

Book Reviews

Nada Zečević, *The Tocco of the Greek Realm: Nobility, Power and Migration in Latin Greece (14th-15th Centuries)* (Belgrade: Mankart, Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Eastern Sarajevo, 2014), 244 p.

The Tocco of the Greek Realm by Nada Zečević is the first specific study of the Tocco family, and their time as rulers in 14th and 15th century Greece and represents an important advance on the work of Donald M. Nicol and others.¹ The Tocco family originated from the Kingdom of Naples eventually moving into the Balkans as part of the Angevin attempts to claim the Imperial throne in Constantinople. As Angevin power declined the Tocco were able to act as their own independent lordship pursuing their own ambitions and plans in order to create a powerful “state” under the stewardship of Carlo I Tocco. Although after his death their domains were weakened the Tocco stayed in the region until, like the other small lordships in the Balkans, they were eventually swept up by the Ottoman conquest of the late 15th century.

Zečević analyses the family through their long-term history. She believes that the routes of Tocco lordship can be traced to their rise to prominence in Angevin Naples as part of the Guelph faction during their conflict with the Ghibellines. This Angevin influence continued into the courts of Carlo I, Carlo II and Leonardo III Tocco. They applied Neapolitan institutions and practices to their governments. Their courts were based on Angevin titles such as *vicarius*, *mastro rationalis*, *tresurerius*, *procurator*, and contained many Neapolitans who would have been familiar with Angevin governance. It can therefore be surmised that the Tocco lordships were heavily influenced by the Angevins, and the political culture of Naples. However when one analyses the work of Christopher Wright on the Gattilusio of Lesbos and the similarities between Gattilusio and Tocco

1. Donald MacGillivray Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros 1267-1479* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

lordship one can question the extent to which Angevin Naples actually affected the lordship of Carlo I, Carlo II and Leonardo III.² The Tocco arguably had more in common with the other Italian Lordships in the late Medieval Balkans such as the Zaccaria, Acciaioli and Gattilusio than they did with their Angevin suzerains suggesting they were part of a greater movement that existed in the 14th and 15th century Balkans.

According to Zečević one of Carlo I's greatest moments, when he was granted the title of δεσποτής by the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, may have an Angevin influence. The title of *Despotus Romaniae* was used by the Angevin princes of Taranto and the Orsini family in the 14th century as a result of the marriages to the daughters of Nikephoros I Komnenos Doukas the Despot of Epiros. This would suggest that the title used by Carlo was a re-appropriation of those used by the Latin lords rather than an exclusive title granted by imperial authority. Zečević questions whether Carlo was first granted the title by the Byzantines and then used it to infer the legacy of the Angevins and the Orsini, or whether he appropriated the Angevin title first and persuaded the emperor to confirm it "officially." However, there is some evidence in the *Cronaca dei Tocco* to suggest a deeper Byzantine influence over this title.³ At the same time that Carlo was granted the title of δεσπότης his brother Leonardo II was also bestowed the title of μέγας κοντόσταυλος and they were both made *Κατακουζηνάτοι*, essential members of the emperor's family clan. This suggests that the title could have been of Byzantine rather than Angevin origin since Manuel II felt it appropriate to make the Tocco brothers titular members of his family rather than just acknowledging their claim to a "foreign" title. It should be noted though that the *Cronaca dei Tocco* is of Greek origin and so this may have clouded the judgement of the intricacies of the title.

Another aspect of the Tocco that Zečević analyses in some detail is that of their Italian and Catholic identity. The retention of these

2. Christopher Wright, *The Gattilusio Lordships and the Aegean World 1355-1462* (Leiden and Boston MA: Brill, 2014).

3. *Cronaca dei Tocco di Cefalonia di Anonimo*, ed. Giuseppe Schirò, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 10 (Rome: Academia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1975).

identities by the Tocco has long been debated and is seen as an interesting part of their character. Perhaps this is most clearly seen from the fact that the Leonardo III Tocco and his family were able to effortlessly reintegrate into Neapolitan society despite the fact that he had been raised in Akarnania and ruled his domains from the Ionian Islands. This suggests that the Italian identity of his family continued to permeate throughout the generations despite the physical connection to Italy having been severed. A major reason for this can be seen yet again from the personnel of the courts of the Tocco lords. The comprehensive appendices list many prominent Italians under the services of the three Tocco lords, many of whom were not Neapolitans suggesting a greater emphasis on an Italian connection rather than solely an Angevin Neapolitan one. Many humanist scholars of the day came to Carlo II's court, most notably Cyriac of Ancona the renowned antiquarian who visited Arta on several occasions to look at the ancient walls and inscriptions. Their presence would have created a much more vibrant court, similar to those of Renaissance Italy, and would have had a profound influence over those who were members of them. The Catholic faith of the Tocco lords is also an important part of their identity. Nicol suggests that it is probable that Esau Buondelmonti converted to Greek Orthodoxy, though there is no suggestion that the Tocco followed a similar path. Leonardo III's marriage to Milica Branković is a key example of how he retained his Catholic faith and identity. Zečević suggests that marriage into the family of the former Serbian Despots and their Orthodox faith was part of a strategy by Leonardo to win over his Orthodox subjects. However as she points out the matrimonial contract between the two and Leonardo's clearly very close relationship to the Papacy, who granted him aid and support against the Ottomans along with patronage over the church of St. Demetrius on the island of Santa Maura, show that he clearly identified as an Italian Catholic. Whereas the extent of the Angevin identity of the Tocco is still up for debate, their Italian and Catholic identity is clearly apparent.

Another of Zečević's strengths is her analysis of the other members of the Tocco family, who have until recently been neglected by historians. The family's rise to power under Guglielmo Tocco as

governor of Corfu has remained largely forgotten as has the establishment of Tocco power in the Ionian Islands under his son Leonardo I Tocco. She also mentions the rather shadowy figure of Antonio Tocco, the youngest brother of Leonardo III, who successfully reconquered Cephalonia in the early 1480's and re-established Tocco rule until he was murdered and removed either by the disgruntled local population or at the whim of the Venetians. By taking a long-term approach to the history of the Tocco family, rather than just focusing on Carlo I, Carlo II and Leonardo III, Zečević places these largely-ignored members of the Tocco family in their correct position as part of the greater family success. Her analysis of the structures of government and the role of the kin-based administration under Carlo I, particularly his strained relationship with his brother Leonardo II, help to understand how he was able to control large swathes of territory with relatively few people. After Carlo I died this kin-based lordship was fragmented as a result of his will that divided up his domains and the conflict between Carlo II Tocco and the illegitimate sons of Carlo I in the 'Tocco Civil War' over who was to be head of the family.

Zečević has brought the Tocco lords into much greater focus. Her analysis of their Angevin, Catholic and Italian identities has helped to further our understanding not only of their character but also of the structure of their lordship and its governance. By analysing the family through its long term history one is able to understand the origins of Tocco lordship and place Carlo I and his successes in their proper place amongst the greater successes of the family over the 14th and 15th centuries. This allows further analysis of those who came before Carlo I and those who came after Leonardo III widening the scope on the family and their connection to the Eastern Mediterranean. There is still much work to be done on the Tocco lordships, though Zečević has helped to further our knowledge of the Tocco and their time as rulers in the Balkans. This book is the starting point of more analysis of the Tocco and not the last word.

ROBIN A. SHIELDS

Royal Holloway, University of London