

Panspermía and the *Romaíoi*:
Performative Ethnicity and the Weaponisation of Space in
Byzantium's Post-Imperial Networks, c.1190–1235.



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Short Abstract

Panspermia and the *Romaioi*: Performative Ethnicity and the Weaponisation of Space in Byzantium's Post-Imperial Networks, c.1190–1235.

This thesis addresses a roughly forty-five-year period of intense transition and change as witnessed by a single generation, and its reception by the one that followed. In the period of study (c.1190–c.1235), the unified political state of a predominantly Greek-speaking Orthodox people of the Medieval Roman Empire, known conventionally as Byzantium, fragmented into rival and often warring polities. Secession, particularism, and rebellion following the end of the direct imperial Komnenoi dynasty in 1183 was exacerbated by the Latin Conquest of Constantinople and the establishment of Catholic Crusader principalities across the Balkans and Aegean Islands. The sack of 1204 is often viewed as an end, or at least an interlude, to the imperial narrative. However, many individuals followed careers and held positions before and after the Latin conquest and the social networks which produced our authors and authorities survived and persisted even in an altered form into the age of exile and fragmentation.

Within that milieu, this thesis explores the rhetoric and language employed to the notions of ethnicity, identity, and its implications. It studies word choices, literary devices, and the construction of identities of opposition as defined by similarity and difference. Through a series of case studies of Constantinople, Paphlagonia, and Epiros, this thesis investigates the relationship between those who have their Roman identity removed and become something else entirely. Through an intertextual reading of epistles, documents of synods, seals, inscriptions and hagiography, it discusses the process of otherization, its criteria, and its aims. The thesis also casts light on some neglected source material, such as an inscription from 1193/94. By comparing this epigraph with other sources, the thesis moves ethnic discourse from the elite audience into the public domain.

Long Abstract

Panspermia and the *Romaioi*: Performative Ethnicity and the Weaponisation of Space in Byzantium's Post-Imperial Networks, c.1190–1235.

This thesis addresses a roughly forty-five-year period of intense transition and change as witnessed by a single generation, and its reception by the one that followed. In the period of study (c.1190–c.1235), the unified political state of a predominantly Greek-speaking Orthodox people of the Medieval Roman Empire, known conventionally as Byzantium, fragmented into rival and often warring polities. Secession, particularism, and rebellion following the end of the direct imperial Komnenoi dynasty in 1183 was exacerbated by the Latin Conquest of Constantinople and the establishment of Catholic Crusader principalities across the Balkans and Aegean Islands. Within historiography, it is not common to treat this period as one of continuity. The sack of 1204 is often viewed as an end, or at least an interlude, to the imperial narrative. However, many individuals followed careers and held positions before and after the Latin conquest and the social networks which produced our authors and authorities survived and persisted even in an altered form into the age of exile and fragmentation.

Within that milieu, this thesis studies the rhetoric and language employed to the notions of ethnicity, identity, and its implications. It studies word choices, literary devices, and the construction of identities of opposition as defined by similarity and difference. Frequently, the authors studied in this thesis self-identified as 'Romans.' This was, however, only one among several ethnonyms and was not exclusive to any of the reduced polities which claimed continuity with Byzantium. In a similar vein, modern historiography's own engagement with Byzantine Romanness has continued to divide the field. This thesis hypothesises and adopts the contention that even in pre-1204 Constantinople there had escalated the process of social stratification known as 'Constantinopolitan Exclusivism. This exclusivism, which prioritised birthplace and familial descent, as well as the learned characteristics of language and dialect, education, customs, and loyalty to either macro or micro figures of authority was a product of twelfth-century Byzantium's increasingly closed society. That social stratification continued as a rhetorical, and arguably political, element beyond the fall in 1204. Within the disunited Byzantine world some people were considered 'more Roman' than others. As the first section of this thesis will discuss, in Byzantine rhetoric some people ceased to be considered Roman; and the second and third sections will demonstrate that entire regions could cease to be included within it.

This thesis aims to fill the gap of the scholarship of thirteenth-century Byzantium, which lacks an authoritative study of changes in the rhetorical construction of ethnicity in the context and reception of the broader generation that witnessed the Fourth Crusade. It has engaged with primary materials for which critical editions are either outdated or completely absent and whose literary studies are, with some exceptions, mostly limited to overviews and registers. The explosion of scholarly focus on the literature and material culture of the twelfth century, has been matched in recent years by the studies of Palaiologan culture. This is without even mentioning the growth of Byzantine identity studies. The thirteenth century, meanwhile, despite being increasingly well-served by studies of political ideology, networks, and sources in translation, has remained bereft of detailed modern studies which go beyond the milieu of Nikaia-Constantinople, where our main narratives derive. Through a series of case studies in Constantinople, Nikaia and Paphlagonia, and most substantively in Epiros this thesis discusses the methods and motivations through which people(s) unbecame Roman in the eyes of their

contemporaries. Through reinventions of history, geography, and language, this thesis studies the contraction of Romanness. It does so not by treating Roman identity as an ethnic term but as a qualified and multi-layered identity which became increasingly politicised.

The methodology applied by this thesis to the study of ethnicity in Byzantine dialogue is ‘social constructionist’ building upon such classic studies as Fredrik Barth’s *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (1969) and the sociological school that followed. With Barth and his successors’ research focus on boundaries and identity performance and change upheld, ethnicity is established as something fluid and contextually moving. Therefore, the study of inclusion as part of a Byzantine *Romaíoi* ‘Roman’ community vs exclusion into an ethnic other becomes a constantly changing element of Byzantine discourse. A discussion of the most critical terms used for ethnic discourse is presented alongside the methodology. As demonstration of developing usage of language, a hereto unstudied term in Byzantine rhetoric, the *panspermía* is discussed. A classical term revived in the twelfth-century court poetry of Manuel I Komnenos’ reign, yet expanding ultimately into epistolography and hagiography, *panspermía* refers to the amorphous ethnic enemy of Orthodox Romanness. With no strict boundaries, it allowed authors to place certain peoples within a conceptualised barbarian world that ‘mixed’ together many ethnic groups.

Section One establishes the cultural milieu of Constantinople before 1204. It offers a new edition and first translation of an overlooked 1193/94 inscription from Kavala, Byzantine Christoupolis. The inscription, which declares the Paphlagonians to have brought ruin to the empire, discusses the legacy of Andronikos Komnenos. The role of the Mesaritai family, key supporters of Andronikos, is then presented as they too sought to blame external causes for Constantinople’s decline. Nicholas Mesarites’ narration of an attempted coup in 1200 is discussed for its attempt to present elite Byzantines themselves as ‘unmixed’ and opposed by the entire world outside their gates.

Section Two traces changes to Nikaian society as refugees from Constantinople reconciled themselves to living amongst provinces they had recently decried. Discussing the insistence upon shared language, it presents the changes to group identity necessitated by the loss of the capital. Through a presentation of epigraphic and rhetorical material, a war with Andronikos’ grandson in Paphlagonia allowed for a reimagining of future ethnic groupings. Nikaian use of *panspermía* is discussed as qualified by their understanding of language groups.

Section Three meanwhile offers a balanced discussion between Nikaia and Epiros, their main Greek-speaking rival. Epiros, the only contemporary which produced substantial texts in the immediate decades after 1204 developed a substantially different political ideology. The Balkans, with all its linguistic variation, could never afford to rhetorically group its neighbours into such a hostile bloc. Instead, Epiros’ expansion and attempted rebuilding of the Byzantine Balkan peninsula had to project itself as more inclusive, linguistically diverse, and ecumenical. This thesis, establishing Epiros’ ability of doing so through synods, hagiography, and a reimagining of the Archbishop of Ohrid lastly considers how to its opponents, Epiros lost its Romanness, its Greek-speaking character, and became itself a *panspermía*. That narrative of lost rhetorical plurality forms the basis of the thesis’ conclusions.

As a contribution to the growth of identity studies in Byzantium and the wider Middle Ages, this thesis aims to offer new perspectives on underappreciated evidence. Its conclusions are discussed in a framework of constantly negotiated and redefined ethnic groups. It presents multiple translations of underexploited sources relating to the period before and after the 1204

collapse, while offering a new perspective to our understanding of the layers of a constructed Byzantine identity. Through inter-textual and inter-material comparisons it traces the shift in ethnic othering from classical antiquarianism to outright politically and ecclesiastically-charged indictment.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Reference
<i>AI</i>	Kazimir Popkonstantinov, <i>Starobălgarski nadpisi. Albulgarische Inschriften</i> , 1–2 (Die Slawischen Sprachen, 36, 52), (Salzburg, 1994–1997).
<i>API</i>	<i>Ἀρχεῖον Πόντου</i> .
<i>Analecta Sacra</i>	<i>Analecta sacra et classica Spicilegio solesmensi parata</i> , ed. Pitra, <i>Juris ecclesiastici graecorum selecta paralipomena</i> , (Paris, 1891).
<i>Akropolites</i>	George Akropolites, ed. Augustus Heisenberg, <i>Georgii Acropolitae Opera</i> , I, (Leipzig, 1903); trans. Ruth Macrides, <i>George Akropolites: The History</i> , (Oxford, 2007).
<i>Apokaukos, 'Epirotica'</i>	Vasil Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica saeculi XIII,' <i>Vizantijski Vremennik</i> , 3 (1896), 233–299.
<i>BF</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i> .
<i>Chomatenos, Vita Clementis</i>	Demetrios Chomatenos, ed. Alexander Milev, <i>Grutskite žitija na Kliment Okhridski</i> , (Sofia, 1966), 174–182.
<i>CV</i>	Nikephoros Blemmydes, ed. Joseph A. Munitiz, <i>Nicephori Blemmydae Autobiographia sive curriculum vitae</i> , (Turnhout, 1984); trans. Joseph A. Munitiz, <i>A Partial Account</i> , (Leuven, 1988).
<i>Δελτίον</i>	<i>Δελτίον τῆς Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Ἐθνογικῆς Ἑταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος</i> .
<i>Disputatio</i>	Jeff Brubaker, <i>The Disputatio of the Latins and the Greeks, 1234</i> , (Liverpool, 2022).
<i>DOC</i>	Michael Hendy, <i>Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection</i> , Vol. 4.2, (Washington D.C., 1999).
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> .
<i>DOSeals</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Seals Catalogue</i> . [https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals].
<i>EEBΣ</i>	<i>Ἐπετηρίδες – Ἑταιρεία Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν</i> .
<i>Ephraim "Epiros" Dossier</i>	Ephraim of Ainos, ed. Immanuel Bekker, <i>Chronographia</i> , (Bonn, 1840). Christian Gastgeber, 'Das "Epiros"-Dossier im Codex Vindobonensis theologicus graecus 276,' <i>JÖB</i> , 66 (2016), 61–110.
<i>Exile</i>	Michael Angold, <i>A Byzantine Government in Exile. Government and Society under the Laskarids of Nicaea</i> , (Oxford, 1975).
<i>Germanos II</i>	Spyridon Lagopates, ed. <i>Γερμανὸς ὁ Β' Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινοπόλεως-Νικαίας</i> , (Tripolis, 1913); trans. Michael Angold, <i>Germanos II, Patriarch of Constantinople</i> , (Liverpool, 2024).
<i>Kinnamos</i>	John Kinnamos, ed. August Meineke, <i>Epitome</i> , (Bonn, 1836); trans. Charles Brand, <i>Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus</i> , (New York, 1976).
<i>JÖB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i> .
<i>Lambropoulos</i>	Kosmas Lambropoulos, <i>Ιωάννης Απόκαυκος, Συμβολή στην έρευνα του βίου και του συγγραφικού έργου του</i> , (Athens, 1988).
<i>Lament</i>	Eustathios of Thessaloniki, ed. and trans. John Melville Jones, <i>The Capture of Thessaloniki</i> , (Canberra, 1988).
<i>MB</i>	Constantine Sathas, <i>Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη</i> , 7 vols., (Athens, 1972–1894).
<i>MC, Epistulae</i>	Michael Choniates, ed. Foteini Kolovou, <i>Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae</i> , (Berlin, 2001).

Abbreviation	Reference
<i>Monumenta Bulgarica</i>	Thomas Butler, <i>Monumenta Bulgarica</i> , (Ann Arbor, 1996).
<i>NC, CD</i>	Niketas Choniates, ed. Jan Louis van Dieten, <i>Historia</i> , (Berlin, 1975); trans. Harry Magoulias, <i>O City of Byzantium</i> , (Detroit, 1984).
<i>NC, OE</i>	Niketas Choniates, ed. Jan Louis van Dieten, <i>Orationes et Epistulae</i> , (New York, 1972).
<i>Pachymeres</i>	George Pachymeres, ed. Albert Failler, <i>Relations Historiques</i> , I–III, (Paris, 1984–1999).
<i>Palastrevolution</i>	Nicholas Mesarites, ed. Augustus Heisenberg, <i>Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos</i> , (Würzburg, 1907); trans. Michael Angold, <i>Nicholas Mesarites, His Life and Works</i> , (Liverpool, 2017), 31–74.
<i>PD</i>	Demetrios Chomatenos, ed. Günter Prinzing, <i>Demetrii Chomatenii Ponemata Diaphora</i> , (Berlin, 2002).
<i>PH</i>	<i>The Packard Humanities Institute: Searchable Greek Inscriptions</i> [https://inscriptions.packhum.org]
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i> .
<i>Regestes</i>	Vitalien Laurent, <i>Les registres des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople</i> , 7 vols., (Paris, 1932–1991).
<i>Robert of Clari</i>	Robert de Clari, ed. Philippe Lauer, <i>La Conquête de Constantinople</i> , (Paris, 1924).
<i>Skylitzes</i>	John Skylitzes, ed. Hans Thurn, <i>Synopsis historiarum</i> , (Berlin, 1973); trans. John Wortley, <i>John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057: Translation and Notes</i> , (New York, 2010).
<i>SQOAC</i>	<i>Byzantium, 1180–1204: “The Sad Quarter of a Century”?</i> , ed. Alicia Simpson, (Athens, 2015).
<i>Stefec</i>	Rudolf Setefec, ‘Die Regesten der Herrscher von Epeiros 1205–1318,’ <i>Römische Historische Mitteilungen</i> , 57 (2015), 15–120.
<i>Stilbes</i>	Constantine Stilbes, ed. Jean Darrouzès, ‘Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès contre les Latins,’ <i>Revue des études byzantines</i> , 21 (1963), 50–100.
<i>Tafel and Thomas</i>	<i>Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig</i> , (Vienna, 1856–57).
<i>Urbs Capta</i>	<i>Urbs Capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences</i> , ed. Angeliki Laiou, (Paris, 2005).
<i>Varzos</i>	Konstantinos Varzos, <i>Η Γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν</i> , (Thessaloniki, 1984).
<i>Villehardouin</i>	Geoffrey of Villehardouin, ed. Edmond Faral, <i>La Conquête de Constantinople</i> , (Paris, 1961); trans. Caroline Smith, <i>Joinville and Villehardouin. Chronicles of the Crusades</i> , (London, 2008), 1–136.

Prologue

‘I am more amazed by this above all else, emperor,
 how when the *ethne* (peoples) of the West massed together,
 and all languages and tribes rose up at the same time
 against your divine and sacred and serene state,
 you alone sufficed against them, and you routed them all.
 Some feared threats, while others shied away from weapons,
 or were made slaves to treaties and lawful oaths.
 Accepting hostages from some foreign *ethne*,
 and by both sending envoys and receiving them from others,
 you established all things for everyone, as according to the law of Paul.¹

At least it seems to me, unconquerable *autokrator* of the Romans,
 that providence has deceitfully riled up the [foreign] tongues,
 and roused the mixed *panspermia* of *ethne*.
 Then, in whatever manner, your great will may be revealed
 and the majestic intelligence of your understanding shall prevail
 by discerning the depths of their scheming.
 For another might withstand against one or two western nations,
 but against all the rulers of the foreign tribes,
 only God and Manuel, my sole emperor, could prevail.²

¹ [Romans 3:19-20].

² Theodore Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte* ed. Wolfram Hörandner, (Vienna: 1984), §30.335-354.

‘ἐγὼ δ’ ἐκεῖνο, βασιλεῦ, θαυμάζω πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων,
 πῶς τῶν ἐθνῶν τῶν δυτικῶν συγκινηθέντων ἅμα
 καὶ πάσης γλώσσης καὶ φυλῆς συγκατεξαναστάσης
 κατὰ τοῦ θείου καὶ σεπτοῦ καὶ γαληνοῦ σου κράτους
 εἷς μόνος πᾶσιν ἤρκεσας καὶ πάντας ἐτροπώσω,
 τοὺς μὲν φοβῶν ταῖς ἀπειλαῖς, τοὺς δὲ κλονῶν τοῖς ὅπλοις,
 τοὺς δὲ σπονδαῖς δουλούμενος καὶ τοῖς ἐνθέσμοις ὄρκοις
 καὶ παρ’ ἐνίων μὲν ἐθνῶν δεχόμενος ὀμήρους,
 τοῖς δὲ καὶ πρέσβεις ἐφίεις καὶ παρ’ αὐτῶν λαμβάνων
 καὶ πᾶσι πάντα καθεστῶς ὡς ὁ τοῦ Παύλου νόμος.

δοκεῖ μοι γοῦν, ἀνίκητε Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτορ,
 ἐπίτηδες τὴν πρόνοιαν τὰς γλώσσας συγκινηῖσαι
 καὶ τὴν ποικίλην τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐγεῖραι πανσπερμίαν,
 ὡς ἂν ἐντεῦθεν ἐκφανῆ τὸ μέγα φρόνημά σου
 καὶ τῆς φρενὸς τὸ μέγεθος γνώριμον κατασταίη
 καὶ τῶν σκεμμάτων τὸ βαθὺ καὶ τῆς ἀγχιβουλίας.
 ἐνὶ γὰρ ἔθνει καὶ δυσὶν ἂν ἄλλος τις ἀντῆρε
 συνερρωγόσιν εἰς ταῦτ’ οὐ καὶ συνεληλυθόσι,
 τὸ δὲ πρὸς πάσας ἐθνικάς ἀντάραι φυλαρχίας
 μόνον θεοῦ καὶ Μανουὴλ τοῦ μονοκράτορός μου.’

On Prodromos’ historical poems see Paul Magdalino, †Ruth Macrides, ‘Theodore Prodromos, Carmina historica, I, Translation and commentary,’ in: *After the Text: Byzantine Enquiries in Honour of Margaret Mullett*, (London: 2021), pp.29-40; or more generally Nikos Zagklas, *Theodoros Prodromos: Miscellaneous Poems*, (Oxford: 2023); For the Byzantine intellectual response to the Second Crusade see, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, ‘The “Wild Beast from the West”’: Immediate Literary Reactions in Byzantium to the Second Crusade,’ in: *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, eds. Angeliki Laiou, Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, (Washington D.C.: 2001), pp.101-117.

This extract of a poem attributed to Theodore Prodromos offers a glimpse of the language used at the court of Constantinople in the mid-twelfth century in praise of the emperor and his handling of diplomacy with Western European powers. The poem describes the passage of the Second Crusade in *c.*1145 as the crusaders were transported across the Dardanelle straits from Europe to Asia, where the Aegean Sea partitioned the Byzantine Balkans from their territories in Anatolia. In alluding to the passage, the poem discusses the neighbouring *ethne*, who had threatened the Byzantine state, but had been successfully controlled. It depicts these peoples in ways that combine several unusual but contemporary terms, but in an innovative and experimental way. These terms, which are key to this thesis and shall be explored further below, expressed the ideas of an exclusive in-group, which defined itself by revived and modified ideas of ethnicity, couched in the rhetoric of biological generation and language group. Meanwhile, according to the Byzantine concept, the ethnic 'other,' the *panspermía*, existed outside the empire as an amorphous enemy, marked as foreign, both in linguistic and geographic terms. The idiom *panspermía* was especially popularised in the twelfth century. Thereafter, in the age of fragmentation, it increased in usage and would continue to appear in the textual material of the following generation in reference, repetition, and eventual divergence from how Prodromos had conjured it in his poem.

Introduction and Methodology

0.1. Unbecoming Roman: Deconstructing an Ethnic Dialogue of Collapse

This thesis addresses a roughly forty-five-year period of intense transition and change as witnessed by a single generation, and its reception by the one that followed. In the period of study (c.1190–c.1235), the unified political state of a predominantly Greek-speaking Orthodox people of the Medieval Roman Empire, known conventionally as Byzantium, fragmented into rival and often warring polities. Secession, particularism, and rebellion following the end of the direct imperial Komnenoi dynasty in 1183 was exacerbated by the Latin Conquest of Constantinople and the establishment of Catholic Crusader principalities across the Balkans and Aegean Islands. Within historiography, it is not common to treat this period as one of continuity. The sack of 1204 is often viewed as an end, or at least an interlude, to the imperial narrative. However, many individuals followed careers and held positions before and after the Latin conquest and the social networks which produced our authors and authorities survived and persisted even in an altered form into the age of exile and fragmentation.

Within that milieu, this thesis studies the rhetoric and language employed to the notions of ethnicity, identity, and its implications. It studies word choices, literary devices, and the construction of identities of opposition as defined by similarity and difference. Frequently, the authors studied in this thesis self-identified as ‘Romans.’ This was, however, only one among several ethnonyms and was not exclusive to any of the reduced polities which claimed continuity with Byzantium. In a similar vein, modern historiography’s own engagement with Byzantine Romanness has continued to divide the field.³ This thesis hypothesises and adopts the contention that even in pre-1204 Constantinople there had escalated the process of social stratification known as ‘Constantinopolitan Exclusivism.’⁴ This exclusivism, which prioritised birthplace and familial descent, as well as the learned characteristics of language and dialect, education, customs, and loyalty to either macro or micro figures of authority was a product of twelfth-century Byzantium’s increasingly closed society. That social stratification continued as a rhetorical, and arguably political, element beyond the fall in 1204. Within the disunited Byzantine world some people were considered ‘more Roman’ than others. As the first section of this thesis will discuss, in Byzantine rhetoric some people ceased to be considered Roman; and the second and third sections will demonstrate that entire regions could cease to be included within it.⁵

This thesis aims to fill the gap of the scholarship of thirteenth-century Byzantium, which lacks an authoritative study of changes in the rhetorical construction of ethnicity in the context and reception of the generation that witnessed the Fourth Crusade. It has engaged with primary materials for which critical editions are either outdated or completely absent, and whose literary

³ Tassos Kaplanis, ‘Antique Names and Self-Identification: *Hellenes*, *Graikoi*, and *Romaioi* from Late Byzantium to the Greek Nation-State,’ in: *Re-Imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture*, ed. Dimitris Tziouvas (Oxford: 2014), pp.80-97; Yannis Stouraitis, ‘Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach,’ *BZ*, 107 (2014), pp.175-220; idem., ‘Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium,’ *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017), pp.70-94; and cf. the contesting theories of Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, (Cambridge: 2008); and its reconsideration, from ethnic nation to civic nation in idem., *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, (Cambridge, MA: 2019).

⁴ Paul Magdalino, ‘Byzantine Snobbery,’ in: *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. Michael Angold, (Oxford: 1984), pp.58-78; idem. ‘Constantinople and the Outside World,’ in: *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. Dion Smythe, (Aldershot: 2000), pp.149-62; Yannis Stouraitis, ‘Byzantine Romanness: From Geopolitical to Ethnic Conceptions,’ in: *Transformations of Romanness*, ed. Walter Pohl, (Berlin: 2018), p.139.

⁵ Gill Page, *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity Before the Ottomans*, (Cambridge: 2008), pp.50-51.

studies are - with some exceptions mostly limited to overviews and registers.⁶ The explosion of scholarly focus on the literature and material culture of the twelfth century, has been matched in recent years by the studies of Palaiologan culture.⁷ This is without even mentioning the growth of Byzantine identity studies.⁸ The thirteenth century, meanwhile, despite being increasingly well-served by studies of political ideology, networks, and sources in translation, has remained bereft of detailed modern studies which go beyond the milieu of Nikaia-Constantinople, where our main narratives derive.⁹ Several modern studies, even those dealing with social studies of the final centuries of Byzantium, equally place their beginning in the 1261 recapture of Constantinople by Michael VIII Palaiologos, treating its short Indian Summer as an establishment of his state as an ‘Empire of the Romans,’ without engaging with the fact that at many points there were certainly as many people if not more who satisfied all the cultural criteria of being ‘Roman,’ outside that empire than within it.¹⁰ After 1204, there was never a single political homeland of the Romans.

This is a study then of the role and function of the phenomenon of othering, describing and separating one’s own culture from another, in spite of multiple parties sharing a great deal of history, heritage, language, and even kinship. Navigating these pluralistic identities necessitated a great deal of uncertainty and inconsistency, as well as emotive condemnation. This is the textual culture of a generation of turmoil, rebellion, and foreign conquest after the fall which ultimately escalated ‘Constantinopolitan Exclusivism’ into a form of ‘Ethnic Distortion.’ As the Byzantines promulgated socio-political tensions on the ethnic plane, authors frequently included ethnographical asides in their texts which will, across this thesis, provide details which range from simply invented to wildly disingenuous. Authors repeatedly demonstrate that ethnographical allusions in the writing of the period c.1190–c.1235 were at the mercy of individual opinion and contemporary politics. It is for this reason that texts and inscriptions in this thesis are viewed not as positivist depictions of historical fact but as performative materials within a genre of ethnic discourse. That discourse in turn created a ‘performative ethnicity’ which projected the idea of a group ethnic identity, claiming inclusion and exclusion, but altered the criteria of what was necessary to belong to that group at will. In short, we do not take *prima facie* that judgements and descriptions of others’ identity were necessarily believed on either side. Rather that the language of Byzantine and post-Byzantine

⁶ Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni 1081-1261*, (Cambridge: 1995), pp.158-264.

⁷ For a recent overview of scholarship see the chapter ‘Komnenian Age’ in: James Howard-Johnston, *Byzantium in a Changing World*, (Oxford: 2025), pp.148-196.

⁸ Diana Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums: Empire and Identity in Southeastern Europe*, (Cambridge: 2023), esp. ch. 6 pp.199-218; Michael Edward Stewart, David Alan Parnell, and Conor Whately, eds. *The Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, (Abingdon: 2022); David Ricks, Paul Magdalino, *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity*, (Aldershot: 2016).

⁹ For political ideology see Dimiter Angelov, *The Byzantine Hellene: The Life of Emperor Theodore Laskaris and Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century*, (Cambridge: 2023); Idem., *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330* (Cambridge: 2007); On networks see the various works related to the University of Vienna’s *Entangled Charters of Anatolia (1200-1300, ENCHANT)* project led by Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, notably, idem., ‘Mercantile and religious mobility between Byzantines, Latins and Muslims, 1200-1500: on the theory and practice of social networks,’ *Medieval Worlds*, 1 (2019), pp.187-216; and Ekaterini Mitsiou, ‘Networks of Nicaea: 13th century socio-economic ties, structures and prosopography,’ in: *Liquid and Multiple: Individuals and Identities in the Thirteenth-Century Aegean*, eds. Guillerme Saint-Guillan, Dionysios Stathakopoulos, (Paris: 2012), pp.91-104; of sources in translation and biographies see Angold, *Germanos II*; idem. *Mesarites*; and the introduction by Günter Prinzing, *PD*.

¹⁰ Christos Malatras, *Social Stratification in Late Byzantium*, (Edinburgh: 2023); Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, pp.74-82.

identity was a constructed product of context and served a socio-political and intellectual function to stress an idealised hierarchical taxonomy. A declaration of one's ethnic position in that context was normally a statement between the author in relation to figures of authority or institutions.

0.2. Performative Ethnicity

The methodology applied by this thesis to the study of ethnicity in Byzantine dialogue is 'social constructionist' building upon such classic studies as Fredrik Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (1969) and the sociological school that followed. In a colloquium held over fifty years ago, Barth and his colleagues established the key directions of research for modern understandings of ethnicity. In introducing his work, Barth discussed the difference between how a culture existed and how it was conceived. Dichotomising the two, he distinguished between cultural and ethnic categories, conceiving that the two need not correspond to a one-to-one relationship, and that ethnicity is shaped in an ongoing and constantly changing social dialogue. Individuals could share many cultural similarities of language, religion, and custom while also belonging to ethnic groups which were constructed as needed to serve immediate concerns.¹¹ In his own contribution, Barth studied the Pathan people of Afghanistan and the attributes shared across what they believed constituted an ethnic group. His conclusions were that there were circumstances in which an ethnic identity can be performed, and that there are criteria for its continued existence, establishing that 'Pathan identity can readily be maintained under these circumstances, since they allow an adequate performance in the various fora where such an identity is validated.'¹² The volume impacted multiple fields of research which remain active today, focusing on such phenomena as ethnic identity formation and change, the use of stereotyping, the functioning of multi-ethnic societies in Europe and Asia, and many more.¹³ Further research sharpened the focus upon social boundaries and their construction, ultimately theorising that all ethnic groupings are something performative and context-dependent; positing that thoughts, speech, and actions related to ethnicity were always produced in response to contextual and situational prompts and produced variable results.¹⁴

Focusing on the situational rather than the essentialist has opened new avenues of enquiry. By establishing the fluctuating boundaries of ethnicity, we may discuss cases of ethnic denial as well as studies of migration.¹⁵ A situational ethnicity's function in dialogue necessitates understanding how those boundaries shift and to what purpose. There is space within social constructionism for several facets of sociological theory. As posited by Émile Durkheim, in

¹¹ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, (Boston: 1969), introduction pp.9-38, esp. p.14, and chapters of Gunnar Haaland and Jan-Petter Blom; for its reassessment see Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years*, (Abingdon: 2018); Judith Butler, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*, (Oxford: 2007).

¹² Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, p.127.

¹³ On Barth's influence see, Sinisa Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, (London: 2004), pp.8-10; On stereotyping in medieval studies see Claire Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe, 950-1250: Medicine, Power and Religion*, (York: 2021); idem. 'Characteristics of Bodies and Ethnicity, c.900-1200,' *Medieval Worlds*, 5 (2017), pp.95-112.

¹⁴ Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (Garden City: 1967); on its place in ethnic discourse see Joane Nagel, 'Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture,' *Social Problems*, 41 (1994), pp.152-76.

¹⁵ Jonathan Okamura, 'Situational ethnicity,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 4.4 (1981), pp.452-465; Madhumita Banerjee, et al., 'Situational Ethnicity and Identity Negotiation: "Indifference" as an Identity Negotiation Mechanism,' *International Marketing Review*, 39 (2022), pp.55-79.

times of intense social change, *anomie* or ‘normlessness’ increases amidst the breakdown of social order.¹⁶ The loss of traditional norms of behaviour and relationship are accompanied by a lack of cohesion, including in cases of ethnic groupings. The struggle to maintain solidarity is holistic and multiple and involved sanctioning deviant *anomie* behaviours, with either repressive or restitutory sanctions.¹⁷ Stability depends on continuing established societal norms and punishment, either enforced by law or otherwise. It is a means of reestablishing social solidarity which, if it were not done, would lead to a loss of societal cohesion. Durkheim’s theories, while originally applied to changes wrought by industrialisation, have since been applied to multiple historical contexts.¹⁸ The struggle of an individual or group in times of change to *prove* their identity is thus considered a timeless phenomenon. The Byzantines had an established set of behavioural criteria relating to either the Orthodox religion, the state, law, army, and more. These provided opportunities for public discourse and demonstration of their Romanness, Christianity, and/or Hellenism. It is within the confluence of these criteria that Byzantine identity studies must operate. Embedded therein were Byzantine exceptionalism, the traditions of conquest, the Chosen Nation Status, and the sense of cultural superiority making performative ethnicity within Byzantium - of being a *Romaíos* - also indelibly linked with the denigration of an excluded party.¹⁹

The pathway to a constructionist model of ethnic identity has not been smooth. Ethnicity and its sense of either inclusion or exclusion, remains a fluctuating line to social thought. The primordial nineteenth-century theories, based upon biological nationalism and nation-hood examined fixed inherited characteristics, often imbuing ethnicity with phenotype and race.²⁰ However, from as early as the school of Max Weber (1864–1920) arguments posited the value of ‘social action’ demonstrating one’s conformance, acceptance, and value of a dominant culture.²¹ Social status was therefore considered dependent on an individual’s social actions and their engagement with authority. Weber’s own chapter on ethnicity demonstrates this shift:

‘Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. That belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community, unless drastic differences in the custom, physical type, or above all, language exist among its members.’²²

¹⁶ Émile Durkheim, *Division of Labour in Society*, trans. Wilfred Douglas Halls, (Basingstoke: 1984, repr., 2013), pp.xxx, 277-280.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.83. Durkheim refers to these sanctions as a mechanical reaction. ‘Repressive sanctions’ are more common within premodern contexts.; Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, pp.26-29.

¹⁸ Marco Orru considered the application of *anomie* to Ancient Greece and Early Christianity. Marco Orru, *Anomie: History and Meanings*, (Abingdon: 1987, repr. 2024).

¹⁹ Walter Pohl, ‘Early Medieval Romanness a Multiple Identity,’ in: *Transformations of Romanness*, pp.21-22; Shay Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation in Byzantium* (Leiden: 2018).

²⁰ For an overview see Polly Rizova, and John Stone, ‘Race, Ethnicity, and Nation,’ in: *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia*, 9 (2010), pp.6037-6056; In a Byzantine context this argument is best traced in Bas ter Haar Romeny, ‘Ethnicity, Ethnogenesis and the Identity of Syriac Orthodox Christians,’ in: *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100*, eds. Walter Pohl et al., (London: 2016), pp.190-192.

²¹ The foundational work is Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, (Tübingen: 1922, trans., London: 1978).

²² *Ibid.*, p.389.

Weber's view that ethnic groups are essentially political communities placed the emphasis not on cultural commonality but on the continued existence of authority. Byzantium was not homogeneous: across its territories, there were substantial variations in all three categories of custom, experience, and language. Weber's final words are particularly thought-provoking for the Late Byzantinist, in that they inspire enquiries into the extent to which Byzantium actually represented a homogeneous state, as opposed to the efforts that imperial authorities went to make it seem such. Viewing their ethnicity as something presumed, negotiated, contingent, politicised, and non-essentialist is not incompatible with social constructionism and helps explain the ease with which individuals could, in the eyes of their compatriots-turned-rivals, 'unbecome Roman.'²³

The 1960s produced new studies on nationhood and nationalism, pre-eminently Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and Anthony Smith's *Ethnic Origins of Nations*. These works posited theories of 'ethnosymbolism,' seeing elements of the 'nation' in pre-modern states but emphasising that the nation remained a modern phenomenon.²⁴ The 2010s witnessed the beginning of a radical shift from this dominant position within Byzantine studies as theories were promulgated that advocated for a view of Byzantium as an essentially monolithic nation, united by a single culture, with a reemphasised Roman-Hellenic identity and a deemphasised Christian one.²⁵ Taking a more positivist view of source material which accepted claims of mass assimilation and treating the empire as defined by a single language and majority ethnic group, this revisionist approach to ethnic dialogue in Byzantium was to view it as something wilfully overlooked by generations of historians, in need of redemption. Best exemplified by the work of Anthony Kaldellis, this school depicts a predominantly homogeneous pool of peoples inhabiting Byzantium, marked foremost by their 'Romanness' and the dominant social norms that stemmed from it. It is also an inherently top-down model to ethnicity, one that relies on a positivist reading of political ideologies disseminated from centres of authority.

Polarised now into two essentially unreconcilable camps, this thesis does not attempt to resolve a field-splitting issue in totality. The trap of positing opinions of how the Byzantines conceived and used ethnicity remains at the mercy of their sheer chronological duration. A study of 1100 years of human history has inherent flaws of presumption and selective use of sources. This thesis instead presents an analysis of a key generation, favouring the school of constructionism while engaging with the nation-state argument as necessary. Preference is given to the constructed identities of dialogue, background, audience, and purpose; as well as positioning each author within the literary traditions in which they wrote.

The recent set of studies edited by John Haldon and Yannis Stouraitis advocates for the importance of showcasing and performing oneself *being* Byzantine-Roman, of demonstrating one's identity.²⁶ The introduction to the volume describes these criteria:

²³ Stouraitis, 'Roman Identity in Byzantium,' pp.217-218.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: 1983, repr. 2006); Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Oxford: 1986).

²⁵ Anthony Kaldellis, 'The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach,' *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 27 (2017), pp.173-210.

²⁶ Johannes Koder, 'Remarks on linguistic Romanness in Byzantium,' in: *Transformations of Romanness*, pp.111-121; Leslie Brubaker, 'Performing Byzantine Identity: Gender, Status and the Cult of the Virgin,' in: *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World*, (Edinburgh: 2022), pp.129-145.

‘But since... identification is processual, functional and performative, the East Roman discourse of identification embodied a set of operational strategies in which situation and context determined which elements were invoked in which combinations, and incorporated many subsets of ‘Romanness’, some reflecting regional cultural, linguistic or ethnic traditions and lifeways, some heterodox beliefs, some social status and situation, some a mix of all of these.’²⁷

Making ethnicity a social construct empowers the use of language and makes possible the study of historical sociology. For us to understand *why* individuals acted in a certain way, *how* they viewed and constructed their group identity each time, and *where* they lay the boundary for recognising themselves in another, is the basis of the study that follows.

0.3. Ethnic Dialogue in the Thirteenth Century: Performative Romanness

Having established ethnicity as something fluid and contextually moving, the study of the boundaries of inclusion as part of a Byzantine *Romaioi* ‘Roman’ community vs exclusion into an ethnic other becomes a constantly changing element of Byzantine discourse. Issues then arise regarding how our sources define people(s) outside the inclusion group. The Byzantine world of the thirteenth century was a period of repeated political fragmentation and transformation. It would be wrong to expect stability and our sources repeatedly demonstrate that ideas of cultural cohesion were frequently altered. Navigating a world which after 1204 lacked a single centre necessitated new descriptions of who lived and governed where as well as new understandings of what was shared and what was distinct across regions.

Both before and after the 1204 loss of Constantinople there were many different means of ‘being’ Roman. Walter Pohl contends that *Romanitas* ‘Romanness’ encompassed an urban identity; a political identity; legal and civic identities; military identity; territorial identity; imperial identity; cultural identity; religious identity; and lastly a ‘binary identity’ – the dichotomy of Romanness vs Barbarity.²⁸ All of these were heavily linked with the institutions of state, military, and church centred in Constantinople, a conception the elite Constantinopolitans of 1200 themselves revelled in. The cycle of wealth investment within the capital, of granting offices and salaries, maintaining routes of education and employment, and of exerting imperial and ecclesiastical authority over these had been the source of Byzantine survival since the restructuring of the empire after the seventh century contraction.²⁹ ‘Being’ Roman meant demonstrating an accordance with these various forms of Romanness. For so much to be conveyed with a single word and its derivatives ensures context remains crucial. Pohl’s own uncertainty over defining Romanness as an ethnic identity, owing to the vast number of different language groups and regionalities in the early and middle Byzantine period, is not a problem solved in later periods.³⁰ The Komnenian restructuring of Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a gradual centring of Romanness around Constantinople (as discussed in the following sub-chapter), made Constantinople the centre of the majority of the above forms of Romanness but exceptions invoking other forms naturally remained. Losing Constantinople as a centre, combined with a highly fragmented political scene, consequentially

²⁷John Haldon and Yannis Stouraitis, ‘The Ideology of Identities and the Identity of Ideologies,’ in: *Identities and Ideologies*, p.5.

²⁸ Pohl, ‘Early Medieval Romanness - a Multiple Identity,’ pp.9-39.

²⁹ John Haldon, *The Empire that Would Not Die*, (Cambridge: 2016), pp.159-192.

³⁰ Pohl, ‘Early Medieval Romanness - a multiple identity,’ pp.26-32.

made most criteria uncertain. Political Romanness required a state, and religious Romanness an organised church. Cultural, civic, and legal Romanness could survive provided educational institutions could continue but the most potent form of Romanness that remained was the polemic, ‘binary Romanness.’ This was the Romanness articulated by the state which enfranchised its supporters and ostracised its opponents. Most importantly for this thesis’ purposes it survived powerfully beyond the collapse of 1204. Demonstrating this, the political leanings of thirteenth-century Greek authors could frequently sway their rhetorical refusal to recognise another’s linguistic and religious Romanness. Instead, they could focus purely on political leaning, redefining the boundary of Roman and making people(s) either barbarians, or more commonly *ethne*, a term which combined cultural and religious barbarity.

The concept of ‘being Roman’ after Roman political authority ended is not historiographically new, though it is only rarely applied with reference to Byzantium.³¹ The study of Late Antiquity has produced numerous studies of the transformation of the Late Roman world of Western Europe into the patchwork of kingdoms which succeeded/seceded from imperial control in the fifth and sixth centuries.³² In that world, positing the existence of cultural hybridity amongst Romans, Franko-Romans, or in Early Medieval England is something well-established, as these communities navigated complex spaces. Archaeological studies of graves have asserted that often there were no clear discrepancies between ‘Roman and ‘post-Roman’ sites. Sites and populations could transition from imperial control with minimal disruption to their day-to-day function. The conclusions of some of these studies were that many sites operated as a ‘small local community on a frontier of different intersecting cultural influences... who loosely selected cultural alignments based on varying political affiliations with no implications of shifts in the ethnic makeup of those making these affiliations, or necessary implication of large-scale population change.’³³ They suggested that the end of Roman control was accepted by most non-elites as a new *status quo*. A commonly accepted understanding is that ethnic identities should be considered either the preserve of elites or for those with specific goals writing on behalf of authorities.³⁴ Late Antique legal frameworks, for example of Salic law or *Pactus Legis Salicae*, describe worlds not divided by ‘Roman’ and ‘Barbarian’ but composite, of a population first dichotomised by distinct populations but later assimilated. As Roman culture became blended with a Christian inheritance these hybrid identities were gradually absorbed into a wider population.³⁵ In Byzantine Studies we have demonstrated a rapidity in declaring certain populations entirely one thing or another, often with minimal evidence of material

³¹ See Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Byzantium after the Nation: The Problem of Continuity in Balkan Historiographies*, (Budapest: 2022).

³² Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West: 376-568*, (Cambridge: 2007), esp. pp.35-45; Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800)*, (Notre Dame: 1988).

³³ James Harland, *Ethnic Identity and the Archaeology of the Aduentus Saxonum: A Modern Framework and Its Problems*, (Amsterdam: 2021), p.216; Martin Carver, et al., *Wasperton: A Roman, British and Anglo-Saxon Community in Central England*, (Woodbridge: 2009), pp.130-133.

³⁴ Patrick Geary, ‘Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages,’ *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 113 (1983), pp.23-26; Frans Theuws, ‘Graves Goods, Ethnicity, and the Rhetoric of Burial Sites in Late Antique Northern Gaul,’ in: *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: the Role of Power and Tradition*, eds. Ton Derks, Nico Roymans, (Amsterdam: 2008), pp.290-293.

³⁵ Guy Halsall, ‘Transformations of Romanness: The Northern Gallic case,’ in: *Transformations of Romanness*, pp.45-56.

culture and simply based on biased narratives written for patrons (of which the thirteenth-century ones are particularly skewed).³⁶ The result has created a rather unstable field.

In the thirteenth century, we enter a situation not dissimilar to the fifth. Political disintegration was followed by hybrid acculturation, demonstrating various peoples' own inheritance of Roman identities. Of the three major successor-states for whom we have something approaching documentation in the thirteenth century, Nikaia, Epiros, and Turnovo, all three established their states in some form of continuity from Byzantine Rome. Nikaia and Epiros by dynastic legitimacy with the Komnenoi-Doukai-Angeloi dynasty, and Turnovo through a combination of religious and historical inheritance, progressively equally dynastic.³⁷ All three also reconstituted an ad hoc amorphous senate to give legitimacy to the election of their rulers imitating the manner of Constantinople.³⁸ Those three senates then advised and elected an 'Emperor of the Romans' (in the case of Turnovo, 'Emperor of the Bulgarians and the Greeks').³⁹

The study of this language of ethnicity is not ethnography as it normally appears. It is foremostly a case of socio-political polemic exploiting or conjuring cultural differences. Following the sack of Thessaloniki in 1185, ethno-religious polemic generated treatises and discourse directed from the elites of society to the broader populace. As imperial authority weakened and unrest grew, narratives and terminologies long redundant could be revived, and the old term used in a new way, to demonstrate that individuals were not those who had lived alongside them for centuries but were in fact not Roman. The innovation was the emphasis placed upon an ethnicity and language, particularly one linked to language and origin in a certain space. As will be shown, it was almost always done with an objective of 'othering' and creating a distinction between oneself and a rival. Only a few such instances aimed at creating unity will appear in this thesis.

The authors who witnessed this age of turmoil, many of whom were themselves of significant social status, therefore had to create new understandings of what various terms meant. There is a well-established emphasis on Hellenism, particularly in the Roman Empire established in Nikaia, such that the period of the (teleologically named) 'empire-in-exile' was deemed to be the birth of Byzantine Greek 'nationalism'.⁴⁰ As such, attention was paid to the reappearance of terms relating to Hellenic learning, positioning Greek as the sole language of Medieval (Byzantine) Rome, and to reimagined ideas of Hellas itself. These are discussed in Section Two.⁴¹ While we no longer accept that the period of the 'Empire of Nikaia' was the singular age of proto-nationalism, recent research has demonstrated a stronger identification with smaller regional polities. Almost mirroring the formulation of neighbouring kingdoms broadly demarcated by singular ethno-linguistic groups, the Nikaian state demonstrated a usage of

³⁶ Cf. Jorge López Quiroga, et al., eds. *Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe: Historical, Archaeological and Bioarchaeological Approaches*, (Oxford: 2017).

³⁷ The latter is best manifest through the *translatio* of various saints to the Bulgarian capital, chrysobulls claiming authority over multiple *ethne*, and the Middle Bulgarian translation of the chronicle of Constantine Manasses.

³⁸ Each of these are discussed at length in their respective chapters. For Bulgarian inheritance of a 'Synklit' or 'senate' see Ivan Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria*, (Leiden: 2011), pp.346-351.

³⁹ For Bulgarian texts referring to Byzantines as Greeks see Angel Nikolov, 'Empire of the Romans or Tsardom of the Greeks? The Image of Byzantium in the Earliest Slavonic Translations from Greek,' *Byzantinoslavica*, 65 (2007), pp.31-40.

⁴⁰ Apostolos Vacalopoulos, *The Origins of the Greek Nation: The Byzantine Period, 1204-1461*, (New Brunswick: 1970).

⁴¹ Sections 2.10, pp.122-127, 3.2, pp.135.

Hellenism, continuing and accelerating a trend from before 1204, as elite Byzantine authors positioned themselves as heirs to Classical Greece. Publications by Dimiter Angelov have offered an understanding that the growth of terms such as *Hellene* and *Hellas* used extensively by Nikaia, notably under Theodore II Laskaris, should continue to be considered a significant development.⁴²

However, the Byzantine state which collapsed in 1204 was not Classical Greece but an ‘Empire of the Romans’ governing parts of a Christianised thirteenth-century Balkans and Anatolia. Those who had been subject to Constantinople’s governance until then spoke a multitude of languages and formed part of the complexity of a multiethnic state. There is no question that Greek, occasionally called *Romaika*, was the dominant language and that many of our authors preferred locations where they could converse in their mother-tongue.⁴³ However, Greek was not a homogenous language, it existed in a number of dialects and registers (both literary and spoken), and the Roman character of an individual was not always assured by their being a Greek speaker.⁴⁴ As discussed in Section Two, equating language with fidelity became an ideological position born of exile.⁴⁵ Multiple times Greek-speakers (referred to generally as homoglotts) are appealed to on linguistic grounds in a shift that conflated Greek Hellenism with Romanness to the exclusion of others. In that ideology, the language of the homoglotts became an ideal of unity.

Linguistic-political identification runs contrary to the vast language diversity of the Byzantine state. Greek, Latin, Armenian, Slavonic, Vlach, Turkish, Arabic, Syriac, and more were all spoken in the Byzantine political community before 1204 and are an important reminder that Romanness was more nuanced than association purely with one language.⁴⁶ Considering Greek to be the only language in which Roman identity was transmitted ignores our sources, never an objective of history. If the theory of *translatio imperii*, of a moving Roman centre to Constantinople, can be postulated for pre-1204 Byzantium then it should not be ignored in successor-states regardless of their success in retaking Constantinople.⁴⁷ While the centres of Nikaia-Constantinople’s other major rivals; Epiros, Trebizond, Ras, and Turnovo, never

⁴² For a discussion of earlier literature of a national awakening in the period after 1204 see Michael Angold, ‘Byzantine “Nationalism” in the Nicaean Empire, *BMGS*, 1 (1975), pp.49-70; For a further refutation and proof of existence some decades prior see Paul Magdalino, ‘Hellenism and Nationalism in Byzantium,’ in: *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Byzantium*, (Aldershot: 1991), pp.1-29; Gill Page, *Being Byzantine*, pp.65-67.

⁴³ See Section 3.7, p.173; Kaldellis, *Romanland*, pp.97-106.

⁴⁴ John Tzetzes famously decried Cretans, Rhodians, and Chians as parts of foreign *ethne* gangs which plagued Constantinople in the twelfth century. Tzetzes, *Chiliades*, ed. Petrus Leone, (Naples: 1968), 13, ll. 356-362, p.528.

⁴⁵ Section 2.4–2.10.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kaldellis, *Romanland*, pp.97-106.

⁴⁷ This is also allowing for the coronation of a ‘Roman Emperor’ on Cyprus in 1183 by Isaak Komnenos of whom the Cypriot sources confirm claimed the imperial title ‘καὶ φημιζεται βασιλεὺς,’ and minted coins as: ICAAKIOC ΔΕCΠIOTHC. See the sources discussed by Stavros Georgiou, ‘The Regime of Isaac Doukas Komnenos (1184-1191) in Cyprus: The Testimony of Michael the Syrian,’ *Bizantinistica*, 18.2 (2017), pp.191-200; For the projection of Turnovo as new Constantinople or ‘Tsargrad’ in the fourteenth-century Bulgarian translation of Constantine Manasses and the argument that it draws from a lost thirteenth-century copy written for John II Asan. See Linda Yuretich, *The Chronicle of Constantine Manasses*, (Liverpool: 2018), pp.14-15n.77; Miliana Kaimakamova, ‘Turnovo - New Constantinople: The Third Rome in the Fourteenth-Century Bulgarian Translation of Constantine Manasses’ “Synopsis Chronike,” *The Medieval Chronicle*, 4 (2006), pp.91-104; Lubomira Havlíková, ‘Les suppléments annalistes accompagnant la traduction moyen-bulgare de la Chronique de Constantin Manassès et leur importance pour la formation et stabilisation de la conscience de la nationalité et d’État bulgares aux XIIIe-XIVe siècles/étude historique,’ in: *Rapports, co-rapports, communications tchécoslovaques pour le Ve Congrès de l’Association Internationale d’Études du Sud-Est Européen à Belgrade*. (Prague: 1984), pp.145-59.

returned to a direct long-term political subordination within an empire of Constantinople they still asserted themselves as political centres claiming Roman inheritance.

As this thesis will demonstrate in Section Three, a shared cultural community that transcended political divisions survived imperial fragmentation. Known sometimes in scholarship as the ‘Byzantine Commonwealth,’ a theory which oscillates in academic acceptance, it refers to a shared Byzantine-Roman culture of the Balkans originally emanating from Constantinople.⁴⁸ With ties of common religion, political history, governance, art/architecture, it had at times been reinforced by honorific titles creating a cultural hierarchy. However in the age of fragmentation, the continued existence of a supra-political ‘land of the Romans’ or *Romania* demonstrated a new meaning. In the thirteenth century, usage of the term *Romania* referred to the lands subject to pre-1204 Constantinople. Divided between the Balkans and Anatolia, it was further nuanced with repeated references to ‘East’ and ‘West’ in both Greek and Slavonic.⁴⁹ Since its usage outlasted the disintegration of Byzantine authority, we cannot read it as a defined geopolitical construct but rather as a cultural one. A detailed description of *Romania* survives, perhaps surprisingly, in an inscription from Turnovo dating to 1230 (discussed in Section 3.16) Publicly displayed within the Bulgarian capital, *Romania* was described to the people as a land formed of ‘Greek,’ ‘Serbian,’ ‘Albanian,’ and ‘Bulgarian’ sections centred around Constantinople [*Tsargrad*], called often in Slavonic, as in Greek, simply ‘the City’ [*Grad*].⁵⁰ The fact that the Frankish conquest in 1204 did not end this ideology, merely altered it, allowed for the coexistence of multiple tsars and/or emperors. Each of these peoples had their own tsar/emperor, so rivalry was presented as an internal struggle to prove the dominance of a single ruler who could claim hegemony of *Romania*.

Greek-language depictions of *Romania* after 1204 vary.⁵¹ It naturally privileged Greek-speakers, but in 1219, amidst re-expansion, emphasis was given to distinguish between Bulgarians who supported the Asanid state and those who were loyal to *Romania*.⁵² When Epiros as Western *Romania* in 1225 sought to proclaim their own emperor, one letter from Epiros to Nikaia responded to complaints they had dared elected their own contender for rulership:

‘Let it be deemed just, then, that the one who alone in Constantinople has assumed the imperial title—the azymite [Latin Emperor], the one who has gone astray in matters of

⁴⁸ For the original theory see Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500-1453*, (London: 1971); and its reappraisal, Peter Frankopan, Jonathan Shepard eds. *Revisiting the Byzantine Commonwealth: Nodes, Networks, and Spheres*, (Oxford: 2025); in this period Vlada Stanković, ‘Kinship, Orthodoxy and Political Ideology: The Byzantines and the Balkans after the Catastrophe of 1204,’ *Byzantinoslavica*, 80 (2022), pp.108-119; idem. ‘John II Asen (1218-1241), the Importance of Being Roman, and the Battle for Dominance over Southeast Europe,’ in: *Car Ivan Asen II (1218-1241). Sbornik po sluchai na 800-godishninata ot negovo v'zhestvie na b'lgarski prestol [Emperor John II Asen (1218-1241). Volume commemorating 800 years of his ascension to the Bulgarian throne]*, eds. Vassil Gjuzelev, Iliya Iliev and Kiril Nenov, (Plovdiv: 2019), pp.49-54; cf. for an almost complete dismissal see Petar Angelov, ‘The Byzantines as Imagined by the Medieval Bulgarians,’ in: *State and Church: Studies in Medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium*, eds. Vassil Gjuzelev and Kiril Petkov, (Sofia: 2011), pp.47-82.

⁴⁹ For the Greek *Dytikoi* see Section 0.55, p.30.

⁵⁰ Kiril Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh-Fifteenth Century, The Records of a Bygone Culture*, (Leiden: 2008), p.425; Slavonic Inscription in *AI*, 2, pp.166-168; See also a similar description of the Bulgarian *Romania* in Petkov, *Voices*, pp.276-277.

⁵¹ For pre-1204 depictions see Kaldellis, *Romanland*, pp.83-97.

⁵² See Section 3.7, pp.175–176.

faith—should be called “emperor”; and likewise, that the ruler beyond the Haimos, the Skythian [Bulgarian] Asan, should be addressed and magnified in writing as “most high emperor,” while the one who has received the right of empire from his forefathers, and who is rightfully called to it, is overlooked.

‘Καί δικαιοῦσθω λοιπὸν ὁ μόνῃ τῇ Κωνσταντινουπόλει τὸν βασιλικὸν περιγραφάμενος πλατυσμὸν, ὁ ἀ[ζ]υμίτης, ὁ περὶ τὴν πίστιν σφαλλόμενος, βασιλεὺς ὀνομάζεσθαι, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ὁ τοῦ Αἴμου κατάρχων Σκύθης Ἀσᾶν καὶ βασιλεὺς ὑψηλότατος ἀκουέτω καὶ μεγαλυνέσθω ἐν γράμμασι, παροράσθω δὲ ὁ τὸ δικαίωμα τῆς βασιλείας ἐκ προγόνων λαβὼν καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν δικαίως καλούμενος.’⁵³

Differences exist in the two languages in how *Romanía* was generally envisioned. In Greek *Romanía* was often a united political community, while the Slavonic usage was more cultural and allowed for different states. The Greek concept would generally avoid ethnonyms related to contemporary ethno-linguistic peoples and rely instead on classical terms of Roman enemies, presenting the land as composite but whole, while Slavonic could freely allow for the presence of multiple emperors/tsars within *Romanía*.

Ethnic presentation was not therefore uniform. Throughout this thesis several sources will provide evidence for a preference for a Roman identity defined by language; others, for one defined by kinship, spatial origin, communication, loyalty, or religion. Each offers grounds for co-Romanness or recognition as *homogene*. We must also accept that for many peoples of this period, the self-identifier of a Greek-speaker was not always *as* a Roman. In some cases, the term *Hellene* or *Graikos* was preferred as less ambiguous in a multi-cultural setting.⁵⁴ In addition, geographical identifications could be used, either to express difference, or regionality, or to invoke a reputation or tradition associated with that ethnonym. Sections One and Two engage with this in the example of Paphlagonia.

⁵³ Apokaukos, ‘Epirotica,’ §26, pp.292.30-293.3; Yannis Stouraitis, ‘What did it mean to be ‘Roman’ in Byzantium?’, *Revisiting the Byzantine Commonwealth*, p.53.

⁵⁴ Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, pp.202-216; Idem., *Imperial Ideology*, esp. pp.95-96; Page, *Being Byzantine*, pp.66, 87; Paul Magdalino, *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Byzantium*, (Aldershot: 1991).

0.4. Constantinopolitan Exclusivism

‘I, meanwhile, *a most pure* Constantinopolitan [lit. unmixed, ἀκραϊφνέστατος], and who serves the most holy throne of Constantinople, by the grace of mightiest God, I want and pray to have Constantinople unfailing in all things as according to the holy laws laid down before us.

Ἐγὼ δὲ Κωνσταντινουπολίτης ὢν ἀκραϊφνέστατος, καὶ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου θρόνου τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως μέρος γεγονὼς τῇ χάριτι τοῦ Θεοῦ, καιριώτατον, θέλω λαὶ ἔυχομαι ἔχειν τὸν Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀσκανδαλίστως πάντα τὰ παρὰ τῶν θείων κανόνων ἐπιφιλοτιμηθέντα αὐτῷ προνόμια.⁵⁵

Over the course of the twelfth century, the value of ‘correct’ birth grew.⁵⁶ This had obvious aristocratic links but was also inextricably tied to geographical origin whereby certain characteristics were believed to be either inherent or imbued. ‘Constantinopolitan Exclusivism’ had grown in the late Komnenian period to denote a social disparity between capital and provinces. That disparity made some people less Roman, less educated in Hellenic learning, and consequently less like the people of Constantinople and more like *ta ethne*, the foreign-speaking peoples beyond the imperial frontiers, where the rhetorical *panspermia* resided.⁵⁷ Theodore Balsamon’s words, quoted above, describe the purpose inherited by those who were born to ‘purely’ Constantinopolitan families. Serving as *nomophylax*, *chartophylax*, and titular Patriarch of Antioch, Balsamon became the legal canonist of Manuel I and continued in service as a favoured poet until the later years of Isaak II Angelos (1185–1194). Consequently, Balsamon proved to be at the literary and legal heart of the second half of the twelfth century.⁵⁸

By his death, Balsamon had finished his extensive commentaries discussing the implementation and contraventions of canon law in the Orthodox Church. His two works, the *Nomocanon of XIV Titles* and the *Chronological Syntagma*, divided the Byzantine world into city and ‘outer provinces’ [ἔξω χώραι], focusing on issues of religious practice and non-conformity, often seemingly critiquing and condemning the Byzantine provincial.⁵⁹ Magdalino is of the view that Balsamon altered canon 60 of the Council of Carthage whereby ‘provinciality and rusticity are confused’ so that the pagan tendencies of ‘outer villages’ [ἔξω χωρία], (a term referring to genuine agricultural workers), was conflated into ‘outer provinces’ tarring all with the same brush.⁶⁰ Balsamon produced his final work in 1195, a series of answers to questions asked by Markos III, Patriarch of Alexandria (1180–1209), of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.⁶¹ When asked if the people of Alexandria should be living by imperial law, the synod ruled:

⁵⁵ Theodore Balsamon, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, ed. Rhalles and Potles, (Athens: 1852-1859), II, pp. 285-286; Paul Magdalino, ‘Constantinople and the Outside World,’ p.150.

⁵⁶ Alexander Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, (Berkeley: 1985), pp.102-110.

⁵⁷ Page, *Being Byzantine*, pp.50-52, 69-70.

⁵⁸ For a short biography see John McGuckin, ‘Theodore Balsamon,’ in: *Christianity and Family Law: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, (Cambridge: 2017), pp.116-117. On his writings see Section 1.1, p.44.

⁵⁹ Balsamon, *Σύνταγμα*, II-IV, or *PG* 137-138; Paul Magdalino ‘Constantinople and the ἔξω χώραι in the time of Balsamon,’ in Nicolas Oikonomides, ed., *Byzantium in the Twelfth Century*, (Athens: 1992), pp.179-98, here p.185.

⁶⁰ Magdalino, ‘Constantinople and the ἔξω χώραι,’ p.187.

⁶¹ Balsamon, *Σύνταγμα*, IV pp.447-496, trans. Patrick Demetrios Viscuso, *Guide for a Church under Islām: The Sixty-Six Canonical Questions Attributed to Theodōros Balsamōn; A Translation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Twelfth-Century Guidance to the Patriarchate of Alexandria*, (Brookline: 2014).

‘According to the great apostle, “Whatever the law says, it says to those under the law” [Romans 3:19]. Indeed, those boasting of an Orthodox life, whether they might be from the East, or from Alexandria, or elsewhere, are called Romans, and must be governed according to laws, but are not bound by the law that states, “A Roman man must not be ignorant of law” [Οὐ δεῖ Ῥωμαῖον ἄνδρα νόμον ἀγνοεῖν]. For only the inhabitants [κατοικοῦντες] of Rome, the Queen of Cities, which is fortified with suitable towers and rich with many legal scholars, are bound by their fetters. For this reason, those who claim to be ignorant of the law are not pardoned, whether they might be craftsmen, or vagabonds, and ignorant of letters, since they are able to learn the content of the law from their fellow inhabitants. Those who live outside of Rome, namely, peasants [ἀγρόται] and the rest, much more Alexandrians, who do not know the civil law, are pardoned. At any rate, it is good for them to ask and learn legal prescriptions. However, if it is hard to manage, they shall be worthy of pardon.’⁶²

The distinctions drawn in this passage between Constantinopolitans and provincials attract speculation. They fit into a larger context of imposing heavy distinctions, almost pejorative, upon the non-Constantinopolitan. The ruling was that firstly, Alexandria was not subject to the law, but it was good that they were interested, and that non-Constantinopolitans were considered unlearned peasants and should seek to better themselves by learning from the capital.

Disregard from the centre was at times met with provincial anger. The hoarding of wealth was specifically resented. The letter of Michael Choniates to the imperial *protasekretis*, who had not deigned to visit Athens but was demanding higher taxes, provoked outrage. Choniates’ rebuke ‘You, delicate citizens of Constantinople, unwilling to venture beyond your walls and gates’ in the face of banditry and lawlessness at land and sea has been used to suggest a critically strained relationship on both sides.⁶³ Conversely, there has been in recent scholarship an attempt to disprove Constantinopolitan Exclusivism as an ethnic term, and to focus on it purely as an antiquated social distinction.⁶⁴ That argument considers all internal Byzantine identities as pseudo-identities, without genuine meaning of difference. It is an argument that jumps centuries, conflating terminologies used in the High Roman world of the second century with the Byzantine Roman of the twelfth.⁶⁵ However, that model allows no room for the political changes and social repercussions of the period 1180–1235. Identities and ethnic boundaries were constantly mutating and the processes by which peoples and regions left the empire and established their own states must be considered with relation to a demonstrably increasingly exclusive style of governance from the capital.

Byzantine texts lacked a singular consistent label or ethnonym for the provincial. They could refer to them as rustics [ἀγροίκοι] or more generally as those who ostensibly were taxable

⁶² Ibid., p.454, trans. p.72-73.

⁶³ MC, *Epistulae*, §50, p.69.52-53, ‘ὕμεῖς δέ, ὧ τρυφεροὶ τῆς Κωνσταντίνου πολῖται, οὐδὲ τοῦ τείχους καὶ τῶν πολλῶν προκύπτειν ἐθέλετε.’ The letter later discusses various commercial regions of the empire and the effects of piracy, see lines 55-75; The extent to which economic pressures stimulated unrest and secession from the empire is essentially outside of this thesis’ scope and a lack of evidence renders much to speculation. Shawcross believed that as a solution to economic pressure all urban Athens had gained tax exempt status by 1204, see Teresa Shawcross, ‘Golden Athens: Episcopal Wealth and Power in Greece at the Time of the Crusades,’ in: *Contact and Conflict in Frankish Greece and the Aegean*, ed. Nikolaos Chrissis, (London: 2016), pp.82-85; Angold, *Church and Society*, p.145.

⁶⁴ Anthony Kaldellis, ‘Provincial Identities in Byzantium,’ in: *Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, eds. Michael Stewart, David Parnell, Conor Whately, (London: 2022), pp.248-262.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.252-254.

subjects [ὑπήκοοι], but authors were inconsistent regarding how to depict populations in times of instability. This was diversified in the late twelfth century by formerly Byzantine cities which had rejected control or were now subject to foreign powers.⁶⁶ Were these people Romans awaiting liberation or had they become something else? This paradox, markedly increased since the eleventh-century loss of Central Anatolia, rapidly escalated across the entire empire from 1185 onwards. Many populations had found that there were substantial benefits, often economic, to secession from imperial control. Seizing greater autonomy and choosing to ignore imperial authority caused a further ‘crisis of identity’ and ‘ideological destabilization.’⁶⁷

In a well-studied case of the struggles within Byzantine ethnic ideological plurality, the example of the Greek Orthodox population of the Lake Pousgouse/Skleos/Beyşehir Gölü) is especially noteworthy.⁶⁸ In 1142, Emperor John II Komnenos encountered this group while on campaign near Ikonion/Konya. The people were insular; their economy tied purely to a local network of rivers that they traversed with canoes. Since the Turks had taken Ikonion two generations earlier, they had been left to ‘mix’ [ἐπιμιγνύμενοι], forming ties of riverine commerce and, according to our sources, ‘friendship’ [φιλίαν].⁶⁹ Our narratives state that the loyalties of Lake Pousgouse to Constantinople were not so much divided as entirely discarded. Their experience since imperial control had retreated in the 1070s had entirely superseded any shared Roman heritage to the point that they considered the ‘Turks to be their neighbours’ [Τούρκους... ὡς ὁμοροῦσιν] and the ‘Byzantines as enemies’ [Ῥωμαίους ὡς ἐχθρούς].⁷⁰ They refused both submission and displacement and, consequently, had to be attacked and defeated in a difficult river-based campaign. The two sources that record the event, John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates, differ in their presentation. Kinnamos refers to the population as ‘Romaíoi’ and describes their livelihood that it was possible for their canoes to travel to Ikonion and back from the lake in a single day. Through such intermingling ‘through time and custom they had united to the Persians (Turks) in character.’⁷¹ In a very similar narrative written a few decades later, Choniates goes even further. Choniates reasons that despite being ‘*Christianoi*... through time, custom is stronger than kinship and religion’ [οὕτω χρόνῳ κρατυνθὲν ἔθος γένους καὶ θρησκείας ἐστὶν ἰσχυρότερον.]⁷² The grammatical and lexicographical similarity in the two judgements strongly suggests that Choniates used Kinnamos’ account but had shifted the terminology to reflect his own perspectives.⁷³ He denies Romanness to the population. Gill Page considered Choniates’ phrasing ‘a denial of the ethnic as well as the more obvious political identity.’⁷⁴ We could go further. The wording reflects Choniates’ own understanding of ‘Roman’ as a conditional political identity. In the face of mass disintegration, his word had lost its ethnic meaning. The episode neatly captures the development from Kinnamos, who

⁶⁶ Yannis Stouraitis, ‘Collective Identifications in Byzantine Civil Wars,’ in: *War and Collective Identities in the Middle Ages*, ed. Yannis Stouraitis, (Amsterdam: 2023), pp.103-104.

⁶⁷ Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, pp.354-356.

⁶⁸ Yannis Stouraitis, ‘Roman identity in Byzantium,’ pp.201-2; idem., ‘Reinventing Roman Ethnicity,’ pp.70-94; Jean-Claude Cheynet, ‘Rebellion and Treachery,’ in: *Mobility and Migration in Byzantium: A Sourcebook*, eds. Claudia Rapp, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, (Vienna: 2023), pp.93-94; Alicia Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study*, (Oxford: 2013), p.326.; Cf. Kaldellis, ‘Social Scope of Roman Identity,’ pp.173-210.

⁶⁹ The verb of mixing is notably an antonym of Balsamon given above. NC, CD, §37.89-91, trans. pp.21-22. ‘διὰ λέμβων καὶ ἀκατίων τοῖς Ἰκονιεῦσι Τούρκους ἐπιμιγνύμενοι οὐ μόνον τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους φιλίαν ἐντεῦθεν ἐκράτουναν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν αὐτῶν ἐν πλείοσι προσεσχέκασιν.’

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Kinnamos, *Epitome*, §10, p.22.15-16, ‘χρόνῳ γὰρ δὴ καὶ ἔθει μακρῷ Πέρσαις τὰς γνώμας ἀνακραθέντες ἦσαν), τοιάδε τινὰ ἐνενοεί.’

⁷² NC, CD, §37.92-93, trans. p.22.

⁷³ Simpson, *Choniates*, pp.217-218.

⁷⁴ Page, *Being Byzantine*, p.84.

wrote for the successful generation of Manuel to the era of unrest under the Angeloi. For Choniates, who wrote first for Alexios III Angelos in the 1190s and revised his *Chronike Diegesis* in exile after the collapse of 1204, loyalty to the empire was a characteristic of the Romans. Breaking that loyalty made one into something else, something other. These people still spoke the language of the Romans and had the religion of the Romans, but their political allegiance rendered them simply ‘Christians.’

Other moments within Choniates’ work portray a dichotomy posited between the inhabitants of Constantinople, who consider the city their homeland and *patris*, and the untrustworthy provincial ‘other.’ Some of this reflects how personal experience impacted politics. The most direct clash between the Constantinopolitans and the provincial happened immediately after the capital fell in 1204. There, a group of individuals with whom Choniates self-identified as ‘εὐπατρίδαι’ [well-born] were confronted by the ‘ἀγροικοὶ καὶ ἀγελαῖοι’ [lit. the fieldworkers and the common people] of the Constantinopolitan hinterland.⁷⁵ Niketas left an account of his exit from the city, his journey with his household, and an encounter with the villagers of Thrace. As they passed through the nearest villages, he and his travelling party were confronted and mocked:

‘Such was the fate that befell us and who were associated with us because of their [similar] dress, as well as those who had participated in rhetorical studies with us.

Καὶ τοιαῦτα μὲν τὰ ἡμέτερα καὶ τῶν οἱ συνεκοινωνοῦν ἡμῖν σχήματος καὶ τῶν λογικῶν ἐν μεθέξει παιδεύσεων.’⁷⁶

Both sides evidently shared basic language and an adjacency to the urban environment of the capital, but differed in social class, education, and appearance. Choniates was a former head of the civil service. The villagers, as Choniates’ narrative states, regarded the destruction and ruin of the city’s elites as an ‘ισοπολιτεία’ – an act of vengeful equality for their previous arrogance.⁷⁷ While he assures the villagers that the Latins will shortly spread misery upon them too, we encounter a paradox. Our major source for the Byzantine collapse Niketas Choniates, *was* himself a provincial by birth. Despite having gained education and position in the capital, his situation was vulnerable. The higher educational paths open to the student of the twelfth century were usually to seek out further opportunities in the capital. Funding further education required a patron or family connection, a debt that enhanced the familial ties between those who engaged with this avenue of life and precluding them further from those who did not. Choniates had achieved influence for a time but had fallen from office and was almost entirely

⁷⁵ NC, CD, §593.70-73, ‘Οἱ δ’ ἀγροῖκοι καὶ ἀγελαῖοι ἐπεκερτόμουν μᾶλλον τοῖς ἐκ Βυζαντίου ἡμῖν καὶ τὴν ἐν πτωχείᾳ καὶ γυμνότητι κακουχίαν ἰσοπολιτεῖαν ἀφρόνως ὠνόμαζον, οὐ τοῖς τῶν πέλας κακοῖς παιδευόμενοι.’

⁷⁶ NC, CD, §594.79-80, trans. Rapp, *Mobility and Migration*, p.45; For awareness of group identity amongst elite Byzantines see the recent publication of Samuel Pablo Müller, *Latins in Roman Byzantine Histories*, (Boston: 2022), and alternate translation of this passage p.238. Müller writes, ‘What emerges from these passages, therefore, is a certain group consciousness among educated “bureaucrats” of high social rank, who, in addition to their possession of a more elevated culture, could be identified by their dress.’

⁷⁷ This word, classical in origin to refer to a civic equality, veered radically from usage in Byzantine sources to insinuate a ‘commonwealth’ or ‘ally’ in the eleventh century, see Michael Attaleiates, *The History*, ed. Dimitris Krallis, (London: 2012), 2.1 pp.12-3, ‘Οὐ μὴν δὲ ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ποτε σύμμαχοι καὶ τῆς ἰσοπολιτείας ἡμῖν συμμετέχοντες,’ and its late twelfth century usage by Eustathios, Niketas’ brother’s mentor, which demonstrates a revived classical meaning of ‘equality,’ see Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Eustathii metropolitae Thessalonicensis opuscula*, ed. Theophilus Tafel, (Frankfurt: 1832), p.83.6-7, ‘ἐνθα ἡ φιλία ἰσότης εἶναι νομίζεται, καὶ ἰσοπολιτεία νερόμισται.’ See Denis Zakythinis, ‘Byzance. État national ou multi-national?’ *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικῆς Αρχαιολογικῆς Εταιρείας*, 10 (1981), pp.40-41.

bereft of any allies. The upper ranks of the former Constantinopolitan elite were not open to him and he struggled for re-entry for the remainder of his life. When he lacked office, as happened between 1203 and 1206 and again after 1211, Niketas Choniates was destitute. He ranted against the aristocratic elite upon whose patronage he depended.⁷⁸ The didactic element of the field-workers' passage given above, written after Choniates' own final loss of office should likely be read as a final strike against this closed elite, now that Choniates had become, once more, part of the common people.

The texts which were both written by, and addressed to, this closed Constantinopolitan society produced a variable definition of their opposing rival group. Sermons were delivered in opposition to the increased external contacts with the twelfth century, particularly the crusading movement. Read in a sermon before a Constantinopolitan congregation between 1194–97 Constantine Stilbes, future Metropolitan of Kyzikos, praised the relics within the city, which made it Orthodoxy's own Jerusalem. He urged his people to ignore Western Europe's urge to reconquer Jerusalem, and echoed a now familiar message for Constantinopolitans: 'Even if someone should summon us, even compel us, even if they happen to be very powerful, even an *archon*, far from the high Jerusalem in which we were first born... let us not *mix* [μηδὲ συναναχρανθῶμεν] with that rabble.'⁷⁹ Determining who was included within that 'us' remained fluid.

Judgements are of course limited by representation of sources. With the notable exception of Niketas Choniates' *Chronike Diegesis*, much of the textual material detailing the period 1190–1235 originates from high-ranking bishops, of either metropolitan or archdioceses. Its relevancy remains questionable. In the first half of the age of exile, we have little but dossiers of letters from ecclesiastic individuals, primarily engaging in artistic rhetorical communications of the sort that once dominated Constantinopolitan clerical education and literary salons. A handful of imperial chrysobulls and papal letters are rounded out by manuscripts which contain colophons and invocations testifying to local events. However, as the province became the centre, and authors became more invested in their local environments these sources do provide the scope to support this thesis' hypothesis that in the first half of the thirteenth century much is unstable, shifting, and innovative in internal understandings of Byzantine ethnicity and the limits of collective groupings.

⁷⁸ Simpson, *Choniates*, pp.30-31.

⁷⁹ Bernard Flusin, 'Didascalie de Constantin Stilbès sur le Mandylion et la Sainte Tuile,' *REB*, 55 (1997), pp.78-79, '§11.3-13 'Κἂν τις ἡμᾶς ἐφ' αὐτὸν προσκαλῆται, κἂν προσβιάζηται, κἂν μέγας τυχὸν δυνάστης, κἂν ἀρχικός, πόρρω που τῆς ὑψηλῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐν ἣ γεγεννήμεθα μὲν τὴν ἀρχὴν... μηδὲ συναναχρανθῶμεν πολιτικῶ συρφετῶ;'; Eshel, *Elect Nation*, p.152.

0.5. Terminologies

Several terms can be traced across the source material from c.1190–c.1235 which demonstrate the significance and/or mutability of language of inclusion. For the purposes of this thesis these refer to *ethnos*, *genos*, *patris*, *panspermia*, *homoglottoi*, and *alloglottoi*. A discussion of these terms is given below.⁸⁰

0.51. *Ethnos*

Studies of the language of ethnicity in the Byzantine millennium have naturally focused on the most conventional means of referring to a collective people as an *ethnos* [ἔθνος].⁸¹ From this word comes the entire sub-field of Byzantine ethnography and ethnic studies. *Ethnos* was broader than the modern strict identifications of a ‘people’ but referred to a community sharing a language, religion, and/or who populated a region or state. This might be the majority population or, conversely, in Medieval Byzantine contexts could designate a recognised minority amongst a majority population. One thirteenth-century document even outlines the permissions allowed to foreign peoples provided they maintain a separate quarter.⁸²

In Byzantine Greek, there was a privileged position for an *ethnos* of a chosen people, normally identified as Roman, Greek-speaking, and (Orthodox) Christian. Other Christian contexts offered different usages of *ethnos*.⁸³ In one recent work, Shay Eshel performed a study of the ‘Elect Nation Concept’ as various authors positioned Byzantine Romans as sole heirs to the Old Testament Israelites. He identified both the creation of the paradigm and the struggle to assert a chosen *ethnos* status for Byzantium. The theologically universal message of Christianity allowed for significant flexibility regarding who was included within the Byzantine *ethnos*. However, in the face of the Frankish conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 and the ascendancy of the Papacy, such ties were challenged. Both tore at the idea of the empire of Constantinople and a chosen Roman *ethnos* as the centre of Christianity.⁸⁴

In opposition to a chosen *ethnos* were the *ethne* [τὰ ἔθνη]. In the plural, *ethne* broadly referred to all non-Orthodox and/or foreign-speaking (in this thesis ‘alloglot’) peoples and is translated as ‘foreigners’ or ‘gentile nations.’⁸⁵ Byzantine ethnography selectively used the language of the Hellenistic age and Early Christianity. For example, the Psalm 118 v. 10–11:

‘All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord, I defeated them.

⁸⁰ The model for encomium written by the fourth century author Menander Rhetor remained unchanged for many centuries. It established the importance of praising first *patris*, then *genos*, and ultimately if further exempla were needed, one’s *ethnos*. Menander Rhetor, ed. and trans. Donald Russell and Nigel Wilson, (Oxford: 1981), pp.79-81.

⁸¹ Christopher Jones, ‘Ἐθνος and Γένος in Herodotus,’ *The Classical Quarterly*, 46.2 (1996), pp.315-20.

⁸² As is described by one thirteenth-century synod by Chomatenos, in: *Analecta Sacra*, ed. Pitra, Cap. CLXXXVI ‘ad C. Cabasilam,’ cols. 661-664, trans. Rapp, *Mobility and Migration*, pp.379-380.

⁸³ Anthony Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia: 2013), pp.57-59, 130; David Olster, ‘Classical Ethnography and Early Christianity,’ in *The Formulation of Christianity by Conflict through the Ages*, (New York: 1995), pp.9-31; Todd Berzon, *Classifying Christians. Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity*, (California: 2016), pp.30-36.

⁸⁴ Eshel, *Elect Nation*, pp.139-184, esp. p.150.

⁸⁵ Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*; Page, *Being Byzantine*, pp.92, 135; Stouraitis, ‘Collective Identifications,’ p.103.

πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐκύκλωσάν με, καὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Κυρίου ἡμυνάμην αὐτοῦς· κυκλώσαντες ἐκύκλωσάν με, καὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Κυρίου ἡμυνάμην αὐτοῦς·.

Textual diversions into the realms of foreign *ethne* are some of the most conservative passages of Byzantine Greek. Using ancient ethnonyms of ‘Persian,’ ‘Moesian,’ ‘Ausones’ and ‘Hagarene’ etc. allowed Byzantine authors to retain the perennial opposition of binary models from Classical Antiquity.⁸⁶ The paradigm of ‘Greek vs. Barbarian’ used by Attic authors through processes of Romanisation and imperial assimilation became that of ‘Roman vs. Barbarian,’ and through Christianization was transformed into a single chosen Byzantine Roman Christian *ethnos* vs. the *ethne*. Because the true Roman *ethnos* was central to Christianity, when creating distinctions between this chosen *ethnos* and the ‘other’ *ethne*, the opportunity was created for critiquing the culture of another people within the genre of Christian heresiology.⁸⁷ As this became imbued with the concept of unmixed *genos* vs a mixed *panspermia* of *ethne* (as explained below, pp.33–34) the importance of a ‘pure’ *ethnos* grew.

The relevance of this development for the period 1195 to c.1235 relates to the ongoing claims for legitimacy and succession to the Empire of the Romans and a chosen elite people of God. There remained a chosen people and then all others surrounding them. However, given the performativity of Romanness and its political disintegration, the territory to which the Roman *ethnos* inhabited was subjective, and increasingly narrow.

0.52. *Genos*

Genos [γένος] had two main functions in late Komnenian society and its literary rhetoric. Firstly, it denoted cultural groups. From the twelfth century ideas of being ‘Roman by *genos*,’ were often synonymous with *ethnos* and with a general, but not consistent, hierarchical conception that several *gene* constituted an *ethnos*.⁸⁸ Secondly, *genos* served to denote the presence or absence of familial nobility.⁸⁹ In cases of imperiality, for example of the Komnenoi-Doukai *genos*, it functioned as a dynastic and rhetorical flourish often translated as ‘family’ or ‘dynasty.’ However, the Byzantines also used this term in a broader sense.

Rodolphe Guiland was first to study the usage of *genos* in Byzantine literature, establishing its re-entry in the ninth century into the language describing nobility.⁹⁰ This middle Byzantine reintroduction of the patronymic *genos* emphasising the family connections of individuals was a powerful element of the late Komnenian world, which created something akin to a formal aristocratic class. Sporadic evidence does detail evidence of legal barriers and limits to social mobility based on *genos* (see pp.57-58).⁹¹ The most recent study of pre-1204 Byzantium further confirmed the role of *genos* in the rhetoric of inheritance and characteristics. Conceived alongside *patris* (fatherland); the two bestowed a likeness from parent to child.⁹²

⁸⁶ Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*, pp.106-117.

⁸⁷ Berzon, *Classifying Christians*, esp.23-29; Eshel, *Elect Nation*, p.193.

⁸⁸ Stouraitis, ‘Byzantine Romanness,’ p.135.

⁸⁹ The *genos* had a range of other minor applications, sometimes referring to language group or geographical but these were less common.

⁹⁰ Rodolphe Guiland, ‘La noblesse de race à Byzance,’ *Byzantinoslavica*, 9 (1948), pp.307-14.

⁹¹ For the claim see Malatras, *Social Stratification*, p.26; for contradicting views see Paul Magdalino, ‘Court Society and Aristocracy,’ in: *A Social History of Byzantium*, ed. John Haldon, (Oxford: 2009), 229-230; Jean-Claude Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy and its Military Function*, (Aldershot: 2006), I, p.42.

⁹² Nathan Leidholm, *Elite Byzantine Kinship, ca. 950-1204: Blood, Reputation, and the Genos*, (Amsterdam: 2019), pp.23-24, 61-62.

The use of *genos* in compounds proliferates. With *homogenês*, for example, meanings of commonality and inclusion are intended. Adversely, the gradual establishment of something akin to a more distinct and exclusive system of birth seems to have shifted in the reign of Manuel I. This was the period when the conception of being noble, *eugenês*, became legally distinct from that of ignoble, *dysgenês*, to the extent that marriage between one and the other became, without imperial sanction, punishable by law.⁹³ The exclusion of middling and second rank families from the highest offices of state reduced career opportunities. The church, legal, and bureaucratic paths remained viable as means of progression, but these too saw most of the high offices held by aristocrats. It is notable that barriers to social mobility ultimately caused significant discontent, firstly under Andronikos Komnenos (1182–85), and later, in the exiled state of Nikaia, during the reign of Theodore II Laskaris (1254–1258). Both rulers attempted to promote new men, running contrary to the preferences and opinions of their established *eugeneis*.⁹⁴

The *eugeneis* feature strongly in one key narrative of the appointment of Michael VIII Palaiologos as regent, prior to him seizing imperial power in Nikaia in 1258. In a well-known passage, Palaiologos was depicted as having been elevated to the throne supported by a ‘golden line’ of *archontes* (wealthy prominent men)⁹⁵ united by their ‘*eugenês*’ and *megalogenês*, or ‘high *genos*.’⁹⁶

‘The other *eugeneis*... and as many others whom the golden line of *megalogenês* had bound together.

Οἱ... εὐγενεῖς ἄλλοι...καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι οἷς ἡ μεγαλογενῆς σειρὰ καὶ χρυσῆ συγκεκρότητο.’⁹⁷

Our source, the historian George Pachymeres described with the term *megalogenês*, a rare word revived in late-thirteenth-century usage, repurposed from a Homeric invocation.⁹⁸ Pachymeres used it to describe the network of elite kinship supporting the early Palaiologan state. Despite the fact that several of these families would have struggled to be called ‘golden’ in twelfth-century Komnenian Constantinople, they were those who had cemented their *genos*’ status in Nikaia.

⁹³ Balsamon, *Σύνταγμα*, IV, p.189 trans. Paul Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel Komnenos, 1143-1180*, (Cambridge: 1993), p.211.

⁹⁴ Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, pp.215-234; idem. *Byzantine Hellene*, pp.124-127.

⁹⁵ A generic term of elite status defined best as means of wealth production and protection of it. See Malatras, *Social Stratification*, pp.73-74, 113; On different levels of *archontes*, i.e. either relatives of the emperor or not, see *Actes Chilandar*, I, p.269.

⁹⁶ Dionysios Stathakopoulos, ‘The Nicaean Emperors and the Aristocracy,’ *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 33, (2023), pp.219-246; Angold, *Exile*, pp.80-88; Aleksandar Jovanović, *Michael Palaiologos and the Publics of the Byzantine Empire in Exile, c.1223-1259*, (Cham: 2022), pp.85-90.

⁹⁷ Pachymeres, I, §21. The families involved were Tzamantouroi, Laskarides, Tornikioi, Strategopouloi, Raoul, Palaiologoi, Vatatzai, Philai, Kavallarioi, Nestongoi, Kamytzai, Aprenoi, Angeloι, Livadariοι, Tarchaneiotai, Philanthropenoi, and Kantakouzenoi.

⁹⁸ Iliad, 8.1.

0.53. *Patrís*: A Changing Emphasis on Birthplace, Autochthonous and *Authigeneis*

Patrís [πατρίς] literally refers to one's 'fatherland,' the place of one's origin, and is a common word in Byzantine Greek. In theory, every individual had at least one *patrís* (and sometimes multiple *patrides*) that they in some way represented. While this could refer to *Romanía* and the entire territories subject to Constantinople, more commonly it referred to the specific place of one's birth, either a province or city.⁹⁹ The convention was that a developed, wealthy and religiously notable homeland was superior to the one of rustic character, where education, virtue, and faith were less developed. At the top of the hierarchy of Byzantine *patrides* was Constantinople and, as seen above with regards to 'Constantinopolitan Exclusivism,' it existed in a class of its own. Other centres would gain literary reification as Constantinople diminished, but, before 1204, this had not yet occurred to any meaningful extent.¹⁰⁰

When one wished to refer to the inhabitants being native to a particular town, the term *autochthon* [αὐτόχθων] was employed. *Autochthon* in a Byzantine context occurs in lexica, commentaries, but most obviously in the Old Testament. A literal translation of Leviticus 24:16 reads:

‘And he that names the name of the Lord, let him die the death: let all the congregation of Israel stone him with stones; whether he be a stranger or a native [αὐτόχθων], let him die for naming the name of the Lord.

ὀνομάζων δὲ τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου, θανάτῳ θανατούσθω· λίθοις λιθοβολεῖτω αὐτὸν πᾶσα ἡ συναγωγή Ἰσραήλ· ἐάν τε προσήλυτος, ἐάν τε αὐτόχθων, ἐν τῷ ὀνομάσαι αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου, τελευτάτω.’

Autochthon and its synonym *authigenês* therefore exist within a paradigm of indigeneity (as opposed to migration). It is not always loaded with implications of preferential treatment, but as seen above and in Section 0.4, the growth of Constantinopolitan Exclusivism had accentuated attitudes. A different earlier view was given by Stephanos Skylitzes, future Metropolitan of Trebizond, in his commentary to Aristotle's works (c.1130):

‘An *autochthon* is one who has not migrated or colonists from other lands, or if they come from another land have remained in this land for many years, so that they might be similar to the *autochthones*, like those similar to the [*autochthones*] of Constantinople.

Αὐτόχθονας εἶναι καὶ μὴ μετανάστας καὶ ἀποίκους ἄλλης χώρας ἢ, κἂν ἀπὸ ἄλλης χώρας ἦλθον, ἀλλ’ οὖν χρόνους πολλοὺς ἐπιμεῖναι ταύτη τῇ χώρᾳ, ἵνα εἶεν ἀρχαῖοι καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο πλησίον τῶν αὐτοχθόνων, ὡς οἱ πλησίον τῶν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει.’¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Johannes Koder, ‘Space and Identity: Byzantine Conceptions of Geographic Belonging,’ in: *Spatialities of Byzantine Culture from the Human Body to the Universe* ed. Myrto Veikou and Ingela Nilsson, (Leiden: 2022), pp.217-218; Claudia Rapp, ‘The Christianization of the Idea of the *Polis* in Early Byzantium,’ in: *Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, Plenary Papers, (Sofia: 2011), pp.263-84.

¹⁰⁰ Clive Foss, *Nicaea: A Byzantine Capital and Its Praises*, (Brookline: 1996); or Bessarion's encomium of Trebizond in Scott Kenedy, *Two Works on Trebizond*, (London: 2019), pp.59-216.

¹⁰¹ Hugo Rabe, *Stephani in artem rhetoricam commentarium*, (Berlin: 1896), p.280.17-20; Wanda Wolska-Conus, ‘À propos des Scholies de Stéphane à la Rhétorique d'Aristote: L'auteur, l'œuvre, le milieu,’ *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Études byzantines*, (Bucharest: 1976), III, pp.599-606; Magdalino, ‘Constantinople and the Outside World,’ p.156.

There is no singular source that presents what a fatherland meant to the Byzantines. *Patris* could refer both to the empire at large and to a single city; it could be the place of family, yet it was also the place from which at least part of one's physical and mental ethnic characteristics came.¹⁰² In Section 1.5, Nicholas Mesarites views his indigeneity, that he had not migrated, as a point of prestige. For those who considered their *patris* to be a mark of social distinction 'ἐπατρίδης', the mark of being ennobled by birth within a *patris*, features prominently.

Exchanging Homelands

Ten years into the chronology of this thesis, the *patris* of most of our authors was lost to foreign conquest. It therefore inspired changes to how *patris* should function in a world where Constantinople was no longer the political centre. We possess a highly insightful thirteenth-century analysis of *patris* in the writings of Michael Choniates, brother of Niketas and former Metropolitan of Athens, as he wrote to a colleague on the subject in 1208. The letter was a reply to a letter of Manuel Beriboes, likely a deacon, who having spent much of his adult life in Constantinople had recently returned to his birthplace Chalkis/Euripos, on the island of Euboea. We may assume that the letter was a somewhat tropic complaint about the rustic nature of Beriboes' new environs compared to the capital. However, Choniates set forth a defence of Chalkis as Beriboes' original and true *patris*. Choniates, himself in exile, wrote:¹⁰³

'Therefore, you do not view your return from Byzantium to Euboea as a return to your *patris*, but as an ostracism and another exile to foreign lands. For you do not love your native soil, but rather you are distressed as a stranger, and like the righteous Lot you are tormented in your soul by the deeds of the lawless.¹⁰⁴ Longing for a better *patris* think yourself a stranger and an interloper amongst those present...'

[...] But, in this philosophical state of being a stranger, what are you to those in Chalkis [Euboea] who are being tyrannically and barbarically taxed, to pray to be preserved from further abuse, if yet you rejected, as one who lives there, merely the brotherly love to the affairs of your brothers or the matters of *homogenōn*. As a benevolent person, do you reject the numerous responsibilities of charity?'

ἔντεϋθεν καὶ τὴν ἐκ Βυζαντίου εἰς τὴν Εὐβοίαν ἐπάνοδον οὐ κάθοδον ἐπὶ πατρίδα ἢ ἀνάκαμψιν οἰόμενος ὠλοφύρου ὡς ὀστρακισμὸν δὲ καὶ ἄλλην ἐπ' ἄλλοδαποῖς φυγὴν· οὐ γὰρ ἀγαπᾷς οἰκῶν πάτριον ἔδαφος, δυσκολαίνεις δὲ μᾶλλον ὡς παροικῶν καὶ κατὰ τὸν δίκαιον Λῶτ τὴν ψυχὴν τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν ἀθέσμων βασανιζόμενος. τῆς γὰρ κρείττονος πατρίδος ἐφιέμενος, ξένον σεαυτὸν τῶν παρόντων νομίζεις καὶ παρεπίδημον [...]

[...] ἀτὰρ οὕτωςι ξενουμένῳ φιλοσόφως τί σοι καὶ τοῖς ἐν Χαλκίδι δασμολογουμένοις τυραννικῶς τε καὶ βαρβαρικῶς, ὡς εὐχεσθαι διατηρεῖσθαι τῆς ἐπιτηρείας τῆσδε ἀνώτερον, εἰ μὴ γε ἄρα <τὰ> τῶν ἀδελφῶν οικειούμενος ὡς φιλάδελφος ἢ τὰ τῶν

¹⁰² On *patris* as community and birthplace of peoples outside Constantinople see Paul Magdalino, 'Honour among Romaiοι, The Framework of Social Values in the World of Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos,' *BMGS*, 13 (1989), pp.183-218; on *patris* for Constantinopolitans see Catia Galatariotou, 'Travel and Perception in Byzantium,' *DOP*, 47 (1993), pp.221-241.

¹⁰³ The irony, that Michael Choniates had himself famously lambasted Athens for its rustic character some twenty years earlier is absent.

¹⁰⁴ It is ambiguous if this refers to the Latins or Beriboes' internal struggles.

ὁμογενῶν ἀπλῶς ὡς φιλόανθρωπος ἀπηύξω τὴν τῶν ἐράνων πολυάριθμον ἐνδελέχειαν;¹⁰⁵

Michael Choniates' letter offers a number of interesting perspectives. Firstly, that in the current context *patris* was not something an individual could change. Secondly, that the population of Chalkis, sharing a *patris* with Beriboes, were considered *homogeneis* with Beriboes and that as a man of means he had obligations both to the people and the place. This was also the view of the eleventh-century judge and historian Michael Attaleiates. Born in Attaleia/Antalya he expressed in a monastic *typikon* for his foundation in Constantinople a belief that God had allowed him to prosper despite being born of a foreign *genos* [ἢ τοῦ γένους ἀπαλλοτριώσις] to other Constantinopolitans.¹⁰⁶

Precisely the opposite conception, that a *patris* could be gained, had been the subject of an oration written for the arrival of the nine-year-old Princess Agnes of France before her marriage to the future Alexios II (1180–1183) in summer 1179:

‘After journeying from the land of her fathers [πατριῶτις, epic form of πατρίς, usually for barbarian homelands] she prepared to come to this land, which we would not say is unrepresentative of God, and she considered this to be a *patris* for all, where one would do well.

καὶ ἐξελθοῦσα ἐκ τῆς πατριώτιδος γῆς καὶ συσκευασαμένη ἐλθεῖν εἰς γῆν, ἣν οὐκ ἂν εἴποιμεν μὴ καθυποδεῖξαι θεόν, ἐλογίσαστο καὶ αὐτὴ πατρίδα πᾶσαν εἶναι, ὅπουπερ ἂν εὖ πρᾶττοι τις;¹⁰⁷

Eustathios' oratory for Agnes, who had a long life in Constantinople after her marriages to Alexios II and Andronikos, was borne out by later events. Married after 1204 to Theodore Branas, Agnes became a conduit for conqueror and conquered. Under the Latins, despite having lost her French she still served as an ally for a Frankish takeover of Byzantium.¹⁰⁸ Branas became notable as the only named Byzantine noble serving them. In 1206, he was *kaisar* holding Didymoteichon and Adrianople reportedly as much in his wife's name as his own.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ MC, *Epistulae*, §152, p.246.29-42.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Attaleiates in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. and trans. John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero (Washington D.C.: 2000), §19.28.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Wirth, ed., *Eustathii Thessalonicensis opera minora (magnam partem inedita)*, (Berlin: 1999), §15, p.256.25-27, Author's translation, cf. Andrew Stone, *Eustathios of Thessaloniki: Secular Orations 1167/8 to 1179* (Leiden: 2013), p.161. Panegyric since the 2nd century CE had focused on the successes of empire. Eustathios' over-emphasis on common *patrides* drew on models since Aelius Aristides (117-c.180), emphasising cultural assimilation as a means of praising imperial achievement and the extent of their power. Aristides' encomium of travel within the Roman Empire describing North-Western Anatolia claimed that: 'Travel is now easy since the whole world is like one man's *patris* [νῦν γοῦν ἕξεστι καὶ Ἑλληνι καὶ βαρβάρῳ καὶ τὰ αὐτοῦ κομίζονται καὶ χωρὶς τῶν αὐτοῦ βαδίζειν ὅπου βούλεται ῥαδίως, ἀτεχνῶς ὡς ἐκ πατρίδος εἰς πατρίδα ἴοντι.] Aelius Aristides, Ῥώμης ἐγκώμιον ed. Wilhelm Dindorf, *Aristides*, 1, (Leipzig: 1829, repr. Hildesheim: 1964), Jebb edition, p.225.20-22. For 'πατριώτης' see Richard Porson, *Φωτίου τοῦ πατριάρχου λέξεων συναγωγή*, 2, (Cambridge: 1822), p.402.

¹⁰⁸ Robert of Clari, trans. Norton, p.79.

¹⁰⁹ Filip Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Constantinople*, (Leiden: 2011), pp.151-158; Geoffroy de Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, E. Faral (éd), (Paris: 1961), §404-423; Ewan Short, 'The Agency and Authority of Agnes of France and Margaret of Hungary in the Aftermath of the Fall of Constantinople (1204-1206),' *Question Journal*, 3 (2019), pp.28-37.

0.54. Homoglotts and Alloglotts

‘And again, there is the *Hellēnikon* [lit. Hellenism/Greekness] being both of the same blood and *homoglōsson* [lit. of the same language], and common establishments of the gods and customs of the same type, of which it would not be fitting that the Athenians become traitors.

αὔθις δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, ἐὼν ὁμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματα τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἡθεὰ τε ὁμότροπα, τῶν προδότας γενέσθαι Ἀθηναίους οὐκ ἂν εὖ ἔχοι.’¹¹⁰

Homoglotts, Ionic Greek *homoglossoi*, and later atticized to *homoglottoi* [ὁμόγλωσσοι/ὁμόγλωττοι] is used by our sources to identify individuals with whom they shared a mother-tongue.¹¹¹ The term originated with the father of History, Herodotos, in the fifth century BCE. In a performative context, homoglotts could imply an ethno-linguistic group bound together by mutual intelligibility and extending as far as this community was spread.¹¹² Its antonym, alloglotts [ἀλλόγλωσσοι/ἀλλόγλωττοι] implied linguistic otherness. From 1180–1204, as the empire lost several key territories, Greek authors could define most renegade peoples by this. It further reinforced the conception of a Greek-speaking Roman *ethnos*, primarily based around Constantinople, opposed by speakers of other languages, allowing an additional ethnic element to the ‘*ethne*.’

It must be maintained that despite the claims, linguistic cohesion was far from assured. Historical linguists, notably Juan Signes Codoñer, have posited the existence of Byzantine dialects. This theory positions Hellenization of indigenous Anatolian languages as a slower, even ongoing, process in the medieval period.¹¹³ It potentially creates sub-divisions of Greek-speakers. In Anatolia, dialect operated as a mark of distinct ethnicity, referred to as ‘σόλοικος’ and the study of non-Atticizing Greek in a Byzantine sphere has grown in recent years. Previous assumptions that only Pontic Greek can be studied or reconstructed have been challenged.¹¹⁴ While Pontic Greek has produced the most material, it was the conclusion of the editors of *The Cambridge Grammar of Medieval and Early Modern Greek* that Pontic grammatical constructions and morphology can be hypothetically extended to Cappadocia and then the surrounding regions.¹¹⁵ While these might not have been fully independent languages, more akin to regional dialects, the theory that this can create sub-imperial identities is supported by

¹¹⁰ Nigel Wilson, ed., *Herodoti historiae* 8.144, 2 vols. (Oxford: 2015). Adapted translation.

¹¹¹ On the paradigm of homoglotts and alloglotts, terms which exist within linguistic studies in a not dissimilar sense to the Byzantine usage, see the monumental study by Louise Dabène which popularised the terminology in modern research of concepts of ‘native’ and ‘mother-tongue,’ see *Repères sociolinguistiques pour l’enseignement des langues*, (Paris: 1994); Laurent Gajo ‘Lieux et modes d’acquisition du FLE: enseignements, pratiques, pratiques d’enseignements,’ *Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquée*, 71 (2000), pp.15-33; and more recently in exegetical studies of historical interlingualism by Wolfgang Vondey, ‘A Political Theology of Glossolalia: Reconciling the Tongues of Babel, Jerusalem, and Corinth.’ *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 33.2 (2024), pp.233-251.

¹¹² For discussions of these terms see Savvas Kyriakidis, ‘The idea of civil war in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Byzantium,’ *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog instituta*, 49 (2012), pp.243-256; Stouraitis, ‘Collective Identifications,’ pp.140-142.

¹¹³ Juan Signes Codoñer, ‘Identity through language in the Byzantine Commonwealth,’ *Revisiting the Byzantine Commonwealth*, pp.66-79; idem., ‘Byzantine identity: territory and language,’ in: *The Mediterranean: A View from the East*, ed. Daniela Dueck, (Seville: 2024), pp.195-220.

¹¹⁴ For an overview see Angela Ralli, ed. *The Morphology of Asia Minor Greek. Selected Topics*, (Boston: 2019), esp. pp.1-15.

¹¹⁵ David Holton et al. ‘Morphosyntax,’ *The Cambridge Grammar of Medieval and Early Modern Greek*, (Cambridge: 2019), pp.1767-1858, esp. pp.1819-1820.

the works of sociolinguists who argue that language is only a secondary aspect to ethnicity, subordinate to homeland, region, and social class.¹¹⁶

The Roman author Polybios (200–118 BCE), was particularly influential in Byzantine depictions of sameness and otherness.¹¹⁷ In the second century BCE, Polybios recorded the precursor to Republican Rome’s invasion of the Balkans. The claim was made that the Greeks had never been subjugated by a foreign people, for their historical conflicts were merely a hegemonic struggle between those, who were *homophyloi* to each other.¹¹⁸ The Macedonian advocate then took the stance that it was the alliance with an invading foreign power from Italy, the *allophyloi*, which was a greater threat. The Republican Romans who gathered as a ‘cloud from the west’ [νέφος ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσπέρας] were a danger to both ‘yourselves and all of Greece.’¹¹⁹ Although in later centuries the ‘Romans’ became the Greek-speakers themselves, the paradigm remained remarkably consistent. Byzantine ethnicity, like Greek ethnicity, was paradoxical. Self-identifying regions could be divided and hostile but also potentially united around a broader concept.

A second essential paradigm adopted by thirteenth-century Byzantines from Polybios’ *Historiae* related to the composition of armies. The paradigm, originally relating to Carthage but later transposed to any other polity, was that armies were inferior when they were neither ‘*homoethne*’ nor ‘*homoglottoi*.’ In narrating Carthaginian attempts at rebuilding after the First Punic War, Polybios writes:

‘The consequence was that when the total force was assembled... it produced at once a spirit of dissension and sedition, and the soldiers began to hold constant meetings, sometimes of particular nations and sometimes general. As they were **neither all *homoethneis* nor *homoglots***, the camp was full of confusion and tumult and turbulence. For the Carthaginian practice of employing hired troops of various nationalities is indeed well calculated to prevent them from combining rapidly in acts of insubordination or disrespect to their officers, but in cases of an outburst of anger or of slanderous rumours or disaffection it is most prejudicial to all efforts to convey the truth to them... Some of these troops were Iberians, some Celts, some Ligurians, and some from the Balearic islands; there were a good many mix-Hellenes [μιξέλληνες], mostly deserters and slaves, but the largest portion consisted of Libyans. It was therefore impossible to assemble them and address them as a body or to do so by any other means; for how could the general be expected to know all their languages? And again to address them through several interpreters, repeating the same thing four or five times, was, if anything, more impracticable... The consequence was that everything was in a state of uncertainty, mistrust, and confusion.

‘διόπερ ἅμα τῷ συλλεχθῆναι πάντας... εὐθέως διαφορὰ καὶ στάσις ἐγεννᾶτο καὶ συνδρομαὶ συνεχεῖς ἐγίνοντο, ποτὲ μὲν κατὰ γένη, ποτὲ δ’ ὁμοῦ πάντων. ὡς δ’ ἂν **μήθ’**

¹¹⁶ Stephen May, ‘Language rights: Moving the debate forward,’ *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9 (2005), pp.319-347, esp. pp.328-332; John Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity*, (Oxford: 1985).

¹¹⁷ Polybios, *The Histories*, ed. and trans. William Paton (Cambridge, M.A.: 2010), 9.28, 29; On Polybios’ works in Byzantium of which all but the first five of his forty book *Historiae* come exclusively through Byzantine anthologies and excerpts, see Panagiotis Manafis, *(Re)Writing History in Byzantium: A Critical Study of Collections of Historical Excerpts*, (London: 2020), pp.226-228; John Moore, *The Manuscript Tradition of Polybius*, (Cambridge: 1965).

¹¹⁸ Polybios, §9.37.7-8, ‘τότε μὲν γὰρ ὑπὲρ ἡγεμονίας καὶ δόξης ἐφιλοτιμεῖσθε πρὸς Ἀχαιοὺς καὶ Μακεδόνας ὁμοφύλους καὶ τὸν τούτων ἡγεμόνα Φίλιππον.’

¹¹⁹ Ibid. §9.37.8.3, ‘σφῶν αὐτῶν ἐπεσπασμένοι καὶ κατὰ πάσης Ἑλλάδος.’

ὁμοεθνῶν μῆθ' ὁμογλώττων ὑπαρχόντων, ἦν ἀμιξίας καὶ θορύβου καὶ τῆς λεγομένης τύρβης πλήρες τὸ στρατόπεδον. Καρχηδόνιοι γὰρ ἀεὶ χρώμενοι ποικίλαις καὶ μισθοφορικαῖς δυνάμεσι, πρὸς μὲν τὸ μὴ ταχέως συμφρονήσαντας ἀπειθεῖν μηδὲ δυσκαταπλήκτους εἶναι τοῖς ἡγουμένοις ὀρθῶς στοχάζονται, ποιῶντες ἐκ πολλῶν γενῶν τὴν δύναμιν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ γενομένης ὀργῆς ἢ διαβολῆς ἢ στάσεως διδάξαι καὶ πραῦναι καὶ μεταθεῖναι τοὺς ἡγνοηκότας ὀλοσχερῶς ἀστοχοῦσιν. οὐ γὰρ οἷον ἀνθρωπίνῃ χρῆσθαι κακία συμβαίνει τὰς τοιαύτας δυνάμεις, ὅταν ἅπαξ εἰς ὀργὴν καὶ διαβολὴν ἐμπέσωσι πρὸς τινὰς, ἀλλ' ἀποθηριουῖσθαι τὸ τελευταῖον καὶ παραστατικὴν λαμβάνειν διάθεσιν. ὃ καὶ τότε συνέβη γενέσθαι περὶ αὐτοῦς· ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ μὲν Ἴβηρες, οἱ δὲ Κελτοί, τινὲς δὲ Λιγυστῖνοι καὶ Βαλιαρεῖς, οὐκ ὀλίγοι δὲ μιξέλληνες, ὧν οἱ πλείους αὐτόμολοι καὶ δοῦλοι· τὸ δὲ μέγιστον μέρος αὐτῶν ἦν Λίβυες. διόπερ οὗτ' ἐκκλησιάσαι συναθροίσαντα πάντας ὁμοῦ δυνατὸν ἦν οὗτ' ἄλλην οὐδεμίαν εὐρέσθαι πρὸς τοῦτο μηχανήν. πῶς γὰρ οἷόν τε; τὸν μὲν γὰρ στρατηγὸν εἰδέναι τὰς ἐκάστων διαλέκτους ἀδύνατον· διὰ πλειόνων δ' ἐρμηνέων ἐκκλησιάζειν, ἅμα τετράκις καὶ πεντάκις περὶ ταύτου λέγοντα πράγματος, σχεδὸν ὡς εἰπεῖν ἔτι τοῦ πρόσθεν ἀδυνατώτερον... ἐξ ὧν ἦν ἀσαφείας, ἀπιστίας, ἀμιξίας, ἅπαντα πλήρη.”¹²⁰

This judgement of military strength in the Republican state continued to be studied, heavily quoted, and employed as a model in many ages of Byzantium.¹²¹ In the second half of the twelfth century, Eustathios of Thessaloniki composed a commentary of the *Iliad* and wrote a prose paraphrase, of the kind common in Komnenian Byzantium to interpret Classical texts for a contemporary audience.¹²² He states that Troy had fallen because it was ‘neither *homoethneis* nor *homoglottoi*’ and that armies should be arranged by race [φύλα] ‘or else all shall be confused and mixed.’¹²³

There are many examples of twelfth-century Byzantium’s interpretation of Classical models to reflect their own world. Like in Polybios’ Carthage, in Eustathios’ account of Troy the besieged city suffered because it had a mixed alloglot population and so lacked the means to communicate, correspond, and create *taxis*, or order. Across this thesis the argument will reappear in the account of Nicholas Mesarites for John Axouch’s failed coup, John Apokaukos’ descriptions of preferred episcopal sees, and Theodore II Laskaris’ descriptions of a rebelling Balkans. The terminology to define ordered Romanness by language groups is equally omnipresent in the main narratives of Niketas Choniates and George Akropolites. On a practical element, Byzantine authors would supplement these terms by referring to matters of military miscommunication caused by unintelligibility amongst the army.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Ibid., §1, p.67.1-12, Adapted translation.

¹²¹ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §4, trans. Angold, p.45; Leonara Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios*, (Cambridge: 2012), pp.40-41; Simpson, *Choniates*, pp.251-253; Penelope Buckley, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene: Artistic Strategy in the Making of a Myth*, (Cambridge: 2014), pp.66n.124; Prokopios, *Gothic Wars*, ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, (Oxford: 1940), XXX.17-18.

¹²² Panagiotis Agapitos, ‘The Politics and Practices of Commentary in Komnenian Byzantium,’ *Byzantine Commentaries on Ancient Greek Texts, 12th-15th Centuries*, ed. Baukje van den Berg, (Cambridge: 2022), pp.41-60, esp. p.43.

¹²³ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes*, ed. Marchinus van der Valk, (Leiden: 1971), I, p.548.1-11. οὐχ’ ὁμοεθνεῖς εἶναι δηλοῖ τοὺς ἐν τῇ Τροίᾳ οὐδ’ ὁμογλώσσους... ἵνα μὴ φύρωσι καὶ συγγέωσι τὸ πᾶν.’

¹²⁴ The criticism was of course contrary to the wide-spread imperial practice of employing foreign mercenaries both before and after 1204. See John Birkenmeier, *The Development of the Komnenian Army 1081-1180*, (Leiden: 2002), pp.232-233; Pachymeres relates the 1259 Battle of Pelagonia almost as a proverbial episode of Polybios. A rumour of a scandal breaks out amongst the troops and communication issues prevent resolution. See Pachymeres §1.31, trans. Cassidy, pp.39-41.

0.55. *Dytikoi*

Known by both self and external identification, *Dytikoi* [δυτικοί] is a geographical term referring to ‘the Westerners.’ Its usage prior to the thirteenth century was abstract and not specific to a particular people. With the sole requirement being that an individual or group comes from ‘the West,’ either the etymologically linked ‘δύση,’ or the synonymous ‘ἑσπερά,’ many peoples over the course of the Byzantine millennium could be described as such. In the eleventh century the lands in contact with the First Bulgarian Empire were described as ‘the West’ by authors based in Constantinople. John Geometres (died c.990) described conquests by Tsar Samuel in the poem *On the Rebellion* [Εἰς τὴν ἀπόστασιν] as follows:

‘Concerning the West, who can choose the words?
The mass of Skythians roam and weaves about,
as if it was their own *patris*.

Τὰ πρὸς δύσι δὲ, ποῖος ἐξείποι λόγος;
Σκυθῶν μὲν αὐτὴν πλήθος, ὡς μὲν πατρίδα
Διατρέχει τε καὶ περιτρέχει κύκλω.¹²⁵

These lands in the Balkans were considered a rightful Roman ‘West’ despite their current control by the Bulgarian Empire. Therefore, their reconquest by imperial forces and re-subjugation was a return to Byzantium, not a novel annexation. Without further conflict throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the term ‘Westerner’ and its derivatives moved abroad and referred primarily to the ‘Latin West’ and the inhabitants of Italy, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and anyone else who contributed to the crusades. As such, it functioned primarily as a term of external opposition. Anna Komnene describes the First Crusade as ‘all the West and the entire *genos* of the barbarians.’¹²⁶

Regarding the growth of self-defined homoglot communities within Byzantium, we know of some other displaced peoples who maintained distinct bonds of confraternity linked to geographical origin. A 1048 *typikon* of a community in Thebes (modern Greece) describes the continued practices of a group of settlers originally from Naupaktos who would meet at least once a year to continue their tradition of processing an icon of the Virgin from Naupaktos. The *typikon*, signed by 49 individuals of both clergy and laity, was active as late as 1120, and it was preserved because it was carried by the population to Italy during the Norman sack of Thebes in 1147.¹²⁷ It is a noteworthy precursor to the self-definition that we see after 1204. Within the chronological scope covered by this thesis, there were comparable phenomena of displaced Byzantine groups in exile. C.1208 Michael Choniates addressed two letters to the ‘Hagiosophitai’ of Evripos (Chalkis), who were likely displaced deacons of the former patriarchate forming a collective brotherhood in exile.¹²⁸ Meanwhile in Ioannina, a group of Constantinopolitans were settled within the acropolis of the city shortly after the fall and

¹²⁵ John Geometres, in: *Anecdota Graeca e Codd. Manuscripts*, ed. John Cramer, 4, (Oxford: 1841), p.272.23-25.; Mitko Panov, *The Blinded State: Historiographic Debates about Samuel Cometopoulos and His State (10th-11th Century)*, (Leiden: 2019), p.42.

¹²⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, ed. Diether Reinsch, (Berlin: 2001), §10.5.4.12-13, ‘πᾶσα γὰρ ἡ ἑσπέρα καὶ ὅσων γένος βαρβάρων.’

¹²⁷ John Nesbitt, ‘A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era,’ *BZ*, 69 (1975), pp.360-84; Leslie Brubaker, ‘Performing Byzantine Identity,’ pp.131-132.

¹²⁸ MC, *Epistulae*, §§102, 103.

remained there as a discrete faction.¹²⁹ There is a suggestion based on an undated *semeioma* written by one *Dytikos* that the group was organised as a Constantinopolitan unit. The document, likely dating to the 1220s, concerned one Theodore Diabatenos ‘*Primikerios* of the Varangians’ and his marriage to Kale Mardaropoula.¹³⁰ There is no further evidence to confirm whether or not Diabatenos was genuinely leading a reconstituted Varangian Guard in Ioannina to protect the fugitive Constantinopolitans. Later in 1232, following the fall of the Epirote Emperor Theodore Komnenos Doukas and the regime that had fostered their prosperity, there were isolated reports of violence between autochthonous Ioannites and Constantinopolitans. This suggests that the acceptance and integration of the capital’s refugees depended on a viable patron and protector.¹³¹ The terms used; ‘*autochthones* inhabitants of the *patris*’ [οἱ αὐτόχθονες ἄποικοι τῆς πατρίδος] who after political collapse became briefly aligned with the ‘mixture of foreigners’ indicates a period of hostility.¹³² Once more, the evidence is too fragmentary to say more. These hints and mentions of diasporic peoples united by birthplace and separated from the larger community simply help flesh out an understanding of the continued stratification of Byzantine society.

After 1204, a network of newly independent bishops was formed within the Epirote state. In a vast dossier of their epistolary communications, they repeatedly self-identified as the ‘Westerners,’ and *Dytikoi*.¹³³ They owed their positions to Epiros’ expansion, either through the restoration of their sees or as entirely new appointments of the local rulers and synods. The thirteenth-century *Dytikoi* were a more far-flung and better attested group than the preceding examples. Through their letters, the *Dytikoi* frequently demonstrated a capacity to self-identity as a discrete network of learned bishops and secular authorities based on their location relative to Constantinople. Authors adopted oppositional geopolitical/ecclesiastical ethnonyms: ‘the West,’ ‘the Western Provinces,’ and ‘the Churches of the West.’¹³⁴ This spatial identification did not override all other loyalties or identities, rather, we get the impression of a long process of growing acceptance that the circumstances had changed. Much still linked the Byzantine successor-states, they could recognise one another as being of the same *genos*, reference the imperial age before 1204, and were to a great extent formed of a generation that knew each other either personally or by reputation. While the *Dytikoi* linked by the Greek language were

¹²⁹ On Ioannina post-1204 see Tonia Kiousopoulou, ‘Spatial Organization in Late Byzantine Cities (13th-14th Centuries),’ in: *The Routledge Handbook of the Byzantine City from Justinian to Mehmet II (Ca. 500 - Ca. 1500)*, ed. Nikolas Bakirtzis, (Abingdon: 2024), pp.96-99.

¹³⁰ Apokaukos, ed. Nikos Bees, ‘Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropolitens von Naupaktos (in Aetolien),’ *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher*, 21 (1971-1974), §4, p.60.20-21, ‘Καλὴ δὲ ταύτης τὸ ὄνομα, εἰς γάμον τῷ πριμμικηρίῳ τῶν ἐν Ἰωαννίνοις βαράγγων, τῷ κῦρ Θεοδώρῳ, ἐξέδοτο.’; Lambropoulos, §34, p.293. On changes to the Varangian-Byzantine relationship in the thirteenth century see Sverrir Jakobsson, *The Varangians: In God’s Holy Fire*, (Cham: 2020), pp.99-100, 139-140, and 159-162. This particular mention of Epirote Varangians escaped the author.

¹³¹ John Apokaukos’ 1232 *Semeioma*, ed. Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ‘Περὶ συνοικισμοῦ τῶν Ἰωαννίνων μετὰ τὴν φραγκικὴν κατακτησὶν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως,’ *Δελτίον τῆς ιστορικής καὶ ἐθνολογικῆς ἐταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 3 (1891), pp.451-455; Brendan Osselwald, ‘The Ethnic Composition of Medieval Epiros,’ in: *Imagining frontiers - Contesting Identities*, ed. Steven Ellis, (Pisa: 2007), p.132; Donal Nicol, ‘Refugees, Mixed Population and Local Patriotism in Epiros and Western Macedonia after the Fourth Crusade,’ in: *XV^e Congrès international d’études byzantines, Rapports 1. Histoire*. (Athens: 1976, repr. London: 1986), pp.3-33.

¹³² Apokaukos, ‘Περὶ συνοικισμοῦ,’ p.455.

¹³³ Ioannis Smarnakis, ‘Political Power, Space, and Identities in the State of Epiros (1205-1318),’ in: *The Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, eds. Michael Edward Stewart, David Alan Parnell, and Conor Whately, (London: 2022), pp.300-311.

¹³⁴ Apokaukos, ‘Epirotica,’ §15, p.265.22 ‘τῶν δυτικῶν... τῆ δυτικῆ.’ §24, p.285.28 ‘ἡμᾶς μέρη... τὰ δυτικὰ. §26, p.289.19. §26, p.291.4-5, ‘ἐν δύσει χηρευούσας ἐκκλησίας.’; Smarnakis, ‘Political Power.’

identifiable as homoglotts, they were differentiated from others by experience and autonomy under the anomalous geopolitical conditions of their new society, and they tell us as much. Numerous times, the Epirote *Dytikoi* try to explain why they have created a parallel church and imperial state. Linked by ideas of exile and abandonment, almost an origin tale is provided in a letter of 1220 rebuking the leader of the rival church in Nikaia for claiming authority over them.

‘Physically a chasm opened between us, which the Latin tyranny compounds. [It divides] the leading inhabitants from the physical location of [your] throne, and therefore the highest offices of the East from the West. You did not think to look after us humble ones through letters, considering us like a tattered garment or useless vessels that are discarded. In this corner of the West we were abandoned.

‘σωματικῶς γὰρ εἶργει τὸ μεταξὺ χάσμα, ὅπερ ἰταλικὴ τυραννὶς ἡμῖν ἐπεβόθρευσεν· ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς ἐν ὑψηλοῖς κατοικῶν καὶ θρόνου καὶ τοπικῆς θέσεως· ὑψηλότερα γὰρ τὰ ἔφα τῶν δυτικῶν· ἐπὶ τοῦς ταπεινοὺς ἡμᾶς ἰδεῖν διὰ γραφῶν οὐκ ἠξίωσας ἢ ὡς ῥάκος ἀποκαθημένον ἡμᾶς λογισάμενος ἢ ὡς ἄχρηστον σκεῦος, ἐν γωνία ταύτη παρρηριμμένους τῇ δυτικῇ.’¹³⁵

That these letters, which are essentially schismatic and secessionist, have survived at all is a testament to the interest in this generation. The manuscript preserving the majority of the letters, *Ms. Petropolitanus 250* (and its addenda in *251*) contains the works of an independent, imperial Epiros of the 1220s.¹³⁶ As well as the main body of John Apokaukos’ work, it also includes works by multiple authors which attest to a more complex composition. Within *Petropolitanus 250*, there are the works of Basil of Ohrid, John Apokaukos, chrysobulls of Emperors Theodore Komnenos Doukas, and letters from his successor Manuel, Euthymios Tornikes, George Bardanes, George Mesymeres, Michael Choniates, Niketas Choniates (*Epistulae*), Patriarchs John VIII Xiphilinos, Germanos II, Manuel Sarantenos, Theodore Prodromos, and Euthymios Malakes. The collection in a single codex of such disparate authors on both sides of the Nikaian-Epirote conflict is an apt illustration of the networks of the *Dytikoi* and of their internal and external communications. Letters were received and retained for further study to influence later compositions. It may have been at the monastery of the Mesopotamon that Michael Choniates’ works were first collected after his death c.1222 by George Bardanes, Choniates’ former mentee. This may explain the presence of Niketas Choniates’ letters. The collection then passed to the Mesopotamon across the straits from Bardanes’ see in Kerkyra, where he likely bequeathed them at his own death c.1238.¹³⁷

This composite manuscript also encourages speculation. *Petropolitanus 250* has been tentatively associated to the scribe Nikandros, active throughout the mid-thirteenth century and identified as the copyist of five manuscripts, one dated to 1255.¹³⁸ If Nikandros copied

¹³⁵ Vasilievsky, ‘Epirotica,’ §15, p.265.17-23.

¹³⁶ Description of ‘Греч. 250’ see Irina Lebedeva, et al., *Каталог греческих рукописей Российской национальной библиотеки [Catalogue des manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque nationale russe]*, (Saint-Petersburg: 2014),

¹³⁷ Angold, *Church and Society*, p.211; A description of the history of the Mesopotamon monastery is in Donald Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros: 1267-1479: A Contribution to the History of Greece in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: 1984), p.245.

¹³⁸ Anna Gioffreda, ‘L’Ambrosiano C 279 inf. e il copista Nicandro,’ *Medioevo Greco: rivista di storia e filologia bizantina*, 13 (2013), pp.127-138; Nikandros’ dates his work in *Grec 0194A* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France,

Petropolitanus 250, the manuscript should be dated to the reign of Michael II Komnenos-Doukas (1230-1268), likely to the period preceding the Battle of Pelagonia in 1259, when Michael was at the high-point of his imperial ambitions, championing the Epirote claim to independence, and his uncle's legacy. The manuscript's composition, the fact that there is no introduction, no break between the works of Apokaukos, imperial chrysobulls or any other author, as well as its utter lack of ornamentation or illumination, encourages us to view this product of the *Dytikoi* as a functional item. Likely gathering narrative material on Epiros as told through the language of the *Dytikoi*, it was probably commissioned as means for Michael's own chancellery to support his claims to independence.

0.56. *Panspermía* (of *Ethne*).

'There are some who hold that the semen, though a unity, is as it were a *'panspermía'* consisting of a large number of ingredients; it is as though someone were to mix and blend together a large number of juices into one fluid... So, they say, it is with the semen, which is a mixture of a large number of ingredients; and in appearance the offspring takes after that parent from whom the largest amount is derived. This theory is obscure, and at many points a sheer fabrication. At the same time, it aims at a more satisfactory statement, viz., that this "*panspermía*" is something that exists not in actuality, but only potentially.'

“εἰσὶ γὰρ τινες οἱ φασι τὴν γονὴν μίαν οὖσαν οἷον πανσπερμίαν εἶναί τινα πολλῶν ὥσπερ οὖν εἴ τις κεράσειε πολλοὺς χυμοὺς εἰς ἓν ὑγρόν... τοῦτο συμβαίνειν καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γονῆς πολυμιγῶς οὖσης· ἀφ’ οὗ γὰρ ἂν τῶν γεννῶντων πλεῖστον ἐγγένηται, τούτῳ γίνεσθαι τὴν μορφήν ἐοικός. οὗτος δὲ ὁ λόγος οὐ σαφῆς μὲν καὶ πλασματίας ἐστὶ πολλαχῆ, βούλεται δὲ καὶ βέλτιον λέγειν μὴ ἐνεργεῖα ὑπάρχειν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ δύναμιν, ἣν λέγει πανσπερμίαν· ἐκείνως μὲν γὰρ ἀδύνατον, οὕτως δὲ δυνατόν.”¹³⁹

The term *panspermía* [πανσπερμία], is primarily attributed to the philosopher Anaxagoras (sixth century BCE) as discussed in Aristotle's treatise *De generatione animalium*.¹⁴⁰ *De generatione* describes the various theories of zoological and human conception, and of *panspermía*, an indistinguishable, inseparable mixture of biological seed presented at conception through which one's paternal qualities are transmitted. Aristotle dismisses the idea that the seed comes from both parents and is in competition to decide both gender and characteristics. He concludes that in everything there is a core element of chance. As a result, any characteristic could skip generations as the seed of many ancestors lay dormant in the generation of life. *De generatione*'s discussion ultimately frames the treatise with a warning against the causes of both visible and behavioural deformity and deficiency. Changes to the

BNF); Charles Astruc, *Les Manuscrits grecs datés des XIIIe et XIVe siècles conservés dans les bibliothèques publiques de France. I. XIIIe siècle*. (Paris: 1989), pp.28-31.

¹³⁹ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, ed. & trans. Arthur Peck, (Cambridge, MA: 1943), 769a.29-b.2; While *panspermía* also features in Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione*, the latter work with its focus on metaphysics is less pertinent to this thesis. See idem. *La Generazione e la Corruzione*, ed. & trans. Maurizio Migliori, (Milan: 2013), 314a.28-30, p.6; For the debate between Democritus and Anaxagoras see Herman De Ley, 'Pangenes versus Panspermia, Democritean Notes on Aristotle's Generation of Animals.' *Hermes*, 108.2 (1980), pp.129-53.

¹⁴⁰ Despite the attribution of the origin of *'panspermía'* to Anaxagoras (particularly in the outlandish modern theories of cosmic biological generation), the term does not survive in his own writings, merely those of his commentators. The closest allusion in his surviving work is Fragment 4, ed. Herman Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 2, (Berlin: 1952), p.34. For a history of the term, see Robert Temple, 'The prehistory of panspermia: Astrophysical or metaphysical?' *International Journal of Astrobiology*, 6.2 (2007), pp.169-180.

mixture could manifest in physiognomy or alter created life, resulting in something out of harmony with nature. Aristotle's warnings were attached to *panspermia* for generations, normally in relation to flora and fauna, but with a lingering warning to protect the natural order from outside influence and prevent the generation of monstrosities.

The term *panspermia*, while never totally absent from Byzantine texts, re-entered Greek discourse in the twelfth century in a resurgence hereto unstudied.¹⁴¹ It was likely prompted by new commentaries on Aristotle's minor works composed by Michael of Ephesus (1118-1130), a philosopher in the literary circle of Anna Komnene (1083-c.1153). Anna, the polymath daughter of Alexios I, convened a literary salon which continued beyond her entry into a convent in 1118. Michael's commentary expanded upon Aristotle's rejection of *panspermia*. More freely critical of Aristotle than his predecessors, Michael shifted his argument almost exclusively towards human society and monstrosities arguing that there were more criteria in the creation of humans and positing that 'likeness and unlikeness' in the child were dependent also upon conditions of 'foods, lands, winds, and all other things he said.'¹⁴² Conventionally, Michael made also several passing comments making both 'God and Nature' responsible for life.¹⁴³

Following Michael's commentary, there was resurgent interest in *panspermia* as a term of human ethnicity particularly in how it related to peoples being 'mixed.' It reappears during the reigns of John and Manuel Komnenos as unequivocally a polemical term, most frequently as the idiom '*panspermia* of *ethne*' [*πανσπερμία τῶν ἐθνῶν*], to refer to an amorphous ethnic enemy, conflated with imperial nemeses in the court poetry of Theodore Prodromos (c.1118-1158). Prodromos first used it when describing John's triumphs over the Pechenegs classicized as the 'western *panspermia* of the Getae.'¹⁴⁴ A later poem (translated in the prologue for this thesis) employed the imagery as Manuel Komnenos was portrayed standing alone against a *panspermia* of the entire western *ethne* of the Second Crusade.¹⁴⁵ Prodromos used the imagery in six different works each denoting the mixed nature of Byzantium's ethnic enemies. He established 'mixed *panspermia* of *ethne*' [*ποικίλην τῶν ἐθνῶν... πανσπερμίαν*] as the primary usage, although there are later moments of the *panspermia* being qualified as either specifically Latin, Bulgarian, Kievan Rus, or a combination of these. Post-1204, Patriarch Germanos II's depiction of Constantinople as a *panspermia* (Section 2.8) and one weakened before 1204 by its composite mixtures of peoples receives specific discussion. The final expansion of the *panspermia* to include the *Dytkoi* and the Balkans is discussed in Section 3.17.

¹⁴¹ A text attributed to Emperor Leo VI (886-912) describes Zeus creating the Olympian gods out of his divine '*panspermia*,' *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae*, ed. Theodora Antonopoulou (Turnhout: 2008), p.4.64. Michael Psellos also briefly considered the term in his own commentary to *De generatione*, see Linos Benakis (ed.), *Michael Psellos Kommentar zur Physik des Aristoteles*, (Athens: 2008), 3.12.21-27.

¹⁴² For Michael's commentary on *panspermia* see John Philoponus (Michael of Ephesus), *De generatione animalium commentaria*, ed. Michael Hayduck, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* (Berlin, 1903), 6, pp.183-85, here p.185.35-36 "ὁμοιότητα καὶ ἀνομοιότητα καὶ αἱ τροφαὶ καὶ αἱ χώραι ἄνεμοί τε καὶ τᾶλλα πάνθ' ὅσα εἰρήκει."; On Michael see the introduction to James Wilderbing and Julia Trompeter, *Michael of Ephesus on Aristotle*, (London: 2019), pp.1-6.

¹⁴³ Michael of Ephesus, p.64.10, 'εὐλόγως οὖν, φησὶν, ὁ θεὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις ταῦτα ἐδημιούργησεν.'

¹⁴⁴ Theodore Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte*, p.25.35, 'ἡ δυσμική δὲ τῶν Γετῶν πανσπερμία.'

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.30.47.

0.6. Hypothesis

This thesis shall establish through a series of case studies three aspects of thirteenth-century rhetoric relating how the (former) Byzantines constructed identities. Drawing together theories of performative ethnicity, Constantinopolitan Exclusivism, and the fluctuating terminologies of inclusion which our sources employed, an analysis of these phenomena will be presented. It will contextualise and compare the tensions of Constantinopolitan society in the years immediately preceding 1204 with the rhetoric of the fragmented rival polities that came after. Having established that there was rhetoric that privileged one birthplace over another it will investigate the changes that occurred when the source of that singular virtue, Constantinople, was lost.

If we place Constantinopolitan Exclusivism in the field of simple snobbery relating only to social class then it contributes only to explanations of strain and instability before 1204. However, if we can acknowledge it as part of a greater trend, a need to categorise and classicize their contemporary world into one which fit ancient models and sub-divided their own cultural group, then the rhetorical war waged across the Aegean can add a new dynamic both to the study of the thirteenth century and to Byzantine identities in general. Always moving, always contextual, the group identities of Byzantium were negotiated in binary paradigms which couched social, political, and religious differences in ethnic terminology. Such was the binary paradigm of ‘Roman’ vs ‘Barbarian’ and of a chosen *ethnos* amongst gentile *ethne*, which will necessarily reduce anyone excluded from an author’s groupings into something else. As this thesis traces the usage of language current at the court of the Komnenoi and Angeloi to the period after the fall, new connections and conclusions can be drawn in how the Byzantines discussed, even politicised, ethnicity. We might shift emphasis from proving the existence of ethnic groups to unlocking the perceptions of ethnicity within broader Byzantine source material. Which aspects of Romanness did certain individuals lack, how consistent were those claims, and could they be refuted?

Within the social constructionist theory, ‘pariah groups’ were often created to separate minority groups from a host population. Often distinguished by wealth, education, or language, the ‘boundaries of pariah groups are most strongly maintained by the excluding host population.’¹⁴⁶ While ‘pariah groups’ are discernible pre-1204, the situation is complicated after. Those provincials who were a pariahs in 1200, after 1204 became the literal neighbours of our sources and the binary paradigm of Romanness had to follow events and re-draw the boundary of inclusion. In a fragmented political scene the projection of different ethnic groups using either valid or invalid ethnonyms continued to use the same terminology discussed above, gradually expanding the binary paradigm of Romanness to make ‘foreign’ enemies of former citizens.

¹⁴⁶ Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, pp.30-32.

Section One:

1.0. Ethnicity and Ideology in 1200: Constantinopolitan Exclusivism and the Legacy of Andronikos Komnenos

This chapter is a study of the use of rhetorical ethnicity and otherization by Constantinopolitan elites before the loss of the capital and their displacement in 1204. It will establish trends towards projection and political distortion of origins and ethnonyms, as well as an exclusivism which privileged Constantinople in its relationships with provincial populations. Both phenomena persisted, even directed, the rhetoric of the age of exile between rival Greek-speaking states and so contextualise trends begun in the unsettled age of the late Komnenoi and their Angeloi branch. Discussed in this section are two prime cases. First, an imperial inscription set up in a provincial city, which publicly condemns and otherises another *ethnos* of the empire. Second, the rhetorical devices used in a narration by a member of the fallen regime describing the combined threat of the *ethne*, alloglots, and homoglots in the last days of the Angeloi regime, just before the arrival of the Fourth Crusade.

1.1. The 1193/94 Christoupolis Inscription

In 1937, a young Georgios Bakalakes (1908–1991), future Professor of Archaeology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, published in the *Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς* an inscription that has remained little known to this day.¹⁴⁷ He announced his discovery and published a transcription of a marble plinth, which was until that point occupying a position in the external ramparts of Kavala's predominantly Ottoman-built castle, a fortress overlooking the Aegean Sea in south-eastern Macedonia. Functioning as a cornerstone in a north parapet facing Kavala's aqueduct and the city below, the stone was reused from an originally Byzantine context.¹⁴⁸ Displayed now in Kavala's Archaeological Museum, it has remained overlooked by many Byzantinists owing to its publication's proximity to World War Two, suspension of the journal, and a general lack of awareness. Absent from all standard works on Byzantine epigraphy, this opening section seeks to correct this oversight. The inscription speaks to domestic instability within the Byzantine Empire, and an attempted reconstruction of what was presumably a church amidst a general rebuilding of the city of Kavala, Byzantine Christoupolis, in 1193/4. As well as a narrative of recent events, it is also the strongest and most explicit textual evidence that we yet possess, demonstrating the isolation and identification of internal Byzantine populations as enemies. As such, the inscription allows for a transposal of 'Constantinopolitan Exclusivism' from an almost entirely elite context to a public one. With a Byzantine population openly condemned as the cause of imperial decline, the inscription marks a significant shift in the usage and context of ethnonyms for political purposes.

Carved in close-set uncial characters between 1.2cm and 2cm high, the full Christoupolis inscription was published as measuring approximately 70cm wide by 41cm high and 14cm thick, while a diagonal break renders the last part partially lost and very uncertain. Since 1937,

¹⁴⁷ Georgios Bakalakes, 'Οι τελευταίοι Κομνηνοί εξ επιγραφής της Καβάλας,' *Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς*, 100 (1937), pp.464-472. I am grateful for the staff of the Archaeological Museum of Kavala for their permission and assistance in photographing the inscription and searching their own records. The inscription was mentioned but given without reference or further discussion by Velika Ivkowska, *An Ottoman Era Town in the Balkans: The Case Study of Kavala* (Routledge: 2020), p.48; In older scholarship it was referenced by Paul Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macédoine Orientale à l'époque Chrétienne et Byzantine* (Paris: 1945), p.176; Bakalakes' rendering of the inscription has been reproduced just once (without any discussion) in an overcorrection of several lexicographical errors while retaining multiple others, in a general narrative of the city by Nikolaos Georgiades, 'Χριστούπολις, Η Βυζαντινή Καβάλα,' *Byzantina*, 32 (2012), pp.160-161.

¹⁴⁸ Bakalakes, 'Οι τελευταίοι Κομνηνοί,' pp.464-465.

an additional break has rendered the beginning of each line lost. This leaves the remainder measuring 61cm wide, 51cm high and 14cm thick. It is possible that the original measurements were incorrect. To reconstruct those lost characters, we rely entirely on Bakalakes' lithographs. Meanwhile, for the remainder, modern photographs are presented below. The text of the inscription retains a dodecasyllabic metre and an element of classicising vocabulary, but its execution does not match the literary quality. The execution is replete with non-standard orthography, the spelling of repeating words being inconsistent within the inscription itself, and the inscription has neither border nor frame.¹⁴⁹ The provincial origin and the inexperience of its craftsman is suggested by a complete lack of any decoration, ligatures, or orthographical *varia*, usually an opportunity for craftsmen to demonstrate their command of aesthetic. When compared to Christoupolis' two other known inscriptions, both from the tenth century, the 1193/94 example has little in common with either.¹⁵⁰ Basileios Kladon's rebuilding of Christoupolis' walls in 925/26 possessed accentuation and protocol, while the unnamed and undated tower rebuilding of the same century was incised with a prayer invoking God directly.¹⁵¹

Bakalakes' reading of the inscription was imperfect and is not consistent with the museum's currently displayed transcription. With the exhibited one bearing additional errors of its own, there is need for subsequent correction. Therefore, a fully updated epigraphic edition, standardised Greek, and first translation of the extant fifteen lines of this inscription read as follows:

Transcription:

- 1 ΚΑΤΑΚΑΝ[ΘΕΝ]ΤΑ ΔΕ ΤΟΥΤΟΝ ΣΗΝ ΤΩ ΟΙΚΩ ΚΑΤΕ
 ΚΑΝΣΑΝ ΔΕ ΤΗΝ ΠΟΛΙΝ ΤΟΤΕ ΠΑΣΑΝ ΟΤΕ ΚΑΤΗΛΘΕΝ
 ΕΝ ΚΟΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΕΙ ΚΟΜΝΙΝΟΣ ΑΝΔΡΟΝΙΚΟΣ Ο ΤΙΡΑΝΙΣ[ΑΣ]
 ΕΚ ΠΑΦΛΑΓΟΝΩΝ ΚΕ ΣΥΝΩΝ ΑΛΕΞΙΩ ΤΩ ΤΟΝ ΜΑΝΟΥΗΛ ΕΞ ΟΣ
 5 ΦΥΟΣ ΤΕΧΘΕΝΤΙ ΚΑΙ ΔΥΣΤΥΧΩΣ ΑΡΖΑΝΤΙ ΤΗΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΑΣ.
 <Ὁ ΡΗΘΕΙΣ> ἈΝΔΡΟΝΙΚΟΣ ΒΥΘΙΣΑΣ ΤΟΥΤΟΝ ΣΗΝ ΤΗ ΤΕΚΟΝΧΗ
 ΤΗΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣ ΗΡΞΕΝ· ΚΑΙ ΤΥΡΑΝΝΗΣΑΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΟΥΣ¹⁵² ΕΙΣΑΠΑΞ
 ΜΟΝΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΙ ΣΗΝ ΤΗ ΣΙΖΙΓΟ ΤΟΥΤΟΝ + ΕΛΘΟΝ ΔΕ ΠΑΛΗΝ Ε[ΙΣ ΒΙΘΝ]
 ΝΟΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΓΓΕΛΩΝ ΑΝΕΙΛΕΝ ΤΟΥΤΟΝ ΩΣ ΠΑΡΑΒΑΤΗΝ ΟΡΚΩΝ·
 10 ΚΕ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΕΙ ΚΑΙ ΦΗΜΙΖΕΤΕ ΜΟΝΟΣ ΙΣΑΑΚΙΟΣ· ΗΝ ΟΥΤΟΣ
 ΑΓΓΕΛΩΝ ΚΛΑΔΟΣ ΚΕ ΒΛΑΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΔΡΟΝΙΚΟΝ ΤΟΝ ΑΟΙΔΙΜΟΥ¹⁵³
 ΤΟΥΤΟΝ ΤΟ ΟΓΔΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΑΣ ΕΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΚΕΝΙΣΘΗ Ο ΠΑΡΟΝ
 [ΙΚΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΟΝ ΙΚΕΤΕΥΩ ΠΛΕΙΟΝΑ ΟΜΩΜΟΚΩΣ
 [ΑΝΘ'] ΟΝ ΕΚΤΗΣΕ Μ'ΕΞ ΟΣΦ[Υ]ΟΣ [ΓΝΗΣΙΩΣ]
 15 ΤΗ ΠΑΝΥ[ΜΝ]ΗΤΩ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΝΑΓ[Ι]Ω ΙΚΟΝΙ [...]¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ For discrepancy between literary quality and execution see Andreas Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme Auf Stein Nebst Addenda Zu Den Bänden 1 Und 2*, (Vienna: 2014), pp.73-75.

¹⁵⁰ *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, (Vienna: 1976-), 15 vols.; Peter Soustal, *Makedonien, Südlicher Teil*, (Vienna: 2022), discussing Kavala/Christoupolis in *TIB*, 11, pp.351-355; Flora Karagianne, *Οι Βυζαντινοί οικισμοί στη Μακεδονία μέσα από τα αρχαιολογικά δεδομένα (4^{ος}-15^{ος} αιώνας)*, (Thessaloniki: 2010).

¹⁵¹ Rhoby, *Stein*, GR62, GR63, pp.239-243. All three inscriptions share dodecasyllabic metre.

¹⁵² Alternatively, 'KV>C<NOUCE [βασιτειανούς],' Bakalakes, 'Οι τελευταίοι Κομνηνοί,' p.466.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.466. Alternatively, Bakalakes, [τοῦ Ἀγγελου]. This section, concerning Isaak's lineage, is less legible.

¹⁵⁴ These final three lines are very uncertain. The currently exhibited and tangential reconstruction is here reproduced, with reservations.

Standardisation into dodecasyllabic verse:

- 1 Κατακαυθέντα δὲ τοῦτον σὺν τῷ οἴκῳ
κατέκαυσαν δὲ τὴν πόλιν τότε πᾶσαν
ὅτε κατῆλθεν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει
Κομνηνὸς Ἀνδρόνικος ὁ τυραννήσας
5 ἐκ Παφλαγόνων καὶ συνὼν Ἀλεξίῳ
τῷ τοῦ Μανουήλ ἐξ ὀσφύος τεχθέντι καὶ
δυστυχῶς ἄρξαντι τῆς βασιλείας.
Ὁ ῥηθεὶς Ἀνδρόνικος βυθίσας τοῦτον
σὺν τῇ τεκούσῃ τῆς βασιλείας ἤρξεν·
10 καὶ τυραννήσας τοὺς κοινωνοὺς εἰσάπαξ
μονοκρατορία σὺν τῇ σύζυγο τοῦτου
ἐλθὼν δὲ παλιν εἰς Βιθυνοὺς τῶν Ἀγγέλων
ἀνείλεν τοῦτον ὡς παραβάτην ὄρκων·
καὶ βασιλεύει καὶ φημίζεται μόνος
15 Ἰσαάκιος· ἦν οὗτος Ἀγγέλων κλάδος
καὶ βλαστός Ἀνδρονίκου τοῦ ἀοιδίμου.
Τούτου τὸ ὄγδοον τῆς βασιλείας ἔτος
ἀνεκαινίσθη ὁ παρῶν <οἶκος πατρός
ὄν ἰκετεύω πλείονα ὁμωμόκῳς
20 [ἀνθ’] ὧν ἔκτισέ μ’ ἐξ ὀσφύος [γνησίως]
ἢ πανυ[μν]ήτῳ καὶ πανάγνῳ εἰκόνη... >

Translation:

- 1 After this [katholikon/kastro?] had been burned down,
they then burned down the house and the entire city.
That was when Andronikos Komnenos, the tyrant of the Paphlagonians,
returned to Constantinople and together with Alexios,
5 born from the loins of Manuel, wretchedly ruled the empire.
The aforementioned Andronikos, when he had destroyed¹⁵⁵ him [Alexios]
together with his mother [Maria of Antioch],¹⁵⁶
ruled the empire and completely tyrannised his fellow rulers.¹⁵⁷
He held power as sole-emperor together with the wife of [Alexios].
10 Then one Angelos from Bithynia came again
and killed him [Andronikos] as a breaker of oaths.

¹⁵⁵ Βυθίσας, literally ‘sank,’ was likely a reference to the disrespectful deposition of the imperial bodies. The term, or similar, is known elsewhere. Eustathios of Thessaloniki’s *Lament* reads that Andronikos ‘entrusted him [Alexios] to the depths of the sea,’ [βυθῶ θαλάσσης πιστεύσας] p.52.16.

¹⁵⁶ Dowager-Empress Maria Hauteville of Antioch was strangled towards the end of 1182, and her son Alexios II either strangled or decapitated with a bowstring before September 1193. Their murderers were Stephen Hagiochristophorites, Constantine Tripsychos, and Theodore Dadibrenos. Two churchmen sanctioned the deed and were party to the burial at sea of Byzantium’s *porphyrogenitos* child-emperor. These were John Kamateros, future Archbishop of Bulgaria (for whom see below), and Theodore Choumos. NC, *CD*, §269-274, trans. p.149-152; Charles Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West*, (Harvard: 1968), pp.46-50. The event is recorded also in western narratives, see Robert de Clari, §XXI, trans. p.50 and legendariums constructed as far abroad as Oxford recount the tyranny of the ‘Greeks’ under ‘Emperor Andronius’ so that the Trojan war was recast with Andronikos as a new Greek (Achaean) King Agamemnon, positioning the Crusaders as heirs to the Trojans with an ancient grievance for its sack. Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium* for ‘Of Andronius, Emperor of Constantinople,’ in: M. R. James, et al., *Oxford Medieval Texts: Walter Map: De Nugis Curialium: Courtiers’ Trifles* (Oxford: 1983), pp.176-179; Teresa Shawcross, ‘Reinventing the Homeland in the historiography of Frankish Greece: the Fourth Crusade and the Legend of the Trojan War,’ *BGMS*, 77 (2003), pp.120-152.

¹⁵⁷ Alternatively: the ‘common people’ [κοινωνοὺς].

This sole man reigned and was called
Isaak, of the branch of the Angeloi
and a blossom of Andronikos the famed.
15 In this, the eighth year of Isaak's reign [1193/94],
<the present house of my father was rebuilt.
Having sworn many vows, I pray for him
in return for having me begotten from his loins as his legitimate son
19 for the most praiseworthy [Virgin]... and all holy icon...>¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Many thanks to Ida Toth, Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, and Andreas Rhoby, for their advice and recommendations regarding this inscription.

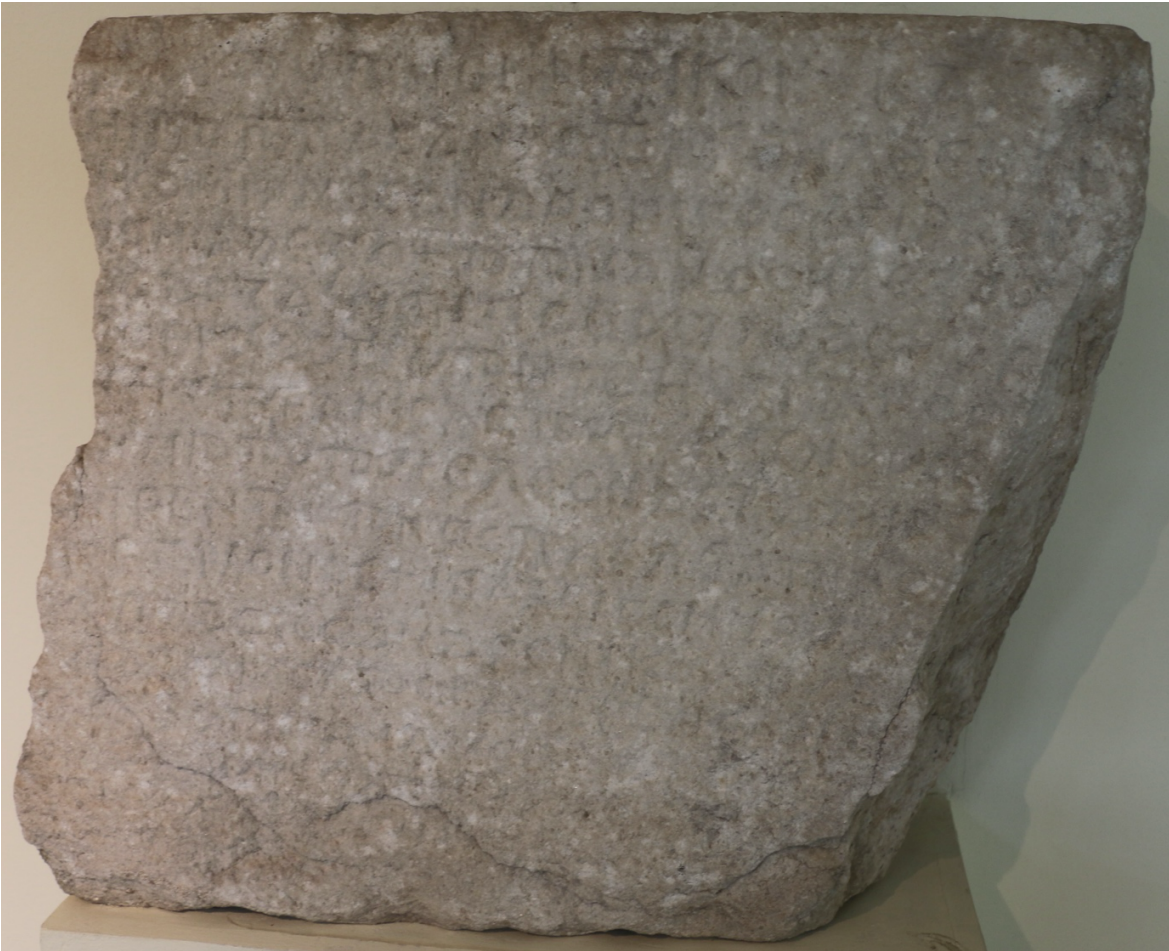


Figure 1.1–2. Christoupolis 1193/94 marble plinth inscription with edited light and in negative. Kavala Archaeological Museum. Photos taken by author 9/06/2024 & 15/09/2025. Presented with permissions.

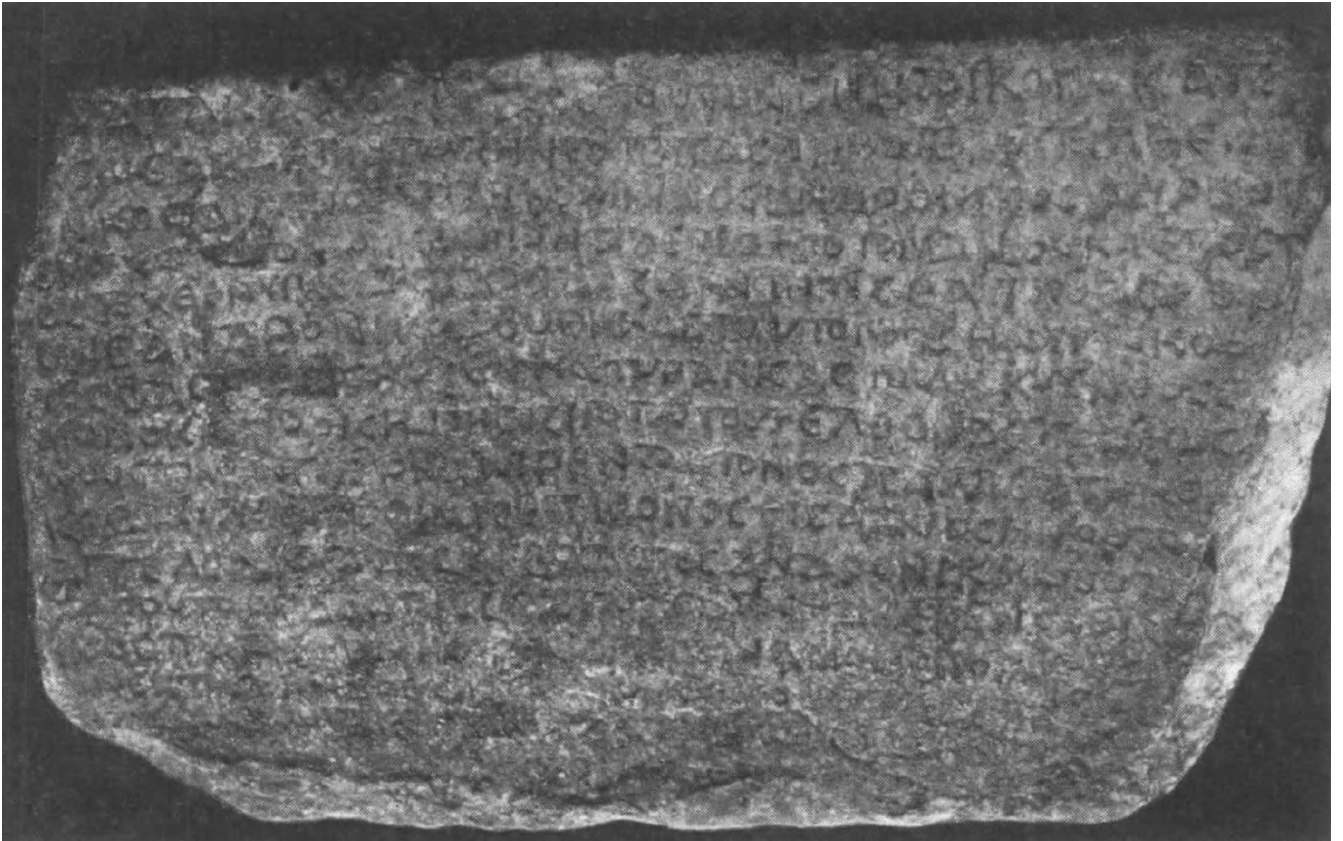


Figure 1.3–4. Bakalakes' 1937 lithographs, 'Οι τελευταίοι Κομνηνοί,' pp.464, 466.

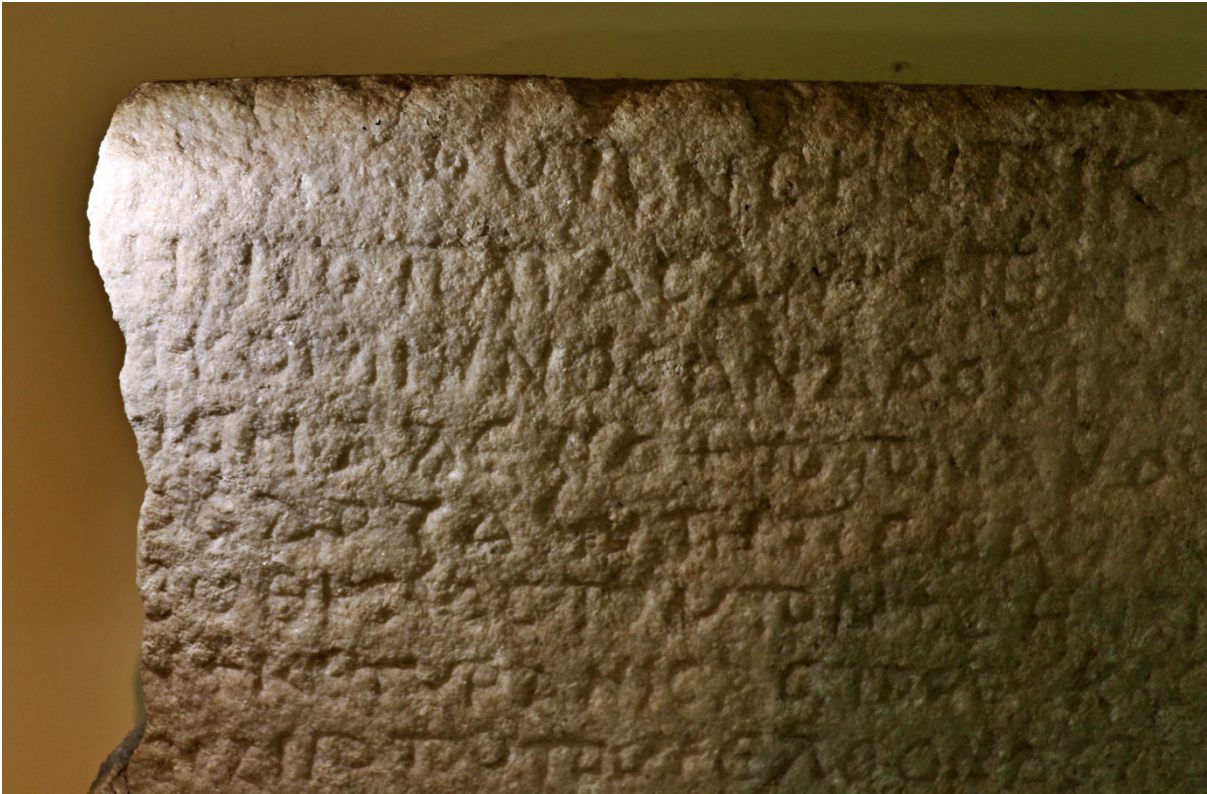


Figure 1.5. Opening lines of Kavala inscription, exposed to light and edited for contrast. Third Line: KOMNINOC ANAPONIKOC.

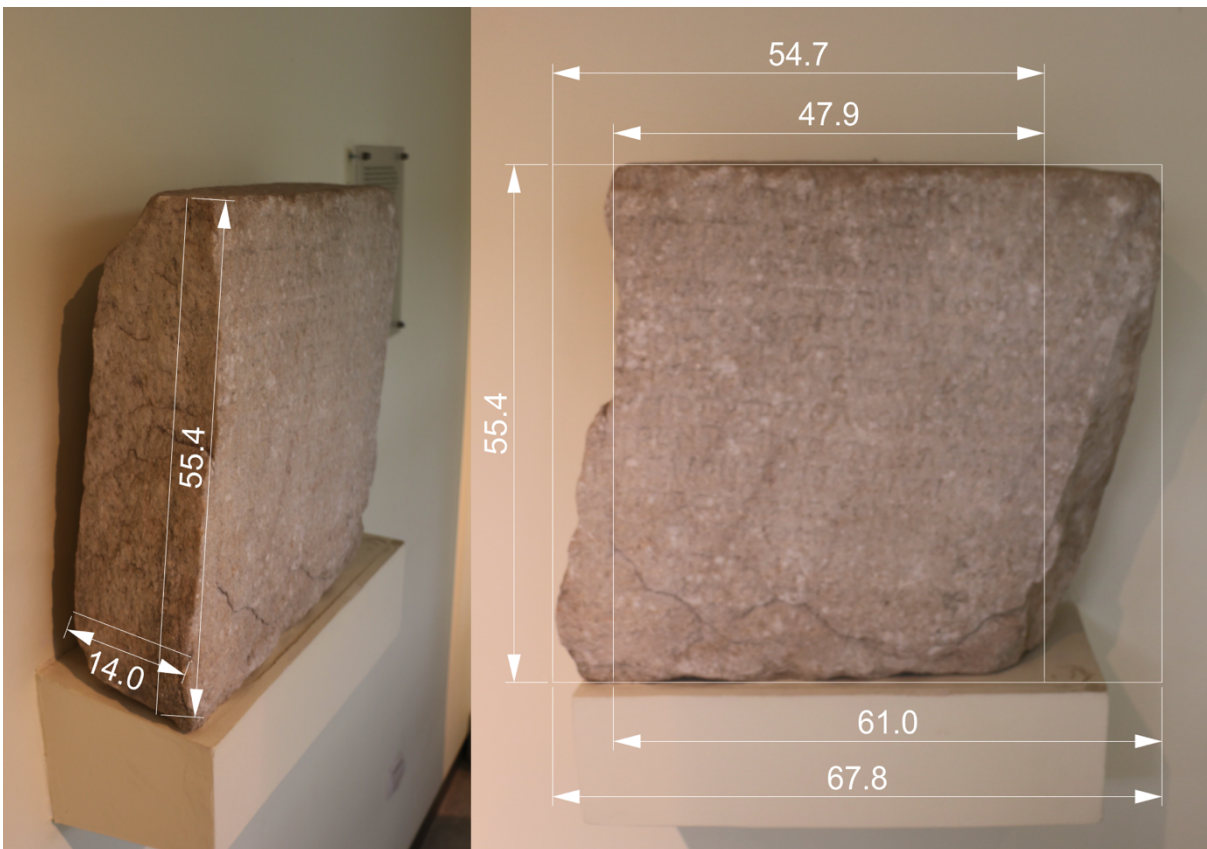


Figure 1.6. Approximate measurements of the extant Kavala inscription (cm). Estimated owing to irregularity. Visual measurements by Dr Michael Joyce-Badea.

The inscription provides, in no uncertain terms, a public condemnation of the rise and reign of Andronikos I Komnenos (1183–1185) and a narration of his overthrow by Isaak II Angelos (1185–1195).¹⁵⁹ It narrates the execution of Alexios II Komnenos and his empress-mother, with implicit reference to its circumstances and establishes Andronikos as tyrant, oath-breaker, and murderer, on both personal and imperial levels. It is foremostly a piece of propaganda for the new Angelos dynasty, dates itself to their eighth regnal year, and refers to their previous rebellion in Bithynia where Isaak and his family raised Nikaia against Andronikos. Despite Bakalakes, Georgiades, and the Kavala Archaeological Museum’s own displayed interpretation that the rebuilding was in response to the damage caused by the Norman invasion of 1185, there is nothing in the text that explicitly states this.¹⁶⁰

The Christoupolis dedication is therefore a most unusual survival. Byzantium is only rarely known for narrative inscriptions of this kind, relating the court affairs of the capital in a provincial city. Far longer than the usual ‘raised up from the foundations what time had laid low’ or ‘raised by order of X’ formulae common to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the complex style and measured dodecasyllabic metre suggests a highly educated composer of an epigram executed by a less-skilled provincial craftsman.¹⁶¹ However, not even Isaak II’s own rebuilding of a tower of Constantinople’s Land Walls received such prolonged treatment.¹⁶² The Christoupolis inscription’s closest comparandum, also of a lengthy civic narrative celebrating a new construction, is an 1175 poem commemorating the refortification of Dorylaion.¹⁶³ The Dorylaion epigram in sixty-two verses of hexameter created a poetic encomium for Manuel Komnenos celebrating the completion of works and the emperor’s visit to the city. Now extant only in textual form it is strongly believed to have also been inscribed.¹⁶⁴ The Christoupolis inscription would therefore be appropriate within that twelfth-century literary tradition. An alternative option would be to compare Christoupolis’ inscription with the Bulgarian tradition, of the form that their tsars established across topography important to their legitimacy. These stone ‘inscription annals’ were performative dedications marking a site of rebuilding that emphasised legitimacy and continuity while situating a site within a relationship with a political centre.¹⁶⁵ For comparison, we have the inscriptions of Tsar John Vladislav

¹⁵⁹ Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance 963–1210*, (Paris: 1990), pp.427-435; Savvas Neocleous, ‘Andronikos I Komnenos: Tyrant of Twelfth-century Europe,’ *The Medieval History Journal*, 22 (2019), pp.92-130.

¹⁶⁰ Bakalakes, ‘Οι τελευταίοι Κομνηνοί,’ p.468; Georgiades, ‘Χριστούπολης,’ pp.160-161.

¹⁶¹ On dodecasyllabic poetry in the Komnenian age see Elizabeth Jeffreys, ‘Why Produce Verse in Twelfth-century Constantinople?’ in: *"Doux remède..." Poésie et poétique à Byzance*, (Paris: 2009), pp.219-228; Marc Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometers*, (Vienna: 2003), pp.131-147.

¹⁶² Isaak II’s inscription commemorating the 1187 rebuilding of tower thirteen of the Land Walls was precisely this laconic:

‘+ προστάξυ αὐτοκράτορος Ἀγγέλου Ἰσαακίου |
πύργος ἐκ παραστάσεως Διμένι Βασιλείου ἔτει ,σϗτε’

See Nicholas Melvani, ‘The Epigraphy of the Land Walls of Constantinople,’ in: *Materials for the Study of Late Antique and Medieval Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Istanbul. A Revised and Expanded Booklet*, eds. Ida Toth, Andreas Rhoby, (Oxford: 2020), pp.142-149.

¹⁶³ Foteini Spingou, ‘A poem on the refortification of Dorylaion in 1175,’ *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 21 (2012), pp.137-168; Magdalino, *Manuel*, pp.96n.281, 456; For a later comparandum see Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, Gr99, pp.325-333.,

¹⁶⁴ Magdalino, *Manuel*, pp.96n.271, 456.

¹⁶⁵ For the corpus of ‘stone annals’ in Bulgar inscriptions see Veselin Beshevliev, *Die protobulgarischen Inschriften* (Berlin: 1963); For comparison with Christoupolis see the Vitola inscription, discussed by Jordan Zaimov and Vasilka Tapkova-Zaimova, *Bitolskijat nadpis na Ivan Vladislav, samodarzec balgarski*, (Sofia, 1970), 32-3; *AI*, 1, pp.15-16; trans. Petkov, *Voices*, p.39.

produced in both 1013 and 1016 in the early eleventh century for constructions at Vitola, and by Tsar John II Asan during the Second Bulgarian Empire after 1230. These public renderings of deeds done, battles fought, emperors overthrown, and new ages begun could potentially (though less likely) have some echo within Christoupolis' Greek inscription.¹⁶⁶

For authorship we can make only educated guesses. One possible composer of the text of the inscription is Theodore Balsamon, the titular Patriarch of Antioch, residing in Constantinople. Known primarily for his legal canonical text the *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles*, Balsamon also composed a corpus of epigrams with several dedicated to Isaak II.¹⁶⁷ Within that corpus were epigrams for tombs, books, dedicatory inscriptions, and schedography which attest to a career beyond 1195 when Isaak was deposed. While we cannot certainly identify Balsamon as the composer of the text of the Kavala inscription, there are a number of repeated motifs and phrases. Balsamon had also lauded Isaak's descent as 'Isaak *Ausonokrator*, descended from the loins of the Angeloi' [Ἰσαάκιος Αὐσονοκράτωρ, ἐξ Ἀγγελικῆς ὀσφύος κατηγμένος].¹⁶⁸ While falling short of ever explicitly naming Andronikos Komnenos, Balsamon also referenced contemporary events. An epigram *To Emperor Kyr Isaak Depicted in an Image on Horseback with Crown and Bare Sword* praised Isaak's actions which had 'ceased the tyrannical slaughter... [and] cut off the head of tyrants' [τυραννικὴν ἔπαυσεν ἀνδροκτασίαν... τὸ δ' αὐ κατεσπάθισε τυράννων κάρα].¹⁶⁹ While not definitive evidence, between Isaak and Balsamon there was a personal relationship and Balsamon wrote one epigram for a book on military tactics which the emperor had given him as a gift. Alternative authors could be Niketas Choniates, who composed an oration celebrating the 1186 marriage of Isaak to Margaret of Hungary,¹⁷⁰ George Tornikios, who acclaimed Isaak's ascent to the throne,¹⁷¹ or Eustathios of Thessaloniki who proclaimed Isaak in a sermon to be a 'liberator and great emperor' [τοῦ ἐλευθερωτοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως].¹⁷² Lacking certain authorship, we can at least place the Christoupolis inscription within the rhetoric of Isaak's court and the foundational legend he projected of his ascension to the throne. The spelling variances for 'Κοσταντινουπόλει' and 'Κομνινός' as well as the mutable phonetic spelling of 'τιρανίς[ας]' (line 3) and 'τυραννήσας' (line 7) have little importance beyond confirming inexperience. While we have no details regarding either patronage or knowledge of whose house was being rebuilt, obvious candidates are the local bishop, or an imperial official for the rather humble city of Christoupolis.

The historical record does not dispute the inscription's narrative. In September 1183 having murdered Alexios II, Andronikos was crowned as emperor. He shortly after married the late emperor's betrothed, the twelve-year-old Frankish Princess Agnes. Andronikos himself being in his sixties compounded the horror of the deed but he was equally at fault for gross perjury. Alexios' murder broke the 1171 oath sworn in Hagia Sophia by many nobles and foreign rulers

¹⁶⁶ I am grateful to Sophia Kalopissi-Verti for this suggestion.

¹⁶⁷ Konstantin Horna, 'Die Epigramme des Theodoros Balsamon,' *Wiener Studien*, 25 (1903), pp.165-217; the most extensive discussion of this corpus is by Andreas Rhoby, 'The Poetry of Theodore Balsamon,' in: *Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: Texts and Contexts*, eds. Andreas Rhoby, Nikos Zagklas, (Turnhout: 2019), pp.111-146.

¹⁶⁸ Horna, 'Die Epigramme,' §29.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., §10 for book epigram, and §43 for warrior-horseback image. See also §14 a *translatio* of the *Hodegetria* icon as response to Alexios Branas' 1187 rebellion. Rhoby, 'Theodore Balsamon,' pp.132-133.; Note the potential wordplay between 'androkatasian' and 'Andronikos.'

¹⁷⁰ NC, *OE*, §5, pp.35-44.

¹⁷¹ Tornikios confirms that labelling Andronikos a 'tyrant' had begun early in Isaak's reign, see the oration of George Tornikes, *magistros* of rhetors and from 1200 Metropolitan of Old Patras, narrating Isaak's ascension to the throne in: *Fontes rerum Byzantinarum*, ed. William Regel, (St. Petersburg: 1917), II, p.256.27-257.2; See Jean Darrouzès, *Georges et Demetrios Tornikes. Lettres Et Discours*, (Paris: 1970), p.40.

¹⁷² Eustathios, *Lament*, p.2.5.

to safeguard the young emperor's minority.¹⁷³ The brief reign was unsettled and unpopular, and while Andronikos crushed rebellions in 1184 in Nikaia and Prusa, his regime completely unravelled when the Sicilian Normans crossed the Adriatic and sacked Thessaloniki in August 1185. The Angelos family, responsible for the uprising in Nikaia from late 1183 to early 1184, suffered the blinding of four brothers for their rebellion. The two spared brothers Isaak and Alexios (both of whom would themselves rule as emperors before suffering blinding in coming decades) proved continued centres of resistance. In Andronikos' final year, as the Norman threat loomed, persecutions against all potential threats escalated. On the night of the 11th September 1185 Isaak, not yet thirty, resisted an arrest in a private residence in Constantinople when he acted 'alone' to slay Stephen Hagiochristophorites, Andronikos' *pansebastos* and *logothete*.¹⁷⁴ Riding to Hagia Sophia and crowned with the suspended crown of Constantine the Great, support for Andronikos melted away. Isaak's supporters seized Andronikos as he attempted to flee and subjected him to a brutal mutilation and death in the Hippodrome. With a grizzly revolution began the turbulent reign of Constantinople's aristocrats who slowly lost the empire.¹⁷⁵

There is no simple solution for answering why this 'Gesta Isaaki Angelorum' was located in Kavala/Christoupolis of all places in Byzantium. Assuming that it originates there, by no means a certainty, the modest city appears an unlikely candidate for singular focus by Isaak's regime. Moreover, the level of narrative detail suggests its creator's contact and dealings with major urban centres, either Thessaloniki or Constantinople. We should not dismiss Christoupolis' position on the Via Egnatia but more likely we should imagine that the inscription is one small piece of a larger programme of multiple sites. There may have been several more similar inscriptions commemorating Isaak during his reign. He is known to have commissioned fortifications at Philippopolis,¹⁷⁶ Anchialos,¹⁷⁷ churches at Anaplous,¹⁷⁸ and throughout his reign maintained a fascination with his miraculous ascension to the throne.¹⁷⁹ It is possible then that plaques such as this were established at other refortified sites to spread the Angelos 'legend.' The rather small size of the inscription would suggest something similar to the inscribed chrysobull on a marble slab erected in Corfu/Kerkyra in 1228 set up either above or adjacent to a church doorway at eye height, or if military above a walled gate.¹⁸⁰

The need for Isaak's rebuilding in these provinces was dire. While the Angeloi were relatively secure in Anatolia, the Balkans were in uproar. The Bulgarian-Vlach rebellion begun in 1185 by the Asan dynasty, ostensibly over a refusal of a *pronoia* grant, was exacerbated by landed local elites in the Lower Danube submitting to the uprising and withdrawing from imperial rule. While interpretations range between ethno-nationalistic and economic, the result proved

¹⁷³ NC, CD, §275, p.153; Igor Medvedev, 'Η συνοδική απόφαση της 24 Μαρτίου 1171 ως νόμος για τη διαδοχή στο θρόνο του Βυζαντίου,' in: *Το Βυζάντιο στον 12ο αιώνα: Κανονικό Δίκαιο, Κράτος και Κοινωνία*, ed. Nicolas Oikonomides, (Athens: 1991), pp.229-238.

¹⁷⁴ Eustathios' *Lament* draws a colourful description of Hagiochristophorites as a low-born slit-nosed creature. More on him below. *Lament*, §44.23-29, trans. p.45.

¹⁷⁵ The Angelos family's Nikaian rebellion is known through NC, CD, §280-283, trans. pp.156-157; Ephraim, §4929-5131.

¹⁷⁶ NC, CD, §402, p.221.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., §434, p.238.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., §442, p.243.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. §443, p.238. See also §423.21-24, p.233, 'Isaak was absolutely convinced that he had received the throne from God, who alone watched over him.'

¹⁸⁰ This was that inscription's theorised purpose in Andreas Rhoby, 'Indelible Archives: Law and Donation in Middle and Late Byzantine Inscriptions: Documents and Vocabulary,' in: *Byzantinische Rechtsgeschichte im internationalen Kontext: Akten einer Tagung der Akademien der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen und Sofia (28.9.-1.10.2021)*, ed. Peter Schreiner, (Berlin: 2024), p.104.

unstoppable for the Angeloi emperors and rebellion rapidly detached provinces from the empire.¹⁸¹ A refortification of the cities such as Kavala, located within a few days march of Constantinople after damage either by the Normans, Asanid Bulgaria, or forces of the Third Crusade is certainly possible. In late 1204, as the armies of the newly crowned Latin Emperor set out to conquer the Balkans, they remarked at the strength of Isaak's rebuilt Christoupolis, '*qui ere uns des plus dorz del munde,*' not that it stopped the mighty city from immediately surrendering to Baldwin.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Stankovic, 'Stronger Than It Appears?,' pp.35-48; Francesco Dall'Aglio, 'Qualche considerazione sulla fondazione de 'Secondo Regno Bulgaro,' *Ricerche slavistiche*, 9 (2011), pp.55-64.

¹⁸² Villehardouin, §280. It should be noted that each of the cities captured in this campaign: Christoupolis, Serres, and Thessaloniki, receive similar hyperbolic treatment. For the fortifications of Kavala on an archaeological record see Karagianne, *Οι Βυζαντινοί Οικισμοί στη Μακεδονία*, pp.138-139.

1.2. Tyrant of the Paphlagonians

Isaak Angelos came to power with the deconstruction of Andronikos' regime. His predecessor's reign was to be frequently depicted over the course of the Angeloi period (1185–1204) as something populist, violent, anti-aristocratic, culturally barbaric, and spatially 'eastern.' However, the Christoupolis inscription is hugely important, because on lines 3-4 is our only material evidence for a phenomenon we otherwise know of only in literary texts. This being that Andronikos was proclaimed a tyrant by the Angeloi with an ethnic appellation: 'The Tyrant of the Paphlagonians' [Κομνηνός Ἀνδρόνικος ὁ τυρραννήσας ἐκ Παφλαγόνων]. Governed by 'ἐκ,' Andronikos is both coming 'out of the location of the Paphlagonians' and the despotic figurehead 'of the Paphlagonians.' This introduction and attribution of Andronikos informs the reader of the inscription in Macedonia, and potentially across other sites in the Balkans, that the Paphlagonians were complicit in his crimes and in the troubles of the empire and the enemy of whomever the donor, acting on behalf of Isaak II, believed themselves to be. This is so crucial because it allows us to move the hostile classicising ethnographical shifts in other authors of the period from the textual sphere to the public.

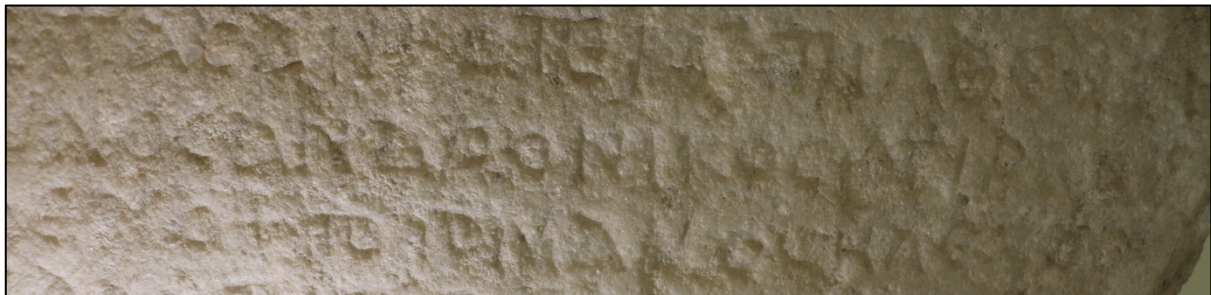


Figure 2. Detail of lines 1-3. ANAPONIKOC O TIPANIC[AC].

The treatment of Andronikos is an interesting prototype of ethnic projection which helps contextualise the following periods. On multiple occasions under the Angeloi, narratives were constructed that made Andronikos' initial uprising across Anatolia an uprising of rustics and provincials that threatened the elites of the capital. The consistency of these accounts suggests a grain of truth to that reasoning which was exploited. Andronikos *had* marched through Byzantine Anatolia across provinces that were socially and physically distanced from Constantinople. Whilst there he had rallied their populations against perceived foreign forces subverting the capital, and likely with polemic that governance and economic prosperity had been usurped by Latins, totemized by Alexios II's mother and regent Maria of Antioch.¹⁸³ This seems the only way to explain the wave of ethnic violence against the wealthy Italian merchant quarter along the Golden Horn. Conversely, however, Andronikos' opponents would later create the opposite perspective that, in bringing a Paphlagonian mob to Constantinople, it was *he* who had brought a 'foreign' element into the capital.

We possess two contemporary Greek narrative sources for the rise and fall of Andronikos. In both of them we find evidence of otherization, beginning with Andronikos' entry into Constantinople as a symbol of intra-Byzantine orientalism. Choniates describes the distinctive clothing worn by Andronikos when he met the leaders of Constantinople to demand their surrender, dressed in 'a violet-coloured garment of Iberian weave, open at the sides and reaching down to the knees and buttocks and covering the elbows; while on his head he wore a greyish black headdress shaped like a pyramid.'¹⁸⁴ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, a prolific scholar and imperial orator to Manuel I, also narrates that when Andronikos crossed the

¹⁸³ NC, *CD*, §243, trans. p.137.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, §252, trans. p.141.

Bosporus into the city he received Alexios II's regents' surrender dressed 'with a smoky-coloured headdress above his diadem' described by our author as 'a custom of Laz origin.'¹⁸⁵ The similarities in the two descriptions suggest either genuine information or intentional misrepresentation and othering of the fallen emperor as an eastern presence.

As Niketas Choniates informs us, upon ascending the throne Andronikos styled a very different court and senate, populated by men promoted from families external either to the Komnenoi or Constantinople. The Paphlagonians were a key element to this replacement of Manuel's supporters and they were identified frequently and solely, as the key supporters of his seizure of the throne:

'He rewarded the Paphlagonians for their goodwill towards him and everyone else who joined him in his rebellion, honouring them with dignities and lavish gifts. Splendid dignities and magnificent offices were transferred to certain individuals according to whim, and he promoted his own sons. Stripping others of their offices, he awarded these as suited him to those who followed after him in the same way that those apostates of the living God in former times followed after Baal...

Some of these men were expelled from house and *patris* and separated from their loved ones, while others were given over to prison and iron manacles, while still others had their eyes gouged out without any formal charge being brought against them. They were accused in secret because they were scions of *eupatrides*, and the fact that they were often victorious in warfare or distinguished by noble stature and excessive elegance, or by some other praiseworthy trait, nettled Andronikos and inspired in him no great expectations.

Ἀμειβόμενος δὲ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν εὐνοίας τοὺς Παφλαγόνας καὶ πάντα ἄλλον συναφασάμενον αὐτῷ τῆς ἀποστασίας ἀξιώμασι τούτους ἐτίμησε καὶ δωρεαῖς φιλοτίμοις ἐδεξιώσατο... καὶ τὰ λαμπρὰ δὲ τῶν ἀξιωμάτων καὶ τὰ τῶν ὀφικίων μεγαλοπρεπῆ, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐδόκει, μετατιθεῖς ἐπὶ τινῶν μὲν τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ παῖδας προβάλετο, ἄλλοις δ' ὑπεξῆρεν ἐτέρους, ἐκείνους δὴπουθεν, οἱ ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ ἐπορεύθησαν ὡς τοῦ Βάαλ πρότερον οἱ ἀποστάτες ζῶντος θεοῦ...

Οἱ μὲν τοίνυν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπηλαύνοντο οἴκου καὶ πατρίδος καὶ τῶν φιλότατων ἀποδίσταντο, οἱ δὲ εἰρκταῖς καὶ χειροπέδαις σιδηραῖς παρεδίδοντο, ἄλλοι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐξεκόπτοντο, αἰτίαν οὐδεμίαν πρόδηλον ἐπαγομένην ἑαυτοῖς εὐρίσκοντες, τὸ δὲ εἶναι τῶν εὐπατριδῶν σιωπηλῶς ἐγκαλούμενοι καὶ κατὰ πόλεμον πολλακίς εὐδοκιμῆσαι ἢ φυῆς σώματος γενναιοτάτης ἢ ὥρας ἰκανωτάτης μεταλαχεῖν ἢ τι ἕτερον φέρειν ἐπαινετὸν ὑποκνίζον Ἀνδρόνικον, οὐδ' ἀγαθὰς ἐκείνῳ τὰς ἐλπίδας ὑποβάλλον.¹⁸⁶

Let us consider also the famous sermon given by Eustathios, when he occupied the Metropolitan see of Thessaloniki in 1185 in an extensive and highly emotional *Lament for the Fall of Thessaloniki* after its violent and humiliating sack by the Norman Sicilians.¹⁸⁷ Blame was laid at Andronikos' door more than any other. Eustathios isolated the moment Andronikos ordered the cruel death of young Alexios II as the beginning of broader calamity. The narrative

¹⁸⁵ Eustathios, *Lament*, §50.25-26, 'ρίψις μὲν καπνικοῦ καλύμματος τοῦ περὶ κεφαλὴν, ὅπερ Λαζόθεν εἶχε τὴν ἀφορμὴν'.

¹⁸⁶ NC, CD, §257.83-258.97, adapted trans, p.144.

¹⁸⁷ Eustathios, *Lament*, ed. and trans. Melville Jones, pp.1-160.

from that point is of varying pretenders and rampaging foreigners seeking to exact revenge upon Andronikos' empire for his crimes. A pseudo-Alexios II had thus appeared in Vagenetia and travelled to Sicily and given them a pretext for invasion.¹⁸⁸ However, guilty of injuring the Latin West alongside Andronikos' person were the Paphlagonians, who Eustathios considered to be the cause of all recent disasters:

‘But the Great City could well find fault with Andronikos from the very beginning of his entry there, because his foot did not bless it. Nor did he stand there in righteousness, as the sequel showed in full. As soon as the inheritance of Constantine the Great came upon him, at once *the Paphlagonians who were with him, a wicked ethnos and barbarians in the eyes of the ancient Hellenes* followed their orders and sprang upon those members of the Latin race who in accordance with long established custom were set apart along the shore of the horn of Byzantion on the eastern side, and were settled thickly there to the number of more than sixty thousand... This was a bad thing, but the cure for it which was practised by the Paphlagonians was just as bad, because of their unreasonable violence. When they had entered the Great City, and had run up against the Latins and, as might be expected, had attached to themselves others who had a taste for revolutionary activities, they attacked the Latins, who were not expecting this, with the most terrible results. And in so doing they sowed the seeds from which we, and many others with us, have reaped sheaves, so to speak, from the meadow of Persephone; for it is from this action that our present woes came upon us.

Ἐνταῦθα ἔστιν εἰπεῖν ὡς ὁ μὲν εἰπὼν «εὐλόγησέ σε ὁ Θεὸς ἐπὶ τῷ ποδί μου» αἰοιδιμὸς ἔστιν εἰς ἀγαθόν, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ ἔξω ἐγκωμίων ἢ τοῦ δικαίου μνήμη πίπτειν οἶδε, τὸν δὲ Ἀνδρόνικον ἐξ αὐτῶν βαλβίδων εἰσόδου ἔχει ἂν ἡ Μεγαλόπολις μέμφεσθαι ὅτι οὐκ εὐλόγησεν αὐτὴν ὁ πρὸς αὐτοῦ. Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἴστατο ἐν εὐθύτητι, ὡς τὰ ἐφεξῆς ἅπαντα ἔδειξαν. Ἄμα γὰρ ἡ τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου κληρονομία εἶχεν αὐτὸν καὶ αὐτίκα οἱ ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν Παφλαγόνες, ἔθνος ἀτάσθαλον καὶ ἐν Ἑλληνισί βάρβαρον, κελευσθέν, ἐνεπήδησε τῷ τῶν Λατίνων φύλῳ, οἱ ἀφωρισμένοι κατ’ ἔθος ἀρχαῖον περὶ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν τοῦ Βυζαντίου κέρατος, τὸν τοῦ Φωσφορίου ἐχόμενον, ὑπὲρ ἐξήκοντα χιλιοστύας ἐχέοντο εἰς ἀριθμὸν... ἔμελλον δὲ οἴμοι κακῶ μεγάλῳ μέγα κακὸν ἐκθεραπεῦσαι οἱ Παφλαγόνες, οἷς ἀλογίστως ἐθρασύναντο. Εἰσελθόντες γὰρ τὴν Μεγαλόπολιν καὶ πλαγιάσαντες ἐπὶ τοὺς Λατίνους (εἰκὸς δὲ πάντως καὶ ἄλλους τῶν τοιαῦτα νεωτερίζεσθαι φιλοῦντων συναίρεσθαι αὐτοῖς) ἐπέρχονται τοῖς Λατίνοις οὐκ ἂν ἐλπίζουσι καὶ διατίθενται τὰ ἐλεεινότερα καὶ σπέρματα ἐκεῖνα προκατα-βάλλοντα, ἀφ’ ὧν ἡμεῖς καὶ πολλοὶ ἕτεροι σὺν ἡμῖν τεθερίκαμεν λειμῶνος Περσεφόνης, οὕτω φάναι, δράγματα.¹⁸⁹

The association of Andronikos with Paphlagonia then climaxes in a discussion of his decline into paranoia. Eustathios describes:

‘While in his [Andronikos'] heart he was exercising imperial rule over the Great City, with his tongue he was always speaking of Paphlagonia; he eloquently described the advantages which it possessed by comparison with the deficiencies of Constantinople, and boasted of the treasures which were stored under guard for him there.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., §42-54, pp.53-65.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., §32.29-34.20, trans. pp.33-35. My emphasis.

Ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενε μακρὰ γογγύζων καὶ κατὰ σχῆμα δυσανασχετῶν καὶ τῆ μὲν ψυχῆ νεμόμενος βασιλικῶς τὴν Μεγαλόπολιν, τῆ δὲ γλώσση τὴν Παφλαγονίαν προφέρων καὶ ἄπερ αὐτὸς ἐρρητόρευεν ἐκεῖσε καλά, ὧν δῆθεν Κωνσταντινούπολις ἐστéρετο, καὶ θησαυροὺς ἐκόμπαζεν ἐκεῖ πεφυλαγμένους αὐτῶ.¹⁹⁰

Eustathios reviles the Paphlagonians for their violent entry into Constantinople and condemns them for both their contemporary deeds and, through a classicising ethnotype, for the sins of their ‘ancestors.’ For Eustathios, Andronikos’ Paphlagonians are the heirs of ancient evil. When Andronikos unleashed them upon the Latin quarter and promoted them and their ilk to office he is portrayed as effecting a change upon the culture of Constantinople. When Melville Jones commented upon this line in his edition of Eustathios’ *Lament* he remarked that: ‘No passage in surviving Greek literature emphasises the ‘barbarian’ nature of the Paphlagonians by comparison with the Greeks.’¹⁹¹ However, knowing of the Christoupolis inscription and comparing it to other moments of Paphlagonian ridicule such as those Magdalino identified in earlier Komnenian prejudice, we may refute this hypothesis and posit an Angeloi-era preference for distinguishing and othering the Paphlagonians amidst a broader conflict.¹⁹² The portrayal of Paphlagonians in the late twelfth century as the heirs to an ancient hatred demonstrates both Eustathios and other Constantinopolitans identification of their own people with the Classical Greeks, as was increasingly frequent in Komnenian Byzantium, and a utilisation of that model to portray a civic political dispute as an external ethnic one.¹⁹³ Otherising and differentiating the Paphlagonians as a people merely renewing an eternal war with the Greek world, inherently irrational and harbingers of collapse, is thus the first of several instances of denying a group’s Byzantine past, with all the nuances of Roman, Greek, and Orthodox Christianity which that corresponds to, in favour of a stricter exclusivity.

Paphlagonian support for Andronikos’ insurrection, the identified cause of later catastrophe, rested upon genuinely well-established Komnenian connections. When Andronikos gathered men around the Paphlagonian capital Kastamon and other regions, he was exploiting a tradition of Paphlagonia as a heartland of provincial Komnenian power since the eleventh century. At Gounaria ‘all the soldiery of the region’ had elected Isaak I Komnenos (1057-1059) from a newly founded mustering ground.¹⁹⁴ Thereafter, both court histories of Alexios I’s (1081-1118) reign propagated his family’s connection; portraying him weeping at his abandoned grandfather’s house in Kastamon after the loss of imperial control to the Turkish raids that followed the Battle of Manzikert in 1071.¹⁹⁵ The reconquest of Kastamon, the Komnenoi ancestral *kastro*, by John II (1118-1143) was celebrated by a triumph in 1134 and commemorated in three poems by Theodoros Prodromos.¹⁹⁶ Prodromos’ poems were restrained and mediated the link. They reflect little of the imperial family’s heritage in the region as a

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., §40.34-42.4, trans. pp.41-43.

¹⁹¹ Melville Jones, *Lament*, p.178.

¹⁹² Paul Magdalino, ‘Paphlagonians in Byzantine High-Society,’ in: *H Βυζαντινὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία 6ος αἰ.-12ος αἰ.*, (Athens: 1998), pp.141-150.

¹⁹³ See also NC, *OE*, §301, trans. p.167, for Choniates calling himself both a ‘Hellene’ and a ‘Roman’ while narrating the crimes of Andronikos against this group.

¹⁹⁴ John Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p.456; John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565-1204*, (London: 1999), p.151. For a GIS reconstruction of the location of Gounaria and Paphlagonian roads see Cahit Mete Oğuz, *The Northern Heartland: A Study of Roman Paphlagonia in the Middle Ages*, (PhD thesis, Simon Fraser University: 2023), p.41.

¹⁹⁵ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Nicephori Bryennii Historiarum* ed. Paul Gautier, pp.197-198; Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, p.14.

¹⁹⁶ Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte*, §§3, 4, and 8, praises Kastamon’s recapture(s) and lists it for subsequent triumphs in §5, 9b. Only §8.199-206 potentially implies any Komnenian connection as *patris*.

patris and instead present the expedition as a conquest of non-Roman territory comprising the eastern ‘power of the Persians.’¹⁹⁷ This lack of admission of prior loss appears deliberate and purposefully obscure. Only the fact other conquests were not celebrated so extensively hint at its totemic value. In corroboration, a residual Komnenian connection appears very much alive. Andronikos is by far the most explicit. In 1181 he exploited his governorship of Paphlagonia to rally Kastamon’s support against the regency of Dowager-Empress Maria and her lover the *protosebastos* Alexios Komnenos (1180-1182).¹⁹⁸ After Andronikos’ rise and fall, imposters pretending to be Alexios II rallied support in Anatolia twice in a decade. A first fled the capital for Anatolia and from 1189–93 led a force eight thousand strong, recruited from across Anatolia, before being cornered in the Meander Valley. A second Alexios II was assassinated in 1197 after a two-year insurrection while rallying support in Tzoungra, modern Çankırı, in southern Paphlagonia.¹⁹⁹ Accepting lingering sentiment for the Komnenoi which could be stirred into political insurgency against Constantinople, we should consider what else polarised the two regions.

1.3. Paphlagonian Ethnicity

Paphlagonians remained a particularly identifiable group of Greek-Orthodox people who were regularly attacked by urban elites. Insults were levelled on cultural grounds referring to either custom or language, with both linked to the rurality of the region. For Niketas Choniates, Andronikos’ habitual resort to incest, cruelty, blinding, and murder was a direct consequence of his having travelled extensively amongst the ‘barbarian’ *ethne* of the east. His tendencies were understood as a reproduction of ‘their’ behaviours.²⁰⁰ As seen, a public declamation in the epigraphy of Kavala/Christoupolis in 1193/4 against the ‘Tyrant of the Paphlagonians’ can also be compared to their dismissal in the 1185 oration of Eustathios as ‘barbarians’ and ethnic enemies of the ‘Hellenes’ as part of an ideological shift which positioned them outside the Greek-speaking world. While it is only in the late twelfth century that we observe the conflation of Paphlagonia into a barbarian space whilst still being an imperial province, since the tenth century Paphlagonians had been heavily ridiculed for their rusticity, their customs for public song and dance, and a general lack of learning.²⁰¹ Establishing this milieu, both as a perceived other and (rarely) as a self-identified one further illuminates the implications of Isaak II’s Kavala/Christoupolis inscription publicly decrying Andronikos as an invading tyrant of ‘barbarian’ Paphlagonia.

The differences between the Constantinopolitan-educated elites and Paphlagonians are likely more than simply rhetorical. We can make only educated guesses regarding language in

¹⁹⁷ Roman Shliakhtin, ‘Master of Kastamon, Emperor of Eternity: Ioannes Komnenos as Border-maker and Border-breaker in Theodoros Prodromos’ poem ‘On the advance to Kastamon,’ in: *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, eds. Nicholas Matheou et al., (Boston: 2016), p.430.

¹⁹⁸ Anthony Bryer, ‘David Komnenos and Saint Eleutherios,’ *APL*, 42 (1988/89), p.176; Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West 1180-1204*, p.39.

¹⁹⁹ NC, CD, §420-423, trans. pp.231-233, and again §462-463, trans. pp.253-254.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., §353.15-20, trans. p.195. ‘In a word, Andronikos would not have been the least of the Komnenoi emperors had he mitigated the intensity of his cruelty, had he been less quick to apply the hot iron and to resort to mutilation [...] Such practice he copied from the *ethne* with whom he mixed [ὅπερ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν, οἷς προσέμιξεν.] when, more than other, he was compelled to wander.’

²⁰¹ For a recent thesis on the role of Paphlagonia in pre-1204 Byzantine society, with particular attention paid to geography see Oğuz, *A Study of Roman Paphlagonia*; Magdalino, ‘Paphlagonians in Byzantine High-Society,’ pp.141-150; Charis Messis, ‘Μουσική, χορὸς καὶ λιπαρὴ εὐωχία: Λογοτεχνικὲς εἰκόνες τῆς Παφλαγονίας κατὰ τὴ Μέση Βυζαντινὴ περίοδο,’ *Δελτίον Κέντρου Μικρασιατικῶν Σπουδῶν*, 20 (2017): pp.63-88; idem. ‘Régions, politique et rhétorique dans la première moitié du 10e siècle: le cas des Paphlagoniens,’ *REB*, 73 (2015): pp.99-122.

Paphlagonia in the manner of Juan Signes Codoñer’s research on dialects, but a distinct regional-cultural identity and reputation of Paphlagonia is known from many examples of Middle Byzantine literature. They were notorious in Constantinople as producers of eunuchs, thieves, and in the *De Thematibus* as a ‘genos of mules’ [τὸ τῶν ἡμιόνων γένος].²⁰² In one tenth century poem by Constantine of Rhodes, Paphlagonians were mocked as a people more akin to the pigs they farmed than the learned culture of a Constantinopolitan elite.²⁰³ Evidently a lingering reputation persisted into the twelfth century. Even before Andronikos’ coup we find in the satirical underworld of the *Timarion*, a twelfth-century work set in Thessaloniki, a remark in the final words of the play. As the autobiographical author returned from the realms of the dead and rejoins the living, he asked his companion to find a body-collector to prepare some newly dead for the journey to Hades:

‘Only it mustn’t be any respectable class of person who might resent the job but rather one of those filthy Paphlagonians from the market who will see a profit for himself in being sent down to Hades with some pork.

μόνον ἔστωσαν μὴ τῶν σεμνῶν καὶ καθαροδιαίτων ἀνδρῶν, οἱ τάχα ἂν μυσσαθῆσονται τὴν διακονίαν, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐν μακέλλῳ καὶ ρυπαροδιαίτων Παφλαγόνων, οἱ κέρδος ἂν ἠγήσονται τὸ μετὰ χοιρείου κρέατος καθ’ Ἄιδου στέλλεσθαι.’²⁰⁴

The repeated resurrection of negative tropes for the Paphlagonians would repeat until the eve of the Turkish conquest and beyond. During the fourteenth century the Paphlagonian origin of Nikephoros Gregoras was attacked by his religious opponents. Gregoras was described as ‘this barbarian... who had departed from the land of the Paphlagonians for the Queen of Cities... and partaking in the education of the Hellenic muses, he managed to lose his barbaric customs and accent [φωνήν] but not the barbarity of his manners nor mind... revealed himself worse than his *homophyloi*,’ in an attack that once more framed the conflict as Hellenes against Paphlagonian barbarians.²⁰⁵ The late-twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries therefore marked Paphlagonia’s frequent transformation in rhetoric from rustic to barbarian *ethnos*.

On the part of the Paphlagonians we are less informed. At times we can detect anti-urban settlement by those who occasionally involved themselves in the workings of the capital. This is evidenced by a number of hagiographies for local narratives such as Sts. Philaretos the

²⁰² *De Thematibus*, ed. Immanuel Bekker, (Bonn: 1840), p.29.15-16; Messis, ‘Régions, politique,’ pp.99-122. The ‘mules’ imagery is returned to by Germanos II where it implies ethnic mixing. It is likely mocking rusticity here.

²⁰³ The poem of Constantine of Rhodes to ‘Theodore the eunuch from Paphlagonia’ in: Pietro Matranga, *Anecdota Graeca e mss. bibliothecis Vaticanae, Angelicae, Barberiniana, Vallicelliana, Medicea, Vindobonensi deprompta* (Rome: 1850), pp.625-626; Magdalino, ‘Paphlagonians in Byzantine High-Society,’ pp.141-143.

²⁰⁴ *Pseudo-Luciano: Timarione*, ed. Roberto Romano (Naples: 1974), p.47; *Timarion*, trans. Barry Baldwin (Detroit: 1984), p.76.

²⁰⁵ D. Kaimakes, *Φιλοθέου Κοκκίνου Δογματικά Έργα*, (Thessaloniki: 1983), p.480, ‘Γρηγοράς δ’ ούτοσιν ἐκ βαρβάρων παρὰ τὴν τῶν πόλεων βασιλίδα ταυτηνί, καὶ τὴν μεγάλην ἐλθῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ μητέρα, τῆς γὰρ Παφλαγόνων ὄρμητο γῆς, καὶ ἀγωγῆς καὶ παιδείας ἐνταῦθα καὶ μούσης Ἑλληνικῆς μετασχών... τὸ μὲν βάρβαρον ἦθος ἀμηγέπη καὶ τὴν φωνὴν ἀποβαλεῖν ἔσχε, τῶν δὲ τρόπων τε καὶ τῆς γνώμης τὸ βάρβαρον οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἔσχε ἀποβαλεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσεξείργασατο καὶ προσέθηκεν ἐκ πάντων τοῦ πολλοῦ τοῦ περιόντος τῶν ὁμοφύλων χειρῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα φανείς.’; Messis, ‘Régions, politique et rhétorique,’ pp.73-74n.26; Anatolian Greeks in Paphlagonia did not survive as a distinct ethnic group into the Ottoman and modern periods. The nineteenth century cadastres depict them as a minority but a Turkish majority was likely by the fourteenth century. See Dimitri Korobeinikov, ‘The Cumans in Paphlagonia,’ *Journal of Black Sea Studies*, 18 (2015), pp.29-44.

Merciful of Amnia, George of Amastris, and Alypios the Stylite.²⁰⁶ The *Life* of Philaretos, itself supposedly written by the grandson of the saint during the eight-century Arab incursions, demonstrates a particular religious and social assumption as a Paphlagonian ‘εὐγενῆς’ and landholder in the regions of Galatia and the Pontos.²⁰⁷ That text attempted to emphasise the bonds between emigres to the capital and the province, as the saint’s widow returned to Paphlagonia after his death to rebuild the churches destroyed in the wars.²⁰⁸ Why they should choose to do so is perhaps revealed by another example. St. Alypios, who continued to be the subject of hagiographical compendiums into the thirteenth century, was a saint whose original *Life* had carried a distinctly anti-Constantinopolitan message. A seventh-century hagiography narrated his literal refusal to enter Constantinople. Alypios abandoned his companions at the ferry-crossing in Chalcedon because ‘he despised trips to the city because of their tendency to drive the soul to passionate pleasure-seeking’ [ταῖς πολιτικαῖς ἐκδημίαις ἥκιστα συνηδόμενος ῥῆον μετακλινούσαις ψυχὴν ἐπὶ τὰ ἡδέα καὶ ἐμπαθέστερα].²⁰⁹ It was a section removed by Symeon Metaphrastes’ tenth-century (Constantinopolitan) revision to portray mere ‘dislike at being abroad’ [ταῖς ἐκδημίαις ἀχθόμενος ἦν].²¹⁰ In both versions Alypios was then led in relief by a saintly intervention to return to his *patris* of Paphlagonia to begin a thirty-year stint atop his pillar.²¹¹ In a noteworthy revival, the cult of St. Alypios was revisited once more by the Cypriot monk Neophytos the Recluse in the thirteenth century. Cyprus, which in 1209 had pledged themselves to the patriarchate in Nikaia in return for the appointment of a new archbishop, was the first external boost to the authority of the institution in exile.²¹² We might question then if overtures to Paphlagonia influenced Neophytos’ creation of a new thirteenth-century encomium for the saint ‘Alypios from Hadrianople in the land of Paphlagonia’ as an effort to heal the breach with the frequently rebellious region. Notably, it also removed all references to the saint yearning to abandon urban centres for the quiet of his *patris* in Paphlagonia.²¹³

Undoubtedly there were socio-economic differences reflected in the friction between urban and rural landscapes. Promising to address these is likely to have been a source of popular support, for what we know of Andronikos’ domestic policies 1183–85 reads as a revival of the provinces against urban centres. Detail is lacking but both Niketas Choniates in the capital and his brother Michael in Athens report a series of policies aimed at provincial renewal. Andronikos was known in his brief reign to have eased Manuel’s heavy taxation, reestablished the office of

²⁰⁶ George of Amastris ed. Vasil Vasilievsky, *Russko-vizantijskie issledovanija*, 2 (St. Petersburg: 1893), pp.1-73; Lennart Rydén, *The life of St. Philaretos the merciful written by his grandson Niketas: a critical edition with introduction, translation, notes, and indices*, (Uppsala: 2002).

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.26-28.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.116-117.

²⁰⁹ Delehaye Hippolyte, *Les Saints Stylites*, (Brussels: 1923), pp.76. Text at §10, p.155; trans. Charles Kuper, ‘The Greek Life of Alypios the Stylite (stylite and monastic founder of Hadrianopolis,)’ in: *The Cults of Saints in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: 2018), §10.

²¹⁰ Symeon’s version in Hippolyte, *Les Saints Stylites*, p.177.

²¹¹ From Alypios’ pre-tenth-century *Life* literally, ‘He returned the fruit to its native land from which it was grown to preserve the native-land’s joy,’ §7 [ὁ Θεός, ὅτι τὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς φύντα τῆς πατρίδος καρπὸν αὐτῆ πάλιν τῆ πατρίδι σωτήριον εὐφροσύνης ἀπέδωκεν.] p.152. Note an emphatic double use of *patris*.

²¹² Angold, *Exile*, p.19, Cyprus’ early support was short-lived. Continued involvement from Patriarch Germanos inflamed relations with the Latin regime and caused the Cypriot Church to break contact, in idem. *Germanos II*, pp.42-45; and Germanos’ letters in Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, II, 9-10; Konstantinos Chatzepsaltes, ‘Ἡ ἐκκλησία Κύπρου καὶ τὸ ἐν Νικαίᾳ οἰκουμηνικὸν πατριαρχεῖον ἀρχομένου τοῦ ἰγ’ μ. Χ. αἰῶνος,’ *KyprSpud* 28 (1964), pp.141-144; Gastgeber, “Epiros Dossier,” pp.99-102.

²¹³ Ioannis Stefanis, ed. *Αγίου Νεοφύτου Σωζόμενα Ἔργα*, (Thessaloniki: 2018), pp.593-598. Neophytos’ text is fairly unspecific, the sole use of an ethnonym, ‘Hellenic graves’ [τὸ χωρίον Ἑλληνικῶν τύμβων] in the idolatrous sense referred to ancient, malignant graves surrounding Paphlagonia. p.595.

praetor as a means of reducing corruption amongst tax collectors, and purged the system of aristocratic purchases of state offices.²¹⁴ The Indian summer of Andronikos' early reign, which sits oddly alongside a tyrannical image, informs us also that the emperor had succeeded in enlisting some notable, but second-rank, families in his state offices. We are fortunate enough to know the family name of the most prominent.

²¹⁴ NC, *CD*, §325-326, trans. 179-180; MC, *OE*, §30.6-14 praises the 'Most brilliant *praetor* who has attended to our affairs before all others so that the unequal taxation might be re-distributed.' [ὁ πανυπέρλαμπρος πραιτωρ πρό γε τῶν ἄλλων τὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐπεσκέψατο... ἀναδασθείη... ἢ τῆς φορολογικῆς ἀδικίας εὐάφορμος πρόφασις] see also §§32, 40; Anthony Kaldellis, *The New Roman Empire: A History of Byzantium*, (Oxford: 2024), p.701.

1.4. The Mesaritai: Supporters and Survivors of Andronikos' Insular Constantinople

‘[John Mesarites] was brought to the attention of the emperor by his father [Constantine], as a precious pearl or ruby worthy of the imperial crown. That harsh and difficult emperor, Andronikos it was, took him on as a gift from the Gods and kept him close, so that nobody else would carry him off. Though disagreeable to everybody else, he was sweetness and light where my brother was concerned. He arranged the payment to him of a hefty salary by the keepers of the private treasury and the provision of additional supplies and fabrics... Of course his progress in imperial service was slow, partly because of his attachment to reading and learning and partly because of the emperor's evil temper, even if he always showed him the greatest kindness, until with the assent of God the hand of Angelos smote [Andronikos] an almighty blow and felled, as though he were some worthless and mangy vermin, that frightful man, who had the look and the roar of a lion.’

καὶ προσήχθη τῇ βασιλείῳ περιωπῇ ὑπὸ τοῦ σφετέρου πατρὸς ὡς ἔντιμος μάργαρος καὶ λίθος λυχνίτης τῇ βασιλικῇ ταινία κατάξιος. καὶ ὁ βαρὺς ἐκεῖνος καὶ δύσκολος βασιλεὺς, Ἀνδρόνικος δ' οὗτος, ὡς ἔρμαιόν τι τοῦτον ἀναλαμβάνει καὶ ὡς μὴ συληθῆναι παρά τινος ἐγκολπίζεται, καὶ ὁ ἐφ' ἅπασιν ἀηδῆς ἐπὶ τοῦμῳ ἀδελφῷ ἠδὺς ἐγνωρίζετο. τοιγὰρ καὶ ἐτησίους δόσεις βαρυσολκεῖς παρέχειν αὐτῷ τοῖς οἰκειακοῖς θησαυροφύλαξι προὔτρεψε καὶ διατροφὰς παρέχειν ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ καὶ σκεπάσματα· [...] ἀμέλει καὶ βραδεῖαν ἐπὶ τὰ βασίλεια τὴν πορείαν πεποίητο δώματα, τοῦτο μὲν καὶ διὰ τὸ προστετηκέναι τῇ ἀναγνώσει καὶ τοῖς μαθήμασι, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ διὰ τὸ τοῦ κρατοῦντος κακότητες, κἂν ἐκεῖνος ἐπ' αὐτῷ τὰ πάμπολλα ἐχρηστεύετο, ἕως αὐτὸν νεύσει θεοῦ ἢ Ἀγγελικῆ Βριάρεω παταγμὸν ἐπάταξε χεῖρ καὶ τὸν φοβερὸν ἐκεῖνον καὶ λεοντώδη κατὰ βλέμμα, κατ' ἐρυγμὸν ὡς οὐτιδανὸν καὶ ἐξίτηλον κατέρραξε κνώδαλον.²¹⁵

The ecclesiastical author Nicholas Mesarites (c.1163–c.1217) is our window to the Constantinopolitan milieu which supported the ethicized-violence and insular policies of Andronikos Komnenos' regime. Nicholas Mesarites' several works and letters written between the years 1200 and 1215 attest to momentous changes within Byzantine society. Within that tumultuous era, the Mesaritai family were peripatetic. They were notable individuals at the courts of Andronikos I, Alexios III, and later Theodore Laskaris in Nikaia. As seen above, John was Andronikos' personal confessor and resumed the role for Alexios III. Nicholas from c.1195 until April 1204 held the high-ranking position of imperial *skeuophylax* and sacristan of the relics of Christ's Passion in the Pharos Chapel. However, it was their father Constantine, who first played a pivotal role in securing the family's promotion to such prestigious offices. We know the outline of Constantine's career as he climbed the imperial legal bureaucracy. From 1166 Constantine was a *kouropalates* and *krites* [judge] of the Velum, then was appointed to the Hippodrome, and most likely after 1182 under Andronikos reached the climax of his career with the combined posts of *protasekretis*, giving him responsibility for drafting imperial chrysobulls, and an ad hoc role of president of 'all the senate.'²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Mesarites, *Epitaphios* §19.7-25, adapted trans. Angold, p.157.

²¹⁶ An author in his own right, Constantine Mesarites' surviving work is a series of biblical exegeses which have received little attention. Francois Halkin, ed. *Inédits byzantins d'Ochrida, Candie et Moscou*, (Brussels: 1963), pp.32-55; For Constantine as *koroupalates* and *krites* in 1166 see Stergios Sakkos, *Ὁ πατήρ μου μείζων μου ἐστίν*,

When Andronikos began his insurrection from a position of semi-exile to challenge the regency on an anti-Latin momentum, he had only a meagre force and he did not take Constantinople by storm. What he needed were factions *within* Constantinople and it is from Nicholas' writings that we learn how multiple members of the Mesaritai family became key supporters of Andronikos in the 1180s. Nicholas, too young to serve Andronikos directly, survived his overthrow where other family members did not. When he reached prominence c.1195 we can probably see the perspective of a family which had once united behind Andronikos' policies being revived at the close of the twelfth century. Known for his unconventionality as an author, Mesarites' word choice and detail create a vivid authorial perspective.²¹⁷ From the *epitaphios* Nicholas prepared for his brother John's funeral in 1207 we glean most of our information for the family. John Mesarites had had some tumultuous early plans to be a run-away monk in Alexandria but was foiled by his father's pleas to Emperor Manuel. Nicholas gives the unlikely resolution that Manuel directly intervened and enforced his return. There is an element of insult levelled to Manuel in the narrative, which Angold's edition did not address, particularly regarding why Manuel was contemptuously likened in the *epitaphios* to Hesiod's 'cawing crow [κρώζη κορώνη].'²¹⁸ There is in fact very good reason for animosity.

The Mesaritai family's place within Manuel's Komnenian empire was somewhat middling. They held offices but were distinctly ignoble and unaligned with the network of aristocratic alliances who provided the state with its military commanders and governors. This was the age of the Komnenian System, the patrimonial network of aristocratic families which simultaneously 'brought the empire's military command structure within the imperial *genos*... [and] lowered the social status of all families who did not belong to the favoured Komnenian elite... to a second-class aristocracy of civil and religious officials.'²¹⁹ Our knowledge of the Mesaritai within this second-rank of the pre-1180 elite is greatly enhanced by an aside found in the work of the legal canonist Theodore Balsamon referring to one Theodore Mesarites, likely Nicholas' uncle. As part of an entry discussing the right of widows to choose their own husbands in the absence of fathers and grandfathers, it concedes to certain women the right to choose their own second-marriages, but a caveat is made when pertaining to 'noble women' [εὐγενεῖς γυναῖκες]. As Balsamon recorded it, Emperor Manuel:

'Our mighty and sacred emperor put an end to corruption arising through arranged marriages of noble women who were joined with ignoble men and punished the latter severely. This was done to the imperial secretary Kyr Theodore Mesarites, having taken as wife the daughter of the *sebastos* Bryennios without the emperor's approval.

Ὁ δὲ κραταιὸς καὶ ἅγιος ἡμῶν βασιλεὺς διαφθορὰν συνοικεσία εὐγενῶν γυναικῶν συναφθεισῶν ἀνδράσι δυσγενέσι διέσπασε, καὶ τοὺς συναφθέντας μεγάλως ἐκόλασεν·

II. *Ἐριδες καὶ σύνοδοι κατὰ τὸν ἰβ' αἰῶνα*, (Thessaloniki: 1966), p.155.6-7; Jules Pargoire, 'Nicolas Mésarités, métropolitte d'Éphèse,' *Echos d'Orient*, 47 (1904), pp.219-226. For *protasekretis* and the less defined leadership of Andronikos' senate see Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, §6.24-25, [ἐξ ἀνακτορικῆς ἐπικρίσεως τῆς συγκλήτου πάσης προκάθηται καὶ τὸ πρωτοασκηρικὸν ὄφικιον ἀναζώννυται, τὴν αἰδεσιμωτάτην κλήσιν, τὸ πρωτόθρονον ὄνομα]. The office is unusual, *protothronos* being normally reserved for bishops presiding over suffragan sees.

²¹⁷ Alexander Kazhdan, 'Nicephorus Chrysoberges and Nicholas Mesarites: A Comparative Study,' *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, (Cambridge: 1984), p.250.

²¹⁸ Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, §12.20, trans. Angold, p.150.n60. A reference, perhaps, to Manuel's suppression of the emerging family. The full quotation would be 'And do not leave your house unpolished whilst you are building it, lest a cawing crow sit upon it and croak.' [μηδὲ δόμον ποιῶν ἀνεπίξεστον καταλείπειν, μή τοι ἐφεζομένη κρώζη λακέρυζα κορώνη.] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, ed. Martin West, (Oxford: 1978), §746-7.

²¹⁹ Magdalino, *Manuel*, pp.187-188.

οἶδεν τι πεποηκῶς καὶ εἰς τὸν βασιλικὸν γραμματικὸν κύριον Θεόδωρον τὸν Μεσαρίτην, τοῦ σεβαστοῦ τοῦ Βρυεννίου τὴν θυγατέρα χωρὶς εἰδήσεως βασιλικῆς εἰς γυναῖκα λαβόντα.²²⁰

We can identify two specific individuals who suffered punishment for this crime under Manuel but themselves or their relatives returned to hold key positions under Andronikos. One of these was Andronikos' chief minister and *epi tou stratou*, Stephen Hagiochristophorites. Eustathios informs us of the specific punishment for the crime. Under Manuel's regime Hagiochristophorites had been whipped, mutilated, and his nose slit for attempting to marry an 'ευγενή γυνή,' a noblewoman.²²¹ Balsamon leaves it ambiguous if rhinectomy was meted out to Theodore Mesarites but Manuel had likely done something similar. It was this discrete partitioning of the imperial nobility from the *dysgeneis* that reinforced the 'Komnenian System.' Therefore, despite serving in what had formerly been a reasonably high office of the state bureaucracy, the Mesaritai family before 1180 had suffered a firm demonstration of their exclusion from the upper aristocracy. Even the Bryennioi, an extended branch of the Komnenoi-Doukai *genos*, were beyond them and they had been publicly refused the opportunity to 'marry-up.' This humiliation of the family would certainly explain Nicholas Mesarites' unfavourable depiction of Manuel as a 'cawing crow.'²²² Vengeance for the insult to the Mesaritai family would be exacted in the years to come.

In 1182 Andronikos Komnenos set to work dismantling Manuel's circles. It is here we find Nicholas Mesarites' father, Constantine, as a pivotal player. We gather from Nicholas' more nuanced portrayal of Andronikos, a generally reviled emperor, that Constantine Mesarites was a key figure in the reign of Andronikos and their fortunes became tied to his success. As representatives of a discontented middle-aristocracy, unable to advance beyond the judiciary, Constantine and his fellow *kritai* played a role in forcing the senate's agreement to the capitulation of the city to the usurper.²²³ Through this politicking, multiple excluded families achieved their hereto blocked advancement. It was almost certainly Andronikos who placed Constantine in a position of oversight in the senate, while John became a personal confessor to the new emperor. To Nicholas Mesarites whose family owed much to Andronikos' patronage the memory of the emperor is distinctly nuanced; an unstable figure, doomed by his wrath yet generous to his family.

Andronikos' 1185 overthrow spelled disaster and a temporary end to the prominence of the Mesaritai. Both Nicholas' father and an unnamed brother perished violently. By Mesarites' account they died being hurled from a great height, potentially alongside the emperor in the

²²⁰ Balsamon, *Σύνταγμα*, IV, p.189, trans. Magdalino, *Manuel*, p.211; The noblewoman was likely the daughter of Joseph Bryennios, who in 1166 signed himself *pansebastos sebastos* in Sakkos, 'Ο πατήρ μου,' pp.154.14-15.

²²¹ Eustathios, *Lament*, §44.23-29, trans. p.45. 'Stephanos was his first name, and his surname Hagiochristophorites; and those who are of the right opinion gave him the nickname Antichristophorites after he had departed from the ways ordained by God. His earlier history had marked him out as the very image of worthlessness. He had contracted a marriage out of his class, committing the crime of making a noble alliance above his own *eugenos*, but the penalty which he had paid was no mean one [ὑπὲρ ἀξίαν γάμον εὐγενῆ, δέδωκε τιμωρίαν οὐκ ἀγεννῆ, *there is a pun here, lit. the punishment was not ignoble*]. His nose was cut off, because he had done wrong by cavorting with one whom he should have left alone, and from his back strips of chastisement went glancing down.'

²²² Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, §12.20.

²²³ Other chief civic officials who supported Andronikos are known from Choniates and Eustathios. Constantine Patrenos, judge of the *Velum*, and Michael Haploucheir, judge and *protonotarios* of the *dromos*. NC, CD, §266, 270, 336, trans. pp.148, 150, 185; Eustathios, *Lament*, §22.10-25, 44.18-48.23, trans. pp.23, 45-49, records in detail Andronikos' usage of the *kritai* to bring down the regency government.

Hippodrome.²²⁴ While Nicholas presumably was too young and too ecclesiastically inclined to warrant reprisals, of the prominent Mesaritai John alone survived by retreating to the monastery of St. Daniel the Stylite at Anaplous in Phyrghana in North-Western Anatolia (potentially, near or at the same location the future Germanos II spent his initial years after 1204). While it is dressed up in the epitaph as a religious reclusion, given his role as Andronikos' personal confessor, we should imagine John was hounded from the city by Isaak II's regime. Only the deposition of Isaak by his brother Alexios III in 1195 saw John's reappearance in the capital, now seemingly with the patronage of the Kamateros family.²²⁵ With his brother entitled *didaskalos* of the Psalter and acting once more as confessor to an emperor, these conditions were the backdrop for the launching of Nicholas Mesarites' own career.²²⁶

The two main authors for the Byzantium that weathered the Fourth Crusade offer useful parallels to one another. Both Nicholas Mesarites and Niketas Choniates lost rank and office in Constantinople after April 1204. Losing his status under Alexios III, Mesarites lived for several years under the Latin conquerors fighting for Orthodox ecclesiastical representation, before moving to Nikaia in 1208, and finding valuable if itinerant employment there. He ended his life as Metropolitan of Ephesos. In contrast, Choniates struggled and hesitated, attempting to serve the Latins and only eventually opting to support Theodore Laskaris' struggle to reunite Byzantine Anatolia from Bithynia. Where Mesarites never wavered, Choniates' delays and uncertainties might reveal other differences in the nuances of social status. Choniates' own career and ultimate penury shall be discussed in section two. However, whereas Niketas Choniates was originally from Chonai in South-Western Asia Minor, Nicholas Mesarites, and as he would have us believe much of the Mesaritai clan before him, all originated from Constantinople. He is uniquely proud of this fact, and it influences much of his work. Where Choniates commonly asserts he is a 'Roman', in his own work from before 1204, Mesarites was almost never this. He was foremostly a Constantinopolitan, proud of his *patris* and 'a native of the queen of cities' [τις τῶν τῆς βασιλευούσης ἀθιγενής].²²⁷ He disliked provincial Byzantine homoglotts, Italians, Georgians, Germans, Turks, and essentially all other alloglots, excepting only the Varangians. With the exception of referring to the official titles of 'Emperors of the Romans' and institution of 'the army of the Romans' Mesarites' use of 'Roman' seldom refers to a people. It reappears after 1204, but inconsistently and with many concessions and substitutions for the topographical term he prefers; a group identity defined as 'Constantinopolitan' [Κωνσταντινουπολίται] and as a church simply 'Greek' [Γραικός].²²⁸

²²⁴ Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, §5.6-8. 'καὶ θάνατος ἡμετέρου πατρὸς καὶ βίαιος νιοῦ ἀπὸ βίωσις καταρραγέντος ἀφ' ὑψηλοῦ καὶ θρυβέντος τὴν ὀλομέλειαν, τὸ μέγιστον τῆς πατρικῆς ἡμῶν οἰκίας δυσκλήρημα.' Trans. Angold, p.144. 'The greatest piece of ill-luck to befall our patrimonial house, the death of our father and the sudden demise of [another of] her sons, who was thrown down from a height, [leaving] his whole body smashed to pieces.' It is not unlikely the place of execution was one of the columns of the hippodrome's *spina*, where Andronikos and then Alexios V were killed.

²²⁵ Ibid., §24, trans. Angold, pp.161-2. Close ties developed either in the 1180s or more likely the mid-1190s between the Mesaritai and the Kamateroi. Nicholas wrote multiple letters to John X Kamateros and recommendations to imperial spiritual advisors were achieved primarily through the support of the patriarch. Angold, *Mesarites*, pp.312-319.

²²⁶ Angold, *Mesarites*, pp. 42, 160.

²²⁷ For discussion of Constantinople as Mesarites' *patris* see Galatariotou, 'Travel and Perception,' p.240.

²²⁸ Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, §49.13, p.62.

1.5. Ethnic and Constantinopolitan Exclusivism in Mesarites' Warning: The Coup of John 'the Fat' Axouchos Komnenos 1200/01

'But, at a given signal, some others from John's bodyguard [clad] in full armour broke in from the Augoustaion through the western gateway. Overbearing, rough and ill-disciplined they shouted out, "From now on all will be well with us and with *Romania*; no longer will we be overrun by these barbarians, not by the Skythian,²²⁹ Bulgarian, Tauroskythian,²³⁰ Persarmenian,²³¹ Illyrian, Triballos,²³² Paion,²³³ Alaman,²³⁴ Italian,²³⁵ Iberian,²³⁶ Libyan,²³⁷ nor even today by the Persian,²³⁸ who has achieved great success in Asia. They will lick the dust off our feet (Ps.72, 9, Is.49, 23); all will bow down to our authority. They will submit their stiff necks to the yoke of servitude. The Queen of Cities can now rest easy; all the rulers of the world will make obeisance to you with the noblest of gifts. Behold another Joshua, son of Nun, sent by divine providence to obliterate the kingdom of the Canaanites, who will destroy the Bulgarian!

²²⁹ Each of these classicising ethnonyms refers to contemporary events and shall be parsed. Cumans: Allied to the Bulgarians since the 1185 revolt and in 1200 were also in a state of war with Byzantine allies in the Kievan Rus civil war. For Cumans in the Bulgarian revolt, known primarily from Latin sources, see Francesco Dall'Aglia, 'The Opposition Between Bulgaria and the Latin Empire of Constantinople: A Necessary Hostility?' in: *Medieval Bosnia and South-East European Relations. Political, Religious, and Cultural Life at the Adriatic Crossroads*, eds. Dženan Dautović, et al., (Leeds: 2019), p.73.

²³⁰ Kievan Rus: as Niketas Choniates informs us, the Rus were at civil war between Romanos Rurikovich and Romanos Mstislavich, the former aligned with the Cumans, and thus an enemy of Byzantium. Mstislavich in some analyses was married to Euphrosyne Angelina, a daughter of Isaak II, and had previously succeeded in attacking the northern Bulgarian border to relieve pressure on Thrace. NC, CD, §522.25-523.49, trans. pp.206-207; Alexander Maiorov, 'The Alliance between Byzantium and Rus before the Conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204,' *Russian History*, 42 (2015), pp.272-393.

²³¹ Armenians: Choniates uses the term 'Persarmenian' for the Danishmenids who had made Kastamon their capital prior to its two reconquests in the 1130s by the Byzantine army, NC, CD, §19.2, trans. pp.12-13.; Mesarites appears to be using the term differently, unsurprisingly as the wars with the Danishmenids were well before his lifetime. In *Palastrevolution* 'Persarmenian' appears once more, when Mesarites praises his 'Cilician and Persarmenian companions.' Here the term appears to distinguish between those from Cilician Armenia with whom Byzantium was currently in communion, and Armenians from Caucasian Greater Armenia.; Mesarites, *Palastrevolution* §18.27-28, trans. p.60. For 'Persarmenian' for Greater Armenia see also Prokopios, *The Persian Wars*, I, §10.

²³² Both Illyrian and Triballos refer to Serbs. Less than two years prior Grand Župan Stefan had rebuked his wife, Alexios III's daughter Eudokia, and charged her with adultery. The expulsion of the princess from court sparked a civil war with Stefan's brother who had the backing of the emperor. NC, CD, §531, trans. p.292; Macrides, *Akropolites*, p.116n.7. Cf. Vlada Stanković, 'Stronger than It Appears? Byzantium and its European Hinterland after the Death of Manuel I Komnenos,' *SQOAS*, pp.35-48, which completely ignores the divorce.

²³³ Hungarians: Following Andronikos' usurpation in 1182 Béla III, Manuel's son-in-law, invaded Niš-Braničevo and only agreed to peace in 1185 with Andronikos' successor when Isaak II married Béla's daughter. Isaak was forced to recognise the new frontier and annexation of lands in Dalmatia, notably Sirmium. Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: a political study of the Northern Balkans, 900-1204*, (Cambridge: 2000), pp.282-284.

²³⁴ Germans: Possibly a lingering reference to the passage of the Third Crusade. Reappears as an uncultured mercenary in the imperial guard who had to be restrained from looting the palace by Varangians, Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §31.21, trans. p.73.

²³⁵ Italian merchants had repeatedly enriched themselves at Byzantine expense and later attempted to loot the Pharos chapel with the Georgians, see Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §16.3, trans. p.56.

²³⁶ Ibid., Georgians: Repeatedly identified throughout as greedy looters.

²³⁷ Either the Almohad Caliphate, or simply Arabs in general.

²³⁸ (Seljuk) Turks: Here begins the first instance of the narrative which otherwise ridicules Axouchos for Turkish ancestry persecuting Turks.

Αἱ δὲ χαμάζε ἐρρίπτοντο καὶ ἡ εἰσπόρευσις ἄνετος καὶ ἔνδοθεν τῶν ἀδύτων ὁ Ἰωαννης, καταβώμενος τοῦ κατὰ πραότητα τοὺς πάλαι βασιλεῖς ἐκνικήσαντος. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκ τῶν τοῦ Αὐγουστεῶνος θυρῶν δυτικῶν εἰσπηδήσαντες ἐκ συνθήματος ἕτεροί τιμες σιδηρόφρακτοι ὑπασπισταὶ τοῦ Ἰωαννου καὶ ἐπιτάρροθοι ἰταμοὶ καὶ ἀκάθεκτοι “ὡς εὖ γε τῇ Ῥωμαίδι τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦδε καὶ ἡμῖν’ ἐπεφώνουν, ‘οὐ καταστρατηγήσει τις ἐτι βάρβαρος ταύτης, οὐ Σκυθῆς, οὐ Βούλγαρος, οὐ Ταυροσκύθης, οὐ Περσαρμένιος, οὐκ Ἰλλυριός, οὐ Τριβαλλός, οὐ Παίων, οὐλ Ἀλαμανός, οὐκ Ἰταλός, οὐκ Ἴβηρ, οὐ Λίβυς, οὐκ αὐτός ὁ τά ἐγάλα κατὰ τὴν Ἀσιαν ἰσχύων Πέρσης τὴν σήμερον. τὸν τῶν ποδῶν ἡμῶν λείξουσι χοῦν, ὑποκύψουσι πάντες, δουλεύουσουσιν, ὑπὸ ζυγὸν δουλείας πεσοῦνται οἱ πρώην αὐτῶν ἀκαμπέστατοι τράχηλοι. ἀγάλλου τοίνυν ἡ βασιλεύουσα, οἱ βασιλεῖς γάρ τῆς γῆς κῦδιστοι δῶροις πᾶντες σοι προσκυνήσουσιν. ἄρτι ὄν ἀπεβάλου κόσμον ἀπέλαβες, ἀπεσεῖσω τὴν ὕβριν, περιεδήσω τὸν τῆς ἀγαλλιᾶσεως στέφανον. ἴδου ἄλλος οὗτος υἱὸς Ναυῆ Ἰησοῦς, ἐκ θείας προνοίας ἀπεσταλμένος τὰς τῶν Χαναναίων βασιλείας ἐξαφανίσων, ἀλλὰ καὶ καταστρέψων τὸν Βούλγαρον.”²³⁹

In spite of its short duration and utter failure, the attempted coup of John *Paxys* or ‘The Fat’ Axouchos Komnenos received significant attention from contemporaries. Situated towards the end of the reign of Alexios III Angelos Komnenos (1195-1203), almost two years before the Crusaders arrived, the events capture Constantinople at a point of political and social crisis.²⁴⁰ Four contemporary Greek-speaking authors either reference or describe the uprising, one author twice. This quantity of sources and the fact that all other sources fail to align with Mesarites’ own account is just one intriguing detail regarding content; for his text is unusual in several regards.²⁴¹ Nicholas Mesarites’ account of the failed coup of John ‘the Fat’ Axouchos Komnenos, entitled *A Narration in the Form of a Speech*, is less valuable for its accuracy than for its intent.²⁴² We cannot know how much of the content was written before and after 1204 or if Mesarites, like Choniates, rewrote his works after 1204 in a way that projected the post-Fourth Crusade tensions onto pre-conquest episodes. The scholarly consensus that he did not is based on the fact that Mesarites is believed to have constrained himself to adding only paratextual information to his works and left the main body alone. Mesarites’ texts have long been recognised as having had a highly limited circulation and for leaving no literary impact in Byzantine circles. Therefore the surviving manuscript(s), though composite of several hands,

²³⁹ It is notable that of all enemies, Bulgarians were considered the greatest threat to the court of 1200. Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*; §3.8-24, adapted trans. Angold, p.44; Johannes Koder, ‘Ruling Elites and the Common People: Some Considerations on their Diverging Identities and Ideologies,’ in: *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World*, pp.52.

²⁴⁰ Byzantine sources for the coup are: NC, *OE*, §10, p.101; NC, *CD*, §526-529, trans. p.289; Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, trans. pp.31-74; Euthymios Tornikios, ‘Discours d’Euthyme Tornikés (1200-1205),’ ed. Jean Darrouzès, *REB*, 26 (1968), p.66; Nikephoros Chrysoberges, *Nicephori Chrysobergae ad Angelos orations tres*, ed. Maximilian Treu, (Wroclaw: 1892), p.1; For a brief overview of secondary literature: Michael Angold, ‘The Anatomy of a Failed Coup: The Abortive Uprising of John the Fat (31 July 1200),’ in: *SQOAS*, pp.113-134; idem, ‘Byzantine Politics vis-à-vis the Fourth Crusade,’ in: *Urbis capta*, pp.55-70; Alexander Vasiliev, ‘Mesarites as a Source,’ *Speculum*, 13 (1938), pp.180-182; See also Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West*, pp.98, 122-124, 248-49; Anthony Kaldellis, ‘The Chronology of the Reign of Alexios III Komnenos for the years 1198-1202 AD and its Implications,’ *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 32 (2022), pp.59-82.

²⁴¹ Michael Angold, ‘Mesarites as a source: then and now,’ *BMGS*, 40 (2016), pp.55-68; Beatrice Daskas, ‘A literary self-portrait of Nikolaos Mesarites,’ *BMGS*, 41.1 (2016), pp.151-169; Kazhdan, ‘Chrysoberges and Mesarites,’ pp.224-255.

²⁴² Mesarites’ works, of which there are many, mainly come down to us in two manuscripts in Milan *Cod. Ambrosiani gr. F93 and Cod. Ambrosiani gr. F96* which once formed a single codex. The narration of John’s coup is in the latter *F96* folios 17-31^v. Augustus Heisenberg published the critical edition as *Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos* in 1907; Annaclara Cataldi Palau, ‘Deux lettres inédites (Milan, *Ambrosianus* F96 Sup., ff.15v-16v)’ in: *Manuscripta Graeca et Orientalia*, eds. André Binggeli et al., (Leuven: 2016), pp.187-232, p.191.

in Mesarites' sections are thought to contain the autograph, i.e., written in Nicholas' own hand. Others may have come from a single copy of the autograph dictated during his later incumbency in Ephesos after 1214. The addition of several notes at irregular points supports the theory that he personally revisited his texts. These are only tentative conclusions but the limited manuscript tradition and his unwavering praise for the short-lived heir Alexios Palaiologos (d.1203), and Emperor Alexios III, who would have died after 1211 having fought as an enemy of the Nikaian state to which he joined in 1207, suggests that Mesarites performed only very minimal revisions.

At its heart the *Narration* is a series of four episodes of ethnic competition between the Constantinopolitan indigenous population and a composite threatening force of both foreigners and provincials alike. The insistence on projecting this message onto all events overwhelms the story, and makes its internal narrative a logical paradox. This is neatly illustrated when shortly after the above proclamation of a dawning age of restored imperium ruling humbled *ethne*, Mesarites described its consequences: 'These wretches shouted out these things and more besides and accompanying them came a mixed crowd formed from every *genos* and age.'²⁴³ Confirming in his later descriptions that these were alloglots, quite why a heterogenous crowd would support their own subordination defies easy understanding. Further discussion of this point is given below. The usurper, John Axouchos Komnenos, was himself not a prime candidate for an ethnic revival of unmixed Hellenic Romanness. His homonymous Turkish grandfather was taken as a child when Nikaia was recaptured in 1097 and raised as a childhood-friend and *grand domestic* of John II. This John Axouchos had married his son Alexios to Maria Komnene, the daughter of John II's eldest son the *porphyrogenitos* heir-apparent Alexios (d.1142). The product of this marriage, John 'the Fat' led a quieter life than his forebears, until he became a figurehead for a failed coup organised by Alexios Doukas Mourtzouphlos.²⁴⁴ Their push for the throne, begun in the evening of the 31st July 1200, failed spectacularly by morning.²⁴⁵ Lacking the support to defend the palace, John was overwhelmed within hours and decapitated as he fled. The architect of the coup, Alexios Doukas Mourtzouphlos, was imprisoned where he would remain until August 1203.²⁴⁶

However, despite its minimal impact the narrative of John's failed coup is crucial for witnessing the climax of Constantinopolitan Exclusivism. Mesarites delivered the text as a speech before the court of Alexios III and his empress. The genre of the *Narration* veers between oration and history, employing *ethopoeia*, *psogos*, and *encomia* to enhance its characters. The narrative possesses a strong sense of first-person authorship describing Nicholas' own actions and interactions with multiple others. Several tropes are employed for the reason of his writing; that his tongue was overworked from answering questions, he wishes to clarify details etc., but the performativity of the text can be ascertained behind these vague senses of urgency and social pressure. Mesarites' insistence on writing a full response was inherently to clarify and exonerate his own actions during a failed coup to the court of Alexios.²⁴⁷ Designed to be read

²⁴³ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §4.24-26, 'Ταῦτα καὶ τούτων πλείω οἱ ἀλάστορες ἐπεβόων, καὶ συμπάρῃν τούτοις σύμμικτος ὄχλος ἐκ παντὸς γένους καὶ ἡλικίας πάσης'

²⁴⁴ Mourtzouphlos' name is given only in the paratext of the manuscript, now presumed written by Mesarites himself, previously thought written in 1259. Angold, *Mesarites*, p.34.

²⁴⁵ While the calendar day is clear, the year of the coup is still debated. We accept here the chronology of Kaldellis, 'The Reign of Alexios III Komnenos,' p.70.

²⁴⁶ For Mourtzouphlos' release and service under Alexios IV see Robert de Clari, pp.77-83; Benjamin Hendrickx, 'Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos: His Life, Reign and Death (?-1204),' *Hellēnika*, 31 (1979), pp.108-132.

²⁴⁷ A rendering of what was entitled by Mesarites as 'λόγος αφηγηματικὸς.' For performativity in Byzantium see *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, eds. Theresa Shawcross, Ida Toth, (Cambridge: 2018), especially Margaret Mullett, 'Object, Text, and Performance in Four Komnenian Tent Poems,' pp.414-429.

almost as a defence, at several points the narrative breaks to address his audience, including the imperial couple by name.²⁴⁸ In the course of its delivery Mesarites articulates a warning both implicit and explicit about the danger of foreign influence in Constantinople, while attempting at multiple points to define what a ‘foreigner’ was. In the course of arriving at that conclusion, the narrative ties itself in knots, rendering multiple moments paradoxically flawed so that it does not make consistent judgements. Mesarites depicts Axouchos as a Turkish usurper and threat, a representative and ethnotype of the entire Turkish people, and yet places him at the head of an attempt to restore Byzantium and make good its recent defeats to the long list of *ethne* given above. It is only the first of several inconsistencies which reveal more about Constantinopolitan society than has been hereto recognised. It is through the insistence on what he is protecting that we can see the link with Andronikos and a consistency in a Mesaritai family outlook that continued to seek to remove foreign influence from Constantinople, beginning with the 1182 Massacre of the Latins but lasting until 1204. We should remember that the Augoustaion, where the narrative begins, is also the site of the Magnaura, one of Constantinople’s two Senate Houses.²⁴⁹ The narrative then quite literally begins with Nicholas Mesarites addressing the place where his father, intimate supporter of an anti-alloglot emperor, culminated his career and presided before his execution. In such scenarios we should perhaps not look for sound judgement.

As a final point, we should note that the list of *ta ethne* given by Mesarites are common within twelfth-century Byzantine literature. The styling of emperors by the epithets of the peoples they had conquered had been revived under the Komnenoi.²⁵⁰ However, while in the same vein, Mesarites’ usage is inverted. Rather than a triumphal rollcall of those who had been defeated, this was a foreboding list of those who had infiltrated and overrun the empire and for the good of the city must now be expelled. Inspirations for such a transposal could be Mesarites’ reworking of the ten *ethne* who were dispossessed to form the Promised Land of the Israelites (Genesis 15:17) while the phrasing shows elements of merging with (Deuteronomy 7:1)’s description of the Seven Enemies of Israel.²⁵¹ Both lean heavily on Mesarites’ adherence to the model of the Byzantine Orthodox as God’s Chosen People.

²⁴⁸ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §24, 25, 29.

²⁴⁹ [Fig.3] The convening of the Senate at a separate palace of the Magnaura is only sporadically certain, it may have been subsumed into the Great Palace by the eleventh century. Asuman Denker, *Byzantine Palaces in Istanbul*, (Istanbul: 2011), pp.19-21.

²⁵⁰ Prodomos’ poems contain numerous examples of idealised tribes conquered by John and Manuel Komnenos, and Hagia Sophia’s 1166 Conciliar Edict heralded the emperor with a string of his subjugations. Cyril Mango, ‘The Conciliar Edict of 1166,’ *DOP*, 17 (1963), pp.315-330; Prodomos, *Gedichte*, §1.87-1.99, §4.233-4.237, §16.1-16.12, §17.91-17.95.

²⁵¹ Eshel’s work highlighting the continued usage of the Byzantines as the New Israelites in opposition to the disloyal and godless *ethne* was employed throughout the twelfth century to emphasise Constantinople’s importance to foreigners. The bleed through effect here is that Constantinople, the New Jerusalem, being overrun by the godless Gentiles makes defence and perfection of the city a religious duty. Eshel, *Elect Nation*, pp.139-159

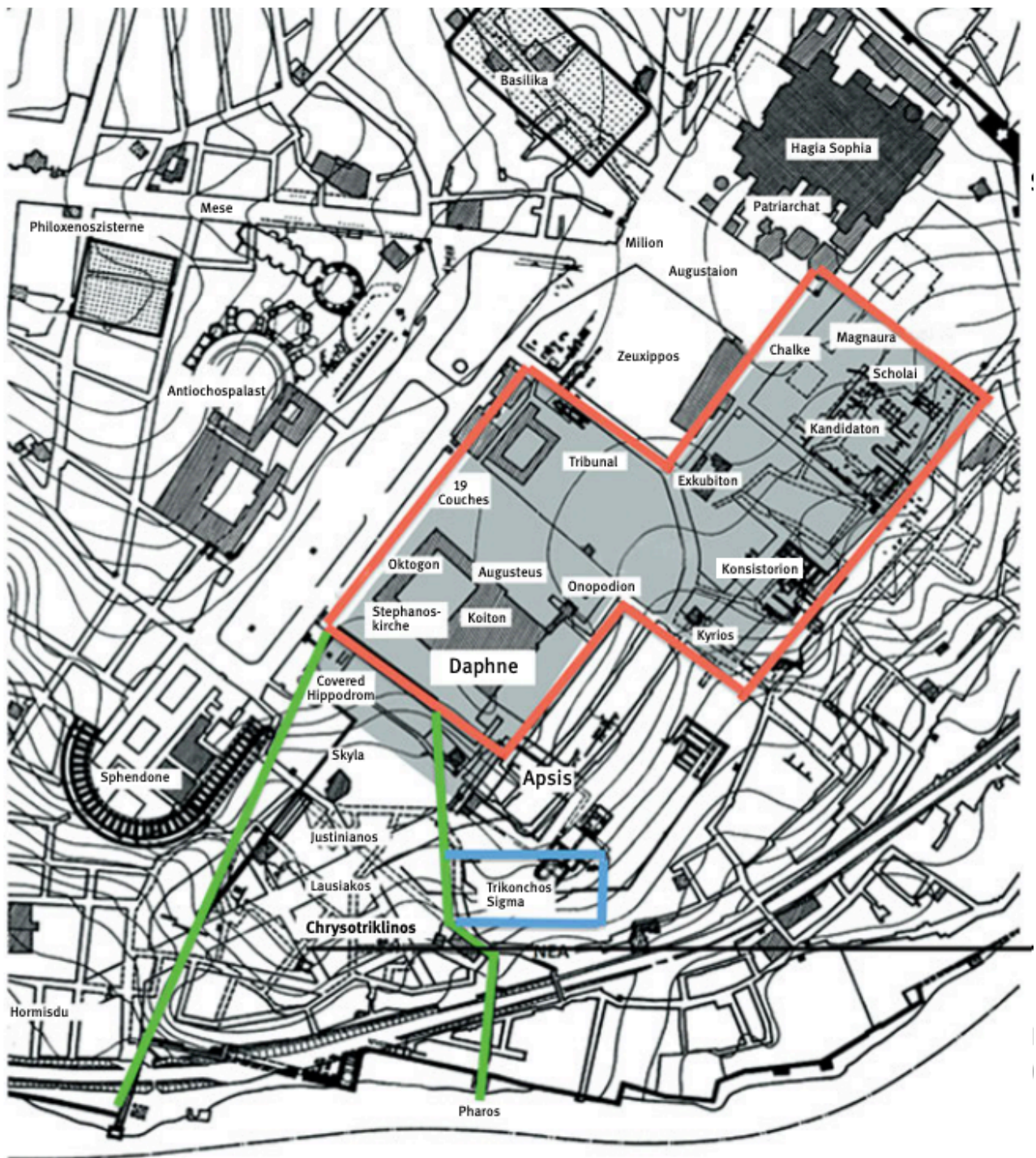


Figure 3. Map of the Great Palace of Constantinople. 'Old Upper Palace' in red, and 'Lower Palace' in Green. Michael Featherstone, 'The Everyday Palace in the Tenth Century,' *The Emperor's House*, (Istanbul: 2015), p.150.

1.6. Outline of the Coup

The events of the attempted coup can be described succinctly. John Axouchos Komnenos' coup was closely modelled on the formula that had brought Isaak II Angelos' to power in 1185.²⁵² In daylight hours when the forum was busiest their supporters were to gather and proclaim an emperor within the Augoustaion. Adjoining this forum was Hagia Sophia where they would occupy the cathedral and commandeer the patriarch for a coronation using one of the suspended ancestral crowns. Following this and utilising public support the conspirators were to seize control of the Great Palace and the emperor's personage and install their claimant on the throne. The emperor would be seized and subjected to the small mercies of a Constantinopolitan mob.

The proclamation of John in 1200 was successful; however, according to Mesarites' eyewitness depiction, it was also the only part to go well. John's conspirators filled the square outside the Hagia Sophia and issued their proclamation. They found some supporters but it is hard to tell how many. Their coronation was botched when the patriarch locked himself in a side-room and the only ecclesiastic willing to officiate was a 'rustic' eastern monk, hardly the same as the patriarch (who receives rampant praise.)²⁵³ The conspirators then seized the Great Palace, completely missing Alexios III who was in the Blachernae Palace at the other end of the city, and occupied it as their troops took to looting the palatial complex. Mesarites himself enters the narrative at this point as running to the palace to see to the protection of his charge, the Pharos chapel. He briefly speaks with the usurper John himself about its protection but unable to secure troops to protect the Pharos and the relics of Christ's Passion within, Mesarites was forced to appeal to its would-be looters. Rallying a combination of Constantinopolitan and Cilician-Armenian penitents Mesarites turned them into defenders of both the Pharos and the Nea Ekklesia against John's alloglot supporters. In the fight he claims he took a wound. Meanwhile, Alexios III dispatched his son-in-law and heir apparent, Alexios Palaiologos, with a contingent of both his native [συγγενείας] household guard and the Varangians who arrive via boat on the Golden Horn.²⁵⁴ After steeling themselves in another ethnic debate, these troops quickly located John Axouchos Komnenos and decapitated him in a newly constructed building attached to the Hall of the Chrysotriklinos. One account makes grisly mention of his fleshy head displayed outside.²⁵⁵

1.7. Ethnicity as Rhetorical *Psogos*: John 'the Fat' Axouchos Komnenos

Related to two emperors, John Axouchos' mother was the granddaughter of Emperor John II. However, three generations later this member of the extended Komnenoi was recognised and criticised on ethnic grounds as a Persian, the classicising ethnonym for a Turk.²⁵⁶ This association was surely a new development, a product of his failed treason, for the Axouchos family had been high in imperial service for decades, though their position was repeatedly

²⁵² Choniates himself made this connection to several attempted coups, see NC, *CD*, §423.25-424.32, trans. p.233.

²⁵³ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution* §5.18-25, 'τις γούν τῶν ἀφ' ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν Ναζιραῖος... ἀπόνηρος... ἄγροικος.'

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, §25.13.

²⁵⁵ Tornikios, 'Discours d'Euthyme Tornikés,' §1, p.69.15-16, 'You, who wished to be the head of all, are now seen only as a head. [καὶ τὸν κεφαλὴν ἀπάντων εἶναι θελήσαντα μόνον δὴ τῶν ἀπάντων κεφαλῆς δίχα θεάσεται].'

²⁵⁶ Alexander Beihammer, 'Strategies of Identification and Distinction in the Byzantine Discourse on the Seljuk Turks,' in: *Visions of Community*, pp.499-510.

tenuous.²⁵⁷ Regardless, ethnic difference had not previously been conceived of as a barrier but was purposefully invoked here.

Only a discussion of the act of treason offered the opportunity, like Andronikos and his Paphlagonians, to create a new inherently opposed, ethnic other. In this way Axouchos, like his father, lost his contemporary reputation and any familial networks and ties to the Byzantine state and could be likened to an eternal Persian enemy. Mesarites narrates that when fleeing through the Mouchroutas, a Seljuk-inspired section of the Great Palace, John was ‘an actor on this Persian stage set, which happened to be the handiwork of a relative on his grandfather’s side... He took great gulps of wine as he greeted the Persians pictured on the walls of the building and raised a toast to them.’²⁵⁸ There is no evidence either to corroborate that the elder John Axouchos had brought Turkish painters to court but similar palatial paintings were attested to also by the Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela.²⁵⁹ Scenes of conquest portraying Manuel I’s wars and victories against the Turks, known to us at the Blachernae, while they would surely inspire little confidence in anyone attaching themselves to an ethnically Turkish coup, did offer further opportunities for defamation.²⁶⁰

Mesarites was not alone in seizing the opportunity and warning to capitalise on Axouchos’ Turkish ancestry. The other Byzantine sources for the moment recognised and rhetorically weaponised it to a lesser extent. Euthymios Tornikios, deacon and rhetor to Alexios III, conveyed in his own oration how John’s ‘Persian’ bloodlines had come close to the imperial throne:

‘For this descendant of the Persian race [John Axouchos] then was born and raised to an evil fate. You [Alexios] have always known this man to be vain, obese, and idle of the unfavourable seed of Ishmael, *whose god is his belly*, which I say according to the divine and holy Paul [Philippians 3:19]. This man, although close to the imperial *genos* and although enriched and warmed by the loving womb of the emperor, did not act within this brotherly love but rebelled due to his inborn wickedness. For the serpent is cunning. Once a Persian, always a Persian. And as the saying goes, *this ape is an ape*.²⁶¹ – He could not set aside his ancestral Persian evil and arrogant mind.’²⁶²

²⁵⁷ John ‘the Fat’s’ father *protostrator* Alexios Axouchos, had a shorter career than his own father, suffering tonsure on suspicion of collaboration with the Turks in 1167. Alexios denied all accusations and prejudice seems likely, based on his heritage which reportedly inspired a decoration of his home with paternal Turkish motifs. The charges seem to have limited his son to a quiet and private aristocratic career until 1200. See Kinnamos, §264-270, trans. pp.199-201; Georgios Charizanis, ‘Ο Πρωτοστράτορας Αλεξιος Αξουχος, Ο Σεβαστοκράτορας Αλέξιος Κομνηνός και το Μοναστικό Κέντρο του Παπικού Ορούς (Β’ Μισό του 12ου αι.). Προσωπογραφικά και αλλά Ζητήματα,’ *BF*, 30 (2011), pp.671-693.

²⁵⁸ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §28.1, trans. pp.70-71; Paul Magdalino, ‘Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace.’ *BMG*, 4 (1978), pp.101-14.

²⁵⁹ These were in a palace adjacent to the Blachernae. Sandra Benjamin, *The World of Benjamin of Tudela*, (London: 1995), p.135.

²⁶⁰ Alicia Walker saw in this and the two-faced praise of the Seljuk-inspired Mouchroutas building where Axouchos wanders later as being othering via architectural ekphrasis and placing John firmly outside of Byzantine society on an additional artistic level through such lines as ‘This Persian hall is more delightful than the Lakonian ones of Menelaus.’ Alicia Walker, ‘Middle Byzantine Aesthetics and the Incomparability of Islamic Art: The Architectural Ekphrasis of Nikolaos Mesarites,’ *Muqarnas*, 27 (2010), p.88.

²⁶¹ Aesopian fable: the ape cannot be a fisherman, if he attempts, he shall drown in his stolen net.

²⁶² Tornikios, ‘Discours d’Euthyme Tornikés,’ §1, pp.66.17-67.6. ‘Ἀπόγονος γὰρ τοῦ περσικοῦ τούτου γένους ἐνταῦθα ἐπὶ κακῇ σφετέρᾳ μοίρᾳ καὶ φῶς καὶ ἀνατραφεῖς, — ἴστε πάντως τὸν ματαῖον ἐκείνον, τὸν κρεωβαρῆ τε

Tornikios' text is tropic, both biblical and Aesopian, but despite its brevity in depicting events it shares with Mesarites an important device – ethnotypes. The use of 'ethno-symbolic' characters, a term recently expounded upon by Claire Weeda, for stereotyped individuals within literary sources was a narrative technique whereby individuals take on the qualities and proclivities of their entire race.²⁶³ Tornikios' use of ethnotypes was a means of showing that Axouchos had an innate hostility that had merely waited to reveal itself. There is of course, no evidence that Turks, Seljuk or otherwise, made any contact with John. Nor that he repudiated Orthodoxy, nor that he even spoke Turkish, being three generations removed. There is no evidence in *any* source of Turkish mercenaries during the attempted coup. If there had been, they would surely have joined Mesarites' narrative when he describes foreign mercenaries serving Axouchos. The projection of a previously Byzantine aristocrat as a 'Persian' on account of an at-most two and likely only one grandparent being of Turkish heritage (we do not know who his grandfather married), means we should view the consigning of Axouchos as 'Persian' as a political attack. He is likely being compared to another recent usurper, this time from the Anatolian provinces, Theodore Mangaphas also known as 'Morotheodoros' [Foolish Theodore] which was a rendering of the original old Turkish meaning of his surname 'Mankaphas' or 'stupid.' Theodore had rebelled in Philadelphia in 1188/89 against Isaak II and his Turkish ties seem more active than John Axouchos'. Sultan Kay-Khusraw helped Mangaphas both in recruiting from Seljuk lands and offering a safe harbour from which he could raid Byzantine territory and a slave market on return. Byzantine bribes and demands secured his transfer to Isaak II's agents, but with caveats that preserved his sight in captivity.²⁶⁴ Such a recent and violent figure of mixed ancestry likely contributed to Axouchos' personification.

It is likely that Mesarites' depiction of Axouchos was a conflation of all previous Turkish hostility. Mesarites' depiction of John's hybrid ethnicity brands him in the same vein of the ethnotype of Persian or Turk, focusing on the comparison of the Turkish/Persian foreigner against the nobly born Constantinopolitan but is more layered than others. As opposed to the outright demonisation of Turkish ethnicity that traditional encomiasts such as Tornikios prefer, Mesarites repeatedly portrays John at multiple points as revealing his Turkish origins through his actions - both past and future. The narrative is written to create *prolepsis* and on three occasions flashforward scenes prophesise encroaching death and the inherent weakness of a Persian against a Greek/Roman.²⁶⁵ These are hidden within parataxic discussions of ungainliness, depression, and sweaty-drenched anxiety, which are projected as typically Persian characteristics. John, while seen only briefly, is beheld as scarcely functionally human.

καὶ ἀποφάλιον, τὸ ἀχάριστον σπέρμα τοῦ Ἰσμαήλ, οὗ θεοῦ ἡ κοιλία, κατὰ Παῦλον λέγω τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἱερόν — οὗτος, κἂν τῷ γένει προσήγγισε τῷ βασιλικῷ, κἂν φιλοίκοις κόλποις τοῦ βασιλέως ὑπεζωπυροῦτο καὶ ὑπεθάλλετο, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἠγάπα τῆς ἐμφύτου πονηρίας ἀφίστασθαι, ὁ ὄφις ὁ σκολιός. Πέρσης δ' αἰθὶς ὁ Πέρσης ὄν, — καὶ τοῦτο δὴ πίθηκος, κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, ὁ πίθηκος—τὴν προγονικὴν αὐτοῦ κακίαν καὶ τὸ γαῦρον φρόνημα καὶ περσικὸν οὐκ ἀπέθετο·

²⁶³ Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe*; idem. 'Characteristics of Bodies and Ethnicity, c.900-1200,' *Medieval Worlds*, 5 (2017), p.98.

²⁶⁴ Mangaphas' twice attempted rebellion, the first being an attempt in 1188/9 to proclaim himself emperor and minting coinage. He picked up the epithet of 'Morotheodoros' after his failed 1199 rebellion. See Dimitri Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks in the Thirteenth Century*, (Oxford: 2014), p.52; NC, *CD*, §400-401; Macrides, *Akropolites*, §7, p.122n.7.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, §11, 28.1.

‘His hair was coarse and dyed black;²⁶⁶ his shoulders were blubbery and bulky, which was a family trait passed down to him from the *genos* of his grandfathers, while the small of his back was swollen and fleshy. Paunchy and pot-bellied he was a useless burden on the imperial throne. Approaching a little closer I stood on the right and saw that he was hardly breathing and scarcely alive.

ἐφ’ ᾧ καὶ τὸ ἐκείνου πρόσωπον ἰδεῖν ἀπεκώλυε—τρίχας τε τετανυσμένας μελαντέρας τὲ καὶ τραχείας, καταλλήλους τῷ ἐκ πάππων ἐπ’ αὐτὸν κατιόντι γένει, ὄμους πιμελεῖς τε καὶ ὑπερόγκους, μετάφρενα διωδηκότεα τὲ καὶ κατάσαρκα, τοῦ βασιλικοῦ ἐκείνου θρόνου ἄχθος ἐτώσιον, προγάζστορα καὶ προκοίλιον. ἐγγίσας οὖν τούτῳ ἔστην ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ τοῦτον ἄπνουν ἐώρακα καὶ ἡμθνήτα σχεδόν.²⁶⁷

With full reference to his *genos* and inherited characteristics of his Turkish family, John becomes something abominable. A creature of mixed and unhuman aspects, useless [ἐτώσιος], and as he resembled all Persians, he represented a reminder that such were the inherent weaknesses of his mixed ancestry, a ‘Turk’ could never be allowed to sit on the imperial throne. While both Mesarites and Tornikios use common Persian stereotypes stressing John’s fleshy build and alcoholic tendencies, no less than three times does Mesarites prophesise John’s eventual decapitation. He repeatedly pictures him being so startled or depressed that his head might just hang so low it could drop off.²⁶⁸ These comments are designed to imply a distinct inherited characteristic of John’s, a biological ugliness that betrayed, even caused, his actions and fate.²⁶⁹ Undoubtedly an invention after events to demonise the treason of the deceased culprit, we may also develop the isolation, distortion, and invention of ethnicities further. This unexplored aspect is addressed below, because from the example of John comes an ethnic deluge. There are more cases at work in the text than just the antagonist, whom Nicholas meets only sparingly. Others are more directly addressed at various points.

1.8. Alloglot Ethnotypes

‘We took up a defensive position, as the outer gates of the church came under attack from a dark cloud of *ethne*, who were gnashing their teeth [Psalm 35:16] and calling on, not their idols, but their saints. This cloud consisted of men clad in armour, whose appearance and speech told us that they were Georgians and Italians... I went in secret dread of seeing those *ethne* stringing words together in their own tongues.... I decided to engage those alloglot brutes in conversation through a window – of which there were not a few. ‘Who are you?’ I asked. ‘Where do you hail from? What is your business? Make known your *genos*, your profession, and the reason for your coming here. They made an awkwardly phrased reply in a broken dialect and had difficulty getting their tongues round the words. They told me in their awkward way – their eyes full of anxiety – that they were members of the new emperor’s bodyguard.

²⁶⁶ This was in contrast to the Angeloi, for certainly Isaak II and likely Alexios III and their Komnenoi-Doukai cousins, from several potential portraits were remarkable for their ‘bright red-blond hair’ [τὴν τρίχα πυρρός]. NC, CD, §452.16.

²⁶⁷ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §11.6-12, trans. p.51.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., §29.1; The motif is somewhat shared in Tornikios, ‘Discours d’Euthyme Tornikés,’ §1, pp.69.4-70.4.

²⁶⁹ Notably, these are not Turkish characteristics shared with earlier Komnenian literature. John Skylitzes’ ethnographic introduction of the Turks rather highlights Turkic vigour and skill-at-arms. *Synopsis*, §442-446, trans. pp.416-424.

Φρουρούντων οὖν ἡμῶν προσέβαλεν αἰφνηδὸν ἐπὶ τὰ πρόθυρα τοῦ νεῶ νέφος ἐθνῶν, τοὺς ὀδόντας αὐτοῦ τετριγὸς οὐ κατὰ τῶν ἀναθημάτων ἀλλὰ κατὰ τῶν ἀγίων αὐτῶν. τὸ δὲ νέφος Ἰβηρες καὶ Ἱταλοὶ σιδηρόφρακτοι, ὡς ἡμῖν ἢ τούτων ὄψις παρίστα καὶ ἡ διάλεκτος [...] ὦν ἐν δεινῷ κεκρυμμένως ἐώρων τοὺς ἐξ ἐθνῶν, ταῖς ἰδίαις αὐτῶν διαλέκτοις συνείροντας λόγους [...] οὕτω γοῦν τὰ κατὰ τὸ δεξιὸν κλίτος τῷ πρὸς τὸν ναὸν εἰσιόντι ἀσφαλῶς διαθέμενος ὡς μοι καὶ δέδοκτο, εἰς προὔπτον διὰ τοῦ θυριδίου—εἶχε γὰρ οὐκ ὀλίγας ὀπάς—τοῖς μιαρωτάτοις ἐκείνοις διειλέχθην καὶ ἀλλογλώσσοις καὶ ‘τίνες’ ἐπηρώτων ‘ἐστέ; πόθεν πῆ πάριτε; τίς ἡ ὑμῶν ἐργασία; καταλέξατε τὸ γένος, τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς ἐνταῦθα ἀφίξεως.’ κάκεινοί μοι παρακεκινημένη τῇ φράσει, παρακεκομμένη τῇ διαλέκτῳ, παραφόρῳ τῇ γλώττῃ, τῷ εἶδει σεσοβημένοι, τεταραγμένοι τὰ ὄμματα, ὡς εἰς τὰ ἅγια προσκυνήσοντες ἐηλύθησιν ἀπεκρίναντο καὶ εὐχάριστον ἀναπέμψαι φωνήν, ὅτι τοι τὸν νέον βασιλέα δορυφορήσαντες διαμεμενήκασιν ἄτρωτοι.²⁷⁰

Having in previous sections created the upheaval and antagonists within the narrative, Mesarites then entered its events directly. In an episode set within the Pharos Chapel, we learn the limits of his religious community. The Pharos gave Constantinople its claim to be the centre of Christian Orthodox religiosity on Earth. Containing the Crown of Thorns, the Holy Nail, the Lance, His Funeral Shroud – generations of emperors had expanded and protected the collection.²⁷¹ Mesarites describes rallying a group of Orthodox Constantinopolitans and Cilician Armenians to repel a ‘dark cloud of foreign *ethne*’ who hound upon the gates of the Pharos Chapel. Mesarites had arrived at the Pharos Chapel and found it under attack from armed men but not yet breached. The Pharos, which formed part of the palatial complex, housed the relics of Christ’s Passion and was entered only by the express permission of the emperor and a select clerical staff. A ‘nightwatchman [ὄρφναῖος]’ alone was within.²⁷² The author informs us that he used an extended *ekphrasis* of the relics within; from the Crown of Thorns to the Stone that bore ‘witness to Christ’s resurrection from the dead’ until the first wave of would-be looters fell silent.²⁷³ He informs us they were mostly labourers, masons, and carpenters. The references to the overwhelming sanctity of the church’s contents worked and these attackers swore to become the Pharos’ defenders. The chapel’s nightwatchman then allowed Mesarites and his new companions entry. The ethnicity of these penitents is only revealed two passages later when he praises two groups respectively, both ‘my Cilician and Persarmenian companions... [and] my fellow *autochthones* and fellow *homopatrie*, good native stock that you are’ for their repentance.²⁷⁴ The inclusion of Cilician Armenians in an address to the group whom Mesarites calls ‘brothers, who have all been born again through the Holy Spirit and baptism,’ was probably in reference to the contemporary state of co-Orthodoxy

²⁷⁰ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §16.1-33, adapted trans. Angold, p.56.

²⁷¹ The Pharos received its final addition from Manuel Komnenos’ when the emperor ordered a *translatio* of the Stone of Unction, Christ’s burial slab, from Ephesos and Manuel personally carried it upon his back through Constantinople. Ivan Drpić, ‘Manuel I Komnenos and the Stone of Unction,’ *BMGS*, 43 (2019), pp.60-82.

²⁷² Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §15.32.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, §13. For a reconstruction of the relics of the Pharos from this speech see Holger Klein, ‘The Crown of His Kingdom: Imperial Ideology, Palace Ritual, and the Relics of Christ’s Passion,’ in: *The Emperor’s House. Palaces from Augustus to the Age of Absolutism*, eds. Michael Featherstone et al. (Berlin: 2015), pp.201-212; *idem.*, ‘Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople,’ in: *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft: Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen, Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. Franzo Bauer, (Istanbul: 2006), pp.79-99.

²⁷⁴ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §18.27-30, ‘Συνέριθε Κίλιξ καὶ Περσαρμένιε... ὡς ἀγαθὸς βλαστός σου αὐτόχθων συμφυλέτα ὁμοπάτριε, ὡς ἐπαινετόν σου.’

between the two churches.²⁷⁵ The Cilician Armenians were thus distinguished from the native Constantinopolitan population but privileged as recognised coreligionists of the Byzantine city. It is an unusually particular and specific judgement of who is inside or outside of the religious community of 1200.

The narrative's strongest identifying criteria of members of foreign *ethne* were language and dress, with both linked strongly to *patris*. When a second wave of attackers came, opposed by Mesarites and the first, by origin, appearance, and verbal communication Mesarites identified to Alexios III's court the assailants as Georgians and Italians, grouping them together either as *ethne* twice, or as 'allogeneis.' However, it is in his demands to know their origin and business of work that the narrative demonstrated the centrality of language. Despite the fact that some of these mercenaries were evidently bilingual and could communicate with Mesarites, it was 'these alloglot brutes' [τοῖς μιαιλωτάτοις ἐκείνοις... ἀλλογλώσσοις], the Georgians and Italians, whose language he 'feared,' and who demonstrated their inability to assimilate to 'his society' by their broken speech. They threatened and were directly opposed to the group for which he lacks any other term than 'we/us/ours' [οἱ ἡμέτεροι].²⁷⁶ To Mesarites these alloglots replied in a broken 'polluted' dialect of Greek, likely reflecting the personage of John Axouchos, their usurping emperor.²⁷⁷ The passage represents several elements. Firstly that Greek continued to be a cosmopolitan language, in that it was the medium of cross-cultural oral communication. It also demonstrates stratifications imposed by levels of fluency, register, and education were being relayed to multiple other criteria. The degree to which Byzantine society was multilingual, a fact which textual evidence clearly attests, is being performatively challenged by the extent that Greek-speaking elites would go to present their society as having only one language. This has been a topic of multiple studies. First-language Greek elites could impose Greek as a language of authority decrying other languages, a phenomenon seen across this thesis, and which does not reflect the diversity of their population.²⁷⁸ It is evident that the episode here was intended to humiliate, otherize, and compound the preceding criteria to create strict defining lines of community before the imperial court.

A combination of these elements manifested in the framing of the battle at the Pharos. As negotiations broke down, the scene became not merely the clash of the godly against the godless or the native against the foreigner but as a contest of cultures, represented in ethnically-aligned saints. In the narrative, the Georgians and Italians used 'their own saints' as battle-cries.²⁷⁹ When the Constantinopolitan Orthodox alliance defeated these outsiders they compelled the foreign mercenaries at spear-point to place their heads upon the floor in *proskynesis*, abandon these foreign cults, and swear oaths to the Greek saints upon the Pharos' walls.²⁸⁰ It is a highly dramatic expression of how divided Christian communities had become

²⁷⁵ Ibid. §12.20-21. 'παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ γὰρ τοῦ ἁγίουπάντες ἀνεγεννήθημεν πνεύματος καὶ βαπτίσματος, μὴ περιαιτέρω προβῆτε.'; Azat Bozoian, 'Collections of Documents Concerning Armenian-Byzantine Ecclesiastical-Political Relations,' in: *Armenian Perspectives* (Richmond: 1997), p.77; Andrew Stone, 'Nerses IV 'The Gracious', Manuel I Komnenos, The Patriarch Michael III Anchialos and Negotiations for Church Union between Byzantium and the Armenian Church, 1165-1173,' *JÖB*, 55, (2005), pp.191-208.; On communion with Chalcedonian Armenians and prohibitions upon non-Chalcedonian Armenians c.1195 see Balsamon, *Guide for a Church under Islam*, §6, p.74, and §32, p.102.

²⁷⁶ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution* §§16.29, 18.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., §16.25-27.

²⁷⁸ For an overview of literature on this topic see Arietta Papaconstantinou, 'Byzantine Linguistic Pluralism Revisited: An Introductory Essay,' *Journal of Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies*, 2.1-2, (2023), pp.172-182; and primarily Nicolas Oikonomides, 'L' "unilinguisme" officiel de Constantinople byzantine (VIIe-XIIIe s.),' *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 13 (1999), pp.9-21.

²⁷⁹ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*. §16.1-3.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., §16.15-17.

and how Mesarites was manifesting the very firm lines between the competing traditions of the inhabitants of Constantinople. Furthermore, it is overwhelmingly suggested that the Pharos, including its saints, represents Byzantium. Mesarites calls his chapel ‘another Sinai, Bethlehem, Jordan, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethany, Galilee, Tiberias, Holy Basin, Last Supper, Mount Tabor, the *praitorion* of Pilate, and the place of the skull, or Golgotha,’ and in service to that elaborate metaphor, the Pharos was a metaphor for an impending alloglot onslaught upon all Constantinopolitans.²⁸¹ The enemies followed ‘Amalek’ (1 Samuel:15), the Orthodox alliance new Israelites.²⁸² The Orthodox defenders, again referred to merely as ‘ἡμέτεροι’ or ‘our people,’ counsel him to order the captives’ execution and not give them the chance to break their vow and risk endangering the Church.²⁸³ That they are not killed but made obedient to the Orthodox holy figures resolves the disloyalty of the foreign *ethne* present throughout the narrative. He writes that he could not profane the sanctity of the church. The mercy of this reestablished hierarchy, in the service of which Mesarites say he was heroically wounded, marked the victory at the holiest site in Constantinople, the ‘dark cloud of *ethne*’ was defeated, and Mesarites’ narrative vindicated. The consistent identification and reduction of Christian geo-religiosity to this one city and chapel indicates that the narrative functions as *ekphrasis* of the Pharos and the Greek Orthodox Church beyond its direct description of Christ’s relics.

This subtle manipulation of conventional identifications aligning hostile Christians as enemies of God serves as a valuable comparison to discussions of terminology used both before and after 1204. Equally his narrative has parallels after 1204 when the pamphlets of the *Errors of the Latin Church* circulated claiming occupying cardinals in churches surrounding Constantinople would plaster over Byzantine saints in favour of Italian ones, dispersing relics, and recognising nothing of local custom.²⁸⁴ The episode at the Pharos was designed therefore to show the capabilities and supremacy of the Orthodox religious tradition and the Greek-language against a foreign invader.

1.9. Constantinopolitan Exclusivism at the *Nea Ekklesia*

Despite the triumphs of the composite Orthodox force in the Pharos, Mesarites’ narrative was not a message of shared unity across a pan-Orthodox community under an imperial church opposing a religious other. While he valued their participation as loyal subjects and subordinates to the imperial church’s hierarchy, in the next episode of the narrative we see the climax of a process of inter-Byzantine spatial othering known as Constantinopolitan Exclusivism.

Leaving the Pharos, Mesarites hurried to the *Nea Ekklesia* – the monumental church built by Basil I in the ninth century – and left another highly personal and subjective description that for the first time conjured the ethnic concept of the *panspermia*. In this short scene Mesarites described a group of Orthodox clergymen as they looted one of the largest churches in the city, and a symbol of imperial power. The huge church, ‘a masterpiece worked by human hands, but beyond human intelligence,’ was surrounded by three ranks of assaulters. Mesarites therefore called out to his allies:

²⁸¹ Ibid., §14.

²⁸² Ibid., §18.10

²⁸³ Ibid., §§16.29, 18.

²⁸⁴On the *Errors* see Section 3.5, p.157. Jean Darrouzès ‘Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès contre les Latins,’ *REB*, 21 (1963), §403-405.

“Advance comrades,” I told them, “and bravely oppose these looters, who are no better than wild beasts. They are like savage wolves with no place in the sheepfold of the church, or like dirty swine rampaging against us. If we don't bravely resist them, they will kill us and carry off the sacred [vessels]; they will completely scatter these among the *ethne* and make them disappear.”

δεῦρ' ἴτ', ἐπειπὼν, ‘συνεργοί, τοῖς θηριοτρόποις τούτοις καὶ ἄρπαξι γενναίως ἀντικατάστητε· ὡς λύκοι καὶ πάλιν ἄγριοι ξένοι τῇ μάνδρᾳ ταύτῃ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἢ καὶ ὡς μισοὶ τινες σύες καθ' ἡμῶν ἐπεισέφησαν· εἰ γὰρ μὴ γενναίως καὶ τούτοις ἀντικαταστῶμεν. κτενοῦσιν ἡμᾶς, τὰ ἱερὰ ἀφαρπάσουσι κάπῃ τὴν τῶν ἐθνῶν πανσπερμηδὸν διασπεροῦσι ταῦτα καὶ ἀφαντώσουσι.’²⁸⁵

As Mesarites sent forth his ad hoc force of labourers, their delivery of the Nea Ekklesia relied upon them defeating another notably foreign group. A corps of ‘iron-wearing barbarians’ [σιδηροφράκτων βαρβάρων ὄμαδος] had to be defeated or else, with Mesarites’ and his companions’ deaths, they would loot the church and the great treasures of Byzantium would vanish.²⁸⁶

The holy vessels would be lost, scattered ‘panspermêdon’ as Mesarites put it, to the enemy. The image of these religious items, scattered and lost to barbarous *ethne*, marks an interesting development both for its innovation and doubly in its application. The pluralised *ethne* which contained within it the provincial Greek-speaking populations of Byzantium. We know this because Mesarites tells us precisely who was assaulting the church. Most egregious of all to him were the final group, who were Orthodox churchmen. Of these, he stresses to the court both their origin and to the extent to which they had joined the alloglots in assaulting the imperial city. It is in this example that we see how Mesarites projected the provincial Byzantine in opposition to the Constantinopolitan:

‘I heard what was happening. Caught thieving at that time were monks and priests, who certainly weren't native to Constantinople, *not nursed [by it] nor bred in it*, [οὐ τῆς Κωνσταντίνου θρέμματα καὶ γεννήματα], *not native to it nor raised in it* [οὐκ αὐθιγενεῖς οὐκ αὐτόχθονες]. Together with the common people and the alloglots they imitated those people at the crucifixion, who divided the Lord's tunic among themselves, or those who make the sacrifice of shame by desecrating and profaning the holy places (Hosea: 4.19).

Καὶ ἤκουσαί μοι τὰ περὶ τούτου καὶ κατεφωράθησαν τῆνικαῦτα Ναζιραῖοι καὶ ἱερεῖς σὺν ἀγελαίοις καὶ ἀλλογλώσσοις, οὐ τῆς Κωνσταντίνου θρέμματα καὶ γεννήματα, οὐκ αὐθιγενεῖς οὐκ αὐτόχθονες, τοὺς σταυρωτὰς ἐκείνους μιμούμενοι, τοὺς τὸν δεσποτικὸν χιτῶνα διασμερίσαντας ἢ τοὺς τῆς αἰσχύνῃς θύτας ὅσον ἐς τὸ τὰ ἅγια συλᾶν καὶ κοινοῦν.’²⁸⁷

The narrative here targets the Greek-speaking clergy who had relocated to Constantinople and now sought to enrich themselves at its expense. Missing the irony that his own ‘native’ companions had attempted precisely the same before his intervention, Mesarites offers a new paradigm to the court; that the provincial Greek Orthodox had betrayed them, joined the

²⁸⁵ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §19.31-38.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, §20.16.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, §21.23-28.

alloglots and true Constantinopolitans stood alone. In this, Mesarites was building on an attitude found in the milieu of Constantinople that anyone outside the City walls was an enemy. This attitude derived in part from the image of a hostile Paphlagonian ‘ethnos’ looting the capital in 1182, but also from the many rebellions and instabilities since. His words culminate the twelfth century’s general rise in hostility towards Byzantine provincials. Exclusivism stretched into the cultural sphere, and Mesarites weaponised their non-Constantinopolitan ethnicity to expel provincials from ‘his’ society on distinct criteria of (lack of) education, descent, and upbringing. Expressing an incredibly narrowed image of Greek Orthodox social identity, Mesarites brands the provincial not just as another *ethnos* assaulting God’s people but as the enemies of God Himself who profaned like the ignorant non-Christian foreigner. For Mesarites these people were showcasing their rustic, alien origins despite their holy vows and were now in contestation with his people, the ‘true’ inhabitants of Constantinople and the heirs to its religious-cultural traditions.

In linguistic terms Mesarites’ language for doing so informs us both of his own intended audience for the narrative, who were now outside of his social grouping, and primarily how Mesarites thought of himself. Mesarites tells us himself that to be a member of ‘his’ people is to be ‘αὐθγενής’ (native-born), and ‘αὐτόχθων’ (sprung from the land itself). Language and religion alone do not qualify an individual – birthplace and upbringing do. No churchman was given an ethnic term in this passage, primarily because there is no consistent agreed-upon term for inner-Byzantine distinctions between Greek-speakers. These individuals kept the same institutions, language, religion, dress, and even occupation as Mesarites himself and his audience. But the court are being warned and reminded of the provincials’ perfidy. When a second secular group of builders also took the chance to loot the *Nea Ekklesia*, they handed over their goods in shame. These individuals receive lesser indignation, presumably on account of the scale of their betrayal and hypocrisy being reduced. No-one is described as ‘Romaίος’ nor ‘Graikos.’ The previous catch-all of Constantinopolitans can no longer be used, because that would imply commonality with these now disgraced individuals.

1.10. Storming the Great Palace: A Competition of Indigenous and Migrant Ethnic Groups within the Byzantine Army.

In a final scene of ethnic commentary – and also the final scene of Mesarites’ narrative of John’s botched coup – the author conjures up the first passage for which he was no longer present. The imperial response to the coup offered the opportunity to offer a (more conventional) encomium of the imperial couple and their heir-apparent. Mesarites addresses all three, Alexios III, the Empress Euphrosyne Doukaina Kamatera, and then their son-in-law Alexios Palaiologos as a narrative of family, nobility, and ‘natural’ superiority.

This family unit around Alexios III is addressed in rhetorical tropes of idealised appearance and virtues.²⁸⁸ Their partnership is the opposite of John Axouchos who suffers damning *psogos*. They are three, he is one and alone; Alexios III is in fine health, John is sweating and drunk; the troops supporting the emperor are many, John’s are few; Alexios’ imperial bearing, robes, and signs of office distinguish him, John was only picked out by his being overweight and Turkish.²⁸⁹ Furthermore, Emperor Alexios is vindicated by the quality of men who support him, his son-in-law Alexios Palaiologos – the then heir apparent – is ‘by nature superior’

²⁸⁸ Ibid., §25.11, ‘οἰκογενὲς τοῦτο καὶ ὀνομάσει τις.’

²⁸⁹ Ibid., §25.8-§26.

[μεγαλοφυῶς] to everyone.²⁹⁰ The implication was that he possessed everything which others in the narrative lacked; distinguished dynastic descent, spatial upbringing in Constantinople, education and experience, and he exemplified this in his appearance and actions. All of these ‘virtues’ are encompassed in the chosen ethnonym for these final passages, ‘αὐτόχθων’ i.e. ‘indigenous.’

Alexios Palaiologos and Georgios Oinaiotes the *parakoimomenos* led a combined seaborne force from the Blachernae palace to sail down the Golden Horn and dock in the Great Palace.²⁹¹ Palaiologos’ household guard rallied some Varangians stationed there, gathering ‘like a mother her children,’ having first found them cowering in store-rooms.²⁹² Together, they prepared to storm the palace. Their force was arranged in rows of seven ‘according to *phyle*’ or ‘race’ [ἐξ ἐκάστης φυλῆς] in full armour.²⁹³ However, some of the *ethne* (i.e., the Varangians) turned cowardly at the prospect of a night-time attack and refused to commit.²⁹⁴ Their cowardice prompted Oinaiotes to address ‘our own race’ [τὸ ἡμέτερον φύλον] and call out:

‘Rise my people, like a lion’s whelp; roar like a lion; don’t rest until you have eaten your prey. What do you intend to do? Why are you holding back? Seize the moment before it is too late, so that no *alloethnês* can steal our glory; so that the *ethne* cannot say, “Where is the army of the Romans?” Lest the heathen say in their boastful way to one another, “We have been victorious, we have won the day, we have shared out half the kingdom,” lest the mercenaries rejoice, having emigrated from their native land; or else immigrants [παρεπίδημοι] shall sing their own praises. We shall first seize back control of the palace buildings. If we desire, we shall hunt down, as slaves, those who have lately invaded it.

λαὸς οὐμνὸς ἀνάστα ὡς σκύμος, ὡς λέων γαυριῶθητι, οὐ κοιμήθησι; ἕως φάγῃς θήραν. Τί μέλλετε; τί δὲ ἀναδύεσε; ἀρπάσατε τὸ τῆς ὥρας ὄψέ, μὴ τὴν ἡμετέραν εὐκλειαν τῶν ἀλλοεθνῶν τις κερδήσῃ, μὴ εἴπωσι τὰ ἔθνη ‘ποῦ ἐστὶ τῶν Ῥωμαίων στρατός; μὴ εἴπη τις ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον ἀλαζῶν ἐθνικός· ἐνικήσαμεν, ἐκρατήσαμεν, διαμοιράσωμεν τῆς βασιλείας τὸ ἡμισυ· μὴ κλείσθωσιν οἱ μισθῶτοι οἱ τῆς σφῶν ἄποικοι γειναμένης, μὴ δοξασθῶσιν οἱ παρεπίδημοι. Οἱ τῶν ἀνακτορικῶν οἴκων προηγησῶμεθα κύριοι· εἰ θελητὸν ἡμῖν, ὡς δοῦλοι ἐρέψονται οἱ ἀρτίως ἐπερσκωμάσαντες.’²⁹⁵

In this scene, another instance of *ethopoieia*, the content of the speech is the same message that Mesarites has been consistent with throughout the narrative.²⁹⁶ The foreigner both within and without the capital city, victorious for a decade in overturning Constantinople’s authority, *must* be made subject to Byzantium’s own aristocrats and cannot be allowed to excel them. Mesarites

²⁹⁰ Ibid., §§25.17, 25.38. Despot Alexios was the designated heir for the throne until his death c.1203. At *Palastrevolution* §25.22 he is described as ‘naturally superior to all by word and deed,’ [κατὰ πρᾶξιν καὶ λόγον πάντων μεγαλοφυῶς ὑπερέχοντα].

²⁹¹ *DOSeals*, 1951.31.5.776. Oinaiotes’ seal is published.

²⁹² Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §25.32, ‘ὡς μήτηρ νοσσία ἐπισυνήγαγεν ἑαυτῆς.’

²⁹³ Ibid., §25.33.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., §25.35, ‘ἐδειλάνδρουν οἱ ἐξ ἐθνῶν.’

²⁹⁵ Ibid., §25.43-55, adapted trans., p.67.

²⁹⁶ Mesarites considered himself an author of *ethopoieia* and character portraits. Amongst the works he describes completed before 1207 is *An Ethopoieia of a Mathematician* who sought to become Patriarch of Antioch yet was conflicted. See Bernard Flusin, ‘Nicolas Mesaritès. Éthopée d’un astrologue qui ne put devenir patriarche,’ *Travaux et mémoires. Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, 14 (2002), pp.232-241; trans. and commentary Angold, *Mesarites*, pp.41, 297-305.

was obviously eager to attach himself to their ranks and act as their spokesperson. When the army was steeled and did advance it was exclusively with Palaiologos' household as a 'vanguard of our race' [πρόμαχος ἡ ἡμετέρα φυλή].²⁹⁷ Encomium of Palaiologos as the future emperor allowed Mesarites to reinforce the didactic message that only those native to the city could save it, and only those who came from traditional established families, which he was desperate to position the relatively new Mesaritai as, could deliver it.²⁹⁸ The opponents within this paradigm are also its opponents, *παρεπίδημοι*, translated as 'migrants,' 'interlopers,' or 'foreigners.' It served as an antonym to the conception of being 'natural,' 'indigenous,' 'native' and not one of the 'immigrants' in a usage almost overwhelming in this passage. It is the culmination of an ethnic paradigm that dominates the text.

The 'indigenous' army advanced into the Great Palace and swiftly overcame the resistance of Axouchos' supporters. They caused his flight into the aforementioned Mouchrotas, the Turkish-designed section of the Great Palace, where the last of his bodyguard were routed. Fleeing once more, Axouchos arrived in the imperial stables where he was wounded and seized. There his hair was pulled out, and he was dragged back through the Mouchrotas to the Triklinos of Justinian where he was disembowelled. Then at the Skyla, the gateway from the same chamber to the Hippodrome, Axouchos was decapitated. The added insult of the pretender's Persian ancestry being the site of his undoing was undoubtedly an additional layer of irony.²⁹⁹ The *ekphrasis* for the Mouchrotas which declared it superior to the palaces of Menelaus, and which Walker noted reserved the highest achievements for Byzantine architecture, mirrored the scenes of native triumph where Constantinopolitans proved their superiority.³⁰⁰ Mesarites proudly claimed to the imperial court that following John's death he refused sanctuary to his fleeing and wounded supporters. Not bearing to pollute his 'Church of Surpassing Purity' with the blood of John's followers he closed the doors to their calls for mercy and they were hunted down.³⁰¹ The final sections detailing the movements of imperial troops are notable for the employment of Mesarites' very sparse group identifiers. There is a very rare usage of 'Roman,' here reserved for the army.³⁰² The Byzantine army having been demonstrated as multi-ethnic, warranted the ethnonym, yet it was evidently very much divided into a hierarchy of peoples physically arranged by race in which the Constantinopolitans went first. This very strict usage of 'Roman' inferred it purely as an arm of a political state, an army for a future emperor, where his presence necessitated the use of the term, for it is never used again.³⁰³

For the narrative's 'army of the Romans,' it is evident that the climactic triumph of the native was Mesarites' opportunity for revealing the purpose of the composition. Having positioned Palaiologos and his 'vanguard of our race' as the greatest soldiers of all, Mesarites addresses his audience and said, once more in the first person:

'Oh you gathered here, I am an eye-witness [to these things]. But because of Christ Pantokrator... the authority of the emperor remains unshaken and is glorified from generation to generation. Then, I hope that such an inauspicious sight will never again

²⁹⁷ Ibid., §26.34.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., §25.21, 'παντῶν μεγαλοφυῶς υπερέχοντα.'

²⁹⁹ Magdalino, 'Manuel and the Great Palace,' p.106; Walker, 'Architectural *Ekphraseis* of Nikolaos Mesarites,' p.87.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p.93.

³⁰¹ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §29.20, 'ὁ τῆς υπεράγνου ἀποκατασταίη ναός.'

³⁰² Ibid., §25.15, 'τῶν Ῥωμαίων στρατός.'

³⁰³ Yannis Stouraitis, 'Trapped in the imperial narrative? Some reflections on warfare and the provincial masses in Byzantium (600-1204),' *BMGS*, 44 (2020), pp.1-20

fall upon my eyes. May *neither I nor any other native* of the Queen of Cities ever again gaze upon such a display.

ὃ παρόντες, τεθέαμαι· ἀλλὰ γὰρ παντοκράτορι... ἢ τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἀρχὴ ἀκατάσειστος, κυδαινομένη ἐν γενεαῖς γενεῶν, μὴ συμπέσοι ποτὲ τοιοῦτον ἐπ' ὀφθαλμοῖς μου ἀποτρόπαιον θέαμα, μηκέτι δ' ἐπόψομαι δείματα τοιαδί μηδέ τις τῶν τῆς βασιλευούσης ἀθιγενῆς.³⁰⁴

With a focus once more on the immutability of inherited hierarchy, Mesarites defines his self-identity as being one of these endangered yet superior aristocratic natives of Constantinople. This moment marks the first time he describes himself in the singular in the narrative and it is naturally performative and context-driven. The word choice is particular, the invocation precise and exclusive, and he has warned 'his' people in an extended parable of home-grown supremacy. Mesarites' *Diegesis* preaches mistrust of provincials and alloglotts speakers alike. It also demonstrates a particular ability to identify an individual, here Axouchos but also a Germanic member of the Varangians, as bestial, defined by a singular aspect of their ancestry and characteristic and make of them an ethnotype. It is far from the last time this will occur.

1.11. Conclusion

In all likelihood the coup of John 'the Fat' Axouchos Komnenos had only the support of a small aristocratic clan and some hired mercenaries of the kind that continually flocked to Constantinople for work. John was able to overpower neither the patriarch, emperor, nor imperial kin, and his 'reign' lasted only a few hours. Yet the importance of Mesarites' account is not in its accuracy but in the didactic message, the heritage of ethnic loathing it captures resurgent, and the polemic in which it distorted events to make members of Byzantine society into enemies within.

Mesarites' *Diegesis* captured a Constantinople in crisis and a Byzantine elite, even grasping sub-elite, identity in transition. The moment was seized to mock a man with Turkish heritage, albeit generations diluted, who was regardless of this a Komnenos. Personal factors motivated Mesarites to defend his emperor Alexios III and patriarch John Kamateros in a manner that was both novel and the culmination of Constantinopolitan Exclusivism. The opportunity to deliver encomiastic passages for Mesarites' patrons and redeemers after a decade of insignificance was seized. He used it to impart to the imperial court the true feelings of a threatened and scared Constantinopolitan who disliked the growth of foreign interest in the city, the Italians with their trade, the Turks with their raids, the Varangians with their disinterest, and all the subject peoples who no longer recognised Constantinopolitan suzerainty. It was a message founded in the reign and legacy of Andronikos I in the 1180s and given the opportunity reappeared so that internal identities could be polemicized once more.

We may draw a picture of the layers of ethnicity which Mesarites attributes to 'his' own community. Firstly, he is a Constantinopolitan, one of the aristocracy (to which he enthusiastically asserts the Mesaritai are), an Orthodox churchman, a supporter of Emperor Alexios and the Kamateroi (both empress and the patriarch to whom he owed advancement), and only lastly a Greek-speaker.³⁰⁵ *Romanía* and *Romaíos* were political identities which

³⁰⁴ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §31.38-42.

³⁰⁵ Mesarites' later documents even use the term 'Γραικός' in his negotiations with Latins, as seen all throughout *Neue Quellen II*, §17.24, p.17.

asserted commonality and unity, and Mesarites knew only Constantinople. The Constantinopolitans of the court are the audience to whom he is speaking and, writing in the first person, Mesarites is on 'our' [their] side. By their actions, the non-Constantinopolitan Greek-speaker has demonstrated their disregard for 'our' institutions, values, and property and joined with the migrant and the foreigner. Nicholas' view is that provincials outside the city are no longer the same people. He has demonstrated the culmination of the process of unravelling the social and ideological fabric of the empire.

To conclude, we must disregard a positivist reading of the narrative, that a remarkable amount of people overlooked John's Turkish ancestry and attached themselves to a xenophobic coup manned by alloglots aimed at the purging of alloglots. Therefore, we come to a more analytical reading. Mesarites composed a complex narrative of allusions to Classical models of Polybios which sought to create a unified *ethnos* of a singular *patrís*. It was addended to by Old Testament concepts of a chosen people and so manufactured a struggle between the 'Byzantine chosen people' and *ta ethne*. It facilitated this through *ethopoeia* and an invented call for expulsion which reflected his own family's views and a need for aristocratic acceptance. What is critical for this thesis' understanding is the demonstration of the existence and persistence of this form of narrative, with its tools of inversion and demonstrably false ethnonym attribution. It was a trend that accelerated at the turn of the thirteenth century. Ethnic distortion in Constantinople left a legacy which can be traced in the disparate dialogue exchanged between Byzantine fragments after the Latin sack of April 1204.

1.12. Constantinople Conquered, The Orthodox Church Unravelling: The Last Days of Patriarch John X Kamateros (1204–06)

The Fourth Crusade began on the 15 August 1198 with a Crusading Bull issued by Innocent Pope III. Aimed at the recapture of Jerusalem, conquered by the Fatimids in 1187, it ended in April 1204 with the dismantling of Byzantium. The history of the diversions to make good Venice's losses is well-known. First Zara, a maritime city subject to the Kingdom of Hungary was conquered and looted in November 1202. Then was the arrival of Isaak II's son, Alexios (IV) Angelos, who presented a new plan. After escaping Constantinople in 1201 he had sought refuge at the court of his brother-in-law the German Emperor Phillip of Swabia (1198–1208) and evidently constructed a plan to finance the struggling crusade with funds from Byzantium's treasury if they placed him upon the throne. This narrative of causes and ad hoc planning is far less important for this thesis so here provided is a simple narrative. After arriving before Constantinople, besieging the city twice, fear and catastrophic fires forced the rapid turnover of five (or six) emperors in two years until the murder of the young Alexios IV Angelos ended any hopes of financing the crusade. Then the imperial city was attacked, conquered, and comprehensively looted over the night of 12th–13th April 1204. Nineteenth-century scholars tried to record every narrative and named relic of those removed from Constantinople over those days but conflicting reports and proliferating relics make tracing any items including Mesarites' charges very difficult.³⁰⁶

The two Byzantine state institutions, emperor and church, mirror this diffusion. Only the latter managed to escape disaster without rival or contender challenging their position. The Ecumenical Patriarch at the time of the sack was John X Kamateros (August 1198–May/June 1206). What little we know of Kamateros' earlier incumbency in Constantinople is defined by his correspondence with Pope Innocent III, which produced a series of conventional hostile letters in defence of Orthodoxy and criticising the Papacy.³⁰⁷ As a Kamateros, John was the second of his family to become patriarch in fifteen years. Frankly, the hugely influential family had dominated Constantinople for the last quarter of the twelfth century.³⁰⁸ In a letter to Basil Kamateros, Michael Choniates even referred to the family as the 'golden *genos*.'³⁰⁹ During the siege, one source claims that in February/March 1204 Kamateros had accompanied Alexios V Mourtzouphlos into battle with the Crusaders. There is an unsupported assertion by Alberic of Trois Fontaines that the Crusaders put the armoured patriarch to flight, seized an imperial icon which he carried, and then paraded it.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Paul Riant, *Exuviae sacrae Constantinopolitanae*, 2 vols., (Geneva and Paris: 1877-78); Alfred Andrea, *Contemporary Sources for the Fourth Crusade*, (Leiden: 2008), pp.204-264; David Perry, *Sacred Plunder: Venice and the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade*, (Pennsylvania: 2015).

³⁰⁷ See Aristeides Papadakis and Alice-Mary Talbot, 'John X Kamateros Confronts Innocent III: An Unpublished Correspondence,' *Byzantinoslavica I*, 33 (1972), pp.26-41; Linda Paterson, 'Greeks and Latins at the Time of the Fourth Crusade: Patriarch John X Kamateros and a Troubadour Tenso,' in: *Languages of Love and Hate Conflict: Communication and Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean*, eds. Sarah Lambert, Helen Nicholson, (Turnhout: 2012), pp.119-140; Eleni Kaltsogianni, 'Nikephoros Chrysoberges' Encomium of the Patriarch John X Kamateros: A New Fragment,' *Parekbolai* 10 (2020), pp.141-149.

³⁰⁸ Georg Stadtmüller, 'Zur Geschichte der Familie Kamateros,' *BZ*, 34 (1934), pp.352-358. Basil II Kamateros (1183-1186).

³⁰⁹ MC, §129.4-5, 'χρυσός γένος.'

³¹⁰ Alberic of Trois Fontaines, in: *Sources for the Fourth Crusade*, p.299; Jonathan Phillips' rather sensationalist narrative conflates Alberic, Robert de Clari, and the *Devastatio Constantinopolitanae* to portray an armoured Kamateros leading a part of the army, struck by Peter of Bracieux during the fight and falling from his horse, and ultimately losing the icon. This should almost certainly be rejected. See Jonathan Phillips, *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople*, (London: 2005), pp.229-230.

While the family survived the fall and Basil Kamateros continued prominently in Nikaia, John had a more precarious fate.³¹¹ The patriarch fled first with Niketas Choniates to Selymbria with few if any possessions. Given that theological conflict had driven the two to blows in 1198, to the extent that Niketas penned an entire oration against John Kamateros that failed to derail his path to the patriarchate the next year, we might assume Choniates had reconciled himself to John by 1204 or else their exile was additionally tense.³¹² Competing reports then exist on Kamateros' movements after 1204. Leaving Choniates at Selymbria he shortly moved on. Choniates records he died on the 26th June 1206 at Didymoteichon.³¹³ Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, a century later, placed Kamateros' death due to thirst during the siege of Adrianople as it fell to the Latins.³¹⁴ There are additional reasons to believe Kamateros retained both importance and purpose, and that he continued to travel. To his enemies, the fall of an Ecumenical Patriarch who had once been so haughty to the Pope's demands but was reduced to vagrancy became a figure of mockery for troubadour songs written after the sack. In the Occitan dialogue of Elias Cairel 'patriarch[a] Juan' had become a humiliated figure who had vanished into the wilderness whom petitioners might seek out if they too wished to make absurd requests.³¹⁵

However for those for whom Kamateros still represented the religious head of the Orthodox *οἰκουμένη* he continued to occupy an office that was neither extinguished nor vacated by the partition of the empire after April 1204. Kamateros when he left Constantinople took many senators of the urban elite with him, including Niketas Choniates, but potentially also multiple upper members of Hagia Sophia.³¹⁶ He then lived for two further years in rather active exile in Thrace. In his exile the aged patriarch maintained epistolary connections with his now dispersed network of bishops and clergy and performed several actions that became hugely influential. These shall be examined below. The patriarch is the presumed recipient of two

³¹¹ Three of Niketas Choniates letters are addressed to Basil in Nikaia. NC, *OE*, §§1, 7, 11; Simpson, *Choniates*, p.23.

³¹² NC, *OE*, §8, 'To the Chartophylax of the Great Church.'

³¹³ NC, *CD*, §633.57 trans.p.347. Akropolites places the patriarch in exile in the same city, without mentioning when he died. Akropolites, §7, trans. p.119.

³¹⁴ Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, *PG*, 147, col. 464.56. 'Ἰωάννης διάκονος ὁ χαρτοφύλαξ ὁ Καματηρὸς ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἀλεξίου μέχρι ἀλώσεως Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἔτη ε', μῆνας η', ἡμέρας ζ'. Ἐζήσθη δὲ καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς πόλεως ἔτη β', ἐν Ἀδριανουπόλει μῆνας β', ἡμέρας ιδ', καὶ ἐνδεία ὕδατος ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν Λατίνων τελευτᾷ. Πρῶτερον δὲ ζητηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Νικαίᾳ καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως Θεοδώρου τοῦ Λάσκαρι παρητήσατο.' John Kamateros, previous deacon and chartophylax under Alexios until the fall of Constantinople, incumbent for five years, eight months, seven days. He died two years after the fall of the city in Adrianople on the 14th day of the second month owing to a lack of water caused by the assault of the Latins. Earlier, having been summoned by those in Nikaia and by Emperor Theodore Laskaris, he declined.'; On Kallistos Xanthopoulos see *Ecclesiastical History and Nikephoros Kallistou Xanthopoulos: Proceedings of the International Symposium, Vienna, 15th - 16th December 2011*, eds. Christian Gastgeber, Sebastiano Panteghini, (Vienna: 2015).

³¹⁵ Paterson, 'Patriarch John X Kamateros and a Troubadour Tenso,' pp.126-127.

³¹⁶ Later Epirote authors estimated in 1227 that half of the refugees from Constantinople, including the elites, fled to the Balkans and were incorporated into 'the West' as it became Epirote territory. Chomatenos, *PD*, §114, p.373.78-84, 'After the fall of the megalopolis, those of the senate who remained living, some looked to the East, others fled far to the West, and thus divided both the imperial court of the senate and the archbishops' unity. And I think half, if not more, of those subject to the ruling throne of Constantinople are now in the West.'

'Μετὰ γὰρ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς μεγαλοπόλεως, ὅσοι τῆς συγκλήτου βουλῆς ζῶντες ἐναπελείφθησαν, οἱ μὲν πρὸς τὴν ἀνατολὴν ἀπεΐδον, οἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν δύσιν ἐμάκρυναν φυγαδεύοντες, καὶ οὕτως οὐδ' ἢ ἐνταῦθα βασιλικὴ πρόβλησις συγκλήτου βουλῆς ἡμοίρησε καὶ ἀρχιερατικῆς συμπονοίας καὶ συνδρομῆς, καὶ οἶμαι, ὡς, εἰ μὴ τὸ πλέον, ἀλλὰ γε τὸ ἥμισυ τῆς ὑπὸ τὸν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως θρόνον ἐπαρχίας ἐν τῇ δύσει τυγχάνον ἐστίν.'; Nicol, 'Refugees, Mixed Population,' p.11.

letters from Nicholas Mesarites, seeking advice about what should come next in his life after the loss of Constantinople.³¹⁷ We do not have the replies.

Mesarites' letters give some image of the Constantinople Kamateros had fled. The first two years following the fall had been exceptionally difficult. Some former officials tried to make careers under the Latins but few prospered.³¹⁸ Mesarites, in an unexplained tragedy suffered the death of his wife and children, along with the loss of his family home. His wretched descriptions of Constantinople make it difficult to isolate fact from rhetoric. He describes suffering disease and plague, and long visits to nearby monasteries to grieve city, kin, and status. Living in poverty and having tried to defend the remaining Orthodox congregation, Mesarites finally gave up and resolved to abandon the Constantinople that had once defined him. Therefore Mesarites sought guidance and new employment from Kamateros, requesting the patriarch's advice on his next destination. Should he now leave and travel east to Nikaia, where he would encounter rivals from his earlier career, or westwards to where the 'Skythians' (of Asanid Bulgaria) roam and who terrify him.³¹⁹ Mesarites' perspective of moving to live under their authority, having probably lived his entire life in Constantinople is highly telling. Nikaia, a Byzantine 'city of victory,' would offer advancement and a possible church career. His second option of joining the Patriarch in the West would have placed him in a far more dangerous situation, for the Patriarch was at that time dealing with the likely collapse of a carefully constructed alliance between Alexios III Angelos and the Bulgarian Tsar. That alliance which had led to victory at the Battle of Adrianople in 1205 and the capture of the new Latin Emperor, was by 1206 in freefall. After the death of Kamateros and his brother, Mesarites resolved by March 1207 to go East. First to Nikaia carrying a petition, he stayed there for a month before returning to Constantinople, and within weeks returned to Nikaia where he then remained.³²⁰ His accounts of these journeys, of learning how to live amongst the Anatolian people, to avoid displaying his wealth and education for fear of attracting bandits, are an interesting case of a displaced figure finding his world had become a lot bigger. Abroad, experience of wild land was valued. He obeyed the caution of fellow travellers, refraining from singing learned hymns like the *Trisagion* because they implied wealth worth stealing. Thus Mesarites learned to disguise his voice as 'deep and barbarous' [τραχύ τε καὶ βάρβαρον] and gradually calmed his arrogance towards the wider world.³²¹

Despite his absence from most histories, John X Kamateros did perform multiple deeds on behalf of the Orthodox Church after leaving Constantinople. In contrast to the accounts of Choniates and Kallistos, Demetrios Chomatenos the future Archbishop of Bulgaria at Ohrid, offers a very different narrative. At a synod in 1217/18 Chomatenos provided a new account of the final days of Kamateros. Wishing to contextualise the actions of the Bulgarian clergy Chomatenos narrated that when Constantinople fell in April 1204 the patriarch had first gone to the court of the Bulgarian Tsar Kaloyan. He had done so in order to join the deposed Emperor Alexios III Angelos who had been a guest of Kaloyan since his flight into Bulgaria in July

³¹⁷ Cataldi Palau, 'Nicolas Mesaritès: deux lettres inédites, pp.187-232, trans. Angold, *Mesarites*, pp.312-319.

³¹⁸ Simpson, *Choniates*, pp.22-24.

³¹⁹ Mesarites, 'Deux lettres inédites,' pp.228. 'εἰ ἐπὶ δυσμῆν καὶ τὰ Σκυθικά, συναντήματα ἔντρομα, ἐξθλακτοῦντα Κερβέρειον, καὶ Χαρώμενειον ἀποπνέοντα.' trans. Angold, p.317. '...if towards the setting sun there are the Skythian people, who are terrifying to encounter, because they howl like Cerberus and snort like Charon.' The future state of Epiros was evidently not a centre of large resistance in 1206.

³²⁰ Angold, *Mesarites*, p.195.

³²¹ Mesarites, *Neue Quellen II*, §10.35-36.

1203.³²² In an overlooked source, the occasion warranted a narration of the last acts of Patriarch John Kamateros.

‘For since, as has been related, the solemnity of both the Empire and the Patriarchate disappeared from the once-blessed Constantinople by the invasion of the ethne, and the bishops were scattered, some here, some there, indeed, most of them ended their lives in this very exile; The authority of the empire in all the western provinces was devolved upon the Bulgarians at that time, when even the Emperor of the Romans [Alexios III] himself fled from Constantinople and came to them. Even the then Patriarch of Constantinople (that man was John Kamateros) came to negotiate not only with the emperor of the Bulgarians, but also with the Bulgarian patriarch. It was not unreasonable to consider having such a hegemony when those bishops upon those lands were in despair of the restoration of Roman authority. However, if the matters had been peaceful and had stayed in the established order, they would have been considered usurpers, if, lacking any sense of propriety, they had insolently invaded in that regard and, having driven out the incumbent bishops, treated the gift of divine grace as plunder. But since they were appointed to the churches when they (i.e. the churches) were virtually ‘widowed,’ their ordination could not be prejudicated against, nor would likewise the designation of ‘adulterers’ be suitable for them.

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς εὐδαίμονος ποτὲ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τῆ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιδρομῇ, ὡς διείληπται, ἢ τῆς βασιλείας τὲ καὶ ἱεραρχίας σεμνότης ἠφάντωται καὶ διεσπάρησαν ἄλλος ἀλλαχοῦ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς, ὧν καὶ οἱ πλείους καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὑπερορίᾳ τὸν βίον ἀπέλιπον, ἢ ἐξουσία δὲ τῆς βασιλείας κατὰ δύσιν σχεδόν τι πᾶσα ἐν τοῖς Βουλγάροις περιέστη κατ’ ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ, ὅποτε καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων, φυγὰς ἐκ τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως γεγονῶς, ἐκεῖνοις προσέδραμε καὶ ὁ τηνικάδε Κωνσταντινουπόλεως πατριάρχης (Ἰωάννης ἐκεῖνος ἦν ὁ Καματηρὸς) εἰς ὁμιλίαν τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν Βουλγάρων, ἀλλὰ δὴ καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ Βουλγαρικῷ πατριάρχῃ ἐλήλυθεν, οὐκ ἦν ἀπεικὸς ἐννοῆσαι τὴν τοιαύτην ἡγεμονίαν καὶ ἀρχιερεῖς ἔχειν ἐν ταῖς ὑπ’ αὐτὴν χώραις ἐν τῷ ἀπογῶναι τῆς ἀνακλήσεως τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς. Τότε δ’ ἂν ὡς ἐπιβήτορες ἐλογίσθησαν, ὅταν, τῶν πραγμάτων ἡρεμούντων καὶ ἐν τῷ καθεστῶτι μενόντων, ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ κυνικοῦ αὐτοὶ θρασυνόμενοι κατ’ ἐκεῖνον ἐπέβησαν καὶ τοὺς καθεστῶτας ἀρχιερεῖς ἀπελάσαντες ἄρπαγμα τὴν τῆς θείας χάριτος δωρεὰν ἐποίησαντο. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὡς χηρευούσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἐπεκηρύχθησαν, οὐ πρόκριμα ὑπίδοιντο ἂν ἐν τῇ σφετέρᾳ χειροτονίᾳ, οὐδ’ ἢ τῶν μοιχῶν προσηγορία ἴσως τούτοις ἀρμόσειεν³²³

Chomatenos’ account is vague, probably intentionally so, but there is good reason for believing he may have even been present at the meeting.³²⁴ However, current scholarship has allowed neither Kamateros nor this narration its place in thirteenth century historiography. The conception of a Byzantine-Bulgarian alliance between 1204 and 1206 united in resisting the Latin conquest has been posited multiple times but always overlooked the importance of the patriarch. Alexander Vasiliev, Petar Nikov, and most deeply Alexandra Krantonelle have

³²² Alexios likely had the means to encourage Kaloyan’s hospitality. He reportedly fled with ‘one thousand pounds of gold and other imperial ornaments made of precious gems and translucent pearls.’ NC, CD, §547.75-76, ‘καὶ δέκα χρυσοῦ ἐνθήμενος κεντηνάρια καὶ κόσμους ἄλλους βασιλικούς ἐκ λίθων τιμαλφῶν συγκειμένους καὶ μαργάρων διαφανῶν,’ trans. p.299.

³²³ Chomatenos, PD, §146.93-110.

³²⁴ In the context of 1217/18, Chomatenos sought a renewed mediation with Bulgaria. He was serving before 1204 as *apokriseis*, [legate], between the Archbishopric of Bulgaria in Ohrid and Constantinople. Being likely fluent in both languages, his role would have been invaluable. See Section 3.11, p.170.

looked at the alliance's formation and dissolution yet Kamateros' own role remains essentially underexplored.³²⁵ Both Alexios III and Kamateros were briefly considered by Krantonelle, who postulated that any such meeting between the two exiled heads of Byzantium and Kaloyan must have taken place between the 13th April and the summer of 1204. As presumably the elderly patriarch would have taken more than a few days to reach Bulgarian land this can be redated at least to May. However, Krantonelle dismissed both Alexios and Kamateros' arrival as essentially desultory and meaningless, considering both to be deposed authorities and she concluded the meeting as bearing no importance on later events.³²⁶ Other evidence points to a more meaningful meeting. The alliance according to one Latin source, the *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*, was responsible for some 'five-thousand armed men' [quinque milibus hominum] leaving with Alexios and joining 'Johannes... King of the Vlachs.'³²⁷ There is therefore likely far more to the final actions of Kamateros than older scholarship has allowed, both in their immediate effect and then their memory. The final patriarch left a legacy that was either distorted or purposefully forgotten. Kamateros' authority in the Balkans was frequently invoked by John Apokaukos in Naupaktos as the authority by which various properties were granted to his see. Kamateros was remembered often in the era of exile. Six of Apokaukos' letters from the period 1217–1230 refer to land privileges he had received from the pre-1204 era and the 'ἀγιωτάτου πατριάρχου κϋρ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Καματηροῦ.'³²⁸

Chomatenos' narrative of Kamateros' final days is very distinct. He describes an ad hoc arrangement that came to exist between Alexios, Kamateros, and Kaloyan, modelling his language on a passage of Eusebios' *Ecclesiastical History* describing St. Mark's visit to Peter in Rome.³²⁹ Caveats are used, accepting the canonical irregularity, but employing *oikonomia* where 'it is not unreasonable to think' [οὐκ ἦν ἀπεικὸς ἐννοῆσαι] that an agreement could be struck between Byzantine and Bulgarian. There are obvious inconsistencies and questions raised by Chomatenos' telling of Kamateros' actions after 1204. It is unclear if Kamateros came to Bulgaria to be a patriarch to the Bulgarians, something ostensibly within his rights as head of the Orthodox Church, or to recognise Archbishop Basil of Turnovo's patriarchal rank, or to grant it something approaching localised autocephaly in return for an alliance. Any of these is possible, and all would be best swept under the carpet after 1206 when the Bulgarian alliance ended and they rejoined fighting alongside the Latins. Chomatenos' continued ridicule of a Bulgarian 'Patriarch' in 1217, (see, pp.170-178) has to jump over a decade of recent history to fit his narrative. It obscures what we know of Kamateros' last acts as patriarch in Bulgaria. Chomatenos' specific claim that Kamateros granted the rights for local and independent church appointments to the territories currently governed by the Bulgarians can, through other evidence, be contextualised; this other evidence does not, however, paint Kamateros in quite the same noble light.

³²⁵ Alexander Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, (Madison: 1952), II, p.190; Alexandra Krantonelle, *H κατά των Λατίνων Ἑλληνο-Βουλγαρική σύμπραξις ἐν Θράκη 1204-1206*, (Athens: 1964).

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.61-65.

³²⁷ *Corpus Chronicorum Elandriae*, ed. J.J. de Smet, (Brussels, 1837), I, p.133 'Et sic intrantes Constantinopolim et Alexium quaerentes minime inveniunt; nam cum quinque millibus hominum fugam capit versus Johannem regem Valachiae.'

³²⁸ Apokaukos, ed. Bees, '§§10.51, 51.31, 52.23, 57.18, 72.17, and Sophrone Pétridès, 'Jean Apokaukos, Lettres et autres documents inédits,' *Izvestija Russkago Archeologiceskago Instituta v Konstantinople* 14 (1909), §12.20.

³²⁹ Eusebios, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Gustave Bardy, II.17 p.42. 'ὄν καὶ λόγος ἔχει κατὰ Κλαύδιον ἐπὶ τῆς Ῥώμης εἰς ὀμίλιαν ἐλθεῖν Πέτρῳ, τοῖς ἐκεῖσε τότε κηρύττοντι. καὶ οὐκ ἀπεικὸς ἂν εἴη τοῦτό γε'. 'Tradition says that he came to Rome in the time of Claudius to speak to Peter, who was at that time preaching to those there. This would, indeed, be not improbable...'

It is not known how long Patriarch Kamateros spent with Kaloyan and Basil. The ‘Byzantine-Bulgarian alliance’ however loosely it was arranged, led to some successful local resistance to the Latins and ultimately the Battle of Adrianople in April 1205, with the capture of the Latin Emperor Baldwin of Flanders. It definitively ended with the Bulgarian sack of Adrianople and Veroia in April 1206 when citizens in Adrianople and Didymoteichon refused to accept Kaloyan’s authority and in anger massacres occurred. Later legend depicted Kaloyan henceforth calling himself the ‘Roman-slayer.’³³⁰ With the collapse of unity, Alexios III fled south while Kamateros died in Didymoteichon/Adrianople.³³¹ Fugitive emperor and patriarch both, Alexios and Kamateros’ sojourn at the Bulgarian court was remembered in the Balkans as the point at which the institutions that defined Byzantine society and church hierarchy were effectively ended.

The epistolographical register for John Kamateros’ final acts as patriarch do however, support Chomatenos’ claims of deregulated autocephaly. It is evidence that has gone almost unrecognised by scholarship. The register attests to Kamateros’ actions in exile throughout the Byzantine-Bulgarian alliance. It firstly confirms part of Chomatenos’ account, that in the unprecedented circumstances, ecclesiastical regulations were relaxed for all the Orthodox Church likely at Bulgaria’s request. Kamateros’ correspondence survives in a register entry in the Oxford Bodleian *MS.Roe 18* (f.106_v). This firstly confirms that Kamateros maintained an epistolary communication with the bishops of Anatolia. Although the language of these letters has been lost, summaries from the patriarchal register have survived in the manuscript compiled by Constantine Sophos in 1348. Two notes refer to Kamateros’ activities in his years of exile 1204-1206. The first of these stated that:

‘During the same reign [of Theodore Laskaris], many western or other metropolitans (driven from their own dioceses by the Latin domination of the time), were established also by the occasion of a vote of the synod in vacant metropolises and bishoprics in Anatolia.

Ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς βασιλείας πολλοὶ μητροπολίται δυτικοὶ καὶ ἕτεροι, διὰ τὴν τηνικαῦτα ἐπικράτειαν τῶν Λατίνων ἐξελαθέντες τῶν οἰκείων ἐκκλησιῶν, ἐγκατέστησαν ψήφῳ καὶ τῆς συνόδου προσκαίρως χηρευούσαις μητροπόλεσι κατὰ Ἀνατολὴν καὶ ἐπισκοπαῖς.’³³²

This decision was taken in line with the general line of pragmatism and *oikonomia*, ensuring continued income for bishops. It also set a precedent to be later used by the Nikaian faction to address how the bishop in Nikaia could also be that of Constantinople. Bishops already invested as metropolitans at this time were moving to unoccupied sees due to the Latin conquest. Uncanonically, but certainly to avoid losing rights of reclamation, they were not forced to give up their title of their previous office. Consequently, in episcopal lists drafted over the next two decades an individual could be recorded as bishop of both ‘Melanitzion and Corinth.’³³³ However, Kamateros’ final great act as patriarch was one that has been scarcely recognized. As an attempt to resolve the issue of ecclesiastical vacancies after 1204, it was performed in a

³³⁰ Akropolites, §13, trans. Macrides, p.130; cf. Choniates’ less structured narrative, §627, trans. p.343-345.

³³¹ Choniates, ed. Van Dieten, §633, trans. Magoulas, p.347. Choniates makes the point of calling Kamateros’ passing a ‘μαλακῶ θανάτῳ’ ‘a gentle death’ which presumably precludes him from death at the hands of the Bulgarians.

³³² Jean Darrouzès, ‘Notes inédites de transferts épiscopaux,’ *REB*, 40, (1982), p.157-170, p.159; cf. Papadakis, Talbot, ‘John X Camaterus Confronts Innocent III,’ pp.26-41.

³³³ Darrouzès, ‘Notes Inédites,’ p.167.

manner that cascaded throughout the Orthodox Church for the next thirty years, splintering Byzantine society and provoking an seven-year schism. The final entry, and the last recorded act of Kamateros prior to his death, is remarkable. It reads:

‘During the same reign [of Theodore Laskaris] a synod of various bishops gathered at the capital, Nikaia, *by a written order* of Patriarch John Kamateros, who had at that time emigrated somewhere in Western Thrace and was unable to cross to Nikaia because of the domination of the Latins. The synod elected and ordained many candidates for the Asian dioceses deprived of bishops.

Ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς βασιλείας κατὰ τὴν μεγαλόπολιν Νίκαιαν ἀθροισθεῖσα σύνοδος διαφόρων ἀρχιερέων ἐπιτροπῇ ἐγγράφῳ τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Καματηροῦ, τηνικαῦτα παροικοῦντός που τῆς δυσμικῆς Θράκης καὶ μὴ δυναμένου διαβῆναι εἰς Νίκαιαν διὰ τὴν τῶν Λατίνων δυναστείαν, ἐψηφίσατο καὶ ἐχειροτόνησε πολλοὺς εἰς ἐκκλησίας ἀσιανὰς χηρευούσας ἀρχιερέων.’³³⁴

These acts, surely dated between 1205 and 1206, opened the floodgates of the Orthodox Church to profound and spiralling problems. By his own decree Patriarch Kamateros had suspended canon law where the appointment of metropolitans and bishops was his own prerogative. Granting the synod of Nikaian bishops the right to autocephaly permitted the selection of individuals outside of patriarchal choosing to the sole-surviving Byzantine institution that was henceforth entirely at the mercy of regional powers. In the post-1204 era it was likely intended as an act of continuity, but in granting provincial autonomy to ordinations it instead risked institutionalising regional separatism. If we consider again the narration of Chomatenos in 1217 that ‘upon the widowed churches they proclaimed they would not take into account previous judgements in their own elections, nor would the title of adulterers be fitting for them,’ we should consider this in reference to Kamateros’ relaxation of the laws of canonical ordinations. Chomatenos was claiming Kamateros suspended canon law not just in Anatolia under Nikaia but also in the Balkans.³³⁵ The candidates of local/secular rulers formerly under the Ecumenical Patriarchate could now claim legal election to the church but support only regional interests. We have many examples of this over the next thirty years and Chomatenos himself was a dual beneficiary: both his own appointment to Ohrid by a regional power was permitted, as were his appointments of partisan bishops and metropolitans all across the Balkans, each of whom was directed to make legal recourse to Chomatenos’ quasi-patriarchal permanent synod.³³⁶ The consequences of Kamateros’ decision would ultimately echo for the next three decades. As the bishops of the Western Balkans, now gathering around the ambitious rulers of Epiros, explicitly invoked his example and convened their own synods to create a self-ordained parallel church they remembered that it was Kamateros who had given an ecclesiastical dimension to the splintering of Byzantine society.

³³⁴ Darrouzès, ‘Notes inédites,’ p.159.

³³⁵ Chomatenos, *PD*, §146.109-110. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὡς χηρευούσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἐπεκηρύχθησαν, οὐ πρόκριμα ὑπίδοιντο ἂν ἐν τῇ σφετέρᾳ χειροτονίᾳ, οὐδ’ ἢ τῶν μοιχῶν προσηγορία ἴσως τούτοις ἀρμόσειεν.’

³³⁶ Günter Prinzing, ‘A quasi patriarch in the state of Epirus: The autocephalous archbishop of "Boulgaria" (Ohrid) Demetrios Chomatenos,’ *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog instituta*, 41 (2004), pp.165-181.

Section Two

2.1. Kings David Ex Patria: Forming a Homoglot State from the Nikaian-Paphlagonian War for Western Anatolia

The last years of Constantinopolitan society before the Fourth Crusade captured the city in 1204 were beset by divisions. The rhetoric of the previous four decades had privileged a singular class of people, long boasting of their superiority, who had been proven inferior in catastrophic fashion. The tensions between the former ruling elite and the provincial population had to be navigated and reimagined for any successful response to prove decisive. Therefore, over the course of the following three decades, and as the subject of this section and case study, Nikaian rhetorical ideology reimagined precisely that relationship. Nikaian rhetoric therefore demonstrated significant shifts in the language of an *ethnos* formed of *gene*. It restructured the concepts of homeland, and it reimagined who their Roman Empire was for. Its context for doing so was, once more, in a fight to the death with Komnenian Paphlagonia and secessionist tendencies. These were combated in a series of orations, synods, inscriptions, and epistles redefining the Nikaian Roman Empire as a homoglot Hellenic state.

The inhabitants of Constantinople facing Latin rule were confronted with a series of decisions. The most obvious was whether to remain in Constantinople under foreign rule, enduring deprivations and lootings, or depart for centres of resistance. However, there was no clear singular centre of opposition either in April 1204 or in the months that immediately followed. A rapid turnover of emperors in Constantinople after 1203, from Alexios III to Alexios IV, Nicholas Kanabos, Alexios V, two Constantines (a Laskaris and a Doukas, quickly deposed) exacerbated a very significant issue; if the political and religious elite of the city did depart, to where and to whom would they go? Uncertainty was a product of political fragmentation, and the choice of destination while significant, was unclear. This very issue was reported by Nicholas Mesarites on the 2nd October 1206 as posed by the Orthodox clergy of Constantinople to the party of the Cardinal Legate Benedict of Santa Susanna.³³⁷ The negotiations as recorded by Mesarites depict a failed negotiation for a *modus vivendi* for the Orthodox underneath Latin rule and their new Latin overlords. Despite the installation of Nicholas Morosini as a Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople by the Venetians, the continued correspondence and shepherding of Patriarch John X Kamateros had continued until his death in 1206. Obviously wishing this hierarchy of religious resistance to continue, the Orthodox congregation of Constantinople demanded the election of Kamateros' successor. In an attempt to prove their commitment to a compromise the congregation cited their continued residency in the city in contradiction to those who had left, saying:

‘The monks: “Listen patiently, your lordship! We, whom you see here assembled, are neither stubborn nor impudent, but have been and still are being terribly humiliated by you. If we were as refractory as you say we are, we would, along with other Constantinopolitans, have departed for the lands of the Emperor Theodore Komnenos Laskaris and for those of Kyr David Komnenos and for those of the barbarians who share our faith, even for those of the Turks, as many have done fleeing from the constant hardships and daily murders, which you inflict upon us.”

‘Οἱ μοναχοί· ἄκουσον, ὦ δέσποτα, μακροθύμως. ἡμεῖς, οὓς ὄρας ἐνταῦθα συνηθροισμένους, οὐκ ἐσμέν αὐθάδεις οὐδὲ ἀταπείνωτοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ σφόδρα καὶ ἐταπεινώθημεν καὶ ταπεινούμεθα παρ’ ὑμῶν καθ’ ἐκάστην. εἰ γὰρ ἤμεν τοιοῦτοι οἴους

³³⁷ Mesarites posed the paradox twice. Once here and again in a letter to the displaced Patriarch John Kamateros, see Annaclara Cataldi Palau, ‘Nicolas Mésarités: Deux lettres inédites,’ pp.228-229; adapted trans. Angold, pp.315-317.

ἔφης ἀκατάδεκτοι, ἠδυνάμεθα καὶ ἡμεῖς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ Κωνσταντινουπολίται ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὴν τοῦ Λάσκαρι χώραν τοῦ βασιλέως κῦρ Θεοδώρου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ καὶ εἰς τὴν τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ κῦρ Δαῖδ καὶ εἰς τὰς τῶν ὁμοπίστων ἡμῖν βαρβάρων χώρας, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν τῶν Τούρκων, ὃ καὶ πολλοὶ πεποϊήκασι φεύγοντες τὰς ἐξ ὑμῶν καθ' ἑκάστην θλίψεις καὶ τοὺς καθημερινοὺς θανάτους.”³³⁸

Mesarites' account provides one of the earliest references to the polity of the Grand Komnenoi and the foundation of two rival states and contenders to Greek Orthodox leadership in Asia Minor. It identifies two main destinations where the first flood of refugees from the *patriis* of Constantinople had gone and where 'we... the remaining Constantinopolitans' [ἡμεῖς... οἱ λοιποὶ Κωνσταντινουπολίται] *could* go. In this text we hear also of the rivalry in the immediate years between the newly proclaimed, but not yet crowned, Emperor Theodore Laskaris (1208–1222) and David Grand Komnenos of Paphlagonia (1204–1212/14), a contest framed as a struggle of a true latter-day David against a false.³³⁹

Our impression of the early years of exile is understandably chaotic. Prior to 1203, an attempt had been made at imperial succession under Alexios III Angelos. Lacking a son, his daughters had been married to various prominent families. In a move designed to appoint an heir, Eirene Angelina had married Alexios Palaiologos as he was made *despotes* in 1199, but an early death in 1203 meant the sudden elevation of the husband of Alexios III's second daughter Anna, the *despotes* Theodore Laskaris.³⁴⁰ Laskaris, therefore, was likely heir to the throne. When Alexios III's regime unravelled in 1203 and he fled the city on the night of the 17th–18th July, it would appear Theodore Laskaris either was amongst the party of the refugee emperor or, having been briefly imprisoned, very soon after escaped.³⁴¹ He was certainly not in Constantinople in April 1204.³⁴² However, while Alexios began his travels in the Balkans and the Bulgarian court (see pp.144-150) Laskaris went east, travelling the Byzantine cities of Anatolia with his imperial princess-wife before finally arriving at Nikaia. By the time of the *Partitio terrarum imperii Romaniae*'s creation in the autumn of 1204, describing and dividing Byzantium's territories amongst the Crusaders, Laskaris had used his imperial wife to overcome the reluctance of the inhabitants of Nikaia and grant him entry.³⁴³ Using Anna as his demonstration of loyalty to Alexios III's regime, Laskaris succeeded in uniting the lands of southern Bithynia, Prousa, Mysia and Smyrna. He secured his eastern frontier with tributes to the Seljuk Sultan Kilij Arslan III and then to facilitate a southern expansion towards Chonai, Laodikeia, and Philadelphia in August 1204 made an alliance with the sultan's uncle, the deposed Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kay-Khusraw I (1192–6, 1205–11). With Laskaris' financial backing Kay-Khusraw regained his throne in Konya between 22nd February and 23rd March 1205 and thereby provided for the fledgling Nikaian state a peaceful and stable eastern frontier, and until the 1210 return

³³⁸ Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, ed. Heisenberg, p.62.9-16, adapted trans. Angold, p.183.

³³⁹ For the most recent in-depth treatment of the early years of the Empire of Nikaia see Ilias Giarenis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας Θεόδωρος Α΄ Κομνηνός Λάσκαρις. Η συγκρότηση και η εδραίωση της αυτοκρατορίας της Νίκαιας*, (Athens: 2010).

³⁴⁰ Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, p.50; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, p.443-444. Palaiologos' depiction in Mesarites strongly suggests his place as future emperor. See Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, where he is called 'spiritual son, [ὁσφύος υἱὸν]', §25.19, trans. p.66.

³⁴¹ Korobeinikov's theory that Laskaris left the capital in autumn 1203, and not with his father-in-law, can simply not be definitively proven, *Byzantium and the Turks*, p.128.

³⁴² Akropolites, §5, trans. Macrides, p.118, Macrides' commentary pp.82-83.

³⁴³ Nicolas Oikonomides, 'La décomposition de l'empire byzantin,' in: *Byzantium from the Ninth Century to the Fourth Crusade* (Athens: 1976), pp.3-28; Antonio Carile, 'Partitio terrarum imperii Romaniae,' *Studi Venezii*, 7 (1965), pp.125-305; Van Tricht, *Renovatio*, pp.47-59.

of Alexios III, a powerful ally.³⁴⁴ Even following that event, the time of war was brief. Following the Battle of Antioch-on-the-Meander in June 1211/12 and the death of Kay-Khusraw who had been manoeuvred into a restoration attempt for Laskaris' father-in-law, the succession of Kay-Khusraw's son saw the alliance renewed, titles recognised, and peace maintained for the remaining decade of Laskaris' reign.³⁴⁵

The northern-eastern frontier was an entirely different issue. Towards the Black Sea were the lands of the Grand Komnenoi, the two grandsons of Emperor Andronikos Komnenos. The younger of the two brothers, David, was ensconced in the Komnenian heartlands of Paphlagonia, with the major cities of Herakleia-Pontika, Amastris, Amisos, Tarsia and Klaudiopolis.³⁴⁶ The response to the challenge posed by this strip of coast stretching from the Sangarios river across the Black Sea littoral forms the case-study of this chapter. The scholarship of David's twelve-year reign over these lands has attracted attention from historians of Nikaia, Trebizond, the Latin Empire, and more generally the transition of Anatolia to majority Turkish control.³⁴⁷ Both David and his elder brother Alexios Grand Komnenos (1204-1222), had co-founded the Empire of Trebizond with Iberian support mere days before Constantinople fell.³⁴⁸ They did so with the backing of Queen Tamar of Georgia (1184-1213) with whom they were related through marriage. It is unknown if the early Grand Komnenoi were raised at the Georgian court or had fled to it recently, but their expedition ostensibly served both parties. Tamar secured a western flank of Georgian expansion against Turkish raids and an indebted prosperous maritime city with which to trade, while the Grand Komnenoi brothers gained an opportunity to reclaim Trebizond, which their grandfather Andronikos had ruled as Dux of Chaldia. They would attempt to extend that power. Alexios established dominion in Trebizond and Sinope, while David between 1204 and 1205 expanded their control westwards into Paphlagonia, where the Komnenoi had held estates since the eleventh century.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.133-137; Bar-Hebraeus, p.362.

³⁴⁵ On the discrepancy in date of Antioch-on-the-Meander see for 1211, Günter Prinzing, 'Der Brief Kaiser Heinrichs von Konstantinopel vom 13. Januar 1212,' *Byzantion*, 43 (1973), pp.412; cf. for 1212, Filip van Tricht, 'La politique étrangère de l'empire de Constantinople, de 1210 à 1216,' in: *Le Moyen Age*, 107.3 (2001), pp.409-438; and Klaus Belke, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini 13. Bithynien und Hellespont*, (Vienna: 2020), pp.194-195.

³⁴⁶ For an overview of the archaeology of Paphlagonia see Klaus Belke, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini 9. Paphlagonien und Honōrias*, (Vienna: 1996). For the archaeology of David's capital of Herakleia-Pontika in the Byzantine period see Wolfram Hoepfner, *Herakleia Pontike-Ereğli: eine baugeschichtliche Untersuchung*, (Vienna: 1966), pp.46-49; For the Anatolian lineage of the Komnenoi see Basileios Katsaros, 'Το "πρόβλημα της καταγωγής" των Κομνηνών,' *Βυζαντικά*, 3 (1983), pp.111-122.

³⁴⁷ Alexander Vasiliev, 'The Foundation of the Empire of Trebizond (1204-1222),' *Speculum*, 11.1 (1936), pp. 3-37; Ruth Macrides, 'What's in the name "Megas Komnenos"?' *AII*, 35 (1978), pp.238-41; Anthony Bryer, 'David Komnenos and Saint Eleutherios,' *AII*, 42 (1988-89), pp.163-187; Rustam Shukurov, 'The enigma of David Grand Komnenos,' *Mésogeios*, 12 (2001), pp.127-129; Ian Lester Booth, 'Theodore Laskaris and Paphlagonia, 1204-1214: Towards a Chronological Description,' *AII*, 50 (2003), pp.150-224; Vincent Puech, 'The Aristocracy and the Empire of Nikaia,' in: *Identities and Allegiances*, pp.71-72; Sergei Karpov, 'The Black Sea Region, Before And After The Fourth Crusade,' in *Ibid.*, pp.283-292; Van Tricht, *Renovatio*, pp.31, 158, 186-188, 239-240, 351-357; Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, pp.130-140; Michael Angold, 'Mesarites as a source: then and now,' pp.55-68, Alexander Vasiliev, 'Mesarites as a source,'; Angold, *Exile*, p.58; Ilias Giarenas, 'Ο Δαβίδ Κομνηνός, συνιδρυτής και στρατιωτικός ηγέτης της αυτοκρατορίας της Τραπεζούντας. Ο αγώνας κυριαρχίας, η αντιπαράθεση με την Νίκαια και ο ρόλος των λογίων,' *Βυζαντικά*, 25, (2005/06), pp.169-190.

³⁴⁸ Cf. that David is the elder brother see Bryer, 'David Komnenos,' p.184 and Odysseas Lampides, 'Ο ανταγωνισμός μεταξύ των κρατών της Νίκαιας και των Μεγάλων Κομνηνών διά την κληρονομία της βυζαντινής ιδέας,' *AII*, 34 (1977-1978), pp. 3-19. Given Choniates' depiction of David as 'exalting his own brother whose name was Alexios, he became his forerunner and herald,' this seems unlikely. See Choniates, *CD*, §626, trans. p.343.

³⁴⁹ Booth, 'Theodore Laskaris and Paphlagonia,' pp.211-216; Bryer, 'David Komnenos,' p.176.

David, merely seventeen-years-old, had himself proclaimed as a sub-imperial ruler of a principality in Paphlagonia that emphasised a Komnenian continuity but stopped short of the imperial title. Niketas Choniates, partisan to the Laskarid cause, immediately sought to discredit them. Frequently referring to both David and Alexios on account of their youth as ‘youths’, ‘striplings’, even ‘children’ [τὰ μεράκια], he disparaged their position as heirs to Andronikos and that perceived legacy of Constantinopolitan terror. Choniates’ texts relished the prospect of their defeat as a further blow against the memory of Andronikos. However, that very link to Andronikos and the revolution that had brought him to power in 1182 made the early Grand Komnenoi something akin to populist figures, utilising a name far more recognisable to Asia Minor than Laskaris. As Andronikos’ heirs gathered lands to themselves and fielded armies, a highly active epistolary programme of letters were sent to the lords and cities of Anatolia, provoking a response from Nikaia that redefined the cultural and religious loyalties of Anatolian Greek Orthodoxy.

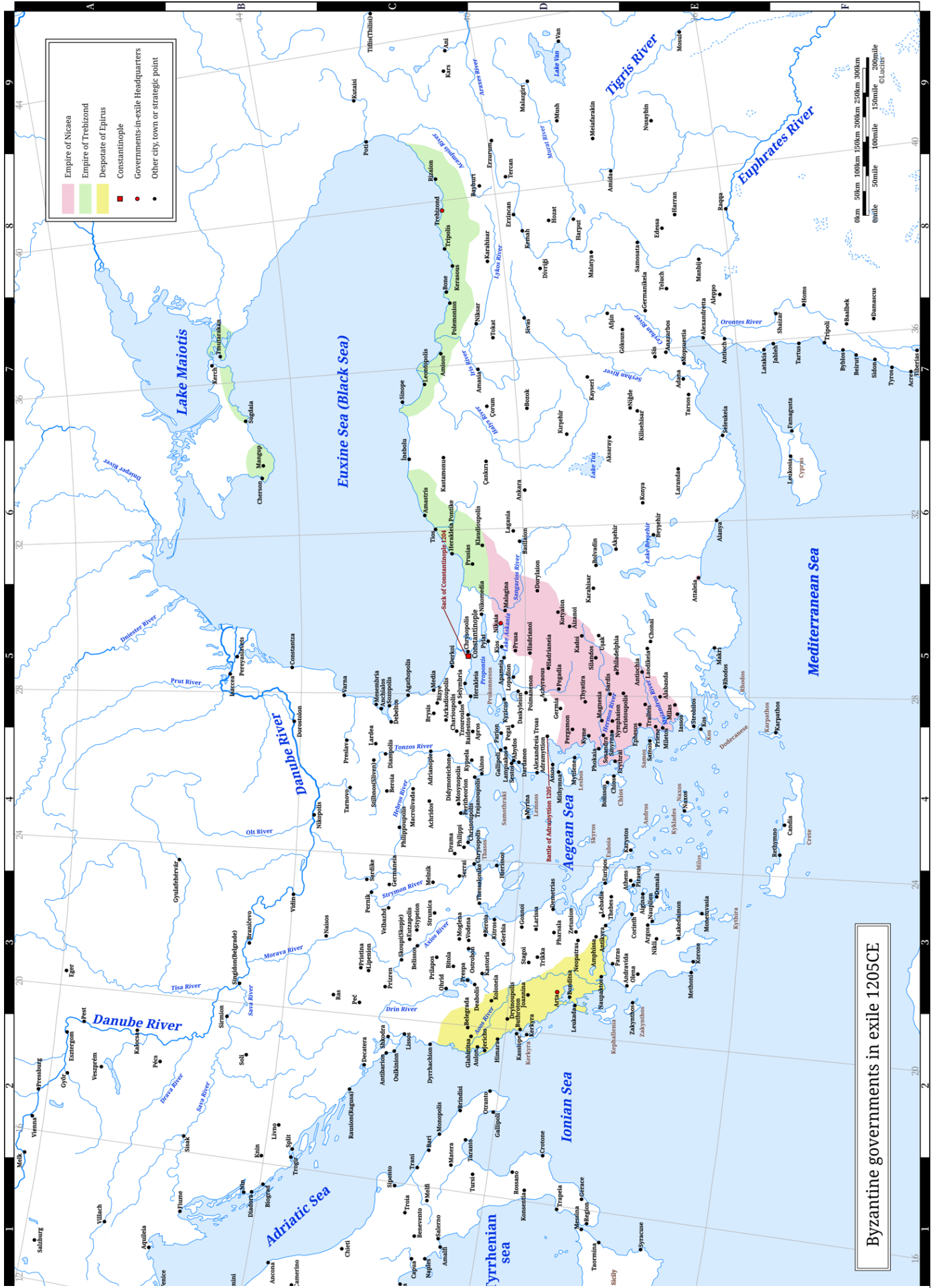


Figure 4. Map: Byzantine governments-in-exile, 1205 CE by Lucius, © Lucius (lucius-note.net)

2.2. The Sources

Epigraphic Evidence

The transition of control in Northern Paphlagonia in the early thirteenth century is recorded by two inscriptions, the latter of which is now lost. What was likely the seat of governance of David's territories in Paphlagonia, Herakleia-Pontika, was almost completely rebuilt over the thirteenth century prior to the Turkish conquest (1360).³⁵⁰ The city was besieged unsuccessfully in 1205/06 and again in 1208 by Theodore Laskaris after a refortification of the city was completed by David. The tower, attached to the northern 'Girls' gate (Kiz Kapisi) of the city at a height of 15 metres, reads in a monumental inscription spread over six marble blocks measuring ten metres in length:

‘David, purple-born [imperial] blooming offshoot,
sprung from the loins of his grandfather Andronikos,
builds from its foundations a new tower
and skilfully revives the whole of Herakleia-Pontika that has been stricken by time,
a new tower for all of.
Year 6715 [1206/7], tenth indiction.

‘† ὁ πορφυρανθῆς Δα(υῖ)Δ εὐθαλῆς κλάδος
πάππου φυεῖς ἄνακτος ἐξ Ἀνδρονίκου
ἐξ ὑποβάθρας ἐκδομεῖ πύργον νέον
καὶ συνεγείρει καταβληθεῖσαν χρό[νῳ]
τὴν Ποντοηράκλειαν ἐντέχνως ὄλην. ἔτ(ους) ,ςψιε´, ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ι.’³⁵¹

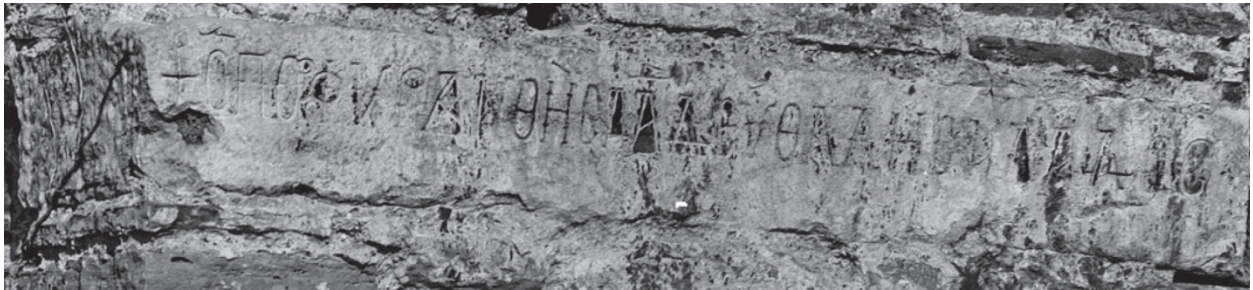


Figure 5. Kiz Kapisi, Herakleia-Pontika (Ereğli). Part of the inscription of David Komnenos. Photograph taken from Andreas Rhoby, *Stein*, p.1034.

³⁵⁰ Klaus Belke, *Paphlagonien und Honorias* [TIB, 9], (Vienna: 1996), pp.212-216.

³⁵¹ The inscription has been published several times, most recently with a German translation by Rhoby, *Stein* (Vienna: 2014) TR43, p.1043. The English translation here is my own. For alternative reading see, Lloyd Jonnes, *The Inscriptions of Heraclea Pontica, with a Prosopographia Herecleotica*, (Bonn: 1994), p.25.



Figure 6. Kiz Kapisi inscription incorporated into a residence in the 1950s. Photograph taken from Hoepfner, *Herakleia Pontike-Ereğli*, plate 10b.

The connection to Andronikos and the broader imperial Komnenoi dynasty was pivotal to David's domain and his appeal.³⁵² Such a public declaration of loyalty and inheritance in Paphlagonia set Andronikos' heir on a mission of vengeance against the Angeloi dynasty which Theodore Laskaris, as Alexios III's son-in-law, represented. Comparing Herakleia-Pontika's inscription to Isaak II's inscription of 1193/94 in Christoupolis/Kavala demonstrates an ongoing struggle for the narrative of Andronikos and legitimacy being fought amongst former imperial territories. Therefore, at the conclusion of the war and Paphlagonia's annexation there was an attempt to co-opt Komnenian loyalist sentiments. In an inscription on a single block upon the citadel on the acropolis, undated but certainly linked to the annexation in 1212/14 of Paphlagonia to the Nikaian Empire, the following read:

'If, like the proverb, *the stones should cry out*,³⁵³
 And the inanimate stones emit a speechless shout,
 Cry out the tower-maker made you,
 A small command [...]
 Of *autokrator* Theodore Laskaris, the Komnenos-sprung.
 He raised this tower, stranger.

Ἐάν οἱ λίθοι κράζωσιν ἐκ παροιμίας
 πέμψον βοήν ἄλαλος, ἄψυχος πέ[τ]ρα
 τὸν πυργοποιὸν κρά[ξε τὸν κτίσαντά σ]ε

³⁵² While no longer accepted, this inscription has encouraged some thought that David was himself crowned emperor, see Alexios Savvides, *Βυζαντινά στασιαστικά και αυτονομιστικά κινήματα στα Δωδεκάνησα και στη Μικρά Ασία 1189 - c.1240 μ.Χ.*, (Athens: 1987), pp.266, 285-286.

³⁵³ Luke 19:40.

κέλευσμα μικρὸν [...]
 Κομνηνοφυοῦς Λασκάρου Θεοδώρου
 αὐτοκράτοϋς τὸν πύργον ἔγε[ι]ρε, ξένε.³⁵⁴

The two inscriptions publicly present the conflict and transition of power to Laskaris from David to the populace of Herakleia-Pontika. David reminded all Paphlagonians, and any other Anatolian peoples, entering the city both of himself and of the dynasty responsible for their security for nearly two centuries. Laskaris' more subtle and smaller imperial epigram informed only the citadel's governor and garrison. Both frame their contenders as two candidates of an intra-Komnenoi struggle, intentionally stressing in each context their continuity from the Constantinopolitan Komnenoi. David positions himself as the heir to his grandfather Andronikos through his father the *sebastokrator* Manuel, and Laskaris as a more abstract Komnenos-sprung, simply attached himself to the pre-1185 imperial family. Notably, to both sides it is in their interests to diminish the Angeloi. David could position himself quite naturally as a dynastic heir to particularist sympathies while Laskaris had to, by necessity, tread a thin and delicate line that avoided any mention of his actual Angelina wife and claim to the throne. It was crucial he do this when, as we have seen, the Paphlagonians had been on the receiving end of Constantinopolitan ridicule, insult, and ethnic condemnation since 1183, if not before. Avoiding the language of the Kavala inscription of 1193/94 with its naming of 'Andronikos tyrant of the Paphlagonians', or the forms of othering present in the 1185 Thessaloniki sermon of Eustathios which made the Paphlagonians into the cause of the ruin of Byzantium, Laskaris' word choice was an exceedingly shrewd one.

Throughout the nine years of conflict with Paphlagonia, the Nikaian state developed both its legitimacy and political ideology. Nikaia's maturation into an imperial power which had subjugated its rivals was only complete with Alexios III's capture in 1211 and David's destruction in 1212 or 1214. Only with the annexation of Paphlagonia was Laskaris able to consolidate control of Western Anatolia, and the remainder of his reign was dedicated to a slow rebuilding of economic and diplomatic soft power. In that expansion Nikaia achieved some recognition of its rights as Roman Emperors from the Seljuks and Armenians of Asia Minor. It is critical however that each of the physical exempla of early Nikaia's external legitimacy, the five Cappadocian church inscriptions by Greek Orthodox Seljuk subjects that name Laskaris as emperor, date from after 1211. Only after Alexios III's capture, the fall of Paphlagonia, and the end to a composite struggle of dynasties and regional loyalties was his authority recognised. Epigraphic dedications in Gulsehir (Zoropassos) at Karsi Kilise (1212), Tatlarin (1215), and the *katholikon* of the Archangelos monastery in Camil, near Ürgüp (1216/17), should remind us of the slow process for Laskaris to gain



Figure 7. Nikaia, 'Tower of Babel' inscription. Southern Gate.

‘Πύργος Χαλάνης [...]
 βουλὰς δὲ συγχέει π[...]’
 ον Λάσκαρις <ἀν>ίστη[σιν...]
 Θεόδωρος τὸ θαῦμα[α...]

Tower of Chalane
 but it confuses the advice
 Laskaris erects
 Theodore the Miracle...'

Transcription, Rhoby, *Stein*, TR96, pp.705-708.

³⁵⁴ Rhoby, *Stein*, TR44, pp.593-494; *TIB 13*, pp.804, 918; Jonnes, *Heraclea Pontica*, p.26.

recognition as an Emperor of the Romans-in-exile.³⁵⁵ Outside Nikaian court circles, in 1208 Michael Choniates addressed Laskaris simply as ‘Emperor of the East’ (Letter §94); not until 1217, in a letter sent from the Balkans, did Choniates present the polity as more than a centre of refuge, and Laskaris himself as the equal of an emperor in Constantinople (Letter §179).³⁵⁶ A period of consolidation is to be expected and the only known public inscriptions before 1211 which name Laskaris as emperor, though both now lost, emanate from either Nikaia itself³⁵⁷ or in Laskarid-held Prousa.³⁵⁸ Both name him a Komnenos. Through a comparison with other datable evidence we might ask how meaningful it was that in that the lands which Theodore controlled he endeavoured to style himself a ‘Komnenos Laskaris’, whereas in the public epigraphy of others, even when being recognised emperor, he was known simply as ‘Theodore Laskaris.’³⁵⁹ It could reflect a struggle for legitimacy waged across Anatolia. Later evidence, suggests that Laskaris did eventually establish his state’s dynastic claim, as seen by a 1219 treaty with Venice where he was recognised as ‘Teodorus, in Christo Deo fidelis Imperator et moderator Romeorum et semper augustus, Comnanus Lascarus.’³⁶⁰

Textual Sources

Texts provide most of our knowledge for the conflict between David Komnenos and Theodore Laskaris, and they all present the perspective of the latter’s camp. For the most part, these are highly hostile to David. Written closest to events is *Oration 14* by Niketas Choniates, most likely completed in the summer of 1206. Choniates, an accomplished orator who had performed several times at the courts of Isaak II and Alexios III, produced a work entitled *Speech drafted to be read before Kyr Theodore Laskaris, reigning over the eastern Roman cities when the Latins conquered Constantinople and, out of Moesia, John [Asan] overran the western Roman*

³⁵⁵ For the 1216/17 inscription ‘ἐν ἔτοϋς ς[ψ]κς ἐν δικτιῶνος, ς ἐπὶ βασιλείῳ Θεοδώρου Λάσκαρη [sic.],’ see Georges Kiourtzian, ‘Une nouvelle inscription de Cappadoce du règne de Théodore I^{er} Laskaris,’ *Δελτιον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 4 (2008), pp.131-138; Tolga Uyar, ‘Thirteenth-Century 'Byzantine' Art in Cappadocia and the Question of Greek Painters at the Seljuq Court,’ in: *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*, ed. Bruno De Nicola, (Farnham: 2015), pp.215-252; idem., ‘Carving, Painting, and Inscribing Sacred Space in Late Byzantium: Bezirana Kilisesi Rediscovered (Peristrema-Cappadocia),’ in: *Architecture and Visual Culture in the Late Antique and Medieval Mediterranean*, eds. Vasileios Marinis et al., (Turnhout: 2021), pp.207-222; Sophie Métivier, ‘Byzantium in question in 13th-century Seljuk Anatolia,’ in: *Liquid & Multiple: Individuals & Identities in the Thirteenth-Century Aegean*, eds. Guillaume Saint-Guillain, Dionysios Stathakopoulos, (Paris: 2012), pp.235-258.

³⁵⁶ MC, *Epistulae*, §§94, 179.

³⁵⁷ A lost Nikaian inscription dated to 1206/07 recording a renovation of Nikaia’s destroyed *kastron* was recorded in the nineteenth century as:

✠ ἀνεκαινιῶθη διόλυτον κάστρον Νικαίας
ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ κύρου
Θεοδώρου τοῦ Λασκάρη ἔτει ςψις´ κ(όσμου).

See Rhoby, *Stein*, p.707n.1365; Published by Packard Humanities Institute as PH278021 [https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/278021?hs=60-65].

³⁵⁸ Sencer Şahin, *Katalog der antiken Inschriften des Museums von Iznik (Nikaia): entfernte Umgebung der Stadt*, (Bonn: 1982), No. 480, 481, 482. For the so called ‘Tower of Babel’ [Πύργος Χαλάνης] see no. 481 with republication and further discussion by Rhoby, *Stein*, Nr. TR96, pp.705-708; For the post-1208 October inscription in Prousa naming Laskaris ‘τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου ἡμῶν βασιλέως Θεοδώρου Κομνηνοῦ τοῦ Λασκάρου’, see PH278701 [https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/278701]; and discussion in Naomi Pitamber, *Replacing Byzantium: Laskarid Urban Environments and the Landscape of Loss (1204-1261)*, (PhD thesis, University of California Los Angeles: 2015), pp.80-81; Nicholas Melvani, ‘State, Strategy, and Ideology in Monumental Imperial Inscriptions,’ in: *Inscribing Texts in Byzantium*, (Abingdon: 2020), p.175.

³⁵⁹ Uyar, ‘Thirteenth-Century 'Byzantine' Art in Cappadocia,’ pp.215-217.

³⁶⁰ Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden zur älteren Handels*, II, pp.205-7.

regions with Skythians.³⁶¹ The oration provides a highly detailed and rhetorical depiction of campaigns in 1205 against both David in Paphlagonia (July–October) and to a lesser extent against Manuel Maurozomes in Laodikeia (between October 1205–March 1206).³⁶² A further brief mention of David in *Oration 13*, a Lenten *selention* of February 1207, informs us of the courtly rhetoric that was used to describe David. Both *Orations* depict him as an enemy of Laskaris and all true Byzantine Romans. Character defamation and damnation via *psogos* were employed with multiple biblical analogies of enemies of Israel.³⁶³ David even inherited from his grandfather a likening to the Old Testament pagan deity Baal which Choniates had earlier employed for Andronikos.³⁶⁴ Critically however, there is a great deal of difference in the portrayal of David in the *Orations* and his depiction in the narrative history. *Oration 14*, as said above the most substantial source, was written while Choniates was planning his departure from Latin Constantinople and sought employment in Laskaris’ court. The 1207 Lenten oration informs us that Choniates’ petition worked, and he had reached Nikaia before February 1207. A further *selention* for the start of Easter 1208 (§17) and a 1211/12 oration (§16) praising the victory at Antioch-on-the-Meander where the Seljuk Sultan was killed, round out the four surviving speeches written in this last phase of Choniates’ life.³⁶⁵

Choniates’ *Oration 14* survives in the sole manuscript that contains the entirety of his oratorical works, *Codex Marcianus* XI 222, dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. In its current edition it forms a collection of orations (and a few brief epistles) presented not chronologically but thematically. The preceding text *13*, is a sermon composed at Nikaia for the emperor several months after this one. *Oration 14* is the longest text that Niketas addressed to Laskaris, but despite the name it is not really an oration as it was sent as a letter and not performed by the author. It places the text in the highly unusual, though not unattested, tradition of orations given via proxy.³⁶⁶ We can reconstruct its context. At the time of writing, David’s forces have been recently defeated and driven off by Laskaris’ army. It was sent to Theodore Laskaris in the summer of 1206 after both the Latin conquest of Constantinople in April 1204 and following Choniates’ own return to the capital in June 1206, having previously spent two years living at a secondary home in Selymbria. Those roughly six months in Constantinople were marked by a failure to find a position with the Latin regime. *Oration 14* therefore acts as a petition to join

³⁶¹ NC, *OE*, §14, pp.129-147, ‘Τοῦ αὐτοῦ· Λόγος ἐκδοθεὶς ἐπὶ τῷ ἀναγνωσθῆναι εἰς τὸν Λάσκαριν κῦρ Θεόδωρον βασιλεύοντα τῶν ἐφ’ ὧν Ῥωμαϊκῶν πόλεων, ὅτε οἱ Λατῖνοι κατεῖχον τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν, ὁ δὲ ἐκ Μυσιάς Ἰωάννης κατέτρεχε μετὰ Σκυθῶν τὰς δυσικὰς Ῥωμαϊκὰς χώρας.’; For dating see Nikolaos Christis, ‘Ideological and Political Contestations in Post-1204 Byzantium. The orations of Niketas Choniates and the imperial court of Nikaia’ in: *The Emperor in the Byzantine World: Papers from the Forty-Eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Shaun Tougher, (London: 2019), pp. 249; Simpson, *Choniates*, pp.63-67; *Oration 14* was recently partly published in English translation, however almost all the sections that detail Laskaris’ campaigns against David Komnenos and Manuel Maurozomes were omitted. See Georgios Chatzelis, Jonathan Harris, *Byzantine Sources for the Crusades, 1095-1204*, (London: 2024), pp.206-207; for an older German translation see Franz Grabler, *Kaisertaten und Menschenschicksale im Spiegel der schönen Rede: Reden und Briefe des Niketas Choniates*, (Graz: 1966), pp.220-249.

³⁶² For chronology of events in the speech see Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.141-142.

³⁶³ NC, *OE*, §13 pp.120-128, trans. Grabler, pp.206-219; On *psogos* see, Alberto Puertas, ‘Psogos: The Rhetoric of Invective in 4th Century CE Imperial Speeches,’ *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Ancient Rhetoric*, eds. Sophia Papaioannou et al., (Leiden: 2021), pp.170-191.

³⁶⁴ NC, *OE*, §14, p.134.6; idem., *Historia*, §258, trans. p.144. [Kings, 17:16; Jeremiah 39:29]. Manuel Maurozomes, who had married into the Turkish court, was in turn made into a new Ahithophel, the scheming advisor of the Biblical David [2 Samuel: 15-17]; Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.56, 139-147.

³⁶⁵ NC, *OE*, §17, pp.176-185, Grabler, pp.299-314, §16, pp.170-175, Grabler, pp.286-298.

³⁶⁶ See eleventh-century letter §140 of Michael Psellos, *Michael Psellus: Epistulae*, ed. Stratis Papaioannou (Berlin: 2019); Floris Bernard, ‘Michael Psellos,’ in: *Companion to Byzantine Epistolography*, p.138; and the fourteenth-century panegyric letters of Demetrios Kydones for John VI and John V discussed by Florin Leonte, ‘The Letters of Demetrios Kydones,’ in *ibid.*, p.158.

the Nikaian court and a display of rhetorical skill.³⁶⁷ Throughout this time Choniates' prominent companion was John Belissariotes, Niketas' brother-in-law and predecessor as *logothete ton sekreton* in 1196, but Belissariotes died c.1208 shortly after arriving in Nikaia.³⁶⁸ Essentially bereft of allies, Choniates' three appeals to the future patriarch Theodore Eirenikos and Basil Kamateros, *logothete* in the Nikaian court, were continued pleas for position that ultimately went unheeded.³⁶⁹

Oration 14 broadly follows the structure of imperial orations as established by Menander Rhetor in the third century CE. Therefore, Choniates pivots between praise of Laskaris' accomplishments in war, and in the latter sections, to present those deeds performed in peace.³⁷⁰ The text is an attempt at restoring himself in the eyes of a Greek-speaking administration, of regaining employment, position, and status but also of attempting to present and maintain a continuity between Constantinople and Nikaia. Laskaris is depicted as a legal, natural, and divinely-ordained occupant of a title he has only just claimed (Summer 1205). There are pleas for him to put on the 'red boots' of imperality, but we should note Laskaris would not be crowned until the patriarchate was reconstituted (March 1208).³⁷¹ The text positions Laskaris as the natural choice for empire. Through marriage to Anna Komnene Angelina, Alexios III's daughter, Laskaris was elevated to quasi-imperial status and Choniates presents the imperium as his inheritance to claim. Meanwhile, the catastrophic state of Byzantine affairs is depicted with oratorical flourishes. Blunted and dusty weapons are taken up again by eager hands and as a result of Laskaris' legitimacy and God-given prowess he is inspiring the people to believe once more. By reorganising the institutions of the imperial city of state and imperial offices, Choniates proclaims imperial rebirth: 'Thus you [Theodore] have revived the extinguished wisdom of the Romans.'³⁷²

The highly distinct final sections of Niketas Choniates' *Chronike Diegesis*, known as the LO recensions covering events from 1203 until 1206, were first written between 1204–1208. The summer 1205 campaign narrated at length in the oration is recounted in just twenty-seven lines in the *Chronike* but the text does provide more information for the summer-autumn campaign of 1206.³⁷³ However those details are part of the further revision between 1208 and 1211, and perhaps even until his death c.1217.³⁷⁴ By that point Choniates had tried and failed to gain senior office and, with the exception of an embassy in 1213, appeared disillusioned with the inactivity and rapprochement towards the Latins of the Laskarid court.³⁷⁵ Therefore in this final

³⁶⁷ For Choniates' fall from grace, see Michael Angold, 'Niketas Choniates in exile,' in: *Bibliophilos: Books and Learning in the Byzantine World*, eds. Charalambos Dendrinos, Ilias Giarenis, (Berlin: 2021), pp.17-34.

³⁶⁸ NC, *OE*, §15 is the monody read at Belissariotes' grave; Simpson, *Choniates*, p.20.

³⁶⁹ NC, *OE*, pp.202-3, 209-11, 216-17. Basil, representing a last major figure of the Kamateroi, may have been seen as Niketas' route back to imperial affairs. These letters circulated at Nikaia with Choniates' other major late work, his anti-Latin and anti-Armenian treatise the *Panoplia Dogmatike*. On this see Simpson, *Choniates*, pp.26-40; Angold, 'Choniates in Exile,' pp.20-27, and this thesis, p.157.

³⁷⁰ *Menander Rhetor*, eds. Donald Russell, Nigel Wilson, (Oxford: 1981), p.85.

³⁷¹ NC, *OE*, §14, p.132.1-2.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, §14, p.131.22-23. εἰ πως ἀναθάλπεις οὕτως τὸ ἀπεσβηκὸς ἦδη τῶν Ῥωμαίων φρόνημα·

³⁷³ NC, *CD*, §626.57-71, trans. p.343.

³⁷⁴ These are the LO body of manuscripts (finished in 1210/11), the post-1204 versions of the text, which include effectively everything post p.614 of the published De Gruyter edition and relates events related to Nikaia, Laskaris, and David. See NC, *CD*, pp.xci-xcix; Simpson, *Choniates*, pp.68-77; Foteini Spingou, 'Classicizing visions of Constantinople after 1204: Niketas Choniates' De signis reconsidered,' *DOP*, 76 (2022), pp.181-220; Chrissis, 'Orations of Niketas Choniates,' pp.252-253.

³⁷⁵ Chrissis, 'Orations of Niketas Choniates,' pp.253-255; For Choniates' death see Basileios Katsaros, 'A Contribution to the Exact Dating of the Death of the Byzantine Historian Nicetas Choniates.' *JÖB*, 32.3 (1982), pp.83-91.

recension of the *Chronike* where loyalty to Laskaris is diminished, David's treatment is far more balanced. Following a further period of disfavour and repulsion with Nikaian politics, David features rather than an enemy of God's People but in a didactic narrative that depicts both David, Theodore Laskaris (and a short-lived Komnenos claimant Manuel Komnenos Maurozomes) as part of 'a three-headed monster constituted of the stupid.' His final revisions are a universal condemnation of all Byzantines' failure to unite.³⁷⁶ It was in this a-text recension that all the Komnenoi became equally worthless.³⁷⁷ Descriptions of Laskaris as a mighty defender against the Latins were excised. These last versions portrayed both David and Laskaris just as guilty as any other Byzantine provincial lord. Therefore, with such an erratic swing between opinions we must be careful. Across different sources, do we hear Laskaris' ideology or Choniates? Is it possible to get to the character of the Paphlagonian state through the rhetorical conventionalities of encomia in the *Orations* that make David an inconsistent monster? Only through a very careful reading and analysis with other authors do we start to understand the supporters of David as a second great eastern bloc, and alternative refuge, for the Constantinopolitans.

Other key sources for the conflict between Theodore Laskaris and David Grand Komnenos include the five synodal acts of Patriarch Michael Autoreianos, composed between 1208 and 1212. Contained within *MS. Parisinus 1234A* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and published by Nicolas Oikonomides they allow us to follow the narrative of the struggle later than Choniates' *Orations*.³⁷⁸ Naming David and his brother as the key enemies of Laskaris' empire, the acts detail the escalation of the war as an oath of loyalty, a *homologia*, was circulated firstly at Nikaia and then all of Anatolia to reject any enemy 'Roman or foreign, crowned or uncrowned, and not even the grandsons of Lord Andronikos' [Ῥωμαῖος ἢ ἔθνικός, ἔστεμμένος καὶ μὴ τοιοῦτος, ἢ καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἔγγονοι τοῦ κῦρ Ἀνδρονίκου].³⁷⁹ Subsequent acts promised a remission of sins to those who died fighting for the 'people of God' and their various *patrides*. These valuable documents describe a culture of disputed loyalties resolved through oathtaking and ecclesiastical innovation that defended Nikaia from its enemies. They have however been only inconsistently engaged with by scholarship.³⁸⁰

Final detail for the Nikaian-Paphlagonian conflict is added by Nicholas Mesarites' later writings. A Lenten sermon dated to the 8th March 1215 provides fragmentary and uncertain detail for the annexation of Paphlagonia.³⁸¹ No source definitively narrates David's defeat or death. What we can reconstruct is that matters rapidly deteriorated for the Grand Komnenoi after 1211. One theory is that David likely lost Herakleia-Pontika in 1211/12 and was captured, tonsured (and likely blinded), then died on Mt. Athos in 1212 as the monk Daniel while still a young man.³⁸² That information comes from a manuscript colophon in Vatopedi monastery on

³⁷⁶ NC, CD, §625.44-46, trans. p.343.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. §529, trans. p.290.

³⁷⁸ Nicolas Oikonomides, 'Cinq actes inédits du patriarche Michel Autôreianos,' *REB*, 25 (1967), pp.113-45.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. p.123.35-36.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p.123.35-36. For the oath in Nikaian court culture see Angold, *Exile*, pp.65-66.

³⁸¹ Mesarites, *Neue Quellen II-III* pp.3-96, trans. Angold, pp.235-254.

³⁸² The colophon is ambiguous. In a passage dated to December 13th 1212, *MS Vatopedi 760* f.294a reads: 'ἐκοιμήθη ὁ εὐσεβέστατος μέγας Κομνηνὸς κύριος Δαυίδ, ὁ διὰ τοῦ θείου καὶ ἀγγελικοῦ σχήματος μετανομασθεὶς Δαυιὴλ μοναχός.' For a David Grand Komnenos identification see Bryer, 'St Eleutherios,' pp.183-186; Shukurov's chronology presents a hypothetical political coup against David by his brother and subsequent *damnatio memoriae*; Shukurov, 'Enigma of David Komnenos,' pp.125-131; Van Tricht notes the existence of another David Komnenos, who had served in Thessaloniki as *doux* during the unsuccessful defence of 1185, as potential identification for the monk Daniel. Van Tricht then posits two sieges of Sinope, with David killed in the first in

Mt. Athos and is much disputed, but ultimately David does disappear from our sources.³⁸³ An alternative solution will be offered below. Meanwhile, David's brother Alexios Grand Komnenos assumed control but was captured as Sinope fell in 1214 by the Seljuk Sultan Izz al-Dīn Keykavus I (1211–1219). The events, narrated by the Seljuk historian Ibn Bibi tells of how one 'Tekfur Kyr Aleks [Alexios]' of the land of Ġānīt [Pontos] was captured while hunting with five-hundred cavalry' in reprisal for a raid into Seljuk territory.³⁸⁴ Taken within sight of Sinope's city walls he was tortured while the Sultan demanded the city's surrender. Only after repeated ordeals did Sinope's inhabitants relent and save the life of Andronikos' remaining grandson.³⁸⁵ Sinope was taken, cutting the lands subject to Trebizond off from a contiguous border with Nikaia and restricting the once populist leaders of 'the uncrowned,' to their Pontic base. Keykavus' conquest of Sinope was then declared in a vast series of eighteen inscriptions that demonstrated the Sultan's power, the hierarchy of emirs in the Seljuk state, as well as our only example of a bi-lingual inscription that visually demonstrated a subordination of Greek to Arabic.³⁸⁶ With the exception of brief reconquests of Sinope in 1228–1230, and again from 1254–1263, Trapezuntine power remained essentially limited both in manpower and territory to north-eastern Anatolia behind the Pontic Alps and a few outposts in Cherson.³⁸⁷ Anatolia, with the exception of that northern strip of land, knew only Nikaia as a Greek-speaking power.

2.3. The Challenge of David Komnenos

Aside from the epigraphy shown above, David's and his brother's socio-political ideology as an alternative refuge to Laskaris is known through a series of campaigns and the textual and sigillographical sources that pertain to it. In his *Chronike Diegesis* Choniates briefly describes two campaigns of David in 1205–06. Narrating in his history the campaign of 1205, the same subject addressed in *Oration 14*, Choniates described the foundation and immediate curtailment of the empire of the Grand Komnenoi:

'David Komnenos enlisted Paphlagonians and the inhabitants of Pontic Herakleia and hired as mercenaries a division of Iberians who lived on the banks of the Phasis River. With these he subjugated towns and cities, and exalting his own brother whose name was Alexios, he became his forerunner and herald. He was to spend his time in the regions of Trebizond, and, like the proverbial Hylas, his name was invoked but he was never seen.

Ὁ δ' ἐκ Κομνηνῶν Δαυίδ στρατολογήσας Παφλαγόνας καὶ οἱ τὴν Ποντικὴν οἰκοῦσιν Ἡράκλειαν καὶ μοῖραν μισθωσάμενος Ἰβήρων τῶν πινόντων τοῦ Φάσιδος κόμας καὶ πόλεις ὑπεποιεῖτο καὶ τὸν οἰκεῖον μεγαλύνων κασίγητον, ᾧ ἢ κλησὶς Ἀλέξιος,

1211–12, the city subsequently retaken by Alexios, and then lost again in 1214. *Latin Renovatio*, pp.355–356n10. Ultimately, given Alexios III's tonsure to a monastery within Nikaia in 1211, it would also seem at odds with Laskarid practice to use Athos as David's place of exile.

³⁸³ Giarenis theorised that the majority of David's lands were conquered in 1207 and he became a monk in 1210, having been curtailed since three years prior, and then died on Athos in 1212. There is little to recommend this theory given the continued military operations of Nikaia in 1212 and 1214 and Autoreianos' condemnations of Andronikos' 'grandsons' (in the plural) c.1208. Giarenis, 'Ὁ Δαβίδ Κομνηνός,' pp.183–187.

³⁸⁴ Ibn Bibi, *Die Seltchukengeschichte des Ibn Bibi*, trans. Herbey Duda, (Copenhagen: 1959), pp.64–68.

³⁸⁵ The reluctance of the city to save Alexios could indicate animosity between the two brothers and Alexios' hand in David's downfall, Shukurov, 'Enigma,' pp.129–131.

³⁸⁶ Scott Redford, *Legends of Authority: the 1215 Seljuk Inscriptions of Sinop Citadel, Turkey*, (Istanbul: 2015), pp.166–169, 235–243.

³⁸⁷ Ibn al-Athir, p.291; Andrew Peacock, 'Sinop: A Frontier City in Seljuq and Mongol Anatolia,' *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia*, 16 (2010), pp.103–124.

πρόδρομος ἐκείνου καὶ προκῆρυξ ἐγένετο. ὁ δὲ ἔμελλεν ἀεὶ χρονίζων ἐν τοῖς τῆς Τραπεζοῦντος μέρεσι καὶ παροιμιακὸς ἐδείκνυτο Ὕλας, φωνούμενος καὶ μὴ ὀπτανόμενος.³⁸⁸

Choniates does not hide that David, given prominence over his brother, gathered Paphlagonian support using the name of his family. We are reminded again of the connection between onomastics and Komnenian support in Paphlagonia (see p.51). The young Alexios Synadenos mentioned as David's general was likely a son or relation of the Andronikos Synadenos posted as *doux* of Trebizond before 1179.³⁸⁹ While David himself captured coastal Sinope and Oinaion, this young Synadenos led an inland campaign to capture Laskarid-held Nikomedia but was ambushed by Laskaris in a mountain pass.³⁹⁰ Choniates frames his destruction as complete.³⁹¹ Synadenos was likely brought as a prisoner to Nikaia where he was rehabilitated as an example of the praise Laskaris received in *Oration 14* for turning friends into enemies.³⁹² In panic at this capture of the only general we know of aside from the two Grand Komnenoi brothers, David returned to Herakleia-Pontika and regrouped.

Having failed rather spectacularly in fighting a direct war for westward expansion against Laskaris in 1205 David attempted a different strategy in 1206. Following several defeats by a brief Bulgarian-Nikaian alliance, the Latin Empire under Henry of Flanders (August 1205–1216) was keen to grow its Byzantine clients. By March 1206 David Komnenos, proud heir of the architect of the Massacre of the Latins, was considered a Latin vassal.³⁹³ By summer 1206 Nikaian forces had been ousted from Nikomedia under the command of Baron Thierry of Looz (1205–07) and we begin to hear a little of David's new policy building an anti-Nikaian coalition in the campaign of 1206.³⁹⁴

‘Theodore Laskaris raised an army to fight David in the Pontos. He forced his way into Plousias, a city of archers and warriors, and nullified her friendship with David, and he would have taken Herakleia and forced David to take flight, had not the Latins encamped at Nikomedia provided assistance to David, who had made a treaty with them, thus placing Laskaris in an uncertain position. On the one hand, zeal and daring incited him against the Latins, while on the other, he drew back from the task at hand. While he was of the opinion that he should enter Herakleia and occupy the city, and then he thought that he should take the opposite course; it was as though both options were being anxiously weighed in the balance. Deeming it more expedient, rather than more daring, to quicken his pace against David's protectors [ὑπερασπιστὰς], he resumed his march. When the Latins were informed of his approach, they were unwilling to risk

³⁸⁸ NC, *CD*, §626, trans. p.343

³⁸⁹ Andronikos' seals have been recently republished. Üyesi Nilgün Elam and Alexandra-Kyriaki Wassiliou-Seibt, 'Ist Andronikos Synadenos um die Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts in normannische Gefangenschaft geraten?' *BZ*, 114.1 (2021), pp.163-170.

³⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion of these military movements see Alexios Savvides, *Byzantium in the Near East*, pp.67-71; The coastal route David took is outlined by Mete Oguz as route A3 (Herakleia-Oinaion). See, *The Northern Heartland*, p.23.

³⁹¹ NC, *OE*, §14, p.141.

³⁹² See Section 0.54, pp.27-30; and NC, *OE*, §14, p.144.14.9. The Synadenoï reappeared in Nikaian aristocratic circles from 1222. See Akropolites, §23, trans. Macrides, p.169; Angold, *Exile*, p.69; Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, p.138.

³⁹³ According also to Latin sources David had accepted Latin suzerainty. See Henri de Valenciennes, *Histoire de l'empereur Henri de Constantinople*, ed. Jean Longnon, (Paris: 1948), §551-553; Villehardouin, §453; Van Tricht *Renovatio*, p.110.

³⁹⁴ Villehardouin, §482; Van Tricht, *Renovatio*, pp.110n23, 146n187, 174, 179n90, 182, 255, 262, 267-268.

a fight at close quarters and so withdrew during the night and entered Byzantion [Constantinople].

David reasoned that he had been unexpectedly saved from a danger which had crept very close, no further removed than his knee from his leg, and so again he took firm possession of Herakleia. Rewarding his Latin allies in Byzantion, he welcomed the fleet of provision ships carrying cured pork and requested that they support him a second time. Furthermore, **he implored, by means of letters and treaties, both to those who had submitted to Laskaris and also to all his own land to join him and unite with the lands subject to the Latins. And indeed, as they agreed to these things, he was informed that Laskaris had departed Nikaia for Prousa.** David also went forth from Herakleia, exulting in the allied forces which had recently been sent to him from Byzantion. He carried out combined military manoeuvres, crossed the Sangarios River, and ravaged the towns subject to Laskaris. He left there several days later. Some of the hostages received from Plousias he put in chains for defecting to Laskaris.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ Θεόδωρος ὁ Λάσκαρις κατὰ τοῦ ἐν Πόντῳ Δαυίδ στρατιὰν ἀγείρας τῆς μὲν Πλουσιάδος ἐπέβη καὶ τῆς πρὸς Δαυίδ φιλίας ἐκείνην ἀπέστησε, τοξότιδα πᾶσαν οὖσαν καὶ μάχιμον· εἶλε δ' ἂν καὶ Ἡράκλειαν καὶ τὸν Δαυίδ δραπέτην ἐκεῖθεν ἔδειξεν, εἰ μὴ Λατίνων τῇ Νικομήδους παρεμβαλόντων κατ' ἐπικουρίαν Δαυίδ, ἐπεὶ καὶ εἶχε τούτοις Δαυίδ σπεισάμενος, ἐν ἀμφινόῳα κατέστη ὁ Λάσκαρις. εἶλκε μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἐντεῦθεν προθυμία καὶ τόλμα κατὰ Λατίνων, ἐκεῖθεν δ' αὐθις ἀντέσπα τὸ ἐν χερσὶν ἔργον, ὡσεὶ καὶ ἐντὸς Ἡρακλείας οἰόμενον εἶναι καὶ κυριεύειν τῆς πόλεως, καὶ πολλάκις ἐκάτερον καὶ ὡς ἐπὶ τρυτάνης ζυγοῦ καὶ μετὰ συνοχῆς ἕκαστον. ὡς δ' ἐκεκρίκει συμφορώτερον μᾶλλον ἢ περὶ θρασύτερον ἐπὶ τοὺς ὑπερασπιστὰς ἴεσθαι τοῦ Δαυίδ, ἐπανακάμπτει μὲν εἰς αὐτούς, ἦν ὄδευε παρεικῶς· οἱ δὲ τὰ περὶ τούτου πυθόμενοι συστάδην μὲν παρακινδυνεύειν οὐκ ἔγνωσαν, μεθίστανται δὲ νυκτὸς καὶ εἰσίασι τὸ Βυζάντιον.

Ὁ δὲ γε Δαυίδ ὡς οὐκ οὐκ ἐβάλετο κατὰ νοῦν, παρὰ δόξαν τοῦ κινδύνου ῥυσθεῖς, ὄν ἔγγιον εἶχε προσέρποντα καὶ σχεδὸν οὐδ' ὅσα γόνυ κνήμης ἑαυτοῦ ἀφιστάμενον, ἀπρίξ μὲν καὶ πάλιν τῆς Ἡρακλείας ἔχεται· τοὺς δ' ἐν Βυζαντίῳ Λατίνους τῆς συμμαχου διαμειβόμενος στρατιᾶς σιτηγῶν πλοίων δεξιούται καταγωγαῖς καὶ κρέασιν ὑείοις ταριχηροῖς καὶ παρ' αὐτῶν αἰτεῖται δευτέραν σῦναρσιν καὶ λιπαρεῖ ταῖς πρὸς τὸν Λάσκαριν γραφαῖς καὶ σπονδαῖς τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις σφίσι κάκεινον ἐντάττεσθαι καὶ τὴν ὑπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαν χώραν ταῖς ὑπὸ Λατίνους ἐγκρίνεσθαι. ἀμέλει καὶ ὡς εἶχε ταῦτα καταθεμένους, πύθοιτο δὲ καὶ τὸν Λάσκαριν ἐκ Νικαίας εἰς Προῦσαν μετάραντα, ἐξ Ἡρακλείας πρόεισι καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ συμμαχικῷ γαυριῶν, ὅπερ ἐκ Βυζαντίου προσεχῶς ἐκείνῳ ἀπέσταλτο, γυμνασίαν τε καὶ ἀνάπειραν ἑαυτοῦ κάκεινων ποιούμενος, τὸν Σαγγάριον διαβάς ποταμὸν ὑπηκόους κωμοπόλεις τῷ Λάσκαρι ἔκειρε. καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας μὲν αὐτὸς ἐκεῖθεν μεθίσταται ὁμήρους ἐκ τῆς Πλουσιάδος δεξάμενος, ἐνίοις δὲ καὶ δεσμὰ περιθέμενος διὰ τὸ σφᾶς προσχωρήσαι τῷ Λάσκαρι.³⁹⁵

This episode is critical for understanding the scale of Byzantine political disintegration. In these two campaigns we understand both the appeal of David, and the danger the Grand Komnenoi posed to a nascent Nikaian state. We learn what their name when invoked might represent. Having changed tactics after his 1205 defeat, David was actively writing to the towns and lords of Anatolia with the aim of discrediting Laskaris, convincing them to reject his still uncrowned rule, and recognising David's right to govern the Anatolian territories of Byzantium on behalf

³⁹⁵ NC, CD, §640.13-641.40, adapted trans. from p.351.

of a Latin Emperor in Constantinople. The detail in the passage suggests that Choniates by 1211 was well informed. He knew the order of events, David's reactions, and demonstrates the order of arrival of information into Herakleia-Pontika. If these details are to be believed, it is likely that whatever encyclical letters David sent across Anatolia made mention of this and Choniates had it to hand when he was writing some years later. It is critical to highlight that in David's pursuit of subverting Laskarid rule he did achieve success. He not only won over, with a composite army, the towns of the Sangarios frontier but he had achieved something greater, he was now receiving military information detailing the movements of Laskaris' army. He was being informed at what time the city would be most vulnerable. That three-hundred Latin auxiliaries were sent ahead as a foraging party and were ambushed likely, given their location, on their return to Nikomedia, is almost an afterthought to the scale of what a subversive network within Nikaia might be able to accomplish.

The letters David received and wrote himself are lost to us. However, the evidence that they were sent is not. Almost unheard-of for a short-lived Byzantine successor-state, we possess a series of David's seals [Figs.8.1–3]. Each of the three variants is highly unusual, featuring a reverse with a dynastic claim to rulership. Each stresses David's Komnenian connection as either grandson to an emperor, or descendant of many. On the obverse of two of these seals of David are depictions of his homonym, the Prophet-King David, an invocation otherwise unknown in Byzantine sigillography.³⁹⁶ The first [Fig. 8.1] shows King David as a boy in noble but sub-imperial garb, wearing a rounded crown with *praependoulia*, and the second [Fig. 8.2] as an enthroned bearded King David with an imperial *stemma*. The Prophet-King David is not found as sole intercessor on any other Byzantine seal but was probably used here for its connection with monarchy. The only known usage, notably on the rise in the twelfth century, is of an *Anastasis* scene similar to ecclesiastical iconography where David and Solomon rise from a sarcophagus.³⁹⁷ Conspicuously, David's own brother utilised that scene in an *Anastasis* scene for his own seal, likely denoting ideas of the rebirth of kingship [Fig. 9].³⁹⁸ The two brothers therefore utilised the same imagery, but David altered it slightly so that his first seal pulled David from the background to the foreground and positioned a young beardless David in contemporary quasi-imperial clothing upon a curule. We gain little of Paphlagonian education from the craftsmen behind two of David's seals. Besides the highly unusual dedication to King David, they spelled their two dodecasyllabic couplets of intercessory prayer phonetically but syntactically incorrect, [Figs. 8.1 & 8.2] 'προφουτης,' not 'προφήτης.'

There is a probable link between David changing his seal from the boy-prophet David to adult King David and the orations circulating at the Nikaian court. Potentially, we might posit that the delight Choniates had in 1206 in ridiculing David to the Nikaian court in *Oration 14* prompted the iconographic change. Multiple times the Grand Komnenoi, who were also attracting exiled noblemen, were frequently described as 'seducers of the people.' Framed as youths, popular for their appearance and their bearing, they encourage licentiousness and treachery but shall frequently embarrass themselves by not (yet) being men. There are an unusually high number of sexually ambiguous slurs slung at this Pontic threat. In *Oration 14*,

³⁹⁶ King David is only present on the eleventh-century seals of the Rus since David Igorevich. Alexandre Soloviev, "Ἀρχων Ῥωσσίας." *Byzantion*, 31 (1961), p.241; Fedir Androshchuk, 'What does it mean to be Greek in Rus'? On identity and cultural transfer,' in: *Wanted: Byzantium. The Desire for a Lost Empire*, eds. Paul Stephenson, Ingrid Nilsson, (Uppsala: 2014), pp.66-67; Victoria Bulgakova, *Byzantinische Bleisiegel in Osteuropa: die Funde auf dem Territorium Altrusslands*, (Wiesbaden: 2004).

³⁹⁷ John Cotsonis, *The Religious Figural Imagery of Byzantine Lead Seals I*, (London: 2020), p.254.

³⁹⁸ Paris Gounaridis, 'Ένα μολυβδόβουλλο του Αλεξίου Α' Μεγαλοκομνηνού,' *Byzantine Symmeikta*, 13 (1998), pp.247-261.

Choniates pitted Laskaris – a military leader, ‘the equal of the deeds of a true David’ [προέκρινεν ὡς ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τὸν Δαυὶδ ἀληθίζοντα] – against the corrupting adolescent Grand Komnenoi who had seduced the Pontic regions where ‘the people there were inclined towards those youths, like upon like, devoted to those entirely ill-starred demonic men and the sheen of their smooth womanly bodies.’³⁹⁹ The insults against the Grand Komnenoi, that they were the Pontic ‘*meirakia*’ ‘youths’ or ‘lads,’ who came along as young, sexually wanton seducers of the people are meant to compare feebly in every aspect in comparison to the emperor.⁴⁰⁰ Laskaris need only combat their decadence, accept the crown, and become the new emperor. If word of these insults reached David, and we know that letters were being exchanged in both directions, then David may have altered his seal to depict an older King David in response to either this speech or the 1207 *selention*.

David’s other seal [Fig. 8.3] bearing St. Eleutherios, is more obscure in both patron and meaning. Anthony Bryer, who most recently published it, dated its striking to August 1207 and placed it at a local fair at Tarsia on the banks of the Sangarios river, connecting it with a movement of pig herders and a cult of Eleutherios of Tarsia.⁴⁰¹ However, this cult was most likely long since ended. That St. Eleutherios martyred at Tarsia was a *koubikoularios*, a civil dignitary. It conflicts with David’s representation of St. Eleutherios which was seemingly a portrayal of St. Eleutherios the *Hieromartyr*, the bishop from Illyria. While conflation of the two saints is possible, we should note that Bryer’s theory that places David in Tarsia is less convincing than our other evidence of a more general revived thirteenth-century interest in St. Eleutherios, related to events in 1204. Following restoration in 2015, we can now see much clearer the donor portrait in the Old Metropolitan Church of Veroia of one John Amarianos, likely a governor or commander in the armies of Epiros. Amarianos paid for a new cycle of frescoes for the church following Veroia’s capture between 1219–21. He then chose to depict himself offering the Metropolitan Church to St. Eleutherios, a young man in bishop’s robes [Fig. 10].⁴⁰² These two depictions of Eleutherios, within fifteen years of each other, attest to a thirteenth-century revival of an unusual and rarely depicted saint.⁴⁰³ Most likely playing upon onomastic themes of liberation and freedom (ἐλευθερία), quite what David was connoting with this, liberation from the illegitimacy of Laskaris or from obedience to a vacant/exiled church, is pure conjecture. When St. Eleutherios features again in later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century depictions in Venetian Crete he is always a bishop. We can therefore reject Bryer’s hypothesis and assert that there is little exclusively Pontic or Paphlagonian about Eleutherios.⁴⁰⁴ His resurgence was a subjective message of justice and liberty.

³⁹⁹ NC, *OE*, §14, p.139.13-16.

⁴⁰⁰ NC, *OE*, §14, p.139.15-16. ‘στύλβοντι τὸ σῶμα γυναικώδει λειότητι’. Interestingly enough, the connection with the biblical David who as a ‘lad’ or μεῖραξ when he led the Christian people was employed in a more positive way in an earlier oration by Niketas for Isaak Angelos who was barely 30 years old when he campaigned against the Bulgarian-Vlachs in October 1187. Simpson, *Choniates*, p.52.

⁴⁰¹ Bryer, ‘David Komnenos,’ pp.173-175.

⁴⁰² Eleutherios is known to us from Orthodox painting manuals as a ‘young bishop with incipient beard [Νέος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος ἱερομάρτυς].’ See Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ερμηνεία της Ζωγραφικῆς Τέχνης* (St. Petersburg: 1909), pp.156, 197.

⁴⁰³ Thanasis Papazotos, *Η Βέροια και οι Ναοί της (11ος-18ος αι.) Ιστορική και αρχαιολογική σπουδή των μνημείων της πόλης*, (Athens: 1994), pp.92-93.

⁴⁰⁴ Angeliki Lymberopoulou, *The Church of the Archangel Michael at Kavalariana. Art and Society on Fourteenth-century Venetian-Dominated Crete*, (London: 2006), p.49.



Figure 8.1 Obverse: ΔΑ[ΒΙ]Δ ΒΑΣ[ΙΛ]Ε[ΥΣ] Ο ΠΡΟΦΥΤΗΣ. Reverse: ΔΑ[ΒΙ]Δ ΡΑΣΙΛΕΥ ΑΣΦΑΛΕΣ ΓΡΑΦΩΝ ΚΥΡΟΣ ΔΑ[ΒΙ]Δ ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΥ ΡΑΣΙΛΕΥΓΟΝΟΥ ΓΙΝΘ. Transliteration: ὁ προφήτης Δαβὶδ βασιλεὺς ἀσφαλὲς γραφῶν κύρος Δαβὶδ Κομνηνοῦ βασιλεγγόνου γίνου. Translation: King David, be a secure guarantor of the documents of David Komnenos, descendant of emperors. DOSeals, 1951.31.5.1706.



Figure 8.2 Obverse: ΔΑ[ΒΙ]Δ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ Ο ΠΡΟΦΥΤΗΣ. Reverse: ΔΑ[ΒΙ]Δ ΡΑΣΙΛΕΥ ΑΣΦΑΛΕΣ ΓΡΑΦΩΝ ΚΥΡΟΣ ΔΑ[ΒΙ]Δ ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΥ ΡΑΣΙΛΕΥΓΟΝΟΥ ΓΙΝΘ. Transliteration: Δα[βι]δ βασιλεὺς ἀσφαλὲς γραφῶν κύρος Δα[βι]δ Κομνηνοῦ βασιλεγγόνου γίνου. Translation: King David, be the sure guardian of the correspondence of David Komnenos, descendant of the emperors. Zacos, I, no.2754 Roma Numismatics Limited Auction IX, 22 March 2015, Lot 954, Unsold (£1500 res).



Figure 8.3 Obverse: Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΟΣ. Reverse: +ΔΑ[ΒΙ]Δ ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΥ ΠΟΡΦΥΡΟΒΛΑΣΤΟΥ ΛΟΓΟΥΣ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΚΥΡΟΙ ΘΕΟΥ [ΘΥ]ΤΗΣ. Transliteration: Δα[βι]δ Κομνηνοῦ πορφυροβλάστου λόγους Ἐλευθέριος προσκυροῖ Θεοῦ θύτης. Translation: May Eleutherios, the priest of God, confirm the words of the bearer-of-the-purple-blossom David Komnenos. Seal at The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, SL0160. Image courtesy of the Henry Barber Trust.



*Figure 9 Figure 4 Obverse: Η ΑΝΑΤΑΚΙΣ Reverse: ΑΛΕΞΙΟΣ Ο ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΣ. Ο ΑΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ.
Translation: The Holy Resurrection. Alexios Komnenos. St. George. Seal of Alexios I Grand Komnenos.
Excavated from Trebizond citadel, now in Athens Numismatic Museum, BE 726/1998.*



Figure 10. Old Metropolitan Church in Veroia, Greece. John Amarianos as donor (l.) with St. Eleutherios (r). Inscription: Δέησις τοῦ δοῦλου | τοῦ Ἰω(άννου) τοῦ Ἀμαρι|νοῦ. Ο ἅγιος | Ἐλευθέριος. Photo taken by author May 23, 2024.

2.4. Reshaping the Criteria of a Roman *Ethnos* in Nikaia (1205–1214)

The process of rebuilding a Roman Empire in Nikaia mutated political and religious ideologies. The consequences of ideological realignments in the immediate years after 1204 are felt throughout the entire period of exile. To combat other Anatolian lordships, singular stress is placed on shared characteristics between Anatolians and Constantinopolitans as a means of establishing continuity and common ground. They include the previously seen terms *homogeneis* but foremostly *homoglottoi*.⁴⁰⁵ Only one attempt has been made to understand the context of these terms, and that was with an eye towards the Palaiologan restoration.⁴⁰⁶ That methodology's broad approach to two centuries of discussion and lack of contextualisation of material makes its conclusions problematic.

Between 1204 and 1214 several enemies surrounding the Nikaian state attempted to subvert its authority. David Grand Komnenos in Paphlagonia is only one of four rivals mentioned in textual sources. There were three lesser ones: Theodore Mangaphas notably of mixed Byzantine-Turkish descent in Philadelpheia, Sabbas Asidenos in Miletos in the Meander Valley, and Manuel Maurozomes Komnenos in Laodikeia. Laskaris as the champion of a new Israel must defeat these rivals. All his enemies posed challenges and all but Asidenos feature in Choniates' *Oration 14* of 1206. Three figures from the Old Testament were presented as the enemies of a chosen Christian Roman state and its recreation. Respectively, Bel an idolatrous god [Daniel 14: 1-22], Dagon the pagan god of pre-Judaic Palestine [1 Samuel], and Ahithophel, the betrayer who defected from King David to his rebel son, becoming the first suicide [II Samuel 15:31–37; 16:20–17:23]. The first two were defeated and/or subjugated by the end of 1206 by Laskaris while Maurozomes, our Ahithophel, continued to fight for several years. Laskaris' ongoing conflict with Maurozomes and David Komnenos is commented upon further in the *Selektion* Easter oration of 1208.⁴⁰⁷

Laskaris' success in subordinating these regions occurred in fits and starts, and not without significant setbacks. He had inherited the disunity of Byzantium in 1204, complete with provincial separatist tendencies amongst local elites, some of which were reflected in the *Partitio Romaniae* confirming which regions had ceased paying imperial taxation by 1203.⁴⁰⁸ The risk of cities and independent lordships aligning with Latins, Turks, or Armenians through marriage and titles was very real. Therefore, against these challenges there was a need to forge anew a Roman Nikaian group identity, one that certainly utilised previous bonds of kinship, birthplace, and education, but also one that in the face of foreign conquest and collaboration had to be broader than the exclusivism of the previous century. That process, from transplanted 'Constantinopolitan Exclusivism' to a larger but strictly Greek Anatolian Orthodox

⁴⁰⁵ NC, *OE*, §14, pp.132.6, 137.7.

⁴⁰⁶ Pantelis Papageorgiou, 'Offspring of Vipers: the attitude of the 'eastern' literati towards their 'ὁμογενεῖς' of the 'west' under the new socio-political conditions of the late Byzantine period,' *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 6 (2020), pp.85-114.

⁴⁰⁷ Maurozomes was also closely allied with the Seljuk Sultan Kay-Khusraw I and cannot have been a true latter Ahithophel [i.e. an advisor and ally to the false David] but rather was just being considered a traitor. Manuel Maurozomes was a grandson of Manuel I Komnenos, his father Theodore Maurozomes had married an illegitimate daughter fathered by Emperor Manuel on Theodora Vatatzina. He had every right then to call himself Manuel Komnenos Maurozomes and by his marrying his daughter to Kay-Khusraw was granting to the Seljuks the prestige of Emperor Manuel's Komnenian bloodline; Claude Cahen, *The Formation of Turkey, The Seljukid Sultanate of Rūm: Eleventh to Fourteenth Century*, (London: 2001), p.45.

⁴⁰⁸ Teresa Shawcross, 'The Lost Generation (c.1204-c.1222): Political Allegiance and Local Interests under the Impact of the Fourth Crusade,' *Identities and Allegiances*, pp.11-12; Oikonomides, 'La décomposition de l'empire byzantine,' p.15.

Romanness, can be sequenced. As the paradigms of in-groups and out-groups continued, the rhetorical *panspermia* opposing a chosen *ethnos* began to shift.

2.5. The *Eupatrides*

Niketas Choniates' texts have an important function for the purposes of this thesis' exploration of ethnicity and its manipulation. This is best evidenced by his deployment of criteria of ethnic commonality and distinction. Choniates posits an argument in his orations and in the revised latter stages of the *CD* of who is to blame for its collapse and what should, but did not currently, unite Byzantine society. He stresses in his first oration to Laskaris how he should address other Greek Anatolian populations. In the narrative opening to *Oration 14* Niketas leans upon the common ground shared between exiled Constantinopolitans. Appealing to Laskaris on a fraternal basis, with a view to their common history and narrating recent events they had both experienced, he wrote:

‘Since Roman affairs have been overthrown and a western *panspermia* of *ethne* has overcome the very best and most beautiful of cities, **all we others** of the old aristocracy have been scattered to the winds elsewhere. They ran to save their lives and while some have emigrated out of the *patris* [Constantinople], others remained within it. They [other Byzantines] did not bring aid to the fatherland but rather the *patris* having been invaded... willingly submitted to the rulers of *ethne* and disgracefully surrendered their freedom for the pleasures of bread and the indulgence of wine.

‘τῶν δὲ πραγμάτων ἄλλως ῥιφέντων καὶ πανσπερμίας ἐθνῶν ἐσπερίας χειρωσαμένης τὴν πρωτίστην καὶ καλλίστην τῶν πόλεων καὶ ἄλλων ἄλλη διασκεδασθέντων τῶν ἐς ἡμᾶς εὐπατριδῶν καὶ πάντων τὸν περὶ ψυχῆς τρεχόντων καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀπαναστάντων, τῶν δὲ μεινάντων μὲν ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος, οὐκ ἐπαμυνάντων δὲ τῇ πατρίδι... οἷς ἐκόντες τοῖς κρατοῦσιν ὑπέκυπτον ἔθνεσι καὶ τρύφους ἄρτου καὶ κοτυλαίου κεράσματος τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἀγεννῶς ἀπεδίδοντο.’⁴⁰⁹

Both Choniates and Laskaris had served under Alexios III in Constantinople. However, Niketas had fallen hardest. His reputation as Grand Logothete and senior member of the civil service for the Angeloi emperors were blots on his record. He had lost his position with the restoration of the blind Isaak II and Latin-supported Alexios IV in January 1204. With the Latins outside the walls, large sections of the city burned in two catastrophic fires, those last two months had made plain that in those months of effective siege, Byzantine-Latin collaboration had utterly failed as a viable imperial policy. Regardless, despite the strongly anti-Latin imagery throughout *Oration 14*, it is worth remembering then that throughout 1206 Choniates had tried precisely what he condemned others of doing and futilely sought employment under the Latin regime.

Choniates frames himself as an aristocrat who shares with Laskaris a *patris*, lost to the ‘western *panspermia* of nations.’ The last line of the oration makes this explicit, when he imagines the speech not as his own words but as the words of a personified Constantinople itself: ‘Wailing and cut-off, these things the wet-nursing city and common *patris* of the Romans says to you, oh emperor.’⁴¹⁰ The former logothete’s positioning of himself as a peer runs somewhat counter

⁴⁰⁹ NC, *OE*, §14, p.130.29-131.4.

⁴¹⁰ NC, *OE*, §14, p.147.16-20, ‘Ταῦτα ἡ γαλοῦχος σοι πόλις καὶ κοινὴ τῶν Ῥωμαίων πατρίς οἰμώζουσα καὶ κοπτομένη φησί, βασιλεῦ· ὁ δὲ τῶν παρακλήσεων Κύριος κλύει μὲν τῶν ταύτης ὀλοολυγμῶν, εἶη δὲ καὶ τὸ σὸν τιθεὶς κράτος εὐθυμον πολυχρόνιον.’

to the Constantinopolitan society discussed in section one. Choniates' depiction of himself as one of these elite Romans offers a different perspective, but a comparable setting, to Mesarites' speech. Choniates himself, as per his patronymic, was not from Constantinople but Chonai. Consequently, at times of mass representation the *Chronike Diegesis* employed the concept of multiple *patris*, one private and, as seen here in the oration, a 'common' *patris* of Constantinople which Choniates could emphasise that he too shared in.⁴¹¹ There was also a less frequently seen conception of a common '*patris* of the Romans' as a term to refer to all Byzantine territory either currently or formerly subject to Constantinople. That use of the term only appears twice, once in an early chapter of Choniates' *Chronike* as a criticism of Andronikos Komnenos and again at the end of *Oration 14*, given above.⁴¹²

However, we could reason that Choniates' assumption of an exchanged *patris* in 1205 ran counter to Constantinopolitan thought in 1200. When Mesarites in 1200 had imagined an exclusive community of co-believers limited to the native-born to the city of Constantinople, the *authigeneis*, he set a firm boundary for his distinction. For Choniates, his primary concern is with the *eupatrides*, driven from Constantinople the Queen of Cities. We should ask therefore, would Mesarites have considered Choniates' as one of the *authigeneis*? Or, would Choniates' well-known pro-Latin policies have made him precisely the sort of target Mesarites' *Diegesis* took aim at, those who as provincial 'foreigners' to the city had invited in the alloglot foreign *genos* (ἀλλόγλωστον γένος)?⁴¹³ Choniates' *eupatrides* then were distinct from Mesarites' 'indigenous' *authigeneis* community, as it included the elites of the city who were in imperial service and whose office, career and education had 'ennobled' them, where birth had not. As Choniates imagined the *eupatrides* flocking to Laskaris, they were therefore a broader group, men and women who served the imperial regime from a number of different *patrides*. Rhetorical *topoi* made these *eupatrides* the new Judeans, and the first tribe of Israel to acknowledge him as emperor.⁴¹⁴ Other tribes, representing their own *patris* but united by a common one, would soon follow suit.

2.6. Anatolian Homoglotts

The community projected in Choniates' *Oration*s made shared Hellenic language a crucial component to rebuilding the empire and a diving line against Latin and Turkish conquerors. It was through language and verbalising his authority that Laskaris was subjugating and unifying the cities of Anatolia. In the final pages of his *Chronike Diegesis* Choniates, even displaced and disillusioned, was advocating for loyalty along linguistic lines.⁴¹⁵ Despite the bluntness of this dichotomy and that it had no reality in the state before 1204, by summer 1205 Laskaris had achieved a compromised control over three cities through mediating dialogue. The precedent established by his entry to Nikaia was continued and would be a frequent aspect of Laskaris' early career. With minimal dynastic right, it is quite probable that Theodore Laskaris was poorly known to Anatolian populations before this. He appears to have achieved supremacy by signalling something of a change in the relationship between imperial power and the majority Greek-speaking cities by representing a new insistence on homoglotts' unity.

⁴¹¹ Chonai where it appeared was usually qualified as 'my' *patris*. See NC, CD, §178 'τὴν ἐμοῦ τοῦ συγγραφέως πατρίδα', §422 'εἰς τὴν ἐν ταῖς ἐμαῖς Χώναις,' §638 'ἡ ἐμοῦ τοῦ συγγραφέως Νικήτα πατρίς αἱ Χῶναι.'

⁴¹² NC, CD, §228.28 'aid for the common *patris*' [τῆς κοινῆς πατρίδος ὠφέλιμον]; OE, §14, p.147.16.

⁴¹³ Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, §21.23-26; NC, OE, 16.175.30-34; Chrissis, 'Orations of Niketas Choniates,'.

⁴¹⁴ NC, OE, §14, p.130.33-35; Simpson, *Choniates*, p.76.

⁴¹⁵ NC, CD, §602, trans. Magoulias, p.331. 'It was an evil thing to be in service to a Latin who in speech is unintelligible to a Hellene,' [εἰ καὶ πονηρὸν ἐς θεραπείαν χρῆμα Λατῖνος, φωνὴ ἀσύμφωνος Ἑλλησι].

Terms are repeatedly used with reference to the strategies Laskaris employed to unite the Anatolian Cities and ‘alter their opinions’ [κατ’ ἐκείνου τὰς γνώμας μεταθεμένους].⁴¹⁶

‘Rivals become allies, opponents become protectors, and yesterday’s enemies are today’s marching leaders. Oh, from this battle is birthed peace! Oh, that strife that has brought forth friendship and has unified into one the divided minds.

οἱ ἀντίμαχοι σύμμαχοι, ὑπερασπισταὶ οἱ ἀντίπαλοι, καὶ τῶν ὁδῶν ἡγήτορες σήμερον οἱ χθὲς πολεμήτορες. ὦ μάχης ἐκείνης εἰρήνην μαιευσαμένης· ὦ νείκους ὠδινήσαντος φιλίαν καὶ συνάψαντος εἰς ἓν τὰ διεστῶτα φρονήματα.’⁴¹⁷

What Choniates in *Oration 14* knew of Laskaris’ political strategies from afar would have depended on word of mouth and news sent through letters. While praise for an emperor’s peaceful activities typologically follows warfare as part of the genre of imperial orations we must make allowances that it is evident that Laskaris’ achievements in battle were in 1205 matched or even exceeded by those of bloodless subjugation.⁴¹⁸ The paradigm could equally be inverted, and we should note the strong condemnation levelled at Laskaris’ other rival in *Oration 14*, Manuel Maurozomes Komnenos, who had allied with the Turks against Nikaia.

‘[Maurozomes] reckoned to be brave only against *his fellow citizens*; he has cut down the homoglotts who did not agree with him, as if they were foreigners [ἀλλόφυλον].

ὁ κατὰ μόνων τῶν οἰκείων εἰδὼς ἀνδρίζεσθαι ἔκειρε τὸ μὴ συμφρονοῦν ὁμόγλωττον ὡς ἀλλόφυλον.’⁴¹⁹

The implication of this judgement was that it was the time for every homoglott to be fighting the foreign invasion as a concerted force of those unified by the criteria that united an idealised Byzantine Empire, of homogenous religion and Greek language. By extension Maurozomes was in his actions betraying this wider community to which he should belong. However, the debate over a national identity in the lands of the former *Romanía* is far from universally established in scholarship.

2.7. The Nikaian Holy War?

We cannot confirm if further subversive letters were sent by David Grand Komnenos to the Anatolian *archontes* after 1206, but we do know how they were countered. At a synod convened between 1208–1210, the lingering subversion of Grand Komnenoi influence was directly opposed through the leadership of Michael IV Autoreianos (1208–14), the first Ecumenical Patriarch installed in Nikaia. When John Kamateros died in May 1206, the patriarchate had remained vacant for two years until an appeal from Mesarites on behalf of the Constantinopolitans reached Laskaris, beseeching him as the proclaimed Roman Emperor, to

⁴¹⁶ NC, *OE*, §14, p.144.14.9.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §14, p.144.14.9-14.

⁴¹⁸ Menander Rhetor, *Basilikos Logos*, pp.84-85. On imperial orations in this period see Ida Toth, *Imperial Orations in Late Byzantium (1261-1453)*, (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford: 2003), especially for the role of peace-making, pp.17-18. Toth observed the increased emphasis on military valour in Komnenian-era orations to continue under the Angeloi and Palaiologoi, pp.27-28, 43-44.

⁴¹⁹ NC, *OE*, §14, p.137.5-7.

find amongst Nikaia's ad hoc synod of displaced or Anatolian-based bishops a successor.⁴²⁰ The election on the 20th March 1208 for Kamateros' successor installed Michael Autoreianos, the former *megas sakellarios* in Hagia Sophia, as first Nikaian-Constantinopolitan Patriarch.⁴²¹

From Autoreianos we possess a series of synodals acts, five of which were published by Oikonomides in 1967.⁴²² These five acts circulated as a series of missives to the sees of Anatolia compiled from multiple hands around fifty years later in a manuscript owned and signed in a *monocondyla* by Theodore Skoutariotes, historian and Metropolitan of Kyzikos (1277–1283).⁴²³ In content and character they vary between highly conservative and fundamentally radical, at odds with Orthodox doctrine. Autoreianos, whose first deed was to crown Laskaris in Easter 1208 in the first coronation outside Constantinople in centuries, bound the offices of emperor and patriarch to an unusually tight degree. Of Autoreianos' acts known between 1208–1210, the three most important are; firstly, a declaration of 'indulgence' for remission of sins of all soldiers who die in Laskaris' wars [Ἐνταῦθα τοῖς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ συγχωρεῖ];⁴²⁴ secondly, a letter of forgiveness of sins for Laskaris personally [Ὡδε συγχωρεῖ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ].⁴²⁵ Finally, in April 1208 a *homologia* oath of loyalty to Laskaris and his family signed by all present archbishops and circulated across Anatolia to those who were absent.⁴²⁶

The first two acts of Autoreianos were hugely radical as they essentially adopted Crusader theology. The first act was addressed to 'the military, the household, and all the subjects and all the soldiers of the emperor.'⁴²⁷

'Having received from Him the great gift of his grace, we absolve you, the defenders of the people of God, for your sins committed in life; those who may meet death bearing the brunt of battle for the sake of the *patrīdes* and on the behalf of the common salvation and liberation of the people.

Παρ' οὗ ἡμεῖς, τὴν μεγάλην δωρεὰν τῆς αὐτοῦ δεξάμενοι χάριτος, συγχωροῦμεν ὑμῖν, τοῖς ὑπερμαχοῦσι τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὰ ἐν τῷ βίῳ πεπλημμελεμένα ὑμῖν, ὅσοις τῶν πατρίδων προκινδυνεύουσι <καὶ> τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ λυτρώσεως ἐπισυμβαίη καὶ θάνατος.'⁴²⁸

It is quite surprising that the only definitive example of Byzantium engaging in qualified Holy War has received so little attention in scholarship. This is due to its claims being essentially

⁴²⁰ Mesarites, *Neue Quellen II*: 5, 202, 2, 198. The Mesaritai brothers represented the Orthodox community in these negotiations, which continued their contradictory ethnic terminology. The Constantinopolitans are the 'Romaic congregation,' yet the Latins are the 'Romaioi.'

⁴²¹ Giarenis, *H Συγκρότηση*, p.245.

⁴²² Oikonomides, 'Cinq actes inédits du patriarche Michel Autôreianos,' pp.113-45.

⁴²³ Raimondo Tocci, 'Bemerkungen zur Hand des Theodoros Skutariotes,' *BZ*, 99 (2006), p. 127-144.

⁴²⁴ Oikonomides, 'Cinq actes,' §2, pp.117-119; *Regestes*, §1205.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, §3, p.120; *Regestes*, §1206. This letter makes reference to the general indulgence offered to the army.

⁴²⁶ Oikonomides, 'Cinq actes,' §4, pp.122-124; *Regestes*, §1207, 'Τόμος ἐνυπόγραφος γεγονώς παρὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ πατριάρχου κῦρ Μιχαὴλ καὶ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸν πάντων ἀρχιερέων εἰς τὸ βασιλεῖς ὁμολογεῖν τὸν Λάσκαριν κῦρ Θεόδωρον καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ κῦρ Νικόλαον καὶ δέσποιναν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ Ἄνναν.'

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, §2, p.117. Τοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς κατ' αὐτὸν μεγάλης συνόδου πρὸς τὸ στρατιωτικὸν καὶ συγγενές καὶ οἰκεῖον τῷ βασιλεῖ, μᾶλλον δὲ εἰς τοὺς ὑπηκόους τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ στρατιώτας ἅπαντας.; On 'hypekooi' see Stouraitis, 'What did it mean to be Roman,' pp.46-48.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, §2, p.119.70-75.

uncorroborated by other sources.⁴²⁹ No narrative source mentions Autoreianos' proclamation. With the exception of a document within the fifteenth-century manuscript *Athonite Dionysios 219 f.141v* recording that Patriarch Autoreianos forgave all sins in a general absolution, these proclamations which claim circulation across Anatolia are ignored and largely forgotten.⁴³⁰ Questions should equally be asked why Skoutariotes alone chose to keep such uncanonical documents. Despite previous flirtations by emperors in the seventh and tenth century, there had never been a prior Byzantine 'indulgence' as the Orthodox Church had always rejected the idea.⁴³¹ Soldiers were, by the canonical law of St. Basil of Caesarea, required to abstain from communion for three years after killing and this had been employed in arguments from the ninth through thirteenth century against both emperors' attempts at blessing soldiery and the Catholic Church's creation of the Crusading movement.⁴³² The sole recent engagements with Autoreianos' innovations by Dimiter Angelov and Savvas Kyriakidis theorised that the proclamation stemmed from the rapid recruitment of Western mercenaries, that Autoreianos sought to rebalance papal prohibitions against serving Orthodox powers.⁴³³ However, there is little reason to believe this. The act's opening address to the household of the emperor as 'Ἄνδρες Ῥωμαῖοι'⁴³⁴ amidst other traditional military invocations would seem to exclude a solely foreign minority contingent and secondly, Autoreianos' subsequent document informed the emperor that he had sent the first with the 'πανσέβαστος ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης,' a title normally invested upon a close relative serving as steward.⁴³⁵ Given that Autoreianos' second document made a point of forgiving the emperor's own sins, and that he was remembered for this general absolution in the fifteenth century, we remain convinced that the intended target was the Nikaian soldiery *en masse*.

The motivation behind such religious innovation would appear to address some of the issues present in Constantinopolitan society which Laskaris was addressing in Nikaia. He was engaging with the cities diplomatically, as we know from *Oration 14*, to support his claim to restore a sanctified monarchy. He did so by sharpening divisions between Catholics and Orthodox and by making them monolithic, emphasising the need for unity, and most of all a call for an end to polyarchy.⁴³⁶ The plea that followed this then addressed the soldiery emphasising their descent from a singular *genos* hailing from multiple *patrides*.

⁴²⁹ For example, Autoreianos' acts are entirely missing from the volume, *Byzantine War Ideology Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion*, ed. Johannes Koder, Yannis Stouraitis, (Vienna: 2012); while Tia Kolbaba discussed Autoreianos exceedingly briefly, describing his acts as 'Crusader and Jihad inspired,' in: 'Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in The Byzantine Empire,' *Byzantion*, 68 (1998), pp.194-221, p.207n.46; Yannis Stouraitis treats it as an aberration but acknowledges its unprecedented nature in 'Jihad and Crusade: Byzantine Positions towards the Notions of 'Holy War,'" *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 21.1 (2011), pp.11-63, at p.58.; Angeliki Laiou treated it simply as an interesting contrary footnote in, 'On Just War in Byzantium,' in: *To Ellēnikōn: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis*, ed. Jean Longnon, (New York: 1993), p.172n.2; eadem., 'The Just War of Eastern Christians and the Holy War of the Crusaders,' in: *The Ethics of War: Shared problems In Different Traditions*, eds. Richard Sorabji, David Rodin, (Ashgate: 2006), p.41; Giarenis, 'Ο Δαβίδ Κομνηνός,' p.185.

⁴³⁰ *Regestes*, §1215. F.142r. Many thanks to Matthieu Cassin for scans of this manuscript.

⁴³¹ See the account of John Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, §274, trans. p.263; Kolbaba, 'Fighting for Christianity,' p.205.

⁴³² This includes Constantine Stilbes' most recent *List of Errors*, see p.73 para. 60. Traditional Byzantine rejection of soldier martyrdom employs St. Basil's Canons 3 and 13; Nicolas Oikonomides, 'The concept of 'holy war' and two tenth-century Byzantine ivories,' in: *Peace and War in Byzantium*, ed. Timothy Miller, (Washington D.C.: 1995), pp.62-86; Kolbaba, 'Fighting for Christianity.'

⁴³³ Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, p.100; Savvas Kyriakidis, 'Crusaders and mercenaries: the west-European soldiers of the Laskarids of Nikaia (1204-1258),' *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 29.2 (2014), pp.139-153.

⁴³⁴ Oikonomides, 'Cinq actes,' §1, p.117.1.

⁴³⁵ Angold, *Exile*, pp.148, 152.

⁴³⁶ Oikonomides, 'Cinq actes,' §2, p.118.39, 'πάντως τὸ τῆς πολυαρχίας ἄτακτον ἀναιρῶν.'

‘For the liberty and the glory of our *genos*, and the honour and protection of our fathers, wives, and children... Rise up, emboldened by God and take up the ancient dignity, and do not allow the nobility of the *patrīdes* that bore you to be overthrown.

τοῦτο δὲ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐλευθερίας τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους καὶ εὐδοξίας καὶ πατέρων καὶ γυναικῶν καὶ τέκνων τιμῆς καὶ συστάσεως... καὶ διανάστητε θαρροῦντες Θεῷ καὶ ἀναλάβετε τὰ πρῶτα φρονήματα, καὶ τὴν εὐγένειαν τῶν ἐνεγκουσῶν ὑμᾶς πατρίδων καταρριφῆναι μὴ καταδέξῃσθε.⁴³⁷

Attention should be paid to the insistence by Autoreianos in two passages on a singular people from multiple homelands and how distinct this is from the Constantinopolitan rhetoric pre-1204. It demonstrates a transition away from Constantinopolitan Exclusivism began very early as it was recognised how important it was to encourage and foster conceptions of group homelands. It is striking how insistent Nikaian rhetoric was on defending ‘the faith handed down to you by your father,’ and fighting for ‘the paternal *patrīdes*’ across multiple Nikaian sources. The theme is particularly prevalent during the patriarchate of Germanos II. Germanos’ patriarchate for which we are better informed than the interceding incumbencies, describes his actions between 1204 and his elevation to patriarch in 1222 and his time in rural Anatolia instructing the people that they would not ‘betray the religion of their birthplace and the customs of their fathers.’⁴³⁸ These were messages confirming an expanded network of kinship that bound them to a shared and inherited territorial land, for performative acts of loyalty in service of its redemption, and an insistence on shared customs against an enemy.⁴³⁹ The reach of this Nikaian policy and their ability to turn social practice into social experience and foster this group identity born of commonality must rely on what little we can reconstruct of post-1204 communication between institutional centres. A separate letter by Germanos to the Orthodox congregations in Constantinople in 1222 informs us how the church was communicating with parishes both within and without Latin rule. Germanos writes:

‘Our mediocrity exhorts you in the Lord, Orthodox Christians in Constantinople, to distribute the present letter of my mediocrity to all the churches, and to impose on these the injunction that every Sunday and on other festive occasions it be read out for the strengthening of the Orthodox people.’⁴⁴⁰

Spreading Germanos’ message was a network of officials from great to small. What little we know of lines of communications between towns, villages, and urban centres, is that relationships were normally centred on elder representatives [πρεσβύτεροι] nominated by the smaller polity to engage with government officials and relay messages.⁴⁴¹ Allowing for some disruptions due to war and instability it was through these secular and ecclesiastical links that Autoreianos’ message fifteen years earlier would have likely travelled.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., §2, p.117.9-11, 16-18.

⁴³⁸ Lagopates, §1, p.216.14-15, trans. Angold, *Germanos II*, p.20, 87 ‘μήτε τῆς ἐνεγκαμένης αὐτοῦς τὴν εὐσέβειαν προδιδόναι καὶ ἔθῃ τὰ πάτρια.’

⁴³⁹ For such reasons, that Anthony Smith, the father of ethno-symbolism, regarded some Late Byzantine dialogues as heavily ethnicizing, creating a narrative of the ‘nation’ or *ethnos*. See Smith, *Origins of Nations*, p.55.

⁴⁴⁰ Gerard Ficker, *Die Phundagiagiten: ein Beitrag zur Ketzergeschichte des byzantinischen Mittelalters*, (Leipzig: 1908), p.125, trans. Angold, *Germanos II*, p.117.

⁴⁴¹ Dimitris Krallis, ‘Popular Political Agency in Byzantium’s villages and towns,’ *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 28 (2018), pp.11-48.

Autoreianos' third act was to solidify these notions of paternity and homeland liberation with an oath of *homologia* taken in April 1208.⁴⁴² In 1171 Emperor Manuel had set a precedent of asking his court to swear a near identical *homologia*, to his two-year-old son Alexios II. The oath, which survives in full lacking only a list of signatories, called upon a broad range of those present to recognise and swear [ὁμολογῶ] their commitment to Manuel's son, empress-wife, daughter, and any other legal offspring, should Alexios predecease.⁴⁴³ The absolute failure of this document to protect the imperial heirs notwithstanding, its formula and intent were long-lasting. We are unaware of any similar oaths taken under Andronikos or the Angeloi but Manuel's document was certainly the archetype for the Nikaian *homologia* taken by all Nikaian bishops between 1208 and 1210.

Autoreianos, surely at the direction of Laskaris, promulgated a civic identity that required oaths from the civic office, military, and Roman subjects in both cities and villages.⁴⁴⁴ The action, surely more encompassing than anything Manuel had ever attempted, promulgated a civic Roman identity that was defined by oaths to the emperor and his family which contained a declaration that all who did not recognise Laskaris were enemies of the mighty and holy empire of the Romans, and the kingdom of God. It is here that we have the strongest condemnation against the leaders of other hellenophone homolot polities.

‘All those present shall sign . . . they shall not confer nor speak against you . . . let us not recognise any other whomever he may be, even if he be Roman or foreign [ἔθνικός], crowned or uncrowned, nor even these grandsons of Lord Andronikos [David and Alexios Grand Komnenos.

[...] It has been decided that absent metropolitans and archbishops, wherever they may be, must sign this *tomos*, as well as the patriarchal archons. The participants in the great synod will take care that the bishops subject to them act according to our decision.

τομογραφοῦμεν τὰ παρόντα... καὶ οὐ μὴ φρονήσωμεν ἢ μελετήσωμεν, ποτὲ κατὰ σοῦ, ἢ τοῦ σώματός σου ἢ τῆς βασιλείας σου, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἑτέρῳ τινί, ἐχθρῷ καὶ πολεμίῳ τῆς βασιλείας σου, συμφρονήσωμεν, ὅποιος ἂν καὶ εἴη οὗτος, Ῥωμαῖος ἢ ἔθνικός, ἐστεμμένους καὶ μὴ τοιοῦτος, ἢ καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἐγγονοὶ τοῦ κῦρ Ἀνδρονίκου.

[...] Τετύπεται δὲ καὶ τοῦς ὅπουδῆποτε ὄντας τῶν μητροπολιτῶν τε καὶ ἀρχιεπισκόπων, διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐνταῦθα παρεῖναι νῦν, ὑπογράψαι ἐν τῷ παρόντι τόμῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς θεοφιλεστάτους πατριαρχικοὺς ἄρχοντας. Μελήσει μέντοι τοῖς συνέδροις ἡμῶν, τοῖς τῆς μεγάλης συνόδου καὶ τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτοῦς θεοφιλεστάτους ἐπισκόπους παρασκευάσαι ποιῆσαι κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐπίκρισιν.⁴⁴⁵

Due to Andronikos' grandsons being the only named opponents of the empire in the document, we may safely confirm that the Nikaian *homologia* was necessitated by the challenge of David Komnenos. The oath, which surely sought to address moments of betrayal such as during the 1206 campaign sought to address any future recognition of these 'uncrowned.' Many questions remain unanswered regarding the Orthodox venture into Holy War and civic oaths led by

⁴⁴² On oath-taking in the later empire see Savvas Kyriakidis, 'The Use of Oaths in the Conspiracies and Revolts against Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328),' *JÖB*, 71 (2021), pp.269-284.

⁴⁴³ Medvedev, 'Η συνοδική απόφαση,' pp.229-238.

⁴⁴⁴ Oikonomides, 'Cinq actes,' §4, p.123.9-11, 'τὸ πολιτικόν τε ἅπαν καὶ τὸ στρατιωτικόν καὶ τοὺς κατὰ τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν <τὴν> δὲ ἐπικράτειαν τῶν τε πόλεων καὶ χωρῶν οἰκίτορας'.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, §4, p.123.27-36, p.124.59-65.

Michael Autoreianos. By the time of his death, the patriarch had become deeply unpopular, supposedly for his reopening of the ‘The Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28) controversy, an issue settled unsatisfactorily by Manuel I from 1166-1170 which allowed for hierarchy within the Trinity.⁴⁴⁶ A position of ultra-Orthodoxy, rejecting imperial interference in church doctrine, only a few years after that leader had taken several truly uncanonical steps in service of imperial authority might also suggest who was really behind the unorthodoxy of the early Nikaian Church.

The details of David’s career subverting Laskaris after 1208 are mostly tangential. Vanishing from both Nikaian and Trapezuntine narrative sources David is not mentioned again, excepting his potential Vatopedi obituary. By 1212 when David had fallen, the independence of his Paphlagonian domain was near an end. Mesarites, on return from a visit to Constantinople reported that Alexios had suffered a catastrophic defeat in Paphlagonia, likely to the Seljuks, and half of Paphlagonia was annexed without major conflict in 1214. It seems likely that he had suffered *damnatio memoriae* from which we cannot return him. Theories proposed for why Alexios was directly administering his brother’s territory have been offered. David may have been tonsured or blinded by his brother for his pro-Latin tendencies or as might seem equally possible, he had suffered a popular uprising from a Paphlagonian population who after 1208 had been placed outside the sworn boundaries of communion and opposed by every single bishop of Anatolia. We cannot know. Potentially there was a rewarding of the Paphlagonian church when the see of Pontic-Herakleia, David’s capital, was shortly thereafter raised to metropolitan rank but the evidence is hardly conclusive.⁴⁴⁷ The diatribes against the Paphlagonians were ended, its population enrolled in the Nikaian army, and the identity of the Nikaian emperor as a Komnenos-Laskaris maintained.⁴⁴⁸

What is more critical are the elements shared between Choniates’ *Oration 14*, and the acts of Autoreianos. Choniates, as restored court orator, records early Nikaian ideology. In the 1205/6 oration, Choniates had posited the idea that those homoglot populations who rejected Laskaris, notably Paphlagonians, should be treated as a separate and disobedient latter-day tribe of Israel. Consequently, unless they accepted unification they should be denied communion. In describing the war between Laskaris and David in 1207, in *Oration 13*, the language of rebuilding a composite New Israel through negotiated subjugation reappears. *Oration 13* once more asserted to the Easter-time court that Laskaris was the real David:

‘He [David] entered firstly upon that tribe of Judah and then all of Israel. My [Christ’s] kingdom is also here, residing upon the eastern Roman cities, and shall just as the first-born David, mightiest of the kingdoms of the earth, later prevail over all those other tribes and possess the promised land of Zion.

ὥς ἐκεῖνος τῆς Ἰούδα πρώτως ἐπέβη φυλῆς, εἶτα καὶ τοῦ παντὸς Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ ἡ βασιλεία μου ἐς δεῦρο τῶν πρὸς ἀκτῖνα Ῥωμαϊκῶν ὑπεριζάνουσα πόλεων πέποιθεν ὡς ὁ πρωτότοκον θέμενος τὸν Δαυίδ, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσι τῆς γῆς, καὶ

⁴⁴⁶ Manuel had settled the issue controversially with his *Ekthesis* and inscribed 1166 Edict in Hagia Sophia, praising his own divine wisdom. Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel*, pp.287-291; Mesarites, *Fourth Lenten Sermon*, §1-11 trans. Angold, pp.242-246, 251-261; Cyril Mango, ‘The Conciliar Edict of 1166,’ *DOP*, 17 (1963), pp.313-330.

⁴⁴⁷ Jean Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae, Géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire byzantine*, I (Paris: 1981), p.164.

⁴⁴⁸ For Paphlagonians in the Nikaian army see Akropolites, §71, trans. Macrides, p.330.

προσεπιδοὺς ὕστερον ἐκείνω τὴν τῶν ἐτέρων φυλῶν κληρούχησιν καὶ τῆς Σιών τὴν κατάσχεσιν.⁴⁴⁹

Comparing the two speeches, the motif of truth vs falsehood appears in both *Orations 13* and *14*. It deviates significantly therefore from the model of Meander Rhetor. Just as Choniates speaks from afar, so too does he imagine Laskaris. The use of distance in the letter is constant and allows for a particularly dramatic passage. The climax in the latter stages of *14* features ethopoeia and an imagined Laskaris as a shepherd where he wanders the hills of Paphlagonia and addresses the subjects of David Komnenos.

‘For you do not weigh their sin, nor do you ignore what they have done, nor do you at least reproach them for those things, using righteous anger: You ought to say these words to them, divinely sounding emperor, and in no way will you deem it necessary to attack:

“Oh men, as I testified to you often, sending forth messengers carrying matters in peace, but by no means, are you reciprocating, I called and you did not listen, I warned those present and you did not heed. I bared my chest to you, and I intended to embrace you eagerly, yet by your opinions you cut off the paths to me.” I said, “Will I come to you with the rod [of punishment], or in love and gentleness of spirit? And with your deeds you have chosen the rod that strikes. Now then, in such a way how will I receive the stiff-necked and shameless to my face? **I have sounded the horn to return, as a shepherd in the mountains seeking his lost and lawless flock as they approach an abyss. But you, unlike the ones bleating, did not return to the summons of animals. Moreover, you went further astray. And since my shepherd’s-pipe appeared useless, the war-horn sounded. As sheep, I have gathered together for slaughter those who will destroy you.** Then [will be] the killing from which we will derive neither benefit nor purpose, if you persist in these things. There is no advantage to you in these acts [which are] according to an opposition born of poor judgement. Resistance and folly will bring you no gain; you have shut off mercy from yourselves.

I came, and you turned away; I arrived and spoke, but I found you listening to another, your eyes turned elsewhere. [Therefore], let this man rise up and help you! **You have not eaten the bread, nor drunk the wine and you have not received the hands [of communion].** You exchanged my imperial rule for unlawful tyranny! You joined with other ‘powerfuls’ rather than siding in Christ with the Lord. Where will you go to continue being devoted to those who have fled? Into the hills? But behold they have been searched like fields now fit for horses. Onto the walls? Or onto the Acropolis? But I shall scale them and take them by a mere shout, and if you were entirely unshakable in these things I would concentrate part of the soldiery [to the task]. Shall you take heart in those whom you have hoped shall save you? But how shall he [David] save others, who cannot save himself?”

‘Οὐ γὰρ ἰστᾶς αὐτοῖς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, οὐδὲ δρᾶς ὅποια δεδράκασιν ἢ γοῦν ἐκεῖνα σφίσιν ἐπεγκαλεῖς δικαίῳ θυμῷ χρώμενος· „ὡς διεμαρτυράμην ὑμῖν πολλάκις,

⁴⁴⁹ NC, *OE*, §13, p.127.23-28.

ὧ ἄνδρες, τὰ εἰς εἰρήνην πέμπων ἀγγέλους, ἀλλ' οὐδαμῶς ἀντησπάσασθε, ἐκάλεσα καὶ οὐκ ἠκούσατε, ἠπειλήκειν τὰ παρόντα καὶ οὐ προσέσχετε. ἀνεπέτασα τὸ στέρνον ὑμῖν καὶ προθύμως εἶχον ἐναγκαλίσασθαι, ὑμεῖς δὲ καὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς μοι πρὸς ταῖς γνώμαις διαταφρεύσατε. „ἐν ῥάβδῳ“, εἶπον, „ἐλεύσομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἢ ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ πραότητι πνεύματος; “καὶ οἷς διεπράξασθε τὸν πλήττοντα προείλεσθε σκίπωνα. νῦν οὖν, ὅπως τοὺς σκληροτραχήλους καὶ ἀναιδεῖς τῷ προσώπῳ εἰσδέξομαι; **ἤχησα τὸ ἀνακλητικὸν ὡς ἐπὶ ποιμνίῳ ποιμὴν εἰς ὄρη πλανωμένῳ καὶ ἀνομίας καὶ βάραθρα, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπεστράφητε τῶν κηρυγμάτων ὡς τῶν συριγμάτων τὰ τῶν ζώων βληγόμενα· μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν καὶ διακυρίττειν προήχθητε. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἤχησεν ἡ σάλπιγξ τὸ ἐνυάλιον φανείσης ἀνονήτου τῆς σύριγγος καὶ ὡς εἰς πρόβατα σφαγῆς τοὺς ὀλοθρεύσοντας ὑμᾶς συνήθροισα.** φθόνος τοίνυν οὐδεὶς ἀπολαύειν ὑμᾶς τῶν βουλευμάτων τε καὶ τῶν σκευμάτων, οἷς ἐπεμείνατε· εἰς οὐδὲν ὄφελος ὑμῖν τὰ δρώμενα μετ' ἀντίστασιν ἐξ ἀβουλίας· ἑαυτοῖς τὸν ἔλεον ἀπεκλείσατε. ἐπέστην καὶ ἀπέστητε· ἐλθὼν καὶ λαλήσας εὗρον ἄλλω τὰς ἀκοὰς ὑπέχοντας, ἐτέρω τὰ ὄμματα ῥέποντας· ἀναστήτω καὶ βοηθησάτω τοίνυν ἐκεῖνος ὑμῖν, οὗ τὸν ἄρτον ἠσθίετε καὶ τὸν οἶνον ἐπίνετε καὶ τοῖς λήμμασι τὰς χεῖρας ὑπέιχετε. ἐννόμου βασιλείας τυραννίδα ἠλλάξασθε· χριστῷ Κυρίου προσφοιτήσαι δυνάμενοι ἐτέρω ὄψοδῃ προσεδράμετε. πῆ δὲ καὶ πεφευγέναι ἔχοντες τοιοῦτοις προσανείχετε; εἰς ὄρη; ἀλλ' ὡς ἱππήλατον πεδίον ἰδοὺ ἐξηρεύνηται· ἀλλ' εἰς τεῖχος; ἀλλ' εἰς ἀκρόπολιν; ἀλλ' ὑπερέβην ἂν καὶ ταῦτα καὶ εἶλον αὐτοβοεῖ, κἂν ἦσαν ὅλως ἀτίνακτα τοσαύταις μυριάσι στρατευμάτων περιειλούμενα. ἀλλ' εἶχετε θαρρεῖν εἰς ὃν ἠλπίκατε καὶ ὃν θεραπεύειν εἴλεσθε; καὶ πῶς ἂν ἔσωσεν ἐτέρους ὁ μὴ σῶζειν ἑαυτὸν δυνάμενος;”⁴⁵⁰

Comparing the shared content in our sources from 1206 and 1208, it would appear that as part of the reconstruction of the Orthodox Church, control of communion and access to Orthodoxy was to be equated with Nikaian rule. Choniates’ somewhat conventional positioning of the Romans as a chosen elect nation who alone were the real Christians was being aligned with a patriarchate that required active oaths for continued membership. Controlling access to communion based on political allegiance is the mentality of an Orthodoxy under siege. Developed one step further from Magdalino’s ‘fortress-mentality’ of the church pre-1204, these were evolving strategies of a church and political order facing destruction that needed means to compel their rival homoglotts to submit.⁴⁵¹

2.8. The *Panspermia* in Nikaia (1204–1230)

The *panspermia* in Nikaian rhetoric features in three forms: Italian, generically ‘western’, and lastly Constantinopolitan. The first two are literal and the thirds rhetorical. All three are distinctly negative. It is remarkable how quickly the idea of a *panspermia* occupying Constantinople enters the parlance of Byzantine authors after 1204. As seen above, as early as summer 1205 the former capital under Latin rule was described with the term.⁴⁵² The Crusaders’ members, Flemish, Frankish, Venetian, and German most likely warranted the phrase that all peoples had - as once feared - become mixed.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ NC, *OE*, §14, p.142.32-143.25.

⁴⁵¹ Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel*, p.368.

⁴⁵² NC, *OE*, §14, p.130.29.

⁴⁵³ See Section 0.4, pp.16–21.

Several years after his arrival into Nikaia and in his final performance as court orator, Niketas Choniates alluded to the term once more when praising Laskaris' 1211/1212 victory at Antioch-on-the-Meander.

‘And may you terrify and defeat not only the barbarians in the east, but also the **alloglot and widely-spread** [Hom. Il. 2.804] **genos that invaded us from the west**, and may you be yourself the longed-for liberator of renowned Constantinople and a redeeming Zorobabel.

καὶ φοβῶν καὶ νικῶν οὐ μόνον τὸ πρὸς ἕω βάρβαρον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ δυσμόθεν ἐπεισφρήσαν ἡμῖν πολυσπερὲς καὶ ἀλλόγλωτον γένος· καὶ εἴης αὐτὸς ὁ προσδοκώμενος ἐλευθερωτὴς τῆς λογίμης πόλεως Κωνσταντίνου καὶ ὁ ἐπανάγων Ζοροβάβελ.⁴⁵⁴

Nicholas Mesarites, who remained in Constantinople until his brother's death in 1208, was equally consistently referring to an 'Italian *panspermia*' ruling over the city he had once sought to defend from foreign influence. In the *Epitaphios*, read over his brother's grave, Nicholas could claim that his brother had continued the fight against the Latin conquest with 'honey-sweet language and fire-breathing words... in the realm of dialectics so that his skill was displayed not only in the ruling-city and the Italian *panspermia* but also spread to Phoenicia, Palestine, Egypt and the Pentapolis and as far as the message of our Lord runs.'⁴⁵⁵ From the 1208 *Epitaphios* to the 1215 *Sermon*, Mesarites' theological position towards the Latins altered. From 1215 onwards the image of the occupying *panspermia* became tinted with charges of heresy.⁴⁵⁶ In 1215 Nicholas Mesarites, now Metropolitan of Ephesus, delivered a sermon that described at length his journey from Nikaia to Constantinople as he was sent to negotiate for the protection of Constantinopolitans' monastic property. He then proceeded onward to Herakleia-Pontika to report to Laskaris on recent failed negotiations with the Latins.⁴⁵⁷ Unusually, the *Sermon* opened 'I bring news, having departed from both Nikaia and then Constantinople, once [our] beloved earth and *patris*, and also from the fertile and productive soil of the Paphlagonians.'⁴⁵⁸ An unusual juncture, the *Sermon* both celebrated the annexation of Paphlagonia and, at the culmination of the sermon, spread the imagery of *panspermia* to his congregation. Debating various theological controversies Mesarites urged, 'Let us root out every tare of the heretical *panspermia* [*πανσπερμία αἰρετικῆ*] for the sake of the good seed of the Church of Christ.'⁴⁵⁹ It was a usage of the term that blended together the political and religious aspects of *ethne*. While supplying some details about the collapse of the Grand Komnenoi in Paphlagonia, in the context of performative literature the *Sermon* demonstrated a growing Nikaian ideological link between political loyalties, religious identities, and a stark condemnation of all external powers.

⁴⁵⁴ NC, *OE*, §16, p.175.30-34.

⁴⁵⁵ Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, §17.16-20, 'ἡ μελιχρὰ γλῶσσα τὲ καὶ πυρίπνοος τὸ μὲν τῶν λόγων... οὗ μέγα τὸ κλέος ἐν διαλεκτικαῖς παραστάσεσιν κατὰ μόνην τὴν βασιλεύουσαν καὶ τὴν Ἰταλικὴν πανσπερμίαν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ Φοίνικας καὶ Παλαιστίνην Αἴγυπτον τὲ καὶ Πεντάπολιν καὶ ὅσιν τὰ τοῦ κυρίου περιέδραμον εὐαγγέλια.' Adapted trans. p.142.

⁴⁵⁶ Mesarites, *Fourth Lenten Sermon*, trans. pp.233–295.

⁴⁵⁷ On persecution of Orthodox Greeks in Latin Constantinople, particularly in 1214, see Akropolites, §17, trans. Macrides p.155-156. The *Sermon* liberally deployed Andronikos Kamaretos' *Sacred Arsenal* in §34-49, trans. pp.277-288. On the *Sacred Arsenal*, see Section 3.5, pp157.

⁴⁵⁸ Mesarites, *Fourth Lenten Sermon*, §1, trans. p.252 'ἀπαγγέλω ἐπὶ Νίκαιάν τε ἀπάραντι κατὰ Κωνσταντινούπολιν, τὸ ποτὲ φίλον ἔδαφος, τὴν πατρίδα, κατὰ δάπεδον Παφλαγόνων πολύχουν καὶ πάμφορον.' Note the positive reception of the Paphlagonians upon their incorporation to the empire.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.295.

It is because of this text which lurches between genres of travel narrative, news heralds, theological-anthological disputation, and finally a sermon that we hear of the annexation of Herakleia-Pontika. Paphlagonia was divided between Laskaris and Sultan Keykavus, the former taking David's capital after the latter tortured a captive Alexios Grand Komnenos in September to force Sinope's surrender on the 1st November 1214.⁴⁶⁰ In contrast to the public suffering of the surviving Grand Komnenos brother, Paphlagonia was reportedly taken without major battle. The striking contrast between Alexios' humiliation, David's disappearance, and Theodore Laskaris' success, is demonstrated upon the rebuilt fortifications of Herakleia-Pontika (pp.91-92). Theodore Laskaris now inscribed 'Laskaris Komnenos' in David's conquered capital made it plain which Komnenian heir had triumphed.

2.9. The Constantinopolitan *Panspermia*

The destruction of Paphlagonian independence through localised political-ecclesiastical hostility arguably demonstrated the capacity of the Nikaian Church to reconnect the fragments of Byzantium. Following the poorly evidenced years of Laskaris' later reign in which he appointed three short-lived patriarchs and was survived by Patriarch Manuel I Sarantenos, the Nikaian society that began their third decade of exile started to demonstrate a break with the social values of the pre-1204 age. The patriarchate itself prompted a challenge to the exclusivity of elite society when ethnicity and origin once more entered the vocabulary of churchmen.

In 1223, with the appointment of Germanos II as Nikaian Patriarch a striking challenge was issued to the concept of Constantinopolitan Exclusivism which inverted almost every paradigm of pre-1204 society and the concept of *panspermia*. It was both a perfect development with Mesarites' own later usages of the term while simultaneously radical. It is well established that pre-1204 preference for a Constantinopolitan origin and upbringing in the city as the entry to an elite community was transplanted into the Nikaian.⁴⁶¹ It is most indicative then that with an emperor who himself assumed power as a son-in-law of non-distinguished ancestry and had to defeat Theodore I's brothers to seize power, that John III Vatatzes chose his patriarch to be Germanos II (1223–40). Germanos, born to fishermen in the village of Anaplous on the Bosphorus, had overcome his own obscure origin and served as a deacon in Hagia Sophia at a remarkably young age, being in his early or mid-twenties when he was ordained, and still barely thirty when the city had fallen.⁴⁶² He fit the policies of John III, and expanded under Theodore II, in promoting 'new men' to positions of trust.⁴⁶³ For several years after 1204 Germanos had returned to rural Anatolia, dwelling in the mountain monasteries outside the small town of Achyraus, south of Prousa in modern Bigadiç. Upon ascending to the reconstituted patriarchal throne, Germanos found himself in a difficult position. The legitimacy of his claim to be the Constantinopolitan Patriarch was debatable, the Epirote rivalry had hugely expanded in their claims to independence, and undermining his authority at home were criticisms that he was not descended from the old families of Constantinople. The early years of Germanos signalled a shift in Nikaian social values, but it was not a smooth transition.

⁴⁶⁰ Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.104-105; Redford, *Legends of Authority*, p.40.

⁴⁶¹ Macrides, made notice of Theodore II's encomium for Akropolites' birthplace in Constantinople, while also himself in the 1250s seeking to promote 'new men' to counteract the rising popularity of Michael VIII Palaiologos, see *Akropolites*, pp.6, 88; Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.61-68; Angeliki Laiou, 'The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Palaeologan Period,' *Viator*, 4 (1973), pp.131-151.

⁴⁶² Angold, *Germanos II*, pp.16-18.

⁴⁶³ Jovanović, *Michael VIII and the Publics*, pp.120-128.

Multiple parties within Anatolia appear to have rejected or resented Germanos' patriarchal authority. He spent much of his early incumbency battling malcontents in Lykia, people he labelled as Bogomils.⁴⁶⁴ It's unlikely that this was an actual revival of the heresy of Basil the Bogomil, burned at the stake in the 1110s. Rather, it would appear a composite resistance to the provincial patriarch's own authority that was given an old name. In Nikaia, shortly after ascending the throne in 1222, Germanos came under a different critique from his peers, that his parentage was too rustic. Nikaian society, formed of many exiled Constantinopolitan families, revived the same exclusivism and insistence on specific *genos* and *patris* that had been current before 1204. Germanos' response was dramatic. As a consequence, it is in his sermons where our concepts of *panspermia* and *patris* overlap. Evidently not one of the *eupatridai*, Germanos responded to the personal attack of his own rustic beginnings, by challenging the claim that Constantinople could ever produce 'pure' and 'noble' men and composed a highly unusual and reactionary paradigm to their enforced boundaries of nobility. In his sermon he proclaimed that those who flaunted their birth in pre-1204 Constantinople were themselves tainted because there simply did not exist any noble births inside the former capital due to the mixing of so many diverse peoples living within. Several historians have noted that his description of Constantinopolitans was unusual, but it had until recently lacked extended attention.⁴⁶⁵

'What do they say? That our patriarch is not one of the well-born, nor can those who bore and nurtured him boast of being natives and sucklings of the Queen of Cities. What are you talking about? Are we worthless for this reason? What virtue is there in the filthy spawn of courtesans and the fruits of adultery, the off-spring of slave-girls bought for money, originating perhaps from the Rus, or from the descendants of Hagar and the rest of the *panspermia* of *ethne*? I used to think that the Great City was like an ark against the flood, not for its own fauna, but as a shelter for the *panspermia* of *ethne* it housed: thus did it fail to avoid disaster, shipwrecked under the weight of my crimes—because *as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me* [Ps. 38: 4–6].

[...] See what a perfect image of a whore our Jerusalem had become, behaving shamelessly to all, *since when in earlier times it was full of judgment and righteousness lodged in it, but it now houses murderers* [Isaiah 1.21]. It had been corrupted when the seeds of these half-barbarians filled the city of Constantine. Have they not filled the City of Constantine with bastard children and patent half-breeds? Has Constantinopolitan ground ennobled and made respectable those who resemble mules through their mixing of *gene*? Will the soil of the City of Constantine make them well-born?

[...] I did not recognise the ancient *patris*. I know that I am a citizen of paradise, that I am a noble [εὐγενής] man of the Anatolian [Eastern] Sun, for paradise is in the East, and that the king of all of those is upon the earth, due to the grace of God and the Son of the Most High.

⁴⁶⁴ Very little is known about these 'Bogomils' beyond Germanos' own writings. His efforts began in a September 1223 encyclical letter against them, following which he spent almost all 1225 travelling Anatolia debating Bogomils wherever he found them. A sermon of March 1227 declared their 'overthrow.' Angold, *Germanos II*, pp.30-33; Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World C. 650–C. 1450*, (Manchester: 1998), pp.37-41, 268–274.

⁴⁶⁵ Magdalino, 'Byzantine Snobbery,' p.65, and Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, p.97; I am grateful to Michael Angold for proofs of his recent translation of the patriarch's sermons. The following translations are my own, but with some adaptations from his *Germanos II*, pp.197-205.

[...] Today [the deceiver] spits in your face because of your past shame; with the West having fallen to the works of darkness He [Christ] turns away and, remembering his native land, turns towards the East, for that is where paradise is. He [Christ] is seeking his ancient *patris* and his former nobility and the sun of righteousness. Choosing the likes of me the Lord moulds a second and better creation... I have been made beautiful by the purple of the Lord's blood and have been honoured by the engagement ring of the Spirit on my right hand. This is true *eugenia* and good fortune without end.

Καὶ τί φασιν οὗτοι; Οὐ τῶν εὖ γεγονότων πατριάρχης ἐστὶν ὁ ἡμέτερος, οὐδ' οἱ τοῦτον γεγεννηκότες καὶ θρέψαντες γεννήματα εἶναι αὐχοῦσι καὶ θρέμματα τῆς βασιλευούσης τῶν πόλεων. Τί φῆς ἄριστε; ἄτιμοι παρὰ τοῦτο ἡμεῖς; ἔντιμοι καὶ εὐγενεῖς, ὅσοι τὰς μητρικὰς ὠδῖνας ἔλυσαν ἐν αὐτῇ; Καὶ ποῦ θήσεις τὰς ῥυπαρὰς τῶν ἑταιρίδων κυφορίας καὶ τὰς μοιχιδίους παρασποράς, τοὺς ἐξ ἀργυρωνήτων θεραπεινῶν τόκους ἐκ τῶν Ῥῶς τυχόν ὠρμημένων ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἀπογόνων τῆς Ἄγαρ καὶ τῆς λοιπῆς τῶν ἐθνῶν πανσπερμίας; Ἐοικέναι γὰρ ἐγὼ τὴν μεγαλόπολιν ὑπετόπαζον τῇ ἐπὶ τοῦ κατακλυσμοῦ κιβωτῷ οὐ ζῶων ἀλόγων κατ' ἐκείνην, ἀλλὰ τὰς τῶν ἐθνῶν θαλαμεύουσιν πανσπερμίας, εἰ καὶ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν οὐ διέφυγε, ναυαγήσασα τῷ φόρτῳ τῶν ἐμῶν ἐγκλημάτων· ὡς γὰρ φορτίον βαρὺ ἐβαρύνθησαν ἐπ' αὐτήν.

Τί δὲ ἀρτίως οὐ πόρνης ὄψις ἐγενέτο τῇ καθ' ἡμᾶς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἀπηναισχύντησε πρὸς πάντας καὶ μεθ' ἧς πρότερον ἐκοιμήθη δικαιοσύνην νῦν κοιτάζονται φονευταὶ καὶ νενοθευμένων σπερμάτων καὶ προδήλως μιζοβαρβάρων τὴν Κωνσταντίνου ἐπλήρωσαν; Εὐγενεῖς ἄρα οὗτοι καὶ τίμοι, οἱ τοῖς ἡμίονοις προσεοικότες διὰ τὴν ἐκ διαφορῶν γενῶν ἐπιμιζίαν καὶ ἐξευγενήσει τούτους τῆς Κωνσταντίνου τὸ ἔδαφος;

Οὐκ ἠγγνόσά μου τὴν ἀρχαίαν πατρίδα· οἶδα ὅτι πολίτης εἰμι τοῦ παραδείσου, ὅτι εὐγενῆς τῶν ἀφ' ἡλίου Ἀνατολῶν—κατ' ἀνατολὰς γὰρ ὁ παράδεισος—ὅτι βασιλεὺς πάντων τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς, ὅτι κατὰ χάριν Θεοῦ καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου.

Ἐμπτύει σου σήμερον τὸ πρόσωπον ὑπὲρ τῆς τότε αἰσχύνης καὶ ἀποστρέφεται μετὰ τῶν δυσμῶν καὶ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκότους καὶ στρέφεται πρὸς Ἀνατολὰς, νόστον μνησθεῖς—ἐκεῖσε γὰρ ὁ παράδεισος—καὶ ζητεῖ τὴν ἀρχαίαν πατρίδα καὶ τὴν πρώτην εὐγένειαν καὶ τῆς δικαιοσύνης τὸν ἥλιον. Τοιοῦτόν με παραλαβὼν ὁ δεσπότης δευτέραν πλάσιν ἀναπλάττει τὴν κρείττονα... ἐγκαλλωπισθῶ καὶ τῇ πορφύρᾳ τοῦ δεσποτικοῦ αἵματος καὶ τῷ ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς δακτυλίῳ ἀρραβῶνι τοῦ πνεύματος ἐνωραίσθῶ. Τοῦτο ἢ ἀληθῆς εὐγένεια καὶ ἢ ἀδιάδοχος εὐκληρία.⁴⁶⁶

The critical description of Constantinople, the heart of the Byzantine world, as an ethnic *panspermia*, polluted and debauched before 1204 was a condemnation without parallel by the head of the Orthodox Church. It was a universal denunciation of the population who lived inside the city before it fell, and a complete reversal of how Niketas Choniates had constructed *panspermia* in 1205.

As evidenced in the closing statements, Germanos was defending the native Anatolian population from the encroachment of Constantinopolitan society and seeking a mediation towards a new beginning. Having had his own geographical origin weaponised, Germanos'

⁴⁶⁶ Germanos II, ed. Lagopates, §10, pp.282.19-283.6, p.282.37-283.4, p.286.19-23, p.287.1-16, cf. partial trans Magdalino, 'Byzantine Snobbery,' p.65.

response was to invert the paradigm, assigning weakness, sin, and inherent corruption to the inhabitants of Constantinople who had lived in such a heavily diverse and ultimately conquered society. In rebutting critiques regarding his lack of prestigious ancestry, Germanos in return named Constantinopolitans a distinct race that were, firstly, an unholy mixture of *ethne*, and secondly, conceived through the union of different and alien *gene*. Through this argument Germanos was conjuring the worst implications that his detractors were the very monstrosities discussed in the classical treatises of *panspermia*. His ‘mixed’ opponents were the bestial, mulish heirs of those born without virtue and had wrought their own destruction.⁴⁶⁷ Germanos finished with a Christian message, that they were doubly sinners unworthy of God’s benevolence. The Constantinople of this sermon was the site of the *panspermia* which had come to embody all that was wrong with Byzantine society. It was not Greek, Hellenic, Roman, or Orthodox but Russian, Islamic, servile, full of prostitutes and concubines, and had become *mixobarbaroi*, or half-barbarised. There is something of a sense of lost grandeur in his words, stressing that he knew of Constantinople as an ancient *patris* and what it had been in previous days but that the blame for the fall of the city was on what it had become and those who had inherited and inhabited it. Germanos’ shifting ethno-racial boundary of good birth made nobility Anatolian. While he certainly offered a broader catchment zone in the 1220s than one focused on pre-1204 Constantinople, it was just as wilfully assigning negative cultural traits with professedly inherited weaknesses, only this time to all Constantinopolitans or indeed anywhere else.

Contextualising the provincial homoglot population within Nikaian society may help understand Germanos’ viewpoint beyond simple personal tensions. Germanos may have represented the views of Anatolian autochthones who had gained in prominence during exile. In Efi Ragias’ study of Nikaian documents pertaining to the regulation of tax assessment in the first half of the thirteenth century, from the 1232 *Apoke Psomion* [Ἀποκὴ ψομίων] there is evidence of substantial inflation.⁴⁶⁸ Ragia believed that when comparing the *praktikion* of the Lampsakos in Constantinople (dated to 1219 but unchanged since before 1204) to the 1232 document, the fiscal value of farmers possessing oxen had increased by 2.5 times. She judged that the *zeugaraia*, the chief fiscal unit for assessment for the *epithelia* taxation for provincial workers on cultivated land, had tripled from pre-1204 to 1232. For these people, the coming of Nikaian politics was a huge tax hike. If that development had been accompanied by a cultural insistence upon singular language and birthplace within Constantinople, then likely it was an incendiary development.

Germanos and Theodore II Laskaris would intermittently project Anatolia as the heartland of a Greek Christian Empire. This Nikaian emphasis upon Anatolia from the mid-1220s onwards, combined with an expanded exclusion of peoples Germanos named polluting, was sweeping. He and other Anatolians alone were ‘pure’ and ‘noble’ because, unmixed, they did not have the blood of foreigners in his veins. While other letters sent to the Constantinopolitans would maintain a more traditional claim to their city, at his base in Nikaia, Germanos II as patriarch and head of the Orthodox Church was reshaping society in this manner. Towards the closing stages of his sermon, he announced that it was only through the Lord ‘choosing the likes of me’ that there could be a rebirth.

⁴⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 769a.29-b.2. ‘And indeed, this is what comes next to be treated. after what we have already dealt with—the causes of monstrosities, “Καὶ γὰρ ἐχόμενον τῶν εἰρημένων ἐστὶν εἰπεῖν περὶ τῶν τοιούτων τὰς αἰτίας.

⁴⁶⁸ Efi Ragia, ‘Agrarian Policy in the Early Palaeologan Period,’ *TM*, 25.1 (2019), p.541; *Actes de Chilandar*, 1 (AA 20), pp.15 (§45), 16 (§55).

2.10. Ethno-Linguistic and Spatial Demarcation in the Early Nikaian Empire

Amongst the most prominent attributions of scholarship for the Empire of Nikaia is the period's role in developing the ideology of 'Hellenism' in Byzantium. It was a process defined by reshaping the identity of the inhabitants of the empire in lines with conceptions of Hellas, the Greek language, and continuity with a pre-Christian and pre-Roman era to an extent not previously known in Byzantium. Earlier scholarship was divided if the identification of authors with notions of being the heirs of the Hellenes of Classical Greece contradicted or even overrode their conceptions of being *Romaioi*.⁴⁶⁹ It is the opinion of this thesis that the two (and other) identities co-existed, even overlapped at times, but that their (re)expansion occurred in a state of perennial opposition. Each time identities of Hellene, Greek, or Roman were invoked was in moments that sought to combat, suppress, and negotiate with divergent political loyalties. This occurred through policies of ethnic propaganda, assimilation, and if they failed, with war.

Undeniably, the period of the Nikaian Empire witnessed greater emphasis on Hellenization in the Nikaian Empire, particularly in the later reigns of Laskaris' successors, John Vatatzes and Theodore II.⁴⁷⁰ Such a development is well attested through letters to the popes, sermons eulogising Hellenic or Anatolian characteristics written by the Nikaian Patriarchs, and it was aided by the establishment of the Nikaian Roman Empire in a land where Christianity and Greek-language were the majority in all lands not occupied by alloglots.⁴⁷¹ As seen throughout the twelfth century the emphases placed on birth and birthplace had shifted, not so much in meaning but in intensity and frequency.⁴⁷² Despite remaining inconsistent and flexible in what community they signified, the importance associated with a prestigious *genos* was undeniable. In exile, to move past this and recreate a more unified community required finding different bonds. This section has demonstrated these as they were first experimented with, a literal oath of loyalty taken by all peoples under the Orthodox Church to recognise Laskaris and no other. However, to both expand their state into other Greek-speaking rivals and to undermine their own loyalties, the Nikaian state needed to further develop their state ideologies and their singular claim to be people united by a single language and merely temporarily disunited by current events.

If there was to be a resurgence in Hellenism, it was benefited by the appointment and character of both Patriarch Germanos II and Emperor John III. There had been a growing willingness to use 'Greek' and 'Hellene' to refer to theological discussions with the Latins. Kaldellis saw in this a means of clearing ambiguity between the two Romes, but this does not apply for every case.⁴⁷³ Mesarites, for instance, had consistently used 'Γραϊκος' to refer to his language-group since 1208.⁴⁷⁴ In 1234 Germanos engaged in a series of negotiations with the Latins for a

⁴⁶⁹ Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, pp.27-46; cf. Angold, 'Byzantine 'Nationalism' in the Nicene Empire,' pp.49-70; Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, pp.317-388; Magdalino, 'Hellenism and Nationalism'; Eshel, *Elect Nation*, pp.175-180.

⁴⁷⁰ Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, pp.202-216.

⁴⁷¹ The sources give some hint of this. In a 1225 sermon, long before Nikaia crossed into the Balkans, Germanos II gave a sermon on the incomprehensibility of other languages. '[...] if you were to enter a barbarian church, though it be Christian, you would pass your time without understanding the words of the gospel, because they would be in a foreign language.' Germanos II, *Select Sermons*, §15, p.230; Hélène Ahrweiler, 'L'expérience nicéenne,' *DOP*, 29 (1975), p.24.

⁴⁷² Nathan Leidholm described the complex link until 1204 between *genos* of ethnicity and *genos* as family; Leidholm, *Elite Byzantine Kinship*, pp.51-52.

⁴⁷³ Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, p.353.

⁴⁷⁴ Translated by Angold, *Mesarites*, pp.203, 254, 263, 289. The first, a discussion of the legacy of the Hellenic language for Greeks is in a theological setting, the others refer purely to language.

potential religious reunification. In the recordings of the meetings Germanos identified himself as the head of the ‘Church of the Greeks’ [ἡ τῶν Γραικῶν ἐκκλησία] and part of a displaced ‘Empire of the Greeks’ [ἡ βασιλεία τῶν Γραικῶν]. His opponents were the papacy and the ‘Church of the Latins.’⁴⁷⁵ No-one was identified Roman. However, shifting terminologies did not cease there. In the same negotiations, Germanos presented a historical example of friendship to the embassy of cardinals. In a quite remarkable allegory, Germanos described the sixth-century Justinianic reconquest of Italy as an example when the ‘Empire of the Greeks’ had defended the ‘Italians’ of Old Rome from *ethne*.⁴⁷⁶ Germanos, who otherwise maintained in his formal address a full entitlement as ‘Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch,’ had adopted a new stance that continually repositioned contemporary and historical terminologies. He also demonstrated a personal ideological preference for ‘Greek’ over ‘Roman.’⁴⁷⁷

The final example of this Nikaian stance is given below. In a powerfully worded reply to Pope Gregory IX dated to 21st May 1237, John III staked the secular imperial claim to a Hellenic *genos*. Relations between the papacy and Vatatzes were particularly fraught. Multiple letters sent by Gregory refer to Vatatzes as ‘excommunicatus’ from May 1236 and ‘inimicus Dei et ecclesie Romane’ by 1237.⁴⁷⁸ With the call of a crusade, Gregory sought to escalate Nikaia from mere schismatic Christians to heretics and launch an assault upon Anatolia. Therefore, to defend Nikaian land Vatatzes composed the below reply emphasising a Byzantine legacy that stemmed entirely from the Hellenic people and language.⁴⁷⁹ Vatatzes named himself Roman Emperor on the grounds of his *genos* and laid claim to all Hellenic peoples wherever they might be. In that letter, John expounded upon the nature of imperial rights, saying:

‘To begin with, the forefathers of our Imperial Majesty from the family of Doukai and Komnenoi, not to mention others, were ruling over the *gene* of the Hellenes; these men of my *genos* held the realm of Constantinople for many hundreds of years. And the Church of Rome and its prelates called them the Emperors of the Romans.’⁴⁸⁰

‘[...] For although we have been forced to move to this place [i.e. Nikaia], nevertheless we have, by the grace of God, the immovable and unchangeable right to reign and to rule. For it is said that he who reigns rules over an *ethnos*, a people, and a population, and not over the stone and timber of which walls and towers consist.

⁴⁷⁵ Aloysius Tautu, *Acta Honorii III (1216-1227) et Gregorii IX (1227-1241)*, (Vatican: 1950), no. 179a, 240-49; Sathas, *MB*, II, p.45; Brubaker, *Disputatio*, p.114.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ethne* used here in the biblical sense to mean barbaric non-Christian, at a time when the Italian Romans formed part of Byzantine Christendom. Christos Arampatzis, ‘The Unpublished Letter of Patriarch Germanos II of Constantinople to the Cardinals of Rome,’ *EEBS*, 52 (2004-2006), pp.363-78, p.376.64-65. ‘καὶ τῆς Ῥώμης πολλάκις κρατηθείσης ὑπὸ ἐθνῶν ἢ βασιλεία τῶν Γραικῶν τῆς τυραννίδος αὐτὴν ἐλυτρώσατο.’; Brubaker, *Disputatio*, p.118.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.107.

⁴⁷⁸ Koji Murata, ‘Dei et ecclesiae inimicus. A correspondence between pope Gregory IX and John III Batatzes,’ *Communicating Papal Authority in the Middle Ages*, (London: 2023), pp.159–166.

⁴⁷⁹ John Vatatzes’ letter to the pope published by Ioannes Sakkelion, ‘Ἀνέκδοτος ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Ἰωάννου Δούκα Βατάτση πρὸς τὸν Πάπαν Γρηγόριον,’ in *Πηγές τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ Νέου Ἑλληνισμοῦ* (Thessaloniki: 1965), pp.50-53; Luca Pieralli *La corrispondenza diplomatica dell'imperatore bizantino con le potenze estere nel tredicesimo secolo (1204-1282)*. *Studio storicodiplomatico ed edizione critica* (Vatican: 2006), pp.124-5, ll.41-67; The letter has been partially translated, both by Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp 41-42; and Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, pp.370-371.

⁴⁸⁰ Old (Italian) Rome is implied here, following on from an introductory section where Vatatzes criticised the pope for not addressing him as emperor Pieralli, *La corrispondenza* p.124.46-52. Adapted trans. Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, p.42.

[...] If Constantinople is the cause [of the pope's disdain] ... we affirm... we shall never stop warring against those who have subjugated Constantinople. If we did, we would injure natural laws, the customs of our *patris*, the tombs of our fathers, and the divine and holy precincts if, because of all the strength of these things, we did not fight on.

Αὐτίκα οἱ τῆς βασιλείας μου γενάρχαι, οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους τῶν Δουκῶν τε καὶ Κομνηνῶν, ἵνα μὴ τοὺς ἑτέρους λέγω, τοὺς ἀπὸ γενῶν ἐλληνικῶν ἄρξαντας· οὗτοι γοῦν οἱ ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ γένους, εἰς πολλὰς ἐτῶν ἑκατοστ[ύας] τὴν ἀρχὴν κατέσχον τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως· οὓς δὴ καὶ ἡ τῆς Ῥώμης ἐκκλησία, καὶ οἱ ταύτης ἱεραρχικῶς προϊστάμενοι, Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτορας ἀνηγόρευον.

[...] Ἡμεῖς δέ, εἰ καὶ τοῦ τόπου βιασθέντες μετεκινήθημεν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ δικαίου, τοῦ ἐς τὴν ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τὸ κράτος, ἀμετακινήτως καὶ ἀμεταπτώτως ἔχομεν, Θεοῦ χάριτι· ἔθλους καὶ γὰρ ὁ βασιλεύων, καὶ λαοῦ, καὶ πλήθους ἄρχειν λέγεται καὶ κρατεῖν, ἀλλ' οὐ τῶν λίθων τε καὶ ξύλων, ἀ τὰ τεῖχη συνιστῶσι καὶ τὰ πυργώματα.

[...] Εἰ δὲ περὶ τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος... διαβεβαιούμεθα... οὐδέποτε παυσόμεθα μαχόμενοι καὶ πολεμοῦντες τοῖς κατάγουσι τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν. Ἡ γὰρ ἂν ἀδικοῖμεν καὶ φύσεως νόμους, καὶ πατρίδος θεσμούς, καὶ πατέρων τάφους, καὶ τεμένη θεῖα καὶ ἱερά, εἰ μὴ ἐκ πάσης τῆς ἰσχύος τούτων ἕνεκα διαγωνισόμεθα.⁴⁸¹

Vatatzes' letter was, first and foremost, a response. It was a situational treatise refuting any argument either previously given or forthcoming from the Papacy, that without Constantinople he could not assume the imperial title. As per a situational response, Vatatzes was negotiating an identity that defended a *patris*. In a preceding section it allowed a diatribe of the Latin Empire's illegitimacy and a critique of their papal support.⁴⁸² Within that context, the ethnographical terms used were ones of contrast and distinction. The political ideology within John's letter has numerous notable elements and has attracted different interpretations.⁴⁸³ Korobeinikov saw in this letter a discussion of titles and legitimacy that emphasised continuity, Angelov isolated it as an extended retort to the slur of being dubbed a 'Greek' by the pope. However, we have demonstrated that Vatatzes' own patriarch used that language by volition.⁴⁸⁴ Angelov viewed it also as a milestone use of 'Hellenic *gene* [γενή ἐλληνικά]' and as precursor to when John's son Theodore II would utilise 'Hellene' as his dominant ethnic identifier.⁴⁸⁵ Conversely, Kaldellis viewed it as a letter that boasted no more of Hellenism than it did Romanness, and simply defended the Nikaian position using the terms their opponents had used.⁴⁸⁶ All interpretations should agree that the ethnic identity projected was particularly explicit.

⁴⁸¹ Pieralli, *La corrispondenza*, p.125.94-126.101. Adapted from partial translation in Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, pp.370-371 and Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.41-42. Final paragraph previously untranslated.

⁴⁸² Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, p.42.

⁴⁸³ Panagiotis Christou, *Οἱ περιπέτειες τῶν ἐθνικῶν ὀνομάτων τῶν Ἑλλήνων* (Thessaloniki: 2003), p.134; Angold, 'Byzantine Nationalism,' p.56; Paris Gounaridis, 'Greks,' 'Hellènes' et 'Romains' dans l'état de Nicée' in: *Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Νίκο Σβορόνο*, eds. Vasilis Kremmydas et al., (Rethymno: 1986), p.251; Angelov, 'Byzantine Ideological Reactions to the Latin Conquest of Constantinople,' *Urbs Capta*, p.302.

⁴⁸⁴ Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, p.96; Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.41-43.

⁴⁸⁵ Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, pp.96-98.

⁴⁸⁶ Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, p.371-372.

In Vatatzes' letter there are themes that stretch back to the foundation of Nikaian ideology. Their position had remained fairly consistent since the wars of subjugation with David Komnenos. They were defined by language group, but the terminology had become more entrenched as Nikaian elites assimilated into their surroundings. When Choniates' *Oration 14* compared Theodore Laskaris' travels and dialogues to win over the cities of Anatolia to the tribes of Israel there had been insistencies on homoglotts. However, Vatatzes' projection of himself as emperor responding to significant threats was to promulgate the conception of the 'Emperor of the Romans' reigning over a pluralised 'Hellenic *gene*.' It is a clear continuation but significant adaptation of Choniates rhetoric in 1205. When Vatatzes' chancellery used *gene* in the context of this letter, it was to encompass the pre-1204 empire but with an important caveat, that there existed a plural Hellenic *gene* and they (and only they) belonged rightfully to him. Leaving space for multiple distinct but homoglot peoples helped explain the continuation of other post-Byzantine states, Epiros, Trebizond etc., who were currently outside his authority but justly belonged within it. The trajectory from homoglotts to Hellenes in a letter that emphasised kinship and a geographic cultural memory marked a culmination of Nikaia's conceptualised *genos* as they drew their first boundary for future expansion. Their restored Roman state, triumphing in a just return, was to be a land of the Hellenes and the Greeks.

Pluralising the homoglot Byzantine people while simultaneously restricting inclusivity to Greek-speakers had been an element of Nikaian identity since Choniates' *Oration 14* in 1205. The New Israelites that will reconstitute the fabric of Byzantium were formed from distinct peoples, contemporary manifestations of the other eleven of the twelve tribes of Israel. Biblically, the tribes were united by Saul through conquest, election, and crowning of the first king [1 Samuel]. This aspect of the leadership of a scattered but Chosen People and their prospects for expansion and solidification was linked by Choniates to the reclamation of Sion and Jerusalem. i.e. Constantinople. In the act of praising the recent victory over David, Choniates seems to insist that before such an assault could be mounted Nikaia, as New Judah must reunite the other tribes.⁴⁸⁷ The motif features also in Germanos II' compositions. The image of a composite New Israel was not new to Greek Orthodoxy. Since at least the ninth century Byzantine authors had been referring to co-Christian neighbouring rivals as separate tribes of Israel.⁴⁸⁸ Throughout the 1220s the image persisted, although the emphasis on fragmentation and exile seems to lessen over time. As Nikaia established itself as an Anatolian power, several sermons were given framing their current society as a New Israel. Twice Germanos II asserted himself as part of a composite Israel but an outsider to Judah and *Nikaian* society. He deflected criticisms of a rural origin by claiming his humble beginnings were the same as Gideon, born of the lowest of the tribe of Manasseh before he was appointed to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.⁴⁸⁹ A shift occurs when the tribes of Israel begin to be imagined as purely homoglot and an implicit assumption that Nikaian Israel's limits coincided with the Greek language. Linguistic divisions had been reinforced by political events after 1204. Armenians, an *ethnos* distinguishable by both language and church, were a populous group

⁴⁸⁷ See the recent thorough discussion of the concept in Eshel, *Elect Nation in Byzantium*.

⁴⁸⁸ Theodore Daphnopates in the tenth century made a notable oration regarding the cessation of war with Peter of Bulgaria in 927. In that text Daphnopates had gone so far as to claim that within this Greater Byzantine Israel 'there were neither foreigners nor *alloglots*. The war was between brothers and fathers with sons.' [ὄτι μὴ ἀλλογενεῖς ἀλλοφύλοις μηδ' ἐ ἀλλογλώσσοις ἀλλόγλωσσοι, υἱοὶ δὲ πατράσι καὶ ἀδελφῆς ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες υἱοῖς ἀντέστημεν, ἐπανεστήμεν.] Ivan Dujčev, ed. and trans., 'On the Treaty of 927 with the Bulgarians,' *DOP*, 32 (1978), pp.258.55-58.

⁴⁸⁹ Germanos II, *Selected Sermons*, in 1223 in §1, p.87, and 1224 §13, p.201; cf. Judges 6. For the Manasseh tribe in Byzantium see Barbara Crostini, 'Famous Forgiveness: The Reception of the Prayer of Manasseh in Byzantium (with a Transcription of Hesychios of Jerusalem's Scholia from MS Oxford, Auct. D.4.1),' in: *Hellenism, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* eds. Radka Fialová et al., (Berlin: 2022), pp.145-178.

around the Troad (Troy). Despite recent statements of communion and theological parity from Cilicia (encountered in Section 1.53), these Armenians apparently supported the Latins against the Greeks immediately after the conquest.⁴⁹⁰ Villehardouin writes of them ‘detesting Greeks’, and Choniates that the Armenians ‘would not in any way cease from urging Baldwin and the other counts to cross the straits and subdue, like an appointed offering, the eastern cities.’⁴⁹¹ The Armenians, like all other alloglots, are notably excised from the image of rebuilding Israel and the image is absent from documents celebrating the brief 1213 marriage between Theodore Laskaris and the niece of the King of Cilician Armenia.⁴⁹²

This insistence on equating the Greek language with implied ‘natural’ loyalty encouraged over a century of Greek scholarship to see in the period of the Nikaian Empire the ‘birth of the Greek nation.’ Greek historians dating back to Constantine Sathas in the nineteenth century and propagated in the late twentieth by Apostolos Vacalopoulos have maintained an argument of collective national awakening.⁴⁹³ The conception had also gained a degree of acceptance in Anglophone scholarship, though recent studies have been more moderate.⁴⁹⁴ Having flirted with the development of ‘proto-nationalism’ in this period in the 1970s, Western historians have slowly moved away from such terms on the basis that national awakenings and nationalism were distinctly eighteenth-century concepts and should not be posited back.⁴⁹⁵ The resultant image produces a somewhat tentative, spotty image of a national awakening. Hellenism as a politically unifying ideology appears as a concept linked heavily to peoples, kinships, and loyalties rather than a fixed conception of space, and any progression was seriously interrupted by the violent overthrow of Theodore II’s heir in 1259. Shawcross has convincingly argued that following John IV’s deposition and blinding after the reoccupation of Constantinople in 1261 the new Palaiologan dynasty created a deep breach that provoked lasting hostility between the reclaimed capital and the loyalties of the Laskarid ‘Hellenes’ of Anatolia.⁴⁹⁶ That does not suggest a community that held inherent ethnic commonality to be more important than personal loyalties. As the collapse of Byzantine Anatolia is beyond the scope of this thesis, study has been limited to *how* Byzantine fragments interacted and utilised ethnicity, with only limited discussion of their effectiveness at reunification.

The ethno-symbolic theories of Anthony Smith have thus far been favoured by recent western scholarship, advocating Smith’s theories that posit that characteristics of nationalism can exist

⁴⁹⁰ For Byzantine-Armenian church relations in this period see Stone, ‘Negotiations for Church Union between Byzantium and the Armenian Church,’ pp.191-208; Boghos Levon Zekiyan, ‘St Nersēs Snorhali en dialogue avec les Grecs,’ *Actes du XV Congrès International d’études byzantines, Athènes Septembre 1976*, IV (1980), pp.420-441; Charles Frazee, ‘The Christian Church in Cilician Armenia: Its Relations with Rome and Constantinople to 1198,’ *Church History*, 45 (1976), pp.166-184; See also the ecumenical sermons translated by Mesrob Ashjian, *St. Nerses of Lambrun: Champion of the Church Universal*, (New York: 1993).

⁴⁹¹ NC, CD, §601, trans. p.330, ‘οὗτοι γὰρ οὐδὲ βραχὺ τι γοῦν καθυφῆκαν τὸν Βαλδοῦϊνον ἐνάγοντες καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους κόμητας ἐξερεθίζοντες ὡς εἰς προκειμένον ἔρμαιον διαβῆναι τὴν τῶν ἐφῶν πόλεων χεῖρωσιν.’; Villehardouin, §385 p.103.

⁴⁹² Alexey Pavlov, ‘Sinodalnaja gramota 1213 goda o brake grecheskogo imperatora s doceriju armjanskogo knjazja,’ *Vizantijskij Vremennik*, 4.1-2 (1897), pp.160-166.

⁴⁹³ Sathas, MB, 7, p.21; Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, pp.28-45; Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, pp.360-388.

⁴⁹⁴ Kaldellis, *Romanland*, p.274.

⁴⁹⁵ Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, p.203.

⁴⁹⁶ On the ‘Arsenite Schism’ and repeated pro-Laskarid uprisings from 1262 until 1305 see Teresa Shawcross, ‘In the Name of the True Emperor: Politics of Resistance after the Palaiologan Usurpation,’ *Byzantinoslavica*, 66 (2008), pp.203-228; Dimitar Angelov, ‘The Confession of Michael VIII Palaiologos and King David,’ *JÖB*, 56 (2006), pp.193-204; Ruth Macrides, ‘Saints and sainthood in the Early Palaiologan Period, in: *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. Sergei Hackel, (San Bernardino: 1983), pp.73-79.

in pre-modern societies of *ethne*, but that they do not equate to a modern nation. Therefore, attention must be allocated to ascertaining *if* the Nikaiaans achieved the following criteria of ethnic symbolism: a collective self-identification, common ancestry, territorialisation, and consistent shared customs and laws.⁴⁹⁷ If these criteria can be met then Smith's theories would posit the completed phenomena of ethnogenesis and (re)creation of an ethnic nation. Firstly, there must be the possibility of *ethnic crystallization*, meaning the sheer time needed to integrate both elites and a common population with such criteria. This is then followed by 'vernacular mobilisation', the emphasis upon the above criteria by elite groups, 'cultural politicisation,' and the creation of a sense of loyalty and duty to the common group. We could cite evidence from the 1208 *homologia* in support of this. Finally, there is the stage of 'ethnic purification,' the galvanisation of the need to guard an internal culture against rival external groups into a clearly defined group, essentially hostile or at least hierarchical to outsiders.⁴⁹⁸ This requires enemies being named and forcibly foresworn. In the context of Nikaia (1204–1237) this essentially means whether historians and historical sociologists view the period of exile as a time of ethnogenesis creating a more unified people, or simply a time of policies supporting the preservation of the old community. It can also be viewed, as is the opinion of this thesis, that the Nikaian response was part of a long process of ideological contraction on behalf of the imperial court, and that the attempt to mollify that process of exclusivism and solidify a Nikaian community was ultimately cut short.

The issues inherent to the creation of Nikaian ethnic identity were that it bound all of its identifiers, 'Roman,' 'Hellenic,' and 'Greek' as an inherently political identity, an oath, in an age of political fragmentation. As Nikaian identity was the first identity created after 1204 it lacked the ability and flexibility to recognise other splinter-states born out of Byzantium as anything other than illegitimate. This created clear demarcations between ethno-linguistic groups of Turks, Franks, Bulgarians, and others but lacked the ability to consistently engage with other states either led by, or containing, homoglotts on any other basis than as legitimate lord vs. illegitimate rebels. Where Vatatzes referred to a singular *ethnos* born of multiple Hellenic *gene* he was likely allowing himself the caveat that at present he was ruling only those Hellenic *gene*. It allowed claims for a broader state but one still imagined as a single linguistic group. Thus according to the models of Polybios and his homoglotts it would be stronger than a combination of several. The fact that Nikaian 'Byzantium' had only just become an overwhelmingly Greek-speaking state was of lesser importance. Lacking an ability to recognise other homoglot states as legitimate, it provoked critiques, even from its own subjects for how it sought to define all aspects of public life with political identities. These will be explored below. Regardless, the clash between Laskarid Nikaia and David's Paphlagonian domain provoked the first instance of this identity formation, and a stamping out of deviance. The Paphlagonians, the great cause of Byzantine downfall since 1182, had been subjugated and made Romans once more. Its manner of doing so, of suppressing spatial identities and long-held loyalties, had taken radical new developments.

⁴⁹⁷ Anthony Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism. A Cultural Approach*, (Abingdon: 2009), pp.23-60.

⁴⁹⁸ Idem., 'The Ethnic Sources of Nationalism,' *Survival*, 35.1 (1993), pp.48-62.

Section Three

3.1 Making Bulgaria of the Epirote Byzantine ‘West’

Historical Overview

The state of Epiros was, for a period of some ten years, the most prominent power within the formerly Byzantine world. At the height of its power between 1224 and 1230, Epiros appeared to both its own supporters and Latin opponents as the greatest threat to reclaim Constantinople after 1204.⁴⁹⁹ Were it to achieve this aim, as seemed probable in the 1220s, it would make obsolete the authority, prestige, and very purpose of the Roman Empire of Nikaia. More than the challenge of sheer territorial mass and soldiery, however, the fact was that this Roman Empire of Epiros-Thessaloniki exposed the chief weaknesses of its Laskarid rival. Compounding a geographical expanse which stretched across the entire Balkan Peninsula, was Epiros’ dynastic claims and a political ideology and policy which encouraged the reengagement and reinvestment of former imperial peoples. Epiros’ legitimate inheritance of Roman Byzantine lands, name, and ambitions, was subject therefore to a long process of revisionist and teleological historical writing that saw it discredited, destroyed, and ultimately reimagined as an alloglot and barbarian state.

It is not a novel position to state that there is a false transparency to the histories we possess for the thirteenth-century Byzantine world. Much of Ruth Macrides’ work well-established that when the historian approaches the main source for the period 1204–1261, George Akropolites’ *Chronike Syngraphe*, ‘Akropolites’ thirteenth century has become *our* thirteenth century.’⁵⁰⁰ Emphasising a direct and singular continuity between the Laskarid Nikaian state and the Palaiologan state which reconquered Constantinople in 1261, it is a paradigm that influenced

⁴⁹⁹ For the narrative history see Nicol, *Epiros*; François Bredenkamp, *The Byzantine Empire of Thessaloniki (1224-1242)*, (Thessaloniki: 1996); Nikolaos Lappas, *Πολιτική ιστορία του κράτους της Ηπείρου κατά τον 13ο αι.*, (PhD dissertation, University of Thessaloniki: 2007); for a political history and chronology of key events see Alkimini Stavridou-Zaphraka, ‘The Political Ideology of the State of Epiros,’ in: *Urbs Capta*, pp.311-325; idem., *Nikaia και Ηπειρος τον 13 ήαίωνα. Ιδεολογική αντιπαράθεση στην προσπάθειά τους να ανακτήσουν την αυτοκρατορία* (Thessaloniki: 1990); the third volume of the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* provides an inventory of surviving material culture in Epiros: Peter Soustal, *Nikopolis und Kephalaonia, Tabula Imperii Byzantini 3*, (Vienna: 1980); more recent studies of the artistic ideologies of Epiros have been published by Leonela Fundiá, *Art, Power, and Patronage in the Principality of Epirus, 1204-1318*, (Abingdon: 2022); idem., ‘Art and Political Ideology in the State of Epiros During the Reign of the Theodore Doukas (r.1215-1230),’ *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 23 (2013) pp.217-250; for introductions to culture, demographics, and religious ideology see Günter Prinzing, ‘Epiros 1204-1261: Historical Outline -Sources - Prosopography,’ in: *Identities and Allegiances*, pp.81-99 and idem., ‘Das Kaisertum im Staat von Epeiros. Propagierung, Stabilisierung und Verfall,’ in: *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμποσίου για το Δεσποτάτο της Ηπείρου (Arta, 27-31 May 1990)*, ed. Evangelos Chrysos (Arta: 1992), pp.17-30; an updated narrative of Epiros was the thesis of Brendan Osswald in *L’Epire du treizième au quinzième siècle: autonomie et hétérogénéité d’une région balkanique*, (PhD dissertation, University of Toulouse: 2011), and became the basis for a series of studies on the region idem., ‘The Ethnic Composition of Medieval Epirus,’ in *Imagining Frontiers, Contesting Identities*, (Pisa: 2007), pp.125-154 and idem., ‘The State of Epirus as Political Laboratory,’ in: *Epirus Revisited. New Perceptions of its History and Material Culture: From the Thematic Session "Epirus Revisited" of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016*, ed. Christos Stavrakos, (Turnhout: 2020); for a recent but somewhat problematic legal study see Alexander Liarmacopolus, *Legal History of the Despotate of Epirus (1204-1215)*, (Athens: 2015); elsewhere recent research at the University of Ioannina in prosopographical, sigillographical, and archaeological studies has been published in a collective volume edited by Efstratia Sygkellou, *Μεσαιωνική Ηπειρος. Η νεώτερη έρευνα. Εξελίξεις και προοπτικές/ Medieval Epirus. The Recent Research. Developments and Prospects*, (Arta: 2024).

⁵⁰⁰ For the foundational argument see the preface, introduction, and commentary to Ruth Macrides, *George Akropolites: The History. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, (Oxford: 2007), as well as idem., ‘The thirteenth century in Byzantine historical writing,’ *Porphyrogenita: Essays on the history and literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in honour of Julian Chrysostomides*, ed. Ruth Macrides, Charalambos Dendrinos, Jonathan Harris, (Aldershot: 2003), pp.62-76.

later Byzantine authors in addition to early historiography. Macrides directed much of her career to deconstructing these emphases of later narratives onto prior periods.⁵⁰¹ This chapter accepts these positions as foundational in order to analyse further the criteria behind later judgements, while contextualising them within other moments of ethnic performativity and distortion discussed in earlier chapters.

The case-study of Epiros, particularly in its imperial age until 1242, remains a part of Byzantine history that is both poorly understood and disparately published. Its territories existed outside of a single national boundary, and it is rarely treated as a discrete field of study. However, for an overwhelming majority of the period 1204–1235, Laskarid Nikaia remained restricted to Anatolia. For the peoples of the Balkans, it was the Epirote state which led the Orthodox counterattack. Successful in campaigns against Crusaders, Bulgarians, and Venetians, the Epirotes successfully resisted foreign conquest then expanded eastwards across Macedonia and Thessaly. They provoked a targeted crusade from the Papacy, defeated it in 1223, and in 1224 put an end to the Latin Kingdom of Thessaloniki by annexing the city and claiming it as a new capital. Proclaimed a Roman Empire in 1225, crowned in 1227, by 1228 the Epirote state of the Komnenoi-Doukai governed more cities than the Roman Emperor in Nikaia and achieved recognition as ‘Imperator Grecorum,’ granting its ruler equal rank with Nikaia in international diplomacy.⁵⁰²

While the Laskarids were at peace with the Latin Empire after 1212, respecting a treaty that lasted a decade, their inaction ultimately cost them the loyalty and respect of the Greek Orthodox bishops of the Balkans. As the Epirote sources themselves inform us, for a long time Nikaia had been an ephemeral presence. It is remarkably poignant that after 1204 there is only one confirmed movement of Nikaian troops from Asia into Europe before the year 1235.⁵⁰³ That event was a humiliation. Around 1225 at the request of the populace a sole campaign installed a small Nikaian garrison into Latin-held Adrianople. However, in a show of military force Nikaia was soon ejected from the city by the Epirotes. As the Nikaian soldiers were led home, they were given the chance to recognise the Epirote ruler and make *proskynesis* before retreating to Asia.⁵⁰⁴ The episode aptly captured the self-belief in the western provinces of the former Byzantium that they were fully equal and independent of the east. Adrianople’s quick

⁵⁰¹ For the teleological aspect of thirteenth century sources, the DPhil thesis of Matthew Kinloch remains the most recent development to Macrides’ original framing of Akropolites’ text as a distorting and fallible narrative. Kinloch assessed individual episodes from Akropolites’ *Chronike*, establishing that both primary and secondary literature had used many statements of self-identified hearsay to create a Nikaian ‘metanarrative.’ See Matthew Kinloch, ‘Rethinking thirteenth-century Byzantine historiography: a postmodern, narrativist, and narratological approach’ (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford: 2018), pp.101-171.

⁵⁰² Akropolites, §24, trans. Macrides, pp.171-172; Nicol, *Epiros*, pp.103-105. Where Epiros governed, attempts were made to restore Roman law and administration. Efforts have been made to ascertain the *themata* and *katepanikia* that were recreated under *stratego*i and *doukes*. Lists compiled in the 1950s compiled evidence for the Epirote *themata* of Vagenitia, Acheloos, Skopje, Derbon, Sosxos, Drama, Molisko, Kolonias, Veroia, Stanos, Diabolis, Nikopolis and Thessaloniki. Dimitar Angelov, ‘K voprosu o praviteliakh fem v Epirskom despotate i Nikeiskoi imperii’ [Concerning the Rulers of the Themata in the Despotate of Epirus and the Empire of Nicaea], *Byzantinoslavica*, 12 (1951), pp.56-74. On the same methodology of the elder Angelov we could also add Voleron, Serres, Prilep and Pelagonia (Bitola). However, some of these administrative units may have been no larger than cities, a product of the Komnenian sub-division of themata in the twelfth century and others a product of the wars since. Governance appears ad hoc and unclear. Osswald argued for only five administrative themes that can be definitively isolated from sources based on a treaty of 1210 and a simple lack of information for after. Osswald, *L’Epire*, pp.347-358. For a map of Epirote territories in 1215 see *ibid.*, p.49 and in 1228 see below.

⁵⁰³ Angold, *Germanos II*, p.56. Angold states 1246, overlooking the siege of Constantinople in 1235-36.

⁵⁰⁴ Akropolites, §24, trans. Macrides, p.172; Nicol, *Epiros*, pp.103-105. One officer, John Kammytzes, did not dismount and refused to recognise Theodore. The Nikaian emperor made Kammytzes *me*gas *hetaireiarches* as reward.

capitulation to Epiros reflected that in the absence of the Laskarid dynasty, the various peoples of the Balkans were, until 1246, in a cultural and historical narrative of their own; contested by Epirotes, Latin Crusaders, Venetians, the Papacy and Bulgarians.

This chapter addresses the matter of the Byzantine ‘*Dytikoi*,’ as a community that self-identified as discrete ‘Westerners,’ and the growth of a rival, alternative Roman Empire in Epiros. That state reached the height of its power and created a lingering memory of influence and territory in the first reign of a Roman Emperor in Epiros, Theodore Komnenos Angelos Doukas (1215–1230/37–46). The chapter will then assess how, through a long rivalry with the Empire of Nikaia, Epiros’ culture was projected into an ethnic other. The Nikaian narrative, compounded by synodal and epistolary sources transformed Epiros in manners similar, yet more developed, to the examples of previous chapters. Epirote independence proved longer-lasting and more spectacular than either tensions in Constantinople in 1200 or the direct conflict with David Grand Komnenos in Paphlagonia. Nikaian textual sources for the struggle with Epiros were not expressing causes of decline or short-lived disunity but of long-term political opposition. The core of the state formed in Epiros would never again be united with Nikaia or Constantinople in any meaningful, lasting form. The Epirote-Nikaian conflict had time to crystallise and gain multiple dimensions that previous tensions did not. Two achievements cemented Theodore’s rise. In 1217 Theodore captured of Peter of Courtenay, the shortest-reigning Latin Emperor, causing Pope Honorius III (1216–1227) to call for a disastrous crusade against Theodore to defend Latin Thessaloniki and redeem the captive Peter and cardinal legate.⁵⁰⁵ That crusade was agonisingly slow to materialise, lack of information only later revealing that Peter was already dead, so Theodore released the legate and made pretence of loyalty to the Crusaders. Unrepentantly fraudulent, at the same time he continued to campaign.⁵⁰⁶ The delay and confusion in relating the discrepancy between Theodore’s overtures to Honorius sealed Latin Thessaloniki’s fate and not until 13th May 1223 do we have confirmation that Theodore was even excommunicated.⁵⁰⁷ Capturing Platamona in 1219 and Serres in 1220, only the encirclement of Thessaloniki itself provoked the final crusading bull by Honorius. By the time the crusade led by William of Montferrat landed at Halymros (near Volos) in early 1225, Thessaloniki had already fallen and the crusade collapsed with dysentery.⁵⁰⁸ When Theodore conquered Thessaloniki in Autumn 1224 there had already been plans since 1219 to crown him in the city. The Metropolitan of Naupaktos John Apokaukos foresaw that ‘Thessaloniki, a noble city befits a noble man’ [πόλις εὐγενῆς εὐγενεῖ πρέπουσα, πόλις Θεσσαλίας] and prophesied that when Theodore took the city and came to venerate St. Demetrios’ myrrh-producing tomb, he should say “Thus exalting, I may bravely await another

⁵⁰⁵ *Bullarium Hellenicum: Pope Honorius III's Letters to Frankish Greece and Constantinople (1216-1227)*, ed. W.O. Duba And C.D. Schabel, (Turnhout: 2015), §§31, 33, 35, 36, 41, 48, 190-91, pp.15-30; account of Courtenay’s capture in the William of Tyre continuation, *L'estoire d'Eracles in: Recueil des historiens des croisades, I, Historiens occidentaux*, (1844), pp.290-294. French translation of passage Brendan Osswald, ‘Trois notes sur l’histoire de Durazzo (Durrës) au XIIIe siècle,’ *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome - Moyen Âge*, 133 (2021), pp.131-168.

⁵⁰⁶ *Bullarium Hellenicum*, §§50, 51.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, §176. The letter proscribed on pain of excommunication any Catholic from ‘offering provisions, weapons, horses, and knights from serving in his army or from offering transportation to the lands of Theodore.’ ‘auctoritate nostra inhihentes ne quis equos, arma, victualia, seu etiam milites, aut aliud quodlibet auxilium presumat insuis navibus aut galeis in terram dicti Theodori transportare.’

⁵⁰⁸ For the Platamona campaign see Apokaukos’ letters in ‘Epirotica’ §4, pp.246-248 and Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ‘Epistolae,’ §12, p.269-270; Lambropoulos, §33; Nikolaos Chrissis, *Crusading in Frankish Greece A Study of Byzantine-Western Relations and Attitudes, 1204-1282*, (Brepols: 2013), pp.56-82.

anointing from this oil.”⁵⁰⁹ Probably in late 1225, Epiros made good on this prophecy. Theodore was proclaimed with the title of ‘Emperor of the Romans.’ While the coronation took until 1227 to enact, Theodore needed time to court the Balkan bishoprics, the creation of a rival Roman Empire in the Balkans escalated into an ecclesiastical schism between 1227 and 1233. Announcing the creation of an independent Epirote Church to collectively crown Theodore Emperor of the Romans, it was not easily forgotten. Hostility outlasted the loss of hegemony. Rivalry persisted beyond Epiros’ major defeat in 1230, the collapse of Asanid Bulgarian overlords after 1241, and even after the Nikaian annexation of Thessaloniki in 1246 and their attempted conquest of Epiros in 1259, so that projection of a hostile otherized ‘*Dytikoi*’ identity remained.⁵¹⁰ Despite the brevity of Epirote supremacy, the conflict inherited and then influenced the ethnic language of politics for Laskarid-Palaiologan emperors who struggled to reestablish their authority in the Balkans.

There is a teleological nature to the narrative sources of the Byzantine thirteenth century that shapes the first three decades, arguably the first half of the century, to mirror the political situation of the second. George Akropolites, Nikephoros Blemmydes, Theodore Skoutariotes, George Pachymeres, the monk Ephraim, and Nikephoros Gregoras were all either witnesses to the Nikaian reconquest of Constantinople in 1261 or lived in the capital city afterwards. Therefore, to greater and lesser extents, all our narrative authors discuss Epiros with knowledge of their failure to capture Constantinople or their later refusal to submit to either the Laskarids or the Palaiologoi who retook Constantinople.

⁵⁰⁹ Apokaukos, ‘Epirotica,’ §4, p.246-248.; Lambropoulos, §33; Ilisas Giarenis, ‘Πτυχές της ιδεολογικής αντιπαράθεσης Νίκαιας και Ηπείρου. Ο ρόλος του χρίσματος, στο Μεσαιωνική Ήπειρος,’ in *Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συμποσίου*, ed. Costas Constantinides, (Ioannina: 2001), pp.99-122; Alkimini Stavridou-Zaphraka, ‘Πολιτική ιδεολογία του κράτους της Ηπείρου,’ *Byzantiaka*, 31 (2014), pp.155-178.

⁵¹⁰ Smarnakis, ‘Political Power,’ pp.304-307; For the later narrative of Bulgaria’s collapse under multiple minority rulers amidst the Mongol invasion, see Alexandru Madgearu, *The Asanids: The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185-1280)*, (Leiden: 2016), pp.228-266; John Giebfried, ‘The Mongol Invasions and the Aegean World (1241-61),’ *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 28.2 (2013), pp.129-39.



Figure 11. Epirus and its neighbours in 1228. Map by Ian Mladjov.

3.2. Constructing ‘Bulgaria’ from the Principality of Epiros (the Empire of Thessaloniki) in Narrative Histories

Before addressing the Epirote sources and society itself, this chapter will first establish the existence of its distortion. Here presented are a selection of the well-known examples of ethnicity projected upon Epiros. The main narrative history in whose work we find this was written by the Nikaian general, diplomat, and civic functionary, George Akropolites (1217–1282). Akropolites wrote his *Chronike Syngraphe* several years after the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, likely beginning in 1267. He composed it at the court of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–1282), whom he served first as *praetor*, then *logothetes tou genikou*, and ultimately as *megas logothetes*.⁵¹¹ Holding the last position for two decades, Akropolites became the voice for the Palaiologan restoration. As he continued his career in Constantinople, the *Chronike* strongly emphasised the political ideology and legitimacy of Nikaia, presenting the Laskarid dynasty and then Michael VIII as the sole heirs to the Byzantine imperial throne. Within that milieu, Akropolites regarded the Epirote state as a rival and through his writing sought to prove it both lesser and unlawful. In addition to the leanings natural to one in high imperial service, Akropolites’ personal experience factored into this. Born in Latin Constantinople of somewhat humble stock, he had gained a preliminary education while his father served the Latins in an undefined capacity. Then at age 16 in 1233 Akropolites moved to Nikaia to complete his studies and took service with John III Vatatzes Doukas (1221–1254) and continued to serve John’s successors, both Theodore II Laskaris (1254–1258) and Michael Palaiologos. By Theodore II, Akropolites was promoted and married to Eudokia, an unknown in-law of Michael Palaiologos. He achieved significant advancement after Theodore II’s early death and in the chaos of the Arsenite schism that pitted Laskarid loyalists against the Palaiologan usurper, Akropolites strongly aligned with Michael VIII. In his accounts, he supported Michael’s elevation to the throne in 1259, while minimising the sidelining and later blinding of the legitimate Laskarid heir, John IV.

Akropolites’ personal experiences, especially his lengthy imprisonment in Epiros, as well as his place in the court of Michael VIII, greatly colour the narrative we possess. Between 1257 and the 1259 Battle of Pelagonia the major witness and sole historian for the period of exile was a prisoner captive in Arta at the court of Michael II Komnenos Doukas (1230–c.1268).⁵¹² While serving as *praetor*, Akropolites had been sent to subjugate the Albanian principality of Arbanon and the surrounding region that had been allied to Epiros since the 1200s.⁵¹³ Provoking an uprising, Akropolites was besieged in Prilep and delivered to Michael II. While we might suppose that Akropolites survived his captivity as a result of his rank and station, he also presents his release from Epiros as a matter of importance for Michael VIII as the emperor personally negotiated on his behalf.⁵¹⁴ Throughout that experience of governance and captivity there is nothing in his *Chronike Syngraphe* to suppose that Akropolites formed any ties with the Epirote West. Rather, the experience confirmed and exacerbated his prejudices. Akropolites repeatedly dubbed Michael II Komnenos Doukas, the Epirote ruler contemporary to him, as the ‘renegade,’ or more literally the ‘apostate’ [ὁ ἀποστάτης].⁵¹⁵ Ongoing conflict between Palaiologan Constantinople and provincial powers continued beyond the 1261 restoration. That conflict marked a key difference between the Palaiologan empire and the pre-1204 state and

⁵¹¹ On the date of the composition of Akropolites’ History, see Macrides, *Akropolites*, pp.31-34, and see also pp.19-25; *DOSeals*, 1951.31.5.1285, provides Akropolites’ last title from his own seal.

⁵¹² Akropolites, §70, trans. Macrides, pp.328-329.

⁵¹³ Chomatenos’ *PD*, §1 (c.1216), deals with the marriage of one Epirote ‘Komnene,’ who had been wed to Demetrios Progonos, the late ruler of Arbanon.

⁵¹⁴ Akropolites, §79, trans. Macrides, p.354.

⁵¹⁵ Akropolites, §82, trans. Macrides, pp.365-366.

was not resolved before the Palaiologoi began their rapid territorial decline in the mid-fourteenth century. Therefore, the extent to which provinces were successfully (re)assimilated into the empire is rather dubious.

Two events in the 1250s and 60s heavily shaped sources against Epiros and ensured that decades-old events maintained their relevancy in contemporary rivalries. Between 1256 and 1257 the Nikaian Emperor Theodore II Laskaris faced down a tremendous war in the Balkans against both Bulgarians and Epiros to defend his recent conquests. Belief that Nikaia had secured the peninsula and restored singular centralised rule proved short-lived. The Palaiologoi discovered instead their inability to enforce submission or break-apart homoglot and alloglot regional powers. When the army of the Nikaian Emperor and his generation of Anatolian Byzantines returned home the region simply rose in rebellion. The private correspondence of Emperor Theodore II presented these tensions succinctly. He imagined himself as an antiquarian in the Balkans with no connection to the contemporary cities. The alloglot inhabitants of Italians, Bulgarians, and Serbs, represented a limit to his world. Theodore wrote that civilisation ended at the Rhodope Mountains, and that in the future any imperial army must become made entirely of ‘Hellenes.’ Laskaris mused, ‘Shall the Persian help the Hellene? The Italian rages, the Bulgarian profanes, and the Serbian constrains with violence. Only the Hellene, by nature seizing the opportunity, can help himself.’⁵¹⁶ When the conflict inherited by his successor reignited two years later and was described in Akropolites’ *Chronike Syngraphe*, he simply re-drew the limits of Hellenism, culturally ostracising Epiros.

‘The renegade Michael was encamped with his wife and his retainers in the area of Kastoria. Suddenly the report reached him that the Roman armies were crossing the valley at Vodena, advancing against them.⁵¹⁷ Hearing this message and receiving no small fright in their hearts, they rushed to flight and set all their men in motion... They drew back then as far as their own boundaries, namely the Pyrrenaia [Pindos] mountains which separate Old and New Epiros from our Hellenic land.

ὁ δὲ ἀποστάτης Μιχαὴλ μετὰ τῆς συζύγου αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν οἰκείων περὶ τὰ τῆς Καστορίας μέρη ἐστρατοπέδευεν. ἄφνω δὲ ἐπῆλθε τούτῳ βοή, ὡς τὰ Ῥωμαϊκὰ στρατεύματα τὰ τῶν Βοδηνῶν τέμπη διαβάντα κατ’ αὐτῶν χωροῦσιν. οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀκούσαντες τῆς φωνῆς καὶ πτοίαν οὐ σμικρὰν ἐν ψυχῇ λαβόντες πρὸς δρασμὸν αὐτοὶ τε ὥρμησαν καὶ πάντα τοὺς ἑαυτῶν ἐκίνησαν... συνεστάλησαν οὖν μέχρι τῶν οἰκείων ὄρων, εἶπουν τῶν Πυρρηναίων ὄρων, ἃ δὴ διορίζει τὴν παλαιὰν τε καὶ τὴν νέαν Ἑπειρον τῆς Ἑλληνίδος καὶ ἡμετέρας γῆς.⁵¹⁸

Akropolites’ definition of Hellas, of one that aligned with political divisions to end at the Pindos mountains, differed substantially from the writings of Theodore II.⁵¹⁹ In Laskaris’ *Second Oration Against the Latins*, Laskaris set the limits of the Hellenic *genos*, to include numerous lands outside of Nikaian control. Theodore’s Hellenes, ‘first of all peoples on account of its

⁵¹⁶ Theodore II Laskaris, *Theodori Ducae Lascaris Epistulae*, ed. Nicolaus Festa, (Florence: 1898), §44.79-84 ‘καὶ τίς ὁ βοηθήσων ἡμῖν; Πέρσης πῶς βοηθήσει τῷ Ἑλλήνι; Ἴταλός καὶ μάλιστα μαινεται, Βούλγαρος προφανέστατα, Σέρβος τῇ βία βιαζόμενος καὶ συστέλλεται· μόνον δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν αὐτὸ βοηθεῖ αὐτῶνοικοθεν λαμβάνον τὰς ἀφορμάς’; Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, pp.170-175.

⁵¹⁷ Vodena, modern Edessa, was notably the final personal stronghold of Theodore Komnenos Doukas until the 1250s. Akropolites, §49, trans. Macrides, p.249.

⁵¹⁸ Akropolites, §80, trans. Macrides, p.356.

⁵¹⁹ Angelov relates in detail the differences in Theodore II’s geographical definition of ‘Hellas.’ See *Byzantine Hellene*, pp.202-216. On the differences in depictions of Hellenism between Akropolites, Nikephoros Blemmydes and Theodore II see Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, pp.380-383.

aptitude and knowledge' inhabited lands that stretched from the Pontos to the Adriatic within a network of winding rivers and gulfs. Naturally, he included within this all the Anatolian lands of Nikaia, but so too the Peloponnese, Thrace, Constantinople, Crete, all the way to Dyrrachium and Naupaktos, the cities comprising the northern and southern extent of the Despotate of Epiros, were considered Hellas. Only at Moesia and beyond a small part of Scythia did Theodore think the Hellenic *genos* ceased.⁵²⁰ The lack of consistent ethnography between the two authors, despite essential contemporaneity and shared political perspectives, illustrates how difficult and muddled viewpoints could be. We surmise that our sources, while they are commonly used to represent official outlooks, are ambiguous. They reveal personal aims more than shared belief. Theodore II Laskaris evidently envisioned a shared heritage and ecumenical Hellenism that might unite these lands; Akropolites a Constantinopolitan Roman vision that projected outsiders into other ethnonyms.⁵²¹

In an attempt to break the Epirote people away from its regional elites, Nikaia attempted to promulgate a synodal decree that demanded the excommunication of the entirety of the *Dytikoi*.

‘So a measure was devised which would achieve the Emperor's purpose, although its effect was proved to be minimal: the whole domain of the ruler [Michael II of Epiros], with its cities, its regions, and all the classes of the population under their chief were to be placed under an interdict and an *anathema*, both by proclamation and by synodal *tomos* [decree], and it was to be stipulated that no communion at the Lord's mysteries was to take place in the area, not even for those in extremis, no baptisms, nor burials, nor any of the rites normally practiced by Christians were to be performed. The idea was that such straits would cause all the population, or a majority among them, to revolt against their own ruler, and when he had been bound to be handed over by them, they would submit to the yoke of obedience imposed by the person devising such a measure.

Καὶ μέθοδος ἐντεῦθεν ἐπινοεῖται δι’ ἧς ἀνυσθεῖν τὸ σπουδαζόμενον, εἰ καὶ ἀσυντελής ἀπελήλεγκται, τὸ τὴν ἐκείνου σύμπασαν ἐπικράτειαν, τὰς πόλεις τὰς χώρας τὸν παμμιγῆ μετὰ τοῦ ἡγεμόνος λαόν, ἀφορισμῶ καθυποβεβλήσθαι καὶ ἀναθέματι, διὰ τε φωνῆς καὶ διὰ τόμου συνοδικοῦ, καὶ ὠρίσθαι, μήτε τῶν δεσποτικῶν μυστηρίων εἶναι τινα κοινωνὸν ἐκεῖσε μὴ δ’ ἐπ’ αὐταῖς μεταλλάξῃσι, μήτε βαπτισμοὺς ἢ κηδεύσεις ἢ τί ἕτερον τελεῖσθαι τῶν νενομισμένων χριστιανοῖς, ὡς ἂν ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων ἀναγκασμάτων, ἢ πάντες, ἢ τὸ πλῆθος, τοῦ σφῶν αὐτῶν κατεξανεστηκότες ἄρχοντος, ἐν δεσμοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἐν ἀγωγῇ γεγονότος, ὑποταγῆς ἀχένα πρὸς τὸν μεθοδευσάμενον κλίνωσι, ταῦτα διανοούμενον, ὧν πέρας οὐθέν, ταῦτ’ ἀναπλάττοντα τῷ ἐθέλειν, ὧν τὸ πράττεσθαι τὸ ἀσύστατον, τά, φρονέοντ’ ἀνὰ θυμὸν, ἃ ῥ’ οὐ τελέεσθαι ἔμελλεν.⁵²²

The measure, aimed at causing an uprising in Epiros to overthrow their leaders, failed due to the intervention of Nikephoros Blemmydes, the imperial tutor, philosopher, and counsellor. Blemmydes advocated for prudence and negotiation, a continuation of Nikaian policies that had won the Laskarids Anatolia and avoided such drastic splits of the Orthodox Church. He warned of:

‘Innumerable crowds of Christians, guilty of no crime, whom we are driving, against their will and against the Lord’s will, far from the proffered hand that would help them,

⁵²⁰ Christos Krikones, *Θεοδώρου Β' Λασκάρειος Περὶ Χριστιανικῆς Θεολογίας Λόγοι* (Thessaloniki: 1988), p.138.34-45; Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, p.213.

⁵²¹ Cf. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, p.381.

⁵²² Blemmydes, *CV*, §1.81, trans. p.89; Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, p.178.

and far from his dominion... Would it not be fine if we brought them together? And if we encouraged them? And if we won them over?’

καὶ ἡμεῖς ἄρτι, τοὺς δὴ τοσούτους τοῦ δεσπότη καμάτους, ὅσον τὸ ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῖς φρούδους ποιεῖν ἐπειγόμεθα, καὶ τὸ κράτιστον ἔργον αὐτοῦ καταλύομεν, ἐσμὸς χριστιανικοῦ μικροῦ δεῖν ἀπείρους, ἠδικηκότας οὐδέν, τῆς τοῦ προσλαβομένου χειρὸς ἐκσπῶντες ἄκοντος ἄκοντας, καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ κυριότητος πόρρω τιθέμενοι. Πότερον οὐ καλῶς συνάγομεν; Οὐ καλῶς οἰκοδομοῦμεν; Οὐ καλῶς ἐπιστρέφομεν.’⁵²³

We know very little about further negotiations beyond Blemmydes’ claim that he succeeded in shifting the *anathema* and excommunication solely to the Epirote ruler. Repeatedly, Blemmydes mediated on behalf of an independent Epiros. He respected Epiros’ right to exist, calling it ‘self-governing and self-appointed’ [αὐθέκαστοι καὶ αὐθαίρετοι].⁵²⁴ He even studied in Epiros, used its libraries for books he couldn’t find in Anatolia, and freely made relationships across the Aegean including with the independent Gabalades *kaisares* of Rhodes.⁵²⁵ Such moments reflected the ties which continued to connect former Byzantine territories. In addition, Blemmydes maintained a warm epistolary contact with the Epirote ruler and aptly demonstrated the chasm between projected political divisions of former imperial lands post-1204 and an enduring shared cultural sphere.⁵²⁶

After the 1261 reconquest of Constantinople, Epiros continued to play a role in the factionalism of the deeply unhappy early years of Michael VIII Palaiologos. Following clashes in 1259, Michael VIII resumed the war against the Epirotes in 1265 but achieving little returned to the capital in ignominy. There he continued to face opposition from Patriarch Arsenios who had opposed Michael’s path to the throne at every turn as sworn protector of the Laskarid dynasty. When Palaiologos’ returned he intimidated Arsenios’ supporters.⁵²⁷ In response Arsenios formally rebuked the emperor as he sought to pray at the Hagia Sophia for waging an ‘ἐμφυλίου πολέμου’, a ‘civil war’ against Epirote Christians who, amongst other aspects, shared the Orthodox faith.⁵²⁸ Because it was an unjust war against a man who was ‘one flock in Christ’ Arsenios claimed, it had failed.⁵²⁹ We cannot know how widely the Patriarch’s judgement was shared. What we can suppose is that supporters of Michael VIII, including Akropolitēs, wished to defend the emperor, and did so by attacking Epiros and Arsenios’ argument. If they could demonstrate that they had betrayed the faith, had transformed from *homoglottoi* or a similar term into another *ethnos* or *genos*, then in their political conflict they could be more certainly regarded as opponents.⁵³⁰ This then was the paradigm of our sources through which we are constantly forced to look through, reflecting a much later, highly polemic, and debatably genuine historical reality.

A monarch would remain independent in the capital at Arta with only brief interludes until the city fell to the Ottomans in 1449. While useful context, we should obviously avoid teleological perspectives, Epiros’ lasting independence was not guaranteed to either side. To the thirteenth-century generation of interest to this thesis, the twelfth-century Byzantine Empire of the

⁵²³ Ibid., §1.83-84, trans. p.90-91; ‘Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, p.178.

⁵²⁴ Blemmydes, *CV*, §63-64.15-16; Angold, *Church and Society*, p.540.

⁵²⁵ Alexis Savvides, ‘Ἡ Πρόδος καὶ ἡ Δυναστεία τῶν Γαβαλάδων τὴν Περίοδο 1204-1250 μ.Χ.,’ *Δελτίον*, 24 (1981), pp.358-376.

⁵²⁶ For Blemmydes’ letter to Michael II see J.B. Bury, ‘Inedita Nicephori Blemmydae,’ *BZ*, 6 (1897), pp.528-531.

⁵²⁷ Pachymeres, III, §24.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., III, §26.

⁵²⁹ Ibid. III, §26.6 ‘ἐπειδήπερ καὶ μιᾶς μάνδρας ἐστὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.’

⁵³⁰ Kyriakidis, ‘The idea of civil war,’ pp.243-256; Stouraitis, ‘Collective Identifications,’ pp.99-116.

Komnenoi, stretching from Dyrrachium to Trebizond remained in living memory. A more productive investigation should assess both how and why Epiros grew into an alternative state, how it offered populations like Adrianople a choice to either support or deny their own imperial mission, and the challenge this posed. Then, having ascertained the means of provocation, we might continue to trace the ethnic distortion and condemnation common to other chapters of this thesis, while ascertaining the particularities of the conflict in this region. Framing Epiros as an ideological, religious, and cultural alternative, and the condemnation which that provoked, are key issues for further unpacking innovations and changes to social and group identities within the former Byzantine world.

Akropolites' image of the Epirotes in the early decades of the thirteenth century is therefore informed by the author's context, his biases, and the politics of late thirteenth-century ethnography. One of the most notorious examples of Akropolites' (mis)representation of Epiros concerns the narrative of the coronation of Theodore Komnenos Doukas, who crowned himself Emperor of the Romans in 1227 at the height of Epiros' power. The event itself was a provocation. It represented the transition from undefined polity to imperial monarchy, and the response it elicited was polemically divisive, a trend that continued in Akropolites' re-telling.⁵³¹

‘But the Archbishop of Bulgaria, Demetrios, crowned him with the imperial diadem since, as he said, he [Demetrios] was independent and was not obliged to give account of his actions to anyone, and for this reason had the authority to anoint emperors—whomever, wherever, and whenever he wished. When Theodore was proclaimed emperor, he dealt with affairs in an imperial manner: he appointed *despotes* and *sebastokratores*, *megaloi domestikoi*, *protovestiarioi*, and all the rest of the imperial hierarchy. But, being naturally unsuited to the institutions of the imperial office, he handled matters in a Bulgarian or, rather, barbarian fashion for he did not understand hierarchy or protocol or the many ancient customs which have been established in the palaces.

ὁ δὲ Βουλγαρίας ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Δημήτριος τὸ βασιλικὸν περιδιδύσκει τοῦτον διάδημα, ὡς ἔφασκεν, αὐτόνομος ὢν καὶ μηδενὶ εὐθύναις ὀφείλων δοῦναι, καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν βασιλέας χρίειν οὓς τε ἂν καὶ ὅπου καὶ ὅτε βούλοιο. βασιλεὺς οὖν ἀναγορευθεὶς ὁ Θεόδωρος βασιλικῶς ἐχρῆτο τοῖς πράγμασι, δεσπότης τε προυβάλλετο καὶ σεβαστοκράτορας μεγάλους τε δομεστικούς, πρωτοβεστιαρίους καὶ τὴν λοιπὴν πᾶσαν τάξιν βασιλικήν. ἀφυῶς δὲ ἔχων περὶ τοὺς τῆς βασιλείας θεσμοὺς Βουλγαρικώτερον ἢ μᾶλλον βαρβαρικώτερον ταῖς ὑποθέσεσι προσεφέρετο, οὐ τάξιν γινώσκων οὐδὲ κατάστασιν οὐδὲ ὅσα ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀρχαῖα ἔθιμα καθεστήκασιν.⁵³²

When the account was written it was describing events three decades earlier. In 1227 at the time of Theodore's coronation, Akropolites was only an eleven-year-old child living still in Constantinople. However, as an adult he chose to provide an account of Theodore's coronation that fully otherises, barbarises, and 'Bulgarises' the Epirote state and the emperor with whom it reached its zenith. The Epirote Roman Emperor, Theodore Komnenos Angelos Doukas, a great-grandson of Alexios I Komnenos, nephew of Manuel I, cousin to Isaak II and Alexios III, at one point himself a commander in the Nikaian army of Theodore Laskaris c.1204–05, yet despite all of these was recast as a Bulgarian. We can only assume the insult rang as hollow to contemporaries as it does to a modern audience but it is a reminder of the ease with which the

⁵³¹ See Section 3.9, pp.184–202.

⁵³² Akropolites, §21.11-22, trans. Macrides, p.162; Smarnakis, 'Political Power,' p.305.

‘Roman’ ethnonym could be removed.⁵³³ In the judgement of Akropolites’ narrative, Theodore was a barbarian irrespective of his aristocratic birth as the son of a Doukas *sebastokrator*, and his generational kinship to the imperial family. It overlooked a Greek-language education within Constantinople, all previous acts of service, and any of these easily demonstrated facts to create a judgement within the boundaries of contemporary Byzantine historical writing to create an ethnic Bulgarian and a barbarian. In this respect Akropolites’ treatment of Theodore to make Romanness contingent to political loyalty goes one step further than his predecessors’ portraits of John ‘the Fat’ Axouchos Komnenos. For Theodore, there was no evidence of foreign parentage required to make a Roman ‘usurper’ a barbarian. The development continued the trend of the twelfth-century authors yet was only the first of such moments in Akropolites’ narrative.

Having established that much of Akropolites’ writing projects the situation of the 1250s and 1260s into the context of the 1220s and 1230s, we can now look at the criteria for such judgements. In a recent PhD thesis, Athanasios Eleutheriou has judged the state of Nikaia to be an ‘empire of propaganda.’⁵³⁴ We might posit that Nikaia projected perspectives of the situation in the 1250s back into the past, with a key agent being George Akropolites. While the thesis has not considered Epiros, it has demonstrated the capacity for a positivist reading of our source material as well as the dangers that transpire from such an approach. Eleutheriou takes to task several of Akropolites’ claims, including that the towns of Stenimachos, Peristitza, Krytzimos, Tzepaina, Ohrid, Oustra, Perperakion, Kryvous all went over to Tsar Michael Asan in 1254, ‘For the inhabitants, being Bulgarians, sided with those of the same race (*homophyloi*), shaking off the yoke of those who spoke another language.’⁵³⁵ Eleutheriou queried this statement and its relevance to one of the better-known moments of supposed ‘national awakening’ at the city of Melnik in 1246. This was, as is known in historiography, the geographic setting of the supposed speech that saw the population of Melnik, reportedly living in that part of Macedonia since the Bulgar conquest of 1205, declare themselves as of ‘the pure Roman *genos*, all driven from Philippopolis’ [ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες καὶ ἐκ Φιλιππουπόλεως ὁρμώμεθα, καθαροὶ τὸ γένος Ῥωμαῖοι] as a substantive enough reason to join the advancing Nikaian empire.⁵³⁶ Multiple scholars have supposed that this speech conveyed an ideological policy, and in fact promoted the paradigm of the post-1261 Palaiologan state.⁵³⁷ We might go further however, and suppose that the court culture in which Akropolites wrote presented itself as a solely Greek-speaking one, deeply mistrusting (amongst others) the Bulgarians.

It is certain that an anti-Bulgarian, but essentially broader anti-alloglots attitude was present in Akropolites’ *Chronike Syngraphe*. It belonged to a period of strongly politicised ethnicities and projected a message that concealed that many Greek-speakers, formerly under either Epiros or various Bulgarian lords, had not rejoined the empire. The population of Melnik as it appears in the chancellery documents of *despotes* Alexios Slav in the 1210s was decidedly bi-lingual

⁵³³ Macrides, *Akropolites*, p.95; Page, *Being Byzantine*, pp.99-101.

⁵³⁴ Athanasios Eleutheriou, *Πληθυσμιακή κινητικότητα, εθνολογική σύνθεση και η εικόνα του "άλλου" στην αυτοκρατορία της Νίκαιας (1204-1261)*, (PhD thesis, Kapodistrian University of Athens: 2020). Hypothesis on p.266.

⁵³⁵ Akropolites, §54.108.2-5, trans. Macrides, p.281, ‘Βούλγαροι καὶ γὰρ τυγχάνοντες οἱ οἰκίτορες τοῖς ὁμοφύλοις προσέτρεχον, τὸν ζυγὸν τῶν ἀλλογλώσσων ἀποσειόμενοι.’

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, §44.27-28, adapted trans. p.231.

⁵³⁷ Much about the speech is unusual. Philippopolis was infamous for Bogomilism and anti-ecclesiastical resistance, not *Romanitas*. The city had been recently criticised as such by Villehardouin in the early campaigns of the Latin Empire, Villehardouin, §399. To depict the people of Philippopolis as a city of unyielding Roman loyalists is frankly inconsistent. Angold, ‘Byzantine “nationalism,”’ pp.49-70, esp. pp.63-65; Macrides, ‘George Akropolites’ rhetoric,’ in: *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, (Oxford: 2003), pp.201-211.

and it is unlikely that the Greek-speakers widely attested in Epirote sources detailing a multi-ethnic society from 1215–1236 had fled in their entirety by 1254.⁵³⁸ Our understanding of human migrations, both forced and voluntary, makes that doubtful.⁵³⁹ It would be more appropriate to see a continual and broader Bulgarisation to how Epiros and the mixed ‘Western’ population of Balkans were depicted and events distorted. Accepting that paradigm, we could then interpret that Akropolites’ text had a progression to his work, there was first the original Bulgarisation of Theodore Komnenos Doukas, and then the entire population of Macedonia made ‘Bulgarian’ by their loyalty to a foreign power.

We should consider also Akropolites’ depiction of the defeat of Demetrios Komnenos Doukas (1244–1246), Theodore’s younger son, during the Nikaian annexation of Thessaloniki in 1246. The event was ignominious. Demetrios, subordinate to Nikaia since his brother’s act of demotion in 1242, refused to supply the Nikaian Emperor John III Vatatzes Doukas with a market or to act as befitted a *despotes* loyal to his Emperor.⁵⁴⁰ Consequently, a conspiracy formed uniting a group of sympathisers within the city with a small force of Nikaian troops. The result allowed Vatatzes’ army to gain control of a city gate and enter. Demetrios was delivered to Vatatzes and was saved from blinding only by the intercession of his sister Eirene, wife of the Bulgarian Tsar, who managed to gain a pardon on account of her brother’s youth.⁵⁴¹ The end to Komnenoi-Doukai Thessaloniki after twenty-two years was then recorded in a manner that denied, dismissed, and rewrote the identity of the entire regime:

‘The city of Thessaloniki thus became subject to the Emperor John or, rather, to the Romans; for those who had ruled her were opposed to the Romans.

ἡ μὲν οὖν πόλις Θεσσαλονίκη οὕτως ὑπὸ τὸν βασιλέα γέγονεν Ἰωάννην, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίους· οἱ γὰρ αὐτὴν κρατοῦντες ἐναντιόφρονες Ῥωμαίους ἐτέλουν.’⁵⁴²

Akropolites presented the Komnenoi-Doukai of Thessaloniki, and by extension the entirety of their land in the Balkans as non-Roman. The qualification for this was that being outside the community of the Nikaian Roman Empire made them into something ‘other’. His perspective posits Roman as a purely political identity not defined by language, religion, or family, but entirely by political agency and loyalties. That is the opposite of the ‘Roman nation’ espoused by the school of Anthony Kaldellis and Aleksander Jovanović.⁵⁴³ This ideology propagated

⁵³⁸ Basileios Demos, ‘Ἐθνολογικά στοιχεία στα ἔργα του Δημητρίου Χωματιανού,’ in: *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμπόσιου για το Δεσποτάτο*, pp.280-285. There is a heavy emphasis on Greek as the language of legitimate power in several overtly pro-Palaiologoi passages. In a later passage discussing the acclamation of Michael VIII, Akropolites presented it as exceptional that the Cumans transplanted to Anatolia by John III acclaimed the emperor ‘not in a barbaric voice, but in Greek and intelligibly’ [ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ Σκυθικὸν ἤροντο γένος, οὐ βαρβαρικῶς ἀπεκίνοντο ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἑλληνικῶς τε καὶ συνετῶς]. Akropolites, §76.158.17-20, trans. Macrides, p.346n.10.

⁵³⁹ Normal practice saw a large part of the community either slowly return or make arrangements with new overlords. For migrations, both forced and voluntary in this period see *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone Aspects of Mobility between Africa, Asia and Europe, 300-1500*, eds. Johannes Preiser-Kapeller *et al.* especially Yannis Stouraitis, ‘Migrating in the Medieval East Roman World, ca. 600-1204’ pp.141-165; and Alexander Beihammer, ‘Patterns of Turkish Migration and Expansion in Byzantine Asia Minor in the 11th and 12th Centuries,’ pp.166-192.

⁵⁴⁰ For John Komnenos Doukas’ demotion see Akropolites, §40, trans. Macrides, pp.215-216.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, §45, trans. Macrides, pp.237-238.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, §45.12-15, trans. Macrides, p.238.

⁵⁴³ Kaldellis, *Romanland*; Jovanović, *Michael VIII and the Publics*, Kaldellis’ argument has been discussed. Jovanović’s claims are simply too broad and sweeping to reflect the nuance of the period. See p.5 ‘the majority of the urban population in the Sultanate of Rum was still Roman’ or p.29 ‘The Hellenophone inhabitants of the

within Constantinople after 1261 made the Palaiologan state the *only* Byzantine-Roman state. It denied a rival Byzantine claimant family's Roman legitimacy and, aside from demonstrating a purely political loyalist conception of Roman identity that was subjective, demonstrated that it could be cast aside at will. We shall observe one final mention in Akropolites:

‘The western *genos* is by nature inert in regard to defending towns. For such are the inhabitants of the western parts, readily yielding to all potentates. In this way they avoid death and preserve most of their wealth.

οἱ ἄλλοι μαλακισθέντες— φύσει γὰρ ὑπάρχει τὸ δυτικὸν γένος πρὸς φυλάξεις ἄστεων μαλθακώτερον— τοιοῦτοι γὰρ εἰσιν οἱ τῶν δυτικῶν οἰκίτορες, ῥαδίως πᾶσι τοῖς δυαστεύουσιν ὑποπίπτοντες. ἐντευθεν τοὺς ὀλευθροὺς ἀποφυγγάνουσι καὶ τὰ πλείω τῶν σφετέρων περιουσιῶν διασώζουσι.⁵⁴⁴

The identification of alternate *gene* in Byzantine contexts is a complex issue. Ioannis Smarnakis saw in this passage evidence that the victorious Nikaïans back in Constantinople considered that the Epirotes ‘had a different ethnic identity to that of the Romans.’⁵⁴⁵ It is certainly the suggestion, but the question is likely not one of ethnicity, but of loyalty represented as ethnicity. Accepting this judgement as the state of affairs in the 1270s as the culmination of processes of otherization, it is the chapter's intent to further discuss moments of projection and distortion in Akropolites. Can we detect where that ‘ethno-political’ exclusivity had begun, what criteria it used, and how it had developed since 1204?

The other major source for attitudes towards the Byzantine ‘West’ is George Pachymeres, who was likely the first Greek-language historian to mature and gain much of his education outside Constantinople in centuries. Born in Nikaïa around 1242 he followed Michael VIII Palaiologos to Constantinople in 1261 and was ordained deacon before rising through the church ranks to *protekdikos*. Pachymeres' wrote a *History* of both Michael and his successor Andronikos II that frequently laments the collapse of Byzantine Anatolia, which he calls ‘the Eastern provinces’ [τὰ ἀνατολικὰ... τάξεις]. In his narrative, Pachymeres identifies the constant need to transport troops to combat the ambitions of ‘the West’ of Michael II of Epiros as a major cause of the decline.⁵⁴⁶ Notably in a passage narrating the 1263 treaty made between *despotes* John Palaiologos, commander of his brother Emperor Michael Palaiologos' armies, and ‘Michael of the West’ [Μιχαήλ ὁ τῆς δύσεως] there was a later addition by the author. In a complaining palinode he added to the passage:

‘Then again, the emperor attacked the *Dytikoi*. For it was not possible, *it was not*, for those people to remain in their place.

Τότε τοίνυν καὶ πάλιν ἀπεπειρᾶτο τῶν δυτικῶν· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἦν, οὐκ ἦν, ἐπὶ ταῦτοῦ μένειν ἐκεῖνους.⁵⁴⁷

empire in exile together with their once-compatriots living in Epeiros, the crusader states such as the Principality of Achaea or Lusignan Cyprus, and the Saljuq Sultanate of Rum saw themselves simply as Romans.’; cf. Yannis Stouraitis, ‘Collective Identifications in Byzantine Civil Wars,’ pp.99-116.

⁵⁴⁴ Akropolites, §80.55.56, trans. Macrides, p.357.

⁵⁴⁵ Smarnakis, ‘Political Power,’ p.306.

⁵⁴⁶ Albert Failler, ‘Signification du terme "Dytikoi" dans l'histoire de Pachymère,’ in: *Actes du XV^e Congrès international d'études byzantines*, 4, (Athens: 1980), pp.114-120.

⁵⁴⁷ Pachymeres, III, §20.25-26, Emphasis added. cf. I.6.

The extent to which Pachymeres' upbringing influenced this view is not yet quantified. His Roman *patria* was firstly his home in Anatolia and then the imperial capital of Constantinople. He had little first-hand knowledge of an independent and crowned Epirote Balkans and evidently considered it a source of weakness and pain for imperial governance.

The perspectives of the narrative historians are important and useful; they inform us of Epiros' reception by other Greek-speakers. However, they only tell us how Epiros was considered and remembered after 1261 and the restoration of the Empire by the Palaiologoi. We need also to consider how long had the ideology that the Epirotes belonged to a different ethnic group been current. Is it possible to detect the Nikaian response and contemporary distortion to Theodore's rise, or how much ethnic hostility was shared between pre and post-1261 attacks on Epiros? How quickly did political fragmentation and conflict gain an ethnic element? To answer these questions we need to turn to the writings of the Nikaian generation from 1220 to 1240, primarily Patriarchs Manuel Sarantenos and Germanos II, Nikephoros Blemmydes - the grammarian and monk who tutored Theodore II Laskaris.⁵⁴⁸ Through them, we might understand whether ethnic distortion and misrepresentation of Epiros amidst the projection of an inherent ethnic hostility were creations of the reign and restoration of Michael VIII Palaiologos or if they could be found earlier. Most of all, we should query what had changed about the West? What, in some authors' eyes, had become irredeemably Bulgarian about the Epirote Roman Empire?

⁵⁴⁸ Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, pp.80-88.



Figure 12. Excavated stretch of the Via Egnatia, Village of Radozde, Struga, Lake Ohrid. Photo taken by author, 23/09/2024.

3.3. Historical Foundation: Michael I and the Angeloi Network

Before considering Epiros' own sources regarding the ethnic identities of its rulers and subjects, a detour into the circumstances of their political foundation and state ideology should first be given. Much has developed since the eminent history *The Despotate of Epiros* was published by Donald Nicol in 1958 and a modern monograph dedicated to the History and culture of an independent Epiros remains desirable. It is no longer correct to think of the early history of Epiros as an independent state when so much of what they did was in the service of the exiled emperor Alexios III. Rather, early Epiros should be viewed as an extension of the kinship network of the Angeloi, a connection of familial ties, marriage alliances, and patronage that far outlasted Alexios III's career as emperor and only gradually transformed into a monarchy. As should be acknowledged the Byzantine successor state formed in the western Balkans by the descendants of the *sebastokrator* John Doukas (d.1200) is commonly, though anachronistically, referred to as the Despotate of Epiros.⁵⁴⁹ John Doukas, a commander at the famous imperial defeat at Myriokephalon in 1176 and later promoted by his nephew Isaak II Angelos, left six sons three of whom (Michael, Theodore, and Manuel) would independently rule former Byzantine territories. Those sons' own descendants would then govern either Epiros or Thessaloniki until 1318. The title 'Despotate of Epiros' however is entirely a creation of their enemies and adopted by historiography.⁵⁵⁰ For the generation we are concerned with here referred to their land as either '*Romanía*,' 'the West,' or simply by referring to the geographical *theme* or city i.e. Bulgaria, Ohrid, Nikopolis, Epiros, Vagenetia etc. While the title of *despotes* was granted by emperors in Nikaia in 1242 as an attempt at downgrading their ambitions, it is the opinion of this thesis that there is significant evidence of that term's usage both before and after Epiros' assumption of the imperial crown in 1224/7. Similar to the Constantinopolitan Komnenoi, the two titles *despotes* and 'Emperor of the Romans' were also used concurrently until the end of the thirteenth century.

For those early years between 1204 and 1224, the period termed the 'Indefinite State' of Epiros, the imperial pedigree and connection to previous imperial families was repeatedly invoked.⁵⁵¹ This ideology rested heavily on the legacy John Doukas left his sons. The *sebastokrator* was the product of the unusual marriage of Alexios I's daughter Theodora Komnene to Constantine Angelos, a union that hugely elevated the stock of her husband and had him entitled *pansebastohypertatos*. Consequently, John bequeathed to his descendants the ability to style themselves using any of the three imperial houses of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁵⁵² His seal, reconstructed from two halves catalogued separately, show a pride and familial legitimacy that placed him in the upper echelons of imperial ideology. Depicting an exquisite rendering of the *Deesis* it reads:

'This metrical seal is the property of John, *of-purple-descent* and son of a Doukas mother, also descended from the Angeloi on his father's side, and a *sebastokrator* by appointment.

⁵⁴⁹ *Despotes*, a title normally reserved for the emperor's brother or son, was first given by Manuel I in the 1160s for his heir apparent and son-in-law Bela. cf. Magdalino, 'Neglected Authority,' pp.316-323; Rodolphe Guiland, 'Recherches sur l'histoire administrative de l'Empire byzantin: Le despote, δεσπότης,' *REB*, 17 (1959), pp.52-89.

⁵⁵⁰ For Akropolites and Pachymeres' later and hostile description of the Epirote rulers as 'Despots of the West' see Failler, 'Signification,' pp.114-120.

⁵⁵¹ Osswald, 'Epirus as Political Laboratory,' pp.13-37; idem., 'Aux origines du despotat d'Épire: quelques notes prosopographiques concernant le sebastokrator Jean Doukas et son fils Michel Ier Comnène Doukas,' *Μεσαιωνικά και νέα Ελληνικά*, 13 (2019), pp.9-44.

⁵⁵² John's brother Andronikos was the father of Isaak II and Alexios III Angelos, making his children the cousins of the Angeloi emperors; Varzos, §§90, 93.



Figure 13. Seal of the sebastokrator John Doukas.

στιχομετρία κτύσης σφραγίς Ἰωάννου πορφυρογέννου Δούκαινης μητρός παιδὸς ἐξ Ἀγγελῶν δὲ πατρόθεν κατηγμένου καὶ σεβαστοκράτορος ἐκ τῆς ἀξίας.⁵⁵³

The seal established an unusual if highly prestigious lineage. Claiming the then current imperial house of the Angeloi, it also invoked the legacy of the Doukai/Komnenoi and demonstrated a late twelfth-century understanding of *porphyrogenes* [πορφυρογεννής] as a term notably distinct from *porphyrogenitos* [πορφυρογέννητος]. This was related to the fact that John was not actually born in the purple birthing chamber of the imperial palace. He was not the son of a reigning emperor, but his mother had been the daughter of one. Komnenos was simply implied. It is a distinction worth noting for the only other attestation of *porphyrogenes*, or ‘of-purple-descent,’ was one of the homonyms employed by the court poet Theodore Prodromos to refer to the reigning Emperor John II Komnenos, another child of Alexios I.⁵⁵⁴ The conception therefore of an extrapolated porphyry lineage and of the prestige and the potential capacity for rulership imbued within that term remained undefined.⁵⁵⁵ However, for the children of John Doukas it was a gift and was recognised as such. Well before the imperial disintegration finalised in 1204, John’s children invoked the connection and its potential.⁵⁵⁶ John’s eldest son Constantine Angelos’ seals had called himself a ‘grandson of a purple-born’ [πορφυροφύος ἔκγονος] prior to an attempted coup against Isaak II that saw him blinded.⁵⁵⁷ When Theodore Komnenos Doukas rebuilt a tower in Dyrrachium in 1217, well prior to his assumption of the crown, the inscription invoked John’s legacy and named him ‘This child of a happy man John, the *sebastokrator*, the flower of the [imperial] purple, Theodore supreme in

⁵⁵³ *DOSeals*, 1951.31.5.537 (top left and bottom right), *DOSeals*, 1951.31.5.2858 (top right and bottom left).

⁵⁵⁴ Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte*, §7.9.

⁵⁵⁵ cf. Macrides, ‘What’s in the name,’ pp.238-245.

⁵⁵⁶ For John’s younger brother Alexios Angelos Komnenos’ 1164 inscription at St. Panteleimon at Nerezi, Skopje see Ida Sinkević, ‘Alexios Angelos Komnenos, a Patron without History?’ *Gesta*, 35 (1996), pp.34-42.

⁵⁵⁷ *DOSeals*, 1958.106.486; NC, CD, §435-437, trans. pp.239-240.

military command, Doukas Komnenos, firm, strong-handed.’⁵⁵⁸ The repeated invocation of imperial-adjacent epithets was testament to the cultural memory and enshrinement of a family legacy. It was by that point not just a reference to the 1122 marriage of the *porphyrogenita* Theodora Komnene and Constantine Angelos, but of what that represented. John Doukas may have been only the cousin and *sebastokrator* of Isaak II but there was an element of inherited prestige that would continue to define the early years of the Angelos-Komnenos-Doukas domains in Epiros.

An independent lordship was first founded in Arta [Ἄρτας], the capital of the theme of Nikopolis, by John’s illegitimate son Michael. The outline of Michael’s career before 1204 is known in sketchy details. We have a probable seal, wherein he is styled Michael Komnenos *sebastos*, by that point a highly general term used as an honorific to all members of the extended imperial and aristocratic families.⁵⁵⁹ It is known from Niketas Choniates that under Alexios III, Michael had served as *doux* and *anagrapheus* [δοῦξ καὶ ἀναγραφεὺς] in the themes of Mylassa and Melanoudion.⁵⁶⁰ An *Anagrapheus* by the late Komnenian period was usually responsible for taxation and land cadastre serving as either the direct subordinate or precursor to an individual becoming *doux* and governor of a theme itself.⁵⁶¹ It would appear Michael performed both functions. According to Choniates in 1200 this illegitimate tax-collector prince rebelled, seeking help from the Seljuk Sultan Sulayman II (1196–1204) and raided the towns of the Meander Valley ‘showing himself to be worse than the foreigners [χείρων τῶν ἀλλοφύλων] and a more pitiless murderer.’⁵⁶² While a sign of military ambition, all should be read with the awareness of Choniates’ disapproval of Michael’s independence after 1204. Michael then reappears amongst the retinue of Boniface of Montferrat, the founding Frankish King of Thessaloniki (1204–1207), initially accompanying the campaign to Macedonia before departing to quell unrest in Epiros. Before leaving, he swore an oath of allegiance to Boniface to serve the Frankish conquest.⁵⁶³ However, Michael proceeded to marry either the daughter or widow of the recently murdered governor of Nikopolis and assumed authority in Arta.⁵⁶⁴ Eschewing conventional titles Michael was known only by his father’s rank and dynasties; as another ‘uncrowned’ power he occupied a unique liminal zone of authority.⁵⁶⁵ For the next

⁵⁵⁸ Fundić, *Art, Power, and Patronage*, p.17. ‘Παῖς οὗτος ἀνδρὸς εὐτυχοῦς, Ἰω(άννου) σεβαστοκρατοῦντος, ἄνθους πορφύρας, Θεόδωρος μέγιστος ἐν στρατηγίαις, Δοῦκας Κομνηνός, εὐσθενής, βριαρόχειρ’.

⁵⁵⁹ *DOSeals*, 1951.31.5.2914; Cf. Wassiliou-Seibt, *Siegel mit metrischen Legenden* II, no. 2126. ‘σκέποις Μιχαήλ, ταγματῶν ἀρχηγέτα, γένει Κομνηνὸν καὶ σεβαστὸν ἀξία.’ Trans. ‘Commander of the hosts, may you watch over Michael, a Komnenos by *genos* and a *sebastos* by rank.’

⁵⁶⁰ NC, CD, §529, trans. Magoulias, p.290.

⁵⁶¹ Pagona Papadopoulou, ‘Coinage, Numismatic Circulation and Monetary Policy under John II Komnenos (1118–1143),’ in: *John II Komnenos, Emperor of Byzantium: In the Shadow of Father and Son*, eds. Alessandra Bucossi, Alex Rodriguez Suarez (Abingdon, 2016), pp.183-200; Efi Ragia, ‘Ἡ αναδιοργάνωση τῶν θεμάτων στη Μικρά Ἀσία τὸν δωδέκατο αἰῶνα καὶ τὸ θέμα Μυλάσσης καὶ Μελανουδίου,’ *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 17 (2008), pp. 223-38.

⁵⁶² It is possible that Michael received this help from the party of John Tzelepes Komnenos, son of Alexios I’s son Isaak, who had converted to Islam and married a daughter of Sultan Masud I, and been at the Seljuk court since the 1150s. John’s absence from the history of his brother Andronikos’ reign in the 1180s suggests a death by then, although a son named Sulayman Komnenos is purported. The other prominent Komnenian in Seljuk service, Manuel Komnenos Maurozomes, did not arrive in Konya until after Sultan Sulayman’s death in 1204. Varzos pp.480-485; Sophie Métivier, ‘Les Maurozōmai, Byzance et le sultanat de Rūm. Note sur le sceau de Jean Comnène Maurozōmēs,’ *REB*, 67 (2009), pp.197-207.

⁵⁶³ Villehardouin, §301, trans. Smith, p.81.

⁵⁶⁴ These details come from the hagiographical *Life of St. Theodora of Arta* written by the monk Job in the late thirteenth century. With major chronological errors, it is of more use for the later reception and mythologising of Epiros’ founding amidst opposition to the Palaiologoi. *PG 127:903-8* and in translation by Alice-Mary Talbot in *Holy Women in Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation*, (Washington D.C.: 1996), pp.323-335.

⁵⁶⁵ On Autoreianos’ attempts to forestall any recognition of the ‘uncrowned’ c. 1210, see above, p.113.

eleven years Michael continued to break his oath of loyalty to the Latin Empire, despite apparently renewing it four times, and ruled independently respecting the sanctity of neither Venice nor the Crusaders.⁵⁶⁶ On the potential dedicatory monogram on the church of St. Nicholas Kremastos in Aitolokarnania he was merely ‘Michael,’ and in his 1210 treaty with the Venetians, and the Latin Empire sources, the founder of Epiros remained untitled.⁵⁶⁷

This illegitimate scion established himself in Arta by capitalising upon the city’s modest yet notable development in recent decades. Arta, ancient Ambrakia, was re-fortified in the tenth century with its Hellenistic walls incorporated within the medieval citadel. The name first appears in the ‘Deeds of Robert Guiscard’ in 1082 when Arta was under siege from Bohemond of Taranto during the first Norman invasion.⁵⁶⁸ The outcome of that siege remaining unknown, imperial attention grew and there is likely evidence of Komnenian-era rebuilding in Arta’s castle.⁵⁶⁹ The city’s industries and population expanded over the course of the twelfth century resulting in it replacing Naupaktos as the governor’s seat of the theme.⁵⁷⁰ Still towered over today by a much-later developed castle of some 5km circumference, Arta may not have equalled Dyrrachium in prestige but its citadel was protected and it is theorised that Michael busied himself with the fortification of the lower city of both Arta and the growing city of Ioannina.⁵⁷¹ As a capital, Arta’s environs did offer advantages. Some 12km from the Ambracian Gulf its connection to the sea via the Arachthos river snaked through the wetlands southwards. Similarly, its western approach winding through the fertile plains towards the Pindos Mountain range offered a defensive line to the city and agriculture on which it depended. Early Epirote conquests were Larissa and Salona. In 1213 Michael broke his vassalage to the Venetians and captured Dyrrachium from his former masters.⁵⁷² Both that city and the island of Corfu/Kerkyra were taken and became key outposts for the Komnenoi-Doukai of Epiros, much as they had been for the Komnenian empire of Constantinople before them. In both cities, the continuity and legitimacy of the Epirote Komnenoi were emphasised and the towers of Dyrrachium rebuilt and inscribed with the family name.⁵⁷³

Despite these early suggestions of a regional lordship, we should theorise that the manifestation of a Western Balkan imperial ideology came later. To explain the ease with which Michael of

⁵⁶⁶ Alkmini Stavridou-Zafraka, ‘Το αξίωμα του “δεσπότη” και τα δεσποτικά έγγραφα της Ηπείρου,’ in Costas Constantinides ed., *Medieval Epiros: Proceedings of a Symposium (Ioannina, 17-19 September 1999)*, (Ioannina: 2001), pp.73-97.

⁵⁶⁷ The contract with Venice is published in Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden*, I, pp.119-120; See Fundić, *Art, Power, and Patronage*, p.26.

⁵⁶⁸ Geoffrey of Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, trans. Kenneth Baxter Wolf, (Ann Arbor: 2005), III.39.

⁵⁶⁹ Myrto Veikou, *Byzantine Epirus: A Topography of Transformation. Settlements of the Seventh-Twelfth Centuries in Southern Epirus and Aetoloacarnania, Greece*, (Leiden: 2012), pp.146-147. Likely Komnenian brickwork is present in the masonry of the Alichniotissa part of the castle, overview of the eleventh/twelfth centuries pp.40-41, 47, for large residences and workshops expanding around Arta pp.93-97 and fortifications up to 1204 pp.143-155; Dejan Radičević, ‘Fortifications on the Byzantine- Hungarian Danube Border in the 11th and 12th Centuries,’ in: *Fortifications, Defence Systems, Structures and Features in the Past*, ed. Tatjana Tkalčec et al., (Zagreb: 2019); Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium’s Balkan frontier*.

⁵⁷⁰ Arta in the *Partitio Romaniae* was recognised as an *episkepsis*, i.e. the seat of a bishopric and notable for its economic output. On the development of Arta from its tenth-century foundation to centre of regional governance of Nikopolis see Myrto Veikou, *Byzantine Epirus*, pp.45-47.

⁵⁷¹ Tonia Kiousopoulou, ‘Spatial Organization in Late Byzantine Cities (13th-14th Centuries),’ in: *The Routledge Handbook of the Byzantine City from Justinian to Mehmet II (Ca. 500 - Ca. 1500)*, ed. Nikolas Bakirtzis, Luca Zavagno (Abingdon: 2024), pp.96-99; Varvara Papadopoulou, *Byzantine Arta and its Monuments*, (Athens: 2007), pp.18-19.

⁵⁷² Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden*, I, pp.119-120.

⁵⁷³ Fundić, *Art, Power, and Patronage*, p17.

Epiros changed his allegiances we should consider that the early regime of Michael in Epiros was always until 1211 loyal to the authority and kinship network of Emperor Alexios III Angelos, Michael's first cousin. Despite his Anatolian raid there is no reason to assume that there was a personal breach between the two. What little we can piece together of Michael's post-1204 career suggests that he never envisioned his lands as a discrete Epirote domain. Rather, until 1212 he was primarily engaged with attempting to secure the towns of the Peloponnese (known as the Morea) against Latin expansion using the familial networks of the deposed but still active Alexios III.⁵⁷⁴ Alexios, who after his flight in 1203 went first to the Bulgarian Asanid Tsars, journeyed south in 1204 and lent his rank, name, and leadership to the piecemeal resistance. His actions at the Bulgarian court shall be returned to later. Regardless, Alexios was in Thrace until 1204 where he had escaped with a retinue of 'those Roman notables who boasted of Thrace as their *patrides* and were not un-glorious in war.'⁵⁷⁵ Macrides supposed that this was the same regional powerbase that had first put Alexios on the throne in 1195.⁵⁷⁶ The fugitive Alexios III departed Mosynopolis in the summer of 1204, first for Thessaloniki, and then journeyed south. There he met and joined with the other notable Byzantine noble defending the Balkans from the Latins, Leo Sgouros (1200–1208).⁵⁷⁷ Sgouros, the rebel lord of Nauplion, Corinth, and Thebes, had previously with his father Theodore belonged to a family promoted in the 1190s by Alexios III. Despite receiving a venomous depiction in the works of the Choniatai brothers, who despised him for besieging Athens and causing the death of their nephew, Sgouros was amongst the ranks of the *sebastoi*. The about-turn from rebel before 1203 and renewed ally after 1204 became a career trajectory shared between Sgouros and Michael of Epiros. In late 1204 Alexios, currently journeying with a retinue and whatever remained of the imperial treasury, legitimised Sgouros' authority by marrying him in Larissa to his daughter, the princess Eudokia Angelina. According to Theodore Skoutariotes, Alexios made Sgouros *panhypersebastos*, even *despotes*, and presumably reinforced these rather obsolete titles with what financial and military support he could offer.⁵⁷⁸ The result was that Sgouros continued to hold out against Latin assaults for a further four years. The union of Eudokia Angelina and Sgouros reunited the two families and it seems likely that military commanders were exchanged or appointed.

Alexios Savvides was amongst the first to note an alternative interpretation of Leo Sgouros' death in 1208. Savvides posited that bereft of an heir, Sgouros' widow Eudokia appealed to her first cousin Michael Angelos Komnenos Doukas to dispatch his legitimately born half-brother Theodore (the future Epirote Emperor) to shore up the collapse.⁵⁷⁹ Due to previously unconsidered archaeological finds, this connection may have more to it than previously ascertained. It is possible to suppose that there were other Sgouroi local to, or even employed in, the cause of Michael of Epiros. In Northern Epiros itself, the grave of one Michael Sgouros *sebastos* was discovered in the village of Brrar, some 50km east of Dyrrachium in modern day Albania and published (in Albanian) in 1987. Overlooked by modern western scholarship, it is dated by an inscription to 1200/01 (6709) and attests to a family chapel created by Sgouros for

⁵⁷⁴ Michael Kordoses, 'Οι Σχέσεις τοῦ Μιχαήλ Ἀγγελου Δούκα μέ τήν Πελοπόννησο,' *Ἡπειρωτικά Χρονικά*, 22 (1980), pp.49-57.

⁵⁷⁵ NC, CD, §612.46-49.

⁵⁷⁶ Macrides, *Akropolites*, p.79n.485.

⁵⁷⁷ NC, CD, §608, trans. pp.333–334.

⁵⁷⁸ Skoutariotes, *Synopsis Chronike*, in *MB*, 7 (1894), §453.26-28, 'ἦν καί εἰς Κόρινθον ἀφικόμενος συνέξυσε τῷ Σγουρῷ, ἐκέῖσε κατάρχοντι, καί δεσπότην τοῦτον ἐτίμησε.' The title *panhypersebastos* is known only from a seal, potentially pre-1204; Alexios Savvides, 'A note on the death of Leo Sgurus in A.D. 1208,' *BMGS*, 12 (1988), pp.289-295.

⁵⁷⁹ Savvides, 'A note on the death of Leo Sgurus,' pp.293-295.

himself and up to five of his kin.⁵⁸⁰ The grave demonstrates a further regional link for the families aligned to the restoration of Alexios III. In the Peloponnese, Theodore slowed the Latins' progress and maintained a separate front to the war with the result that it was not until 1212 that the Latins took Argos and were finally secure in the south.⁵⁸¹ The delay bought time. By the moment of Frankish Achaëa's triumph, Michael had broken another vow and taken the wealthy fortress-city of Dyrrachium from the Venetians.⁵⁸² In doing so he reinforced the foundations of an Epirote state and the westernmost bulwark of the formerly Byzantine Balkans.



Figure 14. Michael Sgouros' sarcophagus excavated at Brrar (1200/01). National Historical Museum, Tirana. Image published by Konstantinos Giakoumis, 'Commemoration, and Tomb Purchases in Albania,' p.171.

When control passed from Sgouros to Theodore the fragmented regime of Alexios III doggedly continued. The small network of individuals loyal to him had proved there was surprising longevity for regional power in the Balkans without Constantinople. Our two sources, Choniates and Akropolites, portray Alexios' actions in this period differently. Choniates, who wrote the final pages of his *Chronike* with dejection until 1215 relates that in 1205 Alexios, journeying back north after the nuptials, was captured by Boniface of Montferrat, the Latin King of Thessaloniki. Forced to surrender the 'imperial insignia' [τὰ τῆς βασιλείας... σύμβολα] Choniates states that Alexios and his wife were resident in Thessaloniki until the catastrophic defeat of the Latins at Adrianople in April 1205 at which point they were sent to the 'King of Germany,' or in a variant reading to Lombardy.⁵⁸³ Akropolites meanwhile states that he was

⁵⁸⁰ Note the recent incorrect identification of Michael Sgouros 'sebastos,' an honorific title widely utilised by various prominent nobility, as 'sebastokrator' by Konstantinos Giakoumis in "For a Christian Ending to Our Life" Church Endowments, Commemoration, and Tomb Purchases in Albania and the West Balkans (Thirteenth-Nineteenth Centuries)' in: *Pro refrigerio animae: Death and Memory in East-Central Europe, Fourteenth-Nineteenth Centuries*, eds. Angela Jianu, Gheorghe Lazăr, (Abingdon: 2023), pp.114-143, at p.117. The excavation report by Aleksandër Meksi and Damian Komata, 'Kisha e Shën Mërisë së Bërrarit,' *Iliria*, 2 (1987), pp.215-27 publishes the Greek text: 'Μνήσθητι Κ(ύριε) τὸν δούλον σου Μιχαὴλ σεβαστόν τὸν Σγοῦραν ἅμα συμβιωὶ καὶ τέκνοις, Ἀμήν. Ἔτους ςψθ'. Meksi's identification of the Sgouroi as an Albanian family cannot be sustained. A Michael Sgouros *grammatikos* was a notary on a document from 1192 written to Genoa and is probably the same individual. See Fotini Vlachopoulou, *Ο Βίος και Η Πολιτεία του Λέοντος Σγουρού Βυζαντινού Ἀρχοντα της Βορειοανατολικῆς Πελοποννήσου στις Αρχές του 13^{ου} Αιώνα*, (Masters' thesis, University of Johannesburg: 2009), pp.18-19; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestation*, p.139.

⁵⁸¹ Savvides, 'Leo Sgurus,' pp.289-295.

⁵⁸² Macrides, *Akropolites*, p.144n.1; for the 1212 date of Dyrrachium's fall see Raymond J. Loenertz, 'Lettre de Georges Bardanès, métropolitte de Corcyre, au patriarche oecuménique Germain II, 1226-1227,' *EEHS*, 33 (1964), p.116.

⁵⁸³ NC, CD, §612, 620., trans. pp.335, 339.

taken in captivity to a destination of Montferrat.⁵⁸⁴ Despite modern scholars' acceptance, it seems unlikely Alexios ever reached these foreign lands.⁵⁸⁵ All that is certain is that at the time of Choniates' *Chronike*, recounting events up to 1206, he had yet to regain liberty. Akropolites and Skoutariotes simply narrate that Alexios was seized by men *from* Lombardy while journeying to Epiros to stay with Michael and that Arta was forced to pay a great ransom to redeem the fallen emperor and his empress wife. It was only then, after residing with Michael for up to two years and planning for the future, that Alexios made his final gamble and sailed for Attaleia in southern Anatolia. Alexios entrusted Michael with the ailing empress and on his departure was accompanied by Michael's brother Constantine together with a large quantity of sacred vessels pillaged from the environs of Ohrid which they sold in Anatolia.⁵⁸⁶ The likely recipient of these gifts and Alexios' next choice of ally was, by Orthodox law, also his son. Alexios arrived at the lands of the Seljuk Sultan Kay-Khusraw who, according to multiple sources, had been adopted and baptised as Alexios' son-in-law in 1203 and had joined him in that year's nighttime escape from Constantinople.⁵⁸⁷ Alexios used this tie and pressed upon Kay-Khusraw to launch a campaign that might suppress the 1208 coronation of Theodore Laskaris as emperor and reclaim an empire in Asia Minor. Laskaris' refusal launched an unlikely war between two adopted sons of Alexios III, the spiritual adopted godson and his son-in-law. The June 1211 Battle of Antioch-on-the-Meander was a costly victory for Laskaris that sealed victory with the surprise decapitation of the Seljuk Sultan, spelling the end of Alexios III's career. Akropolites, who wanted to emphasise the more natural transition from Alexios to his son-in-law Laskaris, narrates that Alexios was captured, tonsured, and concluded his life in the now-lost Hyakinthos monastery in Nikaia. The later chronicle of Theodore Skoutariotes, Bishop of Kyzikos in the 1270s, adds further detail. At the judgement of the army and a Nikaian 'senate' Alexios, like his five brothers before him, was blinded [στερουσι τοῦ φάους τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν].⁵⁸⁸ It was only now, with Alexios' mutilation and soon death, that the Byzantine West was set loose to pursue its own path.

3.4. The *Despotai* of Alexios III Angelos: Reconstituting the Komnenian System?

While Alexios III was alive and maintained a semblance of authority, the efforts of Epiros were in support of the head of the family. It is often claimed that its early rulers went untitled, and ideologies remained conservative.⁵⁸⁹ We never hear of an Epirote response to Alexios III's demise at the hands of Laskaris but as their state of loyalism ended c.1211 upon his death, it is demonstrable that Epiros began to act as an autonomous Byzantine state. The first evidence of this is numismatic. A minute silver currency of high-grade aspron trachea has been recovered in recent years of Michael I. Bearing the name of ΜΙΧΑΗΛ ΔΘΚΑC on the obverse and a reverse of a beardless Christ inscribed Ι[ΗCΟΥ]C Ω̅ ΕΜΜΑΝΘΗΛ it has survived in only six known

⁵⁸⁴ Macrides, *History*, p.80.,n.480.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. Kaldellis, *History of New Rome*, p.762.

⁵⁸⁶ Akropolites, §8, trans. Macrides, p.124; Ephraim §7565 states Empress Euphrosyne died in Arta; For Constantine Angelos' involvement and appropriation of church property see Apokaukos' letter published by Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus, 'Συμβολή εις την Ιστορίαν της αρχιεπισκοπής Αχρίδος,' in: *Recueil de mémoires en l'honneur de l'académicien B. J. Lamanskij*, (St. Petersburg: 1907), I, pp.227-250. p.243.14-19; Lambropoulos, §60.

⁵⁸⁷ For Alexios' alliance with Kay-Khusraw, and discussion of the adoption of the sultan as his son-in-law in 1203, see Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, pp.122-125. For the baptism see Akropolites, §8, trans. Macrides, p.124.

⁵⁸⁸ Skoutariotes, in Heisenberg's addendum p.278 no.6.; For an introduction to Skoutariotes' chronicle see Konstantinos Zafeiris, 'The Issue of the Authorship of the Synopsis Chronike and Theodore Skoutariotes,' *REB*, 69 (2011), pp.253 -63.

⁵⁸⁹ Osswald, 'Political Laboratory,' pp.13-37

examples.⁵⁹⁰ Due to their extremely low frequency, for over a century numismatists have struggled to place the coin issue in any certain context, deeming a ceremonial usage alone.⁵⁹¹ A possible solution would be that the currency dates to the short period of time in which Michael was subject to the Venetians after the 1210 treaty, after Alexios III's final defeat, and before his breach of contract in 1212.⁵⁹²



Figure 15. Aspron trachea of Michael I. Lot 173, New York Sale January 2021.

Angeliki Laiou's study of coinage circulation through Epirote texts established a number of different terms including indications of preference for certain denominations.⁵⁹³ The concurrent terms *nomismata trikephala*, *nomismata trikephala prattomena*, and *trikephala protimomena* (lit. 'three-headed coins,' 'full three-headed coins,' 'three-headed coins of the preferred type') would suggest that there was an acknowledgement of debasement that Michael sought to address.⁵⁹⁴ In that context, a limited coinage of a ceremonial collection to be a guarantee of purity to the Venetian tribute would be possible.

As discussed there is little evidence that Michael was granted the title of *despotes*, the highest honour an Angeloi emperor could bestow. However, the title of *despotes* does appear through inscriptions, seals, and references in later works describing investments by Alexios to at least three individuals. As already stated, Alexios had likely bestowed the title to Leon Sgouros in 1204, and we know that an attempt was also made to support John Chamaretos whose family

⁵⁹⁰ Hendy, *DOC*, 4.2, pp. 623-624; Petros Protonotarios, 'Η νομισματοκοπία του βυζαντινού κράτους της Ηπείρου (1204-1268),' *Ηπειρωτικά Χρονικά*, 24, (1982), pp.130-150; idem., 'Monnayage du 'Despotat' d'Épire,' *Revue Numismatique*, 25 (1983), pp.83-99; Ioannis Touratsoglou, 'Monnaie byzantine aux XIIe-XIIIe siècles,' *Revue Numismatique*, 158 (2002), pp. 387-390; Harry Mattingly, 'A Find of Thirteenth-Century Coins at Arta in Epirus,' *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 3 (1923), pp.31-46. Note the incorrect reading of this coin in Sears Catalogue §2227 as 'ΔΕΣΠΕ.'

⁵⁹¹ See Julian Baker, *Coinage and Money in Medieval Greece 1200-1430* (Leiden: 2021), who supposes a 'symbolic or representational' use. p.1352.

⁵⁹² Günter Prinzing, 'Epiros (Including the Ionian Islands) and the Italian Powers 1204-C.1267: Between Cooperation and Confrontation,' in *Bisanzio Sulle Due Sponde Del Canale D'ottranto* (Spoleto: 2021), pp.53-56.

⁵⁹³ Angeliki Laiou, 'Use and Circulation of Coins in the Despotate of Epiros' *DOP*, 55 (2001), pp.207-15.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.208 n3,4,5.

defended Lakonia in the southern Peloponnese from the Latins.⁵⁹⁵ At this time, and given his promotion to replace Sgouros in 1208, it is possible that Michael's brothers Theodore and Constantine as Alexios' legitimately-born cousins were also made *despotai*. Support for this view comes from later in the 1210s and an inscription upon the village church of Episkopi at Mastron, where the bishops of Achelos shepherded a small see. A fragmentary preservation makes rendering the inscription difficult but as published it reads:

'The brothers [...] bearing crowns... to the throne of the empire [. . .] of the *despoina* Anna the most pious great Komnene [... <dedicated by>] the *despotes* Theodore and Constantine, all by maternal descent of the imperial *genos* of Alexios Komnenos, entirely your servant; for the greatest beauty of <the final kingdom>.

1 Τὸ[... ἀδε]λφούς
 [.....στεφε]φόρους
 [.....]ηφορ[.....] ε[.....ν] πρὸς θρό-
 νον βασιλείας... δεσπο[ίνης Ἄν]νας φι[λευσεβε]στάτης με-
 5 γάλης Κομνηνῆς [.....] δεσπ[ό]τη Θεοδ[ώ]ρ[ω καὶ Κ]ωνσταντίνω
 ἐ[κ μητρό]τητος πάντας [γέ]νει βασιλέω[ν]
 Κομνηνὸν Ἀλέ[ξιον] [τὸν] δοῦλον σὸν πάντως· εὐειδέστατ[ος] γὰρ
 <β[ασι]λείας [ἐσ]χά[της]>.⁵⁹⁶

While the inscription poses numerous problems regarding identities it does indicate that Theodore and Constantine were styling themselves *despotai* several years after Alexios III's demise. The Anna Komnene of the inscription is Theodore's daughter Anna, betrothed c.1219 to the Serbian prince and future king Stefan (II) Radoslav Doukas. Two surviving golden rings [fig. 17.1-2] were also produced to commemorate the betrothal, with a Greek inscription reading:

'The pledge of Stefanos, a shoot with roots of Doukas, receive in your hands Anna, born a Komnenos.

Μνήστρον Στεφάνου Δουκικῆς ῥίζης κλάδου Κομνηνοφυῆς ταῖν χερσῖν Ἄννα δέχου.⁵⁹⁷

The Episkopi at Mastron inscription should probably be dated prior to Anna's departure for the nuptials in Prilep/Skopje in 1222/23.⁵⁹⁸ The reference to 'Alexios Komnenos' once more

⁵⁹⁵ NC, CD, §638, trans. p.350; The Chamaretoi, a poorly known family, remained connected to the Epirote state until 1222 when they appealed to Demetrios Chomatenos for his help against one Daimonogiannis who governed Monemvasia. For their use of the title of *despotes* in letters and seals see Paul Magdalino, 'A Neglected Authority,' *BZ*, 70 (1977), pp.316-323; Andreas Mazarakis, 'The Lead Bulla of the Despot Ioannis Chamaretos,' *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*, 11 (2012), pp.111-118; Chomatenos, *PD*, §22; Charis Kalliga, *Byzantine Monemvasia: The Sources* (Akron: 1990), pp.81-85.

⁵⁹⁶ Greek text published Fundić, *Art, Power, and Patronage*, p.15. Translation my own.

⁵⁹⁷ Translation: '.' See Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst*, (Vienna: 2010), pp.292-294; Jeffrey Spier, *Late Byzantine Rings, 1204-1453*, (Wiesbaden: 2013), pp.21-22, pl.1a.

⁵⁹⁸ For a recent narrative of Serbian history after 1204 see Vlada Stanković, 'Rethinking the Position of Serbia within Byzantine *Oikoumene* in the Thirteenth Century,' in: *The Balkans and Byzantine World before and after the Captures of Constantinople, 1204 and 1453*, ed. Stanković (London: 2016), pp.91-102. The betrothal was arranged by Chomatenos in document §10 of *PD* and officiated by Apokaukos. For confirmation of the marriage see Apokaukos' letter, ed. Bees, 'Unedierte,' §54, pp.110-111; Lambropoulos, §23; and recently Ivana Komatina, 'Nevestinska kićenja suncorodne kćeri. Brak Stefana Radoslava i Ane Dukene / nova tumačanja'

invokes their descent through Alexios I's *porphyrogenite* daughter Theodora and the elevation of the Angeloi family. It is ambiguous if *despotes* is being used as an honorific, or if Alexios III had indeed granted the title to his cousins but the reference to the term and the brothers as 'crown-bearers' [στεφηφόροι] could suggest a tangible office. Regardless, there are multiple indications of ties to the 'last' emperor being invoked as a source of legitimacy. This was also the case with the aforementioned John Chamaretos and the Gabalas family of Rhodes, who continued to style themselves *despotes* and *kaisares* into the 1220s and 1240s respectively.⁵⁹⁹ The most powerful invocation is in the Serbian monastery complex of Studenica where artists were continuing to inscribe the name of 'Noble Emperor of the Greeks Kyr Aleksii' III Angelos' [СВЪАТОУ ЦРЪ ГРЪЧСЪКАГО КΥΡ ΑΛΪΚΚΥΣΕ sic.] as father-in-law of the future Serbian King in 1209.⁶⁰⁰ At additional points within the Studenica monastery founded by Radoslav's father Stefan Nemanjić (1196–1228, crowned 1217), Nemanjić equally employed the title of *sebastokrator* that Alexios III had bestowed on him. Serbia's involvement within the Angeloi network continued as a matter of prestige and priority and they demonstrate the potency of this 'Komnenian-Angeloi System' in exile as it continued to bind together an extended royal family around the displaced Byzantine and affiliated elites. The Serbian connection serves as a good measuring mark for the standing of Byzantine emperors and claimants post-1204 to express their power in alloglot courts.

Epiros may have been commemorated in the same way. Between 1222 and 1233 Stefan Radoslav (1228–1233) dedicated the monastery of Mileševa. He depicted his wife and son standing opposite a Byzantine Emperor dressed in the narthex. Heavily defaced and now unnamed, that figure's apparent red-blond hair and beard and simplified loros are distinctive features of the individual. There are only two contenders commonly believed that this portrayed: either Alexios III Angelos, Stefan's now long-dead maternal grandfather or his living father-in-law, Theodore Komnenos Doukas of Epiros. There are few details shared between the Mileševa fresco and the Alexios III miniature in *Codex Mutinensis graecus* 122. Assuming that Alexios III was not intended, the individual shown was the heir to the imperial networks Alexios had left in the Balkans, Theodore, the Epirote Emperor of the Romans, in 1228 at the height of his power. This latter option is the opinion of this thesis. Hypothetically, Theodore was commemorated here to give legitimacy and prestige to his daughter the Serbian Queen and project his role as father-in-law to the Serbian King. There is much to recommend the view as the careers of both rulers were indelibly linked, and Theodore viewed Serbia as an extension of his empire (see pp.199-201). Allied since the 1219 betrothal, it has even been posited that Radoslav's



Figure 16. Alexios III Angelos, as depicted in *Codex Mutinensis graecus* 122 f.294v.

[[Nymhostolisma of the sunlike daughter: the marriage of Stefan Radoslav and Anna Doukaina. New interpretations],’ *Istorijski Casopsis*, 72 (2023), pp.117-144.

⁵⁹⁹ Mazarakis, ‘Lead Bulla,’ pp.113-114; The Gabalas family passed the rank of *kaisar* from father to son and it is posited they had received it from Alexios III. Savvides, ‘ἡ Δυναστεία τῶν Γαβαλάδων,’ pp.358-376.

⁶⁰⁰ The full Slavonic inscription detailing Studenica’s construction by the *Sebastokrator* Stefan Nemanja in the year 6717 (1209) is given in Ljubomir Maksimović, ‘L’Ideologie Du Souverain Dans L’etat Serbe et la Construction De Studenica,’ in *Studenica et L’Art Byzantin Autour De L’Annee 1200* (Belgrade: 1988), p.44. The inscription is in a dedicatory portico to describe the royal couple’s lineage.

scyphate coinage was struck from dies sent from Epiros.⁶⁰¹ The fall of Theodore in 1230 precipitated the fall of Radoslav, at least as depicted in the Serbian sources of the 1250s and 1260s.⁶⁰² However while both reigned Theodore Komnenos Doukas and Stefan Radoslav Doukas represented two monarchs of a reconstituted Komnenian system, heading an imperial *genos* ruling a composite empire of Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Albanians, which sought to rebuild an empire containing them all.⁶⁰³ This mosaic of alloglot peoples aligned in kinship and politics prompts various questions which await further discussion. To what extent were the links between their cultures maintained, did lower-level marriages take place, was coinage shared, how fluid were border territories, and so forth? These will be added in the course of answering how, to Akropolites' eyes and the readership of a Constantinopolitan court, could it be justified that Theodore Komnenos Doukas had ceased to be a Komnenian Byzantine Roman and become a Bulgarian?



Figure 17.1-2. Wedding Rings of Serbia and Epiros, 1219–1224. Above: Belgrade National Museum. Below: Royal Ontario Museum.



⁶⁰¹ On Radoslav's coinage bearing CTEΦANOC RIZ, see Rastislav Marić, *Studije is srpske numizmatike* (Belgrade: 1956), p.67; Vladimir Penchev, 'Kade bile kovani monetite na bulgarskiot car Ivan II Asen' [Where have the coins of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Asen II been struck?], *Macedonian Numismatic Journal*, 2 (1996), p.109.

⁶⁰² Following Theodore's defeat and Radoslav's deposition, the usurping Serbian King Vladislav (1233-1243) married Tsar John Asan's daughter Beloslava, effectively taking the same junior role to the Bulgarian tsar his brother had held for Theodore. See Madgearu, *The Asanids*, pp. 209-10; For an overview of relations see Ljubomir Maksimovic, 'Serbia's View of the Byzantine World (1204-1261),' pp.121-131; Domentijan, *Žitije svetog Save [Life of St. Sava]*, ed. Tomislav Jovanović, (Belgrade: 2001), pp.312-314.

⁶⁰³ For identification as Alexios III see Branislav Todić, 'Novo tumačenje programa i rasporeda fresaka u Mileševi,' in: *Na tragovima Vojislava J. Đurića*, (Belgrade: 2011), p.67; For Theodore see Vojislav Djurić, 'La peinture murale byzantine XIIIe et XIIIe siècle,' in: *Actes du XV^e Congrès Internationale d'études Byzantines*, (Athens: 1979), p.219.



Figure 18. Mileševa Monastery, Narthex South Wall. Imperial figure of Emperor Alexios III Angelos or Theodore Komnenos Doukas standing next to unidentified figure, right. On left panel, Sts. Constantine and Helen. (1222-1234). Photo courtesy of the Blago Fund.



Figure 19. Mileševa Monastery, Detail of Imperial Figure (1222–1233), likely Theodore Komnenos Doukas of Epiros.

3.5. Bulgaria and Byzantium: Co-Orthodox and Co-Fraternal?

‘They make it law to praise the holy in only three languages, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, but not in any other [language] of the faithful nations.

Νομοθετοῦσι μόναις τρισὶ γλώσσαις τὸ θεῖον δοξολογεῖν, λατινικῇ, ἑλληνικῇ καὶ ἑβραϊκῇ, ἑτέρᾳ δὲ μηδεμίᾳ τῶν πιστευσάντων ἔθνῶν.⁶⁰⁴

One of the more remarkable texts written in the aftermath of the Sack of Constantinople in 1204 was an updated and extended list of the *Errors of the Latin Church*. It was composed by the former teacher of the Patriarchal School of the *Orphanotropheion*, Constantine Stilbes, who had recently become the Metropolitan of Kyzikos - a town on the south eastern shore of the Sea of Marmara.⁶⁰⁵ Stilbes had left Constantinople very shortly before the city's fall to be installed as Metropolitan of Kyzikos, and it was in his new residence that he wrote the longest-ever instalment on this highly polemical subject entitling it *The Errors of the Latin Church Concerning Dogma and Writings* [Τὰ αἰτιάματα τῆς λατινικῆς ἐκκλησίας ὅσα περὶ δογμάτων καὶ γραφῶν].⁶⁰⁶ Stilbes' work belongs to a popular genre of polemical writings, more commonly known as 'The Byzantine Lists' which have been most thoroughly studied by Tia Kolbaba.⁶⁰⁷ The *Lists* were composed primarily as pamphlets and were likely intended for a more general consumption than most other Byzantine literature. Lower in linguistic register and less rhetorically embellished, they were a literary counterpart to the imperially-sponsored polemical anthologies that circulated throughout the twelfth century such as Euthymios Zigabenos' *Dogmatic Full-Armor* [Πανοπλία δογματική] and Andronikos Kamateros' *Sacred Arsenal* [Ἱερὰ Ὀπλοθήκη].⁶⁰⁸ While the latter two works were *florilegia*, i.e. theological anthologies of authoritative excerpts concerning matters of theology and doctrine, the purpose of Stilbes' *Errors of the Latin Church* was to remodel the list of theological differences between the Catholic Latins and Orthodox into a holistic cultural attack in response to the Fourth Crusade. The most striking feature of Stilbes' approach to this subject is his blend of ethnic religiosity, which he used in order to unite the entire Orthodox *oikumene* against the Catholics. In the specific case of liturgical languages, Stilbes' concern is the matter of shared heritage. He posits both that the Latins 'do not recognise saints if they are not of their own race' [Μνήμας ἁγίων οὐκ ἐπιτελοῦσιν εἰ μὴ τῶν αὐτοῖς δοκούντων ὁμοφύλων αὐτοῖς] and that the Latins compound this. Where the Latin Crusaders rule, they compound the cultural attack by imposing

⁶⁰⁴ Jean Darrouzès, 'Constantin Stilbès,' p.63 para 9; For a similar near-contemporary defence of non-Greek liturgical languages see Balsamon, trans. Vicuso, *Guide for a Church under Islam*, §6, p.74.

⁶⁰⁵ Alexander Kazhdan in the ODB states that Stilbes was appointed to Kyzikos as late as early 1204 while Timothy Miller opted for the closing years of the twelfth century. Stilbes was certainly a witness to the two great fires that struck Constantinople in 1197, about which he wrote a poem "*The Incineration of New Babylon*": *The Fire Poem of Konstantinos Stilbes*, ed. and trans. T. Layman (Geneva: 2015); Timothy Miller, 'Two teaching Texts from the Twelfth-Century Orphanotropheion,' *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations*, (Leiden: 2003), pp.9-20.

⁶⁰⁶ Darrouzès, 'Le mémoire,' p.61.

⁶⁰⁷ Tia Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: "Errors of the Latins,"* (Urbana, 2000). While Constantine Stilbes' list is not a main point of study in Kolbaba's book, she discusses his work and offers a description of his 'List' in her appendices, p.178.

⁶⁰⁸ Jan Louis van Dielen, *Zur Überlieferung und Veröffentlichung der "Panoplia Dogmatike" des Niketas Choniates*, (Amsterdam, 1970); Alessandra Bucossi, ed. *Andronici Camateri Sacrum Armamentarium: Pars prima*, (Turnhout: 2014).

a fate when the liturgies of John Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory the Great and more Orthodox Fathers cannot be performed intelligibly across the polylingual Orthodox world.⁶⁰⁹

Stilbes' *Errors of the Latin Church* is strikingly explicit in its links to contemporary events as it details and describes the sack of Constantinople through the criminal acts of the Latins.⁶¹⁰ However, amongst the appalling records of rapine and slaughter, the plundering of churches, imperial tombs, and the destruction of a millennium of accumulated wealth, Stilbes chooses to include the above-cited passage concerning the permitted liturgical languages of both churches. Juxtaposing the Latin position to Orthodoxy's linguistic plurality, his focus on liturgical languages should be understood as an attempt to demonstrate a clear cultural difference between Byzantium and the Catholic West.⁶¹¹ The restrictions of the Latin Church brought by the Crusaders were being exploited by Stilbes to broaden the offended party, no longer just the Greek-speaking Byzantines but the entire Orthodox world. Anyone who did not use Latin, Greek, or Hebrew tongue as a fundamental part of their religious identity should consider themselves to have been assaulted by the Latins. Stilbes even tells us to whom this pamphlet is addressed: 'The Greeks and all nations in the Orthodox faith' [Γραικοὺς καὶ πᾶν ἔθνος εἰς τὴν ὀρθόδοξον πίστιν].⁶¹²

Stilbes' poignant condemnation of violence and liturgical restrictions is, therefore, an apt starting point for understanding the shared cultural spheres of the former Byzantium in the thirteenth century. The Orthodox Church inhabited a much more diverse world than that of Roman Italy. The Orthodox Christians in Armenia and Georgia use their own languages and alphabets while the Serbs, Albanians, Rus, and, most critically for our purposes, the Bulgarians, used the ones of Byzantine invention: Old Church Slavonic written in the Cyrillic script. The legacy of the proselytizing ninth-century missions of Sts Cyril-Constantine and Methodios, as well as their student and successor St. Clement of Ohrid, was a bond that Byzantine bishops were not willing to surrender. To insist on excluding the Slavonic Creed risked cutting the Byzantines off from one of their greatest cultural achievements, the Christianisation of the Slavs and a language that rendered the Gospels and Church Fathers comprehensible to the non-Greek-speaking peoples of the medieval Balkans. Condemnations of Catholicism's linguistic restrictions, the 'trilingual heresy,' were not a new feature of inter-Christian discourse and Stilbes' complaint echoed back to the original mission.⁶¹³ However, the insistence on Bulgarian inclusion is a noteworthy yet underappreciated priority for the Orthodox Church in the thirteenth century. As a result of the Fourth Crusade, Orthodoxy was transitioning from being Constantinople-centred to a polycentric institution in the later medieval period. The Byzantine Orthodox Church's prioritisation of religious unity over ethnic homogeneity had long

⁶⁰⁹ Darrouzès, 'Le mémoire,' pp.73, para. 48, 49. Additional cultural critiques were broad and holistic. They range from the Latins not venerating Constantine the Great as Equal-of-the-Apostles, Latin customs that allowed dogs to lick their owner's plates, eating of pork rinds, and a doubtful claim that Latins drink their own urine 'like the Armenians.' Ibid., p.80, para. 72, 73; p.81, para. 75, p.81, para. 75.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., pp.81-86, para. 76-98.

⁶¹¹ Despite the papacy's support for the original missions of Sts. Cyril-Constantine and Methodios to Moravia in the ninth century, that manifests in the hagiographies of those two saints, under Pope Stephen V the use of Slavonic as a liturgical language was banned in 890. Mirela Ivanova, *Inventing Slavonic Cultures of Writing Between Rome and Constantinople*, (Oxford: 2024), p.167.

⁶¹² Darrouzès, 'Le mémoire,' p.73, para.49.

⁶¹³ See for example, *Vita Constantini*, in *Medieval Slavic Lives*, ed. and trans. Marvin Kantor (Ann Arbor: 1983), p.71, 'When he [Cyril] was in Venice, bishops, priests and monks gathered against him like ravens against a falcon. And they advanced the trilingual heresy, saying: "Tell us, O man, how is it that you now teach, having created letters for the Slavs, which none else have found before... We know of only three languages worthy of praising God in the Scriptures, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin."'

reinforced the imperial state in Constantinople before 1204, but, by the late twelfth century, many of the satellite *ethne* of Obolensky's 'Byzantine Commonwealth,' were rapidly breaking away to form independent quasi-national churches.⁶¹⁴ What had once been imagined as a Bulgarian-Byzantine relationship with 'neither *allogeneis*, *allophyloi*, nor *alloglottoi*,' where war when it occurred was merely between 'brothers, fathers, and sons,' had become a strained relationship but it did continue to be a factor into the thirteenth century.⁶¹⁵ However, attempts to reengage with co-Orthodox communities after 1204 and to express a continuation of a centralised Orthodoxy amidst a transformation and transplantation of *impérialité* have been underappreciated before 1261.⁶¹⁶ This chapter offers an alternative to the restrictive ideologies discussed in other chapters by focusing on the concept of geographic origin not as an exclusion but as a shared inheritance. It underscores the consistent effort and priority given by the Byzantine Church to a shared Greek-Bulgarian tradition in the (post-)imperial Balkans.

This chapter is an investigation into the strength of the Byzantine-Bulgarian relationship, into the production, protection, and prolongation of the hybridity of an identity for those living in the liminal and shared spaces. It additionally discusses the potency of the institutions that operated as shared cultural centres within the former provinces of Byzantine Macedonia. These lands subject to either Bulgaria or Epiros in this period have few consistent toponyms and were inhabited by multiple peoples. Both thirteenth-century contemporaries and modern historians recognised and commented on this fact. Multiple peoples claimed a shared genesis that resulted from the proselytization missions to the Slavs. Gerhard Podskalsky has advocated for the existence of a persistent spatialised identity until the nineteenth century broadly definable as 'Macedonian' which includes Bulgarians, Serbs, and Greeks, to which we could also add evidence of Albanians.⁶¹⁷ The heterogeneity of the former Byzantine Balkans, in sharp contrast to the largely homogenous character of the Empire of Nikaia whose territories were essentially Greek-speaking, led to a growth of differences.⁶¹⁸

The Byzantine-Bulgarian relationships that connected the central Balkan provinces between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries are primarily known through the writings of bishops, whose corpora of surviving letters to colleagues and acquaintances express their concerns, advice, and response to contemporary events. Byzantine letters make use of elaborate formulae and *topoi*. The conventions of their genre as well as their elaborate rhetoric make these sources complex and frequently opaque. In older scholarship, the apparent lack of specific information caused many a frustrated claim that 'the average Byzantine letter was about as concrete, informative, and personal as the modern, mass-produced greeting card.'⁶¹⁹ However, recently letter registers have been increasingly reappraised; certainly for their prosopographical details which allow for the tracing of careers and families but also for the evidence of the more intricate

⁶¹⁴ Stouraitis, *War and Collective Identities*, p.8; idem., 'Reinventing Roman Ethnicity,' pp.70- 94.

⁶¹⁵ Theodore Daphnophates, ed. Dujčev, 'On the Treaty of 927,' pp.258.55-58. 'ὅτι μὴ ἀλλογενεῖς ἀλλοφύλοις μηδ' ἐ ἀλλογλώσσοις ἀλλόγλωσσοι, υἱοὶ δὲ πατράσι καὶ ἀδελφοῖς ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες υἱοῖς ἀντέστημεν, ἐπανεστήμεν.'

⁶¹⁶ The approach of soft power in the Palaiologan period was given specific focus in the introduction to a recent edition of *Travaux et Mémoires*. See Marie-Hélène Blanchet, Raúl Estangüi Gómez, 'L'Empire byzantin sous les Paléologues, entre déclin et ruine: révision en six étapes d'un legs historiographique ancien' in: *Le monde Byzantin du XIIIe au XVe siècle: anciennes ou nouvelles formes d'Impérialité, Travaux et Mémoires*, 25.1 (2021), pp.7-87.

⁶¹⁷ Gerhard Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur des Mittelalters in Bulgarien und Serbien 865-1459*, (Munich: 2000), pp.165-167.

⁶¹⁸ Angelov, 'Byzantine Ideological Reactions to the Latin Conquest of Constantinople,' *Urbs Capta*, p.299; Angold, 'Byzantine 'Nationalism;'; Magdalino, 'Hellenism and Nationalism' p.16.

⁶¹⁹ George Dennis, *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus: Text, Translation, and Notes*, (Harvard: 1977), p.xix.

relationships, rituals, and intent behind distance communication.⁶²⁰ Letters served a purpose; they communicated a need, opinion, or desire, and the manifestation of authorial ‘self’ from afar. Additionally, utilisation or deviation from the *topoi* of the genre could represent degree of familiarity or tone. Some letters provided opportunities for rhetorical and dialectic expression, demonstrating learning and wordplay that invoked *auctores* and authorities, and these were often later gathered by the authors and students of the craft into compilations for use as models for similar compositions.⁶²¹ Within Byzantine epistolography there existed a scale of complexity and incredibly curt and brief letters could coexist in collections by the same author alongside far more lengthy discussions of the same subject.⁶²² While the expression of a single theme can often dominate an entire exchange, other letters were humbler and could be praised for their simplicity. One matter that remained constant is that the letter collections as we have them today are not homogenous primary material. They were gathered to present an author as a composite figure and an educated discourses upon the subjects covered. As such, indeed as some letters themselves tell us, the correspondence that we possess was designed to be read by many more people than just the addressed parties.

3.6. The Byzantine Archbishops of ‘All Bulgaria’

The narrative of the Byzantine-Bulgarian relationship of the thirteenth century relies heavily on either the creation or distortion of what had become the origin myth of the Bulgarians: their conversion to Christianity and the creation of a written language. The collective memory of that narrative, what it meant to join imperial Orthodox Christendom and the place of the Byzantine archbishops as authorities in its retelling is of pivotal importance. It is the narrative and implication that underpins a thirteenth century revival and perpetuation of a Byzantine Bulgaria. Generations of historiography have pivoted between emphasising the similarities and shared culture of Byzantium and Bulgaria.⁶²³ While Greek historiography has been discussed, the school of Bulgarian historians who follow in the theories of Petar Mutafchiev (1883–1943) or Ivan Dujčev (1907–1986) advocate for the shared heritage of the region as it was inherited and shaped by the peoples of Macedonia and Bulgaria. Mutafchiev sought to dispel ‘the widely held delusion that Byzantium had *always* been a Greek empire’ or that ‘*Romaioi* indicated a state, not a national belonging.’⁶²⁴ Dujčev meanwhile posited the argument of a ‘Slavia Orthodoxa’ or Byzantino-Slavism which placed the origin of Bulgarian (and broader Slavic culture) in the conversion mission sent from Constantinople.⁶²⁵ An unpopular historical trend

⁶²⁰ Tropes of exile, poverty, living in a state of near-death until a letter has arrived to revive them, are just some. See Floris Bernard, ‘Epistolary Communication: Rituals and Codes,’ in: *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography*, ed. Alexander Riehle, (Leiden: 2020), pp.307-332.

⁶²¹ The exchange between Michael Choniates and Euthymios Tornikes (and later his son Demetrios) was one such relationship, a friendship that developed over a shared passion of written Attic Greek. MC, *Epistulae*, §§147, 153, 159, 170, 176, 180. See Foteini Kolovou, ‘Euthymios Tornikes as a letter writer. Four unedited letters from Euthymios Tornikes to Michael Choniates in the Codex Buc. gr. 508,’ *Yearbook of Austrian Byzantine Studies*, 45 (1995), pp. 53-74.

⁶²² Stratis Papaioannou, ‘The Epistolographic Self,’ in: *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography*, ed. Alexander Riehle, (Leiden: 2020), pp.339-345.

⁶²³ For a balanced and nuanced discussion of the trends in Bulgarian scholarship on Byzantium see chapters 4 and 7 of Diana Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums. Empire and Identity in Southeastern Europe*, (Cambridge: 2023).

⁶²⁴ Translated quotations of Mutafchiev’s work taken from Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums*, pp.134-135; Petar Mutafchiev, *Kniga za bǎlgarite*, (Sofia: 1987), pp.26-28; idem. ‘Gǎrtsi, vizantiytsi i elini,’ *Demokratiya* 3.1, (1922), pp. 3, 58-63, 4, 84-89.

⁶²⁵ Ivan Dujčev, ‘Les Slaves et Byzance,’ in: *Études historiques à l’occasion du XIe Congrès international des sciences historiques, Stockholm, août 1960*, (Sofia: 1960), 1, pp.31-71; Discussion of Dujčev’s work in Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums*, pp.229-235; Jonathan Shepard, ‘Byzantine Emperors, Imperial Ideology, and the Fact of Bulgaria,’ *Bulgaria Mediaevalis*, 2 (2011), pp.545–561.

during the communist period, both will be upheld here with certain nuances. Mutafchiev was insistent that Byzantium did become an exclusively Greek empire by the final stages of its history. This chapter however is concerned with those who sought to preserve a multi-lingual state. It returns then to the narrative and manner of the conversion of the Bulgars, their incorporation into the empire, and an analysis of differences and mutations between the period of the centralised Byzantine state before 1204, and the provincialized age after. The dichotomy reflects the scale of resources, ambitions, and opportunities available to religious authorities in each period. We might see how in an age of narrowed communities, defined heavily by language, attempts were made to preside over a variety of culturally distinct peoples.

One of the more descriptive details about the position of Byzantine ecclesiastics in Bulgaria is given by John Apokaukos, the Metropolitan of Naupaktos (1200–1233). In a letter he advises George Bardanes on which bishopric to choose shortly after his refusal of Glavenitsa (modern-day Southern Albania) on account of its meagre prosperity:

‘Thus, in previous times, and indeed until now, the most distinguished thrones of bishops, the Bulgarian bishoprics, were so highly praised and exalted on account of both their income and their pleasant location that many of the students of the Great Church, myself among them, would dearly wish to occupy a Bulgarian throne, if the disapproval of self-promotion did not prevent the pursuit of this office.

Οὕτως ἦσαν εἰς τὸν ἀνόπιν θρόνον καὶ μέχρι νῦν οἱ τῶν ἐπισκόπων ἐπιφανέστεροι θρόνοι, αἱ δὲ κατὰ Βουλγαρίαν ἐπισκοπαὶ κατὰ τε προσόδους κατὰ τε τοπικὰς θέσεις καὶ ὑψηλολογούμεναι καὶ μεγαλιζόμεναι, ὡς καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας τροφίμων καὶ σὺν ἐκείνοις κάμει, εἰ μὴ τὸ φιλοδοξεῖν διεκόλυσεν, ἐρᾶν ἐπιβῆναι θρόνου Βουλγαρικοῦ.’⁶²⁶

As Apokaukos evidently saw no great breach between the history and occupancy of Bulgarian bishoprics between the period of pre-1204 and the time of his writing in c.1218, it is necessary to understand the context of Byzantine Bulgaria and its competing traditions.

When the Bulgarian Empire was reannexed to Byzantium in 1018, after nearly three decades of war, its governance and ecclesiastical organisation were entirely transformed. Despite being briefly conquered by Emperor John Tzimiskes in the 970s, Bulgaria and the Danube River frontier had not been Byzantine territory for four hundred years.⁶²⁷ A major part of the reintroduction of imperial administration was the dissolution of the Bulgarian Patriarchate of Preslav and reestablishment of the ‘Archbishopric of All Bulgaria’ in the city of Ohrid.⁶²⁸ The

⁶²⁶ Vasilievsky, ‘Epirotica,’ §6, pp.251-252.33-37,

⁶²⁷ The infrastructure of Tzimiskes’ conquest of Bulgaria is best illuminated by the *Taktikon Scorialensis*, which lists the themes and offices of command, initially *strategoï*, created for Berea, Dristra and Preslav-Ioannoupolis. Published by Nicholas Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, (Paris: 1972), pp.255-277. A narrative of Tzimiskes’ conquest is provided by: Leon the Deacon, *History* books 8-9, ed. C. B. Hase, *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae libri decem* (Bonn 1828), trans. Denis Sullivan, Alice-Mary Talbot, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century* (Harvard: 2005), pp.175-222; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp.284-313, trans. Wortley pp.271-298; Stephenson, *Byzantium’s Balkan frontier*, pp.51-55; Anthony Kaldellis, ‘The original source for Tzimiskes’ Balkan campaign (971 AD) and the emperor’s classicizing propaganda,’ *BMGS*, 37 (2013), pp.35-52.

⁶²⁸ Much of Bulgaria’s conquest is attested sigillographically through finds in Preslav and published in Ivan Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria*, 3 vols., (Sofia: 2003-2009). An absence of seals for civic officials but an abundance for the *strategoï* of Dorostolon/Dristra attest to the presence of large armies until the

extant three *sigilla* issued by Emperor Basil II (976–1025) at Ohrid in 1020 confirmed great and highly specific powers upon the incumbent.⁶²⁹ Firstly, the archbishop was made responsible for the entire ecclesiastical discipline of the Bulgarian *theme*. This included the oversight of some twenty-three suffragan bishops, though their number was seemingly reduced to eleven by 1204.⁶³⁰ In return for this duty over an often-unruly Bulgarian people, a strain which many appointees lament, bishops were also tasked with raising taxation. This granted the archbishop of Ohrid the right to collect the *kanonikon* tax from the bishoprics and towns of his expansive diocese. The Vlach populations in Bulgaria and the Turkic tribes around Varda were included within this remit.⁶³¹ These economic privileges were combined with the status of autocephaly, which meant that the archbishop was officially appointed by the emperor himself from a selection of three candidates proposed by the Synod of Ohrid.⁶³² Consequently, imperial policy was to make the appointment of archbishops to Ohrid a highly lucrative extension of imperial power into the conquered territories of Byzantine Bulgaria.

A great deal of our understanding of the relationship between the imperial exclave of Ohrid and the Bulgarian society in which it sat is provided by the letters and letter networks of its archbishops. The first most notable of these is the letter collection relating to the tenure of Theophylact, Archbishop of Ohrid (1088–1126).⁶³³ Despite complaining relentlessly about being removed to the fringes of Byzantium in his private correspondence, Theophylact seems to have engaged fully with the Bulgarian culture of Ohrid.⁶³⁴ The legacy of the conversion of the Slavs was the staging ground for Theophylact’s policy of Greek-Bulgarian hybridity. He intertwined the two peoples by producing the first Greek hagiography of St. Clement of Ohrid, most likely drawing on a lost earlier Slavic text, which highlighted the conversion of the Bulgars. The emphasis of this work was on the deeds of Sts Cyril-Constantine and Methodios as founders and missionaries, less in a pan-Slavic sense than a purely Bulgarian-Greek one.⁶³⁵ Clement, is said to exceed Constantine and Methodios. He is ‘another St. Paul and the Bulgarians another Corinthians’ [καὶ Παῦλος ἄλλος τοῖς Βουλγάροις Κορινθίοις ἄλλοις γενόμενος] and is credited as their leading disciple with the creation/refinement of the

annexation. The subsequent creation of themes of Bulgaria, Sirmium, Serbia, and Parduvanon, while downgrading of the region of Dristra to a *katepanate* under Basil II, has been interpreted as a movement away from militarisation towards regular administration: Alexandru Madgearu, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube, 10th-12th Centuries* (Brill: 2013), pp.7-100, esp. pp.34-36, 56; cf. Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)*, (Oxford: 2005), pp.392-447.

⁶²⁹ Mitko Panov, ‘Ohrid Archbishopric and Ecclesiastical Identity in Byzantium,’ in: *“Days of Justinian I”*, ed. Mitko Panov (Skopje: 2021), pp.82-93; Heinrich Gelzer, ‘Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistümerverszeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche II,’ *BZ*, 2 (1893), pp.22-72.

⁶³⁰ Günter Prinzing, ‘The Autocephalous Byzantine Ecclesiastical Province of Bulgaria/Ohrid How Independent Were Its Archbishops?,’ *Bulgaria Mediaevalis*, 3 (2012), p.365.

⁶³¹ Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200*, (Cambridge: 1990), pp.105-6. ‘The *kanonikon* was a payment in both cash and kind which does not appear in the exemption lists because it was exacted by the church. The payment was standardised by Isaac Komnenos at one nomisma and two miliaresia together with six modioi each of wheat and barley, six measures of wine, one ram and thirty birds from a community of thirty households.’ Note the presence of the Vlach Tzola in Chomatenos, *PD*, §136.5-6.

⁶³² Madgearu, *The Asanids*, pp.51-52.

⁶³³ Theophylact of Ohrid, ed. Paul Gautier, *Théophylacte d’Achrída Lettres*, (Thessaloniki: 1980).

⁶³⁴ Eleftheria Papagianni, ‘Οι Βούλαγοι στις επιστολές του Θεοφυλάκτου Αχρίδας,’ *Πανελλήνιο Ιστορικό Συνέδριο (Μαΐος 1989)*, (Thessaloniki: 1989), pp.63-71.

⁶³⁵ Ilija Iliev, ‘Prostrannoto žitie na Kliment Okhridski. Kritično izdanie (The Long Life of Saint Clement of Ohrid. A Critical Edition),’ *Byzantinobulgarica*, 9, (1995), pp.60-120, trans. Dujčev, *Kiril and Methodius: Founders of Slavonic Writing*, pp.93-127; *Gruskitite žitija na Kliment Okhridski*, ed. Alexander Milev, (Sofia: 1966), pp.76-146, repr. I. Basileios Anastasiou, ‘Βίος Κωνσταντίνου-Κυρίλλου, Βίος Μεθοδίου, Βίος Κλήμεντος Αχρίδος,’ *Επετηρίς Θεολογικής Σχολής Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης*, 12, (1968), pp.162-184. Odd references in the Greek to ‘we Bulgarians’ [τοῖς Βουλγάροις ἡμῖν] suggest a Bulgarian interlocutor, Iliev, p.101.880.

Glagolitic Slavic alphabet.⁶³⁶ Clement's achievement therefore enabled the diffusion of the 'divine Gospels from Greek texts into the Bulgarian tongue.'⁶³⁷ The text makes the notable attribution of the 864 baptism of King Boris, normally said to have been performed by St. Methodios, to Clement's own hand. Then from this example thereafter the Bulgarian *ethnos* followed their king's example becoming Christians.⁶³⁸

Obolensky and Angold have convincingly argued that throughout his time, and especially through his rewriting of this hagiography, Theophylact was attempting to Hellenise Bulgarian culture.⁶³⁹ Margaret Mullett, who has produced the most substantial literary analysis of his letters, has sought to provide a context for Theophylact's otherwise seemingly disingenuous comments about the Bulgarian people. She has noted high dissonance between Theophylact's condemnation of the Bulgarians for their inherent vices and sins and his efforts to present Bulgaria as a Christian nation, to say nothing of Theophylact's own gradual assimilation into Bulgarian culture. Mullett has advocated for each of Theophylact's works to be presented, contextualised, and analysed entirely as a representative of their respective genres.⁶⁴⁰ If in one work he complains hyperbolically about 'the Bulgarian nature, the nurse of all evil', it is – Mullett claims - because of the context of the letter, in that particular case, because a Bulgarian peasant called Lazaros committed arson that damaged private property.⁶⁴¹ Mullett's argument for a more holistic approach to Theophylact's life and work is especially compelling when considering the archbishops' efforts to promote local Bulgarian interests, related both to education and to two local cults: Sts. Clement and Achilleios.⁶⁴² This resulted in his second literary work on another aspect of shared Byzantine-Bulgarian heritage: a hagiography narrating early Bulgarian history through the *Martyrdom of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis*.⁶⁴³ Theophylact's focus was again on the connection of contemporary Bulgaria with a shared Christian past, this time providing Tiberiopolis with its contemporary Bulgarian name Στρουμίτζη.⁶⁴⁴ The work has a great deal in common with his *Vita Clementis*, focusing upon the conversion of the Bulgarians where they transitioned from being 'before not a people,

⁶³⁶ Theophylact, ed. Iliev, 'Long Life,' p.101.863.12; Angeliki Delikari. 'The Cyrillo-Methodian Mission, Theophylact of Ohrid and the Long Life of Saint Clement,' *Kirilo-Methodievski studii*, 25 (2016), pp.192-198.

⁶³⁷ Theophylact, ed. Iliev, 'Long Life,' p.82.59-61; 'They refined/discovered the Slavonic letters, then they translated the holy Scriptures from the Greek language into Bulgarian' 'ἐξευρίσκουσι μὲν τὰ Σθλοβενικὰ γράμματα, ἐρμηνεύουσι δὲ τὰς θεοπνεύστους γραφὰς ἐκ τῆς ἐλλάδος γλώττης εἰς τὴν Βουλγαρικὴν.'

⁶³⁸ Ibid., p.85.184-186, 'And besides, this Boris was a recipient of the blessing of baptism, whence the Bulgarian nation too began to be deemed worthy of holy baptism and to be Christian.' 'Ἦν γὰρ ὁ Βορίσης οὗτος καὶ ἄλλως γνώμης δεξιᾶς καὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δεκτικῆς, ἐφ' οὗ καὶ τὸ τῶν Βουλγάρων ἔθνος τοῦ θεοῦ τε καταξιούσθαι βαπτίσματος καὶ χριστιανίζειν ἤρξατο.'

⁶³⁹ Dimitri Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, (Oxford: 1988). Obolensky's chapter on Theophylact of Ohrid pp.34-83; Angold, *Church and Society*, pp.170-172.

⁶⁴⁰ Mullett, *Theophylact*, pp.269-270.

⁶⁴¹ Trans. *ibid.*; Gautier, *Théophylacte*, §96.34-35, 'φύσις δὲ βουλγαρικὴ πάσης κακίας τιθηνός.'

⁶⁴² Suggestions of Theophylact's personal involvement with Bulgarian society that could have built a scriptorium come from letter §103, where Theophylact reveals he was tutoring Bulgarian students in Greek, and addresses them during a period of sickness. Gautier, *Théophylacte*, §103, 'Τοῖς παιδευθεῖσιν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ Βουλγάρους.' This letter remains the only evidence of any such students.

⁶⁴³ Mullett, p.238; Eirini Sophia-Kiapidou, 'Critical Remarks on Theophylact of Ohrid's Martyrdom of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis: The Editorial Adventure of a Text from the Middle Ages,' *Parekbolai*, 2, (2012), pp.27-47.

⁶⁴⁴ Idem., *Μαρτύριο των Δεκαπέντε Μαρτύρων της Τιβεριοπόλης. Κριτική έκδοση, απόδοση στα ελληνικά και υπομνηματισμός*, (Athens: 2015), p.44 The critical apparatus provides the full title present in *Oxford Bodleian Barocci 197 f.589r*: 'Μαρτύριον τῶν ἁγίων ἐνδόξων ἱερομαρτύρων ΙΕ' τῶν ἐν Τιβεριοπόλει τῆ βουλγαρικῶς ἐπονομαζομένη Στρουμίτζη μαρτυρησάντων ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς Ἰουλιανοῦ τοῦ παραβάτου συγγραφέν ὑπὸ Θεοφυλάκτου τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου ἀρχιεπισκόπου πάσης Βουλγαρίας.'; Paul Gautier, *Deux oeuvres hagiographiques du pseudo-Théophylacte*, (PhD dissertation, Paris: 1968).

but a barbarian *ethnos*, yet became and is now called a people of God' [ὁ πρὶν οὐ λαός, ἀλλ' ἔθνος βάρβαρον, νῦν «λαὸς Θεοῦ» γίνεται καὶ καλεῖται.]⁶⁴⁵ Mirela Ivanova has observed an intentional continuity in Theophylact's narrative. By omitting Tsars Peter (927–969), Samuel (977–1014), and the wars of recent Bulgarian rulers, it asserts a pan-Christian community through the dual tradition of Roman-Bulgarian place and personal names. By narrating the movement of martyrs between Thessaloniki and Stroumitsa/Tiberiopolis Theophylact's *Tiberiopolis* becomes a constructed narrative of Bulgarian history that emphasises a spatial hybrid unity, not monoculturalism.⁶⁴⁶ The ongoing debate about Byzantine ethnicity and some scholars' insistence on an essentialist doctrine of assimilation into Byzantium and the language of the '*Romaika*' has regrettably shifted the focus away from the overlapping identities of those who lived in provincial Byzantium. Theophylact provides evidence of the existence of hybrid, multi-layered identities long into the Byzantine millennium.⁶⁴⁷ Moreover, in a much-discussed statement from Theophylact in his letters to the deposed empress Maria of Alania in 1095, Theophylact himself suggests that he considered himself, after seven years, as fully belonging to the Ohrid milieu by both those among whom he lived in Ohrid and those who had known him before:

'I have a charming story to offer to the lady who is truly full of grace. During my stay in this city—it was such a long time ago—all of my belongings, which are normally pleasant and fragrant, rotted and started emitting a foul smell. Then, I returned to the Bulgarians—I, a genuine Constantinopolitan and strangely a Bulgarian—smelling of decay as they smell of goatskin. And what is worse, these people will assume that you also found me disgusting, although it was due to you that my stench became abundantly and pleasantly sweet-smelling.

Ἔχω δέ τι καὶ χαριεντίσασθαι πρὸς τὴν τῶν χαρίτων ἀληθῶς γέμουσαν. Κάτειμι τοίνυν ἐπὶ Βουλγάροις ἀτεχνῶς Κωνσταντινουπολίτης, τὸ ξένον Βούλγαρος ἀπόζων σαπρίας ὡς ἐκεῖνοι τοῦ τῶν κωδίων γράσου καὶ τὸ δεινότατον ὅτι με οἱ ἐκεῖνοι ἄνθρωποι καὶ παρὰ σοῦ βδελυχθῆναι οἰήσονται, ἧ γὰρ ἂν ἡ σαπρία μοι εὐωδιάσθη καὶ μάλα πλουσίως καὶ χαριέντως;⁶⁴⁸

The classism and tropes concerning the Bulgarians were always present, particularly in communications with the capital. Regardless, we see also the sense that a bishop, having spent a long time amongst his provincial population, believed he had come to represent them both in the city and abroad.

The resultant picture of Ohrid in this period has been fleshed out into an age of economic expansion and prosperity, with multiple new basilicas erected over the course the twelfth

⁶⁴⁵ Sophia-Kiapidou, *Μαρτύριο Τῶν Δεκαπέντε*, p.166.

⁶⁴⁶ Mirela Ivanova, 'Seeing Like a Church: The Politics of Theophylact of Ohrid's *Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis*,' *Travaux et Mémoires*, 26, (2022), pp.675-94.

⁶⁴⁷ Pohl, 'Early medieval Romanness,' pp.21-22; Koder, 'Remarks on linguistic Romanness,' pp.111-114; cf. Kaldellis, *Romanland*, p.143.

⁶⁴⁸ Translation adapted from Eirini Sophia-Kiapidou, 'Theophylact of Ohrid's Vita of Clement of Ohrid and the Martyrdom of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis,' *Kalligraphos - Essays on Byzantine Language, Literature and Palaeography* (Berlin: 2023), p.74; Gautier, *Théophylacte* §4, p.141.55-62. Translation adapted from Mullett, *Theophylact of Ohrid*, p.261; cf. Paul Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*, (Cambridge: 2003), p.83.; Note alternative translation by Dirk Krausmüller in: *Moving Byzantium: A Sourcebook*, ed. Claudia Rapp, pp.261-262.

century.⁶⁴⁹ The archbishop's palace, while non-surviving today, is described as pleasant, tall, and attracting the envy (and potential animosity) of the local inhabitants of Ohrid. The impression of prosperity has a somewhat mixed representation in Theophylact's letters. Frequently, he writes to bishops, to the emperor, and to the patriarch to complain of the oppression of imperial tax-collectors hoping to gain tax exemptions.⁶⁵⁰ To Nikephoros Bryennios, the son-in-law of Alexios I Komnenos, he writes of the 'δημόσιον εὐνοίας' and 'ψευδολογίες', the 'public opinion' and 'lies' shared by Ohrid's inhabitants and tax-collectors that he lived in luxury while they swarmed below.⁶⁵¹

'[They say] my mountains flow with milk, that I am stuffed with I know not how many talents for my supplies, that I am immensely rich and live like a satrap, that in comparison to the riches of the archbishop those of the Persian would seem shabby, that the palaces at Susa and Ecbatana are mere huts compared with my airy, high-rise residence, where in summer I cool the furnace of my fleshiness.

[...] τὰ δὲ ὄρη μου χέεσθαι γάλακτι καὶ ταλάντων οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπόσων συμπορισμοῖς ἀδρὸν εἶναι με καὶ βαθύπλουτον διωμόσατο καὶ ἄγειν σατραπικῶς, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ μικροπρεπῆ φανῆναι ἂν καὶ τὰ Μηδικὰ τοῖς ἀρχιεπισκοπικοῖς παραθεωρούμενα καὶ τὰ ἐν Σούσοις καὶ Ἐκβατάνοις βασιλεία καλύβας ἀτεχνῶς πρὸς τὰ ἐμὰ πολυόροφα καὶ τοὺς ῥιπιστοὺς οἴκους, οἷς ἐνθερίζων ἀναψύχω τὴν τῶν ἐπιφαινομένων μοι σαρκῶν κάμινον."⁶⁵²

Until recently archaeological evidence did not allow further pursuit of a lost mighty palace lordling over the villagers.⁶⁵³ Excavations published in 2020 in the vicinity of Ohrid's Hagia Sophia cathedral have, however, revealed lower walls of an multi-levelled episcopal complex formed of typical eleventh- and twelfth-century brickwork, as well as surviving frescoes of archepiscopal robes, and a series of structures which potentially stretched some 30m all the way to the shores of Lake Ohrid.⁶⁵⁴ Establishing the vast size of this likely palace helps to understand how subsequent archbishops of Ohrid worked to make the reputation which Theophylact denied a reality. One *sebastos* John Komnenos who later took the monastic name Hadrian, probably a younger brother of Emperor John II Komnenos, was made Archbishop of Ohrid c.1157 and he held this office until his death c.1163.⁶⁵⁵ He may even have hosted his nephew, Manuel I, at Ohrid during one of the emperor's campaigns on the Danube border. Owing to the *Du Cange Register* compiled in the 1170s, we possess a list and description of all Ohrid's Archbishops of Bulgaria up to John/Hadrian Komnenos.⁶⁵⁶ As a consequence, we can

⁶⁴⁹ Mullett, *Theophylact*, pp.60-65; S. Čurčić. *Architecture in the Balkans: From Diocletian to Suleyman the Magnificent, c. 300-1550* (London: 2010), pp.571-575.

⁶⁵⁰ This kind of complaint is tropic. Bernard, 'Michael Psellos,' *Companion to Byzantine Epistolography*, p.133; Alan Harvey, 'The land and taxation in the reign of Alexios I Komnenos: the evidence of Theophylakt of Ochrid,' *REB*, 51 (1993), pp.139-154.

⁶⁵¹ Gautier, *Théophylacte*, §96, p.487.64-76; Including the patriarch, there may be several individuals with this name. Stadtmüller, 'Kamateros,' pp.352-358.

⁶⁵² Trans. Mullett, *Theophylact*, p.132.

⁶⁵³ Such was Mullett's belief in 1997, *Theophylact*, p.66.

⁶⁵⁴ Pasko Kuzman, 'Archaeological Discovery to the South of the Saint Sophia Church in Ohrid,' *Arheološki Informator*, 4 (2020), pp.141-162. That palace was repurposed by Serbian governors in the fourteenth-century, and later by the Ottomans until its dismantling in 1808 upon which the governor's residence was rebuilt in Samuel's Fortress, Ohrid's citadel.

⁶⁵⁵ Günter Prinzing, 'Wer war der „bulgarische Bischof Adrian“ der Laurentius-Chronik sub anno 1164?,' *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 36.4 (1988), pp.552-557.

⁶⁵⁶ Vasilka Tapkova-Zaimova, 'The Du Cange Catalogue,' *Studies in Medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium*, pp.209-235; idem., 'Дюканжов списък,' *Palaeobulgarica*, 3 (2000), pp.21-49. Tapkova-Zaimova reproduced on p.27 the 1740 transcription of Michael Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, 2, (Paris: 1740).

comment with some accuracy upon the choice of candidates for the archbishopric. While John/Hadrian Komnenos was undoubtedly the most prestigious, all the others were deacons of Hagia Sophia, *chartophylakes*, and as *eugeneis* carried patronymics. Theophylact's successor Leo Bugos/Mungos had even previously served as διδάσκαλος τῶν ἐθνῶν, a teacher of foreign students, before ascending to Ohrid's episcopal throne.⁶⁵⁷

John/Hadrian Komnenos was the first archbishop to commit an act of historical conflation that would have critical importance throughout the thirteenth century. During his incumbency the title, and by extension the rights and privileges, of the Ohrid Archbishopric of All Bulgaria were expanded to include the long-abandoned sixth-century colony of *Justiniana Prima*. Its full styling read: 'ἀρχιεπίσκοπος τῆς Πρώτης Ἰουστινιανῆς καὶ πάσης Βουλγαρίας.' *Justiniana Prima* and its episcopal see had been founded as a colony to honour Justinian's birthplace but had lapsed in the intervening centuries.⁶⁵⁸ The city was something of a failed project, abandoned less than a century after its founding. However, at its foundation the colony's diocese had been granted full archbishopric status along with numerous other caveats within Novel XI establishing the great extent of its powers.⁶⁵⁹ Eliding with *Justiniana Prima* therefore allowed Ohrid to claim multiple ancient privileges, in particular the rights for *Justiniana Prima* to be outside the jurisdiction of any patriarch.⁶⁶⁰ Only Cyprus would have comparable status, a significant comparison given one source's claims that Isaak Komnenos (1185–1191) was later crowned emperor by the archbishop of that island.⁶⁶¹

Ohrid's history becomes murkier after John/Hadrian Komnenos. The final certain archbishop prior to 1204 is one John Kamateros, distinct from the contemporary Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople John X Kamateros (1198 – May 1206).⁶⁶² Prior to election, as deacon this John Kamateros had presided over the disreputable burial-at-sea of Emperor Alexios II in 1183.⁶⁶³ Potentially, some of this John Kamateros' correspondence survives. A John Kamateros who

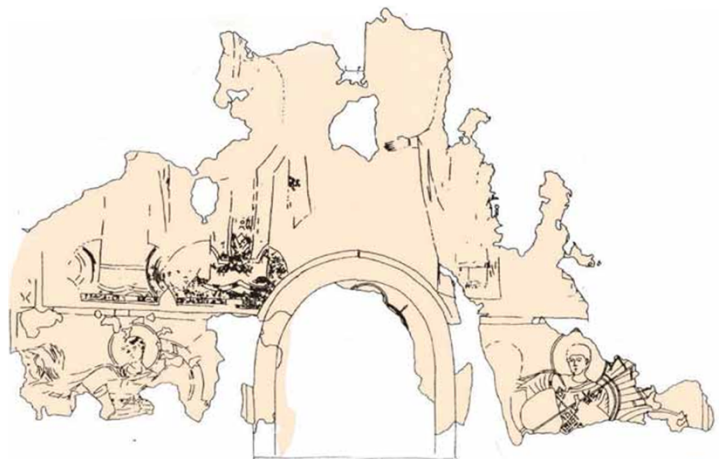


Figure 20. 1191, St. George, Kurbinovo. Archbishop John Kamateros upper right figure. Fragmentary fresco cycle of Isaak II and Margaret of Hungary flanked on left. Grozdanov, Kurbinovo and Other Studies, p.266.

⁶⁵⁷ Tapkova-Zaimova, 'Du Cange,' pp.27, 33.

⁶⁵⁸ Vujadin Ivanišević, 'Main Patterns of Urbanism in Caričin Grad (Justiniana Prima),' in: *New Cities in Late Antiquity. Documents and Archaeology*, ed. Ethymios Rizos, (Turnhout: 2017), pp.221-232.

⁶⁵⁹ Novel XI of Justinian is in: *Corpus Iuris Civilis* ed. R. Schoell, III, (Berlin: 1954), p.94.

⁶⁶⁰ Stanislaw Turlej, *Justiniana Prima: An Underestimated Aspect of Justinian's Church Policy*, (Krakow: 2016), pp.50-61.

⁶⁶¹ Savvas Neocleous, 'Imaging Isaak Komnenos Of Cyprus (1184-1191) and the Cypriots: Evidence from the Latin Historiography Of The Third Crusade,' *Byzantion*, 83, (2013), pp.297-337; The claim that an archbishop or potential patriarch (Antiochene or unilaterally promoted Cypriot), had crowned Isaak emperor comes from the Syriac Chronicle of Patriarch Michael (1166-1199), *Chronique le Michel le Syrien* trans. by J.B. Chabot (Paris: 1905), III, p.402.

⁶⁶² *DOSeals*, 1951.31.5.2400. Seal published of a 'John, Archbishop of Bulgaria' could relate to either Kamateros or Komnenos. 'Τὸν ποιμενάρχην Βουλγάρων Ἰωάννην πιστὸν μοναστήν, μητροπάρθενε, σκέποις.'; Maksimović-M. Popović, 'Les sceaux byzantins de la région danubienne en Serbie,' *SBS*, ed. Oikonomides, 2 (Washington D.C.: 1990), p.224.

⁶⁶³ NC, CD, §274, trans. p.152.

may be the Bulgarian archbishop was the recipient of three letters penned by George Tornikes, Metropolitan of Ephesos. The subjects of these letters were dogmatic and concerned a matter of disagreement concerning the creed, but John Kamateros appears without title or office.⁶⁶⁴ Despite their content focusing greatly on remembering the duty of Greeks to speak with Greek and a reference to George's uncle (Theophylact of Ohrid) having previously served as Archbishop of Bulgaria, John is not given a title and regrettably it is not enough to securely identify both time and place.⁶⁶⁵ Hypothetically, if these letters are addressed to our John Kamateros (incumbent in Ohrid c.1191–1215), then they should be dated later. What little we know of John Kamateros' archepiscopal activities in Bulgaria comes from a translation of a Slavic prayer for St. Mihail Voyn (Michael the Warrior), a ninth-century military saint believed to have lived during the reign of Tsar St. Boris-Michael. St. Mihail was a suitable model for Byzantine-Bulgarian cooperation, as in life the saint had served in the imperial army before embarking on a set of dragon-slaying exploits. Kamateros appears to have composed a series of prayers for the saint and within the last lines of his odes included an acrostic of his own name 'ΙΩΑΝΝ...Σ.'⁶⁶⁶ The tentative association of this text aside, we have no extant letters written by John Kamateros for the duration of his incumbency as archbishop. Only in other aspects does Kamateros demonstrate himself an influential figure. He is identified as donor of the monastic church of St. George Kurbinovo near Lake Prespa, built 1191.⁶⁶⁷ Kurbinovo, an outstanding example of late Komnenian-Angelid art was executed by skilled artisans likely from Constantinople. The church embodies the wealth and connections of twelfth-century Ohrid. Remaining fragments even confirm Kamateros had himself and Emperor Isaak II Angelos painted together on Kurbinovo's façade.

The end of John Kamateros' incumbency as Archbishop is recorded in the writings of his successor, Demetrios Chomatenos. In those of Chomatenos' documents which pertain to Ohrid c.1216/7 it is stated that Kamateros had been in office until 'πέρυσι' i.e. last year.⁶⁶⁸ If Demetrios Chomatenos, prior to succeeding him had been serving under Kamateros in Ohrid as *chartophylax*, then it is probable that Kamateros was briefly restored when Epiros captured the city in 1215/16.



Figure 21. 1191, St. George, Kurbinovo. St. George (below) and feet of an archbishop, likely, Kamateros (above). Author's photograph, taken 01/09/25.

⁶⁶⁴ The letters were published and dated to 1153-1155 associated with an unspecified John Kamateros. See *Georges et Démétrios Tornikès*, §§10, 11, pp.15, 127-134, also p.128n.4.

⁶⁶⁵ A potential reading would be that it was an intentional slight on Tornikes' part to ignore Kamateros' office and merely allude to his own family's experience in Bulgaria.

⁶⁶⁶ Sergey Yurievich Temchin, 'Ohridskiy arhiepiskop Ioann Kamatir kak veroyatnyy avtor slavyanskoy sluzhby Mihailu Voynu iz Potuki, [The Archbishop of Ohrid John Kamateros as a Possible Author of the Slavonic Liturgical Office for St. Michael, the Soldier of Potuka],' *Starobulgarska Literatura*, 55 (2017), p.32.

⁶⁶⁷ Cvetan Grozdanov, 'Sur les portraits des personnages historiques à Kurbinovo,' *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog Instituta*, 33 (1994), pp.85-102; idem., *Kurbinovo and Other Studies on Prespa Frescoes*, (Skopje: 2015), pp.118-123.

⁶⁶⁸ Chomatenos, *PD*, §10.43.



Figure 22.1–2. Apse of St. George, Kurbinovo. Dated 1191. Author's photographs, taken 01/09/25.



There is no clear paradigm for either the deposition or retention of bishops in the face of Bulgarian and Latin expansion after 1204. The situation depended either on personal oaths of submission to the conquering powers or to absorption into the centres of Orthodox resistance.⁶⁶⁹ Deposition when it occurred rarely involved either an exile over a great distance or a complete cessation of contact with their congregation. While the patriarch licensed Nikaia to encourage migration to new dioceses in Anatolia, the Epirote episcopal letters talk far more of bishops serving from a close distance. When the Metropolitan Michael Choniates was expelled from Athens in 1205, he had removed himself to Kea an island off the east coast of Attica and continued to guide his flock as best he could across the straits.⁶⁷⁰ Choniates' communication with the Metropolitan of Thebes reveals that the latter did the same from Andros.⁶⁷¹ The Patriarchs of Constantinople-Nikaia developed the practice of sending encyclicals to the Orthodox congregation of the former capital with news, greetings and blessings.⁶⁷² Following their example, Kamateros may not have even left the environs of Ohrid or its dependent villages.⁶⁷³ The only evidence that Kamateros did briefly leave Macedonia is his signature on a synodal act in October 1213, when he appeared in Nikaia as one of several undersigned bishops confirming the Nikaian church's support for Theodore Laskaris' impending marriage to the daughter of the Armenian Cilician King Levon (1187/1198–1219).⁶⁷⁴ While evidence that Kamateros was there in 1213 he is also the only signatory of a Balkan see, all others were Anatolian. Given that other evidence suggests bishops commonly held two offices simultaneously upon migration to Anatolia (uncanonically but permitted under the 1205 flexible precept of *oikonomia*), the visit may have been temporary.⁶⁷⁵

The candidate to succeed Kamateros became the most prominent of all Ohrid's archbishops, and a leading figure in ecclesiastical and geopolitical developments. Before the fall in 1204 it has been theorised that Kamateros selected a deacon amongst the clergy at Hagia Sophia to serve as his *apokriseis*, responsible for administering matters and organising communications between Ohrid and the patriarchate. Both Günter Prinzing and Ilia Iliev have demonstrated that between 1191 and 1203 the man selected to hold this post was one Demetrios Chomatenos. Their theory is based on a reference in the communications of John Apokaukos, writing much later, in defence of Chomatenos. We learn much from Apokaukos' response that: 'I have known the shepherd [Chomatenos] for a long time, since the time he was *apokriseis* to the

⁶⁶⁹ The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 asserted in its opening chapters the proclamation that the Greeks needed to take an oath of loyalty that accepted Papal Primacy. See Chris Schabel, Nikephoros Tsougarakis, 'Pope Innocent III, the Fourth Lateran Council, and Frankish Greece and Cyprus,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 67.4 (2015), pp.742-759.

⁶⁷⁰ Michael appointed the monk Lukas of Hagios Georgios in the island of Makri to administer the spiritual needs of Athens, sending his own *sigillion* as proof of the deputization. MC, *Epistulae*, §99, p.132.35-40. In letter §116, p.193.7 (c.1207) Michael replied to his nephew's complaint about his 'ill-considered and ill-examined ordinations' [τὰς ἀσκέπτους καὶ ἀδοκμάστους χειροτονίας]. Most likely, Michael's delegates were provoking tension with the Latins.

⁶⁷¹ MC, *Epistulae*, §91.

⁶⁷² Germanos II, ed. Lagopates, §1, pp.350-353; trans. Angold, §3, pp. 103-107.

⁶⁷³ Prinzing differs and believes that Kamateros, potentially with Chomatenos in tow, departed for Nikaia and was there, at least in 1207. Günter Prinzing, 'A Quasi Patriarch in the State of Epirus: The Autocephalous Archbishop of "Boulgaria" (Ohrid) Demetrios Chomatenos,' *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog instituta*, 41 (2004), p.172.

⁶⁷⁴ Pavlov, 'Sinodalnaja gramota,' pp.165-166; Corrected and amended Pavlov, *Sbornik neizdannyh pamjatnikov Vizantijskogo cerkovnogo prava*, [Collection of Unpublished Monuments of Byzantine Church Law], (St. Petersburg: 1898), pp.138-140; *Regestes*, IV, p.17; Prinzing, 'Quasi Patriarch,' p.174.

⁶⁷⁵ Darrouzès, 'Notes inédites de transferts épiscopaux.'

patriarchs.⁶⁷⁶ If this is the case, then Chomatenos was well-prepared for assuming the archbishopric and its hybrid character, and had experience representing it abroad. He had also already witnessed first-hand the changes that accompanied the fragmentation of Byzantium.

3.7. Ohrid under the Bulgarian-Vlach Empire: The ‘Tyranny of the *Drougoubitai*’ (1203/06–c.1216)

Ohrid remained under some remnant of Byzantine control during the turbulent years following the Bulgarian-Vlach uprising in 1185, until the annexation of the city by King/Tsar Kaloyan (1196–1207). This event is loosely dated to the period between 1203–06.⁶⁷⁷ It was then conquered by Theodore Komnenos Doukas (1215–1230) and incorporated within the ‘Principality of Arta/Empire of Thessaloniki’ in the opening campaigns of his expansionist reign. Throughout the intervening years Ohrid had been under the control of Kaloyan’s successor Boril (1207–1218). The period is remembered by Demetrios Chomatenos, who succeeded John Kamateros as Archbishop of Ohrid c.1216, as ‘the period of the tyranny of the *Drougoubitai*’ [τῷ καιρῷ τῆς Δρουγουβιτῶν τυρραννίδος].⁶⁷⁸ The chronology of these events is far from clear.

The major powers surrounding Ohrid during this time were relatives of the Asan dynasty. At Kaloyan’s murder outside Thessaloniki in 1207, his nephew Boril (1207–1218) usurped power from the heir-apparent but thereafter struggled to gain legitimacy. In the same year, Boril’s brother, the *sebastokrator* Strez, replaced Dobromir Chrysos in controlling the territory which surrounded the fortress at Prosek (Demir Kapija, North Macedonia).⁶⁷⁹ He would remain independent until Theodore annexed Prosek in 1219.⁶⁸⁰ Meanwhile Alexios Slav, a nephew of the Asan tsars Peter and Kaloyan, ruled from the fortified cities of Melnik and Tsepina vast swathes of the Rhodope Mountain range that gave him the security to pursue an autonomous diplomatic policy.⁶⁸¹ Strez and Chrysos were loosely allied to Bulgaria until Boril’s deposition and the restoration of the legitimate heir John/Ivan II Asan in 1218.⁶⁸² Alexios Slav was

⁶⁷⁶ Apokaukos, *Epirotica*, §17, p.272.17-19. ‘Τοῦτον ἐγὼ τῶν ἐκάστοτε Βουλγαρίας ἀποκρίσεις παρὰ τοῖς πατριάρχεις ποιούμενον ἐγνώρισα ἐκ μακροῦ’; Lambropoulos, §70; Prinzing, *PD*, p.11n.45; Iliya Iliev, *Ohridskiyat arhiepiskop Dimitar Homatian i balgarite [The Ohrid Archbishop Demetrios Chomatenos and the Bulgarians]*, (Sofia: 2021), pp.93-94.

⁶⁷⁷ Dimitar Angelov, ‘Prosopography of the Byzantine World (1204-1261) in the Light of Bulgarian Sources,’ *Identities and Allegiances*, pp.101-121.

⁶⁷⁸ Chomatenos, *PD*, 81.91. *Drougoubitai* is a term with multiple meanings. It is normally connected with the region around the Strymon and Serres. Omeljan Pritsak, ‘Drougoubitai’ in: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan; Franjo Barišić, ‘Vesti Dimitrija Homatijana o "vlasti Druguvita" [Informations de Demetrius Chomatianos sur le "pouvoir des Drougoubitai"]’, *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog Instituta*, 20 (1981), pp.41-58; Ivan Dujčev, ‘Dragvista-Dragovitia,’ *REB*, 22 (1964), pp.215-221; Nicol, ‘Refugees, Mixed Population,’ p.11n.45.

⁶⁷⁹ Robert Mihajlovski, Ordance Petrov, ‘New evidence from the fortress of Prosakos, Demir Kapija: the seal of George Oinaiotes, sebastos and parakoimomenos,’ *Patrimonim Mk*, 15 (2017), pp.227-231.

⁶⁸⁰ Apokaukos, ‘Epirotica,’ §3, pp.244-246; Lambropoulos, §35; Nicol, ‘Refugees, Mixed Population,’ p.26.

⁶⁸¹ Alexios Slav, still in power just before 1230, from 1208 was married to an illegitimate daughter of Henry of Flanders and made *princeps* and *despotes* of Philippopolis. After her death in 1218 he allied himself to Epiros. By 1220 Slav had gained sufficient wealth and authority to found a monastery in Melnik dedicated to the Virgin Spelaiotissa, for which the *sigillion* charter survives, granting it revenues and gifts. The *sigillion*, a blend of Greek and Slavonic legal terminology, is preserved at the Athonite Vatopedi Monastery. See Akropolites, §24, trans. Macrides, p.172; Jacques Bompaire, *Archives de l’Athos Vatopedi I*, (Paris: 2001), §13; Ivan Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria*, (Leiden: 2011), pp.64, 279; Kalin Yordanov, ‘“Frankski” gerb ot familnata grobnitsa v manastira “Sv. Bogoroditsa Pantanasa” v Melnik [“Frankish” coat of arms from the family tomb at the Panagia Pantanassa Monastery in Melnik],’ *Bulgaria Mediaevalis*, 11 (2020), pp.195-235; Angelov, ‘Prosopography,’ pp.101-121; Van Tricht, *Renovatio*, pp.378-379.

⁶⁸² Günter Prinzing, *Die Bedeutung Bulgariens and Serbiens in den Jahren 1204-1219*, (Munich: 1972).

noticeably more fluid and drifted between Latin, Epirote, and Bulgarian ties. Lacking Bulgarian narrative sources, it is very difficult to ascertain precisely when lands changed hands. We would hope to rely upon hoards, but multiple coinages circulated concurrently and these Bulgarian warlords and principalities all made use of billon *trachea*, which predominantly lacked dedications. This debased coinage, known in earlier scholarship as the ‘Bulgarian’ series and now termed ‘Faithful Copies’, were further complicated by a Latin imitation coinage and served alongside coinage already in circulation. The result produced a commonly acceptable but regionally indistinguishable means of exchange. The Bulgarian Tsars would not mint their own coinage and allow for confident identification until well after 1220.⁶⁸³

Ohrid did not take part in the original uprising of Peter and John /Ivan I Asan in 1185 and some twenty years were required for it to capitulate to a ‘national’ Bulgarian uprising. There is an important distinction to be made then between the First and Second Bulgarian Empires, that reflected the genesis of a hybrid Byzantine-Bulgarian ethnicity in the 150 years of Byzantine rule. Ohrid, Sofia, and Skopje, key parts of the ninth and tenth century Bulgar empire of Boris (852–889), Symeon (893–927) or even that of Samuel (997–1014), were not central to the Second Bulgarian state. The Asanid Bulgarian empire was on the Danube, geographically further north and as it expanded into Thrace and Macedonia it was entering lands far more defined by their affinity with the Balkan Byzantines than antagonism.⁶⁸⁴ When the *Synodikon* of King Boril was issued in 1211 to declare anathema against Bulgaria’s enemies, Ohrid was still under Bulgarian control. The document’s intention was to solidify an independent Bulgarian Church and to emphasise political independence, hence article §91 ‘To John Asan the King, called *Belgun*, who freed his people from Greek slavery, eternal remembrance!’⁶⁸⁵ However, despite three entries invoking the names and deeds of Sts Cyril, Methodius, and Clement, the *Synodikon* never mentions Ohrid.⁶⁸⁶ The emphasis is entirely on the northern territories, and not on Macedonian cults like Tiberiopolis, and, as such, it directly contradicts the narrative of the conversion of the Bulgarians that Theophylact’s *Vita* had propagated. The *Synodikon* made St. Clement solely the ‘Bishop of Great Moravia,’ claiming him for the Bulgarian Empire of the thirteenth century.⁶⁸⁷ It did so by directly capitalising on the weaknesses of Theophylact’s text. In Theophylact’s hagiography, despite Clement being claimed as the founder of Ohrid’s spiritual mission as an archbishopric for connecting Greeks and Bulgarians, he is mentioned in the context of Ohrid only twice.⁶⁸⁸ Far more space is given to his journeys to Rome and the Hyperborea. This ‘oversight’ will be addressed in the great response work of Demetrios Chomatenos’ own *Vita Clementis* in the age of Epirote expansion.⁶⁸⁹

We do not know definitively if there was a Bulgarian archbishop of Kaloyan or Boril’s choosing appointed to Ohrid. There is not one mentioned in the *Synodikon*, although that text’s fragmentary preservation makes a definitive use uncertain.⁶⁹⁰ Chomatenos’ vast dossier of materials begins in 1216 with the Epirote conquest of the region. Much of his early correspondence has to deal with decisions and appointments made under the Bulgarian regime.

⁶⁸³ Michael Hendy, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire 1081-1261*, (Washington D.C.: 1969); Hendy, *DOC*, 4.2; Baker, *Coinage and Money*, pp.76, 87, 1220-1221.

⁶⁸⁴ Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations*, pp.450-453.

⁶⁸⁵ Butler, *Monumenta Bulgarica*, p.211. For the belief that *Belgun* is a Cuman word indicative of a mixed ancestry, see also Butler, p.211n.8.

⁶⁸⁶ From this we might even contend that John Kamateros had never been ejected from office.

⁶⁸⁷ Butler, *Monumenta Bulgarica*, §90, p.211.

⁶⁸⁸ Theophylact, ed. Iliev, ‘Long Life,’ §54, p.98.745, §70, p.102.915.

⁶⁸⁹ See Section 3.8, p.178.

⁶⁹⁰ Butler, *Monumenta Bulgarica*, pp.203-204.

In Chomatenos' correspondence the *'Boulgarepiskopoi'* [βουλγαροεπισκόποι] specifically the bishops appointed by Asanid Bulgaria during the period when Kaloyan and Boril had expanded into Ohrid's suffragan dioceses were a source of great controversy. Not having been appointed by a Byzantine-Greek archbishop, they were vulnerable on two counts. Firstly, to the Epirote Church the elections were simply uncanonical. Kaloyan's negotiations with the pope had elevated an archbishop who acted as a patriarch and this was unlawful to Chomatenos' mind. The second was that according to Apokaukos' letter to Patriarch Manuel Sarantenos in 1222 there appears to be a conception in the fragmented world created after 1204 world that a bishop or priest appointed by a foreign power would be acting on their appointee's behalf as an agent.⁶⁹¹ This point shall be returned to. The question of how to deal with the *Boulgarepiskopoi* was first asked of Basil Padiadites, the Metropolitan of Corfu (d.1218), who had been in office since c.1201 and had avoided dethronement.⁶⁹² Padiadites' long career and his education and tenure in 1160s Constantinople as μαῖστωρ τῶν γραμματῶν made him something of a provincial authority in the early years after 1204. His letter refusing the Pope's invitation to the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 amplified that reputation. Articulating and defining Orthodoxy's obedience to the Seven Ecumenical Councils made up of the five patriarchal seats of the Pentarchy, Padiadites reasoned that as the Pentarchy seats could not be called, and that without an Orthodox Patriarch 'our throne of Constantinople is widowed,' he concluded that the Pope's council was by very definition non-ecumenical and invalid.⁶⁹³ Constantinides believed that this letter was public, perhaps even encyclical, and thus was one of the reasons Padiadites was approached with such reverence by John Apokaukos and remembered after his death as a spiritual champion by Theodore Komnenos Doukas.⁶⁹⁴ Padiadites' omission of the authority and standing of the Constantinopolitan-Nikaian Patriarchate would doubly have encouraged Theodore's support. Padiadites therefore was a precursor to the role that Chomatenos was about to fill, a spokesperson and legal recourse of the western fragments of Byzantium.

The *Boulgarepiskopoi* matter raised another matter we as historians should investigate. How many Bulgarians were appointed as bishops in pre-1204 Byzantine Bulgaria? The first Archbishops of all Bulgaria in Ohrid after Basil II's conquest were seemingly Bulgarian, but from Leo of Ohrid's tenure (1037–1056) they were all Byzantines educated in Constantinople

⁶⁹¹ In c.1207/08, David Grand Komnenos of Paphlagonia had dismissed one such bishop sent by the Nikaian Patriarch to his bishopric of Amastris. Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §17, p.275.28-31. 'Did not that Lord David Komnenos therefore have the deacon of the church Pammakaristes [Patriarch Autoreianos' selection] whipped and dismissed, because he sailed to Amastris after having been elected there, in order to inspect the city's affairs? [Ὁ δε Κομνηνός ἐκεῖνος κύρ Δαυίδ οὖν μάστιξιν ἤκισατο καὶ ἀπεπέμψατο τὸν τῆς ἐκκλησίας διάκονον ἐκεῖνον τὸν Παμμακαριστὴν, ὅτι ψηφισθεὶς ἐν Ἀμάστριδι ἀνέπλευσεν ἐν αὐτῇ, ὡς περισκοπῆσαι τὰ κατ'αὐτήν;]; Lambropoulos, §70.

⁶⁹² Padiadites received letters from Chomatenos, Apokaukos, and sent letters to Innocent III and Constantine Stilbes. These have been published respectively by Konstantinos Manafas, 'Ἐπιστολὴ Βασιλείου Πεδιαδίτου μητροπολίτου Κερκύρας πρὸς τὸν πάπαν Ἰννοκέντιον Γ' καὶ ὁ χρόνος πατριαρχείας πατριαρχείας Μιχαὴλ Δ' τοῦ Αὐτωρεαίανου,' *ΕΕΒΣ*, 42, (1975/76), pp.429-40; and Foteini Springou, 'Basil Padiadites: Living in Corfu: A Letter to Constantine Stilbes,' *Sources for Byzantine Art History Volume 3: The Visual Culture of Later Byzantium (1081-c.1350)*, (Cambridge: 2022), pp.952-957. He was also the author of the treatise *'On the Loss of Thorns'* potentially written after Theodore Komnenos Doukas' capture of the Latin Emperor Peter of Courtenay in 1217, published by Athanasios Karpozilos, 'Βασιλείου Πεδιαδίτη ἔκφρασις ἀλώσεως ἀκανθίθων' *Ἡπειρωτικὰ Χρονικά*, 23 (1981), pp.284-298; For Basil Padiadites' life and works see Costas Constantinides, 'Λογισύνη στήν Ὁρθόδοξη ἐπισκοπὴ Κερκύρας κατὰ τὸν 13^ο αἰῶνα: Ἡ περίπτωσις τοῦ Βασιλείου Πεδιαδίτου,' *Ἡπειρωτικὰ Μελετήματα Ζήτημα Ἀπὸ Τὴν Πνευματικὴ Ζωὴ Στὴ Μεσαιωνικὴ Ἡπειρο*, (Ioannina: 2018), pp.65-83.

⁶⁹³ Manafas, 'Ἐπιστολὴ Βασιλείου Πεδιαδίτου,' pp.435.24-25, 'νῦν μὲν γὰρ τέως χηρεύει καθ' ἡμᾶς θρόνος τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως,' This overlooking of the Constantinopolitan-Nikaian Patriarchate is potentially another legacy Padiadites left to Epiros.

⁶⁹⁴ Constantinides, 'Βασιλείου Πεδιαδίτου' pp.72-73.

belonging either to Hagia Sophia's clergy and/or prominent families. Concerning the bishops suffragan to the archdiocese we have only hints, but they lean towards suggesting that bishoprics were reserved for Greek-speakers first and foremost. We glean a little more from the search to secure George Bardanes a bishopric between c.1217–1219. Bardanes, was a student of Michael Choniates and continued to serve the exiled Metropolitan of Athens. In c.1208 held the quasi-titular positions of *hypomnematographos* and *chartophylax* and was a frequent representative for the ageing Metropolitan.⁶⁹⁵ Choniates rewarded his service and unusual degree of learning in an age of exile and sent Bardanes to Nikaia in search of appointment and made simultaneous enquiries with Apokaukos in Naupaktos. Apokaukos' reply to Bardanes provided the background to the previously discussed reputation of the wealth of Bulgarian sees amongst the clergy of Hagia Sophia (see p.162) but also continued to say:

‘And even if these present anomalous times have rendered all these things entirely untrue, it is still true to say, I think that in these distant places the bishoprics of Grevena and Vonitsa are superior, being entirely Hellenic and composed in their population of Greeks [Γραικῶν]. Then if you wish to be a bishop to possess one of these vacant bishoprics, that of Grevena is superior. The loving Lord shall make it so and the philanthropic angels appoint [you].

καὶ κἄν πάσα καὶ ταῦτα πάντως ἡ καιρικὴ ἀνωμαλία ἠχρείωσεν, ἀλλ' εἰ προσήκει τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγειν, ὑπερφέρειν νομίζω καὶ εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα ταῦτα τὴν τῶν Γρεβενῶν τῆς Βονδίτζης, τοῦτο μόνον ταύτης ὑπερτερούσης αὐτῆς, τὸν πάντα ἑλληνισμὸν καὶ τὸ μέσον κεῖσθαι Γραικῶν. Ἄν τε γοῦν ἐπισκοπῆσαι θελήσεις ἂν τε κατέχειν ἀνεπισκόπως ἐπισκοπὴν, ἢ τῶν Γρεβενῶν ὑπερτέρα ἴστω φίλιος κῦριος, ἴστωσαν φιλάνθρωποι ἄγγελοι.⁶⁹⁶

Given Apokaukos' reference to multiple sees and places in Bulgaria desired by multiple bishops in the preceding part of the letter we should assume that he is referring to more than just Ohrid itself.⁶⁹⁷ His own personal feelings were that it was preferable to avoid the sinful ambition of wealth and also to be in less diverse locations. He suggests that Grevena, of which our knowledge of the Byzantine town is of a highly modest fort (modern Spilio) and a collection of small villages, was considered fully Greek.⁶⁹⁸ Vonitsa meanwhile is more problematic. Apokaukos in 1222 directly contradicts this description of a purely Greek region in a *semeioma* which was convened to record the rape, impregnation, and injuries suffered by the maiden Vlasia Sgouropoulos and her father at the hands of one Constantine Avrilionis, who was described as a Vlach by *genos* and an emigrant [ἄποικος] amongst the Romans.⁶⁹⁹ Avrilionis was not even alone in the assault, but assisted by ‘people of his own *genos*’ [μεθ' ὁμογενοῦς

⁶⁹⁵ Ekaterini Galoni, *Γεώργιος Βαρδάνης: Συμβολὴ στὴ μελέτη τοῦ βίου, τοῦ ἔργου καὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς*, (Thessaloniki: 2008).

⁶⁹⁶ Bees, ‘Uedierte,’ §6, pp.251-252.39-41; Lambropoulos, §37.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., ‘οἱ τῶν ἐπισκόπων ἐπιφανέστεροι θρόνοι, αἱ δὲ κατὰ Βουλγαρίαν ἐπισκοπαὶ κατὰ τε προσόδους κατὰ τε τοπικὰς θέσεις.’

⁶⁹⁸ Modern archaeology suggests Grevena was an isolated region of Hellenised Slavs. A twelfth century rank and seal of one Constantine Kabasilas, bishop of Grevena, remain the only evidence of a bishopric. John Rosser, ‘Dark Age Settlements in Grevena, Greece (Southwestern Macedonia),’ in: *Les Villages dans l'Empire byzantin, IVe-XVe siècle* ed. Cécile Morrisson, (Paris: 2005), pp. 279-288.

⁶⁹⁹ Bees, ‘Uedierte,’ §5, p.61.21-22, ‘ἔφησε γάρ, ὡς Αὐριλιόνης τις, Ῥωμαίων ἄποικος, ὄνομα Κωνσταντῖνος, Βλάχους τοῦτο τὸ γένος ὁ καιρὸς ὠνόμασεν ἄνθρωπος, κατὰ χρόνον τὸν πέρις, Βλασίαν, τὴν αὐτοῦ θυγατέραν.’; Lambropoulos, §12, p.271; The phrase could be a sarcastic literary allusion on Apokaukos' part to Vlachs' Dacian heritage. See Florin Curta, ‘Constantinople and the Echo Chamber: The Vlachs in the French Crusade Chronicles,’ *Medieval Encounters*, 22 (2016), pp.456-457.

λαοῦ]. Evidence such as this suggests that Apokaukos' depiction of a region as having a 'pure' demographic was entirely rhetorical – as indeed were such views from most other authors. Apokaukos' perspective is interesting. He has already expressed his disagreement with a previously common practice of avaricious members of the Constantinopolitan clergy to seek the episcopal sees of Bulgaria as a means of gaining wealth.⁷⁰⁰ It is unclear how widespread this practice was. We certainly cannot say from the meagre evidence that *all* bishoprics within Bulgaria pre-1204 were occupied by ethnic Greeks, but it is enough to suggest that there were many. Therefore, we should accept Chomatenos' perspective that the advance of Asanid Bulgaria and the installation of the *Boulgarepiskopoi* was a new development, one that impoverished the Greek-speaking clergy.

Chomatenos' letter to Padiadites in 1217 regarding the matter of the *Boulgarepiskopoi* culminated in an unusually strong declaration of co-Orthodoxy between Greeks and Bulgarians.⁷⁰¹ It followed a series of Chomatenos' questions to Padiadites asking if the bishops, as well as the priests that they have ordained, were to be kept in office after the restoration of Greek (Epirote) authority. The letter is noteworthy for its reference to a 'Bulgarian Patriarch,' some seventeen years before the Patriarch Germanos II recognised this title on behalf of the Constantinopolitan-Nikaian Patriarchate in 1235.⁷⁰² Chomatenos knew the legal limits of his own archdiocese of 'Ohrid and all Bulgaria' and the reference to a 'Bulgarian Patriarch' should be read as mocking. To Chomatenos, claiming superiority over the ambitious and unilateral self-promotion of Basil the Archbishop of Turnovo (who had received his rank in c.1203 from Pope Innocent III as a reward for abandoning Orthodoxy) was a prime opportunity to demonstrate his own leadership of the Ohrid archdiocese and its Bulgarian congregation.⁷⁰³ The letter begins with a presentation of Basil as a latter-day Maximos the Cynic, a reference to Maximos' own act of opportunism in his brief usurpation of the Constantinopolitan patriarchate in 380. Maximos, who had seized upon the illness of patriarch Gregory of Nazianzus to satisfy his ambitions and supplant a still-living legitimate authority, was forced to flee the wrath of the Constantinopolitans when they supported the latter. There were contemporary echoes. Basil of Turnovo, like Maximos, had invoked the Italian papacy for support. Departing for Italy, Maximos had rallied the backing of Ambrose of Milan and other western bishops. Having been confirmed in a first synod, he was finally deposed in a second in 382 when all facts were made plain. Chomatenos, giving this *exemplum* to Padiadites, ponders if there should be a repeat of history. He questions if 'it seemed best to reject both them [*Boulgarepiskopoi*] and those ordained by them. For the Cynic Maximos and his followers, in accordance with the enforcement of the Fourth Canon of the Second Ecumenical Council, were named Pharisees and adulterers.'⁷⁰⁴ If the *Boulgarepiskopoi* were to be condemned as such it would follow that additionally their appointees, and all of those who had performed rites of birth and death during the past decade of Ohrid and its suffragan churches' existence would be deemed uncanonical. Chomatenos sought to avoid this obvious escalation and so sought Padiadites' advice and

⁷⁰⁰ Apokaukos, 'Epirotica,' §6, p.251-252.37-39; Lambropoulos, §29.

⁷⁰¹ Chomatenos, *PD*, §8.

⁷⁰² Ioannis Tarnanidis, 'Byzantine-Bulgarian Ecclesiastical Relations during the reigns of John Vatatzes and Ivan Asan up to the year 1235,' *Cyrrillomethodianum*, 3 (1975), pp.28-52.

⁷⁰³ Tsar Kaloyan (1196-1207) received recognition from Pope Innocent III as *Rex Bulgarorum et Blachorum* as well as the restoration of a Turnovo archbishopric. Migne, *PL*, vol. 214, col.1112-1113 (n. CXV), 1115-1116 (n. CXVII); vol. 215, 155-156 (n. CXLII), 288-292 (n. V-VII), 551-554 (n. CCXXX, CCXXXI); Butler, *Monumenta Bulgarica*, pp.219-232.

⁷⁰⁴ Chomatenos, *PD*, §8, pp.49-50.87-89, 'Τοῖς μὲν οὖν ἔδοξεν ἀποβλήτους θέσθαι αὐτούς τε καὶ τοὺς παρ' αὐτῶν χειροτονηθέντας· μοιχοὺς γὰρ οὗτοι καὶ ἐπιβήτορας τούτους ὠνόμασαν καὶ τὸν κυνικὸν Μάξιμον, τὸν τῷ δ' κανόνι τῆς οἰκουμενικῆς δευτέρας συνόδου ἐμφορόμενον.'

approval by emphasising affinity and syncretism between Bulgarians and Greek-speaking Romans.

[...] it was recognized that it was unworthy of the philanthropic tradition of the Church not to accept them. They argue that these individuals not only do not oppose our doctrines of faith but also strongly agree with us and observe the same ecclesiastical laws and rites. They assert that all the divine Scripture (including the lives of the saints and their deeds), translated into their own language from our books directs and guides their polity. Even if their so-called patriarch was later elevated to the patriarchal dignity by the pope of Elder Rome, he was nonetheless initially ordained an archbishop by the lawful Roman (Byzantine) archbishop, namely the bishop of Vidin, and by another two bishops. And if even the one who ordained him [Kaloyan] subsequently met his end by the sword, having been hated by the Bulgarians for seeking to rise up against *Romania*, they say it does not prejudice against the priestly office of those who had been previously ordained.⁷⁰⁵

For, the one ordaining, in performing an ordination, does not pass on his own affliction, be it spiritual or physical; rather, he summons the grace of the all-holy Spirit and, by performing ordination, he bestows it on the one being ordained. Even junior doctors know how to treat the physical ailments, while the spiritual ailments [can be treated] only by those who have received authority from God to make legal and canonical decrees. In this manner, the Church Fathers also accepted those who had been ordained by heretics but had converted to Orthodoxy. They determined that it was necessary to receive such individuals who turned away from heresies. They assert that these individuals should not be considered Pharisees or usurpers.

Τοῖς δὲ ἀπαῖδον ἐγνώσθη καὶ τοῦ φιλανθρώπου ἔθους τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀνάξιον τὸ μὴ δεχθῆναι αὐτούς, ἐπεὶ, φασίν, οὔτε ἀντιδοξοῦσιν ἡμῖν εἰς τὰ τῆς πίστεως δόγματα, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν ὁμοφρονοῦσι καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἡμῖν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησιαστικῇ καταστάσει τηροῦσι θέσμια, ὅτι καὶ πᾶσα ἡ θεία γραφή (καὶ τῶν ἁγίων αἱ πολιτεῖαι καὶ οἱ βίοι) ἐκ τῶν ἡμετέρων δέλτων εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν μεταγλωττισθεῖσα διάλεκτον τὴν αὐτῶν πολιτείαν ἰθύνουσι καὶ συνέχουσι καὶ ὁ λεγόμενος δὲ πατριάρχης αὐτῶν, κἂν ὕστερον εἰς τὸ πατριαρχικὸν ἀξίωμα παρὰ τοῦ πάπα τῆς πρεσβυτέρας Ῥώμης ἀνήχθη, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης βαθμὸν παρὰ ἐπισκόπου ἐννόμου καὶ Ῥωμαίου, τοῦ Βιδίνης ἐκείνου, καὶ ἐτέρων δύο ἐπισκόπων προήχθη. Εἰ δ' ἔτι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ χειροτονήσας μετὰ ταῦτα ξίφει ἐτελειώθη, μισηθεὶς παρὰ τῶν Βουλγάρων διὰ τὸ ἐλέσθαι τὴν πρὸς τὴν Ῥωμανίαν ἐπάνοδον, ἀλλ' οὐ προκρίνειν τοῦτο, φασί, τῇ ἱερωσύνῃ τῶν προαχθέντων·

ὁ χειροτονῶν γὰρ ἐν τῷ χειροτονεῖν οὐ μεταδίδωσι τῆς οἰκείας νόσου, εἴτε ψυχικὴ ἐστὶν εἴτε σωματικὴ, τῷ χειροτονουμένῳ, ἀλλὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ παναγίου ἐπικαλούμενος Πνεύματος τελειοῖ δι' αὐτῆς τὸν χειροτονούμενον. Τὰς νόσους δὲ τοῦ χειροτονούντος σωματικὰς μὲν οὔσας παῖδες ἰατρῶν οἶδασι θεραπεύειν, ψυχικὰς δὲ οἱ προϊστασθαι τῶν νομικῶν καὶ κανονικῶν θεσπισμάτων ἐξουσίαν λαβόντες παρὰ Θεοῦ. Οὕτω καὶ τοὺς παρὰ αἰρετικῶν χειροτονηθέντας μεταβαλόντας πρὸς τὸ ὀρθόδοξον οἱ πατέρες ἐδέξαντο καί, ὅπως δεῖ τούτους ἐξ αἰρέσεων ἐπιστρέφοντας δέχεσθαι, διωρίσαντο, διατείνονται δὲ μὴδὲ λογιζεσθαι τούτους μοιχοὺς καὶ ἐπιβήτορας.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁵ This protection against what would be effective Donatism had to be strongly argued.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., §8, p.50.94-117.

Hostility to the Pope and to Kaloyan defines the letter, but the matter of the *Boulgarepiskopoi* divides Chomatenos. The intent to distinguish between the Bulgarians who were *homofronousi*, who shared their books, their faith and rites, belonged to *Romanía* and hated the *Drougoubitai*/Asanids for their invasion of Byzantium is an underappreciated aspect of Chomatenos' texts. This position reaches its apogee in the declaration that 'the Bulgarians are not heretics, but Orthodox' [ἀλλὰ μὴν οἱ Βούλγαροι οὐχ αἰρετικοί, ἀλλ' ὀρθοδόξοι] and that they should be fully accepted is powerful; even though Chomatenos effectively concedes that he does not know how to proceed.⁷⁰⁷ Evidently, the matter split opinions. Division threatened the fabric of his city and any potential inclusion of the Bulgarians into an Epirote mission.

Theodore Komnenos Doukas is credited with ordering a Synod in Ohrid in 1217/18 to attempt a middle ground and settle the matter of the *Boulgarepiskopoi*. The resultant synodal decree, entry §146 to Chomatenos' dossier, features a number of compromises that re-established a working Ohrid archdiocese. Previously, a unified ecclesiastical response had not been forthcoming from the Epirotes. The unnamed bishop of Moglena (modern-day Almopia, Greece) had been in favour of suspending all canon law regarding ordinations and allowing all innovations in accordance with the 'difficulties of current times.'⁷⁰⁸ His perspective was that many ordinations in Theodore's Epirote territory had already taken place with neither patriarchal nor synodal approval, and that it served no-one to persecute the appointees. This should perhaps have been better appreciated by Chomatenos, given his own installation in Ohrid solely at Theodore's discretion, but both disagreed.⁷⁰⁹ The Asanid Bulgarian Empire continued to be critiqued, and the Archbishop of 'Zagora' [Turnovo] was further reduced to the impersonator of a patriarchal dignity which had unlawfully usurped Chomatenos' own.⁷¹⁰ Regarding the ordinations several similar questions are again asked, here addressed to the gathered bishops:

'How are the *Boulgarepiskopoi* not equal, and their rejectable ordinations not similar, to Maximos the Cynic?' If the *Boulgarepiskopoi* were equivalent to Maximos, should they be cast out in accordance with previous writings and ecclesiastical tradition?

πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ βουλγαροεπίσκοποι καὶ ἀκολούθως καὶ οἱ παρ' αὐτῶν χειροτονηθέντες ἀπόβλητοι ἔσσονται, παρὰ τὰς ἐγγράφους καὶ κανονικὰς παραδόσεις νεωτερικῶς τὰς χειροτονίας τῆ συνεργία τῆς Βουλγαρικῆς ἐξουσίας δεξάμενοι κὰν τούτῳ τῷ κυνικῷ Μαξίμῳ παρομοιούμενοι'.⁷¹¹

However, in the synod's resolution we might potentially see some of the mollifying advice and caveats offered by Padiadites as one canonically-trained bishop to another. Chomatenos pondered that if the Bulgarians were to be treated unreservedly in the light of Maximos, it would go too far. Were they to regard all ecclesiastical services, baptisms and funerals as uncanonical it would render anyone who had died in the past decade of Asanid rule as unsaved souls.⁷¹² Such a decision would be inflammatory.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., §8, p.51.147-148.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., §146, p.425.67-69. 'τὴν τοῦ καιροῦ καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων δυσκολίαν.'

⁷⁰⁹ Later critiques voiced by Germanos II in 1222 attacked *Dytikoi* ordinations on these grounds. These are reconstructed from Apokaukos' defence. See Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §17, pp.272.23-26; Lambropoulos, §70.

⁷¹⁰ Zagora from Old Slavonic 'beyond the mountains' is usually associated with the region beyond Philippopolis, near modern Stara-Zagora, Bulgaria.

⁷¹¹ Chomatenos, *PD*, §146, p.424.52-55.

⁷¹² Ibid., §146, p.425.78-86.

The resultant proclamation reestablished the ecclesiastical framework for Ohrid as a centre of Greek-Bulgarian Orthodoxy. Chomatenos accredits ‘the Great’ Komnenos Doukas, through an intermediary of the bishop of the Albanian diocese of Kanina [τὰ Κάνινα], for pressing and finding a practicable compromise. This concluded that if a bishop had been ordained in ‘Zagora’, i.e. by the Archbishop of Turnovo, they were to be expelled from the Epirote Church. The resolution effectively safeguarded the archepiscopal rights of Ohrid while restoring its jurisdiction over the reconquered parts of the archbishopric by deposing only those Bulgarian bishops who had expelled a Greek bishop and taken their position. We have little exact knowledge of where this had taken place, but Chomatenos allows the detail that it was unlikely any other living bishops were still awaiting reinstallation.⁷¹³ It was, therefore, a *fait accompli*. Combined with the deployment of Kamateros’ relaxation of self-appointment restrictions (section 1.6, pp.78-84), Epiros broadened their state’s foundations while reflecting the fragilities of their political reality. All the appointees of ‘deacons, subdeacons, and priests’ [ὑποδιακόνου καὶ διακόνου καὶ ἱερείου] performed by the *Boulgarepiskopoi* from their time in office were to be retained in post, including those who had directly received their ordination from the Bulgarians, provided it was not to a novel see. The instruction was that, in line with its philanthropic nature, they were to be welcomed and embraced by the Orthodox church.⁷¹⁴ The decree was judicious on multiple grounds. Bishops were rarely born or educated in the see they occupied. If Kaloyan and Boril had been operating on the same methods as the Byzantines before and neighbouring them, their candidates for bishoprics would have been political supporters, second sons of aristocrats, and the most educated and polemical voices of their interests and campaigns which had supplanted the Greeks. Such individuals could not be retained.

The decrees and precedence of the synod of 1217/18 established a *modus operandi* for the expanding Epirote state. Its rulings stand as the first documentation for Chomatenos’ vision of an independent ecclesiastical hierarchy defined by the lands reclaimed and politically loyal to Theodore. As an exercise in state-building it demonstrates an entirely inseparable relationship between church and (splinter-)state after 1204. Chomatenos’ Epirote Church and the inclusion, retention, or expulsion paradigms under which it operated were identical with the limits of Theodore’s secular authority. The appropriation of rights of appointment, which were claimed were legally given by Kamateros a decade prior, gave it a legal foundation. From a sociological perspective the question should be asked whether this began the ethnogenesis of a ‘Western’ [δύτικοι] Byzantine-Roman identity (pp.30, 188-193). There are indications that it was so. A carefully cultivated independence found its roots in this document of 1217/18. For the first time the churches and provinces of Epiros are referred to collectively by their leader Chomatenos as ‘the Western regions’ ‘ἐσπέριος λῆξις’ and ‘δύσις κλίμα’ with the Archbishop of Ohrid as their voice.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹³ Ibid., §146, p.427.136-140.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., §146, p.427.143-155; Nicol, *Epiros*, p.85.

⁷¹⁵ Chomatenos, *PD*, §146, p.423.20, p.425.75.

3.8. Demetrios Chomatenos: A New St. Clement of Ohrid

The motif of shared origin was highly contested in the Byzantine world after 1180, and especially after 1204. As the focus increasingly shifted to noble birth, correct spatial origin, and more entrenched differences between the Hellenophone Byzantines and their alloglot neighbours, exclusivity and cultural superiority were more common than inclusion. However, a too often disregarded work produced in thirteenth-century Epiros offers a different view. This work provides insights to suggest that St. Clement and Theophylact's mission of Greek-Bulgarian proselytization was, in the wake of the *Boulgarepiskopoi* synod, being begun anew. We should recall an entry in Constantine Stilbes' *Errors of the Latin Church*. It claimed that the Latins attempted the destruction of depictions of Orthodox saints whom they saw as foreign. Therefore a decision to reinvest in St. Clement and his teachers, a cult once banned by the Papacy and unknown to the Franks was a polemical, ideological, and political decision.⁷¹⁶ Therefore, the thirteenth-century production of a new, concise, and updated reworking of the *vita* of St. Clement of Ohrid, commonly called the *Ohrid Legend*, should inform our understanding of one vision of Macedonian group identities, particularly when it is attributed to one specific author – Demetrios Chomatenos.⁷¹⁷

This is crucial because the *Ohrid Legend* account has been unfairly critiqued by some scholars as brief, historically inaccurate, and a poor addendum to an earlier work.⁷¹⁸ However, for informing us more about Chomatenos' ambitions for Epiros, rather than the saint, it is invaluable. Podskalsky's dating of this work to 1230–1236, when Chomatenos' ecclesiastical domain was crumbling and the Epirote imperality failing, is given without rationale.⁷¹⁹ The *vita* should probably be dated earlier, to the late 1210s and 1220s and the age of Epirote expansion. Its purpose was to reproduce the proto-foundational myth of St. Clement as Evangeliser of the Slavs but also to bind him to Ohrid and the liminal Macedonian region of Theodore's expansion. It is a mission statement concerning the multiple *ethne* that the Epirote Church sought to reconnect. Returning to the moment at which the Byzantines Christianised the Slavs allowed Chomatenos to imagine himself as rebuilding the Greek Orthodox connection to the Slavic world through the cult of St. Clement. While Theophylact had left a highly useful model, Chomatenos could refine it in a new direction that focused on the heritage and history shared between the co-Orthodox peoples set amidst the journeys and space both they and Clement traversed.

Chomatenos' new hagiography tells the life of St. Clement in middle-register Greek at a fragment of the length of Theophylact's eleventh-century *vita*. Its brevity has led some scholars to suggest that Chomatenos wrote this work as either an introduction or preamble to its earlier

⁷¹⁶ Darrouzès, 'Stilbes,' pp.73, para. 48, 49.

⁷¹⁷ 089 (*Mošin 39*) in the possession of Ohrid's National Museum. The version of the *Vita Clementis Ochridensis* (*Short Life of St. Clement*)/*Ohrid Legend* used in this thesis was published as Demetrios Chomatenos, *Grutskite žitija na Kliment Okhridski*, ed. Alexander Milev, (Sofia: 1966), pp.167, 174-182. It has also recently been re-edited by Ilia Iliev, *Proizvedeniya na Dimitar Homatian, otnasyashti se do balgarskata istoriya. Razlichni trudove, zhitie na Sv. Kliment Okhridski. Uvod, prevod i komentar (Gratski izvori za balgarskata istoriya, tom XIII)* [*Greek sources for Bulgarian history. Vol. 13, Works of Demetrios Chomatenos, relating to Bulgarian history: various works, life of St. Clement of Ohrid*], (Sofia, 2023); For discussion cf. Prinzing, *PD*, p.53. For an English translation see Ivan Dujčev, *Kiril and Methodius: founders of Slavonic writing: a collection of sources and critical studies*, (New York: 1985), pp.127-130.

⁷¹⁸ Milev, *Grutskite žitija na Kliment Okhridski*, pp.174-75; Gerhard Podskalsky, 'Two Archbishops of Achrida (Ochrid) and their significance for Macedonia's secular and church history: Theophylaktos and Demetrios Chomatenos,' *Byzantine Macedonia: Identity Image and History* (Leiden: 2000), pp.139-148.

⁷¹⁹ Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur*, p.296. The manuscript tradition, in both Greek and Slavonic, would not agree with that. See below.

counterpart.⁷²⁰ We would go further. A targeted policy of reinvestment would coincide with other contemporary activities expanding St. Clement's cult. Recent archaeological research in Ohrid has dated the complete demolition and reconstruction of the church of St. Panteleimon-Clement to the thirteenth century during Chomatenos' incumbency as archbishop. Enlarging the tomb which housed Clement's body, Chomatenos also expanded the size and scale of the church in a building phase attested by fragmentary surviving frescoes, foundations, and the terracotta tiles of the tomb itself.⁷²¹ Establishing that context, we should likely place the *vita* as the culmination of Chomatenos' rebuilding of Ohrid where the text would be read before a congregation in the new church.

In its content, Chomatenos' hagiography shares much with its predecessor, focusing on the conversion of King Boris. We might note the similarities in the phrases:

'He [Boris] transformed this barbarian and rugged nation into a holy one through his personal zeal, having accomplished an apostolic work and thereby deemed worthy of apostolic grace.

ἄκαὶ βάρβαρον οὕτω καὶ ὠμόν ἔθνος εἰς ἔθνος ἅγιον διὰ τῆς οἰκείας σπουδῆς μετεποίησεν ἀποστολικὸν ἔργον ἀνύσας καὶ ἀποστολικῆς διὰ τοῦτο ἀξιωθείς χάριτος.⁷²²

However, Chomatenos' text has an updated and highly current spatial identity, linking Ohrid to the thirteenth-century liminal Macedonian zone as well as Albanian Illyria and Serbia. In contrast to Boril's *Synodikon* that gave Clement no geographical placement, in Chomatenos' text the bond between Ohrid's environs and Clement cannot be overlooked. While the focus upon parity between the Greeks and the Bulgarians was present in the original, this idea is embodied in the very character description of Chomatenos' St. Clement:

'This man, our great father and illuminator of Bulgaria, his *genos* hailed from European Moesia which many men know are also Bulgarian, while of old [they were] from Olympos near Prousa and were moved towards the Northern Ocean and the Dead Sea by the hand and authority of Alexander. After many years travelling, they crossed over the Danube and all the neighbouring territories received them; Pannonia, and Dalmatia, Thrace, Illyrika and many cities of Macedonia and Thessaly.

[...] He [Clement] particularly resided around the city of Lychnidos in Illyria, which was the metropolis of surrounding cities and is now called Ohrid in the language of the Bulgarians. He also renamed Kephalaria to Glavinitsa in the Bulgarian tongue, where he left monuments.

Οὗτος ὁ μέγας πατήρ ἡμῶν καὶ τῆς Βουλγαρίας φωστήρ τὸ μὲν γένος εἶλκεν τῶν Εὐρωπαϊῶν Μυσηῶν, οὓς καὶ Βουλγάρους ὁ πολὺς οἶδεν ἄνθρωπος, πάλαι μὲν ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ Προῦσαν Ὀλύμπου πρὸς τὸν βόρειον ὠκεανὸν καὶ τὴν νεκρὰν θάλασσαν ὑπὸ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου χειρὸς καὶ ἐξουσίας ἐκτοπισθέντων, μετὰ δὲ συχνῶν χρόνων παραδρομῆν δυνάμει βαρεῖα τὸν Ἴστρον περαιωθέντων καὶ τὰ γειτονεύοντα πάντα κληρωσαμένων,

⁷²⁰ Jordan Ivanov, *Bǎlgarski starini iz Makedonija*, (Sofia: 1931), pp.314-321.

⁷²¹ Pasko Kuzman, 'Arheoloshki svedoshtva za dejnosta na Sveti Kliment Ohridski vo Ohridskiot region [Archaeological Evidence for the activity of St. Clement in the Ohrid Region],' *Slovene*, 2 (2016), pp.147-149.

⁷²² Chomatenos, *Vita Clementis*, §14.6-9.

Παννονίαν καὶ Δαλματίαν, Θράκην καὶ Ἰλυρικὸν καὶ πολλὰ τῆς Μακεδονίας καὶ Θετταλίας.

Μάλιστα δὲ τὰς διατριβὰς ἐποιεῖτο περὶ τὴν Λυχνιδὸν Ἰλλυρίων πόλιν, τῶν πέριξ πόλεων οὖσαν μητρόπολιν, ἣ νῦν Ἀχρὶς κατὰ τὴν Μυσῶν ὀνομάζεται γλῶσσαν, καὶ τὴν Κεφαληνίαν μετονομασθεῖσαν τῇ Βουλγάρων φωνῇ Γλαβινίτζαν, ἔνθα καὶ ὑπομνήματα καταλέλοιπεν.⁷²³

It is certainly by design that the territories Clement travelled were the very territories in which Chomatenos was writing and constituted Theodore's Epirote state.⁷²⁴ There was a need for an appropriate ethnonym to describe this people. In one passage Chomatenos wrote that Clement was descended from the 'faithful Orthodox *ethnos* of the European *Moesians*,' and it is evident that he was attempting to find a neutral term acceptable to both Bulgarians and Greek-speakers.⁷²⁵ The 'Moesians,' an anachronistic and typically geographical rather than contemporary ethnic term, was meant to encompass multiple peoples. Chomatenos' projected origin of the Moesians positioned them in Antiquity and simply made the Bulgarians originally Greek, stating that it was Alexander the Great who had moved them over the Danube.⁷²⁶ This equated the Bulgarians with any Hellenic people. Of other lands mentioned, only Pannonia remained outside Epirote control, and its ambiguity left open the idea of religious/political expansion further north into Asanid land. The hybrid identity of the text is further enhanced by how Chomatenos onomastically frames his environs in a narrative of continuity. Just as Ohrid was once Lychnidos so too was the surrounding town of 'Kephalonia' or 'in the Bulgarian voice Glavinica.'⁷²⁷ All mirrored the journey of the narrative's Moesians-Greeks-Bulgarians and Chomatenos' projected flock.

Throughout the *Ohrid Legend*, a didactic element can be detected; Chomatenos instructs the assembled congregation to go out and seek various extant monuments and inscribed pillars, dotted around the landscape recording the deeds and miracles of Clement.⁷²⁸ Clement's tenure as bishop left behind physical monuments, a 'holy school' [τὸ ἱερόν φροντιστήριον], and the Monastic Church of the *Megalomartyr* Panteleimon. Within these buildings, Clement's treasures were still to be found:⁷²⁹

‘He bequeathed to us such memorials and sacred books in Ohrid, and original works from his holy hand, revered and honoured no less than by the entire people, just as those Mosaic and divinely inscribed tablets.

⁷²³ Ibid., §1, 6.

⁷²⁴ No mention is made of Clement's time in Rome. Pannonia likely could not be omitted and as seen below a northern expansion was certainly envisioned. Stefan Rohdewald, *Sacralizing the Nation through Remembrance of Medieval Religious Figures in Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia*, (Leiden: 2022), p.58-60.

⁷²⁵ Chomatenos, *Vita Clementis*, §1.1, 'Οὗτος ὁ μέγας πατήρ ἡμῶν καὶ τῆς Βουλγαρίας φωστήρ τὸ μὲν γένος εἴλκεν τῶν Εὐρωπαϊῶν Μυσῶν', §2.5, 'καὶ τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως τῶν Μυσῶν ἔθνει.'

⁷²⁶ In earlier narrations of the campaigns of the 970s 'Moesians' had previously been the term of choice to refer to Tzimiskes' conquest of the province from enemy rule as a return: 'Moesia, since it belonged to the Romans and was a part of Macedonia from of old.' Leo the Deacon, *History*, ed. Hase, 103; trans. Talbot and Sullivan, p.153.

⁷²⁷ Chomatenos, *Vita Clementis*, §6.

⁷²⁸ Ibid., §9 'Στήλας δὲ λιθίνας ἐν τῇ Κεφαληνίᾳ ἔστιν ἰδεῖν ἄχρι καὶ εἰς τὸδε χρόνου σωζομένης, ἐν αἷς γράμματα ἐγκεκόλαπται, τὴν εἰς Χριστὸν παρὰ τοῦ ἔθνους προσέλευσιν καὶ οἰκείωσιν σημειούμενα.' 'Until today it is possible to see stone pillars preserved in Kephalonia, in which letters are carved, commemorating the coming and union of the people in Christ.' These stone pillars, now lost, were sketched and published following a WW1 Austro-Hungarian occupation of the region. Reproduced by Iliev, *Ohridskiyat arhiepiskop Dimitar Homatian*, p.288.

⁷²⁹ Chomatenos, *Vita Clementis*, §8.

Ἄλλα τοιαῦτα καταλέλοιπεν ἡμῖν ὑπομνήματα καὶ ἱεράς βιβλους ἐν τῇ Ἀχρίδι, καὶ τῆς Ἁγίας χειρὸς πονήματα ἴδια, οὐχ ἦττον παρὰ παντὸς τοῦ ἔθνους σεβόμενα καὶ τιμώμενα, ὡς καὶ αἱ Μωσαϊκαὶ καὶ θεόγραφοι πλάκες ἐκεῖναι.⁷³⁰

These aspects of the *Ohrid Legend*, reveal a spatial, unifying, and inter-ethnic purpose of the work emphasising shared heritage. This Greek language instruction made the Moesian Clement a ‘Great Father and Luminary of Bulgaria’ and Ohrid his space as a point of cultural unity between the two peoples.⁷³¹ Even pagan Bulgaria received a kinder treatment. Rather than the Bulgarians existing as the ‘stupid’ and ‘ignorant dullards’ of Theophylact’s life of Clement, to whom the Greeks flaunted their superiority, by Chomatenos they are treated more evenly, when he claims that it was merely that ‘the Bulgarian nation had not yet been fully enlightened by baptism’ [Ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ Βουλγάρων ἔθνος οὐπω πᾶν ἐπεφώτιστο τῷ βαπτίσματι] and needed a shepherd to lead them to God.⁷³²

The success of Chomatenos’ presentation of Ohrid and St. Clement’s cult is seen in the proliferation of his composition. Several manuscripts preserve his text, but one of the earliest that dates from the thirteenth century demonstrates that potentially within Chomatenos’ own lifetime his *Ohrid Legend* was translated into Slavonic.⁷³³ The earliest manuscript of a bilingual Greek-Slavonic text was edited by Victor Ivanovich Gregoravich. In the introduction to the text Gregoravich identified the manuscript on palaeographical grounds as thirteenth century. Gregoravich describes *MS 47* (formerly I.r.13) and its discovery at the Bulgarian Zographou Monastery on Mt. Athos in 1847 as well as his removal of a folio which was then deposited in Moscow’s Rumyantsev Museum (No.1858).⁷³⁴ Several other either monolingual or bilingual manuscripts were catalogued in the mid-nineteenth century and two later editions followed without altering the text.⁷³⁵ A very damaged manuscript from Ohrid itself (Mošin No. 89(39)), once held at either the Church of Blessed Mary or St. Panteleimon-Clement and carrying the Greek text of the *Ohrid Legend* is dated to the thirteenth century and may be our oldest or even autograph text.⁷³⁶

Various studies have been performed on Chomatenos’ archdiocese and his application of the law in Epirote territories. Research into onomastics and prosopography has determined that his congregation and legal jurisdiction continued to incorporate a heavily mixed populace of predominantly Bulgarians. In the years that followed as Epiros continued to annex the lands

⁷³⁰ Ibid., §9.

⁷³¹ Ibid., §1.1 ‘ὁ μέγας πατήρ ἡμῶν καὶ τῆς Βουλγαρίας φωστήρ’.

⁷³² Ibid., §10.

⁷³³ Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur*, p.297.

⁷³⁴ Victor Ivanovich Gregoravich, *Izyskania o slavyanskikh apostolakh, proizvedennyye v stranah Evropeyskoy Turtsii* [Research about the Slavic Apostles carried out in the Countries of European Turkey], (Saint Petersburg: 1847), p.6; No work has yet either challenged or developed Gregoravich’s identification of the manuscript on palaeographical grounds to the thirteenth century. The dating was accepted by Pazel Safarik, *Pamatky hlalohského pisemnictvi*, (Prague: 1853), pp.LVII-LIX; Jordan Ivanov, *Vizantiski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije 1*, (Belgrade: 1955), pp.297-302; Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur*, p.297. I have been unable to find a modern catalogue number of this folio in the National Library of Russia.

⁷³⁵ Georgi Balashchev, *Klimenta, Episkopa slovenski i sluzhbata mu po stara slovenski prevod s edna chast gratski paralelen tekst transliterated* [Clement, bishop of Slovenia, and his office in an old Sloven translation with one part of a Greek parallel text], (Sofia: 1898), pp.23-30; and Jordan Ivanov, *Balgarski starini iz Makedonia* [Bulgarian Antiquities in Macedonia], II (Sofia: 1931), pp. 314-321.

⁷³⁶ For description see Vladimir Mošin, *Les manuscrits du Musée national d'Ochrida*, (Ohrid: 1961), p.208; Francois Halkin, ‘Manuscrits byzantins d'Ochrida en Macédoine yougoslave,’ *Analecta Bollandiana*, 80 (1962), p.21.

that had been under Asanid Bulgarian rule they had many times to follow a middle path. Chomatenos' dossier entry §81 dealt with a land dispute in Veroia dating after 1219 between one Manuel Sbenilos and Panagiotes that disregarded entirely the legal support of the Veroian bishop installed by Asanids. Panagiotes, who appears to have collaborated with the Bulgarians, again 'during the time of the tyranny of the Drougoubitai,' had had his supporting evidence thrown out.⁷³⁷ The justification was:

'If the barbarians are entirely barbarians, the laws of the Romans are nothing to them... as the law for barbarians is their own will... for nothing concerning the deeds of the Bulgarians has its basis in law.

Εἰ γὰρ βάρβαροι πάντως οἱ Βούλγαροι, νόμοι δὲ Ῥωμαίων Βουλγάροις χρῆμα εἰκαῖον καὶ μηδενὸς ἀξιούμενον λόγου (νόμος δὲ βαρβάρους τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα)... (οὐδὲν γὰρ Βουλγάροις καὶ πράξεις ἐκ νομικῶν ἀρχῶν ἔχουσαι τὴν σύστασιν).⁷³⁸

However, despite such hyperbole there was often overture and compromise. In the above case, Chomatenos found in favour of the Bulgarian-aligned Sbenilos. While the target was evidently the infringement upon the authority of the Epirote Church and an Asanid Bulgarian collaborator, Chomatenos found in favour of Snebiloi, whom onomastics would suggest was of Bulgarian descent, over Panagiotes a more obvious Greek. There are multiple cases where he mediated sympathetically for those with probable Slavonic roots.⁷³⁹ Overall, studies of Chomatenos' dossier as a whole continue to pose challenges resulting from its vast number of cases and we must be careful to avoid overly selective evidence. The article concerning Chomatenos' ethnography published as part of the 1990 international proceedings on Epiros offends on just that ground and lists insults against the Bulgarians rather than contextualising Chomatenos' individual cases.⁷⁴⁰ Were they to do so they would find a staunch dichotomy between the supporters and limits of the Asanid Bulgarian Empire (which he deemed an 'ἀποστασία') and Bulgarians in his community.⁷⁴¹ More recent analysis has found Chomatenos to have held Bulgarians to Roman law on many occasions, accepted their testimony, and was lenient with punishments. Primarily with cases of divorce and inheritance Chomatenos' ruling frequently found in favour of the least amount of time away from attending church, and financial compromises that provided each party with a form of income. The language of these low-level cases is indicative. In some cases of the archbishop's ruling, Bulgarian nouns e.g. a rug [τζέργα, черга] were transliterated into Greek and there is much to suggest Chomatenos was not alone in accepting the terminologies of the pluralistic world in which he lived. In another land dispute we hear of him specifically calling one *knetzes* [κνέτζης] Leon Argyros to give oral witness, a man bearing a title of Slavic origin but a dynastic name of the middle Byzantine aristocracy, and evidently a local archon of Ohrid who had knowledge of the family of the plaintiffs Ioannes and Georgitzes Kontos and a vested interest in the proper application of property law in Ohrid.⁷⁴² This narrow window of time for Chomatenos' vast dossier, between 1215 and 1236, demonstrates an active and busy man at the head of a legal synodal court which

⁷³⁷ Chomatenos, *PD*, §81, p.276.91 'ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς Δρουγουβιτῶν τυραννίδος'.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.* §81, p.281.273-280.

⁷³⁹ Iiev, *Ohridskiyat arhiepiskop Dimitar Homatian*, pp.274-276.

⁷⁴⁰ Demos, 'Εθνολογικά στοιχεία,' pp.280-303.

⁷⁴¹ Chomatenos, *PD*, §52, p.191.25, ἀποστασία'; discussed by Iiev, *Ohridskiyat arhiepiskop Dimitar Homatian*, p.264.

⁷⁴² Chomatenos, *PD*, §40, p.148.57; Iiev, *Ohridskiyat arhiepiskop Dimitar Homatian*, p.287; Notably absent from Jean-Claude Cheynet, 'Les Argyroi,' *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 40 (2003), pp.57-90.

offered stability and a degree of impartiality to those who lived anew under Epirote Roman law.

The discovery of an ornate wooden statue of St. Clement dated to *ca.* 1230 serves as a vivid illustration of Chomatenos' concerted effort to renew Greek Orthodoxy's appeal to a broad base.⁷⁴³ While we have no other surviving material culture from his incumbency it reminds us that there was a physical and visual element to Chomatenos' patronage. The narrative of the conversion of Bulgarian nation and the link to the contemporary space of Macedonia under a Greek-led Church formed a second aspect of the Epirote ecclesiastical settlement. By preserving Epiros' renewed attempt to incorporate Bulgarians to a Greek-led but heavily diverse Macedonia, Chomatenos' hagiography functions as an extension of the synod of 1217, and of the Epirote attempt to recreate the Byzantine Archbishopric of All Bulgaria. It reiterates the foundation myth of the Bulgarians but also of the Greeks and the Albanians who lived alongside them. This microcosm of pragmatic ecumenism was not, however, to exist uninterrupted for long.



Figure 23. c.1230 Statue of St. Clement, St. Clement (Mary Periblepta) Church, Ohrid Museum.

⁷⁴³ Rohdewald, *Sacralizing the Nation*, p.59; Milcho Georgievski, *The Icon Gallery - Ohrid*, (Ohrid: 2024), §10.

3.9. Imperial Epiros 1225/27–1230: Transforming a Komnenian Revival into Ethnic Secession

The 1225 proclamation and 1227 coronation in Thessaloniki was a triumphant assumption of the title of ‘Emperor of the Romans’ celebrating an apparent reunification of the Byzantine Balkans.⁷⁴⁴ Theodore Komnenos Doukas’ domain now encompassed almost the entire Via Egnatia, from Dyrrachium to Thessaloniki and onwards to Christoupolis, Adrianople, and Vize.⁷⁴⁵ The ideology that emanated from Epiros during that period accomplished two things. Firstly, it established an imperial court hierarchy and independent church that recreated some elements of the Komnenian System pre-1204. Theodore was positioned as imperial heir in both physical and textual material. Secondly, through the mouthpiece of Chomatenos in Ohrid, the religious centre of his empire had shifted north and reflected that the Balkans encompassed a broad variety of alloglot peoples. However, the narrative that survives of imperial Epiros was of a barbarian Bulgarian state, one which in pro-Laskarid/Palaiologoi sources no longer shared the same ethnic identity as the Epirote *Dytikoi*. That transformation and discreditation of the Komnenoi-Doukai Epirote Roman Empire is discussed in this chapter. Firstly, we must establish the weaknesses that allowed this transformation, and which grains of truth of legitimate cultural difference they were exploiting.

The imperial proclamation massively escalated the rivalry between Epiros and Nikaia. Theodore was equating his Western polity of liberated churches and cities with the Roman Empire of Nikaia. The act established a parallel, rival Byzantium in the Balkans. As there was still no direct confrontation or war between Epiros and Nikaia, the contest for Byzantine imperality was waged on an ideological plane that pressed the issue of divided loyalties. Notably, there was a three-year gap between Theodore’s capture of Thessaloniki in 1224 and his actual coronation. The delay was due to the abject refusal of Constantine Mesopotamites, the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, to autonomously crown a second emperor. When the matter was discussed at a Nikaian synod convened at Magnesia in 1225 a compromise was offered to appoint Theodore junior emperor under John III Vatatzes, an offer swiftly rejected.⁷⁴⁶ The Nikaian response was not outrage at the division of the imperial office itself, co-emperors were common even after 1204, but at the divided authority behind it and what it represented.⁷⁴⁷ A Byzantine emperor’s coronation by custom, if not law, required a Patriarch of Constantinople and that was one title in the fragments of Byzantium that was not shared. When Epiros was forced to defend the coronation, their response was to ask in turn:

‘For this the tyrannical circumstance of the time necessitated. When was it ever heard that the same person would pastor the metropolis of Nikaia and be called the Patriarch of Constantinople? But thus, so indeed the same thing happened in the West.

τοῦτο γὰρ ἢ τοῦ καιροῦ περίστασις τυραννήσασα ἐπεισήγαγε· πότε γὰρ ἠκούσθη τὸν αὐτὸν μητρόπολιν Νικαίας ποιμαίνειν καὶ πατριάρχην Κωνσταντινουπόλεως λέγεσθαι;) οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐν τῇ δύσει ταῦτο συμβέβηκε.’⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁴ The chronology is uncertain. This chapter follows the chronology of Stavridou-Zaphraka, ‘The Political Ideology of the State of Epiros,’ pp.318-319; Angold, *Germanos II*, pp.35-36.

⁷⁴⁵ Akropolites, §24, trans. Macrides, pp.172-173.

⁷⁴⁶ Blemmydes, *CV*, pp.56-57; Stavridou-Zaphraka, *Νικαία καὶ Ἡπειρος*, p.71.

⁷⁴⁷ Akropolites’ record remains the only reference to the proposal. Akropolites makes plain the offer was ecclesiastical, hierarchical, and personal, but not military. Akropolites, §21, trans. Macrides, p.163.

⁷⁴⁸ Chomatenos, *PD*, §114, pp.372-373.73-75.

We shall start first with Epiros' political ideology which was more conventional. From the five years that followed Thessaloniki's capture, Theodore embarked on multiple campaigns and tours of his territories, passing through several cities where he took care to publicly proclaim himself in continuity with the Constantinopolitan Komnenoi. This is best attested in Corfu/Kerkyra where an inscribed chrysobull dated to June 1228 announced Theodore taking his place in a long line of imperial sons, brothers, uncles and cousins to whom he was related in the Komnenos and Angelos dynasties. For every emperor given, Theodore's blood connection to each was stressed. Inscribed on a marble plaque of 1.20 x 0.6m and today housed in the Palazzo Braschi in Rome it is the most complete physical statement of Epirote political ideology. The chrysobull evidences a developed ideology that resulted from the elevation of the principality into an empire. The act itself is concerned with Theodore Komnenos Doukas' reconfirmation of gifts of pronoria and 'free' [παροίκοι ἐλευθέροι] and 'unfree workers to ecclesiastical land' [ἀγιοδούλοι], on both the island of Corfu and the theme of Vagenetia, on the shore opposite.⁷⁴⁹ It names George Bardanes as metropolitan and given the elaborate inscription upon his own tomb, we should expect that Michael Choniates' pupil composed the text of Theodore's inscription.⁷⁵⁰

In the inscribed chrysobull, Theodore invokes both legal precedent and the actions of several previous emperors. They are all Theodore's own familial relations and he positions himself relative to each. From Alexios I

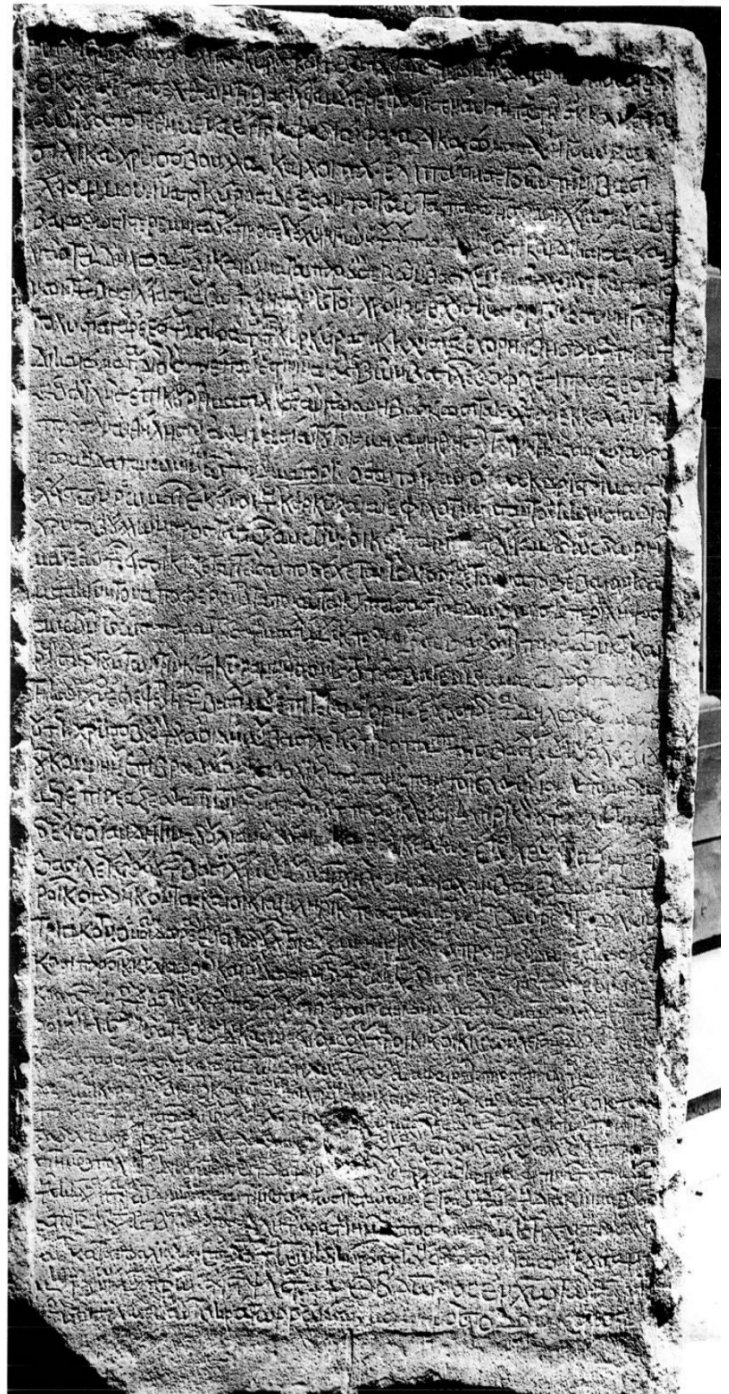


Figure 24. 1228, Theodore Komnenos Doukas Corfu/Kerkyra Inscribed Chrysobull. Guillou, 'Recueil des inscriptions,' Pl. 38.

⁷⁴⁹ Transcribed in André Guillou, 'Recueil des inscriptions grecques médiévales d'Italie,' *Publications de l'École Française de Rome*, 22, (1996), pp.59-65. Workers granted p.61.23-24; Rudolf Stefec, 'Die Regesten der Herrscher von Epeiros 1205-1318,' *Römische Historische Mitteilungen*, 57 (2015), pp.15-120 §55, Rhoby, 'Indelible Archives,' p.104; For the additional May 1228 chrysobull for Naupaktos which is preserved in a manuscript copy see *ibid* §56 and Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §29.

⁷⁵⁰ Bardanes' 1229 letter explicitly states he was recently hosting Theodore on Corfu. See Loenertz, §5, p.181. Bardanes' epigraphical skill is attested by a 31-verse epigram carved in marble in the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul on Corfu. His epitaph states that it was written in 1224, two decades before his actual death c.1242. As his letters complain so frequently about poor health, it would seem Bardanes was preparing his mortal legacy before he was forty; Wolfram Hörandner, Andreas Rhoby, Anneliese Pau, *Byzantinische Epigramme in Inschriftlicher Überlieferung*, 3.1, (Vienna: 2014), pp.435-439.

Komnenos (1081–1118) through to Alexios III (1195–1203) astonishing stress is placed on the link between Theodore as a Komnenos and his role as their heir. Emphasising the legitimacy of an imperial *genos* reaching back over a century this Epirote Roman Empire was presented as an unbroken continuation of Komnenoi and Angeloi imperality. Therefore, Theodore reconfirms the chrysobulls of ‘the great-grandfather of my imperality Kyr Alexios’ [προπάπ(ου) τῆς βασιλ(είας) μ(ου), κὺρ Ἀλεξι(ου)], the privileges of the ‘uncle of my imperality, Kyr Manuel’ [θεί(ου) τ(ῆς) βασιλεί(ας) κὺρ Μαν(ου)ήλ]. The more recent legacy of the Angeloi, still in living memory, were equally invoked as the ‘privileges of Kyr Isaak and Kyr Alexios, the emperors, *autokrators*, and first cousins of my imperality’ [προστάγμα τ(οῦ) κὺρ Ἰσαακί(ου) (καὶ) τ(οῦ) κὺρ Ἀλεξίου ... τῶν βασιλέ(ων) (καὶ) αὐτοκράτορ(ων) τ(ῆς) δὲ βασιλεί(ας) μ(ου) πρωτεξαδέλφ(ων)].⁷⁵¹ It served Theodore to portray himself as sole heir to the Constantinopolitan imperial family that had united the Komnenoi, Doukai, and Angeloi, and to conveniently minimise the twenty-year interregnum since Alexios III had lost the throne. As a whole, Theodore’s edict is comparable, though smaller, to other plaques erected by nearly contemporary emperors, notably Manuel I’s 1166 Conciliar Edict, erected to mark the settlement of the ‘My Father is greater than I’ controversy.⁷⁵² That monumental edict is well-known, remaining in situ in Hagia Sophia until 1567. Its uncovering in 1959 revealed the most substantial late Byzantine epigraphy yet known and probably serves as a comparison to how Theodore was seeking to style himself. Where Manuel’s inscription was comprised of five marble slabs (four surviving) with a total width of 4.12 x 1.05m and thereby much larger as a whole, the individual plaques had a somewhat comparable size to Theodore’s chrysobull. Taking for instance Manuel’s first part, that primary individual slab measures 2.05 x 1.16m and is larger but not incomparable. Whereas the Constantinopolitan Edict had an ornamental border, the Corfu one had none. The lettering on the Corfu edict, while professionally done and without lexicographical mistake, is also distinctly more close-set and less ornate. The closing formula of the Corfiot inscription is noteworthy for its full entitling of Theodore as ‘Theodore Komnenos Doukas, faithful in Christ God, emperor and *autokrator* of the Romans’ [† Θεόδωρος ἐν Χ(ριστῷ) τῷ Θεῷ πιστὸς βασιλεὺς (καὶ) αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων Κομνηνὸς ὁ Δούκας †]. Like Laskaris, Theodore is styled as no less than a full Roman Emperor, with no distinction drawn between the territorial extent of the pre-1204 age and his own Western Balkan state.

When the coronation was performed two years later Theodore appears to have embarked on a fairly wide-spread artistic programme of installing representations of his likeness and references to his coronation along the Via Egnatia, the road that was now the main artery of his empire from Thessaloniki to Dyrrachium. Potential portraits survive in Ohrid, Veroia, and Thessaloniki. Of the last it has been posited that Theodore portrayed the achievement and high point of his career inside the metropolitan church of St. Demetrios inside his new capital. An unlabelled fresco on the northeastern façade of the easternmost pillar facing the sanctuary depicts a young saint in the royal garb of the thirteenth century. With the beardless face of St. Demetrios the figure is neither a soldier nor a churchman but an aristocrat with nimbus. He is dressed contemporarily to the thirteenth century. Demetrios holds in his right hand a horn of oil used for anointing, and in his left the imperial crown. For this reason this fresco has been identified as a product of the fulfilment of Epirote prophecy (see p.131) and a commemoration by the Komnenoi-Doukai of Theodore’s coronation and St. Demetrios’ role.⁷⁵³

⁷⁵¹ Ibid. p.61.

⁷⁵² Mango, ‘The Conciliar Edict of 1166,’ pp. 313-330.

⁷⁵³ Euthymios Tsigaridas, ‘Τοιχογραφία του αγίου Δημητρίου στον ναό του Αγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης,’ in: *Δώρον: Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Νίκο Νικονάνο*, (Thessaloniki: 2006), pp.209-212. Additional probable portraits, now anonymised, are in St. Erasmus in Ohrid and the Old Metropolitan Church in Veroia.



Figure 25. c.1224–1230, Church of St. Demetrios, Thessaloniki. Fresco of eponymous saint holding horn of oil and crown. Author's photograph, 21/05/2024.

3.10. Epiros' Religious Ideology: New Moses and *Demagogue* of the *Dytikoi*

In tandem with Epiros' imperial ideology, the religious ideology being propagated on Theodore's behalf by the network of the *Dytikoi* continued to voice a multi-lingual Orthodoxy. As Epiros achieved further military success and annexed additional territories, the Western Church followed the precedent of the *Boulgarepiskopoi* synod and acted independently following their archbishop. Prompting numerous outraged letters from Nikaia, they fought a canonical battle to prove the legitimacy of their actions. Ultimately, in 1227 a synod in Arta was convened where the gathered *Dytikoi* took an oath of sole loyalty, a *homologia*, to Theodore.⁷⁵⁴ It may also have been commemorated in sculpture.⁷⁵⁵ The same year, Chomatenos informed Patriarch Germanos of the decision and provided a rationale for their actions. Shortly after George Bardanes announced the state of ecclesiastical independence and schism.⁷⁵⁶

In their self-identifications, the two documents offer slightly different descriptions of the social stratification of Theodore's state but position it within a geographical 'Western' homeland. The Arta synod produced a *Praxis Synodiki* which was likely sent to all the churches and bishoprics which it represented.

'Paul, the divine apostle, spoke about faith in Christ. For it is with your heart that you believe in righteousness and with your mouth you profess you are saved. We, this apostolic ecumene and, all these bishops in the Western lands, being both those on high thrones and the humblest *proedroi*.⁷⁵⁷ Just as we believed in the righteousness of hearts, indeed [we believe in] the proclamation and coronation and anointing of our mighty and holy lord and emperor Kyr Theodore Doukas, this we both affirm [*homologia*] by mouth and we write by hand.

Παῦλος ὁ Θεῖος ἀπόστολος περὶ τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν διαλεγόμενος πίστεως, καρδία μὲν, φησι, πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην, στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν. Τοῦτο τὸ ἀποστολικὸν οἰκειοῦμενοι καὶ ἡμεῖς οἱ κατὰ μοῖραν ταύτην τὴν δυτικὴν ἐπίσκοποι πάντες, ὅσοι θρόνων ὑψηλοτέρων καὶ ταπεινότερων ὑπάρχομεν προέδροι, ὅπερ ἐπίστεύσαμεν εἰς δικαιοσύνην καρδίας, τὴν ἀναγόρευσιν δηλαδὴ καὶ στεμματοφορίαν καὶ χρῆσιν τοῦ κραταιοῦ καὶ ἀγίου ἡμῶν αὐθέντου καὶ βασιλέως κῦρ Θεοδώρου τοῦ Δούκα, τοῦτο καὶ στόματι ὁμολογοῦμεν καὶ χειρὶ γράφομεν.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁴ Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §24, pp.285-286; Lambropoulos, Synodal §14, p.273; Stavridou-Zaphraka, 'Political Ideology' p.318; Bredenkamp, *Empire of Thessaloniki*, pp.170-177; On the size of the synod we can make educated guesses. Prosopographical evidence shows twenty-one bishoprics within the Western Church whose attendance was presumably required by the synod. For comparison, to secure approval for Laskaris' wedding to Philippa Roupenid, niece of the Armenian King Levon Nikaia had only the signatures of the patriarch, three archbishops, two metropolitans, and six bishops. Pavlov, 'Sinodalnaja gramota,' pp.165-166, The listed undersigned were the incumbents of Patriarch of Constantinople, archbishops from Ohrid, Ephesos, and Kyzikos, and bishops from Sardes, Laodikeia, Philadelphia, Prusa, Kios, and Melitoupolis.

⁷⁵⁵ Theoretically, due to iconographical similarities between Theodore's coronation issue coinage and the roundels of a presumably-Komnenian emperor in Dumbarton Oaks and Venice, sculpture was produced at this synod for the act of oath-taking. Olga Karagiorgou, "'The Emperor's New Clothes': Looking anew at the Iconography of the Tondi," in: *The Tondi in Venice and Dumbarton Oaks Art and Imperial Ideology between Byzantium and Venice* (Venice: 2019), pp.147-150.

⁷⁵⁶ Chomatenos, *PD*, §114, pp.370-378; Loenertz, 'Lettre de Georges Bardanes,' pp.117.413-14; Athanasios Karpozilos, *The Ecclesiastical Controversy between the Kingdom of Nicaea and the Principality of Epirus (1217-1233)*, (Thessaloniki, 1973), pp.80-81; Prinzing, 'A Quasi-Patriarch,' pp.175-176.

⁷⁵⁷ For *proedroi* in a thirteenth-century context, see ODB. *Proedros* was previously a civic functionary referring to the president of a senate, but in this period refers to a bishop officiating within a vacant bishopric either as a second see or as one unconfirmed in it.

⁷⁵⁸ Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §24, p.285.12-19; Lambropoulos, Synodal §14, p.273.

The proclamation of an imperial Epirote state informs us about Theodore's ideology and the fine line he was treading.⁷⁵⁹ In contrast to the Nikaian *homologia* of 1208, which this was certainly in response to, at no point was an ethnonym used to describe the clergy present.⁷⁶⁰ The Epirote *homologia* did not approach the clergy as Romans or Hellenes but as *Dytikoi*, defined purely by territory controlled. Throughout the entire document, ethnic terms such as 'Roman', or 'Bulgarian' are utterly absent. The synod was distributing an act and proclamation across the Balkans that at no point made Theodore an 'Emperor of the Romans.' While Theodore was a descendant of emperors, the synod's declaration of faith in Theodore was a shared 'opinion of all Christians here' [ἐπικρίσεις καὶ πάντων τῶν ενταῦθα χριστιανῶν]. Evidently, the defining union of this synod in Arta had decided to subsume the various peoples of Theodore's empire within a broad concept of 'all Christians.' Theodore was simply proclaimed 'Emperor' of this gathering without a possessive ethnonym.

This ambiguous decision can be unpacked further if we insert the figure of Demetrios Chomatenos and his composition of the *Ohrid Legend/Short Life* of St. Clement. Neither the *Ohrid Legend* nor the older *Life* of Clement contains references to a Roman people beyond the dismissed messages of the Pope of Old Rome. The ethnonym of Roman is thus utterly absent, establishing a narrative political ecumenism that was current in all the narratives of the conversion of Bulgaria. The *Life* of Cyril-Constantine had gone further in a passage where Cyril had been at the Khazar court debating theology with a Muslim and a Jew. Cyril discredits Judaism by saying when Jerusalem had fallen so too had the practice of animal sacrifice, and now all taxes went to Rome. When a Khazar asked, 'How had Rome remained standing for so long?' in comparison to other empires, Cyril replied:

'It does not, for it has passed as the former ones [. . .] Our kingdom [*tsarstvo*] is not Roman, but Christian [. . .] The Romans worshipped idols, but now, one from one, and one from another people and tribe, rule in the name of Christ.

НЕ ДРЪЖИТЬ СЕ, МИМО ШЛО БО ЁСТЬ ЯКО И ПРОЧАА [. . .] НАШЕ БО ЦАРСТВО НѢСТЬ РИМ'СКО НЪ ХРИСТОСОВО [. . .] РИМЛЯНЕ ИДОЛѢХЪ ПРИЛЕЖАХЪ, СИИ ЖЕ ОВЪ ОТЬ СЕГО ОВЪ ОТЬ ИНОГО ЕЗЫКА И ПЛЕМЕНЕ ВЪ ХРИСТОВО ИМЕ ЦАРСТВЪЮТЬ.⁷⁶¹

This tradition of the Slavic world established the common practice of calling the Byzantine Emperor not 'Roman' but a Tsar either of the 'Christians' or the 'Greeks.' It was often as a means of expressing unity and commonality.⁷⁶² We might see within Chomatenos' *homologia*, an otherwise ethnically ambiguous document, the preservation of such a tradition and the archdiocese of Byzantine-Bulgaria projecting Ohrid as a centre of revived political evangelicalism. To achieve that end the gathered western bishops had signed the foundational document and given the approval of half of the former Byzantium to a new imperial state.

⁷⁵⁹ No definitive work deals with the ideology of Theodore's state/empire. Stavridou-Zaphraka, 'Political Ideology' remains the essential brief introduction; Nicol, *Epiros*, pp.76-103.

⁷⁶⁰ Potentially, this was a deliberate response to Theodore Laskaris receiving his own *homologia* from an unspecified number of bishops in 1208, Stavridou-Zaphraka, 'Political Ideology,' p.318.

⁷⁶¹ Trans. Ivanova, *Inventing Slavonic*, pp.72-73; Slavonic text eds. Franciscus Grivec and Franciscus Tomšič, 'Vita Cyrilis, Vita Constantini in Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses. Fontes,' in: *Radovi Staroslavenskog Instituta* 4, (Zagreb: 1960), §10.52-56, pp.95-143.

⁷⁶² Nikolov, 'Tsardom of the Greeks?,' pp.31-34; Angelov, 'Prosopography,' p.111.

Theodore's empire and its people were united by religion and geography but lacked a clear ethnonym. Komnenian authority and personal achievement were the central unifying factors and therefore later sections set forth Theodore's qualifications: 'Descendant of emperors, worthy of imperality, forged soldier, vigilant protector' who 'receives the reward of empire' [τὴν τῆς βασιλείας ἀντιμισθίαν] as a result of various labours. The enemies of Theodore's empire were 'Godless Latins' [ἄθέων Λατίνων] and 'the Skythians out of the Haimos mountains' [Αἴμου Σκυθῶν]. The first is self-explanatory but the latter, like *Drougoubitai*, was a spatialised and qualified ethnonym that made it very clear who had disturbed the church hierarchy. It was also a way of avoiding the continuing matter that Theodore's empire and church contained vast populations of Slavic-speakers recently reclaimed from Asanid Bulgaria.⁷⁶³

The imperial tradition of the 'Senate' which the *homologia* claimed to call upon had some sense of validity. In a separate letter to Germanos, Chomatenos reasoned that Epiros' ruling class contained at least half of those who had fled Constantinople of both senatorial and ecclesiastical rank.⁷⁶⁴ Its choice of ruler had attracted them. Unlike Nikaia's elevation of the Laskarids or the patriarchal appointment of Germanos, their leader was not a man 'ignoble and anonymous like Saul' nor an 'ignoble servile and apostate king like Jeroboam' or an Ephraim who 'conspired with *allophyloi* to divide Israel' but a Komnenian heir.⁷⁶⁵ While each of these exempla were sarcastic and cutting remarks against Nikaia's own actions since 1204, the defence of Chomatenos was that Epiros had fought for and earned its own survival, had succeeded in Constantinople's absence to religious leadership, and had yet breached no canon of the church. It asked only for recognition and autonomy of its achievements. He acknowledges that a unification of the provinces, what he termed a 'συνασπισμὸς,' remained an ultimate goal, but was simply unattainable in the current conditions.⁷⁶⁶ The Epirote stance merely requested, via demonstration of recent events, that both sides recognise that.

To announce Theodore's coronation in 1227 Demetrios Chomatenos sent the below letter on behalf of the gathered leaders of the Balkan territories. He composed a declaration that was communal in defence of himself but also projected Theodore and the respective *Dytikoi* as leaders of a multi-faceted state. Chomatenos presented a polity that was multi-layered and stratified. It also took cares, like with the *Boulgarepiskopoi* to find legal precedents for all of their actions. The result gave the Western Church and State an aspect of legal justification that other successor states lacked.⁷⁶⁷

'But since there has been a confusion of worldly affairs of a kind, I believe, never before experienced even now by the Romans, so that even our blameless faith is endangered in doctrines and customs by the destructive *ethne*, foreign and divergent, which have ravaged the greatest rule of the Romans. There has been a common opinion among those remaining in the West, both from the Senate and the ecclesiastical order and

⁷⁶³ Vasilievsky 'Epirotica. §24, p.285.25. Epiros' alliance with John Asan was formed in 1228, see pp.200-201 below.

⁷⁶⁴ Chomatenos, *PD*, §114, p.373.77-83.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid. §114, p.374.122-127, 'Τίνα δὲ διὰ τῆς κρίσεως εἰς τὴν βασιλείον περιωπὴν προηγάγομεν; Ἄρα γε τῶν ἀδοξούντων καὶ ἀνωνύμων ὡς εἶ τινα Σαούλ, υἱὸν Κίς, ὄνους νέμοντα πατρικὰς καὶ πονηρῶ πνεύματι ἐνεργούμενον, ἢ Ἰεροβοὰμ δυσγενῆ καὶ ἀγνώμονα οἷα δοῦλον καὶ ἀποστάτην, ἢ Ἐφραΐμ, κατὰ δάμαλιν παρουστρήσαντα καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἀλλοφύλων τῷ Ἰσραὴλ συνεπιτιθέμενον;'

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., §114, p.372.46.

⁷⁶⁷ For a judgement of Chomatenos as 'a more erudite canonist than the Patriarch' see Macrides, *Bad Historian or Good Lawyer? Demetrios Chomatenos and Novel 131*, *DOP*, 46, (1992), pp.187-196; Donald Nicol, 'Kaisersalbung: The Unction of Emperors in Late Byzantine Coronation Ritual,' *BMGS*, 2 (1976), pp.44-45.

indeed with the entire multitude of the military, to, by the grace of God, elevate to the throne Kyr Theodore Doukas, and also to anoint him as emperor due to the circumstances that arose here at that time because there was no expectation of union [συνασπισμοῦ] from elsewhere – for the East barely manages to defend itself, being constantly surrounded by many difficulties – and so that those hostile to us, who daily mock us, may be humbled, submitting to both the imperial name and authority, by which this mighty and holy emperor of ours expelled them from this region with immeasurable sweat and toil, and so that the populace, and especially the military, may have a firm and unwavering opinion towards this *demagogue* [δημαγωγόν], knowing that they are no longer under a mere general who is easily scorned, but under a mighty emperor. For the fearsome and revered aspect of the imperality not only encourages and exalts the subjects [ὑπηκόους] but also restrains rival sentiments.’

‘Ἄλλ’ ἐπειδὴ τῶν κοσμικῶν πραγμάτων γέγονε σύγχυσις, ὅποια, ὡς ἐγῶμαι, οὐδέπω καὶ νῦν ἐς τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἐκόμασεν, ὡς κινδυνεῦσαι καὶ αὐτὴν ἀκρωτηριασθῆναι τὴν ἀμώμητον πίστιν ἡμῶν δόγμασί τε καὶ ἔθεσι τῶν τὴν μεγίστην τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν λυμνημένων ἐθνῶν, ἐκφύλοις οὔσι καὶ ἀπεμφαίνουσι, σκέψις γέγονε κοινὴ τῶν ἐν τῇ δύσει περιλειφθέντων ἀπὸ τε τῆς συγκλήτου βουλῆς καὶ τῆς ἱεραρχικῆς τάξεως, ναὶ δὲ καὶ σύμπαντος τοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ μυριοπληθοῦς ὄντος, τῇ χάριτι τοῦ Θεοῦ προβληθῆναι εἰς βασιλέα τὸν ἀναγεγραμμένον Δοῦκαν κῦρ Θεόδωρον, ἅμα δὲ καὶ χρισθῆναι διὰ τὰ παραστάντα τηρικαῦτα ἐνταυθοῖ περιστατικά, ὅτι τὲ ἀλλαχόθεν συνασπισμοῦ προσδοκία οὐκ ἦν (ἢ γὰρ ἐῴα λῆξις μόγις ἔχει ἐπαρκεῖν ἑαυτῇ, ὡς πολλῶν καὶ ταύτην δυσχερειῶν ἐκάστοτε περικυκλωσῶν) καὶ ἵνα καὶ οἱ κύκλωθεν ἡμῶν δυσμενεῖς, οἱ καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμῶν καταχάσκοντες, ἐντεῦθεν συστέλλονται, τῷ βασιλικῷ ὑποχωροῦντες ὀνόματί τε καὶ ἀξιώματι, οὓς ὁ κραταῖος οὗτος καὶ ἅγιος ἡμῶν βασιλεὺς ἐκ τῆς περιχώρου ταύτης ἀμυθήτοις ἰδρῶσι καὶ πόνοις ἀπήλασε, καὶ πρὸς γε ἵνα καὶ τὸ ὑπήκοον καὶ μάλιστα τὸ στρατευόμενον τὴν πρὸς τὸν δημαγωγὸν τοῦτον γνώμην σταθερὰν σχῆ καὶ ἀρέμβαστον ὡς οὐκέτι δηλαδὴ ὑπὸ ψιλῶ στρατηγῷ καὶ εὐκαταφρονήτῳ, ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ βασιλεῖ κραταιοτάτῳ ταπτόμενον καὶ ἀγόμενον· οἶδε γὰρ τὸ τῆς βασιλείας φοβερὸν καὶ αἰδέσιμον οὐ μόνον θαρρύνειν καὶ ἀγάλλειν τοὺς ὑπηκόους, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπεναντία καταστέλλειν φρονήματα.’⁷⁶⁸

The image of Theodore as a *demagogue* is an invocation from Old Testament models. Thirteenth-century authors’ identifications of the Nikaians as New Israelites, driven from their home into exile are well established, but the Old Testament’s presence in Epiros is lacking attention.⁷⁶⁹ A close reading of the texts praising and proclaiming Epiros finds that there is one previously overlooked reappearing image, Theodore was being projected as a new Moses and *demagogue* of a vast, varied, yet certainly exiled people.

The *demagogue* image first appears in 1217, in a letter written to Theodore by Apokaukos concerning his brother Constantine’s taxation of Naupaktos. Apokaukos begged Theodore that as his brother had become a new Pharaoh, Theodore could be a new *demagogue* like Moses and that as ‘our *demagogue*’ he should end the tyranny.⁷⁷⁰ The image is then considerably expanded as an ideology in 1219 in a letter by Chomatenos describing Theodore’s public

⁷⁶⁸ Chomatenos, *PD*, §114, p.372.37-57; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, p.71; Bredenkamp, *Empire*, pp.136-138; Stavridou-Zaphraka, ‘Κοινωνία,’ p.315.

⁷⁶⁹ Angelov, ‘Byzantine Ideological Reactions,’ pp.293-310.

⁷⁷⁰ Bees, ‘Unedierte,’ §38, p.97.13-23, ‘σοι καὶ συστράτηγον καὶ συμπολεμοῦντα τῷ ἡμετέρῳ δημαγωγῷ καὶ κατὰ Μωσέα... πληγῆναι τοῦτον καὶ δευτέρα πληγὴ παρὰ σοῦ τοῦ ἡμετέρου δημαγωγῷ.’

hanging of a bandit, one Petrilos, together with his sons.⁷⁷¹ Chomatenos justified the execution with a quote from the *Basilika* and used the opportunity to praise Theodore as a ruler:

‘You do not crave glory, nor money, nor possessions, nor softness, nor luxury, nor anything else that takes hold of those who crawl upon the ground and are enticed by this life’s deception, laying claim to pre-conceived stratagems and demagoguery, but you struggle with divine zeal on behalf of your homeland and your *homophyloi* [ὁμοφύλων].’⁷⁷²

After this passage rejecting the sins and temptations of the temporal world, Chomatenos made a biblical connection in the following paragraph:

‘Thus, you [Theodore] endure hardships and sufferings each, and there is never the time during this for rest. Therefore, you resemble that great Moses, **the demagogue** and general both.

Καὶ οὕτω δυσπαθείαις τὲ καὶ ταλαιπωρίαῖς ἑαυτὸν παραβάλλεις ἐκάστοτε, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι σοι καιρὸς ἐν τούτοις ἀνέσεως οὐδέποτε οὐδαμοῦ. Κάντεῦθεν καὶ Μωσῆν ἐκεῖνον τὸν μέγαν, τὸν δημαγωγὸν τε καὶ στρατηγὸν εἰκονίζεις,⁷⁷³

Were these to be the only such mentions of *demagogue*, we might attribute less importance to them. Nicholas Mesarites did in one work call Laskaris a *demagogue* gathering peoples into Nikaia, and the image is obviously undergoing a resurgence.⁷⁷⁴ It implied a leadership regardless of crown, dependent on the support of the people, the *demos*.⁷⁷⁵ Leadership for its own sake should be avoided but divine demagoguery was a sign of God’s favour. Therefore, as becomes apparent throughout the 1220s when multiple authors begin to use the model as a source of justification, these instances were the start of an entire *demagogue* cult of Theodore that ultimately entered diplomatic texts.

Tantalising fragments stress the strength of Mosaic *demagogue* adopted as an imperial image for Theodore, as it had been for Bulgarians during the eleventh-century empire of Samuel, and Byzantines before.⁷⁷⁶ It was even incorporated into Chomatenos’ texts regarding St. Clement of Ohrid. A Greek-language *akolouthia* for Clement might allow us to expand Theodore’s religious ideology in an additional way. Copied into a manuscript dated to 1497/98 is a chant bearing the acrostic dedication of ‘Demetrios, Archbishop of the Bulgarians’ [ἡ ἀκρόστιχος Κλήμεντα τιμῶ ποιμενάρχης βουλγάρων Δημήτριος] within the work *Other Canons for our Holy Father Clement*.⁷⁷⁷ It confirms that Chomatenos’ development of the cult of St. Clement

⁷⁷¹ Chomatenos, *PD*, §110, pp.363-367.

⁷⁷² Ibid. §110, pp.363.20-364.24, ‘οὐ δόξης ἐρῶν, οὐ χρημάτων, οὐ κτημάτων, οὐ τρυφῆς, οὐ χλιδῆς οὐδέ τινος ἄλλου, ὧν δεσμοῦνται οἱ χαμαὶ συρόμενοι καὶ ταῖς τοῦ βίου τούτου ἀπάταις δελεαζόμενοι, τῆς προκειμένης στρατηγίας τὲ καὶ δημαγωγίας ἀντιποιῆ, ἀλλὰ ζῆλον ἔνθεον ζηλοῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος σου καὶ τῶν ὁμοφύλων.’

⁷⁷³ Ibid. §110, p.364.24-28. Emphasis added.

⁷⁷⁴ Mesarites, *Neue Quellen III* p.11, trans. Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, p.253, ‘leader of his people.’

⁷⁷⁵ See examples from biblical exegesis composed by Emperor Leo VI and John Chrysostom. *Leonis VI*, ed. Antonopoulou, §3.48, ‘Πάλαι μὲν οὖν ὁ δημαγωγὸς Ἰσραὴλ Μωϋσῆς’; John Chrysostom, *On Genesis 3*, in: *PG*, 526, 527.3.

⁷⁷⁶ Ivan Biliarsky, ‘Old Testament Models and the State in Early Medieval Bulgaria, in: *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Paul Magdalino, (Washington D.C.: 2014), pp.262-270.

⁷⁷⁷ Ivan Snegaroff, ‘Quelques copies inédites d’akolouthies grecques de St. Clément d’Ochrida,’ *Godishnik na Dukhovnata Akademiia "Sv. Kliment Okhridski,"* 5 (1955/56), p.224. “Ἄλλος κανὼν τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Κλήμεντος Ἀχρίδος.’

had survived him. The liturgy chanted ‘You who cleansed the *ethne* of Moesia through baptism. You who are the archbishop’ [καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τῆς Μυσίας ἐκκαθάρης τῷ βαπτίσματι. ἀρχιερέων ὑπάρχεις].⁷⁷⁸ In Chomatenos’ chant there was then a repeated echoing call of ‘New Moses, [Νέος Μωϋσῆς].’⁷⁷⁹ It was the case therefore that Clement’s epithet, identical with the Epirote Emperor Theodore’s, was being performed in the cathedral and Epirote rhetoric of a ‘New Moses’ was imbued with Ohrid’s saint.

The *demagogue* image appears again in the letters of George Bardanes as a caveat that excused or even superseded oath-breaking. This related to an additional controversy, second to the coronation, concerning an oath of loyalty taken by Theodore Komnenos Doukas to Theodore Laskaris prior to either of them being crowned emperor, c.1205.⁷⁸⁰ This oath, supposedly similar to those taken in 1208, is mentioned by Akropolites as a ‘pledge of faithful service’ [πίστιν δουλείας] and does not appear to be a later invention.⁷⁸¹ A letter sent by George Bardanes from Kerkyra/Corfu c.1226-7 refutes a lost, presumably furious, letter by Patriarch Germanos:

[...] Concerning our great and mighty emperor. For zealously, we cannot endure nor bear the immense slanders against him in your letter without groaning... we cry ‘Oh hear, Heavens, and shine your light upon the earth’ against such falsehoods. What say you, have you ever seen, the most noble and valiant among emperors, our Kyr Theodore Doukas, associating with Hagarenes or partaking, even briefly, in their polluted way of life? Have you known him to be recalled from there with compassion by the former Emperor in Asia, Laskaris? Or has the goodness, the beneficence, and the favour by which the *demagogue* [Theodore] used the subordinate-commander [Laskaris], or rather, the general commanded the soldier, escaped you? For he [Laskaris] was not wearing the crown then, nor had the ruler of Asia yet donned the purple robe, but he was moving from place to place, not finding rest for his feet and being spurned by the mouths of the mighty.

τὸν περὶ τοῦ κρατίστου καὶ ἁγίου βασιλέως ἡμῶν· ζηλοῦντες γὰρ ἐξηλώκαμεν καὶ τὸν θυμαλγέα χόλον οὐχ οἷοί τέ ἐσμεν καταπέττειν οὐδὲ τὰς ὠγγίους κατ’ αὐτοῦ συκοφαντίας τὰς ἐν τῷ γράμματι ἀστενακτι καρτερεῖν ἀνεχόμεθα· [...] προαγόμεθα: “ἄκουε οὐρανὲ καὶ ἐνωτίζου ἢ γῆ”, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ “ἦλιε κρύψον σου τὰς ἀκτῖνας” ἀναβοῶμεν πρὸς τὴν τοσαύτην ψευδηγορίαν· ἄρα γὰρ ἔχεις εἰπεῖν ὡς τεθέασαι πώποτε τὸν ἐν βασιλεῦσιν εὐγενέστατον τε καὶ ἀνδρικότατον, τὸν Δοῦκα κυρὸν Θεόδωρον, παρασκηνοῦντα μετὰ τῶν ἐκ τῆς Ἄγαρ καὶ φιλίας νόμῳ τῆς ἀλισγηματώδους αὐτῶν διαίτης ἐπ’ ὀλίγον γοῦν συμμετέχοντα; ἔγνωσ ἀνακληθέντα τοῦτον ἐκεῖθεν φιλοκτιμώμως ὑπὸ τοῦ προβεβασιλευκότος ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, τοῦ Λάσκαρι; πότερον οὐ διέλαθεν σε τὰ τῆς εὐποιίας, τὰ τῆς εὐεργεσίας, τὰ τῆς εὐμενείας, δι’ ὧν ὁ δημαγωγὸς τῷ ὑποστρατήγῳ, εἰ βούλεσθε δέ, ὁ στρατηγὸς τῷ στρατιώτῃ φιλοτιμότερον ἀπεχρήσατο; Οὐδέπω γὰρ ἐστεφηφόρει τὸ τότε οὔτε μὴν πορφυρίδα ὁ τῆς Ἀσίας ἄρξας περιεβάλλετο, ἀλλ’ ἦν τόπους τόπων ἀμείβων μηδὲ τοῖς ποσὶν εὐρίσκων ἀνάπαυσιν, πρὸς δὲ καὶ καταστασιαζόμενος ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν δυσηνίως διακειμένων καὶ ἀποπτυνόντων τὰ τῆς κυριότητος στόμια.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., p.225.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ The date of the oath and Theodore’s departure from Nikaia is ambiguous. This thesis proposes that Theodore was in Epiros leading his brother’s army by 1206.

⁷⁸¹ Akropolites, §14, p.25.1, trans. Macrides, pp.144, 146n.6.

⁷⁸² Galoni, *Βαρδάνης*, pp.426-427.

Theodore's projection as *demagogue* was employed to grant him immunity from oaths and imbue his state with the broad evangelical message of St. Clement. It had the equal effect, however, of making his Komnenian Empire one rooted firmly in the Bulgarian archiepiscopate. To the Nikaian empire across the Aegean, these were vulnerabilities. Nikaia, confronted with the loss of Hellenophone authority, would soon capitalise upon them so that the ideological othering of Epiros could begin.

3.11. Making Epiros into Bulgaria: Condemning the Church and the Coronation of Theodore

As demonstrated above, Epiros' own imperial ideology was largely conventional. Paradoxically, it was depictions of universal church and state in an unconventional, particularist age. It emphasised Theodore's role as Komnenian heir and his martial virtues as monarch but also projected a shared Orthodoxy based around Macedonia-Moesia amidst reemphasised Greek-language proselytization to the Slavs. They had also attempted to prove that Nikaian had been ineffectual in their role as emperors and patriarchs. While not seeking to dismiss Nikaian claims to the patriarchate and recognising the Romanness of Nikaia, Epiros' public correspondence in contrast to Nikaia had not made a Hellenic identity key to its assumption of imperality. The Nikaian defence was to go on the attack, exploit differences, and find a manner of proving that the true emperor and rightful heir to Constantinople was always in Nikaia. The Nikaians adopted the stance that ecclesiastically Epiros was utterly uncanonical and divided the Greek Orthodox Church. While existing in the realm of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, it is striking that in this matter we encounter repeated images of ethnic distortion. The battleground was once more in epistolography.

The Nikaian approach before 1225 had been frustration tinted with recognition of their own limitations. Epiros' autonomous church appointments had provoked a number of letters well-studied through the works of Karpozilos, Nicol, and Breidenkamp. From the time of Michael I between 1204–1215, then accelerating until 1227, the Epirotes were installing their own choice of bishops in liberated cities where displaced incumbents could not be found. News filtered through slowly from the fragmented Balkans to Nikaia and the empowerment of the local synod was part of the legacy of John X Kamateros and his grants of local autonomy after 1204.⁷⁸³ The reconstituted patriarchate in Nikaia objected that a synod under Michael and Apokaukos had installed the bishops Kalospites at Larissa and Dokeianos in Dyrrachium in 1213.⁷⁸⁴ Both appointments were submitted to Nikaia for confirmation but went without response from patriarchs Theodore II (1214–1216) and Maximos II (1216).⁷⁸⁵ As patriarchs ignored the matter, so it continued and accelerated with Theodore's conquests across Thessaly and Macedonia. Patriarch Manuel Sarantenos (1217–1222) finally attempted to control the issue. In a letter from 1217 Manuel agreed to confirm all appointees but insisted that such actions not take place again.⁷⁸⁶ To settle the dispute at length, a pan-Orthodox synod was proclaimed, calling the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria to Nikaia for Easter 1220 to discuss all ordinations since 1204.⁷⁸⁷ The entire *Dytikoi* declined to attend. By 1222 Epiros' restored bishoprics included Larissa, Leukada, Kerkyra, Gardiki, Vonitsa, Ohrid, Serres, and

⁷⁸³ See section 1.6, pp.78–84.

⁷⁸⁴ Karpozilos, *Controversy*, p.73.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, *Controversy*, pp.73-74; Mentioned in the letter of Manuel Sarantenos, §16 in: Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica' pp.268-269. The lack of response to this appeal is confirmed in Sarantenos' words p.268.12-14 'ἀναφορά... μέχρις ἀποκρίσεως... πατριαρχῶν δυσχέραντων, οἶμαι, πρὸς τὸ τοῦ πράγματος τολμηρόν.'

⁷⁸⁶ Translation of Manuel Sarantenos in Karpozilos, *Controversy*, p.75: 'Moved by brotherly love and wishing to see the beautiful and undefiled body of the Church no longer divided, after you have begged forgiveness, we decided to issue along with the brethren a synodal act ratifying your request. However, we warn you that the repetition of uncanonical ordinations will bear the consequences of the canons of the Church both against the ordaining bishop and the ordained.'

⁷⁸⁷ Proclamation and invitation in Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §14, p.264.10-17; Lambropoulos, §44.

Neas Patras.⁷⁸⁸ They represented two decades when the patriarchate was not consulted in filling vacant bishoprics in the Balkans.⁷⁸⁹

Between 1219 and 1221 in a letter that contained their refusal of Nikaia's synod, Apokaukos sent a treatise critiquing the political actions of Nikaia over the past decade. He complained of a great 'silence' felt in the Epirote Church and, owing to a lapse of communications, of their sense of complete separation.

'This very fact, O divine and sacred head, namely the long-lasting neglect by your high priesthood towards the Churches of the West over many years and the prolonged silence towards us who are under your pastoral hand has compelled all of us to agree with the present address: our entire clergy has deemed this an outright separation from one another, seeing both the long indifference shown toward the vacant most holy Churches, and the fact that we, your bishops, are deemed unworthy of patriarchal letters.

‘Τοῦτο γοῦν αὐτὸ, θεία καὶ ἱερὰ κεφαλὴ, τὸ ἐκ τῆς σῆς μεγάλης ἱεραρχίας πρὸς τὰς κατὰ δύσιν ἐκκλησίας ἐπὶ μακροῖς ἡλίοις ἀνάσχολον καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοῦς ὑπὸ τὴν σὴ ποιμαντικὴν χεῖρα ἐκ σιγῆς μακρᾶς ἀπροσαύδητον ἠνάγκασεν ἅπαντας εἰς τὴν παροῦσαν κατανεῦσαι ἀναφορὰν, ἄντικρυς χωρισμὸν ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων ἡγησαμένου σύμπαντος τοῦ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἱερατικοῦ τὴν τε μακρὰν ἀφροντιστίαν τῶν χηρευουσῶν ἀγιωτάτων ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ τὸ τοῦς σοῦς ἡμᾶς ἐπισκόπους γραμμάτων μὴ καταξιῶσθαι δεσποτικῶν.’⁷⁹⁰

Apokaukos listed also Nikaia's political actions as breaches of trust. For example, Theodore Laskaris' long-term treaty with the Latin Empire after 1212 had been enhanced in 1218/19 by the Nikaian Emperor's marriage to Mary of Courtenay, the daughter of Empress Yolanda (regent 1217–1219), in the naïve hope of inheriting Constantinople.⁷⁹¹ We hear of the differences in religious-political objectives when John Apokaukos opined that Nikaia had betrayed their Orthodox brethren through conciliatory relations with the Latins.⁷⁹² The letter culminated with a plea to the patriarch to cease his appeasement of Latins and 'avoid schism' [μὴ σχισθῆναι]. It is noteworthy that the first mention of schism does come from the Epirote side. Where Karpozilos saw Apokaukos as a 'conservative ecclesiastic who always strove for some kind of rapprochement,' a different interpretation would see Apokaukos' letter as distinctly provocative.⁷⁹³ The letter, after a long list of the accomplishments of Theodore, finished with a plea for harmony and unification, as well as a somewhat overlooked rhetorical plea for equal cooperation.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁸⁸ All bishoprics listed in Apokaukos, 'Epirotica' §17; Lambropoulos, §70. The complete ordination document for a Bishop of Serres is in Chomatenos' dossier, §80.

⁷⁸⁹ Apokaukos, 'Epirotica,' §17, p.274.10-276.11; Lambropoulos, §70; Nicol, *Despotate*, p.79; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, pp.69-79; Angold, *Germanos II*, p.214 n.531.

⁷⁹⁰ Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §24, p.290.30-36; Lambropoulos, Synodal §15.

⁷⁹¹ Van Tricht, *Renovatio*, pp.364-367.

⁷⁹² Apokaukos, 'Epirotica,' §15, pp.265.31-266.21; Lambropoulos, §44.

⁷⁹³ Karpozilos, *Controversy*, pp.73-80, here p.74.

⁷⁹⁴ Apokaukos, 'Epirotica,' §15, p.267.29-32. 'What if these things were heard by the ears of many, and what if the two worked together, unified, and fought side-by-side?' [Εἰ δὲ εἴς τοιαῦτα καὶ ὅσα τὰ τῶν πολλῶν ἐπλήρωσεν ἀκοῆς, τί δ' ἂν εἰργάσαντο δύο, ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Θεοῦ, συνόντες ἀλλήλοις καὶ συνασπίζοντες;] Potentially, this offer was remembered by Akropolites when records an attempt by Vatatzes to placate Theodore with junior co-emperor two years later.; Lambropoulos, §44.

The Nikaian response to this warning letter of schism came in February 1222. Letters from this point deviate heavily from the standard for Byzantine communication. As most recently assessed by Emmanuel Bourbouhakis, there were strict rules of rhetoric and ritual to Byzantine epistolography.⁷⁹⁵ Their letters were a means of manifesting presence from a distance, of expressing friendship or desire, as well as authority and social hierarchy. Faux-pas and insult were made by failing to address individuals by name, dignity, or with correct courtesy. *Topoi* of thirst and exile relieved by the words of a desired contact, of brotherhood, and harmony would be expected. Therefore, it is quite striking that from 1222 the tone of the patriarchs took a radical shift. That year Patriarch Manuel lambasted the *Dytikoi* because Dyrrachium's see had again been appointed without patriarchal oversight.⁷⁹⁶ Sarantenos isolated Chomatenos as the perpetrator and mastermind behind all. In a letter to Apokaukos he lays the blame solely at the door of Chomatenos and projected a 'foreign' Bulgarian ethnicity upon both the archbishop and his see. Manuel wrote:

'If, as we are informed, these are the decrees and actions of the grasping [Archbishop of the] Bulgarians, I am amazed if he has not fallen into much worse. *Being a man foreign so to speak, to ecclesiastical discipline and education*, he probably would have thought, upon assuming power, to reach up and strike even the heavens with his head, but let it be known that he does not securely know what is at his feet, let alone grasping securely what is in his hands, given that his hierarchical position lacks the long-standing custom.

Εἰ δ' ὅπερ καὶ ἐνηχήμεθα, τοῦ τῆς Βουλγάρων ἐπειλημμένου ταῦτά εἰσι διατάγματα τε καὶ ἐνεργήματα, θαυμάζω μὲν εἰ μὴ καὶ πρὸς πολλῶ χειρόνα τοῦτων οὔτος ἐκκλισθῆ, ἄνθρωπος ὢν ἐξωτερικὸς, ὡς οὕτως εἰπεῖν, καὶ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἀγωγῆς καὶ παιδείσεως ἄγευστος τὰ πολλά· τάχα γὰρ ἂν αὐτὸς ἐξουσίας λαβόμενος δόξειε, μετὰ τὸν εἰπόντα, καὶ αὐτὸν οὐρανὸν προσαράσσειν τῇ κορυφῇ· πλὴν ἴστω μηδὲ τὰ ἐν ποσὶν εἰδὼς ἀσφαλπως, ὡσπερ δὴ μηδὲ τὰ ἐν χεροῖν βεβαίως πάντη κρατῶν διὰ τὸ τὴν ἱεραρικὴν αὐτοῦ κατάστασιν πολλοῦ ἐνδέειν ἔτι τῆς ἀνέκαθεν συνηθείας.'⁷⁹⁷

Manuel's othering of Chomatenos made the Archbishop of Ohrid an external to Byzantine society, an 'ἄνθρωπος ὢν ἐξωτερικὸς.' Sarantenos made of the foremost authority on Late Byzantine law and canonical education a figure lacking 'ecclesiastical discipline' [ἀγωγή] and 'education' [παιδείσις].⁷⁹⁸ The following direct reply demonstrated a remarkable character defence of the archbishop from Apokaukos, as he sought to prove Chomatenos' credentials and role within Hagia Sophia before 1204. Apokaukos reminded Sarantenos that Chomatenos had previously served as 'apokriseis to the patriarchs' before 1204, our sole knowledge of Chomatenos' previous place of work.⁷⁹⁹ We therefore assume that Chomatenos had spent time in service to the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria and had relayed messages from Ohrid to Constantinople. While we cannot know precisely where he was from, it is unlikely that

⁷⁹⁵ Emmanuel Bourbouhakis, 'Epistolary Culture and Friendship,' *Companion to Byzantine Epistolography*, pp.279-306; and Bernard, 'Rituals and Codes,' pp.307-332; Gustav Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial dans l'épistolographie byzantine: textes du Xe siècle*, (Paris: 1962).

⁷⁹⁶ Manuel Sarantenos' letter is §16 in Vasilievsky, 'Epirotica,' §16, p.268.25-30.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., §16, p.269.9-17.

⁷⁹⁸ On these terms see Basileios Katsaros, 'Προδρομικοί 'Θεσμοί' για την Οργάνωση της ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης της εποχής των Κομνηνών από την προκομνηνεια περίοδο,' *Η Αυτοκρατορία σε Κρίση (:) Το βυζαντινό των 11^ο Αιώνα (1025-1081)*, (Athens: 2003), pp.443-471; Costas Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries, 1204-ca.1310*, (Nicosia: 1982).

⁷⁹⁹ Apokaukos, 'Epirotica,' §17, p.272.17-19. 'Τοῦτον ἐγὼ τῶν ἐκάστοτε Βουλγαρίας ἀποκρίσεις παρὰ τοῖς πατριάρχεις ποιούμενον ἐγνώρισα ἐκ μακροῦ.'; Lambropoulos, §70.

Chomatenos belonged to the Bulgarian Greek school of clerics begun by Theophylact, and more likely he was from Constantinople. Sarantenos' remarks are obviously false and yet they continue the trend of ethnic distortion of figures based on their politics. As patriarch of an office rooted in Constantinopolitan inheritance Sarantenos could hardly have been unaware of Chomatenos' role.⁸⁰⁰

When the charge changed from autonomous appointments to coronations, the tone of letters alters. Germanos' letter sent to Chomatenos after 1227 has been published by Günter Prinzing.⁸⁰¹ From this document, as noted, there was no brotherly address from the patriarch's letter, no blessing of peace and respect. Rather it was a letter of chastisement, one that ridiculed Chomatenos' see.

‘Most blessed Archbishop of Bulgaria, do not let the amusement of your person turn into discontent, and do not frown when we speak to you in an unusual and strange manner, bypassing the sweet address of brotherhood and rescinding the dignity of liturgical collegiality: for the reason for this does not lie in our modesty, but rather in your ignorance, one must say, or in your invincible forgetfulness.

Μακαριώτατε ἀρχιεπίσκοπε Βουλγαρίας, ἀλλὰ μὴ σύναγέ σου τὴν τοῦ προσώπου διάχυσιν ἐπὶ το στυγνὸν μὴδ' ὑποχάλα τὸ ἐπισκύνιον, ἀσυνήθως καὶ ξένως προσομιλούντων ἡμῶν καὶ τὸ γλυκὺ παρατρεχόντων τῆς ἀδελφότητος πρόσρημα κατὸ τὸ τῆς συλλειτουργίας καθοσιούντων ἀξίωμα· οὐ γὰρ τῆς ἡμῶν μετριότητος ἐκκρεμῆς ἡ αἰτία, ἀλλὰ τῆς σῆς εἴτε ἀγνοιάς, χρὴ λέγειν, εἴτε τῆς ἀκαταμαχήτου λήθης ἐξήρηται.⁸⁰²

Germanos proceeded to goad Chomatenos, continually conflating him with the *ethnos* of his office with the mocking question, ‘For tell me, holy man, upon which of the shepherds of your flock was the inheritance of coronation permitted; when has an Archbishop of the Bulgarians crowned an Emperor of the Ausones [Romans]?’⁸⁰³ The defence Chomatenos could offer to such charges was to explain the nature of Epiros, and try and layer Bulgaria within *Romania*. The most complete articulation of that defence came after Klokotnitsa, likely in 1233. While it is written to Germanos in penitence, it is surprisingly defiant. Flexibility and *oikonomia* were still made central to the Epirote cause. In the penultimate, but surely crowning culmination of the synodal decisions of his dossier, their explained rationale deserves further discussion:

‘Because Theodore, from the family of the Doukai, Angeloi, and Komnenoi, had assumed the leadership of the remaining western part of the Roman dominion and, mightily resisting the Latin incursions, was constantly drawing many of the regions under them to himself, taking possession of them — some indeed by the rule of war, others by methods of strategy. Eventually, he achieved even the liberation of the Serbs, accomplishing this not with weapons but with a peaceful stratagem. He expelled the tyrants who were occupying it, delivered those who were wretchedly held in subjection, and inscribed the name of their land within the bounds of his own authority.

⁸⁰⁰ Apokaukos, ‘Epirotica’ §§15, 16; Lambropoulos, §44; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, p.82.

⁸⁰¹ Günter Prinzing, ‘Die "Antigraphe" des Patriarchen Germanos II. an Erzbischof Demetrios Chomatenos von Ohrid und die Korrespondenz zum nikäisch-epirotischen Konflikt 1212-1233,’ *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi*, 3 (1983), pp.21-64.

⁸⁰² Prinzing, ‘Die “Antigraphe,”’ p.34.3-8.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.34.18-20, ‘Εἰπέ γάρ, ἱερώτατε ἄνερ, ἐκ ποίων σοι πατέρων ὁ τῆς στεφοδοσίας κληῖρος εἰάθη; τίσι τῶν τῆς Βουλγαρίας ἀρχιεπισκόπων Βασιλεῖς Αὐσόνων ἐστεφηφόρησαν πῶποτε;’.

What came next? The body of the people needed a hierarchical head, so that what was shaken might be stabilised, what was cast away and led astray might be restored, and what had been defiled by the abomination of the Latins might be cleansed by the appropriate rites of purification. For this, they appealed to their liberator [τοῦ ἐλευθερωτοῦ], entreating him persistently and considering the failure of their request unthinkable.

So he [Theodore] turned to a synod in exile, namely the assembly of the Illyrian hierarchs (which later also took on the name of the Bulgarian episcopate, for so it remains unchanged to this day). He addressed them collectively and initially failed in his request (for this sacred synod knew that granting his appeal would violate the traditions of the fathers, should they yield to the ruler's demands). However, as he persisted, sometimes entreating, sometimes compelling, and at times justifying his request with pious reasoning—one of which was the disorder and confusion in worldly affairs—this holy assembly at last, though reluctantly and with difficulty, yielded to his supplications. Seeing that canonical precision was being overwhelmed by the waves of circumstance and that both the Church's customs and the salvation of the people were in jeopardy, they chose to overlook, for the sake of a noble cause, the restrictions that had been imposed on our overlooked churches. Indeed, the sacred canons—particularly the fourth of the First Council and the twenty-seventh of the Sixth—clearly address such matters. Thus, they selected one to lead the Church, proceeding with the sacred rite and laying hands upon his head, invoking the Holy Spirit... That person was I, the very one who now stands before you, answering for my elevation to this position. I testify to this before the all-sovereign God and this tyrannical moment in time—a witness whom none could dismiss as false, unless one considers that time itself has a soul, a tongue, and a sense of judgement.

Ὅτι δὲ τῆνικαῦτα τοῦ ὑπολελειμμένου κατὰ δύοσιν μέρους <τῆς> τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίας τὴν ἀρχὴν διεζώννυτο Θεόδωρος ὁ ἐκ Δουκῶν καὶ Ἀγγέλων καὶ Κομνηνῶν καὶ ταῖς Λατινικαῖς ὀρμαῖς κραταιῶς ἀνθιστάμενος ὑπέσπα πολλὰς ἐκάστοτε τῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ χωρῶν καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτοῦ ταύτας ποιούμενος ἦν, τὰς μὲν δηλαδὴ πολέμου νόμῳ, τὰς δὲ μεθόδοις στρατηγικαῖς, φθάνει λοιπὸν καὶ τὴν τῶν Σερβίων ἐλευθερίαν ἔργον ἀόπλου μηχανῆς ποιησάμενος, καὶ ἀπελαύνει μὲν τοὺς κατέχοντας τυράννους, λυτροῦται δὲ τοὺς ἀθλίως κατεχομένους καὶ τὸ τῆς χώρας αὐτῶν ὄνομα τῆς σφετέρας ἐξουσίας τοῖς ὄροις ἐγγράφεται.

Τί τὸ ἐπὶ τούτοις; Χρῆζει ἀρχιερατικῆς τὸ σῶμα τοῦ λαοῦ κεφαλῆς, ἵνα τὸ σεσαλευμένον στηρίξη καὶ τὸ ἀπωσμένον καὶ πεπλανημένον ἀνασώσῃται καὶ τὸ μεμολυσμένον τῆς Λατίνων βδελυγμίας ἀποκαθάρῃ περιρραντηρίοις προσήκουσι· περὶ τούτου δεῖται τοῦ ἐλευθερωτοῦ καὶ ἀντιβολεῖ λιπαρῶς καὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτήσεως ἀποτυχίαν ἠγεῖται ἀνύποιστον.

Πρόσεισιν ὑπερορίῳ συνόδῳ καὶ τῷ προκαθημένῳ ταύτης, τῇ τῶν Ἰλλυριῶν ἱεραρχῶν δηλαδὴ, τῇ καὶ τὴν τῶν Βουλγάρων ὕστερον <κε>κληρωμένη ἐπίκλησιν (ἀσάλευτα γὰρ ἐς δεῦρο ἔκειτο ταύτη), καὶ κοινὸν τούτοις τὸν λόγον ποιεῖται καὶ τὴν μὲν πρώτην ἀστοχεῖ τοῦ προκειμένου βουλευμάτος (ἤδη γὰρ ἡ ἱερὰ σύνοδος αὕτη τὰς παραδόσεις τῶν πατέρων παρανομήσουσα, εἰ δηλαδὴ ταῖς τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἐπικαμφθεῖη δεήσεσιν), ἐπεὶ δ' οὐκ ἀνέηκεν οὗτος, τὰ μὲν ἱκετεύων, τὰ δὲ βιάζων, τὰ δὲ ὁδοποιῶν εὐλογίας ταῖς οἰκείαις προτάσεσιν, ὧν μία ἦν ἡ κοσμικὴ σύγχυσις καὶ τὸ τῶν πραγμάτων

άνώμαλον, εἶξεν ὁψὲ γοῦν καὶ μόλις ὁ ἱερὸς οὗτος σύλλογος ταῖς αὐτοῦ παρακλήσεσι καὶ ὀρῶν τὴν ἀκρίβειαν βαπτιζομένην τοῖς κύμασι τῆς τῶν πραγμάτων μεταβολῆς, ἐγκινδυνεύοντα δὲ ταύτη τά τε τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἔθνη καὶ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ λαοῦ, τὸ μὲν ὑποπτευόμενον ὑπὲρ διοικήσιν ὄρημα καὶ τὸ ἐπηρητημένον ἐπιτίμιον τοῖς ἐπιούσι ἐν ὑπερορίοις ἐκκλησίαις τῷ τέως παρεῖδε διὰ τε τὸν τοῦ καλοῦ ζῆλον, διὰ τε τὸν τῆς οἰκονομίας λόγον καὶ διὰ τὴν ἐνεστῶσαν δυσχέρειαν (ὧν δὴ καὶ οἱ θεῖοι κανόνες, ὃ τε δηλαδὴ τέταρτος τῆς πρώτης συνόδου καὶ <ὁ> λζ' τῆς ἕκτης τρανότατα μέμνηται), ψηφίζεται δὲ τὸν προστησόμενον τῆς ἐκκλησίας ταύτης καὶ οὕτω προάγει κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τὸ ἱερόν, τὴν φχεῖρα δοῦς τῇ τούτου κεφαλῇ καὶ τῷ Πνεύματι. [...] Αὐτὸς δὲ ἡμῖν ἐγώ, ὃς δὴ καὶ παρίσταμαι σήμερον καὶ λόγον ὑπέχω τῆς ἐμῆς ταύτης προαγωγῆς καὶ συνίστημι ταύτην ὑπὸ μάρτυρι τῷ παμβασιλεῖ Θεῷ καὶ τῷ τυράνῳ τούτῳ καιρῷ, ὃν οὐκ ἄν τις ὡς ψευδομάρτυρα παραγράψαιτο, εἰ μὴ ποτὲ τ' ἂν εἴη ἐκεῖνος ψυχὴ τίς καὶ γλῶσσα καὶ αἴσθησις ἔμπληκτος καὶ παράφορος.⁸⁰⁴

Chomatenos' final defence of Epiros' foundation tells us how under duress, it could self-identify. A Roman West led by a Bulgarian-Illyrian episcopate, and under whose leadership it had sought legal and political legitimacy in a time of unprecedented dissolution. Establishing what little precedent they had, Epiros had grown to meet diverse subject populations. Its ideology of identification blurred boundaries constantly. This letter, written in Greek, apparently carried by the Bishop of the Serbs to Patriarch Germanos demonstrated at least two alloglot peoples, Bulgarians and Serbs, who were essential to the Roman Epirote state.⁸⁰⁵ Chomatenos does not present the West as a monoethnic state for an ethnic Roman group, but a political and religious community constituting *Romanía*. The attempt to invoke canon law again supported an older conception of Byzantine society which had been a consistent recourse and framework for the past decade. The milieu it created in turn allowed the homoglot state of Nikaia the chance to critique the Epirote court as no longer Greek and/or Roman, but something foreign. Chomatenos' letter, and several others like it, were met by the ruling elites in Nikaia with rhetoric of mockery, religious censure, and eventually the same form of ethnic distortion. Theodore was referred to simply as the 'possessor of the western cities and regions' without reference to ethnonym, *genos*, or name.⁸⁰⁶ They viewed the Epirotes under Chomatenos' leadership as becoming predominantly 'Bulgarians,' bound up into the monolithic, panspermic 'other.' Germanos condemned Chomatenos, similar to his predecessors and through both tone and word choice placed Chomatenos outside of the brotherhood of the Greek Orthodox Church.

3.12. The Battle of Klokotnitsa 1230

Within the period of Theodore's supremacy, no source called Epiros a barbarian 'other,' Bulgarian or similar. Such a claim only began after his defeat. Following capture in 1230 and release in 1237, Theodore assumed a new role as advisor for his two sons, before disappearing from our sources in 1252. The ethnic distortion of Epiros was firstly directed purely at Chomatenos as Archbishopric of Bulgaria. For the later creation of a broadly 'Bulgarised' Epiros, that narrative began at Klokotnitsa.

As is well known and has been mentioned frequently over the course of this chapter, Theodore Komnenos Doukas' empire collapsed on the 9th March 1230 at the hands of Tsar John Asan. With the exception of his brother, the entire imperial family was captured. The narrative of

⁸⁰⁴ Chomatenos, *PD*, §150, pp.433-441.35-83; Angold, *Germanos II*, p.52; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, p.93.

⁸⁰⁵ Chomatenos, *PD*, §150, p.433.2-3. This is either the Archbishop of Serbia, i.e. St. Sava, or else the Bishop of Servia, see Prinzing, *PD*, p.264.

⁸⁰⁶ Prinzing, 'Die "Antigraphe,"' pp.35-35.57-60.

these events is not the chief concern here, for much effort has been spent trying to understand why Theodore, with his wife and children present, would attack a power he had recently concluded an alliance with. In the immediate prelude to the battle Theodore signed a year-long peace treaty in September/December 1228 with the Latins. Negotiations with the *Imperatorum Constantinopolis* styled Theodore as *Imperator Grecorum* thereby securing the first external recognition of his title as emperor. Following this truce Theodore would be free to march upon Constantinople.⁸⁰⁷ The obvious threat to a long siege was from the nominally Catholic Bulgarian Empire which had been allied to the Latins since 1228, but possibly since as early as 1225. The relationship was antagonistic, for Theodore had been expanding his lands at the Bulgarians' expense since 1216 and what they had lost in territory, the Asanids were attempting to redeem in diplomacy. As such, the Bulgarians had proposed that in the absence of an adult Latin Emperor the young Baldwin II should be betrothed to John Asan's daughter and Asan could act as regent.⁸⁰⁸

As unlikely as it was that Latin Constantinople would accept a Bulgarian regency, Epirote diplomacy attempted a counter policy of their own alliances with several regional powers. In the early 1220s Theodore had betrothed his niece Maria Petralaphina as child-bride to Alexios Slav and secured either neutrality or the active allegiance of the long-time *despotes* of Melnik.⁸⁰⁹ Eastern lands were entrusted to Constantine Maliasenos, Theodore's nephew by marriage as Michael I Doukas' son-in-law.⁸¹⁰ The larger power of John Asan, despite Theodore's many conquests in Macedonia, remained. Therefore, between 1225 and 1228, after the capture of Adrianople that secured the advance on Constantinople, Theodore attempted to neutralise Asanid Bulgaria. He married his brother *despotes* Manuel to Maria Beloslava, the daughter of John Asan, sealing an alliance. Potentially, it could have led to a joint assault upon Constantinople but ultimately the treaty became infamous. In March 1230 Theodore advanced from Adrianople, ostensibly to attack the Latin Empire, but came instead into Bulgaria. He was then captured in a conflict with the tsar. According to legend, the broken treaty was held aloft on a standard and Theodore's decade-long success ended overnight. Thus was the bizarre capture of Emperor Theodore Komnenos Doukas at Klokotnitsa.⁸¹¹

The decision to march north and attack Bulgaria divides many historians. Nicol believed Theodore's advance into Bulgaria tried to cover his back for an assault on Constantinople.⁸¹² Bredenkamp believed it to have been an ambush of the imperial family.⁸¹³ Most recently Kalin Yordanov, expanding on Bredenkamp, has seen in the conflict a form of proxy war in which Theodore campaigned to effect the reinstatement of Alexios Slav into his recently lost fief of Philippopolis.⁸¹⁴ Strategies aside, Akropolites' re-telling of Theodore's campaign depicts the emperor setting out north from Adrianople towards the Hebros river, trying ineffectually to

⁸⁰⁷ The discrepancy results from the treaty signed in December but seemingly actioned from September. Roberto Cessi, *Deliberazioni del Maggior Consiglio di Venezia*, (Bologna: 1930), 1, §140; Van Tricht, *Renovatio*, p.358.

⁸⁰⁸ For the earlier date see *Ibid.*, pp.395-396.

⁸⁰⁹ See Akropolites, §39, trans. Macrides, p.172. Additionally, Michael Angold, 'The Petraliphas Family during the period of exile (1204-1261),' in: *Epiros: The Other Western Rome*, (Forthcoming: 2026).

⁸¹⁰ See Demetrios Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography*, (London: 1968), pp.142-43.

⁸¹¹ Akropolites, §25, trans. Macrides, pp.178-179; Nicol, *Epiros*, pp.104-105.

⁸¹² Nicol, *Epiros*, p.110.

⁸¹³ Bredenkamp, *Empire of Thessaloniki*, pp.151-152.

⁸¹⁴ Yordanov's theory is that Theodore sought to defend the rights of Alexios Slav, a claimant to the Asanid throne, due to his recent marriage to Maria Petralaphina, Theodore's niece. It could help resolve one of the mysteries of Epirote studies. Kalin Yordanov, *Printsat na Filipopol: nepoznatiyat despot Aleksiy Slav v svetlinata na novi izvori i otkritiya [The Prince of Philippopolis: The Unknown Despotes Alexios Slav in the Light of New Sources & Discoveries]*, (Sofia: 2022), pp.181-194.

provoke a confrontation on the river's banks, before being ambushed by a force of one thousand Cumans in the service of Asan. The narrative allows neither side an aptitude for command or prowess. Indeed, there is much to suggest that we should mistrust Akropolites in this passage, as it appears as an episode of psogic character assault. Theodore was relegated to 'a man who conducted himself arrogantly and in a most disorderly fashion, not only in imperial affairs but also generally in all civil matters.'⁸¹⁵ The passage reads purely didactically, Theodore broke his 'oaths' (given in the plural 'τοὺς ὄρκους') with Asan, much as he had done with Theodore Laskaris in c.1205, and therefore received a rightful reward of defeat and destruction.⁸¹⁶

Akropolites' re-telling of the battle is wildly inconsistent, particularly with its own terminology. Having earlier labelled him a Bulgarian, Akropolites then claims Theodore's army consists of 'Romans' and 'Italians,' and the Bulgarian army of 'Skythians.' The lands overrun by Asan's army afterwards were also 'Roman.'⁸¹⁷ As a further point in onomastics, we should note that much regarding Klokotnitsa in Akropolites' *Chronike* is heavy with implied meaning. Theodore marched to Klokotnitsa a Komnenos and after his defeat became an Angelos. The narrative allowed him only a distinct, lesser, and failed dynasty when compared to the triumphs of John III and Michael VIII, who Akropolites consistently calls Komnenoi.⁸¹⁸ The longevity of the Bulgarian annexation suggests again that Akropolites' account may be concealing further elements of what occurred. Their expansion was actually not that extreme, only Thrace and Macedonia passed to Asanid control, effectively restoring the 1225 borders. Akropolites, Ephraim, and Skoutariotes all made the claim that Adrianople, Didymoteichon, the theme of Voleron, Serres, Pelagonia, Prilep, Thessaly, Elbanon [Arbanon] and Illyrikon [Dyrrachium] passed to John Asan but many of these conquests were exceptionally transitory.⁸¹⁹ They were more likely seeking to discredit Michael II Komnenos Doukas, who had reclaimed Arta and many of these territories by the time they were writing. Many narratives of Klokotnitsa were designed to delegitimise Epiros. Matthew Kinloch studied the various western sources for Klokotnitsa and found little valid historical detail. He judged that Akropolites' account tells us nothing beyond hearsay regarding the battle and merely serves as a narrative tool to degrade Theodore.⁸²⁰ Kinloch concluded that given that Akropolites' remarks were mostly just hearsay, his sources were merely rumours capitalised upon thirty years later when the text was composed. Consequently, Akropolites' need to Bulgarise Epiros took priority over accuracy. Akropolites concludes the section on Klokotnitsa by recounting that Manuel, Theodore's successor, retired to Thessaloniki with his wife and was 'not troubled on the whole by the Bulgarians, since he shared his bed with Asan's daughter by a concubine.'⁸²¹

Seeking for elements of Bulgarian culture within Epiros after Klokotnitsa, it is striking that we finally hear a little of the Asanid voice. After Theodore's defeat his brother Manuel assumed governance in Thessaloniki but was subordinate to John Asan, being married to his daughter. Commemorating the moment the central Balkans passed for a decade after 1230 to Bulgarian control, John Asan commissioned a monumental inscription within the Church of the Holy

⁸¹⁵ Akropolites, §24-25, trans. Macrides, p.178. quoted passage §25, p.41.17-21, 'ὁ μὲν οὖν Ἄγγελος Θεόδωρος τὰς μετὰ τοῦ Ἀσάν Ἰωάννου σπονδὰς διαλύσας, οἷα ἐκεῖνος ἀνὴρ θρασύτερος καὶ ἀτακτότερον φερόμενος οὐ μόνον ἐν βασιλείοις ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς τοῖς πολιτικοῖς.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., §25.23; Kinloch, *Rethinking Thirteenth-Century Byzantine Historiography*, pp.139-155.

⁸¹⁷ Akropolites, §25, pp.41.24-p.42.21, trans. Macrides, pp.178-179.

⁸¹⁸ Later Nikaian coinage is also theorised to depict a fallen angel wing, the defeat of 'the Angeloi', i.e. the Epirote Komnenoi-Doukai. See *DOC*, 4.2, pp.473-474.

⁸¹⁹ Akropolites, §25, trans. Macrides, p.179; Ephraim, §8109-8116; Skoutariotes, 474.17.

⁸²⁰ On various sources and their significant chronological faults which conflate the defeat, capture, and blinding of Theodore to one episode, see Kinloch, *Rethinking thirteenth-century Byzantine historiography*, pp.139-155.

⁸²¹ Akropolites, §26, p.44.1-5, trans. Macrides, p.182.

Forty Martyrs in Veliko Tarnovo. There we catch a glimpse both of what the imperial Balkans had been as well as Asanid Bulgaria's perspective of Macedonia in the thirteenth century.

‘In the year 6738 [1230] I, John Asan, in Christ God faithful Tsar and Autocrat of the Bulgarians, son of the old Tsar Asan, built from the foundations and adorned with paintings the whole of this most honourable church in the name of the Holy Forty Martyrs with whose help in the twelfth year of my reign, in the year this temple was being painted, went to war in *Romania* [РѠмани(Ѡ)] and routed the Greek [грѣцкаѠ] army and captured Tsar Theodore Komnenos himself and all of his *bolijars*. I conquered his entire land, from Odrin [Adrianopolis] to Drach [Dyrrachium], the Greek [грѣцкѠ] [part], as well the Serbian [срѣвскѠѠ] and Albanian [арѣбанаскѠ] parts. The cities round about Constantinople and the City itself were ruled by the Franks but even they obeyed the hand of my tsardom, because they had no other tsar but me and they lived their days thanks to me. God ordained it to be so, because without Him neither word nor deed can be accomplished. Glory to Him for all ages! Amen.

в лѣ(т) зѣли ин(д) .ї. азъ ІѠ Ясѣ(н) въ Хѣ Бѣ вѣрны цр̄ и сам(о)дръжець
вѣлгарѠмъ снѣ старого Ясѣнѣ цр̄ѣ създа(х) Ѡ(т) зачала. и писаниѣ(м) Ѡкраси(х)
до конца: прѣч(с)тнѠѠ сїѠ црѣкѠв въ имѠ сѣты(х) .м̄. мѣнкѣ. ихже п(о)м(о)щиѠ
въ .їѣ. лѣ(т) цр(с)тва моего въ неже лѣ(т) писадаше сѠ храмъ сѣ. излѣзох на
брань въ РѠмани(Ѡ) и радѣы(х) воинскѠ грѣцкаѠ. и самаго цр̄ѣ кюр ѠодѠра
Комнина вѠх сѣ всѣми болѣры его. а зема всѠ прѣлѠх Ѡ(т) Одрина и до Драчѣ
грѣцкѠ. и еше же арѣбанаскѠ и срѣвскѠѠ. тѣкмо сѠшы(м) градово(м) окр(с)ти
Цр̄ѣгра(д) и самого того град дръжаѠѠ фрѠзи. нѣ и ти под рѠкѠ цр̄(с)тва моего
повиноѠѠх сѠ понеже много цр̄ѣ не имѣѠх развѣ мене и мѣноѠ ради днѣ
словѠ испроваждаѠце вѣѠѠ бѣ тако повелѣѠшѠ. иѠо без него ни дѣло ни слово
сѣврѠшаѣтъ сѠ. томоу слава. въ вѣкѣты, аминѣ ::⁸²²

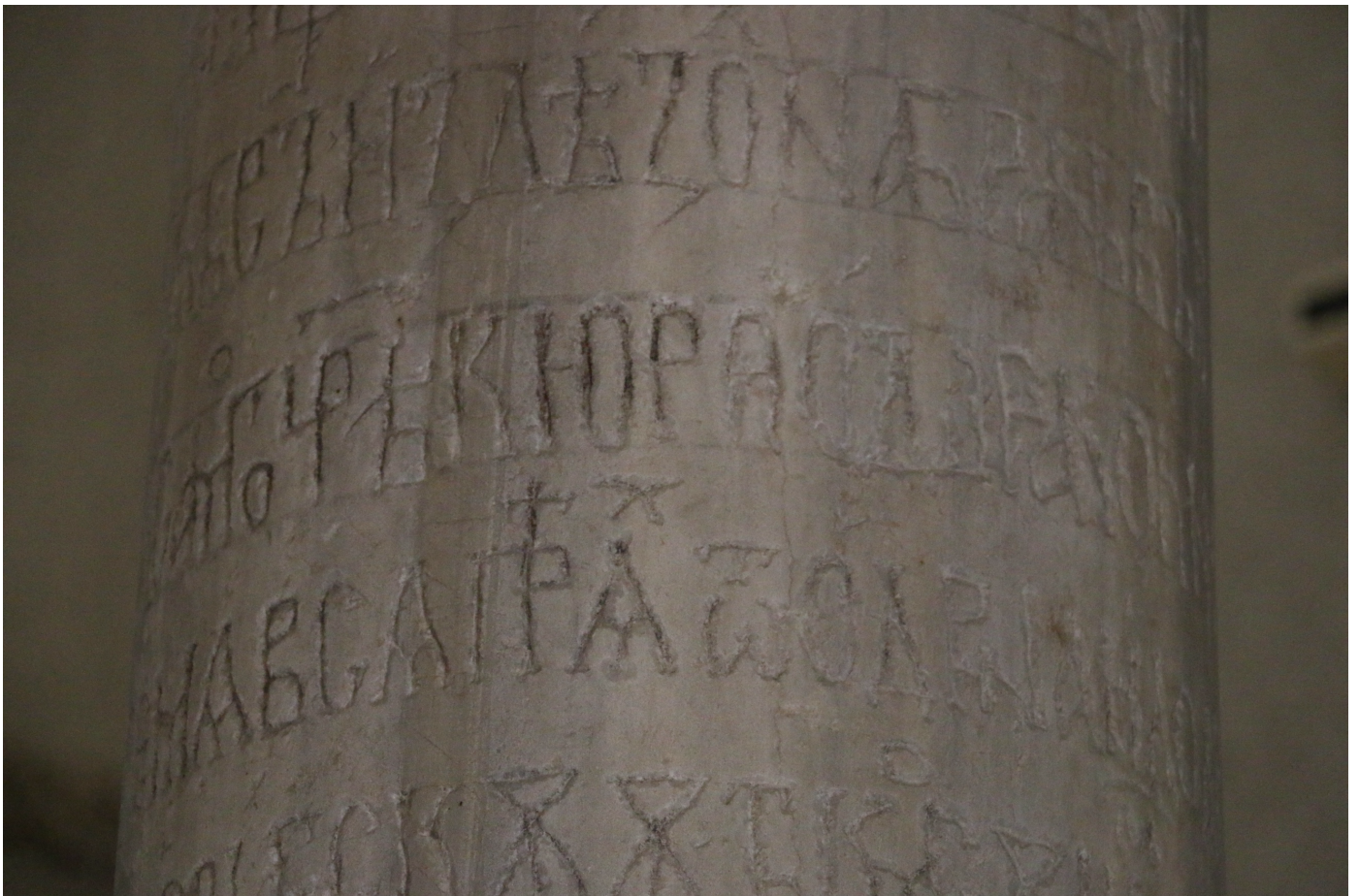
From the inscription we infer that Theodore's empire, a part of *Romania*, was effectively inherited by the Bulgarian state. The *Romania* it refers to is a shared concept, constituted of Greek, Serbian, and Albanian regions and also a conception the Bulgarians were part of. The *Romania* consisted of the regions and the identical titles that both Theodore and Asan claimed. The reference to Constantinople and 'the City' confirmed that the spatial ideology was unchanged since before 1204 and there was still a centre. To the ideology of the inscription, this was almost a civil war, one that while defensive, had caused a triumphant expansion. Within that Roman community there were multiple ethno-linguistic regions but their representation is simplified. While there were words at Forty Martyrs for the Serbs and Albanians, there is no mention for the Bulgarians living under Theodore's rule.⁸²³ It confirms from the other side the heterogeneity of the Epirote domain but also that the Bulgarians, similar to some Byzantines before them, could in the triumphant ideology of this inscription equate all Bulgarians with the Asanid realm.

⁸²² Slavonic inscription in Popkonstantinov, *AI*, 2, pp.166-168; trans. Petkov, *Voices*, p.425; Angelov, 'Prosopography,' p.111.

⁸²³ For a discussion of the Serbian regions, see Dragoljub Marjanović-Radovan, 'Serbian Lands in The Tarnovo Inscription of the Bulgarian Emperor Ivan Asen,' in: *Car Ivan Asen II (1218-1241). Sbornik po sluchai na 800-godishninata ot negovo v'zhestvie na b'lgarski prestol [Emperor John II Asen (1218-1241). Volume Commemorating 800 years of his Ascension to the Bulgarian Throne]*, eds. Vassil Gjuzev, et al. (Plovdiv: 2019), pp.95-101.



Figure 26.1–2. Church of Holy Forty Martyrs inscription, Veliko Turnovo. 1) Column in situ. 2) Detail of 'Tsar Kyr Theodoros Komnenos' [црѣ кюр Ѡодѡра Комнина]. Author's photographs, 12/09/2025.



3.13. Conflating the Western *Panspermia*: Epiros and Bulgaria in the 1230s and 1240s.

With the capture of Theodore Komnenos Doukas at Klokotnitsa there followed eleven years of Bulgarian hegemony in the Balkans, lasting until the death of John Asan in 1241. This period, when the hierarchy of the Greek-Bulgarian relationship was inverted, would give Palaiologan historians their greatest opportunity to misrepresent the ‘West’ as having become something ‘other.’ The reign of Manuel Komnenos Doukas (1230–1237), Theodore’s brother, usually forms something of an epilogue for his brother’s. By the time Manuel was deposed he had presided over the full subordination of the Epirote Church to Nikaia and the territorial collapse of Theodore’s Epirote Roman Empire. Only traces of Theodore’s imperial mission were inherited in the reigns of his brother, his nephew Michael II now establishing himself in Arta, and in the political ideology of John Asan, but all efforts after 1237 and certainly 1246 were more ad hoc and based on resistance rather than rebuilding. Lacking the military supremacy of an Epirote state pre-1230 and with the almost complete disappearance of the *Dytikoi* bishops, the Thessaloniki Empire became a client of the Asanid state. From the Nikaian perspective, seeking to project affairs along ethno-linguistic lines, Bulgaria’s culture had achieved dominance.

Manuel Komnenos Doukas avoided the captivity suffered by his family members and brother’s generals and reigned for seven years in a somewhat ambiguous capacity as Asan’s son-in-law in Thessaloniki. Numismatic evidence suggests that Thessaloniki, likely shortly after the battle, minted coins bearing the Slavonic legend of Tsar John Asan.⁸²⁴ Around 1235/36 Manuel, who had governed Thessaly since 1227 and was already invested with the title of *despotes*, assumed the title of emperor.⁸²⁵ Both the form and chronology of Manuel’s reign in Thessaloniki is contested. It appears likely that Manuel ruled in his brother’s name until late 1234 when Theodore was blinded in Bulgarian captivity. Theodore’s mutilation was the price for a Bulgarian-Nikaian alliance in the prelude to the unsuccessful joint siege of Latin Constantinople from 1235–1236.⁸²⁶ Between these larger powers Manuel appears to have quietly noted that Theodore’s blinding had made him ineligible to rule and thus assumed the imperial title, most likely without a coronation; it was probably in spring 1235 that he began minting the imperial issue of his coinage in Thessaloniki.⁸²⁷

In the meantime, with the direct annexation of Theodore’s northern territories, Asanid Bulgaria pivoted in its religious position. Since 1203 Bulgaria had been a pragmatically Catholic kingdom with a papally-appointed archbishop. Regrettably, the degree to which Bulgaria culturally ‘catholicised’ in the near thirty-year-period since 1203 is an argument almost without

⁸²⁴ *DOC*, 4.2, pp.639-643.

⁸²⁵ When Manuel received the title of *despotes* is contested. The Episkopi inscription would suggest earlier than Brendan Osswald’s and Rudolf Stefec’s dates of 1227-1228, although the styling of *despotes* is sometimes not that of a title. Rudolf Stefec, ‘Beiträge zur Urkundentätigkeit epirotischer Herrscher in den Jahren 1205-1318,’ *Néa Póμη*, 11 (2014), pp 249-370, p. 279; Brendan Osswald, ‘Deux notes de titulature relatives à l’empire de Thessalonique et au despotat d’Épire (xiiiie siècle),’ *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 145.2 (2022), pp.775-822.

⁸²⁶ John Langdon, ‘The Forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian Assault and Siege of Constantinople, 1235-1236, and the Breakup of the *entente cordiale* between John III Ducas Vatatzes and John Asen II in 1236 as Background to the Genesis of the Hohenstaufen-Vatatzes Alliance of 1242,’ in: *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton Anastos*, (Malibu: 1985), pp.105-136.

⁸²⁷ Evidence that Manuel was still *despotes* in Theodore’s name is supported by the *Semeioma* of 1232, dated to the fifth indiction, which calls on continued support for ‘our holy emperor Theodore.’ See Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ‘Περὶ συνοικισμοῦ p.455; Redated by Osswald, ‘Deux notes,’ pp.775-822; Hendy, *DOC*, 4.2, pp.566-567.

sources.⁸²⁸ Peaceful relations between Bulgaria and the Latin Empire had prevailed in most of Boril's reign (1207–1218) but with the death of Henry of Flanders in 1216 Bulgaria began to fall out of the Latin orbit, beginning with the 1217 torture and murder of Bishop William of Philippi taken by Bulgarians as he celebrated Mass.⁸²⁹ John Asan's reign, begun by deposing Boril, long suffered the loss of territory to Epiros until the short-lived alliance with Theodore in 1227 was ended in 1230. The surprise victory at Klokotnitsa placed Bulgaria in the anomalous position of a Catholic power reigning over multiple Orthodox peoples as far as the Adriatic Sea.⁸³⁰ Thereafter, Bulgaria's realignment with Orthodoxy after thirty years came swiftly. It began the month after Klokotnitsa when John Asan made a triumphal visit to Mt. Athos that echoed a very familiar almost commonly Byzantine Balkan tune.⁸³¹ In a Slavonic chrysobull written in imperial red ink that elegantly captures the shared heritage of the Bulgarian and Greek states Asan wrote:

'My tsardom willed to grant to the holy monastery of the most holy Mother of God called Vatopedi, which is situated in the Holy Mountain, the village called Semalto, which is in the province of Serres, so that this monastery owns and rules over the village with its people and all its customary rights, and *stasi*, and appurtenances, and revenues, with a sovereign and unalienable power for as long as my tsardom lives.

As for those sent out by my tsardom at all times to collect tribute and do what needs to be done for my tsardom, that is, *practors*, *sevasts*, *doukes*, *katepans*, one-tenth tax collectors, *psars*, *apokrisiaries*, *apodoharies*, and all others from small to great, none of them should have power to enter, nay, even set foot in the properties of this holy monastery... April [1230].

Asan, Tsar of the Bulgarians and the Greeks.
[АСЪН : ЦРЪ : БАГАР[Ъ]М : И ГРЪК[Ъ]М]⁸³²

The expanding Bulgarian regime was designed to present continuity to the *Dytikoi* people based on shared religious and cultural heritage. Asan retained Theodore's governing structure of officials, taxation, and titles, and Akropolites confirms this charter was part of a broader policy of continuity.⁸³³ It was the direction of power that had shifted. After 1230 a huge increase of coin finds in Bulgaria bearing Manuel's name (when compared to Theodore's) strongly suggests Thessaloniki's financial dependency and the direction of its taxation north.⁸³⁴

⁸²⁸ The papacy was excised from Boril's *Synodikon* §41 by later authors but letters preserved in the Vatican attest to their alliance. See Madgearu, *The Asanids*, p.209-212.

⁸²⁹ *Bellarium Hellenicum*, §66.

⁸³⁰ Francesco Dall'Aglio, 'Crusading in a Nearer East: The Balkan Politics of Honorius III and Gregory IX (1221-1241),' *La Papauté et les croisades*, (London: 2011), pp.173-179; Madgearu, *The Asanids*, pp.120-121; See also the 1230 charter with Dubrovnik/Ragusa signed 'Asan, Tsar of Bulgarians and Greeks,' Gregory Iliinskij, *Gramoti bolgarskih tsarej*, (London: 1970), trans. Petkov, *Voices*, pp.382-483.

⁸³¹ Stankovic, 'Importance of Being Roman,' pp.49-54.

⁸³² Michael Laskaris, *Vatopedskata gramota na car Ivan Asenja II [The Vatopedi document of the Tsar Ivan Asen II]*, (Sofia: 1930), p.5, adapted trans. Petkov, *Voices*, pp.481-482, here standardising placenames and titles. For the document's description see Constantinos Nihoritits, 'The Slavonic Archive,' *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi*, (Mt. Athos: 1998), II, p.633.

⁸³³ See Akropolites, §25, trans. Macrides, p.179.

⁸³⁴ Konstantin Dochev, *Moneti i parichno obrushtenie v Turnovo (XII -XIV v.)*, (Veliko Turnovo: 1992), pp.52-56.

The inversion of power, of a dominant alloglot *ethnos*, was fully tolerated by Manuel's government for barely a year. While Slavonic and Bulgarian culture were celebrated when it aligned with Greek and could be presented as subordinate and derived as in the previous regime, the dominance of Asan was its almost complete antithesis.

3.14. Manuel's Ecclesiastical Capitulation

The Greek narrative sources, as with Theodore, provide only hostile coverage of Manuel's reign. Rather than manipulate his ethnic character they insult his authority and the prestige of his personal *genos*. Before Theodore's 1237 release Akropolites records two episodes of Manuel's reign, his installation after Klokotnitsa, and a 1235 visit of Nikaian ambassadors. Both scenes sought to embarrass him. The first remarks that Manuel survived the battle merely 'having fled.' The second, after the spring 1235 assumption of titles of *basileus* and *despotes*, jeered the limited extent of the Emperor of Thessaloniki's authority. In comparison to the omnipotence of Christ who also used these titles, Manuel reigned over a single city. Akropolites continually mocks the regime, creating an image of a debased Manuel ruling only by Bulgarian sufferance. Three times it is repeated that Manuel's wife the Empress Maria was John Asan's daughter 'born from a concubine' [ἐκ παλλακῆς ἐκείνῳ γεγέννηται].⁸³⁵ This should certainly be considered a further attack upon the ignobility of Manuel's court, and a not dissimilar insult to Germanos' description of sin-filled Constantinople as home to the offspring of Rus and Arab 'slave-girls' (see p.119). Both Ephraim and Skoutariotes, less partisan to Michael VIII, omitted this description.⁸³⁶

The details of Manuel's policies are known primarily through letters, and his early reign lacks the most detail.⁸³⁷ It seems that sponsored syncretism of Greek and Bulgarian culture, a key aspect of Theodore's reign, was absent from Manuel's, who seems never to have gained the allegiance of Demetrios Chomatenos. The conventional chronology, which we do not challenge, theorised that Manuel, restricted to Thessaloniki, was in the aftermath of Klokotnitsa initially fully subservient to the Bulgarians. John Asan soon made a symbolic visit to Mt. Athos marching Bulgarian power into the hinterland of Thessaloniki and the heart of Orthodoxy. It is a fair assumption that Manuel, lacking Theodore's military and manpower, was entirely cowed.⁸³⁸ However, by late 1231 Asan's attempt to subordinate the Thessalonian church to Turnovo pushed him too far. Asan attempted to fill the metropolitan bishopric of Thessaloniki – which had probably stood vacant since Mesopotamites had gone into exile in 1225 – with a

⁸³⁵ Akropolites, §25, 26, 38, trans. Macrides pp.178-184, 106-107. For the argument that Anna Asan is not a concubine and rather her father's legitimate daughter from a previous wife, see Ivan Bozhilov, *Familijata na Asenevci (1186-1460), Genealogija i prosopografija* (Sofia:1985), pp.86-7, 100-1.

⁸³⁶ Ephraim, §8107-8125, Skoutariotes, p.475.11-17.

⁸³⁷For Manuel's religious position and policies see commentary to his letters in Stefec, 'Beiträge' §§7, 8, 9; as well as Eduard Kurtz, 'Christophoros von Ankyra als Exarch des Patriarchen Germanos II,' *BZ*, 16 (1907), pp.120-142; Osswald, *L'Épire du treizième au quinzième siècle*, pp.71-72; eadem 'Deux Notes,' pp.775-822; Bredenkamp, *Empire of Thessaloniki*, pp.199-243; Alkimini Stavridou-Zafraka, 'Η Αυτοκρατορία της Θεσσαλονίκης επί Μανουήλ Δούκα (1230-1237). Η εξωτερική πολιτική,' *ΙΓ' Πανελλήνιο Ιστορικό Συνέδριο (29-31 Μαΐου 1992). Πρακτικά*, (Thessaloniki: 1993), pp.157-178.

⁸³⁸ In preparation for the 1235 siege John Asan's negotiations with Nikaia he had two aims. Firstly, recognition of his title as 'Emperor' and secondly, the restoration of a Bulgarian Patriarch of Turnovo who would crown his heirs. Manuel appeared rather meekly in these negotiations. Where the Bulgarian was recognised as 'Πανσευσεβέστατος βασιλεὺς', Manuel was merely the 'beloved son-in-law' [περιπόθητος γαμβρός] of the Asanid Emperor. Kurtz, 'Christophoros von Ankyra,' p.141; Gastgeber, "'Epiros Dossier,'" p.69, 'πανυψηλότατος δεσπότης καὶ βασιλεὺς καὶ περιπόθητος γαμβρὸς τῆς βασιλείας σου'.

Bulgarian, one Michael Pratanos.⁸³⁹ If Pratanos' incumbency of the office was on the same scale as Chomatenos' appointment in Bulgaria in 1216, then we might presume a similar installation of a Bulgarian retinue filling the lower offices of the Epirote Church with appointees loyal to Asan. While we know of only one case of this, the bishopric of Hierissos near the borders of Mt. Athos, it seems likely there were more.⁸⁴⁰ In protest, Manuel undertook a diplomatic rapprochement with both Nikaia and Rome, sending letters to Germanos II and to Pope Gregory IX.

This inversion of Theodore's Greek-led Bulgarian Church into John Asan's Bulgarian-led Church in Greece was unpopular in Thessaloniki and is credited with causing the major concession of Manuel's reign. At the end of 1231 while still reigning merely as Theodore's *despotes*, Manuel offered to end the schism between Epiros and Nikaia and place the Western Church under the ostensible authority of the Nikaian Patriarch.⁸⁴¹ Manuel wrote to Patriarch Germanos in a highly penitent letter that announced not only an end to the schism but inverted the language of separation into one of parity and kinship. Manuel announced that in pursuit of friendship with our 'mighty *gambros* John Doukas, Emperor of the Romans' he would 'renounce our many rights... to end divisions amongst *we* Romans [Πειθόμεθα τοίνυν και πολλά τῶν ἀνηκόντων... ἡμῖν δικαίων ἀφελεῖν τὸ τῆς διαστάσεως ὄνειδος ἐξ ἡμῶν τῶν Ῥωμαίων]."⁸⁴² While not a complete reversal of Theodore's regime, it was close. Manuel expressed a wish to maintain the self-appointed autocephaly of the Epirote Church in his first letter, but rapidly conceded Chomatenos' role.⁸⁴³ Meanwhile the recognition of a separate Roman Emperor in Nikaia, especially one that professed a kinship through marriage, church, and ethnonym, 'we Romans', was in complete conflict with the exclusivity of the oaths of recognition in the *homologia* of 1227. It marked an effective collapse of the Epirote position.

The continued epistolary exchange prompted Christopher, the Metropolitan of Ankyra, to be dispatched as patriarchal *Exarchos to the West* to enforce unity and preside over a synod in Thessaloniki in 1232/33.⁸⁴⁴ Germanos II was unyielding in victory, and Christopher began the practice of breaking apart the Epirote Church, attaching some regions to Nikaia while recognising anything north of Thrace as belonging to Bulgaria. Each elevation of a western office was a knife to the ambitions of Epiros. It also further delineated the church along ethno-linguistic boundaries. In 1232/33, the result was achieved in a letter from Manuel to Germanos as contrite and submissive as it was to prove short-lived. Manuel announced the complete 'defeat' of the West. The letter shows the definite influence of Nikaian ideology, likely due to the presence of the *Exarchos* in Thessaloniki, and once more framed Byzantine fragmentation as the disunited tribes of Israel. Therefore, the letter declared that time of conflict ended for

⁸³⁹ Philip Meyer, *Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster*, Pratanos at §VIII pp.187-189; p.188, II, 7-17; Bredenkamp, *Empire of Thessaloniki*, pp.202-203.

⁸⁴⁰ Meyer, *Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster*, §VIII, pp.187-189.

⁸⁴¹ For the most recent and comprehensive treatment of the 1232 reunion of the churches see Christian Gastgeber, 'Das "Epiros"-Dossier im Codex Vindobonensis theologicus graecus 276. Patriarch Germanos II. und the Union with the griechischen Church of Epiros (1232/33). Edition und sprachlich-textpragmatische Untersuchung,' *JÖB*, 66 (2016), pp.61-110; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, pp.134-158; Tarnanidis, 'Byzantine-Bulgarian Ecclesiastical Relations,' pp.28-52.

⁸⁴² Stefec, 'Beiträge,' §7, p.319.20-27. Vind. Theol. gr. 276 beginning under the title 'Πιπτάκιον τοῦ πανευτυχεστάτου δεσπότης κυρ Μανουήλ τοῦ Δοῦκα πρὸς τὸν παναγιώτατον και οἰκουμηνικὸν πατριάρχην κυρ Γερμανόν.' This letter's implications divide scholarship. Stefec viewed it as Manuel surrendering his title as emperor, *ibid.*, pp.318-323; Osswald theorises it as simply the right to ecclesiastical independence. Osswald, 'Deux notes,' pp.775-800.

⁸⁴³ Stefec, 'Beiträge,' §7, pp.319-320.49-56.

⁸⁴⁴ Angold, *Germanos II*, pp.52-55; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, p.94.

now ‘from a clash between Ephraim and Judea comes one people, one voice praising the lord’ as Manuel conceded the independence of his church.⁸⁴⁵

‘Behold the astounding victory of your holiness, for lo you have conquered even the West, that which none of your predecessors residing in Nikaia could do.

εὗγε γὰρ τῆ σῆ ἀγιότητι τῆς πανυπερλάμπρου νίκης, ἐπεὶ νενίκηκας ἰδοὺ καὶ τὴν δύσιν, ἦν οὐδεὶς τῶν πρὸ σοῦ καθιδρυθέντων ἐν τῆ Νικαίᾳ νενίκηκεν.’⁸⁴⁶

However, Manuel’s position as ruler of Epiros, as well as the popularity of these decisions appears somewhat contentious. It is likely that the act of ‘surrender’ estranged Manuel from the networks of *Dytikoi* bishops who had most ardently supported his predecessor. At the synod convened in Thessaloniki Bardanes, not Chomatenos or Apokaukos, became the voice for Manuel’s conciliation and it appears the two senior bishops of the realm were absent in protest.⁸⁴⁷ It has been proposed that until Theodore’s blinding in late 1234 both Apokaukos and Chomatenos had continued to issue documents in Theodore’s name.⁸⁴⁸ Even Bardanes, who acted as Manuel’s ambassador and was the only one of the trio to survive in office until 1237, openly rejoiced at Theodore’s return that year and Manuel’s fall from power.⁸⁴⁹

The bolster given to the Nikaian Patriarchate by Theodore’s defeat and Manuel’s capitulation cannot be overestimated. With only the vaguest promises on their behalf the ‘Church of the Greeks,’ as Germanos henceforth referred to it, was reunited. The ‘Ecumenical’ title they had claimed since Manuel Sarantenos in the 1210s was now pressed. Analogous to the collapse of the Epirote Church was Germanos’ initiation of a series of ecumenical dialogues with a group of papally-deputised Franciscans.⁸⁵⁰ In those negotiations Germanos framed his leadership of

⁸⁴⁵ Stefec, ‘Beiträge,’ §8, p.324.19-21. ‘οὐκέτι γοῦ Ἐφραὶμ καὶ Ἰούδας οὐδὲ καταφάγεται οὗτος ἐκεῖνον καὶ ἐκεῖνος τοῦτον, ἀλλ’ εἰς λαὸς ὁ ἐξ Ἰακῶβ, αἰνουνρες ὁμοστώμως καὶ εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεὸν.’

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., §8, p.324.28-30.

⁸⁴⁷ Bardanes wrote:

‘We gathered together to complete the sacred synod except for one, two or perhaps three, who were detained for a rational reason.

‘Convenimus itaque in unum alius aliunde et omnes ad sacri coetus complementum, except uno aut altero vel fortasse tertio; qui rationabili detenti sunt causa.’

See Kurtz, ‘Christophoros,’ §2, p.134.8-10; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, pp.90-92. Bredenkamp is the most insistent of continued ‘national political feelings’ which rallied to Michael II in Arta, see *Empire of Thessaloniki*, pp.239-242. While there is little explicit evidence to support such a claim, continued conflict should be considered. Demetrios Chomatenos however wrote a highly extended defence of Epiros and his actions in a letter c.1232 to Germanos based on examples of *oikonomia* which protested his further demotion but ultimately achieved little. See Chomatenos, *PD*, §150, pp.433-441; Angold, *Germanos II*, p.52; Karpozilos, *Controversy*, p.93.

⁸⁴⁸ Apokaukos demonstrated this in the 1232 *Semeioma*, Kerameus, ‘Περὶ συνοικισμοῦ’ pp.454-455; Lambropoulos, §45, p.298; Chomatenos was more ambiguous, see Prinzing, *PD*, §106, commentary p. 209-218*, n.82 where from 1234, but potentially as late as 1236, Chomatenos viewed Theodore to still be the imperial authority and Manuel merely his despotic representative; Osswald, ‘Deux notes,’ pp.777-780.

⁸⁴⁹ George Bardanes’ letter §25 to an unknown recipient read:

‘I have one remaining comfort, Lord Emperor Theodore on his return from captivity is showing me the same benevolence and affection of old.

Unum vero mihi tantum relictum est solatium, domini Theodori imperatoris e captivitate reversi antiqua erga me benevolentia et dilectio.’

Johannes Hoeck, Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto, Abt von Casole Studia Patristica et Byzantina*, 11, (Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal: 1965), §25, p.228.23-25. For a summary of this letter see Galone, *Γεώργιος Βαρδάνης*, p.361 (Latin letter §22). Attesting Bardanes’ duties as Manuel’s ambassador and envoy to Italy see *ibid.*, Latin letters §§16, 17, 18.

⁸⁵⁰ For the ‘Church of the Greeks, [ἡ τῶν Γραικῶν ἐκκλησία]’ see Arampatzis, ‘The Unpublished Letter,’ p.377.111, trans. Brubaker, *Disputatio*, pp.115-20, here p.120; *Regestes*, IV, 1257.

the Orthodox Church. He described: ‘We Greeks [as the] mother, unshaken in the ancient Orthodoxy [...] of many *ethne* of ‘the Ethiopians, all the Syrians, to the north the most valiant Iberians, the Asags, the Laz, the Alans, the Goths, the Khazars, the innumerable Russian *panspermia*, and the conquering *basileia* of the Bulgarians.’⁸⁵¹ The inclusion of these peoples, paying particular attention to their military virtues, appears as a scarcely-veiled threat from Germanos. He was listing the peoples he could hypothetically call upon to enforce his will in parallel to how the papacy had acted since the Crusades began. In 1232 these peoples were in communion with one another, they had curtailed Theodore, and Bulgaria (briefly) stood as a conquering ally of Germanos’ formerly sidelined Patriarchate. The allied image demonstrates a tremendous shift following Theodore’s collapse and Manuel’s capitulation.

3.15. The Epirote Inheritance of John II Asan

The legacy of Theodore inherited by the enlarged Bulgarian Empire can be detected through both inference and direct means. Few textual sources detail the dynamics of the subordinate relationship between Epirote Thessaloniki beneath Bulgarian Turnovo. One of the few, and by far the most fantastical, is the Flemish rhyming chronicle of Philippe Mouskés (c.1240) which, similar to Germanos above, depicted a great coalition of Orthodox powers gathering for the siege of Constantinople in 1235.⁸⁵² That alliance contained:

‘But Vatace and King Ausen
Micalis and the Cumans
and also the Vlachs forthwith
and Toldre, a powerful man,
of whom many have heard,
came to Constantinople
the imperial, the noble city,
to besiege King Jehan.’

Mais Vatace et li rois Ausens
Li Micalis et li Coumain,
Et li Blac ausi tout de plain
Et li Toldres, uns om poisans
L’oïrent dire aus ne sai quans;
Venut sont viers Costantinoble
L’empérial cité la noble,
Pour le roi Jehan asségier.’⁸⁵³

An army of John III Vatatzes, John Asan, the Christianised Cumans, a young Michael leading the Cumans,⁸⁵⁴ and a presumably still-recently blinded Theodore [Toldre] Komnenos Doukas, offers a somewhat marvellous mosaic of the enemies of the besieged Latin Emperor John of

⁸⁵¹ Arampatzis, ‘Unpublished letter,’ p.377, trans. Brubaker p.120. The Russian *panspermia*, seemingly a reference to the many types of wild peoples to the extreme north is a noteworthy positive, or at least neutral, usage of what is otherwise a distinctly negative term.

⁸⁵² Philippe Mouskés, ed. Frédéric De Reiffenberg, 2 vols., *Chronique rimée de Philippe Mouskés, évêque de Tournay au treizième siècle, publiée (pour la première fois avec des préliminaires, un commentaire et des appendices) par le Baron de Reiffenberg*, (Brussels: 1845).

⁸⁵³ Mouskés, II pp.613-614, §29039-29046, trans. Madgearu, *The Asanids*, pp.217-218; Attila Bárány, ‘King Andrew II of Hungary in Philippe Mouskés’ Chronique rimée,’ in: *Byzance et l’Occident. Rencontre de l’Est et de l’Ouest*, ed. Emese Egedi-Kovács, (Budapest: 2013), pp.27-45.

⁸⁵⁴ Either Michael Asan or Michael II Komnenos Doukas is possible.

Brienne (1229–1237). We should note the attention paid to Theodore, and the claim that he was apparently well-known in the West. Akropolites claimed that following his capture Asan ‘treated [Theodore] well... for a long time [ἐφιλοφρονεῖτο... ἐπὶ πολὺ].’ The above evidence however suggests something different. Mouskés’ rhyming chronicle is the only evidence for what we otherwise have to suppose, this being that as Asan annexed his empire, the Bulgarian was physically bringing a captive and humiliated Theodore with him on campaign.

Epigraphic material demonstrates certain developments to Bulgarian ideology. Increasingly after Klokotnitsa John Asan began to style himself as Tsar of a collection of peoples. The Forty Martyrs columnal inscription, dated to shortly after the 1230 battle itself, should be sequenced first. It styles the ruler singularly as ‘John Asan, in Christ God faithful emperor [Tsar] and autocrat of the Bulgarians’ while simultaneously positioning himself as ruler of a *Romania* formed of ‘Serb’, ‘Albanian’, and ‘Greek’ regions, (pp.202-203). A year later at the fortress of Stanimaka (Asanovgrad) John Asan was projecting an ideology of multiple lands, naming the Bulgarians and the Greeks but not limited to them:

‘In the year 6379 [1231], fourth indiction, I, Asan, from God elevated emperor [tsar] of the Bulgarians and the Greeks, as well as of other countries, installed *sevast* Alexios and built this fortress.’⁸⁵⁵

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Bulgaria’s assumption of Epiros, and what that meant for later Byzantine writers, was the inheritance of the ideology of a broadly defined ‘Western’ Emperor. The re-employment of this ideology can be seen in numerous examples of both textual and material evidence. The term appeared repeatedly during negotiations for a settlement and alliance between John Asan as Emperor of the Balkans and John III Vatatzes of Anatolia. The key demand of the Bulgarian Empire in exchange for their assistance assaulting Constantinople was the restoration of an Orthodox Bulgarian Patriarchate, an objective they achieved in 1235. The two emperors sealed the pact with a marriage between Elena Asanid and the future Theodore II Laskaris. It is significant that at this juncture we at last have narratives to balance Akropolites. Two sources provide very short narratives of these negotiations: the *Story of the Restoration of the Bulgarian Patriarchate*,⁸⁵⁶ and the *Life of Joakim*,⁸⁵⁷ the first patriarch of the restored office in Bulgaria (1235–1236), and in both of them we find the image of a ‘Western’ empire.

In the *Restoration of the Bulgarian Patriarchate* a narrative survives in both a fourteenth-century Slavonic version and a later Athonite version in Greek. The Greek entitled ‘When the *basileia* of John Asan reigned over Zagora and many *kastra* of the Romans,’ and contains multiple historical inaccuracies.⁸⁵⁸ The wrong patriarch is named, Manuel Sarantenos rather than Germanos II and it gives the name of the Bulgarian Tsar as Kaliman (1241–1246), John

⁸⁵⁵ Petkov, *Voices*, p.426.

⁸⁵⁶ The *Restoration* survives in Slavonic - where it was interpolated into a version of Boril’s *Synodikon* at section §112 - see Mikhail Popruzhenko ed., *Sinodik Tsaria Borila* (Sofia: 1928), §112-117, pp.82-87; and Greek: Philipp Mayer, *Die Haupturkunde für die Geschichte der Athosklöster* (Leipzig: 1894), pp.187-9, trans. of the Greek in Petkov, *Voices*, pp.436-438; The Greek *Restoration* accredits Akropolites and supplies additional information, see p.189.32-32. Angelov, ‘Prosopography,’ p.112, n.38.

⁸⁵⁷ Ivan Snegarov, ‘Neizdadeni Starobalgarski zhitija,’ *Godishnik Na Duhovnata Akademija "Sv. Kliment Ohridski"*, 3 (1954), pp.166-8, trans. Petkov, *Voices*, pp.285-287, with incorrect reference. For older Bulgarian bibliography see Angelov, ‘Prosopography,’ pp.111-112, n.40.

⁸⁵⁸ Mayer, *Die Haupturkunde* pp.187.31-35, ‘Ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας Ἀσάνη κυρίου Ἰωάννου, τοῦ βασιλευδόντος κατὰ τὴν Ζαγορὰν καὶ κρατήσαντος καὶ πολλὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων κάστρη, γέγονε ἡ ῥηθησομένη πράξις.’

Asan's son and successor.⁸⁵⁹ While the account avoids any ethnonym, it refers to geopolitical emperors making a joint decision to install Manuel Disypatos as Metropolitan of Thessaloniki in 1235.⁸⁶⁰ The Slavonic text is considerably more accurate and uses several terms in translation which are, as Angelov demonstrated, strikingly current in contexts particularly familiar to this thesis. They demonstrate a common parlance of the Bulgarian ideology inherited from Epiros.⁸⁶¹ When the bishops gathered for Joakim's acclamation as patriarch, it was with the consent of the 'Eastern Tsar' and collective decision of 'all the Eastern metropolitans, archbishops, and men of the holy mountain' [мітрополиты же ѿ архієп(ис)копы єпніскопы же ѿ вѣсчѣстныа мнихы с(вѣ)тыа горы].⁸⁶² The two monarchs were then presented as a balanced pair, two halves of Orthodox *Romania* split between two tsars [цѣсарѣи], Vatatzes as the 'Eastern' Tsar and Asan as the 'Western'.⁸⁶³

In the fourteenth-century Slavonic *Life of Joakim* we can push further the continued theory of inherited ideological spatialisation. That source's author provides a clear demonstration of a geo-cultural structure and a religious framing that following Epiros' subordination, Bulgaria had inherited the title of 'the West':

'The high priests of the entire Bulgarian land came together at a council, seeking to find someone fitting the rank of highest priest and found . . . [folio missing]. With great joy the tsar returned to his reigning city of Turnovo. *All the high priests of the West* [архієреи же вси западнии] installed the patriarch on the see of the great patriarchate of Tsargrad Turnovo.'⁸⁶⁴

In this narration of the first appointment of a patriarch in Bulgaria since 1018 this complete reversal of Chomatenos' ambitions is presented as the Turnovo Bulgarian patriarchate becoming the new centre of a 'Western' Church. Unanswerable questions exist regarding who and how many bishops were present, were they installed by Theodore and Chomatenos or by the Asanids, and how many continued to side with a Balkan patriarchate over an Anatolian? These fragmentary references, an inherent issue with Bulgarian material, are our only source of knowledge about continued usage of the Epirote Empire's recognisable language of pluralism couched in geopolitics. A continued 'Western' Church under Bulgarian leadership offers a further possible source. Chomatenos' works, both legal and hagiographical, were copied either within his own incumbency or those of his successors. The following Archbishops of Ohrid, John of Bulgaria and potentially one Sergius, are likely contenders to have continued efforts at Balkan ethnic syncretism where emphasising dual heritage served a continued purpose.⁸⁶⁵ However, presently lacking further research upon the manuscript transmission of the *Ohrid Legend* any conclusive judgements remain uncertain.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., p.188.18, 22.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid. Disypatos' installation should be dated to 1258; Jovanović, *Michael VIII and the Publics*, p.190.

⁸⁶¹ Angelov, 'Prosopography,' pp.111-112.

⁸⁶² Popruzhenko, *Sinodik*, p.86.

⁸⁶³ Ibid., Given in the dative [цѣсарѣемъ].

⁸⁶⁴ Snegarov, 'Neizdadeni Starobalgarski zhitija,' pp.166-8, trans. Petkov, *Voices*, pp.285-287.

⁸⁶⁵ We lack accurate dates for Chomatenos' successors after 1236. Both names are known from Boril's Synodikon, updated after the 1235 restoration, and afterwards. Archbishop John of Bulgaria was appointed in 1241 and held office until 1248/50 when he fled to Nikaian Thessaloniki. For his biography see Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, p.66n.137. Blemmydes speaks of being offered the archbishopric during a period of vacancy c.1250, before it was occupied by Constantine Kabasilas c.1259 during the Palaiologan expansion, see Blemmydes, *A Partial Account*, p.80; Popruzhenko, *Sinodik*, p.93, §158, trans. Petkov, *Voices*, p.260. Sergius is a more tentative figure.

The agency of the Greek element within this process of what Akropolites deemed Bulgarisation, but in many respects were just continuity, can be detected in various donor portraits. These attest to the active marital policies of the Komnenoi-Doukai and the Asanids. Both dynasties became more intertwined as part of the conditions for Theodore Komnenos Doukas' release. Having been blinded after a failed conspiracy, and presumably now well into his fifties, Theodore did not seek the throne again. Instead he secured Thessaloniki for his sons, proclaiming them emperors, and ruled by proxy. Bulgarian suzerainty for Epiros' Macedonian domains continued through a new marriage alliance.⁸⁶⁶ It was a shadow of the empire that had been, lacking the ambition and erudition of earlier Constantinopolitan-educated bishops, but in kinship and familial memory the Western Roman Empire of Epiros lived on. In 1237 Tsar John Asan married Eirene Doukaina and with her fathered three children, Michael, Theodora, and Maria. This Michael Asan ruled Bulgaria as a child from 1246–1256 and his court presented him as a dual heir to both Bulgaria and Epiros. Theodore was invoked specifically, and through him the Komnenoi. At the Church of the Taxiarchs in Kastoria, when the city was under Bulgarian rule following their expansion after Klokotnitsa, the young Tsar Michael and his mother Eirene (who was later buried within) were presented in Greek as donors. The dedication reads:

‘Prayer of the servant of God, Michael Asan, son of the great *basileus* Asan, and his mother Eirene, daughter of Theodore Komnenos.

+ Δέησις τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ Μι[χαήλ Ἀσάνη, υἱοῦ τοῦ] μεγάλου βασιλέως [Ἀ]σάνη, και, τῆς μητρός [αὐτοῦ] Εἰρήνης Θ[εοδώρου] Κομνηνοῦ.⁸⁶⁷

The Greek invocation of Michael's father 'the great *basileus* Asan' and through Eirene his maternal grandfather 'Theodore Komnenos,' indicates a dual heritage to the reader. Theodore's hybrid legacy was remembered and embraced in Bulgaria and his lineage had been inherited by the Tsar. The continued presence of Theodore's daughter ensured a continued Epirote influence in Bulgaria at a royal dynastic level and in this fusion of peoples we could perhaps read that Epiros and Bulgaria had become one.

The Kastoria donor portrait is only one of multiple instances when the two peoples, Greek and Bulgarian, were intrinsically linked. At the 1227 Artan synod when Theodore had become an Emperor, he had been elected by a 'West,' formed of 'Western metropolitans, archbishops and all of us bishops,' but most notably 'under the autocephalous Archbishop of Bulgaria.'⁸⁶⁸ History had ultimately caught up and finally united Byzantine Bulgaria with Bulgaria. Chomatenos and Apokaukos had always been careful to distinguish the Archbishopric of Ohrid from Turnovo using terms such as 'Zagora' or 'from the Haimos Mountains,' but within the ethnonym of their leadership vulnerability had always lain. Looking back from the 1250s and 1260s when the Bulgarians had once more become a Byzantine enemy, the continued profession of Theodore Komnenos Doukas and his daughter Eirene as mother of the Bulgarian Tsar undoubtedly helped conflate terms which had been left deliberately ambiguous.

⁸⁶⁶ Osswald, *L'Empire*, pp.75-78.

⁸⁶⁷ Inscription, with alternative readings, taken from Eugenia Drakopoulou, *Η Πόλη της Καστοριάς Τη Βυζαντινή Και Μεταβυζαντινή Εποχή (12ος - 16ος Αι.)*, (Athens: 1997), pp.77-78; cf. Ian Mladjov, 'The children of Ivan Asen II and Eirēnē Komnēnē: contribution to the prosopography of medieval Bulgaria.' *Bulgaria Mediaevalis*, 3 (2012), pp.485-500.

⁸⁶⁸ Apokaukos, 'Epirotica,' §26, p.288.21-23. Address taken from Apokaukos' 1227 proclamation letter to Nikaia. 'δυτικοῖς μητροπολίταις καὶ ἀρχιεπισκόποις καὶ τοῖς ὑφ' ἡμᾶς ἐπισκόποις, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τῇ κατὰ Βουλγαρίαν αὐτοκεφάλῃ ἀρχιερατικῇ ἐξουσίᾳ.'; Lambropoulos, §15.



Figure 27. Church of the Taxiarchs, Kastoria. Archangel Michael flanked by Tsar Michael Asan (l.) and Eirene Komnene Doukaina (r). Photo taken by author; 14/09/2024.

3.16. Conclusion

To conclude this examination of the Epirote Roman Empire's distortion into Bulgaria, we have asserted that little about Epiros' imperial ideology was innovative. It was a Komnenian state, attempting to rebuild a network of marriages at foreign courts, emphasising its nobility and dynastic descent. However, its conservatism was applied to a new world. The two halves of Byzantium were pulling apart, one defined by reemphasised linguistic identification, and the other by a shared heritage and religion. The entire milieu of the Balkans into which Epiros expanded was against the tide of their efforts. States defined by language were on the increase and linguistic snobbery was not absent from the private correspondence of the *Dytikoi* bishops.⁸⁶⁹ In their ecclesiastical administration and public religious ideology however, there was an attempt to turn back the clock and reassert the pan-Orthodox pluralism of previous centuries. It was starkly in contrast to the Nikaian effort, and Epiros' multi-ethnic state remained dependent upon the stability of two decades of military success.

Beyond the vagueness of the *Dytikoi* as 'Westerners', there was not a particularly strong spatial definition to their lands. The narratives presented were ecumenical (Orthodox), anti-Latin occupation certainly, yet engaging with the other Balkan powers. What has been presented is not in many ways the secession of a province or an age of innovation. Rather, it was the attempted revival and preservation of a multi-ethnic Byzantine Balkans that ultimately lost to a more Greek-centric narrative. Whereas the homogeneity of Nikaia became something essential to their ideology, as they positioned themselves as the sole heirs to the Constantinople of 1204, Epiros had a slower and more organic position. Essentially existent through bonds of kinship for its first decade, the expansion into Macedonia in 1216 reestablished Greek Orthodoxy in liminal lands and with an evangelical character. Certainly, this was aided by the three decades of Bulgarian Catholicism and the papacy where Epiros offered an alternative and an opposition. The presence of Bulgaria within the Epirote state is felt only sporadically. Within the church, that image of the ruler as a *Demagogue* - a New Moses- and of its archbishop as a new St. Clement, projected them both as dual leaders of a disparate and multi-lingual people spread across Macedonia. It made them ultimately the antithesis of the Nikaian state. The Epirotes themselves were a *panspermia* of *ethne* in its purest sense, though no extant *Dytikoi* source used the word. The struggle with Epiros, for all its dynastic claims and aristocratic lineages, can and perhaps should be seen then, as the struggle between a Greek Byzantium and an ecumenical one. When defeated it allowed for the exclusivity of ethno-spatial-linguistic narrative, which this thesis has traced since Constantinople in 1200, to resurge in force. When Nikaia triumphed, Hellenism won out over the pluralistic inclusion of Orthodox Christianity. The Archbishopric of Ohrid lost control of Serbia and Macedonia, the *Dytikoi* became a separate *genos*, the Angeloi branch of the Komnenoi-Doukai dynasty became barbarians, and Epiros became 'Bulgaria' – a foreign place.

A final conclusion should ask therefore, did the Epirote *Dytikoi* ever form part of Nikaia's rhetorical *panspermia* of *ethne*, the barbarous, displacing ethnic other? The answer is that the *panspermia* which multiple Byzantine authors from 1150 believed threatened or had brought ruin to Byzantium (and in particular the 'western *panspermia*') conjured by the twelfth-century poetry of Theodore Prodromos, intermittently reappeared in Palaiologan rhetoric. Epiros was never explicitly named and attempts at broad and unspecific condemnation, either the 1258 excommunication *tomos* or outright war in the 1260s, met with resistance. In those contexts only by conflating their territory with Bulgaria could they become a part. Only one text written in the late thirteenth-century intimates this. An updated *Miracles of St. Demetrios* was written

⁸⁶⁹ Section 3.7, p.173.

by John Staurakios, chartophylax for the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki in 1284, and it indicates that within the local tradition of Palaiologan Thessaloniki, the Epirotes had become an element of the *panspermia* on their own ethnic identification. It was in a narrative where the Bulgarians were not just within the *panspermia*, they were the leaders of it.⁸⁷⁰

‘Then a mighty blow struck the Romans with the anger of God when they neglected his righteousness and let loose upon us the Latin rod [of punishment.] And first fell, (O judgement of God) the imperial city, highest and strongest, and its ruler fled, a wanderer straying from place to place. Riches and treasures [fell] to the enemy, Roman armies dismembered and scattered and were insignificant, so that to say it simply, affairs of the Romans were sickened unto death. And the soul of Rome so to speak was pitifully extinguished, all the body of lands and cities had died when the imperial lady and her handmaidens were taken captive.

Then the beasts of the earth, the *ethnarchs* fell upon part [of the land], just like in the time of the most imperial Leon, lord of Rome, when he was weakened. They crept out of their caves to snarl at Rome and they hunted, wounded, ravaged and bit them.⁸⁷¹ And like before, just as Gebal and Amon (Psalms: 83:7) arranged against the sons of Israel, was as a *panspermia* of all *ethne* [πανσπερμία ἔθνους παντός], with their leader John of the Bulgarians, or rather Ioannitsa [Kaloyan] as he is known until now. This man marched unhindered against the Romans and crossing Macedonia made a desolation of all. He devastated lands, stormed and razed every fortress to its foundations, plundering, looting, and deporting entire populations, resettling them along the banks of the Danube. In short, wherever he advanced, he left desolation in his wake. They assaulted Thessaloniki with uncontrollable strength, wielding an army more numerous than the sands; comprised of Bulgarians, of nomadic hordes, Skythians, Khazars, Romans, Albanians, and the Rus. A *panspermia* of all *gene* [πανσπερμίαν παντός ἐκ γένους], as many as are born in the far-north, a Hydra or a Typhos with a hundred heads, or a hundred-handed giant or Titan or other beast.’

‘Γίνεται τῇ Ρωμαίων πλῆγῃ κραταιὰ ἐν τῷ παροργίσει τὸν Θεὸν καὶ ἀθετῆσαι καὶ παριδεῖν τὰ αὐτοῦ δικαίωματα καὶ ράβδον ἀφήσει καθ’ ἡμῶν τὴν λατινικὴν. Καὶ πρῶτα μὲν ἀλίσκεται, (ὦ Θεοῦ κριμάτων!) πόλις ἢ Βασιλεὺς, ὑψηλὴ καὶ κραταιὰ καὶ μετέωρος καὶ ὁ κρατῶν φυγὰς, ἀλήτης, τόπον ἐκ τόπου περιπλανώμενος· καὶ χρημάτων μὲν θησαυροὶ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς στρατεύματα δὲ τὰ ρωμαϊκὰ ἐσκυλμένα καὶ διεσκορπισμένα καὶ ἀνυπόστατα καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν, πρὸς φθορὰν ἐνόσει Ρωμαίοις τὰ πράγματα· καὶ δὴ τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς Ρωμαΐδος, ὡς οὕτως εἰπεῖν, ἀπεσβηκυίας οὕτως ἐλεεινῶς, ἅπαν τὸ σῶμα χωρῶν ὁμοῦ νενέκρωται καὶ τῶν πόλεων καὶ τῆς δεσποίνης αἰχμαλώτου γεγονυίας καὶ αἱ θεραπαινίδες τῇ τυραννίδι συναπηνέχθησαν.

Τότε δὴ τότε καὶ τὰ θηρία τῆς γῆς, αἱ κατὰ μέρος ἐθναρχαὶ τοῦ βασιλικωτάτου Λέοντος, ἄνακτός φημι τῆς Ρωμαΐδος, ἐξασθενήσαντος, τῶν οἰκείων φωλεῶν ἐξερπύσαντα καθυλάκτου τῆς Ρωμαΐδος, κατέτρεχον, ἐλύπουν, ἐπέρθουν, κατέδακνον, οὐ Γεβάλ καὶ Ἀμὼν καθάπερ πάλαι κατὰ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, ἀλλὰ πανσπερμία ἔθνους παντός, ὅτε καὶ τῶν Βουλγάρων ὁ τότε κρατῶν Ἰωάννης, Ἰωαννίτζην δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ φήμη

⁸⁷⁰Ivan Dujčev, ‘A quelle époque vécut l’hagiographe Jean Staurakios?’ *Analecta Bollandiana*, 100 (1982), pp.677-681; On Staurakios see Francesco Dall’Aglia, ‘The Bulgarian siege of Thessaloniki in 1207: between history and hagiography,’ *Eurasian Studies* 1.2 (2002), pp.263-282; Prinzing, *Die Bedeutung Bulgariens und Serbiens*, pp.84-85; Madgearu, *The Asanids*, p.168.

⁸⁷¹ Emperor Leo VI (886-912) suffered many defeats. During his reign Thessaloniki was sacked by the Arabs.

ἕως ἄρτι τοῦτον κατονομάζει. Οὗτος κατὰ πᾶσαν τοῦ κωλύοντος ἐρημίαν ἐκστρατεύει κατὰ Ρωμαίων καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν Μακεδόνων διαδραμών, χώρας ἀφανίζει, φρούρια πάντα πορθεῖ καὶ ἐδαφίζει ἐξ αὐτῶν κρηπίδων εἰς γῆν· προνομεύει, λεηλατεῖ, μετουκίζει τὸ πλῆθος ἅπαν καὶ παροχθίους ποταμῶ τῷ Ἰστρῶ ποιεῖ καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν πᾶσαν ὅσῃν ἐπέδραμεν ἐρημοῖ. Ὅρμᾶ καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων πόλιν ἀκρατήτω φορᾶ, στρατὸν ὑπὲρ τὴν ψάμαθον ἐπαγόμενος ἐκ Βουλγάρων, ἐκ δρομάδων νομάδων, Σκυθῶν, ἐκ Χαζάρων, ἐκ Ρωμαίων, ἐξ Ἀλβανῶν ἐκ τῶν Ρώσ. πανσπερμίαν παντὸς ἐκ γένους, ὅποσα βόσκει κλῖμα τὸ ὑπερβόρειον, ὅποσα βόσκει κλῖμα τὸ ὑπερβόρειον, Ὑδραν ἂν τις εἶπε μυριοκάρηνον ἢ Τυφῶνα ἑκατογκέφαλον ἢ ἑκατόγχειρας Γίγαντας ἢ Τιτάνας ἄλλους θρασεῖς.⁸⁷²

John Staurakios, living within the Palaiologan state, assigned many peoples to the army and *panspermia* of Kaloyan in 1207. Many are otherwise unattested at the short-lived siege of Thessaloniki at which Kaloyan was killed.⁸⁷³ Within Staurakios' account we also encounter one of the last discussions of *panspermia* as an ethnic term. He uses it in a way no other author has done so, not only as a *panspermia* of *ethne* but as a *panspermia* of *gene*, and with full reference to the horrors Aristotle once imagined as a construct of birth weakness and defect. Staurakios' usage implies no strong differentiation between either *ethne* or *gene* but these horrors of a Hydra, Typhos, and Titan, were formed of a population that had truly lost all cohesion. These were tensions that reflected a Palaiologan perspective of what had happened within the Balkans over the thirteenth century.

While Bulgarians, Skythians, and Khazars, could be identified in Kaloyan's army from other sources, two of the last three peoples, 'Romans, Albanians, and the Rus' are without attestation. Rus may simply be mercenaries. However, 'Romans' assaulting Roman lands likely were references to the Angeloi, particularly Alexios III's and Kaloyan's brief alliance in 1204/05. The Albanian element, however, has no place in that context. Arbanon/Albanians were recognised under the Palaiologoi as allies of Michael II in the revived conflicts on-going in the 1260 and 1270s. They had been allied to Epiros since the 1210s and, in revolt against the Palaiologoi, had captured George Akropolites and delivered him to Arta. For Staurakios in the 1280s therefore, the realm of the Komnenoi-Doukai-Angeloi represented an extension of Bulgaria. Continued conflict had made it easy to conflate many enemies into one. Staurakios' hagiography would be then our third and this thesis' final reference to a *panspermia* formed also of Greek-speaking homoglot populations. After Theodore Prodromos' poetic warnings against the raging *panspermia*, Niketas Choniates' adoption of 'western *panspermia*' to refer to Latin-held Constantinople, Germanos II's c.1222 *Oration against the Holder of the Inkwell* that lambasted the capital's *panspermia* pre-1204 for causing Constantinople's fall, Staurakios here named multiple Byzantine populations, homoglots included, within a *panspermia* only defeated by the direct intercession of St. Demetrios. It is a confirmation that ecclesiastical authors in Thessaloniki had begun to be influenced by the Palaiologan narrative. Akropolites and Pachymeres had swayed even hagiographical retellings of recent history to assign co-Orthodox peoples, homoglots as well as alloglots to the ethnic other.

⁸⁷² John Staurakios, ed. Ioakhim Iberites, 'Λόγος εἰς τὰ θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου,' *Μακεδονικά*, 1 (1940), §34, p.369.19-370.5.

⁸⁷³ The other hagiographical source for the siege, written a generation later by Constantine Akropolites, mentions a different list of 'Bulgarians, Paiones, Moesians, Zeces, Rus, Alans, Skythians, Melanclenes, and Sauromatians.' See Dall'Aglio, 'The Bulgarian Siege of Thessaloniki,' p.275.

4.0. Conclusions: Lost Plurality

Over the course of this thesis, we have repeatedly encountered the phenomenon of individuals polemicised by ethnonyms which projected them as hostile to a dominant population. Crossing the permitted boundaries of Roman identity, Andronikos Komnenos became a Paphlagonian, John Axouchos Komnenos a Persian/Turk, and both Theodore Doukas Komnenos and Demetrios Chomatenos became Bulgarians. According to the pro-Palaiologan narrative of Akropolites, until 1242 the entire city of Thessaloniki was considered to be under foreign governance. In accordance with the binary identity of Romanness, these individuals were cast as ‘Barbarians.’ And yet, each of these cases of ethnic distortion possessed a singular aspect of truth which could be used to project the stance whereby the polemical hostile *ethne* were at war with God’s New Israelites, the Byzantine-Romans. The Komnenoi *did* have specific loyalties in Paphlagonia, Axouchos *did* have a Turkish grandfather, imperial Epiros *did* have its ecclesiastical heart in the Bulgarian Archbishopric in Ohrid and engaged with a multi-ethnic population, and Asanid Bulgaria *did* directly inherit Epiros’ own ideology. However, prior to these moments of dispute, each individual had also had a permissible role and/or position within Byzantine society. They only became the ethnic ‘others’ as situational conditions demanded. Understanding how and why that process took place, what criteria were utilised, and how the political-ecclesiastical rivalries struggled with the concept of a fragmenting Roman/Greek/Orthodox *ethnos* have been the central points of enquiry in this thesis.

There is no doubt that the weakening and fall of Byzantium caused major crises of identity. The division of Anatolia between Laskarid Nikaia, the Grand Komnenoi, and the Turks, and of the Balkans by Latin Crusaders, Epiros, and Bulgaria fragmented an empire but moreover left a society and its institutions at the mercy of geopolitics. Both the learned authors of our texts and the secular authorities which erected inscriptions sought to find the sources of decline. As much as they could seek to blame collapse on the foreign invasions of *ethne*, there are demonstrable tendencies to seek inwards. Under pressure to prove that certain peoples had always been the foreigner amongst them, they created the ethnic ‘others’, the ‘pariah groups’, who could be blamed for various causes of the decline, which had begun well *before* 1204. As a trend it merely increased, rather than began, after the Latin conquest. The acceleration of an exclusive, performative identity defined by language, by birthplace, by current provincial location, is evidenced for the periods *before* and *after* the Fourth Crusade.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that this polemic was not simply the rhetoric of elites. The Kavala/Christoupolis inscription, here given long-overdue attention, confirms that the projection of othered ethnicity had a broader audience. As ideology shifted, its performance moved from the small *theatra* of history-writing and private epistolographic exchanges to the public sphere. The causes of imperial decline and the legacy of Andronikos Komnenos were openly publicised on the walls of Kavala/Christoupolis and Herakleia-Pontika. In his imperial address of 1200, Mesarites seized an opportunity to address the imperial court corroborating aggression and condemnation of provincial homoglotts and conflating them with alloglotts. A rhetorical construal, the *panspermia* of *ethne*, added an ethnic element to the notion of barbarianism; crucially, the one which related to Greek and non-Greek-speakers alike. In Nikaia of 1208/1210, oaths were taken and religious innovation created to solidify the distinction between the dominant political culture and secessionist homoglot parties. The ethnic distortion of homoglotts in the primary sources for Anatolia and the Balkans, the heartlands of Classical Greece and Rome, depict these groups as having lost their ethnic homogeneity. They threatened both the authorities and the broader public’s place within communion but were

given, by Nikaia's newly-sworn community, an opportunity to prove their loyalty and perform their Romanness.

Modern scholarship of the Byzantine thirteenth century continues to struggle with the discrepancy of our historical narratives. Excepting Niketas Choniates, all Greek-language histories were written after the reconquest of 1261 and projected perspectives back onto the age of exile. This thesis has demonstrated that the conflict with the Paphlagonians, a homoglot people marked by their own cultural oddities, accents, and political loyalties, was but one stage in a continual cultural conflict. The narratives of the Nikaian war with David Grand Komnenos describe the confrontation of a frequently renegade population which challenged Nikaian legitimacy and undermined ties of loyalty. Had David's letters continued to be sent and had he continued to be informed of Laskaris' movements then the scale of the disaster could have proved critical. In contrast to other case-studies the restoration of imperial authority in Herakelia-Pontika was achieved not through references to Romanness or Hellenism, which in the context of Paphlagonia might have limited resonance, but to a re-alignment of Orthodoxy with political loyalty and an experimentation with Holy War.

This thesis presents in greatest detail the case study of the 'transformation' of Epiros into Bulgaria. This focus arises from the fact that Epiros constitutes the only instance in which the target population produced substantial sources through which they could articulate their own perspective. While Epiros appears in the Nikaian-Constantinopolitan narrative as yet another ethnic rival, the *Dytikoi* produced a huge corpus of evidence justifying their own actions. The thesis provides evidence that Patriarch Kamateros had granted local churches the right to autocephaly during the Angeloi-Bulgarian alliance of 1204–1205. Given the vacancy and removal of the patriarchate to Nikaia, the Epirotes had cause to believe that they operated within a legally justified Romanness of both relaxed and delegated authority. It was only during the brief chronological window of Komnenoi Doukai supremacy that Nikaian rhetoric mutated from apathy to antipathy. As far as we can reconstruct the relationship it was aggressive and antagonistic only on one side. Epiros did not seek to misrepresent Nikaia, they perhaps felt no need to, while the Laskarids remained ensconced in Anatolia. Their only comparable act was to refer to Asanid Bulgaria as 'Zagora' or as those 'beyond the Haimos.' Instead, they embraced the Bulgarian hybridity of their state, building upon over a century of Byzantine Bulgaria's acculturation. As Epiros expanded, they projected themselves as the heirs to an earlier, more ecumenical, age. Their opponents, defending the rights of the anointed emperors of Nikaia, were a series of patriarchs and emperors who freely engaged with the ethnic diatribes of polemic and prejudice which had circulated in Constantinople. Nikaia continued a counter-tradition which polemicalised difference and considered alloglots external to the Roman community. Their authors composed new writings on the limits and virtue of Hellenism, as opposed to the barbarity of Balkan peoples. Its conclusions detailing Epiros' confrontation with Nikaia, as the Laskarids linked an exclusively homoglot Anatolian identity with their own Romanness, must in future be weighed against the dynamics of an imperial Epirote state which existed in a multilingual space.

This thesis has offered a biopsy of the Byzantine state in the process of being dismantled. Inspired by the resurgent interest in the 'Byzantine Commonwealth' and the shared legacy of the empire by its former peoples, this study has attempted to move the debate past the insistence on ethnic Romanness that has come to dominate much scholarship, and to focus instead on evidence for performative Romanness in specific contexts, or on any suspicious lack thereof. Romanness, in the contexts of the twelfth and thirteenth century, represented far more than simple cultural similarities. *Romania* was made of all of the fragments of the empire; and

Roman was one identity amongst several. Defined by oaths and communion, sole rulership over a community which had lost political cohesion caused among other consequences the movement and shift of ethnonyms. The misrepresentation of ethnic groups, long understood in Byzantine Studies as a Classical antiquarianism, came in the late twelfth century to represent a political and class divide in society. Entire homoglot and alloglot peoples, united by religion and history, became barbarians and lost their Romanness. As the rhetorical *panspermia* expanded, the ethnic enemies of *Romanía* were decried across multiple public-facing spheres. Ultimately, this rhetoric engendered the notion that the *ethne* opposing the Romans had become the Romans themselves. This paradoxical outcome highlights the complex interplay between a performed and conditional identity and a fractured and fluid Byzantium.

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