BYZANTINE SEALS FROM THE RAS FORTRESS*

In this paper, seals found at the location of the Ras fortress (Tvrdava Ras) have been published. Inscriptions on these seals show that they used to belong to persons which could be identified with certain military commanders who served under Alexios I Komnenos. The seals in question are: the seals of protonobelissimos Eustathios Kamytzes, Constantine Dalassenos Doukas, protoproedros and doux Constantine Kekaumenos and a certain person called Alexios.

Keywords: seal, Alexios I Komnenos, Nicholas Synesios, Eustathios Kamytzes, Constantine Dalassenos Doukas, Constantine Kekaumenos.

The number of published seals found on medieval sites in Serbia does not even come close to the significance of this territory in the provincial organization of the Byzantine Empire. Owing to the efforts of Ljubomir Maksimović and Marko Popović, the findings from Serbia, which are kept in the collections of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade and in the National Museum in Belgrade, have been systematically published.1 Most of these seals originate from Braničevo – one of the main strongholds of the Byzantine Empire on the Danubian frontier.2 The findings based on the sigillographic material found in Sirmium are particularly important, despite the fact that they have yet to be fully examined.3

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* This study is part of the projects nos 177021 and 177032 of the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development.

On the other hand, the central and southern regions have yielded a comparatively small number of Byzantine lead bullae. The most important set includes four seals and a lead blank from the Ras fortress. In the last few years, the number of seals discovered at the Ras fortress has increased. Among these, the most important discovery is the bulla of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, which – together with other, previously unpublished seals – gives further information about Byzantine activities in the Balkan interior in late 11th and early 12th century. Judging by the available sigillographic material, it would seem that Ras – as one of the major fortresses on the Serbo-Byzantine border – held great strategic importance in the imperial military system.

The scarce data about the Ras fortress and the surrounding area can be traced to the sixth century – to the reign of the Emperor Justinian I. The fact that this toponym originated in Late antiquity is confirmed by Procopius’ mention of the toponym Arsa. A region called Rasa (h 'Ra,sh) has also been mentioned in De administrando imperii, where it denotes a border area between Bulgaria and Serbia. Even though Constantine Porphyrogennetos did not specify within whose borders this area lay in the late ninth century (Serbian or Bulgarian), somewhat newer data indicates that the region was in fact located on Bulgarian territory.

The Byzantine Empire first conquered the Ras fortress during the reign of John I Tzimiskes (969–976), at the time when Russia and the Byzantine Empire fought in the Balkan interior to gain control over Bulgaria. The fact that the Byzantine Empire established its military hold on Ras at this time is confirmed by a seal belonging to a certain John, the protospatharios and katepano of Ras (tou/ Ra,sou). It has been assumed that the Byzantine Empire occupied the wider area surrounding the fortress in the operations carried out in the early seventies of the tenth century. This thesis is supported by the Chronicle of Dioclea, which relates the activities of Tzimiskes’ generals in the province of Rascia even after 971 – the year when the Emperor withdrew from the Balkan front. No data has been preserved about the fate of Ras in the period which saw the renewal of the Bulgarian state under Samuel and his successors (976–1018), but there is no doubt that Ras became a part of the new Bulgarian empire. During the reign of Basil II (976–1025), after the reorganization of

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rule in the Balkans (after 1018/1019), Ras once again became a part of the Byzantine Empire, as confirmed by Basil’s second sigillion issued in 1020 in the autocephalous Archbishopric of Ohrid. It is significant to note that this sigillion considers the bishopric of Ras as a former Bulgarian diocese, and not just starting from Samuel’s reign, but as early as the reign of Emperor Peter (927–969). The rank which Ras held after 1018/1019 in the military and administrative system of the Empire is not known, but it is worth mentioning the hypotheses about the identification of Ras and the surrounding area with the strategos of Serbia, as the extant seals suggest. The administrative unit in question could have – presumably – existed approximately until the mid-11th century.

The reign of Alexios I Komnenos brought new dilemmas concerning Ras and its surrounding area. Namely, there is no data which would unequivocally confirm that the Ras fortress had indeed been in Byzantine possession during the reign of this ruler. For example, it is conspicuous that the letters of Theophylaktos of Ohrid do not mention Ras at all, but the Notitia 13, which dates from Alexios’ time, states that the bishopric of Ras was a suffragan of the Church of Ohrid. In addition to this, Anne Komnene, who gave detailed accounts of Alexios’ conflicts with the Rascian župan Vukan (1091, 1093–1094), does not mention Ras in any of her writings. On the other hand, the Chronicle of Dioeclea states that in the 1080s Bodin conquered Rascia, the region where – with his help – župan Vukan and his brother Marko established their rule; however, the question remains whether the Byzantine border fortress became a part of Serbia at this time. The Serbian conquest of Ras is confirmed at a later date, during the reign of John II Komnenos (1118–1143). John Kinnamos relates the Serbian conquest and burning down of the Byzantine Ras (circa 1127–1129), which prompted the Emperor to punish Kritoplos, the commander of the fortress. Recently found seals on the site The Fortress of Ras support the opinion that the Byzantine Empire
held dominant (but perhaps not continuous) control over Ras during Alexios’ reign. At this location, besides the bulla of Alexios I, we also found seals which used to belong to high-ranking military commanders of the Byzantine Empire. Prosopographical identification of these persons and their activities in the area surrounding Ras (and in the wider region of the Western Balkans) is not certain. However, it could be surmised that some of them were in office during the reign of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos; hence, the question remains if these commanders played a role in the Serbo-Byzantine conflicts of 1091 and 1093–1094 and in the renewal of the peace treaty in 1106. Also, we should allow for the possibility that some of these seals belong to the period of Serbo-Byzantine conflicts of 1127–1129, which broke out during the reign of Alexios’ successor John II Komnenos.

**CATALOGUE**

1. The seal of Emperor Alexios I
2. The seal of protonobelissimos Nicholas Synesios
3. The seal of protonobelissimos Eustathios Kamytzes
4. The seal of Constantine Dalassenos Doukas
5. The seal of protoproedros and doux Constantine Kekaumenos
6. The seal of the monk Christopher
7. The seal of Alexios
8. Anonymous seal
9. Anonymous seal
10. Lead blank

**№ 1. The seal of Alexios I**

Obv. A bearded Christ is shown en face, sitting on a high-backed throne. Christ’s head is nimbated. He blesses with his right hand, and holds the book in his left. Christ’s feet rest on a dais. The inscription has not been preserved.

Rev. The Emperor Alexios I is shown en face, standing on a dais. The bearded emperor wears a crown adorned with prependoulia and is dressed in a divitision, torque and a loros draped across his left shoulder. In his right hand he holds a labarum which is resting on the ground, and in his left a globe with a cross. Only a few letters comprising the inscription which used to surround the image can today be discerned.

Weight: 20.5 gr; Diameter: 30 mm.

Date: 1081–1118.

Published: *Ivanišević*, Pečat cara Aleksija I, 57–64.

№ 2. The seal of protonobelissimos Nicholas Synesios

Obv. The bust of St. Nicholas; he is shown giving out blessings with his right hand and holding a Gospel book in his left.

.ΙΝΙΚΟ | ΟΣ
[Ὁ ι(γιος)] Νικόλαος
Rev. Inscription (eight lines).

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…Ο.ΘΕΙΤ.ΔΩΝΑΛΙ.ΝΙΚΟΛΑΨΙΑΝΟΡΕΛΛΙ.ΣΙΜΩΤΩ.ΣΙΝΕΣΙΩ | 'Ο
[+Κύριε βοήθει μοί] σῶ δούλῳ Νικόλαῳ (πρωτο)νοβελισσίμῳ τῷ Συνεσίῳ

Weight: 7.78 gr; Diameter: 20 mm.

Date: late 11th – early 12th century.

Published: Maksimović, Olovni pečati, 437–438, no. 3.


Even though the narrative sources give no information on Nicholas Synesios, it is worth taking into account Anne Komnene’s statements about a certain Synesios, a military commander close to Alexios I Komnenos, whose activities can be traced from 1087 to 1091.¹⁵ Anne Komnene mentions one person with the name Synesios in the context of conflicts between the Byzantine Empire and the Pechenegs in the Balkans. She does not state the name, titles or the functions of Alexios’ commander, but her data indicates that he was close to the emperor and that he enjoyed the protection of the emperor’s relatives. On the other hand, sphragistic material found in the Balkans testifies to the existence of a person called Nicholas Synesios. There are at least three seals which testify to the fact that this person held the title of protonobelissimos. One of these seals originated in the Ras region. It was first published by Lj. Maksimović, who dated it approximately in the 11th –12th century. The obverse depicts St. Nicholas (blessing with his right hand and holding the scepter in his left), while the reverse contains an inscription which – unfortunately – does not give any information about Nicholas Synesios as a protonobelissimos.¹⁶ The hierarchical rank Nicholas Synesios held previously is confirmed by a seal which was probably found in South or South-eastern Bulgaria. The obverse again depicts St. Nicholas, while the inscription on the reverse shows that the seal owner, Nicholas Synesios, held the rank of protoproedros.¹⁷ The publisher I. Jordanov dated the seal in the third quarter of the 11th century. The dating of these seals, as well as the geographical origin of the bullae which have so far been published, allow for the possibility of identifying Nicholas Synesios (protoproedros and later


¹⁶ Maksimović, Olovni pečati vizantijskog porekla, no. 805; I. Jordanov, Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria, II: Byzantine Seals with Family Names, Sofia 2006, 393-394, states that there are two more unpublished seals belonging to Nicholas Synesios, on which he bears the same rank of honor – protonobelissimos: Dumbarton Oaks no. 55.1. 3307 and Hermitage no. M–9927.

¹⁷ Jordanov, Corpus II, no. 687.
protonobelissimos) as the Synesios who, according to Alexias, participated in the Balkan conquests of Alexios I Komnenos. Even though Anne Komnene places the last of Synesios’ activities in the aftermath of the Byzantine victory over the Pechenegs in the Battle of Lebounion (1091), this does not mean that his career ended after that year. The seal of protonobelissimos Nicholas Synesios from Ras, as well as the recently published seal of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos from the same location,18 could perhaps be dated at a later time – in the period of Byzantine conflicts with the Rascian župan Vukan (1091, 1093–1094, 1106).

№ 3. The seal of protonobelissimos Eustathios Kamytzes

Obv. Standing figure of Virgin Hagiosoritissa

...ΘΥΣΟΡΗΤΗΣ

(Μήτηρ) Ἐυστάθιος Πρωτονοβελήσιμος τοῦ Καμύτζη.

Rev. Inscription (six lines)

ΓΡΑΦΑ[]ΚΦΡΑΓΙΖ[ΛΟΓΟΥΣΕΥΣ][]ΘΙΩΝΗΔΙΚΗΘ[ΚΑΜΙΤΙΣ]

Γραφ[αί(α)] σφραγιζ[ε] (και) λόγους Εὐσταθίου (πρωτο)νοβε[λ]ισίμου τοῦ Καμύτζη.

Weight: 16.53 g.

Date: end 11th – early 12th century.

Commentary: The seal was offered on the auction of the auction house Gorny & Mosch no. 109 (March 7th 2011) under the catalogue number 3191. The catalogue erroneously states the name of the owner as Ευμαθίου. This reading was followed in the regular section on published in BZ 105.1 (2012), 503, no. 1839. The photograph of this seal before it was cleaned up clearly shows the inscribed letters ΕΥΣΙΚΑ ΕΥΣΤΑΘΙΟΥ.

Analogies: Eustathios Kamytzes, protonobelissimos: V. Laurent, La collection C. Orghidan, Paris 1952, no. 97. The obverse depicts Virgin’s bust with a medallion on her chest. The reverse contains a five-line-long inscription: Μήτηρ Ἐυστάθιος Σφραγίζει Ἐυσταθίου πρωτονοβελήσιμου τοῦ Καμύτζη. The threshold between the eleventh and the twelfth century has been suggested as a possible date (1100).

Eustathios Kamytzes was one of the high-ranking officers close to Emperor Alexios I Komnenos.19 Anne Komnene has left numerous testimonies of his service, which was tied both to the East and the West of the Empire.

It is thought that the earliest information about him dates from 1083, the year when he was sent to Emperor Alexios I as the commander of a Turkish battalion of 7000 men.20 In 1091/1092, he took part in the conspiracy of Gregory Gabras, the son of Theodore Gabras, sebastos and doux of Trebizond, which ended in miserable defeat

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18 Ivanišević, Pečat cara Aleksija I, 57–64.
20 Alexias 154.
of the conspirators. Gregory Gabras was captured, but was later pardoned and married to Maria, the daughter of Alexios I. Eustathios Kamytzes was exiled for a short while— it is known that already in 1094 he attended the Council of Constantinople held at the Blachernae palace. At this time, he bore the titles of proedros and chartoularios tou stavlou. Other news about him inform us that he campaigned in the East in 1098, and that John Doukas (the brother of Irene Doukaina) appointed him the strategos of Lampe. In 1108, at the time of the second Norman invasion, he controlled the pass of Arbanon and was defeated by Guy, Bohemond’s brother. This is the only mention of his activities in the Balkans in Anne Komnene’s writings. The next stage of his service took place in Nicaea: in 1113 he was the doux of Nikaia. He was defeated and captured while fighting Turks who besieged the city. However, he managed to escape and join the emperor in Damalis, who immediately sent him to Constantinople. He returned to Asia Minor in 1116, at the time when Alexios I led his last campaign against the Turks.

The gradual rise of Eustathios Kamytzes through the official ranks during the reign of Alexios Komnenos is well documented in written sources: from the title of proedros (late 1094), he rose to the rank of nobelissimos, and finally to the venerable title of protonobelissimos. Kamytzes probably survived Alexios I, as he is mentioned as a deceased person in the Typikon Pantocrator (1136). The last title he bore was sebastos, probably awarded to him by John II Komnenos.

№ 4. The seal of Constantine Dalassenos Doukas

Obv. Inscription (three lines)
\[\Gamma\omicron\Delta\omicron\sigmaφ\varsigma\omicron\zeta\omicron\nu\varsigma\kappa\varsigma\] Rev. Inscription (three lines)
\[\Delta\omicron\alpha\lambda\nu\omicron\kappa\varsigma\] Diameter: 17 mm.

Date: late 11th – early 12th century

Unpublished.

Analogies: A.-K. Wassiliou-Seibt, Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden. Teil 1, Einleitung, Sigellegenden von Alpha bis inklusive My. Wiener Byzantinistische Studien 28/1 (2011) 423a, b, c; G. Schlumberger, Sigillographie de

23 Alexias 338.
24 ibid. 397–398.
25 ibid. 443–446, 448–449.
26 ibid. 470.
27 Gautier, Le synode, 218.
28 G. Schlumberger, Sigillographie de l’empire byzantin, Paris 1884, 548.
29 V. Laurent, La collection C. Orghidan, Paris 1952, 60, no. 97.
30 Gautier, Typikon du Pantocrator 240.56, 256–257. The most widespread opinion is that Eustathios Kamytzes died after 1118 and before 1136, ibid. 257; Skoulatos, Les personnages, 85 n. 12.
l’empire byzantin, Paris 1884, 651, no. 7; Б. А. Панченко, Каталог моливдовулов коллекции Русского Археологического Института в Константинополе, Известия Русского археологического института в Константинополе IX, София 1904; К. М. Konstantopoulos, Βυζαντιακά μολυβδόμουλλα του εν Αθήναις. Έθνικον Νομισματικόν Μουσείον, Athens 1917, no. 618 b; А.П. Каждан, Армяне в составе господствующего класса Византийской империи в XI–XII вв. Ереван 1975, 95, no. 13; В. С. Шандровская, Поправки и дополнения к «Каталогу моливдовулов» Б. А. Панченко, Византийский Временник 38, 1977, 112, no. 299: claims that there are three more seals belonging to Constatine Dalassenos Doukas in the Hermitage collection: Hermitage: no. M-6003, M-4579 and M-9338; Ch. Stavrakos, Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel mit Familiennamen aus der Sammlung des Numismatischen Museums Athens, Wiesbaden 2000, no. 5.

The identification of the seal owner, Constantine Dalassenos Doukas, is problematic. The Alexias mentions a certain Constantine Dalassenos, a general under Alexios I Komnenos, who was close to the emperor via his mother.31 Owing to Alexias, his activities are documented well enough: he is most frequently mentioned in operations led in the Eastern part of the Empire, as a general who led military operations against Smyrna and Tzachas. However, like other distinguished commanders under Alexios, he also took part in the great struggle with the Pechenegs in the Battle of Lebounion (1091), where he – together with the emperor and George Palaiologos – commanded the Byzantine forces.32 At the same time, this is his only activity in the Balkans that we know of Anne Komnene, however, never attaches the family name Doukas to this Constantine Dalassenos. The titles of Constantine Dalassenos are not known, except that he bore the rank of protokouropalates, as confirmed by one of the seals attributed to him.33 On the other hand, there are many seals which bear the name of Constantine Dalassenos Doukas, but none of them contain any information about his titles or ranks. Hence, the question remains whether Constantine Dalassenos Doukas mentioned on the seals can be identified as the Constantine Dalassenos from Anne Komnene’s writings. J.-C. Cheynet has argued against this identification, claiming that the name in fact belonged to two different persons. In his opinion, Constantine Dalassenos Doukas, known to us only based on the seals, belonged to the Doukas family on his paternal side, but was related to the Dalassenos clan via his mother.34

№ 5. The seal of protoproedros and doux Constantine Kekaumenos

Obv. The bust of St. Michael holding a sceptre in his right hand and a globe topped with a cross in his left.

\[ \text{M} | \text{I} | \text{L} \]

\[ \text{Mt(χαή)} \lambda \]

Rev. Inscription (five lines)

31 Alexias 223. 95.
32 ibid. 247.
34 Cheynet, Études, no. 22.
№ 6. The seal of monk Christopher

Obv. The bust of Virgin Mary with a medallion.
+ΘΚΕΡΘ – ΤΩΣΩΔ
Rev. Probably a saint standing.
ΧΡΗΣΤΟΦΟΡΟΥ – ΟΝΑΧΟΥ
+Θ(εοτό)κε β(οή)θ(ει) τῷ σῷ δ(ούλῳ) Χρηστοφόρου [μ]οναχοῦ
Weight: 7.78 gr; Diameter: 20 mm.
Date: – Second half of the 9th – first half of the 10th century
Published: Maksimović, Olovni pečati, 437, no. 1.

№ 7. The seal of Alexios

Obv. Inscription (three lines)
+ΤΩΛΕΙΣΩΝ
Rev. Inscription (three lines)
ΔΟΥΛΟΥ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Ἀλεξίου
Diameter: 18 mm.
Date: last third of the 11th – first half of the 12th century
Unpublished.

№ 8. Anonymous seal

Obv. The bust of Virgin ?
Rev. A peacock with its tail spread out.
Weight: 7.84 gr; Diameter: 21 mm.
Date: 10th century
Published: Maksimović, Olovni pečati, 437, no. 2.

№ 9. Anonymous seal
Obv. The bust of St. George, holding a spear in his right hand
\(\Theta|\Gamma\xi|\Upsilon|\Pi \cdots\)
\(\text{Ὁ (άγιος) Γεώρ[γιος]}\)
Rev. The bust of St. Nicholas, giving out blessings with his right hand and holding the book in his left.
\(-\Lambda|\Lambda|\Omega|\Sigma\)
\([\text{Ὁ ἁγίος Νικόλαος]}\)
Weight: 7.78 gr; Diameter: 20 mm.
Date: 12th century
Published: Maksimović, Olovni pečati, 438, no. 4.

№ 10. Lead blank
Weight: 7.78 gr; Diameter: 20 mm.
Date: late 12th century
Published: Maksimović, Olovni pečati, 438, no. 5.

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Вујадин Иванишевић
(Археолошки институт, Београд)
Бајана Крсмановић
(Византолошки институт САНУ, Београд)

ВИЗАНТИЈСКИ ПЕЧАТИ ИЗ TВРЂАВЕ РАС

У раду су објављени печати који потичу са локалитета Тврђава Рас. Од десет печата четири представљају нове налазе (печат Евстатија Камице, Константина Даласина Дуке, Константина Кекавмена и извесног Алексија). Већина печата припадала је личностима које би се могле идентификовати са појединим војском вођама Алексија I Комнина, попут йроийн овелисима Николе Синесија, йроийн овелисима Евстатија Камице, Константина Даласина Дуке, а могуће и Константина Кекавмена, йроийн овелисима и дуке.