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

Vassiliki FOSKOLOU

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“IN THE REIGN OF THE EMPEROR OF ROME...”:
DONOR INSCRIPTIONS AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY
IN THE TIME OF MICHAEL VIII PALEOLOGOS

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 government¹.

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 authority². 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 intact³.

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 live⁴. 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 churches⁵. 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”⁶.

¹ S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece* (VeröfTIB, 5), Vienna 1992, 45-6 with earlier bibliography.

² Ibid, 25. Cf. T. Papamastorakis, *Ο διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών της παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στη Βαλκανική Χερσόνησο και την Κύπρο*, Athens 2001, 298-9, 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.), *Venezia e Creta. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi*, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Venice 1998, 510-22. For a different interpretation see Chr. A. Maltezos, “Byzantine ‘convetudines’ 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.

⁴ On the interpretation of byzantine churches and especially of their

wall paintings as a means of communication of their donors with the society, see Maria Panayotidi, “The Question of the Role of the Donor and of the Painter. A Rudimentary Approach”, *ΔΧΑΕ ΙΖ* (1993-94), 143-56. Ead., “Donor personality traits in 12th century. Some examples”, in Chr. Angelidi (ed.), *Byzantium Matures. Choices, Sensitivities, and Modes of Expression (Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries)*, Athens 2004, 145-66, with earlier bibliography.

⁵ On these inscriptions, see Tsougarakis, op.cit. (n. 3), 510, n. 1. On the religious policy of Andonikos II and its importance in shaping his political character and ideology, see A. E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins. The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II 1281-1328*, Cambridge Mass. 1972, 32-7, and D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium (1261-1453)*, London 1972, 99ff.

⁶ These are the inscriptions in Hagios Pavlos at Hagios Ioannes in Pirgiotissa (1303/4) and another, now lost, inscription from Gortyna (1292?), 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 Katafyge 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 references⁷.

This paper attempts to test the accuracy of this view by taking just such an approach to two donor inscriptions in Hagioi Theodoroi at Kafiona in Mani and Hagios Georgios at Dourianika 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 Theodoroi, Kafiona, Mani

According to the dedicatory inscription, the decoration of the church of Hagioi Theodoroi 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 Panterimos and his sister Katafyge. A nun named Katafyge 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 Katafyge, 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).

⁷ Cf. a similar approach to the portraits of Stefan Dušan in churches belonging to the Serbian nobility suggested by T. Papamastorakis, “Εικαστικές εκφάνσεις της πολιτικής ιδεολογίας του Στέφανου Dušan σε μνημεία της εποχής του και τα βυζαντινά πρότυπά τους”, in *Byzantium and Serbia in the 14th Century*, Athens 1996, 140-57.

⁸ N. B. Drandakis, “Les peintures murales des Saints-Théodores à Kaphiona (Magne du Péloponnèse)”, *CahArch* 32 (1984) 163-5. Id., *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, Athens 1995, 74-7. See also Kalopissi-Verti, op.cit. (n. 1), 66-7. On the church and its wall-paintings see Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες*, 70-100, with earlier bibliography.

⁹ On the *sevastokrator* Constantine Palaiologos, see *PLP* I/9, 1989, 98 no. 21498.

¹⁰ D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée, I: Histoire politique*, Paris 1932, 33ff. D. J. Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Paleologus and the West*,

... τῶν εὐσεβε[στ]άτων βασιλέω<ν> Μιχ(αήλ) κ(αί) Θεωδώρας τῶν Παλε[ο]λόγω(ν) καὶ ἡγεμονέβοντος τοῦ περιποθίτου ἀνταδέ(λφου) ἀν[τῶν] / ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῆς Πολλυπονίσου Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ σεβαστ[ο]κράτ(ορος) τοῦ Παλεωλόγου ...⁸.

The above information permits us to date the commission to the period 1262-70. To be precise, in 1262 the *sevastokrator* Constantine Palaiologos, brother of Michael VIII⁹, arrived in the Southern Peloponnese leading an armed expedition to take possession of the three fortresses, Mani, Mistra and Monemvasia, which had been ceded to the Byzantines by the Frankish prince Guillaume II de Villehardouin in exchange for his freedom¹⁰. However, Michael VIII's aim was to recapture the whole of the Peloponnese and thus the *sevastokrator*, with Monemvasia and the surrounding area as his base “waged war day by day on the prince – not being satisfied with just part of the peninsular and wanting to rule it all, ..., [and] fought as well as he could¹¹”. These campaigns, which are described in detail in the *Chronicle of the Morea*, were not always successful, which meant that in 1264, after two years, Constantine returned to the imperial capital¹². A little later, in 1270, a Venetian document mentions him once again in the Peloponnese as *dominus pro ipso domino Imperatore*¹³.

The reference in the Venetian archives, as well as the information we have from Pachymeres implies that the *sevastokrator* was not only a military governor but had been sent as a representative of the Byzantine ruler on a special mission with wide-ranging powers¹⁴. All his activities through-

Cambridge Mass. 1959, 157-8. A. Bon, *La Morée franque*, Paris 1969, 129-33. On the chronology of the *sevastokrator*'s 1262 campaign, see A. Failler, “Chronologie et composition dans l'histoire de Georges Pachymère”, *REB* 38 (1980), 88.

¹¹ ‘Ο δὲ γε σεβαστοκράτωρ, τῇ Μονεμβασίᾳ καὶ τοῖς περίεξ προσκαθήμενος, καθημερινούς πολέμους πρὸς τὸν πρίντζην ἔξῃγε –μηδὲ γὰρ ἀρκεῖσθαι τῷ μέρει τῆς νήσου–, πάσαν δὲ κρατῆσαι θέλων, ὑπάρχους ἔχων τὸν τε μέγαν δομέστικον τὸν Φύλῃν καὶ τὸν παρακομιώμενον Μακροηρόν, ὡς ἐνὸν ἡγωνίζετο, G. Pachymères, *Relations historiques*, I, Livres I-III, ed. A. Failler (CFHB XXIV/1 series Parisiensis), Paris 1984, 275.

¹² Zakythinos, op.cit., I, 37-9. Geneakoplos, op.cit., 159, 171-3.

¹³ “... ad Savastocratoram, 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 Zakythinos, 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.

¹⁴ D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée, II: Vie et Institutions* (Edition revue et augmentée par Chr. Maltézou), London 1975, 60-1.

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 the Taygetos through diplomacy¹⁵ and rebuilt “strong fortresses on mountains and in highly fortified passes”¹⁶. In other words Michael VIII had given him political rights over an area which he had, however, to conquer militarily or by gaining the loyalty of the local people. This dual aspect of 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 Peloponnesos, 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 overlord of what was already the Byzantine region of Lakonia, Michael VIII and his consort, and recognize his representative, the *Sevastokrator* Constantine, but by also referring to him as “governing the Peloponnese” (ἡγεμονέβοντος... ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῆς Πολλυπονείσου), 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:

[Ἀνακαινίσθη ὁ πᾶν]σεπτος ναὸς [οὔ]τος + Γεωργίου μάϋ[τ]υρος τροπαιοφόρου [δ]ιὰ συνεργείας τε κόπου καὶ μόχθου + Ἰωαννίου [...] τα[π]υνοῦ [...] εἰς ἄφεσιν καὶ λύσιν πολ[λῶν] σφαλμάτων[ν] βα[σι]λεύοντος εἰς Ῥώμ(ην) ἄνακτος [vac ca.10] / [vac ca.15] [καὶ ἐπὶ μη]τροπολίτου Μονεμβασίας ὑπερτίμου ἐξά[ρχ]ου + πάσις τε Πέλοπος νήσου Γρηγό[ρ]ιος ἔτους ςψπγ' (=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 this 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.

¹⁵ Zakythinis, *Le Despotat*, I (n. 10), 34.

¹⁶ “Ritornato il principe Guglielmo in la Morea, liberato dalla prigionie e consegnati li tre castelli, Malvasia, Mistà e Mine all’imperator Michiel, el detto imperator cominciò a molestar la Morea con gente e con Turchi, che fece venir d’Asia, e occupò molti lochi e fece castelli forti sopra montagne e passi fortissimi”, Marin Sanudo Torsello, *Istoria di Romania*, Introduction, edition-translation, commentary by E. Papadopoulou, Athens 2000, 125. Sanudo mentions that the Emperor Michael VIII built castles, but it goes without saying that this was the work of his military commander.

¹⁷ ...καὶ Πελοπόννησον πᾶσαν κατέδραμον, τὴν μὲν ληϊζόμενος τὴν δὲ καὶ ὑποχείριον ποιούμενος..., H. Grégoire, “Imperatoris Michaelis Paleologi de vita sua”, *Byz XXIX-XXX* (1959-1960), 455. English translation of G. Dennis, in J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero (eds), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Li-

brary and Collection), Washington, D.C. 2000, III, no. 38, p. 1244.

¹⁸ On the office of the donors, see Kalopissi-Verti, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 67.

¹⁹ M. Chatzidakis and I. Bitha, *Corpus of the Byzantine Wall-Paintings of Greece. The Island of Kythera*, Athens 2003, 140-1, 134 figs 1, 140-1 fig. 12-16, with earlier bibliography. On the church and its wall-paintings see *ibid.* 134-41.

²⁰ See *PLP* I/1-12 Add., Vienna 1995, no. 93654. According to Chatzidakis and Bitha he was probably a priest, *op.cit.*, 141.

²¹ Chr. Maltezos, “Le famiglie degli Eudaimoniannis e Venier a Cergo dal XII al XIV secolo. Problemi di cronologia e prosopografia”, *RSBS* 2 (1982), 210-14. Ead., “Μονεμβασία καὶ Κύθηρα”, in Chr. Maltezos (ed.), *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα. Ἀρχαιακές μαρτυρίες*, Athens 1991, article no. 13, 5-7. Ead., “From Byzantine to Venetian Kythera”, in Chatzidakis and Bitha, *op.cit.*, 309-10.

This is implied in the expression Ῥώμης ἄναξ (“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 existence²². 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 city²³, 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 Komnenos²⁴.

As well as connoting the Roman *imperium*²⁵, it could be

used to denote the power of the Byzantine emperor. A typical example is the title Ῥώμης ἄναξ 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 Alania²⁶. Moreover those who adopted the term βασιλείς Ῥώμης 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 versified 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. ἄναξ, δεσπότης, βασιλεύς, σωτήρ, ἥλιος, ἄσκηρ, and πορφυρόχρους στύλος τῆς Ῥώμης²⁷. These titles, with their clear references to the Roman heritage²⁸, reflect the more general idea of “renovatio imperii” in the time of the Komnenoi, as well as their at-

²² F. Dölger, “Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner”, in id. (ed.), *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, Ettal 1953, 70-115. See also D. A. Zakythinos, “Rome dans la pensée politique de Byzance du XIIIe au XVe siècle”, in *Byzance. Hommage à André N. Stratos*, I, Athens 1986, 207-21.

²³ G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une Capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 452*, Paris 1974, 43-7.

²⁴ Dölger, op.cit., 93-8. It is indicative of the ideological climate of the twelfth century that a passage from Constantine Manasses *Chronike Synopsis* characterizes Constantinople as “unwrinkled Rome, never grown old; Rome forever young and constantly rejuvenated” (Ῥώμην τὴν ἀρρτυδίωτον, τὴν μήποτε γηρῶσαν, Ῥώμην αἰεὶ νεάζουσαν, αἰεὶ καινιζομένη ...) and again farther on in the same text the comment which ends the narration of the sack of Rome in 435 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 ταῦτα μὲν συμβέβηκε τῇ προεσβυτέρῃ Ῥώμῃ, ἣ δὲ ἡμετέρα τέθηλεν, αὔξει, κρατεῖ, νεάζει, καὶ μέχρι τέλους αὔξειοιτο, ναί, βασιλεὺ παντάναξ!), see *Constantini Manassis Breviarum Chronicum*, ed. O. Lampsidis (CFHB XXVI), Athens 1996, 127 ll. 2321-22, 129 ll. 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 Constantinople (see Zakythinos, “Rome”, op.cit. (n. 22), 216). On this rhetorical *topos* in *enkonomia* of the city, see also, E. Fenster, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae*, Munich 1968, 55ff.

²⁵ A typical example is the inscription which according to later sources was inscribed on the column of Constantine the Great in the Forum of Constantine in Constantinople: Σὺ Χριστὲ κόσμου κοίρανος καὶ δεσπότης./ Σοὶ νῦν προσηῦξα τὴνδε σὴν δούλην πόλιν/ Καὶ σκῆπτρα τάδε καὶ τὸ τῆς Ῥώμης κράτος./ Φύλαττε ταύτην ὥστε τ' ἐκ πάσης βλάβης, see F. A. Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike*, Mainz 1996, 177. It should, however, be noted that this was not a genuine inscription, but a later invention. See Dagron, op.cit. (n. 23), 38. A. Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinopoleos*, Bonn 1988, 299.

²⁶ In the laudatory verses on the frame of the miniature: Σκέπει σὲ Χριστὸς εὐλογῶν, Ῥώμης ἄναξ, Σὺν βασιλίδι τῇ πανευγενεστάτῃ, see A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris 1936, 118; I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, Leiden 1976, 108, fig. 70.

²⁷ On these epigrams see S. Lambros, «Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς Κῶδιξ 525», *NE* 8 (1911), 145: ...τὸν αὐτάνακτα Μανουήλ..., τὸν πορφυρόχρουν τῆς νέας Ῥώμης στύλον (epigram in which Christ is represented as praising Manuel II and his consort), 146: ...αὐτοκρατοῦντος Μανουήλ Ῥώμης νέας... (epigram on an icon of St. Theodore), 147: ...Κομνηνοφύης ἐκ γένους τρισολβίου / Ῥώμης νέας ἄνακτος Ἰσαακίου», 158: «Πάππος γὰρ Ἀλέξιος, εὐσεβῆς ἄναξ, / ὁ σκῆπτρα Ῥώμης προσλαβὼν ἄθλον μέγα... (funerary epigram for the granddaughter of Alexios I, Eudokia), 173: Πάππος, πατήρ, παῖς βασιλεῖς Ῥώμης 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, ll. 1, 7-8, 114; IV, ll. 11-12; VII ll. 8; XII, l. 5, 7; XX l. 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’s 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 nurturer (ἡ τεξαμένη καὶ θεραπεμένη) 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.

²⁸ 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 Ῥώμης (purple-coloured column

tempts to present themselves as the “restorers” of the empire, successors to the great emperors of the past and guarantors of the Roman heritage²⁹.

The exiled emperor of Nicaea John III Vatatzes seems to have had similar hopes, when he called himself *κοίρανος Ῥώμης ὀπλοτέρης*, 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.³⁰

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 practices³¹. 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 West³².

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 period³³. This can moreover be seen in his constant preoccupation with stressing his Komnenian descent³⁴, 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 successor³⁵.

Thus the appellation *Ῥώμης ἄναξ* in the Kythera inscription is entirely consistent with Michael VIII's inclinations to represent himself as the restorer of empire, heir of Constantine 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 disheveled state and put on your former adornments; as Rome set aside weakness and receive invincible force from a great emperor...”³⁶.

The second person mentioned in the inscription reinforces

of Rome) is even more interesting, and self evidently refers to the emperors “born in the purple”. Its special interest lies in the fact that according to tradition the porphyry marble of the *Porphyra* (the room in the Great Palace in which heirs to the Byzantine throne were born) came from Rome. This tradition, which, as Paul Magdalino notes, makes the *Porphyra* a visible monument to the political theory of *translatio imperii*, can be traced back to the eighth century, but became particularly popular in the time of the Komnenoi and especially in relation to Manuel I. See Magdalino, *Manuel I Komnenos*, op.cit., 243-4, 424, 434ff.

²⁹ On these tendencies in the Komnenian emperors and especially Manuel Komnenos, see C. Mango, “The Conciliar Edict of 1166”, *DOP* 17 (1963), 320-1, 324, 330; Magdalino, Nelson, op.cit. (n. 27), 170-3; Magdalino, *Manuel I Komnenos* (n. 27), 115ff, 413-70 passim.

³⁰ The phraseology used in the inscription is characteristic; having first stressed the former glory of the εὐστόου, εὐλοετειράς, ἐριδόμου Smyrna with its marble walls which time has turned into ἰσχυοπαρεῖω γρηή, it mentions that the *κοίρανος Ῥώμης ὀπλοτέρης Ἰωάννης παῖς Δουκοφύτων ἐρικυδῶν βασιλῆων* has scraped off the decay and set the city on its feet, H. Gregoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure*, Paris 1922, no. 81. See also H. Ahrweiler, “L'histoire et la géographie de la région de Smyrne entre les deux occupations turques (1081-1317)”, *TM* 1 (1965), 35-6.

³¹ On Michael VIII's political ideology in general, see H. Ahrweiler *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantine*, Paris 1975, 115-28 and L. Mavrommatis, *Οἱ Πρώτοι Παλαιολόγοι. Προβλήματα πολιτικής πρακτικῆς και ιδεολογίας*, Athens 1983, 17-34. On his foreign policy and attempts at recovering the territories of the empire, see Geanakoplos, op.cit. (n. 10), 154ff. On the reconstruction of Constantinople, see A-

M. Talbot, “The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII”, *DOP* 47 (1993), 243-61. On the revival of earlier institutions, see R.J. Macrides, “From the Komnenoi to the Palaiologoi: Imperial Models in Decline and Exile”, in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, Aldershot 1994, 269-76.

³² On the title *New Constantine*, see H. and H. Buschhausen, *Die Marienkirche von Apollonia in Albanien*, Vienna 1976, 153-4; R. Macrides, “The New Constantine and the New Constantinople- 1261?”, *BMGS* 6 (1980), 22-4; T. Papamastorakis, “Ένα εικαστικό εγκώμιο του Μιχαήλ Η Παλαιολόγου: Οι εξωτερικές τοιχογραφίες στο καθολικό της μονής της Μουριώτισσας στην Καστοριά”, *ΔΧΑΕ ΙΕ'* (1989-1990) 237-8; Talbot, op.cit., 259-60.

³³ Macrides, “From the Komnenoi to the Palaiologoi”, op.cit.

³⁴ Buschhausen, op.cit. (n. 32), 152-3; Papamastorakis, “Ένα εικαστικό εγκώμιο”, op.cit., 236.

³⁵ This is a reference to the monastery of the Mavriotissa, Kastoria and the church of the Theotokos in Apollonia. The iconographic programme of the exterior walls of the Mavriotissa was been interpreted as an encomium to Michael, which extols him as the legitimate successor to the Komnenian dynasty, Papamastorakis, “Ένα εικαστικό εγκώμιο”, op.cit., 221-38. The church in Apollonia was restored after the victory of Dyrrachium in 1281/2. The donor portrait in this church shows Michael VIII with the other members of the imperial family confirming the ancient privileges of the monastery which, as is revealed in the inscription which accompanies the image, had originally been instituted in a chrysobull of Manuel I Komnenos (see Buschhausen, op.cit. (n. 32), 143-82, mainly 146-7, 156-7s, figs 16-19, pls 101, 104-107).

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 Lakedaimonia was led by: “Gregory, the most holy metropolitan of Monemvasia; who is both exarch and has full ecclesiastical jurisdiction over all the Peloponnese”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 VIII³⁸. 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’s alignment with Michael VIII’s post 1274 unionist policy³⁹.

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 II⁴⁰. She also suggested that Gregorios was already in possession of the title of Metropolitan of Monemvasia, when he was transferred to Lakedaimonia after the restoration of the Byzantine suzerainty in the region and attributed his omission from the *Synodikon* of Monemvasia to confusion over his actual position⁴¹.

However, the fact that he is referred to as Metropolitan of Monemvasia in the inscription in Kythera one year after the Council of Lyon⁴², alongside Michael VIII, makes Laurent’s thesis the more convincing. Moreover, something similar happened in the ecclesiastical province of Lakedaimonia 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 Mistra⁴³.

The inscription also verifies that Gregorios held the office of ἐξάρχου πάσης Πελοποννήσου [“exarch of all the Peloponnese”], confirming the veracity of the *Chronicle*. This title

³⁶ ...ὡς βασιλεὺς τῆς νῦν ἀκοσμίας ἀποβλήθησει καὶ κόσμον ἐπενδύσει τὸν πρότερον ὡς Ῥώμη τὸ ἀσθενὲς ἀποβαλοῦσα ἰσχύον ἀνίκητον λήψει ἐκ βασιλείας μεγαλοουργοῦ..., X. Sideridis, “Μανουὴλ Ὀλοβόλου, Ἐγκώμιον εἰς Μιχαὴλ Η΄ Παλαιολόγον”, *ΕΕΒΣ* 3 (1926), 185. Another address to Michael VIII by the same author recounts how, thanks to his efforts, Constantinople had once again become the στερεὰ καὶ ἰσχυρὰ Ῥώμη, see Fenster, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae*, op.cit. (n. 234), 188. These orations written in the period 1265-7, when Holobolos was occupying the position of Master of the Rhetors (ῥήτωρ των ῥητόρων), whose duties included an official annual address to the emperor. On Manuel Holobolos, see Macrides, “The New Constantine”, 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 Μετὰ τὸ ὑποταγῆναι τὸν ἐνταῦθα τόπον (i.e. Lakedaimonia) εὐδοκία θεοῦ καὶ ὑπὸ τὴν χεῖρα τῶν κραταιῶν καὶ ἁγίων ἡμῶν αὐθεντῶν καὶ βασιλέων πρῶτος κατέλαβεν ἀρχιερεὺς ὁ τῆς ἀνωτάτης μητροπόλεως Μονεμβασίας κύρ Γρηγόριος· ἔξαρχος δὲ ὢν καὶ τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικά δίκαια ἔχων πάσης Πελοποννήσου..., E. Kisliger, *Regionalgeschichte als Quellenproblem. Die Chronik von Monembasia und das sizilianische Demena. Ein historisch-topographische Studie*, Vienna 2001, 203 Pb, for commentary on this passage see p. 66-7. On the character of the second part of this *Chronicle*, which is in effect a short chronicle of the church in Lakedaimonia, see P. Lemerle, «La chronique improprement dite de Monemvasie: Le contexte historique et légendaire», *REB* XXI (1963), 24-5.

³⁸ V. Laurent, «La liste episcopale du Synodicon de Monemvasie», *EO*

32 (1933)146-7. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat*, II (n. 14), 277. On the elevation of Monemvasia by Michael VIII, see. F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, III, Munich 1932, 39 no. 1897a; St. Binon, «L’histoire et la légende de deux chrysoboules d’Andronic II en faveur de Monembasie», *EO* 38 (1938), 274-311; Zakythinos, *Le Despotat*, II (n. 14), 271-2; V. Laurent, *Les regestes des Actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, vol. 1/IV, 165 no. 1361.

³⁹ Laurent, op.cit.

⁴⁰ H.A. Kalligas, *Byzantine Monemvasia. The Sources*, Athens 1990, 67-8, 208-15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 212-14. However, she does not explain why a Metropolitan of Monemvasia should be transferred to Sparta, when both towns were already under Byzantine rule, while continuing to keep his earlier title; cf. Kisliger, op.cit., 66 n. 571. Kalligas maintains this view in the recent Greek edition of the book, though she is well aware of the inscription from Kythera, but adds that Gregorios was contemporary with the events in Lyon and probably in favour of Union. See H. Kalligas, *Η βυζαντινή Μονεμβασία και οι πηγές της ιστορίας της*, Athens 2003, 280-3.

⁴² 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”, *ByzSl* X (1949), 28-41; Geanakoplos, *Michael Paleologus* (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

shows that he must have been sent by the Patriarch endowed with extensive powers⁴⁴, probably on account of the special political circumstances and in the context of the re-establishment of the ecclesiastical administration in the area⁴⁵. 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 region⁴⁶.

To sum up, an examination of the two inscriptions in Southern Greece indicates that the mention of Michael VIII en-

tails 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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την ιστορία και τέχνη της Μητρόπολης του Μυστρά”, *ΔΧΑΕ Θ'* (1977-79), 144-55. As T. Papamastorakis has pointed out the alterations in the Cathedral of Mistra coincide with the *damnatio memoriae* of Michael VIII and Germanos III by patriarch Athanasios I, suggesting that it was a concerted effort initiated at a certain point in time by certain circles. See T. Papamastorakis, “Tampering with History: From Michael III to Michael VIII”, *BZ* 96/1 (2003), 207-8. It is worth noting that in the case of Monemvasia too something similar is discernible; towards the end of the fourteenth century a disagreement broke out between the metropolitans of Corinth and Monemvasia over the jurisdiction of the Bishoprics of Maina and Zemena, (see Kalligas, *Byzantine Monemvasia*, 248 ff.). The metropolitans of Monemvasia were attempting to prove their rights in this respect using the imperial decree which had elevated their church to metropolitan status. However, in the relevant documents, they systematically avoided naming the emperor in question (see *MM*, II, Vienna 1862, 287-91 esp. 288-9) which is a little strange given that the interests of their church were at stake. And indeed, when they did decide to mention him, it is evident from the phraseology that they were attempting to twist matters, since they claimed it was Monemvasia’s liberator from the Latin occupation, “kyr Andonikos”, who “defeated and took prisoner the prince who was tyrannizing the Peloponnese at that time with his army and took him away to Constantinople” (...τὸν τυραννοῦντα τότε τῆς Πελοποννήσου πρίγκιπα αὐτῷ στρατεύματι τροπώσάμενος, αἰχμάλωτον ἔδεινον ἀγαγὼν ὡς τὴν Κωνσταντίνου..., Sp. Lambros, “Δύο ἀναφοραὶ μητροπολίτου Μονεμβασίας πρὸς τὸν Πατριάρχη”, *NE* 9 (1912), 290 ll.25ff.). However the emperor who defeated and took the Frankish prince back to

Constantinople as his prisoner was not Andronikos, but Michael VIII (see op.cit. supra, n. 10) The fact that Andronikos is characterized as “pious and firm champion of church dogma” (εὐσεβῆς καὶ στερεὸς τῶν δογματῶν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὑπέριμαχος) makes it likely that the Monemvasiot church dignitaries felt they could not make any great claims using the name of the unionist Michael, which not only meant their omitting to mention his name, but attributing his military successes to his son. In this context it seems highly likely that he would have been deleted from the church sources such as the *Synodikon*, as would the metropolitan most closely associated with this impious emperor.

⁴⁴ On the office of *exarch*, see H.G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, Munich 1959, 116; J. Darrouzès, *Recherches sur les ὀφφύκια de l'église byzantine*, Paris 1970, 162ff.; A. Kazhdan, A. Papadakis, “Exarch”, *ODB* 2, 767.

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 *chartophylax* (Kislinger, op.cit. (n. 37), 66-7).

⁴⁶ 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; Zakythinios, *Despotat*, II (n. 14), 276; Maltezos, “From Byzantine to Venetian Kythera”, op.cit. (n. 21), 309-10.

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 *ἄναξ Ρώμης*, με την οποία προσφωνείται ο βυζαντινός ηγεμόνας στην επιγραφή των Κυθήρων, όπως επίσης και ο τίτλος *ἡγεμονεύοντος ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ Πελοποννήσου*, που χρησιμοποιείται για τον αδελφό 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.