

Two Paradoxes of Border Identity: Michael VIII Palaiologos and Constantine Doukas Nestongos in the Sultanate of Rūm

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After the battle at Mantzikert in 1071, a considerable number of Byzantine aristocratic families continued to hold their ancestral possessions despite now being under sway of the victorious Seljuks. There was a phenomenon of divided families, with members of the same clan continuing to enjoy political careers on both sides of the Byzantine-Seljuk border. The number of families with ‘double’ Byzantine-Seljuk affiliation was enormous: the Komnenoi, Gabrades, Maurozomoi, Tornikioi, Bardachlades, Pakourianoï (a branch of the ‘Greek’ Hethoumides), to list but a few. Little is known about the identity of those who remained Byzantine in the Seljuk territory. However, one can assume that the semi-independent position of some Byzantine lords now outside the borders of the empire did not disappear after the Seljuk conquest.

The self-portraits of the Byzantine courtiers who became Seljuk can also be found in sources from a later period, the thirteenth century. Close relations, and sometimes alliances, between the two states, Byzantium (and the Nicaean Empire) and the Seljuk Sultanate of Rūm,¹ allowed those many members of the Byzantine aristocracy who were at odds with the emperor to seek asylum at the Seljuk court. They sometimes had relatives in Rūm, and in most cases their new fortune was built up with grants and gifts from the sultan. The traditional political and social influence of the Greek aristocracy continued in the Sultanate. Two cases, that of Michael Palaiologos, the future emperor Michael VIII (1259–82), and that of his mysterious *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphenдонēs*, give insights into the minds of the noble refugees.

¹ Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, 289–97. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr M. E. Martin (Oxford), who read a draft of this chapter and offered various suggestions. All possible mistakes are, however, mine.

Michael Palaiologos, the son of Andronikos Palaiologos (d. between 1248 and 1252), the *megas domestikos*² (highest-ranking military official of Byzantium), and Theodora (the daughter of Alexios Palaiologos and Irene Angelina, elder daughter of Emperor Alexios III Angelos [r. 1195–1203]),³ was the head of the aristocratic *fronde* in the Empire of Nicaea. He was arrested twice on suspicion of disloyalty.⁴ Nonetheless, sometime between the end of 1253 and November 1254, the emperor John III Batatzes (1221–54) appointed him *megas konostablos*.⁵ When governing the provinces of Mesothynia and Optimates, the Nicaean frontier territory on the Sangarios River, Michael Palaiologos received the news in 1256 that the emperor was going to arrest him.⁶ Michael crossed the Sangarios River and arrived at the Seljukid border zone, and there his large caravan was robbed by the frontier Turkmens who took into slavery his servants and retainers, so he arrived at Konya ‘denuded of everything’.⁷

The sultan ‘Izz al-Dīn Kay-Kāwūs II (1246–56; 1257–61) appointed Michael the commander of the Christian part of the Seljukid army. He fought on the Seljukid side against the Mongols in the battle at Sultanhanı before 23 Ramaḍān AH 654 (14 October 1256). When Baiju, the famous Mongol commander-in-chief, finally defeated the sultan, Michael Palaiologos escaped. He rushed northwards from the battlefield to Kastamonu and then to Nicaea.⁸ According to George Pachymeres,

² Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 243–4, n. 6. Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, 177, n. 32. Cheynet and Vannier suggested another date for Andronikos Palaiologos’ death (1247).

³ Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus*, 17–18; Papadopulos, *Versuch*, 1–2; Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, 176–9, 185–6, nn. 32, 33.

⁴ Failler, ‘Chronologie et composition’, 9–20; Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus*, 21–4.

⁵ George Akropolites, *History*, 64, ed. Heisenberg, 1:134.10–12; George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.7, ed. Failler, 1:37.1–11; Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus*, 26; Angold, *Byzantine Government in Exile*, 187–8.

⁶ George Akropolites, *History*, 64, ed. Heisenberg, 1:134.7–136.7; George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.9, ed. Failler, 1:43.6–20; *PLP*, no. 21528; Talbot, ‘Michael VIII Palaiologos’, in *ODB*, ii.1367.

⁷ George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.9, 6.24, ed. Failler, 1:43.21–45.1, 613.17–20; George Akropolites, *History*, 22–3, ed. Heisenberg, 1:36.8–25.

⁸ George Akropolites, *History*, 65, ed. Heisenberg, 1:137.9–138.18. On sections 64–5 and 69 in Akropolites (which narrate the story of Michael’s sojourn in Rūm), see the excellent commentaries in Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 312–19, 325–8, and Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 112–15, 117–18, 268–70, 275.

While in the foreign land, he [Michael Palaiologos], standing side by side in battle together with his men under the imperial banners (σημαίαις βασιλικαῖς), was the best at [fighting] against the enemies of the sultan, in order to please the emperor, if somehow the latter could have heard [about that]. He then felt sorry so much that [finally] he deliberately chose to go back [to his homeland]. He came forward to speak to the then [metropolitan] of Ikonion and used him as a mediator to the emperor so that, if possible, [the latter], having verily suppressed his anger now, would give him the warrant letters (τὰ πιστὰ γράμμασι); and this would be [the chance] for him, [Michael], to return. The hierarch supplied the embassy with the letters (γράμμασι σχεδιάσαντος τὴν πρεσβείαν);⁹ the sovereign granted his pardon (κατένευσε τὴν συμπάθειαν); and [Michael] returned back with the imperial charters (βασιλικαῖς συλλαβαῖς) of safety [guaranteeing] that he would suffer nothing fatal from the [emperor's] anger. And the emperor kindly accepted the humble one: he embraced him as he arrived, and gave his pardon (συμπαθεῖ)¹⁰ to him, as [Michael]

⁹ The term ἡ πρεσβεία meant, strictly speaking, 'embassy', and for σχεδιάζω the dictionaries suggest the basic meaning of a swift and careless action: 'to do a thing off-hand or on the spur of the moment; to play off-hand': LSJ, 1744 (and Supplement, p. 288); Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon*, 1062; Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique*, 4:1080; Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1357. The Byzantine dictionaries listed four meanings of σχεδιάζειν: (1) ἐγγίζειν and πλησιάζειν ('to bring near, approach'); (2) ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος λέγειν ('to speak offhand') and τὸ εἰκῆ ἀποφαίνεσθαι ('to give an opinion without plan or purpose, at a venture'); (3) λέγεται δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ταχέως ποιεῖν ('to speak and do at once'; cf. Stephanus, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*, 8:1646–7: 'ex tempore aliquid facio, et tumultuario opere'); (4) ἐτοιμάζειν ('to get ready, prepare, furnish'): Photios, *Φωτίου τοῦ πατριάρχου λέξεων συναγωγή*, 2:561.21–2; *Lexica Segueriana*, 378.13; *Suidae Lexicon*, 4:489.29–30; Hesychius of Alexandria, *Lexicon*, ed. Schmidt, 1426; Pseudo-Zonaras, *Lexicon*, 1:887.7. It is Pseudo-Zonaras' translation, ἐτοιμάζειν, which I accept.

¹⁰ Pachymeres uses the noun ἡ συμπάθεια ('sympathy') and the verb συμπαθέω ('to sympathise') in the sense of 'pardon, immunity' and 'to pardon': George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.9, ed. Failler, 1:45.8–12. However, Akropolites also employs the same term in his own direct speech addressed to Theodore II, in which he, Akropolites, predicted to the emperor that Michael Palaiologos would soon ask for 'immunity' (συμπαθείας), a permission for safe return: George Akropolites, *History*, 64, ed. Heisenberg, 1:135.15; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 314–15, n. 6. This meaning is derived from the fiscal term for 'tax immunity'; see Kekaumenos, *Strategicon*, ed. and tr. Litavrin, 276.21, 507–8. The dictionary of Pseudo-Zonaras, whose wording is close to that of Pachymeres, uses συμπάθεια in order to explain the term ἐπιχώρησις ('concession, permission'): *Lexicon*, 807.1.

confessed that he acknowledged his unpardonable crimes. [Theodore II] then restored him to his previous dignity [of *megas konostablos*].¹¹

This is the information about Michael's sojourn in Rūm from September 1256 until the beginning of 1257 provided by the Byzantine sources, Akropolites and Pachymeres. An additional source – an amalgamation of Pachymeres and George Akropolites with an unidentified account – is that of Nikephoros Gregoras. The general outline of his story is close to that of Pachymeres and Akropolites: Gregoras lists Michael's flight to the Seljuks, his battle with the 'Scythians', i.e. the Mongols,¹² and, finally, the pardon granted by Theodore II and Michael's consequent return to Nicaea.¹³ However, other details in Gregoras, mostly those concerning the battle with the Mongols and the return of Michael Palaiologos to Theodore II, cannot be found elsewhere. They were obviously taken from an additional source.

According to Gregoras, when Michael Palaiologos arrived in Konya, the sultan 'with all speed' (πάσῃ σπουδῇ) was gathering his forces against the Mongols and:

As there were many Romans under his power, who in olden time became his subjects (lit. 'were enslaved'), he enrolled them into a division, formed the army and assigned [them to the command] of the general Palaiologos (ὕπὸ στρατηγῶ τῷ Παλαιολόγῳ). They were invested with the foreign Roman, rather than the native [Seljuk], dress and weapons, in order to bemuse the Scythians (i.e. the Mongols) when the latter realised that the Roman allied force had just arrived.¹⁴

Thus, it is Gregoras who suggests that the 'Byzantine' detachment in Seljuk service was indeed composed of the Greeks of Rūm. He likewise relates some details of the oaths given by Michael Palaiologos to Theodore II. That Theodore II sent the oaths guaranteeing Michael's personal safety is mentioned by Akropolites, Pachymeres and Gregoras;¹⁵ but that Michael

¹¹ George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.9., ed. Failler, 1:45.1–12.

¹² On the designation of the Mongols as 'Scythians', see Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 2:282.

¹³ Nikephorus Gregoras, *History*, 3.2, ed. Schopen, 1:57.19–60.3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 3.2, ed. Schopen, 1:58.19–59.1.

¹⁵ George Akropolites, *History*, 69, ed. Heisenberg, 1:144.20–3; George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.9, ed. Failler, 1:45.4–12; Nikephorus Gregoras, *History*, 3.2, ed. Schopen, 1:59.10–14; Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten*, no. 1842. On the nature of this oath on the part of the emperor to his subject, exceptional in Byzantine history, see Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 327–8, n. 9.

in his turn 'confessed that he acknowledged his unpardonable crimes,' is noted only by Pachymeres. The text of Gregoras is more explicit:

And thus the Roman land received back Palaiologos, but not before he himself gave assurances, through the most solemn oaths, of guarantees of his good faith in regard to the emperor: to always remain within the limits of submission, to never seek the empire for himself, to forget (lit. 'to leave to the past') [everything] that had been said against him, and henceforth with his future deeds to clean himself from the now faint (lit. 'dead') suspicion, and moreover to always keep and maintain the same goodwill and love to the same emperor Theodore and his son John, and the successors-to-be in their dynasty and the empire.¹⁶

What was Michael Palaiologos' ultimate goal when he decided to seek asylum in Rüm? Was he really guilty of preparing a revolt against the emperor? Did he move to Rüm asking for military help from the Seljuks in the seizure of the Nicaean throne (hence his riches which were most unfortunately taken by the frontier Turkmens)?¹⁷ Or did he intend, albeit unwillingly, to settle permanently in the Sultanate, thus becoming a member of the Byzantine aristocracy abroad? However, the political context casts doubt on the suggestion concerning the revolt. There existed a Nicaean-Seljuk treaty against the Mongols, concluded in 1243 during the reign of John III Batatzes.¹⁸ Emperor Theodore Laskaris confirmed this agreement three times: twice in 1254–5,¹⁹ and the last time in the spring of 1256, just before Michael Palaiologos' flight.²⁰ It is unlikely that the Seljuks, who were under constant threat from the Mongols, had wanted to establish a new emperor in Nicaea; on the contrary: it was the Greeks of Nicaea who for a while helped to crush the Seljuk Sultanate after the latter was defeated by the Mongols.²¹ Moreover, it is the text of Gregoras that clarifies the meaning of '[Michael's] unpardonable crimes' in Pachymeres. These do not refer to Michael's 'plots' just before his flight to Rüm (that suspicion is called 'dead' in Gregoras), but rather to his desertion from

¹⁶ Nikephorus Gregoras, *Historia Byzantina*, 3.2, ed. Schopen, 1:59.14–24.

¹⁷ Prinzing, 'Ein Mann τυραννίδος ἄξιος.' See also Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 317, n. 5.

¹⁸ George Akropolites, *History*, 41, ed. Heisenberg, 1:69.17–70.9; Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten*, no. 1776.

¹⁹ Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten*, nos 1824, 1825.

²⁰ George Akropolites, *History*, 61, ed. Heisenberg, 1:125.9–13; Ibn Bibī, *Histoire des Seldjoudes d'Asie Mineure*, 284, tr. Duda, 270; Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten*, no. 1830.

²¹ Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*, 161–74.

the important post in Mesothynia and, according to Theodore II (whose words were preserved by Akropolites), to the fact that ‘he did not stay in Roman lands even if he were to suffer these terrible things (i.e. blinding), preferring to fare ill among his own people than to fare well in a foreign land.’²² That is why Michael was asked ‘to forget [everything] that had been said against him,’ as the emperor’s threats to blind him and the arrest of his uncle, the *megas chartoularios*, also called Michael,²³ were the chief reasons for Michael Palaiologos’ decision to seek asylum in Rûm.²⁴ Pachymeres and Akropolites attributed the suspicions to only the emperor Theodore II Laskaris,²⁵ but it is Gregoras who states that Michael fled because of the envy (ὁ φθόνος) of Theodore II’s retainers;²⁶ the same ‘envy’ is mentioned in Michael’s two *typika* and the laudatory orations of George of Cyprus and Manuel Holobolos.²⁷

I suggest that the prospect of becoming a Seljuk courtier for the rest of his life was real for Michael Palaiologos in 1256. There are two extant *typika* of Michael’s, written towards the end of his life, sometime in 1280–1, where he describes his *curriculum vitae*, including, of course, his stay in the Rûm. The *typika* are highly trustworthy in the sense that they are concerned with the events of 1256–7, since part of the story was provided later by Michael Palaiologos himself. (The main core of the text was written in 1261, when Michael managed to re-conquer Constantinople from the Latins.) The *typikon*, which features strong elements of autobiography and which Michael VIII had commissioned for the monastery of his patron saint, the Archangel Michael, on Mount Auxentios near Chalcedon, contains the most detailed explanation of Michael’s motives during his sojourn in Rûm. The text reads:

I had therefore to leave my native land, that of the Romans, I mean, and I fled to a foreign country. I entered Persian [Seljuk] territory, facing many

²² George Akropolites, *History*, 64, ed. Heisenberg, 1:135.1–4; tr. Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 312.

²³ On him, see Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, 174–6, n. 31.

²⁴ George Akropolites, *History*, 64, ed. Heisenberg, 1:134.25–135.1; George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.9, ed. Failler, 1:43.6–20.

²⁵ George Akropolites, *History*, 64, ed. Heisenberg, 1:134.18–135.1; George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.9, ed. Failler, 1:43.14: τῆς ἀρχῆς ὑποψίαν.

²⁶ Nikephorus Gregoras, *History*, 3.2, ed. Schopen, 1:58.1–13.

²⁷ *Τυπικὸν τῆς ἐν τῷ περιωνύμῳ βουνῷ τοῦ Αὐξεντίου κατὰ τὴν ἐπαρχίαν Χαλκηδόνος βασιλικῆς μονῆς*, 790, tr. Dennis 1, 1231; Michael VII Palaiologos, ‘De vita sua’, 453, tr. Dennis 2, 1243; George (Gregory) of Cyprus, ‘Oratio laudatoria’, *PG* 142:364; Siderides, ‘Μανουὴλ Ὀλοβόλου ἐγκώμιον’, 177; Manuel Holobolos, *Orationes*, ed. Treu, 1:34.23–9.

dangers along the way, it should be noted, from all of which I was rescued by God. I remained for quite a while with the ruler of the Persians. There I often led a contingent of our Persian enemies nobly into battle against the Atarïoi [Mongols]. This people migrated from lands to the East not a long time ago. They have been raised to war, gladly shed blood, and are spirited like a herd of cattle. Borne along by the situation and yielding to necessity, I endured. What was accomplished there let others say. I feel no obligation to speak about such things myself. But I shall sum up everything by saying just one thing, and let the all watching eye [of God] be witness to my words. During the time I spent in Persia I engaged in absolutely nothing, in word, in deed, in plot, or in attempt against the ruler of the Romans at that time, the blessed late emperor, my cousin [Theodore II Laskaris] or against the realm of the Romans. Rather, with God's help, I intended and carried out in practice only what would benefit them. The spirit of envy soon dissipated and in a short time I left Persia and again returned to the land of the Romans, subjected myself to the ruler and again loyally performed the services he commanded. These things then happened before I became emperor.²⁸

Here Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos shows that his self-consciousness comprised elements of a border identity. The idea of being Byzantine while actually being Seljuk was a logical outcome of the maxims of Kekaumenos, who had advised to seek the favours of the emperor but at the same time keep the ancestral possessions outside the control of the empire.²⁹ Kekaumenos, however, wrote at a time when no Seljuk polity was yet present in Asia Minor. Michael's duplicity was no secret for his subjects. When Pachymeres wrote that, in 1256, Michael 'was the best at [fighting] against the enemies of the sultan, in order to please the emperor,' he alluded to the same idea that Michael expressed in his *typikon*. Of course, the political *amicitia* between the Seljuk Sultanate of Rûm and the Byzantine (Nicaean) Empire³⁰ allowed the notion of being simultaneously Byzantine and Seljuk, but Michael's text avoided stressing that. On the contrary, he described the 'Persian territory,' i.e. the Sultanate of Rûm, as a hostile and dangerous land and even called his fellow Rûmî Greeks, who spoke the same language as he did, 'our Persian enemies.'

²⁸ *Τυπικὸν τῆς ἐν τῷ περιωνόμῳ βουνῶ τοῦ Ἀλέξανδρου κατὰ τὴν ἐπαρχίαν Χαλκηδόνος βασιλικῆς μονῆς*, 791; tr. Dennis 1, 1231.

²⁹ Kekaumenos, *Strategicon*, ed. and tr. Litavrin, 314–15; Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, English tr. C. Roueché, ch. 5: 'Advice to a toparch'.

³⁰ Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, 289–94.

If Michael did indeed try to present himself as a Byzantine patriot, his text nonetheless contained some logical discrepancies, appropriately noted later by Pachymeres. Pachymeres seemed to have been aware of Michael's *typikon*, as only he, Theodore Skoutariotes and Michael VIII use the extremely rare form *Atarioi* for the Mongols (Tatars).³¹

Can Michael VIII's behaviour in Rūm be seen as a case of so-called 'situational identity'? If so, it was remembered for a long time: until the end of the thirteenth century, when the final versions of his *typika* were composed and Pachymeres began writing his *History*. But the picture of the forced adaptation to harsh circumstances of the future Byzantine emperor, who arrived 'denuded of everything' at the gates of Konya, so carefully painted by Akropolites and Michael himself in his *typika*, is not in accordance with the data of other sources. He arrived at a friendly country, was met by his relatives (including the sultan himself)³² and on the whole managed to use his 'Persian adventure' to his own profit. The Byzantine source that explicitly suggests a direct connection between Michael's flight to Rūm (and his subsequent return to Nicaea) in 1256–7 and his step-by-step usurpation of the Byzantine throne in the years between 1258 and 1261 is a poem of Manuel Philes, written sometime at the beginning of the fourteenth century.³³ The poem is dedicated to St Stephen the First Martyr (Acts 6:5,8–7:60), whose monastery in Constantinople was established, or restored, by a certain *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs* ('chamberlain of the great seal') who was later buried there. However, the most intriguing aspect of the poem is its description of the circumstances of the first meeting between the *parakoimōmenos* and Michael Palaiologos:

When the hero Michael Palaiologos Doukas
fled the envy which is hostile to man³⁴
and went to the land of the Persians from that of the Ausonians³⁵

³¹ Korobeinikov, 'Ilkhans', 398–401.

³² On the dynastic relations between the Seljuks of Rūm and the Palaiologoi, see Korobeinikov, 'Byzantine Emperors'.

³³ Manuelis Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, 2:260–3 (poem 242).

³⁴ I translate the expression τὸν μισάνθρωπον φθόνον, which literally means 'envy that abhors mankind'.

³⁵ Originally, the 'Ausonian land' and the 'Ausonians' meant Italy and Italians (including the Romans). As such, it also meant 'Byzantium' and the 'Byzantines', who considered themselves as 'Romans'. Interestingly, 'Ausonia' could also have meant 'Ionia', i.e. the western shore of Asia Minor: Herodianus Grammaticus, 'De prosodia catholica', 3 (1): 296.7–10; Herodianus Grammaticus, Περὶ παρωνύμων, 3 (2): 877.40–878.2.

before [obtaining] the crown of his royal accession and power,
 he met with him [i.e. the future *parakoimōmenos*] before [meeting] any
 nobleman
 and deemed worthy his words of advice about himself,
 for he considered him the wisest of all men,
 very [strong] and capable of enduring in battle.
 Then, having him as his great helper,
 he [i.e. Michael] from there [Persia] came here [to Nicaea], desiring
 [to return],
 and at once took hold of the realm of the Ausonians.
 In exchange, he honoured him,
 who had earlier appeared [to have been] of good repute among the satraps
 because of the dignities [he had received] in reward,
 with the honour of the Chamberlain of the Greatest Seal.³⁶

That man, now the *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*, was so grateful to St Stephen, who helped him to endure in 'Persia' and then to return to Byzantium, that he established in St Stephen's name the monastery in Constantinople in which he eventually passed away as a monk; he was buried by his former servant, now also a monk by the name of Dionysios, probably the *hēgoumenos* of the same monastery. He earlier served his master in 'Persia'.³⁷

The wording in Philes is not exceptional: like other later authors, he mentions the 'envy which is hostile to man' which forced Michael to flee from the Nicaean empire. However, it is only Philes who connects Michael's sojourn in Rūm in 1256 with his enthronement that took place on 1 January 1259.³⁸

Philes gives no clue as to the name of Michael's 'great helper' (συνεργός) in Rūm, save his later title. Originally, the term *parakoimōmenos* ('chamberlain') designated the eunuch who slept in the emperor's chamber and thus had direct access to the sovereign. Under Michael VIII Palaiologos,

³⁶ Manuelis Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, 2:261.21–35: Ἐπει δὲ φυγῶν τὸν μισάνθρωπον φθόνον / Ἐξ Αὐσόνων γῆς ἦλθεν εἰς γῆν Περσίδος / Ὁ βασιλειῶν καὶ κρατῶν πρὸ τοῦ στέφους / Ἦρωσ Μιχαῖλ Παλαιολόγος Δούκας, / Τοῦτω πρὸ παντὸς εὐγενοῦς ἐντυγχάνει, / Καὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτὸν ἀξιῶ βουλευμάτων, / Ὅρων σοφὸν τὸν ἄνδρα τῶν ἄλλων πλέον / Καὶ καρτερικὸν ἀκριβῶς πρὸς τὰς μάχας. / Εἶτα συνεργὸν εὐτυχῶν τοῦτον μέγαν / Ἐκεῖθεν ἦκει δεῦρο τοῦ σκοποῦ χάριν, / Καὶ γίνεται μὲν Αὐσονάρχης αὐτίκα, / Τιμᾷ δὲ τιμῇ τοῦ παρακοιμωμένου / Τῆς σφενδόνης τὸν ἄνδρα τῆς ὑπερτάτης, / Φανέντα καὶ πρὶν εὐκλεῖ τοῖς σατράπαις / Ἐκ τῶν πρὸς ἀντάμειψιν ἀξιωματῶν.

³⁷ Manuelis Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, 2:262.36–60; on Dionysios, see *PLP*, no. 5435.

³⁸ George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.29, 2.4, 6.36, ed. Failler, 1:115.5–6, 137.7, 667.7–10; *Kleinchroniken*, ed. Schreiner, 1:75 (6).

the office, no longer restricted to the eunuchs, was divided between the 'chamberlain of the great seal' (*parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*) and the 'proper' chamberlain (*parakoimōmenos tou koitōnos*).³⁹ While the latter served as head of the pages and the *valets-de-chambre*,⁴⁰ the former was keeper of the emperor's private seal for the letters addressed to the emperor's family: his mother, wife and his co-emperor son. He also held the emperor's sword if its bearer, the *prōtostratōr*, was absent.⁴¹ The 'great seal' was a signet ring: the first known *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*, Isaac Doukas, brother of the emperor John III Batatzes, was referred to in the Byzantine-Genoese treaty documents of March–July 1261 as *parachimemoni magni anuli imperii sui Isachii Ducis* and *parachimomenos magni anuli imperii nostri Ysachius Duca* ('chamberlain of the great signet of our imperial majesty Isaac Doukas').⁴² According to Pseudo-Kodinos, the 'great seal' was used for the wax sealing of the private letters of the emperor:⁴³ if so, a signet ring was a more appropriate tool than a seal, which actually was a misnomer for σφενδόνη.⁴⁴

The reform of the chamberlain's offices took place as early as 1260:⁴⁵ Pachymeres wrote that by the beginning of 1261, Michael VIII had received two refugees from the Sultanate of Rūm, the Basilikos, natives of Rhodes and the Sultan's retainers, whom he knew from his sojourn in the Sultanate in 1256; he then granted them Byzantine court titles. One of the brothers, Basil, became the 'proper' chamberlain (*parakoimōmenos tou koitōnos*);⁴⁶ he thus cannot be identified with our *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*.⁴⁷

However, the title of *parakoimōmenos* (without the addition *tēs megalēs sphendonēs* or *tou koitōnos*) continued being employed in the sources,

³⁹ Guillard, 'Le parakimomène', 198–200 (repr. in id., *Recherches*, 1:208–9).

⁴⁰ Pseudo-Kodinos, *Traité des offices*, 176.6–14; Guillard, 'Le parakimomène', 198 (repr. in id., *Recherches*, 1:208).

⁴¹ Pseudo-Kodinos *Traité des offices*, 175.23–176.5. The *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs* held the sixteenth position in the list of the court dignitaries: ibid. 137.12, 156.4–12, 300.11–2, 305.9–10, 307.10–2, 320.31–321.38, 334.43–335.44, 344.18–9, 347.15–6.

⁴² Pieralli, *Corrispondenza diplomatica*, 142.298–300, 50.6–7; Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten*, nos. 1890, 1892.

⁴³ Pseudo-Kodinos, *Traité des offices*, 175.23–32.

⁴⁴ Kazhdan, 'Sphendone', in *ODB*, iii.1936–7.

⁴⁵ See Guillard, 'Le parakimomène', 198–9 (repr. in id., *Recherches*, 1:208–9).

⁴⁶ George Pachymeres, *History*, 2.24, ed. Failler, 1:183.1–19, *PLP*, nos 2452, 2458.

⁴⁷ It seems that the last *parakoimōmenos* before the division of the office was George Zagarommates (d. 1261), the 'chamberlain' under Theodore II between 1254 and 1258 and uncle (θεῖος) of Michael VIII: *PLP*, no. 6417; George Akropolites, *History*, 75, ed. Heisenberg, 1:154.20–155.10; Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 123–4, 281–4

including the fourteenth-century lists of the court dignitaries:⁴⁸ in Byzantium until 1367⁴⁹ and in the Empire of Trebizond until 1432.⁵⁰

The list of *parakoimōmenoi tēs megalēs sphendonēs* under Michael VIII, including those mentioned as ‘chamberlains’ only,⁵¹ comprises five names:⁵²

and n. 935; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 339–42 and n. 11; *Βυζαντινὰ ἔγγραφα τῆς Μονῆς Πάτμου*, ed. Branouse and Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou, 1:128; 2:156–63; *Acta et diplomata graeca*, ed. Miklosich and Müller, 4:11, 31 and 232–6; 5:259; 6:191, 199 and 231; Ahrweiler, ‘Smyrne’, 177–8.

⁴⁸ Pseudo-Kodinos, *Traité des offices*, 309.8. Pachymeres himself is a good example: though he had mentioned Basil Basilikos as the *parakoimōmenos tou koitōnos* by 1261, he afterwards made reference to the *parakoimōmenos* John Makrenos in 1262–3 without any clarification of his court functions: was he the holder of the ‘great seal’ or the head of the chamber offices? George Pachymeres, *History*, 3.16–17, ed. Failler, 1:11.16, 273.5–10, 275.16–277.16. According to Failler, John Makrenos was the *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*: George Pachymeres, *History*, 2, part 5: Index, 34, 49. But this is merely a suggestion; cf. *PLP*, no. 92605 (*parakoimōmenos*) and Guiland, ‘Le parakimomène’, 199 (repr. in id., *Recherches*, 1:209) (*parakoimōmenos tou koitōnos*). Likewise, in documentary sources one can find the titles *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs* and *parakoimōmenos* in reference to one and the same person: *Acta et diplomata graeca*, ed. Miklosich and Müller, 4:257–8.

⁴⁹ *PLP*, no. 91760: Theophylaktos Dermokaites, the *oikeios* of Emperor John V Palaiologos (1341–7; 1354–91).

⁵⁰ *PLP*, no. 24789: Michael Sampson, the half-brother of the *amērtzantarios* Theodore Sampson (*PLP*, no. 24788). On this famous family in the Empire of Trebizond, see *PLP*, nos 24785–90; its last representative, Manuel Sampson, had been settled in Rumeli on the orders of the Ottoman authorities by 1484–7: Karpov, *Istoriia Trapezundskoi imperii*, 440–1.

⁵¹ When only the title of the *parakoimōmenos* is mentioned under the Palaiologoi, there is a strong suspicion that this means the holder of the ‘great seal’, who ranked higher than the *parakoimōmenos tou koitōnos*. The traditional Byzantine antiquarian way of naming suggests the continuing usage of the older forms, in this case the shortened form of the ‘chamberlain’.

⁵² According to the *PLP*, there were no fewer than twenty *parakoimōmenoi* in Byzantium (including the Empire of Trebizond) between 1258 and 1461: *PLP*, nos 209, 1180, 2458, 5298, 5691, 5829, 6417, 8665, 10955, 92605 (16358), 20201, 24106, 24789, 25210, 27276, 27305, 29122, 29580, 30954, 91760. Of these, ten (nos. 2458, 5691, 5829, 6417, 8665, 92605 [16358], 20201, 24106, 27276, 30954) were *parakoimōmenoi* between 1258 and 1307: George Zagarommates under Theodore II (no. 6417), six under Michael VIII and three under Andronikos II until c. 1307: Dionysios Drimys c. 1300 (no. 5829); a certain Rhaoul, also c. 1300 (no. 24106); and John Komnenos Choumnos, the *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs* after 1307 (no. 30954). It should be noted that Constantine Doukas Nestongos (no. 20201) was the last *parakoimōmenos* under Michael VIII and the first one under Andronikos II. As to the six *parakoimōmenoi* under Michael VIII, I exclude Basil Basilikos (no. 2458) from the list, as he was the *parakoimōmenos tou koitōnos*.

1. John, whose seal as *parakoimōmenos* and *pansebastos*, dated to the middle of the thirteenth century, is extant; this John might have been identical to John Makrenos (3) below.⁵³ However, according to N. P. Likhachev, John could be identified with John Phagomodes, *sebastos* and *parakoimōmenos*, whose seal also survives; its *terminus a quo* is the end of the twelfth century.⁵⁴
2. Isaac Doukas, *sebastokratōr*, *pansebastos* *sebastos* and *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*, brother of the emperor John III Batatzes and uncle (*avunculus*) of Michael VIII, who died in Genoa in 1261.⁵⁵
3. John Makrenos, *parakoimōmenos* (probably *tēs megalēs sphendonēs*) in 1262–3.⁵⁶ He was among the generals sent by John III Batatzes to fight against Michael II Angelos Doukas, despot in Epiros (1230–67), during the campaign in the winter of 1252–3.⁵⁷ As *parakoimōmenos*, he was sent together with *meγas domestikos* Alexios Philes⁵⁸ under the command of Michael VIII's half-brother, the *sebastokratōr* Constantine,⁵⁹ to

⁵³ *PLP*, no. 8665; Laurent, *Bulles métriques*, no. 484; George Pachymeres, *History*, 3.16, ed. Failler, 1:273, n. 4.

⁵⁴ Likhachev, *Molivdovuly grecheskogo Vostoka*, 296–7 (LXXXI.8). On the Phagomodes, the local family from Smyrna of which Constantine Phagomodes, *pansebastos* and close retainer of the emperor in 1225, was a representative, see *Acta et diplomata graeca*, ed. Miklosich and Müller, 4:190, 252; Ahrweiler, 'Smyrne', 160; *PLP*, nos 29548, 29549. However, no representative of the Phagomodes family is listed in the *PBW*.

⁵⁵ George Akropolites, *History*, 51, ed. Heisenberg, 1:101, lines 6–18; George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.8, 1.21, 8.19, ed. Failler, 1:41.15–19, 93.1–8; 2:173.2–7 (Pachymeres never mentions Isaac Doukas Batatzes by name, only through various marriage connections); *Annali genovesi*, 4:42–3; Pieralli, *Corrispondenza diplomatica*, 142.298–300, 150.5–7; *PLP*, no. 5691; Dölger and Wirth, *Regesten*, no. 1892; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 109, n. 73; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 269–70, n. 5.

⁵⁶ *PLP*, nos 92605, 16358; Ahrweiler, 'Smyrne', 146; Guiland, 'Le parakimomène', 199 (repr. in id., *Recherches*, 1:209); Failler, 'Chronologie et composition', 85–103. His name is known only from the headline of ch. 17 in George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.17, ed. Failler, 1:275.21. Failler (George Pachymeres, *History*, 2, part 5: Index, 34 and 49) suggested that John Makrenos was the chamberlain of the Great Seal (μεγάλης σφενδόνης).

⁵⁷ George Akropolites, *History*, 49, ed. Heisenberg, 1:89.20–90.31, Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 89–90, 240–1 and n. 657; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 249–59 and n. 14.

⁵⁸ George Pachymeres, *History*, 2.13 and 3.16, ed. Failler, 1:155.1, 273.9, 275.19; *PLP*, no. 29809.

⁵⁹ George Akropolites, *History*, 77, 82, ed. Heisenberg, 1:160.16–161.8, 173.10–11; Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 126, 132, 288–9 and n. 975; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 347, 350–1 n. 15, 366; Nikephorus Gregoras, *History*, 3.5, 4.1, ed. Schopen, 1:72.16–18 and 79.11–80.11; *PLP*, no. 21498; Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, 178, n. 16; Papadopoulos, *Versuch*, 6; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 161, n. 149.

Monemvasia to fight against William II Villehardouin, Prince of Achaia (1246–78). Initially successful, both John Makrenos and Alexios Philes were then taken captive in the battle at Makry Plagi in the Peloponnese in 1263;⁶⁰ Philes soon died in captivity, but John Makrenos, while in Achaia, was reported to have married Theodora, daughter of Theodore II Laskaris, widow of Matthew de Valaincourt, Baron of Damala and Veligosti.⁶¹ Michael VIII Palaiologos appeared to have convinced himself that John Makrenos wanted to become emperor through this marriage connection; he then exchanged John for the Latin prisoners of war, brought him back to Byzantium and ‘at once deprived him of his eyes’ (παρασχεδὸν τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀφαιρεῖται).⁶²

4. Gabriel Sphrantzes, cousin (ἀντανέψιος) of John Doukas Angelos,⁶³ son of Michael II of Epiros.⁶⁴ Once the *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*, he had been deprived of his office and blinded on the orders of the emperor before August 1280.⁶⁵ He thus must have held the office sometime between 1263 and 1280.
5. Constantine Doukas Nestongos, who was already the *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs* when he followed Andronikos II, a co-emperor at that time, to the military expedition along the Meander valleys which ended in the restoration of Tralles (Aydın) in 1280. Between 1280 and 1283/4 Nyssa (Sultanhisar) was taken by the frontier Turks; its governor, the ‘*parakoimōmenos* Nostongos’, i.e. Constantine Doukas Nestongos, was taken captive.⁶⁶ He was soon released, probably ransomed, and then witnessed the Byzantine-Venetian treaty of 15 June 1285 as *avunculo imperii nostri parachimumeno magnesfendonis domino Constantino Duca Nestingo* (‘the maternal uncle, the Chamberlain of the Great Seal of our empire, lord Constantine Doukas Nestongos’).⁶⁷ Further information

⁶⁰ *Chronicle of Morea*, ed. Kalonaros, 190–227.4546–5465, ed. Schmitt, 301–56.4546–5465; *Kleinchroniken*, ed. Schreiner, 1:599 (5); Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus*, 158–9, 173–4.

⁶¹ According to Zhavoronkov (tr.), John Makrenos indeed married Theodora: Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 280, n. 922; 345, Table 2. On Matthew de Valaincourt and his family, see *PLP*, no. 2555, and Lock, *Franks*, 76, 83, 89.

⁶² Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, 1:275.16–277.16.

⁶³ *PLP*, no. 205; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 95, n. 50.

⁶⁴ *PLP*, no. 220; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 93–4, n. 48.

⁶⁵ George Pachymeres, *History*, 6.25, ed. Failler, 1:621.24–623.2; *PLP*, no. 27276.

⁶⁶ George Pachymeres, *History*, 6.20–1, ed. Failler, 1:593.6–11 and 599.10–4.

⁶⁷ *Urkunden zur Handels- und Staatsgeschichte*, ed. Tafel and Thomas, 3:339; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 151–2, n. 132.

about him can be found in Greek charters, in which he appeared as a powerful landowner in Prinobaris near Smyrna; it seems that he reduced his political activity after 1285. The first document, issued in February, in the fourth indiction (i.e. in 1276, 1291 or 1306), was signed by ‘the slave of the emperor’, *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs* Constantine Doukas Nestongos.⁶⁸ Two other documents, of March and April 1307, concern his *paroikoi* (‘peasant tenants’) who tried to occupy the lands of the Lembiotissa monastery near Smyrna.⁶⁹ In both charters Constantine Nestongos is labelled the ‘uncle’ (θεῖος) of Emperor Andronikos II, ‘the most noble Doukas’ and, again, *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*.⁷⁰

One should exclude the ‘chamberlains’ John (1) and Isaac Doukas (2) as possible candidates for our *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*: if John’s seal is attributed to Phagomodes, it belongs to the first half of the thirteenth century, before 1256. As to Isaac Doukas, it seems improbable that emperor John III Batatzes’ brother was an émigré in Rûm in 1256; besides, he died in Genoa and was buried in the city’s cathedral of St Laurence. His grave could not have been in the monastery of St Stephen in Constantinople.

If Philes wrote his poem in strict chronological sequence, the best possible candidate for our *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs* would have been John Makrenos (3), because his appointment to this office took place in 1261–2, soon after Michael Palaiologos’ enthronement. However, some details in Philes’ verses exclude him: our hero, Michael’s chief supporter while in Rûm in 1256, began the construction of St Stephen’s monastery when, ‘still alive and seeing the sun, he laboured with his body’,⁷¹ while John

⁶⁸ *Acta et diplomata graeca*, ed. Miklosich and Müller, 4:103–4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 4:257–60; Ahrweiler, ‘Smyrne’, 153–4, 165 and 173. However, Ahrweiler thought that our ‘chamberlain’ Constantine Doukas Nestongos (*PLP*, no. 20201) was identical with the *mezas hetaireiarchēs* Nestongos Doukas, the *kephalē* (‘governor’) of Magnesia and *doux* of the *thema* of Neokastra, mentioned by Pachymeres for 1304–6: George Pachymeres, *History*, 11.16, 11.24, 12.14, 12.23, 12.30, 13.27, ed. Failler, 2:441.28–443.33, 471.24–475.28, 549.25–551.4, 573.4–16, 593.1–24, 687.1–15). This identification has been rejected by scholars; see *PLP*, no. 20725 (Nestongos Doukas); George Pachymeres, *History*, 2, part 5: Index, 37; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 152, n. 133.

⁷⁰ *Acta et diplomata graeca*, ed. Miklosich and Müller, 4:257: τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς βασιλείας μου τοῦ παρακοιμωμένου τῆς μεγάλης σφενδόνης, κυροῦ Ἰωάννου Δούκα τοῦ Νεοστόγγου (read Κωνσταντίνου, ‘Constantine’, instead of Ἰωάννου, ‘John’: Ahrweiler, ‘Smyrne’, 173); *Acta et diplomata graeca*, ed. Miklosich and Müller, 4:258: τοῦ πανευγενεστάτου Δούκα καὶ παρακοιμωμένου τῆς μεγάλης σφενδόνης τοῦ Νεοστόγγου.

⁷¹ Manuelis Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, 2:262.43: Ἴτι μὲν οὖν ζῶν καὶ βλέπων τὸν ἥλιον ἔκαμνε τῷ σώματι.

Makrenos and Gabriel Sphrantzes (4) (whose family was connected almost entirely to the Balkans⁷²) were most likely blinded when middle-aged on the orders of Michael VIII. The strong pro-Michael Palaiologos sentiments in the poem of Philes were at variance with the real circumstances of Makrenos' and Sphrantzes' lives. Besides, a closer look at the poem's structure reveals that though Philes followed the chronological sequence, he described the events, which were separated by years, as if these were almost simultaneous. That leaves no option but to accept the opinion of R. Janin, who suggested that Constantine Doukas Nestongos was indeed the benefactor of St Stephen's monastery in Constantinople.⁷³ Of all of Michael VIII's *parakoimōmenoi tēs megalēs sphendonēs*, only Constantine Doukas Nestongos had a long and prominent career.

How did Constantine end up in Rūm? One can only guess. As Constantine was still alive in 1307, and as his political career began only in the 1280s, it seems that in 1256 he was of a relatively young age, being of the same generation as, or even a later than, Michael Palaiologos. But he was already in Rūm and enjoyed 'good reputation' among the 'satraps' at the moment of Michael's arrival.

It seems that Constantine Doukas Nestongos was Michael Palaiologos' first cousin. According to Polemis, Constantine might have been the brother of Alexios Doukas Nestongos (Nostongos), the governor (*kephalē*) of Thessalonike and *pinkernēs* ('cupbearer of the emperor') who is mentioned as a 'first cousin' (ἑξάδελφος) of Michael VIII in 1267.⁷⁴

Who might Constantine Doukas Nestongos' father have been? The imperial branch of the Doukas family that was related to the Palaiologoi in the thirteenth century was that of Emperor John III Doukas Batatzes and his brother Isaac Doukas (2), the *parakoimōmenos tēs megalēs sphendonēs*.⁷⁵ Theodora, wife of Michael VIII, whom he married in 1253/4, shortly before his flight, was a granddaughter of Isaac Doukas,⁷⁶ and Michael VIII himself called John III his great-uncle (θεῖος).⁷⁷ Indeed, Michael VIII's maternal grandmother,

⁷² George Pachymeres, *History*, 6.32, ed. Failler, 1:641.1–19.

⁷³ Janin, *Géographie ecclésiastique*, 477; cf. *PLP*, no. 5435; Kidonopoulos, *Bauten*, 62–5.

⁷⁴ *Actes de Zographou*, nos 7:22.125, 24.178; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 151–2, n. 131–2; *PLP*, no. 20727.

⁷⁵ Polemis, *The Doukai*, 106–11, n. 72–6.

⁷⁶ George Akropolites, *History*, 51, ed. Heisenberg, 1:101.6–18, Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 251–2, n. 703–8; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 269–70, n. 6; *PLP*, nos 21380, 21528; Talbot, 'Theodora Palaiologina', 295.

⁷⁷ George Akropolites, *History*, 78, ed. Heisenberg, 1:162.19–22; Michael VII Palaiologos, 'De vita sua', 451, tr. Dennis 2, 1243; cf. Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 289, n. 980.

Irene Komnene, daughter of Alexios III, was the second cousin of John III Batatzes, whose mother⁷⁸ was the daughter of Isaac Doukas Angelos.⁷⁹ The latter was the brother of Andronikos Angelos,⁸⁰ who was the father of the emperors Isaac II and Alexios III.

The Nestongoi were also connected with John III Batatzes and the Angeloi. According to Akropolites, in 1224/5 Andronikos Nestongos, the first cousin (πρωτεξάδελφος) of John III, plotted against the emperor. Andronikos' brother Isaac Nestongos, a certain Makrenos (probably the father of John Makrenos [3]) and many other notables were among the conspirators. The plot was unsuccessful; Isaac Nestongos and Makrenos were sentenced to blinding and having their hands amputated, but Andronikos Nestongos was only imprisoned in the fortress of Magnesia. Shortly afterwards, he escaped (by the wish of the emperor as Akropolites suggests) and would have run away to the land of the Muslims, i.e. to the Sultanate of Rūm, where he then lived and died.⁸¹ According to Barzos, Andronikos and Isaac Nestongoi were the sons of a certain Nestongos and the daughter of Isaac Doukas Angelos, the latter being the uncle of Emperor Isaac II (1185–95, 1203–4).⁸²

Was this Andronikos Nestongos the father of Constantine Doukas Nestongos? The wording in Philes seems to suggest that Constantine's sojourn in the Sultanate of Rūm lasted for several years before 1256: the patron saint of Constantine Doukas Nestongos, St Stephen, did not just help Constantine return to Byzantium, but 'indeed miraculously drew out that man from Persia by putting [him] on the hook of the fishing-line.'⁸³ The statement alludes to the apostles, 'the fishers of men' (Matthew 4:18–19);

⁷⁸ On her, see Barzos, *Γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 2:851–7, n. 190.

⁷⁹ On Isaac Doukas Angelos, see *ibid.* 1:673–4, n. 96.

⁸⁰ Isaac Doukas Angelos and Andronikos Angelos were sons of Constantine Angelos, husband of Theodora Komnene, daughter of Emperor Alexios I (1081–1118). On Andronikos Angelos, see Barzos, *Γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1:656–62, n. 93; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 86, n. 39.

⁸¹ George Akropolites, *History*, 23, ed. Heisenberg, 1:36.18–37.25; Angold, *Byzantine Government in Exile*, 40–1.

⁸² Barzos, *Γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 2:857–8, n. 190a; Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 200–1, n. 362. On the relation between John III Batatzes and Michael VIII and his wife Theodora Doukaina Palaiologina, see the tables in Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 349 (Table 5); Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, 185–6. On the earlier Nestongoi, see Cheynet, 'Les Nestongoi', 599–607. See also Table 13.1 in this chapter.

⁸³ Manuelis Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, 2:262.41–2: Σὺ γὰρ ἐκείνον εἶλες ἐκ τῆς Περσίδος, / Ἄγκιστρον ἐνθεῖς ὀρμῆς τεραστίων.

and the word ἄγκιστρον ('hook') in Philes, used by Christ himself in Matthew 17:27, was often interpreted in the apostolic teachings as a spiritual tool with which a human being was drawn out for a higher purpose, ultimately for their salvation.⁸⁴ In other words, when he was back in Byzantium after 1256, Constantine Doukas Nestongos did not return to his previous state of being 'Roman' (as indeed Michael Palaiologos did) – he emerged into a new life in Christ. Moreover, Constantine's servant, who later became the monk Dionysios, was not a Byzantine who followed Nestongos into exile – on the contrary, Constantine Doukas Nestongos 'was his master while in the Persian land,'⁸⁵ as if they met in Rūm for the first time. If Constantine Doukas Nestongos was a son of Andronikos Nestongos, he must have been born in, or brought at a young age to, Rūm, since he was younger than Michael Palaiologos. That is why Michael met him only when he himself was in Rūm in 1256.

There were other Nestongoi at the court of Theodore II; they are thought to have been descendants of either of the rebel brothers, Andronikos or Isaac Nestongos.⁸⁶ I do not think that Constantine Doukas Nestongos was a son of the blinded Isaac Nestongos, brother of Andronikos. If such were the case, Constantine Doukas Nestongos should have been born in Nicaea and later, like Michael Palaiologos, have run away from the ever suspicious Theodore II Laskaris just before 1256. However, the Nestongos family is reported to have been in favour of Theodore II during his short reign; a representative of the family, George Nestongos (Nostongos), who was in charge of the emperor's table (*epi tou kerasmatos*, i.e. *epi tēs trapezēs*), 'boasted about himself' in front of other members of the aristocracy, and especially against his cousin (ἀυτάνεψιος) Michael Palaiologos, the future emperor. George was so dear to Theodore II that despite his illustrious pedigree, which was potentially dangerous to the Laskarid dynasty, the emperor wanted to make him his son-in-law.⁸⁷ Other Nestongoi were George's brother Michael, whom Michael VIII made *protosebastos* in 1259;⁸⁸ Theodore Nestongos, the

⁸⁴ *Matthäus-Kommentare*, ed. Reuss, 222–3, n. 212; Lampe (ed.), *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 20 (s.v. ἄγκιστρον).

⁸⁵ Manuelis Philes, *Carmina*, ed. Miller, 2:262.54: ἐκεῖνον ἐν γῆ Περσικῇ σχῶν δεσπότην.

⁸⁶ See Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 259 and n. 760, 273 and n. 866.

⁸⁷ George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.21, 1.27, ed. Failler, 1:95.1–12, 107.10–22. Cf. Theodore Skoutariotes, *Addimenta*, ed. Heisenberg, 1:42, 293.10–17; Theodore Skoutariotes, *Chronicle*, ed. Sathas, 524.5–11; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 303, n. 12, 325, n. 6; *PLP*, no. 20724.

⁸⁸ George Pachymeres, *History*, 2.13, 12.2, ed. Failler, 1:155.18–21 and 2:515.1–6; *PLP*, no. 20726.

defender of Melenikon (Melnik) in 1255;⁸⁹ and, finally, the *epi tēs trapezes* Isaac Nestongos, who surrendered Ohrid to Michael II of Epiros in 1257; only then did Theodore II suspect Isaac to have been a traitor.⁹⁰ But no Nestongos was sentenced to blinding or amputation under Theodore II; even Isaac might have survived and was later able to sign a document as a landowner near Smyrna in 1281.⁹¹

Andronikos Nestongos, who died in Rüm, was the first cousin of John III; he was therefore the great-uncle of Theodora (the wife of Michael VIII and granddaughter of John III's brother Isaac Doukas [see Table 13.1]). If Constantine Doukas Nestongos was Andronikos Nestongos' son,⁹² this fact alone implies that he was also the uncle (θεῖος) of Empress Theodora and the great-uncle (also θεῖος in its broader sense)⁹³ of Andronikos II, son of Michael VIII and Theodora. However, this interpretation needs additional support, as the term θεῖος is not very precise: its chief meaning was, and still is, 'brother of the father or mother';⁹⁴ but in Byzantine and modern Greek it can also refer to the cousin of the father or mother.⁹⁵ The Byzantine-Venetian treaty of 15 June 1285, which mentions the *parachimumeno magnesfendonis domino Constantino Duca Nestingo*, translates the θεῖος of the Greek original as *avunculus*. The term *avunculus* generally means 'uncle'; but while in classical Latin it referred to the mother's brother, in medieval Latin it could also mean 'father's brother' and, rarely, 'cousin'.⁹⁶ The 'great-uncle'

⁸⁹ George Akropolites, *History*, 9, ed. Heisenberg, 1:115.5–15; on the date, see *ibid.* 59, ed. Heisenberg, 1:119.24–5, Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 261, n. 776, Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 281–2, 294.

⁹⁰ George Akropolites, *History*, 68 and 72, ed. Heisenberg, 1:142.9–12, 151.1–15, Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 325, n. 6; *PLP*, no. 20200.

⁹¹ *Acta et diplomata graeca*, ed. Miklosich and Müller, 4:123; *PLP*, no. 20199; Zhavoronkov (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 273, n. 866.

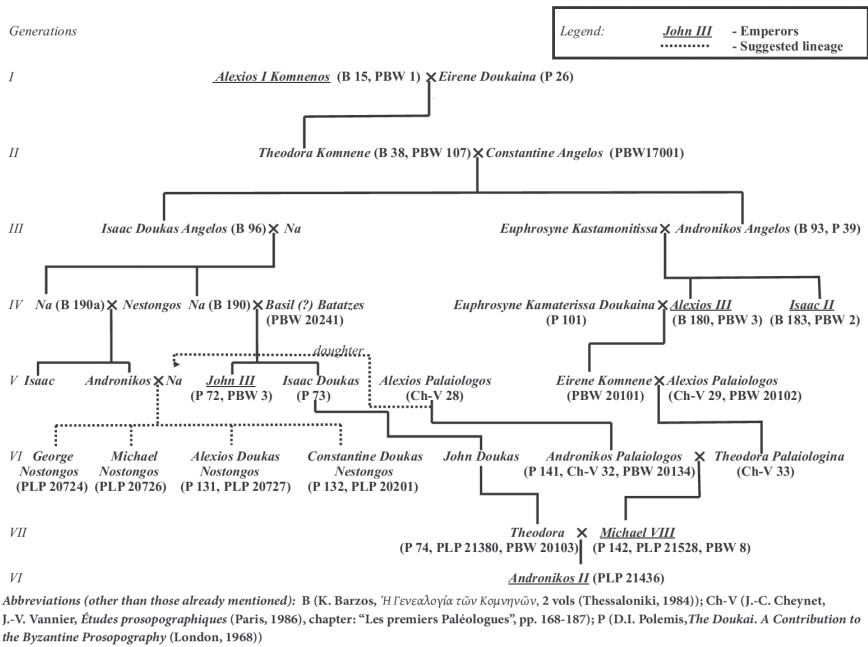
⁹² So Kidonopoulos, *Bauten*, 64; Savvides, *Βυζαντινά στασιαστικά καὶ αὐτονομιστικά κινήματα*, 214–16.

⁹³ For θεῖος meaning 'great-uncle', see Blum's translation of Akropolites, *History*, 78, ed. Heisenberg, 1:162.19–22: Blum (tr.), *George Akropolites*, 177. See also Gómez, 'Théodôra Palaiologina Philanthrôpênè', 131; Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique*, 2:426.

⁹⁴ Stephanus, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*, 5:276–7; LSJ, 788; Anthimos of Ghaza, *Λεξικὸν τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης*, 2:43; Kriaras, *Λεξικό*, 7:94; Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 1:658.

⁹⁵ Demetrakos, *Μέγα λεξικόν*, 7:3312.

⁹⁶ Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 221; Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, 75; Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français*, 87; Forcellini et al., *Lexicon totius latinitatis*, 1:418; Stephanus, *Dictionarium*, 1:81; Du Cange et al., *Glossarium*, 1:496; Diefenbach, *Supplementum*, 63; Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*, 40; Ernout and Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique*, 109–10.

Table 13.1 The Nestongoi, Angeloi and Palaioiogoi: Constantine Doukas Nestongos as ‘uncle’ (θεῖος) of Andronikos II.

was called *avunculus magnus* (or simply *avunculus*), the ‘great-great-uncle’ was *avunculus maior*; and the ‘great-great-great-uncle’ was *avunculus maximus*.⁹⁷ The Greek term for ‘great-uncle’ was usually πρόθειος.⁹⁸ The intersection between the meanings of θεῖος and *avunculus* reduces the list of possible connotations to either ‘uncle’ (brother of the father or mother) or ‘great-uncle’ (brother of the grandfather or grandmother). This thus suggests a close relation between Constantine Doukas Nestongos and the Palaiologos dynasty, though in the documents Constantine is never named Palaiologos, Komnenos or Angelos.

Indeed, the links between the Nestongoi and the Palaioiogoi were very close. Of all the Nestongoi mentioned above, there were at least four who were relatives of Michael VIII Palaiologos. They were our Constantine Doukas Nestongos, θεῖος (*avunculus*) of Andronikos II; Alexios Doukas Nestongos (Nostongos), governor (*kephalē*) of Thessalonike in 1267 and ἐξάδελφος (first

⁹⁷ Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 221.

⁹⁸ Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique*, 2:426.

cousin) of Michael VIII; and, finally, George and Michael Nestongos (Nos-tongos), who, according to Pachymeres, were the ἀτανέψιοι of Michael VIII Palaiologos. Despite Pachymeres' tendency towards archaism, his wording is precise: the term ἀτανέψιος means only 'first cousin' in his *History* as far as the Byzantine aristocracy is concerned.⁹⁹ It should be noted that Michael VIII's mother Theodora had no sister or brother;¹⁰⁰ this means that Michael VIII's aunt must have been an otherwise unknown sister of his father, the *megas domestikos* Andronikos Palaiologos (d. 1247), and that this aunt was the mother of George and Michael Nestongos. Given the fact that the chief meaning of θεῖος was 'uncle', and that Constantine Doukas Nestongos' father was most likely Andronikos Nestongos, one may suggest that all four Nestongoi (George, Michael, Alexios and Constantine) were brothers, the sons of the rebel Andronikos Nestongos. If Constantine was born in Rūm, then the aunt of Michael Palaiologos, the wife of Andronikos Nestongos, must have joined her husband in exile.

My chief concern has been to demonstrate the closest possible relationship between Constantine Doukas Nestongos and Michael VIII Palaiologos, but one can advance another interpretation: Constantine might have been Michael VIII's first cousin, and he was almost certainly a distant uncle of Theodora, Michael VIII's wife.

Thus, when he came to Rūm in 1256, Michael Palaiologos did not encounter a 'blind marsh, or Scythian cold, or waterless sands, full of wild beasts', as Theodore Metochites would later describe the Sultanate.¹⁰¹ Indeed, he found himself in a Byzantine environment. The first noble person he met in the most difficult circumstances, after he was deprived of everything by the Turkmen nomads, was Constantine Doukas Nestongos, his first cousin (if one accepts Polemis' view) or the uncle of his wife Theodora (if one accepts Andronikos Nestongos as Constantine's father).

In Philes' poem, the difference between the images of Michael Palaiologos and Constantine Doukas Nestongos is profound. While Michael returned safely to Nicaea, his helper in Rūm, Constantine, after his own return to the Byzantine Empire, was described as if he was a convert, despite the fact

⁹⁹ George Pachymeres, *History*, 1.7, 1.21, 1.22, 2.13, 6.16, 6.25, 7.12, ed. Failler, 1:37.4, 95.7, 95.25, 155.20, 581.16, 621.27; 2:49.16; Failler, 'Pachymeriana quaedam', 187–91.

¹⁰⁰ Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, 178–9, n. 33.

¹⁰¹ Theodore Metochites, *Βασιλικὸς δεῦτερος*, in MS Cod. Vindobon. Philol. Gr. 95, f. 154r; Theodore Metochites, *Οἱ Δύο Βασιλικοὶ Λόγοι*, ed. Polemis, 376.9–10. This is a citation from Plutarch, *Vitae parallelae*, i (Thes.1.1), 1.4–5; Metochites, *Οἱ Δύο Βασιλικοὶ Λόγοι*, ed. Polemis, 377, n. 259. See also Ševčenko, 'Decline of Byzantium', 178, n. 46.

that he represented just the first generation of his family in the Sultanate. Accordingly, Pachymeres, when mentioning the Basilikos brothers, the natives of Rhodes, friends of Michael VIII Palaiologos and the favourites of Kay-Kāwūs II,¹⁰² refused to call them ‘Romans’, Byzantines. Besides Greek, they knew Arabic and Turkish. Only when they moved to Nicaea in 1260–1 and received the titles of *parakoimōmenos tou koitōnos* and *meḡas hetaireiarchēs*, respectively, did they get the chance to ‘become Roman’ (κατὰ Ῥωμαίους μετασηματισθέντες).¹⁰³ Likewise, Michael VIII called his fellow Rūmī Greeks ‘Persian enemies’, thus denying their Byzantine identity, though the Cappadocian inscriptions show that these Greeks continued to commemorate the Byzantine emperors as their sovereigns.¹⁰⁴ Only Gregoras, himself a native of Heracleia Pontike, a remote Byzantine outpost surrounded by the Turks from the 1300s, noticed that the Rūmī Greeks were once ‘Romans’, thus implying that they were no longer Romans and that Byzantine manners and usages were alien to them. The Byzantine attitude had changed. What seemed to have been acceptable during the times of John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates was no longer deemed suitable in the middle of the thirteenth century.

We are facing two paradoxes. The catastrophe of 1204, when the crusaders took Constantinople, had almost no repercussions in Asia Minor, save for the foundations of the empires of Trebizond and Nicaea. However, Nicaea, in her relations with the Sultanate of Rūm, inherited all the connections and diplomatic traditions that Byzantium had enjoyed before 1204. One can notice the same changes of loyalty between Nicaea and Rūm on the part of the members of the aristocratic elites after 1204.

The difference between Nicaea and Byzantium before 1204 was evident – while the empire of the Komnenoi and the Angeloi was multiethnic, Nicaea emerged as an almost entirely Greek state.¹⁰⁵ From the sixties of the thirteenth century, the border identity seems to have been no longer tolerated by the ‘real’ Byzantines who lived within the empire. This coincided with the reforms of Michael VIII Palaiologos that aimed at unification of the Byzantine eastern border.

¹⁰² On them, see Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 121–2, 242, 363.

¹⁰³ George Pachymeres, *History*, 2.24, 6.12, 6.24, ed. Failler, 1:183.1–19, 575.14–20, 615.11–21.

¹⁰⁴ Jolivet-Lévi, *Études Cappadociennes*, 289; Thierry and Thierry, *Nouvelles églises rupestres*, 202; Laurent, ‘Note additionnelle’, 367–71; Bees, *Inscriftaufzeichnung*, 7; Korobeinikov, ‘Byzantine Emperors’.

¹⁰⁵ Ahrweiler, ‘Expérience nicéenne’, 21–40.

The second paradox was rooted in Michael VIII himself, as his self-consciousness bore evident traces of the border identity, which is why he felt so guilty for his flight to Rūm. It was he, then, who conducted the reforms that greatly reduced the independence of the people on the Byzantine side of the empire's eastern frontier in Asia Minor. The border identity as a historical phenomenon never ceased to exist, but the Byzantine aristocracy outside Byzantium in Asia Minor had almost disappeared as a powerful political stratum by the end of the thirteenth century.

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