

Summary

The present Ph.D. dissertation entitled 'Illness and Statesmanship. Health of Byzantine rulers from the Palaiologan dynasty in the first half of the XVth Century' focuses on Manuel II Palaiologos and his sons, their state of health and their rule. The two main theses put forward in the dissertation are as follows. Firstly, that health and the well-being of the emperors was one of the most important concepts in the Byzantine imperial ideology and had special significance in the times when the Byzantine empire was endangered and the emperors had to face strenuous times and decisions. With their withering health their endurance and abilities to make quick and precise judgements could have been impeded. The second thesis is that the ailments of the Byzantine rulers from the given period were prone to influence their decisions on a more local, rather than an international ground. Their diseases did not deteriorate the Byzantium's political position in the broad perspective; nor did they negatively influence its diplomacy or made the penetration of its lands easier for the Turks. No health issue, however serious, influenced the overall Byzantium's strategy for survival.

With the empire at its weakest and most vulnerable, the idea of a healthy ruler and a healthy emperor was in the times of Manuel II and his sons one of the most important concepts in the Byzantine political ideology. It was also very important before, but it was during the reign of the last Palaiologoi that it gained special significance. With the Turks just outside Constantinople a healthy ruler gave, among many other things, also a hope that the empire would endure and would not collapse despite the Turkish efforts. In the first half of the XVth Century a Byzantine emperor could effectively rely only on two of his attributes namely: Constantinople (a 'physical' attribute) and imperial ideology (a 'non-physical' attribute). All other attributes to which a Byzantine ruler could formerly refer to if looking for support, such as e.g.: the army, Constantinople's population, the senate, were irrevocably lost. Without Constantinople as a capital an empire would cease to exist as it eventually did. An imperial ideology provided a Byzantine ruler with a divine status and a recommendation to lead over his people and the whole Orthodox world. In order to fulfill this and other requirements imposed on him by the ideology, an emperor had to be healthy and that is why the idea of a ruler who was well educated, well qualified for governing and in perfect mental and physical shape was a condition *sine qua non* for a Byzantine ruler (or a candidate for a ruler). A serious visible physical detriment i.e. a violation of a physical integrity (e.g. blinding) deprived a ruler or a candidate for a ruler to function in public. Health was not an asset. It was something that you were obliged to have or retain, or to get if you were prepared to be an emperor or you dreamed of becoming one.

The dissertation is composed of three chapters. The first one explores the idea of a healthy Byzantine emperor and in general every other Byzantine ruler belonging to the dynasty of Palaiologoi in the first half of the XVth century from a point of view of the Byzantine concept of power. To a lesser extent it deals also with the meaning of health in official ceremonies. Besides the official accounts of ceremonies (in which the emperor took part) prescribed for a specific occasion, and which were left by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (Xth Century) and by the author known as Pseudo-Kodinos, who lived under the rulership of Palaiologoi (XIVth Century), the works written by the emperor Manuel II were used for the purpose of our

investigation. It was neither an original idea of Manuel II nor his educated compatriots that the emperor should be healthy, both physically and mentally, but it arose from the character and the prerogatives of the imperial power that was imposed on the Byzantine rulers. The emperor could not be ill mentally or physically because he personified the Byzantine empire and his disease would be regarded as the disease of his realm. His health influenced the state's condition. Manuel II knew what he was writing about since it concerned him personally. It was not the case of solely theoretical divagations. It was real deliberations with clear intentions behind them: a ruler must be healthy, both mentally and physically and versatile in order to fulfill his duties. Although the chosen collection of Manuel's II Palaiologos works is not homogenous, they all reflect a notion of a healthy ruler derived from the Byzantine concept of power. The works analysed in the study are as follows: 'Praecepta educationis regiae' and 'Orathiones VII ethico- politicae' both treatises dedicated to the elder son and successor to the Byzantine throne John VIII; a transcription of a conversation held between Manuel II and his mother Helena Kantakouzene; Manuel's II letters to various recipients and an eulogy composed by him over his late brother, despot of the Morea, Theodore I.

In the second chapter the focus is shifted onto the medical issues and ailments from which three Palaiologoi, namely Andronic, the despot of Thessalonica and two emperors Manuel II and John VIII, suffered from. The first one struggled with leprosy, the second suffered a stroke, and the third had gout. Gout's treatment based on a highly toxic colchicine extracted from a herb called 'Colchicum autumnale' and prescribed to John VIII by Demetrios Pepagomenos, a specialist in gout, closely connected with the imperial family, caused him to be temporarily infertile. Having analyzed these medical conditions we move to chapter three which aims at showing how the health of these rulers influenced the decisions they made. Manuel's II stroke did not deteriorate Byzantium's position any further since John VIII was there to take over the rule. Even if Manuel II had not been paralyzed and had actively participated in political decisions, he would not have achieved any more than his son and successor on the Byzantine throne. John VIII's gout did not impede him to go to Italy to finalize the Union project, his *idée fixe*. However at the same time, the state of health of the Palaiologoi did have an impact on the decisions they made within the Byzantine territories. It was the serious condition (leprosy combined with leg edema) as a main cause that led Andronicus to leave Thessalonica and hand it over to Venice. It was the lack of a male offspring of John VIII that made the internal situation in Byzantium unstable during his reign. Due to lack of a successor he had to face his brother's ambitions to rule in Constantinople. If he had had any offspring from his three marriages, it would have been not that easy for his brothers to raise claims to the throne when he was still alive. A separate part of chapter three concerns the problem of the lack or a relatively small number of offsprings among the other sons of Manuel II (Constantine XI, Theodore II and Demetrios) and its impact on their statesmanship. If Constantine XI or Theodore II, when they were both despots in Morea, had had a masculine descendant from their Latin wives, their capacity to unite whole Morea under sole Byzantine rule, would have been greatly strengthened.

The conducted research led to the following conclusions. Based on the selected pieces from Manuel II works we could determine that the idea of a healthy emperor constituted one of the most important elements of the Byzantine political ideology. Manuel II referred to the long standing tradition of political writings that underlined the necessity for a Byzantine ruler, and especially an emperor, to be in perfect physical and mental shape. It was to be achieved through an appropriate

education in which members of a ruling dynasty were to be involved from their early years. Manuel II as an emperor himself understood clearly the rationale that stood behind the idea of a healthy ruler, in particular in the violent times of the first half of the XVth century. The diseases that frequently appeared among Manuel II and his sons were of significance on the more local scale (Thessalonica, Morea) influencing decisions and political alliances, but they did not have any impact on the Byzantine foreign policy and they did not deteriorate Constantinople's calculations for the survival of Byzantium.

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