

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Good Romans, Bad Romans: Political Loyalty and  
Roman Identity after the Fourth Crusade

By

Grant Wesley Hobbs

June 2024

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts degree in the  
Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Anthony Kaldellis  
Preceptor: Deirdre Lyons

## Introduction

At the turn of the thirteenth century, Romanía was nearly completely dismantled by Western invaders during the Fourth Crusade. In 1204, the crusaders captured the city of Constantinople and in the immediate aftermath the Franks and Italians conquered most of the rest of Romanía save for rump states in Epeiros, Nikaia, and Trebizond. This period, beginning in 1204 and only completely ending with the Ottoman conquest of the Aegean in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is known as the *Frankokratia*, or “rule of the Franks.”<sup>1</sup> The present study examines the relationship between political loyalty to the *basileus* and Roman ethnic identity during the first two centuries of the *Frankokratia*. The extant Roman primary sources, introduced below, imply that loyalty, by which I mean political belonging, to the emperor (*basileus*) was central to identification as a Roman. But despite what some of our sources would have us (and their contemporary audience) believe, political loyalty to the *basileus* was not a concrete signifier of Roman ethnicity. Rather, political loyalty to the *basileus* was only emphasized in elite circles, from which much of our surviving sources originated. This was a product of the fragmented state of the thirteenth-century Roman world – each successor state positioned itself as the legitimate successor to Constantinople, and so linked Roman ethnicity to themselves in a propagandistic fashion. The primary sources do not agree upon the nature of the intersection of political-legal identity and Roman ethnicity. But I would argue that it is precisely

---

<sup>1</sup> Histories of this period can be found in Anthony Kaldellis, *The New Roman Empire: A History of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 733-840, Michael Angold, “After the Fourth Crusade: The Greek Rump States and the Recovery of Byzantium,” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire: C. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 731-758, and David Jacoby, “After the Fourth Crusade: The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Frankish States,” also in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, 759-778.

this lack of consensus which speaks to the overall relative unimportance of political loyalty to the *basileus* as an indicator of Romanness.

The most important successor state, for the purposes of this investigation, was the Empire of Nikaia, a modern term used to signify the rump state based in Nikaia and ruled by the Laskarid dynasty. Before the capture of Constantinople, Theodoros I Laskaris (r. 1205-1221) was proclaimed *despotes*, signifying his eligibility for the succession, by his father-in-law Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195-1203), who had no sons. In the chaos of the sack of Constantinople, Theodoros managed to escape to Prousa, modern Bursa, Turkey, and began consolidating a local power base in Alexios III's name. Initially marred by setbacks, it was not until the new "Latin Empire," as the Frankish crusader state based in Constantinople is known to modern historians, suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Bulgarians in 1205 that Theodoros achieved real military victory and later that year proclaimed himself a new *basileus*, moving his capital to the symbolic city of Nikaia, the location of the first ecumenical council.<sup>2</sup> Theodoros I's successors, particularly Ioannes III Doukas Batatzes (r. 1221-1254) and Theodoros II Laskaris (r. 1254-1258), achieved lasting success against the Latins and reclaimed nearly all of western Anatolia, Thrace, and Macedonia from various competing states, save for Constantinople itself.<sup>3</sup> In 1261, the usurper Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1261-1282) finally retook Constantinople, a key victory, and founded the Palaiologan dynasty, which would rule Romanía until the Ottoman conquest in 1453. For much of the Palaiologan period, Romanía grappled with continuous losses to its territorial integrity, especially to the Ottomans. By the time of Ioannes VI Kantakouzenos's

---

<sup>2</sup> Angold, *Byzantine*, 12-14; Kaldellis, *New*, 758-759; Lock, *Franks*, 51-54.

<sup>3</sup> Kaldellis, *New*, 774-782; Macrides, *George*, 254-255; Ahrweiler, *Byzance*, 301-327; Angelov, *Byzantine*, 147-180; Angold, "After," 731-758.

abdication in 1354, Roman territory was reduced to the area around Constantinople and disparate possessions across Greece and the southern Balkans.<sup>4</sup>

But Nikaia was not the only Roman successor state, nor was it ever predetermined that it would be the one to ultimately succeed in taking Constantinople. Rival states existed in what modern historians call the Empire of Trebizond and Despotate of Epeiros (sometimes also briefly called the Empire of Thessaloniki). Trebizond, located on the Black Sea coast of eastern Anatolia, was ruled by the Megas Komnenoi family, a branch of the former dynasty in Constantinople from pre-1185, lasted until the Ottomans conquered the area in 1461 and even retained their claims to the imperial throne after Michael VIII entered Constantinople.<sup>5</sup> The biggest challenge to Nikaian supremacy came from Epeiros, ruled by another branch of the extended Komnenos family (the Komnenodoukai), which captured Thessaloniki, the empire's second city, in the late 1220s.<sup>6</sup> But the Bulgarians defeated Epeiros in 1230, leaving it greatly weakened and ultimately suffering major losses to Nikaia in the 1240s. Our primary sources come from the contexts of these successor states and it is possible to glean much from them in the way of identity as a social force in the medieval period. It is in this ever-changing political landscape, so markedly different from the general uniformity of Roman rule for the previous millennium, that this paper seeks to investigate the relationship between political allegiance and ethnic Romanness.

When I say identity as a social force, I mean that by claiming membership in an identity one enters into a social relationship with two kinds of others, the gaze/perceptions of which act upon the individual and influence their behavior and self-conception. The two kinds of others are

---

<sup>4</sup> Laiou, "Palaiologoi," 806-808, 822-824.

<sup>5</sup> Vasiliev, "Foundation," 3-37.

<sup>6</sup> Nicol, "Ecclesiastical," 227-228; Kaldellis, *New*, 762-771.

etic and emic others, i.e., outside and inside, respectively, from the perspective of the identity group. Both the emic and etic social pressures are normative – they reinforce existing notions of what that identity group “should” be like through shared emic values and shared etic stereotypes. Historically speaking, this means that identity is formed both in relation to communal solidarity and contrasting against the other, therefore affecting relations between different identity groups. In the medieval world, there were many different types of identities: ethnicity, religion, and place of origin, to name a few of the most important. For the present study, I focus on the intersection of two of these: ethnic identity and political-legal identity. While the “nation-state” is a modern concept, an association between “right” government and community identities seem to be visible to some extent in the medieval period. In the Roman context specifically, the title “basileus ton Rhomaion” implies a connection between the Romans as an identity group and the leadership of the basileus. This connection is also present in other titles such as “king of the Franks” or “tsar of the Bulgarians.” Understanding how identity is negotiated offers insight into the power dynamics of social relationships as well as how identity can be wielded to cause conflict or cooperation. In an increasingly globalized modern world, identity formation is even more complex as the variety of social pressures from different groups in conversation with one another each influence identity in some way.

### **The Shape of Roman Ethnicity**

Since World War II, the prevailing argument regarding ethnic identity, in broad strokes, is that it is socially constructed and not fixed upon birth.<sup>7</sup> I define ethnicity not as a group of people, but a *property of* a group of people.<sup>8</sup> It is a ubiquitous belief that, somehow, a group is

---

<sup>7</sup> Chandra, *Constructivist*, 2-3; Hall, *Ethnic*, 1-3; Smith, *Myths*, 4-7.

<sup>8</sup> The distinction originally put this way in Page, *Being*, 11.

related to one another through shared ancestry. Importantly, biology *does not* matter here – only that members of the group *believe* themselves to be related.<sup>9</sup> Ethnicity is both outwardly expressed and internalized in one’s identity through certain markers; these markers of ethnicity include the following traits, though none are universal, and any ethnicity may exhibit any, all, or few of them: a common name for themselves (endonym), an association with a specific territory, shared cultural traits such as language, religion, customs or literary tradition, and a collective sense of solidarity among lived experiences.<sup>10</sup> Finally, membership in an ethnicity is normative. Members of the group are expected to behave a certain way or else risk ostracization – group members exert normative social influence on one another, consciously or unconsciously.<sup>11</sup>

What the Roman ethnicity was and what constituted membership in it has been debated at length in the twenty-first century. The orthodox view in Western scholarship is to label the Romans anachronistically as “Byzantines” or “Greeks,” a view which essentializes the Romans as exotic other in order to provide a foil to rational, Enlightenment-era values.<sup>12</sup> A major, recent challenge to this essentialist view focused on the *Frankokratia* came with Gill Page’s work *Being Byzantine* in 2008, in which she examined how Roman identity was affected by the fall of Constantinople in 1204 by comparing Roman historical literature from before and after the fall to track changes in self-conception. Ultimately, Page argues that there was no single uniform sense

---

<sup>9</sup> The unimportance of actual biology constitutes the prime distinction between constructivism and primordialism, the view that ethnicity is genetically predetermined. See the forceful refutation of primordialism in Buell, *Why*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> These factors are broadly agreed upon across much scholarship on historical ethnicity and constructivist theory. See Hall, *Ethnic*, 3, 25; Smith, *Ethnic*, 24-9; Chandra, *Constructivist*, 51; McInerney, *Companion*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> The normative aspect of ethnicity has primarily been discussed within the context of the United States. See Baum, “John,” 56-76. In the Roman/Byzantine world, see Neville, *Byzantine Gender*, 33-58.

<sup>12</sup> Lecky, *History*, 13. The essentialist position pervades into modern scholarship. See Cameron, *The Byzantines*, ix, 16, 27, and Angold, *Byzantium*, 2, 20, 22, 57.

of Roman identity post-1204, that what it meant to be Roman changed over time from very much driven by loyalty to the *basileus* to the *basileus* losing relevance in self-identification, and that the conquest in 1204 and subsequent Frankish occupation was the single most important event driving said change in the period.<sup>13</sup> Page states that the primary understanding of the term *Rhomaïos* (“Roman”) was political, and an ethnic understanding was secondary and necessarily serving the political definition.<sup>14</sup> Anthony Kaldellis’s 2019 monograph builds upon Page’s framework yet goes further and argues for the continuous existence of a distinct Roman ethnicity from late antiquity until after the Ottoman conquest in 1453, that both Romans and non-Romans recognized this, and that the Roman state, known vernacularly as “Romanía,” or “Roman-land,” can be considered a relatively culturally homogeneous state during certain periods of its existence.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, Kaldellis stresses that the primary sources should be taken *prima facie* when they reference *Rhomaïos*; i.e., the ethnic understanding of the term should take primacy over the political.<sup>16</sup> While I agree with Kaldellis regarding how *Rhomaïos* should be understood, I take somewhat of a middle ground between these scholars – *Rhomaïos* is primarily an ethnic term, as Kaldellis says, but the “political Roman identity,” as Page puts it, *is* somewhat separate from the ethnic and worth studying in its own right. Page posits that the political identity was fully separate from the ethnic, that each existed independently of one another in the thirteenth century and onward. It is true that political loyalty to the emperor did not automatically or fully make one Roman, yet the apparent importance of this loyalty to, at the very least, “remaining Roman,” is somewhat overlooked. My thesis seeks to rectify this imbalance.

---

<sup>13</sup> Page, *Being Byzantine*.

<sup>14</sup> Page, *Being*, 46-47.

<sup>15</sup> Kaldellis, *Romanland*.

<sup>16</sup> Kaldellis, *Romanland*. 10-11.

I primarily rely upon thirteenth and fourteenth-century Roman historical writing as my source material. From the Nikaian/Constantinopolitan perspective the works of Georgios Akropolites, Georgios Pachymeres, Nikephoros Gregoras, and Ioannes VI Kantakouzenos all survive. Each of these men were highly educated and very close to the imperial court, Kantakouzenos being a former emperor himself – therefore, we must keep in mind the social position and potential agenda of these sources when attempting to draw conclusions from them.<sup>17</sup> To attempt to rectify this discrepancy, I analyze the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Morea* from the Frankish-occupied Peloponnese, generally considered to offer a vernacular, non-Constantinopolitan perspective, which survives in four different versions: French, Italian, and Catalan prose, and a Greek verse manuscript.<sup>18</sup> I also examine the work of Michael Panaretos, a fourteenth-century official in the Empire of Trebizond, and therefore outside the Nikaian/Constantinopolitan milieu, who composed a brief chronicle of the Trapezuntine state's history.<sup>19</sup> These sources, taken together, allow for a broader understanding of the relationship between political-legal identity and Roman ethnic identity across the Balkans and Asia Minor, which ultimately did not inform identity formation as much as scholars assumed previously.

### **Romanness in Exile: The Thirteenth-Century Historians**

Georgios Akropolites lived from 1217-1282 under both Latin and Roman rulers and was instrumental in the restoration of Constantinopolitan centers of learning after the reconquest of the city by the Romans in 1261. He served in various court positions in close proximity to the emperor, especially Ioannes III Doukas Batatzes, including as tutor to the emperor's son

---

<sup>17</sup> The following works detail the elite circles our sources moved within: On Akropolites, see Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 4-19. On Pachymeres, see Stanković, "Writer," 127-38. On Gregoras and Kantakouzenos, see Page, *Being Byzantine*, 141-146.

<sup>18</sup> Shawcross, *Chronicle*, 31-52.

<sup>19</sup> Asp-Talwar, "Chronicle," 173-212; Neville, *Guide*, 273-274.

Theodoros II. Theodoros II promoted Akropolites to the position of *logothetes tou genikou*, the chief financial minister, and *praitor*, a governor/general position, before his final position as *megas logothetes*, the equivalent of chief foreign minister, until his death. Akropolites's history is generally very favorable to the Palaiologoi, especially Michael VIII, as modern scholarship has consistently demonstrated.<sup>20</sup> For Akropolites, to be Roman was to support Michael as emperor after his reconquest of Constantinople.

From the outset, it is clear that there is a connection in Akropolites's writing between the Nikaian regime and the application of the term "Roman."<sup>21</sup> In the admittedly few times that Akropolites uses the title "emperor [*basileus*] of the Romans" he refers only to rulers in Nikaia: Theodoros I Laskaris, Ioannes III Doukas Batatzes, and Michael VIII Palaiologos.<sup>22</sup> While other rulers may also have been emperors, such as the Latin emperors in Constantinople or the Bulgarian tsars, Akropolites does not qualify *basileus* with "of the Romans" in these instances; the Latin emperor Robert I de Courtenay, for example, is called "emperor of Constantinople" or "emperor over the Italians" and Bulgarian tsar Ivan Asen II is called "emperor of the Bulgarians."<sup>23</sup>

Akropolites's attitude towards the Romans of Epeiros changes over the course of the *History*. Initially, Theodoros Komnenos Doukas, ruler of the Roman successor state in Epeiros from 1215-1230, is not presented as opposing Nikaia but rather "serving [the emperor] as were the rest of the Romans," implying the Roman origin and ethnicity of Theodoros himself and, by

---

<sup>20</sup> Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Gill Page argues this much in Page, *Being*, 94-107. See esp. 99-103.

<sup>22</sup> Theodoros I: Akropolites, *History*, §14; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 144; Ioannes III: Akropolites, *History*, §44; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 230-231; Michael VIII: Akropolites, *History*, §85; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 376.

<sup>23</sup> Robert I: Akropolites, *History*, §15; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 148, Akropolites, *History*, §18,157; Ivan Asen II: Akropolites, *History*, §13; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 139.

extension, his brother and predecessor Michael I Komnenos Doukas, given the contemporary understanding of Roman ethnicity as implicated in kinship.<sup>24</sup> Akropolites further declares that Theodoros's victory over Latin emperor Pierre II de Courtenay (r. 1216-17) in 1217 "was a great help to the Romans at the time." This conciliatory attitude was shared among educated writers working in both Nikaia and Epeiros – Georgios Bardanes, later metropolitan of Corfu, cordially described the event to patriarch Germanos II at Nikaia in a letter which lacked the antagonism present in the later conflict between the two men over the ecclesiastical independence of Epeiros.<sup>25</sup> Akropolites initially applies the label of Romanness to the general population in Epeiros as well, though in a roundabout fashion; when explaining the "greatly confined" circumstances of Theodoros I Laskaris because of the Latin gains in northwestern Anatolia in 1205, he claims:

...he [Theodoros] was no less hard-pressed by the Romans. For in the confusion of the conquest of the city of Constantine, commanders appeared from one place, another from another; those who were prominent over the others made the land they had under their control their personal realm, having set out to do this either by their own initiative or because they had been summoned to the defense of the land by its inhabitants.<sup>26</sup>

It seems contextually reasonable to assume that Akropolites meant the defense against the crusader forces by "defense of the land," and so the "inhabitants" must have been primarily ethnic Romans. Akropolites therefore applies "Roman" to both the inhabitants of the land and presumably the "commanders" whom the inhabitants invested with power to defend themselves against the Latins, which certainly encompassed the Epirot regime. The *Life* of St. Theodora of Arta, probably compiled in Epeiros in the late thirteenth century, relates that Michael I

---

<sup>24</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §14; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Loenertz, "Lettre," 20; Angold, *Byzantine Government*, 20-21; Nicol, "Ecclesiastical," 213-214; Fine, *Late*, 114-116.

<sup>26</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §7; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 119-120.

Komnenos Doukas “was summoned to rule there,” confirming Akropolites’s account from an Epirot perspective.<sup>27</sup>

In 1224, Theodoros Komnenos Doukas captured Thessalonike from the Latins and declared himself *basileus*. Akropolites says Theodoros “appropriated the insignia of imperial office,” including donning the purple robes and putting on red shoes, and that Constantinos Mesopotamites, metropolitan of Thessalonike, “opposed him most firmly.”<sup>28</sup> Theodoros Komnenos Doukas’s self-proclamation as emperor, without the approval of the patriarch of Constantinople in exile, forfeited his claim to Romanness. From this point forward, Akropolites no longer uses the term “Roman” for any ruler of Epeiros, almost as if Theodoros Komnenos Doukas’s proclamation was an original sin against the “true” Roman state and people, sufficiently marking his political descendants as different. He immediately switches and calls Theodoros “naturally unsuited to the institutions of the imperial office” because he “handled matters in a Bulgarian or, rather, barbarian fashion.”<sup>29</sup> Akropolites others the Epirot rulers by constructing a “Romans vs barbarians” dichotomy that is common in much medieval Roman historical writing in connection with foreigners, i.e., non-Romans, and that is prevalent throughout the rest of the *History*.

Most of the time, Akropolites’s denial of Romanness did not extend to the subjects of the Komnenos Doukas regime, the general population. When narrating the defeat of Theodoros Komnenos Doukas at the hands of Ivan Asen II (r.1218-1241), tsar of Bulgaria, at the Battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230, Akropolites claims Theodoros’s army was “composed of Romans and

---

<sup>27</sup> Talbot, *Holy*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §21; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 162.

<sup>29</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §21; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 162.

Italians,” and after his victory Asen “[left] some of the fortresses to be ruled by Romans.”<sup>30</sup> Supposedly, Asen “was most compassionate to those foreigners who came over to him and especially to the Romans” that his conquests in the Balkans absorbed.<sup>31</sup> Theodoros’s brother Manuel “fled when the Roman army was defeated” in Klokotnitsa’s aftermath.<sup>32</sup>

But this acknowledgement of Roman identity among the population of Epeiros was not completely consistent. Though rare, Akropolites also called the Epirot Romans “the western race” and “the inhabitants of the western parts,” who, unlike true Romans, were “by nature cowardly in regard to defending towns.”<sup>33</sup> The surrounding narrative of the section in which these references are found provides a clue as to why Akropolites made the switch to denying Epirot Romanness when he did. In 1259, Michael VIII Palaiologos sent his brother, the *sebastokrator* Ioannes, to march against the anti-Nikaia alliance led by Epeiros; Ioannes decisively defeated Epeiros at what modern historians call the Battle of Pelagonia. As we have seen, Akropolites conflates “Roman” with both the ethnic group and the Nikaian state due to his ties with Michael VIII. Necessarily, then, Epeiros and Nikaia cannot both be “the Romans” if they are fighting one another – instead, Akropolites strongly expresses the opposition between the states by calling the Nikaian army “Roman” against “the renegade” Michael II Komnenos Doukas and drawing a contrast between “*their* own boundaries...which separate Old and New Epeiros from *our* Hellenic land.”<sup>34</sup> By othering Epirot Romans in this way Akropolites participates in the construction of a propagandistic narrative of the reign of Michael VIII specifically and the Nikaian regime more broadly – Akropolites’s *History* ultimately serves to

---

<sup>30</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §25; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 178-179.

<sup>31</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §39; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 211.

<sup>32</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §26; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 180.

<sup>33</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §80; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 357.

<sup>34</sup> Akropolites, *History*, §80; Macrides, *George Akropolites*, 356. Emphasis is my own.

glorify Michael after his eventual reconquest of Constantinople in 1261. For Akropolites, loyalty to Nikaia when faced with an episode in which ethnic Romans fought against one another was a necessary condition for his acknowledgement of Roman identity.

Like Georgios Akropolites, most of the biographical information we know about Georgios Pachymeres comes from self-inserts into his *History*. According to his own account, then, Pachymeres was born in Nikaia in 1242 and moved to Constantinople shortly after Michael VIII entered the city.<sup>35</sup> Pachymeres was educated there and joined the clergy – by the time he wrote the *History*, he was *protekdikos*, a relatively senior secretarial office within the Patriarchate, and *dikaiophylax*, a lay judicial position literally meaning “guardian of justice.”<sup>36</sup> Given the abrupt termination of the *History* in 1308 and no biographical evidence to argue otherwise, Pachymeres is assumed to have died shortly after this date, perhaps 1310.<sup>37</sup> Pachymeres wrote the *History* as a continuation of Akropolites and covered the reign of Michael VIII and the first half of the reign of his son Andronikos II (r. 1282-1328), though is decidedly less favorable to Michael VIII than Akropolites. For instance, Michael focused his foreign policy efforts in the West and pursued church union to forestall a Catholic attack on his realm, both policies with which Pachymeres disagreed. Yet Pachymeres respected Michael nonetheless for the reconquest of Constantinople and other parts of Romanía.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps because of these gripes Pachymeres does not fully commit to the propagandistic use of Roman identity present in Akropolites. He clearly emphasizes the fact that ethnic Romans lived throughout Romanía and

---

<sup>35</sup> Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche*, 1:447; Pachymeres, *History*, 23.3-6; Failler and Laurent, *Relations*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Pachymeres, *History*, 23.5-8; Failler and Laurent, *Relations*, 240-241, n. 3, 364, n. 1; Neville, *Guide*, 238.

<sup>37</sup> Magdalino, “Byzantine,” 231.

<sup>38</sup> Page, *Being*, 111.

need not necessarily have pledged fealty to Michael VIII, as we shall see, though Pachymeres often chooses to label these individuals as something completely different: *thelematarioi*, which can be translated as “willful” or “voluntary,” and *gasmouloi*, of an uncertain etymology but meaning something like “mixed-race” and used to describe individuals of mixed Roman/Latin parentage, both of which I shall explain below.

Page argues that Pachymeres’s treatment of the *thelematarioi* implies that the default understanding of identity was that ethnicity determined political loyalty.<sup>39</sup> Pachymeres defines the *thelematarioi* in the following manner:

They would accept to lean sometimes to the Romans and sometimes to the Italians [i.e., Latins]. The Romans were attached to them, for these people were themselves Romans while the Italians believed they had their security thanks to them because of their good relations with them...thus they found themselves between the Romans and the Italians and for this reason they were called *thelematarioi*.<sup>40</sup>

What Pachymeres is essentially describing is a survivalist attitude among the so-called *thelematarioi* in which their loyalties were torn between their ethnicity, which Pachymeres clearly states was Roman, and their Latin overlords, who reportedly treated them relatively well. Page is correct in identifying Pachymeres’s implication when he says that the reason the Romans were politically “attached,” so to speak, to the *thelematarioi* was strictly because of their Roman ethnicity, exposing the underlying assumption that Roman ethnicity was supposed to signify loyalty to the Roman state. Pachymeres goes on to say that the *thelematarioi* “leant back” towards the Romans because “there was nothing between the *thelematarioi* and us” after the

---

<sup>39</sup> Page, *Being*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Pachymeres, *History*, 110.10-14; Failler and Laurent, *Relations*, 156. French: Ils accepteraient de pencher aussi bien pour les Romains que pour les Italiens: les Romains étaient attachés à ces gens qui étaient eux-mêmes Romains, tandis que les Italiens croyaient avoir leur sécurité grâce à eux à cause de leurs bons rapports avec eux, et ils n’avaient en effet personne d’autre à qui s’en remettre. Si on chassait les habitants, un danger risquait de résulter de ce vide. Ils se trouvaient donc places entre Romains et Italiens, et pour cette raison on les appelait aussi volontaires.

Roman capture of Selymbria, modern Silivri, Turkey, in eastern Thrace, an important strategic step towards retaking Constantinople.<sup>41</sup> Thereafter, the *thelematarioi* began to work with Michael VIII. Apparently, they were included in Alexios Strategopoulos's battle plans for capturing the city – though Pachymeres still distinguished them from Romans despite their loyalty to the emperor at that point.<sup>42</sup>

After secretly leading the Roman forces into Constantinople during the city's reconquest in 1261, the *thelematarioi* vanish from Pachymeres's record. This can be interpreted in two different ways; (1) that, having served their purpose in the narrative, Pachymeres had no need to mention the *thelematarioi* anymore, despite their distinctiveness as a group, or (2) that the *thelematarioi* no longer "existed" after the retaking of Constantinople because they were simply ethnic Romans with political loyalty to the *basileus*, and could be referred to as *Rhomaioi* without complications. It is impossible to say which of these options is correct, though I would posit that option two is at least more likely. Pachymeres clearly described the *thelematarioi* as ethnically Roman yet being friendly with the Latins, serving them when it was convenient, as mentioned above. It is this that marks them as "different" from Romans, but with the obstacle of Latin rule in Constantinople no longer in play, the *thelematarioi* could return to what Pachymeres would describe as original Roman behavior – being Roman included loyalty to Michael VIII. There was no indication of the *thelematarioi* pining for a return to Latin rule, so Pachymeres had no reason to call them something other than Roman because they did not outwardly exhibit the un-Roman trait of disloyalty to the emperor.

---

<sup>41</sup> Pachymeres, *History*, 111.2-5; Failler and Laurent, *Relations*, 156. French: "...il n'y eut donc rien entre les volontaires et les nôtres."

<sup>42</sup> Pachymeres, *History*, 138.13; Failler and Laurent, *Relations*, 192.

But for Pachymeres, political loyalty in itself did not necessarily mean one qualified as ethnically Roman. Following the reconquest of Constantinople, Pachymeres describes a group enlisted in the Roman navy whom he calls *gasmouloi*:

For the *gasmouloi*, whom the language of the Italians would call mixed (*symmiktous*), because they were born of Roman and Latin parents, he [Michael VIII] also relied on them and sent them onto the ships [to campaign in Morea]: indeed from the Romans they held foresight in battles and prudence, from the Latins ardor and overconfidence.<sup>43</sup>

The *gasmouloi*, then, were of mixed Roman and Latin descent, lived in Constantinople, and served in Michael VIII's army. If Michael was comfortable sending them to fight against the Latin forces in the Principality of Achaia, there is no question that their loyalty to the Roman state was ever in doubt. But despite their loyalties and partial Roman ancestry, Pachymeres does not label them as *Rhomaioi*. He is careful to say that their nature or character was influenced not only by their Roman parentage, granting them the highly desirable traits of combat expertise and prudence, but that the Latins also imparted some of what was purportedly "Latin" character and somewhat more negatively connotated, especially "overconfidence." Perhaps it is because of this perceived corruption of the otherwise Roman nature of the *gasmouloi* that Pachymeres labels them as something different. Pachymeres also relates that they spoke the Latin language which probably indicated a difference in their upbringing that made their early life more like those of the Latins than the Romans.<sup>44</sup> The *gasmouloi* therefore lacked two features of the Roman ethnicity: a collective sense of solidarity among lived experiences, and a perceived lack of submission to ethnically Roman behavioral norms outside of loyalty to the *basileus*.

---

<sup>43</sup> 188.8-13; p. 252. French: Pour les Gasmoules, que la langue des Italiens appellerait métis, parce qu'issus de parents romains et latins, il se reposa aussi sur eux et les envoya sur les navires: ils tenaient en effet des Romains la prévoyance dans les combats et la prudence, des Latins la fougue et la suffisance.

<sup>44</sup> Page, *Being Byzantine*, 118.

Pachymeres's indication that they were understood by the Latins as "mixed" as well is perhaps an appeal to the idea that both Romans and Latins understood the *gasmouloi* as something different to themselves and therefore it must have been so – an interesting claim yet without regard to what the *gasmouloi* may have called themselves. Regardless, Pachymeres's perspective, which was probably representative of Constantinopolitan literate circles at large, denies the Romanness of the *gasmouloi* despite their Roman ancestry and political loyalty.

Comparing Akropolites and Pachymeres can yield a few conclusions. Both authors, to a considerable degree, link Roman ethnic identity with political loyalty to the *basileus*, whether that be in exile in Nikaia or after the reconquest of Constantinople. Both authors also, either on purpose or accidentally, acknowledge the existence of ethnic Romans outside of the political reach of the Laskarids and Palaiologoi yet tend to reserve the label *Rhomaioi* for ethnically Roman supporters of Nikaia, especially when Roman-on-Roman conflict occurred, such as in the case of conflict with Epeiros; both call the ethnically Roman inhabitants of Epeiros "westerners."<sup>45</sup>

The extent to which Pachymeres allowed exceptions to the general rule of *Rhomaioi* for Nikaia, however, is a major difference between the two. Akropolites's othering of Romans outside of Nikaia seems to have been predicated on the single event of Theodoros Komnenos Doukas proclaiming himself rival *basileus*. Pachymeres, on the other hand, admits that there were ethnic Romans outside of Nikaia but they were emphatically not *the* Romans as neither the *thelematarioi* nor the *gasmouloi* satisfied all of the necessary conditions that unequivocally signified membership in the Roman ethnicity. Perhaps the development between the black-and-

---

<sup>45</sup> The term Pachymeres uses is *dytikos*, which Failler and Laurent translate as "occidentaux". See the following examples: Pachymeres, *History*, 20.13, 89.17, and 311.16; Failler and Laurent, *Relations*, 34, 126, and 404.

white conception of loyalty to the *basileus* as necessary for Romanness in Akropolites to the more spectrum-like understanding found in Pachymeres is a product of the difference in the time of writing between the two.

### **The Emperor's Own Words: Ioannes VI Kantakouzenos**

One of a very small number of author-emperors throughout the whole of the Roman Empire's existence, Ioannes VI Kantakouzenos began his political career as *mezas domestikos*, the top general, to emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos (r. 1328-1341).<sup>46</sup> Soon after Andronikos's death, a conspiracy between the patriarch of Constantinople, Andronikos's widow, and the head of the navy pushed Kantakouzenos out of the capital and labeled him a rebel. Kantakouzenos was declared co-emperor to the child Ioannes V Palaiologos (r. 1341-1391, with interruptions) by the troops still loyal to him and prevailed in the ensuing six-year civil war. His relatively short reign saw church controversy and territorial loss, and Ioannes V forced Kantakouzenos to abdicate in 1354, when he retired to a monastery and lived until 1383. As a monk, Kantakouzenos wrote his *History*, in which he tried to exonerate himself and explain his actions as emperor, as well as cover the reigns of his predecessors Andronikos II and Andronikos III.<sup>47</sup> His work is the only surviving history written by a Roman emperor about his own reign.<sup>48</sup> Again, because Kantakouzenos's goal in writing the *History* was to vindicate his own reign, we must take his narration of events with caution – but fortunately, he proves an invaluable source of material regarding the relationship between political loyalty and identity in fourteenth-century Romania.

---

<sup>46</sup> Fatouros and Krischer, *Geschichte*, 1:2-4; Nicol, *Reluctant*, 17-27.

<sup>47</sup> Kazhdan, "L'Histoire," 286.

<sup>48</sup> Nicol, *Reluctant*, 1.

Kantakouzenos gives a mixed account on whether Roman ethnic identity and political loyalty were independent phenomena. When recounting a failed siege by Andronikos III of the Genoese garrison in Phokaia, a town in the eastern Aegean that was a Roman possession until the late thirteenth century, Kantakouzenos says the Genoese “drove the Romans who lived in Phokaia and their families out of the city” to conserve food.<sup>49</sup> This implies that the Romans in Phokaia were under siege along with the Genoese – i.e., they did not desert the city to join Andronikos’s forces nor did they help them from the inside, meaning that in this instance the term *Rhomaïos* was applied without any indication of an expected loyalty to Andronikos. But in a later passage, also dealing with the Genoese, Kantakouzenos seems to flip this perspective. Kantakouzenos writes that he concluded a deal with the Genoese whereby they would control the city of Chios but he would be able to appoint “whomever he should wish” to rule over the rest of the island. Additionally, “this man would also have authority over the Romans inside the city of Chios. If...there should be a dispute between one Roman and another...it would be adjudicated by the *archon* of the Romans,” and not the Genoese judiciary.<sup>50</sup> There seems to be an implication on Kantakouzenos’s part that the ethnic Romans in Chios should be subject to the Roman emperor, indicative of the strong ties between the two. According to Kantakouzenos, it may have been “better” for ethnic Romans to live under Roman rule, but it seems it was not a necessary precondition to Romanness.

More examples of when Kantakouzenos calls a group Roman regardless of their political loyalties can be found in book four, where Kantakouzenos describes an embassy that he sent to the Mamluk Sultanate in Cairo regarding the treatment of Christians in Egypt and Palestine. He

---

<sup>49</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 2.481.8; Fatouros and Krischer, *Geschichte*, 1:112. The context for this dispute can be found in Kyrris, “John,” 331-56.

<sup>50</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 4.82.11-16; Miller, *The History*, 215-216.

delivers the apparent response of the sultan An-Nasir Hasan (r. 1347-1351) in the form of a letter, in which Hasan says, “the envoy also asked that we order the ruin of St. George’s church [in Cairo] in the quarter of the Romans to be reconstructed.”<sup>51</sup> This reference is incredibly interesting for two reasons; first, there is an apparent difference between the Romans living in Cairo and the “Christians who happen to be coming to the holy place of Jerusalem” whom Kantakouzenos as Hasan mentions a few lines later.<sup>52</sup> What is probably the case is that the Roman embassy was particularly concerned with a distinctly ethnic Roman neighborhood in Cairo as well as the protection of all Christian pilgrims in general to Jerusalem as the Roman regime postured to attempt reconciliation between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in the fourteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Secondly there is another obvious difference between the Roman quarter in Cairo and the “prisoners of war” whom Kantakouzenos wanted back, “who happened to be from the land of the Romans.”<sup>54</sup> This demonstrates a clear contrast between loyalties of two different kinds of Romans living in Mamluk Egypt – first, the presumably loyal subjects of the sultan, living freely in their own quarter within the city, and the prisoners of war, presumably ethnic Romans as well because of the strong connection between Romanía as Roman homeland and Roman ethnic identity.<sup>55</sup> Kantakouzenos does not reserve the term *Rhomaïos* for only those prisoners of war who lived within his own borders but clearly articulates the existence of ethnic Romans outside of Romanía who need not be loyal to him.

---

<sup>51</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 4.96.8; Miller, *The History*, 228.

<sup>52</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 4.96.20-21; Miller, *The History*, 229.

<sup>53</sup> In his retirement, Kantakouzenos himself was appointed as negotiator for a proposed ecumenical council between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, though the attempt fell through. On Kantakouzenos’s attempts at church unity, see Nicol, *Reluctant*, 84-119 and Norwich, *Byzantium*, 332.

<sup>54</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 4.97.19-20; Miller, *The History*, 230.

<sup>55</sup> On the importance of Romanía to ethnic Roman identity, see especially Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 81-120.

A final example indicative of Kantakouzenos's application of *Rhomaïos* to Romans not necessarily loyal to the *basileus* is in his account of a meeting between Andronikos III and the Turkish Bey Demirhan (d. 1345?) of the Karası dynasty. It is difficult to know with certainty, but the Karasid Beylik likely controlled much of Mysia and Troas in northwestern Anatolia before its defeat at the hands of the Ottomans in 1345.<sup>56</sup> Apparently the purpose of this meeting was to guarantee the safety of Roman subjects of the bey, as Kantakouzenos says that "Demirhan...vowed to maintain peace in the future and not to undertake any attack against the Romans of the East."<sup>57</sup> The "Romans of the East" cannot be understood as Roman subjects in this context because by the 1340s, when this meeting is supposed to have taken place, the Ottomans and Karasids together likely completely controlled the Anatolian sides of the Hellespont (Dardanelles) and the Sea of Marmara. Although the Roman *basileus* no longer controlled the northwestern Anatolian littoral, ethnic Romans undeniably still lived in the area.

Kantakouzenos's treatment of ethnic Romans without political loyalty to the emperor is somewhat complicated by his refusal to call ethnic Romans living in Epeiros, the Peloponnese, or Macedonia *Rhomaïoi*; instead, he calls them by the name of the city or region they were from. Gill Page argues that the primary reason for this was that the situation here was usually not multiethnic and therefore the hardening of ethnic boundaries did not occur, making the distinguishing between Romans and other groups irrelevant.<sup>58</sup> While this may be partly the case, a better explanation lies in Kantakouzenos's understanding of Roman territory and its connection to ethnicity. It is clear that Kantakouzenos believed that much land outside the contemporary

---

<sup>56</sup> Modern-day Çanakkale and Balıkesir provinces of Turkey.

<sup>57</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 2.340.14-15; Fatouros and Krischer, *Geschichte*, 2:20. German: „Temirchan...gelobte, künftig den Frieden zu bewahren und keinen Angriff gegen die Rhomäer des Ostens zu unternehmen.“

<sup>58</sup> Page, *Being*, 165-166.

territory of Romanía was still bound to Romanía in some way due to Roman control there. A great example of this is Andronikos III's correspondence with the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Alexander (r. 1331-1371). Andronikos III demanded that Ivan Alexander return the city of Anchialos to Roman control because it and the rest of Bulgarian-occupied lands "not only belonged to the Romans from time immemorial, but were also largely founded by them and settled through colonization."<sup>59</sup> In fact Anchialos (present-day Pomorie, Bulgaria) had been ruled on and off many times by the Bulgarians from 812 onwards with the Bulgarian khans and tsars resettling Bulgars and Slavs there.<sup>60</sup> Kantakouzenos's conception of what Romanía encompassed, then, stretched back at least as far as the extent of the Roman Empire in the ninth century, a five hundred-year continuity.

An even more potent example comes from Kantakouzenos's account of negotiations with rebel leaders in Epeiros, who had revolted against imperial rule in 1338 with the support of the Angevins in the Principality of Taranto.<sup>61</sup> According to Kantakouzenos, he personally persuaded the rebels to stand down with the following speech:

You also commit great injustice by replacing the rule of the Romans, which in this area dates back almost to the time of Caesar, with the rule of the Tarantinoi [i.e., the rulers of Taranto], a barbaric people.... The Angeloi [the current rulers in Epeiros] did not win the rule of Akarnania [i.e., Epeiros] by liberating the country from the barbarians, but they took advantage of the war of the Latins against the Romans and unlawfully seized control, although they were subjects of the Roman emperors and had been commissioned by them with the administration of the country for one year each.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 2.461-463; Fatouros and Krischer, *Geschichte*, 2:99. German: „Denn diese Städte hätten nicht nur seit eh und je den Rhomäern gehört, sondern seien sogar zum großen Teil von ihnen gegründet und durch Kolonisation besiedelt worden.“

<sup>60</sup> Obolensky, *Byzantium*, 23-74.

<sup>61</sup> Nicol, *Last*, 183.

<sup>62</sup> Kantakouzenos, *History*, 2.520.1-16; Fatouros and Krischer, *Geschichte*, 2:136-137. German: „Ihr begeht auch großes Unrecht, indem ihr die Herrschaft der Rhomäer, die in dieser Gegend fast in die Zeit Cäsars zurückgeht, durch die Herrschaft der Tarentiner, eines barbarischen Volkes, ersetzt.... Die Angeloi errangen die Herrschaft über Akarnanien nicht etwa, indem sie das Land von den Barbaren befreiten, sondern sie nutzten den Krieg der Latiner gegen die

The justification Kantakouzenos gives for the rebels to surrender to himself and Andronikos III is that they unlawfully held land rightfully belonging to the Roman state, which had been that way for more than thirteen hundred years, and even blames the rise to power of the Angeloi (Doukas Komnenos) family on their previous prominence in imperial administration over Epeiros. In Romanía, the use of provincial exonyms did not signify different ethnicities after the Roman ethnogenesis during late antiquity.<sup>63</sup> There was no need, then, for Kantakouzenos to call the inhabitants of Epeiros “the Romans of Arta” or “the Romans of Akarnania,” as he does with “the Romans of Chios,” because they did not live outside Kantakouzenos’s conception of the natural boundaries of Romanía, like the “Romans of Cairo” did, nor were they ruled over by non-Romans, as is the case with the “Romans of the East.” They were provincial Romans, and so provincial identifiers, like Artans or Akarnanians, sufficiently identified them. Kantakouzenos conceptualized the conflict between the Palaiologan regime in Constantinople and the Despotate of Epeiros not as two separate states going to war, but as infighting within a single Roman polity.

Overall, then, Kantakouzenos’s understanding of the relationship between political loyalty and Roman ethnicity is messy at best. Kantakouzenos certainly believed that there were ethnic Romans living outside of the Roman polity, whether they felt political loyalty towards the current *basileus* or not. But in the case of Epeiros, the Romanness of its inhabitants is granted on the basis of who “should” be loyal to the *basileus* and which territories “should” be ruled by him. There is no indication that Kantakouzenos believed that because Romans lived in Cairo the borders of Romanía should extend all the way to Egypt, nor even, it seems, over much of

---

Rhomäer aus und rissen die Herrschaft unrechtmäßig an sich, obgleich sie Untertanen der rhomäischen Kaiser waren und von ihnen mit der Verwaltung des Landes jeweils für ein Jahr beauftragt worden waren.“

<sup>63</sup> Kaldellis, “Provincial,” 250-255.

Anatolia. Rather than push that political loyalty to the *basileus* was a necessary precondition to Romanness, as Akropolites and Pachymeres usually did, Kantakouzenos essentially argues for a reversal of responsibility – that the Roman *basileus* should work to improve conditions for Romans everywhere, whether inside his borders or not. This represents a marked shift in Roman ideology: from irredentism and exclusivity in the writings of the thirteenth-century historians, to a quiet concession that many Romans no longer lived in their “own” state. Roman ethnicity, for Kantakouzenos, was not dependent on loyalty to the *basileus* but did entail some kind of relationship to him, whether that be as subject or fellow kin abroad.

### **Outside the Echo Chamber: Propaganda in the Peloponnese and Trebizond**

Roman identity is understood, and consequently used, somewhat differently in the *Chronicle of the Morea*. The *Chronicle* is a fourteenth-century epic poem that tells the (hyperbolized) story of the conquest of the Peloponnese by the Franks immediately following the Fourth Crusade, and traces its history, focusing on the newly founded Principality of Achaëa’s rulers, through the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It survives in numerous manuscripts across four languages: Italian, Aragonese, and French in prose, and Greek in verse. Between these, the French and Greek manuscripts are the oldest, which makes sense, given that they were the languages of the Principality’s court and majority population, respectively. Though the question remains open, the most recent analysis of the *Chronicle*’s authorship shows its likely origin as a Greek text, with the Romance language adaptations coming later.<sup>64</sup> Like the courtly histories from Constantinople and Nikaia, the *Chronicle* is a work of political propaganda. Unlike those histories, the *Chronicle*’s author fully embraces the Roman identity of the Moreot

---

<sup>64</sup> Teresa Shawcross, *The Chronicle of Morea: Historiography in Crusader Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 42-52.

locals *without* denying the existence of Romans outside the Principality – in fact, those “faithless” Romans of Constantinople/Nikaia are central to the author’s goal of strengthening loyalty to the Frankish Achaean state.

It may initially seem puzzling that a work originally composed in vernacular Greek, the language of the conquered Romans, would exist to serve the purposes of the Frankish aristocracy. An examination of the context behind the *Chronicle*’s composition, though, greatly strengthens this claim. In the mid-fourteenth century, the time of the *Chronicle*’s composition, the Franks had occupied the Peloponnese for about a century – enough time for a second and third generation of Franks to be born and raised there. There are many members of the Frankish ruling class, especially from the second generation after the conquest onwards, said to have spoken Greek, including Prince Guillaume II de Villehardouin (r. 1246-1278), according to the *Chronicle* itself, who was born in Kalamata.<sup>65</sup> Guillaume is also described as “wise and hard-working for all men born in the territory of Romanía,” meaning that Franks born in the principality were common.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the *Chronicle* additionally confirms the presence of the Greek language at the prince’s court at large: a Turkish embassy to Guillaume II’s capital in Andravida “knew the spoken language of the Romans,” not French, and in response Guillaume sent Ancelin de Toucy to the Turks “because... [he] knew with accuracy the customs and language of the Romans.”<sup>67</sup> Franks who learned Greek as a second language in Morea, whether in adulthood or through exposure as a child to local customs, would have learned vernacular *Romaika*, which would explain the absence of Attic grammar in the *Chronicle*. The dating of the

---

<sup>65</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 4130; Harold E. Lurier, trans. *Crusaders as Conquerors: The Chronicle of Morea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 192. See also Lock, *Franks*, 298-299; Shawcross, *Chronicle*, 50; Kaldellis, *New Roman Empire*, 751.

<sup>66</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 2750-2788; Lurier, 152.

<sup>67</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 5207, 5236; Lurier, 223.

*Chronicle* provides a further clue. The eyewitness details within the *Chronicle* seem to suggest a composition of around the 1320s, precisely as Roman resistance centered in Mystras and Monembasia pressured the principality's defenses and popular support for the Sicilian Angevin overlords was waning.<sup>68</sup> Given the above evidence, it was probably a Frank born in the principality that composed the *Chronicle* in Greek at the behest of a noble family (Shawcross suggests the le Maure, who often were appointed bailiff by the Angevins) during the turbulent early fourteenth century.<sup>69</sup> One of its purposes would have been to shore up support for the Angevins (and Frankish rule more generally) among the primarily ethnic Roman population. Understanding this propagandistic function is vital to the treatment of Roman identity in the *Chronicle*.

The author of the *Chronicle* makes it abundantly clear that the inhabitants of the Peloponnese were primarily members of the Roman ethnicity and that the Peloponnese was part of the wider lands of Romanía. Guillaume de Champlitte and Geoffroi I de Villehardouin, the initial conquerors of the Peloponnese, “took counsel with the local Romans” of Patras after taking the city in 1205 to ask them which town to capture next; the Romans replied that Corinth’s castle was “the finest of Romanía.”<sup>70</sup> Those that resisted conquest were Roman as well. During the siege of Nikli, also in 1205, Geoffroi I threatened to kill the inhabitants if they did not surrender. In a passage which demonstrates understanding on the part of the *Chronicle*’s author regarding Roman ethnic solidarity, some “Romans who were with the Franks who had relatives inside the castle” successfully convinced the Nikliots to give up.<sup>71</sup> This is exactly the same

---

<sup>68</sup> Lock, *Franks*, 127-129.

<sup>69</sup> Shawcross, *Chronicle*, 48-49.

<sup>70</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 1420-1450; Lurier, 109-110.

<sup>71</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 2038-2072; Lurier, 131.

terminology that the *Chronicle* uses for Romans outside of the principality's control in every instance. In the prologue, recounting the events of the First and Fourth Crusades, "Romans" and "Romanía" are used when talking about the ethnic group and state: Alexios I Komnenos is labeled as "*basileus* of the Romans" and "*basileus* of all Romanía," and Isaac II Angelos tells his son Alexios IV that he has dishonored "the Roman people" after making impossible promises to the Franks.<sup>72</sup> There is no distinguishable difference in the ethnicity of Romans living inside or outside Roman-controlled lands, according to the *Chronicle*.

Turning to the question of whether political loyalty to the *basileus* was a necessary component to Roman ethnicity, the *Chronicle* flips this idea on its head. Numerous invectives throughout the text display the author's deep prejudice against Romans. He says that "the Roman race from the beginning is always found in much deceit and great infidelities," meaning that, in his view, to be a Roman was to be untrustworthy.<sup>73</sup> The author then "demonstrates" that ingrained Roman untrustworthiness *caused* political disloyalty. For example, "the faithless Romans, those rebels," i.e., the people of Constantinople, overthrew Alexios IV, "their basileus, their rightful lord," and installed Alexios V Doukas in early 1204.<sup>74</sup> Instead of labeling Doukas's supporters as something other than Roman, as Akropolites or Pachymeres may have done, the rebels' actions exemplify, to the author of the *Chronicle*, that perfidiousness and Romanness were intrinsically linked. This is true for the *Chronicle*'s discussion of post-1204 events as well. The author considered Theodoros II Doukas Laskaris (r. 1254-1258), who ruled from Nikaia, the legitimate "basileus of the Romans," despite there being a "basileus in Constantinople,"

---

<sup>72</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 40-61, 655-700; Lurier, 68-69, 87.

<sup>73</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 587-617; Lurier, 85.

<sup>74</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 818-855; Lurier, 91.

Baudouin II de Courtenay (r. 1228-1261/73).<sup>75</sup> Then, when Michael VIII usurped the throne from Theodoros II's young son Ioannes IV Laskaris, the author again considers this event expected Roman treachery (and exaggerates, saying that Ioannes IV was murdered).<sup>76</sup> To the author's outside position, the above examples were all of typical Roman behavior and therefore political loyalty to the *basileus* was not a hallmark of Roman ethnicity at all; the author of the *Chronicle of the Morea* would probably argue that political *disloyalty* to the basileus was more Roman, though certainly less honorable.

So far unmentioned in this analysis is the Empire of Trebizond, the third Roman successor state. Its ruling dynasty, the Megas Komnenos, or "Grand Komnenos," family, had close ties with the Bagrationi dynasty in Georgia – Alexios I, its first ruler, was raised at the Georgian court and Georgian *mepi* Tamar the Great (r. 1184-1213) helped establish Trebizond as an independent state in 1204, remaining an important ally.<sup>77</sup> Like Nikaia and Epeiros, the Trapezuntine emperors styled themselves "*basileus* of the Romans" and continued to do so after Michael VIII Palaiologos reconquered Constantinople – unlike Epeiros, they were allowed to keep the title of *basileus*, with the condition that they would drop "Romans" from the title and use "*basileus* of all the East, Iberia and Perateia" instead. It is from this context that an important work from the Trapezuntine court survives: Michael Panaretos's *About the Emperors of Trebizond*. We do not know any concrete biographical information about Michael Panaretos, including his name, other than what he tells us in *About the Emperors of Trebizond*. From these references, Panaretos was probably born in the early fourteenth century and worked in the court

---

<sup>75</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 3038-3063; Lurier, 161.

<sup>76</sup> *Chronicle of the Morea*, 1210-44, 2028-3063; Lurier, 102-103, 161. See also Angold, *Byzantine Government*, 91-93.

<sup>77</sup> Vasiliev, "Foundation," 3-37.

of Alexios III Megas Komnenos (r. 1349-1390), serving on several diplomatic missions to Constantinople, until his death. The chronicle continues after this point, but modern scholarship accepts that an anonymous continuator finished his work.<sup>78</sup> The Greek in the chronicle is of the Pontic dialect, reflecting a probable origin within Trebizond for our authors. Scott Kennedy argues that, because of Michael Panaretos's position in the Trapezuntine court as *protonotarios*, chief notarial secretary, the primary purpose of the chronicle was probably to help Panaretos and future *protonotarioi* keep track of imperial relationships, history, and neighbors such that they could reference them later when drafting official documents.<sup>79</sup> Because the purpose of the chronicle was not literary exercise nor wide dissemination at court but rather the audience was the author himself, it lacks propagandistic features found in the other texts which survive from the period.

There is no discernable difference in Panaretos's writing between Romans living in Trebizond and Romans living elsewhere. When describing a battle between Trebizond and the Çepni, a nomadic Turkic group, Panaretos calls the people of Trebizond Roman: "The Romans, who were hoping to find the emperor [Alexios III Megas Komnenos] at the shore, were fighting fiercely.... As many as forty-two Romans fell."<sup>80</sup> In another conflict with the Turks, this time the Aq Qoyunlu in 1341, Panaretos says that they "came here [i.e., the city of Trebizond] and the Romans were routed without even putting up a fight."<sup>81</sup> In neither instance were the Romans loyal to the "emperor of the Romans," a title Panaretos specifically reserves for the Palaiologan

---

<sup>78</sup> Kennedy, *Two*, ix-x; Neville, *Guide*, 273; Asp-Talwar, "Chronicle," 173-177.

<sup>79</sup> Kennedy, *Two*, x.

<sup>80</sup> Panaretos, *About*, 101.15-19; Kennedy, *Two*, 53.

<sup>81</sup> Panaretos, *About*, 30.1; Kennedy, *Two*, 15.

dynasty in Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> Such a deference of title implies the existence of ethnic Romans in Constantinople and the restored Roman Empire more broadly, though they do not figure in Panaretos's narrative. Interestingly, Panaretos contrasts the "emperor of the Romans" with "our emperor" when recounting a failed attempt by Michael, a Palaiologan prince, to capture Trebizond in 1373.<sup>83</sup> This does not, however, signify an ethnic difference between the majority population of Trebizond and Constantinople, but merely distinguishes for the reader which ruler Panaretos is talking about. Panaretos did not make such a distinction only in times of conflict, either; Panaretos recounts a marriage alliance between "the emperor" Alexios III and "the Roman emperor" Ioannes VI Kantakouzenos and a second one in 1360/61 between "our emperor" Alexios III and "the emperor" Ioannes V Palaiologos. For Panaretos, it was unnecessary to be loyal to the *basileus* of the Romans to be ethnically Roman, nor was it necessary to be loyal to the *basileus* in Trebizond. The Roman ethnic identity and political identity functioned independently from one another and Panaretos did not use either in a propagandistic manner.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In the end, we are left without a feeling of much consensus at all amongst our source material. Georgios Akropolites and Georgios Pachymeres both would have us believe that *Rhomaïos* was an exclusive group of ethnic Romans and supporters of Nikaia, the Laskarids, and the Palaiologoi. They diverge on the extent to which such exclusivity must be pursued but nonetheless agree that political loyalty *does* inform one's Romanness. Ioannes Kantakouzenos fully concedes the existence *Rhomaïoi* outside of Romanía, even as far away as Cairo, despite

---

<sup>82</sup> Examples can be found in Panaretos, *About*, 28.1, 49.1, and 74.1; Kennedy, *Two*, 15, 25, and 35.

<sup>83</sup> Panaretos, *About*, 97.1-2; Kennedy, *Two*, 47.

their political loyalties, yet still implies at the very least a connection between ethnicity and emperor. Outside the Nikaian/Constantinopolitan milieu, the author of the *Chronicle of Morea* turns the perceived relationship between Roman ethnicity and political loyalty to the *basileus* upside-down, polemically portraying the stereotypical Roman as disloyal and untrustworthy. And in Trebizond, Panaretos constructs the two aspects as functioning completely independently. In the end, the context of our authors completely determine how they wrote about the relationship between identity and loyalty. Akropolites and Pachymeres strongly linked Roman ethnicity with political loyalty because they needed to bolster the legitimacy of the newly ensconced regime in Constantinople against other Roman and Latin claimants: it functions entirely as propaganda for the Palaiologoi. The author of the *Chronicle of Morea* follows a similar thread as Akropolites and Pachymeres but deploys his propaganda in the opposite direction to support the Principality of Achaëa's dicey situation in the fourteenth century. Without any more serious contenders to the imperial throne by the time he wrote, Kantakouzenos had no need to mobilize Roman ethnicity as propaganda for his regime – his goal was to justify his own actions while in office, which apparently included supporting Romans outside his borders. If political loyalty to the *basileus* was an integral part of Roman ethnic identity, Akropolites, Pachymeres, and Kantakouzenos should at the very least all agree on what would be a basic, foundational aspect of their own identities. Perhaps only the writings of Michael Panaretos truly represent the reality of the time, which was that Romans lived inside and outside Romanía, as he bluntly put it.

Of course, another possible explanation for such a divergence could be relatively rapid changes in what Romanness entailed over the course of about one and a half centuries. The further the author from the events of the Fourth Crusade, the less strong of a connection between

Roman ethnicity and political alignment with the *basileus* of the Romans. The explanation for why this may have occurred, however, leads back to the necessity of propaganda in a more hotly contested Aegean. It then becomes difficult to say whether society-wide understandings of Romanness shifted over time along with our literary evidence from the hardening of boundaries in the thirteenth century to the unimportance of the *basileus* in Panaretos or if they had always been there in the first place. Such a conclusion would depend on whether it is possible to say if the general Roman populace felt a sense of patriotism, especially in conjunction with regrouping after the loss of Constantinople in 1204 – an area in which more scholarly study is needed.

## Bibliography

Primary Sources, Critical Editions & Translations:**Akropolites, Georgios. *History*.**

- . Heisenberg, August and Peter Wirth, eds., *Georgii Acropolitae Opera*. Ed. stereotypa anni 1903 / correctiorem curavit Peter Wirth, 2 vols. Bibliotheca scriptorium Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1978. Originally printed 1903.
- . Macrides, Ruth, trans., *George Akropolites: The History*. Oxford Studies in Byzantium. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

***Chronicle of the Morea*.**

- . Lurier, Harold E., ed. *Crusaders as Conquerors: The Chronicle of Morea*. trans. Harold E. Lurier, Records of Civilization Sources and Studies 69. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.
- . Schmitt, John J., ed. *The Chronicle of Morea, A History in Political Verse, Relating the Establishment of Feudalism in Greece by the Franks in the Thirteenth Century, Edited in Two Parallel Texts from the Mss of Copenhagen and Paris, with Introduction, Critical Notes and Indices*. London: Methuen & Co., 1904. Reprinted Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1967. Greek text with English introduction, summary, and table of rulers.

**Kantakouzenos, Ioannes VI. *History*.**

- . Fatouros, Georgios and Tilman Krischer, trans. *Johannes Kantakuzenos: Geschichte*, 3 vols. Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 17, 21, 71. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1982, 1986, and 2001.

**Pachymeres, Georgios. *History*.**

- . Failler, Albert and Vitalien Laurent, eds. *Relations historiques. Vol. 1-2, Livres I-III*. Translated by Albert Failler and Vitalien Laurent. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Series Parisiensis 24. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984.
- . Failler, Albert, ed. *Relations historiques. Vol. 3-4, Livres VII-XIII*. Translated by Albert Failler. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Series Parisiensis 24. Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1999.

**Panaretos, Michael. *About the Emperors of Trebizond, the Grand Komnenoi, How and When and How Long Each Ruled.***

---. Kennedy, Scott, trans. *Two Works on Trebizond*. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 52. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.

Secondary Sources:

Ahrweiler, Helene. *Byzance et la mer*. Paris, 1966.

Angelov, Dimiter. *The Byzantine Hellene: The Life of Emperor Theodore Laskaris and Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Angold, Michael. *A Byzantine Government in Exile: Government and Society Under the Laskarids of Nicaea (1204-1261)*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1975.

---. "After the Fourth Crusade: The Greek Rump States and the Recovery of Byzantium," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire: C. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard, Revised ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 731-758.

---. *Byzantium: The Bridge from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2001.

Asp-Talwar, Annika. "The Chronicle of Michael Panaretos." In *Byzantium's Other Empire: Trebizond*, edited by Antony Eastmond, 173-212. Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Anadolu Medeniyetleri Araştırma Merkezi, 2016.

Baum, Rosalie Murphy. "John Williams's Captivity Narrative: A Consideration of Normative Ethnicity," in *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*, ed. Frank Shuffelton. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993, 56-76.

Buell, Denise Kimber. *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Cameron, Averil. *The Byzantines*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Chandra, Kanchan, ed. *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Fine, John V. A. *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Hall, Jonathan M. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hunger, Herbert. *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*. 1. Aufl. München: C. H. Beck, 1978.

- Jacoby, David. "After the Fourth Crusade: The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Frankish States," *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire: C. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard, Revised ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 759-778.
- Kaldellis, Anthony. *The New Roman Empire: A History of Byzantium*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2024.
- . "Provincial Identities in Byzantium," in *The Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, ed. Michael Edward Stewart, David Alan Parnell, and Conor Whately. New York: Routledge, 2022, 248-262.
- . *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Kazhdan, Alexander. "L'Histoire de Cantacuzène en tant qu'oeuvre littéraire." *Byzantion* 50, no. 1 (1980): 279-335.
- Kennedy, Scott, trans. *Two Works on Trebizond*. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 52. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Kyrris, Costas P. "John Cantacuzenus, the Genoese, the Venetians, and the Catalans (1348-1354)." *Vyzantina* 4 (1972): 331-56.
- Laiou, Angeliki E. "The Palaiologoi and the World Around Them," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire: C. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard, Revised ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 803-833.
- Lecky, William Edward Hartpole. *History of European Morals: From Augustus to Charlemagne*. New York, NY: Appleton, 1873.
- Lock, Peter. *The Franks in the Aegean: 1204-1500*. New York, NY: Longman Publishing, 1995.
- Magdalino, Paul. "Byzantine Historical Writing, 900-1400," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, ed. Sarah Foot, Chase F. Robinson, and Daniel R. Woolf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 2:218-37.
- Macrides, Ruth, trans., *George Akropolites: The History*. Oxford Studies in Byzantium. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- McInerney, Jeremy. *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2014.
- Neville, Leonora. *Byzantine Gender*. Amsterdam: Arc Humanities Press, 2019.
- . *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

- Nicol, Donald M. "Ecclesiastical Relations Between the Despotate of Epirus and the Kingdom of Nicaea." *Byzantion* 22 (1952): 207-228. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44169905>.
- . *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- . *The Reluctant Emperor: John Cantacuzene, Emperor and Monk, C. 1295-1383*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Norwich, John Julius. *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.
- Obolensky, Dimitri. *Byzantium and the Slavs*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994.
- Page, Gill. *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity Before the Ottomans*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Shawcross, Teresa. *The Chronicle of Morea: Historiography in Crusader Greece*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Simpson, Alicia. *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Smith, Anthony D. *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. New York, NY: Blackwell, 1987.
- Stanković, Vlada. "The Writer behind the Historian: Observations on George Pachymeres' Narrative on Constantine Tich and Contemporary Events in Bulgaria." *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* 3 (2012): 127-38.
- Vasiliev, Alexander A. "The Foundation of the Empire of Trebizond 1204-1222." *Speculum* 11 (1936): 3-37.