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The Aristocracy in Late Byzantine Thessalonike: A Case Study of the City's *Archontes* (Late 14th and Early 15th Centuries)

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Thessalonike, the “second city” of the Byzantine Empire and the major administrative, economic, and cultural center of medieval Macedonia, was also a major geographical center of the aristocracy, second perhaps only to Constantinople in this respect too. There were several factors that made the city of Thessalonike a particularly attractive home for the Byzantine aristocracy. In the first place, it was a prosperous urban center which, on account of its geographic location, possessed a vast and fertile agricultural hinterland.¹ Thanks to the documents of Mount Athos, we know that many of the landed possessions of the Thessalonian aristocracy were situated in this hinterland, especially in Chalkidike, not far from their urban residences—an advantage that the Constantinopolitan aristocracy naturally did not enjoy. Herein lies, in large part, the economic foundation of the considerable local power wielded by the aristocrats of late Byzantine Thessalonike, at least as far as the first half of the Palaiologan period is concerned when the countryside still constituted the primary source of wealth in the Byzantine world. Second, besides the agricultural wealth of its hinterland, Thessalonike owed its prosperity also to the fact that it was a port town with a thriving commerce. This, too, suited the interests of the city's aristocracy, particularly from about the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, when, as modern scholarship of the last twenty years has demonstrated, the Byzantine aristocracy on the whole began to get more heavily involved in commercial enterprises.² Finally, like some other cities of the empire in the Palaiologan period, Thessalonike enjoyed certain

I am extremely grateful to David Jacoby, Alice-Mary Talbot, and two anonymous reviewers who read this paper and offered valuable suggestions.

¹ On the connections between Thessalonike and its hinterland during the Palaiologan period, see A. Laiou, “Η Θεσσαλονίκη, η ένδοχώρα της και ο οικονομικός της χώρος στην εποχή των Παλαιολόγων,” in *Διεθνές Συμπόσιο Βυζαντινή Μακεδονία, 324–1430 μ.Χ.* (Thessalonike, 1995), 183–94.

² On this general phenomenon, see especially N. Oikonomidès, *Hommes d'affaires grecs et latins à Constantinople (XIIIe–XVe siècles)* (Montreal–Paris, 1979), 120 ff; A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis, “The Byzantine Economy in the Mediterranean Trade System, Thirteenth–Fifteenth Centuries,” *DOP* 34–35 (1982): 199ff; eadem, “The Greek Merchant of the Palaeologan Period: A Collective Portrait,” *Ακαδ. Αθη. Πρ.* 57 (1982): 105 ff (both repr. in A. E. Laiou, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium* [Aldershot, Hampshire, 1992], nos. VII and VIII); and most recently K.-P. Matschke and F. Tinnefeld, *Die Gesellschaft im späten Byzanz: Gruppen, Strukturen und Lebensformen* (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna, 2001), 158 ff, with extensive references to earlier bibliography.

imperial privileges and immunities, which seem to have encouraged some degree of autonomy and self-government, providing thereby the city's aristocrats with further means to extend their power locally in political as well as in economic terms.³

Although there are some important works on the late Byzantine aristocracy,⁴ a study devoted exclusively to the Thessalonian aristocracy in the same era has not been undertaken to this date. Yet, considering that a notable feature of the Palaiologan period was the growing power and importance of the local aristocracies in the provincial cities of the Byzantine Empire,⁵ and in view of the special position of Thessalonike among the latter, such a study remains a desideratum. The present paper cannot possibly fulfill this major task within the limits provided. Therefore, rather than offering a comprehensive treatment of the aristocracy in late Byzantine Thessalonike, I restrict my discussion to an analysis of certain individuals and families who belonged to the middle and lower strata of this social group, hence excluding the high aristocracy. Such a choice, as arbitrary as it might seem, can be justified on several grounds. First of all, it is noteworthy that quite a large proportion of the representatives of the high aristocracy who appear in the sources as residents of Thessalonike are actually "outsiders" rather than locally rooted citizens. They include, in the first place, the imperial governors (*kephalai*) and commanders who were sent from Constantinople for purposes of central administration, and whose presence in the city was generally of short duration. While some among them are known occasionally to have established firm links with Thessalonike—as, for instance, Nikephoros Choumnos, *kephale* of Thessalonike in 1309/10, who bought houses in the city which he leased afterwards,⁶ and whose son George likewise served as governor of Thessalonike in 1327/28⁷—this group of people essentially belonged to the aristocracy of the capital, and as such they should not concern us here. Second, modern scholarship on the Byzantine aristocracy or

³ On the privileges of Thessalonike, see O. Tafrali, *Thessalonique au quatorzième siècle* (Paris, 1912), 24, 49, 66–71, 150, 157; G. I. Brătianu, *Privilèges et franchises municipales dans l'Empire byzantin* (Bucharest–Paris, 1936), 108–9, 115–22; Lj. Maksimović, *The Byzantine Provincial Administration under the Palaiologoi* (Amsterdam, 1988), 248–57. Although the precise nature and content of these privileges are not all that clear, Manuel II acknowledged their importance in his public speech of 1383, where, addressing the citizens of Thessalonike as the descendants of Philip and Alexander, he stated that they were accustomed to greater freedom compared with the inhabitants of other Macedonian and Anatolian cities, and that they were exempt even from the tribute all free Byzantines had to pay to the emperor: B. Laourdas, "Ο «συμβουλευτικός πρὸς τοὺς Θεσσαλονικεῖς» τοῦ Μανουὴλ Παλαιολόγου," *Μακεδονικά* 3 (1955): 296, line 24–297, line 11, 298, lines 4–15. For some practical applications of the fiscal privilege referred to by Manuel II, all dating from the first half of the 14th century, see now E. Patlagean, "L'immunité des Thessaloniciens," in *EΥΨΥΧΙΑ. Mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1998), 591–601, esp. 592. It is also to be noted that the agreement concerning the transfer of Thessalonike to Venetian rule in 1423 was concluded with the condition that the privileges and customs of the city's inhabitants were to be respected: C. N. Sathas, ed., *Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au Moyen Âge*, vol. 1 (Paris–Venice, 1880), 133, 135–38 (no. 86); K. D. Mertziotis, *Μνημεῖα μακεδονικῆς ἱστορίας* (Thessalonike, 1947), 72.

⁴ G. Ostrogorsky, "Observations on the Aristocracy in Byzantium," *DOP* 25 (1971): 17ff; A. E. Laiou, "The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Palaeologan Period: A Story of Arrested Development," *Viator* 4 (1973): 131–51 (repr. in eadem, *Gender, Society and Economic Life*, no. VI); D. S. Kyritses, *The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1997); Matschke and Tinnefeld, *Gesellschaft*, 18–62, 158ff.

⁵ See, for instance, Laiou, "Byzantine Aristocracy," 145–50; E. A. Zachariadou, "Εφήμερες ἀπόπειρες γιὰ ἀντοδιοίκηση στὶς Ἑλληνικὲς πόλεις κατὰ τὸν ΙΔ' καὶ ΙΕ' αἰῶνα," *Ἀριάδνη* 5 (1989): 345–51.

⁶ J. F. Boissonade, ed., *Anecdota nova* (Paris, 1844; repr. Hildesheim, 1962), 29; cf. Kyritses, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 192; *PLP* 30961.

⁷ See *PLP* 30945.

on the social history of the Palaiologan period has already brought to light a fair amount of information concerning some of the great aristocratic families of late Byzantine Thessalonike, whereas those families and individuals from the middle and lower ranks of the city's aristocracy remain in relative obscurity, which therefore makes the study of the latter groups more interesting and appropriate, albeit more challenging. Challenging, because people from these latter groups are in general much less visible in the sources compared to members of the high aristocracy. Nonetheless, sufficient data can be pieced together, from literary and documentary sources, concerning one particular subgroup that played a key role in the government of the city, the so-called *archontes*, a group of local officeholders who dominated civic life in Thessalonike and constituted the city's ruling elite.⁸ Thus this paper presents a case study of the *archontes* of late Byzantine Thessalonike, whose social, economic, and political characteristics are examined in the context of contemporary historical developments.⁹ In terms of chronological scope, on the other hand, the focus is mainly on the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries—the period roughly from the end of the Zealot movement until the final capture of the city by the Ottomans in 1430—since, in the current state of our knowledge, there is hardly anything new to be added to what existing scholarship on the two major civil wars of the first half of the fourteenth century has disclosed in relation to the Thessalonian aristocracy.

Nearly two decades have transpired since the publication of Michael Angold's "Archons and Dynasts: Local Aristocracies and the Cities of the Later Byzantine Empire," which drew attention to the decisive role played by the *archontes* in the provincial cities of Byzantium between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The final section of this paper also included a short discussion of "the growing bitterness produced by archontic power," which started becoming evident in the urban centers of the empire during the initial decades of the fourteenth century and which finally exploded with the Zealot uprising in mid-fourteenth-century Thessalonike. Before concluding, Angold briefly alluded to subsequent developments in the same city:¹⁰ "The Zealots finally gave way in 1350. . . . The

⁸ That the *archontes* constituted a local elite is beyond any doubt. To what extent they can be considered an aristocratic group depends, on the other hand, on how one defines the "aristocracy." If we adopt the conventional definition of the aristocracy as bearers of official distinctions, such as offices, titles, or honorific epithets, then the *archontes* are certainly to be included in the category of aristocrats due to their role in the civil administration of provincial cities as holders of local government offices. For a review of different definitions of the aristocracy, including the one above, see Kyritses, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 7–12; for different meanings of the term *archon* in the Byzantine Empire, see *ODB* 1:160. Thus I prefer to categorize the *archontes* as aristocrats of middle and lower rank rather than simply identify them as a local elite, given that "elites" include a group much broader and less precisely delineated than the "aristocracy." On these two terms, see J.-C. Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine (VIIIe–XIIIe siècle)," *JSAV* (July–December 2000): 281. The misleading term "gentry," which is sometimes used to designate the *archontes*, has been deliberately avoided in this paper since the *archontes* were an essentially urban group, unlike the gentry: see M. Angold, "Archons and Dynasts: Local Aristocracies and the Cities of the Later Byzantine Empire," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (Oxford, 1984), 238. Equally misleading is the designation "nobility of second rank" used for *archontes* and *archontopouloi* in *ODB* 1:161, as there was no nobility in Byzantium.

⁹ This study will not deal with the ecclesiastical *archontes* of Thessalonike, although as a group they may have shared similarities with the lay *archontes*. For some earlier observations on the *archontes* of Thessalonike, see Tafrafi, *Thessalonique*, 22–23, 75–80; B. T. Gorianov, *Pozdnevzantiiskii feodalizm* (Moscow, 1962), 86–87, 252–53, 269 f, 349.

¹⁰ Angold, "Archons and Dynasts," 236–49; 248–49 for the passage quoted. On the so-called Zealot movement, see now K.-P. Matschke, "Thessalonike und die Zeloten. Bemerkungen zu einem Schlüsselereignis der spätbyzantinischen Stadt- und Reichsgeschichte," *BSI* 55 (1994): 19–43; Kyritses, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 358–87.

archontes returned to power and exacted their revenge. In Thessalonica, at least, there was no restoration of social harmony. The *archontes* were more than ever fractious and self-seeking, scornful of the needs of the poor and resentful of the power wielded over them by imperial princes, such as Manuel Palaiologos, who established his court at Thessalonica from 1382 to 1387.”

In fact, throughout the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, social tensions associated with the conduct of the *archontes*—both in relation to the central government and in relation to the local population—persisted in Thessalonike. On various occasions following Manuel Palaiologos’ reign in the city,¹¹ the *archontes* continued to display a firm desire to dissociate themselves from central authority. Disturbances and open acts of resistance occurred whenever people linked to the imperial government were appointed to the city, as was the case in 1403 and again in 1408.¹² Although we can only presume, but cannot be absolutely certain of, the *archontes*’ actual role in these two disturbances, more explicit is a statement made in the fifteenth century by Archbishop Symeon of Thessalonike, who refers to the opposition of the *archontes* against the court officials in Constantinople, adding that the latter in turn were opposed to the burghers (οἱ ἀστού) of Thessalonike.¹³ This highly articulated separatism of the *archontes* of Thessalonike was by no means a unique or isolated phenomenon in late Byzantium; it must be seen in conjunction with the progressive decline of the power and authority of the Palaiologan state, in the course of which provincial cities steadily acquired a considerable degree of independence from the capital,¹⁴ which consequently brought greater power into the hands of the local aristocracy. So it is within the broader context of decentralization that we must analyze the particular behavior of the *archontes* of Thessalonike and evaluate the key role they assumed in the internal and external affairs of the city.

Contemporary observers of events in Thessalonike frequently bring up the theme of social conflicts in their writings, making specific reference to the tensions especially between the *archontes* and the common people. In this respect, one of the most striking descriptions of the *archontes* has come down to us from the pen, once again, of Symeon of Thessalonike. In his lengthy Discourse on the Miracles of St. Demetrios, which he composed in the 1420s, the archbishop writes: “The *archontes* live wantonly, hoard their wealth, and exalt themselves above their subjects, freely performing injustices, not only offering nothing to God, but also stealing away from God. They believe this to be their power, and

¹¹ For the general history of this period, see G. T. Dennis, *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica, 1382–1387* (Rome, 1960); J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), 43–60.

¹² D. Balfour, ed., *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)* (Vienna, 1979), 44, 48; cf. 115 note 59, 122–23 (hereafter Symeon-Balfour). In 1403, Demetrios Laskaris Leontares, Emperor John VII’s envoy charged with taking over Thessalonike from the Ottomans, was the target of resistance and intrigues (ἐπιβουλαί). The disturbance (ταραχή) of 1408 occurred on the occasion of Emperor Manuel II’s trip to the city to install his minor son Andronikos as despot and Demetrios Laskaris Leontares as the latter’s regent.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 53, lines 30–31: καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις μὲν οἱ προέχοντες τοῦ κοινοῦ, κατ’ ἀστών δὲ πάλιν ἐκεῖνοι.

¹⁴ Maksimović, *Provincial Administration*, 248–67; Zachariadou, “Εφήμερες ἀπόπειρες γιὰ αὐτοδιοίκηση,” 345–51; N. Oikonomidès, “Pour une typologie des villes ‘séparées’ sous les Paléologues,” in *Geschichte und Kultur der Palaiologenzeit*, ed. W. Seibt (Vienna, 1996), 169–75. For earlier signs of the trend toward urban autonomy, see A. P. Kazhdan and A. W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1985), 52–53; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 150 ff.

they consider the poor citizens and their subordinates as scarcely human. But the poor, too, imitating those in authority, arm themselves against each other and live rapaciously and greedily.”¹⁵ Symeon then continues with an account of various religious offenses, committed both by the civil authorities and the subjects, wherefore, he claims, God has punished the Thessalonians by their present misfortunes, that is, the Ottoman attacks and the city’s helplessness before them. But the common people, not realizing this, blame the *archontes* for all their troubles and are prepared to rise up in rebellion against them, expecting that “they might thus live freely and uncontrolled.” Despite all its rhetoric and moral overtones, this passage, marked by Symeon’s critical and disapproving attitude toward the *archontes* (whom he holds responsible even for the reprehensible actions of the common people), reveals how much the populace felt oppressed in the early fifteenth century by the conduct of their local governors. And one major consequence of this oppression, as the archbishop sadly acknowledges, was that the common people were inclined on the whole to give up their own masters (δεσπότες) of the same faith and race in favor of either Ottoman or Venetian sovereignty.¹⁶

It must be granted that in virtually all periods and provinces of the Byzantine Empire parallels can be found of abuses and oppression exercised by the *archontes* over the lower classes. Indeed, the problem assumed the aspect of a conventional and proverbial theme, finding one of its best expressions in the Byzantine saying, “Even the most miserable of the *archontes* will bully the people under him,” transmitted by Eustathios of Thessalonike in the twelfth century.¹⁷ Thus we may rightly question whether or not such conventional statements do reflect existing practices. But, as demonstrated by Helen Saradi in two important articles on the *archontike dynasteia*, the problem is brought up not only in purely theoretical, moralistic, and theological contexts, but is also confirmed in notarial documents as well as other legal sources.¹⁸ It seems reasonable, therefore, to accept its presence as a real issue in Byzantine society, and try then to evaluate the existing references in the light of the particular historical and social conditions in which they occurred.

And so, coming back once again to Symeon’s testimony, the archbishop informs us that in the early 1420s, shortly before the cession of Thessalonike to Venice,¹⁹ there was a strong

¹⁵ Symeon-Balfour, 47, lines 9–14: Καὶ ἄρχοντες μὲν κατασπαταλῶσι, θησαυρίζουσι τε καὶ ὑπεραίρονται κατὰ τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα, πᾶν ἀδικίας ἔργον ἀνέδην διαπραττόμενοι, οὐ μόνον οὐδὲν ἀποδιδόντες Θεῷ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀφαρπάζοντες καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι ἀρχὴν ἡγούμενοι ἑαυτῶν καὶ τὸ τοὺς πενομένους καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτοὺς μηδὲ φύσεως ἀνθρωπίνης σχεδὸν εἶναι νομίζειν· πτωχοὶ δὲ πάλιν τὸ ἄρχον μιμούμενοι κατ’ ἀλλήλων ὀπλίζονται καὶ ἀρπακτικῶς καὶ πλεονεκτικῶς ζῶσι.

¹⁶ Ibid., 47, lines 14–38; cf. 119–20.

¹⁷ Angold, “Archons and Dynasts,” 249 and note 67.

¹⁸ H. Saradi, “The Twelfth-Century Canon Law Commentaries on the ἀρχοντική δυναστεία: Ecclesiastical Theory vs. Juridical Practice,” in *Byzantium in the 12th Century; Canon Law, State and Society*, ed. N. Oikonomides (Athens, 1991), 375–404; H. Saradi, “On the ‘Archontike’ and ‘Ekklesiastike Dynasteia’ and ‘Prostasia’ in Byzantium, with Particular Attention to the Legal Sources: A Study in Social History of Byzantium,” *Byzantion* 64 (1994): 69–117, 314–51.

¹⁹ On the Venetian regime in Thessalonike (1423–30), see Mertzios, *Μνημεῖα*, 30 ff; P. Lemerle, “La domination vénitienne à Thessalonique,” in *Miscellanea Giovanni Galbiati*, vol. 3 (Milan, 1951), 219–25; A. E. Vacalopoulos, *A History of Thessaloniki*, trans. T. F. Carney (Thessalonike, 1972), 65–75; K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)*, vol. 2, *The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1978), 19–31. For a discussion of Symeon of Thessalonike’s eyewitness account of these years, which was unavailable to the authors above, see Symeon-Balfour, 163 ff. To this list may now be added a forthcoming article by D. Jacoby, “Thessalonique de la domination de Byzance à celle de Venise. Continuité, adaptation ou rupture?,” in *Mélanges Gilbert Dragon=TM* 14 (2002): 303–18. I am grateful to the author for having sent me the manuscript of his article prior to its publication.

opposition among the lower classes particularly to the policy of resistance pursued against the Ottomans by members of the city's governing body. This opposition was spurred by two interrelated considerations on the part of the lower classes. First of all, the resistance policy which prolonged the years of warfare had only helped to intensify their hardships; second, it was supported and executed by the local governors who, in the opinion of the lower classes, were merely considering their own interests and not those of the masses: "Now on top of this the majority were shouting against and bitterly reproaching those in authority and me myself, accusing us of not striving to serve the welfare of the population as a whole. They actually declared that they were bent on handing the latter over to the infidel."²⁰ The lower classes were further aggravated because the *archontes* and some wealthy Thessalonians who supported the cause of war against the Ottomans made no financial contributions toward the city's defense needs. Their reluctance could not have resulted from their lack of means for, as we have already seen, Symeon explicitly criticized the *archontes* of Thessalonike for living wantonly and hoarding their wealth. Earlier, too, during the Ottoman blockade of 1383–87, we have evidence that burying money was commonly practiced by the wealthy citizens.²¹ According to Isidore Glabas, one of the prerequisites for winning the struggle against the Ottomans in the 1380s was to convince those with financial resources to contribute to military expenditures.²² Four decades later, in 1423, when a military commander, who was sent from Constantinople to assist the Thessalonians against the Ottomans, suggested the establishment of a common fund for defense purposes "to which each member of the Senate and of the citizen body should contribute out of his own assets," his main target must no doubt have been the upper classes who could afford to pay the necessary sums. But it was precisely these people who, in apprehension of a forceful exaction of their money, opposed the Constantinopolitan general's proposal. The reaction of the lower classes to the conduct exhibited by the rich was to protest and riot in favor of surrender to the Ottomans.²³ Their outrage, provoked in the first place by the unwillingness of the rich to contribute to the war cause, is likely to have been accompanied and enhanced by the fear that the civil authorities might turn to the populace to make up for the resources that could not be procured from the well-to-do. Such a policy seems to have been applied in 1383, when in comparable circumstances a new tax was imposed even on the poor citizens of Thessalonike due to the inadequacy of other sources of revenue.²⁴

A similar atmosphere of social discontent was witnessed in Thessalonike in 1393, when the hostility of the common people toward the *archontes* had reached such an intensity that the latter, anticipating the outbreak of a popular movement against their rule, wanted to resign.²⁵ In this case, too, the overriding grievance of the populace was that they were be-

²⁰ Symeon-Balfour, 55–56 (text), 157 (trans.).

²¹ A. C. Hero, "Five Homilies of Isidore, Archbishop of Thessalonica: Edition, Translation, and Commentary" (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1965), Homily 1.12 (hereafter Isidore-Hero); Tafrafi, *Thessalonique*, 108 note 2. I owe special thanks to I. Ševčenko for having made available to me the thesis cited here.

²² Isidore-Hero, Homily 5.15.

²³ Symeon-Balfour, 57; cf. 161–63. For members of the Senate among the *archontes* of Thessalonike, see below, p. 144 and Table 1.

²⁴ Isidore-Hero, Homily 1.11.

²⁵ B. Laourdas, ed., *Ἰσιδώρου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Θεσσαλονίκης, Ὁμιλίες εἰς τὰς ἐορτὰς τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου* (Thessalonike, 1954), Homilies 4 and 5, see esp. 64–65 (hereafter Isidore-Laourdas).

ing oppressed by their political leaders. At this date Thessalonike was under Ottoman rule. However, as the Ottomans granted the city a semi-autonomous status following its surrender in 1387, administrative functions had remained in the hands of the local Greek magistrates who were expected to pay regular visits to the Ottoman court. Consequently, the social tensions and civil discords from the Byzantine period, in particular the conflicts between the common people and the *archontes*, were perpetuated through the years of the first Ottoman domination (1387–1403). It is one of Symeon's predecessors, Archbishop Isidore Glabas, who informs us about the social conflicts of 1393 and also provides evidence for the uninterrupted role of the *archontes* in the administration of Ottoman-occupied Thessalonike.

A notable feature of Isidore's account is his favorable and positive attitude toward the *archontes*, which sharply contrasts with Symeon's account composed about three decades later. It is true that at an earlier date Isidore had voiced some complaints against certain municipal governors who declined to give assistance to poor and wronged citizens, and also against those who executed orders for the secularization of ecclesiastical property.²⁶ Yet, in principle, he considered it proper, useful, and necessary for all Thessalonians to revere, to love, and to give support to the *archontes*.²⁷ Fearing that the disagreements between the people and the *archontes* might lead to some form of political change, he composed two homilies in 1393, one to instruct the citizens to put an end to their disturbances, and the other to persuade the *archontes* not to resign from their posts.²⁸ He argued that the *archontes* deserved respect for all the tasks and troubles they shouldered on behalf of the people: they were the ones who acted as mediators between the Thessalonians and the Ottomans, who bore the latter's insults and maltreatment, who left their families behind, traveled through dangerous lands on embassies to the Ottoman court, and thus enabled the inhabitants to continue to live in peace.²⁹ Drawing a comparison between those who govern the state and the common people who work with their hands (i.e., craftsmen, artisans, and peasants), Isidore suggested that the latter were unfit to take part in the administration of the city since they did not have the benefit of education that distinguished the ruling elite from themselves.³⁰ He advised the *archontes*—whom he qualified as “the distinguished,” “the honorable,” “the few select” citizens—to act as befitted their own class and to ignore the complaints of the people as incoherent utterings.³¹

Clearly, then, there is a strong divergence between the views expressed by Isidore and those expressed by Symeon with regard to the *archontes* of Thessalonike. But this divergence need not necessarily be taken as evidence that the *archontes* in power during the final decade of the fourteenth century differed fundamentally from the ones who held office in the early decades of the fifteenth century, at least in terms of their treatment of and attitude toward the common people. From the distinction Isidore draws between those who were created by God as fit for governing and those who knew how to use different

²⁶ Ibid., Homily 3.38–39; Isidore-Hero, Homily 1.11; C. N. Tsirpanlis, “Συμβολή εις την ιστορίαν της Θεσσαλονίκης. Δύο ανέκδοτοι όμιλίοι Ισιδώρου άρχιεπισκόπου Θεσσαλονίκης,” *Θεολογία* 42 (1971): 568–70.

²⁷ Isidore-Laourdas, Homily 2.39, lines 15–18.

²⁸ Ibid., Homilies 4 and 5, respectively.

²⁹ Ibid., Homily 4.57–58.

³⁰ Ibid., Homily 5.61, 63.

³¹ Ibid., Homily 5.63–64, 61.

tools yet had no education, it is obvious that he is not talking about the actual *archontes* in office in 1393, but that he is referring in abstract and idealized terms to a traditional ruling class to which the *archontes* belonged. Symeon, on the other hand, who is more precise than Isidore, seems to be pointing a direct finger at the specific *archontes* of his own day. In any case, since the tensions between the people and the local magistrates appear in the writings of both, there is no reason for supposing that there was a change in the social conditions existing within Thessalonike. Isidore feared, however, that such a change might take place and, therefore, focusing on the positive attributes of the *archontes* as a class, praised and defended them. Symeon, not interested in the theoretical attributes of a superior ruling class, seems to have looked at the actual state of affairs and reported his observations in a more or less realistic and critical manner, openly revealing his bitterness toward both the *archontes* and the common people who imitated them. A letter written by Demetrios Kydones in 1372 confirms, moreover, that the wrongdoings and abuses that Symeon attributed to the *archontes* were pretty much in effect during Isidore's own generation too. Advising the *megas primikerios* Demetrios Phakrases to make use of the local *dynatoi* in the defense of Thessalonike against a Turkish attack during that year, Kydones urged his addressee to warn the notables "that the present situation is not an occasion for grasping at some advantage, nor should they further provoke those who are desperate."³²

The writings of Isidore Glabas and Symeon, informative and significant as they are, provide us in the end with no more than a vague, and to a large extent impressionistic, portrait of the *archontes* of Thessalonike, who are always mentioned collectively, with no explicit reference to individual members of the group.³³ But with the help of prosopographic data compiled mainly from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Athonite documents, it has been possible to uncover the identities of some fifty *archontes* of Thessalonike (see Table 1).³⁴ As can be observed from this list, most of them belong to well-established families of Thessalonike with strong local interests—including the Angeloi, Deblitzenoi, Kasandrenoi, Kokalades, Maroulai, Melachrinoi, Prebezianoι, Rhadenoi, Spartenoι, Stavrakioi, Tarchaneiotai, and Hyaleades—though, with possibly few exceptions, almost none can be linked with the highest echelons of the Thessalonian aristocracy. In addition, several family names show continuity over time: for example, Kokalas (ca. 1320 and 1336), Kyprianos (1348–61 and 1414), Metochites (1373–76 and 1421), Prinkips (1407–9 and 1421), and possibly Komes (1366 and 1404–19). Some other cases of recurring family names, yet without any indication of continuity over time, may be noted as well: Nicholas and Petros Prebezianos (1366), George and Andronikos Doukas Tzykandyles (1373–81

³² R.-J. Loenertz, ed., *Démétrius Cydonès. Correspondance*, vol. 1 (Vatican City, 1956), letter 77, p. 110, lines 27–31; English trans. in Dennis, *Reign of Manuel II*, 55–56. On the particular use of the term *dynatoi* to denote the local notables in provincial cities during the Palaiologan period, see Kyritses, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 9 note 5. For Demetrios Phakrases, see *PLP* 29576.

³³ See note 56 below for an exception.

³⁴ The table is by no means intended to be exhaustive, and comprises two categories of people. In the first place, it includes all individuals who are specifically designated as *archon* in the available documents pertaining to Thessalonike (altogether 37 people). As a second category, it includes a select group of fifteen individuals who are not explicitly called *archon*, but have been chosen on the basis of their official titles or other internal evidence suggesting that they were local magistrates. This second group could certainly be expanded, but I have been selective in my sampling so as to minimize error.

TABLE 1. ARCHONTES OF THESSALONIKE (14TH–15TH CENTURIES)

Unless marked with an asterisk, (*), the persons included in this table are specifically designated as archon in the documents.

| Date | Name | Other Title or Occupation | Document ¹ | PLP no. |
|----------|--|---|---|--------------|
| 1314–24 | Manuel Kampanaropoulos | — | Ivir. III, 73, 78, 81 | 10825 |
| 1314–26 | Theodore Chalazas | <i>myrepso</i> , <i>depotatos</i> | Ivir. III, 73, 78, 81, 84 | 30363 |
| ca. 1320 | Constantine Kokalas* | fiscal official, <i>oikeios</i> | Ivir. III, 76 | — |
| ca. 1320 | Michael Stavrakios* | <i>oikeios</i> | Ivir. III, 76 | 26710 |
| 1320 | Theodore Brachnos | <i>exarchos ton myrepson</i> | Ivir. III, 78 | 3205 |
| 1327 | Demetrios Sgouros | <i>megalyperochos</i> | Zogr., 25 | 25051 |
| 1327 | George Allelouias | <i>megalyperochos</i> | Zogr., 25 | 676 |
| 1327 | Athanasios Kabakes | <i>megalyperochos</i> , <i>chrysepilektes</i> | Zogr., 25, 28 | 10015 |
| 1333–36 | Alexios Hyaleas* | <i>megas adnouiastates</i> , <i>eparchos</i> , <i>oikeios</i> | Chilandar, 123; Reg.Patr., 111 | 29470 |
| 1336 | George Kokalas* | <i>megas adnouiastates</i> , <i>oikeios</i> | Reg.Patr., 111 | 92485 |
| 1341 | Manuel Phaxenos (brother-in-law of Agape Angelina Sphratzaina Palaiologina) | — | Lavra III, 156, app. XII | 29609 |
| 1341 | Theodore Doukas Spartenos (brother of Agape Angelina Sphratzaina Palaiologina) | <i>oikeios</i> | Lavra III, app. XII | 26498 |
| 1348–61 | George Kyprianos | — | Xénophon, 30; Dochei., 36, 38 | 92473 |
| 1356–66 | Manuel Ko(u)llourakes | <i>oikeios</i> , <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 36, 38; <i>Maked.</i> 5 (1963): p. 137 | 92439 |
| 1361–66 | Symeon Choniatas | — | Dochei., 36, 38 | 31244 |
| 1366 | Demetrios Phakrases | <i>megas primikerios</i> , <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 38 | 29576 |
| 1366 | Demetrios Glabas [Komes?] | <i>megas droungarios</i> , <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 38 | 91685 |
| 1366 | Nicholas Prebezianos | — | Dochei., 38 | 23700 |
| 1366 | Petros Prebezianos | — | Dochei., 38 | 23703 |
| 1366–78 | Manuel Tarchaneiotas | <i>oikeios</i> , <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 38; Zogr., 44; Lavra III, 149 | 27499, 27501 |
| 1373 | Laskaris Kephalas* | <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 41 | 11677 |
| 1373–76 | Laskaris Metochites* | <i>megas chantoularios</i> , <i>doulos</i> , <i>apographeus</i> | Dochei., 41, 42; Chilandar, 154; Vatop., pp. 35, 38, 40 | 17983 |
| 1373–81 | George Doukas Tzykandyles* | judge, <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 41, 48 | 28126 |

(continued)

TABLE 1. *Continued*

| Date | Name | Other Title or Occupation | Document ¹ | PLP no. |
|----------|--|--|---|---------|
| 1379 | John Pezos | — | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 6 (1922):p. 283 | 22245 |
| 1379–84 | Demetrios Phoberes | <i>apographeus</i> | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 6 (1922):p. 283; Dochei., 49 | 29998 |
| 1379–84 | John Maroules | <i>apographeus</i> | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 6 (1922):p. 283; Dochei., 49 | 17153 |
| ca. 1381 | tos Palaiologos* | <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 48 | 21410 |
| ca. 1381 | Andronikos Doukas Tzykandyles* | <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 48 | 28125 |
| ca. 1381 | Demetrios Talapas* | <i>kastrophylox, doulos</i> | Dochei., 48 | 27416 |
| 1381 | Manuel Deblitzenos | <i>doulos, oikeios</i> | Dochei., 47, 48, 49 | 91757 |
| 1381 | Manuel Kasandrenos | — | Dochei., 47 | 11316 |
| 1381 | George Angelos | — | Dochei., 47 | 91034 |
| 1404 | Constantine Ibankos* | judge, <i>doulos</i> | Dochei., 51 | 7973 |
| 1404–19 | Bartholomaios Komes (son-in-law of Manuel Deblitzenos) | — | Dochei., 51, 57, 58 | 92399 |
| 1406–9 | Paul Gazes | <i>apographeus, doulos</i> | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 3 (1919):p. 337; Xéropot., 29; Dochei., 53; Diony., 11; Lavra III, 161 | 3452 |
| 1406–9 | Michael Ka.tes | <i>apographeus</i> | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 3 (1919):p. 337; Xéropot., 29 | — |
| 1407–9 | George Prinkips | <i>apographeus, doulos</i> | Xéropot., 29; Dochei., 53; Diony., 11; Lavra III, 161 | 23746 |
| 1409(?) | John Aprenos* | — | Esphigm., 31 | 1209 |
| 1414 | John Kantakouzenos* | — | Dochei., 54 | 92318 |
| 1414 | Theodore Doukas Kyprianos* | — | Dochei., 54 | 92474 |
| 1415 | John Douk(a)s Melachrinos* | <i>doulos</i> | Diony., 14 | 17665 |
| 1415–21 | Stephanos Doukas Rhadenos | <i>apographeus, kephale of Kassandreia, doulos</i> | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 3 (1919):pp. 335–36; <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 6 (1922):pp. 86–87; Dochei., 56; St. Pantél., 18; Lavra III, 165; Diony., 20; <i>Athens</i> 26 (1914):p. 274 | 23999 |

| | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|-------|
| 1415–21 | John Rhadenos | <i>apographeus, doulos</i> | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 3 (1919):p. 336; Dochei., 56; Lavra III, 165; Diony., 20 | 23991 |
| 1418–21 | Constantine Palaiologos Oinaïotes | <i>apographeus, doulos</i> | <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 6 (1922):pp. 86–87; Dochei., 56; Lavra III, 165; Diony., 20 | 21028 |
| 1421 | Demetrios Hidromenos | <i>apographeus, doulos</i> | Diony., 20; <i>Gr.Pal.</i> 6 (1922):pp. 86–87 | 8077 |
| 1421 | John Angelos Philanthropenos | <i>archon τῆς συγκλήτου, oikeios</i> | Ivir. IV, 97 | 29767 |
| 1421 | Thomas Chrysoloras | <i>archon τῆς συγκλήτου, oikeios</i> | Ivir. IV, 97 | 31158 |
| 1421 | Demetrios Palaiologos Prinkips | <i>archon τῆς συγκλήτου, oikeios</i> | Ivir. IV, 97 | 23747 |
| 1421 | Michael Palaiologos Krybitziotes | <i>archon τῆς συγκλήτου, oikeios</i> | Ivir. IV, 97 | 13840 |
| 1421 | Andronikos Metochites | <i>archon τῆς συγκλήτου, oikeios</i> | Ivir. IV, 97 | 17978 |
| 1421 | Michael Angelos Trypommates | <i>archon τῆς συγκλήτου, oikeios</i> | Ivir. IV, 97 | 29382 |
| 1421 | Theodore Diagoupes | <i>archon τῆς συγκλήτου, oikeios</i> | Ivir. IV, 97 | 7822 |

¹ Except when indicated otherwise, the references are to document numbers.

Abbreviations:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Chilandar | <i>Actes de Chilandar</i> , I: <i>Actes grecs</i> , ed. L. Petit, in <i>VizVrem</i> 17 (1911) |
| Diony. | <i>Actes de Dionysiou</i> , ed. N. Oikonomidès (Paris, 1968) |
| Dochei. | <i>Actes de Docheiariou</i> , ed. N. Oikonomidès (Paris, 1984) |
| Esphigm. | <i>Actes d'Esphigménou</i> , ed. J. Lefort (Paris, 1973) |
| <i>Gr.Pal.</i> | <i>Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς</i> |
| Ivir. III, IV | <i>Actes d'Iviron</i> , vols. 3–4, ed. J. Lefort, N. Oikonomidès, D. Papachryssanthou, V. Kravari, with the collaboration of H. Ménévéli (Paris, 1994–95) |
| Lavra III | <i>Actes de Lavra</i> , vol. 3, ed. P. Lemerle, A. Guillou, N. Svoronos, D. Papachryssanthou (Paris, 1979) |
| <i>Maked.</i> | <i>Μακεδονικά</i> |
| Reg.Patr. | <i>Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel</i> , 3 vols., ed. H. Hunger and O. Kresten (Vienna, 1981–2001) |
| St. Pantél. | <i>Actes de Saint-Pantéléon</i> , ed. P. Lemerle, G. Dagron, S. Ćirković (Paris, 1982) |
| Vatop. | <i>Χρυσόβουλλα καὶ γράμματα τῆς μονῆς Βερασσίδιου</i> , ed. W. Regel (St. Petersburg, 1898) |
| Xénophon | <i>Actes de Xénophon</i> , ed. D. Papachryssanthou (Paris, 1986) |
| Xéropot. | <i>Actes de Xéropotamou</i> , ed. J. Bompaire (Paris, 1964) |
| Zogr. | <i>Actes de Zographou</i> , ed. W. Regel, E. Kurtz, B. Korablev, in <i>VizVrem</i> 13 (1907) |

and ca. 1381, respectively), John Rhadenos and Stephanos Doukas Rhadenos (1415–21). Occasionally kinship ties can be traced between *archontes* who bear different family names, as in the case of the brothers-in-law Manuel Phaxenos and Theodore Doukas Spartenos (1341), or that of Manuel Deblitzenos (1381) and his son-in-law Bartholomaios Komes (1404–19). It is not certain, but Symeon Choniates (1361–66) may have been the grandfather of George Angelos (1381), and the latter, in turn, Manuel Deblitzenos' brother-in-law.³⁵ Thus, on the basis of these preliminary observations, we can conclude that a series of interrelated local families yielded successive generations of *archontes*, forming what appears to have been a tightly linked, more or less homogeneous social group.

More than half of the *archontes* listed in Table 1 are qualified in the documents as *oikeioi* and/or *douloi*, sometimes of the emperor, sometimes of the despot of Thessalonike, and sometimes of both. While there is nothing unusual about the application of these honorific epithets to civil dignitaries, which was standard procedure in the Palaiologan period, being an *oikeios* or *doulos* was nonetheless a mark of distinction and undoubtedly enhanced the *archontes*' sense of belonging to the elite of their society.³⁶ Noteworthy also is that the last seven individuals listed in our table were all members of the Senate of Thessalonike in 1421. The presence of Senate members among the *archontes* of Thessalonike is confirmed in another Athonite document dating from 1414, which makes reference to two ἄρχοντες τῆς συγκλήτου, but unfortunately does not disclose their names.³⁷ Besides people of civilian status, moreover, we can also identify some individuals of military status in Table 1: for example, one *meGas primikerios* (Demetrios Phakrases, 1366), one *meGas droungarios* (Demetrios Glabas [Komes?], 1366), one *meGas chartoularios* (Laskaris Metochites, 1373–76), and one *kastrophylax* (Demetrios Talapas, ca. 1381). Manuel Deblitzenos, too, belonged to a family of soldiers and was himself a military man.³⁸ It would have been useful to calculate the ratio of civilians to holders of military rank within our sample group of *archontes*, yet the fragmentary nature of the evidence makes it virtually impossible to engage in such statistical endeavors. Nevertheless, it should be noted that none of the abovementioned military posts, with the sole exception of *meGas primikerios*, are very high-ranking ones, which is in correspondence with the social status of the *archontes* whom we have defined as aristocrats primarily of middle and low rank.

The names of some of these *archontes* themselves or of their family members reappear in a Venetian document of 1425, dating from the period of the Venetian domination in Thessalonike. This document lists fifty-nine Thessalonians, described as *gentilomeni e gentilomeni piçoli*, whose names are reproduced in Table 2.³⁹ They were all granted raises of

³⁵ See N. Oikonomides, "The Properties of the Deblitzenoi in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Charanis Studies: Essays in Honor of Peter Charanis*, ed. A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis (New Brunswick, N.J., 1980), 195 note 27; *Actes de Docheiariou*, ed. N. Oikonomidès (Paris, 1984), 260.

³⁶ On these epithets, see J. Verpeaux, "Les oikeioi. Notes d'histoire institutionnelle et sociale," *REB* 23 (1965): 89–99; Kyritses, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 15–20; *ODB* 3:1515, 1:659.

³⁷ *Docheiariou*, no. 54, line 11.

³⁸ On the military character of this family, see Oikonomides, "Deblitzenoi," 177 f.

³⁹ For the document, which is dated 7 July 1425, see Mertzios, *Μνημεῖα*, with facsimile reproduction following p. 48 and modern Greek translation on pp. 46–61. The relevant section containing the names is found on pl. 2^a–3^a of facsimile and pp. 49–52 of the translation. As a separate category below the *gentilomeni e gentilomeni piçoli* (who are alternatively designated by the Latin word *nobiles*), the document refers to seventy unnamed *stratioti* of Thessalonike whose salaries were increased by 10 *aspra* per month: *ibid.*, pl. 4^a; cf. pp.

TABLE 2. "NOBLES" AND "SMALL NOBLES" OF THESSALONIKE (1425)

(From Venetian document of 7 July 1425 reproduced in Mertzios, *Μνημεῖα* (as in note 3), following p. 48: pl. 2^a-3^a)

| Name | Monthly Salary (in <i>aspra</i>) |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Thomas Alusiano [Alousianos] | 300 |
| 2. Georgius Jalca [Hyaleas] | 300 |
| 3. (Calo)jani Radino [Rhadenos] | 300 |
| 4. Thomas Grusulora/Chrussulora [Chrysoloras] | 300 |
| 5. Michali Democrati [Dermokaites?] | 300 |
| 6. Michali Caromaffi | 200 |
| 7. Theodorus Calatola | 150 |
| 8. Jani Falca [Jalca?, i.e., Hyaleas] | 100 |
| 9. Manoli Jalca [Hyaleas] | 40 |
| 10. Dimitri Vuironi [Vryonis?] | 80 |
| 11. Jani Ramata [Rhamatas] | 80 |
| 12. Georgius Aramando [Amarantos?] | 50 |
| 13. Andronicus Amarando [Amarantos] | Raised from 80 to 120 |
| 14. Jani Aliati [Aliates] | same |
| 15. Duchá Milca [Jalca?, i.e., Hyaleas] | same |
| 16. Michali Jalca [Hyaleas] | same |
| 17. Georgius Gassi [Gazes?] | same |
| 18. Manoli Melita [Melitas] | same |
| 19. Inavissi (?), brother-in-law of Aliati [Aliates] | same |
| 20. Simon, son of <i>chier</i> Simon | Raised from 70 to 100 |
| 21. Manoli Calamca | same |
| 22. Georgius Laschari Defala | same |
| 23. Dimitri Melachino [Melachrinos] | same |
| 24. Argiropolus Mamoli [Argyropoulos Mamales?] | same |
| 25. Pasqualis Lascari [Laskaris] | same |
| 26. Michali Plomino | same |
| 27. Manoli Mamoli [Mamales?] | same |
| 28. Dimitri Caroleo | same |
| 29. Dimitri Lascari [Laskaris] | same |
| 30. Jani Melacrino [Melachrinos], son of Georgius Algriopolo [Argyropoulos] | same |
| 31. Constantin Algroopolo [Argyropoulos] | same |
| 32. Duchá Melacrino [Melachrinos] | same |
| 33. Georgius Melacrino [Melachrinos] | same |
| 34. Michali Amarando [Amarantos] | Raised by 20 <i>aspra</i> |
| 35. Georgius Macrino [Makrenos] | same |
| 36. Alexius Melacrino [Melachrinos] | same |
| 37. Georgius Camandora [Tzamantouras] | same |
| 38. Digieni Senex [Presbytes?] | same |
| 39. Lucas Arimati | same |
| 40. Rali Enbiristi | same |
| 41. Pachi Masgida [Masgidas] | same |
| 42. Michali Trachanioti [Tarchaniotes] | same |
| 43. Braichus Masgida [Masgidas] | same |
| 44. Andronichus Digeni [Digenes] | same |
| 45. Duchá Cavassilla [Kabasilas] | same |

(continued)

TABLE 2. *Continued*

| Name | Monthly Salary (in <i>aspra</i>) |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 46. Alexius Digeni [Digenes] | same |
| 47. Angelus Theodorus | same |
| 48. Jani Gramatico [Grammatikos] | same |
| 49. Vassi Covazi (?) | same |
| 50. Jani Digiēni [Digenes] | same |
| 51. Angelus Miropuno (?) | same |
| 52. Andronichus Machitari [Machetares] | same |
| 53. Nicola Crussaffi [Chrysaphes] | same |
| 54. Dimitri Placichaliti [Platyskalites] | same |
| 55. Ducha Cotiassi | same |
| 56. Jani Pessa [Pezos?] | same |
| 57. Jani Vassilico [Basilikos] | same |
| 58. Dimitri Algiropolo [Argyropoulos] | same |
| 59. Georgio Radino [Rhadenos] | Raised by 40 <i>aspra</i> |

varying amounts in the monthly salaries they received from Venice for the services they provided in the defense of Thessalonike against the Ottomans. Among them, (*Calo*)*jani Radino* (no. 3), one of the three ambassadors sent to Venice in 1425 to request, among other things, these raises, can be identified with the *apographeus* John Rhadenos (1415–21) in Table 1. Listed among the “nobles and small nobles” of Thessalonike in the pay of Venice, we also find one *Georgio Radino* (no. 59), who was presumably someone related to John Rhadenos, but remains otherwise unknown from any other source. Second, *Thomas Grusulora/Chrussulora* (no. 4), another ambassador present at Venice in 1425, is no doubt the senatorial *archon* Thomas Chrysoloras attested in an Athonite document of 1421, as shown in Table 1. Third, *Ducha Melacrino* (no. 32) may be identified with John Douk(a)s Melachrinos (1415), who figures in Table 1. Four additional members of the Melachrinos family appear as well in the Venetian document of 1425 (nos. 23, 30, 33, 36). One of them, *Jani Melacrino*, is reported, moreover, to be the son of George Argyropoulos, member of a prominent Thessalonian family with three further representatives in the same source (nos. 31, 58, 24). Other archontic patronymics from Table 1 that recur in the Venetian document of 1425 include Hyaleas⁴⁰ (nos. 2, 8?, 9, 15?, 16), Laskaris (nos. 25, 29, 22), Tarchaniotes (no. 42), Angelos (no. 47), and possibly Gazes (no. 17) as well as Pezos (no. 56). The cross-references between the names listed in Tables 1 and 2 thus indicate that a significant proportion of the Greek “nobles and small nobles” to whom the Venetians paid salaries for their participation in the defense of Thessalonike against the Ottomans came from the same families, and in some cases were the very same individuals, as the *archontes*

52–53. On the general social status of the *stratiotai* in late Byzantium, see M. C. Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 1204–1453* (Philadelphia, 1992), 364–65.

⁴⁰ The name of this family appears in the document as “Jalca,” which is no doubt a misreading for Jalea, i.e., Hyaleas, on the part of the Venetian scribe who must have copied the names from a list. Cf. Jacoby, “Thessalonique,” 308 and note 29. It is also feasible that “Falca” and “Milka” (nos. 8 and 15, respectively, in Table 2) represent further corruptions of “Jalca” caused by the scribe’s carelessness and lack of familiarity with Greek names.

who occupied government posts in the city prior to the establishment of the Venetian regime. This, after all, should not be so surprising since we know from Symeon that in 1423 the despot Andronikos Palaiologos had agreed to the cession of Thessalonike to Venice, acting in response to the counsel of “those who shared governmental functions with him” and “the very magnates of our body politic”—in other words, the *archontes*.⁴¹

The documentary sources, in addition to allowing us to identify a substantial number of *archontes* and their network of family ties, also provide data with regard to the economic character of this urban elite. It is not clear from the Byzantine documents what kinds of material compensation they received for holding government offices, yet our prosopographic survey suggests that the bulk of their income derived from other sources of revenue. Many *archontes* or their extended families were in fact landowners in possession of large- to medium-size holdings in the surrounding countryside, primarily in Chalkidike.⁴² In addition, several possessed urban properties (such as houses, shops, or workshops) inside Thessalonike.⁴³ It is quite likely—yet difficult to demonstrate statistically—that in the period we are concerned with, when communications between Thessalonike and the surrounding countryside were cut off due to the Ottoman threat, and many landowners in the area are known to have suffered major losses in the face of enemy attacks, urban properties situated within the city, along with the income derived from their exploitation, may have acquired much greater importance. We are all familiar today with the plight of the Deblitzenos family, thanks to the late Nicolas Oikonomides, who made known to us in the 1980s how the members of this Thessalonian family, including the *archon* Manuel Deblitzenos himself and his heirs, were dispossessed of their lands and became impoverished under the impact first of Serbian and then of Ottoman incursions.⁴⁴ Likewise, the only piece of property that the *archon* George Prinkips presumably inherited from his father was an entirely ruined and deserted vineyard, the rest of the family’s landed possessions having been lost due to the devastation caused in the countryside during the Ottoman blockade of 1383–87.⁴⁵ By contrast, it is known that some members of the Argyropoulos family who leased from the monastery of Iviron several gardens situated in the vicinity of the Golden Gate of Thessalonike, just outside the city walls, managed them successfully and greatly increased their productivity after 1404. In 1421, the monks of Iviron, no longer wanting all the profits to accrue to the Argyropouloi, took the gardens back from

⁴¹ Symeon-Balfour, 55, lines 20–21: οἱ σὺν ἐκείνῳ δὲ τῆς ἀρχοντικῆς μοίρας . . . καὶ αὐτοὶ δὲ οἱ τῆς πολιτείας ἡμῶν πρότοι. For an analogous identification of the Greek *archontes* of the Morea as *gentiles hombres*, *gentil homme grec*, or *nobiles* in the different versions of the Chronicle of the Morea, see D. Jacoby, “Les archontes grecs et la féodalité en Morée franque,” *TM* 2 (1967): 468 note 240.

⁴² E.g., the *archontes* Manuel Phaxenos, Theodore Doukas Spartenos, Manuel Tarchaneiotes, and Manuel Deblitzenos cited in Table 1, above, as well as various members of the archontic families of Kokalas (*PLP* 14090, 14094), Stavrakios (*PLP* 26702, 26703), Maroules (*PLP* 17156), Kasandrenos (*PLP* 11312, 11313), Angelos (*PLP* 91030, 91031), Gazes (*PLP* 3444), Melachrinos (*PLP* 17633), and Rhadenos (*PLP* 23987, 23992).

⁴³ Manuel Deblitzenos owned several houses and small shops in the city: *Docheiariou*, 263–64 (no. 49). A certain Maroules who owned some properties in the Omphalos quarter of Thessalonike may perhaps be identified with the *archon* John Maroules: *ibid.*, 263; cf. *PLP* 17143 and 17153. House-owners are also attested among members of the archontic families of Allelouias (*PLP* 674), Melachrinos (*PLP* 17627), etc.

⁴⁴ Oikonomides, “Deblitzenoi,” 176–98; *Docheiariou*, nos. 26, 47–51, 57–58.

⁴⁵ *MM* 2: no. 471, 221–23. I have assumed that the George Prinkips mentioned in this patriarchal act of 1394 is the same person as the *archon* George Prinkips attested in several Athonite documents between 1407 and 1409: see Table 1 above; cf. *PLP* 23741 and 23746.

them.⁴⁶ It is quite likely that the favorable location of the gardens near the city walls was a factor that facilitated this successful case of individual entrepreneurship on the part of the Argyropouloi.

Among the *archontes* we also come across representatives of typical urban middle-class professions, some of whom were evidently connected with the guildlike associations of Thessalonike:⁴⁷ for example, the *chrysepilektes* Athanasios Kabakes (1327), the *myrepsos* Theodore Chalazas (1314–26), and the *exarchos ton myrepson* Theodore Brachnos (1320). Moreover, Theodore Chalazas bears the name of a family among whose members professional money dealers are attested in early fifteenth-century Thessalonike, thus suggesting that some *archontes* may have been engaged in business and banking. The evidence for this is contained in the notebook kept by an anonymous Thessalonian church official, where we find a reference to a money changer (καταλλάκτης) called Chalazas and his brother-in-law Platyskalites, likewise a money changer who bears the family name of a “noble” listed in Table 2 (no. 54).⁴⁸ The same source informs us, furthermore, that this Platyskalites had a stepbrother, Michael Metriotes, who made a journey to Tana at the end of the fourteenth century. In view of the commercial importance of Tana, Michael Metriotes’ trip there is most likely to have been for trading purposes.⁴⁹ From the notes kept by the anonymous church official, we also learn about a financial operation involving the transfer of funds from Constantinople to Thessalonike in the 1420s, which was handled by two *archontes* from the capital and a third person in Thessalonike, a certain Alousianos, who may well be Thomas Alousianos in Table 2 (no. 1).⁵⁰

Incidentally, a certain Rhadenos, who served Manuel II as counselor in Thessalonike during 1382/3–87, was the son of a wealthy merchant and had two brothers who engaged in business, even though he himself does not seem to have been associated with the family’s business affairs.⁵¹ On the other hand, the *archon* Nicholas Prebezianos, whose name appears in an act of the monastery of Docheiariou dated 1366 (see Table 1), may have engaged in trade himself, for among the fragments of the Greek account books published by

⁴⁶ *Actes d’Iviron*, vol. 4, ed. J. Lefort et al. (Paris, 1995), nos. 97 and 98. On this case, see K.-P. Matschke, *Die Schlacht bei Ankara und das Schicksal von Byzanz. Studien zur spätbyzantinischen Geschichte zwischen 1402 und 1422* (Weimar, 1981), 159–75.

⁴⁷ On these associations, see Oikonomidès, *Hommes d’affaires*, 109, 111–12. For the three *archontes* mentioned here, refer to Table 1 above.

⁴⁸ S. Kugéas, “Notizbuch eines Beamten der Metropolis in Thessalonike aus dem Anfang des XV. Jahrhunderts,” *BZ* 23 (1914): 153 (§ 86). The involvement of Thessalonian *archontes* in business and banking, suggested here, runs parallel to the phenomenon discussed by K.-P. Matschke, “Notes on the Economic Establishment and Social Order of the Late Byzantine *Kephalai*,” *ByzF* 19 (1993): 139–43, where the author presents evidence for the connection between provincial municipal administration and commercial/financial enterprise in the Palaiologan period.

⁴⁹ Kugéas, “Notizbuch,” 153 (§ 86); cf. M. Th. Laskaris, “Θεσσαλονίκη καὶ Τάνα,” in *Τόμος Κωνσταντίνου Ἀρμενοπούλου* (Thessalonike, 1952), 331–40.

⁵⁰ Kugéas, “Notizbuch,” 148–49 (§§ 53, 58); cf. Jacoby, “Thessalonique,” 308.

⁵¹ Loenertz, ed., *Démétrius Cydonès*, vol. 2, letters 177, 169, 248, 202. Cf. G. T. Dennis, “Rhadenos of Thessalonica, Correspondent of Demetrius Cydonès,” *Byzantina* 13 (1985): 261–72; F. Tinnefeld, “Freundschaft und ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ: Die Korrespondenz des Demetrius Kydonès mit Rhadenos (1375–1387/8),” *Byzantion* 55 (1985): 210–44; Matschke and Tinnefeld, *Gesellschaft*, 171–72, 192, 202–4, 260 note 261. For a female pawnbroker from this family in the early 15th century, see Kugéas, “Notizbuch,” 144 (§ 9). For *archontes* among the Rhadenoi in 15th-century Thessalonike, see Table 1, also Table 2 (nos. 3, 59). For landowning members of the same family in early 14th-century Thessalonike, see note 42 above.

Peter Schreiner, a businessman (cloth merchant?) by the name of *kyr* Nicholas Prebezianos is attested in Thessalonike during 1356–57.⁵² It should be noted that the author of this account book, a landowning merchant who was the nephew of the latter, is identified through his brother's name as a Kasandrenos⁵³ and might have possibly belonged to the same branch of this well-known Thessalonian family from which stemmed the *archon* Manuel Kasandrenos, active in Thessalonike in 1381 (see Table 1). Kasandrenos' business circle in the 1350s included at least two other individuals who may also have been connected with archontic families: one Tzykandyles, who traded in various commodities including wheat, barley, caviar, fish, and different items of clothing,⁵⁴ and one George Gazes, who traveled to Serres with wheat he acquired from Kasandrenos.⁵⁵

Finally, we may include here evidence concerning the international enterprises of another prominent Thessalonian called John Rhosotas, given that in one of his letters Isidore Glabas names a certain Rhosotas among the notables of Thessalonike.⁵⁶ John Rhosotas had a business agent called Theodore Katharos, and the realm of activity of these two men together encompassed Venice, Dubrovnik, and Novo Brdo. In 1424–25, Theodore Katharos can be traced in Dubrovnik, where he was acting as Rhosotas' agent. At an earlier date Theodore had made a deal in Venice with a Ragusan merchant, to whom he entrusted a certain amount of money and merchandise. The Ragusan was then arrested and died in prison at Venice. Hence in Dubrovnik Theodore was mainly occupied with trying to recover the money the deceased merchant owed, which he claimed amounted to slightly more than 3,875 ducats. It seems that Theodore did not possess sufficient proof, and in the end he lost about one-third of this huge sum of money.⁵⁷ During his visit to Dubrovnik, he may have been involved in other enterprises too, as suggested by a document of 1424 which mentions a *Teodorus Grecus* who exported cloth from there to Serbia.⁵⁸ It is not clear whether Theodore acted alone or once again as John Rhosotas' agent in the last-mentioned enterprise. Yet several sources demonstrate that a certain *Caloiani Rusota*, who may be identified with John Rhosotas of Thessalonike, held a prominent place at the Serbian court in the 1420s and 1430s, where he actively engaged in business and banking, providing loans particularly to Ragusan merchants who were dealing in Serbia. He served furthermore as customs officer at Novo Brdo until his death in 1438.⁵⁹ If these two men are identical as suggested, this raises of course the question of when John Rhosotas left

⁵² P. Schreiner, *Texte zur spätbyzantinischen Finanz- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte in Handschriften der Biblioteca Vaticana* (Vatican City, 1991), 85 (§§ 61, 63). See *ibid.*, 84 (§ 53), for Nicholas' brother, *kyr* Manoles Prebezianos, who traded in cloth (from Serres).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 82 (§ 4), 86f; cf. 81, 98. For a discussion of this text and the individuals in question here, see also Matschke and Tinnfeld, *Gesellschaft*, 166 ff.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *Texte*, 83, 84, 87, 88 (§§ 26, 45, 50, 100, 125, 136).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 84 (§ 48). A rather obscure entry, on the other hand, concerns a certain Masgidas whose family name figures twice in the Venetian list of 1425 (Table 2, nos. 41 and 43): *ibid.*, 84 (§ 56).

⁵⁶ Sp. Lampros, “Ἰσιδώρου μητροπολίτου Θεσσαλονίκης, Ὀκτὼ ἐπιστολαὶ ἀνέκδοτοι,” *Νέος Ἑλλ.* 9 (1912): 380. Cf. *PLP* 24579. Apart from Rhosotas, Glabas also names a Tzymisches (*PLP* 27949) and a Klematikos (*PLP* 11798) as notables of Thessalonike.

⁵⁷ B. Krekić, *Dubrovnik (Raguse) et le Levant au moyen âge* (Paris, 1961), nos. 686, 688, 690, 691, 697, 699, 702, 708, 709, 718, 721.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 695.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 808 and 810; M. Spremić, “La Serbie entre les Turcs, les Grecs, et les Latins au XVe siècle,” *ByzF* 11 (1987): 438 note 16; K.-P. Matschke, “Zum Anteil der Byzantiner an der Bergbauentwicklung und an den Bergbauerträgen Südosteuropas im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert,” *BZ* 84–85 (1991–92): 57–67.

Thessalonike, to which a precise answer cannot be given. It is possible, though not so significant from our point of view, that Rhosotas may have already established himself in Serbia while Theodore Katharos was acting on his behalf in Dubrovnik.⁶⁰ Supposing this were the case, it is of far greater significance for our purposes that Rhosotas did not totally disengage himself from his native city and delegated the management of part of his affairs to a fellow Thessalonian. In any event, without his prior international enterprises and foreign contacts, his rise to prominence at the Serbian court would have been quite unlikely.

The involvement of the *archontes* in trade and banking that has emerged in the discussion above is important, since it gives us concrete evidence concerning a major source of their wealth, which, according to our rhetorical and narrative sources, they refused to channel toward defense needs. A portrait of Thessalonian society found in a fifteenth-century text attributed to John Argyropoulos likewise gives the impression of the existence of an affluent upper class that remained indifferent to the demands brought on by the war with the Ottomans and continued to spend money in pursuit of a wanton, carefree, and relatively luxurious lifestyle. The text in question is an invective against a certain Katablattas, who was a native of Serres but spent the years between ca. 1403 and 1430 in Thessalonike, having fled there from Bursa after a period of service in the Ottoman army as a foot soldier.⁶¹ Katablattas became a school instructor in Thessalonike and also served as a scribe in the city's tribunal. Most importantly for us, he had close ties with people from the upper levels of Thessalonian society, including members of the ruling elite. He frequently visited the palace of the despot Andronikos, had contacts with the city's senators, gave public speeches, and seems to have enjoyed a certain degree of influence with Andronikos as suggested by the request of a woman who asked him to write a letter to the despot on her behalf. The text's depiction of the social gatherings (e.g., banquets, weddings, hunting parties) attended by Katablattas, elaborately focusing on all the singing, dancing, drinking, and eating that took place on these occasions, corresponds closely with the wanton lifestyle attributed by other contemporary sources to the milieu in which Katablattas was active. Therefore, while it is important to keep in mind that the work at hand is an invective and that some of the accusations found in it against Katablattas may be false or exaggerated, there is no reason to reject the authenticity of the general image of Thessalonian upper-class society it conveys. It is also noteworthy that the text mentions a certain Rhosotas who gave a big party in Thessalonike on the occasion of his daughter's wedding, sometime between 1403 and 1430.⁶² Whether this last piece of evidence concerns the aforementioned John Rhosotas or, as seems more likely, one of his kinsmen in Thessalonike, it lends in either case further support to our hypothesis that links the financial resources and sumptuous lifestyle of the city's archontic families in these critical times to profits from trade and banking.

To conclude, this quest for the *archontes* of Thessalonike has taken us almost full circle from literary sources of a rhetorical, moralistic nature, through a series of documentary

⁶⁰ Matschke suggests, for instance, that Rhosotas' move to Serbia may have coincided with the first Ottoman occupation of Thessalonike: "Zur Bergbauentwicklung in Südosteuropa," 62–63.

⁶¹ P. Canivet and N. Oikonomidès, "La Comédie de Katablattas: Invective byzantine du XVe s.," *Δίπτυχα* 3 (1982–83): 5–97. For the identification of the author and the dates given above, see *ibid.*, 9, 15–21. The portion of the text that corresponds to Katablattas' years in Thessalonike is on pp. 35–51.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 49.

sources, finally to another type of literary source, an invective. It is hoped that in the course of these wanderings among literary and documentary sources, the *archontes* of Thessalonike have emerged as a more tangible group than they were before. Yet two further tasks still remain to be undertaken in the future. The first is to conduct a comparison with the *archontes* of other cities, such as Serres⁶³ and Ioannina, so as to gain a wider and more complete overall perspective on this important and powerful segment of the late Byzantine aristocracy. The second task will be to broaden our perspective still further and incorporate the high aristocracy into the study of the *archontes*, so as to fulfill the ultimate goal of constructing a comprehensive portrait of the Thessalonian aristocracy in the late Byzantine period.

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⁶³ On the *archontes* of Serres, see now A. Laiou, “Κοινωνικές δυνάμεις στις Σέρρες στο 14ο αιώνα,” in *Οι Σέρρες και η Περιοχή τους από την Αρχαία στη Μεταβυζαντινή Κοινωνία* (Serres, 1998), 209 ff.

