *Црквена и световна политика краља Милутина према западним силама – неколико нових запажања*, Свети цар Константин и хришћанство, I, ур. Д. Бојовић, Ниш 2013, 601–602; А. Узелац, *Под сенком пса*, 211; С. Мишић, *Српско-бугарски односи на крају 13 века*, 338–339.

[98] П. Ников, *Татаробългарски отношения*, 27–28; В. Златарски, *Българо-сръбските политически отношения в миналото*, Българска историческа библиотека 3/2 (1930) 90.

[99] For details see S. Georgieva, *Marital unions as a tool of diplomacy*, 453–455.

born somewhere in the wide range from 1284 to 1298 when her father died. For Stefan's date of birth there are some clues in the sources, but that does not mean that we can tell without hesitation exactly how old he was when he married Theodora. Most researchers claim that he was born in 1275 based on information from Gregoras, according to which at the time of his second marriage (i.e. 1325[100]) Stefan Dečanski was fifty years old.[101] It is not clear, however, whether Gregoras used the word to indicate the exact age of the King or exaggerated his years to emphasize how old he was when compared to his 12-year-old wife, Maria Palaeologus, from whom *he immediately began to have children*.[102] Archbishop Danilo defines Stefan when he returns from the Tatars as a "teenager", meaning a young man aged between 12 and 20. Stefan must have been born in 1281 at the latest, because in 1282 his father married a Princess of Thessaly, with whom he divorced very soon without having any children with her. Then, in 1284, he married Anna Terter, who was only five years old and could not have had a teenage son in 1298. It turns out that Gregoras' age expression is quite close to the truth even if he rounded the years of the Serbian King to a larger integer. The conclusion that can be drawn is that in 1298, and even more so in 1309, Stefan was of age that allowed him to have children. However, the age of the husband is not the only factor determining the appearance of children, so the birth of Stefan Dušan in 1311[103] still does not seem to be a particularly convincing argument to date his parents' marriage in 1309.

There is logic also in the objection that in 1309, Milutin would have no political advantage to get into kinship with the overthrown and persecuted family of Smilets,[104] and the marital diplomacy of this ruler shows that in general he used marriages as a means to solve the pressing problems of foreign political nature. An interesting explanation for the birth of Dušan towards the end of the first decade of the 14th century is suggested by M. Purković.[105]

[100] С. Пириватрић, *Податак Нићифора Григоре о хронологији брака Стефана Дечанског и Марије Палеолог*, Споменица академика Сима Ћирковића, Београд 2011, 342–343.

[101] Nicephorus Gregoras *Byzantina historia*, I, 456.

[102] *Ibidem*.

[103] Other researchers date Stefan Dušan's date of birth to about 1308–1309 г. Cf. К. Јиречек, *Историја Срба*, 352, according to him Dušan was born in "about 1308", according to М. Пурковић, *Принцезе из куће Немањића*, Београд 1996, 57 and С. Мишић, *Српско-бугарски односи на крају 13 века*, 339 – about 1309.

[104] П. Ангелов, *Болгаро-сербские политические отношения в годы правления царя Феодора Святослава и короля Стефана Милутина*, 109; П. Ангелов, *Българската средновековна дипломация*, 156.

[105] М. Пурковић, *Принцезе из куће Немањића*, 56–57.

According to him, Dušan's mother – Theodora and the Bulgarian princess, married to Stefan Dečanski at the end of the 13th century, are not the same person. Such a possibility exists, as the source which mentions the name Theodora, namely the 1346 charter of Stefan Dušan,[106] represents this woman only as the mother of the Serbian ruler. There is nothing in the document about her origin. The scholars associate Dušan's mother with his father, Stefan Dečanski, who is known to have married a Bulgarian princess and hence the identification of this Bulgarian princess with Theodora. However, this may not be true if Stefan Dečanski had another marriage after the Bulgarian princess and before the marriage with Byzantine woman Maria Palaeologina from 1325, for which there are undisputable data. This is precisely what M. Purković points out as a possibility. The Serbian scientist argued his opinion with evidence from the anonymous "Description of Eastern Europe" written in 1310, whose author claims that Milutin gave his illegitimate son (Stefan Dečanski) two women.[107] Hence Purković concludes that by the time of the creation of the "Description of Eastern Europe", Stefan Dečanski had already had two marriages – the first with a Bulgarian lady and the second with Theodora, of whose origin nothing is known. This hypothesis, if true, would question the name of Smilets' daughter, married to Stefan Dečanski, and would strike off the hypothesis of the latest date of her marriage to the Serbian prince.

From what has been said so far, the hypothesis that Milutin, having decided to conclude an alliance with Byzantium and marry Simonis, and thus rejected the proposal of Smilets' widow, found a way to soften his refusal and in turn proposed to the Bulgarians to get into kinship with them with the marriage of his son Stefan (Dečanski) and the younger daughter of Smilets.[108]

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[106] С. Новаковић, *Хрисовуља Стефана Душана гробу мајке му краљице Теодоре*, Споменик 9 (1891) 6.

[107] *Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis*, 126. The author of this work is undoubtedly well-informed and reliable as a source of information, but in this sentence that speaks of Milutin's polygamy and his even giving to his bastard two women and to his daughter two men, it seems that not the facts, but the hyperbole was the main driving motif. Purković himself fails to accept all the information in this sentence as true because he does not pay attention to the anonymous author's statement that Milutin's daughter (the medieval writer knows only Carica) was married twice and confidently states that Carica never got married – М. Пурковић, *Принцезе из куће Немањића*, 55.

[108] Р. Грујић, *Краљица Теодора, мати цара Душана*, Гласник Скопског научног друштва I, 2 (1926) 18–19 http://www.scribd.com/doc/36621487/Kraljica-Teodora-Mati-Cara-Dusana#scribd (15. 03. 2016); М. Маловић, *Стефан Дечански и Зета,* Историјски записи XXXII (LII), XLI, 4 (1979) 12–13; J. Fine, *The late medieval Balkans;*

And this happened in the same 1299 year when Milutin married Simonis, and the life in Milutin's state was "quiet and uneventful", thanks to the peace with Byzantium; the internecine war among the Tatars, which took the edge off the Golden Horde, and the war between Milutin and Dragutin had not yet started. With this marriage, the Serbian King preserved his good neighbourly relations with the Tsardom of Turnovo, and the ruling widow, though she failed to prevent the conclusion of the Serbian-Byzantine alliance, nevertheless secured the support of the King who became her kinsman by her daughter's marriage.

The kinship with Stefan Uroš II Milutin, however, did not help the tsaritsa and her son-in-law Eltimir, when a few months later Theodore Svetoslav and Chaka, his brother-in-law and son of the slaughtered Nogai, entered Turnovo at the head of Tartar troops. The Serbian King did not come to the aid of his new relative, which shows that the power of kinship relations cannot be compared to the power of political interests, and Milutin's interests clearly contradicted his kinship loyalty to the widow of Smilets.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the Bulgarian-Serbian political marriages concluded between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century are indicative of the balance of power between the two countries at that time. Milutin took the royal crown in 1282 under extraordinary circumstances. His elder brother, Stefan Dragutin, who became King after he had dethroned his father, broke his leg when he fell off a horse. According to Danilo, Stefan accepted this as God's punishment for rebelling against his father, and in his repentance he summoned his younger brother, Milutin, to the place called Deževa, and "presented him with" the power.[109] Researchers interpret this account in the sense that Stefan Dragutin's trauma deteriorated to such an extent that his ability to govern the state was called in question. A council in Deževa was summoned, where Dragutin gave the crown to Milutin. According to Pachymeres, a contemporary and witness of the events, the elder brother retained enough land for himself and relinquished the crown to his brother under the condition of *keeping it after his death for his children*.[110] In other words, if we believe Pachymeres, Milutin received political power over Raška until Dragutin's death, and then he had to hand it over to his nephews. Until 1299, the two brothers were in good relations and helped each other. Stefan Dragutin maintained a close relationship with Hungary, where his father-in-law and suzerain ruled, and Milutin pursued an active anti-Byzantine

a critical survey from the late twelfth century to the Ottoman conquest, Michigan 2009, 226–227.

[109] Архиепископ Данило и други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, 25–27.

[110] ГИБИ, 10, 192.

policy and expanded its territory to the detriment of Byzantine lands in northern Macedonia. Thus, the Serbian kingdom, de facto ruled by both brothers, gained political power and authority and gradually became a dominant force on the Balkan Peninsula. A favourable factor was the long-standing political crisis in the Tsardom of Turnovo, torn apart by separatism fuelled by the weak central power, and pressed by the Tatar suzerainty. Byzantium also had no power to oppose the strengthening of Serbia due to the Tatar invasions in Thrace and the Turks' invasions in Asia Minor. The first Bulgarian-Serbian marriage, concluded under the dictate of Milutin in 1284 was in line with the plans of the Serbian King to impose his power in Macedonia, pushing Byzantium out. The marriage to Anna Terter aimed to break the Bulgarian-Byzantine alliance, concluded several months earlier, and to provide Raška if not with the support of the Turnovo Tsardom, then at least with neutrality in the upcoming conquest of Milutin to the south. Shishman's marriage to the daughter of grand župan Dragoš from 1292 was concluded under the dictate of Milutin, but was the onset of a long, peaceful and loyal relationship between Raška and Vidin, which became also kinship relations with the marriage of Milutin's daughter Anna/Neda with Shishman's son Mihail. The good relations between the Vidin rulers and the Serbian King were preserved to the end of the period, as Milutin, judging by the words of Danilo, preferred to impose his influence by patronage, not by supremacy. And if at first this behaviour was probably due to the fear of Nogai, who stood behind his vassal Shishman, then, after the internecine war in the Golden Horde and Nogai's death, the coercion disappeared, but good relations remained, which should be attributed to the political decisions of Milutin. This Serbian King, though aspiring to territorial expansion of his kingdom, preferred to do it at the expense of Byzantium, and he never undertook unprovoked military action against either Vidin or Turnovo. While fighting with Byzantium, he sought to maintain a reliable alliance with the Bulgarians along his eastern border because of his conquest plans in Macedonia.

In 1298, however, Milutin suddenly changed his long-standing active hostile policy towards Byzantium and responded favourably to the Empire's suggestions for peace and alliance. Negotiations prolonged and in March 1299 the Serbian King began to become impatient. Meanwhile, he renewed his allied relations with Vidin through the marriage of his daughter Anna/Neda with Mihail Shishman. Together with the union with Byzantium, the King got into kinship with the Tsardom of Turnovo, marrying his son Stefan to the daughter of the ruling widow of Tsar Smilets. Three alliances, cemented with three marriages, were concluded almost at the same time. Soon after, the war between Milutin and his older brother Dragutin broke out. Following

Pachymeres' narrative, most researchers claim that the union with Byzantium and Milutin's marriage to princess Simonis is the cause of the war between the two brothers. According to Pachymeres, Dragutin suspected that he was *in jeopardy, since his brother naturally arrogated himself much more than before and therefore hastened to prepare his troops immediately*.[111] However, events show that it was rather the opposite. Milutin's diplomatic activity in 1298 and early 1299 seems like preparation in anticipation of an impending war, and the threat obviously did not come either from the east or from the south, because Milutin sought alliance with his eastern and southern neighbours. The outbreak of the war with Dragutin shows that the expected hostilities came from the northwest. Many researchers associate the Serbian internecine war with the Deževa agreement. Unfortunately, no documents for this agreement have been preserved, and we know only what Danilo and Pachymeres mentioned. Therefore, there is no clarity as to how exactly the conditions accepted by Milutin when taking power led to the war with Dragutin. The observations on the marital diplomacy of the Serbian King at the very end of the 13th century show that by 1299 Milutin expected the relations with his brother to worsen. This suggests that perhaps the condition under which Milutin received the crown in 1282 had to come into force that year but the King did not intend to comply with it. A possible logical explanation is that in that year Dragutin's firstborn son Vladislav became an adult, and Milutin had to hand over the power to him.[112] Of course, a question arises as to why in Deževa Dragutin did not ask his brother to become a regent of his son. Unfortunately there is no answer in the sources. It is also possible that Pachymeres faithfully reflected the original agreement between the two brothers and that Milutin indeed received the crown by the end of Dragutin's life, but in 1298 Dragutin demanded a change of that condition and the surrender of power to his son. It is doubtful that this happened on the occasion of Vladislav's coming of age, since in 1282[113] the prince was depicted between his father and his mother in the fresco in the monastery of Đurđevi Stupovi (the pillars of St. George) as a child reaching in height to below the breast of his parents, i.e. Vladislav then was at least six years old. This means that at the end of the 1290s, he must have been at least 22 years of age – surely an adult even by the standards of our time, although there is no specific evidence of the age at which a Serbian prince was considered adult in the 13th century.

[111] Georgius Pachymeres, *op. cit*., CFHB, XXIV/4, 315; ГИБИ, 10, 195.
[112] Cf. З. Йончева, *Династически бракове*, 224.
[113] С. Радојчић, *Портрети српских владара у средњем веку*, Скопље 1934, 28; М. Пурковић, *Принцезе из куће Немањића*, 41.

However, from the point of view of the history of the Bulgarian-Serbian marital diplomacy of Milutin's time, this question is not essential. For the present study, it is important that during the period under review all political marriages were concluded on the initiative and/or under conditions dictated by the Serbian ruler. Only the project of marriage between Milutin and the widow of Smilets took place on the initiative of the Bulgarian side, but it failed, because Smilets' Turnovo Tsardom could not compare with the authority of Byzantium. Although the Bulgarian rulers were passive in the marital diplomacy, they benefited from the marriages because they cemented alliances which guaranteed that Milutin's conquest policy would not be directed eastward against the lands of the Tsardom. The preservation of already diminished territories cannot be said to be a particularly high goal, but the goals were determined by the current state of the power that the Bulgarian Tsardom of the end of the 13th century did not have because it was exhausted by internecine wars, separatism and Tatar hegemony.

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Сашка ГЕОРГИЈЕВА

БУГАРСКО-СРПСКА БРАЧНА ДИПЛОМАТИЈА С КРАЈА 13. И ПОЧЕТКА 14. ВЕКА

Резиме

У раду су анализирани бугарско-српски бракови у периоду од 80-их година 13. века до почетка 20-их година 14. века. Тај период обележила је владавина српског краља Стефана Уроша II Милутина (1282–1321) као сталне фигуре у свих пет дипломатских бракова и одлучујећег фактора од којег је зависио успех или неуспех договора.

Први бугарско-српски брак који се разматра закључен је 1284. године када је Милутин посетио Ђорђа I Тертера у Трнову како би га приволео да одустане од новоформираног савеза с Византијом, чиме би се краљу омогућило да води активну антивизантијску политику у Македонији. Шишманов брак с кћерком великог жупана Драгоша из 1292. године означио је почетак дугог, мирног и лојалног односа Рашке и Видина, између којих су успостављени и рођачки односи након удаје Милутинове кћерке Ане/Неде за Шишмановог сина Михајла, који су очувани до Милутинове смрти.

Године 1298, Милутин је променио своју дуготрајну непријатељску политику према Византији и започео је преговоре ради постизања мира и закључивања савеза. У међувремену, обновио је савезничке односе с Видином удајом своје кћери Ане/Неде за Михаила Шишмана и одродио се с Трновским царством женидбом свог сина Стефана с кћерком удовице цара Смилеца која је у то време била владарка. Три савеза, утврђена трима браковима, закључена су скоро истовремено. Убрзо након тога, избио је рат између Милутина и његовог старијег брата Драгутина. Милутинова дипломатска активност 1298. и почетком 1299. године делује као припрема за неизбежан рат. Избијање рата против Драгутина показује да су очекивана непријатељства долазила са северозапада. Вероватно су се тицала услова под којима је Милутин примио круну 1282. године, али којих није намеравао да се придржава.

Иако су бугарски владари били пасивни на пољу брачне дипломатије, имали су користи од бракова будући да су њима учвршћивани савези који су гарантовали да Милутинова освајачка политика неће бити усмерена против земаља Бугарског царства. Не може се рећи да је очување већ умањених територија било нарочито узвишен

циљ, али циљеви су утврђивани према постојећем распореду моћи коју Бугарско царство није имало крајем 13. века будући да је било исцрпљено убилачким ратовима, сепаратизмом и татарском хегемонијом.

Кључне речи: Милутин, Ђорђе I Тертер, Стефан Дечански, Михајло Шишман, Ана/Неда, дипломатски бракови.

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