The Byzantine Hellene

This book tells the extraordinary story of Theodore II Laskaris, an emperor who ruled over the Byzantine state of Nicaea established in Asia Minor after the fall of Constantinople to the crusaders in 1204. Theodore Laskaris was a man of literary talent and keen intellect. His action-filled life, youthful mentality, anxiety about communal identity (Anatolian, Roman, and Hellenic), ambitious reforms cut short by an early death, and thoughts and feelings are all reconstructed on the basis of his rich and varied writings. His original philosophy, also explored here, led him to a critique of scholasticism in the West, a mathematically inspired theology, and a political vision of Hellenism. A personal biography, a ruler’s biography, and an intellectual biography, this highly illustrated book opens a vista onto the eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia, and the Balkans in the thirteenth century, as seen from the vantage point of a key political actor and commentator.

DIMITER ANGELOV is Dumbarton Oaks Professor of Byzantine History at Harvard University. His publications include Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330 (Cambridge, 2007) and Church and Society in Late Byzantium (edited, 2009).
The Byzantine Hellene

The Life of Emperor Theodore Laskaris and Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century

DIMITER ANGELOV

Harvard University, Massachusetts
φιλτάτη Εὐρυδίκη
Contents

List of Illustrations [page ix]
List of Maps [xii]
List of Tables [xiii]
Acknowledgments [xiv]
List of Historical Figures [xv]
List of Rulers in Byzantium and Beyond [xviii]
Author’s Note [xx]

Introduction [1]

1 Byzantium in Exile [13]

2 “The Holy Land, My Mother Anatolia” [37]

3 “I Was Raised as Usual for a Royal Child” [57]

4 Pursuit of Learning [70]

5 Power-Sharing [88]

6 Friends, Foes, and Politics [109]

7 Elena and the Embassy of the Marquis [128]

8 Sole Emperor of the Romans [147]

9 The Philosopher [181]

10 The Proponent of Hellenism [202]

Epilogue [217]

Notes [231]

Appendix 1: The Chronology of the Works of Theodore Laskaris [320]

Appendix 2: Chronology of the Letters [347]

Appendix 3: The Mystery Illness [381]
Contents

Appendix 4: The Manuscript Portraits [390]
Appendix 5: The Burial Sarcophagus [392]
Bibliography [393]
Index [430]
Illustrations

Note: All figures appear between pages 108 and 109, with the exception of Figure 28, which appears on page 211.

1 Portrait of Theodore II Laskaris in the History of George Pachymeres, Codex Monacensis gr. 442 (14th c.), f. 7v, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich
2 Pen-and-ink portrait of Theodore II Laskaris, Codex Marcianus gr. 404 (15th c.), f. Vlr. Copy of the fourteenth-century manuscript the History of Pachymeres (Fig. 1), Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice
3 Engraving based on the Munich manuscript of the History of Pachymeres (Fig. 1) in Nicephori Gregorae, Romanae, hoc est Byzantinae, historiae Libri XI, edited by Hieronymus Wolf. Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1562
4 Seals of Theodore I Laskaris
   4a. Seal of Theodore Komnenos Laskaris, protovestarites and sebastos, Inv. no. M-12005, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
   4b. Imperial seal of Theodore I Laskaris, Sceau Zacos 1132, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, Bibliothèque nationale de France
5 The walls of Nicaea
   5a. View of the walls of Nicaea in the 1930s (Schneider 1938, Plate IV)
   5b. The south (Yenişehir) gate in 2015
6 The Babylonian Tower constructed by Theodore I Laskaris
   6a. In the 1930s (Schneider 1938, Plate III)
   6b. In 2015
   See Schneider and Karnapp 1938:35, 52; CIG, vol. 4, 8747
7 Monastery of Hyakinthos, church of the Dormition of the Virgin (Schmit 1927: Plates I and II)
8 Church of St. Sophia in Nicaea, 2014 and 2015
9 The Palace in Nymphaion (Kemalpaşa)
   9a. A nineteenth-century engraving of the palace (Texier 1862:260, Plate 51)
   9b. A photograph of the palace in 1907, The Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University, Album F 13
   9c. A photograph of the palace in 1907, The Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University, Album F 16
   9d. The palace in 2012
10 The fortifications of Magnesia, 2014
   10a. The fortifications of Magnesia
   10b. With a view of the fertile plain and modern Manisa
Illustrations

11 Europe viewed from Asia at Lampsakos, 2014
12 The fortifications of Pegai, 2014
15 Seal of Irene, mother of Theodore II Laskaris, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC, DO Seal 55.1.4363
16 The royal couple of Latin Constantinople
16b. Funerary statue of Marie of Brienne (d. c. 1280), wife of Baldwin II. Black limestone. Ambulatory of the church of St. Denis. On the attribution, see Bony 1984–89
17 Seals of Theodore II Laskaris
17c. Theodore II Laskaris as a sole emperor, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, Sceau Zacos 725
18 The Moral Pieces, opening essay, Ambrosianus gr. C 308 inf. (917), f. 78r, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan
19 The Marquis of Hohenburg, Grosse Heidelberger Liederhandschrift (Codex Manesse), Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Palat. Germ. 848, f. 29r
20 The Bulgarian tsar Michael Asen (?) and his wife Anna, Metropolitan church of Taxiarhes, Kastoria, 1254–55 (?). The traditional identification (Bozhilov 1985:108, 110; Drakopolou 1997:77–79; Kalopissi-Verti 1992:95–96; Subotić 1998–99) with the Bulgarian ruler is uncertain. The male figure may depict another Michael Asen (Asanes), who was in Byzantine service in the fourteenth century. See Mladjov 2012:490–5; PLP 1514
21 Coins of Theodore II Laskaris
21a. Gold hyperpyron, The Barber Institute Coin Collection, University of Birmingham
Illustrations xi

21b. Electrum *trachy*, AR - LHS Auction 97 (May 10, 2006), Lot 143
(ex-Petros Protonotarios collection)

21c. Billon *trachy*, © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC, DO Coin 1948.17.3735

22 A view of the Rhodope Mountains from the hilltop fortress of Tzepaina (Tsepena), 2011

23 Philippi with a view of Mount Pangaion, 2014


25 Theodore II Laskaris’ eldest daughter Irene as Tsarina of Bulgaria together with her husband Constantine Tikh. Fresco (1259) on the south wall of narthex of the church of SS. Nicholas and Panteleimon in Boyana

26 Concentric circles with the four elements in BnF, Suppl. gr. 460, f. 17r, a deluxe manuscript of Theodore’s treatise *Natural Communion*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits

27 Diagrammatic drawing of the Holy Trinity. Cod. Vaticanus gr. 1113 (13th c.), f. 73v, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana


29 Hellas in the middle of the world. Drawing in Cod. Vaticanus gr. 1113 (13th c.), f. 94v, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

30 Hellas in the middle of the world. Drawing in Cod. Barocci 97 (15th c.), f. 80r, The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford
Maps

Map 1 Western Asia Minor in the lifetime of Theodore Laskaris [page 38]
Map 2 Locations in which Theodore Laskaris is attested to have been before 1254 [47]
Map 3 Asia Minor and the Balkans in 1257 [173]
Tables

Table 1 One big family: the relatives and imperial ancestors of Theodore Laskaris [page 36]
Acknowledgments

The idea of writing this biography was first conceived over fifteen years ago in the vibrant academic environment of Cambridge, Massachusetts, where, by fortuitous coincidence, the book is now seeing its completion. Many scholars have contributed to its genesis in the meantime. I am grateful to Angeliki Laiou for encouraging me to pursue my interests in an extraordinary historical figure and embark on the difficult project of reconstructing his life and thought world. I have greatly benefited from intellectual exchanges with my former Birmingham colleagues Joseph Munitiz and Ruth Macrides. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the erudition and generosity of Panagiotis Agapitos, with whom I have had many illuminating discussions over the past year about the literary output of Theodore Laskaris. Colleagues from around the world who have contributed to this book with insightful suggestions and in many other invaluable ways include Jean-Claude Cheynet, Christian Förstel, Antonia Giannouli, Timothy Greenwood, Martin Hinterberger, Mark Jackson, Joni Joseph, Cemal Kaftadar, Tsveta Kyoseva, Linda Lott, Michael McCormick, Marijana Mišević, Margaret Mullett, Pagona Papadopoulou, Jake Ransohoff, Marcus Rautman, Jonathan Shea, Jo Van Steenbergen, Elena Stepanova, Alexandra Wassiliou-Seibt, and Bahadır Yıldırım. Henry Buglass and Louise Parrott helped me to devise the three maps. My amazing mother Doreta and my father Georgi have been a continual source of wisdom, each in a unique way. I learned a lot from Eurydice during our memorable and inspiring visits to historical sites in Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and the Republic of North Macedonia as we retraced some of the travels and campaigns of Theodore Laskaris. Lastly, I must thank the History Department of Harvard University for providing me with a publication grant and my patient editor, Dr. Michael Sharp, at Cambridge University Press.
List of Historical Figures

Alexios Strategopoulos: a general blood-related to the imperial Komnenos family; a small expeditionary force led by him resulted in the surprise recapture of Constantinople on July 25, 1261

Anna, Nicaean empress: daughter of the emperor Alexios III Angelos; wife of the first Nicaean emperor Theodore I Laskaris; mother of the Nicaean empress Irene; see Table 1, p. 36

Basil Vatatzes: putative father of the Nicaean emperor John III Vatatzes and grandfather of Theodore; provincial official in Asia Minor and high general (d. 1194); married to an anonymous lady who was a great-granddaughter of Alexios I Komnenos and a first cousin of Isaac II Angelos and Alexios III Angelos

Constantine: chamberlain (koubouklarios) of Theodore and addressee of a theological work

Constantine Strategopoulos: son of Alexios Strategopoulos; married to a niece of John III Vatatzes

Constantine (Komnenos) Tornikes: son of Demetrios Komnenos Tornikes; general and high court official

Constanza-Anna of Hohenstaufen, Nicaean empress: daughter born out of wedlock to the Western Roman emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen and Bianca Lancia; second wife of John III Vatatzes; stepmother of Theodore; sister of Manfred, King of Sicily

Demetrios Komnenos Tornikes: long-term chief minister in the empire of Nicaea from at least 1216 until his death between 1248 and 1252

Eirenikos family: a prominent family before and after 1204; Theodore Eirenikos was head of the imperial chancery in Constantinople before 1204, “consul of the philosophers” in Nicaea, and patriarch of Constantinople in exile (1214–16); Nicholas Eirenikos was a court poet in Nicaea; Theodore’s head tutor at the court may have belonged to this family

Elena Asenina: Nicaean empress and wife of Theodore from 1235 until her death in 1252; daughter of Tsar Ivan Asen II of Bulgaria
List of Historical Figures

Germanos II: patriarch of Constantinople in exile (1223–40); born in a village on the Bosporus; deacon of the patriarchal clergy before 1204; influential orator and homilist

George Akropolites: born in Latin-held Constantinople (1217) and educated under Nikephoros Blemmydes, he was one of Theodore’s influential tutors and correspondents; imperial secretary, teacher, and civil servant in the empire of Nicaea; Theodore promoted him to the office of grand logothete (megas logothetes), which he held until his death (1282)

George Mouzalon: one of three brother pages who were sons of a palace functionary and were raised at the court; talented musician and faithful courtier; addressee of many of Theodore’s letters and works; he held a number of offices during Theodore’s rule and served as his chief minister

Irene, Nicaean empress: eldest daughter of the Nicaean emperor Theodore I Laskaris and the empress Anna; first wife of John III Vatatzes; mother of Theodore; see Table 1, p. 36

John III Vatatzes, emperor of Nicaea (John Doukas Vatatzes): father of Theodore; see Table 1, p. 36

John Phaix: imperial secretary; addressee of letters and a theological work

Joseph Mesopotamites: imperial secretary and close friend and correspondent of Theodore; his influential family included Constantine Mesopotamites, head of the imperial chancery before 1204 and later metropolitan bishop of Thessalonica

Hagiotheodorites: private secretary of Theodore and a descendant of a powerful twelfth-century family of imperial ministers

Laskaris family: the family rose in prominence in the twelfth century and intermarried with the ruling dynasty of the Komnenoi; the Laskaris were quite possibly descendants of a foreign grandee naturalized in Byzantium in the eleventh century from the Shaddadid family, which ruled Dvin and Gandzak in Armenia

Michael of Epiros: Michael II Komnenos Doukas, ruler of Epiros; illegitimate son of Michael I Komnenos Doukas, the founder of the state of Epiros; nephew of Theodore Komnenos Doukas (Theodore of Epiros); see Table 1, p. 36

Michael Palaiologos: son of Theodora Palaiologina and the general and megas domestikos Andronikos Palaiologos, who served the Nicaean emperors for more than twenty-five years; grandson of Despot Alexios Palaiologos who was married to a daughter of Alexios III Angelos; hence a second cousin of Theodore by matrilineal descent (see Table 1,
List of Historical Figures

p. 36); political rival of Theodore; the high aristocratic family of the Palaiologoi had intermarried with the imperial dynasties of the Komnenos and the Doukai in the twelfth century

Nikephoros Blemmydes: the leading philosopher and teacher in the empire of Nicaea

Nikephoros Pamphilos: archdeacon in the imperial clergy; later metropolitan bishop of Ephesus (1243/1244–60) and patriarch of Constantinople in exile (1260)

Theodore (Theodore Laskaris, Theodore Doukas Laskaris, Theodore II Laskaris, the younger Theodore): crown prince and emperor of Nicaea

Theodore the elder (Theodore Komnenos Laskaris, Theodore I Laskaris): founder and first emperor of Nicaea; father of the empress Irene and grandfather of Theodore II Laskaris

Theodore of Epiros: Theodore Komnenos Doukas, ruler and briefly emperor of the state of Epiros; see Table 1, p. 36

Theodore (Komnenos) Philes: Nicaean governor of Thessalonica and the surrounding region; he had a bitter conflict with Theodore, whom he accused of sexual misconduct

Zabareiotes: a teacher who may have been Theodore’s head tutor at the court
List of Rulers in Byzantium and Beyond

**Byzantine Emperors before 1204**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruler</th>
<th>Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexios I Komnenos</td>
<td>1081–1118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John II Komnenos</td>
<td>1118–43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel I Komnenos</td>
<td>1143–80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexios II Komnenos</td>
<td>1180–83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andronikos I Komnenos</td>
<td>1183–85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac II Angelos</td>
<td>1185–95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexios III Angelos</td>
<td>1195–1203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexios IV Angelos</td>
<td>1203–04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Kanavos</td>
<td>(1204)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos</td>
<td>(1204)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Byzantine Emperors and Rulers after 1204**

**Nicaea**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruler</th>
<th>Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theodore I (Komnenos) Laskaris</td>
<td>(1204–21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John III (Doukas) Vatatzes</td>
<td>(1221–54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore II (Doukas) Laskaris</td>
<td>(1254–58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John IV Laskaris</td>
<td>(1258–61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael VIII Palaiologos</td>
<td>(1259–82), ruling in Constantinople after 1261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Epiros**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruler</th>
<th>Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael I Komnenos Doukas</td>
<td>(1204–c. 1215)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore Komnenos Doukas</td>
<td>(1215–30, c. 1237–53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel Komnenos Doukas</td>
<td>(1230–c. 1237)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Komnenos Doukas</td>
<td>(c. 1237–44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetrios Komnenos Doukas</td>
<td>(1244–46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael II Komnenos Doukas</td>
<td>(c. 1231–c. 1267)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trebizond (the Grand Komnenoi)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruler</th>
<th>Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexios I</td>
<td>(1204–22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>(1204–12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel I</td>
<td>(1238–63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Rulers in Byzantium and Beyond

Latin emperors of Constantinople

Baldwin I (1204–05)
Henry (1206–16)
Peter of Courtenay (1217–18)
Yolanda (1217–19), regent
Robert of Courtenay (1221–27)
John of Brienne (1229–37)
Baldwin II (1240–61)

Sicily and Italy

Frederick II Hohenstaufen, King of Sicily (1198–1250) and Western Roman emperor (1220–50)
Conrad IV, King of Sicily (1250–54)
Conradin (1254–58), underage King of Sicily (in absentia)
Manfred, Prince of Taranto (after 1250) and King of Sicily (1258–66)

Seljuk sultans of Rum

Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw I (1192–96, 1205–11)
Rukn al-Dīn Süleyman II (1196–1204)
‘Izz al-Dīn Külc Arslān III (1204–05)
‘Izz al-Dīn Kaykāwūs I (1211–19)
‘Alā’ al-Dīn Kayqubād I (1219–37)
Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II (1237–45/46)
‘Izz al-Dīn Kaykāwūs II (1246–56, 1257–61)
Rukn al-Dīn Külc Arslān IV (1248–54, 1256–65)
‘Alā’ al-Dīn Kayqubād II (1249–57)

Tsars of Bulgaria

Peter and Asen (1185–97)
Kaloyan (1197–1207)
Boril (1207–18)
Ivan Asen II (1218–41)
Koloman (Kaliman I) (1241–46)
Michael Asen (1246–56)
Kaliman Asen II (1256)
Mitsos (Micho) Asen (1256–57)
Constantine Tikh (1257–77)

Kings of Cilician Armenia

Leo I (1187–1219), king after 1199
Hetoum I (1226–69)
Author’s Note

I have used a mixed approach in rendering Byzantine names into English. Whenever possible, the English equivalent of personal names has been preferred: thus, Theodore, not Theodoros; John, not Ioannes. I have adhered to the practice of transcribing Byzantine family names and not Latinizing them: thus Palaiologos, not Palaeologus; Kantakouzenos, not Cantacuzenus. In the case of Byzantine court titles and offices, I have again attempted to strike a balance. I have provided the standard translation of many titles, with the Greek term left in parenthesis: thus, grand logothete (megas logothetes) and consul of the philosophers (hypatos ton philosophon). Court titles whose translation is especially problematic or impossible, such as mesazon and sebastokrator, have been given in transcription. The discussion of the sources as well as various supplementary and technical matters has been confined to the notes and the appendices, which lay out the evidentiary basis of this book in great detail. All references to the Old Testament follow the nomenclature and numeration of the Greek Septuagint. References to classical Greek texts are based on the standard editions.