

= John Komnenos Asen =

John Komnenos Asen (Bulgarian : ????? ?????? , Yoan Komnin Asen ; Greek : ??????? ??????? , I?ann?s Komn?nos Asan?s ; Serbian : ?????? ?????? , Jovan Komnin Asen) was the ruler of the Principality of Valona from circa 1345 to 1363 , initially as a Serbian vassal and after 1355 as a largely independent lord . Descended from high @-@ ranking Bulgarian nobility , John was a brother of both Tsar Ivan Alexander of Bulgaria and Helena of Bulgaria , the wife of Tsar Stephen Du?an of Serbia . Perhaps in search of better opportunities , he emigrated to Serbia , where his sister was married . There , he was granted the title of despot by Stephen Du?an , who placed him in charge of his territories in modern south Albania .

As the despot of Valona , John established commercial ties with Venice and Ragusa , and he became a citizen of the former in 1353 . After the death of Du?an in 1355 , he took the side of the unsuccessful Simeon Uro? in the ensuing conflict for the Serbian throne . With Venetian assistance , John maintained the essentially independent status of the Principality of Valona . He probably died of the plague in 1363 and he was succeeded by Alexander Komnenos Asen , who was likely his son from his unknown first wife . John 's second marriage was to the former Epirote queen @-@ consort Anna Palaiologina .

= = Origin and Serbian vassalage = =

While the birth date of John Komnenos Asen is unknown , his origin is clearly documented in the sources . On both sides , he descended from the highest ranks of 14th @-@ century Bulgarian nobility . He was born to Keratsa Petritsa , a daughter of despot Shishman of Vidin , and Sratsimir , the despot of Kran . John 's mother was a descendant of the Asen dynasty as a grand granddaughter of Tsar Ivan Asen II . His siblings were Ivan Alexander , who would ascend to the Bulgarian throne in 1331 , and Helena , who married Serbian ruler Stephen Du?an in 1332 . Even though John was commonly referred to as a Komnenos in the sources , his relations to that Byzantine family are rather scarce . He had rights to that name either through his mother 's descent from the Asens , themselves related to the Komnenoi , or through his marriage to Anna Palaiologina .

It is uncertain as to exactly why John emigrated to Serbia instead of assuming a high @-@ ranking position in Bulgaria , as his ancestry and family ties would suggest . Bulgarian historian Ivan Bozhilov is of the opinion that John was not seeking political refuge in Serbia . Instead , it is most likely that he moved to that country with the belief that Serbia 's territorial expansion and political influence in that period would secure him better career opportunities . Presumably , John accompanied his sister Helena when she moved to Serbia to marry Stephen Du?an in 1332 .

John was first mentioned as the despot of Valona in 1350 and his documented presence in the Albanian lands only dates to 1349 . However , he was most likely bestowed the title as early as 1345 or 1346 , when Stephen Du?an was proclaimed Emperor (Tsar) . American scholar John Fine believes this happened immediately after Stephen Du?an 's coronation in 1346 . Along with Stephen Du?an 's half @-@ brother , Simeon Uro? , and Jovan Oliver , John was one of three people to bear that title under Stephen Du?an .

John was installed as ruler of Valona in late 1345 , in the wake of the Serbian conquest of south Albania from the Byzantine Empire , which was concluded no later than August 1345 . Besides the Adriatic port of Valona (modern Vlorë) , John 's appanage included nearby Kanina and the inland castle of Berat to the northeast . Other than that , the extent of his domain is uncertain . Estimates of the area John ruled over range from all of central Albania to only the three cities mentioned , with the rest remaining under the government of local Albanian nobility , who owed allegiance either to John or to Stephen Du?an directly . To the south , John 's appanage bordered on the lands of Simeon Uro? , the ruler of Epirus .

= = Relations with Venice and independence = =

In 1349 , John plundered a Venetian commercial ship which had been shipwrecked on the coast he controlled , in accordance with the medieval principle of *jus naufragii* . This act necessitated the involvement of Stephen Dušan in order to settle the dispute between Venice and John , as evidenced by an official document from 13 April 1350 . Despite this conflict , under John the Principality of Valona was an active partner of Venice and Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik) in maritime commerce . Two receipts from 27 April 1350 document John 's role as a mediator in cattle , sugar and pepper trade and reveal that he received significant income from the Valona customs . The customs was profitable because the port was often visited by merchant ships . Even though all of these documents were written in Slavic , John signed his name in Greek , which testifies to his Hellenisation . At the time , John also had ties with the Mamluk rulers of Egypt , who addressed him as ? King of Serbia and Bulgaria ? in correspondence .

In 1353 , John and his family were granted Venetian citizenship , which hints that his domain was under the protection of Venice . The premature death of Stephen Dušan in 1355 plunged the Serbian Empire into civil war . In that conflict , John took the side of his wife 's son @-@ in @-@ law Simeon Uro? against the legitimate successor Stephen Uro? , who was Stephen Dušan 's son and Simeon Uro? 's nephew . While Simeon 's attempt at taking the throne was ill @-@ fated and Stephen Uro? even captured Berat in 1356 , John managed to preserve his remaining lands and became independent from both Simeon and Stephen Uro? . The threat of Nikephoros II Orsini , who was gaining ground in Thessaly and Epirus , forced John to request the dispatch of a Venetian warship and an administrator from Venice to take control of his domain , to which the republic obliged .

Bulgarian historian Hristo Matanov conjectures that after 1355 , John may have minted his own coinage intended for trade with partners outside the inner Balkans . He bases this theory on a new reading of several Latin @-@ language coin inscriptions as *Monita despoti Ioanni* instead of *Monita despoti Oliveri* , as previously thought . The new reading , which would identify the coins as being minted by John , was proposed by Yugoslav numismatist Nedeljkovi? , who rejects the initial attribution of these coins to Jovan Oliver .

A commercial document from 30 January 1359 , which testifies to John 's continuing trade relations with Venice , is chronologically the last reference to his activity in contemporary sources . While the date of his death was not recorded , it is likely that John perished during the plague epidemic which hit Valona and Durazzo (today Durrës) in 1363 .

= = Family = =

John 's first marriage probably dates to after his arrival in Serbia , though the identity of his first wife , if any , is unknown . If the next ruler of Valona , Alexander Komnenos Asen , was his son , then he would have been born circa 1346 ? 1348 , as he was already an adult in 1363 ? 1366 . This would place John 's potential first marriage a few years before Alexander 's estimated birth . Around 1350 ? 1355 , John married Anna Palaiologina , a granddaughter of Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos and a widow of John II Orsini , the despot of Epirus . This marriage to an Epirote noblewoman consolidated and legitimised John 's position in the region . Besides Alexander , another very likely child of John Komnenos Asen was a certain Komnena , the wife of Bal?a II who had succeeded Alexander as ruler of Valona in early 1372 .