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OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT AND CONTEXT OF ANNA KOMNENE’S ALEXIAD*

This paper deals with Anna Komnene’s ways of conveying important political messages in the Alexiad through observation of the narrative structure and arrangement of the text in some episodes. It offers another way of reading the Alexiad, which could improve our understanding of this crucial historical source of the Byzantine 12th century. With potential new ways of literary and historical analysis of the Alexiad and necessary contextualisation of Anna’s narrative and metanarrative, the significant work of the Komnenian princess emerges as a complex mixture of genres. Anna’s use of epideictic rhetoric presents a starting point for understanding her work. Through the analysis of the three important episodes in the Alexiad, we intend to show various forms of Anna’s literary expression which enable us to reveal the hidden meaning of the text, and its historical, and more importantly, its ideological context.

Key words: Anna Komnene, Anna Dalassene, John II Komnenos, Komnenoi, history, rhetoric, narrative, text, autobiography

Кључне речи: Ана Комнина, Ана Даласин, Јован II Комнина, Комнени, историја, реторика, наратив, текст, аутобиографија

Anna Komnene’s outstanding work on Alexios Komnenos’ reign has recently raised some interesting debates among modern Byzantine scholars, who

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considered the questions of authorship, ideas and literary perspective of this highly biased and politically engaged history. Nevertheless, the scholarly attention – except for the very important articles by D. R. Reinsh, A. Kambylis, P. Magdalino, and V. Stanković crucial analysis of Anna Komnene’s political ideas behind her history, as part of his extensive work on the literary production of the Komnenian epoch – was not focused on the ideological context of the _Alexiad_. In the light of the new approach that has recently been promoted in studies about M. Psellos, M. Attaleiates, N. Bryennios, and N. Choniates, it seems necessary to reconsider Anna Komnene’s work from a purely literary perspective in order to understand its completely subversive political ideology, promoted by the first Komnenian princess.

The pioneers of modern Byzantine studies left us a specific legacy concerning the problems of the _Alexiad_. The issue of Anna’s mixed up chronology was in the focus of the older generations of scholars, since their approach firstly demanded chronological accuracy in order to consider a work plausible. Anna’s work was accused of some chronological, thematic and content inconsistencies, which led to the overlooking of the _Alexiad’s_ main distinction: being a masterpiece of Byzantine literature. A somewhat different approach which considers the literary aspect of Anna’s history is inevitable for understanding Anna’s personal history that appears to be a metanarrative of the _Alexiad_.

A literary approach implies an analysis of Anna’s rhetoric and the way she constructed her narrative. Therefore, the composition of the _Alexiad_ appears to be the crucial starting point in investigation of Anna’s conveyed messages. Nonetheless, some important features of the text structure show us that Anna intentionally used a sequence of events based on the particular theme of the chapter to achieve a special effect on her audience. A look upon the text, and the way it was arranged in some cases, can lead us to some important conclusions on the hidden meaning of Anna’s history.

We have chosen to present some crucial examples of Anna’s narratological and rhetorical mastery that show us clearly the path that should be considered when dealing with such a demanding history as the _Alexiad_.

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1 Anna’s history was reassessed on a very important symposium organised in New York in 2000. The proceedings from this conference were published in the book _Anna Komnene and her Times_, which should be considered as a turning point in contemporary studies of the _Alexiad_.
3 Stanković 2006, Stanković 2007, Stanković 2010
4 To name just a few recent and very important references, among an immense bibliography that is growing daily: Kaldellis 1999, Stanković 2006, Krallis 2012, Neville 2012, Laurizen 2013, Simpson 2013
1. DEATH AND BIRTH OF THE BASILIS ANNA

In Book VI of the *Alexiad*, chapter 7, Anna speaks about astrology in the time of Alexios’ reign (1081–1118). This extensive passage on astrologers is very interesting for various reasons: it provides us with information on this ancient science, on the Byzantine concepts of belief and superstition, and furthermore, it enables us to understand the cultural climate and disposition of the court towards astrology in the time of the Komnenian epoch. It has been recently noted that Anna’s negative disposition towards astrologers was actually her expression of discontent towards her nephew, emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), and his favouring of astrology which flourished during his reign. This important remark leads us to the conclusion that Anna’s writing was intermittently, if not entirely, politically subversive. Anna’s political thought can be defined as a critique of Alexios’ successors, John II (1118–1143) and Manuel I, but also as a praise of herself, which was primarily focused on her claim for Alexios’ heirdom. Anna considered herself as the unique and only “legitimate” Alexios’ heir. She promoted these bold and dangerous thoughts in her history, sometimes plainly, but much more often covertly. Her ways of conveying subliminal messages are of prime interest for us.

In the aforementioned passage, Anna speaks about one important prophecy, which proved to be more inexact than inaccurate. One astrologer prophesied the date of emperor Alexios’ death, but he had been wrong. Nevertheless, something curious did happen on that particular day: the Emperor’s lion that had lived in the palace died. The next prophecy was even more interesting. Again, Alexios did not die, but this time, one of the most important figures in Alexios’ life died, and that was his mother, the empress Anna Dalassene.

5 Alexias 2001, VI 7,1–6 (94.67), 181–183. An interesting analysis of this passage has been offered by Takács 1976, 35–44 and Magdalino 2003, 15–31
6 On astrology in Byzantium see Magdalino 2006, 119–162,
8 Magdalino argues the question of intentional anachronisms in Anna’s history, which could be understood as her means of criticism of the important events or phenomena of Manuel’s reign. – Magdalino (2000), passim. His view could be adopted as a useful pattern for “decoding” Anna’s messages.
9 The question of legitimacy in the Komnenian epoch is a complicated one. Anna’s “legitimacy” as a “chosen successor” of her father, was part of her more fictional than historical political ideology. Her own “imperial right” is, in our case, considered only from Anna Komnenë’s perspective, since it was not attested in the political ideology of John’s and Manuel’s reign. On Anna Komnene’s discourse see Vilimonović 2014, 107–120
“After some considerable time he again foretold the date of the Emperor’s death and was mistaken; yet the Emperor’s mother [his mother], the Empress Anna, died on the very day Catanances had foretold.”

The most important element of this passage is its position in the text. The story of Anna Dalassene’s death does not belong chronologically to this part of Anna’s history at all. The mother of the Komnenoi is mentioned again and for the last time in the events of 1095. It is curious that the story of Anna Dalassene does not have its logical ending in the history of Alexios’ reign, as one might expect, since the emperor’s mother was the crucial figure of the Komnenian insurrection, of the success and establishment of Alexios’ reign. At first, there is no logical explanation of Dalassene’s sudden disappearance from the story. But what is more confusing is the question why Anna mentioned the death of her grandmother in a seemingly casual passage, such as the one on astrologers. There might be an explanation if we reflect upon the structure of the text in this book and the sequence of events, or more precisely, the sequence of the narrative unities. Chapter 7, and the story on astrologers precedes one of the most important autobiographical passages in the whole Alexiad.

In chapter 8, we find the story of birth of Alexios’ three scions – Anna, Maria and John. The mention of Anna Dalassene’s death does not seem as a coincidence at all, since the way she was named is highly indicative. In the Alexiad, we find Anna Dalassene named as mother of the Komnenoi (μητήρ τῶν Κομνηνῶν), which is typical for Book II, in the story of the Komnenian revolt. Anna intentionally called her this way to stress her importance in the revolt, and her unifying and leading role in the Komnenian oikos. Afterwards, we find her as empress (βασιλίς, δέσποινα) and mother (μήτηρ), which signifies her role in Alexios’ reign, where she was indisputably the first and foremost

10 ἐτεθνήκει δ’ ὅμως ἡ βασιλίς Ἄννα καὶ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην ἦν ὁ Κατανάγκης προείπεν Alexias 2001, VI 7,5 (50.51), 182. For English quotations I use E. Dawes’ translation of the Alexiad, with my emendatinois in brackets where I find them important. In this case, literal translation is more useful since it shows the way Anna played with words and their meaning, based on their place in the text. In this sentence, even though we know that it is the Emperor’s mother, Anna’s subject with the imperial title is Anna Dalassene, and not Alexios who is referred to as ἀυτός. I prefer the sentence “his mother, the Empress Anna” as the one that precisely bears Anna’s hidden message, instead of “the Emperors mother, Empress Anna”, since it directs the reader’s attention towards the imperial title of Anna Dalassene, and her basileia.

11 Alexias 2001, X 4,5 (64), 292

12 There is only one article that reconsiders the question of Anna Dalassene’s fall from favour – Runciman, 1949, passim. Nevertheless, V. Stanković dealt with her political role and significance even after the retirement, through thorough analysis of her endowment, the Monastery of Christ Pantepotpes. See Stanković 2006, 327–330, Stanković 2011, 52–56

13 On Anna Dalassene’s role and significance see Stanković 2006, 18–41, 119–128
influential figure in the empire, according to Anna's testimony.¹⁴ We also find her in the text three times as *Anna Dalassene* (ἡ Δαλασσηνὴ Ἄννα),¹⁵ which can be understood in the context of her individual role, as one of the most powerful women of her ages, who acted not only as part of the Komnenian *oikos*, but also as the heiress of her respectful ancestors, and not only for her sons, but also for herself and her own ambitions.¹⁶ It seems to us that these layers of characterisation of Anna Dalassene are possible to detect, since her dominant political role was vital for Anna's own claim for power.¹⁷

It is hardly accidental that the story of the all-powerful Anna Dalassene and Alexios' dependence on her is attested only in the *Alexiad*, where we find a significant amount of diminution of Alexios' political ability, compared to his mother's.¹⁸ Anna's gender awareness should also be noted: she puts forward her grandmother as a unique and undisputed example of women's ability to rule, as equally as men, or even better.¹⁹

All these aspects of the character of Anna Dalassene are crucial for understanding Anna's way of telling a story, or rather, of constructing a narrative. By naming her grandmother in various ways on various occasions, Anna conveyed important messages on the role and ways the most important Komnenian woman exerted power.

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¹⁴ On Anna's messages behind the presentation of Anna Dalassene in the *Alexiad* see – Vilimonović 2014, 259–265

¹⁵ "<...>ἡ μήτηρ τῶν Κομνηνῶν, ἡ Δαλασσηνὴ Ἄννα<...>- "Alexias 2001, II 5,1 (13); "<...>ἡ Δαλασσηνὴ καὶ μήτηρ τῶν ἀριστέων ἐκείνων παιδῶν<...>"- Alexias 2001, II 5,3 (38); "ἡ δὲ Δαλασσηνὴ πρὸς αὐτοὺς<...> " - Alexias 2001, II 5,5 (60)

¹⁶ In this respect, it is interesting to consider Anna Dalassene's politics, as seen in the *Alexiad*, as a satisfaction of her own personal ambitions. Dalassene did act in favour of her sons, that is, in favour of the Komnenian *oikos*, of which she took over the helm to ensure the imperial throne. Nevertheless, her own political ambition to be involved in the imperial politics and to rule led to her joint rule with her son, Alexios I Komnenos. These important, if not crucial, elements of Anna Dalassene's politics significantly change the picture of the ways women could exercise their power. The case of Anna's grandmother was certainly the most favourable for her argument, since Anna Dalassene's influence on her son was indisputable and overwhelming. According to the *Alexiad*, it looks like Anna Dalassene did not act to ensure the throne for her son, but for herself. This embellished picture of the Komnenian mother comes in detail only from Anna Komene. Whether historically accurate or not, it speaks certainly about Anna Komnene's own ambition as heiress of an aberrant woman, but undisputedly the one to be remembered.


¹⁸ One might recall Lemerle well-known evaluation of Alexios as “faible devant les femmes” – Lemerle 1977, 298

¹⁹ Alexias 2001, III 7,1 (14.16), 103. The author's gender is one of the crucial elements of the *Alexiad*'s uniqueness, since it influenced the way certain events and characters were presented. In this regard, it is perfectly understandable why women were the leading figures of the *Alexiad*.
Anna’s ways of referring to her grandmother have proved to be logical and sustainable so far. At this point, the only entitling that was utterly peculiar was in the passage we are dealing with. In the mention of her grandmother’s death, Anna calls her simply basilis Anna. If we consider this problem in the context of the story about astrologers, there is no logical explanation. However, if we look further in the text, some sort of explanation that might be plausible is offered. The story of basilis Anna’s death precedes the story of Anna’s own birth, in which she stressed the importance of being “born in the purple”, and even more importantly, of being included in the imperial acclamations next to the purple-born Constantine Doukas.

The flow of the narrative connects these two stories: the prophecy about Robert Guiscard’s death led to the story about astrologers and the prophecy about Alexios’ death, which lead to the account on Anna Dalassene’s death. Chapter 7 ended with the story of Robert Guiscard’s death which enabled Alexios to return triumphantly to the capital, where he found his empress in labour. Chapter 8 opened with Alexios’ triumph, which announced the most important event for the dynasty: the birth of the first purple-born child, and that child was Anna Komnene. Historically, the sequence of events in this part of the Alexiad should neither have included the mention of Anna Dalassene’s death, nor the birth of the three imperial scions, since these events happened in the lapse of almost one decade. Therefore, we should reconsider Anna’s messages within the context in which all of these events were mentioned, that is, the ideological context that can be deduced from the arrangement of the text in this part of the narrative.

Since Anna Dalassene was mentioned only in this part of the Alexiad as basilis Anna, we should take into account Anna’s tendency of presenting her own ambitions through her grandmother’s achievements. This puzzling naming of Anna Dalassene as basilis Anna obviously stands in this part of the text to indicate its antecedent, which is, after just one passage, the purple-born Anna. The story of the death of basilis Anna should be considered together with the story of Anna’s own birth. The death of her grandmother (even though it happened after Anna was born), stands as a powerful portend of her own birth. 20

20 Anna’s mannerism of connecting with the protagonists, for the purposes of focusing the audience’s attention to herself and her artificially unique position within the imperial oikos, with the use of the possessive pronoun –ἐμός– is used also in relation to Anna Dalassene. Anna connects herself with the powerful mother of the Komnenoi, by designating her as “my grandma” (ἐμὴ μάμμη), in a passage where she lauds the reigning abilities of Anna Dalassene. Only in this passage (Alexias 2001, III 7,2 (11.19), 103), where the praise reaches its climax, Anna chooses to refer to her protagonist with words designating close familial relationship, thus intentionally connecting herself with the picture of the almighty Komnenian mother. –Vilimonović 2014, 255
Anna Dalassene was renowned for her specific designation mother of the Komnenoi and mother of the emperor. A unique mention of basilis Anna suggests Anna Komnene's subliminal message about the preponderance of her birth. Moreover, it reveals Anna's ambition to be the next basilis Anna, and the successor of her almighty grandmother.

Lastly, maybe this interpretation of Anna's text also offers a possible answer to the question of the important and puzzling omission of Anna Dalassene's fall from grace. Anna's silence about the circumstances of Alexios' mother's withdrawal from power is certainly deliberate. Her grandmother presents a pivotal character of the Alexiad and one would expect to find a complete story on her last years where instead total silence lies. Anna's silence has, as a matter of fact, been signified as an important element of her means of conveying subliminal political messages. Her silence in Anna Dalassene's retreat is certainly personal and politically engaged. Anna Komnene probably tucked these events into silence, since a story of the most powerful Komnenian woman did not have a praiseworthy ending in the context of a woman's rule.

The silence that surrounds the faith of Anna Dalassene can be compared to a similar case: the destiny of ex-basilis Maria of Alania. Both of these women were personally important to Anna, and she used them as an argument for her aptitude for the imperial throne, since their political role in the turbulent times before the Komnenian ascent, and in favour to it, was undisputable and even crucial. At least that was what Anna tried to convince us. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Anna was silent about the inglorious end of the political carrier of her grandmother and her untried mother-in-law. On the other hand, she did not refrain from praise when she spoke about their political roles in ensuring the imperial throne for the Komnenoi, wherefore it can be concluded that, for Anna Komnene, only ways in which women could exercise their power with success and admiration were of prime importance. The resounding echo of Anna Dalassene's legacy is clearly shown in Anna's rhetoric of praise addressed to her grandmother, after whom she was named, and whose politics she wished to emulate.

Anna's ambitions were, in this exemplary passage, laconically compiled in the epithet she used in combination with her grandmother's name: she was not renowned as basilisa Anna, but as mother of the Komnenoi, Anna Dalassena, empress, or just simply, mother. That mysterious empress that Anna Komnene

21 Not only in literature, but also in official documents. See Stanković 2006, 122
22 Buckler 1929, 251–256; Leib 1958, passim. The most significant is her silence about John II Komnenos' life and role before 1118, see Stanković (forthcoming). On Anna's criticism and especially her silence as means of creating a complete damnatio memoriae of her brother's role and significance as their father's co-ruler see Vilimonović 2014, 271–288
alludes at actually never came to power. It was rather her wish to be the one, which is apparent precisely from the selected narrative imagery where the death of basilis Anna was superseded by the birth of the purple-born Anna.

2. THE BIRTH OF THE PORPHYROGENITI

Another story that is obviously inconsistent, compared to the surrounding events and the main narrative theme, is the story of the birth of Alexios’ three scions. We should consider this extensive passage as a separate narrative unity belonging to Anna’s autobiography that is interwoven into the main narrative that is, into the story of Alexios’ deeds.

This story speaks about the birth of Anna and Maria Komnene and John Komnenos, and it is centred on Anna’s birth to which John’s birth is juxtaposed. Maria’s birth has a role of conjunction between these two opposing stories: as a passing-by sentence that begins with the word ἐπεί which stands as explanatory mark of the story that immediately follows.

“[Since they beget another daughter]<...>they much desired to have a son as well, and their prayer was granted.”

The choice of the word ἐπεί is very significant since it focuses the reader’s attention on the story that follows. John’s birth presents the story on which the authoress aimed the audience’s attention. What is even more significant is that behind the focus on John’s birth lies Anna’s tendency to compare the story of her own birth with her brother’s. These two stories show an apparent antagonism on various levels. The aesthetic criteria are one of the very important ones. Anna tried to convey the message of her unprecedented resemblance with the father emperor, in contrast to the other children. There is a certain amount of decreasing gradation in the description of the children’s physical likeness with their imperial parents. Anna completely resembled the father-emperor, while Maria resembled her “ancestors”, which is obviously more imprecise than the previous description. On the other hand, John was not compared physically to any of his predecessors. What is even more striking, we are left with a detailed account of his appearance, apparently, for the purposes of criticism.

The description of the physical appearance of the new-born baby, the emperor-to-be, contains important features that suggest a negative disposition

23 ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῖς βασιλεύσι καὶ δεύτερον ἐτέχθη θήλυ, ἀναφέρον μὲν κατὰ τὴν ὄψιν ἐς τοὺς προγόνους, ἐμφαίνον δ’ ἀμα καὶ τὴν ἐσύστερον ἐπιλάμψουσαν αὐτῷ ἀρετήν τε καὶ φρόνισιν, ἐπεπόθουν καὶ ἄρρεν τεκεῖν καὶ διεύχης αὐτοῖς τοῦτ’ ἴν.”Alexias 2001, VI 8,4 (28.31), 185
25 Anna’s protraiture presents a significant literary ploy. Through a form of physical description she introduces simultaneously a description of a moral character. – Laiou 2000, 9
of the authoress towards her younger brother. While all the protagonists in the Alexiad are described in a typical praiseworthy manner, with golden-reddish hair, pale or milky white complexion, and rose cheeks, the description of John is quite far from the lauded esthetical topoi:

“The child had a swarthy complexion, broad forehead, lean cheeks, a nose neither snub nor aquiline but something between the two, very black eyes which betokened, as far as one can judge from an infant’s face, a quick intelligence.”

It is interesting that Anna never spoke about her own physical appearance. She stated that someone else should judge her appearance, not her. Nevertheless, she did leave us an important clue, she wished to be remembered. According to her testimony, she resembled her father completely.

“And at dawn on a Saturday a female child was born to them who was exactly like her father, they said; that child was I.”

In the ideological concept of the Komnenian mosaics, there is one important feature that could be useful for Anna Komnene’s case. Images of men – of fathers and sons, of emperors and their successors – show a significant semblance, indicating an established and predetermined succession line. In the world of imagery, a chosen imperial heir was presented as a heritor of his father’s physical features. Visual culture spoke through images, and physical semblance spoke about state ideology and one’s predestination for the imperial throne. If we consider Anna’s literary work as her most important endowment that speaks of her ideology, not through visual images, but through textual im-

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26 The beautiful characters bestowed with white skin, dazzling eyes, rosy cheeks and blond, golden hair are found in the Byzantine literature from 11th century onwards, as Hatzaki 2009 has pointed out. She wrote on the perception of beauty in art and literature from 11th to 14th century. About established esthetical topoi especially, 8–10

27 See, for example, the descriptions of Constantine Doukas (Alexias 2001, I 12,3 (80.83); III 1,3 (34.41)), Maria of Alania (Alexias 2001, I 2,4 (20.37)) and Irene Doukaina (Alexias 2001, III 3,3 (18.46)). Alexios’ main enemies – Robert and Bohemond – where also described in a lauded manner with the same topoi, which can be explained as a literary means of contributing to Alexios’ magnitude. Only John’s description stands alone in contrast to all the others, which can be understood as Anna’s specific discourse of which the crucial motive was John’s unfitness for imperial throne.

28 τὸδὲ παιδίον μέλαν ἦν τὴν χροιάν, μέτωπον τούτῳ ἐυρῷ, παρειαὶ υπόξηροι, ρίς οὔτε σιμή οὔτε κάμπτουσα πρὸς τὸ γρυπόν, ἀλλὰ μέση πως ἀμφοῖς – ὀφθαλμοί μελάντεροι καὶ τὸ ὑποακαθήμενον ἥθος καὶ ὀξύ, ὥσπον ἐκ βρεφυλλίου σώματος εἰκάσαι. ἐμφαίνοντες.” – Alexias 2001, VI 8,5 (41.45), 185. The adjective μέλας, which suggested of a dark and malignant character, had an especially negative meaning.

29 "τίκτεται τούτοις παιδίον θῆλυ ἐμφερές<...>κατὰ πάντα τῷ πατρί." Alexias 2001, VI 8,1 (85.86), 184

30 Hatzaki 2009, 25–27
ages, then her emphasis on the complete resemblance with the father-emperor suggests an important political message: that only she was the predestined heir of their father.

A passage on her birth bears a lot of ideological motives that are carefully interwoven in the text. Such is the seemingly incidental notion on the great joy of the Doukai family when Anna was born:

“All the ceremonies usual at the birth of an Emperor’s child were performed most lavishly, that is to say, acclamations and presents and honours given at such a time to the heads of the Senate and the army, so that all were more joyful and exultant than ever before and loud in their praises, **especially the Empress’ [blood] relations who could not contain themselves for joy**.”

The description of these lavish ceremonies shows a certain amount of ambiguity when compared to those that followed John’s birth:

“Then you would have seen the palace full of rejoicing and no shadow of sorrow or even care, for all the well-disposed rejoiced from the bottom of their heart, **whilst the others feigned delight.** A people, as a rule, is ill-affected to its rulers, but by much pretence and flattery win the favour of their superiors.”

Anna’s reflexion on the deceptive and fraudulent nature of some people should be taken in the context of her own negative disposition towards this particular event. That **feigned delight** could be understood as her own sentiment, since she ended the story of her birth with the ambiguous statement: “This was perhaps symbolic of what should befall me later, whether it can be called good, or on the contrary, ill fortune.”

She leaves her audience here without a clue on the meaning of her ill fortune, but she did speak about the events that “befell her later”, in the following lines when she described the birth of the first son and heir, John II Komnenos.

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31 Alexias 2001, VI 8,3 (11,16), 184. Here, Anna uses a construction "καθ’ αἷμα προσήκοντες" which is typical for denoting Alexios’ group of closest followers, mostly on the battle field. It is interesting that Irene is presented also as having her own group of closest people, which is emphasised especially in this passage. Anna intentionally stressed this to strengthen once more her close and unique relationship with the Empress mother and with her kinship. That mutual connection with both of the parents, on which Anna persisted, symbolises the idea of her double legitimacy. See Stanković 2006, 202–209. On Anna’s favourisation of the Doukai oikos in the Alexiad see Vilimonović 2014, 140–242

32 "καὶ ἦν ἵδειν τὰ βασιλεία χαρμονής ἀνάπλεω καὶ πένθους οὐδαμοί οὐδ’ ἔτέρας οἰασδηπτον ἑννοιας, τὸν μὲν ἐκ μέσης θαλάμης καρδίας χαϊρόντων υπόσσιενοι, τὸν δὲ συσχηματιζομένων χαϊρειν." Alexias 2001, VI 8,4 (35.38), 185. Anna used μὲν... δὲ to emphasise the antagonism, whilst in the description of the ceremonies that followed her birth there is no use of these particles. Instead, she insists that “everyone” (ἄπαντες) were pleased, but above all (καὶ μάλλον), the Empress’ kinship.

33 "προμάντευμα δὲ ἵδειν τούτῳ τῶν ἔμοι ξιμπεσόντων ἦν ἐπιτε χαϊρημάτων ἐπι τοῦμαλιν δυστυχημάτων" Alexias 2001, VI 8,3 (26.28), 185
The whole narrative unity ends with the story of John's baptism and crowning in the church of Hagia Sophia. From the literary perspective, we could divide Anna's narration in the following way:

1. Exposition – when Anna opens the story of her birth;
2. Complication – when Anna describes the ceremonies that followed her birth and her place in the imperial acclamations jointly with Alexios' co-ruler, the purple-born Constantine Doukas;
3. Climax – represents the birth of the "much desired" son and heir;
4. Resolution – ends in raising "this child to the rank of Emperor".

When viewed as a separate narrative unity, this important passage carries a lot of crucial political messages\(^{34}\) that were focused on Anna's claim for the imperial throne, based on the events and circumstances of her birth. The story of her birth presents one of the typical examples of *basilikos logos* prologue, which is usually reserved for the story of birth and origin.\(^{35}\) Anna's own birth is described in a highly flattering manner, where the stress is laid on her likeness to her father, with an almost magical connection to him while she had been waiting in her mother's womb for the emperor's return. The simultaneous occurrence of these events – Alexios' triumphant return and Anna's birth – conveys the message of Anna's almost transcendental predetermination for the imperial throne. Her predestined *basileia* was confirmed once more in her binding to the purple-born Constantine Doukas, and his imperial legacy.\(^{36}\)

The story of Maria's birth presents a conjunction between the two opposing stories. Maria's birth followed Anna's, and this is convenient in a literary sense, since it conceals an overt comparison of Anna's and John's birth. The story of Maria's birth is not as descriptive as those of Anna's and John's, which leaves us with an impression of a passing-by story. The most interesting indicator that refers to Anna's intentional way of constructing this narrative unit is the silence about the birth of all the other purple-born children of the imperial couple. This clearly suggests Anna's intention not to speak about the birth of Alexios' and Irene's children and to tell the story of the right she gained by her birth, of which she was deprived with the birth of John Komnenos. The story of her birth is concluded with the birth of John Komnenos, which chronologically does not pertain to this part of the narrative, but contextually completely fulfils the intention of Anna Komnene to conclude the story of the "ill fortunes that befell her" after her birth with the story of John's coronation.

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\(^{34}\) Stanković (forthcoming), 7–10, analysed Anna's narration on John's coronation and on subtle, but probably intentional, omissions she made.

\(^{35}\) Men. Rhet 1981, 80–82

\(^{36}\) On the role and significance of Constantine Doukas in the *Alexiad* see Stanković 2006, 33–34; Stanković 2007, passim; Vilimonović 2014, 194–209
3. THE BIRTH OF THE EMPEROR'S TWINS

The third story we chose to analyse in order to show Anna's use of textual and narrative construction for the purposes of a political manifesto is the account of the birth of John II's children. This notion appears quite suddenly in the narrative and at first it seems to bear no significant meaning. However, if we consider the meagre amount of John's presence in the history of Alexios' reign, than this information appears to be of prime importance:

"Whilst he was journeying to Thessalonica, the first son of the prince [basileus] John Porphyrogenitus was born at Balabista and a little girl was born at the same time."37

This sole information on the birth of John's twins raises many questions, such as: Why were his children born outside the capital, and the purple-room? Was it dangerous for his wife, Irene Piroshka to stay alone in the capital? Why did Anna choose to mention this occurrence so important for the dynasty in such a restrained manner? The most important question for us is the third question that could also provide possible answers for the first two.

The starting point for our argument presents the fact that Anna did feel the need to mention this event, even though she could have kept it silence, as she had done with almost all the events that concerned John Komnenos. What seems as the authoress' intentional criticism towards her brother is the mention of the unflattering circumstance for the young emperor-to-be that his first born son was born outside the capital, and what is even more important, that he was not a purple-born.38While Anna in this passage referred to John as porphyrogennetos and basileus, apart from designating his son as a “first-born”, she did not add any of the expected imperial epithets for his son. Apparently, for Anna Komnene it was of greatest importance to prevent this disparaging circumstance about the birth of the John's successor from falling into oblivion.39

37 "ἐν δὲ τῷ τὴν πρὸς Θεσσαλονίκην ἀνύειν ἐτέχθη ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ πορφυρογεννήτου καὶ βασιλέως Ἰωάννου κατὰ τὴν Βαλαβίσταν συνεπαγόμενος ἐν τῷ τίκτεσθαι καὶ ἕτερον θήλυ." Alexias 2001, XII 4,4 (42.44), 370
38 All of his children were born before 1118, before John's ascent to the throne. Nevertheless, all of his children were praised as purple-born children. See, Stanković 2006, 94. In this respect, it is rather curious but highly indicative that Anna precisely chose to mention that John's first-born son was born away from Constantinople and the Great palace.
39 Anna's play with words and meanings is interesting especially when she defines the rule and nature of a history. She stresses that she wrote the history of Alexios' deeds to prevent them from falling into oblivion. After thorough reassessment of Anna's work it is clear that she actually wrote her personal history about her imperial right to prevent it from being forgotten. For a look behind the history writing in the 12th-century Byzantium with special emphasis on Nykephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene see Stanković 2006, 191–196; Stanković 2010,
In this way, her seemingly casual intrusion into the text with the information on the birth of John’s twins emerges as a means of mockery of John’s scions who were deprived of the right to be born in the purple-room of Constantinople, and, therefore, bereft of being immediately predestined for the imperial throne, as Anna was, according to her own testimony and the circumstances of her birth, which were presented as a paradigm of the proper imperial birth. What is even more indicative is Anna’s way of entitling her brother, whom she deliberately in her history avoided to designate as basileus. In this sentence, she used precisely this term, as it contributed even more to Anna’s subversive intention to mock her brother and the fact that his first-born son was not a purple-born, that is, that he was not a Constantinopolitan. It is interesting that Anna did not mention the birth of the rest of John’s children, who were born in Constantinople. The intention here seems to be only for contemptuous reasons.

The argument about the derogatory meaning behind this story can be supported with a look upon the following text, where Anna describes the incident that occurred in Constantinople, when Alexios (and probably John with him) returned to the capital,

“Suddenly a very violent southwest wind arose, blew this statue (*of Constantine the Great) off its pedestal and hurled it to the ground, the sun was then in the sign of the Bull. Most interpreted this as a bad omen, especially the Emperor’s ill wishers; for they whispered that this accident portended the Emperor’s death. <…>”

In this part of the text, the way Anna sequenced the events is of prime importance: after the birth of John’s children, on their return to the capital, a statue of Constantine the Great, the founder of the city, fell and broke. This part of the narrative gives an impression of a bad omen that immediately followed the birth of John’s twins. This way, Anna provided the story of the birth with an important “miraculous” event indispensable for every basilikos logos. Anna’s rhetorical mastery in this case shows clearly how she used a miraculous but also a “bad omen” not to favour John’s twins through the form of basilikos logos, but to scorn them through the form of psogos, that is, the rhetoric of blame.

passim and Stanković 2011, passim. On the importance of history for Anna Komnene see Vilimonović 2014, 22–36
40 She used other forms instead – Vilimonović 2014
41 The rise of the Komnenian oikos started as soon as they became “Constantinopolitans”. Relations with clients and kinship they made in the capital were crucial for their subsequent rise and for the success of their establishment on the imperial throne. See Stanković 2006, passim.
42 Alexias 2001, XII 4,5 (56.60), 370
CONCLUSION

The three chosen examples offer a new and conceivable approach towards Anna Komnene’s “history”, which appears to be rather a mixture of genres⁴³ and a compound of different narratives. Its literary and rhetorical complexity calls for another sort of approach which would include a necessary contextualisation of separate narrative units, and the understanding of the way Anna structured her text. Sometimes, only a sequence of narrative “images” would reveal the hidden meaning of the text, and bring Anna’s conveyed political messages to the surface. Anna’s rhetoric of praise and blame presents the crucial element for understanding her composite work which can be defined as history only in terms of a personal history. The intent and purpose of the work lead to the conclusion that it was composed to prevent Anna’s personal history, or rather, her political manifesto, from falling into oblivion. For us, a new way of investigating Anna’s written message that calls for a complete deconstruction of her narrative is of prime importance in order to decode the crucial elements of the Alexiad’s metanarrative.

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⁴³ For the question of genre and literary aspect of Anna Komnene’s work see Reinsch 2000, passim; Ljubarskij 2000, passim; and Anna’s rhetoric of lament Quandahal-Jarratt 2008, passim; Neville 2013, passim; Vilimonović 2014, 124–140

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РАЗМАТРАЊА О ТЕКСТУ И КОНТЕКСТУ АЛЕКСИЈАДЕ
АНЕ КОМНИН

Алексијада Ане Комин представља у жанровском погледу једно комплексно дело, што изискује нужну потрагу за новим приступима њеном изучавању. Најзначајнији метод представља деконструисање и тумачење Аниног наратива, као и издвајање метанаратива, односно „велике приче“.

Начин на који је Ана структурисала свој текст пружа подстицај за преиспитивање старих приступа и отвара нове могућности, због чега смо овакав приступ искористили на примеру три веома значајне епизоде Алексијаде – вест о смрти Ане Даласин, рођење Алексијеве и Иринине деце и рођење Јованових близанаца. Ове, наизглед неповезане приче заједно припадају једном истом метанаративу који је заправо Анина лична прича, односно њена лична историја о њеном царском праву и неоспорном, двоструком, легитимитету. Наизглед успутне вести, управо по свом месту у тексту, и према догађајима који следе у нарацији, показују да служе у сврхе преношења порука, не само путем отворених искaza, већ и путем изгледа самог текста и Аниног начина слагања „наративних слика“, односно наративних целина.

Једин другачији и посве нови приступ, који служи да се разуме идеолошка, а не само историјска позадина дела, подразумева тумачење Алексијаде и као ремек-дela византијске књижевности, што износи у први план истраживања Анина реторски израз и њен аутобиографски дискурс.