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Thessaloniki during the Zealots' Revolt (1342-1350): Power, Political Violence and the Transformation of the Urban Space

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During the first half of the fourteenth century a series of urban riots took place in many Byzantine cities. Most of them were associated with the so-called Second Civil War (1341-1347) when rival factions of the ruling elite, formed around John V Palaiologos' regency and the *meGas domestikos* John Kantakouzenos respectively, struggled for power.¹ Among these urban riots, the most famous was the revolt that took place in Thessaloniki in 1342 resulting in the seizure of power by the Zealots' faction and the creation of a semi-independent local regime that survived until 1350.

Despite the scarce and rather vague evidence provided by the available sources, contemporary scholars who have studied the Zealot revolt have proposed several interpretations of the movement. Older, traditional Marxist approaches supported the view that the Zealots had a political program of social reform and studied the revolt within the context of a class struggle between the local landowning aristocracy and the bourgeois elements or proletariat of the city.² On the other hand, the recent

¹ For the political context see in general Nicol 1993: 185-208. On the urban riots of the era see Kyritses 2012. For a reappraisal of the social aspects of the Second Civil War where the author emphasizes the divisions within the aristocracy see Malatras 2014.

² Zealots were already viewed as social reformers by Tafrafi 1913. Kordatos 1928 soon followed in the same interpretative current by using the analytical tool of the class struggle to explore the revolt. Several studies in the 1950s and 1960s by East European Marxist scholars supported similar views. For an overview of these works see Barker 2003: 30-32. Most of the relevant Marxist literature regarded Zealots as social revolutionaries with a program of property redistribution, mainly on the basis of an alleged

literature on the subject attributes the civil unrest to diverse causes and associates it with various political, social or even religious contexts. The malfunctioning of the local communal institutions prior to the rise of the faction, the importance of the personal strategies of the Zealots' leaders in formulating a political agenda for a diverse group of people coming from all social strata, the religious differences associated with the Hesychast controversy, a local separatist tradition or even conjectural economic factors like the high cost of bread have been proposed in the relevant studies as the main initial causes of the uprising and the reasons for its continuation.³

The aim of this paper is to explore the transformations that occurred in the urban space of Thessaloniki during the revolt by focusing mainly on the tactics that the Zealots employed to alter both the social and political functions and the symbolical meanings of certain zones of the city. In my view, a study of the Zealots' policies regarding the urban space can also shed some light on the Zealots' broader political program and eventually leads to a reappraisal of their uprising. The first part of the paper is devoted to some brief considerations on the interrelationship between political power, ritualized violence and space. It sets up a

anti-Zealot discourse against the confiscation of Church properties written by Nicholas Kabasilas. However, Ševčenko 1957 and 1962 persuasively argued that the discourse was unrelated to the revolt.

³ Papadatou 1987 and 1991 viewed the Zealots as a political aggregation of sailors and other people who claimed their participation in the local communal institutions. Matschke 1994 in an important contribution to the debate defined the Zealots as a group of people coming from all social strata with no well structured political program who mainly depended on the strong personalities of their leaders. Kotsiopoulos 1997 viewed the revolt within the context of the religious conflicts of the era as an effort on the Zealots' part to establish a theocratic regime that strongly opposed the Orthodox doctrine expressed by Gregory Palamas and the Hesychasts. Barker 2003: 21 argued that the Zealots' period should be explored within the broader context of a recurrent Thessalonian separatism. Kyritses 2012: 273-274 emphasized the importance of a grain shortage in 1345 just before the severe riots that ended with the massacre of many of the Zealots' rivals. According to Malatras 2012/3, the revolt should be viewed as an attempt by a local faction of the aristocracy to appropriate power by exploiting the power of the people for its cause. For analytical historiographical surveys of the relevant literature see: Barker 2003: 29-33; Malatras 2012/3: 231-233; Congourdeau 2013: 27-30; Congourdeau 2014b: 13-18.

theoretical background that enables an exploration, in the second part, of the interaction between the Zealots' political tactics and the urban space. The paper concludes with some brief thoughts on the Zealots' identity, especially in terms of the faction's composition and its political program.

1. Some Theoretical Considerations on Power, Ritual and Space.

During the last few decades the concept of "space" has been extensively used in the social sciences, and particularly in history, as an analytical category. In the relevant literature space is no longer perceived as merely the product of natural procedures or human activities, a pre-determined entity that provides the background of political, social and economic life.⁴ My own approach relies mainly on Henri Lefebvre's path-breaking analysis in which the social production of space is conceived through a tripartite dialectic model. According to the French philosopher, space is always in a process of transformation through social relations closely bound up with the forces of production, including technology, knowledge, social division of labour, the state and the superstructures of society.⁵ In particular, space is the product of the interaction between representations of space ("conceived space", which includes theories or more generally the production of knowledge about space), spatial practices ("perceived space", which corresponds to codes of social/spatial conduct defined by the continuous interaction between humans and

⁴ For space in social theory see: Zieleniec 2007; West – Pavlov 2009. For a comprehensive account of the "spatial turn" in the humanities see Warf and Arias 2009. For history in particular see indicatively: Kingston 2010; Williamson 2014. The concept of "space" as an analytical tool has often been used in recent western medieval studies. For relevant historiographical overviews see indicatively: Cassidy – Welch 2010; Goodson, Lester and Symes 2010; Cohen, Madeline and Iogna Prat 2014. Spatial issues have also been explored in the context of Byzantine history and archaeology, although in most cases the relevant studies either follow traditional empirical methods of analyzing the textual and material evidence or rely upon an essentially structuralist background ignoring the recent theoretical contributions. For a critical assessment see Veikou 2016: 144-147.

⁵ Lefebvre 1991: 85.

space), and finally representational space (“lived space”, which is defined by the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the subjects that move in, inhabit, appropriate or imagine space).⁶ Lefebvre’s model perceives space not simply as the product of social relations but also as a means of production itself, a site that produces human activities and exchanges. Furthermore, it is also regarded as a powerful tool that regulates thought and action, thus becoming a means of control, and hence of domination and power.⁷

A central issue in my own research is the interaction between the Zealots’ modes of exercising power and the urban space. More specifically, I argue that the construction of a new network of “sites of power” by the faction inside the city altered the local spatial practices and produced both physically and mentally a new urban political topography.⁸ Following a Foucauldian approach, I understand “power” not as a substantive entity that can only be possessed and exercised by the rulers but as a matter of techniques and discursive practices deeply embedded in the network of social relations that shapes the micropolitics of everyday human life. In Foucault’s analysis power is considered as a productive force that directs human activities, structures the field of possible actions and generates new knowledge.⁹ The implementation and articulation of power relations also lead to specific spatial configurations that in turn create new discourses, power techniques and knowledge.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., 36-46.

⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸ The issue of the spatial dimensions of power has been extensively debated in the relevant literature. For a useful overview of the main relevant theoretical contributions see Allen 1999. For an example of a collection of studies dealing with the interrelation of power and space in the early Middle Ages see the essays in De Jong, Theuws and Van Rhijn 2001.

⁹ Foucault 1980: 146-165, 233-239; idem 2001a; idem 2015: 225-237.

¹⁰ Although Foucault did not systematically elaborate a theory of space, his thought has had a strong impact on the “Spatial Turn” in the humanities. Especially the spatial dimensions of his conceptualization of power and knowledge explored in several of his writings have deeply influenced much of the recent literature on space. For his outlook on the production of spatial discourses see: Foucault 1980: 63-77; idem 2001b. For the spatial dimensions of the exercises of power and the production of disciplinary

The new spatial practices produced by the Zealots' actions in order to impose their dominance on the city were interrelated with both institutional changes and the extensive use of political violence, especially in ritualized forms. In Foucault's approach ritual techniques play a fundamental role in how power is structured and exercised. According to his view, the ritualization of violence operates on the most basic and fundamental level of power relations: that of the human body. Through violent rituals the body becomes a political field produced by the material exercise of power.¹¹ Furthermore, the social body "is the effect not of consensus [or coherence or control] but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals".¹² Thus the social body is perceived as the product of a shifting network of power relations out of which the sovereign's power is also constituted.¹³ In this context the ritualization of violence is mainly a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relations that aim to fashion individuals by reshaping, formalizing, supervising and controlling political, social and eventually spatial functions.

Apart from its close interrelation with the articulation of power relations that shape the social body, ritual violence plays an important role in the formation of cultures of violence through its performativity.¹⁴ It performs the group's identity, internal hierarchies and goals, defining the symbolic borders between the "self" and the "others". It establishes new hierarchies through performances that stress the superiority or the "normal" behaviour of a particular group in juxtaposition to the inferiority or the "abnormal" activities of others.¹⁵ Ritualized violence is both performing and performative; it constitutes a form of spectacular com-

spaces such as prisons and clinics see: Foucault 1995; idem 2003. For the "heterotopias" which are conceived as "other" spaces linked to alternative cultural and social praxis see Foucault 1984. For comprehensive overviews of Foucault's thought in relation to space see: Zieleniec 2007: 125-149; West – Pavlov 2009: 111-165.

¹¹ Foucault 1995: 25-26.

¹² Idem 1980: 55.

¹³ Idem 1980: 187; idem 2015: 230.

¹⁴ Carol 2007: 10; Wood 2007: 108. On the performativity of ritual see in general the comprehensive overview by Bell 1992: 37-46

¹⁵ Carol 2007: 13; Skoda 2013: 169.

munication while at the same time achieving concrete goals. However, violent rites cannot attain their aim if the “vocabulary” of gestures they use is not understood by the audience of the rituals. Only through the extensive use of familiar cultural paradigms can the audience acquaint itself with the symbolic meanings of the violent acts.¹⁶

The concept of the performativity of ritual violence and its close relationship with spatial practices again leads us to a conceptualization of space not as a stable and predefined entity but as a dynamic process of continuous changes and transformations. The form and the meanings of space are generated through the articulation of certain types of power relations embedded in several social or broader cultural practices and in the performative actions of various agents.¹⁷ Thus a study of the ritualization of violence by the Zealots can serve as an illustrative case study of the interrelation between political acting and urban space in the late Byzantine world.

2. The Zealots’ politics and the urban space.

Let us now explore the local political life in Thessaloniki during the Zealots’ era and its interaction with the urban space by beginning with a brief chronological survey.¹⁸ The spark for the revolt was ignited immediately after the decision by the city’s governor, Theodore Synadenos, to declare his loyalty to Kantakouzenos by openly expressing his will to deliver the city into his hands (1342). At that time the Zealots, a group of citizens supporting John V Palaiologos, rose up in rebellion, clashed violently with their enemies in the streets and finally managed to prevail

¹⁶ Skoda 2013: 3, 18.

¹⁷ The concept of space as a “practiced place” has already been extensively explored by Michel De Certeau whose reflections on the issue have significant analogies to Lefebvre’s conceptualization of “spatial practices” and “lived space”. In his view, space is produced by the ensemble of activities and movements occurring in a specific place. Cf. De Certeau 1984: 91-110. For the interaction between performance and space see Rose 1999.

¹⁸ For a detailed chronological account of the political events see Congourdeau 2013: 31-43.

and seize power. The rebels expelled many of their opponents after their victory and looted their properties.¹⁹

The rivalry between the Zealots and Kantakouzenos' supporters inside the city continued during the following years, reaching its peak in 1345/6. At that time John Apokaukos, who had been appointed by Constantinople as one of the two governors of the city, decided shortly after the death in Constantinople of his father Alexios – who was a member of John V Palaiologos' regency - to change sides and defect to Kantakouzenos. He assassinated the leader of the Zealots, Michael Palaiologos, and gained control of Thessaloniki for a few months. However, the Zealots regrouped and counterattacked in the following year under the leadership of another member of the Palaiologos' family named Andreas. This time the Zealots prevailed and John Apokaukos was arrested and executed along with many of his supporters.²⁰

The civil war formally ended in 1347 when Kantakouzenos entered Constantinople. The two opposing sides came to an agreement: Kantakouzenos was recognized as emperor while John V Palaiologos became co-emperor and heir to the throne.²¹ After the reconciliation of the two rival aristocratic factions the position of the Zealots in Thessaloniki became extremely precarious. Andreas Palaiologos defected to the Serbian court in 1349 following a failed attempt on his part to regain total control of the city by eliminating the rival side. He later became a monk on Mount Athos.²² The Zealots attempted to negotiate the submission of the city to Stefan Dušan but their opponents strongly opposed this plan and asked the imperial government to support their cause.²³ The following year Kantakouzenos along with John V Palaiologos entered Thessaloniki and persuaded the assembly of the people to accept their authority. The most prominent members of the Zealots' faction were arrested and imprisoned in Constantinople while the others were expelled from the city.²⁴

¹⁹ Kantakouzenos, II, 233,8 – 235,9.

²⁰ Kantakouzenos, II, 568,14 – 582,4; Gregoras, II, 740,10 – 741,5.

²¹ Nicol 1993: 207.

²² Kantakouzenos, III, 109, 4-16.

²³ *Ibid.*, III, 109,16 – 111,8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 117,4-25.

During the revolt a new regime had been established in Thessaloniki that resembled that of a semi-independent city-state. Supreme power was held by two *archontes* (governors) appointed by the Zealots and the imperial government in Constantinople respectively.²⁵ Kantakouzenos also mentions a council (*voule*) apparently composed of two rival groups of people, each of which was totally controlled by the Zealots' archon and his co-governor respectively.²⁶ Assemblies of the people (*ekklēsiai*) were also occasionally summoned especially when important matters had to be settled. Such an occasion is mentioned in 1345 when the city's inhabitants took the decision to send ambassadors to Kantakouzenos to negotiate the terms of a possible surrender.²⁷ In 1350 another assembly

²⁵ The Zealot leaders to hold this office were Michael and Andreas Palaiologos. Their co-governors, appointed by the imperial government, were, in chronological order: Michael Monomachos (1343), John Vatatzes (1343), John Apokaukos (1343-1346) and Alexios Laskaris Metochites (1348-1350). On all these persons see Congourdeau 2013: 173-175. Kantakouzenos clearly mentions this system of co-governing the city during his narration of the rivalry between Michael Palaiologos and John Apokaukos. See Kantakouzenos, II, 569,1-3: Παλαιολόγος γὰρ ὁ Μιχαήλ, κεφάλαιον ὄν τῶν Ζηλωτῶν καὶ συνάρχειν ἐκεῖνον [John Apokaukos] τεταγμένος, λυπηρὸς ἦν μάλιστα, τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ χρώμενος οὐκ ἴσως. Ibid., II, 570, 3-5: σκηψάμενος [John Apokaukos] δέ τι βουλευέσθαι τῶν κοινῶν, μετεκαλεῖτο καὶ τὸν συνάρχοντα [Andreas Palaiologos], ὡς κοινωνήσοι τῆς βουλῆς.

²⁶ Kantakouzenos, II, 569, 22 – 570, 6 mentions one assembly of this council in 1345 where groups of armed men escorted both John Apokaukos and Michael Palaiologos. The meeting ended with Michael Palaiologos' assassination by his rivals. A second assembly took place in Apokaukos' house on the acropolis on the eve of the massacre in 1346. See Kantakouzenos, II, 574,24 – 575,3. Councils of advisory character where mainly the local elites were represented often took place in many Byzantine urban settlements in this era. For general overviews on the composition and the function of these local councils see: Kioussopoulou 2013: 115-118; Kontogiannopoulou 2015: 56-82.

²⁷ Kantakouzenos refers to the composition of this assembly in the following words: καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκκλησίαν φανερῶς συναγαγὼν ἔκ τε τῶν ἀρίστων καὶ τῆς στρατιᾶς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν τῶν μάλιστα ἐν λόγῳ... (Kantakouzenos, II, 573, 10-12: "He [John Apokaukos] convoked an open assembly of the best citizens, the soldiers and the other citizens especially those among them who had the right to speak publicly..."). The "best citizens" were apparently the members of the local aristocracy while the "soldiers" were probably those who held *pronoiai* in the region. I do not translate the term "τῶν μάλιστα ἐν λόγῳ" as "the most prominent among them" since in this spe-

was summoned which decided to eventually submit the city to the imperial authority.²⁸ Unfortunately, there is no mention in the sources of the place where these assemblies were held, although we could suppose that the public *agora* was probably the site of these meetings.²⁹

The city had already been granted privileges that probably included the running of some local institutions by John Vatatzes in 1246 when it was reintegrated into the Byzantine state. At that time a group of distinguished citizens demanded the issue of a chrysobull which would reassert protection of the local established customs and rights and the liberty of the citizens.³⁰ This particular wording of the request implies that similar privileges had also been granted in the past. The chrysobull has not survived but judging from similar imperial documents concerning other urban centers of the empire, the civic privileges would have included exemptions from taxes and duties, probably a court for cases of civic and canon law composed of local judges and also a senate of the magnates acting as an advisory body to a governor appointed by the imperial government.³¹ However, during the period of Zealot rule a radical reformation of the local political institutions took place that drastically altered the city's relationship with the imperial center.

The new political regime of Thessaloniki, which was structured around the division of power between the two co-governors, represent-

cific context the term “ἄριστοι” precisely refers to those who belonged to a group of distinguished people. In my view, the term literally refers to “those who had the right to speak publicly”. If my interpretation is accurate then it seems that the assemblies of the people functioned in a relatively organized institutional framework where the right to speak publicly was confined to specific persons probably appointed by the two rival sides; in other words, the term refers to the most prominent members of both political groups. General assemblies of the people were occasionally summoned in late Byzantine cities usually to confirm the rulers' decisions. However, it seems that they did not occur within a regulated framework. On this issue see Kontogiannopoulou 2015: 83-87.

²⁸ Ibid., III, 117,11-23.

²⁹ On the political character of the *agora* see *infra*.

³⁰ Akropolites, I, & 45, 26-28.

³¹ On the privileges of late Byzantine Thessaloniki see: Patlagean 1998; Maksimović 1988: 248–57. For references to the function of local councils in Thessaloniki during the same period see Kontogiannopoulou 2015: 65-66, 94-95.

atives of the Zealots and the imperial government respectively, also had important spatial dimensions. The authority of the co-governors was exercised in separate urban zones since the harbor was under the control of the Zealots' leader while the rest of the city was ruled by the imperial governor.³² Not only was the power of the two governing poles restricted to particular places but, more importantly, both sides had their own localized base of political support.

Kantakouzenos mentions the crucial role played by the *naftikon* and the *parathalassioi* in the events that led up to the massacre of many members of the rival faction by the Zealots in 1346.³³ These terms literally refer to people engaged in maritime activities who also lived in a seaside quarter.³⁴ The same group of people is again mentioned in the context of the events preceding Andreas Palaiologos' defection to Serbia (1349) when the latter tried to mobilize the *parathalassioi* against his opponents. However, on that occasion the rival side prevailed by attacking first, thus forcing Andreas Palaiologos to leave the city and

³² Kantakouzenos, in narrating the events that led up to the final clash between Andreas Palaiologos and John Apokaukos, observes that the inhabitants of the seaside quarter had their own authority distinct from that of the rest of the city. See Kantakouzenos, II, 575, 12-14: ἔχουσι δὲ καὶ ἰδιάζουσιν ἀρχὴν αὐτοὶ παρὰ τὴν τῆς ἄλλης πόλεως· ὧν ἐκεῖνος [Andreas Palaiologos] τότε ἦρχε.

³³ Kantakouzenos, II, 575, 8-12: περὶ ἦν οἰκοῦσι πᾶν τὸ ναυτικὸν, οἱ πλεῖστοι τε ὄντες καὶ πρὸς φόνους εὐχερεῖς, ἄλλως τε καὶ ὀπλισμένοι πάντες, ὥσπερ τὸ κράτιστόν εἰσι τοῦ δήμου, καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν ταῖς στάσεσι πάσαις αὐτοὶ τοῦ παντὸς πλήθους ἐξηγοῦνται προθύμως ἐπομένου, ἧ ἂν ἄγωσιν αὐτοί. The term *parathalassioi* is used in the same context as a synonym for *naftikon*. See *ibid.*, II, 576, 7-8, 18-19.

³⁴ In this specific context the terms *naftikon* and *parathalassioi* define a group of people who both practiced professions related to maritime activities and dwelt near the harbor front. Matschke 1994: 24-26 has already argued that the people designated by the term *naftikon* were related to trading activities. In the older literature it had been suggested that the term referred to a naval guild. See for example Sjuzumov 1968: 28. Nevertheless, there is no mention of the existence of such an institution in the city at that time. Moreover, all references to guilds have disappeared from the Byzantine sources after the 12th century. For another view in which the authors identify *naftikon* with the armed crews of the imperial fleet cf: Papadatou 1991: 18-22; Kyritsis 2012: 269-270. The fleet, however, had already left the city in 1343 to avoid a battle against the overwhelming naval power of Umur, who had come to the aid of Kantakouzenos. See Kantakouzenos, II, 390,24 – 391,1.

to eventually find refuge at the Serbian court.³⁵ So it seems that a group of men living in the harbor zone with jobs related to the sea (probably sailors, dockworkers or even fishermen) formed the core of the Zealots' armed forces.

The harbor, situated at the southwestern corner of the city, was fortified by an inner wall with towers³⁶ that spatially distinguished its people and their activities from the rest of the urban space. Kydones, in his well-known "Monody on the Fallen in Thessaloniki", written immediately after the bloody events of 1346, describes the harbor as a distinct, separate city thriving within the broader urban fabric of Thessaloniki.³⁷ The port linked the city with the Italian commercial networks and provided the agricultural production of the Macedonian hinterland with access to international markets. During the first half of the 14th century it operated mainly within the transportation networks of the Aegean Sea, maintaining close contacts with Constantinople, Chios and Negreponte. Its role in long-distance trade was less important, although there was much sea traffic between the city and Venice.³⁸

On the other hand, Kantakouzenos' supporters had their base in the acropolis, a fortified triangular quarter situated upon a hill in the north-eastern part of Thessaloniki. This area was less populated than the lower part of the city and served as a barracks and also as a residential area for the imperial governor, the military personnel and some aristocratic families.³⁹ John Apokaukos had a house in this quarter from which he governed the city;⁴⁰ he also retreated there with some of his followers when he was planning to murder Michael Palaiologos.⁴¹ His residence

³⁵ Kantakouzenos, III, 109,4-16.

³⁶ Bakirtzis 2003: 43.

³⁷ Kydones, Monody: 641.

³⁸ On the role of Thessaloniki's port in the Italian maritime trade of the era see Jacoby 2003: 103-107. For the agricultural production of Thessaloniki's hinterland see Laiou 2000: 200-203.

³⁹ On the late Byzantine acropolis see Bakirtzis 2003: 43-47. Kantakouzenos, II, 579, 4-5 briefly describes the acropolis as a small separate town with its own inhabitants: *πόλει γάρ τινι ἔοικε μικρᾷ καὶ οἰκήτορας ἰδίους ἔχει...*

⁴⁰ Kantakouzenos, II, 571, 22-23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, 570, 1-3.

was used for political assemblies too since it is mentioned that such a meeting with Andreas Palaiologos and his men took place there just before the bloody events of 1346.⁴² The acropolis was also the Zealots' main target in their attack against John Apokaukos and his followers, which ended with victory for their faction and the mass executions of their opponents.

The exercise of supreme power by both co-governors constantly produced tensions between them and often led to violent confrontations between their supporting factions. Political violence reached unprecedented heights during the lifetime of the semi-independent city-state of Thessaloniki. Large-scale executions and exiles of adversaries, plundering and destruction of dwellings and properties, fights around fortified places, aiming at the annihilation of rivals marked the political life of the city between 1342 and 1350. It is worth mentioning the well-known anti-Zealot account of Gregoras in which the city's regime is described in gloomy colours as a system of mob rule with no central guidance that had nothing in common with any of the known classical polities.⁴³ However, political violence – especially in its ritualized forms - was also a productive force since it invested with new symbolic meanings several urban zones, created a new network of “sites of power” and eventually forged new rival political identities which were mutually exclusionary and oppositional and were also both related to distinct spatial zones. In other words, it generated new conceptualizations, perceptions and uses of the urban space that drastically altered the spatial experiences of the individuals and shaped their mental horizons.

The Zealots' violent political action was characterized by the frequent use of religious symbols and rituals. According to Kantakouzenos, during the uprising that brought them to power (1342), members of the faction invaded the houses of their opponents holding crosses and declaring that their actions were guided by that holy symbol.⁴⁴ Moreover,

⁴² Ibid., II, 575, 2-3.

⁴³ Gregoras, II, 796, 2 – 12.

⁴⁴ Kantakouzenos, II, 234, 11-17: εἰς τοσοῦτον δὲ ἀπονοίας καὶ τόλμης ἦλθον, ὥστε καίτοι τὰ δεινότερα τολμῶντες, σταυρὸν ἐκ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀδύτων ἀρπάζοντες, ἐχρῶντο ὡσπερ σημαία καὶ ὑπὸ τούτῳ ἔλεγον στρατηγεῖσθαι, οἱ τῷ πολεμίῳ μᾶλλον τοῦ

a few years later, in the context of their rivalry with John Apokaukos (1345), a few Zealots holding candles forcibly rebaptized in vats placed in the city avenues some of their opponents who belonged to the lower social stratum, arguing that the latter had lost the chrism of baptism due to their support of Kantakouzenos. They also forced those who were passing by to pay a fixed amount of money for the ritual. If they declined to pay, they were considered to be supporters of their rival and had to undergo the same treatment.⁴⁵

The confrontations with Kantakouzenos' followers certainly had some religious overtones since the latter were staunch supporters of Hesychast theology, which introduced into official Orthodox doctrine monastic methods of achieving communion with God through inner quietude. The Zealots' opposition to Hesychasm was very strong and most likely a result of their political rivalry with Kantakouzenos. The faction forbade Gregory Palamas, the leading theologian in the Hesychast movement, to enter the city after his appointment to the metropolitan see of Thessaloniki (1347).⁴⁶ However, the extensive use of religious symbols and rituals in the entirely political context of a civic confrontation mainly served to juxtapose on a symbolic level the "political orthodoxy" of the Zealots with the "heterodoxy" of their adversaries. Furthermore, the uses of religious rituals and symbols as political tools strengthened

σταυροῦ ἀγόμενοι. καὶ εἴ τις πρὸς τινα ἕκ τινων ἰδίων ἐγκλημάτων διεφέρετο, τὸν σταυρὸν ἀρπάζων, ἐχώρει κατὰ τῆς οἰκίας, ὡς δὴ τοῦ σταυροῦ κελεύοντος.

⁴⁵ Ibid., II, 570,21 – 571,4: ...ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἀγυῖας, δεξαμενὰς τινὰς ὕδατος πληροῦντες, εἶτα καὶ ὑφάπτοντες κηροῦς, τινὰς τῶν τὰ Καντακουζηνοῦ ἠρῆσθαι δοκούντων βασιλέως συλλαμβάνοντες, ὄντας ἕκ τοῦ δήμου, ἀνεβάπτιζον ὡς ἀπομοσαμένους τὸ βάπτισμα διὰ τὴν ἐκείνου κοινωνίαν· τοὺς τε παρίοντας ἐκέλευον ἀργύριον ῥητὸν κατατίθεσθαι εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν. καὶ ἦν ἀνάγκη πράττειν κατὰ τὸ ἐκείνων κέλευσμα, ἢ ὑποπευθεσθαι αὐτίκα ἦν, ὡς τὰ Καντακουζηνοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως ἠρημένον καὶ ἀχθόμενον πρὸς τὴν ἑρεσχελίαν.

⁴⁶ Ibid., III, 104,5 – 105,22. Kantakouzenos, III, 104,15-17 mentions that both of the city governors stated that they did not recognize his own imperial authority and thus refused to accept Gregory Palamas' appointment. Meyendorff 1964: 89-93 has also noted that the Zealots' anti-Palamism was merely a result of their anti-Kantakouzenism. On the context of the rivalry between Gregory Palamas and the Zealots see Rigo 2014 with references to the earlier literature. On Hesychasm see in general Meyendorff 1964; idem 1974.

the bonds between the members of the faction, creating the necessary solidarity and sense of belonging to the same community. Through this ritualization of the civic conflict the Zealots performed and stressed their own identity, declared their superior political “orthodoxy” in sharp contrast to the inferior “heterodoxy” of their enemies and claimed a dominant role in the life of the city. The forced rebaptisms in particular were not only an act of public purification of Kantakouzenos’ supporters but also a declaration of the Zealots’ exclusive right to use the purifying power of the water to convert their opponents politically. The choice of the city’s central avenues as the sites for these rebaptisms and the obligation of the passers-by to pay a certain amount of money also had strong political connotations. Through these acts the faction transformed the arterial streets of Thessaloniki⁴⁷ that regulated the movements of people and products into “sites of power” under its own total control.

The ritualization of violence also aimed at terrorizing the Zealots’ opponents, thus becoming a powerful instrument of social control. In 1343 Turkish troops under the leadership of Umur, emir of the beylik of Aydin, who had allied himself with Kantakouzenos, blocked Thessaloniki and cut off all land communications with its hinterland. Umur sent an embassy to the city to demand its surrender; in return he promised to release all the men that had been captured by his troops. The Zealots, fearing that Kantakouzenos’ followers inside the city would seize the opportunity to persuade the people to accept the proposal, decided to terrorize their rivals with cruel acts and murders.⁴⁸ According to Kantakouzenos’ account, they arrested a certain Palaiologos, a member of the aristocracy, in his own house – a man they suspected of supporting their rivals, although in fact he had given no grounds for such suspicions. They executed him in the public agora and then quartered him; placing each of the pieces of the corpse over the city gates while the head was put on a spike and

⁴⁷ 14th-century Thessaloniki had retained some basic features of its Late Roman Hippodamean street plan, although many residential neighborhoods had been transformed into labyrinthine urban insulae. The main avenues of the late Byzantine city followed the course of the modern streets of Aghiou Demetriou, Egnatia and Venizelou. On the street plan of the city see Bakirtzis 2003: 42-43 and fig. 4.

⁴⁸ Kantakouzenos, II, 393,7-17.

displayed in the streets. The Zealots also arrested a member of the middle class named Gavalas. The prisoner had his nose and ears cut off and his body mutilated before being executed. Several others were expelled from the city after also having their noses and ears cut off.⁴⁹

The symbolic meanings of these punishments were primarily associated with the Zealots' intention to establish their own control over the city's urban space and social body. The execution of the aristocrat took place in the public agora, a significant urban political locus. Its site has been identified with the Roman market south of the basilica of Saint Demetrios. In the late Byzantine period the area consisted merely of an open square with no buildings or commercial activities taking place there. It had a purely political character as a meeting-place for the Thessalonians but also as a site of executions and public humiliations.⁵⁰ During the period of Zealot rule the agora was a contested public space since both rival factions claimed their dominant role in the city's political life by performing their own rites of violence there. In the context of the events following the assassination of Michael Palaiologos a part of the demos that apparently supported the anti-Zealot faction, after murdering some rivals who had sought refuge in the Acheiropoietos basilica, dragged a Zealot into the agora, where he was lamed and stoned to death.⁵¹

The display of the pieces of the aristocrat's corpse over the city gates was a strong ritual performance of the Zealots' dominance over Thessaloniki. The gates were sites of great political significance since they linked the city with the outside world by controlling the flow of humans

⁴⁹ Ibid., II, 393,17 – 394,5: και Παλαιολόγον τέ τινα ἐκ τῶν ἀρίστων, οἴκοι σχολάζοντα διὰ τὸ ὑποπεύεσθαι και μηδεμίαν αἰτίαν τοῦ ἀποθανεῖν παρεσχημένον, ἐξαργάσαντες ἀπέσφαξαν ἐπὶ τῆς δημοσίας ἀγορᾶς, και τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποτεμόντες, ἔπειτα και τὸ σῶμα διελόντες τετραχῆ, τὰ μὲν τμήματα ἐν ταῖς πόλεως πύλαις ἀπηώρησαν ἐκάστη τμήμα· τὴν κεφαλὴν δὲ δόρατι ἐνθήμενοι και τὰ ἔγκατα σύροντες ἀνηλεῶς περιήεσαν τὴν πόλιν. Γαβαλᾶν δὲ τινα ἐκ τῶν μέσων πολιτῶν τὰ ὄντα πρότερον ἐκτεμόντες και τὴν ῥίνα, και τὰ ἄλλα μέλη διαλωβησάμενοι, ἔπειτα ἀπέκτειναν. ἑτέρων δὲ οὐκ ὀλίγων τοιούτων ῥίνας και ὄντα ἐκτεμόντες, ἔπειτα κατεδίκασαν ἀειφυγίαν, και ἀνοίζαντες τὰς πύλας, ἐξήλαυνον τῆς πόλεως.

⁵⁰ Bakirtzis 2003: 57 with references to the earlier literature.

⁵¹ Kantakouzenos, II, 571,8-15.

and products entering or exiting the urban space. In his case study of ancient Rome's spatial practices, Lefebvre has already observed that the roads allowed the city to assert its political centrality at the core of its subject territories.⁵² In the case of Thessaloniki, in the specific political context of the period when the city had been cut off from its hinterland by Umur's troops, the display over the gates of their rival's dismembered corpse was a clear statement of the Zealots' intention to restore the ties between Thessaloniki and its rural surroundings. In other words, it was a violent rite addressed not only to an audience inside the urban space but also to outsiders that threatened the city as a political entity.

The punishment imposed on Gavalas, who belonged to the middle class, before his eventual execution, also had strong political connotations. The severing of noses and ears, along with blinding, was often used in the Byzantine world as a penalty for usurpers. In this way the punished person was considered disabled and unfit to exercise supreme political power by rising to the imperial throne. Thus at first the symbolic meaning of Gavalas' mutilation was clearly associated with the Zealots' intention to present the members of the middle class as being unsuitable for ruling the city on their own. On a broader perspective, the material exercise of power through the torture and mutilation of the bodies of individuals belonging both to the aristocracy and the middle class had a powerful political function. On a symbolical level, through the productive force of ritualized violence, they metaphorically represented a civic social body under the Zealots' total control.

Another imaginative rite of violence took place in the city in the summer of 1342. At that time Alexios Apokaukos had arrived in Thessaloniki representing the regency with seventy warships in a demonstration of military strength aimed at Kantakouzenos' troops in Macedonia.⁵³ In July a Serbian shepherd named Tzimpanos captured two members of aristocratic families, the *protosebastos* Constantine Palaialogos and Arsenios Tzamlakon, on their way back from Serbia where they had negotiated an alliance with Stefan Dušan on Kantakouzenos' behalf. Tzimpanos delivered them to Apokaukos and received as a re-

⁵² Lefebvre 1991: 245.

⁵³ Kantakouzenos, II, 243,12-18.

ward numerous city properties that had previously belonged to Tzamlakon.⁵⁴ At first Apokaukos personally treated the prisoners with cruelty and then ordered Palaiologos to be imprisoned while Tzamlakon was handed over to the captains of his ships to be publicly humiliated by their sailors. The captive was forced to climb aboard the deck of a ship in the harbor while the whole city was gathered in the docks to attend the ritual punishment. Tzamlakon was dressed in monastic clothes while his tormentors had also put a Turkish hat on his head and forced him to hold two candles in his hands. The sailors started to kick him from behind; then they came in front of him and kissed him, shouting loudly: “Behold Kantakouzenos’ patriarch!”. Once this humiliating public performance was over, the captive was sent back to prison.⁵⁵

The peculiar ritualized public humiliation of Tzamlakon had been organized by Apokaukos’ navy officers but it took place in the harbor where the Zealots’ faction had its base. The whole event had a theatrical character. It was carefully directed on a seaside stage with all the participants playing distinct roles, while the humiliated protagonist even wore a costume. Moreover, it was addressed to an audience familiar with the symbolic language of similar religious rituals. Publicly performed rituals and ceremonies formed an essential part of Byzantine political and religious life. They were fundamental components both of court life – which itself was perceived as a paradigm for the rest of society and the “barbarian” world – and of the broader Byzantine conception of the world.

⁵⁴ Kantakouzenos, II, 256,4-20.

⁵⁵ Ibid., II, 256,20 – 257,9: εἰς τοὺς δεσμώτας δὲ πρότερον αὐτὸς δι’ ἑαυτοῦ πολλὰ ἐνυβρίσας καὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιδειξάμενος πικρίαν, πρωτοσεβαστὸν μὲν ἐκέλευεν εἰς δεσμοτήριον ἀπάγειν, Τζαμπλάκωνα δὲ τοῖς τριηράρχαις παρεδίδου, ὡς ἅμα τοῖς ναύταις ἀτάκτως ἐνυβρίσουσιν. οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ μίαν τῶν τριηρέων ἀναγαγόντες, καὶ τοῦ δήμου σχεδὸν τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων παντὸς παρόντος, τὰ μοναχῶν, ὥσπερ εἶωθεν, ἡμφιεσμένον, ἐπέθηκαν τῇ κεφαλῇ πλόν τι, ὃ τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ δημῶδεσι τῶν Περσῶν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς φορεῖν ἔθος, λαμπάδας τε ἡμμένας ἀμφοτέραις κατέχειν ἀναγκάζοντες ταῖς χερσίν, ὀπισθεν μὲν ἐλάκτιζον ἐπὶ τὸν προκτόν· εἶτα παριόντες, ἔμπροσθεν ἠσπάζοντο, „οὗτος“ ἐπιβοῶντες „ὁ πατριάρχης Καντακουζηνῶ.“ μετὰ δὲ τὴν πολλὴν ἐκέειν ἔρεσχελίαν καὶ τὸν θρίαμβον τὸν ἄτιμον, ἐκέλευε καὶ αὐτὸν εἰς δεσμοτήριον ἀπάγειν.

The primary aim of this theatrical performance was to ridicule the rival and provoke laughter in the audience. On a symbolical level the whole event was a parody of the admission of a patriarch or any ecclesiastical official into the city. Through an elaborate theatrical language that could be easily understood by the civic audience Kantakouzenos' rivals declared their sovereignty over Thessaloniki by clearly stating that the ecclesiastical authorities had to be approved by them in order to be legitimate.

The spatial dimensions of this theatrical performance were equally important. The harbor area was intended to represent the main entrance to the city that linked the urban space with overseas territories. It was also perceived through the presence of the fleet as a nodal meeting-point of sea routes, a space not only of economic but mainly of political value whose control enabled those in power to regulate the relations between the city and its broader hinterland. Moreover, in a way similar to the aforementioned symbolic use of the city gates, the theatrical parody of the admission of a patriarch approaching from the sea was ultimately a performance that was just as much addressed to political enemies outside the city that threatened to sever its ties with the rest of the world.

The massacre of John Apokaukos and many of his supporters in 1346 was also invested with strong symbolic meanings. The prisoners were led naked onto the city walls where Apokaukos was executed first. He was thrown off the walls but initially survived; some time later, however, a Zealot finished him off by cutting off his head with a sword while others kept striking his body even after his death. His followers were executed in the same way, being thrown off the walls at several different points while the Zealots shouted loudly that the executions were taking place in their name.⁵⁶ Then the heads of some of the dead prisoners were

⁵⁶ Ibid., II, 580,18 – 581,3: οἱ δ' ἐκέλευον τοὺς δεσμώτας ἄγειν καὶ κατακρημνίζειν πρὸς αὐτοὺς, καὶ αὐτίκα οἱ δεσμῶται ἤγοντο γυμνοί. καὶ πρῶτον μὲν Ἀπόκαυκος κατακρημνίσθη· οὕτω δὲ συμβάν ὀρθὸς ἔσθη καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐπιπολὸν, μηδενὸς προσάπτεσθαι τολμῶντος. ἔπειτά τις προσελθὼν τῶν Ζηλωτῶν, καὶ μαλακίαν τῶν ἄλλων κατηγορήσας, ἀπέτεμεν αὐτὸς τὴν κεφαλὴν μαχαίρα. εἶτα καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι περιστάντες κατέτρωσαν τὸ σῶμα ὅλον. ἔπειτα καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἐρρίπτουν ἀπὸ τῶν

placed on spikes and displayed in the main streets to terrorize those who had similar political views.⁵⁷

The execution of the prisoners by throwing them off the city walls at different points as the Zealots shouted their own name symbolized both the latter's absolute control over the material and symbolic borders of the urban space defined by the walls that enclosed it⁵⁸ and the expulsion of the rival faction from the city, which in this context was perceived as a merely political entity. The display of their opponents' heads was a powerful performance that symbolized their dominance over the now utterly lifeless bodies of their defeated enemies. Taking place in the main streets as it did, this rite of violence was another way for the Zealots both to declare their total control over the arteries that regulated movement inside the city and to effectively exercise politics of terror that aimed to produce a disciplined civic body.

During the eight years of their political action the Zealots systematically shaped a new topography of power in late Byzantine Thessaloniki. They made extensive use of political violence in order to construct a network of "sites of power" through which they performed their own powerful position in the civic life of the city. The harbor was at the center of this urban network, being both the faction's base and a space of political centrality since it controlled the city's main communications with the rest of the world. The arterial streets leading to the main city gates were the most important components of this power network. They regulated the movements of humans and products inside the urban fabric and between the city and its environs, also serving as channels for the broader diffusion of political discourses and practices. Unlike the harbor, where the Zealots were completely dominant, these streets were contested spaces whose control was continuously claimed by the faction through the exercise of physical violence and the imaginative political use of religious rituals. The public agora, an

τειχῶν, ἀπαιτούντων ὄνομαστί τῶν Ζηλωτῶν, οὐκ ἐφ' ἓνα τόπον, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πλείους.

⁵⁷ Gregoras, II, 741,3-5:... ἀνά πάσας τὰς τῆς πόλεως πλατείας περιενεργεῖν ἀπηνῶς τὰς δυστυχεῖς αὐτῶν κεφαλὰς, εἰς ἔκκληξιν τῶν ὅμοια βουλευομένων.

⁵⁸ On the significance of the city walls as symbolic borders between an "inside" and an "outside" world see Bakirtzis 2012: 157-158.

open space where the city's inhabitants probably gathered for public assemblies, was also a contested political space since both of the rival factions performed their own rites of violence there in order to metaphorically declare their dominance over the whole city. Finally, the walls – the material and symbolic borderlines of the urban space – were invested with a strong political meaning during the events that led up to the execution of the Zealots' opponents in 1346. Through the Zealots' politics, this new political topography, which included vital parts of the urban space, contrasted with the traditional center of power, the acropolis, where Kantakouzenos' supporters had their base. This radical transformation eventually made the city itself the principal seat of power, a space whose control also expressed the status and the might of the prevailing faction.

One of the most important consequences of this new political context with its specific spatial dimensions was the shaping of new rival civic identities. The Zealots systematically performed their own civic identity through political activities and rituals that contrasted their "political orthodoxy" with the "heterodoxy" of their opponents. Their main goal was to display a model of "right" political conduct according to which the affairs of the city had to be managed by a local civic body and its own institutions without much intervention from the imperial government and its agents. They tried to shape and reinforce, through institutional changes, the extensive use of political violence and the powerful symbolic language of diligent performative acts, the cohesion of a new civic community which was to accomplish this goal. They eventually attempted to impose their own political identity not only as the dominant one but more importantly as the only acceptable one in the civic context. On the other hand, the rival faction is presented by the sources as acting in a traditional way, aiming mainly to restore an alleged harmony and order that characterized the previous state of affairs. However, with their final victory the supporters of the imperial government managed to put a definitive end to the Zealots' efforts to create a new civic community with a political culture related to the functions of a city-state almost independent from any external authority.

3. Some Thoughts on the Zealots' identity.

Who were the Zealots and how was their faction organized? Did they have a political program of their own or did they simply seize the opportunity to gain profit for themselves within the context of a dynastic rivalry? According to Kantakouzenos' account, which has been thoroughly analyzed above, the core of the faction consisted of people who dwelt in the harbor district and were engaged in activities relating to the sea. However, the Zealots were not followed by the whole of the *demos*, the lower social strata of the city, since on at least three occasions Kantakouzenos either narrates conflicts between the two groups or clearly distinguishes their political stances.⁵⁹ An important reference to the origin of the Zealots is provided by Philotheos Kokkinos, author of the life of the local Saint Sabbas the New. Philotheos notes that these men did not belong to the council or the aristocracy nor to the middle class but were rather a mob of foreign migrants from remote Byzantine territories and the islands of the Cyclades.⁶⁰ They blindly and slavishly followed one or two demagogues whose main purpose was to harm the city and the Church.⁶¹

This passage provides valuable assistance in enabling us to understand the social conditions prevailing in the harbor district during the Zealots' revolt. Apparently, a great number of migrants from the Cyclades, which were under Venetian control, and also from other parts of the Byzantine state had arrived in the city probably seeking work on the ships or in the port warehouses. The relatively thriving economic life of the harbor could explain the arrival of such a migratory wave. These men could easily have been recruited by the Zealots in order to increase both their manpower and their impact on the city's proletariat.

Apart from members of the lower social strata who were connected

⁵⁹ Kantakouzenos, II, 570,24, 571,8-9, III, 109,12-13.

⁶⁰ Vita Sabbae, &3, 31-36: ἡ τάληθέστερον εἰπεῖν, οὐδὲ τῆς βουλῆς ταῦτα καὶ τῶν ἀρίστων, οὐδέ γε τῆς δευτέρας καὶ μέσης, ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις, μοίρας, ἀλλὰ τοῦ πολλοῦ καὶ συρφετώδους ἀνθρώπου, καὶ τούτων οὐχ ἡμεδαπῶν, ἀλλ' ἐπηλύδων τινῶν βαρβάρων ἔκ τε τῶν ἡμετέρων ἐσχατιῶν καὶ τῶν κύκλωθεν νήσων ὑπ' ἀνάγκης φυγάδων αὐτόθι συνελαθέντων.

⁶¹ Ibid., & 3, 37-46.

with the life of the harbor, a small section of the local aristocracy led the Zealots during most of the period of their political action. Their known leaders came from the aristocratic family of the Palaiologoi, although their exact relationship with the ruling dynasty remains unknown. They probably had close ties with the seaside quarter where Andreas Palaiologos had his residence.⁶² Considering the commercial activities that characterized the harbor district, the ties between the Palaiologoi and this urban area could be explained by their economic involvement in maritime activities. During this period aristocratic families began to invest their capital not only in imperial offices and land, just as they had traditionally done, but also in commercial and shipping enterprises related to long-distance trade.⁶³ In this respect, personal and business relations between the Palaiologoi and dockworkers, sailors, craftsmen or migrants living and working in the port could explain the mechanisms used by the Zealots to recruit supporters.

The Zealots, however, were not just a group of people used by a branch of the local aristocracy who sought to achieve its own political goals. They came to the political fore suddenly in 1342, initially as supporters of the Palaiologoi in the civil war but soon went on to formulate their own distinct political agenda focused on the local civic life. They continued their political action after the resolution of the dynastic struggle in 1347 and even after Andreas Palaiologos had departed for Serbia. In his narration of the events immediately after John Apokaukos' temporary victory, Kantakouzenos briefly mentions that the Zealots' most distinguished members were imprisoned in Platamon and other small

⁶² Kantakouzenos, III, 109,12.

⁶³ On the commercial enterprises of late Byzantine aristocracy see Oikonomidès 1979: 119-123, 126-128; Laiou 1980: 199-202, 221-222; Matschke and Tinnfeld 2001: 158-220; Matschke 2002: 803-805. According to the aforementioned literature territorial losses and the impact of Italian maritime activities caused the economic re-orientation of the Byzantine elite during the second half of the 14th century. Recently Jacoby 2015: 84-85 has convincingly argued that aristocratic families had already in the late 12th century started investing in trade and shipping. On the activities of the aristocracy in Thessaloniki with an emphasis on the late 14th and early 15th centuries see Necipoğlu 2003; eadem 2009: 57-64.

towns, while the mob was evicted from the city.⁶⁴ His reference to the fate of the remaining Zealots when Thessaloniki was eventually reintegrated into the Byzantine state also implies that the faction was not organized through clientelism but had structured internal hierarchies. Kantakouzenos again distinguishes the most prominent members of the faction who were sent to prison in Constantinople from the rest who were expelled from the city.⁶⁵ It seems that the Zealots were organized as a party with a distinct internal hierarchy which continued to function even after the departure of its last aristocratic leader.

The Zealots were probably not interested in the redistribution of wealth or in taking other measures in favor of the socially and economically weak since there are no such references in the sources.⁶⁶ However, they did have a program of political reform. Their main aim was to seize power in the city by eliminating their rivals and actively participating in the government of Thessaloniki through the establishment of novel local institutions that resembled those of a semi-independent city-state. They made diligent use of pre-existing religious and family conflicts in order to expand their influence and to define the political borders separating them from their enemies. Through their political activities they transformed the urban space by making the city itself a site of power par excellence. They eventually formed a political party whose main goals were domination of the city and the redefinition of Thessaloniki's relations with the imperial center.

The Zealots' revolt is an illustrative example of the radical politics to which the rise of the cities during the late Byzantine era could lead. The economic and social changes associated with the growth in the maritime trade under the control of Venice and Genoa and the progressive

⁶⁴ Ibid., II, 571, 18-21: καὶ τῶν Ζηλωτῶν, ὅσοι μὲν ἐν λόγῳ ἦσαν, κατέκλεισεν ἐν δεσμωτηρίῳ, πρὸς Πλαταμῶνα πέμψας καὶ τὰς ἄλλας πολίχνας, ὅσαι ὑπ' αὐτῶ ἐπέλουν· τὸν δὲ ἄλλον συρφετὸν ἐξήλασε τῆς πόλεως.

⁶⁵ Ibid., III, 117, 23-25: καὶ ἐκέλευε συλλαμβάνεσθαι τοὺς μάλιστα ἐν λόγῳ, οὓς καὶ εἰς Βυζάντιον ἤγαγεν ἐπανελθόν. τοὺς δ' ἄλλους τῆς πόλεως ἐκέλευεν ἐξωθεῖσθαι·

⁶⁶ On the other hand, John Apokaukos is mentioned as having imposed taxes on the rich when he was the sole governor of the city. See *ibid.*, II, 572,3-4.

decline of the imperial authority led to a broader decentralization of political power in the late Byzantine world. Several urban centers acquired a certain degree of autonomy while contemporary political thinking often emphasized the importance of the city as a predominantly political space.⁶⁷ Kantakouzenos himself observes that eventually the new regime, in which supreme power was exercised by the two co-governors, rendered Thessaloniki autonomous from the imperial power.⁶⁸ The Zealots' politics addressed issues of self-government in a civic context and successfully attempted to transform the urban space into a political field where their party claimed sovereignty by violent means. They eventually invented their own way of acting in Thessaloniki during the 1340's, when the city gradually alienated itself from the Byzantine state and began to evolve into an almost autonomous city-state.

⁶⁷ On the rise of the cities and its political and intellectual dimensions see: Maksimović 1988: 248-267; Zachariadou 1989; Kioussopoulou 2013: 111-121; Shawcross 2013.

⁶⁸ Kantakouzenos, III, 104,17-18: τῆ δ' ἀληθεία, ἑαυτοῖς ἰδίᾳ τὴν Θεσσαλονίκης ἀρχὴν περιποιῶντες.

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