



Imperial Ideology & Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330

DIMITER ANGELOV

ANGELOV

Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330

This is the first systematic study of Byzantine imperial ideology, court rhetoric, and political thought after the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 – in the Nicaean state (1204–1261) and during the early period of the restored empire of the Palaiologoi. The book explores Byzantine political imagination at a time of crisis when the Empire ceased to be a first-rate power in the Mediterranean. It investigates the correspondence and fissures between official political rhetoric, on the one hand, and the political ideas of lay thinkers and churchmen, on the other. Through the analysis of a wide body of sources (some of them little known or unpublished), a picture of Byzantine political thought emerges which differs significantly from the traditionally accepted one. The period saw refreshing developments in court rhetoric and political thought – some with interesting parallels in the medieval and Renaissance West – which arose in response to the new historical realities.

321.030 949
509 022
ANG

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.cambridge.org

ISBN 978-0-521-85703-1



engage. Nor did Laskaris abandon the time-honored dogma of the divine right of emperors, which for him was an unquestionable postulate. In contrast to Machiavelli, Laskaris was not a fully secular thinker and was deeply affected by his faith and by Christian ideas. The ending of the fourth book of the *Explanation of the World* reveals the author less as an unscrupulous ruler than as a Christian concerned with his salvation. Although Theodore II Laskaris was a harbinger of Renaissance political discussions and sensibilities, he still belonged firmly to the mental world of the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER 8

*The critics of the Palaiologoi: fiscal responsibility
and elective kingship*

Scholars have long noticed that criticism of the emperor (*Kaiserkritik*) by Byzantine historians provides illuminating insights into Byzantine political attitudes and thought. In his systematic study of criticism of the emperor in histories and chronicles of the period from the sixth to the twelfth centuries, Franz Tinnefeld has unveiled a wide spectrum of opinion and an overarching pattern. Byzantine historians tended to criticize the emperor's personality or specific policies through the prism of traditional moralistic ideas and ideological constructs. The categories of *Kaiserkritik* thus tended to match those of the *Kaiseridee* (the imperial idea).¹ The twelfth century marked a break in this pattern and a significant change in the analytical categories employed in the critiques.² Two historians, John Zonaras and Niketas Choniates, attacked the heart of the imperial absolutist system on the basis of an alternative model of governance, which looked back to Roman republican times. Zonaras and Choniates held deeply negative views of the political and fiscal reforms which the contemporary Komnenian emperors introduced. They accused them of having abolished a long-standing Byzantine tradition of public administration in order to impose an arbitrary mode of governance based on family privilege. They denounced the Komnenian aristocratic clan for siphoning off public wealth for their individual benefit. As a basis of their critique, they revived old Roman constitutionalist ideas of

¹ F. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates* (Munich, 1971), 192–93. For the early Byzantine period see A. Cameron, "Early Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*: Two Case Histories," *BMGS*, 3 (1977), 1–17; Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley, 1985), 65–66, 242–60. According to Averil Cameron, Procopius used traditional categories of the imperial idea in his criticism of Justinian.

² Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik*, 160–63, 190. In 1978 Hans-Georg Beck discussed briefly Zonaras' critique as source for the persistence of republican thinking in Byzantium. See H.-G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich, 1978), 42. In 1983 Paul Magdalino produced an in-depth analysis of this line of twelfth-century critique, setting it in a historical and intellectual context. See P. Magdalino, "Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*," *Speculum*, 58 (1983), 326–46, repr. in Magdalino, *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Byzantium* (London, 1991), study VIII.

senatorial power and the public accountability of the emperor, who himself occupied a public office.³

Much remains unclear about these twelfth-century changes, especially with respect to their impact and carryover into the later Byzantine period. Was the new criticism based on notions of public power, a development unique to the Komnenian era, or did it persist beyond 1204? And if it did, how precisely did it affect the ways in which late Byzantine critics understood the responsibilities of the office of the emperor? Naturally, authors of historical works were not the only critics of imperial policy in late Byzantium. Authors of mirrors of princes and court orators also attacked problems of imperial administration. If historians had an advantage over these other authors, it lay in the greater freedom that history writing gave them to comment on contemporary problems without having to deal with literary or rhetorical convention. As continuators of twelfth-century trends in *Kaiserkritik*, the historians after 1204 faced the double-sided reality of imperial absolutism coupled with the flickering survival of Roman ideological and legalistic notions of public power. Imperial government as practiced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries retained the hallmarks of the Komnenian reform: the widespread use of individual fiscal privilege (tax exemptions and grants of *pronoiai*) and the dominant role of the emperor's relatives in the hierarchy of court dignitaries. For nearly two centuries the Palaiologan family ruled the empire as their own patrimony, dividing its territory among members of the clan and occasionally fighting over their shares. As we have seen, in official documents the emperor claimed a supreme right to grant and confirm private possessions in the entire taxable territory of the empire.⁴ Nonetheless, old Roman notions of public power remained embedded in political vocabulary and the language of government. As we have also seen, authors of mirrors of princes insisted that the emperor occupied an office and governed for public benefit. Nikephoros Blemmydes, for example, availed himself of Roman conceptions of public wealth in discussing imperial taxation.⁵ For the late Byzantine historians, imperial administration was also the sphere of "social affairs" or "public

³ Ioannis Zonarae epitomae historiarum libri XIII–XVIII, vol. 3, ed. Th. Büttner-Wobst, CSHB (Bonn, 1897), 766–67. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J.-L. van Dieren (Berlin and New York, 1975), 143, 209. See also Zonaras' commentary on canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (Rhalles-Potles, vol. 2, 282). Zonaras made a pun on the Byzantine word for senate (σύγκλητος), noting that the senate has been "closed down" (συγκέλεισται) and the empire has been turned into a tyranny.

⁴ See chapter 4, pp. 147–49.

⁵ Blemmydes, *Imperial Statue*, 44, ch. 2, reasoned that the emperor held nothing in private because he was not a private individual, but administered public wealth (τὰ κοινά) for the benefit of the community (τὸ κοινόν). Cf. chapter 9, p. 294.

matters."⁶ The fisc into which tax revenues were deposited bore two interchangeable designations: "the imperial treasury" (*basilikon bestiarion*) and "the public fisc" (*demosion*).⁷ The designation "public land" is often found in official documents and doubtless stems from old Roman legal notions.⁸

Even among lawyers, however, there was a certain confusion as to the distinction between public and imperial property. Two anonymous scholia to the legal compilation of Constantine Harmenopoulos (completed in 1345) demonstrate the confusion. The two anonymous scholiasts commented on a law which prescribed that the embezzler of public property, that is, property belonging to the fisc, should restore to the fisc a double reparation.⁹ One of the scholia simply explained that the words "public fisc" and "imperial treasury" were synonyms.¹⁰ The other scholion, however, made a historical excursus explaining that it was a common practice among the ancient Roman emperors to make the Roman people the owner of all newly conquered lands. These lands became public property (the Roman *ager publicus*), from which term, according to the scholion, stemmed the designation "public fisc" used in the Palaiologan period. Thus historical memories and administrative terminology carried into the late Byzantine period a lingering awareness of Roman concepts of public property and of power as a public exercise.

Two late Byzantine historians-critics fleshed out the meaning of the emperor's public office in relation to the concrete circumstances of the early Palaiologan period. Before we turn to their critique, it will be helpful to place it within the context of contemporary historical writing. Five authors have left us detailed accounts of Byzantine history during the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century: George Akropolites (1217–82); the anonymous author of *Synopsis Chronike* who has been identified with Theodore Skoutariotes, *dikaiophylax* and later metropolitan of Kyzikos under the emperor Michael VIII;¹¹ George Pachymeres (1242– after

⁶ See the use of the expression τὰ κοινὰ πράγματα (or simply τὰ κοινά) in Akropolites I, 96.23, 156.23; Pachymeres I.i, 273.15, 283.19–20; I.ii, 331.10, 399.17; Gregoras I, 63.20, 64.14, 70.21, 492.12–13; II, 579.9; Kantakouzenos I, 154.11, 211.6, 248.12; II, 124.7. For the expression δημόσια πράγματα, see Gregoras I, 362.13–14; II, 605.4, 679.13, 700.6, 702.4; III, 173.2; Kantakouzenos III, 183.23.

⁷ See further nn. 10 and 46. In addition to the historians, official documents also commonly use the two terms interchangeably.

⁸ See, for example, the chrysobull issued in 1347 by John VI Kantakouzenos on behalf of Demetrios Kabasilas, his political supporter during the Second Civil War (1341–47): *Dionysiou*, no. 2.36–38 (Dölger, *Regesten*, 2933). Some of the lands which the emperor granted to Kabasilas with a full right of ownership were said to have been "public lands" (ἐν τῶν μὲν πρότερον δημοσίων) in the past.

⁹ *Hexabiblos*, 1.2.38, ed. Pitsakes, 24–25.

¹⁰ Ibid.: δημόσιον λέγεται τὸ κοινόν ἢ βασιλικόν.

¹¹ A. Heisenberg, *Analecta: Mitteilungen aus italienischen Handschriften byzantinischer Chronographen* (Munich, 1901), 7–18, attributed the chronicle to Theodore Skoutariotes. This identification has been

1307); Nikephoros Gregoras (1290/94–1358/61); and the emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (ca. 1295–1383, r. 1341–54). All these historians composed their works during the early Palaiologan era, approximately between 1261 and 1369 – a golden age for historiography as it was for secular literary culture in general.¹² For anyone who expects to find in these histories a fulfillment of the high intellectual promise of the twelfth century, the first impression is disappointing. Table 4 presents a summary of the critical opinion. Most of these historians lacked the elaborate conceptual apparatus and detached perspectives of their twelfth-century predecessors. Their criticism retained the traditional focus on the emperor's personal foibles and immoral actions, such as excessive anger, womanizing, or immoderate ambition. Strongly influenced by classical models of historiography, two of the historians – Nikephoros Gregoras and John VI Kantakouzenos – turned Fortune (*tyche*) into a blind force governing human affairs. They often explained disastrous events of the Palaiologan era, such as the Turkish conquests and the civil wars, as the work of fate. Thus they avoided addressing the thorny question of individual responsibility and imposed on the past an irrational explanatory framework. For example, Gregoras called Fortune a “tyrant” which controlled human affairs.¹³ Having learned astronomy from his teacher and patron Theodore Metochites, Gregoras believed that Fortune manifested itself in celestial phenomena, such as eclipses of the sun and the moon. Thus he noted that the solar eclipse on 25 May 1267 presaged the fall of Asia Minor to the Turks.¹⁴ Commenting on the disastrous events of the Second Civil War (1341–47) the historian declared that he would blame the inscrutable ways of fate, but not the emperor Kantakouzenos or the empress Anna of Savoy.¹⁵ According to Gregoras, humans made conscious choices and acted on the basis of moral convictions; it was

challenged by A. Kazhdan, “Extseprty Skilitsy,” *Academie Bulgare des Sciences, Bulletin de l'Institut d'Histoire* 14/15 (1964), 529–30.

¹² The earliest history, that by Akropolites, was written sometime between 1261 (the last event mentioned in the surviving part of the work) and 1282 (the death of the author). The latest, that of Kantakouzenos, was completed on 8 December 1369. See D. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Kantakouzenos) ca. 1100–1460* (Washington, 1986), 100. After 1369 there are no surviving histories written until after 1453.

¹³ Gregoras III, 96. Cf. Gregoras I, 90–91, 303.8–11. Kantakouzenos' usage of the figure of Fortune in his historical memoirs has been studied in detail by A. Kazhdan, “L'Histoire de Kantakouzenos en tant qu'oeuvre littéraire,” B, 50 (1980), 279–335. On Gregoras, see E. Moutsopoulos, “La notion de ‘kairicité’ historique chez Nicéphore Grégoras,” *Byzantina*, 4 (1972), 207–13.

¹⁴ Gregoras I, 108–09, 384–86.

¹⁵ Gregoras II, 753–54. Nevertheless he criticized Anna of Savoy for not opposing Turkish raids on the Balkans, described her as a spiteful woman and accused her of lending support to his enemy Gregory Palamas. See *ibid.*, 702, 747, 761–62, 778, 789, 887. His critique of Kantakouzenos begins in his account of events after the end of the Second Civil War in 1347. See table 4.

the task of a historian such as himself to pass a judgment on these convictions. Yet often Fortune determined outcomes, and in this case historians were not justified in praising or criticizing individuals.¹⁶ An example of this way of looking at the past is Gregoras' presentation of the military policies of Andronikos II. The historian refrained from making use of Pachymeres' criticism of Andronikos II for hiring during the period 1302–04 contingents of Alans and Catalans, who ravaged the territory of the empire instead of fighting the Turks. Gregoras instead praised the emperor for having invited the foreign mercenaries and mused upon the ways that Fortune foiled the emperor's excellent plans for the defense of Asia Minor.¹⁷

Parochial concerns and personal loyalties also colored the historians' criticism of the emperor. Involvement in high politics and dynastic conflicts led to biased, one-sided portrayals of individual emperors. George Akropolites was Michael VIII's grand logothete when he was writing his chronicle of the Nicaean empire. He found fault with all Nicaean emperors and was thus in a position to introduce the first Palaiologos, who overthrew the Laskarid dynasty, as the hero of his chronicle. A more honest judge of contemporary emperors than Akropolites was Theodore Skoutariotes, the probable author of *Synopsis Chronike*, who was a unionist during the reign of Michael VIII. In his world chronicle he paraphrased Akropolites' work and introduced laudatory characterizations of the Nicaean emperors and the patriarch Arsenios, yet he avoided criticism of his patron, Michael VIII. The historian Gregoras was an active supporter of Andronikos II during the First Civil War. He presented a laudatory and at times apologetic portrait of the elder Andronikos and blamed his grandson, Andronikos III, for provoking the bloody internecine strife. Gregoras left a mixed portrait of the emperor John VI Kantakouzenos: he followed with sympathy John Kantakouzenos' struggle against the regency government of John V during the Second Civil War (1341–47), yet when he reaches the point where Kantakouzenos victoriously entered Constantinople in 1347, he changes his view of him, because Kantakouzenos began from that point on to support Gregoras' enemy, the theologian Gregory Palamas. The emperor John VI Kantakouzenos himself had an easily discernible agenda in his historical memoirs. They were a personal apology for his involvement in two disastrous civil wars that left Byzantium in ruins. Kantakouzenos strove to portray himself as a defender of the dynastic rights of the Palaiologan emperors. He played down criticism of the elderly Andronikos II, assigning

¹⁶ Gregoras II, 645–46. In some cases, however, virtue was able to overcome fortune. See Gregoras II, 361.1–9.

¹⁷ Gregoras I, 226.18–227.4.

blame for the First Civil War to poor imperial advisers such as Theodore Metochites.¹⁸ He presented Andronikos III as his “brother” and himself as defender of the legitimate rights to the succession of Andronikos III’s son, John V Palaiologos, during the Second Civil War.¹⁹

GEORGE PACHYMERES, GEORGE OF PELAGONIA AND THE
LEGEND OF EMPEROR JOHN THE MERCIFUL

One remarkable historian, George Pachymeres, and one equally remarkable historical biographer, George of Pelagonia, can easily redeem the relative dearth of sound historical analysis and the narrowly personal perspectives on the past of their contemporaries. The two authors strongly attacked the Palaiologan tax system and succession practices. Both pitted old notions of public power against the Palaiologan regime, and both used the empire of Nicaea as a historical foil for criticizing the Palaiologoi. The historian George Pachymeres was the author of a history covering the period from about 1256 until 1307, that is, the entire reign of Michael VIII and about half of that of Andronikos II. The *History* of Pachymeres is the most sophisticated piece of historical writing of the period, both in its rational analysis of past events and in its complex, at times bewildering, Attic prose. The career and writings of Pachymeres provide enough information to enable one to sketch a portrait of the author. He fits closely the profile of other learned scholar-bureaucrats who flourished during the reign of Andronikos II. Born in the city of Nicaea during the heyday of the Laskarid empire, Pachymeres possessed enormous secular learning and was interested in rhetoric and classical philosophy. His other great intellectual achievement, besides his *History*, was a paraphrase of most of the Aristotelian corpus.²⁰ Unlike other learned scholar-bureaucrats, such as Choumnos and Metochites, Pachymeres worked in the patriarchal administration and was ordained a deacon. He began his career during the reign of Michael VIII, when we find him occupying the professorial post of “Teacher of the Apostle,” and he was a close associate of the unionist patriarch

¹⁸ Kantakouzenos I, 84.

¹⁹ See F. Dölger, “Johannes VI. Kantakouzenos als dynastischer Legitimist,” SK, 10, 19–30; repr. in F. Dölger, *PARASPORA* (Ettal, 1961), 194–207.

²⁰ F. Littig, *Die Philosophia des Georg Pachymeres* (Munich, 1891); B. Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, trans. N. Moutafakis (Indianapolis, 2003), 197–98. For a discussion of the rest of Pachymeres’ works (rhetorical, philosophical, and theological, and a textbook on the quadrivium), see A. Failler, *Pachymeres I.i, XXI–XXII*; S. Lampakes, *Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης. Πρωτέκδικος και δικαιοφύλαξ, εισαγωγικό δοκίμιο* (Athens, 2004).



Plate 3. George Pachymeres, Codex Monacensis gr. 442 (14th c.), f. 6 verso, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich

John XI Bekkos (1275–82).²¹ During the reign of Andronikos II he rose further in the hierarchy of patriarchal officials, and at the time he was completing the *History* (shortly after 1307) he held the important judicial offices of *dikaiophylax* and *protekdikos*, which were part of the hierarchy of patriarchal officials.²² His employment as a high-standing judge doubtless put him in close contact with daily social reality and broadened his scope beyond the limited world of the court and the imperial capital. Still, throughout his lifetime Pachymeres seems to have maintained close connections with the imperial court and was a confidant of all the emperors. Michael VIII, Andronikos II, and Michael IX trusted Pachymeres sufficiently to share with him important information and to handpick him to perform important ad hoc tasks.²³ Pachymeres was indeed a shrewd survivor in the dangerous world of early Palaiologan politics, while at the same time maintaining a degree of critical distance and, most importantly, independent judgment. In the early months of 1283 the anti-unionists gained the upper hand within the church and purged the patriarchal administration of Latin-minded ecclesiastics. The *dikaiophylax* Theodore Skoutariotes, whose office Pachymeres later came to occupy, lost his job and was excommunicated for his unionist convictions. Pachymeres stayed on and even

²¹ As "Teacher of the Apostle" in 1277 Pachymeres ranked ninth among the patriarchal officials who signed a document in support of the Union. See J. Darrouzès, *Recherches sur les OFFICIA de l'Église byzantine* (Paris, 1970), 112–23, 532.9; cf. Pachymeres I.i, XIX–XX. The close association between Pachymeres and Bekkos emerges from a number of episodes in the *History*. When in 1279 Patriarch John XI Bekkos decided to resign from the patriarchate after an embezzlement scandal in the church, he entrusted Pachymeres with writing his letter of resignation. See Pachymeres I.ii, 575.29–30. Cf. Laurent, *Regestes*, 1443. When John Bekkos received in December 1282 a *prostagma* issued by Andronikos II informing him of the death of his father, Michael VIII, the patriarch showed it first to Pachymeres. See Pachymeres II.iii, 21.14–22. Pachymeres reported Bekkos' prophetic dreams (I.i, 171) and described with sympathy his mistreatment by Michael VIII (I.i, 297–301; I.ii, 483–85; 569–71).

²² On the function of these two offices see Darrouzès, *Recherches sur les OFFICIA*, 327–29; R. Macrides, "Dikaiophylax," ODB, vol. 1, 624. It can be assumed that Pachymeres completed his *History* shortly after 1307, the year when his account suddenly breaks off, most likely because of the author's death.

²³ In 1265 Michael VIII chose Pachymeres, at that time a young notary in the patriarchate, to be part of a delegation which visited the exiled patriarch Arsenios in his prison on the island of Prokonnesos. See Pachymeres I.ii, 373. Michael VIII also talked to Pachymeres about his "poverty" before he was elected regent in September 1258. See Pachymeres I.i, 103.4–8, where the author reports somewhat disapprovingly Michael VIII's claims of poverty. Andronikos II, while residing in Nymphaion in Asia Minor (1290–93), entrusted Pachymeres with conducting negotiations with the Latin ambassadors of the King of Naples, Charles II (1285–1309), regarding the possible betrothal of Michael IX Palaiologos to Catherine of Courtenay. See Pachymeres II.iii, 171.19–25. In 1301 Andronikos II again selected Pachymeres to interview an aged official of John III Vatatzes regarding Nicaean fiscal practices. See Pachymeres II.iv, 325.32–327.2. Michael IX Palaiologos was close enough to Pachymeres to talk to him about the rebellion and the blinding of the general Alexios Philanthropenos (1296). See Pachymeres II.iii, 239.32–35.

climbed higher on the ladder of the patriarchal administration.²⁴ Yet, unlike Theodore Skoutariotes (the likely author of the *Synopsis Chronike*), Pachymeres did not present a honeyed image of the rulers in a lackluster world chronicle. The very proximity to the imperial court which made other historians parochial was for Pachymeres a unique opportunity to observe with a critical eye the problems of early Palaiologan society. He was a harsh critic of Michael VIII, whose portrait he painted with a great sense of sarcasm, and he ventured to criticize even the contemporary emperor Andronikos II and his government.

The second important critic of the Palaiologoi was George of Pelagonia (known also as George the Philosopher), a Byzantine classical scholar whose literary activity is traceable in the middle and second half of the fourteenth century. George of Pelagonia composed a panegyric biography of the Nicaean emperor John III Vatatzes more than a century after the latter's death, at a time when he was the object of saintly veneration. This work – a product of the intellectual and political milieu of the second half of the fourteenth century – falls outside the chronological limits of our inquiry. Yet the depth of its criticism of the ruling dynasty and the similarity between its approach to the Nicaean past and that of Pachymeres' *History* warrant its inclusion in our discussion. Precious little is known about the author himself. Born in the town of Pelagonia (Bitola) in Macedonia, George had a considerable secular education and was interested in grammar and classical philosophy.²⁵ He opposed the mystical theology of Palamism in the mid-fourteenth century and about 1354 wrote a polemical treatise directed

²⁴ On the conviction of Skoutariotes, see Pachymeres II.iii, 65.

²⁵ August Heisenberg published the panegyric biography of Vatatzes in 1905 with the title "Life of St. John the Merciful" on the basis of the fifteenth-century Vat. gr. 579. He was not aware of its author, because the manuscript which he used transmits the work as anonymous, and attributed it to a monk from Magnesia. See A. Heisenberg, "Kaiser Johannes Batatzes der Barmherzige," BZ, 14 (1905), 160–233. One year later, in 1906, Nicola Festa published a short study of the text. Although he did not solve the problem of authorship, he showed that the text in the manuscript is an autograph draft of the author and contains his own interlinear and marginal revisions. Festa argued, quite rightly, that the saint's life is an encomium in form and that its title, "Life" (Bios), is an addition by a later hand. See N. Festa, "À propos d'une biographie de St. Jean le Miséricordieux," VV, 13 (1906), 1–35. In 1927 Gyula Moravcsik brought to light another fifteenth-century Vatican manuscript of the work, Vat. gr. 2129, and demonstrated that the text in this manuscript was a copy of the corrected version in Vat. gr. 579, with the significant addition of the author's name in the title: τοῦ Πελαγονίως (sic). As Moravcsik observed, this could be no one else than George of Pelagonia, the only literatus of the Palaiologan period bearing the surname "of Pelagonia." See G. Moravcsik, "Der Verfasser der mittelgriechischen Legende von Johannes dem Barmherzigen," BZ, 27 (1927), 36–39. In 1957 Konstantinos Amantos announced the existence of a third, post-Byzantine manuscript of the work which, according to him, does not offer any significant new readings: Cod. Sinait. gr. 2015. See K. Amantos, "'Ο βίος Ἰωάννου Βατάτζη τοῦ Ἐλεήμονος," in Προσφορά εἰς Στίλπωνα Π. Κυριακίδη (Thessaloniki, 1953), 29–34. George of Pelagonia is a shadowy figure in the history of Palaiologan literary culture. See PLP, no. 4116. That he was born in the town of Pelagonia (Bitola) can be deduced from his

against the Hesychast theologian Gregory Palamas, which remains unpublished.²⁶ He composed the laudatory biography of John III Vatatzes not long after 1371, at a time when he was living in or visiting Constantinople.²⁷ Unfortunately, it is not known how George of Pelagonia made a living – whether as a salaried imperial official or possibly as a teacher – but he was certainly not a bishop, as has been hypothesized.²⁸ The humanistic and secular

surname “the Pelagonian” (Πελαγών or Πελαγονίος) or “of Pelagonia.” In addition to the life of John Vatatzes, two other works of his are extant and still unpublished: a treatise on grammar and a polemical tract against Gregory Palamas. See E. Granstrom, “Katalog grecheskikh rukopisei leningradskikh khraishch,” VV, 31 (1971), 136 (treatise on grammar in St. Petersburg, Sobr. gr. 489); A. Martini and D. Bassi, *Catalogus codicum Graecorum Bibliothecae Ambrosianae* (Milan, 1906), 245 (polemical tract against Palamas in Ambr. gr. 223 (D 28 sup.)). George of Pelagonia left a note in a manuscript containing the *Physics* and *On the Heavens* of Aristotle. This is Ambr. gr. 512 (M 46 sup.), where he signed his name as George the Philosopher of Pelagonia. This manuscript belonged once to the emperor Theodore II Laskaris; then it became a property of George of Pelagonia and finally passed into the hands of the scholar John Chortasmenos (ca. 1370–before 1439). See Martini and Bassi, *Catalogus*, 617–18; G. Prato, “Un autografo di Teodoro II Lascaris imperatore di Nicca,” JÖB, 30 (1981), 250, n. 13. On the first folio George of Pelagonia commented critically on a note by Theodore II Laskaris: “May no one say this, namely that a book has been read by someone. For this is not a big enough achievement, but the reader is praiseworthy only if, having read the book, he thinks about it, no matter what his judgment is. And he would thus appear to be a lover of letters and much worthier than the one who never excels in matters of learning or than the critic of ‘the great folly’ of people pursuing intellectual subjects.”

²⁶ Moravcsik, “Der Verfasser,” 38, dated the work to about 1354, without adducing any evidence. J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959), 413, mentioned the text in his list of sources on the Palamite controversy, but did not assign to it any date.

²⁷ The dating of the text has been the subject of controversy. George of Pelagonia mentioned or alluded to a few events of the late fourteenth century. Two which have been noted by scholars are the conflict between John VI Kantakouzenos and Genoa in 1348 and the Turkish sack of Adrianople in 1369. On the date of the former event, see Festa, “À propos d'une biographie,” 15–17. A. Heisenberg, BZ, 14 (1905), 162, considered 1361 to be the date of Adrianople's capture and dated the text to approximately 1365–70. In the meantime E. Zachariadou, “The Conquest of Adrianople by the Turks,” *Studi Veneziani*, 12 (1970), 211–17, has shown that Adrianople fell in 1369. In fact, the author refers to the emperors of his day as tributaries to the Turkish rulers and therefore must have been writing after 1371, when, as a result of the battle on the Maritza, Byzantium began to pay tribute to the Turks. See Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 194.19–21: καὶ δουλεύουσι νῦν αἰσχυρῶς δυσμενεῖσι βαρβάροις φόρους ἀπάγοντες, καὶ ποιοῦσι κατ' ἀνάγκην τὰ προσταττόμενα. Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, “Byzance, état tributaire de l'Empire turc,” ZRVI, 5 (1958), 49–58. On the other hand, George of Pelagonia must have written the biography not long after 1371, if we are to accept that he was involved in the Hesychast controversy in the 1350s. Therefore a date of composition in the early fifteenth century, as suggested by Festa “À propos d'une biographie,” 17–18, is improbable. Festa has pointed to a number of passages indicating that the author was addressing a Constantinopolitan audience. To the examples which Festa has adduced, one may also add George of Pelagonia's digression about the slothful Byzantine soldiers and mariners living in Constantinople in his own time. He professed to have seen them with his own eyes. See Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 228.1–21.

²⁸ See H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 723. Cf. A.-M. Talbot, “George the Philosopher,” ODB, vol. 2, 838–39. According to Moravcsik, “Der Verfasser,” 38–39, George of Pelagonia may have been the abbot of the monastery of Saint Demetrios in Pelagonia. These hypotheses are implausible for several reasons. For one thing, no source refers to him as bishop or monk. His name “the Pelagonian” indicates a place of origin rather than being a reference to an ecclesiastical see. One may compare him to the patriarch Gregory of Cyprus (Γρηγόριος Κύπριος)

interests of an anti-Palamite are evident in his biography of Vatatzes, which he filled with about forty quotations from classical authors, mostly Plato.²⁹ Although his subject was a holy man, George of Pelagonia never called the emperor a saint and referred to him instead as “emperor John the Thracian,” “emperor John” or simply “the admirable John.”³⁰ He avoided the clichés and the providential scheme of causality characteristic of saints' lives. Only after lengthily giving the biography and describing the accomplishments of Vatatzes did the author mention briefly, almost as an afterthought, one posthumous healing miracle worked by the saint's relics. His lack of interest in sainthood is quite noteworthy in the fourteenth century, when the patriarchate of Constantinople established a procedure for the official sanctioning of the legitimacy of new saints based on examining their miracles – a kind of canonization.³¹ This suggests that George of Pelagonia was not addressing an ecclesiastical audience and, not surprisingly, the patriarchate of Constantinople recognized the emperor John Vatatzes as Saint John the Merciful only in the late seventeenth century.³² Rather, his self-proclaimed

or the scholar George of Trebizond (Γεώργιος Τραπεζούντιος), who were born in Cyprus and Trebizond, respectively. Second, an anti-Palamite like George of Pelagonia was unlikely to have held a post in the church after the triumph of Palamism in 1354. Third, Pelagonia was in Serb hands from the early 1340s until its fall to the Turks in 1385. See G. Soulis, *The Serbs and Byzantium in the Reign of Tsar Stephan Dušan and His Successors* (Washington, 1984), 19 ff., 156. The issues which George of Pelagonia discussed concerned Byzantine politics, and there are references, as we have seen, to Constantinople. By contrast, when the author spoke of Vatatzes' reconquest of Macedonia in the 1240s, he declined to dwell on this and referred his audience to history books for additional information. See Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 224.27–28. There is a possibility that George of Pelagonia was identical with another George the Philosopher, who appears in the sources under different names: George the Philosopher, George Gabrielopoulos, and George Kydones. See PLP 3433. This George was a physician by profession and is known mostly from the letters of Demetrios Kydones. He lived in Constantinople until 1361, when he left the city because of suspicions of disloyalty to John V. He traveled extensively (in Cyprus, the Holy Land, Crete, the Morea, Genoa, and Venice) and in 1383 was pardoned by John V. On his life and career see F. Tinnefeld, “Georgios Philosophos. Ein Korrespondent und Freund des Demetrios Kydones,” OCP, 38 (1972), 141–71. One has to admit that there are some similarities between the two literati named George the Philosopher. Both were anti-Palamites, both considered Plato to be their favorite philosopher, both were critical of the regime of John V. On the other hand, George Gabrielopoulos Kydones originated from Thessaloniki, not from Pelagonia, and never used the surname Pelagonios. Therefore this identification has to be rejected.

²⁹ See J. Praechter, “Zum Enkomium auf Kaiser Johannes Batatzes den Barmherzigen,” BZ, 16 (1907), 143–48. There are numerous quotations from *Gorgias*, *The Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Laws*, and *Timaeus*. The quotes from Christian authors are much less in number.

³⁰ Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 195.14, 197.29, 210.6, 211.10, 213.11.

³¹ The most recent case of such a canonization was that of Gregory Palamas in 1369. See R. Macrides, “Saints and Sainthood in the Early Palaiologan Period,” in S. Hackel (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint* (San Bernardino, 1983), 69–71.

³² John Vatatzes was officially recognized as a saint shortly before or during the term in office of Patriarch Parthenios IV (1657–62). See M. Gedeon, *Πατριαρχικά πίνakes* (Istanbul, 1884), 587–88; Macrides, “Saints and Sainthood,” 71. His name still appears in the calendar of the orthodox church on 4 November. A seventeenth-century saint's life of Vatatzes seems to reflect a local

goal was to perpetuate the emperor's memory and, most importantly, to provide his contemporaries with a model ruler against whom they would be able to judge the abilities of contemporary emperors.³³

The work by George of Pelagonia defies traditional generic classifications and may be called a panegyric biography. The author appears to have derived all his factual information from the histories of Choniates, Akropolites, and Skoutariotes, or possibly other historical works which have not survived. He fitted the episodes of the emperor's life into the rhetorical form of imperial panegyric and employed traditional rhetorical devices, such as comparisons of the ruler with classical and biblical figures. Most of the biographical information he provided for Vatatzes' life is attested in earlier sources and is undoubtedly historically accurate.³⁴ In two cases, in order to make the image of Vatatzes more glamorous, George of Pelagonia narrated accomplishments for which he or his alleged ancestors were not responsible. The author related at length the story of the military exploits of the grand domestic John Komnenos Vatatzes (late twelfth century), about whom he appears to have read in Choniates and whom he made the emperor's grandfather.³⁵ He also had Vatatzes defeat and kill in battle the Seljuk sultan Kaykhusraw I (1192–96, 1204–11), which was actually a famous exploit of Theodore I Laskaris at the battle of

popular tradition in the region of Magnesia – it has been republished by J. Langdon, *Byzantium's Last Imperial Offensive in Asia Minor* (New Rochelle, 1992), 88–117. In 1931 Hippolyte Delchaye announced the discovery of what then seemed to be an early saint's life of the emperor written by Constantine Akropolites (d. ca. 1324), the historian's son. See H. Delchaye, "Constantini Acropolitae hagiographi byzantini epistularum manipulus," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 51 (1931), 266. Cf. F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 3rd edn. (Brussels, 1957), no. 934c. This *vita*, or rather account of the saint's posthumous healing miracles, deals with a different thirteenth-century saint, who was born in Lampsakos and was a soldier. While the cult of the saintly emperor was centered on the region around Magnesia, this saint was venerated in Nicaea. He was surnamed "the Younger" most probably in order to be differentiated from Vatatzes. See D. Polemis, "The Speech of Constantine Akropolites on St. John Merciful the Young," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 91 (1973), 31–54.

³³ Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 195.6–13, 195.31–34.

³⁴ George of Pelagonia borrowed from the *History* of Akropolites the episodes of the battle of Poimnenon (ca. 1224), the rebellion of the Nestoroi brothers (1224), the siege of Constantinople (1235–36), and the construction of the fleet. See Akropolites I, 34–38, 51–52, 59; Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 219–220, 221–222, 226.35–227.6. The mention of Vatatzes' financial support for the churches of Constantinople during the Latin occupation of the city may have been derived from *Synopsis Chronike*, MB, vol. 7, 508–09. Cf. A. Heisenberg, BZ, 14 (1905), 222–24.

³⁵ *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J.-L. van Dieten, 262–64 (cf. the fourteenth-century vernacular paraphrase of Choniates' *History*, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1835), 340–43); Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 199–206. George of Pelagonia altered the name of Vatatzes' supposed grandfather from John to Constantine and never indicated which of the latter's two sons was Vatatzes' father, while changing their names from Manuel and Alexios to Nikephoros and Theodore. This "information" has no historical value for reconstructing Vatatzes' family biography. The identity of his parents is unknown from contemporary sources.

Antioch-on-the-Meander in 1211.³⁶ In addition, an episode which is clearly fictitious was inserted into the panegyric biography. An English nobleman (brother of the king of England) had allegedly asked for the hand in marriage of Theodore I Laskaris' daughter, and Vatatzes was made to defeat spectacularly the foreign rival in a wrestling bout.³⁷

The two historians-critics of the Palaiologoi raised the Nicaean emperor John III Vatatzes to the pedestal of a model of kingship and historical antithesis to the dynasty which ruled Byzantium after the Laskarids. George Pachymeres and George of Pelagonia were neither subtle nor rhetorical in using the historical memory of the Nicaean empire. Pachymeres announced in the very preface to his *History* that Byzantium lost Asia Minor because it abandoned the sound fiscal and diplomatic policies of the Nicaean emperors.³⁸ George of Pelagonia also declared in the introduction to his panegyric biography that he was providing his contemporaries with a yardstick for judging the Palaiologoi.³⁹ When presenting Vatatzes' biography, he often slipped into a direct critique of the Palaiologan dynasty. The two authors chose to construct their critiques of the Palaiologoi in the way they did because they found in Vatatzes a credible and universally recognized symbol of good and just kingship. In the early Palaiologan period fables and legends had grown around the figure of Vatatzes – legends known and exploited both in popular milieux and by the court. The reasons for idealizing the Nicaean past are not hard to discern. The empire of Nicaea had succeeded in establishing a well-functioning central administration and had been constantly on the offensive in order to recover lost territories after 1204. As the Turks overran Asia Minor in the late thirteenth century, the Greek Anatolian population remembered Vatatzes' reign as a halcyon time of relative peace and prosperity. Vatatzes' burial place in the monastery of the Virgin Sosandra near Magnesia (the family shrine of the Laskarids) became a pilgrimage center of saintly veneration. On account of his legendary generosity to the poor, the local population remembered him as St. John the Merciful. The historian Pachymeres provides the earliest historical testimony of his saint's cult. Relating the story of the siege of Magnesia by the Turks in 1303, he mentions having overheard from "many and reliable witnesses" accounts of an unusual, miraculous event. In 1302 the junior emperor Michael IX Palaiologos (1294–1320) took residence in the city of Magnesia and assumed its defense together with an Alan mercenary force.

³⁶ Akropolites I, 16–17; Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 215–217.

³⁷ Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 212–13.

³⁸ Pachymeres I.i, 23–35.

³⁹ Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 195.6–13.

He accomplished little and left Magnesia in the winter of the following year. Then, suddenly, Saint John the Merciful began to appear at night along the city walls dressed in full imperial regalia. He proved his sanctity by miraculously restoring hearing to a deaf man, urged the population to defend the city, and declared that he had become its protector.⁴⁰ The circulation of this story among the embattled townsmen of Magnesia shows their nostalgia for the Nicaean past, their sense of abandonment by the Palaiologoi, and their search for a saintly defender against the Turks.

The Palaiologoi themselves were keen to appropriate the historical memory of Vatatzes. The imperial panegyrics of Michael VIII flaunted Vatatzes as the emperor's uncle who had raised the first Palaiologos and had recognized his extraordinary abilities as a warrior. In his propagandist autobiography Michael VIII presented himself as the heir to Vatatzes, whose grandniece he had married.⁴¹ He also used Vatatzes' negotiations with the papacy (in the period 1250–54) as the historical model for his own Union of Lyons (1274–82).⁴² In 1301 Andronikos II invoked the memory of Vatatzes as a rigorous collector of taxes in order to parry the church's opposition to raising the excise tax on salt and iron.⁴³ And in 1305, faced with the disastrous depredations of Asia Minor and Thrace by the Catalan Grand Company, Andronikos II defended himself in a public address before the leading officials and dignitaries of empire by pointing to the example of the great Vatatzes, who also had employed Latin mercenaries.⁴⁴ Pachymeres, who reported the propagandist uses of Vatatzes' figure by the Palaiologoi, offered a veiled response in his *History* and turned the historical memory of the Laskarids against the ruling dynasty. Doubtless

⁴⁰ Pachymeres II.iv, 347–49, 439–41. A manuscript of the *History* of Akropolites, which dates to the fourteenth or fifteenth century (Vat. gr. 166), contains a marginal gloss which refers to Vatatzes as St. John the Merciful. See Akropolites I, 32.13 (*apparatus criticus*).

⁴¹ H. Grégoire, "Imperatoris Michaelis Palaeologi de Vita Sua," B, 29–30 (1959–60), 49. Cf. chapter 3, pp. 124–25.

⁴² Pachymeres I.ii, 471.13–17. Gregoras I, 129. The embassy to Rome at that time had been led by the metropolitan of Sardis Andronikos and the metropolitan of Kysikos George and had included the future patriarch Arsenios. Cf. chapter 11, p. 367.

⁴³ Pachymeres II.iv, 321–27. The patriarch John XII Kosmas (1294–1303) had protested against higher excise taxes because they led to price increases. Andronikos II had a certain Angelos, *logaristes tes aules* at the time of Vatatzes, write a statement which was read in front of the patriarch. According to his testimony, Nicaean tax officials who failed to collect the predesignated amount of taxes faced a harsh punishment. One of them was beaten to death on the emperor's orders. Another fled to Trebizond, fearing punishment.

⁴⁴ Pachymeres II.iv, 597. Andronikos II is said to have referred to a Western mercenary by the name of William (Γουλιέλμος). The identification suggested by Albert Failler of this William with Goulamos (Γουλάμος), lord of Albanon, mentioned by Akropolites I, 91.11, is not probable.

the Nicaean ruler commanded respect and authority among the historian's audience.

THE CRITICS AND THEIR IDEAS

When Pachymeres was completing his *History* in the first decade of the fourteenth century, the Turks had already overrun the whole of the Anatolian countryside and the Byzantines retained a foothold in only a few cities, including the historian's native Nicaea. In his *History* Pachymeres used economic reasoning to explain the fall of Asia Minor to the Turks. He paid enormous attention to tax collection and tax redistribution. The historian often called these taxes "public taxes."⁴⁵ He and Kantakouzenos were the only late Byzantine historians to speak of a "public treasury," a designation which they used interchangeably with the more conventional expression "imperial treasury."⁴⁶ In the introduction to his *History* Pachymeres set out clearly the contrast between Nicaean and Palaiologan taxation policies. Here he singled out two wise policies of the Nicaean rulers, policies which the Palaiologoi abandoned with detrimental consequences. First, the Laskarids of Nicaea had provided the Byzantine border soldiers living along the Turkish frontier with salaries, military holdings (*pronoiai*), and generous tax exemptions on their privately owned landed properties. Thus the fighting spirit of the soldiers grew in tandem with their economic prosperity, and they put up a very successful resistance against the Turks.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Pachymeres called imperial taxation "public taxation" (κοινή εἰσπράξις). See Pachymeres I.i, 99.17 and further n. 46. A favorite expression of the historian for designating imperial taxation was "the common [public] contributions" (κοινὰ συνδόσεις). See Pachymeres I.i, 99.12; II.iv, 339.11. Cf. Pachymeres II.iv, 543.1–2 (taxation practices among the Genoese of Pera). In two cases Pachymeres spoke of the "public funds" (τὰ κοινά). See Pachymeres I.i, 101.11, 105.5.

⁴⁶ Pachymeres used two expressions, "the public treasury" (κοινὸν ταμεῖον) and "the imperial treasury" (βασιλικὸν ταμεῖον), to describe the fisc. On the latter expression, see Pachymeres I.i, 33.9, 77.29, 97.20, 307.18. On the former, see Pachymeres I.i, 139.17, 253.16, 293.7, 307.27, 313.18; II.iii, 81.11, 81.30, 179.31; II.iv, 325.24, 629.15. That he was speaking about the same treasury becomes obvious in a passage where he uses the two expressions interchangeably. See Pachymeres I.i, 307. Kantakouzenos distinguishes between the "imperial treasury" (βασιλικὸν ταμεῖον) and the "public fisc" (δημόσιον). For the former expression, see Kantakouzenos I, 167.11–12, 202.20–21, 203.18, 279.21–22, 311.17–18, 338.15, 380.6; II, 89.13–14, 100.20–21, 149.2. For the latter, see Kantakouzenos II, 89.17, 279.12; III, 81.4–5, 188.21. Yet Kantakouzenos also used the two expressions interchangeably. See Kantakouzenos II, 89. By contrast, Akropolites and Gregoras speak simply of "the imperial treasury" and call it most often βασιλικὸν ταμεῖον. See Akropolites I, 6.9, 6.27; Gregoras I, 191.2, 220.21, 242.14, 263.9, 317.20, 524.17; II, 789.17, 790.5; III, 243.24. The expression βασιλικὸν πρυτανεῖον is restricted to Gregoras: Gregoras I, 69.21–22, 101.16, 138.11, 205.12–13, 222.23–24, 396.10, 425.19, 566.11–12; II, 595.22, 603.8, 666.2, 854.17.

⁴⁷ Pachymeres I.i, 29.20–31.20. The historian spoke of tax exemptions (ὀτελείαι), *pronoiai*, and other "daily acts of generosity" (καθημερινὰ βασιλικά φιλοτιμίαι). The last expression probably refers to the payment of salaries.

However, after 1261 Michael VIII made the fatal decision to tax their properties and reduced significantly the size of their *pronoiai* holdings.⁴⁸ The impoverished border soldiers – former guardians of the frontier – found themselves in dire economic straits; some migrated away from border areas and others joined forces with the Turks in raiding Byzantium. It was this social explanation of the loss of Asia Minor, intimately bound to Palaiologan fiscal policies, which Pachymeres pursued systematically in the body of his *History*.

The second historical explanation of the Turkish conquest which Pachymeres proposed in the introduction concerned the empire's foreign policy. The Nicaean emperors had been wise enough not to fight simultaneous wars on two fronts, in Asia Minor and in the Balkans.⁴⁹ Thus they were able to concentrate the empire's limited military resources on one critical spot at a time. The Palaiologoi did not adhere to this policy and overextended themselves in wars in Asia and in Europe. To be sure, Pachymeres reported here a criticism of Michael VIII with which we are already familiar: in his second panegyric delivered in Nicaea in the period 1290–93, the young Theodore Metochites urged Andronikos II to forget about the West and devote every effort to defending Asia Minor.⁵⁰ Pachymeres' historical commentary on the empire's foreign policies was more sophisticated than Metochites' panegyric one. The historian played down the individual responsibility of the Palaiologoi by noting the difficult geopolitical reality they faced. The despotate of Epiros was a recalcitrant enemy that constantly siphoned the empire's resources away from the East.⁵¹ According to Pachymeres, history itself showed its wry face to the Palaiologoi. The reconquest of Constantinople in 1261 tragically turned the empire westward and made it harder for the Palaiologoi to follow Laskarid policies. The absence of the Byzantine emperors from Asia Minor after 1261 disheartened the local population and created conditions ripe for corruption among local tax officials.⁵² Pachymeres reported that a member of Michael VIII's close circle, the *protasekretis* Michael Senacherim, had exclaimed upon learning of the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, "May no one cherish hopes for the future, because the Romans again have set foot in the City."⁵³ By 1307, when Pachymeres was completing his *History*, these words must have sounded like a fulfilled prophecy.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.23–33.11. Pachymeres attributed the initiative for this detrimental innovation to a certain Chadenos, who may have been the tax official Constantine Chadenos known from the documents of the Lembiotissa archive. See MM, vol. 4, 285. Cf. Dölger, *Regesten*, 2010a.

⁴⁹ Pachymeres I.i, 27.19–29.19. ⁵⁰ See chapter 5, pp. 169–72. ⁵¹ Pachymeres I.i, 35.14–23.

⁵² Pachymeres I.ii, 405.23–407.20, 633.26–635.9. ⁵³ Pachymeres I.i, 205.

Pachymeres held the Palaiologoi personally responsible for the fiscal mismanagement of the empire. The historian was particularly preoccupied with showing how Michael VIII frittered away the funds diligently gathered by the Laskarids and misused the public fisc. For Pachymeres, the seeds of the disaster were sown during the three-year period (1258–61) when Michael VIII Palaiologos consolidated his hold on power, was elected co-emperor, and deposed and blinded the child-emperor John IV Laskaris. Pachymeres' emphasis on this transition led him to give an unbalanced account of the reign of the first Palaiologos. Two of the six books devoted to the reign of Michael VIII (1259–82) describe in detail the memorable events of this three-year transitional period. One of the crucially important episodes in his *History* was the blinding of the last Laskarid emperor on Christmas Eve 1261. According to the historian, this event was "the beginning of great troubles for the Romans and the cause for an intolerable political turmoil."⁵⁴ The criminal breach of oaths which accompanied Michael VIII's accession to the throne as a sole emperor led to the Arsenite schism (1265–1310) and alienated the hearts and minds of the Anatolian population from the Palaiologoi. Most importantly, however, a number of fiscal and administrative changes marked the accession of Michael VIII. It was in this context of the political transition between Nicaea and the Palaiologan state that Pachymeres opposed the two rival models of taxation.

According to Pachymeres, Vatatzes viewed tax money and the taxable properties of the subjects as public property. Therefore he spent as little tax wealth as he could, maintaining extensive crown lands and private imperial flocks which provided him with most of the revenues necessary for imperial administration. Pachymeres made the most important observations on the nature of Nicaean finances after describing the election in September 1258 of Michael Palaiologos as regent governing in the name of the underage John Laskaris. This post gave Palaiologos access for the first time to the hoarded wealth of the Laskarids. The historian praised the Nicaean emperors as competent financial managers and mentioned that both John III Vatatzes and Theodore II Laskaris had left behind full treasuries. The treasury of Theodore II (kept in the fortress of Astritsios in the Troad) consisted entirely of tax monies. By contrast, the sole source for Vatatzes' treasury (kept in Magnesia) was revenues from crown properties and gifts from foreign rulers; it held no public taxes, the "livelihood of the people," as Pachymeres called

⁵⁴ Pachymeres I.i, 225.25–26: τὸ δ' ἦν ὅρα τὸ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις μεγάλων ἔρξαν κακῶν καὶ ταραχῆς ἀνυποπίστου ῥεχθέν.

them. Vatatzes used this private imperial wealth for overtly public purposes, such as paying officials their salaries.⁵⁵

Pachymeres turned Vatatzes' crown estates, whose existence is solidly attested in contemporary sources, into a model of just imperial finances.⁵⁶ The historian was at pains to stress Vatatzes' reluctance to spend tax wealth and related two telling anecdotes. The first was about a lesson in just rulership which Vatatzes taught his son Theodore II Laskaris. One day the young prince had gone hunting dressed in the imperial gold-embroidered clothes. When the father saw him returning in full regal splendor, he scolded him for having donned and flaunted garments paid for with the subjects' "blood" (that is, with tax money). Vatatzes advised his son to wear the luxurious imperial clothes only on important public occasions, such as the reception of foreign ambassadors.⁵⁷ In another anecdote that was meant to reveal Vatatzes' legendary generosity, Pachymeres underlined again his special attitude to tax wealth. Once, after having recovered from a serious sickness, Vatatzes decided to distribute as an act of thanksgiving gold coins to the poor urban populace in the empire. He gave out coins from his private purse, because he did not want to waste public tax money on individual expenditure. Vatatzes even called the Nicaean patriarch Manuel II (1243–54) to bear witness to the source of the money:

Wishing to defend himself before the Romans that the public funds were not depleted after he had distributed so great a quantity of alms, he [the emperor John III Vatatzes] called as a witness to his words before the patriarch Manuel the almsgiver himself [that is, John III Vatatzes himself] and said that no public funds had been wasted, but he had acquired these monies through his own diligence and care, by which he constantly cultivated lands, helped in this by knowledgeable experts, and raised various animal flocks in his estates.⁵⁸

Other similar anecdotes which illustrated Vatatzes' unwillingness to exploit tax wealth appear to have circulated widely during the fourteenth century. The historian Gregoras related a curious story of the Nicaean ruler using

⁵⁵ Pachymeres I.i, 97.21–30. The historian's language is worthy of note. Vatatzes' treasury in Magnesia did not consist of unjustly collected tax wealth (ἐκλογαί; εἰσπραξίς ἄδικος), which were the "livelihood of the people" (βίαι ἀνθρώπων) and the "blood of the poor" (αἵματα πενήτων), but came from revenue raised from private agricultural estates (ἐκ τῆς περὶ τὰ ἴδια προμηθείας; ἐκ γεωπονίας).

⁵⁶ See MM, vol. 4, 9, 142–44, 146–50. Cf. *Synopsis Chronike*, MB, vol. 7, 507.29–31.

⁵⁷ Pachymeres I.i, 61–63.

⁵⁸ Pachymeres I.i, 101.10–16: Καὶ Ῥωμαῖοις ἀπολογεῖσθαι θέλων ὡς ἀμείωτα τὰ κοινὰ, τοῦ τοσοῦτου προβάντος ἔλεου, αὐτὸν ἐκείνον τὸν ἐλέησαντα τῶν λεγομένων ἔφερε μάρτυρα πρὸς τὸν πατριάρχην Μανουήλ, λέγων ὡς οὐδὲν ἐξήντηται τῶν κοινῶν, ἀλλ' ἐκ προμηθείας κτήσεται τοῦτα καὶ μελέτης ἰδίας, ἐξ ὧν γεωπονῶν οὐκ ἀνίει δι' εἰδημόνων ἀνδρῶν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς δὴ τοῖς κτήμασι θρεμμάτων διαφόρων ἐπιμελούμενος.

the revenues of imperial chicken farms to purchase a crown for his wife, Eirene Laskarina. The empress's crown had become known among the appreciative Nicaean subjects as the "egg-crown."⁵⁹ In the late fourteenth century George of Pelagonia also praised Vatatzes for having distributed alms out of his own private assets and not out of the public taxes.⁶⁰

For Pachymeres, Michael VIII's tax policies were the polar opposite to those of Vatatzes. The first Palaiologos availed himself recklessly of the empire's tax wealth after he gained access to the Laskarid treasuries in the autumn of 1258. Writing with the hindsight of the early 1300s, when the government of Andronikos II was chronically short of money, the historian saw part of the problem in the senseless waste of a healthy fiscal surplus. He described scathingly how in 1258 and 1259 various social groups – senators, soldiers, and ecclesiastics – thronged to the side of Michael Palaiologos "like dogs" in order to receive a share of the Laskarid treasuries or a tax privilege.⁶¹ The new emperor issued so many charters of privilege in the second indiction (September 1258–September 1259) that he was later compelled to repeal some of them.⁶² The historian emphasized that the purpose of this generosity was to lure supporters for his usurpation.⁶³

Pachymeres' critique of Michael VIII, however, went much further than denouncing his wasteful policies. It focused on the ways in which Michael VIII used illegitimately the tax apparatus of the state to extort wealth from the population of Asia Minor. To illustrate Pachymeres' train of thought, we need to return to the episode of the lesson which Vatatzes taught his son Theodore Laskaris upon the latter's return from hunting. The historian put in the mouth of Vatatzes a fateful maxim. He instructed his son that "the wealth of the emperors is reckoned to be the wealth of the subjects. For this reason, it is absolutely unacceptable for subjects who are so [wealthy] to subordinate themselves in service to others."⁶⁴ Pachymeres did not elaborate further as to the kind of service and subjection to which he was referring,

⁵⁹ Gregoras I, 43. The eggs were sold to the Seljuk Turks, Nicaea's neighbors, who paid high prices for them during a famine.

⁶⁰ Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 231.25–33.

⁶¹ Pachymeres I.i, 105.5–9 (funds given to the church), III.27–113.1 (to officials), 139.3–8 (to senatorial dignitaries and soldiers).

⁶² Pachymeres I.i, 139. One of the short-lived privileges apparently was the conversion of the *pronoia* into a hereditary possession.

⁶³ In a passage describing Michael VIII's generous fiscal grants to the Byzantine marines and rowers (*gasmouloi* and *proselontes*), Pachymeres pondered the causes for this reckless generosity. He raised three hypotheses: Michael VIII was generous by nature, he wanted to enlist supporters for his coup, or he wanted to imitate the Nicaean emperors. Pachymeres rejected as improbable the first and the third hypotheses. See Pachymeres I.i, 255.12–20.

⁶⁴ Pachymeres I.i, 63.7–9: ὁ γὰρ βασιλέων πλοῦτος πλοῦτος τῶν ὑπηκόων λογίζεται· παρ' ἣν αἰτίαν καὶ τὸ εἰς δουλείαν καθυπεῖκιν ἑτέροις σφίσιν οὕτως ἔχουσι καὶ λίαν ἀπώμωτον.

but in another section of the *History* he was more straightforward: it was the voluntary subjection of the heavily taxed Byzantine population of Asia Minor to the Turks. Pachymeres dealt again with Michael VIII's taxation policies while describing the Turkish conquest of Paphlagonia and eastern Bithynia early in his reign.⁶⁵ The historian noted that Michael VIII squandered very rapidly the Laskarid treasuries which he had inherited, adding that the costly diplomatic dealings with the West drained further the fisc. Finding himself short of money, Michael VIII began to tax the previously tax-exempt population of Asia Minor. He ordered frequent fiscal surveys and imposed burdensome levies. This policy had fatal consequences. Although the peasants in Paphlagonia and eastern Bithynia were inhabiting a very fertile land and had plenty of foodstuffs, they were short of gold and silver coins in which the taxes were collected. After selling their produce, they could no longer sustain themselves. The border population approached the Turks, began to serve them as guides and informers, and took part in raiding expeditions against Byzantium. Thus, under the burden of rapacious taxation, the Byzantine population turned away from agriculture and began to procure its sustenance by pillage and plunder under the leadership of Turkish emirs.

This episode is closely related to the story of the economic decline of the border soldiers, who also lost their wealth by paying taxes. Pachymeres' reasoning is clear: during the Nicaean period the Byzantine population of Asia Minor did not succumb to the Turks, because they paid lower taxes to the central government than later under the Palaiologoi. The historian asked himself why Michael VIII should have decided to embark on such a short-sighted taxation policy. He professed not to be fully aware of the emperor's motives, yet in a manner characteristic of his historical writing, he quoted an explanation that was circulating secretly at the time of these events.⁶⁶ According to the rumor, Michael VIII feared the population of Asia Minor after the pro-Laskarid peasant uprising in Bithynia in 1262. Whether as a precautionary measure or as punishment, he resolved to deprive them of their wealth.

As much as Pachymeres disliked taxation, he did not go as far as his contemporary Thomas Magistros, who, as we shall see in the following

chapter, formulated an ideological manifesto against the very practice of taxation. Rather, Pachymeres was dissatisfied with the way in which the imperial fiscal apparatus was administered by the first two Palaiologoi. Pachymeres had clear ideas about how taxation should function, and he also showed how it should not be used. Not surprisingly, the historian looked to the Nicaean period for a model tax-gathering emperor and found it in Theodore II Laskaris. When in autumn 1258 Michael Palaiologos gained access to the hoarded wealth of the Laskarids, he found, in addition to the treasury in Magnesia, another treasury kept in the fortress of Astritsios. As Pachymeres explained, Theodore II Laskaris abandoned the sound fiscal policies of his father and used public taxes (rather than revenues from crown estates) to build up the sizeable treasury in Astritsios. However, Pachymeres' overall assessment of Theodore II's taxation policies was positive, because the young emperor redistributed fairly the tax wealth among all his subjects:

Theodore, even though he collected money more vigorously out of the public taxes, spent much greater sums with an untroubled mind; hence the ebbs and flows of money resembled those of the sea. For what was taken away was being compensated by what was easily added; and for the despoiled individuals, the loss of a resource signified the acquisition of a greater one, for *each subject* gave less on account of public taxation and acquired a greater amount than the one of which he was deprived, since *all* received [something] from the emperor.⁶⁷

This statement is a concise articulation of the principle of fair redistribution of tax wealth. It makes little practical sense, especially if viewed as an actual description of taxation practices. It was impossible in reality for each and every subject to get a share of the collected tax wealth in a pre-modern society. Nor could each taxpayer receive a greater tax return than the tax paid without there being any losers in the process. Yet this statement makes much sense when placed in a historical and intellectual context. The historian implied that under Theodore II Laskaris taxation had been universal, most probably an allusion to his reformist anti-aristocratic policies and the confiscation of privileged land holdings. Universal taxation made it possible for him to redistribute the collected tax wealth "fairly" and for the benefit of the majority of the subjects. The idea of the emperor as benefactor of all

⁶⁵ Pachymeres I.i, 291–93. The historian referred to these areas as the lands of the Maryandenoï, Boukellarioi, and Paphlagonians. One cannot assign a date to the events, which appear to refer to the policies of Michael VIII toward Asia Minor in general.

⁶⁶ Elsewhere Pachymeres also reported a rumor in order to offer interpretations which damaged the reputation of Michael VIII. According to him, rumor had it that Michael VIII was responsible for the assassination in September 1258 of the Mouzalon brothers. See Pachymeres I.i, 79.26–30.

⁶⁷ Pachymeres I.i, 99.11–18 (emphasis added): 'Ο δὲ γε Θεόδωρος εἰ καὶ δραστηκώτερον ἐχρυσολόγει ἐκ τῶν κοινῶν συνδόσεων, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ πολλαπλασίον ἐξεκένου γνώμης ἀπλότητι, ἐξ ὧν ἀμπτωιδῆς τινες καὶ χαρὺβδεις, ὡς ἐκεῖ τῆς θαλάσσης, ἐνταῦθα τῶν χρημάτων ἐδείκνυντο· τὸ γὰρ ἀφαιρούμενον ἐπληροῦτο πάλιν ἐκ τοῦ ῥαδίως προσγιγνομένου, καὶ ἦν ἡ τοῦ ὄντος ἀφαίρεσις τοῦ προσγιγνομένου τοῖς ἀφαιρεθεῖσι πρόσθεσις πλείων, ἐκάστου μείον μὲν συνδιδόντος διὰ τὴν κοινὴν εἰσπραξίν, πλείον δ' ἔχοντος οὐτὲρ ἀφήρηται ἐκ τοῦ πάντως ἐκ βασιλείως ἔχειν. In the next sentence Pachymeres praised Theodore II Laskaris for his generosity to his subjects.

subjects – and not a dispenser of individual privilege for the benefit of the few – figures prominently in court literature (imperial panegyrics and mirrors of princes).⁶⁸ Therefore Pachymeres' idealization of the fiscal practices of Theodore II Laskaris is closely related to the rhetorical idea of imperial generosity as benefiting all subjects. For Pachymeres the ideal of universal generosity was the antithesis to the system of privilege.

Here, as nowhere else in Pachymeres' *History*, it is possible to see how the historian projected onto the Nicaean past his own wishful thinking and ideals. Theodore II Laskaris himself would have been much surprised to read this later interpretation of his policies. As we have seen, his main ideological and practical interests lay in establishing a new service elite consisting of his "friends," who were bound to him by personal links of dependence and received economic privilege. One of the most notable features of his political thought is his advocacy of a personal, quasi-feudal model of power in lieu of a public, institutional one.⁶⁹ Yet Theodore II's political treatise never circulated widely after his death in 1258. With the passage of time it became possible for Pachymeres to turn Theodore II's policies into a model for public taxation and fair tax redistribution. The historian apparently admired a public taxation system in which the taxpayers recovered the money they had turned in to the state and even made a profit. For Pachymeres, good taxation resembled an interest-bearing loan from the subjects to the state. The worst form of taxation was that in which a privileged social group skimmed off public wealth for their own individual benefit. And Pachymeres knew well which this group was. A number of passages from his *History* will uncover his reasoning for us.

Unlike the twelfth-century critics of the Komnenoi, Pachymeres did not condemn the Palaiologan clan for appropriating public wealth. In fact, he acknowledged the entitlement of the imperial family to high court titles and fiscal privilege, a situation which had been established for two centuries. He presented a laudatory portrait of the Despot John Palaiologos, brother of Michael VIII, despite his enormous *pronoiai* consisting of the entire islands of Lesbos and Rhodes.⁷⁰ He described without any note of criticism the enormous *pronoiai* and flocks belonging to Constantine

⁶⁸ Chapter 4, pp. 135–36, chapter 6, p. 194, and chapter 9, p. 303 (the ideas of Thomas Magistros).

⁶⁹ Chapter 7, pp. 224–26.

⁷⁰ Pachymeres I.i, 285–91; I.ii, 417.7–9. Pachymeres liked him so much because, as a general in Asia Minor, he managed to repel the Turkish attacks, while after his death (1273/74) the Turks ran into no serious resistance. See Pachymeres I.ii, 591.27–28.

the Porphyrogennetos, Andronikos II's brother. He admired Constantine's generosity and hinted that Andronikos II's envy was the real reason for his conviction and sentence to life imprisonment on trumped-up charges in 1294.⁷¹ No Palaiologoi other than the two emperors were targets of Pachymeres' criticism.⁷² The historian disliked a lower, but nevertheless important, tier in the political elite to which the Palaiologoi gave free rein to appropriate public tax wealth. Part of this elite consisted of local administrators and tax officials in Asia Minor during the reigns of both Michael VIII and Andronikos II. They delayed paying soldiers their salaries and, after military victories, took for themselves the lion's share of captured booty.⁷³ According to Pachymeres, the rapacious agents of the fisc in Asia Minor during the reign of Michael VIII lacked the integrity of Nicaean tax officials, who had tended to belong to the ranks of the high aristocracy and had always turned in to the fisc all the taxes they collected.⁷⁴

Herein lay the chief difference between the Nicaean and the Palaiologan administrations. The historian contrasted the practice of tax collecting in Nicaea to that of tax farming under the Palaiologoi. The main culprits in this transformation were Andronikos II's ministers, who turned the sale of offices and tax farming into a widespread practice. Describing events of the year 1295, Pachymeres noted:

The affairs of the Roman state turned completely for the worse. An "undue advantage" has come to exist in our time that many [offices] are sold by the imperial ministers for pay or gifts. This practice has begun to cut off [access to] honors

⁷¹ See Pachymeres II.iii, 171–181, esp. 175.24–35, 181.1–14.

⁷² A Palaiologina, however, became his target. Pachymeres blamed the manipulative older sister of Michael VIII, Eulogia Palaiologina Kantakouzene, for inciting her brother to blind John IV Laskaris and for falsely accusing the *parakoimomenos* John Makrenos of conspiring against the emperor. See Pachymeres I.i, 181.10–12, 225.12–16, 275–77.

⁷³ Pachymeres I.i, 35.3–6 (delay of salaries and appropriation of booty); II.iii, 235.16–19 (delay of salaries). The comment on the distribution of booty is particularly interesting. According to Constantine Harmenopoulos, the fisc was to retain one sixth of the booty. The rest was to be divided *equally* among the soldiers and their commanders. See *Hexabiblos* 2.6.5, ed. Pitsakes, 147. By contrast, Pseudo-Kodinos, 251, speaks of the emperor retaining one fifth of the booty. The imperial propaganda of Andronikos II made much of the emperor's just distribution of captured booty to soldiers. See Lampenos, *Encomium*, 44, 48.

⁷⁴ Pachymeres I.i, 293.4–7. One of the "good" Nicaean tax officials was the grand domestic Andronikos Palaiologos, Michael VIII's father. Another was a certain caesar, Romanos. According to Albert Failler, Pachymeres refers here to the tenth-century emperor Romanos Lakapenos (920–944), who held the court title of caesar before acceding to the imperial throne. It seems more likely to me that the historian had in mind an otherwise unknown dignitary in the Nicaean empire, as Michael Angold has hypothesized. See M. Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile: Government and Society under the Laskarids of Nicaea (1204–1261)* (Oxford, 1974), 210.

from many reputable men suitable for office (εἰς ἀρχὴν εὐδόκιμοι) who either do not consent to pay or are not able to do so – inasmuch as this [practice] has begun to affect above all those who do not hesitate to receive, and this [very practice] has begun to empower others who offer gifts with the hope of making a profit.⁷⁵

Further, Pachymeres continued by criticizing the officials in Asia Minor who delayed paying soldiers their salaries and by blaming Andronikos II for his unwillingness to punish corrupt officials – an attitude that caused much harm to the empire. The commentary by Pachymeres suggests that the sale of offices became a common occurrence early in the reign of Andronikos II. It is apparent that the historian referred here to the sale of offices as well as specifically to tax farming, for he emphasized that the purchaser hoped to make a profit.

What is more interesting is Pachymeres' evaluation of this phenomenon. He was not interested in the economic rationale of Andronikos II's government for resorting to tax farming. For him, it was just another socially disastrous tax policy of the Palaiologoi. The tax-farmer was a sort of entrepreneur who used the "public" tax apparatus to extort wealth from the subjects and also paid bribes to the imperial ministers who auctioned the taxes. The historian did not blame any specific individuals, although he left sufficient clues elsewhere in the text to allow us to identify some of the culprits he had in mind. The expression "imperial ministers" (*mesiteuontes*), which Pachymeres used to describe the imperial officials receiving "pay and gifts," suggests that the prime minister (*mesazon*) may have been an object of criticism.⁷⁶ In the period 1294 to about 1305 Andronikos II's prime minister was Nikephoros Choumnos, about whom Pachymeres elsewhere wrote that he had become very rich.⁷⁷ In fact Choumnos himself admitted in his correspondence that imperial ministers (*mesiteuontes*) working below him took big bribes, but he excused himself by noting that he took much

⁷⁵ Pachymeres II.iii, 235.11–16: τὰ δὲ τῆς Ῥωμανίδος ἐξησθενήκει τέλεον. Πλεονέκτημα γὰρ παρ' ἡμῖν ἐγένετο τοὺς παρόντας χρόνους μισθοῦ τοῖς μεσιτεύουσι καὶ λημμάτων τὰ πολλὰ πράττεσθαι. Τοῦτο πολλοῖς μὲν τοῖς εἰς ἀρχὴν εὐδοκίμοις, ἢ μὴ καταδεχομένοις καταβάλλειν – πολλῶ γὰρ οὐχ ἥκιστα τοῦτο, ὅσω καὶ ἀξιοῦσι λαμβάνειν –, ἢ μὴ δυναμένοις ἴσως, ἐκόλουε τὰς τιμὰς, ἄλλοις δὲ παρρησίαν ἐσίδου διδοῦσιν, ὥς ἔξιν ἐλπίζουσι. My English translation differs from the French one by Failler. I have preferred to translate the word πράττω here as "to sell" rather than "to do." The genitive of price (μισθοῦ, λημμάτων) and the sense of the following sentence make this translation more likely.

⁷⁶ Pachymeres uses a similar expression (μεσίτης or μεσιτεία τῶν κοινῶν) to refer to the office of imperial prime minister (*mesazon*). See Pachymeres I.ii, 625.20, 627.6; II.iii, 215.18. Gregoras I, 170.10–12, 271.2–4, refers to the *mesazon* by simultaneously using the words μεσιτεύων and παραδυναστεύων. For the terminology used in reference to the Byzantine prime minister, see H.-G. Beck, "Der byzantinische 'Ministerpräsident'," BZ, 48 (1955), 309–38.

⁷⁷ Pachymeres II.iv, 557.

less than the rest.⁷⁸ Theodore Metochites, who occupied the position of *mesazon* after 1305 (i.e., at the time Pachymeres was completing his *History*), is also known to have sanctioned the sale of offices and tax farming.⁷⁹ Pachymeres saw in this governmental practice the emergence of a new elite whose fortunes were connected with the public tax apparatus. This elite completely replaced the honest and able officials who had served the Nicaean emperors.

The ideals that Pachymeres pitted against the government of Andronikos II were the reforms of Theodore II Laskaris. For Pachymeres, Theodore II Laskaris was a political visionary who promoted the very same "men of good repute" who – due to the sale of offices – found themselves excluded from serving in the imperial administration during Andronikos II's reign:

He [Theodore II Laskaris] was the kind of ruler who seemed heavy-handed toward officialdom, since he selected functionaries and rewarded them with the appropriate dignity not on the basis of nobility and kinship by marriage with the imperial family, but according to merit. But he considered that for his own relatives and kinsmen this [blood relationship] was enough and sufficed as ground for dignity. *This policy was, upon close scrutiny, the deed of a ruler who fosters virtue and incites his subjects toward good repute* (εὐδοκίμησις).⁸⁰

It is clear that Pachymeres idealized the Nicaean past, presented it as a missed historical opportunity and sought to remind his contemporaries that imperial administration could be conducted differently – and that in fact it had once been conducted differently. The rise of the Palaiologoi led to the emergence of a new elite consisting of officials in the provinces and in the capital, who abused the tax system of the empire. The historian saw crown finances as the alternative to the rapacious tax practices in his own time and considered, in a utopian way, the best kind of taxation to be the one in which the tax refund ("the acts of imperial generosity") equaled and even exceeded the tax paid. Thus tax-payers could retain their own wealth.

⁷⁸ J. Boissonade, *Anecdota nova* (Paris, 1844; repr. Hildesheim, 1962), no. 156, 178–79. Choumnos addressed this letter to an anonymous opponent who accused him of venality.

⁷⁹ Gregoras described how at the beginning of the First Civil War Kantakouzenos and Syrgiannes bought all the governorships in Thrace from the παραδυναστεύοντες, implying that the *mesazon* Theodore Metochites was involved as well. After Metochites fell from power at the end of his reign, the populace of Constantinople burned his luxurious residence because he bought it with embezzled tax money. See Gregoras I, 302, 425–26. Cf. I. Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in P. Underwood (ed.), *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4 (New York, 1975), 28.

⁸⁰ Pachymeres I.i, 61.6–11 (emphasis added): τοιοῦτος δ' ὢν, βαρὺς ἔδοξε τοῖς ἐν τέλει, ὅτι, οὐ κατ' εὐγένειαν καὶ κῆδος βασιλικόν, ἀλλ' ἀριστίνδην τοὺς ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐκλεγόμενος, τοῖς προσήκουσιν ἐσέμνυνεν ἀξιώμασιν· οἷς δὲ συνέβαινε προσγενέσιν εἶναι καὶ οἱ πρὸς αἵματος, ἀρκεῖν ἔκρινε τὸ τοιοῦτον καὶ ἱκανὸν εἰς λόγον σεμνώματος. Τὸ δ' ἦν, εἰ σκοποῖη τις, ἀρετὴν ὀφελόντος ἐρχοντος καὶ παρακαλοῦντος πρὸς εὐδοκίμησιν τὸ ὑπήκουον.

Pachymeres' historical reasoning along socioeconomic lines is unique among the historians of the Palaiologan period. Gregoras, who also reported the over-taxation of Asia Minor during Michael VIII's reign, never explored the issue any further.⁸¹ There is no doubt that Pachymeres put his finger on an important problem of contemporary society, and his reasoning parallels the interpretations presented by his contemporary Thomas Magistros, who likewise favored reliance on crown wealth.⁸² A response to Pachymeres' criticism may be found in the *History* of Gregoras, who was a protégé of Theodore Metochites and, as we noted, an apologist for Andronikos II's regime. Describing the pre-history of the First Civil War (1321–28), Gregoras noted that Andronikos II had increased taxation and resorted to tax-farming in order to increase the imperial budget to ten million *hyperpyra*.⁸³ And Gregoras explained that tax farming, while unjust in principle, was not at all "unwise" when viewed in the context of the troubled times in which he was living.⁸⁴ This attempt to use extenuating circumstances to justify rapacious tax practices seems weak and inadequate in the face of Pachymeres' vigorous critique and economic explanation of Byzantium's decline.

In the late fourteenth century George of Pelagonia used a different point of departure in his critique of the Palaiologoi. Writing in a period when the Palaiologoi had ruled the empire for more than a century, he viewed the emperor as the holder of an elective public office which the current dynasty had illegitimately turned into a hereditary one. Criticism of hereditary succession, which scholars have not observed in earlier periods, is a development unique to the Palaiologan era, when the ruling dynasty seemed firmly established on the throne. In order to understand the critique by George of Pelagonia, we need to remind ourselves of late Byzantine succession practices and rhetorical theories of imperial succession. The Palaiologan period began with the election of Michael VIII as regent in the constitutional

⁸¹ Gregoras I, 138.9–14. ⁸² Chapter 9, 299.

⁸³ Gregoras I, 317–318. The historian explicitly mentioned tax farming. According to Gregoras, Andronikos II resorted to increasing taxes in order to rebuild the fleet and create a standing army. On these policies cf. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 246–47.

⁸⁴ Gregoras I, 317.2–9: "Since . . . all plans and devices, both his own and those involving allies, were condemned by God to accomplishing absolutely nothing for the emperor, he turned to another approach, which is unsound on a truthful and just ground, yet with respect to a time of such violence and antagonism was not entirely too unreasonable. For he decided to raise the yearly taxes levied on the subjects." ('Επεὶ . . . πᾶσαι μηχαναὶ καὶ παλάμαι γνήσιναι τε καὶ συμμαχικαὶ τῷ βασιλεὶ θεοθεν παντάπασιν ἡλέγχθησαν οὐσαι μηδέν, ἑτέραν ἐτράπετο, σφαλερὰν μὲν κατὰ γὰρ τὸν ἀληθῆ καὶ δίκαιον λόγον· πρὸς δὲ οὕτω βίαιον καὶ ἀνταγωνιστὴν χρόνον, οὐ πάνυ τοι σφόδρα ἀσύνετον. ἔγνω γὰρ τοὺς ἐτησίους τῶν ὑπηκόων αὐξῆσαι φόρους.) Further on Gregoras speaks explicitly of tax farming as a method of maximizing the tax revenue.

arrangements of 1258. While Nicaean imperial propaganda never spoke of imperial elections, the court rhetoricians of Michael VIII and Andronikos II floated the idea of election as a legitimate mechanism for succession. As late as 1353, in his imperial panegyric Nicholas Kabasilas spoke of the election of emperor Matthew I Kantakouzenos (1353–57).⁸⁵ These rhetorical interpretations sought to place a legitimizing veneer on a fait accompli. Moreover, they presented election as only one of the factors of imperial legitimacy, the main one being imperial pedigree and descent from a long line of emperors.

George of Pelagonia took seriously the ideas of imperial election. It is important to observe that he was not the only late Byzantine author to find fault with contemporary succession practices. The historian Nikephoros Gregoras voiced criticism of the policy of the Palaiologan emperors of crowning their sons as co-emperors. In the first book of his *History*, which he began to write during or shortly after the First Civil War, Gregoras pointed out that the Palaiologan system of succession was fraught with hidden dangers.⁸⁶ He attributed the decision of John III Vatatzes not to crown his son Theodore II Laskaris as co-emperor to the father's fear that his son would not wait for his death and would rebel, as had happened in the 1320s. According to Gregoras, the wise Vatatzes had arranged that on his death the army and the high aristocracy would gather to elect by their "free volition" (*hekousios gnome*) his son as emperor.⁸⁷ In another passage Gregoras implied that the excessive desire of the Palaiologoi to ensure succession for their sons caused harm to the empire. After describing the sorry end of the Union of Lyons, Gregoras reported that some people had offered a curious explanation as to why Michael VIII had embarked on unionist policies. According to them, he was motivated to conclude the Union by his desire to bequeath the imperial office to his offspring. Despite his father's concern, Andronikos II showed no gratitude to him and deprived him of a proper Christian burial, because he sought to ingratiate himself with the anti-unionist party. Gregoras expressed his strong opinion on this matter: "For me, a wise and intelligent administrator would be the person who chooses the best things first for himself and then for his sons and

⁸⁵ Chapter 3, p. 132.

⁸⁶ J.-L. van Dieten, *Nikephoros Gregoras, Rhomäische Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1973), 38, has established that Gregoras began writing his *History* before 1337. In fact, he may have already begun writing during the First Civil War, because he opened it with a speech by Andronikos II (d. 1332) directed against his calumniators.

⁸⁷ Gregoras I, 53–55. This commentary ran contrary to historical truth. Theodore II enjoyed official co-authority with his father before the latter's death. See chapter 3, p. 117 and n. 7.

relatives."⁸⁸ Gregoras further noted that although Michael VIII was an intelligent ruler, he was weak in his excessive affection for his children. Meditating philosophically on the issue, Gregoras quoted Plato, his favorite classical philosopher: "The eye of love is blind where the beloved is concerned."⁸⁹ It is apparent that Gregoras' reasoning reflects the historical experience of the rebellion of Andronikos III against his grandfather Andronikos II, whose side Gregoras took during the First Civil War.

Unlike Gregoras' philosophical considerations, the reasoning of George of Pelagonia was entirely political. The target of his critique emerges in the very introduction to his panegyric biography. Here the author noted that Vatatzes surpassed both the current emperors and those who ruled before them, thus suggesting that he was embarking on a collective critique of the entire Palaiologan dynasty.⁹⁰ His criticism most often took the form of direct jibes at the Palaiologoi which he interjected into the laudatory discourse. The Palaiologoi were no emperors, but "slaves to their passions, cowards and fools" who preferred a life of luxury to campaigning.⁹¹ Their vanity made them marry foreign princesses and marry off their daughters to foreign rulers. By contrast, Theodore I Laskaris had chosen a Byzantine bridegroom (Vatatzes) for his daughter.⁹² The subjects of the Palaiologoi emulated their incompetent emperors, ceased to practice military exercises and lost completely their warrior spirit.⁹³ The soldiers were good-for-nothings who preferred an easy life and plundered the properties of their compatriots.⁹⁴ George of Pelagonia made a few subtle allusions to contemporary events. He hinted at the unfruitful trip of John V to Rome (1369–71) in his description of how Vatatzes' father and uncle, who were fleeing the tyrant Andronikos I (1183–85), listened to "a silly counsel" and sailed off to Rome to seek the pope's help. On their way to Rome,

⁸⁸ Gregoras I, 154.2–10: εἶχε δὲ καί, ὡς τινες ἔφασαν, συντριβὴν τινα λογισμῶν κεντοῦσαν αἰεὶ τὸ συνειδὸς τῆς ψυχῆς διὰ τὴν καινοτομίαν τοῦ δόγματος, εἰς ἣν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐς τοὺς παῖδας διαδοχῆς τῆς βασιλείας αὐτὸν κατήνεγκεν· ἀφ' ὧν, ὡς τὸ εἶκός, αὐτὸς ἀπώνατο μηδὲ ταφῆς τελευταῖον ἀξιωθῆναι βασιλικῆς, τοὺς τῆς ἐκκλησίας θεσμούς τῆς πατρικῆς στοργῆς πολλῶν προτιμώντων. Ἐμοίγ' οὖν ἐκεῖνος ἂν εἴη σοφὸς καὶ φρόνιμος οἰκονόμος, ὅστις αὐτοῦ γε εἴνεκα πρῶτον αἰροῖτο τὰ βέλτιστα, ἔπειτα τῶν υἱῶν καὶ ὅστις καθ' αἶμα προσήκει. On Michael VIII and the Union, see Gregoras I, 124–25.

⁸⁹ Gregoras I, 154.18–23. Plato, *Laus*, 731c.

⁹⁰ After describing the current rulers as an incompetent lot, he noted that those before them were no different. See Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 194.23–24: τοὺς μὲν οὖν νῦν ὄντας, ἥδη δὲ καὶ τοὺς πρὸ αὐτῶν τῷ χρόνῳ, τοιοῦτους πάντας ἐξετάζων εὐρίσκω.

⁹¹ Ibid., 194.14–19, 195.25–31, 200.25–26, 224.32–225.2, 229.34–330.2.

⁹² Ibid., 212.3–20. George of Pelagonia tendentiously forgot to mention that Vatatzes himself gave his son Theodore II a Bulgarian bride, Helena Asanina. The second wife of Vatatzes was the Latin princess Anna-Constance of Hohenstaufen.

⁹³ Ibid., 210.20–25. Cf. ibid., 199.16–20, where the author blamed his contemporaries for their immoral conduct.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 228.1–229.33.

they stopped on the island of Crete and were blinded.⁹⁵ The author praised Vatatzes for having pacified cities whose populace was rebelling, a reference to the urban upheavals of the fourteenth century and perhaps the Zealot movement in Thessaloniki.⁹⁶

The main theme of George of Pelagonia's critique becomes evident from the opening of his biography. Here he noted that he was offering to his audience a model ruler, and he pointed out explicitly that Vatatzes surpassed the current emperors because he did not acquire the imperial office from his father. The biographer lashed out at the imperial princes of the Palaiologan dynasty by making a scorching generalization: "For the most part sons of emperors turn absolutely bad in their character, spoiled by luxury, ignoble flattery, empty conceit, narrow-minded weakness of character and most shameful sloth." Therefore, he added, they are of no use to their subjects.⁹⁷ The author then referred to the authority of his favorite classical philosopher, Plato, who had also criticized the sons of kings.⁹⁸ And George of Pelagonia knew well what the alternative was: a return to the principle of elective imperial succession, which was how Vatatzes had acceded to the imperial office. Hereditary succession was nothing but a bad and unjust custom:

Many people admire emperors born from emperors because they are noble and draw the fame of their family from a long time ago. I believe in the exact opposite. For me, the emperor who inherits the imperial office from his father, *because of a preposterous custom which governs such matters* [of succession], is not an admirable individual. It has already happened that many emperors have acquired their office by merit and then passed it on as an inheritance to their inferior sons, an office which was in no way suitable for them, because they were uncouth, undisciplined, uneducated, cowardly, unmanly and overpowered by foolish passions, as it has been said before. Thus the praiseworthy emperor is not the one who inherits power from his father. Rather it is the one who has proved himself worthy of the imperial office first as a private individual and then has come to occupy it in a just manner – elevated to power by the just judgment of the electors, not by usurping it in a tyrannical fashion.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Ibid., 205.19–21.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 230.10–14.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 196.19–23: ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον γὰρ οἱ τῶν βασιλέων υἱεῖς φαῦλοί τινες τὸν τρόπον ἀτεχνῶς ἀποβαίνουσιν, ὑπὸ τρυφῆς διεφθαρμένοι καὶ κολακείας ἀγενοὺς καὶ ὄγκου κενοῦ καὶ μαλακίας ἀνελευθέρου καὶ βλακίας ἀσχίστης, ἐξ ὧν εἰς οὐδὲν εἰσι χρήσιμοι τοῖς χρωμένοις οὐδὲ τοῖς ὑπηκόοις ὠφέλιμοι.

⁹⁸ The reference is to Plato, *Gorgias*, 492b. Cf. A. Heisenberg's critical apparatus: BZ, 14, 196.24.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 197.9–21 (emphasis added): οἱ μὲν οὖν πολλοὶ θαυμάζουσι τοὺς ἐκ βασιλέων βασιλέας ὡς εὖ γεγονότας καὶ πόρρωθεν σχόντας τὴν τοῦ γένους λαμπρότητα. ἐμοὶ δὲ τούναντιον ἅπαν δοκεῖ· οὐ γὰρ ὅστις πατρικὴν διεδέξατο βασιλείαν, ἀτόπου συνηθείας περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα κρατούσης, οὗτος ἐμοὶ θαυμαστός· πολλοῖς γὰρ ἥδη συμβέβηκεν αὐτοῖς τε παρ' ἀξίαν ἐπιλαβέσθαι τοῦ σχήματος καὶ τοῖς υἱεῖσι χεῖροσι γεγονόσιν ὡς κληρὸν καταλιπεῖν, πρᾶγμα μὴδὲν σφίσι προσήκον, ὡς ἀρρῦθμοι καὶ ἀτάκτοι καὶ ἀπαιδεύτοι καὶ δειλοὶ καὶ ἀνάνδροι καὶ ὑφ' ἡδονῶν

Vatatzes was the personification of the ideal of the elected emperor. He was "a private individual born in a family of private individuals," who lived in the city of Adrianople.¹⁰⁰ George of Pelagonia described in some detail the way in which he imagined Vatatzes to have been elected, although the author ran into visible difficulty in his effort to develop an electoral system. He wrote that all men of power at the time had convened to elect Vatatzes: the emperor Theodore I Laskaris, whose daughter Vatatzes married, generals, the entire army, officials, the representatives of the urban population, and ecclesiastics.¹⁰¹ In another section of the introduction the author referred to the electors as "the people and those empowered to elect men worthy of the imperial office."¹⁰² Here he noted that even if these electors had not picked Vatatzes on account of their folly, Vatatzes would still have been a more honorable private individual than those emperors who succeeded their fathers on the throne. All this was said in the introduction to the *vita*-panegyric. In the actual biographical account the author made no reference to election, but instead wrote that Theodore I Laskaris selected Vatatzes as his successor and gave him his daughter in marriage.¹⁰³ In addition, George of Pelagonia cited examples of illegitimate imperial elections. Thus Andronikos I Komnenos, the emperor-tyrant who persecuted Vatatzes' father and grandfather, came to power through "election by certain imposters and ungodly people."¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, hereditary succession was the worst method of acquiring the imperial office. Thus the Angeloi emperors (1185–1204), though members of the same dynasty, paid no attention to family loyalties and treated their relatives cruelly.¹⁰⁵

It is clear that when George of Pelagonia presented imperial election as an alternative to hereditary succession, he was thinking in terms of an ideological paradigm. He did not propose nor was he aware of institutional or legal mechanisms for such elections, because such mechanisms did not exist in reality. Yet it is noteworthy that the author conceived seriously of imperial elections and considered them to be a way of breaking the chain

κρατουμένοις ἀτόπων, ὡς καὶ πρὶν εἶρηται μοι. οὐκοῦν οὐχ ὁ παρὰ πατρός διαδεξιόμενος τὴν ἀρχὴν οὕτως ἐπαινετός, ἀλλ' ὅς ἰδιώτης ὢν ἐπειτ' ἄξιον ἑαυτὸν ἀποδείξας τοῦ σχηματός εἰς τοῦθ' ἦκεν ὥσπερ ἦν δίκαιον, εὐθύτητι διανοίας τῶν δεδωκότων τὰς ψήφους ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν αἰρεθείς, ἀλλ' οὐ τυραννικῶς εἰσχωμάσας.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 197.30–31: ἐξ ἰδιωτῶν μὲν γεγονώς ἰδιώτης. Here George of Pelagonia did not follow Akropolites, who wrote that Vatatzes came from the city of Didymoteichos in Thrace and was a *protovestiarites* (high-standing member of the imperial guard) before marrying Theodore I's daughter. See Akropolites I, 26. *Synopsis Chronike*, MB, vol. 7, 462, calls his title *protovestiaros*.

¹⁰¹ Heisenberg, BZ, 14, 196.32–197.6.

¹⁰² Ibid., 197.23–24: ἀλογία δῆμου καὶ τῶν ἔχόντων αἰρεῖσθαι τοὺς βασιλείας ἀξίους.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 209–11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 202.37–38: κωμαστῶν τινων ψήφω καὶ βεβήλων ἀνθρώπων.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 206.32–207.13.

of succession among the Palaiologan emperors. His views were potentially revolutionary, for they amounted to a call for dethroning the ruling dynasty. As in the case of Pachymeres, George of Pelagonia based his criticism on notions of public power and viewed the emperor as the occupant of a public office. The emperor's office was not restricted to a single family, but was open to those who were legitimately elected, and, if we add Pachymeres' views, its function was to administer the public tax wealth for the benefit of all subjects.

The critique of the Palaiologoi by George Pachymeres and George of Pelagonia shows a side of late Byzantine political thought that differs significantly in tone and conceptual categories from the *Kaiseridee*. The fourteenth-century *Kaiserkritik*, like that of the twelfth-century, attacked the very heart of imperial autocracy and used notions of public power to back up its arguments. Still, some differences stand out. The late Byzantine historians-critics did not denounce the power concentrated in the hands of the emperor's relatives, as Zonaras and Choniates had done in the twelfth century in their critique of the Komnenian clan. By contrast, the fourteenth-century authors recognized the entitlement of the imperial relatives to court titles and fiscal privilege. The Komnenian reform of the court hierarchy seems to have become accepted as legitimate by the historians. The Palaiologoi became the target of a different line of attack. They were reminded that their power over the empire's tax apparatus was not unlimited, and that they had the duty to preserve and increase the wealth of their subjects. They were also reminded that the imperial office in Byzantium was never meant to belong to a single family. To be sure, the Palaiologoi held a tight grip on the imperial office. When John VI Kantakouzenos was elevated to the imperial throne during the Second Civil War, he ruled in the name of the legitimate Palaiologan co-emperor, John V. Subsequently, in his memoirs, he took pains to defend the legitimacy of the Palaiologan dynasty.¹⁰⁶ Yet evidently Kantakouzenos was responding to, or at least tried to avoid, a radical current of resistance against the Palaiologoi. The principle of dynastic succession had not become fully entrenched in Byzantium by the second half of the fourteenth century. Radical opponents to the Palaiologan regime availed themselves of old ideas of the openness of the imperial office and could – and did – readily advocate the overthrow of the ruling dynasty.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Dölger, "Johannes VI. Kantakouzenos als dynastischer Legitimist".