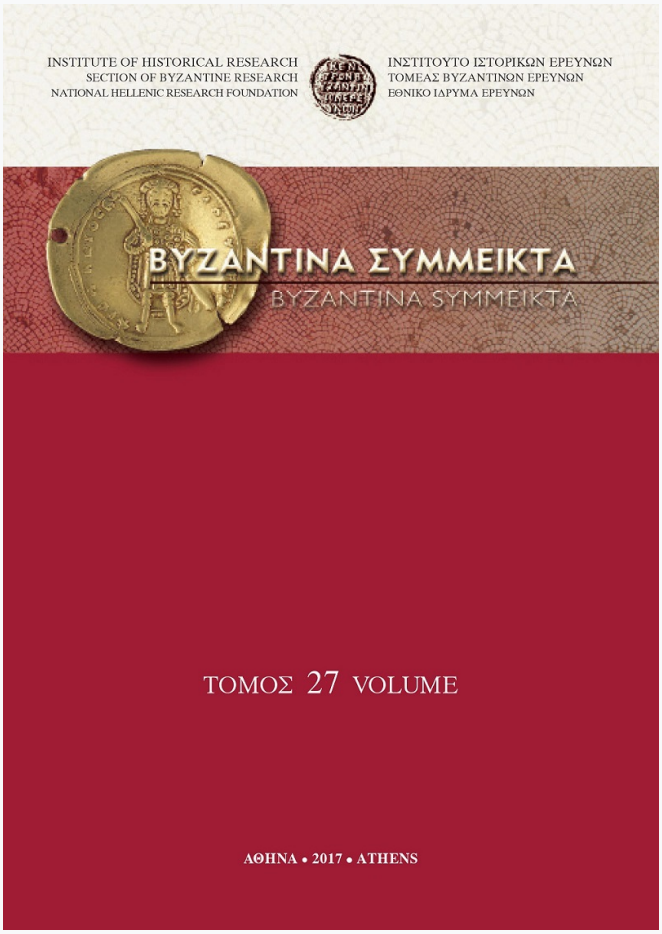
Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 27 (2017)

BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ 27



The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach

Anthony KALDELLIS

doi: 10.12681/byzsym.10476

To cite this article:

KALDELLIS, A. (2017). The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, *27*, 173–210. https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.10476

INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH
SECTION OF BYZANTINE RESEARCH
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION

ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ
ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ

ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ
BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

Anthony Kaldellis

The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach

ΑΘΗΝΑ • 2017 • ATHENS

Anthony Kaldellis

The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach*

qui iam cognoscit gentes in imperio Romano quae quid erant,
quando omnes Romani facti sunt, et omnes Romani dicuntur?[1]

Who now knows which nations in the Roman empire were which,
when all have become Romans and all are called Romans?

After centuries of denials and evasions, the debate over the nature of Roman identity in Byzantium is finally picking up. I have previously argued that the Byzantines' view of their own Roman identity was a national one, making Byzantium effectively a nation-state. Being a Roman was premised on common cultural traits including language, religion, and social values and customs, on belonging to the ἔθνος or γένος on that basis, and on being a "shareholder" in the polity of the Romans[2]. This conclusion has been challenged by Ioannis Stouraitis, who offers "a critical approach"

* The author thanks the journal's two anonymous referees for their valuable suggestions for improvement.

1. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* 58.1.21, ed. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, *Augustinus: Enarrationes in Psalmos* [CCSL 38-40], Turnhout 1956, here v. 39, 744.

2. A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge 2007, ch. 2; From Rome to New Rome, From Empire to Nation State: Reopening the Question of Byzantium's Roman Identity, in: *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Grig – G. Kelly, Oxford 2012, 387-404. Polity of the Romans: *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge, MA 2015.

to the issue[3]. He suggests that Roman identity was limited to a tiny elite in Constantinople, and sees the empire as a system of exploitation of the provincials that precluded meaningful identification between the two. The Roman label was part of a misleading homogenizing discourse used by elites and implied no horizontal community. Both positions are revolutionary, albeit in different ways. The nation-state proposal breaks from the tradition of viewing Byzantium as a multi-ethnic empire with a "universalist" theocratic ideology, while the elite reading disrupts the assumption of many historians that all or most Byzantines at least called themselves Romans, that it was part of their identity[4]. Most Byzantines were either far more Roman than anyone had thought, or not Roman at all, with the second option leaving their ethnic identity indeterminate.

Clearly, there is much to debate. This contribution will not tackle all the relevant issues, for example whether Byzantium had the institutions necessary to create or maintain a national identity, or whether it had a notion of a homeland. It concerns a specific point that no one has so far elucidated fully with reference to the evidence found in the sources: What was the *social scope* of attributions of Roman identity in Byzantine sources? In other words, when the sources refer to Romans in Byzantium do they mean a narrow Constantinopolitan elite or do they refer to a much larger population, including that of the provinces, which crossed the divides of social class? This article will scrutinize a broad array of diverse sources and argue that the evidence consistently points toward a broad Roman community defined by ethnic and not class criteria. The analysis begins with elite sources and then steadily moves away from the capital by examining the social valence of Roman identity claimed for and by the Byzantine army; by provincial sub-elite or non-elite sources; and also by foreign sources describing Byzantine society. In all cases, the evidence is consistent and clear: the Romans of Byzantium were a large ethnic group, the largest by far in the empire, making up the vast majority of its population. Elite, non-

3. I. Stouraitis, Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach, *BZ* 107 (2014), 175-220.

4. Countless citations can be provided to this effect, e.g., A. Christophilopoulou, *Τὸ πολίτευμα καὶ οἱ θεσμοὶ τῆς βυζαντινῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, 324-1204*, Athens 2004, 76: "Everyone, from the emperor down to the last citizen of the most distant frontier had a deeply rooted sense of Roman continuity, as is manifestly shown in Byzantine literature".

elite, and foreign sources agree on this. By contrast, while Stouraitis finds room to cite T. Eagleton, M. Mann, L. Althusser, and P. Bourdieu, he quotes no Byzantine text that unambiguously (or even ambiguously) states that Roman identity was limited in its social scope to a Constantinopolitan elite.

Ethnic vs. elite identities

Before we turn to the sources, some key terms that frame the debate must be elucidated. Specifically, in sociological research ethnic and elite identities present quite different profiles. To argue that Roman identity in Byzantium was national rather than ethnic, in prior publications I relied on a specific model of ethnicity that is slowly losing ground among scholars. According to this specific model, a group's ethnic identity presupposed a myth or awareness of a common ancestry, whether real or imagined[5]. To be sure, Byzantine sources do not emphasize such a notion in connection with Roman identity. But although many scholars still hold to that definition of ethnicity, most seem to have shifted to a more flexible one according to which an ethnic group can be identified also on a basis of its common name (or ethnonym), shared culture, common language and religion, homeland, an awareness of its difference from neighboring groups (e.g., Romans vs. Bulgarians or barbarians more generally), common political institutions, a sense of having a common history, perceived kinship beyond the immediate family, or any partial but significant combination of those factors. No single rigid definition will cover all ethnic groups in history: some factors will inevitably be more important for one group than for others. The rise of this more expansive definition of ethnicity can be traced, for example, in the programmatic statements made by many of the contributors to the *Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*[6]. In many historical

5. Emphasized, for example, by J. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge, 1997, and many other theorists.

6. J. McInerney, ed., *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Malden, MA 2014, see esp. 2, 35, 67, 104, 112, 115, 122, 143, 158, 178, 216, 217, 221, 298, 341, 350, 371, 517. A large amount of modern theoretical bibliography could be cited here, but it is more conventient to refer readers to the studies cited there by the contributors. The application of the same definitions to late antiquity is surveyed by A. Becker, Ethnicité, identité ethnique. Quelques remarques pour l'Antiquité tardive, *Gérion* 32 (2014), 289-305.

contexts, this definition makes ethnicity and national identity almost equivalent, and indeed some theorists do not believe that there is always much difference between the two[7].

The goal of this paper is not so much to demonstrate that the Romans of Byzantium actually were an ethnicity, which would require extensive evidence as to the historical reality of the components of that definition. Its goal is rather more specific: to show that the Byzantines used the identity label Roman in an ethnic way, as pointing to an ethnic group, a group moreover that included the vast majority of the population of Byzantium. The sources presented below will demonstrate that, for the Byzantines, the term Roman had a valence that covered most of the constituent elements of what modern scholars call an ethnicity. The Byzantines themselves often called it an *ἔθνος*. Though they certainly did not use that word with semantic consistency as a technical term[8], we will find many cases of significant convergence and overlap between their terminology and the modern definition of ethnicity given above.

Class exclusions are usually not a criterion for an ethnic identity. The latter is assumed to be held by a population or people as a whole, including all its classes, professions, and age-groups, and both genders. Thus, its ethnonym must be seen to be applied consistently across all those divisions[9]. That is why it is important to study carefully whom our sources mean when they refer to the Romans: only the elite, or the majority of the provincial population too? As we will see, they refer collectively to the Greek-speaking and Orthodox population of free citizens (not slaves) of the empire. This paper will argue that elite sources call this entire population Roman and

7. T. Spira, Ethnicity and Nationality: The Twin Matrices of Nationalism, in: *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World*, ed. D. Conversi, London 2002, 248-268; G. De Vos, Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation, in: *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict and Accommodation*, 3rd. ed., ed. G. De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross, London et al. 1995, 5-41, here 24-25. For the modernist bias of much scholarship on these issues, see below.

8. For a typological study of terms related to ethnicity and identity in Byzantium, see Θ. Παπαδοπουλου, *Συλλογικὴ ταυτότητα καὶ αὐτογνωσία στὸ Βυζάντιο: Συμβολὴ στὸν προσδιορισμὸ τῆς αὐτοαντίληψης τῶν Βυζαντινῶν κατὰ τὴν λόγια γραμματεία τους (11ος - ἀρχὲς 13ου αἰ.),* Athens 2015.

9. For the importance of the ethnonym used in discursive identity-claims, see N. Luraghi, The Study of Greek Ethnic Identities, in: *Companion to Ethnicity*, 213-227, here 217.

also that it is overwhelmingly likely that the latter too called itself Roman. This is what Byzantinists have meant all along when they say that the Byzantines called themselves Romans. The proof for it has not, however, ever been systematically presented.

Thus Roman was the ethnonym of a large population but one that was defined by specific markers that excluded various "others" who were regarded as belonging to foreign or ethnically different groups. All this makes Roman an ethnic identity in Byzantium. Obviously the concept of ethnicity can always be explored in greater depth and analyzed to pieces, but we do not need to do so here because the rival hypothesis that has been set forth is so antithetical to it that the two need to be seen from a distance in order to be compared properly. To argue that Roman was a label used only by (and possibly only for) the social elite would require an equally rigorous definition of the term "elite" in its Byzantine context and how it relates specifically to Roman identity. As Byzantium had no legally defined or hereditary aristocracy, and as its political, military, economic, ecclesiastical, monastic, and literary elites did not always overlap, scholars have found it difficult to provide a unified definition of its elite[10]. It is all the more incumbent upon Stouraitis to do so in a way that grounds his argument in social realities. However, he does not offer a definition, even though he uses the word elite, the foundation of his argument, 104 times. He variously qualifies it as the "literate elite", "social elite", or "ruling elite", and treats it as a homogeneous block of opinion.

But in Byzantium the literary elite did not overlap with the ruling elite, seeing as the former were often the latter's clients or secretaries. Did illiterate generals have the same view of Roman identity as classicizing historians with much less social power? Where did they get this view? Stouraitis does not say because he does not ask how his elite was constituted, recruited, or reproduced; how it formed its views on identity; or even what those views were. In order to keep the argument's focus on the elite, he assumes that Roman identity was linked to literacy, but he does not explain why, beyond the fact that it is only in textual sources that we can find Roman-identity claims. But this is to turn the limitations of our sources into a social

10. Various provisional attempts (by social context) are made in the contributions to J. Haldon, *A Social History of Byzantium*, Malden, MA 2009.

ontology. There is, of course, a literacy-threshold beneath which we cannot follow discursive identity-claims, but such claims did not necessarily stop where literacy was absent. This was, after all, a mostly oral society. Roman-identity claims could have flourished in oral contexts and were transmitted in non-literary ways. The present study of the evidence will support such a conclusion.

Stouraitis does not explain whether the Roman identity of Byzantium belonged to a small ethnic group in charge of the empire; was a literary game played by a few writers; or was an affect of certain institutions of the capital. As he tends (without explanation) to link Romanness to literacy, he concludes that there were, at any time during the middle Byzantine period, only about 300 elite types with a vested interest in Roman identity, a number that he multiplies by ten for the sake of argument[11]. This elite is mostly Constantinopolitan and exists in conceptual and economic opposition to the provinces. But this distinction cannot be maintained in this form, as we will see repeatedly in the analysis below. In reality, many members of the capital elite came from the provinces. Every Byzantine regime drew upon provincial talent, including its authors. The capital also required a steady influx of provincials to maintain its population, given the death-rates of medieval cities. A surviving Byzantine definition of a native Constantinopolitan hints at this background: *indigenous inhabitants are [people who are] not migrants or colonists from another land, or who, if they come from another land, have lived in this land long enough to be old-timers and in this respect resemble the indigenous inhabitants, like those who resemble the indigenous inhabitants of Constantinople*[12]. The capital cannot, therefore, be surgically detached from the provinces. Moreover, there is no evidence that provincial society was divided between upper-class Romans and lower-class non-Romans, or at least none has so far been presented.

The review of the evidence below will show that Roman-identity claims also cannot be separated from the provinces. As I said above, ethnic

11. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 196.

12. Stephanos (Skylitzes?), *Commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric* 1360b31, ed. G. Rabe, *Anonymi et Stephani in artem rhetoricam commentaria* [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 21, pt. 2], Berlin 1896, 263-322, here 270; transl. (modified) from P. Magdalino, Constantinople and the Outside World, in: *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. D. Smythe, Aldershot 2000, 149-162, here 156.

identity-claims depend on discursive evidence. We cannot know that a person, group, institution, or aspect of material life were or were seen as Roman unless a text tells us so. A study of identity-claims, therefore, requires clarity about (a) who was making the relevant claims; (b) about whom they were being made; and (c) the nature of the identity in question. But Stouraitis does not pose these questions. Some passages in his article imply that the Roman-identity discourse of the elite "projected an image of the empire's population as a solid Roman community"[13], which is mostly correct, but there are many more others that state the opposite: the elite had no interest in "creat[ing] a broadly shared vision of the Eastern Roman community as a political community of common culture"; "up to the twelfth century, Romanness as a politico-cultural discourse of self-identification concerned mainly the members of a social upper stratum"; "the identities of provincial masses [had] no strong sense of belonging to the Roman political order"; and there was no "vision of national community" among the elite and no awareness or acceptance of such a thing among the provincials[14]. But what do the sources say?

Elite sources on the scope of Roman identity

Let us start with sources that are undoubtedly elite (I will here draw primarily on evidence of the early period, but also from the sixth century, to establish continuity with the middle period). It turns out that the majority of the provincial population are clearly classified as Romans even in elite sources. This will have important theoretical consequences later on in the argument (see below, p. 201), for it makes a huge difference whether the elites believed Roman was an elite identity, restricted to themselves, or a national one that crossed social class and extended across a large territory. As proponents of the elite reading of Roman identity do not make this crucial distinction, it is important to understand what kind of community elite authors meant when they referred to the Romans.

As many of our sources recount military history, these claims are often associated with barbarian raids in which provincials living by the frontier are enslaved. For example, Prokopios (sixth century) says that *the Gepids*

13. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 194.

14. Respectively: Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 196, 204, and 202.

held the city of Sirmium and almost all the cities of Dacia... and enslaved the Romans of that region[15]. He means the general population and not just elites. Likewise, the Slavs raided Thrace *and enslaved many of the Romans there*, one of whom, apparently an average person, he calls *a Roman man* in the singular[16]. He gives a number for the Roman victims of barbarian raids in the Balkans under Justinian: *more than twenty times ten thousand of the Romans who lived there [in the Balkans] were either killed or enslaved*[17]. As the issue has been raised of how many Romans there were in the Byzantine empire (with one estimate numbering them between 300 and 3,000), it is important to show that Byzantine sources offer higher estimates, here in the hundreds of thousands for one set of provinces (we will see other estimates below). I set aside for now the question of whether those provincials knew or cared that they were being called Roman in elite sources. It is theoretically possible that Prokopios was attributing to them an identity that they did not share. Still, it is important to note that he was doing so, and doing so casually as if expecting his readers to accept, without objection, most provincials as Romans. This was not only casual usage, it was banal. Theophylaktos Simokattes (seventh century) claims that Slavic raiders carried away *a great haul of captive Romans* from the provincial towns of the Balkans[18]. The historian (and later patriarch) Nikephoros (eighth century) notes that provincial *Romans* in Asia Minor were captured by invading Persians[19].

Elite authors consistently viewed these provincials as Romans and not as ethnically diverse subjects of the empire. The tenth-century diplomat Theodoros Daphnopates used the Roman identity of common prisoners in his argument against the Bulgarian tsar Simeon's right to bear the title "emperor of the Bulgarians and the Romans". *Of which Romans exactly are*

15. Prokopios, *Wars* 7.33.8, ed. J. Haury, *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia* (rev. ed. G. Wirth), 4 vols., Leipzig 1962-1964; trans. H. B. Dewing and A. Kaldellis, *Prokopios: The Wars*, Indianapolis 2014; A. Kaldellis, *Prokopios: The Secret History with Related Texts*, Indianapolis 2010.

16. Prokopios, *Wars* 7.14.11-16.

17. Prokopios, *Secret History* 18.21.

18. Theophylaktos Simokattes, *History* 7.2.1, ed. C. de Boor, *Theophylacti Simocattae historiae* (rev. ed. P. Wirth), Leipzig 1972.

19. Nikephoros, *Short History* 12, ed. and transl. C. Mango, *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History* [CFHB 13], Washington, D.C. 1990.

you the emperor? Daphnopates asked, *of those whom you have captured* [*in your raids*], *or those who have been enslaved by faithless nations and sold* [*to you*]*? Because you know well what the rest [of the Romans] think and say about you*[20]. In other words, Daphnopates' notion of the Roman community included provincials downtrodden by foreign raids and even those sold into slavery by infidels, and he viewed them as potentially constitutive of an emperor's right to bear the title "of the Romans." Let us give an example from the later period. The Bulgarian tsar Kaloyan (d. 1207) styled himself the *Roman-Slayer* (*Ῥωμαιοκτόνος*) in imitation of the Byzantine emperor Basil II the Bulgar-Slayer. The thirteenth-century historian who tells us this, Georgios Akropolites, says that the tsar took on this moniker specifically after destroying many cities in Thrace and capturing or killing their Roman inhabitants[21]. The provincials are always and casually assumed to be Romans.

These (elite) historians called provincials Romans in other contexts too, not only military. In a geographical digression on Lazike (Kolchis), Prokopios reaches the border between that non-Roman land and the empire and says that *Romans live in the adjacent land, whom people also qualify* (*ἐπικαλοῦνται*) *as Pontians*[22]. In other words, their Roman identity was primary and their provincial one (as inhabitants of the province of Pontos) was a qualification upon it: they were the Romans of Pontos. In the *Secret History*, Prokopios refers often to the Roman victims of Justinian, frequently giving the impression that they were more than just a few elites. *No Roman man* managed to escape from that emperor, whose evil *fell upon the entire race* (*ὅλῳ τῷ γένει*). I note for now –and will discuss below– that Prokopios casually describes the Roman people as a *γένος*, whose primary meaning is family, species, race, or people. Elsewhere in the work, Prokopios refers to Romans *who lived in distant lands*, including *in the countryside*[23].

20. Theodoros Daphnopates, *Letter* 5; ed. J. Darrouzès and L. G. Westerink, *Théodore Daphnopatès Correspondance*, Paris 1978.

21. Akropolites, *History* 13, ed. A. Heisenberg, *Georgii Acropolitae opera*, v. 1, Leipzig 1903.

22. Prokopios, *Wars* 2.29.19. It is sometimes claimed that they were Laz, but Prokopios, who knew all about the Laz, makes no such connection; cf. A. Bryer, Some Notes on the Laz and Tzan, *Bedi Karthlisa* 21-22 (1966), 174-195, here 177-178.

23. Prokopios, *Secret History* 6.23 and 11.38.

Prokopios' successor Agathias refers to the (distant) Pelasgian ethnic origin of the people of the city of Tralleis in western Asia Minor, *yet*, he adds, *the townspeople* (*ἀστοὶ*) *should not now be called Pelasgians but rather Romans*. He means their entire population, not only the elite, and he treats Roman as a categorical equivalent to Pelasgian, an ethnic label[24].

Numerous (elite) texts from the middle period casually assume that large numbers of imperial subjects, in fact likely the majority of the population, were Romans. Let us look at texts that specifically include those who were not elites and not from Constantinople. In the 830s the emperor Theophilos admitted up to 30,000 Khurramite (Iranian) warriors into the empire who were fleeing from the Abbasid armies. To integrate them into imperial society, the emperor enrolled them in the Roman army and also *arranged for them to marry Roman women* in the provinces where they were settled. The court historians who report this (Genesios and Theophanes Continuatus) must have assumed that there were thousands of Roman women of marriageable age in the provinces[25]. Regardless of whether this order was carried out, this is indicative of who they thought was a Roman in their world. In fact, we know one of these women: saint Athanasia, from the island of Aigina, by no means a Constantinopolitan lady[26]. The same sources also explicit label as Romans men from non-elite professions, such as icon-painting monks[27].

Consider also a decree of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078-1081) reported by the contemporary historian Michael Attaleiates. That emperor released from certain debts to the imperial fisc *all Romans, wherever on earth they lived, thereby making them into free Roman citizens*[28]. The ideology

24. Agathias, *Histories* 2.17.5; ed. R. Keydell, *Agathiae Myrinaei historiarum libri quinque* [CFHB 2], Berlin 1967.

25. Genesios, *On the Reigns of the Emperors* 3.3, ed. A. Lesmüller-Werner and J. Thurn, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor* [CFHB 14], Berlin 1978; Theophanes Continuatus 3.21, 3.29, ed. M. Featherstone and J. Signes Codoñer, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur* [CFHB 53], Berlin 2015.

26. *Life of Athanasia of Aigina* 4 (p. 181), ed. F. Halkin, *Six inédits d'hagiologie byzantine*, Brussels 1987, 179-195.

27. Theophanes Continuatus 4.15: *μοναχόν τινα τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς Ῥωμαίων ζωγράφον.*

28. Attaleiates, *History* 284, ed. E. Tsolakis, *Michaelis Attaliatae Historia* [CFHB 50], Athens 2011: *Ἔστησεν οὖν ἐντεῦθεν πᾶσι τοῖς πολιτευομένοις καὶ πανταχῇ γῆς*

behind the passage is that debt is a form of slavery[29], with the further crucial implication that the Roman community was geographically expansive and included people who were insolvent: they were on the verge of slavery, but the emperor made them *free Romans* again. Elsewhere Attaleiates notes that the elephant paraded in the capital by Konstantinos IX Monomachos (1042-1055) delighted *the Byzantioi* [*Constantinopolitans*] *and the other Romans who happened to see it*, the latter obviously being Romans who were not from the capital[30]. For him, therefore, the Roman community extended outside the capital and included poor people. The historian Ioannes Kinnamos (twelfth century) also recorded how the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180) prevented Romans from taking out loans with their freedom as collateral, for Manuel *wanted to rule over free Romans, not slaves* (*ἐλευθέρων γὰρ ἄρχειν Ῥωμαίων, οὐμενοῦν ἀνδραπόδων αὐτὸς ἤθελεν*)[31]. These were clearly not elite Romans, at least not for the most part. In the course of his narrative, Kinnamos also casually reports on the provincial origin of the theologian Demetrios: *he was Roman by genos, from the town of Lampe [in Asia Minor]*[32]. We note again the idea that one was a Roman by genos (to be discussed below).

A fascinating episode that reveals how broadly the elite imagined the social scope of Roman identity is reported by the historian Niketas Choniates (late twelfth-early thirteenth century). As the emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (1183-1185) was growing unpopular and the republic (*πολιτεία*) was speaking out against him, he convened a council of state which decreed the execution of his political enemies and their families. His own son Manuel opposed this, arguing that the decree, if literally enforced, would lead to the death of the entire Roman population –*τὸ Πανρώμαιον*– and not merely of *all the Romans* but of some foreigners too. Specifically, he argued

---

κατοικοῦσι Ῥωμαίοις τὸν φόβον τῶν ὀφλημάτων καὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐλευθέρους τούτου ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ πολίτας Ῥωμαίους εἰργάσατο.

29. D. Angelov, Three Kinds of Liberty as Political Ideals in Byzantium, Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries, in: *Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, v. 1: *Plenary Sessions*, Sofia 2011, 311-331.

30. Attaleiates, *History* 48.

31. Kinnamos, *History* 6.8, ed. A. Meineke, *Ioannis Cinnami epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum* [CSHB], Bonn 1836.

32. Kinnamos, *History* 6.2.

that the "family" of one of the accused would extend from one relation to the next in an endless chain of affiliation until all the Romans were killed, and the number of victims would eventually be *infinite* (*ἄπειρον*)[33]. This was hyperbole, but his reasoning reveals that the totality of the Romans (*Πανρώμαιον*) was, for him, not an elite but a national or ethnic community defined by *genos* and constituted mostly through kinship. The community that Manuel Komnenos imagined was not literally "infinite" in size, but it was significantly larger than 300 or 3,000 Romans.

According to the elite thesis of Roman identity, the sources should use Roman to signify the Byzantine elite or nobility, as a term to differentiate them from the rest of the population. What we find in the sources is the exact opposite, namely that Roman is used for the majority of provincial population and that it encompasses elites and non-elites alike.

Let us pause and critically reflect on the evidence surveyed above. These (elite) authors, ranging from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries, took it for granted that the Roman community of Byzantium extended across the empire, from the capital to the frontier provinces, and it included people from many or all social classes. Their use of the ethnonym Roman implies that their readers –other members of the elite– naturally assumed that there were, potentially, millions of Romans out there. We must, therefore, conclude that, according to the Byzantine elite, the Roman community of Byzantium was not limited to that elite. Whether rightly or wrongly, they believed that they were talking about a whole people, an ethnic group, or a nation. but *not*, as we will crucially see below, to *all* subjects of the empire: ethnic criteria had to be met. Thus, when we come across generic references in elite texts to the Romans, references which do not specify which Romans are meant (and there are thousands of such references), we must assume that they are pointing to this expansive community. Scholars may wish to argue that this is a fiction, a "projection" of a broad national image upon a

33. Choniates, *History* 337-338, ed. J. L. VAN DIETEN, *Nicetae Choniatae historia* [CFHB 11], Berlin 1975: ... *ὑπὸ κρίμα θανάτου τιθεῖσαν σχεδὸν τὸ Πανρώμαιον καὶ μὴ μόνον ἀφανίζουσαν ὁπόσοι Ῥωμαίων προήλθοσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἐξ ἔθνους οὐχὶ βραχεῖς διαφθείρουσαν ... εἰς γὰρ ἄπειρον ἀποτελευτήσειν τὴν τελευτήν, τοῦ μὲν διὰ τόνδε συλλαμβανομένου τε καὶ ἀναιρουμένου, κἀκείνου μὴ ἀπόλιδος εὑρισκομένου μηδὲ φυέντος ἀπὸ δρυός, ἀλλ' ἐκ πατρὸς καὶ μητρός, ἢ καὶ ἐξ ἀγχιστείας τὸ συναπτόμενον εἰς γένος καὶ τὸ φίλιον ἀναφαίνοντος ...*

population that was, in fact, not really constituted in this way[34]. They may or may not be right, but an argument would have to be made for that, and so far it has not been. What we have done so far is partially clarify who is meant when Byzantine texts refer to Romans (I say partially because crucial distinctions remain to be made). The evidence surveyed so far shows that Roman identity was emphatically not limited in scope to an elite, at least not in the eyes of the elite itself.

Furthermore, we touched above on how problematic the notion of an elite is in a Byzantine context and that it probably cannot be defined in a way that would distinguish it, in terms of identity, from the general population. Let us consider the authors we have cited so far: most were historians, some held offices in the Roman state, and all were active in Constantinople at some point, but interestingly not all of them were from Constantinople. They came from a provincial cities, including Caesarea, Alexandria, Attaleia, and Chonai. This was typical of the Byzantine elite throughout the centuries: from the imperial position on down, the ranks of the army, Church, court, and bureaucracy were staffed by men who were recruited on an ongoing basis from the provinces. This elite of provincial origin evinces no awareness, in its surviving texts, that they were less Roman than their counterparts in the capital. Consider the eleventh-century general Eustathios Daphnomeles, who denied that he blinded a Bulgarian noble out of a hatred which stems from the fact that *he is Bulgarian and I Roman: for I am not a Roman from among those who inhabit Thrace and Macedonia, but one from Asia Minor*[35]. Daphnomeles, in other words, imagined the Romans as distributed throughout, or even filling up, the core territories of the empire. They were, moreover, to be distinguished from Bulgarians, who were foreigners. The only distinction that he makes among Romans is that those of Thrace-Macedonia would be more likely to hate Bulgarians than those of Asia Minor.

Many in the Byzantine elite were local notables before they moved to the capital. We therefore have to explain where they acquired the view expressed casually and consistently in their texts that the provincial population

34. Stouraites, Roman Identity, 194.

35. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, ed. I. Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae synopsis historiarum* [CFHB 5], Berlin 1973, 362.

consisted mostly of Romans. The simplest (and correct) explanation is that they grew up exposed to this notion in their towns because the provincial population self-identified as Roman. Elites-in-the making did not have to "learn" this identity in Constantinople. We would otherwise have to postulate Roman identity as an affectation that they picked up during the course of their education, though we never hear anything about the textual or other instruments of this process of Romanization. Also, not all members of the elite were classically educated (e.g., likely, Daphnomeles), so we require an extra-textual process of Romanization. A different explanation is that local elites in the provinces self-identified from birth as Romans but that their surrounding social context (local non-elites) did not. But where are we to draw the line, and what social mechanisms sustained this local distinction in the long run? The elite reading of Roman identity cannot answer these questions.

The difficulty in defining the Byzantine elite is exacerbated when we bring more sources into the discussion. Prokopios, an allegedly "classicizing" author, is one thing, but we find the same expressions in his contemporary Cyril (Kyrillos) of Skythopolis, a monk at St. Saba near Jerusalem and the author of saints' lives. In his *Life of Ioannes the Hesychast* he says that a Saracen raid against the provinces of Arabia and Palestine seized *as captives many tens of thousands of Romans*[36], meaning average provincials. A fascinating story about precisely such captives is told in the second collection of *The Miracles of St Demetrios* of Thessalonike, written by an anonymous priest in the seventh century. The Avar khan took a multitude of captives off to his own realm, where they had children with barbarian women and taught those children *the impulses of the genos according to the customs of the Romans*, so that when the children grew up they wanted to return to their homeland. This ecclesiastical writer calls them *a Roman people* in exile, ready to return like the Jews whom Moses led to the promised land[37].

36. E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, Leipzig 1939, 201-222, here 211.

37. *Miracles of St. Demetrios* II, 284-287, ed. P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius et la pénétration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, v. 1, Paris 1979: *τὸν ἅπαντα λαὸν τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας κατέστησεν ὁ λεχθεὶς χαγάνος ... ἐπιμιγέντες μετὰ Βουλγάρων καὶ Ἀβάρων καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἐθνικῶν, καὶ παιδοποιησάντων ἀπ' ἀλλήλων ... παῖς δὲ παρὰ πατρὸς ἕκαστος τὰς ἐνεγκαμένας παρειληφότων καὶ τὴν ὁρμὴν τοῦ γένους κατὰ τῶν ἠθῶν τῶν Ῥωμαίων... μαθὼν τὴν τοῦ τοιούτου λαοῦ τῶν πατρῴων πόλεων*

This story makes sense only if we treat Roman as an ethnic identity, not a class identity.

It was not only a Constantinopolitan elite (of provincial extraction) who were "projecting" a Roman identity onto the population of the empire. This was also being done by monks in Palestine and priests in Thessalonike who were not engaged in "homogenizing discourse" about Roman identity but just writing edifying stories about saints. One might argue that they too were educated (by definition, for they were authors) and so complicit in the same elite game, but the plot has become incredibly complex by this point. What could they possibly hope to accomplish by artificially pretending that the Romans of their world were a *γένος* spread across the provinces, if that was not the case? And the authors who were complicit in this game have expanded in scope and diversity well beyond a narrow Constantinopolitan elite: we must now include provincial ecclesiastical and monastic leaders as well, in addition to icon-painters, soldiers, and captives. And the group is only going to expand more when we turn to texts that seem to reflect additional provincial perspectives.

The Roman army

A major blind spot in the elite reading of Roman identity is the army. It sees the Byzantine empire as radically bifurcated between an exploitative elite residing in Constantinople (that produced discourses of Roman identity) and an indifferent provincial population that seemed to have no identity beyond being generically Christian[38]. The Byzantine army, however, formed a strong link, even a bridge, between these two (alleged) sides, and it consisted of tens of thousands of men who were socially prominent bearers of Roman identity. It is the army that is most frequently associated with the common name of the *γένος* ("the Romans") in our sources, which is due to the focus of most historical texts on war.

In elite narratives, the army is consistently called *the army of the Romans*, and its soldiers are individually called Romans when necessary[39].

ἐπιθυμίαν, ἐν σκέψει γίνεται καὶ ἀνάστατον λαμβάνει τὸν πάντα Ῥωμαίων λαὸν μετὰ καὶ ἑτέρων ἐθνικῶν, καθὰ ἐν τῇ μωσαϊκῇ τῆς ἐξόδου τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐμφέρεται βίβλῳ.

38. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 203, 205.

39. E.g., Theophylaktos Simokattes, *History* 2.6.1, 7.2.8.

More strikingly, the soldiers are addressed collectively as *Romans!* by their officers in battle-speeches, and some of those speeches invoke the glory of the old Roman empire, the early wars of expansion, and even the heroes of the Republic. This happens in speeches reported from all periods, and the Roman references in them are thick[40]. There can be no doubt that Byzantine soldiers responded to the Roman name and to patriotic appeals to defend the Roman land and the Roman people, pointing to a community broader than just themselves. Proponents of an elite reading of Roman identity could argue that this was merely a literary game, a convention of historiography that persisted without relation to the identities of the men being addressed. After all, the speeches are, in fact, mostly invented by the historians who report them.

It is, however, possible to penetrate the distorting veil that elite sources have (allegedly) pulled over reality. First, we have a number of addresses to the soldiers that were not invented by historians but were meant to be delivered to the army as written, two by Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos (945-959) and one by the patriarch-in-exile at Nikaia, Michael IV Autoreianos (1206-1212). Konstantinos VII's speech of 958 calls the soldiers *champions of the Roman genos* and *advance-fighters of the Romans*[41]. Autoreianos also addresses all the soldiers and subjects of the emperor as Roman men with his first words[42]. Moreover, the practice of addressing soldiers as Romans is attested in the Syriac *Chronicle* of pseudo-Joshua the Stylite (ca. 506), an Edessan text that is less beholden to the conventions of Greek

40. E.g., Agathias, *Histories* 2.12.2-4, 5.17.1; Euagrios, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia*, London 1898; Theophylaktos Simokattes, *History* 1.1, 2.14, 2.16, 3.13; Herakleios in Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* p. 307, ed. C. de Boor, *Theophanis chronographia*, v. 1, Leipzig 1883; *On Skirmishing* 23, ed. G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* [CFHB 25], Washington, D.C. 1985; Theodosios the Deacon, *Capture of Crete* 73-74, 412, and passim, ed. H. Criscuolo, *Theodosii diaconi de Creta capta*, Leipzig 1979; Leon the Deacon, *History* 1.6, 2.3, 8.3, 8.10, ed. K. B. Hase, *Leonis diaconi Caloënsis historiae libri decem* [CSHB], Bonn 1828; Kinnamos, *History* 1.10, 2.6, 2.8, 5.14, 5.15; Niketas Choniates, *History* 42, 154, 166, 386.

41. R. Vári, Zum historischen Exzerptenwerke des Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos, *BZ* 17 (1908), 78-84, in sections 1 and 8 of the speech.

42. N. Oikonomides, Cinq actes inédites du patriarche Michel Autôreianos, *REB* 25 (1967), 113-145, here Act II, p. 117.

historiography[43]. More interesting is the text of a religious service honoring fallen soldiers as saints that is preserved in a tenth-century manuscript. It stresses their Christian qualities, but also calls them *the offspring of Rome* and the foundation of the *fatherland* and the entire *γένος*[44]. We note again the language of *γένος* to refer to the larger community that these soldiers died to protect. This text is important because it does not reflect a Constantinopolitan standpoint. The imperial Church most emphatically did not recognize fallen soldiers as saints[45]. This service was probably the product of a local context, likely the camps of Cappadocia, and so it is important that it too reflects a Roman identity and ideology.

Therefore, the evidence indicates not only that Byzantine soldiers had a Roman identity, but that they *were* Romans in direct succession to the armies of the Roman *respublica* since antiquity. This adds tens of thousands of Romans, which the elite reading cannot accommodate. Moreover, they do not come alone. In many publications, John Haldon has argued that the armies of the middle Byzantine empire were recruited locally, culturally homogeneous, closely tied to their home communities, and continued to reflect those communities' concerns and outlook after they had been recruited[46]. If they were Romans and understood their occupation as the protection of the *γένος*, the *πατρίς*, and Romanía, as all the texts tell us that they did, then it is likely that these concerns were shared by their families and communities. Given the number of soldiers that the empire had, this would not exclude many people. Besides, the alternative argument – that the army, recruited and stationed in the provinces, had a Roman identity but that the communities from which it was drawn and which it was pledged to defend did not – would be bizarre, in need or impressive conceptual

43. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle* 293, transl. F. Trombley and J. Watt, Liverpool 2000, 85.

44. Th. Détorakis and J. Mossay, Un office inédit pour ceux qui sont morts à la guerre, dans le Cod. Sin. Gr. 734-735, *Le Muséon: Revue des études orientales* 101 (1988), 183-211, esp. vv. 43-44, 101.

45. M. Riedel, Nikephoros II Phokas and Orthodox Military Martyrs, *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41 (2015), 121-147.

46. J. Haldon, Military Service, Military Lands, and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations, *DOP* 47 (1993) 1-67, e.g., 53, and in the papers in *State, Army and Society in Byzantium*, London 1995.

acrobatics to maintain. It would also fly in the face of all the sources at our disposal. The elite reading of Roman identity must, therefore, not only somehow extract local elites from their surrounding provincial context, but also separate soldiers from their families and local communities. It is unclear what methodology could accomplish this, or why we would want to do it in the first place.

Provincial, subelite, and foreign sources

As mentioned, the extent of illiteracy makes it difficult to find self-ascriptions of Roman identity further down the social scale and into the provinces. This does not mean that the identity itself was absent there, which would be a reductive conclusion resting on a circular premise. Still, there are texts coming from across the empire's territory, across genres, and across centuries that, whether taken in isolation or together, create a difficult burden for the elite reading of Roman identity to overcome. They strongly suggest that the majority of Byzantines self-identified as Romans and Christians, two labels that pointed to different aspects of their life and were not conceptually homologous, but could easily overlap.

Let us start with hagiography. In the fantastical fifth- or sixth-century *vita* of Epiphanios of Salamis, the saint is described as coming from a poor family of peasants in the province of Phoenicia who did not have enough to eat. Yet when the saint comes to the court of the Persian king – a long story there – he warns the king not to fight against the Romans, *for if you move against the Romans you will be moving against the Crucified one*. When he leaves, the king tells him to *go in health, Epiphanios, Glory of the Romans!* (*ἡ δόξα τῶν Ῥωμαίων*)[47]. This provincial production is not written in a high style, but clearly made the point – to us as well as to later generations of Byzantines – that a poor provincial from Phoenicia was naturally a Roman. In the ninth-century vita of Nikolaos the Younger, a provincial work, the first-person plural pronoun ("we") is used in apposition to the Romans in reference to a barbarian invasion; the same also happens in the ninth-century *vita* of Petros of Atroa[48].

47. In *PG* 41: 41, 45; see C. Rapp, Epiphanius of Salamis: The Church Father as Saint, in: '*The Sweet Land of Cyprus*' , ed. A. Bryer and G. Georgallides, Nicosia 1993, 169-187, here 178-184.

48. Nikolaos in I. Polemis and E. Mineva, eds., *Βυζαντινά υμνογραφικά και*

Epigraphy provides an interesting specimen from Sirmium, from the later sixth or seventh century. We saw above how Prokopios assumed that much of the population of the town and its surrounding territory was Roman. A local inscription preserves a prayer written in horrible Greek, certainly not written by anyone in the "literary elite". It says: *Christ, Lord, help the city and stop the Avars, and protect Romanía along with the one writing these words, Amen*[49]. This is merely a provincial expression of the same sentiment that the emperor Herakleios put on his coins: *Deus adiuta Romanis*, God help the Romans[50]. The Romans in question included both the emperor and his provincial subjects.

Vernacular poetry confirms the provincial extension of Roman identity. The epic *Digenis Akritis* originated in the frontier regions of eastern Asia Minor. Versions of the tale were being performed to military and lay audiences. As do all texts, it constructs its own version of social reality and Romanía in general, which is different in many ways from those of the Constantinopolitan elite, but it reflects an unselfconscious Roman identity nonetheless. When a Saracen emir asks some Byzantine prisoners, *What is your γένος? What theme do you live in?*, they answer, *We are from the Anatolikon [theme], from noble Roman stock*[51]. They do not mean that all Romans are noble, but that they specifically come from noble families among the Romans, families which they then name. The emir, after all, already knows that his captives are Roman; they are giving him more specific information about themselves.

A preface to a monastic typikon from ca. 1100 also proves that Roman identity was understood in ethnic terms, linked to specific cultural indicia, and designated a broad territorial population, not a limited social

---

αγιολογικά κείμενα, Athens 2016, 446 *τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἐκάλυπτε γῆν καὶ βαρβαρικὸν ἔθνος... καθ' ἡμῶν ἐπιστρατεύσαντες*. Petros in Sabas, *Life of Petros of Atroa* 48, ed. V. Laurent, *La vie merveilleuse de saint Pierre d'Atroa* [SubsHag 29], Bruxelles 1956, 65-225: *πλῆθος Ἰσμαηλιτῶν κατὰ τῆς ῥωμαϊκῆς βεβούλευται ἐξελθεῖν χώρας ... εἰ τοῦτο γένηται καὶ εἰσέλθουν πρὸς ἡμᾶς οἱ Ἰσμαηλῖται ...*

49. *Eranos Vindobonensis*, Vienna 1893, 331-333: *Χρ(ιστέ) Κ(ύριε) βοήτι της πόλεως κ' ἔρυξον τὸν Ἄβαριν κὲ πύλαξον τὴν Ρωμανίαν κὲ τὸν γράψαντα ἀμήν.*

50. P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collections*, v. 2.1, Washington, D.C. 1968, 270 (no. 61.2).

51. *Digenis G* 1.263-267, ed. E. Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions* [Cambridge Medieval Classics 7], Cambridge 1998.

class. The aspiring monastic founder, Nikon of the Black Mountain (active near Antioch), sought to establish his Orthodox credentials in a territory (northern Syria) that had become religiously diverse, including branches of the Syrian and Armenian churches. He states that he himself was never curious about the fine points of doctrine but had received the faith *entire from the start and from his ancestors: these were not people who had been raised and lived in any of the places and lands where the heresies are all mixed up together, but were a Roman root* (*ῥίζα Ῥωμαίων*), *via the grace of Christ*[52]. Nikon configures his Romanness as a function of ancestry, i.e., ethnically, and uses this to establish his Orthodoxy. This does not mean that Roman and Orthodox were semantically interchangeable, but Orthodoxy was one of the essential cultural indicia of the Roman *γένος*, and therefore the latter could be cited as proof of the former. Nikon himself may have come from a noble Constantinopolitan background[53], which makes it all the more significant that he does not configure his Roman identity in terms of class or Constantinople at all. Instead, he assumes that Romans were a people spread over a *territory*, not just the capital. This too is the conclusion that his non-elite, non-Constantinopolitan monastic audience would have drawn: any place in the heartland of Asia Minor would suffice for his argument to work. Nikon came from a "land" where the Romans were not mixed up (territorially) with the heresies that one could find in northern Syria (Armenians, Syrians). This is consistent with an ethnic reading in which the *ἔθνος* is spread out over a particular territory.

In the cases presented above (Epiphanios, Sirmium, *Digenis*, Nikon, the *vitae*), we see that provincial Roman identity emerges with greater focus when it is juxtaposed to the presence of a foreigner (Persians, Avars, Arabs, etc.). The interface between Romans and non-Romans appears as that between Byzantines and foreigners at the border of the empire, and not between elite and non-elite Byzantines *within the empire*. This supports the national or ethnic interpretation, because within Romanía, in what was a largely homogeneous Roman context, there would have been little purpose to insist on that distinction.

52. V. Beneshevich, *Taktikon Nikona Chernogortsa*, St. Petersburg 1917, 15.

53. I. Doens, Nicon de la Montagne Noire, *Byz* 24 (1954), 131-140.

The "home" territory was not, however, entirely homogeneous in terms of its Roman identity. I will present one category of exception here and the second in the next section. One *internal* interface between Romans and non-Romans is illustrated strikingly by wills in which slaves are manumitted. Two of these documents from the eleventh century and one from the twelfth categorically state that when slaves are freed they become *free Roman citizens*[54]. These new Romans would occupy the bottom of the social scale, thus the salient distinction between Roman and non-Roman was between free and slave, not elite and non-elite. The wording of these documents reinforces the language and ideology of "Roman freedom" that we observed above in connection with Nikephoros III Botaneiates (via Attaleiates) and Manuel I (via Kinnamos). This language was not a meaningless formula but deeply consequential in terms of social and legal history (though its implications cannot be worked out here). A typical reaction by Byzantinists to this kind of language is to dismiss it as a fossil devoid of any actual social value, but this is special pleading that is used to dismiss anything that sounds "too classical to be true". At least we can say that the language of citizenship and freedom was not limited to Constantinopolitan elites because one of the manumission cases is from southern Italy and the other from the eastern reaches of Asia Minor; the third, from the twelfth century, is from Thessalonike or Constantinople. Thus, we see again that Roman identity is not exclusively elite or Constantinopolitan but extends to the farthest provinces and the lowest social classes, and is used to constitute the political status of all free Byzantines (a point discussed below). Those former slaves surely knew that they were now Romans, and if they knew so did other provincials.

By this point, the category Roman has expanded beyond the elite to include provincial monks and clerics, the bards of quasi-vernacular epics on the eastern frontier, and newly freed slaves in the distant provinces. In sum, it is much safer to conclude that the vast majority of the population self-identified as Romans than to maintain the conspiracy-theory of a

54. S. Vryonis, The Will of a Provincial Magnate, Eustathius Boilas (1059), *DOP* 11 (1956), 263-277, here 270; A. Dain, Une formule d'affranchissement d'esclave, *REB* 22 (1964), 238-240; Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Letter* 27 (p. 80); ed. F. Kolovou, *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike* [Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 239], Munich-Leipzig 2006.

"homogenizing discourse". There might not have been anything particularly interesting, assertive, active, or patriotic about the Roman identity of this majority – that is a separate topic – but it was there.

Furthermore, we can use indirect evidence to confirm that provincial and non-elite Byzantines answered to the Roman name (in the relevant contexts). I am referring to the testimony of foreigners or outsiders. Consider the *Typikon* of the Georgian monastery founded in Bulgaria in 1083 by the Caucasian aristocrat Gregorios Pakourianos. He specifically decreed that no Roman priest or monk should ever be appointed in it, because the Romans are violent and greedy and will seek to take it over. Clearly, he was not referring here only to the imperial elite (of which he was a member); moreover, his stipulations reveal not only that one could easily tell who was a Roman and who not, but that Romans were associated with specific ethnic stereotypes[55]. In a *vita* composed in early ninth-century Palestine, Stephanos of St. Saba (near Jerusalem), who died in 794, tells the story of a Byzantine woman who had come there to practice asceticism with her two daughters: he labels them simply as *Romans by genos* (*τῷ γένει μέν εἰσι Ῥωμαῖαι*), though conceivably they were from the city of Rome in Italy rather than Byzantium[56].

The best foreign evidence comes from the Arabs, who consistently called the Byzantines Romans (*Rum*), except for the specific ethnic minorities living among them such as Slavs, Armenians, or Bulgarians (depending on the period). The Arabs were excellent ethnographers and named the various ethnic groups that were subordinate to neighboring states. Yet in their detailed testimony about Byzantium, they treat its inhabitants, whether high or low, Constantinopolitan or provincial, as *al-Rum*. To give only a few among countless examples, the ninth-century Arab essayist al-Jahiz argued that the *Rum* of his time were good not at science but at the humble *handicrafts of turnery, carpentry, painting, and silk-weaving*[57]. He was not writing about an elite here –of generals, statesmen, and orators–

55. Gregorios Pakourianos, *Typikon* 24, ed. P. Gautier, Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos, *REB* 42 (1984), 5-145, here 105.

56. *AASS: Julius III*, 1723, 531-613, here 570-571.

57. Al-Jahiz, transl. C. Connelly, *Contesting the Greek Past in Ninth-Century Baghdad*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University 2016, 116.

but the general Rum population. Likewise, Byzantine slave women in the Arab world were called *Roman women* and juxtaposed to other ethnicities, such as Slavs and Franks[58]. Examples can be cited of slaves of *Rum* ethnic origin who were not nobles but had practiced lowly professions, such as blacksmiths[59]. A fascinating case is provided by the poet Abu Firas, a cousin of the Hamdanid prince of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla. In 960s, Abu Firas spent time as a captive in Constantinople. As it happens, his mother was Roman, a slave-woman of his father's, though Abu Firas defensively claimed she was a free woman. At any rate, he refers to her as *Rum*, which again proves that this was, in Arab eyes, an ethnic category, not an class one[60]. In this, the Arab and the Byzantine sources agree.

Arab ethnographers relied on the testimony of visitors to the empire, none of whom formed the impression that the Roman ethnonym was limited in scope to a small elite in the capital. They also traded with, captured, and interrogated Byzantines often, but if they uncovered non-Roman identities among them that fell beneath the horizon of notice in our allegedly elite Byzantine sources, this still failed to shake their view that *Rum* lands were populated overwhelmingly by self-identifying Romans.

Confirmation of this conclusion comes unexpectedly from a Frankish source. Western European sources generally call the Byzantines "Greeks", which was a distortion driven by the need of western institutions (such as the papacy and the German empire) to assert exclusive ownership of the Roman tradition. Nevertheless, in the Greek version of the *Chronicle of the Morea* (early fourteenth century, but reflecting the thirteenth century), the Byzantines are called Romans throughout, including both the subjects of the Byzantine emperor and his former subjects now ruled by the French in the principality of Achaea. These Romans are called a *γένος* throughout the poem and are defined by traits that were shared by a large population in the Aegean region, for example religion (e.g., 470: *to make all Romans*

58. N. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Cambridge MA 2004, 115-137.

59. Al-Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, transl. P. K. Hitti, New York, 1961, v. 1, pp. 86, 248 (mistranslated as "Greeks").

60. E.g., Abû Firâs al-Hamdânî, *Les Byzantines: La voix d'un prisonnier*, transl. A. Miquel, Paris 2010: poem 19 (p. 48): *I sometimes fear the Roman relatives of my mother*; poem 18 (p. 46): *my low blood* (stressing her low social class); see A. El Tayib, Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī, in: *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. J. Ashtiany at al., Cambridge 1990, 315–327, here 315.

obey the pope, for they were Orthodox); ethnic stereotypes (e.g., 593-594: the *γένος* of the Romans is crafty and faithless); and speech (*the language of the Romans* –what we call Greek– is called *ῥωμαΐϊκα*: 4130; cf. 5207)[61]. Romans and Franks are often juxtaposed as different but comparable types, and references are made to the *local Romans* of the Morea (e.g., 1424). Why does this poem deviate from the standard western practice of calling the Byzantines Greeks? This question has not been fully investigated, but the most recent study supports the priority of the Greek version of the poem over the French (the latter would then be a translation and adaptation of the Greek)[62]. This was, then, a Frankish text, reflecting the typical prejudice against the Romans / Byzantines, but it was composed in vernacular Greek by a Moreot Frank, who was likely bilingual. In his poem he reflected local usage, including the fact that the Greek-speaking Orthodox population of the empire and its former provinces (such as the Peloponnese) called themselves Romans and spoke *ρωμαΐϊκα*.

In other words, even their language, which was known to the Byzantines as being Greek, was also called, via their national name, as *the language of the Romans* or *ρωμαΐϊκα*[63]. The national name took priority over the original names of the nation's cultural indicia. Therefore, Byzantines were not Greeks because they spoke Greek (that is a modern nationalist interpretation); rather, their language (Greek) was renamed Roman because they were Romans: current ethnicity here trumped ancient linguistic taxonomies. It is important that we find this label in vernacular contexts, such as the *Chronicle of the Morea*. The late Byzantine translation of the romance of *Apollonius, King of Tyre*, is called in the manuscript a *Μεταγλώττισμα ἀπὸ λατινικὸν εἰς Ρωμαϊκόν*, i.e., Greek[64]. This usage is confirmed in non-Byzantine texts, whose authors clearly learned the language-name *ρωμαΐϊκα* from Greek-speaking provincials and not the elite in the capital. Sultan Veled (Walad) was the son of the great Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi and lived in Asia Minor in the later thirteenth century. In one poem, he addresses a beautiful

61. Ed. J. Schmitt, *The Chronicle of Morea*, London 1904.

62. T. Shawcross, *The Chronicle of Morea: Historiography in Crusader Greece*, Oxford 2009.

63. C. Cupane, Ἡ τῶν Ῥωμαίων γλῶσσα, in: *Byzantina Mediterranea: Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. K. Belke et al., Vienna 2007, 137-156.

64. R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance,* London 1996, 140, 253 n. 35.

woman in Greek, which he calls *ῥωμαϊκά*, so that she can understand him[65]. Thus, independent Frankish and Persian witnesses, active at opposite ends of the former Byzantine world (in the Morea and central Asia Minor respectively), attest that the language of the Byzantines was popularly called *ῥωμαϊκά*. The implication here is momentous: elite sources prefer saying *the language of the Romans* instead of *ῥωμαϊκά* because the latter word was *too vernacular and demotic* for their high-register tastes. But it appears as soon as we get sources that report what people were saying in the provinces. This supports the conclusion that Roman identity was popularly held at the provincial level in Byzantium, and was not a literary game by the elite. Quite the contrary, it was "Hellenism" that was an elite pursuit.

Striking additional proof is provided by the poem *Dittamondo* written by the fourteenth-century Florentine poet Fazio degli Uberti. This didactic poem takes the form of an exploration of the known world. When the narrator reaches Macedonia he meets a local with whom he speaks in a demotic form of Greek, which is transcribed directly into the poem. *Do you speak Frangika?*, he asks the local. The latter answers *Ime roméos* [*εἶμαι Ῥωμαῖος, i.e., I am a Roman*][66]. What he says immediately after that is harder to make out, but this outside testimony should lay to rest any doubt that the Byzantines called themselves Romans and meant by that their demotic, everyday forms of speech, not anything elite.

Ethnic distinctions inside Byzantium

There was another category of people living in the Roman territory (Romanía) who were not considered Romans. The Byzantine sources do not attribute a Roman identity to the *entire* population of the empire or to all who served the emperor. It was not only slaves but other groups, larger or smaller depending on the circumstances, who are pointedly excluded through their ethnic ascriptions. In the early period, these groups included (among others) Isaurians (at times), Jews (partially), Goths; in the middle period Slavs in

65. D. Korobeinikov, How 'Byzantine' Were the Early Ottomans? Bithynia in ca. 1290-1450, in: *Osmanskii mir I osmanistika*, ed. I. V. Zaitsev and S. F. Oreshkova, Moscow 2010, 215-238, here 222.

66. Uberti, *Dittamondo* 3.23 (v. 36), ed. G. Corsi, Bari 1952, v. 1, 249; see the commentary in v. 2, 298-301. I owe this reference, with gratitude, to Andreas Kyropoulos.

Greece, Bulgarians, Jews (partially), and Armenians. Though they were subject to the emperor, or serving in his armies, these groups are named in ways that make them non-Roman (e.g., through the opposition *Armenians and Romans*)[67]. If Roman identity was a truly imperial identity applied to whoever served the emperor or was subject to him[68], this should not have happened. But it did, because Roman was an ethnic identity exclusive to other ethnic identities. It is thus misleading or false to say that "any people or group could potentially be included as Roman subjects"[69]. This fails to distinguish between Roman and non-Roman subjects of the Roman empire, and is a mistake made commonly by historians who refuse to accept the reality of Roman identity in Byzantium[70].

Our sources regularly distinguish between Romans and ethnic foreigners serving in the Byzantine armies, either by naming the foreigners (e.g., Bulgarians, Slavs, Armenians, Arvanites) or simply calling them *ἀλλόφυλοι* (people of another race), *ἐθνικοὶ* (foreigners), or "barbarians"[71]. These distinctions go back to the early Byzantine period. We find them

67. See, e.g., G. Theotokis, Rus, Varangian and Frankish Mercenaries in the Service of Byzantine Emperors (9th-11th c.), *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 22 (2012), 125-156. The evidence for such distinctions is pervasive in the later period also: G. Page, *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity before the Ottomans*, Cambridge 2008.

68. As advocated by, e.g., G. Greatrex, Roman Identity in the Sixth Century, in: *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*, ed. G. Greatrex and S. Mitchell, London 2000, 267-292.

69. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 189. He postulates the twelfth century as "a period of gradual transition from imperial to ethnic notions of Romanness" (202). But he neither defines nor documents this transition.

70. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 199-200, repeats the error in the case of the Bulgarians: as "Roman subjects, they were Romans and not barbarians, in the sense of foreigners." There is, however, abundant evidence that *Roman* Byzantines did not view all or most Bulgarians as Romans even after they had become imperial *subjects*; instead, they continued to view them, along with other "ethnic" subjects, as barbarians: A. Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Lands and People in Byzantine Literature*, Philadelphia 2014, ch. 4, among many treatments of the theme.

71. E.g., Theophanes, *Chronographia*, pp. 366, 393 (for the eighth century); Leon VI, *Taktika* 20.89, ed. G. T. Dennis, *The Tactica of Leo VI* [CFHB 49], Washington, D.C. 2010; Leon the Deacon, *History* 2.8; Kekaumenos, *Strategikon* 80, 88, ed. D. Tsoungarakis, *Κεκαυμένος: Στρατηγικόν*, Athens 1993; Attaleiates, *History* 116, 297.

frequently, for example, in Prokopios[72]. In his speech addressed to the army in 958, Konstantinos VII reminds the men that there are units of barbarians (*ἐθνικοί, ἔθνη*) fighting alongside them, so the rest should fight bravely to impress the courage of "the Roman *γένος*" upon both them and the *ὁμόφυλοι* (men of the same race)[73]. The distinction also had legal implications, reinforcing the point made above about the robustness of Roman citizenship as a legal attribute in Byzantium. In a compilation of decisions made by the early eleventh-century judge Eustathios Romaios, we find cases of men in imperial service, holding high court titles, who are designated as *barbarians by race* (*τό γένος*), *from the foreign nations* (*ἔθνος*), or *ἐθνικοὶ who had come to the Roman empire*. One of them was a Georgian, so the distinction between him and the Romans could only be ethnic and not religious. The men in these cases had not followed *the laws of the Romans* when drawing up their wills but rather their own customs, and the judge emended the wills in accordance with Roman law[74]. It would seem that foreigners in imperial service, and likely many non-Romans living in the empire, followed partially different legal regimes than the majority Roman population, and in this case the judge imposed uniformity. This opens up a fascinating but neglected area of ethno-legal research, namely a Byzantine law of persons that differentiated legal regimes based on ethnicity, e.g., for Jews, Varangians, Muslims, and others[75]. But on what grounds were ethnic distinctions made?

In the case cited in the *Πεῖρα*, the distinction is firmly made on the basis of *γένος*, i.e., barbarian ethnicity, and not religion (which was either

72. A. Kaldellis, Classicism, Barbarism, and Warfare: Prokopios and the Conservative Reaction to Later Roman Military Policy, *American Journal of Ancient History* n.s. 3-4 (2004-2005 [2007]), 189-218. For barbarians in the service of Belisarios, see, e.g., Prokopios, *Wars* 6.1.27, 7.35.23-25.

73. See esp. sections 6-8 of the speech.

74. Eustathios Romaios, *Peira* 14.16, 54.6, ed. I. and P. Zepos, *Ius Graecoromanum*, v. 4, Athens 1931.

75. S. Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, trans. B. S. Benedikz, Cambridge 1978, 24, 95, 182 (cf. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 394); A. Linder, The Legal Status of Jews in the Byzantine Empire, in: *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, ed. R. Bonfil et al., Leiden 2012, 149-217; W. Reinert, The Muslim Presence in Constantinople, 9th-15th Centuries: Some Preliminary Observations, in: *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. H. Ahrweiler and A. E. Laiou, Washington, D.C. 1998, 125-150.

not mentioned or irrelevant, for the case concerned a Georgian). What made Romans different from barbarians, *ἐθνικοί*, and generally "others" who lived or served within the empire? Here is where the notion of a Roman *γένος* becomes urgently relevant and in need of explication rather than dismissal. A number of primary sources do suggest that the Romans of Byzantium viewed themselves as an ethnic or national community defined on the one hand by cultural traits such as language, religion, customs, food, and dress, and on the other by belonging to a specific named polity (the *πολιτεία* of the Romans) in which they were shareholders. The idea of the *γένος* or *ἔθνος* of the Roman people has been occluded in scholarship but is quite prominent in the sources. One of the most famous is the declaration by Konstantinos VII that other nations do not mix well with Romans because of the specific traits entailed by what he called *the Roman order of things*, which include race, religion, language, and other customs[76]. Many examples can also be given from less tendentious sources. I will give one here. A note appended to the history of Ioannes Skylitzes in the early twelfth century says that the emperor refounded a city in Italy with settlers from the Pontos, *which explains why that city uses Roman customs and dress and a Roman social order down to this day*[77]. The author of this note understood it as self-explanatory. But modern scholars who deny the existence of premodern nations fail to grasp or must deny its obvious implications for the nature of the Roman community of Byzantium and the ways in which it distinguished between insiders and outsiders. One could apparently tell who was a Roman based on *customs, dress, and social order.*

Many Byzantinists, like many premodern historians, axiomatically deny the existence of premodern nations and are committed to what is sometimes called the modernist school of nation-formation, which was pioneered in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s by modern historians and anthropologists such as Ernerst Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and others, who viewed nation-states exclusively against the background of their modern emergence. Stouraitis, for example, refers to this as "the still valid and

76. Konstantinos VII, *De administrando imperio* 13.114-115, 175-185, ed. G. Moravcsik and R. Jenkins, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: De administrando imperio* [CFHB 1], Washington, D.C. 1967.

77. Skylitzes, *Synopsis* 151.

preponderant sociological axiom about the modernity of nations and national identities"[78]. In reality, however, this model is embarrassingly outdated and under fire from many directions, both empirical (scholars are adducing a growing number of premodern people who match period-neutral definitions of the nation) as well as theoretical (modernists mistake the specific processes by which *some* –not all– modern nations emerged as transhistoric definitions of nationhood)[79]. The modernist doctrine has even been dethroned in Oxford's Very Short Introduction to Nationalism[80]. This is a large debate that is tangential to our focus, the social scope of Roman identity in Byzantium, but one part of it bears directly on our problem.

According to the modernist view, in the days before national identities (so roughly before the mid-eighteenth century) elites developed specifically elite identities which allowed them to distinguish themselves from their subject populations. If anything, they developed cross-cultural aristocratic identities that drew them closer to the elites in neighboring states, forging tighter connections between them than either had to their "native" subject populations. This, in a nutshell, is the modernists' view of prenational elite identities[81]. In this light, however, the Byzantine version of Roman identity appears odd, for no texts have been brought forward in which Roman identity is the preserve of the Byzantine elite, and there are many, as we have seen, which imply the opposite. Nor, on the other hand, did Byzantine elites use their Roman identity in order to establish links to foreign elites – far from it, in fact: they consistently used it to distinguish between Romans and foreigners. Roman identity consistently encompasses a large

78. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 178.

79. I cite a sampling from an enormous bibliography: C. Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge 2012; A. Gat, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Cambridge 2013; D. Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism*, Cambridge 2006; E. Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, Princeton 2000; J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, London and New York 2000; S. Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern*, Winona Lake, IN 2002; T. M. van Lint, The Formation of Armenian Identity in the First Millenium, *Church History and Religious Culture* 89 (2009), 251-278; S. Reynolds, Nations, Tribes, Peoples, and States, *Medieval Worlds* 2 (2015), 79-88.

80. S. Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2005.

81. This orthodoxy can be found in many books. For a concise formulation, see E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY 1983.

community defined by ethnic criteria that reaches from the emperor down to humble provincials. If this matches anything in the modernists' theoretical playbook, it is the proto-national identities that early modern intellectuals began to formulate within their countries before the latter had been taught to recognize themselves as nations. These intellectuals "imagined" the nation as a horizontal community before it was actually created.

Unfortunately, Stouraitis does not engage with his theoretical models deeply enough to make this connection. He assumes that Byzantine elites "projected an image of the empire's population as a solid Roman community"[82], but does not explain why they would do so if it were not the case; how they came to imagine such a thing; and why we should call this an elite identity to begin with when it is emphatically presented as an ethnic or national one in the sources. Were Byzantine elites engaged in a preliminary act of conceptual nation-building, or were they referring to a Roman nation which already existed? Either there were millions of Romans in Byzantium or some revolution in thought was taking place that no modernist theorist has yet explained.

Was "exploitation" a relevant factor?

Proponents of the elite reading of Roman identity advance an argument from exploitation that must also be addressed. The general idea is that the Byzantine elite so exploited the mass of the population economically that there could not possibly be any community of ethnic or national identity between them. But this position faces steep evidentiary and methodological hurdles. For one thing, no text says or implies anything of the sort. Moreover, it has yet to be demonstrated why popular national sentiments can exist in early modern and modern states marked by extraordinary degrees of exploitation, racism, and inequality, but not in Byzantium. Be that as it may, in support of the exploitation thesis Stouraitis offers a reading of a single episode from the *vita* of Antonios the Younger (ninth century). Yet this quasi-fictional episode, taken out of the context of the *vita*, does not bear the weight that he has imposed on it. It is worth looking more closely at it because it exposes the problematic methodologies required by the elite thesis.

82. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 194.

The *vita* claims that in the 820s a Saracen fleet attacked the city of Attaleia on the southern coast of Asia Minor in retaliation for an action by the Byzantine emperor against the Arabs elsewhere. The saint, who in that phase of his career was the governor of the city, pleads with the Arab commander not to attack his unfortunate town as *the emperor of the Romans orders his officers to do what he wants and it happens ... whether we want it or not*, basically "do not blame us for what he emperor did elsewhere". After a threat of divine retribution by the saint, the Saracens take hostages and leave[83]. In that one claim about the emperor, and the alleged absence of a defensive force to guard the city, Stouraitis sees "a remote, absolute power which managed its power-political affairs according to its own interests that did not identify with the interests of the common people... [who were] engaged in a war that was not really theirs"[84]. The episode allegedly exemplifies the exploitation of the provinces by a distant and uncaring capital .

But we have to be cautious, if not skeptical, for it is not at all clear that the text supports such robust readings. First, it is not clear that the emperor left this city to face the Arabs unprotected. The governor's stratagem of dressing some women up as soldiers to make his force seem bigger does not prove "the absence of a strong garrison"[85]. We do not know whether his original defense force was adequate or not as the stand-off was resolved diplomatically[86]. Neither the *vita* nor the saint blame the emperor for any (alleged) lack of protection. The point of the stratagem is to make the saint seem clever, not the emperor bad. Second, the saint's comments hardly imply that the citizens of Attaleia did not fully identify with the imperial order. We can imagine a patriotic citizen of a modern western nation, threatened by terrorists over the actions of his own government in their lands, responding in exactly the same way in order to appease his captors – and he would not necessarily have to be insincere. The saint is merely giving the emir a plausible pretext on which to negotiate a settlement, which is in fact how the story ended.

---

83. *Life of Antonios the Younger* 18 (p. 199), ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Συλλογὴ Παλαιστινῆς καὶ Συριακῆς ἁγιολογίας*, v. 1, St. Petersburg 1907, 186-216.

84. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 195.

85. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 195.

86. *Life of Antonios the Younger* 17 (p. 199).

Saying that *we follow the emperor's orders, whether we like them or not*, does not, moreover, express alienation. Consider, for example, the case of Eustathios Daphnomeles, the general whom we mentioned above. In 1018, at the end of the Bulgarian war, he and two attendants infiltrated the base of the last enemy general, Ibatzes. Surrounded by hostile Bulgarians, he blinded Ibatzes and told the crowd that he did not do this from personal motives but rather from *an imperial command, which I carried out as an obedient instrument*[87]. This, among other arguments for peace, persuaded the Bulgarians to capitulate. Daphnomeles was not an alienated provincial, but one of the emperor's closest associates. The saint in the *vita* was expressing the same notion: we are all but instruments of the emperor. Instead of pointing to a great ideological "distance" between the capital and the provinces, these two episodes reveal the opposite, namely that "following imperial orders" is what Byzantines did. The imperial order was efficacious, morally imperative, and had penetrated not only society (from the Balkans to southern Asia Minor) but had become a personal morality code. This points to solid integration and identification, not alienation.

Third, it is certainly not evident in the *vita* that the citizens of Attaleia saw this as "a war that was not really theirs". By the 820s the imperial government had been defending Asia Minor from Arabs for nearly two centuries, attacking one place, defending another, allocating resources here, and withdrawing them there. Provincials throughout Asia Minor knew perfectly well what was going on and abundant evidence outside the *vita* text suggests that they identified with this war effort[88]. Provincial alienation cannot just be postulated without at least mentioning all this other evidence. But Stouraitis' reading disregards crucially relevant information about Byzantine provincial administration too. Specifically, Attaleia was the second largest naval base in the empire after Constantinople and the capital of a theme (Kibyrraiotai). Thousands of sailors and marines were based there and the local economy was therefore based to a considerable degree on imperial expenses and policies. In addition, Attaleia was one of the duty-ports designated by the imperial government, which meant

87. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 362.

88. F. Trombley, War, Society and Popular Religion in Byzantine Anatolia (6th-13th Centuries), in: *Η Βυζαντινή Μικρά Ασία (6ος-12ος αι.)*, ed. S. Lampakis, Athens 1998, 97-139.

that trade coming into the empire from the east was required to stop there and pay tariffs[89]. More than most provincial cities, Attaleia was a "company town," where the company was the Roman state. It was a virtual extension or forward base of Constantinople. With these facts in mind, we can understand exactly why the Arabs chose to attack it in the 820s and how lame the saint's response was. This is why it is important to know and carefully consider the relevant historical context before making grand statements about provincial alienation.

A dubious interpretation of a single, mostly fictional story has here been turned into a full sociology of provincial alienation. But one could just as easily produce the opposite conclusion by selecting a different episode from another text. Consider the famous seventh-century *vita* of Maria the Egyptian. When she is about to die (in the desert, far from Constantinople), the monk Zosimas (not affiliated with the government in any way) asks her to pray for the Church and the empire (*βασιλεία*)[90]. Or else we could merely cite any number of instances when an emperor was informed about an Arab attack and either sent an army out to protect the provincials or went to do so in person. Precisely such an episode occurs elsewhere in the *vita* of Antonios himself, who blesses an army which the emperor sent against the Arabs to prevent them from harming the provincials[91]. Attaleia itself was saved in this way on a number of occasions[92]. How many such instances are necessary to refute the (alleged) impression created by one episode?

Moreover, the *vita* of Antonios reveals how important it is to read these texts in their entirety to make sure that the surrounding context does not vitiate the interpretation. Stouraitis extracts a sociology of empire from the words of a saint addressed to an Arab commander, but what he fails to tell us is that the saint in question was not a native of the empire to begin with: his *γένος* was, as the *vita* reveals, "Palestinian": he was a Christian from a town near Jerusalem where he grew up. Only later in life did he cross *from Syria*

89. H. Antoniadis-Bibicou, *Recherches sur les douanes à Byzance: L'«octava», le «kommerkion» et les commerciaires*, Paris 1963; D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium,* Tempe AZ 2012, 4-6.

90. In *PG* 87: 3697-3726, here 3724, section 36.

91. F. Halkin, Saint Antoine le Jeune et Petronas le vainqueur des Arabes en 863, *AnBoll* 62 (1944), 210-223, here 219.

92. E.g., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 398-399; H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*, Paris 1966, 134.

[*i.e., the Muslim world*] *into Romanía*, where he entered imperial service and was eventually promoted to governor of Attaleia[93]. From the rest of the *vita* it becomes clear that the saint's entire career is structured around imperial interests and interventions. He is hardly an exponent of a remote provincial outlook disconnected from the capital. In fact, he spent quite a bit of time in Constantinople, and chose to fight against the rebel Thomas the Slav simply out of loyalty to the emperor[94]. But even he was not quite a native Byzantine. When he is first appointed, he has to remind himself of the Proverb that *it is righteousness that exalts an ethnos and sins that condemn a tribe* [Prov. 14.34], implying that his exercise of authority will be premised on his morality rather than ethnic affinity with his subjects. When his spiritual father in Palestine writes to him, he reminds him that his *πατρὶς* was back there[95].

Let us now look again at the episode of the Arab attack. When the saint meets the commander and delivers the words that are allegedly so damning to Roman identity, the *vita* says that he spoke them *in Arabic* (which is what *Σύρᾳ φωνῇ* likely means here)[96], and he begins the exchange by revealing his insider's knowledge of affairs in "Syria" (the Muslim world). In other words, the saint is not necessarily reflecting the views of the Attaliots about the emperor, but is adopting the persona of one "Syrian" speaking to another. That is perhaps why he makes the emperor appear so distant, though, in truth, he was anything but irrelevant to the saint's own life and to Attaliot society. And why should we base our interpretation on the saint's words? Consider what the Saracen says to justify the attack: *You yourselves* (*αὐτοὶ*) *have forced us to do this, by sending raiders to plunder Syria*[97]. In other words, he intuitively identified the people of Attaleia with Romans elsewhere, assuming that they were the same people. In this he was entirely correct, especially about the people of Attaleia.

In short, this quasi-fictional episode does not support the notion that the provincials were alienated from a distant and oppressive capital. What it does show is how crucial imperial affairs were for shaping the life of

93. *Life of Antonios the Younger* 2 (p. 187) and 9 (p. 192) respectively.
94. ibid. 12 (pp. 194-195).
95. ibid. 20 (p. 201).
96. ibid. 18 (p. 199).
97. ibid. 18 (p. 200).

the saint from the moment of his entry to Romanía to the very end of his life; how aware Byzantine Romans were of ethnic differences; and how important imperial governance was for the lives of provincials (e.g., in resolving property disputes)[98]. Exploitation there may certainly have been in Byzantium, as there is in modern nations too, but that is not the question under discussion. That question is whether (alleged) exploitation disrupted the community of Roman interest that bound center and periphery together in what the Byzantines consistently called Romanía. This *vita* fails to demonstrate alienation, and it is significant that a historian looking for proof of non-identification between the capital and the provinces could turn up no stronger evidence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Byzantine sources decisively and consistently refute the idea that Roman identity was held exclusively by the elite in Constantinople, as well as the idea that it was used only by them, even if they projected it onto the rest of the population. Roman identity in Byzantium was neither limited to the capital nor to the social elite. The evidence points to a self-aware national community that extended beneath the threshold of visibility that our texts afford. Socially, all were Romans who were above the level of slaves; ethnically, all were Romans who conformed to the relevant ethnic indicia and who did not belong to another ethnic group; and geographically, Romans could be found from one end of the empire to the other. The elite in Constantinople identified as Roman because it was drawn from this extended horizontal community. That is what the sources say, consistently and coherently. These sources come from all periods and almost all regions of the empire; from all the social classes that left any written record in Byzantium; and from all genres. Their full testimony on this matter is, moreover, corroborated by that of foreigners, especially the Arabs but also Caucasians and even Franks. It is impossible that this testimony was produced by a single over-arching conspiracy to project a "homogenizing discourse" on the identity of the empire's population who neither knew nor cared that they were Romans.

98. ibid. 31-32 (pp. 209-210).

In the absence of evidence, by contrast, "critical" theory points wherever we want it to point. The elite theory, moreover, creates problems that we did not have before[99]. For example, if the majority of the empire's population did not think that they were Romans, then who did they think they were and why are their ethnonyms not mentioned in any text that has survived, whether Byzantine or Arab? Stouraitis offers no clear answer to this, and refers to the majority of the empire's population merely as generic Christians who were (vaguely) "ethno-culturally diverse"[100]. Whereas Byzantine sources divide the world into Romans and barbarians (or *ἐθνικοί*, foreigners), treating these two categories as exclusive and complementary, the elite reading requires some untheorized and unnamed *tertium quid* for the population of the empire itself. And it is not only provincials whom it strips of Roman identity, but the populace of Constantinople as well. They were endowed with venerable political rights[101], but Stouraitis refers to them only as "the mob"[102], a contemptuous term that reflects the same elite language that he otherwise wants to read critically from an ostensibly Althusserian standpoint, no less. Yet this people, in 491, demanded that the empress appoint a true Roman to govern them and *not to allow any foreign element to be added to the race of the Romans*[103]. The empress appointed Anastasios, a provincial from the city of Dyrrachion, who promptly claimed descent from Pompey the Great. The people played this role for centuries. In 1203-1204, they begged the emperor Alexios IV Angelos to fight the Crusaders because *they were true patriots – unless he [the emperor] was only pretending to side with the Romans against the Latins.* That last quotation

99. It fails to provide a model for the de-Romanization of the ancient empire (for which see the epigraph by Augustine) and the ethnic re-Romanization of the later Byzantine empire (as the Greek-speaking Orthodox continued to be called Romans, or *Rum-Romioi*, under the Ottomans). But these points sidetrack us into other periods.

100. Stouraitis postulates a "Greek" ethnic group at Roman Identity, 210-211, by misreading a passage of Psellos. Had he read Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, to the end, he would have found it explained at 223-224.

101. A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge, MA 2015.

102. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 192, 210.

103. *Book of Ceremonies* 1.91 (v. 1, 411), ed. and transl. A. Moffatt and M. Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogennetos: The Book of Ceremonies*, Canberra 2012.

was a grudging admission by an elite author who also liked to see the populace as a "mob"[104].

Stouraitis believes that a national interpretation of Byzantium – whether advanced by a modern scholar or, for that matter, by the Byzantines themselves – "reifies" a fictional discourse generated by elites[105]. Well, one buzz-word deserves another: what the elite reading does, by contrast, is to "rarify" Roman identity to the point where it can be blown away by a slight theoretical breeze. This stands in a long tradition of denialism, by marrying Franz Dölger's view that Roman identity in Byzantium was a function of court propaganda to Cyril Mango's view of Byzantine literature as a distorting mirror of classicizing fantasy[106].

Reification means to treat something as a thing –Latin *res*– that is not really an integral entity. This is ironic because one of the most common words associated with the Roman name in Byzantine texts is precisely the word "thing," *pragma – τὰ πράγματα τῶν 'Ρωμαίων, the public affairs of the Roman people,* the *respublica* of Byzantium.

104. Choniates, *History* 560-561; cf. 233-234.

105. Stouraitis, Roman Identity, 174, 184, 207.

106. F. Dölger, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, Ettal 1953, 70-115; C. Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror*, Oxford 1975.

Η Κοινωνικη Εμβελεια της Ρωμαϊκης Ταυτοτητας στο Βυζαντιο: Μια Προσεγγιση Βασει των Γραπτων Πηγων

Έχουν προταθεί προσφάτως αντίθετες ερμηνείες αναφορικά με την κοινή διαπίστωση ότι οι Βυζαντινοί «αυτοαποκαλούνται Ρωμαίοι». Σύμφωνα με μία άποψη, το Βυζάντιο ήταν ρωμαϊκό έθνος-κράτος, ενώ αντιθέτως έχει υποστηριχθεί επίσης ότι η ρωμαϊκή ταυτότητα ήταν αποκλειστικότητα μιας αριθμητικά περιορισμένης «ελίτ». Το παρόν άρθρο χαρτογραφεί για πρώτη φορά την κοινωνική εμβέλεια της ρωμαϊκής ταυτότητας, όπως προκύπτει από τις γραπτές πηγές: ποιούς εννοούσαν οι Βυζαντινοί και οι Άραβες συγγραφείς, όταν χρησιμοποιούσαν τον όρο «Ρωμαίοι»; Οι Ρωμαίοι ήταν ένα στενό κοινωνικό-οικονομικό στρώμα ή είχαν συνείδηση ότι αποτελούσαν το μεγαλύτερο μέρος του πληθυσμού της αυτοκρατορίας; Από την ανάλυση των κειμένων προκύπτει ότι η ρωμαϊκή ταυτότητα δεν περιοριζόταν στην πολιτικοκοινωνική ελίτ της αυτοκρατορίας, αλλά αφορούσε σε όλα σχεδόν τα κοινωνικά στρώματα, τόσο στην Κωνσταντινούπολη όσο και στην επαρχία. Η αντίθετη ερμηνεία περί ελίτ βασίζεται σε παραπλανητικές σύγχρονες θεωρίες και όχι στις πρωτογενείς πηγές.