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978-0-521-85703-1 - Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330

Dimitar Angelov

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## *Introduction*

This book is a study of imperial ideology and political thought in Byzantium after the watershed in its history caused by the Latin conquest of the city of Constantinople, New Rome, in the year 1204. The dichotomy imperial ideology vs. political thought is deliberate and purposeful. It reflects the approach of this study toward a large and diverse body of Byzantine political literature, consisting of rhetorical, theoretical, and ecclesiastical texts which all share the common subject of imperial rulership. Our principal goal is to explore the correspondence, tensions, and rifts between official ideology of kingship, on the one hand, and ideas of imperial governance formulated at a semi-official or independent level, on the other, during a period of unparalleled political and financial crisis facing Byzantium. We will examine a set of competing political ideas; some of them were traditional and conventional for the empire of New Rome, while others were novel, occasionally reformist, and always relevant to the new political realities in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade.

The study is promising not only because of the considerable quantity of political writing which has so far attracted a relatively scant scholarly attention. An arresting historical problem stands at the crux of the discussion in the following chapters: the manner in which Byzantine political imagination responded to the trauma of the loss of Constantinople and to the post-1204 historical realities. How did the Byzantines accommodate themselves mentally to the political reality of Byzantium as a small and fragmented state, a second-rate power in the politics of the Eastern Mediterranean? The writings of a remarkable constellation of literati – propagandists and court rhetoricians, theorists and authors of advice tracts, historians and ecclesiastics – open a window into Byzantine political imagination, and its limits, in a period when the empire lost the extensive territory, international prestige, and wealth which it had once enjoyed, especially during the reigns of such emperors as Justinian I (527–65), Basil II (976–1025), and Manuel I Komnenos (1143–80). Indeed, this book is as much about the evolution

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of state ideology as it is about the opinions and perspectives of individual Byzantine authors, who left their strong personal imprint on courtly genres that mandated adherence to tradition rather than original thought.

The methodology employed in the following chapters is both literary and historical. We will extrapolate ideas exclusively from written texts. In other words, pictorial representations of the emperor (on coins and in wall painting) and court ceremonies – sources which, too, shed light on imperial ideology – will be used only occasionally, mostly when they complement the analysis of the written sources. In addition, we will make no attempt to distill ideology from imperial policies, for our interest lies in the articulated political thinking and vocabulary of the Byzantines themselves.<sup>1</sup> Our methodology is also decidedly historical. One can form a comprehensive understanding of political ideas only when setting them in a concrete historical context. At the outset, therefore, it is helpful to familiarize the reader with the hallmarks of the empire's political history in the thirteenth and the early fourteenth century. We should bear in mind that this introduction is brief and sketchy.<sup>2</sup> Each chapter will provide further historical context as relevant.

The year 1204 pitted Byzantium against unprecedented political division. In the wake of the fall of Constantinople the imperial territories that eluded Latin conquest – and in some cases that had seceded from the empire before the arrival of the crusader armies – fell into the hands of a multitude of Greek lords.<sup>3</sup> The three most important successor states to Byzantium formed in the thirteenth century were the empires of Nicaea and Trebizond in Asia Minor and the principality (briefly an empire) of Epiros in the Balkans. The states of Nicaea, Trebizond, and Epiros each claimed at a certain point of their history to be the legitimate successor to Byzantium and had a ruler bearing the title of emperor of the Romans. Of the three splinter states, the empire of Nicaea (1204–61) was by far the most successful one. The founder of the Nicaean empire Theodore I Laskaris (1205–21) was a talented Byzantine general who had married before 1204 a daughter of Emperor Alexios III Angelos (1195–1203) and had been

<sup>1</sup> For the use of artistic evidence as a source on the state ideology of the empire of Trebizond, see A. Eastmond, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium: Hagia Sophia and the Empire of Trebizond* (Aldershot, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For detailed accounts of political events in the period, see A. Gardner, *The Lascarids of Nicaea: The Story of an Empire in Exile* (London, 1912); D. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1993); D. Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the West, 1258–1282: A Study in Byzantine–Latin Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959); Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*.

<sup>3</sup> N. Oikonomides, “La décomposition de l’empire byzantin à la veille de 1204 et les origines de l’empire de Nicée: à propos de la *Partitio Romaniae*,” in *XVe Congrès d’Études Byzantines. Rapports et co-rapports*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1976), 1–28 (repr. in *Byzantium from the Ninth Century to the Fourth Crusade* (Aldershot, 1992), Study XX).

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given the high honorific title of Despot. Laskaris slipped away from Constantinople shortly before the Latin conquest and managed to carve out a small principality despite an inauspicious beginning as a state-builder; the first episode of his activities in Asia Minor mentioned by the sources was the refusal of the citizens of Nicaea to admit him into their city.<sup>4</sup> In 1205, in the city of Nicaea, he was proclaimed emperor and in 1208 was officially crowned in an ecclesiastical ceremony. Theodore I's son-in-law and successor, the emperor John III Vatatzes (1221–54), reconquered large territories in the Balkans, including the important city of Thessaloniki in 1246. His son and successor Theodore II Laskaris (1254–58) withstood successfully the counteroffensive of the Bulgarians in the years 1254–55. In 1261 Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–82), a general who usurped power from the Laskarid dynasty, recaptured Constantinople and moved the seat of the empire back into the old imperial capital. Nonetheless, the Nicaean state and the restored empire of the Palaiologoi never managed to reunite fully the disparate pieces of the fragmented Byzantine world. Large areas formerly belonging to Byzantium escaped imperial control. Not only did many Aegean and Ionian islands and a sizeable portion of mainland Greece remain under Latin dominion, but soon after 1300 almost the whole of Asia Minor was lost to the Turks. In the early fourteenth century Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328) oversaw the transformation of Byzantium into a small Balkan state. The Nicaean and the Palaiologan empires thus had to coexist not only with foreign powers' domination over former Byzantine territories, but also with the rival Byzantine states of Epiros and Trebizond. In the long run, the rulers of Epiros and Trebizond acquiesced to demands that they abandon their claims to the Byzantine imperial title and had to settle, in 1242 and 1282 respectively, for the lesser title of Despot, the second in the court hierarchy of titles after that of the emperor, but nevertheless they were to remain masters of independent territorial states.<sup>5</sup>

The reconstituted imperial office after 1204 was a historical and symbolic bridge to the empire of the twelfth century. The emperors in the later period continued to enjoy the same wide-ranging prerogatives as before

<sup>4</sup> Akropolites I, 10–11.

<sup>5</sup> G. Prinzing, "Das Byzantinische Kaisertum im Umbruch zwischen regionaler Aufspaltung und erneuter Zentralisierung in den Jahren 1204–1282," in R. Gundlach and H. Weber (eds.), *Legitimation und Funktion des Herrschers vom ägyptischen Pharao zum neuzeitlichen Diktator* (Stuttgart, 1992), 129–83. Between 1282 and 1360 the ruler of Trebizond reassumed the imperial title, although in a modified version less offensive to the masters of Constantinople: in the second half of the fourteenth century he styled himself as "emperor of the entire Orient, the Iberians and Perateia, the Grand Komnenos." See N. Oikonomides, "The Chancery of the Grand Komnenoi: Imperial Tradition and Political Reality," *Ἀρχαῖον Πόντου*, 35 (1979), 299–332, esp. 321–30.

and in practice ruled more or less as absolute monarchs. They still served as commanders-in-chief, presided over the highest civil law court, the imperial tribunal, redistributed the state's tax resources, and retained traditional powers in ecclesiastical administration, such as appointing and investing the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (seated in Nicaea between 1208 and 1261).<sup>6</sup> In the eleventh and increasingly during the twelfth century the imperial office had begun to make widespread use of the administrative system of economic privilege, whether through tax exemptions to individuals or through grants of *pronoia*, that is, conditional grants of tax-collecting rights over lands. As a method of governance, the system of privilege continued to exist after 1204.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the perennial problem of dynastic instability and frequent challenges to the throne persisted in late Byzantium (see table 3, pp. 120–21). In fact, all emperors in the thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries except Theodore II Laskaris battled with rival claimants and rebels. Ironically, it was during his peaceful reign that the plot of Michael VIII Palaiologos and the aristocratic faction headed by him against the Laskarids gestated.

The late Byzantine aristocracy, with its strong awareness of noble lineage and a sense of entitlement to the imperial office, was a factor which no emperor in the period could afford to ignore. Ever since the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) blood and pedigree – the degree of kinship with the emperor in specific – had replaced institutions as the organizing principle in the hierarchy of court dignities. This was still the situation in the late Byzantine period, when the emperors relied heavily on their immediate and extended families in governing the empire.<sup>8</sup> Kinship alliances, however, were not always possible or desirable, as aristocratic groups proved a two-edged sword: they could undermine as well as bolster imperial authority. The Nicaean emperors John III Vatatzes and Theodore

<sup>6</sup> On the imperial tribunal see P. Lemerle, "Recherches sur les institutions judiciaires à l'époque des Paléologues. I. Le tribunal impérial," in *Pankarpeia. Mélanges Henri Grégoire* (Brussels, 1949), 369–84. On the powers of the imperial fisc see A. Kazhdan, "State, Feudal, and Private Economy in Byzantium," *DOP* 47 (1993), 83–100, esp. 95–100. On the extensive rights of the emperor in the church, see below chapter 11, 355 ff. The only emperor in the period who did not take part in campaigns was Andronikos II Palaiologos during the second half of his reign (1296–1328). See Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> On the system of economic privilege see N. Oikonomides, "The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy," in A. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium* (Washington, 2002), vol. 3, 972–1058, esp. 1039–58; N. Oikonomides, *Fiscalité et exemption fiscale à Byzance (IXe–XIe s.)* (Athens, 1996). On *pronoia* and the scholarly controversy this institution has generated see A. Kazhdan, "Pronoia: The History of a Scholarly Discussion," *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 10 (1995), 133–63.

<sup>8</sup> See N. Oikonomides, "L'évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XIe siècle (1025–1118)," *TM*, 6 (1976), 125–52, esp. 125–28; A. Laiou, "The Byzantine Aristocracy of the Palaeologan Period: A Story of Arrested Development," *Viator*, 4 (1973), 131–51.

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II Laskaris attempted to prune the economic privileges and office-holding powers of the aristocracy, but these policies failed in the long run. After 1259, the Palaiologan clan ruled the empire until 1453 as their own family patrimony, even introducing for the first time in Byzantium's history the institution of territorial appanages that were granted to members of the immediate imperial family.<sup>9</sup>

The late Byzantine period naturally saw also some new tendencies in the prerogatives and nature of the imperial office. The Nicaean royal court was itinerant – the rulers regularly wintered in Nymphaion in Lydia and tended to spend the spring and summer in the capital city of Nicaea in Bithynia.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly, the legislative authority of the imperial office declined drastically during the thirteenth century. The emperors after 1204 seldom issued laws on civil matters, as they had done on numerous occasions during the early and the middle Byzantine period. An administrative order (*prostagma*) by Michael VIII Palaiologos concerning military requisitions and the novel drafted in October 1304 by the patriarch Athanasios I (1289–93, 1303–09) and his synod are the sole surviving pieces of new secular legislation from late Byzantium.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the church, whose judicial role grew in the period, took the initiative to compose the novel of 1304 which remained known for posterity as the “novel of patriarch Athanasios.” The church was also the recipient of a few imperial laws of general application concerning ecclesiastical matters.<sup>12</sup> Instead of general laws, the Byzantine emperors after 1204 preferred to issue privileges addressing a specific individual, city, monastery, bishopric, foreign dignitary, or urban community.

The ideological response to the events in 1204 has already drawn the attention of Byzantinists. Scholars have spotted both signs of continuity and change. Hélène Ahrweiler devoted part of her monograph on Byzantine political ideology throughout the centuries to the period after

<sup>9</sup> M. Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile: Government and Society under the Laskarids of Nicaea (1204–1261)* (Oxford, 1974), 60–79; J. Barker, “The Problem of Appanages in Byzantium during the Palaiologan Period,” *Byzantina*, 3 (1971), 103–22.

<sup>10</sup> Akropolites I, 68.1–2, attributes the practice to John III Vatatzes, although it appears to date back to the beginning of the Nicaean period. See M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300–1450* (Cambridge, 1985), 445.

<sup>11</sup> L. Burgmann and P. Magdalino, “Michael VIII on Maladministration,” *Fontes Minores*, 6 (1984), 377–90; Zepos, *JGR*, vol. 1, 533–36. On the novel of Athanasios, see chapter 9, n. 50.

<sup>12</sup> Andronikos II issued two other novels and these concerned ecclesiastical administration (Dölger, *Regesten*, nos. 2040, 2159). All Palaiologan novels were thus closely associated with the church. See S. Perentidis, “Le terme ‘Néara’ sous les premiers Paléologues,” *Subseciva Groningana. Studies in Roman and Byzantine Law*, vol. 4 (1990) (= *Novella Constitutio. Studies in Honour of Nicolaas van der Wal*), 163–76.

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1204. Ahrweiler observed the emergence of “Greek and orthodox patriotism” during the Latin occupation of Constantinople, while she discussed in brief political ideology after the reconquest in 1261 under the rubric of “national utopia.”<sup>13</sup> Ivan Duichev too observed an ideological shift, which, according to him, led to the disappearance of the sacral aura of the emperor.<sup>14</sup> Other scholars have preferred to stress the traditionalism of imperial ideology in the later period. John Meyendorff regarded continuity with late antiquity as the dominant feature in ideology in the period 1071–1261 and spoke of “a permanent crisis,” which boiled down to an “ever-growing gulf separating myth and reality.”<sup>15</sup> The most detailed study on Byzantine imperial ideology after 1204 is that of Alkmini Stavridou-Zafraka, who examined the ideological controversy between the empire of Nicaea and the principality of Epiros in the period 1204–30 over the legitimacy and eventual imperial coronation in 1227 of a rival Epirote ruler. Stavridou-Zafraka has shown that both Nicaea and Epiros continued to pay tribute to the tenets of Byzantine imperial ideology, had emperors whose power was legitimized in accordance with tradition, and presented as their political *raison d'être* the recapture of Constantinople from the Latins. Only some of the theories of political legitimacy put forth by the principal ideologue of the Epirote state, Demetrios Chomatenos, the archbishop of Ohrid, departed from traditional ideology, especially as Chomatenos tried to justify the simultaneous existence of two Byzantine emperors and two Byzantine empires outside the mother city of Constantinople.<sup>16</sup> Striking continuities with traditional imperial ideology have been observed even during the early fifteenth century, when the plight of the empire had reached its peak and the fall of Constantinople, fully encircled by the Turks, seemed close at hand.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> H. Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975), 103–28.

<sup>14</sup> I. Duichev, “Le grand tournant historique de l’an 1204,” *ZRVI*, 16 (1975), 63–68; I. Duichev, *La crise idéologique de 1203–1204 et ses repercussions sur la civilisation byzantine* (Paris, 1976), *passim*, esp. 44. Duichev’s unfounded hypothesis contradicts the evidence discussed here in chapter 2.

<sup>15</sup> J. Meyendorff, “Ideological Crises in Byzantium, 1071 to 1261,” in Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY, 1982), 67–85.

<sup>16</sup> A. Stavridou-Zafraka, *Νίκαια και Ηπειρος τον 13<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα. Ιδεολογική αντιπαράθεση στην προσπάθειά τους να ανακτήσουν την αυτοκρατορία* (Thessaloniki, 1990); eadem, “The Empire of Thessaloniki (1224–1242): Political Ideology and Reality,” *Byzantiaka*, 19 (1999), 211–22. See also below n. 47. On the date of the imperial coronation of Theodore Komnenos Doukas, see E. Bee-Sepherle, “Ο χρόνος στέψεως τοῦ Θεοδώρου Δούκα ὡς προσδιορίζεται ἐκ ἀνεκδότων γρωαμαμάτων Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ἀποκαύκου,” *BNJ* 21 (1971–76), 272–79.

<sup>17</sup> H.-G. Beck, “Reichsidee und nationale Politik im späthbyzantinischen Staat,” *BZ*, 53 (1960), 86–94; J.-L. van Dieten, “Politische Ideologie und Niedergang im Byzanz der Palaiologen,” *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 6 (1979), 1–35, esp. 2–6.

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Our examination has a more comprehensive scope than previous studies, focusing on official ideology and the larger and richer field of political ideas on kingship, including both secular and ecclesiastical thought. Accordingly, the discussion is divided into three sections: part I, “Official ideology”, deals with the ideas of propagandists and panegyrists, part II, “The secular thinkers,” focuses on political theories of governance outside the official context, and part III, “The ecclesiastics,” examines the constitutional ideas of churchmen. Our study focuses on some hitherto little-known political authors, such as Theodore II Laskaris and Thomas Magistros, as well as on some better known ones, whose ideas have not been sufficiently explored. The chosen time span (1204–ca. 1330) is extensive enough to enable us to compare and contrast two distinct periods of the Byzantine restoration after 1204, the Nicaean empire in exile and the empire of the early Palaiologoi. The cut-off point (ca. 1330) has been chosen because it makes this comparison meaningful and feasible. This end point, although unrelated to issues of historical periodization, marks changes in the political and intellectual life of the late empire. The long reign of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos ended in 1328 as the elderly emperor was forced to resign from office, and with it the destructive First Civil War (1321–28) also came to an end. The civil war left Byzantium a weakened state. The city of Nicaea, with its symbolic importance as a one-time capital of the empire in exile, fell into the hands of the Ottoman Turks on 2 March 1331. Byzantine court culture underwent a transformation after Andronikos II’s dethronement. The splendid flowering of court oratory during his reign came to an abrupt end under the new regime of his grandson Andronikos III.<sup>18</sup> In the second half of fourteenth century, as the financial and political weakness of the state reached a critical point, the emperor lost his monopoly of patronage of Byzantine literati; some of them sought patronage outside the empire, thus foreshadowing the exodus of Greek scholars to the West in the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> The year 1330 forms no absolute break point for our study, however, in the same way as it does not generally in the periodization of Byzantine history. While the investigation will be carried methodically and systematically up to this end point, we will have to refer on occasion to developments in the later Palaiologan period, especially with regard to ecclesiastical thought. The

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 1, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the conclusions of I. Ševčenko, “Society and Intellectual Life in the Fourteenth Century,” *Actes du XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des Études Byzantines*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1974), 69–92, esp. 81–83, 92.

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in-depth analysis of political ideas on kingship in the years 1330–1453 will have to remain a desideratum.

Two important matters that require a preliminary introduction are the terminology we have adopted and the particular attention paid to rhetorical texts as the principal source on Byzantine political ideas. In the first place, to what extent are we justified in speaking of a field of “political thought” in Byzantium? This subject exceeds the scope and ambitions of a study limited to the later period of Byzantine history; nonetheless the issue is of paramount importance, especially as we shall make frequent use of the concept of political thought in subsequent chapters, and some tentative considerations become necessary. Second, what were the salient characteristics of late Byzantine political writing?

## POLITICAL THOUGHT IN BYZANTIUM

Scholars have traditionally argued that the Byzantines lacked propensity for political theorizing and fell short of developing a discipline of political thought. The alleged absence of rival theories of politics, aside from the omnipresent and commonplace tenets of the monarchy, has served to support this skeptical interpretation.<sup>20</sup> Byzantine imperial ideology itself has been seen as static and unchanging after the formative period of late antiquity, and furthermore has been identified with the totality of Byzantine political thought.<sup>21</sup> The problem of whether or not Byzantium developed a native tradition of political thought has two different dimensions. First, we must ask ourselves whether the Byzantines regarded the intellectual investigation of politics as an autonomous sphere of inquiry. Second, of course, we should consider whether a modern critic may qualify the body of Byzantine political ideas as constituting “political thought” and, if this is the case, what the principal characteristics of this thought are.

For the Byzantines as well as for the ancients, the investigation of politics belonged to the discipline of philosophy. According to Aristotle’s categorization of philosophy which was further elaborated in late

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, E. Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (Oxford, 1957), 1: “Byzantium did not produce any *original* political theory; nor did it trouble itself to discuss *rival* theories about the nature of the Empire” (emphasis in original).

<sup>21</sup> J. Bury, *The Constitution of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1910), 38: “there was no need, in the Eastern Empire, to evolve theories, as nothing was in dispute”; W. Ensslin, “The Government and Administration of the Byzantine Empire,” in J. Hussey (ed.), *The Cambridge Mediaeval History*, vol. IV, 2 (Cambridge, 1967), 18: “The Byzantines themselves accepted the Empire as *sui generis*, because it was sent from God, and any idea of theorising about it never entered their minds.” Similar, although more nuanced, is the assessment by D. Nicol, “Byzantine Political Thought,” in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge, 1988), 51–79.

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antiquity by the commentators of the Alexandrian School, philosophy had two branches, theoretical and practical. Practical philosophy comprised ethics, economics, and also politics – the field in which Aristotle wrote *The Politics* and Plato *The Republic*.<sup>22</sup> The late Byzantine scholars Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197/98–ca. 1269) and Theodore Metochites (1270–1332) – two of the literati whose political ideas we will explore – were well aware of the twofold division of philosophy, and subdivided practical philosophy into its three traditional elements: politics, economics, and ethics.<sup>23</sup> Yet, despite this classification, no Byzantine is known to have embraced the study of politics as an autonomous philosophical discipline in its own right. Instead, the concept of political philosophy (*politike philosophia*) was often used anachronistically in reference to classical authors. For example, in one of his speeches the late antique orator Themistius (ca. 317–ca. 388) referred to Aristotle’s advocacy of “practical and political philosophy.”<sup>24</sup> In the fourteenth century Theodore Metochites harshly criticized the political writings of the ancients and noted that their “political philosophy” was of no use, as it proposed theories without any correspondence to past, present, or future reality.<sup>25</sup>

The apparent lack of a Byzantine categorization of its own political writing as philosophy does not necessarily mean a lack of interest in political ideas and theories – ideas and theories which almost exclusively touched on operational aspects of the Byzantine monarchical constitution. Texts rich in ideas on kingship belong to diverse genres which are predominantly nonphilosophical but literary – or, by the Byzantine standard, rhetorical. Indeed, the question of the sources bears special methodological significance and is related to a long-standing scholarly controversy. By choosing

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 993b19–21; *Eudemian Ethics*, 1214a9–12. See Elias, *Prolegomena philosophiae*, ed. A. Busse (Berlin, 1900), 32. Cf. also the comparative summary of the prolegomena to philosophy by Ammonius, Elias, and David in L. Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam, 1962), xxvii–xxxii (repr. in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence* (Ithaca, 1990), 344–47.)

<sup>23</sup> Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome of Logic*, PG, vol. 142, col. 733BC; Theodore Metochites, *Introduction to Astronomy*, in B. Bydén, *Theodore Metochites’ Stoicheiosis Astronomike and the Study of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics in Early Palaiologan Byzantium* (Göteborg, 2003), 443–50, esp. 445–46. In his treatise on education Metochites even called politics “the best and most important part of philosophy,” which, he added, the ancient philosophers had failed to discuss properly and realistically. See I. Polemis, *Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης. Ἠθικός ἢ περὶ παιδείας* (Athens, 1995), 172.15–16.

<sup>24</sup> Themistius, Or. 34, 6, translated in *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius*, trans. P. Heather and V. Moncur (Liverpool, 2001), 315. Interestingly, in the sixth century the dialogue *On Political Science* equates political philosophy with the art of kingship, both of which are said to be an imitation of God. Further research is necessary to trace the subsequent influence of this idea. See *Menae patricii cum Thoma referendario De scientia politica dialogus*, ed. C. Mazzucchi (Milan, 1982), 18.6–7.

<sup>25</sup> Metochites, *Miscellanea*, ch. 81, 536.

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to focus on different sources, scholars have oscillated between two contrary approaches to the political thinking of the Byzantines.<sup>26</sup> The proponents of the first approach have tended to use court rhetoric and propaganda as well as the ritual of imperial ceremonial in order to trace the uninterrupted persistence over time of an ideology of kingship, whose principal tenets have been designated as the *Kaiseridee* (the “Byzantine imperial idea”). This concept acquired scholarly currency after two pioneering studies of Byzantine propaganda published in Germany and Austria, by Otto Treitinger on imperial ceremonial (1938) and Herbert Hunger on the solemn preambles (*prooimia*) of official imperial documents (1964), respectively.<sup>27</sup> The *Kaiseridee*, although never given a precise definition by scholars, boils down to the monarchical tenets of imperial authority which the Byzantines universally accepted: sacral rulership, possession and imitation of divine virtues, sun mimicry, and traditional epithets and comparisons such as, for example, “helmsman” or “victor.” Naturally, scholars who have traced the *Kaiseridee* in Byzantium have not been interested in issues of change over time. For instance, in his study Hunger examined the continual impact of the *Kaiseridee* from the time of Byzantium’s founder, Constantine the Great (313–37), until the last Byzantine emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos (1449–53). The identification of the *Kaiseridee* with the entirety of Byzantine political thought has predictably led to questioning the originality and creativity of the Byzantines in this aspect of their intellectual life.

The picture of smooth continuity of Byzantine political ideas throughout the centuries presented by the *Kaiseridee* has elicited two responses. The first one has qualified the picture. In the past twenty-five or so years scholars have become increasingly aware that imperial propaganda varied from period to period and within the reigns of successive emperors, despite deceptive continuity in ideological vocabulary and court ceremonies.<sup>28</sup> The

<sup>26</sup> For critical reviews on some of the historiography on Byzantine political thought see H. Hunger (ed.), *Das byzantinische Herrscherbild* (Darmstadt, 1975), 1–12 (*Einleitung*); M. Th. Fögen, “Das politische Denken der Byzantiner,” in I. Fetscher and H. Münkler (eds.), *Pipers Handbuch der politischen Ideen*, vol. 2 (Munich and Zurich, 1993), 41–85, esp. 78–82.

<sup>27</sup> O. Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell* (Jena, 1938; 2nd edn Darmstadt, 1956); H. Hunger, *Prooimion. Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengen der Urkunden* (Vienna, 1964).

<sup>28</sup> This approach has been advocated in the study of propaganda by Alexander Kazhdan and in the study of ceremonial by Michael McCormick. See A. Kazhdan, “Certain Trends of Imperial Propaganda in the Byzantine Empire from the Eighth to the Fifteenth Centuries,” *Prédication et propagande au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris, 1983), 13–28; M. McCormick, “Analyzing Imperial Ceremonies,” *JÖB*, 35 (1985), 1–20. A similar approach is that of Hélène Ahrweiler, who in her book *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin* (1975) traced changes in the ruling ideology of the empire