

## 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).

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# The Byzantine Hellene

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

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DIMITER ANGELOV  
Harvard University, Massachusetts



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## 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

- 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,



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 Ephesos (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

**Zabareiotos:** a teacher who may have been Theodore's head tutor at the court

## List of Rulers in Byzantium and Beyond

### Byzantine Emperors before 1204

Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118)  
 John II Komnenos (1118–43)  
 Manuel I Komnenos (1143–80)  
 Alexios II Komnenos (1180–83)  
 Andronikos I Komnenos (1183–85)  
 Isaac II Angelos (1185–95)  
 Alexios III Angelos (1195–1203)  
 Alexios IV Angelos (1203–04)  
 Nicholas Kanavos (1204)  
 Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos (1204)

### Byzantine Emperors and Rulers after 1204

#### Nicaea

Theodore I (Komnenos) Laskaris (1204–21)  
 John III (Doukas) Vatatzes (1221–54)  
 Theodore II (Doukas) Laskaris (1254–58)  
 John IV Laskaris (1258–61)  
 Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–82), ruling in Constantinople after 1261

#### Epiros

Michael I Komnenos Doukas (1204–c. 1215)  
 Theodore Komnenos Doukas (1215–30, c. 1237–53)  
 Manuel Komnenos Doukas (1230–c. 1237)  
 John Komnenos Doukas (c. 1237–44)  
 Demetrios Komnenos Doukas (1244–46)  
 Michael II Komnenos Doukas (c. 1231–c. 1267)

#### Trebizond (the Grand Komnenoi)

Alexios I (1204–22)  
 David (1204–12)  
 Manuel I (1238–63)

## 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 Kılıç Arslān III (1204–05)
- ‘Izz al-Dīn Kaykāvūs I (1211–19)
- ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Kayqubād I (1219–37)
- Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II (1237–45/46)
- ‘Izz al-Dīn Kaykāvūs II (1246–56, 1257–61)
- Rukn al-Dīn Kılıç 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)
- Mitso (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.