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Popular Political Agency in Byzantium's villages and towns

Dimitris KRALLIS

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ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ
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BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

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POPULAR POLITICAL AGENCY IN BYZANTIUM'S VILLAGES AND TOWNS

“Merely to classify governments as monarchies aristocracies, and democracies is, as we know, to omit a tremendous amount of what is politically interesting”

R. E. DOWLING (1972)

“Politics is, quite simply, the art of getting things done. It is the art of winning agreement, of mobilizing support, of gaining consensus”

H. A. DRAKE (2000)

A renewed interest in urban sociability, popular political agency, and collective identity marks recent studies that critique the established view of Byzantium as a multiethnic, quasi-theocratic, and despotic empire¹. While,

1. A. KALDELLIS, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge MA 2015 is essential for urban politics; N. S. M. MATHEOU, *City and Sovereignty in East Roman Thought, c. 1000-1200: Ioannes Zonaras' Historical Vision of the Roman State*, in: *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, ed. N. S. M. MATHEOU – Th. KAMPANAKI – L. M. BONDIOLI, Leiden 2016, 41-63 for a constitutionalist approach to the city; D. KRALLIS, 'Democratic' Action in Eleventh-Century Byzantium: Michael Attaleiates's 'Republicanism' in Context, *Viator* 40.2 (2009), 35-53 on urban politics and IDEM, *Urbane Warriors: Smoothing out tensions between soldiers and civilians in Attaleiates' encomium to Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates*, in: *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between*, ed. M. LAUXTERMANN – M. WHITTON, Oxford 2017, 154-168 on generals as urbane citizens.

however, Constantinople emerges from contemporary work as the hub of a surprisingly polyphonic politics, less has been said about the social and political characteristics of the empire's smaller towns and villages². I turn here to this larger world in an effort to retrieve evidence, however faint, of its social and political life. The voice of the polity's smaller settlements is not, however, easily recoverable from our sources, as villages and provincial towns did not leave straightforward accounts of their social and political persona³. They nevertheless existed in an environment rich in interactions with the state, the Church and monasteries, as well as political or other interests. Notably, they also often left behind them material remains, which do help us reconstruct village or town attitudes towards the men, women, and the institutions cited above. This paper outlines the relationship of villages and towns with the world around them during the middle and, on occasion, the late Byzantine period and salvages evidence of collective attitudes towards authority that would qualify, however faintly, as politics.

In this effort I must inevitably place a premium on attested interactions between villages and towns on the one hand and the state apparatus that kept the Byzantine polity whole on the other. The relationship of villages with the empire's courts and army therefore figures prominently in my analysis.

2. A. ΚΟΝΤΟΓΙΑΝΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Τοπικά συμβούλια στις βυζαντινές πόλεις. Παράδοση και εξέλιξη (13ος-15ος αι.)*, Athens 2015, 88-89 as evidence of dearth in relevant scholarship; M. VEIKOU, 'Rural Towns' and 'In-Between' or 'Third' Spaces. Settlement Patterns in Byzantine Epirus (7th-11th c.) from an interdisciplinary approach, *Archeologia Medievale* 36 (2009), 43-54 reflects on the need to move past the urban/rural divide. This, I would argue, has implications for the reading of texts, as the city is almost reflexively assumed to possess a political character, distinct from that of the more "passive" village.

3. M. ΚΑΠΛΑΝ, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VIe au XIe siècle*, Paris 1992, 201; J. F. HALDON, *The Empire That Would Not Die: The Paradox of Eastern Roman Survival, 640-740*, Cambridge MA 2015, 57 on the dearth of non-elite sources; A. ΛΑΙΟΥ, On Individuals, Aggregates and Mute Social Groups: Some Questions of Methodology, *Σύμμεικτα* 9 (1994), 369-385 [= EADEM, *Economic Thought and Economic Life in Byzantium*, edited by C. MORRISSON and R. DORIN (Variorum collected Studies Series CS 1033), Farnham 2013, VII], on studying peasants through what she terms "extensive and recalcitrant" data; M. VEIKOU, Byzantine Histories, Settlement Stories: *Kastra*, «Isles of Refuge», and «Unspecified Settlements» as In-between or Third Spaces. Preliminary Remarks on Aspects of Byzantine Settlement in Greece (6th-10th c.), in: *Οι βυζαντινές πόλεις (8ος-15ος αιώνας): Προοπτικές της έρευνας και νέες ερευνητικές προσεγγίσεις*, ed. T. ΚΙΟΥΣΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Rethymno 2012, 159-206 on settlements other than cities and on questions of definition.

Such interactions are, in my opinion, of special interest, as justice and war occasioned a mobilization of resources and narratives that helped forge a larger imagined community out of myriad villages and towns⁴. Courts and armies aside, I also engage with the material traces of the provincials' communication with the state. Monuments, whether Church buildings and inscriptions or war memorials and funerary shrines (surviving in material form or sometimes simply as notes on parchment), often bear marks of a community's interaction with the larger world beyond its *territorium*. In turn, pious foundations at the village and town level became nodes that linked such spaces to larger geographies, imperial or other⁵. The image composed from the diverse materials outlined above draws villages and provincial towns out of the realm of political irrelevance in which overly materialist, elite-driven readings of Byzantine history have for all too long consigned them. One finds in villages and towns a "tremendous amount of what is," indeed "politically interesting"⁶.

Fiscal Unit or Living Community?

The village community was "a fiscal and legal unit made up of landowners usually living in a single village." Thus notes the relevant *lema* in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*⁷. This definition does not strike Byzantinists as peculiar; used as we are to imagining Byzantine subjects as entries on the ledgers of Constantinopolitan officials⁸. Put simply, when the polity of the Romaioi is conceived as little more than a tributary state in Roman

4. A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* [Greek Culture in the Roman World 2], Cambridge 2007, chapter 2 for Byzantium as a Roman nation and 74ff, especially 76-78, for a discussion of Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Gelner's take on the nation.

5. L. NEVILLE, The Adventures of a Provincial Female Founder: Glykeria and the Rhetoric of Female Weakness, in: *Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. L. THEIS, M. MULLETT et al., Vienna 2011/12, 153-162 on monastic links to individuals and their properties on Aegean islands.

6. R. E. DOWLING, Pressure Group Theory: Its Methodological Range, in: *Questioning the Past: A Selection of Papers in History and Government*, ed. D. P. CROOK, Queensland 1972, 383-399 for said quote.

7. *ODB* v. 3, 2168 entry Village (A. KAZHDAN)

8. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 186 on the bureaucratic language that turned villages into quantifiable entities.

imperial clothing, villagers, or for that matter town's people, can hardly be imagined as anything other than powerless pawns contested among imperial agents and aristocrats who vied for a finite set of precious and meticulously measured resources⁹.

The pages that follow question this limited definition of the Byzantine village community. Motivated by conviction that communities surely were more than fiscal or legal units and emboldened by recent work that seeks to take seriously the political agency of the *Ρωμαῖοι* within the *πολιτεία*, I trace here evidence of social and political affinities in Byzantium's villages and towns. Our source material suggests that the Byzantine village was an agglomeration of people with a pronounced economic identity. When read as a *unit*, whether fiscal or legal, a village emerges as a passive collectivity whose identity is subordinated to the diktats of powerful outside forces¹⁰. The village, however, was much more than that, as noted by Michel Kaplan, who wrote of its "moral personality"¹¹. Were it to be conceived as a *community*,

9. J. F. HALDON, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production*, London 1994; L. BRUBAKER – J. F. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: A History*, Cambridge 2011, 724 on the patrimonial nature of the Byzantine state; I. STOURAITIS, Roman identity in Byzantium: a critical approach, *BZ* 107.1 (2014), 175-220, here 183 engaging with Kaldellis in a theory-laden attempt to counter the latter's evidence-driven argument that we could and indeed should imagine a provincial Roman political identity; A. KALDELLIS, The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach, *ByzSymm* 27 (2017), 173-210 for a comprehensive rebuttal of Stouraitis' critique. HALDON, *The Empire That Would Not Die* revisits earlier work with a critical eye on Kaldellis' work.

10. A. LAIOU, The Peasant as Donor (12th – 13th centuries), in: *Donation et donateurs dans le monde byzantine. Actes du colloque international de l'université de Fribourg 13-15 mars 2008*, ed. E. YOTA, Paris 2012, 107-124 [=EADEM, *Economic Thought*, IX], here 119 on the documentary bias that weakens the village as we see it in the sources; A. LAIOU, The Byzantine Village (5th-14th century), in: *Les villages dans l'empire byzantine (IVe-XVe siècle)*, ed. J. LEFORT – C. MORRISSON – J.-P. SODINI, Paris 2005, 46-53 [=EADEM, *Economic Thought*, XI], on the internal affinities helping constitute the village community as "internal structuring factors".

11. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 195 on "personnalité morale"; M. KAPLAN, Les villageois aux premiers siècles byzantins (VIe-Xe siècles): une société homogène? in *Byzance: Villes et campagnes*, ed. M. KAPLAN, Paris 2006, 14-30, here 19; M. KAPLAN, Les élites rurales byzantines. Historiographie et sources, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyen Âge* 124.2 (2012), 299-312 on the rural elites with essential bibliographical survey; More generally on the village see LEFORT – MORRISSON – SODINI, *Les villages dans l'empire byzantine (IVe-XVe siècle)* (as in previous note).

the village awakens; it becomes a living a breathing organism whose relationship with political authority must be considered outside a purely economic and impersonal framework¹². Once that happens we detect in it traces of politics that escape the one-dimensional focus on elite struggles for state domination and resource extraction.

The raucous, messy world of the peasants

In search of Byzantium's political village let us turn then to provinces and consider the following passage in Attaleiates' *History*: *The commander of the army cares not one whit for the war nor does what is right and proper by his fatherland, and even shows contempt for the glory of victory; instead, he bends his whole self to the making of profit, converting his command into a mercantile venture, and so he brings neither prosperity nor glory to his own people. The rest of the army, for their part, take the cue of injustice from their leaders and with an unstoppable and shameless fervor they inhumanly maltreat their own countrymen. They violently seize their property and act like the enemy in what is their own home and country, falling short of the nominal enemy in no respect of evildoing or plunder. For this reason their own countrymen invoke against them the most dire curses, as their defeat would bring relief to all the Roman villages and lands and cities, given that they behave in this way*¹³.

12. F. TROMBLEY, War, Society and Popular Religion in Byzantine Anatolia (6th-13th Centuries), in: *Byzantine Asia Minor*, ed. S. LAMPAKIS, Athens 1998, 97-139 indirectly addressed such questions from the perspective of rural popular piety and war in Asia Minor.

13. *Michaelis Attaliate Historia*, ed. E. TSOLAKIS [CFHB 50], Athens 2011, 151: ὁ δὲ τοῦ στρατοῦ προηγούμενος μὴ προσανέχων τῷ πολέμῳ, μηδὲ τῇ πατρίδι νέμειν τὰ ὅσια προαιρούμενος καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῆς νίκης δόξαν περιφρονῶν, πρὸς τὸ κερδαίνειν ὅλον ἑαυτὸν ἐπιτείνει καὶ τὴν στρατηγίαν ἐμπορίαν κέρδους οὐκ εὐπραγίαν τοῦ ἰδίου ἔθνους οὐδ' εὐδοξίαν πεποιήται. Τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν πλῆθος, ἐκ τῶν ἡγεμόνων τὰς ἀφορμὰς λαμβάνον τῆς ἀδικίας, ἀκαθέκτοις καὶ ἀναισχύντοις ὄρμαϊς τοὺς ὁμοφύλους κακῶς καὶ ἀπανθρώπως μετέρχονται, ἀρπάζοντες καὶ βιαζόμενοι τὰ τούτοις προσόντα καὶ τὰ τῶν πολεμίων δρῶντες ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ κατοικίᾳ καὶ χώρᾳ, καὶ μηδεμίᾳς κακοποιίας ἢ λαφυραγωγίας παραχωροῦντες τοῖς λεγομένοις πολεμίοις. Ἀφ' ὧν αἱ παλαμναιόταται τούτοις ἀρὰὶ παρὰ τῶν ὁμογενῶν ἐπιφέρονται, ὡς τῆς ἡττης αὐτῶν ἄνεσιν παρεχομένης πάσαις ταῖς τῶν Ῥωμαίων κόμαις καὶ χώραις καὶ πόλεσι τοιούτων πράξεων δρωμένων. Translation in A. KALDELLIS – D. KRALLIS., *The History: Michael Attaleiates*, Cambridge MA 2012, 357.

Attaleiates' account, while broad in focus, shows Roman citizens in the process of losing trust in their government and its agents. While editorializing on the failure of contemporary Roman generals to protect the people of Asia Minor the judge notes that soldiers and their commanders not only ignored their duties to their compatriots, they also used their authority and sheer brutal strength to plunder the very same people they were tasked to protect¹⁴. The *History* records here Roman-on-Roman crimes, as the mobile society of the army preys on the settled communities of villages and towns. These very same villages and towns now break ranks from the Roman polity and seek the protection of barbarians who prove more law-abiding and pious than their fellow Romans. In discussing similar phenomena, John Haldon noted that "the fact that the inhabitants of a particular region surrendered to an invading army does not necessarily mean either that they had given up all hope of their own cause or that they had abandoned former loyalties and political identities"¹⁵. Rather it appears that "people were certainly concerned about the fate of the Roman empire as such, representing a world order that few imagined vanishing. But it is likely that the fate of their own city or district took priority in the face of imminent threat"¹⁶. Thus, as we return to the passage of the *History* cited above we note that Attaleiates does not condemn the Asian Romans' switched allegiance. Rather we must treat the choice of those provincials as evidence of pragmatic calculations by politically active members of the medieval Roman polity.

Let us remain with those rowdy provincials and observe, in the pages that follow, their village in action. In a collection of documents from the archives of the Iviron monastery cases emerge where village communities go to court on account of disputes with land-rich pious foundations. Evidence on Radochostas, the *kastron* Adrameri, Siderokausia and Hierissos outlines village and town communities with a discernible corporate identity. Notarial accounts of court trials that pitted these communities against the monks of Iviron record processes of representation. Here we see the village having

14. D. KRALLIS, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in eleventh-century Byzantium*, Tempe AZ 2012 for Attaleiates as a political thinker focused on the crisis of empire.

15. HALDON, *The Empire that would not die*, 58.

16. HALDON, *The Empire that would not die*, 178.

its day at court, with select members from among the collectivity putting forward its case. As noted recently by Leonora Neville, the numbers or persons of those representatives varied from court case to court case and there was even divergence between the names listed on the documents and the actual signatories¹⁷.

What should we make of such seemingly lackadaisical approach to representation? How should we treat the fact that the people fighting for the rights of the village at court often give the impression to have been but casually mustered?¹⁸ My sense is that this flexibility is evidence of high levels of trust among members of the village community, as it attests the villagers' readiness to entrust diverse interests to a wide array of their peers. Alexander Kazhdan's selfish and phobic Byzantine family fades here before a thicker village-wide web of affinity and common interest¹⁹.

The notary in the case in question describes a cacophony of village voices that filled the court, juxtaposing them to the uniform incantations of the monks: *In unison they let loose voices intermixed, loud and rustic, seizing the courtroom; the one saying that grain just planted in the furrow of earth was trampled underfoot and would not sprout, another that already animals had fed on the new sprouts, another that a road had been mowed*

17. L. NEVILLE, Organic Local Government and Village Authority, in: *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. P. ARMSTRONG, Farnham 2013, 285-295, here 287-289; L. NEVILLE, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950-1100*, Cambridge 2004, 66-98 on an analysis of the village dynamics that focuses on relationships between households; More on these documents and on village representative bodies and their relationship with the rest of the villagers see KAPLAN, *Les élites rurales byzantines*, 308-309; KONTOGIANNOPOULOU, *Τοπικά συμβούλια*, 42 on village representation.

18. NEVILLE, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society*, 66-67, sees this casual approach to representation as evidence of a Byzantine tendency to conceive of people's roles in relational terms. Such an approach is treated in her work as the result of the impact of theology and rhetorical traditions on the Byzantine worldview and becomes an explanation for what may be seen as lack of order, structure or even hierarchy in Byzantine social formations. For similarly relaxed approaches to representation (and social hierarchy) see the case of Aphrodito in Late Antique Egypt as presented by G. RUFFINI, *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt*, Cambridge 2008, 242. .

19. A. P. KAZHDAN, *People and Power in Byzantium*, Washington DC 1982, 31ff on individualism and narrow family affinities; KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 195-196, on entrusting individual family livestock to collectively paid shepherds.

down by beasts even before the summer season. Thundering back, the monks answered that ‘We alone ought to be the owners of the whole Arsinikeia, as written in the delimitation of our monastery’²⁰.

Where, however, the notary sees divergent agendas of uncoordinated villagers one may, instead, detect cohesive, even effective representation. The words *συμφώνως* (in unison) and *συμμίκτους* (intermixed) speak of unity of purpose on the part of villagers whose legal concerns constituted a mixed bag of vexations and complaints²¹. Rather than treat such distinct complaints as evidence of boorish inefficiency and lack of court decorum, one may in fact see here an attempt on the part of the village representatives to put before the judge each and every one of the complaints for which the members of the collectivity sought redress.

I should parenthetically note that this emphasis on cacophonous congregations was by no means exceptional. In the 12th century, Niketas Choniates cast popular assemblies as: “more destructive than fire” arguing that they suffered from “inconstancy of character and [were] untrustworthy”, while his brother Michael treated popular meetings as opportunities for the eruption of disorder²². The erudite bishop of Athens in fact juxtaposed the loud and unruly crowds of his contemporaries to the presumed order of the ancient Greek *δήμος*. Much like his contemporary Eustathios of Thessalonike, he also admired the order that supposedly characterized

20. NEVILLE, *Organic Local Government*, 289, for the translation with a slight emendation; J. LEFORT – N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ – D. ΠΑΠΑΧΡΥΣΣΑΝΘΟΥ (eds.), *Actes d’Iviron I*, Paris 1985, n. 9, line 20-4: *συμφώνως πάντες τὸ δικαστήριον καταλαβόντες φωνὰς συμμίκτους* ηφίουν έναρθρους καὶ ἀγροίκους, ὁ μὲν λέγων ὅτι μονοῦ κατα[βαλλο]μένου τοῦ σπέρματος(ς) λαγόσι τῆς γῆς ποσὶ καταπατηθὲν οὐκ ἐβλαστησεν, ὁ δὲ ὡς ἅμα τῷ ἐκβλαστήσει κατεβοσκηθη, ἄλλο(ς) ὡς ἅμα γεγωνὸς οδοῦσι κτηνῶν προ καιροῦ του θερου ἐξεθερίσθη καταβροντώμενοι δὲ οἱ μοναχοὶ ἀντέλεγον ὡς ‘ἡμεῖς μόνοι ὄλην τὴν Ἄρσινικ(ειαν) ὀφείλομεν δεσπόζειν εἰς τὸν τοιοῦτον περιορισμὸν ἐπ’ ὄνοματι τῆς ἡμῶ(ν) μονῆς ἀναγραφομένη[ν]. See KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 201, for an analysis of that same text.

21. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 226, on the mixed social background of those villagers, citing *Iviron* no.4 lines 123-129, 132-134.

22. Πυρὸς ἐστὶν δραστικώτερον and ἀστασίαν ἦθος καὶ παλιμβολώτατον. I. A. VAN DIETEN (ed.), *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, Berlin 1975, 233-234.

western public congregations²³. Aside from upper crust pining for docile popular behavior, the emphasis on cacophony in both court documents and in the writings of the empire's intellectual elite suggests a mirroring between village representation at court and the similarly boisterous larger popular assemblies in towns all around the empire²⁴.

One in fact has to wonder whether this form of assertive, not to say forceful, collective representation lies behind Kekaumenos' advice regarding a judge's dispensing of his duties according to which: *if it is a crowd who accuses, and you have the authority to judge, make a careful examination; and if you find that the crowd is speaking justly, give sentence humanely. But if the crowd has been roused against the man by intrigue or even by envy, proceed subtly and wisely, and deliver the accused man, and you will be the mouthpiece of God, and his man*²⁵.

Who constitutes this crowd Kekaumenos needs to tiptoe so dexterously around? What is the venue in which the crowd exerts its pressure? Is this a situation similar to the one recorded in the Athonite document above or must we perhaps imagine some other form of collective pressure exerted on the provincial judge? Could we finally be dealing with something larger

23. S. P. LAMPROS, *Μιχαήλ Ἀκομινάτου τοῦ Χωνιάτου τὰ σωζόμενα*, v. 1, Athens 1879-1880, 183 lines 3-15: *Κελτοὺς μὲν καὶ Γερμανοὺς καὶ Ἰταλοὺς ἴδοι τις ἐν τάξει δημιουργοῦντας καὶ σὺν κόσμῳ ἐκκλησιάζοντας*, Eustathios of Thessalonike, in his *Exegesis of the Iambic Canon on Pentecost by John Damascene*, PG 136, column 717 on a rather admiring reading of Venice as a triple thread rope, made stronger by the interweaving of monarchic, aristocratic, and popular elements. On these passages see P. MAGDALINO, *Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine Kaiserkritik*, *Speculum* 58.2 (1983), 334-335.

24. J. HALDON, *The Idea of the Town in Byzantium*, in: *The Idea and Ideal of the Town Between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G. P. BROGIOLO – B. WARD PERKINS, Leiden 1999, 21. Haldon notes that even larger cities begin to be treated administratively as villages (the example of 11th c. Thessalonike), making such mirroring a far more pervasive phenomenon, going beyond the level of representation.

25. *Εἰ δὲ καὶ πλῆθος ἐστὶν τὸ κατηγοροῦν, σὺ δὲ ἔχεις ἐξουσίαν τοῦ κρίνειν, ἀκριβολόγησον καὶ εἰ μὲν εὐρήσεις δίκαια λέγον τὸ πλῆθος, δὸς ἀπόφασιν μετὰ φιланθρωπίας, εἰ δὲ ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς τὸ πλῆθος ἐκινήθη κατὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἴτε καὶ ἀπὸ φθόνου σοφῶς ὑπελθὼν ἔξελε τὸν κατηγορηθέντα καὶ ἔση στόμα Θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπου αὐτοῦ*: Kekaumenos, ed. G. LITAVRIN, *Sovety y rasskazy*, S. Peterburg 2003, 136, cf. D. TSOUGKARAKIS, *Κεκαυμένος, Στρατηγικόν*, Athens 1996, 31. For the translation see C. Roueché's online text under I. *On Holding Public Office*.

and perhaps even more dangerous? The populations of two cities, Athens and Cherson, had attacked and even killed regional governors in the 10th century when they deemed them overbearing²⁶. Something similar happened in Naupaktos during the reign of Konstantinos VIII, when the people killed their governor on account of his exacting ways²⁷. Kekaumenos himself describes the 11th century rebellion of the people of Larissa and their Vlach neighbors explaining that the main reason for the uprising had been generalized dissatisfaction with newly imposed taxes²⁸.

On all four occasions, Athens, Cherson, Naupaktos and Larissa, people demonstrated a capacity to mobilize manpower for the defense of local interests. How did crowds scale up from the level of court representation to that of a rebellious rural or urban collectivity? How do we move from the village of Prinovaris whose inhabitants raided the vines and livestock, as well as the oil and grain supplies of the neighboring monastery, while also assaulting its abbot and monks, to the killing of provincial judges and other representatives of the imperial government?²⁹ If villages could mobilize to fight a monastery and its people both on the ground and in the halls of a provincial court, how did those very same collectivities imagine their relationship with provincial governors and representatives of Constantinopolitan authorities?

While Athonite archives shed light on collective efforts to defend a village community's interests before state authorities, a different form of village representation is outlined in the *Praktikon* of Adam. This document, which deals with the lands granted to Andronikos Doukas in the Meander valley in the 1070s, outlines a world of communities with populations between 35 and 75 people. Here, single individuals represented these smaller settlements to the outside world³⁰. Thus on two occasions, at Olinthos and Galaidai,

26. I. BEKKER, *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus* [CSHB], Bonn 1838, 388.8 for Athens, 360.15 for Cherson.

27. Skylitzes, *Σύνοψις Ἱστοριῶν*, Konstantinos VIII 1 in H. THURN ed., *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* [CFHB 5], Berlin 1973, 372 [here after *Synopsis Historiarum*].

28. Kekaumenos, 270; cf. TSOUGKARAKIS, *Κεκαυμένος, Στρατηγικόν*, 227 on taxes and Nikoulitzas' advice.

29. MM, v. 4, Vienna 1871, 256-258.

30. P. THONEMANN, *The Maeander Valley: A Historical Geography from Antiquity to Byzantium*, Cambridge 2011, 262-264 for village size, 264-266 for representation.

named elders (*πρεσβύτεροι*) are listed as intercessors between village and government officials. From Olinthos and Galaidai to Radochostas and Siderokausia, village communities delegated the defense of their interests to elders or alternatively to more or less informally selected groups of their peers. To serve their peers before the authorities these men walked on provincial roads maintained through *corvée* labour extracted by the state from their fellow villagers. On their way to courts in the larger urban centres of their respective *θέματα* they sometimes cast their gaze on forts and defensive structures whose moats, walls, and keep were the handiwork of many a state-mobilized neighbor³¹. In taking a step out of the comfort of the face-to-face society that was the village into a larger Roman world, they unwittingly reinforced existing links, social, economic, religious, and even ethnic, between their villages and those important provincial towns³².

Such links are often but casually outlined in our sources. Thus Michael Attaleiates' *History* refers to "the city of Chliat and the towns subject to it"³³. Similarly the world of Saint Lazaros of Mt Galesion in the *θέμα* of the Thraakesioi is one of dense networks of villages that dot the *territorium* of larger cities like Ephesus, Chonai, and Magnesia. Much the same can be said about the universe inhabited by Theodore of Sykeon. John Haldon and Leslie Brubaker noted the politico-administrative linkage between towns and the surrounding villages in Asia Minor and Jaques Lefort charted thick networks of villages around cities such as Bari³⁴. What is more, in the case of

31. R. P. H. GREENFIELD, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint*, Washington D.C. 2000, 127[41] offers examples of non-*corvée* labour undertaken by local communities in his discussion of the elaborate wood-planked and rope-supported hiking paths built through craggy territory to take pilgrim's to the Saint's pillar.

32. D. DRAKOULIS, Το δίκτυο των οικισμών της Επαρχίας Οσορόνης κατά την πρόωμη Βυζαντινή περίοδο (4ος-6ος αιώνας): Η Έδεσσα και οι κυριότερες πόλεις, *Βυζαντινά* 30 (2010), 161-202, here 169-71 and 181-88 for similar linkages between cities, towns, and the villages in their vicinity in Late Antiquity.

33. *τὸ τε ἄστυ τὸ Χλίαι καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τούτου πολίχνια*, Attaleiates (ed. TSOLAKIS), 102, translation in KALDELLIS – KRALLIS, *The History: Michael Attaleiates*, 228 for Chliat; On cities and the territories around them in Late Antiquity see F. TROMBLEY, Town and *territorium* in Late Roman Anatolia (late 5th- early 7th c.), in: *Recent Research in Late Antique Urbanism*, ed. L. LAVAN, Portsmouth 2001, 217-231.

34. BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 543; J. LEFORT, The Rural Economy, Seventh-Twelfth centuries, in: *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A. E. LAIOU, Washington DC 2008, 276.

Lazaros we see a landscape crisscrossed by networks of friendships, family relations, and social obligations, all layered atop existing governmental and ecclesiastical interactions³⁵. Here a family may entrust its son's education to a notary living a village over, while an encounter with a foreigner on a provincial road is *not* riddled with trepidation and fear. It is rather an instance of recognition, when Romans from different parts of the empire may ponder their common identity³⁶. Within the confines of Thrakesion a holy man builds a reputation that escapes the region, inhabitants of the local metropolis of Ephesos keep an eye on the spiritual map of the province, and a Calabrian matron living in the very same city richly endows Lazaros' monastery in an Asian village³⁷. Finally, this intimately networked province keeps a steady eye on Constantinopolitan affairs as evidenced by Skylitzes' account of the vision by a servant of the bishop of Pergamon. The man in question, a eunuch, associated regional crop failure and attacks by swarms of locusts to the scandalous rise of Michael IV to the throne³⁸. Court scandal did not therefore escape the attention of alert provincials.

In a different quadrant of the empire's map, Ioannes Skylitzes outlines the special links of Adrianople to the villages around it as he discusses the defense of the latter by the πατριίκιος Bryennios during the reign of Konstantinos IX³⁹. Earlier, in the mid-1040s, in the later phase of Leon Tornikios' rebellion, the military commander Michael Iassites, who was dispatched by Konstantinos into Thrace to dislodge the rebel's forces from the area, focused his special attention on the villages of the Haemos area, instead of marching about in search of the enemy host⁴⁰. While it is reasonable to assume that tactical advantages could accrue from the fortification of those villages and the attendant denial of fodder from the enemy, one should

35. A. KALDELLIS, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade*, Oxford 2017, 6 on the tight relationship between the state and the church apparatus.

36. GREENFIELD, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, 79 [3] on notaries in neighboring village, 83 [7] on Cappadocian pilgrims, 85 [8] on Paphlagonian monk.

37. GREENFIELD, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, 89 [11] on fame spreading beyond the locale, 119 [33] on Iouditta the Calabrian.

38. Skylitzes, Michael IV 4 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 394-395.

39. Skylitzes, Konstantinos IX 25 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 472-473.

40. Skylitzes, Konstantinos IX 8 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 441.

also note that Iassites' initiative had an openly political goal, that of drawing to the imperial side towns and villages previously loyal to the rebel. Here then we have a commander who recognizes villages and villagers as bearers of political identities.

In fact, numerous inscriptions from around the empire's lands attest a desire on the part of emperors to engage those very same villagers and make their presence felt among them⁴¹. Such texts, some inscribed on the walls of churches, often record a conversation between members of the village community and imperial power. In so doing they evoke the larger political community to which the empire's provincial population belonged⁴². This larger community did not simply exist in the realm of epigraphy. It was widely invoked and celebrated throughout the empire as evidenced in St. Nikon's stipulations for the commemoration of the reigning emperors during mass held in the Church of his monastery⁴³.

Do beautiful villages dream of brave warriors?

As the first millennium came to a close Leon Diakonos opened his work of history with the following words: *I, the one who composed these words, am Leo, son of Basil. My birthplace was Kaloe, a very beautiful village in Asia, located on the slopes of Mt. Tmolos, near the sources of the river Kaystros, which, after flowing past the Kelbianon region and offering a most pleasant*

41. K. MENTZOU-MEIMARI, Χρονολογημένα βυζαντινά ἐπιγραφαὶ τοῦ Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum IV, 2, ΔΧΑΕ 9 (1977-1979), 77-132 this list is partial, it does, nevertheless, give a sense of the presence of the emperor and his court in the provinces, as recorded through inscriptions on buildings they maintained or repaired. Both buildings and inscriptions became spaces and texts with which local communities developed a discursive rapport.

42. V. FOSKOLOU, 'In the Reign of the Emperor of Rome...': Donor Inscriptions and Political Ideology in the Time of Michael VIII Paleologos, ΔΧΑΕ 27 (2006), 455-462; Chr. A. MALTEZOU, Byzantine 'consuetudines' in Venetian Crete, DOP 49 (1995), 278-280 sees evidence of noble donor political aspirations and loyalties in the deployment of such inscriptions. Both articles cover the late Byzantine era.

43. A. BANDY, *Nikon Metanoeite: Testament of Nikon the Metanoeite for the Church and Monastery of the Savior, the Mother of God, and St. Kyriake in Lakedaimon*, in: *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, ed. J. THOMAS – A. CONSTANTINIDES-HERO, Washington DC, 2000, 319 on commemorating the emperor.

*vista to the beholder, empties out into the gulf of Ephesos, that famous and celebrated city, and forms an estuary*⁴⁴.

Writing in Constantinople for an audience of his peers about events to which he had often been an eyewitness, Leon still reminisced about his village (or perhaps town) of origin. Kaloe, the place where his father and mother were no-doubt buried, was part of the identity he wished to project to his readers. His hometown was to him much more than a fiscal unit⁴⁵. Its identity was linked to region and landscape and its people could be proud of its beauty. What is more, Kaloe and the fields around it did not exist in a vacuum. They were integrated into a broader world. The River Kaystros, whose sources, were near Leon's hometown provided more than a scenic vista. It took villagers all the way to the Gulf of Ephesos, linking them to a famed city and its well-frequented harbor⁴⁶. While one could perhaps argue that Leon's interest in Mt Tmolos, Kaystros, and Ephesos stemmed from a desire to appeal to his classically trained readership, we must nevertheless ask ourselves how the men and women of his town thought about these very same geophysical markers. How did such venerable locations echo in the minds of Kaloeans and how different from theirs was the Constantinopolitan perception of Leon's hometown? We should thus keep this short paragraph and the questions raised by it in mind as we piece together evidence on village and town collectivities.

44. Ὁ δὲ ταῦτα συντάξας Λέων εἰμὶ Βασιλείου υἱός· πατρίς δε μοι Καλόη, χωρίον τῆς Ἀσίας τὸ κάλλιστον, παρὰ τὰς κλιτύς τοῦ Τιμόλου ἀνωρισμένον, ἀμφὶ τὰς πηγὰς τοῦ Καῦστρίου ποταμοῦ, ὃς δὴ, τὸ Κελβιανὸν παραρῶδῆων καὶ ἥδιστον θαῦμα τοῖς ὄρωσι προκειμένος, ἐς τὸν τῆς κλεινῆς καὶ περιπύστου Ἐφέσου κόλπον πελαγίζων ἐσβάλλει: *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae libri decem et liber de velitatione bellica Nicephori Augusti*, ed C. B. HASE [CSHB], Bonn 1828, 5; A. M. TALBOT – D. SULLIVAN, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth-Century* [Dumbarton Oaks Studies 41], Washington DC, 2005, 57 for the translation.

45. For the idea that beautiful nature attracts people to a place see the introduction to the *τυπικὸν* of the Monastery of Kosmosoteira founded by Isaakios Komnenos in 1152 in L. PETIT (ed.), *Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosoteira près d'Aenos, Izvestiia Russkago Archaelogicheskago Instituta v Konstantinople* 13 (1908), 57; translation in THOMAS – HERO, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, v. 2, 833.

46. G. MAKRI, *Ignatios Diakonos und die Vita des Hl. Gregorios Dekapolites*, Stuttgart 1997, p. 82, 17.11-14, Gregory Dekapolites' account of a bustling harbour, afflicted, however, by piratical raids.

Writing nearly two centuries before Leon, another chronicler sought to take us back to the Byzantine village. Among the ten vexations which, according to Theophanes, Emperor Nikephoros I inflicted upon the *Romaioi* in the early 9th century, one finds the forced transplant of soldiers and their families from Asia Minor to the areas of Slavic settlement in Europe. *In this year Nikephoros, following the godless punishments [he had meted out] and intent on humiliating the army altogether, removed Christians from all the themata and ordered them to proceed to the Sklavinias after selling their estates. This state of affairs was no less grievous than captivity: many in their folly uttered blasphemies and prayed to be invaded by the enemy, others wept by their ancestral tombs and extolled the happiness of the dead, some even hanged themselves to be delivered from such a sorry pass. Since their possessions were difficult to transport, they were in no position to take them along and so witnessed the loss of properties acquired by parental toil*⁴⁷.

Its polemical tone notwithstanding, Theophanes' text outlines what was surely a harrowing social and emotional experience. Soldiers' families, which had been long settled and integrated in the social life of villages in Asia Minor, were asked to move, fracturing social bonds and disrupting familial economic plans developed and maintained over generations. More ominously perhaps, Nikephoros' order also shattered the bonds among the living and generations of their relatives that lay buried around the settlements left behind. Another point of interest in Theophanes' analysis is his emphasis on the sense of outrage among the people to be transported: "many in their

47. Theophanes *Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883, 486.10-22 *Τούτω τῷ ἔτει Νικηφόρος μετὰ τὰς ἀθέους ὑπεξελεύσεις τὰ στρατεύματα πάντη ταπεινώσαι σκεψάμενος Χριστιανοὺς ἀποικίσας ἐκ παντὸς θέματος ἐπὶ τὰς Σκλαυινίας γενέσθαι προσέταξεν, τὰς δὲ τούτων ὑποστάσεις πιπράσκεσθαι καὶ ἦν αἰχμαλωσίας οὐκ ἔλαττον τὸ πρᾶγμα, πολλῶν ἐξ ἀνοίας βλασφημούντων καὶ ἐχθρῶν ἐφόδους αἰτούντων, ἐτέρων δὲ περὶ τοὺς γονικοὺς τάφους θρηγνούντων καὶ τοὺς ἀποθανόντας μακαριζόντων εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ καὶ ἀγχόνας ἐχρήσαντο πρὸς ἀπαλλαγὴν τῶν δεινῶν. τά τε γὰρ προσόντα δυσκίνητα συνεπιφέρεσθαι ἡδυνάτου καὶ τὴν ἐκ γονικῶν πόνων κτηθεῖσαν ὑπαρξίν ὀλλυμένην ἐώρων.* For the translation see C. MANGO – R. SCOTT, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813*, Oxford 1997, 667; HALDON – BRUBAKER, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, 746-747*, on the implications of this move for Byzantine institutional history.

folly uttered blasphemies and prayed to be invaded by the enemy”. This one sentence clearly outlines the understanding among soldiers that their role was the defense of local communities. By wishing an invasion of their own homeland these men were not really calling for the misery of enemy raids to be visited upon their fellow villagers. They rather hoped to demonstrate the folly of the imperially mandated transfer, while highlighting their essential long-standing role in the defense of their homes and communities.

We have no way of tracing the lives of these soldiers to their new homes in the Balkans. There is, however, evidence from later centuries that such population moves did not necessarily undermine the regional identity of the transferred groups. In his work on the late empire Raúl Estangüi Gómez cites the case of the *Klazomenitai* settled in Serres and the Cretans living around Lake Volve⁴⁸. The reference to those soldiers, their local, and regional origins speaks to modes of identification that emphasized such roots and shows that the villager or townsman who lived away from their fatherland maintained broadly regional and specifically local identities years after such departure⁴⁹. We can therefore rather safely assume that the soldiers from Asia Minor settled in Europe also maintained, at least for a while, their original identities in their new homes away from home, even as their Roman-ness was reinforced in the Balkans through confrontation with a new Slavic “other”. In fact, on occasion, that very same transplanted community of Romans would play a cardinal role in the “Hellenization” of newly conquered lands.⁵⁰

The strength of regional or more narrowly local identities is also attested in the *Life of Hosios Loukas*, where villagers who had fled piratical raids

48. R. ESTANGÜI GÓMEZ, *Byzance face aux Ottomans: Exercice du pouvoir et contrôle du territoire sous les derniers Paléologues (milieu XIVe-milieu XVe siècle)*, Paris 2014, 41.

49. KONTOGIANNOPOULOU, *Τοπικά συμβούλια*, 58; *Basilika* LIV.2.2 on the ten year period marking the integration of a person as citizen in a town or village community.

50. On the “re-Hellenization” of Greece – which was never really de-Hellenized – see J. HERRIN, Aspects of the Process of Hellenization in the Early Middle Ages, *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 68 (1973), 113-26; For a cautious approach to the Slavic presence in the Peloponnese see I. ANAGNOSTAKIS – A. KALDELLIS, The Textual Sources for the Peloponnese, A.D. 582-959: Their Creative Engagement with Ancient Literature, *GRBS* 54 (2014), 105-35, here 131-2 on the political motivations for an exaggeration of the Slavic presence in the Peloponnese.

in the Saronic Gulf settle as a group in Phocis and preserve their collective identity, even as they clash with the inhabitants of their new home, who in turn close ranks in order to manage the challenges posed by the appearance of the newcomers.⁵¹ In each one of these case studies we see villagers and townspeople, soldiers or displaced citizens, all displaying strong corporate identities based on local interests, collective experiences, and memories of past origins. Such identities were not, as evidenced in our material, the sole product of the fisc's bureaucratic practices, even when articulated within the framework of a larger Byzantine world.

Since we turned to the relationship that Constantinople built with provincial towns and villages across the empire's lands through the fulfillment of its obligation to defend Roman citizens from external enemies it would be instructive to leave for the moment the world of towns and villages for the mobile society of the army on campaign. We move now from Phocis to Bithynia. On the field of Ares, by the city of Nikaia, the drama of civil conflict was unfolding in August 1057. Two armies faced off, one flying the colours of Emperor Michael VI Stratiotikos, and the other those of a rebel alliance under Isaakios Komnenos. In the run-up to the battle, however, the troops of the two hosts foraged in carefree manner. Skylitzes tells us that the soldiers met in the fields around their camps and debated politics. One side deployed the loyalist argument and the other the case for rebellion as they attempted to draw their fellow Romans to their respective positions⁵².

The debate is described as civil and peaceful and the historian suggests that it was *not* something that the commanders of either side wished to see happening⁵³. As soldiers began to be swayed on an individual level, the leaders of the two armies dispatched eloquent men, no doubt members of the officer corps, to deploy persuasion in order to once again harden opinion and allow for war to take its proper path. Possession of the throne was to be

51. A. DUNN, The rise and fall of towns, loci of maritime traffic, and silk production: the problem of Thisvi-Kastorion, in: *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization: In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*, ed. E. JEFFREYS, Cambridge 2012, 38-71 on Hosios Loukas' Kastorion.

52. Skylitzes, Michael VI 9 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 498-9.

53. In an earlier instance of civil strife (Skylitzes, Michael II 12 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 39), the soldiers sought to put an end to fighting having been away from their homes and families for too long and having soiled "their hands with the blood of their fellow countrymen".

determined in the battlefield. This process of opinion hardening, however, involved persuasion. The Romans in this story participate in deeply political conversations and are treated as political beings by their leaders who in turn deploy rhetoric to convince them.

Significantly, many of the Roman soldiers conversing on the sidelines of battle preparations were no doubt themselves inhabitants of villages and towns⁵⁴. While we do not have to wax lyrical, like George Ostrogorsky, about the bonds that tied Byzantium's free peasantry to the armies drawn from their ranks, we need to consider the implications of the army's social embedding. Thus, in a survey of the Byzantine countryside in the tenth century Nicolas Oikonomides discussed the special place of soldiers in the empire's villages. He explained that for every warrior settled in a given village a second, non-fighting head of household was frequently also present to tend the land in the absence of his martial relative⁵⁵. Oikonomides in effect described a social reality where soldiers in rural communities did not exist as isolated individuals but were in fact effectively integrated in villages and towns⁵⁶. As a consequence of processes of on-the-ground integration such as the ones described above, a soldier's allegiance to emperor or rebel was not simply predetermined by the color of his regimental pennons but was instead the outcome of deliberations that no doubt also colored provincial life at the town and village level. Deliberations therefore unfolded throughout the empire's lands that were both personal and therefore tied to family strategies and aspirations but also more broadly social, linked to the expectations and interests of the soldier's milieu⁵⁷.

In more general terms, Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon noted such links among armies, villages, and provincial towns suggesting that with the

54. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 231-5 on soldiers and villages.

55. N. OIKONOMIDES, *The Social Structure of the Byzantine Countryside in the First Half of the Xth Century*, *Symmeikta* 10 (1996), 103-124, here 130ff.

56. HALDON, *The Empire that would not die*, 149, 272: Here Haldon shows how such links were in fact memorialized in Byzantine case law as evidenced in the *Ecloga* where one family's property dispute revealed the complicated economics behind a soldier's presence and integration in provincial society.

57. KRALLIS, 'Democratic' Action in Eleventh-Century Byzantium, 44-6 for deliberations in Rhaidestos in 1077; KONTOGIANNOPOULOU, *Τοπικά συμβούλια*, 90-133 for the proliferation of such phenomena in the sources of the Late Byzantine era.

decline of cities in the late sixth and seventh centuries and the attendant shrinkage of the Roman government's footprint in the Byzantine periphery, soldiers in the armies become the closest and most permanent connection between a distant government and the populations living in the empire's provinces⁵⁸. Thus early in the ninth century Thomas the Slav would dispatch troops to certain areas of Bithynia in order to sound out whether the local townships and villages would be inclined to join him⁵⁹. By virtue of their special links to villages and provincial towns, soldiers were thought to be the most effective envoys of an aspiring strongman to the society he wished to represent and rule. John Haldon in fact explored this link, outlining what he termed the "socio-sexual intervention" of the community of soldiers in the empire's villages. In discussing the settlement of Roman armies in Asia Minor Haldon emphasized ties of affinity and kinship that over time came to link army and village⁶⁰. Such processes of "socio-sexual intervention" were not limited to the crisis of the seventh century that originally occasioned them. They can be followed in later years as well. Genesisios therefore explains that thousands of "Persians" fled to Byzantium in the first half of the ninth century and were distributed to the *θέματα*. Once on the ground in the empire's provinces they were paired to Roman women, who were no-doubt expected to help graft these men onto the local bodies politic⁶¹. The officially sourced *De Cerimoniis* by Konstantinos VII confirms the validity of Genesisios' story and notes that tax credits were available to families that took-in foreign soldiers as *γαμβροί* (grooms)⁶². On such occasions the villages and towns of the empire's provinces become "laboratories" for the

58. BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 624; A position emphatically staked in HALDON, *The Empire that would not die*, 149ff, specifically 150-1.

59. Skylitzes, Michael II 8 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 34.

60. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 385.

61. HALDON, *The Empire that would not die*, 124 on legal infrastructure making its way into villages and regulating lives.

62. *Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos: The book of ceremonies in 2 volumes*, translated by Anne MOFFATT and Maxeme TALL, with the Greek edition of the CSHB, Canberra 2012, v.2, 694-695 on tax credits for Saracen settlers; A. EGER, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier: Interaction and Exchange Among Muslim and Christian Communities*, London 2015, 291-293 on the same issue.

creation of Romans out of the newly settled foreigners⁶³. The inner workings of those “laboratories” can also vaguely be followed in texts such as the *Life of Philaretos* and its well-used example of the poor and ill-equipped soldier Mouselios, who seeks the assistance of the local village potentate in anticipation of his appearance at a formal army muster⁶⁴. We find here rather suggestive evidence of bottom-up forging of Roman identity.

Every monument has an audience, but which audience?

According to Michael Attaleiates’ 11th century *History*, during his campaign against the Saracens who had occupied the Island of Crete since the early 9th century, the *generalissimo* Nikephoros Phokas shored up the morale of his forces by dedicating a church to the Virgin Mary before the walls of the besieged city of Chandax: *As there were numerous craftsmen on the ships and willing hands numbering in the thousands, a beautiful and holy church was erected in three days. It had a domed roof and was adorned with lateral aisles, columns, and antechambers, decorated with marble and the shining images of saints, and altogether arranged to produce a beautiful effect. Subsequently, he ordered the wooden gong to be struck that called everyone to prayer... The beautiful church that he built is still standing and is honored in the name of the Mother of God; it is called “of the Magistros.” Phokas himself is represented in it as a victor and winner of trophies, a monument to his courage and piety, making an offering of the conquest of that great island. When I visited the island, I saw the image myself, which in all ways resembles the aforementioned emperor⁶⁵.*

63. A. LESMÜLLER-WERNER – H. THURN (ed.), *Iosephi Genesii Regum libri quattuor* [CFHB 14], Berlin 1978, 38 [book 3.3] for Roman wives and 41 [book 3.6] for settlement in themes.

64. L. RYDÉN, *The Life of St Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Indices*, Uppsala 2002, 72-74, lines 218-245.

65. Καὶ πολλῶν ὄντων τεχνιτῶν ἐν τοῖς πλοίοις καὶ χειρῶν ἐν μυριάσιν ἀριθμουμένων, ναὸς ἀπηρτίσθη διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν περικαλλῆς καὶ σεβάσιμος, σφαιροειδῆ τὸν ὄροφον ἔχων καὶ παραπτέροις κεκοσμημένος καὶ κίοσι καὶ προνάοις καὶ κόσμῳ διηριθμισμένος μαρμάρων καὶ μορφαῖς ἁγίων περιαστραπτῶν καὶ ὄλως ἀπηρτισμένος εἰς ὠραιότητα. ... Καὶ νῦν ἔστιν ὁ κατασκευασθεὶς παρ’ ἐκείνου περικαλλῆς ναὸς καὶ ἐπ’ ὀνόματι τῆς Θεοτόκου τιμώμενος καὶ τοῦ μαγίστρου λεγόμενος καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Φωκᾶς ἀνεστηλωμένος ἐν

The church, unattested in other written sources and expunged from the material record, is evidence of a Roman sensibility, very much alive in the middle byzantine period that associated religious orthopraxy with victory⁶⁶. Attaleiates himself in the *History* explicitly praised the Romans of old for their capacity to carefully assess any situation and, by acting accordingly, propitiate the divine⁶⁷. Here then we have a Byzantine version of much older Roman practice that sees Nikephoros' host coming together to build a church and in so doing seek favour from the Mother of God. This building calls us to consider the ways in which it was remembered. On his part, Attaleiates evokes it in order to make a point about the piety of a long-dead hero. There were surely, however, other contexts in which this church registered. For starters the landscape in which it stood was marked by it. No man, woman, or child living in the vicinity of Chandax and gazing upon it could avoid its presence. That much is clear from Attaleiates' account, where we learn that during a visit to the island the judge had also visited the church. Evidently, in the fields before the city of Chandax, the shrine of the *Magistros* was a well-known and visited attraction.

What memories then did such a monument evoke among the Cretans who cast their eye on it? How did a building bearing on its walls the effigy of a warrior hero mark the memory of the citizens of Chandax and of the

τούτω νικητῆς καὶ τροπαιοῦχος, δεῖγμα τῆς ἀνδρείας αὐτοῦ καὶ εὐσεβείας τῆς τηλικαύτης νήσου παριστῶν τὴν κατάκτησιν. Καὶ εἶδον τοῦτον ἐγὼ τῇ νήσῳ ἐπιδημητικῶς καὶ ἔστιν ἐμφερῆς πάντῃ τῷ προμνημονευθέντι βασιλεῖ: Attaleiates (ed. TSOLAKIS), 173-176; translation in KALDELLIS – KRALLIS, *The History: Michael Attaleiates*, 413-415.

66. N. M. PANAGIOTAKIS, *Θεοδόσιος ὁ Διάκονος καὶ τὸ ποίημα αὐτοῦ «Ἄλωσις τῆς Κρήτης»*, Herakleion 1960, for an account of the campaigns in Crete that fails to mention the church in question; M. FEATHERSTONE – J. SIGNES CODONER, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Libri I-IV*, 16 line 14 on a church dedicated in the 9th c. to the rebel Bardanes Tourkos in Asia Minor; C. ANDO, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire*, Berkeley 2008, for questions of state, religion, and orthopraxy.

67. Ἄλλ' οἱ πάλαι Ῥωμαῖοι οὐχ οὔτω ποιοῦντες τὰς φοβερὰς ἐκείνας καὶ μάχας καὶ στρατηγίας κατώρθουν, ἀλλὰ, καίπερ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου καὶ τῆς ἐκ τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ ὑπερφουῶς σαρκώσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τόνδε τὸν κόσμον συναναστροφῆς νομοθεσίας μηκέτι λαβόντες ἐπὶ τὸ σέβειν τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἀρετῆς ἀντιποιεῖσθαι καὶ τοὺς τῆς ἀγαθοεργίας νόμους καὶ εὐσεβείας καὶ καθαρότητος ἐκθύμως τηρεῖν, ὅμως τῇ φυσικῇ μεγαλοφροσύνῃ πρὸς τὰς τούτων παρατηρήσεις νουνεχῶς ἐπαιδεύοντο: Attaleiates, (ed. TSOLAKIS), 150-151, translation in KALDELLIS – KRALLIS, *The History: Michael Attaleiates*, 353-355.

villagers in the town's *territorium*? Moreover, what did local Cretans think of its association with “numerous craftsmen on the ships and willing hands numbering in the thousands,” who built it as testament to Nikephoros’ *Reconquista*? This is by no means an idle question since the soldiers and marines that manned the empire’s fleet and expeditionary force issued from the Kibyrrhaiot, Thrakesian, and Aegean themes, many of them Attaleiates’ Pamphylian compatriots⁶⁸. These men apparently lived a dual life as craftsmen and warriors in their towns of origin, towns that in this very same account appear separated from Crete by a mysterious and dangerous sea⁶⁹. Their construction of the *Magistros*’ Church grafted a token of their collective identity as heterochthonous Romans from Asia on the Cretan landscape they were about to reattach onto the body of the fatherland. Their gift to the Mother of God forced future generations of Cretans to engage with the memory of the *Reconquista* and the collective Roman effort that made it possible.

If, as Haldon suggests, the army was indeed the most permanent connection between an administration settled in Constantinople and populations in the provinces, it would be instructive to examine the ways in which this most Roman of institutions and its activities were communicated to and remembered among villagers and townsmen. Three moments in the work of Attaleiates’ younger contemporary Ioannes Skylitzes (at least one of them recycled from his sources) help us with that task. The first takes us early in the 9th century. While campaigning against the forces of the emir of Tarsos, Andrew the Skythian, the *generalissimo* in command of the Byzantine forces, defeats the enemy and then surveys the battlefield. As a

68. *The book of ceremonies* [as in n. 62], v. 2, 651-659 on prior Cretan expeditions with references to numbers of people; H. HELLENKEMPER – F. HILD, *Lykien und Pamphylien I* [TIB 8], Vienna 2004, 301-308 on Middle Byzantine Attaleia with references to the fleet; H. AHRWEILER, *Byzance et la mer. La marine de guerre, la politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzance aux VIIe-XVe siècles* (Paris, 1966) and E. EICKHOFF, *Seekrieg und Seepolitik zwischen Islam und Abendland: das Mittelmeer unter byzantinischer und arabischer Hegemonie (650-1040)*, Berlin 1966, on Byzantium’s navy in general.

69. Οὐδένα μὲν εἶχε τὸν ὁδηγήσοντα πρὸς τὴν νῆσον τὴν Κρήτιν διὰ τὸ ἀγνοεῖν πάντας τὴν ὁδὸν ἐκείνην ἐκ τοῦ χρόνοις πολλοῖς μὴ παροδεῦσαι ἐκεῖθεν πλοῖον ῥωμαϊκόν ... Attaleiates (ed. TSOLAKIS), 172-173, translation in KALDELLIS – KRALLIS, *The History: Michael Attaleiates*, 409.

conscientious commander he buries his own Roman dead and then proceeds to dig a mass grave in which he cast the remains of deceased Saracens. Atop the tumulus thus created the Roman commander erects a great column as a victory trophy and “memorial for later generations”⁷⁰.

A few years later, the admiral Nasar defeated a fleet of North African Saracen raiders off the western Peloponnese, capturing a number of enemy ships intact. After the battle he sailed south around Methone, where he dedicated the captured ships as a victory monument. I know of no Byzantine parallels to this, though reading this story I cannot but recall the Carthaginian ships' prows that marked the republic's victories against Punic fleets on the Rostra in the Roman forum⁷¹. Roughly a hundred and 50 years later the admiral Konstantinos Hayé leading a squadron of Kybirraiot ships defeated a large Arab expedition in the Aegean and after sending scores of Saracen marines to Constantinople for the emperor's triumph, proceeded to impale hundreds of the remaining captives along the coast of the Thrakesion theme⁷².

70. *Καὶ μέγαν ποιησάμενος κολωνὸν εἰς στήλην καὶ τοῖς μετέπειτα*: Skylitzes, Basil I 24 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 144; On Roman trophies see V. M. HOPE, *Trophies and Tombstones: Commemorating the Roman Soldier*, *World Archaeology* 35.1 (Jun., 2003), 79-97.

71. *τὰς δὲ ληφθείσας ἀσινεῖς ὥσπερ ἀνάθημά τι ὁ στρατηγὸς Νάσαρ δίδωσι τῷ θεῷ, τῇ κατὰ Μεθώνην ἐκκλησίᾳ αὐτὰς ἀποχαρισάμενος*. Skylitzes, Basil I 33 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 155; M. FEATHERSTONE, *The Everyday Palace in the Tenth Century*, in: *The Emperor's House. Palaces from Augustus to the Age of Absolutism*, ed. M. FEATHERSTONE – J.-M. SPIESER – G. TANMAN – U. WULF-RHEIDT, Berlin 2015, 152 for the Skyla, possibly a set of naval victory trophies in the palace grounds in Constantinople.

72. *Τῷ δὲ σφμγῷ ἔτει, ἰνδικτιῶνος τρίτης, Μαΐω μηνί, Ἄφροισι καὶ Σικελοῖσι καταδραμόντες τὰς Κυκλάδας καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θρακησίου παράλια, τελευταῖον κατεπολεμήθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκεῖσε φυλαττόντων, καὶ πεντακόσιοι μὲν ζῶντες ὡς βασιλεῖα ἤχθησαν, οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ πάντες ἀνεσκολοπίσθησαν ἐν τῇ παραλίῳ ἀπὸ Ἀτραμυτίου καὶ μέχρι Στροβίλου*. Skylitzes Michael IV 8 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 398. Cf. W. FELIX, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt im früheren 11. Jahrhundert. Geschichte der politischen Beziehungen von 1001 bis 1055* [BV 14], Wien 1981, 186, 203-204 and V. VLYSIDOU – E. KOUNTOURA – S. LAMPAKIS – T. LOUNGHIS – A. SAVVIDIS, *Η Μικρά Ασία των θεμάτων. Έρευνες πάνω στην γεωγραφική φουσιονομία και προσωπογραφία των βυζαντινών θεμάτων της Μικράς Ασίας (7ος-11ος αι.)* [Ερευνητική Βιβλιοθήκη 1], Αθήνα 1998, 217.

What is going on here? What were these victorious Roman commanders doing at the end of their successful campaigns? I would argue that in each case they embarked on familiar modes of communication. Greeks and Romans erected similar war trophies in battlefield after battlefield over centuries of warfare, from the days Miltiades to Marius, Sulla and Manuel Komnenos⁷³. The practice was evidently so common that writers delving in genres as diverse as hagiography, church history, and court rhetoric repeatedly used the imagery of the trophy, whether metaphorically or in direct reference to an actual military victory. This suggests that instances like the ones discussed above were in fact regular phenomena that left an actual imprint on the Byzantine countryside⁷⁴. Furthermore, our sources suggest that, monuments aside, Byzantine emperors and commanders dispatched reports of their victories to every corner of the empire in order to communicate their actions to the population. Such was the case of Thomas the Slav who sent letters to towns all over Asia Minor informing them of his victories, and that of Kamytzes, ordered by Alexios Komnenos straight from the battlefield to Constantinople to address a crowd of citizens eager to hear the latest about operations against the Seljuk Turks⁷⁵.

73. P. KRENTZ, *Fighting by the Rules: The Invention of the hoplite agon*, *Hesperia* 71 (2002), 23-39, here 32ff on trophies in the Greek world; C. S. MACKAY, *Sulla and the Monuments: Studies in his Public Persona*, *Historia* 49 (2000), 161-210, here 166ff on trophies in the Roman world; A. MEINEKE, *Ioannis Cinnami epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, [CSHB], Bonn 1836, 261 on Kinnamos' account of a cross erected as a trophy for a great victory over the Hungarians during the time of Manuel Komnenos.

74. Nicephorus Basilaces, *Λόγος εἰς τὸν αὐτίδιμον βασιλέα κῦρ Ἰωάννην τὸν Κομνηνόν*, *Nicephorus Basilaca, Orationes et epistulae*, ed. A. GARZYA, Leipzig 1984, *Orationes* B3.52.10 for a rhetorical example with a mixed literal and metaphorical use of trophy imagery; TROMBLEY, *War, Society and Popular Religion*, 106 citing the miracles of St. Theodore Teron on an alternative form of victory monument in the shape of a church.

75. Skylitzes, Michael II 10 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 36; Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XIV.6.6 in D. R. REINSCH, A. KAMBYLIS (eds.), *Annae Comnenae Alexias* [CFHB 40], Berlin 2001, 449; M. C. G. LAU, *The Power of Poetry – Portraying the Expansion of the Empire under John II Komnenos*, in: *Landscapes of Power: Selected Papers from the XV Oxford University Byzantine Society International Graduate Conference*, ed. M. C. G. LAU et al., Bern 2014, 201-203 on imperial attempts to inform the population of the capital about military affairs in the provinces.

The key though to making sense of the three stories about battle trophies related above, might actually lie in Skylitzes' invocation of commemoration for the sake of future generations⁷⁶. In every one of the instances discussed above memories were created and we must consider the audience to which those memories were addressed. What was the discursive function of a prominent victory monument in rural Anatolia and coastal Peloponnese? Who "read" it and how was that monument interpreted?⁷⁷ Was it villagers and townsmen, whom Roman soldiers had helped move to secure fortresses before heading towards battle? Or was it perhaps other warriors, who walked by such monuments for years to come on their way to an *ἄπληκτον* or even on march to battle with the enemy?⁷⁸ To answer such questions we must trace interactions between monument and community and outline the ways in which villages and towns responded to imperial and other narratives of belonging and collective action.

We must therefore set those non-extant monuments aside for the moment and turn to surviving physical spaces. Luckily Asia Minor, in both Lykaonia and Cappadocia, offers intriguing examples of small-scale, locally significant commemoration of military service. The town of Barata in Lykaonia (modern day Madenşehir) lies to the Southeast of Ikonion on territory much frequented by Arab raiding parties during the Middle Byzantine period. In its vicinity one finds some 50 odd Byzantine churches dated to the period from the 3rd to the 8th century. Here the work of Gertrude Bell and William M. Ramsey preserved evidence of inscriptions on what are, in effect, rural and small town churches that enshrined on stone the relationship between provincial Roman society and the often-local warriors that defended it.

Two inscriptions then, carved on a church dated by Ramsey to the 8th century, face each other and read⁷⁹

76. See n. 70 above.

77. For an example of the ways in which more erudite Byzantines "read" ancient monuments see A. KALDELLIS, Christodoros on the Statues of the Zeuxippos Baths: A New Reading of the *Ekphrasis*, *GRBS* 47 (2007), 361-383.

78. EGER, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 253ff on fortified refuges for village populations.

79. W. M. RAMSAY – G. BELL, *The Thousand and One Churches*, London 1909 (repr. Philadelphia 2008), 545 for the translation.

ΕΝΘΑ	Here	ΕΝΘΑ ΚΗΤΕ ΦΙΛΑΡ	Here lies Philaretos
ΚΗΤΕ	lies	ΕΤΟΣ ΑΚΥΛΑ, ΑΠΕ	Son of Akylas, I died
ΑΚΥΛ	Akyl-	ΘΑΝΟΝ ΙΣ ΤΟΝ ΠΟ	in the war In the
ΑΣ	as	ΛΕΜΟΝ ΜΗΝΙ ΜΑ	month of May,
ΑΠΕΘΑΝΕΝ	He died	ΗΟΥ Δ΄	the thirteenth,
ΑΠΡΗΛΗΟΥ	April 11	ΙΝΔ Δ΄	Indiction 4
ΙΑ΄	Indiction 10		
ΙΝΔ Ι΄			

Ramsay and Trombley, at opposite ends of the twentieth century, observed that what we have here is family-driven commemoration of a deceased warrior⁸⁰. The father, who outlived his son, enshrined his kin's sacrifice on a building well used by the local community and integrated it in Barata's wider sacral geography and calendar⁸¹. Visitors to the church in question did not, however, simply stumble upon a commemoration of a fallen defender of the community. They would also draw, by gazing at the inscription on the outside and by bowing before the shrine of the dead man inside the church, a generational line that connected the civilian father (and non-combatants in general), with the soldier son, committed in life to the defense of his own community. In doing so they momentarily became part of a wider imagined community. This larger world stretched from the lintel of the church at Barata all the way to the provincial capital at Ikonion and the residence of the thematic *στρατηγός*, ultimate commander of Philaretos' regiment. It in fact extended all the way to Constantinople where the polity's rulers and paymasters of its armies resided.

Not too far from this testament to a Byzantine warrior hero, on the central column supporting the Western doorway of another church, we read in epically misspelled Greek.

ΕΝΘΑ ΚΑΤΑΚΙΤΕ ΜΟΥΣΙΑΝΟΣ Ω ΠΩΛΑΣ ΠΛΙΓΑΣ ΥΠΩΜΙΝΑΣ

Here lies Mousianos, he who endured numerous wounds⁸²

80. RAMSAY – BELL, *The Thousand and One Churches*, 523, with an example of a church built by a larger group of men, possibly prominent members of the community.

81. RAMSAY – BELL, *The Thousand and One Churches*, 546; TROMBLEY, *War, Society and Popular Religion*, 129.

82. RAMSAY – BELL, *The Thousand and One Churches*, 525-527; TROMBLEY, *War, Society and Popular Religion*, 129-130 on Mousianos

This unselfconsciously misspelled inscription was ostentatiously carved in bold, large, inelegant letters on the side of the church and evokes the warrior's struggle (against both Saracen foe and Greek orthography). Only here the numerous wounds endured by the warrior's body speak openly, if rather laconically, of the toil and pain that came with membership in the polity's armies. The beholder was therefore to imagine his deceased fellow villager's battered body and recall his years of sacrifice on behalf of the community, even as the fruit of his agricultural labour likely helped outfit and feed other soldiers bearing scars of war and patriotism.

Some hundred or so kilometers to the east of Barata, just outside Lykaonia, the village of Çomlekçi in Cappadocia was according to archaeologists Byzantine Koron, home until the late 9th century to a *στρατηγός* and important frontier-defense node⁸³. Here, much as with Barata, Byzantine thematic troops fought numerous battles against the forces of the Emirs of Tarsos in the 9th and 10th centuries⁸⁴. About thirty kilometers to the north of Koron lies a rare surviving iconographic homage to medieval Roman warrior heroes. On the walls of a rock-carved chapel we find the painted image of two warriors on horseback facing each other, both lancing a lion-headed warrior-demon flanked by their two horses⁸⁵. To the top right and left of the image, commemorative inscriptions name the heroes:

ΕΝΘΑ ΚΑΤΑΚΗΤΕ Ο ΔΟΥΛΟΣ ΤΟΥ Θ(ΕΟ)Υ ΚΡΗΒΟΝ ΛΕΟΝ

ΜΗΧΑΗΛ ΤΡΟΥΜΑΡΧΗ⁸⁶

Here lies the Lord's servant the *scribon* Leon [and] Michael *troumarches*

Nicole Thierry convincingly outlined the socio-cultural context for the monument, marking the Constantinopolitan institutional connections of the *σχιβων* Leon. She also, however, traced the variety of non-metropolitan identities inhabited by the two warriors and expressed through their dress

83. N. THIERRY, Portraits funéraires inédits de deux officiers byzantins morts au combat sur les frontières de la Cappadoce. Étude préliminaire, *ΔΧΑΕ* (2009), 169-176, here 169; C. JOLIVET-LEVY, Les cavaliers de Karbala, *Zograf* 33 (2009), 19-31.

84. JOLIVET-LEVY, Les cavaliers de Karbala, 28 for the geography of the 9th and 10th c. battlefields.

85. THIERRY, Portraits funéraires inédits, 170.

86. THIERRY, Portraits funéraires inédits, 171 for Leon and 172 for Michael.

and armor⁸⁷. A saddle similar to those used by nomadic warriors, short stirrups adjusted to horseback-riding in mountainous terrain, and turban-like headgear also seen on representations of Armenian warriors, all speak of the hybridity that marked Byzantine Cappadocia⁸⁸.

Identity issues aside, the inscription on the painted image clearly explains, that the two warriors lay in rest within the rock-cut chapel. This information would not be of significance were it not telling us a bit more about the men in question. Unlike the dead soldiers buried by Andrew the Skythian by the side of his victory monument early in the 9th century, all men that lay anonymously in the standard fashion of Greek and Roman military burials, Leon and Michael were buried away from the battlefield. We can therefore surmise that they had perhaps survived wars and were cut down later by either disease or age, only to be eventually offered proper burial and personalized commemoration⁸⁹. This distinct difference between the collective anonymity of the people's defenders in the battlefield monument and the commemorated life of individual named soldiers at Barata and Çomlekçi was, no doubt, keenly felt among the locals, who would find occasion to visit these sites.

87. J. E. COOPER – M. DECKER, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*, New York 2012, 42-44 on Cappadocia's ethnic mix; JUAN SIGNES CODONER, *The Emperor Theophilos and the East, 829-842: Court and Frontier in Byzantium during the Last Phase of Iconoclasm*, Farnham 2014, 151-152 on the distribution of the Khurramites in the Byzantine themes, the kind of act that would intensify the character of areas like Koron as Byzantine "melting-pots"; W. TREADGOLD, *The Byzantine Revival, 780-842*, Stanford 1988, 314 for a plausible reconstruction of this troop dispersal.

88. THIERRY, *Portraits funéraires inédits*, 172 on saddle, stirrups and Parthian style pants, 173 on the turban; EGER, *The Islamic Byzantine Frontier*, 250 note 16 on the Cappadocian elites' oriental tastes

89. HOPE, *Trophies and Tombstones: Commemorating the Roman Soldier*, 87-90; Not all battles saw proper burial of the dead: *τὴν ἐν ἀριστερᾷ πορευθῆναι θελήσας ὁ βασιλεὺς πολλῶν πτωμάτων θέαν ἀνθρωπίνων προσέλαβεν. Ἐν ἐκείνῳ γὰρ τῷ τόπῳ συνέστη τῷ παρελθόντι ἔτει ὁ πόλεμος τοῖς τε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ τοῖς Τούρκοις στρατηγοῦντος Μανουὴλ κουροπαλάτου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ, καὶ τὸ ὄωμαϊκὸν ἠττήθη στρατόπεδον*. Attaleiates, *History* 147, translation in KALDELLIS – KRALLIS, *The History: Michael Attaleiates*, 269 that Romanos Diogenes' troops walked past the unburied bones of Roman soldiers from the previous year's campaign Skylitzes, Basil II 43 in *Synopsis Historiarum*, 364 relates a similar story about the Bulgarian dead from the Byzantine victory at Spercheios.

The responses, however, evoked by these different types of monuments would also have been rather varied. On the funerary tumulus one was called to remember a collectivity of warriors, comprised of men recruited from throughout the *θέμα* or even of members from a locally stationed *τάγμα*, either Roman or foreign⁹⁰. The collective monument forced the locals to imagine themselves as something larger than their village and town. The named warriors in the funerary chapel and on the walls of the Lykaonian churches on the other hand were explicit reminders of the community's rather specific contribution to the polity of the Romans. Either way, provincials entered a universe larger than their village or town every time they stood before the funerary monuments in question.

We must therefore ask: Who visited the chapel in Çomlekçi? Who organized the services in honor of the deceased heroes? What words were uttered during the ceremony? Would they perhaps read like the ones below?

*Let us gather together people of Christ
And celebrate the memory
Of our brothers who died in battle
And those who perished in intolerable captivity.
Let us entreat on their behalf.
They were valiant until their slaughter
Your servants, Lover of Man;
They received
Blows pitilessly,
Persevering in fetters;
Let it be that these men for these things
Achieve atonement of their souls, Lover of Man*⁹¹

Much like the representation of Leon and Michael in the Cappadocian chapel and the inscription on the Barata churches, these verses address an existing sensibility and desire for commemoration of the polity's defenders.

90. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 235 on provincially stationed *τάγματα*, citing the posthumous miracles of Peter of Atroa, *BHG* 2365, 163-165 on tagmatic soldiers in villages; HALDON, *The Empire that would not die*, 150 on the mostly autochthonous provenance of provincial soldiers.

91. Th. DĒTORAKIS – J. MOSSAY, Un office byzantin inédit pour ceux qui sont morts à la guerre, dans le Cod. Sin. Gr. 734-735, *Le Muséon* 101 (1988), 183-211.

Rural communities structured their social imaginary and became part of a larger history that transcended the locality through such commemorative practices⁹². Juan Signes Codoñer in fact compellingly suggests that such desire to commemorate and celebrate local warrior heroes links texts and monuments such as the *τοιῶδιον*, the chapel and the tumulus discussed above to orally delivered narratives of *Akritic* heroism that he considers essential components of the historical accounts by Genesios and the Continuator of Theophanes about Manuel the Armenian⁹³.

Were we to consider Codoñer's suggestion, we would be looking with greater interest at border and trans-border heroics that became the subject matter for widely circulating orally transmitted narratives about Roman heroes who, more often than not, were "socio-sexually" integrated in village communities⁹⁴. These stories essentially linked the provincials' experience and memory of war to Constantinopolitan perceptions of Anatolian realities and created a common identity that bound together populations of distinct regional and social backgrounds⁹⁵. Such processes of identity formation were inevitable, given the prominent place of soldiers in the lives of rural communities. In the beginning of the thirteenth century Ioannes Apokaukos, Metropolitan of Naupaktos, noted the impact that war had on rural communities. He explained that women were forced to work in the fields when soldiers left the villages to fight in war⁹⁶. More than the effects of absence, however, the presence itself of soldiers in villages and towns

92. P. STEPHENSON, *Religious Services for Byzantine Soldiers and the Possibility of Martyrdom, c. 400 - c. 1000*, in: *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihads: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges*, ed. S. H. HASHMI, Oxford 2012, 37 for the translation and analysis.

93. CODOÑER, *The Emperor Theophilos and the East*, 98-99.

94. EGER, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 293-309 on the special relations of frontiers to central authority.

95. S. EFTHYMIADIS, *Le miracle et les saints durant et après le second iconoclasm*, in: *Monastères, images, pouvoirs et société à Byzance*, ed. M. KAPLAN, Paris 2006, 154 n. 3 on Constantinopolitan commemorations of the provincial war dead as martyrs. It would be interesting to consider the dialectic between the local commemorations discussed here and the Constantinopolitan celebration of provincial heroism outlined by Efthymiadis.

96. V. VASILIEUSKII, *Epirotica saeculi XIII, Viz Vrem* 3 (1896), 242, lines 15ff; *γυναικας ἔργων ἀνδρικῶς τελεσιουργούς...* S. GERSTEL, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology and Ethnography*, Cambridge 2015, 94.

marked their inhabitants' daily lives. The fellow villager in constant pain from the repetitive stress injuries that resulted from his use of the bow, as was the case of a man buried at Panakton in Boeotia, and the numerous men with visible war wounds, were all living monuments to a very special form of tax paid by each rural community to an authority larger than individual villages and towns⁹⁷.

Memory at the village level: Where local sensibilities meet global affinities

The interplay among monument, memory, and identity may be further followed in the built environment of the Byzantine village and town. In her work on the late Byzantine Morea Sharon Gerstel explores processes of communication between villages and church authorities by means of monumental commemoration of land transfer deeds and donations, both private and imperial⁹⁸. Gerstel's analysis and rich apparatus of visual data chart a process by which clerical authorities memorialized the linkage of landscape and means of production with specific churches through inscriptions and monumental depictions of local ecclesiastical and secular Constantinopolitan paperwork⁹⁹.

Hagios Demetrios in Mystras, therefore, became a large-scale canvas on which its benefactor (Nikephoros, bishop of Lakedaimon) outlines social and economic relations that bound this town church to its rural assets: *I had it (the church of Hagios Demetrios) built to glorify God and the Holy Great Martyr of God, Demetrios, and I also raised from the foundations five mills in Magoula, and I also planted both an olive grove and an orchard in Magoula, and in Leuke I planted vineyards. I also bought the houses of the Chartophylax Eugenios right next to the church. And if afterwards*

97. GERSTEL, *Rural Lives and Landscapes*, 107 for Panakton; S. GARVIE-LOK, Human remains from the fortress of Mytilene, in: *Medieval and Post-Medieval Greece: The Corfu Papers*, ed. J. BINTLIFF – H. STÖGER [BAR International Series 2023], Oxford 2006, 115-120 for warrior injuries and wounds in Mytilene.

98. S. GERSTEL, Mapping the Boundaries of Church and Village: Ecclesiastical and Rural Landscapes in the Late Byzantine Peloponnese, in: *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. S. GERSTEL, Washington DC 2013, 355-368.

99. GERSTEL, Mapping the Boundaries, 340 and 343 for monumental depictions of Chrysobulls in the church of the Virgin Hodegetria (Aphentiko), 349 for inscriptions on church columns in Hagios Demetrios.

*someone tries coercively or with whatever means he could to remove them from the Church...*¹⁰⁰.

Urbs and *rus* link up here as town folk attending mass at Hagios Demetrios are given a lesson in rural geography that explicates and reinforces the church's economic footprint on the lands around Mystras. Implicit in the monumental representation of documents decorating the church walls is their symbolic juridical function. Thus liturgy in church of the Virgin Hodegetria (Aphentiko) doubles as court session. Standing before copies of imperial decrees in monumental scale the viewer was able to imagine a judge confirming the land transactions in question before a crowd of contesting villagers or other private landlords. *Urbs* and *rus* were thus united in a provincial context through this evocation of metropolitan authority and Roman legal traditions.

If Hagios Demetrios in Mystra speaks of links between urban and rural space, the village church of Archangel Michael in Polemitas offers evidence of a fully articulated village community coming together to contribute to the decorative program of the building. In this rural sanctuary in Mani we find three priests, one *αναγνώστης*, roughly thirty peasant families and a named notable from Prousa listed among the donors¹⁰¹. Another inscription on the church of Hagios Ioannes Prodromos at Megali Kastania reads as follows: *The Church of the Holy Forerunner was decorated by means of contributions by the notables and the common people, with an eye to absolution from their sins. Amen Lord may your wish come true*¹⁰².

Much as individual villagers of diverse social backgrounds appeared as one at a provincial court to embody the village before a judge, thus they also displayed their corporate identity on the walls of a local church.

Either way, the village emerges as a self-conscious entity with a distinct corporate identity and well-defined interests. In seeking to understand the response of villagers to war memorials and other signs of authority in the vicinity of their homes, both Constantinopolitan and local, one may

100. GERSTEL, *Mapping the Boundaries*, 349 for translation; (slightly modified); G. MILLET, *Inscriptions byzantines de Mistra*, *BCH* 23 (1899), 122 for the Greek text.

101. A. LAIOU, *The Peasant as Donor* [as in n. 10], 117.

102. LAIOU, *The Peasant as Donor*, 118 for the inscription.

examine an example of commemoration that transcended town and village boundaries by connecting people of different origins to a sacred object. In 1048 notables and clergy from the area of Thebes came together to establish a confraternity, forty-nine individuals in all, twenty from the ranks of the church and twenty-nine lay¹⁰³. Members agreed to meet regularly and committed to celebrate mass as a group once a year. Furthermore, they assumed on a rotating monthly basis the responsibility for the care of an icon. Part of their duties for the month in question included organizing the procession that took the icon of the Virgin Mary from its domicile in one church to the church that would become its home for the coming month.

While the commemoration of a regionally significant icon is by no means the same thing as memory organized around a war memorial and battle trophy, it nevertheless represents a significant social occurrence with impact on local society that was felt surely outside the strict membership of the confraternity. Processions were public events and no-doubt attracted a diverse, ever changing crowd as they traced paths that linked small rural churches in the hinterland of the city of Thebes. Each month a distinct set of people would come out to reinforce existing links with the members of the confraternity, while at the same time celebrating the memory of the most orthodox emperors, the holy patriarch, and the bishop of Thebes, along with late abbot of Stiris Lord Theodoros Leobachos, the Abbesses of the monastery of the Naupaktian women, members of the confraternity living and dead, and the Christian crew in general¹⁰⁴.

A commemoration then, pegged on a moving object of numinous significance, tied people with distinct regional affinities to emperor and patriarch in Constantinople as well as the local notable members of the confraternity and the ecclesiastical and monastic elite of Thebes. The celebrated icon moved on roads and footpaths in the rural space around the Boeotian metropolis. It travelled along transport networks, whose upkeep depended on collaborative efforts that mobilized people from proximate towns and villages, past publicly maintained fortifications bearing

103. J. NESBITT – J. WITA, A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era, *BZ* 68.2 (1975), 360-384, here 381 for membership breakdown.

104. NESBITT – WITA, A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era, 365.

inscriptions that celebrated their builders' dedication to the community¹⁰⁵. Urban and suburban populations partook once a month in a ceremony that confirmed both their local and regional affinities. These men, women, and children would also imagine a broader Roman world, if only because some among the processing confraternity members were known for their origins and past service in distant parts of the empire, from Corinth and Adrianople to Cappadocia, Karystos and Kos¹⁰⁶.

The town and village community mirrored in the activities of the Theban confraternity is by no means a Kazhdanian community of introverts in fear of the world beyond their fatherland. Instead, we see here individuals and communities that engage with a world much wider than their town's *territorium*. This coming together both within town and village or across community lines is notable given that it appears to mobilize people of diverse social backgrounds towards collective goals satisfactory to all. As noted by Leonora Neville, in the village of Radochostas the inhabitants "decided it was just to come together from small to great" in an attempt to demarcate their land. Neville perceptively notes in her analysis that the "allusion to differences in status among the villagers" reveals "a certain self-consciousness about the act of transcending those divisions" in pursuit of a larger village goal.¹⁰⁷ Here we are no longer in a village that is a mere fiscal unit. We are instead dealing with a living community defined by interests negotiated amongst its members and defended through the collective action of rich and poor villagers¹⁰⁸.

In his work on the Byzantine rural world Michel Kaplan notes that the members of the village community came together as a collectivity to select their own representatives, whether those were the rich and influential among them or simply elders¹⁰⁹. Thus, while the village might be conceived

105. GERSTEL, *Rural Lives and Landscapes*, 14 on footpaths between villages in western Mani; S. TROIANOS, Καστροκοιτία. Einige Bemerkungen über die finanziellen Grundlagen des Festungsbaues in byzantinischen Reich, *Βυζαντινά* 1 (1969), 39-57 on state maintained forts; G. KIOURTZIAN, En attendant les Seldjouks: une inscription des remparts d'Alanya en Asie Mineure de 1199, *RÉB* 70 (2012), 245-254 for inscriptions on forts.

106. NESBITT – WITA, *A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era*, 367-8.

107. NEVILLE, *Organic Local Government*, 289.

108. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre*, 198-200 on village representation.

109. KAPLAN, *Les villageois aux premiers siècles byzantins*, 24.

in fiscal terms as an undifferentiated collectivity, when it came to its legal representation this was embodied by a select group of individuals. As we saw earlier, this smaller subsection of village representatives was not always a fixed group. We have in fact noted that such variability is perhaps indicative of diffusion of trust among a village population that appeared to often delegate the effective representation of their individual and collective interests to a wide cross-section of their peers. We therefore find in villages and towns a social landscape markedly different from a world where «deprived of any substantial form of social relationship, [the Byzantines] consciously kept within the narrow circle of the nuclear family and, lacking the means of collective defense and help, felt alone and solitary in a dangerous world»¹¹⁰.

When, however, we encounter these politically constituted villages and towns and their representatives, it pays to remember that from the days when Rome first established relations with towns and cities of the Greek east, more or less moderated assemblies of citizens represented each individual town before the power of the empire. Such interactions were in fact part of Rome's political DNA and we may not assume that they came to an abrupt end with the waning of the ancient world. They certainly survive in the capital, where citizens cohered in different types of collectivities in order to participate in imperial ceremonies as representatives of their associations and as embodiments of the *populus romanus* itself¹¹¹. Thus, from the provincial village and town to the capital city, community identity and interests were distilled into more or less formal representation of individual collectivities before the governing authorities.

110. KAZHDAN, *People and Power in Byzantium*, 34.

111. Konstantinos VII Porphyrogenetos' *De Cerimoniis* is replete with such interactions and involvement; MATHEOU, *City and Sovereignty in East Roman Thought*, 57, citing Theodore Prodromos' commentary on Aristotle, that echoes the Polybian tripartite *πολιτεία*. Also see Eustathios of Thessalonike in note 23 for the Venetian "mixed constitution" as a triple thread rope weaving together monarchic, aristocratic, and popular elements; for Prodromos' text see *Anonymi et Stephani, in artem rhetoricam commentaria*, ed. H. RABE, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, 22/2, Berlin 1896, 296.

Conclusions

I have traced in this paper instances in which smaller communities, whether villages or provincial towns, under different kinds of circumstances, displayed forms of communal behavior and collective identity. Our evidence helps us identify ways in which villagers, otherwise treated in scholarship merely as constitutive elements of the fiscal unit that was the village, could imagine themselves as something more than numbers in an imperial ledger. A fresh look and synthetic approach on existing material about Byzantium's myriad rural communities is therefore necessary if we are to move towards a richer understanding of the polity of the *Ρωμαῖοι*. In the context of such analysis I sought evidence, both textual and material, on the social and collective identity of villages and towns in the empire's provinces.

The relationship of villagers and townsmen with state and non-state actors is thus no longer merely a question of material resources, surplus generation and tribute extraction – in and of themselves important issues well covered by much modern scholarship of a historical materialist bent – but rather a direct expression of village corporate identity and perhaps evidence of political agency. Jumbled cries and seemingly chaotic representation before provincial and Constantinopolitan judges spoke of village agendas defended by trusted representatives in well-frequented and apparently equally trusted courts maintained in the provinces and the capital by the emperor and the bureaucracy in his service. Concurrently the memorialization on village and town spaces of local state actors, such as deceased soldiers, marks the participation of these communities in a larger and familiar Byzantine cosmos that claimed their allegiance. Much in the same vein village churches and their walls become a canvas for the public expressions of local attitudes towards autochthonous and heterochthonous state and non-state agents. Such processes of identity formation and active expression of village and town attitudes towards the outside world must be understood as a form of Byzantine politics that mirrors at the micro level of the village larger and perhaps rowdier forms of political expression observed until now only in the polity's larger urban centers.

Writing about the Byzantine world of the period stretching from the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the emergence of the Abbasid Caliphate

in the eighth a colleague noted: “The vast majority of the rural and urban population accepted this world and were bound up in reproducing it both ideologically as well as in practical, day-to-day life, except on those occasions when they were confronted with particular challenges to their versions of the way the world should be – as exemplified in the oppositional rebellious activities of soldiers from time to time.”¹¹².

It is the task of scholars to trace the identification posited in this passage, between people of all ranks and provenance and their polity, in both rural and urban areas. In line then with recent research on the Byzantine *πολιτεία* the material presented here points towards a significantly richer commons than that inhabited by the Kazhdanian *Homo Byzantinus*. The emerging picture enriches our understanding of Byzantine politics by asking the reader to escape the walls of Constantinople and the army formations of the empire’s aspiring military commanders in order to consider a world of continuously and vociferously expressed local demands and opinions that no authority, as Kekaumenos clearly suggested, would have been wise to ignore.

112. HALDON, *The Empire that would not die*, 291.

ΛΑΪΚΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ΔΡΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΤΗΤΑ ΣΤΑ ΧΩΡΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΙΣ ΠΟΛΕΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟΥ

Αν και η σύγχρονη έρευνα για την βυζαντινή δημοκρατία παρουσιάζει την Κωνσταντινούπολη ως κόμβο μιας πολυσύνθετης και πολυφωνικής πολιτικής, πολύ λιγότερο έχει ερευνηθεί η κοινωνική και πολιτική ταυτότητα των μικρότερων οικισμών της αυτοκρατορίας. Θέμα του άρθρου είναι αυτός ο εκτενέστερος κόσμος χωριών και πόλεων της περιφέρειας και η σχέση τους με τον «ρωμαϊκό» κόσμο γύρω τους κατά τη διάρκεια της μεσοβυζαντινής περιόδου. Διερευνάται η στάση του χωριού και της πόλης απέναντι στην εξουσία και εντοπίζονται διάφορα στοιχεία συλλογικής δράσης, τα οποία μπορούν να χαρακτηρίζονται ως «πολιτική δραστηριότητα».