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Dimitris Krallis

Serving Byzantium's Emperors

The Courtly Life and Career
of Michael Attaleiates

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Therefore since I have received such great blessings... so as to become a member of the senate, in spite of my humble and foreign background, and to be enrolled among the elite of the senators (whom the language of old used to call "aristocrats"), and among the most illustrious of the civic judges, and to pride myself on public honors, I ought surely to offer appropriate and worthy gratitude to God the giver of such blessings.

—Michael Attaleiates, *Diataxis*, p. 21

[Our enemy], quills and inkwells in hand, imitated scribbling in tomes, mocking us as secretaries

—Niketas Choniates, *History*, p. 594

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ENTWINED

Byzantine writers apparently loved lush meadows. To the encomiast writing about the virtues of an emperor, his object of praise was like a meadow teeming with flowers, each virtue representing a different blossom. For the historian too, a book could be a meadow; its pages bundled pleasant vignettes, all together constituting an appealing landscape. Michael Psellos tells us that people jump with joy as they walk through meadows. Then again, lest the association of history with pleasure offend the more austere among us, the flowers in meadows also attracted bees and those were useful, utility being a central concern of the historian.

Like Emperor Konstantinos Monomachos, who was known in the eleventh century for his gardening prowess and his efforts to replicate nature on the palace grounds, I have sought to create a meadow of words out of carefully selected and deliberately arranged materials. The flowers in this meadow are sometimes my ideas but more often than not the assemblage of other scholars' wisdom—both medieval and modern—the plan is mine. Taken as a whole, like a grand vista on a meadow teeming with flowers of all kinds, this book offers what I hope is a coherent, academically useful and altogether pleasing way of reading Byzantine history. In its particulars, it offers vignettes and detail, which may in turn lead us to the consideration of the whole and spur broader reflection on the nature of Romania, the polity of the people we call the Byzantines.

This book has been a long time coming. It was conceived in late 2006 as *parergon*, a side project. It was a distraction from the stressful duty to my professional self, the completion of the first, tenure-granting monograph. And yet, for all that working on it over all these years has given me hours upon hours of pure joy—a smirk and smile often marking my face, as I wrote biography and pondered on the reactions of audiences to Attaleiates’ journey—it also raised a number of uncomfortable questions. Was another book on this medieval judge necessary? Was returning to the man I have studied for so long evidence that I was running out of ideas? Was what is discussed in here derivative?

You hold the book in your hands, which suggests that over time I came to the following answers to these three questions: yes, no and no. The book—I tell myself and I hope the reader agrees—is not really about Attaleiates per se but more broadly about Romanía, its mandarins and high court officials, and the culture of the Byzantine eleventh century in general. For all that historians and audiences remain fascinated with Byzantium, we rarely think about what truly made it different from other contemporary polities. Its *noblesse de robe*, to which Attaleiates belonged, was one such crucial distinguishing characteristic.

Attaleiates did not leave us all that much for a detailed biographical sketch to emerge from his writings alone. His voice sometimes echoes loudly in his writings, yet more often than not his silences are deafening. What you have in your hands is therefore the result of a peculiar form of Byzantine crowdsourcing. A number of Attaleiates’ contemporaries (do they really make up a crowd?) and their experiences are selected and creatively bundled to produce a historically plausible approximation of what was. Creativity may raise an eyebrow or two, hence the discomfort discussed above.

This book relies heavily on the painstaking, meticulous, funny, often brilliant, and at times frustrating work of my colleagues in the field of Byzantine Studies. From their pages, I liberally and with gratitude borrow as I relate Attaleiates’ life. The past few years have seen established ideas scrutinized even as new ways of understanding the polity of the Romans, its people, and its culture have taken hold. Like the monarchy of the medieval Romans, Byzantine Studies appears eternal and stable. While, however, in conferences and in our own work we celebrate the past and pay our respects to genealogies of knowledge that provide comforting stability to what we know, in the pages of journals and

books a gradual, subtle, but tangible repositioning of the field has taken place. Attaleiates' life, as it emerges from the pages of this book, is an attempt to reflect on these changes and relate them through the accessible medium of biography to both colleagues and, hopefully, a broader audience.

Well before it could be considered for any reader, let alone a broad audience, this book has for years existed as ideas circulated, discussed, and tested among friends, colleagues, and students. Former and current graduate students at Simon Fraser University patiently endured my excited monologues and hand waving, showing keen interest in the project. Alex Olson, Chris Dickert, Aleks Jovanovic, and Jovana Andjelkovic have spent hours in conversation over food and drinks on this or that aspect of the story. John Fine's Michigan cohort—Anthony Kaldellis, Adam Shor, Young Kim, Alex Angelov, and Ian Mladjov—have always been willing to exchange ideas, Ian ever ready to improve our work with his stunning works of cartography. Ray Van Dam's storytelling and sense for historically significant minutiae is always with me. I owe my Ann Arbor colleagues thanks for the opportunity to discuss and further develop my ideas on Attaleia as a Byzantine city-state by attending a symposium at the University of Michigan in honor of Diane Owen Hughes.

During my sabbatical year, Catherine Holmes' intercession offered me three stimulating months as a Visiting Fellow at University College, Oxford. Her hospitality was invaluable, while conversations with college veterans George Cawkwell and Alexander Murray proved stimulating and endlessly whimsical. James Howard-Johnston and Mark Whittow welcomed me back into the uniquely lively Oxford Byzantine community. Mark's knack for the unexpected question and openness to new, curious ideas was a reminder of what I had so enjoyed during my studies at Oxford in the 1990s. I am profoundly saddened by his passing and by the fact that I will not be able to get his reaction to this book.

For years, I have been sharing with Leonora Neville this or that aspect of my project during our annual meetings at the Byzantine Studies Conference. Her enthusiastic interest in Attaleiates' tale helped me bring this project to fruition. I have to thank her and the editorial board of the *New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture* series at Palgrave Macmillan for the trust they put on this book. And so we come to Nicole, who for more than a decade has offered support, companionship, and ceaseless questioning of all ideas and certainties. I set the first words

of this book on a word processor's luminous white page while sitting on *her* couch at Heather Street. A few blocks west and to the south, the last taps on the keyboard ring from the living room in *our* apartment as this project comes to an end.

Vancouver, Canada

Dimitris Krallis

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* Anna Komnene. *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis. CFHB. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001.
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Psellos, *Chronographia*

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BYZANTINE RULERS FROM THE RISE OF THE MACEDONIAN DYNASTY TO THE KOMNENIAN REVOLUTION

A straight-up list of men and women who held supreme power during the two hundred years before the first Crusade cannot account for the subtle and not so subtle developments at the commanding heights of the Medieval Roman polity. I have, nevertheless, indented the reigns of the four emperors who came to power by associating themselves with the empress *Zoe*, the daughter of Konstantinos VIII, the last male heir to the Macedonian dynasty.

- 867–886 Basileios I
- 886–912 Leon VI, the Wise
- 912–913 Alexander
- 913–920 Konstantinos VII, Porphyrogennetos under regency
- 920–944 Romanos I Lekapenos
- 944–959 Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos
- 959–963 Romanos II, son of Konstantinos VII
- 963–969 Nikephoros II Phokas
- 969–976 Ioannes I Tzimiskes
- 976–1025 Basileios II, son of Romanos II
- 1025–1028 Konstantinos VIII, son of Romanos II
- 1028–1042 *Zoe*, daughter of Konstantinos VIII
- 1028–1034 Romanos III Argyros, married to *Zoe*
- 1034–1041 Michael IV the Paphlagonian, married to *Zoe*
- 1041–1042 Michael V Kalaphates, *Zoe*'s adoptive son
- 1042–1055 Konstantinos IX Monomachos, married to *Zoe*

- 1055–1056 Theodora (Zoe's sister)
- 1056–1057 Michael VI Bringas or Stratiotikos
- 1057–1059 Isaakios I Komnenos
- 1059–1067 Konstantinos X Doukas
- 1067–1068 Eudokia Makremvolitissa, widow of Konstantinos X Doukas
- 1068–1071 Romanos IV Diogenes, married to Eudokia Makremvolitissa
- 1071–1078 Michael VII Doukas, son of Konstantinos X Doukas
- 1078–1081 Nikephoros III Botaneiates
- 1081–1118 Alexios I Komnenos

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

In a time of culturally sensitive readers, scholars should phase out the distorting Anglicization and Latinization of Byzantine names. Mostly following the *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, I have adopted the actual Greek forms of proper names—for example, Konstantinos Monomachos rather than Constantine Monomachos (or, perish the thought, Monomachus). In deference to his Latin cultural background, the first Christian emperor will still appear as Constantine. Keeping a clean text while conveying phonetically the long and short *etas* and *iotas* of the Greek is nevertheless tricky. I have thus kept unaccented *etas*, as in Ioannes, Diogenes, and Maleses, and opted for *iota* (ι) when rendering accented forms, as in Digenis. The dignities and offices of the men and women who populate the pages of this book have been transliterated directly and italicized. The reader should, however, note that it is sometimes impossible to offer an accurate translation given our lack of knowledge regarding certain titles (e.g., *vestes*). Since no policy can remain fully consistent, I have retained some first names and place-names more widely used in Anglicized form outside the field of Byzantine or classical studies, such as Menander, Antioch, Constantinople, Cyclades, or Trebizond.

NOTE ON BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS AND ENDNOTES

To keep the account of Attaleiates' life as continuous as possible I opted for a dual system of citation. Sparse endnotes refer the reader to primary documents and select modern works where essential, while bibliographical essays at the end of the manuscript offer more on the relevant scholarly debates.