

ACADÉMIE ROUMAINE
INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES SUD-EST EUROPÉENNES
SOCIÉTÉ ROUMAINE D'ÉTUDES BYZANTINES

ÉTUDES BYZANTINES ET POST-BYZANTINES

Nouvelle série
Tome IV (XI)

Byzantine Heritages in South-Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period

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2022

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Byzantine Influences in the Documentary Production of Serbian Medieval Rulers

Nebojša Porčić

Abstract: The paper analyses the diplomatic features of the approximately 460 preserved documents of medieval Serbian rulers, which cover a period of roughly three centuries (1180s to the early 1500s), to provide an overview of influences generated upon them by Byzantine documentary production. Throughout that time Serbia was also exposed to diplomatic models from the Latin West, while the fact that the majority of documents were produced in the native, Serbian language stimulated the development of characteristic local practices. Nevertheless, Byzantine influences clearly maintained a continued presence and had a conspicuous role in shaping various aspects of Serbian medieval documentary production, especially regarding rulers' representation. In addition, these influences display a diachronic dynamism with periods of increasing and decreasing intensity which are closely correlated with the dynamics of political relations between Serbia and the Byzantine Empire.

Keywords: Serbia, Byzantium, diplomatics, documents, chrysobull, seal

As one of the “new nations” of the Middle Ages who established and developed their statehood within the framework of the Byzantine commonwealth, the Serbs were also greatly influenced by Byzantium in the means through which the rulers of those states exercised and represented their power.¹ One of the foremost among

¹ An overview in English of the various forms of Byzantine influence on medieval Serbia can in fact be found in D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, New York – Washington, 1971, p. 219-223, 237-243, 247-257, 439 (Index, under *Serbia*). Most recently the topic

such means were the documents issued by these rulers, a highly valuable type of historical source which provides direct textual and – if preserved in original form – even physical expressions of the very act of ruling a medieval state. Byzantine influence on medieval Serbia in that field has long since been noted by scholars,² but its treatment has largely been confined to passing observations in broader works dealing with formal or ideological aspects of Serbian documents or to analyses within the context of specific historical events which proved particularly stimulating to such influence.³ However, with the growth of capabilities for systematic study of Serbian rulers' documents provided by new editions of texts and, especially, by the increased accessibility of document images,⁴ it now seems possible to undertake specialized and more comprehensive research of this important phenomenon. On this occasion, an attempt will be made to present an overview of the influence of Byzantine models on the documents of Serbian medieval rulers and establish its correlation to the wider course of historical events, taking into account the full size and chronological range of the corpus of Serbian rulers' documents – around 460 preserved units, spread unevenly over a period of more than 300 years from the establishment of the united Serbian state under the Nemanjić dynasty in the late 12th century to the activities of the titular Serbian despots in southern Hungary in

has been addressed in several contributions to the first two volumes of the collective work *Byzantine Heritage and Serbian Art I-III*, eds. D. Popović and D. Vojvodić, Belgrade, 2016.

² For early observations on the topic see M. Lascaris, "Influences byzantines dans la diplomatie bulgare, serbe et slavo-roumaine", *Byzantinoslavica* 3, 1931, p. 500-510.

³ Examples of the first approach can be found in С. Станојевић, *Студије о српској дипломатици*, I-II, Београд, 1935, and С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Владарска идеологија Немањића. Дипломатичка студија*, Belgrade, 1997. The second approach has almost exclusively been applied to influences associated with the rise of the Serbian rulers to imperial status in the mid 14th century. Examples include the introductory study to А. Соловјев and В. Мошин, *Грчке повеље српских владара*, Belgrade, 1936, p. LVII-CV, as well as Г. Острогорски, "Простагме српских владара", *Прилози за књижевност, језик, историју и фолклор* 34, 3-4, 1967, p. 245-257; Д. Кораћ, "Повеља краља Стефана Душана манастиру Свете Богородице у Тетову. Прилог српској дипломатици и сфрагистици", *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 23, 1984, p. 141-165; N. Porčić, "The Menologem in Serbian Medieval Document-Making", in *ΠΕΡΙΒΟΛΟΣ. Mélanges offerts à Mirjana Živonović* I, eds. B. Miljković and D. Dželebdžić, Belgrade, 2015, p. 285-298.

⁴ Despite its relatively modest size (see below), the corpus of preserved documents of Serbian medieval rulers has not yet been published in one all-encompassing edition. In fact, until recently, most documents had been published only in various 19th and early 20th century editions of variable scope and quality. Nevertheless, during the last two decades, many documents have seen new editions, often accompanied by images, in the journal *Стари српски архив* (launched in Belgrade in 2002), and in collections such as А. Младеновић, *Повеље кнеза Лазара*, Belgrade, 2003; А. Младеновић, *Повеље и писма деспота Стефана*, Belgrade, 2007; *Зборник средњовековних ћириличких повеља и писама Србије, Босне и Дубровника* I, ed. by В. Мошин, С. Ђирковић and Д. Синдик, Belgrade, 2011; Н. Порчић, *Документи српских средњовековних владара у дубровачким збиркама. Доба Немањића*, Belgrade, 2017; Н. Порчић and Н. Исаиловић, *Документи владара средњовековне Србије и Босне у венецијанским збиркама*, Belgrade, 2019. Also, images of many documents are accessible online at <http://monasterium.net:8181/mom/collections/by-country#Srbija>.

the early 1500s, when Serbia itself had already been conquered by the Ottoman Turks.⁵

The scarcity of preserved material is most evident in the earliest part of this period, when the first Nemanjićs – the dynasty’s founder Nemanja and his son Stefan – ruled Serbia with the title of grand *župan*. Yet, even the mere handful of documents we have at our disposal allow some conclusions about the presence – and, just as importantly, absence – of certain elements of Byzantine influence. An obvious and crucial absence that should be noted immediately is that of the Greek language. The available documents are all written in Serbian or in Latin, which is used for the earliest treaties with the neighboring maritime city of Dubrovnik and for letters to the papacy.⁶ This fact in itself greatly limited the potential for Byzantine influence in textual forms, and indeed influence of that sort cannot be clearly observed. Only on the more general level of the documents’ formulary it can be noted that solemn charters for ecclesiastical institutions display an affinity for using proems and that all preserved originals, regardless of type, have signatures. Both of these features can be reasonably connected to Byzantine influences, because by this time proems and signatures were largely falling out of use in Western document-making practices. However, on closer inspection, these early Nemanjić proems hardly resemble their Byzantine counterparts, being much longer and more akin to works of ecclesiastical rhetoric,⁷ whereas signature formulas and graphic layouts have much more in common with signatures of witnesses in Byzantine (and Latin Eastern Adriatic) private acts than with those of the Byzantine emperors.⁸ Among

⁵ For general information about the corpus of preserved Serbian medieval documents issued by Serbian rulers and authors of lesser rank, see Ž. Vujošević, N. Porčić and D. M. Živojinović, “Das serbische Kanzleiwesen. Die Herausforderung der digitalen Diplomatik”, in A. Ambrosio, S. Barret and G. Vogeler (eds.), *Digital Diplomats. The computer as a tool for the diplomatist?*, Köln, 2014, p. 134-136.

⁶ See the latest editions in *Die Register Innocenz III. 2. Pontifikatsjahr, 1199/1200: Texte*, ed. by O. Hageneder, W. Maleczek, and A. A. Strnad, Rom – Wien, 1979, p. 323-326; *Зборник...*, p. 45-48, 55-57, 63-64, 67-69; Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, p. 129-135 and images (т. 1-5).

⁷ A good example is offered by the comparison of the two preserved Serbian proems from this period – the one in Nemanja’s charter for the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos, and its somewhat longer and more elaborate variant in Stefan’s charter to the same institution (*Зборник...*, p. 68-69, 80-82) – to the brief proem of the document by which the Byzantine emperor Alexis III confirmed the possession of Hilandar to Nemanja’s youngest son, the monk Sava (*Archives de l’Athos XX. Actes de Chilandar I. Des origines à 1319*, ed. by M. Živojinović, Ch. Giros and V. Kravari, Paris, 1995, p. 114).

⁸ The best surviving example of the formula and graphic layout is provided by the signature of Nemanja’s brother Miroslav, prince of the region of Hum, with the words *кръсть княза Миросьлава* (“cross of prince Miroslav”) written out between the arms of a cross – see image in Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, т. 3. A very similar solution was employed on Nemanja’s own founding charter for the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos (see below, note 10). The formulaic and graphic similarities with Byzantine and Eastern Adriatic private acts were noted already by М. Кос, *Дубровачко-српски уговори до средине 13. века*, Глас Српске краљевске академије 123, 1927, 7-9.

other things, unlike Byzantine imperial signatures, they were clearly not the rulers' autographs.

There is, nevertheless, one unmistakably Byzantine feature – the seal. The five seals of grand *župan* Nemanja known today were practically identical to contemporary Byzantine seals – they were metallic, bore only inscriptions or inscriptions and hagiographic images (Saint Stephen), and even used the Greek language.⁹ This layout is typical of seals belonging to Byzantine imperial dignitaries and officials, thus accurately reflecting Nemanja's formal status of a Byzantine imperial official "in charge" of Serbia. Most of these seals are also made of the same metal used for the seals of Byzantine dignitaries – lead. But on his most important document, the foundation charter of the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos, Nemanja apparently reached for a Byzantine symbol of supreme authority, making his seal golden (gilded), like the seals of the emperors.¹⁰ It is difficult to discern whether Nemanja's action represented a symbolic confirmation of the practical independence he had gained for Serbia during his three decades in power or was it simply a means of bestowing an additional degree of solemnity upon the charter. At the time of its issuing (in 1198 or early 1199), Nemanja had already relinquished his throne and was living out his last days as a monk on Mount Athos, in the lands of the Byzantine emperor Alexis III, who had just presented Nemanja with a golden-sealed document (chrysobull) of his own permitting him to found Hilandar.¹¹ Yet, regardless of Nemanja's concrete reasons, it is clear that the inspiration for the use of a golden seal came from Byzantine imperial sphragistic practice.

The practical independence of Serbia that Nemanja had achieved was formalized in 1217, when his son Stefan Nemanjić assumed the title and crown of king. This event opened a new period in the documentary production of Serbian rulers, which lasted until 1345 and is today reflected by around 130 preserved documents. Although these documents are again quite unevenly distributed, with more than half of them dating from the last 25 years of this period, the material provides enough continuity to support the conclusion that the main changes brought

⁹ Seals with very similar characteristics were also used by Nemanja's brothers Stracimir and Miroslav, who acted as regional lords under his supreme rule. For the latest analysis of all these seals with references to numerous earlier works see Б. Хекић, "Печати раних Немањића – узор и паралеле у формативном периоду немањићке сигилографске праксе", *Историјски часопис* 68, 2019, p. 36-41, 56-59 (Images 1-8).

¹⁰ The charter, with the seal appended to it, was lost during the First World War, and is accessible today only through old photographs and lithographs – *Зборник...*, p. 67-68.

¹¹ It is important to note that Nemanja's lost charter for his main monastic foundation in Serbia, the monastery of Studenica, is also described as a "golden-sealed charter" (*въ златопечат`њи повели его*) by his son Sava (Свети Сава, *Сабрана дела*, transl. Т. Јовановић, Belgrade, 1998, p. 150). Also, at the time when the Hilandar charter was issued, Nemanja and Alexis III were related through the marriage of Nemanja's son Stefan and the Byzantine emperor's daughter.

about by the assumption of the kingly title dealt with the introduction of features reflecting sovereign status. A number of those features came from the West, which is not surprising since the kingly title was of Western origin and the royal crown itself had been procured from the Roman papacy.¹² Thus, from the 1230s at the latest, charters of Nemanjić rulers issued to lay addressees began bearing seals of a markedly Western type – large wax pieces with images of the king enthroned or charging on his horse.¹³ Yet, there were also numerous contributions of Byzantine origin. The signature, for example, not only remained mandatory on all types of documents, but it also abandoned the formula of a witness declaration in favor of a true ruler’s intitution in which the Serbian ruler was occasionally even designated as *самодржѣць*, a direct translation of the Byzantine imperial title of *αὐτοκράτωρ*.¹⁴ Moreover, the only surviving document of Stefan’s eldest son and immediate successor king Stefan Radoslav, whose mother and wife were both Byzantine princesses, is signed in Greek (*Στέφανος ῥήξ ὁ Δούκας*), apparently by his own hand.¹⁵ This remained an one-off occurrence, but it seems that Radoslav was also responsible for another bit of Byzantine textual influence that had a lasting effect – the adoption of the Byzantine “imperial pronoun” *ἡ βασιλεία μου* (“my imperial person” or “my emperorship”), whose Serbian version *кравевство ми* (“my royal person”) first appeared in his document and then went on to become a constant feature of the documents of Serbian medieval rulers, with appropriate changes of the title.¹⁶

¹² A wide range of issues related to this event and the establishment of the autocephalous Serbian archbishopric in 1219 have been covered in the new collective volume *Кравевство и архиепископија у српским и поморским земљама Немањића – тематски зборник*, eds. Љ. Максимовић and С. Пириватрић, Belgrade, 2019. On the effects of the assumption of the royal title in documentary production see Н. Порчић, “Немањићи успон на кравевство у светлости дипломатичких и дипломатских сведочанстава”, *ibidem*, p. 221-230.

¹³ The earliest (and best) example is the seal of King Stefan Vladislav, Stefan Nemanjić’s second son, on a document from cca 1236: Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, p. 146-147 and т. 12 (images); Б. Хекић, “Печати раних Немањића”, p. 46, 60 (Image 11). For images of other seals of this type see Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, т. 20, 27, 41, 49, 53.

¹⁴ On the use of *αὐτοκράτωρ* in Byzantine documents see F. Dölger and J. Karayannopoulos, *Byzantinische Urkundenlehre. Erster Abschnitt: Die Kaiserurkunden*, München, 1968, p. 43, 56, 65, 120, 121. The applications and meanings of the term in the Byzantine world, including Serbia, are discussed by Г. Острогорски, “Автократор и самодржац”, Глас Српске кравевске академије 164, 1935, p. 95-187. More on Serbian usage: С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Владарска идеологија*, p. 60-69. For examples of use in documents issued until 1321, see *Зборник...*, p. 641 (Index, under *самодржаць*).

¹⁵ The document is a privilege to the neighboring Adriatic maritime commune of Dubrovnik, issued in early 1234, after Radoslav had been deposed and forced out of the country by his brother Vladislav – Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, p. 139-141, т. 8 (image).

¹⁶ After the Nemanjićs assumed the imperial crown in 1346, it was converted to *царство ми* (“my imperial person”), whereas in the subsequent period, when Serbia was ruled by regional lords and despots, the formula was *господство ми* (“my lordship”). King Radoslav’s attitude towards the Byzantine world has been recently re-examined by Љ. Максимовић, “Византинизми’ кравља Сте-

Radoslav's charter belongs to the corpus of documents issued to lay addressees, but the main focal point for expressions of Byzantine influence among the documents of Nemanjić kings was the corpus of charters intended for ecclesiastical addressees, primarily monastic foundations. This may be considered natural since the Serbian church organization, belonging to the Eastern Orthodox family of churches, was the part of Serbian society most closely associated with Byzantium and committed to Byzantine traditions and models. In fact, as shown above, such a tendency was visible already in the Hilandar charters of the grand *župans* Nemanja and Stefan, but after Serbia's rise to kingship there was a marked turn towards those Byzantine practices which were regarded as symbols of sovereignty. Thus, while charters for lay addressees bore the Western-type wax seals described above, charters intended for ecclesiastic institutions used metallic seals with Byzantine features, only not those reminiscent of the seals of Byzantine dignitaries and officials like at the time of Nemanja, but of the emperors themselves. These Serbian royal metallic seals were always gilded and displayed the dynasty's patron Saint Stephen on one side and the standing figure of the ruler with full insignia on the other.¹⁷ Also, like the Byzantine imperial golden-sealed charters, these documents increasingly called themselves "chrysobulls" (*хрисовуль*) or, in Slavic translation, *златопечатноу слово*.¹⁸ Perhaps most noteworthy, however, was the appearance in Serbian royal ecclesiastic charters of the use of red ink. In contemporary Byzantine imperial documents, red ink was used for the emperor's autographed signature and for certain words in the main text (the so-called *logos*-formula), theoretically also entered by the emperor's own hand and thus symbolizing his direct involvement in the document-making process.¹⁹ Therefore, by introducing red ink into their documents – even if only into one type – the Nemanjić kings of Serbia adopted a highly recognizable symbol of sovereignty. It is, nevertheless, important to note that this early Serbian usage of red ink was not a mere copy of the Byzantine model. On one hand, although they did use red ink for their signatures, the Serbian rulers did not at this time appropriate the

фана Радослава", *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 46, 2009, p. 139-147.

¹⁷ Descriptions and images of metallic seals belonging to medieval Serbian rulers preserved in the monastery of Hilandar, the largest such collection available today, have been published in Д. Синдик, "Српски средњовековни печати у манастиру Хиландару", in В. Кораћ (ed.), *Осам векова Хиландара. Историја, духовни живот, књижевност, уметност и архитектура*, Belgrade, 2000, p. 229-237. For seals of the royal period see p. 232-234, images 9-24.

¹⁸ Examples from documents issued until 1321 can be found in *Зборник...*, no. 20, 54, 64, 82, 93, 104, 137.

¹⁹ On the use of red ink in Byzantine imperial documents: F. Dölger and J. Karayannopoulos, *Byzantinische Urkundenlehre*, p. 200 (Index, under *Rotworte*); *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. Kazhdan, New York, Oxford, 1991, under: *Chrysobull*, p. 451-452 (N. Oikonomides), *Ink*, p. 995 (W. Hörandner), *Menologem*, p. 1341 (N. Oikonomides), *Prostagma*, p. 1740 (idem); A. E. Müller, "Die Entwicklung der roten Urkundenselbstbezeichnungen in den Privilegien byzantinischer Kaiser", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 88, 1995, p. 85-104.

logos-formula, which was considered an imperial prerogative. On the other hand, use of red ink in Serbian documents expanded to include elements which were not rubricated in Byzantium – the document’s invocative cross and initial letters, as well as the initial letters of other words or passages in the text (the so-called subinitials) – very much resembling in appearance and function the decorative and practical rubrication used in manuscript books. In this way, Serbian document makers demonstrated both an understanding of Byzantine customs regarding the use of red ink and a readiness to adapt its use to their own needs and preferences.²⁰

A new wave of Byzantine influences came into Serbian royal documents at the beginning of the 14th century, during the reign of king Milutin (1282–1321). Most importantly, use of red ink for signatures expanded from ecclesiastical charters to all types of royal documents, just like in Byzantium. The suddenness of this change and the absolute consistency with which it was applied thereafter leave no doubt that this was a deliberate decision motivated by the symbolic significance of red ink, and it can almost certainly be linked to Milutin’s marriage with the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II in 1299.²¹ This exalted marital union with the Byzantine court probably stimulated another two changes which were more of a stylistic nature. One was the increasing replacement of the Western-type devotional formula (*Dei gratia – по милости Божијем*) by the Serbian translation of the Byzantine imperial epithet *ἐν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ πιστὸς* (*въ Христа Бога вѣрны* or *благовѣрны*). This epithet had actually already appeared once previously in the only preserved document of the Byzantinophile king Radoslav,²² but it was only from the early 14th century, after Milutin’s marriage, that it started really making its way into Nemanjić intitulations and signatures.²³ The other change was the appearance of a characteristic minuscule cursive-like Cyrillic script, now usually called the “diplomatic” or “chancery” minuscule. Although the script of Serbian royal documents had already been showing signs of minusculation for several decades,²⁴ its final fruition into a recognizable new script at this specific moment may also be attributed to the influence of models from Byzantium, where by this

²⁰ Use of red ink in Nemanjić documents has been recently analyzed by Н. Порчић, “Царске шаре црвене”: о заступљености и обрасцима употребе црвеног мастила у документима Немањића”, *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 53, 2016, p. 255-273.

²¹ Н. Порчић, “Царске шаре црвене ...”, p. 261.

²² Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, p. 139.

²³ For early examples from Milutin’s time see *Зборник...*, no. 93, 99. After Milutin there are about 20 more examples of its use in royal documents, mostly in signatures.

²⁴ The processes of development of Serbian medieval Cyrillic script have been presented in detail with plentiful illustrative material by П. Ђорђевић, *Историја српске ћирилице. Палеографско-филолошки прилози*, Belgrade, 1971. Formation of the chancery minuscule and dilemmas about its naming are discussed on p. 82-84, 88-98, and 115-125. The first document considered to display this script in fully developed form is King Milutin’s charter to Dubrovnik from 1302 (images in П. Ђорђевић, *Историја...*, p. 335; Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, т. 30).

time all imperial documents were written in a Greek cursive script.²⁵ However, it should be noted that the new Cyrillic minuscule became the norm for all documents except solemn ecclesiastic charters, which had in other respects proven most open to Byzantine influences. Those solemn documents kept the more representative, almost majuscule “Cyrillic uncial” script, drawing attention to the fact that by this time, when Serbian royal document-making already had an almost century-long tradition, introduction of new and/or foreign elements increasingly had to contend with deeply rooted autochthonous practices.

Gaining momentum from the time of Milutin, Byzantine influence in Nemanjić document-making peaked after Milutin’s grandson Dušan (1331–1355) conquered large tracts of Byzantine territory and in 1346 had himself crowned emperor of the Serbs and the Greeks. It is in this period – more precisely from 1344 – that we encounter the earliest preserved documents issued by Serbian rulers in the Greek language. Serbian rulers issued documents in Greek before, but the greater part of these were letters and treaties arising from communication with their Byzantine counterparts – a document group which suffered practically total loss with the subsequent disappearance of both Byzantine and Serbian court archives. However, with Dušan’s extensive conquests of predominantly grecophone Byzantine territories both before and after 1346, Serbian rulers started using the Greek language to communicate with their new subjects. Since these documents contained grants of lands and privileges, frequently on behalf of the church, they at least partially retained their usefulness in the following centuries, resulting in a relatively high number of preserved units – about 30 come from Dušan, and about a dozen were issued by subsequent Serbian rulers of Greek regions. These documents have been extensively and comprehensively studied by Aleksandar Solovjev and Vladimir Mošin almost a century ago, and although the contents of the group has somewhat changed, their general conclusions are still valid today.²⁶ Chief among them is that the vast majority of these documents completely conform

²⁵ See remarks on the script of contemporary Byzantine imperial documents in N. Oikonomidès, “La chancellerie impériale de Byzance du 13^e au 15^e siècle”, *Revue des études byzantines* 43, 1985, p. 175-176, and A. E. Müller, “Documents: Imperial Chrysobulls”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, eds. E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon and R. Cormack, Oxford, New York, 2008, p. 130, 132.

²⁶ A. Соловјев и В. Мошин, *Грчке повеље...*, was published in 1936, based on the authors’ research in Athonite and other monastic archives that started in the 1920s. The diplomatic analysis of the corpus forms part of the volume’s introduction (p. LXVI-CV). In the meantime, some documents which Solovjev and Mošin attributed to Serbian rulers have been reattributed to Byzantine emperors or identified as forgeries, but there have also been additional discoveries. For references to editions of these new finds, as well as to fresh editions of the documents already published by Solovjev and Mošin (notably within the *Archives de l’Athos* series), see an updated catalogue by Д. Живојиновић, “Регеста грчких повеља српских владара”, *Меуовута грађа – Miscellanea* 27, 2006, p. 57-99, as well as further remarks in D. M. Živojinović, “The Medieval South Slavic Documents in the Athonite Archives”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 23/2, 2019 [*Lire les “Archives de l’Athos”*, eds. O. Delouis and K. Smyrlis], p. 592 (note 65), 600-604.

to the models used in Byzantine imperial documentary production, mirroring two of its main document types – the solemn, often lengthy chrysobull, bearing the red-inked *logos*-formula and full onomastic signature of the ruler with his golden seal, and the shorter, more practical imperial command (*prostagma*), whose only red-inked section was the menologem, a special kind of signature which, instead of the name and title of the issuer, contains information on the month and indiction of issue.²⁷ In fact, analysis of the language concluded that almost all documents were written by native Greek speakers, albeit with varying degrees of grammatical and orthographic skill and literary talent.²⁸ Also, Solovjev and Mošin pointed out another phenomenon which should be noted as an example of Byzantine influence, although not in the form or appearance of a document feature, but in its proper use. This concerns the timing of the adoption of the menologem.²⁹ In Byzantine practice use of the menologem was a strict imperial prerogative, limited to the emperor himself and – only from the early 1300s – to the co-emperors designated by him. Therefore, Dušan's Greek documents of the *prostagma* type issued prior to the 1346 coronation do not bear the menologem, but instead an abridged form of the onomastic signature (*Στέφανος κράλης*),³⁰ while the menologem itself appears only after 1346.

There is, however, one segment in which this conformity of the Serbian rulers' Greek documents to Byzantine models was not so complete – several onomastic signatures in chrysobulls, as well as the menologem on Dušan's only Greek *prostagma* that has been preserved in original form, are not written in Greek, but in Serbian.³¹ This example of blending becomes important when attention is turned to the impact of the wave of Byzantine influences generated by Dušan's rise to imperial status on the corpus of documents issued by Serbian rulers in their

²⁷ In addition to entries in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (see above, note 19), a clear introduction to these types with references to detailed works can be found in A. E. Müller, "Documents...", p. 129-135.

²⁸ This was explained by the hypothesis that most of the preserved documents issued by Serbian rulers in the Greek language were prepared by the Greek addressees themselves and then only submitted to the Serbian rulers for validation – A. Соловјев and В. Мошин, *Грчке повеље...*, p. ХСVIII-CV.

²⁹ A. Соловјев and В. Мошин, *Грчке повеље...*, LXXVII-LXXXIII. For the most comprehensive treatment of the menologem in Byzantine documentary production, including Greek documents of Serbian rulers, see O. Kresten, "ΜΗΝΟΛΟΓΗΜΑ. Anmerkungen zu einem byzantinischen Unterfertigungstyp", *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 102, 1-2, 1994, p. 3-52.

³⁰ Use of such an abridged signature also had its precedents in Byzantine tradition, as it was the form of signature used on prostagmas by co-emperors and rulers of the Epirote state – A. Соловјев and В. Мошин, *Грчке повеље...*, p. LXXXI-LXXXIII; O. Kresten, "ΜΗΝΟΛΟΓΗΜΑ...", p. 3-9.

³¹ Dušan's heavily damaged prostagma was not known to Solovjev and Mošin in 1936, being first published four years later: P. Lemerle and A. Soloviev, "Trois chartes des souverains serbes conservées au monastère de Kutlumus", *Annales de l'institut Kondakov (Seminarium Kondakovianum)* 11, 1940, p. 130-134 (with image).

native language. Textually, the influence here remained limited – although there are some instances of more or less faithful translations of characteristic phrases from Byzantine documents, such as *ἡ βασιλεία μου ἔχει θέλημα καὶ διορίζεται*,³² the texts of Serbian imperial documents stuck to using the by now deeply rooted and well-developed native phraseology. Of course, this phraseology included some Byzantine features such as the use of the *ἐν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ πιστὸς* formula, which became the norm in Serbian imperial signatures, but they had mostly already been introduced earlier. Real changes were predominantly focused on the features highlighting the new imperial status of Serbian rulers – the seal, the *logos*-formula, and the menologem. Thus, after 1346 great wax seals with images of the enthroned ruler completely disappear in favor of gilded ones modeled very closely on contemporary Byzantine imperial bullae.³³ Yet, while some of these used the standard imperial Byzantine sphragistic combination with the image of the emperor on one side and Christ on the other, others continue the old Nemanjić tradition of depicting the ruler and Saint Stephen.³⁴ Use of the *logos*-formula also differed from Byzantine models. Instead of the usual three occurrences of the word *logos* encountered in the documents of the Byzantine emperors³⁵ – and, as mentioned above, in the Greek-language documents of Serbian rulers – documents of Serbian rulers written in the native tongue contain a highly varying number of red words (usually two to five), which were not limited to the Serbian equivalent of the term *logos* (*слово*), but also included other terms, such as the ruler's title or the word "chrysobull". At the same time, the old practice of using red ink for invocation crosses, initials and sub-initials was continued, even though it was not compatible with Byzantine models.³⁶

Perhaps the most telling example of this struggle between autochthonous

³² For example, Н. Порчић, *Документи ...*, p. 269: *има хотъниѣ и благоизволи царство ми.*

³³ Д. Синдик, "Српски средњовековни печати ...", p. 234-235, images 25-42.

³⁴ It has been suggested quite convincingly that seals with the image of Christ were intended for use in the regions recently conquered from the Byzantines, which were familiar with such iconography from the seals of Byzantine emperors, whereas seals of the Saint Stephen type were attached to documents for addressees in the old Serbian lands – Д. Кораћ, "Повеља краља Стефана Душана манастиру Свете Богородице у Тетову. Прилог српској дипломатици и сфрагистици", *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 23, 1984, p. 144-155.

³⁵ The Byzantine practice of writing the word *logos* three times began in the later part of the 13th century and apparently had religious connotations, but nevertheless there are some rare exceptions – N. Oikonomidès, "La chancellerie impériale...", p. 180-183.

³⁶ For these peculiarities in the rubrication of Serbian imperial documents see Н. Порчић, "'Царске шаре црвене'...", p. 265-266. Specifically on the *logos*-formula in Serbian documents: Ђ. Бубало, "Логос формула у хрисовуљи цара Стефана Уроша манастиру Лаври (1361)", in Б. Миљковић and Д. Целебџић (eds.), *ΠΕΡΙΒΟΛΟΣ. Зборник у част Мирјане Живојиновић*, vol. I, Belgrade, 2015, p. 323-338. It should be noted that one form of rubrication encountered in Byzantine as well as Serbian Greek-language chrysobulls – the use of red ink for writing certain elements of the date formula – left no trace whatsoever in those issued in Serbian.

practice and the need to import symbols of imperial status into post-1346 Serbian documents written in the Serbian language is offered by the menologem. During the royal period, Serbian documentary production had developed three main types of documents: the solemn charter, the plain charter and the letter. One of the main distinguishing features between the last two were their signatures – although they both used the same abridged signature formula (the ruler’s name and title in briefest form: *Стефан краљ*), on plain charters these words were written in large, majuscule script similar to that used for signatures on solemn charters, whereas on letters the writing was in a much smaller, minuscule script. After 1346, both of these were replaced by the menologem, but while in Byzantine practice the menologem always had the same formula (“in the month of M, in the indiction I”) and the same outward appearance (being autographed by the emperor himself in his individual cursive script), in Serbia it developed two distinct versions – a “full” month-and-indiction formula in large, majuscule script for plain charters, and an “abridged” formula containing only information about the month in small, minuscule script for letters.³⁷ This readiness of Serbian imperial document-makers to significantly alter perhaps the most coveted diplomatic symbol of the newly-acquired imperial status so that it would fit in neatly with their existing practice provides a clear testimony of the development and strength of the autochthonous Serbian tradition of documentary production at the time of most intense Byzantine influence.

In addition to the introduction of features directly related to the adoption of the imperial title, this period of unprecedented circulation of Byzantine ideas and models among Serbian document-makers also witnessed other changes that should or may be attributed to Byzantine influence. For example, the term “chrysobull”, which is previously always encountered as a designation for solemn charters issued to ecclesiastical institutions, began to be used for solemn charters issued to lay addressees as well, just like in Byzantium.³⁸ Also, use of the minuscule Cyrillic script developed under Milutin now expanded to all document types, thus achieving the scriptural uniformity characteristic of Byzantine imperial documents of this period.³⁹ Finally, another noticeable change in the Serbian rulers’ Serbian-language documents from this period concerns the use of paper. Since it first appears as the writing material for Serbian documents in the early 14th century, paper was primarily used for plain charters and letters, whereas solemn charters were

³⁷ A detailed presentation and discussion of the two versions is given in N. Porčić, “The Menologem...”, p. 289-294, with images 1-4.

³⁸ The first such “lay chrysobull” was Dušan’s great charter of privileges to Dubrovnik – Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, p. 99, 249-253 and т. 63-65. Curiously, the document was left without some of the usual features of chrysobulls both by Byzantine and Serbian standards (*logos*-formula, proem). This was “corrected” in 1357, when those features were added to its confirmation by Dušan’s successor Uroš – Н. Порчић, *Документи...*, p. 274-277 and т. 82.

³⁹ See above, note 25.

almost exclusively written on parchment. Yet, from the time of Dušan's imperial coronation, paper is increasingly encountered as the writing support of solemn charters, culminating during the reign of his son and successor Uroš (1355–1371), when it became almost the only material in use for all types. The cause of this trend is uncertain, but if it was a result of Byzantine influence, it would present an interesting case of the influence of historical practices rather than the current state of Byzantine documentary production, since the Byzantine imperial chancery was notable for its almost exclusive use of paper in the 11th and 12th century, but by the 14th century a great majority of its solemn documents were written on parchment.⁴⁰

The surge of Byzantine influence in Serbian documentary production caused by Dušan's rise to imperial rank ended abruptly with the downfall of the Serbian empire and extinction of the main branch of the Nemanjić dynasty in 1371. Even for some years before this conventional date, the centralized Nemanjić state had all but disappeared, giving way to a number of practically independent regional lordships.⁴¹ The rulers of these lordships held widely differing views about their own status and position in relation to the Nemanjićs and their legacy, including the wide range of Byzantine influences in documentary production which had been adopted under that illustrious dynasty.⁴² Unsurprisingly, the extent to which these influences continued to be present was determined in large measure by the political and administrative traditions of the individual regions. Thus, Byzantine influence is far more visible in documents of the lords who ruled regions conquered from the Byzantines in Dušan's time. The most striking example is provided by the Thessalian branch of the Nemanjićs who broke away from the Serbian empire already in the early part of Uroš's reign, assumed the title of "emperor of the Greeks and the Serbs" and continued issuing chrysobulls and prostagms in Greek with all of the Byzantine trappings of imperial rank, albeit with occasional slipups that can be attributed to the inexperience of their makers.⁴³ There is also a strong presence of Byzantine elements in the mixed corpus of Serbian and Greek documents issued

⁴⁰ A more likely possibility would be that the expansion of paper reflected the beginning of a marked shortage of parchment which in the second half of the 14th century also brought about a limited renaissance of paper in Byzantine chanceries. On the dynamics of use of different writing materials in Byzantine documentary production see N. Oikonomides, "Le support matériel des documents byzantins", in J. Glénisson, J. Bompaire and J. Irigoien (eds.), *La paléographie grecque et byzantine*, Paris, 1977, p. 385-416.

⁴¹ This process has been thoroughly examined by P. Михаљчић, *Крај Српског царства*, 2nd ed., Belgrade 2001, who notes the highly illustrative fact that although the last Serbian emperor, Uroš, died in December 1371, his last preserved document dates from 1366 (p. 123, 304-305).

⁴² An overview of the documents of some regional lords from the standpoint of rulers' ideology is given by Б. Ферјанчић, "Владарска идеологија у српској дипломатици после пропасти Царства", in И. Божић and В. Ј. Ђурић (eds.), *О кнезу Лазару*, Belgrade, 1975, p. 139-150.

⁴³ For editions of the documents of the Thessalian Nemanjićs see above, note 27. An account of their political and administrative activities, including comments on the diplomatic aspects of their documents, is presented in Б. Ферјанчић, *Тесалија у 13. и 14. веку*, Belgrade, 1974, p. 241-264.

by Jovan Uglješa. This regional lord consistently used the red inked signature to which he was entitled since he received the exalted Byzantine title of despot from emperor Uroš, but other Byzantine features appear somewhat haphazardly regardless of the language of the document.⁴⁴ The same general conclusion – a noticeable but quite inconsistent presence of Byzantine elements – applies to documents of the Dragaš family, who also held the title of despot, although the corpus of their documents available today is typologically quite uniform, consisting almost entirely of charters to ecclesiastic institutions written in Serbian.⁴⁵

This apparent continuity of strong Byzantine influence was in fact a very brief phenomenon – Jovan Uglješa was killed fighting the Ottomans even before the death of his formal suzerain emperor Uroš, the Thessalian Nemanjićs relinquished their lordship in 1373, and the lands of the Dragaš family fell under Ottoman rule in 1395. As a result, the tradition of Serbian medieval documentary production at the highest level continued only among the regional lords of the old Serbian lands to the north. They ruled territories without direct Byzantine legacy in document-making and bore no Byzantine titles, while danger from the Ottomans prompted them to maintain close relations with Western powers such as Hungary or Venice. Consequently, the presence of Byzantine influence in their documents dropped significantly from the level achieved under Dušan. The imperial prerogatives of the monogram and *logos*-formula appear no more. Also, from the beginning of the 15th century use of cursive-like script and paper begin to markedly decline, especially in solemn charters.⁴⁶ At the same time, Western type wax seals made a full comeback, only now with heraldic imagery, and the devotional formula of the Western type (Serbian variants of the *Dei gratia* formula) returned to the intitations and signatures of those issuers who considered themselves powerful enough to claim a sufficient degree of sovereignty. In fact, the extent to which vestiges of Byzantine influence survived was determined primarily by how the individual lords measured themselves and their ambitions in relation to the status and power of the Nemanjićs.

Confirmation of this is provided by comparison of the practices of the three main dynasties of regional lords in old Serbian lands – the Balšić, Branković, and Lazarević. Although he never abandoned the hierarchically ambiguous title

⁴⁴ The only comprehensive overview of Uglješa's document-making practice is given in Б. Ферјанчић, "О деспотским повељама", *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 4, 1956, p. 108-110.

⁴⁵ The Dragaš documents are also treated in Б. Ферјанчић, "О деспотским повељама", p. 110, and Б. Ферјанчић, "Владарска идеологија...", p. 146-148.

⁴⁶ While the return of parchment can be viewed as a western influence or simply a resurgence of autochthonous practice from the royal period, the decline in use of the cursive-like minuscule seems to have rather been a consequence of the further development of Cyrillic uncial script, which gave rise to a new rather elegant style, sometimes called semi-uncial – В. Јерковић, "'Полуустав' у српским повељама од краја 14. и током 15. века", *Зборник Матице српске за филологију и лингвистику*, 42, 1999, p. 89-91, 108-111.

of *knez* (prince), Lazar, the founder of the Lazarevićs, pursued with much success his ambition to establish supremacy over the old lands of the Nemanjić kingdom. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the features of his documentary production⁴⁷ – and the presence of Byzantine influences in it – bore many similarities to that of the Nemanjić kings. His documents were signed with red ink,⁴⁸ his signatures and intitulations regularly used the epithets *въ Христа Бога благовѣрны* and *самодръжъць*,⁴⁹ and in addition to wax heraldic seals he occasionally also used seals made of gold (gilded silver?), with the ruler's image on one side and the image of the Nemanjić patron Saint Stephen on the other.⁵⁰ These practices continued essentially unchanged among the Lazarevićs after Lazar died in the battle of Kosovo against the Ottomans in 1389, but after 1402, when Lazar's elder son and chief successor Stefan acquired the title of despot from the Byzantine emperor, a wave of formalization coupled with increasing western influences caused some Byzantine features to wane. The epithet *самодръжъць* became very rare, and *въ Христа Бога благовѣрны* was largely displaced by the *Dei gratia* formula – their presence, as well as the presence of gilded seals, remained limited to occasional charters for ecclesiastic institutions, leaving only the red-inked signature as a truly permanent Byzantine feature.⁵¹

The actual strength of Byzantine influence in Lazarević practice becomes more visible in comparison to the Balšić and Branković documents. Both of these families, consigned to the status of modest regional lordships in the shadow of the Lazarevićs, almost never signed their documents and hardly ever used red ink to any purpose. The Balšićs are also not recorded to have ever used metallic seals,

⁴⁷ The most comprehensive discussions of Lazar's documentary production, including comparisons with his Balšić and Branković contemporaries, are offered in В. Мошин, "Самодржавни Стефан кнез Лазар и традиција немањићког суверенитета од Марице до Косова", in И. Божић and В. Ј. Ђурић (eds.), *О кнезу Лазару*, Belgrade, 1975, p. 13-44, and Б. Ферјанчић, "Владарска идеологија ...", p. 139-150.

⁴⁸ In some cases, the color of Lazar's signatures, as well as the signatures of some documents issued by his heirs until 1402, is not really red, but a dark shade of brown (*Archives de l'Athos XII. Actes de Saint-Pantéléemôn*, ed. by P. Lemerle, G. Dagron and S. Ćirković, Paris, 1982, p. 174-175, 176, 185). It is unclear whether this is the result of natural darkening of originally red ink or a deliberate action by the document-makers that was somehow symbolic of Lazar's status.

⁴⁹ These features are conveniently presented in a table by Р. Михальчић, *Кнез Лазар. Историја – култ – предање*, 2nd ed., Belgrade, 2001, p. 112.

⁵⁰ For metallic seals of this period see Д. Синдик, "Српски средњовековни печати ...", p. 235 and images 45-54. An example of Lazar's wax heraldic seal: А. Младеновић, *Повеље кнеза Лазара*, p. 317.

⁵¹ In terms of Byzantine influence, it is nevertheless very important to note that on Stefan's gilded seals the image of Saint Stephen is replaced with the image of Christ (see above, note 50), no doubt as a result of his rise to the title of despot, which was considered by the Byzantines as an "imperial dignity", second only to that of the emperor himself – Б. Ферјанчић, *Деспоти у Византији и јужнословенским земљама*, Belgrade, 1960, p. 9-13.

while among the Brankovićs these do appear on a couple of preserved ecclesiastic charters.⁵² Rare appearances of the *въ Христа Бога благовѣрны* epithet are also mostly found in documents of that type, but on occasions when these lords wanted to express an air of sovereignty they generally used the *Dei gratia* formula. Only in one or two moments when they perceived that their fortunes were on the rise, the Balšićs employed the epithet *самодръжъць*, but for the Brankovićs there is no evidence of that at all.⁵³ Yet, even this attitude can in a way be taken as a trace – or distant echo – of Byzantine influence, because it demonstrates that the symbolism of Byzantine imports into Serbian document-making was not forgotten. A wonderful example of this was provided by Đurađ Branković, who in 1427 succeeded his uncle Stefan Lazarević to become the second and last great ruler of the Serbian despotate before the Ottoman conquest. After assuming power, Đurađ stuck to his own family’s custom of not using any signature on his documents for another two years, until he officially received the title of despot from the Byzantine emperor.⁵⁴ Only then did he begin to issue documents signed with red ink, like his predecessor had done. Moreover, even at the end of the 15th century, when Serbian medieval statehood was reduced to the titular despotate of the last Brankovićs living in exile in Hungary, documents issued by them to Serbian monasteries on Mount Athos called themselves chrysobulls, contained intitulations with the epithet *въ Христа Бога благовѣрны*, bore red-inked signatures and gilded seals with the combination of regal and hagiographic images, but also duly avoided the epithet *самодръжъць*, which was clearly inapplicable in the circumstances.⁵⁵ In this way, these late Serbian rulers, who were born at the time when the Byzantine Empire had already disappeared, demonstrated that they still understood the meaning of document features that had long ago been introduced to Serbian document-making from Byzantine models.

Byzantine influence is visible in the documents of Serbian medieval rulers ever since the earliest period from which they have been preserved. This influence was predominantly concentrated in those document features which were concerned with rulers’ representation, thus forming part of a wider inflow of Byzantine influences in the field of political ideology. As a result, the chronological dynamics of this influence display a close correlation with the evolution of the Serbian rulers’

⁵² An early Branković charter with a hagiographic metallic seal and no signature can be seen in M. Спремић, *Деспот Ђурађ Бранковић и његово доба*, Belgrade, 1994, images adjoining p. 96.

⁵³ В. Мошин, “Самодржавни Стефан кнез Лазар...”, p. 32-41; Б. Ферјанчић, “Владарска идеологија...”, p. 148-149.

⁵⁴ The chronology and course of events are presented in M. Спремић, *Деспот Ђурађ Бранковић...*, p. 135-137.

⁵⁵ For examples of such documents see К. Митровић, “Повеља деспота Ђорђа Бранковића о прихватању ктиторства над Хиландаром”, *Стари српски архив* 5, 2006, p. 229-239, with images, and К. Митровић, “Повеља деспота Ђорђа, Јована и Ангелине Бранковић манастиру Светог Павла”, *Стари српски архив* 6, 2007, p. 209-217, with image.

power and status, as well as the state of their relations with the Byzantine Empire. In the late 12th and early 13th century, when Serbian rulers of the new Nemanjić dynasty were rising from local autonomy within the empire's administrative system to a status of practical independence, the Byzantine features of their documents resembled those of Byzantine officials while occasionally flashing symbols of sovereignty. The latter symbols became much more pronounced after in 1217 Serbian rulers assumed the title of king. This was especially the case in documents intended for ecclesiastic institutions which, being part of the family of Eastern Orthodox churches centered on the patriarchate of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, naturally stimulated and favored use of Byzantine models. A strong and deliberate expansion of Byzantine influences occurred in the early 14th century, when continued rise of the Nemanjić state was affirmed by stronger political and family ties with the Byzantine imperial court. This process culminated around the middle of the century, when Serbian assumption of the imperial title brought about an influx of documentary symbols of sovereignty at the highest level, particularly faithfully applied in the corpus of Serbian rulers' documents issued in the Greek language that have been preserved from this period. However, in documents issued in Serbian, the steady rise in the power and status of Serbian kings during the previous decades had contributed to the development of an autochthonous practice in documentary production – itself including previously adopted Byzantine elements – which proved strong enough to modify even the reception of characteristically imperial document features. Since imperial status had opened to Serbian rulers the ultimate level of Byzantine models, it is not surprising that after the Serbian Empire collapsed and broke up into regional lordships with rulers of far inferior power and status, no new acquisitions from Byzantine practice can be noted. Instead, examination of Byzantine influence in documents of the late 14th and 15th century turns into a chronicle of survival of the features adopted earlier in the documentary productions of various regional lords, operating in various political circumstances on territories with different document-making legacies. Nevertheless, in determining which features to use and how to use them, these new rulers demonstrated a high degree of familiarity with and respect for their meaning, confirming thus that Byzantine influences had not only led the Serbs to apply Byzantine elements in the documents they produced but also to think of those elements and documents in much the same way as the Byzantines did.