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"Βασιλεύοντος εις Ρώμην ἀνακτος..." Κτητορικές επιγραφές και πολιτική ιδεολογία την εποχή του Μιχαήλ Η´ Παλαιολόγου

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“In the Reign of the Emperor of Rome...”: Donor Inscriptions and Political Ideology in the Time of Michael VIII Paleologos

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It is common knowledge that a host of dedicatory inscriptions and donor portraits begin to be found in church from the thirteenth century on, something which has been justifiably associated with the socio-economic reforms, as well as the political situation at the time, i.e. the break-up of the Byzantine Empire, the creation of new regional states and the weakening of central government. The inscriptions often mention the ruling Byzantine emperor as an indication of date, a practice which may acquire special significance in this political context. These references have usually been approached through the wider socio-historic context of the late Byzantine period and interpreted as an expression of political allegiance and other ties which bound the patrons to the central authority. On the other hand, the mention of the Palaiologan emperors in the corresponding examples in Venetian Crete, was interpreted as a reflection of a fundamental part of the identity of the local Orthodox and Greek-speaking population, i.e. their status as subjects of the Roman Empire, an identity which remained unchanged during the first period of Venetian rule mainly because the infrastructure of the Byzantine cultural tradition remained intact.

Over and above the wider repercussions, any inscription constitutes primarily a message from the donors, a means of communicating their opinions and expectations, which is directly connected with their ideology and social status as well as with the time and place in which they live. Focusing, for example, on Crete, it does not appear to be accidental that of the twelve relevant inscriptions five mention Andronikos II, an emperor who made the restoration of Orthodoxy a basic plank of his policy after all the commotion caused by the Union of the churches. Even less likely to be a matter of chance is the fact that in two cases the donors are priests and monks, who appear to be related to one another, and who are at pains to stress this aspect of Andronikos’s policy, calling him: “Orthodox and Christ-loving Emperor”.

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2 Ibid, 25. Cf. T. Papamastorakis, "Ο διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών της παλαιολόγειας παριστάνει τη Βαλκανική Χρονική και την Κύρο της Αυτοκρατορίας" in *Ναοί, Εκκλησίες, Παραδοσίες*, Athens 2001, 296-9, where the mention of a Byzantine emperor is seen as an acceptance of his policies by the patrons.
3 D. Tsougarakis, "La tradizione culturale bizantina nel primo periodo della dominazione Veneziana a Creta. Alcune osservazioni in merito alla questione dell'identità culturale", in G. Ortalli (ed.), *Venecia e Crete. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi*, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Venice 1998, 510-22. For a different interpretation see Chr. A. Maltezou, "Byzantine 'consuetudines' in Venetian Crete", *DOP* 49 (1995), 278-80, in which the references to the Byzantine emperor are associated with a propagandistic use of the "Byzantine idea" by the local nobility in order to maintain its power in the community and influence over the rural population of the island.
6 These are the inscriptions in Hagios Pavlos at Hagios Ioannes in Pargia, (1293), and another, now lost, inscription form Gortyna (1297), see G. Gerola, *Monumenti veneti dell'isola di Creta*, vol. IV, Venice 1932, 538, 560-1. The inscription in Hagios Pavlos names the patrons as the priest Petros and his sister Katalyfe while the Gortyna inscription
In other words, the references to the Byzantine emperor could represent the expression of a political point of view on the part of the donor which could be decoded by examining his or her profile, the contemporary history of the region as well as the practical politics or even the ideology of the respective emperors. An analysis of these three parameters will allow us to determine more exactly in each case the significance of these references.

This paper attempts to test the accuracy of this view by taking just such an approach to two donor inscriptions in Hagioi Theodori at Kafiona in Mani and Hagios Georgios at Douraniaka on Kythera, both of which mention the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, are situated in the south of Greece and are dated to a period of general political instability caused by the stand-off between Frankish and Byzantine forces over control of the region. These two examples have been chosen not just because of the things they have in common, but also because the inscription from the Mani was first made known to the academic community by the late Prof. Nikolaos Drandakis, to whose memory this book is dedicated.

The inscription from Hagioi Theodori, Kafiona, Mani

According to the dedicatory inscription, the decoration of the church of Hagioi Theodori in Kafiona, Mani was funded by the bishop of Veligoste Georgios and a synkellos, whose name is missing, during the reign:

refers to the monk Manos (?) and his brother, the monk Panterios and his sister Kataphygia. A nun named Kataphygia is also mentioned among the donors in Hagios Georgios in the village of Hagia Triada in the same region, Gerola, op.cit., 536-7. Given the rarity of the name Kataphygia, as well as the chronological and geographical proximity of the monuments it seems likely that all three instances refer to the same person (see Gerola, op.cit., 538).

6 Cf. a similar approach to the portraits of Stefan Dušan in churches belonging to the Serbian nobility suggested by T. Papamastorakis, "Епископскіе статуи и их значеніе в политической идееology of the Serb king Dušan оn роfile of the donor and те братахъ врховнаго твоего", in Byzantium and Serbia in the 14th Century, Athens1996, 140-57.


8 On the sevastokrator Constantine Palaiologos, see PLP 1/9, 1989, 98 no. 21498.


12 "... ad Savastocrataram, fratrem domini Imperatoris, qui erat ibi de Morea dominus pro ipso domino Imperatore...", G. L. Fr. Tafel, G. M. Thomas, Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig, III, Vienna 1857 (reprinted Amsterdam 1964), 255. On the dating, see Zakynthinos, op.cit., 43. We do not know how much longer he remained in the Peloponnese, but he died before 1275 in Constantinople having embraced the monastic life. See PLP 9, no. 21498.

out his time in the Peloponnese add to this impression. Apart from the military operations against the Franks, he won the loyalty and cooperation of the Melingoi, the Slavs of what was already the Byzantine region of Lakonia, Michael VIII and his consort, and recognize his representative, the sevastokrator’s mission is also implied in the way in which Michael VIII refers to the retaking of the Peloponnese in the autobiographical chapters of the Typikon of the Monastery of Saint Dimitrios in Constantinople: “...and I coursed through the entire Peloponnesees, pillaging some areas and forcing the submission of others”17. The patrons of the decorative programme of Hagioi Theodoroi, two high-ranking church dignitaries18, not only mention in their dedicatory inscription the rightful overlords of what was already the Byzantine region of Lakonia, Michael VIII and his consort, and recognize his representative, the Sevastokator Constantine, but also referring to him as “governing the Peloponnese” (ἡγεμονέβοντος... εν τι χώρα τῆς Πολυπονίσου), they are accepting and promoting the imperial policy for the whole region. The title they give him constitutes an indirect announcement of his own ambitions and those of Michael VIII in respect of the retaking of the whole Peloponnese, which, given the continuous warfare associated with the entire period of his presence in the region, would seem to have been particularly topical at that time.

The inscription from Hagios Georgios, Dourianika, Kythera

The donor inscription in Hagios Georgios in Dourianika on Kythera is inscribed in two lines between the apse proper and its semi-dome and reads as follows:

[Ἀνακαινισθή ὁ σῶν χρήστων ναιος [ποιητος + Γεωργίου μαρτύρου τροταιφόρου δόξα συνεργείας τε κόστος και μόχθου + Ἰωακείου [... τα[...]][...]] εἰς ἄφεσιν και λύσιν πολλον] εφαλμάτων[ν] βιολαύνοντος εἰς Ἱωάννην ἄνακτος [νας 10] / [νας 15] καὶ ἐπὶ μητροπολίτου Μονεμβασίας ἐπίτηδευμον εξό[κ][ο]ν + πάσω τε Πέλοπος νήσου Ερηπ[ο][ν]ος ἔτους ἐφιππή (=6783 = 1275)19. The donor, one Ioannikios who is not known from other sources20, chooses to date his commission by reference to the Byzantine emperor who, given the mention of 1275, must be Michael VIII Palaiologos (1261-1282), and to a high-ranking church dignitary, Gregorios Metropolitan of Monemvasia.

It was in the same year that Kythera had returned to the jurisdiction of the Byzantine Empire. More particularly, it was by 1275 at the latest that the inhabitants of nearby Monemvasia, led by a local nobleman, the sevastos Pavlos Notaras, managed to rid the island of the Venetian Venier, who had ruled it since 1238. That the activities of Notaras should be seen in the context of Michael VIII’s policy to redeem the Southern Greek territories from the Latins is endorsed by the description he receives a few years later in a Venetian document as “homo domini imperatoris et capitaneus loci Cerdigi”21. The coincidence in the date allows us to suppose that this reference to the Byzantine emperor is a reflection of contemporary political circumstances and by extension to assume that at some level it expresses the donor’s acknowledgement of the new ruler of the island and perhaps also his approval of what had happened.

However, the unknown donor was not just any islander gratified by the turn of events, but seems much more likely to have been a supporter of the policy of the emperor in question: someone who was informed about his views and his ideology.
This is implied in the expression Τώμης άναξ (“Emperor of Rome”), the appellation used for the emperor. The word “Rome” was synonymous in Byzantine thought with the Roman empire and its capital and had a multiplicity of interpretations over the many centuries of the empire’s existence. The name “New Rome”, the invention of which had been attributed from as early as the fourth century to Constantine the Great as an expression of his desire to create a new capital city, went on to be used to promote the city as the only legitimate successor to the universal Roman Empire, as well as to stress its precedence over the old and “decadent” capital of the West. It is not by chance that this sense of a universal, new and strong Constantinople/Rome should attain its greatest popularity in periods of “revival” of empire, such as for example the twelfth century and more especially the reign of Manuel I Komnenos. As well as connoting the Roman imperium, it could be used to denote the power of the Byzantine emperor. A typical example is the title Ρώμης άναξ which accompanies Michael VII Doukas (and later Nikephoros III Botaneiates) in the manuscript Par. Coislin 79, in which he is depicted being crowned by Christ, together with his consort Maria of Alania. Moreover those who adopted the term βασιλεῖς Ρώμης νέας most of all were the members of the Komnenian dynasty. In epigrams inscribed on funerary monuments, painted portraits or works of the minor arts, as well as in the varied panegyrics of Theodore Prodromos, we find a host of similar, and sometimes particularly original, titles combined with the name of Rome, often intermingling notions of empire and of Constantinople: e.g. άναξ, δεσπότης, βασιλεῖς, σωτήρ, ήλιος, αστήρ, and πορφυρόχρους στύλος τῆς Ρώμης. These titles, with their clear references to the Roman heritage, reflect the more general idea of “renovation” in the time of the Komnenoi, as well as their at-

24 Dölger, op.cit., 93-8. It is indicative of the ideological climate of the twelfth century that a passage from Constantine Manasses ChroniqueSynopsis characterizes Constantinople as “unwinkled Rome, never grown old; Rome forever young and constantly rejuvenated” (Πώμην τὴν ἀμπελιποῦσαν, τὴν μέροπτα γιγαντίαν, ἄναξν ἄνεινος, ἀϊδος οἰκοδομήν ...). And further on in the same text the comment which ends the narration of the sack of Rome in 415 and which the author addressed to Manuel Komnenos: "...and this happened in the old Rome, but ours shall flourish — may it increase, hold sway, remain young and evermore wax stronger. Yes, indeed, o supreme ruling emperor! (Καὶ τοῦτο μὲν συμβαίνει καὶ τὴν περιπέτειαν Ἡρών, ἢ δὲ ἡμετέρα τεθνήκαμεν, οὐδὲς, ὡς ταῦτα, τὸ μέγα τοῦτον Ἀλέξιον, τὸν ναύαρις πιονίνην,)” see Constantini Manassii Breviarum Chronicum, ed. O. Lampisidis (CFHB XXVI), Athens 1996, 127 II. 2321-22, 129 II. 2506-08. The same subject of a comparison between the two cities is found later in the fourteenth century in an oration by Theodore Metochites on the relationship between imperial city and emperor in the rhetorical imageries of the Komnenian emperors and the conceptual ramifications thereof, see P. Magdalino, R. Nelson, “The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century”, ByzF 8 (1982), 137-40, 146-7. Such appellations in the historical poems of Theodore Prodromos are indeed legion: see for example W. Hörandner, Theodoros Prodromos. Historische Gedichte, poems I, II, I, 7, 8, 114; IV, II, 11-12; VII II, 8; XII, 5, 7; XXI, 20 etc. In these poems the name Rome is frequently substituted for Constantinople; for the relevant references see the index in Hörandner, Prodromos, op.cit., 585. It should also be noted that in Prodromos’ verses Constantinople/Rome has a special part to play in the image of the emperor; identified with the empire itself it is his slave (δούλη) as well as his mother (μητέρα), the bearer and nurterer (ὁ τεκτόνημα καὶ ἀγορεύμαν) of the Roman Emperor, see Hörandner, op.cit., 107-8. On the relationship between imperial city and emperor in the rhetorical image of the Komnenian emperors and the conceptual ramifications thereof, see P. Magdalino, The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180, Cambridge 1993, 424-5.
26 On these epigrams see S. Lambros, "Ο Μορφωτικός Κώδικας 525", NE 8 (1911), 145: "...τῶν σύντοι Μονοθεία, τόν πορφυρόχρους τῆς Ρώμης στύλον (epigram in which Christ is represented as praising Manuel II and his consort), 146: ...ποσειδονιστόν Μονοθεία, τὸν πορφυρόχρους τῆς Ρώμης νέας ... (epigram on an icon of St. Theodore), 147: "...Σοφογραφημένης ἐν γένοις τρισολβίου / Ρώμης νέας άναξίας Τουτσικάκιας", 158: "Πάππος τοῦ Άλεξιος, εὐφράστη ἄναξ, / ὁ σωτήρ Ρώμης προσφέροντος ἄθλον μέγαν ... (funerary epigram for the granddaughter of Alexis I, Eudokia), 173: "Πάππος, πατὴρ, παῖς βασιλέως Ρώμης νέας (epigram on a portrait of John II, Manuel I and Alexios II Komnenos). See also the commentary on the above mentioned epigrams relating to imperial portraits in P. Magdalino, R. Nelson, "The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century", ByzF 8 (1982), 137-40, 146-7. Such appellations in the historical poems of Theodore Prodromos are indeed legion: see for example W. Hörandner, Theodoros Prodromos. Historische Gedichte, poems I, II, I, 7, 8, 114; IV, II, 11-12; VII II, 8; XII, 5, 7; XXI, 20 etc. In these poems the name Rome is frequently substituted for Constantinople; for the relevant references see the index in Hörandner, Prodromos, op.cit., 585. It should also be noted that in Prodromos’ verses Constantinople/Rome has a special part to play in the image of the emperor; identified with the empire itself it is his slave (δούλη) as well as his mother (μητέρα), the bearer and nurterer (ὁ τεκτόνημα καὶ ἀγορεύμαν) of the Roman Emperor, see Hörandner, op.cit., 107-8. On the relationship between imperial city and emperor in the rhetorical imagery of the Komnenian emperors and the conceptual ramifications thereof, see P. Magdalino, The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180, Cambridge 1993, 424-5.
27 On the notion of the emperor as light of the world and its links to Roman tradition, see Grabar, L’empereur (n. 26), 104-5. However, the appellation πορφυρόχρους στύλος τῆς Ρώμης (purple-coloured column
tempts to present themselves as the “restorers” of the empire, successors to the great emperors of the past and guardians of the Roman heritage.

The exiled emperor of Nicea John III Vatatzes seems to have had similar hopes, when he called himself κοίρανος Ἰωάννης παις Δούκος Τώμης όπλοτέρης, in a now lost inscription referring to the rebuilding of the walls of Smyrna (1222/3), managing to stress both his imperial descent and the importance of his restoration work.

It is common knowledge that the keystone of Michael VIII’s political ideology after the recapture of Constantinople was the “revival” of the Roman Empire, which involved the reconstruction of the city, military campaigns for the retaking of former imperial territories and the strengthening of imperial power through the reintroduction of earlier institutions and practices. This tendency is best reflected in the appellation of New Constantine which was added to the official imperial title on documents, painted portraits and diplomatic gifts sent to the West.

As might be expected, at an ideological and institutional level the models for his policy of renewal, as well as the means of legitimizing his authority as successor to the Byzantine imperial tradition, were sought in relatively recent times, and especially, as Ruth Macrides has pointed out, for the most part in the Komnenian period. This can moreover be seen in his constant preoccupation with stressing his Komnenian descent, the restoration of monastic foundations connected with the Komnenian emperors in areas he repossessed and the way in which he used art to promote himself as their successor.

Thus the appellation Ἐμπατώμην Ἡμᾶς of the Kythera inscription is entirely consistent with Michael VIII’s inclinations to represent himself as the restorer of empire, heir of Constantinople and successor to the Komnenian dynasty. The choice of this rather uncommon title allows us to suppose that the donor was not only acquainted with but shared and wished to promote the inclinations of the New Constantine, just like his “official” encomiast Manuel Holobolos. In one of his panegyrics for the emperor he wrote, addressing the city of Constantinople: “like a queen you shall now throw off your disdained state and put on your former adornments; as Rome set aside weakness and receive invincible force from a great emperor...”

The second person mentioned in the inscription reinforces...
the notion that the patron of the church in Kythera was a supporter of the first Palaiologan emperor. Gregorios, Metropolitan of Monemvasia, can be identified as the metropolitan of the same name mentioned in the second part of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*. From this we learn that, once the Frankish occupation had come to an end, the church in Lakedaïmonia was led by: "Gregory, the most holy metropolitan of Monemvasia; who is both exarch and has full ecclesiastical jurisdiction over all the Peloponnesian..." 37. On the basis of this reference Gregorios has been thought to be the first prelate to be given the title of metropolitan when, after the retaking of the area by the Byzantines, the see of Monemvasia was elevated to the status of a metropolis by Michael VIII. 38. However, given this context, the omission of his name from the *Synodikon* of Monemvasia is somewhat problematic. In order to explain the absence from the list of church dignitaries in the town of the person who apparently had the dual honour of overseeing the return of the population to the Orthodox rite and the elevation of its church to cathedral status, the editor of this text, V. Laurent, made the plausible suggestion that this was a case of *damnatio memoriae*. This could be attributed to Gregorios' alignment with Michael VIII's post 1274 unionist policy. 39.

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36...διός βασιλέως τῆς τόν ἀκομὴν αποβλήθησα καὶ κόσμων ἐπενδύσα

... τὸν πρῶτον ὡς Ρώμη τὸ θυγατρείας ἀποβλήθησα διὰ ἁγίου λόγου λόγου εἰς βασιλέως μεγαλοκρυσα... X. Sideridis, "Μακεδονικές Ολοπλούς, Έγγραφαν ἵνα Μιο Παλαιολόγου", *ΕΕΒΣ* 3 (1926), 185. Another address to Michael VIII by the same author comments how, thanks to his efforts, Constantinople had once again become the στερρά καὶ ἰσχυρά... Ρώμη, see Fermet, *Launtes Constantinopolitane*, op.cit. (n. 324). 188. These orations written in the period 1265-7, when Holobolos was occupying the position of Master of the Rhetors (φήμα τῶν φήμων), whose duties included an official annual address to the emperor. On Manuel Holobolos, see Macrides, "The NewConstantine", op.cit. (n. 32), 15-9. It is important to note that this custom, which goes back to the time of Alexios I Komnenos, was revived by Michael VIII. See Macrides, "From the Komnenoi to the Palaiologoi", op.cit. (n. 31), 271-2.

37 Μετά τὸ ὑποχογονήμα τῆς τοῦ ἐνταύθα τοῦπολεο (i.e. Lakedaïmonia) ἐθείο

... κυρίας καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τῆς χρόνου τῶν κρατεῖσα τῶν ἱδαν αὐθεντῶν καὶ βασιλέως πρῶτος καθισμόντων διηγήματι ἡ τῆς ἀγαθής μητροπόλεως Μονεμβασίως κύριος Ευγέργας Χρήστος δὴ ἔπεφτο καὶ τὸ ἐκείνους


On the Council of Lyon and the reactions the union of the churches provoked in the Byzantine society and especially in church circles, see: H. Evert-Kappesova, "La société byzantine et l’Union de Lyon", *Byz* X (1949), 28-41; G. Samalopoulos, *Michael Palaeologos* (n. 10), 270-3; and Nicol, *Last Centuries* (n. 5), 58-61, 66-70, 84-5. Also Nicol, "The Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyons, 1274", *StChH* 7 (1971), 113-46. 43 This campaign can be attributed to the efforts of Metropolitan Nikephoros Moschopoulos (1289-1315), M. Chatzidakis, "Νεώτερα για

Haris Kalligas put forward some objections to this theory. In particular, she maintains that the church of Monemvasia was already a cathedral by the mid twelfth century and that, after the Latin occupation, its status was formally reinstated by Andronikos II. She also suggested that Gregorios was already in possession of the title of Metropolitan of Monemvasia, when he was transferred to Lakedaïmonia after the restoration of the Byzantine suzerainty in the region and attributed his omission from the *Synodikon* of Monemvasia to confusion over his actual position. However, the fact that he is referred to as Metropolitan of Monemvasia in the inscription in Kythera one year after the Council of Lyon, alongside Michael VIII, makes Laurent's thesis the more convincing. Moreover, something similar happened in the ecclesiastical province of Lakedaïmonia where, in an attempt to eradicate all memory of unionist bishops not only were their names struck out of the *Synodikon*, but their portraits were obliterated and any inscriptions mentioning them removed from the walls of the Cathedral of Hagios Dimitrios in Mistra. 44 The inscription also verifies that Gregorios held the office of Ξάρχου πόλεως Πελετοποννήσου ["exarch of all the Peloponnesian..."], confirming the veracity of the Chronicle. This title...
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shows that he must have been sent by the Patriarch endowed with extensive powers, probably on account of the special political circumstances and in the context of the re-establishment of the ecclesiastical administration in the area. The mention of his name in Kythera, which since the twelfth century had come under the ecclesiastical province of Corinth, reinforces this view and encourages us to assume that he played a decisive role in church affairs in the region.

To sum up, an examination of the two inscriptions in Southern Greece indicates that the mention of Michael VIII entails a topical statement on the part of the donors – and probably one easily recognized by its medieval public. Aware of the ambitions and the ideology of the first Palaiologan emperor, they are demonstrating their support for his policy and actively promoting it. Finally, it reveals how, behind the apparently formal phraseology of donor inscriptions, many layers of meaning may lie concealed. Seeking out these sub-texts and by extension studying the inscriptions as a means of communication may open up new avenues of exploration and interpretation.

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45 This is also suggested by his first actions. In particular, according to the Chronicle, he installed bishops at Elos and Amikleio, former bishoprics of the ecclesiastical provinces of Patras and Lakedaimonia respectively, and re-organized the ecclesiastical district of Lakedaimonia, appointing a skevophylax, a sakellarios and a chariphylax (Kühlinger, op.cit. (n. 37), 66-7). The church of Kythera, a bishopric in the ecclesiastical province of Corinth since the twelfth century, came under the authority of the ecclesiastical province of Monemvasia at some point before 1301, the year in which Andronikos II issued his chrysobull confirming the translation of the bishopric to Monemvasia, Dölger, Regesten (n. 38), III, no. 2237.


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ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΝΤΟΣ ΕΙΣ ΡΩΜΗΝ ΑΝΑΚΤΟΣ...
ΚΤΗΤΟΡΙΚΕΣ ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ΙΔΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ
ΤΗΝ ΕΠΟΧΗ ΤΟΥ ΜΙΧΑΗΛ Η' ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΥ

Αντικείμενο της μελέτης αποτελεί η ιστορική ανάλυση δύο κτητορικών επιγραφών που βρίσκονται σε ναούς του νότιου ελλαδικού χώρου, χρονολογούνται σε μία περίοδο γενικότερης πολιτικής αναστάτωσης λόγω της αντιπαράθεσης Φράγκων και Βυζαντινών για την κυριαρχία στην περιοχή και αναφέρουν το όνομα του βυζαντινού αυτοκράτορα Μιχαήλ Η' Παλαιολόγου. Πρόκειται για τις επιγραφές στους ναούς των Αγίων Θεοδώρων στην Καφιόνα της Μάνης (1263-1270) και του Αγίου Γεωργίου στα Ντουριάνικα Κυθήρων (1275). Η συνδυαστική ανάγνωση των σύγχρονων ιστορικών συμφραζομένων των συγκεκριμένων περιοχών και της πολιτικής πρακτικής, όπως επίσης και της ιδεολογίας, του μνημονευόμενου αυτοκράτορα αποκαλύπτει πως η αναφορά του Μιχαήλ Η' δεν χρησιμοποιείται απλώς ως μια τυπική χρονολογική ένδειξη, αλλά εμπεριέχει ένα επίκαιρο -και πιθανότατα ευανάγνωστο για το μεσαιωνικό κοινό- πολιτικό μήνυμα από την πλευρά των χορηγών. Ειδικότερα η έκφραση αναξ Ψώμης, με την οποία προσφέρεται ο βυζαντινός ηγεμόνας στην επιγραφή των Κυθήρων, όπως επίσης και ο τίτλος ηγεμονεύοντος εν τῇ χώρᾳ Πελοποννήσου, που χρησιμοποιείται για τον αδερφό του Μιχαήλ Η', τον σεβαστοκράτορα Κωνσταντίνο, στην επιγραφή της Μάνης, υποδηλώνουν πως οι δωρητές ήταν ενήμεροι για τις επιδιώξεις και την πολιτική ιδεολογία του πρώτου Παλαιολόγου αυτοκράτορα, δηλώνουν την υποστήριξή τους και προπαγανδίζουν την πολιτική του στην περιοχή τους.