

A LATE BYZANTINE PATRONESS:  
HELENA KANTAKOUZENE PALAIOLOGINA

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Despite the dwindling of economic resources in the second half of the fourteenth century, Byzantine emperors and empresses continued to rely on patronage and donation practices as instruments of social and political intervention. In this paper, based on the study of several late Byzantine texts, I will examine the patronage activities of a late Byzantine empress, Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina (1333–1397), the wife of emperor John V Palaiologos (r. 1354–1391).<sup>1</sup>

Raised in the court of her father, John VI Kantakouzenos (r. 1347–1354), for a time her husband's regent and rival to the Byzantine throne, Helena played a significant role in the political dramas of the second half of the fourteenth century. At first, following her father's theological interests she took part in the debate over the orthodoxy of Hesychasm and supported the Palamites.<sup>2</sup> Once this debate was settled, we find her involved in her son's, Andronikos IV's, rebellion from 1376–1379, when she was imprisoned to-

gether with many members of the ruling family.<sup>3</sup> Due to the internal strifes and the external pressures, in the following decades, the situation of the Byzantine state deteriorated considerably. In 1391, after the death of John V, her son, Manuel II, became emperor. Yet, since he was the vassal of the Ottomans, in the first year of his reign he had to leave Constantinople and join the Ottoman forces in Asia Minor. According to a contemporary instruction by the Venetian Senate, during this time Helena acted as regent, although we have no precise details on her activity.<sup>4</sup> In the following year, 1392, she participated in the ceremony organized for the new emperor's coronation<sup>5</sup> and shortly afterwards she entered the monastery of Kyra Martha in Constantinople under the name of Hypomone.<sup>6</sup> Her retirement did not deter her from continuing to get involved in the affairs of the state. Manuel makes her speak in a dialogue written in 1396 where she was pictured as a person possessing the abilities of a political

1 A short biography of Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina (PLP, no. 21365) is included in D. M. NICOL, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos ca. 1100–1460. A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study*, Washington, DC 1968, pp. 135–138. Cf. also A. ANGELOU, *Manuel Palaiologos. Dialogue with the Empress-Mother on Marriage. Introduction, Text, and Translation*, Vienna 1991, pp. 39–40.

2 O. HALECKI, *Un empereur de Byzance à Rome*, London 1972, p. 142.

3 J. CHRYSOSTOMIDES, *Manuel II Palaeologus: Funeral Oration for his Brother, Theodore, Despot of Morea*, Thessaloniki 1985, pp. 101–103.

4 F. THIRIET, *Régestes des délibérations du sénat de Venise concernant la Romainie*, I, Paris 1958, p. 196. The document was edited by R.-J. LOENERTZ, *Démétrius Cydonès: Correspondance*, II, Vatican 1960, pp. 444–445.

5 S. W. REINERT, *Political Dimensions of Manuel II Palaiologos' 1392 Marriage and Coronation*, in: C. SODE/S. A. TAKÁCS/P. SPECK (ed.), *Novum Millennium. Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck*, Aldershot 2001, pp. 291–302; P. SCHREINER, *Hochzeit und Krönung Kaiser Manuels im Jahre 1392*, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 60, 1967, pp. 70–85.

6 P. SCHREINER, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, I, Vienna 1975, p. 22.

adviser and a deep understanding of the political problems of Byzantium.<sup>7</sup> From the same period, we also have strong evidence for her role in the sale of several Peloponnesian strongholds to the Hospitaller Knights, during the reign of her son, Theodore, in Morea (1382–1407).<sup>8</sup>

Not only had her marriage with John V been meant to put an end to the dissensions between John VI and the Palaiologoi, but now there was also an increasingly established group of individuals active in the Constantinopolitan court with a preference for the Latins whom they considered an appropriate choice for an alliance that would reinforce the autonomy of Byzantium.<sup>9</sup> Under such circumstances Helena took several steps to package her acts of imperial favor for the sake of retrieving the weakened position of imperial authority with tact and subtlety. By and large, her patronage indicates an understated attempt to re-establish firm imperial influence over an increasingly independent grouping of men, previously in John V's service but, beginning in the 1370s, alienated by his politics of rapprochement with the Ottomans.<sup>10</sup> In this paper my contention is that she used donation and patronage mostly in

order to counterbalance her husband's, John's, political actions after 1371 when the emperor failed to secure the support of Latin Christian leaders. In doing so she appears to have cultivated the Kantakouzenian side of her family as opposed to the Palaiologan one, which testifies to a prolonged rivalry between the two families even after John VI Kantakouzenos's abdication in 1354.<sup>11</sup>

Before we can decide whether this contention is true, one has to examine in detail first the question of how her patronage worked in the second half of the fourteenth century even if this activity is not always well documented and the information at our disposal is restricted to several allusions included in letters addressed by her *protégés*.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the picture of her direct involvement in the affairs of the empire, a different facet of her personality surfaces in the textual sources of the late fourteenth century. A writer herself, we know that when she was still a teenager she wrote several classicizing *epinikioi logoi* celebrating a military victory of her father John VI.<sup>13</sup> In his chronologically first letter addressed to the empress (L 389), Demetrios Kydones praised her literary achievements as well as

7 ANGELOU, Manuel Palaiologos (cit. n. 1).

8 For instance, Helena's involvement in the sale of Corinth to the Knights Hospitallers by Theodore in 1397, her youngest son is attested in CHRYSOSTOMIDES, Manuel II Palaeologus (cit. n. 3), p. 167.18–19.

9 HALECKI, Un empereur (cit. n. 2), p. 91. The emergence of such a group is connected with John V's negotiations with the papacy for the Union of the Churches. Among other such individuals, we may count here John Laskaris, Kalopheros, the Kydones brothers Demetrios and Prochoros, and Manuel Kalekas.

10 On John V's change of attitude in the relation with the Ottomans see N. NECIPOĞLU, Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins, Cambridge 2009, p. 29.

11 This idea was first put forward by M. DABROWSKA, Ought One to Marry? Manuel II Palaiologos' Point of View, in: Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 31, 2000, pp. 146–156. Dabrowska argues that Helena promoted the Kantakouzenoi through her children, Manuel, the future emperor, and Theodore, the despot of Morea. On the contrary, John V, while neglecting Manuel and Theodore, favored Andronikos who was under his tutelage. On the conflicts between the Kantakouzenoi and the Palaiologoi in Morea see also NECIPOĞLU, Byzantium (cit. n. 10), pp. 235–250.

12 We have six letters addressed by Demetrios Kydones: letters 25 (1371–1374), 134 (after 1374), 143 (1371–1374), 222 (1392), 256 (after 1374), and 389 (1352), in: LOENERTZ, Correspondance (cit. n. 4). An English translation of these letters (except for letter 222), which I am using here, has been provided by F. KIANKA, The Letters of Demetrios Kydones to Empress Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina, in: Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 46, 1992, pp. 155–164. The letter addressed by Nikephoros Gregoras to Helena has been edited by R. GUILLAND, Correspondance de Nicéphore Gregoras, Paris 1927, Letter I. 42.

13 Letter 389.22–23: εἶη δὲ καὶ τὸν βασιλέα τοῖς σοῖς λόγοις ἀφορμὰς παρασχόμενον παρὰ φίλης φωνῆς τοὺς ἐπινικίους ἀκοῦσαι, καὶ οὕτω διχῆ καρπούσθαι τὴν ἡδονήν.

the fact that Helena succeeded in doing a man's job, namely to produce a literary text: *And what is surpassing <regarding the beauty of your poems> is that the sounds are those of a girl and that men yield to a woman in literary matters, and that what nature too recoils from, your zeal and labor have obtained for you.*<sup>14</sup> In another letter accompanying a translation from Augustine's texts (L 25), Kydones justifies the choice of this text by alluding to the Latin Father's wide theoretical knowledge: *Who knew more than he did what parts of Plato and Aristotle are in agreement with the faith?*<sup>15</sup> Kydones rhetorically asked. Likewise, Nikephoros Gregoras's sole letter addressed to the empress praises the model of the learned individual, οἱ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ ὅσοι τῆς λογικῆς ἐπιστήμης ἐφευρεταί, and assumes that Helena was one of them.<sup>16</sup> Adopting a rather didactic tone, Gregoras includes frequent allusions to the classical Greek philosophers, Demokritos and Empedokles, or other ancient figures such as Adrastus and Croesus.<sup>17</sup> Further contours of the image of her refined education and rhetorical skills can be grasped from the elaborated letter of consolation Manuel II addressed to her in the 1380s<sup>18</sup> as well as from the above mentioned *Dialogue on Marriage*, where she plays the part of a character able to respond with ease to her son's arguments.<sup>19</sup> These multiple allusions to her education were most often integrated into her representation as

a model of learning for other individuals. Another letter addressed by Kydones suggests that the empress's enthusiasm for literature could prompt others to acquire a similar type of knowledge: *if what is honoured by rulers has many admirers, perhaps someone who looks toward your example will also covet the honor that comes from learning and will advise hard for its sake. Thus through you learning will speak up boldly once again and what is truly good will also be considered good.*<sup>20</sup>

Doubtless, when Gregoras and Kydones described Helena as a paragon of education, they envisaged a concrete situation: by that time scholars used to meet frequently in the so called *theatra* organized at the imperial court where authors were performing and discussing their texts.<sup>21</sup> Since John V, unlike other Palaiologan rulers, did not display much interest in cultivating learning and rhetorical skills,<sup>22</sup> it is likely that Helena undertook the role of patron of arts and was considered by other scholars of the time as a sort of a catalyst of such meetings of scholars whom she probably has also supported financially.<sup>23</sup>

Helena's contemporaries did not only notice her propensity for scholarly activities but also her theological interests. As she embraced the doctrine of Hesychasm recently adopted in the Byzantine Church, she entertained a close friendship with some of its supporters. Among them was Philotheos Kokkinos, Gregory Pala-

14 Letter 389.8–11.

15 Letter 25.22–24.

16 GUILLAND, *Correspondance* (cit. n. 12), ep. I. 42.

17 Ibid.

18 Letter 1 in: G. T. DENNIS, *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus: Text, Introduction, and Commentary*, Washington, DC 1977, pp. 3–4.

19 In the end of the dialogue Manuel concedes that her mother's arguments were better. ANGELOU, *Manuel Palaiologos* (cit. n. 1), pp. 115–117.

20 Letter 25.30–31.

21 Strong evidence for *theatra* in this period comes from the letters of Manuel II: 9, 24, 27, in: DENNIS, *The Letters of Manuel II* (cit. n. 18), pp. 24–25, 66, 70.

22 John was rarely associated with scholars, in the same way as John Kantakouzenos or Manuel II, see HALECKI, *Un empereur* (cit. n. 2), p. 42.

23 Cf. the end of Nikephoros Gregoras's letter asking the empress for further support in his scholarly activities: ἡ σὴ δ' ἐρρώσθω μοι σύνεσις καὶ μὴ λήγοι τοιαῦτα προβάλλουσα. Cf. also Kydones's letter 222.

mas's friend and hagiographer. However, the relation with him moves slightly out of the sphere of patronage. Kokkinos, born in 1300, was much older than Helena and had lived for a long time on Mount Athos, before he was appointed patriarch twice.<sup>24</sup> From this position he dedicated three of his sermons on beatitudes (*μακαρισμοί*) to the empress,<sup>25</sup> which constitutes an indication of the acknowledgment of her efforts in promoting Hesychasm. It can thus be assumed that the patriarch was trying to prompt her to further promote Hesychasm, at a time which witnessed reverberations of the mid-fourteenth century religious debates.

These debates were also reflected by Demetrios Kydones's letters addressed to the empress. Despite their different religious options – Kydones had previously converted to Catholicism – each of them had rather nuanced positions. Even more so, Kydones's attacks against Philotheos Kokkinos, Helena's close acquaintance and Prochoros Kydones's prosecutor,<sup>26</sup> does not appear to have affected in any way his relationship with the empress. As in other texts of his, he states that, in his view, the differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism are insignificant. In this respect, the end of L 25 is telling: *you will laugh at those who divide Hellenes and Scythian in Christ, and who ask about the native lands of writers rather than their ideas*. Following this path, the translation of Augustine's work which he sent together with L 25 becomes an element in his defence against those accusing him of heresy; about Augustine he states: *and*

*who fought more vigorously than he did those parts that are contrary to it?* It is therefore possible that, when addressing Helena on questions of faith, Kydones was well aware that the empress in the debate over Hesychasm had a rather moderate position.<sup>27</sup>

But Kydones did not make use of his close acquaintance with Helena only for scholarly purposes. In 1373, after having served John V as *mesazon* for two decades, he left Constantinople and went to Lesbos where his friend, Francisco Gattilusio, a Latin ruler with strong anti-Ottoman views, had his residence.<sup>28</sup> The emperor, who suspected a pro-Latin plot at a time when he was endeavoring to approach the Ottomans, called him back to Constantinople. Under such circumstances, the former *mesazon* summoned Helena's protection. A letter in his collection reflecting this episode reveals the degree of instrumentality of their relationship.<sup>29</sup> Kydones asks for Helena's intervention so that the emperor John V and his son, Manuel, stop suspecting him of treason: *I beg you, he says, to make them more indulgent toward me, and I ask you to send me a letter containing your advice on this, which I will receive as if it were an oracle, and I promise to do nothing contrary to what seems best to you*. Kydones's change in the attitude towards John V reflected in this letter was not a secret for the emperor: after having accompanied the emperor in his travel to Italy in 1369–1371 (?), he stepped out from the position of *mesazon* and subsequently, upon Helena's intervention, he managed to avoid the emperor's sanctions.<sup>30</sup>

24 1353–1354 and 1364–1376.

25 *Orations* 6, 7 and 8, in B. S. PSEFTONKAS, *Φιλοθέου Κοκκίνου λόγοι και ὁμιλίαι*, Thessaloniki 1981, pp. 23–233.

26 Cf. Kydones's letter to Kokkinos, LOENERTZ, *Correspondance* (cit. n. 4), letter 129, I, p. III.

27 Cf. HALECKI, *Un empereur* (cit. n. 2), pp. 141–142.

28 Cf. Kydones's letters to Francisco Gattilusio, LOENERTZ, *Correspondance* (cit. n. 4), pp. 242, 321.

29 Letter 134.

30 Kydones's letters 70 and 117 criticize heavily the emperor's behavior. For instance, in his L 70 addressed to the emperor himself, upon requesting his due wages from the emperor, he describes John an evil ruler in case he refuses to pay his servants. Yet, it seems that their relationship was much more complex and knew many variations for, in the 1350s and 1360s Kydones played a role in John's dealings with the papacy, see HALECKI, *Un empereur* (cit. n. 2), pp.

Although, if we take into consideration these letters, at its most basic level, Helena's good relations with the scholar-*mesazon* can hardly be disputed, the question of how their relation developed remains. Apart from their common literary interests their relationship was also based on political support and distribution of largesse. Political support originated in the previous connections between his family in Thessalonike and the wealthy Kantakouzenoi who ruled Byzantium for a while.<sup>31</sup> During the Zealots' uprising, his family lost most of the properties and, as a result, young Demetrios moved to the imperial court of Constantinople in the service of John VI Kantakouzenos. Once he arrived in the City, he had a rapid ascension in the court hierarchy and was soon appointed the emperor's *μεσάζων τοῖς πράγμασιν*, one of the most important court offices of the time.<sup>32</sup> Following John VI's abdication and John V's accession to power in 1354, he remained in the imperial administration and was active especially in the diplomatic service due to his connections in the Western world and his knowledge of Latin. Later on, his rhetorical training helped him to become one of the tutors of Helena's son, Manuel.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, along the lines of the major topics approached in his letters addressed to the empress –

learning and theology –, Helena's protection and support is frequently summoned by Kydones. The shift to a patron-client relation is marked by a change in Kydones's attitude occurring in a letter written after 1374:<sup>34</sup> here, he does not speak anymore like an instructor to his diligent student and aspiring author, but asks the empress to show benevolence in receiving the sermon on St Lawrence as a gift in exchange for her generosity. The same attitude surfaces in another letter sent to Helena together with a fruit from his garden again as an expression of gratitude: *and would I not appear to be unjust if I shared it with others before sending it (the gift of fruit) to you, to whom it is more just to bring the whole crop even, as if I were bringing it to my lady and the mistress of everything I own and the one who cultivates the farmer himself by her favors every day?*<sup>35</sup>

But the most illustrative document indicating how Helena fashioned her relationship with the *mesazon* remains the last letter which Kydones sent to the empress (L 222), in celebration of her entrance in the monastery of Kyra Martha.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, in this letter, Kydones also gives thanks for the gifts she offered to him and to other individuals on this occasion thus pointing to the breadth and context of Helena's patronage. Arguably, this extensive text although

95–110; F. TINNEFELD, *Demetrios Kydones. Briefe*, I, Stuttgart 1981, p. 27; J. R. RYDER, *The Career and Writings of Demetrios Kydones: A Study of Fourteenth-Century Byzantine Politics, Religion, and Society*, Leiden 2010, pp. 174–175.

31 In 1347 Kydones addressed a panegyric to John VI Kantakouzenos in which he recounts the friendship between his father and the emperor: *ἐμοὶ πατὴρ ἦν ὃν πολλὰ μὲν ἐκόσμησε συνελθόντα, μέγιστον δ' ἦν εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκείνῳ τὸ σοὶ φίλον εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα, καὶ τὸ πάντων ἡμεληκότα πρὸς σε μόνον βλέπειν, καὶ ὃ τι νεύσεις τοῦτο νόμον ἡγεῖσθαι· καὶ τοσοῦτον αὐτῷ τὸ τὰ σὰ θεραπεύειν συνήνεγκεν, ὥστ' οὐχ ὅπως οἴκοι τῆς σῆς εὐνοίας ἀπώνατο, ἀλλὰ καὶ φίλοις ὑπισχνεῖτο τὰ παρὰ σοῦ, καὶ τοῖς ἄλλως δεομένοις ἀπὸ τῶν σῶν ἐδίδου θαρρεῖν. *Ad Ioannem Cantacuzenum Oratio* I, in: LOENERTZ, *Correspondance* (cit. n. 4), I, 4.23–25, p. 2.*

32 Cf. RYDER, *Demetrius Kydones* (cit. n. 30), pp. 170–173.

33 DENNIS, *The Letters of Manuel II* (cit. n. 18), XXXVII.

34 Letter 256.

35 Letter 143.20–23.

36 On the monastery of Kyra Martha, which had many connections with the Palaiologos and Kantakouzenos families, see the account of Stephen of Novgorod in G. MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Washington, DC 1984, pp. 306–309; V. LAURENT, *Kyra Martha. Essai de topographie et de prosopographie byzantine*, in: *Échos d'Orient*, 38, 1939, pp. 296–320.

included by the author himself in his epistolary collection was written not only as a letter but also as a fully-fledged panegyric. There are several clues that qualify this text for a rhetorical composition intended for public performance. First, its unusual length makes it by far the longest composition in Demetrios's epistolary corpus and second, its units largely correspond to the sections traditionally employed in panegyrics. Thus, it includes an extensive part describing the empress's ordeals during her son's, Andronikos IV's, rebellion in 1376–1379 and praising her attitude adopted in that situation. As for the public performance of this letter-panegyric we know from one of Manuel II's letters that it was read out loud so that *everyone judged it to be a perfectly marvelous letter*.<sup>37</sup>

It is worthwhile to investigate more in depth the contents of this text which offers an image of the extent of Helena's donation as well as an overview of the reasons why the empress made a donation to a scholar and retired state official like Kydones.<sup>38</sup> Taking into account that Helena's entrance in the monastery did not exclude her from the political decision process, one may ask what was the upshot of her donation upon entering the monastery while at the same time maintaining an active role at the court. Kydones was surely aware of that and, consequently, he must have formulated his eulogy with great care.

The debut of the text praises Helena's largesse which Kydones frames into a more general idea of divine charity: *To some God gave other kinds of benefits, as it seemed proper to Him... but to me He gave your protection* (πρόνοια).<sup>39</sup> Then, following closely in the steps of a well-staged modesty *topos*, Kydones gives thanks for the numerous

gifts he and his fellows received from the empress. Thus, in addition to having been granted a significant part of Helena's possessions upon her entrance in the convent of Kyra Martha, he adds that she created special official positions at the imperial court in order to have him closer.<sup>40</sup> This statement, albeit it lacks further specific details, points to concrete benefits which Helena could offer: remunerated public offices and occasional gifts. To a certain extent, this piece of information reflects Kydones's situation in the 1370s when he stopped working on a regular basis for the emperor and pursued his scholarly interests.

While in addressing Helena Kydones alludes to his economic troubles,<sup>41</sup> he readily states that her patroness's precious gift came as a blessing for him: *And by offering me [such gift] you went beyond my need, so that richness became not a consolation for my poverty, but a blessing*.<sup>42</sup> This statement sets the coordinates of a closer connection with the empress, further reinforced by a list of a range of situations when her support (εὐεργεσία, 222.34) proved helpful: ἐν ἀπορίαις, ἐν νόσοις, ἐν συκοφαντίαις, ἐν παντὶ βοηθείας δεομένων καιρῶν. (222.26–27), *in difficulties, in sickness, in false accusations, and at any time requiring support*.

Interestingly enough, this epistolary encomium is centered around a sole event from Helena's life, namely, her son's, Andronikos's, usurpation (1376–1379). This episode had had negative implications for both the ruling family and the Byzantines' dealings with the neighbouring Genoese and Ottomans: during the rebellion, Andronikos, having obtained foreign help, put into prison his father John V, his mother Helena, and the brothers, Manuel, and Theodore. Furthermore, after the end of the rebellion, the agree-

37 DENNIS, *The Letters of Manuel II* (cit. n. 18), letter 23, p. 64.

38 A short commentary on facts from Kydones's life connected to the letter has been provided by KIANKA, *The Letters of Demetrios Kydones* (cit. n. 12), pp. 162–163.

39 Letter 222.1–2.

40 Ibid., 11–12: τιμὰς τε ταῖς δωρεαῖς προσετίθεις, τὰς μὲν παρ' ἑαυτῆς ἀνευρίσκουσα.

41 Ibid., 9–10: καὶ γὰρ μοι καὶ χρημάτων δεήσαν πολλῶν.

42 Ibid., 10–11.

ment between the two sides stipulated that Helena and her father John VI had to stay for two more years as captives in the Genoese colony of Pera.<sup>43</sup> In narrating Andronikos's *coup*, Kydones presents the events in chronological order<sup>44</sup> and describes the critical circumstances in which Helena was forced to side with one part of the family against the eldest of her sons.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, the text's focus remains on Helena's motherly trials compared to Job's troubles<sup>46</sup> and reveals her dual position in the conflict: on the one hand she had to show loyalty to her husband and legitimate ruler, and on the other hand she tried to protect her son, Andronikos. By using extremely negative terms with regard to the actions of the first-born son, Kydones's understated aim was to contrast the rebellious Andronikos with her second born son, Manuel, indicated in these circumstances as the legitimate successor of John V. Moreover, even her husband, John Palaiologos, is criticized for getting involved in dynastic battles instead of dealing with the common enemy, the Ottomans.<sup>47</sup>

In the last section of the letter-panegyric, Helena's capacity to deal with difficult situations is

connected to the idea of the empress's benevolent attitude expressed by her generous gift towards both poor people or friends,<sup>48</sup> including Demetrios himself.<sup>49</sup> In addition, when referring to the previous δωρεαί, he asserts that this final donation, which represented a sign of his own prestige,<sup>50</sup> was the last and most consistent instalment in a series of numerous gifts: *καὶ τοῦτον ταῖς πολλαῖς εὐεργεσίαις ἐπέθηκας κολοφῶνα*. (222.176–177) *and you placed this <present gift> on the top of your many good deeds*. In this way, by praising the empress's generosity as her chief virtue, Kydones shows himself always alert to remind of this connection which places him in a privileged position among the empress's *protegés*.

The language used in this epistolary oration echoes the terms employed in other panegyrics of the Palaiologan period. At a time of constrained finances and resources, the emperor's generosity was constantly evoked among the cardinal king-ly virtues in different oratorical addresses.<sup>51</sup> The members of the ruling family knew that the dispensation of imperial bounty was both virtuous and had effects on the grateful recipients who, like Kydones, could further advertise the rulers'

43 J. BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus. A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship*, New Jersey 1969, pp. 70–72.

44 His account which relates details of this episode (222.50–52: the suspicions among the emperor and his first born son Andronikos; 56–59: reciprocal attacks of the emperor and his son; 101–102: the escape from prison of John V and Manuel; 134–135: her release from prison hailed by the population) ends however happily: *τῆ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπανόδῳ λύσας τοῦτο τὸ νέφος, ἔδειξε σε πάλιν ἡμῖν, αὐγὴν καθαρὰν, εἰπέ τις, μετὰ τὸ σκότος ἐκείνο τὸ τὰς ἀπάντων ψυχὰς ἐπισχόν.* (*and dissolving with the return of the emperor this cloud, it showed you again to us, in guise of a clear dawn, after the darkness which possessed the souls of everybody*) (L 222.130–131).

45 The author often shows his antagonism towards Andronikos: *ἀπιστίας δὲ καὶ φθόνους τοῖς οικειοτάτοις ἐμφυτεύσας καὶ ἐριδας (implanting distrust, jealousy, and envy among the members of the family)* (L 222.50). Later on, he describes the condition of the imprisoned members of the family by comparing it to a plague added to famine: *καὶ ταῦτα λιμῶ λοίμοῦ προστεθέντος (as the plague was added to famine)* (L 222.114). Cf. also CHRYSOSTOMIDES, *Manuel II Palaeologus* (cit. n. 3), pp. 100–103.

46 Letter 222.45.

47 *Ibid.*, 56–58.

48 *Ibid.*, 169–174.

49 *Ibid.*, 174–175: *τις τῶν οικείων καὶ φροντίδος ἄξιός σοι δοκῶν (considering myself one of your friends worthy of your protection)*.

50 *Ibid.*, 185–186: *μνημεῖον τῆς σῆς ἀρετῆς, ἄθλον δὲ τῆς ἐμῆς εὐνοίας, πρὸς δὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ἐνδειξίς τιμῆς ἢ τετίμημαι παρὰ σοῦ. (a memorial of your virtue, a prize for goodwill towards me, a proof of the honour by which I was honoured by you)*.

51 D. ANGELOV, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium (1204–1330)*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 134–138.

dynastic claims. At a different level, a look at other contemporary panegyrics may also enable us to establish several distinctively female elements of Helena's acts of patronage and donation. In an early βασιλικὸς λόγος addressed to John VI Kantakouzenos (1347) whom he was praising for his military victories, Kydones weaves into the encomium allusions to the emperor's previous acts of generosity alongside requests of protection and support.<sup>52</sup> Similar requests for benefits and acknowledgment of merits in imperial administration surface in the panegyric addressed later on to John V (1371), where, in addition, Kydones offered a short overview of his career.<sup>53</sup> The function of this last panegyric was not to praise the emperor's generosity or protection but to serve as a defence against the calumnies of those who influenced the emperor's opinion about his *mesazon*.<sup>54</sup> Both examples coming from the same author indicate a difference of approach in addressing Helena. While in these two earlier texts the expression of gratitude for various benefits was attached to different virtues and further appeals for support, in the panegyric letter addressed to Helena gratitude not only for present gifts but also for other previous benefits<sup>55</sup> was celebrated as the central feature of the empress's ethos. The tone of the letter is also different from the other panegyrics, as the inclusion of many consolatory features when describing the empress's ordeals in prison generates a certain intimacy between the author and the addressee. By contrast, such intimacy is absent in the panegyrics addressed to the emperors despite the fact that according to various sources Kydones was very close to both

of them.<sup>56</sup> We can thus conclude that Helena's support for the *mesazon* was surely more discreet than of the emperors, since only in the last years of her life he wrote an encomium for her, but it was also more efficient.

Arguably, advertising this donation in the public sphere had more implications for the empress's image than for old Kydones. By and large, patrons and clients were aware of the symbolical power embedded in an act of offering or receiving gifts and, for that reason, it was imperative that a patron's generous deed become widely known. In such circumstances, Kydones's letter with its marked features of a public encomium served as a platform for making known the empress's position vis-a-vis an influential supporter of the newly installed emperor, Manuel II, as well as the interests of the ruling family in the process of arousing the public awareness with regard to their activities.

Having established the details of Helena's relationships with Kydones as it emerges from his letters, I will now conclude by tracing inasmuch as possible the social and cultural implications of her patronage. Doubtless patronage, a mutually beneficial business, structured large sections of medieval society.<sup>57</sup> In Kydones's case it is also true that his skills and knowledge of Latin helped him in his long career in the public service at a time of many political changes. Yet, his talents do not entirely explain his continuity in office after the usurper Kantakouzenos left the throne in 1354 and was replaced by the legitimate John V Palaiologos. It is likely that Kydones became part of an agreement between the two rul-

52 δειξον ὡς κοινή τις εἶ τοῖς ἀτυχοῦσι καταφυγή, *Ad Ioannem Cantacuzenum Oratio I*, in: LOENERTZ, *Correspondance* (cit. n. 4), I, p. 7.

53 *Ad Ioannem Palaeologum Oratio*, in: LOENERTZ, *Correspondance* (cit. n. 4), I, 10.1–11.2, 12.27–39, 13.1–25.

54 *Ibid.*, 11.3–28, 15.10–16.5.

55 Letter 222.26–27.

56 RYDER, *Demetrius Kydones* (cit. n. 30), pp. 170–175.

57 For a discussion of patronage in the Western medieval world see for instance J. S. BOTHWELL, *Edward III and the English Peerage. Royal Patronage, Social Mobility and Political Control in Fourteenth-Century England*, Woodbridge 2004, pp. 1–8.



ers<sup>58</sup> and that Helena, in her double role of the usurper's daughter and the new emperor's wife, was involved in his rehabilitation after having served John VI. Thus, she might have wished to pay a tribute to her father's friendship with the Kydones family, for, in fact, the bright educated *mesazon* came to Constantinople at John VI's invitation following the confiscation of the family properties in Thessalonike and, during his first years at court, he acted as a kind of tutor to the teenage princess, as he himself suggests (L 389).

The attested connections with several literati of the second half of the fourteenth century place Helena in a series of Palaiologan educated women who supported scholarly endeavors. John V's wife helped her intellectual friends in various ways, including financial support and the organization of

scholarly meetings. Yet, unlike them, her patronage was politically charged, as her involvement in the public and religious life indicates. She used patronage and donation for the cultivation of her father's, John Kantakouzenos's, former supporters and thereby of a set of interests different from those of her husband, John Palaiologos. The only evidence that we have points to a strategy that combined comradeship based on common interests in learning, political support, and distribution of imperial largesse. In this way, she tried to build bridges between scholars holding different views in theological or political issues. The type of patronage she assumed explains why she was equally revered by both hard-line Palamites like Philotheos Kokkinos and anti-Palamites, like Kydones and Gregoras.

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58 By this agreement between John V and John VI entailed, the former one offered the Despotate of Morea in the administration of the Kantakouzenoi. Cf. D. ZAKYTHINOS, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, I, London 1975, pp. 95–97.

